



People and Nature: Our Future is in the Balance

NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION

GULF STATES NATURAL RESOURCE CENTER
44 East Avenue Suite 200
Austin, Texas 78701

(512)-476-9805
FAX (512)-476-9810
<http://www.nwf.org>

Texas Living Waters Project NEWS

For Immediate Release
8/12/03

Contact: John Hannah or Myron Hess
512/476-9805

Proposed Water Diversions Could Pose Threat to Sabine Lake

Austin – Responding to a threat to wildlife resources in Sabine Lake and the Sabine River, the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) has asked to participate in Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) proceedings to determine how much additional water the Sabine River Authority (SRA) can divert from Toledo Bend Reservoir.

At issue is an application by the SRA to divert an additional 293,000 acre-feet of water per year from Toledo Bend Reservoir, apparently so it can be piped to the Dallas/Fort Worth area. One acre-foot is equal to 326,000 gallons of water.

Coastal bays and estuaries like Sabine Lake require a delicate balance of salt water from the sea and freshwater from rivers to maintain a healthy and productive fish and wildlife population. Upsetting this balance could negatively impact commercial shrimpers, crabbers and recreational fishermen on Sabine Lake.

According to Myron Hess, legal counsel in NWF's Austin office, the SRA has suggested that the permit should not include conditions to protect flows in the Sabine River or freshwater inflows into Sabine Lake.

“That is very troubling,” Hess said. “We've asked to participate in the permit process to help make sure that water quality, fish and wildlife, and the rights of people to enjoy those resources are protected.”

In addition, NWF's letter to the TCEQ raises concerns about the adequacy of water conservation and drought management measures by the ultimate users of the water.

A 2002 NWF report "Saving Water, Rivers and Money " showed that cities in Dallas/Fort Worth area could save up to 521,000 acre-feet of water each year through conservation.

"If, as it appears, this water is intended for the Dallas/Fort Worth area, water conservation is a particularly important issue," according to Dr. Norman Johns, author of the report. "Cities in that area generally have poor water conservation programs and the highest per person usage rates in the state," Johns said.

Several recent newspaper articles have quoted Jerry Clark, the Sabine River Authority's general manager, as saying the water likely would be piped to the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

A recent analysis by the TCEQ of the amount of freshwater expected to reach Sabine Lake in the future paints a troubling picture.

The commission's report indicates that if all existing water diversion permits were fully exercised, Sabine Lake would seldom see freshwater inflows at the levels recommended by State studies for supporting the health and productivity of aquatic life. That does not include the additional water withdrawals requested in the current application.

"Let's face it; shrimp, crabs, and fish need water too," Hess said. "We need to make sure that we meet the real water needs for our cities and other users without wasting water and without wiping out the natural bounty of our rivers and bays. NWF plans to participate in the permitting process to help make sure that we find that balance."

The National Wildlife Federation is the nation's largest member supported conservation advocacy and education organization.

###