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Texas water board rules Marvin Nichols Reservoir is a conflict as groups head to mediation

The proposed man-made lake, which will funnel water to the booming D-FW region, has been debated for decades.



By [Lana Ferguson](#)

Energy and Natural Resources Reporter

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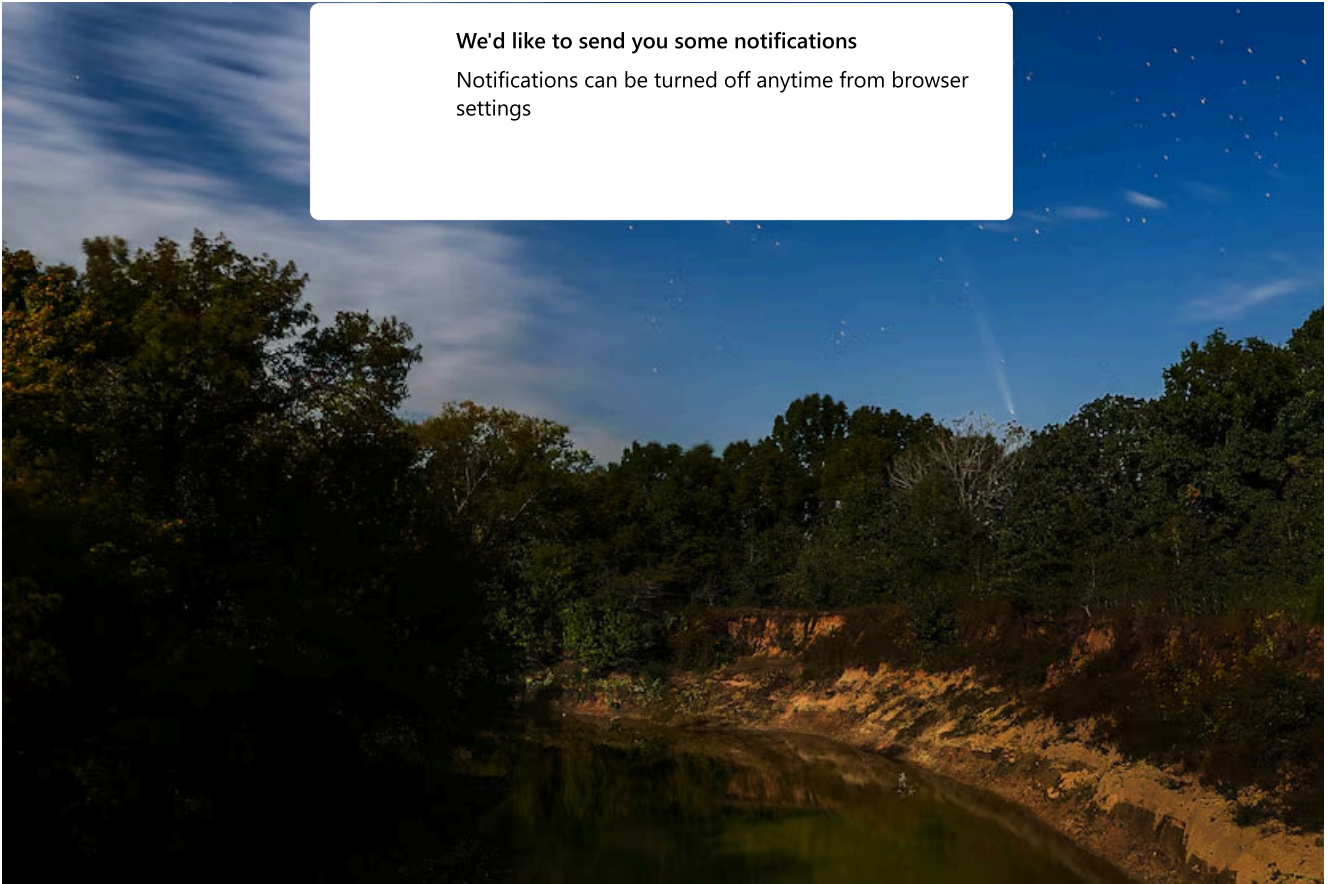


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The faint streak of comet Comet A3 Tsuchinshan-ATLAS is seen over the Sulphur River, which is illuminated by moonlight, on Tuesday, Oct. 15, 2024, in Red River County, Texas. Residents in the Sulphur River Basin will be impacted if the proposed Marvin Nichols Reservoir in northeast Texas is built. (Smiley N. Pool / Staff Photographer)



The Texas Water Development Board voted Thursday to declare the proposed Marvin Nichols Reservoir [an interregional conflict](#), sending local planners to mediation to attempt to find a solution.

