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THE NEWS HERALD

Lake James' future foretold

Crescent Resources shares plans for development

By SHARON McBRAYER
The News Herald

MORGANTON — After finding common ground and resolving issues with Burke County, Crescent Resources unveiled its master plan on Monday at two meetings for future development at Lake James.

Based on an application filed with the county on Thursday by Crescent, the real estate arm of Duke Energy, and after the county changed the way land is used around the lake on March 30, the developer plans to bring a combination of residential and public uses around the lake.

"This is a day we've waited a long time for," said Tom Johnson, chairman of the Burke County Commissioners.

"We're excited we're here today."

In a meeting earlier in the day, Johnson introduced Jim Mozley, senior vice president for Crescent, who, along with project consultant and architect Mark Permar, laid out the plans for the lake. Mozley, who called the plan a team effort between Crescent, the county, environmentalists and people who know the desires of the community, said there are six key concerns surrounding development at the lake: protecting water quality, view sheds, increased recreational and public access, an increased economic resource for the county, linking trails for pedestrians and bicyclists and the preservation and conservation of the land.

Mozley said the centerpiece of the development, which is designed to blend with the environment, will be a lodge and lake headquarters that will serve entrepreneurial efforts,

as well as public access. The lake headquarters, along the eastern shore of the lake, will be devoted to public recreation such as hiking, picnics, fishing, canoeing, bicycling and camping, according to the plans.

In addition to the lodge and lake headquarters, there also would be rental cabins, camping areas and a trail system that would loop around the lake for biking and walking, Mozley said. Eventually those trails would link with Morgan's trail system, the Mountain to Sea and the Over the Mountain Trail systems, he said. Along the trail system would be what Crescent calls "Pocket parks."

Plans also call for a settlement area with a "Gathering place" that would include a restaurant, amphitheater, small grocery store and a common area. "This plan has a great deal of thought, and it's comprehensive," said Permar.

One of the major plans for the lake, Crescent officials said on Monday, is to dedicate about 3,000 acres for a state park. Mozley would not go into detail about the park, which would encompass 36 miles of shoreline, but he said Crescent is in meetings with state officials and the company is enthused with how seriously the state is about the park. Mozley said he would like to see progress on plans for the park within six months.

Johnson said the plan preserves the lake and water quality, but it will have a greater impact on the county. He said historically the county has always relied on industry as its economic base, but commissioners now see tourism sharing the economic base equally with industry.

Johnson said the commissioners want to market the county as a tourist destination. "This is the first step today in us turning ourselves around

Mark Permar is the project consultant and architect for Crescent's Lake James development plan. Photo by Joshua Harris

here," Johnson said. "I'm excited and pleased to say I was involved in this."

As part of attracting tourists to the county, Johnson said they would hire someone to market the county to tourists. Municipalities within the county would hopefully kick in money to fund the position, he said.

Johnson said he is currently working with the state to estimate how many jobs could be created by the development at the lake and hopes to release those figures in May or June. And with the addition of major development at the lake will come the need for a stronger law enforcement presence, Johnson said.

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Interpretive map by Duke Conover

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STAFF REPORT

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Enjoying a spring break

Bush acknowledges state's pain during visit

By PAUL NOWELL
Associated Press

CHARLOTTE — President Bush acknowledged thousands of North Carolina manufacturing workers have endured painful job losses since he took office, but offered hope for the future in a speech Monday at a community college job-retraining program.



8 DAYS