



Troubled Waters: Conservation keeps water running

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[Texas Parks & Wildlife](#) monitors the water in Matagorda Bay, an ecosystem and way of life affected by the Lower Colorado River.

Among the many crucial tests they perform is the test for salinity levels. The drought has caused salinity levels in the bay to increase, because there's less freshwater flowing from the rivers.

"River water is important to the sea life because that brings nutrients and provides the proper habitat," Leslie Hartman, Matagorda Bay ecosystem leader for Texas Parks and Wildlife, said. "What we're seeing is an increase in off-shore critters coming in but a reduction in certain species."



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Dry conditions aren't the only thing that affects salinity.

As competing demands for the waters of the Lower Colorado increase upstream, the amount left over for the bays and estuaries declines.

"The party's over. We can't be so wasteful with our water use anymore," Environment Texas Director Luke Metzger said.

He says it's up to everyone to conserve water.

"The demand for water will exceed supply in the coming decades. That means we need to figure out how we're going to either generate new sources of water or save the water we do have," Metzger said.



Rice farming has bigger saving potential than others.

Environmentalists say that easier and less expensive

Troubled Water Series

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conserving water is always than finding new resources.

"When we have shortages, the first thing we look to is water efficiency or water conservation," Jennifer Walker, the environmental specialist for the Lower Colorado Region planning group, said.

Some uses in the basin, like rice farming, have bigger saving potential than others.

In rice farming, the fields are flooded. By leveling the fields, not as much water is wasted to maintain the flood.

"You've got less water to establish the flood. Plus you've got a greater control of it. It's more manageable because you've got more permanent structures in place," Ronald Gertson, a rice farmer in Wharton County, said.

Right now, nearly 70 percent of the water in the Colorado that's expected to change in

Conserving on the farm now agriculture for future

But environmentalists say it's too.



Conservation is increasingly important in urban areas.

"As the population goes up, possible to have your population grow, to bring in business, to do the things cities like to do, but also use water efficiently and use the same amount or less water to supply the same people," Walker said.

San Antonio, San Marcos and Austin are showing us the way.

Austin resident Andrew Morris said he has been cutting back his use because of the current drought.

He said he feels even one person can make a difference.

"I'm just one household, but I do think it's important," Morris said.

So whether people are in the cities competing for water resources, or on farms and ranches struggling to survive with the water left to them, or on the coast where fishermen plow the ocean to get by, Texans together must soon find ways to manage and share a precious resource, and that's as clear as water.

Water Development History

To view a [history of major events](#) for water development in Texas, and a general history of the [Texas Water Development Board](#), click the links.

River is used for agriculture, but the next 50 years as cities grow.

could keep families in generations.

important to cut back in town,

the water use stays flat, so it's possible to do the things cities like to do, but also use water efficiently and use the same amount or less water to supply the same people,"

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