



# Cape Fear Firebird

*The Light of Save the Cape*

April 2, 2014

*[P]arks represent an investment in quality of life, an important draw for this area.*  
–Star News, editorial, March 29

## ***The Value of Parks***

As we pitch our plan for a park on the property of the Ports Authority near Southport to public officials, we too often encounter the attitude that parks are just an expense. Rare is the public official with the wisdom to recognize the value of parks, the duty of government to meet this common need of our society. Parks department officials at every level have the same problem. Obtaining and keeping funds in Federal, State, and local budgets for parks is a perpetual campaign.

So let's look beyond our noses at the value parks represent, the return on tax dollars. Some of that return we can measure, some is more difficult to count but very real.

In March, the National Park Service released a report showing that national parks across the country generated \$26.75 billion in economic activity in 2012 and supported 243,000 jobs. North Carolina's share of those economic impacts was \$1.46 billion. Nationally, parks return \$10 for every \$1 of tax money invested in parks.

NCDENR's Division of Parks and Recreation is sponsoring a similar study for our State parks, which will be available later this year. The last such study, done for the year 2008, attributed \$289 million in annual sales to visitors to our State parks, approximately ten times the Parks Division's annual budget, duplicating the Federal experience. The State study was conservative, including only economic impacts from non-local visitors—new money attracted to an area by a park. The study also excluded direct revenues, such as campsite rental.

These figures are particularly significant when one considers that tourism is one of North Carolina's largest and most important industries. North Carolina ranks third in the United States in national park visits and economic impacts. In our State, Brunswick County ranks tenth of the hundred counties in tourism economic impacts.

Focusing a bit wider and longer, we must consider the future of Brunswick County, which does not now have a State Park. The theme of the County's economic development effort is "Work where you play," based on the County's natural features and recreational opportunities. In order to deliver on that promise, the County must add park acreage at rate matching population growth—over 40% in each of the past several decades. And that acreage must be allocated before it is needed, before it is gobbled up by development. Indeed, consultants to the County Parks Department advised that population growth "dictates an assertive program of growth in the parks and recreation programming for Brunswick County because it is obvious from further qualitative research that the new residents will anticipate and expect a first-class system."

**Save the Cape, Inc**

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