

NEWS

Cane Creek issue rages as impact study discussed

By **BOB KIMPLETON**
Staff Writer

Another round in the proposed Cane Creek Reservoir controversy ended Tuesday when the state Division of Environmental Management received final responses to its draft version of an environmental impact statement on the project.

The comments will be used by the division in preparing the final version of the EIS, to be released in about 90 days. The final EIS will be a major factor in determining whether the Orange Water and Sewer Authority gets the authority to condemn land for the Cane Creek project.

The 758-acre reservoir would supplement water supplied to Chapel Hill and Carrboro by University Lake. Severe summer droughts in 1968, 1976 and 1977 have cast doubts on the ability of University Lake to supply enough water to the two growing towns.

OWASA contends that Cane Creek, in western Orange County, is the best possible source of clean water, while project opponents, led by the Cane Creek Conservation Authority, argue that there are other sources which would provide water just as good as or better than Cane Creek.

The statement made no recommendations on which water source the county should use. The statement noted that Cane Creek would provide water unpolluted by significant industrial discharges, but left open the possibility that other sources, such as Jordan Lake, would be treatable to raise their quality to comparable levels. Costs of the various alternatives would be within ten percent of each other, the statement said.

In his written response, Chapel Hill Mayor Joseph Nassif stated that industrial waste present in alternative water supply sites such as Jordan Lake make Cane Creek the best choice.

The Triangle J Council of Governments in its comment stated: "The likely quality of Cane Creek water is better than that of the alternatives... this difference outweighs the potential socioeconomic and ecological costs of the Cane Creek project."

The Orange County commissioners also have supported the Cane Creek project.

"We are obligated professionally to try to provide... a supply of water of the very best quality available," OWASA executive director Everett Billingsley said Wednesday.

In its response, OWASA said that the \$10 million Cane Creek project was more cost-efficient than the alternatives.

The CCCA has argued that Cane Creek water is no better than water from alternative sources. "There's not a whole hell of a

lot of difference between Cane Creek and Jordan Lake," CCCA attorney David Harlow said.

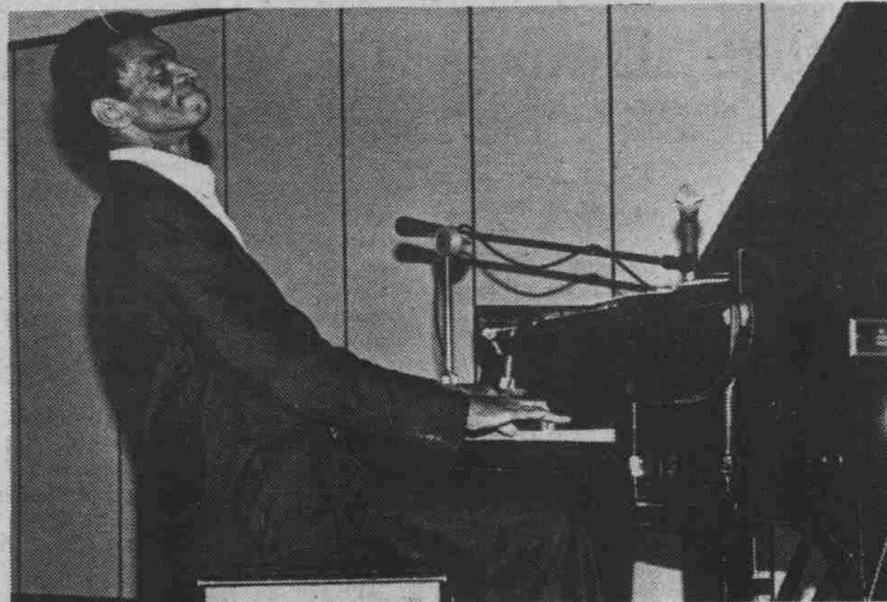
Suggested alternatives to Cane Creek include tapping water from Jordan Lake or the Haw River and raising of the University Lake dam.

"Cane Creek is not going to be a long-term solution for Chapel Hill water needs," Harlow said.

Another objection raised by CCCA is that the project would put an unfair burden on Cane Creek residents.

Cane Creek residents, many of whom own farmland in the area, formed CCCA in 1976 to contest OWASA's claim to eminent domain.

In 1979, the department granted OWASA the authority to condemn the land, but the N.C. Court of Appeals ruled last summer that they had to file an environmental impact statement before condemning land.



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