

# Hood County Commissioners urge TCEQ to deny air quality permit for Wolf Hollow expansion

August 29, 2024

By LAUREN DAVIS Staff Writer – Hood County News

The Hood County Commissioners Court adopted a resolution Tuesday, Aug. 27 urging the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to deny an air quality permit requested by Constellation Energy for the expansion of its Wolf Hollow II power generation facility — referred to as Wolf Hollow III.

The court's decision follows concerns raised by local residents and officials about potential environmental and health impacts.

If approved, the Wolf Hollow III project would serve as a critical backstop for Texas' energy grid during periods of extreme demand, such as heat waves or cold snaps.

The proposed new eight gas units would replace older, less efficient generators within the Electric Reliability Council of Texas system and help ensure reliable energy supply as additional energy sources are developed. However, local officials and residents are wary of the environmental and noise impacts of the expansion. Constellation Energy has assured the community it will comply with all state and local noise ordinances and will not expand bitcoin operations at the site.

The outcome of TCEQ's decision on the air quality permits will determine whether Constellation Energy proceeds with the Wolf Hollow III project.

The resolution, presented during the court session, specifically called on the TCEQ to deny the issuance of state air quality permits for Wolf Hollow II, which currently operates as a 1,115 MW combined-cycle gas and steam turbine facility.

The facility, located in Hood County, began operations in June 2017 and is owned and operated by Constellation Energy. The company has proposed expanding the site with eight additional gas-fired generation capacity under the name Wolf Hollow III, which would add approximately 300 megawatts to the Texas grid. During the session, Precinct 2 Commissioner Nannette Samuelson read a statement from Cindy Highsmith, a local resident, who expressed concerns about the potential increase in air pollutants.

Highsmith highlighted that the proposed expansion would emit significant amounts of harmful contaminants, including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide and hazardous air pollutants like sulfuric acid and mercury. She emphasized the importance of Hood County maintaining its status as an "attainment area" under the EPA's air quality standards, which ensures clean air for residents and supports responsible industrial growth. "There are three nonattainment areas in Texas. They are Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth and San Antonio," Highsmith wrote. "Do we want to become a non-attainment area? I think the answer is no."

Highsmith also pointed out the proximity of the Wolf Hollow site to water bodies such as the Brazos River, Squaw Creek and Lake Granbury, raising alarms about the potential for mercury contamination in these areas. She urged the commissioners to support the resolution to protect public health and the environment.

Samuelson concluded with a motion, "The Hood County Commissioners Court urges TCEQ to deny issuance of proposed state air quality permit 175-173, issuance of prevention of significant deterioration, air quality permit PSDTX-1636, and issuance of greenhouse gas GHG-PSD, air quality permit GHG-PSDTX-238, (8:30) for emissions of GHG and that this resolution be mailed to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Office of Chief Clerk, P.O. Box 13087, Austin, Texas."

With Precinct 4 Commissioner Dave Eagle seconding Samuelson's motion, the resolution received unanimous support from the court and will be sent to the TCEQ and the offices of State Sen. Brian Birdwell and State Rep. Shelby Slawson to bolster their case against the expansion.

# Local leaders educate themselves on impact of cryptocurrency centers

February 16, 2024

By Hannah Barricks

Glen Rose Reporter

GRANBURY — Hood County Commissioner of Precinct 2, Nannette Samuelson, hosted a meeting at Twin Canyons Ranch to discuss Bitcoin farming and its threats to rural communities after Marathon Digital Holdings set up residency in her jurisdiction, rattling the bones of nearby homes and farms with relentless humming from large fans used to cool the mining machines.

Several Glen Rose representatives from city hall attended the meeting to learn about possible threats as renewable energy continues to surge in Texas. There, the group heard complaints from the plant's neighbors, including alleged headaches, ear ringing, and environmental issues that Hood County residents attribute to the machines.

MDH is one of many Bitcoin companies setting up shop in Texas after Gov. Greg Abbott turned to the Texas Blockchain Council to solve some of the state's energy grid issues, tweeting after the meeting that Texas would soon be "#1 for blockchain & cryptocurrency."

Since the meeting, more and more pro-cryptocurrency legislature has steadily moved through the House and Senate, making Texas the center of the movement.

