



December 2007 / January 2008

Bulletin

YOUR PRIMARY VOICE ON LAKE ISSUES

With a mission to identify issues affecting our members and pursue resolution with the responsible organizations

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President's Corner ...

Here we are at the end of the year. Already! I keep thinking that we are going to slow up, have a lull in the activity. Fat chance! Thank goodness we have strong Committee Chairmen. Most of the LGA action begins at the Committee level. Every Committee is involved with really important stuff right now. Here is a quick summery of what is going on. You will find a more lengthy discussion in each Committee's report.

Aquatic Weed Committee is putting the finishing touches on the revised LGA Hydrilla Control Plan. The presentation of this plan to the Lake Gaston Stakeholders Board, the Stakeholders Technical Advisory Group, And the Lake Gaston Weed Control Council, will be the next step in our effort to influence how we attack this continuing problem.

The Planning and Development Committee has started to define the specific limits that we will push the counties to incorporate into their building regulations. An example would be height limitations, buffer zones and housing densities.

The Membership Development Committee is assessing how well the trial programs it proposed this year worked. It is also brainstorming on how to get better penetration into the Home Owner Associations to encourage group joining. We have 1230 household members now, we want 3000.

The Safety Committee is deeply involved with boater education. We won the game in Virginia this year. We are now working on the strategy for moving our program forward in North Carolina. Allies must be found and detractors educated. In the shorter term, the committee is designing a phone guide for lake homes that will clarify who to call in emergencies. Another issue is whether our current support for local law enforcement needs to be modified as a result of the recent armed robbery.

The Environmental Committee is rapping up one of this year's tasks, providing sampling of hundreds of points for lake vegetation for a North Carolina State University project. The measurement and tracking of Hydrilla mats will contribute to the study of how Hydrilla propagates.

Government Relations Committee (Public Affairs) has had its hands full responding to the many challenges presented by the county governments, state governments, and Dominion Power. In many cases, this is where the rubber meets the road when we rise to represent our members. We are currently involved with the Proposed Lakeside Commons wastewater treatment facility, Eaton's Crossing density issue and the Brunswick signage ordinance.

Whew! I need to stop now and rest up for Christmas. Oh, and may you have a Merry one.

John

Two Major Developments Under Review

The Government Relations committee (formerly Public Affairs) reviewed its current mission statement and in light of the more recent and future focus of activities decided to rename the committee as listed above and revise its mission statement to read "Maintain lake area influence on local and state (VA & NC) political establishments in promoting legislation that supports the needs of lake residents." The committee also recognizes its responsibility in fostering public relations and marketing through such activities as providing guest speakers for our monthly meetings, hosting forums, participating in county festivals, etc.

The committee has been addressing two major developments around the lake. First, the proposal to build 120+ boat slips at Eaton's Crossing Development by Redtail-Gaston LLC. We feel this request is in violation of sections of the Shoreline Management Plan approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and we plan to officially notify them of our opinion and request they disapprove the request.

Second, we were made aware of a project being developed by Lakeside Commons LLC to build a wastewater treatment facility that would discharge the processed water into Pea Hill Creek. We have notified the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (VaDEQ) of our concerns and our desire to be actively involved in the review process prior to issuing permits, if any. They have acknowledged our letter and encouraged our participation in the public notice provision of the permitting process and/or meet with them to personally discuss our concerns.

There will be much reported in the coming weeks and months on both of these important items. Stay tuned to the LGA and your local newspapers!

If anyone is interested in working with this committee (we meet the 3rd Monday of the month at 9:00 a.m. at Eaton's Ferry Grocery & Grill) or if you have information that may be beneficial to this committee, please contact Moira Underwood, LGA Executive Director, at (252) 586-6577 or toll free 1-888-586-6577 or execdir@LakeGastonAssoc.com

From the Desk of the Executive Director

I'm still hanging on to summer. Well ... having been born and raised in England, the heat can be just a little bit over bearing, compared to what I have been used to, but these warm Fall days and blue skies have kept my sweaters on the shelf. Until the Saturday of the Boat Parade which this year turned into an all day event.

