

MEMORIAL

MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT

Understanding the Regional Water Authorities

Discerning residents may have noticed a line-item on their water bill titled “SWC Fee” or something similar. This fee is collected by Memorial MUD and paid to West Harris Co. RWA, the Regional Water Authority (RWA) in the area. Below is a brief description of what RWAs are and what they do.

History

On June 18, 1999, HB 2965 was signed into law by the Texas State Legislature and the Regional Water Authorities were created. The law also called a special election so voters could confirm the creation of a new authority and elect directors to lead it. The RWAs became empowered to negotiate for a secure, long-term, reliable, quality supply of wholesale drinking water for all the independent neighborhoods, municipal utility districts, small municipalities, and permitted well owners within its boundaries.

Among the RWAs created was the North Harris County Regional Water Authority (NHCRWA). Resting within the Harris-Galveston Subsidence District (HGSD), known as the greatest area of subsidence in Texas, the new authority faced an epic challenge: securing the future water supply, constructing the new water delivery infrastructure, and generating the funding to accomplish it - all within a set timeframe. The legislation also required the new agency to promote water conservation.

Following the lead of the NHCRWA, the West Harris County Regional Water Authority (WHCRWA) was created by HB 1842, approved by 77th Texas Legislature, and signed into law May 28, 2001. Like the NHCRWA, the WHCRWA was created to accomplish public purposes stated in the bill, including:

- the provision of surface water and groundwater for various uses;
- the reduction of groundwater withdrawals;
- the conservation, preservation, protection, recharge, and prevention of waste of groundwater and of groundwater reservoirs;
- the control of subsidence caused by withdrawal of water from those groundwater reservoirs.

Mandate

As a result of the increasing threat subsidence posed to these areas, the HGSD adopted a series of regulatory plans to reduce groundwater pumpage. In their 1999 plan, they ultimately mandated a reduction to only 20% reliance on groundwater by 2030. With the help of the NHCRWA and the WHCRWA, a fair and equitable contract with the City of Houston was successfully negotiated to supply surface water from Lake Houston and construction is already underway in both Authority areas. The goal of the HGSD is to see the same dramatic improvements occur in these areas as were experienced south and east of Houston years ago.

Resident Impact

Authorities pay a fee as a line on their bill, which is collected by the individual water district that supplies them. This amount is then passed to the Authorities to fund water supply delivery infrastructure and groundwater conservation efforts; the projects and efforts to convert fully to surface water supply for the HGSD area are created through bonds, which these fees repay as they are collected.

The Authorities charge the water districts groundwater and surface water fees based on a Rate Order adopted by their respective Boards of Directors. These fees have funded construction of the initial infrastructure and will continue to cover debt service requirements and bond covenants, as well as to fund the maintenance and operation of the surface water delivery system and construction of future infrastructure.

The Authority fees are a necessary part of the cycle of water service and wastewater treatment. They fund the infrastructure that converts the area to utilizing more surface water and reducing subsidence in the HGSD. These efforts are all part of a larger conservation and sustainability goal set by the State Legislature of Texas.

Continued Growth

Conservation and sustainability efforts require time and money, along with a dedication to meet or exceed the goals set by entities like the HGSD. In the early 1900's the greater Houston area did not expect or plan for the amount of growth and water requirements that would come with expansion in the 60's through the present day. The Regional Water Authorities are providing the ways and means to make sure water continues to flow and subsidence is abated as Houston and surrounding areas continue to grow.