

TEXAS LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE ON WATER

**Core Principles and Recommendations
October 2014**



**DEVELOPED BY THE SUPPORTERS OF THE
TEXAS LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE ON WATER**

**HOSTED BY WYE RIVER GROUP (WRGH.ORG). FOR MORE INFORMATION
CONTACT: JON COMOLA, JRCOMOLA@WRGH.ORG, 512-695-8806**

NOTE: This document does not necessarily represent the views of the organizations with which its authors are affiliated. Rather, it represents the best thinking among a very learned and diverse group of water stakeholders. It is the “making of a consensus.”

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CORE PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SURFACE WATER AND GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT

- **Core Principle: Water planning and management structures should acknowledge interactions between surface water and groundwater.**

Recommendation: The Texas Legislature should recognize, in law, the physical relationship between surface water and groundwater and develop planning and management approaches that reflect this relationship. Further, the Legislature should commit the state resources necessary to make these approaches effective.

DATA GAPS AND RESEARCH NEEDS

- **Core Principle: A comprehensive knowledge of Texas water resources is needed to ensure well-informed water policy decisions.**

Recommendation: Public and private institutions in Texas, including the Texas Legislature, should make an ongoing commitment, with greatly enhanced funding levels, to conduct or support research that expands knowledge of the state's water resources and how to best manage those resources.

Recommendation: Water researchers and research institutions in Texas should establish a state network to help coordinate the investigation and evaluation of critical water topics.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES

- **Core Principle: New water management technologies will be a key part of the comprehensive effort needed to meet the state's water supply challenges.**

Recommendation: The Texas Legislature should explore using existing funding sources or establishing new funding mechanisms to assist in facilitating and advancing the development, demonstration, and deployment of innovative technologies and strategies for water management solutions.

OPTIMIZING THE TEXAS STATE WATER PLAN

Core Principles:

- **The state needs to plan for all its water needs.**
- **All the state's water resources should be used efficiently and effectively.**
- **Planning is best done with meaningful levels of local, regional, and state participation.**

Recommendation: Regional water planners and the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) must implement the prioritization process for water projects in a manner that truly supports and facilitates the most realistic projects, including conservation projects, by emphasizing factors such as viability, feasibility, sustainability, and cost-effectiveness of projects.



Recommendation: TWDB should set clear expectations for the regional water planning groups to follow when considering the impacts of proposed water management strategies on agricultural and natural resources, actively evaluating and incorporating conservation as the first priority for meeting unmet water needs, and assessing and incorporating the implementation of drought contingency plans into the regional water plans. TWDB should rigorously evaluate the extent to which a regional plan truly addresses these overarching state concerns and make that assessment a significant factor in determining TWDB's approval of that regional plan.

Recommendation: The Texas Legislature should authorize TWDB to suggest projects and strategies in the regional water plans and the state water plan to meet multi-regional needs more effectively, to address multi-regional issues such as maintaining environmental flows, and/or to achieve other multi-regional or state goals. TWDB should be directed to work closely with regional planning groups throughout the regional planning process to pursue these possibilities and identify ways in which state financial assistance might be optimized to implement these projects and strategies.

Recommendation: The Texas Legislature should change the frequency of the regional and state water planning process from five years to 10 years and enhance opportunities to use the planning groups and TWDB staff and resources to address critical information needs that will lead to enhanced water plans and policies. The first five years of the planning cycle would be for developing updated plans, and the second five years would be devoted to targeted research designed to improve future plans and future water management.

Recommendation: Funds previously allocated to planning activities should be reallocated in the second half of the 10-year cycle to critical regional research topics.

Recommendation: The Texas Legislature should create a system of staggered terms for regional planning group members and should direct TWDB to set new requirements for publicizing opportunities for participation on the planning groups and for increasing diversity among planning group members. The Legislature should direct TWDB to evaluate the need for representation of additional water stakeholder interests on regional water planning groups and make recommendations to the Legislature accordingly.

ENVIRONMENTAL FLOWS

- **Core Principle: Environmental flows are a critical water need that must be met.**

Recommendation: The Legislature should ensure that environmental flow needs are incorporated into water planning as a formal category of water use to be planned for and that a variety of proactive measures, consistent with private property rights, are implemented to meet those needs at locations where adequate flows are not otherwise assured.

