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EDITORIALS

OTHER VIEWS

FOURTEEN MONTHS — and still no court action in land condemnation suits filed to acquire land for Cape Lookout Seashore.

Delay, Fumble and Falter

More papers have been put in the clerk of court's office, Beaufort, adding to the long trail of papers that are eventually supposed to lead to acquisition of lands on the outer banks for Cape Lookout Seashore.

But nothing has been done, since March 6, 1970 when the first condemnation proceedings were filed in the Carteret courthouse, toward getting these condemnation cases further along.

No hearing dates have been set, no land appraisers appointed in cases where such could be done — and the "reason" advanced for this pall of inactivity is that the state wants to get "all the cases together," presumably to handle them in one lump before the court.

That sounds logical, but it isn't. It's a cover-up for lack of attention to a situation that will cost the state hundreds of thousands of dollars more than it would have had land acquisition been actively pursued, beginning in 1966, when Congress enacted the Cape Lookout Seashore bill.

NOW, Gov. Scott and other conservation-minded leaders have decided that the state should own Bald Head (Smith) Island at the mouth of the Cape Fear River. Exactly where the state is going to get between \$10 and \$20 million to buy the island is an interesting question, since gathering together the few hundred thousand that was once thought needed to buy outer banks land for Cape Lookout Seashore was quite a chore.

So now the state is jumping into another costly project, without having completed Cape Lookout. Gov. Scott reportedly has ordered land condemnation proceedings to begin on Bald Head. Sometimes one wonders how mature men in high governmental

position can, without embarrassment apparently, make patently illogical moves.

Cape Lookout Seashore was initiated to "save the outer banks." It was a forerunner to all present "save the environment" crusades. Some people were against putting more private land in public hands, but the outer banks lands were valued at relatively nothing on Carteret tax books (until owners decided they should value the land much higher since the government was going to buy it.)

Bald Head is now listed in Brunswick County at \$5½ million tax value and the owner, Carolina Cape Fear Corp., contends it's worth \$20 million. That's a healthy chunk of tax revenue to lift out of a county. We believe Bald Head should be developed privately, but we are not opposed to its being public land IF the state can acquire it at fair cost and IF the state takes care of first things first — like getting Cape Lookout Seashore in shape for the federal government to formally establish the park.

As W. H. Potter, Beaufort, chairman of the county's Cape Lookout Seashore committee, said recently, the state says that success in establishment of the park is "just around the corner." The corner has been five years long."

The state should have gotten at least one condemnation proceeding through the courts before the present legislature adjourns. But now it is probably too late to do that. If there is a flaw in the 1969 law under which Seashore land can be acquired, it will be 1973 before that can be corrected. All this is in the typical pattern of Seashore land acquisition — delay and blunder.