

Winter storm puts focus on future planning

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As so many of us continue to navigate our way through COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, distances, securing vaccinations, and more, Valentine weekend arrived in a whirlwind!

In a matter of hours and then days, waves of snow with ice blanketed our entire region with accompanying temperatures in the low teens and single digits. Photos and experiences were being accumulated for the generations. An arctic vortex whirled its way to surround and cover us with wintry mischief most unusual for our region. And, behold, the weather phenomenon remained like a trapped bubble providing temperatures rare and damaging.

This rare intense winter for our Hill Country and state have brought discoveries, damages, needs and endurance with a list of challenges going forward. From private family and personal circumstances requiring repairs and modifications to public policy matters galore at multiple levels of governance, the futuring processes are underway. It will neither be easy nor inexpensive. However, what emerges will be so necessary! The agility and innovativeness of some will assist in the development of new thinking for protection and preventiveness. The crash or near collapse of other systems and infrastructure will cry out for attention and measures forthcoming. Mature thoughtfulness and interactive consultations will assist us if we can avoid the pitfalls of blaming, name calling, shouting matches or worse.

There are heroic folks in leadership and neighborliness we could identify in good number. We'll allow them to go unnamed for now, but perhaps for celebration in the future. As for some who sought to take inappropriate advantage in some way, they will face moments of accountability in coming months.

Where Karen and I live, it seems the birds and wildlife peer curiously as if to check on us! They'd become acquainted with our constant presence during the viral pandemic and seemed to take note of additional behavior changes as the arctic vortex made new and sometimes damaging demands with its extended stay. We'll get to find our "new rhythm" in time with numerous adjustments, modifications and discoveries. Perhaps most important will be a fresh measure of neighborliness and patient kindness with many others.

Meanwhile, some notable matters have become public to inform and guide discernments from home localities to state and region. For those of us in the Comal County Conservation Alliance, alarms sounded with the dramatic drops in the aquifer levels most of us depend upon for good water.

Just the quick mention of "pervasive leaks" in water lines inside homes, businesses and public spaces as well as burst water source pumps and pipelines gave hint that our already stressed water supplies would become more troubled. Add to that an electrical grid in a rare panic mode of overloading demands. Meanwhile, public inoculation and food distribution centers required closure or drastic modifications at the same time that roadways for supplies were severely compromised or closed completely.

The extended freeze brought implications for future planning and improvements. Can we assess where it is best not to place new home and commerce in aquifer recharge and watershed areas? The rapid multiplication of "straws" from new wells large and small translate into ominous overload of the aquifers (Edwards & Trinity), finite sources of pristine waters! Keeping recharge areas clean and increasing protected set aside acres make for wise planning and oversight.

What has seemed smart now becomes urgently necessary! Let's take to heart setting aside for protection and future generations precious acres before they're gone and repurposed.

One piece of the discussion is scheduled for this Tuesday, March 9 from 6 to 7 PM. Look for registration details to Zoom in (www.comalconservation.org).

Here's to recovery with a welcome turn toward spring!

