

A bimonthly publication of the **Northwest Kansas Groundwater Management District No. 4**
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WATER TRANSITION REGS TO HEARING

The Water Transition Assistance Program (WTAP) regs are to be heard in two locations in early May, both starting at 7:00 P.M.:

May 1, 2007 - Norton Public Library, #1 Washington Square, Norton, KS

May 2, 2007 - Ida Long Goodman Library, 406 N Monroe, St. John, KS.

The WTAP program was approved by the Legislature last session to permanently retire water rights in critical areas of Kansas by purchase. The process is slated to be a bid process with a specified application timeframe of September 1 through November 15 of each year. The converted land can be dry land cropped or returned to perennial cover. The water right itself must be a valid, certified water right that is privately owned with the well(s) in an eligible area (closed to non-domestic new appropriations and designated by the chief engineer or a GMD as an area needing reduced water use).

If you are interested in this program or have ideas about its implementation, you will be interested in these hearings.

More information on this water right retirement program is available on the SCC website: <http://scc.ks.gov> The proposed regs and much more detail about the proposal is available there. The GMD 4 office can also provide copies of this material upon request.

DWR HOLDS HEARING FOR IGUCA

A hearing to consider the expansion of the Pawnee Valley Intensive Groundwater Use Control Area into parts of the Pawnee-Buckner-Sawlog subbasin in Pawnee, Hodgeman and Ness counties was begun March 12 in Larned. The hearing included both formal and informal segments.

Only parties to the proceedings were allowed to present evidence and cross-examine witnesses during the formal portion of the hearing. These parties were determined through earlier pre-hearing conferences. Any other interested persons were allowed to submit evidence or comment, orally or in writing, at an informal public comment session held March 27 – also in Larned.

No policy or program decisions were made during the hearing by the chief engineer who will consider all testimony before deciding if the IGUCA should be expanded, and what, if any, corrective control provisions should be implemented to address the specific concerns identified. A follow-up article later will be in order.

GROUNDWATER FOUNDATION NEWS

During the annual meeting of the NW Kansas Groundwater Conservation Foundation a possible new direction was discussed. Currently the Foundation is poised to incent water right holders to reduce water use by 4 specific means:

- 1) Retire full water right permanently;
- 2) Retire partial water right permanently;
- 3) Enter into WRCP setting aside the full water right for 5-10 years; and
- 4) Enroll in MFA (5 yrs) setting aside from 10% to 100% of the right.

It was suggested that the Foundation also choose to support USDA's EQIP program by paying the \$100.00 per acre set aside rate for the 4th maintenance year – a year that EQIP does not pay for. The Articles of Incorporation and the Foundation By-laws are both written generally enough that this new direction can be accommodated, but the more specific grant requests have not included this option yet. Following much discussion, the board decided that all new grant requests should include the USDA EQIP program support as another way to reduce groundwater use.

Technically, the Foundation will be open for business in October 1, 2007 when the first application period opens and runs through December 1, 2007. It is hoped that another grant request cycle can be completed by then and the Foundation funding picture will be more solidified. In the absence of outside grants, the decision on how to best spend the existing Foundation funds will need to be made.

