

## LOWERING THE LAKE LEVEL ON LAKE CONROE – CHAPTER 2

Kingwood was developed in a known flood plain and civil engineers failed in their responsibility to determine the best methods to minimize flooding. Kingwood was subsequently annexed by The City of Houston out of sheer greed to expand its tax base. The City of Houston cut costs by not adequately engineering Lake Houston for flood control they knew would be required. The City of Houston cut costs by not maintaining Lake Houston and the West Fork of the San Jacinto River even as they saw sand, silt and debris rise annually that inhibited water flow and promoted flooding. Developers and investors built Kingwood in a known flood plain out of sheer greed to put profits in their pockets. Individuals purchased homes in a known flood plain to have access to beautiful Lake Houston, live in a highly forested area, have minimal commute times to Houston and enjoy so many favorable aspects of the Kingwood community. And now, Lake Conroe is expected to see its lake level reduced to help solve the problems not created by Lake Conroe or the residents and businesses who have invested their life savings to call Lake Conroe home.

Since its inception in 1973, Lake Conroe has been deemed a “water supply reservoir” and not a “flood control reservoir”. The San Jacinto River Authority has emphasized this point repeatedly as it has been attacked over the years by anyone experiencing flooding South of Lake Conroe (whether the water came from Lake Conroe or not). Not until Hurricane Harvey and enormous pressure being applied to elected officials such as Governor Abbott and Houston Mayor Turner did the pressure get turned up on the San Jacinto River Authority to modify its position and state Lake Conroe was now a “flood control reservoir”. Funny how that works in an election year where there are more votes in Houston and Kingwood than little Lake Conroe. Funny how that works when Governor Abbott appoints the Board of SJRA and serves as the SJRA General Manager’s boss. And while he was at it, Governor Abbott told SJRA they needed to create a new Flood Management Division – but didn’t provide any funding to do so. Without funding, the Flood Management Division is supported by those purchasing raw or treated water from SJRA.

Funny how many “funny things” have occurred in the decision to lower Lake Conroe’s lake level. The process of decision-making at SJRA initiates by SJRA’s Management evaluating the facts of a situation, presenting the suggested resolution to its Board, and the Board voting on it. The staff and Management at SJRA do a wonderful job of evaluating and providing best resolutions; and because of that, in my experience of over 15 years working with SJRA, the SJRA Board has NEVER overturned a proposal by SJRA Management. NEVER! So, when SJRA Management proposed a “Seasonal Lake Level Adjustment Plan” to its Board in February, 2018 that called for a 6” reduction in the Spring and a 12” reduction in the Fall, it struck me as odd that 1) the SJRA Board President took the floor and suggested a 12” reduction in the Spring and 24” reduction in the Fall, 2) the SJRA Board President immediately requested that a vote be taken on his lone wolf proposal, and 3) the SJRA Board voted unanimously in favor of the Board President’s proposal. Did I say earlier that Governor Abbott appoints the SJRA Board?

SJRA is designed to provide and implement strategies for a water supply reservoir in the San Jacinto River Basin. At best, Kingwood represents less than 0.5% of the San Jacinto River Basin’s total square miles. Why then, after Hurricane Harvey, did Governor Abbott appoint not one but two individuals residing in Kingwood to the SJRA Board? That’s two out of seven Board positions, or 29% of the Board. Any question on how those Kingwood Board Members voted?

When a reservoir is impounded in Texas, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) determines a maximum “yield” for that reservoir – meaning how much water can be safely removed in a given year without harming the reservoirs ability to provide water in a drought. For Lake Conroe, that annual “yield” is 100,000 acre feet (or about 5 feet of water across the reservoir). When SJRA’s Board voted to release water and reduce Lake Conroe’s lake level by 12” in Spring and 24” in Fall, that 3 feet of water (valued at over \$10 Million at SJRA’s raw water rate) would count against the 5 feet allowed by TCEQ annually – leaving only 2 feet of water for water consumption and drought contingency. Knowing 2 feet of water would be insufficient to cover consumption and drought contingency, TCEQ decided it would selectively choose to not enforce its own ruling and not count any water released for SJRA’s Seasonal Lake Lowering Program against the 100,000 acre feet maximum yield. Any guess who appoints the Board of TCEQ? If you guessed Governor Abbott, you’d be correct.

I recognize that many of these decisions were made with the best of intentions; namely, to avoid future flooding and assist those experiencing terrible flooding during Hurricane Harvey. But why must residents and businesses of Lake Conroe suffer unnecessarily for the poor decisions of those outside the Lake Conroe area?

The SJRA Board will vote on February 27, 2020 as to continuing, modifying or eliminating its current Seasonal Lake Level Adjustment Program for the next year. If you disagree with this 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](mailto:jhouston@sjra.net). To contact the SJRA Board, please visit [www.sjra.net/about/board](http://www.sjra.net/about/board) or e-mail [floodmanagementdivision@sjra.net](mailto: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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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. Please be heard.

Mike Bleier, President

Lake Conroe Association

Lakelevelsnewthoughts