

## **Water utilities can help Texas in a big way**

BY: JENNIFER WALKER AND RUTHIE REDMOND

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

DECEMBER 6, 2016

Ensuring Texas will have water to meet the needs of humans and wildlife is a huge challenge. Fortunately, we can all play a role in reaching that goal because conserving water is one of the cheapest and most effective tools we have to protect our water supplies.

Many Texas water utilities are now taking on this challenge and investing in conservation in a big way, thanks to low-interest loans made available through the State Water Implementation Fund for Texas (SWIFT) — a program created by the Texas Legislature and approved by voters in 2013.

The application period for the third round of SWIFT funding began Friday and is a cause for celebration. The Texas Living Waters Project, a coalition of conservation groups, applauds Texas water providers for investing in our future by going big on water conservation. Cities across Texas (Fort Worth, Austin, Bedford, Keller, Waco and others) have all been awarded SWIFT funds for conservation projects. These projects will save millions of gallons of water, and save Texans money. Now is the time for more Texas utilities to do the same.

Conserving water makes sense because it prevents or delays the need to build and maintain more expensive infrastructure to procure water supplies. Saving water also means saving money for homeowners and utilities, as well as benefiting the fish and shellfish that depend on fresh water flowing in our rivers and into our bays.

During the first round of SWIFT funding in 2015, only 5 percent of awarded funds were for water conservation. However, the number of utilities applying for conservation funds is quickly growing. Kathleen Jackson of the Texas Water Development Board (the state's water planning and financing agency) states that in the most recent funding cycle, "more than 35 percent of the total funds requested were for conservation and reuse projects." We hope even more utilities will take advantage of the low-interest loans available for conservation by getting started on their application today.

The Texas Water Development Board is doing its part by working with utilities and applicants to guide them through the SWIFT funding process. We are also playing a key role in helping utilities understand the SWIFT application process and evaluate the benefits of using this fund to save water in their communities. We have organized SWIFT funding workshops around the state that bring water utility managers and policymakers together so that everyone understands the SWIFT funding process. In addition, we have also created a guidance document for small and medium-sized utilities that serves as a step-by-step guide for the SWIFT application process. That document is available on our website.

For Texas to have enough water to meet the future needs of both people and the environment, we need to use our existing supplies as efficiently and responsibly as possible. Keeping water conservation projects at the forefront of our planning process is a vital first step for ensuring abundant water for both humans and wildlife.

SWIFT funding is an example of the can-do spirit that Texas is known for. Our hat's off to a real Texas success story.

Walker is the Water Resources Program Manager and Ruthie Redmond is the Water Resources Specialist for the Sierra Club's Lone Star Chapter. The Texas Living Waters Project is a collaborative project of the Sierra Club' Lone Star Chapter, National Wildlife Federation and Galveston Bay Foundation. For more information, go to: <http://texaslivingwaters.org/issue-papers-and-publications/>

**FAIR USE NOTICE** This document contains copyrighted material whose use has not been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. The Texas Living Waters Project, which is a nonprofit undertaking, is making this article available in our efforts to promote comprehensive water planning in Texas. We believe that this constitutes a "fair use" of the copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law. If you wish to use this copyrighted material for purposes of your own that go beyond "fair use", you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.