

## Longview News-Journal

### Proposed reservoir might be dropped

By GLENN EVANS

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MOUNT PLEASANT – A water strategy for Northeast Texas won preliminary approval Wednesday after planners added a recommendation that Marvin Nichols Reservoir be tossed out of any region's plan.

The water plan for Region D, which is comprised of 19 counties including Gregg, must go through a public input process before the Texas Water Development Board in Austin takes it up with similar plans from 15 other regions.

The regional plans will be compiled into a master state water strategy looking 50 years ahead.

The Region D Water Planning Group added its negative opinion of the proposed Marvin Nichols Reservoir on Wednesday and got applause for doing so from more than 100 Sulphur River area residents.

The Dallas-based Region C is proposing the 62,000-acre reservoir on the Sulphur River to meet growth needs. Opponents say the lake would cost the region 400 to 1,300 timber industry jobs, which would drain \$87 million to \$275 million a year from the local economy.

A federal announcement that Red River Army Depot and Lone Star Army Ammunition Plant in Bowie County are slated to close under the federal Base Realignment and Closure Act aggravates the potential economic loss Marvin Nichols is expected to cause.

"I appreciate the votes from all of y'all who heard our cries and heard our pleas," lake opponent Max Shumake told the board after its 16-6 decision to add the anti-Marvin Nichols recommendation.

Richard LeTourneau of Hallsville, who is secretary of the 32-member planning group, and Longview small business representative Mendy Rabicoff voted for the measure opposing the Marvin Nichols Reservoir proposal.

Longview Public Works Director Keith Bonds, who represents municipalities, voted against the recommendation.

"It's just good water planning to make sure all of your options are open," Bonds said later. "I wouldn't say I was pro or con Marvin Nichols at all. But all the options need to be looked at."

The planning group also OK'd stipulations for entities that plan to build a lake in Region D.

Groups that want to build a lake in the region would have to identify up front any land that would be affected and how much money dispossessed land owners would get. Lake planners also would have to justify the construction of a new reservoir and outline the financial loss to schools and other taxing entities before they could earn local support.

An amendment proposed by Hopkins County member Beth Wisenbaker that the Region D plan urge the Dallas area to conserve water and buy water rights from existing lakes was shot down twice.

Wisenbaker had wanted her amendment to specify another proposed lake along the Sulphur River, George Parkhouse Reservoir, as an alternative for Dallas if it exhausts conservation and other measures. Other members objected to steering another region toward any Northeast Texas project, and the preliminary plan approved Wednesday does not recommend any of its 15 potential lake sites for construction.

The question will be what the Water Development Board does with the competing recommendations from Region D and the Dallas-based Region C. The regional planning groups were created in a 1997 state water bill to give a sense of local control to water planning. Lawmakers called it a ground-up approach to the state plan.

LeTourneau told the group Wednesday that state water board members told him last year that Region D would have to establish that Marvin Nichols would harm local resources to prevent Region C from building it.

The language adopted Wednesday is intended to impress on the state board that building the lake would have a significant harmful impact on Northeast Texas' employment and natural resources.

"(International Paper) has stated they would close (its Cass County plant) if they lose their source of hardwood along the Sulphur River," member George Frost said.

Frost said if the military base closings go as recommended and International Paper closed, "we could lose 7,000 or 8,000 jobs just like that."

A public hearing on the Northeast Texas plan will be held at 7 p.m. on Aug. 2 at the Upshur County Civic Center in Gilmer.