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**'Harder to kill than Dracula'**

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Victoria's D.M. O'Connor Interests isn't happy to see that the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority wants to redesign the Lower Guadalupe Water Supply Project.

The O'Connors had hoped to see the proposed project - which they have long opposed for the environmental and economic problems they fear it would cause - tossed on the scrap heap of junked water projects.

"This thing is harder to kill than Dracula," said Bill Jones, a spokesman for the influential ranching and business concern.

Recently, the project's major partner, the San Antonio Water System, withdrew from the project. The O'Connors then asked remaining project partners GBRA and the San Antonio River Authority to remove the project from the state's regional water plan, a move which would kill the project by ending its chances for state funding or permits.

But GBRA announced on Wednesday that it was going to develop options for a reconfigured Lower Guadalupe project that would meet the long-term needs of GBRA's 10-county district, particularly the rapidly growing upper end of the Guadalupe Basin, including Boerne, New Braunfels, San Marcos, Seguin, Buda, Kyle and Kerrville.

As originally envisioned, the project would have taken billions of gallons of underground water and Guadalupe River water from the Victoria area and exported it to San Antonio.

GBRA on Wednesday also announced it would remove the controversial underground-water-withdrawal component of the project, which had been seen locally as a threat to existing water wells tapping the area's aquifer.

On Thursday, the O'Connors responded via Jones.

"While elimination of groundwater is a step in the right direction, we still have major concerns about the 'reconfigured' project," said Jones.

He asked: If a redesigned project were to be built, what assurances are there that GBRA will not add groundwater to the project in the future?

"If only river water is used, what happens when the river runs low in drought? Will the project turn to groundwater to serve its customers?"

Jones said project sponsors have previously said that groundwater was necessary to make the project economically feasible because it created a "firm yield" - a predetermined amount of water that would be reliably available even during drought.

"What has changed? Why would it now be economically feasible to build a project without the firm yield that groundwater provides?"

Jones also asked if GBRA would be willing to "contractually guarantee that Victoria area groundwater will never be a component of the LGWSP."

He said the project is now "about GBRA's determination to sell water from the Lower Guadalupe Basin to the Hill Country, whatever the costs. This is not a water management strategy; it is a water marketing scheme."

Jones said Victoria and the surrounding counties would see absolutely no benefit from a reconfigured project.

"We only stand to lose billions of gallons of river water that could be used for our own economic and environmental benefit," said Jones.

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