

Planning group lowers status of proposed reservoir

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The proposed \$1.7 billion Marvin Nichols Reservoir lost support in the area where it would be built Wednesday when regional water planners voted to downgrade the project's importance.

Meeting in Mount Pleasant, the Northeast Texas Water Planning Group voted unanimously to change the status of the planned reservoir on the Sulphur River from "recommended" or "proposed" to a "potential" water project.

"There's too much opposition to the lake and not enough studies have been done to validate the need for this type of reservoir," said Richard LeTourneau, 54, a Longview metal fabricator and planning group member. "We need to know more about the economic and environmental impacts of such a large project."

The vote will not directly affect the plan, which has been recommended by north-central water planners and is set by the Texas Water Development Board.

Those planners say the 62,000-acre reservoir and its 130-mile pipeline are needed to ensure an adequate water supply for the Metroplex, where the population is expected to double to 10 million by 2050.

Eighty percent of the water from the lake, one of the largest reservoir projects in Texas history, would flow to North Texas, which has the greatest need for additional water of any area in the state, water officials say.

But opposition to the lake from East Texas residents and businesses is steadily growing.

The opponents contend that the reservoir, part of an \$18 billion state water plan, would flood forests, drive Texans from family lands farmed and ranched for generations, harm the economy and destroy wildlife habitat.

Bill Ward, owner of a timber company that employs 250 people in Linden, called Wednesday's vote "a real big first step" to getting the reservoir stopped.

"Our goal is to get the lake pulled off the state water plan," Ward said. "It's bad economically for Northeast Texas and wrong to take people's land without a good reason."

But removing the proposed reservoir from the state water plan would be difficult and would require the approval of the state water development board, said Carla Daws, spokeswoman for the board.

The state agency is responsible for developing the state water plan, coordinating the efforts of 16 regional water planning groups and providing financing for projects.

Erin Rogers, Lone Star Sierra Club outreach coordinator, said: "The question will be whether state water officials subvert the democratic process and allow North Texas to force the reservoir on East Texas against its will.

"This monstrous lake could easily be avoided if North Central Texas can implement water conservation measures like those used in other areas in the state."