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AGENDA ITEM MEMO

BOARD MEETING DATE: August 15, 2024

TO: Board Members

THROUGH: Bryan McMath, Interim Executive Administrator
Ashley Harden, General Counsel
Rebecca Trevino, Chief Financial Officer
John T. Dupnik, P.G., Deputy Executive Administrator, Water Science and Conservation

FROM: Mark W. Wentzel, Ph.D., Hydrologist, River Science and Hydrosurvey
Mindy Conyers, Ph.D., Manager, River Science and Hydrosurvey

SUBJECT: Water Resources Investigations with the U.S. Geological Survey

ACTION REQUESTED

Consider authorizing the Executive Administrator to execute a contract in an amount not to exceed \$2,113,735, including \$1,750,000 from the Texas Water Development Board, for continuation of the Water Resources Investigations data collection program with the U.S. Geological Survey in Fiscal Year 2025.

BACKGROUND

Water data is the foundation upon which Texas builds its water plans, protects against flood risk, and manages water resources. The first U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) streamflow gage in Texas was installed 135 years ago on the Rio Grande near El Paso. The USGS and funding partners currently maintain a network of 779 streamflow and 160 lake level gages, providing near real-time data across the state. Each year, the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) enters into a contractual agreement with the USGS to cover the cost of gaging for a portion of the statewide network. The USGS also contributes funding toward the cost of gages included in the agreement. Gages included in the agreement collect data for one of two primary purposes: (1) water resources monitoring and planning or (2) flood forecasting and warning.

In Fiscal Year 2024, the TWDB partnered with the USGS to operate and maintain 51 streamflow and 34 lake level gages for water resources monitoring and planning and 57 streamflow, 6 lake level, and 45 rain gages for flood forecasting and warning. Additionally, the cost to install a flood-hardened stream gage on the Blanco River at Highway 281 in Blanco and a collocated precipitation gage was added to the Fiscal Year

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2024 contract. These gages will replace similar equipment at this location that has been operated by the Lower Colorado River Authority since 2016 and is scheduled to be removed after August 2024. A flood-hardened stream and precipitation gage near this location are required to maintain flood forecasting and warning capabilities in the basin. Total cost of the agreement in Fiscal Year 2024, including installation of the equipment in Blanco, was \$2,046,195, with the USGS contributing \$363,735 and the TWDB contributing \$1,682,460.

KEY ISSUES

Although the USGS does not increase their costs for operation and maintenance of gages every year, over the last 21 years, gaging costs have increased an average of one and a half percent per year. For Fiscal Year 2025, the USGS will increase operation and maintenance costs approximately three percent above costs for Fiscal Year 2024. Funds available from the USGS for cost share will not increase from Fiscal Year 2024 levels. The TWDB has sufficient funds budgeted to cover the additional gaging costs in Fiscal Year 2025.

The Executive Administrator proposes continuing the gaging contract with the USGS for Fiscal Year 2025. A portion of contracted funds will cover operations and maintenance for 51 streamflow and 34 lake level gages that provide data for water resources monitoring and planning. A second portion of contracted funding will support flood warning and forecasting. Flood gaging services will include operation and maintenance costs for 58 existing streamflow, 6 lake level, and 46 rain gages, including the additional stream gage on the Blanco River.

The total cost of the Fiscal Year 2025 gaging contract will not exceed \$2,113,735, with \$363,735 provided by the USGS and up to \$1,750,000 provided by the TWDB from general revenue and the Texas Infrastructure Resiliency Fund.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive Administrator concludes that the Water Resources Investigations gaging and data collection program furthers the objectives of statewide water resources data collection and dissemination and of collection of flood related information and recommends approval of this request.