

## **One water project may be scrapped due to miscount**

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SAN ANTONIO - Botched population-growth estimates for San Antonio will be revised downward, perhaps giving regional water planners the chance to erase from their drawing boards at least one project designed to provide water for the Alamo City's future needs.

Whether that project will be the Victoria area's Lower Guadalupe River Diversions or one of the many others planned across the 21-county region will be determined over the next few years as the South Central Texas Regional Water Planning Group updates its current water plan for the next half-century.

The water planners learned Thursday that their current water plan vastly overestimates - by more than 700,000 - Bexar County's projected population growth through 2050.

The original estimate placed the mid-century population of Bexar County at more than 3 million. A new draft estimate sets it at 2.3 million. The current population is about 1.4 million.

Fewer people than previously projected in San Antonio would mean less additional water needed for that city's residential, business, industrial and other uses.

"That could be a water project we don't have to plan for now," said Mike Fields, a water planner from Victoria County.

The regional plan now calls for Bexar County to receive more than 570,000 acre-feet of additional water per year through various projects by 2050. An acre-foot equals about 326,000 gallons.

Among those projects are the Lower Guadalupe River Diversions, which would take Guadalupe River water from near Tivoli and underground water from the greater Victoria area; another that would supply San Antonio with Colorado River water from near Bay City; and yet another that would supply the Alamo City with desalinated seawater from a plant on San Antonio Bay.

Increased use of water in Canyon Reservoir near New Braunfels and importing underground water from Bastrop, Lee, Milam, Wilson and Gonzales counties are also on the books.

Fields said the population-growth estimate miscue means the regional planners will "need to sit down and look at everything again and ask: 'Do we need this much water for San Antonio?' Maybe some of these projects need to be pushed back or canceled entirely."

The population-growth errors were made by Texas Water Development Board officials, who in the late '90s provided the projections to regional planners for use in the development of their 2001 regional water plan.

In Bexar County, the errors were probably due to an overestimate of Hispanic birth rates, Dan Hardin of the Texas Water Development Board's water uses and projections divisions told water planners Thursday.

Tentative updated population projections, based on the 2000 census, have now been provided by TWDB to the regional planners.

The updated numbers reveal an overall projected population decrease of about 655,000 from the previous estimate for the sprawling region stretching from Port Lavaca and Victoria to San Antonio and San Marcos and west to Uvalde.

Victoria County's new population projection for 2050 is 121,416, up 580 from the previous projection.

Karnes County's revised projection is 23,256, about 3,900 higher.

Gonzales County's projected population increases to 23,219, a jump of about 2,900 from the previous estimate.

Refugio County's projection is up 19, to 8,915.

Goliad County's projection falls by 32, to 7,860.

DeWitt County's new draft projection is 21,021, down more than 5,000 from the previous projection.

Calhoun County's new population projection for 2050 is 26,814, down 6,500 from the earlier figure.

In the months ahead, the draft population growth projections will be finalized by the TWDB.

"(The water planning group is) then going to come up with our estimate of how much water is needed to support that population and try to match projects to meet that need," said Fields, manager of Central Power and Light's Coletto Creek Plant in Goliad County.

Water planners discussed having TWDB's Hardin make a public presentation in August or early September on why the population figures have changed.

In other news, water planner Hugh Charlton of Victoria has submitted his letter of resignation to the planning group. Charlton resigned because he is retiring from DuPont and can no longer serve as the group's representative of industrial interests.

"We accept his resignation with reluctance," said planning group chairman Evelyn Bonavita of San Antonio.

A replacement for Charlton will be sought from industrial interests in the region.

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