Improving Water Planning in Texas: January 2023 Environmental Defense Fund Report

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The Environmental Defense Fund ("EDF") issued a January 2023 report titled:

Improving Water Planning in Texas – The Critical but Overlooked Link Between Desired Future Conditions and the State Water Plan ("Report")

The *Report's* authors include:

- Carlos Rubinstein

Former Chairman of the Texas Water Development Board, Commissioner of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and Rio Grande Watermaster

- Vanessa Puig Williams, J.D.

Director, Texas Water Program

Environmental Defense Fund

A focus of the *Report* is groundwater.

The *Report* provides the authors' views on:

- Process by which the Texas Groundwater Conservation Districts("GCDs") have executed their required planning function to arrive at a Desired Future Condition ("DFC")
- Link between DFC development and state water planning
- Legislative history associated with Groundwater Management Areas joint planning and the DFC process
- Linkage between DFC development, Modeled Available Groundwater ("MAG") determination and how this does or does not inform regional and state water planning efforts
- Identification of technical and significant differences in documenting/justifying adherence to statutory requirements regarding the development of DFCs
- Recognition that not all GCDs are created equal or have similar/sustainable funding for the development of the DFCs
- Highlights differing processes/perspective views from GCDs based on the authors' review of their explanatory reports
- Recommendations as to how the DFC process could be enhanced for the benefit of all users/uses
- Recommendations regarding the preservation of groundwater resources to ensure sustainability

Specific recommendations provided in the *Report* include:

- Appropriation of additional money to the Water Development Board to develop additional data and improve groundwater models that local districts need
- Expanding the scope of groundwater planning
- Analyze the degree to which surface water sustains aquifers and groundwater sustains river and stream flows
- To protect surface waterflows, rights, and resources
- Increasing state funding to help groundwater districts improve modeling, technical assistance in data collection
- Requiring districts to provide more narrative, modeling, quantitative analysis and supporting documentation in explanatory reports on their proposed DFCs
- Provide GCDs with socio-economic analyses that evaluate the potential impacts of aquifer depletion
- Strengthen the Water Development Board's authority to meaningful review explanatory reports/supporting data that underpins planning by GCDs
- Require the Water Development Board to model the sustainable yield of aquifers to ensure groundwater supplies meet Texas' need without depleting aquifers and jeopardizing future generations
- Require local and regional planning entities to build plans around those aquifer levels

A copy of the *Report* can be downloaded here.