



Aug. 3, 2022

LCRA manages the Highland Lakes under a state-approved 2020 Water Management Plan designed specifically for the lower Colorado River basin.

We have heard some concern lately over whether the plan is up to the task of protecting water for firm customers such as cities, businesses and industries, and we want to explain the plan, as well as provide information on what customers and members of the public can expect from LCRA going forward.

First, there is no question this drought is serious. Inflows into the Highland Lakes are at historic lows, with the January-July totals below any other January-July totals in the history of the lakes. We've also had well-below-average rainfall throughout our basin since last fall.

However, it's important to note that even with historic low inflows and triple-digit heat for weeks on end, our water supply is still at more than 1.16 million acre-feet, or more than 58% of capacity.

The lakes are functioning as designed – capturing water during rainier times for use during drier times such as these. The WMP also is functioning as designed – curtailing interruptible uses of water to allow us to continue to meet the needs of firm water customers.

The plan allows for supply of interruptible water, provided we can continue to meet the needs of firm customers. The plan was developed with significant input from participants from a variety of interests, including municipal, industrial and agricultural customers, as well as those with environmental and recreational perspectives. The plan reflected compromise among the participants, none of whom protested the plan before the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality approved it.

The plan is designed for projected demands for the year 2025, and the yearly demands we've seen to date have been below the year 2025 projections. Those projections are so fundamental to the WMP they also are the basis for triggering the next revision process.

In fact, the triggers for beginning the next update include that the 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 to date has not reached either normal/average-use demands or max/high-use demands for 2025. When the 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 then is warranted.

It's also important to note how the plan functions. When interruptible agricultural water is being provided, there always are caps on the amount available.

Further, the plan enables LCRA to adapt its operations as drought conditions change and requires LCRA to cut off or cut back water for interruptible agricultural customers in the lower basin as droughts worsen. In fact, under criteria in the plan, just last month LCRA determined that water would not be available for the Gulf Coast, Lakeside and Pierce Ranch agricultural operations for the second growing season this year.

In addition, the plan includes hydrology from the drought of 2008-2015 and recognizes that event as the "Drought of Record," or the worst drought this region has experienced. The plan allows the interruptible supply for agriculture to be cut off midseason if diversions exceed the seasonal allocation, if releases from the Highland Lakes exceed the release caps, or if combined storage in lakes Travis and Buchanan were to fall to 1 million acre-feet.

The level of firm demands, hydrology from the new Drought of Record and numerous provisions that can result in the cutoff of water for interruptible agriculture in the middle of a calendar year are all things that were not in the plan in place in 2011.

Along with the determination in place to cut off interruptible water for the second growing season this year, we are now in drought response Stage 1 of our firm customer Drought Contingency Plan, and we have requested that firm customers (mostly cities and industries) implement the corresponding response measures in their own contingency plans to reduce water use.

If combined storage in lakes Buchanan and Travis continues to drop and falls below 900,000 acre-feet, Stage 2 of our firm customer Drought Contingency Plan would be triggered. The next evaluation date for availability of water for interruptible agricultural customers will be March 1, 2023.

Questions can be submitted through [Contact LCRA](#).

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