

# I. DESCRIPTION OF LAKE WACCAMAW STATE PARK

## LOCATION AND ACCESS

Lake Waccamaw State Park is located in Columbus County, 38 miles west of Wilmington and 12 miles east of Whiteville (Figure I-1).

From I-95, travel southeast on US 74, continuing east on the highway after it merges with US 76. After passing Whiteville, travel approximately 12 miles. Signs on this highway will direct you to the park. Turn right on Chauncey Town Road and left on NC 214. Turn right on Jefferson Road. Before the road takes a sharp right at the lake, turn left on Bella Coola Road. Follow Bella Coola Road until its end at Lake Waccamaw State Park.

From I-40 at Wilmington, take US 74/76 west for approximately 38 miles. Signs on this highway will direct you to the park. Turn left on Firetower Road and left on NC 214. Turn right on Jefferson Road. Before the road takes a sharp right at the lake, turn left on Bella Coola Road. Follow Bella Coola Road until its end at Lake Waccamaw State Park.

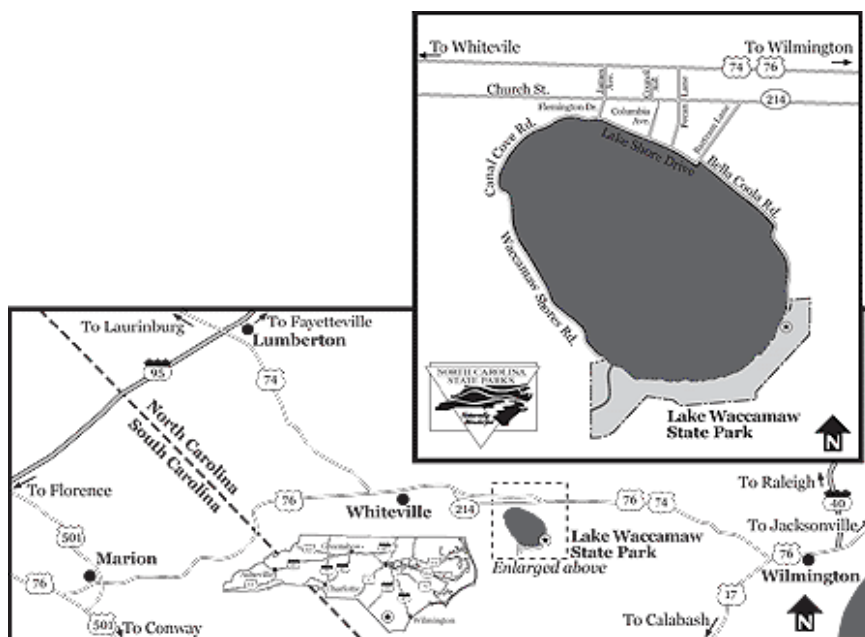


Figure I.1. Location Map for Lake Waccamaw State Park

The park mailing address, telephone number and email address are:

Lake Waccamaw State Park  
1866 State Park Drive  
Lake Waccamaw, NC 28450

(910) 646-4748  
(910) 646-4915 - fax  
[lake.waccamaw@ncmail.net](mailto:lake.waccamaw@ncmail.net)

## **PARK LAND AND WATER**

As of January 1, 2006, Lake Waccamaw State Park consisted of 10,694 acres that included the 8,950-acre state lake. Lake Waccamaw is one of hundreds of Carolina bays in North Carolina. The term "bay" does not refer to a body of water; rather, the name for these natural basins originates from the fact that there is an abundance of sweet bay, loblolly bay and red bay trees growing beside these watery, oval depressions in the earth.

The Bladen Lakes area contains one of the largest concentrations of Carolina bays. These elliptical, southeast-northwest oriented depressions are found scattered over much of the Coastal Plain of North Carolina and South Carolina. Over many years, most of these shallow bays have filled in with sediment and vegetation. Some—including Lake Waccamaw—contain open water. Jones, Salters, Baytree, Singletary and White lakes are nearby bay lakes with open water that are also in the state parks system. While all Carolina bays are unusual, Lake Waccamaw is probably the most unique.

While many bays are small, ranging about 500 feet in length, Lake Waccamaw covers more than 8,950 acres and has 14 miles of shoreline. Many bays are also totally dependent on rainfall, but Lake Waccamaw gets its water supply from the Friar Swamp drainage. Most Carolina bays also have naturally high levels of acid, making the water unable to sustain a large diversity of aquatic life. Limestone bluffs along Lake Waccamaw's north shore and a partial limestone lakebed neutralize the lake's water, however, making it suitable for many species of plants and animals.

