

## PROTECTING THE HIGHLAND LAKES

The Central Texas Water Coalition advocates for

- Responsible water management policies that minimize fire risks, risks to drinking water supplies, and adverse economic impacts resulting from very low lake levels
- Equitable pricing for water to encourage conservation by all
- Routine updating of hydrology and climatology studies utilized in LCRA's Water Management Plan, regional water planning, and other water management decisions

### Texas Can't Afford to Waste Water

In 2011 during the drought, nearly half of the available water supply in Lake Travis was released downstream. Lake-area businesses closed, properties were at increased fire risk, jobs were lost and property values declined. That year, due to a flawed Water Management Plan, huge volumes of water from the lakes were used to flood downstream rice fields. **More water was lost on its way to those rice fields than the City of Austin saves through its water conservation program in a year.** Since 2011, the Central Texas Water Coalition has worked to ensure this doesn't happen again.

**With significant growth in Texas' population, unreliable rainfall poses a real threat to the drinking water supply, public health and safety, and the economy.** Weather experts predict more drought and a Texas Water Development Board study **shows less surface water is flowing in Central Texas watersheds.**

We can't control the rainfall, so we must plan for the future and ensure responsible and forward-thinking management of the resources we have during floods, drought, or our new normal. **Economic losses from water supply shortages can be devastating.**

### Water pricing is still inequitable and unsustainable

LCRA has slightly raised the price of raw water to irrigators but more needs to be done.

- The prices for raw water are far lower for irrigators than Firm customers. The price of water doesn't reflect the replacement cost, operating costs, or the cost of new supplies.
- LCRA charges for the canal distribution system as it exists but doesn't cover costs of improving the system to reduce losses during transport.
- Low prices do not stimulate conservation, and do not fund conservation projects or new water supplies.
- A weak agricultural water conservation plan does not set adequate conservation goals for irrigators, thus missing an opportunity to save water.

The Central Texas Water Coalition is a 501(c)(4) non-profit organization advocating for water policies that will preserve the Highland Lakes as irreplaceable natural resources supplying water for more than two million Central Texans and providing an important economic engine for the tourism industry and the State of Texas. CTWC takes a broad-based and multi-disciplinary approach that is based on applying facts, current science and best practices for water management.



### Extremely low lake levels cause:

- Large reductions in property values and associated tax revenues for our schools and government
- Loss of revenue for businesses and lost jobs
- Significant increases in fire risks due to water accessibility issues

## CTWC's Major Successes in Protecting the Lakes

By design, water levels in Lakes Travis and Buchanan fluctuate with changes in weather and demands for water.

CTWC is committed to working collaboratively with LCRA, Region K, TWDB, TCEQ and other stakeholders to focus on education, hydrology, climatology, management and conservation of our limited water supplies. Our success includes:

- **Helped Secure Protective Emergency Orders from TCEQ:** Participated in successful efforts to support LCRA's requests to cease large releases of water stored in the Highland Lakes from 2012-2015, the years of historic drought for Central Texans.
- **Participated in a contested administrative hearing to significantly improve the 2015 Water Management Plan (WMP) governing LCRA's management of Lakes Buchanan and Travis.** The 2015 WMP required LCRA to maintain a combined storage in Lakes Travis and Buchanan above 600,000 acre-feet, ended unlimited releases by LCRA, separated releases into two crops, and institutionalized the lake-level triggers of the emergency orders.
- **Worked for Accountability for Highland Lakes Management:** Participated in LCRA's Sunset Review Process given the impact of LCRA's water management decisions. The Sunset staff report noted that "serious questions continually arise regarding the adequacy of the system of "checks and balances" in place for LCRA. Specifically, there is a serious question whether state law provides for adequate oversight of raw water rates or whether the technical methodology state water planners use to calculate future water availability projections is still appropriate." They also found that LCRA should implement policies to enhance accountability.
- **Prevented More Water Diversions:** Worked to stop the proposal to build a dam across the Colorado River which would have resulted in less water flowing into Lake Buchanan. This would only exacerbate the concerns with current lower inflow trends.
- **Raised Awareness of Unfair Pricing:** CTWC recognizes that rates play a significant role in incentivizing water conservation. In 2015 LCRA established a seven-year plan to phase-in higher agricultural interruptible water rates, established surcharges for high usage, and began moving toward a full-cost recovery rate for operating distribution canals. However, that plan is no longer being implemented as established and more changes are needed to achieve a full-cost rate that is equitable to Firm Customers. Agricultural interruptible rates should incorporate fair and accurate allocations of river management costs and begin charging a fair portion of system capital costs.
- **Improved Transparency in Water Planning:** Supported legislation requiring all Regional Water Planning Group Meetings to be open to the public.
- **Researched and prepared a document on the History and Social and Economic Importance of the Highland Lakes** using economic impact studies plus real estate and property tax data. This was included in the 2016 Region K Plan and incorporated into the 2017 State Water Plan.
- **Participated in LCRA's process for the 2020 WMP:** This WMP includes a cap on the total amount of stored water released for downstream irrigation purposes. It also changes the trigger level for cutting off water for irrigators downstream. The amount of stored water in Lakes Buchanan and Travis must now be 1 million acre-feet rather than 900,000 acre-feet before water is released downstream.
- **Active in development of policy items for Region K and 2022 State Water Plan** to include additional studies of the watershed, support for brush management efforts, improved modeling for surface water and groundwater interaction and update of the regional economic impact studies included in the 2017 State Water Plan.



### HISTORY OF CTWC

In May of 2010, the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) appointed a Water Management Plan Stakeholders Advisory Committee, which consisted of 16 individuals representing diverse interests: rice producers, environmentalists, water supply customers, and the Lakes.

Individuals representing the Highland Lakes formed CTWC in 2011 to provide a unified voice for Central Texas.

Coalition partners include Texas residents, businesses, affected government entities, property owner associations, environmental interests and concerned citizens. All are united by their commitment to protect our future through responsible water management and conservation policies.

[CentralTexasWaterCoalition.org](http://CentralTexasWaterCoalition.org)

CTWC is the ONLY organization dedicated to protecting the interests of the businesses and residents of the Highland Lakes region through ongoing engagement with regulatory agencies that control water policy in Texas.

CTWC continues to represent lake interests by educating the public on the need for responsible water management, encouraging conservation, and urging citizen involvement to help protect the Lakes and our future.