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Georgia, Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Virginia, Tennessee and North Carolina giving updates of the spring fill and what is happening in the river system.

Lake Nottely and all other lakes within the TVA should be at full summer pool by June 1, possibly before if rainfall continues at a steady and consistent rate.

In addition to water levels, information from a recent study funded by the TVA was shared with the group about the economic impact that TVA reservoirs and waterways had throughout the Tennessee Valley.

“We partnered with the University of Tennessee to do a study on a question that we always got asked a lot, ‘what is the economic impact of the TVA lakes,’” said Travis Brickey, senior program management for TVA public relations. “We never really had a study to show or to give us a solid answer for that question.”

TVA released the data from the study to the public shortly after Monday’s meeting, with astronomical results.

Three of TVA’s 49 reservoirs were selected for the study – Norris Reservoir, Watts Bar and Chickamauga. These three were chosen to represent an urban environment, a rural environment and a tributary



**District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch, Robin Peak, Travis Brickey, Chris Cooper, Burt Robinson and Tom Barnett. Photo/Lily Avery**

reservoir.

From these three reservoirs, the University of Tennessee students conducted in-depth analysis of visitors to the lakes, property owners and the net economic value of these factors.

These studies concluded that, on average, the combination of water recreation and waterfront property owners along TVA shorelines create an annual economic impact of \$11.9 billion.

“This has always been a question that we wanted to answer,” said Chris Cooper, TVA natural resource manager.

“We wanted to get a feel for what kind of money these reservoirs bring into each county.

“On an annual basis, UT came out with a study that we’re at \$11.9 billion a year. That’s what’s coming to the areas on an annual basis. If you want that down a little bit further, that’s \$1 million a mile of shoreline.

“As far as jobs, we’ve provided 130,000 jobs a year that that provides for. As far as taxes, you’re looking at about \$900 – \$916 million a year in taxes that comes in.

“TVA is a very valuable resource, not just for live, work

and play, but also good for economics as well.”

TVA is looking into the possibility of continuing this research in other areas of the Tennessee River Valley by focusing on the non-commercial forms of reservoir use, such as hiking, biking and camping, in the coming years.

Tom Barnett, senior manager of TVA’s River Forecast Center, shared information on local lake levels and how the severe drought in the region has effected when area lakes will reach full summer pool.

“We’re coming off of one of the driest years we’ve seen in quite some time, since 2007 and 2008,” said Barnett. “The drought in 2007 was a record drought for the Tennessee Valley and 2016 wasn’t much better.

“We ended up well below normal on both rainfall and runoff. We had a really parched fall, the fifth driest second half of the year in TVA’s records. October was actually the driest runoff we’ve had in 142 years.”

Because of this dryness, TVA had to push water flow from reservoirs in Western North Carolina, North Georgia and Eastern Tennessee to make up for the low runoff levels that would typically feed the entire Tennessee Valley water system.

“Those lake levels will suffer as a result of this,” said Barnett. “You saw last fall that we were having to draw reservoirs down to nearly winter pool levels in early October just to meet those minimum flows to keep those aquatic habitats healthy and make sure that we’re assimilating all those waste flows that come into the river.”

While lack of rainfall last fall was detrimental to lake levels, December and January proved to be wetter with more rainfall, though

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percent of children in Union County’s Title I schools – all but the high school – live with any number of hardships at home, such as lack of computer and Internet access, diminished parental availability, not enough food... and the list goes on.

“All of those are intertwined with generational poverty,” said Dr. Fred Rayfield, superintendent of Union County Schools. “The low family income leads to lack of nutrition and health problems, homework not getting done and kids not making it to school. It’s just all tied together.”

For the 2016-2017 school year, Union County has received about \$1.9 million in federal funding, which has gone toward ensuring that Title I designated schools can provide the same high-quality education as other schools in the state.

Title I funds work to combat disadvantages by providing additional resources to students, like a greater number of teachers and remediation activities designed to emphasize individual attention among those who are struggling.

And the program is working.

Recently, the Union County Board of Education learned that two schools in the system had been awarded prestigious honors as Title I Reward Schools.

Specifically, Union County Elementary School and Union County Middle School had each earned the title of Highest-Performing Reward School.

This is a monumental achievement for these two

schools, as the Georgia Department of Education only awards Highest-Performing Reward School to the Top 5 percent of Title I schools in the state, looking at three years’ worth of academic data.

UCES Principal Patricia Cook believes that much credit is due the teachers, thanks to the high expectations her teachers have for students.

“We have teachers that tutor before school, they stay after school, and then our afterschool program helps those students a lot, too,” said Cook.

Gwen Stafford, principal at the middle school, agreed with Cook.

“You set those high expectations, and then it’s hard work,” said Stafford. “It comes down to the work ethic, the dedication of our teachers and our students in getting it done, and going the extra mile and finding out the resources.

“If you need food, okay, I can get you food. If you need firewood or whatever you happen to need, let us know. We’ve got resources, we can get those people in contact and we can find that, whatever it takes.”

Cook said that Union County Family Connection is a terrific partner for the schools, with its stated goal of having every child in Union County grow up to be successful, productive and contributing adults.

And while Title I funds go a long way toward leveling the playing field in the schools, that money can only be spent in certain ways, which is where

the community comes into play to fill the gap.

All three educators, Cook, Stafford and Rayfield, have seen tremendous acts of kindness from members of the community over the years.

Just last month, Rayfield spoke with a woman whose church had raised money to pay the cafeteria balances of children whose families were struggling.

Cook remembers a student some years ago who couldn’t finish their homework because it kept getting dark outside – they lived in a tent.

In nearly every case of need that comes to light, the residents of Union County move in to take care of their own.

The stories of how poor families become locked into poverty generation after generation are prevalent in the mountains and elsewhere in Georgia. What makes a difference is how often people show they care.

“We have a great community in general,” said Stafford. “If there’s any need that we have out there, all we have to do is put it out, and people are just flooding us trying to help.”

Another key to success, according to Rayfield, is parent involvement, which can be hard to come by in homes that have parents who must work long hours or in the evening.

“Stay engaged past primary and elementary school,” said Rayfield. “There’s this huge dip in parental engagement when students hit middle and high school, even in coming to the normal events and activities.”

**United Community Bank thanks customers with ‘Tomato Day’ event**



Every year, United Community Bank shows customers they care with an appreciation day featuring free lunches and the customary free tomato plants, this year on Friday, May 5. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

**VFW Pancake Breakfast**

The Hiwassee VFW Post 7807 Auxiliary is hosting a pancake breakfast on Saturday, May 13th from 9 to 11 a.m. The VFW is at 1329 Sunnyside Road (Hwy 288).

The cost is \$5 per plate and is open to the public. For more information call 706-896-8887.