



Refresher on SJRA Surface Water Project

By: SJRA GRP Division Staff

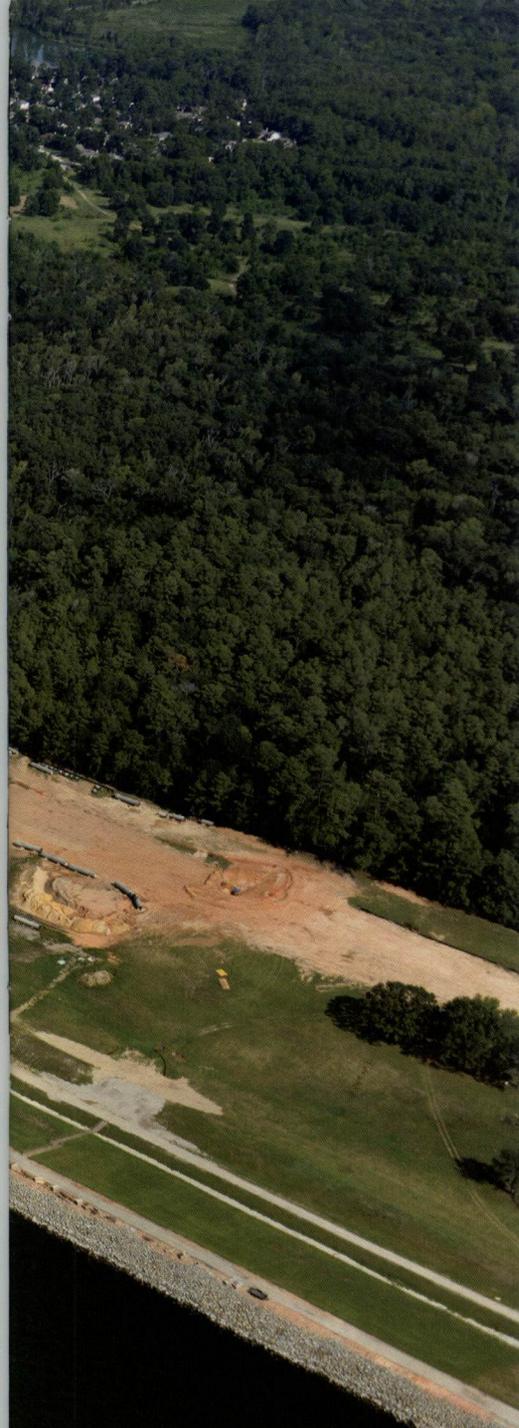
Author's Note: So much information has been written about the San Jacinto River Authority's surface water project over the past few years that our recent articles tend to deal with very specific, detailed aspects of the project. However, we have been reminded recently that new people are moving into Montgomery County every day, and a brief summary of the issues related to conversion from groundwater to surface water would be helpful to those just hearing about it for the first time. For more detailed information, please visit our website at www.sjra.net.

At this time, Montgomery County is totally reliant on groundwater for all of its municipal water supply. Whenever additional water is needed for a new subdivision or development, the local water supplier simply drills a water well. The problem is that Montgomery County's rapid population growth has caused an increase in water demand that cannot be met by our current groundwater supplies. Current demands have outpaced the ability for our underground aquifers to recharge. This has led to alarming declines in water levels in the county's aquifers.

Interesting Fact: Aquifers are underground reservoirs of water. Precipitation, rain, and snow flow into creeks, rivers, lakes, oceans, and other permeable recharge areas throughout the region and slowly recharge the aquifer. Natural refilling of the aquifers in our area is a slow process. Water must move



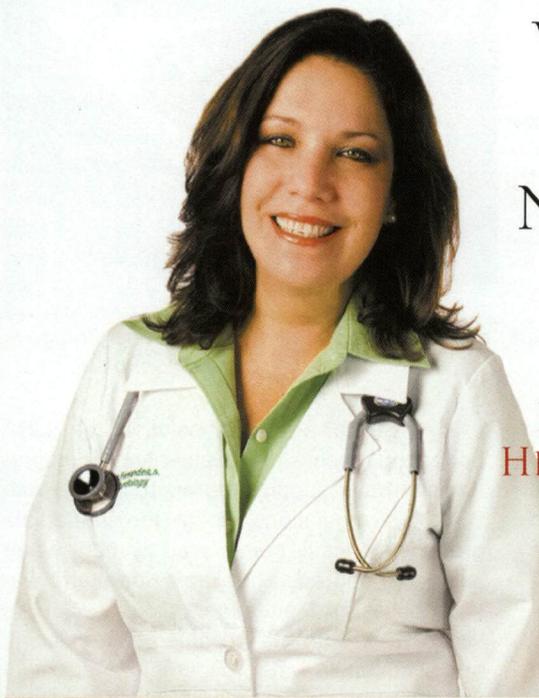
Walls being installed at the High Service Pump Station where the treated drinking water is pumped into water lines for delivery to Conroe, The Woodlands, and other customers.



through the shallow unsaturated soils before reaching the aquifer. If water is being removed faster than it can be refilled, the aquifer's levels will eventually be drained.

