

NEWS | NATURAL RESOURCES

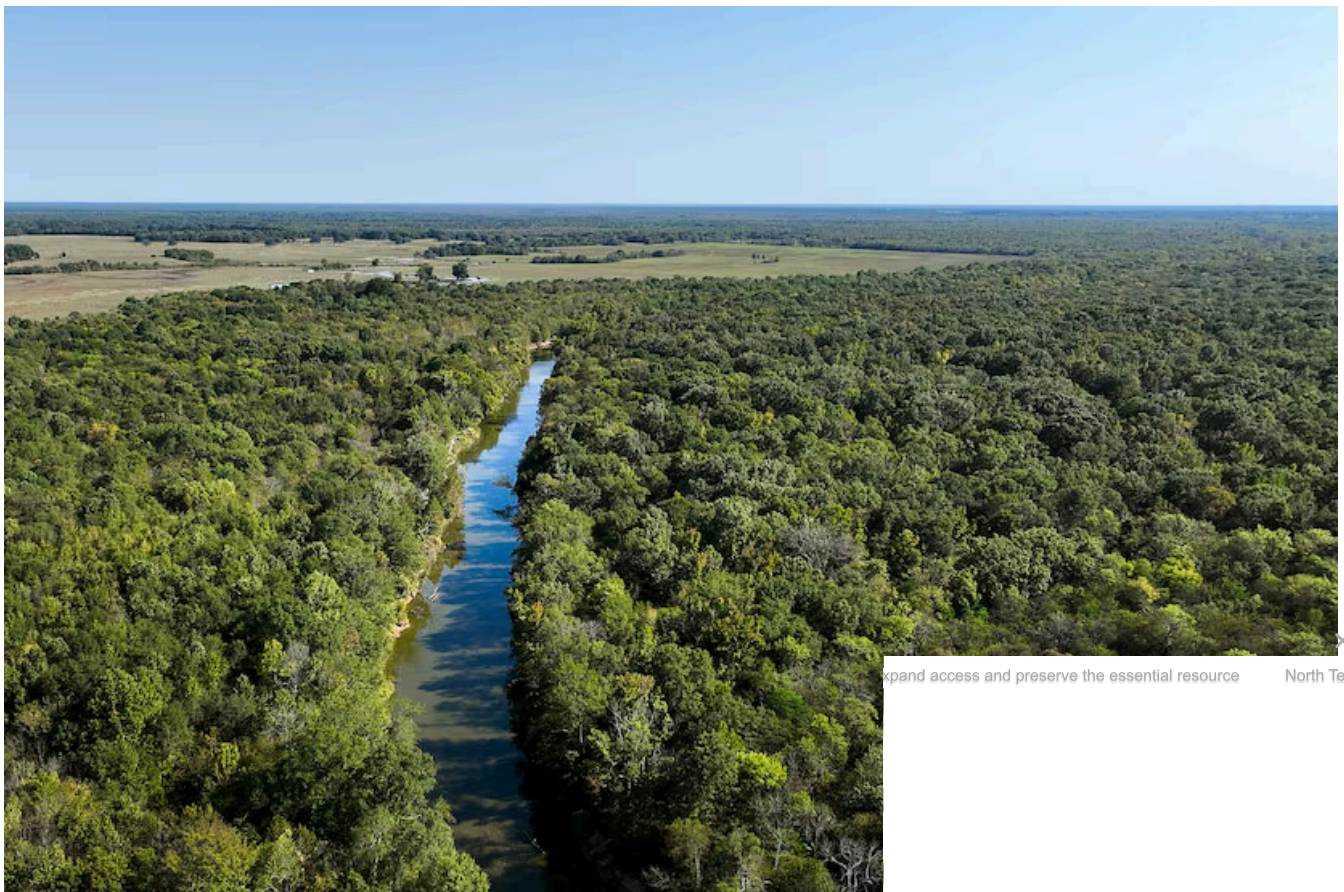
## Texas is trying to avoid a water crisis. How does Dallas-Fort Worth factor into the plans?

Nearly 9 in 10 Texans worry about a future water shortage, according to a recent survey.



By **Lana Ferguson**  
Energy and Natural Resources Reporter

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Cuthand Creek cuts through Bill & Joyce Wilson's 8,500-acre property in Red River County, Texas, on Monday, Oct. 14, 2024. Residents in the Sulphur River Basin will be impacted if the proposed Marvin Nichols Reservoir in northeast Texas is built.

SMILEY N. POOL / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



**Update:**

For more stories on the Future of North Texas, visit [dallasnews.com/futurentx](https://dallasnews.com/futurentx).

Water is becoming a [scarce resource as Texas](#) continues to grow, and it's prompting concerns among state officials and industry leaders over what happens when the next drought occurs.

The regional economy is expanding, but growth trends are beginning to collide with stark realities about natural resources that are already strained.