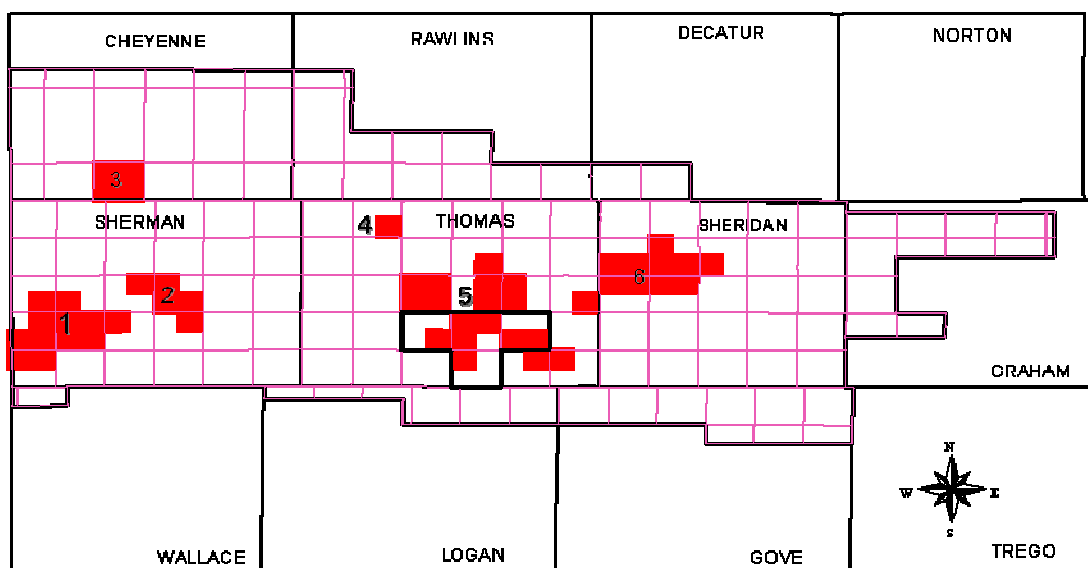
2006 WATER USE REPORTS

The weather did not cooperate this year in NW Kansas for the annual water use reports. Unfortunately the March 1 report deadline is set in statute and is not "extendable" by DWR. In an effort to work with snowed in meters DWR provided for a two-step reporting process this year – allowing for an incomplete report to be filed by the March 1 deadline with follow-up info provided as soon as possible afterwards. GMD 4 tried to get the word out by sending press releases to all newspapers and radio stations in the area. This process was also posted on the front page of the GMD 4 website as a "special announcement" until March 6th and staff responded to an estimated 30 phone inquiries as well. We now see the merit of getting annual water use info as soon after the well is shut down as possible.

ENHANCED MANAGEMENT CONTINUES....TASK 3 BEGUN

Task 3 of the enhanced management process calls for the review of all data issues. In beginning this task, it was determined that the section-level data is good enough to generally set the high priority areas. However, this same data is much more questionable for use in setting specific management policies in areas less than 1 township in size or for time periods less than 10 years of time. Due to this limitation, the single, quarter-section high priority areas were reviewed again with added scrutiny. Two of them were eliminated due to questionable data support which in turn rendered this final version of the GMD 4 High Priority Areas. Next data issue to look at is: How best can the data reliability be improved in our priority areas for potential management scenarios?

GMD4 High Priority Areas Adopted March 8, 2007



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KANSAS CROP WATER ALLOCATOR

A while back we did an article on the Water Optimizer – a Nebraska spreadsheet designed to help producers make the best crop choices in the face of limited and/or restricted water supplies. Well Kansas has such a spreadsheet as well – called the Crop Water Allocator. Available as a free download from KSU’s Mobil Irrigation Lab website (www.oznet.ksu.edu/mil), this product allows the producer to play with acres, water supply capabilities, crop and energy prices and other inputs to get all the different possible crop combinations – sorted by their return in dollars to the producer.

Both spreadsheets answer similar questions. At this time the KS Crop Water Allocator is fueled by crop production curves specifically generated from western Kansas data while the NE Water Optimizer is planning to expand their data set for more crops based on additional production data from Kansas and Colorado (with a grant from USDA’s Risk Management Agency - RMA). You might want to try both products to see which one is easiest to use or provides the best reports.

2007 WELL MEASUREMENTS

The preliminary 2007 water level measurements have been released by the Kansas Geological Survey, and the water tables are continuing to decline. Overall, the Ogallala wells declined an average of -.94 feet as compared to -.57 feet last year. In the specific GMD areas (city of district office) the 3-yr numbers are:

	2005	2006	2007	
GMD 1	0.00	-.37	-.42	(Scott City)
GMD 2	+1.00	0.00	-2.17	(Halstead)
GMD 3	-.39	-1.15	-2.18	(Garden City)
GMD 4	-.61	-.59	-.21	(Colby)
GMD 5	0.00	0.00	-1.29	(Stafford)

Due to the later than normal measurement period in 2007 and some 300 wells that could not be measured (snow and bad roads) these numbers may or may not represent the actual 2007 water level change last year. Also, this data will not be final until mid-April.

The Water Table

Sponsored by the NW Kansas Groundwater Management District No. 4, 1175 S. Range, Colby, KS 67701-0905. Office hours: 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday (except the noon hour) - closed during State holidays.

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ADDRESS CORRECTIONS ARE APPRECIATED

THE NATURE OF A KANSAS WATER RIGHT

This segment will focus on converting an irrigation water right to another use type – a more common happening now that new water rights are greatly restricted in many areas of the state. Just last week it was stated that 40% of an irrigation water right is “lost” when such a conversion is made. As we’ll see this is not always the case.

