

SAN ANGELO

STANDARD-TIMES

Serving West Texas

11/18/96

Water wars

San Angelo part of statewide battle

By STEVE RAY
and ANNA M. TINSLEY
Harte-Hanks Austin Bureau

AUSTIN — Battle lines are forming in a statewide water war that threatens to pit Texan against Texan as officials debate who can claim ownership of one of the state's most precious natural resources.

Already, cities and counties are taking sides on several issues including transferring water between river basins and rights of capture that allow landowners to pump unlimited quantities of water from beneath their land.

San Angelo was thrown into the fray when water district officials limited the amount of water the city could draw from the Hickory Aquifer and fights erupted over taking water from the Concho River.

The looming battle has prompted state officials to begin work on new legislation designed to help end the growing threat of water wars. That threat is increasing, officials said, because of swelling populations and ongoing droughts that have caused the demand for water to skyrocket.

"Nothing is more critical to the state's future than water," said Mike Hailey, a spokesman for Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock.

"We are committed to doing everything within our power to have a plan ready for debate and implementation."

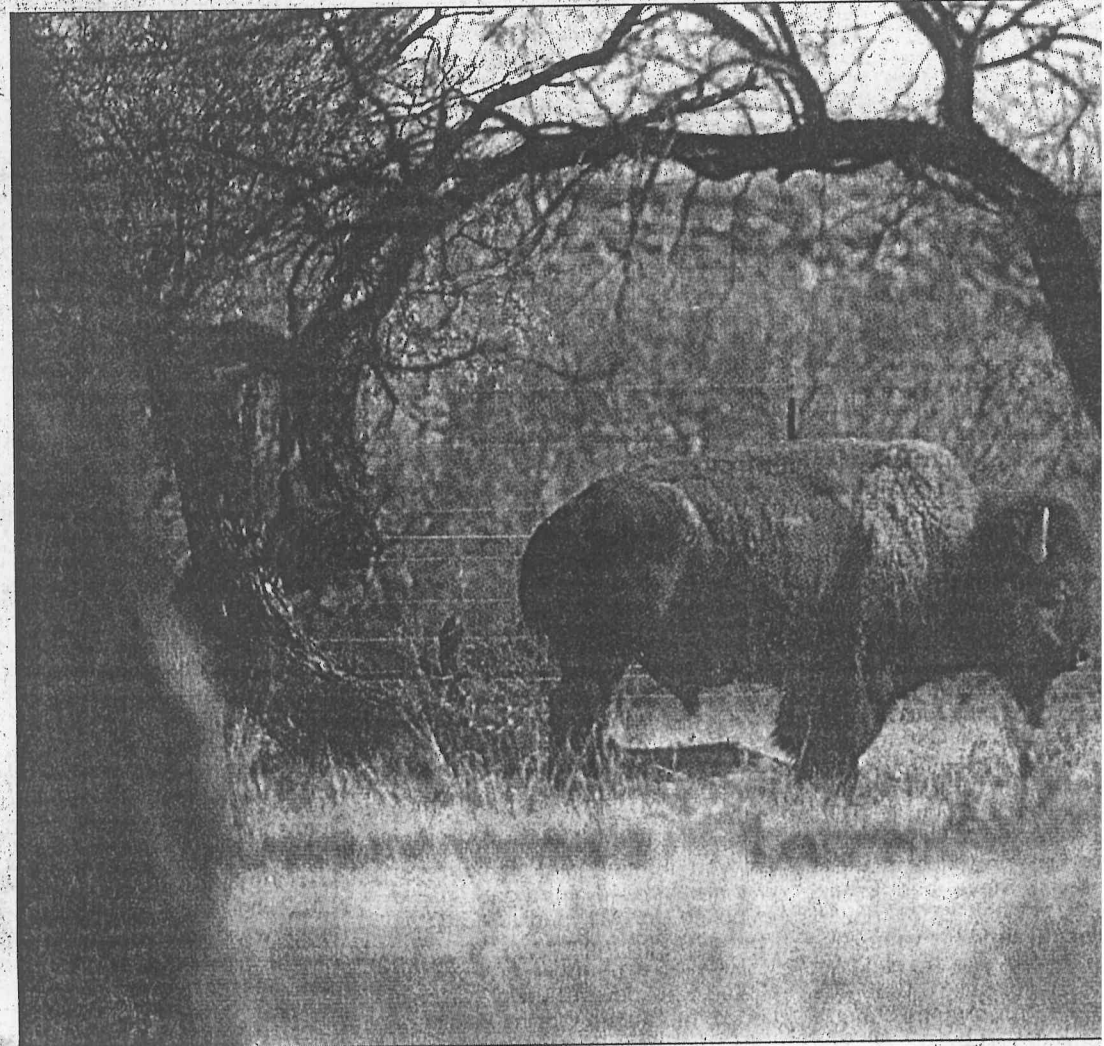
Bullock's office is working on possible legislation with representatives of House Speaker Pete Laney and Gov. George W. Bush, as well as state officials from the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission.

