

Forget about energy, water is the biggest problem facing Central Texas

By Bryan Brah

Austin faces a water crisis within the next 50 years unless conservation efforts are dramatically increased and expanded, according to an LCRA plan approved last month by the Texas Water Development Board.

The plan affects the 1.1 million people living in the Lower Colorado River Basin which runs from San Saba County to the Gulf of Mexico, 77 percent of whom reside in the Austin Metro area. According to the plan, "By 2060, the population of the region as a whole is projected to more than double to 2.7 million."

Currently the residents of the region, known as LCRA Region K, use about 1 million acre/feet of water each year, but the total volume of water available to the region is just under 1.3 million acre/feet per year.

"We're almost at the limit of our water resources," said Frank Mikan, a local geologist and professor at Austin Community College. "People need to realize that we live on the edge of a desert, and start acting accordingly. If we don't do something quickly to reduce our consumption, then we're going to have serious problems," continued Mikan.

According to the LCRA plan, some reductions in water use can be achieved through changes in agricultural practices or crops, improvements in manufacturing, mining, and power generation technologies, and by reducing the outflow at municipal water treatment plants.

"One of the easiest solutions," according to Mark Wieland of the city of Austin Water Conservation department, "is to reduce consumer demand." Each of the

government agencies, departments, and NGOs concerned with water use offers suggestions and programs designed to reduce municipal consumption.

LCRA offers specifications to builders and homebuyers for landscaping with native plants, designing efficient irrigation and rainwater collection systems, as well as tips and tricks to purchase, maintain, and repair water-using appliances and fixtures.

The city of Austin offers its municipal customers a range of programs to assist and encourage conservation, from rebates for efficient toilets, clothes washers, and water timers, to raffling off new hybrid cars. "We're doing whatever we can to encourage people to use less water," said Weiland.

To find out more about how you can help ward off the looming water crisis facing Central Texas, contact the city of Austin Water Conservation Department or the LCRA.

You can also visit their websites at:

<http://www.cityofaustin.org/watercon/>
<http://www.lcra.org/water/conservation.html>

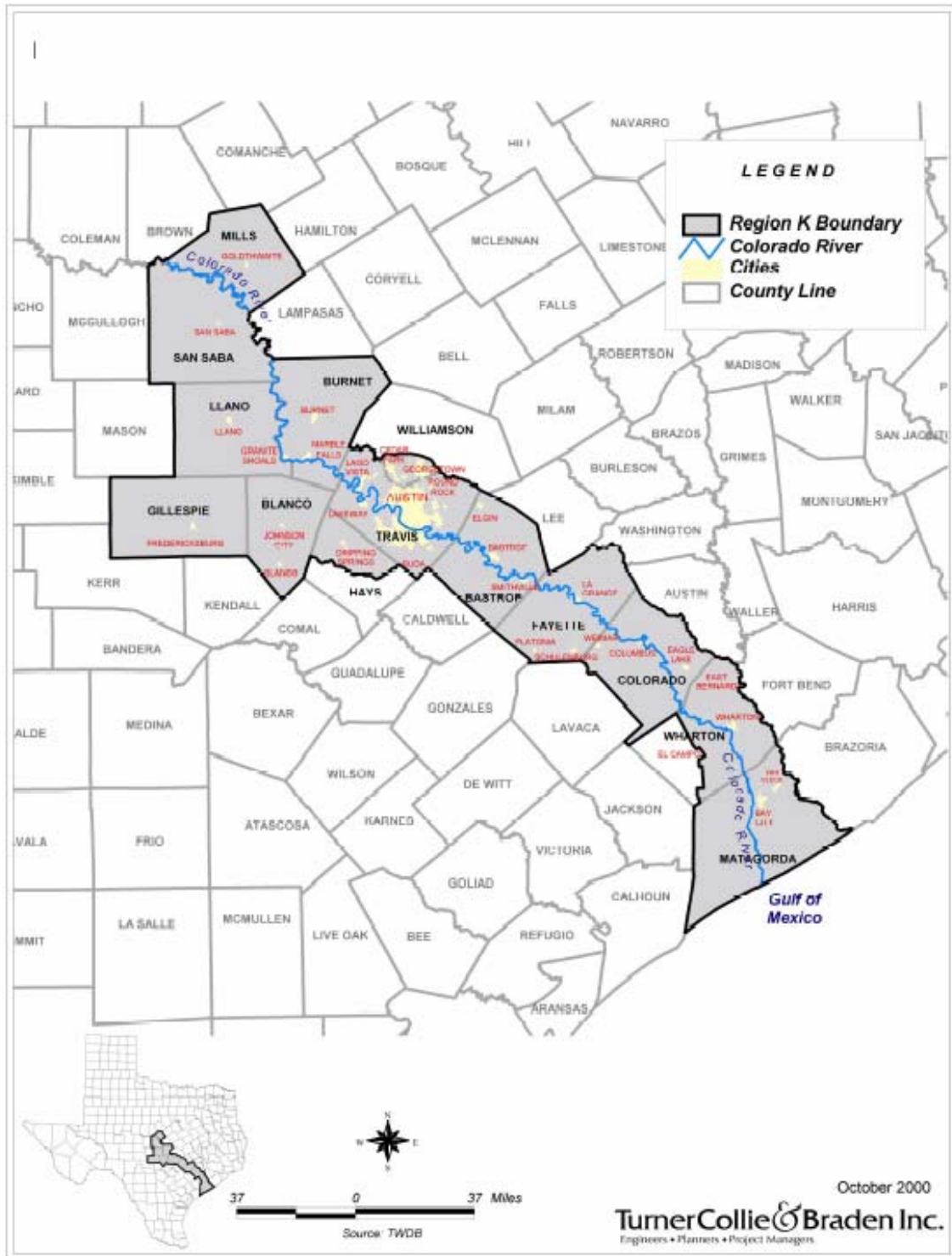
The full text of the LCRA Region K water plan is available on the Texas Water Development Board website at:

<http://www.twdb.state.tx.us/rwpg/main-docs/AdoptedRegionalPlan-index.asp>

SIDEBAR or INFO BOX

"Top 5 Water Conservation Tips:"

- 1. Stop the leaks.** Fix toilets that "run," faucets that drip, broken or cracked irrigation lines, and check your water meter for silent leaks.
- 2. Replace your old toilet.** Toilets made before 1980 use up to 7 gallons per flush compared to new toilets that use 1.6 gallons or less per flush.
- 3. Replace your clothes washing machine.** New washers use half as much water as older models.
- 4. Get rid of the lawn.** Instead use native or drought resistant plants for landscaping.
- 5. Don't over water.** Give plants only as much water as they need. Use drip irrigation instead of sprinklers wherever possible.



Map of LCRA Region K

References and Sources

Besides the three websites listed in the article, I referred to the following websites:

Save Our Springs Alliance <http://www.sosalliance.org/>

Texas Water Foundation <http://www.texaswater.org/>

The following is a list of people contacted for this article:

Frank Mikan at Austin Community College 512.322.0596 (this is his home phone)

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