GAM RUN 23-011: SUTTON COUNTY UNDERGROUND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT MANAGEMENT PLAN

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Groundwater Division
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June 1, 2023



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Texas Water Code § 36.1071(h), states that, in developing its groundwater management plan, a groundwater conservation district shall use groundwater availability modeling information provided by the Executive Administrator of the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) in conjunction with any available site-specific information provided by the district for review and comment to the Executive Administrator.

The TWDB provides data and information to the Sutton County Underground Water Conservation District in two parts. Part 1 is the Estimated Historical Water Use/State Water Plan dataset report, which will be provided to you separately by the TWDB Groundwater Technical Assistance Department. Please direct questions about the water data report to Mr. Stephen Allen at 512-463-7317 or stephen.allen@twdb.texas.gov. Part 2 is the required groundwater availability modeling information, which includes:

1. the annual amount of recharge from precipitation, if any, to the groundwater resources within the district;
2. the annual volume of water that discharges from the aquifer to springs and any surface-water bodies, including lakes, streams, and rivers, for each aquifer within the district; and
3. the annual volume of flow into and out of the district within each aquifer and between aquifers in the district.

The groundwater management plan for the Sutton County Underground Water Conservation District should be adopted by the district on or before September 13, 2023 and submitted to the TWDB Executive Administrator on or before October 13, 2023. The current management plan for the Sutton County Underground Water Conservation District expires on December 12, 2023.

We used version 1.01 of the groundwater availability model for the Edwards-Trinity (Plateau) and Pecos Valley aquifers (Anaya and Jones, 2009) to estimate the management plan information for the Edwards-Trinity (Plateau) Aquifer within Sutton County Underground Water Conservation District.

This report replaces the results of GAM Run 13-005 (Boghici, 2013). Values may differ from the previous report as a result of routine updates to the spatial grid file used to define county, groundwater conservation district, and aquifer boundaries, which can impact the calculated water budget values. Additionally, the approach used for analyzing model results is reviewed during each update and may have been refined to better delineate groundwater flows. Table 1 summarizes the groundwater availability model data required by statute. Figure 1 shows the area of the respective models from which the values in Table 1 were extracted. Figure 2 provides a generalized diagram of the groundwater flow components provided in Table 1. If, after review of the figures, the Sutton County Underground Water Conservation District determines that the district boundaries used in the assessment do not reflect current conditions, please notify the TWDB at your earliest convenience.

The flow components presented in this report do not represent the full groundwater budget. If additional inflow and outflow information would be helpful for planning purposes, the district may submit a request in writing to the TWDB Groundwater Modeling Department for the full groundwater budget.

METHODS:

In accordance with Texas Water Code § 36.1071(h), the groundwater availability model mentioned above was used to estimate information for the Sutton County Underground Water Conservation District management plan. Water budgets were extracted for the historical calibration period for the Edwards-Trinity (Plateau) Aquifer (1981 through 2000), using ZONEBUDGET Version 3.01 (Harbaugh, 2009). The average annual water budget values for recharge, surface-water outflow, inflow to the district, outflow from the district, and the flow between aquifers within the district are summarized in this report.

PARAMETERS AND ASSUMPTIONS:

Edwards-Trinity (Plateau) Aquifer

- We used version 1.01 of the groundwater availability model for the Edwards-Trinity (Plateau) and Pecos Valley aquifers to analyze the Edwards-Trinity (Plateau) Aquifer. See Anaya and Jones (2009) for assumptions and limitations of the model.
- The groundwater availability model for the Edwards-Trinity (Plateau) and Pecos Valley aquifers contains two layers. Within Sutton County Underground Water District:
    - Layer 1 represents the Edwards Group and equivalent limestone hydrostratigraphic units of the Edwards-Trinity (Plateau) Aquifer, and
    - Layer 2 represents the undifferentiated Trinity Group hydrostratigraphic units or equivalent units of the Edwards-Trinity (Plateau) Aquifer.
- A water budget for the district was determined for the Edwards-Trinity (Plateau) Aquifer (Layers 1 and 2, combined). The Pecos Valley Aquifer does not occur within the Sutton County Underground Water District and therefore no groundwater budget values are included for it in this report.
- Water budget terms were averaged for the period 1981 to 2000 (stress periods 2 through 21)
- The model was run with MODFLOW-96 (Harbaugh and McDonald, 1996).

