

September 11, 2023

Mayor Kirk Watson
Mayor Pro Tem Paige Ellis
Austin City Council Members

Subject: Public Comments in Support of Item 80 on September 14th Austin City Council Meeting Agenda

Dear Mayor Watson and Esteemed Council Members,

I am writing on behalf of the Hill Country Alliance to express our strong support for Item 80 on the September 14th agenda, to approve a resolution directing the Austin City Manager to seek a contested case hearing in opposition to the proposed Waterstone Creek LLC dam on the South Llano River.

The Hill Country Alliance (HCA) was founded in 2004 in response to the incredible development pressures facing the Hill Country. Our mission is to bring together a diverse coalition of partners to preserve the open spaces, starry night skies, clean and abundant waters, and unique character of the Texas Hill Country. Since those early days, HCA has grown into a trusted regional organization, working in 17 counties of Central Texas. The protection of our region's waterways is one of our most important areas of focus.

The Llano River is an iconic Hill Country waterway. It is a major tributary of the Colorado River and Austin's water supply, providing significant inflows to the Highland Lakes during average conditions. During extreme drought conditions the importance of the Llano River is even greater. As recently as early August, it was the *only* upstream tributary still contributing flow— though today all tributaries are measuring zero flow, an indicator of the severity of our current drought.

The dam proposed by Waterston Creek LLC would impound 12 acre feet of water on the South Llano River, which is the rough equivalent of six Olympic-sized swimming pools. Even more importantly, the granting of this permit by TCEQ would set a new precedent in permitting a private dam on a public waterway.

As you know, Central Texas is projected to experience greater climatic extremes in the future. The water resources of the Hill Country are perhaps its most critical feature. The flows of our springs, creeks, rivers and aquifers are already under extreme stress due to ongoing drought and increasing withdrawals. As a community of residents responsible for the stewardship of critical shared resources, we must raise our voice in opposition to projects that pose immediate public risk for only private gain. The creation of surface water reservoirs dramatically increases the amount of water lost to evaporation. We also know that dams, low water crossings, and other impediments to the flow of water, sediment, and aquatic species can cause cascading and irreparable harm to ecological function.

By approving the resolution to seek a contested case hearing, the City of Austin would take a necessary step to protect Austin's water resources and the Highland Lakes, to stand in solidarity with the communities of Llano and Junction as well as the countless individual landowners and residents opposed to this dam, and to ensure a more resilient water supply for our community.

Thank you for your dedication to the well-being of Austin and our water supply. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Katherine Romans" followed by a horizontal flourish.

Katherine Romans, Executive Director
Hill Country Alliance
katherine@hillcountryalliance.org