



North Carolina State Parks *Annual Report* 2017



Message from the Director



Dear Friends,

North Carolina celebrated 100 Years of Making Memories in grand style in 2016. The Centennial Celebration in our state parks provided us with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to recognize the visionaries who helped create the first state parks system in the Southeast, to attract a whole new set of visitors, forge new partnerships and share our vision for the next 100 years.

We also received a tremendous boost from voters who approved \$75 million for state park land acquisitions and capital improvements as part of the ConnectNC infrastructure bond package.

We attracted a record-setting 18.8 million visitors, held special events in each operated state park unit, including signature events at Mount Mitchell and Fort Macon state parks, and offered unique experiences and opportunities to people of all ages.

We did face some exhaustive and intimidating challenges that involved fighting wildfires in the western part of the state and facing nature's fury in the form of Hurricane Matthew, in the east and coastal plain.

We strived continuously to provide a safe, healthy, accessible and affordable escape for people to commune with nature, find a respite from hectic everyday life and discover places to enjoy recreational pursuits that strengthen the mind, body and spirit.

Through it all, we maintained our non-stop commitment to our three-pronged mission of conservation, education and recreation as we managed your 230,000-acre state parks system.

The past year was full of outreach, education, celebration and just plain fun. Please take the time to read about visitor experiences, natural resource management initiatives, our 100th anniversary celebration and our plans for the years ahead elsewhere in this report.

The future looks bright for North Carolina State Parks. Our park rangers, office assistants, maintenance mechanics, seasonal employees and the rest of the staff in the Division of Parks and Recreation always have the welcome mat out. Please come see us and be reminded about why your North Carolina State Parks are Naturally Wonderful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Murphy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. Below the signature, the name "Mike Murphy, Director" is printed in a simple, black, sans-serif font.

Mike Murphy, Director

North Carolina State Parks Centennial Celebration

After years of planning for its Centennial Celebration in 2016, the time came to pull out all the stops and sing “Happy Birthday” from the top of Mount Mitchell. North Carolina State Parks wanted the Centennial Celebration to provide every North Carolinian and our guests the opportunity to join the fun by hosting video premiers, creating long-lasting partnerships, holding celebration events and introducing new programs.

The year began with the January premier of *Here in This Place: A Celebration of North Carolina’s State Parks*, a 30-minute film created entirely by North Carolina State Parks staff and featured at the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences. Not to be overshadowed, *Saving the Best: North Carolina State Parks at 100*, produced by Tom Earnhardt and UNC-TV, aired several weeks later on UNC-TV and in every state park.

The state parks system had tremendous partner support not only with UNC-TV but with several industry friends and North Carolina state entities that showcased the parks system in their monthly/bi-monthly membership publications, on their websites, and in programs. The centennial opened the door to private partnerships with Subway and their Summer Reunion Campaign and Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina’s Hike NC! initiative.

North Carolina State Parks was the subject of exhibits and displays, including the *I-Spy with my Ranger Eye* photo exhibit at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences in the spring and the North Carolina Museum of History during the fall. The 2016 North Carolina Science Festival’s theme was Science in the Great Outdoors.

100 Years of Making Memories was the paid summer media campaign featuring 10 billboards throughout the state from June through September, four magazine advertisements in *Our State* and *Southern Living* magazines, digital advertisement placements, and featured travel segments on WRAL’s (NBC Raleigh) *Out and About* and WLOS’s (ABC Asheville) *Road Trippin* programs.

North Carolina State Parks planned and executed over 40 centennial celebration events at individual state parks, including signature events at Fort Macon and Mount Mitchell. The festivals ranged from cannon firings and re-enactments to a heritage day, community picnic, fishing derbies and paddling programs. In addition, a SetUp event was hosted, drawing participation of triathletes from across the eastern United States.

After years of planning, two highly anticipated programs were initiated. In the spring. The North Carolina State Parks Passport Program was launched and autumn saw the introduction of the 100-Mile Challenge web-based program. By the end of the year, over 40,000 passports had been distributed along with 144 people claiming prizes and 28 people completing visits to all listed parks.



Carver's Creek Centennial Celebration



Game playing at Jones Lake Centennial Celebration



100 Mile Challenge hike at Fort Fisher



Screengrab from the NC Parks Out & About segment

Floods, Hurricane and Wildfires Impact State Parks

A flood in September, a hurricane in October and two major wildfires just one month later presented challenges for North Carolina State Parks in 2016.

Hurricane Matthew came ashore in southeast North Carolina Oct. 8, bringing rainfall of up to 15 inches. During and after the storm, 25 of the system's 41 state park units were at least temporarily closed to visitors, with the storm's effects reaching as far west as Morrow Mountain in Stanly County and Stone Mountain State Park in Wilkes County. Damage was limited to downed trees, washed out trail sections and other effects of flooding. Numerous campsites and boat ramps were closed for several weeks.

About 10 days before Matthew struck, the Long Valley Farm Dam at Carvers Creek State Park was destroyed. The millpond, which was a popular attraction at the park, was drained. North Carolina State Parks estimates the dam replacement to be between \$2 million and \$3 million and initiated work on the design phase of the project, which has been awarded North Carolina Parks and Recreation State Trust Fund monies.

With personnel still engaged in storm cleanup, twin wildfires erupted in drought conditions at Chimney Rock and South Mountains state parks in early November.

On Nov. 5, what became known as the Party Rock Fire was spotted at Chimney Rock State Park on remote property. The fire gradually moved beyond park property, threatening populated areas of the town of Lake Lure and the village of Chimney Rock. Ultimately, 7,142 acres were burned by the wildfire, including 2,489 acres within the state park.

On Nov. 6, a wildfire began near the Chestnut Knob Trail at South Mountains State Park, well within the park, and eventually threatened scattered homes just outside the park's northern boundary. The fire's footprint eventually covered 6,435 acres, making it the largest-ever wildfire within the state parks system.

The simultaneous wildfires prompted response by about 65 state parks personnel, including rangers, maintenance mechanics, natural resource managers and administrators. Trained personnel traveled to the fires from as far away as Dismal Swamp and Hammocks Beach state parks. The North Carolina Forest Service – in charge of wildfire containment – was assisted by teams from other states, primarily Florida and Oregon. Both fires were contained through the efforts of approximately 1,400 firefighters by the end of November with no fatalities or major injuries and no damage to structures, although a significant number of damaged trees have had to be removed.



A Morrow Mountain State Park ranger breaks down a fallen tree at a campsite



Flooded boathouse at Merchants Millpond State Park



View of the Party Rock Fire at Chimney Rock State Park at night



Smoke from the Chestnut Knob fire at South Mountains State Park

North Carolina Voters Approve ConnectNC Bond

In March 2016, North Carolina voters approved a \$2 billion bond that will fund infrastructure projects. The ConnectNC Bond Package includes \$75 million for 45 state parks projects across the state.

