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NEWS

Inglis won't seek money for lake

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If Union County wants to proceed with the Patriot's Lake project it will have to do so without the help of Fourth District Rep. Bob Inglis.

During meetings at the Upstate Workforce Investment Board and USC-Union Thursday, Inglis reiterated his view that the lake is not justified on economic grounds. Patriot's Lake would be formed by damming Tyger River and Fairforest Creek. Before work could begin, however, a reconnaissance study would have to be done followed by a feasibility study and an environmental impact statement which could take up to 25 years to complete.



Lake, health care meetings Members of the U.S. Forest Service (above) listen during a meeting on the Patriot's Lake project at the Upstate Workforce Investment Center Thursday morning. The meeting was one of two called by Fourth District Rep. Bob Inglis to discuss the lake project. The second meeting was held at USC-Union. Inglis also visited Wallace Thomson Hospital Thursday afternoon where he spoke with staff including CEO Bill Leonard (right) about the challenges facing the hospital in providing healthcare to the community. (Charles Warner photos)

The reconnaissance study would cost \$100,000 while the feasibility study and environmental impact statement would cost \$15 million- \$20 million. Half the cost of the feasibility study and environmental impact statement would be paid for by the federal government and half by Union County. Under current law, federal funding for the studies would have to be secured through a congressional earmark and Inglis said he won't seek one for either the reconnaissance study or the feasibility study and environmental impact statement.

"It's hard to justify that request (for \$100,000) and even harder to justify the next request which would be \$7 million-\$10 million, which would have to be matched with \$7 million-\$10 million locally," he said. "The reason is that having fallen short in the concept study of cost-benefit analysis it's difficult to justify the \$100,000 followed by the \$7 million-\$10 million.

"What we are dealing with today is the hard, cold numbers and that's what I've got to use to justify it in Washington in an environment in which strict scrutiny is applied to earmark requests," he said. "It's very difficult to pursue an earmark under the best of circumstances; it is inadvisable to pursue one where the economics have been challenged and that's the case here."

The concept study Inglis referred to was conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at the request of Union County Council. The study found that while technically feasible, the lake - which is projected to cost \$187 million to build, is not justified economically.

Proponents have touted the lake as a source of water for the Upstate, but the Corps concluded that the region will have sufficient water through 2030. Pat O'Donnell, project manager for the Corps, said Monday that even if population growth in the Upstate were double what is currently projected, the region will still have sufficient water through 2030. O'Donnell said the only area that might experience even a slight deficit in water supply under such circumstances is Union County.

The report's conclusions have been criticized by lake proponents who said it does not reflect the reality of the drought has experienced in recent years and the population growth that is projected to continue. Proponents also say the report didn't consider the potential for hydroelectric power and didn't take an in-depth look at the economic and recreational benefits of the lake.

Chamber of Commerce Director Torrance Inman attended both meetings and said that while the study looked at the economic benefits generated by lakefront property, it did not take into account the larger impact on the county as a whole.

"That's just one part of it; I don't think the study took into consideration the entire economic impact and the other development that would take place beyond the lake, either adjacent to or more so in the county," he said. "We've had a number of people who have called us and asked about the lake project over the last few years who have property here in Union they either inherited or have not been doing anything with and had considered selling it. With the potential of a lake in the future they're hanging on to that property and figuring out how they can develop that property to be beneficial as a spin-off from the lake."

Inglis, who advocates developing Tyger River without building the lake and said he will seek a federal earmark to help finance such development, urged Union County's leaders to pursue such a course of action.

"My two cents worth would be to ask the question, 'Do we as a leadership team want to pursue a project that may take 25 years and very difficult steps with high probability of falling on any number of those difficult steps leading to an improbable result of success or do we want to pursue options that are readily available and are proven?'" he asked. "I would hope that the leadership team here in Union would consider those readily available economic development steps that we know will work because we all want the same thing which is expansion of economic opportunity in Union using the resources here to their best and highest potential."

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