

PANHANDLE WATER PLANNING GROUP

Minutes

December 17, 2009

A meeting of the Panhandle Water Planning Group (Region A) (Legislative Committee) was held on Thursday, December 17, 2009 at 10:30 a.m. in the Board Room of the Panhandle Regional Planning Commission, 415 West Eighth Avenue, Amarillo, Potter County, Texas.

Steve Walthour, Chairman, presided.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Cole Camp, PIKA; Bill Hallerberg; Vernon Cook, Roberts County; C.E. Williams; Panhandle GCD; Nolan Clark;

STAFF PRESENT:

Kyle Ingham, Local Government Services Director; Jonathan Ellis, Local Government Services Program Specialist

1. CALL TO ORDER

Steve Walthour called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m.

2. DISCUSS – LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDED IN THE 2006 PANHANDLE REGIONAL WATER PLAN

AND

3. DISCUSS – NEW LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDED IN THE 2006 PANHANDLE REGIONAL WATER PLAN

Members discussed the recommendations from the 2006 Plan. The following changes are the result of this discussion. Some changes are self explanatory and relate to issues of time periods involved in the implementation as opposed to time of these new recommendations. For other changes comments were added for clarification:

BEGINNING OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Excerpt from Chapter 8 Legislative Recommendations, 2006 PWPA Plan

8.3 Legislative Recommendations

As the PWPG has gone through the preparation of the regional water supply plan, several items have been identified which the PWPG recommends be considered before the next planning cycle. Title 31 of the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §357.7(a)(9) states that the¹ regional water plans will include: “regulatory, administrative, or legislative recommendations that the regional water planning group believes are needed and desirable to: facilitate the orderly development, management, and conservation of water resources and preparation for and response to drought conditions in order that sufficient water will be available at a reasonable cost to ensure public health, safety, and welfare; further economic development; and protect the agricultural and natural resources of the state and regional water planning area.” Following is a list of recommendations:²

8.3.1 Regulatory Issues

- a) *Continue to evaluate the rules governing reuse to encourage the use of wastewater effluent.* The current regulatory environment provides a number of barriers to encourage the reuse of wastewater effluent. TCEQ should re-evaluate the current rules and change the rules to provide and quantify incentives for municipalities, industries and agriculture to reuse wastewater effluent.
- b) *Assessments and evaluation of the Ogallala Aquifer in the Region A Planning Area need to consider the minimal recharge rates comparable to other major aquifers in the State of Texas.* The Ogallala Aquifer is a mined and finite resource that has minimal recharge as identified in {INSERT CITATION}.³⁴

8.3.2 Legislative Issues

- a) *Continue⁵ state-sponsored water availability modeling for minor aquifers.* This information is particularly important in the evaluation of the minor aquifers in the Panhandle. There was extremely limited information available regarding supplies which are anticipated to be available from the minor aquifers in the region.
- b) *Expand funding for implementation of water supply strategies.* Many water supply strategies, particularly those associated with brush control, water conservation and irrigated agriculture, have limited means of implementation other than public outreach

¹ It was determined that the language from the Senate Bill One was not specifically appropriate for this late version.

² It was determined that these recommendations were for several groups, not just the TWDB.

³ It was determined that this was significantly completed.

⁴ It was determined that the planning group was more concerned with water availability rather than water rights, thus it was determined that the important parts of this paragraph were covered elsewhere for the purposes of the Planning Group and the paragraph was as a result removed.

⁵ It was determined that numbers and lettering would lend itself more easily to referencing.

and education. The PWPG recommends that the state and federal governments sponsor programs to implement these strategies.

- c) *Manage groundwater resources through local groundwater conservation districts.* There remain certain areas of the Panhandle Water Planning Area that are not within the boundaries of a groundwater district. In order to create an equitable situation with regard to groundwater management, these areas should be included in a local district contained within the regional planning area.
- d) *Create a water conservation reserve program for irrigated acreage management.* A water conservation reserve program should be created to make it economically feasible for farmers to convert irrigated acreage to dry land.
- e) *Encourage the federal government to continue to support Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) participation.* As properties currently in CRP are coming out, property owners are converting and reestablish the properties to irrigated agriculture and utilizing higher volumes of groundwater. {INSERT #'s of CRP coming out}⁶
- f) *Develop or improve grant and loan programs for utilities to replace/repair aging infrastructure.* Development of a program similar to the TWDB Wastewater Revolving Loan Program to address aging water infrastructure and metering programs.
- g) *Provide funding for continuation of the High Plains-PET.* This support should be administered through the network team annually, through groundwater conservation districts within the network area. The State should provide funding to allow continuation and/or cost sharing of operating costs of the High Plains-PET network and its integration into a statewide network.
- h) *Evaluate policy barriers to use playa lakes for conservation purposes.* The State should evaluate the current legislative barriers to using playa lakes. The barriers should be removed or reduced to allow using the playas for aquifer recharge or other beneficial water supply purposes.
- i) *Maintain the functionality and viability of the Water Conservation Advisory Council.* The group currently operates on a volunteer basis with no state or federal funding.⁷

8.4 Recommendations for Future State Water Plans

- a) *TWDB should⁸ establish and continue to promote clear guidelines for eligibility for funding and needs assessment for very small cities, unincorporated areas.* Statements to the effect that those "entities which fall under the planning limits retain eligibility for state funding assistance for water-related projects without having specific individual needs identified in the appropriate Regional Water Plan" would greatly enhance the

⁶ It was determined that this program has been valuable in the past and should be continued. Further it was determined that there was no other instance in this plan satisfactorily addressing this sentiment, thus this bullet was added.

