



Good, Clean Fun

by James M. Decker

It's no secret that Stamford's city pool is important to me. I've discussed it several times in social media posts. At city council meetings, we have worked on both short-term improvements to the pool as well as a long-term improvement plan. But today, I want to discuss why I find it so important. The city pool is not just a random city service that I have fixated on. City pools, especially in rural communities, stand as something very meaningful.

As we talk about revitalizing rural communities, the conversation inevitably involves "quality of life." If a community wants to keep its current residents and attract new ones, the community must have amenities that make the community an enjoyable place to live. Moreover, these amenities should provide quality of life for everyone in the community, not just a partial segment.

In the past, I've written about food as a unifying force in society. Sharing a table and a meal places people on the same level, no matter their heritage, background, or net worth. Certain public spaces have a similar effect. Have you ever attended an exciting sporting event—high school, college, or professional—and celebrated wildly with perfect strangers? You might've discussed the action or, in the heat of the moment, high-fived or even hugged someone you had never seen before and haven't seen since. You didn't know their story and they didn't know yours, but in the moment, you were unified.

Our rural communities have a limited number of public spaces that offer that same opportunity for unity, particularly for our children. The public swimming pool is often the foremost such public space. Unlike other swimming pools that we may visit, a public swimming pool doesn't require a membership, a hotel reservation, or permission from the property owner. A public swimming pool is available to everyone who can pay the admission fee.

My grandfather has spoken of the importance of the public swimming pool to his childhood. Growing up in Seymour, Texas, in a family of limited means, the city's public swimming pool was one of the few forms of good, wholesome recreation that was accessible to anyone and thus, accessible to him. His childhood summer revolved around the pool. That lesson has stuck with me. In a socio-economically diverse community, the public swimming pool may be the only "good, clean fun" available to all children and adults of all ages.

In 2018, accessibility was on my mind as pool season opened. Pool admission fees were not exorbitant, but still came with a cost. For a child of limited means, attending the pool every day might not be affordable. For a parent or guardian, taking multiple children to the pool would be pricey, much less attending multiple times. In mid-June, a few weeks after the pool opened, a donor in the community offered to underwrite the city's estimated revenue for the rest of the summer, so that any child could swim in the pool every day, without worrying about

the cost. As many of you know, that effort was a great success. Our daily pool attendance almost tripled. We heard from parents and grandparents who said just what I suspected—free admission made the pool much more accessible. This summer, it was a no-brainer to continue that free admission.

On Saturday, June 1, I attended our annual "Splash Day" to open the pool and I was blown away. In the past, 100-150 was a standard turnout on Splash Day. This year, 244 folks visited the city pool. For a town of 3,000 people, a substantial portion of its youth

were at the pool on that Saturday. As I looked around the pool, I thought about the pool as a unifying space. Toddlers splashed gleefully. Elementary school kids played. Teenagers threw footballs and jumped off the diving boards. Adults relaxed. People conversed and enjoyed a carefree Saturday.

City pools are not a profit center. They cost money to operate. Even when an admission fee is charged, the pool still loses money. But so do city streets and other city parks. Just like streets and parks, a public swimming pool should be viewed as a necessary service that benefits the

citizens. This service is a unifying space, open to all, providing better quality of life.

Whether you're reading this in Stamford or elsewhere, I encourage you to think about the spaces that unify your community. Do you have any? What are they? How can you make them more accessible and more unifying, for the betterment of all?

James Decker is a lawyer, farmer, and mayor in Stamford, and the creator of the forthcoming "West of 98" podcast and website. He may be contacted through Facebook at facebook.com/james.decker.

