

## Senate bill sets environmental flow standards

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Matagorda County residents filled a room of the Bay City Civic Center Tuesday night to get more information about Texas Senate Bill 3, which outlines the Environmental Flows Allocation Process for the Matagorda/Lavaca Bay area.

Senate Bill 3 was passed to set environmental flow - the amount of water necessary for a river, estuary or other freshwater system to maintain its health and productivity - standards for every major river system in the state.

The bill created a public process that allows for each area of the state to have a team of stakeholders from diverse interest groups and an expert science team that will each develop a set of recommendations to submit to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).

TCEQ will consider both sets of recommendations along with public input before they adopt formal environmental flow standards.

Myron Hess, National Wildlife Federation representative, said Texas' growing population is one of the main reasons why legislators thought the bill was necessary.

"One of the reasons that this is all an issue and we can't just say everything is going to be fine and we'll just let the bay fend for itself, is that we have this growing population in Texas," Hess said.

"As we have more population, we are using more water and nature is not making a whole lot more of it," Hess explained.

"So, we have an issue of figuring out how we divvy up the uses of water - make sure we meet the human needs that we need to but also that we take care of environmental quality."

According to Hess, some current strides taken to address the issue is public water conservation and setting limits and stipulations on water rights permitting.

Dr. Norman Johns, National Wildlife Federation representative, outlined what the future would hold if environmental flows were not allocated for.

"Here's the cut-to-the-chase, the whole coast is kind of threatened, a lot of danger signs for most our major estuaries," Johns said.

"So that is the bad news part and we have to do something to avoid that future."

The stakeholder and expert science teams will work together to prevent the future as Johns outlined it if no environmental flow allocations are made, said Hess.

"People who participate in this process will have a real opportunity in playing a key role in determining what the future looks like for the Colorado River basin," Hess said.

The stakeholder and expert science teams will use existing data and studies to form their recommendations, said Ken Kramer, Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club representative and panel discussion moderator.

Kramer said the assumption was that if environmental flows allocations were not made on an adaptive management basis, then research could continue indefinitely before any standards are put into place.

According to Hess, if we didn't have this process then the problem would continue to grow worse.

"We are using this process to say let's at least stop, let's look at this collectively and let's make the best decision we possibly can based on the information we have and look at it in a comprehensive way," Hess said.

"If we waited 20 years and didn't try to deal with this comprehensively then I am convinced that we would be much worse off than what we would be if we do deal with it now."

According to SB3 the stakeholder groups must consist of at least 17 members representing "a fair and equitable balance of interest groups concerned with the particular river basin and bay system for which the group is established".

The interests groups are made up of agriculture water users, recreational water users, municipalities, soil and water conservation districts, industrial water users, commercial fishing, public interest, regional water planning groups, groundwater conservation district, any entity with jurisdiction over surface water and environmental interests.

Anyone wishing to volunteer to serve or to nominate someone to serve on the expert science committee or stakeholders committee may do so by submitting a letter to TCEQ. Contact Kathleen Ramirez at [kramirez@tceq.state.tx.us](mailto:kramirez@tceq.state.tx.us) or 512-239-6757 for further instructions.

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