MINUTES

RIO GRANDE REGIONAL WATER PLANNING GROUP (RGRWPG)

(REGION M) 9:30 AM WEDNESDAY, August 12, 2025

LRGVDC MAIN CAMPUS
VIA GOTOMEETING VIDEO CONFERENCE & IN PERSON INITIATED AND CHAIRED AT 301 W. RAILROAD STREET, WESLACO, TX
PRESIDING: JIM DARLING, CHAIRMAN

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Mr. Jim Darling called the meeting to order at 9:30 am and confirmed that a quorum of the voting membership was present.

The following voting members were in attendance:

Board Members	Category
Jim Darling	River Authorities
Sonny Hinojosa	Water Districts
Frank Schuster	Other
Nick Benavides	Small Business
Jaime Flores	Environmental
Louie Pena	Ground Water Management Area
Dale Murden	Agriculture
Jorge Flores	Municipalities
Tom McLemore	Water Districts
Debbie Farmer	Ground Water Management Area
Steven Sanchez	Water Utilities
Marilyn Gilbert	Municipalities

The following voting members were not in attendance:

Donald McGhee	Industries
Glen Jarvis	Other
Tomas Rodriguez	Public
Carlos Garza	Small Business
Judge Joe Rathmell	Counties
Dr. Neal Wilkins	Agriculture
Comm. David Fuentes	Counties
Robert Latham	Electric Generating Utility

2. Consideration and Action to Approve May 7, 2025, Meeting Minutes. ***Sonny Hinojosa made a motion to approve May 7, 2025, meeting minutes, Nick Benavides seconded the motion, upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

3. Public Comment – Public Comment from Assistant City Manager Fabian Rodriguez from City of Elsa. Mr. Rodriguez wanted to announce a couple of announcements. Mr. Rodriguez stated that they propose three alternate water source projects for consideration: (1) a raw water interconnect a two-mile underground line, (2) a municipal water well mixed with supply and mix with our surface water at about a 40/60 ratio, and (3) a direct reuse system from our wastewater plant for irrigation and commercial use, potentially offsetting 300 gallons. We've been sharing project details with your office. Mr. Jim Darling then stated that Some projects, like reservoir systems, weren't included due to the requirement that they provide additional water. For the first project, if you're purchasing water from another district, it may qualify. This is important for us because we currently rely on District 9, and if the canal is closed, we only have about three days of storage.

4. Consideration and Action to Approve Membership renewals for Members who have expired term Dates. The group agreed not to make any membership changes during the planning process to avoid disruptions. They plan to wait until the plan is finalized and approved by the state—likely before the October 20th deadline—before revisiting membership status. At the next meeting, members will be notified and asked if they wish to remain on the plan or recommend replacements. ***Sonny Hinojosa made a motion to approve to table this action item until following meeting. Steven Sanchez seconded the motion and upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

Mr. Jim Darling then stated that the focus is on pages 1–44, which cover the Texas Development Board's required topics. Pages 45–50 include optional suggestions for improvement, and pages 55–82 detail socioeconomic impacts by Dr. Ellis—no action is needed on those unless there are objections. Notably, agriculture ranks around 15th in socioeconomic impact, which some irrigation stakeholders may want to discuss.

5.A.1 Status on current TWDB Contract Activities. Ms. Jaime Burke started off with Schedule and Progress Update. Jaime gave a quick progress since last meeting. The planning cycle is nearing completion, with the final adopted plan due by October 20th. Key milestones so far include the submission of the Initially Prepared Plan (IPP) in March, meetings and a public hearing in May (both in-person and virtual), and ongoing public comment collection through July 22nd. An implementation survey for projects from the 2021 plan is underway, with a deadline of September 5th for responses. The team has been addressing comments from the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB), Texas Parks and Wildlife, and the public, including new water management strategy requests. Additionally, a socioeconomic impact analysis from the TWDB will be included in the plan, highlighting potential costs if water needs are unmet. The next steps include reviewing comments in August and adopting the final plan in early October. Next Jaime moved on to Upcoming efforts: The team will finalize responses to all comments and seek TWDB approval for the Level 1 comment responses. They will complete final plan edits, including the incorporation of the socioeconomic impact analysis. Updates to the TWDB database (DB27) will be finished by the September 22nd deadline. Newly recommended water management strategies will be reviewed and, if approved, incorporated into the database. Preparation for the final plan adoption meeting in early October is underway, with the adopted plan scheduled for submission to the Water Development Board by October 20th. The timeline from the Initially Prepared Plan (IPP) to the final plan has been reviewed, covering key milestones and deadlines. If there are any questions, they're open for discussion, but most details have already been explained.

