

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 650 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. 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 650 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 dating back to 1934, J-17 was at or below 650 feet msl approximately 37% of the time; however, J-17 was at or below 650 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
 - initial 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)
 - initial implementation fee of \$150/acre-foot that also increases 1.5% per year.
- Ten-year program
 - initial 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)
 - initial implementation fee of \$172.50/acre-foot for years 1-5 and \$210.60 for years 6-10.

November 16, 2010

Dear Irrigator:

In 2007, the Texas Legislature created the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program ("EARIP"). The Legislature directed the Edwards Aquifer Authority (Authority), Texas Department of Agriculture, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Texas Water Development Board and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to work with other stakeholders to develop a plan for protecting the federally listed threatened and endangered species at the Comal and San Marcos springs.

The EARIP is considering an innovative voluntary program, called the *Voluntary Irrigation Suspension Program Option*, or *VISPO*, 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. The VISPO would be ONE of the means to help meet the state and federal mandate to resolve the longstanding dispute over the use of the Edwards Aquifer by ensuring sufficient flows at the Comal and San Marcos.

The EARIP wants to inform you and other interested persons about the proposed VISPO. We include with this letter an Information Sheet that provides an explanation of the proposed optional program as well as background on the EARIP.

We encourage you to learn more about the VISPO program by attending one of the informational meetings scheduled as follows---

6:00 p.m. Monday, December 6, 2010

Location: Texas AgriLife Research and Extension Center, 1619 Garner Field Road, Uvalde, Texas, 78801

6:00 p.m. Tuesday, December 7, 2010

Location: Braden Keller Community Center, 1410 Amelia St., Castroville, Texas, 78009

Thank you for your consideration of this important program.

Sincerely,



Robert L. Gulley
Program Manager
Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program

RLG/mb

Enclosure