



# NEWS

GUADALUPE-BLANCO RIVER AUTHORITY  
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## **GBRA Board discusses Hays County water project**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, February 17, 1999

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SEGUIN- Rapidly-growing areas of Hays County that currently depend on limited groundwater supplies from the Trinity Aquifer may soon benefit from a proposed regional plan that would bring in treated surface water, wastewater treatment facilities and other related services, said Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority general manager Bill West.

West briefed the GBRA directors at their Wednesday meeting in Seguin on the current status of the Hays County/Dripping Springs Project -- a cooperative, regional effort that was originally outlined in a memorandum of understanding approved in January, 1998 by the respective boards of the GBRA and the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA).

Hays is one of ten counties in GBRA's statutory district, for which it has a legislative responsibility to 'develop, conserve and protect' water supplies. However, -- the northern part of Hays County also lies within the geographic boundaries of the lower Colorado River basin.

The water needed to supply the project will be diverted from the Colorado River and treated at the LCRA's Upland Water Treatment Plant in southern Travis County. Because this location is closer to the Hays County delivery point than Canyon Reservoir, water can be treated and delivered at a lower cost to customers in Dripping Springs and the surrounding area. LCRA will also be responsible for constructing the pipeline from the plant to the Travis/Hays County border.

GBRA will construct the water pipeline inside Hays County as well as any necessary storage facilities. However, the treated drinking water will be delivered by existing retail water providers to their customers.

West explained that Hays County, located along the rapidly-growing I-35 corridor, has some of the highest growth rate projections for the state. "Its location just south of

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the Austin/Travis County metroplex, combined with a lower cost of living and plentiful Hill Country acreage make it the destination of choice for suburban residential growth and the commercial and industrial services to support this growing population.”

Most of the county is served by groundwater wells drawn from two major aquifers. The Edwards in the south and southeast serves communities along I-35 including San Marcos, while the Trinity and Glen Rose in the north and northwest supply water to Dripping Springs and other nearby areas.

Pumping from the Edwards is limited by S.B. 1477, which placed a 450,000 acre/foot/year ‘cap’ on the aquifer and established the Edwards Aquifer Authority to manage this resource. The Trinity Aquifer, as yet unrestricted by law, is smaller and has a limited water supply.

West believes the best way to protect the Trinity is to provide alternative surface water supplies that can be part of a dependable water management and planning infrastructure. “Contrary to what some people think, this pre-planning actually helps to prevent uncontrolled growth and protect the environment,” said West. “Planned developments are more likely to include wastewater treatment plants than uncontrolled sprawl with its potential for contamination from septic tanks.”

West told the GBRA Board that the project was originally planned to meet the region’s water needs for 20 years and anticipated the possibility of 25-30% funding from the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB).

During a meeting with TWDB officials last year, however, West said GBRA was strongly encouraged to consider sizing the project to supply 40 years of growth. “TWDB recognizes the value of sound, regional water planning programs and indicated they would consider funding up to 50 percent of the cost during the project’s initial years,” said West.

The next steps will involve gathering the information necessary to establish design, engineering and cost components for the project. This will enable GBRA to identify the unit cost for the user and begin work on the participation contracts.

“This project is no different than all the others GBRA has supported or currently in process, including the surface water treatment plant built by New Braunfels Utilities that enabled them to reduce Edwards Aquifer pumping by 90% since 1991; the San Marcos Regional Pipeline Project and Water Treatment Plant scheduled for completion in 1999; the expansion of Canyon Regional Water Authority; and the proposed Western Comal Project that will deliver treated drinking water to the rapidly growing area west of Canyon Lake,” said West. “What they all have in common is the ability to provide dependable, alternative water supplies for people and communities in limited groundwater areas.”