

Municipal Utility District No. 18
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February 2010 Newsletter

Board Changes:

At our December meeting, the Board regretfully accepted Bill Newsom's resignation due to health issues. Bill has served as a Director for MUD 18 since May of 1996. The Board is grateful to Bill for his many years of dedicated service to the District. At our January meeting, to fill Newsom's unexpired term, the Board appointed Chris Uzelmeier who brings valued experience working with the Lake Conroe Communities Network. The officer duties of the Board were realigned as indicated at the end of this newsletter. The Board positions for Champagne, Constantino and Pierce expire in May. Each incumbent has filed for re-election. Anyone who is interested in running for a position on the board should follow the procedures posted on the bulletin board outside the Bentwater Pro Shop by March 8.

Water Rate Increase:

For several years, concerns have been raised about the long term water supply in our county, **The next section of this newsletter gives a summary of this challenge and efforts to address it.** Meanwhile, MUD 18 has been encouraging residents to look for opportunities to conserve water usage. Your monthly bill has included a rolling 12 month history of your water usage and the water rate schedule used to calculate your monthly bill. Beginning in December, your monthly bill has included a pie chart to help you understand where you are on the "water chart." A recent study of rates in the area, confirms Bentwater rates are low by comparison. Based on a usage of 10,000 gallons per month and current rates, the following are the current **water fees** in each of the following areas:

April Sound (MUD's 3 & 4)	\$15.60
Walden (MUD's 8 & 9)	\$18.20
City of Conroe	\$26.38
The Woodlands	\$21.25
Bentwater	\$13.00

Our last service rate increase was in October 2005. At our January meeting the Board voted to increase the water rates to be more in line with area rates and to encourage conservation. The following rates will be effective in April and will be seen in the May bill:

Gallons	Rate (*per 1000 gallons)
0 – 4,000	\$10.00 (minimum bill)
4,001-10,000	\$ 1.00*
10,001-15,000	\$ 1.50*
15,001-20,000	\$ 2.00*
20,001-30,000	\$ 3.00*
Over 30,000	\$ 3.75*

With the new rates and assuming 10,000 gallon/month, the water bill will be \$16.00. A chart on our website, under the documents tab, provides details on how the water bill is calculated. The \$30 sewer/garbage fee remains unchanged.

Update on Montgomery County's Water Supply Planning:

The MUD Board has been spending much time and energy on the future of our water supply. Currently we obtain all of our water from the Jasper aquifer, which is about 600 feet deep. This has been a generous aquifer. Almost all utility districts have been using this aquifer as their primary, or sole, water supply. The aquifer is showing the consequences of this heavy usage. We have watched the aquifer decline and production rates fall off. We have had to spend money on upgrading our pumps and suspending them at lower and lower levels. Other MUDs have had similar experience. In the Woodlands, the problem is severe enough to be causing land subsidence.

This situation cannot continue indefinitely. The problems will be aggravated by addition of new homes in the areas served by our aquifer. In response, the Texas legislature created the Lone Star Groundwater Conservation District (LSGCD) for Montgomery County, with powers to do whatever is necessary to preserve the aquifer by limiting further decline. The agency has spent several years collecting data on the use of the aquifer, its decline rate and the limitations on its recharge rate. The agency's strongest action to date is to mandate a reduction in use of groundwater and to force utilization of other sources of water. It would be very expensive to bring water from other counties, so our most convenient source has been assumed to be Lake Conroe. The San Jacinto River Authority (SJRA) has rights to the water in Lake Conroe and thus has been heavily involved in developing plans for supplying lake water for domestic use.

