

S. A. Water Future Not In Danger

by Kevin Daniels

The May 5 editorial "Foundation's Request Threatens Local Water" asserts that the San Marcos River Foundation's application for annual rights to more than 400 billion gallons of San Marcos and Guadalupe river water endangers San Antonio's water future.

First, the water that the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority has contractually committed to sell to the San Antonio Water System comes from water rights granted in the 1950s. The foundation's application was filed in 2001. Thus, water should always be allocated to GBRA water rights before any was granted to the foundation.

GBRA's water rights could be subordinate to a foundation's only if the sale of SAWS is deemed an interbasin transfer and the GBRA is unable to legislatively combine the Guadalupe and San Antonio River basin. And if this legislative relief is not forthcoming, GBRA has stated that the GBRA/SAWS project will not be built, regardless of the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission's action on the foundation's application.

Second, the foundation's application is not inconsistent with the state water plan. The plan sets forth 24 strategies for meeting the water needs of the San Antonio and Guadalupe river basins for the next 50 years, including the diversion of water from the lower Guadalupe River to San Antonio.

Four of these strategies involve groundwater use; five relate to conservation and reuse; seven are projects already being implemented; and eight involve existing resources, water rights and reservoirs. Granting the foundation's application would not impact any of these projects except the diversion to San Antonio - and then only if the GBRA is unable to obtain legislative relief from the interbasin transfer statute.

Third, GBRA's claim that the state water plan will result in increased freshwater inflows into San Antonio Bay is specious at best. The hydrologic studies underlying the state water plan show that the diversion of 70,000 acre-feet of water from the lower Guadalupe River to San Antonio will decrease freshwater inflows to the bay.

Freshwater inflows return to normal levels or increase only if the remaining 20 strategies set forth in the plan, including the transfer of Colorado River water and Milam County groundwater to San Antonio, are implemented and Edwards Aquifer pumping decreases during the next 50 years. No one can guarantee these things will happen.

Freshwater inflows are crucial to the health of the coastal environment. Freshwater inflows control not only the unique bay habitat, but the economies of the coastal communities that are dependent on that habitat. The San Marcos River Foundation application is a valiant attempt to preserve both.

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