Loudoun Farm Bureau 2024

Local Resolution Adopted at the September 17, 2024 Annual Meeting

Drought Monitoring and Farm Relief

Given the uncertain future of local impacts of El Nino and La Nina climate patterns, we urge the county to prioritize a drought management plan for western Loudoun to support the current and expanding agriculture economy.

We further support a U.S. Geological Study to determine if the current limited community well monitoring program is capable of measuring groundwater recharge rates and trends in all major western watersheds, especially during prolonged drought conditions.

We further support implementation, without further delay, of the Source Water Protection Board Member Initiative (BMI) of June 1, 2021, to establish permanent buffer protections along all major watersheds in Loudoun County.

We further support flexible emergency drought economic planning in the Department of Economic Development to better enable Loudoun farmers to survive emergency drought declaration periods. Including working with Loudoun Water to offer 375 to 1000 gallons water tank fills for animal consumption on an emergency basis.

Attachment #2:

Email to Loudoun County Board of Supervisors from Loudoun Farmers

August 12, 2024

To: Chair Phyllis Randall and Loudoun Board of Supervisors
From: Loudoun Farmers associated with the LCPCC Agriculture Working Group and Other Farmers

The farming community in Loudoun has been seriously impacted by the hot, severe drought weather pattern we experienced from early June to August this year. This type of weather pattern has become a threatening trend over the past decade. Future climate forecasts predict more of the same in years to come. Such weather forecasts portend the need for long range agriculture drought relief planning.

Extended drought for the last couple months has dried up streams, lowered farm ponds, reduced first cutting hay and caused significant corn and soybean losses. What recent rain we received last week has come too late to undo the serious economic impact.

The farming community needs assurance that the county is addressing the following critical needs:

1. Can we confidently track, on a trend basis, long-term ground water recharge capability in our western Loudoun watersheds? Do we have the well testing capability in place to determine if our ground water reserves will be preserved under extreme drought conditions over extended periods of time? Has the USGS ever done a groundwater study in Loudoun County? The USGS monitoring well that is close to Neersville is showing significant recent declines in ground water levels! We are no longer getting the winter snowpack that provided a major surface recharge source to replenish our ground water reserves.

2. Supervisors need to prioritize water resource management to maintain a viable agriculture economy in western Loudoun. Water resource management to protect

agriculture ground water needs to become a critical focus, perhaps under the Source Water Protection Board Management Initiative (BMI) along with shoreline protection for our key western Loudoun watersheds. Protection of our western Loudoun ground water aquifers and watersheds will ultimately benefit the citizens of eastern Loudoun who depend on groundwater reserves to recharge the Potomac, Lower Goose Creek and Broad Run watersheds.

3. The county Department of Economic Development needs to develop a long-term flexible agriculture drought relief plan for Loudoun farmers. For example, we may need to be able to import hay when the county is declared in extreme drought as we have been since the middle of June. There is also a need to plan for distribution of portable emergency water to farmers utilizing large volume 500- or 1,000-gallon liquid tote bins which can be easily loaded onto farm trucks and returned when emptied. This may need to be a joint effort with Loudoun Water.

4. Finally, the county needs to actively seek further suggestions and recommendations from farmers regarding practical emergency drought relief that can fill the gaps which are not covered by federal assistance. It will be another 8 months before farmers can receive federal drought relief assistance!

Under the serious drought conditions we are now facing as a new normal, we hope this letter will convey our deep concern that every effort will be made to conserve and protect our ground water aquifers and watersheds in Loudoun. If you can elevate and expand planning efforts to address this critical need, we will be most appreciative.

We also appreciate current Department of Economic Development efforts to provide drought relief for the farming community. Let us know if we can be of additional assistance in providing further recommendations to assist in this effort.

Everyone benefits from local food security which depends on our ability to sustain agriculture in Loudoun!

Sincerely, the Undersigned Concerned Loudoun Farmers
Fred George, President, Lovettsville Farmers Club; Dr. Kirk Norbo, Minibovine Farm,

Waterford

M&M Skinner, Seven Oaks Vineyard, Philmont; Ben Sedlins, Short Hill Winegrowers, Hillsboro; Dr. Joe Smith, Burnt Mill Farm, Hillsboro; Robbie Thompson, Stony Point Farm, Hillsboro; Warren Howell, Allder School Berries, Purcellville; Craig Damewood, Cherry Hill Farm, Round Hill; Pete Holden, Quintessence Farm, Lincoln; Todd Cummings, Hillsboro; John Adams, Rock Croft Farm, Lucketts

Attachment #3:

WATER SUPPLIES MAY BE SHRINKING IN LOUDOUN, ELSEWHERE, SOME SAY GROWTH IS DRAINING DRINKING WELLS

Washington Post

December 11, 1994

By Peter Pae

Armed with a forked tree branch that he holds over the ground, Talbot Warren has helped find water for residents of rural Loudoun County for nearly a quarter-century.

