

April 8, 2015

Water fight continues; Neutral hydrogeologist weighs in

BYLINE: The Free Press staff

LENGTH: 585 words

The debate about the Electro Purification (EP) well project continued Tuesday in Hays County Commissioners Court as a neutral scientist weighed in on the data.

District Senior Hydrologist and **Aquifer Science** Team Leader Brian Smith with the Barton Springs/Edwards Aquifer Conservation District (BS/EACD) presented his agency's findings on the hydrological studies and analysis associated with the EP project.

The groundwater district's General Manager John Dupnik said in an interview Monday that Smith would help provide objectivity in a highly contentious and emotional debate.

"There is lots of misinformation out there," he said. "We aim to calibrate the conversation back to reality."

Dupnik said there are too many unknowns about the Trinity Aquifer and that it would be irresponsible to discuss with certainty any conclusions on both sides.

He said, "BSEACD can be the technical voice of objectivity because we don't have a dog in this hunt."

Smith is the third scientist in as many weeks to present to the commissioners.

Two weeks ago, David Braun of Braun and Gresham, LLC, provided commissioners the results of a hydrological evaluation by LBG-Guyton Associates. He presented his findings on behalf of Bill Johnson and Halifax Ranch, who paid for the hydrological study.

The study, based on an analysis of existing data, groundwater models and data from three of EP's seven test wells, concluded that if the EP project continued pumping more than 1.8 billion gallons of water annually from the Middle Trinity Aquifer, local Well owners would see a negative impact on their residential wells.

Last week EP went on the rebuttal, claiming the LBG-Guyton evaluation of EP's data was invalid and inaccurate. Wet Rock Groundwater Services President Kaveh Khorzad, who was hired by EP to conduct a study, said the Theis equation used in the LBG-Guyton report was a simple and incomplete way to determine drawdown.

Khorzad also concluded that the Trinity Aquifer has more water than previously thought.

BSEACD's Smith, however, said Electro Purification's claim that LBG-Guyton's data was inaccurate wasn't necessarily true.

He told commissioners it is a widely used equation by hydrologists and it has merit.

"We use the Theis equation for our wells," Smith said. "We are concerned enough that there could be negatives effects on people's wells that we know we need to focus on the studies."

According to Smith, it will be a while before they figure out just how many wells are in the area.

"We will be measuring shallow wells, intermediate wells, and deep wells, to see what drawdown if any they are experiencing," Smith said. "Just those numbers alone will be able to help. At least we have the tools to predict into the future what will happen if these wells are in full production over a period of time."

He said that BSEACD is looking at determining the overall sustainability of the area.

"We're still going to do studies to determine the impacts of pumping in the area," he said. "They intend to do further testing and said they will cooperate with us."

"I think what we're saying is that we're running out of water no matter what we do," Judge Bert Cobb said.

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Despite the controversy, Dupnik said all the focus on groundwater management is probably a good thing.

"There has never been so much good attention on why we exist," he said.

Smith told commissioners Monday, "EP is committed to working with us as we move forward. We will monitor wells nearby where they are pumping."

Kim Hilsenbeck contributed to this report.

LOAD-DATE: August 7, 2015

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

DOCUMENT-TYPE: Local Government

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper

JOURNAL-CODE: HFP

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