
LOWER COLORADO RIVER AUTHORITY
P.O. Box 220, Austin, TX 78767-0220
1-800-776-5272, FAX (512) 473-3557



BOARD APPROVES DROUGHT MEASURES; TURNS FOCUS TO PLANNING FOR FUTURE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Nov. 18, 2009

MEDIA CONTACT: Robert Cullick 1-800-776-5272, Ext. 4086, or Emlea Chanslor, Ext. 3342

AUSTIN – At its meeting Wednesday, Nov. 18, the LCRA Board approved drought measures aimed at managing the ongoing Colorado River Basin Drought. The Board’s approval followed weeks of expert staff analysis, public input from customers and stakeholders and deliberation among Board members.

The additional drought management actions are needed to manage the serious drought that has at times been more intense than the worst drought this region has experienced, the Drought of Record that occurred from 1947 to 1957. The region’s water supply reservoirs were about 39 percent full in early September. Plentiful rains in September and October brought water supply levels up to 52 percent of capacity, which alleviated the need for significant cutbacks next year.

Speaking to the LCRA Board of Directors, General Manager Tom Mason recounted how the drought developed during 2009. “This summer was a turning point. We began to understand that the drought may exceed the historic worst drought. We proposed various options, received broad public input, and developed a plan for all water users in the lower Colorado River basin.”

The LCRA Board approved the following measures:

- Allow some water for interruptible customers in 2010 for a first rice crop. LCRA will consider whether water could be provided for second crop at a later date. LCRA will follow provisions in its Water Management Plan, either the 1999 plan currently in effect, or the 2003 plan, which could be approved by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) in the coming weeks.
- Seek temporary amendments from TCEQ to optimize river water in the lower portion of the basin so it can be used for industrial, irrigation and municipal uses if dry conditions return and the water is not being used for agricultural customers.
- Continue to encourage customers to conserve water. At this time, conditions have improved such that firm water customers, which include cities and industries, may lift their mandatory watering restrictions with little risk of significant impact on water supply over the next six months. Staff will continue working with customers on pro-rata curtailment procedures to be prepared for use if the drought worsens.

The Board also directed staff to carefully review water availability in light of the drought conditions and to bring all new applications for increased water demand to the Board for consideration, temporarily suspending a current rule allowing staff to issue contracts for less than 500 acre-feet. The Board took this action rather than adopt a temporary suspension of new contracts for water, as recently discussed.

The Board and management also signaled their commitment to incorporating the lessons from

this drought into future planning. “As steward of the Colorado River, LCRA has a responsibility to plan for the water future of our basin. LCRA will live up to this responsibility,” Mason said.

Next month the LCRA Board will review potential costs of future water supply options identified in a draft long-term water supply plan, the Water Supply Resource Plan, which LCRA staff is preparing. The plan will be LCRA’s roadmap for meeting future water needs in its basin to 2100. LCRA received widespread public input last year and plans another round of public input on the draft plan early next year.

LCRA also will begin the process to update its Water Management Plan, which guides water management in the lower Colorado River basin – particularly during droughts. Updating the plan will involve extensive technical analysis and input from an advisory committee.

Sign up to receive updates on LCRA’s water supply planning efforts at www.lcra.org/watersupply.