

McDowell officials seek expanded preservation

BY MIKE CONLEY
MEDIA GENERAL NEWS SERVICE

MARION — An expanded Lake James State Park will mean the preservation of more land on the Burke County side and continued public access to the lake as a whole.

Meanwhile, McDowell County officials said they are open to other possibilities that could preserve more land on Lake James for the McDowell side.

"I want to see a proper balance between growth and preservation," said David Walker, chairman of the McDowell County Board of Commissioners. "Growth is inevitable.

"I want to preserve as much as we can of the land around the lake so future generations will be able to enjoy hunting, fishing and camping. Everything has got to have a proper balance to it."

The purchase of the land is expected to spark greater tourism, as well as commercial and residential development. As part of the agreement with the state, Crescent Resources plans to develop its property around the lake that would preserve the "natural beauty of the area."

State Rep. Mitch Gillespie, R-McDowell, said once the new park is built, the state could lease the existing Lake James State Park, located near the county line on the McDowell side, to the two counties.

The park has two boat ramps at Hidden Cove and Canal Bridge, campsites, hiking trails, fishing areas, picnic areas and a beach for swimming and sunbathing. The park also has exhibits and information about the animals and plants that live along the lake.

McDowell County Manager Chuck Abernathy said leasing the existing park by both McDowell and Burke certainly could be a possibility.

"There's all kinds of alternatives," he said. "We're open for discussion. We certainly want to be cooperative."

Also, McDowell officials still are pursuing the idea of leasing more than 300 acres of land at the Black Bear section of Lake James for use as a county-operated recreation park.

ON THE NET:

- Lake James State Park:
www.ils.unc.edu/parkproject/visit/laja/home.html
- McDowell County government:
<http://mcdowell.main.nc.us/~mcdowell/>

*New Life
Assembly of God*
(Section House Road)

Bob Hicks - Revival
Aug. 22-25

256-6075

Evening Services 7:00 pm

BY THE NUMBERS

\$30.6 million

Agreed value of the 2,915-acre piece of land.

\$20 million

Amount allotted for state parks in the bill.

\$18.36 million

Amount that North Carolina paid Crescent Resources.

\$12.25 million

Gift that Crescent paid to the state to secure the deal.

Expansion came within a \$310 million state House bill recently signed by Easley.