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LCRA WANTS PUBLIC COMMENT ON PROPOSED WATER MANAGEMENT PLAN

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LCRA is taking public comment on the proposed revision to the Water Management Plan for lakes Travis and Buchanan. The plan is posted at LCRA.org. Comments can be submitted by email to wmp@lcra.org.

LCRA's Water Management Plan determines how water is allocated from lakes Travis and Buchanan, the region's water supply reservoirs. The proposed changes are intended to make the plan more flexible and more responsive to growing demands in the basin. LCRA's Board of Directors is expected to consider the plan at its Feb. 22 meeting. The public has until Feb. 9 to review the plan and comment.

Many of the changes being considered were recommended by an advisory committee that spent more than a year investigating and discussing how to best balance the diverse demands on the Highland Lakes. The committee was composed of customers and others who depend on the lakes, including cities, industry, lake area residents and businesses, farmers and environmental groups.

"This is a vitally important plan that affects everyone in the region," said LCRA General Manager Becky Motal. "We want to encourage everyone to take some time and take a look at what's being proposed and let us know what you think."

The major changes being proposed are summarized in the plan's executive summary. Among them:

- Using two trigger points during the year to determine how much stored water from the lakes is available for agriculture, mostly downstream rice farming. One trigger point, Jan. 1, would be used for the first rice crop and a second, June 1, would be used for the second crop. The current plan contains only a Jan. 1 trigger point.
- Eliminating "open supply," which is the practice of making unlimited water from the Highland Lakes available for downstream agriculture when the lakes are above a defined trigger point. In the future, the amount of stored water available from the lakes for the downstream agricultural operations would be capped at all times.
- Asking firm water customers, mostly cities and industry, to reduce water use consistent with their drought plans only after Highland Lakes water for agriculture is restricted. Current practice is to ask firm customers for voluntary conservation before agricultural water is restricted. Firm customers pay considerably more for their water than farmers and other "interruptible" customers pay.
- Using two different projected future demand levels in the new plan to set triggers based on the amount of water used by cities and industry. The current plan is based on a single demand projection looking 10 years in the future. Using two levels is a more adaptive way to look at

expected water needs. This new approach responds to actual growth in water use and could make more water available for agricultural needs until it is needed by cities and industry.

- Incorporating new scientific studies that better reflect the needs of the river and bay environment.

LCRA's Water Management Plan is the only one of its kind in the state. It was required by the 1989 court settlement that determined the water rights for the Highland Lakes. The state approved the first Water Management Plan in 1989. Updates were approved in 1992, 1999 and 2010.

After LCRA's Board considers this revised plan, it will be forwarded to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality for final approval. This proposed revision comes as the region is in the midst of an extreme drought. Water releases from the Highland Lakes this year will be governed by an emergency order requested by the LCRA and approved by the TCEQ in December. Under that order, LCRA will substantially cut back or cut off Highland Lakes water to farmers this year unless there is a significant amount of rain in the coming months, which is not predicted.

"With the emergency order, the proposed updates to the Water Management Plan and LCRA's continuing efforts to find new water supply and promote conservation, we are prepared to help our customers make it through a severe and prolonged drought," Motal said. "Water is a precious, shared and limited resource. It is imperative that we all work together to use it as wisely as we can."

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About LCRA

LCRA is a nonprofit conservation and reclamation district that provides energy, water and community services to Texans. Created by the Texas Legislature in 1934, LCRA has no taxing authority and operates solely on utility revenues and service fees. LCRA supplies electricity to more than 1.1 million Texans through more than 40 wholesale customers. LCRA also provides many other services to the region. These services include managing floods, protecting the quality of the lower Colorado River and its tributaries, providing parks and recreational facilities, offering economic development assistance, operating water and wastewater utilities, and providing soil, energy and water conservation programs.

