

Legislative Report

April 2021

Luckily, I've been able to spend quite a few days at the Capitol this past month attending committee meetings and meeting with legislators, their staff, and other advocates. I have also been able to attend the weekly meetings of the TAGD legislative committee and the Texas Ag Council. There is a big final crush to get bills heard and voted out of committee and in each chamber to beat the end of the session deadlines. As a reminder, I have included a bill tracking list with my report that provides links for the actual bill texts, the bills' progress and a brief summary of content below each bill listing.

SB 152 by Chairman Perry is the biggest pending bill that would affect GCDs. The bill, as passed in the Senate, addresses four major topics: attorney fees, notice to affected landowners for permit applications, petitions to change rules, and updating and challenging DFC's based on new MAG data. According to my communications with Billy Howe at the Farm Bureau, the attorney fee portion will be stripped in the House at Chairman King's insistence. I assume that TAGD will then be able to support the bill, based on what I have heard at our legislative committee meetings.

Another bill of particular interest that has sailed through the House is HB 3619 which would mandate GCDs to consider potential impacts on nearby exempt wells in issuing permits. Besides the issue that TAGD has wanting only registered exempt wells in the mandate, the companion bill has not been heard in the Senate because Chairman Perry and the Farm Bureau oppose it because they think it could harm private property rights.

There are a couple of bills that could still pass that would facilitate the studying of interaction of groundwater and surface water throughout the state. However, both still have a long way to go. TAGD is also passively following a slew of local bills, general water bills, and government policy bills, mainly concerning notifications, open meetings, and taxation. I will report on those that could affect us when and if any of them pass.

Also, it might be of interest that I got to spend a couple of days with our sheriff and two area DAs who were in town pushing a bill that would make it easier to prosecute cartel human smugglers who engage in dangerous behaviors that could harm their victims or area landowners, workers, or guests.

See photos below.

