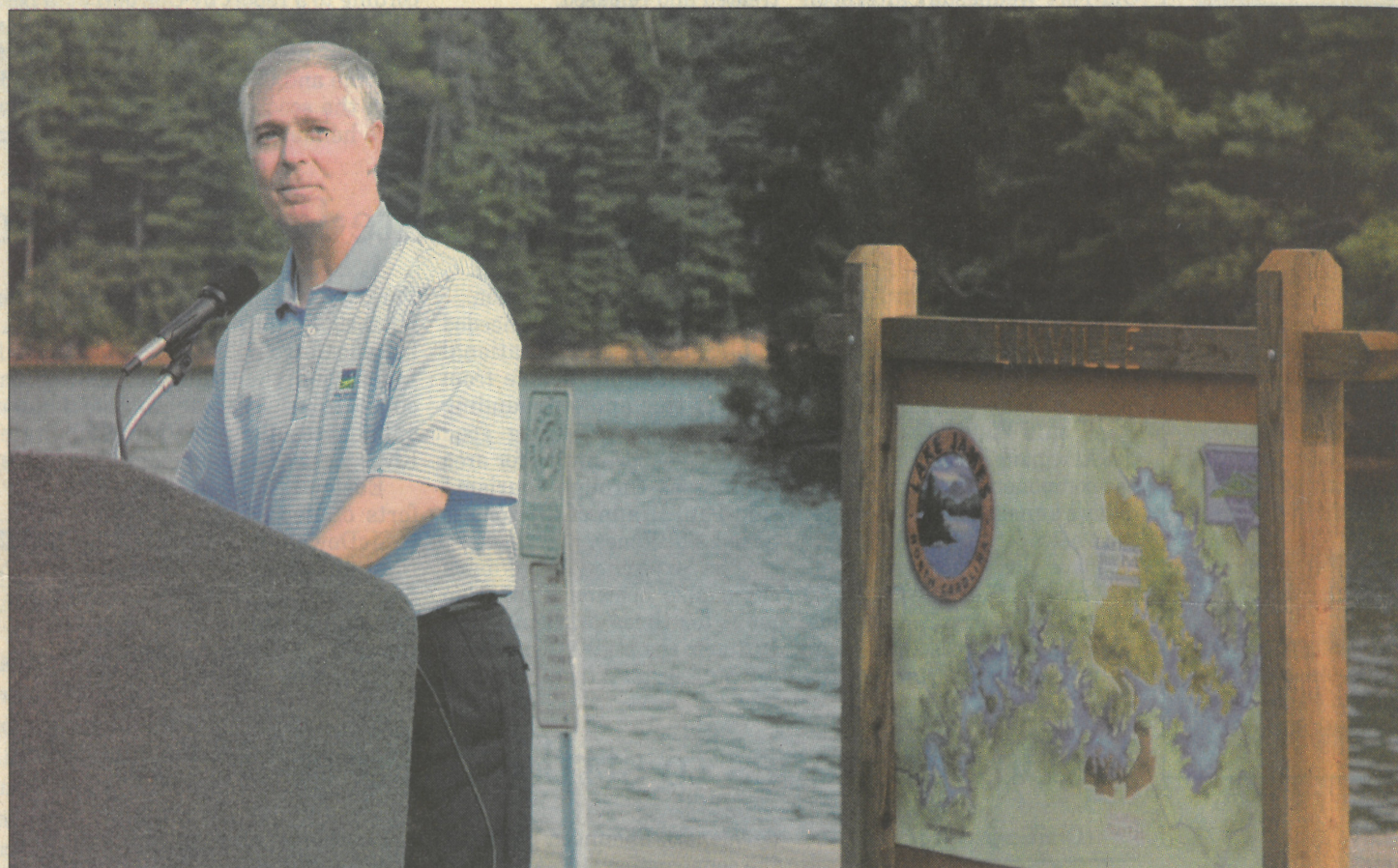


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Gov. Mike Easley arrived by boat Thursday at the larger Lake James State Park. The new park will be Linville Access Area to sign an agreement with nearly six times the size of the existing one. (Photo by Peggy Rowe)

# Easley makes park expansion official

## Deal will protect 30 miles of shoreline

By MIKE CONLEY  
Staff Writer

Gov. Mike Easley arrived by boat Thursday and authorized the purchase of 2,915 acres in Burke County to create a new Lake James State Park nearly six times bigger than the existing one. Easley said this larger park will protect key natural resources, boost tourism and recreational opportunities for both McDowell and Burke

counties.

"The Lake James State Park expansion, from its current 605 acres to more than 3,500 acres, will bring jobs to the region and protect the area's scenic beauty," Easley said. "This expansion will connect public lands and trails and help to promote tourism and recreational opportunities."

The state will pay \$18.36 million for the land.

At a news conference at the Linville Access Area, Easley and Art Fields, president and chief executive officer of Crescent Resources, signed an agreement to sell the land to the state.

"The project is the result of a private-

public partnership that recognizes the important relationship between natural resource stewardship and economic development," Easley said.

The deal follows two years of planning talks between Crescent, which owns much of the land around the lake, and officials from Burke and McDowell counties, the business and development communities, the Foothills Conservancy, Citizens to Save Lake James, the Lake James Task Force and the Southern Environmental Law Center.

"Significant time and effort have gone

(See EASLEY, 2A)