



Fort Macon
STATE PARK OF THE YEAR

NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS 2016 ANNUAL REPORT



MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

DEAR FRIENDS:

With all eyes focused on the North Carolina state parks centennial year of 2016, an interesting thing happened during the course of the last 12 months. More people than ever visited North Carolina state parks in 2015. A record-setting 17.3 million people came to see, enjoy, experience, and learn about our majestic mountains, magnificent beaches, beautiful and diverse foothills, and the rivers, lakes, plains, and forests in between. Six parks recorded over a million visitors. One of those parks was Fort Macon, which was named State Park of the Year and is featured on the cover of this annual report. Mount Mitchell State Park was named State Park of the Century in accordance with the coming centennial year and its significance as our first state park.

2015 was a special year for state parks for a number of reasons. We moved with the North Carolina Zoological Park, the Museum of Natural Sciences, the Aquariums, and Division of Land and Water Stewardship, to the newly formed Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. Governor Pat McCrory and the General Assembly created the new department to bring agencies with similar missions and goals together to generate synergy and partnerships for mutual and multiple benefits.

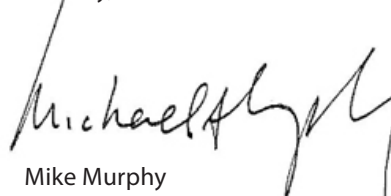
In other news, North Carolina added 3,032 acres to the state parks system in 2015 to increase the total of lands protected for conservation, education and recreation to 228,564 acres. In the state's budget, the General Assembly provided an additional \$10.6 million for the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, bringing the total funding available for state and local park projects to \$36.8 million for the biennium. The \$2 billion Connect NC bond issue includes \$75 million for 45 projects that include new and expanded visitor centers, new and improved campsites, variety of day use facilities and land acquisitions for parks, natural areas, and trails.

Governor McCrory joined other state and local officials in April at Lake Norman State Park in Iredell County to dedicate a new, 11,000-square-foot visitor center and district office designed to national green building standards. Similar to visitor centers built at 22 state parks and state recreation areas since 1994, the Lake Norman facility offers a unique design and features interior and exterior exhibits, a teaching auditorium and classroom, along with administrative offices. During 2015, the Governor also visited Pilot Mountain, William B. Umstead, Hammocks Beach, and Stone Mountain state parks.

You can learn about these and other accomplishments elsewhere in this annual report. We hope you take the time to learn more about your state parks. We have lined up a very special series of events in 2016 in celebration of our 100th anniversary. You can learn more about the centennial and the events, by visiting <http://www.ncparks.gov/100/celebrate-our-centennial>

Please come visit, volunteer, and/or join one of the many individual park friends support groups or the statewide Friends of State Parks, non-profit organizations dedicated to supporting state parks <http://www.ncfsp.org/>. Please join us in celebrating 100 years of making memories. The dedicated men and women of North Carolina state parks are proud to serve as stewards of the best North Carolina has to offer. They're waiting to welcome you and show you why North Carolina state parks are Naturally Wonderful.

Sincerely,



Mike Murphy

FORT MACON STATE PARK NAMED THE 2015 NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARK OF THE YEAR

Fort Macon State Park in Carteret County was named the 2015 North Carolina State Park of the Year by the NC Division of Parks and Recreation, and will hold that distinction throughout the year-long centennial celebration of the state parks system.

The park was chosen for its “exemplary contribution to the North Carolina state parks mission of stewardship, public service and education,” and specifically recognized for initiatives in expanded recreation opportunities, volunteerism, interpretive programming, and sustainability.

“It’s fitting that during our 100th anniversary, Fort Macon is honored as State Park of the Year. It was the first functional North Carolina state park, having been created in 1924,” said Mike Murphy, state park director. “With its outstanding professional staff and careful stewardship of both fragile natural resources and a historic landmark, Fort Macon represents all that a state park should be.”

Despite visitation of nearly 1.3 million during 2015, the staff, under the direction of Superintendent Randy Newman, found time to create the park’s first nature trail and provide 1,090 interpretive programs and stage 14 special events. With help from Friends of Fort Macon, a new 600-square-foot exhibit space was created, and the staff directed major renovations to the park’s bathhouse and enhanced a sustainability program that reduced water usage by half.

Other nominees for 2015 that were designated Regional State Parks of the Year were Carolina Beach, Eno River, and Mount Mitchell state parks.



NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS REPORT RECORD VISITATION OF 17.3 MILLION IN 2015



Boating at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area



Bikers at William B. Umstead State Park



First Day Hike at Carvers Creek State Park



Hikers at Grandfather Mountain State Park

Governor Pat McCrory announced in February that visitation at North Carolina's state parks set a new record in 2015. More than 17.3 million people visited the state's 39 parks, up from 15.6 million the previous year.

"An 11 percent increase proves that nothing compares to the enriching experience of a visit to a North Carolina state park," McCrory said. "North Carolina's natural beauty is an important part of our overall quality of life that is second to none. I commend the men and women of our parks division for creating unique adventures that can turn a visit into a lifetime memory, and sharing our vision of preserving our state parks for future generations."

Among 39 state parks and state recreation areas, 30 reported increases in visitation in 2015. Jordan Lake State Recreation Area in Chatham County reported the highest visitation, at nearly 1.6 million visits, and was among six state park units logging more than a million visitors. The others were Fort Macon, Jockey's Ridge, and William B. Umstead state parks, and Falls Lake and Kerr Lake state recreation areas.

"The diverse beauty of North Carolina is found in our state parks," said Natural and Cultural Resources Secretary Susan Kluttz. "From the mountains to the coast, each park is unique in the wonderful opportunities it offers to our visitors to connect with nature."

In recent years, many state parks have added special events to their calendars to complement system-wide events such as First Day Hikes, National Trails Day, and Take a Child Outside Week. Newer state parks such as Carvers Creek in Cumberland County and Gorges State Park in Transylvania County are being discovered by the public.

"Beginning with First Day Hikes a year ago, North Carolinians found every opportunity to enjoy our state parks in 2015, setting a visitation record for the third straight year. This reflects the value they place on our state parks and the opportunities for family recreation," said Mike Murphy, state parks director. "There are even more reasons to visit in 2016 as we celebrate our 100-year history with special events statewide and in every state park."

