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Environmental Problems Follow 'Land Boom' In Western North Carolina; Wildlife, Streams, Wilderness Areas Threatened By Development Surge

By Jim Dean

Major newspapers across the nation are calling it "the last, big Eastern land boom." They're talking about western North Carolina, and they compare the sprawl of development and real estate speculation with the Florida, Arizona and Southern California booms.

A story in the *Baltimore Sun* in early August is fairly typical. Says the *Sun*, "Land prices have tripled in many areas during the past year and even 'goat land'—a localism for almost vertical rocky hillside covered with trees—may bring more than \$500 an acre.

"We don't know how long it's going to last," says one real estate agent, "but people are not quibbling about terms, and there is no sign of a financial downturn."

Though this may be news to many North Carolinians, particularly those living in the Eastern or Piedmont sections of North Carolina, it is hardly news to western Tar Heels. They have seen gentle valleys and small communities turn almost overnight into rapidly growing tourist centers complete with condominiums, motels, ski resorts, summer vacation home developments and all the neon trappings that go with it.

Feelings in the mountains are mixed, of course, but there is considerable widespread opposition to the "land boom" by local people who do not like to see life styles and familiar landmarks altered so quickly. Many would prefer not to see them changed at all.

There are also serious environmental problems rising as a result of the boom. Huge recreational complexes are ex-

panding into private, near wilderness areas. All too often, there are major losses of wildlife habitat and streams.

The populations of many species of fish and wildlife (bears, turkey, deer and trout for instance) cannot tolerate more than minimal damage to habitat. These species—and many others—will be seriously affected by the rapid development, and may not even survive in some areas where they are now fairly abundant. Already huge inroads have been made on prime near-wilderness areas and wildlife habitat. Sportsmen and conservationists are concerned that if the "land boom" continues at its original, uncontrolled pace, there will be very few suitable large areas for the wildlife to life, and even fewer trout streams.

"It seems to me," observes one native of the region, "that

many of these developments are destroying the very things that attract people to the mountains in the first place. No one really feels any security anymore. It seems that only yesterday I could look out my window in the morning and confidently expect the comforting sight of rolling fields and mountains and the road curving in the distance. It was like a picture postcard, and I don't have to tell you how much it meant to see it everyday. Now, there is a trailer court in the valley, the mountains are carved up in roads and chalets and the road is wrapped up with motels and tourist traps. It makes me sick to see it, but what can I do?"

Very little, actually, and if the prophets are correct, we are only seeing the beginning. One reason the native residents are so helpless is the fact that only a few of the 23 western counties have any sort of effective zoning, which means that no landowner has any real assurance that his property might not someday soon be ringed with mobile homes or sitting next to a new factory or recreational area where the center of attraction is an "old west" gunfight staged hourly seven days a week.

Some see the boom as a good thing, uplifting economic areas long depressed. And yet, most of the natives in these areas prefer their way of life and in no way consider themselves as economically underprivileged.

In addition to the general sprawl of development throughout the western end of the state, there are many new resort cities or recreational areas being developed, some of them huge. Though a very few of them are taking pains to partially protect the environment and aesthetics of the area, most are far more interested in a fast buck. Many of these fast bucks are going to out-of-state developers who have already run out of places to despoil in their own states and are looking for new horizons. Though some of the unwise development is locally funded, much of it originates from out-of-state speculators, particularly from Florida.

Perhaps, as some point out, the land boom in western North Carolina is unavoidable. It is, after all, one of the few remaining large areas in the nation which has not previously felt the blades of hordes of bulldozers. And people in other states along the Eastern Seaboard have become disenchanted with the loss of primitive innocence and natural beauty and are looking for new promised lands. Western North Carolina looms large in the imaginations of those seeking a simpler way of life. Therefore, perhaps some sort of boom is unavoidable.

But it need not result in the same massive destruction that has occurred in other states which have experienced such booms. Statewide Land Use Planning bills are in the hopper, and if a good, strong one is passed, it will help. A law regulating land speculation by out-of-state developers should also be considered. Other states have such laws.

Meanwhile, the state should strongly consider acquiring as much of the unspoiled private land as possible to insure that at least part of the western North Carolina area will still have aesthetic appeal and plenty of fish and wildlife.

