



# Cape Fear Firebird

*The Light of Save the Cape*

February 7, 2013

*Nothing that's worthwhile is ever easy. Remember that.*  
–Nicholas Sparks, *Message in a Bottle*

## **Movie, Movie**

The course of events in the last few years has left the North Carolina State Ports Authority, an enterprise agency of the NC Department of Transportation, with nearly 600 acres of undeveloped land just north of Southport. And, alas, considerable debt appertaining thereto.

This, of course, is the site purchased for the North Carolina International Terminal, the deepwater port where the water is not deep. The realization that the project would cost nearly \$5 billion and has no prospect of success has put this away in a bureaucratic closet for another day.

But that 600 acres still looms up East Moore Street, threatening the future of the area. It is zoned for heavy industry, a category that permits the most noxious and unsuitable uses. And that zone includes almost 200 acres of ecologically valuable marshland, and about 400 acres of uplands that could be put to beneficial uses. But Jim Bradshaw, the Brunswick County Economic Development Director, steadfastly and often insists that the property be used for heavy industry.

Nothing could be less suitable. The property is accessible only through the streets of Southport, precluding any use involving significant movement of materials or people. Access by water is impractical—the river there is only two feet deep, and the Corps of Engineers has estimated that making it deep enough for large vessels would cost \$1.2 billion. As for rail access, in 1982 Williams Terminals Company bought the property for a coal terminal, but Carolina Power & Light told Williams it could not tolerate long trains crossing the property of the Brunswick Nuclear Plant. Progress Energy, CP&L's successor, gave the same message to the State Ports Authority in 2010. And we can promise a fight if Mr. Bradshaw or other officials advance plans for something ugly.

So what can be done with a secluded, inaccessible, pristine, and ecologically valuable property to produce revenue for the State Ports Authority and income and opportunity for the community? The answer, dear friends, blew in last July—movies.

The State of North Carolina is committed to the film business. That has been bringing about \$200 million per year to the State in recent years, and *Safe Haven* brought \$15 to 20 million to the region. So far. The release of that movie next week will be a bonanza for months and maybe years.

While the State and the Cape Fear can offer appealing locations for filming, and Screen Gems in Wilmington offers quality support, the missing piece is a large, secluded place for outdoor sets and action scenes—an eastern counterpart of Paramount Ranch or Disney's Golden Oak Ranch.

The Ports Authority has just such a place. And it is certainly available.