Frequently Asked Questions

All documents related to the System Operation Permit, 2018 Conformed WMP, and the associated Technical Report as well as the timeline of the permitting process referenced within these FAQs may be found at the following link: System Operations

1. What is the System Operation Permit?

Short Answer: The System Operation Permit (SysOps) is the informal name for Brazos River Authority's (BRA) Water Use Permit No. 5851.

Long Answer: The SysOps Permit is a Water Use Permit 5851, a water right issued by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) to the BRA on November 30, 2016. The SysOps Permit contains authorizations and special conditions that dictate the volume(s) of the appropriation, diversion rate limits and locations, the Permit's priority date, and conservation requirements that guide the implementation and maintenance of the Permit. The authorizations and conditions within the SysOps Permit were developed over a 14-year permitting process and ensure that the BRA's use of the SysOps Permit complies with TCEQ rules, including environmental flow standards, and does not impact other authorized water users in the Basin.

2. Where does the SysOps Permit's water come from?

The BRA's Water Supply System includes 11 water supply reservoirs, 3 of which are owned by the BRA and the other 8 owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Coordinated use of the water supply storage within these reservoirs reduces losses (e.g. evaporation) and accordingly creates additional water supply. This coordinated use is known as 'System Operation.'

The water authorized by the SysOps Permit comes from combining the additional water supply generated by System Operation with treated wastewater effluent (return flows) and the naturally occurring flows in the river network. The SysOps Permit recognizes and quantifies this system supply and authorizes BRA to make beneficial use of this supply. The issuance of the SysOps Permit marked the first time a new supply, made solely available from system operation, was permitted by TCEQ.

3. How is the Water Management Plan related to the System Operation Permit?

Over the course of the permitting process, BRA was directed to develop a Water Management Plan (WMP) that outlines the operating principles for the SysOps Permit. The requirement for BRA to maintain and update the WMP is included as a special condition to the Permit. The WMP is attached to and incorporated into the SysOps Permit.

The WMP is comprised of:
- a water use accounting plan,
- TCEQ-adopted environmental flows standards,
- maximum diversion rates for all potential diversion locations,
- data from water availability modeling,
- and other information that demonstrates the BRA's ability to comply with the authorizations and special conditions of the SysOps Permit.

4. What does the Water Management Plan do?

The WMP establishes and governs the operating principles upon which decisions are made for diversion, storage, and use of water appropriated under the SysOps Permit. These operating principles ensure that the use of the water permitted by the SysOps Permit complies with the authorization and special conditions of the Permit. The WMP guides only the use of the SysOps Permit and does not directly limit the operation of the BRA's other water rights.

5. What is the Technical Report and the Water Use Accounting Plan?

At the same time as the WMP, the BRA also developed an accompanying Technical Report to provide supporting information and technical data for the WMP. The Technical Report is a separate set of documents and includes several appendices, which was reviewed and approved alongside the WMP.

One of the appendices of the Technical Report is the Water Accounting Plan (WAP). The WAP is a means to record and track the BRA's water use, including reservoir and river diversions, return flows, and other water supply system data. The current WAP is maintained regularly by the BRA and is available to the public upon request.

6. What considerations are given for environmental needs in the SysOps Permit and WMP?

The SysOps Permit authorizations are subject to the Senate Bill 3 (SB3) Environmental Flow Standards adopted by TCEQ in 2012. The SB3 Environmental Flow Standards were developed at the request of the State Legislature to promote healthy rivers throughout the State. Both the WMP and Technical Report describe how the SysOps Permit complies with these environmental standards.

7. Does the BRA ever update the WMP?

Yes, the BRA is required by the special conditions of SysOps Permit to submit an amendment to update the WMP at least every ten (10) years from the date the Permit was issued to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. As such, the first update to the WMP (2026 WMP) must be submitted to the TCEQ for technical review by November 30, 2026.

8. What will BRA be updating in the 2026 WMP?

The initial WMP was developed in 2012. Therefore, there is a wide variety of technical information including hydrology, customer demand datasets, water availability models, system infrastructure, etc. that must be updated. Additionally, the written descriptions that comprise the WMP and Technical Reports must also be updated to reflect the outcome of those technical changes.

Additionally, in 2024, the BRA dedicated 6,035 acre-feet of the SysOps Permit's firm water supply to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for environmental uses. A description of that dedication will be included in the 2026 WMP and Technical Report.

The BRA will provide a summary of the changes to the 2026 WMP and additional educational material may be placed on this website before the submittal deadline when available.

9. Who will draft the chapters and sections of the WMP and Technical Reports?

The BRA's project team made up of hydrologists, engineers, and water resource planners are responsible for the development of the 2026 WMP and technical reports.

10. When will TCEQ review and approve the 2026 WMP?

The 2026 WMP amendment application will be submitted to TCEQ on November 30, 2026. TCEQ will then review the application documents to ensure all necessary information is included, upon which time the application will be declared administratively complete. The TCEQ will then undertake a technical review which could last anywhere from one (1) to three (3) years. Once the technical review is completed, full notice of the application will be issued to the entire Brazos basin.