

Up a creek, under a lake

Robert Morgan

Posted on July 26, 2004

GRANT - In a corner of Allen Parish, just north of Grant and west of Elizabeth - a no-name place really - there is a community where life seems a little slower.

It is a place where the pastoral life is preferred over fast food and city malls.

Neighbors and sons help toss square hay bales into tin barns, and old men still work hard at farming.

Sweat is not a bad word, and sweet is the smell of fresh cut hay or clean air in the cool shade of the nearby West Bay Wildlife Management Area.



Paul Rutherford

Jeremy Johnson (from left), Tony Turner and Blackie LeBlue stack hay in a barn on land that could be the future site of a proposed lake in Allen Parish.

People talk about homesteads that were cleared by hand and are still held in the same families after 100 or 150 years.

Joy Williams, who lives off La. Highway 112, said, "People live in this rural area because they chose to live the rural life.

Now fear has come to the farm.

It is a fear that there will be no farms in this area; that water trapped behind a dam will spread over the land where they were born, grew, courted, married, reared families and have seen their loved ones grow old, die and buried them close by.

"This is more than about rural development. It's about money, and we're talking big money. It's about taking away a way of life," Charles Horton said.

Horton, president of the newly created Community Preservation Association, chaired a meeting of about 40 residents who worried aloud that their idyllic life will be wrenched from them in the name of economic development.

The group represented families who have built their lives near the banks of the Six Mile and Ten Mile creeks in Allen Parish.

"Our heritage runs deep in our community. My family goes back 150 years," Horton said, adding he is restoring the house where his grandmother lived.

"She can come back there, and there is a 100 years of things in that house," he said.

What they fear is the Allen Parish Reservoir District Board of Commissioner will select one of the creeks as the site for a new lake.

They fear their lands will be taken by expropriation to be sold for high-dollar housing developments, a golf course and recreational facilities.

They are alarmed that more was not known about the proposed reservoir possibly taking their houses until recently.

Margie Turner, standing in the meeting hall of the Turner Church established in 1935, said, "It was misinformation, not getting information that brought us together to see what we can do to get the right information put out."

James Moore, who brought the issue to the notice of various media, said he has asked residents of Castor Creek to join the new association.

"We have also signed a petition, over 200 strong and growing, with hundreds proposing to join us. We are not opposed to a lake, but (to) its location as other areas are available," Moore said, reading from a prepared text.

Horton acknowledged that no decision has been made to locate the reservoir on either of the creeks.

In fact, four sites have been tentatively identified by the Monroe engineering firm of Denmon Engineering and the firm has not issued a final report.

In addition to Six Mile and Ten Mile creeks, the tentative list includes Mill Creek, a stream that runs through West Bay WMA, and Castor Creek, located east of Oberlin.

Horton said, "We know that two members of the commission have said they would prefer the Ten Mile area. It' s a nice area."

Naming one of the members as Police Juror Allie "Buddy" Farris, Horton said, "He' s since changed his mind."

The people in this community have gotten topographical maps and estimated the damage that will be done if dams are placed on Six Mile or Ten Mile creeks.

"We know the tentative feet (depth) of the lake," Horton said.

Charles "Phil" Boyette said, "It would go right through our front door. I can swim, but I don' t think I want to do that."

So it goes, as relatives and neighbors take turns voicing their fears of the water.

Moore praised Sen. James David Cain, R-Dry Creek, for placing Six Mile and Ten Mile creeks in the Natural and Scenic River System when he was the representative for the area.

The two creeks converge downstream to add to the Whiskey Chitto, a creek favored by canoeist and outdoorsmen and also in the Scenic Rivers System.

To get a stream removed from the system would require a study by the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, which would report to the Legislature.

Both legislative bodies would have to vote by two-thirds margins in favor of the removal for it to happen.

Several people point out that Mill Creek is not in the Scenic Rivers System, and no one lives along its banks.

"I honestly believe they are going to look at Mill Creek," Turner said.

But Horton said, "This is Louisiana. I wouldn't be surprised if Huey Long showed up."

Robert Morgan: 487-6313; rmorgan@thetowntalk.com

Law maker opposes taking people's land

By Robert Morgan / *The Town Talk*

GRANT - If it takes a Legislative vote to put a dam on Six Mile or Ten Mile creeks to create a reservoir, Rep. Herman Ray Hill said he will oppose the effort.

Hill, D-Dry Creek, represents this small community in the northwest corner of Allen Parish, where residents worry they could lose their land and their way of life in the name of economic development.

"In the beginning I told (local officials) I was not in favor of taking anyone's home, and am not for taking any stream out of the Scenic Rivers System," Hill said.

Legislative opposition to damming either scenic stream to create a reservoir could force the project to be located elsewhere.

If Six Mile or Ten Mile creeks were chosen as the site, "it would have to come from the local representative or senator to do that. I don't believe we have the support from the them to do that," said Phillip Beard, chairman of the Allen Parish Reservoir District Board of Commissioners.

Hill said he would not introduce such legislation and he would oppose any similar legislation filed by another lawmaker.

Mike Thompson, administrative consultant for the project, said the Scenic Rivers designations for the two streams create an obstacle to be overcome.

All four potential sites for the reservoir present problems, Thompson said.

Local opposition to putting a dam on either of the scenic streams caused the reservoir commission to vote at its last meeting to ask for an expanded review of the potential for damming Mill Creek, he said.

Denmon Engineering of Monroe has identified four possible streams that could create a reservoir, Six Mile, Ten Mile, Mill and Castor creeks.

Although Six Mile and Ten Mile creeks present some difficulties, Thompson said they had to be included in the list of possible sites in order to assure a fair selection process.

The permitting process, including a 404 Permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to disturb a wetland, could be stalled if the consultants appear to have chosen a site without sufficient scientific, environmental and cultural data to justify the choice, he said.

"The truth is we will not prejudice the project" by deleting or ignoring a possible site for political reasons, he said.

He added, however, "The (review) process is going to help them (residents of Six Mile and Ten Mile creeks) to be honest. We know this because we do this all over the country."

Thompson has been hired to lead development of reservoirs in four parishes, including Allen, Lincoln, Caldwell and Washington.

While he understands the concerns of residents who would be affected by a reservoir on either of the scenic streams, he said any site chosen will present problems.

"The studies are made to build the best lake with the least amount of problems," he said. "We don't want it where it's not wanted either."

Robert Morgan: 487-6313; rmorgan@thetowntalk.com