

Don't force residents' hands on water

An open letter to the citizens of Montgomery County:

Over the last seven years, I have been asked many times about the Lone Star Groundwater Conservation District groundwater reduction regulatory plan and the San Jacinto River Authority surface-water conservation program, at times, even encouraged to write a book. How and where does one begin to address all the questions, doubt and controversy surrounding the current \$552 million SJRA surface-water conversion program? Add interest to the principal debt and you approach \$1 billion the citizens in the SJRA plan are now responsible for paying. Currently, there are certainly more questions, doubt and controversy than answers.

Both LSGCD and SJRA have made numerous claims in the media about what they call a groundwater crisis. They have chosen the "fear-based" approach as their weapon of choice to communicate. Simply put, it is the fastest and easiest way to gain mileage with the uninformed public. The truth moves much slower.

Our county coalition group, consisting of cities around the county, investor-owned utilities and MUDs, have been told our professional hydrologists "will have to prove everything." However, many of us have been asking LSGCD for several years to prove their own 64,000 acre-feet number, which is the basis of their current regulatory rules. We are still asking.

The response those of us have received for asking honest questions while trying to protect our legal and property rights has been nothing short of being ridiculed, demonized and more. ... All laced with the intimidation. SJRA has on its website, a statement saying, "Fact: The LSGCD was created to study the aquifers and force a solution by regulating groundwater use." Really ... to "force" a solution? Logos of each agency are shown with this statement. "Force." Remember that word..

Example: One of the most erro-



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neous, one-sided provisions in SJRA's initial GRP proposed contract required GRP members to "Forfeit their legal rights." ... Interested? SJRA wanted this so no one could sue them. ... Imagine that. Fortunately, our City Council said, "No, not on our watch."

Is the groundwater crisis they both claim real? Could the claimed crisis actually be localized within the county due to a certain well owner's large group of wells being in a specified area? Regarding current aquifer management, LSGCD has chosen to put all the different aquifers in Montgomery County into one barrel. Truth is, all aquifers don't behave the same. Professional hydrologists know this. Oh, by the way, the aquifers don't know where the county line is either, so why do the adjoining counties south of us get to pump two to three times more water than currently allowed in Montgomery County out of the same aquifers?

Moving forward, our coalition of county water providers is working diligently with qualified groundwater attorneys, professional hydrologists, engineers and others. We are offering honest hydro-science options for the LSGCD board to consider; and our attorneys are willing to work with the LSGCD to bring current and future LSGCD rules and policies into compliance with state law.

The recent total estimated recoverable storage ("TERS") report by the state shows 180,000,000 million acre-feet of groundwater in the Gulf Coast Aquifer. A former consultant for LSGCD gave an example. He said, "Using only one-half of 1 percent equals

900,000 acre-feet, lots of groundwater, 14-plus times LSGCD's current 64,000 acre-feet number." Not included in the "TERS" report is an additional amount of 60,814,000 acre-feet of brackish water for Region H, with TDS (Total Dissolved Solids in MG/L) less than 3,000, as reported by the state. Montgomery County is in Region H. The state also reports an additional amount of 25,018,000 acre-feet of brackish water is available in Region H with TDS between 3,000 and 10,000. The state's report says both are high in availability and productivity.

What does all of this mean for the citizens of Montgomery County? An opportunity for all cities, MUDs, IOUs and all other county water providers to provide water to their customers at the lowest possible rates; the freedom of economic choice to do so, and under fair and impartial regulations that preserve and protect our private property rights, legal rights and more..

Through increased conservation education and awareness, the availability of surface water, rapidly advancing technology for water treatments involving brackish, blending, reuse and the groundwater science information in the state's new "TERS" report, we all have fresh opportunity to work together to ensure diversified long-term water for Montgomery County.

The coalition will continue to submit professional science and supporting information for improved aquifer management standards. In doing so, our coalition of water providers in Montgomery County looks forward to working with the LSGCD board to benefit all of our citizens.

With the state's new "TERS" report and all the additional aquifer-science information being presented, maybe, just maybe, the good people of Montgomery County will no longer be "forced" into higher water bills.

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