

# WATER

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have been several meetings to get the public informed about the proposed project, how the Bluebonnet Groundwater Conservation District rules deal with it and how locals could be affected.

The project is now going to go to a contested hearing set for Thursday, July 11, at the Austin County Fairgrounds at 9 a.m.

### The Players

• **Electro Purifications, LLC** is a wholesale water supplier based in Houston. It has contracted with Chambo, Inc. and Brazos Holdings, Inc., which owns 3,200 acres in Austin, Waller and Fort Bend counties, to build 10 wells on the property in Austin and Waller counties.

• **Chambo and Brazos Holdings** list F. Clayton Chambers, Craig P. Chambers and Dunbar N. Chambers as leaders of those companies.

• **Bluebonnet Groundwater Conservation District (BGCD)** was created in 2001 to oversee groundwater production to protect the resource and control subsidence. It serves Austin, Grimes, Waller and Walker counties.

Each county has four volunteer representatives on the BGCD board of directors who oversee the district's finances, drought status and permitting.

The representatives for Austin County are Milton Beckendorff, Michael Blezinger, Sharon Brandes and Glenn Huebner.

The representatives for Waller County are David Minze, David Groschke, Jim Vaughn and Brent Davis.

The board was formally presented with the proposal at a preliminary hearing last month at the Austin County Fairgrounds in Bellville. A contested hearing for the proposal will not be heard by the board, but rather a State Office of Administrative Hearings (SOAH) judge.

• SOAH will conduct a hearing in a format similar to a civil trial. The judge will then put together a report and pass that along to the BGCD board.

Rules state that if even one request for a SOAH hearing is submitted, it has to go through that process. The North Fort Bend Water Authority requested the hearing and will pay the \$44,000 estimated cost.

• The North Fort Bend Water Authority works to prevent subsidence by reducing groundwater withdrawal. It lies within the Fort Bend Subsidence District.

• Cities of Richmond and Rosenberg are the initial customers for Electro. They lie within the Subsidence District, but opted out of the North Fort Bend Water Authority. They have to comply with Fort Bend Subsidence District limits on

groundwater use, and so are trying to get it from outside the county.

• The landowners in a half-mile radius of the project were supposed to have received notice of the application. There are 125 landowners in Austin County, 27 in Waller County and 175 in Fort Bend County that are within a half-mile of the proposed well field.

• The rest of the county. The project would pump from the Evangeline Aquifer, which runs under all three counties.

### Why here?

The cities of Rosenberg and Richmond, in Fort Bend County, have to reduce the amount of groundwater per the Fort Bend Subsidence District. In its application, Electro states that all the water from the Brazos River Authority has been subscribed to and that the City of Houston's water supplies do not have inter-basin transport authorization.

It does not say if any other options were looked at, such as joining the North Fort Bend Water Authority. Although subsidence is a recorded issue in Fort Bend County, based on a "lack of measured subsidence over the past century, it appears that the proposed pumping will not cause any significant land surface subsidence" here.

In other words, there haven't been significant reports on subsidence effects in the project area, so there isn't evidence that there is a problem.

### Application

In November 2012, Electro sent in 31 applications for its proposed 10 well project to the BGCD.

That includes 10 well development applications, 10 operating permit applications, 10 transport permit applications and one aggregation permit application.

The BGCD hasn't created a format for big projects like this, so each well has to have its own application.

In that initial application, Electro paid BGCD \$5,000 in fees for those applications.

In response, the BGCD asked for more information on specific topics and an additional \$10,750 in application fees, which it received in January of this year.

The fees break down as:

- \$75x10 wells for the well development application
- \$375x10 wells for the operating permit application for non-exempt wells permits for five years or less
- \$375x10 wells for transport permit applications for non-exempt wells operating five years or less
- \$50x5 years x10 wells for the aggregation permit application

The 10 wells will include seven in

Waller County, generally located at 36604 Fort Bend County Line Rd. in Brookshire, and three in Austin County, generally located at 6135 Coody Lane near Sealy.

