



TEXAS WATER UPDATE

Despite recent rains, a widespread drought continues to affect much of Texas, leading water experts to project the conditions could soon eclipse the drought of record of the 1940s and 1950s. Even if conditions improve, the effects of the current drought have reinforced the importance of ensuring that the state's long-term quality of life and economic viability are factored into water management decisions and planning.

To ensure optimum management of this precious natural resource, all aspects of water use, from personal and business use to decisions about the types of crops we grow, must be examined. Proper water management must include conservation, developing alternative sources and equitable pricing that encourages efficient use. Comprehensive management also requires greater transparency and increased involvement of local governments and the public in the planning process.

The following recommendations were developed by the Central Texas Water Coalition to help guide the development of water policies to ensure adequate supplies of water exist for the future.

ENSURE ADEQUATE DRINKING WATER FOR THE FUTURE

With depleted water sources and an expanding population, it is critical that greater emphasis be placed on protecting the state's water supply. To do so, water management decisions must be made with the full understanding of their effect on water availability during times of extraordinary drought, less severe drought and normal conditions.

Recommendation: *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

The Texas Water Code does not include consideration of the local and statewide economic impacts of water management decisions made by state regulators. Such decisions can have a negative effect on tax revenues, economic viability, business and industry, and job growth.

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

INCREASE WATER CONSERVATION

Water conservation and efficiency must be a central part of the state's water management strategy. Efforts should include reducing losses in water distribution systems, encouraging agricultural users to choose the best available technology for irrigation systems, and increasing public education on the value of water conservation. It should also include preserving the watersheds that feed our lakes and aquifers through land use policies and infrastructure planning.

Recommendation: *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

Water pricing is an important factor in managing water demand and should support the state's growing emphasis on conservation. While many municipal and industrial users face higher rates that encourage reduced use, other pricing practices provide little incentive for conservation. Some firm users such as governmental entities currently pay \$175 per unit of water. These suppliers provide their customers water for drinking, bathing and washing dishes. Conversely, the same water has been sold for \$6.50 per unit in massive quantities to be used for weed control for extremely water-intensive crops.

Recommendation: *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

Texas' State Water Plan is developed by 16 regional water planning groups that function independently. To many observers, these groups lack transparency. Issues complicating public access and participation are common. Additionally, public notices of critical meetings by river authorities often provide little time or information for citizen understanding and input.

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

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

- Ensure adequate drinking water for the future
- Consider economic impact in water management decisions
- Increase water conservation
- Provide greater transparency in water planning
- Use updated hydrological data

PRESERVE OUR ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Water must be managed in a way that maintains the biological and ecological soundness of our lakes, rivers, bays and estuaries. The connections between natural spring flows and river base flows from groundwater must be recognized, further researched and protected.

Recommendation: *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

Hydrological data provides the foundation for predictive water modeling that guides water management decisions. With an increasingly drier climate and a corresponding decline in lake inflows, historical hydrology data can no longer be relied upon to provide accurate projections of future inflows. Updated studies should be conducted to guarantee water management decisions used to ensure our state's future water supplies are based on current inflow modeling.

Recommendation: *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

When certain water supply emergencies occur, the state is limited to the use of a 120-day emergency order with one 60-day extension. Continued extension of emergency orders adds unnecessary bureaucratic complications, especially when the drought circumstances have not changed.

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

EXPLORE ALTERNATIVE WATER RESOURCES

Meeting future water demands of our state will require the use of new technologies and strategies. With the Gulf of Mexico and abundant brackish groundwater, Texas is uniquely positioned to expand new water supply alternatives.

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

ENSURE ADEQUATE FIRE PROTECTION AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Falling lake levels and receding shorelines reduce access to transportable water and threaten a community's ability to fight fires. With increasingly dry conditions, it is imperative that public safety risks posed by depleted water supplies are considered. Central Texas' experience with the Bastrop and Lake Travis fires of 2011 reinforce the urgency of recognizing this threat.

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