

Demand for Canyon Lake water rising quickly

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NEW BRAUNFELS -- In the past five years, cities throughout the Guadalupe River basin have been lining up to buy Canyon Lake water. As the supply dwindles, cities and subdivisions that have not contracted for the precious resource are starting to feel the pressure.

Among the towns scrambling for their portion, Wimberley is studying the best route for a pipeline to bring about 3,000 acre-feet of water a year to town. Right now, the city relies on wells drilled into the Trinity Aquifer, but it is already overtaxed and more and more wells are being drilled into it as the area's population grows.

"We are moving as fast as we possibly can," said Tom Haley, Wimberley mayor and president of Wimberley Water Supply. "I don't want it to get away. We want our share of water to take the pressure off of Cypress Creek and Blue Hole.

"We don't know how much water is in the ground, but we know we can't live on well water forever."

The state allows the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority to sell as much as 90,000 acre-feet of water a year from Canyon Lake. The lake should be able to supply that much even in a repeat of a drought of the 1950s that was the worst on record.

Of the supply, 75,740 acre-feet are spoken for, leaving less than 15,000.

In the past five years, the cities of Blanco, Boerne, San Marcos, Kyle, Buda, Fair Oaks Ranch and Bulverde have bought Canyon Lake water. Various municipal utility districts, subdivisions and rural water supply companies also have contracts.

In all, more than 27,000 acre-feet of water has been reserved from the Western Canyon and San Marcos Regional projects, both completed in the past five years.

"There are two quantities to keep in mind," said river authority General Manager Bill West. "One is the treated water available from the Western Canyon Pipeline -- that is about 3,000 acre-feet, and there is no question there are more requests for that water than available capacity. The other quantity is the amount of raw water from the lake that is available (about 14,200 acre-feet), and that won't last long either.

"That is why we, and everyone else, are looking at alternative supplies."

He said the river authority is still looking at a plan to pump water from near the mouth of the Guadalupe River back to the upper end of the basin, a project that San Antonio Water System officials considered

joining but opted out of last year. The river authority is also looking at pumping from the Simboro Aquifer in Lee and Milam counties.

"There is no way to say when Canyon Lake will be fully spoken for, but we need additional supplies on the upper end of the Guadalupe River basin, no question about that," West said.