

Water Conservation Advisory Council Meeting Summary of Minutes

Date: March 21, 2024

Time: 10:30 am – 1:00 pm

Location: Conservation Conference Room CR-A238, San Antonio Water System Office
2800 US Hwy 281 N., San Antonio, TX 78212

Meeting Chaired by: Karen Guz, Presiding Officer

Meeting Facilitator: Denise Livingston, Council Staff Support

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality	Leslie Patterson Jennifer Allis	Institutional Water Users	Bill Hoffman Eddy Trevino
Texas Department of Agriculture	David Villarreal	Professional Organizations Focused on Water Conservation	Sarah Schlessinger Colin McDonald
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department	Marty Kelly Vanessa Chapman	Higher Education	Robert Mace Allen Berthold
Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board		Agricultural Groups	Charles Ring (11:17 am) John Bender
Texas Water Development Board	Sam Marie Hermitte Erika Mancha	Refining and Chemical Manufacturing	Craig Elam
Regional Water Planning Groups	Aubrey Spear	Electric Generation	Greg Carter Ryan Bayle
Federal Agencies	Troy Hill	Mining and Recovery of Minerals	CJ Tredway
Municipalities	Karen Guz, Chair Joyce Warren	Landscape Irrigation and Horticulture	Whitney Milberger
Groundwater Conservation Districts	Sarah Martins	Water Control and Improvement Districts	Dustan Compton
River Authorities	Stacy Pandey Amy Muttoni	Rural Water Users	Kyle Eppler
Environmental Groups	Jennifer Walker	Municipal Utility Districts	Donna Howe Earl Foster
Irrigation Districts	Wayne Halbert		

Also present: Adam Foster, Alicia Lee, Alyssa Pantuso, Amanda Masino, Annika Schiller, Becki Begley, Blaire Parker, Chris Loft, Christopher Charles, Christopher Perry, Cole Walker, Hector Ortiz, Joanna Warren, Joseph Hopkins, Latricia Spikes, Mary Alice Boehm-McKaughan, Monica Polgar, Natalie Houston, Paula Szymanski, Sarah Kirkle, Sarah Riggins, Shean Dalton, Ted Pick, Valerie Miller

TWDB Staff – Antonio Delgado, Jessica Paz, Temple McKinnon, John Sutton, Shae Luther, Jaclyn Buck, Taylor Nickell, Loren Whitman, Daniel Rice, John Dupnik.

Links to documents discussed in meeting:

[Stakeholder Opportunities | Texas Water Development Board](#)

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Agricultural Water Conservation Grants – [Request for Applications](#)

Agricultural Water Conservation Grants – [Application Instructions](#)

[Property Tax Code Sec. 202.007. CERTAIN RESTRICTIVE COVENANTS](#) PROHIBITED.

1. The meeting started at 10:30am
2. Roll call - A quorum of the Advisory Council was present at the meeting.
3. Public Comment – No public comments.
4. TWDB Update – Sam Hermite gave TWDB report.
 - a. The Water Use Surveys were due March 1. -69% return as of 3/11. Past due letters were sent.
 - b. Regional Water Planning Group technical memoranda were due to TWDB March 4.
 - c. The TWDB is continuing to seek public input to assist in implementing the Texas Water Fund and requests stakeholder feedback to inform funding priorities as well as the administration of the programs to which funds may be transferred.

The TWDB held a stakeholder workshop on March 20, with 115 virtual participants and 53 in-person.

Online surveys or written feedback are still being accepted.

To date, we have received –

 - [62 surveys for Financial Assistance for Water Infrastructure projects.](#)
 - [44 for New Water Supply, and](#)
 - [40 for the Stateside Water Public Awareness Program](#)
 - d. The TWDB and the Lower Colorado River Authority held a Surface water evaporation monitoring and estimation: new developments and implications for reservoir operations and water planning, on March 19.
 - e. TWDB Financial assistance deadlines. TWDB invites entities to submit project information to be included in the intended use plans (IUPs):
 - i. Approximately 296 Project Information Forms (PIF) were submitted for consideration in our upcoming Fiscal Year 2025's State Revolving Fund Programs Intended Use Plans. 147 projects were identified as potential water loss mitigation projects. Questionnaires were sent out this week for additional information regarding those water loss projects.
 - ii. Drinking Water SRF – Lead Service Line Replacement – April 1
 - iii. Clean and Drinking Water SRF – Emerging Contaminants – April 1
 - iv. Flood Infrastructure Fund – April 15
 - f. water loss use and conservation [webinars](#) had over 300 participants.
 - g. Conservation department vacancies:
 - i. Water Loss Specialist (2)/ Water Conservation Specialist (1) – positions have been filled.

