

Conestee park potential generating excitement

It's not just animals who are enjoying rebirth of land

Published: Tuesday, April 24, 2007 - 2:00 am
Greenville News

By Mike Foley
STAFF WRITER
mfoley@greenvillenews.com

The treetops are alive with song.

An intermittent chorus turns into a cacophony and then into silence.

A bullfrog croaks and the chorus is rejoined.

Lake Conestee Nature Park is in the midst of a spring awakening. Everything is green, save for the fresh brown pathways and the khaki-colored bridge over a wetland that's fed by the Reedy River and Marrow Bone Creek.



It's hard to believe, when you stand still for a moment, that you're on the outskirts of Greenville.

But just beyond the woodpecker's staccato, past the ducks' sharp bass, is the dull roar of rush-hour traffic coursing along Interstate 85. And sharp pings of leather against an aluminum baseball bat also indicate that Memorial Stadium is near, and in use this afternoon.

Still, if you ignore the faint sounds of civilization, you can absorb nature reclaimed.

Lake Conestee Nature Park is a dream come true. Not just for the turtles, the squirrels and the people who venture down its trails, but for those who believe in bringing natural order from chaos.

Jeffery Beacham, executive director of the Conestee Foundation, is one of the people who believes. He's got studies, he's got plans, and he's got people who believe, too, that the land and water that once filtered Greenville's waste can become natural splendor.

Right now, there's only the Phase I trail system to point to as evidence of what Conestee Park can become. But it's a great start.

The park currently stretches across 300 acres, but Beacham said within a year, it could be 600 acres, as a coalition of public, private, education and business backers lay the groundwork for what he says could be Greenville's equivalent of New York's Central Park.

"It's a huge piece of urban ecology in the heart of one of the fastest-growing locations in the Southeast," he said.

The master plan, under development since 2005, calls for eventually encompassing city of Greenville property north of Conestee, including a closed city landfill and part of the Memorial Stadium land. Beacham raves about the possibilities.

"If you didn't know better, you can stand in the middle of landfill land and think you're in a huge pastureland," he said. "It's on a river bluff, with a good view of the city, and the (Reedy) river below."

While all the work is still in the planning stages, and more agreements need to be worked out, Beacham is optimistic that the Reedy River Greenway from I-85 and Mauldin Road may link to Conestee along the Reedy, much sooner than later.

"It's not fully set," he said. "It's a work in progress."

"But the potential here is so exciting. We're very excited about the future."