

Drought wanes as new year dawns

Kyle is latest of Central Texas cities and water suppliers to lift mandatory watering restrictions.

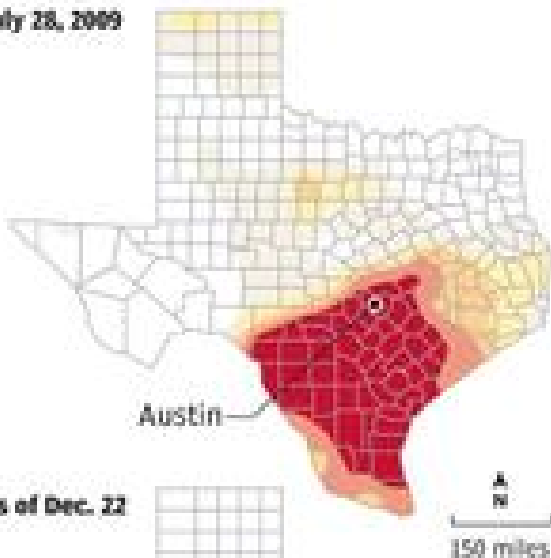
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By Asher Price

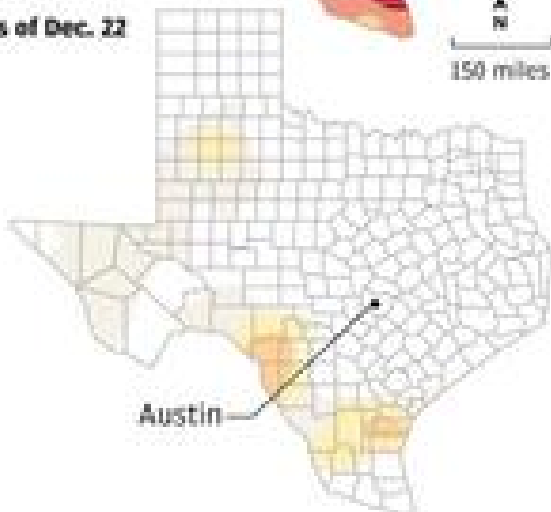
An end to the drought



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As of Dec. 22



AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Once upon a time, it seemed as if rain would never again fall on Central Texas.

Churches prayed for precipitation. Lake levels dropped so much that long-submerged cars reappeared. Trees shed their leaves. Cattle grew gaunt, and hay was hard to come by.

But a wet autumn changed all that, and, in the latest sign that the drought is over, the City of Kyle announced last week that it was ending watering restrictions .

"With all our water sources rising and with demand down, we decided to lift the restrictions," said Jerry Hendrix , a spokesman for Kyle, which gets its water largely from the Edwards Aquifer and the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority .

In the past month or so, some of the major water providers in the Austin area have announced drought conditions were over, or at least substantially eased.

At its meeting Dec. 17 , the board of the Barton Springs/Edwards Aquifer Conservation District , which serves more than 50,000 people in northern Hays and southern Travis counties, declared an end to the drought. Groundwater levels in the Barton Springs

portion of the Edwards Aquifer had recovered, and spring flow at Barton Springs was robust.

The no-drought announcement had been a long time coming: The district declared a groundwater drought on June 23, 2008, at one point demanding that water suppliers cut their water use from the Barton Springs part of the aquifer by 30 percent .

In no-drought status, groundwater users are encouraged to maintain conservation practices, but water use restrictions are lifted.

"We have eased out of the drought, but we didn't rocket out of it," said Robin Gary, spokeswoman for the district. "We still need to get a lot more recharge to (replenish) the aquifer so next summer we're not in a drought."

The Edwards Aquifer Authority , which manages groundwater supplies for 1.7 million people, decided in mid-October to lift limits .

More than 1 million Central Texans get their water from the Colorado River, and in mid-November , the board of the Lower Colorado River Authority released customers from mandatory restrictions. The river authority's chief municipal customers soon responded.

In November, the Austin Water Utility eased limits, but certain rules remain in place: Commercial properties and apartment buildings may use sprinklers only on Tuesdays and Fridays; single-family homes with odd addresses may use sprinklers only on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and those with even addresses only on Thursdays and Sundays. No outdoor sprinkling is allowed between 10 a.m. and 7 p.m., but hand watering is permitted anytime.

The City of Cedar Park, which gets its water from the Colorado, lifted its restrictions earlier this month.

The river's major reservoirs, Lakes Travis and Buchanan, continue to recover. At their low point, in mid-September, they dipped below 40 percent of their full capacity. As of Tuesday , the LCRA reported that they had recovered to 58 percent of capacity.

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