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# University Lands implements groundwater management

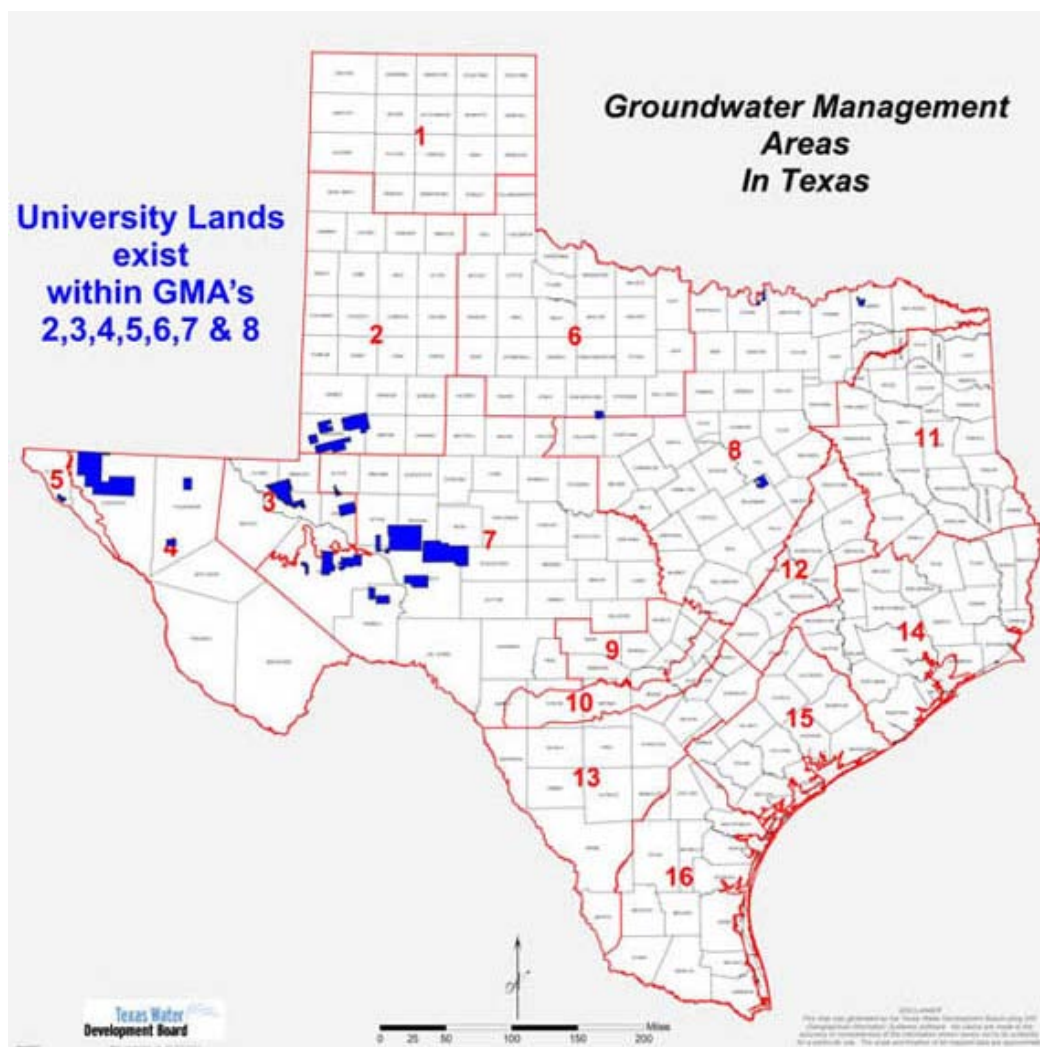
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Posted: Thursday, April 28, 2016 3:39 pm

By Mella McEwen mmcewen@mrt.com | 0 comments



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**HS SOFTBALL:** Preview capsule for today's MCS game

**JC SOFTBALL:** Tauanu'u leads MC into Region V West tourney

As the unconventional shale boom was flowing through much of the 2 million acres owned by University Lands, the agency found itself coping with a number of challenges.

Demand to lease part of the surface and mineral rights on the 2.1 million acres that University Lands manages on behalf of the Permanent University Fund resulted in several lease sales in excess of \$200 million. The fund benefits the University of Texas and Texas A&M systems.

But that demand also meant "University Lands saw higher and higher demand for frac water and frac pits," said Richard Brantley, executive director at University Lands.

Brantley will discuss the agency's groundwater management at the upcoming Environmental Regulatory Seminar May 12.

That, combined with the drought of 2010 and 2011, raised concerns about water availability.

"Although you hear about all these volumes, it is sustainable and there's no reason to worry. But it still should be well-managed," Brantley said.

University Lands began requiring oil and gas producers operating on its lands to "go deeper" for water, to the Santa Rosa and Dockum formations that were more brackish. The agency also required producers to case off shallower sections to protect groundwater.

"We also required professional engineers and professional geologists to stamp off on the work," Brantley said. "It was a lump for the industry to swallow, but when oil was \$100, it was easier to swallow."

Oil and gas companies operating on University Lands leases "would tell us how well they were doing and how they were managing their water. I made an attempt to gather these partners together and get them to go through what they were doing and share best practices. The room would get very quiet," Brantley recalled.

In 2014, the agency hired Daniel B. Stephens & Associates to develop a water well management system that included a water well inventory and perform hydrological studies of the groundwater resources on selected portions of University Lands.

For its groundwater resource evaluation, the Albuquerque-based company used geophysical logs; water well driller reports and water well data obtained from the University Lands well library; geophysical logs, scout tickets and cable tool driller reports obtained from the Bureau of Economic Geology data archives; driller reports obtained from the Texas Water Development Board, the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the groundwater conservation districts that touch University Lands (Brantley estimates there are 13).

The company built a database of hydrological studies to describe the geologic structure and stratigraphy of the major and minor aquifers on selected University Lands to about 3,000 feet below ground surface.

"Nobody is able to deliver data of this quality," Brantley said.

He said anyone can access the data from the University Lands website, enter queries and build three-dimensional models to see what has been done around proposed sites.

Though the state has maps of its aquifers and delineation of deposits, it's still not well understood.

"We're adding to the science of water in West Texas," he said.

Brantley was quick to credit the oil and gas industry, which has funded the study, for their efforts in reducing water use and recycling and reusing produced and brackish water.

"Water is in their lifeblood. Without water, a \$10 million well is not worth a nickel. Yet water's always an afterthought," he said.

Still, and especially in light of current low oil prices that are near or at break-even economics, those efforts vary by company, he said.

"Over time you see oil and gas operators of all stripes and behavior. There are those without a long-term perspective, who buy properties, develop them and then sell them. Then there are others who are spending millions on water infrastructure for sustainability," Brantley said. "I've seen a lot of positives overcome many negatives in groundwater management planning."

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