



January 16, 2020

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Talladega County Commissioners,

My name is Justinn Overton and I am the Executive Director of Coosa Riverkeeper. I'm here today to explain the way the Coosa River and Lay Lake has shaped my life and our concerns surrounding the Coosa River Toll Bridge project developed by Tim James, Inc.

I never knew the ways that a body of water could impact my life. I sat in the bottom of a Jon boat as a kid anxious to swim as my parents reeled in largemouth bass from Logan Martin and Lay Lakes. When I was eight years old, my dad explained to me that I couldn't play in a creek because it would make me sick—it wasn't until I was much older I learned its because there was PCBs in the sediment of that tributary and my dad was fearful that I would kick up the dirt and cause health problems similar to my grandfather's death from cancer linked to PCB contamination in Anniston. In high school, I explored the Narrows and all the fun Lay Lake has to offer. Years later, I married my high school sweetheart at the 4H Center. In 2013, I became the Executive Director of Coosa Riverkeeper and draw on my childhood memories often when I speak to folks like you.

A river has a head and a mouth, but doesn't have a voice to speak for itself. That's why Coosa Riverkeeper is here today to speak for Lay Lake and the folks like many of you in the room- who use it for fun, to put dinner on the table, or enjoy the sunsets with your loved ones. People are drawn to this area for the peace and quiet and that's why many of our members are very concerned about this proposed toll bridge.

I understand that the logistics of the proposed toll bridge sound appealing to families looking to visit one another more quickly... or folks making their way to work more easily. We are a data driven organization grounded in science and policy and our concerns about this toll bridge have absolutely nothing to do with logistics, but have to do with the many questions that we have that are unanswered or refused to be answered. How many 18 wheelers full of timber are going to cross this bridge? Is this toll bridge a part of a larger plan that spans across the Cahaba River too? How long will this total toll of \$4 roundtrip stay in place? How soon before the developer sell this toll bridge to another company?

Our reservoirs like Lay Lake are an economic development opportunity themselves. It is not necessary to open a corridor for industry to grow Talladega County. Invest in your lake, not in its demise. In the Greater Gadsden Area, their community has invested in river front activities like board walks, better boat ramps, and access on Neely Henry Lake. For the counties around Neely Henry Lake, they can attribute over \$570 MILLION dollars in total economic impact includes which direct, indirect, and induced spending that multiplies through the economy from the existence of the lake itself. According to that same economic impact study from Jacksonville State University, there were 10.4 million dollars of NEW revenue from bass fishing tournaments in just one year.

Lay Lake is home to many of us in this room and there is a lot to be gained personally for some of you, whether it's time or money. I ask you to take a moment and remember your favorite day on the lake. Do you remember the biggest fish you've caught? The most vibrant sunset? Do you remember how long it took to get there? If Tim James, Inc. is able to construct this toll bridge on Lay Lake, he may be kicking up dirt with PCBs. I'm here today because I do not want to be responsible for telling our children that they shouldn't get into our river just because we put economic development over their future.

For the Coosa,



Justin Overton
Executive Director



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