

## What is the Groundwater Management Plan? How will it affect Cedar Valley?



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# Iron County Water Stewards

## *Answering Community Questions*

*Get to Know Your H2O: Central Iron County Water Conservancy District appreciates questions submitted by community members about the Pine Valley Water Supply Project and local water needs. As part of its role as steward of water in Cedar Valley, the District is working with a group of experts, community members and elected officials to help prepare viable solutions for the future and to respond to community questions and concerns about emergent water issues.*

*This week's question from the community is answered by*

*Spencer Jones, Board Member of the Central Iron County Water Conservancy District and the Groundwater Management Plan Committee.*

### **Question: What is the Groundwater Management Plan? How will it affect Cedar Valley?**

**Answer:** According to the Utah Division of Water Rights, the Cedar City Valley aquifer is currently being overdrafted by approximately 7,000 acre-feet per year, or in other words more groundwater is being used from the aquifer than what we receive in our valley. A declining aquifer can cause soil compaction, fissures, loss of storage, increased pumping costs, etc.

This is a problem, and the State has one tool to help fix that problem, which is through priority regulation of water rights through a Groundwater Management Plan (GMP). The GMP is an effort to bring the valley's aquifer back into balance by only allowing water rights to be used that are within a sustainable amount. That sustainable amount has been determined to be approximately 21,000 acre-feet per year.

In 2016, the State held its first public meeting regarding the development of a GMP for the Cedar City Valley. A group of water users in the valley then formed a committee to assist in the development of the plan. Many meetings were held to find the best way to implement this GMP.

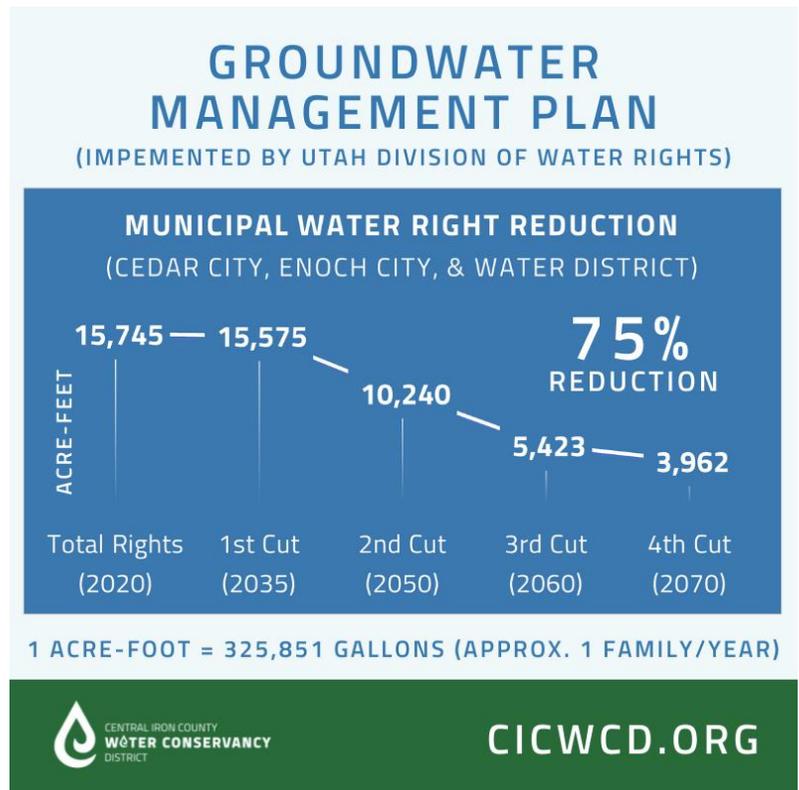
In January 2021, after several years of planning and discussion with the public, the Utah Division of Water Rights implemented the GMP for the Cedar City Valley. This plan will slowly curtail water rights based on water right priority date, or seniority. The most senior water rights will be given priority, and water rights junior to July 1934 will be slowly reduced. Municipalities in the valley (Cedar City, Enoch City and the District) stand to have their current groundwater rights reduced by 75 percent by the year 2070.

A GMP regulates water rights similar to how surface water is regulated in a stream or river. Some years, water is sufficient in a stream which results in all water right holders receiving water. However, on drier years, when

stream flows are low, only senior water right holders (those who were first to obtain water rights) will receive that water, as they have priority.

Through the plan's priority regulation schedule, the use of junior water rights will not be allowed unless the aquifer is balanced and the aquifer can safely sustain itself at a higher usage than safe-yield of 21,000 acre-feet. This could be done through voluntary arrangements among the community to manage withdrawals from the aquifer by efforts different than priority date or through adaptive management which could postpone water right curtailments if groundwater levels stabilize through other means.

The GMP will have a large impact on the Cedar Valley, but it is important that the aquifer be stabilized and balanced. The District, along with other local entities, is working hard to mitigate that impact by helping balance the aquifer through conservation, recharge, reuse, and importation projects. Some recent projects include LESA irrigation conversion for agriculture fields, the Quichapa Recharge Project, and the Pine Valley Water Supply Project.



Several special interest groups have recently moved their focus to Cedar Valley water and have been spreading misinformation. The Central Iron County Water Conservancy District was created by a vote of Cedar Valley residents more than two decades ago. It has consistently been dedicated to developing and stabilizing the valley's water supply through conservation, recharge, reuse, and importing of water for the benefit of all current and future water users in the region. The District utilizes scientists, experts and professionals to understand the valley's underground aquifer and to determine responsible solutions for the community as it strives to meet local water challenges. For reliable information on the Pine Valley Water Supply Project specifically and the Cedar Valley's water situation in general, please visit <https://cicwcd.org/>. For more detailed information about the Pine Valley Water Supply Project and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, please visit <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/1503915/570>.

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**WATER CONSERVANCY**  
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