5.A.2 Presentation of public Comments Received on IPP, including New Water Management Strategy requests. Consideration and ACTION to Approve proposed responses. At the public hearing, verbal and written comments from TCEQ requested that Region M include a new salinity study in the 2026 plan. The team proposed adding a paragraph in Chapter 1, Section 1.4.2, which covers existing water-focused plans in the region, to reference the study. There was some discussion about the study's scope and content, with clarifications that the draft report focuses mainly on the Rio Grande rather than the Colorado River, and that the draft report is not yet public and won't be included as an appendix. Instead, a summary paragraph with the report title and authors will be added, with a potential link to the final report in the next plan. Questions were invited following this explanation. Jim Darling then made a comment; there was a concern raised about the regional water authority's responsibility for paying costs processing invoices from Mexico is due to a lengthy administrative process, not a reflection of poor maintenance. The drain's maintenance continues annually as scheduled, despite the lag in invoicing. Jaime then moved on to the following, several cities, including Elsa, Pharr, Donna, Mercedes, Rio Hondo, and Maverick County, requested adding new water management strategies to the plan, primarily focused on fresh and brackish groundwater projects, direct reuse, desalination, and new reservoirs. Some strategies, like groundwater wells and reuse, are being considered with additional data presented later. However, due to time and budget constraints, new reservoir projects won't be fully evaluated and may instead be listed as "considered" strategies rather than recommended ones. There was discussion about the importance of coordination with irrigation districts before pursuing new reservoirs, as many cities rely on irrigation district water. A potential program to assist groundwater projects was also mentioned. Details of the proposed new fresh groundwater well strategy in Elsa were presented for the first time to the public and planning group consideration. The project involves tapping the Gulf Coast Aquifer to provide 2,464 acre-feet per year by 2040, including necessary treatment and infrastructure, with estimated costs provided. Concerns were raised about potentially inflated treatment cost estimates, emphasizing the need for local engineering expertise to optimize expenses. The conversation highlighted the importance of exploring existing water supplies, especially irrigation district water, before investing heavily in new groundwater projects. Collaboration with irrigation districts was stressed as a more cost-effective and strategic approach, as reverse osmosis and groundwater alone won't fully meet future needs. The plan currently lacks sufficient discussion of these coordination efforts, which should be addressed moving forward. Jaime sought clarification on the difference between the $425 and $108 figures after debt service. It was explained that once debt service is paid off, the remaining cost is primarily for operation and maintenance. Another member acknowledged they had initially misunderstood the figures, reversing their meanings.

Ms. Burke explained that all project costs are developed using TWDB's uniform costing model to ensure consistency across the state. Marlyn Gilbert raised concerns that actual project costs often vary significantly from these estimates, citing examples like Corpus Christi's desalination plant. Jim Darling noted that costs can differ based on location, such as between Cameron and other counties. Ms. Gilbert asked if there's flexibility to adjust costs in the plan when more accurate local data becomes available. Mr. Smith confirmed there is a process to justify using local data instead of the tool's estimates. Ms. Burke added that while external costs can be used, the tool still calculates operation and maintenance for consistency, and actual funding requests often reflect higher costs due to inflation and project updates. Kevin emphasized that the plan's cost figures are for planning purposes only and don't lock projects into specific costs when seeking funding, as more refined numbers will come later. ELSA proposes using treated effluent from their wastewater plant for non-potable irrigation of parks, fields, and future commercial needs. They requested 168 acre-feet per year, but Region M's methodology limits non-potable project yields to 25% of projected demand, reducing Elsa's expected supply to 108 acre-feet per year by 2040. The associated costs and cost components were presented.

Pharr plans to supplement its raw water supply with Brackish groundwater from new wells in the Gulf Coast aquifer in Hidalgo County, treated via reverse osmosis (RO). The project aims to pump 7,500 acre-feet per year to produce 5,600 acre-feet of treated water by 2030. A second phase planned for 2060 is not included in this cycle. The project involves building a treatment facility, nine new wells, and a 2.4-mile transmission pipeline. Concentrate from RO will be discharged into the Arroyo Colorado. Costs were presented, noting that Brackish groundwater treatment is more expensive than fresh groundwater. Pharr provided updated information on their water augmentation potable reuse strategy, mainly revising the probable construction costs. Two new components, a second pump station and a 1 MGD storage tank—were added to the cost estimate. Aside from these cost updates, no other changes to the strategy were requested.

