

## Gaines Court Extends Lightened Burn Ban Through Feb. 13

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Gaines County land owners will continue to be allowed to participate in the burning of brush and debris for agricultural and industrial purposes until Feb. 13, following action taken by members of the Gaines County Commissioners Court on Monday morning.

Monday's three week extension stems from an early December decision by Gaines County Commissioners to lighten restrictions of their countywide, outdoor burning ban, to allow for local land owners to clear debris for the development of land. The decision was made in the wake of snowfall precipitation received in the West Texas and southeastern New Mexico region over the past several weeks.

"I think we are in a position where we can continue this for another three weeks," said Lance Celander, Gaines County Judge in Monday's discussion of the issue before a vote by Gaines County Commissioners, which was unanimous.

The amended regulations allows for local residents to participate in a controlled burn under the following guidelines established by the Gaines County Commissioners Court:

- all burns must be attended at all times and must never be left unattended at any time;
- all controlled burns must be reported to the Gaines County Sheriff's Office at their non-emergency number -- (432) 758-9871 -- and provide the location of the burn and a contact name/telephone number of the person in charge of the burn;
- an adequate water source and basic fire fighting tools (i.e. shovels, hoes) must be present at the fire site;
- fires can only be burned on days where wind speeds do not exceed 15 mph; and
- fires can only be burned during daylight hours.

Two weeks ago, Gaines County Commissioners voted to re-extend their full outdoor burning ban for a 90 day period, which restricts burning brush, trees, grass, leaves, crop residue and any material in an open pit within Gaines County's boundaries.

The restrictions, however, allow for Gaines County residents to continue the burning of household waste from a private residence, provided residents follow the proposed guidelines recommended by County officials.

A violation of the Gaines County burn ban, according to regulations established by Gaines County Commissioners, could result in a minimum of a Class C

Misdemeanor charge, which is punishable of a fine not to exceed \$300.

Earlier this month, officials with the United States Dept. of Agriculture designated Gaines County, and 39 other counties in the Lone Star State, as primary natural disaster areas due to losses caused by drought, excessive heat, high winds and wildfires that occurred during the period of Jan. 1, 2011, and continues to the present time, according to a news release issued by the USDA.

“Texas farmers have experienced severe drought conditions over a long period of time, which has caused major losses to a wide variety of crops such as forage crops, pasture, corn, oats and wheat,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “President Obama and I are committed to using the resources at our disposal to reduce the impact of these disasters on Texas producers and help to get those affected back on their feet.”

All counties by the USDA as designated natural disaster areas are eligible for low interest emergency (EM) loans from USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA), provided eligibility requirements are met.

Farmers in eligible counties have eight months from the date of the declaration to apply for loans to help cover part of their actual losses.

FSA will consider each loan application on its own merits, taking into account the extent of losses, security available and repayment ability. FSA has a variety of programs, in addition to the EM loan program, to help eligible farmers recover from adversity.

USDA also has made other programs available to assist farmers and ranchers, including the Supplemental Revenue Assistance Program (SURE), which was approved as part of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008; the Emergency Conservation Program; Federal Crop Insurance; and the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program. Interested farmers may contact their local USDA Service Centers for further information on eligibility requirements and application procedures for these and other programs.

Additional information is also available online at <http://disaster.fsa.usda.gov>.

Secretary Vilsack also reminds producers that the department’s authority to operate the five disaster assistance programs authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill expired on Sept. 30, 2011.

This includes SURE; the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP); the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees, and Farm-Raised Fish (ELAP); the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP); and the Tree Assistance Program (TAP). Production losses in the counties listed above are covered because the event triggering the loss occurred prior to the expiration of these programs; however, production losses due to disasters occurring after Sept. 30, 2011, are not

eligible for disaster program coverage.

In 2011, the City of Seminole observed its driest year on record, having received just 5.82 inches of precipitation and breaking a 77-year-old record mark of 6.57 inches recorded in 1934.

The 2011 calendar year started with the Seminole community receiving just .20 inches of precipitation between Jan. 1 and March 31, and was followed by five straight months (April through August) with hot and moisture free weather conditions.

During that span, Seminole reported 51 days of temperatures reaching at or above 100-degrees, with the highest temperature recorded at 111-degrees on June 26.

In Sept., the Seminole community received 1.61 inches of precipitation, followed by .35 inches in October and just .04 inches in November.

December, thanks in part to a pair of cold fronts which brought along snowfall precipitation, finished with a total of 1.15 inches, according to local weather tabulations.

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