

**From:** James Park  
**To:** PHILLIP BARR  
**Date:** 7/12/05 10:37AM  
**Subject:** Re: Fw: The Ogallala Aquifer

Mr. Barr:

In response to your email concerning the extent of the Ogallala Aquifer, the figure you provided indicates that the Ogallala Formation extends well south of the proposed NEF site. Such a conclusion may not be supported based on the large scale used in the figure. I point you to the two attached figures taken from USGS websites. The first is from the USGS Groundwater Atlas website <[http://capp.water.usgs.gov/gwa/ch\\_c/C-text5.html](http://capp.water.usgs.gov/gwa/ch_c/C-text5.html)> discussion of the High Plains Aquifer (also known as the Ogallala Aquifer), and the second figure is from the USGS High Plains Regional Ground Water (HPGW) Study website <[http://co.water.usgs.gov/nawqa/hpgw/HPGW\\_home.html](http://co.water.usgs.gov/nawqa/hpgw/HPGW_home.html)>. Both figures show the southern boundary of the Ogallala Aquifer north of the proposed NEF site.

Based on site investigations at the proposed NEF which have not encountered the Ogallala Formation and the NRC staff's independent evaluations, the NRC staff has concluded that the Ogallala Aquifer does not extend below the proposed NEF site.

James R. Park  
NMSS/DWMEP/EPAB  
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
(301) 415-5835  
[jrp@nrc.gov](mailto:jrp@nrc.gov)

>>> "PHILLIP BARR" <[pharb2@msn.com](mailto:pharb2@msn.com)> 07/02/05 09:30AM >>>  
Could the NRC explain the differences between the Texas map and the NRC map of the aquifer.  
No comment from the state of Texas.  
They just took the map off their site.

Phillip Barr  
Lea County

Subject: Fw:

[http://www.rra.dst.tx.us/gw/Ogallala\\_1.cfm](http://www.rra.dst.tx.us/gw/Ogallala_1.cfm)<[http://www.rra.dst.tx.us/gw/Ogallala\\_1.cfm](http://www.rra.dst.tx.us/gw/Ogallala_1.cfm)>

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The Ogallala Aquifer

Image by Texas Tech University<<http://www.ttu.edu/>>

The Ogallala aquifer is a huge underground reservoir created millions of years ago through

geologic action. The underground water supply is west of the Mississippi River and east of the Rocky Mountains. It includes the following states: South Dakota, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico. The reservoir covers a total area of 800 miles north to south and 400 miles east to west. This region is a part of the Great Plains that is referred to as the High Plains<[http://www.rra.dst.tx.us/c\\_t/history/Land/HIGH%20PLAINS.cfm](http://www.rra.dst.tx.us/c_t/history/Land/HIGH%20PLAINS.cfm)>.

In order to assess the current problems facing the Ogallala aquifer it would be helpful to know a little about its history. The aquifer developed over millions of years through erosion of the Rocky Mountains depositing rock and sediment at the base of the mountain range. Stream beds at the base of the mountain range were filled and forced the rivers to take on new directions across the nearby countryside. The debris that was left behind by the streams formed the High Plains. This debris was porous and permeable to water. The new landscape formed a "trough" that holds water to depths of 500 feet.

The biggest reason for concern is the fact that the aquifer has been cut off from almost all of its natural recharging sources. The Rocky Mountains have not supplied the aquifer for over a thousand years. The climate of the High Plains today is classified as a semi-arid region receiving 15"-20" of rainfall a year. When it does rain the evaporation rate is very high due to the dry air and high winds. Many of the rivers including the Platte, Republican, Canadian<[http://www.rra.dst.tx.us/c\\_t/Rivers/CANADIAN%20RIVER.cfm](http://www.rra.dst.tx.us/c_t/Rivers/CANADIAN%20RIVER.cfm)>, and Arkansas actually drain the aquifer because they have water tables below that of the aquifer. Even if a river does act as a source, it only does so when it is able to flow. Another reason that rain water is not effective is that caliche is found just under the soil surface in many areas. Caliche is a lime-like material with a very low porosity that prevents infiltration. Playa lakes<[http://www.rra.dst.tx.us/c\\_t/history/Land/PLAYAS.cfm](http://www.rra.dst.tx.us/c_t/history/Land/PLAYAS.cfm)> are also found on the Ogallala aquifer. These lakes are simply depressions in the High Plains that collect water but do not contribute to infiltration greatly due to rapid evaporation rates. For these reasons the High Plains were a lifeless desert region until the early to mid 1900s.

