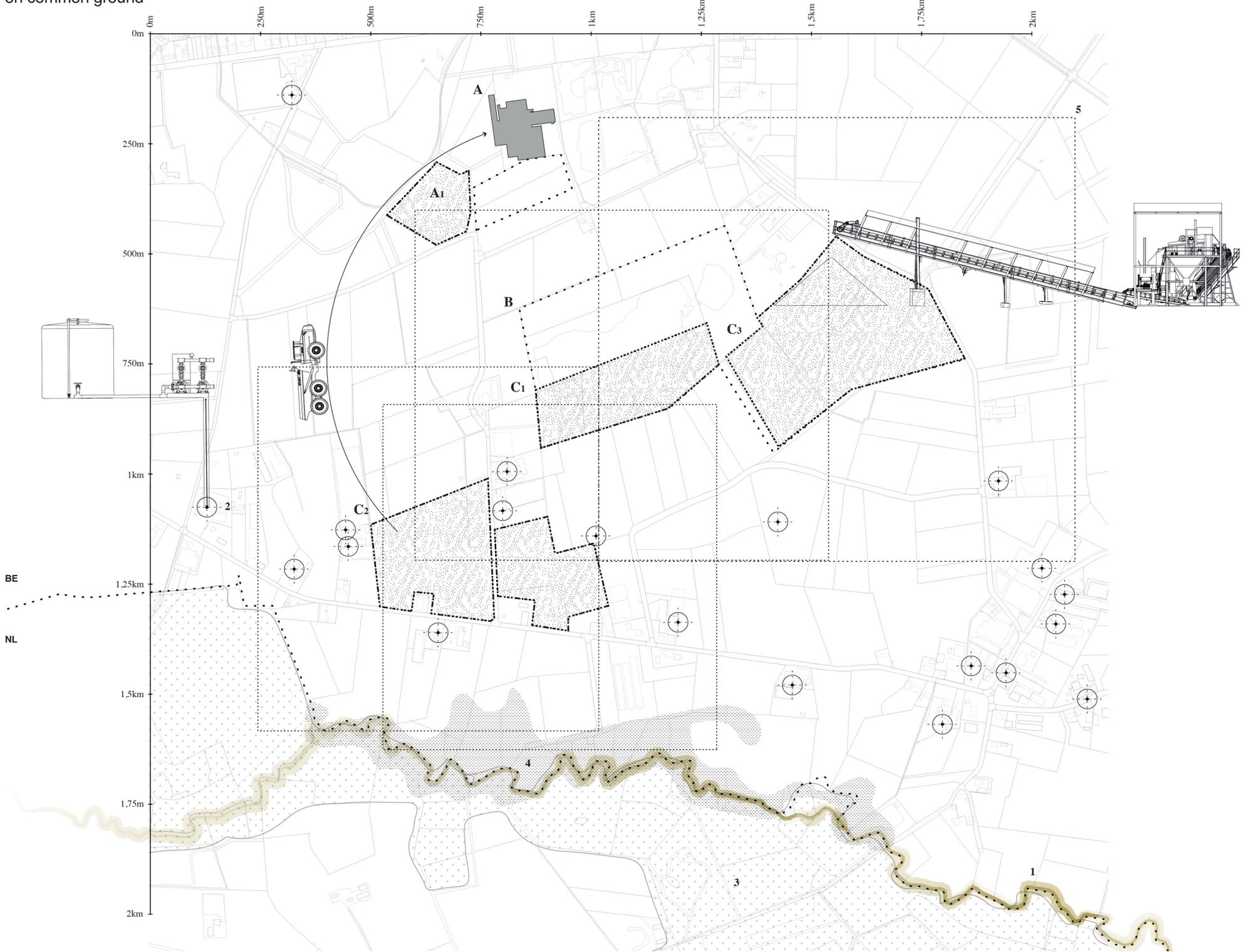


# Extractivism on common ground



**We have become witness of the immense environmental impacts of an ever-expanding human need to manage, commodify, and harness natural resources that became known under the label of extractivism. This project reveals the depredations of extractivist logic in the border zone around Baarle and aims to dislodge its hegemony by bringing it back on common ground.**

When you take a close look at the Dutch-Belgium border in the Kempen region, you'll notice a strange protrusion creating a peninsula that is known as 't Merkske, named after the small creek, that gridles its way along the border. For a long time, this region was a forgotten corner, so it escaped human intervention. That was until the 19th century when man discovered new ways to work the land and in doing so layers of clay were found underneath the sandy soil. It set of a thriving brick industry that would radically shape the landscape up until now.

A stone's throw from the border and the protected Dutch nature reserve, lies the Desta brick factory. It's industrial production of bricks goes back to the 1960's when the factory was established on the banks of the brook valley. On these banks layers of clay were formed by the deposition of sediments. The excavation process takes place on the former agricultural lands in the direct surrounding of the factory site, turning it from lush meadows into a lunar landscape in no time.

