

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Regionalization in Presidio County

West Texas

BY THE NUMBERS

\$12.6M

Funding Secured

\$16M

Potential funds in outstanding applications

42

Projects proposed

39

Members in collaborative steering committee

9

Entities in collaboration

5

Years of capital improvement planned



Water needs in West Texas are great. The Regional Water Plan for the Far West Texas region expects a 7% increase in water demand by 2040 to meet a growing population. The local economy driven by agriculture and energy relies on a steady supply of water in a part of the state known for being hot and dry. Presidio County took a significant step in securing its water sustainability that will allow the region to maintain its place in the Texas economy, but also spur economic growth.

Nine entities in Presidio County are working together with Water Finance Exchange (WFX), in partnership with the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), to implement a regional approach to water supply and sustainability. By developing a multi-year capital improvement plan and a 39-member steering committee of local representatives to see it through, Presidio County is demonstrating how regionalization, conservation, and sustainability work together.

The Need

Presidio County, in the heart of West Texas, is faced with the dry conditions and worries of drought that affect the broader region. With a median household income of approximately \$25,000, Presidio County is one of the poorest counties in Texas. This rural, remote, and majority-Hispanic county of just under 7,000 residents has long been underserved, resulting in deteriorating infrastructure and outsized needs.

The absence of surface water sources and the sole reliance on Bolsons aquifer for its entire water supply amplify these concerns. Without adequate data and equipment for monitoring the aquifer, communities had no way of knowing how their daily activities impact their water supply or how enthusiastically they can encourage economic development. EDF is leading the push for data and monitoring, but simply knowing what water use and availability is only the first step. Recognizing that there is limited water available, communities in Presidio County need to communicate and collaborate on where and how that water is being used. WFX is helping foster that collaboration and drive the funding of critical water infrastructure projects, all while improving transparency for the residents.

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Across the nine entities in Presidio County, very few had the technical or administrative capacity to seek funding for their water systems. Trey Gerfers, chairman of the Presidio County Underground Water Conservation District, told the Big Bend Sentinel, “often this kind of funding is announced and there’s a deadline to apply for it, but in places like Presidio, Marfa and Presidio County we just don’t have the staff. We don’t have the capacity to understand those rules, understand all the ins and outs and apply for it.”

The Process

WFX worked closely with all nine entities in the county to identify and prioritize their water infrastructure needs. Communities listed the projects they felt would address their urgent and future needs, including new pipes, well replacement, data monitoring, flood control, first-time connections, and more. At the same time, WFX helped organize a steering committee made up of 39 representatives from communities across Presidio County to help prioritize all 42 proposed projects. The result was a multi-year capital improvement plan, collaboratively driven by local representatives, that provides a roadmap to addressing water infrastructure needs in the region.

WFX then worked with Presidio County to submit funding applications for all 42 projects through various programs at the Texas Water Development Board, including the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF), Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) and the Economically Distressed Areas Program (EDAP), and other federal funding programs. It’s unlikely that all 42 projects will get funded in the first year, but as some projects do receive funding, they can be removed from the priority list to make way for the next greatest need. Additionally, new projects can be added as new needs arise. “It’s a living document that creates a timeline for action with coordinated, blended funding opportunities and details the responsibility on the part of the communities and the steering committee”, said Rogelio Rodriguez, Director of the Texas Water Infrastructure Fund for WFX.

WFX further helped develop rate impact analyses for each project, which assess the expected increase in water rates if a project receives funding. Funding for projects will cover between 30 to 70 percent of the full cost, depending on the community and the funding program. That leaves a portion of the funding responsibility up to the local entity, likely resulting in an impact on local water rates.

This not only helps communities with their planning, but it also improves the transparency for utility customers, who can be made aware of possible rate increases well in advance.

The Outcome

As of March 2023, communities in Presidio County have preliminarily received \$12.6 million for project costs through the EDAP program. Of that amount, 70 percent is grant funding. That high percentage of project costs funded through these grants means a lower impact on water rates for residents. Funding announcements for the second round of the FY 2023 DWSRF are expected in March 2023, and they could total up to \$16 million with a significant portion being grant funding.

On the ground, many of those projects will result in Presidio County residents getting water connections for the first time. In Las Pampas, where residents were still visiting a water line in the center of town to fill a container for their household water needs, many now will be receiving water directly to their home.

The Presidio Municipal Development District is looking to build out water connections in their industrial park to attract new industries. In Marfa and the City of Presidio, providing reliable water to the municipal airports is another means to drive economic development in the region through sufficient water infrastructure.

Green infrastructure projects seek to ensure a sustainability of the water supply. Rain catchment systems will simultaneously reduce the reliance on groundwater while recharging Bolsons aquifer. Wetland restoration, tree planting, and the restoration of oxbow lakes and Alamito Creek will improve flood management in the region and further develop the wildlife and natural amenities that contribute to the region’s tourism economy.

The variety of projects driven by the concepts of sustainability and regionalization makes Presidio County a model for other communities seeking to holistically address their complex water resources needs.