

THE JOPLIN GLOBE

Corps opens public comment period on proposed reservoir

John Hacker, The Joplin Globe, Mo.

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A public comment period on a proposed reservoir on Baynham Branch south of Joplin.

Missouri American Water has announced plans to build an 828-acre reservoir in Newton County as a source of water for its customers in the Joplin area.

Currently, Missouri American gets most of its water for Joplin from Shoal Creek, supplemented by 10 wells that pump from the Ozark aquifer.

The public comment letter, sent to people in and around the area who would be affected by the reservoir, says as the population in Jasper and Newton counties increases, existing water sources would not meet projected water demand during prolonged drought.

“The project purpose is to provide a long-term water source for the city of Joplin and nearby communities to meet current and projected water supply demands,” according to the letter. “The proposed reservoir would have the potential to provide up to 20 million gallons per day for the Missouri American Water Company service area. The project involves construction of an earthen dam on Baynham Branch to create an 828-acre water supply reservoir with a maximum normal pool depth of 80 feet. Baynham Branch is an intermittent tributary to Shoal Creek within the Spring River watershed. The dam would be located 0.6 miles upstream from the confluence of Baynham Branch and Shoal Creek. The drainage area upstream of the reservoir site would be 15.7 square miles.”

Reservoir construction would require relocation of existing roads and utility lines or closures and abandonment due to the inundation in the reservoir’s footprint.

Missouri American’s senior director of external communications, Christie Barnhart, said the notice was mailed to people who would be affected by the proposed reservoir.

One of those residents is Glenn Brown, a Newton County property owner who said studies he has paid for show the karst nature of the site will result in “major leakage” within the basin, which has several losing stream segments, and it would not be a workable site for the reservoir. Brown also said he thinks the reservoir will end up being an expensive

failure that will require an expensive fix in the future and affect water rates for customers. The cost of the project has been put at more than \$200 million.

However, Missouri American officials believe the site will work based on their own field analysis. In fact, the utility in 2021 previously noted: “The investigations have not indicated what would be considered a fatal flaw in the project site.”

Brown said that using a direct allocation from Stockton Lake, which the Corps approved earlier this year as an option, would be much better than building the reservoir.

Storage space in Stockton will now be reallocated to provide for drinking water and industrial water supply to communities that participate in the nonprofit Southwest Missouri Water, formerly the Tri-State Water Resource Coalition. Approximately 38 million gallons of water per day will be available from Stockton for members of Southwest Missouri Water, which also includes Carthage and Jasper County. Roddy Rogers, executive director of Southwest Missouri Water, said the allocation would provide over half of the projected available future supply to meet demand through 2060.

Water for the reservoir would come from three possible sources: Baynham Branch itself, water that would be diverted into the reservoir via a pipeline from Shoal Creek during periods of high flows, and possibly water that could be pumped via pipeline into the reservoir from Stockton Lake.

Jay Woods, a communications specialist with the Corps office in Little Rock, Arkansas, said the Corps and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources will work together on the permitting process.

People who want to comment can send an email to the Missouri Department of Natural Resources at wpsc401cert@dnr.mo.gov or write the department at P.O. Box 176, Jefferson City, MO 65102.