

Texas Water Development Board



2016 Region M Water Plan

Chapter 10: Public Participation

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List of Abbreviations

IPP	Initially Prepared Plan
LRGVDC	Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council
RGRWA	Rio Grande Regional Water Authority
RWPG	Regional Water Planning Group
SWIFT	State Water Implementation Fund of Texas
TAC	Texas Administrative Code
TWDB	Texas Water Development Board
WUG	Water User Group
WWP	Wholesale Water Provider

Chapter 10. Public Participation and Plan Implementation

10.1 Public Participation

Public participation is the basis of the regional water planning process initiated by Senate Bill 2 in 1997. Under the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) rules laid out in 31 TAC §357, Regional Water Planning Groups (RWPGs) must include a broad cross-section of stakeholder groups representing communities throughout the region. Voting members of the Rio Grande Regional Water Planning Group (Rio Grande RWPG) as of May 1, 2015, are listed in Table 10-1.

TWDB rules require RWPGs to have at least one meeting prior to preparation of the regional water plan, provide ongoing opportunities for public participation during the planning process, and hold at least one public hearing prior to adoption of the initially prepared regional water plan (IPP). The RWPGs are also required to comply with TWDB rules specifying how and to whom notice of public meetings and public hearings is to be provided.

The Rio Grande RWPG has gone well beyond minimum requirements set by the state for public participation, providing multiple opportunities for public input and for direct participation in the planning process and development of the plan. The group also identified key groups of stakeholders that represent utilities, Irrigation Districts, farmers, and environmental organizations, beyond the individual stakeholders on the Planning Group, that have participated in development of the plan.

The Rio Grande RWPG held regular meetings throughout the planning process, generally on a monthly basis. Each meeting provided opportunity for public comment. Meeting schedules, agendas, and minutes were emailed to the planning group, posted on the Region M website, and the meeting dates were listed on the TWDB website. The Rio Grande RWPG's website: www.RioGrandeWaterPlan.org is a resource for the public on issues of concern to regional water planning and information on the planning process.

The Initially Prepared Plan was approved and certified for submittal by the voting members of the Rio Grande Regional Water Planning Group at the regularly scheduled meeting on April 15, 2015. The TWDB notified the RWPG on May 7, 2015 that the IPP was administratively complete.

The RWPG requested public comments on the IPP to be submitted between May 1 and September 1, 2015 to the LRGVDC. No public comments were received. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department submitted comments on August 14, 2015.¹ The TWDB sent comments based on their review of the IPP on August 25, 2015.² Comments from both the TPWD and TWDB, including the RWPG response to TWDB comments, are included in Appendix H.

¹ *2016 Rio Grande Regional Water Planning Group Initially Prepared Plan*, Mr. Ross Melinchuk, Deputy Executive Director, Natural Resources. August 14, 2015.

² *Texas Water Development Board Comments on the Rio Grande (Region M) Initially Prepared Plan*, Contract No. 1118301324. Jeff Walker, August 25, 2015.

