

# Rabun County Alliance

formerly West Rabun Property Owners ~ Est. 2001



## Fall 2017 Newsletter

*“Seeking Leadership and Accountability in Government”*

### LEASE LOT PROPERTY TAXES

As noted in prior newsletters, property values for lots in Rabun leased by Georgia Power Company are determined by the Georgia Department of Revenue each year (this does not include structures). In the past, the values were not determined and communicated to the County until December. RCA has long argued that these values be determined and communicated earlier, and we are pleased to report that the DoR completed its task in September!

Readers might be surprised to learn the large portion of total County taxes that is collected from taxes on leased residential land alone. Total taxes to be collected for County activities and the County's schools for 2017 are \$33.3 million. Taxes on residential leased land (excluding structures and improvements) are \$8.2 million, or 26.2% of the total! Thus, taxes on all other items combined (leased lot structures, land values and structures on fee simple properties throughout the County, automobiles, mobile homes, heavy equipment, etc.) provide less than three times the revenues that taxes on leased lot land alone provides.

Values in total are 3.8% higher for 2017 compared to 2016, but the 2016 values were 1.7% under the 2015 values, so the values in 2017 are only 2% higher than the 2015 values. However, not all lakes are created equal, nor do they exhibit similar trends in property values. The following table shows significant value change differences between the lakes:

	<u>Burton</u>	<u>Seed</u>	<u>Rabun</u>
2017 values vs. 2016	4.8%	-0.3%	-0.3%
2017 values vs. 2011	11.8%	10.2%	-3.0%

Even more unusual is a comparison of the ranges of variation shown by values for the three lakes. All three declined in value in 2012 compared to 2011, but the trends thereafter

show no resemblance to each other. By way of contrast, during the 7 years from 2011 to 2017, the year with the highest value during the period in comparison to the year with the lowest value was as follows (the comparison shows the highest year first, then the lowest year, and finally the percentage that the highest year was above the lowest year): Burton: 2017(h), 2012(l), 24.1%; Seed: 2014(h), 2012(l), 14.6%; and Rabun: 2014(h), 2012(l), 14.6%.

What conclusions can be drawn from these numbers? Many, but without any degree of certainty. First of all, the total numbers include properties not on the lakes, so there is some degree of variation in the retraction and growth of the total numbers not directly parallel to what is happening on the lakes. Second, rebuilds, remodels and new construction would have an impact on value changes that could be on or counter to trends. But, it's clear that the trends are more closely aligned between Seed and Rabun than either is aligned with Burton. And finally, total property values for non-lakeside properties increased every year from 2011 to 2017, suggesting that growth away from the lakes (whether in terms of new development or in values, or both) has outpaced lakeside growth.

### THE TALLULAH RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL

In this and the past two newsletters, articles have mentioned the Tallulah River Watershed Council. Other than representatives who attend meetings, there are no affiliated members of the TRWC, nor does it produce periodic newsletters. As a result, the work of the TRWC is largely invisible to the general public. Accordingly, RCA wishes to make its members aware of the purpose and activities of a group that is dedicated to preserving the integrity and character of this spectacular landscape where we spend time.

*Origin:* In the 1990's, there was significant undocumented concern about wash into Lake Burton of chemical treatments

**COMMUNITY CALENDAR:** visit the Chamber of Commerce at [gamountains.com](http://gamountains.com) for Rabun County events  
visit [georgiapowerlakes.com](http://georgiapowerlakes.com) for helpful lake information from Georgia Power  
visit [lakerabun.org](http://lakerabun.org), [lbca.net](http://lbca.net), and [seedlake.org](http://seedlake.org) for the various Association events  
Men's Christian Fellowship meets every Friday, 7:45-9:00am (706-947-3740 or 706-782-7425 for more info)

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spread to condition the Waterfall golf course. Numerous allegations were made regarding observations of inappropriately colored waters contained in creeks flowing from parts of the golf course. The Lake Burton Civic Association decided to investigate the issue and asked Tom Fischer, a full-time resident, to lead the investigation. Tom spent a good bit of time investigating the topic, interviewing several people and securing whatever data the Georgia Power Company had regarding water testing. He issued a report compiled from data provided by GPC which failed to demonstrate chemical concentrations of concern. However, the GPC data did not include any information regarding the major pollutants associated with golf course maintenance believed to be problematic: fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides and fungicides. Tom recommended further studies be conducted, and sought to create an ongoing organization that would not only investigate the Waterfall issue, but which would concern itself with any and all threats to the watershed.

