

LRWA Watershed Report

Editor/Layout:/Occasional Author
Linda Fawcett

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THE NORTH LLANO GETS HIT WITH A SECOND 2025 FLOOD - *short-lived, not quite as high, but FAST!*

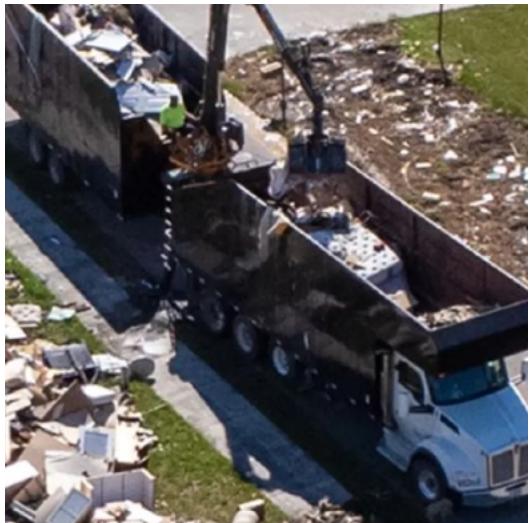
On November 20, the North Llano River rose to another significant flood stage brought on by predicted rainfall in the area. Landowner rain reports in the area ranged from 2 inches or so on the North Llano to as much as 9 inches in the Fort McKavett area. A flood watch and flood warnings kept folks off the banks, but most were otherwise not expecting such a big rise on the river, maybe because fall rains had not so far saturated the ground as had happened prior to the big N. Llano flood of July 13. Yet many North Llano landowners, especially those downstream from where Copperas Creek enters the river, noted an extreme velocity of floodwater reminiscent of July 13, even if the river didn't rise quite as high. Based on the nearest USGS gauge, the river stage at 7:30 pm was an estimated 20' at this spot (see right bottom photo), from 8.5' that morning, compared to an est. 24' high back in July (middle photo), with water flow (cubic feet per second) on Nov. 20 going from 18.2 cfs at 12:01am, to a peak of 27,600 cfs at 7:40pm.



ABOVE Top to Bottom: 1) North Llano, full but back within its banks, about .5 mile west of 10-Mile Bridge (2nd crossing) along 1674 West, Nov. 21; 2) Same location: July 13; 3) Same spot: Nov. 20. Note **red marker** to orient the same tree in each picture.

LEFT: Copperas Creek, Nov. 20, 1674 North.

The North Llano and its streams: Over-zealous clean up from the July 13 flood likely made the flood of November 20 worse.



Observed and commented on by landowners along Ranch Rd 1674 West and North over the last couple of months, were what seemed to be a steady parade of black double-trailers with brush vegetation, much of it green, sticking out of their open tops (similar to picture at left, a FEMA truck used after a recent hurricane). A few inquiries and confirmations from nearby landowners, particularly along Copperas Creek, reported that indeed FEMA grants had been offered, accepted and completed on multiple properties straddling the creek. Very selective flood cleanup might be needed, of course, but unfortunately this cleanup was done in the same way as what happened along much of the Guadalupe River after its devastating July 4 flood.

Being selective would have meant leaving fallen trees where they lay in the streambed (one of the best ways to protect and stabilize a bank during a future flood). Similarly, it is best to leave much of the "flood trash" seen caught in surviving trees and bushes for the same reason, with the additional benefit of decomposition to enrich the soil. But instead, FEMA contractors, who may not have known anything about riparian care—and more importantly, were being paid by the ton (!)—had plenty of incentive to aggressively remove as much flood debris as possible in the river bed and surrounding riparian zone.

Wrong. There was one report on Copperas Creek of even pulling up surviving live trees (!) in the river bed until being caught and told not to do that. This kind of "cleanup" leaves few riparian plants to hold back future flood waters, such as native streamside trees, bushes, switchgrass, etc, even our "beloved" baccharis.

On November 20, it seems Mother Nature gave the lower North Llano a mini-demonstration of the results of this mis-handling of flood debris. **THEREFORE**, it is now time for a re-education of the importance of riparian zones and why they are critically important! And to re-plant! (keep reading...)

THE IMPORTANCE OF NATURALLY OCCURRING RIPARIAN ZONES

First rule of thumb is to let the river do what it will and let it largely heal itself after floods. **Sky Lewey**, beloved former director of Resource Protection and Education, Nueces River Authority:

...rivers have to be given enough room to operate, they need room to meander, they need room to flood, they need those flood plains so slower water can get out, slow down and drop sediments..."

