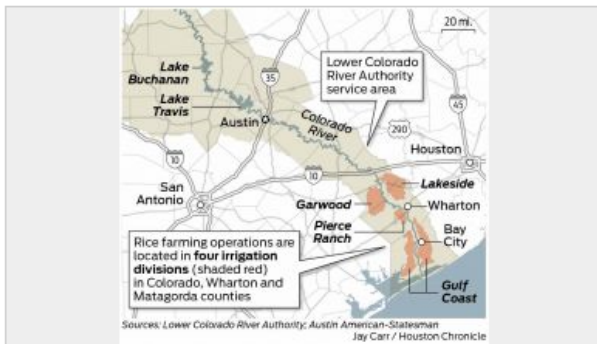


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## Board approves reservoir to help rice farmers

By Matthew Tresaugue | January 16, 2013 | Updated: January 16, 2013 9:45pm

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A Central Texas river authority on Wednesday moved forward with plans to build a Wharton County reservoir to help satisfy the water needs of rice farmers.

The **Lower Colorado River Authority** agreed to spend \$18 million toward the purchase of land near Lane City, about 70 miles southwest of Houston, and initial engineering and permitting of the reservoir.

The decision comes one week after the river authority told farmers that they are

unlikely to receive irrigation water for the second year in a row because of worsening drought conditions.

The river authority said the reservoir, the first of three to be built in rice country, would provide a reliable supply for farmers while easing the burden on the Highland Lakes, which also provide water for Austin and its rapidly growing suburbs.

"This is a historic project on many levels," said **Becky Motal**, the authority's general manager. "Not only would it be the first major reservoir built in the basin in four decades, but it's the first project in our history that would allow us to store significant amounts of water downstream that could be used by multiple customers."

The reservoir, which is estimated to cost \$206 million to build, would provide 90,000 acre-feet of water a year. One acre-foot is enough water to satisfy the needs of two or three typical Texas households for a year.

The river authority plans to start filling the reservoir by 2017. It could not happen soon enough for rice farmers, who last year were unable to plant 60,000 acres after being cut off for the first time.

"The rice producers are excited about what this decision has to offer the whole basin — more reliable irrigation supplies and higher reservoir levels," said **Ronald Gertson**, a fifth-generation farmer in Wharton County. "To make it through the next four years, we need more normal weather conditions and a shared responsibility for getting the reservoirs built. These conditions will be essential if the industry is to make it until the reservoirs can be brought on line."

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