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Officials break ground on Cassels-Boykin County Park

By STEVEN ALFORD
The Lufkin Daily News

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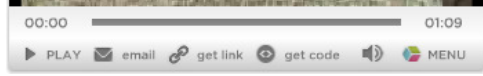
After years of planning, the dreams of an avid outdoorsman and his supportive friends were realized Thursday morning as groundbreaking commenced on the Cassels-Boykin County Park Improvement Project.

Plans for the lakeside park include the Dr. Bill and Emily Shelton pavilion and a new five-lane boat ramp.



(ENLARGE)

This artist's rendering of Cassels-Boykin County Park depicts the location of the new five-ramp boat launch in a cove shielded from the weather.



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"This pavilion is one of the many dreams the late Dr. Shelton had for this community," said James Slack, chair of the Lake Enhancement Task Force. "He worked tirelessly to ensure children and the physically challenged had access to the lake. Today his dream has become a reality."

The project encompasses three phases including the pavilion, boat ramps, a handicapped-accessible fishing pier and several new camp sites and hiking trails.

"We expect this to have a very high impact on tourism for the county," said Wes Suiter, county judge. "It's taken a lot of work to get to this point, but we're all very excited to be here today."

Through donations and grants, the project has about half of the \$5 million required to finish the plans.

"This is the community's pavilion and park," Slack said. "Any donation is welcome and tax-deductible. It helps us get that much closer to completing the dreams of Dr. Shelton."

With the new facilities, Cassels-Boykin would be able to handle larger fishing tournaments, as well as outdoor events such as concerts, or weddings, bringing in more visitors to the area.

Due to lack of funds and hurricane damage from Rita, most parks on Sam Rayburn Reservoir have been closed or poorly maintained, making the project that much more important, said Slack.

"We see this park as a great economic development for the county and its residents," he said.

Because those working on the project are volunteers, all funds generated for Cassels-Boykin can be applied directly to the park.

Without the dedication of Dr. Bill Shelton and the many members of the Lake Enhancement Task Force, the project would not be happening, Slack said.

Due to federal fund-raising constraints, Cassels-Boykin would have been shut down by the Corps of Engineers, which has been the fate of many of the Corps' and U.S. Forest Service's public facilities on Sam Rayburn Reservoir.

The Lake Enhancement Taskforce, in conjunction with the Angelina County Chamber of Commerce, hopes to have the first two phases of the project ready by April in time for a large fishing tournament in May.

Angelina County has agreed to maintain the park once the enhancements are complete, and income generated at Cassels-Boykin will go toward additional improvements and future expansions at the park, plus others on Sam Rayburn Reservoir.

Cassels-Boykin, located off state Highway 147 outside Zavalla, was established in the 1960s by the Corps of Engineers and after

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years of aging and erosion was spotlighted in 1997 by the task force for further development.

"These two phases are just the beginning of what is going to be a great facility for the residents of all East Texas," Slack said. "We have a lot of room to grow and expand."

For more information, or to make donations, visit the Chamber's Web site at www.lufkintexas.org or call (936) 634-6644.

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