

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 2759
By: Thompson, Ed
Natural Resources
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

A mesonet is a set of earth observation stations designed to detect and monitor "mesoscale" weather phenomena ranging in size from several miles to hundreds of miles, including flooding, severe thunderstorms, high winds, droughts, and heat waves. The TexMesonet hydrometeorological network, initiated after the devastating 2015 Blanco River flood, provides statewide data related to hydrological and meteorological conditions that is collected from accurate, on-the-ground, deliberately placed earth observation stations. This data is shared freely online in English and Spanish, providing benefits for weather forecasting, flood preparedness, drought monitoring, wildfire management, water resources planning, water conservation, agriculture, industry, and the public.

Currently, TexMesonet is operated by the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) under its umbrella authority for studies, investigations, and surveys, but the network is not explicitly named in statute. Specific statutory authority for this network was included as a major issue in the TWDB Sunset Self-Evaluation Report and would establish the TWDB as the lead agency to coordinate this work in Texas through station ownership and partnerships with public and private entities, among other purposes. H.B. 2759 seeks to codify TWDB duties with respect to the TexMesonet by providing authority to serve as the lead agency to develop the hydrometeorology network and further mesonet efforts in Texas.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

H.B. 2759 amends the Water Code to include monitoring hydrometeorological conditions among the duties of the executive administrator of the Texas Water Development Board and to require the executive administrator to establish the TexMesonet Hydrometeorology Network for the purpose of providing a statewide resource for hydrometeorological data and summary information benefiting weather forecasting, flood preparedness, drought monitoring, wildfire management, water resources planning, water conservation, agricultural readiness and productivity, industrial readiness, and related business readiness and productivity across Texas. The bill requires the network to do the following:

- establish a series of stations throughout Texas to monitor hydrometeorological conditions;

- coordinate mesoscale, evapotranspiration, and soil moisture monitoring efforts in Texas by collecting, receiving, analyzing, processing, and facilitating access to basic hydrometeorological data and developing and disseminating products, tools, and summary information related to that data;
- serve as the centralized repository for hydrometeorological data in Texas; and
- provide appropriate technical assistance related to these duties.

H.B. 2759 authorizes the executive administrator, on behalf of the network, to enter into the following:

- any agreement with an individual or a federal, state, or local governmental entity to provide site location and access for earth observation stations; and
- a partnership with a public or private entity to provide additional funding and resources for improved access to and development of hydrometeorological data, products, and tools.

The bill requires each state agency or political subdivision of Texas that collects hydrometeorological information to cooperate with the network in the development of a coordinated, efficient, and effective statewide hydrometeorological data collection and dissemination resource.

H.B. 2759 authorizes the executive administrator to establish the TexMesonet advisory committee to advise and make recommendations to the executive administrator on ensuring data quality and optimizing hydrometeorological data collection, product development, and dissemination of data and information. The bill exempts the advisory committee from statutory provisions governing the size, composition, or duration of an advisory committee and entitles committee members to reimbursement for actual or necessary expenses incurred in performing member functions, but not to compensation. The committee may include members representing the office of the state climatologist, the National Weather Service, existing hydrometeorological networks, and other appropriate entities.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2023.