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State of Louisiana
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
OFFICE OF CONSERVATION

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COMMISSIONER OF CONSERVATION

November 27, 2013

Dennis McGehee, Chairman-Elect
Capital Area Groundwater Conservation Commission
3535 South Sherwood Forest Blvd., Suite 137
Baton Rouge, LA 70816-2255

Anthony J. Duplechin, Director
Capital Area Groundwater Conservation Commission
3535 South Sherwood Forest Blvd., Suite 137
Baton Rouge, LA 70816-2255

Re: Baton Rouge Area Aquifer Management Plan

Dear Mr. McGehee and Mr. Duplechin:

Over the past year and a half, the Capital Area Groundwater Conservation Commission has made real progress in the continuing effort to provide long-term management of the Southern Hills Aquifer system here in the Baton Rouge area. I give a great deal of credit to outgoing Chairman Joey Hebert for his constructive attitude and labors in this regard. Of course, much of the groundwork for what was accomplished under his watch was laid down under previous chairs, just as his achievements will serve as a foundation for later efforts. We here at the Office of Conservation look forward to a continued productive relationship with the Commission while moving forward together on developing and implementing a plan to provide for the future sustainability of groundwater resources in the area.

Now that the U.S. Geological Survey has delivered the highly anticipated saltwater intrusion model for the 2,000-foot sand and the water level model for the 1,500-foot sand, giving us the best and most up-to-date scientific information available, we must move forward with the development of a detailed plan that includes an aggressive timetable for management actions relative to groundwater use and saltwater encroachment in the Baton Rouge area.

Prior to receipt of the USGS study, the Office of Conservation called on the Commission to act on the two very well identified cones of depression in Baton Rouge area aquifers, one in the 1,500-foot sand around the Lula Street station, and one in the 2,000-foot sand in the industrial district north of the State Capitol. The stakeholders who make up the membership of the Commission responded to that call to action. Industry agreed to a reduction in its

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groundwater use from the 2,000-foot sand, a cap was placed on industrial withdrawals from the 1,500-foot sand, and the Baton Rouge Water Company began work on a scavenger well system to protect the well field at the Lula Street pumping station. It was recognized at the time that these actions were important initial steps in the building of a more comprehensive approach to managing groundwater use, but did not represent a complete strategy for long-term management.

In fact, the USGS scenarios for the 2,000-foot sand indicate that simply reducing or ceasing the industrial area pumping center's withdrawals from that sand would lessen saltwater encroachment between that pumping center and the fault to the south, but at the same time likely would result in accelerated saltwater encroachment at greater concentrations toward the public supply wells further south and east at Lula Street and Government Street, due to their closer proximity to the saltwater source.

In addition, while the modeling of potential scavenger well impacts in the 2,000-foot sand for the area near the Baton Rouge Fault indicates such wells have the potential to provide protection for wells to the north, it also indicates that this protection would likely come at the expense of accelerated encroachment toward wells between the scavenger well and the fault to the south. It should be noted that the scavenger well that already has been installed in the 1,500-foot sand is further north than either of the sites modeled by USGS, and much closer to the well fields near North Street to the east and Government Street to the southeast.

From such observations, I am sure that it is as clear to Commission members as it is to the Office of Conservation that simplistic solutions that capture the public imagination such as solely limiting industry use or depending solely on a scavenger well system not only run the risk of failing to solve the larger problem, but also have the potential to make matters much worse, much more quickly, as demonstrated by the USGS models.

Thus, it is equally clear that a cooperative effort should be undertaken to put in place a comprehensive plan for long-term aquifer management. The next step, as noted in a letter from July 16, 2013, by my designee to the Commission, John W. Adams, was the scheduling of a special technical committee meeting "with the goal of preparing a formal plan that contains specific procedures for CAGWCC's regular, ongoing evaluation of the rate of movement and impacts of saltwater intrusion in the several sands of the Baton Rouge area aquifer system through current and future USGS modeling efforts."

I will go one step further in now recommending that the Commission develop a full-scale plan of action with specific steps and goals set out for long-term resolution of the saltwater intrusion issue, an effort in which the Office of Conservation stands ready to assist, and which was the motivation for the Memorandum Of Understanding agreement that we offered to the Commission as a means of facilitating cooperative effort.


I believe it would be preferable for all stakeholders for the Office of Conservation to provide guidance and support for the Commission in the exercise of its authority over groundwater use in the Baton Rouge area to provide for a smoother transition toward the next phase of long-term management of this vital resource. While the powers provided to the Office of Conservation by state law broadly encompass management of groundwater resources

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throughout the state, they offer fewer options for intermediate steps than those specifically delegated by the Louisiana Legislature to the Commission.

I believe we share in the recognition that there are no easy solutions. However, there are many resources at hand to help navigate this difficult path. My office will certainly be available in any and every way to assist and provide guidance. Please let me know how we may be of help.

Yours very truly,


James H. Welsh
Commissioner of Conservation