

Appointees will represent regions on legislative committee

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Water Plan

MOUNT PLEASANT, Texas—The Northeast Texas Regional Water Planning Group, Region D, will make nominations for 45 days as members prepare to appoint three people to a legislative-driven commission.

The creation of the commission—a special study committee required by Senate

Bill 3—was an amendment by Texas Sen. Kevin Eltife, R-Tyler, during the intense water debate of the recent legislative session.

The committee will have six members: three from Region D, which includes Bowie, Cass, Morris, Titus, Red River and 14 other counties; and three from Region

C, which includes the Dallas metroplex. The commission is directed to study many things, including:

- Alternative water supplies from existing and proposed reservoirs, including but not limited to Lake Wright Patman, Toledo Bend Reservoir, Lake Texoma and Lake o' the Pines;

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- Mitigation issues, socioeconomic issues and innovative methods of compensation for landowners;

- The minimum number of acres required for the reservoir.

It is also asked to make recommendations to the Legislature including whether Marvin Nichols, a plan by the state to address long-term water needs in the Dallas vicinity, should remain a designated reservoir based on the information generated.

The legislation, which is aimed at removing the appearance of bias, says the commission can't be aided by groups who already might perform work for Marvin Nichols.

Group chairman Jim Thompson said Region D's bylaws include provisions for electing members to

the board, but not for a commission. The executive committee makes recommendations to the board for board members. It takes a two-thirds majority to approve board members.

"That certainly is an option we could use with respect to the commission members," he said.

Some liked that idea. But David Weidman, who is also a member of the pro-Marvin Nichols group Northeast Texas Water Coalition, had concerns about just the executive committee making the recommendations. Another member, George Frost, agreed. They say the recommendations should come from the entire board.

And others said it was also important to look outside the members of the Region D board.

In the end, the board approved a motion that has the entire board able to submit up to three nominations each, with resumes, to the administrative agency over the next 45 days.

The administrative agency is the Northeast Texas Municipal Water District.

Before the group's next meeting, slated for Aug. 15, the administrator will send out the list of nominees to the group members to prepare for the meeting. Those selected will have to be approved by a two-thirds vote.

Many had their own ideas about what kind of people should be appointed to the board. It was the general feeling that those selected must be willing to spend great amounts of time on the commission and have a good understanding of the issues.

Others think the members needed to have Region D's best interests in mind. Group member Sharon Nabors said they need to make sure their three representatives are looking out for everyone and will not bow to what Dallas wants.

"Why should we have to bend over to the metroplex," she said.

Several others mentioned a need for the commission members to be able to communicate and strongly defend Region D's opposition to Marvin

Nichols and negotiate properly with Region C.

Member of the Northeast Texas Water Coalition were also on hand, pleading with the group for "fair and open" members to be appointed, instead of those absolutely opposed to Marvin Nichols.

Clarksville Mayor Ann Rushing, a member of the coalition, asked the group to remember Marvin Nichols will be built one day and the region needs to have a seat at the planning table.

"It can be built with us or without us," she said.

Her statements were met with boos from Marvin Nichols opponents, whose views were defended by Sulphur River Oversight Society President Max Shumake.

Jerry Boatner, a member of the coalition and the mayor of Mount Pleasant, said they were asking for commission members with a "broad view of what can come to pass in our corner of the state."

"A no at all costs approach will leave us left out," he said.