

The Victoria Advocate - <http://TheVictoriaAdvocate.com>

Water plan revised to include decreases in projected water needs

ROBIN M. FOSTER

Victoria Advocate

Saturday, June 4, 2005

An updated plan for future water projects in south central Texas will receive its first public review in July.

The South Central Texas Regional Water Planning Group, also referred to as Region L in the statewide water planning process, approved publication of its initial 2006 regional water plan for distribution on June 17. Copies of the plan will be available in county clerks' offices and public libraries throughout the region. It also can be viewed at the group's Web site, www.watershedexperience.com

The 21-county region includes Victoria, DeWitt, Goliad, Karnes, Refugio and Calhoun counties. Public hearings are planned across the region beginning the week of July 17.

The proposed plan for 2006 revises the 2001 Regional Water Plan to include new data. The biggest difference between the 2001 plan and the 2006 plan will be a decrease in the region's projected water needs through 2060, said Margaret Moorehouse, who ensures public participation in the region's water planning process. The decrease is a result of population figures provided in the 2000 census, she said. Those figures caused the projected water needs in several counties, including Bexar, to go down from what was stated in the 2001 plan, she said.

"Water needs have declined. Some of the counties, like Goliad County, that bothered them because their numbers dropped. But, it's a complicated process based on the population's age and other factors," Moorehouse said.

She also noted that a huge undertaking by the Texas Water Development Board to develop groundwater availability models of the state's major aquifers provided a new level of analysis for water needs.

"We have a much better idea of what the groundwater projects can do for the communities," she said.

While the plan shows projected water needs are lower than previously thought, overall needs do increase through 2060.

Some components of the 2001 plan will remain the same in the 2006 plan. Others will include changes or additions.

Mike Mahoney, a member of the planning group, said more development is planned for the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer, which extends through west central Texas from the Mexico border in Webb County to the border of Arkansas and Louisiana. Within Region L's area, the Seguin Schertz Local Government Corp. is asking for more water from the aquifer, he said. San Antonio Water System, Bexar Metropolitan and Canyon Regional Water Authority also have additional projects there, he said, noting that those projects are merely planned, not approved. They all would be subject to a permitting process.

The Lower Guadalupe Water Supply Project, which would pump water via pipeline from under the ground in Victoria, Goliad and Refugio counties, along with Guadalupe River water drawn from near Tivoli to San Antonio, remains in the plan, with some changes, even though San Antonio Water System is considering withdrawing from it.

Moorehouse said the group's planning deadlines required that the project remain in the initial 2006 plan. The group will be hearing from SAWS and other agencies involved in the project as the planning process continues, she noted. Their input could alter the project or result in changes to the plan.

Use of brackish groundwater is added to the plan in two areas - a project involving the Wilcox Aquifer in south Bexar County and the Lower Guadalupe Water Supply Project in the Gulf Coast Aquifer, Mahoney added.

The plan also will provide a table showing how water supply options are divided between retail and wholesale water suppliers based on the water needs they are trying to serve. Both Moorehouse and Mahoney said it's being required by TWDB for accounting purposes.

Distribution of the initial 2006 Regional Water Plan will precede public hearings by 30 days. The public hearings will begin at 7 p.m. as follows: July 18, Victoria Community Center; July 19, GBRA offices in Seguin; July 20, Uvalde Adult Activity Center; and July 21, Marriott Plaza in San Antonio.

• **Robin M. Foster is a reporter for the Advocate. Contact her at 361-275-6319 or cueroadv@vicad.com.**