



NEWS

GUADALUPE-BLANCO RIVER AUTHORITY
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GBRA ENCOURAGES WATER CONSERVATION

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SEGUIN - With no end in sight to the long, dry spell that began last spring, Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority general manager Bill West is urging people to take water conservation "very seriously."

"This summer may well be referred to as 'the summer of the century' in terms of the number of 100-degree readings," said West. "In addition, recorded rainfall at the San Antonio airport has been less than one inch since April 1 and the forecasts for July and August aren't much better. GBRA is encouraging everyone to practice serious water conservation to protect existing surface and ground water supplies."

According to West, residents of the Guadalupe River basin get their water from a variety of sources. Canyon Reservoir's stored surface water is contracted from GBRA by cities, industries and agriculture for either their primary water supply or a backup supply during low river flows or drought. Wells drilled into the Carrizo-Wilcox, Trinity, Gulf Coast or Edwards Aquifer provide the majority of ground water to basin residents.

During the drought of 1996, West said many wells in the Trinity Aquifer went dry or could not meet normal pumping demands. In addition, when reservoir inflows averaged less than 90 cubic feet per second (cfs) for 45 days that spring, a 'drought' condition was activated in accordance with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC) permits governing Canyon Reservoir. As a result, releases from the reservoir were substantially reduced for several months.

Currently, Canyon Reservoir inflows are above 90 cfs and the reservoir is in good shape. However, West is concerned that continued lack of rainfall could begin to seriously affect the region's water supplies.

The Edwards Aquifer Authority initiated Stage I of its drought management plan on June 1 and activated Stage II on June 25 when the J-17 well elevation reached

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641.9 feet mean sea level (msl). West noted that several Guadalupe basin cities including New Braunfels and San Marcos have also activated the first drought management levels of their year-round water conservation plans.

Comprehensive state water legislation known as Senate Bill 1 was passed during the last session of the Texas Legislature. One of the new law's provisions requires all water purveyors and their customers to develop emergency management plans that can be activated during a drought. West said GBRA is working hard to educate Guadalupe basin water suppliers and citizens about these new requirements. "As of today, water conservation is the rule, rather than the exception, when it comes to managing resources. We need to get used to the fact that it will become a part of our daily lives," said West.

Another complication is the disappearance of El Niño and the threat his sister La Niña poses to future weather patterns. La Niña develops when sea surface temperatures drop below normal in the tropical Pacific waters off Central and South America.

Although there is a greater chance of hurricane development during a La Niña cycle, it usually brings very dry weather to this area. Most of the droughts in Texas have been associated with La Niñas. The monthly prediction just issued by National Weather Service forecasters calls for La Niña to continue to strengthen through December. Climate forecasters expect the current dry weather pattern to continue through the summer months and, with the exception of some potential rainfall in September and October, to remain drier than normal through May of 1999.

While cautioning that no one can predict the weather with absolute certainty, West also noted that by the time people realize they are in a drought it's often too late to do much about it. "We need be treating water right now as if we were in the middle of a drought. If it rains, we've still saved water. If it doesn't, we may have extended our available water supply to get us through any tough times ahead."