

North Plains Water News



A Publication of the NORTH PLAINS GROUNDWATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

VOLUME 57, NO. 4 "Maintaining our way of life through conservation, protection, and preservation of our groundwater resources."

Winter 2011

District Ag Committee Receives State Award for Water Conservation Efforts

AUSTIN - The Water Conservation Advisory Council (Council) publically announced the 2011 winners of the Save Texas Water Blue Legacy Award in Agriculture. A presentation of the awards took place at the 2011 Texas Irrigation Expo (www.texasirrigationexpo.org) in McAllen, TX on December 9, 2011 where Council member, Dr. Robert Mace, presented the winners with their awards.

The Blue Legacy Award in Agriculture is an annual award that recognizes the outstanding water conservation efforts and successes of the agriculture community. Award winners were selected based on their demonstrated willingness and commitment to incorporate water conservation practices into their operations, as well as their leadership in furthering water conservation in their communities or within the industry. This year's award selection committee consisted of representatives from Texas Farm Bureau, Texas Department of Agriculture, Texas AgriLife Extension,

and the Water Conservation Advisory Council.



North Plains GCD Ag Committee receives the Save Texas Water Blue Legacy Award from the Texas Water Conservation Advisory Council. (L to R) Phil Haaland, Danny Krienke and Harold Grall.

The Council recognized the **North Plains Groundwater Conservation District ~ Agriculture Committee** for their Excellence in Collaborative Partnership. In 2009, the members of the agriculture committee, along with the rest of the district board, began planning

a demonstration project based on their long-term perspective of irrigated

agriculture in the region. In 2010, the three agriculture committee members dedicated their own irrigated acres for the first year of the "200-12 Project", largely at their own expense. They believed it was the role of the groundwater conservation district to show producers

how to save water, not just require that they do it. The resulting demonstration project is the "200-12 Reduced Irrigation on Corn Project". The "200-12 Project" is a five year on-farm demonstration that shows how currently available water conservation technologies and irrigation management practices can reduce groundwater use and allow farmers to remain profitable and financially viable with restricted and diminishing groundwater resources. Members of the North Plains Groundwater Conservation District Agriculture Committee: Mr. Danny Krienke, Mr. Harold Grall, and Mr. Phil Haaland.

The Council also recognized three families and their farming operations for successfully promoting and incorporating water conservation through efforts in their operations.

- **D & D Farms and the Ford Family** of Dumas, TX. For the Fords, dryland farming in the Panhandle is unpredictable with moisture being the limiting factor. The Fords utilize strip-

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You Should Have Received Your Production Report Forms for 2011...

Groundwater Producers in the North Plains Groundwater Conservation District should have already received their 2011 Production Reporting Forms and Worksheets. If you are a producer in the district and you have not received your forms, please call the district office at 806-935-6401. March 1, 2012 is the deadline for production reports to be completed and turned-in to the office to avoid late fees. Anyone who paid late fees on their 2010 reports by May 21, 2011 may be eligible for a refund if their 2011 reports are completed and in the office by January 16, 2012.

The district will be participating in the Crop Production Clinics sponsored by Pioneer Hi-bred. The 2012 Texas &

Oklahoma Panhandle Crop Production Clinics will be held in three locations in the district. The dates and locations for the Clinics are: January 9th – Dumas, January 10th – Dalhart, and January 12th – Spearman. District staff will be available at the Clinics to answer questions regarding production reporting and the Groundwater Conservation Reserve program, and to assist producers in completing their production reports. If you have any questions about filing production reports please call the district office at the number listed above, or stop by the office at 603 E 1st Street in Dumas. District staff will be happy to assist you!

North Plains Board Proposes to Extend Groundwater Conservation Reserve

At their November meeting, the North Plains GCD Board proposed extending the Groundwater Conservation Reserve from two to five years. On January 17, 2012, the Board will hold a hearing to take public comment regarding the proposed rule. The hearing will be held at 9:00 AM at the Amarillo College Dumas Campus, Room 126, located at 1220 East 1st Street in Dumas, Texas.

