

Neches River needs protection in coming year

By The Enterprise

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The coming year could be a crucial one in the long history of the Neches River. The main threat is an effort by Dallas to construct a reservoir on the upper reaches of the river that could seriously disrupt its flow all the way to Southeast Texas.

That city and the Texas Water Development Board want to build the Fastrill Reservoir to meet the Dallas area's water needs in coming decades. Yet that area has some of the state's few remaining large tracts of undisturbed hardwood forests.

As such, it is teeming with wildlife such as deer, squirrels, egret, otter, turkeys, wood ducks, etc. That's why the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wants to establish a 25,000-acre national wildlife refuge in Anderson and Cherokee counties.

Dallas and the Water Development Board have filed a lawsuit against the creation of the refuge in federal court. In fact, now Dallas is seeking an even bigger site for the reservoir.

Organizations like the Texas Conservation Alliance and the Friends of the Neches River have noted that Dallas could meet its future water needs from lakes like Lake Texoma or Wright Patman Reservoir.

Dallas also needs to put greater emphasis on conservation. The State Water Plan estimates that Dallas residents in 2003 used an average of 238 gallons per person per day. The state average is 185 gallons and the national average is 150 gallons.

Except in rare cases, state and federal officials should not dam up any more free-flowing rivers. (And there aren't a lot left.)

The Neches is one of the great natural resources of East Texas and the state. It must not be jeopardized in 2008, or ever.