

NOTICE TO WATER USERS AND PROPERTY OWNERS WITHIN THE NORTH HILLS CONTROLLED GROUNDWATER AREA

In April 2008, the Dept of Natural Resources and Conservation issued an Order extending the designation of the North Hills Temporary Controlled Groundwater Area (TCGWA) for a period of two years. The TCGWA encompasses an 11.00 sq mile area identified in the Order as Drake Zone 2 in the Helena North Valley generally located north of Lincoln Road and approximately 3 miles west and 2 miles east of Interstate 15. The temporary designation is due to expire April 25, 2010.

The purpose of the temporary designation was for the Department to collect and analyze any data it deemed necessary to determine if the statutory criteria found in Mont. Code Ann. §85-2-506(2)(b) and §85-2-507(a), 2007, are met. The Department was to evaluate the impact of development on ground water supplies and what potential controls, if any, might be appropriate to designate a permanent controlled groundwater area.

After careful consideration and discussion with representatives of the Petitioners and other parties, the Department is now planning to allow the temporary designation to expire April 25, 2010, for the following reasons. The 2009 Legislature authorized funding under HB52 for the study and analysis of ground water in Montana to help shape statewide policy as well as providing the data necessary for local decisions regarding water. The Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology (MBMG) has been tasked with conducting ground water studies including ground water/surface water interactions in priority sub-basins. The Ground-Water Assessment Steering Committee prioritized sub-basins based on anticipated growth in housing, agriculture, industry and commercial activities.

The North Hills of the Helena Valley was ranked in the top four areas to be investigated. MBMG has begun its work including assembly of existing data, establishment of new hydrologic monitoring, and drilling of exploratory and test wells, conducting aquifer tests, water quality sampling and evaluating transpiration consumption by crops and natural vegetation. The analysis includes a numerical ground water model to simulate observed hydrologic conditions and evaluate the response of the ground water system to specific stresses, such as new wells or well fields. The final product will be a report on the hydrogeologic system, models that simulate hydrogeologic features and processes and a comprehensive set of hydrogeologic data available to the public as well as local and state authorities responsible for ground water management and development.

The information and data that will be available to the Department will be more extensive than that collected and analyzed to date. The information and modeling will be invaluable to determine if specific controls or monitoring may be needed in order to protect existing water rights and if future development can occur without adverse impacts to senior water rights. The Department will use this information to determine if a new temporary or permanent controlled ground water area should be designated. The MBMG study is expected to be completed by Fall 2011.

Interested persons who have questions or concerns regarding the expiration of the North Hills CGWA should contact Kim Overcast at the DNRC, Water Resources, 1424 9th Ave, Helena, MT 59620-1601; 406-444-6614.

Published in the Independent Record on January 29, February 3, and February 7, 2010.