The bond projects, which have been assembled to support each part of the state parks system's mission, will enhance the visitor experience by:

- Offering newer and more diverse recreational experiences, such as expanded and upgraded campsites, picnic areas, cabins, day-use areas and facilities;
- Providing new and expanded visitor centers, classrooms, auditoriums, exhibits and other learning venues and experiences, and
- Acquiring lands to protect key natural resources for conservation and public use.

The ConnectNC projects for state parks identified in the package include:

- \$20.9 million for new/improved visitor centers and community buildings in 11 parks in support of our education mission;
- \$18.8 million for new/expanded campgrounds and cabins in 12 parks in support of our recreation mission;
- \$21.3 million for park-wide and day-use improvements in 12 parks in support of our education and recreation missions; and
- \$14.1 million for land acquisition in 10 parks in support of our conservation mission. Funds would only be used to purchase lands from willing property owners interested in selling their land to state parks.



Renovated bathhouse at Poplar Point Campground at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area



Rebuilding a bridge at Fort Macon State Park



Visitor center at Lake Norman State Park



Heron Shelter at Lake Norman State Park



Improved group campsites at Merchants Millpond State Park

**The photos on this page are examples of types of projects included in the ConnectNC Bond Package.*



Hike, Walk, Run, Paddle, Skate in State Parks 100-Mile Challenge

In 2016, North Carolina State Parks challenged residents and visitors to join a new health and wellness program encouraging them to complete 100 miles of hiking, walking, running, bicycling, paddling, skating, rolling their wheelchairs or riding their horses within the state.

The program showcases the state's naturally wonderful trails and waterways, with over 1,200 miles of hiking trails at state parks including more than 600 completed miles of the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail.

Hiking enthusiasts and beginners alike can create an account at nc100miles.org. Users can keep track of their mileage as

they progress toward 100 miles and earn digital badges along the way for exploring state parks, participating in events and reaching milestones. Additional information about the program is available on the FAQ page at nc100miles.org.

The North Carolina 100-Mile Challenge is coordinated in partnership with the Blue Cross Blue Shield Hike NC! program, which provides guided hikes in North Carolina State Parks. Hike NC! is a series of more than 60 guided hikes; many of which will be in state parks and will be led by state park rangers and other hiking experts. To learn more about the Hike NC! Program, visit GoHikeNC.com.



State Parks Offer Special Programs for 2016 National Grandparents Day

For many, an introduction to nature and the outdoors came from a doting grandparent or other older relative. To honor those connections for National Grandparents Day, North Carolina State Parks offered special programs Sept. 9-11 to encourage youngsters and their grandparents or surrogate grandparents to rediscover the outdoors and each other.

The ranger-led programs covered topics as varied as grandparents' personalities – fishing together at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area, Crowders Mountain State Park and Goose Creek State Park; learning to make and fly a kite at Haw River and Jockey's Ridge state parks; a beachcombing session at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area; and a scavenger hunt at Lake Waccamaw State Park. There were many easy, educational hikes. At Carvers Creek State Park, children and grandparents discovered canoeing together.

There are varying stories about the 1970s origin of National Grandparents Day, but a presidential proclamation designated the first Sunday of September following Labor Day for the observance. A later presidential proclamation stated, "On National Grandparents Day, we give thanks to those who helped raise us and pay tribute to a generation that still inspires us toward brighter horizons."



Kite-making at Falls Lake State Recreation Area's Grandparent's Day event



Hiking at Haw River State Park

North Carolina State Parks Report Record 2016 Visitation of 18.8 Million

In its 2016 centennial year, North Carolina State Parks enjoyed record visitation of 18.8 million, a nine percent increase over the 17.3 million visitors the previous year.

“North Carolina’s State Parks are a treasured resource that belongs to all of us,” Governor Roy Cooper said. “I want to encourage even more North Carolinians to visit and enjoy our wonderful state parks.”

Among 39 state parks and state recreation areas, 31 reported increases in visitation in 2016. William B. Umstead State Park in Wake County reported the highest visitation at 1.84 million, a 38 percent increase over 2015, and was among six state park units logging more than a million visitors. The others were Fort Macon and Jockey’s Ridge state parks and Falls Lake, Jordan Lake and Kerr Lake state recreation areas.

“Our centennial year in 2016 was a time of celebration and reconnection with state parks, and record visitation suggests that North Carolinians participated fully,” said Mike Murphy, state parks director. “Visitors have come to rely on the state parks as a valuable resource for recreation, conservation and education.”

Visitation at state parks and state recreation areas has increased more than 49 percent in the past 10 years. In 2006, 12.6 million people visited state park units.

The state parks system achieved the record attendance despite closings due to Hurricane Matthew in early October and wildfires in western parks a month later. In the aftermath of the hurricane, 25 state parks were at least temporarily closed, and in November eight state parks were closed to allow personnel to help contain wildfires at Chimney Rock and South Mountains state parks.

State parks reporting significant increases in visitation included Pilot Mountain State Park in Surry County (51 percent), Pettigrew State Park in Washington/Tyrell counties (38 percent), Lake Norman State Park in Iredell County (24 percent) and Mount Mitchell State Park in Yancey County (26 percent).



Visitors rock climbing at Pilot Mountain State Park



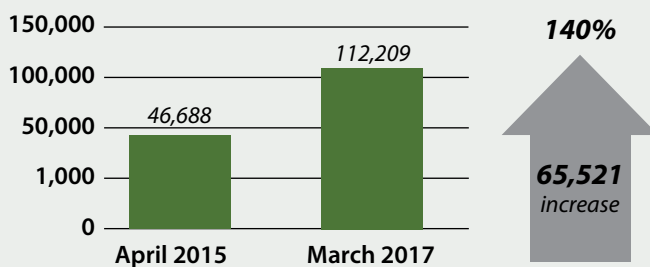
Horseback riding in William B. Umstead State Park



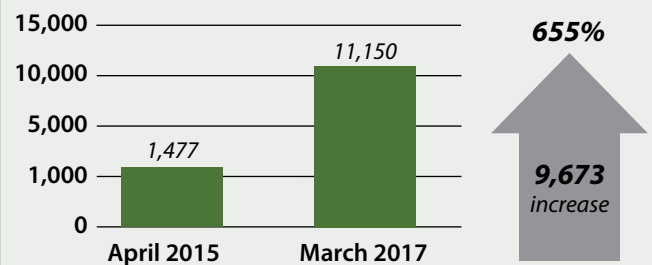
Visitors watch a reenactment at Fort Macon State Park

Facebook Page Shows Explosive Growth

Followers



Average Engagement



Volunteers Plant Atlantic White Cedar at Dismal Swamp State Park

More than 40 volunteers worked to restore native habitat in Dismal Swamp State Park in Camden County by planting 3,000 Atlantic White Cedar seedlings during a three-day project in the spring of 2016.

