District Board Approves Well Capping Program

Locating and closing open (or uncapped) wells is one of many objectives included in the District's Management Plan. This objective is a part of the District's goal of protecting groundwater quality. Open wells pose a threat to humans and animals, as well as groundwater quality. Fortunately, since the District's creation in 1992, there have been no reports here of people trapped in open wells.

State law and South Plains UWCD Rules require that all open or uncovered wells be covered with a cap that is capable of withstanding not less than four hundred pounds, and is not easily removed. Well caps constructed of heavy steel plating and a length of straight pipe are best suited for meeting these requirements.

When an open or uncovered well is discovered and reported to the District office, a notice is sent to the well owner or operator. The letter contains a request that the matter be corrected within 30 days. In most instances, when the District revisits the well site, the problem is corrected. However, in some cases additional requests must be sent to the responsible party before the well is properly closed.

To address these circumstances, the District Board recently approved the service of capping wells for landowners at the cost of $50 per well. This service provides a quick closure of the well, and may be particularly helpful for absentee well owners. The well owner still has the option of capping the well later using their own cap, and avoiding the $50 cost provided by the District. If this occurs, the District will then visit the site and retrieve its cap for use at another well site.

Calendar of Events

March 6	*Board Meeting 8:30 am District office*
April 3	*Board Meeting 8:30 am District office*
April 6	*Good Friday*
May 2	*Board Meeting 8:30 am District office*
May 28	*Memorial Day*

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Phone:(806) 637-7467 FAX: (806) 637-4364 E-mail: spuwcd@spuwcd.org Web Address: www.spuwcd.org

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PO BOX 986
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Committee Publishes Rainwater Harvesting Report

True or false: Certain households in Texas rely entirely on rainwater for supplying their household water needs. The answer is true, and many more home owners are discovering the benefits of rainwater harvesting. As its name implies, roof-based rainwater harvesting refers to the collection of rainwater runoff from roof surfaces.

House Bill 2430, 79th Texas Legislature, established the Texas Rainwater Harvesting Evaluation Committee (the committee). The membership of this committee includes representatives from the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB), the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, the Texas Department of State Health Services, and the Texas Section of the American Water Works Association Conservation and Reuse Division. Since the committee was created in 2005, it has evaluated the potential for rainwater harvesting in Texas, and recently completed a report to the 80th Legislature, entitled "Rainwater Harvesting Potential and Guidelines for Texas". This report fulfills the committee's obligations for evaluating this conservation practice and submitting recommendations for future consideration. Summarized in the report are three key findings, which include:

1. There is a significant untapped potential to generate additional water supplies in Texas through rainwater harvesting, particularly in urban and suburban areas.
2. With the application of appropriate water quality standards, treatment methods, and cross-connection safeguards, rainwater harvesting systems can be used in conjunction with public water systems.
3. There is a need to develop training and educational materials on rainwater harvesting to help design appropriate systems and to realize the full potential of rainwater harvesting in Texas.

Following each key finding, the report contains several recommendations for the Texas Legislature. It is possible that the Legislature will act on those recommendations during the 80th session this year.

Within the District, there are no known existing roof-based rainwater harvesting systems. However, as this practice and technology evolve, such systems might be installed where feasible. Other areas of the U.S. are now implementing guidelines for the design and installation of these systems. The city of Santa Fe, New Mexico, requires the installation of rainwater harvesting systems for all new residential structures greater than 2,500 square feet. The report also states that up to 60,000 Hawaiians depend on rainwater harvesting systems for meeting their water needs.

The committee's report contains illustrations of the expected annual runoff from 2,000 square feet of roof area. From this illustration, it appears that 18,000-19,000 gallons per year might be expected within the District. This means each rainfall event equaling one inch may generate about 1,000 gallons from 2,000 square feet of roof area. Also, small-scale methods of implementing this practice may prove useful. For instance, capturing rainfall in small containers for potted plant use may be an option for starting more simply. In fact, captured rainwater may be more suitable for watering plants than tap water. No water conservation practice, however small, should be ignored as an opportunity for conserving our water resources.

The District will continue the monitoring of rainwater harvesting system technology and provide additional information as it becomes available.

I'll have two lumps in my gorgeous green grass, please!

I'll have two lumps in my gorgeous green grass, please.

Many parts of the country are currently facing water shortages and drought. In some parts of the country, they're having trouble remembering when they last had significant precipitation. The end result of these long dry stretches is every conservation department's dream response from the public. People are actually learning to live with less water—it has become second nature, a way of life for them. And people somehow don't seem to miss the water-rich times.

Parts of Texas, Arizona, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Wyoming, South Dakota, and Wisconsin are all currently suffering extreme drought. Parts of twelve more states adjacent to these are suffering moderate to severe drought.

Life in the West is full of changes people hardly even notice anymore—watering schedules, desert landscaping and limits on how often you can wash your car in the driveway. Little things like not leaving the water running while brushing your teeth or not watering lawns by hand have become part of everyday life. Fund-raiser car washes are a rarity.

The white ring around the shore at Hoover Dam in Boulder City, Nev., shows the reduction in water levels due to drought on Lake Mead. Boaters and swimmers have grown accustomed to the bathtub rings where the water used to be. Similarly, tourists at Hoover Dam outside Las Vegas gawk and take pictures of the prominent white water line.

Around Las Vegas, the gambling mecca, outsiders may wonder where all the grass has gone. Since 2003, no new home has been allowed to have turf in the front yard. After all, this is a city that maybe gets 4 inches of rain a year.

