Letter to the Editor, The Republican Newspaper, January 16, 2014.

I sit on the DNR Policy and Review Board , created when the state bought Deep Creek Lake. We are charged by the Governor “to review and advise” the DNR Secretary on lake management, programs and finances.

 In this role, I just received a notice that one of the staff is leaving, reducing lake management to one full time mid-level staff person and hours of operation are now down to 4 days a week! While there will be increase in part-time staff for summer seasonal work, the core work rests on this one person’s shoulders.

Republican readers know about 60% of the tax revenues the County come from lake property values and other associated activities. The lake serves as the “economic engine” of Garrett County. Now we have just one mid-level staff person managing this resource only 4 days a week.

 I have never heard of a comparable situation where a resource so important for the economic well-being of an area is so completely under staffed.

Reduction in staff is not due to a lack of funds. Deep Creek Lake management has an enviable funding source—the “buffer strip permits fees”. While the total revenue figures are not publicly available, these fees generate close to close to $900,000 each year. The revenue is supposedly dedicated for lake management purposes, except for 25% which goes to the County as payment in lieu of taxes on the buffer strip lands.

Quick math suggests there is somewhere in the neighborhood of $600,000 available for lake management. With only one full time, mid-level staff person and some office expenses, there must be more funds available for more staff and programs.

Reduction in staff is not due to a determination there is no work to be done. This coming year is critically important to the lake and programs need to be developed now in anticipation. A huge challenge is to prevent more invasive species including hydrilla into the lake. Staff support is needed for the watershed planning process. The Carrying Capacity study is already one year overdue. The sediment study will be released this month calling for shoreline protection and restoration projects and the list goes on.

Who has made this decision? Where has the money gone?

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