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Williamson County declines support for local petition, pushing forward local groundwater management

By [Haley McLeod](#) | 3:54 PM Jan 9, 2024 CST

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Williamson County Commissioners approve resolution for groundwater study in the western part of the county. (Haley McLeod/Community Impact)

[Williamson County Commissioners Court](#) approved a resolution Jan. 9 which outlines the county's plans for groundwater resource management and declines support of a local petition to annex parts of western Williamson County to a neighboring county's underground water conservation district.

What's happening?

The [Aquifer Conservation Alliance](#), a local advocacy group formed by Williamson County residents, refiled a petition Sept. 6 with the [Clearwater Underground Water Conservation District](#) in Bell County. The petition outlines WilCo residents' desire to annex the western half of the county into the conservation district for it to manage the region's use of the Trinity Aquifer, with a focus on drilling of wells.

After discussions over the past year between the counties and the CUWCD, Williamson County commissioners said the court will not support the ACA petition, as Bell County would retain a majority of the board members for the water control district.

The portion of Williamson County that would be annexed is double the size and population of Bell County, Precinct 4 Commissioner Russ Boles said.





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also a taxing district. That portion of Williamson County is worth double the entirety of Bell County," Boles said. "You've got more people paying more tax dollars with the least amount of income. And that just sits wrong with me, any way you look at it."

Commissioners shared a desire to see data before the county can make any significant decisions. Part of the resolution details plans for a county sponsored groundwater study.

"The data is critical. We've been operating on zero data, except, 'My well is going dry,'" Precinct 1 Commissioner Terry Cook said.

According to city documents, the county budget has allocated \$77 million for water and wastewater infrastructure projects in fiscal year 2023-24, via American Rescue Plan Act funding, with another \$1 million dedicated specifically to a groundwater study.

The Court selected [LRE Water, LLC](#) Dec. 19 to conduct the groundwater study. LRE will also partner with regional experts, like the Bureau of Economic Geology and Baylor University, according to county documents.

Some context

The ACA initially obtained 106 resident signatures when first filing the petition in March 2023 to the CUWCD, which is higher than the 50-signature threshold needed for Clearwater to consider the annexation, [according to previous Community Impact reporting](#).

An annexation for this part of the county into a groundwater conservation district would result in state regulation of water for the region.

All wells would be required to register with the CUWCD and additional permitting could be required for some wells. However, domestic wells and livestock wells producing less than 25,000 gallons of water per day would be exempt from permits.

Groundwater conservation districts are political subdivisions of the state created to protect underground water resources by regulating groundwater waste.

There were 576 new wells drilled to the Trinity Aquifer in Williamson County between 2017-21, according to recent data compiled by the CUWCD.

There are a total of 781 wells across all of Williamson County, according to [Texas Water Development Board](#) data. The county utilizes water from the Trinity, Carrizo-Wilcox and Edwards aquifers, though the western side of WilCo lies over the Trinity.

The Trinity Aquifer is a major underground water source extending across much of Texas. According to





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groundwater is absorbed to recharge the underground aquifer, according to the TWDB.

When water resources dwindle, western Williamson County experiences the drying of creeks, springs, wetlands and residential wells sourced from the Trinity aquifer.

Quote of note

"Annexation into another groundwater district is premature, but if the results from the study turned out [that] there's some action we need to take, that needs to be directed by Williamson County, in my opinion, and not by another county." Precinct 2 Commissioner Cynthia Long said.

By **Haley McLeod**
Government Reporter

Haley joined Community Impact in September 2023 and is the government reporter covering Round Rock, Pflugerville and Hutto, as well as Williamson County. Upon her graduation from Texas State University, she worked previously as a data journalism intern for Texas Community Health News covering statewide health topics. In her free time, Haley is an outdoor enthusiast always seeking new adventures.



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