

## Fort Worth Business Press

### Lobbying for water interests in Texas is ‘big, big’ business

Robert Francis - November 20, 2006

As water increasingly takes a higher profile in Texas, so too does the amount spent for lobbying on various water interests.

While local government interest dominated lobbyist spending in 2005, two water districts were also on the list of funds spent on lobbyists in Austin.

“Water is increasingly important in Texas and I think we’re going to see more and more water districts and other water-related spending on lobbying activities,” said Andrew Wheat, research director at Texans for Public Justice.

Two water districts made the Texans for Public Justice top 10 list of Top Ideological and Single-Interest Clients in the Austin-based group’s Austin’s Oldest Profession: Texas’ Top Lobby Clients and Those Who Service Them, which was released in August.

One was the Edwards Aquifer Authority, which spent \$850,000 on lobbyists in 2005, the other was the Lower Colorado River Authority which spent \$685,000. By comparison, the city of Austin spent \$1.46 million on all of its lobbying efforts, the city of Houston, \$1.32 million.

Wheat said the Edwards Aquifer spent its lobbying funds regarding Senate Bill 3 and fending off perennial proposals to strip Texas’ water authorities of their authority to regulate water quality.

“There’s no question that water is becoming a big, big business on the Legislature’s agenda,” said Wheat.

In its “2007 Water for Texas” report, the Texas Water Development Board predicted the population of the state will double over the next 50 years causing a severe strain on current water resources. The state’s water supplies, both ground and surface, are decreasing as the population increases and the drought continues.

According to Dr. John Baen, real estate professor at the University of North Texas in Denton and vice president of the Texas Land & Mineral Owners Association, water issues will continue to rise to the forefront as the drilling for natural gas continues. Because drilling requires the use of several thousand gallons of water daily, several residents and municipalities have been concerned

about how to deal with both the water and the disposal of the water after it has been used.

“There are several issues the state has to deal with as growth continues and many of those have to do with water,” he said. “You’ll see more pressure on the Legislature to deal with those issues.”

That’s particularly true in Parker County, where several water wells have been depleted. Some residents have blamed the drought and others have pointed their finger at the drilling rigs utilizing local water resources. Weatherford State Rep. Phil King said in a note to his constituents that “protecting valuable water resources from depletion” is a key issue in the 80th legislative session.

Some issues may pit water districts against each other. For instance, in April, the Texas Water Development Board approved a long-range water plan for the Dallas-Fort Worth area that hinges on the construction of two huge new reservoirs in northeast Texas. Those reservoirs are opposed by many in the area, which is just north of Tyler and Longview.

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