



⊠ North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission ⊠

MEMORANDUM

DATE: 23 October 2007

TO: Chatham County Planning Department

FROM: Jacquelyn Wallace, Urban Wildlife Biologist, NC Wildlife Resources Commission

SUBJECT: Westfall Subdivision Proposal

Please accept my comments on the request by Over Jordan, LLC, for subdivision final approval of “Westfall, Phases 1A, 1B, and 1C” (f/k/a Booth Mountain), consisting of 94 lots on 160 acres, located off SR-1721, Lystra Road and SR-1717, Jack Bennett Road, Williams Township.

As shown on the attached map, this subdivision will be located within **two state-designated Significant Natural Heritage Areas**. These areas are displayed in brown dots and labeled on the attached map as:

1. **Boothe Hill Upland Wildlife Area**, and
2. **Herndon Creek Ravine**

Boothe Hill and Herndon Creek Ravine were designated by the state’s Natural Heritage Program as Significant Natural Heritage Areas because they support rare and high quality natural communities.¹ The remaining forest on Boothe Hill, particularly the summit, provides one of the best examples of mature, upland hardwood forest in the county. This hardwood forest provides outstanding wildlife habitat for area-sensitive species such as bobcat and wild turkey that need large tracts of unbroken forest to survive. Herndon Creek Ravine is similarly valuable, as it is one of the deepest ravines in the county, and contains a mesic hardwood forest, several springs,

¹ Documentation of the site’s environmental value can be found on pgs. 113-114 and pgs. 205-206 of the “Inventory of the Natural Areas and Wildlife Habitats of Chatham County, North Carolina.” A copy of this document can be obtained by calling Kristen Sinclair with the NC Natural Heritage Program at 919-715-8687.

and a bottomland hardwood forest. Boothe Hill and Herndon Creek Ravine together provide an important wildlife corridor that connects the uplands around Boothe Hill with the lowland forests on Jordan Game Land. This corridor likely supports several wildlife species identified as priorities for conservation in North Carolina's Wildlife Action Plan. According to the environmental survey conducted by S&EC in March 2007, the site supports at least two: spotted salamander and carolina ladle crayfish.

As it is currently proposed, the Westfall subdivision will eliminate the Significant Natural Heritage Areas and upland wildlife habitat found on this site. We believe Westfall could be redesigned to accommodate needed built area while also protecting the most sensitive areas on this site. In fact, conserving the environmental values of this site could allow the applicant to highlight the protected heritage area as an environmental asset, which would likely add real estate value to the home sites.

To adequately protect the state-designated Significant Natural Heritage Areas, we strongly suggest the following measures be incorporated into this subdivision's plans:

- We recommend that **no built structures** (other than boardwalks, trails, or other passive recreational structures) **be placed within the boundaries of the Significant Natural Heritage Area (SNHAs)**.
 - This area harbors some of the rarest natural communities in Chatham County, and is an inappropriate site for buildings. Buildings, associated infrastructure, and resulting sedimentation will seriously damage and possibly eliminate the rare natural communities on site.
 - We therefore recommend a building envelope, no build easement, or permanent conservation easement be placed around the area that falls within the SNHA boundaries. The Ecosystem Enhancement Program (EEP) is accepting donations of conservation easements throughout the Herndon Creek watershed, and the applicant could consider pursuing this as a conservation option.
- We recommend the applicant document the presence of the **SNHA boundaries on all plats** (preliminary and subsequent plats) as well as on all subdivision applications.
- We recommend the applicant follow **conservation subdivision design principles** in this development. Application of conservation subdivision design would involve:
 - Clustering the homes as much as possible outside of the heritage area (SNHA)
 - Permanently protecting **the most environmentally valuable 50%** of the site as open space (i.e., the summit of Boothe Hill, stream buffers, the ravine, a corridor connected to Jordan Game Land, and other areas that could be identified via consultation with a qualified biologist)

Thank you for the opportunity to review this subdivision proposal, and for considering our comments. I am available to discuss any site design changes the County or applicant may want to pursue. If you would like to discuss these comments further, please contact me at (919) 360-9680.

cc: Jeff Marcus, NC Wildlife Resources Commission
Shari Bryant, NC Wildlife Resources Commission
Vann Stancil, NC Wildlife Resources Commission
Kristen Sinclair, NC Natural Heritage Program
Sarah McRae, NC Natural Heritage Program
Allison Weakley, Chatham County Environmental Review Board

Westfall Subdivision

