*Welcome to LLA Reports, a podcast produced by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor’s office. This podcast is intended to be an oral representation of the written report it highlights and is primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature.*

This is Gina Brown. I’m a manager with LLA Performance Audit Services. This episode of LLA Reports focuses on our new report titled “Status Update: Capital Area Groundwater Conservation Commission.”

The purpose of this status report was to provide an update on whether the Capital Area Groundwater Conservation Commission implemented recommendations we made in a May 2019 report.

In that performance audit report, we found that while the Commission took some actions to regulate water usage from the Southern Hills Aquifer, it did not effectively regulate withdrawals from the aquifer system to reduce and manage saltwater encroachment and to ensure the sustainability of fresh groundwater for the future.

The Southern Hills Aquifer System provides water for the greater Baton Rouge Area. The Legislature created the Capital Area Groundwater Conservation Commission in 1974 to oversee the management of the aquifer. As part of its work, the Commission regulates wells that are used to withdraw water from the aquifer for both industrial and public use. The Commission does not regulate wells used for agricultural and horticultural purposes, or individual domestic wells.

Our 2019 report, “Regulation of Groundwater Resources Greater Baton Rouge Area,” contained 19 recommendations. In our latest report, we found that the Commission fully implemented five of them. The implemented recommendations were:

* Periodically evaluating water withdrawal fees and deciding whether the fees should be raised;
* Ensuring all wells are permitted before being constructed;
* Incorporating Ascension Parish wells into the Commission’s district;
* Working with the Legislature to amend state law to include Ascension Parish as part of the Commission’s district; and
* Obtaining an opinion from the Louisiana Board of Ethics about whether the makeup of the Commission violates state law.

In addition, we found the Commission partially implemented one recommendation that suggested charging an application fee for new well permits and developing penalties for well owners if they fail to obtain a permit before installing a new well.

Another recommendation – limiting usage by well to better manage the withdrawal of water from the aquifer – was not implemented.

We found the other 12 recommendations from the 2019 report were in the process of being implemented. Those recommendations included:

* Ensuring all information in the Commission’s database is complete;
* Reconciling the Commission’s population of wells with the state Office of Conservation’s well registry;
* Setting limits to restrict water withdrawals from the aquifer’s 1,500- and 2,000-foot sands;
* Reserving the aquifer’s 1,500- and 1,700-foot sands for public water supply needs;
* Monitoring the scavenger well in the 1,500-foot sand to determine if it is successfully addressing saltwater intrusion and whether it can be used in the 2,000-foot sand; and
* Defining the term “northward away” when approving how close a new well can be installed near the Baton Rouge Fault Line.

The remaining recommendations included:

* Considering different fee structures to encourage water conservation;
* Ensuring the Commission collects fees on all wells that meet regulation standards;
* Using the Commission’s authority in state law to require all of the wells it regulates to be metered so withdrawal amounts are recorded;
* Developing a process to conduct inspections to verify well withdrawal amounts;
* Ensuring the Commission’s management plan includes a time line to control saltwater movement, performance measures for controlling saltwater, and a financial plan to make sure revenues meet regulatory priorities; and
* Investing in public education efforts focused on the need for conservation and how to reduce water withdrawals from the aquifer.

*We hope you found this podcast informative, and that you’ll follow future episodes of LLA Reports.*

*This podcast was created as part of the audit report just discussed and is intended primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature. Both the full report and the podcast can be found on the LLA’s website at* [*www.lla.la.gov*](http://www.lla.la.gov)*.*

*Thank you for listening.*