At least five species on the state's rare plant list—the Venus-hair fern, green-fly orchid, seven-angled pipewort, narrowleaf yellow pondlily and water arrowhead—can be found at Lake Waccamaw State Park. Longleaf pine is abundant, as well as a variety of oaks. Huckleberries are plentiful and the ground is thickly covered with wire grass.

Lake Waccamaw's water quality contributes to an interesting mix of animal life in the park. Several species are found only in or around the lake and nowhere else on earth. These species are known as endemics. At Lake Waccamaw, fish endemics include the Waccamaw darter, Waccamaw silverside, and Waccamaw killifish. The water also contains a diversity of unusual mollusks. The endemic Waccamaw spike and Waccamaw fatmucket are among the 15 species of mussels and clams found in the lake. And, of the 11 snail species, the Waccamaw amnicola and the Waccamaw siltsnail are also endemics. Of course, the park also contains non-endemic species including a variety of birds and waterfowl, frogs, lizards, deer, bobcat, fox, black bear and the American alligator.

## **VISITOR FACILITIES**

Lake Waccamaw State Park offers a variety of recreational opportunities, including boating, camping, fishing, hiking, and picnicking (Figure I-2). Boating is a popular pastime at Lake Waccamaw. While there is no boat access in the park, two free public boat launch areas are available nearby. The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission maintains one, while the other one is operated by Columbus County Parks and Recreation. Powerboats and sailboats may be launched from the boat ramps, but parking is limited.

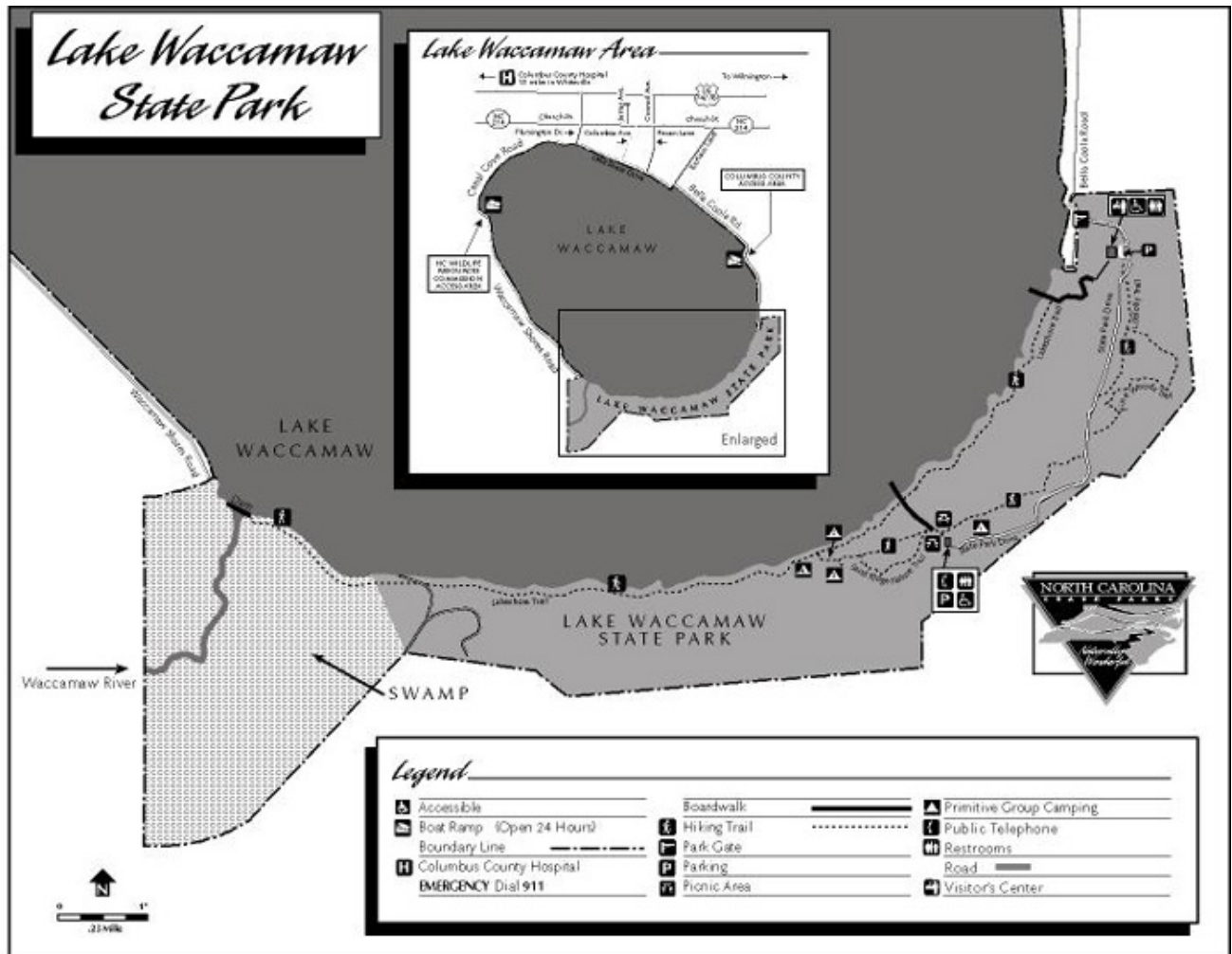


Figure I-2. Lake Waccamaw State Park

Four primitive group camping areas are nestled beneath trees not far from the water. Picnic tables, fire circles and pit toilets are located nearby. All supplies, including drinking water, must be packed to the sites.

