



Clean Rivers Funding

About WEAT

The Water Environment Association of Texas (WEAT) is made up of about 1,600 Texas professionals dedicated to protecting and enhancing our state's water resources. We are a not-for-profit technical and educational organization with members from a variety of disciplines. Since 1928, WEAT and its members have been helping to protect the health of our communities and preserve our precious water resources. WEAT is a Member Association of the Water Environment Federation (WEF). The WEF network includes water quality professionals from nearly 80 member associations, such as ours, in more than 30 countries.

WEAT Position Summary

Request that funding from general revenue be returned to its original amount of \$5 million for the Texas Clean Rivers Program.



Background

The Clean Rivers Program was created in 1991 by Senate Bill 818, also known as the Clean Rivers Act (Texas Water Code Sec 26.0135). Since its inception, the program has grown in importance, providing an abundance of water quality and biological data. The TCEQ relies upon this information for numerous programs, including wastewater permitting, water quality assessments, standards setting, and Total Maximum Daily Loads. The TCEQ accomplishes the work of the Clean Rivers Program through grant agreements with regional water authorities. There are 15 regional water authorities that manage the program in 23 river and coastal basins. The majority are river authorities, with one water district, one council of governments, and a federal water commission. Many of these organizations count heavily upon the Clean Rivers Program to fund their basin's environmental monitoring efforts.

The Clean Rivers Act established a dedicated fee to fund the program. The fee is assessed on wastewater dischargers and was known as the Water Quality Fee. The fee was capped at \$5 million per year and the budgets from 2001 through 2011 for the program were set at \$5 million to match.

Challenges

In 2001, during the sunset review process, HB 2912 removed the program's dedicated fee status and \$5 million cap. The program is now funded through the General Revenue Dedicated Water Resources Management Account No. 153. From 2001 through 2011 it was funded at the historical rate of \$5 million. However, in 2011, despite the TCEQ's legislative appropriations request (LAR) of \$5 million for fiscal years 2012 and 2013, the Texas Legislative Budget Board (LBB) requested a 10% reduction to the program. This resulted in a cut of \$500,000 per year. For the 2014 and 2015 fiscal years, the TCEQ requested \$4.5 million - the amount specified by the LBB. The reduction to the program, combined with years of flat-funding, means that the program will be able to do less than ever before. Increasing analytical costs, salaries and other inflationary pressures have reduced the resources available to conduct the program. This has left gaps in monitoring networks and has contributed to a shortage of critical data. Although the original fee has been combined with others and the dedicated status removed, wastewater facilities have seen increases in the fees they pay despite the 10% reduction to the program. There is sufficient revenue being collected to support the full, historical appropriation of \$5 million.

WEAT Position

WEAT believes that the Clean Rivers Program is a valuable program. While WEAT does not support a fee increase to provide additional funding for the program, we request that funding from general revenue be returned to its original amount of \$5 million.