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**Improbable coalition protests huge reservoir
Ranchers, loggers, conservationists join forces to fight
lake designed to supply N. Texas water by 2050**

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GRAND PRAIRIE - East Texas ranchers, loggers and conservationists descended on North Texas water planners Monday, demanding that one of the largest reservoir projects in Texas history be scrapped.

The proposed 62,000-acre, \$1.6 billion Marvin Nichols Reservoir would flood forests, drive Texans from family lands farmed for generations, harm the economy and destroy wildlife habitat, about 100 protesters told the Region C Water Planning Group.

"This is not worthless bottomland. This is a priceless heritage," said Dickie Dalby of Dalby Springs, a fifth-generation Texan who lives in a house his ancestors built in 1849.

Dalby's property would be flooded by the giant lake - roughly seven times the size of Eagle Mountain Lake - which is proposed for East Texas about 15 miles north of Mount Pleasant.

"I represent the East Texas timber industry and my concerns are economic," said Bill Ward, owner of Ward Timber Co., which employs about 250 people in Linden, about 45 miles southeast of the proposed lake site.

In addition to the land needed for the lake, a federal requirement to set aside wildlife habitat could mean that 163,000 acres more could be lost. The project could cost the region \$140 million annually because it could take 200,000 acres out of production, Ward said.

"The timber industry, along with the Sierra Club, the community and the National Wildlife Federation, will stand together to see this lake never gets built," he said.

Regional water planners say the Marvin Nichols Reservoir and its 130-mile pipeline are needed to ensure an adequate water supply for North Texas by 2050, by which date the population is expected to have doubled to 10 million. Eighty percent of the reservoir water would flow to the Metroplex.

"Unless we do something, we won't have the water," said Terry Stewart, Dallas Water Utilities director and chairman of the Region C Water Planning Group, which is responsible for 16 North Texas counties.

"I don't see any conservation effort, ever, that would eliminate the need for the lake."

Another member of the planning group, Fort Worth Water Department director Dale Fissler, called the public comments "good suggestions" but said they overlook the need to plan for "a worst-case scenario" drought.

"That's what gets you to having to build this reservoir," Fissler said.

Opponents say the reservoir could destroy 30,000 acres of hardwood bottomland forest, 15,000 acres of mixed post oak forest and habitat used by 22 endangered and threatened species.

Never have so many opponents turned out at one time. About 50 of them arrived in a bus draped with a "No Marvin Nichols Reservoir" banner. In the meeting, at the Trinity River Authority Central Wastewater Treatment Plant, they held fans inscribed with "No Nickels for Nichols."

Too often "water rustlers and water hustlers" have taken advantage of rural communities, they said in urging water planners to introduce more conservation measures before proceeding with plans to build the lake. Drought-resistant landscaping should be encouraged, and incentives to save water and disincentives to use water should be explored, they said.

"Marvin Nichols is a wasteful, unneeded project. North Texas has alternatives," said state Rep. Lon Burnam, D- Fort Worth.

The lake and pipeline are the biggest of a total of \$6.1 billion in water projects proposed for North and East Texas. North Texas has the greatest need for additional water of any area in the state, water officials say.

The water planning group would "make a concerted effort" to listen to the public and is "open to improving" its planning effort, Stewart said.

After the meeting, he said that none of the North Texas water agencies have committed to building the reservoir.

"Right now, it is a water plan," he said, but he noted that the Sulphur River Authority in East Texas has hired a consultant to study the feasibility of building the lake.

Max Shumake, a rancher and president of the Sulphur River Oversight Society, said members would return for the next water planning meeting in October. The society, which formed in November to oppose the lake, has 250 members, he said.

"Right now, I think our people look real good arm-in-arm with the Sierra Club," Shumake said.

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