

# Durham Morning Herald

## EDITORIALS

### Island Developers Pushing Ahead

The Scott administration's brave talk about saving the Smith (Bald Head) Island complex from development has turned out to be, regrettably, just talk. Governor Scott's "plan" for acquiring the wilderness island at the mouth of the Cape Fear River for the benefit of the people has turned out to be no plan at all, just wishful thinking at best.

The administration's performance record has been cruelly disappointing to North Carolinians who would like to save something of value for future generations. Instead of taking a bold approach to prevent development of the island, as Mr. Scott had indicated earlier would be done, the administration has stood almost idly by as the initial phase of development proceeded.

Where was the state when the developers, the Carolina Cape Fear Corp., or contractors landed heavy equipment on the island to level maritime forests for a golf course? Where was the state when the island's spinal dune was broached, when dune protection was a feature of environmental protection legislation for coastal areas enacted by the last legislature? Where was the state when the developers were selling "in excess" of \$2.5 million worth of land to prospective future residents, when the buyers surely must have known that aggressive action could do much to discourage development?

Why has the state, which claims owner-

ship of the 9,000 acres of marshland in the 12,000-acre island complex, not made it crystal clear that it will press its claim for the marshlands, that it will fight to the last ditch against any despoilation of those breeding grounds for marine life, and that it will use any weapons in its arsenal to prevent change in the natural surroundings along the perimeter of the island complex?

Mr. Scott may have a point in blaming the economic recession for failure of private interests to contribute for purchase of the island so that it could be preserved for the public. But it does him no credit to point to a role as public benefactor in his opposition last year to a resolution in the legislature for island development. Actually, his lack of positive leadership on the island issue gave the legislature no incentive to acquire the unique asset. Instead of presenting a specific program, tied to a specific request for funds, he more or less tossed the issue to the General Assembly.

The developers have won some key rounds. It would be too early, however, to concede them a complete victory. Whether they get that victory would appear to depend upon whether, and how, state and federal governments use environmental protection weapons in their arsenals. More than talk will be needed, as is evident in failure of the Scott administration's talk to save the island from the development that has occurred.