

Tuesday, October 11, 2005 (Star-Telegram.com)

Panel still supports building large reservoirs in East Texas

By Neil Strassman

Star-Telegram Staff Writer

ARLINGTON - After reviewing public comments, a regional water planning group said that it is not contemplating any changes in a \$14 billion water plan that calls for building large reservoirs in East Texas.

Building new reservoirs is the "most cost-effective" strategy, said a consultant and members of the Region C Water Planning Group, a panel charged with developing a plan to ensure an adequate supply of water for the 13 million people expected to live in North Central Texas by 2060.

The reservoirs are the keystone of the plan and have prompted the greatest controversy.

The water planners say the new lakes must be a part of the plan, but critics say additional conservation measures and the use of water from the region's existing lakes will be sufficient.

"The flexibility of the plan is extremely important," said Jim Parks, chairman of the planning group.

A conservationist said four new reservoirs would flood hundreds of square miles of East Texas and Northeast Texas, destroy wildlife habitat and take land from thousands of Texans.

"We urge you to reconsider," said Rita Beving, conservation co-chairwoman of the Sierra Club's Dallas chapter.

About one-third of the region's water supply in 2060 would come from currently available water sources, one-quarter from new connections to existing water sources, one-quarter from a combination of conservation and water reuse and a little less than one-fifth from new lakes.

The region now gets 90 percent of its water from reservoirs and the four proposed lakes in East Texas that would cost \$3.3 billion dollars.

The 62,000-acre Marvin Nichols Reservoir, west of Mount Pleasant on the Sulphur River, and its 130-mile pipeline, would cost roughly \$2.15 billion to build, about 25 percent more than the initial cost of the lake when it was first proposed several years ago.

Two new lakes are proposed in Fannin County and another East Texas lake is recommended south of Lake Palestine.

Desalination, bringing additional water south from Lake Texoma on the Oklahoma border and shipping it 200 miles from the Toledo Bend reservoir were described by some panel members as impractical.

Several developers praised the work of the planning group and the proposed reservoirs.

"It's going to take every bit of this to ensure there are viable water resources," said Jay Hawes, of Provident Realty Advisors in Dallas.

The panel met at the Grand Prairie wastewater treatment plant to review public comments on the draft plan and to discuss some of the alternatives it includes, in addition to the reservoirs.

The 16-county water plan is expected to be finalized by mid-November and voted on by the panel on Dec. 5. It must be submitted to the Texas Water Development Board by early January.

