

Issues facing the lake

Disbanding of the water partnership, lack of a state water plan and the ongoing water wars

Just as we are completing a great summer on Lake Martin, with a real possibility of an extended full pool until mid-October for the second straight year, we are slapped in the face with three issues that could mean bad news. What follows is a brief discussion of each; look for continuous updates at lakemartinhobos.com.

Middle Tallapoosa Clean Water Partnership

This organization was founded by the State 20 years ago as a gathering of local agencies and organizations for the betterment of all water sources in applicable regions. Every area of Alabama was represented by similar groups, but with very limited State funding.

Financial support through the Legislature has been reduced over the last few years until July 2018 when it was announced that ACWP would disband. Our own MTCWP met and made the decision to dissolve by the end of October. Our local partnership organization has thrived because of funding from Alexander City and has prospered over the years with regular, well-attended meetings and activities, including a project that teaches more than 400 local fourth-grade students about water quality and other water-oriented subjects at Wind Creek State Park each spring.

Grants have been issued to other groups through MTCWP for environmental projects to help Lake Martin. The recycling of electronics, which prevents these devices from being discarded into nature, and the collection of unused prescription drugs from individuals are just a few of the good deeds brought to us by MTCWP.

The group also has gained support from local county commissioners to provide dumpsters around the county on a quarterly basis, offering citizens a free alternative to dumping furniture, tires, etc., in natural areas or streams.

What happens now to fill this State-created void? Hopefully, the MTCWP member organizations will refuse to let the works of such a good group die. Discussions are under way now to reorganize the

group, perhaps as a local, caring organization made up of businesses, volunteer organizations – such as the HOBOS – and city/county governments.

State of Alabama Water Plan

Alabama is one of the few states in the nation that has no water plan. A water plan is probably not needed when we have lots of rain, as in the current season,

but think back to 2007 when we had a terrible drought that was compounded by the Corps of Engineers' demand for more water so they could dredge the Alabama River, a futile effort at a terrible time.

A water plan would provide guidance to cities, industry, farming interests and utilities and also would provide priorities for water users. Of course, each water user would like unlimited access to water, but that's not possible in times of shortage, so a water plan is imperative.

Former Gov. Robert Bentley developed a group of state agencies called

the Alabama Water Agencies Working Group for the purpose of developing a water plan. The AWAAG membership originally consisted of the Alabama Department of Environmental Management; Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources; Alabama Office of Water Resources; Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries; and Geological Survey of Alabama. One year later, the Alabama State Climatologist was added to the group. AWAAG functioned for years and was close to submitting a recommendation when now-sitting Gov. Kay Ivey suddenly disbanded the group and handed the whole mess to the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs Office of Water Resources, which has been instructed to make its recommendations by Jan. 1, 2019.

An important factor in understanding the situation is that cities (sewage systems), industry (paper mills, etc.) and utilities were not included as members in the AWAAG group, so one might assume these groups fought the efforts of AWAAG. An article titled "State Water Plan Stalled" in the May 2018 issue of *Business Alabama* Magazine provides further insight into the industry viewpoint of a water plan.



HOBOS
BY JESSE CUNNINGHAM

In addition, an article by Lake Watch Lake Martin President Eric Reutebuch in the July 2018 issue of *Lake* magazine offers more detailed information on the continuing water plan delays from an environmental viewpoint.

Water Wars Saga

Believe it or not, Water Wars continues with new lawsuits and no resolution to the old lawsuits. The Florida vs. Georgia lawsuit is still hung up in the Supreme Court after mediation failed. In my opinion, if Florida wins, Lake Martin wins, and Georgia learns that Atlanta cannot have *all* of our water. If Georgia wins, look out: Alabama needs a water plan.

Alabama has two lawsuits pending against the Corps of Engineers. One lawsuit by Alabama contends that the Corps of Engineers' new *Master Water Control Manual for the Chattahoochee River Basin* is faulty due to invalid data input into the document. The other lawsuit filed by Alabama claims the same problems with the water control manual for the Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa River system. According to some authorities, these suits might not be decided for another two years or so.

Why are these three issues important to Lake Martin residents and lovers? Just as it always has, our world is changing. We are always impacted by decisions made by others. Our best action is to always be informed and prepared to make necessary moves that are in our best interests.

Stay informed about your lake. Join the HOBOS in our effort to save the Middle Tallapoosa Clean Water Partnership and insist that our state government make decisions about a water plan that protects all citizens, not just the influencers, from special interests.

Jesse Cunningham is president of Lake Martin Homeowners and Boat Owners Association. Visit www.lakemartinhobos.com for more information.



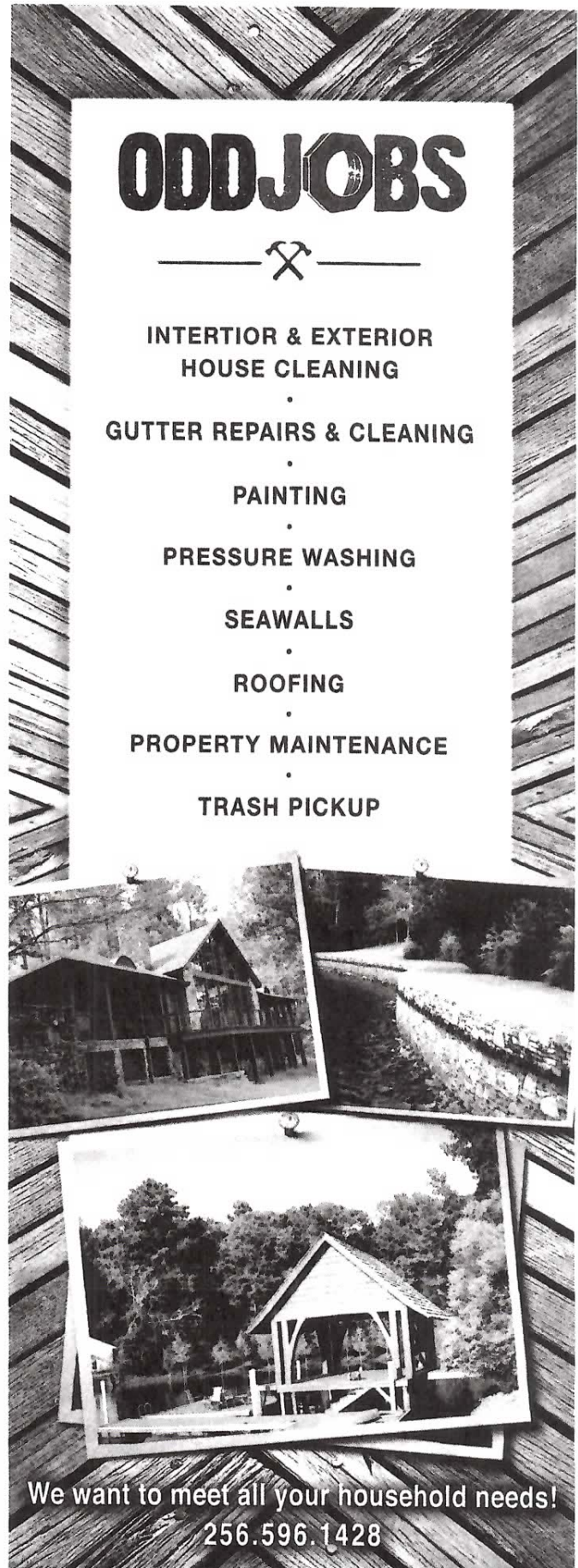
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