

# Local Enhanced Management Areas – Success Demonstrated, New Proposals Considered

In 2012, the Groundwater Management District Act was amended by the new statute for Local Enhanced Management Areas (K.S.A. 82a-1041). A Local Enhanced Management Area, or LEMA, is a geographic area where the owners of water rights voluntarily agree to have their water rights regulated to an agreed-upon, higher level of conservation and less water use.

The only active LEMA is located in Northwest Kansas and is known as the Sheridan County 6 LEMA. The area in this LEMA covers mostly Sheridan County (90 square miles), but there are also 9 square miles located in adjacent Thomas County. The number refers to a numbering system established by Northwest Kansas Groundwater Management District No. 4, identifying different areas throughout their district that showed higher than average groundwater declines. This LEMA was formally proposed on June 15, 2012, and became official by order of the Chief Engineer on December 31, 2012. The success of the Sheridan 6

LEMA has led to a request to continue it for another 5 years, and has demonstrated to others that LEMA's can work. No water rights for municipal use were subject to reductions in the Sheridan 6 LEMA.

On April 10, 2017, a district-wide LEMA was proposed for all of Northwest Kansas Groundwater Management District No. 4. The Chief Engineer has not formally replied to the request at this time.

Continuing the discussion started at the meetings regarding the state's water vision a few years ago, some local water right owners in Southwest Kansas are asking if a LEMA is a tool that they can use. Water levels in some parts of the Ogallala Aquifer in northeastern Kearny and northwestern Finney Counties, north of the Arkansas River, have declined over 70 feet in the last 10 years. These

water right owners are searching for a way to reduce this rate of decline, and believe a LEMA might be the first step in doing so. They hope to have an initial public meeting in September, and an order from the Chief Engineer designating the area in early 2018.

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