In the process of excavation colossal pits are formed by taking away the sandy topsoil to expose the deeper bands of clay. These pits, with a depth of 6 meters or more, slowly fill up with groundwater that's pushed up from the phreatic layers. As a result, the phreatic groundwater disappears locally. Outside the area to be exploited, a drop in the groundwater level is also to be expected as drainage takes place in a sand layer. This will affect both the neighboring farmlands that are already dealing with shortages to water the lands, as well as the protected nature reserve of 't Merkske that is seriously affected by recent droughts.

To make matters worse, the Desta company recently announced the expanding of their extractivist operations, by purchasing more lands almost directly at the border.

Borders are best thought as places of negotiation. To deal with the correlating issue of extractivist activities and the management of drought and floods it needs to be scrutinized and addressed in a cross-border approach. This project seeks to dislodge the unevenly felt effects of the excavations by offering ways to start re-negotiating the distribution of water in order to get back on common ground.

By taking the manufacturability of the landscape as a starting point, two structures are added in a concept of dualism to act as seemingly opposite or contrary forces that actually become complementary, interconnected, and interdependent. One acts as an underground dam to hold back the groundwater from seeping away towards the excavation sites. Pits start to form in the process of making the dam that become the mold for the second and opposite force; the towers that form an aqueduct for the distribution of water. These water towers have the ability to retain, filter and eventually discharge water. The extent to which the towers either hold water or let it through is defined by the materiality of which they are composed of. For instance, in the case of a flood in the brook valley the water needs to be drained from the dam that functions as a gully at the same time. An elaborate system of pumps distributes the water from the dam towards the excavation pits nearby where the stormwater can be collected. The swift discharge of water requires a highly porous tower to let the water seep through easily. This in contrast to the towers that are located on the edge of the brook. These should have a more solid character, so the water slowly absorbs into the ground in periods of drought.

Apart from the functional aspects of this infrastructural intervention more so it aims to ritualize the process of re-negotiating water that's becoming extremely relevant in the epoch of climate crisis we live in. The project springs from the conviction that the invisible and intangible effects of extractivism in conjunction to the topic of climate change demands to be made legible to the senses.

- A Desta brick factory
- A1 Brickyard
- B Current excavation site
- C1 Fase 1 extension excavation site
- C2 Fase 2 extension excavation site
- C3 Fase 3 extension excavation site
- 1 Brook valley 't Merkske
- 2 Agricultural groundwater extraction pumps
- 3 Prohibited area groundwater extraction (NL)
- 4 Area indication recent floods
- 5 Squares indicating areas with a measurable decline in groundwater level

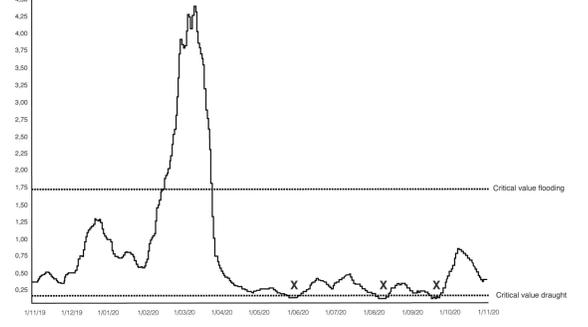
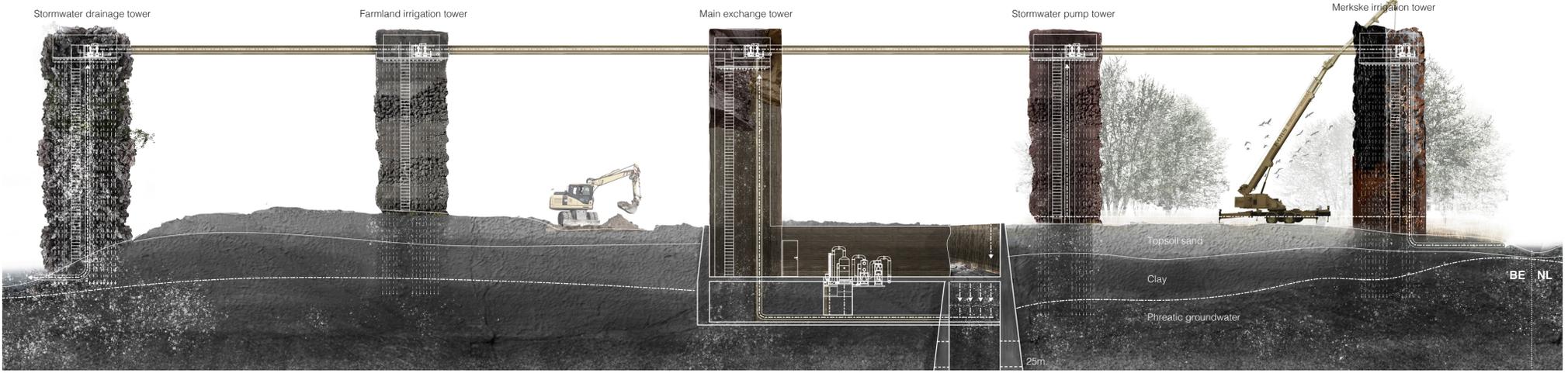


