



P.O. Box 13231, 1700 N. Congress Ave.
Austin, TX 78711-3231, www.twdb.texas.gov
Phone (512) 463-7847, Fax (512) 475-2053

AGENDA ITEM MEMO

BOARD MEETING DATE: January 22, 2026

TO: Board Members

THROUGH: Bryan McMath, Executive Administrator
Ashley Harden, General Counsel
Matt Nelson, Deputy Executive Administrator, Office of Planning

FROM: Sarah Lee, Senior Advisor, Water Supply Planning

SUBJECT: Background on development of the 2026 Regional Water Plans

ACTION REQUESTED

Briefing and discussion on the development, adoption, and review processes for the 2026 Regional Water Plans.

BACKGROUND

In accordance with § 16.051 of the Texas Water Code (TWC), the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) is required to develop and adopt a comprehensive state water plan every five years that incorporates the regional water plans developed and approved in accordance with TWC § 16.053. Pursuant to TWC § 16.053(i) and 31 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) § 357.50, regional water planning groups are required to submit their adopted regional water plans to the Board for approval every five years.

Sixth cycle of regional water planning (2026 Regional Water Plans)

Texas has just completed its sixth cycle of the regional water planning process that was created in 1997 by Senate Bill 1, 75th Texas Legislature.

The regional water planning group members developed their plans over the last five years under regional water planning grant contracts with the TWDB. Each of the planning groups conducted their work at open meetings and in a participatory manner. The 12 statutorily required planning group member interests represented in each region include: agriculture, industry, environment, public, municipalities, business, water districts, river authorities, water utilities, counties, power generation, and groundwater management areas. All planning groups also include non-voting members from the TWDB, the Texas Department of Agriculture, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board, as well as liaisons from adjacent regional water planning groups.

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Additionally, planning groups have discretion to include membership categories as they deem appropriate to their planning efforts, such as Higher Education, Economic Development, or the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

Each planning group approves its own bylaws to govern methods of conducting business and each group has a political subdivision of the state, such as a river authority or council of governments, to administer the planning process and enter into and manage contracts related to developing their regional water plan.

Development of the plans must be performed in conformance with TWC § 16.053; and 31 TAC, Chapters 355, 357 and 358; and associated guidance documents included in the grant contracts. Together, the statute, rules, and contract documents provided a framework on which the regional water plans were developed and which allows the TWDB to combine the regional plans in a meaningful way when preparing the state water plan.

With the support of their political subdivision, each regional water planning group:

- applied for grant funding and entered into a contract with the TWDB;
- procured technical consultants to perform analyses and develop the documents;
- developed and submitted a midpoint Technical Memorandum for review;
- assessed their 2021 regional water plans for any infeasible water management strategies and amended those plan as appropriate (new requirement this cycle);
- refined a standardized scope of work for developing their water management strategies with public input;
- developed and submitted a draft, or Initially Prepared Regional Water Plan for review;
- held at least one public hearing to solicit comments on the draft regional water plan;
- considered TWDB, public, and other comments and revised their plan, as appropriate; and
- adopted their final plan and submitted it to the TWDB for approval.

Regional water plans

Regional and state water planning is based on several fundamental parameters that guide the entire process, including:

- planning for drought of record conditions when, generally, water supplies are lowest and water demands are highest;
- conducting evaluations for all water user group categories (municipal, manufacturing, steam-electric power generation, mining, irrigation, and livestock); and
- reporting the associated data over a 50-year planning period by water user group, county, river basin, and regional water planning area.

