

Oconee water problems will worsen without some changes

By Wendell Dawson, Editor, AVOC, Inc • October 1, 2007

Oconee County is facing a water crisis and much uncertainty about its future. Unrestrained growth is a major contributor to the problem. The sad thing is that area and state leaders were discussing a water shortage 15 and 20 years ago. We went through a severe drought in 2002, while some current officials were in office. Water shortages and drought conditions should not be a surprise.



Bear Creek Reservoir on Savage Road 9-07

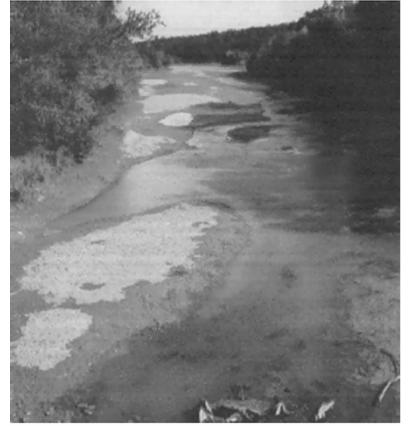
Drought conditions just five years ago in 2002

North GA Streams cannot support unlimited population

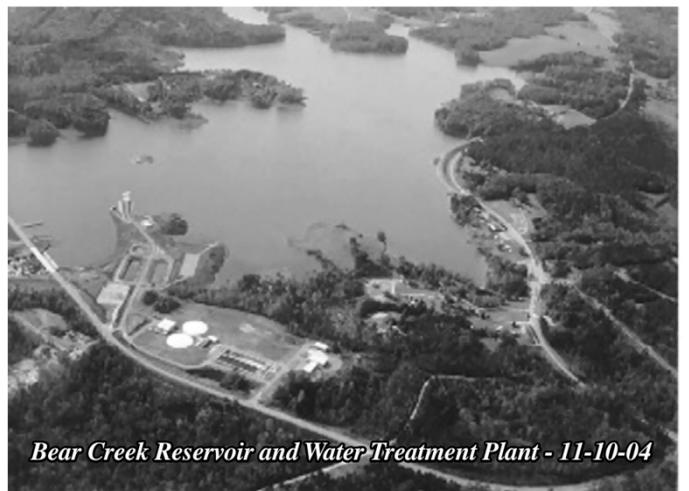
Bear Creek Reservoir in Jackson County is experiencing water limitation problems. The filling is limited because of the low flow in the Middle Oconee River. Now, most of us have seen the Middle Oconee, the Apalachee at High Shoals and Hard Labor Creek. The Middle Oconee has a much bigger flow than does the Apalachee and HLC.

Water supply is going to be a tougher challenge in the future than now. **The streams of North GA cannot supply water for an unlimited population.** Alternatives to reservoirs are needed. Bear Creek Reservoir is dropping but so is Lake Lanier. Size is not the answer. The Chattahoochee, Middle Oconee, North Oconee, Oconee and Apalachee Rivers cannot fill existing reservoir space.

The UOBWA Bear Creek Reservoir has a capacity to provide approximately 50 MGD for sixty days. Oconee's debt for Bear Creek was approximately \$10 Million. The Hard Labor Creek project is supposed to provide less than 45 MGD with costs of approximately \$400 Million Plus.



Middle Oconee at US 441-
Clarke Co. Line
- 9-22-07
- Stream that feeds
Bear Creek Reservoir



Bear Creek Reservoir and Water Treatment Plant - 11-10-04

Bear Creek Reservoir has been online for 5 years! Where would we be without Bear Creek Reservoir today?

Reservoirs do not produce water. Streams do. The capacity cannot handle unrestrained growth. Local governments must exercise some responsible population growth policies.

When we were working on the Bear Creek Reservoir, we did not anticipate "wide open" indiscriminate residential growth. No reservoir or water supply will meet the demands of "unlimited growth".

Some will say, "You can't stop progress" and others will say, "You can't stop Growth"! First, one could debate what is "progress"? Overwhelming infrastructure is not progress.

Governments have much influence on growth: Rezoning; where waterlines are run; where sewer lines are run and other controls. It takes strong officials to understand the danger and take the steps to prevent an area being overrun with growth.

Regional leaders are needed to seek regional solutions. The four counties in Bear Creek Reservoir (Upper Oconee Basin Water Authority) have the foundation and apparatus for a regional solution. Apparently, the four counties cannot work together on the challenges. The UOBWA Chair is Melvin Davis of Oconee County. His name does not come up during news stories about water bans, etc. Staff persons are quoted.