Not wishing to miss an opportunity to be out in the community, the LGA joined a number of vendors on the shores of Lake Gaston at South Shore Realty's location to take part in the pre-Boat Parade festivities that included a Chili Cook-off. A cold snap leading up to the day forced me to get a sweater off the shelf. I arrived at 10 a.m. to set up the LGA booth with Larry Jolly clad in many layers, snow boots, gloves and ear muffs. (I was a girl scout.)

We had a glorious position for our booth looking out across Lake Gaston, a sunny but cold day, and those LGA directors taking turns to man the booth had a chance to meet prospective and current members, answer questions, talk about the Association for six hours. We were across from the new Lake Gaston Ace Hardware store, Superior Walls, Andy's Cheese Steaks trailer, and next door to BB&T's booth. Later at 6 p.m. the LGA took part in the Boat Parade using Jack Saunders' boat with the addition of our moving reindeer, powered by Jack's generator. The whole day was judged a great success from our point of view, and we are adding it to our list of Festivals for 2008.

Where has the year gone! As you know we have already sent out renewal notices for those of you whose membership expires the end of December, and they have been coming in daily by the 100s. Thank you! I'm not sure if you noticed that we included the new toll-free number we have which is 1-888-586-6577. We thought it would help those of you who are long distance from our Littleton, NC office to contact us, especially those of you who do not have email addresses.

Many thanks to those of you who are remembering to keep us up-to-date with your email address when it changes. For those of you who have email addresses who prefer not to share them with us, you may want to reconsider because we send out emails to our members that contain date related information each month. Like, county agendas, public hearing notices, planning agendas, etc. Rest assured your email address remains confidential.

We have one more monthly meeting left this year which will be on Wednesday, December 5 at 9:30 a.m. at the Lake Gaston Baptist Church. Our guest speaker will be Ken Krulik, Warren County's new Planning Director.

Seasons Greetings and safe travels,

Moira

P&D Have Mapping Project Underway

Patrick Dempsey, an LGA Director from Mecklenburg, has offered to initiate our draft Planning and Development Influence Zone map based on data gathered from the counties. He is experienced and knowledgeable in the computer tools and has sufficient computer assets to work the issue at this point. Our appreciation to Patrick.

In our quest to find county zoning maps, planning maps, the Shoreline Management Plan map and the Flood Insurance Rate Map of the area, Committee members reported that three counties have all four maps that we are interested in, and the other two counties are working on it.

Examples of development plans provided by Jack Saunders were discussed. These plans were from Northampton County N.C. and Northampton County VA. The discussion focused on developing what the committee and LGA wants for the lake such as recommending density, multi-family condo's, cluster housing, etc. It was agreed that the committee should start by developing action items supporting the committee's second objective at the December meeting. Objective number 2 states "consistent planning and zoning for the development of single family, multi-family and high density housing in a manner complementary to the rural atmosphere and environmentally sensitive area. Planning and zoning should address minimum lot sizes, building height and infrastructure impacts."

Although there has been no recommendation to pursue "incorporation" of a town called Lake Gaston, part of the discussion noted that the only way we might be successful in accomplishing some consistency lake wide may be to "incorporate" a town of Lake Gaston. There is an expert on incorporation, David Lawrence, at the UNC School of Government, who can be contacted to inquire if he would be willing to address the LGA on this subject of why and how you might go about incorporation. (Post meeting note: Mr. Lawrence is available for our April monthly meeting if we would like him to speak.)

