

pp. B1
+
B10

Dallas region's reservoir plans irk E. Texas

■ Residents say projects threaten their way of life

By **THOMAS KOROSEC**
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

The name Dallas has become a fighting word in some quarters of East Texas.

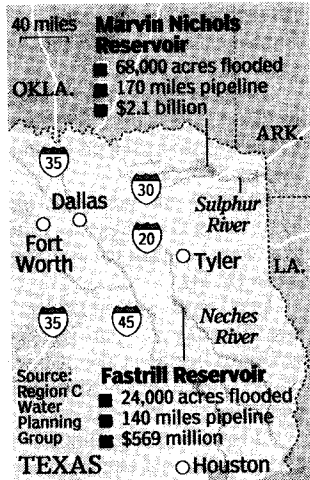
As the Dallas-Fort Worth region moves ahead on long-range plans to build two new reservoirs in East Texas, landowners, environmentalists and timber interests have united in opposition, pulling many local politicians along.

Miffed at the prospect of job losses in the timber industry and destruction of choice wildlife habitat, opponents have begun calling Dallas a spoiled and selfish bully that wants its swimming pools and green lawns, even in droughts, and has the political muscle to do as it pleases.

"We have about 400,000 people to their 5 million. When we go down to Austin, it's kind of embarrassing," said John Bradley, a timber grower from Jefferson and former vice chairman of the North East Texas Water Planning Group. "Last time we were down there, the state water board sounded like the Dallas water board."

His reference was to a 5-1 vote last month by the Texas Water Development Board in
Please see WATER, Page B10

PROPOSED RESERVOIRS IN DALLAS WATER PLAN



EDWIN LOUIE : CHRONICLE

WATER: Critics plead case to state panel on Tuesday

CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1

favor of a Dallas-Fort Worth area plan that calls for building the reservoirs as part of a 50-year plan to provide water for the region.

The plan calls for the 68,000-acre Marvin Nichols reservoir to be built on the Sulphur River near Mount Pleasant and the 24,000-acre Lake Fastrill to be built on the Neches River near Jacksonville.

The prospect of Fastrill flooding the U.S. Wildlife Service's proposed 25,000-acre Neches River National Wildlife Refuge as well as an antique railroad has sparked considerable opposition from loggers and conservation groups since it was proposed last year.

But opponents of the Marvin Nichols reservoir, which was first proposed in 2001, have had several more years to organize, and even the regional water planning group governing the area in which the reservoir would be built opposes the project.

On Tuesday, the North East Texas planning group gets its turn before the state panel, and its long-range plan recommends that Marvin Nichols not be built.

Whatever the outcome, it will be merely another step in what promises to be a decade-long fight.

"Sentiment is overwhelmingly against it," said Jim Thompson, chairman of North East Texas Water Planning Group and an executive with Ward Timber Ltd., a major timber producer in the Texarkana area. "Any benefit we might get in terms of water is outweighed by the harm to our economy."

In a recent letter to the state planning panel, Thompson said the Marvin Nichols reservoir clashed with state law requiring water plans to be "consistent with the long-term protection of the state's water, agricultural and natural resources."

Threat to timber

Dallas' proposal makes no mention of the reservoir's impact on the timber industry, even though it is a major agricultural crop in the area, he said.

He said plans for the reservoir also clash with a state law that allows transfer of water be-

tween river basins only if the user is employing the highest level of conservation.

If it gets approved, the Marvin Nichols reservoir is scheduled to go on line in 2030 and begin shipping water 115 miles west. By that time, the Dallas-Fort Worth area will be using 202 gallons of water per day per person, the highest usage of any region in the state and a few gallons less per day from its current rate.

"I don't know why I should lose my heritage so Dallas can have St. Augustine lawns," said Max Shumake, who along with other family members owns 797 acres of farmland in Red River County that would be flooded by the reservoir.

Shumake, a 57-year-old retired electrician who founded the Sulphur River Oversight Society, is often credited with turning local opinion against the project.

"We never dreamed it was going to take our farms and knock down the timber industry," he said.

A study by the Texas Forest Service, a state agency, estimated that Marvin Nichols would lead to the loss of 417 to 1,334 jobs in the area — most in the timber industry. The range depends on how much land beyond the reservoir is set aside to mitigate the flooding of the river and how strictly it is managed for wildlife.

Under federal law, sensitive environmental areas such as the bottomland hardwoods along the Sulphur River, considered prime habitat for songbirds and other animals, must be replaced with similar lands when a reservoir is built.

The industry's ally in this case is its frequent opponent, a constellation of environmental groups led by the Texas Committee on Natural Resources.

