



To: Public Utility Committee

From: Greg Meszaros, Director, Austin Water

Date: April 13, 2015

Subject: Decker Lake Golf Water Considerations

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### **Background**

Walter E. Long Lake (also known as Decker Lake or Long Lake) is currently operated by Austin Energy as a cooling reservoir for the Decker Power Plant. The lake holds approximately 33,000 acre-feet of water. To make up for evaporative losses and maintain lake levels for steam-electric cooling, water is diverted from the Colorado River to the lake via an underground pipeline, which serves as the lake's primary source of water. The Decker Creek watershed also provides inflows to the lake.

As part of the utility's drought response efforts, Austin Water identified the use of Walter E. Long Lake for off-channel storage as a key water supply augmentation strategy. In its July 2014 report, the Council-appointed Water Resource Planning Task Force also recommended this as a key supply strategy.

### **Decker Golf & Water Considerations**

*Source of irrigation water.* Decker Lake Golf (DLG) has proposed a deep well on a site adjacent to the proposed golf course that would pump brackish water from the Trinity Aquifer and serve as the development's preferred source of water for irrigation. The use of this groundwater will not impact the Colorado River system. The Watershed Protection Department has reviewed and indicated support for this groundwater proposal.

*Protection of City water rights.* The DLG contract includes extensive language protecting the City's interests in using the lake for water supply purposes. Per the contract, there is no obligation for the City to maintain the lake at specific level and the contract explicitly states that the City's use and operation of the lake may include significant and regular drawdown of the lake level for extended periods of time, which may have negative aesthetic impacts.

The City also maintains full rights to the lake and any groundwater beneath the lake or golf courses, and the City maintains all of its rights to store and withdraw water in any form in any aquifer beneath the golf courses and the park.

Lastly, the contract affirms the City's right to use and operate the lake for any purpose the City deems necessary or advisable, and prohibits the developer from impairing or interfering with the City's use and operation of the lake. This includes affirmation of the City's right to seek to amend its water right permits in the lake in any manner the City deems necessary or desirable and a prohibition on any protests by the developer of any such permit application or amendment by the City.

### **Walter E. Long Lake & Water Supply**

To enhance storage options, we will need to modify current operations of the lake and increase lake level fluctuations up to 3 feet in order to store additional water during operation of the Decker Power Plant. This will reduce demands on the City's primary water supply reservoirs (lakes Travis & Buchanan).

Looking to the future, operation of the lake as an off-channel reservoir through its full 25-foot operating range is preferred. This option requires improvements such as increased pumping capacity to refill the lake and modifications to the Decker Power Plant. This option yields up to 20,000 acre-feet of water per year with the potential to increase that amount. We are also evaluating additional water supply options such as Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) in underground aquifers below or in the vicinity of the lake.

Please let me know if you would like any additional information. I can be reached at (512) 972-0108 or [greg.meszáros@austintexas.gov](mailto:greg.meszáros@austintexas.gov).

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