Another way to re-iterate the importance of maintaining the natural riparian zone on your property is poetically expressed by **Bill Neiman**, owner of

Native American Seed, from his introduction to the Fall 2025 catalog...

"Riparian Sponge - Over and over, rivers teach us that her protective clothing of plants must never be thoughtlessly removed. She refuses to submit to the idea that her clothes should be tailored into a "nice yard." Instead, she wants us to understand her need for what her closest human friends call a "riparian sponge."

Riparian describes the meandering zone surrounding the riverbanks. These areas extend out from normal water levels... sometimes so far that flood plains mingle with foothills.

In trying to understand a riparian sponge, think of the role that plants play in keeping our ancient river sisters properly clothed. Plants too are good teachers, and they work closely in tandem with the rivers. Those with the highest stability are always seen in healthy riparian zones. Their deep and fibrous multi-functional roots store water during times of plenty... and slowly release it when times of drought return. Hence the “sponge.”

But those roots are also anchoring and interlocking with each other, with the giant ancient trees, and the land itself. During times of raging floodwaters these riparian plants bind together with the trees to hold the banks in place and help prevent the land from tearing.

Close your eyes.

Picture a wall of water pushing over tall, leafy, wide-bladed grasses onto the next bunch-grass, then onto the next, and so on down the riverbank. Rushing water lays them down, each overlapping the next. **Taller grasses function exactly like the shingles on a roof to shed water flowing over them.** They protect the ground from violent, turbulent digging. Above them, the interlocked bushes and trees are surrounded at ground level with tall native grasses. Together they work as a living shield to protect the earth during floods and to slow the velocity of the raging torrents. This important work cannot be done by the trees alone. A wide diversity of native plants evolved with the river over thousands of years. They know exactly



how to live right here, without much extra care. When floodwaters recede, riparian plants slowly rise back up and life goes on. When the water and mud dry out, they simply stand back up and keep on.

From time to time, with or without healthy riparian areas, large old ancient trees may fall and be swept down in the raging waters. Yet, the rivers have a plan. Big, downed wood is but another crucial element of her long-term health. Pushing those ancient trees downstream, bobbling along the rapids, then quietly hustled over the flat by fast-moving waters with all the flotsam until each reaches a destination of her choosing. She aligns and positions her big wood in such a way to provide for her future needs... they serve like boulders to break the velocity and forces of future floods. Next time the river sends a torrent of water down, these hulks of ancient big wood are still there. Plants will re-establish on the backside of these huge, protective, waterlogs. Sometimes they create deep pools behind them, where fish can grow and thrive. Sometimes they redirect and turn the flow of her water, allowing the river to meander and adapt as she will.

And all those drifts and piles of smaller bits and pieces...? All the live and dead plants, sticks, leaves and ground-up tree bark; gravel, silt, and sands are part of her plan, too. That's her way of spreading good compost that quickly converts to organic soil. Those are her special homegrown seeds. Native plants naturally being spread out in special ways along her banks.”

That's just what rivers do. But, what is it that people do? “Everything we do on the land is eventually reflected in a river. That's why it's so important to think about the whole landscape, how big and little pieces fit together” - Sky Lewey.

Planting Tips to Preserve Riparian Zones

Simply go to the Hill Country Alliance link below: tons of good information!

Especially take a good look at the PDFs: "Woody Debris Management..." and "Healing in the Hill Country: A Guide to Flood Recovery"

<https://hillcountryalliance.org/our-work/water-resources/riparian-management/>

AND, FOR IN-PERSON ADVICE... MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

The Llano River Watershed Alliance will partner with the **La Cuna Center** for a **SPRING 2026 WORKSHOP** in Castell, Texas!

Saturday, APRIL 18, at the Castell General Store

10am - 3pm, \$25 includes lunch.

