



**GUADALUPE-BLANCO RIVER AUTHORITY**  
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## **CONSERVATION CRUCIAL FOR GUADALUPE RIVER BASIN**

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SEGUIN- Eventually, it will rain. When it does, officials at the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority (GBRA) hope that people will remember how quickly a fickle Mother Nature can move from a flood to a drought.

"Conservation must become a way of life in Texas," said GBRA general manager Bill West. "The flood of October 1998 lulled people into a false sense of security. They looked at all that water and thought the drought of 1996 was over. It wasn't, and we've been coping with an extended drought ever since. The bottom line is that we can't use rain as an excuse to stop practicing conservation or planning for the future."

To underscore his point, West refers to the Senate Bill 1 draft water plan for Region L issued for public review on August 25. Region L includes the ten counties in GBRA's statutory district and eleven others in the Nueces and San Antonio river basins.

"The Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) has developed population growth projections to the year 2050 for each of these counties as part of the planning process," said West. "Most counties show an increase and many along the IH-35 corridor will probably double their population."

All these people and the businesses to support them will need water, and the Region L plan lists a wide variety of options for developing this additional water supply. "Many of the options will take years to develop but the beauty of conservation is that what we do today has immediate results," West said.

"GBRA is working closely with other water entities including the San Antonio Water System, the San Antonio River Authority and the Edwards Aquifer Authority (EAA) to promote regional conservation efforts," said West.

"In addition, we have always worked with cities, industries, agricultural interests and the general public in the Guadalupe River Basin to promote water awareness and conservation practices. The cities of New Braunfels and San Marcos are now getting most of their municipal water from Canyon Reservoir's stored water supply rather than pumping from the Edwards Aquifer, and the City of Victoria is in the process of converting to surface water. We are making serious efforts throughout the basin to reduce use of the Edwards Aquifer in order to protect its water supply and sustain flows from Comal and San Marcos Springs," said West.

This year, in addition to water-saving ads, news releases, and cooperative programs with schools, universities and the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, GBRA has helped sponsor a series of public meetings about managing and protecting existing water resources.

A January conference at the Center for Water Research at UTSA provided city and county officials from the Hill Country Priority Groundwater Management Area with information about current state laws and policies covering groundwater management and protection for the Trinity Aquifer.

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In March and May, special meetings at the UTSA Center for Water Research featured a computer model developed by the Texas Water Development Board that simulates the flow and storage of groundwater in the upper and middle Trinity Aquifer. This model will help regional water planners see how various amounts of population growth, rainfall and drought will impact the Trinity Aquifer's water resources.

On August 17, a Drought Management Forum was held at the San Marcos Activity Center, and on August 29 a meeting at the Victoria College Student Center focused on the hydrology of the Gulf Coast and Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifers.

West said GBRA is also keeping a close eye on key water indicators in the Basin. As of September 6, Canyon Reservoir was at 89% of stored capacity and five feet below its normal elevation of 909 feet mean sea level (msl). The inflow measured at the Spring Branch gauge was only six cubic feet per second (cfs). GBRA is currently releasing approximately 52 cfs from the reservoir into the Guadalupe River below Canyon Dam.

The flow at San Marcos Springs was 113 cfs, or 73% of its monthly norm and at Comal Springs in New Braunfels, the 150 cfs flow reached the official 'jeopardy' rate for endangered species set by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

As part of the Emergency Drought Management Plan administered by the EAA, the City of San Antonio and the eastern aquifer region including Bexar and portions of Caldwell, Comal, Guadalupe and Hays counties have been under Stage II water restrictions. However, Wednesday's 150 cfs rate at Comal Springs will also trigger emergency springflow protection measures by the EAA and a sprinkler ban for all aquifer users, including those in Atascosa, Medina and Uvalde counties.

Springflow decline is seriously impacting the baseflow of the Guadalupe River and much of the basin is relying on springflows to supply the majority of an already-reduced river flow. In the lower basin, the current river flow at Victoria is 267 cfs or 13% of its monthly norm. In the upper basin, water levels at test wells in the Trinity Aquifer reached new historic lows. In Kerr County, new lows were recorded for the Cypress Creek well of 1,445 feet msl and for the Donna Drive well of 1367 msl. The Comfort Well in Kendall County is also at a new historic low of 1,279 msl.

"These conditions simply reinforce why management and protection of our surface and groundwater resources is so important," said West. "We must all work together to ensure that everyone who depends upon these regional resources will have enough water to meet their basic needs."

Currently, people who live adjacent to 'flowing streams' are allowed to withdraw water for personal domestic and livestock purposes. They are exempt from TNRCC permit requirements under 30 Texas Administrative Code (TAC), 297 (although in some cases a contract may be needed) for such uses as watering a lawn, family garden or providing water to a few animals. West hopes these 'domestic users' will not abuse this right and consider their neighbors' needs for water, as well as their own.

"GBRA will continue its leadership role in public education and conservation efforts," said West. "Planning alone is not the answer. We must change the way we value and use this precious resource if we are to have enough water to meet our future needs."