

# Looking for water in Hays County

## Drought and growth blamed for lack of groundwater.

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HAYS COUNTY — When Wayland Clark decided to build a home in northern Hays County 26 years ago, a local well driller gave him some advice about rural water.

"Water is kind of like love," Clark recalled the old-timer saying. "It's where you find it."

Clark has had trouble finding water since April, when his 320-foot well started drying up. He lowered his water pump from 300 feet to 315 feet, but that only worked for about two weeks, he said.

Since then, he's had water trucked in to his 2,500-gallon tank and turns the well pump on sporadically — usually with no luck.

Clark is one of about 30 residents in northern Hays County who have reported drying wells to the Hays Trinity Groundwater Conservation District.

The district has about 5,000 wells in northwestern Hays County, and Andrew Backus, the district's president, said there are probably many more wells in danger of going dry across the county.

Residents such as Clark who live near the Northridge subdivision have been the most vocal, Backus said, "but it's going on in multiple places."

Wells are also going dry in southwestern Travis County, where many residents are calling for the formation of a water conservation district.

The Hays County Commissioners Court on Tuesday passed a resolution calling for water conservation. It also requested that new subdivisions use surface water only, when available, and repair plumbing leaks in homes.

"The issue is, we're in somewhat of a drought," Hays County Judge Jim Powers said. "When you're in a drought, what do you do? You have to conserve water."

Many people are trying to deepen their wells or buy water.

Ray Whisenant, who owns Whisenant and Lyle Water Services Inc., said he's had so many requests for water deliveries in the past few months that he's a week behind.

For his water troubles, Clark blames the nearby Northridge subdivision that started going up in 2000.

He and a few neighbors protested the subdivision from the start, saying its small lot sizes threatened their ability to draw water from the Trinity Aquifer. The average lot size in the subdivision is 1.87 acres, and it will eventually include 50 lots.

"We've been through worse droughts and haven't had a problem," Clark said. "It's just too many people pulling water."

Under Texas law, individual landowners have the right to the water under their property.

Robert Wade, one of the subdivision's developers, says the homes on his 108-acre subdivision are not causing the well problems.

Wade said none of the 16 families who live there has reported problems with their wells.

The complaining neighbors, he said, are "just trying to put up another roadblock" to the subdivision's expansion.

Allen Walther, director of Hays County's Environmental Health Department, said a required water availability study prepared by an independent company in 2000 pumped 30 gallons per minute for 24 hours in the subdivision, which he called "an indication that you have a pretty strong well."

But Backus, the conservation district president, agrees with neighbors that Northridge's lots are too small and that the new residents are starting to put too much strain on the aquifer.

"What it seems to be is, we're short rainfall, and we have unacceptably small lot sizes for those that are dependent on groundwater in that particular aquifer," Backus said.

Meanwhile, Jim Blair, who owns Bee Cave Drilling Inc., said he's so busy that he has to turn away work.

Calls have come from Wimberley to Leander, he said.

"It's been a madhouse of lowering pumps," Blair said. "Everybody seems to blame some neighbor that they have that's just recently moved in or is abusing water usage.

"The fact is, it's all of those things. It's everybody using water faster than the water is going into the aquifer."