

**DRAFT**

## **WRIA 54 Water Management Work Group Meeting**

12/11/2007

**Attendees:** Sara Hunt, Charlie Peterson, Lloyd Brewer, David Luders, Craig Volosing, Mike Hermanson, Mark Wachtel, Brian Crossley, Wes McCart, Stan Miller, Dick Price.

**Facilitated by:** Bryony Stasney.

### **PERMIT EXEMPT WELLS**

Group discussed background information on permit-exempt wells, issues and potential strategies to address the issues. Bryony reminded the group that the role of the WMWG is to identify the water management concerns associated with permit-exempt wells and develop alternative solutions for later evaluation and confirmation by the Planning Unit.

### **Background**

Bryony provided a handout entitled, "Permit Exempt Well Worksheet" that included:

- List of the issues identified during Phase II issue polling and within the Phase II Technical Assessment report.
- Information on permit-exempt wells and permit-exempt well water use in WRIA 54 including the sub-basins where there may be impacts to groundwater and surface water resources as a result of current and/or potential future uses of permit-exempt wells.

Discussion from the group included:

- Needs to be an explanation of "6-pack development" in background information.
- Washington State has made new development almost impossible. Permit-exempt wells may be the only option to supply water to current / future populations.
- Permit-exempt water use results in a consumptive or net use of water. The consumptive water use of one well is likely to be insignificant. Cumulatively, the consumptive water use of many wells located in an area could be an issue, particularly if groundwater resources are limited and streamflows are low.
- Permit-exempt water use impacts, if any, are likely to be seasonal since the highest use and consumptive use occurs in the late spring, summer and fall when permit exempt wells are used for outdoor irrigation.
- Include in background information why 5,000 gpd was originally selected as the limit for single homes / groups of homes.
- Currently permit-exempt water use for one-half acre of lawn or non-commercial garden is unlimited. 5,000 gpd may be excessive for indoor water use for a single home (compared to 1,500 max day demand for eastern WA in WDOH guidelines) but may be appropriate for multiple residences supplied by one permit-exempt well. Some group members were uncomfortable with including this issue since WDOH guidelines are relevant to water system sizing and not to actual water use. Others felt strongly that allowing 5,000 gpd for a single home is excessive considering the need to use water wisely and that this issue should be included since there is an opportunity to manage single home water use to a reasonable level.
- Dick Price confirmed that Stevens County PUD's service area is at least as big as the proposed UGA in the Suncrest area.

## Issues

Group confirmed the permit-exempt well issues as:

- *Permit-exempt wells and associated water use can reduce water available to senior water rights holders, for instream flow and can impact water quality (by reducing groundwater discharge to surface water).*
- *There is insufficient management for the use of permit-exempt wells. Management for other water uses is addressed through permitting.*
- *We do not currently know the impact of permit-exempt withdrawals on groundwater and surface water resources in WRIA 54. The following information will need to be evaluated to assess impacts: location; how much water is actually pumped, water source; consumptive use; and timing of use / impact. Even with accurate information, it may be difficult to evaluate the impact of permit-exempt wells on groundwater and surface water resources in WRIA 54.*
- *Volume limit of 5,000 gpd for permit-exempt water use for a single home may be excessive and is inconsistent with WDOH's guidelines that suggest that 1,500 gpd is appropriate to use as a maximum day demand (MDD) per Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU) (i.e., one single-family home) in eastern Washington.*
- ***There is a need to consider a permit-exempt volume limit for non-commercial lawn or garden one-half acre or less in size.***
- *There may be a disconnect between local land use planning, water availability and water management.*

**Comment [bes1]:** I heard this in the conversation although it was not stated directly. WMWG to confirm.

There was consensus from the Water Management Work Group that there is a potential for detrimental impacts to groundwater and surface water resources in WRIA 54 due to unmanaged growth of permit-exempt wells, particularly in areas where groundwater and surface water resources are already strained / low. The group agreed that if a few permit-exempt wells use excessive water and/or if there is high density permit-exempt well water use, the potential for impacts are higher.

## Potential Solutions / Toolbox

Group identified the following alternative solutions:

- Designation of a groundwater management sub-area (pursuant to RCW 99.44.130, 400-). The boundary for a sub-area could be drawn to coincide with the contact between the crystalline basement rocks and the Columbia River Basalt Group Rocks and similar age / younger sedimentary rocks. Designation of a sub-area allows for development of a groundwater management plan that could include components such as requirements for any new wells, including permit-exempt wells (e.g., locations, densities, depths, withdrawal rates, etc.).
- Reservations for specific uses, including permit-exempt well water uses, as a component of an instream flow rule for the Spokane River and / or specific sub-basins. Permit-exempt well water use could be managed within an instream flow rule by e.g., 1) establishing a reservation / reservations by sub-basin for permit exempt well water use and either estimating use (as recommended in the Watershed Plan) or metering new permit-exempt wells to debit the reservation; 2) not allowing the use of permit-exempt wells if municipal water supply is available; and 3) limits on outdoor irrigation. *See handout provided by Sara Hunt for additional examples.*

- Collect information and evaluate impacts to confirm where the permit-exempt water use problems are now and will likely be in the future. Conduct studies as needed to evaluate the impacts. Establish a program to collect and assess data and address the impacts. Counties, purveyors and Ecology to work together to identify and confirm the problem areas. WRIA 54 efforts should combine with WRIA 55/57 implementation efforts. Areas where there are / may be problems include:
  - West Plains (currently agreed as a problem area by the WMWG reflected by declining groundwater levels in the CRBG aquifers).
  - Chamokane (where streamflows are declining and the only recent increase in water use has been via permit exempt wells). The USGS has begun a study to develop a groundwater flow model of the Camas Valley and Ford sub-basins (the Chamokane drainage). It is expected that this study will confirm impacts from permit-exempt well water use.
  - Sub-basins that have SWSLs in place (i.e., Deep Creek, Spring Creek, Mill Canyon Creek and the Spokane River). The SWSLs essentially result in closure of the basins to new water rights appropriations due to fisheries concerns. Additional permit-exempt well water use may exacerbate the problem of low stream flows. The toe-width assessments completed in Phase II for Deep Creek and Spring Creek should be used to assess the validity of the administrative closure. Mill Canyon Creek should be investigated further and a decision made if an instream flow assessment is needed to confirm the validity of the administrative closure. Additional flow gaging for Deep Creek, Spring Creek, and Mill Canyon Creek may be needed to support these assessments / recommendations.
  - Other sub-basins where significant growth is projected (e.g., Long Lake N and Long Lake S).
- Work towards consistency between Ecology and WDOH. Consider more reasonable limit for indoor permit-exempt well water use for a single home (e.g., 1,500 gpd as opposed to 5,000 gpd to be consistent with WDOH water system sizing guidelines).
- Consider a reasonable limit for permit-exempt well water use for non-commercial lawn or garden one-half acre or less in size. Currently permit-exempt water use for one-half acre of lawn or non-commercial garden is unlimited.
- Land use regulations and density triggers for permit-exempt wells.
- Public education on permit-exempt wells.
- Ecology to enforce against illegal permit-exempt well water use.

**Next meeting**

January 8, 10 – noon, Spokane County Public Works Building, Conf. Rm 4A. The group agreed that the focus of the January 8, 2008 meeting will be water allocation (i.e., water rights).