

INITIALLY PREPARED PLAN

# CHAPTER 10: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND PLAN ADOPTION

Rio Grande Regional Water Plan

B&V PROJECT NO. 192863

PREPARED FOR

Rio Grande Regional Water Planning Group

3 MARCH 2020



## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 10: Public Participation and Plan Adoption .....</b>	<b>10-1</b>
10.1 Public Participation .....	10-1
10.2 Facilitation of the Regional Water Planning Process .....	10-4
10.3 Plan Implementation Issues.....	10-5
10.3.1 Additional Planning Studies .....	10-5
10.3.2 Local Water Supply Planning and Implementation.....	10-5
10.3.3 Funding for Plan Implementation .....	10-5

### LIST OF TABLES

Table 10-1	Voting Members of the Region M Planning Group .....	10-1
Table 10-2	Locations of Public Posting for the Initially Prepared Plan .....	10-4



## List of Abbreviations

ID	Irrigation District
IPP	Initially Prepared Plan
LRGVDC	Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council
RGRWA	Rio Grande Regional Water Authority
RWPG	Regional Water Planning Group
SWIFT	State Water Implementation Fund of Texas
TWDB	Texas Water Development Board
WSC	Water Supply Corporation
WUG	Water User Group
WWP	Wholesale Water Provider



## CHAPTER 10: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND PLAN ADOPTION

### 10.1 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation is the basis of the regional water planning process initiated by Senate Bill 2 in 1997. Under Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) rules laid out in 31 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §357, regional water planning groups (RWPGs) must include a broad cross-section of stakeholder groups representing communities throughout the region. Voting members of the Rio Grande RWPG as of January 27, 2020, are listed in Table 10-1.

TWDB rules require RWPGs to have at least one meeting prior to preparation of the regional water plan, provide ongoing opportunities for public participation during the planning process, and hold at least one public hearing prior to adoption of the initially prepared regional water plan (IPP). The RWPGs are also required to comply with TWDB rules specifying how and to whom notice of public meetings and public hearings is to be provided.

The Rio Grande RWPG has gone well beyond minimum requirements set by the state for public participation, providing multiple opportunities for public input and for direct participation in the planning process and development of the draft plan. The group also identified key groups of stakeholders that represent utilities, irrigation districts (IDs), farmers, and environmental organizations, beyond the individual stakeholders on the planning group, that have participated in development of the plan.

The Rio Grande RWPG held regular meetings throughout the planning process, generally on a monthly basis. Each meeting provided opportunity for public comment. Meeting schedules, agendas, and minutes were emailed to the planning group and posted on the Region M website, and the meeting dates were listed on the TWDB website. The Rio Grande RWPG’s website: [www.RioGrandeWaterPlan.org](http://www.RioGrandeWaterPlan.org), is a resource for the public on issues of concern to regional water planning and information on the planning process.

This IPP was approved and certified for submittal by the voting members of the Rio Grande RWPG at the regularly scheduled meeting on February 5, 2020.

**Table 10-1 Voting Members of the Region M Planning Group**

INTEREST	NAME	RESIDENT COUNTY
Public	Tomas Rodriguez, Chairman*	Webb
	Laredo	
Counties	Joe Rathmell	Zapata
	County Judge, Zapata	
	David L. Fuentes	Hidalgo
	Precinct 1 Commissioner, Weslaco	
Municipalities	Jorge Flores	Maverick

