Water Wildlife and the Future of Texas – Charting a Course

The health of Texas’ rivers, lakes and estuaries, essential natural infrastructure of our state, depends upon water to sustain them as functioning ecosystems. Why is so obvious a need so difficult to realize? We live beside and recreate in Texas rivers or the lakes which rivers and streams nourish. Springs gushing from our aquifers sustain us in drought, desert and spirit. We depend upon healthy aquatic ecosystems to treat our wastes and somewhere downstream to draw water from for the health and safety of our citizens. Freshwater inflows create our coastal estuaries, more productive than any farmland, generating billions annually in economic benefits. Yet, for twenty-five years we have continued to debate and equivocate about what to do while our population and the resource demands to sustain us expands inexorably.

In many areas around the world it is too late. In Egypt, China and India rivers and estuaries have been destroyed, some with intent and others without thought. In Central Asia the Aral Sea has all but dried up as a legacy of Soviet water planning. The health of 34 million people has been compromised. The record of developed countries fares no better. In the USA we have done the same to the Colorado River in the west and are perilously close to doing so to the Everglades and the wetlands of Louisiana. The hurricanes of two years ago have taught us the value of those natural ecosystems or at least the consequences when they are gone. Must we repeat that history in Texas? Will we fail to learn what others might teach us? The answer to both questions is no. We are at what is perhaps a unique crossroads in Texas water policy. The opportunity of bringing together policy, politics and science exists. What we must do now is “chart the course” that melds these essential elements into a reality. Then we must stay the course to see it done – the future of Texas depends upon it.

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