

LCRBC Cautiously Optimistic about LCRA's 2020 Water Management Plan

Counties, agriculture and environmental interests want assurance of downstream flows

EAGLE LAKE, Texas (Dec. 11, 2018) — The Lower Colorado River Basin Coalition said it is “cautiously optimistic” about the 2020 Water Management Plan approved on Tuesday by the Lower Colorado River Authority to guide operations of the river.

The LCRA Board of Directors approved the 2020 Plan, which updates and replaces the 2015 Plan, following a stakeholder input process that began in May.

“We applaud the LCRA for its inclusive process in updating the 2015 Water Management Plan and are cautiously optimistic that it will protect downstream interests during both drought and flood,” said Bastrop County Judge Paul Pape, a member of the LCRBC Executive Committee.

“We will be watching closely to see how higher levels of stored water in the Highland Lakes and reservoirs affect flood risks in the river below the dams,” said Pape, whose county has been flooded by the Colorado River for the past three years straight.

The Water Management Plan guides LCRA’s operations of the river as water is stored in Lakes Travis and Buchanan and released when needed for industry, agriculture and the environment downstream. The 2020 Plan make three key changes from the 2015 Plan:

- Average level of stored water in Highland Lakes will increase to 1.68 million acre-feet of water from 1.55 million acre-feet
- Trigger level for cutting off water for agriculture downstream will increase to 1 million acre-feet of stored water in Highland Lakes from 900,000
- Arbuckle Reservoir, an off-channel reservoir in Wharton County due to come online in mid-2019, will add 90,000 acre-feet of water supply to the river system

“The stakeholder process was an intensive one and no one got everything they wanted,” said Kirby Brown of Ducks Unlimited and co-chair of the LCRBC. “Still, we are cautiously optimistic that the plan will be fair because it is based on scientific modeling.”

Farmers downstream welcomed the addition of the Arbuckle Reservoir to the management plan.

“Thanks to the LCRA’s foresight in pursuing the construction of the Arbuckle Reservoir, this revision of the water management plan has been a positive one in spite of a number of climate issues that could have resulted in very bad outcomes for downstream interests,” said Ronald Gertson, a 5th generation rice farmer in Wharton County and member of the LCRBC Executive Committee.

Environmental members of the Lower Colorado River Basin Coalition also welcomed LCRA’s stakeholder process while expressing concern about the continued decrease in freshwater

inflows to Matagorda Bay predicted under the 2020 Plan. The Colorado River empties into Matagorda Bay at the end of its 862 miles.

Jennifer Walker, Senior Program Manager for Water at the National Wildlife Federation and LCRBC Executive Committee member, said "in order to maintain good fishing, strong seafood production, profitable tourism, and a healthy Matagorda Bay, it is essential to maintain adequate levels of freshwater inflows."

"Unfortunately, with each new version of the Water Management Plan, future inflows are predicted to fall farther and farther below the levels recommended by scientists," Walker continued. "We are hopeful that LCRA will commit to helping identify options to turn the tide of decreasing inflow levels before the next version of the WMP is developed."

The water management plan now goes to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality for approval and is expected to be implemented in 2020.



ABOUT THE LOWER COLORADO RIVER BASIN COALITION

The Lower Colorado River Basin Coalition (www.waterdownstream.com) seeks a fair and balanced approach to water management of the Colorado River for all parties under all conditions – drought and flood. Equitable river management requires that river waters keep flowing downstream of Longhorn Dam all the way to the Matagorda Bay.

The Coalition is made up of broad and diverse interests from Travis County to Matagorda Bay, including: counties, cities, small communities, school districts, chambers of commerce, realtors, developers, businesses, industry, private landowners, agricultural groups, ag businesses, farmers, ranchers, conservation groups, environmental organizations, hunting and fishing guides and lodges, birding groups, nature tourism businesses, and others.

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