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TEXAS' WATER OPTIONS: BEFORE PIPELINES & DAMS

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(March 8, 2013) Texas has been growing rapidly for many decades and seems that we are also getting hotter and drier.

Many Texans are "water short" now or will be in the future. Whether this was caused by too much growth, poorly planned growth, water waste or a declining, local water resource(s) – or a combination, varies.

In most areas we have had plenty of water – just turn on the pump or the faucet. Bingo. Fresh water. In our much-blessed Texas, we have in general, had things pretty easy water-wise for the last 100 years, including too-cheap water. We often forget where it comes from, how much we use or waste and how much water may be available.

Most climate experts feel we are now in a climatic change period. These dry/wet or hot/cold periods are mostly natural and have occurred forever and are seen in tree ring dating, as well as in recorded human history. Future growth has to be considered along with its effects upon all water resources. Voices are heard saying things such as: "*Is Austin the new San Angelo?"* or *"Is San Angelo the new El Paso?"*

Regional planning has been done for over a decade with the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB). Regional plans are merged into a State plan and updated every five years. Each region's plan must consider conservation first. The plans contain water conservation projects or water resource developments, which are often costly.

Priorities for Funding and Implementing the State Water Plan

1. First and foremost always, is CONSERVATION. And, I am speaking of get down and dirty serious conservation – not window dressing. Not just low-flow shower heads and toilets, which are good, but limited. One of the largest savings can be had by converting outside landscapes to low water use designs

such as Xeriscape or Wildscape using native plants or adapted low water use plants, often with Rainwater Harvesting and drip irrigation. Landscape water is usually 40-50% of total annual water use!

2.WATER REUSE is a very good and sensible option – keep your water, except for required river releases, and recycle it.

3. LOCATING AND REPAIRING UTILITY SYSTEM LEAKS can save a lot of water. Many towns lose 10 to 30 percent of their drinking water from leaky pipes!

4. AQUIFER STORAGE & RECOVERY (ASR) projects can be the best way to store extra water until a drought arrives – and it will.

5. DESALINATION of saline ground water or of Gulf water is in use already and often a good choice in spite of power costs and salty effluent disposal issues.

6. IMPROVED LAND STEWARDSHIP on watersheds (catchments) often can improve water quality and in some cases, water yields by using Selective Brush Management. While far from a sure thing, especially on non-karst limestone watersheds, it is always a practice which should be in use – everywhere. Riparian Management along creeks and rivers goes hand-in-hand to provide clean water and more available stored water.

This list is not all-inclusive and certainly does not have all of the information needed to consider any of these options – but it is a start and can may guide you in making good decisions for you and Texas.

Seeing our Legislature take a good and logical look at our State Water Plan and financing is hopeful. But going for the big, expensive, glamorous water projects will often cause more problems and not reduce our appetite for what is more precious than gold or oil …water! "

Maybe TWDB will grant priority to applications for improved conservation, system leaks, rainwater harvesting, reuse programs, watersheds, etc. And, require a conservation water pricing system such as the inverted pyramid and a good conservation program. Give conservation applicants a better interest rate. We need to do conservation first, including the tough stuff. All of the major costly items being discussed such as new reservoirs, long pipelines, etc., carry major baggage of one kind or another.

A good place to begin planning is on the TWDB website http://www.twdb.state.tx.us/ to Conservation. Another good source is the Texas Water Resources Institute http://twri.tamu.edu/ . Water education is crucial to achieving results and changes in water use. Remember: ***The Cheapest "New Water" is the Water You Save!***

Some content in this article is used with permission from *Ranch & Rural Living Magazine*, San Angelo, Texas. Mike Mecke is a retired rangeland and water resource specialist and a regular columnist for Ranch and Rural Living. Mike also serves on the Advisory Board and Water Team of the Hill Country Alliance (HCA).

The Hill Country Alliance is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to raise public awareness and build community support around the need to preserve the natural resources and heritage of the Central Texas Hill Country. Visit us at www.hillcountryalliance.org.