

June 23 Teleconference: Bringing the Public Back Into Public Utilities
Linda Curtis, League of independent Voters of Texas

Welcome, everyone. Thanks to officials, legislative staffers, candidates, media, experts, students, leaders of non-profits, affected landowners from the four Simsboro counties, SAWS watchdogs and ratepayers for joining us.

Forgive me if I don't individually recognize all of you. I do want to recognize the officials on this call -- Milam County Judge Steve Young, Lee County Judge Paul Fischer and Bastrop County Judge Paul Pape. We may have reached Burleson County Judge Schroeder a little too late. We know all officials have their hands full, so we appreciate you.

Also, I want to recognize a very special person in San Antonio, former City Councilwoman, Maria Berriozobal. Remember, Maria welcomed our busload of Simsboro landowners at the rally she led at City Hall in 2015 when the Vista Ridge nightmare began.

Hill Country Weekly, Univision, Austin American-Statesman (Bastrop Advertiser), Channel 4 TV – San Antonio, and the San Antonio Express News, welcome to the call.

We also very much appreciate the many staffers on the line tonight from Senate and Representative districts throughout the pipeline area and the assistance of my own Representative Cyrier's office.

We have volunteer resource/experts on the call to answer your questions. They are Michele Gangnes, Lee County attorney landowner and a founder of the Simsboro Aquifer Water Defense Fund, James Murphy, water attorney extraordinaire and advisor to the League of Independent Voters, Colleen Waring, Milam County landowner and government auditor, Carol Fisher, an environmental compliance specialist and Alan Montemayor, a retired mechanical engineer, with water and energy focus in San Antonio.

I want to get right down to business.

The purpose of this call is to give you information that we hope will encourage you and give you ideas to take action with us or on your own. We are still looking for accountability at and proper oversight of SAWS and an audit of Vista Ridge and any future \$1B or more projects BEFORE contracts are signed.

Soon, a municipal petition drive for the SAWS Accountability Act will be launched by a cross-partisan coalition called the SAWS Act PAC. The date will be set this Friday. San Antonians are especially invited to join that call at 1 pm and to join

weekly meetings of the SAWS Act PAC.

After six years of wrestling with this project – from the donor communities to San Antonio, I think it's entirely possible that Vista Ridge is nearing a real tipping point due to things beyond anyone's – even SAWS' -- control – COVID-19 and the related economic downturn.

These are the facts as we know them. On April 15, 2020, SAWS started buying Vista Ridge water at a reduced amount of 20 million gallons per day--and the very same day, started "discharging"--- wasting---up to half that amount by literally pouring it down a dry creek bed. We are not sure how much they have dumped and for how long, but on June 12 they told the Post Oak Savannah GCD they stopped discharges that day.

The Rivard Report said 10 million gallons per day would cost ratepayers at least \$50,000 a day based on the price of \$1600 per acre feet for Vista Ridge water. That cost per acre foot, according to our experts, is much closer to \$2400. A low-ball guesstimate of the cost of the waste is \$3 million to the ratepayers between April 15 and June 12.

Many of you have asked why SAWS would dump the most expensive water in Texas? Here's how we understand it – with a caution that because Vista Ridge is a public-private partnership and the opaque nature of SAWS' operations. The convoluted Vista Ridge "take and pay" public-private partnership was out of sync on April 15. SAWS' could not finish building its hookup to Vista Ridge on schedule. This problem came amid costly tunneling and engineering problems that were triggered by developers' insistence that the Vista Ridge integration line be moved to location to benefit development. But the financing needs of SAWS' private partners to stick to the scheduled start date of April 15 won out, leaving SAWS ratepayers paying the price for SAWS having nowhere to go with unusable water.

Thanks to the Rivard Report and KSAT TV, the door is open to bringing the bigger waste of Vista Ridge and SAWS out into the light of day. It's been known from day one of this project that Vista Ridge was a bloated project demanded by developers to offload the costs of mass conveyance of water onto SAWS ratepayers to fuel development over the sensitive zones of the Edwards aquifer, the source of San Antonio's drinking water.

Supposedly the pumping full bore of 45 million gallons per day for Vista Ridge will start in August or September. The truth is no one, except God, knows what this will do to what Mother Nature took hundreds of thousands of years to create -- the aquifers themselves. The Carrizo-Wilcox does not recharge in human lifetime terms. And, the hydraulics of artesian aquifers can be harmed. The Post Oak

Savannah Groundwater Conservation District claims it can monitor the aquifers and cut back. I'm not a scientist, but I've been listening to the back and forth on this for years. The fact is hydrological science just isn't that "scientific."

In August 2019, our coalition sent an 11-page, well documented report to officials throughout the pipeline area warning them about the lack of oversight of SAWS and the Vista Ridge Project. I suggest you read it on the SAWSAct.org webpage.

To steal SAWS's phrase we (1.3 million ratepayers and hundreds of thousands of people in the aquifer donor area 142 miles away, are all seemingly locked into "making San Antonio waterfull". This is for growth that may or may not come, but if it is to come, how wise is it to subsidize it off the back of current residents to pay the infrastructure costs for newcomers not there yet – in the middle of an economic downturn in one of the poorest places in the US – San Antonio, Texas.

What can be done, now that the pipeline is nearly finished?
Damned if we know!

Seriously, each one of you on this call can play your part to solve this puzzle.

Let me make sure you all understand that we support the groundwater conservation districts. But, it's not only that they lack the tools to fully manage these resources and to mitigate rule of capture. And, it's not only a legislative failure to not have given them these tools. **It is this project -- Vista Ridge and a rogue municipal water utility – SAWS – that are deforming the entire paradigm for groundwater management.** SAWS wasn't always rogue but those who have the power to get them under control have repeatedly refused and won't even discuss it. This problem doesn't exist!

And now, these mistaken projects keep coming! A governmental entity, LCRA, is coming in for another mega-permit on top of almost 75,000 acre-feet mega-permits already approved by one of the better groundwater districts in Texas – Lost Pines.

Here is the agenda. We'll open up after each speaker. Officials get the first questions then media. Again, thank you all for being here.

Agenda:

[SAWS & Vista Ridge Impacts on the Edwards](#) – Dr. Terry Burns, Alamo Sierra Club

[SAWS Rates](#) – Joe Yakubik, professional engineer, San Antonio resident and for identification purposes, Joe is Vice-Chair of the SAWS Rate Advisory Committee,

[What is the SAWS Accountability Act](#) – Alice Canestaro Garcia, SAWS Act PAC,