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TX: Water Conservation Implementation Task Force Reports to Texas Legislature

Source: Texas Water Development Board

Austin - The Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) has provided two reports prepared by the Water Conservation Implementation Task Force (Task Force) to the Governor, Lt. Governor, Speaker of the House, and all members of the Texas Legislature. The Task Force was charged by Senate Bill (SB) 1094 (78th Legislature) to complete and submit A Report to the Legislature (Report), and a Best Management Practices (BMP) Guide to state leadership by November 1, 2004.

SB 1094, relating to the creation of a task force to evaluate matters regarding water conservation, was sponsored by Senator Robert Duncan, approved by the 78th Texas Legislature, and signed by Governor Rick Perry. The legislation directed the TWDB to select the members of the Task Force. The 32-member group represented 16 different entities and interest groups, including agriculture, from throughout the state. TWDB Executive Administrator, Kevin Ward, served as the presiding officer of the Task Force.

The Task Force was directed in SB 1094 to concentrate on issues related to (1) best management practices, (2) implementation of conservation strategies contained in regional water plans, (3) a statewide public awareness program, (4) state funding of incentive programs, (5) goals and targets for per capita water use considering climatic and demographic differences, and (6) evaluation of state oversight and support of conservation. The Task Force successfully addressed all six issues.

The Report to the Legislature represents the culmination of numerous Task Force meetings and many hours of vigorous debate and discussion by its 32 members. The Report presents background information and recommendations regarding each of the six issues enumerated in SB 1094.

Issue One—best management practices—the Report addresses concerns that BMPs would be viewed as mandatory measures by strongly emphasizing the voluntary nature of the BMPs included

in the BMP Guide. The BMP Guide contains 55 BMPs: 21 municipal, 14 industrial, and 20 agricultural. The BMPs are voluntary efficiency measures designed to fit into the state's water resource planning process as an alternative to meet future water supply needs.

Issue Two—implementation of conservation strategies contained in the regional water plans—the Task Force found that water management strategies contained in the 2002 State Water Plan that account for approximately 98 percent of the total volume of water to be saved by 2010 through conservation are being implemented to some degree. For water reuse projects, the Task Force found some level of implementation is present for projects that would account for approximately 97 percent of the total volume of water scheduled to be reused by 2010.

Issue Three—a statewide public awareness program—the Task Force expressed unanimous support for the Statewide Public Awareness Program concept and recommends that the state create and fund a Statewide Public Awareness Program for water conservation. The proposed program, consisting of a design, scope, and budget comparable to those of the highly successful Don't Mess with Texas highway anti-litter campaign, will greatly complement and reinforce other local and regional programs and activities.

Issue Four—state funding of incentive programs—the Task Force recommends authorizing Regional Conservation Coordinators to work with Regional Water Planning Groups and creation of regional and statewide conservation awards programs.

Issue Five—goals and targets for per capita water use considering climatic and demographic differences—the Task Force adopted a standard methodology for determining gallons per capita per day (gpcd). The Report recognizes that a simple comparison of per capita water use among Texas municipal water providers that may have significant differences in climate, geography and source water characteristics, as well as in their service and population profiles may, without additional data and analysis, lead to inaccurate conclusions about comparative water use efficiencies among those municipal water providers.

In addition, the Task Force recommends that all retail public water suppliers that are required to prepare and submit water conservation plans should consider: (a) a minimum annual reduction of 1 percent in total gpcd, based upon a five-year rolling average, until such time as the entity achieves a total gpcd of 140 or less; (b) a statewide goal to reduce total statewide water demand to an average of 140 gpcd; and (c) any guidelines that may be adopted by the SB1 Regional Water Planning Group in which the entity developing the Municipal Water Conservation Plan is located.

Issue Six—evaluation of state oversight and support of conservation—the Task Force included a recommendation to create a standing Water Conservation Advisory Council on matters regarding water conservation.

The Task Force also developed twelve additional recommendations that are not explicitly related to its duties as stated in SB 1094 but which it deemed relevant to the overall issue of water conservation implementation in Texas.

The Report and BMP Guide are available at <http://www.twdb.state.tx.us/assistance/conservation/taskforce.asp>

The TWDB is the state agency charged with collecting and disseminating water-related data, assisting with regional planning and preparing the State Water Plan for the development of the state's water resources, and administering cost-effective financial programs for the construction of water supply, wastewater treatment, flood control and agricultural water conservation projects.

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