

**LOCAL**

# City, county leaders prepare appeal over aquifer planning decisions

By **David Gomez Jr.**, Staff Writer

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Webb County Pct. 3 Commissioner John Galo on May 11, 2026, at the Webb County Courthouse.

Webb County officials discussed appealing actions taken by Groundwater Management Area 13, or GMA-13, arguing the regional planning body's recent decisions could limit Laredo's and Webb County's access to groundwater from the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer and potentially jeopardize future water planning and funding opportunities.

Commissioners received a report from Legacy Water Supply Corp. regarding actions taken by the Wintergarden Groundwater Conservation District and GMA-13 on April 22 involving the adoption of Desired Future Conditions and groundwater withdrawal models for the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer in Webb County.

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“We will be looking at all the legal angles that we can take to control our own destiny,” Webb County Precinct 3 Commissioner John Galo said Monday.

The county’s position follows a special City Council meeting held April 29, where city officials and representatives from Legacy Water Supply Corp. outlined concerns over groundwater allocations tied to Laredo’s proposed supplemental water project.

At the center of the dispute is a groundwater planning number assigned to Webb County through GMA-13, the regional group responsible for setting groundwater management goals for the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer.

County and city officials argue Webb County was assigned a planning figure of just 916 acre-feet of water annually — a number they describe as outdated and far below the region’s actual groundwater use and future needs. Officials contend the figure could ultimately restrict access to state water planning opportunities and low-cost funding tied to the proposed Legacy Water project.

During the April 29 city briefing, presentations showed Webb County and approximately 6,350 to 6,380 acre-feet tied to historical groundwater pun acre-feet connected to the proposed regional supplemental water project.

According to city presentations, the dispute intensified in April after the W Conservation District initially voted April 8 to support the larger allocation



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during a special called meeting April 16. GMA-13 later adopted the revised recommendation April 22.

Local officials and project representatives argued Webb County is at a disadvantage because it does not have its own groundwater conservation district representation within GMA-13, despite the decisions directly affecting local water planning.

“The city of Laredo, Webb County and Laredo ratepayers are not being treated fairly in the water planning process,” said David Earl, general counsel for Legacy Water Supply Corp., to city leaders. “The people who are making the decisions at the most local level are not doing their job correctly.”

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Earl said city and county officials were preparing legal action intended to preserve the region's rights, protect funding eligibility and challenge what they believe are unfair groundwater planning determinations.

Laredo City Manager Joe Neeb said the city intended to appeal the GMA-13 decision and could pursue emergency legal action, including a temporary restraining order, alongside Webb County if necessary.

“I think with the GMA-13, we are going to appeal the decision that was made, and then we will work with Webb County as far as a temporary restraining order, if that's what it takes, in order to get our voices heard,” Neeb said.

Presentations shown during the city briefing outlined several possible legal avenues, including administrative appeals, records requests, statutory challenges and potential claims involving private property rights and “takings” impacts under state law.



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Officials repeatedly stressed the discussions are not tied to an immediate water emergency but rather to long-term water diversification and planning.

Laredo currently relies entirely on the Rio Grande for its public water supply. City officials said the proposed Legacy project would serve as a supplemental groundwater source during drought conditions, population growth and periods of increased water demand.

Also during the April 29 briefing, Neeb said groundwater from the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer would likely represent the closest and least expensive diversification option available to the city.

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“If we can’t get the quantity up, then it will cost us more because we have to go farther away in order to pump it in farther to get that secondary water system,” Neeb said.

While city presentations repeatedly referenced possible long-term impacts on future water rates and taxpayer costs, officials emphasized the Council's actions did not approve final rates, financing or bond packages. Instead, officials described the actions as efforts to preserve funding opportunities through the Texas Water Development Board and other state and federal programs while legal and administrative disputes continue. ✕

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