

Public gets a say in how new state park will be developed

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for the conservation of more than 30 miles of lake shoreline. It would also link to three public trails, including the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail run by the National Park Service.

The master plan is essentially a blueprint for how the land is to be developed. It will take about a year to complete and the process will include an opportunity for the public to provide recommendations. The plan will define how trails and overlooks can be configured to take advantage of scenic views and provide for the greatest visitor enjoyment.

State parks officials are now asking people who are familiar with Lake James to give them suggestions.

"It's probably impossible to create a 'cookie-cutter' park," said Lewis Ledford, director of the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation. "Each park needs to have a plan tailored to its own needs."

LandDesign, a Charlotte planning and landscape architecture firm, will produce the master plan under an \$86,000 contract with the state parks system. The firm is scheduled to present the plan to the division by spring 2006.

During the meeting, Brad Davis, president of LandDesign, said his firm realizes it is taking on a huge project and needs the public's help.

"It's not only a tremendous opportunity and it's a huge responsibility," Davis said. "We have not brought a plan with us tonight. We have a blank sheet of paper."

Tedd Duncan, landscape architect with LandDesign, said he wants to design a lake park that

everyone, including the elderly and disabled, can enjoy. The expanded park could have a beach for swimming, camping, hiking trails, bicycle trails and places where folks can fish from the bank. The lake should be able to accommodate kayaks and canoes as well as bass fishing boats.

Duncan and the other designers asked the people to fill out questionnaires and list what they want and don't want in the new park.

Scott Ogle, who owns land next to the new park, said he and his brother don't want to see any development along the lake. "It could be the best thing that could ever happen if it's done right," he said.

Bruce Whipple, who owns a home at the lake, said he would like to see hiking, camping, fishing and cycling.

"I think the main thing I'm concerned about is let's don't screw up what we've got that brings folks here in the first place," he said. "I would not want to see RV's because they take up too much of the land and they change the nature of the land."

Crescent Resources also plans to develop its property around the lake that would preserve the "natural beauty of the area."

Under a new master plan, Crescent proposes to build a 150-room hotel, patterned after the lodges at Yellowstone and Yosemite parks, and 100 rental cottages. The "lodge" would be surrounded by the state park and would not be visible from the lake. The plan by Crescent also includes a lakeside "village," with a restaurant, amphitheater, small grocery store and a common park area for festivals and events.

Crescent also has a plan to con-

struct residential developments both on the lakefront and away from the lake.

"We're still trying to create good plans on our residential communities before we concentrate on commercial facilities," said Troy Lucas, project manager with Crescent. "This is going to be a great process."

Harris said he and other advocates for conserving Lake James said they are excited about the new park and its potential.

"This is the fruition of 10 years of begging, pleading and crying," he said. "This is the biggest, most significant land acquisition North Carolina has done in decades."

Harris is also happy with how the planners for the state park are listening to the public and getting their ideas.

"They really are coming with a blank slate," he said.

The public will have another opportunity to provide input for the park's master plan. Another meeting will be held at 7 p.m. Thursday in the commission boardroom of the Burke County Service Building, the former Lazarus building, at 110 North Green Street in Morganton.

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