The SJRA has spent more than a year developing an overall plan to reduce groundwater withdrawals by certain participants so that, collectively, all participants comply with the LSGCD rules. Treated lake water would be distributed to some water users; others would continue to pump water from the Jasper aquifer. New treatment and distribution infrastructure would be needed to supply lake water to utility systems that have been built to use groundwater. Engineering studies suggest this will be expensive. The costs would be shared by all participants by paying a pumpage fee, starting at \$0.50 per 1000 gallons. The fee would be equal among participants so that none experience a benefit or penalty for taking surface water or relying solely on groundwater. Over time, water bills may double, triple or even quadruple. This has spawned many contentious issues, but so far the LSGCD is adhering to its deadlines. By June every

MUD must make a declaration of intent to LSGCD on how it will achieve its required reduction in groundwater usage. Before June the SJRA will require binding contracts from those who choose to join their ground water reduction plan. MUD 18 has not yet made its decision on what kind of commitment we will make to meet the LSGCD conservation rule of using 30% less groundwater by 2016. We are working with our engineering consultant, other area MUDs and other area entities to extend the deadlines and explore the least expensive strategy to meet the conservation rule.

Of the many contentious areas and issues, two already stand out. Some are resistant to the idea of conservation -- new ideas in low-water landscaping, upgrading of irrigation systems for greater efficiency, etc. On the other hand, some are opposed to the idea of drawing down our lake level in periods of drought so as to conserve groundwater. There is a fear that repetitive low lake levels will severely depress real estate values here, stop growth and cause closure of some businesses. These would be intangible costs in addition to the engineering and construction costs of using lake water.

This backdrop makes conservation an even more important issue. It is already clear from the way that the rules are written that the least expensive path, BY FAR, is to achieve as much of our required reduction as possible via conservation. Serious conservation efforts can postpone the most dramatic increases in the financial and intangible cost of water to each of us. Everyone dependent on our aquifer is going to hear a steady message about conservation for years to come. This water problem will not go away.

We will keep you informed about our plans to meet the deadlines in dealing with these issues and about the costs and the ever-growing complexity of side issues. We will use our web site, www.mcmud18.com and the e-blast feature to provide ongoing information. And we will continue to include messages in your monthly bill for water and sewer service.

Our Local Water Conservation Requires Planning and Education:

Both the summer drought and the winter freeze gave many of us unplanned opportunities to become better acquainted with our lawn irrigation systems. Many learned they have been overwatering their lawns in the summer. Most residents have lost some plants due to the freeze. We encourage our residents to choose wisely when replacing plants – choose drought hardy plants. We have posted a list of plants recommended by the County Extension Office on our website, www.mcmud18.com under the Conservation tab. We encourage each resident to be aware of where you are on the “water chart” – easily accessed from our website home page – and set conservation goals that you can track via the information we will continue to provide to you.

As a community, we will learn from the *Water Conservation Program*, cosponsored by BCA, MUD and POA. This program will identify a number of homes in Bentwater to pilot water conservation concepts. Landscape irrigation will be an important aspect of the pilots. If you are interested in volunteering to be a pilot, or would like more information, contact the BCA at BCA@bwcivic.org.

We encourage residents who are away for extended periods to arrange with neighbors or a contracted service to have access to your lawn irrigation systems. The objective would be to reduce irrigation during rainy periods and periods of drought induced water restrictions. Residents are responsible for wise water usage, whether at home or away. During our recent freeze, we had 55 emergency cut-offs; 4 of the homes were unoccupied,

Additionally, the POA has committed to taking steps to improve their landscape irrigation practices. They have begun the process of looking for equipment and procedural changes that will support water conservation goals.

MUD 18 Website – www.mcmud18.com:

MUD 18’s web site is available for your use as a convenient and timely source of information: garbage pick-up schedule; contact info for Hays, Waste Management and the Board; helpful information on water conservation, recycling and hurricane preparedness; previous newsletters for reference; tax rate information, etc. You can access background on our bond rating, our financial policies, meeting agendas and minutes. The web site also gives us the capability to send out timely e-blast messages to our customers with information related to weather events, service interruptions or other time critical information. If you received a copy of this newsletter by email, we have your address. If you did not receive it, please log onto the site and give us your email address. Your address will not be shared with anyone and you can unsubscribe at any time.

Sincerely,

Your MUD Board:

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