

...West of 98

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I am not sure my family has gotten over the fact that, when I was a youth, I vetoed the possibility of a particularly unique July 4th family vacation because it would have conflicted with the Texas Cowboy Reunion.

And yet, for most of my life, the word “booster” had something of an unsavory mental association for small towns. I think of an early scene in the movie “Tombstone,” when Wyatt Earp has recently re-connected with Doc Holliday in the Arizona boomtown. They encounter pretentious Sheriff John Behan who dismisses Tombstone’s frontier nature, confidently announcing “no, the die’s cast, we’re growing, be as big as San Francisco in a few years. And just as sophisticated.” His prediction was...exaggerated.

I also think that, perhaps, the frontier booster as a pejorative goes back to the Zanesville Syndicate. “Friday Night Lights” is likely the most famous book ever written about West Texas. It spawned a successful film and later a fictionalized version of the story as a television series that was acclaimed by many (including me). The book, set around the 1988 Odessa Permian football team, opens with the history of Odessa, Texas itself.

Author H.G. Bissinger memorably wrote about the group of investors from Zanesville, Ohio, who purchased 14,000 acres of West Texas and decided to promote it as a utopia: “[w]hat Odessa lacked, and one look informed the most charitable eye that it lacked a fantastic amount, the speculators from Ohio would make up for on the strength of their own imagination...[t]he Zanesville syndicate looked at all the best attributes of the country and decided to attribute them to Odessa whether they were there or not.”

A few hardy and/or desperate settlers allowed themselves to be hoodwinked accordingly and the Zanesville Syndicate’s boosterism created a city that would struggle through the early 20th century until the discovery of oil changed the fortunes of Odessa and much of West Texas. The truth is that the “Swenson Avenue Addition” pamphlet from early Stamford (discussed in my last missive) contains much boosterism that would rival John Behan and the Zanesville Syndicate. Stamford is fast putting on City airs! There has never been a business failure! The climate is most ideal!

It’s a fine line between boosterism and outright fantasy. Fantasy deceives and harms real people trying to make a new life for themselves (see the “rain follows the plow” fallacy of Great Plains settlement). The fantasy also undersells the wonderful things that a community DOES have to offer

and many of our communities have so much to offer the modern-day settler. New developments all across America are pitching quality of life, quiet streets, “small town feel,” low cost of living, and a dozen other buzz words that are the default setting in a rural community. The 21st century boosters of suburbia are trying to sell a new version of something that we have in spades.

If we aren’t the boosters that our communities need, then who will do it? No one. There’s no state, federal, or non-governmental agency raring to tell everyone to move to rural places. In fact, they’re doing the opposite for a variety of reasons. If we rely on them, we’ll definitely be disappointed.

No, we are the boosters that we are looking for and we should be proud to adopt the moniker. We can take it back from the unsavory connotations of the past. We ought to be proud to pitch our community and its wares in an honest and enthusiastic manner, because in a world filled with angst, uncertainty, and restlessness,

we’ve got a lot of good things to offer.

James Decker is the Mayor of Stamford, Texas and the creator of the West of 98 website and the Rural Church and State and West of 98 podcasts. Contact James and subscribe to these essays at westof98.substack.com and subscribe to him wherever podcasts are found.

...School Menus

(Continued from previous page)

Tuesday, April 30

Spaghetti bowl, breadsticks, veggie cup, salad, fruity jello, milk

Wednesday, May 1

No menu available

Thursday, May 2

No menu available

Friday, May 3

No menu available

Blackwell CISD

Breakfast

Monday, April 29

Danish, fruit, juice, milk

Tuesday, April 30

Cereal, fruit, juice, milk

Wednesday, May 1

Pizza, fruit, juice, milk

Thursday, May 2

Biscuit, sausage, eggs, gravy,

fruit, juice, milk

Friday, May 3

School Holiday

Lunch

Monday, April 29

Chili dogs, chips, milk

Tuesday, April 30

Chicken fajita nachos, pinto beans, Spanish rice, milk

Wednesday, May 1

Hornet Chicken Bowl (popcorn chicken, mashed potatoes, corn, gravy, cheese), hot roll, milk

Thursday, May 2

Hamburgers, chips, milk

Friday, May 3

School Holiday

...RLISD board minutes

(Continued from page 3)

Supt. Hood recommended awarding the bid from Neal & Associates for the house pump replacements for the K-12 and the gym. Jose Morales made the motion to approve the bid as presented and was seconded by Cole Bosworth. All were for.

Supt. Hood recommended awarding the bid to Carter Construction for resurfacing the track. Linda Burns made the motion to approve the bid as presented and was seconded by

Cole Bosworth. All were for.

Supt. Hood recommended awarding the bid to Quality Striping to sealcoat, patch, and stripe the parking lots. Cole Bosworth made the motion to approve the bid and was seconded by Jose Morales. All were for.

Supt. Hood recommended awarding the bid to Gladiator Defense Group for the guardian safety equipment. Cole Bosworth made the motion to approve the recommended purchase as presented and was seconded by Linda Burns. All were for.

Supt. Hood recommended to purchase Shoot-A-Ways for the gyms. Jose Morales made the motion to approve the recommended purchase and was seconded by Linda Burns. All were for.

Supt. Hood gave his respective report on enrollment numbers, budget, calendar activities, and career day information.

