

LGA's First 25 Years of Accomplishments

From our very start, we have been a highly active organization devoted to the concerns of our members. Two very controversial projects were being considered in Warren County in those first days, and the association (though not yet incorporated) took quick and decisive action. We were able to get our members to attend in numbers never before seen in Warren County at the hearings related to these ventures:

- Bright Horizons (1988) – This proposal involved a 145 acre multiuse complex to be built in a residential area just north of the Eaton's Ferry Bridge. The plot showed a school for youth lacking motivation, a nursing home, campground, motel, restaurant and stores. The sanitary system serving the anticipated population of 1,000 would pump treated effluent into the Lake, which indicated the developers' lack of concern for the Lake. The Association spearheaded opposition through publicity in the media, by circulating a petition containing the signatures of 600 Warren County residents, and by appearances at the Warren County Board of Adjustment. This included assembling twelve expert witnesses to speak of the negative aspects of the proposed complex. As a result, the developer withdrew his proposal.
- Woods Landing (1988) – This proposed 144 condominium complex was strongly opposed at hearings of the Warren County Board of Adjustment by the Eaton's Ferry HOA and by our association because of plans to use land in Eaton's Ferry Estates for sewage disposal. The proposal collapsed under pressure from these two organizations and funding issues for the developer.

From that point forward, we have been busy at work for our membership – indeed for all who live and work around our wonderful Lake. In 1989 we changed our name from the Lake Gaston Taxpayers Association to the Lake Gaston Association when it was realized that the problems and needs of the property owners exceeded “simple” tax issues. Since then, some of the battles fought (and often won) have included the following:

- The LGA represented Lake Gaston property owners as a charter member of the Shoreline Management Plan negotiations (SMP is part of the FERC / Dominion relicense).
- Negotiated with Dominion to advance the placement of Mile Markers buoys as a major boating safety issue in 1998.
- Helped defeat an attempt by Kinder-Morgan for an inter-basin water transfer out of Lake Gaston in 2001.
- Represented property owners to the Federal Emergency Management Authority (FEMA) in opposition to the 2003 Flood Zone remapping, resulting in FEMA expediting the map amendment (LOMA) process for Lake Gaston.
- The LGA was a charter member - along with the Lake Gaston Weed Control Council and BASS - of the Lake Gaston Stakeholders Board. We helped develop By-Laws and the formation of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) in 2004.
- Fought against mandatory curbside trash collection in Warren County. Under the proposed plan, all trash would have been required to be rolled to a county road (over a mile for some of our members) for pickup. No competing companies would have been permitted. The cost to the taxpayer would have been \$220/year (a much more significant figure in 2006). The hearing was packed and the measure was defeated.
- Instrumental in the 2003 erection of the Henderson NOAA emergency/weather broadcasting tower and the erection of the cell phone tower in Littleton.
- Pressured Dominion Power and SEPA into improved communications and operating procedures to better maintain a constant water level in 2004-5.
- LGA initiated negotiations with the Smith Mountain Lake Association that led to the establishment of the Virginia Safe Boating Alliance in 2005. The SBA is responsible for the passing of statutes that make boater education mandatory in the State of Virginia.
- The LGA submitted their “Recommended Lake Gaston Management Plan” on 2/15/06 that was prepared along with the Lake Gaston Weed Control Council (LGWCC) and the Lake Gaston Stakeholders Board (LGSB). This included a request for sterile grass carp to help control the expansion of non-native plant life (especially hydrilla). These recommendations (and subsequent modifications) have been used for the past 8 years.
- The LGA initiated the formation of the North Carolina Safe Boating Alliance in 2006 - 2007. The group grew to 25 plus groups interested in making boater education a requirement. Mission accomplished.