Donna requested a Brackish groundwater desalination project using water from the Gulf Coast Aquifer in Hidalgo County. With limited input from the city, the plan assumes 80% RO efficiency—pumping 7,000 acre-feet per year to yield 5,600 acre-feet of treated water. The project includes a treatment facility, well field, seven-mile pipeline, and land acquisition. No injection wells were included in the cost estimate, assuming concentrate would be discharged into a local stream. Cost details were provided.

The City of Mercedes requested the same Brackish groundwater desalination project as Donna, using the Gulf Coast Aquifer in Hidalgo County with similar components and assumptions. Ms. Gilbert asked about the consultant involved, and it was confirmed that Nichols handled the requests for both cities. Mr. Darling raised a point about McAllen's approach of blending 15% Brackish water with river water as a potentially simpler and cheaper interim solution that may not require state funding or complex treatment.

Maverick County requested a 1.5 MGD brackish groundwater desalination facility using the Wilcox Aquifer. However, due to MAG (Modeled Available Groundwater) limitations, only 170 acre-feet/year is available, resulting in a treated yield of 136 acre-feet/year by 2040. While the infrastructure is sized for the full request, cost estimates are based on the smaller yield, significantly increasing the unit cost. The county was informed of the limited yield but opted to proceed with including the project in the plan. Steven Sanchez asked whether, if the cost of drilling nine wells becomes prohibitive, a project could still proceed at a reduced scale—producing 2 to 3 million gallons per day instead of the planned 5 million—while using the same allocated funding. His concern was whether the state would allow such a scale-down if full project goals couldn't be met due to high well costs. Mr. Smith then responds with It was explained that since the regional water plan is a planning document, costs and project details are expected to be refined later. Decisions about scaling down a project due to cost limitations would be addressed during the actual funding application process, not at the planning stage.

Mr. Darling stated that the motion would be to approve the inclusion of public comments and the seven requested new water management strategies into the plan as presented. He noted that the motion could include a caveat—subject to all legal requirements being met. Steven Sanchez made a motion to approve the inclusion of public comments and new water management strategies into the plan as presented, with the caveat of subject to all legal requirements being met. Sonny Hinojosa second the motion, upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.

Following the vote, Mr. Darling noted that the strategies being approved were outlined on pages 1 through 44.

Ms. Burke then asked whether the planning group felt there was a need to allow additional public comment on these new strategies, since they were not part of the Initially Prepared Plan. While public comment is not required at this stage, and no comments were received opposing existing strategies—only requests to add new ones—she raised the question in the interest of transparency and ensuring the public had an opportunity to weigh in. Ms. Farmer then stated that in response to what Jaime just offered She would like an opportunity for Public Comment. Mr. Darling asked how they could approve the new strategies while still allowing for potential public comment. Mr. Kevin Smith clarified that while the board doesn't require additional public notice for adding new strategies, there is a mandatory 14-day public comment period before the final plan's adoption in October. He added that the planning group has flexibility—within their bylaws and legal guidance—to extend public comment or issue new notices if they choose to, to address any concerns. Mr. Darling asked how the public would be aware that the new strategies had been tentatively reviewed, noting that re-noticing would require spending money. Mr. Smith responded that options include extending the public comment period or re-noticing, and he would verify if those costs are reimbursable. Mr. Darling expressed a preference for simply extending the comment period, especially since the added strategies are similar groundwater projects and not significantly different from past additions.

Ms. Burke suggested posting a notice on the Region M website specifically about the newly proposed projects. She clarified that the intent wouldn't be to reopen the plan to all comments—just to allow a focused two-week comment period on the new strategies. ***Steven Sanchez made a motion for all public comments to be added and to include the new water strategies as presented; Dale Murden second the motion upon a vote, the motion was carried unanimously.***

5.A.3 Presentation of Agency Comments received on IPP. Consideration and Action to approve Proposed Responses

Ms. Burke It was clarified that the comments being discussed, originally a nine-page report from the Texas Water Development Board, are now official and can be found in the meeting materials—likely within pages 1 through 44. The document is identifiable by its extensive red text. The discussion then moved on to the next agenda item. Ms. Burked then moved on to Texas Water Development Board Comments. The handout includes the Texas Water Development Board's comments along with proposed responses. There are 43 Level 1 comments, which must be addressed, and 7 Level 2 comments, which are optional to address.

