



For Immediate Release

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Organization Recommends Water Policy Roadmap to Texas Legislature

Says Without Better Planning State Will Suffer

(AUSTIN, TEXAS – March 26, 2015) Reinforcing that recent rains have not solved the state’s continuing water crisis, the Central Texas Water Coalition (CTWC) has released the “Texas Water Crisis: A Policy Roadmap” as a guide to the development of water policies for the future. In releasing the 10-point plan, the group believes all aspects of water use, from personal and business use to the types of crops we grow, must be examined. Greater consideration of the effects of water management decisions on future water supplies and the state’s economy should help drive water policy.

“Rainfall is not the only factor contributing to the state’s water crisis,” said Jo Karr Tedder, president of the CTWC. “Past water management policies have also played a significant role.”

In hindsight, a decision in 2011 to release almost half of the available water in Lake Travis to be used for weed control in rice fields was ill-advised. The lake, the major source of drinking water for the region’s more than 1 million residents, has never recovered from the mass release, and remains at only a fraction of its storage capacity.

“With the state’s population expected to grow by more than 8 million in just 20 years, the time for better planning is now,” added Tedder. “The long-term effects of a declining water supply on the state’s quality of life and economic viability will not be easily reversed and could be crippling.”

In calling for decisions that are more protective of the state’s water supplies, the coalition says record low levels for lakes across the state threaten the lakes’ viability as primary drinking water sources for Texas communities. As of March 20, 2015, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality lists 59 of the state’s public water systems as at risk of running out of water within 180 days or less. Forecasters are predicting the current drought could become the “drought of record,” eclipsing the historic drought of the 1940s and 1950s.

According to the Texas Water Development Board, annual economic losses from not meeting future water supply needs could result in income loss of approximately \$11.9 billion annually if current drought conditions approach the drought of record, and as much as \$115.7 billion annually by 2060, with over a million jobs lost.

Recognizing that water supplies are in jeopardy across the state, CTWC seeks to work with concerned citizens and organizations in all Texas regions and river basins to understand their issues. By working together, the group hopes to assist in crafting and advocating for water management policies that responsibly take into account statewide implications.

“Responsible water management must include conservation, developing alternative sources and equitable pricing that encourages efficient use,” stated Tedder. “We also need more comprehensive management with greater transparency and increased involvement of local governments and the public in the planning process.”

The “Texas Water Crisis: A Policy Roadmap” includes the following recommendations:

ENSURE ADEQUATE DRINKING WATER SUPPLIES FOR THE FUTURE

Ensure that regulatory entities make water management decisions that are more protective of drinking water supplies using current sound science to ensure adequate supplies are available for our growing population, even through extended drought.

CONSIDER ECONOMIC IMPACT

Clarify state law to require economic impact as a factor that must be given due consideration in making water management decisions.

INCREASE WATER CONSERVATION

Support conservation rules and policies, and prioritize projects that will have the greatest impact on protecting water resources and reducing water consumption.

ESTABLISH EQUITABLE WATER RATES

Require fair and equitable pricing of water for all customers to encourage conservation. Create a viable avenue for customers to appeal water rates they believe to be unjust and discriminatory.

CREATE TRANSPARENCY IN WATER PLANNING

Require transparency, public access, and public input to river authorities and regional water planning groups.

PRESERVE OUR ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Adopt policies that recognize the connections between natural spring flows and river base flows to protect the biological and ecological soundness of the state’s lakes, rivers, bays and estuaries.

USE UPDATED SCIENTIFIC DATA

Support the use of updated hydrological data in water management decision-making. Ensure adequate staff resources exist to provide real-time hydrological data.

ALLOW FOR LONGER-TERM EMERGENCY ORDERS TO PROTECT THE WATER SUPPLY

Allow for longer terms for emergency orders aimed at protecting the water supply.

EXPLORE ALTERNATIVE WATER RESOURCES

Increase state support for new water supplies including alternative resources, such as desalination.

ENSURE ADEQUATE FIRE PROTECTION AND PUBLIC SAFETY

All water management decision makers should recognize the loss of fire protection when depleted water supplies jeopardize fire suppression efforts and public safety.

Tedder says that the organization hopes legislators and regulators will see the plan as a framework to guide them as the state responds to an expanding population, increased water demands, drier conditions and dwindling water supplies. She will be leading the coalition's supporters on Thursday, March 26, as they tout the water policy roadmap during the 2015 Water Day at the State Capitol.

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The Central Texas Water Coalition is a nonprofit organization whose primary mission is to advocate for and preserve the Highland Lakes' role as an irreplaceable natural resource that supplies water for the region's more than 1 million residents and drives an important regional economic engine for the State of Texas.

www.centraltexaswatercoalition.org