

Lake Ralph Hall Land Office opens

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By Allen Rich
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Ladonia, Texas -- A plan that grew out of a grassroots town hall meeting 24 years ago took one step closer to becoming a reality with a ribbon cutting Friday, March 6, 2015 to formally open the Lake Ralph Hall Land Office.

The idea of a lake first surfaced in 1991 at a town hall meeting in Ladonia; residents were discussing possible ways to boost school enrollment, attract businesses and enlarge the tax base.

For 11 years, Ladonia's Lake Search Team of Mayor Leon Hurse, Chamber of Commerce President Margaret Fisk and Economic Development Coordinator Bob Bledsoe met on the first Saturday of each month to discuss the project.

The permit to develop this new water supply reservoir was filed in September 2003.

On September 24, 2013, Lake Ralph Hall became the first major new water supply reservoir to be approved in almost 30 years by Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

At the ribbon cutting for the Lake Ralph Hall Land Office on March 6, 2015, Thomas E. Taylor, Executive Director of Upper Trinity Regional Water District, said he expects construction to begin 2019-2020. The reservoir would likely be filled and in service by the mid 2020s, although variables such as rainfall and demand could alter the completion date by a couple of years.

"If you build it during a drought, it could take several years to be ready for service," explained Taylor.



(L-R) Debbie Frey, President of Ladonia Chamber of Commerce; Ladonia Mayor Chris Burch; Supt Harvey Milton, Fannindel ISD; Fannin County judge Spanky Carter; Lance VanZant, Vice President, Upper Trinity Regional Water District. *photo by Allen Rich*

Lake Ralph Hall will have a surface area of 7,605 acres, which would be approximately the size of Grapevine Lake, although greater rainfall and runoff in the Sulphur River Basin would indicate that Lake Ralph Hall should yield about 20% more water. Upper Trinity Regional Water District will make water available to the Sulphur River Basin in Fannin County and will supply water to its wholesale customers in the Trinity River Basin, which is primarily in the Denton County area.

The proposed reservoir will be located in southeast Fannin County, north of the City of Ladonia, along the North Sulphur River.

"We are hopeful this will bring economic development for Fannin County," Fannin County Judge Spanky Carter said as he helped cut the ribbon March 6 at Lake Ralph Hall Land Office.



The reservoir is part of long-range plans to meet the water needs of the burgeoning population in North Texas, while also resolving an erosion problem of epic proportions. In order to mitigate flood damage along North Sulphur River, in 1928-29 a 16-foot wide, 10-foot deep channel was dug to parallel the river. That channel is now more than 300-foot wide and 60 feet deep, 10 times its original size, and growing.



Erosion has transformed a relatively miniscule 16-foot wide, 10-foot deep channel that was excavated in 1928-29 into a 300-foot wide channel that continues to erode. *photo by Allen Rich*

Once Lake Ralph Hall is operational, one section of the original North Sulphur River will spring back to life for the first time in 85 years. Plans call for a controlled release of water in a three-mile section of the river below Leon Hurse Dam, allowing the original native flora and fauna to flourish once again.

There are only two lakes in Texas currently in the permit process, Lake Ralph Hall and Lower Bois d'Arc Creek Reservoir. Both lakes are in Fannin County.