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Texas Groundwater Supplies Are in Danger, Reports Say

(AUSTIN, TEXAS – Nov. 16, 2021) Across Texas, groundwater is being pumped out of aquifers so quickly that more wells are in danger of going dry, and more springs and surface water may begin to dry up, according to two reports released today.

The reports — issued by researchers at The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment at Texas State University and at Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) — paint an unstable, unsustainable picture for the millions of Texans, the cities and communities, and the rivers, streams and springs that depend on groundwater:

- Statewide, Texas is losing groundwater at nearly twice the maximum sustained rate — and according to plans already pending with local management agencies, that rate is likely to increase in coming years unless officials change course.
- Groundwater is being pumped out of the Ogallala Aquifer — the primary source of water for Texans in the High Plains and Panhandle regions — 6.5 times faster than its sustainable rate.
- In many cases, groundwater conservation districts have adopted plans and goals that will accelerate these depletion trends — in some districts, officials have set long-term management goals that will lead to unsustainable pumping.

“This unsustainable groundwater pumping will ultimately lead to dry wells, dry springs, less surface water, and other problems that directly impact Texans, Texas’ economy, and the environment,” said Dr. Robert Mace, executive director and chief water policy officer at The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment and lead author of the report “[Five Gallons in a Ten Gallon Hat: Groundwater Sustainability in Texas.](#)”

In many places, he added, Texans are already seeing the depletion and feeling the impact.

“In the Hill Country, water-levels are declining, wells are running dry, and springs are vanishing. That’s a sign of things to come across the state. If we want our aquifers to be available to future generations, we have to start thinking about groundwater differently,”

said Mace, whose research and reporting was sponsored in part by the Cynthia & George Mitchell Foundation. “There’s still time to manage groundwater so that future Texans can count on it.”

The EDF report, “[Advancing Groundwater Sustainability in Texas: A Guide to Existing Authorities and Management Tools for Groundwater Conservation Districts and Communities](#),” focuses on groundwater conservation districts — local agencies charged with managing and protecting groundwater supplies, especially in more rural areas — and the regulatory tools that are available to these districts to manage groundwater sustainably.

The EDF report also warns that Texas is headed in the wrong direction in terms of groundwater management, with most groundwater districts setting long term goals that allow for the eventual depletion of aquifers.

But Vanessa Puig-Williams, director of EDF’s Texas Water Program and lead author of the organization’s report, stressed that districts have the authority to steer these communities and economies in a more sustainable direction. Potential solutions include the creation of management zones, drought triggers, production curtailments, and landowner incentives to keep groundwater underground.

“Local groundwater districts already have the power to protect their communities’ water supplies,” Puig-Williams said. “They simply need better data to inform decisions, as well as the commitment to manage these essential resources in a more sustainable way.”

Click [here](#) to read the Meadows Center report on groundwater sustainability, and click [here](#) to read the EDF report on groundwater conservation districts.

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The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment at Texas State University(meadowscenter.txstate.edu/) was named following a generous gift from The Meadows Foundation in August 2012. The Meadows Center inspires research, innovation and leadership that ensures clean, abundant water for the environment and all humanity.

One of the world’s leading international nonprofit organizations, **Environmental Defense Fund** (edf.org) creates transformational solutions to the most serious environmental problems. To do so, EDF links science, economics, law, and innovative private-sector partnerships. With more than 2.5 million members and offices in the United States, China, Mexico, Indonesia and the European Union, EDF’s scientists, economists, attorneys and policy experts are working in 28 countries to turn our solutions into action. Connect with EDF’s Water Program on Twitter [@GrowingReturns](#).