Speakers & Activities:

- **Steve Nelle** (Wildlife Biologist/ Natural Resource Specialist, retired from 35 years with NRCS): An Ethic of Care
- **Michelle Bertelsen** (Senior Ecologist, Blackland Collective): Land Management For Water Quality
- **Carol Flueckiger** (M.F.A., Art Dept., Texas Tech University): Visualizing Sustainability, an Eco-Art Workshop open to children and non-artists.
- **Brian Wright** (Ranch Manager, White Ranch, near Mason, President: Central Basin Prescribed Burn Association): The Benefits of Prescribed Fire.
- **Accompanying Art Exhibition: *After the Rain***, La Cuna Center Gallery (across the street from the Castell Store). *BELOW: aerial view of prescribed burn artwork, 2025.*



VOTERS APPROVE PROP 4 - DEDICATING \$20B TO WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Texans on November 4 approved a funding milestone for water infrastructure. The constitutional amendment contained in Proposition 4 has become official. This amendment dedicates up to \$1 billion of sales tax revenue per year from 2027-2047 to the Texas Water Fund. This is a similar mechanism that voters approved for highways through Proposition 7 in 2015. [Read the full story here](#). Proposition 4 (Prop 4) was a state-wide vote on a proposed constitutional amendment, dedicating up to \$1 billion per year from existing sales tax revenue to the Texas Water Fund for 20 years.

WHY IT MATTERS. Texas is one of the fastest growing states in the nation and the 8th strongest economy in the world. Meeting its needs requires complex and costly water supply and infrastructure. Over \$150 billion of water, wastewater, and flood infrastructure projects have been identified to meet our needs in the next 20 years.

WHAT IT WILL DO. Dedicate up to \$1 billion/year from sales tax revenue to the Texas Water Fund.

WHAT IT WON'T DO. Increase taxes or fees.



DID YOU KNOW...?

Upland prairie “sponge plants” like Little Bluestem, Indiangrass, and Sideoats Grama provide best-use cover for prairie hillsides. Even during droughts, their roots simply grow deeper to catch available water. These roots are then used to catch every drop of rainwater to feed the aquifers, which feed the springs, and then the rivers.

(In case you're wondering, in the picture at right, that arm belongs to a grown man, not a child!)

Temporary Water Permits: A Hole In the Bucket? *by glen coleman*

Most readers have some general familiarity with basic water rights along Texas' watersheds, a system of allocation with roots stretching back to the Spanish, wherein a landowner or entity "holds" a permanent right to a set amount of water that an owner can then "call" based on their seniority. Broadly speaking, the LCRA owns and manages rights to the natural flow of the Llano River, and its 2020 Water Management Plan, sanctioned by the TCEQ, reflects a pretty close accounting of rights and flows along the Texas Colorado River basin.

Except, maybe not.

There is a very good chance that you have recently seen large water trucks filling their chambers from access points along the basin and dispersing that water for dust control, concrete, sanitation, or other commercial uses. How much water? Good luck.

These allotments are often acquired via a device called a "Temporary Water Permit," and the volumetric accounting for these permits appears to exist outside of the general water rights system. Construction companies will often secure these permits for a week or two to lay dust or set concrete, then move on to the next project.

How do I git me one?

Obtaining these permits is pretty straightforward. Applications are available on the TCEQ website and require the applicant to specify the time period (seldom more than 90 days), the exact location (GPS coordinates and text description), and the maximum amount of water intended for use.

The Alliance leadership recently examined one permit along the basin (construction: dust suppression) and actually found a high degree of scrutiny by the TCEQ in advance of releasing the permit. A staff member

had physically visited the site and confirmed water flows at the designated location.

What we could not find was any systematic accounting of the amount of water removed by these temporary permits in any given year. Given that most permits expire in 90 days, and that the availability of surface water is confirmed before the permit is released, the TCEQ is not really tracking these amounts. No correspondence between the TCEQ and LCRA appears to exist that tracks or accounts for these withdrawals.

Here's the problem,

We know from anecdote and observation that many users simply cheat, quietly paying off a landowner for river access and helping themselves to the goods. How would you know if an activity was illegal? How would a sheriff's deputy or game warden know?

The TCEQ does not require permit holders to have a copy of their permits handy, nor does the TCEQ make those permits available upon request. A concerned neighbor or river user must literally file a public information request with the TCEQ and then potentially wait days for a response. It's pretty ineffective.

Nevertheless, ask.

A driver will normally refer you to the construction company they are driving for, and it is well within your rights to call their office and politely inquire. Calls of this nature are not unusual, and often, the company will confirm that they have a permit. They may decline if they wish, however, and it could then take two weeks to truly find out.

Sometimes that's the best we can do. Every little bit counts, and creating a culture of care and respect for the river is the best way to motivate responsible water use.



