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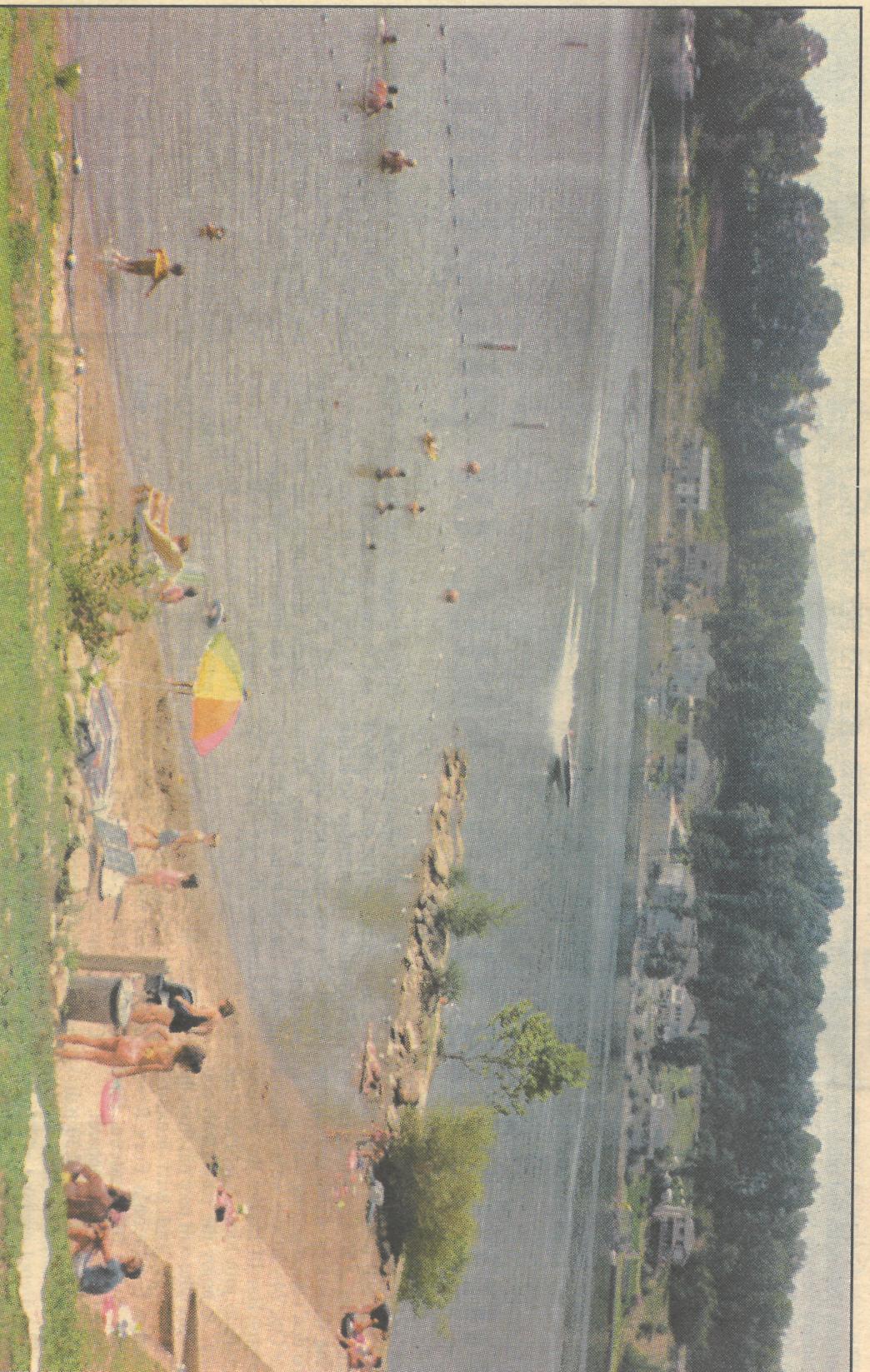


Photo shows contrast between state park beach on one section of the lake and nearby development.

## Population growth crucial factor

By SABIAN WARREN  
News Herald Staff Writer

A strong economy and other factors are cited as reasons for the increase in development pressures on Lake James, but local officials say the chief underlying cause appears to be something fairly obvious: population growth.

Burke and most other counties in the Catawba River basin are experiencing a tremendous influx of new residents, statistics show. While the trend mirrors a demographic pattern evident in other parts of North Carolina and throughout the Southeast, the growth is especially staggering along the Catawba River, state and local officials say.

According to the Office of State Planning, Burke's population was 75,740 in 1990 but is expected to rise to 93,827 by the year 2015, a 24 percent increase.

More modest growth is predicted for McDowell County, on the other side of Lake James. The population there is projected to rise by 10 percent by 2015, to 39,374.

But growth is expected to be far greater in some of the other counties along the Catawba River basin over the same period. Projections call for a 44 percent increase in Iredell, 45 percent in Lincoln, 60 percent in Mecklenburg and 70 percent in Union.

Because of the growth, and

because waterfront property is a finite resource, such land has become ever more desirable and valuable. Lake James in particular

## Lake James At The Crossroads

fits the bill for many people relocating to the area, said Morganton Realtor Jim Belote, the exclusive listing agent for Crescent Resources' lakefront property.

"A lot of people are moving to the Southeast. A lot of people want lake property and they want a lake in the mountains or foothills. A lake like that is hard to find," Belote said.

He added, "Most of the people are coming from higher population centers. A lot of them want to be in a more rural area. Interstate 40 is close by, and people like the topography of the area, the rolling hills. And it's a little bit cooler here."

Depending on location, popula-

tors President Ronnie Thompson. "It will happen," Thompson said of shoreline development. "Real estate in Burke County is drawing people from every state in the country. We have good climate, good schools, and easy access to large cities. People are looking for what we have to offer."

Some local officials say growth is not all bad. In fact, it is necessary for fiscal health, said Burke County Chamber of Commerce President Mike Jackson.

"We're in favor of development," Jackson said. "In order for this county to continue to progress, we have to have development. Without a certain amount, we're not going to be able to keep up with the costs of providing services like education and other things citizens demand from county government. If there is no growth, people are going to be taxed to death. There has to be additional economic expansion to help cover it."

Jackson expects development to continue at the lake, but he says some of the concerns are unfounded. "I think there will continue to be development out there, although it won't be as rapid as some people are worried about," he said.

The advent of some commercial development along the shoreline would be helpful, Jackson said. "As the number of housing developments grow, I think we'll see an expansion of commercial ser-

vice," he said. "It will happen, but it will take time. It will happen in a natural way."

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