

NEWS // TEXAS HILL COUNTRY

Hill Country city looks to tap a new water source: its own sewage

Kerrville wants to put some of its treated effluent back into the Guadalupe River, then pick it up, treat it again and use it for drinking water.

By **Liz Teitz**, Staff Writer

April 3, 2026



The Guadalupe River flows through Kerrville in this photo to release treated wastewater into the river, then recapture it, treat it again and put it back into the city's

water supply.

Sam Owens/San Antonio Express-News



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Hill Country city looks to tap a new water source: its own sewage

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Facing ongoing drought and increasing demand, the city of Kerrville is looking to shore up its water supply by reusing something it already has: treated wastewater.

The city is pursuing a plan that calls for releasing effluent from treated sewage into the Guadalupe River — one of the city's main water up again, treating it again and using it

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The Kerrville City Council has approved a contract for initial design work, and is planning to apply for grant funding for the project this year, officials said recently.

The goal, former public works executive director Stuart Barron told the council, is to increase the use of water the city already has, “to take another bite at the apple at using that water again.”

'The most reliable water'

One of Kerrville’s primary water sources is the Guadalupe River, which starts in Kerr County upstream of the city. The city picks up water through an intake in Nimitz Lake, then treats it to make it safe to drink and provides it to customers.

The city also has groundwater wells and an aquifer storage and recovery facility, where treated river water is injected underground and stored until it’s needed.

But the city is growing — it has about 25,000 according to U.S. Census Bureau data — and drought has also reduced river flows to far be of some of the city’s river water rights.



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Barron told council members in December that for two decades, “they’ve been tasking me with finding new water for the city.”

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“There’s not a lot,” he said. “There’s almost no water out there that’s available, especially during the times of drought.” Barron retired in February after 21 years working for the city.

"Reuse water," sometimes also called "reclaimed water" is “probably the most reliable water we have, because the city already owns it,” Barron said. “As long as we’re generating water, we’re going to have reuse water.”

The city already reuses some of that treated wastewater for irrigation, and discharges some of it to the Guadalupe River from Third Creek, which enters the river near Flat Rock Park. ✕

The city's wastewater treatment plant uses t
raw sewage into sludge, which goes to a lanc
meet standards set by the Texas Commission
be released. The city has been working to upc

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and council members voted recently to approve design work for replacing the filter system there.

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Kerrville hired engineering firm HDR in 2018 to complete a long-term water supply plan. Last year it asked the company to update the plans and projections for some of the strategies identified in the earlier document: a remote well field, indirect reuse and direct reuse — a process in which treated wastewater is put directly back into the drinking water system without any intermediate steps.

HDR identified the indirect reuse strategy as the most cost-efficient and reliable, and last week, city council members voted to spend \$373,490 for 6S Engineering Inc. to design a pump station and water line for the proposed project.

Kerrville currently has a pond for storing treated wastewater at the Kerrville Sports ✕
Complex. The new project proposes building a creek at Guadalupe
Creek Park. There, it would be discharged into the creek. At a certain
time. The creek would then flow into the Guadalupe Creek
city's water treatment plant.

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The full project is expected to cost \$3.1 million and provide 560 acre-feet of water, according to HDR's December presentation. An acre-foot is the amount of water needed to cover one acre in one foot of water, and is a common metric used in the water industry. One acre-foot is about 326,000 gallons; Kerrville's project is expected to provide about 182.5 million gallons per year, or a half million gallons per day.

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In March, Kerrville distributed an average of 3.5 million gallons per day to customers, according to data from the city.

The 2018 report said the city had rights to a total of 6,051 acre-feet per year of surface water from the Guadalupe River, but that "the city's surface water supplies are often unreliable" due to drought and other downstream water rights, which limit the city's ability to use much of that water.



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Sorting through red tape

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Kerrville City Council members voted unanimously to approve the pipeline design contract, which is the first step in the process.

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Kyle Burrow, Kerrville’s director of engineering, said the city will submit a grant application in July for the project, so the goal is to have it “as shovel-ready as we can” by then. He didn’t provide details about that grant funding, but a city spokeswoman said Kerrville is seeking money from the Texas Water Development Board for the project. That application will also include the filter replacement project, Burrow said.

HDR’s Charley Burton told the council that the project would also require amending the city’s existing permit to discharge wastewater to add the new Elm Creek discharge, in addition to the existing site.

The firm also recommended applying to the TCEO for a “bed and banks permit.” which would allow the city to use the river to meet the discharge requirement, but it would help ensure the city met the TCEO’s discharge requirement, Burrow said.



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“The city can technically discharge that into the river,” he told the council. But once it enters the river, it becomes

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state water, and is subject to the rules that govern water rights. In a severe drought, someone downstream with older water rights could call on that water, claiming the city's reuse water that it has put into the Guadalupe, he said.

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A bed and banks permit, however, essentially “tags that water as the city’s even after it’s discharged,” he said, so the city would be able to divert it on top of its existing permitted water — essentially increasing the amount of the city’s supply, rather than just making the existing supply more reliable.

Burton said both the amended discharge permit and the new bed and banks permit are expected to be “easy to obtain.”

Burrow said the city will work with another engineering firm on the new permit application, a process that will happen “in parallel” with the desian work. ✕

Potential opposition

The city’s plan to reuse treated wastewater effluent is often controversial in the Hill Count

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around the region in recent years, both from property owners and residents along the discharge route and others downstream.