Last week, the head of the commission called for a sweeping overhaul of state water laws including changes in the way ground water is allocated, clearer rules on inner basin water transfers and increased monitoring and enforcement of surface water rights.

"Water — how we consume, manage and allocate it — is the single most important factor for the future economic viability of our great state," TNRCC chairman Barry R. McBee told agricultural seed producers and distributors in Austin.

Almost all of McBee's proposals

Tourist draw



Holiday, one of three American bison now at the San Angelo State Park, looks for a spot to graze Sunday afternoon. The park may have other animals, which will have a good draw to the San Angelo park. It would be a good boost for the tourism industry."

State park may get bison

By KACEE HARGRAVE
Staff Writer

If you like watching the three bison roam San Angelo State Park, imagine seeing a herd of more than 60 of them.

That vision could become a reality for San Angelo, as the state park is among three locations being eyed as the future home of the JA Ranch Buffalo Herd.

The herd was donated to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department by Monte Ritchie and Nina Bivens, owners of the ranch headquartered in Palo Duro.

Bob Cook, director of the Wildlife Division of the TP&W, said members of the herd are "genetically the purest-blooded bison left in North America" as shown by DNA testing.

Two officials with the Wildlife Division are scheduled to visit the park early Tuesday afternoon to see if the park would be the best location for the animals.

"It be the biggest thing to happen to the park," San Angelo State Park Superintendent John Culberson said. "If you have the official bison herd located here, that would be a real good draw to the San Angelo park. It would be a good boost for the tourism industry."

The local park also has been chosen as the horned lizard headquarters, where scientists will begin studying the unique animals in their natural habitat. The park also is known for its 250 million-year-old dinosaur tracks and its hunting and fishing opportunities.

Other locations being looked at for the bison herd are Caprock Canyons State Park in Quitaque and the Mason Wildlife Management Area near Mason.

Besides just providing a home for the animals, whichever location is chosen will serve as bison headquarters where DNA testing, herd management and breeding will take place.

"We feel like this will be a good facility for them, because we have veterinary services

Please see WATER, Page 7A

Churches remodel house in

INES ARE OPEN

Do you have a comment? Idea? Observation? If you have something on your mind and want to share it, call 658-8283. An answering machine will take your call, and you'll have one minute to give your thoughts. You need not identify yourself, but please provide initials and your city. If you wish to have your name used, spell it and give a phone number for verification.

a flag represents Americans. Well, he maybe represents this country in a sort of idealistic, abstract, general sense, but not in the same sense that Old Glory represents it. Old Glory represents everything that is good, noble and honorable in America.

No initials

I wish to express my strong disagreement with the United Network for Organ Sharing. They claim they are not passing moral judgment on how people got their liver problems, but I really believe they are by changing the criteria so that the patients with the best chance of survival will get the liver.

I think it should be first come, first served, not somebody playing God and deciding, "Well you'll benefit the most from it, and this one won't, therefore he is going to die." I am not a drinker and I am not a drug addict. I just disagree with that policy.

