

The following document summarizes many hours of research by several of the residents downstream of Lake Oglethorpe. As such it reflects our perceptions and probably the residents of Lake Oglethorpe will not always agree. There are issues that we cannot confirm but that seem relevant and worthy of further investigation. We believe we've been honest in noting our uncertainty about those issues.

Lake Oglethorpe/Downstream Watershed Background

Location and Description:

Lake Oglethorpe is a 63-acre artificial lake in southwest Oglethorpe County, in northeast Georgia. It is located approximately 15 miles east-southeast of downtown Athens, Georgia. It was constructed under the Soil Conservation Service beginning 1970 and was completed in 1972. One of its sources is the (until now) perennially flowing Goulding Creek. During heavy rains the lake empties at the south end into the same Goulding Creek. Goulding Creek runs 2-3 miles downstream, joining Moss Creek and then Big Creek, which runs 5-6 miles south and joins the Oconee River southeast of Athens, Georgia. The lake drains 3.44 square miles of surrounding land.

Originally the lake was constructed for recreational hunting, and then parcelled and sold for residential use. The dam is a Hazard Category II, 40 feet high, impounding 992 acre-feet of water. The Lake Oglethorpe Association (LOA) consists of somewhere around 80-100 households. The lake is not made available to the general public except by invitation.

Water Regulation:

We do not have access to blueprints for the water regulation mechanism, but here is our understanding of its workings: The assembly of valves is contained in a standpipe, with the bottom of the riser acting as primary spillway located at the normal lake level. A secondary emergency vegetative spillway is located about six feet above this. There are two major valves, an 18-inch controlling water about six feet below lake level, and a 48-inch valve at the bottom of the lake. To our knowledge that 48-inch valve has never been tested.

It is only recently that the valve controls have been made secure against outside intrusion.

Water management at Lake Oglethorpe has been for some time now completely passive. Water only flows downstream when the lake level is higher than the bottom of the riser.

Permits, Inspections, and Major Repair:

Over the last few weeks we have spent many hours on the phone and by email to various agencies and interested parties. We have discovered the following issues:

Phone calls to the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have failed to unearth the existence of any permits for the operation of the Lake Oglethorpe dam. Similarly we can find no records of dam inspections until Nov 1 2005. This inspection seems to have been prompted by an intra-neighborhood school bus turnaround dispute.

Simultaneously a dam failure analysis was performed. In November 2005, the NRCS performed a catastrophic flood analysis and confirmed that Lake Oglethorpe dam was a Hazard Category II (low hazard) impoundment. We attach links at the bottom of the page to that analysis as well as to our own topographical corrections.

In the summer of 2004, during reconstruction of a public bridge over the north end of the lake, attempts to open one of the valves resulted in the assembly's destruction. The replacement valve assembly was apparently fabricated by members of the LOA. It is our understanding that major repairs of this sort should have triggered a permit application requirement but to our knowledge this has not been done.

While none of us is a lawyer, the GA EPD Rule 391-3-6-.07 seems fairly clear on the requirements for permits. It's a conundrum that requirements imposed on others, including water release to downstream watersheds, in order to obtain a permit, are exempt for Lake Oglethorpe, which seems not to have a permit. We understand the idea of grandfathering but it seems like 35 years is an awfully long period of time in which gradual compliance with modern environmental knowledge and expectations could have been made. Surely we don't need to tolerate continued water management by amateurs motivated solely by their own interests, just because the impoundment was constructed in a less enlightened time.

Current Situation:

Outflow of the water held by the LOA has always been under control of the LOA Board, uninformed by any professionals expert in water conservation. The Board keeps the lake as high as possible, preventing outflow in order to achieve this, and have stopped any outflow since at least the beginning of Summer 2007. The LOA and Board have made it very clear that the lake is not to be a resource for downstream watershed replenishment.

As the lake neighborhood population has increased, downstream residents have noted a decrease in creek volume and flow over the last ten years. We attribute this at least in part to an effort by the LOA to maintain a full lake in the face of increased water usage in that neighborhood.

On Aug 22 2007 downstream residents approached the LOA Board to ask for a release of water in order to increase the flow rate in the current extreme drought. The Board constructed a ballot to allow member households of the LOA to vote on whether to do so. The vote denied the release 68:8, with two households abstaining.

At this point any negotiations are in limbo, as the LOA has made their determination and for them the matter is closed. We believe we made a good faith effort to reach a compromise with the LOA Board, which shut off debate by neighborhood vote, an

astonishingly poor way to manage water flow. We are amenable to further negotiation or mediation, but there has to be some willingness by the LOA to reopen the matter.

In the last few weeks since late August there has been a letter to the local newspaper, The Oglethorpe Echo, from the downstream residents regarding the situation and refuting points appearing previously in the Echo. In addition, an article by Lee Shearer appeared in the Athens Banner-Herald on Sep 19.

Thank you for considering the above in investigating and hopefully helping us to normalize this situation. We continue to hope this can be done in a manner that does not detract from Lake Oglethorpe and yet restores environmentally responsible downstream watershed input. To accomplish something like this would be a fine outcome that could serve as a model solution for what must be repeating many times across the state.

Sincerely,

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Glenn Galau
Pat Nolan

Wolfskin Community
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The following URLs may be of use:

Goulding Creek Watershed Webpage:
<http://gouldingcreek.net>

Timeline of events since Aug 22 2007:
<http://gouldingcreek.net/mapsanddocuments/07augustrequest/07augustrequest.htm>

Details of the Dam Failure Analysis:
http://gouldingcreek.net/mapsanddocuments/damfailure/nrcs_report.pdf

Glenn Galau's analysis (correcting topo maps):
<http://gouldingcreek.net/mapsanddocuments/damfailure/failurecover.htm>

GA EPD Rule regarding impoundment permit application and requirements:
<http://rules.sos.state.ga.us/docs/391/3/6/07.pdf>

Finally, we've familiarized ourselves with the Georgia State Water Plan, and it appears there is nothing there that negates the philosophy of impoundment responsibilities to downstream watersheds. Indeed the Plan seems to strengthen those expectations, by our reading.
<http://www.georgiawaterplan.org/PDFs/StateWaterPlan.pdf>