So why is Bitcoin good for the Texas power grid? The answer isn't simple and varies depending on the resources you search. Some websites, like earthjustice.org and economist.com, claim that power plants follow the mines, which require an astronomical amount of power to continue solving algorithms that uncover Bitcoins. The plants allegedly see an opportunity to lend their power to the mine, which needs power in excess, and without, or limited, state funding or support, the number of power plants will naturally increase in a homeostatic back-scratching way.

But once the companies started flocking to Texas according to Abbott's plan, so did potential hazards.

"What I quickly learned, and was shocked by, is that residents up to 10 miles away are impacted by this center," said Glen Rose Councilwoman Dee Conrad about the Hood County meeting. "Residents shared that the intensity of the sound varies from a low hum to the equivalent of a helicopter landing on their house. Distance isn't a determinant of the sound level. Depending on topography and weather, there may be homes farther away where the noise is even louder."

For context, Conrad was told the noise from MDH overpowers the Comanche Peak Nuclear Power Plant test alarms in Glen Rose.

"That means the noise emitted could potentially prevent some Hood County residents from hearing the emergency alarm at Comanche Peak," she said.

The plant tests the sirens at noon on the first and third Monday of every month and would be used to alert unsuspecting community members of an emergency at the plant.

Hood County residents also fear the potential environmental impacts of the mine.

"Residents shared that they no longer see songbirds, rabbits, and other habitat on their property," continued Conrad. "One man noted that the geese on Lake Granbury are gone, as are the doves."

## Local leaders educate themselves on impact of cryptocurrency centers, continued

Other residents complained of nausea, tinnitus, hearing issues, migraines, nose bleeds, vertigo, etc., all affected after the mine came to town.

“When the issue of vertigo came up, Constable John Shirley noted that vertigo is a known issue associated with low-frequency sound waves,” Conrad said. “These types of sound waves are emitted from the center. It is clear that both the audible noise and the low-frequency sounds are causing significant mental and physical harm.”

Because of Abbott’s energy blitz, Conrad says there isn’t much state support available for local leaders to combat companies like MDH from buzzing into town.

“The commissioner and constable provided an update on what they are working on, including the limitations due to state law,” continued Conrad. “This open dialogue allowed for a sharing of ideas, potential next steps, and volunteer opportunities.”

Some Glen Rose residents claim to share their Hood County neighbors’ afflictions due to the power plant and are growing increasingly irritated as their concerns fall on deaf ears in Somervell County.

“I live at the corner of Apache Court in Glen Rose,” began one woman’s plea in Somervell County. “It’s gotten to where I can’t eat most of the time.”

People speaking up on Facebook about inexplicable health issues that they attribute to MDH mostly live around Apache Court, Texas Drive, and the Texas Amphitheater, but Conrad worries that Bitcoin companies are coming to Somervell County next, making it everyone’s problem.

“These mines have a history of moving to locations with solar panels, among other leading indicators,” she said. “I fear that when the county supported the solar panel farm (Yellow Viking), it may have put us on the radar for one of these centers. We must ensure all county residents know the harm that can come should one of these facilities move here. Unfortunately, if one does move to our county and chooses land outside the city limits, which is the most likely scenario, there is little to nothing the Commissioner’s Court can do to prevent it. But they can certainly not incentivize it in any way.

“Even if we don’t have a center move to our county, this industry impacts us. It’s estimated that they have caused a 5% increase in electricity costs. Meanwhile, they are subsidized by taxpayers via exemptions and abatements. These Bitcoin transaction centers offer no benefits to anyone other than their owners and investors.”

Conrad assures that she does not support government overreach but recognizes that people should always come first, especially in the eyes of state and local representatives.

“I am a Constitutional Conservative, but that does not mean we have to open our doors to any business, regardless of the harm it does,” she continued. “We are tasked with protecting our most vulnerable. Each of us needs to communicate with our elected officials regularly. Our County Commissioners need to know if something matters to you so they can take action. In this case, the state law provides very few options for the county. But if enough counties band together, we can demand action from our state representatives.

“Our representatives should be accountable to us. Not to lobbyists or big businesses when it harms us, our neighbors and friends, and this beautiful slice of heaven we’re lucky enough to call our home.”

