

SABINE RIVER AUTHORITY ACTS TO SUPPORT 168 FEET WATER LEVEL IN TOLEDO BEND

For the first time, the Sabine River Authority (SRA) of Texas has gone on record in support of halting hydroelectric power generation at the Toledo Bend dam when the water level at Toledo Bend drops to 168 feet. At its meeting in Carthage on March 1, the Board of Directors of the Sabine River Authority by unanimous vote directed the SRA staff to negotiate a revision of the current contract between the SRA and the electric utility companies.

Revision of the contract, known as the Power Sales Agreement, to cease power generation when the lake level drops to 168 would be a major victory for thousands of Toledo Bend area residents, property owners, businesses, and local governments. For many years low water levels in the Toledo Bend during peak summer months has wreaked havoc on tourism, recreation, local government revenue, and area business activity. Recent rains have added much needed water to Toledo Bend, and the result has been an obvious increase in fishing, recreational boat use, and activity at area businesses.

The notable increase in business and recreational activity simply reinforces the importance of ceasing power generation when the lake level drops to 168 feet. Even with a moratorium on power generation below 168 feet, the lake level may still occasionally fall below that level due to drought conditions, dam maintenance, or the requirement for maintaining water flow down river, but the extent of the drop in water level would no longer be worsened by continued pumping of water for power generation at Toledo Bend dam.

The Toledo Bend Bi-State Alliance, which has been conducting the "Save Toledo Bend – Keep 168" campaign had over thirty members in attendance at the March 1 SRA meeting. State Representative Wayne Christian also visited with the SRA Board during the meeting and urged the Board to act promptly to cease power generation below 168. In communications earlier in the week, Sen. Robert Nichols expressed similar sentiments to the SRA staff. A representative of the Bi-State Alliance expressed the organization's appreciation to the SRA Board for adopting the resolution and pledged the Alliance's continued support of the effort. The Alliance also invited the SRA Board to hold one of its meetings in the near future in Sabine County because of the widespread interest in this and related topics in Sabine and neighboring counties.

The action by the Texas SRA was an important step, but much remains to be done before ceasing power generation below 168 feet becomes a reality. The utility companies and the SRAS of both Texas and Louisiana first have to agree on revisions to the contract. If revision of the contract is agreed upon then the appropriate regulatory agencies in both Texas and Louisiana will have to approve the changes. At this point it is unclear how likely it is that the SRAS and the utility companies will be able to reach an agreement on a revised contract or how long it might take to reach an agreement. In addition, it is equally unclear if the state regulatory agencies will support the revised agreement and how long such approvals might take.

Obviously, it is not at all certain that the goal of having power generation cease when the lake level falls to 168 feet will be achieved. However, the action taken by the SRA Board is a very encouraging sign, and the continued support

from Representative Christian and Senator Nichols should ensure that revision of the contract will continue to be actively pursued by both the SRA and the utility companies. Though progress is being made it is critical that local and regional support for the effort continue and expand. Therefore, it is essential that city and county officials, local businesses, recreational and professional fishing enthusiasts, lake area property owners, and interested individuals continue to make their feelings known.

The following is the actual language of the resolution adopted by the SRA Board:

BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE SABINE RIVER AUTHORITY OF TEXAS BOARD OF DIRECTORS HEREBY INSTRUCT THE GENERAL MANAGER OF THE SABINE RIVER AUTHORITY OF TEXAS TO NEGOTIATE AMENDING THE POWER SALES AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE SABINE RIVER AUTHORITY OF TEXAS, THE SABINE RIVER AUTHORITY-STATE OF LOUISIANA, AND THE ENERGY COMPANIES TO CEASE HYDRO POWER PRODUCTION WHEN THE LAKE LEVEL IS 168 MSL.

ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF SABINE RIVER AUTHORITY OF TEXAS ON THIS THE 1ST DAY OF MARCH, 2007.