

FACTS DON'T SUPPORT SJRA LAKE LOWERING – CHAPTER 3

In defense of their votes to lower the lake level on Lake Conroe, the San Jacinto River Authority's (SJRA) Board touts engineering reports that support its position. And when SJRA Management issued a Press Release dated November 21, 2019, they frequently cited those engineering reports. Maybe they didn't read the same reports that I did as these "engineering reports" do not support SJRA's Seasonal Lake Level Adjustment Program (the "Program"). Please allow me to make a few observations.

Has there been any report produced by SJRA or its engineers that quantifies how flooding of the Kingwood area during Hurricane Harvey would have been reduced had Lake Conroe's lake level been two feet lower (as it is today under SJRA's Program)? SJRA's answer is "no".

SJRA directs people to a report issued by Freece and Nichols (SJRA's primary outside engineering firm) entitled "FNI Lake Conroe Dam Gate Operations Modification Analysis – 4/10/2018" which can be found on SJRA's website at www.sjra.net/floodmanagement. It attempts to quantify the "benefits" of starting with a lower lake level during a 100-year storm event (1% probability to occur in a given year) and a 500-year storm event (0.02% probability to occur in a given year and similar to a Hurricane Harvey-type event). The report estimates the impact on several key parameters including the increase in the San Jacinto River's level at the intersection of I-45 (it does NOT address water levels in Kingwood). It concludes "The average change in downstream water surface elevation by decreasing Lake Conroe to a 199' elevation (2 feet below normal pool) is a reduction of approximately 1.0 feet for both the 100-year and 500-year storm events. These reductions are relative to flows that are on average 8 feet above the channel banks in the 100-year event, and more than 12 feet above the channel banks in the 500-year event. The benefits to those downstream, though the water surfaces are reduced by a foot or more in places, are generally not enough to be considered wholesale improvements to the flood hazard and show minimal differences in spatial extent." In other words, an 8 foot flood at I-45 might be reduced to 7 feet, and a 12 foot flood (like Hurricane Harvey) at I45 might be reduced to 11 feet. And as that water spreads out across the land past I-45, the flood benefit becomes even less than 1 foot.

Carrying this a step further, the report goes on to state that "For storm events larger than a 500-year event, it is anticipated that reducing Lake Conroe by 2 feet before a storm event could potentially increase the flood hazard downstream of the dam if the peak release is delayed such that it occurs at the same time as other tributaries to the West Fork of the San Jacinto River."

A second Freece and Nichols report entitled "Proposed Lowering of Lake Conroe Conservation Pool: Potential Impacts on San Jacinto Basin Water Supplies" and listed on SJRA's website is argued to be support for the Program. This 31-page report does little to address Hurricane Harvey or flooding in the Kingwood area. Stating the obvious, the report says if the lake level on Lake Conroe is reduced, there will be less water available to sell and less available for drought contingency. It goes on to say "Reduction in pool elevation could result in larger and more prolonged reductions in storage during dry conditions.....and could potentially reduce recovery to the 201' normal pool elevation". And finally, "Replacement of water diversion reducing pool elevation could require the development of major project infrastructure with associated costs".

Summarized information from the two (2) Freece and Nichols reports described above was used to develop a response from SJRA to Lyle Larson, Chairman, House Committee on Natural Resources in a

letter dated April 16, 2018. You may review the redundant information on SJRA's website as it is listed as further support used by the SJRA Board in making its decision to lower Lake Conroe's lake level.

Lake Conroe was reduced by 1 foot under SJRA's Program between March 1 and April 30, 2018, by 2 feet between August 1 and September 30, 2018, and by 2 feet between August 1 and September 30, 2019. We had no storm events, and Kingwood experienced no benefit from SJRA's Program.

Lake Conroe was reduced by 1 foot under SJRA's Program between March 1 and April 30, 2019. SJRA's November 21, 2019 Press Release suggests their Program is a success because it rained in early May, 2019 and the Program "resulted in both lower peak Lake Conroe lake levels during the storm and lower release rates from the Lake Conroe dam". I won't refute the words in between the "quotes", but I certainly wouldn't therefore deem the Program a success. During this rain event, Lake Conroe rose by 2 feet. Homes on Lake Conroe would not have flooded with the addition of 2 feet of water and water released from the dam could have been done so at a slow and consistent rate so as not to unnecessarily flood those downstream including Kingwood.

During September, 2019, Hurricane Imelda hit the Houston area and caused flooding in Kingwood again (with some Kingwood areas flooding worse than the floods caused by Hurricane Harvey). The Conroe area saw minimal rainfall and had no necessity to release any water (with or without SJRA's Program in place). Kingwood floods – that's all there is to it. Since its creation in 1973, Lake Conroe and SJRA have been blamed for Kingwood flooding. Even when SJRA doesn't release water from its dam, it gets blamed for Kingwood flooding. Due to its geographic location where many tributaries converge, poor civil engineering design and improper maintenance of Lake Houston and the West Fork of the San Jacinto River, Kingwood floods. The SJRA Program will not change that.

And what of the "value" of the water released under SJRA's Program? Water is always touted as a valuable commodity not to be wasted. SJRA has released 21.5 BILLION gallons of water in 2019 under its Program. Applying SJRA's raw water rate of \$0.48 per 1,000 gallons or the City of Houston's raw water rate of \$0.7209 per 1,000 gallons, that comes to \$10.3 MILLION or \$15.4 MILLION, respectively. Both argue that without a customer to buy the water, the water maintains no value and they are wasting nothing. Yet both SJRA and the City of Houston are selling raw water to themselves daily, treating that water for purification, and selling the treated water to the public. If the raw water has no value, maybe they should just charge customers a "processing fee" for water purification and eliminate the charge for the raw water itself.

Let it not be forgotten that Lake Conroe's lake level has been down greater than 2 feet for four consecutive months now – not just the two months of August and September, 2019. Without any valid technical support upon which to base its decision, I do not agree with any vote by the SJRA Board in favor of continuing SJRA's Program. Nor do I see how the elected officials in support of SJRA's Program can continue to sit in the background and do nothing to eliminate it.

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 SJRA's 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 to see continued lower lake levels for years to come. Please be heard.

Mike Bleier, President

Lake Conroe Association

[sjraengineering](#)