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Conservation Groups Hail Passage of Senate Bill 3: Call for House Action

Three of the state's major conservation organizations hailed today's Senate passage of omnibus water legislation. In particular, the groups praised the bill's provisions designed to establish a new process for ensuring sufficient water for fish and wildlife.

"Senate Bill 3 incorporates an historic compromise in efforts to move the state forward in protecting critically important river flows and freshwater inflows," said Myron Hess, manager of the Texas water programs for the National Wildlife Federation. "Both water supply interests and the environmental community joined together to recommend the environmental flow provisions in SB 3 in a joint recognition of the need to maintain the fish and wildlife heritage of Texas while also meeting essential human water needs."

"We urge the Texas House to act favorably on these proposed environmental flow provisions," added Ken Kramer, state director of the Sierra Club. "If enacted, SB 3 will put into place a process that could ensure the continued health and productivity of such major coastal resources as Galveston Bay and Matagorda Bay as well as the vitality of river systems throughout Texas. We know there will be a lot of work to do to implement this process successfully, but this is a big step in the right direction."

SB 3, sponsored by Senator Ken Armbrister, also contains provisions addressing water conservation and groundwater management. Provisions for financing for water resources projects and activities were dropped from the bill during the Senate committee process.

"We are disappointed by the demise of the fee provisions," said Mary Kelly, senior attorney for Environmental Defense. "A modest portion of those fees could have been used by the state water trust to lease or buy water rights for environmental needs in rivers where the surface water is fully allocated. We hope these funding issues can be addressed over the interim. In the meantime we urge the Legislature to appropriate adequate funds from other sources to begin implementing the environmental flows provisions in SB 3."

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For more about water in Texas, go to www.texaswatermatters.org.