TEXAS LEGISLATURE
May 1, 2026

ORPHAN WELLS
and
GROUNDWATER
POLLUTION/DEPLETION

SCHUYLER WIGHT

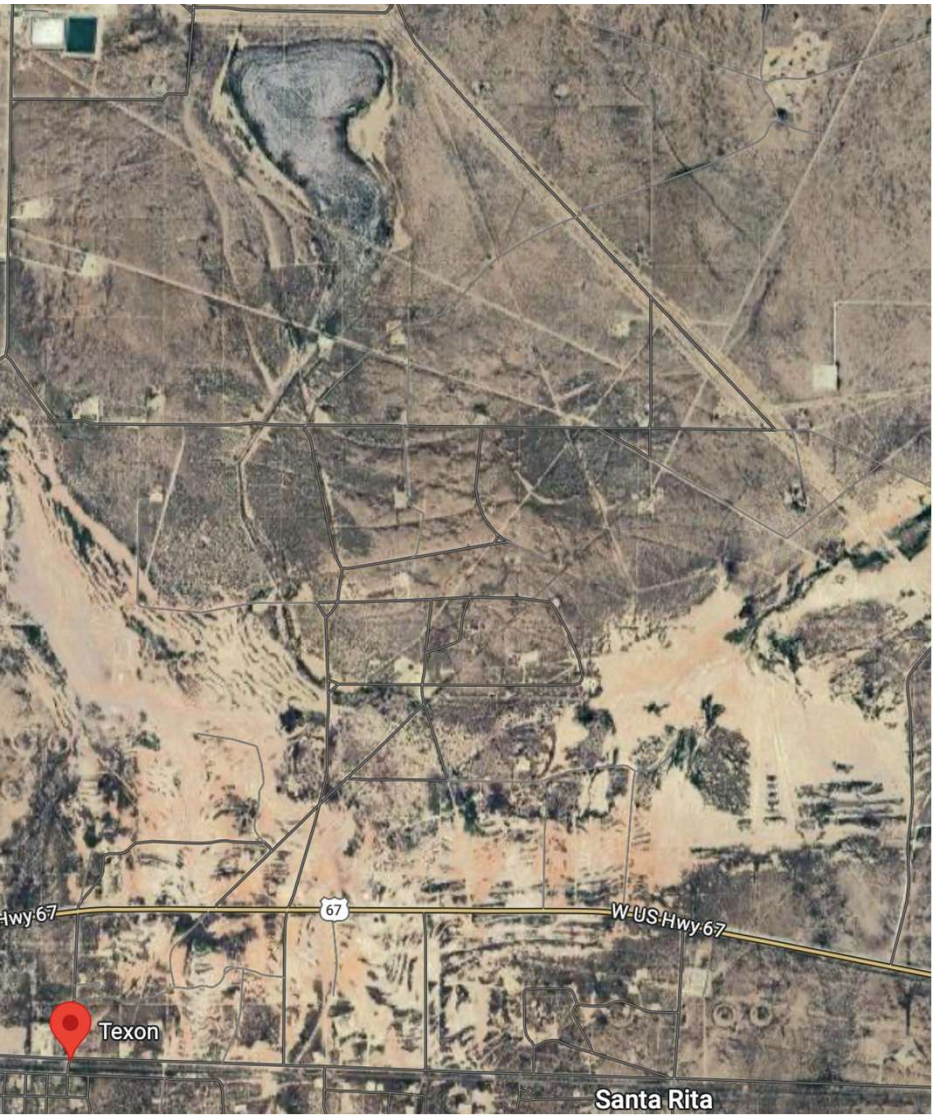
YT RANCH

est. 1885 near Odessa, Texas

6 generations raising cattle in the desert of West Texas
Andrews, Winkler, and Ector counties

Judges 9

45 And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt.



Texon Scar

Same produced water, different method of land application

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100 years of progress?

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Which causes the least damage?

vs.

Crane County Blowouts

What's the Difference?

The Hendrick field is a discovery field in Winkler county near Wink.

