

ANRA shapes program to protect Lake Columbia water

As the Lake Columbia Regional Water Supply project begins to take shape in East Texas, its proponents and supporters will be considering ways to assure the lake's water quality will be protected.

A proposal will be developed over the next few weeks as the Angelina and Neches River Authority (ANRA), the lakes sponsor, begins seeking input from water supply corporations and municipalities which will purchase the water, and landowners and others who will be involved in the lake while it is being built and when it is operable.

Once the proposal is developed, a public hearing will be held in the lake's watershed basin to solicit input from individuals and groups.

"Because Lake Columbia will be supplying drinking water for a large region of East Texas, we want to begin building a partnership among lake water users, landowners, and others with a strong commitment to protecting the lake's water. The water must be of the highest quality to serve the needs of the communities and people consuming water," said Kenneth Reneau of Lufkin, general manager of ANRA.

The Lake Columbia participants include the cities of Alto, Arp, Jacksonville, Nacogdoches, New London, New Summerfield, Alto, Rusk, Troup, and Whitehouse; community water supply systems serving the areas around Afton Grove, Blackjack, Caro, Jackson, North Cherokee, the Rusk rural area, Stryker Lake and Cherokee County; and Temple-Inland, Inc.

"Many of the practices we will be considering to protect the lake's water quality are those which have been in effect in East Texas and in other parts of the country for years," said Reneau.

"These include easy-to-follow practices such as best management practices for forestlands, which are widely followed by forest landowners, with help from the Texas Forest Service and the Texas Forestry Association, to control sedimentation and pollution runoff in streams, rivers and lakes," he said.

Buffer strips of forestland and other permanent vegetation buffers along the banks of Lake Columbia, said Reneau, could be one of the most effective tools in controlling runoff into the lake

"Buffers such as these not only help landowners maintain a productive forest, farm or livestock operations; they also produce benefits such as soil protection, air and water quality, improve fish and wildlife, and demonstrate a commitment to land stewardship," said Reneau.

Any time soil erodes into lakes and streams, it causes a multitude of problems, said Reneau. These include:

- Reducing the water body's depth.
- The elimination of fish habitats.
- The flow of pesticides and excessive nutrients attached to the soil particles in the runoff,

causing contamination of the water used for drinking and recreation.

Other practices being considered by ANRA include regulation of septic tanks within 2,000 feet of the lake, a policy now in effect at other Texas lakes; the clearing of established boat lanes; and working with land developments to help them find the best way to protect the lake's waters.

"We recognize the desire of landowners around the lake to develop their property, and we believe, as partners in the lake's protection, we can help create developments in an orderly, common sense fashion," said Reneau.

The proposals ANRA develops for safeguarding the lake's water should be implemented in a cost-effective manner and without placing unreasonable burdens on landowners, he said.

"Because the water from Lake Columbia will be used for homes and businesses, water quality will be our foremost objective," said Reneau. "It's much easier and less expensive to keep the water clean than to clean it up later."