

Chamber learns about water woes

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By Donna Pearce
Managing Editor

Rick Smenner, President of Save Our Water Lake Eufaula (SOWLE), and Pennie Embry of Oklahomans for Responsible Water Policy presented information about the water issues in Southeastern Oklahoma.

Smenner talked about the creation of SOWLE, which started back when a group was trying to sell Oklahoma water to Texas.

He listed the main components of the local water problems:

- Lake Levels
- Advisory Committee
- Recreation
- Fracking
- Sardis Lake

Smenner reviewed the reasons for low water levels in the lake—hydropower, evaporation and drought.

"Hydropower may be green, but it's not free," said Smenner.

He talked about the comparison of economic return to the state between hydropower generation and generation.

"The Corps is allowed to generate power even if the lake level is down to 565 feet, even though the normal level is 587 feet."

With the Water Resources Development Act, recreation was specified as a use at Lake Eufaula. An Advisory Committee was also supposed to be formed.

"We still have no Advisory Committee. And, we have no study to date for the new allocation," Smenner said.

Smenner also said there was concern about fracking; in particular, a concern with the injection well located in the Onapa area.

"Will fracking end up contaminating our water supply?" said Smenner.

Embry talked about Sardis Lake, in particular, which is now under control of Oklahoma City. That battle is still being waged



Photo by Donna Pearce

Rick Smenner (left), President of Save Our Water Lake Eufaula (SOWL), and Pennie Embry (right), Vice President of SOWLE, prepare their presentation on water issues at Lake Eufaula and throughout the state for the Eufaula Chamber meeting.

between the "big city" interests and tribal nations in Southeastern Oklahoma.

She showed photos of Atoka Lake, which ended up being destroyed when the water was taken away from the locals.

Embry said it was only a matter of time before those seeking our water move on up US69 to Lake Eufaula.

"Which lakes, rivers and streams will serve the demands of so few over the needs of so many," said Pennie Embry, SOWLE Vice-President and member of Oklahomans for Responsible Water Policy

Smenner and Embry both talked about the Oklahoma Comprehensive Water Plan as being presented at this time. They both discussed the lack of non-consumptive uses (recreation) for the lakes, Lake Eufaula in particular.

"There is no allowance for future economic development," said Embry.

"Recreation is massive. Oklahoma Tourism produced \$6.1 billion last year. It is the third largest industry in the state," Smenner said.

"Oklahoma is missing the big boat here," said Rick Smenner, SOWLE President

"If lake levels are down,

people don't come to the lake," said Embry. "We have to be sure there is a reallocation for recreation in the plan."

"If you own a business here, live here or vacation here, this will impact you," said Janiece Vest, local businesswoman and chamber member.

Smenner, Embry, Vest and others said it was extremely important to the local economy for area citizens to learn more by attending two upcoming meetings to be hosted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps Commander's Listening Session will be held at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, May 31, at the Eufaula High School auditorium.

A second come and go Public Scoping Meeting is scheduled for 6-9 p.m. on Thursday, June 2, at the Eufaula Middle School gym.

Several other upcoming events were announced, including LEA's Golden Eagle Poker Run on June 11, the Chamber's Whole Hawg festival on July 29-30 and Eufaula Fireworks on July 3.

For more information, contact the Eufaula Chamber of Commerce at 918-689-2791.