

**Environmental groups condemn state water plan
Advocates say conservation efforts were neglected.**

San Antonio Express-News
Metro and State

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Web Posted : 11/01/2001 12:00 AM

AUSTIN - A Texas water plan for the next half-century, the focus of thousands of hours of negotiations during the past two years and of two public hearings here today, depends too little on conservation and too much on \$17 billion worth of "pie-in-the-sky" projects, a coalition of environmentalists said Wednesday.

While the representatives of the Sierra Club, the National Wildlife Federation, the Texas Center for Policy Studies and Environmental Defense praised San Antonio for its conservation efforts, it rapped the Alamo City for proposed water buys from the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer in Bastrop, Lee and Milam counties and from the Lower Colorado River Authority.

The average daily water use per capita in San Antonio is 147 gallons, far less than other cities such as Dallas, where daily per capita use is more than 250 gallons, said Mary Kelly, executive director of the Texas Center for Policy Studies.

However, the National Wildlife Federation singled out for criticism six projects that together will cost taxpayers and/or ratepayers \$3.5 billion because they "rely on the old concrete and steel approach to water development" rather than conservation.

Without being specific, Ken Kramer of the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club said many of the projects identified by 16 regional water planning groups are "bogus" and "pie in the sky."

"We can't give in to the water engineers," he said, charging that no "reasonable economic principles" were used in developing the 16 regional water plans which, together, provide a statewide water plan that is intended to meet Texas' water needs through 2050.

Emphasis on taking water, rather than conserving it, will affect Gulf Coast bays and estuaries, said Myron Hess of the wildlife federation.

An economic cost from lost fishing and recreation isn't being calculated in the water plans, he said.

State and local water officials disagreed.

Evelyn Bonavita chaired the Region L water committee that negotiated for two years before deciding on a regional water plan for the San Antonio area. It was approved by the Texas Water Development Board.

Environmental concerns "were addressed and will continue to be addressed" in the panel's next five-year planning cycle, Bonavita said, acknowledging an "environmental bias."

Susan Butler of SAWS said the LCRA deal continues to be refined "to ensure that human needs and those of the bays and estuaries are met."

Mark MacLeod with Environmental Defense said no one is examining the \$17 billion bill for water projects, yet the "Legislature is working toward a process of funding that number."

Bonavita countered: "I'd like to know what their (detractors) technical expertise is. I never quite get what technical studies they're basing this on."

Craig Pedersen, executive administrator of the water development board, said while there is room for "philosophical differences" and even criticism of some of the water projects, the regional water planning groups met with more than 2,200 water users over two years and 870 of them have a difference between how much water they have and how much they need.

Today's hearing is at the Stephen F. Austin Building, 1700 N. Congress Ave.

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