Richard Trujillo, utilities administrator for the other Las Vegas—in New Mexico—remembers how the West used to be. "A lot of people used to own lawns. They were able to wash their car every day if they wanted. They were able to wash down their sidewalks instead of sweeping it. Flowers required a lot of water. A lot of that is really of the past now," Trujillo said.

Roy Rogers probably never rode on it, but now he's buried under it—a lush carpet of fake grass. At Sunset Hills Memorial Park in Apple Valley, Calif., converting the grass around the grave of the singing cowboy to artificial turf is all about saving water in the drought-stricken West. Dale, Pat, Trigger, Buttermilk, Bullet and Nellybelle would be proud.

For older houses, the Southern Nevada Water Authority offers rebates to homeowners who rip out grass and replace it with water-smart landscaping, which means a lot of rocks and usually some cactus. Other cities in the West do the same.

In 2003, with the West in the thick of the drought, the Southern Nevada Water Authority shut down all decorative water fountains, leading to unsightly empty tanks outside gas stations and business parks.

Attractions such as the Mirage volcano and the beautifully choreographed fountains at the Bellagio Hotel and Casino on the Las Vegas Strip are still on, but only because they use low-quality groundwater or recycled water.

In Southern California, a weekly watering index guides homeowners on how to use sprinklers more efficiently. It is based on a scientific formula that takes evaporation rates into account.

Water-saving suggestions for the city of Anaheim, Calif., include taking quick showers and refrigerating drinking water instead of running the faucet until the water turns cold.

Western life is full of schedules that tell residents when they may water their lawns.

Water cops in cities such as Las Vegas, Nev., Albuquerque, N.M., Denver and Tuscon, Ariz., enforce the rules. Deviate from the schedule or allow water to run down the street and residents may find themselves with a ticket. And in many cases, it's neighbors tattling on other neighbors.

In Las Vegas, N.M., Trujillo has received calls from homeowners in the middle of the night who say, "Mr. Trujillo, if you come out here now, you'll catch them."

School baseball and football fields across the West have been converting to fake turf, golf courses are ripping out grass, and many cities offer rebates for low-flow toilets and water efficient washing machines.

Many restaurants do not serve customers water unless they ask. "I visit my mom, who lives in Philadelphia. She's making dinner and she has the water running. People in Albuquerque really see that as a terrible thing," said Katherine Yuhas, water conservation officer for the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility.

Sunset Hills Memorial Park owner Chet Hill has persuaded other cemeteries to try artificial turf, too.

The only problem? "Sometimes it looks too good, too perfect," Hill said, "We actually put little lumps in it, throw some dirt underneath it." Using less water in the West is just becoming second nature.

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Education Coordinator Begins Outreach

South Plains Underground Water Conservation District is constantly striving to educate the public about precious water resources and the importance of protecting and conserving them. With this in mind, the district has joined with three other districts to hire an education coordinator. Judy London of Denver City will work with the four district managers to offer educational outreach to schools, youth organizations, and civic groups in Gaines, Howard, Martin, Terry and Yoakum counties.

Ms. London has been a resident of Yoakum County for over 20 years. She has a master's degree in school administration. As an educator, she had secondary classroom teaching assignments in speech, theater, English, and communication technology. She was also a grant writer for Denver City ISD and has considerable experience in program development and project management.

In her role as education coordinator, she expects to fulfill the following goals:

- Establish a library of water conservation and water education videos for ages pre-school through adult.
- Set up a library of free printed materials on groundwater, water conservation, water quality, xeriscaping/water-wise gardening, and other water-related topics.
- Organize educational presentation and activities for audiences of all ages. Topics will include water conservation, weather modification, water-wise gardening, etc.
- Provide curriculum and other learning resources to all twelve elementary schools in the 4-UWCD education cooperative.
- Facilitate continuing education workshops for teachers in the *Major Rivers* and *Project Wet* curriculum.
- Present educational programs and facilitate community service projects for young people in scouting and 4-H programs.
- Publish public relations materials (brochures, newsletters, etc.) for the water education cooperative and the four districts.
- Create Power Point presentations to promote awareness of the UWCD and its role in water conservation, water quality, etc.
- Develop presentations and gather artifacts related to the history of water use in this area.
- Write radio spots and press releases with water conservation messages.
- Contribute to website contents for each district, develop a website for the education cooperative.
- Manage district-specific projects as directed.
- Research grant funding opportunities.

Anyone interested in obtaining more information about the programs available through the water education cooperative can contact Ms. London at Sandy Land UWCD, 806-456-2155, or email jlondon@valornet.com. Presentations can be scheduled for classrooms, home-school groups, civic, youth, or other organizations.

Precinct 3 Vacancy Filled

The Board of Directors met in regular session on February 6, 2007. At that time, the Board considered the vacancy of the Precinct 3 Director, due to the retirement of Chairman, Dan Day. Precinct 3 covers the northwest segment of the District. The resulting action by the Board involved the appointment of Dan A. Day, Jr. to fill the unexpired term of Precinct 3 Director. Congratulations and best wishes to the newest member of our Board of Directors.

Conservation Tips

At this time, the District has received much-needed winter precipitation. However, as spring emerges and outdoor water use increases, remember to use water wisely. The following list provides a few helpful and practical conservation measures for homeowners.

1. Before pouring water down the drain, consider other uses for it, such as watering plants or a garden.
2. Never use your toilet as a wastebasket.
3. Plant water-wise, drought-tolerant plants.
4. Do not use a water hose to clean sidewalks and driveways. Use a broom instead.
5. Buy a rain barrel or a cistern and collect water from gutters to water your plants.