

The News-Journal

If it happened, it's news to us

50¢

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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

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Three years later, still no western Hoke park DOT slow to fulfill promise to build park on land set aside as preserve

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

In January 2002, the 2,500-acre Callo-way tract was dedicated in western Hoke as a nature preserve for the endangered red cockaded woodpecker. It was also

pledged as a future site for a five-acre county park at no cost to Hoke taxpayers, according to N.C. Department of Transportation officials.

Three years later, Hoke officials are concerned that promise has never been fulfilled even though The Nature Con-

servancy, conservation manager of the land, has urged the DOT to complete the park as planned. The park, the first that would exist in western Hoke, is supposed to include rustic picnic areas and restrooms. Extending beyond the boundaries of the park, which would

be surrounded by long leaf pines, DOT officials said Hoke families could enjoy recreational opportunities such as hiking, bird watching, and horseback riding on existing trails.

This concession was requested by Hoke commissioners to compensate for

the potential loss of \$25 million in direct and indirect tax revenue after development was banned on the preserve, removing it from the tax rolls in 2001.

Although a request to rake the pine straw from the pines for profit to the county (See PARK, page 7A)

Water for growth may present crisis

Projects aren't good for grant to fund water for eastern growth

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke commissioners were flooded with some bad news from Lumberton engineer Lacey Koonce in his update on the proposed phase 5 of the Hoke regional water system. The county may not be eligible to receive any grant funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to construct the \$99 million project, according to Koonce.

"I am disappointed because this is a negative picture," Koonce said on Monday evening at the commissioners' meeting.

"You are still short on water supply for what it will take for your growth in the next five to 10 years.

"Without adding more lines, it would still take about \$3.4 million for increasing the supply and treatment and about \$1.4 million for more storage tanks."

Hoke's utility department and contracts with the Public Works Commission in Fayetteville are already enabling the county to supply water to 90 percent of its residents. With plans for additional wells, tanks and some new lines, the project would increase the water capacity to the remaining 10 percent of county residents using private wells, and it would also enhance the water pressure as more subdivisions are constructed, according to Koonce.

Hoke's first three phases for regional water projects were paid by grants, but phase 4 is still being repaid after a loan was previously obtained. Koonce warned that postponing phase 5 might cut back the capability for growth in the Rockfish area. However, Koonce said, it is more financially feasible for the county to supply its own water rather than purchasing it elsewhere.

West Gate, a planned community of 750 homes on Lindsay and Adcock roads, is one (See WATER, page 3A)



Jean Powell shows the site for her dream cabin in the pines she hopes to build some day.

Some landowners want to keep green space By selling development rights they hope to keep land, and keep it unspoiled

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Some landowners in northern Hoke County treasure the natural state of their land, and are seeking ways to protect it without selling off parcels for subdivisions or commercial enterprises. They are willing participants in protecting Hoke's natural resources on their own land, partnering with conservation groups.

Julian Johnson III, a farmer and northern Hoke landowner, and his wife, Margaret Johnson, are some of the pioneers in conservation efforts currently underway in Hoke. For the first time in Hoke's history, Johnson sold a conservation easement on 540 acres of his land to The Nature Conservancy last year, but the land is not tax exempt from the county. Johnson perceives his choice as a win-win situation for his family, which still

owns the land, and the county, which benefits from tax revenue. The Johnsons' land borders the Fort Bragg reservation and Rockfish Creek.

Jean Powell, retired Hoke district attorney and current county commissioner, is a landowner with property also bordering the Fort Bragg reservation and Rockfish Creek. Her land adjoins the Johnsons' property. Powell also willingly sold conservation rights

on the 146 acres of land she owns to The Nature Conservancy. Her property remains on the tax rolls in Hoke, but she has agreed to not develop her land.

Johnson's concept

Johnson said the advantage to him is that the land will remain in his family in a natural state for generations to come, but they would continue to reside on the land, benefit from timbering, improve (See UNSPOILED, page 7A)

This Week



Teen loves ropin' and ridin'
page 1B

Stewart is Wachovia
Principal pick
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McLaughlin House
100 year celebration
planned
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Hoke High
holds town meetings
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Purchase of Upchurch land protects wildlife, Bragg

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

In an ambitious land acquisition, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission has applied for grants from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund to acquire 938 acres of Hoke land.

Planning to protect the "integrity" of military training missions with a buffer and to improve

land use quality, the Wildlife Commission would form a larger conservation corridor around Fort Bragg's southern perimeter, according to Wib Owen, section chief for NCWRC in Raleigh.

Located just off June Johnson Road in northern Hoke, the vast Upchurch property near the Raeford airport is the site of the preservation effort. Owen said the Wildlife Commission is seek-

ing \$2.3 million to finalize the transaction.

"We hope to receive \$723,350 from Clean Water, and the remainder of the funds are being sought through a grant from the Natural Heritage Trust Fund," Owen said. "The Nature Conservancy already owns 89 acres of the Upchurch property. However, they are not permitted to apply for conservation funds from the

Natural Heritage because they are not a state agency.

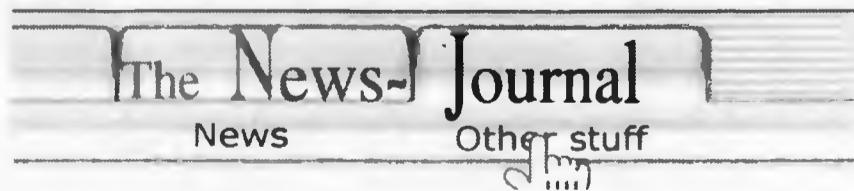
"So the N.C. Wildlife agency is applying for it instead, partnering to manage the land with The Nature Conservancy."

Raeford businessman Gene Carter, proprietor of Upchurch Milling Co., a land-holding firm, confirmed the sale is pending. According to the terms, the Wildlife Commission has been granted a

purchase option for the property, averaging a price of \$2,475 per acre.

"This project rises to the top as one of our priorities," Owen said. "We actually have a pretty aggressive land acquisition program statewide right now."

Bordering the military base for two-and-a-half miles, the Upchurch tract of land remains (See LAND, page 4A)



By KEN MACDONALD
Publisher

Next month, my truck will be 11 years old.

We've been through a lot together: toting children around town to get ice cream, driving to varied sailing destinations, exploring distant camping venues pretending we had four wheel drive.

It's one of those extended cab compact models with the two small - or should I say

too small - seats in the back. When I first bought the truck, my two children fit nicely back there, which allowed us and two of their friends to go fishing or to movies.

True, it is only a four-cylinder, which means don't turn the air conditioner on unless your seatbelt is good and tight, and don't even think about passing anybody unless they're Amish.

But overall she has been a good friend, hard worker and trusty companion.

(See OTHER STUFF, page 7A)

Two arrested in murder of woman believed also betrayed and robbed

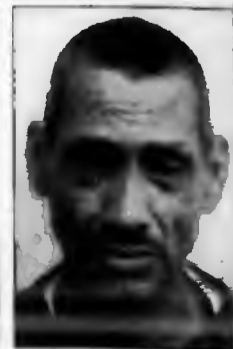
By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Barely one week after a west Hoke mother, April Michelle Pate, was fatally shot in what was suspected to "not be a random crime," detectives from the Hoke Sheriff's Office charged two suspects in connection with her murder, according to Sheriff Hubert Peterkin.

"Within minutes after the home invasion, we were investigating events around her shooting," Peterkin said.



Kelvin Ray Smith



Tony Locklear

"It was not baffling to us because we (See TWO ARRESTED, page 4A)