

Bill to create Edwards Aquifer groundwater district is pending

By Anne C. McAfee

A bill has been filed in the legislature by Senator Gonzalo Barrientos which would protect the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone which supplies water to Barton Springs and to several small towns south of Austin.

The towns of Manchaca, Buda, San Leanna, Ford Oaks and Sunset Valley are wholly dependent on water wells in the Edwards Aquifer for their drinking water. They have banded together in a Small Cities organization to fight a proposed high density municipal utility district (MUD) development in the area.

Provisions of bill

The Barrientos bill, now in the Senate Natural Resources committee, would establish a Hays-Travis Groundwater District for the Edwards Aquifer. It recognizes ownership rights of landowners, and in the early version would establish a 9-member board of directors, along with a general manager and staff to manage the underground water resource.

The district would be required to adopt a comprehensive groundwater management plan, which would include a record of current use and estimates of future groundwater production and demand for water. The district would also be required to provide information on sources of pollution and toxic waste, and to provide pollution protection plans.

The district would govern permits for future wells and would manage production, levy taxes and well fees which would only be applicable in the reservoir zone and recharge zone of the district. The bill would include the upstream contributing watershed zone, as well as the watersheds of Barton, Williamson, Slaughter, Bear, Little Bear, and Onion Creeks.

Specific boundaries would be mapped and officially designated by the Texas Department of Water Resources and the Texas Water Commission within 120 days follow-

ing approval of the act by the legislature.

The bill's earlier version provides for 3 board members to be elected from the reservoir-recharge zone of Hays County, 3 from the reservoir-recharge zone of Travis County, and 3 members elected from the contributing watershed zone of either Hays or Travis County.

Barton's 'could cease' to flow

The bill is especially timely because developer Randy Morine's proposed Bear

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Creek Municipal Utility District would establish the largest water well field ever built in the Barton Springs portion of the Edwards Aquifer. If approved it would pump 1000 gallons of water a minute or 1.4 million gallons of water per day.

City of Austin geologist Fred Snyder with the Department of Planning and Growth Management warns, "The proposed (Bear Creek) well field alone would consume almost 50% of the total recharge" to the aquifer. In a drouth situation, such as Texas experienced in 1955-56, "no water is recharged to the aquifer" and water would have to be removed from storage at the rate of 1.4 million gallons per day.

"The water supply of the aquifer is sufficient to handle current rates of pumpage," Snyder said. "However, as the aquifer

is further developed with wells, the resulting increase in pumpage would reduce the availability of ground water and could *reduce or even cease* the flow of Barton Springs."

Stumbling block

The Barrientos bill has encountered a major stumbling block, however. The Creedmoor-Maha water district, which provides water to rural southeast Travis County and Caldwell County, has voiced strenuous objections to the bill. Although they are located several miles east of the Edwards Aquifer itself, they also depend on the aquifer for their water supply. A compromise may be in the works. The district board could be increased to 11 members to give representation to other interested parties. And other language could be changed.

of three ponds that filter rainwater runoff at Barton Creek Square Mall was clogged and not stopping pollutants from the parking lot from flowing directly into Barton Creek during rainy periods of a half inch or more. These ponds were supposed to keep pollutants from contaminating the Edwards Aquifer which feeds Barton Springs, and provides part of Austin's drinking water supply. It is hoped that monitoring of the site by the city will occur with greater frequency.

A PUBLIC HEARING on the Edwards Aquifer Groundwater bill is tentatively scheduled for some time this week. For more information on the time and place, call Senator Barrientos' office, 475-3731; or the Senate Natural Resources Committee office, 475-1554.
