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Marvin Nichols

Water legislation survives debate Senate Bill 3 heads to committee

By Jodi Sheridan Texarkana Gazette

A controversial water bill passed its third reading Wednesday in the Texas House after enduring a lengthy debate there Tuesday. Senate Bill 3 now heads to a conference committee to have differences between the Senate and House version ironed out.

The biggest different between the two is in the reservoirs.

The Senate version initially included Marvin Nichols, a plan by the state to address longterm water needs in the Dallas vicinity, and Fastrill Reservoir. Those two and a few others were taken out at the House level and were not added back in, but they still face the threat of being added in the conference committee.

Both sides, for and against the reservoirs, lined up to put the lakes back in the legislation. However, negotiations between lawmakers kept them at bay.

About 100 or so amendments were added Tuesday, including several by state Rep. Stephen Frost, D-Atlanta, concerning landowner protections, water usage and conflict definition. He said Tuesday he was pleased with the version they approved.

Now the bill goes to conference committee, and a committee has to be assigned by Friday. That committee will then have until Sunday to get a compromised version approved.

Earlier this week, opponents of Marvin Nichols were pleased with the progress of the bill.

"We're very appreciative of Rep. Frost's continued good works and efforts to give voice to our concerns and strong opposition to designation of Marvin Nichols Reservoir," said Barney Krebs, United Steelworkers local 1148 president.

Krebs said they understood the need to define a water supply plan, but "Marvin Nichols would devastate the forest and paper industry and the working men and women who rely on those strong manufacturing jobs."

InternationalPaper'sTexarkana Mill Manager Kevin Driscoll said Frost was the hero. Driscoll said thanks to him the voices of those the reservoir would affect would be heard. But they warn the fight may not be over even if Marvin Nichols stays out of SB 3 throughout conference.

"Until the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex area identifies their future water supply, Marvin Nichols Reservoir remains on the table and will continue to be a focus for future debate," said mill communication manager Amanda Black Keeney.

Members of the group in favor ofMarvinNichols,TheNortheast Texas Water Coalition, could not be immediately reached for comment Wednesday.

Earlier in the session, SB 3 passed out of the Senate containing language designating 19

reservoir sites as unique reservoir sites, including Marvin Nichols.

State Sen. Kevin Eltife, R-Tyler, was able to get hold of it before it left the Senate and tacked on an amendment guaranteeing Region D some of the water, assigning all construction costs to Region C and forming joint committee to study water issues like mitigation to determine if Marvin Nichols and other reservoirs are really needed.

Region C includes the Dallas metroplex. Region D includes Bowie, Cass, Morris, Red River, Titus and 14 other counties.

Once in the House Natural Resources Committee, several amendments were approved, including one that struck Marvin Nichols from the bill.