

Issues for the Inter-Regional Planning Council

The accuracy of the water demand projections based on population projections in many rural counties, especially in the Texas Hill Country is becoming increasingly questionable.

The current methodology uses census data as the primary mechanism for determining rural population, hence, water demand. The problem is that in many rural counties, the census data does not reflect the water demand that these rural counties are experiencing. The reason for this disconnects can be summarized as follows:

1. Absentee ownership. The census data accounts for this demand at the official residence of the landowner that is often not on the subject property, most likely a metropolitan area. Recent years have seen an explosion of land fragmentation in the Hill country and across the State. Common sense dictates that there is some type of structure on these properties that are used by people. Yet the population projections do not account for this water demand unless this property becomes the person's primary residence. This population primarily uses individual private wells for their water supply and the demand is not captured by municipal or public water systems.
2. Transient population. The census data does not capture the transient population in these counties. In the Hill Country this population is largely made up of hunters and summer visitors. During certain months the entire county population is exceeded by the transient population. This population primarily uses individual private wells for their water supply and the demand is not captured by municipal or public water systems.

Three examples:

- A. Real County. During the summer months the Frio River draws thousands of visitors. The majority, if not all, of this demand is not captured under the census data. Yet, the water demand impact is significant.
- B. Edwards County. During hunting season thousands of hunters descend on Edwards County, the Hill Country and many rural counties around the State. These hunters and hunting camps are not included in census data. However, the water demand is significant in proportion to the actual resident population.
- C. Summer camps. The same situation occurs with the numerous youth and adult camps that are present throughout the Hill Country and other areas of the State.

The planning process allows entities to provide additional information to revise the water demand for the planning horizon. However, many of these small rural entities do not have the financial resources or time to accomplish this task. This has become especially frustrating since this information has been ignored during the planning process, since during every five year planning cycle these entities are tasked with the same problem and the issue of absentee land ownership and transient population must be readdressed.