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Committee on Natural Resources

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September 13, 2013

Mr. Timothy Timmerman
Lower Colorado River Authority, Chairman
P.O. Box 220
Austin, TX 78767

Dear Chairman Timmerman:

Once again I am writing today with my concerns regarding the mismanagement of the Highland Lakes by the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA). Since 2011, I have sent a steady stream of letters warning of the dire consequences which would result from the downstream releases. Due to the irresponsible decisions your Board has made, our lakes today are only 32% full and we are being faced with the reality that they will hit a new all-time low in the next month. If the Board had heeded my advice in 2011 and not done the release to interruptible customers downstream, our lakes would be roughly half full today and we would not be as worried about the health of our basin.

Tuesday's decision to not seek Emergency Relief to suspend the release of more drinking water from the Highland Lakes is another example of LCRA's antiquated way of thinking. Although this drop in lake levels is "only" 8,684 acre feet, the truth is this represents 3% of the water we have left in Lake Travis and it is the amount that would be needed to furnish drinking water to at least 30,000 people for more than a year. This amount of water is of concern to your firm paying customers who rely on the lakes for drinking water-the very customers whose drinking water is supposed to be protected, even during a repeat of the drought of record. The way the LCRA has managed the basin over the past few years has been an example of a typical quasi-government entity abusing its power and thumbing its nose at local elected officials who are trying to responsibly manage this vital asset for the people of Central Texas during one of the most severe droughts of our lifetime. I continue to believe that your actions of late have been in violation of your 1989 court ordered adjudicated water permit.

Also of great concern is that the City of Austin, who prepaid LCRA for water to ensure that their citizens have a stable, reliable source of potable water, is in danger of being curtailed during a drought, a situation for which the City thought they were prepared. What will it cost the City in the future to replace that 8,684 acre feet when it is needed by Austin's residents and not available because the LCRA has released their prepaid water to downstream interests?



Since the drought began four years ago, I have cautioned against making careless decisions with the drinking water supply of more than 1 million Texans. It is time for you to stop the downhill draining of the Highland Lakes and the mismanagement of our basin. Some say we are in year four of a ten year drought, but who knows if this is the new "norm" that we are living in. If this is true, every drop of water is important to the firm paying customers of the LCRA, and you have an obligation to protect their asset. It is time to stop the mishandling of what precious amounts of water we have left in the lakes. I strongly encourage you to ask for Emergency Relief from any further withdrawals from the Highland Lakes. I cannot imagine any circumstance where the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality would not grant this relief given the state of our lakes at this time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Troy Fraser". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "T" and "F".

Senator Troy Fraser
Chairman
Senate Natural Resources Committee