This process is controlled by DWR regulation KAR 5-5-9 which requires that the consumptive use of the original water right cannot be increased through any change. The trick is to determine the actual consumptive use of the irrigation water right being considered. KAR 5-5-9 sets this amount as the average net irrigation need for corn (1.03 AF/ac to 1.19 AF/ac in GMD 4) for the County wherein the well sits, times the maximum acres legally irrigated in any one year during the water right’s perfection period. This amount (and therefore percentage of the existing water right) is actually different with every water right. GMD 4 conversions thus far have ranged from 55% to 100% of the existing water right being convertible. The conversion percentage tends to be the highest for water rights with a low certified acrefeet to irrigated acre ratio.

If you have questions about how a water right will convert, get with GMD 4 or DWR staff and have the numbers run specifically for that water right. KAR 5-5-9 is available from DWR or the GMD 4 office.

BAC Transitions – Step 2

The 12 Basin Advisory Committees in KS are halfway through transitioning from their original organization to their “new look”. In June, the final half of the positions will be appointed and the transition will be complete. If you are interested in a BAC position, you need to apply first. If you have not already done so unfortunately your application will be too late for this the following described process. The application deadline was April 2, 2007.

One change in this transition is that each BAC will be more customized (they are now strikingly similar except for the issues they deal with). BAC’s now have either 9 or 11 members at their own discretion including 6 set positions (representing: public water supplies; industry; ag; fish & wildlife; recreation and environment) and 3 or 5 custom positions individually set by each BAC depending on local basin needs. For example, the Upper Republican BAC has 5 custom positions representing: public at large; GMDs; government; dryland farming and irrigation farming. The Solomon BAC chose to have 3 custom positions – 2 representing public at large and 1 for dryland farming. The Smoky Hill Saline BAC chose 5 custom positions to represent: irrigation; public water supply; and 3 public at large positions – 1 in the west, 1 in the central and 1 truly at large.

The application process for BAC’s is an open process and if there are no current openings when you application is received, it will be held and automatically considered when the next appropriate opening occurs. Remember, the State Water Planning process often starts with the BAC inputs. Call if interested.

Pumping the Tailwater

Editorial Comment by Wayne Bossert, GMD 4 Manager

SEVERAL THINGS OF WELLS...

Abandoned Wells & Accidents: For several years I’ve been noting abandoned well accidents through Google’s world-wide news articles. It seems 2007 has been a particularly bad year – especially in India. In all of 2006 I ran across 9 well accident cases – resulting in 8 deaths. Thus far in 2007 (as of April 16) I’ve run across 14 cases involving 17 deaths. Seventeen of these 23 instances over both years have been in India. Maybe India reports these cases better than the rest of the world, or perhaps their 26 million registered wells are a factor. The remaining 6 cases in both years were in the US (4), Serbia (1) and the Philippines (1). Abandoned wells continue to be dangerous items and should be taken care of rather than left alone.

Wells & Movies: I also ran across a listing of movies that had a water well as part of their plot or otherwise notably involved in the script. There were 22 movies listed and I thought of 5 more for a total of 27 (and I’m sure that’s not all). They are: The Cheyenne Cyclone, 1931; A Civil Action, 1998; Colt Comrades, 1943; Erin Brockovich, 2000; Everybody’s Baby: The Rescue of Jessica McClure, 1987; The Farmer and the Belle, 1950; George Washington Slept Here, 1942; Jean de Florette, 1986; Judith of Bethulia, 1914; The Last Frontier, 1986; Lourdes, 2001; The Miracle Worker, 1962; Mr. Blandings Builds his Dream House, 1948; The Old Chisolm Trail, 1942; Riding the Wind, 1942; Sahara, 1943; Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, 1937; Them Thar Hills, 1934; Water, 1995; The Well, 1951; The Well, 1997; World Gone Wild, 1998; Baby Boom, 1987; The Ring, 2001; The Ring Two, 2005; Cold Mountain, 2002; and Red Headed Stranger, 1986. The original listing (from the Water Well Journal of the National Ground Water Association) and my additions now reside on our “Quotes” web page – with actors and plot descriptions. Two of these movies (Everybody’s Baby (1987) and The Well (1951)) involve rescuing a child that has fallen in a well.

Well Curtailments: For the first time several states have been dealing with water well curtailments on a large scale. Colorado recently shut down 440 groundwater wells in an administrative action while Kansas and Nebraska are working on programs to reduce groundwater pumpage that may involve at least voluntary well shut downs too. The national Groundwater Management Districts Association (GMDA will explore this issue at its Summer Conference – June 3-5, 2007 – in Estes Park, CO. Call me if you need more information on GMDA or the Estes Park conference.