

FINAL DRAFT

CHAPTER 10: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND PLAN ADOPTION

Rio Grande Regional Water Plan

B&V PROJECT NO. 411250

PREPARED FOR

Rio Grande Regional Water Planning Group

7 OCTOBER 2025

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List of Abbreviations

GMA	Groundwater Management Area
ID	Irrigation District
IPP	Initially Prepared Plan
LRGVDC	Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council
RWP	Regional Water Plan
RWPG	Regional Water Planning Group
SB	Senate Bill
SJR	Senate Joint Resolution
SWIFT	State Water Implementation Fund for Texas
TAC	Texas Administrative Code
TPWD	Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
TWDB	Texas Water Development Board
WSC	Water Supply Corporation
WUG	Water User Group

10.0 Public Participation and Plan Adoption

10.1 Public Participation

Public participation is the basis of the regional water planning process initiated by Senate Bill (SB) 1 in 1997. Under Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) rules presented 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 1, 2025, are listed in Table 10-1.

The Rio Grande RWPG abides by the Open Meetings Act¹ and Public Information Act², which require members of governmental bodies to participate in education training and open records training pursuant to Sections 551.005 and 552.012 of the Texas Government Code, respectively. These Acts in conjunction determine how open meetings are operated and information is made available to the public. More information can be found on the Office of the Texas Attorney General website (<https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/>). The Rio Grande RWPG met all requirements under the Texas Open Meetings Act and Public Information Act in accordance with Title 31 of the 31 TAC Sections 357.12, 357.21, and 357.50(f).

TWDB rules require RWPGs to have at least one meeting prior to preparation of the regional water plan (RWP), provide ongoing opportunities for public participation during the planning process, and hold at least one public hearing prior to adoption of the initially prepared plan (IPP) RWP. 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 met and exceeded 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. Outreach efforts included the following:

- Contact survey;
- Overview of regional water planning webinar;
- Population and demands survey;
- Evaluation of infeasible projects from the 2021 RWP survey;
- Supplies and strategy survey;
- Water management strategy project implementation surveys;
- Request for updated Drought Contingency Plans;
- Rural outreach letters; and
- Personalized emails to Water User Groups (WUGs) and Wholesale Water Providers regarding needs and the development of individualized strategies.

¹ Office of the Texas Attorney General. "Open Meetings Act." <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/open-meetings-act-training>.

² Office of the Texas Attorney General. "Public Information Act." <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/governmental-bodies/pia-and-oma-training-resources/public-information-act-training>.

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 RGRWPG 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, is a resource for the public on issues of concern to regional water planning and information on the planning process.

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

Interest	Name	Resident County
Public	Tomas Rodriguez	Webb
	Laredo	
Counties	Joe Rathmell	Zapata
	County Judge, Zapata	
	David L. Fuentes	Hidalgo
	Precinct 1 Commissioner, Weslaco	
Municipalities	Jorge Flores	Maverick
	Eagle Pass Water Works, Eagle Pass	
	Marilyn Gilbert	Cameron
	Brownsville Public Utilities Board, Brownsville	
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, Weslaco	
Small Business	Carlos Garza	Hidalgo
	AEC Engineering, LLC, Edinburg	
	Nick Benavides*	Webb
	Nick Benavides Co., Laredo	
Electric Generating Utilities	Robert Latham	Hidalgo
	Magic Valley Generation Station	
River Authorities	Jim Darling, Chairman*	Hidalgo
	Rio Grande Regional Water Authority	

Interest	Name	Resident County
Water Districts	Sonny Hinojosa, Vice-Chairman*	Hidalgo
	Hidalgo County ID No. 2, San Juan	
	Tom McLemore	Cameron
	Harlingen ID	
Water Utilities	Steven Sanchez	Hidalgo
	North Alamo Water Supply Corporation (WSC)	
Groundwater Management Area (GMA)	Louie Peña	(GMA 16)
	Brush Country GCD	
	Debbie Farmer	(GMA 13)
	Wintergarden GCD, Carrizo Springs	
Other	Glenn Jarvis	Hidalgo
	Attorney, McAllen	
	Frank Schuster*	Hidalgo
	Val Verde Vegetable Co., McAllen	
*Executive Committee		

10.1.1 Rural Outreach

The Rio Grande RWPG supports input from all stakeholder groups in the development of this plan. Throughout the planning cycle, the Rio Grande RWPG offered hybrid in-person/virtual board meetings. As it is important for stakeholders to attend these regular Rio Grande RWPG meetings, this model allowed for a greater attendance across a geographic area.

