



**Public Input of Virginia E. Palacios  
Executive Director of Commission Shift  
Railroad Commission of Texas Open Meeting  
June 2, 2026**

Last week, after heavy rains, the two-acre Kelton Ranch sinkhole in Upton County overflowed. The ranch manager discovered oil coating vegetation up to a mile away from the sinkhole and produced water flowing over the ground.

We're glad that the Railroad Commission finally has a small underground injection investigation team, and we hope they will be utilized to look into incidents like these. We want the commission to have more staff and more funds to prevent disasters like this in the future.

The Railroad Commission has known about the Kelton Ranch sinkhole for decades, and has not taken sufficient action to control crossflow from nearby injection wells. Peer-reviewed studies have linked underground injection to sinkholes forming in this area.<sup>1</sup>

To my knowledge, the wells in the sinkhole intersect with the San Andres formation. You have continued to permit injection wells into the San Andres formation -even the first Class VI carbon dioxide disposal wells permitted in Texas- despite knowing that the San Andres is the source of gushing radioactive salt water that has formed Boehmer Lake.

Considering the number of emergency incidents taking place in the Permian Basin, we recommend the following solutions:

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<sup>1</sup> Jin-Woo Kim, Zhong Lu, and Roy M Huffington, "Association between Localized Geohazards in West Texas and Human Activities, Recognized by Sentinel-1A/B Satellite Radar Imagery OPEN," *Scientific REPORTs* | 8 (2018): 4727–4727

First: identify the most dangerous areas (such as those with high corrosivity, sinkholes, or high-pressure) and consider banning underground injection and plugging extensions for inactive wells in those zones.

Second: require disposal well operators to use tracers in their injection stream so that you can identify the source of produced water breakouts, then issue enforcement actions and penalties against the companies whose injection operations cause contamination.

Third: before issuing drilling permits or well transfers, require companies to demonstrate that they are solvent and can pay for well plugging. This will free up the oil and gas regulation and cleanup fund to be spent on emergencies rather than on routine plugging of the ever-growing orphaned wells list.

Lastly, the inactive wells rulemaking is a significant opportunity to quell some of the problems our state is facing with respect to leaking wells. We know that the commission will need more funding and more staff to be able to effectively implement the rule. But the first step will be passing a serious rule that retains the commission's authority to say "no" to plugging extensions when it needs to. In April, Commission Shift shared our recommendations for the rulemaking with Railroad Commission staff. This rulemaking is an opportunity for you to preserve and remediate Texas' landscape for the benefit of future generations. It's an opportunity for you to correct the system that has damaged Texas land and waters, and left the agency with a list of leaking wells too long to keep up with. Please don't waste it.