

Abilene Reporter News

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Abilene looks northward for site of new reservoir

**By Sarah Kleiner Varble / kleiners@reporternews.com
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The Abilene City Council might ask the Texas Legislature to designate land north of Abilene as ideal for a reservoir, which would protect it from use by the state.

The council is considering building the proposed Cedar Ridge Reservoir in Haskell, Throckmorton and Shackelford counties to secure a water source for Abilene in the future.

Under the proposal, a dam would be built across a deep and narrow ravine through which the Clear Fork of the Brazos flows. The reservoir would be protected from extreme evaporation because the water would be deep.

An attorney from Austin who has worked on the project on behalf of the city told council members Thursday they can ask the Legislature to pass a bill declaring the site unique for a reservoir. The Legislature will convene in January.

The council could also ask lawmakers to consider setting aside money for the project, said Martin Rochelle, an attorney for the Austin-based Lloyd Gosselink firm.

Rochelle told council members he will not move forward with the Legislature unless the owners of three ranches where the reservoir would sit are supportive.

"This project looks good. It's a good site. It's deep," Rochelle said. "I wish it were closer, but it is where it is."

The council hasn't decided whether to move forward with the project. On Thursday, council members voted to extend a contract with Enprotec/Hibbs & Todd, an Abilene engineering firm that is studying the Cedar Ridge project and the potential of Possum Kingdom Lake as a water source.

"We're years away from building a reservoir," Mayor Norm Archibald said during the meeting. "But you can't build a reservoir then if you don't do the groundwork now."

City Manager Larry Gilley said the first step is to reach an agreement with the owners of the ranches.

Rochelle said negotiations have been progressing with the landowners.

If an agreement is reached, the city would ask the state to permit the reservoir, which is a lengthy and complex process, Gilley said.

One step in the permitting process is complete, Gilley said. Earlier this week, the Texas Water Development Board approved the 2007 state water plan that designates as unique the Cedar Ridge Reservoir site and 18 other potential reservoirs.

The project could cost \$130 million to \$150 million, which would be financed over many years. Gilley said the project would be paid back through Abilenians' water and sewer bills.

It's not clear yet if Abilene would form a partnership with other governmental groups, Gilley said, but the city of Abilene has said it will take the lead on the project.

Also this week, four consultants from the Winstead Consulting Group traveled from Austin to brief the council on changes that might take place while the Legislature is in session. The consultants will lobby for the city during the upcoming session of the Legislature.