

## DEEP DROUGHTS HAVE CONSIDERABLE CONSEQUENCES!

It was many decades ago that I became introduced to the term drought. It was our good fortune as a family to spend summers and numerous weekends at our grandparents' coastal farmstead. A stretch of "very dry months" in that otherwise tropical zone required attention to domestic animals and plantings quite different from the ordinary of afternoon showers and occasional sustained rainy days. Grandpa explained that several of the outdoor occupants modified their productivity and activities with drought. Foraging was allowed far beyond the close-in areas that usually provided ample satisfying feed sources. My own activities took on a special focus. In one corner near the fence line a low area provided a fascinating pond with its own whirl of activity. The tadpoles, frogs, tiny perch and reptile population had much less water as their life source receded. I asked for a handful of index cards I took with me and began to note diminished numbers and modified activities among my friendly critters. All of this was a consequence of that new word, "drought." That conversation was dashed away with a 1947 tropical event before hurricanes were given names. Due to damaged access it was awhile before we could resume our visits.

Now I find myself in another drought circumstance of considerable consequence. We are experiencing a year of significant precipitation deprivation. Noteworthy was the long string of record challenging century marks of scorching summer temperatures. Even more important on the acreage where we live are the consequential changes due to the extended dry circumstances. When the dog and I walk along our drive or follow a trail into the wooded patches, her paws raise four clouds of dust. Upon return home she is a powder puff of dry dusts. Pasture and wildlife have little for grazing and have shed body weight. Water sources are lower and, in some places, nonexistent. There's conversation about what I term "well worries." Aquifers are dramatically down. Some regional riverbeds are completely dry. The shiver when one looks at drought charts with Comal and Guadalupe counties as bullseye are not good. So, what can we expect?

We can discuss water policies and measures on another occasion. On Wednesday 9 November from 6-7:30 p.m. at McKenna Center, Dr. Todd Votteler, President of Collaborative Water Resolution, will help us understand the topic, "Texas Drought: The New Normal?" He'll point us to exceedingly helpful resources and information about water supplies and challenges for our precious and currently parched Texas Hill Country.

This timely conversation takes place as open green space shrinks almost overnight with those eager to live in the neighboring spaces remaining. Our New Braunfels City Manager recently pointed out that the city itself has fewer than 6,000 such acres remaining. Area Hill Country municipalities are feeling the pinch as well. While some precious parcels of Comal County remain, it seems high, perhaps urgent, time to find a way to make long term decisions for alternative uses beyond simple development. Nearby counties are taking measures to support landowners who desire to set aside parcels over aquifer recharge and in significant watershed locations. Often these take the form of conservation easements. In drought time we find additional incentives to initiate such public policy discussions. Are you game to join such conversation? Come November 9<sup>th</sup> if possible.

Recent drive-by observations have revealed some new home building that seeks to establish drought-defying lawns and landscape inappropriate for thirsty acres. Certainly there's a choice other than rolls of turf requiring excess watering. Think about it!