

Opponents speak out against lake project

By Bob Merriman
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MOUNT PLEASANT - Opponents of the proposed Marvin Nichols I reservoir continued to challenge the state's reasoning for the lake during a public hearing Tuesday afternoon.

Representatives of the Texas Water Development Board met with foes and supporters of the lake to collect and record public comment on the state's draft 2002 water plan.

Of the 25 people who spoke, 24 said they opposed the lake.

Under present plans, the dam for the 62,000-acre lake is to be built across the Sulphur River west of U.S. Highway 259 in Bowie County and Morris County. Water backed up by the dam will flood a small area of those two counties, as well as parts of Red River, Titus and Franklin counties. About 40,000 acres of Red River County will be under water if the lake is built.

Proponents of the lake say Northeast Texas water will be needed in the Dallas-Fort Worth area because of an expected doubling of that area's population by 2050. Opponents argue that if cities institute conservation measures, additional water will not be needed.

Construction of Marvin Nichols I is expected to cost \$1.7 billion, with the money coming from bond sales.

The state water plan does not address only lake construction, Bill Millican with the water development board said. Planners estimate the cost of water, wastewater and flood control at \$108 billion in the next 50 years. Of that total, \$17.8 billion will be for water development.

"That \$17.8 billion for water development is a small piece of the pie," Millican said.

The majority of the money is earmarked for infrastructure, wastewater treatment and flood control, he said.

A beginning of the \$108 billion comes up next month when Texans go to the polls and vote on 19 proposed constitutional amendments. Proposition 19, if approved, will allow the TWDB to issue \$2 billion in general obligation

bonds. Of the \$2 billion, TWDB would put \$50 million into a loan fund for local projects.

Most of the speakers at the Tuesday afternoon meeting opposed Marvin Nichols I on personal grounds.

George Marshall of Cuthand told the gathering, "Water will not cover my land, but mitigation will." Marshall is a third-generation farmer and rancher and said he will lose most of his property through laws that require flooded land to be replaced by other land.

Robbie Marshall also voiced her opposition to the lake, saying "wildlife will be destroyed" and "virgin hardwood cut down or flooded."

"My boys like to hunt," she said, and added that pastime would be taken away if the lake is built.

Max Shumake of DeKalb said he opposes the lake partly because of the destruction of home and history.

"We've lived there since we were kids," Shirley Shumake said. "I oppose this lake."

Thomas Tucker joined in, saying, "They already took my land."

"We need somebody to represent the people on these boards," said C.V. Love, who with his brother owns 1,200 acres and the family home.

Former State Rep. Jerry Yost of Longview said he supported reservoirs in the past, but no longer does. Almost all reservoirs built in the last 30 years are beginning to silt in, he said.

"They say it's a great benefit," Yost said of water confined in lakes. "The greatest benefit is to those who control it and sell it."

Yost suggested the state look at desalinization, rather than building more dams.

"The state should make an investment in technology that works," he said.

Richard Letourneau, a member of the Northeast Texas region water planning group, said he was the only member of the board to vote against the plan. The area that would be flooded by the lake "is a unique hardwood bottom, one of 14 in the United States," he said.

"It's a scam and a damn shame," said Chester Williams of Friends United for

a Safe Environment.

Lake opponent Elizabeth Farmer said companies in the Dallas-Fort Worth area provide bottled water to numerous retail outlets.

"We don't need to provide water to a location that sells it," she said. "I can't see any reason why they don't supply water to themselves."

Water planning board member Gary Jackson said he supported the lake. A farmer and a lawyer, Jackson said his great-grandparents moved to Texas from Alabama in 1866. He said Texas missed out on aircraft manufacturing plants and other defense industries during World War II because of a lack of hydroelectricity.

"Then the war was over, and we got nothing to show for it," Jackson said.

Jim Presley, a longtime opponent of the lake proposal, likened the regional plan to a game of poker.

"The plan came from marked cards in a stacked deck, and the people were dealt a losing hand," he said.

Written comments on the draft water plan may be made to Phyllis Thomas at the Texas Water Development Board, P.O. Box 13231, Austin, TX 78711-3231 or by e-mail to phyllis.thomas@twdb.state.tx.us.

The board accepts comments through Nov. 12.

TWDB is to present the draft plan with comments to Gov. Rick Perry, Lt. Gov. Bill Ratliff, Speaker of the House Pete Laney and to natural resource committees on or before Jan. 5, 2002.