



NEWS

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Comal County Commissioners hear results of Canyon Lake Economic Study

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SEGUIN – Comal County Commissioners were told today that Comal County and the Canyon Lake area will see numerous benefits as a result of the permit amendment granted to the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority and GBRA's subordination of its downstream hydropower water rights.

Results of the independent, one-year Canyon Lake Economic Study were presented to the commissioners by Dave Keen of BBC Research and Consulting from Denver, Colorado. A Lake Advisory Committee --whose members were appointed by various groups and organizations -- selected BBC to conduct the study after reviewing qualifications from potential study consultants and conducting interviews. The committee also approved the selection of sub-consultant hydrologist, R.J. Brandes Company of Austin, Texas.

Keen's presentation explained that lake levels will be higher in the future with the amendment and subordination rather than without the amendment. Lake recreation activity will be greater; there will be minimal impact on downstream river recreation activity; there will be more business income and jobs in the local area; and more tax revenues will be generated for local governments.

Keen also cited the subordination of GBRA's downstream hydro water rights as "critical to the understanding of the study.

When asked by the Commissioners to further explain the importance of subordination, GBRA general manager Bill West said that GBRA holds senior water rights granted by the State of Texas to use natural river flows of the Guadalupe River downstream of New Braunfels to generate electricity. GBRA's Board of Directors voted to 'subordinate' GBRA's hydro rights in 1996, and subsequently entered into a similar subordination agreement with the City of Seguin in 1998.

As a result, GBRA will no longer pass water through Canyon Reservoir to meet downstream hydroelectric permits. Water will still be passed through the Reservoir to meet (1) environmental flow requirements, (2) senior downstream water rights, and (3) customer contracts for stored water from the Reservoir. The downstream hydroelectric rights will be honored.

With subordination in place, much of the water GBRA would normally pass through Canyon Reservoir to generate electricity will now be held in the reservoir's conservation pool when storage space is available. This effectively 'increases' the amount of usable water from the reservoir on an annual basis.

County Judge Danny Scheel pointed out that with the population of Comal County projected to increase in the future, "more people will be calling on that additional water supply on a daily basis."

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“Our board’s decision to subordinate GBRA’s downstream hydroelectric water rights confirmed their commitment that the needs of people – especially for municipal water supplies – should have a higher priority than the generation of hydroelectricity. This report verifies the soundness of that decision and also shows an indirect benefit to water recreation,” West said.

Keen pointed out that net economic benefits to the area will average \$14 million per year over the next 50 years, as compared to the future without the amendment.

Commissioner Jay Millikin commented that water is important not only to Canyon Lake, but to the entire region, pointing out that communities such as Bulverde and Boerne have serious water needs that must be met. “We lose sight of the fact that GBRA’s responsibility for water goes beyond Comal County,” said Millikin.

When asked about comments released by Friends of Canyon Lake about the BBC study and future lake levels, GBRA general manager Bill West said, “FOCL is asking cities and other customers to waive their right to water from a reservoir that was constructed for flood control and water supply, in order to ‘drought-proof’ the lake for boating. They conveniently forget that this reservoir was partly paid for by these same water supply customers. Just because we have been in a wetter than normal weather cycle since Canyon was built in 1964, and not all customers have used their full contracted amounts, does not mean they should endanger their citizens and future water supplies to ensure an artificially supported lake level”. West repeated that the study indicates the local economy will not be harmed from the permit amendment and subordination.

The study was paid for by GBRA, and directed by the Lake Advisory Committee, at the request of the Comal County Commissioners Court. The committee developed and approved the scope of work and heard frequent reports from the consultants during the process. Committee members included Jack Ohlrich, Bob Mehall, Maria Carson, and Dr. Stovy Bowlin appointed by Comal County Commissioners, Dennis Heitkamp appointed by the Greater New Braunfels Chamber of Commerce, John Guenzel appointed by the Canyon Lake Chamber of Commerce, Jerry Brite appointed by the US Army Corps of Engineers, Bob Wickman appointed by Friends of Canyon Lake, Larry Ratliff appointed by Canyon Lake Water Supply Corporation, Charles Stephens appointed by WORD, and David Welsch appointed by GBRA.

The permit amendment will enable GBRA to provide more water to potential users. Canyon Dam and Reservoir was completed in 1964 as a joint project between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and GBRA, which served as the local sponsor and and jointly financed the project with the federal government. While the Reservoir is primarily a flood control project, the stored water portion below elevation 909 msl is managed by GBRA to provide water to Many cities, industries and agricultural producers. Some contract for this water as their sole supply, while for others it supplies a supplemental source during times of low river flow or drought.

Following a presentation by BBC at the GBRA Board meeting on February 19, Directors unanimously voted to accept the study.