

# Water planning firm benefits from drought

*Water planning firm adding workers soon*

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A floodgate to new business in Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico has opened for one Austin geosciences company due in large part to the drought.

Intera Inc., a consulting firm specializing in environmental, water resources and waste isolation services, attributes a 45 percent increase in its water division this year to the severe lack of water in the Southwest.

Following the last drought in 2009, the company's overall revenue rose from \$15.5 million that year to \$19 million in 2010; and it is expected to reach \$21.5 million this year. The company projects \$26 million in revenue next year, and it expects to be a \$45 million company by 2015.

Meanwhile, Intera, which had 65 employees in 2008, hired 20 new employees last year. And with demand for its expertise growing, it plans on adding up to 20 new positions by mid-2012. Intera has about 135 employees across its two European offices and five domestic offices, and will open an eighth office in Oklahoma by the end of the year to execute two large water planning contracts with a Native American tribal nation.

The drought has been driving business as it motivates clients to seek and secure alternative sources of water, said [Marsh Lavenue](#), Intera president and CEO.

Intera has been looking at brackish water resources, which can be found in deep underground aquifers. While such water may require drilling deeper and cost more to treat, Lavenue calls it a "new frontier for water resources" because no one has claims to brackish water.

Cities, industries and agricultural interests across the state — and the water resource professionals that support them — are feeling the impacts of the current drought and the critical need to identify alternative water supplies to meet current

and future demand, said [Martin Rochelle](#), chairman of the water practice group at environmental law firm Lloyd Gosselink Rochelle & Townsend PC.

He said companies with long résumés in water resources in Texas fill an important role.

“Intera is somewhat unique because they have very strong credentials in both groundwater and surface water work. This puts them in a good position for future growth and a larger role in the water resources field,” Rochelle said.

Intera was founded in 1974 as the child of the environmental division of Houston-based Intercomp Resource Development Engineering and ERA Sciences of Alberta, Canada. It started as a consulting firm for the environmental and petroleum industries and initially focused on providing air quality services.

Its water-related work began in the mid-1970s, when Intera applied petroleum reservoir engineering technology to groundwater flow and transport under a contract with the U.S. Geological Survey.

Intera started its water division in 2001 and has since built large regional planning models for the state and has worked with groundwater conservation districts and municipalities.

“Although water itself seldom provides a hard barrier to growth, the failure to connect land-use and water planning may have far-reaching and increasingly unacceptable consequences,” said [Barney Austin](#), Intera’s director of hydrologic services.

The Texas Water Development Board estimates demand for water in Texas will grow 27 percent during the next 50 years; meanwhile, supply is expected to decrease by 18 percent. Texas’ northern neighbor is in a similar situation; the Oklahoma Water Resource Board expects water demand from the public-supplied residential population to increase 32 percent from 2007 to 2060.

“It is important that cutting-edge water technologies and applications are brought to the attention of these communities in order to provide them with more options to ensure there is a water supply for years to come,” Austin said.

One contract Intera was recently awarded involves working on behalf of certain Highland Lakes stakeholders trying to influence water management on the Colorado River. The Central Texas Water Coalition wants the Lower Colorado River Authority to take the lake economy into account in water management and implement water management strategies to create water in the lower Colorado River basin.

Intera's clients are not limited to large municipalities. Destination spa and hotel Travaasa Austin has contracted Intera to perform small-scale groundwater sampling and analysis.

Intera has also seen growth in its other capacities. The company is involved in high-profile projects, such as providing technology advisory services to mitigate the environmental impacts of Austin's Water Treatment Plant 4 and an environmental support services contract with Austin Energy for the Seaholm redevelopment.