

JORDAN LAKE

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future."

Pittsboro's water problems are twofold. One is that its wastewater treatment plant is at or beyond capacity, which has led to a building moratorium in effect well before the recent housing bust. The other problem is that its water comes right out of the Haw River. The intake is just upstream from the bridge of U.S. 15-501.

An illustration of the problem of drinking water from the Haw comes from the early 1960s, 20 years before Jordan Lake even existed. Cliff Collins, who owns Cliff's Meat Market in Carrboro, used to cross the Haw on 15-501 twice a day on a school bus. One day, as they crossed the bridge, there were soap suds everywhere, even high above the bridge.

While we trust that that kind of egregious industrial pollution has been relegated to the past, the Haw and all of Chatham's rivers are polluted nonetheless. And they all run into Jordan Lake.

Jordan's troubled waters

"Jordan Lake is the biggest storm water pond in the Piedmont," said Tim Keim, a board member of the Rocky River Heritage Foundation and Friends of the Rocky River. "It is in terrible shape. The rivers are in bad shape and the lake is in bad shape."

Problems occur along the lengths of the rivers.

"The sewage treatment plants in



Jordan Lake was intended for recreation, which these 'weekend warriors' are using to full advantage. PHOTO BY JOHN SHILLITO

all the towns up and down the Haw River, the quality of effluent they put out is not high enough to keep the river clean," said Keim. "They clean it up to a certain level, then it gets dumped back into the river. That effluent is bad enough, but there is also all this nitrogen and phosphorus that comes from farm run off. There are 52 sludge sites on the Rocky River. Heavy metals and pharmaceuticals, they don't know what is in the sludge. When it rains, that sludge washes off in to the river."

Sludge is a byproduct of sewage treatment, and it is given to various farmers as free fertilizer.

Elaine Chiosse, Haw Riverkeeper, describes Jordan Lake's problems this way.

"There are almost a million people living above it, with all the wastewater treatment. Reidsville,

Greensboro, Burlington, Mebane, Chapel Hill, half of Durham. All that new development in Chatham County," she said. "It is never the best drinking source when you are taking it from the bottom of a watershed."

Nutrient run off causes algae.

"There is way too much algae and so many species of it," said Chiosso, "some of the most diverse species of Algae. You could be growing some toxic ones. Even if the algae is pretty benign, it makes it more difficult."

Cleaning up Jordan Lake

Rules to clean up Jordan Lake were adopted earlier this decade, but ran into opposition from towns upstream. They balked because of the additional expense. So the rules have gone to the N.C. State Legislature where they are under review and face political opposition that will try to dilute them.

"The Jordan Lake Nutrient Management Rules have been crafted and argued about for seven years," said Chiosso. "The process began in 2002 when Jordan Lake went on the EPA's impaired water list." "The Jordan Lake rules have to be approved," said Keim. "That is the beginning. There is

already a lot of squawking from people in Greensboro and Burlington and Durham. Chatham County is fighting back hard."

"We are fighting as hard as possible so the rules don't get weakened," said Chiosso.

"We've been the strongest advocates for Jordan water protections," said Lucier. We have 120 miles of Jordan Lake shoreline all in Chatham County. We lost 40,000 acres, 60 square miles. We took a tremendous hit for the regional benefit of Jordan Lake."

Chiosso is hopeful that it can be accomplished.

"The most controversial rules are the existing development rules – to go in slowly, steadily, over time, to find some ways to capture polluted storm water from existing development that goes into the rivers."

She points to some success stories.

"The Hudson is a great example of a river that come back to life," she said. "Even the Neuse River."

The Neuse suffered algae blooms and fish kills due to nutrient run off from hog farms in the early '90s.

"These rules went into effect and made some progress with these nutrients," said Chiosso. "The efforts to protect waters go on forever."

Keim put it in more stark terms.

"People don't realize that the rivers in the Piedmont, the Rocky, the Haw and the Deep, before living memory those rivers used to run clear, because of the millions of mussels that grew in the rivers. Because of the pollution, they are almost all gone. Those are indicator species of the health of our rivers.

"We're not going to lose jobs just because of some minnow. If we don't keep them healthy, there won't be any jobs or any life. The human population will disappear as well."

Julian Sereno is editor and publisher of Chatham County Line.



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