

Enforcing laws key to halting lake erosion

By Tracy Wheeler
Staff writer

Since College Lake was built in 1936, its dimensions have shrunk by more than

one-third. And in Timber Lake, islands now exist where only water used to be.

Both are suffering from the same problem — erosion.

Development — much of which has gone unchecked until the last decade or so — has silted large amounts of silt into both lakes. At College Lake, the result has been the creation of acres of swampy wetlands. At Timber Lake, coves are being filled in with waist-deep muck.

Laws intended to curb such damage were created in 1973, said Christy Williams, a conservation specialist with

the Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District. The laws, however, were largely ignored for years. Only in the past two years, Williams said, have the laws begun to be enforced.

That being the case, a public meeting next Monday will explain these laws to anyone interested in learning about them — developers, engineers or the general public.

The meeting — scheduled for Feb. 13 from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Holiday Inn Crown Plaza — is free and is being sponsored by the Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District.

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sored by the Blackwater Creek/Ivy Creek Watershed Committee.

Already, about 40 people have signed up, Williams said. And she said she's surprised — and impressed — to find that half of those signed up are interested citizens.

Though much of the discussion will be technical — focusing on laws, regulations, permits and structural procedures — the citizens can learn a lot Monday, Williams said.

"A lot of people see a lake or see a stream running muddy and they don't know why," Williams said. "They don't know what's there, what's causing it."

"A lot of people don't even know to complain."

If Monday's seminar accomplishes only that, she said, it will be worth it. With few people dedicated to erosion and sediment control, they can be everywhere and see everything. So other people are needed to help monitor the region's lakes and streams.

"Citizen complaints," she said, "are the best way to do that."

And the best way to get accurate complaints, she added, is to educate the public.

"You don't know you're a victim unless somebody tells you," Williams said.

Jennie Aveson will be one of those interested citizens in attendance Monday.

A resident of Timber Lake, Aveson knows erosion is a problem. This seminar is her chance to learn more about erosion and the laws that are supposed to guard against it.

"We're trying to clean up the lake," she said. "We know something has to be done to it. It's going to have to be restored."

Williams, though, doesn't want to place blame for the problem. The point now is to avoid further damage.

"I'm not trying to say the developers are out there trying to pull the wool over people's eyes," she said. "They're trying to do what's right, too."