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## ***Proposed TCEQ Rules Leave Fish and Wildlife High and Dry*** **FUTURE HEALTH OF GALVESTON BAY & SABINE LAKE AT RISK**

*Austin, Texas* – On Wednesday, April 20, the three Commissioners who head the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) will consider adopting standards that would threaten the future ecological health of Galveston Bay and Sabine Lake and the Trinity, San Jacinto, Sabine and Neches Rivers. If approved as currently proposed by the TCEQ staff, these standards could allow the rivers to be drained to a trickle, harming our estuaries and putting oysters, blue crabs and other aquatic species and birds and wildlife that depend on them at risk.

“The most recent proposed standards are grossly inadequate,” said **Myron Hess, National Wildlife Federation**. “We urge the TCEQ Commissioners to strengthen them to a level that protects the fish and wildlife of our state and ensures that we have flowing rivers and healthy productive bays for generations to come.”

These two east Texas bay-basin systems are the first to go through a state process established in 2007 to determine how much water is needed to protect rivers and bays across the state while allowing for increased use due to population growth. Water supplies from existing water rights are not affected.

“The environmental flows process was designed to be a step forward for Texas in recognizing and protecting a portion of river flows for the health of Texas bays and estuaries and all that depends on them, but sadly the current TCEQ staff proposal represents a big step backwards. The standards must be improved,” said **Ken Kramer, Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club**.

Fish and wildlife throughout Texas and along the coast depend on the flowing water in rivers which also provides essential freshwater inflows into bays and estuaries. The unique mix of freshwater from rivers and saltwater from the Gulf of Mexico in Texas estuaries are vital for many marine species including fish, shrimp, oysters and crabs, which fuel a \$2 billion coastal recreation and commercial fishing economy.

The standards proposed by the TCEQ staff would allow drastically reduced freshwater inflows to Galveston Bay creating extremely salty inhospitable conditions for wildlife. “For a body of water that has historically produced as much as 80% of the oysters harvested in Texas, more than any other single water body in the country, while also providing half of the shrimp and one quarter of the blue crab harvest in the state, we must do better,” said **Bob Stokes, Galveston Bay Foundation**.

Additionally, the proposed standards fail to protect sufficient flow from the Sabine and Neches Rivers into Sabine Lake, an area known for its recreational fishing, bird watching and crab and shrimp harvests. Reduced flows also threaten the health of the biologically diverse Sabine and Neches Rivers and the bottomland hardwood forests they support, which provide economic benefits such as reducing floods, improving water quality, providing high value wildlife habitat, and preventing downstream erosion.

*Texas Living Waters is a partnership project that seeks to balance the human demands for water with the need to ensure adequate water for fish and wildlife. Our goal is to achieve environmentally and economically sustainable management of Texas' limited water resources.*

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