

**Comments before the Pennsylvania Act 220 State Water Plan Regional Committee,
by Gilbert Pringle, Township Supervisor from Highland Township and president of
the Adams County Association of Township Officials; January 25, 2004**

Adams County Pennsylvania has been experiencing tremendous residential growth coming up from Maryland where building moratoriums have been imposed, partially due to a scarcity of water. In the recent gubernatorial campaign both candidates Fisher and Rendell ran on platforms of encouraging growth, including in areas such as Adams County. For example, a recent industrial site proposal called Project Value would have brought a truck distribution facility to Adams County. That one project would have required 2 million gallons of water a month; 1 million gallons of that to wash trucks. If compared to a normal home usage of 300 gallons of water a day, that would have equated to more than 2000 new homes.

Adams County is unique in that it has no water sources flowing into the county. The headwaters of all creeks and streams located within the county are replenished only by rainfall.

Because of new development within Adams County, there is an on-going transition regarding the supply of water. 1) traditionally most residents have used on-site wells and only dense town centers used public water systems; 2) increasingly public water systems supply water to outlying suburban and commercial areas; 3) now, community wells are drilled deep underground to capture groundwater and transport it long distances to service remote residences and businesses; and 4) in the near future private, profit-motivated developers and water suppliers are planning to operate water systems within the county.

One case in point - which has generated considerable concern - is the deep well pumps of the Gettysburg Municipal Authority. The pumps are located in Cumberland Township along Marsh Creek. GMA pumps groundwater from Cumberland and Highland Townships into Marsh Creek and then recaptures a percentage of that water downstream at their water processing facility. The wells pump over a million gallons of ground water a day into the creek. During the recent drought, one GMA well was responsible for drying up a number of surrounding residential on-lot wells. Compounding the problem, the GMA water treatment facility only recovers about one-quarter of the ground water that GMA pumps into the creek.

Currently a new developer, Mason-Dixon County Club, is proposing to build over a thousand new houses down stream along Marsh Creek. The developer proposes that two-thirds of the necessary water supply would be drawn from the creek. I, as a landowner along Marsh Creek adjacent to the GMA well, can tell you that during the drought there was no water in Marsh Creek. The creek was dry. Walk across it, don't get your feet wet, dry. The water that downstream developers plan on taking from the creek will be ground water pumped into the creek by GMA from underneath the township residents of Cumberland and Highland Townships.

There are other major developers proposing multi-hundred units residential developments along the Pennsylvania-Maryland border downstream from Gettysburg. When developers approach the townships with subdivision plans, there are few tools available to the township officials to regulate development based on the current or future availability of water resources. It is a concern of Adams County's townships that as more developments are approved and more construction begins, only then will it be known if sufficient water is available or if a crisis situation exists.

If during a drought there is a crisis, large municipal suppliers may be able to drill deeper or pump longer and satisfy their customers' needs. There is a definite possibility that this would impact surrounding on-lot water systems, forcing their owners to try to also drill deeper but with less probability of success. Additionally, the cost to a private landowner could be tremendous. And if a deeper well does not find water, the townships would be faced with an even more expensive solution of laying water pipes to service remote areas at tremendous inefficient taxpayer expense.

Given this background, and having reviewed the charter of your Regional Committee under Act 220, I request that you designate the Marsh Creek watershed area as a Critical Water Planning Area. To quote from your documentation, "A regional committee may, in advance of the formal adoption of a regional plan or the State Water Plan and if justified by evidence developed in the planning process, recommend the designation of a critical water planning area."

I believe there are many compelling reasons why Marsh Creek would be an appropriate critical area for your consideration. 1) Adams County is projected to experience record residential and industrial growth, and the issue of growth as it relates to water supply is a statewide issue, 2) with the growth of large municipal wells and the arrival of industrial water suppliers, the conflicts with individual on-lot well users is a fundamental issue, 3) the blurred line and public policy between groundwater and surface water is clearly evident in the Marsh Creek watershed, 4) Marsh Creek flows south into Maryland and raises questions about interstate water rights, 5) Marsh Creek is upstream from the critical metropolitan areas of Baltimore and Washington, and 6) Marsh Creek feeds a fragile eco-structure all the way to the Chesapeake Bay.

Given these considerations, I and the Supervisors of Highland Township - and I believe the supervisors of the surrounding townships - request that you designate Marsh Creek as a Critical Water Planning Area and use it as a template for developing policies for water use that will apply throughout Pennsylvania.

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