

THE JOPLIN GLOBE

FRIDAY | MARCH 14, 2025

joplinglobe.com | \$2.00

Stockton Lake OK'd as future water source

BY DEBBY WOODIN

dwoodin@joplinglobe.com

Access to a long-awaited alternative water source for much of Southwest Missouri, including Joplin, has been approved.

Roddy Rogers, executive director of the nonprofit Southwest Missouri Water, said the Army Corps of Engineers has decided to allow access to Stockton Lake water storage to members of the organization. Rogers said that supply could serve nearly a million people in the future through a pipeline that would be constructed from the lake.

The organization has been working with the Corps and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources for about 18 years to secure an alternative source for water currently used in the area.

Rogers said the decision "is very significant" to ensure access to water.

A 2003 groundwater study commissioned by Missouri American Water and the city of Joplin showed that the Ozark aquifer, which is the source of groundwater now, could not sustain long-term

SEE **WATER**, 2A



This aerial view shows Stockton Dam. Stockton Lake is owned and operated by the Army Corps of Engineers.

population growth in the Joplin area. There also was potential for water-quality risks to occur in the aquifer due to contamination that exists in the overlying Springfield Plateau aquifer, the study concluded.

As a result of that study, the water organization made a request in 2007 for reallocation of water storage from three Southwest Missouri lakes, including Stockton.

Storage space in Stockton will now be reallocated to provide for drinking water and industrial water supply to communities that participate in Southwest Missouri Water, Rogers said. Approximately 38 million gallons of water per day will be available, which Rogers said would provide over half of the projected available future supply to meet demand through 2060.

"That doesn't mean we'll use it all, but it's there. That sounds like a lot of water, but we lose about the same amount in evaporation every day," Rogers said.

The amount allocated to Southwest Missouri Water is 6% to 7% of the available water in the lake.

"It's not going to have a significant effect on the lake," he said, adding there have been 15 years of study to determine the impact on the body of water.

"In addition to securing water for Southwest Missouri's future, this project will be a long-term economic driver. In the near term alone, it will inject close to a billion dollars and thousands of jobs into the Missouri economy as the water distribution network is completed," Rogers said.

It will supply water for business and manufacturing as well as for residential use.

The 2060 planning horizon "seems like a long way out, but it's not. It takes 20 years to get to this step," Rogers said. "It's a huge economic driver that could bring 8,000 jobs and a billion dollars into our economy," he said, adding that "Wall Street has begun to invest in water for water supply. They say it will be a trillion-dollar industry and will define this century just like oil did the last century."

The next step will be to secure contracts with the organization's members that want to cement their participation in the future water supply system.

In speaking to the Joplin City Council last year, Rogers said, "the long-term view is the key to water's future. We've got to drive our future. We can't wait for it to come to us" when it comes to planning for future water resources, he said.

"We are right on target with what we've been doing with what is going on with the global water industry," he added.

The city of Joplin and Missouri American started the effort to secure an alternative water supply. Last year, the City Council approved a \$2.5 million allocation designated for future water supply development that Joplin's public works director, Dan Johnson, sought for the list of projects to be funded with the city's three-eighths-cent capital improvements sales tax.

The organization covers 16 counties and includes cities such as Springfield, Carthage, Branson, Monett, Mount Vernon, Nixa, Republic, Pierce City, Willard and Ozark.

Rogers said Missouri's congressional delegation was instrumental in ensuring the project's approval. The lawmakers saved Southwest Missouri tens of millions of dollars through the Water Resources Development Act of 2024, which became law Jan. 5, Rogers said.