

For Immediate Release

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STATE WATER PLANNING OUT OF SYNC WITH TEXANS' BELIEFS

Survey commissioned by National Wildlife Federation reveals preference for conservation

AUSTIN, TX – When it comes to meeting the state's water needs for the next fifty years, Texans prefer a much different approach than the new State Water Plan proposes.

According to a statewide poll commissioned by the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) - and conducted by The Tarrance Group, Inc, a national polling firm, - most registered Texas voters strongly favor implementing water conservation efforts before expensive dams and pipelines are considered.

“Texas is getting ready to spend billions of dollars on environmentally devastating projects that in many cases, frankly, aren't necessary,” Susan Kaderka, Director of NWF's Austin office said. “Texans overwhelmingly want us to focus first on meeting our water needs through conservation.”

In 1997 the Texas Legislature divided the state into sixteen water planning regions, each charged with making recommendations to the Texas Water Development Board and the legislature regarding their region's water needs. Every five years, the planning groups must issue new recommendations for meeting water needs.

The first round of recommendations, which were assembled into a State Water Plan late last year, propose a continued emphasis on meeting Texas' water demands primarily through the old “concrete and steel” approach of pipeline and reservoir building. The State Water Plan fails to emphasize strong water conservation and drought management measures designed to minimize wasteful water use.

“The survey results point out many ways in which the new State Water Plan seriously departs from the direction the public would like it to take. That is particularly true in terms of an inadequate emphasis on water conservation and a failure to plan for enough water to be left in streams and rivers so that the water needs of fish and wildlife resources are met.” Susan Kaderka, Director of NWF's Austin office said.

Among the survey's findings:

- Almost all Texas voters (93%) say it is important for Texas to provide adequate protection for rivers, bays and wildlife as it plans for water needs for the next fifty years. *The current State Water Plan does not even recognize wildlife or the environment as a category of water use to be considered in planning efforts.*
- By a 2-1 margin (54%-27%) voters would prefer that a city adopt water conservation measures as opposed to building new dams and pipelines. *However, the State Water Plan relies heavily on the construction of dams and pipelines. The state plan recommends few municipal conservation steps beyond the minimal ones already required by a 1991 law that imposed standards for new plumbing fixtures.*
- Ninety-one percent of Texas voters believe that water supply projects should be proven to be cost effective to qualify for state funding. *Nothing in state law—or the State Water Plan—ensures that state funding will only go to the most cost-effective method to meet a community's water needs.*
- Three quarters (76%) of Texas voters favor limits on the amount of groundwater that can be pumped from an underground aquifer to help ensure water is available for future generations. For large areas of the state, *the State Water Plan recommends water supply strategies that would deplete or even exhaust existing groundwater supplies.*
- Overwhelming majorities of Texas voters are willing to personally participate in specific and meaningful water conservation measures at home such as installing water-saving appliances and limiting lawn watering. (see attached graphic Q3-6) *With only very limited exceptions, the State Water Plan does not call on Texans to do any of these things – even though they have been shown dramatically to reduce per capita water consumption in places like San Antonio and El Paso.*

“It is disappointing that a process so important to the future of Texas has gone in a direction so dramatically opposed to what most Texans would prefer,” Kaderka said.

“The vast majority of Texans (78%) haven't even heard of the new planning process, which is designed to be a "grass roots" process. We recognize that this is just the first round of planning using the new process and that we are all still learning how to make it work. The silver lining here is that if the Legislature, the Water Development Board, and planning groups listen to what Texans are saying before we rush to implement costly and damaging recommendations, there is still time to turn this ship around.”

According to Kaderka the legislature can correct the course of water planning by doing four things:

- 1). Ensuring that meaningful water conservation measures are actually implemented before dam and pipeline projects are funded or authorized;
- 2). Explicitly recognizing wildlife and the environment as a category of water use to be provided for in the State Water Plan;
- 3). Requiring that preference in state funding be given to the most cost-effective methods of meeting a region or community's water needs; and
- 4). Establishing a state-wide management goal of limiting groundwater pumping to sustainable yield and retiring the out-dated rule of capture.

“It is clear that Texans care about our natural heritage,” Kaderka said. “And we call upon our lawmakers to ensure that water policy in Texas reflects Texas values by protecting that heritage. Currently it does not.”

The poll was conducted as part of an outreach campaign by the National Wildlife Federation and other public interest groups to educate Texans about the water planning process and how they can affect its direction. The poll surveyed 800 registered –with over-samples in several regions. Texas voters between April 28 and May 2, 2002. It has a margin of error of + or – 3.5 percent. Summaries of poll results can be viewed at www.texaswatermatters.org

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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