



*People and Nature: Our Future is in the Balance*

## NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION

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# Public Statements on LCRA-SAWS Contract on Colorado River Water Transfer Proposal; February 20, 2002

### Myron Hess, Legal Counsel, National Wildlife Federation

"In authorizing LCRA to negotiate this contract, the Legislature established express protections for the people and resources of the Colorado River watershed. Unfortunately, the contract approved today by LCRA fails fully to honor those protections. As a result, essential freshwater inflows could be lost along with the future health and productivity of Matagorda Bay and the livelihoods of many Texans who rely on the Bay."

"All the information we've reviewed indicates that, unless we're very careful, future water demands within the basin will threaten water quality and the fish and wildlife resources of the lower portion of the Colorado River and Matagorda Bay. Diverting up to an additional 150,000 acre-feet of river flow to San Antonio, especially during dry years, could well make that threat a reality. The contract adopted today does little to prevent that outcome. Now, the challenge we face is to ensure that when a future LCRA Board, in about 7 years, considers whether to continue with the contract, the people and the natural resources of the Colorado Basin get the protection they need. Unfortunately, these projects tend to gain momentum with the expenditure of time and money and become hard to stop, no matter how bad the consequences. "

### Dr. Norman Johns, Water Resources Scientist

"The LCRA likes to say that this project is a win-win-win proposal with the rice farmers, San Antonio, and the Highland Lakes all benefiting. However, this is bit like Enron accounting, only showing the positives; the potential big "off the books" loser would be the Matagorda Bay estuary and the people who make their livelihoods there."

"The information available today indicates that this project could devastate Matagorda Bay. We feel that the contract should assign the 'burden of proof' to LCRA and SAWS to prove that this is not true before the project can proceed. Unfortunately, they opted for ambiguous language calling only for 'adequate protection,' without providing any definition of what that means or how it would be ensured."

### Mark MacLeod, Director for Special Projects, Environmental Defense

"The environmental community offered detailed comments on how the draft contract could be improved. General Manager Joe Beal and other LCRA officials have repeatedly said that the project would not go forward if it harmed the environment. All we asked for was a guarantee that an independent body of scientists without any financial stake in the outcome would assess the environmental effects of the project. We're very disappointed that didn't happen. It could have established a good precedent for the entire state."