The \$7 billion, [66,000-acre man-made lake](#) has become a flashpoint between locals and public officials — and a symbol of what happens when the economic development needs of a booming region collide with longstanding community norms. Expected to be built in northeast Texas, the reservoir will pump water more than 100 miles to Dallas-Fort Worth and surrounding areas.



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It has been included in the state water plan. Texas water planners, who oversee Region C, have included the reservoir in its plans since 2001.

Residents and planners in Region D, who reside in the area along the Sulphur River Basin where the reservoir would be constructed in portions of Franklin, Red River and Titus counties, have vehemently opposed the project for decades. They say the lake has the potential to create substantial adverse effects on the region.

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The governor-appointed board, which includes chairman L'Oreal Stepney and director Tonya Miller, called for representatives to enter the mediation "in good faith" to resolve the intragroup impasse.

Related: [Texas' Marvin Nichols Reservoir feud reaches 'conflict' status: 'We need to push back'](#)

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At Thursday's meeting in Austin, Bryan McMath, executive adm Board, said he believed the regional groups would "benefit great

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recommended a conflict
The mediation must occur
If the regional leaders cannot
conflict. The board's decision
cannot be appealed.

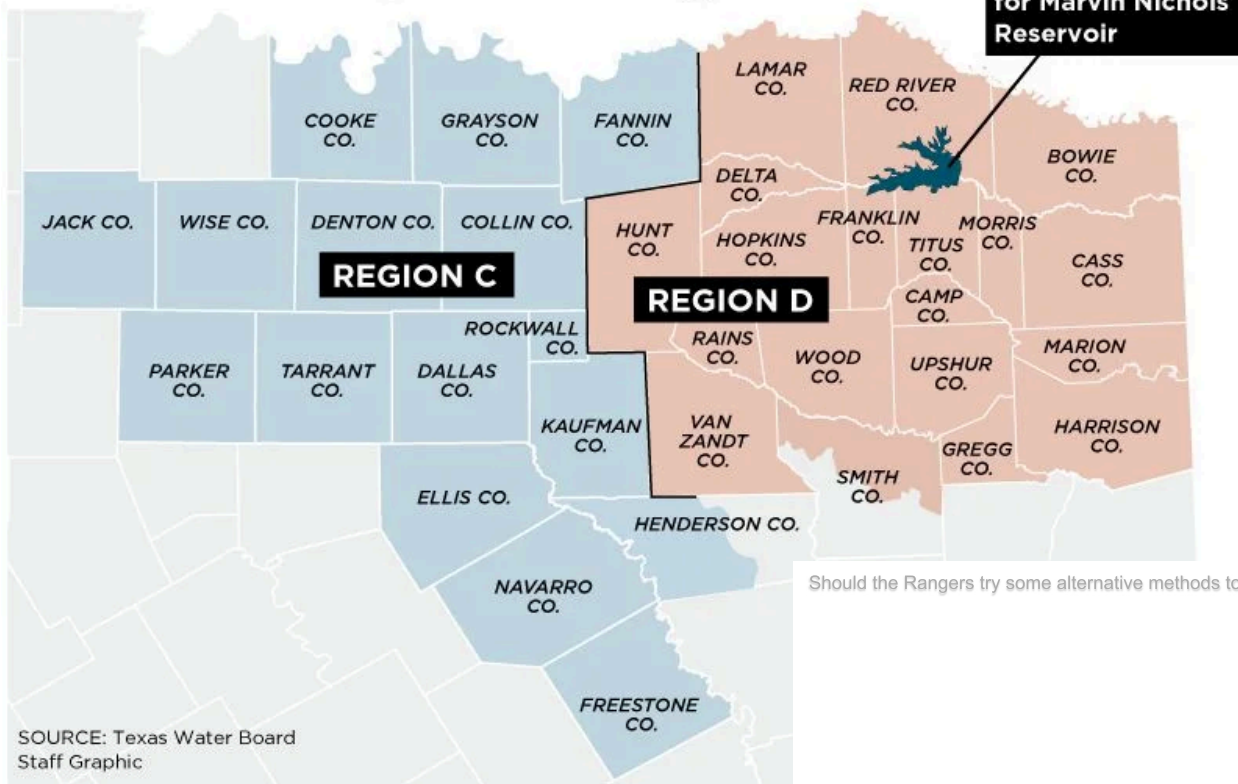
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on how to resolve the
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Texas Water Development Board regions



