

Corps of Engineers asking East Texans to speak up for Lake Columbia project

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By JOHNNY JOHNSON, Cox East Texas

If East Texans want a new 10,000-acre lake in Cherokee County between Lake Striker and Lake Jacksonville, now is the time to say so.

After more than 20 years of planning, the project, formerly known as Lake Eastex and now dubbed Lake Columbia, is currently in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 permitting process.

Essentially, everything up until this point has been planning. The 404 permit will allow the Angelina and Neches River Authority to begin land acquisition and eventually construction of the lake.

"But none of that can happen without the 404 permit," ANRA General Manager Kenneth Reneau said.

And in order to get the 404 permit, Reneau said, the government must believe that the project is wanted and needed.

Unlike other area lakes that currently exist, or are still being planned, the primary purpose of Lake Columbia is water supply. The lake will be located approximately 10 miles northeast of Jacksonville. It will be 14 miles in length, 1.5 miles wide. It is estimated that the lake will contain 187,839 acre feet of water and will provide 85,507 acre feet of water per year to water customers.

"What we are wanting is to be able to get a permit, without having to do any more studies," Reneau said.

Currently the Corps is in the final days of permit decision-making, but according to Reneau, it is still soliciting comments from East Texas residents.

ANRA is asking that anyone who is interested in seeing the project completed to write a letter to the Corps, and focus on what they perceive as the need for the project, and also comment on the mitigation plan that includes purchasing land that will be added to the Big Thicket National Preserve, as well as a designated 500-acre nesting area for migratory waterfowl, near the lake's headwaters.

Those who want to see the project continue, or those who want to see the project terminated, may send their letters to: Ms. Jennifer Walker, Regulatory Branch, CESWF-PER-R, US Army Corps of Engineers, P.O. Box 17300, Fort Worth, Texas 76102.

If the permit is granted in a timely fashion, the lake has a projected completion date of 2008.

Additional information about Lake Columbia and the permitting process can be found on the Web at www.lakeeastex.org.

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