Warren is a dowser -- a man hired to gauge the groundwater supply by watching the movement of a stick. He's proud of his mysterious skills and says he can pinpoint where a well should be dug and how deep it should be.

But in recent years, Warren said, his dowsing twig hasn't swagged the way it used to, and when water is discovered, it hasn't been as plentiful.

"I can tell you that since 1976, it's gone down steadily," said Warren, 50, of Middleburg. "Before, you could go roughly 100 to 150 feet down to get good water. Now, you seem to have to go 450 to 600 feet to get it, and often you don't get enough."

More than half of Loudoun's residents, most of them in rural western Loudoun, still rely on private wells for drinking water. But well drillers, dowsers and residents say water is getting harder to find. They say the hundreds of new homes being built each year in western Loudoun are depleting the area's aquifers.

Loudoun isn't alone. Hydrologists for the U.S. Geological Survey, which monitors several wells in suburban Virginia and Maryland, say that population growth in outlying areas of the Washington region has been the main cause of a general decline in ground water levels.

In fast-growing areas such as Anne Arundel and Charles counties, the water level has dropped by an average of 10 to 20 feet in the last 15 years, said Michael Smigaj, a hydrologic technician with the Geological Survey.

As a result, the groundwater issue has become part of the broader debate over suburban development. In Montgomery County, the town of Poolesville has considered a moratorium on development, amid recurring shortages of well water. In Prince William, opponents of the now-defunct proposal for a Walt Disney Co. historical theme park in Haymarket argued that the project would have exhausted ground water supplies for hundreds of nearby residents.

In Loudoun, the issue has sparked a battle between residents who want limits on development and pro-business advocates, who dismiss reports of shrinking water supply as isolated cases and argue that the cash-strapped county needs the new homes.

"The water table has been dropping. ... We have had wells run dry," said Don Byers, an Aldie resident. "A public water system is impossible to have in rural Loudoun. The only solution is to restrict growth."

"You have to look at the water problem on an ad hoc basis," countered Frank Sterns, president of the Loudoun chapter of the Northern Virginia Building Industry Association. "I don't think it is symptomatic of the whole county."

Several environmental and civic activists say the Loudoun Board of Supervisors has ignored the water problem in its zeal to bring economic development to western Loudoun.

They point to a four-year study by the county's Department of Environmental Resources that concluded the groundwater supply in Loudoun is declining. The 250-page report, completed last year, recommended that development be "prohibited or substantially limited on lands which are critical to groundwater discharge."

Shortly afterward, county supervisors instead relaxed ground water-testing requirements for developers and eliminated the department that issued the study.

County officials contend that the department's demise was a budget-cutting move unrelated to the study. The hydrogeologist who wrote the report says he was fired because of pressure from the building industry.

"I was caught in a political cross-fire," said Brutus Cooper, the hydrogeologist. "I think they were afraid of the conclusion."

Cooper, now an environmental consultant, said the county should have followed up on his study with a comprehensive monitoring of wells.

"The water level has been going down over time. But with the absence of a second study, there is no definitive way of saying by how much," Cooper said. "It's not something that a nice rainfall can take care of."

County supervisors loosened the water-testing rules last summer. The old ordinance required developers to test the groundwater supply before submitting their construction plans for county approval. The measure was drafted in 1988 after several residents found their wells had dried up shortly after construction of nearby subdivisions.

The new ordinance still requires builders to test for water availability and quality, but it allows them to do so after their construction plans have been approved.

"This allows the developers to sell the lots prior to the test," said Jean Brown, a member of the North Fork-Goose Creek Watershed Project, a water conservation group that opposed the change. "It's now 'Home buyers beware.' "

But George Franklin, a county planning commissioner, said it makes sense to limit the drilling tests to subdivided lots that are under contract.

"There is no disadvantage or advantage to the developer," Franklin said. "We just didn't want to see all these holes in the ground for no good reason."

Many western Loudoun homeowners are reluctant to talk publicly about their own well water problems, for fear of lowering the resale value of their homes. But they readily cite examples of neighbors whose wells have gone dry and who have had to dig two or three new ones before hitting water. It costs about $3,000 to dig a 375-foot well, so picking the wrong spot can get expensive.

"It's a hot topic of conversation between friends, but they'll never tell anyone else," said Joe Keating, of Waterford, one of the few residents who admitted having problems with his well.

"When it dries up, you go to the grocery story and buy drinking water and then you go to Leesburg {the largest town in Loudoun} and get five-gallon jugs for washing," Keating said.

As an afterthought, he added, "But it's a good well because water always comes back."