⁷ It was determined that the Water Conservation Advisory Council met the needs of the bullet which was removed, thus the impetus should be on the continuation of this Council.

⁸ This was determined to still be a concern

ability of these small systems to provide their users with a safe and adequate supply of water.

- b) *TWDB should continue to improve the monitoring and quantification of small communities, county-other, manufacturing, and livestock operator water use to provide better information for planning purposes.*
- c) *TCEQ should be made at least an ex-officio member of the RWPGs and be required to attend RWPG meetings to provide input on known water quality/quantity problems.*
- d) ⁹*Allow development of alternative near term water supply strategies for water systems that service fewer than 3,300 population.*
- e) ¹⁰*Clarification of relationship between drought contingency planning and regional water supply planning.* It is not clear what role drought contingency planning has in the regional planning process. ¹¹
- f) *Include an economic impact analysis for the result of implementing water management strategies.* The current planning rules provide for an economic analysis of not meeting water demands. However, there is no provision for economic analysis of implementing a water management strategy. The analysis should include impacts on water suppliers, users and major economic sectors.
- g) *Salinity and brush control projects for the Canadian River and/or Red River Basin.* Although there have been salinity control projects recently implemented in the Canadian and Red River Basins, future State Water Plans should continue to plan for future salinity control projects and their funding to continue to improve water quality in the basins.
- h) *Include projects for future groundwater quality in the region.* Salinity, nitrates, and arsenic have become concerns for municipal water supplies in the region. ¹²
- i) *Interbasin/Intrabasin water transfers.* Future state water plans should provide for a detailed assessment of the potential for transporting water into or out of the Panhandle Water Planning Area. ¹³
- j) *Brush control.* TWDB guidance is needed on how to account for brush control projects in the context of a source of "new surface water" for municipal, industrial, agricultural, and other uses. The Canadian River watershed has more than 50% cover of mixed brush species that are amenable to control for rangeland improvement and water enhancement purposes.
- k) *Analysis of means to improve groundwater recharge.*

⁹ It was determined that this clarification was no longer needed

¹⁰ Since this recommendation had been made official definitions had been adopted such as "safe yield" and "firm yield" thus this recommendation became not needed.

¹¹ There still being uncertainty, members sought to keep this suggestion minus some extraneous information.

¹² Since the last recommendations had been made there have been several specific instances of townships having trouble with their water sources thus it was deemed that this separate bullet was needed. Further, the comment was made that there was no provision for continued improvement of water quality, thus this comment was added.

¹³ It was determined that with there still being potential for some water users to move water outside of the region there should be some set and specific rules for doing so.

- 1) *Updated analysis of surface water supply inflows and availability.* The regional surface water supply has steadily decreased over a ten year period to the extent that regional lakes are at all time lows.¹⁴

END OF RECOMMENDATIONS

4. **DISCUSS AND ACTION AS APPROPRIATE – RECOMMENDATION TO THE FULL PWPG OF LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS TO BE INCLUDED IN THE 2011 PANHANDLE REGIONAL WATER PLAN.**

The members discussed alerting representatives of these recommendations who might be able to keep them in mind as legislation is formed on this area. It was discussed also creating a statement which references the inability of the Ogallala to significantly recharge and referencing the source research created by the Bureau of Economic Geology. Mr. Hallerberg made the comment that he did not believe the City of Amarillo was taking this conservation effort seriously. Discussion turned to the need for education. It was discussed that perhaps the only way to incentivize the conservation of water was to increase the price. It was determined that this concern would be addressed in the bullet regarding the Water Conservation Advisory Council.

5. **OTHER BUSINESS / CLOSING COMMENTS**

There were no further comments or business items presented. Kyle Ingham made the comment that he would get a version of these recommendations with all the changes and get the new version to each of the members for final review before adoption by the full Panhandle Water Planning Group and if they wished to make changes between now and the next PWPG meeting to get in contact with him.

6. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were no public comments.

7. **ADJOURN**

C.E. Williams made a motion to adjourn. Motion was seconded by William Hallerberg. Motion Carried, meeting was adjourned at 12:28 pm.

¹⁴ It was determined that with there still being potential for some water users to move water outside of the region there should be some set and specific rules for doing so.