Fishing is good. Fifty-two species of game and non-game fish swim in Lake Waccamaw. The Wildlife Resources Commission stocks the lake with largemouth bass, bluegill, shellcracker and redbreast sunfish.

Almost ten miles of trails allow visitors to experience a variety of natural communities. Lake Trail, the park's longest, begins at the visitor's center and stretches five miles along the lakeshore to the Waccamaw River. It passes pine forest, old cypress, towering hickory trees, grass beds in the lake and sandy beaches. The 2.5-mile Pine Woods Trail, which winds from the picnic area to the visitor's center, and two loop trails explore the park's diverse plant life. A 700-foot boardwalk near the picnic area allows hikers to get a closer look at the various plants of the bay forest bordering the lake. The boardwalk ends at a 375-foot pier perfect for fishing. An additional accessible boardwalk with two sun shelters traverses the bay forest located near the visitor's center.

At the picnic area, picnic tables and grills are conveniently placed beneath large oak trees draped with Spanish moss. Drinking water and restrooms are nearby. The picnic area and the restrooms, as well as some picnic tables, are accessible for persons with disabilities.

Rangers hold regularly scheduled educational and interpretive programs about Lake Waccamaw State Park. The Lake Waccamaw program introduces students to the unique ecosystem of this particular Carolina bay, focusing on water chemistry and the lake's diversity of aquatic life.

## HISTORY OF LAKE WACCAMAW

Lake Waccamaw is one of the state's few natural lakes and, at 8,950 acres, the largest natural lake in southeastern North Carolina. Like Lake Waccamaw, most of the state's natural lakes are located in the Coastal Plain and are referred to as Carolina bays. The term "bay" stems from the abundance of bay trees growing in the swampy depressions. Stager and Cahoon's interpretation of the geologic history of the Lake Waccamaw area, analysis of sediment cores, and review of other research data leads them to conclude that Lake Waccamaw is a relatively young lake, probably about 15,000 years old or less (Stager and Cahoon, 1987).

The Bladen Lakes area contains one of the largest concentrations of Carolina bays. These elliptical, southeast-northwest oriented depressions are found scattered over much of the Coastal Plain of North Carolina and South Carolina. Many hypotheses regarding their origin have been proposed, including underground springs, wind and wave action, dissolution of subsurface minerals and meteor showers. The oriented lakes theory (wind and wave action) is best supported by scientific evidence. Over many years, most of these shallow bays have filled in with sediment and vegetation (N.C. Geological Survey, 1989). Lake Waccamaw is an example of a Carolina bay that is still water filled.

John Bartram, the nation's first renowned botanist, discussed the area and stayed at a plantation in Bladen County while in the area (Bartram, 1942). In a pamphlet titled *A New Voyage to Georgia by a Young Gentleman*, originally published in London in 1737, the young man who had traveled up from Georgia and while in the area stayed at the plantation of Nathaniel Moore writes of Lake Waccamaw:

*The great desire I had to see Waccamaw Lake, as I had heard so much talk of it.... the innumerable sight of musquitoes, and the largest that ever I saw in my life, for they made nothing to fetch blood of us, through our buckskin gloves, coats and jackets.... The next morning we took a particular view of it, and I think it is the pleasantest place that ever I saw in my life. It is at least eighteen miles round, surrounded with exceeding good land, as oak of all sorts, hickory and fine cypress swamps.*

But Bartram, the unknown young gentleman, and other European explorers and settlers were not the first to find this paradise. Archaeologists have discovered evidence of civilization at Lake Waccamaw dating back thousands of years.

Before arrival of white settlers, Lake Waccamaw was inhabited by the Waccamaw-Sioux, one of five Indian tribes found along the Cape Fear River. The Waccamaw-Sioux settled in the area some time after A.D. 1000. Many Indian artifacts from the period between A.D. 1000-1700 have been

found, including beads, pipes, grinding stones, dugout canoes, and fragments of pottery with intricate stamped designs.

