

# Water bill aims to meet needs of state's growing population

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AUSTIN — An omnibus water bill filed Thursday would force water utilities to conserve more, provide science-based flows for rivers, designate 17 sites for potential reservoirs and require those who deal in water rights to register and report their transactions.

"This bill is important," said Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst, who said the state's population is expected to double by 2060. "If we don't acquire new water resources, the face of Texas will change and I am not going to permit that. We've got to take care of our cities."

A bevy of officials accompanied Dewhurst at a Capitol news conference when he announced the filing of Senate Bill 3 by State Sen. Kip Averitt, R-Waco, shortly after noon. Averitt is chairman of the Senate Natural Resources Committee.

"Sen. Averitt's bill, I believe, is so important because it will help establish a flow requirement that for the first time ever is based on sound scientific theory," Dewhurst said.

Averitt said the legislature has addressed a lot of water issues over the past 10 years, including setting up processes for better groundwater regulation and grass-roots planning to meet future water needs.

"But we believe it's time to ramp up our efforts on implementation," he said of the plans that have resulted.

## On the Web

- [Senate Bill 3 information, text](#)
- [Lone Star Chapter, Sierra Club](#)

Ken Kramer, state director of the Sierra Club, commended Dewhurst and Averitt for their leadership on water issues but was critical of the bill's provision for designating specific sites for potential reservoirs.

"Setting aside land for expensive, environmentally destructive and unneeded reservoirs is a distraction from the priority steps that Texas should take to make better use of the water resources we have," Kramer said, adding that conservation and drought management measures are better means to address future needs.

Averitt said the bill doesn't commit to build any of the reservoirs identified in the State Water Plan but would just put people on notice that they're being considered. He said that some of the sites would doubtless be needed over the next 50 years.

Kramer said he supports the sections on environmental flows and conservation, which received broad consensus in their development. Rep. Robert Puente, D-San Antonio, has introduced stand-alone bills on those topics in the House of Representatives.

Under the bill, retail water utilities serving 3,300 or more people would have to file a conservation plan with goals based on state standards and report annually on progress.

"We all recognize that conservation is our best opportunity to meet water needs for the future," Averitt said. "It's the biggest bang for the buck, and it's a place where everybody can contribute to the cause."

Dewhurst said that \$675 million in water resource development needs have been identified over the next 20 years and that almost \$80 million from general revenue is needed over the next two years.

"We've put a lot of money into resources," Dewhurst said. "Water boards and river boards all around the state of Texas have done an outstanding job. But we've got some real needs as our population grows and we need to provide additional help."

Averitt said the funding would come through state agencies.

"There are some tools in here that will help the agencies with their funding mechanisms and also direct their priorities to things that we think are important, such as conservation," Averitt said.

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