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The Fort Stockton Pioneer

Comanche Springs flowing once again

It's become something of an annual occurrence. The Comanche Springs are flowing once again.

It started on the afternoon of Dec. 24, according to Paul Weatherby, general manager of the Middle Pecos Groundwater Conservation District.

"That's when it hit the canal," Weatherby said. "It's just barely flowing."

Weatherby said he didn't know what the rate of flow would be at this time. He guessed that it might be, on average, 1.5 million gallons per day, but that the flow could be subject to significant variations from day to day.

Still, as little as the flow is, it's been enough to attract onlookers, as well as children who have been playing in the shallow canal that leads from the springs.

"It's one of the most beautiful sights," said Brad Newton, the Fort Stockton representative and the secretary/treasurer of the MPGCD board. "Water's like gold around here. To watch the stream running from the springs to the canal, it's just a beautiful sight. It's nature, despite all odds, healing itself."

It's also a chance for study. Specifically, officials will be looking into the flows from Comanche Springs to get a better understanding of the springs, as well as a better understanding of the aquifer system that feeds the springs, Newton said. "It's a cooperative effort of (Pecos County) Precinct 2, Pecos (County Water Control and Improvement District) 1, the Middle Pecos, Parks and Wildlife, the USGS and the USDA," he said. What is already known is that the reappearance of the flow has become annual, at least for the last 20 or so years, Newton said.

The flow returns during the winter months after the aquifer has had sufficient time to recharge following the end of pumping for agricultural purposes during the growing season. The flow then shuts off in the spring once agricultural pumping resumes.

Weatherby said that measurements from the Texas Water Development Board show that Comanche Springs once flowed at more than 42 million gallons per day; that was back in 1899.

In the 1930s, after the beginning of agricultural use, the flow fell to about 27.8 million gallons per day.

During the period from 1947-51, the springs' flow had been reduced to about 17 million gallons per day, according to the statistics from the Texas Water Development Board.

The last measurement was made in February 2008, Weatherby said, and showed a flow of about 8 million gallons per day.

He predicted that once the flow increases, it could flow at about 8-10 million gallons per day.

"But I would be afraid to say for sure because it's just beginning to flow," Weatherby said.

Newton is sure, though, that it's something to be celebrated.

"It's fun to watch history repeat itself."

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