

East Texas plant could threaten Shreveport's water

■ City among communities concerned about Pilgrim's Pride.

By DON WALKER
The Times

A stream of Texas and Louisiana cities — including Shreveport — are taking a close look at plans by Pilgrim's Pride to build a chicken plant near the East Texas city of Pittsburg.

That's because the company plans to dump an estimated 2.5 million gallons of treated waste water a day into Big Cypress Creek, which feeds into Lake O' the Pines. That lake — soon to be the source of Longview's drinking water — is a tributary of Caddo Lake, a backup water source for Shreveport.

Company officials' assurances that potential water contaminants such as blood, chicken fat, and bacteria-laden chicken parts will not make it past the chicken giant's treatment facility have not eased fears.

For many, it's a matter of economic development versus ecological preservation.

From an economic standpoint, the company plans to employ 150

at the start, and add up to 1,500 jobs within the next eight years, with an annual payroll of \$30 million.

But the city of Longview, which plans to use Lake O' the Pines as its main water source within the next five years, is hoping to preserve its drinking water.

"We don't have any trouble with the plant, but we will aggressively protect what we feel is a valuable water source to the city," said mayor pro-tem Gaylon Butler. "We want to make sure Lake O' the Pines stays an excellent water source."

Downstream, Shreveport is concerned about contamination at Caddo Lake. The lake feeds into Twelve Mile Bayou, which is pumped by the city to maintain the level of Cross Lake, its main water source.

The concern isn't against Pilgrim's Pride, but about whether procedures and water quality mandates will be enforced to monitor the level of contaminants discharged into the tributaries.

"There will be perimeters the company will have to follow," said Wes Wyche, environmental affairs manager of the Department of Water and Sewerage. "We are interested in it, but there are

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Cliff Butler, vice chairman and chief financial officer of Pilgrim's Pride

parties closer to the problem that are basically fighting any battle that needs to be fought."

Longview has hired an attorney and is pursuing the matter legally.

"We want documented information," said attorney Jim Mathews of Austin, Texas. "We don't know what contaminants we're dealing with. They won't tell us what contaminants might be in the source of water coming to the plant, what contaminants will be added at the plant and what will be leaving the plant. All those factors could affect the water quality."

Pilgrim's Pride officials in Mount Pleasant, Texas, said the company expects to have the necessary permits to open its

Pittsburg plant within the next six months. A second public hearing is set for Sept. 10 to address public concerns. The first hearing was in March.

"We're buying the most advanced treatment equipment available for the job," said Cliff Butler, vice chairman and chief financial officer.

"We'll be required by the Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission (TNRCC) to treat the water properly and we'll be in trouble if we don't. We will do it and do it properly."

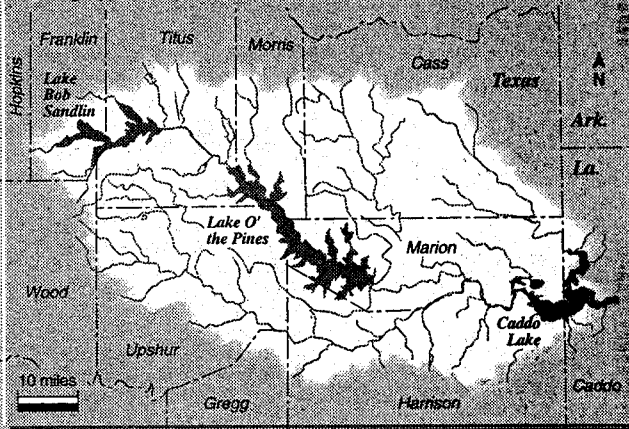
Butler said the treatment of potential contaminants and bacteria will be filtered into sludge from the wastewater and turned into dog food and fertilizer. Much of the waste is biodegradable, he said.

"The treatment involves a lot of aerating and filtering, some sand settling, screening and chemical processes. The company is addressing all the concerns," he said.

Environmentalists are concerned about the amount of chicken fecal matter that may get into the water system. Chicken feces is high in phosphorous, which fertilizes plants, algae and

Caddo Lake watershed

Caddo Lake drains a large part of the East Texas landscape that surrounds it. Water from Lake Bob Sandlin and Lake O' the Pines eventually makes its way into Caddo Lake, which is why environmentalists are concerned about a proposed poultry processing plant pumping treated waste water into Big Cypress Creek above Lake O' the Pines.



Source: Times research

The Times/JANET LACORE

duckweed. That could lead to taste and odor problems during hot summer months, said Dr. Robert Kalinsky, professor of Biological Sciences at LSUS.

The TNRCC has reportedly received hundreds of letters protesting Pilgrim's application for a discharge permit. Public comments and testimony will be

heard over the next several months before the state Office of Administrative Hearings considers the permit. An administrative law judge will then make a recommendation, but the matter will ultimately be decided by the three TNRCC members.

The group has already issued a preliminary permit.