

- SUBJECT:** Changing regional water plans and establishing interregional council
- COMMITTEE:** Natural Resources — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Larson, Phelan, Ashby, Kacal, T. King, Lucio, Nevárez, Price
0 nays
3 absent — Burns, Frank, Workman
- WITNESSES:** For — C.E. Williams, Region A Water Group; Ken Kramer, Sierra Club-Lone Star Chapter; Bob Harden, Texas Association of Groundwater Owners and Producers; Imaad Khan, Texas Impact; Carlos Rubinstein; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Buddy Garcia, Aqua Texas; Kent Satterwhite, Canadian River Municipal Water Authority; Kate Zerrenner, Environmental Defense Fund; Ed McCarthy, Fort Stockton Holdings LP, Clayton Williams Farms, Inc.; Charles Flatten, Hill Country Alliance; Sarah Floerke Gouak, Lower Colorado River Authority; Ron Lewis, North Texas Municipal Water District; Jim Conkwright, Prairielands Groundwater Conservation District; Jay Howard, San Jacinto River Authority; Stephen Minick, Texas Association of Business; Justin Yancy, Texas Business Leadership Council; Kyle Frazier, Texas Desalination Association; Lori Olson, Texas Land Trust Council; Elizabeth Doyel, Texas League of Conservation Voters; Heather Harward, Texas Water Supply Partners; Trent Townsend, The Nature Conservancy)

Against — None

On — Bech Bruun and Matt Nelson, Texas Water Development Board
- BACKGROUND:** Water Code, sec. 16.053 requires the regional water planning group in each regional water planning area to prepare a regional water plan to provide for water conservation and drought response, using existing state and local water plans as a guide. The groups are required to submit a plan at least every five years.

DIGEST:

HB 2948 would create an interregional planning council made up of representatives from the 16 regional water planning groups and would modify the information that the groups are required to provide in their plans.

Interregional planning council. The bill would require the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) to appoint an interregional planning council at an appropriate time in each five-year state water plan adoption cycle.

The purposes of the council would include improving coordination among regional water planning groups, facilitating dialogue on water management strategies, and sharing best practices.

TWDB would consider nominations submitted by each regional water planning group in making appointments to the council. Members would serve until a new state water plan was adopted. The council would be required to hold at least one public meeting and to prepare a report on the council's work for TWDB. The board would appoint the members of the initial council by September 1, 2018.

Regional water plan. The bill also would require regional water planning groups to include the following information in regional water plans:

- examples of unnecessary or counterproductive variations in specific drought response strategies;
- an assessment of the potential for aquifer storage and recovery projects, if the area has significant water needs;
- specific goals for daily water use per capita for municipal water user groups; and
- an assessment of the progress on encouraging cooperation between water user groups in the area.

The bill would specify that in conjunction with submitting a regional water plan, planning groups should make legislative recommendations for any changes that could improve the water planning process.

Prevailing legislation and effective date. HB 2948 would prevail over other legislation passed by the 85th Legislature. The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2017.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 2948 would lead to better statewide water planning by creating an interregional planning council representing all 16 regional water planning groups. This council would increase interaction between regions, which currently meet only intermittently. These interactions would foster cooperation, coordination, and exchange of information across the planning groups, facilitating mutually beneficial strategies and large-scale projects.

The bill also would support intraregional cooperation by requiring a report on the progress of cooperation between water user groups in an area. Increased cooperation could reduce costly litigation between and within regional groups competing over the same water sources.

HB 2948 would expand the scope of information that regional water plans are required to provide to update the water planning process. Planning groups would have to report counterproductive drought response strategies, so regions that use the same water source could employ similar and more effective strategies.

The bill also would speed up the planning process in adopting innovative water management approaches by requiring groups to consider the potential for aquifer storage and recovery projects.

Regional water planning groups also would have to set gallons-per-capita-per-day goals, which would foster friendly regional competition to meet these goals and could incentivize the development of conservation projects.

HB 2948 also would advise regional water planning groups to make legislative recommendations for any relevant changes or improvements to

water planning, expanding discussion between regions and the Legislature.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

While HB 2948 would improve state and regional water planning processes, it also specifically should direct regional planning groups to examine environmental needs, water loss control, and climate resilience.