

Car. Good; Facts Given About Water

Editor's Note: This is the last in a series of articles prepared by the State Board of Water Commissioners for the purpose of familiarizing the people of North Carolina with their ground water resources.

THE COASTAL PLAIN
To understand the occurrence of underground water in the Coastal Plain it is necessary to go back many millions of years into the geological history of the region—back to a time when ocean waves crashed ashore near the present-day cities of Weldon, Kenfield, Rocky Mount, Smithfield, Southern Pines and Rockingham.

Geological evidence shows that the sea covered this area not once, but several times, creeping inland for a time to gnaw at the higher land mass and then slowly retreating. Weathering and erosion processes also carved the land, dumping great quantities of sediments into the streams. These sediments and those accumulated by the encroaching sea were deposited as the waters receded eastward.

fact that these deposits are known to be about two miles thick on North Carolina's outer banks. They lie, layer upon layer, atop a solid mass of bedrock that rises slowly toward the west where it finally reaches the surface to form the indistinct western edge of the Piedmont.

These sediments are composed of consolidated and unconsolidated beds of sand, clay and limestone sloping gently toward the coast at a rate slightly greater than the slope of the land surface. As a result the formations exposed at the surface at inland places are buried progressively deeper to the east.

of clay, which is less permeable. It is contained therefore, in a tabular, nearly horizontal reservoir which extends in all directions.

There is a popular belief that artesian wells and spring owners in the Coastal Plain are indebted to the mountains of western North Carolina for their water. Such is not the case. All water derived from artesian sources in the Coastal Plain entered the ground at some intake point in the Coastal Plain, usually west of the discharge or withdrawal point.

Water enters the artesian beds where they are exposed at the surface and moves downward toward the coast, remaining confined between two beds of clay. If water in the form of rain is continuously applied at the intake area it will create considerable pressure on the water that is trapped between the layers of clay many miles downhill from the intake point. Drill through the clay and into the water bearing strata and normally you will have an artesian well. Artesian springs occur where geologic conditions permit the trapped water to escape through some natural outlet.

Ponds and streams supply most of the water for irrigation in the Coastal Plain today. Unfortunately, in many areas the ponds are inadequate and other surface water sources have been made undesirable by growing competition.

Geologists have divided the Coastal Plain into four relatively distinct ground water regions—based largely on water yield and quality. The first region is a belt, ranging from 30 to 50 miles in width, running in a northeasterly direction from Scotland County in the south up through Northampton County on the Virginia line. The second region is a somewhat larger belt running from Robeson and Columbus in the south through Hertford and Gates in the north.

Ground water quality is generally good in the two non-coastal regions, though there is a notable variety in yield. Wells can seldom be expected to produce more than 50 gallons per minute in the region bordering the Piedmont but in the belt that extends through the central Coastal Plain counties yields of 300 to 700 gallons per minute are not uncommon and some completely developed wells exceed 1,000 gallons.

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Geologists agree that only a very small amount of the ground water available in the Coastal Plain is now being used. There are two main reasons for this. Foremost perhaps is the simple fact that the demand for water is far below the amount of ground water available.

The chief water bearing strata of the Coastal Plain—sand and limestone—have a far greater lateral extent than do the rocks of the Piedmont and Mountains but the eastern formations are by no means uniform.

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