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## Region D Water plan still critical of Marvin Nichols reservoir



By Glenn Evans  
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MOUNT PLEASANT – References to a conflict over a lake the Dallas region wants to build in Northeast Texas remain absent in this area's water map for the coming five years. But the preliminary document OK'd Wednesday sure reads like there is a conflict.

"We made our point on Marvin Nichols (Reservoir), and it's in our (Initially Prepared Plan)," Region D Water Planning Group Chairwoman Linda Price said of a draft for the 19-county region's plan through 2021. "We deleted our reference to a conflict, but we did not take our objections on Marvin Nichols out of the Initially Prepared Plan."

The Initially Prepared Plan, or IPP, is the fourth in a string of five-year updates that each of 16 water planning regions in Texas has sent to Austin every half-decade since 2001. The Texas Water Development Board compiles those into a statewide water roadmap that looks 50 years ahead.

The water board in Austin earlier this year ordered the Northeast Texas Region D planners to remove direct references to the long-running conflict between them and Dallas-based Region C over the planned Marvin Nichols Reservoir.

The 16 counties surrounding Dallas, which comprise Region C, want to build the 67,000-acre reservoir on the Sulphur River to handle a population expected to balloon during the next half century.

Last month, Region D complied with a state water board mandate to remove references to the inter-regional conflict.

That order from Austin came as the plan for Round 3 of the master plan, which covers 2011 through 2015, expires.

"Everything's timing," planning group member Richard LeTourneau of Longview said. "We are opposed to it, and we said so. What we are following is the instructions of the Texas Water Development Board to delete a reference to conflict."

So, while the draft of the plan for 2016-21 obeys the state directive, like the plan for 2011-16 has since last month, it still spells out the Northeast Texas planners' opposition to the lake.

"Region D said (the lake) ... does not protect agriculture and natural resources," Region D Administrator Walt Sears said. "We deleted the conclusion that there is a conflict. The IPP for Round 4 continues to include language as to the adverse effects of the lake."

The Northeast Texas group, spurred largely by members in Cass and other Sulphur River Basin counties, says the lake could devastate the timber and paper industry that steers their economic ship in that corner of the state.

LeTourneau said the Dallas region will continue to fight to build Marvin Nichols.

"Oh, there are many things standing between Region C and building Marvin Nichols," he said. "The permitting process is years and years and years, and study upon study upon study. So, there's no clear sailing."

#### Longview highlight

The five-year draft, which is due in Austin by May 1, required several votes on different elements. One of them highlighted Longview's protective nature of a 50-year water contract it has with Lake O' the Pines.

The panel voted 15-4 on one motion to preserve language in the plan describing the planning group's support for a 10-year project to restore the historic flow of water in the Cypress Creek Basin.

Biologists, hydrologists, other researchers and environmentalists in 2004 began looking at how to mimic water patterns before Lake O' the Pines was built.

The resulting Cypress Watershed Study has required voluntary releases of water from the Lake O' the Pines dam.

Dissenters on Wednesday's vote were wary that the wording of the panel's support could tempt the state to flex a regulatory arm and make those water releases mandatory.

That concern prompted Longview Assistant City Manager Keith Bonds to vote against the show of support.

"It was just precautionary, that these voluntary flows would not become required or mandatory from (the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality)," Bonds said. "In the case of severe drought, we need this water at the intake."

Sears later noted that Longview's intake structure is at the deep end of the lake. Sears is manager of the Northeast Texas Municipal Water District that controls water rights at Lake O' the Pines and holds the contract with Longview.

"It's not foreseeable the city of Longview intake structure would be impacted" by the water releases, Sears said.

Another dissenter to the language, Titus County water systems operator Greg Carter, noted that Lake O' the Pines dipped to its second-lowest point in May 2012 when "it quit raining."

"These environmental flow releases, when they become permanent, they have the ability to impact existing contracts and water rights," he said. "It has a detrimental impact on my operations."

A major goal of the water movement project was helping Caddo Lake return to ancient ebbs and flows that made the state's largest natural lake environmentally unique.

Early success of the Cypress Watershed Study has been hinted at reintroduction of the paddlefish, a prehistoric filter feeder that continues to swim in its one-time home.

Fifty of the 350-million-year-old species were released into the Jefferson watershed in May, followed by 2,000 in September.