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# RANCH & RURAL LIVING

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A photograph of three whitetail deer in a grassy field. One deer is standing in the center, facing right. Two other deer are lying down, one in the foreground on the left and one in the background on the right. A large, dark tree trunk is on the right side of the frame. In the background, there is a wire fence and more trees under a clear sky.

## Whitetail Breeders After Big Racks

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## Bison as Ranch Income Stream

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# water

## *Texas Water Plan: Ready But No Power to Implement*

**H**ow would you feel if you had worked hard for five years, often traveling a long ways, cooperatively finished a very important plan and then were told to shelve it, there is no money to fuel it? Disappointed and unhappy is mild – many of you volunteered your time, effort and hours into preparing the new state water plan. Its components could be life or death to some Texas towns and help the state economy as well. The Texas Water Plan, as I hope you know, is a five year roll-over plan and has just been updated during one of the most severe droughts and heat waves to ever hit the Lone Star State. These plans require a lot of volunteer hours from communities and counties in each water planning region, plus more hours from staff supporters in several state agencies. I know. I have worked on plans in four regions and was in on the start of the current Region J plan until retiring in 2008. But, it is very necessary and satisfying, as nothing is more crucial to an area than planning to make sure there will be sufficient water for all needs—present and future. But now we hear it has funding and implementation problems!

These plans are sent in by each region of the state to the Texas Water Development Board (TPWD) for summarizing into a master State Water Plan, which then recommends projects such as increased water conservation, aquifer storage, reservoirs, rain water harvesting, pipelines, wells, de-sal and watershed stewardship for funding by the legislature, grants and low-cost loans plus local cost-sharing. Some of the projects are short-term and designed to be implemented in this five-year segment, but others are long-term projects due to their nature or high cost.

You may have seen a state-released news article in mid-December stating that due to Texas' budget woes, as felt in most of your counties and school districts last year, the recommended projects can't be currently funded. Texas is in a deficit as are most states and the federal budget as well. That situation puts the brakes on most planned water projects as few are cheap enough for a local town or county to handle alone. The projects from the '07 plan only had a reported 28 percent progress or implementation at any level. Only 13 percent were fully implemented in that five year period.

As you know better than most, we are in a very severe, long-term drought approaching the status of the 1950s drought – our most infamous of recent memory. State climatologist John Nielsen-Gammon reports that we have had droughts in five



of the last seven years and the current one is predicted to go through 2012 at least.

To make matters worse, our state's population is at 25 Million and is projected to be 46 Million by 2060. Demand for water is expected to rise 22 percent while water supplies decline 10 percent due to reservoir silting and aquifer depletion. How much more growth will your town or county support sustainably? Have you checked with your local water agencies and political or economic growth leaders? Might want to get some definite answers; this is very serious, folks. We all realize that a certain level of growth is healthy for a town or a state, but we MUST have sufficient water projected to be available for the current population before encouraging rapid new growth—with a safety factor as well.

**Do you know where most regional water plans talk about obtaining their "new water" for growth? Most of what I have heard or read say from agriculture, especially irrigated agriculture. How would that affect your business, family, town or county? Agricultural sales and income are major factors in Texas. What would that do to our state economy and food prices or food quality at everyone's grocery?**

For the last several years it has been fairly common to read, hear of or see on TV that a Texas town is running low on water or maybe is out of water. We heard similar stories in the '90s in several regions of Texas. Many key lakes, rivers and some aquifers, which furnish

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life-giving water to agriculture, wildlife and to towns, are in a very bad condition. This is especially true in the western two-thirds of the state. Go back to my water article in the November issue of this magazine to see those lake levels and river flows. Not good at all—scary. Just recently the town of Grosbeck came within days of running out of water. And that is in a fairly wet area near Waco—not at much drier San Angelo or Llano. Grosbeck found an emergency source, but what will happen to towns that can't find water or locate funding? Think you can easily sell a farm, ranch, business or home without water? Doubtful if you can, especially not at a fair price that would relocate you and your family to someplace. Would you want to sell or move?

The state plan, or report, also does not do any more than make recommendations to the legislature, and many feel that is a flaw in the state process. Five years of intensive study and planning by local citizens and water experts go into the plan, which most feel out weighs the rapid decision making political process during the short legislative session. Many water knowledgeable Texans feel the process of implementing the state plan needs changing.

Other water needs face the next legislature, such as modernization of our antique groundwater law and enabling logical conservation measures such as rainwater harvesting for potable uses. Many progressive utilities are taking a harder look at implementing conservation measures and assuring we are talking "water needs vs. water demand". Often, with an infrastructure improvement or a realistic water pricing structure, water demand goes down rapidly, not only saving precious water, but taxpayer dollars. Truly, *"the cheapest new water is the water you saved!"*

*Happy New Year! May God bless Texas with ample rainfall and the good sense to use it wisely. ♦*



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