A new visitor center and improvements in mountain bike trails at Lake Norman State Park likely contributed to a 35 percent increase in visitation there to 742,236. Other parks reporting significant increases in visitation included Gorges State Park (48 percent), Pilot Mountain State Park (35 percent), Grandfather Mountain State Park (30 percent) and Hanging Rock State Park (24 percent).



Clear Creek Access at South Mountains State Park where some campsites would be built under Connect NC

LAWMAKERS INCREASE TRUST FUND AND INCLUDE \$75 MILLION FOR STATE PARKS IN BOND PACKAGE

In the state's budget, the North Carolina General Assembly provided an additional \$10.6 million for the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, bringing the total funding available for state and local park projects to \$36.8 million for the biennium. The trust fund provides dollar-for-dollar matching grants to local governments for park and recreation projects and is the primary source of funding for land and capital projects in state parks.

The proposed \$2 billion Connect NC bond issue was overwhelmingly passed by the voters in March 2016. It includes \$75 million for 45 projects that include new and expanded visitor centers, campgrounds, day use facilities and land acquisitions for parks, natural areas, and trails. Every state park has a project identified for funding in the bond package.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2015

BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE FOR STATE PARKS

The Division of Parks and Recreation's design and development program completed some key projects in 2015.

- The Lake Norman State Park and West District Office building was completed. See page 9 for more information.
- Another room in the fort, at Fort Macon State Park, received a museum quality exhibit, "Arms & Armament Exhibit".
- Carolina Beach State Park is now tied onto the Town's sewer system.
- Major repairs and renovations to the Fort Macon State Park bathhouse were completed in 2015, after the beach season. Additional repairs to the decking around the facility and punch list work was to be completed in early 2016, and will be open to the public for the 2016 beach season.
- Major renovations were completed to Haw River State Park's youth cabins.
- Trail structure improvements at Chimney Rock State Park were completed in 2015. These provide access to Pulpit Rock, the Grotto, and the Subway, which have been closed for several years due to their condition.
- A primitive boat-in camping complex was completed at Lake James State Park.
- A new entrance road and trail head was completed at Haw River State Park.

STATE PARKS ADD 3,032 ACRES IN 2015

The Division of Parks and Recreation added 3,032 acres in 20 transactions to 12 units of the state parks system in 2015. Over half of these properties not only protect significant natural and scenic resources, but also provide land for new facilities.

Acquisitions at Grandfather Mountain, Hammocks Beach, and Lake James state parks and at Mount Jefferson and Yellow Mountain state natural areas, offer the land base needed for planned recreational facilities such as trail heads, camping, and picnicking.

The acquisitions at Chimney Rock, Cliffs of the Neuse, Elk Knob, Eno River, and South Mountains state parks provide land for expansion and trail connections. The federal Land and Water Conservation Fund was a critical funding partner in acquisitions at Chimney Rock, Lake James and Pilot Mountain state parks and Mount Jefferson and Yellow Mountain state natural areas.



Hikers at Mount Jefferson State Natural Area

HIGHLIGHTS

Chimney Rock State Park - The addition of 536 acres in multiple tracts connects several areas of the park and was completed with funding from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund and the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). These tracts contain high quality natural communities and rare species.

Grandfather Mountain State Park - The addition of 43 acres in two tracts along the Profile Trail provides access to a new trail head and allows re-routing to make the trail more sustainable.

Hammocks Beach State Park - The addition of 199 acres on the mainland provides room for expanded recreation facilities. The addition of 176 acres on Dudley Island will continue the conservation of this coastal island. State parks expects to close on another 99 acres in 2016.

Lake James State Park - The acquisition of 129 acres brings two inholdings into the state park. The larger one offers about 7,500 feet of shoreline along Lake James and will allow for expansion of trails and probably new recreation facilities. Funding was provided by the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) and LWCF.

Mount Jefferson State Natural Area - The acquisition of 111 acres will provide lower elevation access to the state natural area. New recreation facilities, such as picnic grounds and trails, are planned for this property. Funding was provided by the Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF) and LWCF.

Yellow Mountain State Natural Area - A key tract containing 257 acres was added to the state natural area. This property is suitable for trail head development to allow access to the Spear Tops area. Funding was provided by CWMTF, LWCF, and private donation.

ACQUISITION COMPLETED TO EXPAND HAMMOCKS BEACH STATE PARK

The acquisition of 199 acres on the mainland at Hammocks Beach State Park in Onslow County was completed in May with a formal closing on property previously owned by the heirs of John Hurst.

The Conservation Fund has purchased an adjoining 90 acres that will also be added to the state park through a phased acquisition over the next three years.

The waterfront tract on Queen's Creek, once the site of popular summer camps, is identified as a critical need to protect water quality and scenic assets, as well as the traditional park facilities. Currently, the 1,520-acre park encompasses 229 acres on the mainland along with Bear Island, Huggins Island, Dudley Island, and Jones Island.

"This event marks the end of a very long acquisition process, and the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Hammocks Beach State Park with unique opportunities for recreation and environmental education on this property," said Mike Murphy, state parks director. "Our gratitude goes to the many that have

been involved in this success, but particularly to The Conservation Fund, Onslow County, Friends of Hammocks and Bear Island, and the Hurst family."

Both tracts are being acquired from the heirs of John Hurst, son of a one-time slave who was caretaker of game lands owned by Dr. William Sharpe in the early 1900s. The history of Hammocks Beach State Park reaches back to the friendship of Sharpe, an avid outdoorsman and physician from New York, and Hurst and his wife Gertrude, who eventually became caretakers of Sharpe's hunting and fishing retreat. At the urging of the Hurst couple, Sharpe agreed to leave the property to the NC Teachers Association for use by its members. Bear Island and part of the mainland property was later authorized as the state park.

In 2015 the state purchased a major portion of the mainland property for \$6.96 million, provided through bonds and the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund. The purchase price was part of a settlement agreement reached in June 2014.

LAKE JAMES STATE PARK OPENS BOAT-IN CAMPING COMPLEX

Lake James State Park in Burke County opened a boat-in camping complex in June at its Paddy's Creek Area.

The facility offers 30 boat-in campsites on the tip of the Long Arm peninsula. The reservation-only campsites are furnished with picnic tables, fire pits and tent pads and have access to environmentally-friendly vault toilets.

The camping complex was built by staff at Lake James and from nearby state parks. The \$173,000 project was funded in part by Friends of Lake James State Park and a grant from the Rostan Family Foundation. The project includes an unpaved access road along the length of the peninsula that aids in security and will allow further park development.