Water Weekly

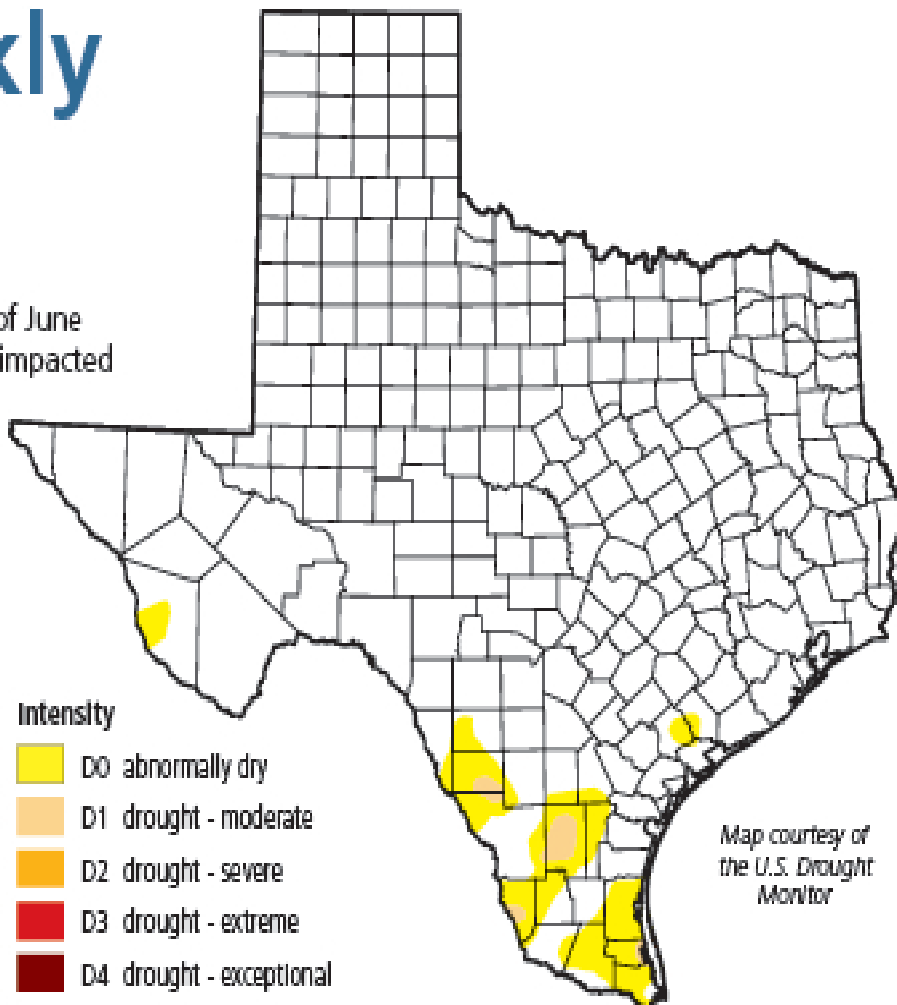
For the week of 06/17/19

Water conditions

The latest drought map, for conditions as of June 11, shows less than 1 percent of the state impacted by drought. About 5 percent of the state is considered abnormally dry and is susceptible to drought conditions in coming weeks.

Drought conditions

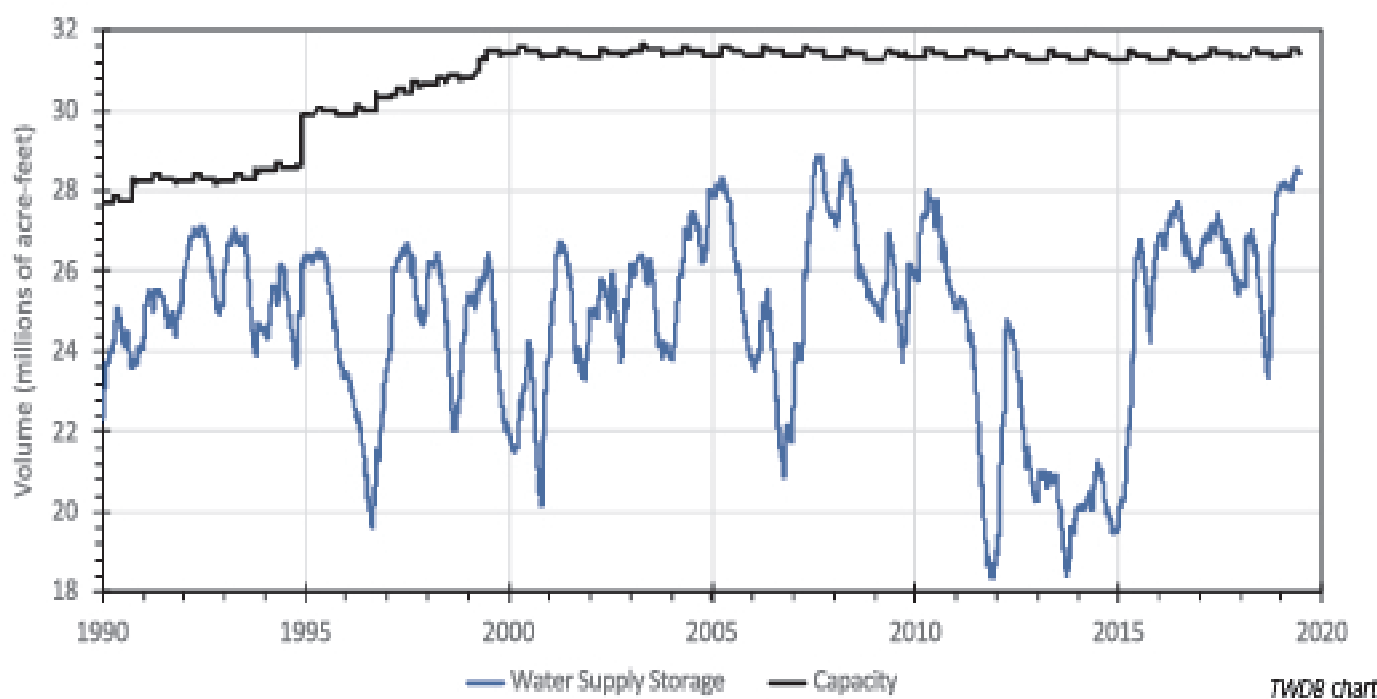
- 0.5% now
- 0.2% a week ago
- 15% three months ago
- 50% a year ago



Map courtesy of the U.S. Drought Monitor

Statewide reservoir storage

Statewide water supply storage is nearly 28.5 million acre-feet, the largest volume in the month of June and approaching the largest volume ever recorded (28.9 million acre-feet in September 2007). Several reservoirs in the western half of the state are holding their largest volumes in 15 or more years.



TWDB chart

Written by Dr. Mark Wentzel — Dr. Mark Wentzel is a hydrologist in the TWDB's Office of Water Science and Conservation.

Bryan McMath, Governmental Relations | bryan.mcmath@twdb.texas.gov | 512-463-7850
 Merry Klonower, Media Relations | merry.klonower@twdb.texas.gov | 512-463-8165