



For Immediate Release

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## **Organization Says It's Time to Rethink Management of State's Dwindling Water Supplies or Consequences Could be Severe**

(AUSTIN, TEXAS – January 15, 2015) With most of the state gripped by a historic drought, the resulting signs and responses point to near desperation. As climatologists fear the worst, lakes in north Texas are at their lowest levels ever, west Texas communities have feared their water supplies were down to only a few months, and central Texas water reservoirs are at record lows threatening the water supply for one of the fastest growing regions in the country. One Texas city is recycling wastewater for personal consumption and has even resorted to cloud seeding in an attempt to induce rain. The threat to the state's water supply is real. The state's water supply, which has helped make the Texas economy the envy of the nation, is disappearing and taking with it drinking water, jobs and tax revenues needed for schools and local governments.

Citing dwindling water supplies in what may become the worst drought in the region's history, the Central Texas Water Coalition (CTWC) says it's time for the state to adopt a new mind-set in managing its water supplies. In calling for a new approach to water management, the organization cited the economic devastation of the current drought combined with the effect of past water management decisions on Lakes Travis and Buchanan, the primary water sources for the region's 1.5 million residents, as examples of why change is essential. The coalition is supporting recommendations currently being considered by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) that would limit the "open" or unlimited water releases from Lakes Travis and Buchanan to flood rice fields in South Texas. A proposal to increase the trigger points for releases to rice farmers has been sent by the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) to the TCEQ, the entity responsible for managing the state's water plan.

Jo Karr Tedder, president of the CTWC, says it is important to understand that a lack of rainfall is not the only reason for the water crisis gripping the Central Texas region. Tedder says, "Past water management policies have allowed these key lakes to be devastated with mass releases of water sold for almost nothing to flood rice fields."

"This isn't about having fun on the water, it's about making sure our policies protect drinking water, economic viability, businesses and jobs," added Tedder.

Area businesses, residents and local governments are still reeling from the releases in 2011 that saw more than 140 billion gallons of water, half of the available supply in Lake Travis, released downstream to grow the extremely water-intensive crops. They point out that the lake has never recovered.

Currently, municipal and business users must pay the Lower Colorado River Authority about \$175 per acre-foot for water from the lakes. Rice farmers who require massive quantities of water to flood their fields pay only about \$6.50 per acre-foot.

“The price disparity provides little incentive for rice farmers to conserve or pursue other sources that are available and closer to their location because they like getting the Highland Lakes water for almost nothing,” said Tedder.

According to the LCRA, the combined storage of Lakes Travis and Buchanan are currently at 34 percent capacity. Six of the all-time lowest annual water inflows into the lakes have occurred in the past nine years.

Tedder stated, “There’s no one who can promise this drought is going to get better. In fact, Dr. John Nielsen-Gammon, our state’s leading climatologist says it could last 15 more years.”

In October of 2013, Austin Water Utility Director Greg Meszaros told the Austin City Council that if the dry weather conditions continue, Lakes Travis and Buchanan could go dry in two to six years.

She continued, “The decision to release the water and the price that it is sold for are examples of why it’s time our entire state must rethink water management.”

She added, “We can’t wait until we’re out of water to better manage it. One and a half million residents in one of the fastest growing regions in the country depend on these lakes. Communities and economies all across Texas are threatened. We must have better planning, sound management, equitable pricing and greater conservation by all.”

Tedder says area residents should let their elected officials know that they support better management and equitable pricing of the state’s scarce and dwindling water resources.

The organization will be asking state legislators to begin the process to shift the state’s outlook on how it manages a precious and dwindling natural resource.

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**The Central Texas Water Coalition is a nonprofit organization whose primary mission is to advocate for and preserve the Highland Lakes’ role as an irreplaceable natural resource that supplies water for the region’s 1.5 million residents and drives an important regional economic engine for the state of Texas.**

[www.centraltexaswatercoalition.org](http://www.centraltexaswatercoalition.org)