

Watermaster Evaluation Fact Sheet - 2021

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 to issue a report for all river and coastal basins that do not have a watermaster. The report assesses 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 Cypress Creek and Sulphur 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 streamflow, reservoir levels, and water use within a basin.
- As needed, holders of impoundment rights may notify the watermaster when they plan to release stored 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 way, all water right holders must notify the watermaster through a declaration of intent and state how much water they plan to divert and for how long.
- The watermaster determines whether a declaration of intent will divert water that rightfully belongs to another user and, if needed, notifies a user with more junior water rights to reduce or to stop pumping.
- When streamflow diminishes, 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 their 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 covers the Rio Grande River segment from Fort Quitman to the Gulf of Mexico in the Rio Grande River Basin (excluding the Pecos and Devils Rivers).
- The South Texas Watermaster covers 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, covers 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, better ensuring that all water users get the best overall value from the water available to them.
- With their real-time monitoring of local streamflow, watermasters can quickly identify and stop illegal diversions.
- Watermasters may be able to anticipate a water 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 install a fairly accurate meter on their diversion facilities or pumps. Users are solely responsible for the costs associated with the meter purchase, installation and maintenance. Meters may represent a significant expense that varies with their technology and pump size. However, by using a meter, the user may be able to increase efficiencies, 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 Cypress Creek or Sulphur River Basins or if you have any questions on this process, please contact:

By Letter: Daniel Schroeder, Watermasters Section Liaison, Water Availability Division, TCEQ, MC-160, P.O. Box 13087, Austin, Texas 78711-3087

By Email: watermaster@tceq.texas.gov

By Phone: Call the Watermaster Program Liaison, Daniel Schroeder, at (512) 239-0067

Web Site: www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/watermaster

P.O. Box 13087 • Austin, Texas 78711-3087 • 512-239-1000 • tceq.texas.gov