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Dear Client:

Historic flooding up-and-down the Central Texas Highland Lakes is affecting many more than those touched by the flood waters. Lakes Buchanan, Inks, LBJ, Marble Falls and Travis have been closed by the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) until further notice, as the surging waters move rapidly downstream, causing dangerous conditions on Lake Austin and Lady Bird Lake. But the impact is broader than that. A boil drinking water order was issued for 1.4 million users because of the massive amounts of silt, mud and debris. 1.4 million users!

One lakeside resident watching water surge into Lake Austin through the Mansfield Dam floodgates from the bottom of Lake Travis said **the roaring water looked like chocolate milk because of all the silt, mud and debris.** This is the same water that is straining the facilities at Austin area water treatment plants. **These extreme levels of crud are 100 times the typical condition of the Highland Lakes.** And these levels have to be treated for your drinking water as well as for use by businesses, industries, agriculture interests, etc.

But here's what is *not* being talked about in the lake water. Think how many **septic systems are being flushed by rising/flooding water. That's human waste. What about animal waste that is being washed from the nearby land into the lake. Can you say fecal coliform? And what about flooded home propane tanks that are floating (leaking?)? Construction porta-potties? And agricultural pesticides washed from the land into the water? To purify your drinking water will take a massive effort beyond getting rid of silt, debris and mud.**

As this is a weekly publication, it is not possible for us to provide up-to-minute info as you read this. **Buchanan is set to open to the public at noon Friday. LCRA will assess the other lakes Tuesday.** But, when we are talking about such widespread impact, we can provide you with a sense of how we got here and, importantly, what you can expect – because, frankly, **millions of dollars are being spent right now to address the situation.**

Just think what this unbelievable amount of water would be doing to the area if the LCRA weren't controlling that water through its system of dam floodgates. **The biggest reservoir lake, Buchanan, was built way back in 1938.** It straddles Burnet and Llano counties. **Mansfield Dam created the other reservoir, Lake Travis.** It wasn't completed in its present configuration until 1942. It overlaps Travis and Burnet Counties. Renovation work is underway on Mansfield now. We'll explore that and different solutions in the next item.

Even as Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) staffers are working 'round the clock to manage historic flooding in this area, millions of dollars have been committed to keep battling the forces of nature – both during flood conditions and, in the flip side of too-much-water, during devastating droughts that have also plagued the Austin area in recent years. In fact this work was underway at the all-important dams controlling the water from Lake Travis and Lake Austin when the flooding hit.

In the Austin area, Mansfield Dam has been operating for three-quarters of a century. And Tom Miller Dam, which controls the water in Lake Austin that ultimately flows into Lady Bird Lake, was built in 1940. So, even though both dams have undergone significant maintenance over the years, **their age meant they were due for a more comprehensive overhaul.**

To give you a bit of the storied history of Tom Miller Dam in West Austin, the **current dam was built atop the remains of two earlier structures, both called Austin Dam.** Massive floods destroyed the first dam (built from 1890 to 1893) and heavily damaged the second (built from 1912 to 1915). There is a famous photo showing a house carried over the top of the second dam when it flooded.

LCRA built Tom Miller Dam on property leased from the City of Austin. **Currently, LCRA is engaged in a \$9.9 million project to replace the dam's original floodgates – yes, those same floodgates that are being tested mightily 24/7 during the current flood event.**

As if that were not enough, the dam holding back the powerful Lake Travis waters is also undergoing an important renovation. **A multi-year, multi-million dollar renovation project on Mansfield Dam will rehab and restore the dam's floodgates to their original condition. Yes, those same floodgates are now releasing massive torrents of water 24/7 into Lake Austin.**

Not mentioned here (but not to be overlooked) are the other upstream dams/lakes in the chain – **Buchanan Dam & Lake, where a \$50 million upgrade project is underway ... Inks Dam & Lake ... Wirtz Dam & Lake LBJ ... Starcke Dam & Lake Marble Falls.** These are all part of the sophisticated LCRA computer monitoring/management system that also gauges inflows from creeks, streams and rivers funneling water from the watershed into the lakes.

A side note: The Austin area has long been known as **Flash Flood Alley**, primarily due to its **shallow, limestone infused soil and terrain that encourages fast runoff** in a major rain event. But, as the Austin area grows and there is more construction of homes and businesses, the **runoff factor grows so great the area could soon be known as Flash Flood Freeway.**

Now to the flip side. It wasn't long ago the Austin area was in the throes of drought. Lake levels upstream dipped to where you could walk across a narrow portion of Lake Travis. Yards were parched. Water was rationed. Check what is being done about this in the next item.

