

Regional Water Planning Groups in Texas: What They Do and Don't Do

Texas has 16 regional water planning groups (RWPG), one for each designated regional water planning area (A–P). The RWPGs have many responsibilities; however, they have a limited scope and authority. The bottom-up approach to the planning process was designed to focus RWPGs on the identification of water needs (potential shortages) and feasible water management strategies to ensure there are adequate water supplies in times of drought.

It is important to recognize that regional water plans (RWP) are high-level, long-term (50-year) water supply plans and that individual water management strategies and projects often require additional detailed evaluations by the project sponsor¹ prior to permitting and implementation. This document is intended to help the public understand the RWPGs' role.

What RWPGs Do

RWPGs are tasked to develop a 50-year RWP that serves the entire region and takes into consideration the water needs of all water use categories² within the region. RWPs must reflect and respond to changes in population, water supplies, technological improvements, economic shifts, project viability, and state policy.

On average, each RWPG consists of roughly 20 voluntary voting members representing a variety of 12 interest categories required by statute. Members must represent their interest category in the planning process. Local water plans developed by local entities must also be considered during plan development.

The RWPGs conduct their work during public meetings in an open and participatory manner and hold public hearings during the development of their RWPs. Planning group members approve draft plans and adopt final plans by voting at open meetings in accordance with each group's bylaws. Once the RWPG adopts its final RWP, the plan is sent to the TWDB for approval.

The adopted RWPs must meet requirements outlined in the [Texas Water Code](#), [TWDB Administrative Rules](#), and the TWDB contractual planning grant [scopes of work](#) (SOW) and [guidance documents](#). These documents identify the scope of water management strategies that must be considered and provide limitations on infrastructure and components that may not be included in the RWPs. RWPGs must also manage the development of their RWP within their allocated budget. Development of the RWPs are funded primarily through legislative appropriations administered by the TWDB. The TWDB grant contracts allocate specific funding amounts to each RWPG and each SOW task.

¹ A project sponsor, such as a utility or wholesale water provider, is an entity identified in the RWP that would take further action to implement, including paying for, water management strategy projects. Project sponsors designated in RWPs do not restrict the project to only being implemented by that entity in the future.

² Categories of water use planned for in the regional water planning process include municipal, manufacturing, irrigation, steam-electric power generation, mining, and livestock.

The RWPGs must complete the following 12 tasks to develop their RWP:

1. Describe the water planning area
2. Quantify current and projected population and water demand over a 50-year planning horizon
3. Evaluate and quantify current water supplies and source availability*
4. Identify surpluses and needs (potential shortages)
5. Identify, evaluate, and recommend water management strategies to meet the needs*
6. Evaluate impacts of the RWP and describe how the plan is consistent with long-term protection of the state's water, agricultural, and natural resources
7. Develop drought response information and recommendations
8. Recommend regulatory, administrative, and legislative changes
9. Describe how sponsors of water management strategies will finance projects
10. Describe the status of project implementation in the regional planning area and impediments to implementation and provide a summary of how the RWP differs from the previous RWP
11. Prioritize the recommended projects in the RWP
12. Adopt the plan, ensuring the state required level of public participation in the process*

Examples of What RWPGs Don't Do

RWPGs do not have the authority or financial means to implement the water management strategies or projects recommended in the RWPs. RWPGs also do not have authority to provide permits for the projects recommended in the plan. Project sponsors are responsible for implementing projects.

RWPGs are not regulatory bodies. They do not have the ability to develop, modify, or enforce compliance with federal, state, county, or local statutes or ordinances.

Although they must consider environmental requirements, RWPGs do not specifically plan (identify water supplies, demands, or resulting needs) for the environment as a water user group (WUG). The categories of water use for WUGs are defined by TWDB rules (see footnote 2). It is these categories of use for which water needs are identified and water management strategies recommended. However, environmental factors such as instream flows and bay and estuary inflows must be considered when evaluating water management strategies during development of the RWPs. Such consideration must be consistent with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) environmental flow standards where adopted.

RWPGs do not have the authority to issue or modify groundwater production permits. RWPGs must utilize groundwater availability resulting from the groundwater management area (GMA) joint planning process, [i.e., modeled available groundwater (MAG) based on desired future conditions (DFC)], when developing their RWP. RWPGs may not modify the DFC or MAG.³ Only groundwater districts in GMAs can modify DFCs.

RWPGs do not have the authority to issue or modify surface water rights, including those regarding reuse. TCEQ is the agency responsible for surface water rights in Texas.

For additional information on the regional water planning process and current activities, please call 512-475-2057 or visit our website at www.twdb.texas.gov/waterplanning/rwp/index.asp.

* These tasks are typically associated with the largest budgets.

³ Except for in a regional water planning area with no groundwater conservation districts or under an approved MAG peak factor or MAG reallocation in accordance with TWDB rules and contract guidance processes.