The wells would be 20 inches in diameter and pull 20 million gallons a day, or 22,500 acre-feet annually from the Evangeline Aquifer, which is a layer of the Gulf Coast Aquifer that runs along the coast of Texas.

Individual wells would produce an estimated 3,234.85 acre-feet per year, amounting to 1.05 million gallons a year.

For the most part, the aquifers under Austin County recharge rate is one-half to one inch per year, according to a 2011 study conducted by University of Texas at Austin, "TWDB Gulf Coast Recharge."

Pending approval of the permits, Electro says it will contract with a licensed driller to drill the wells.

Electro would be the owner and operator of the wells, but not "the owner of the surface or groundwater estates associated with the Project." That remains with Chambo.

The application also includes a hydrogeologic report, conducted by Thornhill Group, Inc. Along with identifying the well and aquifer characteristics, it also looks at groundwater availability.

### Predicted effects

The BGCD has not yet published its own report on the possible effects of the proposed project.

Within the Electro funded report, it concludes that drawdown near the field after one year is estimated at 200 feet in the Evangeline Aquifer.

It says that it will not significantly affect neighboring wells and that there is no evidence to suggest there will be significant subsidence problems as a result of the project.

In the more than 300 comments the BGCD received from the public on this issue, many brought up factors like population growth, drought and the nearby salt dome in Brookshire as not being addressed in the study.

To view all the comments, the full application and other information about the BGCD, visit [www.bluebonnetgroundwater.org](http://www.bluebonnetgroundwater.org).

The State Office of Administrative Hearings docket number for the project contested hearing, set for July 11, is 951-13-4182.

# JUNETEENTH

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doors will open for the campout and trail ride hosted by H. Brown and Crew. This is the first time they have hosted a Juneteenth trail ride, and they're expecting a huge crowd coming from around and out of the state.

"We wanted to do something and give back to the community," said Roshonda Brown. "It's not just for African American people, it's for everybody."

Although Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on Sept. 22, 1862, with an effective date of Jan. 1, 1863, it didn't have much affect on those living in the former Confederacy.

June 18, 1865, two years later, was the day Union General Gordon Granger and his troops arrived in Galveston to enforce the emancipation of the slaves in Texas. Juneteenth is a celebration of him coming to Texas and reading General Order No. 3, which informed Texans that all slaves in the United States are free.

There will be a DJ and some food vendors starting at 3 p.m. on Friday as groups come to set up on the 13-acre

tract located at 960 Garland Lane in Sealy.

The focus will be on Saturday, though.

"It's a mobile celebration," said Brown.

People can bring their horses and go on an 8-12 mile horseback ride. Party wagons are welcome and there will be trophies for crunkest, best party wagon riding club and farthest traveled club or rider.

There is no need to register and everyone is welcome to attend.

There will also be music including Rue Davis, Lady Audrey and The Superior Band, DJ David Thomas, Men in Black and Too Laid Back Band.

There will be tickets for the H. Brown and Crew celebration going for \$10 presale and \$15 at the door.

For more information on the campout and trail ride and to get presale tickets, call the Browns at (281) 924-5562 or (281) 787-4257.

# 911

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hear from dispatch and press a button to map a route to where to respond to the call.

The money to purchase the system will come from forfeiture funds, or money from seizures by the sheriff's department.

The estimated forfeiture budget for 2013 accepted by the court on Monday lists total expenditures as \$140,595.06. Of that, \$109,595.06 is expected to go to equipment, \$11,000 will go toward supplies, \$10,000 will go toward training and another \$10,000 will go to investigative supplies. Currently, the department subscribes to a system through Harris County. Now it will be able to eliminate that cost.

There will be some cost though, about for continued support and maintenance and would come out of the county's general fund. But that would probably be the equivalent to the fees the county pays to Harris County now for the service, said Austin County Judge Carolyn Bilski.

No agreement was signed as of Monday as the county combs through the contract for the technology.