The old lake road was at one time part of an Indian trail that ran from Lake Waccamaw to the Outer Banks. Jones Ridge, on the east shore of the lake, is still sometimes referred to as the “Indian Mounds.” Indians fished, hunted, and lived off the land. The great Indian chieftain Osceola was supposedly born at Lake Waccamaw. He later led the Florida Seminoles in their war against the U.S. Government in the early 1800’s (*Lake Waccamaw State Park Master Plan, 1976*).

Lake Waccamaw gets its name from the Waccamaw Indian tribe. The lake first appears on the Mosely Map in 1733 (Powell, 1968). The bay lakes region of Bladen County was settled during colonial times, primarily by Highland Scots who came to the Cape Fear River Valley seeking religious freedom. John Powell was the first Caucasian to build a homestead on Lake Waccamaw’s shores, traveling from Virginia in 1745. Settlement was slow until the 1850s when the naval stores and railroad industries brought in more people. The Town of Lake Waccamaw, located on the north shore of the lake, was known as Flemington from as early as 1853 to about 1885 (Powell, 1968).

Bladen County, formed in 1734 from New Hanover County, was originally a huge area. Of the 100 counties now in North Carolina, 55 were once a part of Bladen County (Elizabethtown-White Lake Area Chamber of Commerce). Although it has been greatly reduced in size, Bladen County remains North Carolina’s fourth largest county.

For approximately 100 years after the area was settled, landowners practiced farming along the river lowlands and creek bottoms. Settlers in the bay lakes region generally led lives of marginal subsistence. Longleaf pines, then prolific in the area, were used for the production of naval stores, primarily providing turpentine, pitch and timber. These products were critical for building and maintaining sailing vessels of the period. As rivers were then the most effective means of transportation, naval stores and other products were rafted down the Cape Fear River to the port of Wilmington. Many longleaf pine trees in the park still carry the marks of the turpentiners who hacked the trees.

In 1797, for a little more than \$7,000, the State of North Carolina made grants to Stephen Williams for 100,000 acres of land, to William Collins for 40,120 acres, and to Benjamin Rowell for 30,000 acres. These grants were all located on the east side of the lake – where the park is now located – and adjoined each other. In 1904, the Waccamaw Land and Lumber Company purchased substantially all of this land for timber purposes. The company’s headquarters was located nearby in Bolton, where it operated a huge double band sawmill. Logs from the lands purchased in 1904 helped supply the mill. These lands later became owned by Riegel Woodlands Division, subsequently known as the Federal Paper Company.

In early 1869, Charles Oscar Beers began a shingle business along the southern shores of Lake Waccamaw, followed by another shingle operation run by Henry Bascom Short. These two businessmen eventually merged their operations in 1879, with a crew of over 400 workers. Eventually the two merged companies diverged from the production of shingles to become the North Carolina Lumber Company.

At the turn of the century, cypress shingles were shipped across Lake Waccamaw from its south side by flat boats. The shingles were then unloaded onto a pier where they were then transported by

mule-drawn rail cars to the nearby Lake Waccamaw depot for shipment by freight train. Logging and shingle transportation eventually became rail-based. A rail spur followed the west side of the lake and crossed the Waccamaw River just south of the lake. Remnants of the railway bridge crossing can still be seen today (*Lake Waccamaw State Park Master Plan*, 1976).

With its clean water, sandy bottom, and abundant fish populations, Lake Waccamaw has always been a tourist attraction. Attendance increased with the coming of the railroad. In the late 1800s, two passenger trains a day stopped at the Lake Waccamaw depot. Passengers could get a meal at “Miss Lizzie’s” boardinghouse and tour the lake on the *Bohemian Girl*, a steamboat operated by Sam Potts. The Atlantic Coast Line built two large pavilions near the lake for picnics, dances, and Fourth of July celebrations.

Sam Potts (1847-1910) moved to Lake Waccamaw in 1867 and worked as a railroad agent and telegrapher. Shortly after his arrival, he built the *Bohemian Girl*, powered by a one-cylinder engine. People from all over the Carolinas and Georgia came to Lake Waccamaw by train to tour the lake with Captain Potts. Potts was a man of many talents: inventor, telegrapher, taxidermist, jewelry salesman, doctor, and sportsman. He was also an excellent photographer. Using a homemade time-delay shutter device, Potts was able to appear in many of his own photographs.

### **Recognition of State Lakes as Public Resources**

Statewide interest in the Carolina bay lakes emerged in the 1820s. During the 1827-1828 legislature, a bill was passed that made it unlawful for anyone to record for private ownership the lands covered by the waters of any lake within North Carolina. The law followed the limitation of the private recording of unappropriated marsh or swamplands that had been enacted during the previous legislature (*State Lakes Master Plan*, 1977). Some such lands and waters held by the State Board of Education were subsequently sold by the state over the years to raise funds for educational purposes.

