

# Natural Heritage Trust visits Point is made for Cape Fear preservation

By Holly Edwards  
Feature Editor

Members of the Natural Heritage Trust Board of Directors trekked across the southeastern point of Bald Head Island last week as the Smith Island Land Trust presented its case for a \$500,000 grant proposal submitted to the state agency.

SILT needs \$5 million to purchase an additional 21 acres of property at Cape Fear and must come up with half that amount by the end of this year, explained SILT president Nancy Maguire.

The N. C. Division of Parks and Recreation has recommended that Cape Fear be deemed a dedicated nature preserve -- the highest degree of protection available for the land -- if SILT turns the land over to state ownership, she said.

SILT has already purchased 11.5 acres at the point for \$1.5 million, most of which was contributed by island residents, and is now seeking both government and institutional grants to come up with the \$2.5 million it needs by December. The \$2.5-million balance would be due in December, 1999.

North Carolina state parks representative David Hannah told members of the Natural Heritage Trust that Bald Head Island is home to 20 rare species of plants or animals including five federally protected species, is the only example of a southern maritime evergreen forest, has the largest concentrations of loggerhead turtle nests in the state, and is the only cape in the state that is not protected through public ownership.

**'Why should they give away the most economically viable and worthwhile piece of property on the island when the development has already lost huge amounts of money?'**

**Ken Kirkman  
Bald Head attorney**

If SILT cannot purchase the property the family of island developer Kent Mitchell has plans to construct multi-family units near Cape Fear.

While members of the Natural Heritage Trust said they were impressed by the uniqueness of the land, several asked why the Mitchells didn't simply donate a portion of their property for preservation.

The Mitchells contributed \$250,000 to SILT for the purchase of the first 11.5 acres, but thus far the family has declined to donate land outright.

Ken Kirkman, an attorney and spokesman for the Mitchell family, said the Mitchells have offered the land to SILT at a "discounted price" even though the family has lost money on their Bald Head Island real estate venture.

"Why should they give away the most economically viable and worthwhile piece of property on the island when the development has already lost huge amounts of money?" Kirkman asked. "This development has been a significant money-loser for the Mitchells."

The Mitchells purchased the island development from Walter Davis in 1983 for roughly \$15 million.

SILT offered the Mitchell family \$14 million for 93 acres in 1996. The family refused and countered by offering the land trust an option to buy 31.5 acres for \$6.5 million, with \$1.5 million due immediately, \$2.5 million due in December, 1998, and \$2.5 million due in December, 1999.

If SILT obtains funding to purchase the entire 31.5-acre tract, Maguire said it will initiate an effort to purchase an additional 61.5 acres of adjacent undeveloped property.

All property purchased by SILT would be managed by the state Division of Parks and Recreation as part of the Bald Head Island State Natural Area, and only low-level recreational activities would be allowed at the site.

In addition to the Natural Heritage Trust grant, SILT is seeking \$1.3 million in grants from state, federal and private organizations.

One hundred seventy-three acres of maritime forest along Federal Road was purchased for preservation in 1992 with a combination of funds from the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Natural Heritage Trust.

## Policy adopted last May

# County water tap-on fees could be enacted

By Terry Pope  
County Editor

It is getting closer to the date when a controversial mandatory water tap-on policy for county residents could take effect.

A letter outlining the policy and fees for residential water customers was leaked to county commissioners Monday, but it was quickly sent to the county Utility Operations Board (UOB) for further review.

Last May, commissioners adopted

an ordinance, after a series of heated debates and public hearings, to require all property owners served by a county water line to pay for the accessibility of that line to their property. Residents served by a line must either connect their home or pay bi-monthly availability service fees to offset associated costs and the benefits derived, such as a fresh public water supply or fire protection and lower insurance rates.

The ordinance was approved May 5, 1997, and will become effective

May 5 of this year. County staff members are preparing for public reaction by drafting a letter that explains the mandatory tap-on policy and why it is necessary. Angry residents filled the public assembly building at the county government center last May to protest the proposed fees. Many said they did not want county water and would refuse to pay. Some threatened legal action.

"There has been no formal enactment of the rates," said county attorney Huey Marshall.

But commissioners got a glimpse of what public utilities director Lee Smith has recommended. Commissioners were quick to point out Monday that it should first be reviewed by the UOB. Commissioners say mandatory taps are needed to bring the water system out of the red. Up to \$4 million each year is paid from ad valorem tax dollars to supplement the system that benefits some but not all county residents. Water lines are not routed into all communities.

"I don't want to do anything with this until the UOB has had a chance to review the rates," said District 1 commissioner Don Warren of Shallotte, who serves as liaison to the UOB.

The UOB will meet April 13. County manager Jim Varner said Monday there is a staff meeting this week to discuss the different rates and the policy up for review. The ordinance approved last year gives commissioners authority to enact an

**Up to \$4 million each year is paid from ad valorem tax dollars to supplement the system that benefits some but not all county residents**

availability fee, whether homeowners choose to connect to the system or not. But such fees do not automatically go into effect. Commissioners could still decide not to enact the policy.

County government has been in the water business for 20 years, but with no mandatory tap policy the system that should operate as a self-supporting enterprise fund has run

into financial trouble. Growth of the system, coupled with more stringent treatment and monitoring requirements, has affected the cost to treat and provide water, prompting commissioners to dip into property taxes to supplement the system.

Smith's plan also includes a financing schedule so persons can pay the tap fees over a period of time. If approved as presented, special rates would be in effect from May 5 to August 31. For an average home (served by three-quarter-inch

line) the tap fee would be \$275, the point-of-service fee \$450 and meter deposit \$25, for a total cost of \$750. Customers not electing to connect to the water system would receive a bill for the availability of service for each bi-monthly cycle of \$11 per month.

The utilities department would allow residents to finance the tap fee over a period of seven months or the combined tap and point-of-service fees over a period of 12 months or 25 months.



## Pets of the week

A six-month-old male German shepherd mix with black and tan markings and a docked tail is available for adoption at the Brunswick County Animal Services Center. He is said to be healthy and very loving. The adoption fee of \$65 includes a physical exam, heartworm tests, neutering, a rabies vaccination and preventive vaccinations at a reduced rate.

A six-month-old male tabby cat also is up for adoption. He has black and tan stripes and is said to be playful and very affectionate. The adoption fee of \$35 includes a physical exam, feline leukemia and FIV tests, neutering, a rabies vaccination and preventive vaccinations at a reduced rate.

The Brunswick County Animal Services Center is open Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Saturday, noon to 3 p.m.; Sunday, 1 to 3 p.m. For further information, persons may call the animal services center toll-free at 800-233-2169.

## Rabies clinics held in county on March 28

Brunswick County residents can have their pets vaccinated at rabies clinics scheduled Saturday, March 28, at six veterinary offices.

The cost of vaccination is \$5. Clinics will be held at the following times and locations:

Southport Animal Hospital, 8 a.m. to noon; Oak Island Animal Hospital, 8 a.m. to noon; Brunswick Animal Hospital at Supply, 8 a.m. to noon; Companion Animal Hospital in Shallotte, 8 a.m. to noon; Leland Veterinary Hospital, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.; Seaside Animal Care in Calabash, 8 a.m. to noon.

For further information persons may call the Brunswick County Animal Services Center toll-free at 800-233-2169.

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