# Leaders visit Austin to push for Bitcoin regulation

August 31, 2024

By Hannah Barricks

Glen Rose Reporter

Glen Rose leaders Chip Joslin, Rich Bruning, and Dee Conrad visited with at least 13 state representatives in Austin concerning regulations on the growing cryptocurrency market in rural Texas communities. Photo

Credit: Contributed photo

Local elected officials traveled to Austin recently to participate in discussions with lawmakers concerning Bitcoin mining in Texas after Gov. Greg Abbott welcomed the businesses to the state.

Potential Somervell County Commissioner of Precinct 3 and Republican nominee in the November election Chip Joslin, Glen Rose Mayor Pro Tem Dee Conrad, and city councilman Rich Bruning made the trip.

Since 2021, Glen Rose officials have kept an eye on the rapidly growing state cryptocurrency sector by attending town hall meetings and a recent court case in neighboring Hood County that attempted to mitigate the impacts of a Wolf Hollow mine and data center on the border of both counties. The case was spurred following surrounding residents reporting seizures, loss of sleep, vertigo, and ear issues from a constant buzzing they attribute to fans that cool the at least 90,000 computers powering the facility.

During their trip, Glen Rose leaders attended a hearing concerning the state's power grid, overseen by ERCOT, after Houston experienced widespread power outages from Hurricane Beryl. Those proponents favorable to the data centers in Texas argue that paying the mines to cease operations when the grid is stressed will boost power and eliminate future system failures and blackouts, citing the payments made to Riot in Rockdale as proof of success. Despite the large influx of facilities, Houstonians went without power in sweltering summer temperatures for six days or more during Beryl, without mention of aid from crypto.

"The beauty of the trip was the attention and concern shown by everyone we spoke with," said Joslin.

The Glen Rose group partnered with Hood County Commissioner Nanette Samuelson and citizen John Highsmith, who met with staff from at least 13 senatorial offices, described by Joslin as "receptive."

While some senators were already well versed in the issues at hand, the group took the time to educate others about the potential risks associated with Bitcoin mining, its impact on the state's power infrastructure, the health risks reported by residents in Hood and Somervell counties, and environmental consequences.

Despite the challenges, Joslin expressed satisfaction with the outcome, remarking, "We were all shocked at the success we had."

The open dialogue among local and state representatives is a relief for Glen Rose leaders concerned with a lack of cryptocurrency regulation that has nearby citizens caught in a political back-and-forth where each level of government is unsure of its jurisdiction and legal capabilities during the market boom.

"Gov. Abbott has shown he's not afraid to stand up to the federal government," said Joslin about the governor's hard stance on immigration, favoring his constituents over outside influence. As discussions continue, the state's approach to Bitcoin mining and its long-term impact on the power grid remains a critical issue for Somervell and surrounding counties.

Hood County held a follow-up town hall on Aug. 29, hosted by Samuelson at Twin Canyons Ranch, to update on constituent concerns and commissioners court actions.

# Candidates probe Bitcoin mining while campaigning

March 1, 2024

By Hannah Barricks

Glen Rose Reporter

Candidate Lyndon Laird poses with Hood County resident Frank Moffitt outside of The Rooster. Photo Credit: Hannah Barricks/Glen Rose Reporter

By Hannah Barricks

Glen Rose Reporter

**GLEN ROSE** — Last week, Glen Rose City Council members attended a public meeting, joining forces with Hood County precinct hopefuls to discuss the effects of Bitcoin mining on Somervell and Hood county residents.

A bitcoin mine in Hood County, Marathon Digital Holdings, has allegedly been plaguing Pecan Plantation and surrounding residents since its installation a year ago. Specifically, the low-frequency sound waves emitted from fans used to cool the computers are reportedly causing the community substantial issues ranging from health problems to devalued property.

Health complaints attributed to the machines include alleged headaches, ear ringing, and stomach upset.

MDH is one of many Bitcoin companies setting up shop in Texas after Gov. Greg Abbott turned to the Texas Blockchain Council to solve some of the state's energy grid issues, tweeting after the meeting that Texas would soon be "No. 1 for blockchain & cryptocurrency."

But critics of Abbott's plan say that Bitcoin will not fix the grid, and diametrically, it could end up costing taxpayers, the industry's alleged victims.

"In Canada, Bitcoin is charged a heck of a lot more than most people pay for electricity," said Glen Rose Councilwoman Dee Conrad. "In Texas, we give it to them at a discount. Then, we let them sell it back to us and make millions of dollars to stop harming you for seven days."

Conrad refers to credit arrangements between the state and cryptocurrency centers to stop operating, freeing up space on the power grid for pedestrian use.

