

Society of Environmental Journalists

SUPPORTING MATERIAL FOR "The Dam Called Trouble"

Here's some of the supporting editorials, stories from other publications, and letters to the Editor"

After publication of "The Dam Called Trouble" on December 12, the Army Corps mounted an aggressive damage control campaign. First there was a press release intended to insure the public that "while Lewisville Dam has some known dam safety issues, it is not at risk of failure." A press conference atop the dam followed a day later, in which the commander of the Corps Fort Worth District assured reporters that Lewisville "is a well designed and constructed dam" and that the Corps was taking "all the necessary actions to make sure" it remains structurally sound.

But the Editorial Board of The Dallas Morning News made clear that it wasn't buying the Corps' claims. In a December 14 editorial, the board wrote that "The threat to North Texas is real, and the Army Corps of Engineers needs to make that clear to the public. The Corps, however, seems to be sending mixed messages. Publicly, it affirms faith in the integrity of the dam, but internal documents cited in the story indicate that the corps is more concerned than it is letting on."

<http://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/editorials/20151214-editorial-amry-corps-needs-to-square-with-region-on-lewisville-dam-dangers.ece>

Other newspapers and magazines weighed in after the publication of "The Dam Called Trouble," poking holes in the Army Corps' damage-control campaign.

In an editorial, The Denton Record-Chronicle urged the Army Corps to terminate their damage control campaign and "shot straight on dam condition."

"<http://www.dentonrc.com/opinion/editorials-headlines/20151221-shoot-straight-on-dam-condition.ece>

The Dallas Observer published two major stories backing the conclusions of "The Dam Called Trouble."

<http://www.dallasobserver.com/news/tamping-down-fears-officials-contradict-each-other-on-lewisville-dam-danger-feel-calm-now-7861573>

<http://www.dallasobserver.com/news/no-fair-blaming-lewisville-dam-problems-on-the-bible-its-you-and-me-babe-7865510>

On December 28 a congressional delegation met with the paper's Editorial Board pledging to “pressure” the Corps to “accelerate” rehabilitation work on the dam and promising to raise the millions of dollars needed to do the job.

"Dallas-area Lawmakers Pledge Vigilance on Lewisville Lake Dam."

<http://www.dallasnews.com/news/metro/20151228-dallas-area-lawmakers-pledge-vigilance-on-lewisville-lake-dam.ece>

Following that meeting between Dallas-area lawmakers, the Army Corps and the editorial board a number of readers sent letters to the editor imploring The Dallas Morning News to keep covering the growing problems facing the Lewisville Dam. Letters like this one:

Keep an eye on the dam

Re: “Vigilance pledged for dam — Congress members say they’ll work to ensure funding for vital repairs,” Tuesday Metro story.

I would like to commend the DMN for its continuing reporting on the Lewisville Lake dam and its very dangerous instability. Should the earthen dam collapse, the images you paint of entire communities being wiped out, over 400,000 lives being directly affected, a 50-foot wall of water in downtown Dallas, economic disaster for an entire region if not the state, all leave a sense of insecurity for us all, especially when we read where the Corps of Engineers is trying to fix the problem with sandbags and tarps. Really, that should comfort us all?

The corps says it will study the problem by 2017, and the DMN is correct in saying that is too long. Time is running out.

There was a time when our country had folks who could get things done now, who didn't wait for so many government agencies at all levels, full of pencil pushers who took their sweet time to study a problem. North Texas is trusting the DMN to stay on top of this because if not for you, this entire situation would have been kept quiet.”

Don Roe, Dallas/White Rock

Hundreds of readers responded to the story -- The Dam Called Trouble, on the comments below the original story as well as in a DMN blog asking readers to “sound off” about the issues raised by the story:

<http://www.dallasnews.com/news/community-news/lewisville-flower-mound/headlines/20151225-sounding-off-readers-discuss-status-of-lake-lewisville-dam.ece>

Based on the deluge of letters, it became clear that the public wasn't persuaded by the Corps' claims in response to "The Dam Called Trouble" that the dam "is functioning as designed" and poses no "immediate risk of failure."

Even now, three months after it was published, "The Dam Called Trouble" continues to draw widespread attention and concern from cities downstream, from lawmakers and from the general public. In a front-page story published, Feb 12, 2016, "The Dam Called Trouble" was cited again.

"Cities, environmental groups protesting planned gas drilling at Lewisville Lake
<http://thescoopblog.dallasnews.com/2016/02/cities-environmental-groups-protesting-planned-gas-drilling-at-lewisville-lake.html/>

Jim Moroney, the publisher of The Dallas Morning News, wrote me a letter a few weeks after the story was published.

George,

I had as many "spontaneous" comments from readers about this story as I recall having for any story in a long time. The Armageddon-like consequences that would follow this dam's failure were remarkable to imagine. The story carried the stench of bureaucracy with its head in the silt. It is a potential oracle of impending disaster and in today's news parlance, it was a major talker. Hopefully, because of this work, we will never know if the dam would have failed. We have given the government a chance to do what is right and get what needs to be fixed...fixed.

While the audience for what we publish is nowhere as great when we report the story that prevents the tragedy as opposed to when we report the tragedy itself, the most important reason we do what we do is to shine lights that can prevent the darkness before it descends.

Thanks for leading this important reporting.

Jim

Jim Moroney

Publisher and CEO

The Dallas Morning News