

2023 Regular Session

SENATE BILL NO. 42

BY SENATOR FRED MILLS

Prefiled pursuant to Article III, Section 2(A)(4)(b)(i) of the Constitution of Louisiana.

WATER MANAGEMENT. Creates the Louisiana Watershed Initiative. (8/1/23)

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AN ACT

To amend and reenact R.S. 36:4(B)(1)(a), to enact Part VIII of Chapter 2 of Title 49 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes of 1950, to be comprised of R.S. 49:220.41 through 220.45, and to repeal R.S. 38:90.2 and 90.5, relative to the Louisiana Watershed Initiative; to provide for purpose; to create the Watershed Management Council within the office of the governor; to require the council to make recommendations; to provide for membership of the council; to provide relative to compensation; to provide for powers, duties, and authority of the council; to provide for regional watershed coalitions; to provide for rules and regulations; to provide for terms and definitions; to provide for public notice; to provide with respect to funding mechanisms and allocations; and to provide for related matters.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of Louisiana:

Section 1. R.S. 36:4(B)(1)(a) is hereby amended and reenacted to read as follows:

§4. Structure of executive branch of state government

* * *

B. The office of the governor shall be in the executive branch of state government.

1 (1) The following agencies and their powers, duties, functions, and
2 responsibilities are hereby transferred to the office of the governor:

3 (a) Division of administration (Subtitle I of Title 39 of the Louisiana Revised
4 Statutes of 1950 generally, including but not limited to R.S. 39:1 et seq., 11 et seq.,
5 15.1 et seq., 21 et seq., 51 et seq., 71 et seq., 87.1 et seq., 88.1 et seq., 101 et seq.,
6 140 et seq., 171 et seq., 196 et seq., 231 et seq., 251 et seq., 321 et seq., 333 et seq.,
7 360 et seq., and 367; and also R.S. 39:1410, 1481 et seq., 1527 et seq., 1551 et seq.,
8 1751 et seq., 1761 et seq., 1796 et seq., 2001 et seq., and 2171 et seq.; R.S.
9 40:1237.2; R.S. 41:1 et seq., R.S. 42:801 et seq. and 1261 et seq.; R.S. 43:1,31, 33,
10 and 81- 90; R.S. 47:35; and R.S. 49:141, 205, **220.41 et seq.**, 661 et seq., 954.1, and
11 981 et seq.).

12 * * *

13 Section 2. Part VIII of Chapter 2 of Title 49 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes of
14 1950, comprised of R.S. 49:220.41 through 220.45, is hereby enacted to read as follows:

15 **PART VIII. LOUISIANA WATERSHED INITIATIVE**

16 **§220.41. Louisiana Watershed Initiative; purpose**

17 **A. The state of Louisiana recognizes that Louisiana's abundant water**
18 **resources can often endanger communities and that water does not follow**
19 **political boundaries, but rather responds to geological, bathymetrical, and**
20 **hydrological boundaries.**

21 **B. The purpose of this Part is to establish the Watershed Management**
22 **Council to develop, implement, and manage the Louisiana Watershed Initiative,**
23 **a statewide, comprehensive watershed planning process that fosters the**
24 **collaborative management of Louisiana's flood risks by local, state, and regional**
25 **governmental entities.**

26 **C. The legislature hereby finds that:**

27 **(1) Louisiana communities are hydraulically and hydrologically**
28 **connected within the bounds of a watershed, and decisions made in one portion**
29 **of a watershed may impact floodplains in other portions of the same watershed.**

1 (2) Flooding after a rain event is not only related to the amount and
2 intensity of rainfall received, but is also closely tied to land use, as well as policy
3 and infrastructure decisions.

4 (3) Floodplains are impacted by actions and decisions made by a wide
5 variety of people, laws, and regulatory bodies, including private landowners,
6 municipalities, parish leaders, zoning laws, building codes, regulations, and
7 federal requirements.

8 (4) Existing practices across varying levels of government do not
9 currently provide for the comprehensive floodplain management that is
10 necessary to properly address drainage issues as land is developed.

11 (5) The increasing frequency and extent of flood events demands
12 heightened levels of coordination, information sharing, and response among
13 state agencies and local and regional stakeholders in order to more closely align
14 resources and programs designed to protect communities from flooding and
15 manage floodplains and watersheds effectively.

16 D. The legislature further finds that cooperative endeavors and
17 coordination amongst local governments, parish governments, and political
18 subdivisions within a watershed region boundary, in furtherance of the goals of
19 the Watershed Initiative as provided in this Part, constitute a public purpose as
20 contemplated by Article VII, Section 14(C) of the Constitution of Louisiana.

21 E. It is the purpose and intent of the legislature, through the creation of
22 the Watershed Management Council to improve the way residents and
23 governments understand, address, and respond to flood risks; to organize a
24 structure for making changes and improvements on a watershed scale; and to
25 develop modeling, planning, and data tools that inform and support more
26 effective watershed-based floodplain management.