The problem facing The Ogallala aquifer today is not knowing how long the water supply will last. The first recorded use of the aquifer for irrigation purposes was a hand dug well in 1911. Many of the first wells were dug primarily to meet the needs of towns that were forming on the High Plains. These wells were restricted to 50 feet or less. Windmills<[http://www.rra.dst.tx.us/c\\_t/History1/WINDMILLS.cfm](http://www.rra.dst.tx.us/c_t/History1/WINDMILLS.cfm)> were the primary mechanism used in drawing water. Through technological advances and the invention of the "horizontal centrifugal" pump, wells were being dug to depths of 200 feet or more. The newer pumps allowed a flow rate of 1000 gallons per minute (gpm) compared to only a few gpm generated by the windmills. Wells were being installed at a rate of approximately 80 per year in the 1950s. During this time Colorado became concerned about the future of the aquifer. The Colorado legislature passed the Colorado Water Management Act in 1965. The act established Designated Groundwater Basins, Groundwater Management Districts, and bases for controlling well drilling. Realizing that this act would put restrictions on the number of wells permitted, those farmers who had put off drilling wells went ahead with the installations before they could be denied. This surge caused 471 wells to be installed in 1967. Situations such as these caused a great deal of strain on the aquifer, and researchers today are trying to find ways to help and conserve the aquifer's water supply.

A method referred to as "irrigation scheduling" was devised as a way to make better use of the water supply. By monitoring soil moisture and natural rainfall along with other important weather conditions, farmers can apply pre-calculated amounts of water to their crops. The key is to make sure the plants have adequate water during critical times and short on water at less critical times during the growth cycle. Crops with lower water requirements have also been introduced. Even if this method is applied perfectly it would not eliminate the depletion of water from the aquifer.

Another method is to quit irrigating certain stretches of land. This has a greater impact on reducing the water removal rate, but it is unpopular with the farmers who have money invested.

Governmental agencies do not have the authority to remove land from irrigation, but due to lower water tables the cost of irrigation is rising and at the same time causing land to be retired.

The truth of the matter is that if the High Plains are to continue to be of any agricultural importance new water sources must be found. Potential water supplies could be the collection and storage of natural rainfall before it runs off or evaporates, increasing rainfall through seeding clouds (still being researched), and most importantly new sources of water will have to come from outside the High Plains region.

Credit :

<http://www.eos.ncsu.edu/bae/courses/bae472/perspectives/1996/arblanke.html><<http://www.eos.ncsu.edu/bae/courses/bae472/perspectives/1996/arblanke.html>>

Send mail to [info@rra.dst.tx.us](mailto:info@rra.dst.tx.us)<<mailto:info@rra.dst.tx.us>> with questions or comments about this website

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**CC:** Brian Smith; David McIntyre; Kenneth Clark; Lisa Clark; Roger Hannah; Sue Gagner; Timothy Johnson

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**Subject:** Re: Fw: The Ogallala Aquifer  
**Creation Date:** 7/12/05 10:37AM  
**From:** James Park

**Created By:** JRP@nrc.gov

**Recipients**

msn.com

pharb2 (PHILLIP BARR)

nrc.gov

ATL\_PO.ATL\_DO

KMC2 CC (Kenneth Clark)

RDH1 CC (Roger Hannah)

nrc.gov

owf1\_po.OWFN\_DO

DTM CC (David McIntyre)

SFG CC (Sue Gagner)

nrc.gov

owf5\_po.OWFN\_DO

LBC CC (Lisa Clark)

nrc.gov

twf4\_po.TWFN\_DO

BWS1 CC (Brian Smith)