CONSERVATION AND DROUGHT RESPONSE

- **Core Principle: Water conservation is an ongoing activity and is no longer optional.**

Recommendation: The Texas Legislature should continue to require that public water utilities and certain surface water rights holders prepare and submit water conservation plans to the appropriate state agencies on a recurring five-year cycle and report on the implementation of those plans annually. The Legislature should provide additional authority and direction to the appropriate state agencies to take a more proactive role in assisting and, when necessary, requiring water utilities and water rights holders to take affirmative action to advance water conservation. The Legislature should also direct the regional water planning groups to ensure that water conservation is truly the first priority in meeting unmet water needs in their respective plans.

- **Core Principle: Reduction of water loss is an integral part of conservation.**

Recommendation: Building upon action taken by the Texas Legislature in 2013 to enhance requirements for water loss audits and expand funding requirements and options to curb water loss by utilities, TWDB, regional water planning groups, water providers, and surface water rights holders should prioritize reducing water loss when implementing their respective responsibilities.

- **Core Principle: Water pricing mechanisms should promote conservation and be adjusted to produce sufficient revenue for water utilities while further reducing water use in drought years.**

Recommendation: Retail and wholesale water providers should structure their respective water rates to promote water conservation, provide for long-term financial viability without undercutting conservation efforts, and reduce water use during drought situations.

- **Core Principle: Drought conditions require additional actions to reduce non-essential uses of water to sustain the economy and the environment.**

Recommendation: The Texas Legislature should continue to require that public water utilities and certain surface water rights holders prepare and submit drought contingency plans to the appropriate state agencies on a recurring five-year cycle and report on the implementation of those plans annually. The Legislature should provide additional authority and direction to the appropriate state agencies to take a more proactive role in assisting and, where necessary, requiring water utilities and water rights holders to take affirmative action to enhance the effectiveness of drought contingency plans. The Legislature should also direct certain retail water suppliers to coordinate the development and implementation of their respective drought plans as appropriate within the same region.

- **Core Principle: The Texas Legislature and state water agencies — through direct funding, technical support, financial assistance, and/or regulatory action, as appropriate — must be proactive in helping retail and wholesale water suppliers and economic sectors achieve their conservation and drought management goals.**

Recommendation: TWDB and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), with input from the state Water Conservation Advisory Council and other relevant entities, should undertake a well-funded, joint study to determine the potential for water conservation and water use efficiency in Texas and the economic impacts of an aggressive effort to achieve that potential, including possibilities for job creation.



Recommendation: The Texas Legislature should make any necessary changes in state law that would assist the promotion and use of grey water and rainwater harvesting systems in new and existing residential, commercial, and institutional construction.

Recommendation: TWDB should appropriately define “conservation projects” for state financial assistance that allows a broad range of water use reduction and efficiency measures to be eligible for support. However, such a definition of “conservation” should not be so expansive that it includes water supply activities, such as brackish groundwater desalination, which have merit but do not reduce water use.

Recommendation: TWDB should assist retail and wholesale water utilities in acquiring and using software and other tools, such as smart meters, or services to better measure water use, the extent of real water losses, the effectiveness of implementing water conservation measures, and the impact of drought contingency measures on reducing water use.

LAND AND WATERSHED STEWARDSHIP

- **Core Principle: The protection of the vast watersheds and aquifer recharge areas in Texas is critical to maintaining the water resources and future well-being of the state.**

Recommendation: More local governments in Texas should provide funding for purchasing the development rights of private landowners in critical watersheds in their areas in order to maintain the increasingly important hydrologic functions performed by those lands.

Recommendation: The Texas Legislature should complement local efforts by identifying an ongoing source of funding for the Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program to help farmers and ranchers continue their stewardship of those lands and the water sources they support.

EDUCATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

- **Core Principle: “The more Texans know about their water resources, the more likely they are to conserve.”**

Recommendation: The Texas Legislature should fully fund the implementation of Water IQ: Know your water, the state water education program, to help Texans understand the sources of their water as well as how and why to conserve and protect these sources. Water IQ should be used as a complement to other effective local and regional water education programs and as a resource for entities without education programs.



Recommendation: TWDB should revise the Water IQ program to incorporate components, such as an online tool, that help individuals and families calculate and understand the volume of water they use in-home and outdoors, how their water use compares to others, and how to reduce their water use based on that information.

