

McDOWELL COUNTY

Lake James expansion limits access

By Robert Wyatt
STAFF WRITER

NEBO — Ed Barnes lives in the Enka community of Buncombe County now, but for the past 45 years, he has spent many hours of relaxation and recreation on the shores of Lake James in McDowell County.

Barnes has seen a lot of changes come to the lake but hopes the recent expansion of the state park by nearly 3,000 acres doesn't do more harm than good.

"I know they're in transition now while they're planning the new park," Barnes said. "But in the interim, there's almost no place to go. Basically if you get out of your boat anywhere on the lake you're trespassing. If it's not private, it's leased."

Barnes is referring to the recent restrictions put on many camping and picnicking areas around the lake while the new expansion master plan is being implemented.

"You're talking about developing a master plan and making critical decisions that will guide almost every aspect of development in a state park that already

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Hear Duke Power representative Jason Walls explain the recent recreation survey findings in the company's relicensing process.

attracts more than 250,000 visitors a year," Lake James State Park Superintendent **Tim Benton** said.

"What we've been trying to tell people is that there will be a time during this transition that there will be less opportunity to camp at the lake. We just don't have the facilities ready. Once we get the new facilities in place they will be top notch, they will be fully staffed and that is something that everyone can look forward to."

Troy Lucas is spokesman for Crescent Resources LLC, the real estate branch of Duke Power that sold the 2,915 acres to the state park system in early 2005, enabling officials to expand the park.

"You know, you take 30 miles of shoreline and, at least for right

now, you don't allow camping on it; that makes a big impact on the public," Lucas said.

"I would like to go on record as saying that we totally support the park system in the way they're handling things. There's a lot of work that has to be done before it's opened back up to the public. There are a lot of facilities to be built. Once that's done, I think everyone agrees that Lake James will have a state park that will be second to none in the state of North Carolina."

Lake James is just one of 11 lakes in the Catawba River series of lakes that feed Duke Power's hydroelectric projects. Duke Power also limits camping activity on its lakes.

"We have a policy in place today that does not allow overnight camping on any of the Duke Power-owned islands, not just at Lake James, but on any of our lakes," said Jason Walls, spokesman for Duke Power. "We do encourage visitors to enjoy the islands during the day. We just ask that they help us take care of the islands. No open fires and don't leave any debris behind."