- Opposed implementation of tolls on I-95, whereby members traveling from east of I-95 to Lake Gaston would have had to pay a toll. Letters were sent to all N.C. Senators and Representatives on 5/10/06 and the measure was defeated.
- Proposed to all 5 County Boards of Commissioners an annual appropriation of \$116,000 (each) for non-native vegetation control in 2007. Only Warren and Mecklenburg Counties have done so each year. The other 3 counties have made full contributions in some years (and partial ones in a few years when budget restraints precluded full funding). This has taken a great deal of member participation every year to get as much as possible in difficult economic times. (In 2014 we received \$432,000 or 74% of the desired maximum funding.)
- Our members survey the entire shoreline of Lake Gaston (405 miles) every year since 2007 (over 4,300 samples), recording the type and amount of vegetation found. This volunteer service allows the bulk of private and government funding to go directly to the treatment of “invasive” vegetation (principally hydrilla). Lake Gaston is unique in having this survey done by volunteers, and has often been cited as an example for other lakes across the country. This is by far the most extensive project we undertake and reflects the commitment of our members to this wonderful resource we share.
- We began working with law enforcement and County Commissioners/Supervisors in all counties for more police representation in our area back in 2007. The relationship with county law enforcement, and the responsiveness to calls for assistance, has improved markedly. This year (2014), Warren County installed a police sub-station at the Wildwood Volunteer Fire Department so that they would be in a better position to respond to lakefront issues.
- Successfully opposed a new Occupancy Tax on vacation rental property in Warren County.
- Successfully opposed the proposed reduction of mandatory setbacks between commercial and residential properties in Brunswick County from 100’ to 40’.
- Sent a letter to all North Carolina Senators and Representatives requesting they consider amending state statutes to allow part-time residents to vote for local lake county issues where they own property, while retaining their vote at their permanent residence.
- Opposed the Kerr Lake Regional Water System (KLRWS) request to increase its’ authorized transfer from 10 to 24 million gallons per day, requesting that all future transfer allocations should have (as a minimum) a predicted 80% return of treated wastewater to the Roanoke River or its tributaries. We joined with the Roanoke River Basin IBT Coalition in this effort.
- In 2010 the LGA worked with Va. Delegate Tommy Wright and the Virginia Safe Boating Alliance to allow the Department of Games and Inland Fisheries to enforce federal U.S. Coast Guard regulations requiring children under 13 to wear a life jacket while underway on a vessel. Virginia was one of only two states that had not supported this law.
- We supported the Citizens Advisory Council in their efforts to revise the Zoning Ordinance for Warren County in 2011. There were numerous complaints about the noise stemming from a motorcycle park in the county. Our joint efforts led to the new noise ordinance being passed in 2011.
- On 6/11/11 the LGA opposed a change in North Carolina law which would have alleviated the certificate requirement for a transfer of water from one river basin to another river basin to supplement groundwater supplies in 15 designated counties. The proposal was defeated.
- In perhaps our most significant action of the past 25 years, we opposed the lifting of the ban on uranium mining at the Coles Hill site in Virginia. The effects of a spill of uranium tailings would be catastrophic for everyone associated with the Lake. We worked in conjunction with the Roanoke River Basin Bi-State Advisory Committee who performed superbly during the debates. The efforts to lift the moratorium are presently on hold by the would-be developers, but this remains a significant issue that we will stay on top of!
- In January 2014 the LGA wrote a letter Mr. Bob Mack, N.C Department of Insurance, Property & Casualty Division expressing our displeasure regarding the proposed 2014 35% rate increase in homeowner insurance rates pertaining to properties surrounding Lake Gaston. This is still an ongoing issue.