The new amenities augment a swim beach, bathhouse, picnic area and foot trails. These have been opened in the park's Paddy's Creek Area since 2010. The newly developed access is on 2,915 acres, acquired in 2004 from Crescent Resources Inc.



Boat-in Campsite at Lake James State Park

STATE PARKS FEATURED IN NORTH CAROLINA TRAVEL GUIDE



The role of North Carolina's state parks as visitor attractions is being celebrated with twin, companion covers for the "Official 2016 North Carolina Travel Guide."

Visit North Carolina, which touts the state as a travel destination throughout the world, joined the centennial celebration of the state parks system with covers featuring Mount Mitchell State Park, the highest peak in the eastern United States, and Jockey's Ridge State Park, the tallest living sand dune on the east coast.

The magazine also offers features on Carolina Beach and Gorges state parks and Jordan Lake State Recreation Area. The Travel Guide is sent to travelers researching North Carolina and is available at welcome centers. An online version is enhanced by information pop-ups, audio and video, a table-of-contents slide show and NC Insider tips.

GOVERNOR MCCRORY CELEBRATES 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF LEGISLATION ESTABLISHING NC'S FIRST STATE PARK

Governor Pat McCrory signed and issued a proclamation at William B. Umstead State Park, March 3, celebrating the 100th anniversary of legislation authorizing Mount Mitchell as North Carolina's first state park.

"North Carolina's state parks connect us all with our rich natural heritage and our history and contribute significantly to the state's economy, especially in rural areas where many of the parks are located," Governor McCrory said. "This is a premier opportunity to recognize the visionary leaders of our state who set the wheels in motion to create a parks system that delights more than 15 million visitors each year."

The proclamation designates the first week in March as "North Carolina State Parks Week." The governor encouraged people to visit, volunteer, support and learn about North Carolina state parks during the park system's centennial in 2016.

The General Assembly authorized the purchase of land for a state park on Mount Mitchell on March 3, 1915, and 795 acres on the summit were acquired by the end of 1916. This firmly established the first state park in the southeastern United States.



Mount Mitchell State Park

GOVERNOR MCCRORY AND PARK FRIENDS DEDICATE LAKE NORMAN STATE PARK VISITOR CENTER

Gov. Pat McCrory, the family of the late Park Superintendent Casey Rhinehart and more than 100 park supporters and officials dedicated a new visitor center and district office in April at Lake Norman State Park.

The completion of the 11,000-square-foot facility and adjacent amenities, under the guidance of Rhinehart and Ranger Jarid Church, is a benchmark in the park's history and an example of sustainable development, designed to national green building standards. The project represents an investment of \$4.3 million from the N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.

"These parks give access for all citizens to these beautiful places," McCrory said. "The parks need to expand and be exposed to all income levels so that all can enjoy the best of North Carolina."

The role of state parks as contributors to quality of life and to local economies was a common theme for the event's speakers, including Jeff Archer, a parks advisory committee member and owner of a local bike shop, David Pearson, executive director of Friends of State Parks, and W.E. "Bill" Russell, president of the Lake Norman Chamber of Commerce.

Russell commented, "What do parks and recreation have to do with business? I'd say 'everything.' If it's not going to be a great place to live, it's not going to be a great place to work."

Mike Murphy, state parks director, said the visitor center as a place to educate is a tribute to Rhinehart, who died Feb. 25 of cancer after serving as superintendent at the park for 11 years. "He wanted to have a place to serve visitors and to teach about stewardship," Murphy said.

Gov. McCrory presented a plaque honoring Rhinehart's service to his wife Jill, children Kinsey and Nick and parents Bill and Scarlett Rhinehart, and then invited them to help him officially open the facility.

Similar to visitor centers built at 22 state parks and state recreation areas since 1994, the Lake Norman facility offers an architectural design styled to its lakeside setting, classrooms and interior and exterior exhibits. A paved exhibits trail leading to lake viewing platforms and a renovated picnic shelter and picnic grounds are fully accessible.

The visitor center is built to gold-level standards of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program of the US Green Building Council. A few of the features that will contribute to certification include active and passive solar energy systems, geothermal HVAC systems, natural lighting, water-saving fixtures and natural landscaping.



Lake Norman Visitor Center Dedication Ceremony.



Official opening with Gov. McCrory, the Rhinehart family and David Pearson.



Gov. McCrory presents a plaque honoring Supt. Casey Rhinehart's service.

INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION PROGRAM LAUNCHES NEW INITIATIVES

ELK KNOB'S UNIQUE ART TRAIL

Elk Knob's family-friendly interpretive trail is now the perfect combination of art and nature. When Ranger Kelly Safley needed to cut hazardous trees along the trail for safety, her creativity and resourcefulness helped her see an outdoor art gallery. She engaged artists at Appalachian State University, to display their work in hollowed out stumps. Visitors at Elk Knob's Annual Headwaters Festival also contributed to the new community art trail by creating imprinted pottery to be displayed along this new innovative trail.



GOOSE CREEK TAR KILN HISTORY

Goose Creek State Park brings 200-year-old park history to life with a new tar kiln demonstration. In historic tar kilns, heartwood, from longleaf pines, was covered with a mound of soil and heated by fire above. The tar and pitch flowing out of the mound through a gutter was used for waterproofing sailing vessels. In recent years, park rangers have found more than 50 tar kilns in the park while doing forest management. With a grant from the UNC Institute for the Environment, a demonstration tar kiln lets visitors and students experience the distinctive smells and textures of the pine tar and pitch that was once North Carolina's primary export.

NORTH CAROLINA SCIENCE FESTIVAL

State parks hosted 18 events, in partnership with the North Carolina Science Festival, in April. The events included 10 Statewide Star Parties and a series of seven science-themed programs at Hammocks Beach State Park. The official festival mission is to highlight the educational, cultural and financial impact of science on the state. Another goal is to share how science is fun. Over one million people have participated in the festival since 2010 at parks, schools, and learning centers across the state. North Carolina's state parks are ramping up the partnership in 2016, when the theme of the festival will be, "Science in the Great Outdoors." Each state park and recreation area plans to host a North Carolina Science Festival event in April 2016.



TRIANGLE VOLKSMARCH

The Triangle Volksmarch celebrated art, nature, and partnerships for conservation on National Trails Day, June 6. This unique partnership among five public land agencies, encouraged approximately 600 people to hike an estimated 2,000 miles along the Capital Greenway. It included fun educational activities at the NC Museum of Art, the Museum of Natural Science's Prairie Ridge Ecostation, NCSU's Schenck Forest, and William B. Umstead State Park. This self-paced walking challenge for all ages was named the 2015 Innovative Program of the Year by the North Carolina Recreation & Parks Association.

