

## HLC Reservoir project in line for funding

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WALTON COUNTY - Recent talks with state officials and a look at the competitive grant process for state funding for the reservoir has Hard Labor Creek Regional Reservoir Management Board members feeling good about the chances of obtaining some state funding.

"Based on our discussion with (Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority) officials, the rating criteria established in the competitive grant program and GEFA's desire to fund three to four regional reservoir projects that will have a short term impact on water supply capacity, we are very optimistic that the Hard Labor Creek Project will receive at least some grant funding for dam construction," said Kevin Little, chairman of the Walton County Board of Commissioners and the reservoir management board.

In February the reservoir board submitted a formal request to the state requesting \$18 million to fund the building of the dam.

In March, the Georgia legislature approved and Gov. Sonny Perdue signed an amended budget which included in it \$40 million in grant funding to local governments and water and sewer authorities to develop water supply projects.

As a result, GEFA is preparing to release on June 2 the Georgia Water Supply Competitive Grant Program. Hard Labor Creek Regional Reservoir officials have taken a look at the draft proposal of the guidelines and feel they can score high enough to garner some state dollars.

Helping their cause is that the Hard Labor Creek project is one of very few that has received the required U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit. In addition, design work for the dam has already begun and the project is a partnership between Walton and Oconee counties, with officials from nearby counties expressing interest in buying water once the reservoir is online.

"Based on the proposed scoring criteria, the Hard Labor Creek project should receive 80 to 90 points," said Jimmy Parker, of Precision Planning, project manager for the reservoir. "The rating criteria yields significant points for the 404

permit, a regional project benefiting three or more utility systems, Oconee County's Water First Designation, Walton's Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District compliance and most importantly the high non-grant to grant funding ratio provided by the revenue bonds previously issued by both Walton and Oconee counties."

The millions of dollars, though, can also be dispersed to projects that include drilling new wells, re-opening inactive wells, lowering intake structure/pipes, expanding existing water supply or flood control reservoirs, converting flood control or recreational reservoirs to water supply reservoirs as well as alternative water supply projects on a case-by-case basis. Funding may also be allocated to "innovative" water supply projects as well.

Dam design is one of the 10 activities that can be funded.

GEFA will evaluate all of the proposals that meet specified criteria and submitted by Aug. 31, with the final monies awarded sometime in November.

Also at their monthly meeting last week:

- Management board officials were briefed about the lone comment received during the Georgia Environmental Protection Division's recent public comment period, which ended in April. The comment was submitted on behalf of High Shoals Hydro. A letter was submitted by legal counsel that expressed concern regarding future plans to generate power at a hydro-electricity facility during drought periods or times of low river flows.

Similar concern was expressed by the owner in the past. In a letter written in 2003 by former GEPD Director Harold Reheis to Gaynor Bracewell of High Shoals Hydro, it states, "If a local government proposes to withdraw water upstream of your property, there is no EPD requirement that the local government guarantee passage of river flows to allow you to generate electricity. There is the requirement for low flow passage of water for aquatic life protection. EPD will not require your concurrence on an upstream water withdrawal."

The Hard Labor Creek Regional Reservoir project does call for a diversion to be constructed along the Apalachee River in 10 to 12 years, which would affect the river flow toward the existing hydroelectric facility. Local officials said they were aware of the facility and "fully intend" to work with the owners to minimize impacts related to the proposed water withdrawal.

- A projected completion date for design of the reservoir dam is May 2009. Given the 12 to 18 month construction period, the current schedule for dam completion is early 2011.

- After losing two mitigation sites when negotiations fell through with the City of Winder earlier this year, existing potential sites in Walton and Oconee counties were sent to the U.S. Corps of Engineers as possible replacements. According to Parker, the "idea and quality of the proposed mitigation was well received."

If accepted, the sites would allow the reservoir board to increase mitigation efforts on existing sites without the need to acquire additional properties.

A final determination is expected by mid-July.

• The project has closed on 24 percent of the 166 parcels of land required for the project, with negotiations ongoing for an additional 1 percent, leaving 148 parcels outstanding totaling more than 1,670 acres.