

Legislators ask feds for reservoir help

Will Klusener
wklusener@themercury.com

TOPEKA - Kansas legislators are asking federal agencies and Congress to extend the life of the state's reservoirs, including Tuttle Creek Lake.

House members passed a resolution Monday asking the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Reclamation and Congress to work with the state to protect the reservoirs. The reservoirs provide drinking water to about 80 percent of Kansans, but the cost of restoring and maintaining them could be astronomical. "It will be in the billions," said 66th District Rep. **Sydney Carlin**.

The resolution seeks federal assistance to manage the reservoirs to reduce sediment to extend their life. Sediment buildup reduces the amount of water that can be stored for drinking, flood control, drought prevention and recreation.

Though many of the reservoirs were designed with a 50-year lifespan, Tuttle Creek Lake was designed to be "economically viable" for about 100 years, said operations manager Brian McNulty. McNulty said the lake held about 16,000 acres of water in 1970 but is currently down to 12,500 acres. The Corps of Engineers conducts lake surveys every 10 to 15 years, McNulty said, and at the time of the last survey in 2000 the lake had lost about 34 percent of its original capacity.

Silting - sediment that settles to the bottom of the lake from the rivers and streams that feed it - is the main culprit in Tuttle's loss of capacity. Most of the silting occurs at the mouth of the lake near Randolph. The lake was about 20 to 35 feet deep at the Randolph bridge in 1970.

"It's all silted in now," McNulty said, adding that the main part of the lake near the dam remains at nearly its original depth of about 30 feet.

67th District Rep. Tom Hawk called the silting an "unfunded liability," and said the resolution seeks to clarify who is responsible for maintenance and how it should be paid for.

"It's basically a resolution asking 'how should we do this?'" Hawk said.

Carlin said the most likely means of extending the reservoirs' lives would be dredging, a process by which silt that has been deposited at the base of a dam is sucked up and relocated.

McNulty said dredging certainly would not be easy.

"You're figuring hundreds of thousands of feet of silt at ten-feet deep," McNulty said. "You have to ask 'what are we going to do with all that material?'"

The Associated Press also contributed to this report.
