

A BIG CONGRATULATIONS TO Representative Andrew Murr, author of House Bill 1688 and the South Llano River’s Scenic Riverway Designation!
<https://legiscan.com/TX/text/HB1688/2023>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - Contact Information September 22, 2023, Logan Harrison 512-463-0536:

Article by Chairman Andrew Murr

“Ensuring a Pristine Future: Protecting the South Llano River with
A Scenic Riverway Designation”

As the author of House Bill 1688 during the 88th Legislative Session, I am excited to shed light on the significance of this bill and the positive impacts it will have on our region. This legislation addresses the crucial issue of water quality protection, specifically targeting the water quality standards of the South Llano River, the primary drinking water source for the City of Junction. Through a combination of pilot program oversight, increased inspections, and a dedicated fund for reclamation and restoration, this bill aims to safeguard our precious water resources unlike nearly anywhere else in Texas.

The target of this legislation focuses squarely on the South Llano River in Kimble County. This area of the Hill Country is a natural treasure and has long been cherished by Texans for its scenic beauty, recreational opportunities, and vital ecological role. Easily considered one of the cleanest rivers in Texas, these waters are the primary source of drinking water for the City of Junction and, consequently, a majority of all Kimble County residents. Downstream users also rely upon these waters for municipal, domestic and livestock use. To ensure the continued well-being of this waterway, this bill designates this defined “scenic riverway” as a statutorily protected area, with new water quality protections provided to ensure the future water quality of this river segment.

House Bill 1688 requires that the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), the Lower Colorado River Authority, and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department coordinate efforts to inspect the riverway and test water samples on a routine basis (at least twice annually). Inspections must occur from both the surface of the water and from aircraft flying over the riverway. All of these efforts are intended to detect any potential violations from quarrying (surface excavation) in a water quality protection area of the riverway. Further, a funding mechanism is also in place that collects penalties, grants, and gifts

received by the TCEQ as a result of enforcement actions and then makes those funds available to the reclamation and restoration of riverbeds, bottoms, and banks affected by unlawful discharges or other violations.

The protective measures set forth in this new law have additional significance, further enhancing and supporting the South Llano River State Park, our 2600-acre oasis that beckons with its clear running waters and truly rural Texas setting.

The river's unique ecosystem teems with biodiversity and its ecological importance extends beyond its immediate surroundings. By protecting its beds, bottoms, and banks, House Bill 1688 ensures that the intricate web of life that relies on the river's health remains vibrant and intact. As readers are well aware, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has for years worked to enhance and protect our state fish – the Guadalupe bass – in the South Llano River, in part because the river is pristine and the species genetics remain pure (bass hybridization is a threat in many river basins).

In order to designate a scenic waterway, it needs a name. The only other program of its kind in Texas – the John Graves Scenic Riverway – on a portion of the Brazos River, carries the name of prominent historical figure. Our most prominent local historical figure associated with the South Llano River is former Texas Governor Coke R. Stevenson of Telegraph, leading to the designation of the “Coke Stevenson Scenic Riverway.” The Coke Stevenson Scenic Riverway was thus included into the program currently in progress for the John Graves Scenic Riverway (which now has a program end date of 2027). Modeled as a pilot program, the scenic riverway program allows the state to assess the effectiveness of our water quality protection efforts and make necessary adjustments before deciding to expand the initiative to other areas in the future.

Presently, I am not aware of any quarry activities in or near the South Llano River. But like you I drink the water in the City of Junction, I go swimming to keep cool in the summer, and I fish in the fall and winter. And just like you, I want the best for our community. The Coke Stevenson Scenic Riverway is one more way for us to make that happen.

For additional information regarding this new law, and the scenic riverway program, please visit capitol.texas.gov or contact my office.