

hology

e
ty

LIVING



Sunday

Jan. 2, 2000

New state park working toward visitor's center, development

By Tracy Davis
STAFF WRITER

SAPPHIRE – The only signs that the Jocassee Gorges area was made a state park last spring are the 3-inch yellow markers nailed to trees along N.C. 281 in southern Transylvania County.

The plans call for a day when Gorges State Park will house a visitor's center, new trails and a dozen employees, the state's newest outdoor playground remains, or now, relatively unchanged.

Until Tuesday, the park had only two employees working from the superintendent's home.

Now, there's a new workplace next to the Sapphire post office – though it's missing a door – and a third employee.

"It's coming together real good for being here for only two months," said Steve Pagano, Gorges State Park superintendent. "This is the first time in a long time parks have gotten to start

Write Gorges State Park at P.O. Box 100, Sapphire, NC 28774-0100, or call (828) 966-9099, or e-mail gorg@citcom.net. You can also look up (www.ncsparks.net) and go to the Gorges State Park link.

from scratch."

It's not often land on Jocassee's scale – nearly 10,000 acres on the North Carolina side alone – becomes available for use as public land. Pagano has been collecting newspaper clippings and other documents so visitors decades from now will know how Gorges State Park came to be.

The wheels for the park were set in motion in 1996, when Duke Energy officials decided to offer land along the North Carolina-South Carolina border to the two states for a bargain-basement price.

Duke originally bought

WANT MORE INFORMATION ON GORGES STATE PARK?



TRACY DAVIS/CITIZEN-TIMES

A waterfall tumbles down a mountainside off of U.S. 64, at the northeast corner of Gorges State Park. The park, officially formed in April, lies in remote southern Transylvania County and harbors dozens of rare and endangered plant species. The area's waterfalls are spectacular; annual rainfall averages 80 inches a year.

the property in the 1940s and 1950s to generate electricity. Neighboring Lake Jocassee is part of the Duke project.

In southern Transylvania County, where undeveloped land is selling for several thousand dollars and more

an acre, the power company giant could have made a killing.

But the land was sold for \$29.6 million to the Carolinas, with North Carolina's share coming in at \$8.5 million for 6,800 acres of park

and an adjacent 2,916 acres of gameland where hunting is permitted.

The North Carolina property was appraised at \$21.5 million, according to Charlotte-based Duke Energy. The Forest Service recently acquired adjacent land as well.

In South Carolina, the land is 25,000 acres, with adjoining state parks on either side.

Though it's a tenth the size of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, the two-state park is home to diverse wildlife and as many as 60 rare or endangered plant species, according to the state Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

The land is also on the Blue Ridge escarpment, a 150,000-acre stretch of wilderness where the mountains meet the Piedmont. The precipitous drops in the gorges create scores of spectacular waterfalls.

But, there are no facilities.

There are no restrooms. There are no signs announcing a motorist's arrival at Jocassee. Trails aren't marked. There aren't even any good, readily available maps.

Despite acres of unmarked territory, it's a popular spot for hunters, hikers and other sportsmen.

"I'm convinced that it's really going to be a real attraction for a lot of people once they get the trails and the facilities and all constructed," said John R. "Jack" Hudson, a retired attorney who lives south of Brevard and is an avid birder.

"The wonderful thing about it is the waterfalls you get to see, with rainbows... it's just spectacular."

"I would anticipate that five years from now we'll have several hundred people a year coming to experience the state park."

Call Tracy Davis at 236-8980 or e-mail TDavis@CITIZEN-TIMES.com