

San Antonio Water System Path to Resiliency

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The San Antonio Water System (SAWS) is one of the largest water utilities in the United States serving over 2.1 million people with almost 8,000 miles of water main. What has always made San Antonio special is the abundance of water from the Edward's Aquifer. It has made life possible in a semi-arid region. However, San Antonio recognized that dependence on a single source of water limited San Antonio's resiliency. Many attempts were made to diversify, but not until Judge Bunton ordered pumping limits on the Edwards Aquifer due to an endangered species was San Antonio forced to act.

The first thing SAWS did was implement an internationally renowned conservation program followed by the largest direct use recycle system in the U.S. In 2004 started up the Aquifer Storage and Recover Facility which allows SAWS to store water when rainfall is abundant for times of drought. Over the next 20 years SAWS continued to diversify its Water Resource portfolio. Today, SAWS has fourteen water supply projects from eight different sources.

Of course, at a water utility the challenges are never done. In February of 2021 SAWS along with the rest of Texas faced the challenges of Winter Storm Uri. As result of the impacts of Winter Storm Uri on the Texas Power grid and water utilities, the State Legislature passed Senate Bill 3, which requires water utilities to maintain water pressure during extended power outages. SAWS in partnership with CPS Energy, the electrical power provider for the San Antonio, will be placing generators at many of its facilities to ensure water service is provided during loss of power.

SAWS continues to plan for resiliency by developing a Wastewater Facilities Master Plan and an Energy Strategy Master Plan.

With the San Antonio to Austin mega region being one of the fastest growing areas in the United States with a current population of five million expected to grow to six million by 2030 water planning is never done. SAWS continue to plan for new water supplies considering the impact of climate change.