TCJ CC (Timothy Johnson)

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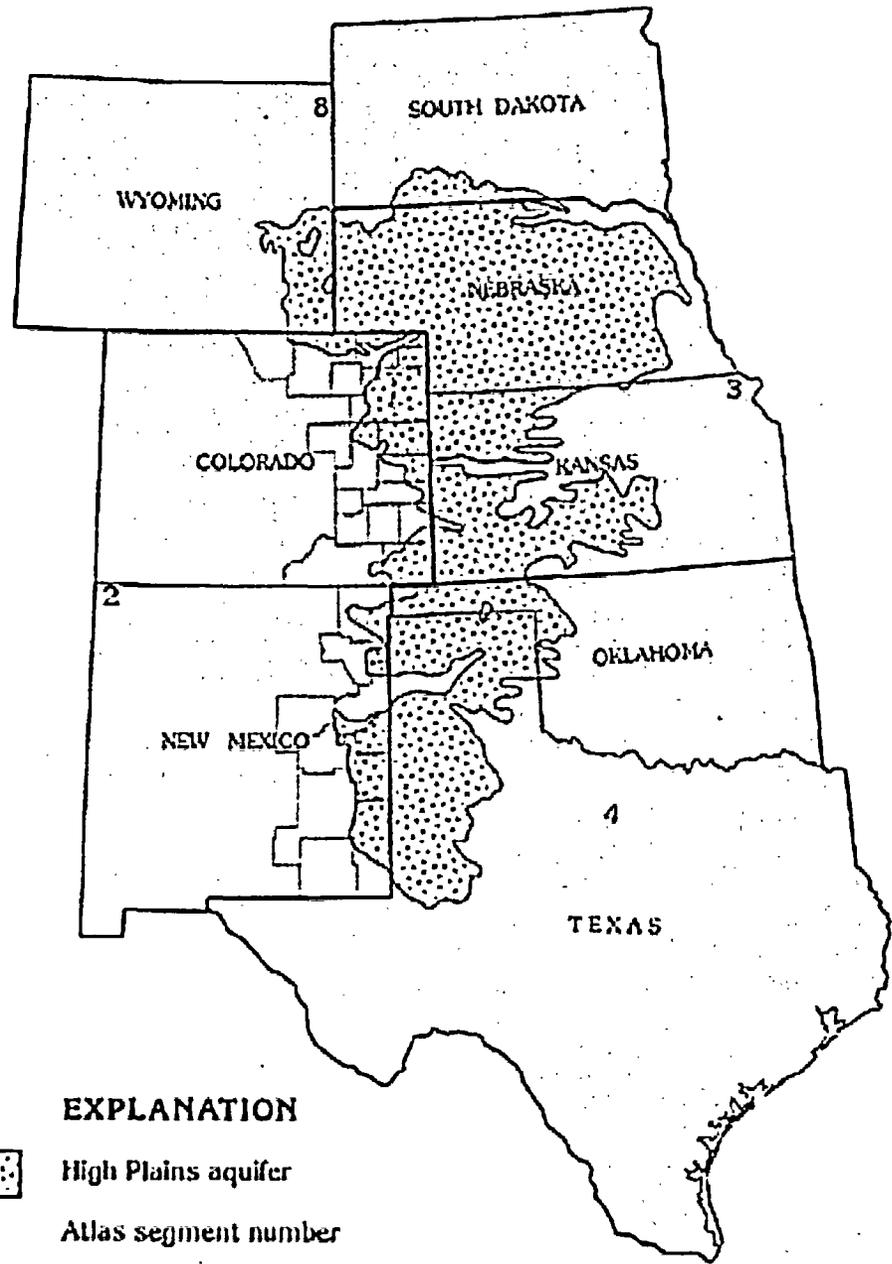
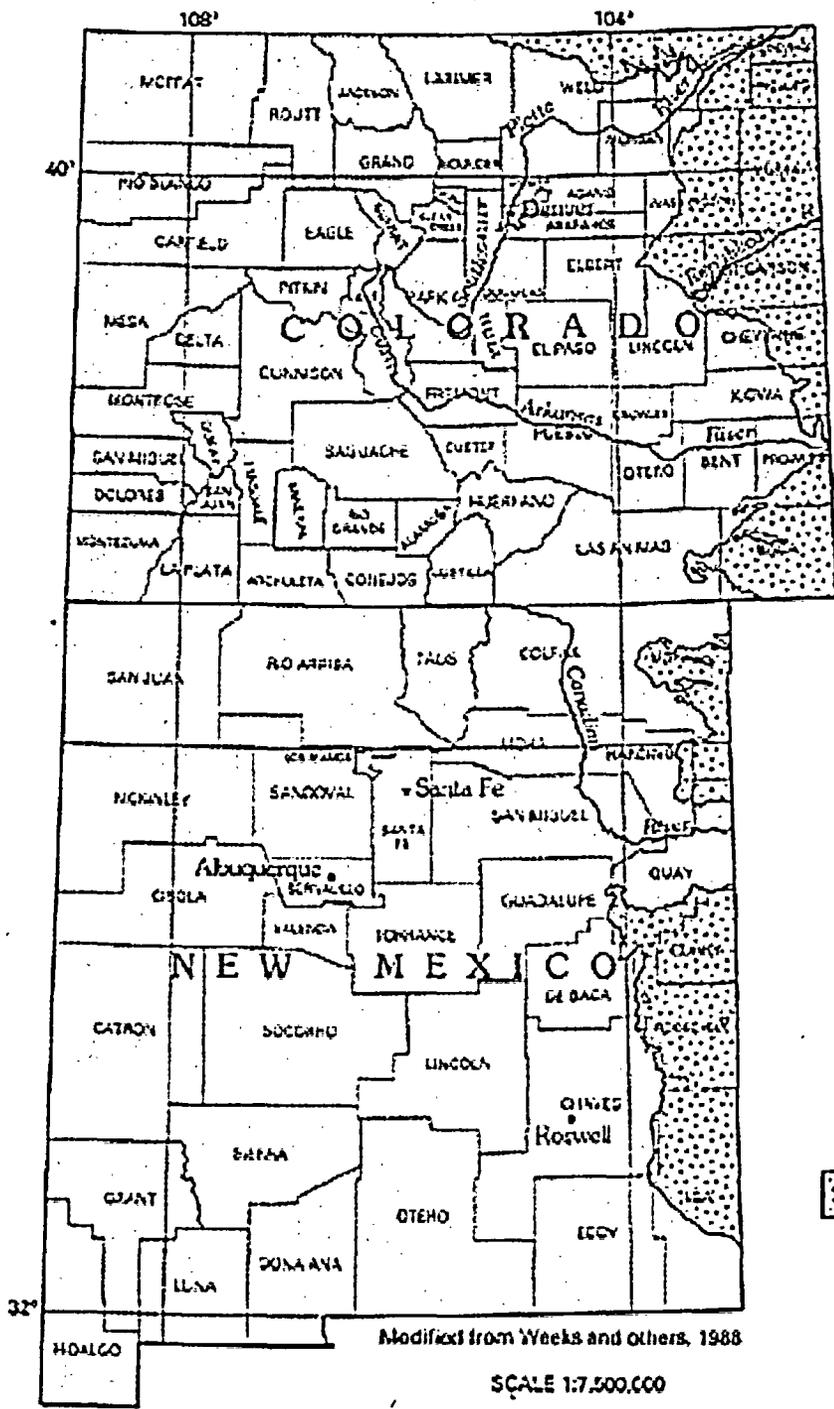
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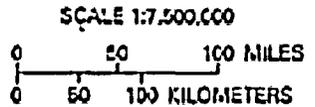
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**EXPLANATION**

-  High Plains aquifer
-  Atlas segment number

Base modified from U.S. Geological Survey digital data, 1:2,000,000, 1972



**Figure 66.** The High Plains aquifer extends through an area of about 174,000 square miles in parts of eight States.

