

Residents unhappy with reservoir plan
Water board will vote in November on construction of Marvin Nichols dam

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Friday, September 22, 2006

GILMER — The Texas Water Development Board unveiled the state's proposed 50-year, \$30.7 million water plan to residents Thursday, but many of the 52 people in attendance expressed dismay at plans to build a new East Texas reservoir that would serve the growing Dallas/Fort Worth area.

The plan calls for the construction of the Marvin Nichols dam, which would flood 72,000 acres along the Sulphur River in Titus and Red River counties.

Northeast Texas water planners who represent an area from the Red River south to Longview recommended that Marvin Nichols not be built after learning hundreds of thousands of additional acres would be lost to mitigate the flood zone, a requirement of the federal Clean Water Act.

"There's nothing to prevent the water hustlers from coming to build reservoirs (in East Texas)," said George Frost, a member of the Northeast water planning group. "They (want to) build reservoirs first and go to existing supplies second."

Bill Mullikin, a member of the state water board staff who spoke to the crowd Thursday, said Texas will need 8.8 million acre-feet of water by 2060. New supplies from 4,500 water management strategies, including 14 new reservoirs statewide, would provide an additional 8.9 million acre-feet by 2060, he said.

The state is losing 90,000 acre-feet of surface water from existing reservoirs each year, and the existing 9 million acre-feet of groundwater will be cut by one-third in 50 years because more water is being removed from West Texas aquifers than is being replenished.

Pointing to municipal water usage that is predicted to double in 50 years, Mullikin said, "Texas does not have enough water today to meet future needs."

Conservationists and landowners have vowed to continue fighting the proposal. None of the voting members of the Texas Water Development Board, which will consider the plan Nov. 14, were present Thursday at the Gilmer Civic Center. If passed, a final plan will be sent to the state Legislature for approval.

"We were told they would be here to hear our comments, so I'm pretty much speaking to the choir tonight," said Billie Lindsay, a Bogota resident who lives on the Sulphur River banks. "I think they're bandits, coming to our part of the country and taking our land and our water."

Clarksville Mayor Mary Ann Rushen voiced her support of the plan, pointing to the economic boom for Red River County and its industries.

"It doesn't take a Ph.D (degree) to realize that if the population doubles in a given period of years, the water needs double," said Gary Jackson, who served for eight years on the Lindale Economic Development Corp. board. "Marvin Nichols will be an economic boom you cannot believe."

Janice Bezanson, executive director of Texas Committee on Natural Resources, came from Austin to attend the hearing. Data from the Dallas-Fort Worth water plan and the National Wildlife Federation suggest that the Metroplex's future water needs could be met with existing supplies and conservation, she said. Increased output from Wright Patman Lake in Bowie County, Lake Fork and Lake Tawakoni could be combined with Lake Texoma, whose slightly higher saline levels could be addressed with desalination, she said.

"(Dallas-Fort Worth) will need additional water in the future, although not as much as they think if they would conserve," she said. "There's certainly an effort to railroad East Texas. This is a major concern that the people of Northeast Texas will be disenfranchised and not get the benefit of those in urban areas."