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- ii. Agricultural Conservation Specialist – interviews have been conducted and recommendations for hiring have been routed for review.
 - iii. Agricultural Data Analyst - applications are being reviewed.
5. TWDB Agriculture Program Update – Antonio Delgado, Manager
FY 2023 – funded
- a. 10 projects across the state.
 - b. 6 equipment cost share grants to Chambers Liberty CND, Maverick County WCD, Mesquite GCD, Rolling Plains GCD, Cibola Creek Municipal Authority, and Edwards Aquifer Authority.
 - c. Demonstration and research grants
 - i. Texas A&M University, Kingsville- This project will quantify the water savings, use and productivity of dragon fruit planted in south Texas. Expect to see 50% decrease in water demand compared to citrus groves.
 - ii. Texas Tech – this project will demonstrate viable methods of soil and crop management
 - iii. Texas A&M Agri-life – irrigation management and soil health in Texas vineyards
 - iv. University of San Antonio Texas – integrate in-situ sensor, observations, remote sensing data and weather forecast to improve short term dry conditions forecasts.
 - b. 88th Texas Legislature increased annual grant amount from \$1.2 million to \$1.5 million and one additional FTE. The program does not have sufficient funds to provide any loans in 2025 but the program will have \$1.5 million in grants. In 2026, the program will not have funding for loans and only \$474,000 in grants.
 - c. Received 26 RFA submissions for projects.
 - d. Hosted two Ag grant webinars and will host one more on March 27.

It was requested that the agriculture team provide additional information to the WCAC agriculture committee to assist with building recommendations, current trend information and any research projects.

6. Workgroup Updates: Prior to the updates, Karen reviewed the timeline of compiling the legislative report completed in a timely manner. The report will include content from all sectors (Agriculture, Municipal, Industrial, Commercial/Institutional, Landscape, etc.):
- Funding recommendations are due to Denise by April 11.
 - Water use trends –
 - are they trending towards water efficiency
 - What trends should we watch, encourage, promote
 - Track recent technology, I.e., AMI

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- Outline work plan for next biennium
 - What issues need to be explored
 - Possible BMPs
 - Stakeholder conversations
 - Content draft deadline is August 8th – send to Denise
- a. Municipal - Karen
- i. Save Texas Water website - conservation was held regarding the updating of the Council's website. The Council's charged with maintaining a website as a clearinghouse for water conservation. source guide with TWDB staff. The site needs a refresh, but that will require a team to layout plan of work, reorganize. \$30-60,000 estimated cost. Although TWDB IT staff would have to be part of the process, TWDB could not dedicate staff resources. This would be a contract with TWDB staff involved in the process. Whitney Milberger volunteered to help with the website restructure.
- The report will contain a section on recommended municipal plumbing code and state plumbing code updates.
- Discussion was held on municipalities and investor-owned utilities to have enforcement abilities for their drought contingency plans.
- The report will highlight the drought survey completed with TAWWA and issues entities are having with HOAs.
- Municipal/Water Loss work groups will have a follow-up meeting prior to April 18th WCAC meeting.
- Bill will draft a short write-up on downward trends with electric generation and industry with more renewables.
- Discussion held on 5 & 10-year goals, GPCD trends, minimizing GPCD increase during drought, and how to calculate baseline.
- NTMWD discussed issue with no state law that protects tenants from being forced to irrigate by their landlords. Similar to issues with HOAs demanding people water in contradiction to drought rules.
- Sarah Kinkle gave an update on the Texas Water Conservation Association, TWCA, meeting.

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- Discussion on drought contingency plans specifically in terms of the Aqua Texas case. [Aqua Texas over pumped](#) their allotted amount by almost double their groundwater permit.
 - Groundwater districts need the ability to enforce groundwater permits and cutbacks when needed.
 - Are sufficient tools available to retail public utilities to adequately enforce their drought plans?
 - Opposite issue - [Rio Ancho Ranch controversy](#) – drought enforcement was not appropriate response during drought. Community ‘did not receive enough water.’
 - Sarah Schlessinger also commented on Investor-owned utilities needing guidance on how to structure their utility rates correctly to promote conservation.
- b. The water loss work group met on March 18.
- i. Discussion on what content to include in legislative report:
 - Review investments being made by prioritizing water loss
 - Level 1 validation process – is critical to understand issues
 - Technical assistance
 - Make water loss a separate issue in water management strategies and in the state water plan.
 - Discussion on how the past two summers have impacted infrastructure with increased line breaks due to shifting soils and higher pressures. Also impacted by seasonal transitions and temperature swings.
 - ii. No recommendations for this report. However, a discussion was held on [HB 4445](#) from last session. Possibly include guidance to legislature on water loss issues, and how percent water loss is not an appropriate target or goal.
 - iii. components now in place.
 - Technical assistance program,
 - Regional Water planning groups water management strategies including water loss as separate item from conservation.
 - Verification program
 - New TWDB water loss staff.
 - iv. Possibly include discussion on water loss mitigation being a water supply solution.
- c. Commercial/Institution- Bill Hoffman briefed the Council on the content proposed for the commercial/institutional report.
- i. Helping utilities work with commercial/institutional water users
 - ii. Technologies in C&I. New tools are being developed to help train people to work with C&I water efficiency.

