

1996 Texas Water Monitoring Congress



Water is becoming an ever more critical resource in Texas affecting the public, ecological, and economic health and well being of the State. Events such as the drought of 1996 have focused attention on efforts to monitor water conditions, the effectiveness of these efforts, and how well the information is presented and distributed. A group of water-resource professionals from local, State, and Federal agencies gathered in late 1995 to address the problems of data collection and dissemination and to find ways to work more efficiently together to improve the usefulness of water information in Texas. This group laid the foundation for a larger gathering of water-resource professionals from across the State to (1) facilitate, standardize, and provide guidance to local, State, and Federal data-collection programs; (2) aid in the development of systematic collection and dissemination of water data; and, (3) build consensus on approaches and responses to future water data needs for Texas.

The 1996 Texas Water Monitoring Congress, a gathering of over 220 attendees, was held in Austin September 9-11. Keynote speakers from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Texas Water Development Board, Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas House Committee on Natural Resources, and the Houston-Galveston Area Council addressed water-resource challenges and the need for water data to make management decisions at the State level. Six workshops focused on major issues, and group leaders summarized results and recommendations for the entire Congress. Interaction among the participants was high and difficult topics were addressed.

Congress Sessions

The first day of the Water Monitoring Congress featured keynote speakers from some of the major agencies that collect water information in Texas. Elizabeth Fellows, USEPA, Washington, D.C., chairs the Intergovernmental Task Force on Monitoring Water Quality. She spoke on monitoring requirements for watersheds at various

interrelated geographic scales and interagency "performance partnerships" with measurable goals.

Craig Pedersen, Executive Administrator, Texas Water Development Board, Austin, carried a message from State leaders. The Board has been directed to improve data collection and dissemination. Key areas marked for improvement include identifying and implementing optimal data networks, increasing efficiencies and

Recommendations from the 1996 Texas Water Monitoring Congress are:

Coordinate water monitoring plans to eliminate redundancies, inefficiencies, and inadequacies in existing data programs by creating a Texas Water Monitoring Coordination Council.

Support adequate funding to coordinate and maintain data-collection programs, including those of the Clean Rivers Program, and supplemental funding for new mandates, including the proposed StratMap initiative.

Adopt and promote the principals and objectives of the Intergovernmental Task Force on Monitoring Water Quality (ITFM, 1995), including standard protocols for data collection, storage, analysis, and quality assurance.

Ensure continuous availability of water information coordinated by the Texas Natural Resources Information System (TNRIS); provide multiple outlets, including Internet links, for access to real-time and historical water data; and develop standard data storage and exchange formats that include metadata (data about data).

reducing costs, cooperating with others and leveraging resources, enhancing data dissemination and sharing, and promoting the importance and benefits of basic data.

Robert Hirsch, Chief Hydrologist, USGS, Reston, Va., spoke on the benefits and increased public awareness that integrated State and Federal water-resource programs can provide. He noted that the USGS has had, for over 100 years, cooperative partnerships with local, State, and Federal agencies to provide high-quality, scientifically sound and objective earth science information. Recently the USGS has actively pursued developing Internet

capabilities for the dissemination of, water information to governmental agencies and the public.

Carl Masterson, Houston-Galveston Area Council, Houston, presented a regional perspective on water-monitoring programs. The Council is an example of several local agencies, working together with State and Federal agencies, to use water data to make decisions for the benefit of a large metropolitan region.

Paul Robinson, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Houston, spoke on the value of historical and real-time water data in planning for floods and droughts and in mitigating their harmful effects.

Charles Dvorsky, Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission, Austin, presented an overview of the State's comprehensive water-quality monitoring effort, the Clean Rivers Program. The program was designed to be a continually improving process of identifying water-quality problems and identifying and testing solutions. He emphasized that water data based on good science are critical to this program.

Larry McKinney, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Austin, addressed the need for water information in the management of the State's natural resources. Texas Parks and Wildlife has recently emphasized studies on aquatic river systems with future emphasis on water quality in rivers that feed reservoirs and estuaries.

Brian Sledge, General Counsel, Texas House Committee on Natural Resources, Austin, concluded the first day's plenary session. He noted that recent events, such as the drought of 1996, have focused attention on the State's water supplies. With a growing population, the legislature will be faced with important decisions to meet the State's growing need for water. It is important to hear from water-resource professionals. Ideas on improvements, changes in existing law or proposing new laws, and other ways to meet the State's water needs are desired and appreciated.

The second day of the Congress consisted of concurrent workshop sessions to identify specific issues that are key to developing a systematic and integrated approach to the collection and use of water data. These sessions addressed:

- Current and future uses of hydrologic data
- Emerging technologies
- Data optimization
- Funding of data-collection programs

- Data management and sharing
- Quality assurance and quality control

On the third day of the Congress, the participants gathered in a plenary session to present findings and recommendations from the workshop sessions on the previous day. The major recommendations are presented above, and additional recommendations and details of workshop discussions are presented in individual session reports.

Detailed reports from the workshop sessions and a summary of the entire 1996 Texas Water Monitoring Congress can be found in the Proceedings and Summary Report. This report is available on the Internet at the address given below. Included in this report are listings of all participants, sponsors, and vendors.

Organizing Committee

Representatives from the following water-monitoring agencies comprised the steering committee that developed the concept and planned the 1996 Texas Water Monitoring Congress:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
U.S. Geological Survey
Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Texas Water Development Board
Brazos River Authority

Further Information

Information about the 1996 Texas Water Monitoring Congress, including the Proceedings and Summary Report, can be found at this Internet address:

<http://txwww.cr.usgs.gov/twxmc/>

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