

## Texas side takes stand against dam

Marvin Nichols proponents, opponents address council

By [PRASHANSA SAI](#) Texarkana Gazette

Texarkana, Texas, City council members struck a compromise on Monday by adopting a resolution stating their adamant opposition, at the present time, to the proposed Marvin Nichols Reservoir and Dam.

However, the resolution also states the council supports Northeast Texas Region D Water Planning Group's efforts in considering an amendment to change the status of the reservoir from proposed to potential.

"I just want to go on the record and state that I don't want to do anything today that would express support for the Marvin Nichols reservoir," said Ward 5 council Member Van Alexander. "I've talked to people about it and based on what the studies show at this time, I am fully opposed to the reservoir."

Ward 3 council Member Christie Adams agreed, stating that the council's support of Region D's consideration of an amendment that calls for further studies on the reservoir would sound like an action taken in favor of the reservoir.

"Plus, I don't feel comfortable voting to support a resolution that I have never even seen before," she said of the resolution that members of the Northeast Texas Region D Water Planning Group will vote on Wednesday at a meeting in Mount Pleasant.

A vote on a resolution that would support Region D's consideration of an amendment ended in a stalemate with Adams and Alexander voting against it, and Ward 6 council Member Bradley Hardin and Ward 4 council Member Pete Snow voting for it.

Mayor James Bramlett intended to vote in order to break the stalemate but did not because the issue needed a 4-2 majority vote.

After some discussion, however, council members reached a compromise and unanimously decided on a resolution that stated the council was opposed to the Marvin Nichols reservoir at this given time but would support Region D's consideration of an amendment that would reclassify the lake.

Ward 1 council Member Derrick McGary and Ward 2 council Member Willie Ray were not present at Monday's special meeting.

Monday's meeting, which was called by Hardin, provided a forum for reservoir proponents and opposers to speak before the council so city officials could take a position on the issue and submit a position statement to Region D members before they make their decision on Wednesday.

Speaking on behalf of the Sulphur River Basin Authority was Administrator Mike Burke, who began his presentation by apologizing to the council for not having a more in-depth presentation for them.

"The Sulphur River Basin Authority wishes to express their appreciation to being heard on the status of the proposed Marvin Nichols Reservoir," said Burke. "Due to the short notice, however, we were not able to have our retained experts here to make a formal presentation concerning the ongoing studies of the feasibility of the proposed project."

Hardin requested the special meeting to discuss the proposed lake and dam at a Nov. 25 council meeting, succeeding the Texarkana Chamber of Commerce's Nov. 21 decision to withdraw its endorsement of the project.

In his presentation, Burke also explained the formation of the regional water planning groups, the relationship between Regions C and D, Region D's recent efforts to re-evaluate its position on the lake project and the ongoing economic feasibility studies that are being conducted on the lake.

"If at some point these economic feasibility studies come back and show that this project is not economically feasible for this region, then the Sulphur River Basin Authority has already gone on record saying that we will not support it," said Burke.

Jim Thompson, chief financial officer of Ward Timber Co., who spoke on behalf of the lake's opponents, disagreed.

"What the Sulphur River Basin Authority hasn't advertised is that they have already signed a contract with several Dallas entities stating that even if they don't support the project for whatever reason, they have no objection to those entities coming in and going forward with the project," said Thompson.

Thompson, who was accompanied by Bill Ward, chief executive officer of Ward Timber, informed the council of the effects the lake would have on the timber and logging industry.

"A study by the Texas Forestry Association estimates a loss of agricultural land with a minimum of 225,000 acres with a maximum of 986,000 depending on required mitigation and that's just impacting the timber and forestry industry ... the study doesn't even get into how it will affect the ranching industry," said Thompson.

Though the Marvin Nichols project has been in the State Water Plan for decades, as stated earlier by Burke, Thompson said the reason for such strong opposition in the recent year is because many of the people who will be affected the project are just now realizing the impacts.

"The reason these issues are coming up right now is because of the public outcry to know more," said Thompson of the acreage loss, mitigation acres and economic impact issues.

Other reasons Thompson said his loosely formed coalition of farmers, ranchers, loggers and environmentalists believe that there is no need for a lake in the area is because Dallas has not addressed conservation as seriously as it should.

Also, there are alternative sources of water that Dallas can draw water from, and the land taken out by the construction of the lake itself including mitigation would cripple the economy of Northeast Texas, he said.

After hearing both sides, council members had the opportunity to ask Burke and Thompson questions, but there was discussion as to whether the council should approve Resolution 296, which essentially supported the Region D Water Planning Group's consideration of an amendment that would reclassify Marvin Nichols or vote on a different resolution that state's the council's opposition to the lake. NETRWPG will meet at 2 p.m. Wednesday at the Texas Agricultural Extension Service building in Mount Pleasant, located at 1708 Industrial Blvd.