



Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority
933 E. Court Street, Seguin TX 78155
www.gbra.org

Page 1 of 2
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TCEQ Prepares Draft Permit for GBRA Water Project

First major permit to adhere to SB-3 environmental flows criteria in the Guadalupe River Basin

For more information

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AUSTIN, TEXAS – A draft permit that would allow the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority (GBRA) to develop a water project to meet the demands of the Guadalupe River Basin, including the fast-developing Central Texas region that includes Hays, Caldwell, Comal, Guadalupe and Gonzales counties has been prepared by the executive director of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). Notice of GBRA's application and the draft permit is being published for public comment.

Preparation of the draft permit brings GBRA's Mid-Basin Project, which may include the use of both surface and groundwater and is among the recommended strategies in the 2011 South Central Texas Regional Water Planning Group's projects in the State Water Plan, closer to reality.

"We filed the application for the permit in December 2009 because we wanted to be proactive in addressing the demand being created in the high-growth areas of our basin," Bill West, Jr., GBRA general manager said. "Between 2000 and 2010, the total population of those five counties has increased from 315,455 to 455,269 — an increase of more than 44 percent."

One of the challenges of any new proposed water project in the state is meeting environmental flows (or "e-flows") criteria for the respective river basin in which the project is being built. The e-flows process, set up as part of Senate Bill 3 (SB-3) to protect stream flow and inflow to Texas' bays and estuaries, has a set of stakeholders for each river basin who make recommendations to the TCEQ for e-flow rules. Rules are then adopted on a basin-by-basin basis by the TCEQ. The stakeholder group in which the GBRA falls is comprised of 25 stakeholders.

When TCEQ published proposed revisions to the relevant section of the Texas Administrative Code, its recommendations for Environmental Flow Standards for Surface Water met the balance "in conjunction with other factors, including the present and future needs for water for other uses related to water supply planning" required by SB-3. A variety of influences related to the Guadalupe River Basin, such as endangered species' needs, population growth, business interests, drought patterns, and agricultural and municipal needs were taken into consideration by the stakeholder committees charged with developing the criteria.

Given impending SB-3 passage, GBRA officials prepared its original permit application with environmental flow considerations being used at the time already incorporated and with a commitment to adhere to final SB-3 e-flows criteria when it attained TCEQ approval.

"We developed this project and its related permit application with the understanding that it would need to meet criteria established by the SB-3 e-flows process. After a lengthy and thorough review, TCEQ's staff concluded the project would meet all of the requirements and standards put in place by the state, and thus issued the draft permit," West said.

This permit would authorize GBRA to divert up to, but not exceed, 75,000 acre-feet (AF) of water per year from the unappropriated flows of the Guadalupe River and use that water for municipal and industrial purposes anywhere within GBRA's 10-county statutory district. The permit also would authorize construction of one or more off-channel reservoirs that would have a combined storage capacity of up to 125,000 AF. With TCEQ's e-flows requirements reflected in the permit, the project's actual yield is expected to be at least 25,000 AF per year. The off-channel reservoir(s) would be constructed somewhere in Gonzales County.

"GBRA's Mid-Basin Project appears to have been developed and evaluated in accordance with how the SB-3 environmental flows process was expected to be applied to new projects as envisioned under the law," explained Bob Brandes, Vice Chair of



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Page 2 of 2
July 31, 2013

the SB-3 statewide Science Advisory Committee. Brandes said, "With TCEQ's draft permit being issued, the proposed project must be in compliance with the e-flow rules for the Guadalupe-San Antonio basin as adopted by the TCEQ, which were intended to strike a balance between environmental flow needs and human and other competing water needs in the basin, including consideration of economic factors."

According to TCEQ staff, now that the notice of application and draft permit has been published, there will be a 30-day comment period. Comments about the draft permit should be sent to TCEQ Chief Clerk Bridget Bohac. If the draft permit is not contested during the 30-day comment period, the final permit could be issued a short period later.

About the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority

The GBRA was established by the Texas Legislature in 1933 as a water conservation and reclamation district. GBRA provides stewardship for the water resources in its 10-county statutory district, which begins near the headwaters of the Guadalupe and Blanco rivers, ends at San Antonio Bay, and includes Kendall, Comal, Hays, Caldwell, Guadalupe, Gonzales, DeWitt, Victoria, Calhoun, and Refugio counties