



MEMO

To: Travis County Commissioners Court

From: County Judge Sarah Eckhardt

RE: REGIONAL GROUNDWATER PARTNERSHIP

Date: August 3, 2015

The State of Texas has traditionally left issues of water supply to private landowners, private water utilities in unincorporated areas and to municipalities within their incorporated areas. However, with the simultaneous occurrence of historic drought, floods, wildfires and population growth, representatives from the counties of Central Texas have expressed a desire for collective action to ascertain:

- How much water is reasonably available to our counties; and
- How much population and what kind of uses can that supply sustain.

Some of the counties of Central Texas are experiencing residential, agricultural and industrial demand that exceeds the local groundwater capacity. Other counties sit atop groundwater sources that are more abundant than local demands require. Piping groundwater across counties has become a reality.

Each of the Central Texas counties is unique with its own mix and distribution of population and industry. However, whatever our differences, Central Texas counties agree that continued economic prosperity is only achieved with dependable water. Therefore, I would request the this Commissioners Court, as the representative of the large County at the center of this region, lead this initiative by:

1. Directing appropriate staff to negotiate an interlocal agreement among the Capital Area Council of Governments counties to study the capacity of groundwater in the region encompassing the CAPCOG area; and
2. Reserving \$100,000 in Allocated Reserve to contribute for such a study.

Dept. Summary of Request

The requested earmark of \$100,000 is to carry out a regional analysis of groundwater availability for Central Texas including existing reserves, utilization rates, anticipated needs and demands for groundwater resources, and potential new sources.

The proposed study is intended to:

- Develop detailed information on existing and potential groundwater resources in Travis County and neighboring counties.
- Provide key informational resources necessary to manage groundwater resources. For example, there is currently no Groundwater Conservation District (GCD) for Travis County, yet the aquifer boundary lines do not adhere to county boundaries. Neighboring GCDs attempt to manage groundwater pumping through setting desired future conditions and limiting pumping during droughts. Since Travis County does not monitor or manage the same aquifers that cross county boundaries, groundwater withdrawals in Travis County impact the aquifer and make management by other districts ineffective. Travis County should be able to answer questions on our water resources.
- Evaluate sustainable growth with respect to groundwater resources.
- Identify geographic areas where little or no water resources are available.
- Assess growth impacts to water resources and protect a diminishing resource.
- Identify opportunities for funding water projects.

PBO Recommendation

The Planning and Budget Office received this request after the budget submission deadline and did not have time to fully analyze the request. PBO does not recommend funding for this request at this time. PBO recommends that the department work to further refine the reported performance measures associated with this request to allow a better understanding of the potential impact.