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Group forms to oppose damming Lavaca River

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EDNA - Lindsey Lee Bradford's business is like headquarters for Leave Our Lavaca Alone, a new advocacy group formed by residents to voice opinions and educate.

The group formed to oppose the Lavaca Navidad River Authority plans to dam the Lavaca River.

"It's an organization the community can turn to ...," Bradford said. "It's for individuals that don't have that much knowledge of what's going on."

The group operates on donations and primarily uses e-mail, members' personal time and research to oppose what they believe would mean the end of life as they know it in Jackson County.

"It's not just a decision that they're taking our land they're taking people's lives," said Shelley Srp, Bradford's sister who also leads the group.

Bradford leafs through a small pile of petitions all of which have names and addresses of residents who support the group. She and volunteers have circulated the papers at more than 30 locations in town. Members have posted several signs through out the community and plans to beef up efforts before the next Lavaca-Navidad River Authority meeting.

"We hope that it shows that the community is not for Stage II of the dam," Srp said. "We're not for damming the river, and we hope that it comes across that it's not just us who are saying it. It shows that there are other people."

The group strongly opposes a feasibility study the river authority approved in January that will examine what kind of a reservoir - a dam-created reservoir or an off-site reservoir - would be economically and environmentally feasible. The project is known as the Palmetto Bend Reservoir - Stage II project and has created dissent among board members and residents as the authority grapples with finding a solution for increased demands for water.

"It is helpful," Patrick Brzozowski, general manager of the river authority, said about the group. "I think it's all in the approach. I know what their interest is, and I respect that interest. ... I think there's a difference of opinion on what the perceived outcome of this study is."

The goal is to find an option that will be profitable yet still benefit residents financially and environmentally while satisfying the water demands of river authority customers.

Board member David Muegge said the group misunderstands the authority's perspective.

"They're stuck on the fact that they think the board wants to dam the river," he said. "We're looking at two options, and they think we're looking more at damming the river more than the other. That's not true."

The study is proposed to cost about \$310,000 and take about three months to complete, but does not guarantee a dam will be built.

Still, members of Lavaca residents' group strongly believe completing the study will create a domino effect to damming the river.

"Our feeling with the study is if you get the study done then that's automatic - you might as well start digging the dirt," Bradford said.

But because nothing's official until the study is completed, some believe there is much room for misinformation.

"There's already misinformation," Brzowski said. "There's a lot of speculation. We've tried to answer the questions that we have facts on that we can answer."

Bradford had a friend draw a Google map of where a dam might be located and received phone calls from concerned residents.

"They can stir up some feelings that at this point doesn't need to be stirred up," Muegge said. "But I think it's good that they're getting involved. I think we all need to be involved before they start making judgments about what's going on."

Although group members have no set meeting time, they're hoping to continue meeting informally to educate community members on different options for developing water in the area.

Bradford hopes to present the signed petitions to the Lavaca-Navidad River Authority monthly meeting Wednesday.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the group contact Shelley Srp at 361-782-5949 or Lindsey Lee Bradford at 361-781-4334. Anyone who is interested can also e-mail the group at leaveourlavacaalone@yahoo.com or find the group on Facebook.

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENED

The construction of Palmetto Bend Reservoir-Stage II project is one of two options the river authority authorized to examine in a feasibility study in January.

The goal is to learn what kind of a reservoir - a dam-created reservoir or an off-site reservoir - would be economically and environmentally feasible, and still benefit the county and river authority customers.

The study is proposed to cost about \$310,000 and take about three months to complete. One proposal from the 2008 Texas Water Development Board Reservoir Site Protection Study positions the on-site reservoir just southeast of Edna, but no location is yet final.

Formosa Plastics indicated that by 2015 it will need an additional 10,000 acre-feet of water, said Patrick Brzozowski, the river authority's general manager. Formosa is the river authority's second-largest customer. Its need, combined with the push of a 2007 state Senate bill urging the river authority to develop water for the region, makes the situation more pressing.

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