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*Page: A1*

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Even in 49-degree weather, people were fishing Friday afternoon at Rodman Reservoir, a place residents don't want to see go.

Putnam County resident Debbie Wickes said she grew up fishing at the Rodman dam and was part of the Save the Rodman Rally when it started. She, like many other Putnam County residents, advocates for keeping the dam that has been there since 1968.

"To me, (it's) memories. Good ones," Wickes said.

Part of the Cross Florida Barge Canal project, the Rodman dam, also known as the Kirkland dam, has been part of Putnam County even after work on the canal project was canceled in 1971.

Residents and members of Save Rodman Reservoir say the positives in keeping the dam outweigh getting rid of it.

"It's kind of disheartening to see some of the information that's put out," Save Rodman Reservoir President Steve Miller said. "There's a lot of benefit to (Rodman)."

Whether the dam should have been created in the first place is not important, said Jimmy Darby, co-owner of Messer's Bait & Tackle. The current economic impact of the area is worth keeping the dam.

He specifically pointed out Rodman Reservoir makes Bassmaster's top 100 best bass fishing spots in the nation. In 2019, the magazine named Rodman Reservoir No. 8 in the Southeast for the best place to bass fish.

"There's people that come from all over the world, from all over the country, to fish (at) this place," Darby said.

Jason Gutierrez, owner of Bass Capital Bait and Tackle in Interlachen, echoed Darby's sentiments. The dam brings in business.

"Just this week, I've had about 30 customers come from upstate just to fish Rodman," he said.

Miller said nutrients from the dam would make the algae bloom problem worse if Rodman was breached.

"The harmful nutrient loads are reduced an average of 35% while the water traverses the

reservoir,” Miller said in an email.

He also said he has tested water samples and one taken in November downstream of the Rodman was the cleanest water sample of the bunch.

“From an environmental standpoint, the dam remaining is the best possible scenario,” Miller said.

Virginia Murphy, co-owner of Messer’s Bait & Tackle, and her husband Charles Murphy have also been on the Save Rodman bandwagon since it started.

Charles Murphy was there to see the dam built and said the environment made by the dam can’t be changed back to what it was before the dam.

“The place cannot be restored. It’s absolutely impossible to restore it,” he said. “It would take over 100 years for it to come back to what it was before. ... The wildlife out there is beyond what it was before the place was built.”

Whether it’s thinking back on childhood memories, economic benefit or preserving the existing ecosystem, Virginia Murphy said she has a message.

“Save Rodman,” she said. “(Put it) in all caps. Red, white and blue.”

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**Page:** A1

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