L.R.C., San Angelo

In response to the caller who complained about high school graduates: Most of the teachers I know do stress the importance of good English and math skills. It is very hard for students who hear and read poor grammar at home and in the community, including in newspapers.

WATER

Continued from Page 1A

would require legislative approval - and voter approval would be needed for one measure that would allow tax exemptions for those who purchase water saving equipment.

But some environmental analysts say passing new water laws could take up to three sessions of the legislature - the same amount of time it took for the last major water law overhaul in the 1980s.

"Trying to tackle major water issues in the legislature is usually a multi session process," said Ken Kramer, director of the Texas Sierra Club, "especially when you're dealing with things as potentially controversial as changing groundwater law and making major changes in inner-basin transfers."

The last major legislative changes to Texas water laws was in the mid-1980s. Lawmakers debated the issue during sessions in 1981, 1983 and 1985 before passing a substantive water package that included environmental review requirements for reservoirs and water permits.

"It literally took three sessions and a couple of votes by voters on constitutional amendments to make major changes," Kramer said. "Water is going to be a front burner issue this time. I'm just not sure if we can resolve all the major aspects of it

CHANGE

Continued from Page 5A
hiring, Smith did not want to release her name.

Smith said the attorney has one-and-a-half years experience, is licensed to practice in two states and recently married a San Angelo man.

Although the attorneys have

to come out with a package at the end of the legislative session."

Among the big issues facing lawmakers are "right of capture," monitoring and enforcement of surface water rights, and transfer of water between river basins.

Right of capture

Right of capture - which lets landowners pump unlimited amounts of water from beneath his or her land - became a hot issue throughout the state because of pumping from various underground aquifers.

Earlier this year, San Angelo officials applied for a permit to pump 15,000 acre-feet of water each year from the Hickory aquifer. But in March, water-district officials said San Angelo could pump only 2,750 acre-feet annually from the aquifer.

That would only meet San Angelo's water needs for about 50 days during a severe drought. Attorneys with the city filed a lawsuit alleging San Angelo was being denied water rights already bought and paid for.

Brady officials have steadfastly opposed San Angelo's pumping water from the aquifer without strict restrictions to limit the amount of water that can be pumped.

The aquifer is the primary source of water for Brady. San Angelo has paid for water rights on the 37,600 acres of land and has nine wells drilled, none of which currently pumps water.

Monitoring and enforcement of surface water rights

Unauthorized diversions of surface water were reported in the Colorado, Brazos and Concho rivers this summer, according to the TNRCC.

In August, San Angelo area residents feuded in a public hearing over allegations that commercial irrigators or river area residents were pumping too much from Concho Valley waterways.

Transfer of water between river basins

This issue was brought to the forefront after Corpus Christi and Austin officials began feuding over a plan to draw as much as 35,000 acre-feet of Lower Colorado River water and move it to Corpus Christi.

Austin vowed to fight that water transfer, saying it could set a dangerous precedent for pumping water out of the river. For years, San Antonio has looked at the river as a possible water source.

Many of those problems were brought on by a statewide drought.

"There are going to be a huge number of bills dealing with water during the session," said state Rep. David Counts, D-Knox City, who as

chairman of the House's Natural Resources Committee, will be at the forefront of water issues. "The drought is still going on - we've only had a little hiatus."

McBee also said that a comprehensive state drought plan needs to be developed. Texas is one of only three Western states without such a plan.

While there is no comprehensive state drought plan, there is a water plan developed because of the 1950 drought. That plan is geared to identify state water needs and help find ways to meet them.

Counts said the recent drought brought the need for a plan to the front burner. Such a plan, he said, would need to include conservation plans that could be used statewide.

"The state drought plan is something we must do," Counts said. "The recent drought brought it to the forefront. You can't make any more water - but you can conserve what you have."

"So many of our towns have run out of water and they no longer exist in existence," he said. "We are putting this together and every area of the state is entitled to some water. We have to try to see that everybody's needs are met."

FREE TVs*



*see store for details

NO Interest until January '98
NO Accrued Interest until January '98
NO Payments until January '98
NO Down Payment EVER!

FREE DELIVERY!

Sound By

Gifts Under \$25

