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Public scoping meeting held for Lake George Project; no punches this time

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By Janel Forte, Reporter CONNECT

GEORGE COUNTY, MS (WLOX) - It's an environmental project in South Mississippi that carries a lot of controversy.

"The application says an estimate of \$80 million," said Jackson County resident Eric Richards.

That's the price tag on the Pascagoula River drought resiliency project in Jackson and George counties. Eric Richards one of many concerned citizens that packed the George County Senior Citizens Building Tuesday night for a public scoping meeting on the project.

"I really thought, in the beginning, this might be a worthwhile project. But when you read the background and all the studies they've done, it becomes obvious this is a very bad project," Richards said.

The purpose is to create a man-made lake in each of the two counties, that would serve as a reserve for the Pascagoula River. Those against the project say it's unnecessary.

"This is not a well-justified project because the Pascagoula River can go to low flows and not be harmed," said Andrew Whitehurst, the water program director for the Gulf Restoration Network.

Still, not everyone there opposed to what's known as Lake George. For each sticker reading "no fake lakes" was another reading "locals for Lake George."

"I'm all for it. It's going to be great for development, for future expansion of homes, for industrial use," said Jackson County property owner Keith Ray.

This meeting organized by the US Army Corp of Engineers is part of the preliminary stages of getting a permit decision. The corp, soliciting feedback from the community, and the Pat Harrison Waterway District was also on hand to discuss the project's concept.

But despite differences of opinions when it comes to the proposal, many agreed the layout of the event needed some work. For Sherwin Ray, who hasn't decided whether or not he supports the project, he says he left feeling uninformed.

"It shoulda been set up in an auditorium with audio/visual equipment where you can make a presentation and people can ask questions from the audience," Ray said.

Those who left feedback said they're looking forward to being able to take a look at the results of the public scoping period.

George County Community Development and Communications Director Ken Flanagan said it would take at least six years to start work on the project once it is approved.

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