I SPY WITH MY PARK RANGER EYE

Photographing and identifying the wildlife and plants in state parks has always been a passion of Ranger Jessica Phillips. She recruited park rangers to select their best photos and then coordinated the "I Spy with my Park Ranger Eye" photography exhibit at the NC Museum of Natural Sciences. The exhibit, which let visitors experience the quiet beauty of state parks through a park ranger's perspective, has plans to expand to other museums and locations throughout North Carolina.



PHOTO SCAVENGER HUNT

The first NC Parks Photo Scavenger Hunt Challenge had 315 individual entries and more than 4,000 photos submitted from 35 state parks. The idea for the challenge came from seasonal state parks employees who attended an Outdoor Nation Summit at Jordan Lake. Outdoor Nation connects millennials (generally ages 18-28) from across the country to promote the outdoors to their generation. The North Carolina team won a \$1,000 grant to get more people outside and engaged in nature by offering prizes for capturing a dozen photos from a list that included an insect, weather, and a selfie with a park employee. A partnership between park staff and Friends of North Carolina State Parks volunteers were key to its success. As one family commented, "We had a blast with this... After living in our area for most of our lives, we honestly discovered just how diverse our state is and how fortunate we are to have these wonderful resources available to us."



NEIGHBORHOOD ECOLOGY CORPS

The Neighborhood Ecology Corps introduces students to science careers, volunteer service and the great outdoors. This new partnership among North Carolina State Parks, the city of Raleigh and NC State University helps address the underrepresentation of African Americans in science careers and nature recreation. In 2015, 20 middle school students in the program hiked, canoed, completed service projects, and camped at seven state parks during teacher workdays and school breaks. One student said, "Neighborhood Ecology helped me pass 7th grade science," and another commented, "I like having new experiences and learning to do things outdoors on our own."



DRAGONFLY DETECTIVES

Dragonfly Detectives is an innovative partnership of the state parks system and the NC Museum of Natural Sciences that trains 4th-8th graders as dragonfly citizen scientists. During six separate field trips to a state park, students learn how to identify species, how to describe dragonfly behavior, and how to capture and mark them on the wing. This research yields data on dragonfly behavior, but also suggests how effective youth can be as scientists. Time and careful data analysis over a three-year period will help determine the reliability of young citizen scientists compared to professional researchers. In any case, a sense of wonder is fully engaged for the young Dragonfly Detectives.



RETAIL OPERATIONS ENHANCE THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

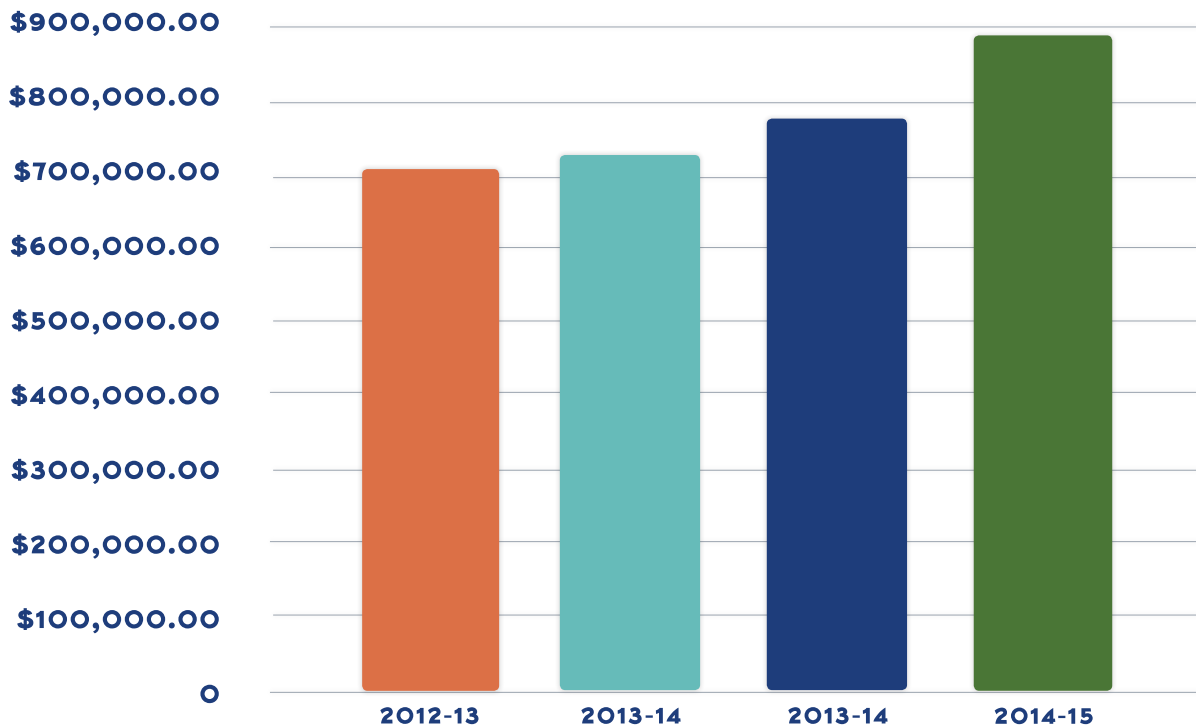
With the 2016 centennial underway, the state parks system is focused on providing souvenirs and keepsakes of the anniversary...something for everyone.

Each park has begun selling these items in the hope that visitors will take a piece of history home with them. Over 200 items can be purchased at the parks as well as through the web store at www.ncparkstore.com.

With the idea of creating more retail opportunities at the parks, retail expansion was initiated in 2015 at Lake Norman, Lake James, Stone Mountain, and Carvers Creek state parks. All the efforts are designed to provide more of what park visitors want and need during their visits.



RETAIL SALES 2012-2015





Campell University volunteers at Raven Rock State Park

VOLUNTEERING CONTINUES STRONG IN STATE PARKS



Meredith College volunteers at Carolina Beach State Park

In general terms, volunteering is the practice of people working on behalf of others or a particular cause without payment for their time and services. Volunteering is generally considered an altruistic activity, intended to promote good or improve human quality of life, but people also volunteer for their own skill development, to meet others, to make contacts for possible employment, to have fun, and a variety of other reasons.

