

GROUNDWATER RESEARCH SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING RECORD

TIME AND DATE:

9:00 AM, February 15, 2007

LOCATION:

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality Campus, Building B, 2nd Floor, Room 201A,
12100 Park 35 Circle, Austin, Texas 78753.

PURPOSE OF MEETING:

Second quarter regular business meeting

AGENCIES/ENTITIES REPRESENTED:

Bureau of Economic Geology [BEG]
Texas Agricultural Experiment Station [TAES]
Texas Commission on Environmental Quality [TCEQ]
Texas Department of Agriculture [TDA]
Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board [TSSWCB]
Texas Water Development Board [TWDB]
United States Geological Service [USGS]

ATTENDEES:

Bridget Scanlon	BEG, Co-chair of the GW Research Subcommittee of the TGPC
Allan Jones	TAES, Co-chair of the GW Research Subcommittee of the TGPC
Mary Ambrose	TCEQ, Chairman of TGPC
Radu Boghici	TWDB
Alan Cherepon	TCEQ
Richard Egg	TSSWCB
Lynne Fahlquist	USGS
Joseph L. Peters	TCEQ
David Villarreal	TDA

MEETING SUMMARY:

I. Call to Order and Introductions

Dr. Jones called the meeting to order at about 9:03 AM. The meeting started with self introductions of everyone present. The Co-Chair, Dr. Scanlon, was not initially present, but arrived about ten minutes after the meeting began. David Villarreal, who substituted for Richard Eyster of TDA, was also about ten minutes late.

II. Discussion of Sources of Funding and Current Calls for Proposals

Dr. Jones began the discussion by describing his recent efforts at TWRI for a couple of projects. He has been talking to congressional sources in Washington and to legislative contacts in Austin about funding the two projects. The two projects are described as follows.

1. The Ogallala (High Plains) Aquifer Project, a joint effort of a number of universities and the Agricultural Research Service, is a project focused on water conservation in the Ogallala, primarily South Kansas and Texas. It has been funded for the past few years and the hope is that it will continue to be funded in the future. The project is looking at engineering solutions such as changing crops, changing crop varieties, and moving from full irrigation to partial irrigation to dry land. It has made use of combined aquifer and economic models so as to look at economic and policy issues. The project includes both research and demonstrations.

2. Also, there are efforts to start a project to look at aquifers in Texas, New Mexico, and Mexico. The proposed project is called the Transboundary Aquifer Initiative. It is being led out of El Paso. This project has not had funding before and may not be funded in the current federal legislative environment. In the last week or so an edict has been issued that FY2008 federal earmarks across the federal government will be cut by 50%, which would make the funding of this project unlikely. If funds would be allocated for this project they would come through the USGS.

In response to a question about the Rio Grand Basin Initiative from Ms. Fahlquist, Dr Jones continued by describing this project. The Rio Grand Basin Initiative called Efficient Irrigation for the Rio Grand Basin, has been on-going for a number of years with most of the work being done by New Mexico State, TCE, and the Agricultural Experiment Station. It appears that funding for this project will suffer like all the earmarks in Texas that go through Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES). CSREES is an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) that funds agricultural programs in places like Texas A&M, Texas Tech, and some of the smaller universities. Those funds are going to be reallocated differently in the future. CSREES has been instructed by the House, and probably will be by the Senate, to take funds that were distributed by earmarks in FY06 and distribute them in the future by formula. Some states will benefit, but others like Texas will suffer about a 2/3 reduction in funding. The hope is that the Rio Grand Basin Initiative, because of recent recognition, – out of 47 nominees it has just won a national award, a couple of weeks ago, for the effective utilization of partnerships – would continue to fare well in funding. There has been a lot of work done on that project in helping local entities develop plans for groundwater desalination in the Lower Rio Grand Valley.

Ms. Fahlquist commented that, because of the new method of funding allocation at CSREES, there will be little opportunity for the funding of new projects. Dr. Jones responded that indeed the situation will be rather the opposite of opportunities, and we will be trying to get by with less money.

In response to a question from Ms. Fahlquist about the status of National Institute of Water Resources (NIWR) grant applications, Dr. Jones informed us that the deadline on these applications was today. He added that there is a 50% match requirement for the NIWR grants.

In response to a question from Ms. Ambrose about the National Integrated Water Quality Program Dr. Jones gave the following information. This program is sponsored by the USDA through CSREES. The closing date is April 4th. Eligibility is to Universities, and Land-Grant institutions can't apply. They want to address water quality issues as related to agricultural, rural, and urbanizing

watersheds. TWRI has sent notice of this to all its people. \$11,000,000.00 is available through the CSREES. Dr. Jones suggested that this shouldn't be affected by the CSREES's new funding policies since this allocation is not an earmark, but a part of base funding. Dr. Jones offered that TWRI would be willing to work with anyone interested in pursuing a project under this funding. All projects pursuing this funding must integrate research, education, and extension. Dr. Jones suggested that the TWDB has an interest in urbanized areas. The best strategy would be to submit a project application through one of the agencies that's funded by CSREES. That would be the Agricultural Experiment Station or TCE. The application should be submitted through that existing mechanism but with the funding passing through to the other Universities.

