

## **Council can't stop return to lowest drought level**

### **Despite outcry, rain forces city to leave harshest restrictions**

By Matthew Waller

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SAN ANGELO, Texas — From Facebook polls to phone calls to in-person pleas, City Council members were begged to keep San Angelo in drought level 3. The council didn't oblige at its meeting Friday, but perhaps only because a city ordinance blocked it.

So effective Monday, the city will be back under drought level 1 restrictions.

But that didn't mean council members didn't agonize over it, and initially three of them — Charlotte Farmer, Johnny Silvas and Fredd Adams — voted to keep the harshest restrictions in place even after City Attorney Lysia Bowling said the drought ordinance prohibited that.

Eventually Farmer joined Mayor Alvin New and Councilmen Kendall Hirschfeld and Paul Alexander in voting to implement drought level 1. Councilman Dwain Morrison was absent.

Bowling explained that the drought ordinance requires the city to go to a different level because of the amount of available water after last week's heavy rain.

"You don't have the discretion to remain in a different drought stage," Bowling said.

The ordinance would have to be changed before the council can impose greater restrictions, Bowling said.

"We've got an update on our water supply status," city Water Utilities Director Will Wilde said in a presentation to start the meeting.

He showed aerial shots of San Angelo-area lakes, and before-and-after shots of the lakes, with water now covering spots that had been dry and cracked.

The city has about 22 months of water available in reservoirs. That puts the city in the category of drought level 1, since it has less than 24 months of water left.

In level 1, watering is allowed once every two weeks from November through March at any hour, and twice a week from April to October between 6 p.m. and noon.

Lower surcharges for water used over the base amount will be effective with November billing.

Lake Nasworthy is still about 1 foot below the normal level, Wilde said. It received about 1,300 acre-feet of water after last week's rain. One acre-foot is about 326,000 gallons.

Twin Buttes Reservoir got about 8,100 acre-feet, a level not seen since September 2011, Wilde said. O.C. Fisher Reservoir, which had been dry, now has about 2,000 acre-feet, the most since January 2011. E.V. Spence Reservoir in Robert Lee, which was nearly dry, got an increase of about 27,500 acre-feet.

O.H. Ivie Reservoir, San Angelo's primary supply, added about 77,700 acre-feet. June 2011 was the last time Ivie had that much water.

The total inflow was at 116,767 acre-feet. Spence totals weren't used in the calculation because getting water to the city from Spence isn't readily possible.

"Just because we have the water doesn't mean we should use the water," Adams said. The rain "could be a license to abuse" the city's water resources.

Hirschfeld said he wanted to back up just to drought level 2.

"This is just buying us some time," Hirschfeld said of the rains.

Farmer said she has received numerous phone calls "begging" the city to stay at drought level 3.

"We need to be very cautious about this gift," Farmer said.

She also expressed concern about residents becoming confused because of going back and forth in drought levels.

Farmer asked for an explanation about the process used in deciding how the water supply is determined.

Wilde said he takes the city's supply requirement and determines how much can be drawn from O.H. Ivie, then subtracts an amount from local reservoirs because of evaporation to calculate how much is left.

Alexander advocated exiting drought level 3. "There are jobs on the line," he said.

Alexander launched into a defense of San Angelo's water situation and potential. He said he sees the drought as "a blessing" that has forced the city to look for better water resources, given that the Hickory Aquifer isn't going to provide enough water and that it contains radium.

Alexander ran a straw poll that attracted more than 90 respondents on his city of San Angelo Facebook page. Many wanted the council to do what the ordinance required, but about 60 percent wanted to stay in drought level 3. He said the present ordinance "is flawless. I don't see a problem with the drought level system yet."

He said he wants to be proactive with water, minimizing losses, such as by consolidating water in reservoirs to reduce evaporation and reusing water, such as effluent waste water. He said Midland and Abilene also are working with San Angelo to look at other water solutions. He said the city also is looking at saving stormwater.

Alexander did suggest one change to the ordinance: automatically consolidating water when there is a drought level in effect, and putting in pipes to reduce water losses in the transfer from the south to north pool of Twin Buttes.

Alexander said the city is using less water than it did in the 1990s; he said the city used 23,314 acre-feet in 1998 and now uses about 15,000 acre-feet.

"I live and breathe water as a servant for the city," Alexander said. "We don't need to lose jobs" by staying in drought level 3 he said, referring to landscaping businesses being affected when outside watering is prohibited in drought level 3.

Silvas said he would support a change in the ordinance and that he approves of restricting outside watering to once every two weeks, as specified in drought level 2.

New said there are many reasons to go to drought level 1, among them the requirement to do so by ordinance.

"I think that causes a real loss of confidence in what we do here" if the ordinance isn't adhered to, New said.

New also said Wilde was being conservative in his calculations and projections, given that the city isn't considering Spence as a water source for now, for instance.

"I don't think today is the day we're supposed to be" changing the ordinance, New said.

New made the motion to enact drought level 1, and Hirschfeld seconded it.

In public comment, Stephen Brown, the vice chairman of the city's water advisory board, said the city is being conservative. He said the Colorado River Municipal River District probably would use Spence and allow for more water from Ivie.

He also said the weather patterns are changing to bring about wetter falls and springs.

"You will see Twin Buttes gain between now and April," Brown said. "I think the ordinance is clear and the mayor is exactly correct."

Jerry Sea, a San Angelo resident, said he is for keeping drought level 3 in place.

"Now that we have it, you're ready to spend it," he said about getting water.

Steve Reisdorfer said he has lived in San Angelo more than 20 years and works at a local store. He hears people talk a lot about drought.

He proposed implementing drought level 2.

"I don't want to see San Angelo look like the thief of water," as compared with other communities in West Texas, he said.

Pam Bladine with the Chicken Farm Art Center said, "Let's recognize that we live in a desert," which may not be the place for lush lawns, she said.

She said there's a greater awareness of the need to conserve water now and she worries that it will fade. "There is a larger picture," she said.

<http://www.gosanangelo.com/news/2012/oct/05/city-moves-to-drought-level-1-despite-outcry/>

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