

Pipeline would link Stillhouse, Lake Belton

Officials: Line would help manage demand in the Brazos River Basin

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BELTON — A seven-mile pipeline to draw water from Lake Belton into Stillhouse Hollow Lake and ultimately, into Williamson County, would synthesize the flow of water along the southern neck of the Brazos River basin, according to a Brazos River Authority proposal.

But the project — at this point, hypothetical and decades away from possible construction — has some worried that Lake Belton will be swallowed by hungry metropolitans to the south.

A Brazos River Authority planning group explored the proposed pipeline, which would transfer up to 30,000 acre-feet to Stillhouse Hollow Lake, in its 2011 regional water plan.

Stillhouse Hollow Lake and Lake Georgetown are already

connected by the Williamson County Regional Raw Water Pipeline.

With pipelines connecting three reservoirs — Belton, Stillhouse Hollow and Georgetown — supply can meet contract demands until about 2060, according to planners.

It's also a quick, cost-effective remedy for a state hemorrhaging its supply.

"The primary benefit of the pipeline will be the delay in developing expensive new sources of water to meet anticipated future demands," according to the summary.

Specifically, reservoirs.

The cost of the Belton-Stillhouse pipeline, including engineering, contingency permitting, mitigation and interest is estimated at \$36 million, according to the report, which

Please see PIPELINE, 5A

Pipeline

Continued from 1A

pales in comparison to hundreds of millions needed for a new reservoir.

Not to mention the wait and public support.

Constructing a reservoir is often a bureaucratic and legal

nightmare, according to those in the state water planning business.

Aside from the public hearings, paperwork, financing, property acquisitions, environmental studies, a reservoir can take nearly half a century, officials said — bad news for a state expected to fall short of demand by 2060, according to state estimates.

You also need a good legal team as you can expect about 10 years worth of lawsuits from those opposing such projects, said Brad Brunett,

Brazos River Authority water services manager.

As for pipelines, the fear that Big Brother will exploit a homegrown resource is common.

"There's a strong 'not in my backyard' mentality," Brunett said. "We see that up and down the basin."

It's part of what state Sen. Troy Fraser, R-Horseshoe Bay, chairman of the committee on Natural Resources for Texas Legislature, calls "water wars."

"It's territorial thing," Fraser