The next regular board meeting will be held Thursday, April 18, 2024, at 5 pm.

A motion was made by Jose Morales, seconded by Linda Burns, to adjourn the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 5:55 pm.

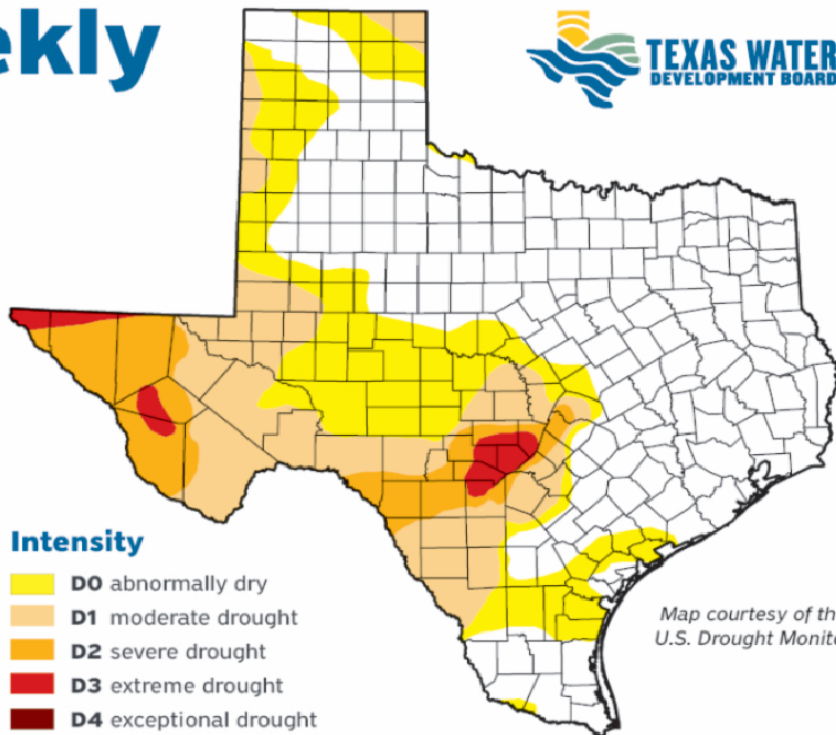
Water Weekly

For the week of 04/22/24



Water conditions

The latest drought map for conditions as of April 16 shows some drought contraction in Central Texas but more expansion in South and West Texas. After six consecutive weeks of small increases, statewide drought has now reached its greatest extent since mid-January.



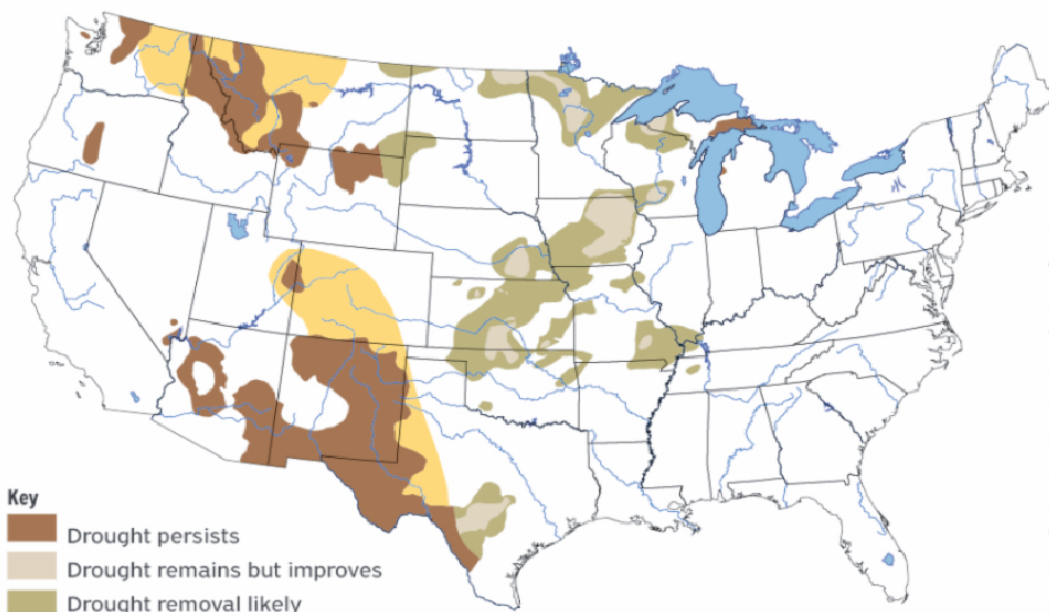
Map courtesy of the U.S. Drought Monitor

Drought conditions

- 27% now
- 25% a week ago
- 31% three months ago
- 58% a year ago

Intensity

- D0 abnormally dry
- D1 moderate drought
- D2 severe drought
- D3 extreme drought
- D4 exceptional drought



Map courtesy of NOAA

U.S. seasonal drought outlook

The latest drought outlook from the National Weather Service for conditions through the end of July anticipates some improvement in Central Texas but continued degradation in West Texas. That would bring a third consecutive summer of drought to parts of Central, South, and West Texas.

By Dr. Mark Wentzel, Hydrologist, Office of Water Science and Conservation

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