First wells drilled in 1926

The field produced 800,000 acre feet of produced water from 1937 to 1957

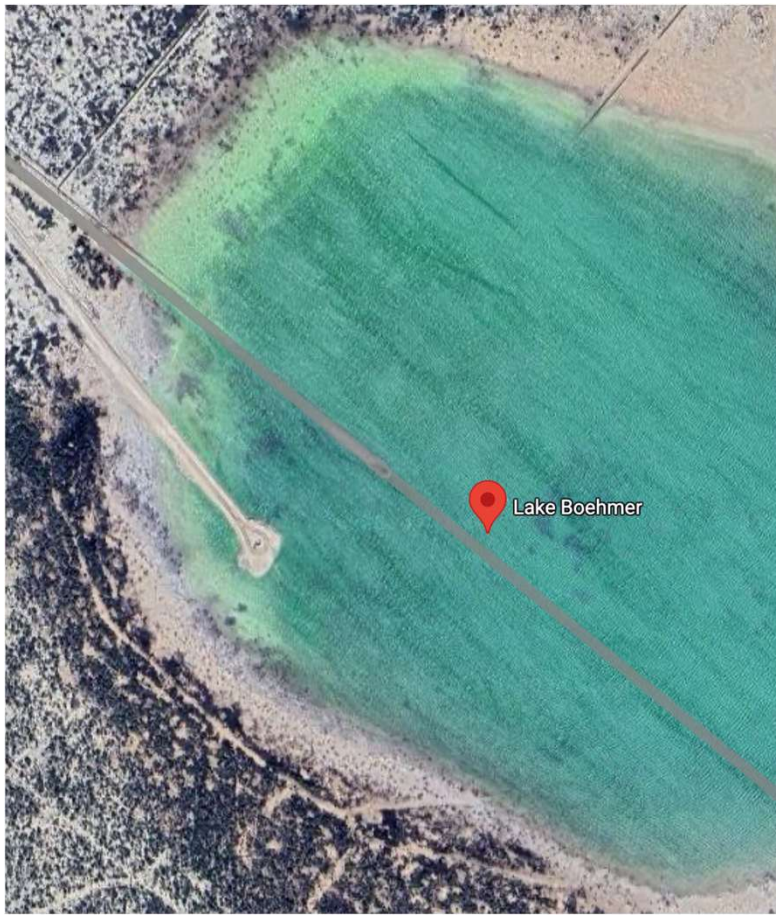
13.7 million gallons/day went to unlined surface pits or to Hendrick Lake

Hendrick Lake is 2 miles north of Wink

Source: TWDB "Water resources of Winkler County, 1959"

