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One man's vision turned into major produced water conference

Woodcock's concern for grandchildren drove effort

March 12, 2022



Jim Woodcock, chair for the Permian Basin Water in Energy Conference, says wanting to ensure his grandchildren had access to fresh water prompted him to organize the Permian Basin Water in Energy Conference.
Tim Fischer/Midland Reporter-Telegram

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Several hundred people flocked to the Midland Horseshoe last month to examine the myriad issues around water and the energy industry's use of the resource.

The Permian Basin Water in Energy Conference attracts speakers and attendees from industry, academia and government, but it is the brainchild of one man who was startled to realize his grandchildren might not have access to fresh water if they continued to live in Midland.

"I was at a 2017 Chamber of Commerce meeting and some of the top producers were talking about drilling 25,000 wells over the next five years," recalled Jim Woodcock, who served as chairman of the conference. "With that number of wells and all the water used to drill and complete them, and on top of that all the agricultural use. That all comes from the same aquifer."

Woodcock decided that the issue needed close examination. As a member of the University of Texas Permian Basin board and member of UTPB's Business Advisory Council, he brought up the issue. After some consideration, it was decided to launch the annual Permian Basin Water in Energy Conference.

"We found a lot of people are anxious to discuss the water situation," he said.

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When the first one was planned in 2018, he said organizers expected 150 would register and hoped 100 would actually show up. Shortly after the conference was announced, 450 community members registered to attend.

After taking a break last year due to the pandemic, organizers streamlined the conference from three days to two.

“I think it’s migrated to talking about the real issues facing the industry,” observed Woodcock. He said he has seen the conference grow to include presentations on reuse and recycling technology, ways to put produced water to beneficial use outside the oil industry, and seismicity and fault lines.

“Things have come up that we never thought about, like carbon dioxide floods meeting water floods,” said Woodcock. “We discussed that; it appears it will be an issue down the road.”

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He said he is pleased UTPB’s John Ben Shepperd Leadership Institute will oversee the conference. He is proud that the conference has provided over \$1 million in economic impact and has provided scholarships for UTPB.

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Originally interested in geology, Woodcock switched to economics in his junior year at Western Kentucky University. After graduating in 1964, he went to work for Xerox Corporation, holding various positions, including worldwide director of training for the office products division. He left Xerox in 1979 to purchase Hy-Bon Engineering, an engineering and compressor manufacturing firm that was purchased by Cimmaron Energy in 2019.

When he purchased the company, Woodcock said Hy-Bon was primarily focused on the domestic market. He expanded into international markets, doing business in Libya, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Middle East as well as South America.

He detailed how his early interest in capturing gas that would otherwise be vented or flared benefited Libya. At the time he was working with the nation, it was the wealthiest country in Africa, producing over 3 million barrels of oil a day. But it would flare 40 million cubic feet of natural gas, he said, because it was almost 700 miles from the oilfields to Benghazi on the coast. By installing Hy-Bon equipment, he said several thousands of barrels of natural gas liquids were captured to be sold.

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