



89th Texas Legislature Policy Priorities

Our Vision for Water in Texas

Bayou City Waterkeeper's legislative agenda for the 89th Texas Legislature focuses on ensuring clean, safe, and accessible water for all residents of the Lower Galveston Bay watershed. Using science and legal advocacy, we work with communities affected by water pollution and flooding to restore our natural systems, achieve equitable policy solutions, and advance systemic change. Our priorities reflect our core values of interconnectivity, fluidity, bold action, justice and equity, and regeneration.

2025 represents a pivotal moment to secure our state's water future. Local efforts alone cannot address the scale of our water challenges. The Legislature has a vital opportunity to act by increasing investment in critical infrastructure, preserving wetlands that protect against storms and flooding, and advancing equitable, community-driven water policies.

Priority 1: Water Infrastructure Equity

Every resident deserves access to clean, safe drinking water and reliable wastewater infrastructure, yet historic disinvestment has created many inequities in our region. The City of Houston alone has lost more than 30 billion gallons of water from poor infrastructure in the past two years. Failing sanitary sewer infrastructure continues to contaminate our communities, with lower-wealth, Black, and brown neighborhoods bearing the heaviest burden of these failures.

Our priorities include:

- Create dedicated state funding streams for water infrastructure improvements while maximizing federal funding opportunities
- Create sustainable funding mechanisms to support cities' private lateral sewer infrastructure improvements, particularly in historically disadvantaged communities
- Develop comprehensive water affordability programs that protect low-income residents and ensure equitable access to clean water
- Strengthen transparency and accountability in environmental decision-making

Priority 2: Water Quality Protection

Nearly 60 percent of Houston's 2,500 miles of waterways are contaminated and unsafe for human consumption or exposure, falling far short of the Clean Water Act's goals for drinkable, swimmable, and fishable waters. From 2011 to 2017, wastewater treatment facilities reported over 13,000 overflows, releasing more than 80 million gallons of untreated sewage into our communities. While the federal consent decree requires Houston to invest \$2 billion in upgrades, stronger state-level oversight and enforcement are essential to protect our communities and waterways.

Our priorities include:

- Strengthen TCEQ's regulatory framework through enhanced public participation requirements, cumulative impact assessments, and robust antidegradation reviews
- Enhance municipal stormwater management requirements with measurable outcomes, green infrastructure incentives, and enhanced monitoring systems
- Improve industrial facility oversight through strengthened emergency preparedness requirements and increased transparency measures
- Reform water management body representation to ensure diverse community participation and environmental justice considerations

Priority 3: Protecting Wetlands & Coastal Ecosystems

Our region's unique wetlands serve as critical natural infrastructure - filtering water, preventing floods, and supporting biodiversity. Yet Texas has some of the least protective wetland laws. The 2023 Sackett v. EPA Supreme Court decision has further weakened federal protections, making state-level action crucial. These protections are particularly vital for our five critical wetland systems: Lake Houston Flatwoods, Greater Lake Creek, Katy Prairie-Pothole, Trans-Brazos Region, and Anahuac Coastal Marsh and Prairies.

Our priorities include:

- Develop a comprehensive state-level wetlands protection framework while supporting local conservation efforts
- Prioritize nature-based solutions in flood mitigation and coastal resilience planning, moving away from reliance on large-scale engineered barriers
- Establish sustainable funding mechanisms for wetland preservation and restoration, prioritizing projects that protect vulnerable, flood-prone communities
- Support expansion of protected areas and wildlife refuges to create connected networks of preserved wetland systems

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