



For Immediate Release, March 1, 2012

HIGHLAND LAKES GET A REPRIEVE, FOR NOW

AUSTIN—A March 1, 2012 deadline and a lake storage level trigger were carefully watched this week by residents and businesses up and down the Lower Colorado River Basin. If the levels in Lakes Buchanan and Travis, already devastated by last year's record releases to interruptible downstream interests during the worst drought in recorded history, had risen just inches more by Thursday at 11:59 pm, massive amounts of water would be released beginning April 1st.

This release would have brought Central Texas closer to pro rata curtailment of cities and industries. It is not happening. The first ever curtailment of water for agriculture may keep the economic engine of Central Texas alive one more year.

The combined storage of Lakes Travis and Buchanan now stands at approximately 847,000 AF of stored water or 58% empty. At the 850,000 AF level, the emergency measure passed by the TCEQ months earlier would have allowed the delivery of 125,000 AF of water for rice farmers, requiring releases from lakes Buchanan and Travis of up to one-third more than this amount to account for leakage and other losses in the canals that supply water for rice and other crops such as turf, and Garwood, an interruptible rice customer whose contract guarantees water.

Absent further rain, the two reservoirs could have dropped as much as 200,000 AF, putting lake levels well below the lows reached in 2011. To put that in perspective, if 200,000 AF were released from Lake Travis today, the lake would be more than 26 feet lower (approximately 604 msl). If the water were released from Lake Buchanan, that lake would be over 17 feet lower (approximately 975 msl). This would leave about 18 months of drinking water supplies in the two reservoirs--risky at best.

How did we get to this point? A simple history lesson seldom told: When the dams for the Highland Lakes were built in the '30's and '40's, the population of Central Texas was small, the counties of Wharton, Colorado, and Matagorda had a booming rice industry, and there was plenty of water for all. Fast forward to 2010, and the Highland Lakes in Central Texas are home to close to 2 million people and industries, while the lower three counties are decreasing to approximately 98,000 residents.

Yet the interruptible interests continue to claim seventy percent of the water from the Highland Lakes as stated in the recently passed Water Management Plan of the LCRA. The cities have done a great job of conserving water and lowering usage levels, all the while growing rapidly. The price of raw water for agriculture, about \$6 per AF of stored water, has not changed in decades, giving no incentive for conservation, while Austin citizens have paid more and more, now with a rate of \$151 per AF and slated to rise again.

The State of Texas has not created significant new water supplies in 40 years. Power plants around the state are looking for alternatives to surface water for their cooling needs. Groundwater is being snapped up all over the state, and controversial new rulings may accelerate this pace. Current water supplies in the Lower Colorado River Basin may be over-committed, and do not appear capable of meeting projected needs for drinking water and industry.

It is time the State Legislature took serious action to provide sustainable new water supplies for Texas and to preserve the natural resource and economic powerhouse, the Highland Lakes. Off Channel Reservoirs are short term options, but not the solution. Australia has made extensive use of desalination, and Israel has just brought online a new desalination plant that will enable the country to sell water to other parts of the region. Brackish groundwater is available in Central Texas as well as fresh groundwater. Alternative crops and new irrigation methods must be pursued in our arid and semiarid regions, along with aggressive conservation, water reuse and xeriscaping. Additional supplies must be sought, and innovative technologies such as desalination and Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) pursued.

Lawmakers need to unite now and put partisan politics aside. Act to preserve the robust health of Texas now before the population doubles again! We are all in this together.

#



Contact:

Jo Karr Tedder, President of CTWC

Janet Caylor, Vice President of CTWC

Phone: 512-715-0015

**Email: OurWater1@gmail.com
or OurWater2@gmail.com**

www.ourwater-ourfuture.com

<https://www.facebook.com/CentralTexasWaterCoalition>

Like us on Facebook 