

## LCA PRESIDENT'S UPDATE

as of April 13, 2018

Hurricane Harvey and its effects are still being felt today. Back in January, we updated you on a request by numerous Kingwood-area organizations including the Lake Houston Area Chamber of Commerce to have lake levels on Lake Conroe reduced permanently by 3 feet as a possible flood control vehicle to reduce flooding downstream of Lake Conroe. We asked that our Lake Conroe community residents and businesses write Governor Abbott and Lt. Governor Patrick to express our concerns over and disagreement with such a program. Our thanks go out to over 1,000 of you who took the time and initiative to write and mail those letters to Austin. The efforts by our community did not go unnoticed by the Governor's Office.

Clearly, programs need to be implemented and funded that assist in flood control from northern Montgomery County to the Gulf of Mexico....and all points in between. Initiatives being considered include a comprehensive flood control study for the area, the creation of detention reservoirs on multiple creeks (such as Spring Creek, Lake Creek, and Cypress Creek to name a few), remediation of portions of the West Fork of the San Jacinto River to improve water flow, better review and regulation of proposed residential and commercial development within flood plains, improved functionality at the Lake Houston dam, and enhanced communication before and during flood events. We are seeing much discussion and some action being taken by appropriate decision makers.

On March 29, Governor Abbott announced authorization of about \$5 million in initial funding for flood control projects to support the Kingwood area. \$3 million has been pre-approved to cover engineering and permitting costs of dredging the San Jacinto River, and \$2 million has been pre-authorized for a regional study that will evaluate ways to prevent future flooding along the San Jacinto River. The funds come from the state's Hazard Mitigation Fund, which is collected from FEMA by the state for redistribution to affected cities and counties.

Additionally, Governor Abbott has directed the San Jacinto River Authority (SJRA) to identify what can be done to prevent flooding along the West Fork of the San Jacinto River and to implement long-term solutions to protect lives, property, and communities located downstream from Lake Conroe. SJRA has accepted this responsibility, hired an experienced individual to head this new department within SJRA, and is reviewing how to best fund this challenge. Harris County places flood control under the Harris County Flood Control District which is authorized to levy taxes to fund its operations. Voters in Montgomery County voted down a request to create a Montgomery County Flood Control District in 1985 which left a void in who was exactly in charge of flood control and how it would be funded.

To be certain, area flooding is not only a practical problem but also a political dilemma. Enormous pressure is being applied by Kingwood-area residents and businesses to elected officials such as Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner, City Representative Dave Martin, State Representative Dan Huberty, and State Senator Brandon Creighton. Those elected officials, looking for relief for (and from) their constituents, look to Governor Abbott for action. Governor Abbott has responded in initiatives listed above and is applying pressure to SJRA to provide solutions. It is strongly perceived that "solutions" include utilizing

the Lake Conroe dam and Lake Conroe lake levels as “one of the tools in the tool box” to provide flood control.

We met with Jace Houston, SJRA General Manager, last week to discuss their new role and the options being considered for flood control related to Lake Conroe. I’d call that meeting a constructive yet preliminary attempt to provide feedback representing the LCA’s perception of the desires of local residents and businesses. We communicated with over 150 individuals and organizations in person or by e-mail this week to start discussing public opinion on the matter.

There appear to be a minimum of three (3) initial responses that SJRA could provide to Governor Abbott regarding Lake Conroe and its lake levels. Those responses could resemble 1) Lake Conroe’s lake levels should not be used as a flood control mechanism, 2) Lake Conroe’s lake levels should be reduced in advance of imminent storms by pre-releasing water through the Lake Conroe dam into the West Fork of the San Jacinto River, and 3) Lake Conroe’s lake levels should be seasonally adjusted downwards based on historic weather patterns. We’ll discuss each option briefly below.

Proposing to not utilize Lake Conroe’s lake levels as a flood control mechanism appears to be a response that brings the most uncertainty and potentially worst consequences. It is felt that such a response would most likely be met with an Austin reply resembling “If you’re not willing to include Lake Conroe in the solution, then we (Austin) are just going to tell you what your future lake levels are going to be.” Such an Austin reply would take away local input (including that of SJRA) and could permit the implementation of a disastrous program like the Kingwood proposal to “permanently reduce Lake Conroe’s lake level by 3 feet”.

