

Lake George Project- Frequently Asked Questions

What is Lake George’s main purpose? The project’s purpose is to provide enough water storage capacity to keep the Pascagoula River’s flows above the State’s established low flow levels for the next 50 years which will directly benefit threatened and endangered species, the environment, and economic activities. The Pascagoula River’s water levels are critical to the environment, economy, and quality of life for George and Jackson County residents. Since 1999 droughts have raised awareness of the negative impacts low flows have on the Pascagoula River’s ability to meet the region’s environmental and economic needs. Experts predict more frequent, severe, and longer droughts in southeast Mississippi over the next 50 years.

Where will the lake be located and what is the size of the lake? The lake project is in southeast George County crossing between the Barton & Agricola communities. The project consists of two lakes (upper and lower) directly connected by Big Cedar and Little Cedar creeks. The upper lake is 1,715 acres with a dam/spillway near Clarence Bonnett Road. The 1,153 acre lower lake’s dam/spillway is just south of the County line. The two lakes total 2,868 acres.

Why are two lakes proposed? Big Creek, Big Cedar Creek, Little Cedar Creek or the Escatawpa River could not support a single lake large enough to store the needed volume of water. The Big and Little Cedar Creek watershed could support two smaller lakes that together could store enough to maintain the Pascagoula’s flows during a severe long-term drought with less impact on private property owners.

When will the lake project be done? Lake George is further along now than at any point in the project’s history. Depending on how long it takes to obtain the necessary permits and complete the required mitigation, construction bids could go out in 2020.

Will Big or Little Cedar Creeks be cut off from flowing into the Pascagoula River? No. Little Cedar Creek will continue to flow from the upper to the lower lakes and both Big and Little Cedar Creeks will continue flowing to the Pascagoula River during and after the lakes are constructed. Minimum flows on both creeks must be maintained in accordance with MDEQ regulations.

Will I be able to fish in the lake? Yes. The lakes will be open to fishing and other recreational activities similar to those at Flint Creek or the Ross Barnett Reservoir. Preliminary conceptual plans also include public campgrounds and boat launches.

Will I be able to use my jet ski, kayak, or motor boat in Lake George? Yes. Recreational boating will be allowed on Lake George similar to boating at Flint Creek or the Ross Barnett Reservoir.

Who will manage the Lake once it's built? The Pat Harrison Waterway District will manage Lake George, much like they manage Flint Creek.

How will the lakes’ shoreline be managed (buffer strips, easements, etc.)? Mississippi does not mandate a specific width for lake buffer strips or easements. Yet, it will be necessary to have some minimal permanent easement around the lakes to manage high water periods. Also, a *Shoreline Management Plan* will need to be developed to address activities that can and cannot take place around the lakes. The Plan will promote “Best Management Practices” instead of a strict regulatory approach. The George County Board of Supervisors will actively engage landowners in developing the Plan before submitting it for agency review and approval.

How will piers, docks, and boat houses be managed around the lakes? The Shoreline Management Plan will also address landowners’ rights to “wharf out” into the lake with piers, boat docks, and boat houses. This will be a detailed process to balance water quality protection, public access, and adjacent landowners’ rights.

Will the lake flood local cemeteries? No. The Supervisors are committed to preserving local cemeteries and other important cultural areas.

How much will the Lake George Project cost and how will it be paid for? The Project’s preliminary cost estimate is \$80 million for land acquisition, engineering design, and construction including building some new bridges. The Project will also impact wetlands and stream banks which will have to be mitigated. The exact number of wetlands and stream bank credits needed and the source and mitigation costs will be determined during the permitting process. Every effort will be made use public lands for mitigation. The George County Supervisors have identified several potential federal and Mississippi funding sources for these costs:

1. Restore Act (Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill)

2. Hurricane Katrina Community Development Block Grant
3. Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (off shore oil and gas revenues)

What progress has been made in the recent years?

Major milestones in recent years include:

- June 2011/Jan. 2013: Pickering Firm, Inc. (PFI) and Mississippi State University (MSU) evaluated the suitability of three George County watersheds for a large lake: 1) Big Creek, 2) Big and Little Cedar Creeks, and 3) the Escatawpa River. Big/Little Cedar Creeks were preferred because of their topography, hydrology, and geology.
- May 2014: MSU and the PFI began field work to identify and map natural springs, wetlands, threatened and endangered species, hazardous sites, cultural resources, and collect other important data.
- July 2014: County officials participated in a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Mobile District interagency pre-application meeting.
- Oct. 2014: MSU and Pickering Firm personnel completed field work.
- Dec. 2014: Pickering Firm personnel met with the USACE to discuss the application, field data, and submission timetable.
- March 10, 2015: George County Supervisors met with the Port of Pascagoula’s Board of Commissioners to request the Port and/or Jackson County to agree to be a co-applicant on the permit.
- April 6, 2015: The Jackson County Board of Supervisors agreed to be co-applicants on the Lake George Project permit application.
- April 16, 2015: The George County Supervisors scheduled an informal community event to present the lake footprint to residents and have Pickering personnel available to answer questions about the Lake George Project.
- May/June 2015: The wetlands permit application and Environmental Assessment will be submitted to the USACE and the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources.

How much money has been spent on the Lake George Project so far? The George County Board of Supervisors and the Pat Harrison Waterway District (PHWD) have approved a total of \$1,770,000 as follows:

1. \$20,000-PHWD: To review Mississippi Department of Wildlife & Parks information and recommend a project scope. Recommended a regional multi-use/multi-purpose water storage lake for drought mitigation.

2. \$740,000-State Bond: To determine the volume of water needed to maintain Pascagoula River’s flows during projected future drought conditions; develop and evaluate alternatives to meet projected demand including a lake in one of three George County watersheds, and prepare an EPA Water Efficiency and Conservation Study. MSU began collecting stream flow data and identifying springs in George County.
3. \$1,010,000-State Bond: Select the most feasible lake site, finalize lake footprints, prepare and submit wetland permit and Environmental Assessment.

Where has the money come from? A vast majority of the funds have come from a \$3,500,000 State Bond approved by the Mississippi Legislature in 2000. The legislation requires these funds be used for the Lake George Project and no other purposes. In 2010, the George County Board of Supervisors convinced the state legislature to transfer the project and the remaining \$3,000,000 Bond authority to the PHWD. At the George County Supervisors’ request the PHWD also contributed \$20,000 to the project.

If my house is on the lake, will I be required to get flood insurance? It is possible. We cannot answer personal home insurance questions. However, George County’s FEMA flood maps were reviewed and floodplain administrators consulted. The Board and PHWD will make every effort to avoid or minimize changing the 100 year flood zones outside the lake’s footprints. A *Hydrologic and Hydraulic Analysis* will be done to determine what changes will be needed to the flood maps.

If my house is on the lake, will I pay more in property taxes? It is possible. Lake George is not anticipated to impact George County’s millage rates. However, over time the assessed value of your house or property may increase because of having lake front property. So property tax liability could increase even without a millage increase.

