

Introduction

DLPR has conducted research about water conservation messaging in order to identify common themes and best practices among water suppliers and other stakeholders in Bexar County and Texas Hill Country. We have identified the following steps that [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] Company should take in order to position itself as a responsible water supplier and to counter adverse messaging from the media and other stakeholders in the region.

1. Recommendations for [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] messaging around conservation

[CLIENT NAME REDACTED] should maintain a subpage on the website dedicated to conservation issues. This “Conservation” subpage should be directly linked to in the menu bar of the home page, between “About” and “Contact.” The new subpage should be populated with information about [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] conservation efforts and suggested best practices for customers. The page should be as well-designed with regard to user experience (UX) elements as the [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] landing page, and should be updated regularly with any new information.

A well-designed and thoughtfully curated conservation subpage will position [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] as a responsible water supplier to the community and serve to counter adversarial messaging from other stakeholders in the region, including the San Antonio Water System and the Trinity Glen Rose Groundwater Conservation District. This messaging about conservation is key to managing [CLIENT NAME REDACTED]’ reputation in the community.

The following elements should serve as the foundation for [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] messaging around conservation:

Ethic of conservation

Conservation is a shared responsibility among water suppliers, their customers, and the relevant governing authorities in the region.

- [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] is committed to developing a long-term water supply plan for the Middle Trinity Aquifer/region, based on third-party data and expert studies.
- [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] will work closely with its customers, including commercial counterparties and residential communities, to educate and provide the resources necessary for these customers to reduce water waste.
- [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] customers play an important role in contributing to the long-term health of the Trinity Aquifer, and [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] is a partner in those efforts.
- [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] is committed to conservation and has a track record of working with others to develop sustainable water supply plans.
- [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] will prioritize conservation and sustainability in its negotiations and agreements with developers and other potential customers.

Data

[CLIENT NAME REDACTED] is undertaking extensive efforts to understand the amount of water available for use from the Trinity Aquifer, and has partnered with third-party experts to evaluate the impact that pumping from additional wells will have on the Aquifer. This has been done with the goal of providing a sustainable amount of water to meet the needs of a fast-growing region.

- Breakdown of data
 - Water available
 - Amount planned for pumping

Drought Contingency Plan

[CLIENT NAME REDACTED] should post a Drought Contingency Plan (either the same one submitted to the TCEQ, or a modified version) on the website with detailed information about what will happen to service in the event of a drought.

This section should also contain information about current conditions, perhaps a banner across the top that updates website visitors and advises them of any restrictions currently in effect.

A banner or graphic indicating current aquifer levels may be helpful here as well.

The message here should emphasize several elements:

- First, that [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] *has* a plan — not only because of the relevant laws and regulations, but also because [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] is committed to sustainable use of the Middle Trinity Aquifer and being a responsible steward over the new wells.
- In the event of drought, the goal is to continue delivering high quality water to customers in a sustainable manner.
- [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] is a responsible partner to the community, and will work closely with residents in order to manage water use during periods of drought.
- The plan itself:
 - The details of the plan for Stage 1 up through Emergency Conditions, as well as expectations/rules for the users to follow.
 - An explanation of what will happen in the event of violations.
 - A link to a subpage including tips for conserving water.

Resources

The subpage should include a dedicated section containing resources for customers who are interested in conservation. These resources should be developed by third parties, and should at a minimum include:

- Tips/tricks to reduce water in residential indoor and outdoor use, as well as commercial use
- How to irrigate effectively
- Information about water-saving landscapes
- Common problems that might be discovered during a routine water audit

While largely linking to material developed by third-parties, [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] can leverage the legitimacy offered by linking to trusted third parties more effectively by providing short summaries of the materials linked-to.

For example [below a link to information about reducing water used in irrigation for residential customers]: “As much as 50% of your water is used outdoors. Click here for tips about effective irrigation.”

As [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] engages new classes of customers, any programmatic efforts to promote conservation should be listed here as well — a curated schedule of events taking place in the region (workshops, lectures, etc), water audits to identify leaks, or rebate programs, for example.

2. Conservation messaging from regional stakeholders

Regional water suppliers such as SAWS and Groundwater Conservation Districts such as TGR operate in a strict regulatory environment that dictates many of their conservation efforts. These regulations and statutory mandates shape these organizations’ messaging around conservation and sustainability, in most cases lending a degree of legitimacy that does not extend to the unregulated wells to be operated by [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] .

By developing a messaging campaign around conservation that shares similar features to those of well-regulated suppliers and managers, [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] can position itself as a responsible regional supplier.

The San Antonio Water System

SAWS maintains an extensive website devoted to its conservation efforts, leveraging its status as a public utility owned by the City of San Antonio in order to position itself as a responsible steward of regional water resources.

