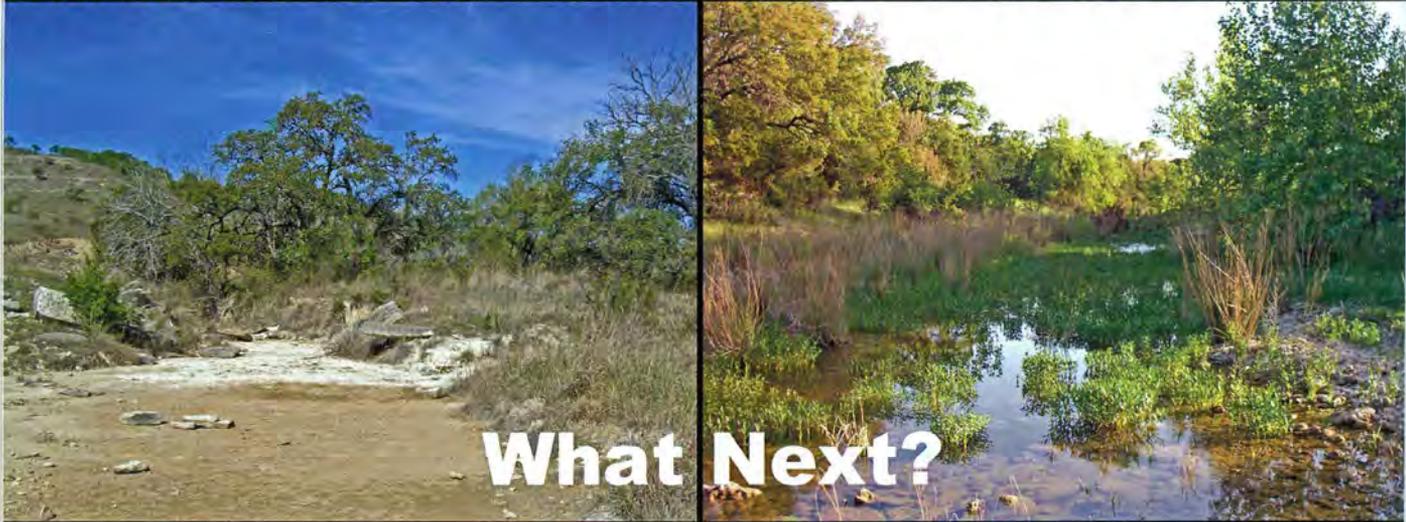


MANAGEMENT NOTES May through August



By Paul D. Ohlenbusch of *Grass by Design* (www.grassbydesign.com/tda)

Nature has shown us that things can change very quickly! As of early March, rainfall through all but the Trans-Pecos and southwestern High Plains had improved greatly. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, the short-term outlook is for normal conditions, while the long-term outlook is for drier conditions. Guess the old adage of “wait a little while and the weather will change” is true. The drought and the pressures it brings will continue to create impacts on your resources, plus the mental and physical health of you and your family.

Spring is in full swing following wet conditions in many areas. Hopefully, the moisture will continue to be favorable for you. So, it's time to think about spring and adapting management to get ready for summer and what it will bring. If summer comes in dry as the forecasters have been predicting, we are back to managing to keep the resources from being damaged more. If instead we luck out and get average to above moisture, remember we are at least a year from the precipitation we need to start completing the recovery from drought conditions. We have had major damage to plants, and the damage will require time to recover.

If drought continues, the plants in Texas rangeland and woodlands will remain under heavy stress. Wildlife will continue to suffer, and population changes will continue. Blame it on lack of water, reduced natural forage and feed, cold and all the other things that drought and extreme weather bring.

Needless to remind most of you, it will take a long time for the vegetation to recover to what it was or maybe it will never fully recover. Continue your plan to manage the recovery of yourself, your family and your resources. Your future is best controlled by managing your mental, physical and production resources through careful and well-thought out plans.

Some Ideas to Consider

Hope you ended with a positive management and financial position of your resources for 2011. Now it's time to adjust your 2012 management plan and, above all, get your five-year plan updated.

Here are some points to consider in the next few months.

- As always, water should be your highest priority. Many areas have had at least some runoff to help fill ponds. Watch to insure you will have adequate water, animal performance and forage production to adapt to changes.
 - Continue monitoring your water resources for availability and quality. Develop alternate plans, considering we could go back to less than optimal. Planning 2012 water options, considering what we have been through, will allow you to develop your options and be prepared before they are needed.
 - During extreme temperatures, check water sources often. Lack of water can stress animals quickly as summer heat sets in. Water temperatures in the 60-70° F range can help animals better cope.
- Continue to review rainfall records for at least the past 12-18 months, and maybe longer, plus the forecast for the next three to six months. Determine if the current soil moisture available is adequate for early spring into summer growth. Good soaking rains have rebuilt both surface and subsoil moisture in many areas. Under these conditions, heavy, intense rainfall usually results in more runoff than infiltration. Even if current soil moisture is good, projected plant growth will be below average and less if drought conditions return. If drought conditions do continue, prepare for well below average plant growth in 2012 and 2013.

- Evaluate the status of grazing and browse use often. The amount of use on highly desirable species is critical, particularly during recovery. If use was heavy in 2011, reduce the pressure this year if possible. Regardless, plan to reduce 2012-2013 stocking rates to allow the preferred species to recover and improve next year.
- Routinely check and repair or replace, where possible, all improvements such as fences, water sources and equipment.
- If you haven't already, be sure to finish your analysis of 2011 financial and production data. Evaluate and adjust the 2012 and five-year management and economic plans based on the current condition of your resources in relation to current and projected weather plus current and projected economic conditions.
- Continue the 2012 management plans for 2011 weed control areas.
- If you were able to prescribe burn areas, evaluate their growth against the burn objectives. Start identifying and planning potential 2013 and beyond burns areas even if the drought appears it will continue. Be prepared!
- Continue the management for 2011 seeded areas to insure long term management is accomplished. Evaluate and update their management requirements for 2012.
- Update your land resource records through new photos or other means. If you haven't started a land resource record, start now. If you use photographs, establish points that you can return to and photograph at least once each year.
- If you haven't developed a business management plan, please get started!

Managing should be based on what you have documented, what is currently happening and what is planned or predicted for future. If you are not measuring and documenting what you have done and recorded the results, how can you really prove you are maintaining and improving your operation? You need to anticipate weather, economic conditions and your personal life to plan how to respond to changes. Management is never easy! *!!*