Over the past two decades, a growing body of research indicates volunteering provides individual health benefits in addition to social benefits. This research has established a strong relationship between volunteering and health: those who volunteer have lower mortality rates, greater functional ability, and lower rates of depression later in life than those who do not volunteer. (nationalservice.gov)

Volunteers are critical partners of and participants in our parks. They are vital in helping us protect our natural resources and natural heritage. They build community by demonstrating strong park stewardship and commitment to public lands.

The average value of volunteer time was estimated at \$23.07/hr. in 2014 by the Independent Sector, a nationally known provider that studies charitable impacts. In 2015, Volunteers contributed about 62,992 hours to state parks. That equates to a value of \$1,453,225. Each volunteer receives a handwritten thank you note and those that volunteer significant hours are awarded gifts from the division.



NORTH CAROLINA PARKS AND RECREATION TRUST FUND (PARTF)

PARTF GRANT AND OUTREACH PROGRAM



2015 PARTF MEMBERS

Jason Kay, Chairman
Mecklenburg County

Ann Babcock
Buncombe County

Lydia Boesch
Moore County

Paul Herbert
Mecklenburg County

Neal Lewis
New Hanover County

Cynthia Tart
Brunswick County

Lisa Wolff
Alamance County

Edward W. Wood
Chowan County

The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF), administered by the Division of Parks and Recreation, is supported by appropriation of the NC General Assembly. These funds are used for: state park projects such as land acquisition and capital improvement projects (65 percent); dollar-for-dollar matching grants for local government parks and recreation projects such as trails, greenways, and land acquisition (30 percent); and for the Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Access Program through the Division of Coastal Management (5 percent).

In the 2014 –15 fiscal year, the total revenue available for allocation was \$13.4 million. The state parks system received \$8.7 million; local governments received \$4 million; and the Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Access Program received \$670,000.

Sixty-four local governments applied for the available funds which were awarded to 17 projects, such as an inclusion park and Miracle League field in Smithfield, a riverwalk in Belville, and land acquisition for a town park in Red Springs. State parks used available funds to purchase and protect 1,604 acres of land, highlighted by the purchase of the first phase of a 289 acre acquisition at Hammocks Beach State Park and 782 acres at South Mountains State Park. In addition, state parks used \$5.4 million for capital projects such as dormitory renovation at Haw River State Park and campgrounds at Lake James State Park. The Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Access Program used funds for 15 coastal communities with projects such as Oceanfront Boardwalk at Carolina Beach and Pier Access in Washington.

Staff has completed the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), a planning document revised every five years for state eligibility for federal LWCF. These funds help with both local and state projects. The plan is a meaningful evaluation of how these funds may be spent and is also used as a planning tool by local and state governments. (The NC SCORP and information regarding PARTF can be found on the division's web site, www.ncparks.gov).



STATE PARKS PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

This past year has been transformative for the state parks planning program. A program manager was hired and two new park designers were recruited, resulting in a fully staffed program for the first time in several years.

The General Management Planning (GMP) and park master planning processes have both undergone revisions to make them more responsive and cost effective. The GMP format has been streamlined to allow for more staff input and to provide updates more efficiently.

The master planning process has been revamped, requiring more staff data collection and consensus, prior to engaging an outside consultant, to develop a final master plan. While this requires more in-house work at the beginning of a project, the overall savings in project time and cost will be significant, while improving the final document.

Standardization of site elements has been an overall goal for the planning program and great strides have been made in the past year. Many typical park site features have been standardized, detailed, and documented for use within the park units. Where required, these designs have been reviewed and approved by the State Construction Office. This allows park staff to construct a site element more quickly using pre-approved plans.

Creating site standards also improves services, provides visual cohesiveness, and promotes a common “grammar” among the parks.

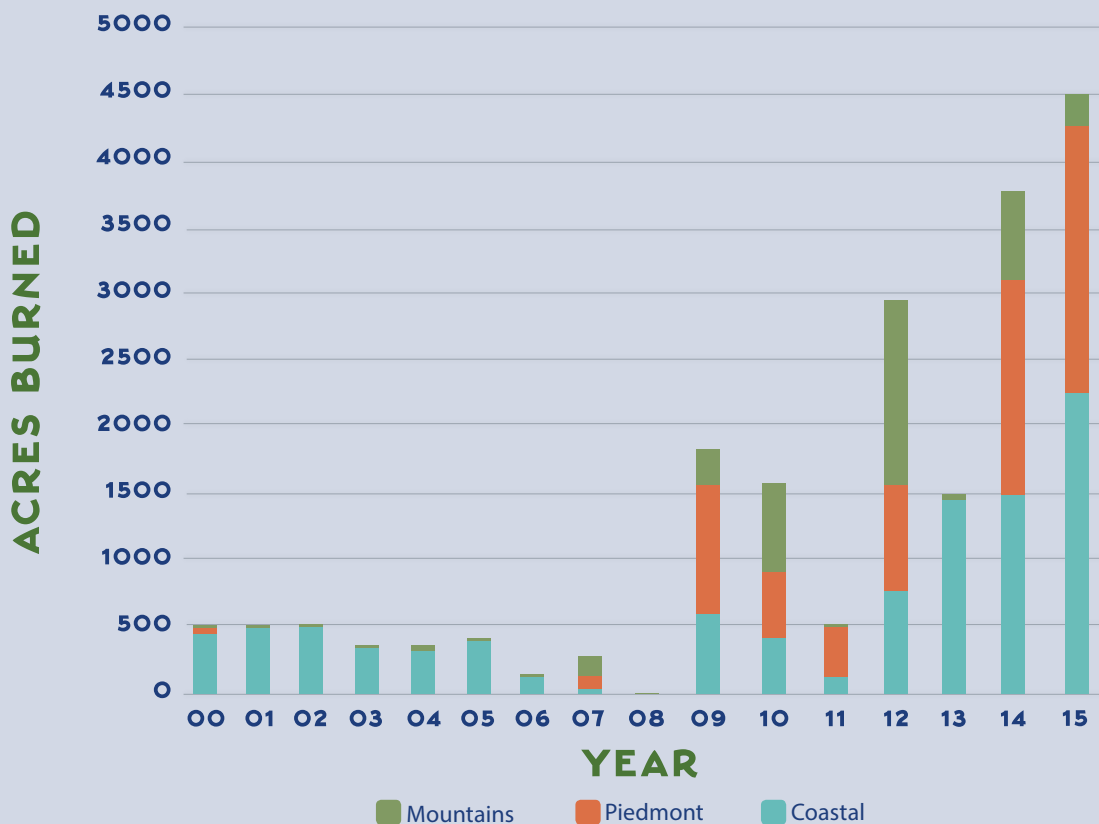
Universal accessibility has been another long-term planning goal to make the parks more accessible to more visitors while preserving the natural park experience. Through continuing education and study of new materials and technologies, staff is working to stay current with accessibility issues, whether planning new facilities, or repairing and replacing existing ones.



NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT STAFF CHURNS AND BURNS IN 2015

Advances in the division’s prescribed fire program were widespread. Not only did the Division of Parks and Recreation have another record fire year with 4,573 acres burned, but it also had a record number of prescribed fires, on more days, and in more state parks, than ever. In one day, state parks had unprecedented fire events in all three geographic regions of the state. Fire was introduced for the first time in many years at Stone Mountain and Hanging Rock state parks.

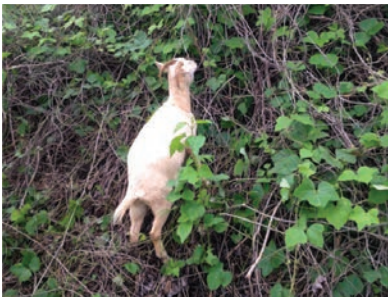
PRESCRIBED BURNING AT NC STATE PARKS 2000-2014





Great strides were made in restoring the hydrology at Dismal Swamp State Park. Two water control structures were installed, rehydrating 2,000 acres of the park, protecting it from potentially damaging wildfires, and encouraging the growth of wetland plant species. The project was completed entirely with a US Fish and Wildlife Service grant at no cost to the division.

In cooperation with federal and state partners, and at no cost to the division, a major feral hog removal project was initiated at Yellow Mountain State Natural Area. Fifty wild hogs that were damaging fragile mountain habitat on Roan Mountain were removed.



A major invasive species control project was undertaken at Chimney Rock State Park – a tremendous group effort of the Weed Action Coalition of the Hickory Nut Gorge, the state park, Chimney Rock LLC, and Friends of Chimney Rock. The partners collectively contributed more than \$40,000 worth of volunteer time, treating over 200 acres and inventorying, mapping and making plans. With this help, a kudzu removal project using goats was established at Chimney Rock State Park.

A bioblitz is where experts from many disciplines assemble for a quick, but thorough survey of plant and animals species. This past year, bioblitz events were organized at Stone Mountain and Haw River state parks, where Ed Corey, of the natural resource program, assembled teams for multi-day field surveys.



A restoration harvest was conducted at Lake Waccamaw State Park, where a tree plantation was cleared, making way for planting of native grasses and trees. Timber harvests are a first step in a complete restoration process intended to reestablish the native ecosystems displaced by former landowners.

SAFETY PROGRAM EXPANDS RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO STAFF



In 2015, North Carolina state parks launched a new Safety Resource webpage. The web page can help staff overcome the logistical challenges of having facilities across the state. The safety webpage has proven to be an essential tool in promoting a safe workplace.

Some of the items the safety resource webpage offers state park rangers and division leaders are:

- Workplace Short Concentrated Safety Topics
- PowerPoint Safety Training Presentations
- Safety Forms
- Suggestion Box
- YouTube Training Videos

In addition, the safety webpage provides park personnel with a safety management tool, called job hazard analysis (JHA). These management tools, are standard driven, task/job specific, and written with safety precautions in mind. Coupled with hands-on training, JHAs can be assigned to each task or piece of equipment. The JHA identifies what personal protective equipment is required and how to perform jobs or procedures safely using best practices. It also provides documentation that reflects the scope, expectation and quality of the training.

In 2015, division employees had a significant reduction in the number of days away from work, missed days, and job transfers. As a result, the NC Department of Labor is recognizing 38 of our 41 state parks and recreation areas for exceeding industry safety standards.

This achievement demonstrates that North Carolina state park rangers, office staff, and maintenance personnel are committed to a safe workplace.

RECREATION RESOURCES SERVICE (RRS)



Recreation Resources Service (RRS) is the nation's oldest technical assistance program for parks and recreation agencies in North Carolina. RRS provides technical assistance, applied research, and continuing education for the state. Services are available to government agencies, citizen boards, civic and service groups, schools, youth agencies, hospitals, senior centers, commercial, and non-profit organizations. RRS can assist in establishing, improving, and or expanding recreation and leisure services. Services are provided through a partnership of the Division of Parks and Recreation and the Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism Management at North Carolina State University. RRS began as a function of the State of North Carolina Recreation Commission in 1943.

- In 2015, RRS sponsored eight teleconferences in 12 locations involving 400 participants across the state using the North Carolina Research and Education Network and webinars. Topics, selected by a teleconference advisory committee, included: pesticide certification, summer camps, collaboration, athletic safety, Americans with Disabilities Act, and arts in parks. Statewide teleconferences were also held regarding the trust fund grant process and financial data reporting, with 163 people attending.
- RRS conducted the North Carolina Municipal and County Parks and Recreation Services Study. The 2015 study marked the 66nd year of assessment for municipal leisure service providers. This edition also marked the 46nd year of assessment for county leisure service agencies. The purpose of the study is to offer leisure service managers and administrators an important tool for tax-supported funding trend analysis, based upon changes in operating budget fund levels from year to year and compares park and recreation salaries and revenue sources for similar communities as a tool to evaluate levels of service.
- Sponsored the National Playground Safety Institute, a training course offered by the National Recreation and Park Association with 70 participants.
- Coordinated the 67th Annual Municipal and County Recreation Directors Conference with more than 100 directors and guests attending the two-day event.
- Coordinated the 5th Annual Women's Lead"her"ship Conference for female park professionals in Cary. It drew 96 women from across the country.
- Coordinated the 4th Annual Aquatics Workshop in Smithfield, attended by 59 swimming pool operators and staff.
- Presented at the 2015 Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals Conference in Annapolis, Md

RRS participates in collaborative efforts to improve the quality of life for citizens. They include:

- Carolina Thread Trail Forum
- Park Ranger Institute
- Yadkin Valley Heritage Corridor
- Wake County Advocates for Health in Action
- North Carolina Recreation and Parks Association
- North Carolina Senior Games
- North Carolina Center for Afterschool Programs
- Community Transformation Catalyst (developing recreational opportunities in Halifax, Beaufort, Pamlico, Craven and Rockingham counties)

One focus of RRS is to meet the needs of the individual parks and recreation agencies across the state, as well as developing recreational opportunities where they don't currently exist.

