

**Headline misleading, Flying Shingle, September 7, 2010, p.5**

Dear Editor

I think the headline in last week's Shingle, "Pumping pause raises water levels" is misleading, despite your perceptive small-print "Coincidence?" inserted above it.

There are several reasons why this year's water level might be higher than last year's, not just that bulk water extraction has ceased. In our own well on El Verano, the present level is 8 feet (2.4 metres) above last year's, and this has nothing to do with Dan Foley. Among the variables to be considered is precipitation the previous winter (not just the last couple of months), the age of the water, the pumping Tim Brown has done for his own use, which aquifer we are talking about (they exist at different levels in that area), and the horizontal interconnectivity or lack thereof between these aquifers and those of neighbours other than Brian Strachan.

Mixing science with politics, as the headline appears to do, is not a helpful contribution to either.

Regards

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Original article

**COINCIDENCE?**

Pumping pause raises water levels  
Monday, August 30 2010

A 'stop-pumping' order seems to have netted a three metre increase in the water table according to Gabriola Groundwater Management Society (GGMS) President Jenny MacLeod.

In a presentation to the Local Trust Committee (LTC) at their Aug. 19 meeting at the WI Hall, MacLeod said that the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) has assumed the operation of an observation well on Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) lands owned by Water Purveyor Brian Strachan, and close to Gabriola farmer Tim Brown's land. She said Strachan's notes show a three metre increase in water levels compared to last year.

MacLeod added that a well in the area that typically goes dry in the summer has not done so this year.

As previously reported, in previous summers Dan Foley of Summer Rain, a water pump and haul company, had been extracting water from Brown's farm. Neighbours in the vicinity had complained that his pumping operations were impacting their wells. Further, Strachan said that his observation well water levels dropped in reaction to pumping from Brown's farm.

Foley applied to the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) in 2009 for official permission to

pump water from Brown's land, and continued pumping while awaiting approval. In February Foley was told by ALC Bylaw Enforcer Thomas Loo to stop pumping, pending a decision by the commission on whether pumping was allowed. Foley complied with the order, meaning that regular bulkwater extraction from the aquifer on Brown's land has not occurred this summer.

MacLeod said Aug 19, that GGMS would like an extension on the stop-pumping order, so that the MOE has enough time to gather solid baseline data against which to measure results if Foley resumes pumping on Brown's farm.

At a later interview, MacLeod pointed out that the increase in neighbourhood water tables comes despite the fact that this has been the "driest July on record", and the second year of drought in a row.

MacLeod said much is not known about the aquifers of the island – their depth, locations, and capacities. Wells on waterfront are vulnerable to saltwater intrusion, she noted, and little is known of the saltwater/freshwater interface, where the seawater surrounding the island meets the freshwater lens above it. She added that because of how water on Gabriola flows through fractures in the rock, it is even possible for wells that are inland to experience saltwater intrusion if they are drilled into a stream that has been contaminated.

MacLeod also noted that good water pressure doesn't necessarily indicate an "infinite supply of water". She said that if water is being pumped from an outlet at the bottom of an aquifer, the aquifer may be drained even though the pressure remains high. She added aquifers can and have been "dewatered", sometimes causing the lands over them to subside.

We should adopt the precautionary principle, MacLeod said, when dealing with policies about commercial bulkwater extraction.