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County recommits to watershed

By Bj Lewis
Staff Writer

Denton County commissioners voted Tuesday to renew an existing agreement with the Upper Trinity Regional Water District and to step up the county's participation in various regional activities.

The agreement was first drafted when the water district was created legislatively in 1989. Under the new multi-year agreement, the county will participate in the water district's Watershed Protection Program and begin new leadership activities in helping protect watersheds that drain into area water supply lakes.

"The county has a very strategic role to play in setting a countywide tone and recognizing watershed protection is a high-priority item," said Thomas E. Taylor, executive director of the water district. "There are probably very few things more important in today's time than trying to protect our water supplies, trying to protect all that from pollution."

Taylor said there are three elements to watershed protection in the agreement: continued support of signs to inform the public about watershed protection, a program to help residents dispose of household hazardous waste and a plan to work with new developers in regard to subdivision regulations. Regarding the latter, Taylor said the idea would be to leave as much natural area conditions as

From Page 1A Watershed

possible.

"Natural grasses, trees and vegetation do a marvelous job of taking out pollutants. It's a marvelous thing nature has created," Taylor said.

There is a great opportunity to protect the watershed locally because Denton County is largely underdeveloped, he said. Officials can stay ahead of the curve, instead of trying to protect areas after they have been damaged, he added.

"Once the watershed is damaged," Taylor said, "it costs more to restore it."

He complimented Commissioners Court members for taking the time to visit several watershed locations and see firsthand the areas they are working to protect. He also credited County Judge Mary Horn with doing a lot of the work to get the agreement worked out.

"The agreement will enable the county to take important steps — at little or no cost — to help protect local creeks and lakes that the people of Denton County depend on for critical water supplies," Horn said.

These measures were not in place when the district was created, but with greater population density, there is a need for them, Horn said.

"There is more awareness, not only with governmental bodies but out in the general public," she said. "Our goal is to keep them [pollutants] out of our watershed. The more we can keep out, the less it [water] has to be cleaned for consumption and use."

Taylor said that as water district officials have met with area city governments, they have received positive feedback about the protection plan from all parties.

"Everyone says, 'We're so glad someone is taking a leadership role in trying to set a vision on how we should protect our watershed,'" he said. "There is no single agency responsible. We're all stepping up to do our share and [Tuesday] the county did."

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See WATERSHED on 19A