

Northern Neck News



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Raiders
defeat Blue
Devils
-B1

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Fones cliff development moving forward

Part II

*The full plan
may take
over 30 years
to complete*

By DJ Jackson

Part I of the Fones Cliff property revealed the recent purchase of the property along the Rappahannock River for \$11 million by Virginia True Corporation. Among the proposed development plan, most notable is the 18-hole golf course and clubhouse that will reflect the historic architecture of Richmond County, and a resort hotel. Robert Smith

is the registered agent of Virginia True Corporation, and a native of Richmond County. Smith also serves as the project lead keeping the Richmond County Board of Supervisors abreast of development activities. To date, the layout of the course is in progress, which includes marking of the holes and mounds. Although Smith said a development of this magnitude could take 20 to 30 years to reach completion, he is confident that the property will be in harmony with the natural surroundings, increase tourism revenue and provide public access to the river and planned recreational activities. The U.S. Fish

and Wildlife Services has made no known attempt to purchase the 976 acres or present the public with alternative development plans to benefit the community. Conservation groups are concerned that housing development along the cliffs will present water runoff issues and harm the eagle population, which has become a major convergence point for bald eagles on the east coast. In a recent communiqué from Jody Couser, Director of Communication at the Chesapeake Conservancy she states, "We are hopeful that the new owners will consider conserving the property.



Aerial photograph taken by Greg Wright, provided by Rappahannock Cliffs.

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CHANGES COMING TO WARSAW \$1 million grant plans

By DJ Jackson

been remarkable. Entrepreneurs are open-

Warsaw Officer hospitalized

Fones Cliff

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We are concerned about the charismatic bald eagle population and the sensitive American Indian history associated with the site. We will continue to work with the large number of concerned citizens, elected officials, and organizations to generate the resources needed to protect Fones Cliffs, which is a national treasure along the Chesapeake Trail, the first all water national historic trail established by Congress in 2006." One individual in opposition of the Fones Cliff development is Bryan D. Watts, Ph.D., Director, and Center for Conservation Biology, College of William and Mary, Virginia Commonwealth University. In a recent communiqué from Watts, his position has not changed since 2015. He claims, in a white paper, that Fones Cliffs is one of the few places in the region that supports high numbers of non-breeding eagles during both the summer and winter seasons. This site is a continental crossroad for bald eagles. In addition to our breeding population, birds come here from Labrador to Miami. They converge here from populations along the entire Atlantic Coast. Bald eagles are increasingly adapting to urban life but progress is slow. The urban-nesting pairs currently account for only 3% of the Virginia population. The increase has been from zero to three percent. The conflict over the development of Fones Cliff has been the topic of discussion for well over ten years.

The issue becomes man versus nature—what rights do property owners have? This is the question that landowners face as many of the eagles nesting and migration points are located on private property. By natural default, private landowners become stewards of the eagle population. This oftentimes presents a challenge to landowners who wish to develop their properties. Adjacent property owner, Terrell Bowers, a Richmond County native, had plans to subdivide his 260 acres to accommodate 100 houses. Like many landowners, Bowers was trying to put his land into a conservation easement. This would protect the land and give him a tax break as well. The value of the land is based on the number of houses allowed on the property. A change in the zoning ordinance reduced his allowance by 90 percent, ten homes.

In 2015 the 976-acre tract was rezoned from general agricultural (A-1) to residential mixed use (R-3) with portions for conditional business general usage (B-2). The current zoning ordinance allows the current owners, Virginia True Corporation, to move forward with the development plans, with strict adherence to state and federal guidelines. Virginia True representatives have plans to present development updates to the Board of Supervisors in a future meeting. In the meantime plans are moving forward and again, it may take well over 30 years to see its completion.

