

WATER DISTRICT NEWSLETTER

SOUTHWEST KANSAS GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT (GMD3)
A GOVERNING BODY CONTROLLED BY LOCAL PEOPLE

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MEETINGS:

2ND WED. EACH MONTH

9:00 A.M. - DISTRICT OFFICE

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<http://www.gmd3.org>

RURAL COMMUNITIES ARE VITAL TO THE URBAN CENTERS

Water management agencies and stakeholders are focused on water saving programs that will have the potential to raise taxes if implemented. The crux of the issue involves using tax revenue to extend the life of the aquifer in western Kansas. Early in the discussion this GMD sponsored a comprehensive economic study that was completed in March of 2001. The study implied that southwest Kansas has assets in excess of 9 billion dollars. The bulk of the wealth can be attributed to the very successful development of the indigenous water resources. In fact, it has been suggested that irrigation crop production in SW Kansas supports the second strongest economy in the state. However, money isn't the most significant factor according to the social elite who spoke during an annual economic summit hosted by KU last October at Lawrence. The consensus among the various university professors, bureaucrats, and attorneys didn't place the greatest emphasis on water or money. In subtle contrast, they emphasized the fact that the quality of life in the urban centers, like Kansas City, Lawrence, and Wichita, is very much dependent upon the young people that are born and raised in the small rural communities throughout Kansas. These rural offspring migrate to the urban centers bringing highly productive work ethics and moral values that improve the quality of life in the more populated urban areas. For this reason, the communities of western Kansas are of vital strategic concern to our urban counterparts. It was a welcome contrast to the worldly tradition of criticizing the inherent resiliency of rural lifestyle. The academic and social elite actually recommended that the urban populace explore opportunities to invest in the preservation of rural communities. Such investment was promoted as a means of maintaining the quality of life in the large cities. It's difficult to find fault in this philosophy in spite of our innate western cynicism. Unfortunately, this philosophy might never be tested because of the potential tax burden.

ITAP: IRRIGATION TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Water planners and stakeholders have spent the last 3 years determining that one part of the solution is to provide voluntary cost-incentive programs or government grants to assist irrigators to make the transition from irrigation to dryland farming. Estimates vary dramatically and little empirical research has been done to determine the financial impact of this endeavor. The lack of factual information isn't a problem. Kansas is a role model for maintaining detailed records on individual land parcels of everything from historic water use to a myriad of other characteristics. A major concern is that land and its market value varies significantly from parcel to parcel, which makes it impractical to establish a statewide standard for valuating water rights. An idea currently under consideration is for the State Conservation Commission to establish a "bid" application process. In this proposal applications for the ITAP could be selected according to a priority system based not only on a pre-determined price range, but also on the positive impact dismissing a particular water right might have on the local water supply. Under the current proposed regulations, the land must also be located in an area designated as a high priority for such grants.

SOUTHWEST KANSAS GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT NO. 3

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RETURN SERVICES REQUESTED**SEPTEMBER 8, 2004 REVISED MANAGEMENT PROGRAM HEARING**

The public hearing scheduled for 10 AM on Wednesday, September 8, 2004, focuses on adopting a newly Revised Management Program that is necessary for the aquifer subunit management protocol to become public policy in southwest Kansas. Following that, it has been implied that before any land in this District qualifies for the ITAP, this GMD must also have detailed water saving strategies approved by the Chief Engineer. These strategies are to include defined goals and initiatives that will reduce the rate of decline of the water level in the high priority aquifer subunits. Such strategic plans are already in place in at least 2 regions of the Big Bend Groundwater Management District No. 5 (GMD5). These adjoin GMD3 along our eastern boundary and include portions of the Middle Arkansas River Sub-basin and Rattlesnake Creek that are within GMD3. These plans were developed and adopted pursuant to an order of the Chief Engineer to reduce annual water consumption by 41,000 acre-feet within the next few years. In contrast GMD3 has not been ordered to reduce consumption by a specific quantity. However, the Chief Engineer did tell the GMD3 Board of Directors on Nov. 19, 2003 to reduce the rate of decline in 3 years through voluntary initiatives or he'll consider a regulatory approach. The hearing on the Revised Management Program will be held at the GMD3 headquarters located at the address listed in this newsletter. Detailed information is available by either contacting the District office or by visiting the District web site at the following Internet address: www.gmd3.org.

GMD5 FIRST TO QUALIFY FOR ITAP GRANTS

It's difficult to imagine that water users inside GMD3 would ever want to give the appearance of competing for the ITAP grants with water users located in GMD5. That's especially true considering the given regulatory circumstances being considered in GMD5. The recent drought aggravated their unfortunate circumstances, but in spite of the drought, it appears that actual consumption was kept to a minimum. This was no small accomplishment and the irrigators located in GMD5 are to be commended for their heroic effort to conserve water during one of the worst droughts in recorded history. Unfortunately, in spite of recent events it appears the water users in GMD5 will have to continue to reduce consumption in order to satisfy the long-term expectations of the Chief Engineer. Future reductions in irrigation may have to be accomplished through regulatory means in spite of their voluntary efforts. That is, unless voluntary incentive programs like EQUIP and ITAP reduce enough irrigated land to sufficiently reduce consumption. It's possible none of the other GMD's will be ready in time to qualify for the ITAP program in the next couple of years. It will take time for the western Kansas GMD's to obtain stakeholder consensus on how, when and where to reduce water consumption needed to reduce the rate of aquifer decline.

ITAP PILOT PROGRAM TIMELINE & PENDING REGULATIONS

Meanwhile, the ITAP program is moving ahead in lieu of not having adequate funding. During 2004 the Kansas Legislature approved a proviso sponsored by Senator Steve Morris, Hugoton, to provide authority for the State Conservation Commission to administrate a pilot, or small-scale sample of the ITAP. The legislation stipulates the State Conservation Commission "to develop and adopt such rules & regulations not later than March 1, 2005, to implement such irrigation transition grants". The SCC plans to have the new regulations prepared for public comment by October of 2004. The program's annual application period will be October 1 through December 1, with the first sign-up being as early as October 1, 2005. That is, if the appropriate funding is secured. A preliminary working draft of ITAP regulations has been circulated for consideration by various stakeholder groups and agencies. A rough draft of the SCC's pending regulations can be viewed at GMD3's web site: www.gmd3.org/ITAPinfo.htm. The GMD3 Board of Directors will complete its review of the pending regulations within the next couple of months, if not sooner.

KANSAS WATER CONGRESS SUMMER CONFERENCE A GREAT SUCCESS

The first Annual Summer Conference of the Kansas Water Congress boasted more than 100 participants. The Garden City Community College Business & Industry Institute hosted the event on August 12 and 13. At least 6 state legislators participated in the conference. Additionally, US Senator Sam Brownback gave an enthusiastic presentation that was greatly appreciated by all. With his trademark precision and candor, Robin Jennison, Speaker of the House (emeritus), provided opening and closing statements. Dick MacRavey, Executive Director of the Colorado Water Congress, gave a rousing historical account of the significance the Water Congress is to Colorado. David Brenn, KWC Executive Director was the general moderator and event coordinator. Speaker panelists consisted of leaders in financial, industrial, municipal, and agricultural interests as well as federal, state & local governments.