

Environmental group: Texas ill-prepared to deal with drought problems

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A national environmental group on Thursday ranked Texas as one of the least-prepared states to deal with drought because state officials don't include climate change in their water plans.

The National Resources Defense Council criticized the state's 2012 Water Plan for basing its projections on the 1950s "drought of record" and not including climate changes that the report says are likely to result in more droughts and droughts of longer durations.

All told, 29 states are unprepared for growing water threats to their economies and public health, according to the report, which can be viewed at www.nrdc.org/water/readiness.

"The most common theme is a lack of leadership at the state level," said Ben Chou, the report's author, during a conference call with reporters.

In Texas, Gov. Rick Perry has dismissed man-made global warming from the campaign stump and accused the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency of threatening the state's economy with more stringent regulations. The governor's staff did not respond directly to Thursday's criticism but defended the state water plan, adding that "the next important step is to ensure that we fund it so it can be implemented."

The National Resources Defense Council is an environmental group that boasts 1.3 million members and a team of 350 lawyers, scientists and other professionals focused on global warming, clean energy and water and air pollution.

The 2012 State Water Plan "attempts to downplay the likelihood of climate change by labeling it as an 'ambiguous risk' — being 'so uncertain that it is not known when (it) will happen, what (its) impacts will be or even whether (it) will occur at all,'" wrote Steve Fleischli, director of the environmental group's water and climate program, in a blog accompanying the report.

Merry Klonower, communications director with the Texas Water Development Board, said the agency conferred with climate scientists and hydrologists during the creation of the 2012 water plan.

Klonower said the agency "determined that there was not enough information available to determine what specific impacts climate variability has on the factors used in developing water plans."

She said the agency "continues to monitor and research the available science to determine when and how to incorporate it into the planning process."

Even without incorporating climate change, the plan paints a grim picture.

Water demand in Texas is projected to increase 22 percent while existing water supplies decrease 10 percent by 2060. The water plan calls for the state to finance \$53 billion in new water projects, although the Legislature has a spotty record of funding past water plans.

"In serious drought conditions," the plan warns, "Texas does not have enough water to meet the needs of its people, its businesses and its agricultural enterprises."

Fleischli argued that Texas is increasing its risk by basing its projections on the 1950s "drought of record." He said the state plan ignored a recent study published in the Texas Water Journal that concluded there have been worse droughts in Central Texas over the past 500 years than the one from the 1950s.

Klonower said the 1950s drought remains the basis for the plan because it was the most significant drought for which the agency has corresponding hydrological data.

"Hydrological records are an essential part of the planning process," Klonower said. "That data is not available for those droughts indicated only by tree rings."

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