Key points:

- **Chapter 1** : 1 comment – add a reuse description
- **Chapter 2**: 2 comments – typo corrections
- **Chapter 3**: 5 comments – clarification requests
- **Chapter 5**: 26 comments – the bulk of feedback, covering corrections, clarifications, added project info/maps, and concerns over whether some strategies meet TWDB requirements
- **Chapter 6**: 2 comments – related to database errors, which are being corrected
- **Chapter 7**: 1 comment – request for clarification
- **Chapter 9**: 3 comments – request for more detail
- **Other Plan Elements**: 3 comments – related to accessibility and GIS data

Due to the volume of comments, not all were discussed in detail during the meeting, but members were encouraged to review them independently. Mr. Darling clarified that most of the Chapter 5 comments were related to correcting information submitted by individual water suppliers, not content authored by the planning team. This chapter accounted for most of the feedback. Mr. Smith added that receiving 30 to 40 comments is typical during this review process and not unusual, it reflects the standard level of detail addressed during the board's review. Ms. Burke explained that some comments received this cycle may have been overlooked in the previous cycle, with about five falling into that category. The board had concerns about whether five specific projects increased water supply, but after coordination, all are expected to remain as recommended strategies, including the El Jardin pipeline replacement, which will have slight modifications. Two additional comments (11 and 17) require further follow-up: one involves preparing implementation timelines for new projects, and the other requires specific cost breakdowns for reservoir land acquisition. The team is actively working with project sponsors to resolve these. ***Dale Murden made a motion to approve the Agency Comments received by IPP, Marilyn Gilbert second the motion, upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

In addition to TWDB's comments, Texas Park & Wildlife (TPWD) also provided comments for Chapter 8 and for next planning cycle. Ms. Burke stated that their comments could be included as a policy recommendation in Chapter 8; however, they are not required, particularly if the planning group does not agree with the recommendations, and although some of the comments are thoughtful ideas that could be looked at by the planning group in future planning cycles, there is not enough time to consider this cycle. ***Nick Benavides made a motion to disregard TPWD comments, Dale Murden second the motion, upon a vote the motion was carried unanimously.***

5.B Consideration and Action to approve Financial Report

Mrs. Melisa Gonzales provided the financial update for the current period. **Travel & Expenses This Quarter:** Mayor Darling and I attended the TCEQ trade show in Austin, resulting in travel-related expenditures. These include travel costs and my billed salary for two days at the event, all charged to Region M. **Hotel Charges Pending:** My hotel stay is not yet reflected in this quarter's figures, it will appear in next quarter's financial report due to the billing cycle of the hotel engine service.

Mrs. Gonzales said that the trade show was beneficial, offering valuable exposure and networking opportunities. She stated that additional significant meetings attended was the discussion with the Mexico–Texas Water Development Board, focusing on cross-border environmental and water-related issues.

Tom McLemore made a motion to approve financial report; Steven Sanchez seconded the motion and upon a vote; the motion was carried unanimously.

5.C Status of Joint Groundwater Area Planning in GMA's 13 & 16.

Ms. Debbie Framer provided the following updates for GMA 13. A meeting was held on Friday, April 11, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. at the Evergreen Underground Water Conservation District in Pleasanton. The July 25, 2025, GMA-13 meeting was rescheduled for Friday, August 15, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. in Pleasanton.

Items to be discussed will be

- Maverick Aquifer is relevant for purposes of joint planning.
- Status report on Groundwater Availability Model updates/recalibrations.
- Standardized methodology for tracking Desired Future Conditions (DFCs);
- Work/schedule/timeline of 4th round of DFCs; and
- Presentation by Wintergarden GCD regarding joint planning.

A copy of the GMA 13 Agendas and Minutes are provided on their website, www.gma13.org.

Mr. Louie Pena provided the following updates for GMA 16. The GMA 16 joint planning meeting took place on July 22, 2025, in Falfurrias, Texas, that included attendance from their consultants INTERA and Steve Young. Presentation highlights: there were three more power points for the nine factors for the explanatory report. GMA-16 approved having the consultant, INTERA, submit official comments on the new GAM to TWDB on behalf of GMA-16.

5.D Reports from other Regional Water Planning Groups:

No updates were provided.

5.E. Report on Water Conservation Plans and Drought Management Plans.

The following had no status reports currently.

5.F. Report on Notices of Applications for Funding and Grants.

The following had no status reports currently.

6. Reports from Federal and State Agencies

6.A. TWDB

Mr. Kevin Smith provided the following updates:

Regional Water Planning Area Boundaries

- TWDB is tasked with reviewing RWP boundaries at least every five years.
- Deadline to receive public comments was June 30, 2025.
- After the closing of the comment period, the TWDB may consider proposing boundary revisions at a regular Board meeting.

