

SUBJECT: Requiring the UT Bureau of Economic Geology to conduct water research

COMMITTEE: Natural Resources — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 9 ayes — T. King, Harris, Kacal, Larson, Paul, Price, Ramos, Walle,
Wilson

0 nays

2 absent — Bowers, Lucio

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Dana Harris, Austin Chamber of
Commerce; Judith McGeary, Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance; Frank
Reilly, Texas Water Future Corporation; Julie Wheeler, Travis County
Commissioners Court)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Mike Hodges, Texas Press
Association)

On — Leah Martinsson, Texas Alliance of Groundwater Districts;
Michael Young, UT Austin; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Kimberly
Nygren, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality; John Dupnik,
Texas Water Development Board)

BACKGROUND: Some have noted that water data collected by agencies and universities
has not been coordinated or disseminated well, leading to missed
opportunities to benefit from an aggregate analysis of the data.
Suggestions have been made to require a single entity to coordinate and
disseminate the data to address this issue.

DIGEST: CSHB 2095 would require the University of Texas Bureau of Economic
Geology, in coordination with the Texas Water Development Board
(TWDB), to make studies of water, including surface water, groundwater,
soil moisture, and atmospheric moisture, to improve on data gaps and on
the processing, analysis, modeling, and integration of water-related data.

The bureau would have to work to enhance, advance, or integrate models characterizing the water resources of the state, including:

- improving the techniques for multiscale modeling;
- expanding the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning;
- integrating multiscale modeling and machine learning;
- creating interoperable, modular, or coupled modeling strategies;
- improving access to and methods for achieving high-performance computing; and
- improving access to open-source, community-supported modeling.

In fulfilling these duties, the bureau would have to cooperate with TWDB and several state agencies, river authorities, water districts, and universities as listed in the bill. Such entities would have to provide data to the bureau on request and to the extent available. The bureau also could coordinate with federal agencies or private entities.

The bureau and TWDB would have to enter into a memorandum of understanding to define their powers, duties, and functions related to the provisions of this bill. Data and information compiled would be made available in accordance with other studies, investigations, and surveys under current law.

To the extent of any conflict or inconsistency, current laws describing the powers, duties, and functions of TWDB would prevail.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2021.

NOTES:

According to the fiscal note, the bill would cost about \$5.7 million in general revenue related funds in fiscal 2022-23 for the salaries and benefits of additional FTEs that would be needed by the University of Texas Bureau of Economic Geology, as well as equipment and other materials.