



# PANHANDLE WATER NEWS

## Conserving Water For Future Generations

PANHANDLE GROUNDWATER  
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

October 2024



## Carson County Playa Festival

Ogallala Commons partnered with the Panhandle Groundwater Conservation District (PGCD) to host the 2024 Carson County Playa Festival.

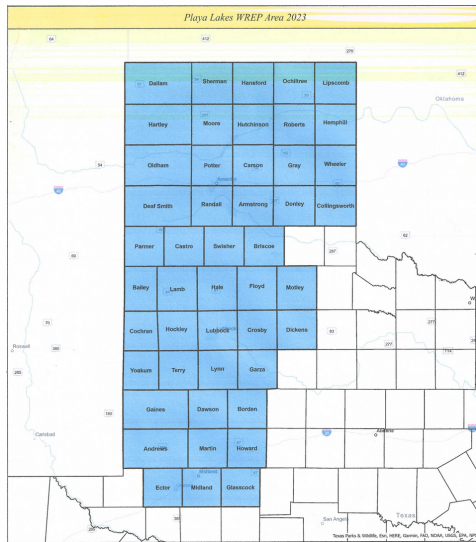
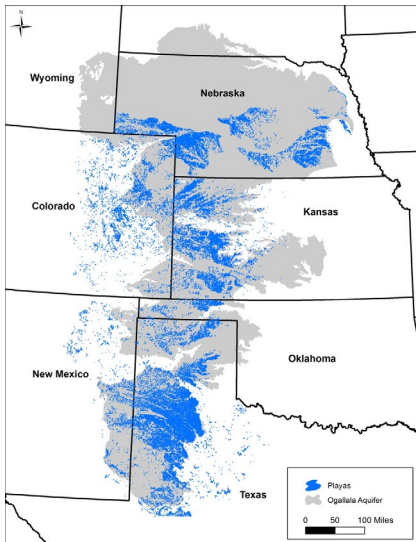
This event was held in Panhandle, Texas at the Carson County Ag Barn and was the 23rd annual Playa Festival. One hundred 5th-grade students from Groom, Panhandle, and White Deer were in attendance. Throughout the morning students rotated through four different presentations that covered a vast range of topics related to the environment, understanding how playa lakes function, as well as the important role playas play in recharging the Ogallala Aquifer. After the morning sessions, the students were able to take what they learned outside and visited a playa lake outside of Panhandle.

The presenters included Justin Trammel, a faculty member of Ogallala Commons Playa Festival, who talked about the basics of playas and why they are important; Jim Steiert, a waterfowler and outdoor writer, who presented about wetland buffers and waterfowl; Robert Martin, another faculty member of Ogallala Commons Playa Festival, who spoke about playa amphibians and reptiles; and lastly, Payton Holtkamp, PGCD's Education and PR Director, who educated the students about the Ogallala Aquifer and recharge.



# TEXAS PLAYA LAKES WETLAND RESERVE ENHANCEMENT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

There are approximately 23,000 playas in Texas, the highest density in North America, and mostly overlay the Ogallala aquifer (see map below). Even though they cover only 2% of the region's landscape, playas are one of the most significant ecological features of the Southern High Plains.



Ducks Unlimited, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, and Playa Lakes Joint Venture are working with landowners to restore and conserve 700 acres of playas and adjacent upland buffers in the Texas Panhandle. Using the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP) program, playas will be enrolled in a 30-year or permanent easement.



## What are playas?

Playas — also called mud holes, buffalo wallows, and lagoons — are round, shallow depressions found at the lowest point of a watershed. They fill with water from rainstorms and run-off. These temporary wetlands provide habitat for many kinds of wildlife and recharge the Ogallala aquifer. When healthy, playas provide future water to support communities and rain-fed operations, water filtration, flood control, livestock forage, and recreation.

## How are playas restored?

A healthy playa has an intact clay basin — without excavated pits or ditches — that is not buried by sediment from nearby fields. Water from the surrounding watershed freely enters the basin through a native vegetative buffer without being diverted from the playa by roads, terraces or other impediments.

Playa restoration reverses past modifications to playas by removing accumulated sediment, filling drainage features, redirecting water back into the playa, and protecting the playa with an adjoining upland buffer which will be established by removing noxious and exotic vegetation, controlling erosion, and reseeding with native grassland species.



## How are landowners compensated?

There are two enrollment options: a permanent easement, which is in perpetuity, and a 30-year easement that expires at the end of that time. For permanent easements, landowners receive 80% of the agricultural appraised value of acres enrolled, not to exceed \$5,000 per acre. Under a 30-year easement, landowners receive 60% of the agricultural appraised value.

