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## Galveston Bay Drought Conditions Prescribed by TCEQ

*Austin, Texas* – The extremely salty conditions currently devastating Galveston Bay oysters and wildlife could become the norm rather than the exception due to rules recently adopted by a 2 to 1 vote of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) Commissioners.

The current drought has reduced the flow of freshwater from rivers into the bay, causing hyper-saline, inhospitable waters for wildlife. “Oyster predators and disease are thriving in these salty waters, harming one of our state’s most important industries,” said **Tracy Woody, Oysterman with Jeri’s Seafood**, which has been in the Galveston Bay oyster business for over 40 years. **Mr. Woody** warned, “Oysters are the bay’s canary in the coalmine. When they suffer, fish, shrimp and waterfowl soon follow.”

“Under TCEQ’s rules, new upstream water users would be allowed to pump the Trinity and San Jacinto rivers nearly dry on a regular basis. The extremely low flows of water to the bay this summer reflect a rare severe drought. But the new TCEQ rules would allow summer flows to be reduced to levels even lower than we are experiencing now more than half the time,” warned **Norman Johns, Water Resources Scientist, National Wildlife Federation**.

These rules were the result of a three-year long effort intended to ensure sufficient water for fish and wildlife – and related industries – even during times of drought while also meeting human water supply needs. The rules only impact new water rights, not existing water rights.

“Instead of putting adequate protections in place for our bay during this process, the Commissioners missed a critical opportunity. Unfortunately, the process resulted in protections lower than those TCEQ has used in the past,” added **Ken Kramer, Director, Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club**.

“We urge TCEQ to revisit these rules and make them stronger, said **Scott Jones, Environmental Policy Specialist, Galveston Bay Foundation**. “We can also help ensure sufficient water flows into Galveston Bay to protect wildlife and the jobs that depend on that wildlife by encouraging some water rights holders to participate in voluntary donation or sale of existing water rights to environmental purposes and in dedication of wastewater return flows,” added **Mr. Jones**.

The Commissioners are currently considering new rules intended to protect fish and wildlife in Central Texas rivers and Matagorda, Lavaca, Mission, Copano, Aransas and San Antonio bays.

“We urge the Commission not to underestimate the critically needed level of freshwater inflows as it recently did for the Trinity and San Jacinto rivers and Galveston Bay. Inflows in the western Texas rivers and bay systems are even more indispensable to the maintenance of their continued health and indeed, to their very existence,” said **Robby Byers, Executive Director, Coastal Conservation Association**.