

# State: Too Early To Set Aside Cash To Buy Bird Island

BY SUSAN USHER

No money towards public purchase to conserve Bird Island will be included in the state budget legislators are now working to complete, but inclusion in a future budget is likely.

"It's too early yet, without some willingness to sell. "It's hard to get money now when there are other projects ready to go," said Rep. E. David Redwine (D-Brunswick). He introduced the bill calling for \$1 million to be set aside in a reserve fund in case the opportunity arose to purchase the island during the coming year. Redwine said the Bird Island legislation has won him more "positive feedback" and interest within the legislature and in the state media "than about anything else" he's done.

While the money isn't there now, Redwine said he's been assured that when the time is right, money will be made available.

The Bird Island project is far from "ready to go," as its owner continues to pursue permits necessary for the barrier island's possible development, a process also expected to help determine a realistic market price for the property, no matter how it might be used.

With state and federal agencies requiring extensive environmental studies as part of the application

process, it could be one or several years before Price and others have answers to their questions.

Straddling the North Carolina-South Carolina state line between Sunset Beach and Little River Inlet, Bird Island is one of the last undeveloped barrier islands off North Carolina's southern coast and the Bird Island Preservation Society would like it to remain that way. The society organized nearly two years ago, after owner Janie Pace Price began seeking permits to develop Bird Island.

Price's attorney, Glen Dunn of Raleigh, is tentatively scheduled to meet July 19 with Sunset Beach Town Council to discuss, again, an earlier request to relax zoning of the island to allow greater overall density and other changes.

The deadline for appealing the zoning decision is past; however, Dunn is expected to reiterate a request to the town council to reconsider its action.

Price's plans for the island are evolving, from an initial proposal for a small family compound to a larger scale project that consultants say would make development more economically feasible. Price hasn't ruled out the possibility of selling Bird Island for conservation purposes if an acceptable offer is made.

Recently another of the agencies that will review Price's plans for the island has called for a complete environmental review.

In December, after plans for access to the island were modified to eliminate a causeway, removing the project from the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which had said it would need an environmental review before considering the permit application.

In April, the Division of Coastal Management advised Price the state would require an environmental study, since results of that federally-required study would no longer be available and the project would have potential impact on public trust waters, wetlands and land.

On June 6, the new lead federal review agency, the U.S. Coast Guard, announced that it will require a full environmental impact statement or EIS.

"An EIS is designed to look at the entire project," said Linda Gilliam, project director with the U.S. Coast Guard 5th District Bridge Section in Portsmouth, Va.

It is being required in part because the property is a sensitive barrier island and possible home to at least one endangered species, and also "to cover all the bases so no one will say later, 'You should have done one,'"

said Gilliam. "It saves all that time and is a simpler process. It avoids delays, covers everything and makes everybody happy."

The Coast Guard is accepting comments on its decision through July 19. Written comments may be sent to Commander (OB), 5th Coast Guard District, 431 Crawford Street, Portsmouth, Va. 23704.

John Parker, permitting coordinator for the N.C. Division of Coastal Management, said that since a federal agency is now requiring an environmental study, the state isn't likely to require a separate study unless the federal study excludes consideration of the uplands of the marsh-island complex.

"We don't want to put them through it twice; it would not be fair to them," he said.

The proposed private bridge to Bird Island from Sunset Beach would be 5,000 feet long. "This is going to be quite an exercise," said Parker. "We've never had one that long."

The Bird Island Protection Society, meanwhile, is continuing its efforts to educate the public on the fragility and beauty of the island through regular walks on its public beach and boat tours of the surrounding marsh. Schedules are posted on public accessways on the island.

# More Spent Fuel Shipments To Local Ports Possible Under 40-Year Plan

BY SUSAN USHER

Continuing shipments of spent nuclear fuel from foreign research reactors through the U.S. Army's Sunny Point Military Ocean Terminal near Southport and/or the North Carolina State Port at Wilmington would be a possibility under several alternatives being considered by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) for long-term management of spent nuclear fuels.

