



TEXAS 85TH LEGISLATURE ISSUE BRIEF SERIES

Issue: Rainwater Harvesting

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I'M FOR THE
Hill Country

HCA is a passionate community caring for the unique features, spring-fed streams, heritage ranch lands, spectacular beauty and culture of the Texas Hill Country for the benefit of future generations.

The Mission of the Hill Country Alliance is to bring together an ever-expanding alliance of groups throughout a multi-county region of Central Texas with the long-term objective of preserving open spaces, water supply, water quality and the unique character of the Texas Hill Country.

*Join the
Conversation...*

The 85th Legislature will consider issues of utmost importance to the future of the Hill Country. This issue brief series provides an introduction to some of the legislative conversations convening in Austin, and how they impact our region.

Most drinking water supplies throughout Texas are either pumped from aquifers below the ground or stored on the surface behind dams. These water supplies are periodically strained by recurring periods of drought, limited storage capacity, and rapidly increasing local populations.

Water providers in the Hill Country are looking to ensure long-term supplies sufficient to keep pace with population growth and development. The rapidly rising supply, transport, and political costs of moving water around the state has prompted suppliers to turn to alternative resources such as brackish or marine desalination, aquifer storage and recovery (ASR), reuse (showers to flowers), and direct potable reuse (toilet to tap).

Another promising alternative water supply is rainwater harvesting. This resource can easily be used - at a minimum price - to replace all outdoor needs in new commercial and domestic construction, saving costly drinking water for indoor use. With the addition of inexpensive filtration, rainwater can be used as drinking water.

As development in the Hill Country creeps out over our state's often unpredictable aquifers and far from expensive pipelines, many new homes are being built with rainwater harvesting systems in place of traditional wells or connections to public water systems. Builders realize that the high costs and vulnerability associated with traditional wells and water utilities make rainwater harvesting systems cost effective and secure.

Rainwater harvesting can provide a cost effective and superior quality water resource, and allow Texas to continue to set the example for the nation by supporting innovative ways to develop and manage a finite resource—our water.



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Benefits:

- Central Texas' annual rainfall can provide the annual needs of a typical household. Even in drought, a 4,000 square foot roof can capture an average household's annual use.
- Rainwater is a superior quality product for household use.
- The practical installation methods and usage of rainwater harvesting systems are simple and well understood.
- The Texas Water Development Board has recognized rainwater harvesting as a viable and sustainable water resource.
- In water-scarce areas without access to expensive pipeline projects or where wells are unreliable, rainwater harvesting makes economic sense.
- Texas lawmakers continue to recognize that rainwater harvesting is helping to relieve the current demand on very costly imported water, achieve regional conservation goals, and they have crafted laws to allow average citizen to economically capture and use this water as a reliable domestic supply.

Challenges:

- The development community in Texas does not have a proven large-scale example to refer to when considering rainwater as an alternative to traditional water sources.
- A more favorable regulatory environment for rainwater harvesting must be fostered by changes to Texas Commission on Environmental Quality rules and through educational programs.
- Lacking a critical mass of successfully built projects, there is some resistance by the lending community to finance rainwater use projects.

Legislation:

In support of rainwater harvesting as a viable water supply, the Legislature has already declared that rainwater harvesting equipment is exempt from state sales and ad-valorem taxes, and legislated that Home Owner Associations may not prohibit the installation of these systems, nor can they prohibit water conserving landscape designs.

Pending Legislation:

HB 173 (Lucio III) Relating to the licensing and regulation of certain rainwater harvesting; providing administrative penalties; authorizing fees; requiring an occupational license.

HB 1334 (Isaac) Relating to a local option exemption from ad valorem taxation of the portion of the appraised value of a person's property that is attributable to the installation on the property of a rainwater harvesting system.

HB 1536 (Farrar) Relating to a study and report by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality on the use of green stormwater infrastructure in this state.

SB 2026 (Rodriguez) Relating to a study and report by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality on the use of green stormwater infrastructure in this state.

Thank you to HCA Board Member Milan J. Michalec for drafting this issue brief.

Over the next 50 years the population of Texas is expected to double. Already, there are places in Texas that are experiencing water shortages because demand is outpacing supply. In the Texas Hill Country, many people are choosing rainwater over groundwater not only for its ease and availability, but also for its taste, purity, and reduced cost.

5315 Highway 71 West,
Bee Cave, TX 78738
512-263-9147
info@hillcountryalliance.org
www.hillcountryalliance.org

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