

...Forest Service

prescribed burn grants
(Continued from previous page)

McCrary says that most of the burn bosses conducting these prescribed fires are contractors and the grant programs require them to be licensed through the Texas Department of Agriculture's Certified and Insured Prescribed Burn Manager Program.

Before burn managers can start ignitions, they must notify McCrary and his staff to make sure every procedure and safety precaution agreed to have been met. Once McCrary gives the go-ahead, the prescribed burn can be conducted on the award recipients designated property.

Following the burn, management goals and the ecosystem are monitored by McCrary and his team. According to McCrary, the landscape recovers quickly from prescribed burning.

"In Texas, prescribed burning is often done in the cool season and the following growing season, or the spring, is when the property will fully recover," said McCrary. "By the end of that first growing season, you'll see very little negative evidence of the fire, besides the reduction of the fuels that were meant to burn, and a transition to more native grasses, wildflowers and tender resprouting wildlife browse."

For more information on prescribed burning and Texas A&M Forest Service grants, visit <https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/PrescribedBurns/>.

New tool allows ranchers to report anticompetitive practices

Farmers and ranchers now have a new online tool to report anticompetitive practices.

The new farmerfairness.gov portal developed jointly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of Justice (DOJ) allows farmers and ranchers to report potential violations of livestock and poultry antitrust laws, including the Packers and Stockyards Act.

As part of these efforts, this portal makes it easy for farmers and ranchers to register a complaint or tip and provide details about anticompetitive practices that would aid an

investigation.

Who may submit a complaint or tip?

Anyone who suspects a violation of federal law governing fair and competitive marketing and contract growing of livestock and poultry, including the Packers and Stockyards Act.

What information should I provide?

Those reporting potential violations of the Packers and Stockyards Act and other competition laws via the online portal are asked to submit the following information:

The names of companies, individuals, or organizations that are involved,

A description of any possible violations of the Packers and Stockyards Act or other federal antitrust laws,

Examples of the conduct that may violate one or more of these laws,

Any other relevant details about the violation, and

The names of companies, individuals, or organizations that may be harmed by the alleged violation and how they are harmed.

What is the process following submission of a complaint or tip?

Complaints and tips will go through a preliminary review by USDA Packers and Stockyards Division staff and Department of Justice staff. If a complaint raises sufficient concern under the Packers and Stockyards Act or antitrust laws, it will be selected for further investigation by the appropriate agency. This action may lead to the opening of a formal investigation.

USDA or DOJ staff will only contact complainants if additional information is needed.

Will my confidentiality be protected?

Both USDA and DOJ will protect the confidentiality of the complainants to the fullest extent possible under the law. For any information provided, DOJ and USDA will follow their respective Privacy and Confidentiality Policies found at: DOJ Confidentiality and USDA Privacy. Packers and Stockyards regulations regarding confidentiality also apply: PSD Confidentiality. DOJ and USDA commit to supporting relevant

whistleblower protections, including newly applicable protections for criminal antitrust complainants against unlawful retaliation.

To submit an anonymous complaint or tip on anticompetitive practices, complainants or tippers should provide appropriate details but not enter their names or contact information. Neither USDA nor DOJ will be able to contact anonymous complainants or tips to obtain additional information that might be needed to evaluate your complaint tip, or to engage in future correspondence regarding your complaint or tip.

This portal is an additional tool to support and protect these individuals who are vital to agriculture and our food supply, USDA said.

TPWD and TDCJ work to move bat colony

To address concerns about the welfare of a large colony of free-tailed bats in a warehouse operated by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) is working alongside TDCJ staff to develop a safe, slow, and progressive movement (exclusion) of the bats from the building. The exclusion effort will help to minimize potential

human-bat conflict.

The bat colony has been present in the warehouse since 1997 and has since grown to be one of the largest urban bat colonies in the state, with an estimated 750,000 bats. The bats use this structure as a maternity roost, migratory stopover, and hibernation site. Each night, the bats leave the roost to feed on insects high above Huntsville, sometimes traveling up to 100 miles in search of food.

TDCJ has determined that the cotton warehouse where the colony resides needs to be demolished due to multiple occupational health concerns and concerns about the structural integrity of the building. If proactive measures to demolish the building aren't taken, the building could collapse suddenly.

The bat exclusion effort will occur in two phases and will primarily take place during the times of year when bats are mobile and therefore not roosting for long periods of time in the warehouse. Additionally, eight bat houses have been constructed and will be maintained to provide a place for the bats to relocate once exclusion efforts begin. It is hoped that the bat houses will keep the bats from relocating in

other buildings throughout the area. Input from bat experts, veterinarians, advocacy groups and stakeholders provided to date and throughout this process will be considered.

The movement of bats from an established roost may bring about potential human health concerns for the workers and the surrounding community. Contact with bats and their guano can result in disease risks such as histoplasmosis and rabies. As a result, TPWD and TDCJ are working closely with the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) for public health guidance.