Recommendation: State, regional, and local entities implementing Water IQ should use all forms of media, including television, radio, and print advertisements, and social media, to convey Water IQ messages to the public.

Recommendation: Wholesale and retail water suppliers should provide daily updates on local water supply conditions to the news media and through social media.

Recommendation: Where practical, retail water utilities should use new technology, such as automated metering systems, to provide direct feedback to consumers on water usage along with educational materials that are customized based on the lifestyle of the consumer.

Recommendation: TWDB, with the assistance of the Water Conservation Advisory Council, should evaluate water conservation education programs used in Texas to determine which programs appear to be the most cost-effective and the most effective in reducing water use. TWDB should also make that information available to water utilities and the public.

- **Core Principle: Water conservation education efforts could be greatly enhanced via collaborative regional programs and standardized resources.**

Recommendation: The Texas Legislature and state water agencies should develop a clearinghouse of water conservation education resources for use by Texas communities.

Recommendation: Each retail water utility in Texas should develop a utility-to-customer website to provide individualized information on customer water usage and cost, billing payment, and conservation programs provided by the utility. This would allow systems to deliver conservation materials and customer feedback in a way that is consistent with research without a substantial cost to the utility.

- **Core Principle: Agricultural water conservation is essential to meeting future water demands, and enhanced education and training is critical to maximizing the potential benefits of agricultural water conservation.**

Recommendation: The Texas Legislature should provide financial resources that allow the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, in cooperation with groundwater conservation districts and other partners, to enhance efforts that provide agricultural irrigation training programs and demonstration projects in major agricultural irrigation areas of Texas.

- **Core Principle: Responsible urban water management requires an understanding of the total value of water as a resource, the functions that outdoor landscaping serves beyond aesthetics, and the benefits of natural landscapes.**

Recommendation: State water agencies, regional and local water utilities, and educational organizations should include information in their water education and training programs that helps urban water users understand water from a systems approach. This information would include an understanding of where tap water comes from, where water goes after it leaves the home as wastewater and the yard as runoff, and how landscape choices impact water and affect its functions. Such an initiative might include the establishment of a Texas Water Conservationist program similar to the existing Texas Master Gardeners program.

ENDORSERS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Endorsers of the recommendations:

1. David Anderson, FORM Strategic Consulting
2. Carole Baker, Texas Water Foundation
3. Crockett Camp
4. Jon Comola, Wye River Group
5. David Eaton, Bess Harris Jones Centennial Professor of Natural Resource Policy Studies, UT Austin
6. Jon Fisher, President, Associated Builders and Contractors of Texas*
7. Kinnan Golemon, President, KG Strategies, LLC
8. Robert Hebert, County Judge, Fort Bend County
9. Myron Hess, National Wildlife Federation*
10. Jerry James, City of Victoria*
11. Robert King, SPEER, South-central Partnership for Energy Efficiency as a Resource
12. Wayne Klotz, Klotz Associates, Coastal Water Authority*
13. Ken Kramer, Sierra Club - Lone Star Chapter*
14. Weir Labatt, former member Texas Water Development Board
15. Wendy Lopez, URS*
16. Daene McKinney, Cockrell School of Engineering, UT Austin
17. Craig Pedersen, UT Austin and Enviro Water Minerals Company*
18. Andy Sansom, Meadows Center for Water and the Environment*
19. Mary Ellen Summerlin, 8-year board member of Headwaters Groundwater Conservation District
20. Melvin Swoboda
21. Ashok Varma
22. Kevin Wagner, Texas Water Resources Institute*
23. C.E. Williams, Panhandle Groundwater Conservation District*

Legislative supporters of the process:

1. The Honorable Charles “Doc” Anderson
2. The Honorable Trent Ashby
3. The Honorable Bill Callegari
4. The Honorable Glenn Hegar
5. The Honorable Lyle Larson
6. The Honorable Eddie Lucio III
7. The Honorable Jerry Patterson
8. The Honorable Allan Ritter

Thank you to others who participated:

1. Bill Espey
2. Elizabeth Fazio, Texas House Committee on Natural Resources
3. Bill Howe, Texas Farm Bureau (Listed for informational purposes only and does not reflect any official position by that person or entity)
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10. Suzanne Schwartz, UT Center for Public Policy Dispute Resolution

*Institutional affiliation listed for informational purposes only and does not reflect any official position by that entity.