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- iii. Using reclaimed water for landscape irrigation and cooling towers.
 - iv. TCEQ return flow data needs to be more accessible and better displayed.
 - This could be a research project.
 - With decreasing wastewater flows, the more concentrated wastewater may pose a problem with the aquatic environment.
 - v. Funding is needed for more academic research
 - vi. Plumbing code changes will be discussed in the report narrative, no recommendations at this time.
 - vii. A workplan will identify items to be followed up on with TCEQ and stakeholders. Also, items that may be made into Best Management Practices.
- d. Public Awareness –
- i. Joyce Warren gave a summary on the Blue Legacy Awards.
 - Finalizing application package and judging criteria
 - Start promotions at the Texas Water conference in Ft Worth in April
 - Colin gave a summary of the award design
 - a. Four main categories will feature a hand-blown glass pitcher by a San Antonio artist and will sit on a piece of oak that has had the tree rings hand marked with the droughts and floods
 - b. Texas Water Foundation is sponsoring the awards; however, additional sponsors are welcome.
 - ii. Sarah Schlessinger discussed the legislative recommendation to support a statewide public awareness campaign. Now part of the Texas Water Fund. Currently the TWDB has an RFA for a public awareness campaign.
 - No legislative recommendations will be put forward at this time from the Public Awareness group.

Sarah acknowledged the Blue Legacy Awards subcommittee for all their work and extended a note of gratitude to AWWA for allowing the awards ceremony in the past and to TWDB for incorporating the new awards at the Water for Texas conference.

Sarah gave her support for the redesigning of the website.
- e. Agriculture: Charles Ring announced the closure of the sugar cane mill in the Rio Grane Valley due to the lack of water. Corn production is also being affected and this impacts the economy. North Texas crops are being affected too and are converting from corn to more conservative crops.
- John Bender gave a report on the agricultural work group.

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- i. The work group approved moving forward with a recommendation for replenishing funding in the agricultural water conservation fund. The recommendation is currently being reviewed by TWDB staff. This will be on the Council's agenda at the next in-person meeting.
 - ii. At the TWCA meeting, Wayne Halbert mentioned the issue of replenishing the funding in the agricultural water conservation fund and asked the TWCA Legislative Committee to consider making that recommendation.
 - iii. The Gate Automation BMP is also on the next in-person agenda for Council approval and then will be processed through TWDB for posting on the website.
 - iv. John will work with TWDB staff to discuss trends, research and projects in ag conservation.
- f. Industrial – No report but they will have a report ready by August 8th for review.
- g. Wholesale/Rural water met March 20 – Dustan Compton gave summary of the ET stakeholder group that met of February 28th.
- i. Evapotranspiration stakeholders discussed a funding recommendation. The TexMesonet and ET Network are working on a list of resource needs.
 - ii. The wholesale work group discussed report content
 - How has wholesale advanced
 - What are wholesaler abilities for conservation, pricing or drought related pricing/surcharge, curtailment. Is there a need for additional guidance? No recommendations at this time. Discussions will continue
 - Review of wholesale contract.
- h. Landscape and Irrigation workgroup – initial meeting had a great turn out. The discussion was on formulating goals of the workgroup.
- i. Be a resource for the Council on landscape/irrigation issues. The group consisted of a wide range of experts in the landscape/irrigation sectors.
 - ii. Focus on irrigation design, application, management
 - iii. Create a resource clearing house – provide educational outreach opportunities. Use the workgroup's expertise to educate on proper plant selection, design, and practicality, etc.
 - iv. Be a resource to educate HOAs, irrigators, landscape designers, and other interest groups.
 - v. The legislative report will discuss the new work group, its goals, and trends in the industry. Also, cross reference the importance of the ET network
 - vi. Discussion was held on meaningful inspections, especially of new irrigation systems and new build (Commercial and residential) and

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the unfunded mandate for enforcement of irrigation standards.
Possible BMP

vii. Next meeting is May 9th 1:00 – 2:30pm

7. Discussion: 2024 WCAC Legislative Report: Karen encouraged the Council members drafting legislative report items to keep in mind “readability”. Clear concise messaging with subtitles and bullet points.
8. Other Business: No other items.
9. Announcement of Conferences and Events
 - a. TAWWA Texas Water Conference - April 9 – 12th in Ft. Worth.
 - b. Agricultural Water Sustainability Summit, August 7 – 9 in Lubbock.
 - c. Texas Groundwater Summit – August 20-22 in San Antonio.
10. Future Meeting Dates: Mar. 21, April 18 (in-person), June 20, Aug. 22 (in-person), Oct. 17, Nov. 7
11. Adjourn – meeting ended at 11:43 am

DRAFT