There are near wilderness areas—one as large as 40,000 acres (the old Mead Paper Company of Sylva tract now owned by a Florida developer)—that might still be bought and saved. It would be sad indeed if North Carolina proved unable to slow and control the rape of her prime western lands. If we don't act soon, it will be too late, and Tar Heels will have learned nothing and profited less from the bitter lessons in Florida, Southern California and other "landboom" states.

United Fund Contributions Finance Many Programs

By Ashton Chapman

Your tax-exempt contribution to the United Fund in Mitchell or Yancey County, or to the special fund campaigns conducted each year in Avery, help a number of humanitarian agencies to continue functioning in your county. Without such donations as yours, some of the agencies could no longer stand ready to serve you and other residents of your area.

One of the most important of these agencies, and one which always serves the public speedily, cheerfully and without any charge, is the American National Red Cross. The importance of the Red Cross to residents of the Tri-County area is beyond calculation.

Every one of its programs is of great importance. These include the life-saving blood program, school health program, service to military families, lessons in swimming and in water safety, courses in first aid and home nursing, to name some of the most outstanding services.

Although there is never any charge for any of these services it does cost the Mayland Chapter to have the bloodmobile from the Asheville Red Cross Blood Center make each of its scheduled visits to the three counties several times a year, and to maintain a centrally-located office for the three counties in Spruce Pine, including expense of telephone, postage, and other necessities.

Therefore it is important that everyone donate generously to the United Fund in Mitchell, or Yancey County or direct to the annual Red Cross drive in Avery, in order that the Red Cross may continue its valuable free services in the three-county area.

Records in the Chapter's headquarters office show that several Red Cross chapters were organized in the three counties as early as World War I and later disbanded.

Grandfather Mountain Chapter, Elk Park, was chartered on October 23, 1917, with E. R. Mortimer, Chairman. This chapter was disbanded March 28, 1928. The Banner Elk Chapter was chartered November 1, 1917, with Dr. W. C. Tate, Chairman, and this chapter was disbanded March 28,

1928. The Avery County Chapter, Newland, was chartered on January 30, 1928, with T. C. Dellinger, Temporary Chrmn. The Bakersville Chapter, to serve the whole of Mitchell County, was chartered January 7, 1918, with A. R. Gallimore, Chairman. This chapter was disbanded January 13, 1921.

The Mitchell County Chapter in Spruce Pine, was chartered August 27, 1928, with Mrs. W. C. Young, Chairman; the Yancey County Chapter, Bumsville was chartered May 20, 1918, with the Rev. Homer Casto, Chairman. It was disbanded December 8, 1923. A new Yancey County Chapter, Bumsville, was chartered De-

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Donna And John McLain Receive Recognition Awards



Mark Bledsoe Pictured With His Parents, Scoutmaster McLain, And Jack Tessier

Youth Dies Of Accidental Gunshot Wound

Tony Young, 15, of Bumsville, died Saturday at Memorial Mission Hospital in Asheville from a self-inflicted gunshot wound in the chest.

According to Carroll Hensley of the Yancey County Sheriff's Department, the shooting was accidental. Young was apparently attempting to clean a 16-gauge shot gun when it fired.

Hensley said he answered the call around 9 a. m. Saturday from the victim's brother, Tyren Young, requesting that the sheriff's department send an am-

bulance to their home.

Tyren Young told Officer Hensley that his brother was in the bathroom when he said he wanted to clean the shot gun

and asked him to bring it to him. He said he took his brother the gun and returned to the living room and sat down to watch television when he heard the shot.

Rescue Squad Sponsors Show

The Yancey County Rescue Squad will sponsor a country music show and dance Saturday night, September 1, 1973 at 8:00 p. m. in the Bumsville Elementary School gym. The Honeycutt Brothers, Mike Loftis and Southern Country and the Robinson family will be inclu-

ded in the local talent. There will be drawings for door prizes and refreshments will be available. Tickets are \$1.00 in advance from Rescue Squad members and \$1.50 at the door. Children under 12 will be admitted free when accompanied by an adult.

Boy Scouts Receive Awards, Troop Honors Scoutmaster

Last Tuesday night Mark Bledsoe, son of Mr. and Mrs. Carlyle Bledsoe received the Eagle Scout Award. Mark is the third boy from Troop 502 to receive this award which is the highest rank in Scouting. The award was presented by Mr. Jack Tessier, Scoutmaster from Asheville, at a Court of Honor held in the Fellowship Hall of Higgins Memorial Methodist Church.