Dr. Jones also described another upcoming project that may be of interest to the Groundwater Research Subcommittee members. This would be a request for an earmark through the Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station to develop a demonstration unit for the desalination of water from the Barnett Shale. It would essentially be a desalination unit transportable on an 18-wheeler. It would be an educational facility that could be driven around to show people how you can desalinate water from the Barnett Shale.

At this point Dr. Jones asked if anyone else had any announcement concerning sources-of-funding.

Mr. Egg mentioned a couple of things.

1. The FY2007 319 proposals are due tomorrow. FY2008 application are still in the future. TCEQ's application has been completed. Although 319 cannot fund research it can fund implementation. One of the things to think about is that EPA is beginning to fund more and push more the Watershed Protection Plan, which is an integrated groundwater and surface water plan. This may be an opportunity. There may be some missing links that leave room for a few additional projects.

2. Also, this state is developing a website that will be like a one-stop site for grant information. The site will be called eGRANT and should be up sometime in April. Agencies with funding are supposed to go in and enter all the information on their RFPs. The DIR and the Governor's Office are collaborating on this project and it should be hosted on the **TexasOnline** website.

At this point Dr. Jones gave us some information on an upcoming position opening at TWRI concerning grant proposal applications. They now have four project managers. They are thinking of hiring, in the next few months, another person with special skills in proposal preparation rather than just project management. If anyone is interested they can apply, or if anyone knows of someone that is interested, they should let them know about the opportunity.

Dr. Villarreal informed us that Dr. Chilton of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for years has petitioned the Park Commissioners to fund a grant writer to help obtain funding for research on invasive species control (especially in waterways) and brush control (such as salt cedar). There is a move right now at the Texas Legislature to fund these kinds of activities and it looks like they may get some funding for a grant writer. Dr. Jones responded that TWRI would like to talk about that, because it may be better for us to fund several grant writers that we can share among agencies. It looks like we're going to have an FY2008 initiative that will probably involve the Army Corp of Engineers or Department of Agriculture or both on aquatic weed control. The more effort you can put into really good quality professional grant writing and management the better. The return on investment is very large.

Dr. Scanlon brought up the subject of ethanol plants being built in Texas. She had heard of five different ones. Dr. Jones responded that he had been talking to DOE a couple of times and had just set up a meeting with them for the week of the 26th. DOE is headed away from carbohydrate based ethanol production to cellulose based production. But nobody has a cellulose based plant except for an experimental demonstration project in Canada. So there is no commercial scale production of cellulosic ethanol. There's resistance to corn base ethanol because of the other important uses for corn. Beef, chicken, and dairy people are against it and corn producers are for it, and water managers in the High Plains are concerned about the resultant increase of aquifer water.

Next Dr. Jones informed us about a couple of large upcoming projects concerning ethanol production. DOE was planning on funding two massive projects to improve the ability of microbes to convert cellulose to ethanol. There would be 125 million dollars for each of two projects for five years. This would be 25 million dollars a year for each. These projects would involve nothing other than working on genes and microbes. But now with appropriations being the way they are, funding for these projects has become questionable. However, these projects would not be accessible to us, but only to organizations and universities like MIT and Berkley that have the large research facilities and extensive background experience for work in microbiology and genomics.

III. Discussion of Progress on Initial White Papers

Ms. Ambrose informed us that the white paper entitled *Influences of Natural and Man-Made Sources of Contamination on Water Quality Trends in the Seymour Aquifer: A 2007 Status Report* has been completed and can be accessed on the TGPC website at <http://www.tgpc.state.tx.us/Seymour%20White%20Paper-4-18-07.pdf>. Ms Ambrose suggested that we wait on the Desalination white paper until we see what happens in the Texas Legislature to see what their focus may be.

Dr. Scanlon reminded us that we had discussed before doing a white paper on heavy metal and radio nuclide presence in certain areas. She volunteered to do a first draft and send it around. Dr. Jones offered the TWRI communications people to help manage the process of collecting the contributions. Ms. Fahlquist volunteered to help with the process, and Dr. Jones offered also some TWRI staff to work also on the actual drafting.

IV. Information Exchange

1. The program "Texas Springs" will be televised tonight.
2. Ms. Fahlquist announced that the High Plains Agricultural Land Use Report by USGS is out.
3. Dr. Jones announced that the Pecos River conference will be held on March 9, 2007 at the Aquarena Center.
4. Dr. Jones also announced that on February 12-14, 2007, will be the annual meeting of the Ogallala Project at the Holiday Inn in Lubbock.
5. On march 30, 2007, there will be an Environmental Defense Conference in Austin at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. The topic will be Texas springs and the protection of Texas springs.
6. TCEQ's annual Environmental Trade Fair will be held May 1 through May 3, 2007.

Action Items:

1. Continue work on the white paper *Desalination Research at Texas Universities – A Brief Overview*, taking into account developments at the Texas Legislature. Comments and suggestions on the two documents should be sent to Dr. Ric Jensen at the TWRI.
2. Initiate work on white paper describing a proposed project to study background heavy metal and radio nuclide presence in certain areas including the use of the resultant data to put together a fact sheet for local residents.

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