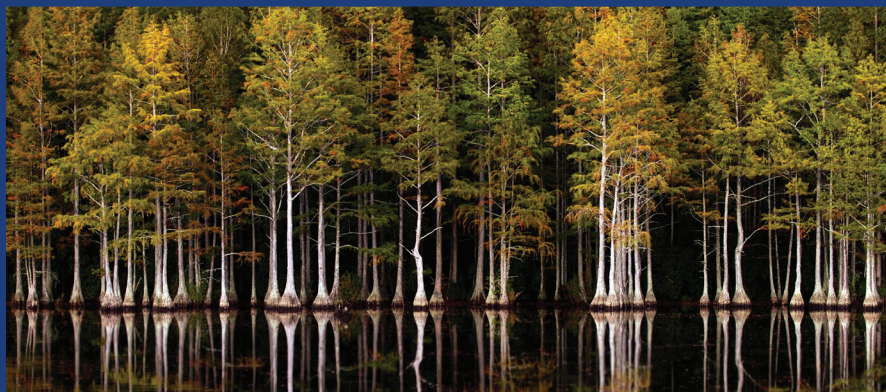




North Carolina State Parks **ANNUAL REPORT** 2019



N.C. DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION
N.C. DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES
Susi H. Hamilton, Secretary Roy Cooper, Governor



Message from the Director



Dear Friends,

I joined the Division of Parks and Recreation as Director in the middle of a very challenging year for our parks. A lot of these challenges came right from mother nature—a force that cannot be tamed. Ice and snow from several winter storms caused extended closings in our mountain region parks in the early parts of the year, heavy rain battered parks across the state in the spring, and record heat scorched through the summer.

At the time Hurricane Florence hit in September 2018, many of our coastal and Piedmont region parks were still recovering from Hurricane Matthew, which had caused extensive damage in 2016. Hurricane Florence was closely followed by Tropical Storm Michael. Erosion, fallen trees, flooding, and damage from the storms' high winds significantly impacted state parks as far west as Morrow Mountain. Felled trees, strewn debris, damaged buildings, picnic shelters and equipment required extensive costly repairs and remediation.

Visitation at our state parks is affected by everything from the economy to the weather, and we really saw a strong example of that in 2018. We had the first decrease in visitation since 2008 despite our state's booming population and visitors' growing interest in outdoor activity, learning about the environment and disconnecting from electronics. Erosion and flooding damaged swim beaches, piers, docks, and trails and campsites, limiting activities available for visitors to enjoy after the storms.

I am proud to say that the support and dedication of our staff, volunteers, the Parks and Recreation Authority, and our Friends groups allowed us to make great strides in recovery over the past year.

As we look ahead, I want to bring forward the lessons we've learned so we can make the future of North Carolina state parks even brighter. To me, the heart of our state parks is the children of our state. They are the ones who will be our park rangers, our maintenance staff, and the leaders of our operations and administration.

That is why I will make sure that every child in our state leaves elementary school having visited at least one of our state parks. Our new initiative, "Schools in Parks," will provide resources to school districts, schools, teachers, and students themselves to connect with their state parks. These connections will foster a sense of stewardship that will benefit them, their families, and the future of our state park system.

Children, I invite each of you to get outdoors in the coming year to see what makes your state parks *Naturally Wonderful*.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dwayne Patterson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dwayne Patterson, Director

Interpretation & Education: Renewed and Invigorated

Our Interpretation and Education programs help people of all ages and backgrounds form meaningful connections to our state parks. More than 300,000 park visitors attended our staff-guided programs to explore the science, art, culture and nature exemplified in North Carolina's state parks. Our rangers and educators reached 109,485 children through lessons designed for school-aged children in 2018. These include memorable activities include school field trips to parks, special learning days for scout groups, the junior ranger program and classroom visits by park rangers.



Big Canoe Adventure at Morrow Mountain State Park

Big Canoe Adventures

The Friends of State Parks generously purchased the biggest canoes in the Southeast for North Carolina state park visitors. The canoes' maiden voyage took place at Morrow Mountain State Park in July 2018. Our two 14-passenger canoes have since visited a dozen state parks and offered tours for river cleanup volunteers, elementary school students, scout groups and Junior Rangers.



MicroEye Video Microscope at Weymouth Woods Sandhills Nature Preserve

Learning big from the little things

Ten state parks now offer visitors the opportunity to take a closer look at the small natural wonders in state parks. In 2018, MicroEye Video Microscopes arrived at Hammocks Beach, Dismal Swamp, Gorges, Morrow Mountain, Goose Creek, Haw River, Fort Macon, Raven Rock, Weymouth Woods and William B. Umstead state parks. Friends of State Parks funded these user-friendly microscopes with support from local chapters of state park Friends groups. The state-of-the-art instruments allow inquisitive minds to see our natural world up-close and to understand details that are otherwise difficult to comprehend.

