

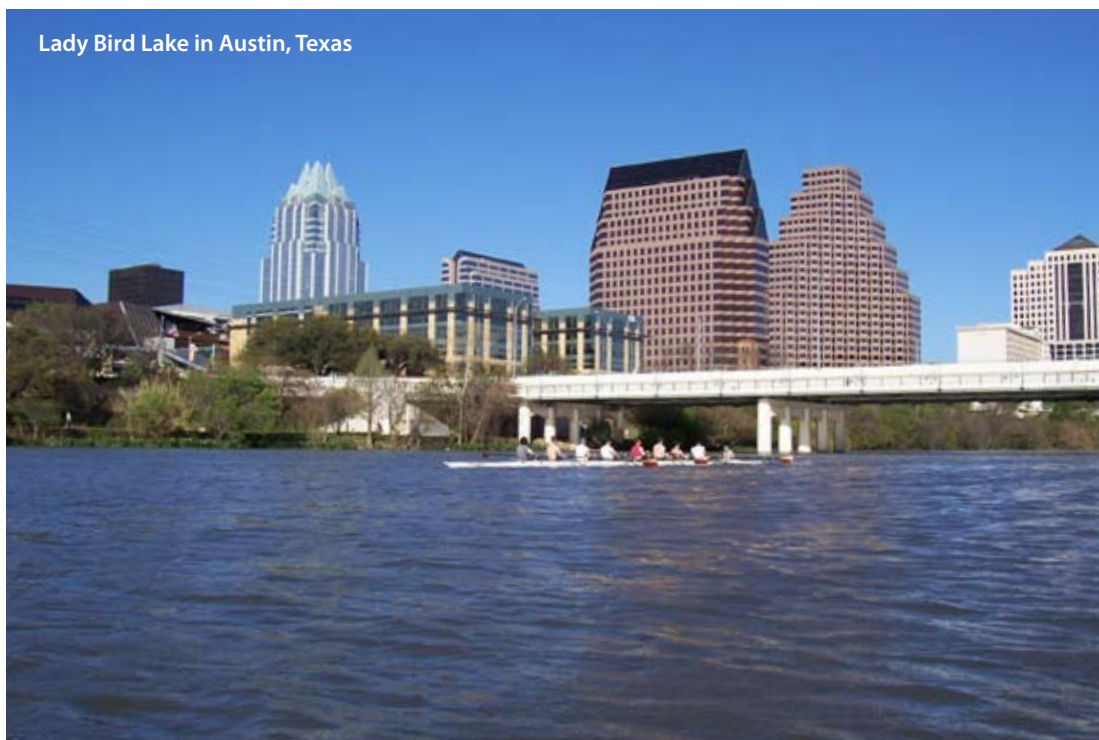
Conclusion

Given Texas’ growing population, the development and protection of our water resources is one of the most pressing long-term issues facing lawmakers. Ensuring clean and dependable water supplies will be essential to protect the health of Texas citizens and the strength of the state’s economy.

With the 1997 initiation of the regional water planning process, Texas took an important step toward coordinating the water needs of communities across the state. This role will continue and may become more prominent as policymakers consider dedicated funding for community water projects.

In evaluating proposals for water project funding, policymakers should seek the appropriate balance among these criteria:

- adequacy — the financing mechanism should be sufficient to cover identified costs without excessively burdening those who pay the fees.
- equity — the financial burden of water projects should be spread among all water user groups in proportion to their demand for water. It should not favor certain user groups or projects.
- specificity — funds raised for water development projects should not be diverted for other budgetary obligations.
- affordability — the plan should be sensitive to water users’ ability to pay, since a certain level of water consumption is nondiscretionary and essential for every Texan’s health. No plan



Conclusion

should unduly burden individuals who might have difficulty paying for it.

- simplicity — the plan should be easy to administer, understand and follow.
- conservation — the financing system should be consistent with the goal of water conservation and discourage inefficient usage.

If Texas state government continues moving toward greater involvement in financing water projects, a dedicated funding source for water projects may prove useful. However, with this more active state role in regional water planning, policymakers will increasingly look to ensure that the water planning process effectively serves the interests of all Texas citizens.

To do so, two key issues should be explored further.

Conservation

Conservation is often cited as the first goal of any water development plan, since it is the most cost-effective and sustainable water management strategy. One concern is the varying levels of conservation effort made by municipalities across the state. Several cities have already made extensive and successful efforts to reduce their water use, while others plan to rely on increased conservation measures to meet growing demand in the future.

Accountability

Another concern identified by the review team was the manner in which different regional water planning groups are required to report their water needs. The “bottom-up” approach currently employed in Texas allows communities and regions to develop their own estimates for future water needs and project recommendations.

While this system has many benefits, including the ability for local stakeholders to determine the direction of water policy decisions that will affect their communities, it may encourage regions to include marginal projects in their plans.

Many water development projects are extremely expensive, and some projects such as reservoirs can have substantial environmental and social consequences. Policymakers may want to consider strengthening oversight and accountability measures to ensure that they fund only those projects that are truly necessary.

Regional water planning will play an important role in the future of the Lone Star State. Starting with the passage of SB 1 in 1997, policymakers in Texas have shown a willingness to confront this challenging issue head-on. Since the passage of SB 1, Texas has taken many steps to ensure that citizens, businesses and agricultural producers have enough water to serve their needs, while safeguarding environmental needs of our rivers, bays and estuaries. The coming years will require continued attention to this issue, to ensure that all Texans have access to the water they need to thrive.