

OTTAWA COUNTY GROUNDWATER BOARD

- DATE: August 15, 2024
- PLACE: Ottawa County Fillmore Complex, Conference Room E
- PRESENT: Roger Belknap, Joe Bush, Jerry Geertman, Frank Johnson, David Kraker, Lee Machiela, Carrie Rivette, Patrick Staskiewicz (Joe Wallace), Alex Svoboda, John Yellich (Remote), Henry Werksma
- ABSENT: Mark Baker, Dale Buist, Adam Elenbaas, Sylvia Rhodea, John Truscott, Dale Zahn
- STAFF: Matthew Chappuies, Paul Sachs,
- PUBLIC: David Barnosky, Steve Hecksel

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Belknap, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

A roll call was conducted, confirming the presence of a quorum.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- GWB 24 - 11 Carrie Rivette moved to approve the August 15, 2024 Agenda. The motion passed.
UNANIMOUS

OLD BUSINESS

- GWB 24 - 12 Carrie Rivette moved to approve the June 20, 2024 Minutes. The motion passed.
UNANIMOUS

PERTINENT PROJECT UPDATES

A. Well Drilling

Matthew Chappuies discussed the ongoing well drilling projects. Drilling began at Allendale High School and then shifted to Polkton Township Hall, near Steve Hecksel’s property. Plans to drill at the middle school are delayed due to a site change, with work expected to start the next week. The team reached 200 feet at Polkton before pausing and aims to continue today. Future drilling is planned at several sites, targeting an additional 10 wells by year-end.

Matthew highlighted a new sample collection method recommended by the Michigan Geologic Survey (MGS), which uses clear containers to collect well cuttings. This method not only aids in research but also improves visual understanding. The wells are being clustered within half-mile to one-mile radii to support future pump tests and data collection, specifically targeting the Marshall aquifer. These efforts will contribute to 3D modeling and improve the accuracy of data regarding groundwater impacts.

The discussion moved toward alternative sampling techniques. Core sampling, as used earlier in the year when MGS was working with Illinois Geological Survey to collect cores, was mentioned as a superior method for developing geological frameworks though it is significantly more expensive. It was noted that while core drilling provides comprehensive soil profiles, the current approach of using well cuttings is a practical alternative.

John Yellich advises a gamma log will be performed on the drill holes to help identify the boundaries between clay and sand zones. The gamma log rig will be deployed in the upcoming weeks to log newly drilled holes, and this data will be compared to existing well records to improve the understanding of subsurface conditions. Although core drilling costs between \$60 and \$90 per foot, the well cuttings and gamma logging methods currently in use provide sufficient data for ongoing research and analysis.

John concluded by emphasizing that while core drilling offers the most detailed samples, the current techniques offer a viable and cost-effective approach to gathering necessary geological information.

Lastly, a brochure is being drafted to help communicate the drilling process and project details to the potential well site landowners. The board discussed drilling procedures, potential incentives such as future personal use, and the lifespan of the wells.

B. Surface Water Monitoring

Chappuies discussed ongoing efforts to implement surface water monitors alongside well sites, in collaboration with the Conservation District and other county teams. The monitors are intended to improve understanding of the relationship between surface water and groundwater, which could provide valuable data for future initiatives, such as developing a county-wide water budget. Specific site locations have been identified for the initial phase, with plans to install two or three monitors this year.

These monitors will help build a larger network over time and will eventually be integrated with the groundwater monitoring system. This would allow all surface and groundwater data to be displayed in a unified dashboard for comprehensive analysis. The data collected will focus primarily on the stream height, but some monitors may also include weather stations and cameras to provide real-time monitoring, especially in areas prone to blockages or debris build-up.

Joe Bush, Water Resources Commissioner, added that the goal is to gather data on stream behavior during rainfall events, helping the county understand how much water leaves the area and how much could potentially be stored upstream, aiding in regional water detention planning.