Thus began the Tallulah River Watershed Council. The TRWC adopted Vision (what we want to create) and Mission (how we will create the Vision) statements, as follows:

**Vision:** *Residents, developers and other stakeholders work together to ensure that economic development within the watershed complements rather than detracts from quality of life within the watershed. Residents are aware of the footprint they leave and consciously strive to minimize its impact. Guests respect the sanctity of the area they are privileged to enjoy and are well-informed regarding how they should conduct themselves.*

**Mission:** *The Tallulah River Watershed Council derives its membership from the civic and community organizations located within the Tallulah River Watershed. The Council identifies and investigates significant threats to the assets of the watershed, from the floor of the waterways to the top of the ridge lines. If warranted from the investigation, the committee informs the affected organizations and works to develop with them a plan to mitigate or eliminate the threat.*

Several concerned individuals subsequently joined the TRWC, either as regional representatives or as subject matter leaders. Representatives of the U.S. Forest Service and Georgia Power Company have also been invited to attend meetings.

The impetus for the creation of TRWC was ultimately successfully evaluated and put to rest. The Water Quality leader sanctioned a water quality study by a respected firm, with specific instructions to test for fertilizers and the three 'cides, and the results of the study were very heartening. As reported by the Clayton Tribune: "Lake Burton aces test for pollutants." The study showed no detectable levels of 62 possible pollutants, including fertilizers, herbicides, fungicides and pesticides, and samples were taken at several locations in Lake Burton.

Other major projects undertaken by the TRWC have included working with local residents of a road that has been increasingly been targeted by four-wheeler joyriders, causing damage to streams, adjacent properties and significant sedimentation wash in the watershed, as well as creating and working with County officials to adopt a ridgeline and steep slope development ordinance.

After working individually and subsequently leading the full Council in pursuit of the TRWC mission, Tom Fischer decided to step down from the leadership role a few years ago, and was very ably succeeded by yet another Tom (Madison). The work that Tom Fischer performed in starting, leading and continuing to participate in the effort was and is greatly appreciated.

To learn more about the TRWC, go to its website: [www.tallulahriverwatershed.com](http://www.tallulahriverwatershed.com). In particular, if you have any interest in learning what you might do to assist in protecting the watershed, put your mouse on the "Stewardship: Best Practices" tab, and a sub-title: "Major Best Management Practices" will appear. Put your mouse on that tab, and another list of options will then appear. Move your mouse over to and click on the "Residents" tab, and you will find numerous ideas for responsible practices. As well as most of us behave, we can always improve.

Should any readers be interested in how they may help or even participate in the work of the TRWC, please contact Tom Madison at [trm.madison@gmail.com](mailto:trm.madison@gmail.com).

## **ARE YOU PREPARED FOR THE NEXT WILDFIRE?**

With the recent damage from Tropical Storm Irma and the 2016 fall fire season in Rabun County still on our minds, it is important that we as a community be prepared for wildfires.

Join local emergency responders to learn more about how you can be ready. You are invited to attend a community meeting on Thursday, November 16th at 7pm at the Rabun County Courthouse. Hosted by Rabun County Fire Services, participants will hear presentations on topics that include: challenges related to dealing with wildfires in North Georgia, the national Firewise program, services provided by the Georgia Forestry Commission, and how to sign up for Code Red Alerts with the County's emergency management agency.

Displays and materials will also be available to help educate participants. For more information please contact Justin Upchurch, Rabun County Fire Services, at 706-782-2751. *Gordon Van Mol, Lakemont Fire Station*

## **KENNESAW ROAD UPDATE**

In the last two issues, we first advised of and then updated the status of a major problem along Kennesaw Road. Briefly, organized groups and individual drivers alike have been ripping along Kennesaw Road, which runs beside a lengthy portion of Dicks Creek. KR intersects with Highway 197 at its southern end, and, where crosses the border of the U.S. Forest Service land, becomes FS 164 which then continues until it intersects with Highway 76 in the north. Various types of four-wheel vehicles drive across and through portions of the Creek and its tributaries, as well as into adjacent meadows, dislodging large quantities of sediment into the Creek and ultimately into Lake Burton. A bit more than half of the entire road lies in the national forest overseen by the U.S. Forest Service; ownership of the portion that is Kennesaw Road is as yet undetermined (private vs. County-owned). At times, the sedimentation wash is so intense that the flowing water has been described as being "coffee-colored."

