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As Groundwater Dwindles, Powerful Players Block Change.

Here are some of the people fighting efforts to conserve a vital resource that's disappearing across the United States.

From a small brick building in Garden City, Kan., 13 men manage the use of groundwater across five million acres in the southwest corner of the state, some of the most productive farmland in America for corn, wheat and sorghum.

They serve on the board of Groundwater Management District 3, which since 1996 has overseen the pumping of 16.2 trillion gallons of groundwater — enough to fill Lake Mead, the country's largest reservoir, twice over.

The board is elected, but not by everyone: The only people eligible to vote are large landowners, a group of less than 12,000 people in an area of roughly 130,000. And in some years, fewer than 100 people actually vote. Others — cashiers at Walmart, teachers at the community college, workers at the local St. Catherine Hospital — have no say in the management of the aquifer on which they, too, rely.

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