

Texas headed for another record drought

By Matt Tresaugue - Updated 1:07 am, Wednesday, February 6, 2013 –

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AUSTIN — The Texas state climatologist warned lawmakers Tuesday that the damaging dry conditions of the past two years could rival the 1950s drought of record if rainfall remains below normal.

The grim forecast came as [Senate and House](#) members of the natural resources committees met for the first time this legislative session to discuss the persistent drought and the state's ongoing water needs.

[John Nielsen-Gammon](#), the state climatologist, said that during the past two years, Texas received only 68 percent of its typical rainfall, making it the third-driest period on record. If the extreme conditions extend through the summer, only the 1950s drought would be drier, he said.

“There is still a good chance that this could be the drought of record for parts of the state,” Nielsen-Gammon told lawmakers.

The most recent federal data shows 90 percent of Texas experiencing abnormally dry conditions, with 22 percent in extreme or exceptional drought. Meanwhile, the amount of water stored in reservoirs statewide is at its lowest point for this time of year since 1990, state officials said.

Against that backdrop, lawmakers are considering a one-time transfer from the state's unencumbered rainy day fund into a new account to help pay for reservoirs, pipelines and other water-supply projects.

The [Texas Water Development Board](#) has identified \$53 billion in needed infrastructure to avoid grave shortages over the next half-century.

The state's water plan proposes construction of as many as 26 new reservoirs, as well as more desalination plants and pipelines and greater conservation, to meet the demands of a projected 46 million Texans in 2060. In 2012, the census listed the population at 26 million.

State Rep. [Allan Ritter](#), a Nederland Republican, and state Sen. [Troy Fraser](#), a Horseshoe Bay Republican, have filed bills calling for a \$2 billion to capitalize the plan. That amount, Ritter has said, could finance it entirely.

Lt. Gov. [David Dewhurst](#) and Rep. [Lyle Larson](#), a San Antonio Republican, have proposed using \$1 billion from the fund for water projects, while Sen. [Kel Seliger](#), an Amarillo Republican, has said \$1.6 billion would be needed.

The amount was not discussed during the hearing, which Ritter said was intended to inform new members of the natural resources committees.

[Ken Kramer](#), a water policy expert for the [Sierra Club's Lone Star Chapter](#), said even if there is not yet agreement on the amount of money, it appears likely the Legislature will provide some funding to implement the plan.

“Everyone recognizes there is a need,” Kramer said. “But we want to make sure those projects are prioritized and conservation is considered.”

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