

## Praying for Rain in San Antonio, Texas

When we think of the human right to water we often picture poor, agri-dependent communities in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet right here in Texas we live with the challenge of persistent drought and the human right to safe, accessible and adequate water is something we never take for granted. Too often, we awake to promising skies in the morning and pray for rain yet receive only a light shower or mist by days end. And the changing climate with more extreme weather patterns is certain to only exacerbate our water anxieties in the future.

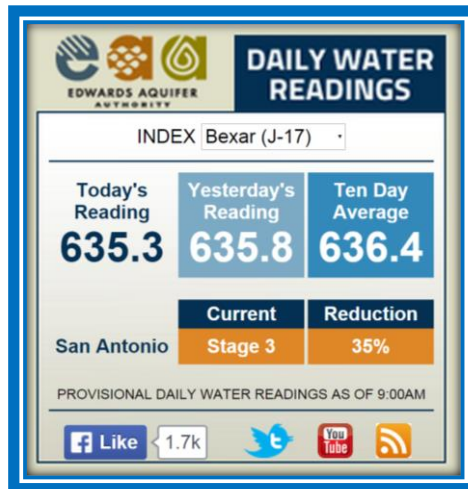
We Texans have lived through droughts before, but currently Texas is experiencing one of the five worst droughts in 500 years with 59% of the state in moderate to exceptional drought conditions. Some of us experienced severe drought in the fifties and remember only brown lawns. Today, driving along San Antonio streets rimmed by luxurious green lawns one could easily be in denial about the realities of the water shortage, but this is only a reflection of our misplaced priorities and a camouflage of the very real inequities of the water distribution system. The human right to water it seems, is protected for some more than others.



One of the realities of living through this drought is how local authorities “manage” information about our existing water supply. Our local water system has been praised for its conservation approach yet weekly lawn watering is still being permitted. Local officials fear that announcing a water shortage might dissuade businesses from relocating here.

The lack of rain and water levels are an integral part of the daily conversation in San Antonio. Readings at the Edwards Aquifer J-17 test well are announced on daily newscasts and appear in our local newspaper:

December 8, 2014:



[http://weather.mysanantonio.com/US/TX/San\\_Antonio.html](http://weather.mysanantonio.com/US/TX/San_Antonio.html)

Data below highlights “first-time” realities as outlined on the Edwards Aquifer website:

- J-17 starts year at lowest level since the 1950s ... at just above 640’ **(January 2014)**. The lowest reading ever recorded was August 1956 at 612.9’. Four of the last eight summers were both hotter and drier than the worst of the 1950s drought.
- The EAA (Edwards Aquifer Authority) declares Stage IV water restrictions for the first time ever **(August 2014)**. These restrictions require pumpers (cities, businesses) to reduce water usage by up to 40% of normal levels.
- J-17 level triggers first-ever implementation of the Voluntary Irrigation Suspension Program for 2015 **(October 2014)**. This program compensates farmers to suspend agricultural irrigation.

One of the more controversial solutions being proposed to address the water shortage in the San Antonio area is the creation of a pipeline which would bring groundwater from “water rich” counties



142 miles away. One reason given to support this proposal is the projected growth in San Antonio’s population expected to increase by 1 million people in the next 25 years. In the pipeline deal, private companies will be responsible for financing and building the pipeline as well as pumping the water. These private companies, some of them oil and gas companies with multiple fracking operations requiring large water supplies, have leased water rights from landholders in water rich areas.

We are concerned that the pipeline will favor private sector consumption and that the cost of its construction will be passed on to the public in the form of dramatically increased water bills.

In our work as shareholder advocates for improved corporate water stewardship we recommend the following three key best practices to ensure the human right to water is protected for all:

- ***Plant citing/Community impact: Report on how the corporation ensures that it is accountable for its environmental impacts, including water consumption and impacts, in all of the communities where it operates.***
- ***Does the company conduct Human Rights Risk Assessments of their business and publically disclose results including the social impacts related to safeguarding the human right to water.***
- ***Development of a comprehensive Human Right to Water policy articulating the company’s respect for and commitment to the Human Right to Water which addresses potability, supply, physical accessibility and affordability of water***

We believe there are likely better solutions than the proposed pipeline to San Antonio's persistent water shortages including enforcing greater conservation and a smart urban development plan that would enable aquifer regeneration and encourage the use of reservoirs. Paramount in researching water plans for our city must be a focus on finding equitable solutions that put the human right to water for citizens first, and that reasonably measure and limit corporate water use. We believe that ethical corporations can and should help find and fund these solutions and that the drought in the Southwest is a test case for enlightened self-interest for these forward-thinking companies.

In the meantime, we will continue to look to the skies every morning and pray for rain.

Anna Falkenberg and Sr. Susan Mika

Socially Responsible Investment Coalition

12/10/14, San Antonio, Texas