SAME POLLUTION, JUST A DIFFERENT PATHWAY

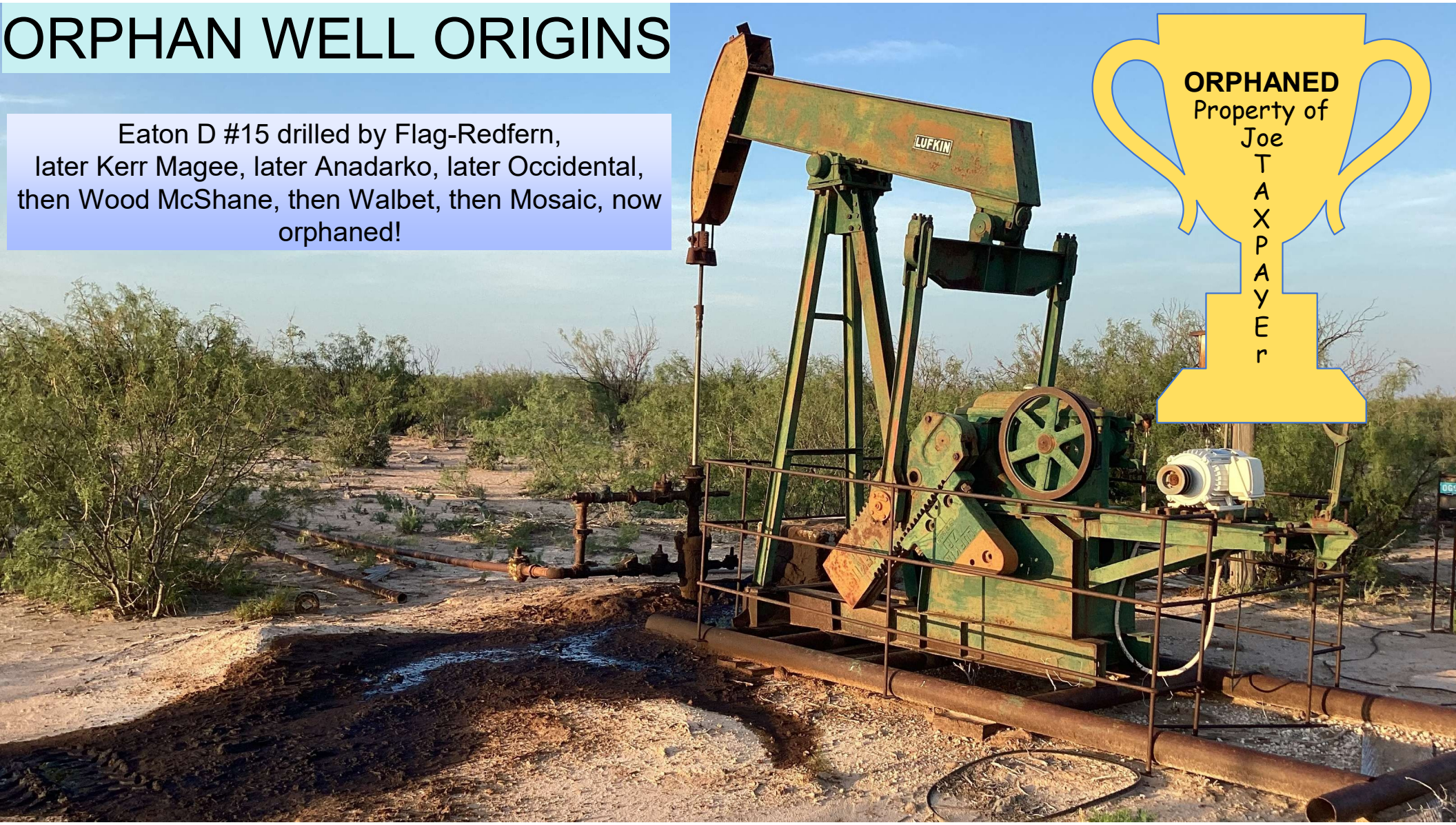
1974 Safe Drinking Water Act required Underground Injection of Produced Water



Hendrick Lake, Wink, TX circa 1968 VS Boehmer Lake, circa 2024

ORPHAN WELL ORIGINS

Eaton D #15 drilled by Flag-Redfern,
later Kerr Magee, later Anadarko, later Occidental,
then Wood McShane, then Walbet, then Mosaic, now orphaned!



Eaton E #7

- Flowing 1 BBL/minute salt water
- Gas was present at surface
- Operator dammed up the water to keep it from running on the highway
- $69,000 for RRC to plug this well

Cordz Juul #13

- First reported to RRC in Fall 2022
- Actively flowing produced water and gas to surface
- Surface around well saturated with salt water
- Tubing and rods in the hole and badly deteriorated wellhead
- Electrical connection not operable indicated well had not produced in decades
- RRC allowed to flow unchecked for 18 months
- Not on the orphan list
- RRC moved on to plug March 29, 2024
- Fishing out tubing and stuck tool pushed cost to $44,056

PCWID #4

- Water injection wells are required to have an H5 test annually
- This well had not been tested in decades
- Operator was injecting directly into the production casing without packer isolation
- Operator was allowed to keep injecting salt water
- Well was leaking produced water sub surface
- Reported to RRC in December 2022
- RRC plugged in spring 2024 $56,275
- Not on orphan list
- 500 feet from an irrigation supply reservoir

Shearer #16

- Reported to RRC December 2022
- Flowing salt water, oil, and gas to surface
- Plugged by RRC in July 2023 for $92,000
- Wellhead broken off, tubing and rods in the hole, flowing
- Not on the orphan list

