

- SUBJECT:** Allowing certain utilities to use water from the Edwards Aquifer
- COMMITTEE:** Natural Resources — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 9 ayes — Larson, Metcalf, Dominguez, Farrar, Harris, T. King, Nevárez, Price, Ramos
- 0 nays
- 2 absent — Lang, Oliverson
- WITNESSES:** For — Donovan Burton, San Antonio Water System
- Against — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Chris Mullins, Save Our Springs Alliance)
- On — Milan Michalec
- BACKGROUND:** Chapter 626, Acts of the 73rd Legislature, Regular Session, 1993, sec. 1.34 requires water withdrawn from the Edwards Aquifer to be used within the boundaries of the Edwards Aquifer Authority.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 1806 would allow a retail public water utility who was an initial regular original permit holder and whose service area was wholly or partly inside the boundaries of the Edwards Aquifer Authority to use water withdrawn from the aquifer to provide retail water service to a county adjacent to the authority's boundaries.
- The San Antonio Water System would be authorized to sell up to 6,000 acre feet of water withdrawn from the aquifer per year at wholesale to a retail public utility or river authority for use in a county adjacent to Bexar County.
- The bill would take effect September 1, 2019.
- SUPPORTERS** CSHB 1806 would allow original permit-holding public water utilities to

SAY: optimize existing infrastructure and water resources to provide water service in counties adjacent to the Edwards Aquifer Authority.

The current restriction that water withdrawn from the Edwards Aquifer may only be used within the authority's boundaries is not common across the state. This restriction drives up water rates and impedes the ability of water utilities to serve customers, forcing those outside the authority to rely on over-utilized or unreliable water sources. As the population and water demand in Central Texas has grown, this has become increasingly unsustainable. Without this bill, water utilities would have to develop new and costly infrastructure and charge higher rates despite the Edwards Aquifer's existing infrastructure and available water. CSHB 1806 instead would allow counties adjacent to the authority to benefit from its water resources.

The bill would not authorize any additional pumping from the aquifer and so would not contribute to unsustainable use of this resource. Concerns about increased impervious cover could be addressed by agreements between utilities and developers.

OPPONENTS SAY: CSHB 1806 would eliminate some restrictions on moving water from the Edwards Aquifer outside the boundaries of the Edwards Aquifer Authority. These restrictions have protected the aquifer from excessive pumping and encouraged good water practices, such as recycling, desalination, and conservation, and should be left in place. Allowing the aquifer's water to be withdrawn for use outside of the authority could enable unsustainable water use in those areas and lead to development that could create impervious cover and degrade the aquifer's water quality.