

North Texas Water Plan Heavy on Reservoirs, Light on Conservation

State law divides Texas into 16 water planning regions. Each region must present an updated plan for meeting future needs every five years. Region C covers the 16-county Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex and includes some of the nation's fastest growing suburbs. Region C's proposed update was recently open for public comment.

In August, Clean Water Fund submitted comments on the Water Plan which faulted it for prioritizing expensive new reservoirs over conservation.

Dallas and Fort Worth have made progress in lowering per capita gallons of consumption (GPCD) through toilet rebate programs and the "Lawn Whisperer" campaign, which offers tips on more efficient lawn watering. However, the GPCD for most cities in Region C remains well above the state average, and few cities have programs in place to lower consumption. Fewer than half of Region C communities limit lawn watering, even during drought. Less than 40% have tiered rate structures to promote conservation and only 25% punish water waste.

Instead of prioritizing proven conservation programs, Region C's Plan calls for piping water in from 8 new reservoirs in East Texas. The reservoirs would cost more than \$8 billion, flood thousands of acres of hardwood forest and agricultural land, and face strong opposition from the communities where they would be located. The Plan fails to act on eleven viable Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) projects. ASR stores water underground during rainy periods for use during dry periods.

Clean Water Fund and Clean Water Action urge Region C to prioritize conservation programs rather than new reservoirs and distribution infrastructure that would hurt the environment, require vast amounts of energy, and cost our communities billions of dollars.



North Dallas water waste on a hot summer afternoon.

Austin Goes BIG in Solar!

In two landmark votes this October, the Austin City Council moved to add 450 megawatts of energy from new West Texas solar farms by the end of 2016. This is on top of a separate 150 MW contract signed last year. The council also voted to bring an additional 150 MWs online by the end of 2019, either through another contract or in a solar farm that the city will build and operate on its own.

It adds up to 750 MWs of clean, affordable, water-saving solar energy for Austin, a milestone that the city had not planned to reach before 2025. The move comes early because bids for the solar power came in at record low prices.

The low prices are largely due to the Federal Investment Tax Credit, which is set to drop from 30% to 10% at the end of 2016. Solar projects must be on line before January 2017 to qualify for the credit. Clean Water Action and allies urged the city to act now to assure that the projects can be completed before the tax credit is reduced.



Webberville solar farm near Austin Texas.

Not only will these low prices add up to substantial savings for ratepayers — the rates can be locked in for 15 to 25 years — but solar does not require the massive amounts of water that gas, coal, and nuclear do. Gas and coal are also responsible for tremendous amounts of water pollution, caused by drilling and mining operations and by the disposal of toxic by-products. Nor

does solar contribute to greenhouse gas or other health-harming emissions.

Clean Water Action members wrote over 1,000 letters and emails to the council urging it to move ahead with these solar deals. Austin's investment puts in a position to go well beyond the 2025 goal. As Texas' population continues to soar, additional energy will certainly be needed.

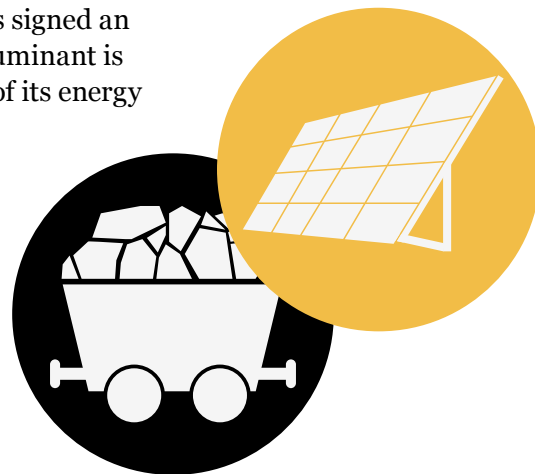
San Antonio is already on track to procure 400 MW of solar by 2017, and Georgetown,

Texas became the largest city in the nation to go 100% renewable when it announced its own 150 MW solar purchase earlier this year.

Big Coal Makes Big Investment in Texas Solar

In a decision that marks a new day for solar energy in Texas, Luminant has signed an agreement with SunEdison to build a 115 MW solar farm in West Texas. Luminant is one of the biggest electrical providers in the state. It produces nearly 70% of its energy from coal plants, including East Texas lignite plants that are among the dirtiest in the nation. Luminant attributes the purchase to economic reasons alone, not to any environmental considerations.

Unlike public utilities in Austin, San Antonio, or Georgetown, which enjoy monopolies within their service areas, Luminant is owned by private investors and must compete for customers in Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth and other deregulated markets. Its decision to invest heavily in solar demonstrates the private sector's belief that solar can now compete with other forms of energy production.



San Antonio Water Grab

The City of San Antonio, renowned for its water conservation programs, has taken a step backward with its plan to pipe water in from Burleson County. The Spanish company Abengoa would build a 142 mile long pipeline for this purpose, in a project dubbed Vista Ridge.

In response to limits on how much water it could pump from the Edwards Aquifer, San Antonio developed some of the best conservation programs in the nation. It doubled in population over 25 years while keeping overall water use constant.

