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County looking for water solutions following floods



David J. Phillip/AP file photo

Louis Marquez carries his dog, Dallas, through floodwaters after rescuing the dog from his flooded apartment on April 19, 2016, in Houston.

HOUSTON (AP) — County commissioners in the Houston area have approved a \$160,000 study this month to investigate whether capturing floodwaters and storing them underground is feasible.

The *Houston Chronicle* reported researchers from Texas A&M University will study whether the impact of floods can be reduced by using high-powered pumps to whisk water into aquifers or old oil wells underground.

Harris County thinks floodwater could help serve Hous-

ton's increasing water demands and preserve water for drought conditions.

Although moving or pumping excess rainwater has been common widespread across the country, some hydrologists and engineers are skeptical it will work in the county, citing water quality concerns and the sheer immensity of the flooding problem.

"Because the floodwaters come with the debris — high level of sediments, junk, potentially anything that's in its way comes along — you've got to filter that out before you think about put-

ting down any injection well," said Susan Roberts, chairwoman of the groundwater management committee at the American Water Works Association.

Some cities in Texas have seen success with water strategies similar to what Harris County is considering including San Antonio, Kerrville and El Paso.

"Sometimes you have to think outside the box and try these things out and put some money behind it to see if it will work or not," said Russ Poppe, executive director of the Harris

County Flood Control District. "This is another step in the evolution in how we manage excessive stormwater here."

If implemented, a water pump project would be a significant departure from the district's traditional flood-control strategy, which relies on straightening and widening channels, lining them with concrete and building detention ponds.

This follows devastating floods in 2015 and 2016 that killed dozens and flooded more than 15,000 homes.