

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

H.B. 3618
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Engrossed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Due to factors including the ongoing drought of record and significant population growth, Texas is experiencing increased public activity in dry riverbeds. This activity can lead to serious fire and safety concerns, particularly for areas with dense and dry vegetation. In addition, overnight camping in these dry riverbeds has created a public safety concern for inexperienced campers who are unfamiliar with the conditions and terrain created by drought conditions. And finally, the vegetation and wildlife can be negatively ecologically impacted by increased activity in dry riverbeds caused by the ongoing drought conditions.

The Blanco River running through Central Texas has significant distances of the riverbed which are dry virtually all year due to the ecological formation of the river amid ongoing drought conditions. Within these sections of the river are several unique features, which have become increasingly popular with outdoor enthusiasts and are contributing to the increased activity in the dry riverbed. Concerns regarding fire safety and ecological damage created by this increased activity in the riverbed have increased the need to protect these portions of the Blanco River. H.B. 3618 seeks to remedy fire safety and public health concerns while balancing the public's interest by limiting camping or the building of campfires in this dry portion of the Blanco River in times of drought.

H.B. 3618 amends current law prohibiting camping and building fires in certain areas and creates a criminal offense.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Chapter 90, Parks and Wildlife Code, by adding Section 90.0085, as follows:

Sec. 90.0085. **CAMPING AND BUILDING FIRES PROHIBITED IN CERTAIN AREAS.** (a) Provides that this section applies to a section of the Blanco River that is not located in a county adjacent to a county with a municipality with a population greater than 1.5 million.

(b) Prohibits a person, notwithstanding Section 90.008(a) (prohibiting a person from restricting, obstructing, interfering with, or limiting public recreational use of a protected freshwater area), from camping or building a fire in a dry riverbed.

SECTION 2. Amends Section 90.011(a), Parks and Wildlife Code, to add a reference to Section 90.0085 and makes no further change.

SECTION 3. Effective date: September 1, 2015.