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DAWN to become regional water commission

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The sun is setting on DAWN, a regional water board put together to lay out the future of water projects in McLean County, and officials associated with the project say they are ready to take the next steps.

DAWN, or Driving Area Water Needs, is a collaboration between local communities and water districts to prepare for the county's future water needs. In particular, the goal is to regionalize water operations for the county, rather than addressing the issue piecemeal. At present, Livermore and Calhoun obtain their own water, while Island, Beech Grove, Sacramento and the North McLean Water District each buy water from different sources.

The city commissions of Beech Grove, Calhoun, Island, Livermore and Sacramento have all voted in favor of joining the project. The resolutions they passed now go on to McLean Fiscal Court and with the court's approval, DAWN will become the McLean County Regional Water Commission.

Operating under the new name opens new doors and gives the project a future, said Betty Howard, chair of the DAWN board.

"When everything goes to Frankfort and we're looking for funding on every avenue we can, they'll see this is McLean County instead of asking 'What is DAWN?'" Howard said.

The next steps are three public hearings, one in Beech Grove, another in Calhoun (for the communities of Calhoun and Sacramento) and a third in Livermore (for the communities of Livermore and Island). Those meetings will be announced at a later date, Howard said.

"They are public informational hearings. There's not going to be any motions made at the hearings. It's just public awareness," Howard said.

Winfred Williams, a DAWN member and chair of the North McLean Water District, said this move keeps the project on the right track.

"Once we apply for grants and that sort of thing, we felt that would be a much better (name). It's also a regional entity by including the whole county," Williams said. "We feel like it's a good thing for the county because the county itself will then have its own plant to take care of McLean Countians, instead of having to rely on other areas to get our own water."

Williams said regionalizing the project also has other benefits, allowing the county as a whole to address regulations and other needs rather than to have to fix the same problems over and over for different areas.

Williams also said the unified stance of local leaders is an asset.

"We're fortunate to have the unity of the county being involved. We think that's a very good thing," Williams said. "That's what we need for a county this size, to work together."

Bell Engineering is the Glasgow firm working with the commission and Howard said she recently spoke with the engineer associated with the regional water project.

"I talked with Bell Engineering's Bob Pickerell. I asked him, 'How do you feel about where we are right now,'" Howard said. "He said, 'You are at least a year ahead of what I expected to be right now.' I think within three years, we could have this undertaking going on. I see in three years, we could have a regional water plant. That's with everybody's prayers for funding. We need all we can get."

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