

Brazos Watermaster Fact Sheet

In April 2014, the Commission ordered the creation of a watermaster in the Brazos River Basin beginning at Lake Possum Kingdom and including the area downstream of that lake.

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 diverter 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 the user with lower priority 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 three other watermaster programs in Texas. The Rio Grande Watermaster coordinates releases from the Amistad and Falcon reservoir system for irrigation, municipal, and industrial uses. 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.

Advantages of a Watermaster Program

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

- ❖ 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 everyone's 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.

Requirements for Diversers within the Brazos Watermaster Program

A diverter is defined as any water right holder, agent, or contractual buyer who impounds, takes, diverts, transports water in a watercourse, or makes a dedicated release of state water.

- ❖ Each diverter (or person making significant return flows) must install and maintain a measuring device. The measuring device must measure within 5% accuracy, unless otherwise approved. You must provide reasonable access to the measuring device.
- ❖ Anyone who seeks to divert water must notify the watermaster before diverting, transporting water, or making a dedicated release by submitting a Declaration of Intent (DOI). DOIs must include the account from which the water will be diverted, the amount requested, a diversion schedule, the pump that will be used, and the rate water will be diverted.
- ❖ Within 7 days after the close of the DOI period, each diverter that has submitted a DOI must submit a signed report with the actual amount of water diverted, transported, or released during the period of the DOI.

The watermaster may pursue appropriate enforcement action when there is a violation of or failure to comply with the Texas Water Code, Texas Administrative Code, the terms of a water right, authorization, or orders issued by the commission or watermaster.

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 both a base fee charged on each account and an annual fee based on the volume of water authorized for each use type in the permit. The current base fee is \$50 per account and generally does not change from year to year. The use fee is calculated each year and is based on the proposed operating budget for each watermaster program.

In addition to the cost of the watermaster program itself, most users will be required to add a meter to their pumps. Depending on the specific technology, a meter may cost \$400 or more. However, metering may lead to enough of a savings in pumping costs to offset the cost of the meter.