The restoration effort began in 2013 and was co-sponsored by the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership, which helped obtain the trees raised by the N.C. Forest Service. Since 2013, 16,000 seedlings have been planted in the park, and the initial planting included 10,000 trees in an area heavily damaged by Hurricane Isabel and subsequently burned in a forest fire. Those have taken hold and are growing, helping to store floodwaters, protect against drought and improve water quality.

The volunteers included members of Friends of Dismal Swamp State Park, Cub Scout Pack 158 and community residents. The group also included more than 30 members of the U.S. Navy Search and Rescue Unit Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 26, and the U.S. Coast Guard from Norfolk, Va.

Atlantic White Cedar – also known as Juniper, Southern White Cedar and Swamp Cedar – was once a dominant feature of the Great Dismal Swamp and wetlands. Extensive logging, draining and clearing for agriculture led to its decline from coverage of more than 200,000 acres in the late 1890s to less than 10,000 acres today.

Hanging Rock State Park Opens New Accessible Picnic Shelter

Hanging Rock State Park opened a new 1,440 square-foot picnic shelter near its swimming lake and bathhouse that's accessible to visitors with disabilities.

The shelter complex was made possible through a partnership with ACCESS North Carolina, a state program that provided funding for accessibility projects at tourism related venues. The \$290,000 project includes an accessible, paved walkway from the parking area and shelter to the lake and bathhouse, and four outdoor, accessible picnic sites.

The shelter offers 10 picnic tables, four of which are specially built to allow accessibility to persons with disabilities. The design, by architect Edwin Bouldin of Winston-Salem uses massive timbers and stonework that complements the park's older shelters and other structures built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s.



Pilot Project Reduces Hydrilla Threat in Eno River

A two-year pilot project launched in 2015 to control hydrilla in the Eno River has reduced the amount and growth rate of the non-native, highly invasive weed.

Members of the multi-agency Eno River Hydrilla Management Task Force introduced the herbicide fluoridone into a section of the waterway at Eno River State Park to determine if herbicide treatment in a flowing river would be as effective as it has been in lakes elsewhere in North Carolina.

Since then, scientists have monitored native animal and plant species in the river to ensure there is no significant injury to those non-target organisms caused by the weed management activities.

Hydrilla is a submersed aquatic plant that can create nearly impenetrable mats of stems and leaves on the surface of lakes, rivers and other waterways. An invasive species from Asia, hydrilla impedes recreational use of waterways, crowds out native vegetation and can ultimately harm fish and other aquatic species. The plant can also clog intakes where rivers or reservoirs are used for drinking water supplies and irrigation.

Researchers found that hydrilla density and the length of hydrilla shoots were noticeably reduced in treated areas. Meanwhile, a companion laboratory study indicated the herbicide at the concentrations used had no adverse effects on non-target species, including rare, sensitive freshwater mollusks.

Task force members are working on ways to continue the treatment in 2017 to ensure the project will be successful.

The Eno River Hydrilla Management Task Force involves partners from Durham and Orange counties, the city of Durham, the town of Hillsborough, the city of Raleigh, N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, and the N.C. Division of Water Resources. Members include land managers, researchers and agency administrators.



Above: Hydrilla at Pleasant Green Dam Site

Left: Volunteers hand-pull hydrilla

*photo courtesy of Eno River Association

Important Property Added To Lake James State Park



Linville Gorge overlook at Lake James State Park

In 2016, a high-quality tract of land, formerly owned by Crescent Communities, was added to Lake James State Park with the help of The Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina and grants from two conservation trust funds.

The property, in two parcels totaling 129 acres, features 8,900 linear feet of shoreline and a stunning view of the Linville Gorge. The Foothills Conservancy aided in negotiations for the \$1.74 million acquisition funded through the N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund and the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.

The property acquisition results in state ownership of the entire Long Arm Peninsula on the lake's northern section. The Long Arm Peninsula and the Paddy's Creek watershed, totaling 2,915 acres, were added to the state park in 2005 in a deal with Crescent Resources, the predecessor of Crescent Communities. The two small parcels were withheld from that agreement and had been inholdings within park boundaries.

First N.C. State Park, Mount Mitchell, Will More Than Double in Size

The state of North Carolina celebrated a key addition to its first state park during the system's centennial year. A national conservation group arranged land acquisitions that will soon double the size of Mount Mitchell State Park.

The Conservation Fund announced it is reselling to the state two tracts totaling 2,744 acres on the western slope of the Black Mountains northwest of Marion. The park was created in 1916, and now occupies 1,996 acres around the highest peak in the East.

The acreage includes 6,584-foot Cattail Peak, which the Conservation Fund says is the highest privately-owned peak in the East. It also is the site of mountain guide "Big Tom" Wilson's cabin, which geologist Elisha Mitchell was trying to reach when he fell and died in 1857 on the 6,684-foot mountain named for him.

The acquisition will expand the state park down the mountain to the Cane River, a renowned trout stream, expanding public

access when the peak is closed by snow.

The Conservation Fund paid \$8.6 million for the two tracts of 1,961 acres and 783 acres and is reselling them to the state for \$3.2 million. The transaction was made possible through the support of Salisbury philanthropists Fred and Alice Stanback, the N.C. Clean Water Management Trust Fund and the N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.

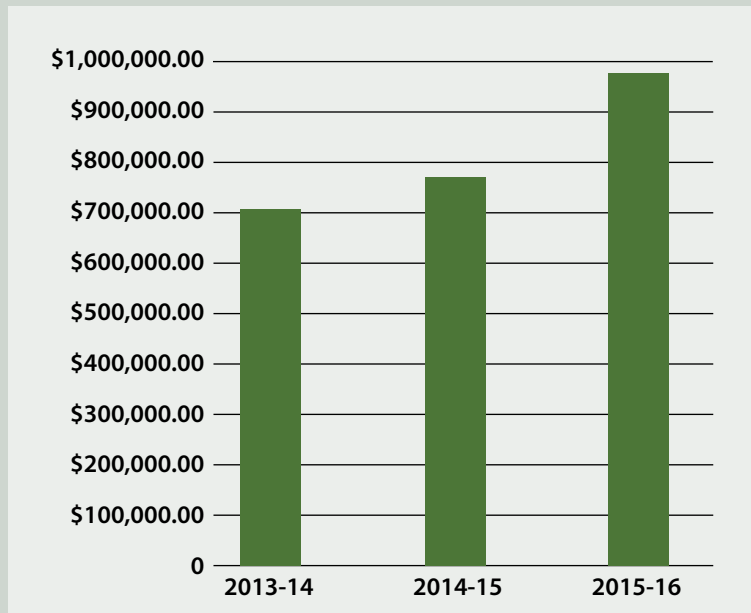


View of Cattail Peak

State Parks' Retail Sales Continue to Grow

During the centennial year, North Carolina State Parks closed in on reaching the \$1 million milestone in retail sales for the first time. Buyers had an assortment of items to choose from including Christmas ornaments, coffee mugs, travel mugs, commemorative posters from each park, sun catchers, patches, magnets and more, with each providing our supporters a chance to claim a bit of history. Retail items can be purchased at the parks or via the webstore at www.ncparkstore.com. The webstore has over 300 separate items, so if visitors forget to purchase at the park, chances are they can find it there.

