

Treated Effluent Reuse

Issue

Ensure adequate water supplies for regional communities by implementation of treated effluent reuse projects.

Background

According to the Texas Water Conservation Association, about sixty percent of all water pumped from Texas' rivers, streams, or aquifers for municipal purposes enters the state's watercourses as discharges of treated effluent from wastewater treatment plants. Treated effluent, or reclaimed water, is a valuable resource for meeting increased municipal water demands as the population of Texas continues to grow.

Direct reuse involves the delivery of reclaimed water via infrastructure directly from the wastewater treatment plant to the end user before the water is discharged into a watercourse. Surface water right holders may directly reuse all effluent, subject only to any restrictions that might have been included in the holders original water right permit. No additional permitting or regulatory approval is required.

Indirect reuse is the process of diverting treated effluent discharges that have already been returned to a watercourse. Indirect reuse requires a water right permit from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and is dependent upon the amount of available water in the stream to satisfy downstream water right holders and environmental needs. Except for the increased permitting effort required, indirect reuse is often less expensive because of the ability to transport the water from the wastewater treatment plant to the end user via a natural water course as opposed to pipelines.

Some efforts to streamline and simplify treated effluent reuse have been pursued in previous legislative sessions, but so far no consensus has been achieved with regard to the issue of balancing the interests of upstream and downstream water right holders.

Legislative Action Needed

Legislation to streamline and encourage the implementation of treated effluent reuse projects while ensuring adequate environmental flows and balancing the interests of downstream water right holders.

Fiscal Impact

No impact on the state's General Revenue fund.