Table 10-1 Voting Members of the Region M Planning Group

Interest	Name	Resident County
Public	Mary Lou Campbell, Secretary/Treasurer *	Hidalgo
	City of Mercedes	
Counties	Joe Rathmell	Zapata
	County Judge, Zapata	
	Humberto Gonzalez	Jim Hogg
	County Judge, Jim Hogg	
Municipalities	Jorge Barrera	Maverick
	Eagle Pass Water Works, Eagle Pass	
	John Bruciak	Cameron
	Brownsville PUB, Brownsville	
	Tomas Rodriguez, Vice-Chairman *	Webb
City of Laredo		
Industries	Donald K. McGhee	Cameron
	Hydro Systems, Inc., Harlingen	
Agriculture	Robert E. Fulbright,	Jim Hogg
	Hinnant & Fulbright, Hebbronville	
	Ray Prewett	Hidalgo
	Texas Citrus Mutual, Mission	
Environmental	Jaime Flores	Hidalgo
	The Arroyo Colorado Watershed	
Small Business	Carlos Garza	Hidalgo
	AEC Engineering, LLC, Edinburg	
	Nick Benavides	Webb
	Nick Benavides Co.	
Electric Generating Utilities	Robert Pena, Jr.	Hidalgo
	Texas Energy Consultants, Edinburg	
River Authorities	James Darling	Hidalgo
	Attorney, Doctors Hospital at Renaissance, Edinburg	
Water Districts	Sonny Hinojosa *	Hidalgo
	HCID No. 2, San Juan	
	Sonia Lambert	Cameron
	CCID No. 2, San Benito	
Water Utilities	Dennis Goldsberry	Hidalgo
	North Alamo Water Supply Corporation	
Groundwater Management Area	Armando Vela	Hidalgo
	Red Sands GCD	
Other	Glenn Jarvis, Chairman *	Hidalgo
	Attorney, McAllen	
	Frank Schuster *	Hidalgo
	Val Verde Vegetable Co.	

*Executive Committee

The Rio Grande RWPG and its consultant team actively solicited comment from local entities on the basic data used to develop the plan. Each entity was contacted to participate in a water infrastructure financing survey. The infrastructure survey was completed to determine the capability to pay for water management strategies listed in the plan and the amount of funding each entity planned to request from the State.

Members of the consultant team also made presentations to groups with an interest in water planning, including the Rio Grande Regional Water Authority.

The Rio Grande RWPG provided extensive notice of and opportunity for public comment on the Initially Prepared Plan. As required by TWDB rule, copies of the draft plan were placed in at least one public library in each county within the regional planning area as well as in the office of the county clerk in each county within the regional planning area (Table 10-2). Copies also were placed at the offices of councils of governments in the region, including the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council.

Table 10-2 Locations of Public Posting for the Initially Prepared Plan

County	Location
Cameron	Cameron County Clerk's Office, 964 E. Harrison, Brownsville, TX 78520 Brownsville Public Library, 2600 Central Blvd., Brownsville, TX 78520
Hidalgo	Hidalgo County Clerk's Office, 100 N. Closner, Edinburg, TX 78539 McAllen Public Library, 4001 N. 23rd St., McAllen, TX 78504
Jim Hogg	Jim Hogg County Clerk's Office, 102 E. Tilley, Hebbronville, TX 78361 Jim Hogg County Library, 210 N. Smith, Hebbronville, TX 78361
Maverick	Maverick County Clerk's Office, 500 Quarry St. Suite 2, Eagle Pass, TX 78852 Eagle Pass Public Library, 589 E. Main St., Eagle Pass, TX 78852
Starr	Starr County Clerk's Office, 401 N. Britton Ave., Room 201, Rio Grande City, TX 78582 Rio Grande City Public Library, 591 E. Canales, Rio Grande City, TX 78582
Webb	Webb County Clerk's Office, 1110 Victoria St., Suite 201, Laredo, TX 78040 Laredo Public Library, 1120 E. Calton St., Laredo, TX 78041
Willacy	Willacy County Clerk's Office, 576 W. Main St., Raymondville, TX 78580 Reber Memorial Library, 193 N. 4th, Raymondville, TX 78580
Zapata	Zapata County Clerk's Office, 200 E. 7th Ave., Suite 138, Zapata, TX 78076 Zapata County Library, 901 Kennedy St., Zapata, TX 78076

A public hearing on the Initially Prepared Plan was held in Weslaco on June 23, 2015 at the Valley Metro Transportation Center. Formal notices of the public hearing were placed in newspapers of general circulation in each county of the regional planning group.

An additional presentation was held at the Rio Grande Regional Water Authority on September 2, 2015. All public outreach on the Initially Prepared Plan includes information on procedures and deadlines for submitting comments.

The final plan was unanimously adopted by a quorum at a regularly scheduled Regional Water Planning Group meeting on November 4, 2015.

