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## Officials say no to water transfers

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Lawmakers from TVA counties on planning panel

MONTGOMERY - Though a legislative committee is working toward a proposed statewide water plan, North Alabama lawmakers say the Tennessee River is off-limits to any water transfers.

Tennessee Valley members of the Joint Legislative Committee on Water Policy and Management are hopeful that the Tennessee River basin remains status quo.

Local legislation approved in 2005 and 2006 prevents the removal of water from North Alabama counties along the Tennessee River.

Rep. Jeff McLaughlin, D-Guntersville, a member of the water committee, said many people outside North Alabama aren't fully acquainted with the Tennessee Valley Authority.

"We have our own set of needs and our own set of priorities that may be a little different," he said, such as "TVA cooling its plants, trying to make sure we've got the site for a Volkswagen or something else, making sure we got all our chickens cooled and watered and all the industry and agriculture we have in the valley."

The bill passed in 2006 to cover Morgan County does allow water withdrawals by Cullman County and a small amount of water by Blount County, which has water taken by Birmingham. The Lawrence County bill also allows Blount County to draw some water.

Sen. Kim Benefield, D-Woodland, chairman of the committee, said she was unaware of the laws covering the TVA counties. The committee will meet again Sept. 23 at Lake Guntersville State Park.

McLaughlin sponsored all the bills that prohibit water transfers out of the Tennessee River basin in Alabama.

"We all want to approach this issue from the standpoint of the greater good of everyone in the state, and at the same time, maintain and strengthen our hand in dealing with Atlanta and any other entity that would want to take that that would otherwise flow through the rivers and streams of Alabama," said McLaughlin.

He said he and other North Alabama lawmakers are primarily in a listening mode on the committee.

"Remember, we, in our part of the state, have taken action," he said. "We have initiated water policy in the valley. We intend to help and see how we can help the rest of the state."

The local bills protecting the Tennessee River could be overridden by statewide legislation. But it's likely that lawmakers from the TVA area could muster enough support to kill such a bill.

In addition to McLaughlin, the water committee has three other members from TVA counties - Sens. Parker Griffith, D-Huntsville; and Arthur Orr, R-Decatur; and Rep. Frank McDaniel, D-Albertville.