



## NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE THREATENED BY UNNEEDED RESERVOIR

The Department of Interior has completed public meetings and will release an environmental assessment this week, prior to establishing **the Neches River Wildlife Refuge** on the lovely stretch of the Upper Neches River in Anderson and Cherokee Counties.

**Fastrill Reservoir**, which **would drown most** of the 25,000 acres of the Neches River Wildlife Refuge, **is not needed for water supply**. None of the 16 regional water planning groups established by the Texas Legislature has identified water from the Neches River as needed to meet identified future demands. **Recently**, the City of **Dallas listed it** in the City's Long-Range Water Supply Plan as a source of water supply for **2045**, but **none of the regional planning groups has adopted it** as a preferred future source.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has ranked the **25,000 acres** within the refuge boundary as **Priority 1 bottomlands**. Priority 1 lands are the best remaining bottomland hardwood forest habitat. Texas has already lost the vast majority of such habitat. The remainder provides crucial support for many kinds of wildlife, waterfowl, and songbirds.

**The Regional Planning Group for East Texas (Region I) does not recommend Fastrill Reservoir** as a strategy to meet any future water demand. Region C planners have identified **more than enough water available in existing reservoirs** to meet that area's demands.

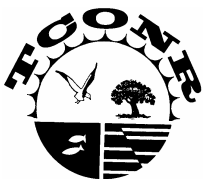
Additional reservoirs on the Neches (such as Fastrill) would **impact the very-water-dependent Big Thicket National Preserve, two national forest wilderness areas, a state wildlife management area**, and other significant downstream natural resources that depend on upstream flood flows to maintain habitat diversity.

**Texas Parks and Wildlife Department** has conducted studies and had begun holding public meetings on the **reintroduction of the endangered black bear in Texas**, with the focus on releasing bear into the habitat-rich Neches River corridor. Biologists say that the Upper Neches bottomlands are some of the least disturbed forested wetlands in the state.

**The Neches River Protection Initiative**, a coalition of citizen groups, launched an initiative several years ago to seek designation of the Neches as a **National Scenic River** from Lake Palestine to B.A. Steinhagen Reservoir and possibly farther downriver. The next step is to have Congress approve a study of the river. Should it be added to the Wild and Scenic Rivers System, it would be only the second in Texas -- after the Rio Grande. Fastrill Reservoir would be in direct conflict with preservation of this scenic river corridor.

The Fastrill reservoir site is in the **debris field of the wreckage of the space shuttle Columbia**. The Neches River National Wildlife Refuge site has been proposed as a **memorial to this national tragedy**. It would also impact the **Texas State Historical Railroad**.

**Opposition to Fastrill is already growing and will be intense** once Texans interested in protecting the Neches River and the Big Thicket National Preserve learn that Fastrill is being taken seriously.



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**Texas Committee on Natural Resources**

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***Neches River Photo by Mark Bush***