

FEDS from 1A

other two involved a payroll glitch and a lack of controls in the handling of 1-cent sales tax revenues, both of which Thomas said have been corrected.

In correspondence to the justice department, which has not yet been sent, the county also plans to invite federal officials to look at all departments and offices.

Laughinghouse said if officials "dug really deep into actions of some other county activities, in both perhaps departments and constitutional offices, they would find other issues if they dug deep enough."

County Attorney Ken Jarrard said commissioners wanted the justice department because it is "an outside-of-the-county body, with investigative powers."

Jarrard said the commission is basically asking the department to "investigate those findings and recommendations of the Sawyer report as they pertain to the elections office."

Jarrard said the justice department could decline the county's invite.

"If they come in and believe whatever the concern was in the Sawyer report is outside of their realm of authority ... it will be for them to make that determination," Jarrard said.

Former elections director Gary J. Smith — whose consulting agreements with outside agen-

cies were detailed in the audit as "material weaknesses," or serious risks — said he's "glad" the commission made the move.

"The justice department will take no action because there's no reason to respond," Smith said.

The Sawyer report raised issues with consulting agreements between then-elections director Smith and Cherokee County and Smith and Election Science Institute, an organization that studies elections.

According to the report, Smith entered into an agreement with Cherokee County at a pay rate of \$500 per day for a 31-day period.

The report stated that Smith was compensated by Cherokee County for 160 hours of work, while in the same time period he clocked 93.97 hours with Forsyth County.

"In total, Mr. Smith was compensated for 351.97 hours in a period which only had a realistic possible work time of 248 hours, including weekends and one holiday," the report noted.

Smith said he used comp time he earned to take time off from his Forsyth County duties to do the work in Cherokee County.

Timekeeping records of Smith's work with ESI were also mentioned in the report.

Thomas said the

Sawyer report provided "direct evidence" on this matter that a previous audit by Bates, Carter and Co. "did not have."

"The Sawyer report ... provided an e-mail from the company called ESI that indicated to us that they paid Gary Smith \$7,500 for his work with them," Thomas said. "He essentially got paid by the county when he wasn't here and he got paid by ESI for the same work."

Smith, who now serves as chief registrar and elections board chairman, said both issues have been resolved and he saw no reason for further investigation.

Thomas said the reason for hiring Sawyer & Co. was to "have a stronger internal controls system in place that will hopefully decrease any exposure we might have to fraud or anything like that ... or loss of assets."

"The Gary Smith issue came up because that was left over from the Bates, Carter report," he said.

Tuesday's decision followed the recent reorganization of the elections office, which stemmed from a long-running issue over the legality of Smith serving as both chairman and department head.

Barbara Luth has been named supervisor of elections, overseeing the day-to-day functions of the county's elections and voter registration department.

PROJECT from 1A

affect wildlife.

One woman, who lives on Majors Road, said past developments in the area have pushed rats to her property.

Attorney Emory Lipscomb, who represents Paces, said access on Castleberry to the site will be "right in, right out" only. He said homes built on Castleberry and Majors will be priced at up to \$1 million.

"The option, as we understand it, is to put 1,279 homes on this tract of land or whether to put commercial, as was thought wise by the planning staff here and by others," Lipscomb said. "And that's what we have opted to."

Lipscomb said the plan is a "more proper use" of the property along Hwy. 9 and that the project would be a benefit to the county.

about six months, so it's a little hard to predict how quickly they'll move on this one," Odom said.

Hubert Bledniak, Ewelina's father, is cautiously optimistic.

"I don't know how it's going to end, but we're hoping for the best," he said.

Hubert and Agnes Bledniak have attained permanent U.S. resident status since moving from Poland. They thought the same was true for their daughter, only to have immigration services deny her

Warsaw for vacation in family goodbye.

"We would because we all the tickets. just spend a there," said Bledniak. "B to buy a return Ewelina because doesn't have ticket.

"But I'm we're going allowed to go they're going needs to stay, going to stay."

In order to decision, im

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