Recognizing North Carolina’s lakes as public resources belonging to the people, the General Assembly of 1911 passed legislation prohibiting the transfer of land covered by lake waters to private ownership. Title of these lakes, held by the State Board of Education, could no longer be sold or transferred to private parties. The legislation assured that Lake Waccamaw would remain a state lake and a public resource unless the North Carolina General Statutes were changed by subsequent legislative action. The legislation directed that:

*White Lake, Black Lake, Waccamaw Lake, and any other lake in Bladen, Columbus, or Cumberland counties containing 500 acres or more shall never be sold or conveyed to any person, firm or corporation, but shall always be and remain the property of the State of North Carolina for the use and benefit of all the people of the State.* (Chapter 8, G.S. 7544)

While Lake Waccamaw and the other State Lakes were thus assured of remaining public lakes, the General Assembly did not appropriate funds for their management or for any public land acquisition of lakeshore property. Without funding, the Department of Conservation and Development - the state agency charged with administering the lakes - was able to do little with them. Since none of the lakes had been surveyed, the state was even unaware at that time of private claims on the lakes (State of North Carolina, 1926).

The town of Lake Waccamaw was incorporated in 1911 (Powell, 1968). The winter of 1917-1918 brought unusually cold weather to the area. The temperature dropped below freezing almost every night for a month with morning temperatures often below ten degrees, and one of the largest snowstorms in recorded history hit Lake Waccamaw. The extremely cold conditions caused the lake to completely freeze over for the first time anyone could remember. It remained frozen for over a week, and ice measured four to five inches thick. Mr. Kinchen Council became known as the only person ever to walk across Lake Waccamaw (Parker and Little, 2005).

### **Administration and Management of the State Lake**

Local parties were interested in the use and development of the lakes, and by 1925 the Department recognized the need to establish policies regarding their use and “...*planned to regulate recreation only so far as is necessary to insure the best permanent use of the lakes for the public and to prevent the destruction of the attractive features such as fish, game, forests, bathing places, etc.*”. Private use of the lakes, already underway with the construction of docks and boathouses, was continued under a permit system. At Lake Waccamaw, five-year renewable permits were issued for nominal fees (State of North Carolina, 1926).

Lake levels at Lake Waccamaw could vary significantly with fluctuations in rainfall, thus causing problems with commercial and recreational use of the shallow lake. To address the problem, local representatives in the 1925 General Assembly were successful in obtaining an appropriation of \$3,000, to be matched by county or local sources, to construct a dam across the lake outlet at the Waccamaw River. That summer the lake level was three feet below normal, and exposed lake bottom made it possible to drive to the dam site. With nature cooperating, the dam was constructed during this period of low water and completed by winter at a total cost of \$3,900, and the county returned the unexpended state appropriation of \$1050 to the state (State of North Carolina, 1926).

After construction began, large numbers of eels became jammed against the dam as they attempted to swim upriver. To proceed with construction, the contractor had to shovel the eels into a truck and haul them to safety. The dam construction included a fish way in order to comply with Federal regulations. By June of 1926, the lake had returned to its normal height.

The Department of Conservation and Development’s 1926 *Biennial Report of the Director*, made to the Governor and General Assembly, recommended acquisition of sufficient land - including part of the shoreline of Lake Waccamaw - to insure the permanent use of the lake by the public (State of North Carolina, 1926). Alas, while private lakeshore development continued, that plea and subsequent and numerous departmental appeals over the years for state land acquisition at Lake Waccamaw went unheeded. No state land acquisition at Lake Waccamaw would take place until 50 years later.

Appeals for state land acquisition were made locally as well. The Whiteville newspaper, *The News Reporter*, featured an article June 25, 1925, titled “First Steps are Taken to Make Lake State Park”. The article documented efforts underway to secure land for a park and mentioned reasons that the state should own at least some land along Lake Waccamaw. The article also mentions a huge heronry present at the lake including a great number of white heron nests (Parker and Little, 2005).

Not long after completion, the Lake Waccamaw dam began leaking seriously. Under state supervision, repairs were made in 1926 using county and private funds. Not long thereafter,

extremely high water during the winter of 1927-28 caused more dam problems, and additional repairs were undertaken.

The Department of Conservation and Development restocked the lake and took efforts to protect fish during the breeding season by staking off and prohibiting fishing in large sections of the lake from March 15 to June 15, 1928. Albert Sasser of Hallsboro was hired as a part-time lake warden, charged with enforcement of rules and regulations (State of North Carolina, 1928) made by the Conservation Board and by the Director of the Department. The public seemed generally satisfied with the administrative measures undertaken.

