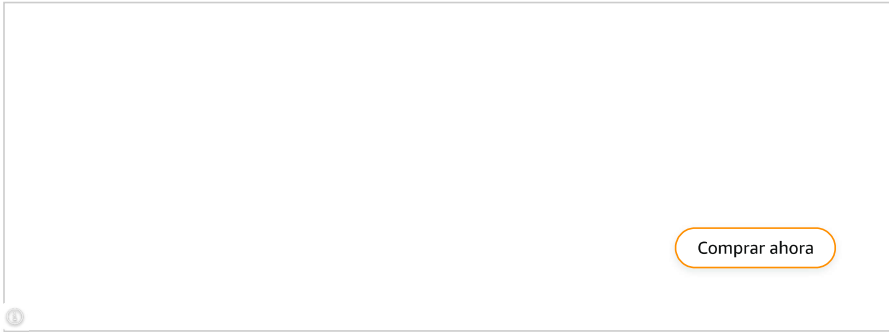




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Lost Pines district: New rules to protect wells, strengthen groundwater management

By **Claire Marks**, *Special to Bastrop Advertiser*
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The Lost Pines Groundwater Conservation District Board of Directors passed several amendments to its rules at its Oct. 15 meeting. These changes reinforce the district's commitment to protecting groundwater in Bastrop and Lee counties.

One amendment expands exemptions for domestic and livestock wells. In the past, landowners with 10 acres or more could qualify for an exempt well. Now, smaller properties also may qualify if their wells produce less than 25,000 gallons per day. The general manager may approve or deny these requests or send them to the board.

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The district amended the permitting process for lower volume groundwater users as well. The general manager may now approve, modify or deny applications requesting up to 50 acre-feet of water per year, rather than sending each request to the board. A permit holder may obtain up to two wells under this streamlined process, helping small producers save time and paperwork.



Claire Marks
Handout

Another change keeps district rules consistent with House Bill 1633, a new state law enacted by the Legislature this year. This law requires groundwater districts to consider how a proposed well might unreasonably affect nearby exempt wells. The Lost Pines Groundwater Conservation District's updated rules now align with state law and add another layer of protection for all wells, permitted and exempt.

To give non-exempt well owners sufficient time to complete their projects, the district extended the deadline for completing a permitted well from 365 days to 545 days, with the option to request an additional extension if needed.

The district added a rule for voluntary permit surrender prior to expiration. Permit-holders may do so by submitting a written request to the general manager and paying any outstanding fees.

The district added a rule requiring landowners or drillers to visibly display their district-issued permit authorization at the drilling site from commencement to completion of drilling. This helps prevent unpermitted drilling, an issue the district recently encountered, and allows both staff and the public to easily verify that drilling is approved. Having accurate permit data helps the district make better management decisions and protect local aquifers for the future.

The board approved a new Enforcement and Settlement Guidelines and Fee Schedule for violations. The schedule outlines possible settlement amounts for different enforcement matters. Small matters, such as late reports or missed payments, carry smaller fines, while serious violations like groundwater waste, overproduction or operating without a permit can result in higher penalties and daily fines. More complex cases will still go before the board.

Finally, the district amended the procedure for rulemaking petition submission, petitions for new or amended rules must now be submitted between June 15 and July 15 each year. This consistent window makes it easier for residents to participate in the rulemaking process.

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Together, these updates keep the Lost Pines Groundwater Conservation District's rules consistent with state law and reflect the district's commitment to sustainable groundwater management in Bastrop and Lee counties.

For more information or to view the full list of rule changes, visit lostpineswater.org or call the district office at (512) 360-5088.

Claire Marks is the education and outreach coordinator for the Lost Pines Groundwater Conservation District.

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