

SUNDAY TALK: THE PUBLIC SPEAKS

Sale of Toledo Bend water bad idea

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The proposed contract by the Sabine River Authority (SRA) to sell water to Toledo Bend Partners (TBP) has the potential to negatively impact interest in many different categories across Louisiana. Sports fisherman, camp owners and business owners in and around the Toledo Bend Reservoir have expressed their concern via news paper articles over the last several days. These are very important issues that must be taken into consideration. People with camps and homes on the shores of Toledo Bend, in some cases, have invested their life savings to enjoy a life on water front property. Their lives and investments are being threatened. Wharfs that extended out 40 to 60 feet into the waters are now sitting on dry land. One can only imagine what it would be like if the contract under consideration were in force at this point in time. Although little has been said about the impact on agricultural interest, concerns are also being expressed by stakeholders in this sector of users of water from the Toledo Bend Reservoir.

Other interests outside the immediate Toledo Bend Reservoir area would also be threatened with

the implementation of the contract between the SRA and TBP.

The coastal plain of Southwest Louisiana (SWLA) is a fresh water marsh that provides recreation for boating, fishing and hunting as well as a livelihood for many whose businesses are dependent on these activities. The coastal plain also serves as buffer protection for the entire region of SWLA from hurricanes that are a constant threat to this part of the state. Being a fresh water marsh, the plains are dependent on the flow of water from Toledo Bend via the Sabine River to prevent salt water intrusion into these sensitive areas of the coastal plain. At the present time the marshes are dying off due to high salinity levels. This situation could be worsened with additional water being drawn from the lake if the proposed contract is approved.

The water source for municipalities in SWLA is the Chico Aquifer. More than 30 years ago the water level in the aquifer was being drawn down at a faster rate than it was being replenished resulting in low levels of concern. To reverse this trend and provide greater balance between the drawdown and replenishment of the aquifer, industry entered into an agreement that resulted in the Sabine

River Diversion Canal System. With the implementation of the system many industrial facilities in SWLA began drawing water from the Sabine River instead of the Chico Aquifer. The result was a pronounced recovery of the water levels in the aquifer. This served to secure the availability of water for the municipalities in SWLA.

The quality of water being introduced into the diversion canal system from the Toledo Bend Reservoir is critical to industry being able to utilize this as a supply for process water in their respective facilities. As the level of the lake is lowered and the rate of water flow from the lake into the Sabine River is reduced, levels of contaminants, salinity from salt water intrusion and conductivity levels increase. As the level of these contaminants increase plants must implement costly procedures to correct the quality issues so that the water is suitable for their use. This is in lieu of going back to drawing water from the Chico Aquifer. These increased levels of contaminants also introduce the risk of industrial facilities not being able to meet state and federal regulations as it applies to water discharge from their facilities. Many of the plants in SWLA are interconnected with one plant being the supplier of

raw material for a neighboring plant. So if those utilizing Sabine River water are negatively impacted, the plants that they supply are equally impacted. All of this significantly reduces the competitive ability of industry in the SWLA region.

One must consider that in 2010 industry in SWLA:

- Provided 5,960 direct jobs in the plants.
- Provided jobs for 2,460 contract employees.
- Provided for 37,000 indirect jobs.
- Paid out \$707 million dollars and salary and benefits.
- Purchased supplies locally in the amount of \$750 million dollars.
- Paid over \$110 million in parish and state taxes.

The benefits derived from this sector of the economy reaches into the northern parishes as they provide employees with the economic means to build camps and enjoy the recreation provided by Toledo Bend Lake. It is difficult to comprehend how the lively hood and economic stability of SWLA and the area surrounding the Toledo Bend Reservoir can be placed at risk over the sale of a natural resource that is so important to the state of Louisiana.

A review of the 80-plus page contract which commits the SRA to supply water to the Toledo Bend

Partners for 49 with an option to renew for another 50 years quickly reveals that sufficient language has not been included to protect current stakeholders, this valuable resource and the citizens of Louisiana. Water is quickly becoming a commodity that will be in greater demand in the decades ahead. This has been recognized by state government and an initiative is underway at a state level to develop an overall plan that will coordinate and manage ground and surface water across the state.

This contract must be tabled for the foreseeable future. The data that initially supported the feasibility of selling water to Toledo Bend Partners should undergo a broad review taking into consideration the impact on all stakeholders, the Sabine River Authority should be part of the state initiative to coordinate and manage ground and surface water usage, and any future initiatives that effect private and business interests must be engaged earlier in the process than was done for the Toledo Bend Partners project.

On behalf of all interests who have expressed concern over the potential to be negatively impacted by this water sales agreement I respectfully request that the board of the Sabine River Authority not go forward with approval of this contract.