Our Planning & Development Committee's prioritized short list of objectives are:

1. Mapping of designated commercial and private future development areas, avoidance of mall sprawl, and set asides for greenways, trails and bike routes. Guide proposed ordinances for creation of buffer zones, requirements for "Streetscape", prevention of siltation, and the creation of protected areas around waterfront and wetlands.
2. Consistent planning and zoning for the development of single family, multi-family and high density housing in a manner complementary to the rural atmosphere and environmentally sensitive area. Planning and zoning should address minimum lot sizes, building height and infrastructure impacts.
3. Description/definition of permitted signage, inoperable vehicles and below standard buildings/housing and elimination plan for non permitted and condemned signs, vehicles and buildings
4. Define role & review process for 'land development task force' and rezoning requests vis-à-vis county governing bodies
5. Preservation of the Rural atmosphere and guidelines for protection of the Environmental Quality of the Lake

If there are members or acquaintances that have experience in community/county development and planning who would be willing to work on this activity please contact us through jackdsaunders@embarqmail.com. Monthly meetings are held the third Friday of the month at 0830 at the Eaton's Ferry Grocery and Grill on Hwy 903 south of the lake.

A Special Thanks to our **SUPPORTING Members** who will be contributing a higher level of Financial support in 2008 so the LGA can approach its mission and goals with greater scope and influence

Since our last Bulletin, many thanks to the following supporting new members who joined at
Bronze (\$50): Daughtridge Gas of Roanoke Rapids, and Chris Williams

Thank you to all our members who are renewing for 2008 and our new members too!

Public Safety Focuses on Legislation and Your Emergency Location

The LGA Public Safety Committee continues to support North Carolina Legislative action for Boating Safety Training parallel to that passed in the last session of the Commonwealth of Virginia's House of Delegates and Senate. Meetings with Rep Wray have led to his offer to provide sponsorship legislation in the next full legislative session. Rep Wray has offered to sponsor a meeting of potentially interested supporters of such boater safety training legislation in the January time frame in Raleigh. Pete Deschenes has contacted numerous organizations and quite a few have committed to becoming part of an alliance to promote the legislation. Rep Wray also volunteered to set up a meeting with appropriate commissioners from the NC Wildlife Resource Commission.

It would be very useful to hear from LGA members to know of their support for such legislation. We continue to encourage all members and their guests to both become trained in Safe Boating Operation, but also to practice Safe Boating.

The committee has discussed how we might best communicate with the widest population surrounding the lake and provide with the most up to date emergency call information in the most convenient manner. We determined to try to add information to the File for Life packets previously distributed by the Lions and the information channels of the local Church Community and large organizations. At the November meeting we had guests representing the Roanoke Wildwood VFD, local churches and the Lake Gaston Lions and contact has been made with the Lake Gaston Ladies Club and local realtors.

We intend to create a master list of emergency services by collecting all the local Fire District numbers and associated Emergency Medical Services. The master list can then be used in the distribution process to identify the specific locality and residence. The first action is to identify the fire districts in each county bordering the lake and to identify the appropriate phone numbers.

After the master list is completed we will be able to exploit the experience and memberships of the Lake Gaston Lions, the Lake Gaston Ladies Club, AARP, Real Estate Agents (for vacationers) and all area churches to maximize the efficient distribution of the information.

The use of cell phones to contact emergency services was also addressed because when using cell phones, there are few cell phone companies with full service in the area and in many instances the phones are in roaming mode. The closest some of those phones can be located is the nearest tower that the signal hits. Without a number of nearby towers, there is no good method for GPS location. It is very important when calling 911 from a cell phone to very clearly identify the specific location one is calling from and to ask where the 911 center answering is located. **One thing that all cell phone subscribers can do is to set up their phone to provide location data. The cell phone "locator" can be either set on "E911" in which case you must dial out to be located, or it can be set to be on all the time. With it on all the time you can be located by emergency services through the police if you fail to respond (sick, injured or worse).**

ALL cell phones have this feature. It's called Location. It's under the "Settings" or "System" tool. Once you turn this on, THEN your phone is traceable (select "Location On" instead of "E911 Only").

There were suggestions made previously that we are providing again for use by members and non members alike.

