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UTAH

Developers' vision a nightmare to some

By Deseret News | Oct 5, 2001, 11:17am MDT

Dave Anderton, business writer



Deer Crest, located above Jordanelle, boasts great views of reservoir. | Tom Smart, Deseret News

JORDANELLE, Wasatch County — Touted as among the best-planned areas in the state, the 22,000 acres surrounding Jordanelle Reservoir are a developer's dream.

Not everyone, however, shares the current vision of thousands of homes, condominiums and hotels ringing one of Utah's best-known and utilized state parks.

Chief among Jordanelle's critics is Heber City Mayor Lynn Adams, who tags development plans around the reservoir as "San Francisco around a lake."

Adams' criticism is joined by a chorus of others, from environmentalists like Paula Trater of Kamas, opposed to east-side golf courses she believes will affect breeding sites of the spotted frog, to nearby Heber residents apprehensive of encroaching development.

Jordanelle State Park, one of the state's biggest and busiest parks, already turns away summer boaters on weekends and holidays.

And should consumer demand for luxury homes smile upon Jordanelle, one day nearly 13,000 units may rise from the landscape.

"On the Wasatch Back, as developments occur, there is going to be more competition for those recreation sites," said Courtland Nelson, director of Utah's Division of Parks and Recreation, who advises that recreationists look to more out-of-the-way places such as Starvation Reservoir or Bear Lake.

Big dreams and big developments awaited the building of the \$114 million Jordanelle Dam.

Even everyday folks grab at the chance to own a piece of paradise.

Take, for example, Star Harbour, a single-lot subdivision on the reservoir's west side.

Less than 60 days after going on the market all 35 lots were sold, said Rory Murphy, vice president of United Park City Mines Co., owner of the property.

Average price, \$95,000.

Views — anything but average.

Adjacent to Star Harbour, another 132 condominiums units are charted in addition to 78,000 square feet of office and retail space.

But some believe the county has sold its soul to Jordanelle developers.

Heber City resident Annie McMullen, who sits on the Wasatch County Board of Adjustments, believes too much density was granted to developers.

"My biggest concern is that there are so many houses approved for that area," McMullen said. "There is no more room to develop in Park City. . . . Now all of those developers in Park City

have come over the hill."

Rose Mecham, a native Rhode Islander who settled in Wasatch County 52 years ago, is looking to a slowing economy — resulting in dampened home sales — as a silent ally in curtailing wanton growth.

"That's one thing I have against developers. They find a little square of ground and they have got to develop that, squeeze everybody in there," Mecham said.

Densities in Jordanelle run the gamut from one unit per 40 acres on sensitive land habitats to eight units per acre on prime sites, according to Al Mickelsen, Wasatch County planner.

Bonus densities are granted to developers offering affordable housing components.

You won't find those densities in unincorporated neighboring Heber Valley, where the highest density allowed is 1.3 units per acre.

McMullen contends water quality will worsen as more structures rise.

"They have rezoned so much land," she said. "The way the planning has been done nobody is looking at the big picture. Everything that has happened up on the hill is going to have dramatic effects to the valley."

But Dan Matthews, manager of the Jordanelle Special Service District, downplays such anxieties, saying that much of the growth will take more than 30 years to realize.

"(Besides) If you are a 'no growther,' one house is a bad idea," maintained Matthews, guessing that the area will likely only reach 6,000 units over a 30-year span.

Mike Ahlin, president of the Jordanelle Basin Owners Association, agrees. He praises the county's foresight in mapping out such a vast area comprising varied property owners despite "antiquated ordinances based on limited growth in the county."

"The county commissioners have done an exemplary job of planning the area," Ahlin said, adding that approximately a half million dollars of private money went into designing and laying out the area's first phase on the reservoir's west side.

Additionally, tens of thousands of dollars have been poured into plans for two other areas on the reservoir's east and south shores, taking into consideration everything from geologic hazards and wildlife habitat to wetlands and traffic.

"Other places don't go to the extent we have done," Mickelsen said.

Yet good planning wouldn't permit 13,000 homes in a watershed area where more than 350,000 Wasatch Front residents get their drinking water, according to Zach Frankel, executive director of the Utah Rivers Council, a nonprofit group dedicated to protecting Utah's rivers.

With 40 percent of Jordanelle's water reserved for Salt Lake residents, dire consequences to the Provo River watershed are in store, Frankel predicts.

"Urban runoff is some of the most poisonous stuff. There is very little watershed planning in the Provo River. I expect to see a long-term decline. What Summit County and Wasatch County are approving in their master plans will eventually end up in Salt Lake County residents' drinking water. I don't believe there has been suitable consideration of these impacts," he said.

Dave Ovard, general manager of the Jordan Valley Water Conservancy District, which owns 50,000 acre-feet of Jordanelle water, disagrees.

"My dealings with Zach (Frankel) tend to suggest he never has any facts and never knows what he is talking about," Ovard said bluntly. "We are all very concerned that Jordanelle could decline, and we are going to be watching very carefully to try to make sure it doesn't."

Even Jordanelle's master plan warns that development could result in increased water runoff and hurt the fisheries of Jordanelle.

"Salts, chemicals and siltation from these increased flows could pollute the stream and upper arm of the reservoir," the plan states.

To prevent such contamination, the Jordanelle Technical Advisory Committee — a group composed of government and water entities sharing interests in Jordanelle — was formed 20 years ago.

"It's a sounding board, an opportunity to get our voice heard. They are very responsive to the concerns of Salt Lake City," said Florence Reynolds, water quality and treatment administrator for Salt Lake City and a member of JTAC.

Notwithstanding Reynolds' confidence in JTAC, she thinks Jordanelle would be better off left undeveloped.

"I'm one of those people that would like to just fence it off and not use it and not allow for that development and not invite the potential for a problem," Reynolds said. "If you had your

wishes, would you develop up there? Probably not. . . . There are watersheds all over this country that are fenced off in New York, San Francisco and Seattle. That's how they protect their water supply."

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