United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
P.O. Box 1306
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87103

March 14, 2005

Ms. Janice Bezanson
Executive Director
Texas Committee on Natural Resources
3532 Bee Caves Road, Suite 110
Austin, TX 78746

Dear Ms. Bezanson:

In response to your phone inquiry of this morning, I am providing you with my biological opinion of the relative merits of lands for mitigation. I base this on 25+ years of experience as a Wildlife Biologist and a specialist in bottomland hardwood forest ecosystems.

You inquired about the quality of mitigation lands when established around the perimeter of the reservoir. In my opinion, lands on the upper end of a reservoir are in no way comparable to an intact bottomland hardwood forest system, especially in the first years after inundation. Even in an older reservoir, lands used as mitigation on the upper end of reservoir projects are a very poor substitute for bottomland forests in the forested corridor along the river. The forests along the Neches River support a more diverse wildlife population in a vastly more productive habitat than would be found along the upper end of a reservoir. Moreover, mitigation sites along the upper end of reservoirs are overrepresented in refuges and wildlife management areas compared with intact bottomland hardwood forests that would be inundated by reservoirs.

I hope this answers your question regarding the relative biological attributes of these two very different habitat types. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need additional information.

Sincerely,

Jim Neal
Migratory Bird Management Specialist
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