

SAWS drafting plans for a possible \$150 million desalination project

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San Antonio Water System is seeking input from water experts on how best to develop a new desalination project in the San Antonio region.

Officials with the utility are examining ways to create new drinking water resources from brackish groundwater -- water with a high salt and mineral content that is unsuitable for drinking.

SAWS issued a request for expression of interest from parties in order to solicit information on desalination projects and possible project delivery methods.

SAWS expects to begin procuring services for major elements of the desalination project in early 2008.

A desalination facility could come online by early 2011. The water utility's goal is to develop up to 22,000 acre-feet annually from brackish groundwater. SAWS is still assessing proposed locations for the plant.

The Texas Water Development Board estimates that there is as much as 400 million acre-feet of brackish groundwater in the San Antonio region alone. The San Antonio region has the most brackish water in Texas, which is why SAWS is looking into turn this salty water into an untapped resource, SAWS water resources director Calvin Finch says.

SAWS officials do not yet have a firm projected cost for the desalination plant. However, preliminary projections show that the plant could cost as much as \$150 million to develop, he says.

Water produced from a desalination plant could be used to augment water drawn from the Edwards Aquifer -- the region's primary source of drinking water -- when peak demand is high, SAWS spokeswoman Anne Hayden says.

Developing brackish water into pure water could be more expensive than pumping water from the Edwards Aquifer. However, in time, Edwards water likely will only get more expensive if no other sources are developed, she says.

SAWS is working to procure water from Canyon Lake, the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer and the Lower Colorado River Authority to maintain multiple sources of water in its portfolio and meet the demand for water in San Antonio.

Because of new development and population growth taking place throughout San Antonio, SAWS is looking at ways to meet that demand, local officials say.