Attachment #4:

a).In response to a 1999 drought, Loudoun County government organized an **Ad Hoc Groundwater Committee** which eventually morphed into the Board-Appointed **Water Resource Technical Advisory Committee (WRTAC).** This Ad Hoc committee made the following recommendations:

- Update hydrogeologic database and evaluate data
- Develop surface and groundwater monitoring plan
- Consider new policies to protect groundwater resources
- Investigate State and Federal funding options

The report is available at: https://loudounwatershedwatch.org/Loudoun_County_Reports/1999_Ad-hoc-Groundwater-Advisory-Committee.pdf

b). In 2001, the County created the Department of Environmental and Historic Resources with one dedicated staff person. The Department was terminated in 2003 without explanation.

c). Then in 2001 the **Water Resource Technical Advisory Committee** became one of the formal committees reporting directly to the Transportation and Land Use Committee (TLUC) of the Board of Supervisors (BOS). Technical experts provided guidance and recommendations to the County from its formal beginning in 2001 until it was abolished by the BOS in 2019. A substantial amount of progress was achieved that helped guide and steer County water-related activities. The effort is documented in over 3,000 files totaling 5 GB. Files from 2003 to 2012 are available in the folder *Building and Development > WRTAC* under https://www.loudoun.gov/documentcenter. Meeting files and reports from 2013 to 2019 were removed from public view by the County.

d). In 2001 Former Republican Congressman Frank Wolf (R-10) and his staff assisted with appropriations for water resources monitoring, later referred to as **Water Resources Monitoring Program** (WRMP). County staff presented a formal lobby request through for $1M Science and Technological source funding and $900k (55%) was approved as a special appropriation with a Loudoun County match of $700K or 45% . Staff then had to convert the funding into the appropriate administrative framework for the award to be an EPA Grant Award (#970153; SF-

424 Forms). The purpose was to provide the basic quantitative data needed to better understand and manage the County's water resources and thus help protect human health and the environment by assuring adequate, sustainable, clean, and safe water. Monitoring included streams, precipitation, and groundwater. The grant initially intended for 2001-2005 was extended to 2009. Through cooperative agreements with the Commonwealth's Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the US Geological Survey (USGS), seven stream gages were developed, eventually totaling 10, which was more than most counties in the Commonwealth. Grant funds supported the drilling and testing of 13 groundwater monitoring wells. These funds also supported subcontract work for stream assessment and a comprehensive statistically based scientific evaluation of water quality conditions and stream health.

Since 2009 when the grant was completed, the County has maintained the groundwater monitoring program conducted by staff and annually funded the cooperative agreements with USGS. The final report is available at https://www.loudoun.gov/DocumentCenter/View/114235/WRMP-TLUC-Report

e).In 2006, Loudoun County Government, along with a diverse group of over 70 stakeholders and watershed experts, conducted a series of meetings to develop a shared vision for watershed management planning strategies for Loudoun County. This effort resulted in development of the **Strategic Watershed Management Solutions (SWMS) project** which was funded by the County along with grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Meetings were facilitated by County staff and by the University of Virginia Institute for Environmental Negotiation. This effort culminated with 28 organizations signing commitments in the "Declaration of Cooperation." The Final Report of the SWMS project, dated December 2006, is available at: https://www.loudoun.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/Index/728 under the folder: *Building and Development > Watershed > SWMS Report* Also, a comprehensive statistical analysis of water resources data is in the folder: *Building and Development > Water Resources Monitoring > Preliminary Data Analysis.*

f). In February of 2007, a community-based advisory body, known as the **Watershed Management Stakeholder Steering Committee** was established to guide watershed planning and watershed management within the County. The committee of 24 diversified subject matter

experts met some 30 times through 2009 with the objective to promote the implementation of the principles, vision, values, goals and recommendations of the Strategic Watershed Management Solutions Final Report referenced above. Discussion included revisions to Limestone Overlay District and voluntary adoption of Chesapeake Bay Act.

No formal report resulted. The Committee was dissolved by the County without explanation. The by-laws remaining and meeting documents are in the folder: *Building and Development > Watershed Stakeholder Steering Committee* at https://www.loudoun.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/Index/728.

g.) In 2007, an internal report from the Loudoun County Environmental Programs Division provides an **Environmental Report Card** for water, air, land, living/cultural resources and climate change (Loudoun County, 2007b). The category water was scored as a "C-", however, did not explore groundwater component in depth. The assessments are followed with a series of recommendations, some of which overlap with those presented in this report. The report states: "Water Quantity appears to be holding steady for now. This could be affected by drought conditions and/or increased demand as Loudoun nearly doubles its population through 2030." The report was never released to the public and the County terminated employment of the author who did not obtain appropriate internal management review.

h.) Then in June 2008 the Department of Planning issued their own report (Loudoun County, 2008a). There were no report card scores, nor were any recommendations included, nor was the 2007 report cited. The presentation to Transportation and Land Use Committee did include "potential next steps", but without commitments by the County or Adoption by BOS and lacked specifics in addressing groundwater. It does not appear that the report was forwarded to the entire BOS. Later, on December 1, 2008, the BOS held a special meeting, Committee of the Whole (COW), which was solely focused on water quality issues and groundwater was not addressed.

i). In September of 2008, with assistance from EPA, a **Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (CWMP) Report** was completed for Loudoun County. The report provides a recommended approach for the county government to develop a plan to manage, preserve and improve the watersheds and water resources of Loudoun County. With assistance from county staff and a county-wide stakeholder group, the contractor analyzed and organized existing water

resource data, at the time, to characterize and categorize sub watersheds into several potential management groups.

