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Will plans doom lake recreation?

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Hal Williams counts himself lucky to have lived most of his adult life on the isolated shoreline of Lake James.

The 75-year-old retiree has spent many contented hours hunting deer and other game in the thick forests that cover the shoreline and fishing for bass and walleye in the cold, clear waters of the lake.

"We've really enjoyed it here," he said one morning while casting for bass from his dock. Williams is especially known for his fishing prowess, long considered one of the best anglers on the lake. Among his trophy catches is a largemouth bass of over nine pounds.

"It used to be when Hal went fishing, people would watch and see if he caught anything," said his wife, Helen.

In recent years, more and more people have begun recognizing what Williams has known for over 40 years — that Lake James is a recreational haven of rare natural beauty. Located only eight miles west of Morganton, the lake is a watery paradise with 154 miles of mostly untouched shoreline framed by Table Rock, Hawksbill, Shortoff and other imposing mountains.

"Lake James needs to remain pristine because it's a source of drinking water and a source of recreation," said former Burke County Commissioner Ronnie Thompson, who frequently enjoys the lake from the deck of his pontoon boat. "The lake itself is priceless. You can't put a dollar figure on it the way it is now."

According to the Burke County Travel and Tourism Commission, more than 400,000 people visited the lake in 1997. The most popular activities, the commission says, are

boating, fishing, swimming and picnicking, with boating being the top draw. In the warm months, the lake is abuzz with motorboats and self-propelled water-skis on weekends, though activity decreases markedly during the week.

A number of public access areas built by Duke Energy offer boat launching facilities, including Linville and Canal Bridge in Burke County and Hidden Cove and North Fork in McDowell. Another access area is currently under construction in McDowell and will feature six boat ramps, three loading piers and parking for 160 vehicles. The lighted and paved facility should be completed by early 1999, said Duke spokesman Joe Maher.

In addition, the Bridgewater Canoe Access Area is located on the Linville River just below the Linville dam in Burke.

Marinas including Mountain Harbour, Benfield's Landing and Mimosa Fishing Club offer docking and fueling facilities.

Boating is only one of the pleasant pastimes on the lake; some visitors also camp in the woods along the shoreline.

"I've been camping for several years up here," said Dewayne Hawkins of Morganton, who was

on a weekend outing with his wife and two children. "We camp up here a couple weekends a month.

My family really enjoys it."

Lake James State Park, on the McDowell side of the lake, is a

popular destination in the summer,

drawing overflow crowds on nice weekends.

Fishing is always a big draw all

around the lake. Anglers try their luck catching largemouth and

smallmouth bass, crappie, white

bass, walleye (also known locally as "pike"), catfish and panfish like

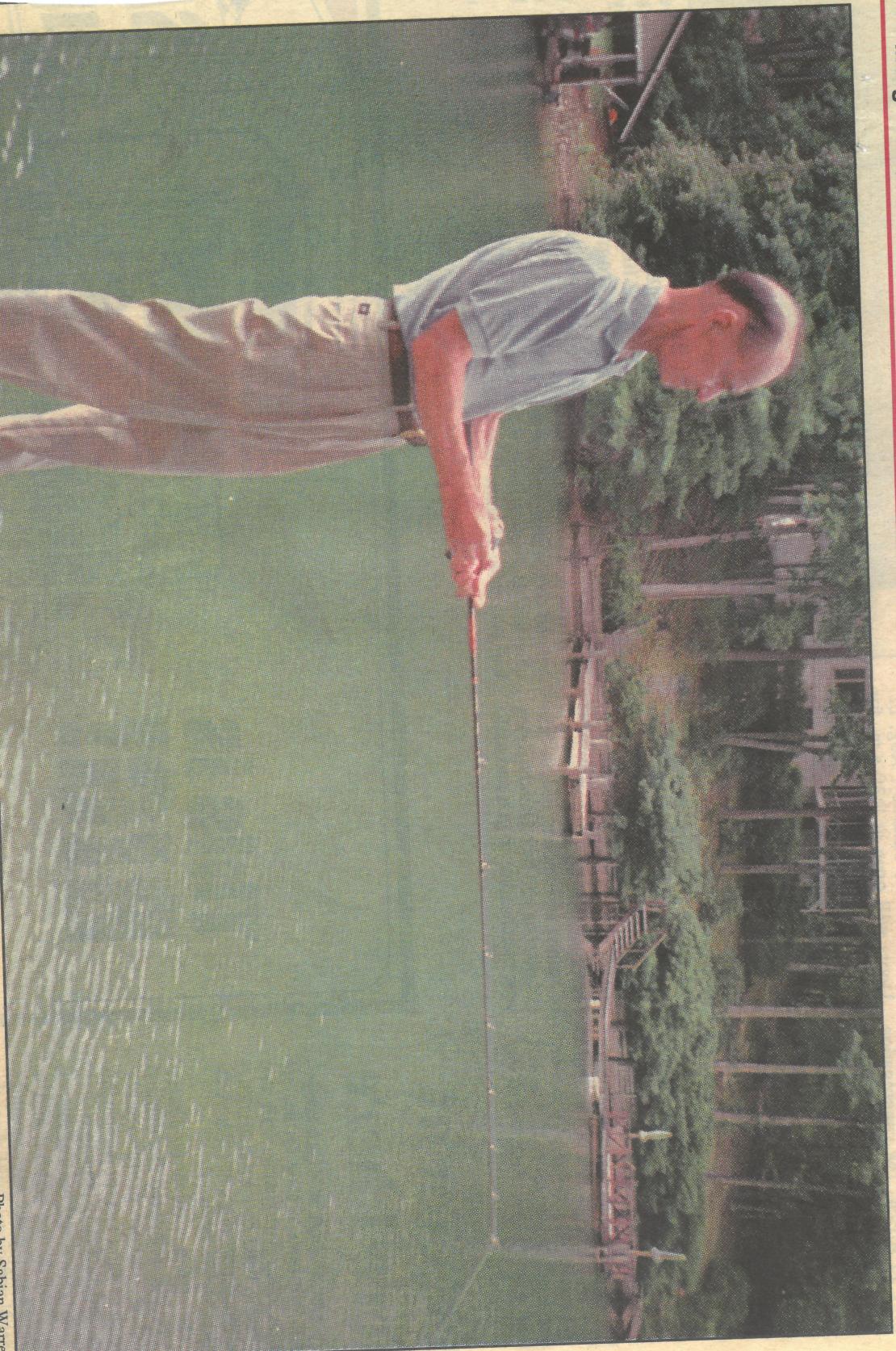


Photo by Sabian Warren

At The Crossroads Lake James



Photo by Mark Haman