

RECENT RAINS WERE GREAT HELP BUT DROUGHT LINGERS

The heavy rains that swept much of the state in recent days must have caused many a drought-weary Texan to breathe a sigh of relief. Not only did several long-receding lakes begin to rise, but some areas got so much rain that flood warnings were issued.

So, does this mean the drought is finally coming to an end? In some areas, possibly, but in others, the answer is, sadly, not yet. While the rains went a long way towards breaking this record dry spell in some areas, the drought has been so severe in places that much more rain will have to fall to end it.



The rainfall was a blessing to some lakes in the Brazos River Authority system. Lake Granbury, which had dropped at one point to 7 feet low, filled in about 24 hours. In fact, so much runoff flowed into the lake that the Brazos River Authority had to open gates at the dam to release large quantities of water to keep the lake from flooding the town and to protect the dam's integrity. Also in the Brazos basin, Lake Waco, which is on the Bosque River and not part of the Authority system, rose more than 5 feet and is once again full. Lake Aquilla also filled up as did Lake Proctor, which was last full in June 2008.



However, as beneficial as the rains were, they did not come close to filling several Brazos basin lakes, said Brad Brunett, Authority water services manager. North of Waco, Lake Whitney rose almost nine feet but remains about 6 feet low. Possum Kingdom, Granger, and Limestone remain 3 to 6 feet low. Stillhouse Hollow, Belton, Somerville and Georgetown remain 9 to 17 feet low.

“We have been receiving periodic rainfall since October 2011,” Brunett said. These rains helped ‘prime the pump’ to the point that we finally saw some significant runoff in parts of the basin with this most recent rainfall event. Hopefully this trend will continue.”

Lake levels are not the only way officials determine whether a drought is sputtering to an end. Another important factor is the amount of moisture in the soil.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), before the most recent rains, much of the Brazos basin was suffering under heavy rainfall deficits. While this ranged from 3 to 6 inches low for much of the basin, towards the Gulf, large areas needed between 9 and 15 inches of rain to return soil moisture to normal levels.

However, the National Weather Service shows over the last week, with few exceptions these lower-basin areas with the greatest rainfall needs got no more than 3 inches of rain. Large swaths received 2 inches or less.

Large parts of the upper Brazos basin also have not made up needed rainfall. Much of this area needed 3 to 6 inches of rain to bring ground moisture back to normal. While some of the area to the West of Possum Kingdom Lake saw up to 3 inches of rain in recent days, most received 2 inches or less.

Rainfall this winter has clearly exceeded official's expectations, and any more will certainly bring that much closer to ending the drought. Even if additional rain isn't enough to make up for losses over the last year or more, they will go a long way towards helping us all through the upcoming hot Texas summer.

The Brazos River Authority provides links to several river and lake level gauges on our Web site. You can find these by clicking [here](#). If you would like to see a chart showing all the lakes and their percentage full, please click [here](#).