It may seem ludicrous to talk about *drought* dangers when massive/historic amounts of water are still flowing through the Austin area. But drought and flood solutions are intertwined. It seems to some long-time residents the area moves from the extremes of flood and drought every other year or so. And solutions take years to come to fruition.

What do we mean by “extremes?” This will tell you all you need to know. This week, the levels of **Lake Travis hovered around 704 feet above mean sea level (msl)**. The optimum operating level is around 681 feet msl. During the drought of 1951, **Lake Travis dropped all the way to 614 feet msl – almost 100 feet below this week’s levels**. Extreme? Yep.

One of the annual water supply problems in this ever-growing region is that the Lower Colorado River Austin (LCRA) has long-standing contracts in place to provide water downstream. **The contracts call for water to be provided to communities, business and industry, as well as agricultural interests such rice farmers to flood their fields**. In the drier summer months, this water is released from Lake Travis, diminishing the supply for others relying on Travis. And, of course, evaporation takes its toll during the summer heat.

So, what’s on tap to address this situation? The LCRA has been working for years to build the **first significant new water supply reservoir in the Colorado River basin in decades**. The Arbuckle Reservoir is nearing completion, just off the main river channel near Lane City, downstream in Wharton County.

The reservoir will add as much water as impounded in Lakes Marble Falls, Austin, and Lady Bird to the region’s supply. It’s big. **When in operation it will reduce the amount of water required to be released from the Lakes Travis and Buchanan to serve downstream demands**. It should be operational early next year, in time for the summertime evaporation and contractual water demands.

A smaller project is also a proposed downstream reservoir that will stem the contractual flow from Travis. It’s called the **Prairie Conservation Reservoir**. This is another off-channel reservoir, with a possible new pump station in Colorado County. **It will provide water to agricultural customers and will also enhance habitat for waterfowl and water birds**.

The LCRA is not simply digging dirt to create a hole to capture water (though this is its biggest – by far – mission). There is also a lotta water under Central Texas dirt. **LCRA drilled four wells as part of the Bastrop County groundwater project**. Though controversial, it pumps water each year, under certain conditions, to LCRA’s Lost Pines Power Park in Bastrop County.

One final point. Water is the lifeblood of existence. Especially in one of the fastest growing regions in the US. **You have to be able to handle too much or too little water. This is LCRA’s mission**. In recognition of the importance of this element, the agency is exploring additional strategies, even including the treatment of wastewater effluent. Long-term planning is essential because as we mentioned, it takes years to implement water projects.

In other news, those hoping to implement the Austin City Council’s controversial paid sick leave mandate got more bad news. A new statewide coalition surfaced this week to “fight for public policies that protect Texas small business owners from burdensome, California-style government regulations.”

The new 501(c)(4) nonprofit lobby group is called ASSET – Alliance for Securing and Strengthening the Economy in Texas. The key: it is a *statewide* group, not Austin-centric. If it is successful in passing key law(s) at the Texas Legislature in January it will **most certainly affect Austin’s paid sick leave ordinance as well as other stringent business mandates**. Check the below wording carefully in the statement put out by ASSET this week.

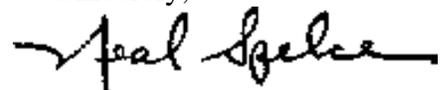
“It is in the best interest of the Texas economy to defend state sovereignty by passing a *statewide law* to **preempt local governments from unilaterally enacting piecemeal local employment and labor laws affecting private employer operational business practices like employer benefits, scheduling and hiring practices.**”

ASSET goes on to note Texas businesses are finding it increasingly **difficult to operate under these unfunded mandates and burdensome regulations**. To make it very clear it is going to lobby for a tough law, it said “ASSET believes **statewide legislation should be signed into law to prohibit municipalities from instituting local ordinances regulating business practices.**”

ASSET, with 16 business group members, starts with strong clout. Some of those members include the **Texas Association of Builders, the Real Estate Council of Texas, the Texas Apartment Association** and the **Texas Hotel & Lodging Association**.

It had to happen. Despite the seriousness of the Austin area’s historic flooding, **Dr. Louis Overholster** couldn’t contain his wise-cracking self, though he did try to see both sides of the situation. Example: he said “flood victims can finally slam dunk their outside basketball hoop – but they have to dive to do it!” Sorry.

Sincerely,



Editor/Publisher