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Representatives from each regional group were given 10 minutes a piece to speak during the meeting.

Both sides reiterated sentiments from Jim Thompson, Region I manager, at any other water planning meeting. He credits that to the project's size, a crowd of more than 400 people.

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the last two decades. In their meetings, they often have a crowd of more than 400 people.

'Real impacts, real individuals'



Gary Cheatwood, 85, (top left) and his son Gary Cheatwood Jr., 48, (bottom) go over a map the elder Cheatwood made to assess properties impacted by the proposed Marvin Nichols Reservoir with John Brooks (top) and Jim Vignali (right) on Monday, Oct. 14, 2024, in Cuthand, Texas. Residents in the Sulphur River Basin will be impacted if the proposed Marvin Nichols Reservoir in northeast Texas is built. (Smiley N. Pool / Staff Photographer)

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“How much of a bottom-up process is it if the most people affected by the project, most damaged by the project and have the most to lose on the project have absolutely no say if it goes in a regional or state water plan or not?” Thompson asked.

“The words that come up are, ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto yourself,’” Thompson said later in his speech. “I don’t think that’s the case here.”

Rachel Ickert, chief engineering officer for the Tarrant Regional Water District, read remarks prepared by Region C chairman Dan Buhman, who was unable to attend the meeting in person.

Related: [‘My mama put that in her will’: What North Texas reservoir planners are up against](#)

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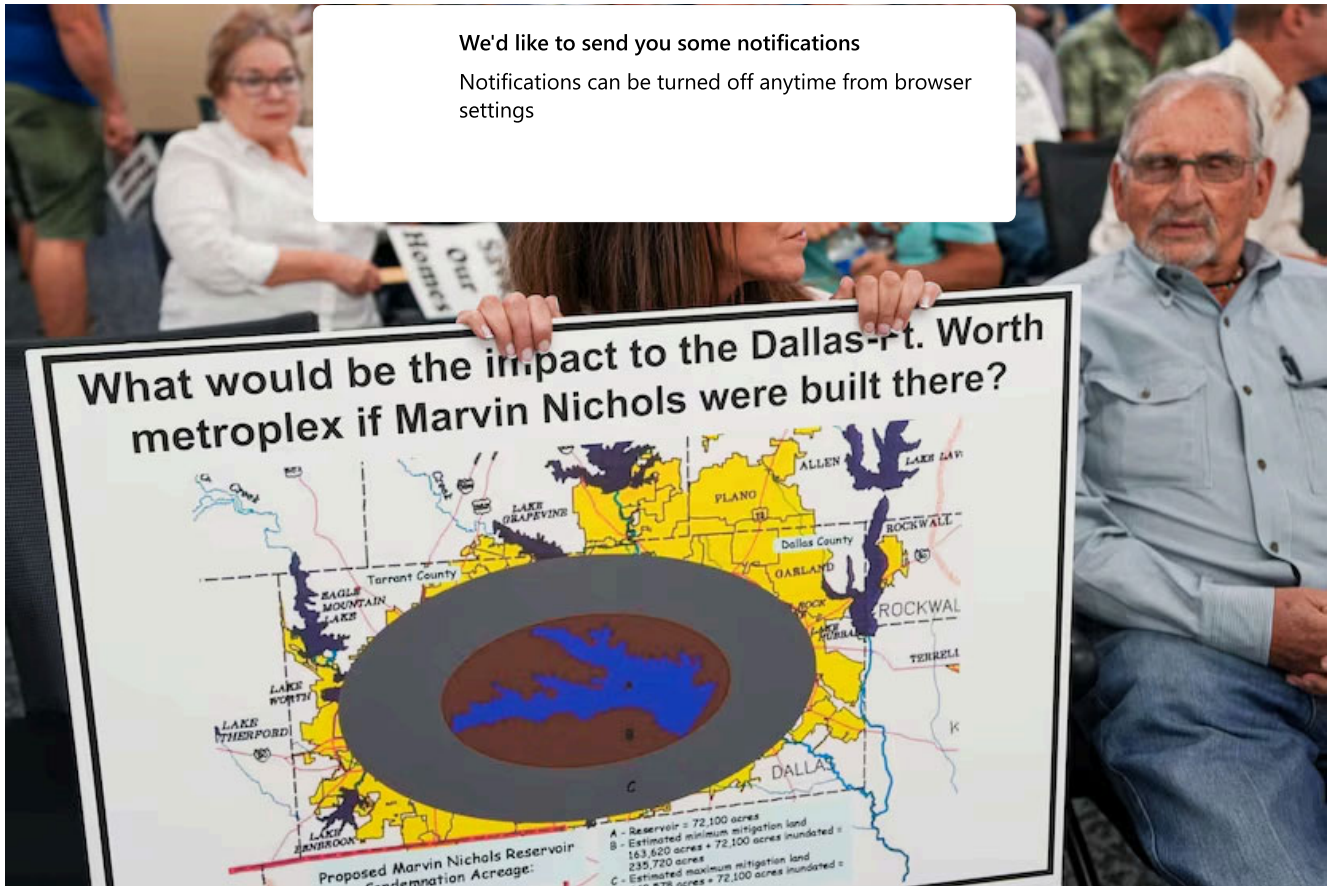
Buhman wrote that the planners recognize “there are real impacts to real individuals.”

