

## Voluntary Irrigation Suspension Program Option (VISPO) Information Sheet

### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The VISPO is a voluntary program that would provide financial compensation to permitted irrigators that are willing to enter into a 5-year or 10-year commitment to reduce or suspend their authorized withdrawals for the calendar year if the elevation of aquifer levels in the J-17 index well in San Antonio is at or below 645 feet above mean sea level (msl) on September 1 of the previous year.

### TARGET VOLUME

The volume goal for the VISPO program is 40,000 acre-feet and any Edwards Aquifer irrigation permitted water rights within the Edwards Aquifer Authority (EAA) boundaries are eligible for enrollment in the program. The procedure for achieving the target volume is to aggressively pursue enrollment from Atascosa, Bexar, Comal and Hays counties first. Then the balance of the target volume goal will be divided equally between Medina and Uvalde counties, with a 15,000 acre-foot cap for each county. In review of enrollment applications for Medina and Uvalde counties, those choosing the 10-year option will be given first priority. Both base and unrestricted irrigation rights will be accepted in the program. Also, a portion of an irrigation right can be enrolled rather than the entire right.

### VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

It should be clearly understood that VISPO program participation would be completely voluntary. Currently, all Edwards Aquifer water right holders are required to reduce their permitted withdrawals intermittently by 40% under the most severe drought restrictions. Accordingly, we believe the financial incentive offered to enrollees in the program should encourage participation. We recognize that a significant amount of irrigated acreage is rented or leased land. Therefore, any situation in which the landowner is not the operator, authorization and payment instructions must be received from both parties.

### PROGRAM TRIGGER AND ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION FREQUENCY

The program, as currently envisioned, will be triggered if the level in the J-17 index well in San Antonio is at or below 645 feet msl on September 1. The J-17 well and trigger level applies to all participants in the program, including those in Uvalde County. The September 1 date was chosen to provide irrigators with ample time to make cropping decisions. According to historical water level records for the model period 1947-2000, J-17 was at or below 645 feet msl approximately 33% of the time; however, J-17 was at or below 645 feet msl every year during the drought of record (1947-1956). Exact implementation frequency in the future is difficult to accurately predict.

### PROGRAM TERM AND PAYMENTS TO ENROLLEES

The EARIP proposes to offer two programs, a five-year and a ten-year program to increase flexibility of potential enrollees. However, the ten-year program will have additional financial incentives to encourage enrollment in the longer-term program.

- Five-year program
  - standby fee of \$50/acre-foot that increases 1.5% per year (this amount is paid to the enrollee every year of the term, regardless of aquifer conditions)
  - implementation fee of \$150/acre-foot that also increases 1.5% per year.
- Ten-year program
  - standby fee of \$57.50/acre-foot for years 1-5 and \$70.20/acre-foot for years 6-10 (this amount is paid to the enrollee every year of the term, regardless of aquifer conditions)
  - implementation fee of \$172.50/acre-foot for years 1-5 and \$210.60 for years 6-10.

March 2011

## **VISPO Status Report Number 1**

Dear Irrigator:

This Status Report follows our January 5, 2011 letter and the informational meetings held in December 2010.

The VISPO is a program being developed by the EARIP to compensate irrigators with permits to withdraw water from the Edwards Aquifer for reducing or suspending irrigation when the aquifer is at specified low levels.

First and foremost, the EARIP appreciates the interest shown by all persons who attended the VISPO informational meetings as well as those who followed-up with calls seeking clarification. We especially appreciate those who submitted responses indicating interest in participating in the VISPO.

The EARIP received responses from approximately 12% of the irrigators who were sent informational letters. Most of the responses indicated the amount and type of water and which program the responder was interested in enrolling. Some of the letters we received offered questions, comments and support for the program, although a few letters expressed opposition to the program. In total, slightly more than 17,000 acre-feet of water was submitted as an indication of interest.

The EARIP has determined that as a result of the amount of positive interest shown by irrigators for the VISPO, it is in the interest of all aquifer stakeholders to move forward. We are pursuing the development of funding mechanisms to implement the VISPO and other components of an appropriate environmental program to address statutory requirements to provide long-term protection for aquifer-dependent threatened and endangered species. In response to the comments received, we have made a few changes to the program and posted information on the EARIP web site. The most notable changes are the trigger level has been reduced from 650 feet to 645 feet at the J-17 index well. The lower level will reduce implementation frequency from 38% to 33%, based on historic records for the period 1947 - 2000. Also, we are going to put more emphasis in securing water in counties other than Uvalde and Medina to reach our goal. You can now follow the progress of the VISPO program at this link - <http://earip.org/Article.aspx?ID=19>.

If you have any questions, please call Rick Illgner at the Edwards Aquifer Authority, (210) 222-2204.

Thank you for your consideration of the VISPO.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Gulley  
Program Manager  
Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program

RLG/mb