Prior to 1929, only the construction of new docks required permits. Thereafter, all docks and buildings needed permits. Permits were also instituted for the operation of boats on Lake Waccamaw and White Lake, and licenses were required to be fastened to watercraft. Commercial boats were charged an additional fee.

The Department adopted a policy of allowing no more closed buildings over the lake and sought removal of those that existed in order to do away with a source of water pollution. Waggaman Pavilion, one such closed structure, had suffered from a storm which destroyed a dock that connected it to shore, and its sanitary conveniences were out of order due to a fire that had destroyed the Waggaman Hotel.

Construction of the dam had greatly improved the value of Lake Waccamaw as a recreation resource by maintaining a fairly constant lake level, making it more attractive as a bathing, boating and fishing resort. The dam, constructed cheaply using wood, continued to have serious leaks, and in 1930 the Engineering Division recommended construction of a new and more permanent dam. Meanwhile, periodic repairs were made.

Efforts to improve sport fishing in the lake also continued. Following requests from local citizens and a full public hearing, trot lines were allowed by permit during three winter months starting in November of 1929 in the belief that this practice would reduce the number of “*undesirable*” scavenger fish (State of North Carolina, 1930). In May of 1931 7,850 black bass fry from the Fayetteville Hatchery were put in Lake Waccamaw. The experimental winter permitting of trot lines continued, partly because of “...*the apparent need of the local people for help in furnishing their table.*” After three winters, a total of 65 permits had been issued at \$1 each. Required reports filed by permittees indicated that of the almost 4,000 fish caught, 60 percent were catfish and 18 percent white perch.

The lake level through the winter and spring of 1932 was at an extremely low level, partly due to the periodic leaking of the dam but mainly due to lack of rainfall. The low water interfered with the use of private docks along the north side of the lake that were used for boating and swimming. As a result of this low water, a legal question arose over the Department’s jurisdiction over that part of the lake bottom no longer covered by water. The Attorney General ruled that “...*whether the lake bottom is covered with water or not, the state property line is the normal high water mark.*”

A lake warden continued to be employed by the state at Lake Waccamaw during the summer months. The Department supplied its outboard motor, while the warden supplied his own boat (State of North Carolina, 1932). The Board of Conservation and Development in July 1932 approved public regulations covering the recreational use of Lake Waccamaw by bathers, boaters and

fishermen. An application to repair the Waggaman Pavilion over the lake, a source of pollution and trouble, was denied. State administration of Lake Waccamaw continued to be handicapped by lack of funds, boats, and state land along the shoreline, and by the difficulty of securing sufficient evidence to convict in cases of rules violations. Only 14 permits were issued for trot line fishing in the winter of 1932-33, probably due to the successful prosecution of a case involving the selling of fish caught in the lake, and no such permits were issued the succeeding winter because of the absence of a lake warden. Low water resulted in a few permits being granted for dock extensions. Lack of funds resulted in no lake warden being employed at Lake Waccamaw in 1933, and no license fees were required. For 1934, a nearby county game and fish warden allocated half of his time to the lake, but enforcement and the collection of permit and fishing fees was reduced (State of North Carolina, 1934).

In May of 1934, Mr. J.S. Holmes, State Forester, proposed establishment of a state park at Lake Waccamaw in a letter to Mr. Conrad Wirth of the National Park Service. The proposal took shape after discussions with Mr. L.A. Sharpe as well as Mr. Stone about Waccamaw and other potential sites for recreation parks. Later that month, the U.S. Department of the Interior responded to Mr. Holme's letter by recommending further consideration of Waccamaw Lake as a state park. The park proposal involved Forestry Camp number 52-P, which was being abandoned at that time (*Lake Waccamaw State Park Master Plan*, 1976). No state action to establish a park, however, was then taken.

To combat high unemployment and spur the economy during the Great Depression, the federal government undertook various conservation programs. A Civilian Conservation Corps camp was located along the shore of Lake Waccamaw and a permit issued for construction of a dock from this camp (State of North Carolina, 1934). Early in 1936, the Town of Lake Waccamaw was granted a permit to construct a large municipal dock and open pavilion as part of a Works Progress Administration project to build a recreation area for the town. Nearby Jones and Singletary lakes also benefited from work undertaken by federal public works programs (State of North Carolina, 1936).

### **Fourth and Sixth of July Celebrations**

Fourth of July celebrations at Lake Waccamaw were the biggest events of the year. Crowds sometimes exceeded 1,000 people, coming by special trains, wagons, buggies and by foot. Local churches, organizations and groups set up refreshment stands and tents adjacent to the public beach where food, candy and drinks were sold. A traveling carnival with attractions such as merry-go-rounds and various sideshows was usually present, and additional entertainment in the form of beauty contests, races, greased pole climbing, and dance contests was also provided. And of course, people cooled themselves in the waters of the lake.

