



## Officials try to fill the funding well

By MATTHEW TRESAUGUE Copyright 2009 Houston Chronicle

Nov. 17, 2009, 12:08AM

FORT WORTH — The thorny issue of how to quench Texas' thirst drew hundreds of elected officials and policy experts to Fort Worth on Monday as part of an effort to rally support for investment in water projects.

In his welcoming remarks, state Sen. Kip Averitt, a Waco Republican who is co-hosting the two-day event, said that Texas has a long-range water plan that is the envy of many states, but it is not fully funded.

The Texas Development Board projects that 85 percent of Texans won't have enough water during times of drought as early as 2060.

To supply the water, the state's 50-year plan proposes spending \$31 billion on reservoirs, pipelines and other infrastructure.

The state, however, hasn't funded the plan.

Instead, state lawmakers decide how much to spend on it during each budget cycle.

Needs fund source

The conference's organizers said the purpose of the two-day event is to build support for a permanent funding source by the next regular legislative session, which convenes in 2011.

Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst told the gathering that he would ask the state Senate's Natural Resources Committee, which Averitt chairs, to study in the interim the cost of funding the plan now versus later.

"Now is not the time to slow down," Dewhurst said, adding the demands for water are so great that there is no other option than to fund the plan.

Dewhurst and other speakers also called for conservation and water reuse projects, echoing the positions of some environmental groups that contend the state's priorities should be improving water-use efficiency and conservation goals rather than building reservoirs.

[matthew.tresaugue@chron.com](mailto:matthew.tresaugue@chron.com)

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