



TEXAS CENTER FOR POLICY STUDIES

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Contact: Cyrus Reed

512-474-0811

NEW REPORT FINDS LITTLE BUDGET TO SCRUB, BUT VAST UNMET NEEDS TO CLEAN AIR, PURCHASE PARK SPACE AND CONSERVE WATER

As the budget picture for next year's legislative session continues to deteriorate, a new report released today finds serious inadequacies in funding at the state's main natural resource agencies, directly impacting Texans' quality of life. The report is the latest in a series of findings by *The Real Budget Project*, a coalition of non-profit organizations studying state spending for education, the environment and other key services.

"Like many basic public services in Texas, environmental protection and public recreation are not receiving adequate funding," noted Cyrus Reed of the Texas Center for Policy Studies, a non-partisan policy and research organization. "In practical terms, this means big polluters are less likely to get caught and punished. It means scarcer water, dirtier air, and more crowded parks. It means anglers had better think twice before they eat the fish they catch in Texas lakes."

The report detailing inadequate funding at the natural resource agencies is just the "tip of the iceberg," said Valerie Benavidez of ProTex, co-coordinator of the *Real Budget Project*. The group will release a full report on the state budget in November.

Tuesday, the *Real Budget Project* released findings on the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (formerly known as TNRCC), the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Water Development Board. According to Benavidez, , the findings illustrate the Texas Legislature's practice of "myth-based budgeting" in which we "pretend we adequately monitor our rivers, enforce clean air laws, and run our park system."

Carolie Mullan, President of the League of Women Voters of Texas stated that the three agencies detailed in the report make up only about one and a half percent of the budget, but are especially important because they prevent much higher costs from occurring in other areas, like public health.

"Every two years, the Legislative Budget Board, Governor's Office and then the Legislature develop a new budget for these agencies, knowing that it will be inadequate to meet the vast needs of the state for clean water, air and accessible parkland," noted Mullan. "And yet when we don't adequately fund these programs, this state sees higher public health costs, lost wages, and lost school days, as well as the loss of our natural heritage."

Among the reports major findings:

- Texas inspects only about two-thirds of its public water systems and one-third of its large agricultural facilities each year, and monitors only about a third of its rivers and streams for basic water quality standards every five years. Water monitoring for toxics and fish tissue testing is practically non-existent. At the same time, reduced inspections and monitoring has been matched by reductions in the average penalties assessed and collected from environmental violators, directly impacting Texan's quality of life;.
- The Legislature created the Texas Emissions Reduction Plan (TERP) in 2001 to clean up the polluted air in Dallas, Houston and other major cities, but the plan is so underfunded the state still isn't meeting federal clean air standards. Because the program has not received enough funding, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality will need an estimated \$136 million each year in FY 2004 and 2005 to meet tough clean air standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency;
- The main regulatory Clean Air Program, "Title V", which permits, monitors and enforces major industrial sources of air pollution, will not be able to generate the funds it needs to meet EPA requirements in FY 2004 and 2005, without changes in the Air Emissions Fee.
- Last year voters approved \$100 million in bonds to repair long-neglected parks, but now there isn't enough money to staff them.
- Texas continues to lag behind other states in the amount of local and state parks, and has no funding to purchase new parkland.
- The current amount of grant funding available for regional water planning groups is paltry, particularly for water conservation planning and environmental studies, even though many areas of the state are facing drought conditions and do not know how to meet their water needs

Reed said it is imperative that candidates for state office and the legislature come up with solutions to increase funding for important programs, such as TERP, instead of ignoring problems. "If we don't find ways to fund TERP, our state implementation plans for clean air won't be approved by EPA and as punishment they will take away highway funding," noted Reed. "But more importantly, our air will continue to poison our children, and we will be paying higher health care costs as well."

He also noted that while the state's water plan states that regional water planning groups have identified over \$17 billion in future water supply and infrastructure needs, TWDB's current budget – as well as its proposed -- doesn't provide much money to study what is a far cheaper solution to the looming water crisis: conservation.

"If we just increased grants and loans for water conservation planning and implementation, we could delay or even prevent the need for these larger, more expensive, projects, such as pipelines and reservoirs," Reed explained.

A copy of the report can be accessed on-line at www.texascenter.org.

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