

Salisbury Post

State finalizes Alcoa land donation, expands Morrow Mountain State Park by 1,085 acres

STANLY COUNTY — The State of North Carolina and Alcoa Power Generating Inc. (“Alcoa”) have finalized a land donation that will expand Morrow Mountain State Park by more than 1,000 acres.

The agreement, tied to the federal relicensing of a hydroelectric project along the Yadkin River, relates to the Relicensing Settlement Agreement, reached in 2007 between Alcoa and more than two dozen stakeholders. Alcoa sold the hydroelectric project in 2017 but retained most of the obligations in the Relicensing Settlement Agreement.

Alcoa’s donation of 1,085 acres, situated along the Yadkin River on the north-northwest side of the park, will allow Morrow Mountain State Park to grow its footprint by more than 20%. The 5,881-acre park is now one of the 10 largest state parks in North Carolina by acreage.

“We recognize the significance of these lands, and we are happy to donate this property for the continued enjoyment and benefit of future generations,” said Mark Stiffler, Vice President of Alcoa Asset Planning & Management, in a press release. “This was one of many agreements we made to the State of North Carolina during the relicensing process, and we are pleased to see this commitment met.”

Alcoa’s donation includes property containing the historic Hardaway site, one of the oldest and most significant archaeological sites in North America. Designated a National Historic Landmark, the Hardaway site includes artifacts dating back more than 10,000 years. It is often credited with providing valuable clues about North Carolina’s earliest inhabitants.

“We are so grateful to have this addition to Morrow Mountain State Park,” said park superintendent Jeff Davidson in a press release. “Nesting bald eagles, timber rattlesnakes and the rare Yadkin River Goldenrod make their homes on the acreage with its large boulder fields, scenic vistas and unique wildlife habitat. This major addition will conserve important ecosystems and make a little more room for recreation to serve nearby communities as well as the growing Piedmont population.”

As part of the relicensing agreement, Alcoa agreed to sell or donate more than 6,000 acres of undeveloped land along the Yadkin River to the State of North Carolina or conservation groups. This includes the donation of 270 acres to expand the Uwharrie National Forest, 63 acres for Eagle Point Nature Preserve in Rowan County and 14 acres around the Badin Public Recreation Area in Stanly County.

In addition, Three Rivers Land Trust and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission purchased 2,463 acres — including 45 miles of shoreline on the Yadkin River above High Rock Lake — from Alcoa last year for conservation purposes. The land trust is currently raising funds to purchase and conserve an additional 2,300 acres of Alcoa property along Tuckertown Reservoir.