



Neches River among most endangered **(<http://jacksonvilleprogress.com/local/x154940754/Neches-River-among-most-endangered>)**

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By Jim Goodson

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Dallas' plans to build a reservoir on the Neches River make the historic East Texas waterway one of the country's 10 most endangered rivers, according to American Rivers, a national conservation group.

Last summer the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service established a National Wildlife Refuge along the upper reaches of the Neches, home to some of the largest and least disturbed tracts of bottomland hardwood forests left in Texas .

The City of Dallas and the Texas Water Development Board, however, are suing the Fish and Wildlife Service to try and overturn the refuge designation so they can build Fastrill Reservoir.

"Everyone falls in love with the beauty of the Neches , whether they canoe it, hunt in its bottomlands, or just drive across its bridges," said Gina Donovan, communications director for the Texas Conservation Alliance (formerly Texas Committee on Natural Resources – TCONR).

"Fastrill Reservoir and two other dams proposed for the Neches would drown the river's valuable bottomland forests, inundate the Neches River Wildlife Refuge, and harm the Texas State Railroad, the Big Thicket National Preserve, Martin Dies, Jr. State Park, and several other public recreation areas."

Jacksonville-based State Rep. Chuck Hobson is among the East Texans attempting to block Dallas' plans.

"I believe that our land is our legacy and we should protect it at all costs," Hobson, whose district contains roughly half the Neches River Refuge land that would be flooded by Fastrill, said. "My constituents are excited about the Refuge and the value it brings to East Texas."

On Monday, the National Wildlife Federation released a report showing that water conservation could provide more water than the Fastrill reservoir. The report, available online at www.texaswatermatters.org, states that additional water conservation, beyond existing proposals, could provide 225,000 acre-feet of water for Dallas Water Utilities annually. The reservoir could provide Dallas with up to only half that amount of water.

"The Neches is a real treasure," said Myron Hess, manager of Texas Water Programs for the National Wildlife Federation. "The damming of this free-flowing river and the flooding of the bottomlands along its

banks would be a loss for all Texans. And it would be utterly unnecessary, since the Dallas area could conserve far more water than the reservoir would provide.”

In addition to Fastrill, two other reservoirs are proposed for the Neches , which together would inundate more than 135,000 acres.

“The Neches has been a vital part of our history, nurturing Caddo Indians and early settlers, transporting timber to markets, providing critical habitat for wildlife, and fueling today’s nature tourism industry,” Donovan continued.

“In addition to conservation, there is more than enough unused water sitting in existing reservoirs to meet the projected future water demands of the DFW area and all of north and east Texas . Instead of threatening to inundate the upper Neches and the wildlife refuge, the City of Dallas should be delighted to have such a wonderful recreational resource within weekend driving distance.”

American Rivers releases its America ’s Most Endangered Rivers report annually available at http://www.americanrivers.org/site/PageServer?pagename=AMR_MER2007_pressroom&JServSessionIdr006;=ppxne9as11.app14a

The report highlights the rivers facing the most uncertain futures. It presents alternatives to proposals that would damage rivers and describes opportunities for the public to take action on behalf of each listed river.

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