WATER 101 ~ DEFINITIONS FROM LCRA

Volume:
The amount of water in the lake usually measured in acre-feet.

Acre-Foot: The amount of water required to cover an area of one acre to a depth of one foot. (1 acre is approximately the size of a football field) One acre-foot of water is equal to almost 326,000 gallons.

Flow: The volume of water passing a given point during a unit of time. Typically “flow” is expressed as cubic feet per second, or cfs. Flow is also known as "flow rate" or "discharge”.

Cubic Feet Per Second (cfs): The rate at which water is flowing. One cfs is equal to about 450 gallons per minute.

Firm vs. Interruptible Water: Water supplies managed by LCRA are divided into "firm" and "interruptible" stored water.

Interruptible Water: Water, which is mostly used for agriculture that is available for use on a year-to-year basis, depending on how much water is stored in lakes Travis and Buchanan. According to LCRA, during water shortages, interruptible water, which is mostly used for agriculture, is subject to rationing or curtailment first -- before firm water supplies. This point is debatable, especially this year! Raw Water Rate costs approximately $6.00 per acre-foot.

Firm Water:
Most of this water is committed for use by cities, industries, power plants and protection of aquatic life. By obtaining a contract from LCRA, cities, industries and homeowners in the lower Colorado River basin may secure a supply of "firm" water that is available even during dry periods that are equal to the worst drought on record unless you are a small firm customer and have to ’chase’ the water. Raw Water Rate for firm water is currently $151.00 per acre-foot.

Surface Water: Water above the surface of the ground, such as a lake or river. The term is used to distinguish it from groundwater.

Groundwater: Water that lies below the surface of the ground, usually in an aquifer or underground stream or lake. Wells are used to draw up groundwater for drinking and other purposes.

Highland Lakes: The chain of six lakes along the Colorado River, upstream of Austin. Each lake – Buchanan, Inks, LBJ, Marble Falls, Travis and Austin is created by one of the six dams owned or operated by LCRA.

Reservoir Lakes: Lakes Buchanan and Travis are reservoir lakes to store water and control floods.

Pass-Through Lakes: Lakes designed to allow water to pass through as opposed to being stored. Inks Lake, Lake LBJ and Lake Marble Falls pass water from Lake Buchanan to Lake

Travis. Lake Austin passes water to Town Lake to flow down the Colorado River to Matagorda Bay.

Constant Level Lakes: Not a correct term when referring to any of the Highland Lakes. Lakes Buchanan and Travis fluctuate more than the other lakes, but they all change daily.

Combined Storage: LCRA refers to combined storage as the total acre feet of Lake Travis and Lake Buchanan.

Minimum Combined Storage: The lowest level the lakes are allowed to reach during computer simulations, or models, used to help determine how water is used from lakes Buchanan and Travis. This level is used as a safety net during severe drought.

Combined Firm Yield: This represents the maximum average annual supply of water that can be supplied from a water source without shortages to upstream and downstream senior water rights during a repetition of the Drought of Record.

Drought of Record: The decade-long drought that affected Central Texas from the late 1940s through the late 1950s. LCRA uses it as a benchmark to compare recent droughts and to prepare for future droughts.