

Maverick Ranch wins dam fight

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Contributing Writer

Although the Bexar County Commissioners Court passed a motion to delete the upper Leon Creek projects from the regional flood control plan, sisters Martha, Mary and Bebe Fenstermaker said they want to see it in writing.

The sisters, who own the 900-acre Maverick Ranch-Fromme Farm south of Boerne, said they have been targeted for eminent domain four times previously and have been battling "bad ideas" for 20 years.

Proposals have included a City Public Service substation and transmission lines, replacing their wooden utility poles with titanic metal poles and recently, a \$16 million dam.

Bebe Fenstermaker said she can't believe their long struggle to preserve their historic, working farm is over.

"The dams on the upper Leon Creek were voted on before we got to the Commissioners Court meeting," she said. "Commissioner (Lyle) Larson's secretary told us that they did vote to drop the dams planned on us and along the Leon on Toutant-Beauregard from the plans. We don't know if that means now or forever."

Art Villarreal, Bexar County flood control division manager, has confirmed that the deletion of the project on their property is indeed a done deal.

"A study commissioned by the San Antonio River Authority showed little or no cost benefit in providing a facility in that area," Villarreal said.

The family has owned the Maverick Ranch-Fromme Farm for 102 years. The sisters have lived on the property for the last 40 years, raising Texas Longhorn cattle.

The entire ranch-farm was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979. The Fenstermakers recently won the Clara Driscoll Award from Preservation Texas.

"It was awarded to us for our continuing efforts to preserve and protect our historic 150-year-old working ranch-farm from eminent domain," Mary Fenstermaker said.

"The latest threat being inundation by the city, Bexar County and the San Antonio River Authority flood retention dam."

Mary said their commitment is rooted in a decision made by ancestors 45 years ago to never develop the property.

"We are charged with carrying that out," she said.

To this end, they also have habitat for two endangered species, the golden-cheeked warbler and black-capped vireo, along with other native fauna and flora.

"We are most concerned with the loss of the golden-cheeked warbler and the black-capped vireo in Bexar County," Bebe said.

"The populations here at the Maverick Ranch-Fromme Farm have increased due to the destruction of their habitat by development, just as is happening at Camp Bullis. These losses of habitat should concern everyone."

She said the impact of growth on water quantity and quality throughout the region is being felt now and will get much worse.

"Why did they want to build a dam here? That was our question all along. We're at the tiptop of a watershed," Martha said. "Growth. The loss of open space and wildlife habitat is beyond comprehension."