
TRENDING: [Texas Voter Guide 2026](#) | [Endorsements](#) | [February heat waves](#) | [Olympics schedule](#) | [How to vote early](#)

NEWS // LOCAL NEWS

As drought risks linger, LCRA revisits water plan for Central Texas lakes

With municipal water demands increasing in Central Texas, the authority is set to tighten how it provides water from the Highland Lakes for crop irrigation.


By [Alex Driggars](#), Staff Writer

Feb 17, 2026





Lake Travis is pictured in July.
Sara Diggins/Austin American-Statesman

 Listen Now: **As drought risks linger, LCRA revisits water plan for Central Texas lakes** As drc 1x
0:00 3:35


The [Lower Colorado River Authority](#) is poised to vote Wednesday on changes to the plan that governs how water is managed in [Lakes Travis and Buchanan](#) — a decision that will shape how Central Texas allocates water for years to come.



Skip Ad

0:14 / 0:30



The authority's board is scheduled to consider amendments to its Water Management Plan at a meeting in Austin. The plan dictates how the LCRA, which operates the Highland Lakes, balances water supplies for municipal customers such as Austin and for agricultural users downstream, including coastal rice farmers.

ADVERTISEMENT

Article continues below this ad

The [proposed revisions](#) come as municipal demand in Central Texas continues to climb. Projections show city water use could increase 24% between 2020 and 2032, while agricultural demand is expected to decline by 18% over the same period. In response, the LCRA is proposing to reduce the amount of water it can release for irrigation and to raised the lake-level thresholds that trigger a cutoff to farmers.

In practical terms, the changes would further prioritize [drinking water supplies during drought](#), tightening limits on crop irrigation to ensure the lakes remain high enough to serve cities even in a repeat of the historic 2008–2015 drought. Despite those stakes — and unlike past revisions that ignited intense regional disputes — this update cycle has drawn comparatively muted public controversy, even as stakeholders on both sides continue to press their concerns.

The LCRA has maintained a water management plan since the late 1980s and last updated it in 2020. State environmental regulators require periodic revisions.



Lake Travis is pictured in July.
Sara Diggins/Austin American-Statesman

One of the authority's primary drought-management tools is cutting off water deliveries to coastal rice farmers in three southeastern Texas counties. The management plan outlines when and how those curtailments occur.



Want more Statesman?

Make us a Preferred Source on Google to see more of us when you search.

[Add Preferred Source](#)

During previous droughts, [changes to the plan have proven controversial](#), sparking debate among farmers and other lake users about how much water to release.

With few exceptions, the LCRA has not released water for agricultural use since 2022, and [last year was the driest since 2011](#).

Rice farmers expect to receive LCRA water this growing season for the first time in four years. Wharton County farmer Timothy Gertson said producers have already made major compromises under the proposed plan but that it's about as good as it's going to get.

ADVERTISEMENT
Article continues below this ad

“We’ve been forced to make significant concessions in trigger levels,” he said. “We’re disappointed in that, and we do have significant concern as to how LCRA is going to continue to meet growing (municipal) demands and statutory requirements for irrigation water supply. We just have to continue to learn how to share this scarce resource.”



A combine harvests rice on the Gertson farm in Wharton County in this 2015 file photo. Nearby, a crop duster sprays fertilizer on the freshly cut stalks.

Austin American-Statesman

Still, some lake-area advocates argue the revisions do not go far enough. The Central Texas Water Coalition, which pushes for stronger lake protections, wants additional limits on downstream releases.

“While it does reflect some progress, it still does not go far enough to reduce risk for the people who rely on this water for basic life functions,” Shannon Hamilton, the organization’s executive director, wrote in a [recent newsletter](#).

ADVERTISEMENT
Article continues below this ad

Hamilton contended that even reduced releases could quickly draw down lake levels during drought and that the plan lacks sufficient safeguards for a fast-growing Central Texas population during future dry spells.

Gertson said farmers are prepared to push back if necessary, underscoring that while this round of revisions may be less contentious than those in years past, the fundamental tensions over how to divide a finite water supply remain unresolved.

“I know a lot of the lakeside interests would rather us just go quietly into the night,” he said. “But we’re not going to do that.”

ADVERTISEMENT
Article continues below this ad

If approved Wednesday, LCRA staff expect the plan amendments to receive regulatory clearance and take effect by 2027.

Feb 17, 2026



Alex Driggars

TRANSPORTATION REPORTER



Alex has been reporting news in Texas since 2016. He primarily covers transportation and infrastructure in and around Austin. Before coming to the capital city as a state politics reporter, the West Texas native covered government and public policy for the Lubbock Avalanche-Journal.

Around the Web

Powered by **REVCONTENT**

Editor's Picks



COURTS

Austin yogurt shop murders case returns to court after 34 years



TECHNOLOGY

San Marcos council rejects revived \$1.5B data center after 9-hour meeting



NEWS

Cornyn, Talarico rally voters on first day of early voting

Let's Play



Really Bad Chess



Flipart



Crossword



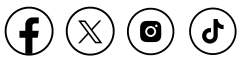
SpellTower



Pile-Up Poker

Austin American-Statesman

Top ^



About



Contact



Services



Account

