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Water need opens debate on Cookietown Reservoir

By Ron Jackson
Staff Writer

RANDLETT — Ranchers, farmers and businessmen gathered Friday near Randlett to determine whether new life should be pumped into the construction of the proposed Cookietown Reservoir, a 12-mile body of water that would follow the Deep Red Run Creek in Cotton and Tillman counties.

The proposed Cookietown Reservoir has been on the planning books of the State Water Resources Board since 1978. A study done then indicated it would hold 37,500 acre feet of water and cost about \$100 million.

"Obviously, that price would be greatly increased," said Kyle Arthur, the state agency's director of water planning. "We were here today to help answer any questions. Naturally, if these discussions were to go any further then we'd have to determine the need and if there was local support."

Robert Smith, Southwestern Oklahoma Regional Development Corporation president, called the meeting to determine interest. Smith hopes to secure enough local support to sponsor the project.

"The first thing we'd like to do is supply a long-term solution to our water needs in this region," Smith said. "Number two, this reservoir would be a big tourist attraction. ... If we don't act now, then we're gonna let someone else come in here and solve the problem.

"I don't think anyone wants that to happen."

'Our land isn't for sale'

Chris Hunt of Grandfield farms thousands of acres that would ultimately be submerged if the reservoir were built.

"I'm talking about four generations of work to build up what we have today," Hunt said. "We do just fine operating in agriculture. I don't see that same sort of operation with fishing. Our land isn't for sale."

Hunt argued about the wisdom of such a project.

"Who's gonna replace the property taxes our county receives from that land?" Hunt said. "What's gonna happen to the co-op when those farmers are no longer there? Who's gonna fill that gap in the economy?"

Charles Witt, a Grandfield councilman, isn't sure what to think.

"We need the water. And, yeah, you gotta have the water, but what's the point if no one is there to drink it? Surely, we could come up with an economical, reasonable solution.

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