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NEWS

Inglis: Tyger River area better if developed as 'green' resource

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Given the cost involved and other issues, Fourth District Rep. Bob Inglis says developing the Tyger River area as a "green" resource is a better option for Union County than Patriot's Lake.

Proponents claim the 6,500-acre lake, which would be created by damming the Tyger River and Fairforest Creek, would be an additional water supply for the Upstate, an economic boon for the county and a possible source of hydroelectric power. A coalition of environmental groups opposed the project and instead calling for the county to instead develop the Tyger River area as a "green" or "ecotourism" attraction.



Ribbon-cutting Ron Camp (above), owner of Union's new Bojangles restaurant, gets a little help from the restaurant's chicken mascot during a ribbon-cutting ceremony this morning. The restaurant, located at the intersection of Rice Avenue and U.S. 176, will begin serving the public at 5 a.m. Tuesday. The Bojangles Chicken and employee Doris Wix (left) hold the door open for those who attended the ceremonies. (Charles Warner photos)

Inglis said the green alternative is more feasible because the cost of the project, geological problems and opposition of environmentalists and congressional budget hawks make it unlikely the lake will ever be built.

"It looks like a very difficult project to complete, because of the cost and because of some geological features and because of the relative scarcity of free-flowing rivers," he said. "This means there would be fairly strong opposition from environmentalists. So winning an appropriation of \$187 million would be very difficult in that environment.

"It's also budget hawks who will be a challenge here, it's not just environmental groups," he said. "It's a big group of people known as budget hawks who will say 'You want \$187 million for a new dam?' There will be very strict scrutiny given to that request."

Inglis said Union County should instead develop itself as a "green county" that would attract both ecotourists and people wanting to live in a more natural, environmentally-friendly community.

"The alternative really is something that I think is very exciting is to market Union County as the green county of the Upstate," he said. "The county with one-third of its land area made up of the national forest, with the best deer hunting in the state, kayaking and boating on a free-flowing river and opportunities for exploring the forest and trails with boat landings.

"Union has an incredible opportunity in front of it," he said. "As the entire region grows, Union is in the center of that growth. It is in pristine condition, it is a green county and where people are going to want to live. It's a tremendous opportunity and the city and the county are doing all the right things to move forward with that winning approach."

A three-year concept study by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects that building the lake will cost

\$187 million. The study also found that the dam would sit on two recently active earthquake faults.

The study has been the source of controversy with both sides criticizing it as incomplete. Opponents say the study doesn't take into account additional costs associated with the dam such as construction of a water treatment facility, distribution systems and related costs. They claim this could drive the cost up as high as nearly \$500 million. They also claim that the two earthquake faults would make the dam unsafe.

Proponents, however, say the study doesn't take into account the beneficial impact the lake would have in terms of water supply, economic development and hydroelectric generation. They also say that the actual cost of construction could be as little as \$90 million and that any related projects could actually promote economic development. They say that modern engineering can secure the dam against seismic activity.

Inglis said ecotourism would fit in with other local efforts to develop a green economy. He pointed to the City of Union's program of making ethanol and biodiesel fuels available to the public through a public-private partnership; its commitment to replacing traditional gas and diesel municipal vehicles with flex-fuel, biodiesel and hybrid vehicles; and the fact that it gets its power from carbon-free sources like nuclear and hydroelectric power.

"Union has great story to tell," he said. "It's great stuff that the city has done that makes true its claim that it's a green city."

Inglis said he believes the county can build on these efforts and develop a green economy that will produce sustainable, environmentally-friendly economic development.

"I'd be very excited about it and the environmental groups would be excited about it too," he said. "What we have is an opportunity to develop ecotourism and jobs that would come from it immediately rather than get into a protracted fight for a \$187 million appropriation that will likely never happen."

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