

# The Dallas Morning News

## Alternative water sources weighed for Dallas County

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There's nothing like July heat to remind people just how badly North Texas needs water.

But Dallas' long-term water strategy has been getting a second look from city officials after a federal judge put a major hitch in a plan to build a huge reservoir in East Texas.

The proposed Lake Fastrill reservoir on the Neches River isn't entirely dead as a result of the ruling. But, the proposal's future is in serious question, prompting Dallas water planners to turn to a list of alternative plans that were drawn up in 2005 with the Fastrill idea.

"We haven't given up on Fastrill. Having said that, we've always subscribed to the philosophy that we're not going to put all our eggs in one basket," said Dallas Assistant City Manager Ramon Miguez.

Dallas Water Utilities, which supplies water to Dallas and 22 suburbs, has identified at least 10 alternative water sources the city could seek to tap in coming years and decades.

Among them are such existing reservoirs as Lake Texoma at the Oklahoma border and Lake O' the Pines in East Texas.

The city would also consider using Mesa groundwater from the Panhandle or purchasing water from Oklahoma.

For a variety of reasons, but primarily cost, those options are considered less desirable than the Fastrill reservoir.

Many alternative sources sit at lower elevations than Dallas or would require pumping from greater distances, Mr. Miguez said.

And there are some problems specific to each proposal. Lake Texoma water, for instance, would require desalinization.

"That's why Fastrill was so enticing," Mr. Miguez said.

The water could be pumped from a relatively close distance and at a minimal cost.

Environmentalists have long questioned whether Fastrill was the cheapest way to provide for future water needs. And they rejected any notion that it was the most environmentally sensitive.

"There are so many reservoirs that have been built that are sitting around idle. We don't need any new reservoirs, at least not in the next 50 or 60 years," said **Janice Bezanson**, executive director of the **Texas Conservation Alliance**.

City officials have secured the water Dallas will need for at least 30 years by preparing to connect the city's pipeline to Lake Fork in December and to Lake Palestine in 2015, Mr. Miguez said.

The Fastrill reservoir wasn't scheduled for completion until 2060. And then it was expected to provide only about 80 million gallons of water per day to Dallas Water Utilities, an amount that would serve just a small percentage of the area's need.

Mr. Miguez said that losing Fastrill is far from a critical blow to future water plans, calling it "a bump in the road."

But city and regional water planners have pushed for construction of new reservoirs because of a projected population boom across Texas and the uncertainty of the amount of water that will be needed in the distant future.

"The notion that there will be no more lakes built in the state of Texas is not realistic," Mr. Miguez said.

City and state officials have not decided whether to appeal the ruling by U.S. District Judge Jorge Solis that has put construction of the Fastrill reservoir in serious doubt.

Judge Solis on Tuesday ruled against major portions of a lawsuit the city had filed against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Fish and Wildlife intends to build a 25,000-acre nature preserve in Cherokee and Anderson counties. The city intended to use much of the same land for the reservoir, prompting the suit.

But despite their loss on most claims, city attorneys are holding out hope.

For now, Judge Solis has agreed to require Fish and Wildlife to wait at least until Thursday on accepting land donations for its refuge. Several donors stand ready to hand over acreage for the refuge, something city officials know will complicate attempts to go forward with legal challenges.

On Thursday or shortly thereafter, Judge Solis is expected to rule on whether to grant a temporary restraining order that would prevent Fish and Wildlife from accepting land donations until the lawsuit with the city is finally adjudicated.

For city and state water planners, the conflict with the federal government has been frustrating because many believed the reservoir could co-exist with a nature preserve. Environmentalists and Fish and Wildlife officials strongly disagreed.

One thing that water planners and environmentalists do agree on, however, is that Dallas must enhance its conservation and reuse of water even as it seeks new sources.

The city has several initiatives under way, including the recovery of effluent and programs that encourage installation of more efficient toilets, faucets and showerheads.

But more will have to be done to ensure cheap and plentiful water into the future, officials say.

"Conservation and reuse are an important part of our long-term water-supply strategy," Mr. Miguez said.