

Abilene Reporter

Report sets water conservation goals

**By Monica Wolfson / Scripps Howard Austin Bureau
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AUSTIN - A state water conservation task force unanimously adopted its report Monday, recommending ways that residents, businesses and agriculture can use water more efficiently.

While the vote was 29-0, the report includes two minority dissensions about key recommendations, which the task force will submit to the Legislature.

Lawmakers created the Water Conservation Implementation Task Force last year to study water conservation issues and make recommendations to lawmakers by Nov. 1.

According to the state water plan, Texas won't have enough water to meet its needs by 2050 if the state doesn't construct more lakes or curtail water consumption.

The report outlines 23 primary water conservation goals for the Legislature, including a public awareness program, a best practices management guide, and education and incentive programs.

A point of contention was a recommendation to reduce water usage from the current average of 164 gallons per resident a day to 125 gallons per resident per day.

Municipalities protested this recommendation, saying it would reduce water revenues and increase rates.

As a compromise, the task force changed its recommendation to 140 gallons per resident a day.

In his minority report, Ken Kramer, director of the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club, said the task force recommendations "do not constitute a bold vision for the future of water conservation in Texas nor do they tap the full potential for water savings."

He protested that a goal of 140 gallons per resident is not ambitious because it has already been achieved by water-conservation-conscious cities such as San Antonio.

There isn't sufficient data to make a reasonable recommendation on gallons per day, said Gene Montgomery, external affairs director of oil and gas producer Oxy Permian. The state may be able to make a more definitive recommendation when more data becomes available, he said.

Jobaid Kabir, manager of the corporate environmental compliance department of the Lower Colorado River Authority, protested the inclusion of "reuse water" as a method of conservation. Reuse water is usually defined as treated effluent water from wastewater treatment plants that are normally released into streams and rivers.

"You can reduce per capita use from 200 gallons per day per person to 140 without doing anything, by just using reuse water," Kabir said.

But Jim Parks, executive director of the North Texas Municipal Water District, said communities that use the same water a second or third time make an efficient use of water and it should be considered conservation.

The report also recommends the state hire 16 regional conservation coordinators to aid small communities in getting water conservation information and give priority for state loans and grants to communities that have implemented water conservation practices.

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