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Which Way?

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"Would you tell me, please which way I ought to walk from here?"
"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.
"I don't much care where -" said Alice.
"Then it doesn't matter which way you walk," said the Cat.*

For the third time in a dozen years, Texas voters have rejected a plan to finance water projects on a statewide scale. We rejected, by only 6,000 votes, a $3.5 billion bond issue in 1969 to fund the Texas Water Plan. We resoundingly defeated a more modest request for $400 million in bonds in 1976 by almost 300,000 votes. Then last month we convincingly voted down a constitutional amendment which would have funded water development through a Water Trust Fund.

We have voted in the past to loan state funds up to $400 million for local water projects around the state. More than $100 million of these funds are not marketable at the present time, however, because of the interest ceiling we imposed upon them.

So here we are, much like Alice, seemingly not much caring where it is we "want to get to."

. . . . .The Queen kept crying, "Faster! Faster.!'' but Alice felt she could not go faster, though she had no breath left to say: so. . .
Just as Alice was getting quite exhausted, they stopped, and she found herself sitting on the ground, breathless and giddy . . .
Alice looked round her in great surprise. "Why, I do believe we've been under thus tree the whole time! tune! Everything's just as it was!"
Of course it is," said the Queen. "What would you have it?"
"Well, in our country," said Alice, still panting a little, "you'd gnenerally get to somewhere else--if you ran very fast for a long time as we've been doing."

"A slow sort of country!'' said the Queen. "Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that."*

Alice might well have been in Wonderland, Texas, for most of Texas is growing at a breathless pace. Cities can't build water supply and treatment systems fast enough to meet the needs of the 1,000 new water consumers moving into the state every day. No sooner than a reservoir fills or treatment plant opens, than population or industrial growth demands more water.

If projections hold true, the population of Texas will have doubled in the 40 years between 1960 and 2000. Estimates of what it will cost to meet the water development needs of this mushrooming population for reservoirs, conveyance facilities, water treatment plants, sewage treatment projects and well fields are over $44 billion.

Communities throughout Texas face increasing problems in financing water treatment and distribution projects.

Most urban areas predict serious water supply shortages in the immediate future in the event of a drought. These include cities in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, North Central Texas and West Texas, and several cities in North and East Texas.

The pressures to keep up with water demand have already had their effects on the state:

- One-fourth of all natural springs in Texas no longer flow.
- Competition among different water consumers in many areas of the state--agricultural, industrial, and municipal--is intense.
- Land surface in certain coastal areas is actually sinking because too much groundwater has been pumped out from underneath it.
- Land values on the High Plains have decreased because groundwater has been removed faster than it could be replaced
- El Paso is so short of water that the city has sued New Mexico for the right to buy groundwater and transport it across the state line.
- Houston plans to spend a billion dollars on water in the eighties, just to keep up with population and industrial growth.

"Have you guessed the riddle yet?" the Hatter said, turning to Alice again.
"No, I give it up," Alice replied. "What's the answer?"
"I haven't the slightest idea," said the Hatter.
"Nor I," said the March Hare.
Alice sighed wearily. "I think you might do something better with the time," she said "than wasting it in asking riddles that have no answers."*

Water planners in Texas can certainly sympathize with Alice, for there are many unanswered riddles in water development. Looking for answers is, however, far from a waste of time. Seeking answers to Texas water problems may, in fact, be the most important way we can spend our time and money.

Water development riddles include how to develop, how to finance, how to manage, and how to protect our water resources. The following examples point out the necessity for you and for all Texans to continually seek answers to the multi-faceted water development riddles in this state.

Riddle: How should water development be financed?
We could let each area of the state "sink or swim" (pardon the pun), rather than appropriate state funds for water projects. Water supply and wastewater treatment have traditionally been local responsibilities, and many Texans feel that this is still the best way to handle water development issues.

We've relied heavily in the past upon federal water resource development programs for assistance in planning, design, construction, and financing of water resources projects. Federal aid to Texas during the past ten years for water development projects averaged over $100 million per year.

It is quite clear, however, that this situation will change in the immediate future. As a matter of fact, there have been no Congressional authorizations for new project starts in Texas since 1976; and there will be no new studies or construction starts in Texas in 1982.

"We're going to have to go it alone more than we have in the past," says Chairman Beecherl. With the federal government pulling back on water appropriations, Beecherl estimates that the state will need to finance projects totaling $28 to $30 billion in the next 20 years.

But opponents of plans to finance statewide water development say, "Let the water users--the cities, industries, and irrigators--pay for water development."

Riddle: Should we develop our water resources to meet future potential needs or meet needs as they become evident?
We can postpone any decision about water development and wait to see if, as predicted, there really will be a major drought or if there really will be 21 million Texans by the year 2000.

"Providing an adequate water supply well may be the most critical issue Texans face," according to Louis Beecherl, Jr., chairman of the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB). "Anticipated population growth coupled with the needs of industry, energy production, and agriculture will place ever greater demands upon our basic water supply," he says.

Beecherl predicts that Texas will exhaust its current water reservoirs by 1990 unless the state immediately begins construction projects to provide additional surface water. He points to 65 potential reservoir sites in the state which could add 4.3 million acre-feet per year to our present 11 million acre-feet of dependable surface water yield.

Since most large water projects take over 20 years from the time of conception to completion, Beecherl says it is essential that we begin development now so that Texans can have additional supplies by the turn of the century.

Critics of this "develop now, drink later," policy say that readily available water encourages more growth, more development, and more water use. "Learn to use what we have more wisely," they say, because we can't continue to offer cheap, abundant water.

Riddle: Who should pay for wastewater treatment facilities?
New and expanded waste treatment plants will constitute a major capital expenditure in Texas over the next 20 years.

Water quality protection planning has identified more than 2700 systems statewide which need new or renovated sewerage treatment facilities. These facilities, needed in order to meet quality standards prescribed by state and Federal law, will cost more than 11 billion dollars.

Because federal funding has been cut drastically in water quality enhancement programs, cities and other local units of government in Texas will have to bear the major cost of treatment expansion and renovations. Cities will need much more help from the state, according to Beecherl, to finance wastewater treatment improvements in the future.

Texas voters have authorized $200 million to help cities with wastewater treatment, but the six percent ceiling on interest has left almost half of the fund unused.

WHICH WAY?
How are you doing with answers to the riddles so far? Keep working at them. The future of our state depends upon how well we answer the water development questions facing us right now..

* Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland and Through The Looking Glass, Grosset & Dunlap (Kingsport, Tennessee: Kingsport Press, Inc., 1976), pp. 66, 177, 75