

More than 200 meet to oppose planned reservoir

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BOXELDER, Texas--Northeast Texas residents packed an unair-conditioned church sanctuary Tuesday, but that wasn't what made them hot under the collar.

The group of more than 200 gathered to get the latest information on efforts to oppose the proposed 72,000-acre Marvin Nichols Reservoir on the Sulphur River.

"We've been told this is a done deal. But if it is, it doesn't have to be done here," said Max Shumake, a member of Sulphur Oversight Society. "I don't see how we can afford to have that much good farm land and hardwood forests under water."

Janice Bezanson, a member of the Texas Committee on Natural Resources, gave the audience a brief history of reservoir construction before telling them the additional water resources generated by the proposed reservoir project would primarily benefit the Dallas area rather Northeast Texas.

"We don't want to see this on the Sulphur River if it's main need is to supply water to the Dallas-Fort Worth area and all those counties to the north of that area where the population is growing," she said.

Bezanson cited several lakes and rivers from which the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex already receives water--including from lakes Ray Hubbard, Lewisville and Grapevine--with potentially more supplies coming from Lake Palestine and Lake Texoma.

She also said the reservoir, which would cover more than 100 square miles of Northeast Texas--including parts of Bowie and Red River counties, would be funded in large part by Dallas area water utilities.

"They want to declare eminent domain and force you to sell your property at a fair market value," Bezanson said. "Even if you get to keep your land, it will be expensive for you in property taxes and you won't get the benefits."

David Moldal, regional organizer for the National Wildlife Federation, told the residents that the proposed project is far from being a done deal because not enough environmental impact studies are being planned.

"Water planning projects like this one represent one of the most serious threats to wildlife," Moldal said. "We don't want to see them flood some 72,000 acres of wildlife habitat land which people use for hunting, farming and ranching, and the more water that's impounded the greater the (negative) impact on the land."

Moldal said the average Dallas area resident uses more water per person, per day, than residents in any other large Texas city.

"Dallas wants the water to perpetuate their wasteful practices, and they aren't making any effort to conserve water," he said.

Of the \$1.7 billion projected to build the reservoir, Bezanson said interested Dallas area water utility companies only plan to invest about \$400 million--with the rest coming from public tax dollars.

She also said Northeast Texas landowners and residents will be affected by efforts to mitigate the proposed project's effects on wildlife, which will include buying additional land for the displaced wildlife.

Jim Presley of Texarkana, Texas, a charter member and co-founder of the Texarkana-based Friends United for a Safe Environment, told the residents that the plan appears to be a stealth political conspiracy.

"It's a conspiracy to hijack your water and land by people you didn't elect to represent you," he said. "It may be hot in here (church sanctuary) but I hope it will get even hotter over this issue."

Presley also said that potential cost overruns come with every project and that such possible overruns for this \$1.7 billion reservoir could put the final price tag at \$2 billion.

The next meeting will be 7 p.m. Sept. 6 at the First Baptist Church in DeKalb, Texas.