



State Planning and Funding to Meet the Critical Water Needs of Texas

Texas faces a multitude of challenges in meeting water supply needs while also protecting our state's irreplaceable natural heritage and maintaining the jobs and businesses dependent upon our fish and wildlife resources.

At a time when our state faces many competing financial needs—for education, transportation, and other vital services—prudent choices must be made to determine the appropriate role for state funding of water supply projects and other water management strategies. Local and regional water suppliers have asserted that State financial assistance is needed to fund about half of the total \$53 billion price tag for water infrastructure projects in the current State Water Plan. However, simply providing that funding without carefully prioritizing projects and also improving the State Water Plan would not be the most efficient use of taxpayer funds.



Boykin Springs Falls, East Texas
Photo by Charles Kruvand

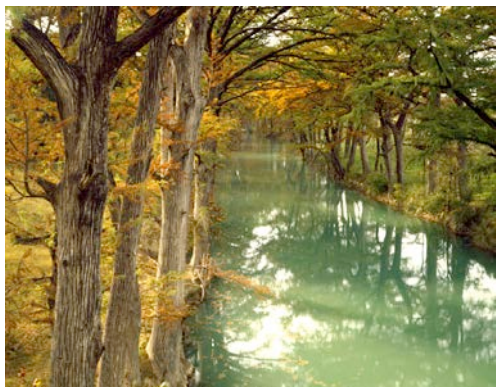
Texas needs a comprehensive State Water Plan that incorporates drought response measures and addresses instream flow and freshwater inflow needs. We also need clear metrics for determining which projects merit State financial assistance. With those refinements, Texas can realistically meet future water supply needs while saving money and protecting our natural heritage. The State Water Plan as currently written will not achieve those objectives.

Recommendations for a Strategic and Cost-Effective Approach to Meet Texas Water Needs:

Improving the State Water Plan:

- The State Water Plan should be revised to refine projections for actual water *needs* rather than water “demands” in future drought years, including incorporation of water use reductions that reflect implementation of effective drought response measures by water suppliers during dry years.
- The State Water Plan should be revised to address all water needs, including water to support the health of our rivers and bays along with the commercial and recreational fishing, river and coastal tourism, and other industries that depend on adequate river flows and freshwater inflows for their survival.

Funding for Instream Flow and Freshwater Inflow Protection: Any State water funding mechanism should dedicate a reasonable amount of funds—at least 5%—to implement on-the-ground voluntary measures to protect and restore instream flows and freshwater inflows to bays and estuaries, **including incentives for enhanced land stewardship**, and to support research to help refine flow requirements.



Sabinal River: Photo by Charles Kruvand

Funding for Water Conservation & Water Reuse:

Any new mechanism for financing water management strategies in the State Water Plan should set aside at least one-third of available funds for the implementation of effective water conservation programs and water reuse projects, with no more than half of that money allocated to reuse. Qualifying water conservation activities must be clearly defined. Prioritizing improved efficiency of water use is the most cost-effective way to meet future water needs in Texas.

Funding for Water Infrastructure Projects: The State should establish clear metrics for determining which water infrastructure projects in the State Water Plan merit State financial assistance. The metrics should reflect the following principles:

- Water supply projects designed to meet near-term needs that cannot reasonably be met through improved water efficiency measures should receive priority consideration.
- Prioritization criteria should reward projects that are highly cost effective, include measures to ensure the new water supply will be used efficiently, and result in low environmental impact.
- Absent extenuating circumstances, there must be a firm commitment for substantial funding from local and regional water supply interests and a demonstration that full funding on the local and regional level is not feasible.
- In the case of groundwater projects, assistance should only be provided to those projects that would not impair existing water supplies, including existing surface water rights, and would not impair springflows or instream flows.

As we move forward in the 21st century Texas clearly needs a comprehensive and fiscally-responsible approach to providing water to sustain the people and the environment of Texas. We can accomplish that goal by refining the State Water Plan to better define our true water needs and by developing a State funding mechanism that provides for more efficient use of already-developed water resources and for protection of fish and wildlife while targeting State financial assistance for critical infrastructure projects to address unmet needs.

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