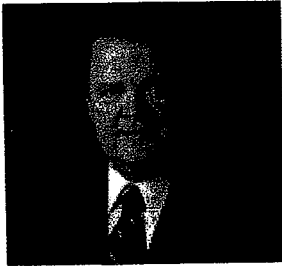


Proposed Lake Ralph Hall Could Ease Multiple Problems

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Reporting Bud Gillett

LADONIA (CBSDFW.COM) – Supporters of the new Lake Ralph Hall feel they're on schedule to win state and federal approval for the proposed reservoir.

The Southeast Fannin County project is expected to provide water for 200,000 people, mostly in Denton County where the population is exploding. But supporters say it would also solve a decades-old soil erosion problem with the North Sulphur River.

Usually a tepid stream, the river's water rages during storms. "It's ferocious," says lifelong resident and former Ladonia Mayor Dough Franklin. "It not only goes forward but it goes in a screw action, round and so it eats into the banks and then the banks cave in."

But the problem is man-made. In the 1920s a channel was built along the river to keep nearby farmland from flooding. It was 10-foot deep and 16-foot wide. It worked, and the farmland doesn't flood anymore. But erosion has widened the channel to twice the width of the Panama Canal, according to Franklin, and it goes on for forty miles. "About 30-million tons of topsoil is going down to, well, eventually the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico," he says.

But supporters of the lake, named after long-time Congressman Ralph Hall, claim the channel will become the backbone of the new reservoir. "This giant channel will become a storage vessel for our water supply," says Thomas Taylor, Executive Director of the Upper Trinity River Water District, the agency pushing for the project. "And we'll turn what is an unmitigated disaster into a very high quality asset and it'll help restore the environment and add habitat."

Taylor and others claim there are no environmental barriers, no cemeteries or sacred Indian grounds to move, no oil wells or power lines, only 15-homes displaced. While it'll be the size of Lake Grapevine, Taylor believes it'll be more efficient. "There's extra rainfall the further east you go; this lake will produce about 20% more than Lake Grapevine does, even though they're the same size lakes."

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Ladonia is the nearest community, situated on the proposed lake's south side. Its mayor says there are 612 residents. "Lakes will attract economic development," claims Ladonia Mayor Jan Cooper, who believes lakefront homeowners will be among the first wave of new commerce attracted to the lake. "The businesses that will be connected to the lake like anything to do with fishing; bait shops and all of that; we know it will be here," she claims. But any payoff is still a ways off.

If all goes well, the lake should be ready in about 15 years.