

# District needs more water

BY CHARLES SOWELL | STAFF

IF ALL OF THE PIECES fall into place the Woodruff Roebuck Water District (WRWD) will spend just over \$60 million to get into the water treatment business and ensure a stable supply of water for their customers, said Curtis Dillard, general manager for the district.

But a key piece of that stable supply picture, a reservoir on Ferguson Creek, has been stalled by a dispute with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers over an environmental impact statement, Dillard said.

The project does not come under the yet to be implemented Surface Water Withdrawal Act and will be grandfathered once it does go into effect in 2011. Had the project be regulated, based in mean annual daily flows, the streams have little or no capacity for withdrawal.

An analysis of stream flow data on both Tygers by Dave Hargett with the South Carolina Water Resources Center at the Strom Thurmond Institute found the streams to be severely stressed.

As of last Friday, based on U.S. Geological Survey stream flow data, the North Tyger was at 4.5 million gallons a day. The mean average daily flow is 13.52 million. The South Tyger was 17.4 million gallons a day and the mean average is 79.7 million. Both flows are just slightly higher than the required minimum 20 percent of mean annual daily flow required by the act.

Currently the district buys

2.5 million gallons a day from Spartanburg Water with peak usage hitting 4 million gallons a day for the WRWD's 10,000 customers, Dillard said.

The contract with Spartanburg runs out in 2013, Dillard said, and they have been unable to find a provider that will be able to meet their projected needs of around 12 million to 14 million gallons a day over the course of the next 50 years. Their customer base is expected to more than double.

WRWD is licensed to withdraw 17.5 million gallons a day from the North and South Tyger rivers.

Plans call for spending \$32 million to build a water treatment plant and intakes on the North and South Tyger. At least that much would also be spent for a storage reservoir to be built at a future date.

The intakes and plant are being funded through general obligation bonds and customers will see an initial monthly increase of about \$1.50 to \$2 in their bills this year and a five percent increase annually for four more years. Funding for the reservoir would be obtained after the licensing process is completed.

The plan, except for the reservoir, is a done deal, according to Dillard and environmental groups in the Upstate who have no problem with WRWD providing a stable, sustainable, source of water for their customers.

Those environmental groups do, however, have a problem with how the program was licensed and per- >

September 17, 2010 Spartanburg Journal

> mitted, said Shelley Robbins project coordinator in the Spartanburg office of Upstate Forever.

"The way state and federal officials go about permitting drinking water projects like this allows for no public input," Robbins said.

WRWD holds a state 401 water permit from the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) and a federal 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Dillard said. Neither of those licenses requires public comment.

Adam Myrick, a spokesman for DHEC, said "There are no specific public notice requirements in our drinking water rules," and provided a link to the agency's web site when asked about the lack of public comment.

No one in the agency's water permitting division would speak with the Journal for this story.

Robbins said the permitted withdrawals at around 17 million gallons per day and the planned withdrawal of 12 to 14 million gallons would put a severe strain on



the Tyger River during periods of drought and could have substantial impacts downstream.

The reservoir would deal with the low flow problem by allowing the district to store water away from the river and draw on it when flows are down, Dillard said. It would be required under the Surface Water Withdrawal Act.

"There were objections from DNR over some wetlands and the Corps wants us to do an environmental impact statement," Dillard said.

The impact statement would add significantly to the cost of the project and WRWD is appealing the requirement.

Dam building does have a public comment requirement and DNR took full advantage of it to voice their concerns. The delay could cause problems after WRWD brings their new system online during low flow periods.

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