Grandfather Mountain State Park will soon be added to the growing list of parks with retail areas. Park staff is determining spacing and other logistics and expect a 2017 opening at the N.C. Hwy 105 office.



North Carolina State Parks PASSPORT PROGRAM

Explore the parks, collect stamps and earn prizes with the North Carolina State Parks Passport Program!

Pick your passport up at a park near you!

Volunteering in N.C. State Parks 2016

Winston Churchill once said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." 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.

Studies have shown that volunteering can have an impact on the volunteer as well as the community by improving the volunteer's health by reducing stress, aiding their ability to develop relationships and making new friends.

Volunteers are critical partners and participants in our parks. They are vital in helping 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 \$23.56/hr. in 2015 by the Independent Sector, a nationally known provider that studies charitable impacts. Volunteers contributed 62,124 hours to state parks in 2016, equating to a value of \$1,463,641.

Each volunteer receives a hand-written thank you note and those who volunteer significant hours are awarded division gifts. Make sure to show your appreciation when you see a volunteer in your state parks, and contact your local park for volunteer opportunities. We have something that will fit everyone.



Elk Knob State Park



Raven Rock State Park



Pilot Mountain State Park



Girl Scouts planting flowers at Raven Rock State Park



Falls Lake State Recreation Area

2016 Accomplishments – Interpretation & Education

Staff Training in Interpretation & Education

Park rangers are thoroughly trained as teachers and interpreters for natural and cultural resources. Rangers offered more than 11,000 educational programs that reached more than 350,000 visitors in 2016. The Interpretation and Education team improved the professionalism of our New Ranger Orientation and Interpretation Training in 2016. For the first time, this orientation covered the entire four-day curriculum of the National Association for Interpretation's Certified Interpretive Guide Program. Nineteen park rangers received the training, as well as two staff from the Museum of Natural Sciences and two staff from the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation. Through workshop evaluations, all participants expressed that they have new tools to help them develop programs and are more enthusiastic about their role as park interpreters.

North Carolina Science Festival

North Carolina State Parks bolstered its participation in the N.C. Science Festival to celebrate the centennial and the festival's 2016 annual theme Science in the Great Outdoors. From April 8 to April 24, more than 4,700 visitors attended 50 special science-based programs in state parks. Carolina Beach State Park had 650 participants at one of 17 Statewide Star Parties. Other innovative programs included S'More Science at Morrow Mountain State Park and a Reptile & Amphibian Bioblitz at Lake James State Park.

Neighborhood Ecology Corps

The Neighborhood Ecology Corps introduces African American middle and high school students to outdoor recreation, environmental stewardship and careers in natural resources. In three years, groups of approximately 25 students have visited nine state parks: Grandfather Mountain, Mount Mitchell, Jordan Lake, Hanging Rock, Haw River, Eno River, William B. Umstead, Raven Rock and Merchants Millpond. Eleven of the more experienced youth from the program were trained as leaders for younger students during a weeklong leadership camp in August at Haw River State Park. Students discussed different types of leadership, studied a natural resources topic and presented a 15-minute lesson, and gained their CPR certification.

Interpretive Design and Exhibits

The Interpretive Design Team partnered with the Museum of Natural Sciences to create exhibit space in the Naturalist Center encouraging visitors to explore nature at a North Carolina State Park. The Interpretive Design Team partnered with UNC-Chapel Hill's Wilson Library to curate a traveling exhibit on the history of Mount Mitchell, including displaying the centuries-old Elisha Mitchell pocket watch. The team is involved in a variety of exhibit planning and installation projects at parks, including receiving a \$4,500 grant from the Gaston Community Foundation to make the Crowders Mountain State Park experience more fulfilling to visitors with physical challenges and visual impairments.

Number of Interpretation & Education Programs in 2016: 11,395

Number of Interpretation & Education Program Participants in 2016: 350,902



Earth Day at Chimney Rock State Park



Junior Rangers at New River State Park

Trails Program

New Mountain Bike Trails

The state trails program staff has been working on a number of trail design and construction projects in state parks.

- Progress continues on a 10-mile segment of multi-use trail at Carvers Creek State Park;
- A 7.1-mile beginner mountain bike loop at Raven Rock State Park is under construction with approximately 10 miles of trail being designed to add an intermediate and advanced loop;
- The 10.5-mile mountain bike trail project at Medoc Mountain State Park is nearing completion and will include beginner, intermediate and advanced loops;
- At Hanging Rock State Park, 8.4 miles of mountain bike trail is also scheduled for construction in 2017.

These projects will add over 35 miles of single-track, mountain bike trails in state parks. The in-house design and layout of trail by staff have resulted in significant cost savings for the division.

Recreational Trails Program (RTP) Grants

The Division of Parks and Recreation, through the North Carolina Trails Program, received 75 grant requests totaling \$6,311,336 for projects in 2016. The North Carolina Trails Committee recommended funding for 26 projects totaling \$1,995,753, awarded by the secretary of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. These projects will leverage \$1,738,087 of grantee matching funds to provide economic development and recreational resources to 17 counties.

Fonta Flora State Trail

The first 11.3 miles of the Fonta Flora State Trail were officially designated as 2016 came to a close, and there are additional trail miles ready for designation in 2017. The newest state trail, the Fonta Flora will encircle Lake James and reach from Morganton to Asheville when completed. These segments of the Fonta Flora State Trail were designated in 2016:

- Burke County: 2.0 miles in Fonta Flora County Park East
- Town of Black Mountain: 0.5 miles of the Oaks Trail
- City of Marion: 1.4 miles of the Catawba River Greenway
- USDA Forest Service: 3.6 miles of Point Lookout Trail
- City of Morganton: 3.8 miles of the Catawba River Greenway

Mountains-to-Sea State Trail

The Mountains-to-Sea State Trail (MST) is an effort to connect Clingmans Dome in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Jockey's Ridge State Park on the Outer Banks. The concept of a trail reaching across the state from the mountains to the sea was first proposed in 1977.

The 40th anniversary marks a major milestone as the MST grows closer to completion. In 2016, three new segments of the MST extended it to 642.5 miles. A 15.5-mile mountain section hand-built by Carolina Mountain Club volunteers is a particularly impressive addition. These new segments are the result of partnerships with land managers and volunteers:

- National Park Service: 15.5 miles from Hientooga Road to Balsam Gap, hand-built by Carolina Mountain Club volunteers;
- City of New Bern: 2.1-miles of the New Bern Riverwalk;
- Classical American Homes Preservation Trust of Hillsborough: 0.5 miles of Oxbow Connection Trail and 95 foot-long bridge over the Eno River;
- National Park Service: 80 foot-long Boone Fork Bridge built by the Friends of the MST with funds from a Recreational Trails Program grant and donations by the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation;
- Town of Elkin: 178 foot-long bridge over Big Elkin Creek built by the Elkin Valley Trails Association with funds from a Recreational Trails Program grant.

