

Water Conservation Advisory Council
Evapotranspiration Stakeholder Update
April 11, 2022

On March 23, 2022, a Water Conservation Advisory Council (WCAC) Evapotranspiration (ET) Stakeholder meeting occurred virtually and had 28 participants. Part of the discussion included the results of a recent survey regarding knowledge, use and interest of ET data in Texas. The following is a brief summary of the survey:

- From February 16 through March 4, the survey received 112 responses, representing a reasonable participation distribution throughout the state, from five stakeholder groups: Agricultural Producer/Consultant, Conservation Professional/Extension, Irrigation/Groundwater Districts, Irrigation/Landscape Professionals and Municipal/Wholesale Water Providers
- Of the stakeholders asked if reliable ET data would be beneficial in their area, 84% responded “yes”, 10% “no” and 5% “maybe”
- Of the stakeholders asked if they have not used an ET network how likely would they use it if available, 36% responded “likely”, 55% “would consider it” and 9% “not likely”
- The survey, sent to hundreds of stakeholders, showed a serious effort to determine the level of interest in creating a statewide evapotranspiration (ET) network in Texas

During the meeting, discussion occurred about a recently approved white paper by the Texas Groundwater Protection Committee titled, “ET Networks and the Protection of Groundwater Supplies and Quality”. It includes two recommendations for consideration in their upcoming legislative report:

- Establish a sustainable statewide ET Network to ensure that accurate and precise crop ET values are made available for the proper management of water use in Texas.
- Identify and provide funding for agencies or organizations that will operate, maintain, and technically support the stations in this network, and that will continue to make available and further develop end-user products and online tools for the dissemination of ET data.

Discussion shifted to a possible recommendation for the upcoming legislative report. Important excerpts regarding ET from the WCAC 2020 Report to the Texas Legislature include:

- “...the Council is interested in monitoring the progress of the potential advancement of ET networks, specifically the TexasET Network, across the state.” and
- “Previous studies have recognized the value of ET networks, the potential of having a statewide network, and the recommendations to have the TWDB become a consistent manager and provider of ET information. The TexasET Network may provide a model to build upon across the state, and the Council is interested in monitoring this potential for a sustainable future.”

Further discussion about the status of Texas Water Development Board’s (TWDB) TexMesoNet program and a potential path forward for a recommendation by the WCAC led to the scheduling of an additional meeting on March 28. This meeting allowed interested parties to gain a more thorough understanding of the TexMesoNet program from TWDB staff. Important details included:

- TWDB currently has 90 stations in the field with a goal to install 20 per year, covering the entire state and with a 20 mile distance between
- TexMesoNet is a “network of networks” and includes high-quality data from thousands of stations across Texas

- Current funding levels are limited to mainly installation of stations and some maintenance
- TWDB staff wants TexMesoNet to eventually serve economic sectors (ex. agriculture, urban, energy, public safety) by creating long-term products from the data
- Staff sees value in supporting existing networks with station and maintenance assistance but there is a lack of resources
- Staff has difficulty identifying locations and gaining approval to build stations and WCAC could consider being an advocate through stakeholder contacts to advance installations
- Through a recent sunset review, staff noted the TexMesoNet program did not have statutory authority and a response from the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission was expected soon
- From the discussion, considerations for WCAC include:
 - Ask TWDB executive staff to consider internal direction of TexMesoNet station placement and standards to include ET data
 - Add language or a separate recommendation in the legislative report regarding overall long-term support for statutory authority of TWDB to continue, and possibly increase support of, the TexMesoNet program
 - Specific WCAC recommendation regarding long-term support of a statewide Texas ET network could include language about a “broad plan” with specific steps to move forward