

LCRA Water Plan is Working

By Phil Wilson
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In recent weeks, some entities have encouraged the Lower Colorado River Authority to immediately begin updating its Water Management Plan, two and a half years before its scheduled update and before any of the triggers that would warrant an earlier update.

I understand the concern, given how hot and dry our region has been for months, but I want to reassure Texans who depend on water from the Highland Lakes and lower Colorado River that while this drought is serious and concerning, our water situation, and specifically our drinking water supply, is in good shape. Though we have seen extremely hot days and haven't had significant rain in months, our water supply reservoirs are still more than 50 percent full.

Lakes Travis and Buchanan, the two water supply reservoirs in the Highland Lakes, capture water during wet times for use during dry times like these. That means the lakes can and will fluctuate significantly from year to year – and sometimes even month to month or week to week during serious droughts. By fluctuating, the reservoirs are doing exactly what they are designed to do – providing a reliable water supply to sustain our region until we see significant rainfall.

Likewise, the 2020 Water Management Plan also is working the way it was designed. The plan was a collaborative effort that included hundreds of hours of work from a group of diverse and sometimes-competing interests from throughout the region. No one, including those who participated in drawing up the plan, protested the plan when it was put before the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality for approval.

The plan is forward-looking, designed to meet the demands expected in the year 2025, and to date, the actual usages we have seen are below those 2025 projections. As spelled out in the plan, the update process must begin no later than 2025, or within a year of the time water use:

- Reaches the normal/average-use demands projected for 2025 two years in a row, or
- Reaches 90% of the max/high-use demands projected for 2025 in a single year.

Yearly water use has not yet reached either normal/average-use demands or max/high-use demands projected for 2025. When water use data for 2022 is available early next year, we will evaluate where we are in relation to those triggers to determine whether beginning the update process is warranted.

The WMP is designed to allow for a supply of “interruptible” water for agricultural purposes to be curtailed under drought conditions in order to allow us to continue to meet the needs of firm water customers such as cities and businesses. The plan has numerous evaluation dates and triggers to assess whether to provide interruptible water, or whether it needs to be curtailed. Many of these were not in the plan back in 2011 when we faced similar intense drought conditions. Following this newer criteria, the recent evaluation on July 1 determined that interruptible water for the second growing season is curtailed. We also are currently in stage 1 of our Drought Contingency Plan and have requested our firm customers to implement their own plans accordingly.

The LCRA takes this drought very seriously. Even with the extreme temperatures and conditions we have seen this summer, we remain confident in the plan. We appreciate and encourage conservation efforts, are working to expand our water supplies and look forward to continued conversations on this important topic.

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