Bitcoin companies expend a large amount of power to continue solving algorithms that uncover cryptocurrency, so much that power plants and abandoned fossil fuel factories are finding demand again, opening their doors to provide energy for the buzzing computers.

The only issue for Abbott is that the crypto mines are still using up all the power, even with the plants popping up.

Texas legislators found a way around this issue by paying the factories to stop running.

In 2021, Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas), an advocate for cryptocurrency in Texas, said, "Because of the ability of Bitcoin mining to turn on or off instantaneously, if you have a moment where there's a power shortage in a power crisis, whether its a freeze or some other natural disaster where power-generation capacity goes down... they become excess reserves that can strengthen the grid's resilience by providing a significant capacity of additional power to be available for critical services if and when it's needed."

## Candidates probe Bitcoin mining while campaigning, continued

The problem with this solution to the Texas power grid shortages, most notably a failure in 2021 that left families without power or access to food for days in freezing temps, is that it's incredibly expensive to turn off Bitcoin.

A news release from a Colorado-based crypto mine called Riot showed that the Texas Power Grid Council, ERCOT, paid them \$31.7 million to shut down.

Who absorbs that cost? Conrad and the Somervell and Hood county residents affected by MDH say it's the taxpayer, and claim that the average energy costs are going up at least 5% for every Texan.

"This is as bipartisan as it gets," said Conrad. "It doesn't matter if the business is on private property. I'm not allowed to sit in my yard and throw trash into yours. Bitcoin is essentially the same thing."

Conrad lamented that environmentalists are the loudest oppositional voice against crypto mines coming to rural Texas.

"The people doing the most work on this care about frog eggs, or whatever," she quipped to the crowd. "They're easy to dismiss. They are worried about fossil fuels, so we don't listen. And then I hear about people having vertigo and children bleeding from their ears. I thought, 'My God, why didn't I hear about this?' But we didn't know."

Conrad said the key to keeping Bitcoin bipartisan is to continue making it about people.

Besides the Pecan Plantation residents, a large portion of families affected by MDH are impoverished and do not feel like they have a voice.

"Check with the people running this year," said a candidate during the meeting. "I know Lyndon Laird and Helen Kerwin are against Bitcoin, but ask around, and you'll see very quickly who cares about people."

Tonya Longsdon of the Somervell County Republican Party brought the issue to the attention of this year's candidates during a Q&A at the Rooster in mid-February.

Texas Representative candidate Lyndon Laird, a lawyer well-versed in these battles, has taken up the cause, beginning a petition with nearly 80 signatures as the first part of a three-step plan to eradicate Bitcoin from Texas.

"This is a big issue in Somervell and Hood counties," said Laird. "People have made complaints, but nobody is listening."

Bitcoin companies have gone around local jurisdiction, claiming discrimination at the state level and forcing counties to allow them to open back up.

Laird wants to file formal complaints with regulatory agencies like the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the Federal Environmental Protection Agency and request information from each agency regarding studies and health assessments.

## Candidates probe Bitcoin mining while campaigning, continued

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“The toll to property values is incalculable,” said Laird. “Who knows what it will be.”

The second part of Laird’s plan involves litigation.

“What we need to do is get this out of local courts and bring it to the state,” he said. “There are billions of dollars involved in this, it provides a payroll, so there are vested interests locally. I think we need to get this to federal court in Tarrant County, which would trigger the EPA’s involvement.”

Residents could be eligible for damages, but most importantly to Laird, he could file a temporary restraining order against the mine and stop it from operating.

“I don’t think it will shut down, but it will get their attention,” he said. “They might agree to drop the sound to a reasonable decibel.”

The third step in Laird’s plan involves him getting elected, and using government powers to shut down the mine. But he vows to continue helping the cause whether he gets elected or not.

Voting in Somervell County continues until March 5.

# Crypto plant manager found not guilty in ongoing battle

July 20, 2024

By Hannah Barricks  
Glen Rose Reporter

HOOD COUNTY — Marathon Digital Holdings plant manager David Fisher was found not guilty last week on several charges relating to noise levels at a Hood County facility.

Fisher, manager of Wolf Hollow II data center, was on trial July 8 and 9, contesting 12 tickets at \$500 each issued by Constable John Shirley for alleged unreasonable noise emanating from the facility.

