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Natural Resources, Tennessee Valley Authority, Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition, Coast Guard Auxiliary and even local officials to address the current state of Lake Chatuge and its watersheds after this last year's drought.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton both attended the meeting, each assuring the public that the two offices would work together to do everything they could to protect and preserve Lake Chatuge and those who enjoy recreational opportunities at the lake.

"I want to thank all of you who are here in concern with our water quality," said Commissioner Bradshaw. "As commissioner, it is a no-brainer that Lake Chatuge is a beautiful lake. Our streams, our mountains – that is what makes this county what it is.

"We have got to keep our water quality at the highest level possible. Without that, we have nothing. I'm going to work with all the folks that we can to support that and keep our water clean."

Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition Executive Director Callie Moore was the first to speak to the group concerning the current science of Lake Chatuge, explaining that while Lake Chatuge is currently not experiencing E. coli outbreaks or chemical inconsistencies, it is still of the highest priority to the coalition.

Moore urged residents to continue to strive for lake and watershed conservation due to various degrees of impact that can occur and go unnoticed. For example, Moore explained the dangers associated with downstream impact and how the removal of certain biological properties in and around the water can affect not only the watershed but also others that are fed through it.

Recently-appointed TVA Natural Resources Manager Chris Cooper explained what the TVA Natural Resources Department does, and how it can be useful to the residents of Towns County. Cooper assured the group that the department would continue to do everything it could to assist in Lake Chatuge conservation.

"TVA has a very small footprint in Northern Georgia," said Cooper. "Most of our footprint is in Tennessee. There is no way TVA could do this



Callie Moore, executive director of Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition

by ourselves. Oftentimes we see ourselves as a catalyst. We come into counties and towns and work with municipalities and agencies to get some of the projects accomplished.

"We do depend on a lot of you all and a lot of lake and watershed groups. We've worked with the Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition a lot. We're here to help.

"As far as water quality on Lake Chatuge, we don't have a lot of land. The property we have on the shoreline is linear. Some places its 5 to 10 feet wide. There's just not a lot we can do in that aspect, but we can help through permitting to make sure that it's done right and to make certain we protect the shoreline."

DNR Sgt. Steve Seitz, DNR Ranger David Webb, TVA Representative Kemmy Garrett and Coastguard Auxiliary Cmdr. John Dixon also spoke during the course of the meeting, explaining each individual department's purpose in regards to Lake Chatuge and providing contact information upon request.

Toward the end of the meeting, members were given an allotted time to question the panel of experts, which brought to light the concern of erosion on Lake Chatuge's shores.

Turner provided a slideshow presentation of photos taken by him and other members documenting the erosion.

According to the panel, large boats remain the primary

cause of the erosion, though no law can be enacted to ban such boats from the lake, much to the dismay of the membership.

Another main concern was the lowered levels of Lake Chatuge in September, especially this past year when the lake was close to winter pool before fall. Due to this, membership questioned Cooper as to why the TVA could not hold the water release until later in the year, rather than lowering levels even more when the lake is already at a lower capacity.

"This is a question we get a lot," said Cooper. "At TVA, we did a reservoir operations study a few years back. We looked at all the flood data and all the reservoir levels all up and down the Tennessee River. One of our major missions in TVA with energy is flood reduction.

"It's a balancing act for TVA. We have a set guide, it's on the internet. We don't have any plans to change that. The study was very intense and it went on for quite a while. I'm not saying that it will never change, but we have to think about the people downstream too."

In line with the homeowners association's current concerns and to round out the meeting, a check of \$500 was presented to the Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition on behalf of the membership to aid in future Lake Chatuge and watershed maintenance and conservation.

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shared an exciting update for Towns County residents.

"I've reached out to the owner of Advanced Digital Cable, and I have talked to him," said Commissioner Bradshaw. "He owns the old Mohawk building, and they are getting ready to remodel that building and he's bringing his business to Towns County."

According to Commissioner Bradshaw, Advanced Digital Cable already had plans of opening up shop in Towns County when he reached out initially, and he expressed his enthusiasm and readiness to make them feel right at home in Towns.

Commissioner Bradshaw followed this announcement by emphasizing the work he's putting in toward building relationships around the county.

"This is what I'm telling everyone that I talk to," said Bradshaw. "If you're an elected official and you're there for the right reasons, then you can disagree with me, you can get upset with me, but we're still going to smile and shake hands and do what's best, in the end, for the county.

"We all have the same goals, we just have different ways of getting there."

In regards to economic development, Commissioner Bradshaw explained that the county does in fact have an economic development board, though it is not currently active. However, Commissioner Bradshaw wishes to contact the members of the board and resume activity as soon as possible.

"We're going after this as hard as we can go," said Commissioner Bradshaw. "I'm a doer. We're working hard and we're going to be making sure we move forward and get things going."

Union County's Commissioner Paris also spoke on development in the meeting.

According to Commissioner Paris, while Towns and Union counties are similar, the financial budget and size of the neighboring counties are not the same, lending to different opportunities that are available. However, Commissioner Paris did encourage Towns County residents to continue to strive for change if they wish to see



Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris also spoke in the meeting.

their community grow.

"This job is not fun if you can't do something for the people," said Commissioner Paris. "We're hired and elected to be your voice and to try and make our counties better."

In terms of economic development, Commissioner Paris explained that such progress comes with a price. If the county is not willing to use tax dollars to expand, then such expansion will not be able to take place. According to Commissioner Paris, the county must spend money to make money and create a better economy for the citizens.

"In Union County, we have an economic development director and his name is Mitch Griggs," said Commissioner Paris. "We also have a development board. Their sole purpose is to bring business to Union County, not just industrial business but commercial business. Any time there is a new shop or a new restaurant or a new facility, they go through Mitch and he helps them get their DOT permit. He helps with any problem they have and any kind of funding that might be available through the state of Georgia.

"So, anybody who comes through our county or the city looking for assistance, we can give it to them. It makes it a business-friendly atmosphere when they come in."

Commissioner Paris went on to explain that there are many funding opportunities for new businesses, and talked about how to create a community that is compatible for such endeavors. One suggestion that Commissioner Paris presented to the group

was to design a spec building for future businesses to see the possibilities of available commercial land lots throughout the county.

"When companies are looking for places to expand, you have to have something to show them," said Commissioner Paris. "You can show them a piece of land, and that's good. But a spec building is something you might want to look at in the future. It does cost money to build a spec building.

"We worked with TVA especially on this project. This is a unique design that if someone comes in and wants to buy an 8,000 square foot building, they can do that. Or if they come in and want a 20,000 square foot building, they can buy the two 8,000 and build a 4,000 in between.

"It's just a really good option. We needed this about five years ago in our industrial park."

Commissioner Paris closed by explaining that bringing industry into the county not only provides jobs for current residents, but also for future generations that would otherwise have to leave the area to find work.

"I feel sure that Cliff and I are going to be able to work together," said Commissioner Paris. "This whole county can work together too. If everybody comes together and talks about what you want, what you have and what you want it to be, it's going to make it better for everyone.

"I'm proud to be a neighbor and work with you all. Anytime I can help and assist, I'll be glad to in any way I can."