

## **The coming crisis**

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The state's draft state water plan does not go far enough to encourage conservation

This month, the Texas Water Development Board concluded public hearings on a draft state water plan that will guide state spending on water development for the next 50 years. Do we need to remain vigilant to the direct and indirect impacts it will have for the Gulf Coast? Yes.

With our ever-increasing population, freshwater becomes a finite resource. A major defect in the regional plans is the lack of any commitment to reasonable water conservation to reduce future demand, thus, decreasing need and outlay for new projects.

This doesn't mean dreary acts of self-sacrifice - lightning fast showers, cactus and gravel in the front yard - it just means smart use of water. It means investing in water-saving equipment for homes, businesses, farms, and industry. It means repairing leaking water infrastructure - as much as 25 percent in some cities. It means structuring water rates so that big users pay more per gallon. In short, it means eliminating waste.

Corpus Christi understands this and has dramatically lowered its daily per-capita water use over the past 15 years and intends to keep lowering it.

But Dallas and other north Texas cities are using water like there's no limit. Because much of the water project funding will come from state sources, we help pay for their lack of commitment to conservation.

The draft water plans do not recognize how wasteful water use will affect the environment and existing economies in their own regions, much less how they impact adjacent regions. This is no small matter for coastal communities. We are at the end of the line in terms of river flows.

A significant sector of our economy - commercial and sports fishing, and increasingly, nature tourism, as well as the very reason we choose to live here - is linked to healthy, productive bays. The bays have to get sufficient freshwater and nutrient silt to support the vast array of marine and bird life that depend on them.

Nueces Bay is already doing its share of "conservation." It gets

considerably less freshwater now, and even less nutrient silt, than it did before Choke Canyon was built, even with the releases of water required under the permit. Under the proposed state plans, the productivity of San Antonio, Matagorda, and Aransas Bays would be threatened,

possibly crippled, by upstream diversions of water from the Guadalupe and Colorado Rivers for urban use.

We have to be concerned about how other regional plans will affect our own.

In our own region is a proposal to pump nine billion gallons of water per year from the Gulf Coast Aquifer to supplement Corpus Christi's water supplies.

This project could lower the aquifer water level by 200 feet over 50 years, potentially leading to saltwater intrusion and land surface subsidence.

The potentially adverse impacts of the state water plan are matched only by its financial cost: \$17.8 billion is the current price tag for the various dams, diversions, and groundwater withdrawals it proposes. This is too much money for too much economic and environmental damage.

We have to continually remind our local and state decision-makers to hold off spending, re-evaluate, and come up with a water plan that makes efficient use of a limited water resource that benefits our human and natural environmental needs - especially our coastal ecosystem - for generations to come.

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