Consumption dropped to less than 130 gallons per person per day, without compromising quality of life or economic growth. These programs saved money by reducing the need for new infrastructure; as the Chief Financial Officer of the San Antonio Water System (SAWS) put it, “Water saved is money earned.”

Vista Ridge is expected to cost \$3.4 billion and add more than \$12 to the average ratepayer’s monthly bill by 2020. SAWS openly states that the pipeline will render advanced levels of conservation, including lawn watering restrictions, unnecessary during times of extreme drought.

Vista Ridge might also lead to an unnecessary “water grid” in Central Texas. SAWS proposes paying for the pipeline in the short term through a series of east-west lines that would convey water to other cities along the

I-35 corridor, and potentially into the Hill Country. This would undermine conservation efforts in the receiving cities, and accelerate sprawl in environmentally sensitive areas. Once SAWS decides it needs all of the water, it would close these lateral lines and force receiving cities to find water elsewhere — likely through additional pipelines from the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer.

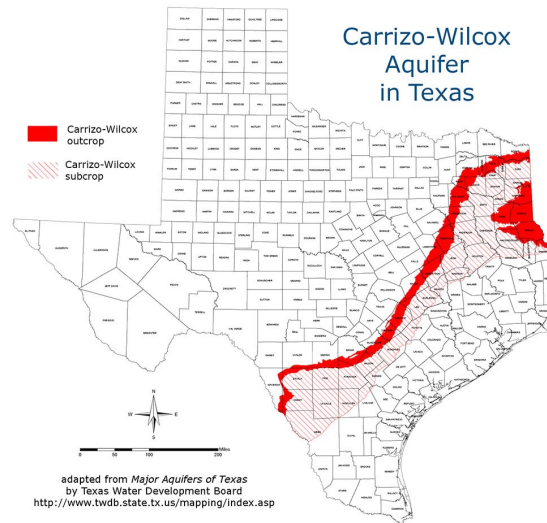
Vista Ridge faces strong opposition along the proposed pipeline’s path and in San Antonio. Contrary to

what water vendors like Abengoa claim, the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer is not a bottomless source; it recharges much more slowly than the Edwards Aquifer, and shares water with the Colorado River and other rivers in ways that are not completely understood. Drawing down this aquifer has been shown to diminish downstream flows in the Colorado, and draw-downs risk cutting off spring flows, and drying up existing wells.

San Antonio has the option to withdraw from the project.

Clean Water Action urges it

to do so, and believes that communities need to take maximum advantage of local sources rather than indulge in California-style systems that bring in water from distant places. This approach is proven to be faulty, and Texas cannot afford to imitate it during a time of rapid population growth, recurrent drought, and climate change.



The City as a Sponge

Imagine a city built to channel stormwater into underground cisterns for later use as a water supply. Imagine streets, driveways, and parking lots made of porous surfaces that allow water to percolate slowly into the ground rather than rush into nearby creeks and contribute to flooding and erosion. Imagine air conditioner condensate from highrises used to flush toilets. And imagine every new home decked out with plumbing that sends laundry and shower water (greywater) to the roots of trees rather than down the drain.

Sound farfetched? Los Angeles, San Francisco, Las Vegas, and Sydney, Australia are already doing some of this, and more. Austin is now in the midst of a comprehensive planning effort to weigh the financial and environmental pros and cons of these and other options for meeting future supply. The effort, called “Integrated Water Resource Planning”, comes at the urging of Clean Water Action and allied organizations who want Austin to explore local, sustainable methods rather than pipe water in from distant sources. Growth itself can function as a source of new water, provided this growth is properly designed. [Learn more at http://austintexas.gov/aiwrpctf](http://austintexas.gov/aiwrpctf)

Water Utility, Environmentalists Find Common Ground

In a move supported by Clean Water Action, the Austin Water Utility (AWU) has proposed making once-a-week lawn watering restrictions permanent. Austin has limited watering to once a week since September 2012, and since then has saved more water due to these restrictions than Austin uses in a typical year.

The City Manager has the discretion to lift restrictions if area reservoirs reach a certain level. But, maintaining the current restrictions will reinforce the message that water needs to be used carefully going forward. Experts predict a drier climate for Central Texas, punctuated by occasional periods of heavy rainfall. Consistent with this model, the heavy rains of late spring and early summer were followed by a 51-day “flash drought” with no rainfall at all. Much of Texas has now slipped back into some level of drought.

AWU’s position is especially encouraging because utilities often prefer to sell water in order to raise revenue rather than conserving it. Clean Water Action has long argued that the people of Austin would respond if called on to conserve — and the numbers show that they have. Austinites are watering less and installing more drought-resistant landscapes. Making once-a-week lawn watering restrictions permanent will require a revision to the city’s current drought contingency plan, which Clean Water Action supports.



Now is the time to sign up at work to support Clean Water Fund and other conservation organizations protecting Texas through **EarthShare’s workplace giving program**. If your employer

doesn’t yet offer the benefit of contributing to great causes through payroll deduction, we may be able to help. Contact Clean Water Fund, CWF@cleanwater.org.

**TEXAS
CURRENTS**
FALL 2015

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