

Hovey group seeks Pecos County help

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By Andrew Stuart

Staff writer

An Odessa group interested in extracting and exporting groundwater from the Trans-Pecos took steps to move its project forward this week, as the company made its case to Pecos County Commissioners Court Monday (April 26).

Two principals from Texas Mountain Canyon Water Association (TMCWA), former Odessa mayor James Reese and Karl Painter of Midland, outlined the project's potential financial benefits and asked the court to request state funding for research on the Hovey Trough, Pecos County Judge Joe Shuster said.

"They wanted us to ask the state to do an independent study," Shuster said. "They – the independent entrepreneurs – couldn't get the government to move, but if another government agency asks for it, eventually it would be done."

Pecos commissioners voted to protest the project, but referred TMCWA's request to the county's groundwater district, which will hear the request at its May 19 meeting.

TMCWA is eyeing groundwater in the Hovey Trough, a formation that extends for 30 miles along Hwy. 67 in Brewster and Pecos counties.

Zan Mathis, an independent consultant for the groundwater district, said he anticipated that the district's board would be receptive to TMCWA's request to seek research funding through the Texas Water Development Board.

"I would say that the water district would probably not be opposed to any free hydrological work that can be done within the district," Mathis said. "We could use all the data we can get – especially if it's free."

Brewster County commissioners expressed their opposition to the Hovey project in an April 14 letter, stating that "the best science available, and the best hydrologists, indicate that the scheme is not feasible and that the water supply is not sustainable."

Reese said that if Brewster commissioners have hydrological data on the Hovey Trough, TMCWA would like to see it.

"If they had reliable science that stated that this project was not feasible or sustainable, that would save us a lot of time and effort," he said. "The ranchers don't want to produce any water that's not rechargeable or sustainable – they just won't do it."

TMCWA does not have formal agreements with customers for the water, but Delmon Hodges, former Pecos County Judge and a principal in the company, said that officials in San

Angelo and Abilene had expressed interest in the project.

“They (TMCWA) just approached them to find out if they’d be interested, and of course they were,” Hodges said. “But they’re going to have to drill quite a few test wells – and get options on the land.”

Principals in TMCWA own several ranches in the area of the Hovey Trough, in Brewster and Pecos counties, and are seeking to lease water rights from other landowners.

The group contends that the Hovey Trough is a previously unrecognized groundwater source, an unused “river of underground water” that is distinct from other major aquifers in the region.