

10/19/2012 2:39:00 PM

Water Worries

New North Texas lake may ease supply issues

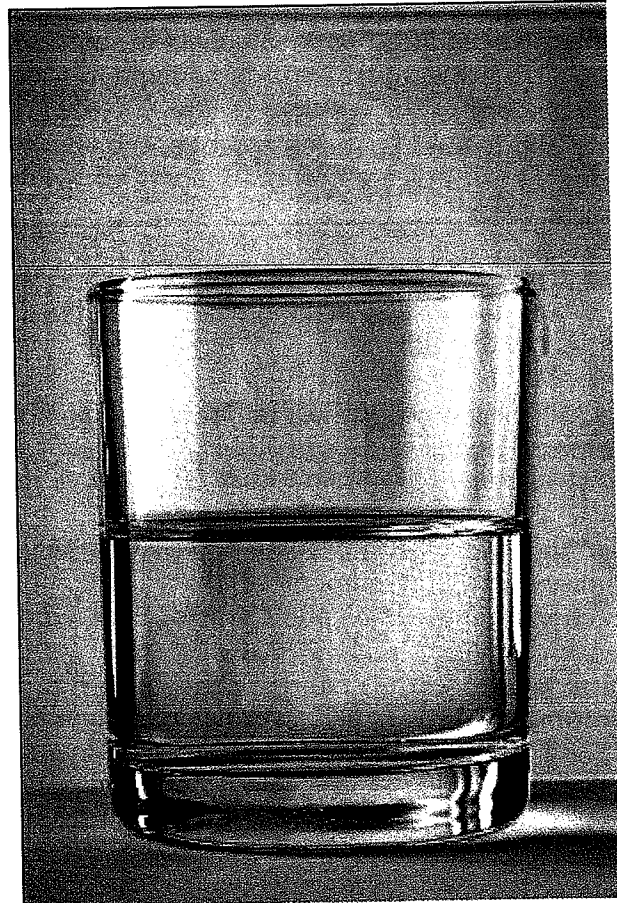
Martha Deller
Special to the Business Press

As Texas officials make plans to deal with state water issues in the next legislative session, North Texas officials are taking steps to add a new lake they hope will alleviate some of those pressures.

The area is beginning to see challenges, said Texas Transportation Commissioner Bill Meadows, who was previously on the Texas Water Development Board.

"At this point, the core cities of Dallas and Fort Worth have identified water sources to meet the anticipated needs up into the 2020s," he said.

However, Meadows said the suburban areas around the Metroplex have to confront some tough water issues. "You get out into the suburban areas – like North Texas [Municipal Water District's] service areas like Plano and Allen – they've got some challenges," he said. "So I think you're beginning to see, if you look at our region as a region and not just cities, then you begin to find challenges."



Officials with the Upper Trinity Regional Water District hope they have at least one solution. The UTRWD provides water to 25 governmental entities in Denton, Collin and Dallas counties.

The problem – and perhaps the solution – goes back to 1928. Fed up with flooding from North Sulphur River, Fannin County farmers decided to tame the river that was ruining their crops. Redirecting the meandering river into a 16-foot wide, 10-foot channel may have kept the river away from the cotton crops.

But it created a much worse problem, said Tom Taylor, executive director of the UTRWD.

The straightened river was twice as steep and ran twice as fast, Taylor said. Over 80 years, the river barreled downstream during heavy rains, wiping out everything in its path including trees and countless bridges, he said.

Fort Worth BusinessPress

should try more cost-effective options first.

Parr said the Upper Trinity district currently buys water from Dallas, which is supplied by Lake Lewisville and Lake Ray Roberts.

"We think we should buy additional water from Dallas and postpone the lake," he said. "We think that's the more cost-effective way for getting additional water for the next 20 to 30 years."

Parr said the town will present evidence at the January hearing that the water district has not addressed the cost-effectiveness issue as required by the TCEQ.

He said the town also will address concerns that the new lake will not stop the ongoing erosion.

"We think the erosion will continue and shorten the life of the lake," Parr said. "That's part of our protest they have not totally addressed."

Taylor said the district is already reusing water. Obtaining Oklahoma water has been litigated for years but is still an option, he said.

Taylor said he is fairly confident that the permit will be approved by TCEQ by next fall and a few months later by the EPA.

The district has not begun actively seeking property but has purchased about one-third of the needed 12,000 acres from property owners who approached the district, he said.

He believes the lake will be approved because it will actually solve existing environmental problems, not cause new ones.

No oil or gas wells, major pipelines or electric transmission lines lie within the project site; no cemeteries will be underwater and only a few residences will be affected, Taylor said.

In addition, the lake project will halt the 85-year-old erosion caused by the North Sulphur River, which has eaten away hundreds, probably thousands of acres of land, he said.

On Oct. 20, about 250 fossil hunters were expected to flock to Ladonia's tiny Pete Patterson Park on the banks of the North Sulphur River channel below the State Highway 34 Bridge, said, Doug Franklin, an environmentalist who works part time for the district.

Franklin, a former Ladonia mayor, said the one day observance of National Fossil Day swells the town's 600 resident population.

"Ladonia is where prehistory, heritage and natural resources come together," he said. "In a way this channel is heritage but it's not natural resources. It's manmade."

When the lake, named for Congressman Ralph Hall and the earthen dam - named for former mayor Leon Hurst - are completed, the existing channel and the bridges over it will be 20 feet under the lake, Franklin said.