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NEWS

Opponents: Tyger River an asset without dam

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The Tyger River is a resource that can be developed to benefit Union County without building a dam, an opponent of the Patriot's Lake project says.

Proponents want to dam the river and the Fairforest Creek to create a 6,500-acre lake they see as an additional water source for the region, an economic boon for Union County, and even a potential source of hydroelectric power.

Opposing the project is a coalition of environmental groups, including the Sierra Club and its attorney, Dennis Chamberlain of Greenville, who represents environmental groups on a pro bono basis.

The environmentalists have opposed the project almost from the moment it was announced. Chamberlain said one reason is because they believe the river is already a tremendous economic asset that can be developed without being dammed.

"I feel that Union County has a wonderful economic and natural resource in the free flowing Tyger River," Chamberlain said. "It has provided family camping, boating and hiking for generations. It has brought annual hunting revenues to Union County in the millions of dollars over the years.

"The corridor up and down the Tyger River includes Rose Hill Plantation State Park, homes from the antebellum and Civil War period, and the Blackstock Revolutionary War battlefield," he said. "A small investment in boat landings for canoeing, campgrounds and picnic areas along with publicizing the Tyger as a recreation corridor could pay big dividends for the local economy and save a precious resource."

(Union County is already working to promote tourism through a variety of projects. It is collaborating with a number of public and private entities to build the Timken Park Sports Complex. It has allocated funds to the Union County Historical Society to restore the Cross Keys House which will anchor a "historical trail" running throughout the county. The county has acquired and is renovating the old Buffalo Mill office to serve as an Upstate Textile League Baseball Museum.)

Chamberlain said he knows personally what kind of resource the Tyger River is and how it acts as a draw for local business.

"I've been coming to Union County for business purposes for the last 20 years," he said. "I've hiked along the Tyger River, I've canoed it a half-dozen times and probably brought between 20 and 30 people down it. I've also sampled the hot dogs at every little store along Highway 49 and bought gas at those stores."

Chamberlain also participated in a Sierra Club-sponsored cleanup of the river and learned about the lack of investment in its upkeep.

"The Sierra Club was involved last year with a cleanup on the river and I found out that the national forest budget had been cut," he said. "We were informed that they used to have someone go down there with a

chainsaw and clear away debris to make it safe to pass through the river. Greater maintenance of the river would protect it and make it more attractive for public use.”

To begin that process, Chamberlain said he would like to see the county, the environmental groups and various other interested parties get together to see what can be done to develop the Tyger River as a green resource.

“I would like to sit down with Congressman (Bob) Inglis and bring together the county, national forest service and all the environmental groups, PRT and other interested parties, those that love the Tyger and want to protect and preserve it,” he said. “Let’s sit down and see what we can do to protect the river and create economic benefits for the county.”

Union County Super-visor Donnie Betenbaugh said Friday that he has asked Inglis to set up a meeting with the environmentalists to find if there is any middle ground between them that would allow them to work together for the good of the county. The county is also interested in learning what, if any, resources the environmentalists have that might contribute towards achieving that goal.

Chamberlain said that for their part, the environmental groups could help publicize Union County as a green tourism destination.

“I think one of the most important things the environmental groups is we can publicize what a great resource this is by bringing attention to the Tyger River and all of its attractions,” he said. “Rose Hill State Park, the National Forest lands, Blackstock Battle-fields and the many historic homes of the area. These things are all very close to the town of Union and there would be a spill off of the green ‘green’ dollars.”

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