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Simpson: It's not just about water

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By David Simpson

East Texas is blessed with a mild climate, fertile land and abundant natural resources. As a result East Texans grow timber for paper and lumber; raise poultry, cattle and other livestock for food; and extract oil, gas, and ore for chemicals, fuel, and power generation. The fruit of all these industries and others they willingly share with the rest of our state, the nation and the world in the marketplace.

East Texas also normally has an abundance of water that is integral to these industries. However, powers are at work other than fair market value to take the water (along with the private property used to collect it) for another region without our region's consent, control, or benefit.

We usually call that stealing except when the government does it for the "public good." In this case, what may be "public good" for North Central Texas may well prove to cripple Northeast Texas if the executive administrator of the Texas Water Development Board has his way.

Instead of facilitating a reasonable compromise on methods of conserving and distributing our region's water without damaging our socioeconomic, agricultural, and environmental conditions, the executive administrator has recommended to the board to require the plans of the Northeast Texas planning group (Region D) to omit its current and even any future objections to the plans of the Dallas-Fort Worth area planning group (Region C) to build the Marvin Nichols Reservoir in Northeast Texas.

I believe East Texans are willing to make sacrifices to supply water to the Dallas-Fort Worth area, but they do not want another regional planning group or the state dictating how to do it. Furthermore, East Texans want to protect their environment, their economic development, their jobs, their industries and their farms — as state statute requires in planning for future water needs.

What is needed is not just a plan without regional conflict, but a feasible and mutually beneficial plan that respects the rights and future development of each region.

Even the executive administrator has admitted that relying on the Marvin Nichols reservoir is not feasible because it is highly unlikely it can be permitted and built in time to meet the projected needs of DFW Region C. Why, then, has he proposed to eradicate the conflict on paper if it is impractical? Why would he do so prior even to public comment? Besides throwing out local control of planning, his injudicious and unequitable proposal may well cause future investment and development in major industries in Northeast Texas to begin to dry up.

Why not require DFW Region D to incorporate other viable alternatives to supply the water that mutually benefit each region? Impounding more water in Lake Wright Patman, purchasing more water from the existing Toledo Bend Reservoir, and neighboring states are all

reasonable alternatives brought to the table by NET Region D.

The struggle between DFW Region C and NET Region D planning groups makes the contests with the federal Bureau of Land Management look like skirmishes. Marvin Nichols is not just about supplying water; it's about a massive land grab where East Texans lose control of potentially an area the size of Dallas or Harrison County — 900 plus square miles.

According to the Texas Forest Service, Marvin Nichols involves not only converting approximately 70,000 acres of East Texas prime hardwood forest land to a reservoir but also the taking of another 188,000 to 750,000 acres (or more, as determined by federal agencies) from private landowners and production in various industries and setting it aside forever to satisfy federal environmental mitigation requirements.

The three members of the Water Development Board need the wisdom of Solomon to discern who is grabbing what is not theirs and who is willing to give up much of what is theirs to preserve life and help their fellow Texans. The baby in this case is not just water, but the land and livelihoods of thousands of East Texans.

— Rep. David Simpson, a Longview Republican, represents Gregg and Upshur counties (District 7) in the Texas House.

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This is an abuse of state power -- purely and simply. The state is trying to usurp local control. Isn't this what they criticize the feds for doing?

This is why voters are, increasingly disassociating from the parties and organizing locally.

I hope your readers use the links on the left hand top corner of this page to send in their complaints...while not holding your breath.

Thanks for covering this important issue and thank you, Rep. Simpson, for all you do.

Linda Curtis, League of Independent Voters of Texas. Join us y'all!

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Excellent piece, @David Simpson!

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