

## FITE:

Fite's candor has gotten him in trouble at times.

FROM A-11

In his mid-20s and not yet out of college two decades ago this year, Fite took an unsteady helm that had claimed three previous Scenic Rivers Commission administrators in six years. He didn't even get paid during his first three months on the job.

Into those political rapids, Fite dove like a man who didn't know how cold the water was. His first battle was over a \$600 motor that was bought twice.

The current soon grew faster. Thriving Fayetteville, Ark., said it wanted to discharge treated wastewater into the Illinois basin. But Fite found his voice, his mission and his leadership. He was ready to fight.

The battle eventually was waged all the way to the nation's highest court, and while justices ruled that Fayetteville could receive its discharge permit, the decision might prove a long-term victory for Fite and Oklahoma.

"It set a national precedent that an upstream state can't pollute a downstream state," he said.

As he starts his third decade as the commission's administrator, Fayetteville once again wants to discharge into the Illinois basin.

This time, however, many northwest Arkansas cities have vowed to clean up their acts, releasing only 1 part of phosphorus per million. The deal is locked in negotiations between lawyers in two states.

At the same time, the federal Environmental Protection Agency is still mulling whether to adopt Oklahoma's state-supported 0.037 phosphorus standard for this side of the Illinois.

This time around, Fite doesn't feel like being patient with lawyers or the EPA. He thinks they ought to get to the point-source dischargers first and then deal with nonpoint sources.

Nonpoint pollution comes from natural sources such as chicken litter that is used as fertilizer.

Point sources, however, are discharges from facilities and are regulated by both state and federal authorities.

"It seems like our state wants to negotiate an all-inclusive deal including poultry growers," he said. "The cities are ready to sign. My opinion of the EPA is they need to get off the pot."

Such candor has gotten Fite in trouble at times.

Several years ago, he resigned temporarily because of the commission's perceived lethargy with dealing with a long-term management plan for the Illinois.

Much of that plan — strategies to clean the river and improve recreation and land use alike — still hasn't been enacted and will be revisited next year.

"Some of the new members seemed like they were here just to stick me with a knife," Fite said. But, he added, his "resignation" was a mistake. "I wish I hadn't walked out."

Commissioner Rick Stubblefield was one of those on whom Fite walked out. The two have tangled at times, although many river observers see both as moderates, balancing idealism with the realities of northwest Arkansas' explosive growth.

Fite has earned Stubblefield's respect.

"The last four years, he's been settling in and looking at long-term issues" such as the management plan," Stubblefield said. "Fite came in young, but the Fayetteville lawsuit allowed him to galvanize people in the watershed through a common goal."

Those goals aren't always in common, even 20 years later.

Stubblefield, who has lived in the Chewey area since 1981, knows that many people say they want to pay the price for an unpolluted Illinois, as long as it's not out of their own wallets.

He touted Fite as the man who can bring people along, sometimes slowly. Neither Stubblefield nor longtime Illinois advocate Phil Lorenz float any rumors that Fite courts only environmentalists.

"I think he has recognized everybody's needs," said Lorenz, who is considered one of the environmentalists. "I think he knows what middle of the road to take that's most likely to achieve the best end."

Fite seems ready to battle for another generation. He's had other offers, but the waterway is too arterial for him. He lives it, breathes it, bleeds it.

"I love the Illinois River. The Illinois River is me," he said. "The Illinois River is a lot of people."

By LINDA MARTIN

World Staff Writer

VINITA — Craig County commissioners agreed Monday to review an offer from the city of Vinita for 5 acres of parkland for a new courthouse-jail complex in exchange for the city receiving 10 years of free jail space.

Progress on the new courthouse-jail complex has been virtually at a standstill since approved by voters last Dec. 10 after the city challenged the county's attempt to build the complex on 5 acres outside the city limits.

The county had offered to have the site annexed to Vinita.

A judge ruled in October that the new courthouse had to be built inside Vinita's orig-

inal townsite when it was made the county seat.

Meanwhile, negotiations under way between the county and city have hit a stumbling block — the land the existing courthouse sits on.

The city gave the county the 1-acre site in City Park for the existing courthouse in 1919.

According to an agreement reached then, once the county is through with the courthouse, the property reverts to the city, officials said.

"Our main concern is about the courthouse later," Mayor Joe Johnson said. "We don't want to be responsible for the courthouse."

"We don't have the money to fix up the building, and we don't have the money to tear it down," he said.

It would cost at least \$130,000 to raze the building, Johnson said.

Commissioner James "Pee Wee" Smith said the county would share the cost of dispos-

ing of the old courthouse.

But as for the city using the new jail at no cost, that would put the county in a financial difficulty, especially with climbing medical costs, Smith said.

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