MEET JD KIDWELL, Return of a former LRWA BOARD MEMBER!



"I'm originally from San Antonio and Boerne. Graduated from Southwest Texas State in 1969 and spent the next 40 years selling environmental equipment and services to the private and public sectors. We sold our business in 2001 and moved to our property in Kimble County.

I was one of the founding board members of South Llano Watershed Alliance, served as president of Kimble County Economic Development Corporation, and served on the Kimble County Tourist Board and Kimble County Hospital Board when the new hospital and clinic were constructed.

We sold our property in 2013 and moved to Mason, Texas where I serve on the boards of Mason County Habitat for Humanity, Seaquist House Foundation, and Mason County Museum Board.

I believe the Llano River is the best of what the Texas Hill Country has to offer and I want to encourage the people of Mason County to reconnect with their river and watershed." -- **JD Kidwell**

MEET HOLLY HARRISON, new LRWA BOARD MEMBER!



Holly L. Harrison has recently joined the LRWA Board, bringing a wealth of experience and a deep connection to the geological sciences. After retiring from a career in the oil and gas industry in 2015, Holly now lives on a rock bluff above the Llano River where she enjoys watching the river go through its natural geological processes of flooding and healing.

With 35 years of experience as

a petroleum geologist, Holly's career has taken her to Denver, Colorado—where she worked for Amoco—and Houston, Texas, with positions at Phillips and BP. She holds a BS in Geology from the University of Delaware and an MA in geology from the University of Texas at Austin. Her academic and professional focus was sedimentary geology, including both clastic and carbonate systems. Holly has technical expertise in reservoir geology, engineering, and development, and has multiple exploration discoveries. She was the Technical Advisor for BP on subsalt drilling hazards.

Holly is part owner of a property at Ivy Falls, on the main Llano River. Together with her husband, Richard, and their canine companion, Hondo, she spends time swimming and looking at rocks. Her interest in geology extends to her family, which includes five professional women geologists.

Holly has two children: her daughter, who obtained both a BS and MS in geology and currently resides in Fairbanks, Alaska, and her son, who holds an ME degree and works in Banning, California. Holly and her family enjoy camping and traveling in their truck camper, having driven to Alaska nine times.

YES, THOSE HUGE 765-kV TRANSMISSION LINES PLANNED THROUGHOUT THE HILL COUNTRY ARE STILL "IN THE WORKS"...

For the Latest Information and "What Can You Do?"

