

The Victoria Advocate

Area lands sought for river flow storage

GREG BOWEN

Victoria Advocate

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AUSTIN - Letters will be mailed next week to landowners in Wharton, Matagorda and Colorado counties whose acreage has been identified as possibly being needed for water-storage facilities totaling 10,000 acres that would be a vital part of the planned Lower Colorado River Authority-San Antonio Water System project.

The letters will inform landowners that project representatives are looking for a reservoir site and would like to visit with them and educate them about the project, said LCRA General Manager Joe Beal.

"We've done enough (preliminary) work so far without actually getting on the land to know where the most likely lands are that could be used," Beal said.

The letters are just one part of a larger public outreach project that will begin soon and include such things as town hall meetings and newspaper ads in an attempt to find a suitable location or locations for the water-storage facility.

"There may be lands that we've not identified that could be very good pieces of property. There may be landowners that would want their land to be used for this purpose."

A total of about 30,000 acres of land will be identified as possible primary and alternative sites in a permit application for the project, said Beal. But something on the order of 10,000 acres of land will potentially eventually be needed to create the required storage facility.

"These facilities are going to look much like the South Texas Nuclear Project's lake. It'll be excavated and ring levied," Beal said.

He said the purpose of the reservoirs is to allow the project to capture and store river flows coming down the Colorado River.

The project will pump water from the Colorado River into the storage facility. From there, the water will be piped to San Antonio, he said.

"In a typical year, there's well over a million acre-feet that flows into the bays and estuaries and we're talking about taking 150,000 acre-feet and moving it to San Antonio."

Some of the stored water might also be used to provide freshwater to Matagorda Bay during times of drought to ensure the health of the bay, he said.

He said it is uncertain whether one 10,000-acre water-storage facility or two 5,000-acre reservoirs will be built.

"The most cost-effective solution would be one. It's just easier and cheaper to build one."

He said further study will be done on the acreage already identified as likely areas for the reservoir.

"The letters will say to landowners that we've identified that their particular piece of land looks like it could be a piece of property that might work. Ultimately we'll ask for permission to go on the land and do that next level of recon as we hone in on the best sources of land for this project."

Such things as oil wells, wetlands, roads, transmission lines on the land could eliminate the land from consideration.

The lands that are probably going to be the best candidates are those that are currently being used for irrigated agriculture, he said. "Generally speaking, those are going to have the least adverse attributes."

He said he hoped the process of finding a likely site would be completed later this year.

"I don't know when the land would be purchased."

The \$1.5 billion LCRA-SAWS project would produce up to 330,000 acre-feet of water a year from the Colorado River.

The project would not only supply a supplemental water source to San Antonio, where shortages are looming, but is designed to also meet shortages foreseen by rice farmers in Wharton, Matagorda and Colorado counties, to help supply the growing communities of Llano and Goldthwaite above the Highland Lakes in the Texas Hill Country, and to help sustain higher water levels in Lake Travis and Lake Buchanan above Austin.

Board members and staffers of project partners LCRA and SAWS met in Austin on Wednesday to discuss the project.