C. Outreach

Chappuies provided an update on recent community outreach events and marketing efforts. Team members participated in the Conservation District's "Conservation on Tap" series at Trail Point Brewing, which focused on native landscaping. Although the event was small, it facilitated productive discussions with residents from Allendale and across the county, yielding positive feedback.

Additionally, the DSI participated in the Macatawa Water Festival at Windmill Island Park in Holland, which attracted over 1,500 attendees. The staff hosted a booth featuring a demonstration kit from the Michigan Geologic Survey, which illustrated concepts like porosity and permeability. This hands-on experience received great engagement from both adults and children, and the event was considered a big success. Staff looks forward to participating again next year.

The marketing campaign, which included targeted billboard ads, gas station TV spots, and social media, has concluded. According to King Media (the contracted marketing firm), the campaign was highly effective. Gas station TV ads were viewed over 350,000 times across 37 locations in the county, digital billboards reached an estimated around 600,000 views at 20 locations, and social media posts generated roughly 200,000 clicks. Altogether, the campaign resulted in over 1 million impressions, driving more than 4,000 unique visits to the groundwater website. Public awareness has increased, with many community members recognizing the ads, and plans are underway to launch a similar campaign in the future, focusing on the watering and growing seasons.

D. Native Landscape Signage Request for Proposal (RFP)

Staff discussed the progress of the native landscaping signage project, first introduced at the previous meeting. Mock-ups of signs were created to explain the native landscaping projects on the grounds, emphasizing that the landscaping is intentional and educates the public on how to implement similar practices.

The plan includes approximately 10 high-quality garden signs and 1 or 2 larger main signs. Based on the quotes received, the estimated cost for the project is around \$50,000 to \$55,000. These signs will be durable, long-lasting, and capable of withstanding the local climate.

To fund the project, staff plans to reallocate \$55,000 from existing budget categories: \$35,000 from *Project Reports*, \$10,000 from *Site Selection Services*, and \$10,000 from the *Temporary Position* fund.

These funds were deemed available because the need for project reports, site selection services, and temporary staffing was either diminished or no longer necessary.

The board discussed the overall cost for the signage package, expressing concern over the price, but acknowledged that thorough due diligence had been done, including evaluating multiple quotes and touring facilities to assess the quality of the signs. Cheaper alternatives were considered, but they would likely degrade quickly and not maintain the aesthetic or quality required for the project.

Staff requested a motion to approve the reallocation of \$55,000 into the Outreach-Educational budget category for the native landscape signage at the Fillmore Complex.

GWB 24 -13 Carrie Rivette moved to approve the reallocation of funds, with Frank Johnson seconding the motion. The motion passed. UNANIMOUS

The board continued discussing the importance of high-quality signage, drawing comparisons to signage used in other departments. Members shared anecdotes about the positive impact that well-designed signage can have, noting that it leaves a lasting impression, while poor signage can reflect a lack of care or investment in a project. Given that these signs will likely be seen by a broad audience, including tourists, schools, businesses, and the general public, the board emphasized the importance of quality for this project. They also discussed incorporating additional elements, such as using recycled materials and adding a digital tour component to enhance the experience of the walking gardens. The board agreed that these aspects are crucial to the project's success.

E. Shallow Wells Work Group

Paul Sachs, Director of Strategic Impact, provided an update on the recent work group meetings. He noted that while it has been challenging to reengage the group during the summer, the staff is working to synthesize the discussions and organize the information on paper. This will help outline current thinking and identify opportunities moving forward, particularly regarding shallow wells. Once the information is consolidated, the group will reconvene for a more focused and intentional discussion to determine the next steps.

F. Farmland Conservation Easement

Paul Sachs provided a quick update on the Farmland Conservation Easement program, highlighting several ongoing strategies related to groundwater issues. He emphasized that in addition to the work being done by the land use planning Staff, the Farmland Preservation Board is playing a key role in the conservation process. Recently, the board has been working to secure agricultural property in Blendon Township for permanent conservation easements, utilizing grant dollars, landowner donations, and philanthropic funds—without any county dollars involved.