“Every recommended water supply strategy has real impacts, both positive and negative,” he wrote. “As water suppliers we compare multiple criteria for dozens of strategic benefit to include in the state water plan.”

Buhman’s main arguments against a conflict being declared were that the planning process into a regulatory process,” that the dispute involves that some are looking at the project’s “adverse effects in a vacuum.”

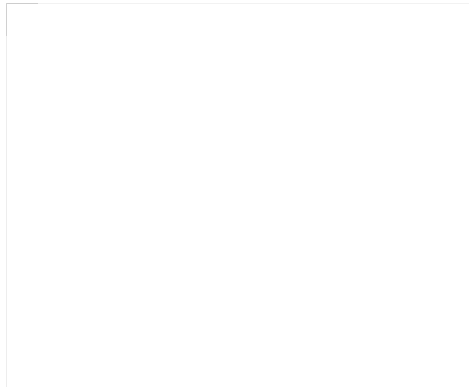
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Brooke Ward holds a poster with an image of what the footprint of the proposed Marvin Nichols Reservoir would look like if centered over Dallas-Fort Worth during a meeting of the North East Texas Regional Water Planning Group D on Wednesday, Oct. 30, 2024, in Pittsburg, Texas. (Smiley N. Pool / Staff Photographer)

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“We are all obligated to the people we serve to select strategies that have the highest net benefit,” he wrote.✕

“Region C believes the Marvin Nichols Reservoir meets this test Should the Rangers try some alternative methods to break their

About a dozen people spoke during the public comment section, halting the project altogether, to protecting generational land. M areas need every option possible for new water supplies.