INTEREST	NAME	RESIDENT COUNTY
	Eagle Pass Water Works, Eagle Pass	
	John Bruciak	
	Brownsville Public Utility Board, Brownsville	Cameron
	Riazul Mia	
	City of Laredo	Webb
Industries	Donald K. McGhee, Secretary*	Cameron
	Hydro Systems, Inc., Harlingen	
Agriculture	Neal Wilkins, Ph.D.	Jim Hogg
	East Wildlife Foundation	
	Dale Murden	Hidalgo
	Texas Citrus Mutual, Mission	
Environmental	Jaime Flores	Hidalgo
	The Arroyo Colorado Watershed	
Small Business	Carlos Garza	Hidalgo
	AEC Engineering, LLC, Edinburg	
	Nick Benavides*	Webb
	Nick Benavides Co.	
River Authorities	Mayor Jim Darling	
	Rio Grande Regional Water Authority (RGRWA)	Hidalgo
Water Districts	Sonny Hinojosa, Vice-Chairman*	Hidalgo
	Hidalgo County ID No. 2, San Juan	
	Tom McLemore	Cameron
	Harlingen ID	
Water Utilities	Dennis Goldsberry	
	North Alamo Water Supply Corporation (WSC)	Hidalgo
Groundwater Management Area	Armando Vela	
	Red Sands Groundwater Conservation District	Hidalgo



INTEREST	NAME	RESIDENT COUNTY
Other	Glenn Jarvis	Hidalgo
	Attorney, McAllen	
	Frank Schuster*	Hidalgo
	Val Verde Vegetable Co.	
Electric Generating Utilities	Vacant	VACANT
*Executive Committee		

The Rio Grande RWPG and its consultant team actively solicited comments from local entities on the basic data used to develop the plan as follows:

- A water infrastructure financing survey and supplemental survey will be mailed to each water user group (WUG) in June 2020, with follow-up phone calls with each entity. The infrastructure survey is intended to determine the capability to pay for WMSs listed in the plan. The supplemental survey will collect input from the WUGs related to water supply issues and their strategies to solve long-term water shortages.

Members of the consultant team also made several presentations to a variety of groups with an interest in water planning, including water utility associations, citrus growers, the RGRWA, and the Lower Rio Grande Valley Water District Managers Association.

The Rio Grande RWPG provided extensive notice of and opportunity for public comment on the IPP. As required by TWDB rule, copies of the draft plan were placed in at least one public library in each county within the regional planning area as well as in the office of the county clerk in each county within the regional planning area (Table 10-2). Copies also were placed at the offices of councils of governments in the region, including the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC) and the RGRWA.

**Table 10-2**      **Locations of Public Posting for the Initially Prepared Plan**

COUNTY	LOCATION
Cameron	Cameron County Clerk's Office, 964 E. Harrison, Brownsville, TX 78520
	Brownsville Public Library, 2600 Central Blvd., Brownsville, TX 78520
Hidalgo	Hidalgo County Clerk's Office, 100 N. Closner, Edinburg, TX 78539
	McAllen Public Library, 4001 N. 23rd St., McAllen, TX 78504
Jim Hogg	Jim Hogg County Clerk's Office, 102 E. Tilley, Hebbronville, TX 78361
	Jim Hogg County Library, 210 N. Smith, Hebbronville, TX 78361
Maverick	Maverick County Clerk's Office, 500 Quarry St., Suite 2, Eagle Pass, TX 78852
	Eagle Pass Public Library, 589 E. Main St., Eagle Pass, TX 78852
Starr	Starr County Clerk's Office, 401 N. Britton Ave., Room 201, Rio Grande City, TX 78582
	Rio Grande City Public Library, 591 E. Canales, Rio Grande City, TX 78582
Webb	Webb County Clerk's Office, 1110 Victoria St., Suite 201, Laredo, TX 78040
	Laredo Public Library, 1120 E. Calton St., Laredo, TX 78041
Willacy	Willacy County Clerk's Office, 576 W. Main St., Raymondville, TX 78580
	Reber Memorial Library, 193 N. 4th, Raymondville, TX 78580
Zapata	Zapata County Clerk's Office, 200 E. 7th Ave., Suite 138, Zapata, TX 78076
	Zapata County Library, 901 Kennedy St., Zapata, TX 78076

Two public hearings will be held on the IPP; Eagle Pass on April 8, 2020 and in Weslaco on May 6, 2020. Formal notices of the public hearings will be placed in newspapers of general circulation in each county of the regional planning group. All public outreach on the IPP will include information on procedures and deadlines for submitting comments.

The final plan will be adopted at a regularly scheduled RWPG meeting prior to the October 14, 2020, deadline.

