

Wet Ash Snagging Project Gets Funding

BY SUSAN USHER

Selective clearing and snagging this year of an 8.5-mile segment of Wet Ash Swamp and its two main tributaries are expected to ease flooding of farm and timber lands in the swamp's 22.8-acre drainage area.

Following three years' effort, Brunswick County learned this week it will receive a two-thirds matching grant of \$32,560 from the state to help finance the \$48,840 project. A hearing on the proposal was held more than a year ago at the Waccamaw Community Building.

Darry Somersett, director of operations management for the county, said Monday that as soon as his office receives formal notification of the grant, staff will begin obtaining easements from property owners so that the work can begin.

The goal of the project, which will be performed by a private contractor hired by the county, is to restore normal stream flow in order to reduce flooding and to control mosquitos. The work will be similar to that done on Juniper Creek in 1985 with federal funds. It will begin at the upstream ends of Mill Branch and South Prong and extend downstream to the Waccamaw River.

Wet Ash Swamp is a small blackwater stream that flows east to west from its origin in the Green Swamp through a wooded swamp corridor to the Waccamaw River, with South Prong and Mill Branch its main tributaries.

Long-time residents say flooding has always been a problem, but that in recent years it has been more frequent, of longer duration and with higher floodwater levels.

Run-Off Increased

An assessment made by the N.C. Division of Water Resources attributes this to more rapid stormwater run-off from the gridwork of ditching on timber plantations in the Green Swamp, a dramatic increase in beaver activity and an increasing load of stream snags—mainly wind-blown trees from Hurricane Diana in 1984. In fact, a major outlet ditch from the swamp timber plantations empties in the head of Mill Branch Swamp.

Somersett said the county had been trying ever since Hurricane Diana to obtain funding for a snagging project on Wet Ash Swamp.

But there have been even earlier attempts to improve its carrying capacity.

Back in the late 1960s, the Soil Con-

servation Service studied the swamp for a possible channelization project, but it never came about because easements from property owners could not be obtained.

However, most, if not all, of the property owners along the swamp and its two tributaries have signed petitions supporting the current project.

The swamp's natural carrying capacity has declined over the past 30 years because of the grid-ditching of the Green Swamp into timber plantations, according to the N.C. Division of Water Resources. "In its natural condition, the (Green) swamp, underlain by a thick layer of peat, could absorb a vast amount of rainfall like a sponge and slowly release it to Wet Ash Swamp as well as several other outflowing streams."

This reduced downstream flood levels and helped maintain the level of flow during the dry summer season.

As a consequence of the grid-ditching, it continues, "water flows out of the swamp much more rapidly after a storm event than prior to the ditching, creating the potential for higher downstream flood peaks."

Where the channel could not handle high-velocity stormwater, parallel channels have formed, which in summer are too shallow to support fish, but are "prime mosquito breeding grounds." In such instances, the main channel is scheduled for snagging.

Wet Ash project is expected to have no significant environmental impact. Most of the work will be performed from a barge-mounted winch; the rest by hand labor, by a private contractor hired by the county.

"People need to realize we won't be able to work on it dead-ahead," Somersett stressed. The Wildlife Resources Commission has asked that work not be allowed during periods of "peak biological activity."

And, in order to preserve wildlife habitat, the Commission will designate which trees may be cut from along stream banks, limiting it to only those in danger of falling into the stream, and will help in managing the area's beaver population.

While most farmers in the area see the beavers as nuisances that damaged crop and timber lands with their impoundments, according to the Commission, the beavers have improved the habitat of the swamp, helped restore some of its former

flood retention capacity and collected sediment washed from crop and timberlands.

Some beaver dams may be removed;

in those that are allowed to remain, corrugated pipes may be inserted so that the level of water in the impoundments can be controlled.

Piver Trial Wrapping Up In New Hanover County

BY RAHN ADAMS

Defense testimony began Tuesday in the New Hanover County trial of an Ash man accused of murdering two Wilmington men last October—one in Wilmington, the other in Brunswick County.

Rayford Clayton Piver, 42, was being tried in New Hanover County Superior Court on a first-degree murder charge stemming from the October 6, 1987, shooting death of Nick Patelos outside a Wilmington bar.

The defendant will be tried later this year in Brunswick County Superior Court for the October 6, 1987, murder of Michael Edward Baker, whose body was found near U.S. 17 at Grissetown.

In Brunswick County, Piver's trial will probably not be held before the June session of Superior Court, said 13th District Attorney Mike Easley last week.

He added that the outcome of the New Hanover County murder trial will not change his handling of the Brunswick County case.