The Rio Grande RWPG conducted outreach specifically to rural entities in the planning area to support plan development. In March 2024, TWDB identified and compiled a list of 35 entities within the planning area that meet the rural political subdivision definition in accordance with Texas Water Code 15.001(14). As 32 of these entities are also WUGs, these entities also received other surveys and outreach as described in Section 10.1. In May 2024, the Rio Grande RWPG sent letters to all identified rural entities providing general information regarding Regional and State Water Planning and how to engage with the planning process. The letter also included TWDB resources providing key water supply planning information for the recipient’s county and requested that these rural entities submit any WMS for inclusion in the plan. A summary of rural entity engagement during the planning cycle is presented in Table 10-2. The general response rate of rural WUG outreach during the 2026 planning cycle was approximately 54 percent.

Table 10-2 Rural Entity Level of Engagement for 2026 RWP

Public Water System (PWS) Name	Water User Group Name	Level of Engagement
Town of Combes	Combes	Did not complete surveys or provide feedback
Town of Indian Lake	County-Other, Cameron	Did not provide feedback to rural outreach letter

Public Water System (PWS) Name	Water User Group Name	Level of Engagement
Bruni Rural WSC	County-Other, Webb	Did not provide feedback to rural outreach letter
Oilton Rural WSC	County-Other, Webb	Did not provide feedback to rural outreach letter
East Rio Hondo WSC Arroyo City	East Rio Hondo WSC	Completed contact list survey; Coordinated population/demand revision request; Completed water supplies survey
City of Edcouch	Edcouch	Did not complete surveys or provide feedback
El Sauz WSC	El Sauz WSC	Completed contact list survey
El Tanque WSC	El Tanque WSC	Did not complete surveys or provide feedback
City of Elsa	Elsa	Completed contact list survey; Requested water management strategies during IPP public comment period
Falcon Rural WSC	Falcon Rural WSC	Completed contact list survey
Jim Hogg County WCID 2	Jim Hogg County WCID 2	Did not complete surveys or provide feedback
City of La Feria	La Feria	Completed contact list survey
City of La Grulla	La Grulla	Did not complete surveys or provide feedback
City of La Joya	La Joya	Completed contact list survey; Completed water supplies survey
City of La Villa	La Villa	Did not complete surveys or provide feedback
Laguna Madre Water District	Laguna Madre Water District	Completed contact list survey; Completed water supplies survey
City of Los Fresnos	Los Fresnos	Completed contact list survey; Completed water supplies survey
City of Lyford	Lyford	Did not complete surveys or provide feedback
Military HWY WSC Del Mar Heights	Military Highway WSC	Completed contact list survey
Mirando City WSC	Mirando City WSC	Completed contact list survey; Completed water supplies survey
City of Palm Valley	Palm Valley	Did not complete surveys or provide feedback
Port Mansfield PUD	Port Mansfield PUD	Did not complete surveys or provide feedback
City of Primera	Primera	Completed contact list survey; Coordinated population/demand revision request; Completed water supplies survey
City of Raymondville	Raymondville	Did not complete surveys or provide feedback
City of Rio Grande City	Rio Grande City	Did not complete surveys or provide feedback

Public Water System (PWS) Name	Water User Group Name	Level of Engagement
City of Rio Hondo	Rio Hondo	Completed contact list survey
Rio WSC	Rio WSC	Completed contact list survey
City of Roma	Roma	Completed contact list survey; Completed water supplies survey
City of Santa Rosa	Santa Rosa	Did not complete surveys or provide feedback
Sebastian MUD	Sebastian MUD	Completed contact list survey
Siesta Shores WCID	Siesta Shores WCID	Did not complete surveys or provide feedback
Union WSC	Union WSC	Did not complete surveys or provide feedback
Webb County Water Dispenser	Webb County	Coordinated population/demand revision request
Zapata County San Ygnacio & Ramireno	Zapata County San Ygnacio & Ramireño	Did not complete surveys or provide feedback
Zapata County WCID HWY 16 East	Zapata County WCID-Hwy 16 East	Did not complete surveys or provide feedback

10.1.2 Public Hearings and Responses to Comments on Initially Prepared Plan

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, 2025. The approved IPP will be submitted to the TWDB and made available for review and comment on March 3, 2025, in accordance with §357.21(h)(7). Hard copies and/or electronic versions of the IPP will be made available to county clerks and public libraries throughout the region and on the internet. The Rio Grande RWPG will provide extensive notice of and opportunity for public comment on the IPP. As required by TWDB rule, copies of the draft plan are 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 10-3). A copy is also placed at the office of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC).