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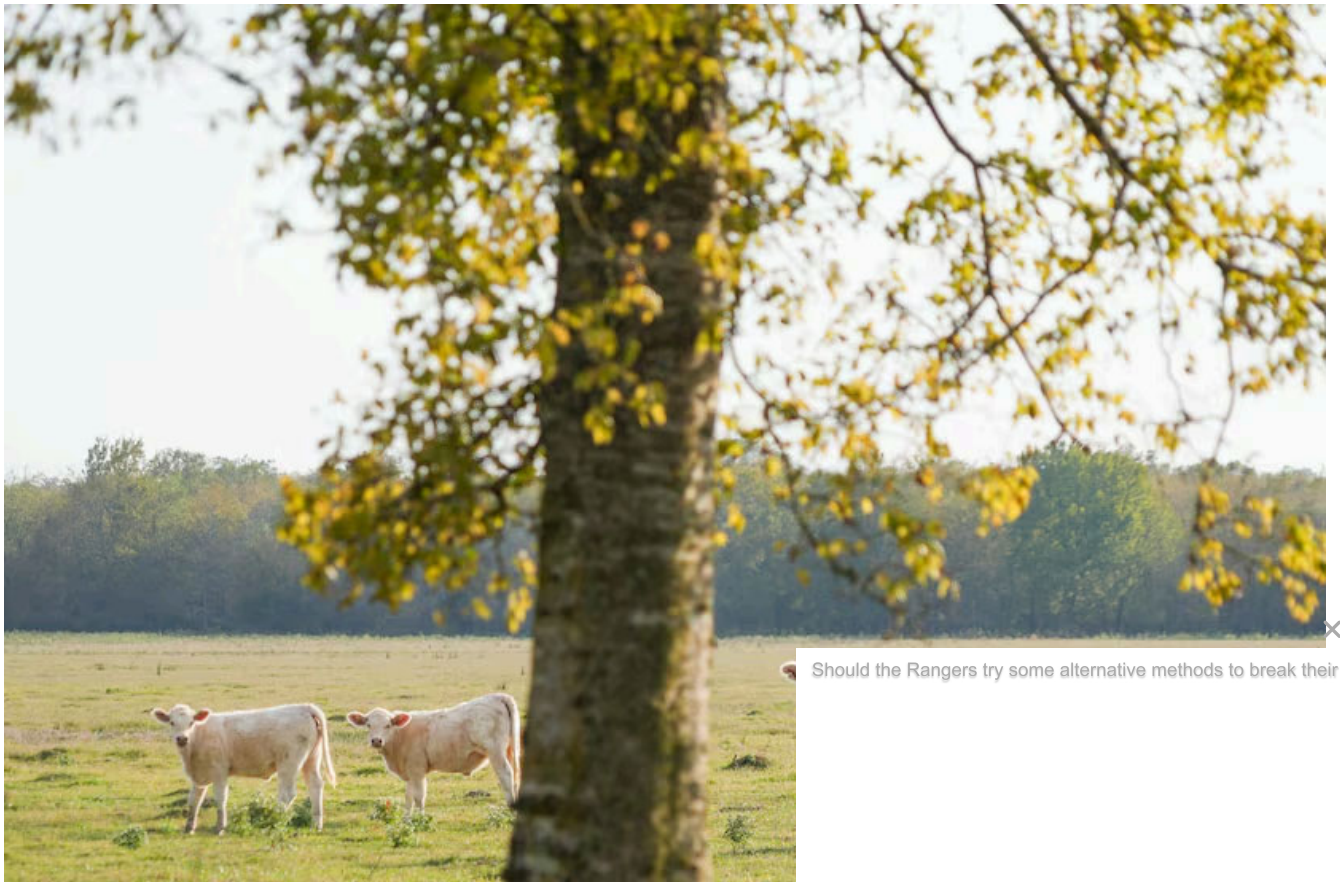
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An estimated 370 public
than 360 of the comment

of the meeting. More

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This is the third interregional conflict the board has considered since water planning began, all of which have pitted Regions C and D against each other. The first was in 2011 and the second was in 2016. Water plans are revised every five years.



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Cattle graze in a pasture that would be completely submerged by the proposed M on Tuesday, Oct. 15, 2024, in Cuthand, Texas. (Smiley N. Pool / Staff Photograph

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By **Lana Ferguson**

Lana Ferguson covers energy and natural resources for the business team. She joined The Dallas Morning News in 2022 after a stint in South Carolina's Lowcountry. The Virginia native graduated from the University of Mississippi with a degree in journalism and Southern studies. Her work has taken her all over the U.S., southern Africa and Sri Lanka.

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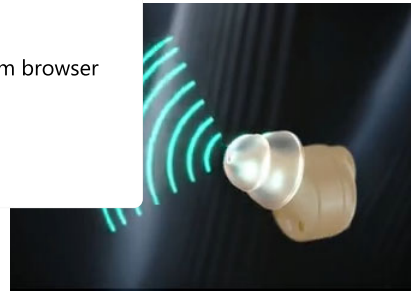
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