

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT.

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Representative Joann Freeborn at 3:30 p.m. on February 6, 2003 in Room 231-N of the Capitol.

All members were present except: Representative Tom Sloan - excused

Committee staff present: Raney Gilliland, Legislative Research  
Mary Ann Graham, Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Dr. Lee Allison, State Geologist, Kansas Geological Survey,  
University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66047

Others attending: See attached sheet

Chairperson Joann Freeborn called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. She announced that there will be a revised agenda for next Tuesday, February 11, and Thursday, February 13, bills just read in on the House Floor and assigned to the committee will be added.

The Chairperson welcomed Dr. Lee Allison, State Geologist, Kansas Geological Survey, University of Kansas, to the committee. Dr. Allison reviewed the status of the High Plains Aquifer and other issues with overhead slides. The High Plains aquifer, which includes the well known Ogallala aquifer, is the most important water source for much of western and central Kansas, supplying 70 percent of the water used by Kansans each day. Water from the High Plains aquifer supports the region's cities, industry, and much of its agriculture. However, large volume pumping from this aquifer has led to steadily declining water levels in the western portion of the region, and the area faces several critical water related issues. The attached Public Information Circular describes the High Plains aquifer, the effect of decades of large volume pumping, and some responses to water issues in central and western Kansas. (See attachment 1)

Individuals, governmental agencies, and private organizations are all attempting to address issues related to the High Plains aquifer. In addition, several new institutions have recently been proposed to deal with issues concerning the aquifer on a regional basis. Irrigators have implemented a number of techniques that have improved the efficiency with which they use water, using low pressure application methods on center-pivot systems, for example, instead of spraying water high into the air. Among the more far reaching proposals for extending the life of the aquifer is the idea of sustainable development. This is the concept of limiting the amount of water taken from the aquifer to no more than the amount of recharge, and perhaps less, depending on the impact on water quality and minimum stream flows. This level of use is the target of the safe yield management policies currently in effect in the Big Bend and Equus Beds Groundwater Management Districts in the eastern part of the High Plains aquifer. Adoption of a similar policy in other areas of the High Plains aquifer would require a substantial decrease in the amount of water currently used. This would have an impact on the type and amount of crops grown in western Kansas and, in turn, on a variety of economic activities. Because many of the water rights in the High Plains aquifer were established long ago and thus have priority, the implementation of sustainable development approaches to water resources has serious legal implications. Other methods for dealing with the High Plains aquifer are being proposed, discussed, and implemented. All are aimed at extending the life of this crucial resource. A copy of "Kansas Geological

CONTINUATION SHEET

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Survey Activities in the High Plains Aquifer”was provided. (See attachment 2) Committee questions and discussion followed.

Don Whittemore, Kansas Geological Survey, was in attendance to answer committee questions. Brownie Wilson, Kansas Geological Survey, demonstrated using the internet to obtain information for researchers and the public. Data base interfaces and on-line tools provide means to analyze, visualize, modify, and obtain aquifer related datasets.

Dr. Allison discussed budget cuts and how they will affect the Kansas Geological Survey department.

Chairperson Freeborn thanked Dr. Allison and staff for their presentation.

The meeting adjourned at 4:50 p. m. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 11, 2003.