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Texas ag and ranch leaders weigh using treated produced water to revive Permian rangelands

By **Mella McEwen**, *Oil Editor*

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Samantha Borgstedt
Courtesy Produced Water Society



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Agriculture and rangeland managers are closely watching efforts to use treated produced water outside oil and natural gas operations.

The subject was a topic at the Produced Water Society's recent conference in Houston, with a panel of speakers with agriculture and rangeland interests discussing how to sustain biodiversity when using treated produced water.



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“I am supportive of any water that benefits Texas and agriculture,” said Charles Maley, advocacy director at the South Texas Property Rights Association and a sixth-generation rancher and a panelist at the conference.

The topic is intriguing, Samantha Borgstedt, project director for the Texas Alliance for Water Conservation and also a panelist, told the Reporter-Telegram.

“I’m willing to learn and be innovative in our operations,” said Borgstedt, a fifth-generation land manager on her family’s farm and ranch.

“I appreciate the oil companies’ efforts to make the water available. We want them to know we’re interested in having conversations. We want to ensure the water is safe and reliable. We want safe food and fiber that’s reliable. That’s our first and foremost effort.”

Now that technology is available that is capable of treating that water to extremely clean standards that is safe to use outside the oil and gas, the focus needs to be on who could use that water, said Eric Bernard, director of planning at KDC Associates and a panelist.



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“When we think of the ways and best purpose will benefit the most people and the planet,” he

He called it extraordinary that “water this salty” can be desalinated to a condition better than some water used by municipalities. He has seen test results showing purified produced water has improved soil biology and health, resulting in improved plant health.

“Water in the shales has laid there hundreds of millions of years. It doesn’t contain PFAs or antibiotics,” Bernard pointed out.

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Maley is excited to have a conversation about putting water back into agriculture, he told the Reporter-Telegram and the use of treated produced water on non-food crops is a good start.

“What would happen if the Permian Basin turned green again,” he mused. “How would that affect areas downstream? I realized. if there’s 20 million barrels of water produced daily, if we reclaim even half of that to agriculture, 40% to 60% could be reused. That’s acres of the Permian Basin green every year. It or two counties or scattered over eight to 10 mi



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The key is to restart the natural water cycle in the Permian Basin, he said. Rather than discharge treated water into streams or the Pecos River, use it to regrow grass. “Get the ground healthy again, catch those rains and have them naturally flow into streams and the Pecos, naturally improve river quality.”

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“This is a once in a millennium opportunity,” Maley said.

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Mella McEwen

OIL EDITOR



Mella McEwen is the oil editor for the Midland Reporter-Telegram.

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