



POW open house encourages public discussion of water and land issues

by Toni Gibbons

On Nov. 19 Protect Our Wells (POW) hosted an open house at Woodmen Valley Chapel in Falcon.

In attendance were the Black Forest Land Use Committee, the Falcon/Peyton Small Area Master Plan Committee, Colorado University Extension Center, Upper Black Squirrel Creek Groundwater Management District, Cherokee Water District, El Paso County Water Authority, the Arkansas Basin Roundtable and Colorado Springs Utilities.

POW was formed in 2002 as a result of growing water concerns with the Black Forest Land Use Committee. Amy Phillips, chairman of the Black Forest committee, said the original goal was to preserve the natural beauty, resources and rural way of life in the Black Forest. Included in that were issues regarding land use, roads and water. "The water issues grew bigger than our committee could handle, and POW was born."

The Black Forest committee was formed in 1974 and became the State of Colorado's first small area planning group run by local citizens. "El Paso County recognizes the work and input of the small area planning committees," said Phillips. "As a result, we have been able to monitor and advise on how proposed development coincides with the existing master plan." The open house lent to the cooperative spirit of some of the groups including, POW, Black Forest, Falcon/Peyton, Upper Black Squirrel and CSU Extension. Kathy Hare, president of the Upper Black Squirrel said the water district is committed to working toward getting the necessary studies done for the possible recharge of the basin. Regarding the recent request by Cherokee Metropolitan Water District for water determination rights that have affected 150 families now owning the land, Hare said the district will be fighting the leases based on the Cherokee's plan to export the water from the basin. "Many of the current homeowners did not know there were leases. It has been a sad situation."

A hearing on the issue will be conducted by the Colorado Ground Water Commission in April 2008.

Sandy Martin, president of POW, said the POW committee will be submitting a proposal for grant money to monitor the aquifers. "Right now, we really don't know how much water is being used."

The proposal will contain three possible ways to conduct the monitoring:

- a manual monitoring;
- automatic data logging; and
- the digging of observation wells.

"We also are pushing for the county to hire an independent hydro geologist to help with consultation on the water and development issues," said Martin. Most of the groups present agree that development is a part of life on the eastern plains. Fourteen years ago, the population was approximately 3,000. Today, it is 20,000, and over the next 20 years it is projected to grow at the same percentage rate.

"We are trying to look at a 20 year time frame," said Lynne Bliss, chairman of the Falcon/Peyton committee, "and identify what is already been used, while planning for what will be used in the future, with the goal of making it more cohesive."

Phillips said she feels the Black Forest committee has been successful in their monitoring of the Black Forest master plan.

"We cover more than 80 square miles of land and our overall density is one lot on five acres with the timbered areas and the northern grasslands."

She also noted that some developers want to do the right thing and are interested in the inherent value of preserving and maintaining the land.

For \$25 a year, private well owners can join POW as a voting member. Those who do not own a well, but would like to be involved can join as an associate member.

For more information on POW, call (719) 351-1640 or visit <http://protectourwells.org>.

The Upper Black Squirrel Creek Groundwater Management District has meetings on the first Tuesday of every month at 7pm at the office next door to Taste Buds Restaurant in Calhan. The public is welcome to attend.

Information on the Black Forest can be viewed at: www.blackforest-co.com.

Information on the Falcon/Peyton Plan Committee can be viewed at: www.hbaa.com

Information for the Colorado State University Extension office can be viewed at: www.ext.colostate.edu.

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