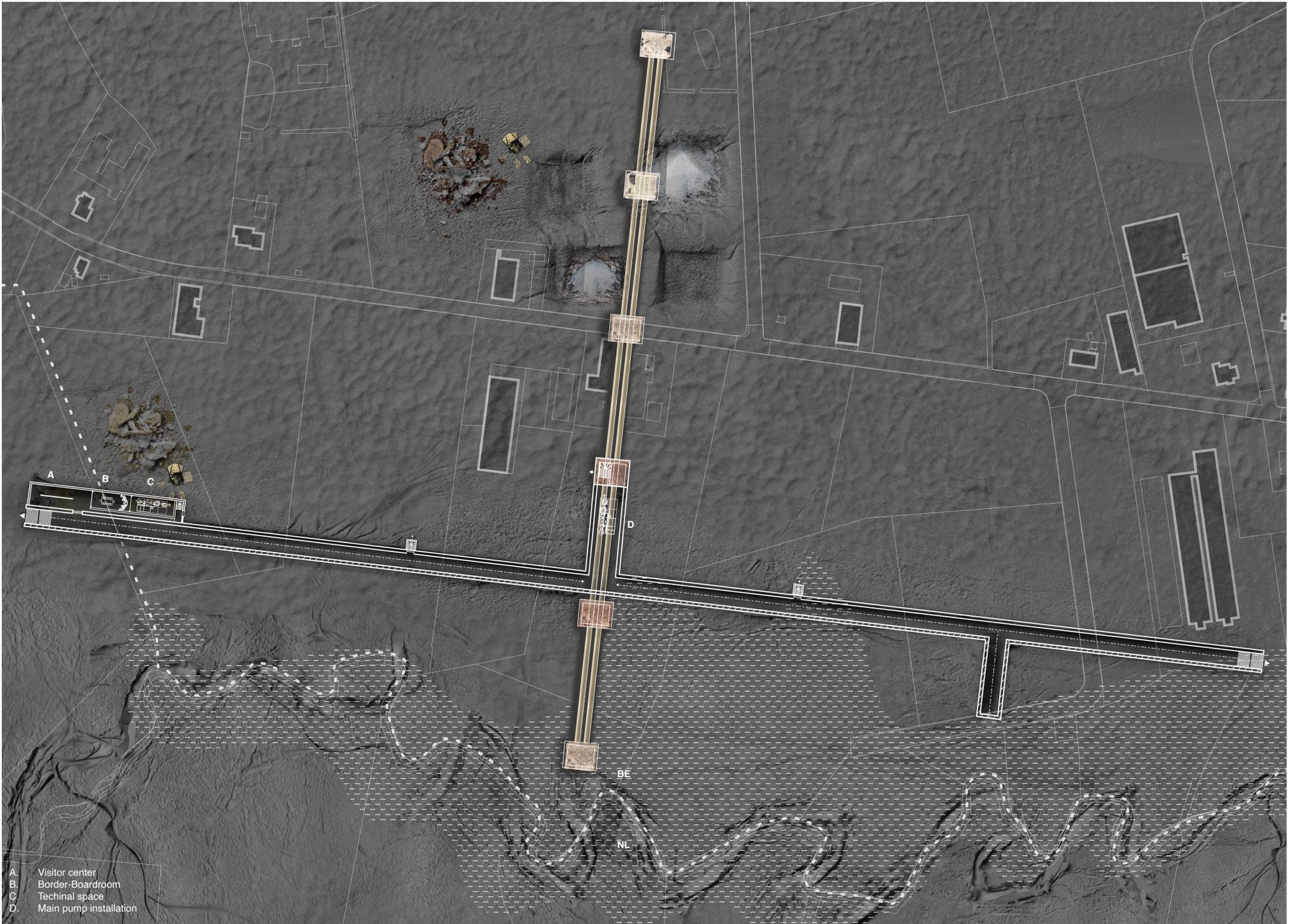
Chart above: showing the waterlevel of 't Merkske in the last year  
Section Below: schematic representation of the proces of groundwater extraction near 't Merkske



# Extractivism on common ground



Scale 1:300



Scale 1:750



**Extractivism**  
on common ground