LGA's First 25 Years of Accomplishments – Part II

During all of this time, we have conducted hundreds of community service events. Some (but certainly not all) of the vents have included:

- Annual Weed Survey – Our members survey the entire shoreline of Lake Gaston (405 miles) every year (over 4,300 samples), recording the type and amount of vegetation found. This volunteer service allows the bulk of private and government funding to go directly to the treatment of “invasive” vegetation (principally hydrilla). Lake Gaston is unique in having this survey done by volunteers, and has often been cited as an example for other lakes across the country.
- Lake Gaston Clean-up Day – Usually held near Memorial Day, the association picks up trash and debris from roadways and waterways to prepare the Lake for the summer season. In this way, both our members and visitors to the area will have a far more enjoyable time at the Lake
- E-Coli Survey – Much like the annual Weed Survey, we sample areas for e-coli bacteria. This is not nearly as extensive as the weed survey, but it helps track a potential problem. We have an especially clean water system and have not had exceptionally readings yet, but we will continue to monitor to see that nothing develops.
- LGA representatives (usually a Director) attend most public meetings held by the 5 counties surrounding the lake and report back to the member residents of each county.
- Political Forums – During election years, we will typically have a candidates’ forum in advance for both the primaries and the general elections. We will invite those running for County Commissioner, School Boards, Sheriffs, Senators, Representatives and all other elected offices. These meeting are open to members and the general public.
- Five County Forums – We hold a forum where all five of the Lake counties (Brunswick, Halifax, Mecklenburg, Northampton and Warren) can meet with the public and discuss issues of concern to our membership. These typically include taxes, assessments, fire and police departments, weed control, water quality, education and numerous other topics. We usually have representatives from Dominion Power and the U.S. Corps of Engineers on hand as well, to talk about water levels, water flows, and issues anticipated for the coming year.
- John 3:16 Center - The LGA joins with the John 3:16 Center’s Christmas Outreach program each year to collect toys for needy children. Volunteers go to about 20 local businesses who have agreed to let us place collection boxes for toys. We deliver these to the John 3:16 Center for wrapping in December.
- Assisted the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in constructing 375 ring enclosures and 8 ea. 24’x24’ pens to house controlled planting of “good” aquatic vegetation. Over 650 plants in 15 different species were planted in June of 2009. A similar project was performed again in July of 2012.
- Hosted the Watershed Protection Forum. The Center for Watershed Protection advised our members on the importance of planning and development standards as well as zoning ordinances to protect the Lake Gaston ecological system.
- Hosted the Tax Assessor Forum in which all 5 counties participated, explaining their assessment processes and answering questions from the audience.

Lastly, there are a number of services which we routinely provide for our members, including such things as:

- Monthly meetings of the Board of Directors are held at the Lake Gaston Baptist Church. These meetings are open to the public and we try to have interesting speakers who talk about issues important to our membership. These issues will typically range from health and safety affairs, fire and police protection, taxes and assessments, social security, hunting, fishing, water quality and other environmental concerns, and many other items that become “hot”.
- Monthly meetings of our 5 committees (Government Relations, Safety, Environmental, Marketing & Membership and Lake Cleanup) which are open to all members (and we greatly encourage all members to take part if they have interests in any of the fields). This is where much of the “work” takes place, and the committee members are generally the ones who perform the assigned duties of each group.
- E-Mail notifications of important, immediate issues. This may be a high-water alert from Dominion Power (we are the only entity they notify), pending County Commissioner meetings where items sensitive to our members are being discussed and/or voted upon, critical weather information, notifications of break-ins, etc. in your community, and other items that we feel should not wait until the newsletter is published.

- We publish a newsletter every two months where we summarize that 2 month period and give notice of events coming up. There are usually letters from the President and Executive Director, as well as the Chairpersons of the 5 committees. These are provided via internet to members (or through U.S. mail to those who do not have internet).
- We make recommendations to the five County Commissions regarding items important to our members. These recommendations vary by county and included the following items in 2014: a) Fully fund the Weed Control effort at \$116,000, b) Continue to invest wisely in economic development projects that will lessen the tax burden on our citizens and reduce our unemployment rate, c) Develop a budget that does not raise taxes on residents, property owners, and businesses, d) Support Law Enforcement and Emergency Services, e) Continue to strive to improve the tax collection rate, ensuring everyone pays their share, f) Continue efforts to identify and eliminate any duplication, waste, and abuse in all departments, g) Continue with your efforts to improve the quality of education for the young people of Halifax County in the most cost efficient way.