

The Oldest Newspaper in Central Texas · Last Updated Friday, Aug 14, 2009 - 02:37:21 pm CDT

Trying to preserve local water rights

By David Barkemeyer

This past week I attended a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Brazos G Regional Water Planning Group in Waco. Brazos G is one of 16 groups across the state that is authorized by the legislature to work with the Texas Water Development Board to create the state water plan which is adopted by the legislature and updated every five years. I was interviewed along with seven other people for consideration for membership on the Region G board. This was the second time in recent years that I have attempted to gain membership in that group to try to gain some voice for Milam County and the towns in Milam County.

The Cameron City Council had passed a resolution recommending me. Mayor John Shoemake of Rockdale, County Commissioner Kenneth Hollis and State Representative Dan Gattis had all written letters of recommendation supporting me for the position. There were two openings on the board in the municipality interest category that were to be filled and there were eight of us that had applied and were being considered. The others were the city managers of Temple and Waco, the water services/utilities directors of Leander, College Station, Round Rock, and Bryan and the mayor of Groesbeck. As we were waiting to be interviewed, I commented to the mayor of Groesbeck that she and I didnt have a chance, being from small rural towns; and sure enough, the city managers of Temple and Waco were chosen to fill the two vacancies.

Im telling you this because I feel that you all need to be aware of what I feel were up against here in Milam County. It has nothing to do with me personally. It has nothing to do with whether youre a Democrat or a Republican. It has nothing to do with whether you live in Rockdale, Cameron or our in the county.

It has to do with the fact that Texas population is growing by leaps and bounds, and practically all of that growth is in the larger towns and cities and they need lots of water. Furthermore, they have the votes and therefore the political power in our state. Milam County has underground water and places where they want to build some reservoirs, and they dont want anyone getting in the way of them getting that water or building those reservoirs. One of the guys interviewing me asked me what I would do if I were selected for the board and then had to go back to the people of Milam County and tell them that the reservoirs were going to be built anyway, even if I objected.

Some might say, Well, Barkemeyer, whats wrong with having a nice lake here in Milam County anyway? There could be development around it, recreational activity, fishing and so on.

A couple of weeks ago I toured on and around Lake Buchanan and observed the results of a lake that has become a reservoir - boat docks that are several hundred yards from the water, properties that are on the decline - believe me its not a pretty sight. Besides, the Little River Reservoir that is in the plan to be built here doesnt even provide for private waterfront property in the first place. Furthermore, Camerons river water intake and pump station will be submerged and even our water and sewer plant location will be in jeopardy. Who is going to pay for relocating and rebuilding these facilities? All I ask is that you take a long hard look before you

come out in support of this project. Fortunately our State Representative Dan Gattis is on our side and realizes the detrimental effects that it will have and is working with us to try to stop this project through legislative action. If allowed to be built, it will be a permanent scar on the face of our area.

Gary Westbrook from Milano, General Manager of the Post Oak Savannah Groundwater Conservation District, is attempting to become a member of the Region G board as a Water District interest category representative. Hopefully he will be successful, but I suspect he will experience the same fate that I experienced. The groundwater issue is a problem for us as well. Rockdale, Milano and Gause are on wells and have already run into problems with receding water tables. The legislature has established rules limiting Post Oak Savannah and other Groundwater Districts ability to prevent companies from transporting water out of the area to meet the needs of the larger municipal areas.

My point in bringing all of this to your attention is that we in Cameron and Milam County must fight hard to protect our area. Understand that we are fighting from a weak position politically. But none-the-less I believe that its important that we fight, fight to protect our water rights, to protect the beauty of our countryside and to protect the rich farmland and pasturelands of our Little River bottom.

If in the end we lose the battle to a reservoir - I personally hope we dont, but if we do - then lets fight for some major concessions for our area to see that we are economically compensated for the sacrifices that we make. This could be in the form of an accompanying constant level lake which allows for private water front development or some other economic asset that will benefit our area in a major way.

Right now all we are getting is a stiff arm in the face.

*FAIR USE NOTICE*

*This document contains copyrighted material whose use has not been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. The Texas Living Waters Project, which is a nonprofit undertaking, is making this article available in our efforts to promote comprehensive water planning in Texas. We believe that this constitutes a "fair use" of the copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law. If you wish to use this copyrighted material for purposes of your own that go beyond "fair use", you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.*