10.2 Facilitation of the Regional Water Planning Process

Facilitation of the regional water planning process for the Rio Grande Region has been provided by the staff of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC). In addition to performing administrative duties relating to the management of State funds, the LRGVDC made all arrangements for meetings of the Rio Grande RWPG, which included posting required meeting notices, preparing meeting agendas, and distributing agenda back-up materials to members of the RWPG. The LRGVDC recorded all Rio Grande RWPG meetings and prepared the official meeting minutes.

10.3 Plan Implementation Issues

There are a number of key issues that will affect whether this plan is successful in achieving its primary purpose – to provide recommendations regarding strategies for meeting the near and long-term water needs of the Rio Grande Region. Many of these issues are identified and discussed in previous chapters, particularly in association with recommended water management strategies and policy issues. Some of the key issues to implementation are discussed below.

10.3.1 Additional Planning Studies

The recommendations presented in this regional water plan are based on planning-level evaluation of projected water demands, water supply, needs, and strategies for meeting future needs. It is important to note that additional, more detailed feasibility evaluations will be necessary prior to implementation of most recommended strategies. In many cases, feasibility evaluations will need to be followed by engineering design, permitting, environmental impacts assessment, and opportunities for public input. Additional planning and project development activities required for strategy implementation will be the responsibility of project sponsors, often with state and/or federal technical and financial assistance.

10.3.2 Local Water Supply Planning and Implementation

This regional water plan is best viewed as providing a framework for local action to implement strategies for meeting future water needs and assist the state in developing the State Water Plan. Implementation of strategies recommended for meeting future water needs is a primary responsibility of local water suppliers, which include cities, water supply corporations, other public water supply entities, and irrigation districts. With or without outside assistance, more detailed feasibility-level planning studies and engineering design is largely the responsibility of local water suppliers. Similarly, the costs of implementing water conservation and water supply strategies will be borne largely by the ratepayers served by local water suppliers. It is therefore essential that there be a strong commitment on the part of the governing bodies and management of local water suppliers to implement the strategies recommended in this plan.

Locally, there has been a great deal of progress with stakeholders working together. The Region M Planning Group highly recommends that this continue to aid in the implementation of water strategies throughout the region. The re-creation of the Rio Grande Regional Water Authority (RGRWA), which has statutory authority to investigate, plan, acquire, construct, maintain, or operate any property the authority considers necessary or proper for the accomplishment of the purposes of the authority, including water treatment, wastewater treatment, water conveyance, and desalination of water, has been key. The RGRWA encompasses many of the same counties

in the Rio Grande RWPG. It includes on its board representatives of each county, as well as the irrigation districts, water supply corporations, municipalities, and the general public.

10.3.3 Funding for Plan Implementation

The availability of funding and access to funding for the implementation of recommended water management strategies is crucial. The SWIFT program is enabling further state investment in water projects. As the initial rules are developed and the first rounds of loans are distributed, the Region M Planning Group intends to stay involved in the refinement process to advocate for the types of projects that are recommended for Region M.

Most local water suppliers in the Rio Grande Region are governmental or quasi-governmental entities (e.g., water supply corporations) that have the authority to charge and collect taxes and/or fees for the services they provide. These entities also have the ability to borrow money for the acquisition of additional water supplies and for water-related infrastructure development and rehabilitation. For the most part, the direct costs for the services provided by these entities should be borne by the individual water users through taxes and/or fees for services.

State and federal loan and grant programs have played a critical role in the financing of water conservation, water supply development, and infrastructure projects. At present, there are a number of state and federal financial assistance programs for water-related infrastructure projects that are available to municipal water suppliers. However, there are few programs that provide financial assistance to irrigation districts for infrastructure improvements, and farmers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley face some difficulty obtaining financing that is available to farmers elsewhere in the state because of the nature of water rights ownership. Because agricultural water conservation is a central element of this regional water plan – and is essential to maintaining the viability of this sector of the regional economy – the Region M Planning Group recommends that new public funding sources be developed to assist irrigation districts and farmers with the implementation of conservation programs.