

acknowledged publicly. Farm Bureau membership is not required to apply for the award.

The national award recipient will be recognized by AFBF in a variety of ways and should be willing to share his or her story and represent the veteran farmer community.

The recipient of the 2024 AFBF Veteran Farmer Award of Excellence will be notified in mid-September.

The award winner will be announced on Veterans Day.

Complete details, including eligibility and requirements, are available online at [fb.org/veteranfarmer](http://fb.org/veteranfarmer).

## FWS plans to expand Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge

By Shelby Shank

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) finalized a plan to significantly expand the footprint of the Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge in the Panhandle, but the plan has drawn criticism from farmers and lawmakers.

In April, FWS released a final plan to conserve or restore up to 700,000 additional acres of wildlife habitat in the Southern High Plains of Texas and Eastern New Mexico as part of the refuge. That's about 110 times the current size of 6,440 acres.

The plan authorizes FWS to purchase land or conservation easements from willing sellers within the project boundaries. Eminent domain and federal mandates will not be used to acquire land.

The initiative seeks to preserve playa wetlands, saline lakes and large patches of grasslands, along with supporting populations of sandhill cranes, pronghorn and lesser-prairie chickens.

The expansion is part of the Biden administration's \$1 billion "America the Beautiful" initiative, which aims to conserve and restore at least 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030.

The original boundary set by the government limited the potential growth of the Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge. The U.S. Department of the Interior lifted the limitations, providing more flexibility for expansion.

"Some of my best friends are cotton farmers," Jude Smith, manager of the Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge and overseer of the expansion project, said. "We're just looking to expand our conservation endeavors for wildlife and wetlands, but we're not taking it by force."

The plan is expected to take decades to reach its goal.

Landowners who choose to participate can retain ownership of their property even if they sell their development rights through a conservation easement.

"It's just an option for landowners who have been asking for this for more than a decade," Smith said. "They

don't have to sell, and we won't take the land from them."

Despite the voluntary nature of the plan, some stakeholders, including U.S. Rep. Jodey Arrington, believe the expansion will take cotton acres from farmers.

"I have shared my serious concerns with the chairman of the Natural Resources Committee, am in close communication with U.S. Fish and Wildlife, and will fight to defend West Texas against even a hint of federal overreach," Arrington said.

Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) opposes federal acquisitions of private property and supports a position of no net loss to private lands.

"The federal government should not be competing with farmers and ranchers to acquire land," said Jay Bragg, TFB associate director of Commodity and Regulatory Activities. "This competition artificially inflates land values, increasing costs or preventing farmers and ranchers from acquiring land. Government ownership also permanently removes land from the county tax rolls, forcing remaining landowners to foot the tax burden. This impacts local and regional economies."

TFB encourages members to reach out to their congressional lawmakers to cut funding for land acquisition projects.

For those considering conservation easements, TFB

recommends reading the fine print closely and consulting with an attorney, family and heirs.

## On This Day in Texas History

July 26, 1870

On this day in 1870, rancher Charles Goodnight married his sweetheart Mary Ann (Molly) Dyer. The two first met at Fort Belknap about 1864. Goodnight, a veteran cattleman, helped blaze the Goodnight-Loving Trail in 1866. His wife Molly, orphaned in the 1850s, had worked as a schoolteacher to support her younger brothers. After their wedding, the couple settled on a ranch in Colorado for a few years before moving to the Palo Duro Canyon to help

establish the JA Ranch. Charles managed the ranch, trailed cattle, and continued to upgrade the herds while Molly made a home on the solitary plains near the canyon. Her husband invented a two-horned sidesaddle so that she could more easily ride on the ranch. Though the couple had no children of their own, she became the "Mother of the Panhandle" to countless ranch hands. Her care for orphaned buffaloes encouraged her husband to establish a domestic buffalo herd. In later years the ranching couple supported numerous schools, churches, and other organizations, and they established Goodnight College in 1898.

