

Water Conservation Advisory Council Meeting Summary of Minutes

Date: January 27, 2026
Time: 10:30 am – 1:00 pm
Location: Virtual

Meeting Chaired by: Karen Guz, Presiding Officer
Meeting Facilitator: Denise Livingston, Council Staff Support

<i>Texas Commission on Environmental Quality</i>	Leslie Patterson Ashley Niell	<i>Institutional Water Users</i>	Eddie Wilcut Vacant
<i>Texas Department of Agriculture</i>	David Villarreal Vacant	<i>Professional Organizations Focused on Water Conservation</i>	Colin McDonald Josh Sendejar
<i>Texas Parks and Wildlife Department</i>	Marty Kelly Jennifer Whitt	<i>Higher Education</i>	Robert Mace Allen Berthold
<i>Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board</i>	Mitch Conine John Foster	<i>Agricultural Groups</i>	John Bender Charles Ring
<i>Texas Water Development Board</i>	Sam Marie Hermitte Erika Mancha	<i>Refining and Chemical Manufacturing</i>	Tanushri Jain Sherman Hampton
<i>Regional Water Planning Groups</i>	Aubrey Spear Wayne Wilson	<i>Electric Generation</i>	Greg Carter Ryan Bayle
<i>Federal Agencies</i>	Troy Hill Salvador Gandara	<i>Mining and Recovery of Minerals</i>	CJ Tredway Cory Pomeroy
<i>Municipalities</i>	Karen Guz, Chair Joyce Warren	<i>Landscape Irrigation and Horticulture</i>	Whitney Milberger Dean Minchillo
<i>Groundwater Conservation Districts</i>	Adam Foster Stephanie Keith	<i>Water Control and Improvement Districts</i>	Dustan Compton Vacant
<i>River Authorities</i>	Stacy Pandey Amy Muttoni	<i>Rural Water Users</i>	Kyle Eppler Mary Alice Boehm McKaughan
<i>Environmental Groups</i>	Jennifer Walker Marisa Bruno	<i>Municipal Utility Districts</i>	Donna Howe Earl Foster
<i>Irrigation Districts</i>	Anthony Stambaugh Michael Kent		

Also present: Adam Conner, Alex Flashing, Alison Wells, Allen Shiftley, Amanda Covington, Annika Schiller, Bill Hoffman, Brianna Fuller, Cecilia Balderrama, Chandler Crouch, Christi Upton, Christina Gildea, Christina Kaeini, Christopher Charles, Christopher Sanchez, Crysta Guzman, Daryll Spillman, Denise Ma, Domonique Green, Drew Aliyas, Eddy Trevino, Emma McNeal, Eric Anderson, Guy Fipps, Jade Rutledge, Jacie Lewis, Jade Rutledge, Jason Pierce, Jayme Martone, Jennifer Barr, Jennifer Nations, Jesse Luna, Jessica Woods, Jesus Palomares, Joseph Hopkins, Kerry Greathouse, Kevin Hunt, Krystal Copp, Margaret Cook, Martha Wright, Michelle Simpson, Natasha Lewis, Paula Paciorek, Paula Szymanski, Perry Fowler, Rachel Hanes, Rob Newman, Ronnie Lemmons, Ruby Perez, Samantha Tweet, Sarah Kinkle, Sasha Kodet, Shala Geer-Smith, Shannon Hamilton, Summer Hvasta, Susan Alvarez, Suzanne Williams, Tillery Sims, Todd Votteler, Troy Allen, Yesenia Perez **TWDB Staff** –Denise Livingston, Jessica Paz, Marla Heger, Melanie Butler, Mindy Conyers, Natalie Ballew, Shae Luther, Yarid Bayissa.