## Who pays for the restoration cost?

Under a permanent easement, 100% of the restoration costs are paid by NRCS and other conservation partners. With a 30-year easement, landowners are responsible for paying 25% of the planned restoration cost. However, cost-share to pay for additional practices — such as fencing around the perimeter of the playa or offsite restoration activities — is often available from other agencies and conservation groups.

## What can I do with the land under an easement?

Landowners retain ownership of their land and agree to follow certain land use requirements. Examples include:

- There may be changes in certain agricultural activities to protect the conservation value of the wetland.
- Grazing is often a desired management practice and may be permitted under a Compatible Use Authorization issued by NRCS.
- The rights for undeveloped recreational activities such as hiking, bird watching, hunting, and fishing may be leased.
- The land under the easement is evaluated annually to ensure both the landowner's and the program's goals are being met.

## What land is eligible?

Privately held agricultural lands containing wetlands that were previously degraded and can be successfully and cost-effectively restored are eligible to enroll in the Texas Playa Lakes WREP. Applications will be prioritized based on the conserved wetland's potential for protecting and enhancing habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, as well as the playa's potential for groundwater recharge to support nearby towns and communities.

## Am I eligible to participate?

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, lender and employer and recognizes the need to be inclusive of all people and ensure equitable access to services. Producers who own privately held land — including beginning producers, socially disadvantaged producers, veterans, and those with limited resources — are eligible to enroll in the Texas Playa Lakes WREP. All landowners must meet conservation compliance provisions and the adjusted gross income (AGI) limitations. Contact your local USDA office for more information on compliance provisions and AGI limitations.

## Is there an application deadline?

WREP applications will be accepted year-round, with funding provided through a competitive evaluation process. State-specific application ranking dates are set yearly to evaluate applications for funding.

## Learn More

For more information about playas, visit [PlayasWorkForTexans.com](http://PlayasWorkForTexans.com). To discuss the Texas Playa Lakes WREP program and how it can support your operation and goals, call us today!

# PGCD Precipitation Enhancement Update

PGCD recently completed its 24th Precipitation Enhancement season. The program typically runs from April 1 – September 30th.

During April, dry and rollercoaster temperatures were seen as the area was in a battle zone between a retreating polar air mass to the north and a springtime air mass to the south. The month started off seasonable, with temperatures cooling off into the 50s by the 2nd and warming into the 80s by the 4th. Temperatures drastically cooled a few days later, with highs remaining in the 40s on the 9th. Temperatures then warmed close to 90°F just a few days later. Unfortunately, precipitation that did occur happened on days when temperatures were too cool for deep convection to form. Therefore, only one recon mission was flown during that month.

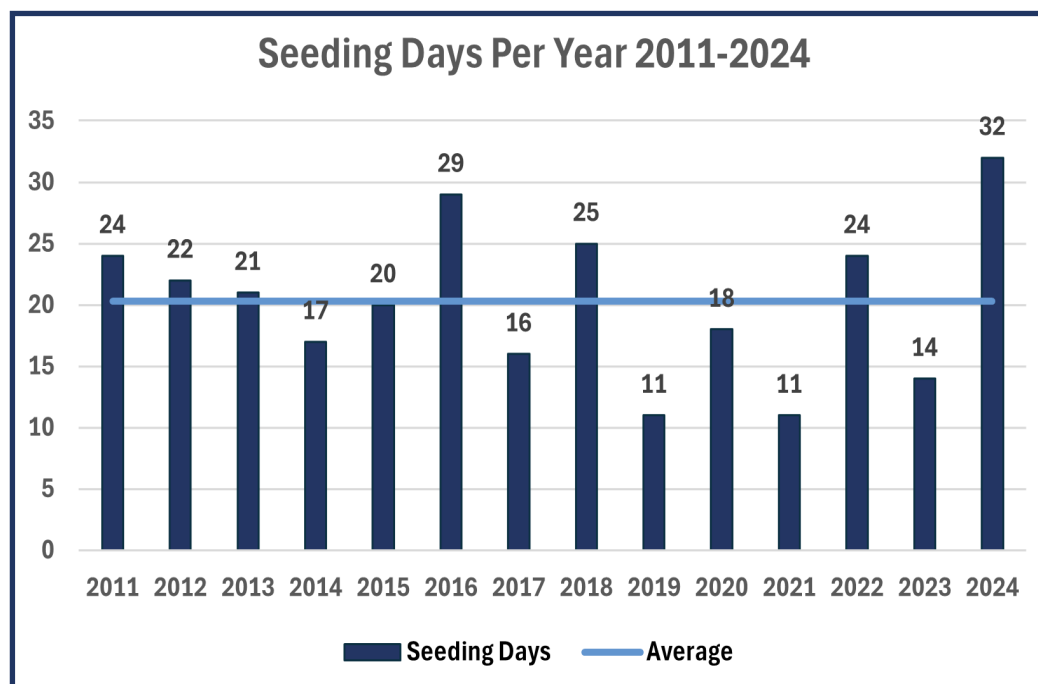
As May approached, temperatures continued to fluctuate as highs reached 90°F on the 1st and then cooled into the 60s on the 4th. With the warmer air, the first seeding mission took place on the 1st. However, the rest of the month proved challenging as strong winds, low/high ceilings, and overnight activity prevented additional seeding opportunities.

