

Self interest: East Texans apparently need to stand on their own

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Our big city neighbors want our cooperation.

So that they can water their yards and their country clubs, they want our water. Of course, they need someplace to hold it, so they also want our land to flood with their reservoirs — never mind what the owners, neighbors or wildlife have to say about it.

So that they can light their skyscrapers and air condition their huge homes, they also want our coal. That might be fine, if they would carry the coal off to Dallas and burn it there. The problem is that it's easier and cheaper to burn the coal here and carry the electricity off to Dallas.

Of course, we can always turn to state leaders for help in protecting our East Texas air, land and water — right?

Well, we might not want to count on Gov. Rick Perry who, according to one of his spokesmen, stands four-square behind the city of Dallas and the Texas Water Development Board which have both sued the federal government for blocking the development of the Fastrill Reservoir in Anderson and Cherokee counties.

In a victory for opponents of the new reservoir, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Department of the Interior established the new Neches River National Wildlife Refuge right in the path of the reservoir that the Dallas/Fort Worth area wanted to build to secure more water for its denizens.

According to an Associated Press story, Perry spokesman Ted Royer was emphatic about the governor's support for the reservoir backers' suits, telling reporters, "The governor strongly supports this lawsuit because the federal government should not tie Texas' hands when it comes to providing water for our people."

Well, yes, some people want the water that the reservoir could hold. Then again, there are also many people who want the unique marshlands and bottom lands along the Neches River to remain intact so they can continue providing one of the last extensive habitats of its kind for a wide variety of wildlife, particularly migratory birds.

Some readers might question why we should care about the fight well to the southeast of Longview. The fact is that this fight is going on throughout East Texas and if not this one, then the next one could have a direct impact on people in our community.

After all, the Texas Water Development Board has already sided with the metroplex in another debate, endorsing that region's plan to develop the Marvin Nichols Reservoir on the Sulphur River north of Mount Pleasant. That approval came despite the strong opposition of our own regional water board after property owners and residents who would be impacted by that project rose up in vociferous protest.

Add to that the "fast track" efforts to gain permits for a massive expansion of TXU coal-fired electrical generation facilities, and one gets the sense that East Texans are being asked to pay an undue price for the growth of Texas' big cities.

In recent weeks several different parties have been through our offices to discuss the state's energy needs and energy future. One of the most compelling arguments we have heard is that there is a pressing need for additional electrical generating capacity soon on the ERCOT power grid that serves most of Texas, but not

our little corner of the state.

We are being told that TXU and the state can't afford to wait for the development of even cleaner coal-based technologies or additional nuclear power plants because ERCOT's reserve capacity is getting dangerously low.

In other words they are concerned about short-term problems and asking us to welcome their long-term solutions that are a major improvement over past coal-fired generating units but still fall short of the advanced technologies most of the country is looking to for the future.

We have promises that with upgrades to existing facilities and the technology going into the new generating units, overall emissions of regulated substances would go down 20 percent.

What we don't have are firm commitments to beat the future standards, including those for substances such as mercury and carbon dioxide.

We've got a problem with that, as should all East Texans and we should be asking the governor why he isn't taking strong stands for the people in this neck of the (piney) woods.

East Texans are being asked to be good neighbors and to share the bountiful resources that make our corner of the state so attractive.

At some point (and we believe that we passed it years ago), East Texans need to take a stand for their own interests and protect the air, the land and the water around us.

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