Currently district rules permit groundwater right owners to accumulate a Groundwater Conservation Reserve (Reserve) by reserving all, or a portion of, the current year's Allowable Annual Production on their property. Thereafter,

the owners may apply the property's Reserve, not to exceed .5 acre-feet per acre per year, to increase the property's Allowable Annual Production within a two-year period following the reserve year. If the Reserve is not utilized within the two-year period following the reserve year, any accumulated Reserve terminates for the reserve year. The Proposed Rule 3.4 would permit groundwater right owners to apply their property's Reserve, not to exceed .5 acre-feet per acre per year, to increase the property's Allowable Annual Production within a five-year period following the reserve year. If the

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North Plains Spreading the Conservation Word

North Plains GCD Representatives have been spreading the gospel about irrigation conservation and making converts along the way. Over the past few months, management and board members have been taking advantage of opportunities to talk about the district's ongoing irrigation conservation demonstrations to irrigators, regulators and whoever else will listen.

The focus of the discussion is the district's "200-12 Reduced Irrigation on Corn" project, also known as the "200-12 Project". The "200-12 Project" was designed to show how currently available tools and practices can be combined into a comprehensive resource management system to allow irrigators to get the most yield per inch of water used.

In November, General Manager,



"200-12 Project" Coordinator, Leon New talks about the water resource management system at the 2011 Commodity Symposium in Amarillo.

Steve Walthour presented to the Texas Alliance of Groundwater Districts. Also in November, Leon New, "200-12 Project" coordinator, presented at the Annual Commodities Symposium during the Amarillo Farm and Ranch



North Plains GCD Board President Bob Zimmer presents the district's conservation strategy at the 2011 Commodity Symposium in Amarillo, as a member of the panel discussion of water issues.

Show. District board president Bob Zimmer presented the district's conservation strategy at the Commodity Symposium, as a member of the panel discussion of water issues. Later in December, Walthour spoke to the Channel Achievement Series audience about the cooperative conservation effort with the Texas Alliance for Water Conservation, Texas Tech University, High Plains Underground Water Conservation District, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service and the

Texas Water Development Board.

Upcoming presentations include three sessions of Pioneer Hi-Bred's Crop Production Clinics, and presentations by board member, Harold Grall at the High Plains Irrigation Conference in January and the Texas Panhandle Water Conservation Symposium in February. In April, the district will present to the United States Committee on Irrigation and Drainage's Water Management Conference in Austin. The conference is titled "Irrigated Agriculture Responds to Water Use Challenges— Strategies for Success."

The name of the "200-12 Project" stems from the goal of raising 200 bushels of corn on only 12 inches of applied irrigation per acre. The demonstrations began in the 2010 growing season when moisture was plentiful and continued into 2011, when it was not. While none of the cooperators in the first two years have attained the goal of 200 bushels on 12 inches, the project has been effective in demonstrating how producers can use less water while maintaining or surpassing historical profit margins. In 2010, cooperators showed that water efficient practices, like residue, pest and nutrient management, combined with emerging technologies such as soil moisture probes and remote pivot tracking and control, allow irrigators to water less and make more money.

The 2011 report has not been released, but the lack of moisture certainly caused challenges for all producers, including those involved



North Plains GCD General Manager, Steve Walthour talks to the Channel Achievement Series audience about the cooperative conservation effort with the Texas Alliance for Water Conservation, Texas Tech University and High Plains Underground Water Conservation District.

in the "200-12 Project." Nevertheless, the 2011 project should yield valuable information about how the system approach can mitigate negative effects, even in the most extreme low water conditions. Given the historic severity of the 2011 drought, interest in water efficient practices has intensified, and North Plains GCD has been in a position to provide real-world information at a critical time.

District Ag Committee Receives State Award

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tillage as a method to help keep the moisture in the soil and cut irrigation costs

- **Gertson Farms and the Gertson Family** of Lissie, TX . Throughout the years the family has implemented a number of new strategies for achieving water conservation and has overseen numerous transformations in their farming operations in order to use water more efficiently.

- **Schur Farms and the Schur Family** of Plainview, TX. Today most of the Schur's land that is irrigated utilizes the most efficient LEPA irrigation technology in conjunction with crop rotation, residue management, and irrigation scheduling and monitoring.

