

More research required for effects on Victoria's reserve

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A new study on how water-supply projects might affect the underground aquifer in the Victoria region doesn't shed any light on a question Victoria-area water watchers were hoping it would answer.

That is: How much underground water is safely available for the taking beneath Victoria, Refugio or other area counties for the Lower Guadalupe River Diversions project?

But that answer could be coming soon via another study.

The diversions project, expected to come on-line in 2010, will take underground water from the Gulf Coast Aquifer somewhere in the vicinity of Refugio, Victoria, Goliad and Calhoun counties, mix it with Guadalupe River water from near Tivoli, and pump it to San Antonio via pipeline.

Developers expect the \$640 million project to provide as much as 41,000 acre-feet of water to San Antonio in drought years, and about 14,000 acre-feet in average years.

For comparison, that 41,000 acre-feet is just a bit more water than is projected to be used in 2010 in all of Refugio, Gonzales, Goliad and DeWitt counties. Opponents of the diversions project warn that taking so much water could be dangerous to the health of the aquifer and could dry up existing wells.

So why isn't the diversions project included in the state's new underground water study for the Victoria region?

Robert Mace, head of Texas Water Development Board's groundwater availability modeling section, said the reason is that the regional water planners who drew up the diversions plan didn't supply adequate information about where they propose to build their water well fields.

Without knowing where the well fields will go, TWDB could not make any predictions about the impact of the planned water withdrawals on the water table in any particular area, Mace said.

Steve Raabe, a representative of the South Central Texas Regional Water Planning Group, which developed the diversions project, said the whereabouts of the project's well fields haven't yet been identified. But Raabe said the planners and the developers of the project - the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority, the San Antonio River Authority and the San Antonio Water System - are working on their own underground water study that will take a more detailed look at the diversions project than does the TWDB study.

"We're trying in our study to identify areas that would be favorable for groundwater development and to estimate more specifically what the effect of that pumping in those areas might be," said Raabe. "We're going into more detail."

He said when the water planners' study is finished at the end of the year it will provide the first solid estimates of water availability for the diversions project, as well as information on how much the water table might be drawn down by the planned withdrawals.