1. All full time residents, part time residents and renters should have the appropriate 911 information posted on or near the phone; items to include E911 address (recommend noting the spelling or number of words in street name such as Flat Rock – two words), nearby major road or intersection (Vincent Lane), subdivision (if applicable), county, and relative position around the lake (NE Quad, on Pea Hill in VA for instance).
2. Be as specific about the reason for the call (such as grass fire, house fire, auto accident, potential heart attack, boating accident, severe cut, burglary, suspicious vehicle). This is extremely useful to the communication center being able to dispatch the appropriate response.
3. Participate in your local government. Attend public forums and Boards of Commissioners/Supervisors to keep aware of what is being discussed and to make your concerns known. Voice support for improved law enforcement and emergency services throughout the counties. (Concerns are more likely to be positively addressed if described as a need of all county citizens and not just one area. Participants should also be courteous and constructive in remarks.)

The LGA Public Safety Committee meets on the second Friday of each month at 0830 at the Eaton's Ferry Grocery and Grill on Hwy 903 on the south side of the lake.

LGA Poised to Present Revised Plan

The Committee has stayed the course. Approximately 18 months ago, we realized that there was a lot of professional evaluation activity that was about to take place. Studies that involve Virginia Tech; North Carolina State; the US Army Corps of Engineers; The Lake Gaston Weed Control Council contract resources; Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and North Carolina Wildlife Resource Commission. The LGA pretty much accepted a 'wait and see' position as these studies progressed.

However, the LGA does feel that a more aggressive utilization of grass carp has to be considered. We published this position and presented it last year to the LGWCC, LGSB & the TAG. This position has been reworked and now suggests that grass carp be considered the primary tool in the arsenal and the chemicals be considered the secondary tool. We feel that this philosophical change needs to be considered based on a number of factors. Monies available to the LGWCC have never been adequate to treat the whole Lake. Grass carp is a cheaper alternative and might enable larger treatment areas with current budget levels. Long term cumulative effect to the soil column also makes us uncomfortable with ongoing reliance on chemicals as the primary tool. These thoughts will be formalized to The LGWCC, The LGSB & The TAG. The revised Proposed Plan will be available shortly on our website.

We are anxiously awaiting the formal fall survey results. Casual observations and early results from the LGA Lake Environment Monitors seem to indicate that Hydrilla was not as pervasive during the 2007 growing season. Scientific data is needed to verify these observations and this data should be available after the first of the year.

A Thank You to All Our Members

Thanks to all who renewed for 2007. A special thanks to the 94 homeowners and businesses that joined at a Supporting level. And a warm welcome to those that have joined throughout the year.

Last Spring the Membership Team decided to call the 244 members that had not renewed for 2007. We asked: what is your current issue, and would you consider returning? We send a big thank to the 54 that re-added their voices. We understand the value of (ear to ear) contact with our members.

You should already have your renewal packages if your membership expires December 31, 2007. This year Moira also sent a separate renewal letter to those members who joined through our Trial membership, and our Realtor Gift membership, in the hopes that they would renew for 2008 at one of our membership levels. In addition we sent a "We've Missed You" letter to those that hadn't renewed for 2007. In summary, we sent out 1376 renewal letters, and I'm happy to report that renewal checks are coming in daily.

We hope you enjoy your membership benefits, which include: Bi-monthly Bulletins, the Web Site and its valuable Links to Government and Businesses; the LGAAlerts; real-time E-mails with important news; monthly Speakers on current issues; and our Forums – On property taxes in January, and a forum for the Mecklenburg County candidates in October.

We enjoyed talking to Home Owners Associations this year about the benefits of membership, and what our Committees are doing.

Thank you all again, and if you think a friend or neighbor would benefit from joining the LGA, bring them to the next monthly meeting. If you have questions call us at (252) 586-6577 or now we have our new toll free number 1-888-586-6577 there's no excuse for being a stranger.

See you at the next LGA monthly meeting, on December 5, 2007 when the speaker will be Ken Krulik, Warren County's new Planning Director.