Table 10-3 Locations of Public Posting of the Initially Prepared Plan

County	Location
Cameron	Cameron County Clerk's Office, 835 E. Levee St., 3rd Floor, 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

County	Location
Starr	Starr County Clerk's Office, 401 N. Britton Ave., Room 201, Rio Grande City, TX 78582
	Rio Grande City Public Library, 591 E. 3rd St., 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 Rd., Laredo, TX 78041
Willacy	Willacy County Clerk's Office, 576 W. Main Ave., Room 153, 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

After submittal of the IPP, a public hearing was scheduled for May 22, 2025, and comments were accepted for a minimum of 60 days following the public hearing. Appendix 10A contains the public hearing public notice and presentation. Appendix 10B contains the public comments and responses. The TWDB and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) reviewed the IPP and provided comments. Appendix 10C contains the TWDB and TPWD comments and responses.

An additional public comment period was provided after the August 12, 2025, Rio Grande RWPG meeting to allow for comments on new water management strategies that were presented and approved as recommended at that meeting. One public comment was received and is included in Appendix 10B with the other public comments.

10.1.3 Final Regional Water Plan Adoption

The 2026 RWP was adopted by a majority vote of the Rio Grande RWPG at the October 7, 2025, Rio Grande RWPG meeting and was submitted to the TWDB by October 20, 2025, for approval and integration into the 2027 State Water Plan.

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 Rio Grande RWPG. The LRGVDC recorded all Rio Grande RWPG meetings and prepared the official meeting minutes.

10.3 Inter-regional Coordination Efforts

The Rio Grande Regional Water Planning Area (Region M) is surrounded by three adjacent planning areas, including: Plateau (J), South Central Texas (L), and Coastal Bend (N). Coordination with Far West Texas (E) was required for water availability modeling assumptions related to the hydrologic variance upstream the Rio Grande. The 2026 RWP includes one recommended WMS, Eagle Pass – Brackish Groundwater Desalination, that delivers water from Kinney County (J) to Maverick County (M). To the extent necessary, coordination with each of these regions was accomplished through chair correspondence, RWPG liaisons, and/or technical consultant collaboration. Subjects of coordination, correspondence, or collaboration included water availability and specific WMSs of interest. The Rio Grande RWPG is aware of no inter-regional conflicts involving recommended WMSs included in the 2026 RWP.

10.4 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.

10.4.1 Additional Planning Studies

The recommendations presented in this RWP 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.

10.4.2 Local Water Supply Planning and Implementation

This RWP 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 a strong commitment is made on the part of the governing bodies and management of local water suppliers to implement the strategies recommended in this plan.

Locally, a great deal of progress has been made with stakeholders working together. The Rio Grande RWPG highly recommends that this continues to aid in the implementation of water strategies throughout the region.

10.4.3 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 for Texas (SWIFT) program is enabling further state

investment in water projects. In 2023, the 88th Texas Legislature passed SB 28 and Senate Joint Resolution (SJR) 75 providing for the creation of the Texas Water Fund. In addition, SB 30 authorized a one-time, \$1 billion supplemental appropriation of general revenue to the Texas Water Fund, contingent on enactment of SB 28 and approval of SJR 75 by voters. Proposition 6 (the proposition for SJR 75), creating the Texas Water Fund to assist in financing water projects in Texas, passed on November 7, 2023, with more than 77 percent in favor.

Of the initial amount appropriated to the Texas Water Fund, the TWDB must allocate no less than 25 percent (\$250 million) to the New Water Supply for Texas Fund. The TWDB must also ensure that a portion of the money transferred from the fund is used for the following: a) water infrastructure projects, prioritized by risk or need, for rural political subdivisions and municipalities with a population less than 150,000; b) projects for which all required state or federal permitting has been substantially completed, as determined by the Board; c) the statewide water public awareness program; d) water conservation strategies; and e) water loss mitigation projects. The Executive Administrator proposed to distribute Texas Water Fund funding as shown in Table 10-4.

Table 10-4 Senate Bill 30 Texas Water Fund Allocations

Funding Description	Target Amount
Rural Water Assistance Fund	\$195,000,000
Water Loan Assistance Fund	\$90,000,000
Statewide water public awareness program	\$15,000,000
SWIFT program support	\$300,000,000
Potential bond leveraged funding through existing financial assistance programs	\$150,000,000
New Water Supply for Texas Fund	\$250,000,000
Total	\$1,000,000,000

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 RWP – and is essential to maintaining the viability of this sector of the regional economy – the Rio Grande RWPG recommends that new public funding sources be developed to assist IDs and farmers with the implementation of conservation programs.