

# Filling up the lakes

## Lack of enforcement leads to erosion and silt in lakes

BY BRETT MCLAUGHLIN  
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — A few years ago it was estimated that it would take \$3 million or more to figure out how to handle stormwater in Oconee County. It might cost more today, but that's not stopping proponents of the idea from saying it's time to do something.

This week, Friends of Lake Keowee Society Executive Director Ben Turetzky used a rezoning request as an opportunity to, once again, evoke the specter of "red water" and silt-filled coves.

Actually, Turetzky notes, it's not a specter, but a reality.

"You can hardly get a boat in or out of Waters Edge (development)," he said, "and those folks are going to be insisting on lower (tax) assessments."

The problem, in the opinion of FOLKS, is that, without standards, unconscionable developers will continue to scalp land and skirt requirements for runoff during construction. The result, Turetzky said, is more silt flowing into the creeks and being carried into Lakes Keowee, Jocassee and Hartwell.

But for the lack of another 737 people in the 2010 census, Oconee wouldn't have a choice but to establish a stormwater management program. Federal law requires that any county with 75,000 residents have a plan.

Oconee grew by 12.2 percent between 2000 and 2010, but the last count totaled only 74,273.

**This week, Friends of Lake Keowee Society** Executive Director Ben Turetzky used a rezoning request as an opportunity to, once again, evoke the specter of "red water" and silt-filled coves.

Despite missing the number program proponents had hoped for, Turetzky said the county may still have to do some stormwater planning if population density figures released later this year are high enough in some areas.

When FOLKS first broached the subject with county officials in 2007, Public Works Director Mack Kelley estimated that setting up an office, establishing a storm water plan and enforcing it would cost the county at least \$3 million.

The issue arose this week as council held second reading on a rezoning request for the Lonesome Valley MX property on Lake Hartwell. Turetzky said FOLKS has no objection to the use of motorcycles and ATVs as long as the use is environmentally friendly.

"The operation, from all we see and read, is a first-class operation," the FOLKS director said. "When all is said and done, if it is deemed to be a personal recreation area we would like to see the owner retain the necessary technical assistance to mitigate the eroded soil from leaving the property. If, however, it is deemed to be commercial, we expect that DHEC will require on-site

sediment capture."

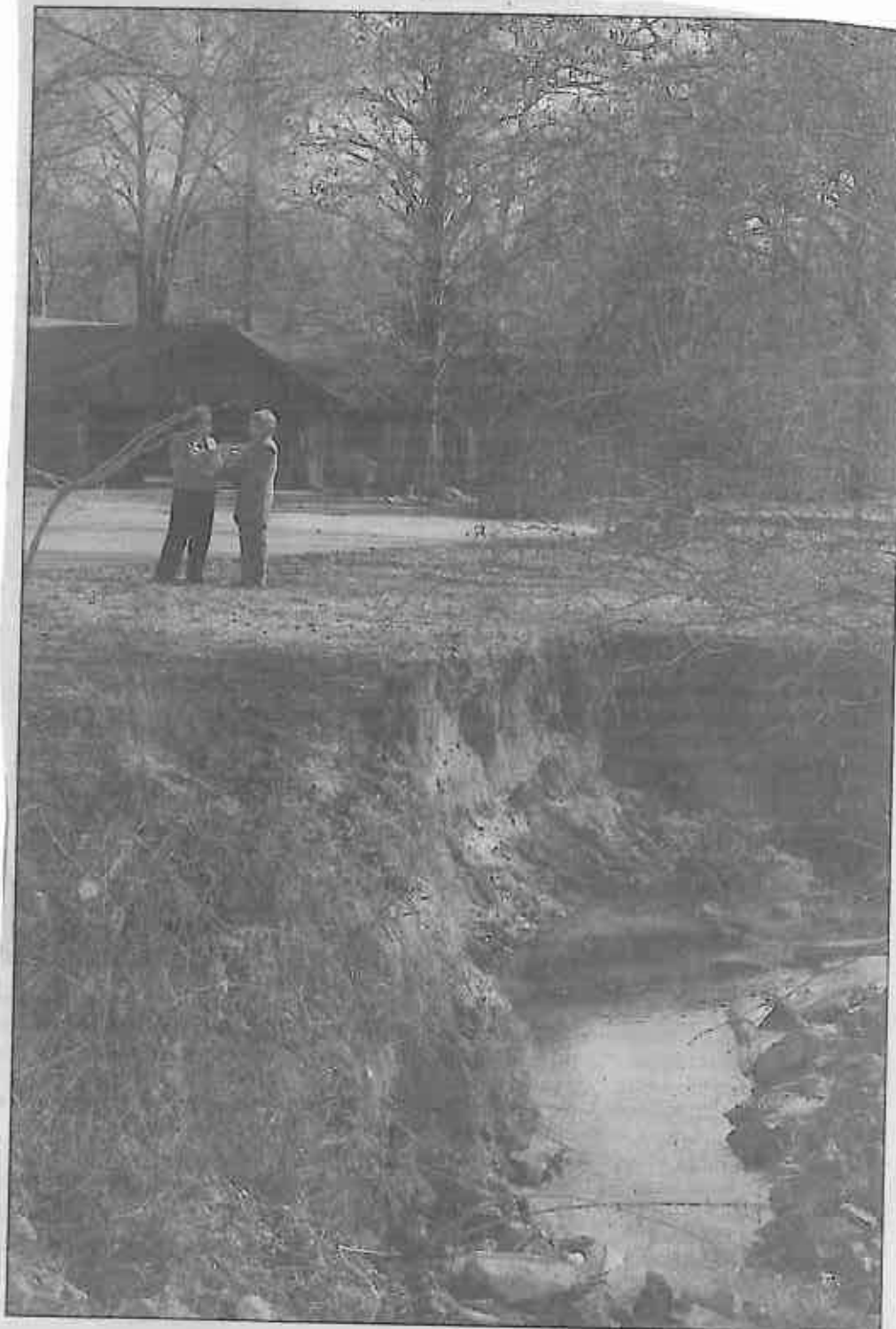
Turetzky said stormwater runoff is a significant problem that goes largely unnoticed unless there is a big rain.

He added that major developers such as Crescent, The Cliffs and The Reserve use "best management practices" when construction is taking place. However, many smaller developers and individual builders don't install runoff fencing properly or simply ignore the flow of silt into nearby creeks.

He said the cove at Mandalay Bay on Lake Keowee filled in, requiring property owners to pay "six figures" to dredge it out only to have runoff from gas line installations at a neighboring development create enough silt to fill in back in.

Turetzky admits that it doesn't make much sense pushing the issue of program development in today's political environment. Still, he would like to see Oconee "get started."

"I understand that they have to look at the full cost," Turetzky said, "but we believe it would be better to start than be under the gun from a mandate and have to build a department from zero."



FILE PHOTO

**Thriftwood development residents are pictured looking over some stormwater damage caused by heavy rains in January 2010. The issue of runoff into streams and eventually area lakes was raised again this week by proponents of a storm water management plan.**