The award program provides an opportunity to broaden water conservation awareness in the agriculture industry. The Council hopes to use these success stories to promote the agricultural industry's efforts in water conservation as well as promote the individuals themselves as credible spokespersons.

To read more about the 2011 winners and to learn more about the Save Texas Water Blue Legacy Award in Agriculture, visit www.savetexaswater.org or contact Vanessa Escobar, Council Support Staff at: Vanessa.escobar@twdb.state.tx.us or (512) 463-1667.

Analyzing the Effects of Hydraulic Fracturing on Groundwater

Higher hydrocarbon prices and new oil and gas well drilling and production development technologies have significantly increased drilling and production in the Texas Panhandle over the past few years. The two technologies that are becoming more common in our area are directional drilling in combination with hydraulic fracturing. Directional drilling allows a producer to drill at an angle to access more of a oil and gas producing geologic formation. Hydraulic fracturing, otherwise known as "fracing", is a process that creates fractures in the geologic formation thousands of feet underground, releasing hydrocarbons to flow into a wellbore and up to the surface. The fractures are created by pumping fluids (mostly water) with sand at high rates and pressures. When pumping is stopped and the pressure is reduced, the fractures begin to close so the sand is trapped in place and props the fractures open. When combined with directional drilling a wellbore

may be fractured for thousands of feet allowing the well to increase production. Though this process will allow increased production across the Panhandle, several agencies and environmental groups have voiced concerns related to the amount of water used and concerns related to water quality. Hydraulic fracturing in the Panhandle occurs thousands of feet below the Ogallala aquifer. However, as much as three to four million gallons of water are used from the aquifer for a single frac job. District staff is working on the best method for companies to report and meter their water use for this process. Additionally, the chemicals added to the water for the frac job may not be environmentally safe if released into the freshwater supply.

The Texas Railroad Commission (RRC) recently adopted reporting rules related to the chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing. According to a news release from the RRC, "A listing of chemical ingredients used to hydraulically

fracture a well that has been permitted by the RRC on or after Feb. 1, 2012, must be uploaded to the public national chemical disclosure registry, FracFocus.org. A supplier, service company or operator is not required to disclose trade secret information unless the Attorney General or court determines the information is not entitled to trade secret protection."

The district believes that direct contamination from the fracturing process is unlikely because the wellbore that is fraced is well below the freshwater in the Ogallala aquifer. However, surface spills of hydraulic fracturing chemicals, as with any oil and gas operation, pose the greatest possible threat to the water supply. Over the next few months, the district will be analyzing the best approach for collecting groundwater production data and protecting the aquifer amid increased hydraulic fracturing and oil and gas drilling.

Texas AgriLife to Present Rainwater Harvesting Workshop

After the record drought of 2011 the discussion of rainwater harvesting might seem irrelevant. However some area experts say they don't think this year's forecast will be as dry as the last. Whatever the amount of rainfall, it is always wise to catch as much as you can and make the best possible use of it. Nicholas Kenny, irrigation specialist for Texas AgriLife Extension Service, will present this year's rainwater harvesting workshop sponsored by North Plains Groundwater Conservation District. "Nich is very knowledgeable and his presentation last year was extremely well-received," said Assistant General Manager for Outreach, Kirk Welch. Kenny will demonstrate how to build and use a rain barrel for irrigating your own residential landscape, and he'll discuss the principles behind more elaborate rainwater harvesting systems. The workshop is scheduled for 9 am, Saturday, March 24th at the North Plains GCD office at 603 E 1st Street in Dumas. Anyone interested in attending the Spring Rainwater Harvesting Workshop can contact the district office at 806-935-6401 to pre-register or email kwelch@northplainsgcd.org.

