

Reinstate TSSWCB's Water Supply Enhancement Program.

The Council recommends that, subject to available state revenue for the 2022–2023 biennium, The Texas Legislature should restore funding to the TSSWCB, in an amount of \$2.6 million per fiscal year, for brush control projects that help to control the spread of invasive species, reduce the risk of wildfire, reestablish native grasses, reduce runoff and sedimentation, improve water quality, and enhance the infiltration of rainfall and soil moisture retention.

Background:

The Water Supply Enhancement Program incentivizes landowner participation in brush control efforts and can, in certain situations, also enhance water availability during times of average rainfall. The program was refocused from brush control to water supply enhancement in 2013, following a Sunset Review, to require the TSSWCB to align projects with regional water plans and water user groups with identified conservation needs. This presents a challenge, as the water management strategies in the state water plan are developed based on a repeat of drought of record, yet water supply enhancement from brush control is largely a result of enhanced infiltration or runoff from rain events. Brush control is a best management practice for land stewardship, however, as it not only provides potential water supply enhancements, but also improves soil health, reduces the spread of invasive species, and reduces sedimentation due to runoff when implemented in conjunction with reseeding of native grasses. With a renewed focus on brush control as a generally accepted best management practice for good land stewardship, the state could better recognize a wider range of benefits beyond the potential for water supply enhancement. Water quality improvements through the reduction in sedimentation via runoff is perhaps the greatest downstream water-related benefit from brush control, although the participating landowners experience other benefits on their property including soil health, reestablishment of native grasses, improved forage for grazing, and wildlife habitat.