Cow Creek Residents Resist Galesville Dam

By ELAINE WEISS
Courier Correspondent

Tests recently conducted by Douglas County at the proposed Galesville Dam site indicate the geology appears to be favorable according to Jim Gossen, Director of Public Works.

But area residents who fear a dramatic change of the valley and loss of their land maintain their opposition.

Mary Cookman says she hopes that her family and others along Cow Creek Road in Azalea will not "live in the shadow of the dam forever." She says that their effort is not just to stall construction. "I'd like to see it off the books."

There are 27 property owners who are directly affected, by the group's count, though not all of them live in the area. The possibility of a dam about seven miles down Cow Creek Road has been one of several alternatives considered by the county for water resources development, according to Project Engineer Ken Shumway.

He acknowledges that it is, "the one we're conducting in detail studies on."

Geological investigations and soil samples were completed during November. Gossen says the suitability of the site is still being evaluated. He has been compiling cost estimates based on 78 prices from San Francisco International Engineering Company, and says that the figures listed now are "not very accurate" and the chart presented from his office is "in need of revising." He is not prepared to say if or when the dam will be built.

"The commissioners don't have a preference until they hear from us," he explained. "I'm not in a hurry to make recommendations."

Douglas County Commissioner Bill Vian is less hesitant.

"My vote would go for the Galesville site tomorrow," he opines, "if the estimated cost has no relation to the value of an owner's personal labor. He sees no pressing need to work on their homes." He views future ownership of these appeals does not exist, he is afraid that he will not be reimbursed forever.

"I feel very badly about certain people," he said. "I want to have them to be reimbursed fairly," he added. "I know Herbert Lumber Co. in Riddle states "I lean toward Galesville, but there's a definite problem of displacement of people." He adds "that you don't put people in a lesser living situation than they have now."

Jim Cookman is less optimistic about reimbursement. He claims that appraisals did not consider something "the dam and where to place it is essentially a political decision." The group is urging to participate in public hearings on a comprehensive plan, to consult an attorney prior to any county action "to adopt a special plan or exception", and to find candidates sympathetic to their cause and support them.

Photos show that ordinary vehicles have arrived at the end of the road which some claim is only accessible by 4-wheel drive. Burl Oar, former water master, led a number of group tours to this point, five miles from a paved road.

Currently county charts show the estimated costs of the two possible 50,000-acre projects within one million dollars of each other, listing Galesville at $17,757,500 and Gold Mt. at $18,802,800. The Galesville site shows extra cost over Gold Mt.

The Galesville site shows extra cost over Gold Mt. and shows extra cost in Property acquisition, utility relocation, and road relocation. The Gold Mountain site is more costly only in actual construction allocations.

Seeking allies, Mrs. Cookman has made four trips to Salem with information supporting her group's cause. She spoke to the State Water Resource Board in October and to LCDC in early November. She plans to return whenever the subject appears on the LCDC agenda to alert them. "Everytime you start to do something, somebody wants to protect a snail or a bird," he said. "If there's five people that don't want something to happen, it's easy for them to stop the whole show."

Even those who want the dam of 9,000 acres on Applegate Creek, "would be like putting a band-aid on major surgery."

The smaller dam had been proposed in conjunction with the much larger Days Creek Federal Dam project that has been halted due to the Carter Administration's moratorium on all federally funded dams.

The other alternative at Gold Mountain, according to Elst and other detractors, "is in an inaccessible spot; would cost a fortune; and Coos County won't do it."

The Gold Mountain site lies between Douglas and Coos Counties and is discouraged by Coos County commissioners.

"The impoundment area created by this dam would flood valuable forest, much of which is under private ownership, "the commissioners wrote in July. "We do not feel we can support this proposal unless the affected landowners also support it."

Those owners include Robert Dollar, Superior Lumber, and Georgia-Pacific.

Owners of the 700 acres of farm land along Cow Creek persist in requesting "equal studies on Gold Mountain. They have visited the alternative site and insist that it is "not remote".

Galesville dam built readily see that the present controversy is 'understandable.' Glendale Mayor Martin Brooks, who sees "water shortages all the way down the system" and has had to hold off subdivisions of 30 to 40 homes because "we can't guarantee them water."

"I feel very badly about certain people," he said. "I want them to be reimbursed fairly." Milton Herbert of Herbert Lumber states "it is in a game where they are changing faster than a umpire."

"You close every law to protect people and trees when you dam," Mary Cookman said her home was never really active before: "This is the first time I took my apron off."

-JIM AND MARY Cookman are living in the shadow of a $17 million Douglas County
-dam project and they'd like to find a place to back up water.

-Elaine Weis
Douglas County Commissioner Bill Vian is less hesitant. "My vote would go for the Galesville site tomorrow," he says. He expresses concern about county water needs, "now and in the future" and does not see any of the alternatives sites as adequate or feasible.

Vian refers to "information gathered by competent people who weigh costs and accessibility" and adds, "I'm not listening to emotional people."

He admits, in reply to a question from the Cookman's, "I'd be madder than hell if I lived there."

However his work with the highway department has given him experience. "I've seen many people displaced," Vian said. "This isn't anything new."

Still he adds, aware of one particular case, "I sympathize very much with the Bradys."

Mary Brady lives on a 100-year-old homestead that has been in her family since 1919. She has lived there all her life and is a teacher of Home Economics at Glendale High School.

One protest sign along Cow Creek Road reads, "Our Commissioner's Political Playground."

Vian responds: "I don't think it's political. I think it's a matter of need." He substantiates this with the evidence of a petition signed by 2,000 people throughout the southern part of the county supporting water resource development.

To Vian, this petition, which specifies no one site, means "an overwhelming majority must have some kind of faith in what we're doing."

Azalea Realtor Frank Elst was active in organizing the petition and is a "strong supporter" of the Galesville Dam. He says the idea has been around since Orlo Worley supported it in 1929.

He indicates that the alternative sites proposed are not feasible. One for a smaller