"Whether they win, lose or draw (in New Hanover County), we'll be seeking the death penalty (in Brunswick)," Easley said last Thursday. "To do any less would minimize the rights of the victim here."

According to the New Hanover County Clerk of Court's office, the state rested its case Tuesday morning. Piver, who had pleaded not guilty, took the witness stand on his own behalf later in the day. Defense testimony was expected to continue at least through Wednesday (March 16).

Testimony in the New Hanover County trial began last Wednesday, with Judge Bradford Tillery presiding. Piver was represented by Wilmington attorneys Richard Miller and Susan Sutton. Assistant 5th District Attorney John Carriker prosecuted the case.

The defendant's court-appointed attorneys in Brunswick County are

Rex Gore and Michael Ramos.

Piver was arrested by the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department on Oct. 6, 1987, within hours of the two shootings.

According to a spokesman for the N.C. Department of Corrections, Piver's arrest came only three months after his release from prison on a murder conviction.

Court records in Brunswick and New Hanover counties show that Piver was given a 30-year prison sentence in 1973 after he was convicted of armed robbery and murder charges in connection with the May 1972 shooting death of Bobby Hamilton, a Wilmington service station attendant whose body was found in Brunswick County.

Piver was released from the Department of Corrections on July 7, 1987.

Armed Robbery

(Continued From Page 1)

County Jail, Gause said. Columbus County Sheriff Bill Rhodes said last Thursday that Godwin is a suspect in "five or six (armed robberies) within the past 90 days" in Columbus County.

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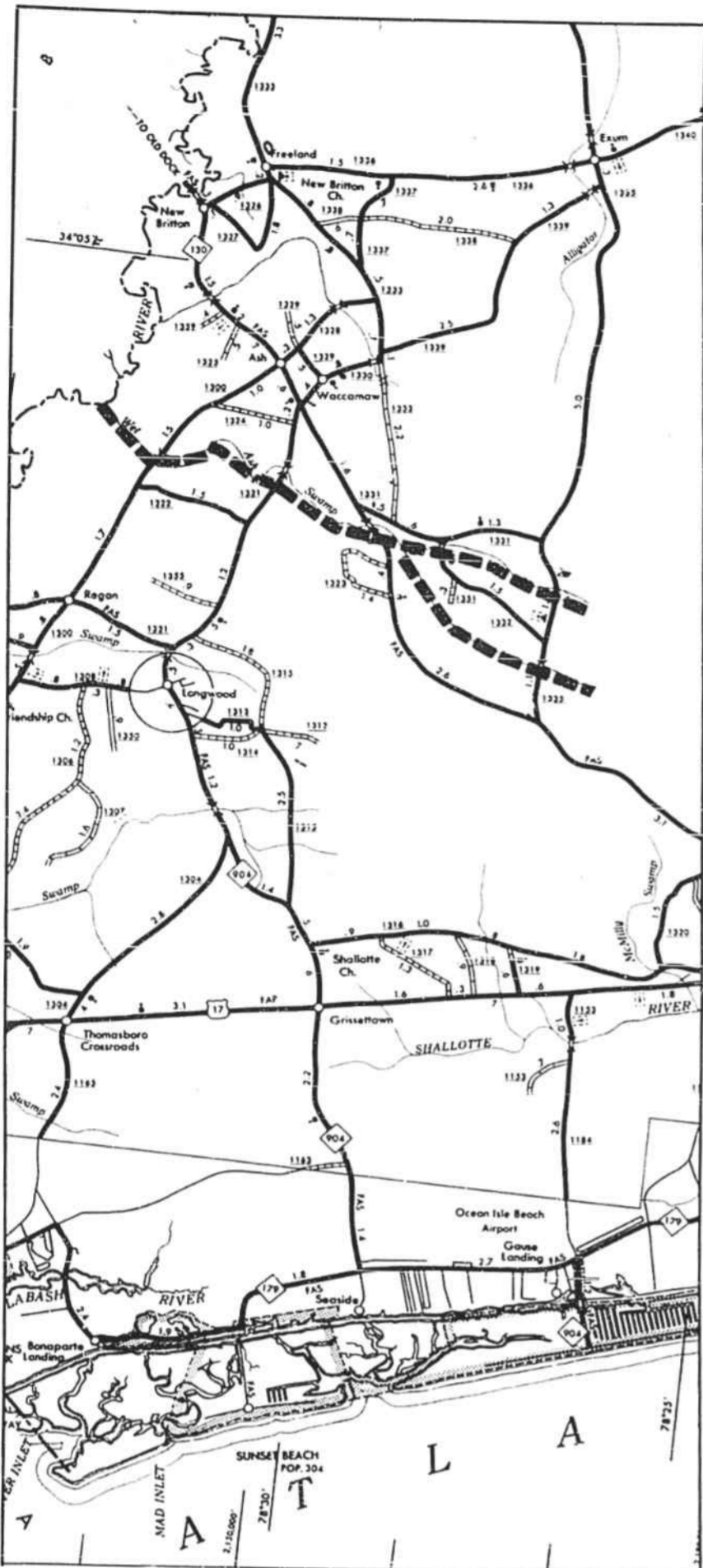
HEALTH INSURANCE