The Hood County circuit court trial was presided over by Justice Jeff Kelley. The jury's deliberation was short, lasting just less than two hours. When the group re-entered the courtroom at 3 p.m. Tuesday, they found Fisher not guilty on all 12 counts.

The prosecutor, Hood County Attorney Matt Mills, argued that Fisher controlled the plant's daily operations, including its operating capacity and subsequent noise, making him criminally responsible when volumes exceeded the state limit of 85 decibels for commercial work, the largest in the nation.

A witness for the prosecution, Cheryl Shadden, spoke with Mills after the trial, where he allegedly shared that the jury did not feel Fisher was the correct person to pin the charges on. Mills has not yet responded to questions concerning who the county will charge in future court appearances or whether the ticketing and litigation will continue.

Hood County Commissioner Nannette Samuelson said Granbury is looking into strengthening its sound ordinances and empowering law enforcement with more authority to hold the mine accountable if they deem it responsible for any future noise violations.

The Wolf Hollow data center is a Bitcoin mine, one of many flourishing in Texas since Gov. Greg Abbott welcomed them to the state as extra support for the unincorporated energy grid after ERCOT failed to avoid a massive energy crisis in February 2021. Freezing temps led to rolling blackouts and even death as people struggled to stay warm in their homes and the grid floundered under increased energy demands.

When China banned Bitcoin mining in 2021, Abbott saw energy potential in the huge chunk of displaced facilities, quickly meeting with the Texas Blockchain Council alongside pro-crypto Texas Sen. Ted Cruz to develop a plan to make Texas the national leader for Bitcoin.

Once up and running, the mines require massive amounts of power to sustain operations but add power to the grid when shut off, creating a contingency plan for ERCOT should another crisis arise.

Cryptocurrency center Riot in Rockdale, made headlines when it pocketed \$9.6 million from power sales and ERCOT funded shut downs in 2023, also called a demand-response, during the June heat waves that plagued the state. By the end of 2023, Riot leveraged the demand-response to generate \$31.7 million, more revenue than it made mining Bitcoin per its yearly earning statement.

Several articles in The Economist question whether the operations of Bitcoin mining, combined with a lack of regulation on the number of facilities entering the state, will stress the grid, not save it. One article, titled "Why Bitcoin uses so much energy," explains that the blockchain recalibrates roughly every two weeks, meaning current data centers must constantly grow to increase the computing power supporting the blockchain, which means using more electricity.

## Crypto plant manager found not guilty in ongoing battle, continued

For many experts, there are more questions than answers to what unbridled growth could mean for the grid and whether the facilities will leave so little energy for citizens that Texas has no option except to pay mines to stop operations indefinitely, an enticing revenue model for businesses already selling power back to the grid at a premium, but potentially expensive for consumers as the supply goes down and demand rises.

Fisher's trial is a starting line for puzzled experts wishing they had a crystal ball, and while plenty of questions remain, it cleared up any confusion concerning the feelings of those living next to Wolf Hollow II.

Over two days, Mills called eight witnesses to the stand, including Shirley and various nearby homeowners who attribute newfound problems to a 24-hour noise produced by thousands of fans that cool the computers. Since 2022, the witnesses claim the noise, ranging in volume from a low hum to a roaring jet engine, has led to vertigo, ear aches, ear infections, and nausea, with many experiencing continual insomnia from nighttime noise that either keeps them up or wakes them in a panic.

Shadden, who lives .2 mile from the facility, produced documents from the Hood County Appraisal Review Board that showed her property value decreasing from \$189,730 to \$145,730 in 2024. Shadden alleged the only change in the area was the mine moving next door in 2022 and the constant unreasonable noise that came after.

She said local assessors have even refused to estimate her home's value, citing a lack of comps, but believes the data would be moot anyway as no one would buy a house so close to the mine and noise.

Shadden and local precinct chair Shannon Wolf said their neighbor Debra Potts sold her home after reducing the price by more than \$200,000. The women also claimed the house sat on the market much longer than expected by Granbury housing market standards.

Shirley testified that he often measured the noise at volumes exceeding 85 decibels, leading him to ticket Fisher.

Danny Lakey, who lives a stone's throw from the Wolf Hollow center, said he often helps Shirley, alerting him when volumes are too high now that monitoring the noise has become part of his morning routine.

"I get ready for work, head to my car, take a decibel reading, and call the police if it's too loud," he said. "It's almost every day."

