

RESERVOIR IDEA MEETS RESISTANCE

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BY: SARA FOLEY, Staff Writer July 12, 2005

About 25 citizens gathered Tuesday night to express their disagreement about the proposed Fastrill Reservoir at the East Texas Regional Water Planning Group Region I public hearing.

The meeting was held at the Lake Palestine Water Treatment Plant in Tyler on Tuesday night to present water management plans for the area over the next 50 years and to gain public input about how people in the area feel about water usage and growth projections.

The proposed Fastrill Reservoir, which would be located in the Upper Neches River in Cherokee County, conflicts with plans the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services has to designate the same piece of land as a wildlife refuge.

Dallas Water Utilities would finance the reservoir and the majority of the water in the lake would be allocated to Dallas.

Dolores Bryson, of Rusk, said she didn't want the reservoir because it could adversely affect wildlife and the resources wouldn't be used for area residents.

"It's arrogant of Dallas to think they can come down and steal our water," she said.

Gary Graham, a consultant with the Texas Water Development Board, said the population in Region I is projected to grow by 50 percent, which would increase water demands as well. Graham presented various ways to supply surrounding counties with their water needs in the future, but said Dallas has listed the Fastrill reservoir as a method they intend to use.

Gene Decker, of Jacksonville, added that the reservoir would only be a temporary solution to water demands instead of changing consumption habits.

"I think we're playing with fire," he said. "We can build lakes, but they dry up. Dallas is wasteful. All of us are wasteful."

Chris Brown, the water project attorney for the planning group, said before the hearing that he thought projected growth in the area doesn't necessitate another reservoir.

"There is a direct conflict with where that reservoir would be," he said. "You've got some pretty serious problems and you don't have a clear demonstration of demand for more water."

Brown said because of other cases with USFWS, he thought the two agencies would try to compromise and attempt to co-exist, even though some supporters of the refuge have said co-existing with a reservoir that has altered the natural landscape would negate the purpose of the refuge.

"Fish and Wildlife tends to negotiate rather than to rule by edict," he said. "In theory, the federal government would get the land, especially because they put their application in first. I suspect what will happen is

there's going to be a protracted negotiation over how this land is going to be used."

Carla Daws, a communications officer with the Texas Water Development Board in Austin, said after the public hearing that revisions could be made to the plan by regional developers or state planners before it is adopted.

"It used to be that these water plans were made from the top down, and that's all changed," she said. "Now it's really grassroots-driven, people in the area should control their own water and that's what these meetings are all about."

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