

News Advisory

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LCRA-SAWS Project Could Devastate Matagorda Bay Ecology in Drought Years

Critical Public Hearing at LCRA on Tuesday

WHAT: Public Hearing

WHEN: Tuesday Feb. 22, 7:00 PM

WHERE: Travis County Precinct 2 Satellite Office, 4501 FM 620

MAP LINK: [MAP](#)

MORE DETAILS: <http://www.lcra.org/water/waterco/saws/index.html>

AUSTIN—A \$1 billion water project proposed by the San Antonio Water System (SAWS) and the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) could devastate the ecology of Matagorda Bay during drought years. The issue will be the subject of a public hearing sponsored by LCRA on Tuesday night.

If it has its way, LCRA will pump up to 150,000 acre-feet of Colorado River water a year to San Antonio. That's about the amount used by the entire City of Austin in one year. An analysis of the project shows that during a repeat of the drought Texas endured in the 1950s, this project would reduce river flows into Matagorda Bay to half the level needed for many estuary species to survive.

The agreement proposes a series of off-channel reservoirs, pumps and a 170-mile pipeline to transfer water to San Antonio. ***Contrary to popular conception, the project would not simply capture flood flows in the off-channel reservoirs.*** Water would be pumped from the river even during dry spells. This could easily reduce the river's flow to a level only seen during the very worst days of the 1948-57 drought.

Under such conditions, the lower reaches of the Colorado would resemble the current trickle in the Rio Grande at Brownsville. Due to lower water volumes and serious weed problems, the Rio Grande stopped flowing into the ocean this past summer.

The productivity of Matagorda Bay is dependent on freshwater flows from the Colorado River, and the bay is an economic mainstay of the Coastal Bend and

the Gulf fisheries. A 1998 Texas A&M study estimated the combined economic impact of commercial and recreational fishing in Matagorda Bay at \$178 million.

97% of Gulf fish species are dependent upon estuaries during some portion of their life cycle. This project could adversely affect many species that use Matagorda Bay as a nursery, including shrimp, blue crab, redfish and oysters. Many varieties of shorebirds could be impacted as well.

In addition to the meeting Tuesday night, public meetings will be held in Burnet County on January 24 and in Wharton County on January 29. Those meetings also begin at 7:00 p.m.

The LCRA Board of Directors and the SAWS Board of Trustees are scheduled to vote on the agreement in February. Written and e-mail comments will be taken by the LCRA through Jan. 31.

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