

FIVE COUNTY FORUM REPORT

The Lake Gaston Association's (LGA) annual Five County Forum was held on March 16, 2017 at the Lake Gaston Lion's Club. We had good attendance of County Managers, Board of Supervisors (VA) and Board of Commissioners (NC) from four of the counties that border Lake Gaston. Due to illness and a schedule conflict, only the County Manager was available from Warren County. Also in attendance were most of the LGA Directors, a few members of the public and a representative from the Lake Gaston Gazette.

The meeting was opened by LGA President Bill Heflin who provided a welcome and opening remarks.

Mr. Steve Hoyle and A.J. Reyes, from North Carolina State University, and Dr. Elton Brown, LGWCC followed with a status and plans for noxious weed control on Lake Gaston. He said that the control efforts for Hydrilla has gone well, but stressed that it will never be eliminated, so we need to remain vigilant in addressing flare ups of growth. Also, there has been growth of a noxious algae, Lyngbya, that is much harder to eliminate. Mr. Hoyle compared both weed growth behaviors in similar lakes.

Clarence Drumgoole, LGA Director, provided an overview of upcoming Lake Clean-Up Day, scheduled for May 20. LGA Director Jeff Dowhan provided an overview of the LGA Education Committee discussed activities supporting local middle schools through the Lakeside Learning events planned for this Spring.

Will Miller, Dominion Energy, addressed Developments in Public Access to Lake Gaston. There are a number of existing and planned public access areas. Existing ones can be located by consulting the Dominion website:

<https://www.dom.com/community/~/link.aspx?id=64DAA2A45F2B46D594880383D0DBD43B&z=z>

Diane Cherry, NC Sustainable Energy Association presented a detailed overview of Solar Trends in NC&VA. NC is second only to California in solar energy development. Ms Cherry described the attributes of typical "solar farm" installations. She covered the status of tax incentives in NC and VA and how they affect growth in the industry. Her presentation generated a fair amount of interaction with the county representatives.

Bill Heflin closed the presentations with a short discussion of property taxes, acknowledging the needs of the counties but stressing that many of the lake area property owners are retirees with fixed incomes. He encouraged the local leaderships to avoid increases in taxes if at all possible.

Each of the local government attendees were given an opportunity to speak a few minutes about developments in their county. In doing so, many expressed thanks to the LGA for the information presented and for providing this unique opportunity for them to meet face-to-face with their peers from neighboring counties.

We extend our thanks to the presenters, attendees, volunteers, the Lions Club, and especially to Subway (Eaton Ferry Rd., who made lunch possible).

Attached to these minutes are responses to a few unanswered questions that the NC Sustainable Energy Association (NCSEA) provided after the meeting.

Submitted by,

Don Carson
Chair, LGA Government Relations Committee

About NCSEA

The NC Sustainable Energy Association (NCSEA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization of individuals, businesses, government, and nonprofits interested in North Carolina's sustainable energy future. Our mission is to drive policy and market development to create clean energy jobs, economic opportunities and affordable energy that benefits all of North Carolina.

Questions Asked During Lake Gaston Association Meeting March 16, 2017

1. Q. When the federal tax credit ends do you get to continue claiming it if you have not completed your project before the tax credit ended?

A. According to Solar Energy Industry Association, “commercial and utility projects which have commenced construction before December 31, 2021 may still qualify for the 30, 26, or 22 percent investment tax credit (ITC) if they are placed in service before December 31, 2023. The Treasury and IRS are currently drafting guidance which will inform solar developers of which percentage of ITC they will qualify for depending on when they started their project.”¹

2. Q. Does NCSEA’s GIS map of solar facilities from the website show the megawatt capacity of each facility?

A. Yes, for each utility-scale project the map provides the name, the town/city in which it is located, and the generating capacity of the installation. The map of North Carolina solar installations can be found at <http://energyncmaps.org/gis/solar/index.html>.

3. Q. What is the minimum acreage needed for a solar facility?

A. There is no minimum size as the space needed varies by exact location, the specific technology used, and other factors. However, most utility scale solar facilities in North Carolina are under 5 MW because of the state implementation of the federal PURPA law.

4. Q. How many acres does a 5 MW solar installation occupy?

A. This figure also varies depending on the exact location, the type of panels used, and other factors. NCSEA’s study with NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services found that on average, solar installations occupy 5.78 acres/MW in North Carolina (that is the median average of all 320+ sites analyzed).²

5. Q. Looking back over the “Are Solar Panels Harmful” slide, has there been any pushback from communities about the potential negative health effects of a solar facility?

A. There are always concerns about the potential effects of large projects like these. Some may be concerned about the electromagnetic fields that are generated by the installations and others may be worried about the materials that go into the panels themselves. In both cases, misinformation has exaggerated the actual consequences of solar installations as the electric fields produced are less than those from televisions and refrigerators and the chemicals that make up the solar cells are in small amounts and are sealed inside the equipment.

6. Q. Are there solar developers that specifically buy timberland or farmland for building their facilities?

A. This does not seem like a common strategy.

7. Q. In the decommissioning phase, is the owner of the facility responsible for paying to restore the land to its previous condition?

A. Usually that is the case but all of these details are defined in the lease.

¹ Solar Energy Industry Association. State Solar Policy: North Carolina Solar. Available at: <http://www.seia.org/state-solar-policy/north-carolina>

²NC Sustainable Energy Association. (2017). Land Use Analysis of NC Solar Installations. Available at: https://c.ycmdn.com/sites/energync.site-ym.com/resource/resmgr/Solar_and_Land_Use_Analysis_.pdf