This assistance takes many forms, including:

- Recreation Advisory Board training
- Development of new Parks and Recreation Departments
- Department accreditation assistance
- Development of system-wide and site specific master plans
- Conceptual drawings of parks
- Maintenance audits
- Regional park and recreation directors meeting

STATE PARK TRAIL PROJECTS

The state trails program staff has been working on a number of design projects at state parks. These include a 10-mile segment of multi-use trail at Carvers Creek State Park, a 6.3-mile beginner mountain bike loop at Raven Rock State Park, 12 miles of mountain bike trails at Medoc Mountain State Park, and a 6.5-mile beginner mountain bike trail at Hanging Rock State Park. The in-house design and layout of trail by trails staff have resulted in significant cost savings across the division.

NORTH CAROLINA'S MOUNTAINS-TO-SEA STATE TRAIL

North Carolina's Mountains-to-Sea State Trail is an effort to connect Clingmans Dome in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Jockey's Ridge State Park in the Outer Banks. During 2015, the three new segments of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail increased the overall length of the completed trail to 621 miles. These new segments of the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail are the result of successful partnerships with land managers and volunteers:

- **The Division of Parks and Recreation:** a 5.92-mile section of trail from Pleasant Green Road to Pump Station Trail.
- **The Town of Smithfield:** a 2.94-mile long segment of the Buffalo Greenway.
- **The Eastern Band of the Cherokee:** a 3.7-mile section from Big Witch Gap to Hientooga Road.

This project is the culmination of a successful partnership with the Division of Parks and Recreation to bridge a missing gap in an otherwise continuous section of trail from Clingmans Dome to Stone Mountain State Park.

The Friends of the Mountains to Sea Trail (FMST), a non-profit support group, secured 30,000 volunteer hours, valued at \$644,250 for the trail in 2015. FMST also raised \$256,259 to support the effort to build the Mountains-to-Sea Trail.



NORTH CAROLINA'S FEDERAL RECREATIONAL TRAILS GRANT PROGRAM

The Department of Natural and Cultural Resources received 38 grant requests totaling \$3,137,875. Of those requested funds, the NC Trails Committee recommended awards for 20 grant projects totaling \$1,584,018 to leverage \$2,279,221 of grantee matching funds to provide economic development and recreational resources to 20 counties in North Carolina.

SPREADING THE GOOD WORD OF STATE PARKS



In early spring, the division welcomed its first marketing specialist. With that addition and financial support from the General Assembly, a more focused and energized marketing and promotion initiative began gaining momentum for the 2016 centennial year.

A Raleigh-based marketing firm was hired to perform a market overview, conduct consumer research and develop a centennial marketing plan. A strategic marketing and communications plan was completed in late summer along with a creative concept—"100 Years of Making Memories."

To build excitement for centennial events, posters for each of the state park events were created. Forty state parks are expected to have a unique one-of-a-kind design to showcase and promote their local event throughout 2016.

The centennial celebration lends itself to many possible stories. By year-end, publications throughout the state had already begun highlighting the state parks in editorials and feature stories. In late December, the covers of the 2016 North Carolina Visitors Guide was revealed featuring Mount Mitchell and Jockey's Ridge state parks.

An improved state parks system website (www.ncparks.gov) was introduced in early September after a two-year redesign. Aside from refining many of the site's most popular features, the website is mobile friendly, allowing smartphone and tablet users greater search options while providing the state parks a more robust online presence. With the new website, came a refreshed look to both the park's online store and the park's blog site.

This marks the 3rd major revision of the site since it was launched in 1996, and the complexity of the upgrade involved dozens of division employees and state park friends under the guidance of website manager, Marla Laubisch.

The ways that people use the Internet constantly evolve. One of the most significant changes in recent years, is that more people now use mobile devices to reach favored websites rather than desktop or laptop computers. The site is designed to allow the system's 17.3 million annual visitors to find information to make decisions about visits quickly and efficiently.

Social media efforts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were a primary focus in boosting social presence, and to allow for better outreach and promotion of the state parks. In less than 12 months, Facebook increased by 25,000 followers, Twitter grew by 25 percent, and state parks passed the 2,000 mark on Instagram. The goal for 2016 is to reach over 100,000 Facebook followers, continue the upward trend with Twitter and Instagram and revise YouTube and Pinterest channels.

Furthering efforts to have technology available for park visitors, the North Carolina State Park Pocket Ranger app provides on-the-spot information, such as maps, event calendars, and reservations. In 2015, over 183,500 people downloaded the Pocket Ranger app, with overnight stays, hiking, fishing, biking, and horseback riding being the top five viewed activities.

Engaging with the public and building awareness of state parks through community events is key to developing longtime supporters. The parks system participated in several local and statewide events, including the Governor's Conference on Tourism, the North Carolina State Fair, and National Tourism Week at North Carolina Welcome Centers, as well as hosting Governor's events at William B. Umstead, Pilot Mountain, Stone Mountain, and Hammocks Beach state parks.