## 10.2 FACILITATION OF THE REGIONAL WATER PLANNING PROCESS

Facilitation of the regional water planning process for the Rio Grande Region has been provided by the staff of the LRGVDC. In addition to performing administrative duties relating to the management of state funds, the LRGVDC made all arrangements for meetings of the Rio Grande RWPG, which included posting required meeting notices, preparing meeting agendas, and distributing agenda backup materials to members of the RWPG. The LRGVDC recorded all Rio Grande RWPG meetings and prepared the official meeting minutes.

### 10.3 PLAN IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

A number of key issues will affect whether this plan is successful in achieving its primary purpose – to provide recommendations regarding strategies for meeting the near and long-term water needs of the Rio Grande Region. Many of these issues are identified and discussed in previous chapters, particularly in association with recommended WMSs and policy issues. Some of the key issues to implementation are discussed in the following subsections.

#### 10.3.1 Additional Planning Studies

The recommendations presented in this regional water plan are based on planning-level evaluation of projected water demands, water supply, needs, and strategies for meeting future needs. It is important to note that additional, more detailed feasibility evaluations will be necessary before most recommended strategies are implemented. In many cases, feasibility evaluations will need to be followed by engineering design, permitting, environmental impacts assessment, and opportunities for public input. Additional planning and project development activities required for strategy implementation will be the responsibility of project sponsors, often with state and/or federal technical and financial assistance.

#### 10.3.2 Local Water Supply Planning and Implementation

This regional water plan is best viewed as providing a framework for local action to implement strategies for meeting future water needs and assist the state in developing the State Water Plan. Implementation of strategies recommended for meeting future water needs is a primary responsibility of local water suppliers, which include cities, WSCs, other public water supply entities, and IDs. With or without outside assistance, more detailed feasibility-level planning studies and engineering design is largely the responsibility of local water suppliers. Similarly, the costs of implementing water conservation and water supply strategies will be borne largely by the ratepayers served by local water suppliers. It is therefore essential that there be a strong commitment on the part of the governing bodies and management of local water suppliers to implement the strategies recommended in this plan.

Locally, there has been a great deal of progress with stakeholders working together. The Region M planning group highly recommends that this continue to aid in the implementation of water strategies throughout the region. Of key importance is the re-creation of the RGRWA, which has statutory authority to investigate, plan, acquire, construct, maintain, or operate any property the authority considers necessary or proper for the accomplishment of the purposes of the authority, including water treatment, wastewater treatment, water conveyance, and desalination of water. The RGRWA encompasses many of the same counties in the Rio Grande RWPG. It includes on its board representatives of each county, as well as the IDs, WSCs, municipalities, and the general public.

#### 10.3.3 Funding for Plan Implementation

The availability of funding and access to funding for the implementation of recommended WMSs is crucial. The State Water Implementation Fund of Texas (SWIFT) program is enabling further state investment in water projects. As the initial rules are developed and the first rounds of loans are distributed, the Region M planning group intends to stay involved in the refinement process to advocate for the types of projects that are recommended for Region M.

Most local water suppliers in the Rio Grande Region are governmental or quasi-governmental entities (e.g., WSCs) that have the authority to charge and collect taxes and/or fees for the services they provide. These entities also have the ability to borrow money for the acquisition of additional water supplies and for water-related infrastructure development and rehabilitation. For the most part, the direct costs for the services provided by these entities should be borne by the individual water users through taxes and/or fees for services.

State and federal loan and grant programs have played a critical role in the financing of water conservation, water supply development, and infrastructure projects. At present, a number of state and federal financial assistance programs for water-related infrastructure projects are available to municipal water suppliers. However, few programs provide financial assistance to IDs for infrastructure improvements, and farmers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley face some difficulty obtaining financing that is available to farmers elsewhere in the state because of the nature of water rights ownership. Because agricultural water conservation is a central element of this regional water plan – and is essential to maintaining the viability of this sector of the regional economy – the Region M planning group recommends that new public funding sources be developed to assist IDs and farmers with the implementation of conservation programs.