

TEXAS NURSERY & LANDSCAPE ASSOCIATION



October 6, 2006

Mr. Bill Roberts
Texas Water Development Board
PO Box 13231
Austin, TX 78711-3231

Dear Mr. Roberts:

The following comments on the Texas Water Plan are submitted on behalf of the growers, suppliers, retail nurseries, and landscape contractors who comprise the membership of the Texas Nursery and Landscape Association (TNLA). The nursery/landscape industry contributes in excess of \$9 billion annually to the economy of Texas and horticultural products are among the top three agricultural commodities in the state.

As a participant in the work of the Water Conservation Task Force, TNLA is pleased to notice how many of the Regions adopted portions of the *Best Management Guide* in their water plans. While each region needs to be able to tailor their own program, use of some standardized guides enables research to support specific goals, and enables the industry to adopt uniform educational programs across the state to help meet conservation goals.

Regarding Chapter 13, Planning Group Policy Recommendations.

TNLA strongly supports the continued development and full funding of the Water IQ program. Experience and statistics show that particularly in the areas of landscape water conservation, consumer education is a critical factor for success.

TNLA also strongly supports funding grants or low interest loans as incentives to use conservation technologies. A study was recently conducted by Drs. Wilkerson and Lineberger at Texas A&M University regarding nursery producer water use and the potential savings from the nursery producer Best Management Practices (BMPs) in the Guide. According to this study, many of the practices are already in place. Those that are not in place are cost-prohibitive for the producer. If producers are to achieve projected water savings, they will need help in adopted the more costly methods.

Information and resources regarding water conservation abound, but are hard to access and often conflicting. TNLA supports the establishment of a water conservation advisory council at the Texas Water Development Board, and a water conservation resource library.

Many of the recommendations regarding landscape water conservation refer to plant selection. TNLA supports the recommendation to increase funding to research drought-resistant crop species, and research for advanced conservation technologies. TNLA is aware that at this time nearly all crop research money is available only for food and fiber



7730 South IH-35 • Austin, Texas 78745-6698

(512) 280-5182 • FAX (512) 280-3012 • e-mail info@txnla.org

crops and urges reconsideration of this limitation due to the necessity to develop new urban crops that will withstand the rigors of urban life, be able to be produced and distributed profitably, and present acceptable aesthetic value to the urban dweller.

Finally, TNLA supports funding education for nursery/landscape professionals and for ground maintenance professionals who work for government or non-governmental organizations to improve their water management knowledge and skills.

TNLA has the following concerns about several of the regional plans.

Regarding plant selection. Several of the regions continue to refer to strategies of plant selection, rebates for landscape renovation that target specific plant materials, and limitations on urban landscape irrigation without providing for variances. Except in times of extreme drought, it is important to get some plant material on top of earth that has been disturbed as quickly as possible in order to prevent polluting runoff and offset the "urban heat island" effect of bare earth and concrete. Paying people to remove or plant certain plant materials produces only a short-term gain because homes change hands on average every five years and the new homeowner must be re-educated to maintain the reduction gained by the original changes to the landscape. Experience has shown that even landscapes that win so called Xeriscape awards, may be using more water than some traditional landscapes. Plants don't waste water, people do.

Landscape water conservation programs should require the inclusion of the industry as a stakeholder. The nursery/landscape professional has direct contact with the end user, often manages and installs irrigation systems, designs or advises homeowners on designs for home landscapes, and sells the products that the homeowner uses in their own landscape. Making the industry a partner in any water conservation program is not only good government, it is good sense.

TNLA suggests the following for consideration.

While the nursery/landscape industry is responsible for a high percentage of landscape management, initial planting is under the control of the construction industry. New home and business construction is expected to continue to flourish for the term of this plan and beyond. The construction industry needs to be a partner in establishing new subdivisions that practice WaterWise landscape principles.

The landscape architect is another missing element. The connection between landscape water conservation and the landscape architect is often tenuous at best. Studies in plant material and water conservation are often not part of the landscape architect's curriculum.

TNLA appreciates the opportunity to comment on the State Water Plan and is available for further consultation with the Board on these or other issues related to landscape water conservation. As a founder and management partner in the Texas WaterWise Council, TNLA is committed to a Texas with adequate water supply and beautiful landscapes for the future.

Sincerely,



Eddy D. Edmondson
President