

## Texas Breaks Promise to Track Oilfield Waste

A Clean Water Action report ([see www.cleanwater.org/tx-ae](http://www.cleanwater.org/tx-ae)) recently revealed that the Texas Railroad Commission (RRC) has failed to protect groundwater from injection of oilfield wastewater, as it promised to do in 1982, as federal law requires. The RRC regulates most oil and gas operations in Texas. Texas has more than 55,000 injection wells for oilfield waste.

Wastewater from drilling contains a toxic mix of chemicals used to extract fossil fuels, especially in fracking. To dispose of this waste, federal law allows it to be injected into the ground, often into an aquifer — but only if the aquifer is not an Underground Source of Drinking Water (USDW). USDWs are defined as having a salinity of no more than 10,000 grams per liter of total dissolved solids.

Through a series of open records requests, Clean Water Action discovered that the RRC has ignored federal law and its 1982 agreement. Specifically, the RRC promised and failed to:

- provide a map of oil fields where injection of wastewater had occurred;
- track injection of wastewater into USDWs after 1982;
- request an ‘aquifer exemption’ from EPA for proposed injection into USDWs before allowing it.

Clean Water Action will continue to document the impacts of the RRC’s failure to comply with federal law. Once oil field waste is injected into groundwater, that water is poisoned for all time. As our drought-plagued state’s population continues to grow, Texas cannot afford to write off future drinking water supplies.



*A Range Resources oil rig across the street from a public park in Denton, TX.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF CATHY MCKENNA VIA FLICKR CREATIVE COMMONS

► **TAKE ACTION:** Please write your state legislators and tell them to hold the Railroad Commission accountable for protecting USDWs. Sample below:

*“I am disappointed to learn that the Texas Railroad Commission has allowed injection of oil and gas wastewater into underground sources of drinking water. I urge you to support legislation that requires the RRC to protect our drinking water supplies as it promised to do in its 1982 agreement with EPA.”*



# Clean Water Action is pleased to announce our Texas endorsements for November 8!



**Pete Gallego, US Congress, TX-23**

Pete is a former state legislator and congressman committed to assuring we have an adequate supply of clean, affordable water. He will stop proposals to weaken environmental protections for Big Bend National Park, and support investments in affordable, renewable energy to create jobs.



**Tom Wakely, US, TX-21**

Tom Wakely is a San Antonio native with strong progressive credentials whose campaign centers on the dangers of climate change and the corrupting influence of money in politics. His opponent Lamar Smith is infamous for his anti-scientific denial of climate change.

## Austin City Council Races:



**Delia Garza, Incumbent, District 2**

Delia is a former City of Austin firefighter and former Assistant Attorney General. As Chair of the council's Public Utilities Committee, she is a champion for affordable utility rates and water conservation.



**Greg Casar, Incumbent, District 4**

Greg is a former organizer for Workers Defense Project and a

leader on the council for fair wages and safe working conditions. He is a champion for affordable housing, pedestrian and bicycle-friendly neighborhoods, renewable energy, and water conservation.



**Leslie Pool, Incumbent, District 7**

Leslie never fails to seek input from the environmental community. As chair of the council's Open Space, Environment and Sustainability Committee, she has fought to protect and expand parkland, and played a major role in Austin's decision to invest in West Texas solar farms and expand water conservation.



**Jimmy Flannigan, Challenger, District 6**

Jimmy is a small business owner who has worked for better transportation solutions for this northwest Austin district for decades. A proven consensus builder, he supports continued investments in water conservation and clean energy. His opponent Don Zimmerman is an anti-environment extremist who has sued the City of Austin on numerous occasions and wants to privatize Austin Energy.



**Alison Alter, Challenger, District 10**

Alison holds a PhD from Harvard and is committed to protecting neighborhoods and natural areas as our city grows. Her opponent Sheri Gallo has voted against once-a-week lawn watering and other proven conservation measures.

## Travis County Commissioner Endorsements:



**Jeff Travillion, Precinct 1**

Jeff is a long-time progressive champion. He will work to shape development to protect natural areas and water quality while reducing the risks of flooding, and will fight for better public transportation that gets people to their jobs, medical services, and school.



**David Holmes, Precinct 3**

David, a Mediator and Crisis Communication Consultant by trade, will work for improved public transportation and make sure that growth does not erode the natural beauty of western Travis County. His opponent Gerald Daugherty's roads-only approach would increase congestion and threaten sensitive watersheds.

# Vote early Oct. 24 through Nov. 4.

**Vote FOR Prop. 1 to Get Austin Moving!** For less than \$5 per month for the typical Austin household, Prop 1 would build a safer, more liveable city.

