

NBU unveils comprehensive plan to meet growth-related water demands

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On Thursday, New Braunfels Utilities announced its 2018 water resource plan, a multi-year planning project aimed at reducing demand and securing additional sources of water needed for future growth.

The plan, presented during the regular board meeting at NBU's office on the plaza, outlines how NBU will secure future water sources over the next 20 years.

Right now, demand for NBU customers is just over 15,000 acre-feet per year (AFY). For reference, one AFY is enough water to supply four families comfortably for a year.

By 2040, annual demand will reach 28,500 AFY.

In the past few years, NBU has conducted studies to determine when it will need more water supplies. But CEO Ian Taylor said this new plan tells the utility where to get that supply from.

"Here is the plan to provide water for our community long term," Taylor said.

"There's a lot of folks that say we're going to run out of water. We're not going to run out of water."

To fill this gap, NBU is taking a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, NBU plans to use conservation to curb demand, while on the other hand, securing new sources of water.

Over the course of this water resource plan, NBU aims to reduce annual demand from the current 168 gallons per capita per day (gpcd) to 125 gpcd.

"Part of this plan is advancing our maintenance systems (and) advancing the use of data so that we can reduce water loss in our system," Trino Pedraza, director of water services, said. "We can find leaks faster. We can make better use of the production water that we have."

These conservation efforts will require increased leak detection and waste management from NBU, as well as the introduction of new policies for customers. Taylor mentioned smart customer portals with water habit reports and rates that increase with more water use.

He also pointed to higher conservation requirements placed on developers entering contracts with NBU.

"Conservation is the cheapest water supply," Taylor said.

The other prong of the water resource plan points to new sources of AFY. While NBU explored multiple options, three rose to the top.

Already under development is a Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority Mid Basin project, a contract with the GBRA to supply treated groundwater from a well field in Gonzales County.

Secondly, NBU plans to double the capacity of its existing surface water treatment plant, a facility located on Gruene Road. This will allow the utility to treat more water from its run-of-river source and the Canyon Reservoir.

"That emphasis on partnerships is changing and bringing water supply to us very quickly and very solidly," Al Kaufmann, chief operating officer, said. "We will likely

have all the water we need and more coming out of Canyon in the future to supply that surface water plant. ”

The plan also proposes growing the Trinity Aquifer project, adding four more wells and expanding a treatment plant currently under construction.

“The key piece is the mid basin project,” Taylor said, “and conservation.”

NBU officials expressed enthusiasm in the plan’s potential.

“I’m fired up,” Pedraza said. “This is exciting.”

NBU plans to give several public presentations this summer to educate the public about the details of their water resource plan.