

education
conservation
cooperation



Date: 3.7.2013

To: Texas House and Senate Natural Resource Committee Members
From: Hill Country Alliance
Contact: Christy Muse, 512.560.3135. christy@hillcountryalliance.org

Re: A Conservative approach to funding water needs.

We applaud the proposals set forth by Chairman Ritter and Chairman Fraser to provide funding for the Texas State Water Plan. As you consider a blueprint for funding the State's water needs, we urge you include policy that emphasizes conservation, the most cost-effective, long-term water supply solution.

Proper conservation strategies address long-term solutions that alter behaviors and change the way Texans think about and use water for generations to come. Proper conservation is the most affordable available water supply strategy and represents the most efficient way to sustain water supply.

Conservation is a broad topic that requires evaluation and prioritization. Strategies such as smart fixtures, re-use and rainwater harvesting are essential conservation measures. Brush management and State Soil and Water Conservation programs have proven to benefit water supply yields. Land stewardship practices on watersheds (water catchments) and riparian management along creeks and rivers goes hand-in-hand to provide clean water and more available stored water.

Moving Texans away from landscape practices that require excessive watering is perhaps the most direct path to reducing demand and creating additional supply. As observed in the attached report from Native American Seed, New Braunfels was able to reduce consumption from 17 million gallons per day to 8 million gallons per day after drought response measures were established last summer. Reducing consumption is doable and affordable, particularly when it comes to landscape and outdoor watering.

As stated in the attached Living Waters report, "It makes little sense to procure, treat and deliver high-quality drinking water to customers across a city only to have it evaporate immediately or disappear down a storm drain once we apply it inefficiently to our outdoor landscapes." It is prudent to strive to meet our state goal of reducing municipal water consumption to 140 gallons per person per day.

We believe a sensible conservation strategy can meet most, if not all, of the future water needs of Texas. On the municipal side, successful conservation programs in San Antonio and El Paso are positive examples where aggressive water conservation met the water needs for populations that doubled in size, but maintained constant water use. Relying on a sensible conservation strategy to achieve Texas' future water needs will be significantly less harmful to the ecologies and economies of Texas' aquifer supplies, property values of private land owners, environmental in-flows, and bay and estuaries when compared with reservoir and pipeline construction and inter-basin transfers.

We respectfully request your attention on the enumerated points below:

- 1) We encourage the highest possible priority given to conservation strategies, **a minimum of 20 percent** of overall funding allocation for proven municipal and agricultural conservation and efficiency improvements.
- 2) We encourage stated objectives for conservation practices and a ranking of effectiveness and efficiency for conservation strategies (and all water plan strategies).
- 3) We encourage investments in state water planning processes including DFC science, Environmental Flows work plans and Regional Water Plan implementation.

The Hill Country Alliance is dedicated to ensuring for future generations an opportunity to enjoy the unique features of the Hill Country region, including the countless spring-fed streams, its multi-ethnic and agricultural heritage, and spectacular scenic beauty.

HCA's Guiding Principles:

Encourage responsible water practices - The economy of the Hill Country and land values are dependent upon the water needs of today being balanced among current users, e.g. ranchers, development and the environment, in such a way that does no harm to the streams and aquifers.

Inform the friends of the Hill Country - A key to solving our region's challenges is to work collaboratively with all interested stakeholders in order to make readily available honest and fair information, along with opportunities for participation in decisions.

Nurture unified support for innovative policy changes - While the actions needed to sustain the Hill Country's natural features vary across the region - from the rapidly urbanizing southern and eastern portions, to the vast open spaces on the western and northern edges - there is a shared interest in respecting private property rights and encouraging locally grown solutions to complex issues through education.

Support economic development that is compatible with the Hill Country's unique features - A key to keeping our Hill Country a special place for generations to come is to promote sources of income for landowners and businesses so that ensuing generations are motivated to keep ranches intact and small towns functional.

Three helpful resources are attached: "Sprayed Away" by Texas Living Waters Project; "St Augustine Fact Sheet" by Native American Seed; and "An Assessment of Water Conservation" by the TWDB and TSSWCB.

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