

WATER AVAILABILITY AND SUPPLY

The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has been working over the past few years with large groundwater users to reduce future withdrawals and establish plans to use alternate sources of water. The EVGMAC was established in 2015 by the General Assembly to assist the State Water Commission and DEQ in developing and implementing a management strategy for the EVGM area to address the limited water resources. In October, 2017, the EVGMAC presented a report with twelve recommendations to the State Water Commission.

Groundwater Usage Rights

- The Council supports agriculture's exemption from water permit fees.
- The Council opposes increases in applicable water permit fees. The Council supports the coordination of all state agencies impacting environmental permits throughout the permitting process.
- The Council supports increasing the length of groundwater permits to at least 15 years.

Below are the recommendations from the EVGWAC that have the greatest possible impact on agriculture:

- *EVGMAC recommended that the essential operational costs of DEQ be funded to successfully manage the groundwater resources. If general funds are not available, they recommended a reasonable flat fee applied only to households and businesses in the EVGM area. If a fee is applied, the funding provided by the fee would not offset reductions of the general funds.*
- *EVGMAC recommended the creation of incentives for local governments and well owners to connect to the public surface water systems when reasonably available, with possible credits to localities to help lower connection fees or to provide low cost financing.*
- *EVGMAC encouraged the General Assembly to develop a statement of regulatory intent to encourage the use of ponds and to work to remedy the regulatory barriers in the development of irrigation ponds for agricultural purposes.*
- *EVGMAC recommended that the General Assembly authorize DEQ to develop and implement a groundwater banking system.*

Over the past two years, water supply/quantity issues have become an increasing concern for regulators, especially in eastern Virginia. Access to water sources, ground and surface, are critical for the entire agribusiness industry, from production to processing to turf and nurseries.

Current water policy places the first priority for water use on human consumption, but the balance with the consumption of water for the production of food and fiber products also needs to be a high priority. Likewise, water resources for businesses, such as turf production, golf courses, and commercial developments, need to be maintained in a manner that supports an adequate water quality and quantity supply for these operations needs in the future.

January, 2018