

Opponents blast proposed N. Texas reservoirs

Group - asked not to consider them - OKs study for Lake Fastrill

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By JIM GETZ / The Dallas Morning News

GRAND PRAIRIE – Opponents of two reservoirs that don't yet exist confronted the group charged with planning North Texas' future water needs Tuesday.

Most of the attacks were directed at the proposed Lake Ralph Hall, which if built would be about 80 miles northeast of Dallas in Fannin County. Also drawing fire was Lake Fastrill, which would be 130 miles southeast of Dallas and which the Dallas City Council recently added to its long-range plan.

David Nabors, an East Texas resident opposed to new reservoirs, told the 20-member Region C Planning Group not to consider either of them. He criticized the planners for voting to study Fastrill when its consulting engineer could not pinpoint its possible site.

"I want to chastise each and every one of you for voting on a reservoir when you don't even know where it is," he said.

Turning to Lake Ralph Hall, Mr. Nabors insisted that only the Fannin County commissioners, the mayor of Ladonia and the Upper Trinity Regional Water District want the lake; average residents, he said, do not.

Responding to comments by Upper Trinity attorney David Brune that Region C must be visionary even if it ruffles feathers, Mr. Nabors said, "If you're going to ruffle a few feathers, ruffle the ones of these water hustlers here, not our grandchildren."

Mr. Brune said Lake Ralph Hall would be easily financed, improve the environment, serve the needs of rapidly growing Denton County and be built in a short time with small impact on Fannin County residents. A document Region C released Tuesday showed Lake Ralph Hall had a lower cost per gallon than many other reservoirs.

The group did not discuss Lake Ralph Hall during the meeting, but the topic came up during the public comment portion at the end.

"The taxpayers would like to know, what is the urgency?" said Laurie Long, a Flower Mound council member. "Who is benefiting if not the consumer?"

Ms. Long warned that residents' water rates would rise if the lake were built. She asked the planners to wait five years to continue to study the issue.

Region C members also heard support for the reservoir – from Corinth's mayor and other Denton County officials.

"It's time to keep our options open," Denton County Judge Mary Horn said.

Activist Beth Johnson, representing the Sierra Club and other environmentalists, opposed both lake ideas, but she reserved most of her fire for Fastrill.

The reservoir, she said, would affect plans for a federal wildlife refuge, the state's desire to reintroduce the black bear, efforts to get the Upper Neches protected as a scenic river, and a memorial for the space shuttle Columbia.

"We view this as an extremely bad idea and unneeded new reservoir, especially given the existing supplies we have pointed out to you," she said.

The planning group, however, granted Dallas' request to include Fastrill to be studied as a possibility. Lakes must be included in regional and state plans for water utilities to obtain needed permits.

Group member Bob Scott, who is also president of the Tarrant Coalition for Environmental Awareness, cast the lone "no" vote.

"I'm all for the state of Texas holding one river in high regard as a scenic river," he said. "When you inundate bottomland hardwood, you're losing part of the character of Texas."

Staff writer Kevin Krause contributed to this report.

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