If citizens in the area find dead or live bats, it's extremely important that they do not handle the bats. The best course of action is to leave the bat alone and, if the downed bat is still alive, to contact a rehabilitator. A list of wildlife rehabilitators can be found on the TPWD website as well as on the Bat World Sanctuary website. For additional questions about bats, citizens can contact a TPWD biologist in their county.

Residents who are hoping to support bat conservation efforts through donations or volunteer opportunities are encouraged to contact Bat Conservation International or a wildlife rehabilitator.

Water Weekly

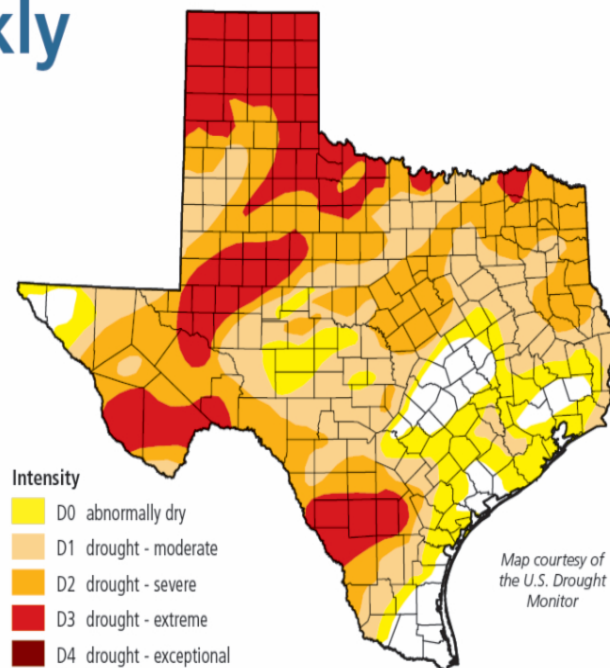
For the week of 02/28/22

Water conditions

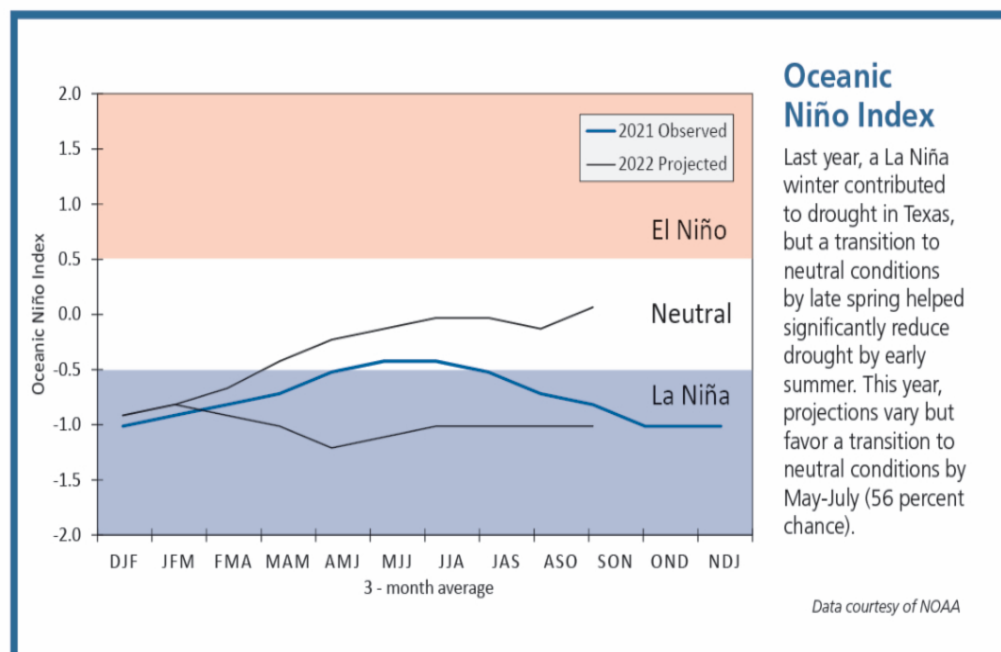
The latest drought map for conditions as of February 22 shows an increase in the area of the state impacted by drought, the first week-over-week increase in four weeks. In comparison to a year ago, as we suffered through a similar La Niña winter, 51 percent of the state was in drought.

Drought conditions

- ◆ 79% now
- ◆ 78% a week ago
- ◆ 40% three months ago
- ◆ 51% a year ago



Map courtesy of the U.S. Drought Monitor



Oceanic Niño Index

Last year, a La Niña winter contributed to drought in Texas, but a transition to neutral conditions by late spring helped significantly reduce drought by early summer. This year, projections vary but favor a transition to neutral conditions by May-July (56 percent chance).

Data courtesy of NOAA

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Our County, Our State and Our Country**

And Don't Forget to Pray for Rain!