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## City of Wylie Public Information Office

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# EDITORIAL

### For Connection Magazine

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## The Next Big Drought?

The Dallas/Fort Worth area has welcomed late winter and spring rain, unlike many drought plagued regions throughout Texas. For the month of March, DFW Airport recorded 5.56 inches of precipitation, close to double the average. But even with the heavy March rains, precipitation recorded at DFW airport for the period of September 1, 2008, through March 31, 2009, was 3.97 inches below normal.

Drought has been a part of the written history of Texas since 1535 when Spanish explorer Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca found a population of soil tillers near the present day town of Presidio. His account reveals the struggle to farm because of two years of drought. In 1756 the San Gabriel River dried up, forcing the abandonment of a settlement of missionaries and Indians. Colonists led by Stephen F. Austin lost their entire crop of corn due to lack of moisture in 1822. And one of the worst droughts in Texas history occurred from 1884 through 1886 prompting many farmers to abandon Texas.

The last century has also been marked with several periods of drought in North Texas, including the most recent in 2006. Enhanced by the increase in water demand due to population growth over the last ten years, headlines told the story of diminishing water supplies, mandatory conservation and the economic toll the drought inflicted. Record spring rains in 2007 quickly filled reservoirs and quenched fears of eventual water rationing and escalating water costs.

History reveals that as severe as the 2006 drought appeared, this dry period does not match the depth and breadth of the 30's dustbowl, the historical drought of the 1950's and a prolonged dry period in the early 80's. The DFW Precipitation Chart found on this page, visually tells the story by showing drier historical periods in yellow and wetter periods in blue. Consider the implications and ask yourself...how would a drought of "historical" proportions impact North Texas today?

As rain falls, reservoirs fill, flowers bloom and grass grows green, it is easy to forget about the drought potential in North Texas. We are two years removed from the 2006 drought--memories are short. An excerpt from the book *Gift of Water, Legacy of Service*, by Bill Sloan, reminds us that drought can quickly strike.

*"Even to habitual 'water worriers,' the first summer of the 1950's gave absolutely no advance warning that North Texas and the rest of the Southwest were about to suffer through the worst and most prolonged drought in the regions recorded history. If anything, weather conditions that summer suggested just the opposite. An unusually wet year in 1949 was followed by another in 1950, as rainfall totals hit 6.31 inches in May, followed by a respectable 3.03*

*inches in June, a soggy 7.70 inches in July and even a near-record 4.31 inches in normally arid August.*

