

The Pilot Editorial, 17 Mar 2019

Editorial: Woodlake Solution Finally Gets Airing

For a moment, let's set aside the details of this latest tussle between Moore County's state legislators and its county commissioners over how best to fix the Woodlake dam and restore the 1,200-acre lake.

The bottom line is this: We cannot continue to let this key eastern Moore County community continue to erode and the issues go unaddressed. We need its potential, we need its tax base, and we need the critical role it plays in drainage and flood control.

But how best to make all that happen? We're still not certain, but we know political games are not the way to go, and that's the way it seems to be in the early going.

In the past week, State Sen. Tom McInnis and state Reps. Jamie Boles and Allen McNeill introduced similar bills that would allow Woodlake's residents and property owners to hold a special election. The election would decide whether property owners would assess themselves the costs of repairing the seriously deficient dam to Lake Surf, allowing water to pool again. The cost of repairs would be in the millions.

Here's the key contention: The county would be required, basically, to front the money for the repairs, and then be repaid over a period of years by the Woodlake property owners.

That is not what the county wants, and it made that clear in a barbed news release last week.

Differing Perspectives

Says McInnis: "It is very important that this dam be repaired for several reasons, most notably the impact on future flood control and the real property tax values that have been significantly reduced due to the breach of the dam," McInnis said

Says the county: "Creating a new tax assessment district and funding the dam repairs would require the county to acquire substantial debt, which would likely negatively impact the county's recently improved bond rating, causing the county to incur higher interest costs."

Moore County would prefer Woodlake's residents pursue incorporation in a referendum. If it was its own village or town, it could collect taxes and borrow funds to repair the dam and restore the lake.

This is not an altogether bad option either. Property owners have sought help with this option in the past year, so it's not like they're opposed to it.

The Right Thing to Do

Squabbling aside, we credit McInnis, Boles and McNeill with stepping up to offer some glimmer of hope for Woodlake. Property owners have been talking with the county for months but with little progress. This legislation has at least thrust the matter to the forefront. It's been a while since Moore County has had someone in the Senate pay attention to its issues, so we appreciate McInnis' willingness to dive into a complicated issue like this.

But whether you choose from column A or column B, one thing must happen before either option is pursued: The German-based company that has owned Woodlake and acted with extreme neglect of its investment must be forced out. Woodlake CC Corp. has more than \$167 million in liens against it. It owes Moore County thousands of dollars in back property taxes. It cannot be left in place and end up enriched by the endeavor of others who care far more than it has shown.

So whether it's foreclosure or some other legal tactic, Woodlake CC Corp. must be roused from its place.

In the end, what's important to Moore County is that the Lake Surf dam is fixed, allowing the lake to refill and reclaim its role in flood control for eastern Moore. A restored lake can revive property values, thereby increasing the tax base and reinvigorate a key portion of Moore County. It's the right thing to do, whether that's making Woodlake its own municipality or a special taxing district.