



Chickasaw Pointe will be the focal point of new development plans.

Lake Texoma to go private

Agency to name winning developer on Dec. 15

OKLAHOMA CITY - In a move to rebuild and improve the lodging facilities at Lake Texoma State Park, the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department (OTRD) and the state's Commissioners of Land Office (CLO) closed a deal to allow the CLO to purchase the Texoma lodge and adjacent golf course plus Chickasaw Pointe Golf Course.

The CLO is taking bids from private developers and management companies to purchase the property. The long-term hope is that the current standard lodge will be replaced by an upscale hotel, the original 18 holes and cabins upgraded and Chickasaw Pointe maintained in top condition. The entire area could become a great tourist draw for Texans, Oklahomans and others throughout the region.

Currently OTRD leases 558 acres from the Army Corps of Engineers and owns an additional 192 acres. Under terms of the agreement the CLO will purchase the land from both entities, including the lodge and both golf courses. Late this year the CLO will chose a qualified developer and enter into a partnership for development of public and private facilities around Chickasaw Pointe and in the area of the current lodge and cabins.

Keith Kuhlman, director of real estate management for the CLO, said his agency will accept proposals from five qualified bidders on developing the resort. Final propos-

als are due Nov. 2 and the winning bid will be announced Dec. 15.

"Each proposal is different in its scope and what it offers," Kuhlman said. "The only thing set in granite is that Chickasaw Pointe can't be touched with a 10-foot pole. There is wording that it must maintain the quality of its present condition."

Some proposals include upgrading the older Lake Texoma course, while others would completely rebuild it or do away with it entirely in favor of such things as a water park.

"Our main goal is we want a beautiful destination resort, a place that all of Oklahoma will be proud," Kuhlman said. "And we want to make a good sound investment for the school kids of Oklahoma."

Part of the funds raised by the sale go toward financing Oklahoma's public schools.

The Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department has operated Lake Texoma State Park since 1951. In 1958, the Texoma lodge and golf course were added. In 1999, Chickasaw Pointe Golf Course opened. The course was designed by Tulsan Randy Heckenkemper and has been the crown jewel of the nine-course state park golf system operated and promoted by OTRD.

Ryan Chapman, director of the state park golf system, currently offices at Chickasaw Pointe. He said he wasn't sure what the future holds, but he would either stay on to manage

Chickasaw Pointe for the new owner or move to Oklahoma City to manage the remaining state park golf courses. OTRD spokesman Mike Fina said the state would spend more time promoting other facilities, such as Lake Murray near Ardmore, Roman Nose in Watonga and Grand Cherokee in Disney.

Sen. Jay Paul Gumm, who represents the area and who wrote the law authorizing the transfer, said the local economy would benefit greatly from new development.

"This is about creating jobs in my district and preserving Lake Texoma as a premier tourist destination," he said. "This new partnership will also spur additional economic expansion in the area, creating even more jobs and opportunity for the people of Marshall County and the surrounding area."

Another benefit, Gumm said, is that the land would now be placed on the tax rolls, providing more funding for schools and roads in the area.

Robb Gray, state tourism executive director, said the Texoma lodge has been "historically underfunded" and for that reason this is a good partnership. "The Texoma Lodge would not have survived much longer in its current state," he said. "The CLO has recent experience working with state land and private developers with the Rose Creek development in Edmond. Additionally, the CLO has the financial resources to make a purchase of this size."

According to Gray, OTRD will maintain Texoma State Park in a smaller area.

"We have plans to retain leases on the Catfish Bay area and the Rooster Creek area. Eventually these areas will be reconfigured and upgraded as the new Texoma State Park," he said. Gray explained it is important to maintain the park to ensure public access points to one of Oklahoma's top tourist destinations.

Gray said current employees would be given preferential treatment for job openings within the agency and qualifying employees could receive a severance package. "The welfare of our employees has been of great concern since the beginning of this project. We have a plan to ensure that all of them are employed or compensated," he said.

The final step will occur in February when the CLO transfers ownership or enters into long-term leases with developers.

"This really was a historic day for Oklahoma," Lt. Gov. Mary Fallin said. "Thanks to this farsighted action by the Commissioners of the Land Office and the Tourism and Recreation Commission, Texoma is going to boom in the next few years."