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**Longhorns—For the
Love of Texas** PAGE 25

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water

Water for Cities vs. Ag

Is it theirs? Or ours?

SUMMER IN TEXAS is just ahead. The recent cold fronts and even Panhandle snows will soon be a distant and fond memory for most. Summer usually brings other issues to the minds of many Texans who produce the livestock, food and fiber crops we all need, issues such as, will I have enough irrigation water to produce the cash crops, hay or pasture needed to make it to the next rainy spell?

Lowered rivers, lakes and even aquifers across the state make this a very real question for many of us. Will my drought stricken ranges support the livestock I need to maintain my business and family without doing serious damage to my basic soil, plant and water resources?

Where has my water gone? Do I have less water for my ranch or farm because of the recurring droughts, climate change effects or other factors?

SOME OTHER FACTORS

Many cities, towns and water utilities have water use restrictions—some have had them in place for years. Many Texas counties are still enforcing burn bans due to long-term drought and record heat waves. State and utility water planners are told to increase “new” water resources and check out supposed surpluses elsewhere that might be available. No river, lake or aquifer is left out of these searches. No possible river bottom lake site is left out. Groundwater sources or irrigated farming regions never escape review, study and possibly planning for purchase and transport. Computers know no boundaries; old geological studies and dam site reviews are dusted off.

Pipelines can tap distant sources to supply urban water needs (or wants?), as

we are now seeing in several regions!

Water resource planning becomes a classic case of the “have-nots” hankering for the water of the “haves.” In most cases across Texas, that means trying to figure out how to get the water from irrigated agriculture or sparsely populated counties with good groundwater or a lake or river. And, man, have we gotten good at that!

Immense growth often has and is still occurring in our driest regions. Think Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Phoenix, Tucson, El Paso, etc. In many rapidly growing areas where cities are bursting at the seams, developers and builders entice their favorite politicians into getting them water, no matter what the cost in dollars, environmental concerns or losses to agriculture. All done in the name of “All Growth is Good!” and “We must either keep growing or die!” with no thought as to what may be lost forever in these mercenary transactions or to whose ox may be gored.

Rural communities and agricultural regions with water resources need to accurately assess those resources and estimate future needs, especially in light of likely climate change effects. Not talking “Gore-isms,” but actual climate facts and forecasts that have been put in front of us by the state climatologist and many weather experts—I mean long range planning by looking forward 50 to 75 years,



Spring of 2013 appears to be leading into a drought year in many parts of Texas, especially West Texas. The trees in this photo appear green but this 2011 summer pasture near Junction, Texas, is dry and brittle. Photo by Gary Cutrer.

utilizing local resources or assistance from the Regional Water Planning Group (RWPG) or the Texas Water Development Board.

Look at all the “what ifs” and “maybes” out there. **If irrigated agriculture** were to go away or greatly decrease, what would that do to towns or local economies or schools? What if local stockmen or ranchers could not irrigate and grow needed pasture or hay? That **saline groundwater** in the far corner of the county that has not yet looked like an asset, might mean survival for our town in 50 years as desalination costs go down and needs go up.

We could lose millions of barrels of good local water as **fracking** companies use it to pressure and fracture oil and gas wells and then re-inject saline and possibly chemically polluted effluent into water bearing layers 4,000 to 5,000 feet deep— while rationalizing that the money is really good and we, or our grandchildren, will **never** need that water! Maybe famous last words!

Some more enlightened utilities and

political leaders are beginning to realize that **Texas must grow smart** – not just fast. Texas county governments, long weak on any ability to properly manage and plan growth, are beginning to band together to get the attention of a largely urban Texas legislature. Planning commissions, Groundwater Management Areas and regional water planning groups now have some rural and environmental representation considering the bigger picture and providing some protection to rural interests and concerns. Someone must speak up for the small percentage of Texans actively involved in agriculture and for Gulf bays, rivers and wild-life which often have no voice at the bargaining tables. Foreign produced food is becoming an option that many do not want to choose.

It is in everyone's best interest to maintain healthy, somewhat normal flows in our Texas creeks and rivers. The rivers with their lush green riparian vegetation are critical not only for quality livestock grazing, but wildlife habitat and clean water. Fish and other vital aquatic life are found in river waters. Part of maintaining healthy flows in many springs and rivers is not to overpump aquifers producing the springs. As go our creek and river flows, so goes our Gulf of Mexico and the billions of dollars in recreational and economic income produced for the benefit of all Texans.

The agriculture community has always been known as conservative, it is now more important than ever that we all put "**conservation**" as our middle name. We all need each other, and we must cooperate as friends, neighbors and fellow Texans in order to achieve many of our goals and to ensure the survival of our communities. Without enough clean water, the rest doesn't matter much. Remember, *Water is Life! Or Agua es Vida!* ♦

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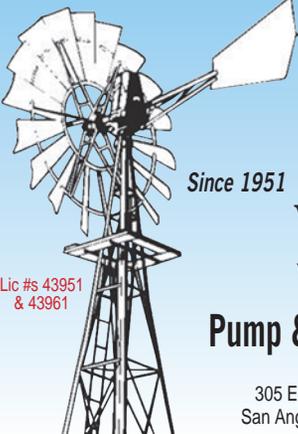


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Camouflaged? Here is a 20,000 gallon wilderness green water tank we installed in Muldoon, Texas. Situated amidst the trees, it blends right in with the surrounding landscape. Rainfall is collected from the owners house seen just through the trees behind. Pump house is to the right just out of sight.

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