Each of these projects is a milestone toward completion of the vision. The National Park Service addition is an important step toward closing a gap in an otherwise continuous section from Clingmans Dome to Stone Mountain State Park. The Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, a non-profit support group, is partnering with the division in planning events to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the MST concept.

Total miles for all State Trails

- **MST** – 642.5 miles designated
- **Fonta Flora State Trail** – 11.3 miles designated
- **Yadkin River State Trail** – 130 miles designated
- **French Broad State Trail** – 117 miles designated
- **Deep River State Trail** – (Hybrid hiking and paddle trail) No mileage has been submitted for designation by land managers, but several miles have been built by a coalition of local and county government officials.

Total trail mileage within state park boundaries (hike, bike, equestrian, paddle): 580.5 miles. (Note: 23 miles of the 580 miles are MST within state parks. These miles are also included in the designated MST mileage and miles of trail within parks.)

State Parks Plans for the Future



Public forum held at Hammocks Beach State Park

The State Parks' Planning Program made solid strides in 2016 to ensure the division continues to have well-considered and forward-thinking plans. Several meetings were held around the state to finalize a number of general management plans. The meetings identified new projects in the parks and allowed field staff to comment on revised plans. These meetings will bear fruit with the completion of several plans in 2017.

The division initiated master planning efforts at Hanging Rock and Hammocks Beach state parks, both triggered by large land acquisitions. Planners held an open house at Hammocks Beach State Park to invite citizens to participate in the planning process. The Hanging Rock master plan is not as far along, but several informal meetings were held in and near the park. Both planning efforts will be completed in 2017. In addition, the division participated in a planning project entitled the Northern Peaks Trail. This focused on creating a trail from Boone to Mount Jefferson State Natural Area.

2016 Land Acquisition Accomplishments

The division added 2,758 acres in 27 transactions at 15 units of the state parks system in 2016. These additions protect natural and scenic resources and provide the land base needed for public access, recreational facilities and future trails. Acquisitions at Hammocks Beach, Lumber River, Crowders Mountain and Mayo River state parks will significantly add to their recreation potential. The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, the Land and Water Conservation Fund as well as the Clean Water Management Trust Fund were important partners in acquisition efforts.

Highlights

- **Lumber River State Park** - The addition of 1,051 acres will set the stage for renewed planning efforts. The tract features upland acreage to support significant development adjacent to the Princess Ann Access.
- **Raven Rock State Park** - The acquisition of 115 acres has allowed park staff to gain access to a paddle-in campsite located on the Cape Fear River.

- **Hammocks Beach State Park** - The completion of the acquisition of 290 acres on the mainland provides the land base for expanded recreation facilities. This acquisition is essential to development of a master plan to meet the natural resource and recreation demands for this beloved park.
- **Crowders Mountain State Park** - The acquisition of 68.8 acres provides a potential location for overnight camping. With the exception of group sites, this popular park has not had a suitable location for drive-to camping.
- **Mayo River State Park** - One of the most critical acquisitions of the year was a key tract containing 322 acres. It provides over three miles of riverfront access for future recreation opportunities. Funding was provided by Duke Energy and Conservation Fund grants.



Land acquired at Mayo River State Park



Land acquired at Hammocks Beach State Park

Natural Resource Management Continues as a Key Objective

Restoration is a key function of the natural resource program and can be as varied as prescribed fire, control of exotic species, and sometimes removing timber that was planted prior to state acquisition. Current projects involving tree removal include reducing the density of loblolly pines at Raven Rock State Park, cutting a dense pine plantation on at Lake Waccamaw, and restoring the shortleaf pine/hardwood community at Lake James by removing invasive white pines.



Team assembled for the bio-blitz on a cool June day at Mount Mitchell.

A bio-blitz is a way of assembling experts and volunteers for an intensive sweep of an area in order to significantly increase our knowledge of that area. This year, our inventory biologist Ed Corey coordinated a 24-hour bio-blitz at Mount Mitchell. While the data are still being analyzed, we estimate that there could be several hundred previously unrecorded species identified for the park. We also performed our first 48 hour bio-blitz at our bay lake parks of Bay Tree, Jones Lake, and Singletary Lake where 40 participants swept the areas for various taxonomic groups, including fungi, lichens, mosses, plants, insects, birds, reptiles and amphibians.



Far Left: Tri-colored bat captured and recorded during the bio-blitz at Singletary Lake State Park



Left: Venus fly-trap (*Dionaea muscipula*), collected during a survey at Sandy Run Savannahs State Natural Area

In addition to the hydrilla control efforts at Eno River State Park, the Lake Waccamaw hydrilla control project completed its fourth year successfully suppressing hydrilla in the 900-acre treatment area. Project managers hope that the hydrilla was caught early enough in its infestation to make the control efforts permanent and to eliminate the fast-spreading weed from the lake.

For several years, efforts have continued on invasive species work at Mitchell Mill State Natural Area. Mitchell Mill has a unique natural community called granite flatrock. There are unique plants such as Small's portulaca (*Portulaca smallii*) and elf orpine (*Diamorpha smallii*), that are part of this natural community that are being threatened by Chinese privet, Japanese stiltgrass, and Asiatic dayflower. The invasive species control efforts have centered around these granite rock outcrops. Progress has been made by reducing the amount of invasive species from rock outcrop edges.



Elf orpine shown on the granite outcrops. The plants shown are only about an inch tall demonstrating their fragile nature



Hydrilla shown is very stunted and unhealthy showing the effectiveness of the herbicide treatment



Areas infested with Chinese privet shown smothering the important granite flatrock natural community



Granite flatrock natural community in flower

17-Year History of Prescribed Fire in State Parks

The division's fire program had another safe and productive year. Not only did the division set a record on the number of acres burned (4,739 acres), but managed to introduce burns in several parks that had not had a prescribed fire in a very long time. Falls Lake State Recreation Area put fire on the ground on seven days, benefitting the environment and also greatly expanding the experience of their staff. Carvers Creek State Park had an amazing 14 days of fire covering nearly a third of the park. Ideally, sandhills areas such as those at Carvers Creek should be burned about every three years.

