

fayobserver.com

Published: 08:44 PM, Wed Dec 26, 2012

Our View: Cape Fear national park? Tall order

Mike Rice and Toby Bronstein have given themselves a daunting challenge - persuading the federal government that about 25,000 acres around the lower Cape Fear River should be protected as a national seashore.

We don't know if they'll succeed in that task. But at the very least, they'll put a public spotlight on the natural beauty of that region that needs to be preserved.

Rice and Bronstein are environmental crusaders whose Save the Cape group was founded to stop a deepwater port proposed for a 600-acre site near Southport. The state paid \$30 million for the land but the plan has run aground on funding issues and public opposition, some of it well fanned by Rice and Bronstein. The state Ports Authority canceled the project in July.

Bronstein told an Associated Press reporter that, "The megaport is in a coma. But until something happens with that land, we continue to be at risk." Perhaps in the long run, but not anytime soon: Gov.-elect Pat McCrory has already said he doesn't back the massive port.

That's good, because such a grand-scale port would put great pressure on the region. While it would provide some new jobs in a county that desperately needs them, it also would add heavily to traffic and congestion. And there is good question whether the port would ever be economically viable. It could easily become another longtime burden on the state's taxpayers, much as the Global TransPark has been for much of its life

Rice and Bronstein see land purchased for the port as an integral part of a future national seashore, which would stretch from the Town Creek swamp southward to Caswell Beach, including Masonboro Island, and state parks and natural areas on the river south of Snow's Cut to Bald Head Island.

Getting momentum for a project of that scale will be a lot more difficult than shutting down an economically shaky port plan. Creating a national seashore in a developed area is only slightly easier than creating world peace. It requires powerful political support to offset opposition from the business and development community. So far, there is no sign of that support, but plenty of opposition. As Jim Bradshaw, executive director of the Brunswick County Economic Development Commission, said of the port site, "We will not rest until that site is developed for industry, creating jobs for Brunswick County."

Still, Rice and Bronstein's campaign will remind us that our state's great beauty is one of the things that draw economic development here. We have to protect our natural treasures with at least as much effort as we put into creating new jobs. Doing anything less is poisoning the well.

Recommend

23