Pecos River Bed Wells

- This well was drilled by Pantex in 1938 with a prospect permit from the state
- Cable tool rig was mounted on a hand-built platform
- Last produced in WWII
- Undocumented Orphans
- Some are leaking into the river
- About a dozen of these reported to RRC.
- Although reported, no inspections have been initiated and no plugging planned
- Not on the orphan list
- Pecos River bed is dry

TXDOT Sinkhole

FM 1053 south of Imperial

- $340K to plug $50M to move road
- Top 1,000 feet plugged left sub surface flow washing out Salado formation and polluting surrounding fresh water aquifier

Kelton Ranch Sinkhole

- Radford Grocery #17
- TD 10,630 feet
- Drilled and plugged back by Monsanto in 1956 to 2,000 feet
- Plugged to surface in 1977 after use as injection well
- 70 foot cave in occurred when they plugged it
- Recently started growing faster
- RRC has no clue how to fix it

Sulfur Well

Drilled as a sulfur test well in 1969 by a subsidiary of BP

- First reported in 2015 to RRC
- RRC ordered BP to plug in 2022
- BP claims this is not the well they drilled
- BP packed up and left
- Still flowing oil, gas, salt water, H2S

JW POTTS #8

- RRC spent 2 weeks fishing and this is what they caught
- $156,913.51
- 1,800’ TD Well is plugged to 465’
- Bottom is open, crossflow and contamination of Rustler formation

Eaton Kim #5

- Flowing salt water to surface
- Last production in Feb 2005
- Plugging extensions prevented these wells from final plug and abandon by the operator
- 17 years with no production on this lease, no tellling how many years on this well
- RRC moved on to plug in fall 2022
- No well control because surface casing was rotten

- 80 foot hole to find the well
- 2 dozers and 2 track hoes
- water trucks 24/7 hauling salt water to disposal

$945,000

- In 2005 the operator could have plugged the well at a cost <$5,000.
- RRC called sheriff and threatened trespass charges on my ranch.
- Sheriff declined to arrest.
- Legislation in the 88th allows landowners on location for RRC plugging
- 1,800’ total depth, only plugged to 700’ below surface leaving cross flow and potential for sinkhole.

What happens when wells are not plugged properly?

- Well drilled and completed to protect pipeline from corrosion
- Shallow well (<650 feet) drilled into the Rustler Aquifer
- Energy Transfer plugged the well, but:
- Overpressured produced water is flowing into the Rustler fresh water aquifer from improperly plugged nearby orphan wells
- If formations are not isolated when plugging, this is one result

Cathodic Protection well

P13 WELLS

- HB 4256 signed by Governor in 2023 put $10 million towards plugging these wells
- Middle Pecos Groundwater Conservation District is working on a plan to plug wells
- More wells will come to surface as pressure builds underground
- If plugging is successful, the plan is to come back to the legislature to request additional funds
- Boehmer Lake well may take $10 million to plug
- While the politicians dither, the wells continue to flow

