

1930s farm next project at Rural Center

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The Daily Advance
Monday, September 24, 2012

CURRITUCK — A 1930s farm at Currituck's Rural Center in Powells Point will be the next phase of a major upgrade to the site that has already cost \$1.3 million.

Currituck County Extension Director Cameron Lowe said she expects a master plan for the farm will be completed soon. The plan may include a barn, smoke house, corn crib, chicken coop and "well sweeper" — a lever system used to pump water out of a well. All are part of the Rural Center's mission to preserve the county's cultural heritage, said Lowe.

The new attraction would include interpretive signs and possibly some scheduled demonstrations in the future.

The farm would be located on a recently-acquired parcel beside the park's entrance on Milbourne Sawyer Road. The property at 144 Gabbard Lane was purchased by the county in April for \$112,000.

A new sign on Caratoke Highway now directs traffic to the site off North Spot Road, which leads to Milbourne Sawyer Road.

The Rural Center, formerly a horse farm, was purchased by the county in 2006 for \$3.2 million, originally as a site for equine events. Since 2009, the county has budgeted \$1.3 million, all from occupancy taxes, toward upgrading infrastructure and adding more recreational features at the 105-acre park.

Most recently, new parking, picnic pavilions, a playground, fishing pier, rain garden, a scenic boardwalk, kayak launch and marked routes in the Currituck Sound have been added at a price tag of \$478,000.

The floating kayak launch is the only one of its kind in the county and gives access to several marked trails on the Currituck Sound, said Lowe. The 2,700-foot boardwalk is the site's first path through the site's swamp and marshland.

The Rural Center opened about three years ago with an indoor horse arena, barns and some horse trails.

Work to upgrade the site began in 2009 with the addition of bleachers, an announcer's booth, bathrooms, fencing, a road to the site and other improvements totaling \$501,000.

In 2010, water, septic and electric services were extended to the site, including a doublewide trailer that became the Rural Center's office.

In 2011, an indoor sound system for the outdoor arena was added.

Now that the equine and recreational facilities have been upgraded, it's time to begin the third prong of the Rural Center's mission, which is cultural heritage, said Lowe.

The 1930s farm reflects an important part of Currituck's history when agriculture was a major part of the local economy, she said.

Once the master plan is completed, basically at-cost by N.C. State University's School of Design, the Rural Center will begin looking for someone to design the barn. To keep costs down, Lowe is hoping to find an architect at N.C. State willing to underwrite the design. That work could begin later this year, Lowe said.

The Farm Bureau Federation has already pledged \$50,000 toward the project. Funding from the county will be decided after the farmstead's master plan is designed, Lowe said.

Plans for the upgrade to the Rural Center do not end there. The county's 2012-13 budget includes plans for a rodeo arena.

Lowe said upgrades to the Rural Center have been noticed by the public. More people than ever before are visiting, she said. In addition, special events, including the county's first-ever Rural Farm Festival, drew about 600 participants last year. This year's event is set for Oct. 6 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and includes horse demonstrations, carriage rides, and a first-ever "Homegrown and Homemade" contest.