

Op-Ed: Regional Water Planners Encourage Public Input by Jim Parks, Chairman, Region C Water Planning Group

“Water, water every where, nor any drop to drink....”

If only it were true that water were abundantly found throughout Texas, and that all our sources of water supply were easily renewable or easily converted into water suitable for consumption.

Water is a critical resource, to preserve Texans’ way of life, to enable continued prosperity and to protect the region’s ecology and wildlife. Without additional water supply, the region’s 2060 employment could be reduced by nearly 700,000 jobs, and the region’s income could be reduced by \$58.8 billion.

While everything is bigger in Texas, this regrettably also holds true for the extended droughts that our state tends to experience. These droughts have taught us that being unprepared is simply not an option.

In the 1950’s, years of prolonged drought led regional leaders to develop numerous reservoirs that addressed the immediate need, but those sources of water are now heavily strained by a rapidly growing population in North Central Texas, which is projected to reach over 13 million people by 2060. As part of that growth, water demand in the region is expected to more than double over the same period.

That is why thoughtful planning for a long-term water supply is so important.

Public awareness and public participation are key elements of regional water planning throughout Texas, and this is particularly true in North Central Texas, where the Region C Water Planning Group seeks to take into consideration not only our rapidly growing population, but also tremendous business growth and a desire to allocate scarce natural resources as intelligently as possible.

A little history to explain the background of our regional water planning process is in order. In 1997, the Texas Legislature enacted Senate Bill 1 (SB 1), which created 16 regional water planning groups statewide and a bottom-up process for development of a 50-year State Water Plan. The bill also stipulated that regional water planners, who represent a wide variety of interest groups in each region, should update their plans every five years in response to changing climate, environmental, socioeconomic and demographic conditions.

The current plan developed by the Region C Water Planning Group in the 16-county North Central Texas region, the *2006 Region C Water Plan*, calls for the development of a wide variety of water management strategies over the next 50 years.

Most notable among these strategies is a combination of ambitious water conservation and water reuse strategies that will put our region among the leaders nationally in efficient use of water resources.

Under the existing plan, Region C’s 2060 water demand would be met through the following water management strategies:

- Approximately *one-third* would come from currently available, connected supplies (primarily reservoirs and streams, but also some groundwater)

- Slightly more than *one-quarter* would come from new water conservation and water reuse projects
- Slightly less than *one-quarter* would come from new connections to existing water sources
- Slightly less than *one-fifth* would come from new reservoirs
- *Additional supply* would be accounted for through the development of regional systems, system operation of reservoirs and use of groundwater.

The RCWPG is now in the midst of reviewing updated population and demand projections and developing a 2011 Region C Water Plan.

Over the coming months, the Planning Group will be closely examining a host of issues that may be of great interest to the public, including:

- Best management practices in water conservation and reuse
- Sourcing of significant supplies of water from Oklahoma
- Transport of water from large reservoirs such as Toledo Bend in East Texas
- Development of selected new reservoirs to ensure a broad variety and ample surplus of future supply sources
- Drought contingency strategies.

The RCWPG hosts public meetings periodically so the public may observe and comment on the group's efforts. The public will also have access to the draft version of the updated Region C Water Plan, known as the Initially Prepared Plan (IPP), once it is initially submitted to the Texas Water Development Board on April 1, 2010.

Following public dissemination of the IPP, one or more public hearings will be held by the RCWPG so public comments on the draft plan can be offered. After these hearings, the Planning Group will review the comments and submit an updated version of the plan to the Texas Water Development Board no later than October 1, 2010.

Finally, the state water organization will review all of the Regional Water Plans, suggest revisions and ultimately combine them to produce an updated State Water Plan in early 2012.

It is important to keep in mind that the Region C Water Planning Group is just a planning group, not a body with legislative, permitting or enforcement powers. However, any water management strategies sought to be developed in the region must first be included in the long-term plan. Thus, the plan serves as a powerful guiding document.

Nothing could be more important to the future of development in North Central Texas than an ample, safe, thoughtfully planned supply of water.

For this reason, we urge the public to monitor the Region C Water Planning Group's work over the next year as we draft a revised water plan, and we welcome all public input on the proposed water management strategies.

For more information about public meetings and hearings, or to review planning documents, please visit regioncwater.org.