

Regional Water Planning: The Simplified Planning Process

What is simplified planning?

Simplified planning is a provision in the regional water planning process that allows for limited updates to a regional water plan (RWP) and a reduced work effort during RWP development. Simplified planning may only be implemented during off-census planning cycles. The decision to pursue and implement simplified planning is at the discretion of the regional water planning group (RWPG) if they meet the requirements for either of the provisions below.

The two simplified planning provisions an RWPG may consider as a basis for this option, in accordance with Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) rules, 31 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) § 357.12, are as follows:

1. RWPGs may implement simplified planning if an RWPG determines in its analysis of water needs that there are sufficient existing water supplies in the regional water planning area to meet water needs for the 50-year planning period; or
2. RWPGs may implement simplified planning if there are no significant changes to the water availability, water supplies, or water demands in the regional water planning area. The threshold(s) for significant changes are to be defined by the RWPG; however, significance may not be based solely on aggregated, region-wide comparisons without consideration of sub-regional changes.

During off-census planning cycles, each RWPG must declare in its Technical Memorandum submittal whether or not it intends to pursue simplified planning. The Technical Memorandum is a regional water planning deliverable to the TWDB that provides a midpoint analysis of water demand projections, source availability, water user group (WUG) supplies, and calculation of WUG needs.

Implementation of simplified planning continues to require the development and submittal of an initially prepared plan (IPP) for public comment and the TWDB's review for overallocated sources and potential interregional conflicts. RWPGs that implement simplified planning will also need to adopt a final RWP in accordance with TWDB guidelines.

What are the steps and public notice requirements for pursuing simplified planning?

1. The meeting at which the RWPG approves submitting the Technical Memorandum is subject to 14-day public notice and comment periods (31 TAC § 357.21(c)).
2. If the RWPG declares it is not pursuing simplified planning, it may proceed with the development of its regional water plan without any further approvals from the TWDB.
3. Upon receipt of the Technical Memorandum, the TWDB Executive Administrator (EA) will evaluate the submittal and any declaration of intent to pursue simplified planning. The RWPG must receive written approval from the EA prior to implementation of simplified planning.
4. If the RWPG declares its intent to pursue simplified planning, it must then hold a public hearing subject to a 30-day notice and comment period (31 TAC § 357.21(d)). This public notice requirement includes notice to other RWPGs that share water supply sources, water management strategies (WMSs), and/or water management strategy projects (WMSPs). It is essential that the RWPG pursuing simplified planning coordinate thoroughly with these RWPGs and any impacted WMS or WMSP sponsors.

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5. At the conclusion of the public comment period following the public hearing, the RWPG must hold a public meeting subject to a 72-hour notice period (31 TAC § 357.21(b)) to consider comments received and make its decision to implement simplified planning.

What content must be updated in the regional water plan if an RWPG conducts simplified planning?

1. Data reports required in Technical Memorandum, such as population projections; water demand projections; source availability; WUG supplies; WUG needs; source water balance; and a comparison of availability, demands, and needs to those of the 2016 RWP, must be included in the simplified plan.
2. A simplified plan may also require revisions to select WMSs or WMSPs, for example, due to new information from the project sponsor or to adjust for new groundwater source availability volumes. Any WMSs or WMSPs that are not reevaluated will, at a minimum, require updates to construction costs to account for use of September 2018 price indices and updated interest rates during construction and associated debt service as identified in TWDB guidance. Annual costs will require updates to power costs, and overall unit costs will need to be recalculated to be consistent with updated costing requirements.
3. RWPGs may determine if material from the previously approved RWP is appropriate to readopt for the development of their current plan. If material is readopted for inclusion in the simplified plan, this material must be identified in Chapter 11 of the IPP and final adopted RWP.

Implementation of simplified planning must meet existing statutory and rule requirements, including no overallocation of any water supply source, and any new statutory or other planning requirements.

How does simplified planning affect the RWPG's contract scope of work (SOW) and budget?

RWPG work on WMS evaluations remains subject to scoping negotiations and notice-to-proceed requirements as outlined in TWDB guidance. Limited updates to WMSs or WMSPs should still be scoped to receive notice-to-proceed from the TWDB. The TWDB will assist with costing updates to the extent that resources allow and will coordinate directly with RWPGs implementing simplified planning.

The RWPG contract SOW and task and expense budgets of RWPGs that choose to implement simplified planning will be renegotiated and amended to reflect the reduced work effort and budget. If an RWPG chooses to rescind its pursuit of simplified planning, it must do so before execution of its contract amendment within the provided contract execution deadlines.

Additional Resources

Regional Water Planning Rules, 31 TAC Chapter 357:

[http://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.ViewTAC?tac_view=4&ti=31&pt=10&ch=357&rl=Y](http://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.ViewTAC?tac_view=4&ti=31&pt=10&ch=357&rl=Y)

Regional water planning contract document *Second Amended General Guidelines for Fifth Cycle of Regional Water Plan Development*:

www.twdb.texas.gov/waterplanning/rwp/planningdocu/2021/doc/current_docs/contract_docs/2ndAmendedExhibitC.pdf

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