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## **Water plan brings some residents to boil**

[By Bryan Kirk](#)

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SEGUIN — A presentation by the South Central Texas Regional Water Planning Group led to protests from farmers and ranchers from Wilson and Gonzales counties who were concerned about the depletion of water from the Carrizo Aquifer.

About 100 people attended the second meeting in Seguin on Tuesday night at the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority's River Annex Building.

Many of them were farmers and ranchers concerned about the efforts of water entities, such as the San Antonio Water System (SAWS) and the San Antonio River Authority, to remove water from outside sources to supplement the Edwards Aquifer and meet the needs of a growing San Antonio.

According to census figures presented by the planning group, the Region L population will more than double from 2.04 million in 2000 to 4.3 million in 2060, with nearly 70 percent of the population living in the San Antonio River basin.

With that increased population projection also came a dire forecast for water shortages throughout the region. Planners predicted a shortage of more than 460,000 acre feet of water by the year 2060.

Much of the shortage would occur in San Antonio, with more than 200,000 acre feet of water needed to supplement the needs of metropolitan San Antonio.

Guadalupe County is projected to have a municipal water shortage of 11,000 acre feet, while Wilson County is projected at a 5,600-acre-foot shortage.

Hays and Comal counties are projected to be hit harder with 33,000- and 32,000-acre-foot shortages respectively.

To combat the anticipated shortage in San Antonio, SAWS, which helped formulate this regional water plan, hopes to reduce pumping from the Edwards Aquifer and pump water from other sources like the Lower Guadalupe River Water Supply Project and the Carrizo Aquifer.

With water being pumped from the Carrizo Aquifer, area farmers in Wilson and Gonzales counties fear their wells will ultimately run dry.

"This is our life's blood," said Glenda Layton, whose family has farmed in Wilson County for generations. "It is the blood of our county and the blood of our community that you are dealing with."

Layton, along with many more Wilson County representatives, took issue with the planning group for incorporating the Carrizo Aquifer as a mechanism to provide water to San Antonio when shortages were predicted.

"This is families. This is history. This is Texas," Layton said.

She was followed by a host of others concerned about the projected shortages, among them, Stephen Zunker, a Wilson County rancher.

"Why would you want to take water from a county that's going to have a shortage and move it somewhere else?" Zunker asked.

Springs Hill Water Supply General Manager Ron Naumann, who is also a voting member of the regional water planning group, said the concerns of farmers and ranchers are legitimate.

"We hear these people and we understand their concerns," Naumann said. "We are trying to address all of them with all the information available to us."

GBRA General Manager Bill West said while the concerns of farmers and ranchers were important, it is also important they see the needs of the entire region.

"The public meetings indicate that people are still focused on local issues with regard to water resources," West said. "While these are important, the [Senate Bill 1] planning process was designed to encourage local input through a grassroots development process in order to obtain regional consensus. Despite this, it is obvious that there is still a lack of understanding on the part of the general public that regional problems can only be solved through regional solutions."

The regional water planning group hosted four meetings in the area labeled Region L by the state.

Region L was created with the passage of SB1 in 1997 and includes Atascosa, Bexar, Caldwell, Calhoun, Comal, DeWitt, Dimmit, Frio, Goliad, Gonzales, Guadalupe, Karnes, Kendall, La Salle, Medina, Refugio, Uvalde, Victoria, Wilson and Zavala counties and part of Hays County.

The function of the regional planning groups are to formulate regional water supply plans and forecast the needs of their particular regions for the future. The regional plans ultimately are used to help form the state water plan.

The planning group is expected to deliver the final draft of the regional water plan in January 2006 to the Texas Water Development Board.