

ARE YOU TIRED OF LOW LAKE LEVELS ON LAKE CONROE YET? CHAPTER 1

October 1, 2019, marked the end of a second year of the San Jacinto River Authority's (SJRA) Seasonal Lake Level Adjustment Program on Lake Conroe where the lake level is reduced by a minimum of two feet (2') between August 1 and September 30. Of course, what we're seeing is not a lake level reduction for only 2 months. Even with 5.2 inches of rain since October 1, we have now seen a Lake Conroe down 2 or more feet for over 4 months (with a lake level of 198.79 on December 2, 2020). Were we in a drought, we may well be looking at lake levels down 3 to 4 feet. SJRA's Board will vote in February 2020 as to whether to extend, modify, or eliminate the program going forward. If you are tired of artificially low lake levels, the Lake Conroe Association (LCA) is asking you to make your feelings heard.

The lake lowering program was implemented by SJRA following the significant flooding of communities located well downstream of Lake Conroe during Hurricane Harvey. The emergency releases from Lake Conroe contributed a relatively small portion of the total water flow (estimated at not more than 15%) downstream and were necessary as the water level in Lake Conroe was threatening to exceed dam design levels and flooding many lake front properties as well. The lake level rose almost 5 1/2 feet before the releases and was over two times the largest ever historical storm effect.

Local businesses and residents that have ties to lake activities have been negatively impacted for two years by the decision to lower lake levels. Many cannot launch their boat or fear damage navigating through lowered lake levels. Boats have run aground on sand bars exposed by lowered lake levels that would normally have been safely submerged. The Southern Empress, a commercial paddleboat operating on Lake Conroe was stranded on a sand bar on September 7th with 83 people aboard. Those people had to be rescued and returned to shore in the dark by small boats called in to help. Businesses relying on boat traffic such as lakeside restaurants experience a decrease in business as customers fear docking in shallow water and accessing high fixed dock decks from their boats. Stumps normally 3-5 feet underwater are now much closer to the surface and causing damage to boats and jet skis. These uncharted and unmarked hazards cause significant risk to the boating public especially those towing children or adults on tubes, on skis, or on wake boards. Marinas are being forced to spend thousands of dollars to dredge adequate access to their facilities. Potential lake front home buyers squirm when see sand bars and vegetation hindering lake access from their potential dream home. Anglers fear damage to shallow native vegetation that supports the lake ecosystem and serves as a breeding ground for the next generation of fish. Professional angling organizations hosting lucrative national competitions on Lake Conroe may choose to go elsewhere. Many fear bulkhead damage due to the lack of hydrostatic pressure as lake levels are reduced.

SJRA's Seasonal Lake Level Adjustment Program was designated as "temporary" by the SJRA Board when it voted to implement the program. "Temporary" was tied to completing dredging of the West Fork of the San Jacinto River. The dredging is designed to improve the flow of water through the river and reduce flooding in Kingwood and surrounding areas. Dredging is expected to be completed before the end of 2019. It is reasonable to expect that the seasonal "temporary" program should be over by then.

The LCA met with a SJRA Management Team on October 8 to discuss their Seasonal Lake Level Adjustment Program and how we ended up here. While they could not speak for the SJRA Board's individual votes to implement and continue this program, they stated that the Board was most likely influenced by the fact that Kingwood-area residents have written letters and attended SJRA Board Meetings demonstrating their desire for and support of SJRA reducing lake levels on Lake Conroe.

Conversely, they described Lake Conroe-area residents as apathetic and uninvolved noting that they do not write or attend. We need to be seen and heard, and it starts with you.

The LCA invited 61 POA's/HOA's to a meeting on November 13 to discuss their concerns over lowered lake levels and what steps should be taken prior to the SJRA Board's February 2020 vote. Those in attendance agreed, without question, that our residents and businesses need to make their opinions heard by SJRA. If you disagree with SJRA's Seasonal Lake Level Adjustment Program and want to see it removed, let SJRA's Management and Board know how you feel. To write letters, SJRA's mailing address is PO Box 329, Conroe, Texas 77305. To send e-mails to Management, the General Manager's e-mail address is jhouston@sjra.net. To contact the SJRA Board, please visit www.sjra.net/about/board or e-mail floodmanagementdivision@sjra.net. You can also express your feelings by attending a SJRA Board Meeting on December 12, January 23 or February 27 which start at 8AM and are held at SJRA's Lake Conroe Campus at 1577 Dam Site Road in the 3rd Floor Conference Room. If you don't take the time to let SJRA's Management and Board of Directors know how you feel, you should expect continued lower lake levels for years to come.

The LCA will be presenting to the SJRA Board in the January 2020 Board Meeting in advance of the February 2020 SJRA Board vote. LCA's goal is to ensure the SJRA Board holds a transparent, objective, and fact-based assessment of the lake lowering program. We believe the current program was enacted by the SJRA Board with minimal technical basis against the recommendations of the SJRA Management and without extensive notice or debate. Our intention is to represent what YOU WANT. We will be preparing that presentation over the next couple months.

Don't let another year of this program continue without making your opinions known. Please let us help you and thanks for listening.

Mike Bleier, President, Lake Conroe Association

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