

Camp Sertoma, bike trails might make it into budget

Bertrand M. Gutierrez/Winston-Salem Journal | Posted: Friday, May 30, 2014 9:45 pm

Camp Sertoma and bike trails at Moore's Springs may continue to operate in Stokes County, less than a year after they were slated for closure.

Senate lawmakers, responding to a lobbying effort by Stokes County officials, gave final approval to a budget bill that includes a provision to transfer ownership of those properties – about 716 acres – from N.C. State University to the parks system run by the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Have you ever visited Camp Sertoma in Stokes County?

The budget must go through another vote in the Senate and must clear the House. But Sen. Shirley Randleman, R-Wilkesboro, whose district includes Stokes, said she is optimistic that the provision would remain in the budget, also known as Senate bill 744.

"They were adamant that they wanted to keep this natural resource. It's an asset to the community that they did not want to let go," Randleman said.

Don Reuter, the assistant director of DENR's Division of Parks and Recreation, said the camp and trail properties are a good fit.

They "could help the state parks system expand recreational offerings and activities, including horseback riding, paddling, hiking, camping, biking and cabin accommodations.

"This is a versatile piece of property with historical significance.

"It includes a variety of facilities and natural resources which are compatible with park operations and could provide opportunities for enhanced visitor experiences at Hanging Rock State Park," Reuter said.

Leon Inman, a Stokes commissioner, said he is ecstatic about the budget provision.

"If the state parks system takes this over ... Stokes would feel like we've won the Camp Sertoma lottery," Inman said, referring to a mantra he has related to state parks officials during negotiations to keep the properties going.

Separately, the Moore's Springs mountain bike trails lie west of Hanging Rock State Park. Last spring, one set of trails included about 8 miles of intermediate to advanced riding, and another set involved about 2 1/2 miles next to the new Moore's Springs Campground on Moore's Springs Road, off N.C. 66.

Word was spreading last spring about the trails, built and conceived by Tony McGee, a host of volunteers and grant money.

But in the fall, state officials announced that four of North Carolina's six 4-H camps, including the Sertoma 4-H Educational Center in Stokes, would close at the end of last year because there was not enough money to keep them open. The closures eventually included a decision by N.C. State to relinquish Moore's Springs.

In response, Inman said, the Stokes commissioners contacted N.C. State officials to keep Camp Sertoma open. There was an effort to have the university sublease the property to the county, which would run it as a campground, but that effort did not come to fruition. Along the way, Stokes officials found out that the state parks system might be interested.

McGee, however, said that while Camp Sertoma was costing N.C. State money to operate, he could have kept the Moore's Springs mountain bike trails open without state assistance. Now, he is frustrated that the trails would be transferred to the state parks division.

"They have booted us out after years of hard work," he said. "They're kicking us to the curb."

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