

## *Quorum Report*

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### **Texas Water Development Board urged to support funding local flood projects**

**Stakeholders support an even mix between the loans and grants and the use of state funds to offer buyouts; about half said the need for rehabilitation of existing infrastructure was as important as new mitigation measures**

Texas forges ahead into flood planning, putting together initial regional stakeholder groups and taking feedback as to how \$973 million appropriated last session should be spent.

Flood planning is fairly new to the *Texas Water Development Board*, which was formed in the 1950s to combat long-term drought in the state. Most of TWDB's work has focused on long-term availability and, more recently, on the revolving [SWIFT fund](#).

Prior to 2015, TWDB's involvement in flooding was primarily centered on distributing federal grants and coordinating the *National Flood Insurance Program*. But as the rounds of Texas flooding have become more intensive, lawmakers have additional duties: expanding flood gauges and hardening stream gauges against major weather events; taking a state flood assessment; and calibrating river models to avoid a recurrence of the [Wimberley flood](#).

The website [Texmesonet.org](http://Texmesonet.org) tracks precipitation activity across the state, as well as river flow, soil moisture and river stages. The website also builds maps on its custom data sets.

A [state flood assessment](#), completed in 2018, estimated the state's unmet flood mitigation costs between \$18 billion to \$26.6 billion. That's after federal and local funds are subtracted.

Sen. **Charles Perry**'s [Senate Bill 8](#) directed TWDB to begin the regional planning process, not unlike the regional water plans, which gauged the state's long-term water needs. So where [regional water plans](#) attacked Texas' problems around drought, these proposed flood plans are expected to keep the state resilient in the face of floods and hurricanes.

Here's the process: Last session resolved mapping. Now comes the planning. And, ultimately, TWDB will turn to funding mitigation projects.

To that end, four bills are in play: Senate Bill 8 mandates regional planning; Sen. **Brandon Creighton**'s *Senate Bill 7* created the potential *Flood Infrastructure Fund*; and *House Joint Resolution 4*, authored by Rep. **Dade Phelan**, R-Beaumont, put the fund on the ballot for

approval in November. And, finally, *Senate Bill 500*, the supplemental budget bill, expanded existing work and provided funding for a large-scale data hub.

The proposed Flood Infrastructure Fund would provide both loans and grants to both structural and non-structural mitigation. On the structural side, that would include local drainage projects, channel conveyance and regional detention/retention ponds. On the non-structural side, it could underwrite buyouts, develop ordinances, pay for a funding system or provide the funds for floodproofing or elevating structures in a flood plain.

TWDB will provide flood-hazard information to the various stakeholder groups, described in the webinar as base-level engineering that incorporates both topography and hydrology data.

Regional stakeholder groups should be formed by mid-2020, with a plan to have regional flood plans in place by 2024. During today's webinar with TWDB staff, local stakeholders offered opinions on a number of questions posed by staff:

Stakeholders at today's meeting supported an even mix between the loans and grants. They also supported the use of state funds to offer buyouts;

About half the attendees, voting in a text poll, said the need for rehabilitation of existing infrastructure was as important as new mitigation measures;

Attendees strongly supported using FIF to pay for local projects that lacked funding rather than other options such as complementing federal buyout programs or a match for federal projects; and

Stakeholders the attendees wanted to add to the regional planning group included the Texas Department of Transportation, school districts and emergency management agencies.

The full flood outreach presentation [can be found here](#).

By Kimberly Reeves