

## EXPANSION: McDowell County looks to expand at Lake James too

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tourism, as well as commercial and residential development. As part of the agreement with the state, Crescent plans to develop its property around the lake that would preserve the "natural beauty of the area."

Rep. Mitch Gillespie, R-McDowell, said once the new park is built, the state could lease the existing Lake James State Park, located near the county line on the McDowell side, to the two counties. It comprises 605 acres and was established in the late 1980s by an act of the General Assembly.

The park has two boat ramps at Hidden Cove and Canal Bridge, campsites, hiking trails, fishing areas, picnic areas and a beach for swimming and sunbathing. The park also has exhibits and information about the animals and plants that live along the lake.

County Manager Chuck Abernathy said leasing the existing park by both McDowell and Burke could certainly be a possibility.

"There's all kinds of alternatives," he said. "We're open for discussion. We certainly want to be cooperative."

In addition, McDowell officials are still pursuing the idea of leasing more than 300 acres of land at the Black Bear section of Lake James for use as a county-operated recreation park. That would include Big Island.

For a few years, county officials have looked at the possibility of leasing the land on the north shore from Duke Power. The land would be turned into a county-operated recreation park with primitive campsites, walking trails and places for fishing. Duke Power has offered to lease land along the Catawba River chain of lakes to other counties. McDowell officials are still

### State Park

**The Lake James State Park** was established in 1987.

**The park** was originally 565 acres and until today was only 605 acres.

**Annual visitation** has reached about 250,000 in the last few years.

**The state park expansion** will add 2,195 acres to the state park.

### Dollars

**\$20 million** - The amount allotted for state parks in the hospital bill signed by Gov. Mike Easley.

**\$30.6 million** - The Agreed value of the 2,915 acre piece of land.

**\$18.36 million** - Amount state paid Crescent for 2,915 acres.

**\$12.25 million** - Gift Crescent gave the state in order to secure the deal.

lic access, other areas will remain open for housing and commercial development. Crescent Resources is developing Black Forest on Lake James, located in the Black Bear section. The housing development has lots ranging in size from 3 acres to 21 acres. A 3.8-acre waterfront lot sells for \$225,000 while a 14.1-acre waterfront lot goes for \$580,000, according to the Black Forest Web site.

Another development, called Bear Cliff, is planned for the Black Bear section. Waterfront lots are already sold and an infrastructure will be developed in the near future, according a Web site.

Other housing developments on the McDowell side are the Arbor at Lake James, started in the spring of 2002, and Sunset Point, a smaller gated community.

In spring 2003, the McDowell County Board of Commissioners adopted new rules for building housing developments on the lake. After the adoption of the ordinance, a representative from Crescent Resources presented the company's plans for Black Forest on Lake James. Another developer announced plans for the construction of Bear Cliff.

Since then, no other developments on the McDowell side

for this to happen."

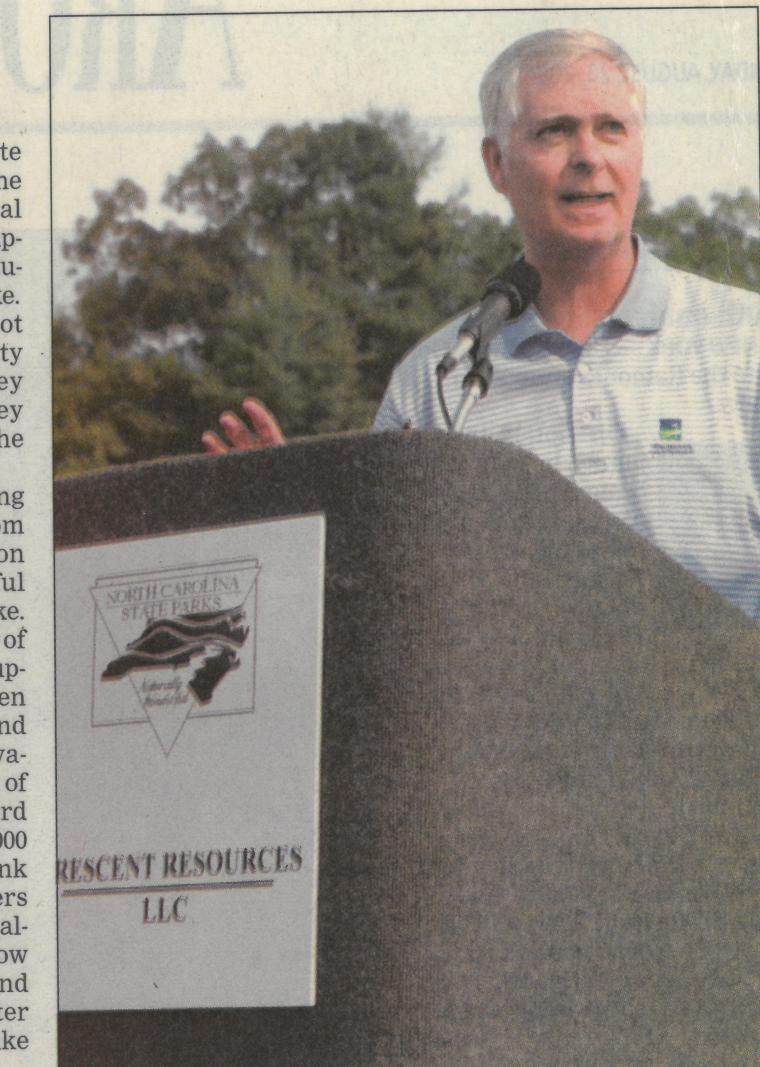
Harris, a local real estate agent, is also a member of the Lake James Environmental Association and an active supporter of preserving the natural resources around the lake.

"I am disappointed it's not here," he said. "Burke County stood their ground and they fought these people and they won. Burke County got the crown jewel."

He added McDowell leasing the land at Black Bear from Duke Power for a recreation park would be a wonderful thing for the future of the lake.

"The Board of Commissioners have long supported a balance between growth and development and preservation and conservation," Abernathy said. "All of the comments I have heard have been positive on the 3,000 acres being preserved. I think the county commissioners would view it that way. A quality on Lake James that we now have will be maintained and the public will have greater opportunities to use Lake James."

"I feel like it's an absolutely wonderful thing that the state of North Carolina has stepped up to buy this land," said Ken Harris, who is chairman of the advisory committee for Lake James State Park. "This is one of the most monumental things to happen for Lake James. There's a few people who have worked many years



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Governor Mike Easley speaks about the \$18 million expansion of Lake James State Park on Thursday.

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