

windmill pumped a small gush of water into the concrete tank with each clanking stroke of the sucker-rod”, conjures the hellishness of unending weather dependency, and reconstructs racial and economic hierarchies. His readers watch, at sheep-shearing time, as fleeces “fold away from the animal’s body and expose the bright cream color of the inner wool”; they see how raindrops striking desiccated soil fail to soak in, but instead “swirl and run away, following the contours of the land, seeking out the draws and swales”; and they learn that a rancher low on feed will burn the spines off prickly pear cactus by making “a slow, gentle pass with the flame,” allowing the thorn “to burn back to a stub without the pear itself having time to sing.”

Representations of ranch life are everywhere in Kelton’s home. The mantelpiece shelf is taken up by five bronze cowboys on horseback, a bronze cowboy holding a coiled lariat and a bronze cowboy holding a saddle. These are awards from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame, the National Cowboy Symposium and the Western Writers of America.

Yet another mounted cowboy statuette sits on a columnar coffee table that functions as its plinth. On its base, a nameplate reads:

“Keepers of the Heritage” with Elmer Kelton

I was surprised to learn that the sculpted cowboy on the horse was Kelton himself.

Kelton would never confer the term “real working cowboy” on himself, but for two summers he was. Buck Kelton had his own cattle operation, the Lea Ranch, on 20 square miles of leased land adjacent to the McElroy Ranch. After Elmer’s junior and senior years in high school, Buck asked him to manage it. Kelton was the only full-time hand; his three younger brothers took turns coming out to help.

The work was simple. Kelton rose at dawn and fixed biscuits and coffee. He brought in the work horses and saddled his favorite. He rode the length and width of the ranch, inspecting fencelines and windmills, checking cattle for screwworm and painting disinfectant where he found blowfly bites. If a fence was broken, he’d get tools and wire from the house and bring them back in a wagon; if a windmill was broken he’d go get the McElroy’s windmill, Cliff Newland. He was on a horse all day. Without trying, he memorized the landscape.

For dinner, Kelton and his brothers ate canned red beans and fried steak—beef from their father’s herd. For variety, they trapped and roasted quail. They swam in the ranch’s stock tanks, raced horses and shot jackrabbits for practice. On a hand-crank phonograph, they played Bob Wills, Gene Autry and the Sons of the Pioneers. By the light of a kerosene lamp,

Elmer Kelton read The Ox-Bow Incident and Tombstone.

What chiefly occupied Kelton’s mind those summers were the weather, the wildlife and the progress of the seasons.

“They were probably the freest times I ever had,” he said. “I’d have been content to stay out there forever.”

Farmers, ranchers need Congress to focus on tax reform

When Congress returns from its August recess, farmers and ranchers need lawmakers to focus on tax reform in addition to the farm bill.

Many vital provisions in the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act are due to end at the close of next year. American Farm Bureau

Federation (AFBF) President Zippy Duvall said Congress must not lose sight of protecting those provisions.

“Our family farms are already burdened by inflation, increased supply costs and much, much more. These new tax burdens could put even more pressure on our farmers and ranchers and may even force them out of business,” Duvall said. “The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act passed in 2017 contains many temporary provisions that relieve some of the burdens faced by farmers and ranchers. Several of these provisions are set to expire at the end of next year, including a key estate tax exemption.”

The estate tax provision is what enables farmers to transfer the operation to the next

generation. When the new Congress is sworn in, that’s when Duvall and Farm Bureau want them to focus on taxes.

“They must address tax provisions that are going to expire at the end of 2025,” Duvall said. “It’s important that we work with lawmakers now so that they understand how current tax provisions enables our farmers to remain in business and protect their farms, so that they can afford to pass them on to the next generation.”

Currently, Americans can claim an estate tax exemption of up to \$11 million per person or \$22 million per couple (indexed for inflation).

Those levels will expire in 2025 and exemptions will return to \$5.5 million per person and

\$11 million per couple.

Knowledge about your own personal tax liabilities is key when advocating for reauthorization of these provisions.

“Arm yourself with information. Do some research or talk to your CPA to understand how these various provisions of the tax code are benefiting your operation and how your operation is utilizing the savings from the provisions enacted by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act,” Dustin Sherer, AFBF director of Government Affairs, said. “And once you do that, talk to your elected officials. Tell them your personal story and tell them what the consequences would be if these options went away. Educating elected officials with personal stories is the best advocacy there is.”