RESULTS:

A groundwater budget summarizes the amount of water entering and leaving an aquifer according to the groundwater availability model. Selected groundwater budget components listed below were extracted from the groundwater availability model results for the Edwards-Trinity (Plateau) Aquifer located within the Sutton County Underground Water Conservation District and averaged over the historical calibration period, as shown in Table 1.

1. Precipitation recharge—the areally distributed recharge sourced from precipitation falling on the outcrop areas of the aquifers (where the aquifer is exposed at land surface) within the district.
2. Surface-water outflow—the total water discharging from the aquifer (outflow) to surface-water features such as streams, reservoirs, and springs.
3. Flow into and out of district—the lateral flow within the aquifer between the district and adjacent counties.
4. Flow between aquifers—the net vertical flow between the aquifer and adjacent aquifers or confining units. This flow is controlled by the relative water levels in each aquifer and aquifer properties of each aquifer or confining unit that define the amount of leakage that occurs.

The information needed for the district's management plan is summarized in Table 1. Figure 1 shows the area of the respective models from which the values in Table 1 were extracted. Figure 2 provides a generalized diagram of the groundwater flow components provided in Table 1. It is important to note that sub-regional water budgets are not exact. This is due to the size of the model cells and the approach used to extract data from the model. To avoid double accounting, a model cell that straddles a political boundary, such as a district or county boundary, is assigned to one side of the boundary based on the location of the centroid of the model cell. For example, if a cell contains two counties, the cell is assigned to the county where the centroid of the cell is located.

Table 1: Summarized information for the Edwards-Trinity (Plateau) Aquifer for the Sutton County Underground Water Conservation District groundwater management plan. All values are reported in acre-feet per year and rounded to the nearest 1 acre-foot.

Management plan requirement	Aquifer or confining unit	Results
Estimated annual amount of recharge from precipitation to the district	Edwards-Trinity (Plateau)	27,013
Estimated annual volume of water that discharges from the aquifer to springs and any surface water body including lakes, streams, and rivers	Edwards-Trinity (Plateau)	26,288
Estimated annual volume of flow into the district within each aquifer in the district	Edwards-Trinity (Plateau)	24,846
Estimated annual volume of flow out of the district within each aquifer in the district	Edwards-Trinity (Plateau)	25,866
Estimated net annual volume of flow between each aquifer in the district	Not Applicable	Not applicable