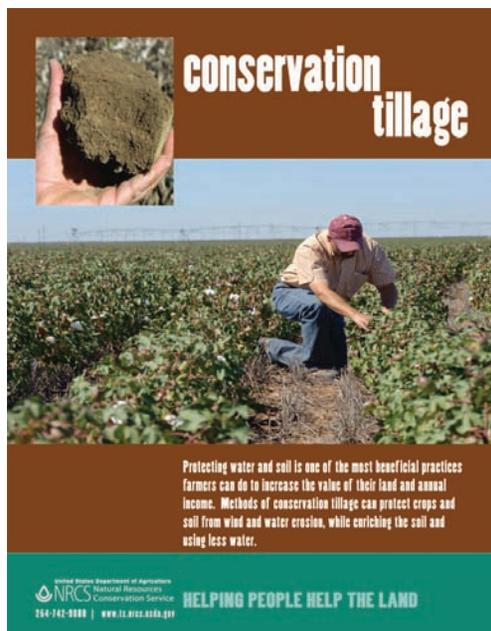
Conservation Tillage Brochure

Conservation tillage is any tilling and planting system that leaves enough crop residue on the soil surface to significantly improve water conservation and reduce soil erosion. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), if a grower wants to make a conservation tillage system work and make the necessary changes in crop production management, conservation tillage can provide greater profits while reducing groundwater use. Conservation tillage is a key component in the agriculture water conservation demonstrations conducted by the district in cooperation with the NRCS and the Texas Water Development Board, and is a practice that has far-reaching applications across Texas and the nation. To encourage the use of conservation tillage practices as part of its public outreach program, the district has underwritten a conservation tillage brochure published by the USDA. You may obtain a copy of the brochure from the district offices or on the district's website www.northplainsgcd.org.

Water Wise Gardening Class Set For March

In a semi-arid climate like the Texas Panhandle, using water wise gardening techniques just makes sense. That is the message of this year's Water Wise Gardening Class offered by North Plains Groundwater Conservation District. Former Texas Master Gardener and Amarillo Globe-News columnist, Bob Hatton, will provide a framework of information that will allow attendees to customize their gardening experience to create a landscape that fits their lifestyle.

Hatton focuses on the two most important aspects of gardening: soil preparation and watering practices, intermingled with the principles of xeriscaping. Hatton explains how xeric, water-friendly practices can and should be applied as a natural part of responsible gardening in the Panhandle of Texas. "However, this is not a class about how to grow cactus and rocks," said Hatton. He presents information that is equally relevant for xeriscaping purists and for gardeners who prefer a combination of low water-use and traditional plants. This year's water wise gardening class is scheduled for 9 am, March 10th at the North Plains GCD office at 603 E 1st Street in Dumas. Please call the office at 935-6401 or email kwelch@northplainsgcd.org to register.



Address Change

North Plains GCD would like to invite you to our new home. Our new home on the web, that is. The new address is www.northplainsgcd.org. The new and improved website is part of our ongoing effort to communicate more effectively with you, the stakeholder. It starts with the address. The old address could have actually led you down the wrong road. The new address, www.northplainsgcd.org, makes it clear where we are, the North Plains, and who we are, the GCD, or Groundwater Conservation District. The new website also sports a cosmetic makeover with a more professional and contemporary

look, but the changes are more than just curb appeal. The new design is also more functional, so that the things you need are easier to find. Finally, we've added some new functionality like current news items and a calendar of upcoming district events. We plan to keep the new features coming to continue to make www.northplainsgcd.org more valuable to you. So come on over and take a look around. Make yourself at home. While you're at it feel free to suggest any changes you'd like to see, we won't mind. After all, home improvement is a job that's never done. See you soon!

North Plains Board Proposes to Extend Groundwater Conservation Reserve

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Reserve is not utilized within the five-year period following the reserve year, any accumulated Reserve terminates for the reserve year. The complete text of the Proposed Rule is as follows:

Rule 3.4 Groundwater Conservation Reserve: An Owner may accumulate a Groundwater Conservation Reserve ("Reserve") by reserving all, or a portion of, the current year's (Reserve Year) Allowable Annual Production on a Property. Thereafter, the Owner may apply the Property's Reserve, not to exceed 0.50 acre-feet per acre per Year, to increase the Property's Allowable Annual Production. If the Reserve is not utilized within the five-year period following the Reserve Year, any accumulated Reserve terminates for the Reserve Year. The Reserve may only be used on the Property on which the Allowable Annual Production was reserved. The Property must be developed for a beneficial use for a calendar year before it is eligible for the Conservation Reserve. If a Property is developed for Groundwater production on or before January 1 of a calendar year, the Property shall be eligible for the Reserve for that calendar year. An Owner may not draw from a future year's Allowable Annual Production to increase the current year's Allowable Annual Production. The Reserve shall only be available to an Owner if Annual

Production Reports for the Property have been timely filed. Any Reserve may only be applied after the Property's Allowable Annual Production for the current year has been depleted. The Reserve shall automatically terminate as to any portion of the Property sold to a third party. Property passing by gift or inheritance shall not be considered as being "Property sold to a third party."

