



Island Report

February 2021, Page 5

Wildlife Overlook

Coming soon!

The Wildlife Overlook is an important component of the common area which the Bald Head Association is charged with maintaining for the benefit of everyone on Bald Head Island. It has long served as a place where families and friends could gather to observe various wildlife native to the Island, including American alligators, Ibis, herons and turtles, in their natural habitat. It has been used by the BHI Conservancy as a location for its nature/birding programs and visited by students from the mainland during field trips.



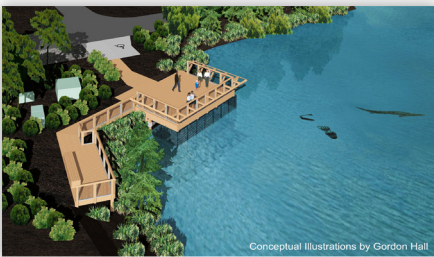
The original Overlook structure was damaged

beyond repair by Hurricane Florence in 2018 and Hurricane Dorian in 2019, and the Association was forced to close the area due to safety concerns. After polling its members, the Association is now constructing a new Overlook professionally designed

to address long-standing safety concerns presented by the former structure and be more durable and accessible. The new design includes a wooden alligator viewing platform to provide visitors with a more meaningful experience over the lagoon. To address technical and logistical challenges with implementing pile foundations in the water, the design team proposed a cantilevered structure which allows for the majority of the primary supporting structure to remain on dry land while, at the same time, maintaining a viewing perimeter similar to the original footprint.



With safety as the highest priority, BHA has consulted and coordinated with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission and the BHI Conservancy to develop a design that considers both human and carnivorous, predatory reptile behavior, including multiple barrier layers to help prevent human-alligator interactions. The resulting primary guard structure includes vertical and angled shielding components to achieve those objectives. The guard panels will be fabricated from hot dip galvanized steel mesh and assembled into removable panels to maximize durability, protect visitors from alligators, and conveniently facilitate repairs when needed. Stainless steel connection hardware will enhance the durability of the structure and reduce future maintenance costs.



The perimeter of the newly designed platforms will address safety concerns by more

effectively separating humans from alligators and discouraging interactions which may pose a danger to either one. The finished wood deck will be treated with a slip-resistant coating as an additional safety feature. A bird viewing area with bench seating has been included in the new design to allow visitors to quietly observe some of the 65 bird species that have been identified on the Island. A walkway will connect the two areas. Educational signage will be placed strategically throughout the new Overlook with information about wildlife in the area, including the American alligator, various bird types and the Island’s lagoon system (including the Overlook lagoon), which works in tandem to control the Island’s storm waters.

The new facility will feature additional designated bicycle and cart parking areas (including paved accessible parking). Finally, new landscape plantings will be installed for the purpose of screening Duke Energy transformers and also to supplement and replace vegetation removed during construction.

The estimated budget for the construction of the Wildlife Overlook is \$325,000-\$350,000 and will be paid for through a multi-year special assessment beginning in 2021. Construction is scheduled to be completed in late spring/early summer of 2021.