

AGENDA NOTE – HRPDC ANNUAL RETREAT

ITEM #10: REGIONAL GROUNDWATER POLICY

SUBJECT:

The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) issues groundwater withdrawal permits. DEQ has determined that it has over allocated the groundwater resources in the Eastern Virginia Groundwater Management Area. The existing regulations do not set priorities for groundwater use and DEQ is struggling to find a better approach for allocating groundwater. If the region develops a policy that identifies priorities for the allocation of groundwater, it could significantly influence the state's policies and permitting program and provide for beneficial water uses in the best interest of the public trust.

ISSUES:

Water level measurements in observation wells and the regional groundwater model both indicate that current groundwater use exceeds the amount of rainwater that is recharging the groundwater system. Current withdrawals have not created significant problems in the region, although some homeowners have had to lower their pumps. However, if current withdrawal rates continue or increase, the groundwater users will likely experience the cumulative impacts of declining water levels. Impacts could include: domestic wells going dry; construction of more private wells at deeper depths and larger pump capacities; political and public pressure on utilities to extend public water and sewer systems; litigation against State agencies, public utilities, and large private groundwater users; and shortage of groundwater to support new businesses or business expansion outside of public water system service areas.

The HRPDC's Directors of Utilities Committee guides the regional groundwater program which includes monitoring water levels and chloride concentrations, the development of a regional groundwater model, and administration of the regional mitigation program. However, a comprehensive policy on groundwater use should also include land use planning and economic development concerns to evaluate the impact of a policy on the overall future and sustainability of the localities.

Principal Water Resources Planner, Ms. Whitney Katchmark, will provide a description of the groundwater system and regulations and seek input on moving forward towards establishing a workgroup to develop a regional groundwater policy.

DISCUSSION