27 §220.42. Definitions

28 As used in this Part, the following terms shall have the meanings
29 ascribed to them unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

1 **(1) "Council" means the Watershed Management Council.**

2 **(2) "Floodplain" means any area of land within a watershed that is**
3 **susceptible to inundation by floodwaters from any source.**

4 **(3) "Watershed" means a geographic area within the boundary of a**
5 **drainage divide that drains all of its streams and rainfall into a common outlet.**

6 **§220.43. Watershed Management Council; creation; membership**

7 **A. There is hereby created within the division of administration the**
8 **Watershed Management Council.**

9 **B. The council shall be composed of the following members:**

10 **(1) The commissioner of administration or his designee, who shall serve**
11 **as chairman.**

12 **(2) A member appointed by the speaker of the House of Representatives**
13 **from the membership of the House Committee on Transportation, Highways,**
14 **and Public Works.**

15 **(3) A member appointed by the president of the Senate from the**
16 **membership of the Senate Committee on Transportation, Highways, and Public**
17 **Works.**

18 **(4) The secretary of the Department of Transportation and Development**
19 **or his designee.**

20 **(5) The chairman of the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority**
21 **or his designee.**

22 **(6) The executive director of the Louisiana office of community**
23 **development or his designee.**

24 **(7) The director of the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and**
25 **Emergency Preparedness or his designee.**

26 **(8) The secretary of the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries or his**
27 **designee.**

28 **(9) The secretary of the Department of Environmental Quality or his**
29 **designee.**

1 **(10) The secretary of the Department of Natural Resources or his**
2 **designee.**

3 **(11) The commissioner of agriculture and forestry or his designee.**

4 **(12) A member appointed by the president of the Association of Levee**
5 **Boards of Louisiana from the membership of the association.**

6 **(13) The chairman of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission**
7 **or his designee.**

8 **(14) The executive director of the Police Jury Association of Louisiana**
9 **or his designee.**

10 **(15) The executive director of the Louisiana Municipal Association or his**
11 **designee.**

12 **C. A majority of the members shall constitute a quorum. Members of**
13 **the council shall not be compensated for their services but may seek travel**
14 **reimbursement from their respective agencies in accordance with the agency's**
15 **travel reimbursement guidelines.**

16 **§220.44. Watershed Management Council; powers and duties; authority**

17 **A. The Watershed Management Council shall have the following powers**
18 **and duties:**

19 **(1) Develop, implement, and manage the Louisiana Watershed Initiative**
20 **to foster the collaborative management of Louisiana's flood risks by local, state,**
21 **and regional governmental entities.**

22 **(2) Promote a unified effort, built on scientific and engineering**
23 **principles, to address flooding issues across the state.**

24 **(3) Achieve consistency in project planning and modeling activities**
25 **across the Louisiana Watershed Initiative.**

26 **(4) Identify and work with or seek input from additional local, state, and**
27 **federal agencies, and other stakeholders including but not limited to nonprofit**
28 **research institutions, university research institutions, drainage or levee boards,**
29 **and other local districts, and private sector companies.**

1 **(5) Expand, develop, and use in-state skill, knowledge, technology, and**
2 **talent to develop and implement the program promoting Louisiana resources**
3 **through collaboration, communication, and cooperation among governmental,**
4 **nongovernmental, for-profit, nonprofit, and university entities.**

5 **(6) Increase state and local resilience to flooding by working to improve**
6 **response to flooding and reduce the instances, damage, and amount of time**
7 **needed to recover from flooding.**

8 **(7) Create a path for the state and its various jurisdictions and political**
9 **subdivisions to coordinate at a statewide and watershed level plan to maximize**
10 **flood risk reduction in coordination with the natural and beneficial functions**
11 **of the watershed and its floodplains, and to consistently manage floodplains**
12 **using contextually appropriate best practices.**

13 **(8) Work with the interdependencies of our communities, infrastructure,**
14 **political jurisdictions, and the natural environment to increase Louisiana's**
15 **resilience and its ability to adapt and thrive.**

16 **(9) Promote actions, including legislative, administrative, and regulatory,**
17 **where appropriate, to enhance watershed and floodplain management in**
18 **Louisiana.**

19 **(10) Identify, prioritize, acquire, and establish funding mechanisms to**
20 **enhance and further efforts associated with the Louisiana Watershed Initiative.**

21 **(11) Facilitate watershed-based floodplain management by working to**
22 **create watershed-bounded entities across the state.**

23 **(12) Develop an approach to watershed-based floodplain management**
24 **that is recognized as a model for others nationally and internationally.**

25 **(13) Create, update, review, and revise a statewide watershed plan in a**
26 **manner that is consistent with applicable federal laws and regulations and with**
27 **the comprehensive master coastal protection plan as defined by R.S. 49:214.2.**

28 **(14) Establish and provide assistance to temporary regional steering**
29 **committees within each watershed region boundary to provide input in the**

1 development and implementation of long-term regional watershed
2 organizational structures, watershed management strategies, and the
3 implementation of projects, programs, and policies emanating from strategic
4 efforts.

5 (15) Employ, appoint, remove, assign, and promote staff necessary for
6 the efficient administration of this Part, provided that sufficient funds are
7 specifically appropriated, available through federal grants, or through
8 interagency transfer agreements.

