

Bird Island Preservation Is Their Goal

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S.C., has seen indications that some type of large cat, possibly a cougar, has nested there in recent years.

Interest in preservation of Bird Island rose sharply last year when development was proposed that would dramatically change the island.

Its owner, Janie Pace Price, filed applications seeking permits to build a 1.10-mile system of bridges and causeway to restore access to the island, specifically to reach a proposed subdivision of a size and density yet to be determined, but referred to in terms of anywhere from 15 single-family homes to several hundred bedroom units in various configurations.

"What they would like is something I'm totally opposed to," said Bill Ducker, Society president. "If development of the island starts, the whole character of Bird Island and Sunset Beach will be entirely different from what it is. I think the island is part of every property at Sunset Beach. We all have a stake in it."

The society organized last October in response to Rep. David Red-

wine's (D-Brunswick) challenge to develop the extensive grassroots support needed to raise funds for purchase of the island.

In a feasibility study for the N.C. General Assembly released this June, the N.C. Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources said acquisition of Bird Island by the state would be appropriate. It proposed maintaining the island in its natural state under the management of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, the agency that administers the Colonial Waterbirds, Nongame & Endangered Species and Conservation Education programs.

"That's the response we were hoping for," said Ducker.

Membership has grown rapidly as word spreads of the society's effort. From 10 members last October, "we're headed toward 1,500 members," treasurer Weddle said in a mid-June interview. "We've got members from California to New York. I'm waiting for some from foreign countries."

The group isn't seeking condemnation of the property and doesn't expect it to be donated for conservation purposes, but has reason to

Guides Lead Nature Walks Along Bird Island's Beach

Guided nature walks are part of the Bird Island Preservation Society's effort to awaken public interest in the natural beauty of the island just west of Sunset Beach.

The walks are led by two members of the Society's "working" board of directors, and typically attract anywhere from one or two to 20 or more participants.

Nature walkers meet at the 40th Street walkover at Sunset Beach, with footgear appropriate for wading on the low tide and walking. Also, you might want to include in your daypack sunscreen, insect repellent and a litter bag.

Choose from these times, dates and themes:

July 201 p.m.Sea Turtles, Minnie Hunt
 July 212 p.m.Shelling, Hunt
 Aug. 246 a.m.Bird Island Past & Present, Frank Nesmith
 Aug. 257 a.m.Sea Turtles, Hunt
 Aug. 31NoonBird Island Past & Present, Nesmith

believe the opportunity to purchase the island will exist once a fair market value is established.

"What we're looking for is a willful seller," said Minnie Hunt, another board member. "Before we have that we need to know what the island's value is."

"She (Mrs. Price) is in the

process of determining that (through the permit application process)."

The island has a tax book value of \$539,000, but if permits are approved for its development that could drive the market value up sharply.

For the society, it's a matter of

working while waiting.

Working to build and strengthen its membership base, to spark public interest in the future of the island, to identify other potential funding sources, and to convince the public that the island's beauty and value as a natural resource is worth a potentially hefty investment.

Membership dues are coming in at a rate that will support continued growth and public education efforts "until the time we can call on our membership for the considerable funds that will be needed to purchase the island," said Ducker.

While waiting for action on the permit applications, newsletters, walks, fair booths and speeches before community groups are all part of the Society's educational efforts.

Hunt and fellow board member Frank Nesmith lead the tours of the island's public beach, a deep love of the island evident as they share information about its history and the plants and animals it shelters.

On its tours, the society stresses respect the owner's private property rights, encouraging visitors to stay at or below the high tide line and not trespass, not to litter, not to trample dunes. To leave no evidence of their passing.

"We encourage everyone to take one of these with them and to use it," added board member Cleo Waldmiller, displaying a litter bag.

An "ornithologically correct" white heron anchors the society's logo on brochures and T-shirts, another effort to increase public awareness of the island's questionable future. While memberships are the largest source of income, T-shirt sales, handled by board member Kim Balbach of Calabash, also help finance the Society's communication efforts. They sell for \$10 and are available at several local stores.

"I think the effort has been successful in terms of numbers, but even more successful in terms of response from the public. We've had very little negative response to what our goals are," said Ducker, who has homes in Florence, S.C., and on Sunset Beach near Madd Inlet. "We've had no developers saying to us that we are anti-development, anti-growth. That means something in Sunset Beach."

As might be expected, membership is strongest among those who visit the Sunset Beach area or who own property there.

Local residents, particular those newer to the area, are among those getting involved, but the Society would like to see even higher local participation. It plans to target much of its future educational efforts in that direction.

"This island is a jewel and a part of Brunswick County's local heritage," said Weddle. "It's a tremendous asset that a lot of people simply aren't aware of."

Memberships in the The Bird Island Preservation Society are \$15 per year, payable by check. Memberships or inquiries should be mailed to the Society, P.O. Box 6368, Sunset Beach, N.C. 28470.

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