

Park Is An Idea Slowly Developing

Bob Barbee is the third superintendent of the Cape Lookout National Seashore. It's his first superintendency but he isn't all that thrilled about it, mainly because the Cape Lookout National Seashore doesn't exist.

Like most National Park Service (NPS) officials, Barbee will lean like a live oak to be diplomatic, especially when state or local government is involved but — like his predecessors — he also prefers real parks to those on paper.

"My field is park management," Barbee said. "I'm not too good at this waiting game."

It has been a decade since the state decided to acquire the long, northern leg of the Carteret County Outer Banks and turn it into a 24,500-acre park. But 26 parcels of the land the state must acquire are still tied up in the courts, Barbee said, in various states of condemnation proceedings, including four large parcels the park could not exist without.

There have been repeated rumors that the continued delay will cause the Park Service to close its small office in BEAUFORT until the park is nearer to being. But it is still open and has a staff of three: Barbee, a research biologist and a secretary. "You don't like to close one out," he said. "Something could break at any time."

Monday could follow Tuesday, too, but once the state finally gets legal title to the 48 miles of Portsmouth Island and the Core Banks, the federal government is committed to acquire the final 10 miles (Shackleford Banks) and money for acquisition and for development will have to be appropriated by Congress.

The general concept for the park has been presented to federal and state officials and Barbee will outline it for the Carteret County Planning Board in February. Sometime



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after that the Park Service will hold a formal public hearing on it in Beaufort.

When — this spring? "Possibly. Probably this spring," Barbee said and added wryly: "I don't feel any real sense of urgency about it."

Barbee is a Colorado man, 35, and his last assignment was at Yosemite National Park, in the west and in the mountains where he likes to be. This is his first duty on the East Coast. He's been in Beaufort 10 months. "How do you like it?" I asked him. He grinned. "It's different. You can say that."

His wife and three daughters are "all skiers and mountaineers." They recently planned a trip to North Carolina's mountains. "We were prepared to spend our last dollar to get some skiing in," Barbee said. "They didn't have any snow."

The Cape Lookout National Seashore, as presently envisioned, will have no roads. It will be reached eventually from several mainland points (and Ocracoke) by ferry boats operated by private firms under NPS franchise. There will be facilities for swimming, picnicking, fishing and camping.

Barbee likes the plan. "We have an opportunity to do something unique and innovative at a cost that is not excessive," he said. "I'd like to be here to open it."

He would never say so publicly, but there is almost no chance he will be. Use of the park by the public is certainly still years away. Or, as Barbee puts it, leaning like a live oak, "We have a luxury of time for planning and research."