



Ray Wilkerson, Chair  
Board of Directors  
Lower Colorado River Authority  
3700 Lake Austin Boulevard  
Austin, TX 78703

November 24, 2004

Re: Proposed Hamilton Pool Road water line extension

Dear Chairman Wilkerson and LCRA Board Members:

Save Our Springs Alliance respectfully submits these comments concerning the proposed LCRA water line extension out Hamilton Pool Road. We ask that you **not** approve the proposed water line. We also offer alternative courses of action for LCRA to take to fulfill its mission of providing affordable utilities and protecting natural resources.

The proposed water line extension out Hamilton Pool Road would - if approved by you - provide surface water to proposed high density developments in the Barton Creek watershed, which replenishes the Edwards Aquifer and Barton Springs. The proposed water line would not provide water to residents of existing subdivisions on well water. It is therefore quite clear that approving the proposed water line would first and foremost be an action to benefit private development interests instead of benefitting the public good.

We have recently learned from LCRA legal staff that you have the authority to implement a Non-Point Source pollution ordinance for portions of the Barton Creek watershed that are in unincorporated Travis County and not currently subject to meaningful water quality ordinances.

We therefore ask that *before* you consider approval of the proposed pipeline, instruct your staff to write a Non Point Source pollution ordinance for the land mentioned above, which includes the properties proposed to be served by the new water line. LCRA has a great opportunity here to show its leadership in protecting natural resources. Approving the water line before utilizing your authority to protect the area's natural resources would undermine efforts to control Non-Point Source pollution in this extremely sensitive part of the Hill Country.

We'd like to compare the current situation with the proposed Hamilton Pool Road water line to the situation a few years back when LCRA was rushing to build the 290 water line. LCRA promised the community that it would undertake an Environmental Impact Study before building the 290 water line. Mild drought ensued, and an emergency was declared; LCRA went ahead and started building the pipeline before the Environmental Impact Study was completed under the auspices of providing surface water to existing residents on wells in a time of "emergency." The pipeline began service in 2002 and only 180 households in the Sunset Canyon subdivision have connected to it, as of Oct 22, 2004. The vast majority of the water in the line is now allocated for high density subdivisions in the Edwards Aquifer Recharge and Contributing Zones.

Now, in 2004, there is no perceived emergency, and the proposed water line will not provide surface water to existing subdivisions on wells. Further, there are three planning processes underway - all being funded by LCRA - that overlap with the Hamilton Pool Road area.

We ask that you allow these planning efforts that LCRA is funding to finish so that you can consider their results before making a decision that the community will have to live with for decades to come. Citizens in all three planning processes are dedicating hours of their evenings away from their families (as LCRA board members do as well) because they care so deeply about the future of this region.

Save Our Springs Alliance, Hill Country Conservancy, Hamilton Pool Road Scenic Corridor Coalition, and Hill Country Coalition are all working to protect the beautiful, scenic land along Hamilton Pool Road. We are working for public and private dollars to secure watershed preserves, conservation easements, and low density conservation developments.

In fact, your decision in May to delay approval of the water line allowed a conservation buyer to purchase a 354 acre tract of land that was proposed for 453 homes. This purchase and conversion of a proposed 453 unit development to a rural density development of 35 homes on the same acreage demonstrates that by giving time for the planning processes to continue, LCRA can also allow the private market time to better reflect the wishes of the existing residents in the area.

Conversely, approving the proposed water line on Hamilton Pool Road now will cause land prices to escalate, perhaps out of the reach of conservation purposes, and will make our conservation work much more difficult. LCRA staff has repeatedly stated that LCRA is not in the land use business. That is true in the sense that LCRA does not have zoning power or other powers considered "land use."

However, your decisions regarding when and where to build waterlines to serve new development is the single biggest factor in determining what land uses, densities, and land costs will be. With an LCRA waterline out Hamilton Pool Road, there is near certainty of high density development that will increase stormwater runoff into Barton Creek without adequate protections, increase sewage, increase lawn fertilizers and pesticides, increase traffic on a road that cannot handle the increase, and increase burden on local schools.

The three planning efforts underway seek to address these important issues with specific recommendations to LCRA and other local governments. We again ask that you give these efforts time to conclude - and that LCRA enact an NPS pollution ordinance for the Hamilton Pool Road area - before voting on the Hamilton Pool Road waterline.

Thank you for your service and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Colin Clark  
Communications Director  
Save Our Springs Alliance