

# THE NEWS HERALD

## \$5.5 million allotted for Bay water



Government officials approved nearly \$5.5 million Thursday to fund an alternative pump station for Deer Point Lake Reservoir, the county's primary water supply source.

*ANDREW WARDLOW | News Herald file photo*

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PANAMA CITY — Bay County's quest for a secondary water source in case of a "catastrophic" potable water shortage advanced Thursday following a water management district vote.

The Northwest Florida Water Management District Governing Board approved nearly \$5.5 million to fund an alternative pump station for Deer Point Lake Reservoir, which serves as the county's primary water supply source.

Since the early 1980s, Bay County has been pursuing a comparable source for potable water, with one run-in with Hurricane Opal in 1995 nearly contaminating the area's sole freshwater source.

"It has happened before," said Valerie Sale, Bay County spokeswoman. "So, if we faced a hurricane of that magnitude head on, it could have a catastrophic effect on a safe water supply. Basically, now there is a secondary source of water if anything happened to the dam."

The funds will be used to develop an upstream intake near the mouth of Econfina Creek and includes the construction of a surface water intake, pump station and pipeline. Upon completion, it will have the capacity to deliver to the Bay County Water Treatment Plant about 30 million gallons a day of raw water.

“This project is vital to ensuring a safe and reliable water supply for the residents, visitors and businesses of Bay County,” said Commissioner Guy Tunnell. “We thank the Northwest Florida Water Management District for their support and look forward to continuing to work with them to manage and protect Bay County’s water and natural resources.”

Designs and permits are in the process of completion, and county officials expect construction to begin in the next few months. Under current timelines, the upstream intake is expected to be functional in less than a year.

The development of an alternative water supply source will improve Bay County’s water supply and provide water for the public while also sustaining water resources and associated natural systems, county officials said.

“The new pumping station will be located in the northernmost portion of Deer Point Lake Reservoir,” said Paul Lackemacher, utility services director. “This new pumping station, surface water intake, and pipeline will ensure our residents that the County will have an available back-up water supply in the event of extreme conditions.”

Deer Point Lake Reservoir is included as a priority in the Northwest Florida Water Management District’s Region III Regional Water Supply Plan.

“As Deer Point Lake Reservoir is vulnerable to impacts from major coastal storm surge events, this project is vital to ensuring a clean, safe and reliable supply of water for the region,” said Governing Board Chairman George Roberts. “The district is pleased to partner with Bay County to implement this project and achieve one of our long-standing water supply planning priorities.”