

Letter to the Editor

Mitigation makes for different ball game

TO THE EDITOR:

You've been hearing plenty about the benefits of Marvin Nichols Reservoir lately. Supporters say that there will be lakefront development and that thousands of local jobs will be created by businesses drawn to the water. Nichols' supporters constantly compare it to Lake Cypress or Bob Sandlin, and therein lies one of the largest misconceptions needing to be clarified. Cypress and Sandlin were both built long before federal mitigation became law.

Mitigation is land confiscated by the Corps of Engineers under the Federal Clean Waters Act of 1989. It's taken to replace wildlife habitat lost to the lake itself and comes from land within the same watershed. Mitigation is added to flooded acreage and will range from 2 to 7 acres for every acre of lake. The U.S. Department of Fish and Game estimates that Marvin Nichols will flood 66,521 acres and that mitigation will condemn an additional 163,620 to 648,578 acres.

Under federal mitigation, lakes like Cypress and Sandlin are no longer built and should never be used as a comparison to Marvin Nichols. The only lake to be built locally since mitigation became law is Cooper Lake. Go see for yourself. There is no lakefront property or development of any sort around Cooper Lake, nor is there any industrial buildup in that area. There is nothing but a glorified mud-hole surrounded by a huge state park with a handful of employees. Cooper Lake is exactly what Marvin Nichols will be, only on a much larger scale.

Mitigation is not a myth. It is federal law and not something to approach lightly. Local business leaders and politicians, in their uninformed desire to build lakes, risk opening a Pandora's box that all of us put together won't be able to get the lid back on.

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