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Lake Ralph Hall Hearing Ends

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The case hearing for the 30-million-gallons-per-day (mgd) Lake Ralph Hall concluded Jan. 25 after nine days of testimony presented before two administrative law judges at the State Office of Administrative Hearings in Austin.

Years ago, the Upper Trinity Regional Water District submitted a water rights application for Lake Ralph Hall, which is set to be located near Ladonia in Fannin County.

Flower Mound who is UTRWD's largest customer, has opposed the lake for nearly a decade and they aren't the only ones.

Two other entities oppose the reservoir – The National Wildlife Federation and The Texas Conservation Alliance. They too have both voiced concern about cost and feel the initial permit application lacked details for mitigation and remediation.

Flower Mound Mayor Tom Hayden and officials vie for less expensive ways to address the region's water needs that haven't been explored, including purchasing more water from Dallas Water Utilities. Flower Mound representatives expect the lake to cost \$460 million. The UTRWD projects less, closer to \$275 million.

Hayden has said Flower Mound residents' water rates will increase because of the added debt taken on for the lake project. Tom Taylor, UTRWD president, has said the town over projected water need in 1999 when it purchased an extra 10 gallons per day of water, impacting rates.

The National Wildlife Federation brought in Chris Brown to testify on what he felt was a lack of information supplied in the initial permit application for water conservation by the clients of the Upper Trinity. Mr. Brown had served on a Texas Water Board commission many years ago and stated the district should strive for 140 gallons a day for each person served by a water district. Upper Trinity currently supplies 175 gallons a day to each person it serves. Brown suggested a written policy in the permit application encouraging conservation. Cross examination revealed current legislative measures that are in play that ask the state water board to come up with ways to measure and evaluate water conservation.

During the next few weeks, a brief summation of the hearing will be prepared and given to each side. They will each have a chance for a rebuttal.

Later this spring, the administrative law judges are expected to make a ruling, and the side ruled against will have opportunity to present a brief arguing the ruling.

Sometime in the late summer or early fall, each side makes their presentation to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) that makes the final ruling. TCEQ is not obligated to go along with the judges' ruling.