

N.C. Coastal Resources Commission To Study Environmental Protection Of Proposed Mine Site

BY ERIC CARLSON
The N.C. Coastal Resources Commission agreed Friday to proceed with preliminary studies that could put strict environmental controls on 5,000 acres of land near Southport, including the proposed Martin Marietta limestone quarry site.

Applicants say the property should be designated an Area of Environmental Concern (AEC) to protect several rare plant habitats and the fragile Walden Creek Estuary, one of the state's primary fin fish nurseries.

Opponents, including Martin Marietta and the neighboring Military Ocean Terminal at Sunny Point (MOTSU), say the area is adequately protected by existing regulations.

The area proposed for special protection lies between N.C. 87/133 and the Cape Fear River and includes 631 acres of Martin Marietta's property and more than 1,500 acres of MOTSU land.

On the second day of a three-day meeting at Sea Trail Plantation in Sunset Beach, the CRC's Planning and Special Issues Committee heard comments on both sides of the issue.

Rosetta Short of Long Beach, the CRC Advisory Council member who filed the application, told the group to "please forget the mining permit" currently being sought by Martin Marietta. She insisted that estuary and the Castle Hayne Aquifer beneath it are "fragile resources" that deserve AEC protection.

"I'm not here to address any permits. That will take care of itself, since it appears that it will be de-



MARTIN MARIETTA Aggregates Environmental Affairs Director John Long tells members of the Coastal Resources Commission that the land surrounding Walden Creek Estuary should not be declared an Area of Environmental Concern. The area proposed for protection includes portions of the company's proposed limestone mine site.

nied," Short said. "I have submitted this application as a concerned citizen who has lived here for 18 years and seen our water resources diminished."

"This area contains eight rare plant species, three rare animal species, two rare natural communities and one significant natural area," Short said. "That aquifer controls the ecological balance of the entire area. It needs an AEC designation."

Also speaking in support of the application was Robert Quinn of the Brunswick Mining Awareness Committee, a citizens group seeking to keep Martin Marietta from opening its quarry.

Quinn outlined the threat he feels mining would have on the Walden

Creek Estuary, a group of five tidal streams and marshes that has been designated a "primary nursery" by the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries. He said limestone dust from the proposed mine will alter the natural acidity of the water, making it unsuitable for the growth of young fish.

"Large quantities of the fin fish that support our commercial fishermen for hundreds of miles are the harvest of the fish that develop in the upper reaches of Walden Creek Estuary," Quinn said. "Our sport fishing and tourist industry thrive due to the combination of natural beauty, history and replenishment of marine life that this estuarine system provides for us."

John Long, Martin Marietta's director of environmental affairs, told the CRC that the lands proposed for AEC protection "are not a unique, complex natural area" and insisted that the process of coastal management was being "co-opted" by people whose sole mission is to stop his company from mining there.

He noted that the proposed AEC is "zoned as a heavy industrial corridor and is in fact heavily industrialized," including 40 percent of MOTSU's property. The area "hardly meets the criteria of an area that has remained unchanged by human activity," nor does it seem to qualify as

a fragile natural and cultural resource area, Long said.

"If this area needed environmental protection, it should have been sought before Sunny Point, before Pfizer and Archer Daniels Midland, before CP&L's nuclear plant, before development and before our application for a mining permit," he said.

Long listed the permits that Martin Marietta will have to obtain before it can open its quarry and noted that 11 state regulatory offices are studying the company's mining proposal. Several of those agencies have recommended denial of the company's application for a mining permit.

Martin Marietta is studying ways of extracting limestone by drilling and blasting under water, which Long said would solve most of the problems associated with the company's current plan to pump 10 million gallons of water a day out of the quarry pit as it flows in from the Castle Hayne Aquifer.

"It may not work," Long said. "If it doesn't work, we'll go away."

As a result of the CRC's decision Friday, the Division of Coastal Management will prepare a preliminary study of the AEC proposal for consideration at the commission's next meeting May 26-27, when the CRC will decide whether a formal study should be undertaken.



CRC STAFF member Rich Shaw and Rosetta Short of Long Beach explain to the Coastal Resources Commission her application to declare the Walden Creek Estuary an Area of Environmental Concern.

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