

Random Thoughts about Rain

As I am writing this, it is raining outside! In fact, it has been raining on and off for three days, with forecasts for at least another day of rain. We have about three inches so far, which I consider to be a major rain event.

It seems like no one is neutral on the subject of rain. If it interferes with our activities, we don't like it. If we haven't had any rain for a while, we like it. If we have been in a drought and plants are dying, we really love it. And of course, if we have a situation like our friends in Houston right now, hate isn't a strong enough word to describe how we feel.

But we all agree on some things: water is essential, droughts are bad, and we all like to see our trees and wildflowers and grasses green and healthy. And of course, if you are a farmer or a rancher, your livelihood depends on it.

At our house, we had a reasonable amount of rain in May and June, but then from late June until Early August, we had nothing (the hottest time of the year), then a more than usual amount of rain in August, and then a month of no rain until this current rain in late September—things were getting crispy again before this latest rain.

The timing of rains can be as important as the actual total. If I could choose when to get rain and how much, I would start by having a one-inch rain every two weeks—26 inches a year. That is actually a little less than the average for this area, but most of every one-inch rain generally reaches the ground and soaks in deep enough to nourish vegetation, and lasts long enough to sustain our native plants for the two weeks before the next rain.

Much of the water from heavy rains that falls in short periods of time tends to run off rather than soaking into the ground to nourish our plants and feed our springs. Most of the water in light showers of one tenth of an inch or so tends to just wet the vegetation and never reaches the ground or just soaks into the ground a little bit and re-evaporates back into the air. We were lucky in the current rainfall that it has been light to moderate for many hours.

I remember as a kid growing up in the High Plains, where the rainfall average is about half what it is in the Hill Country, not only how much we celebrated a rain, but the smell of the sandy-clay soil after being parched for so long and finally getting rainfall.

And I can't think about rain without thinking about this quote from John Graves' book "Hardscrabble".

"So if after a rain-short spring and early summer the July sun and the hot blasting wind out of Chihuahua burn grasses brown and bake the soil dry three or four feet down, they burn and bake your spirit too. And if in, say, September you have gone ahead and gambled—worked some fields and dusted in some seed of wheat and oats and vetch and things on faith and not much of it—and one morning in the gray predawn a fine big

crack of thunder sounds close by and raises you jumping out of sleep on the screen porch, and more resounds with lightning striking somewhere on the Booker through heavy air, the thunder is not around you but inside, echoing in your bowels.”

“And when the rain starts—hesitant spatters of big drops at first, ungenerous, making you push with your stomach muscles for more—then thickens and turns to sheets and wind-driven walls of water so that you know you’ve caught the middle of a strong good storm and the rain will be real rain, not just a shower to sprout corps and let them die, it is raining on the place all right but it is raining on you too, even though you sit there pleasantly dry, wrapped in your sheet beneath the roaring metal roof....It is raining on your dark-cracked fluffy soil and filling it and waking its microbes and fungi and worms, and raining on your hills and soaking into grass and running down rocky draws to brim you tanks...All this you feel, being yourself the land, owning it not merely on paper but inside your hard-way head and your guts.”

Until next time...

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