

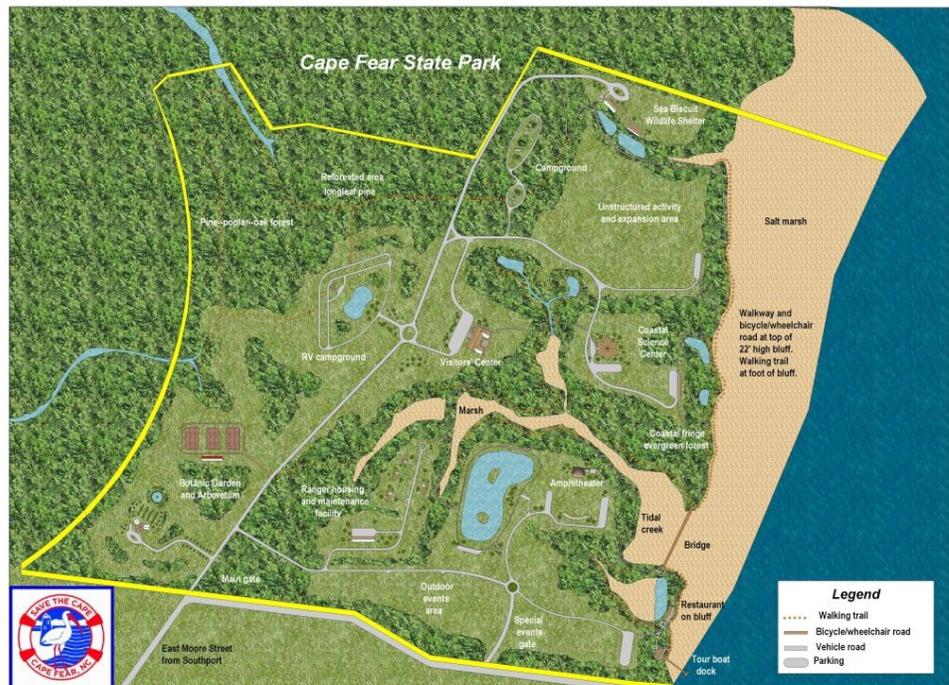
Wednesday, August 13, 2014

## Study: Park could add 169 jobs

By Lee Hinnant  
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An environmental group's study shows plans for a new state park near Southport that could create 169 full-time jobs, generate \$9.1-million in annual sales and pump \$5.7-million into the economy each year.

In addition, the 600-acre facility, if fully developed with campgrounds, an arboretum, science center, amphitheater and restaurant, could have a \$4-million impact on personal income for Brunswick County residents, the report stated.



Save the Cape, which fought plans to turn the site into a megaport, used data from a 2008 N.C. State University study of 14 state parks to gauge the impact of a new state park along the west bank of the Cape Fear River. The results suggest that such a park would have significant economic benefits.

Earlier this summer, Save the Cape rolled out a conceptual site plan for the park, which would be on land owned by the N.C. State Ports Authority adjacent to Archer Daniels Midland's citric acid plant.

The park would have walkways and paths along a 22-foot-high bluff overlooking a salt marsh and the river. Shallow-draft boats would offer nature tours, and visitors could enjoy river views from a restaurant. There would be spaces for special outdoor events, including an amphitheater, primitive and RV campgrounds, ranger housing, botanical gardens, a science

center and visitors center. Additionally, part of the site could house an expanded version of the Sea Biscuit Wildlife Shelter.

Estimating the economics is the latest piece of the puzzle, said Mike Rice, a director of Save the Cape. “It’s not just about hugging trees and looking at red-cockaded woodpeckers, as much as I love doing that,” said Save the Cape director Toby Bronstein. “It’s about the economics.”

The study looks only at money spent by those who reside outside Brunswick County. It draws upon a state study utilizing a program developed for the U.S. Forest Service called IMPLAN (Impact Analysis for Planning). The model considers direct expenditures, impact on sales, personal income and employment, among other factors.

The results show that the park would net a profit of roughly \$100,000 a year and create direct local expenditures about 10 times more than operating expenses. New sales could net \$600,000 a year in sales tax receipts for the county, the study stated.

The park would also generate less-definable values, such as protecting a large fish and shellfish nursery. The study highlights other values.

“The theme of Brunswick County’s economic development program is ‘Work where you play,’ indicating the importance attributed to recreational opportunities in attracting business,” the study stated. “However, it is becoming increasingly obvious that Brunswick County’s economic future is tied less to business and industry and more to lifestyle housing and the care and feeding of retirees. ... New capital coming to Brunswick County is being invested not in industrial enterprises, but in major housing communities, such as the 4,500-acre Brunswick Forest, which appeals to both retirees and young families, and The Charles, a full-service retirement community planned on a 2,100-acre plot.”

The study goes on to say that industry is not dead in Brunswick County but that factors that attract housing are equally applicable to attracting industry. As the economy shifts to one focusing on innovation and technology, “it is about attracting the best human capital.”

Other positive aspects of a park that are difficult to quantify include improving neighboring property values, income from non-visitor spending, health values, community cohesion, reducing stormwater runoff and improving air quality.

“We’ve got something pretty well defined—a conceptual product.” Rice said. The next step is to sell the concept to local and state leaders, and work on a financial plan, he said.

Save the Cape, a non-profit group, runs an online art auction and membership drive at [www.savethecape.org](http://www.savethecape.org).