

GROUNDWATER HI - LITES

May 2023

Big Bend Groundwater Management District No. 5

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UPCOMING DATES

District Board Meeting
May 11

District Office Closed
May 29

FY2024 Budget Hearing
July 13

GMD # 5 WEATHER STATIONS

01 GREENSBURG	(620) 723-2193
02 LEWIS	(620) 324-5866
03 ROZEL	(620) 527-4531
04 CULLISON	(620) 895-6505
05 MACKSVILLE	(620) 348-2238
06 RADIUM	(620) 285-2796
07 GREAT BEND	(620) 793-5798
08 STERLING	(620) 278-2632
09 CAIRO	(620) 672-3359
10 STAFFORD	(620) 234-5667
11 HUDSON	(620) 458-3021
12 TROUSDALE	(620) 995-3219

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Joe Schlessiger, Barton County
Tom Taylor, Director at Large
Darrell Wood, Edwards County
John Janssen, Kiowa County
Kerry Froetschner, Pawnee County
Fred Grunder, Pratt County
Gary Hornbaker, Reno County
Craig Zwick, Rice County
Marlyn Spare, Stafford County

DISTRICT STAFF

Orrin Feril, Manager
John Hildebrand, Conservation Specialist
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Rattlesnake Creek Watershed Plan

Throughout 2023, significant progress has been made developing the Rattlesnake Creek Watershed Plan—Environmental Assessment (Plan—EA). Through the course of that work, due to the groundwater quality conditions encountered closer to the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, the project team has evaluated additional wellfield configurations that would potentially affect areas further to the south than originally envisioned. While the overall feasibility of the project looks good, additional potential impacts need to be evaluated and the potential project cost could exceed the threshold allowed in the Watershed program associated with a Plan—EA. As such, the Natural Resources Conservation Service has requested that the District complete a Watershed Plan—Environmental Impact Statement (Plan—EIS) instead of a Plan—EA. It will take some additional time to fully work through that process, and current estimates are that the Plan—EIS could be complete in the first quarter of 2024 or sooner. Anyone wishing to provide additional comments is welcome to do so here: <https://gmd5.org/watershed-plan>

Annual Meeting Recap

This year's annual meeting was held on February 16, 2023 in St. John. There were approximately 70 in attendance for discussion on the activities of the District and for the election of three board member positions for three-year terms: Joe Schlessiger—Barton County, Darrell Wood—Edwards County, Craig Zwick—Rice County. Following the elections, the 2022 financial statement and 2024 proposed budget were presented to the public for consideration and discussion. Updates on the Rattlesnake Creek Watershed Plan—EA and CKWBA activities were provided to all in attendance. Earl Lewis, Chief Engineer for the Kansas Department of Agriculture—Division of Water Resources, provided an overview of issues throughout the region including the USFWS' request to secure water and addressed several questions from the audience.

Quivira NWR

This February, USFWS submitted a Request to Secure Water to KDA—DWR regarding Quivira NWR. In response to this request, the District submitted a letter to USFWS reaffirming the District's commitment to work with the USFWS and outlined the significant good faith efforts by the District and partners in working toward addressing the claimed impairment. Furthermore in the letter, the District requested USFWS withdraw the Request to Secure Water for 2023 while working through the Watershed Plan process with NRCS as a measure of good faith.

The District, as well as several area water users, recently received correspondence from Earl Lewis that confirmed statements made at the District's annual meeting. In the letter, the Chief Engineer indicates that the 2016 impairment investigation is being reviewed in consideration of the most up-to-date information and hydrologic modeling available. As such, KDA—DWR is not planning to administer junior water rights during calendar year 2023. However, it is currently the intent to develop and implement a “durable remedy” in early 2024. No additional information is available at this time in this matter. A copy of these letters can be found on the District's website here: <https://gmd5.org/quivira-nwr>

Legislative Activity

This legislative session has been very active with regards to water related bills. There were three water-related bills that the District tracked closely this session (HB2279, HB2302, and SB205). HB2279 added additional reporting requirements from the groundwater management districts to the legislature. Additionally, the districts have been tasked with identifying priority areas of concern and creating an action plan to address the areas for approval by the Chief Engineer every 5 years. HB2302 provides \$35 million to the state water plan funding in addition the existing \$8 million from the state general fund and the \$12 million from agriculture & municipal water users. Initially \$52 million from this funding will pay off federal debt for Milford and Perry reservoirs. SB205 is related to the attorney general opinion regarding eligibility for water users participating in water banking that apply for multiyear flex accounts (MYFA). The bill provides specific eligibility for water users applying for a MYFA in 2022 after withdrawing water from the water bank. Going forward the statute would be amended to allow both programs to exist together but not utilized within the same calendar year. All three bills have been signed into law by Governor Kelly.

District Staff Changes

Vanessa Marks has joined the District as the Administrative Assistant. Vanessa is originally from South Dakota and has been in Stafford County for nearly a decade before joining the District. She looks forward to assisting area water users in addressing their water resource concerns. When you get an opportunity, stop by the office to meet Vanessa.



District Management Program Update

The District is in the midst of reviewing and updating the management program in accordance with K.S.A. 82a-1029. We encourage your input into the management of the District as it is critical to ensure the objective of the Groundwater Management District Act is achieved. Once finalized by the District board, the revised management program will be sent to KDA–DWR for review and approval. Upon approval, the board will hold a public hearing to further gather public input. Following this hearing, the board will adopt the revised management program by resolution. The current revised management program can be found on the District’s website here: <https://gmd5.org/management-program>.