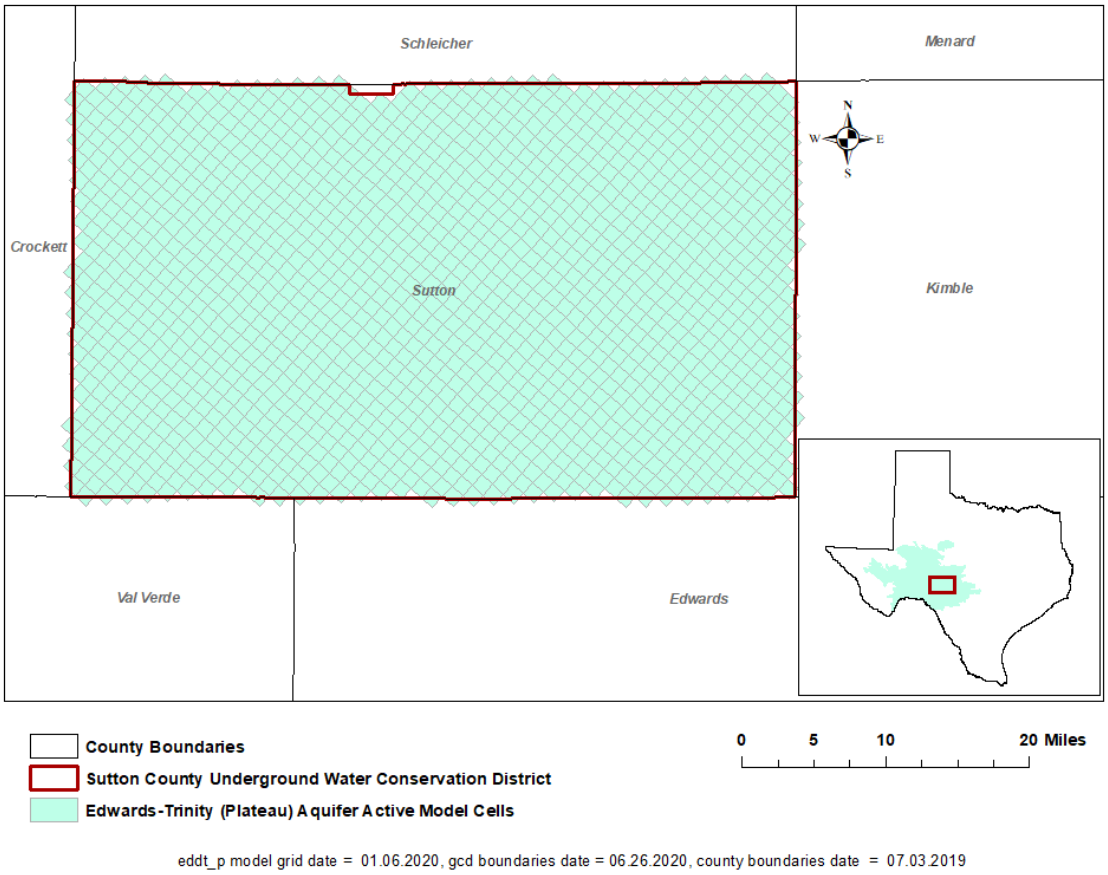
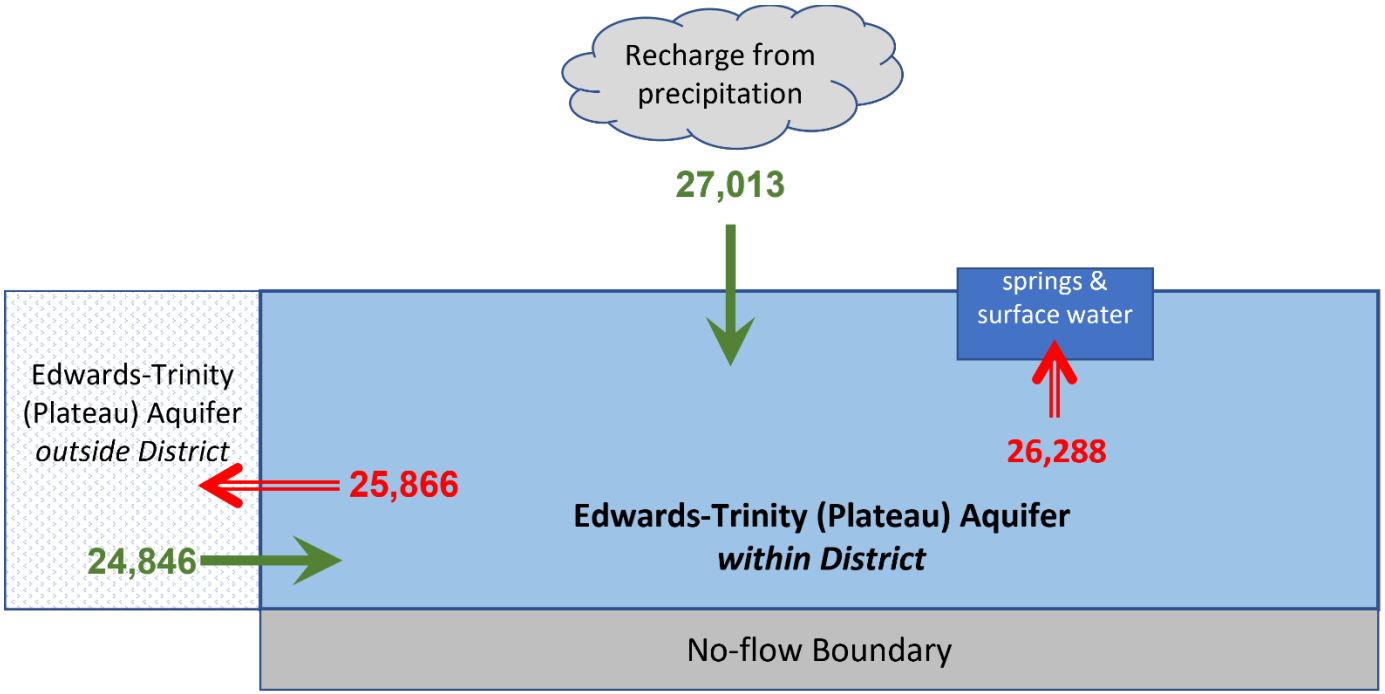


