



NEWS

GUADALUPE-BLANCO RIVER AUTHORITY
933 EAST COURT STREET □ SEGUIN, TEXAS 78155 □ FAX [830] 379-9718

GBRA URGES CONSERVATION DUE TO LOW WATER LEVELS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, April 28, 2000

Contact: Judy Gardner, [830] 379-5822, email jgardner@gbra.org

SEGUIN-Drastic declines in river flows, well levels, springflow and inflows to Canyon Reservoir prompted Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority officials today to issue a widespread call for conservation of water resources.

“GBRA has been monitoring the situation in the Guadalupe River Basin carefully since last fall,” said general manager Bill West. “We have focused on promoting public awareness through conservation ads, news releases, public presentations and special projects such as the recent Trinity Aquifer modeling study in cooperation with the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) and the Center for Water Research at UTSA.”

“With a range of weather forecasts that predict everything from a wet spring to continued drought, the reality is that we are going into the summer with historically low rainfall, predictably high temperatures, and key regional water indicators showing signs of severe stress. GBRA is taking immediate steps internally, as well as publicly, to encourage water conservation measures wherever possible,” West said.

According to West, most of Texas has experienced some degree of drought for several years. Scarce rainfall and low springflows are also affecting the entire Guadalupe River Basin. Normally, rainfall and runoff supply most of the river’s baseflow with springflows contributing around 20-30%. Now, the situation is almost reversed.

April 26 readings at Comal Springs in New Braunfels measured 262 cfs, or 87% of the monthly norm, and the San Marcos springflow was 102 cfs, just 62% of its normal flow. These springflows are currently supplying 77.4% of the water in the Guadalupe River with releases from Canyon Reservoir providing the remaining 20.2 %.

The April 27 reading at the Edwards Aquifer J-17 test well in San Antonio measured 651.8 feet, less than 2 feet above the Edwards Aquifer Authority’s mandatory Stage I conservation level. Records from the Drought of the 1950’s show that Comal Springs begins to dry up when the J-17 well is approximately 622 feet, and it is not uncommon for the Edwards and other regional aquifers to decline one foot or more a day during the summer months.

(more)

Total river flow is also below normal, said West. "The Blanco River is just a trickle and the Guadalupe River flow measured this week at Victoria is only 21 % of the monthly norm. In other words, there is 79% less water available for cities, industries and agriculture in the lower basin.

Water levels at test wells in Kerr and Kendall Counties are also reaching critical levels. April 26 readings at the Kerr County Cypress Creek well were at the historic low of 1,453 feet msl! The Donna Drive well measures 1,412 feet msl, just 35 feet above its historic low of 1,377 msl. The Comfort Well in Kendall County is at 1,294.3 feet msl or eleven feet above its historic low of 1,283 msl.

"These conditions simply reinforce why management and protection of our surface and groundwater resources is so important," said West. "We must all work together to ensure that everyone who depends upon these regional resources will have enough water to meet their basic needs."

A drastic drop in inflows to Canyon Reservoir during the past ten days also prompted today's decision by GBRA officials to reduce the reservoir release rate to 60 cubic feet per second (cfs). The new release will take effect on Sunday evening, April 30.

West said inflows to Canyon Reservoir have been fluctuating since last fall and GBRA has been carefully balancing the conservation of stored water supplies against the required minimum 90 cfs release rate mandated in the reservoir permits from the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC) and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). These permits require natural inflows to be passed through Canyon Reservoir to meet senior downstream water rights, existing operating permits and bay and estuary flow requirements.

From November 1999 through March 2000, United States Geological Survey (USGS) data recorded a high daily inflow to Canyon Reservoir of 139 cfs and a low of 69 cfs. The mean ranges varied from 82 to 99 cfs. "During this time, the reservoir release rate consisted of the natural inflow plus a small amount of stored water, in order to achieve the 90 cfs requirement," said West.

West said "April's data stayed pretty consistent until last week, when the inflow plunged from 104 cfs on April 16 to 42 cfs just ten days later. A 62 cfs drop in just ten days, especially as we approach the traditional hot, dry summer months, can't be left to the whims of Mother Nature to correct."

"When inflows to Canyon Reservoir average less than 90 cfs for a period of 45 days, the FERC permit contains a provision that allows releases below 90 cfs," said West. "We were fortunate that several good rainfall events provided enough relief to get us through the winter, but last week's drastic drop in inflows makes it necessary to cut back the Canyon Reservoir release to conserve stored water."

(more)

According to West, activating this drought provision and reducing the release rate will help conserve stored water in Canyon Reservoir for future municipal and industrial needs. “The FERC permit only requires GBRA to release an amount equal to the actual inflow. However, upon ‘call’ from our customers, we will supplement that release with additional stored water in order to meet contractual obligations,” West said. The last time GBRA invoked the drought release provision for Canyon Reservoir was in May 1996.

West is acutely aware of the impact reduced releases will have on the recreation industry located below Canyon Dam in Comal County. “GBRA has worked closely with the Water Oriented Recreation District and local outfitters for many years and we understand the tremendous economic impact this industry has on the local area. We are continuing cooperative efforts with the Corps of Engineers to create a several-foot ‘recreation pool’ in the reservoir to augment recreation flows during low flows and drought.”

“Unfortunately, we’re going into this season with Canyon Reservoir’s elevation currently at 905.41 msl, almost four feet below normal conservation pool. Unless we get some rain above the reservoir, this is not going to be an easy summer for anyone in this river basin,” said West.