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October 2011

Drought in Texas

Texas Water Resources Institute
make every drop count

A special e-newsletter from the Texas Water Resources Institute about dealing with the Texas drought

Scarce water, food supplies impact hunting

By Kathy Wythe

The outlook for the continued drought is dismal with scientists predicting it to last through next spring, maybe even for another decade. But the outlook for Texas hunting this fall, although not great, isn't so bad, according to state wildlife experts.

Without the spring and summer rains, all four wildlife species that are most hunted in Texas-dove, quail, deer and turkey-are finding scarce supplies of water and food.

Dr. Bret Collier, research scientist for the Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources, said that early spring rains are essential for ground nesting birds of all species. "Spring rains create nesting cover and create forage, ranging from low-lying herbaceous undergrowth as well as insect populations that thrive in the midsummer, which is when all the babies are out."

La Niña strikes again, but what does that mean?

By Danielle Kalisek

Numerous news reports and experts have told the story-Texas will experience another La Niña this year, bringing a relatively warm, dry winter. But what is a La Niña, and who will it really affect?

"Each year in a La Niña year is different," said **Dr. John Nielsen-Gammon**, state climatologist and professor of atmospheric sciences at Texas A&M University. "Some differences are due to the particular year's pattern of La Niña Pacific Ocean temperatures, some of it is due to what's happening in the Atlantic Ocean, and some of it is just the randomness of the weather."

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On Caddo Lake, giant salvinia infestations decline along with water levels

By Leslie Lee

Even in years with normal rainfall, Caddo Lake is shallow. So as this abnormally dry year continues, the water level of the lake famous for its rich ecosystem and extensive bald cypress forests has dropped to its lowest recorded level.

Boat roads, typically surrounded by aquatic vegetation are now encroached upon by terrestrial grasses. Reaches of exposed bald cypress roots show the previous, much higher water lines. Because lake access is difficult, fishing camps are seeing slow business.

The one bright spot for Caddo Lake is that drought has heavily restricted the growth of giant salvinia. According to **Patrick Ireland**, Texas AgriLife Extension Service assistant and project coordinator for the Texas Water Resources Institute's Center for Invasive Species Eradication *Caddo Lake Giant Salvinia Eradication* project, the invasive aquatic plant's infestations on the lake are much smaller than in previous years.

Drought perspectives: Brazos River Authority

By Courtney Smith

The Brazos River is the third longest river in Texas, and its tributaries stretch from New Mexico to the Gulf of Mexico. By the time the river and its tributaries reach the Gulf, it has provided 6.75 billion gallons of water each year for cities, agriculture, industry and mining.

As the drought continues to linger across the state, a new drought of record looms for the Brazos River Basin, impacting water users and, like many other Texans, residents in this area have already experienced water-use limitations or designated watering-days.

"Thankfully, water planning after the last drought of record (1950s) has served the residents of the Brazos basin well," said **Phil Ford**, general manager and chief executive officer of the Brazos River Authority.

If drought continues, water policy changes to come, says Texas A&M expert

By Kathy Wythe

The year is 2020 and Texas is in its tenth year of an exceptional drought of record. Scattered along the Texas coast, large desalination plants are being built to transform salty water from the Gulf of Mexico into drinking water for a large portion of the state's population. The norm for lawns is brown, not green; and rice farmers are starting all over with a different crop.

While this is a fictional scenario, the real possibility of Texas suffering through another 10-year drought as it did in the 1950s is not.

In a Texas A&M University news release, **Dr. John Nielsen-Gammon**, the state's climatologist and professor of atmospheric sciences at Texas A&M, said Texas has experienced droughts that lasted several years and "the same ocean conditions that seem to have contributed to the 1950s drought have been back for several years now and may last another five to 15 years."

But even before the state gets to 2020, **Dr. Ronald Kaiser**, professor and chair of the Texas A&M University Water Program, suggests the state will see policy and legislative changes if the drought persists.

Home on the range, no longer

By Danielle Kalisek

While pastures and rangelands are known as home for large numbers of livestock in Texas, the drought is causing rangelands, especially those with livestock on them, to suffer, and ranchers are making tough decisions regarding their range and cattle.

"Our drought on rangeland is worse than it's ever been," said **Dr. Ron Sosebee**, professor emeritus with Texas Tech University's Department of Natural Resources Management. "I maintain that the drought of the 1950s impacted our rangeland vegetation enough that following the 1950s, the rangelands were never like they were prior to then, and I suggest that following this drought we won't be like we were prior to the time it occurred."

Amidst drought, Edwards Aquifer stakeholders prepare for worse

By Leslie Lee

For decades, the Edwards Aquifer region has seen a steady stream of water disputes. The current drought has only put more pressure on the conflicts over water.

Regional water planners have no shortage of interests to consider between providing water for agricultural producers, protecting endangered species dependent on sensitive spring flows, and keeping thirsty cities' supplies up.

"The only regularly flowing springs from this artesian aquifer are at Comal Springs and San Marcos Springs. The conflict started in the 1950s when the Comal Springs went dry, and since then there's been a dispute about the aquifer," said **Dr. Robert Gulley**, manager of the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program (EARIP).

Drought in Texas is a special e-mail newsletter of Texas Water Resources Institute, part of Texas AgriLife Research, the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Texas A&M University. TWRI and the Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources 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.

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