SAWS’ messaging around water supply and quality centers around three themes:

Data

SAWS stresses the importance of scientific studies and the findings of various committees, blue-ribbon commissions, and agencies at the federal, state, and municipal level. These studies and subsequent data points are frequently cited as SAWS explains their behavior to the public. *Key message:* SAWS knows how much water is available for use and plans accordingly.

Third-party validation

SAWS emphasizes the various regulations with which they must be in compliance, and explains its own behavior within that context. The regulatory regime both reassures customers and stakeholders that SAWS is not the sole authority in determining how much water they can use and provides SAWS with a certain degree of legitimacy as it conducts business in the region. *Key message:* SAWS knows the rules, had a hand in creating them, and follows them without fail.

Shared responsibility

SAWS emphasizes their commitment to conserving the region's water. Their business interest in providing water to their customers is tied to the health of the region's water resources, and is expressed within the larger context of their role in shaping the region's development. By simultaneously stressing both its own commitment to conservation and the need for their customers' cooperation in achieving this goal, SAWS positions itself as a guardian of water resources in the region – an intermediary between users and the resource that has been charged with protecting water from unscrupulous actors. *Key message:* SAWS is the most-willing and best-able actor to conserve water for future generations.

Sample SAWS messages:

Conservation is a shared responsibility: messages that develop a common identity among SAWS customers as a community of conscientious water users, developing a conservation "ethic."

["Be a WaterSaver!"](#)

["We can't do this alone"](#)

Conservation is a source of pride: messages that mark conservation milestones as an achievement to be celebrated and as a distinguishing characteristic of San Antonio residents.

["With your help, we can keep SAWS rates among the lowest in the nation while saving tomorrow's water today"](#)

["San Antonio has saved more than 1 TRILLION gallons of water"](#)

Conservation leads to cost-savings: SAWS has developed rebate programs for both [commercial](#) and [residential](#) users to support these investments. These programs facilitate and undergird the message: "there is great potential for both water and monetary savings."

The Trinity Glen Rose Groundwater Conservation District

TGR is empowered by the Constitution of the State of Texas to manage water resources in the areas under its jurisdiction. The messaging strategy is designed to impress upon local residents and business the importance of its mission, as well as to legitimate its efforts to reduce access to the Trinity Aquifer.

Data

TGR spokespeople often use data in statements to the press and in their [monthly newsletters](#).

Key message: TGR is the foremost expert on available water resources in the Trinity Aquifer.

Legitimacy

TGR-GCD's messaging primarily revolves around its statutory mandate to manage water resources in its jurisdiction. *Key message:* TGR is responsible for the future of the region's water resources.

Shared responsibility

TGR's role grants it a level of authority in discussing conservation efforts, and the subsequent messaging focuses on the users' role in assisting TGR in their work. *Key message:* Groundwater users should be educated and informed about best practices in conservation, and TGR is here to help.

TGR emphasises the role of the user in conservation efforts, with reminders about what constitutes a wasteful practice.

[“Watering during the rain obviously wastes lots of water. So, you need to make sure your water sprinkler controller is set to manual to make sure you don't water while its raining.”](#)

Their website lists the most common items that come up during water audits, which supports their key theme that users can and should be proactive in addressing water waste and promoting conservation.

As the preeminent water authority in their district, which has statutory responsibility for managing water resources within their district, TGR could update their website to reflect their role in conserving and protecting the Trinity Aquifer.

TGR also includes links to third party resources, including the Texas Water Development Board and other GWCDs in the region.

Their limited messaging program provides an opportunity for [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] to build out a more comprehensive set of conservation resources that are available to customers, which could help mitigate the moral authority granted to TGR by the statutes governing water in the region.

Canyon Lake Water Service Company

CLWSC is one of the most similar companies to [CLIENT NAME REDACTED] in the surrounding region. Their messaging about conservation is limited to sharing tips and sharing links to third party publications and resources.

Their conservation subpage is not prominently displayed on the website, and if one were looking for information about conservation from their water supplier, it would not be easily found.

Messaging about drought conditions mentions the requirements under the TCEQ during emergency or drought conditions, but fails to position CLWSC as an authority on conservation:

[“The purpose of the \[drought management\] plan is to provide a strategy for conservation...with an emphasis on maintaining available water supplies for the health and safety of the public.”](#)

CLWSC messaging about conservation is not worthy of emulation, and stands as an example of a regional water supplier that does little to position itself as a responsible, conservation-minded company. Rather, it is focused on the consequences that CLWSC will enact on customers if conservation requirements are violated during periods of drought. In the end, it comes off as refereeing rather than a true commitment to the cause.