Progress has been made, but a solution is not yet at hand. The land adjacent to Dicks Creek below the national forest is owned by private citizens, some of whom have been active in attempting to negotiate a solution with the U.S. Forest Service and potentially Rabun County officials. One resident has met with the Forest Service Ranger who oversees the national forest to discuss methods of controlling access to KR/164. It was learned that the USFS had already planned to repair and close the gate at the Highway 76 entrance to FS 164, and such repair has recently begun. This action (if nothing else is done) is unlikely to provide significant relief to the sedimentation problem: entrance to the entire road would then be only available

at the southern end. Because of the gate closure, those who in the past would enter at one intersection and leave at the other must now double back to their entrance point. Thus, the number of joyriders may decline somewhat, but with the gate closure. two trips along the road are necessary, where previously, many drove through only once.

There has been discussion regarding leaving the northern gate open but installing a gate in the middle section of the road. This would significantly reduce the length of trips the riders could take, and would likely reduce overall traffic on the entire KR/164 road. Also, the ownership of the southern portion of KR must be determined. If it is privately owned, the owners are then in control of how access to that portion of KR may be apportioned; if it is a County road, then discussions must be held with County officials to discuss possible solutions.

Whatever solution may be pursued, access to the national forest for hunting and camping purposes will continue to be available. The sole purpose behind this effort is to prevent ongoing damage to Kennesaw Road, the waterways and the bordering land of this beautiful landscape.

We will continue to report on developments as they occur.

## RECYCLING REPORT

The following table summarizes the quantities of materials that were delivered to recycling centers and the revenues they generated for the County in the recently completed fiscal year.

<u>Commodity</u>	<u>Tons</u>	<u>Revenue</u>
Cardboard	346.1	\$ 48,676
Mixed paper	305.6	26,389
Glass	238.0	5,954
Plastic	63.1	6,726
Scrap metal	380.8	31,853
Metal cans	7.9	425
Aluminum cans	10.8	11,371
E-waste	12.4	2,174
Batteries	1.8	993
Copper boxes	1.2	1,166
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,367.7</b>	<b>\$ 135,727</b>

Oil 6,000 gallons      Antifreeze 350 gallons

Recycling works! It more than pays for itself. It reduces the demands for new raw materials for products we use. It keeps thousands of tons of materials out of our landscape, helping to preserve the natural beauty of our area. It is easy to do and highly responsible.

AND WE CAN DO MUCH BETTER! Kudos to those who recycle. Many people don't (the volume of recyclable materials bundled with trash or thrown along the roads from vehicle windows is significant). We are all temporary caretakers of this magnificent region we inhabit, and the future generations who follow us are dependent on our practices.

## 2017-2018 LAKE DRAWDOWN SCHEDULE

<u>Lake Burton</u>	<u>Lake Rabun</u>	<u>Lake Seed</u>
Draw begins 11/1	Draw begins 11/26	Draw begins 1/2
Down 7' by 12/31	Down 10' by 12/3	Down 12' by 1/6
Fill begins 2/1	Fill begins 12/24	Fill begins 1/28
Normal by 5/1	Normal by 12/28	Normal by 2/4

## LAKE RABUN: GEORGIA'S LAKE COMO

Residents in Lakemont and around Lake Rabun recently celebrated the centennial anniversary of the Lake. (Mathis Dam was the second dam built in the Tallulah River Watershed—do you know which was the first?) To memorialize the captivating history and evolution of “life on Lake Rabun,” the Lake Rabun Association developed an incredible book and DVD, loaded with memories and photos. It is filled with wonderful family stories and a rich history of the lake, and as you read through it, you will be reminded of many fond memories of life on the lakes, specifically around Lake Rabun: boat church, the Lake Rabun Hotel, Hall's Boat House, Lake Rabun Pavilion, Louie's on the Lake... the list goes on and on.

BUT, lest Lakes Seed and Burton property owners feel a bit remote from a book on Lake Rabun, please know that the book also captures a history and images that embody the majesty of the entire watershed. What was the trigger that caused Georgia Power to create the lakes? What do we know of the area before the lakes were contemplated? What was the size of Atlanta at the time? Did you know that:

- Lakemont has German roots?
- Tallulah Falls was once known as the Honeymoon Capital of the South?
- Water skis were known as “aquaplanes” when they first appeared on the lake?
- Trips to the Lake in the early 1920's were day-long adventures?

And all lakes enthusiasts will find the book's spectacular series of photos of the area to be great illustrations of the beauty of the region and why it is treasured.

