

Bird Island Acquisition Called 'High Priority' For Wildlife Board

BY LYNN CARLSON

The director of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission has told a local preservation group that the acquisition of Bird Island off Sunset Beach "would be a high priority" for the commission.

Bill Ducker of Sunset Beach, chairman of the Bird Island Preservation Society, in late September wrote to Charles R. Fullwood, executive director of the wildlife commission, asking that the commission study the feasibility of acquiring the island as a component of the state's Colonial Waterbird Management Program.

"As one of the first official acts of the Bird Island Preservation Society, we would like to request that the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission's Nongame and Endangered Species Program evaluate Bird Island's values and benefits to wildlife, especially nongame, threatened and endangered species," Ducker's letter said.

Ducker could not be reached for comment.

Fullwood's response included a statement prepared by Tom Henson, nongame staff biologist, providing a

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—Charles R. Fullwood

summary of Bird Island's values to coastal wildlife resources.

"Bird Island would make an excellent complement to the other islands managed in the commission's Colonial Waterbird Management Program," Fullwood said. "The island's adjacent marshes offer potential for migratory waterfowl and rail hunting. Recreational benefits derived from public ownership of the island would include fishing, hunting, bird-watching and a variety of opportunities for nature study."

The biologist's summary says, "Bird Island is the only undeveloped barrier island in Brunswick County

and will become increasingly valuable to wildlife as human activity increases on other beaches. The fight against movement of sand and the resulting loss of housing and development on the other beaches in the county has already rendered them extremely marginal for wildlife species that require beach habitats for their continued existence."

He calls Bird Island "essential" for beach wildlife such as sea turtles, piping plovers and colonial waterbirds.

Henson says the documented nesting of a Kemp's Ridley sea turtle in Brunswick County in 1992 "makes Bird Island a potential nesting site for this most endangered species of sea turtle."

Although Bird Island is frequently referred to as a nesting site for the endangered piping plover, Henson's statement says this has not been documented. However, he stated, "Because piping plovers require washover areas and so-called 'eroded beaches' for nesting, undeveloped natural islands where movement of sand by storms, tides and wind is allowed to take place are important to the species. Wintering piping plovers have been documented on the island, and the mud flats on the inland side appear to be an important feeding area."

In addition, Henson says, endangered wood storks

are known to use Bird Island marshes for feeding and resting, and adds, "Southern Brunswick County is the most northern regular occurrence of these birds."

He says the island is "used for feeding by numerous species of shore birds including some species listed as special concern in the state including the black skimmer, brown pelican, glossy ibis, little blue heron, snowy egret and tricolor heron."

The Bird Island Preservation Society was formed in response to the plans of island owner Janie Pace Price to construct a mile-long bridge and causeway system across Mad Inlet to connect it to Sunset Beach. Price also says she plans to develop 15 one-acre homesites there.

The society states its goal as "protecting and preserving the island, its wildlife, plants, and their habitat." Its steering committee includes State Rep. David Redwine, other Brunswick County residents, and representatives of the Brunswick Bird Club, National Audubon Society, N.C. Coastal Federation, N.C. Coastal Land Trust, and Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association.

Price's proposal is before the N.C. Office of Coastal Management while her agents provide additional information about her bridge and causeway plans.



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Walter Gross of APAC-Carolina Inc. in Supply directs traffic at the Seaside intersection of N.C. 179 and N.C. 904. The crew is under contract with the N.C. Department of Transportation to add left turning lanes for all directions at the busy intersection. Other scheduled improvements are traffic signals, long-sought by Sunset Beach area businesses and officials.

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