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Lower Colorado River Authority could build a new lake southeast of Austin

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By **Alex Diggars**, Staff Writer

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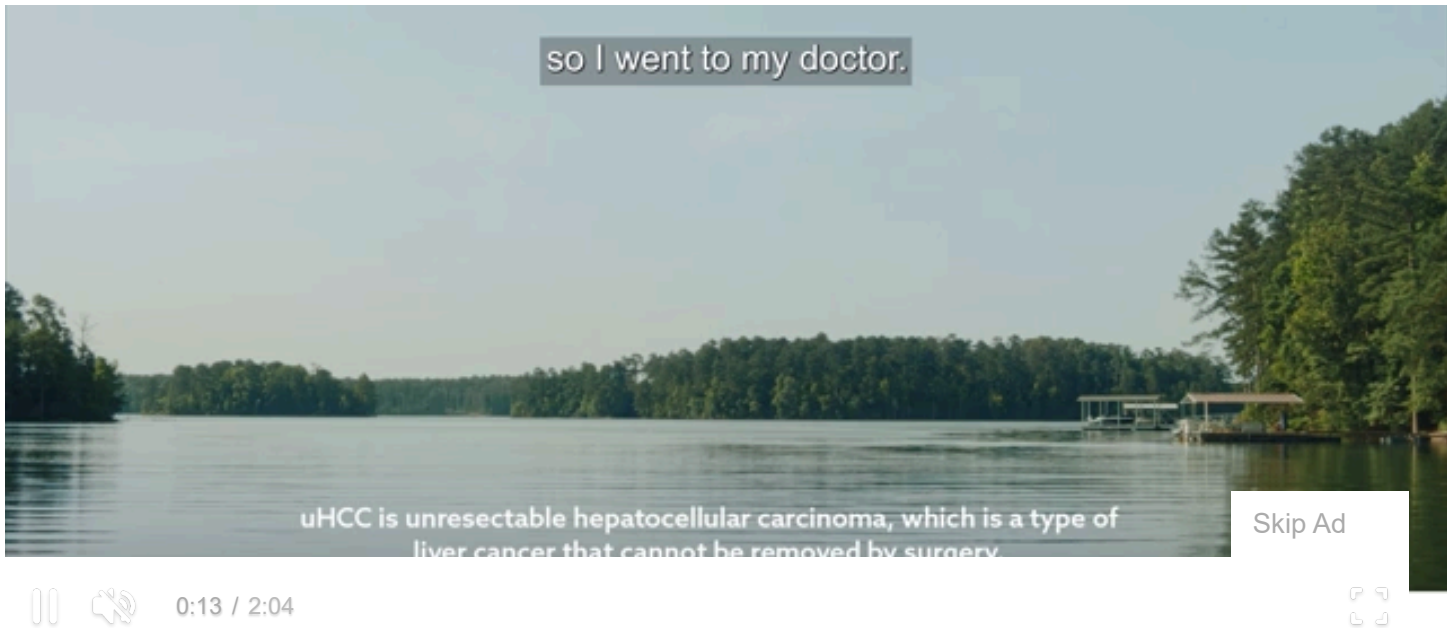




The Lower Colorado River Authority will consider building a new lake in Colorado County, agency officials announced Wednesday.

Alex Driggars/Austin American-Statesman

The Lower Colorado River Authority will consider building a new lake in Colorado County, about 110 miles southeast of Austin, agency officials announced Wednesday.



LCRA General Manager Phil Wilson said during [a Wednesday meeting](#) the authority is “quickly moving forward” with a study to determine if it’s feasible to build a large new reservoir on land it already owns in the rural, southeast Texas county.

