

## Refine state water plan

Jennifer Walker and Ken Kramer and Myron Hess, For the San Antonio Express-News

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Texas faces serious challenges in meeting water supply needs while also maintaining the jobs and businesses dependent upon our fish and wildlife resources and protecting our state's priceless natural heritage.

At a time when Texas faces many competing financial needs, prudent choices must be made to determine the appropriate role for state funding for a water supply project or strategy.

Local and regional water suppliers say that state financial assistance is needed to fund about half of the \$53 billion price tag for water infrastructure projects in the current state water plan.

Texas needs a comprehensive state water plan that incorporates drought response measures and addresses instream flow and freshwater inflow needs. Only with those changes can Texas realistically meet future water supply needs affordably while protecting our natural heritage. The state water plan as currently written will not achieve those objectives.

We recommend that the state embrace a strategic and cost-effective approach to meeting Texas water needs by:

**Improving the state water plan:** The plan should be revised to show projections for actual water needs rather than water “demands,” which may be unrealistic to meet in future drought years. Effective drought response measures during very dry years to reduce nonessential water uses should be incorporated. The plan should also be revised to include all water needs — including water to support the health of our rivers and bays — as well as commercial and recreational fishing, river and coastal tourism, and other industries.

**Funding for instream flow and freshwater inflow protection:** Any state water funding mechanism should dedicate a reasonable amount of funds — at least 5 percent — to implement voluntary measures to keep rivers flowing and provide freshwater inflows to bays and estuaries.

**Funding for water conservation & water reuse:** Any new mechanism for financing water management strategies in the plan should set aside one-third of available funds for the implementation of water conservation programs and reuse projects. Prioritizing conservation is the most cost-effective way to meet water needs.

**Funding for water infrastructure projects:** The state should establish clear metrics for determining which water infrastructure projects in the plan merit state financial assistance.

Priority consideration should go to water supply projects designed to meet near-term needs that cannot reasonably be met through water efficiency measures.

Prioritization criteria should reward projects that are highly cost-effective, include measures to ensure the new water supply will be used efficiently and result in low environmental impact.

There must be a firm commitment for substantial funding from local and regional water supply interests and a demonstration that full funding from those interests is not feasible.

In the case of groundwater projects, assistance should only be provided to projects clearly shown not to indirectly impair existing water supply sources.

Texas needs a comprehensive and fiscally responsible approach to providing water to sustain people and the environment. We can accomplish that goal by refining the state water plan to define our true water needs and developing a state funding mechanism that provides more efficient use of already-developed water resources and for protection of fish and wildlife — while strategically targeting state financial assistance for critical infrastructure projects to address unmet needs.

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Read more: <http://www.mysanantonio.com/opinion/commentary/article/Refine-state-water-plan-4139267.php#ixzz2G0GmsIlq>

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