

## Cane Creek Reservoir - Daniel Okun

Audio

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Duration: 8:56

Transcript:

**Audio Transcript** **Laura Drey** How did you become involved in the Cane Creek reservoir issue? **Daniel Okun** Well, in the first place I live here, though I don't use the OWASA water. We live out of town, but when the Cane Creek issue began, we were living in town. [Laughter] The way it began is very interesting. When I came here, in my course I had a case study. I realized at that time [that] the University owned the water system. When the water system was built, it was planned in 1930. It was completed in 1932, the present system that we have now. It was, at that time, quite large enough, but when I got here in '52, twenty years later, it was clear that it was inadequate. In the postwar period the University was very happy with it. I had my class every year studying. . . . The title of my class was Additional Water Supply for Chapel Hill. [Discussion on class] So I gathered a lot of data and kept it, and I provided them with a lot of data. Then they had to take the data and conclude [what] the best thing to do was. In fact, I wrote a letter to the University. I'd been telling them about this, but then I felt I had better put it on paper. So I wrote them a letter saying they needed to do something, or there would be a very serious problem [because of the rate the student and community population was growing]. Really, nothing too much was done until we had this very serious drought in 1968. [Continued discussion about class] the fact that the University wouldn't let them in the fall. The football would have to be canceled. Anything else doesn't matter but when you can't play football. . . . [The University was talking of closing for a time] One of the options for our water supply, based upon the information that we had - the best option, the one that seemed the most appropriate - was enlarging University Lake. The reason for that was... **Laura Drey** That was back in '68? **Daniel Okun** That was in the 50s and 60s. The reason that that was the answer that we used was because. . . . We were not being paid. We had no money to go out and do surveys. At that time there weren't any maps of the area west of here. So our students could only work with the maps that existed. [Discussion of maps] Those that existed were of Chapel Hill-Carrboro. So we had the drainage area here. We had choices. We could put another reservoir in the Northern Creek drainage area or enlarge this one. We studied many choices. We also considered the Haw River, and, of course, at that time we knew about the Jordan River Reservoir being done. So we studied all of these options, and generally, the one that seemed to be most appropriate at that time was increasing University Lake. However, as soon as the mapping was done, we got copies of the preliminary maps. [Discussion of maps] Then many of our students used new maps, and it became quite clear that there were some additional [reservoir sites] west of here. You need not only a watershed drain, you need a place that's a suitable place for a dam. At that time also the new Council of Governments made a survey of water resources. As soon as the maps were finished, they did this. And a good reservoir site existed out at Cane Creek. There were a few others also. So we were able to enlarge our field of study at that time. [Discussion of maps] But once we had the new area [mapped], it became clear that Cane Creek was a very good option, and it was a good option from many, many standpoints. The students, after that, added to the Cane Creek option. They added a few other reservoirs. After that [mapping], Cane Creek, enlarging University Reservoir, and Jordan Reservoir were the three major options that were evaluated. So Cane Creek seemed very desirable. Of course, one of the reasons it was very desirable was that it was of adequate size. But the more important reasons - because Jordan Reservoir is of adequate size too, much more than adequate size - the far more important reason was that there was no development out there, no urban or industrial development. The quality of the water out at Cane Creek promised to be as good as University Lake. University Lake is a high quality of water, but, of

course, University is also a protected watershed. In fact, one of the ideas that made Cane Creek attractive was that you didn't have to build a pipeline all over town because of hooking water to University Lake. That would be one of the proposals for taking water out of Jordan and putting it into University Lake. But the problem there is that you're taking a very good lake and putting very bad water into it, and that's not desirable. In this case, with Cane Creek [having] as high quality of water as University Lake, and having high quality yield, and it's [being] much more economical than enlarging University Lake... University Lake would be very expensive, and we would not have much additional water, because we would be just adding to what exists now. Whereas, this [way], we keep what exists and we're getting - if we enlarge University Lake, we grow to the maximum yield. The maximum yield for about 30 square miles is about 10 million gallons a day. We had about three in University Lake, and if we enlarge it, we can get about ten. Going to Cane Creek we get a whole new ten, because it's a different watershed. So we add the ten to the present, and pretty soon we've got more, and the cost for the construction is even less than [for] University Lake. It always costs more to enlarge an existing lake than to [unclear] in the new. If it turns out that that should not be enough, then we've still got the option of enlarging University Lake [unclear] while it still exists. So it seemed to be, on engineering measures and from all other measures, the best solution. For years, every year, we'd study and the students would discuss it and evaluate it. So over the years I knew quite well what was going on and quite a bit about it. In fact, I was on a sabbatical leave in '68-'69, and when I came back, I found that the University was beginning to consider what was happening [and looking for an] additional water supply. They were considering Jordan Reservoir because when the Corps of Engineers were planning on that, they were looking for customers. When I found that out, I objected strenuously. I went to the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees said, "Well, doesn't Jordan Reservoir meet the standards?" I said, "Sure, it meets the standards, but that's not adequate standards. The standards are way behind the times," and I urged them to go to Cane Creek.

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