

The resolution of San Angelo's water concerns, which are quite serious, took a monumental step forward when our community agreed to band together with Abilene and Midland to form the West Texas Water Partnership.

As my friends and colleagues Mayor Norm Archibald of Abilene and Mayor Jerry Morales of Midland said at yesterday's news conference at the McNease Convention Center, this vitally important partnership with our sister cities has set our community on a path toward resolving our water woes and ensuring an abundant supply of clean water for generations.

And as we are taking this step toward sustainability in full public view, we pledge that every phase of the planning process will be conducted in the open, subject to the bright light of public scrutiny and approval.

In short the West Texas Water Partnership coalition of Abilene, Midland and San Angelo is addressing the long-term water needs of our three communities and of the region.

San Angelo is already addressing its near-term needs with the development of the Hickory Aquifer. That groundwater source is scheduled to begin delivering up to 9 million gallons per day to San Angelo this fall.

But San Angelo must begin looking to the far horizon for its next water source. As partners in this joint endeavor, the leaders of our three cities will explore opportunities to maximize local water supplies, support conservation and develop new water sources to serve the needs of residents, businesses and industries in our region for the next 100 years.

This new venture represents a unique approach to water planning in our state. Nowhere else in Texas are cities combining resources to find a regional solution to future water demands. With the WTWP, we are setting an example for other communities to emulate, and that's exciting.

Of course, the people of Abilene, Midland and San Angelo are accustomed to dry conditions, and we have adapted to them. We have long been committed to a sensible approach of conserving water and using it efficiently. In fact, San Angeloans used 570 million fewer gallons in 2013 than we did in 2012; that represents an 11-percent decrease in consumption.

But the extreme drought of the past several years has strained our resources, and the West Texas oil boom that is reigniting our local economies has also ushered in a regional population explosion. If no water planning is done, projections show that by 2060, water deficits in our region will be massive.

With the West Texas Water Partnership, we are addressing those concerns head-on. We are researching every possibility to find sources of groundwater and surface water, and developing a plan and projects that benefit everyone.

Part of the solution may involve bringing more water to the region. By working together for the good of the region, we can eliminate the adverse effects that competing with each other for water would have on our three cities. Our alliance will allow for cost-sharing, increased water use efficiency and minimizing environmental impacts.

The West Texas Water Partnership is emphatically pro-conservation. All three of our cities have active, robust conservation and water reuse programs. However, conservation alone will not meet the water needs of our future. Combining conservation with the development of new water sources is the best way to ensure an adequate, long-term water supply.

Citizens of our three cities may rest assured this partnership is dedicated to full transparency and public input. Before selecting any water supply project, we will present proposals to our three cities' governing bodies – and to the public – and listen carefully to all input.

Before moving forward with a project, we will also evaluate it using several criteria, including affordability, environmental impact and the effects of the project on the state or community from

which the water is to be sourced. Our intent is to make sure the projects we pursue benefit all parties involved, or we will not do them.

The importance of this partnership to each of our communities and to our region, as a whole, simply cannot be overstated. With it, we reinforce our common bonds and underscore our roles as partners in our future. With it, we reinforce the foundation for a continuing vital regional economy and an excellent quality of life for all West Texans.

It only makes sense for all of us – city leaders and citizens alike – to join hands and work together in a venture so meaningful for this region. You will be hearing and reading a lot about the deliberations of the West Texas Water Partnership in the months and years to come. As your mayor and your neighbor, I invite you to be a part of the solutions we seek.

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