Sachs also mentioned that the County Board of Commissioners committed \$1 million of ARPA funds to farmland preservation, especially in areas with known groundwater challenges. The Blendon Township site will be the first to leverage these funds, ensuring the preservation of critical farmland that might otherwise be converted to residential development. This site aligns with conservation goals, given that there are no plans for infrastructure in the area.

Board member Alex Sobota added details about the conservation planning for this property, which is part of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP). The plan includes conservation practices to protect water quality, such as erosion control measures. Sobota noted that the project may take up to a year to complete, with multiple sources of federal funding potentially supplementing the county's efforts.

The program is voluntary for landowners, and they have some flexibility in preserving portions of their property while protecting all tillable areas from development. Local involvement, particularly Township approval and alignment with master planning, is essential to the process.

No board action was required, and updates will be provided as the project progresses.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Adding Dedicated Board Seats for Members of the Well Drilling Industry

Paul Sachs discussed the need for better representation from the well drilling industry on the board, given their critical on-the-ground expertise. Currently, one seat is designated for well drillers, but Sachs proposed revising the bylaws to add a second seat, starting January 1. With several at-large positions expiring, one could be converted into this additional well driller seat. The Talent and Recruitment Committee would then seek candidates to fill the role. Other board members supported the idea, noting that well drillers' input on water levels and monitoring wells adds credibility to the board, and a motion was made to move forward.

GWB 24 -14 David Kraker moved for DSI staff to revise the Groundwater Board bylaws regarding sector membership, with the revisions to be presented at the next meeting. Lee Machiela seconded the motion. The motion passes.

UNANIMOUS

B. State Water Withdrawal Assessment Program

Paul Sachs talked about some issues with the State Water Withdrawal Assessment Program, concerns were raised about the state's current tool because it only considers a single aquifer system. This was deemed inadequate for Ottawa County, which deals with a dual aquifer system. Carrie Rivette noted that

the state had released an RFP for a new tool, but it still focused solely on unconfined aquifers. John Yellich explained that the tool, developed in the early 2000s, does not account for Michigan's complex geology. It was suggested that the board draft a letter to the state highlighting the need to address the dual aquifer system in their assessments.

Sachs goes on to mention that Pat Staskiewicz had shared a performance audit report on the State Water Withdrawal Assessment Tool, completed by the Auditor General of the Water Withdrawal Assessment Program in May 2024. The report highlighted numerous challenges and included recommendations for improving the program. Though Pat couldn't attend the meeting, it was noted that he is still reviewing the report. At the next meeting, Pat may provide more details on the findings and discuss how they plan to address the issues raised. The report will be shared with the group for review.

C. Pertinent Updates from Board members

- a. Frank Johnson, Robinson Township Supervisor, shared that the Township is moving forward with plans to implement alternative irrigation sources for residential areas, focusing on reducing reliance on potable water for home irrigation. They are advancing these efforts through master planning and local zoning changes and are committed to the initiative as part of their long-term development strategy. The township is proactively pursuing these solutions to improve water sustainability.
- b. Lee Machiela mentioned an ongoing issue with lowering a well near the intersection of 64th Ave and Bingham St. This problem persists and has now surfaced in a new location.
- c. Alex Svoboda shared that the Conservation District staff are working to implement a large surface water monitoring infrastructure with funds from the County. There are plans to inventory streams with funds from EGLE to monitor best management practices with agricultural producers. Updates will be provided as they become available.

Lastly, the RCPP recently completed its first irrigation project focusing on efficient water usage. There are other similar projects still in progress, however, the funding for RCPP has ended so this is the last year of the program. Agriculture producers are still urged to contact the conservation district for future support.

PUBLIC COMMENT

David Barnoski, from Port Sheldon Township, offered suggestions about using the groundwater promotional videos during down times of Board of Commissioner meetings. He also suggested to directly contact leaders at the State level concerning legislation.

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting: Thursday, October 17, 2024 at 9:00 AM

ADJOURMENT

GWB 24 - 15 Chair Belknap adjourned the meeting at 10:57am.