

# Watermaster Evaluation Fact Sheet - 2019

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## Background

On May 28, 2011, the Texas Legislature adopted the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) Sunset legislation, HB 2694, which includes a requirement for the TCEQ to evaluate and issue a report for all river and coastal basins that do not have a watermaster. The report will assess whether or not a watermaster should be appointed and is required at least once every five years for every basin. The TCEQ developed a schedule to consider several basins each year, resulting in the creation of a five-year cycle. The first cycle began in 2012 and was completed in 2016. In that five-year time, all basins that did not have a watermaster program were evaluated. The second cycle began in 2017. This year, the TCEQ will evaluate the Neches River and Sabine River Basins.

## What is a Watermaster Program?

Watermaster programs operate from field offices within their designated basin(s) and perform the following functions:

- ❖ A watermaster continuously monitors streamflows, reservoir levels, and water use within a basin.
- ❖ As needed, holders of impoundment rights may notify the watermaster when they plan to release sold water. The watermaster can then monitor usage downstream to ensure that the released water reaches the buyer.
- ❖ Before starting their pumps, opening their sluice gates, or starting to divert water in any other way, all water right holders must notify the watermaster and state how much water they plan to divert.
- ❖ The watermaster determines whether a diversion will remove water that rightfully belongs to another user and could notify a user with more junior water rights to reduce or stop pumping if needed.
- ❖ When streamflows diminish, the watermaster allocates available water among the water right holders according to each user's priority date.
- ❖ If a water-right holder does not comply with the water right or with TCEQ rules, the executive director may direct a watermaster to adjust the control works, including pumps, to prevent the owner from diverting, taking, storing, or distributing water until the water right holder complies.

There are currently four watermaster programs in Texas:

- ❖ The Rio Grande Watermaster coordinates releases from the Amistad and Falcon reservoir system.
- ❖ The South Texas Watermaster serves the Nueces, San Antonio, Guadalupe, and Lavaca river basins, as well as the adjacent coastal basins.
- ❖ The Concho Watermaster, currently a division of the South Texas Watermaster, serves the Concho River segment of the Colorado River Basin.
- ❖ The Brazos Watermaster, covers Possum Kingdom reservoir and areas downstream of the reservoir in the Brazos River Basin.

### ***Advantages of a Watermaster Program***

In addition to their monitoring of river conditions, TCEQ watermasters can provide valuable services to the water users in the basins they oversee:

- ❖ Watermasters can coordinate diversions in the basin, ensuring that all water users get the best overall value from the water available to them.
- ❖ With their real-time monitoring of local streamflows, watermasters can quickly identify and stop illegal diversions.
- ❖ Watermasters may be able to anticipate a shortage before it reaches the crisis point, thus enabling local users to work together to develop a strategy that will meet the users' most basic needs.
- ❖ When disputes arise among water users, the watermaster can often help the users settle the matter, thereby avoiding costly litigation.
- ❖ Watermasters can provide valuable technical assistance.
- ❖ A watermaster program affords a long-term solution for managing water rights in a river basin.

### ***Program Costs and Fees***

According to state law, water-right holders in a watermaster area must pay the costs associated with a watermaster program through an annual fee. Certain domestic and livestock uses are exempted from water rights permitting and any fees associated with the watermaster program.

The total amount assessed per water right holder is comprised of a \$50 per account base fee and an annual use fee that is based on the volume of water that may be diverted for each authorized use. The use fee is calculated each year and is based on the proposed operating budget for each watermaster program.

In addition, users will be required to add a meter to their pumps, which may cost \$400 or more (depending on the technology of the meter). However, by using a meter, the user might find that he or she had been running the unmetered pumps longer than necessary, which may lead to water savings.

### ***Participating in the Process***

We encourage your input in this process. If you are interested in the evaluation of the Neches River or the Sabine River Basins or if you have any questions on this process, please contact:

***By Letter:*** Watermaster Section (MC-160), P.O. Box 13087, Austin, Texas 78711-3087

***By Email:*** [watermaster@tceq.texas.gov](mailto:watermaster@tceq.texas.gov)

***By Phone:*** Call the Watermaster Program Liaison: Brooke McGregor at (512) 239-2025

***Web Site:*** [www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/watermaster](http://www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/watermaster)