Regulations have been adopted to force a solution to this problem. The Lone Star Groundwater Conservation District (LSCGD) was created by the state legislature in 2001 at the request of Montgomery County community leaders. The purpose of the LSGCD is to study and manage the groundwater resources in Montgomery County and force a solution to the problem of declining groundwater supplies. The LSGCD has done this by regulating groundwater use and setting deadlines by which water providers must reduce their groundwater pumpage and supplement their supplies with alternative sources such as surface water from lakes and rivers.

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Walls being placed for tanks at the Granulated Activated Carbon building.



View inside one of the two ground storage tanks at the water treatment plant.

Prior to adopting its rules, LSGCD conducted aquifer studies which ended up confirming the reports of many water suppliers that the water levels in the county's aquifers were declining at a startling rate and had been since the 1980's. Additionally, computer models designed to project future groundwater supplies showed that without a major reduction in groundwater use, water levels would continue to decline and eventually spread to other parts of Montgomery County that had previously been unaffected. LSGCD then proceeded with its rules requiring all large volume water users to reduce their use of groundwater and to develop alternative water supplies.

In response to LSGCD's regulations and

to the need for a regional solution, the SJRA began the process of implementing a comprehensive water supply program to comply with LSGCD's regulations, solve the immediate groundwater crisis being faced by many water suppliers, and ensure reliable, long-term water supplies for Montgomery County. SJRA's vision is to provide reliable, cost-efficient, and sustainable water resource management that supports economic and industrial growth within the region and earns the trust and confidence of SJRA's customers.

Interesting Fact: SJRA was created by a special act of the Texas Legislature in 1937. Its geographic boundaries cover the entire San Jacinto River basin, excluding Harris County. SJRA is a multi-county political subdi-

vision and governmental agency of the State. It includes six counties: Montgomery, Waller, Walker, Grimes, San Jacinto, and Liberty. Montgomery County is the heart of SJRA's service and has been its home for 75 years. SJRA has played a key role in developing water resources and providing water-related services throughout the San Jacinto River basin. Like other river authorities in Texas, SJRA has evolved throughout its 75-year history to meet the specific needs and challenges within its service area. For a historical brochure describing highlights of SJRA's first 75 years, visit www.sjra.net.

In order to decrease groundwater usage and comply with LSGCD's regulations, SJRA has developed a regional Groundwater Reduction Plan (GRP). The GRP was offered as a proposed regional solution to any and all water utilities in Montgomery County. Approximately 85 individual water utilities chose to join SJRA's GRP representing approximately 80% of the water usage in Montgomery County. By joining SJRA's GRP, these large volume users are able to reduce their groundwater usage and meet the requirements of the LSGCD in a way that is less expensive than developing their own alternate water supply.

To meet the regulatory deadline of January 2016, many construction projects must take place. At the SJRA main campus, near

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the Lake Conroe dam, a raw water intake, treatment plant, two storage tanks, and pumping facilities are under construction. Along with these facilities, there are approximately 55 miles of large-diameter water pipelines, metering equipment, and blending facilities that are being constructed and installed. As construction of this massive project continues, throughout Conroe and The Woodlands, various major roadways may experience periodic congestion and closures. It is SJRA's objective to complete the construction cost-effectively, efficiently, and with minimum inconvenience to residents and drivers.

The estimated cost for the first phase of the GRP program is \$500 million. This includes the water treatment plant, transmission pipelines, raw water costs, engineering, legal, land acquisition, and other associated costs. Each large volume groundwater provider that is a GRP participant pays a pumpage fee based on the amount of water used by their customers. The amount of the fee is calculated to cover the cost of implementing the GRP program. Each supplier passes the cost through to their retail customers. SJRA does not dictate what amount is passed through; that is solely up to the supplier. By way of example, a typical single-family residence uses 10,000 gallons of water per month (on average), with a pumpage fee of \$1.75 per thousand gallons, this equates to

a pumpage fee of \$17.50 monthly. SJRA recently distributed rate increase inserts, per the GRP participant's approved contracts.

In an attempt to help minimize confusion and to seek out various avenues to help spread the facts about SJRA's program, SJRA has developed a Construction Communication Plan (CCP). The CCP contains numerous strategies for disseminating information about ongoing construction. The plan includes the GRP Division's website, direct mail brochures, signage, public meetings, community association newsletters and websites, press releases, articles in local magazines and newspapers, along with various other forms of correspondence.

The Construction Communications Team (CCT) is one of the strategies within the CCP. The CCT is made up of local stakeholders who meet on a bimonthly basis to recommend strategies to keep the public informed on all aspects of the project, especially construction schedules, work zones, and possible alternate routes. Members of the CCT include: 911 representatives, county commissioners, and staff from The Woodlands Township, local chambers of commerce, county officials, and village and homeowner associations, just to mention a few.

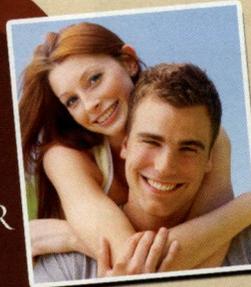
In addition to the CCT, SJRA has provided a construction alert scrolling toolbar, water line Google map, and traffic alert Google map



Excavation and tunnel boring operation along Fish Creek Thoroughfare.

that can be found at www.sjra.net/grp. To assist with construction-related inquiries, SJRA maintains a call center. For more information please visit our website at www.sjra.net/grp or contact us at 936-588-1662. ♦

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