

Plan calls for pipeline in Lavaca

\$1.5 billion plan will send water to San Antonio

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BY BARRY HALVORSON - VICTORIA ADVOCATE

HALLETTSVILLE - An 84-inch pipeline may be built across portions of Lavaca County to move water from the Lower Colorado River to San Antonio.

Representatives of the San Antonio Water System will provide an overview of the SAWS-LCRA Water Supply Project on Monday at the Lavaca County Commissioners Court meeting. It will begin at 10 a.m. in the Lavaca County Courthouse.

The pipeline will be buried a minimum of 42 inches below ground and will extend for about 150 miles, said Gary Guy, SAWS engineer and manager for water resources.

He added that based on the design of the pipe, it would only be capable of carrying the surface water that would be diverted from the river.

"The pipe is designed to carry the base flow from the Colorado River," Guy said. "Pipes are constrained by both volume and pressure and this pipeline has been designed to carry the water from the Colorado River and couldn't hold any more than the 150,000 acre-feet of water, the amount agreed upon. And that is if we can find that much water."

He said they are in the middle of a seven-year study with the LCRA to determine if there is that much water.

"But, no, we couldn't drill wells along the pipeline and add that water to the flow. The pipe couldn't take it and would blow."

Guy said the agreement between SAWS and LCRA, as well as House Bill 1629, would prohibit using groundwater. The engineer said that the legislation also mandates that water is provided to maintain the quality of aquatic life in Matagorda Bay. The plan must be subject to broad scientific and public review (including that counties are informed of the pipeline), meet the water needs of the Lower Colorado River Basin, that it benefits the stored water in the Travis and Buchanan Lake reservoirs, meets with all regional water plans, that the in stream flow of water maintains a proper aquatic habitat and protects endangered species in the Colorado River and includes stringent water conservation measures being implemented by the city of San Antonio.

"The conservation measures are probably the easiest for us because we've already got many of those in place," Guy said. "This is part of the public review portion of the study to determine if the project is even feasible."

"If it isn't, there will be no pipeline."

The seven-year, \$42 million project feasibility study will not be completed until 2010.

If approved, the project calls for the construction of water retention reservoirs in either Colorado County or Matagorda County along the Wharton County line. The current plan calls for three retention reservoirs totaling about 10,000 acres to be built at one of the two sites. The water

collected would then be transported by water lines to San Antonio. The cost of the project is estimated at \$1.5 billion.

Guy said the project developers are looking at a 69 routes depending on which of two starting points are selected.

"We're developing from two starting points until the LCRA can determine the sites for the reservoirs," Guy said. "We have to take into consideration such as civil features (cities), wetlands and archaeological sites which is why the routes are defined by segments. We're looking at a 100-foot wide easement corridor with most of it running parallel to existing right-of-ways.

He said that the proposed pipeline could cross Lavaca County in one of two locations depending on the route.

"Lavaca County will have a portion of the pipeline going through it regardless if we select the Colorado or Matagorda-Wharton locations," Guy said. "In some cases, it will be substantial while in others it will barely touch the county."

Guy said the pipeline will have less impact that most people think.

"All this really will be is an easement," he said. "And the only restriction will be that the property owner will not be able to build a permanent structure over the line for maintenance reasons. At 42-inches in depth, you can grow row crops or graze cattle. We'll remove the topsoil and dirt, put in the line, and the replace the dirt followed by topsoil for row crops or grasses for grazing. People won't lose the use of their land."

And as part of the city of San Antonio, Guy said, SAWS does have the power of eminent domain but would use it only as a last resort.

Anyone who has questions about the project can contact the LCRA at www.lcra.org/lswp; lcraawaterproject@lcra.org.

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