

719-acre Lake Norman tract to be preserved

The Catawba Lands Conservancy will buy land later this month.

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By Joe Marusak

SHERRILLS FORD The Catawba Lands Conservancy plans to conserve 719 Catawba County acres at Lake Norman by month's end, including one of the lake's largest undeveloped tracts, known as Mountain Creek.

The plan will protect about 10 miles of stream and shoreline and 16 miles of buffer in the Lake Norman watershed, which is a protected water supply watershed serving the region, conservancy officials said last week.

Catawba County also intends to develop a regional environmental education park and nature preserve on the land, as called for in the Catawba County Parks Master Plan.

The total purchase price of the Mountain Creek tract is \$3.3million, said Dave Cable, executive director of the Charlotte-based land conservancy.

The N.C. Clean Water Management Trust Fund is contributing \$2million. A conservation easement on a second tract, known as Terrapin Creek, is being donated by Crescent Resources, a land development company formed by Duke Power Co. (now Duke Energy).

The N.C. General Assembly created the Clean Water Management Trust Fund in 1996 to pay for projects that enhance or restore degraded waters or protect unpolluted waters or that have other environmental, educational and recreational benefits.

The Mountain Creek site was scheduled for a 300-home development until the recession nixed those plans. The property became available to the county at a discounted price, as part of Duke Energy's relicensing efforts, conservancy officials said.

A natural resource inventory in November 2006 found a significant number of mature stands of bottomland and upland mixed hardwoods, making the Mountain Creek tract an important woodlands habitat, conservancy officials said.

Terrapin Creek, meanwhile, is a natural heritage site of county significance, as determined by the N.C. Natural Heritage Program.



A great white egret wades in the Mountain Creek area, part of the 719 acres being preserved at Lake Norman.
CATAWBA LANDS CONSERVANCY

Cable said the conservation of the Mountain Creek and Terrapin Creek tracts has been a collaborative effort among the conservancy, Catawba County, Crescent and Duke Energy.

The county will own the land, which will be protected by conservation easements.

The county's park plans call for an education center, trails, picnic areas, primitive camping and access for canoe/kayaking and fishing.

With the Catawba County tracts, the conservancy will have conserved at least 10,000 acres in Catawba, Iredell, Mecklenburg, Lincoln, Gaston and Union counties.

The conservancy is protecting eight miles of cycling, walking and jogging trails at the Sally's Y that's being developed in Denver.

On Dec. 3, the conservancy announced that it preserved the 71-acre Meakin Forest in Mount Holly, making more than 4,000 acres that the conservancy has permanently protected in Gaston County.

The conservancy also is the lead agency for the Carolina Thread Trail, an initiative to link 2million residents with hundreds of miles of trails.

<http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2010/12/21/1924885/719-acre-lake-norman-tract-to.html#ixzz18mjhbqyK>