

# Creek residents frustrated by county

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Residents along Hamilton Creek who are alarmed about the City of Burnet's attempt to be allowed to dump up to 1.7 million gallons of treated wastewater into the stream Tuesday took their case to the Burnet County Commissioners Court. They left feeling frustrated and with little hope of getting any help from the commissioners. Things went south almost from the beginning for the group, Concerned Citizens of Hamilton Creek, when their lead-off speaker, Clint Rhodes, angered the commissioners by questioning their willingness to get involved in the issue.

"It's a very important issue and I don't understand why ya'll don't want to get involved," Rhodes said. "It blows my mind that ya'll don't want to get involved." As Rhodes spoke he appeared to become more agitated and his body language and mannerisms reflected disgust.

County Judge Donna Klaeger and Pct. 1 Commissioner Bill Neve were quick to react. "This court is involved in a lot of water issues," said Klaeger, who then went on to enumerate a number of them the court has been involved in recent months. "To tell this court it's not involved is just not true," Neve said. "This county is extremely involved." Rhodes then sought to return the focus of the discussion to the specific issue of Burnet's application to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality for an amended permit to discharge its treated wastewater, or effluent, into Hamilton Creek.

"It is detrimental to the creek. It's pollution. It's treated sewage" Rhodes said. "Hamilton Creek is a jewel. It's beautiful." After inviting Rhodes and other members of the group to become involved in the county's many water issue discussions and initiatives, Klaeger moved the meeting along to another agenda item and it appeared Concerned Citizens of Hamilton Creek were done for the day. But about an hour later, Klaeger returned to the public comment agenda item and other members of the group were allowed to speak. The four speakers took great pains to express their appreciation to Klaeger and the court for allowing them to speak, obviously seeking to repair some of the damage done by Rhodes' opening gambit.

"As you can tell people are a bit passionate about this," said Lonnie Moore, president of the Protect Lake Travis Association, which along with the cities of Austin and Lakeway and other entities are challenging Burnet's permit application. Hamilton Creek empties into Lake Travis, which is the sole source of Austin, Lakeway and other municipalities' drinking water between Marble Falls and Austin. "We are really asking for your help," Moore said. "These people are your constituents and they are here today to ask the commissioners court for help." Moore then went on to challenge City of Burnet officials' assertions that the effluent the city discharges into Hamilton Creek is high quality. "That's just not accurate," Moore said. Treated effluent from Hamilton Creek that flows into Lake Travis far exceeds the current levels in the lake, he said.

Dennis Cornelison, who owns and operates Creekside Camp and Cabins on the creek with his wife Diane and whose front porch sits less than a 100 yards from the stream, started his speech with effusive praise of his commissioner representative, Pct. 3's Ronnie Hibler, for once helping him recover from having dumped a mobile home in the middle of a county road. Cornelison, who also is a minister, then unleashed a stemwinder of a plea: "We're just asking you to voice your disapproval. We're tickled Burnet is doing good and can build a new sewage plant, but they want carte blanche to do whatever they want to do. "Granted they've been doing a good job, but they can do more. Let's keep it clean. That's what people come here for. We just want you to see a face of who this is going to affect."