Figure 1: Area of the Edwards-Trinity (Plateau) and Pecos Valley aquifers groundwater availability model from which the information in Table 1 was extracted (the Edwards-Trinity [Plateau] Aquifer extent within the district boundary).



Caveat: This diagram only includes the water budget items provided in Table 1. A complete water budget would include additional inflows and outflows. For a full groundwater budget, please submit a request in writing to the Groundwater Modeling Department.

Figure 2: Generalized diagram of the summarized budget information from Table 1, representing directions of flow for the Edwards-Trinity (Plateau) Aquifer within Sutton County Underground Water Conservation District. Flow values are expressed in acre-feet per year.

LIMITATIONS:

The groundwater models used in completing this analysis are the best available scientific tools that can be used to meet the stated objectives. To the extent that this analysis will be used for planning purposes and/or regulatory purposes related to pumping in the past and into the future, it is important to recognize the assumptions and limitations associated with the use of the results. In reviewing the use of models in environmental regulatory decision making, the National Research Council (2007) noted:

> *"Models will always be constrained by computational limitations, assumptions, and knowledge gaps. They can best be viewed as tools to help inform decisions rather than as machines to generate truth or make decisions. Scientific advances will never make it possible to build a perfect model that accounts for every aspect of reality or to prove that a given model is correct in all respects for a particular regulatory application. These characteristics make evaluation of a regulatory model more complex than solely a comparison of measurement data with model results."*

A key aspect of using the groundwater model to evaluate historic groundwater flow conditions includes the assumptions about the location in the aquifer where historic pumping was placed. Understanding the amount and location of historical pumping is as important as evaluating the volume of groundwater flow into and out of the district, between aquifers within the district (as applicable), interactions with surface water (as applicable), recharge to the aquifer system (as applicable), and other metrics that describe the impacts of that pumping. In addition, assumptions regarding precipitation, recharge, and interaction with streams are specific to particular historic time periods.
Because the application of the groundwater models was designed to address regional scale questions, the results are most effective on a regional scale. The TWDB makes no warranties or representations related to the actual conditions of any aquifer at a particular location or at a particular time.

It is important for groundwater conservation districts to monitor groundwater pumping and overall conditions of the aquifer. Because of the limitations of the groundwater model and the assumptions in this analysis, it is important that the groundwater conservation districts work with the TWDB to refine this analysis in the future given the reality of how the aquifer responds to the actual amount and location of pumping now and in the future. Historic precipitation patterns also need to be placed in context as future climatic conditions, such as dry and wet year precipitation patterns, may differ and affect groundwater flow conditions.

REFERENCES:

Anaya, R., and Jones, I. C., 2009, Groundwater availability model for the Edwards-Trinity (Plateau) and Pecos Valley aquifers of Texas: Texas Water Development Board Report 373, 103 p. http://www.twdb.texas.gov/groundwater/models/gam/eddt_p/ET-Plateau_Full.pdf

Boghici, R., 2013, GAM Run 13-005: Texas Water Development Board, GAM Run 13-005, https://www.twdb.texas.gov/groundwater/docs/GAMruns/GR13-005.pdf

Harbaugh, A. W., 2009, Zonebudget Version 3.01, A computer program for computing subregional water budgets for MODFLOW ground-water flow models, U.S. Geological Survey Groundwater Software.

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National Research Council, 2007, Models in Environmental Regulatory Decision Making Committee on Models in the Regulatory Decision Process, National Academies Press, Washington D.C., 287 p., http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=11972.

Texas Water Code § 36.1071