$2.5 million effort plugs Crane Co. flow

By Hannah Brock
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AUSTIN, Texas (KOSA) - The previously uncontrolled flow in Crane County has been plugged, but that came at a $2.5 million cost.

The water flow stopped on Jan. 21 and the well is now cased and cemented, according to the Railroad Commission of Texas, which regulates oil and gas. The commission, which called the flow unusual, says it has not found any RRC records on the well, so they do not believe it was an oil and gas well.

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The effort was a result of an uncontrolled flow that began on Dec. 7 on land along Highway 329. Salty water engulfed 30 acres of propert by Bill Wight, a fourth generation rancher. Throughout the process, he struggled to get answers. The well was also the subject of a no-fly zone, which barred drone footage.

The leak was first discovered on property along Highway 329 earlier this month and reported to the Railroad Commission, which regulates oil and gas. Photo provided by Sarah Stogner. (Hannah Brock)
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The RRC dug 20 pits to collect the water and hauled water constantly. That's according to the RRC's Danny Sorrells, who provided an update about the flow during the RRC's open meeting on Jan. 30.

"It is unusual. It has unusual geology. It also has unusual water flows," Sorrells said. "So, we're looking into that also. This is ongoing. We're at least once or twice a week and have been for the last month."

During public comment, Democratic RRC Candidate Bill Burch alleged the RRC did not follow federal emergency management protocols regarding the spill.

"There does not seem to be any greater urgency to address the actual underlying cancer that is occurring in our industry," Burch said. "Can anyone confirm that you have actually started a real investigation to determine the causations of these blowouts? Without that understanding Texas face an uncertain cost as you continue to play Whack-a-Mole."

Since it started, the flow brought up questions about freshwater contamination. The RRC says it will make all efforts to protect freshwater.

"Although there is no evidence to suggest that this is an orphan oil and gas well, the RRC acted quickly to remediate the water flow in Crane County," RRC officials wrote in a statement on Jan. 31.

The commission said it will work with the University of Texas Bureau of Economic Geology and other entities to understand the geological features near the flow.

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