Prescribed Burning at N.C. State Parks 2000-2016

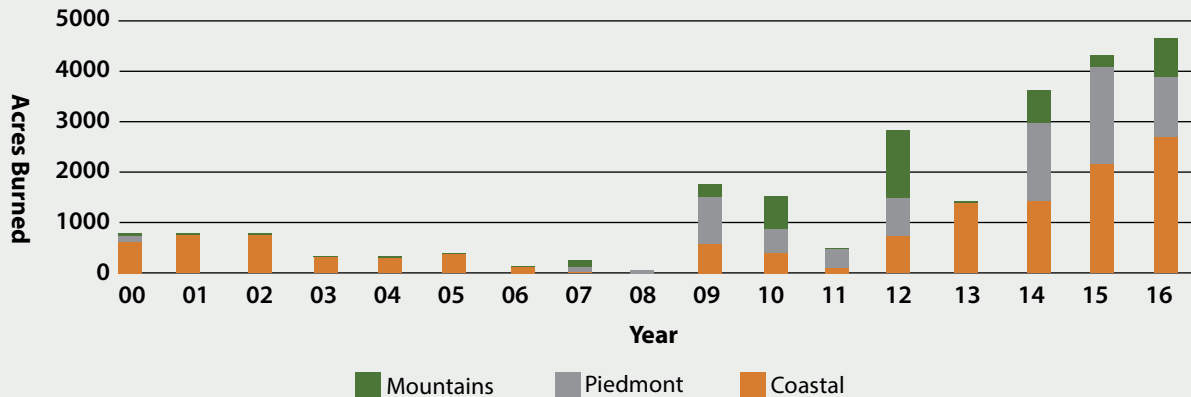


Photo courtesy of VanNoppen Marketing. This aerial view shows a prescribed fire at Lake James State Park. The fire would not have been possible without the help of the N.C. Forest Service.



Many resources gathered in preparation for the Air Bellows Gap cooperative fire. Over 40 personnel from various agencies were assembled to cooperatively burn across state park, national park, and state gamelands boundaries without the need for internal fireline construction.



This backing fire was set next to the Blue Ridge Parkway. This was the first step in the Air Bellows Gap cooperative burn with Wildlife Resource Commission, the National Park Service, and the N.C. Forest Service.

Strategic Directions

As North Carolina State Parks works its way out of the economic downturn and looks beyond its 100th anniversary, we have set a course to meet the increasing demands for protection of natural and scenic resources and for low-impact outdoor recreation. Recent economic conditions reduced the funding available for state park land acquisition and facility development, but has increased demand for the low-cost recreational opportunities offered in the state parks. Public support for open space protection and new park units remains high. It will also be important for the state parks system to continue to improve in other ways. To accomplish these goals, eight strategic directions were identified:

1. Continue expansion of the State Park system

Despite these economic challenges, the state parks system can continue to grow and improve to serve the population growth that is anticipated in the coming decades.

2. Provide the best possible visitor experience

The division can improve the quality of the park visitor's experience by better coordinating all aspects of the operation to focus on connecting visitors to the state's unique natural resources in a purposeful, planned manner.

3. Increase efficiency

The recent rapid growth of the state parks system, increased visitation, and high public interest in division services has placed great demands on its resources. The division's challenge will be to manage the rapid growth of the parks system while maintaining excellence in state park operations and stewardship.

4. Support local economic development

Even before the economic downturn, the state's rural areas increasingly turned to ecotourism for economic growth and stability. The state parks are important regional attractions that can be the cornerstone of these local efforts.

5. Support state and local health and wellness initiatives

Studies show the average American child spends minimal amounts of time in unstructured outdoor play each day in comparison to hours spent daily on electronic devices. This lack of outdoor activity has profoundly impacted the wellness of our children. The division will develop partnerships with public and private health organizations to explore ways to use the state parks to encourage physical activity and healthy lifestyles.

6. Increase natural and cultural resource stewardship

The ecosystems and cultural features protected by the state parks system often represent the highest quality examples of the state's natural landscape and cultural heritage. The primary objective of the division's natural resource management initiatives is to correct or compensate for the disruption of natural processes caused by human activities.

7. Increase revenue generation

The economic downturn accentuated the need for increased revenues as state resources have been continually stretched. By increasing revenues, the division can position itself to absorb potential reductions in appropriations.

8. Expand marketing efforts

North Carolina State Parks could be considered one of the state's best kept secrets. Although the current visitation is not insignificant at 18.8 million per year, the visitation rates have stabilized over time. The division must continue to attract visitors and look to groups who are underserved as park users.

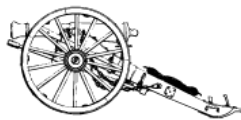


Overlook at Raven Rock State Park

A Special Thanks to All Our Friends Groups



Friends of
Chimney Rock State Park
~ Nurture the Wild Life ~



Friends of
Fort Macon
ATLANTIC BEACH NC



Friends of Cliffs of the Neuse State Park
Friends of Dismal Swamp State Park
Friends of Goose Creek
Friends of Haw River State Park
Friends of Merchants Millpond State Park
Friends of Medoc Mountain State Park
Friends of the South Mountains State Park
Friends of Weymouth Woods State Park

Recreation Resources Service Continues Support for Parks and Recreation Statewide



- In 2016, RRS provided administration for the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund and Land and Water Conservation Fund in 99 of 100 North Carolina counties.
- RRS assisted in the LWCF grant process for local governments and developing the grant process for the ConnectNC Grants for projects that address special needs children and disabled veterans.
- RRS sponsored eight teleconferences in 12 locations using the North Carolina Research and Education Network, with 245 professionals participating. Topics, determined by a teleconference advisory committee, included: park maintenance, volunteerism, summer camps, partnerships and collaboration, inclusive parks and programs, emerging technologies in parks, adventure recreation, and athletic programming. Additionally, via teleconference, RRS conducted two workshops to explain the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund and ConnectNC Bond application process, attended by over 160. For the first time, all sessions were available online to participants who chose not to visit a teleconference site. Attendance numbers from online participation cannot be determined, but it is believed that participation has grown substantially with the new availability of content.
- RRS conducted the North Carolina Municipal and County Parks and Recreation Services Study. Each year, Recreation Resources Service conducts the M CPRSS to provide information to all local governments and park and recreation agencies to use for evaluating current services. Topics including salaries, program fees, facility charges, facilities, and trends are addressed on an annual rotating basis. The report also strives to assist leisure services in budget, planning, preparation and justification. The 2016 study concentrated on program fees. As a result of pressure to capture larger cost percentages, local government park and recreation agencies rely heavily on user fees as revenue for program delivery. The information collected and presented in the report is designed to serve as a tool for benchmarking and making comparisons between like agencies. Park directors and local government managers can use this data to make informed decisions about fee structuring.
- RRS co-sponsored several events as part of NCSU's College of Natural Resources' "Century of Parks" celebration of the 100th anniversaries of North Carolina State Parks and the National Park Service. Included was Mountains-to-Sea Trail Building, celebrations on the NCSU campus and presentations by Gil Penalosa on Urban Parks in the United States.