Representing Fisher was Fort Worth defense duo Bob Gill and Miles Brissette from The Law Offices of Gill and Brissette. The firm's website describes capital murder, federal criminal law, and assault as the firm's areas of expertise, among other high-level criminal charges.

During Gill's cross-examination of Shirley, he continually stressed that the constable never consulted a noise expert to confirm the readings, similar to a medical expert verifying the blood work of a person arrested on suspicion of drunk driving.

Gill accused Shirley of using the data center to get reelected, seeing an opportunity for a platform to garner community support, and calling out Nancy Rhodie and Mary Haller for alleged fraudulent documentation on behalf of the constable's office.

## Crypto plant manager found not guilty in ongoing battle, continued

In his closing arguments, Gill complimented the jury for their attention to the case and honest deliberation, saying the witnesses unfairly blamed Marathon for their problems.

“I’m a real stickler for courtroom rules,” he said. “The witnesses continually said ‘I believe’ when referencing the root of their problems, but there is no proof. They could not prove where the noise came from. I get it. It’s human nature to blame your problems on someone else.”

Mills countered in his closing statements that the jury had one decision to make: did Fisher operate the center to the extent that it produced unreasonable noise?

“The defense could have brought in someone from the plant to say we had the wrong guy. They didn’t,” he said in response to one of many objections from Gill. “David Fisher is running the Bitcoin plant at the expense of the community. Eight witnesses testified that the noise was and continues to be a non-stop annoyance. The people living near the center are experiencing headaches, hearing loss, and heart issues. How can that be reasonable? We aren’t putting David Fisher in jail, it’s a fine. That’s all that is on trial today. Should he be fined for making unreasonable noise?”

Somervell County has carefully watched the court proceedings, with future Somervell County Commissioner Chip Joslin attending the trial. The neighboring lawmakers are learning from Granbury’s relationship with Marathon, preparing for what’s possible in Abbott’s crypto-friendly Texas, where counties have limited protection from mines breaching their borders, and city-wide rumblings predict the center will expand into Glen Rose in the coming years as part of its constant expansion to meet industry computing demands.

The city of Granbury posted a statement to its Facebook page that while it empathized with the people allegedly affected by the mine, they have no jurisdiction to help. Comments under the post lamented that the city should be ashamed of itself for excusing its inaction and scoffed at the post’s carelessness and lack of tact.

Granbury City Manager Chris Coffman did not respond to inquiries.

# Twin Canyon Ranch hosts Wolf Hollow mining meeting

April 22, 2024

By Hannah Barricks

Glen Rose Reporter

HOOD COUNTY — On March 29, Marathon Digital Holdings had a community meet and greet at Twin Canyons Ranch for a Q&A with representatives from the cryptocurrency mine.

“Dear neighbors,” reads a letter from Granbury Marathon representatives. “We are committed to being thoughtful and considerate neighbors in our new community. We have been actively strategizing and seeking community input to find ways to improve our data center.”

Among those in attendance were Lee Bratcher, president of the Texas Blockchain Council since 2019; and Stacie Howell, MDH community liaison, and the facility’s data center team.

The newly installed mine at 8787 Wolf Hollow Court in Granbury began making waves after setting up shop nearly a year ago, with outcry, specifically alleging that the fans used to cool the constantly running computers are a health hazard plaguing the community with harmful low-frequency sound waves.

Other community members alleged that sounds from the mine reach volumes that rival a helicopter landing on their roof. Many complained in the meeting that the fans endlessly hum day and night, without ceasing, causing them sleep problems, hearing issues and headaches.

MDH officials said they will implement its noise improvement plan in seven phases, beginning with shutting down idle fans that face the street, hiring a community liaison, moving eight containers to liquid cooling, installing vegetation and trees around the perimeter, extending the existing barrier around the perimeter, improve fan technology, and continue transitioning containers to liquid cooling, in that order.

MDH is hiring 25-30 new employees and generating \$2 million in annual tax contributions. A handout from the company expressed its intention to invest \$650 million into Hood County through indirect jobs, local business opportunities, tax revenue, and development.

“The fans that run are just pushing air through the machine and running similar to our old desktops,” explained Bratcher. “So there’s nothing different about these machines than a desktop computer, there’s just more of them.”

The facility includes 90,000 computers, with possible plans to expand the facility to 180,000, placing part of the Wolf Hollow mine in Somervell County.