Support State Parks

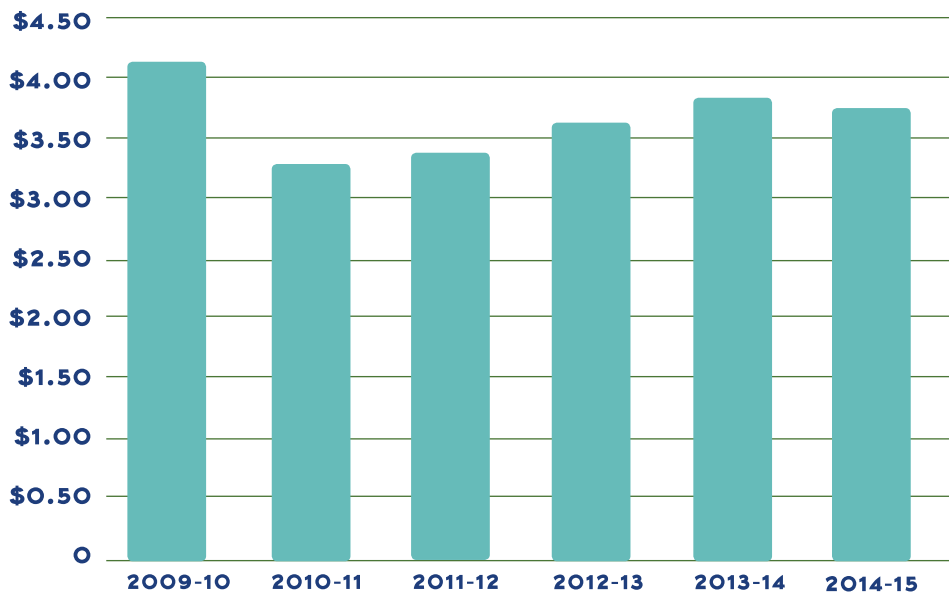
FRIENDS OF STATE PARKS

WWW.NCFSP.ORG



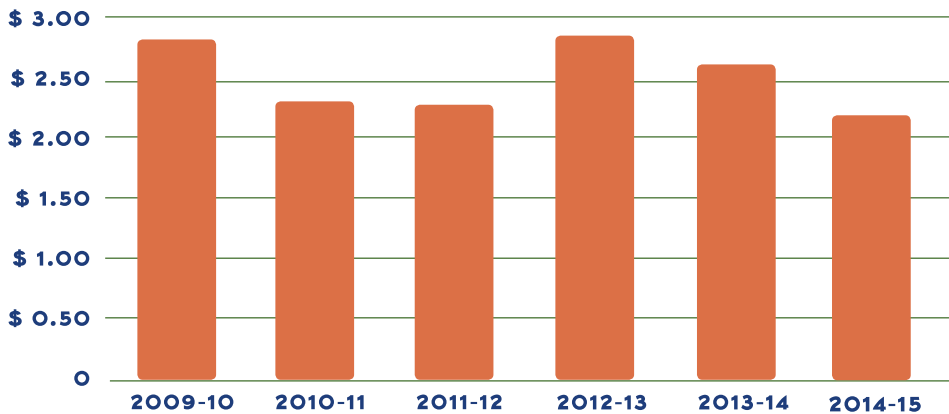
Falls at Chimney Rock State Park

NC STATE PARKS OPERATING COST PER CAPITA



**North Carolina ranks number 48 in operating costs per capita*

NC STATE PARKS OPERATING COST PER VISITOR

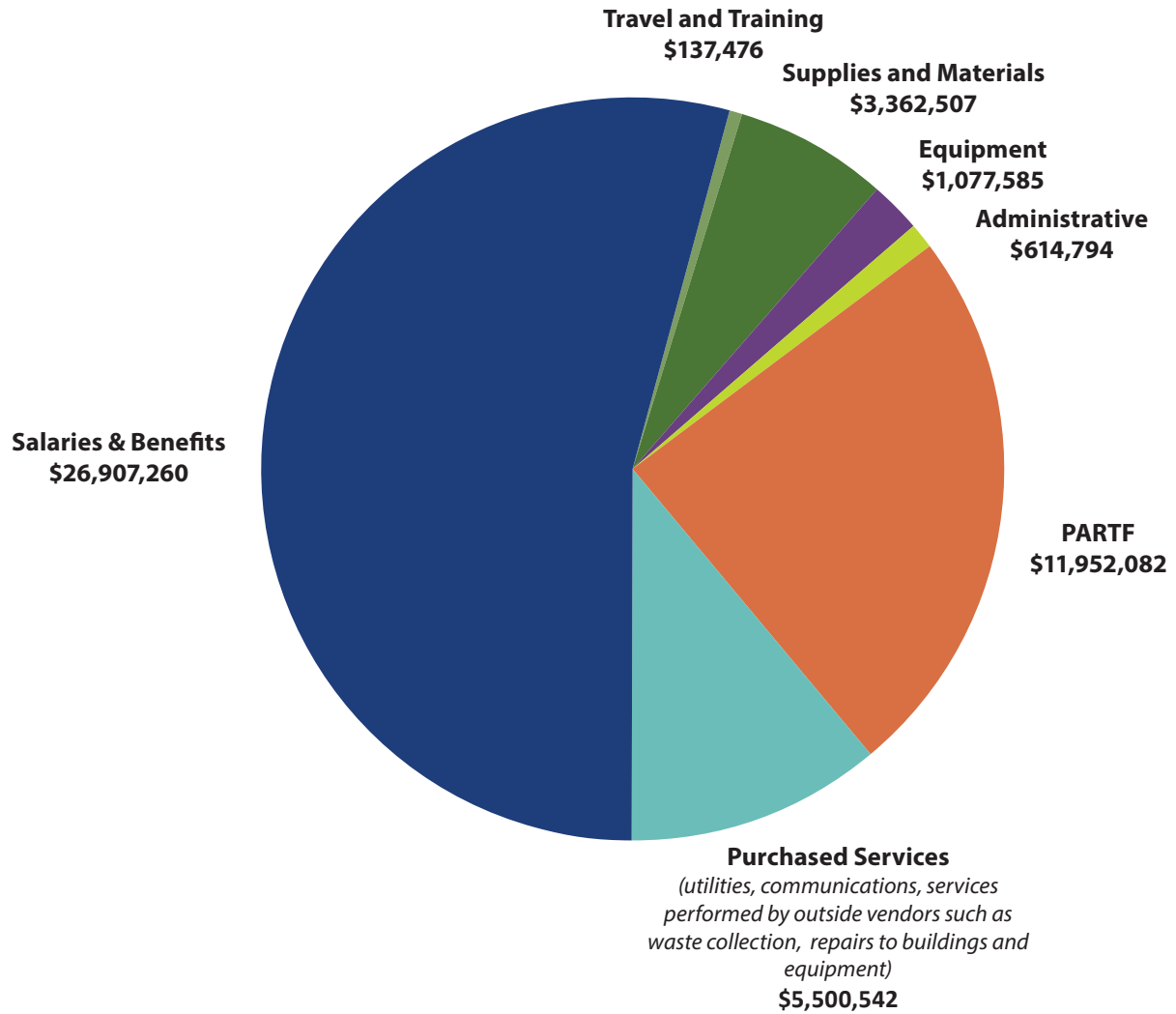


**North Carolina ranks number 39 in operating costs per visitor*



Jockey's Ridge State Park

NC STATE PARKS BUDGET 2014-15



Mount Mitchell

STATE PARK OF THE CENTURY



Natural and
Cultural Resources



NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS

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