The state's [existing water supplies](#) are being depleted by overuse, persistent dry weather, rising temperatures for extended amounts of time, aging infrastructure and water-reliant technology like data centers.

***For more on the Future of North Texas initiative, visit [dallasnews.com/futurentx](https://dallasnews.com/futurentx)***

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Ahead of the 89th legislative session, state leaders agreed action must be taken — a support the growth of residents and businesses in the Lone Star State. If nothing is flowing within the next few decades.

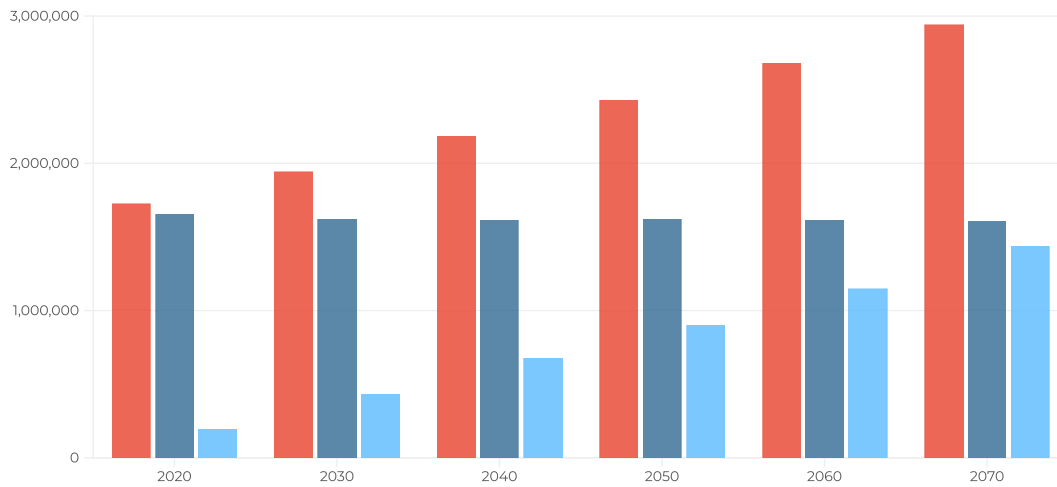
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## Projected DFW water demands and supply, 2020 to 2070

Water demands are outpacing supply, leading to a chronic water shortage as North Texas grows and existing supplies remain constant. Region C covers the counties of Collin, Cooke, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, Freestone, Fannin, Grayson, Jack, Kaufman, Navarro, Parker, Rockwall, Tarrant, Wise and part of Henderson.

In acre-feet: Demands Existing supplies Strategy supplies



SOURCE: 2022 Texas State Water Plan, Region C Regional Water Planning Area - Strategy supplies for water management cover infrastructure upgrades, conservation efforts, water reuse, and the development of other water sources through desalination and new major reservoirs  
 GRAPHIC: Alison Saldanha

The Dallas Morning News

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Legislators responded to Gov. Greg Abbott’s call for a “Texas-sized” investment in water by passing a constitutional amendment that would allot \$1 billion a year from 2027 to 2047 to the recently established Texas Water Fund. Half the funding would be designated toward creating new water supplies while the other half could be used on infrastructure needs.

Texas voters will have final approval of the amendment in November.

Dean Minchillo, a program specialist with Texas Water Resources Institute’s Urban Water team at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Dallas, said this funding, paired with water planning, plays a large role in being prepared for “the next worst drought.”

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A cyclist rides on a trail along the Trinity River near downtown Fort Worth, Wednesday, March 26, 2025.

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“Even though our lakes are full [in North Texas], we really can’t take our foot off the gas,” Minchillo said. “We still have to be cognizant because it’s not a matter of when but a matter of, ‘How bad is it going to be?’”

## Hydrating the “Texas miracle”

[Texas 2036](#), a nonprofit public policy group, surveyed about 1,000 Lone Star State respondents lived in Dallas-Fort Worth. expand access and preserve the essential resource

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The results showed about 85% of participants were worried Texas could face a future they supported the state investing in a long-term water funding strategy that would

**Water, the stuff of life: North Texas' efforts to expand access and preserv**



During the legislative session, Jeremy Mazur, Texas 2036’s director of infrastructure and natural resources policy, told *The Dallas Morning News*, the state has to not only invest in reliable water infrastructure but also establish a dedicated, long-term revenue stream to support those projects.

“We can’t have the Texas economic miracle if we don’t have reliable water infrastructure,” he said, nodding to the potential loss of money if industries that depend on water — like agriculture and energy production — can’t access it.

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Who is consuming the water, and how, is also changing with the state’s rapid urban

For decades, agriculture has been the largest water consumer. However, municipal 2060, according to the Texas Water Development Board’s 2022 State Water Plan.

Total water needs are projected to increase by 120% in the next 50 years, with nearly half of it being associated with municipal users in 2070, officials wrote. The state is expected to balloon to 51.5 million people by then.