Somervell County residents living off Apache Court in Glen Rose have reported headaches, hearing loss, ear ringing, and general malaise that they attribute to the mine.

“That’s like saying there’s arsenic in almonds, so if you can eat an almond, you can have a cup of arsenic for breakfast,” said Glen Rose City Councilwoman Dee Conrad about Bratcher’s computer analogy.

She was seated next to Councilwoman Candace Scholz, Somervell County Precinct 3 Commissioner-elect Chip Joslin, and Commissioner of Precinct 1 Jeff Harris.

“I mean, to negate the exponential impact of one fan to thousands. To say, ‘Well, if you use a laptop at home, then certainly there’s nothing wrong with 20,000 computers.’ To my knowledge, there have been no studies about the negative impacts of people with computer fans in their close proximity. I’m not aware of any studies of damage to people’s health from large, even thousands of computer fans.”

## Twin Canyon Ranch hosts Wolf Hollow mining meeting, continued

Residents allege that on top of the health concerns associated with continual sound wave exposure, their property values are also at risk.

“But the health is the one you can’t undo,” Conrad said. “What work has been done in the past, what studies have been done? What due diligence? My understanding is there was no environmental impact study. It blows my mind that commissioners would get underway without saying, ‘Hey, let’s make sure you’re not going to ruin our land.’ My understanding is none of that was done in this case.”

“I’ve heard of (low-frequency sound wave) studies, but they’re not studying fans,” responded Bratcher. “They’re studying a certain type of frequency that we’re not sure if that is even the same frequency.”

Joslin told Bratcher that he believed there was a difference between noise pollution and repetitive, consistent, exact noise, referencing a local doctor with a sudden influx of patients experiencing vertigo.

“So one of the concerns is the constant noise levels,” Bratcher said. “I have seen third-party noise studies that show that we are very much in compliance with commercial activity in Texas law. If this was not bitcoin mining, if it was a steel mill with the same decibels, would there be the same level of concern?”

Conrad retorted to Bratcher that rural Texans support private business rights and would not begrudge any business the right to conduct itself if it didn’t negatively impact the community.

“When I came to the first meeting, there were two guys here from Marathon,” she said. “As people were complaining about their health conditions, they were turning to these people and going, ‘I’m so sorry. No offense. I know you’re a private business. We don’t want to harm your private business.’ So many residents here are in this conundrum, because what they’re asking conflicts with their true or core values.”

Bratcher agreed with Conrad that bitcoin mining needed to be studied but was unsure who was responsible for conducting the research, stating that the best option would be for a third party, professional company, possibly specializing in noise, to step in and facilitate the study.

“We do need a study, and I think we need to be able to talk facts about decibels,” he explained. “I’ve seen two studies last year that show this facility is in the normal spectrum of industrial activity that happens all across the state.”

Bratcher said that Texas law requires all industrial activity to maintain decibel readings below 85.

“There’s a lot of pain in the community,” said Joe Webber, a Hood County resident. “People are hurt and have questions. They say there’s no medical evidence. But let me remind you in the sixties, the Surgeon General said smoking was hazardous to your health. Remember? And then a lot of pain, a lot of suffering, a lot of lawsuits, and a lot of death. And then, finally, we heeded the warning, and we moved forward.”

“Let me read from the CDC. This comes from one of their publications called, ‘Too Loud, Too Long.’ It reads, ‘Continued exposure to noise can cause stress, anxiety, depression, high blood pressure, heart disease, and many other health problems.’ That’s from the CDC. Members of the community have all expressed problems in those areas, but for some reason, they have been ignored.”

Webber continued, standing in front of the crowd, and scoffed at the proposed plan from Marathon, explaining that he lives a little more than a mile from the facility and can hear it.

## **Twin Canyon Ranch hosts Wolf Hollow mining meeting, continued**

“So, we’re going to move eight containers to coolers,” Webber read from the proposed Marathon plan. “Eight. There are 163 coolers at the facility. The barrier wall didn’t work very well and it deflected the sound. It moved it in a different direction. I want to see the sound mitigated so people can live a normal life.”

Webber’s last comment was met with applause and shouts of “Amen!”

The Wolf Hollow facility could also affect the Somervell County water table as the water requirements to generate electricity for mining are high, varying by location and water sources.