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At the March meeting, two people criticized the council for not addressing the project publicly enough.

Herring agreed that more public discussion is needed, but he and the rest of the council were unanimously in support of the engineering contract.

“Our job is to choose the safest, most reliable and most responsible option available, and to do it in the open,” Herring said in a post on Facebook after the meeting. “That is what we have done here.”

Some pointed out that indirect potable reuse is already in use effectively elsewhere on the Guadalupe River — anywhere downstream treated effluent.

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The wastewater is "not going straight to the water plant, it's dumped in and mixed and diluted with everything else, which happens to everybody downstream," Council Member Kent McKinney said. "It's very similar to most all cities. Very few of us are at the head of the watershed, so to speak."

The effect for Kerrville would be the same if the towns of Ingram or Hunt, which are upstream of Kerrville, started putting their treated wastewater into the river, Burrow said.

"Right now Kerrville is fortunate, because we are the first in line with the river water," he said.

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“This is a great project for us to be doing, I think,” McKinney said. “It’s a good part of our conservation measures and water planning for the future, so this is a big step.”

April 3, 2026



Liz Teitz
REPORTER



Liz Teitz covers water and environment in San Antonio and the Hill Country for the Express-News. You can reach her at liz.teitz@express-news.net.



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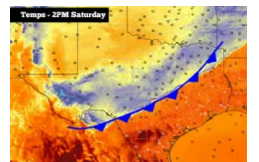
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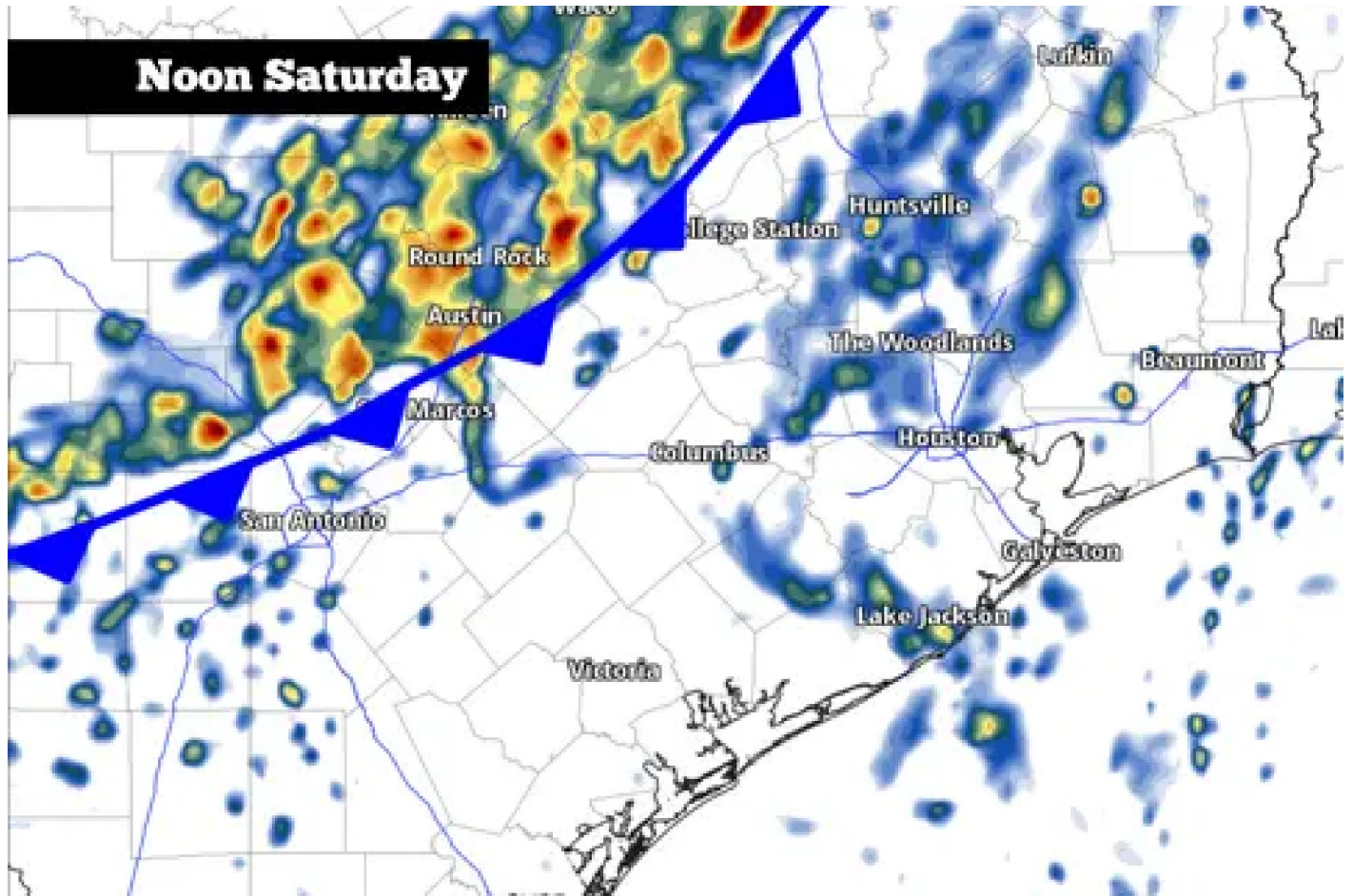
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Park officials blame a budget shortfall and "unforeseen challenges." The project had been in the works for years but had been repeatedly delayed.



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