BEST OF ALL, IT IS A BARGAIN! The book and the DVD can be purchased for \$25! The books are being sold in Clayton and Lakemont at the following locations: Crawford Art Gallery, Indigo, Keller's Furniture Store, Timpson Creek Gallery, Lake Rabun Hotel, Lake Rabun Trading Company, Open Door at Alley's, and The Beach Grocery. Or, buy a box of 6 for \$125 by emailing Anne Pledger at [atpledger@gmail.com](mailto:atpledger@gmail.com). *Stacye Morgan and Mike Walters*

*Editor's Note: The Lake Burton centennial occurs in 2020, and Mike Maffett is collecting historical information for a similar book to be developed covering Lake Burton. Anyone who might know the true story regarding how John Laprade obtained the land that became Laprade's Camp in 1925, please contact him at [mem735@gmail.com](mailto:mem735@gmail.com).*

## MOUNTAIN LAKES MEDICAL CENTER

After a year of construction, the ribbon cutting ceremony for the new Mountain Lakes Medical Center was held on September 15th, followed by an open house and community tours.

An innovative 60,000 square foot medical center, located off Highway 441 North near the entrance to the North Shore Convenient Care Clinic, replaces the outdated facility built in the 1970s. The new medical center includes 25 inpatient beds, convenient outpatient services, an expanded emergency department, dietary/nutritional program (including outpatient nutrition therapy), operating rooms, in-house pharmacy, lab, physical therapy, radiology department and the Overlook Cafe. The 30-acre campus on the crest overlooking downtown Clayton, is more than a state-of-the-art hospital. This is the patient experience ELEVATED to a new level.

From the floor-to-ceiling windows that maximize natural light and sweeping views of the mountains, no detail was too small for



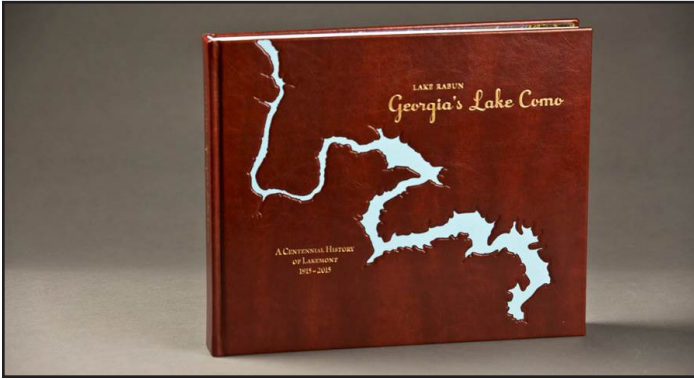
## Rabun County Alliance

*formerly West Rabun Property Owners*

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**Above:** In celebration of the lake's 100th anniversary, Lake Rabun: Georgia's Lake Como and the book's companion DVD contain history, photos, and family stories celebrating "life on Lake Rabun."  
**Below:** Overlooking Clayton, the all-new Mountain Lakes Medical Center's stunning ridgeline location puts a portion of Rabun County's natural wonder on display from every patient room.



consideration in the quest to improve the patient experience. Just because you're in a hospital doesn't mean you should feel like you are. **NOW OPEN** at 162 Legacy Point, Clayton, Georgia—telephone number 706.782.0464, online at *MountainLakesMedicalCenter.com*. (The property owners are currently exploring options for the future of the old facility located at 196 Ridgcrest Circle, and are actively seeking the best solutions to meet the community's needs.)

### ROADS REPORT

RCA has been unable to pursue to a meaningful extent a discussion of progress achieved on SPLOST roads projects, and will present a detailed report in our next newsletter. We have been advised that two roads projects are on the near term horizon: improvements on Boykin and Sandy Ford Roads. Progress on those two projects will be included in the detailed report.

### SHERIFF'S REPORT

The fall colors and weather are definitely here! With the change of the seasons and weather, I want to offer some safety tips pertaining to operating vehicles and boats. Be aware of poor or limited visibility while driving this fall season. Falling leaves as well as an increase in rain during the autumn months may make it difficult to see at a distance. Wet roads combined with wet leaves may make roads slippery and difficult to stop suddenly. Wet roads may further lead to unexpected icy roads. Be vigilant of the temperatures because black ice may form during the night and early morning hours. Drive safely!

With the abundance of water in our County, I want to address fall boating safety. When planning to be on the water, be prepared for rapidly changing weather conditions. We may easily see spring, fall, and winter weather during one day this time of year. Weather patterns could change quickly, so monitor local TV or radio stations as well as any downloaded phone apps. Boating can be especially dangerous due to the possibility of hypothermia, which is not limited to occurring only when in the water or when wet. When hypothermic conditions are observed please seek immediate medical attention. A warm, dry package of clothing should be kept on the boat in case an emergency may arise. Lastly, inform others of boating plans so that your location is known in case of an emergency, and just as in any other time of year, wear your life jacket at all times.

Enjoy the colors, enjoy the cooler temperatures, and have a great fall season! *Sheriff Chad Nichols*