Problems arose with the celebration. In the early days there were no public accommodations, so many visitors used the swampy woods behind the beach for changing and sanitary purposes. Parking for horses and mules, and then later for cars became problematic, so some local residents opened their yards for parking, some charging a fee. Police were used to manage traffic on the one-way roads. As the event grew in popularity, the Weavers opened a bathhouse with several hundred dressing stalls and built a broad boardwalk and a 200-yard-long pier, later lengthened another 400 feet, with a covered pavilion and diving boards.

During the days of segregation, white people came on the fourth and Negroes on the sixth of July (Parker and Little, 2005). In 1938, the usual yearly July sixth Negro gathering and celebration to which thousands went was not held, and the gathering was permanently discontinued. Reasons given for the cancellation included the absence of adequate sanitary, eating, recreational, and other facilities available for the crowds. Plans were made to continue the celebration the next year at Jones Lake (State of North Carolina, 1938). At that time, the federal Resettlement Administration, using Civilian Conservation Corps workers, was developing recreational facilities at Jones Lake in adjacent Bladen County. Jones Lake State park opened July 1, 1939 as the first state park for Negroes and became immediately popular, clearly demonstrating the need for outdoor recreation facilities for nonwhites (State of North Carolina, 1940).

### **Administration and Management after 1940**

By 1941, the old timber dam constructed in 1925 had serious seepage and the water level in Lake Waccamaw had dropped to what was considered too low a level. The General Assembly directed the governor and Council of State to allocate \$10,000 to the Department of Conservation and Development for the reconstruction or construction of a new spillway. The Division of Water Resources prepared specifications and plans and supervised the construction of a new dam (State of North Carolina, 1942). Unfortunately, a serious leak developed in the new dam. Temporary repairs were undertaken and completed by July of 1944. Partly owing to the nature of the site, and partly to vandalism, leaking continued.

During World War II, the shortage of manpower, equipment and supplies, and the institution of gasoline and tire rationing slowed state park activities in general. Conservation work undertaken by federal public works programs, which had been so important to the state parks system, came to an end (State of North Carolina, 1944).

Because of the polio epidemic in the summer of 1944, activities and use of state park areas dropped below even wartime levels. Funds still were not available for hiring a lake warden, but a game warden did give some time to helping out at Lake Waccamaw. This arrangement meant that the lake, which received a large amount of use, still had no direct supervision for eight or nine months a year. The Department of Conservation and Development continued to appeal for the employment of a lake warden on a year-round basis, employment of a temporary warden during the summer, the purchase of patrol boats, and land acquisition at the lake (State of North Carolina, 1946). Lake Waccamaw was not the only state park unit suffering from a lack of fiscal resources. In the first 32 years of the existence of the North Carolina State Parks System, less than \$60,000 was spent to purchase state park land. Instead, the state relied primarily upon donations and federal gifts and leases.

In 1946, a canal was dug along the northwest shore between a natural sand bar along the main lake and a fringing cypress swamp. Spoil from the dredging was added to the sand bar. The higher ground was then heavily developed with private residences with piers (Stager and Cahoon, 1987).

Comprehensive and detailed State Lakes regulations were adopted and administration improved, partly due to budget increases from receipts from fees set up in the regulations. With additional funds, the state purchased better patrol equipment and buoys were installed to mark a safety zone in the water. A warden was also employed during the summer (State of North Carolina, 1948) to help with the heavy and often conflicting public and private use. State lakes permits brought in \$7909 in

the biennium of 1948-1950 (State of North Carolina, 1950) from the licensing of boats, piers and docks.

A major problem was eliminated at Lake Waccamaw in 1954. Holes dredged in the lake bottom several years earlier by a private development company were filled in at the company's expense (State of North Carolina, 1954). During 1954 and 1955, low water levels due to drought led to the amendment of state lakes regulations to allow longer piers and docks. Rains brought by the hurricanes of August and September of 1955 raised the water level back to normal (State of North Carolina, 1956).

The General Assembly passed the Boating Safety Act of 1959 that proved particularly beneficial to state lakes, such as Lake Waccamaw, where the state had little or no ownership of the shoreline. The Act removed some of the protection and law enforcement responsibilities from the Division of State Parks (State of North Carolina, 1962), which had overseen the state lakes since establishment of the division in 1948, and assigned them to the Wildlife Resources Commission. Without state-owned land at Lake Waccamaw, patrol boats continued to be launched at privately owned ramps or piers, and lack of a place for storage of gasoline and other supplies and equipment continued to hamper lake administration.