RRS gave presentations at the N.C. Recreation and Parks Association Conference in Charlotte; the Park Rangers Institute in Salem; and the Healthy Carolinians Conference in Mooresville. Other activities included:

- Sponsored the National Playground Safety Institute, a training course offered by the National Recreation and Park Association with 85 participants
- Coordinated the Playground Maintenance Workshop presented by the U.S. Play Coalition and Clemson University with 33 participants
- Coordinated the 68th Annual Municipal and County Recreation Directors Conference with more than 150 directors and guests attending the two-day event
- Coordinated the 7th Annual Women's LeadHERship Conference in Greensboro, N.C., which drew 86 women from across the country
- Coordinated the 5th Annual Aquatics Workshop in Greenville, N.C., attended by over 40 swimming pool operators and staff. Coordinated the 1st Annual Best Practices in Cemetery Operations Workshop in Raleigh, N.C., which drew 52 participants from across the state



RRS prides itself on its collaborative efforts to improve the quality of life for North Carolina citizens. Included are:

- Blue Ridge Parkway
- 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 of the focuses of RRS is to meet the needs of the individual parks and recreation agencies through the state, as well as developing recreational opportunities where there are not any currently. 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
- Regional trail development
- RRS also exhibited at the N.C. League of Municipalities' and County Commissioners Association's annual conferences in cooperation with NCRPA and at the North Carolina Rural Center annual funders fair.
- RRS experienced staff turnover and office moves in 2016. LuAnn Bryan, the Western Region Consultant moved to the Eastern Region. Judy Frances joined RRS as the Western Consultant. The Eastern Region office was moved from Washington, N.C. to Fort Macon State Park in Atlantic Beach, N.C.



Parks and Recreation Trust Fund



2016 PARTF Authority Members

Neal Lewis, Chairman
New Hanover County

Ann Babcock
Buncombe County

Lydia Boesch
Moore County

Chad Brown
Gaston County

Dr. Vinnie Goel
Wake County

Lewis Ledford
Wake 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 N.C. 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 2015-16 fiscal year, the total revenue available for allocation was \$13,538,600. The state park system received \$8,800,090; local governments received \$4,061,580 and the Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Access Program received \$676,930.

Sixty-seven local governments applied for the available funds which were awarded to 30 projects, such as: The town of Clinton's Royal Lane Park, the town of Garner's Recreation Center project and McDowell County's Catawba River Greenway (Phase 3).

State parks used available funds to purchase and protect 1,573 acres, highlighted by the acquisition of 116 acres at Raven Rock State Park that will improve access to the park and 1,043 acres at Lumber River State Park, which will greatly improve the opportunity for trail development. In addition, state parks used \$5 million for capital projects such as the Wilmor tract development at Grandfather Mountain State Park. The Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Access Program used funds for five coastal communities with projects such as a Riverwalk acquisition effort in New Bern and a new Canoe-Kayak Launch at Bill Smith Park at Oak Island.

ConnectNC Bond Grant

In 2015-16, for the first time, the General Assembly appropriated an additional \$3 million dollars with the purpose to enable children and veterans with disabilities to participate in recreation and sports, regardless of their abilities. These projects will build facilities and/or adapt existing facilities that meet the unique needs of children and/or veterans with physical and developmental disabilities. Funding decision for the grant appropriations will take place in early 2017.

Total number of
local applications:

66

Total number of local
government projects awarded:

32

Total number of dollars
applied for by
local governments:

\$18.3 million dollars

Total amount allocated
for local government projects:

\$8,413,606

N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund

Matching Grant Recipients:

Selected August 2016

Local Government	County	Project	Grant Amount
Asheville	Buncombe	French Broad River East Bank Greenway and Recreational Area	\$350,000
Beaufort	Beaufort	Wrights Creek Phase II	\$100,605
Bertie	Bertie	Albemarle Sound Public Waterfront Access	\$500,000
Bessemer City	Gaston	North Park Phase I	\$500,000
Brunswick	Brunswick	Ocean Isle Beach - Phase 2	\$300,000
Canton	Haywood	Recreation Park Redevelopment	\$350,000
Conover	Catawba	Conover City Park Expansion	\$119,992
Denton	Davidson	DREAM Play Structure at Harrison Park	\$15,000
East Spencer	Rowan	Royal Giants Park Renovations	\$300,000
Fuquay Varina	Wake	Fleming Loop Recreational Park Development	\$500,000
Granite Falls	Caldwell	Shuford Recreation Park Redevelopment	\$196,875
Harnett	Harnett	Government Complex Park Phase 1	\$400,000
Henderson	Henderson	Bell Trail Park	\$350,000
Iredell	Iredell	Jennings Park	\$419,718
Jacksonville	Onslow	City of Jacksonville Marina	\$350,000
Kill Devil Hills	Dare	Bay Drive Multi-Use Path Extension Phase 3 & 4	\$250,000
Lake Lure	Rutherford	Weed Patch Mountain Recreational Park	\$350,000
Laurel Park	Henderson	Rhododendron Lake Nature Park Phase 3	\$80,000
Lenoir	Caldwell	Mulberry Optimist Park Expansion	\$327,200
Lexington	Davidson	Tri-Distributor Land Acquisition	\$250,000
Littleton	Halifax	Littleton Pocket Park	\$78,300
Lucama	Wilson	Lucama Community Park, Phase III	\$25,000
Mebane	Alamance	Mebane Community Park Land Acquisition	\$355,802
Nags Head	Dare	Dowdy Park Phase II	\$250,000
Pineville	Mecklenburg	Lake Park	\$361,460
Pleasant Garden	Guilford	Volunteer Park	\$234,387
Rockingham	Rockingham	Planters Road Dan River Environmental Park & Access	\$27,850
Siler City	Chatham	Siler City Aquatic Facility	\$480,035
Star	Montgomery	Forks of Little River Passive Park Improvements	\$5,000
Teachey	Duplin	Town of Teachey Playground	\$30,000
Wake	Wake	Robertson Millpond Reserve	\$251,097
White Lake	Bladen	White Lake Multi-Use Trail	\$305,285
Totals:		32 projects	\$8,413,606



THANKS TO NC STATE PARKS

FOR JOINING US IN
HELPING NORTH CAROLINIANS
GET OUT, BE ACTIVE AND
EXPLORE OUR AWESOME STATE.

