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Relax: Nothing of note lives on I-85 ramps

By MICHAEL PEARSON
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
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There were no arrowheads, no eagles to see. Not even a snorklewort, whatever that may be. There was just scrub and quite a few passing trucks — such a conclusion for 7,000 trucks.

Yes, folks, the debate — if ever there was one — can now be put to rest: There are no historically significant monuments, bald eagles or anything else of note living in the scrub along ramps to and from I-85 in Gwinnett County.

Thousands of vehicles whiz by these narrow strips of land each day, making them seemingly unlikely homes for endangered animals or hidden history. Yet the federal government still required two business groups working to spruce up central Gwinnett to pay a consultant about \$7,000 to scour five highway intersections for historic sites or rare animals before landscaping them.

"They really did," said Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District director Joe Allen. "We really had to do that."

The interchanges are at Pleasant Hill, Steve Reynolds, Beaver Run, Indian Trail Lilburn and Jimmy Carter.

Such studies are standard for highway projects, said Chuck Warbington, director of the Gwinnett Village Community Improvement District, whose landscaping project also was subject to the study. Yet the requirement surprised Allen, who had been pushing for a quick launch of the beautification effort, one of the group's first visible projects.

Not that he minded all that much — the Federal Highway Administration had to give its blessing for the landscaping, and still has sway over a much larger bridge-replacement plan proposed for Pleasant Hill Road at I-85. He said the feds have been good partners so far.

"They have their reasons, and I respect that," Allen said.

He had hoped to start the work early this year and be done by spring. Now, he's waiting until cooler weather this fall to begin work.

The Gwinnett Village project at the Beaver Run, Indian Trail Lilburn and Jimmy Carter exits has already begun and should be done by next month, Warbington said.

Oh, and for the curious, a snorklewort is a floating plant with inconspicuous white and violet flowers that likes to live in granite outcroppings. The nearest known examples? Stone Mountain.

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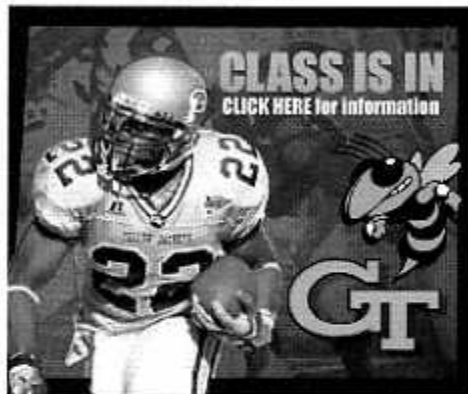
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