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South Texas Water Desalination Projects Honored with National Award

Brownsville PUB, North Alamo WSC, and NRS Consulting Engineers

Lauded for Innovations Boosting South Texas Water Supply Options

(TAMPA, Fla.) — Three South Texas entities working to provide drought-proof sources of drinking water to communities in the Lower Rio Grande Valley were honored today with the coveted “2007 Desalination Project of the Year” award from the WateReuse Association, a nonprofit organization focused on promoting innovative approaches to meeting water supply challenges.

The Brownsville Public Utilities Board, North Alamo Water Supply Corp., and Harlingen-based NRS Consulting Engineers received the award at a special luncheon today during the association’s annual symposium, held this year in Tampa, Fla. Accepting the award were the Hon. Patricio Ahumada, Jr., mayor of Brownsville, and Joseph W. “Bill” Norris, P.E., and Jesus Leal, P.E., principals of NRS Consulting Engineers, on behalf of their firm and North Alamo WSC.

The Desalination Project of the Year award, says the WateReuse Association, “recognizes desalination projects whose significance and contributions to the community continue to advance the desalination industry.”

NRS is the connecting point for the projects, serving as the design, engineering, and construction management firm for North Alamo WSC’s network of groundwater desalination plants in Willacy, Hidalgo, and Cameron counties as well as the Brownsville PUB’s seawater desalination pilot, located on the Brownsville Ship Channel. (Map of project locations attached.)

The combination of these desalination projects offers the Lower Rio Grande Valley a viable water supply in the face of ongoing drought, declining supplies from the Rio Grande, and a projected population boom in the coming decades.

Drought Spurs Regional Innovation

In the 1990s, drought crippled the Lower Rio Grande Valley in South Texas. Reservoirs upstream on the Rio Grande, the sole surface water supply source for all uses, saw levels decline to 29 percent of capacity.

Motivated by the need to secure alternative sources to the Rio Grande, forward-thinking local entities in South Texas began to explore desalination, which is proving to be a drought-proof alternative to the over-allocated Rio Grande. Desalination can also help local municipalities meet the burgeoning demand from new water users, as the region’s population more than doubles in the next 50 years.

North Alamo WSC Taps into Brackish Groundwater

North Alamo WSC is Texas’ largest WSC, covering nearly 1,000 square miles in eastern Hidalgo County, Willacy County, and northwestern Cameron County. The service area encompasses six other public water systems. Although the WSC directly serves primarily rural populations, it also provides water to parts of the McAllen-Mission-Edinburg metropolitan area, which the US Census ranked among the nation’s fastest growing metro areas for 2000-2006.

NRS assisted North Alamo WSC with an ambitious program to construct a network of reverse osmosis plants to treat salty (or brackish) groundwater as a cost-effective and efficient alternative to drawing supplies from the Rio Grande. NRS handled permits and managed design and construction for the North Alamo facilities.

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North Alamo's Lasara Treatment Plant, located 9 miles west of Raymondville, went online first in January 2005. It currently produces 1 million gallons of drinking water per day, but the facility's scalable design allows for capacity to double to meet increasing demands.

The price tag for the new plant is less than what North Alamo would have spent solely on acquiring surface water rights for a conventional treatment plant.

Two more desalination plants are under construction: the Doolittle and Owassa facilities together will produce an additional 7 million gallons per day from brackish groundwater sources. The facilities are scheduled for completion later this year.

North Alamo WSC also is a partner in the North Cameron Regional Water Project, which is using brackish groundwater to produce 2.25 million gallons per day of drinking water for customers not previously served by a conventional treatment plant.

Brownsville Public Utilities Board Looks Seaward for Drinking Water

These ongoing successes with brackish groundwater coupled with the declining costs of desalination implementation set the stage for further innovation: the possibility of an inexhaustible supply of water from the Gulf of Mexico. With major funding from the Texas Water Development Board, the Brownsville PUB is piloting the first ever seawater desalination facility in Texas.

Officially launched in February 2007, the pilot facility was designed and constructed by NRS, which is also managing the ongoing assessment of the pilot.

The pilot will test various technologies and applications, the findings from which will shape the final plant design, with construction anticipated in late 2009 and start-up in 2010. The plant will be sized to produce up to 25 million gallons per day, enough to satisfy one-third of Brownsville's project demand.

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About the WateReuse Association:

The **WateReuse Association** is a non-profit organization whose mission is to advance the beneficial and efficient use of water resources through education, sound science, and technology using reclamation, recycling, reuse and desalination for the benefit of members, the public, and the environment. The association's experienced and diverse membership of more than 300 entities in the U.S. and abroad includes more than 135 water and wastewater agencies. In addition to local utilities, the membership includes federal and state agencies, health officials, consultants, and prominent researchers from the academic community. More information at www.watereuse.org

About NRS:

NRS Consulting Engineers are the go-to professionals with the track record of turning desal visions into reality: on-time, within budget, and with the highest standards of engineering reliability. NRS has been leading desalination projects in Texas since 1995. NRS capabilities encompass the complete range of tasks: from conceptualization and environmental assessments and impact statements to design criteria and development, bid specifications and budgets, financing options, construction and construction management. More information at www.nrsengineers.com