

Marvin Nichols Reservoir opponents voice concerns

By: Jodi Sheridan - Texarkana Gazette - Published: 06/06/2007

MOUNT PLEASANT, Texas—Representatives of various groups opposed to the Marvin Nichols Reservoir voiced their concerns to members of the Rotary Club here Tuesday. Rotary member Isabelle Smith, chairwoman of the Rotary program, said as “forward thinking people,” it was important for the club to have information from both sides of the the issue. She said the Rotary Club would use all information to make an informed decision regarding their stance to the reservoir. Officials who spoke include Max Shumake, a long-time reservoir opponent and president of the Sulphur Oversight Society. He said thousands of people would be displaced and homes and other rights would be lost if Marvin Nichols is built.

Marvin Nichols is a plan by the state to address long-term water needs in the Dallas vicinity. It was designated as a unique site in legislation by the Texas Legislature in the recent session. Norman Johns, a water resource scientist with the National Wildlife Federation, was also on hand Tuesday. Johns spoke of the enormous cost of using two huge pipes to supply nearly 490,000 acre/feet of water per year to the Dallas metroplex, the billions of dollars needed to build it, the 72,000 acres the lake would flood and the destruction of a large amount of rare, bottomland hardwood forest.

“It would be the sixth largest reservoir in Texas,” Johns told Rotary members. He said all the environmental negatives are present, including altered or impaired water flows and effects to the wildlife habitat. “There’s a myriad of ecological functions that get changed,” he said. Johns pointed out Marvin Nichols was a “water supply lake,” meaning instead of being an attractive environmental setting, the levels would fluctuate and in extreme circumstances could even go dry.

There’s also the mitigation: what the lake would cover would also be needed to replace what the lake took. Johns also spoke about conservation. He said cities like Houston, Austin, San Antonio and El Paso had made plans for it, while Dallas area cities were unprepared. “A lot of these cities are planning on conservation being a big part of their future,” he said.

Johns said a projected goal of Dallas was to go from using 265 gallons per capita per day to 233. He said if they followed the task force on conservation, they could get to 152 gallons per capita per day. But he acknowledged conservation wasn’t the only way. He said there was the possibility of wastewater reuse, water from Toledo Bend and other existing dams. Compared to Marvin Nichols, “conservation is cheaper,” he said.

That’s what International Paper would like to see the Dallas area do, in addition to tapping existing water resources. Amanda Black Keeney, the communications manager for the IP Texarkana Mill, told Rotary members how the reservoir threatened the mill’s needed supply and water flow. IP boasts an enormous payroll and provides good-paying, much-needed industry jobs to the area, and Marvin Nichols would threaten that.

Citing an economic report, she said Northeast Texas faces an economic impact of between \$72 million and \$230 million. Add to that what the lake and ensuing required mitigation would devastate and it’s not good for the area, she said. “Who benefits from Marvin Nichols?” Smith asked.

“Not us,” Black-Keeney said. She said they just wanted a solution good for all of Texas, not just Dallas and not just Northeast Texas. She said they want to help Dallas and the metroplex find the water they need. “We’re not anti-Dallas,” she said.