<https://www.preservethehillcountry.com/>

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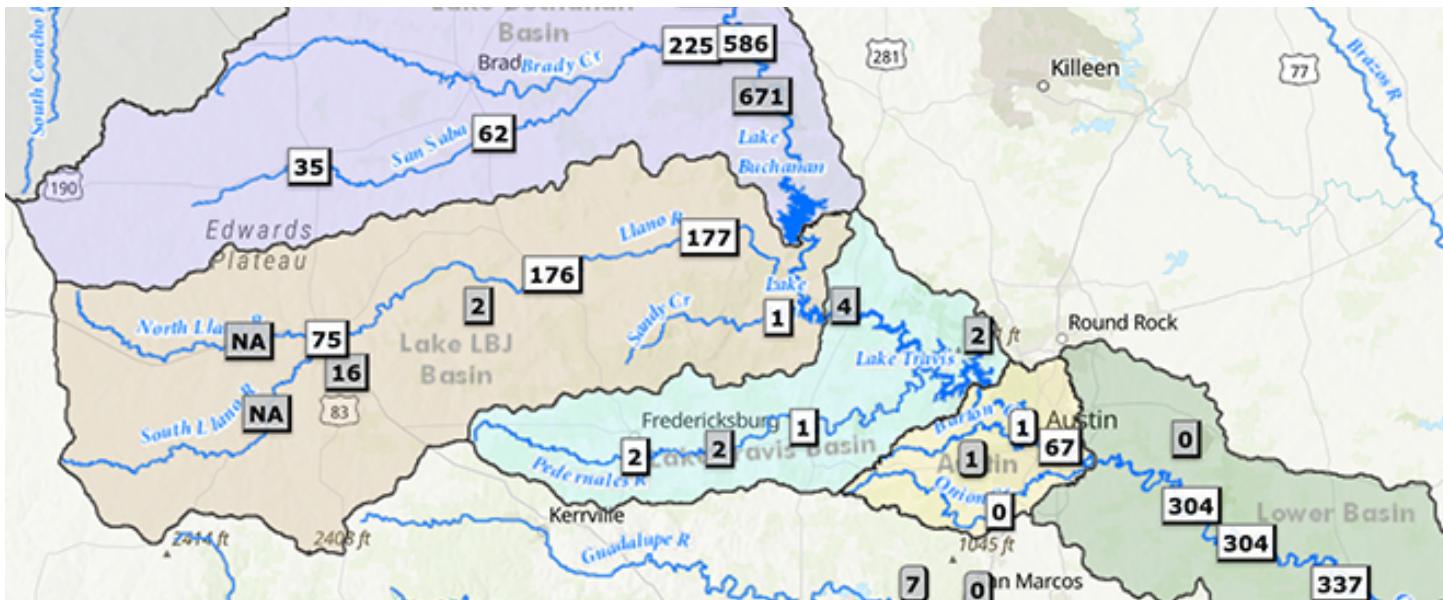
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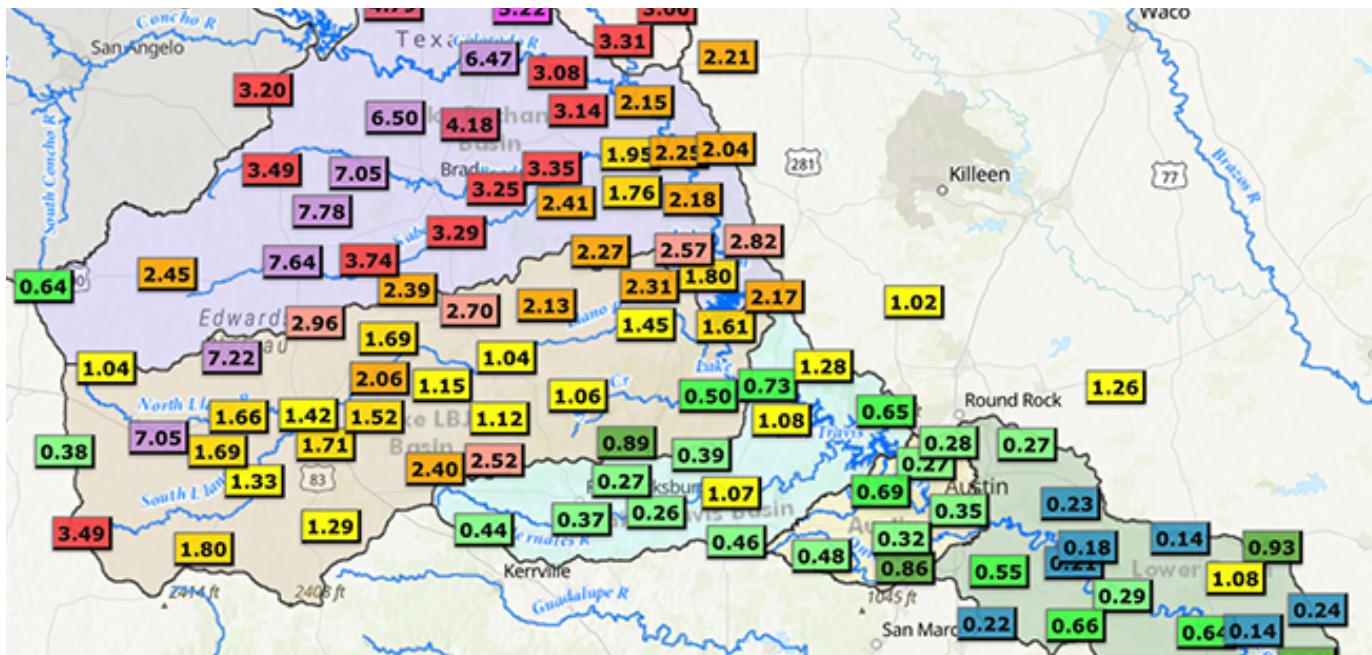
LCRA Hydromet

Streamflow as of

11.28.25



Lower Colorado River Authority's Hydromet is a system of more than 275 automated river and weather gauges throughout the lower Colorado River basin in Texas. The website displays gauges maintained by the City of Austin and USGS. The Hydromet provides near-real-time data on streamflow, river stage, rainfall totals, temperature and humidity. <https://hydromet.lcra.org>



LCRA Hydromet Rainfall last 28 Days as of 11.28.25