# Water Weekly

For the week of 07/22/24

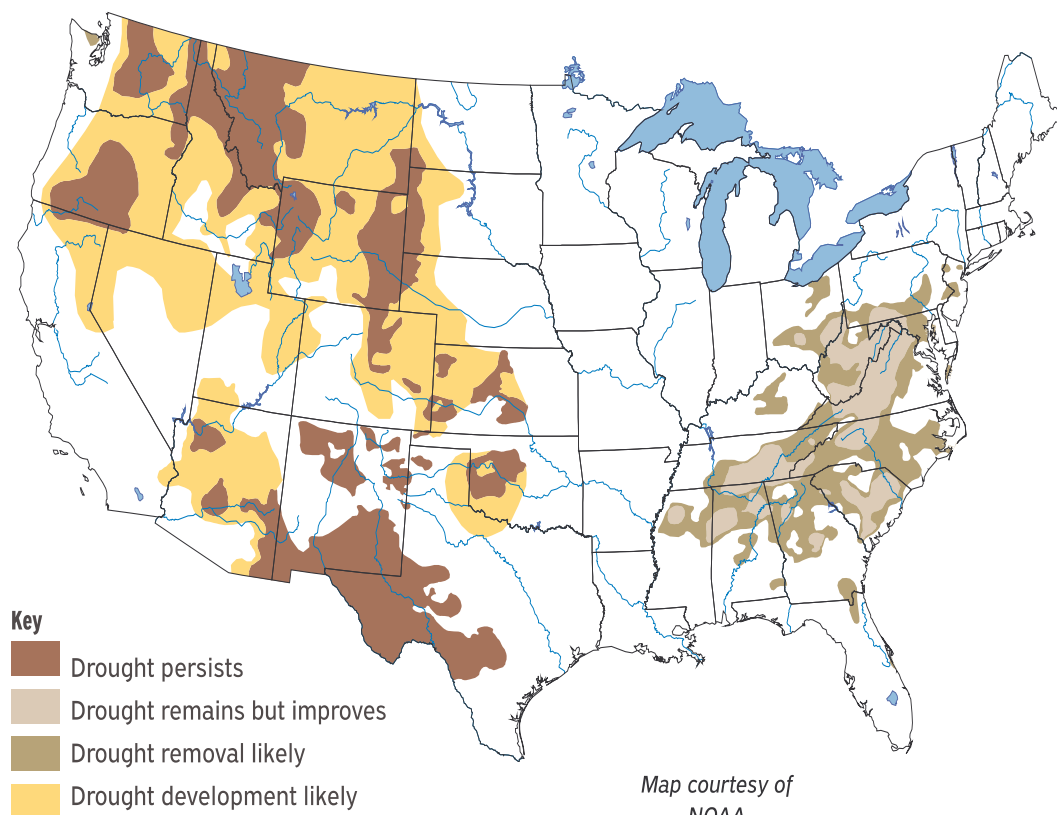
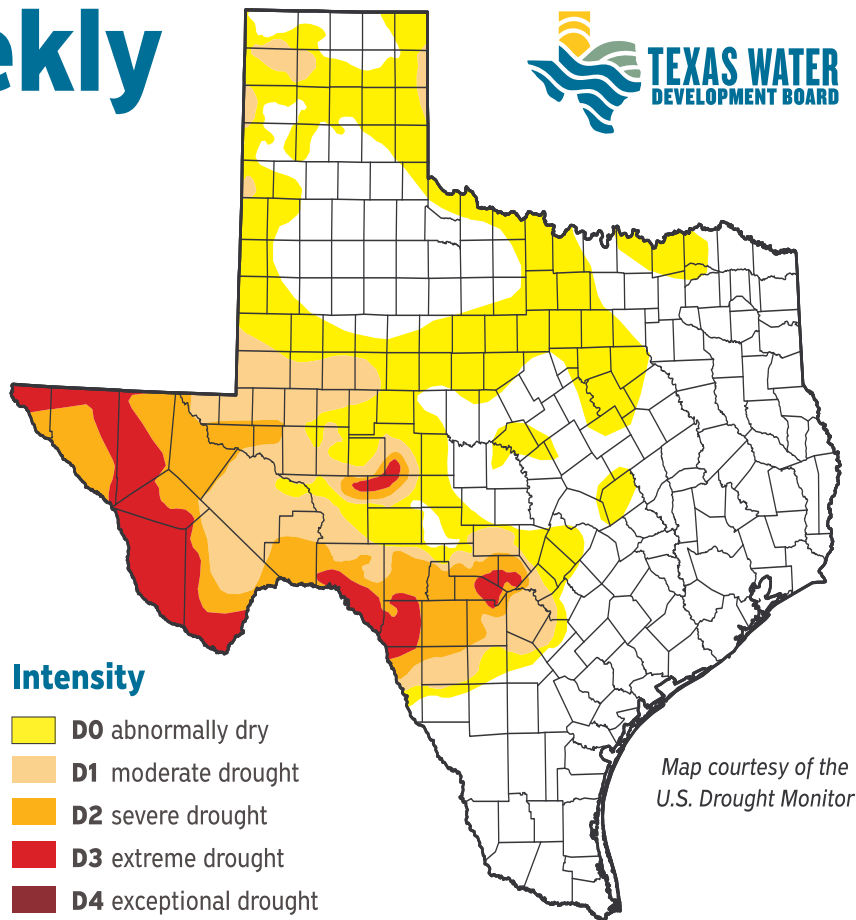


## Water conditions

The latest drought map for conditions as of July 16 shows no change in the area of the state impacted by drought. The area considered abnormally dry (and therefore susceptible to falling into drought in the next week or two) increased almost four percentage points and is now 23 percent.

## Drought conditions

- 25% now
- 25% a week ago
- 27% three months ago
- 43% a year ago



## U.S. seasonal drought outlook

Recent rains might bring some improvement to next week's drought map. But the improvements may not last. The latest seasonal drought outlook, for conditions through the end of October, anticipates no improvements or drought removal for Texas. Drought is expected to expand in the Panhandle and north-central Texas.

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

Kellen McMurry, Government Relations | [Kellen.McMurry@twdb.texas.gov](mailto:Kellen.McMurry@twdb.texas.gov) | 512-475-1589

Media Relations | [MediaRelations@twdb.texas.gov](mailto:MediaRelations@twdb.texas.gov) | 512-463-5129

[www.twdb.texas.gov](http://www.twdb.texas.gov)