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1. The meeting started at 10:30 am
2. Roll call- A quorum of the Advisory Council was present at the meeting.
3. Presentation – Thirsty Data: Water and Energy Resources for New Data Centers – Houston Advanced Research Center, [Margaret Cook](#), PhD
4. Review of Minutes
 - December 2, 2025 – no comments
5. Public Comment – no public comments were received.
6. TWDB report – Sam Hermitte
 - On-line reporting for water use survey, water loss audit, and water conservation reports opened January 2. 2025 water use surveys are due by March 2. All other reports are due before May 1, 2026
 - TWDB is hosting 3 webinars on [Water Loss Use and Conservation](#). The webinars walk participants through the reporting process from WUS, WLA and the conservation reporting. Licensed water operators can receive 4 hours of continuing education through TCEQ by taking this no-cost webinar.
 - i. January 15 – 120 attendees
 - ii. February 11 – 99 registered – as of 1/26/26
 - iii. March 10 – 35 registered – as of 1/26/26
 - Fiscal year 2026 Agricultural water conservation grant request for applications is open with a closing date of March 18
 - Happy Camper presented their analysis of TWDB Municipal Conservation education program.
 - i. Purpose was to evaluate TWDB’s current K–12 education resources, identify practical opportunities for improvement, and align resources with the future statewide water campaign
 - ii. They conducted nine qualitative interviews with participants from the water sector, classroom teachers, and communications/education professionals from nonprofit water organizations.
 - iii. TWDB resources, participants signaled a consistent need for revision. Some identified barriers were findability, classroom readiness, visual clarity, and audience fit.
 - 112 water conservation remain to be reviewed for 2024 and 40 for 2025.
 - Final numbers for the 2024 water loss audit
 - i. UTA reviewed 244 audits. Of those
 - 88 return to TWDB staff (required validation, no ILI, insufficient data, etc.)
 - 16 were inactive public water systems
 - Final numbers for the 2024 water loss audit validations
 - i. TWDB identified 497 required utilities to be validated due to new or existing loans.
 - 224 validations completed
 - 133 were non-responsive entities
 - 78 were non submittals – delinquent reporting
 - 62 unable to complete due to staffing
 - - i. HB 29 – TWDB is preparing FAQs, projected to be out mid-December.

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- ii. Prop 4 – [FAQ's](#)
- iii. GCD Science Grants - \$7.5M - This funding will assist GCDs with developing local groundwater data, improving models, and implementing sustainable water management practices. Requests for application are expected to be posted early 2026.
- iv. Provided additional information on ag water conservation fund.
- Agricultural water conservations
 - i. Presenting the FY 26 RFA for Ag Water Conservation Grants to the December Board meeting.
 - ii. Ag conservation is hosting a webinar at 11:00 a.m. on December 3 to explain how the TWDB estimates how much water is used to irrigate agriculture in the state each year.
- Education - We have agreement with Happy Camper to complete an education analysis of our conservation material. He will be conducting interviews. The project kicked off in late October and will be completed in January.
- Water Conservation Plan Completed an analysis comparing TCEQ's and TWDB's water conservation plans and met with TCEQ.
- TWDB will be participating on the Alliance for Water Efficiency's Technical Advisory Committee for a per capita water use project. The project aims to document current water use per capita methodologies and purposes, then work towards a standardized framework for how per capita water use is calculated and used across various contexts, ensuring consistency, transparency, and applicability across the water sector.
- Partnered with UTA to provide technical assistance to mitigate water loss per SB 28 (2023).
 - As of 8/25/25, UTA has initiated assistance with 70 utilities.
 - Prioritizing WLA with data issues. We are starting with negative water loss and smaller population served.
 - SB 28 criteria
 - Water loss audits submitted to the board
 - Population served; and
 - Integrity of the utility's water system.
 - with AWWA version 6.
- Water Loss Audit Validations – As of 11/24/25, TWDB has performed 217 validations of the 498 required utilities (utilities with new or existing loans). **Approx. 43%**
 - Discussion was held on whether TWDB will submit a summary of findings or lesson learned on the validation program.

Discussion items

- Discussion was held on clarification of the agricultural grant funding and annual authorization.

7. Work Group Reports: Karen summarized the timeline and charges for the Council
- Agricultural –. John Bender gave a summary of the two agricultural workgroup meets held since the last meeting. The work group was divided into 2 subgroups; surface water and groundwater.
 - i. Current funding for ag loan and grant funding is only for political subdivision.