Each of the 16 final regional water plans being presented for approval today include:

1. Description of the regional water planning area
2. Population and water demand projections
3. Evaluation of existing source availability and water supply
4. Identification of water needs
5. Identification, evaluation, and recommendation of water management strategies, including documentation of why certain strategy types were not recommended

6. Impacts of the plan and consistency with the protection of water, agricultural, and natural resources
7. Drought response information and recommendations
8. Regulatory, administrative, and legislative recommendations
9. Implementation of, impediments to that implementation, and comparison to the previous regional water plan
10. Public process and adoption of the plan documentation

Most of the key data on which the regional plans are based is aggregated in and managed through the TWDB's state water planning database. The database was populated by both the TWDB and the regional planning group technical consultants. This database is a foundational tool that the TWDB relies on to verify, in the event of a repeat of a drought of record conditions, implementation of the regional and state water plans would not result in overallocation of any water supply sources and thereby create an associated shortage and risk to public health and safety. This database is also the key tool by which the 16 regional plans are incorporated into the state water plan, including the interactive state water plan platform.

Agency review of the regional water plans

All 16 of the 2026 Initially Prepared Plans were submitted to the TWDB by the March 3, 2025 deadline and were reviewed to determine whether statutory, agency rule, and contractual requirements were met. After reviewing the draft regional water plans, a comment letter was provided to each regional water planning group within 120 days that included comments and questions that had to be addressed in their final, adopted regional water plan to meet statutory, agency rule, and/or contract requirements. The planning groups also provided public notice of their draft plan and held public hearings and accepted oral and written comments.

All 16 regional water planning groups modified their draft regional water plans to address the TWDB comments and in consideration of other agency and public comments received. Planning groups adopted their final regional water plans at a public meeting and submitted them to the TWDB by October 20, 2025. The TWDB has reviewed the 16 adopted regional water plans for compliance with rules and statute.

KEY ISSUES

Table 1 provides a summary of key data findings at the statewide level.

Table 1 - Statewide population, water demands, existing supplies, water needs, and water management strategy supply, and unmet water needs 2030–2080 (acre-feet per year)

Decade	2030	2040	2050	2060	2070	2080
Population	34,243,764	38,478,446	42,228,326	45,660,162	49,027,720	52,319,248
Total water demand	17,363,463	17,768,577	17,776,651	17,726,361	18,049,238	18,384,630
Total municipal demands	5,979,446	6,633,513	7,237,480	7,782,963	8,305,101	8,825,472
Total existing water supplies	15,539,340	14,991,248	14,653,265	14,333,348	14,124,357	13,978,122
Total water needs	3,645,447	4,410,900	4,625,477	4,820,977	5,324,734	5,812,309
Total municipal needs	713,928	1,277,021	1,768,727	2,272,459	2,784,391	3,300,634
Total strategy supplies	2,736,795	4,674,763	5,796,484	6,376,225	7,043,837	7,550,279
Total unmet water needs	2,436,417	2,414,244	2,056,861	1,763,257	1,635,151	1,553,258
Total unmet municipal needs	35,004	41,826	75,359	153,733	141,331	197,103

Statewide, the plans include:

- 6,687 recommended water management strategies
- 3,036 recommended water management strategy projects with a total estimated capital cost of \$173.7 billion.

In order to establish the upcoming 2027 State Water Plan as the basis for performing financial assistance related consistency reviews required by 31 TAC § 357.60(b), the Executive Administrator intends to replicate the approach used following the adoption of the 2021 Regional Water Plans. The Executive Administrator will review all relevant financial assistance applications for consistency based upon the 16, Board-approved 2026 Regional Water Plans. Therefore, projects considered for TWDB funding will be based upon the upcoming 2027 State Water Plan which will be adopted just prior to the next SWIFT commitments.

In accordance with 31 TAC § 357.50, the Board is required to consider approval of submitted regional water plans and may approve a regional water plan only after it has determined that the plan complies with statute and rules, including TWC § 16.053 and 31 TAC Chapters 355, 357, and 358.

RECOMMENDATION

No action is required.

Attachment: Map of Regional Water Planning Areas

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Map & Data Disclaimer
This data was generated by the Texas Water Development Board using GIS (Geographic Information System) software. No claims are made to the accuracy or completeness of the information shown herein nor to its suitability for a particular use. The scale and location of all mapped data are approximate. Map published on: 07/01/2024