

Dow gets prison land

By ALAN NIESCHWIETZ | Posted: Friday, December 2, 2011 2:00 am

ANGLETON — Dow Chemical Co. will deepen the pool of water resources for the company's Freeport site and southern Brazoria County residents after a \$5.5 million bid won the company a 2,200-acre parcel of former prison land on Thursday.

The land once was part of the Ramsey Prison Unit in Rosharon, and Dow Chemical bought it at an auction that drew about a half-dozen potential buyers.

Dow has said it will use the site for a water reservoir, something officials have said became an obvious need during this year's severe drought.

"It was very short and sweet," said Mary Ruth Rhodenbaugh, a former Pct. 4 county commissioner, of the auction. Curiosity, not an intent to purchase, led her to the auction at the Angleton Recreation Center.

The land was sold under terms of a reserve auction, where the seller can refuse to accept a high bid if they believe it is insufficient, said Steve Slocumb, with Hudson and Marshall, the auction house handling the sale. The auctioneer asked for an opening bid of \$5.5 million, which Dow met and no one raised, and that was enough to satisfy state prison officials.

The \$2,500-an-acre price was the amount Diane Fuller, a spokeswoman with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, predicted would be the least the department would accept.

Dow officials were pleased it worked out as well as it did, spokesman Dave Winder said.

"This is what we set out to do," he said. "To acquire property to build an additional reservoir.

"Fresh water is important to our area and to Dow Texas Operations," Winder said. "This will go a long way toward helping our water needs."

Winder said it's too early to tell when the reservoir might be built since a lengthy permitting process has to be followed before ground can be broken.

Brazosport Water Authority board member Larry Schaefer of Angleton, whose organization buys water from Dow and provides it to seven member cities, was at the auction and supported Dow's effort to acquire the land, he said.

Being able to keep extra water on hand for both business and the people of the area during dry spells and droughts makes sense, he said.

"There's a finite amount of water in the Brazos, and by the time it gets to us it's a trickle," Schaefer said.

Rhodenbaugh said she is in favor of the project, but admits it's not 100 percent support.

"I have really mixed feelings about this," she said. "I'm really looking forward to having a sustainable freshwater supply, but at the same time, I hate to see that prime crop land underwater."

Alan Nieschwietz is a reporter for The Facts. Contact him at 979-237-0151.