

STATEMENT OF DAVID MONTEITH, COUNTY COMMISSIONER, SWAIN COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM, ON THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY PROPOSAL TO REMOVE HOUSEBOATS FROM FONTANA LAKE IN SWAIN AND GRAHAM COUNTIES IN NORTH CAROLINA

September 23, 2016

Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member Cummings, and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to update the committee on the proposal to remove the houseboats on Fontana Lake. I would also thank my Representative, Congressman Meadows, and the Committee members for their interest in this important issue.

Ladies and gentleman, my name is David Monteith; I am a Swain County Commissioner. I am here today to let you know how removing houseboats from Fontana Lake would affect the health of Swain and Graham Counties.

Let me provide a brief history of what the people of Swain County have lost to government agencies: in 1880 the first National Park was suggested by Reverend C.D. Smith, a traveling preacher to the area. In 1926, Congress began to consider this suggestion, and 14 years later established new protected land. With this first national park, we lost around 3,000 people and over 11,000 acres of land from Swain County. But in 1943 the second national park was added to Swain County and another 44,000 acres were added to the park, causing another 3,000 citizens to lose their homes. Today 86% of Swain County is federal land, meaning the county must rely on diminished territory – only 14% or the total county – to fund the schools, roads, emergency responders, and other functions of county government.

In the midst of World War II, TVA took more than 11,000 acres of land from Swain and Graham Counties to build Fontana Lake, claiming it would help to end the war. The people of Swain County were told that power from a dam on the lake would be used to help build a bomb for the war effort. Yet again, the citizens of Swain County were forced off of their land through a combination of social pressure and legal action, even when they were unwilling to sell their property. District Court Judge Edwin Yates Webb ruled that it is illegal for one branch of the federal government to condemn land in order to give that land to another branch of the federal government, yet the federal government proceeded anyway. Because of TVA and Fontana Dam, Swain County lost over half of its tax-paying jobs, half of its population, half of its lumber companies and copper mines, more than 33 cemeteries including more than 11,000 graves, 35 settlements, over 30 churches, post offices, hotels and boarding houses, 25 grocery stores, 34 schools, 9 train depots, 15 side tracks, 4 ferries, 4 hunting lodges, many doctors, midwives, and hospitals, blacksmith shops, apple orchards, grist mills, gas stations, saw mills, splash dams, barber shops, dance halls, and movie theaters.

As you can plainly see, the effects of these changes have been severe. If houseboats owners are evicted from Fontana Lake, Swain County will lose over \$3 million in valuation and more than \$12,000 in essential tax revenue. Moreover, Swain County receives neither flood control nor

power from TVA or Fontana Dam. Despite this, we supply TVA with water to produce power for Tennessee, power for other states, and power for TVA to sell for revenue.

Let me list a few facts to review the hardship the houseboat sunset would cause Swain County, and the environmentally responsible steps Swain County has already taken to protect the health of Fontana Lake:

1. If Swain County loses the houseboats on Fontana Lake, the county will lose over \$12,000 from our tax base, and over \$3 million of tax valuation from houseboats.
2. 86% of Swain County is federally-owned land. The Swain County Commissioners must rely on 14% of county land to fund all the responsibilities of the county government.
3. The Fontana Lake Waste Recovery (FLWR) Organization, which I chaired, with grants from DENR, RC&D, TVA and Clean Water Management Trust, cleaned all the human waste from Fontana Lake. Today, this progress has been preserved because residents of Fontana Lake pump waste from their boathouses to keep the lake clean.
4. To provide this service to homeowners, Swain County, through the FLWR, purchased pump-out boats and waste tanks for all dock owners with houseboats.
5. The Fontana Lake Waste Recovery Organization also purchased a pontoon for getting water samples, and can also be used as a pump-out boat if needed.
6. All boathouses on Fontana Lake are in harbors, all on the south shore of Fontana Lake.
7. Fontana Lake Waste Recovery has cleaned the human waste out of Fontana Lake – a drastic reduction from over 700cc to less than 35cc.

I appreciate your careful consideration on this measure – what may seem like a small matter in Washington will have a lasting effect in North Carolina. Swain County and Fontana Lake residents have independently taken great steps to preserve their lake, and I would hope that these positive and proactive actions are not met with a mandate that residents abandon their homes. Thank you again for inviting me to testify before you today. I am happy to answer any questions that the committee may have at this time.