"It will not only flood highly valued land for wildlife and waterfowl, but you will alter downstream flows," said Janice Bezanson, the group's executive director.

She said downstream effects will be particularly troublesome below Fastrill, which would be completed in 2050 under the plan. Below it on the Neches are four wildlife preserves or wilderness areas, including the Big Thicket National Preserve.



AARON STREET PHOTOS : TEXARKANA GAZETTE

TREE-HUGGING: Max Shumake hugs a bottomland post oak to give scale to its size on his family's Red River County property. The Marvin Nichols reservoir would flood 797 acres of his family's farmland.

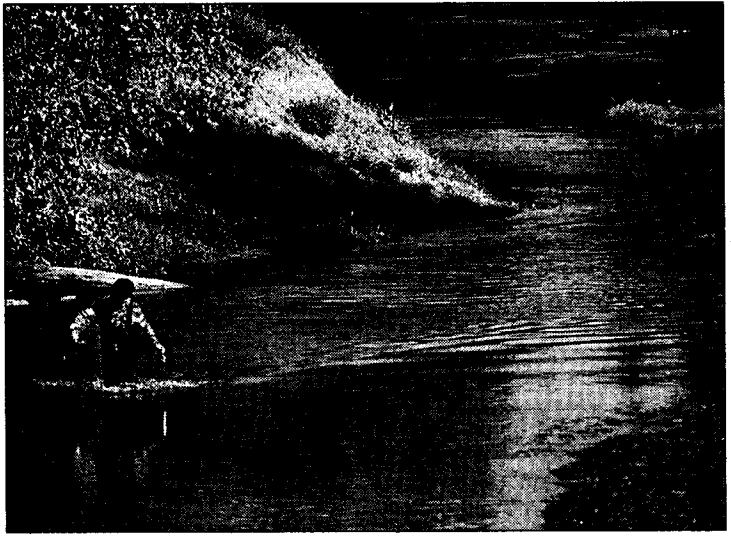
Bezanson predicted that both reservoirs will face lawsuits.

Effects of development

Jim Parks, chairman of the Region C Water Planning Group, the official name of the Dallas-Fort Worth water planning body, concedes the propos-

als are controversial. "Very little can be built in Texas that doesn't affect someone in a positive or negative way," he said.

Parks also is a former director of the North Texas Municipal Water District, which supplies the fast-developing suburbs north of Dallas. It is one of



PASTIME: Cole Ray Shankle, 12, wades through the Sulphur River. His uncle, Max Shumake, founded the Sulphur River Oversight Society.

three chief water wholesalers in the Dallas-Fort Worth region.

"There's no opposition here (in the cities) because people remember we had a drought of record in the 1950s," he said. "Dallas almost ran out of water. The city said to its staff, 'We can't let that happen again.'"

He said new reservoirs included in the region's long-range plans will account for only 18 percent of supplies. Far more will come from conservation and re-use and by drawing on existing reservoirs and water rights.

In 1950, he said, there were eight reservoirs in the state. Over the next 55 years, 29 more were built. "We plan to build only four more over the next 55 years, so it doesn't appear to me that we have gone overboard on reservoir construction."

Because viable reservoir sites have all been used in the Dallas-Fort Worth region, the only place to turn is East Texas, he said.

"Unless we start telling people where they can live, you have to move water around the state to meet the needs," Parks said. "This is the bottom line."

He said it is impossible to predict the projects' future. The Marvin Nichols and Fastrill reservoirs would cost \$2.1 billion and \$569 million respectively. "Until you get into the permitting process, where you get engineering details and concerns are addressed by other governmental agencies, you don't have

the answers," he said, referring to federal environmental impact reviews.

Parks said he is wary of assertions by critics that the reservoirs will not be needed.

"At the population trends we are seeing now, there's a possibility that by 2040 we will have 5.5 million more people here than we are planning for." His plan predicts that the 16-county north-central Texas region will more than double its population by 2060 — reaching 13 million.

Given the size and long time-lines for these major reservoirs, state water planners appear to be in no rush to rule them in or out.

The state board is expected to approve the North East group's plan, which opposes the Marvin Nichols reservoir, but leave the Dallas plan intact as well, said Thompson, the regional chairman. "We think there's a conflict between the plans, but they say there isn't."

Carla Daws, a spokeswoman for the state water development board, said under its rules there is a conflict between two regions only in cases where "two regions have identified the same supply."

Thompson said his group had wanted the issue to be resolved. "But it's one of those things that's going to be a long battle," he said. "We only have to stop it once, and down the line I think we will."

thomas.korosec@chron.com