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Neches River's future remains muddy

2007-04-18 / Front Page

American Rivers ranks Neches 6th most endangered river
BY LELAND ACKER STAFF WRITER

The plight of the Neches River has gained national attention as the American Rivers organization has designated it the sixth most endangered river in the United States in 2007. The organization selected the Neches River due to its importance to the region, the magnitude of the threat to the river and the likelihood of a decision impacting the river within the next 12 months. Rebecca Wodder, president of American Rivers, said the Neches River easily fits all three criteria.

"The Neches River is a tremendously valuable river. It supports wildlife and the economy of the local area," she said. "The threat is also great, with a number of dams being proposed. Those dams would change the entire character of the river, flooding up to 40 miles of it."

Ms. Wodder also noted the immediacy of the threat, with a possible decision to designate the Fastrill Reservoir site as a unique reservoir site by the state legislature within the next month.

American Rivers is a national organization founded in 1973 to protect and preserve the rivers of the U.S., Ms. Wodder said.

"We work with the decision makers, which is why our headquarters ate in Washington, D.C.," she said. "We are also finding ourselves working more with state legislatures."

American Rivers contacted more than 2,500 local river groups to take nominations for the most endangered rivers. The Neches River was nominated by Gina Donovan of the Texas Committee on Natural Resources.

"My reaction to the Neches River being placed on the list is one of elation, but also one of sadness," Ms. Donovan said. "I am elated because a national organization, such as American Rivers, sees how imperiled this awesome river is in East Texas. I am saddened because we are on the list. We have such a tremendous asset. The state should be protecting this last free-flowing river in Texas."

Ms. Donovan said she wants Texans to realize what natural beauty they have in their great state. She said, according to the Texas Department of Parks and Wildlife, the Neches River and seven miles of the Devil's River in west Texas closely resemble what the early settlers saw when they traveled through Texas.

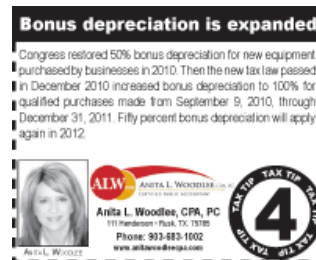
"That is phenomenal to me," Ms. Donovan said, "that the Neches River is what our forefathers saw when they came to Texas. Not to protect that, to me, is a sin."

"The point to this report is to put a spotlight on these rivers," Ms. Wodder said. "We would encourage people to be better informed. They can do so by visiting our Web site, www.AmericanRivers.org. There, they can understand what is up with this river, then get in touch with their representatives to encourage them not to go forward with the legislation for the unique reservoir legislation."

Ms. Wodder said that the Texas Water Development Board showed that the water from the

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Fastrill Reservoir would not be needed for 50 years. She described the city of Dallas as being the worst water waster of the big cities in Texas.

"According to our data, which is from 2001, the average Dallas resident used 250 gallons of water per day. By comparison, the average Houston resident used 160 gallons of water per day," Ms. Wodder said.

"There are handy ways to conserve water and they are becoming easier and better with every passing day," she said. "There is room in the existing water supply and treating water as a valuable resource means a continued flowing Neches River."

Ms. Wodder said healthy rivers are the most valuable resource a community can have. She said healthy, flowing rivers contribute to the health, safety, recreation and economy of a local community, citing the Texas State Railroad and Neches River Hunting Clubs. The report, which names the Neches River as the sixth most endangered river in America, also points out that if the Fastrill Reservoir were built, the Texas State Railroad and two state parks would be forced to close.

"We want people to see rivers are a valuable resource and to throw them away is short sighted," Ms. Wodder said.



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