9 (16) Approve, upon the recommendation of regional steering committees,
10 regional watershed coalitions formed among parishes, political subdivisions,
11 and municipal governments within a designated watershed region to coordinate
12 the development of watershed management plans and to aid in administering
13 the implementation of projects, programs, and policies emanating from those
14 planning efforts. This authority shall be exercised consistent with R.S.
15 49:220.45.

16 (17) Allocate funds to regional watershed coalitions, should sufficient
17 funds become available through either state, federal, or private sources.

18 (18) Promulgate rules and regulations necessary to implement the
19 provisions of this Part.

20 B. Nothing in this Chapter shall interfere with the statutorily-granted
21 authority of any state agency or local government.

22 §220.45. Regional watershed coalitions; creation; powers and duties

23 A. In order to foster regionally led watershed-based floodplain
24 management, the Watershed Management Council may approve permanent
25 regional watershed coalitions from the recommendations submitted by regional
26 steering committees within watershed regions.

27 B. The council shall consider the approval of regional watershed
28 coalitions in a manner consistent with the following procedure:

29 (1) The regional steering committee shall submit a written

1 recommendation that includes the proposed membership and structure of the
2 regional watershed coalition that provides the most effective framework for a
3 designated watershed to meet the goals and objectives of the Louisiana
4 Watershed Initiative.

5 (2) The council shall hold a public hearing for consideration of the
6 recommendation after publishing a public notice of intention to create a
7 regional watershed coalition three times in the official journal of the state and
8 the official journal of each parish contained within the designated watershed
9 regional boundary. The publications shall be not less than fifteen days prior to
10 the date of the public hearing.

11 (3) Thirty days after holding the public hearing and considering any
12 public comments received, the council may either approve the recommendation
13 to create the regional watershed coalition or return the recommendation to the
14 regional steering committee for further consideration if the council determines
15 either of the following:

16 (a) The recommendation needs to address the public comments received.
17 When considering comments related to the creation of a particular regional
18 watershed coalition, comments from individuals and entities located within the
19 particular watershed region shall be given greater weight than those from
20 outside of the region.

21 (b) The recommendation is inconsistent with the purpose of this Part and
22 with requirements imposed by federal or state funding agreements.

23 (4) The council shall foster collaboration amongst approved regional
24 watershed coalitions by convening meetings to resolve disputes and issuing
25 recommendations for actions that prioritize the goals and objectives of this Part.

26 C. Approved regional watershed coalitions shall constitute a political
27 subdivision of the state of Louisiana and shall be subject to the Open Meetings
28 Law pursuant to R.S. 42:11 et seq., and the Public Records Law pursuant to
29 R.S. 42:1 et seq.

Proposed law creates the Watershed Management Council within the division of administration that consists of the following members:

- (1) The commissioner of administration or his designee, who serves as the chairman.
- (2) A member appointed by the speaker of the House of Representatives from the membership of the House Committee on Transportation, Highways, and Public Works.
- (3) A member appointed by the president of the Senate from the membership of the Senate Committee on Transportation, Highways, and Public Works.
- (4) The secretary of the Department of Transportation and Development or his designee.
- (5) The chairman of the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority or his designee.
- (6) The executive director of the Louisiana office of community development or his designee.
- (7) The director of the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness or his designee.
- (8) The secretary of the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries or his designee.
- (9) The secretary of the Department of Environmental Quality or his designee.
- (10) The secretary of the Department of Natural Resources or his designee.
- (11) The commissioner of agriculture and forestry or his designee.
- (12) A member appointed by the president of the Association of Levee Boards of Louisiana from the membership of the association.
- (13) The chairman of the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission or his designee.
- (14) The executive director of the Police Jury Association of Louisiana or his designee.
- (15) The executive director of the Louisiana Municipal Association or his designee.

Proposed law provides for the powers and duties of the council that include developing, implementing, and managing the Louisiana Watershed Initiative and associated actions that encourage collaboration on an interconnected statewide and watershed basis. Proposed law further authorizes the council to create, update, and revise a statewide watershed plan, establish temporary regional steering committees, approve permanent regional watershed coalitions, allocate funds to these coalitions, and promulgate rules and regulations to implement proposed law.

Proposed law provides that nothing in proposed law shall interfere with the statutorily-granted authority of any state agency or local government.

Proposed law provides for the approval of regional watershed coalitions by the council based upon the recommendation of a regional steering committee, a publicly noticed public hearing, and public comments.

Proposed law provides approved regional watershed coalitions are political subdivisions of the state and are subject to the Open Meetings Law and the Public Records Law.

Proposed law authorizes regional watershed coalitions to develop regional watershed

management plans, facilitate watershed management, receive funds, provide assistance to local entities, conduct outreach and education, enter cooperative endeavor agreements, facilitate meetings of local entities, and propose flood risk reduction projects.

Present law creates the Floodplain Evaluation and Management Commission to revise the flood information database. Present law provides for the methodology for evaluating flood-control projects. Proposed law repeals present law.

Effective August 1, 2023.

(Amends R.S. 36:4(B)(1)(a); adds R.S. 49:220.41- 220.45; repeals R.S. 38:90.2 and 90.5)