to help pay hospital-surgical bills

JUNIOR & TEEN MISS CONTEST

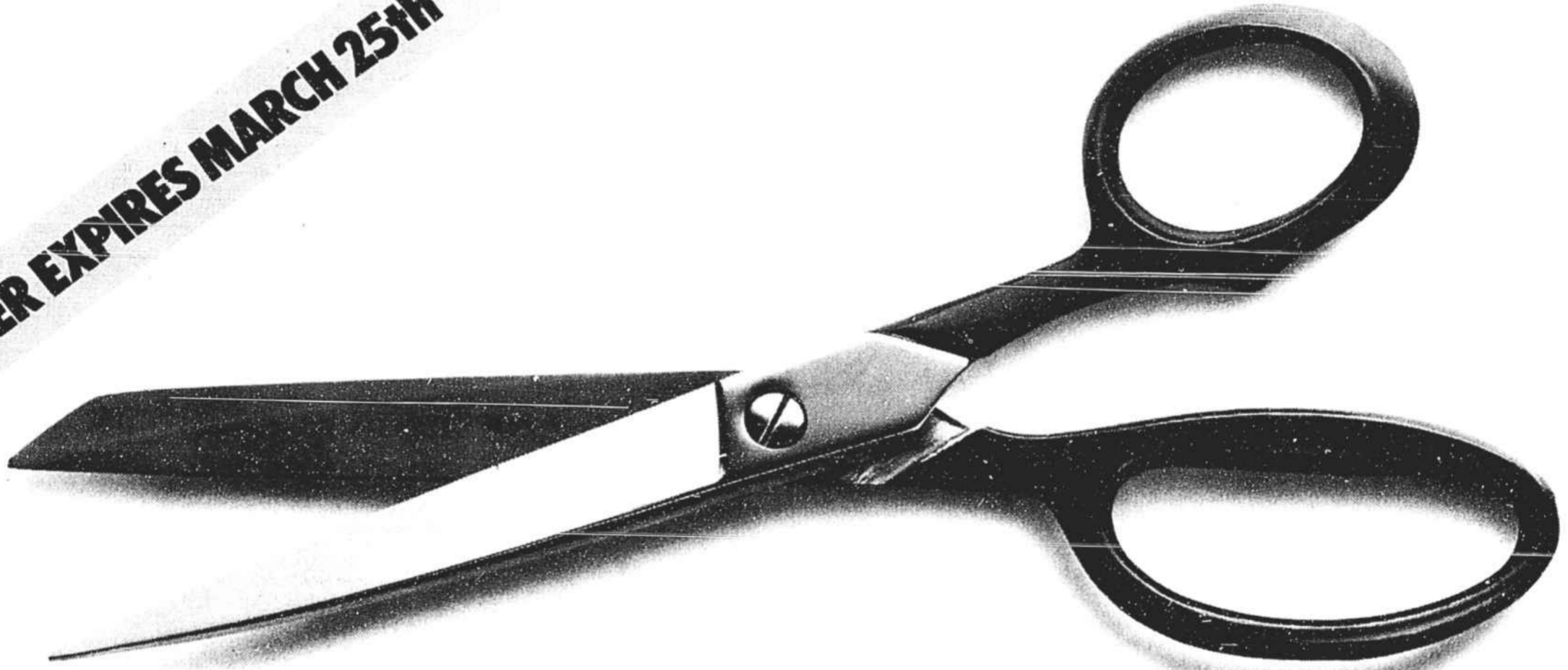
Open to Brunswick County girls 9-17 years. To be held April 16 at Shallotte Middle School. Sponsored by Miss Brunswick Islands Pageant, to benefit Hope Harbor Home. Contact Sarah or Robin Farmer.

754-7428 after 6 PM



A STATE- AND COUNTY-FUNDED snagging and clearing project on Wet Ash Swamp, South Prong and Mill Branch is expected to ease flooding and mosquito problems in the drainage area. The area is marked with a heavy line on above map.

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