

# ***GROWTH AND HOW IT AFFECTS OUR WATER***

**By**

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It seems the destiny of Texas is to grow. We are exploding in population from within, from out-of-state and from illegal aliens – all together it is a very serious picture in a once rural dominated state, which for the most part, has limited water resources. Much of the growth is occurring along or west of I-35/I-37, which is a region known for frequent and severe droughts. Central Texas is where vegetation and climate from the East meets plants and climate from the West and the deserts beyond. Plus, a high percentage of new and younger Texans came here from wetter regions or out of state. At least, that seems to be true where I live. Most did not grow up during or endure the Drought of the Fifties, as many older Texans did. That intense seven to ten year drought (depending upon where you lived) was a character builder and a severe trial for Texas farmers and ranchers. Many did not make it or turned to new fangled irrigation afterwards. You must read our Texas “bible” for those times by the late, great Elmer Kelton “***The Time it Never Rained***”. Elmer was at his best in that fifties ranching story of growing up and existing on a Texas ranch at that time. He makes you feel that hot, dusty drought and see the conditions they endured in your mind!

Growth and expanding population, home building and new businesses seem to be the goals of most city officials, councils and the development community. The viral disease has seized even small town Texas and the Hill Country seems to be a major target area due to its beauty, climate and convenient location to major cities. Too convenient! We are in the process of sometimes killing or destroying what we came here to enjoy and appreciate in these quaint small towns, their clear rivers and across the region.

The Hill Country and many areas of Texas cannot handle a lot of growth simply because there are not the water supplies to support higher populations. Too many moved to these cities and towns from areas that had ample, reliable rain and plenty of cheap water. These new Texans now want their homes and towns to resemble “back home” with large lush green landscapes, parks and golf courses. There is little or no understanding of a term that is familiar to ranchers called “***carrying capacity***”. On a ranch or a pasture, it means the numbers of animals, including livestock and wildlife, which can be maintained without damaging the desired rangeland vegetation. In good years and in drought these numbers will be managed to fit the conditions. It is always limited by the production of forage and by water supplies. I think towns, cities, counties and regions also have a sustainable carrying capacity for people. Sure, we now supplement food by having the local grocery stores truck in supplies and we can often bring in some nearby groundwater or build a reservoir. But, there is a practical and ethical limit to how much water we can

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beg, borrow, buy or steal from adjoining neighbors without damaging them or our environment. These issues are now facing Texans from Amarillo to the Rio Grande Valley and from El Paso east to Dallas, San Antonio or Houston.

Many areas of the state are now beginning to realize that our groundwater – aquifers – do not exist on county lines, so geographic groups of counties utilizing the same aquifers are forming Groundwater Management Areas (GMA's). This is an improvement in groundwater management and protection as it forces folks to work together to arrive at plans for water pumping and to derive a view of what they want their aquifer to look like in the distant future.....maybe, the same as now, or wells averaging 20 ft. lower, or other standards? It is causing some heartburn for people in neighboring counties or towns with differing goals for their groundwater and area's growth. Some of us live in small towns because we like small towns and the values which they possess. Some may want unlimited growth or financial rewards and others are happy about the size they are now. Or maybe one area is an important irrigated farming region and not wanting to give up water for a high growth neighbor "needing" water for more lawns and golf courses. Losing that water is often the death of those farms and communities. These issues may sound familiar if you live in or near ever expanding Dallas, San Antonio, El Paso, San Angelo or Midland?

So, what would "Future Conditions" in a drought of record do to the region where you live? For many it would be a disaster for springs, creeks and rivers and affect groundwater as well due to reduced recharge.

Excessive growth is becoming more and more important across the state as we continue to grow in often poorly planned or organized developments and communities. Regional water planning, such as the state wisely, but belatedly, started in 1997 with Senate Bill 1, is crucial to our future. ***Get involved locally.*** Texas needs to have smart growth and it needed to start yesterday. In most cases, I prefer to be extra conservative in planning, especially where you are talking about affecting people's drinking water and livelihoods on the ranch, farm or in town. You have to walk in the other guy's shoes and water is unlike any other "commodity" as there is no substitute!

Truly, ***Water is Life!***