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## LCRA vote may dry out SAWS plan

By BARRY HALVORSON [news@leader-news.com](mailto:news@leader-news.com)



**A new rice variety specifically developed for the SAWS project can help save water, but may eliminate a second planting prompting concerns.**  
L-N File Photo

Four resolutions approved by the Lower Colorado River Authority board of directors Dec. 17 could eventually jeopardize the future of the LCRA-SAWS water project.

During Tuesday night's presentation at the El Campo Civic Center, LCRA Project Manager Leah Manning said the resolutions will significantly reduce the amount of water the river authority can offer the San Antonio Water System.

The biggest impact came from a resolution concerning how water reserved for future use should be factored into project studies. Manning said that previously, a 50,000 acre-feet reserve in the Highland Lakes in Austin was included in the study as available for transfer. The December resolution put that water off limits.

A second resolution requires the student group to use updated water projections for municipal and industrial growth not reflected in previous planning

projections. Those new numbers show local needs 14 to 25 percent higher than previously thought, Manning said. Under the current terms of the proposed SAWS agreement, the LCRA must be able to deliver a maximum annual pumping limit of 95,000 acre feet in a single year, 62,000 acre feet over a 10-year rolling average and no more than 36,000 acre feet per year at maximum long-term average use. "We know that we will be able to provide less than the 90,000 acre feet with the passage of the resolutions," Manning said. In response to questions from Matagorda County Judge Nate McDonald, Manning said SAWS has agreed to continue funding the study to determine the viability for 2009.

"If SAWS is not satisfied with what they are seeing, are they going to pay to continue?" she said.

"That is something the SAWS board will have to sit down and discuss. They had the chance to cancel this year and didn't, but they can cancel the contract any year."

Project staff expects to have new water yield calculations prepared soon, Manning said. If the project moves forward, the current timeline calls for ground water permit applications for irrigation projects in 2010, and pipeline construction to begin in 2015. After a 10-year construction period, the contract calls for a 40-year contract with SAWS having the right to renew for an additional 30-year period.

In reviewing current study results, Manning said the Matagorda Bay Health Evaluation is nearing completion and addresses such topics as bay health, total flow and establishes frequency achievement guidelines for all criteria flow levels. The needs of the bay extend not only to the annual amount of flow, she said, but to those times when it needs to be increased or "pulsed."

One area where the study says the LCRA can save water is in agriculture conservation. A combination of on-farm conservation, use of new high-yield rice varieties and delivery system (canal) conservation can save up to 118,000 acre feet of water per year.

The rice change met with strong opposition at the local level. Manning said the new high yield rice varieties being developed specifically for the project would save water with a longer growing season that would prevent a second crop from being planted. Several local farmers said that second crop is important to being able to continue to operate. Others said they are row crop farmers and that if additional ground water is used for the rice crop, it would negatively impact their operations. McDonald also questioned the projections, saying the local agriculture industry is going to need more, not less, water in the future.

"I've got a lot of farmers sitting on the sidelines right now that I want to put back to work," he said. "There are such things as growing fuel cane which can be a whole new industry."

With several in the audience questioning the validity of such public meetings - this is the 20th conducted by the LCRA for the SAWS project - Manning cited the inclusion of the water fowl study added specifically at the request of area residents attending previous meetings.

For the project to work, Manning said, it must meet all requirements set out in House Bill 1629, the legislation that allowed for the project. Prior to its passage, water transfers from one water region to another were prohibited. San Antonio is located in Region L while the Colorado River represents most of the geography of Region K.

According to the requirements of HB 1629, before the project can proceed, the LCRA board must find the project:

- . Protects and benefits basin interest;
- . Is consistent with state and regional water plans;
- . Provides inflows adequate to maintain the ecological health and productivity of Matagorda Bay;
- . Provides instream flows no less protective than required by LCRA's water rights for lakes Buchanan and Travis;
- . And benefits the levels of lakes Buchanan and Travis.

People interested in getting involved with the project can visit the LCRA Web site at [www.lcra.org/lswp](http://www.lcra.org/lswp) or subscribe to e-mail updates at [www.lcra.org/about/newsletters\\_signup.html](http://www.lcra.org/about/newsletters_signup.html). They can also request information by phone at 800- 776-5272, ext. 7208; e-mail at [lcrasawswaterproject@lcra.org](mailto:lcrasawswaterproject@lcra.org) or by mail at LCRA-SAWS Water Project, 3700 Lake Austin Blvd., Austin, Texas 78703.

## LCRA clarifies SAWS issue

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Editor, the Leader-News:

LCRA appreciates all of the citizens who attended the project update meeting about the LCRA-SAWS Water Project on Feb. 3 in El Campo. We also appreciate the story about the meeting by Barry Halvorson (for the *El Campo Leader-News*, *Wharton Journal-Spectator* and *East Bernard Express*). The story gave a very good account of the meeting and the complex issues that the study teams are considering in their work.

I want to clarify for the readers that the annual pumping limits mentioned in the article are not requirements for what LCRA must deliver to SAWS, but instead are the maximum amounts of groundwater that can be used to support local agriculture in connection with the project.

The project studies contemplate using groundwater only for agriculture during dry periods when adequate surface water is not available. No groundwater would be sent to San Antonio. LCRA is sticking to those limits in its studies.

Thank you for your interest in the ongoing studies. If you have any questions feel free to contact me at [lcrasawswaterproject@lcra.org](mailto:lcrasawswaterproject@lcra.org).

*Leah Manning*

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*LCRA-SAWS Water Project*

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