

The Failure of the Medina Lake Irrigation System

A Call for Modern Water Management

For over a century, we've been told that Medina Lake exists solely for farmers to irrigate. Today, that promise rings hollow. During the current drought no water has been delivered from Medina Lake for irrigation since it was drained dry in 2022— just as during the 2009–2015 drought, when the lake was also drained. This isn't just an irrigation failure, it's a systemic breakdown.

The Medina Lake Irrigation System has also failed to support the recharge of aquifers. Under normal conditions, the Medina Lake supplies roughly 10% of the recharge to the Edwards Aquifer. Yet when the lake is drained and during periods of drought – when recharge is most crucial – this contribution drops sharply.

Today, the Medina River downstream of the dam has completely ceased to flow.

The lake currently serves a very narrow interest – a few hundred landowners in the Bexar-Medina-Atascosa (BMA) irrigation district. These landowners receive heavily subsidized water – paying a fraction of typical water rates. This subsidy is only possible because the San Antonio Water System (SAWS) pays BMA over \$3 million annually (covering 75% of BMA's budget). And it means that nearly 2 million SAWS customers are subsidizing a very small group of landowners.

A Smarter Vision: Medina Lake – as a lake – for the benefit of everyone in the region

In consultation with U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) SML has studied the Lake, and the study shows that when properly managed, Medina Lake will:

- Retain more of its water during droughts,
- Remain open to the public for recreation (including key sites like Bandera County Park),
- Provide significant recharge to the Edwards and Upper Trinity Aquifers
- Provide a flowing Medina River benefitting all stakeholders below the Medina Lake, even in drought conditions.

This isn't just theory – it's what comparable lakes and rivers across Texas successfully achieve every day.

Our research concludes that 70 – 80% of water is lost when delivered through BMA's canal system – wasting critical water resources and draining the lake during every drought.

It clearly makes more sense that eligible landowners in the BMA district receive water from wells, rather than through a 113-year-old outdated, and highly inefficient rundown canal system.

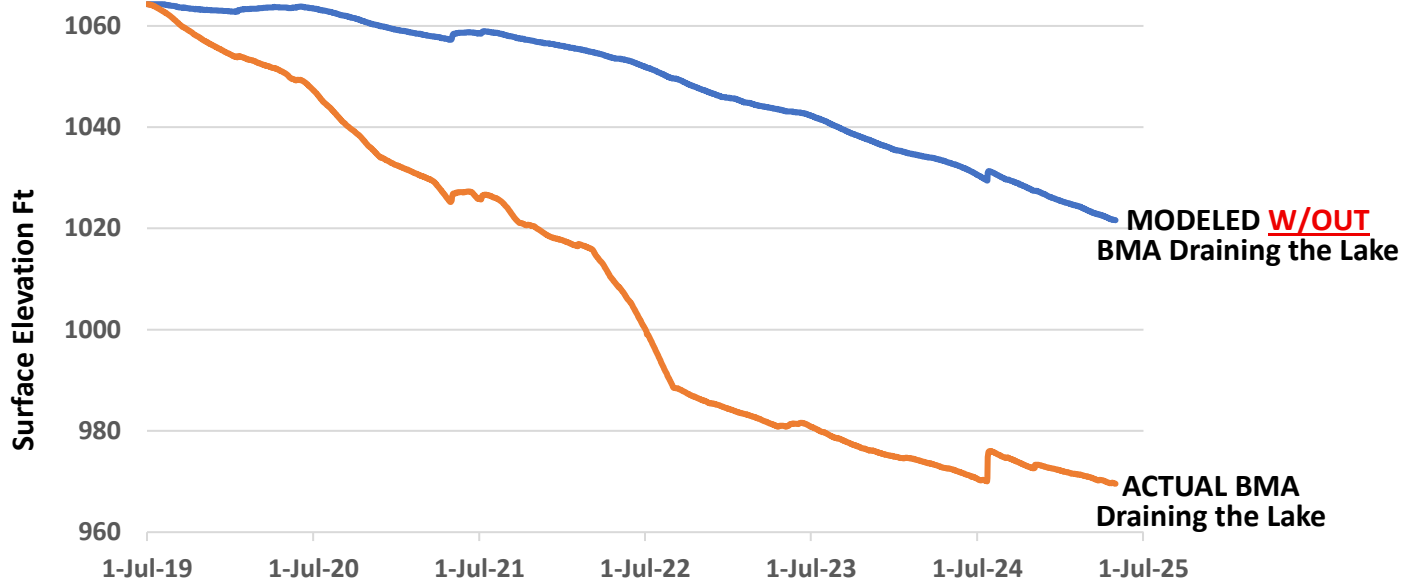
At a time when fresh water is the new gold in Central Texas, we should demand sustainable, fair and effective water management.

Send an email to SaveMedinaLake@gmail.com with any questions or for a copy of the study.

What the Lake Could Look Like Today

If irrigation water deliveries in BMA's district were managed through modern wells and the lake valve operated only during flooding conditions or to maintain adequate downstream flow:

- **Medina Lake would be just 42 feet down** (1022' surface elevation)
- **Instead, on May 1, 2025, it was 94 feet down** (970' surface elevation)



The Solution is to:

1. Replace the canal system with wells strategically placed to efficiently deliver water.
2. Where needed, grant qualified farmers water permits in BMA's district to receive water from the wells.
3. Close the valves on the Medina Lake dam. Only open the valves during flooding conditions and maintain downriver flow.
4. Allow all stakeholders to have a "say" in Medina Lake and its operation.
5. **Change BMA's enabling legislation and TCEQ permit to implement the above.**

Potential Funding Sources and Savings

- SAWS/BMA contract, around \$100 million
- Texas 89th Legislation, Senate Bill 7 & House Joint Resolution 7, Texas Water Fund (if passed)
- Sale of 30 miles of main canal system land to Texas Parks and Wildlife
- Aquifer Recharge Credits from the Edwards Aquifer Authority (EAA) for additional recharge from the Medina Lake System