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Balkanization of Texas water must end

LYLE LARSON, FOR THE EXPRESS-NEWS : MARCH 28, 2014 : Updated: March 28, 2014 4:26pm

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Regional water planning has caused fierce battles.



SAN ANTONIO — Have you ever wondered why we fight each other so fiercely over water resources in Texas?

Both surface and groundwater inventories vary widely throughout our great state. Some areas, like East Texas, have an abundance of water, while many other parts of the state are arid, like El Paso, which receives just 8 inches of rain per year on average.

The solution to this challenge seems simple:

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Send the water from places that have plenty of it to the places that don't.

The reason the answer isn't so simple, and moving water according to the most basic economic tenets of supply and demand has not been successful, is due in part to the regional planning process set forth in state law.

Since 1961, the state has engaged in a process to plan for our future water needs. Since 2002, our state water plan has been developed through a bottom up, regional planning process that requires 16 regional planning groups to first determine the region's current water supply and then develop a plan to address the area's water needs for the next 50 years.

Every five years, each region independently develops its own plan, which is submitted to the **Texas Water Development Board** and compiled into one document, known as the State Water Plan.

The State Water Plan is an excellent planning document, but from a statewide perspective, the regional planning process has led to some unintended consequences, chief among them the genesis of some of the fiercest water battles in the country.

The regional planning process has effectively Balkanized Texas along regional lines. The state has abdicated its responsibility for water development to the 16 regions.

Urban areas, such as San Antonio, find it virtually impossible to cross the imaginary boundary lines of our region, Region L, to procure additional water supplies for our future. The same issues exist up the I-35 corridor to Dallas and throughout West and South Texas.

In the late 1990s, the architects of the regional planning process were exceptionally forward-thinking problem solvers. They intended the process to be an organically developed planning approach that, through no fault of their own, has instead manifested as a mammoth blockade to water projects that are good for Texas.

The parochial sense of ownership elicited by the 16 region conceptual overlay of the state has essentially halted every inter-basin transfer and groundwater transport proposal in the past 15 years.

Texans fight one another along arbitrary regional, county and groundwater district boundaries throughout the state, not based on scientific data, but with the traditional Friday night football and the classic country-versus-big-city mentality.

Ironically, we have deprived a multitude of individual private property rights using this framework.

One highly publicized example of the challenge this process presents is the proposed **Marvin Nichols** reservoir. The construction of this reservoir would take place 150 miles from Dallas, in northeast Texas, and would entail flooding roughly 70,000 acres.

Region C, in which the Metroplex is located, included the controversial project in its plan. On the other hand, Region D, where the reservoir would be located, remains opposed to the proposal.

The two regions have remained engaged in this fight for several years without resolution because the state has no regulatory framework in place to address such challenges.

We must balance our state's municipal, agricultural, industrial and recreational water demands based on availability, rather than perceived regional jurisdictional entitlements.

The bottom line is that water must be transported from the water-rich areas of the state to the water-insecure communities, if we intend to meet the increased need triggered by the exponential population growth our state is experiencing.

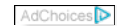
The only way this will be achieved is if we can begin looking at our state's water challenges from 50,000 feet, rather than continuing to enable the current myopic process.

Throughout the history of our state, Texans have survived and thrived by working together to solve problems, which has not only led to many economic successes, but has made our state one of the best places on the planet in which to live.

The way that different regions and political jurisdictions fight over water is simply un-Texan.

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It's time to change that.

The state can and should continue to use the regional planning process as a tool, but the Legislature must provide the leadership in the next legislative session to eliminate the self-imposed regulatory impediment to moving water across our state.

We are all proud of being Texans, now let's start working together toward a common goal: To secure our state's water future.

Lyle Larson, R-San Antonio, represents state **House District 122** and sits on the **Natural Resources Committee**.

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LYLE LARSON, FOR THE EXPRESS-NEWS

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Rep. Larson:

With due respect, you really do know better than this. Please tell your constituents how much farmland the Marvin Nichols will take out for a reservoir with 50% evaporation rates. (That would be 70K acres and 50 miles of the Sulphur River).

East Texans and those of us who, like me, live in the Bastrop/Lee County area where y'all want to move groundwater from our aquifer, don't mind sharing some water. That is what Texans do in ongoing drought.

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Isn't this just another gambit that ignores the real question of Climate Change. It sounds a lot like someone is saying if folks in region A can steal from region B, then region A is happy and region B - well that is their own problem as they don't have as much power in Austin?

I'm all for conservation, but this stealing from Peter to Pay Paul seems to be missing a bunch of steps that should be very transparent to the public who is the ultimate loser in the process.

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