



OIL, GAS OFFICIALS MULL WATER USE

By Matthew Waller Scripps Texas Newspapers
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AUSTIN — Amid drought and dry climates, oil and gas companies told lawmakers their industry will work to use less water.

A Wednesday hearing of the House Natural Resources Committee and House Energy Resources Committee included at times more than a dozen legislators, all gathered to hear about water and the oil and gas industry.

They listened to testimony concerning wells that require millions of gallons of water for development, and about Texas becoming hotter and drier because of human activity.

Nevertheless, those associated with the energy industry were optimistic.

"I see a lot of the cutting-edge work going on right here in Texas," said Brent Halldorson, who spoke to lawmakers on behalf of the newly formed Texas Water Recycling Association.

"With the continued, in my opinion, bad press ... with hydrofracking, with the use of water, that issue continues to be before us, and it should be because it's a very important issue," said House Energy Resources Committee Chairman Rep. Jim Keffer, R-Granbury. He referenced movies he believes negatively portray the oil and gas industry, such as "Promised Land" and "Gasland."

Water and oil and gas has been a contentious subject partly because of the amount of water used in the drilling process called hydraulic fracturing, or fracking.

Fracking, combined with horizontal drilling, has made certain geographic formations produce oil and gas where traditional drilling could not. The process involves shooting water, sand and chemicals into the ground to open up the formation.

Drilling a well can take millions of gallons of water. Although experts estimate that fracking accounts for 1 percent of Texas' water use, the drilling frequently occurs in arid areas such as West Texas, which has been hit hard by drought and wildfires in recent years.

"We're trying to get away from fresh water," Keffer said. "We're not sitting on our hands."

The lawmakers heard a variety of testimony.

MCR Oil Tools CEO Michael Robertson said his company's technology could use 50 gallons of water for a well.

Halldorson said his water-recycling organization is developing proposals to give energy companies tax breaks tied to recycling water.

Researcher Andrew Barron, of Rice University in Houston, said he is developing technology to make harmless tracers that could discern whether fracking is polluting aquifers, given concerns about the chemicals mixed with fracking water.

Oil companies also highlighted the ability to use brackish water instead of fresh water, efforts to prevent evaporation at drilling sites, and using propane to frack instead of water.

The state's oil industry, meanwhile, is continuing to ramp up.

Academics and experts said recently at caucus and visitor meetings that the Eagle Ford Shale boom in South Texas may continue, possibly providing 117,000 full-time jobs and an economic impact of \$90 billion by 2021.

Lawmakers also are considering the possibility that the Cline Shale in West Texas could provide billions of barrels of oil and cause a similar boom.

The presentations followed warnings from Gerald North, a professor of atmospheric science and oceanography with Texas A&M University, who said the state is set to become drier and warmer in the face of anthropogenic climate change.

The representatives listened quietly while North opened the hearing with a dire picture of the future climate and hearkened back to 2011, the worst single-year drought in recorded Texas history.

"Prolonged periods of drought and other extremes of climate are expected as climate changes toward warmer levels," North said. "Water will be a continual and worsening problem."

Matthew Waller is assigned to cover the 2013 Legislature for Scripps Texas Newspapers and works in Austin. Contact him at mwaller@gosanangelo.com or via Twitter @waller_matthew.