[music]

Howdy!

I'm Major Rivers and this is my horse, Aquifer. We've been traveling around Texas for many years. We've seen a lot of changes. But one thing that will never change is our need for good, clean water. Now, you're probably saying that gettin' water's easy… you just turn on the tap… out comes the water. Well, just hold on there a minute. That water doesn't get to your tap by magic, ya know. No, sir. It takes a lot of hard work and costs a great deal of money to get that water to you.

Used to be that people got the water right out of the river. They just put their buckets in… haul out the water they needed. Or, if they didn't happen to live by a river, they'd dig a well and use water that was stored up underground. Ground water, we call it. Well, as you might imagine, it really wasn't too convenient. In Texas, we still get our water from rivers and from ground water. In fact, more than half of the water we use comes from underground water basins called "aquifers"… er, like, like my horse here. And the rest of our water, nearly half, comes from surface water. You know, water on top of the ground… like rivers and lakes and streams. But we don't exactly have to do the gettin' of the water ourselves anymore. Water companies and river authorities do that for us now.

Ok, let's see how these water districts and river authorities get the water from there to here, so to speak. Where you live, it's likely that the people who work for river authority or for water district have the task of getting you the water that you need. And, mind you, bringing water to you and your family is no little task. All over Texas, there are underground areas of gravel or sand or rocks that water seeps right into. You know, aquifers. To get that water out of the ground so we can use it, water districts have to drill holes, that is, wells down to where the water is. Then the water has to be pumped up out of the ground.

Now, we're also fortunate in Texas to have a lot of big rivers, famous rivers too… like the Rio Grande, the Pecos, the Colorado, and the Red. Generally, these major rivers start in the northwest part of Texas and run southeast across the state where they empty into The Gulf of Mexico.

Used to be that some years when it rained a lot, the rivers provided all the water anyone could want.

Actually they sometimes provided more water than anyone could want. Houses floated away, crops were destroyed and people and animals would drown when the river spilled over its banks and flooded the land. Other years when very little rain fell to the ground, some of the rivers would dry up to a trickle. No one had enough water then. So, the rivers could be like… bucking broncos or like old horses out to pasture… neither did as much good.

Texans decided to change that. They built dams on many of the rivers to hold the water back. That way they could control how much water flowed down the rivers toward the Gulf of Mexico. These dams also protected us from the floods. Damming up the rivers like that meant lakes were formed. Turns out, these lakes, called reservoirs are very useful. They actually store water so even in the driest years, drought years they're called, we have enough water.

These reservoirs also provide us Texans with lots of fun. Aquifer and I spent many lazy hot summer days skiing, sailing, or just dangling our fishing lines in a Texas lake or reservoir. Having the water in the reservoirs and in the aquifers isn't the same as having the water in your house though. River authorities

and local water agencies still have to get the water to you. But before they do, they make sure the water is clean and safe to drink. Water that's used to irrigate crops, like cotton or rice, can go directly from the rivers and the aquifers to the farms. But the water we drink, cook with, and bathe in, has to be clean so that no one will get sick from drinking or using dirty water. Water goes from the river, the reservoir, or the aquifer, to a water treatment plant where any dirt that might've gotten in is taken out. And chlorine, or another such chemical, is put in to make sure germs stay out. All this water gets where it's going through a maze of pipelines. Sometimes the water travels miles and miles through pipes before it rushes out when you turn on the faucet. But then, where does the water go? Well, in some places, mainly in rural areas out in the country, dirty water, or waste water, goes down under the ground into what's called a septic tank. From there, it slowly seeps back into the ground. In towns and cities, the waste water goes… you guessed it… back into pipes where it travels to a wastewater treatment plant. Here, the water is cleaned and then pumped back into a river, lake, or stream so it can go back to the water treatment plant to be cleaned some more and used again.

Yessiree, it takes a lot of hard work and money to supply us with all the water we need. It also takes a lot of people, like you and your family making sure that we all use just the water we really need.

There's only limited amount of water and, as you know, Texas is growing. More and more people are needing water every year.

Now, supplying more water isn't easy. Building new dams and reservoirs, or drilling new wells takes a lot of time and money. And more people using more water will mean that we will need more water treatment plants and waste water treatment plants, which can't be built overnight, you know. That means we all must help save the water we already have and use it wisely. How do you do that, you say? Well, Partner, it's easy. Use only as much water as you really need. For example, don't let the water keep running down the drain while you're brushing your teeth. Turn the water off while you're brushing… then, turn it back on. When you need to take a shower, make it a quick one. You'll get just as clean in five minutes as you will in fifteen. And, oh yes, be sure to put Spot in a tub of water for his bath instead of letting the hose run. If you play in the sprinkler, be sure you're watering the yard, not the sidewalk. And use buckets of water when you help wash the car. Don't let the water from the hose run down the street. Each one of us uses thousands and thousands of gallons of water every year. So any way you can conserve, that is, save water not waste it, will help make sure that all of us in Texas have plenty of good clean water now and in the future. Aquifer and I certainly appreciate your using only the water you really need.

So long now!

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