



**Angelina & Neches River Authority**

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**For Release March 28, 2003**

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**River Authority works with State and Federal agencies to provide needed East Texas Water Supply. Plan Preserves Forests and Wetlands for the Big Thicket National Preserve, one of “Ten Most Endangered National Parks”**

March 28, 2003 (Lufkin, Texas)---The Angelina and Neches River Authority is proposing to fund the acquisition of threatened, environmentally important land to be added to the Big Thicket National Preserve as part of its plan to build a regional water supply reservoir in East Texas. The Big Thicket National Preserve was recently named as one of “Ten Most Endangered National Parks” by the National Parks Conservation Association. A recent publication by the Big Thicket Association stated that, “Unless we act quickly to acquire and add some of these lands the Big Thicket National Preserve will be surrounded by a sea of development.” The article goes on to say, “Protection of the Big Thicket National Preserve has entered a crucial land acquisition phase, which may determine if this National Park System Unit survives the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

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The Eastex reservoir was approved and included in the 2002 State Water Plan and will serve twenty small and medium sized cities and small rural water supply systems in a five county area. The reservoir will be located in Cherokee and southern Smith Counties and has been planned since the 1980's.

Multiple studies have indicated that the reservoir will not impact any Endangered or Threatened Species, Priority 1 Bottomland Hardwood forests, Unique Stream Segments, nor any Red Cockaded Woodpecker habitat.

As with any reservoir there will be some environmental impacts. Federal regulations require the River Authority to develop a mitigation plan to compensate for the impacts. The Authority is in the final stages of developing its mitigation plan as part of the US Army Corps of Engineers 404 permitting process. A 404 permit is required as part of the federal Clean Water Act for a variety of projects which affect "waters of the United States".

A portion of the Authority's mitigation plan calls for funding the acquisition of threatened, environmentally important land to be added to the Big Thicket National Preserve. Once a 404 permit is received, bonds can be sold to fund reservoir construction and environmental mitigation. The River Authority would place \$5,000,000 into a mitigation escrow account to be used to acquire and preserve the property prior to donation to the National Preserve. "We are pleased to be partnering with two land preservation organizations on the mitigation. They are internationally recognized and respected for their responsible approach to the conservation and preservation of endangered and environmentally important ecosystems worldwide," said Kenneth Reneau, General Manager of ANRA.

This important mitigation plan cannot be implemented until the River Authority receives a 404 permit for its Eastex Water Supply Reservoir. Any unreasonable delays in obtaining this permit could result in lands that are important to the Big Thicket addition being lost to outside purchasers or developers.

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The Authority hopes that those who comment on the plan will recognize the positive and progressive nature of the mitigation plan and support it in their comments to the Corps of Engineers this Spring. ANRA Board President, Nick Bruno stated, “We are looking forward to the day ANRA receives its 404 permit so we can move forward with the water supply project and begin protecting habitat for the Big Thicket.”

The Angelina and Neches River Authority is a government agency created by state legislature. The major functions of the Authority are water quality management, water resource development, and conservation of water resources. Located in Lufkin, Texas, ANRA has a territorial jurisdiction of 8,500 square miles in the Neches River basin.

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**Interviews available upon request.**

**For additional information and/or for photos, please visit these related websites:**

Big Thicket Association [www.btatx.org](http://www.btatx.org)

Big Thicket National Preserve Phone: 409-839-2689 [www.nps.gov/bith/](http://www.nps.gov/bith/)

Eastex Water Supply Reservoir Project [www.lakeeastex.org](http://www.lakeeastex.org)

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