

First hush-hush and now rush-rush.

Why is the LCRA ignoring its own environmental planning committees and the will of Central Texans?

Why was the pipeline plan so hush-hush?

You may have read about it: Before community residents found out, the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) had been meeting for nearly a year with the owner of the Rocky Creek Ranch — 468 pristine acres in western Travis County on Hamilton Pool Road. The owner had plans to turn the land into a dense subdivision and required a water pipeline to service that many properties. Indeed, this past March a prototype contract had been written which the LCRA Board had scheduled to approve in April. What's more, the LCRA was also negotiating with a second developer to pipe water to another 444 acre planned subdivision just down the road.

Which brings us to lesson one: Waterlines attract developers and, in most cases, developers pay for lines by building more houses on smaller lots. That's how suburban sprawl begins.

In this case, however, laying a pipeline down Hamilton Pool Road will have far greater consequences than stacking hundreds of densely packed rooftops on Hamilton Pool's scenic corridor:

Land to be served by the proposed water line is in the Barton Creek watershed, which replenishes the Edwards Aquifer and Barton Springs. The proposed pipeline and subsequent development will jam our winding two-lane country road (a road the Texas Department of Transportation has no plans to widen in the foreseeable future) with an estimated 3,000 more cars daily. Pollution will make its way into our Barton Springs watershed. And other infrastructure providers will be negatively impacted as well: EMS, the Travis County Sheriff's Department, the Hudson Bend Fire Department, and the Lake Travis Independent School District.



USFWS recommendations fail to prevent degradation of water quality in Barton Springs and Hamilton Pool.

Weak regulations are backed by even weaker enforcement. No enforcing agencies, including the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Travis County, appear to have the resources or manpower to keep developers in line. Recently, a new development west of Dripping Springs, known as Double L, received LCRA water despite failing to comply with Fish and Wildlife guidelines.

Why is the LCRA going down this road?

Selling water to customers is relatively new to the LCRA. Its water and waste water division is \$30 million in the red, and even Board members have expressed a desire for the river authority to put its financial house in order.

The LCRA's first major retail venture — installing a pipeline out Hwy. 290 to Dripping Springs — was less than successful. And two communities now served by the LCRA, Lometa and Sunrise Beach, are up in arms over the quality of their water, the service they receive, and another round of rate increases.

Still, the river authority presses on. Rather than be guided by Envision Central Texas, the area planning process in which literally thousands of Central Texas residents weighed in on growth and development, the LCRA has targeted the environmentally sensitive Hill Country. Instead of laying pipelines along the I-35 corridor where growth is expected and the demand is great, the LCRA has targeted almost two-thirds of its \$355 million projected budget over the next 30

years for new systems in Western Travis County. Central

Texans want growth along established thoroughfares, downtown areas, up and down I-35, and east toward Houston. They don't want to cover the Hill Country with pipes, concrete, and rooflines.

On Tuesday, the first domino falls, unless the LCRA chooses to listen.

So the question is this: Why is it so urgent for the LCRA to act on the Hamilton Pool contract on December 7th? The only answer we've been given is that "a few developers have requested water."

But which is more important? A few developers (whose land values will increase dramatically with a signed contract)? Or the wishes of the vast majority of Hamilton Pool, Hill Country, and Central Texas residents?

Which is more important? Self-interests, traffic congestion, overburdened county services, and polluted aquifers? Or water quality, natural areas, and a real plan for growth that takes environmental stewardship into account?

On Tuesday, the LCRA will weigh in. We urge you to do so as well by calling LCRA General Manager Joe Beal and LCRA Board members at (512) 473-3200, or by e-mailing: joe.beal@lcra.org and placing in the subject line "Please forward to the LCRA Board members."

You can also call Governor Rick Perry at (512) 463-2000; U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson (916-5834); Senator Gonzalo Barrientos (463-0114); Senator Jeff Wentworth (463-0125); and Representative Terry Keel (463-0652). In addition, you can sign our on-line petition at www.hprsc.org.

And of course, you can attend the LCRA Board meeting at 2 pm, December 7th at The Terrace Club on 2600 Hwy. 290 West, just east of Dripping Springs.

Belying their own stated goals — "to use our leadership and environmental authority to ensure the protection and constructive use of the area's natural resources" — the LCRA appears to be leading the march of unbridled growth. Please let them know we value our Hill Country and that Central Texans demand quality land, water, and leadership.

And why the big rush-rush?

Once the negotiations were revealed, public outcry was immediate. Hamilton Pool Road residents, Austin city council member Daryl Slusher, Senator Gonzalo Barrientos, Hill Country community groups, and conservation organizations alike registered their concerns. "Why," they asked, "is the LCRA rushing the proposed pipeline when the very committee it created to make recommendations regarding water development — the Regional Water Quality Planning Committee — isn't due to report until February 2005? Wouldn't it be prudent to wait for their findings?"

Responding to the outcry, the river authority imposed a six-month moratorium on water expansion lines in order to study the situation, as well as formed the Southwest Travis County Advisory Panel, the Non-Point Source Pollution Regulations Committee, and Hamilton Pool Road Focus Group. All are scheduled to report their findings to the LCRA Board by April 2005.

Imagine then our dismay to learn the LCRA scheduled a vote on the Hamilton Pool Road pipeline contract for Tuesday, December 7th *without waiting for its committee findings.*

Why the wishes of a few over so many?

The LCRA agreed to a clause in the proposed contract with the owner of the Rocky Creek development that allows the subdivision to be "grandfathered in" under existing U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regulations, regulations which are expected to be weaker than those in the regional plan.

The LCRA says that present U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regulations are more than adequate to protect our hill country and that signing a contract now is a win-win situation. Conservationists strongly disagree. USFWS recommendations do not consider wastewater pollution, nor does the LCRA have plans to provide wastewater service. USFWS recommendations do not take into account off-site pollution that would be generated by thousands of additional cars plying Hamilton Pool Road. And

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