Safety Tip, Car Key Alarm Could Be a Life Saver

Put your car keys beside your bed at night. If you hear a noise outside your home or someone trying to get in your house, just press the panic button for your car. The alarm will be set off, and the horn will continue to sound until either you turn it off or the car battery dies. This tip came from a neighborhood watch coordinator.

Next time you come home for the night and you start to put your keys away, think of this: It's a security alarm system that you probably already have and requires no installation. Test it. It will go off from most everywhere inside your house and will keep honking until your battery runs down or until you reset it with the button on the key fob chain. It works if you park in your driveway or garage. If your car alarm goes off when someone is trying to break in your house, odds are the burglar or rapist won't stick around ... after a few seconds all the neighbors will be looking out their windows to see who is out there and sure enough, the criminal won't want that.

And remember to carry your keys while walking to your car in a parking lot when out shopping or going to restaurants or entertainment venues. The alarm can work the same way there. This is something that should be shared with everyone. Maybe it could save a life or a sexual abuse crime.

Lake Environment Monitors Sample Over 100 Miles of Shoreline

This past summer, North Carolina State University (NCSU) was awarded a grant to conduct a detailed mapping survey of the aquatic plants in Lake Gaston to assist future management decisions for an ecological lake environment. The Lake Environmental Monitors (LEMs) who are closely affiliated with the LGA Environmental Committee have been busy this fall assisting in the conduct of this survey.

With the aid of hand held GPS computers, LEMs took hundreds of rake samples of submerged aquatic plants around the lake and documented the type of plant and its location. Of the 350 miles of shore line around the lake, the LEMs were able to document over 100 miles of shoreline. Plants identified included Hydrilla, Cara, Brittle Naiad, Coontail, Egeria, Eurasian Watermilfoil and the algae Lyngbya. NCSU is now busy compiling all the survey data onto a computer generated map of the lake. The personnel, who collected the data, have been privileged in seeing a "draft" map of their efforts.

Another aspect of the grant was to include the documentation of large floating mats of hydrilla during November and December. Fortunately for the lake property owners, there have been no sightings of large floating mats during November.

We have been documenting this activity and have produced a display board with photographs that we have added to as the project has progressed that includes the "draft" map. Stop by and look at this very interesting project at our monthly meetings on the membership table.

With the assistance of additional volunteer survey personnel next year, NCSU and the LEMs hope to conduct a complete aquatic plant survey of the entire lake. If you are interested in joining the team, please contact Jack Saunders for further information jackdsaunders@embarqmail.com.

(Editor's note: we are including the Letter to the Editor we submitted for publication in the November 21, 2007 editions of: Brunswick Times Gazette, Lake Gaston Gazette, Littleton Observer, Mecklenburg Sun, and South Hill Enterprise)

To the Editor:

Adequate law enforcement ranks in the top five on the list of important issues by our members. The LGA has consistently pressed the five Brunswick, Halifax, Mecklenburg, Northampton and Warren county governments to provide adequate police protection throughout their counties, specifically reduced response times and more consistent police presence, particularly for the lake area.

The LGA supported Warren County Sheriff Johnny Williams' plan for smaller county police districts and an in-crease in officers to fulfill his plan. We also supported Northampton County Sheriff Wardie Vincent's plan to hire four additional officers and the necessary equipment to support them, with the intent that the entire county's law enforcement capabilities, including the lake, would be increased. That plan was approved by commissioners, and Sheriff Vincent has hired and is currently training those additional officers. He said recently that those officers will soon be on the road and allow a greater presence at the lake.

Here at the lake we have enjoyed a relatively low crime rate compared with other areas of the counties. The latest robbery of Andy's Restaurant, where the thieves were armed, combined with recent robberies of two marinas, a drug store, another restaurant, and others, would certainly seem to indicate increased risk to our citizens and our growing business community.

The LGA will continue to work with our local sheriff departments, business leaders through the Chamber of Commerce, and county boards of commissioners/supervisors to find ways to better protect all the citizens and businesses of our counties from increasing crime.

John Cataldo
President
Lake Gaston Association

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