



## **Frequently Asked Questions Regarding City of Houston Call for Water from Lake Conroe**

### **Why is the City of Houston able to use water from Lake Conroe? Is the SJRA selling water to them?**

The SJRA is not selling water from Lake Conroe to the City of Houston and receives no economic benefit from the release. Lake Conroe was built as a joint venture between the City of Houston and the SJRA, with the City owning two-thirds of the water rights in the reservoir, and the SJRA owning the other one-third. The City of Houston is legally entitled to use the water that they own in Lake Conroe. As spelled out in the joint venture agreement, the SJRA is responsible for the operation and maintenance of the reservoir, so when the City wishes to use its water, it notifies the SJRA to release the specified amount, which then flows down the San Jacinto River to Lake Houston.

### **I thought the SJRA bought out the City of Houston's interest in Lake Conroe.**

The SJRA does now have a contract to use the City of Houston's water in Lake Conroe. In September of 2009, the SJRA and the City executed a long-term water supply contract that secured the SJRA's right to use all of the water in Lake Conroe for Montgomery County customers who are part of the SJRA's countywide Groundwater Reduction Plan (GRP). But the contract is similar to a long-term lease. The City still owns the water, and the contract states that until the SJRA starts using the water for Montgomery County customers, the City still has the ability to call on their water for their own use. Montgomery County won't need the City's water until approximately 2025, so until that time, the City has the legal right to use it.

### **Why is the City of Houston calling for water from Lake Conroe?**

The City has indicated that the purpose of the release is to stabilize the level of Lake Houston for operational needs at the City's Northeast Water Purification Plant.

### **How much water will the City of Houston use each day? What will it do to the level of Lake Conroe?**

The City has currently ordered the release of 150 million gallons of water per day, which is estimated to be approximately half an inch per day of lake level. The releases will likely continue until the current drought conditions begin to abate. If significant rainfall occurs in the Lake Houston watershed, the City would likely reduce the amount of the release. The release was originally estimated to result in a drop in lake level of about 3 to 3 ½ inches per week, and normal evaporation was expected to add another 2 to 3 inches per week to that amount. The actual measured amount of lake level decline since the releases began in mid-August has been approximately 1.3 feet (1 foot 4 inches) per month. The amount of continued decline will vary with rainfall and will be less in the winter months when evaporation rates are lower, but it is probably safe to assume 1 foot per month of continued declines through the winter months if the City continues with the current release rate.

## **Is there a maximum amount the City of Houston can use each year? What agency determines how much water can be used from a reservoir?**

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality is the state agency that sets the maximum amount that is allowed to be used each year from every water supply reservoir in the state. For Lake Conroe, the maximum annual amount is 100,000 acre-feet, which is about 4 to 5 feet of water. Since the City of Houston owns two-thirds of the water, the City is allowed to use 67,000 acre-feet per year, which is about 3 to 3.5 feet. The reason the state operates reservoirs this way comes from the drought of the 1950s. The 1950s drought lasted seven years and is considered the "drought of record" for Texas. State water planners limit the annual amount that can be used from all reservoirs so that there will be enough water to last through a repeat of the seven-year drought of the 1950s.

## **What will make the release of water to the City of Houston stop?**

Rain. Once we return to normal rainfall patterns, both Lake Conroe and Lake Houston will fill back up, and the City will not have a need to pull water from Lake Conroe. In average rainfall years, Lake Conroe spills seven feet of water just due to being "over full." This statistic highlights the severity of the current drought.

## **How low can Lake Conroe get before the City of Houston must stop using water from Lake Conroe? Is there a lower limit?**

There is no lower limit. All water supply reservoirs in Texas are designed to store water for the duration of a seven-year drought. At the end of seven years, the reservoir would be theoretically empty - "theoretically" because the models the state uses to set the annual maximum use for each reservoir are very conservative. They assume no wastewater effluent is flowing into the lake, and they assume no drought restrictions are being implemented. The point is that Texas water supply reservoirs are designed for the worst case scenario, which is a repeat of the seven-year drought of record.

## **Shouldn't the City of Houston implement maximum water restrictions before using water from Lake Conroe?**

The water in Lake Conroe that is being released to the City of Houston belongs to the City of Houston. The SJRA has no control over the conditions under which they order the release. However, the City did implement mandatory drought restrictions prior to calling for water from Lake Conroe.

## **When should I move my boat from my dock? Can I still use the lake for skiing?**

Boat docks vary greatly in terms of the depth of the water at their location, so lakefront property owners should monitor water levels and take appropriate action as needed to trailer their boats or store them in marinas until normal rainfall patterns return and lake levels begin to rise. Most of the lake is still open for recreational use, but boaters should be very cautious to watch out for stumps and shallow areas. Boaters are encouraged to travel and ski in areas of known depth.

## **Doesn't the City of Houston own water in Lake Livingston? Are they using it?**

The City of Houston does own a tremendous amount of water in Lake Livingston – many times what they own in Lake Conroe. They already use some of it in the southern parts of Harris County via a canal system that moves the water from the Trinity River over to the area around the ship channel, but they don't have a conveyance system in place (yet) to move water from Lake Livingston directly into Lake Houston. This system, known as the Luce Bayou project, is scheduled to be completed around 2020. Once completed, the City will be able to move its water from Lake Livingston directly into Lake Houston.

For additional information, please visit the SJRA's website at [www.sjra.net](http://www.sjra.net). To receive updates via the internet or email, you can link to our Facebook page from our website or register your email address by signing up using the field in the lower right corner of our home page.

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