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**For Immediate Release (Tuesday, July 5, 2005):**

## **Sierra Club Proposes Alternative Regional Water Strategies**

### **Group Promotes More Aggressive Conservation, Expanded Groundwater Storage**

(Austin)—**More aggressive conservation, responsible drought management, and expanded groundwater storage can meet most of the future water demands for South Central Texas, according to a new report by the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club. The report, released today, sets forth *Alternative Water Management Strategies for the 2006 South Central Texas Water Plan.***

**The South Central Texas (Region L) Water Plan is one of 16 draft regional water plans recently or soon to be released for public review and comment.** The plans identify water needs and propose strategies to meet those needs from now until 2060. Each plan was crafted under the guidance of a regional water planning group representing diverse interests.

**The Sierra Club report presents options to some of the water management strategies in the draft Region L plan.** Region L encompasses all or part of 21 counties and several cities, including New Braunfels, San Antonio, San Marcos, Seguin, Uvalde, and Victoria.

**“The Region L Planning Group is currently evaluating several water supply strategies that could have significant environmental and economic costs,”** says Sierra Club Research Associate Tyson Broad, one of the authors of the Sierra Club report. **“The Sierra Club believes that the alternative water management strategies outlined in our report provide an integrated approach that avoids many of those costs.** For example, Region L could reduce water demands by over 70,000 acre feet per year by going beyond the municipal conservation scenario outlined in the draft regional plan.”

“Region L should be commended for adopting—and in one area exceeding—the target goals suggested by the state’s Water Conservation Task Force,” said Ken Kramer, Sierra Club state director and member of the task force. “The consensus goal recommended by the task force was 140 gallons per capita per day (GPCD) for municipal water users in the State.”

“The City of San Antonio, however, is already at or below 132 GPCD and, by 2017, intends to be as low as 116 GPCD,” said Kramer. “If other municipal water suppliers in Region L would adopt San Antonio’s aggressive water conservation strategies, there would be less need for the region to propose costly water supply projects,” concluded Kramer.



**The Sierra Club report also recommends agricultural water conservation strategies for South Central Texas, including irrigation canal improvements and replacing flood irrigation systems with more efficient center-pivot sprinklers.**

“Water savings from irrigation conservation practices are discussed in the Draft 2006 Region L Plan,” notes Broad. “However, Region L could gain additional water savings from irrigation transfers to municipal supplies. Edwards Aquifer Authority rules allow transfers of water from the region *in excess* of the legally restricted one acre foot of water per acre if the surplus water is a result of conservation efforts. The draft regional plan does not examine this opportunity.”

In addition to more aggressive municipal and agricultural water conservation on an ongoing basis, the Sierra Club asserts that **drought management also presents a way to substantially reduce water demand during dry periods.** Reducing such demand would avoid building expensive water projects in an attempt to try to provide water for all normal uses in a drought as severe as the historical “drought of record” that occurred in Texas in the 1950s.

“Current statute requires most Texas municipalities to plan for water use restrictions during times of water shortage. The 2005 San Antonio Water System’s (SAWS) Water Resources Plan incorporates a five percent reduction in demand resulting from these drought restrictions,” Broad states. “But the draft Region L Plan ignores the effects of these water use restrictions during drought and does not consider drought management as a water management strategy.”

Groundwater storage is another key concept suggested by the Sierra Club. The potential for expanding the **aquifer storage and recovery (ASR)** operations of SAWS is considered in the report, which notes that, with careful consideration for maintenance of sufficient stream flow and existing water rights, **the ASR efforts could be expanded from seasonal to long term storage.**

“Such an expansion could be facilitated by a change in management structure that allows the groundwater district serving the area where the aquifer storage occurs to have more decision-making power regarding the project,” Broad said. The Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer is the current storage aquifer for the existing SAWS ASR project.

The Sierra Club hopes that its report will assist the public during the comment period on the draft Region L Plan. **The comment period on the plan began June 18 and ends September 21. Public meetings on the initial draft plan will be held in Victoria on July 18, Seguin on July 19, Uvalde on July 20, and San Antonio on July 21.** All meetings start at 7 p.m.

For more information, go to [www.texaswatermatters.org](http://www.texaswatermatters.org).

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