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WHITMAN COUNTY

RECEIVED
FEB 2004
Department of Water Resources

February 9, 2004

Karl Dreher, Director
Idaho Department of Water Resources
1301 North Orchard Street
Boise, ID 83706

RE: Palouse Basin Aquifer Groundwater Management

Dear Mr. Dreher:

Whitman County, adjacent to Latah County and Moscow, is deeply concerned over the recent events regarding the involvement of the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) in local ground water issues.

Several representatives of Whitman County attended the IDWR workshop at the University of Idaho on Monday, February 2, 2004. At the workshop, we were rewarded with some updated information regarding the current state of the technical knowledge regarding both the Wanapum and Grande Ronde aquifers. Additionally, we learned of the IDWR process and procedures regarding the recent request to designate the area as a "Critical Ground Water Management Area". We understand the IDWR is charged with evaluating a request to become more involved in management of the "Palouse Basin Aquifer", by removing management issues from local control. Although this may seem like a good idea to some residents, we urge IDWR to consider taking no action regarding the request.

We would like to point out a few reasons we feel the actions of the local agencies have made substantial progress toward understanding and managing ground water resources over the last 10+ years. Some examples on the Washington side of the basin include:

- In 1997, with the help of the Pullman-Moscow Water Resources Committee (now known as PBAC), Whitman County created a "Critical Aquifer Recharge Area Designation and Protection Ordinance. The intent of the ordinance is to prevent loss of aquifer recharge areas due to construction of impervious surfaces. It was also intended to prevent contamination to the aquifer.

- The State of Washington has been working with all public water systems over a certain size to have Wellhead Protection Areas designated, with the intent of protecting aquifer recharge quality.

- Stabilized pumping rates for the four major grand water users (Pullman, Moscow, WSU, and U. of I.).

- A far greater knowledge of the extent and character of the Palouse basin aquifer system.

- Whitman County, Moscow, Pullman, Latah County, and the two universities, through PBAC, have been actively seeking solutions to our ground water resource issues for many years now. Many successes can be attributed to the actions of PBAC, managed and implemented at the local level.

Our point is that our local communities, including both Latah and Whitman Counties, have been responsible regarding water use, as shown by our municipalities' cooperation with wellhead protection, by our adoption of an aquifer recharge protection ordinance, by an active consumer education for water conservation, and by our participation in, and support of, the Palouse Basin Aquifer Committee (PBAC). We recognize that more work needs to be done to improve water conservation, and to explore other ways to aid in aquifer recharge. We have enough rainfall and surface water infiltration in our area to supply our area with a long-term solution to our water needs. We also understand, however, that it will take a long term commitment to understanding how we can capture, retain, and manage our ground and surface water resources adequately to supply our region for the long term.

This interstate cooperation is unique, and PBAC is quite capable of supplying the cooperative effort by the seven entities that is required to address the question of deep aquifer water use and recharge. We have already compiled several years of efforts delineating and studying the aquifer in our attempt to find ways to avoid a long-term aquifer problem. It would be a true waste to take the control away from the local government entities after they have accomplished so much toward our common goals.

Whitman County Commissioners urge you to allow the City of Moscow and Latah County to continue with our combined efforts to manage this ground water resource. We are not sure what advantage there will be to our local efforts if the State of Idaho designates either the Wanapum Aquifer as a "Ground Water Management Area" or the Grand Ronde Aquifer as a "Critical Ground Water Management Area."

As partners in PBAC and as Whitman County Commissioners, we ask that you NOT designate our Palouse Basin Aquifer as a "Critical Ground Water Management Area."

Thank you.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF WHITMAN COUNTY, WASHINGTON

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G. R. Finch, Commissioner

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