“The only other comment is that, just like the noise, the drain on the water table will affect us,” Joslin said. “The water table doesn’t see county lines. So it’s just one more area that we’re going to suffer in Somervell County. And, okay, we get a couple of jobs. It’s not good enough.”

“But do you also fight other industrial facilities in Hood County that are using the water table?” asked Bratcher. “Is it possible other companies are using up water but we just don’t know?”

Conrad responded that she would vehemently oppose the steel industry if it overused electricity and water, ran off all the wildlife, and made people sick.

“I think there’s probably a lot of confusion and misunderstanding about what a Bitcoin facility is doing,” concluded Bratcher. “There’s probably a lot of education that needs to happen. There’s a lot of mitigation for community impact that needs to happen, too. And I think these seven steps are a great start to that. I think as these things begin to be implemented, it’ll be easier for people to see the benefits of having this facility here.”

Bratcher said cryptocurrency mining has been in Texas since 2017, and China banned the process in 2021.

# Somervell County on radar for cryptocurrency expansion

March 8, 2024

By Hannah Barricks  
Glen Rose Reporter

GLEN ROSE — The Primary Election brought many issues to light in Somervell and Hood counties, but none are gaining steam faster than the public outcry over a newly installed Bitcoin mine owned by Marathon Digital Holdings at 8787 Wolf Hollow Court in Granbury, and the health concerns it brought with it when it set up shop nearly a year ago.

Specifically, the low-frequency sound waves emitted from fans used to cool the computers are reportedly causing residents from Somervell and Hood counties substantial issues ranging from headaches and bleeding ears, to devalued property.

Texas Representative candidate Lyndon Laird, a lawyer well-versed in battling businesses, is fighting the facility on behalf of the community, beginning with a petition as the first part of a three-step plan to shut the facility down. Parts one and two include submitting a restraining order, getting the facility's attention, and wielding government powers to restrict cryptocurrency-friendly legislature.

"This is a big issue in Somervell and Hood counties," said Laird. "People have made complaints, but nobody is listening."

Laird set up the petition outside of The Rooster in Glen Rose during a Republican Party meet and greet and gained nearly 80 signatures.

Only a few Somervell County residents, near Apache Court off Texas Drive, have reported health issues allegedly in line with low-frequency sound wave damage, but that number could grow as MDH plans to expand its facility by 100%, increasing the number of noise-generating computers to 180,000 and officially entering Somervell County.

"Residents have reported and documented ongoing noise and sound frequency complaints that far exceed Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards," explained a news release. "Resulting in serious health concerns including but not limited to widespread hearing loss, bleeding from the ears, migraines, life-threatening cardiac conditions, strokes, chronic tinnitus, vertigo, and the like."

The release also details ongoing daily interruptions to residents' sleep, recreational activities, education, and worship in their local churches.

Hood County residents can sign the petition directly across from the Wolf Hollow facility.

"From the moment I received the first complaint, I reached out to Constable Shirley, and we have worked together to find a solution to abate this noise," said Nannette Samuelson, Precinct 2 Commissioner. "The citizens in our precinct and all of Hood County have the right to peaceful enjoyment of their property. There is technology that can be deployed to eliminate this unrelenting noise and restore peace to this community. I call on Marathon Digital to employ this technology post-haste. People are suffering."

## **Somervell County on radar for cryptocurrency expansion, continued**

“The people in Hood and Somervell Counties are experiencing a humanitarian crisis that is impacting all areas of their lives,” continued Dr. Shannon Wolf, Ph.D., LPC-S, candidate for Republican Precinct Chair 211. “It is not enough for us to empathize with our neighbors in Wolf Hollow. We must not stand by while their lives are being harmed. We the people of Precinct 211, Hood County, respectfully urge all citizens to join our voices together to resolve this crisis. Our neighbors are counting on us, and we must not fail them.”

“The enormity of this issue eclipses any single local elected official, legislator, or impacted citizen,” echoed John Shirley, Constable Precinct 2. “It will take a combined effort, including actions like this, to affect the ultimate solution to the unreasonable noise at Wolf Hollow. I’m happy to continue standing with my Constituents to make ALL corners of Hood County a wonderful place to live. The wrong answer is to do nothing.”

Helen Kerwin, the leading candidate for Texas State Representative of District 58, visited the Wolf Hollow facility after learning about the health complaints in Somervell County. She is actively pursuing the next steps.