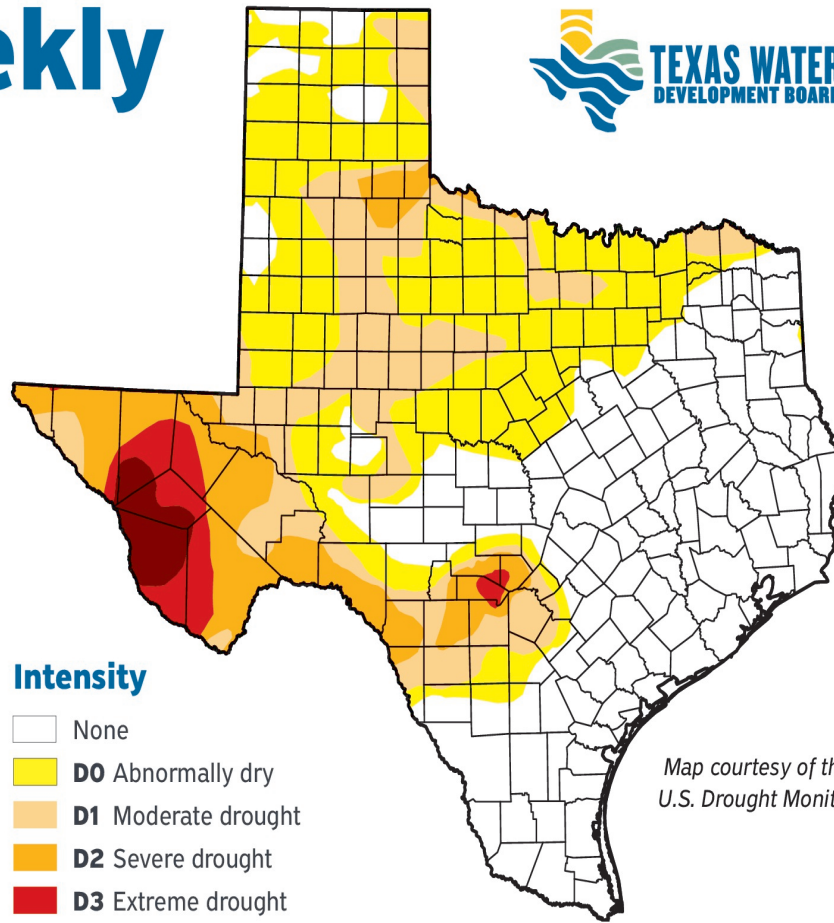
Water Weekly

For the week of 08/19/24



Water conditions

The latest drought map for conditions as of August 13 shows an increase in the area of the state impacted by drought for the second consecutive week. Large areas of the Panhandle and North Central Texas experienced one category of drought degradation in the last week.



Map courtesy of the U.S. Drought Monitor

Drought conditions

- 30%** Now
- 24%** A week ago
- 26%** Three months ago
- 71%** A year ago

Intensity

- None
- D0** Abnormally dry
- D1** Moderate drought
- D2** Severe drought
- D3** Extreme drought
- D4** Exceptional drought

2021-2024 Drought

The current drought began in fall 2021 and covered 97 percent of the state in July 2022 and 86 percent in June 2023. Drought contracted in July 2024 to its smallest extent since October 2021. In the last two weeks, it has expanded to its largest extent since mid-January 2024.

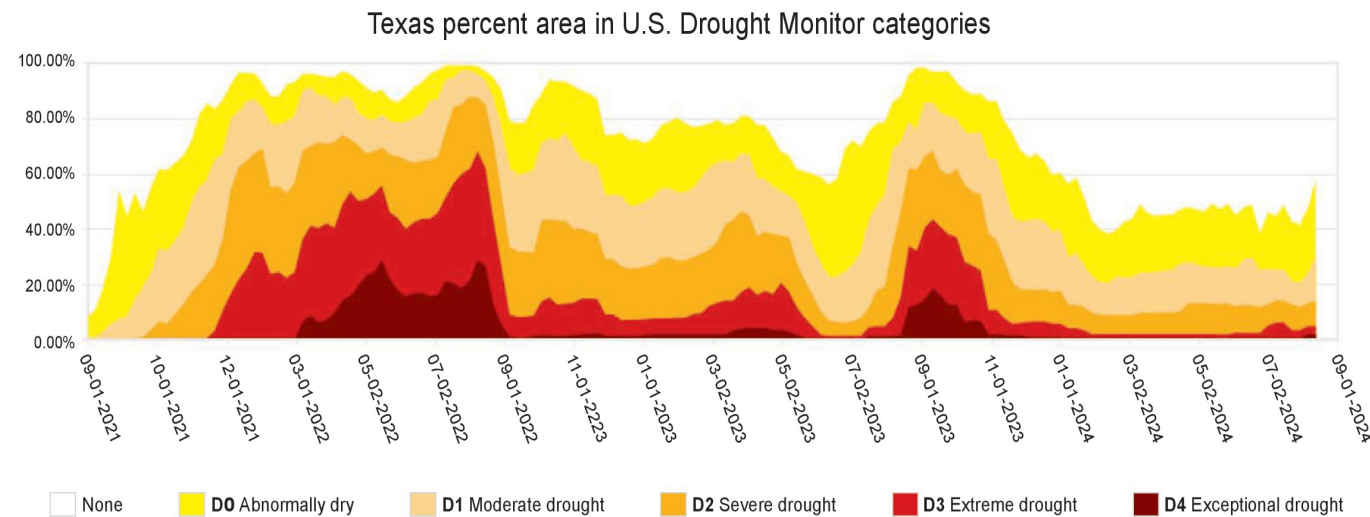


Chart courtesy of the U.S. Drought Monitor

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

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