

# Lake's future in the balance

**D**ear Readers: More than a few area residents, perhaps a touch biased by regional pride, will tell you that Lake James is "the prettiest lake in North Carolina."

In truth, they may have a point.



**Warren**

The clean, clear lake straddling Burke and McDowell counties, with its miles of wooded shoreline and striking mountain vistas, is an unexpected natural treasure

in a region increasingly pressured by population growth.

But Lake James appears on the cusp of momentous change as development pressures mount. In response to growing public interest in lake issues, The News Herald today begins an in-depth series of stories focusing on topics ranging from the history of the lake to modern-day growing pains and conservation efforts.

For most of its 80-year existence, remote Lake James was known to few outside of Burke and McDowell counties, its sparkling waters encircled by dense, unbroken forests that are home to deer, fox and even an occasional black bear.

## Lake James

### At The Crossroads

Use of the impoundment by local residents for recreational pursuits such as fishing and boating has been a tradition for generations, but development along the wild shoreline, where bald eagles can still be spotted, was remarkably limited.

In recent years, however, a surge of housing construction has begun to change the character and appearance of the scenic lake at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Development is expected to accelerate rapidly in the near future, a reflection of the explosive population growth occurring in the

Catawba River valley and elsewhere across North Carolina.

One project in particular – South Pointe – has become a catalyst for opponents of unchecked shoreline development. The huge Crescent Resources subdivision has served as a rallying cry for conservationists, even prompting a demonstration by sign-carrying protesters.

But even as some protest further development, buyers of lake-front property, eager to find refuge from the bustle of urban life, are streaming in from Charlotte and Asheville and other cities and states, even from as far away as

California.

They are drawn by images of an unspoiled lake with mountain scenery, far and away the cleanest impoundment on the Catawba River chain and one of the most pristine in the state.

Yet as newcomers seek homes around the lake, many local residents express worry that "their" lake could become "another Lake Norman."

Staff writer Sabian Warren, whose father is a Burke County native and who often visited the lake as a youth, spent the past month on special assignment researching and writing the articles, wandering the shoreline talking with marina operators, fishermen and property owners and conducting interviews with public officials, conservation leaders and developers.

Today's article on the history of the lake is the first in an 11-part series.

We believe this series of articles to be among the most important The News Herald has ever published for we believe charting the proper course for the future of Lake James is among the most important tasks facing our county in the near future.

**Bill Poteat**  
Editor

**The News Herald**