Proposing a pre-release program in advance of imminent storms does not appear to be as effective as it sounds on the surface. SJRA states that it can only “safely release” 1 inch of water per day into the San Jacinto River without causing downstream consequences, and that a release of 6 inches per day floods the banks of the river in numerous locations. Pre-releasing water into the river only means that the river can no longer receive water from the numerous creeks that need to flow into the river without causing local flooding along those creeks. It was expressed to me that The City of Houston and Harris County Flood Control District really don’t like the “pre-release strategy” and that a “dry San Jacinto River would be best in a flood situation because the river could then accept the greatest amount of water from the creeks that need to empty in the river”. I’m also told that river authorities across the state, in general, do not typically support “pre-release” as a flood control mechanism. As it relates to Hurricane Harvey, a “pre-release” of 1 to 6 inches per day for 2 to 3 days in advance of the storm would not have assisted downstream when SJRA released over 15 feet of water through the dam and, in fact, would have only filled the San Jacinto River that much quicker and further added to flood problems.

Finally, proposing a “seasonally-adjusted lake level” may make the most sense. SJRA is gathering statistics on lake levels, rainfall totals, and releases from the SJRA dam since construction of Lake Conroe in 1973 to best support any proposal. In advance of that specific documentation, it can be represented that the highest lake levels, greatest rains, and maximum releases revolve around two timeframes – Spring rains from mid-March to mid-May and Hurricane Season from mid-September to mid-November. A proposal could resemble reducing Lake Conroe’s lake level to an elevation of 200’ (compared to a “full pool” elevation of 201’) from March 15 to May 15, and reducing the lake level to 199.5’ or 200’ from September 15 to November 15. No releases would occur if the lake were already at those adjusted levels.

It is not forgotten by Montgomery County or The City of Houston that Lake Conroe was built as a water supply reservoir and that Houston owns the water rights to 2/3 of the water in Lake Conroe. Pre-releasing water from Lake Conroe or “seasonally-adjusting” its lake level could have an effect on the ability to draw water for consumption should a drought follow any releases from the Lake Conroe dam. SJRA already utilizes the majority of its 1/3 share of the maximum 100,000 acre feet per year “yield” from Lake Conroe for water sales to its GRP Division (water treatment plant for Montgomery County public consumption), Entergy, and local consumers such as golf courses and residential irrigation permits. While The City of Houston has only called on its 2/3 share of water rights twice since the construction of Lake Conroe, these water rights are crucial as a back-up water supply to the water it pumps from Lake Houston for public consumption in Harris County. And while The City of Houston is actively working on negotiating and constructing supplemental water supplies that will replace its dependence on its Lake Conroe water rights, SJRA will continually require more water from Lake Conroe to serve the ever-growing population of Montgomery County.

As SJRA is developing their proposals on flood control, we can only hope that they keep a few things in mind. It is our opinion that 1) any proposed reductions in Lake Conroe’s lake levels (by “pre-release” or “seasonal adjustment”) are coupled with an equivalent volume reduction in Lake Houston, 2) any proposed plan has a limited duration (i.e. 2 years) that can be reviewed after its expiration once regional flood control studies are completed and the effects of remediation/dredging of the West Fork of the San Jacinto River can be evaluated, and 3) maximum lake levels (before release) on Lake Conroe are examined to minimize local flooding and structural damages.

LCA MEMBERSHIP DRIVE: If you are not a Member of the LCA, please consider becoming one AT NO COST now. We all know there is “power in numbers” and we need your e-mail address to best circulate our communication on a timely basis. To join the LCA, simply send an e-mail to [lca@lakeconroe.com](mailto:lca@lakeconroe.com) and request to be added to our Member Database. Rather than charge a “Membership Fee”, we now provide complimentary membership. We have found that when an emergency or “cause” arises that requires funds of the LCA, an e-mail from the LCA requesting voluntary donations seems to be the most effective tool.

Wow. That’s a lot of information when I go back and read this Update. We hope you find the information provided to be helpful in better understanding the current situation being so frequently reported in the local media. We do not feel any need for panic, and we endeavor to continue to be your voice in developing any solution involving Lake Conroe. We are not asking for any action from you at this time, and we will report back once SJRA develops its initial written proposal on its new flood control role. Thank you and thoroughly enjoy our beautiful Lake Conroe.

Mike Bleier, President

Lake Conroe Association