Under the Boating Safety Act of 1959, boats over ten horsepower had to be registered. The registration fee charged, along with the state lakes permit fee, was seen as double taxation for the same purpose, so the 1965 General Assembly amended the General Statutes to give the Wildlife Resources Commission exclusive authority to regulate safe and reasonable operation of vessels on waters of the state, including state lakes. State lake revenues, which had reached about \$14,000 annually by 1966 and had been used to help manage the state lakes, dropped (State of North Carolina, 1966). In December 1969, State Lakes Regulations were revised to delete all references to boats, boating and law enforcement related to boating regulations.

### **Establishment of Lake Waccamaw State Park**

Over the years, occasional letters from private citizens would be sent to Raleigh advocating development of a state park at Lake Waccamaw. Finally, in October of 1964, the Board of Conservation and Development requested that a "concentrated effort to obtain land for a base of operations at Lake Waccamaw be made." About one-quarter acre of land was offered for sale at less than its appraised value, but the state did not come up with the needed funds for its purchase (*Lake Waccamaw State Park Master Plan*, 1976).

In 1967 the General Assembly authorized a study commission for state parks, the first such study commission. The State Parks and State Forests Study Commission's 1969 report, *North Carolina State Parks for the Future*, noted that public use requires access through public lands, and that without public land at Lake Waccamaw, the intent of the law creating state lakes was not being met. The Commission recommended that steps be taken to insure public access (The State Parks and State Forests Study Commission, 1969).

In 1968, the Lake Waccamaw Town Board unanimously adopted a resolution to support establishment of a state park on the south side of the lake. The following year, the General Assembly took steps to establish a park by appropriating \$50,000 for land acquisition (Division of Parks and Recreation, 1982), but land acquisition was not immediate.

Other support for the park developed. A 1969 land development plan for the Town of Lake Waccamaw by the N.C. Division of Community Planning included a proposed park along the lakeshore, and in 1971 the Cape Fear Council of Governments declared support (Lake Waccamaw State Park Master Plan, 1976).

As North Carolina's development and land prices accelerated, the Division of State Parks urged protection of new park areas as well as expansion of some existing ones before the opportunity to do so would be forever lost. Appeals for additional state park land acquisition throughout the state were made, including the publication in 1972 of North Carolina State Parks NOW or NEVER. The booklet described 27 areas proposed as worthy additions to the state parks system, including land along the shore of Lake Waccamaw and the Waccamaw River. As a point of emphasis, the report also described six areas – called “Never Areas” - previously investigated or proposed as state parks but that were no longer feasible to acquire (State of North Carolina, 1972).

Finally, in May of 1976, 65 years after being declared a state lake by the General Assembly, a 273-acre tract known as “Council Ridge” was purchased to establish the park. The Division of Parks and Recreation had already begun planning for the park. Two public meetings were held in April and June of 1976. Citizens were given an opportunity to offer suggestions as to what types of activities and facilities should be included in the park at the first meeting, and they were asked to review and comment on three alternative plans at the second meeting. Using these public comments, the most desired aspects of the alternatives were then amalgamated as a preliminary master plan which was presented to the public at the July 4, 1976 Columbus County Bicentennial Celebration. The final document, the Lake Waccamaw State Park Master Plan, was published in July 1976 (Lake Waccamaw State Park Master Plan, 1976). The master plan described desired future acquisition and development and a program for phased park development.

### **Park Development**

Without good road access, the Council Ridge Tract had received only very limited use by the public since its acquisition in 1976, and no additional land had been acquired or facilities developed. Recognizing the need to get started with park development, the 1981 General Assembly made a special \$100,000 appropriation for access road funds for Lake Waccamaw State Park. The Division completed an environmental impact statement in November 1982 before scheduling the road improvements. At this time about one quarter of the lake's shoreline remained undeveloped, while most of it had been developed or was undergoing residential development. Interspersed within the development were two Wildlife Resources Commission boating access areas, a commercial boating facility, a public beach, and the Waccamaw Sailing Club (Division of Parks and Recreation, 1982).

In 1983, the Division of Parks and Recreation was awarded a Land and Water Conservation Fund matching grant of \$30,706 to develop a picnic area, boardwalk and pier, parking, toilet facilities and provide water at Lake Waccamaw State Park. Columbus County became a joint sponsor of the grant and ended up assisting with construction through its parks and recreation department and also provided \$30,000 to match the federal funds. The construction was completed in 1984 (National Park Service).

Additional land purchases for the park in the mid-1980s, including acreage formerly belonging to the Federal Paper Company and Georgia-Pacific Corporation, enlarged the park to 1,732 acres. In the 1990s additional facilities were added at the picnic area, and a boardwalk with sun shelters was

constructed. A 5,940 square foot visitor's center/park office, completed in 1998, added greatly to the park's visitor facilities. It contains an auditorium, exhibits about the park's history and natural resources, classroom, administrative offices, and restrooms.

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