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Drought in Texas



A special newsletter of the Texas Water Resources Institute and the Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources

Updated 2011 Texas agricultural drought losses total \$7.62 billion

Texas agricultural losses due to the 2011 drought reached a record \$7.62 billion, making it the most costly drought in history, according to updated totals by [Texas AgriLife Extension Service](#) economists.

"2011 was the driest year on record and certainly an infamous year of distinction for the state's farmers and ranchers," said **Dr. David Anderson**, AgriLife Extension livestock economist. "The \$7.62 billion mark for 2011 is more than \$3.5 billion higher than the 2006 drought loss estimates, which previously was the costliest drought on record. The 2011 losses also represent about 43 percent of the average value of agricultural receipts over the last four years."

"When you are one of the biggest agricultural producing states in the nation, a monumental drought causes enormous losses," Texas Agriculture Commissioner **Todd Staples** said.

Read the full article at [AgriLife TODAY](#).

Extension expert: Just because it rains, it doesn't mean we're out of the drought

By Danielle Kalisek



Rains throughout the state over the last two months seem to have improved prospects for some, but soil moisture profiles are still short and farmers and ranchers throughout Texas remain concerned and very conservative as they schedule their upcoming planting seasons, according to a

[Texas AgriLife Extension Service](#) expert.

"We have a mixed bag out there," said **Dr. Travis Miller**, associate head and Extension program leader in the [Department of Soil and Crop Sciences](#) at Texas A&M University. "Recent rains in December and January have significantly improved soil moisture through a lot of Central and North Texas. We've had good rains as far south as Victoria; lesser rains as far south as Corpus Christi and the Rio Grande Valley. Much of South Texas, West Texas and the High Plains are still very dry with little or no soil moisture."

"Overall, it's not looking good in part of the state, and it's looking much better in others," Miller said. "I try to remind people that if you looked at the drought

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map on this date and you looked at it on a comparable date in 2011, we're much worse off now than we were in 2011."

[for Edwards Plateau wildflowers, turkey...and bitterweed](#)

Upcoming AgriLife Extension programs to provide help for landowners

The Texas AgriLife Extension Service is holding programs across the state this spring, many related to dealing with drought and drought recovery:

- [Rainwater Harvesting Program](#), **March 27**, 6 p.m., Brown County Youth Fair Home Economics Building, U.S. Highway 377 South, Brownwood.
- [Farm Pond Management Program](#), **March 28**, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Navarro County Expo Center, 4021 W. State Highway 22, Corsicana.
- [Multi-County Range and Wildlife Workshop](#), **April 3**, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Staten Creek Ranch, south of Brady on U.S. Highway 87.
- [Rebuilding the Beef Herd](#), **April 3**, Midland; **April 17**, Graham; **April 24**, Abilene; **April 24**, Athens.
- [Rangeland Recovery Workshop](#), **April 5**, 6-8:30 p.m., Andrews County AgriLife Extension office, 851 E. Broadway, Andrews.
- [Hay Workshop](#), **April 27**, 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m., Texas AgriLife Research and Extension Center, Overton.

Prescribed fire can help fireproof land before droughts hit

By Kathy Wythe



After the record-breaking 2011 wildfire season in Texas in which more than 30,000 fires burned nearly 4 million acres and destroyed more than 3,000 homes, viewing prescribed fire as a benefit during drought might sound like an unsound practice.

The use of prescribed fires, however, can lessen the impact of wildfires that occur during drought, according to **Roel Lopez**, [Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources](#) associate director.

Many of the devastating fires were especially dangerous because volatile fuels or underbrush had accumulated in forests and rangelands, he said.

Prescribed fires-the controlled application of fire to the naturally occurring build-up of fuels in a predetermined area-can be used to "fireproof" the landscape, he said.

"Prescribed fire minimizes the amount of fuel in the area that is likely to burn during wildfires," Lopez said. "With prescribed fire, you can actually control what the end result might be. Frequent use of prescribed fire will result in less intense fires and minimize the devastating effects of wildfires, like the killing of overstory trees."

2011 drought highlighted need for environmental flows, says Texas A&M researcher

By Leslie Lee



Dr. Kirk Winemiller has studied ecosystem ecology in rivers in Latin America, Africa and Southeast Asia, but here in Texas he has seen first-hand how the intersections of science and policy affect local river systems. At a [seminar](#) titled, "Texas Water Wars: Science, Policy and Politics to Determine if There Will Be Water for Nature," on the Texas A&M University campus **Feb. 23**, Winemiller discussed water management in Texas, and specifically the state-mandated Instream and Environmental Flows

Programs.

"The Instream Flow Program was my entry point into the Texas water wars," said Winemiller, a Regents Professor in the [Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences](#) at Texas A&M.

"Prior to 1985, environmental needs were not officially considered in Texas water planning, and as a result many streams and rivers in Texas have been over-allocated," Winemiller said. "Both of these programs are all about future water. The burden of environmental protection falls on future water rights, because already established rights cannot be changed."

Drought perspectives: Sabine River Authority of Texas

By Courtney Smith



Last year's drought took a toll on the largest man-made body of water in Texas. The Toledo Bend Reservoir is slowly recovering, having risen nearly 10 feet since last November, but it is still another 3 feet away from full pool, according to the [Sabine River Authority of Texas](#) (SRA).

"The outlook for the Sabine River Basin is a lot better than it was three months ago," said **Ann Galassi**, economic development and public relations manager for SRA. "Rainfall in the last three months has made a significant difference in the storage of our reservoirs."

Lake Tawakoni and Lake Fork, other reservoirs in the basin, are within 3 to 4 feet of full pool, she said. SRA considers the drought over when full pool has been reached at each of the reservoirs in the basin. The Sabine River Basin lies in all or part of 21 counties in Texas. The headwaters of the Sabine River begin just east of Dallas, move southeast through East Texas, form the border of Texas and Louisiana, and empty into the mouth of Sabine Lake.

Though SRA customers only saw minor water restrictions during the 2011 drought, the return of dry conditions would likely lead to another year of drought, she said.

Reflections on the 1950s Texas drought from Reed Eichelberger

Following the [Fall 2011 issue of txH2O](#), which focused on the Texas drought, the TWRI/IRNR communications team invited readers to submit their own memories of past droughts. The below submission is written by Reed Eichelberger, P.E., General Manager of the [San Jacinto River Authority](#).

I was born in 1945, so I was a young boy during the 1950s drought. We lived in Houston, and I have no memories of the impact of the drought in Houston, but I have vivid memories of the hardships my grandfather faced during this time. B.F. Eichelberger and his wife "Granny Tom" ran a small dairy farm on the Bosque river at Eichelberger Crossing, near the small community of China Spring. As a small boy, naturally I idolized my grandfather, and wanted to be a farmer just like him.

Drought in Texas is a special e-mail newsletter of the [Texas Water Resources Institute](#) (TWRI) and the [Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources](#) (IRNR). TWRI and IRNR work together to foster and communicate research and educational outreach programs focused on water and natural resources science and management issues in Texas and beyond. TWRI and IRNR are part of [Texas AgriLife Research](#), the [Texas AgriLife Extension Service](#) and the [College of Agriculture and Life Sciences](#) at [Texas A&M University](#).

If you have information for possible inclusion in **Drought in Texas** please e-mail **Leslie Lee** at lhlee@ag.tamu.edu, call 979.862.7139, or contact us on Twitter (twitter.com/TxWRI) and include your contact information. All submissions may be edited for grammar and style.

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