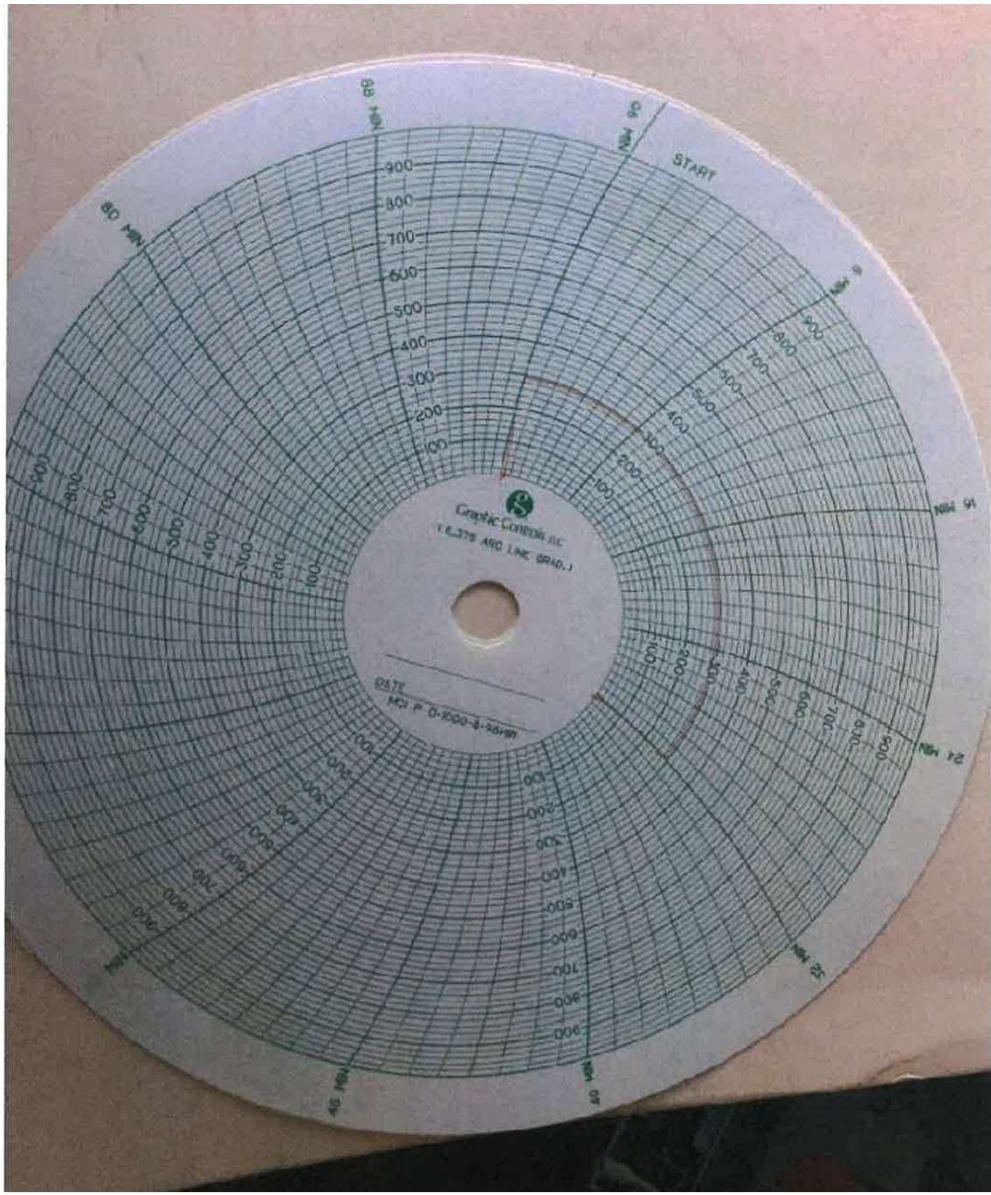
H5 TESTS

- Test chart from an Oxy Inactive well
- Not signed
- No RRC Job #
- No well #
- Numerous Oxy inactive wells do not even have up to date H15 tests
- This is a regulatory gap that can be easily fixed by allowing landowners to witness tests

H5 and H15 tests have the highest rate of falsification of all RRC forms. Companies large and small are guilty.

Bringing integrity to this process would encourage companies to plug inactive wells rather than pass them down to bottom feeders.

One of these days, this well will be an orphan if policy does not change.



We need a George Mitchell for plugging wells

PROCEDURES FOR PLUGGING WELLS HAVE NOT CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY IN 50+ YEARS.

HOW CAN WE INCENTIVIZE INNOVATION FOR PLUGGING WELLS?

- **Economic Incentives to encourage better techniques and procedures for plugging wells.**
- **Sticky well escrow account that can be accessed by any operator.**
- **Current Texas property tax appraisal does not allow for operators to deduct the asset retirement obligations for leases. LOE is allowed to be deducted, but plugging obligations are not.**
- **Carbon credits are one tool in the toolbox, but we need a full set of tools.**
- **Raising pay at the Railroad Commission will help nurture innovative thinking.**