

The State Water Plan and the Coastal Bend Water Crisis

BACKGROUND

Earlier this year, a genuine water crisis emerged in the Coastal Bend. As national headlines emerged on when Corpus Christi and other communities would run out of water, cities imposed strict water use restrictions, declared drought disasters, and rapidly pursued alternative supply options. Texas 2036 examined the data and recommendations from each state and regional water plan from each planning cycle to see whether the water plans ever warned if this water crisis would happen.

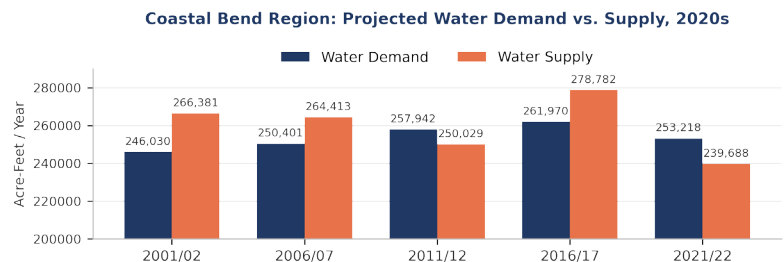
A CITY-LEVEL BLIND SPOT

Across five planning cycles, not one state or regional water plan ever projected that Corpus Christi would run short of water. The water supply plans for the following cities indicated that “no shortages are projected” in every cycle:

- Corpus Christi
- Beeville
- Odem
- Gregory
- Taft
- Aransas Pass
- Alice
- Bishop
- Ingleside
- Sinton
- Rockport
- Kingsville
- Driscoll
- Mathis

NO STABLE REGIONAL SIGNAL

At the regional level, the plans from each cycle did not consistently indicate that the Coastal Bend would face a regional water supply shortage during the 2020s. Projected water supply and demand data for the 2020s from each planning cycle provided conflicting signals of whether the region would face a water supply shortage or surplus during this decade.



A SHIFTING BLUEPRINT

Plans from each planning cycle recommended a different portfolio of water management strategies for implementation by the 2020s. Some recommended strategies were to address local shortages, others as a cushion against uncertain growth. If the plans were meant to be a blueprint, they never settled on what that blueprint should contain.

Strategy (acre-feet/year)	2001/02	2006/07	2011/12	2016/17	2021/22
Additional groundwater wells and pumping	1,322	13,535	2,535	2,466	12,008
Irrigation water conservation	1,383	52	52	1	561
Manufacturing water conservation	1,187	1,418	1,418	1,081	2,210
Mining water conservation	—	548	626	106	76
Municipal water conservation	—	353	353	3,370	20
Brackish groundwater desalination	715	—	—	3,363	2,369
Reclaimed wastewater supplies	—	250	250	2,240	—
Voluntary redistribution/reallocation	5,428	999	738	340	—
Water treatment plant improvements	—	—	40,048	35,485	2,818
Interconnection	631	—	—	1,204	—
Local balancing storage	—	—	—	1,583	4,058
Garwood (Mary Rhodes) pipeline	—	—	35,000	—	—
Recycle and reuse of groundwater	718	—	—	—	—
Seawater desalination	—	—	28,000	—	—
USCOE feasibility study	—	25,000	—	—	—
TOTAL YIELD BY CYCLE	11,384	42,155	109,020	51,239	24,120

RECOMMENDATIONS

Texas 2036's report, *The State Water Plan and the Coastal Bend Water Crisis*, offers several recommendations to improve the planning process established by SB 1. Some of those recommendations include:

- Add a phase to update the models, data, and science behind the plans, and consider a longer planning cycle to allow time to appropriate for those updates.
- Replace the menu of water management strategies with an actionable implementation framework — organized by purpose and urgency, with start dates and completion milestones.
- Stress-test plans for droughts worse than the drought of record.
- Improve tracking of implementation progress over time.