

For Immediate Release 3/27/03
Contact: John Hannah 512/476-9805
or Ken Kramer 512-477-1729

Don Henley Joins Fellow Texans to protect Texas Bays, Rivers and Wetlands

Austin - World-renowned songwriter, musician and conservationist Don Henley joined with fellow Texans today to call on the State Legislature to protect Texas rivers, bays and wetlands from overuse. Currently, there is no mechanism in Texas to ensure that wasteful water use won't dry up rivers - as has happened in various locations around the country.

According to Henley, "Caddo Lake, near where I grew up, is a unique Texas treasure. Under current Texas water law, river flows needed to support Caddo Lake and its wetlands are not protected. These wetlands of state, national, and international importance could dry up and wither away. That is a travesty."

Henley said that he was in Austin to talk with legislators regarding a "time out" for new water rights permits, because "Texas rivers bays and estuaries are stressed and dying."

"We are asking that no more permits be issued to take water out of Texas rivers until enough water has been set aside to keep the rivers, wetlands, bays and estuaries healthy for future generations," Henley said.

The Caddo Lake Institute, which Henley helped found, has filed a water rights application designed to help provide the needed protection.

Henley noted that "misguided action taken last week by a state agency dismissing another similar application designed to protect the San Marcos and Guadalupe Rivers and San Antonio Bay undermines the Institute's application and illustrates that swift legislative action is needed."

"Because the state has failed to protect fresh water flows, private groups such as the Caddo Lake Institute and the San Marcos River Foundation have had to step in and invest large sums of money in an attempt to do what the state should have done, Henley said. "Now the water speculators are asking the legislature to kill citizen efforts to protect these public resources."

"Dried up wetlands and rivers that have ceased to flow are not part of the Texas heritage that I want to pass on to my children and their grandchildren. I believe other Texans share that view," Henley said. "The Rio Grande is lost, the Nueces is very sick, and the Colorado and Guadalupe are at risk and that is not acceptable."

Myron Hess, Legal Counsel for the National Wildlife Federation, noted that a survey of Texas voters, conducted earlier this month, confirmed that Texans do share that view.

"The people of Texas clearly do not see the issue of water as one of people versus wildlife and the environment," Hess said. "They want a balanced approach that protects both and they acknowledge the need to use water more efficiently to make that happen."

Ken Kramer, Executive Director of the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club, noted that "amazingly, the Legislature is considering some proposed bills that would actually decrease protection for the state's rivers and bays and estuaries."

"What is needed from the Legislature is the development of a comprehensive approach for protecting streams, rivers and coastal bays and estuaries." Kramer said. "Our current water law already has inadequate protections for these natural treasures, we certainly can't afford to have the Legislature take any of those protections away."

Freshwater river flows into coastal bays provide the essential balance between saltwater and freshwater. This balance is critical to wildlife and the fishermen and shrimpers who depend on it for their livelihoods.

According to Ben Vaughan of the Coastal Conservation Association of Texas, securing freshwater inflows to Texas bays and estuaries is its number one priority "If we want to continue to have shrimp, crabs, fish and oysters, these bays must have fresh water," Vaughan said.