

# Lake James

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water's edge in order to filter out sediment and harmful nutrients, Kucken said.

"People talk about homeowners' rights, but we don't talk about homeowners' responsibilities. They do have a responsibility to protect the environment," she said.

Grass is a poor buffer, she added.

"Natural areas do a better job of stabilizing the shoreline because of the deeper root systems," she said.

Protecting water quality is becoming increasingly important throughout the Catawba River basin, Kucken said. With a population of more than 1 million, the

basin is the most heavily populated of the state's 17 river basins. The basin includes part or all of 13 counties - Alexander, Avery, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Union and Watauga.

Between 1970 and 1990, the Catawba River basin experienced a 40 percent increase in population. Growth is expected to accelerate even more in the coming years.

Officials emphasize that protection of Lake James' water quality is crucial, since it is the uppermost lake in the chain. Poor water quality at the top of the chain would mean even worse problems downstream.

"There's no hope of cleaning up

any of the rest of the chain if it's not clean at the start," said Ruby Pharr, chairman of the board of directors of the Foothills Conservancy, a land trust consortium with headquarters in Morganton.

Even though Lake Rhodhiss is near the top of the chain, it is relatively polluted compared with Lake James, officials said. The lake with the worst water quality in the chain is Lake Wylie, below Charlotte.

"I don't think too much of all the development," said Jeff Hollifield, a truck driver from Connelly Springs who was on Lake James fishing recently. "It's clean now, cleaner than Lake Hickory or Lake Rhodhiss. If Lake James keeps developing, it's going to get dirty."