Boys receiving the Star Scout Award were Jimmy Wilson, son of Mr. and Mrs. Dean Wilson; Tommy Carr, son of Mr. and Mrs. William Carr; Mike Grindstaff, son of Mr. and Mrs. Louie Grindstaff; Doyle Bradford, son of Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Bradford.

Boys receiving the First Class Rank were Todd Bailey, son of Mr. and Mrs. Dick Bailey; Steve Pansley, son of Mr. and Mrs. Sam Pansley.

Boys receiving the Tenderfoot Rank were Sam Young, son of Mr. and Mrs. Earl Young; Doug McLain, son of Mr. and Mrs. John McLain; Jackie Buchanan, son of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Buchanan; Gregg Edge, son of Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Edge; Gregg Westall, son of Mr. and Mrs. Phillip Westall; Jerry Layell, son of Mr. and Mrs. Hebrun Layell, and Bryan Hensley, son of Mr. and Mrs. Ben Hensley.

A large crowd of parents enjoyed a pot-luck meal and slide presentation of the troop's recent 50-mile hike and trip to the National Jamboree in Butler, Pennsylvania prior to the awards banquet.

As part of Tuesday's ceremonies, Scoutmaster Johnny McLain was presented an award by the members of his troop in recognition of all the work he has done for the Troop and the community as a whole.

John McLain has distinguished himself in many capacities in the four years that he and his family have lived in Bumsville. He has been an able and capable leader in his church, having served as a deacon for the past two years. In 1972 he was elected secretary of the Board of Deacons, a position he has faithfully filled. He has been a regular attendee of his church, including Sunday School, Training Union, and prayer meeting. For the past year he has served a president of the Lion's Club,

indicating his interest in community affairs. The Lions Club has grown and accomplished much under his leadership.

By far his most outstanding work since coming to Bumsville has been that with the Boy Scout organization. Combining vast knowledge of the outdoor world with excellent leadership ability, he has led the Boy Scout Troop 502 of Bumsville to a record high in number and interest. The boys have responded to his work with them both because of his capability and because of his sincere interest in them as individuals. Their knowledge and appreciation of the outdoors have been greatly advanced through numerous camping activities and hikes. Emie Howard and Kennie Dayton, two of the boys in his troop, have received their Eagle Awards and Mark Bledsoe received his recently on August 21.

Time invested in the lives of boys, the future men of America, is time well spent, and no man in Bumsville has invested a greater portion of his life in this choice and important activity.

As part of the evenings events, Donna McLain, wife of Scoutmaster Johnny McLain, was also presented with the "Scouter's Wife Award" by the troop members.

During the time the McLain's have been in Yancey County, Donna has been active in community and church work. She has served as Brownie Leader, Junior Leader, and as Troop Committee Member of the Yancey Girl Scouts. She has also been very active as a member of the First Baptist Church in Bumsville.

CAP To Hold Open House

The Mountain Wilderness Civil Air Patrol Squadron will hold an Open House September 1, 2 and 3 at Mountain Wilderness Air Park at Pensacola.

There will be Free Airplane Rides with each \$5.00 donation to the Civil Air Patrol Squadron. Come see Bumsville and area from the air—and support your local CAP Squadron.

Mayland Tech To Conduct Course In Proper Land Use

Mayland Technical Institute, in conjunction with Agricultural Extension Service, ASCS Service, Farmers Home Administration, Soil and Water Conservation and Mitchell County Rural Development Panel will conduct a 20 hour course in proper land usage for developmental purposes. All interested citizens are urged to attend and especially those who are planning any types of developing or participating in property development.

Topics to be discussed will be as follows:
1. How Development has affected our local areas.
2. Land Capabilities

3. Site Planning
 4. Access Road Lay-Out
 5. Fishery Resources
 6. Wildlife Resources
 7. Forestry Resources
 8. Sanitation
 9. Water Resources
 10. Field Trip to be conducted.
 11. County Planning.
- Registration will be at the auditorium of Harris High in Spruce Pine, September 13, 1973. Classes to run through October 16, 1973. Registration will be at 7:00 p. m., and classes will run from 7:00 p. m. to 9:00 p. m. on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. There will be a \$2.00 registration fee per person.