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- ii. No state programs to provide funding directly to farmers and ranchers.
 - iii. HB 43 expanded the Texas Agricultural Finance Authority, TAFA, program. TAFA funds can already be used for conservation, however, highlighting conservation as a funding opportunity would be beneficial.
 - iv. The surface water workgroup also discussed the issue of the expense of engineering and estimating water savings as a barrier for small irrigation districts to seek funding through the ag program. Proposed discussion with TWDB to identify avenues to alleviate barriers through an administrative methods versus legislative recommendation.
 - v. John gave a report on the issue in the Rio Grande Valley where many municipalities and ag users receive water through the irrigation districts. Many of the irrigation districts use unlined canals that can experience up to 40% of water loss due to seepage.
 - vi. A possible recommendation that is similar to SB 1606 (89th session), is to allow irrigation districts that provide raw water to municipal water districts to apply for financial assistance from TWDB through the Safe Drinking Water Revolving Fund.
 - vii. **WUTAP** program is a program through TWDB to help water/wastewater systems that are interested in funding, get assistance with water conservation plans, rate studies, submission of project information forms and funding applications. The ag workgroup is interested in exploring an option for irrigation districts to have a similar resource.
 - viii. Next workgroup meeting will be in February.
- Commercial and Institutional- Eddie Wilcut is meeting with support staff, Denise Livingston and then will be having a workgroup meeting.
 - i. Discussion on data centers falling in both commercial and industrial categories.
 - Landscape, Irrigation, and Horticulture (E-LaWN) – Whitney Milberger discussed recent a workgroup meeting. The group discussed a possible recommendation for master valves on all irrigation systems. Whitney explained the function and benefits of a master valve.
 - i. Next meeting to further discuss the recommendation will be Feb. 3 at 2:00 pm.
 - ii. Industry professionals will be part of the Feb. 3 discussion.
 - iii. The work group also discussed re-creating the Gold Star recognition program. This program recognizes outstanding water conservation plans. The program was created in an attempt to generate more impactful water conservation programs.
 - iv. The municipal and E-LaWN group will work with the Public Awareness/Blue Legacy Awards committee to further the program.

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- Industrial – No report
- Municipal –
 - i. Further discussion on gold Star program
 - ii. Work with TCEQ to look at drought templates to make suggestions on improvements
 - TCEQ will be doing a formal solicitation process for comments as required by Senate Bill 2662.
- Public Awareness – Colin McDonald
 - i. Next meeting is February 11 meeting on Blue Legacy Awards. Large focus on data, even if the project was not successful, if the entity is willing to share the data, could be beneficial.
 - ii. Working with TWDB for approval to host award ceremony at 2027 Water for Texas conference again.
- Water Loss – Jennifer Walker
 - i. Joint meeting will be planned for municipal and water loss
 - Discuss maintenance plans for extreme drought or other infrastructure stressors.
 - GPCD vs GPC
 - Request for information on how the initial SB 28 water fund dollars were spent. Sam Hermitte will research the issue and report back.
 - HB 29 (89th Legislature) impacts 6 utilities. TWDB FAQs are available. Jennifer requested a future discussion at a work group meeting on how the requirement for water loss mitigation plans will be implemented.
 - Infrastructure proactive analytics and pipe replacement plans to mitigate water loss.
- Wholesale/Rural Water – Dustan Compton
 - i. Workgroup is in the process of drafting two BMPs.
 - Financial incentives program
 - Wholesale Conservation and Public Education
 - ii. Drafting survey for wholesale contacts on successes in conservation
 - iii. Dustan is working with TexMesonet and the ET network. He will be meeting with the stakeholders in early February to determine if a funding recommendation will be needed and what it may entail.

8. Discussion of potential content items for Charges

- (1) monitor trends in water conservation implementation;
- (2) monitor new technologies
 - i. AMI – how to best use AMI to help mitigate water loss and other benefits.
 - ii. Robert Mace discussed atmospheric water harvesting technology
 - iii. ET network
- (3) monitor the effectiveness of the statewide water public awareness program;

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- (4) develop and implement a state water management resource library;
- (5) develop and implement a public recognition program for water conservation; The Blue Legacy Awards and the possible Gold Star program will go under this charge.
- (6) monitor the implementation of water conservation strategies by water users included in regional water plans; 2026 Regional water plans were approved by the Board in January's meeting. and
- (7) monitor target and goal guidelines for water conservation to be considered by the board and commission.

2:03:55 left off here...

9. Announcement of Conferences and Events

- Leslie Patterson announced an upcoming restructuring within TCEQ that will result in her stepping down from the Council. Jade Rutledge and Ashley Neil will be appointed.
- [Central Texas Water Symposium](#), March 4, 2026, Texas State University, San Marcos
- [Texas Water](#) conference April 27-30, 2026, San Antonio
- [Texas Panhandle Water Conservation Symposium](#), February 11, 2026, Amarillo
- [Texas Water Leaders 2026 Program](#) Applications due Jan. 31, 2026

10. Future Meetings:

- February 24, 2026
- April 7, 2026, In-person at the Lower Colorado River Authority, Redbud Center

11. The meeting was adjourned at 1:07 p.m.