

## **Local River Authorities to Consider Regional Water Supply Partnership**

(Orange, TX) The Lower Neches Valley Authority (LNVA) and the Sabine River Authority of Texas (SRA) are discussing a partnership to develop a regional water supply project that will shore up the water supply needs of Southeast Texas. Even with the recent rainfall events, Southeast Texas is still in a drought. Lake Sam Rayburn on the Neches River and Toledo Bend Reservoir on the Sabine River are still near historic low levels for this time of year. Although rainfall events have helped, meteorologists' long-range forecasts are predicting more dry weather through the summer due to La Nina. The ongoing drought that began in April of 2010 and includes the driest single year on record in Texas is testing the developed water supplies in the Neches River Basin. This past year, there was insufficient water in the Neches River to meet the needs of the area 40% of the time without relying on stored water in Lake Sam Rayburn. The communities, industries, and agriculture of Southeast Texas thrive in part because of an adequate and reliable water supply. A shortage of that water supply would pose a significant threat to our local and national economies. Recognizing the threat of a shortage in the Neches Basin, the LNVA, in cooperation with the US Army Corps of Engineers, has started a project to allow the lake to be taken lower by extending the erosion protection on the dam at Sam Rayburn. Additionally, the LNVA considered several alternative water sources of which the most feasible and readily available water supply appears to be importing water from an existing source. The LNVA is requesting initiation of formal discussions with the SRA on development of up to a 200,000 acre-foot water supply agreement to further protect and bolster the water supply of Southeast Texas.

Toledo Bend Reservoir, with 185,000 surface acres, provides over 2 million acre-feet of firm annual yield divided evenly between Texas and Louisiana. Toledo Bend Project, which includes the reservoir and a hydroelectric facility, is jointly owned by SRA Texas and the Sabine River Authority, State of Louisiana. With less than 3% of the water contracted, Texas' half of Toledo Bend is the largest source of surface water in Texas. Toledo Bend Reservoir currently provides 40,000 acre-feet of redundant water supply to SRA's major industrial customers in Orange County during drought or abnormal conditions.

The LNVA provides water to people, agriculture and industry in Jefferson, Hardin, Tyler,

Liberty, Chambers and Galveston Counties. Based on a recent economic analysis, these customers represent over \$34 billion in annual expenditures, \$8.6 billion in gross product and over 87,000 jobs in Southeast Texas. LNVA's request to SRA for up to 200,000 acre-feet of Toledo Bend water is for standby water supplies to be used during drought or abnormal conditions in the Neches Basin leaving the water in the reservoir during normal conditions. Freshwater flows to Sabine Lake would not be adversely impacted because LNVA's service area returns water to the Sabine estuary.

The surface waters of the State of Texas are owned by the State. As political subdivisions created by the State Legislature, the LNVA and the SRA have been delegated the responsibility to manage the long-term water supply needs of each of their basins. LNVA and SRA are members of Region I, one of the sixteen Regional Water Planning Groups (RWPG) developed from Texas Senate Bill 1 as a "bottoms up" water planning process designed to ensure that the water needs of all Texans are met as Texas enters into the 21st century. Each RWPG is responsible for preparing a water plan for their respective region. These plans map out how to conserve water supplies, meet future water supply needs and respond to future droughts in the planning areas. A major emphasis of Region I is to make sure the water supply needs of the region are met. As such, the East Texas Regional Water Plan from Region I and the 2012 State Water Plan identifies a transfer of water from the Sabine River to the Neches River as a Water Management Strategy. This proposed regional water supply project in Southeast Texas is a model of how the RWPGs can accomplish the goals of Texas Senate Bill 1.

Any water supply contract to move Toledo Bend water to the LNVA system would involve an integrated process with several stages that would provide many opportunities for public input. Although preliminary discussions are beginning between LNVA and SRA, no board action has occurred. The SRA Board of Directors will consider the option to proceed with initiating a regional partnership with LNVA at their next board meeting on March 15, 2012. The meeting, which begins at 10:00 a.m., will be held at the John D. Wyndham Civic Center located at 146 Express Blvd. in Center, TX. All board meetings are open to the public with opportunities for the public to address the Board on SRA activities.

If the SRA Board approves the option to proceed, a feasibility study would be prepared to investigate the possibility of moving Toledo Bend water to the LNVA system. Concurrently, an extensive process to obtain an Inter Basin Transfer (IBT) permit from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) would be required since the proposed project moves waters from the Sabine River Basin to the Neches River Basin. The IBT process involves amending the existing water rights permit to identify detailed project costs, proposed uses of the water, effects on user rates and whether there is a need for the water in the basin of origin and the proposed receiving basin. Once prepared, the IBT application would be submitted to TCEQ for review. TCEQ would post the proposed IBT amendment for comments and conduct at least one public meeting in

the basin of origin and the receiving basin to receive additional comments. After reviewing all comments and concerns, TCEQ may grant the amendment for the IBT if it is determined that the benefits of the IBT to the receiving basin outweigh any detriment to the basin of origin.

The proposed regional water supply project is an example of how Southeast Texas' two local River Authorities work together to manage surface water supplies to best support our region's economy and communities. For more information, please contact LNVA at (409) 892-4011 or [scott.hall@lnva.org](mailto:scott.hall@lnva.org) or SRA at (409) 746-2192 or [agalassi@sratx.org](mailto:agalassi@sratx.org)

##

**Sabine River Authority of Texas**

Ann Galassi

Manager - Economic Development / Public  
Relations

409-746-2192

email: [agalassi@sratx.org](mailto:agalassi@sratx.org)

**Sabine River Authority of Texas**

[www.sratx.org](http://www.sratx.org)

