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TWDB Begins Development Of Brackish Water Resources; Sets Legislative Priorities

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TWDB Begins Development Of Brackish Water Resources; Sets Legislative Priorities

by Peter Partheymuller

Staff presents contract recommendations for brackish water studies, 2017 legislative requests.

At its first meeting of 2016 on Wednesday, the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) welcomed Peter Lake for his first meeting as a board member. Lake and the other members of the board, Chairman Bech Bruun and Kathleen Jackson (pictured), heard from TWDB staff regarding a legislative mandate to study brackish water aquifers and the setting of legislative and policy recommendations to include in the [Draft 2017 State Water Plan](#).

The 2015 Texas Legislature directed the TWDB to conduct studies to identify and designate brackish groundwater production zones



in four aquifers and to report to the legislature by Dec. 1. Those four are the Carrizo–Wilcox Aquifer, the Gulf Coast Aquifer, the Blaine Aquifer and the Rustler Aquifer. Last October, TWDB staff issued a request for qualifications (RFQ) to identify vendors to perform the study on three of those aquifers (all but the Carrizo–Wilcox), as well as three others (the Trinity, Blossom and Nacatoch aquifers). The studies of the first three are due by Aug. 31, and the others are due a year later.

According to Erika Mancha, the TWDB’s team lead for Innovative Water Technologies, [agency staff will conduct studies](#) on the state’s other aquifers (except for the Carrizo–Wilcox, which will be done by the Bureau of Economic Geology at The University of Texas at Austin). The three additional aquifers were included in the RFQ to be studied by private vendors “because of their complexity.”

In response to the RFQ, the TWDB received 14 statements of qualifications from companies wishing to conduct the studies. Staff reviewed those statements and made their recommendations to the board this week.

Jackson asked Mancha about the legislature’s very aggressive deadlines and how the TWDB staff will accomplish what is being asked of them. Mancha enumerated key milestones in the process, which include public meetings requesting feedback from all involved in the process. “Stakeholders are going to be part of the brackish aquifer research process. We will make an attempt to engage the public at all times,” she said.

TWDB has already held its first public meeting, during which staff members explained the agency’s approach to the brackish aquifer [research](#) and solicited input from stakeholders “as to what constitutes a significant impact” to the environment in and around the aquifers. A second meeting will be held to take public

suggestions for potential production areas, after which staff members will discuss those results with the contractors.

The other key milestones include creating a priorities list for potential brackish water production zones and then, finally, the presentation of the study results to the board.

Jackson concluded by stressing the unique nature of this legislative directive. “We’ve had studies, both in Texas and in other parts of the country, that delineate the aquifers in terms of the salinity levels and the extent of the aquifers, but don’t necessarily address the brackish production zone. This will determine the amount that would be able to be generated by an aquifer over a 40- or 50-year period without having a significant impact on the surrounding aquifers. It’s a very important study for Texas.”

The three board members approved the recommendations unanimously, allowing TWDB staff members to negotiate contracts and the scope of work for the studies.

Later in the meeting, board members heard from Matt Nelson, director of Water Uses, Projections and Planning for the TWDB. He presented [three policy recommendations](#) — first proposed in the state’s various Regional Water Plans — to be included in the Draft State Water Plan for 2017.

The first was to designate five stream or river segments as having “unique ecological value.” If the legislature were to do so, then governmental agencies would not be able to allocate funds to construct a reservoir in that segment of stream or river.

The second recommendation was to designate 11 sites as “having unique value for the construction of reservoirs.” This wouldn’t, however, guarantee that a reservoir would be funded, much less

built, on these sites. It would, though, prevent state or local agencies from allowing development on the sites that would prevent the construction of a reservoir.

The third recommendation aligned dates for submission of statements of “Desired Future Conditions” (forecasts of water availability) with the Regional Water Plans.

The policy recommendations, though approved by the board, aren’t final. They may well be revised and amended before the Draft State Water Plan is finalized and again before the actual State Water Plan is due Jan. 5, 2017.

Chairman Bruun noted that this is “the beginning and not the end of this process.”

This article [originally published](#) by Strategic Partnerships Inc.

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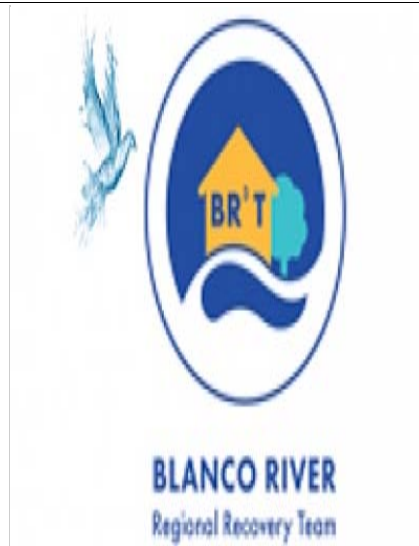
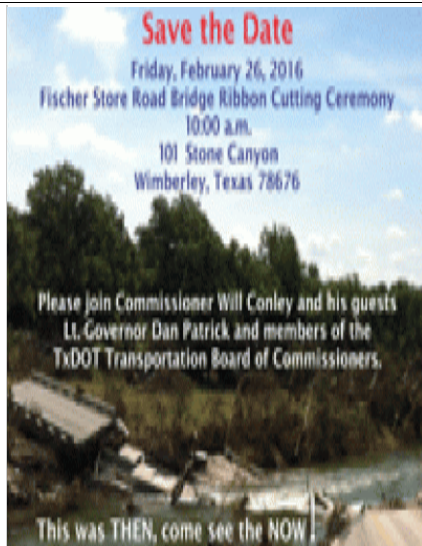
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