

Ogallala Aquifer Sees 2nd Largest Decline on Record

The Kansas Geological Survey (KGS) reports that water levels taken in January 2013 have dropped significantly in certain parts of the aquifer in Kansas since last year's measurement. Each January the KGS measures wells in western Kansas. This January levels had dropped about 3.5 feet. Declines in January 2012 had averaged 4.25 feet.

Drought in Kansas has pushed use of the aquifer for irrigation the past two years. In normal or average precipitation years, the Ogallala recharges only about one-half inch. In Kansas as in much of the High Plains, the Ogallala was tapped for irrigation starting in the 1960's with advances in irrigation technology.

The Ogallala Aquifer lies beneath most of Nebraska and parts of South Dakota and Wyoming in the north, and runs south through western Kansas, eastern Colorado and New Mexico and the Oklahoma and Texas panhandles. According to a study in Texas, the aquifer has fallen no more than a foot on average over 60 years in Nebraska. But in parts of Texas, it has dropped by about 100 feet over the same time. About one-third of the total depletion has happened in just 4 percent of the aquifer, mainly in Kansas and Texas.