Melvin Davis chairs the Upper Oconee Basin Water Authority (Bear Creek Reservoir) and has responsibility for conserving the reservoir resources.

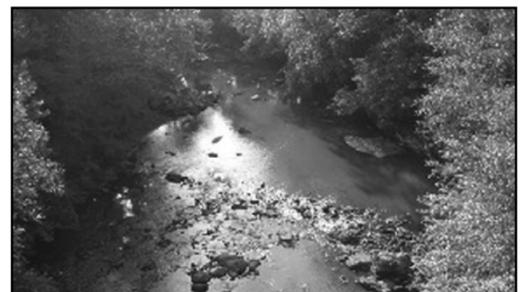


Hard Labor Creek - at regular flow - to be primary stream for Walton Water Project

Walton County - Hard Labor Creek - Too Costly, Too Little Water and Too Late

At the same time, Melvin Davis has decided that Oconee should join with Walton County to strike out on another very expensive and long-term project. **Hard Labor Creek will not be online until at least 2014 and Oconee will have only 3.5 MGD capacity for \$43 Million!!** That won't meet the projected need much less take care of us for 30 years! The project would expand with **8.6 MGD to Oconee after 2030 for \$59.3 million.**

Apalachee River to be backup for Walton Project at Price Mill Bridge (Morgan County Line) - 9-22-07



We need leadership and planning now from the UOBWA folks.

The UOBWA should have meetings and input from area citizen and business leaders. We need long-term conservation planning — not just reacting to conditions that should be anticipated. After all, we build reservoirs for storage during droughts. We need to consider its limits when approving water line extensions and commitments. The current drought policy of total ban on landscapers, including hand watering while allowing car washes to remain open and operating is not a well thought out policy.

We have resources to get through this crisis. It will take cooperation and working with Jackson, Barrow and Clarke County. Clarke could have worked with us on the Barnett Shoals reservoir project. Barrow and Jackson have excess capacity that could carry the group (and Oconee) if the governments could work together.

It is time for area leaders to come together and I don't mean just elected officials with turf and ego issues. We need leadership from the area industrial

sector, business sector and the University. We need persons of vision with the ability to lead.

Our planning and zoning must also reflect the real limits of our water sources in North GA. This has been information discussed in the 1980's in the NEGA RDC. Where were our current officials when all of this was taking place?

Meanwhile, lets get some folks working on the Water Ban issues and work toward a more equitable plan. We did not get into the drought over night. We knew long ago that it was coming. We should have taken more conservation measures earlier.

The UOBWA did give authority to Melvin Davis to deal with it. However, all Press Releases reference the Operations Committee and an Administrative person at NEGA RDC. A recent article about the GA EPD allowing emergency withdrawal quotes Clarke County Staff persons who probably took the lead.

Where are the Elected Officials?!

"For Oconee County Chairman Melvin Davis, the decision was easy..."

— *The Walton Tribune* - September 9, 2007
www.waltontribune.com/story.lasso?ewcd=ff5944ddb559c3cb

Oconee joins Walton in HLC - By Robbie Schwartz
WATKINSVILLE — For Oconee County Board of Commissioners Chairman Melvin Davis, the decision was easy...

"Drought Authority given to Chairman Melvin Davis of the Upper Oconee Basin Water Authority in July 2006"

— *The Jackson Herald* - July 5, 2006 www.mainstreetnews.com/2006/July/J0705F.html

Drought plan in effect for reservoir

Water systems that rely on the Bear Creek Reservoir have been ordered to cut consumption.

The Upper Oconee Basin Water Authority, which owns the reservoir, enacted its drought contingency plan effective Saturday. The move means Jackson, Barrow, Athens-Clarke and Oconee counties must cut their use of water ...

The authority also voted to give Chairman Melvin Davis authority to order implementation of subsequent phases of the drought plan upon the recommendation of the Operations Committee...

AVOC, Inc

Another Voice Oconee County

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 - Member, Upper Oconee Basin Water Group (1989-1994) Active in site selection for Reservoir
 - Chairman, Upper Oconee Basin Water Authority (1994 - 2000) Active in Construction of Bear Creek Reservoir
 - Member, Georgia Water Campaign Advisory Board (1997 - 1999)
- For More Info, See <http://avoc.info/resume.php>