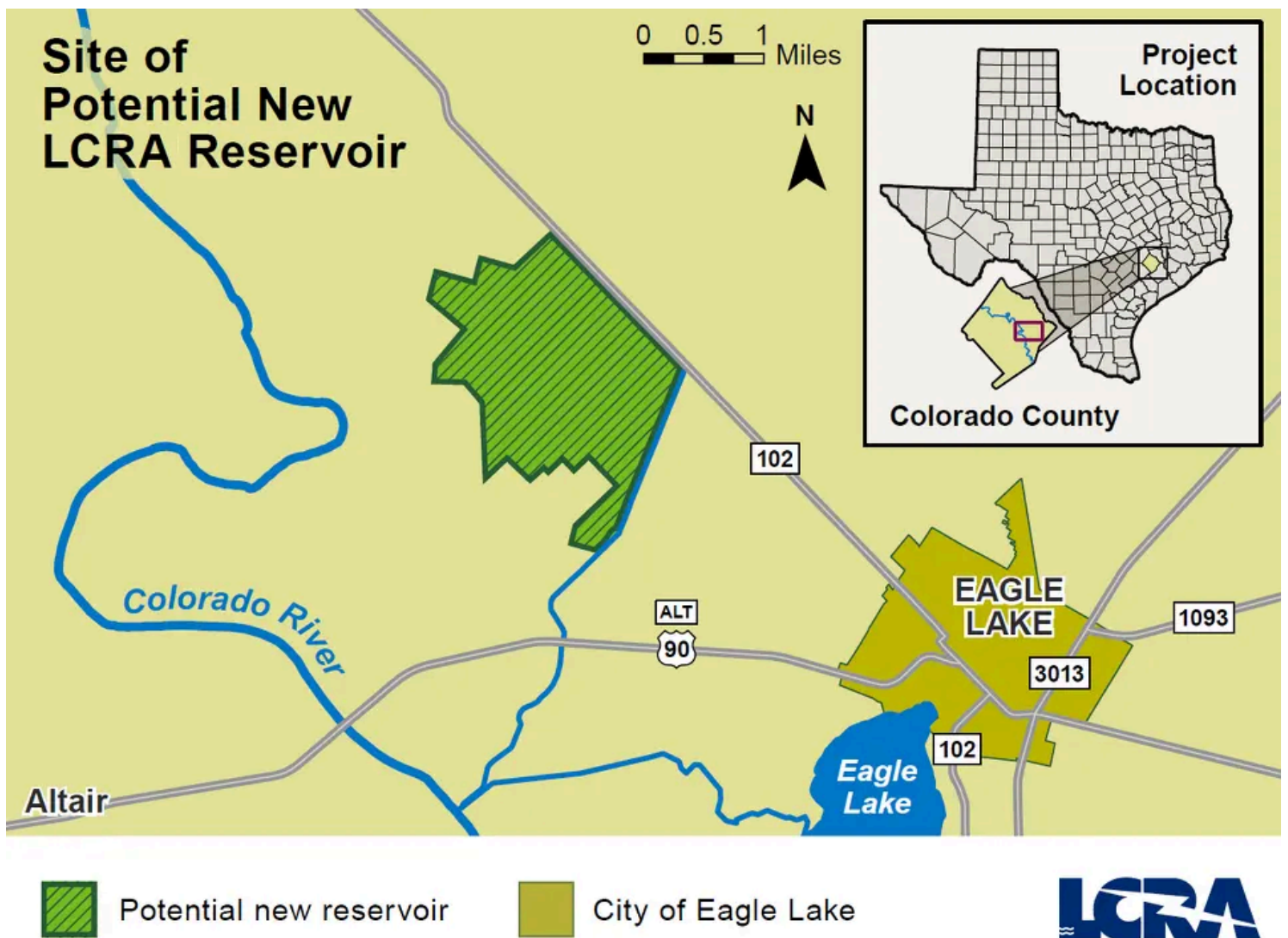
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The lake would be located on a 2,000-acre site just northwest of Eagle Lake and could potentially store between 48,000 and 80,000 acre-feet of water, [the authority said](#), noting that a new reservoir could help it meet its future supply needs. LCRA manages the lower 600 miles of the Colorado River and provides water to dozens of municipalities through a system of reservoirs, including the Highland Lakes.

Details about the potential project, including timeline and cost, are not yet known while the LCRA determines if the site could support the lake.

“It’s too early to know specifics, because we first need to do our due diligence,” Wilson said. “We need to know how the site could best be used for off-channel storage and the technical, environmental and permitting constraints. Once we have that information, we’ll estimate the cost, look at funding options and develop a timetable.”



A map shows the proposed location of a potential new LCRA reservoir in Colorado County. Lower Colorado River Authority

The announcement comes just months after [the authority’s newest reservoir came online](#). Arbuckle Reservoir in Wharton County became operational last October, marking the first time LCRA has added a large lake to its system since the Highland

Lakes came online in the 1950s. It holds up to 40,000 acre-feet. One acre-foot is the amount needed to cover one acre with a foot of water, or about 325,851 gallons.



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Local officials in the Lower Basin welcomed the announcement and the additional water supply it could bring to the region.

“More storage to ultimately make more water available for the various needs we all have is a good thing,” Colorado County Judge Ty Prause said in a statement. Wharton County Judge Phillip Spenrath, co-chairman of the Lower Colorado River Basin Coalition, also praised the move.

“It would increase water storage downstream for the growing needs of businesses and communities downstream of Austin,” Spenrath said. “Competition for water is increasing throughout the basin, and while we appreciate LCRA’s strong science-based, stakeholder approach to its Water Management Plan, additional water in the lower basin — where rainfall is more plentiful — is the best answer.”

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According to the Texas Almanac, Colorado County receives about 41 inches of rainfall per year; That compares to 32 inches in Travis County.

LCRA board approves updates to Water Management Plan

Also on Wednesday, a split LCRA Board of Directors advanced [an update to the authority's Water Management Plan](#), which dictates how water from Lakes Travis and Buchanan is divided between city water utilities like Austin Water and coastal rice farmers downstream. The 15-member board approved the plan with two members dissenting, saying the updates were too restrictive for agricultural users.

"I understand the increased demand up here [in Austin]," said dissenting board member Tom Kelley, a rice farmer and cattleman in Colorado County. "I understand also that the only place that y'all have to take water from is interruptible, and that's us. I get it, but I don't like it."

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Changes to the plan, which was last updated in 2020, include a reduction of the amount of water LCRA can release for irrigation and an increase in the lake-level thresholds that trigger a cutoff to farmers.

The updates come after months of negotiation between farmers and other Highland Lakes stakeholders. LCRA staff will now submit the plan to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality for regulatory approval.

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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.

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