

ENVIRONMENT

Beyond the Pavement: What lies ahead for the "Road to Nowhere"?

-by AMY CARMODY, guest writer-

The "Road to Nowhere," a six-mile stretch that ends in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, just might get the chance to go somewhere. This road would link Swain and Graham County, and residents wonder what kind of impact will it have on the future of the environment.

In 1943, when Americans were in the middle of WWII, the government and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) made the decision to build a dam to create hydroelectric power in Western North Carolina. The creation of it caused 11,000 acres of land to be flooded, forming Fontana Lake. The land was occupied by 1,000 families. Some families sold land for use in the project; those refusing were forced to leave homes, churches, and the graves of their loved ones.

In return for relocating, these families were promised a road around the lake. The road would create access to dozens of remaining cemeteries. After the dam was complete, the government began the promised road. Approximately six miles of it were built before 1969 when the construction came to a halt at the end of a 1,000-foot tunnel.

Since the construction of the "Road to Nowhere", alternative plans have been made to accommodate families of those who once lived in the now flooded Fontana Lake. On the south side of Fontana Lake, a road was built to accommodate travelers into the area. Also, the National Park Service (NPS) provides a ferry for cemetery visitors crossing the lake and cars are allowed up Hazel Creek where many of the cemeteries are located.

This subject has caused friction between environmentalists and residents of Swain County. Dr. Margaret Brown, author of *Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains*, said that there is not just one view in the county. Some residents are satisfied with the current situation of being provided access to the cemeteries by the NPS. Trout fishermen don't want the road to be built due to the impact on clean water supply needed for trout survival. While these people are satisfied with the current situation, many other residents are adamant about having the road complete. Brown feels that

they are upset with TVA and the government and that they have generalized this anger and focused it on the road. "A lot of issues get wrapped up into this one. They are angry about being treated poorly by TVA, and I agree that they were. My personal opinion is that the road is not a good thing and not a good thing for them."

Now, decades after the promise was made and construction halted, Rep. Charles Taylor and Sen. Jesse Helms have decided that it is time to complete construction of the road. In November of 2001, Helms and Taylor set aside \$16 million for the completion of the "Road to Nowhere." Brown referred to this as "political patronage", saying that this amount is "not rational at all".

Bob Miller, a spokesman for the Park, commented in an article for the *Appalachian Voice* that the cost for this project will be closer to \$150 million dollars, and would require detailed environmental and engineering studies.

Nathaniel Axtell, a conservationist, wrote in an article for the *Appalachian Voice*, "The controversial 21-mile road would slice through the largest roadless area in the East and likely expose acidic rock that could sterilize streams such as Hazel, Eagle and Forney Creeks."

Miller believes there are many species that would likely be affected by the construction. The Indiana Bat, a federally endangered species, may be using the North Shore area as a summer nesting area and area black bears. Miller also believes construction may encroach upon some areas that could possibly be added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Alternatives for compensation have been proposed over the past several decades. Most proposals were for cash settlements and all were rejected.

The lingering promise and lack of compromise still remain. According to Brown, "mediation and compromise can only take place when both sides are completely ready for it to happen." Until then, Swain county residents will continue to fight for construction of the road, while environmentalists work to preserve nature beyond the pavement.

King's Creek: Is it going to be Straight?

-by DUSTIN FREE, staff writer-

As you tour the campus of Brevard College one of the main features that most people are attracted to is King's Creek. The small creek cuts through campus from a slower, peaceful pace to a faster pace exiting the east side of campus by the athletic fields and cornfield. A plan for reshaping the current King's Creek has been implemented and will go under construction during the summer months. No longer will the creek flow straight, but its path will instead be curvy.

Nearly five years ago faculty and neighbors of the college addressed an erosion problem caused by King's Creek. The process was started by a proposed grant written by the Cooperative Extension Service to the Clean Water Management Fund. The grant provides the college and community members with a more stable aquatic environment, erosion reduction, and reintroducing native plant species into the aquatic environment encouraging habitat diversity. The plan is to dig a shallow creek bed and line the bed with stones from the old creek bed.

The Cooperative Extension Service plans will make the creek 30 percent greater width in the turns than in the straight sections of the new creek. "All of this will result in a greater aquatic habitat diversity that is going to encourage more species to take residency in the pools that will be created in the new section of King's Creek," said John Calabria of the Cooperative Extension Service at NCSU. The current King's Creek bed will be filled with sediment that is removed from the new creek bed and after the bed is filled the area will have a natural fauna grow occur. This shallower creek bed will not be the same as the current down cutting creek bed, which is allowing the stream to travel at a high velocity. The stream will be able to reach and expand into the natural flood plane, which in return reduces the amount of erosion being caused by the faster moving stream.

When college and community members addressed the issues of erosion and erosion control, a friendship and agreement were met. The land owners were content about the decision made and were all required to sign a letter of intent and are to sign a Con-

servation Easement, which will place regulations on the land and the use of the land. The process has been long and interesting and the landowners are taking all in stride. "The Cooperative Extension Service has been educating the owners about the stream and the course that it will take; also the aspects on maintaining a healthy aquatic environment in the local community," said Calabria. The neighbors of the college that are involved are more that happy to be working with the state and the college in forming a more stable area.

The landowners are satisfied that the state is granting the money for the project, that their land is in good hands, and that it is no longer being swept away with the King's Creek flow. All owners will receive a new portion of land starting at the center of the creek bed moving outward toward their property. In return Brevard College will receive land for a learning lab. This lab will be used for purposes of outdoor education on stream management, aquatic systems, habitat biodiversity, and the naturalization of the land. Brevard College has decided to implement the teaching policies that it has been educating students with and is starting to naturalize the campus.

The nearly \$250,000 project will under go construction efforts earlier this summer and has a proposed two month construction period, which will make the creek and the community healthier. Calabria, head overseer of the project and my informant, had this to say about the project: "We just want to restore it to a natural functioning stream system and with the efforts by Brevard College hopefully we will be able to reflect more of the Southern Appalachian plant species. Thanks to all whom have been cooperative and involved in this process." So it seems that King's Creek will resume its original natural curvy shape and the process will result in a more naturalistic environment. Friends of the creek, no worries, the creek will remain flowing for our community, remaining a vibrant vein for our campus providing life and energy.

