

Equity & Priority in Water Infrastructure

In 2023, the legislature approved SB 28 and SJR 75 that allowed for the creation of the Texas Water Fund, a special fund in the state treasury outside the general revenue fund and managed by the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB), as well as the New Water Supply for Texas. The Joint Resolution passed with 77% in favor, and we need the same bipartisan support for increased funding, program equity, and infrastructure this session.

Texas legislators must prioritize the equitable implementation of programs that conserve water, protect the environment, and provide support to underserved communities.

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Water Waste

According to a National Wildlife Federation report, Texas loses “at least 572,000 acre-feet [of water] per year. **That’s enough water to meet the total annual municipal needs of the cities of Austin, Fort Worth, El Paso, Laredo, and Lubbock combined.**”

Before we spend taxpayer money on new water supplies, we must do something about water loss. Potential solutions include:

- Direct the TWDB to prioritize water loss mitigation and water conservation projects over produced water and seawater desalination projects.
- Prioritize water reuse projects - which can reuse treated wastewater at the local or regional level - and aquifer recovery and reuse projects.
- Implement the water awareness campaign - which includes water conservation education - already authorized by SB 28 and the \$1 billion approved by voters in 2023.
- Utilize the Water Loss Audit data to identify low performing utilities to provide technical and financial assistance aimed at increasing their water use efficiency.

New Water Infrastructure

Many Texas communities require improvements to their water infrastructure; other communities lack adequate water infrastructure altogether. **New water infrastructure and supplies must serve Texas communities first, and not damage the environment.**

The Lone Star Chapter recommends:

- Prohibiting the use of fracking wastewater in water projects until adequate information, disclosure, and standards are established for its constituents,

including radioactive materials, heavy metals, undisclosed chemicals, and its extreme salinity, which exceeds seawater.

- Removing marine desalination projects from fund eligibility until salinity standards and proper discharge standards and locations are updated based on non-partisan scientific recommendations.
- Conducting a needs assessment, and expanding the funding and eligibility for community projects funded by the Economically Distressed Areas Program.

Funding Needs

Supporting Much-Needed Improvements

- SB 28, SJR 75, and Proposition 6 in 2023 created a \$1 billion fund for water infrastructure. However, that's a proverbial drop in the bucket for what is needed to solve all of the state's water issues, and \$250 million of that total was earmarked for riskier "new" water supply projects.
 - With droughts becoming more frequent in several regions of Texas, additional funding will be needed to ensure our communities have adequate water and wastewater treatment to thrive.
- Recent reports suggest that **billions of dollars** for both water and flood infrastructure will be needed in the coming decades; putting a downpayment this legislative session will be necessary to reach even a fraction of these needs.
- TWDB has a number of important exceptional item requests in its requested budget for increased staffing as well as simply keeping up with hydrological and other data such as surface water and groundwater availability studies.