This quickly changed in June, when eight flights occurred within the first nine days, six of which were seeding flights. For the month, 17 total missions took place. This active period continued through August, with eight seeding flights in July and 12 in August. In addition to the very active season, temperatures were historic as a potent upper-level ridge gave way to several 100°F+ days. The highest temperature ever recorded in August was seen on the 22nd at 108°F. Additionally, 10 consecutive days of 100°F+ (breaking a record) were observed, with a total of 17 100°F+ days.

By September, the monsoon started to shut down, bringing fewer chances of rainfall to the Panhandle. However, four seeding flights did take place, with the last one of the season on the 18th. After this period, conditions became quiet, with temperatures ranging from five to 15 degrees above average.

Compared to previous years, this year was very active, with well above average seeding days (32 versus 20). This is due in large part to earlier launch times, which allowed the aircraft to get up before severe warnings were issued. Additionally, monsoonal moisture from the west and continuous shortwaves/frontal boundaries further enhanced the convective potential.

Total flight hours for the year added up to 100, with 60 flights, and 38 seeding missions being conducted. For the season, 724 glaciogenic flares and 46 hygroscopic flares were used.



**The District is always available to visit about the precipitation enhancement program, please call Britney Britten at 806-883-2501 or [britney@pgcd.us](mailto:britney@pgcd.us) to learn more.**

# West Texas A&M University Visits the District

PGCD recently hosted a group of undergraduate and graduate students from West Texas A&M University's Environmental Science Department. General Manager Britney Britten and Meteorologist Corey Clay gave presentations about the goals and programs of the District as well as an overview of the District's precipitation enhancement program.

Field Technician/Meter Specialist Jake Robinson took the group to a water well and demonstrated how PGCD field staff take depth-to-water measurements each year.

The District invites you or a group you're involved with to schedule a visit to learn more about PGCD's services and programs.



For more information, please call Payton Holtkamp at 806-883-2501 or [pholtkamp@pgcd.us](mailto:pholtkamp@pgcd.us).



PANHANDLE GROUNDWATER  
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

## Join the Class of 2025

The Master Irrigator Program is an irrigation management curriculum made up of 32 hours of intensive irrigation education conducted over four one-day sessions to show producers how to maximize advanced conservation irrigation management and conservation practices that work together to save water, conserve energy, build soil health, and enhance farm profitability.

### SAVE THE DATES

Location: Water Conservation Center near Dumas, Texas

**February 19** – Agronomics

**February 26** – Irrigation Scheduling

**March 5** – Systems

**March 12** – Systems & Special Tools

*\*Perfect attendance is required to graduate from the course.*

**Registration Closes February 10, 2025.**

### For More Information

Contact Panhandle Groundwater Conservation District  
806-883-2501

## PGCD's 2024-2025 Tax Rate

During its September Board of Directors meeting, the Directors present adopted the 2024-2025 tax rate for PGCD. There was no written or in-person public comment. The tax rate is equal to the no-new-revenue tax rate which is \$0.008163/\$100 valuation. The no-new-revenue tax rate means the District is projecting to take in the same amount of tax revenue as the 2023-2024 tax year based on property values.

PGCD's overall revenue is 75 percent ad valorem taxes, and the remaining 25 percent comes from export fees, enforcement fees, and interest earnings. PGCD publishes copies of adopted budgets and tax rate calculation worksheets on its website at [www.pgcd.us/public-information](http://www.pgcd.us/public-information).

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Britney Britten at 806-883-2501 or [britney@pgcd.us](mailto:britney@pgcd.us).

# Texas Legislative Outlook for 2025



The 89th Texas Legislative Session is scheduled to convene on January 14, 2025. As a political subdivision of the state, PGCD monitors session activities and bills that might affect local policies regarding groundwater management, property taxes, and local elected officials. Part of that process is monitoring and working with organizations on legislative interim charges. Interim charges are topics or issues that either the Lieutenant Governor or Speaker of the House have chosen to study further in between sessions. There are two main committees the District monitors. On the Senate side, we look at the Senate Committee on Water, Agriculture, and Rural Affairs. Interim charges for this committee include studying water system reliability and specifically identifying opportunities to better equip these systems to better serve the public. They are also charged with monitoring the implementation of legislation passed last session, including Senate Bill 28, also referred to as the Texas Water Fund. On the House side, the District monitors the House Natural Resources Committee. Interim charges for this committee also includes monitoring Senate Bill 28, water reuse expansion, reliability of clean water access, and groundwater infrastructure.

