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LEGISLATIVE MOVE GOOD FOR WATER POLICY IN TEXAS

PASSAGE OF SB 3 MEANS MORE PROTECTION FOR OUR RIVERS, BAYS, AND ESTUARIES

(May 29, 2007 -- Austin) Weekend squabbling in the legislature did not slow down efforts to protect the state's waterways and drinking water sources. Senate Bill 3 was adopted in the waning hours of the 80th legislative session.

"SB 3 is a major step towards ensuring future generations of Texans have flowing, healthy rivers and productive bays and estuaries and fisheries," said Mary Kelly, director of Environmental Defense's Land, Water and Wildlife team.

SB 3 contains "environmental flows" provisions that will move Texas towards setting aside water for fish and wildlife, while still meeting human water needs and protecting existing water rights of cities, agriculture and industry.

"These provisions are as advanced as anywhere in the western U.S.; if we implement this right, Texas will lead the way in showing how our water resources can be managed rationally."

The bill also contains strong conservation programs that will help avoid the need for new reservoirs.

"Texans across the state will benefit, as conservation has proven to be the most cost effective way to meet future demands and help avoid the need for new environmentally-damaging reservoirs."

Despite the many positive components of SB3 there are still portions of the bill that are not supported by the conservation and environmental community. The most troubling is the provision increasing pumping limits from the Edwards Aquifer. Also of concern to East Texas and private landowners were provisions to designate unique reservoir sites named in the 2007 state water plan.

"We think these designations were unnecessary, but it is important to remember that just designating a site in no way means the reservoir will be built. We think it can be shown as we move forward that there are good alternatives to most of the proposed reservoirs—alternatives that are cheaper for rate-payers and that avoid the loss of rare habitats and prime farm and timber lands. Overall, this bill is good for Texas. We're pleased to see serious progress being made."

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Environmental Defense, a leading national nonprofit organization, represents more than 500,000 members. Since 1967, Environmental Defense has linked science, economics, law and innovative private-sector partnerships to create breakthrough solutions to the most serious environmental problems.