Approximately 90 specific watershed management plan recommendations or tasks were listed. The Water Resource Technical Advisory Committee (WRTAC) reviewed and prioritized recommendations for the TLUC and BOS. **However, limited action has been taken by the County to follow through**. The Final Report is available at: https://www.loudoun.gov/DocumentCenter/View/33738/CWMP_report_all

j). As a result of the **Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan,** the County contracted a pilot project in 2014 known as the **Upper Broad Run Watershed Management Plan.** This pilot project was intended to provide detailed watershed management planning in Loudoun and to identify specific watershed problems and issues so that proposed strategies could be developed to protect the health of local streams.

As proposed by the Water Resource Technical Advisory Committee (WRTAC), it was approved and funded ($300,000) by the BOS. Site specific projects (stream restoration and stormwater management retrofits) were outlined, though few have been expanded upon and executed. The Final Report is available at: https://www.loudoun.gov/DocumentCenter/View/108686/UBRWMP-Full-Report?bidId=

k.) In 2016, a second plan, known as the **Western Hills Watershed Management Plan Area,** was funded ($190,000) based on the need to address groundwater concerns in the area and to build on the "lessons learned" in the 2014 Upper Broad Run Watershed Management Plan. Again, as with the Upper Broad Run Watershed Management Plan, the development of the scope of work for this plan was vetted by the **Water Resources Technical Advisory Committee (WRTAC)** and reported directly to the county Transportation and Land Use Committee (TLUC). Using modeling, a series of watershed improvement projects and programmatic suggestions were developed.

There has been little action to implement these recommendations. Map interface to report results, recommendation and photos are posted at https://western-hills-loudoungis.hub.arcgis.com/

The final presentation and last meeting of WRTAC in 2019 is posted at

https://lfportal.loudoun.gov/LFPortalinternet/0/edoc/344966/WRTAC_Presentation_05-29-19_Final.pdf

l.) In 2019, without clear explanation, the BOS abolished the Water Resources Technical Advisory Committee (WRTAC). This regrettable action was taken despite the fact that watershed management plans had not been developed, as planned, for the Catoctin, Limestone, Lower Goose Creek, Middle Goose Greek, Lower Broad Run, Sugarland Run, Upper Goose Creek, Cub and Bull Run Watersheds.

This shortsighted and harmful action was taken at a time when our neighboring counties, Fairfax and Fauquier counties, had completed all of their watershed management plans during the past two decades. **While county officials decided to replace the WRTAC with the current Environmental Commission, with a much broader scope of focus, little to nothing has been accomplished in the past decade to protect the watershed resources of the county which all of our citizens, including farmers rely upon for sustainability. This unfortunate situation has occurred despite the fact that a number of milestones in water resource planning were developed and not acted upon by the County as documented above in this report.**

Now, with warmer weather patterns developing which cause extended drought conditions, the previous short-sighted actions of the BOS to curtail needed watershed resource management is coming home to haunt our rural farms and agri-tourism businesses.

According to current county planning documents, even the Source Water Protection—Board Management Initiative of 2021 has been given a very low current planning priority--to be determined (TBD). (BOS Business Meeting, July 2, 2024, Table 1: ZOAM Work Plan, page 2)

Town of Middleburg

"We're trying to be awfully proactive if the worst happens," says Town Manager Davis

June 4, 2025

https://blueridgeleader.com/were-trying-to-be-awfully-proactive-if-the-worst-happens-says-town-manager-davis/

Private well installations in western Loudoun jumped 50% from 2010 to 2020 (from 11,500 to over 17,000 wells). “Think of Loudoun County as a glass of water. The glass never gets any bigger. But every new development we put in in Western Loudoun, there’s a new straw that goes into the cup trying to drink the water.” Littleton said.

Littleton illustrated how well levels dropped dramatically during the 2024 heat and dry spells: “Well L and Well 4 both dropped to around 10 feet from the pump—just 10 feet from being bone dry.” He continued, “We literally lost 150 feet. And that’s the thing, it’s about the ground, as Danny said, we survive on groundwater. So when there’s no rain, there’s no groundwater going into the aquifer to recharge and fill that water column back up.”