**If you would like more information, please contact Britney Britten at 806-883-2501 or [britney@pgcd.us](mailto:britney@pgcd.us).**

## Winter Water Level Measurements Begin

Each year PGCD conducts water level measurements on over 750 wells throughout the District to determine changes in aquifer water levels. Water level measurements are taken during this time frame as demands for groundwater are lower for the agricultural and municipal water users. This helps the District obtain a static water level measurement. However, it is important to note this is not always possible due to various reasons, including wells pumping nearby, timing with weather delays, etc.

The measurements taken are used to determine the current water level in the aquifer, quantify the volume of groundwater remaining, monitor long-term trends in water levels, and provide the information needed to determine IRS depletion allowances in addition to evaluating the status of the District's adopted desired future conditions.

The readings obtained this Fall/Winter will be published in the July 2025 Newsletter.

**For more information, please contact Ashley Ausbrooks, PG at 806-883-2501 or [ara@pgcd.us](mailto:ara@pgcd.us).**



# PGCD 2024-2029 Management Plan

In order to achieve the goals of the District, the Board of Directors periodically reviews the District's Rules and Management Plan. These documents are the guiding principles and policies to help all water users conserve and protect the District's aquifers.

The first rules for the District were adopted on February 18, 1956, and have been amended 31 times as of January 11, 2024. The Rules and Management Plan are living documents that reflect the changing conditions of the aquifer and the social and economic realities of the citizens.

Since SB1 in 1997, the District has been required to formulate and submit a comprehensive management plan to the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB). District management plans must be updated and filed at least every five years, and TWDB is required to certify the plan and make sure plans meet all the criteria required.

In June of this year, the PGCD Board of Directors approved and submitted the 2024-2029 Management Plan to TWDB. The Water Development Board approved the plan in the following month of August.

Within this management plan, you can find PGCD's mission and overview, groundwater management in Texas, desired future conditions, goals, management objectives, and performance standards.

To see PGCD's Management Plan, visit our website at <https://www.pgcd.us/rules>.

**If you have any questions or comments, please contact Britney Britten at 806-883-2501 or [britney@pgcd.us](mailto:britney@pgcd.us).**



**PANHANDLE GROUNDWATER  
CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

## PGCD's Fall Education Programs



PGCD's Education Program is in full swing. Since September 1, 2024, Payton Holtkamp, the Public Relations and Education Director, has presented to 356 students from 5 different schools in the Panhandle.

Within the PGCD Education Program, Holtkamp promotes water conservation knowledge by incorporating interactive games and hands-on STEM activities into her presentations.

"Being able to apply hands-on activities is key to helping students retain information while allowing them to have fun. If we can make learning about the water cycle and conserving water fun, we hope that students will take what they have learned and apply it to their daily lives," said Holtkamp.



**Upcoming Education  
November 9: WISE - Amarillo, TX**

**To schedule an education program at your school, contact Payton Holtkamp at 806-883-2501 or [pholtkamp@pgcd.us](mailto:pholtkamp@pgcd.us).**



PANHANDLE GROUNDWATER  
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

## Inside This Issue

**Precipitation Enhancement**

**Tax Rate Update**

**Texas Legislative Outlook**

PANHANDLE GROUNDWATER  
CONSERVATION DISTRICT  
P.O. BOX 637  
WHITE DEER, TEXAS 79097  
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

PRESORTED  
STANDARD  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
AMARILLO, TX  
PERMIT NO. 227

## FOLLOW US ON



Panhandle Groundwater  
Conservation District

@PANHANDLE\_GCD

## TO STAY CONNECTED



PANHANDLE GROUNDWATER  
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

## DISTRICT OFFICE

201. W. Third St, PO Box 637  
White Deer, TX 79097  
Phone: 806-883-2501  
Fax: 806-883-2162  
Website: [www.pgcd.us](http://www.pgcd.us)

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Chancy Cruse, President**  
**Devin Sinclair, Vice President**  
**Lee Peterson, Secretary**  
**Charles Bowers, Director**  
**David Hodges, Director**  
**John R. Spearman, Jr., Director**  
**Bill Breeding, Director**  
**Marcus Hardcastle, Director**  
**Wes Stockett, Director**

**Britney Britten, General Manager**

Panhandle Water News is published quarterly.  
Subscriptions are free, upon request.

## PGCD UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Nov. 21** : Board of Directors Meeting
- **Dec. 3-5**: Farm and Ranch Show