

Web Posted: 11/13/2008 7:58 CST

San Antonio Express-News

Regional cooperation on water planning benefits all

Regional cooperation is essential for the complex business of water planning.

And the San Antonio Water System needs help from regional partners as it strives to get its desalination project in production.

For the most part, San Antonio area officials are ready to get the proposed plant in South Bexar County under way. And the current plan calls for pumping brackish water in Bexar and Wilson counties, which has little value in its current form, and cleaning it up for drinking.

The project would reduce pressure on the Edwards Aquifer and enable continued economic growth that benefits the entire region along with San Antonio.

But as water planners know, the next complication is usually just around the corner.

The latest hurdle involves a legislated requirement that groundwater management planning groups determine the desired future condition of the aquifers they oversee.

The brackish water sought by SAWS is in the Wilcox Aquifer. The District 13 Groundwater Management Area includes the Wilcox, and representatives of numerous area groundwater districts will approve the desired future conditions of the aquifer.

The desired future condition levels, which must be set by 2010, essentially will determine how much water can be pumped in coming years.

SAWS needs to know that number for brackish water to complete planning for the desalination plant, and the District 13 planning group can set the desired future condition anytime between now and 2010.

The utility also needs to know how much fresh water can be pumped from the Carrizo Aquifer. SAWS has been pursuing fresh Carrizo water in Gonzales County.

But the GMA's planning group is moving slowly.

Since we're all in this together, the GMA would be doing a service for the entire region if it would set the number for brackish water in the Wilcox Aquifer and fresh water from the Carrizo now instead of waiting until 2010 to make a decision.

This is a case where taking a neighborly step will also benefit the entire region's economy and water planning efforts.

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