Of the water board's 16 regional groups, jurisdictions that include Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston will account for where roughly half of the entire state's population growth is expected to occur in that timeframe.

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Bois d'Arc Lake is filling quickly and as expected, North Texas Municipal Water District said. Construction of the lake's dam and surrounding offices are taking place and the lake is planned to begin operating as a reservoir in 2022.



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## **“We need to keep talking about it”**

Providing safe and reliable drinking water, while managing wastewater treatment a Texans, is a large undertaking shared by multiple agencies.

Major water suppliers include Dallas Water Utilities, North Texas Municipal Water District, each serving more than 2 million people.

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Trinity River Authority and Upper Trinity Regional Water District also distribute water to hundreds of thousands of customers.

The agencies face a challenge not only to provide water to their growing customer bases but also to do it in an economical way that keeps bills affordable.

“Water is important and I’m glad everyone is talking about it,” Dallas Water Utilities director Sarah Standifer said. “We need to keep talking about it.”

Creating additional resources of water will be important, but so is utilizing and taking care of the resources already available in the city’s supply, Standifer adds.

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That’s why the agency has taken steps to bolster conservation, like investing in technology for a leak detection system, which can locate hidden and hard-to-find leaks to get them repaired faster.

Also, officials have implemented time of day irrigation restrictions within the city, and a “new throne for your home” program that offers high-efficiency toilets to replace up to two old ones at no cost, in order to use less water with each flush.

Standifer said if people can turn their faucets on without worrying whether water will come out, “we’re doing our job right,” but added that community outreach and education plays a critical role in conservation.



Bob Fulton, left, Fall Brook HOA landscape director, and Quintarus Thomas, an Upper Trinity Regional Water District irrigation specialist, review the program, or schedule, for the neighborhood's automatic irrigation system on July 21, 2025, in Flower Mound. Thomas recommended the neighborhood water multiple times on a single program to prevent runoff into the street.

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Dan Buhman, general manager and 10-plus year veteran of the Tarrant Regional Water District, became chairman of the Texas Water Development Board's Region C Water Planning Group this spring.

Buhman said he's noticed the way the industry thinks about water has gradually transitioned to more emphasis on conservation and reuse.

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"It's not to say those things weren't important before but certainly they have grown sure has become the most significant new focus."

Buhman said the district tries to be a conservation leader however they can. Last year, the district conserved 1.5 billion gallons of water — about 20% of the municipal supply — something he credits to efficient irrigation.

And on the reuse side, the agency already has 2,000 acres of constructed wetlands with an additional 3,000 being built. It's also working on the first aquifer storage project in North Texas.

"We're trying to extend our existing supplies as much as possible and be good stewards of what we have," Buhman said.

### Looking to the future now



A dump truck drives through a channel redirecting the North Sulphur River to pass between the unfinished spillway at the future Lake Ralph Hall on Aug. 7, 2025, in Fannin County. Once the dam is complete, the spillway will release overflow water back into the higher than the underground pipes that will utilizing gravity to supply a nearby pump station with water. [xpand access and preserve the essential resource](#) [North Tex](#)

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As legislators worked to secure funding solutions to guarantee water supplies availability to all Texans, water officials across the state analyzed and drafted their latest plans.

The Texas Water Development Board's State Water Plan, which uses the "drought of record" for planning, is updated every five years. The next one is slated for 2027.

Right now, the board's 16 regional groups are reviewing their plans — also done every half decade. The regional plans are published a year ahead of the statewide plan in order to help inform it.

Region C's jurisdiction contains all or part of 16 North Texas counties, including Collin, Dallas, Denton, Ellis and Tarrant.

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By 2080, Region C planners predict nearly 40% of the water supply will be already available to the region, in addition to 10% from connection of existing supplies. Another 33% of the region's water will be obtained from conservation and reuse.

However, that leaves a 20% gap in demand.

Tapping into new water sources, such as constructing new reservoirs and run-of-river projects, could fulfill the projected needs, according to experts.

Texas 2036's Mazur said there's no better time than now to invest in expanding the water supply portfolio and support residential and economic growth.

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“Texas needs to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps,” he said.

*This reporting is part of the [Future of North Texas](#), a community-funded journalism initiative supported by the Commit Partnership, Communities Foundation of Texas, The Dallas Foundation, the Dallas Mavericks, the Dallas Regional Chamber, Deedie Rose, the McCune-Losinger Family Fund, The Meadows Foundation, the Perot Foundation, the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas and the University of Texas at Dallas. The News retains full editorial control of this coverage.*

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By [Lana Ferguson](#)

Lana Ferguson covers energy and natural resources for the business team. She joined The Dallas Morning News in 2022 after a stint in South Carolina's Lowcountry. The Virginia native graduated from the University of Mississippi with a degree in journalism and Southern studies. Her work has taken her all over the U.S., southern Africa and Sri Lanka.

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