- **More mobility choices**, with \$37.5 million for sidewalks, \$27.5 million for Safe Routes to School, \$26 million for urban trails, and \$20 million for bikeways.
- **Congestion relief and beautification on major roadways**, with separate sidewalks and bikeways, better bus stops, landscaped medians, drainage improvements, and traffic light synchronization.
- **Safety improvements** at dangerous intersections.



# Community Rallies to Protect Onion Creek

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) has set a public meeting for November 10 to hear testimony on Dripping Springs' request for a permit to dump up to 995,000 gallons of treated sewage each day into Onion Creek. Nearly a dozen community organizations, including Clean Water Action, have expressed strong opposition to the permit due to concerns about polluting this pristine Hill Country creek, Barton Springs, and drinking water supplies. Over 1000 concerned citizens, including Clean Water Action members like you, have written letters and emails to the TCEQ and State Rep. Jason Isaac calling for an alternative approach to direct discharge, persuading the TCEQ to call the meeting.

Even when treated, sewage effluent contains nitrates and phosphates that cause unsightly algae blooms and choke off oxygen that fish need to survive. Onion Creek provides the Barton Springs portion of the Edwards Aquifer with about 45% of its recharge, and the discharge would pose a direct threat to aquatic species in Barton Springs. The discharge would also occur just upstream from the water supply well that the people of Dripping Springs rely on for drinking.

If Dripping Springs receives its permit, new subdivisions in northwest Hays County will likely send their sewage in new pipelines to its treatment plant. Many of these pipes will cross sensitive creeks and some might even be located within their banks. Sewage lines often leak and lift stations that propel the sewage through them sometimes malfunction, leading to raw sewage spills.

There are better ways to handle wastewater. Clean Water Action has joined the Save Barton Creek Association, the new Hays County group Protect Our Water, and others in calling on Dripping Springs to pursue an expanded permit to apply the wastewater to land instead. Properly conducted land application allows soils to absorb phosphates, nitrates, and other contaminants, avoiding the need to discharge into the creek. Reuse of treated wastewater for non-potable purposes is a proven approach that can stretch supplies of fresh water, a prime consideration in our drought-plagued state. Not only would this option spare Onion Creek. This cost-effective alternative would make Dripping Springs a model for sustainability rather than the bad neighbor it seems determined to become.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WWW.PROTECTOURWATERNOW.ORG

## ► TAKE ACTION:

Please consider joining us at the public meeting to protest plans to Dripping Springs' permit application.

### **When:**

Thursday, Nov. 10,  
7:00pm

### **Where:**

1042 Event Center Drive,  
Dripping Springs, Texas  
at the Special Event  
Center at Dripping  
Springs Ranch Park

**Hillary Clinton for President.** The stakes could not be higher and the choice could not be clearer. That is why **Clean Water Action has endorsed Hillary Clinton for President.** Hillary Clinton is a fighter and has a strong history of protecting our environment, water, and health as First Lady, Senator, and Secretary of State.



She has called climate change the “defining challenge of our time”, proposed one of the most far-reaching environmental platforms in history, and incorporated a bold vision for environmental justice in her policies. She will continue President Obama’s legacy of action on climate — and expand on it, ensuring the nation meets the commitments made in Paris. She will also defend the Clean Water Rule.

Learn more here: [www.cleanwater.org/hillary-clinton](http://www.cleanwater.org/hillary-clinton)

## Senate Committee Attacks Federal Environmental Protections

The Texas Senate Natural Resources and Economic Development Committee held a series of panel discussions on September 28th targeting a broad range of recently proposed federal protections for our air and water. The Committee is charged with making recommendations on what steps the Texas Legislature should take on the proposals during its 2017 session. Topics included the Clean Water Rule, the Clean Power Plan, and EPA’s proposal to eliminate the venting of methane and volatile organic compounds by oil and gas operations. Clean Water Action supports each of these proposals.

Each panel consisted of two or more representatives of industry and a single spokesperson for the public interest. David Foster, Texas Director for Clean Water Action, was invited to speak on behalf of the Clean Water Rule, while three industry representatives spoke against it. The Rule would restore protections — stripped away during the Bush administration — to intermittent

streams and wetlands that contribute to drinking water supplies of 11.5 million Texans. Industry representatives trotted out spurious claims that the Rule would force family farmers and ranchers to fill in stock tanks and ditches, even though the Rule explicitly says otherwise. The Rule is actually meant to protect sensitive waterways from big polluters, requiring for example that oil companies who want

to build pipelines across streams and that developers who want to drain wetlands to make room for strip malls secure a permit first, just as they were required to do before 2001.

The tone of comments from committee members makes it clear that they will recommend a purely symbolic resolution

condemning the federal government for attempting to do what Texas refuses to do: protect our air and water from big polluters. The ultimate fate of the proposed protections will be decided by the federal courts and the next President.

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**TEXAS  
CURRENTS**

Fall 2016

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