

Groundwater board approves Pickens' plan for wildlife well

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WHITE DEER - Boone Pickens will be able to provide water for wildlife on his Monte Vista Ranch in Roberts County. The Panhandle Ground Water Conservation District board of directors Thursday approved his plan to reduce a High Impact Production Permit acreage site by 2,240 acres, so a well could be drilled in the eastern part of his ranch for wildlife purposes rather than export.

In a fight over critical habitat for a threatened minnow in the Canadian River, a coalition of about 21 agricultural and water groups in Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Kansas is asking its members for an additional \$24,000. In a 5-2 vote, the PGWCD board elected to contribute \$1,500 for legal fees and expert review.

A Tucson, Ariz.-based environmental group sued the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service over the Arkansas River Shiner, a threatened minnow in the Canadian River, forcing the federal agency to designate parts of the riverbed critical habitat. The coalition took the designation to federal court and got it thrown out.

Led by the Canadian River Municipal Water Authority, which provides water to Amarillo, Lubbock and other West Texas cities, the coalition is working with the Fish and Wildlife Service to develop a conservation plan concerning the minnow and its habitat so the agency won't need to make another critical habitat designation.

"I think we've made progress with the management plan," said C.E. Williams, general manager of the PGWCD.

They face a court-ordered September deadline. In other business, Ray Brady, assistant manager of the district, reported to the board that the water table was declining along the Wheeler-Hemphill County line because of the hydro-frac system being used in the oil and gas well drilling in that area. He said he expected it to continue to decline for at least the next couple of years.