



Regional Water Planning in Texas

In response to the drought of the 1950s and in recognition of the need to plan ahead, the Texas Legislature created the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) to develop water supplies and prepare for the state's future water needs. In 1997, the legislature established a new water planning process based on a "bottom-up" consensus-driven approach.

Coordinating this water planning process are 16 planning groups, one for each regional water planning area (see map). The planning groups, each made up of about 20 members, represent a variety of interests, including agriculture, industry, environment, public, municipalities, business, water districts, river authorities, water utilities, counties, groundwater management areas, and power generation. Each planning group approved bylaws to govern its methods of conducting business and designated a political subdivision, such as a river authority, water district, municipality, or council of governments, to administer the planning process and manage any contracts related to developing regional water plans.

The planning groups conduct all functions during open meetings in a transparent and participatory manner. They hold special public meetings when they develop their scopes of work and hold hearings before adopting their regional water plans. Public involvement helps direct the planning and determine which water management strategies the planning group members recommend. Consensus building within the planning groups is crucial to ensure sufficient support for adopting the plan. Planning group members adopt plans by voting at open meetings in accordance with each group's respective bylaws.

The ongoing work of the regional water planning process consists of a variety of tasks:

1. Describing the regional water planning area
2. Quantifying current and projected population and water demand over a 50-year planning horizon
3. Evaluating and quantifying water availability and current water supplies
4. Identifying water surpluses and needs (potential shortages)
5. Identifying and removing infeasible water management strategies from the previous regional water plan
6. Approving and submitting a technical memorandum
7. Identifying, evaluating, and recommending water management strategies and projects to address the identified water needs
8. Evaluating impacts of the regional water plan on water quality, agricultural and natural resources, as well as

water resources of the state, and describing how the plan is consistent with long-term protection of the state's water, agricultural, and natural resources

9. Developing drought response information and recommendations
10. Recommending regulatory, administrative, and legislative changes
11. Describing the level of implementation of the previous regional water plan and providing a comparison to the previous regional water plan
12. Adopting the draft and final regional water plan, including the required level of public participation

Once the planning group adopts its regional water plan, the plan is sent to the TWDB for approval. The TWDB then incorporates information from the approved regional water plans and other sources to develop the state water plan. The regional water plans summarize the dedicated efforts of about 480 planning group members and their technical experts, with input from the public, and with participation of several state agencies (the TWDB, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Department of Agriculture, and the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board) over a five-year period. This process has resulted in greater public participation, public education, and public awareness, underscoring the benefits of directly involving local and regional decision makers and the public in water planning.

For additional information on the regional water planning process and current activities, call 512-936-2387 or visit our website at www.twdb.texas.gov/waterplanning/rwp.

