



**NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION<sup>7</sup>**

*People and Nature: Our Future Is in the Balance*

**Gulf States Natural Resource Center**

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**NEWS**

## **Public Comment Period Delivers Resounding Message of Dissatisfaction About the State Water Plan**

**96% of 2,000 Comments Received by the Texas Water Development Board  
are Critical or Demand Improvements in the Water Plan**

(Austin, TX) – According to the National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club, Texas Center for Policy Studies, and Environmental Defense, 96% of the written public comments received by the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) have been critical of the proposed State Water Plan. The groups reviewed about 2,000 written comments submitted to the TWDB in a public comment period that ended November 12. Consistent with those comments, the four organizations are urging the TWDB to expressly acknowledge the State Water Plan's shortcomings and commit to a process for addressing deficiencies before recommending implementation of major projects.

"A fundamental principle of the water planning procedure envisioned in SB1 was public participation," said Susan Kaderka, Director of the National Wildlife Federation's Gulf States office in Austin. "The regional groups held lots of meetings but they were dominated by people who make their living from the water business. This is the first time the general public has spoken out on the State Water Plan. The public's message is clear: we've got a long way to go before the state has an acceptable water plan. Now it's up to the Water Development Board to respond meaningfully to the public's message."

Legislation passed in 1997 mandated the preparation of a regionally-based water plan that is to be reviewed and updated every five years. By the time rules were written and a planning structure was put in place, regional planning groups and the TWDB only had a little over three years to prepare this initial version of the water plan.

"Although we acknowledge that planning group members and TWDB staff did a lot of work in a short period of time, the bottom-line is that several proposed projects were not fully evaluated. As a result, there is no way to tell which projects make sense from an environmental perspective or from an economic perspective," said Mark MacLeod, Special Projects Director with Environmental Defense. "As the comments indicate, ordinary Texans understand that what we have now is largely an engineer's wish list of potential projects instead of a comprehensive plan for managing the state's water resources."

The environmental coalition says the majority of public comments point to State Water Plan inadequacies that include failing to ensure that plans won't decimate fish and wildlife resources by unnecessarily drying up rivers and streams, giving inadequate

consideration to water conservation before planning destructive and expensive new projects, planning to deplete some groundwater aquifers which would reduce spring flows and leave future generations with dry wells, and failing to apply basic economic principles to ensure that water projects would make good use of public money.

“The TWDB staff has stated in public comment hearings that it won’t make significant changes to the State Plan. That’s just not good enough. If the State Plan is to have broad acceptance, the Water Development Board must respond to this clear message from the public in a meaningful way,” said Ken Kramer, Director of the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club. “The Board needs to expressly acknowledge these shortcomings in the Water Plan, commit to correcting them during the next round of planning, and acknowledge in the Plan that its not appropriate to implement major new projects until these key deficiencies have been corrected.”

One such project is the proposed \$1.7 billion Marvin Nichols I Dam and Reservoir that would cover 72,000 acres of farmland and bottomland hardwood forests in East Texas and pipe water 170 miles to cities in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area. An analysis done by the National Wildlife Federation indicates that if cities in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area would reduce their excessively high per person water usage rates down to even close to the state average, the project would not be needed. Written public comments received by the TWDB, and testimony at public hearings from residents affected by Marvin Nichols, indicates strong public sentiment against the project.

“Texas needs a comprehensive State Water Plan. The decisions we make now on managing water will dramatically affect the future of all Texans,” added Mary Kelly, Executive Director, Texas Center for Policy Studies. “More and more water will be demanded by growing urban areas. If we don’t manage that demand wisely, fish and wildlife resources and rural economies that rely on those resources could be damaged irreparably. That doesn’t have to happen if the Board will just listen to what the general public is saying.”

In a collaborative effort called the “Texas Living Waters” project, the National Wildlife Federation, Texas Center for Policy Studies, the Texas Office of Environmental Defense and the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club have formed a partnership to promote and achieve environmentally sound water management in Texas. The project has four major goals:

1. Ensure adequate water for environmental needs as well as for human consumptive needs.
2. Reduce the future demand for water by fostering efficient use of existing supplies.
3. Educate decision-makers and the public about the environmental and economic impacts of wasteful water development and the availability of cost-effective, environmentally sound alternatives.
4. Involve citizens in decisions about water resource management at the local and state levels.

The nation’s largest member-supported conservation education and advocacy group, the National Wildlife Federation unites people from all walks of life to protect nature, wildlife and the world we all share. The Federation has educated and inspired families to uphold America’s conservation tradition since 1936.

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