

Survey finds Texans critical of water plans

State official says current proposals meet conservation standards

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By GEORGE KUEMPEL / The Dallas Morning News

AUSTIN – The public is at odds with state and city planners over how to meet Texas' future water needs, a poll released Thursday by the National Wildlife Federation shows.

By a 2-1 ratio, Texans favor conservation over the state's plan to build dams and pipelines, and an overwhelming number said they would join in efforts to save water, federation officials said.

The findings, they said, show little grassroots support for proposals unveiled last year as part of the State Water Plan that continue to focus on the "old concrete and steel approach of pipeline and reservoir building."

"Texas is getting ready to spend billions of dollars on environmentally devastating projects that in many cases ... aren't necessary," said Susan Kaderka, director of the federation's Austin office.

J. Kevin Ward, executive administrator of the Texas Water Development Board, said water conservation and drought management are prominent in the regional and state water plans the agency helped produce.

"Because of this focus on conservation, in the Regional Water Plans and the 2002 State Water Plan, by the year 2050, there will be 1.96 million acre-feet of water, or approximately 640 billion gallons of water saved through conservation each year," he said.

The poll, conducted by The Tarrance Group Inc., surveyed 800 registered Texas voters between April 28 and May 2. The margin of error is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points, meaning the results may vary by that much in either direction.

At a Capitol news conference Thursday, Dr. Norman Johns, a federation water resource scientist, cited the proposed \$1.7 billion Marvin Nichols Dam and Reservoir near Mount Pleasant in East Texas as environmentally damaging projects that could be scrapped.

Eighty percent of that water would be piped 170 miles to Dallas and surrounding cities, he said.

Ms. Kaderka said her group will ask lawmakers next year to modify the state water plan to address some of their concerns.