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Site along Licking looks to the past

Locals invited to share knowledge

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CAMPBELL COUNTY - The history of the wooded hillside along the Licking River near Cold Spring and Alexandria now known as Hawthorne Crossing stretches back to the pioneer days.

Those working on making Hawthorne Crossing into a conservation area and park want to learn more about the 140-acre former dairy farm.

The Campbell County Conservation District and the Campbell County Conservancy want people interested in the Hawthorne Crossing Conservation Area or who may know about the history of the property to attend a public meeting on March 30 at Licking Valley Baptist Church on Licking Pike near the old farm.

The groups hope to gather historical information and update the public on the plans for the conservation area.

The site had a crossing for settlers in the 1790s, according to local historians. The park name derives from the crossing and the small town of Hawthorne that sprang up and then disappeared.

A 200-year-old log cabin still stands on the property but has crumbled with age.

The property sat largely unused until fall, when the Campbell Conservancy and the Campbell County Conservation District bought it with an \$800,000 state grant. They will turn the property into a wildlife refuge that will leave the native species of plants and animals undisturbed while putting in walking trails, bird-watching areas and a boat launch for canoes and kayaks on the Licking River.

The organizers want to have a history display in the park.

"We want to get some of the oral history from the locals," said Dennis Walter, a member of conservation district. "Eventually down the road there may be some interpretive center with the history of that land."

Northern Kentucky University anthropology professor Douglas Hume and students will collect the historical information and oral histories about the land and will be at the March 30 meeting.

"Our goal is to make the community part of the process," Hume said. "So often there are conservation projects that completely ignore the local community. They then either become dissatisfied with it or have a negative conception of it."

Hawthorne Crossing will likely be ready for public use in 2010, Walter said. The state grant, from money Kentucky gets from nature license plates and environmental fines, requires a series of biological and historical assessments to protect the integrity of the habitat.

The conservancy and conservation district have spent the winter handling the legal and technical groundwork, said David Peck, conservancy chairman .

"It will provide a place for people to go and enjoy a nice hike and put a canoe in the Licking River," Peck said.

The March 30 meeting will be at 7 p.m.