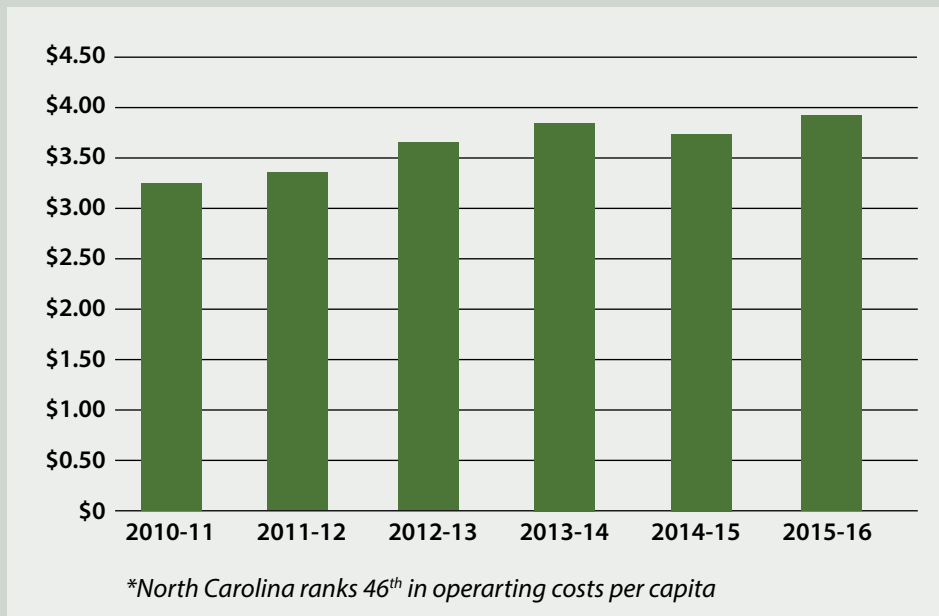


Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina appreciates the NC State Parks' commitment to our Hike NC initiative. This initiative supports our mission to improve the health and well-being of our communities. Together, we inspired more than 2,000 people to sign up for 150+ hikes throughout our beautiful state.

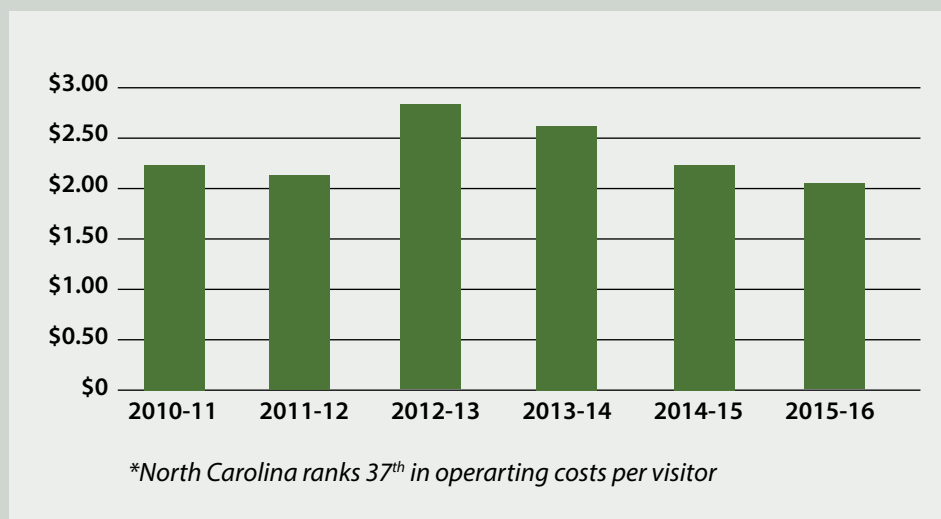
Clearly, we make great trail buddies.



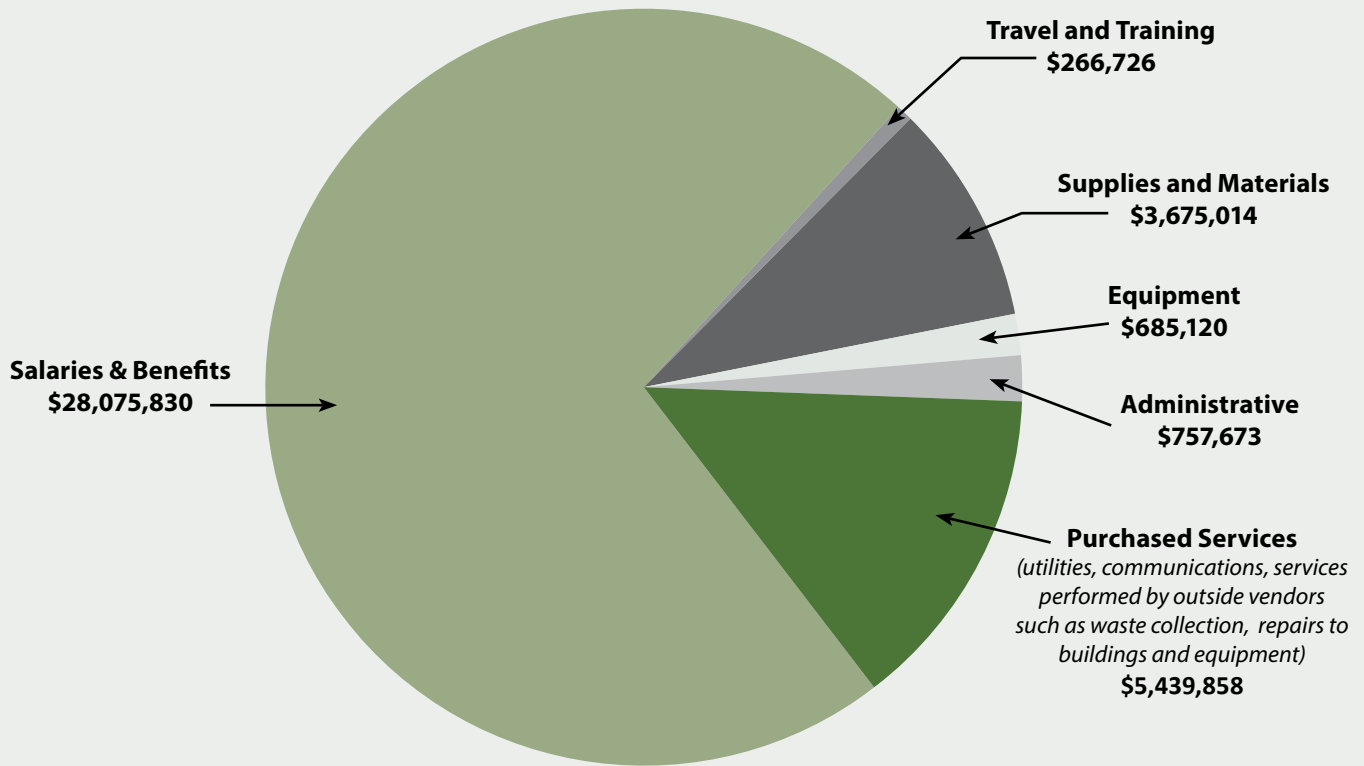
N.C. State Parks Operating Cost Per Capita



N.C. State Parks Operating Cost Per Visitor



N.C. State Parks Budget 2015-16



Stone Mountain State Park



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North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
Roy Cooper, Governor ■ Susi H. Hamilton, Secretary ■ Michael A. Murphy, Director

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