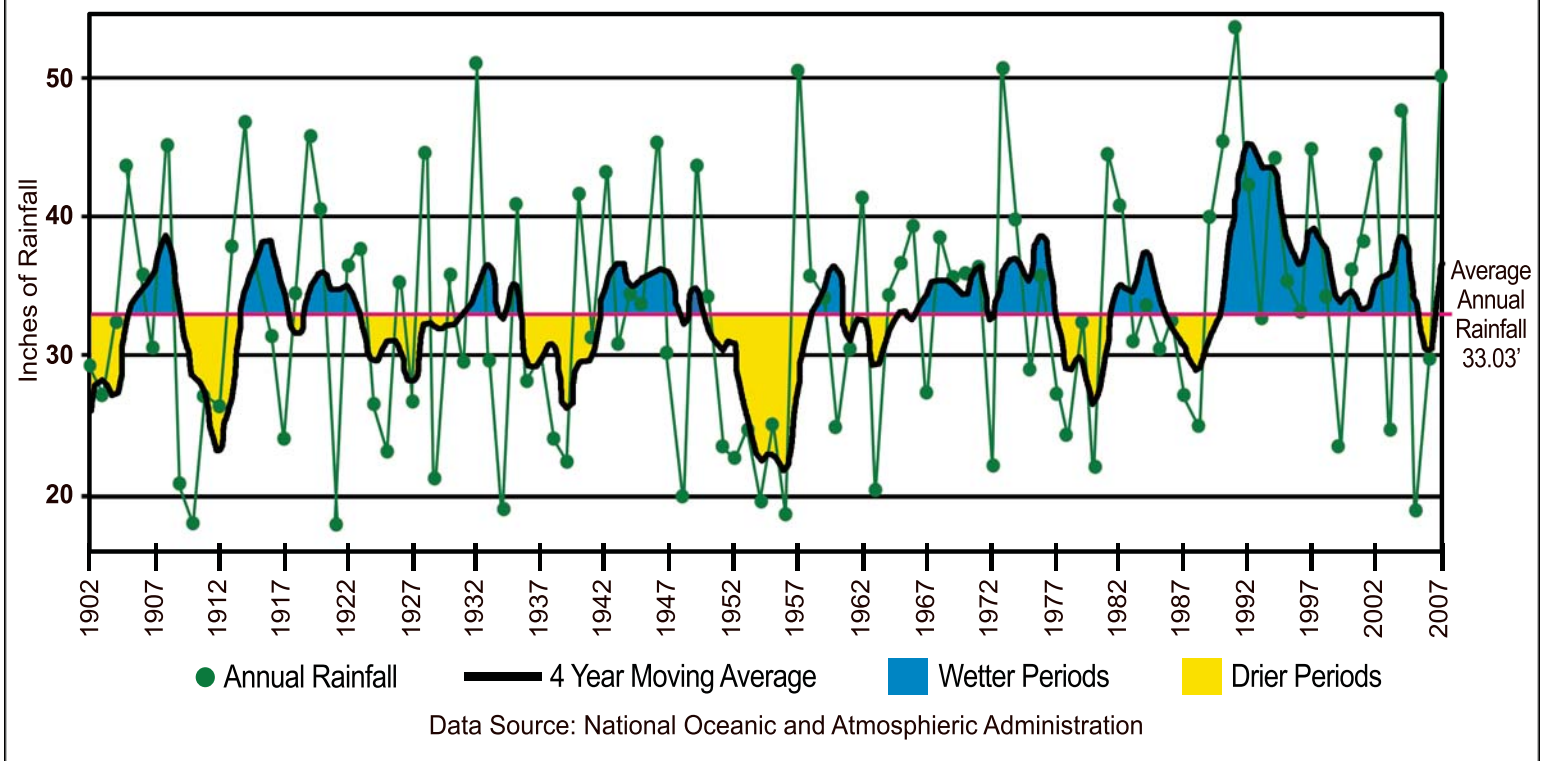
*“But beginning as early as the fall of 1950, an ominous trend had started to manifest itself. Abruptly, the heavy rains that had characterized the first three quarters of the year came to an almost total halt. They stopped so completely, in fact, that total precipitation as recorded at Dallas Love Field amounted to less than a single inch for the entire last quarter of the year—a period that normally produced eight and a half times that amount.*

*“The new year of 1951 brought no relief. An abnormally dry spring was followed by a scorching hot summer. By August, as the area sweltered through a record 22 straight days of 100-degree temperatures and water consumption soared to an all-time high, some people had begun to stare apprehensively into the bright, cloudless skies and wonder aloud when the dry spell would end. The answer, had they known it, would have been utterly devastating. Ahead lay six straight years of rainfall ranging from skimpy to nonexistent—and a water crisis of unprecedented proportions.”*

Droughts are challenging to predict but according to historical trends another is inevitable. Will this be our summer of 1951 when rains halt and temperatures rise for a prolonged, deep drought?







Wylie, Sachse and Murphy, along with 1.6 million other customers in North Texas, receive their water from the North Texas Municipal Water District (NTMWD), located in Wylie. To meet future demands, the NTMWD continues to develop new water sources in addition to its primary sources of Lake Lavon, Lake Texoma, Jim Chapman Lake, Lake Tawakoni and Lake Bonham. But as water demand increases, citizens must do their part through daily conservation to ensure that this finite, valuable resource is available for years to come.

# DFW Annual Precipitation



## Save Water With Your Sprinkler System



-  Water before 10 a.m. and after 6 p.m. Mid-day watering results in fast evaporation and scorches lawns and plants.
-  Cut back outdoor watering to 1 inch every seven days. Experts advise watering lawns deeply and infrequently to promote a strong root system.
-  Check sprinkler systems frequently for directional aim and broken heads to prevent watering driveways, sidewalks and streets. Inspect your system annually for leaks.
-  Use drip irrigation, soaker hoses and root feeders instead of sprinklers to water trees, shrubs and beds more efficiently and reduce evaporation and runoff.
-  Use 4-6 inches of mulch in your beds to prevent evaporation and runoff.
-  Install rain and freeze sensors to prevent sprinklers from operating when it's raining.