Written comments concerning the adoption of the proposed rule and the repeal of the current rule must be filed with the district by mail or hand-delivery at the district's office at 603 East First Street, P. O. Box 795, Dumas, Texas 79029-0795. All written comments must be filed with the District and date-stamped no later than Friday, January 13, 2012, at 5:00 p.m. Central Daylight Time.

Copies of the Hearing Notice and Proposed Rule may be obtained from the district by:

1. calling to request a copy at 1 (800) 456-8350, or 1 (806) 935-6401;
2. e-mailing a request to the district at swalthour@northplainsgcd.org
3. visiting the offices of the district at 603 East First Street, Dumas, Texas 79029-0795; or,
4. visiting the district's website at <http://www.northplainsgcd.org>.

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Inaugural Texas Panhandle Water Conservation Symposium

Limited water supplies affect all kinds of people from every sector of society, so it makes sense that addressing this resource challenge would require representation of all stakeholders. That's exactly what the very first Texas Panhandle Water Conservation Symposium proposes to do. On February 8, 2012, water stakeholders including municipal water managers, scientists, irrigators, educators, regulators, legislators, and residential consumers will gather at the Amarillo Civic Center Grand Plaza, share their ideas, and hopefully come up with some new ones.

The list of speakers includes: Senator Kel Seliger, Representative Four Price, and Amarillo Mayor, Paul Harpole. Among the distinguished list of presenters are North Plains GCD board member and tireless irrigation efficiency advocate, Harold Grall, as well as, the district's "200-12 Project" coordinator and irrigation efficiency expert, Leon New. This unique and timely event is presented by the Texas Water Foundation and Panhandle Groundwater Conservation District and sponsored by North Plains GCD. For more information see the advertisement in this newsletter or log on to www.texaswater.org.

High Plains Irrigation Conference & Trade Show

Amarillo Civic Center – Regency Room
401 South Buchanan Street
Amarillo, TX

Thursday – 19 January 2012
8:30 A.M. – 4:30 P.M.

Profit Based Irrigation Management
200/12 and EPIC Corn Reports
Long and Short-Term Weather Insights
Comprehensive Water Interactions (ie, Fert and Pest)
Tillage and Residue Management
...and more

Irrigation Association CID • (5 CEUs)
Certified Crop Advisor • (5 Soil and Water CEUs)

Ag, Producers & Industry, Groundwater Districts, USDA & Academia

Registration is \$30 at the door: Lunch INCLUDED.
For Conference information, contact Nich Kenny at (806) 677-5600.
For Trade Show information, contact Kern Stutler at (806) 786-5644.

Calendar of Events

Event	Where	Date and Time
Pioneer Hi-Bred Crop Production Clinics	Dumas Dalhart Spearman	January 9, 2012 January 10, 2012 January 12, 2012
North Plains Groundwater Conservation District Rules Hearing and Board Meeting	Amarillo College-Dumas 1220 East 1st St. Dumas, TX (Rm 126)	January 17, 2012 9:00 AM
2012 High Plains Irrigation Conference	Amarillo Civic Ctr. Amarillo, TX	January 19, 2012
Texas Panhandle Water Conservation Symposium	Amarillo Civic Ctr. Amarillo, TX	February 8, 2012
North Plains Groundwater Conservation District Annual Production Reports Due	District Office 603 E. 1st St., Dumas Reports can be mailed to PO Box 795, Dumas, TX 79029	March 1, 2012

Find us on the the web at: www.northplainsgcd.org
On Facebook just search "North Plains Groundwater"
On Twitter: www.twitter.com/NorthPlainsGCD




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