Socioeconomic Impact Analysis (SEIA)

- RWPGs must evaluate the social and economic impacts of not meeting water needs (31 Texas Administrative Code §357.33 (c)).
- SEIAs distributed June 26, 2025, to RWPGs.
- Due to the complexity of the analysis, TWDB's Projections & Socioeconomic Analysis department designed and conducted this analysis.
- Results represent a snapshot of socioeconomic impacts that may occur during a single year repeat of the drought of record if no mitigation strategies are implemented.
- Results presented at next Chairs call and to be posted online.
- TWDB Socioeconomic Impact Analysis website includes a dashboard that summarizes the data in the report, the methodology for the analysis, and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). https://www.twdb.texas.gov/waterplanning/data/analysis/index.asp

RWPG Chairs Call

- Presentation on the Socio-economic Impact Analysis for the 2026 RWPs
- Sixth Cycle of Regional Water Planning Activities
    - Deadline for final Regional Water Plans to be submitted to TWDB is October 20, 2025
    - Regions must provide proposed response to TWDB's IPP comments and plan revisions to TWDB for review prior to plan adoption
    - RWPG discretion to include new projects based on public comment period/WUG input – consultants must manage budget and meet deadlines
    - RWPG discretion to address comments outside of formal IPP comment period
    - RWP data entry and data revision deadline is September 22, 2025 – no revisions to RWP data may occur after this date
    - Draft copies of DB27 data reports may not be included in the final plan to meet reporting requirements – regions must include final versions – available September 24, 2025, in SARA

RWPG Chairs Call

- Sixth Cycle of Regional Water Planning Activities (cont)
    - Final deliverable includes all required electronic files and 4 hard copies
    - RWPG meeting where final plan adopted requires 14-day notice and public comment period prior to meeting.
    - TWDB distributed contract amendments for remaining committed funds for 2026 RWPs
    - TWDB developing schedule for 2031 RWPs – more information to come this fall
    - Meeting notes and recording of SEIA on TWDB website

6B. IBWC

Mr. Adrian Cortez provided an update.

Mexico's Treaty Deliveries

- In the fifth year of the current five-year cycle, Mexico has delivered 320,000 acre-feet of water so far.
- Total delivery for this cycle to date is 742,000 acre-feet.
- Mexico still needs to deliver 852,934 acre-feet to meet their 5-yr requirement, so they remain approximately 46% short of the requirement.
- These deliveries include steps from negotiation via State Department, USDA, and Mexican representatives, reflected as "step increases" in the delivery trend.
  (Note: As of early 2025, data shows Mexico has delivered only 425,405 acre-feet, which is around 24% of the obligation Environmental Law Instituteriograndeguardian.com. This discrepancy may be due to timing or partial accrual.)

Reservoir Levels

- **Mexico Reservoirs**:
    - Rio Conchos: ~25% full
    - Middle tributaries: ~29% full
    - Lower tributaries (including Rio San Juan): ~74% full—water from here has been used to help offset Mexico's delivery shortfall but recognized that it is less favored by valley users.
- **International (U.S./Mexico) Reservoirs**:
    - U.S. has ~873,000 acre-feet stored
    - Mexico has ~218,000 acre-feet
    - Combined total across both systems: ~1,000,000 acre-feet as of yesterday, compared to a record low of 856,000 acre-feet in June 2024

Water Transfer Dynamics & Ongoing Actions

- Monthly transfers from Mexico to the U.S. continue per the negotiated plan.
- These include:
    - Withdrawals from tributaries (currently at **50%** share)

- Use of waters from the San Juan as an exceptional delivery source

- High-level binational meetings are being planned to navigate further actions under the updated protocols

6C. TCEQ Watermaster

Ms. Georgina Bermea provided an update. Watermaster operations rely on IBWC's data, which is publicly available through their platform.

Reservoir Storage (as of August 2, 2025)

- U.S. combined share (Amistad + Falcon): 25.84% of normal conservation capacity, approximately 872,353 acre-feet.
- U.S. usable storage (Amistad & Falcon): 25.33%, or about 853,959 acre-feet.
- Overall system storage (Amistad + Falcon): 18.50% of normal conservation capacity, with:
  - Amistad: 23.85%
  - Falcon: 12.2%
- Mexico's share: 8.65% of normal conservation capacity, about 217,627 acre-feet in Amistad and Falcon.

Current Watermaster Operations

- Amistad: Releasing 15 cubic meters second (CMS)
- Falcon: Releasing 10 CMS
- Anzalduas: Releasing 16.44 CMS, with an expected additional 10 CMS planned from San Juan transfer to Anzalduas.
- Releases are demand-driven, with ongoing evaluation and adjustments based on usage needs.

7. Discussion, Consideration and ACTION on Date for the Next business Meeting.

Next Region M Meeting will be scheduled for October 7, 2025.

8. Adjourn

Jim Darling

Mr. Jim Darling, Chairman