

Phosphorus levels at area lake too high  
Lake O' the Pines plan aims to amend permits issued to wastewater treatment plants

By [RANDY ROSS](#)

Wednesday, April 30, 2008

HUGHES SPRINGS — Water regulatory agencies plan to take action to reduce the amount of phosphorus in Lake O' the Pines by more than half.

At a meeting at the Northeast Texas Municipal Water District office Tuesday night, Arthur Talley, engineer with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, said water samples taken from the lake in previous years indicated a varying level of oxygen in the water. An analysis of lake water showed extremely high levels of phosphorus.



Talley said the phosphorus essentially acts as fertilizer, helping the growth of plants. The plants remove the oxygen from the water.

"That situation is not ideal for aquatic wildlife," Talley said.

Talley introduced a plan to reduce the amount of phosphorus in the lake by 56 percent. He said the plan likely will be approved by state agencies in the summer.

The plan aims to amend permits issued to wastewater treatment plants within the lake's watershed. Wastewater treatment plants are a major source of the phosphorus, Talley said.

The various agencies with water treatment plants also might submit a group permit, which would allow them to work as a group to meet a reduction goal. Talley said the group permit could be much more cost effective than each agency attempting to reduce phosphorus output by the same level.

State agencies also will work with various farmers and ranchers near the lake to reduce the amount of phosphorus produced.

Talley said farmers could take advantage of programs already in existence to help meet reduction goals. Farmers also can cooperate to reduce their output as a group.

Walt Sears Jr., general manager of the Northeast Texas Municipal Water District, said local producers and cities have been cooperative and proactive in improving water quality in Lake O' the Pines.

"We're optimistic that water quality is going to improve over time," Sears said.

Talley said the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality would monitor the results of the plan after it is authorized, but it might take time for results to be seen.

For example, Pilgrim's Pride, one of the largest producers of phosphorus in the area, will have three years to be compliant with its amended wastewater permit.

Once results are observed, the plan might be adjusted to produce better results.

"There's a lot of uncertainty in what we are doing," Talley said.

"It's an ongoing, learning process."

\* \* \*

### **Lake O' the Pines phosphorus levels**

Total phosphorus: 174,900 kilograms a year

Total phosphorus caused by people: 156,700 kilograms a year

Phosphorus goal: 87,200 kilograms a year

Phosphorus by people goal: 69,000 kilograms a year

Vote for this story!

---