

Purchase of land will help Lake James park swell in size

Burke from 1A

said. In effect, Crescent is donating more than \$12 million in land. The plans came out of months of talks aimed at settling a dispute between Crescent and Burke County over rules governing land use at Lake James. Crescent, which owns about 95 percent of the land around the lake, is planning residential development there.

The state will borrow the money for the expansion. The legislature authorized the state to borrow about \$20 million for parks projects in July.

The park will grow from 605 acres - among the smallest of the state's 33 parks and recreation areas - to just over 3,500 acres. North Carolina's largest state park, South Mountains in Burke County, measures just under 17,000 acres. Lake Norman State Park is about 1,500 acres. Cinders Mountain State Park near Kings Mountain has about 5,000 acres.

The expanded Lake James park will offer additional camping, hiking and water-based recreation, officials said.

With the help of a citizens' Park Advisory Committee, state officials will update the park's master plan, which will guide park development. But new areas could be available for activities such as hiking by early next year.

Area leaders also envision a lodge at the park, plus marinas, restaurants and other projects.

Crescent plans to build about 1,650 homes on sections of the lake dubbed Linville, Eastlake and County Line. That development is slated for roughly 3,400 acres to the north, northeast, south and southwest of the expanded state park.

The county approved zoning for those plans this year after months of closed-door talks with Crescent and conservation groups.

Crescent sued Burke County in 2002 over the county's then-newly adopted land-use regulations governing the lake. Crescent claimed the county's rules arbitrarily restricted the company's development of its land, most of which is undeveloped.

The revised regulations reflect a compromise reached by county leaders, Crescent and conservationists - a process that all sides called a model for balancing com-



JEFF WILLHELM - STAFF PHOTO
Visitors from the Mountain View Care Center in Marion spend a few hours at Lake James State Park in April, cooling their feet in the swimming area. Crescent Resources will sell the state 2,915 acres along the lake's northern shore.

merce, conservation and citizen concerns.

Crescent's plan also calls for a lake headquarters that could house a restaurant, recreation areas and other amenities; new parks; more public access; a patch of small commercial development, such as a convenience store or medical offices; and trails linking to established walkways such as the 900-mile Mountains-to-Sea Trail.

Tom Johnson, chairman of the Burke Board of County Commissioners, said Thursday he expects the park and other development at the lake to create roughly 3,500 jobs in areas such as construction, restaurants and retail and bring in \$200 million annually in taxes and tourist revenue.

The park expansion will help Burke as it attempts to diversify its manufacturing-heavy economy, he said.

The project will also protect the lake, conservationists said.

Lake James is the farthest upstream along the 300-mile Catawba River chain of lakes. It is generally considered the cleanest and is the least developed of Duke's reservoirs on the Catawba River.

In developing plans for the lake, the county wanted to protect natural resources while also providing opportunities for private development; to guarantee long-term public access to the lake; and to create a large state park, Johnson said.

"I am happy to stand here," he said Thursday, "and say, 'Mission accomplished....'"

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