

LCRBC Supports Legislation to Strengthen LCRA's Public Engagement

Bills also require rules on public testimony at board meetings

BASTROP, Texas (April 17, 2019) — The Lower Colorado River Basin Coalition continues to support proposed legislation that would require the Lower Colorado River Authority to strengthen its public engagement policies, as recommended by the Texas Sunset Commission.

Senate Bill 606 by Kirk Watson, which passed out of the Senate unanimously on Monday and was referred to the House yesterday, and its companion House bill HB 1502 by Representative Poncho Nevarez, both require public engagement policies. Specifically, they require LCRA to develop a policy outlining how it would “actively engage stakeholders” and to provide a system to “promptly and efficiently act on complaints.”

In addition, the bills require public testimony policies that provide for “reasonable opportunity to appear before the board.”

“We believe this legislation would build on LCRA’s notable accomplishments in the area of stakeholder outreach,” said Kirby Brown, co-chair of the Lower Colorado River Basin Coalition. “For example, LCRA systematically involved stakeholders in the update of its water management plan over the last two years.”

SB 606 and HB 1502 would codify recommendations from the Sunset Advisory Commission, which issued its report on LCRA in January. The Commission evaluates state agencies and makes recommendations to the Legislature on the need for improvements.

There is always room for improvement, said Judge Paul Pape of Bastrop County, co-chair of the coalition.

“We welcome more specific rules regarding public testimony at board meetings, especially as we look ahead to decisions on how the new Arbuckle Reservoir will be operated,” said Pape. The reservoir is LCRA’s new off-channel impoundment in Wharton County that is currently in testing and commissioning, with plans to begin operations later this year.

The Coalition noted that LCRA communicated effectively with the public during the 2017 and 2018 floods, keeping residents along the river and the public apprised of water levels.

“As an example of effective communications, LCRA shared information clearly and consistently about its efforts to manage flood waters over the past two years,” said Myron Hess, environmental attorney and LCRBC executive committee member. “Timely and reliable information is essential during an emergency and LCRA demonstrated that it has the technology and operational capacity to provide it.”

Echoing that sentiment was Judge Phillip Spenrath of Wharton County, a member of LCRBC’s Executive Committee. His county straddles the Colorado River and has seen heavy floods for the past three years.

“We believe LCRA provided the information we needed,” he said.



ABOUT THE LOWER COLORADO RIVER BASIN COALITION

The Lower Colorado River Basin Coalition (www.waterdownstream.com) seeks a fair and balanced approach to water management of the Colorado River for all parties under all conditions – drought and flood. Equitable river management requires that river waters keep flowing downstream of Longhorn Dam all the way to the Matagorda Bay.

The Coalition is made up of broad and diverse interests from Travis County to Matagorda Bay, including: counties, cities, small communities, school districts, chambers of commerce, realtors, developers, businesses, industry, private landowners, agricultural groups, ag businesses, farmers, ranchers, conservation groups, environmental organizations, hunting and fishing guides and lodges, birding groups, nature tourism businesses, and others.

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