



SIERRA CLUB

LONE STAR CHAPTER

To: Sunset Commissioners and Sunset Staff

From: Cyrus Reed, Conservation Director, Lone Star Chapter, Sierra Club,
cyrus.reed@sierraclub.org

April 27, 2022

The Sierra Club appreciates the opportunity to make these written comments to add to our oral comments we presented during the public hearing on the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board.

With approximately 95% of the state's lands privately owned, and the vast and diverse geography of Texas, the TSSWCB serves a vital role in the conservation of our lands, soils, habitats and water resources. Not every solution to our challenges involve regulation, and as primarily a non-regulatory agency, the Board has helped thousands of Texans better conserve their agricultural, forested and recreational lands and soils, participated in finding solutions to non-point source water pollution and more recently in dam safety. Finally, through passage of SB 1118, the Board added a new priority on soil conservation, healthy soils, flood mitigation and other priorities. These new priorities will help directly in the fight to mitigate against climate change and can even help retain more carbon in the soil.

As we stated we are in full agreement with all four of the Sunset staff recommendations. We do not perceive the first set of recommendations having to do with the dam safety program to be meant as a criticism of an agency that was given a big new task, but as an opportunity moving forward to be more participatory and transparent. The Board should develop a 10-year dam safety plan with robust stakeholder participation and with required action by leadership in terms of approving grants and projects. This is good government and transparency and we urge the commissioners to adopt these recommendations, even if it might lead to some required additional employees.

Secondly, we believe there is an important reason to continue the Invasive Species Coordinating Committee and update statutes and management. Invasive species remain and are a growing concern from zebra mussels to carrizo cane to hundreds of other species. With at

least six state agencies with overlapping functions and often different lists, coordinating responses and funding options is important. Mitigating the impacts of invasive species can also be a key fight in the preservation of endangered species, and we would support statutory changes to reflect the potential addition of other agencies like the Comptroller that also work on endangered species. We believe it is reasonable that the committee meet at least once a year, and we would request that at least part of that meeting include a public component for transparency and input.

We are very supportive of continuing the agency, and assuring that an agency with deep roots in the community continues to provide federal and state funding to local agencies, and landowners for dam safety, non-point source water pollution efforts, and the new efforts as a result of SB 1118. While not yet funded, the programs authorized under SB 1118 will be important for flooding, for climate mitigation, for resiliency and water quality.

We are also supportive of Item 4, that imposes similar requirements on the Board to other agencies in terms of formal recusals involving conflict of interest, transparency, as well as including requiring an annual report of the Board's activities. We would ask that efforts related to SB 1118 do be included in these reporting requirements.

We appreciate the efforts of the Board, Sunset staff and the Commissioners to continue and improve this key agency. We hope you will adopt all the recommendations, and add specific measures and statutory language around public participation in dam safety prioritization, the invasive species coordinating council and reporting on grants and other activities.