A draft Environmental Impact Statement issued last week examines a series of alternatives that include taking no action, decentralization, regionalization or centralization of all spent nuclear fuel handling.

Spent fuel is nuclear fuel that has been removed from a reactor after irradiation.

The purpose of DOE's spent fuel management program is to provide interim storage and management of fuel until its ultimate disposition; stabilize the fuel as needed for safe storage and to protect human health; increase storage capacity by replacing facilities that cannot meet standards and provide additional capacity for newly generated spent nuclear fuel; conduct research and development to support safe storage or ultimate disposition; and examine fuel generated by the Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program.

The department is responsible for fuel generated by DOE facilities, naval reactors, university and foreign research reactors using fuel generated in this country, several special-case commercial reactors and miscellaneous generators.

Its goal is to reduce risk of accident during transport or storage and to minimize release of radionuclides to the environment.

Most DOE spent fuel is stored at three locations, Hanford Site in Washington State, Idaho National Engineering Laboratory and Savannah River Site near Aiken, S.C. Small quantities are stored at almost 50 other sites.

The environmental assessment will help the department determine whether to leave the fuel where it is or to consolidate its storage at fewer sites, perhaps even a single site, to improve management efficiency.

According to the draft EIS, current spent fuel storage locations in North Carolina include a university,

and potentially Sunny Point and the State Port at Wilmington. They are among five ports designated as potential ports of entry for shipments from foreign reactors under the department's current "urgent relief" program. The other ports are Charleston, S.C., Savannah, Ga., and Jacksonville, Fla.

Under several of DOE's options for the 40-year period in question, shipments from the Wilmington-Southport area to Savannah River Site would continue beyond the two-year urgent return shipping window, and in some scenarios, increase:

**Decentralized or 1992-93 Planning Basis:** If storage were decentralized, 320 shipments of spent fuel from foreign reactors is anticipated through up to six East Coast ports, including the two Cape Fear River ports. Most generators would only ship spent nuclear fuel in limited amounts to permit their continued operations.

**Regionalization:** Shipments would depend on whether fuel was

distributed based on fuel type or geography. If by type, then all aluminum-clad fuel non-defense production spent fuel would be shipped to the Savannah River Site. The East Coast ports of entry would handle up to 580 shipments from foreign research reactors.

If by geography, shipment activity through a specific East Coast port of entry could depend on whether Oak Ridge Reservation in Tennessee, or Savannah River Site in South Carolina were chosen as the eastern regional site.

**Centralization:** All spent nuclear fuel from all sites would be shipped to a central DOE facility for storage, stabilization as needed for storage. The number of shipments from existing DOE and other storage sites would be highest (5,600 plus 580 U.S. Navy fuel shipments), and the risk of accident highest, though very slight, if Savannah River were chosen for the central site.

In addition to D.H. Hill Library at NCSU in Raleigh, complete drafts

of the EIS are available for review at Department of Energy Reading Rooms at DOE Headquarters in Washington, D.C., and at the DOE Savannah River Operations Office, Aiken, S.C. Copies of the draft EIS, summary document or reference documents are available by calling 1-800-682-5583 between 6 a.m. and 11 p.m. Mountain Daylight Time.

Public comments on the draft EIS will be incorporated in the final environmental impact statement, which is expected to be issued by April 30, 1995. No decisions will be made until the final EIS is issued and a 30-day waiting period has elapsed. Then a formal record of decision will be issued.

Public comments will be accepted through Sept. 30. Written comments should be sent to: Public Comments on SNF EIS, Attention: Thomas L. Wichmann, U.S. Dept. of Energy, Idaho Operations Office, P.O. Box 3189, Idaho Falls, ID 83403-3189.

Comments may also be stated

over the telephone or transmitted by facsimile by calling 1-800-682-5583, or presented at any of 20 public hearings scheduled nationwide. None are scheduled in North Carolina. A hearing will be held in Newport News, Va., and Portsmouth, Va., on July 18; in Savannah, Ga., Aug. 23; and in North Augusta, S.C., Aug. 25. More information on the hearings is available by calling 1-800-682-5583.

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