

August 2020 Legislative Report
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Elections

In our area, the three state legislators who face general election challengers in November are Senators Chuy Hinojosa and Judith Zaffirini and Rep. Ryan Guillen. All are ramping up their fundraising and campaign planning efforts.

Interim Charges

On August 1st, Lyle Larson, Chair of the House Natural Resources Committee, put out a notice that said his committee will be taking written testimony on interim charges. The deadline for submitting testimony is September 25th. I think that our main participation will be in concert with TAGD, but I am happy to work with our staff and legal and hydrological experts if there is a desire for BCGCD to submit our own testimony on any topic. Our main areas of interest would be:

- HB 720, which relates to appropriations of water for recharge of aquifers and use in aquifer storage and recovery projects. The Committee is charged with monitoring the rulemaking process for the permitting of unappropriated flows for aquifer storage and recovery projects by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).
- HB 721, which relates to reports on aquifer storage and recovery and aquifer recharge projects. The Committee will monitor the implementation by the TWDB of legislation to encourage the development of aquifer storage and recovery and aquifer recharge projects, including the completion of a statewide study of the state's aquifers' suitability for aquifer storage and recovery and aquifer recharge projects.
- HB 722, which relates to the development of brackish groundwater. The Committee is monitoring the designation of Brackish Groundwater Production Zones by the TWDB and the adoption of rules by groundwater conservation districts for the production of brackish groundwater from those Zones.
- HB 807, which relates to the state and regional water planning process. The Committee will monitor the appointment of the Interregional Planning Council by the TWDB and the Council's progress toward increasing coordination among Regional Water Planning Groups. The Committee will also look at a joint planning process between Regional Water Planning Groups and Groundwater Management Areas and achieving desired future conditions for aquifers, topics on which TAGD will present a position.

- The Committee is studying the efforts of the TCEQ, the TWDB, and the Public Utility Commission of Texas to incentivize, promote, and preserve regional projects to meet water supply needs and encourage public and private investment in water infrastructure and identifying impediments or threats to “regionalization”.
- The Committee is also reviewing “An Audit Report on Selected Groundwater Conservation Districts” and is seeking written submissions on emerging issues in groundwater and surface water interaction and the status of water markets in Texas and the potential benefits of and challenges to “expanded markets for water”.

Preparing for the Legislative Session

There is much speculation about how the Legislature will conduct its business next year in the face of the pandemic. I’m guessing the final solution will not come until much closer to the start date, given the ever-changing status of outbreaks. In the meantime, I am monitoring committee activity on interim charges, trying to maintain contact with key staff members, and participating in all three TAGD legislative subcommittees. I am now planning to have an in-person meeting with a new legislative assistant for Senator Lois Kolkhorst, whose district includes Victoria and who is a very influential member of the Senate Water and Rural Affairs Committee.

TAGD Water Summit

The annual TAGD conference will be September 1st-3rd and will be totally virtual. There will be a legislative update by the Public Policy Analyst for the Texas Water Conservation Association, a legislative panel, and a keynote address by Chairman Larson.