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## **RIO GRANDE VALLEY SUFFERS WHILE MEXICO WITHOLDS WATER**

*Commissioner Staples, Commissioner Rubinstein warn of devastating impact of federal government's failure to act*

**AUSTIN** – Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality Commissioner Carlos Rubinstein today urged the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) and the U.S. State Department to compel Mexico to deliver Rio Grande system water to the United States. Under a 1944 Treaty, Mexico must deliver an average of 350,000 acre-feet of water annually to the United States. To date, Mexico has withheld more than 430,000 acre-feet owed to the U.S., and the water deficit continues to grow, causing water suppliers across the Rio Grande Valley to run out of water.

In 2012, the IBWC was notified that millions of citizens in the Rio Grande Valley would face irreparable and catastrophic harm if Mexico did not immediately address the water deficit. Cameron County Irrigation District #2, one of the Valley's largest irrigation districts, has notified irrigation users that as of April 12 they are no longer taking orders for new water deliveries. Farmers in the district will only have access to water currently committed. This will have catastrophic consequences to crop yields in this district and may result in total crop losses in some instances. Because of the interconnected nature of the Valley's water distribution system, cities and industrial water users have difficult time acquiring water when irrigation water is exhausted.

"We are facing an absolute water crisis right now and we need Mexico to deliver the water entitled to Texas and the United States," Commissioner Staples said. "We need a renewed commitment by our federal government to insist that Mexico release water belonging to the United States. In a state as large and drought-prone as Texas, water is absolutely critical to the well-being of our citizens, industries and economic health. This is not just a matter of two countries fighting over limited water. That fight happened decades ago and now we must hold Mexico to the deal to which they and we agreed."

"Since November, the State of Texas has repeatedly warned the IBWC, the U.S. State Department and Mexico water officials in face-to-face discussions that if the Mexico water deficit issue was not resolved, this situation would occur," said Commissioner Rubinstein. "Now it is occurring, thanks to our federal entities' inability to secure a meaningful water delivery agreement. This is just the first domino falling, next we could see other irrigation districts running out of irrigation water, rising water prices, then inability of districts and municipalities to finance push water purchases, and finally push water simply being unavailable at any price. It is crucial to the socioeconomic structure of the Rio Grande Valley, and indeed the entire state, that the State Department steps up their commitment to have Mexico comply with the water treaty and release water to Texas."

The Valley's two other largest water districts, Hidalgo County Water District #9 and Delta Lake Irrigation District, have announced that without substantial new inflows from Mexico or substantial rain, they too will likely stop taking orders within 30 days.

Mexico is obligated to provide water to the U.S. under the 1944 Water Treaty, unless Mexico is suffering exceptional drought conditions. As the [drought maps indicate](#), Mexico's portion of the Rio Grande basin that contributes to treaty inflows has not been under exceptional drought conditions since at least May 2012.

Addressing the IBWC, Rubinstein said, "I look forward to receiving from you very soon a credible plan we can review and gain comfort in that actually and in a meaningful way addresses this situation. Conversely, continued delays by Mexico to commit to such a plan that in fact addresses the current deficit in a meaningful way now, speaks volumes about their commitment to actual future long term plans to prevent this situation going forward."

Texas Gov. Rick Perry recently sent a [letter](#) to President Barack Obama, requesting that he and Secretary of State John Kerry "...immediately work with the government of Mexico to ensure that it lives up to the terms of the 1944 Water Treaty."

#### **What others are saying:**

"We were forced to stop taking water orders on Friday. We have been talking to the IBWC since November, warning them this was going to happen. What have they been doing since then?" said Sonia Lambert, General Manager, Cameron County Irrigation District #2. "We know they have been meeting in Washington D.C., but meeting without inviting any of the people who are actually being impacted by the shortages? It just seems arrogant, at best. The IBWC seems to always wait until we have a crisis, then react."

"We will have to stop taking water orders by the end of May or early June, barring no new inflows and no substantial rains," said Frank 'JoJo' White, General Manager, Hidalgo County Water District #9. "It's frustrating that the IBWC has been aware of this for so long and yet they have not done anything. You wonder what their job description is?"

"It looks like we will run out of water and will have to stop taking orders on or about June 2," said Troy Allen, General Manager, Delta Lake Irrigation District. "About half of our municipal suppliers are already having trouble paying for their water supply, and it's not going to get any better for them, unless Mexico starts paying its deficit. We have warned the IBWC and warned them, and we've just beat that horse to death with them, and they have yet to get any significant results toward resolving the issue."

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