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## Balsam Mountain Preserve goes natural

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**BALSAM** — The developers of Balsam Mountain Preserve say they wanted to build a community within a park, rather than a park within a community.

For fishermen, there are 38 miles of streams that are home to rare Southern Appalachian brook trout, as well as 50 miles of trails that connect to Nantahala National Forest.

Developed by Chaffin/Light Associates, Balsam Mountain is a 4,400-acre gated community midway between Waynesville and Sylva, about a 40-minute drive from Asheville. The property was originally owned by Champion International Paper Co., and logging roads were still in place, making development a bit easier. The roads in the community were named with logging, mining and railroad terms.

There will be a total of 354 homes, and the Balsam Mountain Trust protects 3,000 acres, with elevations reaching 5,500 feet. The community offers one- to two-acre home sites, as well as fractional ownership in cottages.

“We have homes up to 4,700 feet,” said broker Bob Tufts. “We don’t have anything beyond that because we don’t want to put the homes on the ridge top.”

The developers are encouraging architectural diversity. “Because the home sites are spread apart, you aren’t going to be looking at one house right next to the other, so you can have some different styles of architecture without offending the house next to it,” Tufts said.

For fire protection, each home is required to have an underground, 2,000-gallon cistern to collect rainwater.

The guardhouse at the community entrance has solar panels, and Balsam Mountain also looks for ways to promote sustainability.

“We have our own sawmill here on the property,” said Tufts. “When we are clearing a home site, if there is wood we can reuse, we take it to our sawmill and cut it into usable lumber and you will see it as siding on the stables, the camp, fences — things like that where we need rough-sawn lumber.”

Balsam Mountain boasts a new Arnold Palmer-designed golf course, stables with trail rides and lessons, a sports camp with fitness center, pool and tennis courts, and a nature center.

Ed and Linda James have been residents of Balsam Mountain Preserve since August and have visited the preserve since 2005. They discovered the area through an ad in the Wall Street Journal.

“It’s just beautiful and open, and they are preserving the natural area,” said Linda James. “We chose

Balsam Mountain Preserve for its beauty, the large tract of land they are preserving, and you can feel safe in wandering around over undeveloped land.”

On-staff naturalists work at the nature center, offering guided hikes, mountain bike rides, children’s activities and bird watching.

Naturalist Michael Skinner has been with Balsam Mountain Preserve for five years. “We don’t preach, we teach,” said Skinner. “We are unique because of this company’s commitment to growth. Having as an amenity the Balsam Mountain Trust is, we believe, something special for the homeowners, but it goes so much beyond that — 3,000 conservation acres: The company’s commitment to conserve is right there in front of you.”

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