

Dallas Morning News

Editorial

State moves closer to 50-year plan

July 23, 2001

The challenges that members of the Texas Water Development Board heard about last week in lengthy meetings are certainly compelling: financing water projects; ensuring the quality of Texas water supplies; managing droughts; making seawater drinkable; and conserving aquifers. The issues are among the topics board members have discussed in meetings they have established to hear from experts, advocates, officials and citizens about Texas' long-range water needs.

Later this year, the panel must finalize a 50-year plan for the state, which essentially represents the work of 16 water planning groups around Texas.

The state faces serious questions about financing the first stages of a water plan. This session, legislators failed to allocate funds for the estimated \$7 billion in projects the state will need by 2010.

The best that water planners can hope for is voter approval in November of a constitutional amendment to expand the water board's bonding authority. Voters should ratify that amendment, although Texas relies too heavily upon bonds to develop its infrastructure. The bonds offer the most realistic chance of jump-starting projects that regions will need to meet growing water demands.

Demographers predict Texas' population could double over the next half-century. The growth will place enormous demands on Texas' most precious natural resource. It particularly will affect places like El Paso, San Antonio and Far West Texas, where water is too scarce to meet the demands of industries, municipalities, farmers and residents over the next half-century.

North Texans can feel fortunate that their region does not face the same level of anxiety. The plan that water experts from this region submitted to the water board last year, and which the panel has approved, should meet the needs of industry, agriculture and residents until 2050.

But North Texans trail other parts of the state in water conservation, a particularly important issue. The Dallas-Fort Worth area uses more water per capita than any other part of Texas.

Just because this region may meet its longer-term needs does not mean that North Texans should exempt themselves from sound water practices. Installing restrictive shower heads, using native plants in gardens and watering golf courses with treated wastewater are among the ways North Texas can better conserve water.

The state does not have a limitless supply of water, as members of the Water Development Board are hearing in their meetings. Plotting a long-range guide for Texas' future will require cooperation from all corners of the state.