Junior Ranger Program Hits a Growth Spurt

Our national award-winning Junior Ranger Program guides children ages six to 12 in hands-on learning about state parks. Children complete an activity book and participate in a stewardship project to earn a unique patch for each park. For the third year, Junior Rangers and their families were invited to attend an overnight Jamboree. The Jamboree at Merchants Millpond State Park in October 2018 included fishing, singing, crafts, puppet shows, canoeing and s'mores. The Junior Ranger Program spread to every North Carolina state park in 2009. Now ten years old, the Junior Ranger Activity Book is being updated with more robust, engaging and exciting new activities and guided lessons.



Water testing at Lumber River State Park

The Summit Environmental Education Center at Haw River State Park

The Summit Environmental Education Center hosted 3,876 park guests ranging from kids to grandparents during the 2018 calendar year. Program participants directly interacted with their natural environment, creating memorable outdoor experiences, connecting with nature and enriching their understanding of the natural world. Overnight camping allowed students to develop their sense of independence while experiencing the excitement and mystery of nature at night. Participants left Haw River State Park with a renewed appreciation for Earth's extraordinary diversity and beauty.



Grandcamp at Haw River State Park

Our partners in interpretation and education enable us to bring the natural science, history and culture of North Carolina to audiences across the state. These partners include the N.C. Forest Service, N.C. Department of Agriculture, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, N.C. Department of Water Resources, UNC Institute for the Environment, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, N.C. State University, the N.C. Arboretum, N.C. Natural Heritage Program, and town and county local governments from the mountains to the coast.

Banner Year For The North Carolina Trails Program

The N.C. Trails program launched a website at trails.nc.gov dedicated to its extensive work on state trails, trails in state parks and Recreational Trails Program grants. The website details all the services offered by the program, including technical assistance, regional trail planning and grant funding opportunities. It offers users specific information about state trails whether complete or under development, including how to access the trails, trail features and facilities.



Mountains-to-Sea State Trail and Fonta Flora State Trail Connector Trail



Building the connector trail at Fort Macon State Park



Queens Creek Paddle Trail at Hammocks Beach

Comin' Round The Mountain

In the mountain region, a Mountains-to-Sea State Trail section over 300 miles long was completed that now connects Clingman's Dome in the Great Smoky Mountains to Stone Mountain State Park. A 6.5-mile section of the Fonta Flora State Trail was completed across the Long Arm Peninsula at Lake James State Park in Burke County, completing a 28-mile loop around the lake. Design for New River State Park's Riverbend Trail was completed. The new trail will connect Wagoner Access facilities to the park's canoe-in only campsites and provide access to the first backpack-in sites for the park.

Sounds and Shores

In the coastal plain, Jones Lake State Park received FEMA funding to replace their fishing pier destroyed in Hurricane Florence. An existing 1,095 foot trail connecting the pier to the parking area will be updated to meet ADA standards. At Fort Macon State Park, the division completed a quarter mile segment of trail, fulfilling a connection between Atlantic Beach and the park and taking pedestrians away from the busy roadway. The project was funded with a Recreational Trails Program grant and labor was supported by the United States Marine Corps and volunteers. At Hammocks Beach, the new Queens Creek paddle trail was established. The 1.4-mile trail begins at the kayak launch on the mainland, follows the deepest water through the marshes and oyster bars along the northeast side of Queen's Creek and ends at the Mitchell's Camp pier.

Lakes, Rivers, and Sandhills of the Piedmont

In the Piedmont, design was completed on a new ten-mile multi-use trail system for Carvers Creek State Park. Opened in May 2019, these trails will allow equestrian, mountain bike and pedestrian use and the plan includes a large horse-trailer parking lot and restroom facilities. Five miles of intermediate and advanced bike trails were constructed at Raven Rock State Park to create more opportunities for biking in the park and to extend the 6.1 mile beginner and hand-cycle track.

division of parks and recreation

NCTRAILS

Natural Resources Program



Prescribed burn at Hanging Rock

Prescribed Fire Program Revitalizes Native Ecosystems

Our outstanding natural resource program continued its expansion of the prescribed fire program throughout all regions of the state in 2018. These prescribed fires continue to reduce dangerous fuels that could otherwise lead to uncontrollable wildfires. They also nurture fire-dependent species like the Longleaf Pine and reduce the spread of invasive species. When we employ prescribed fire in our parks and natural areas, rare native plants and animals thrive there.

Despite the rapid growth of our prescribed fire program, our work has been marked by an exceptional safety record. In 2018, a second full-time staff member was added to the natural resources management team, expanding the capacity and effectiveness of the program.

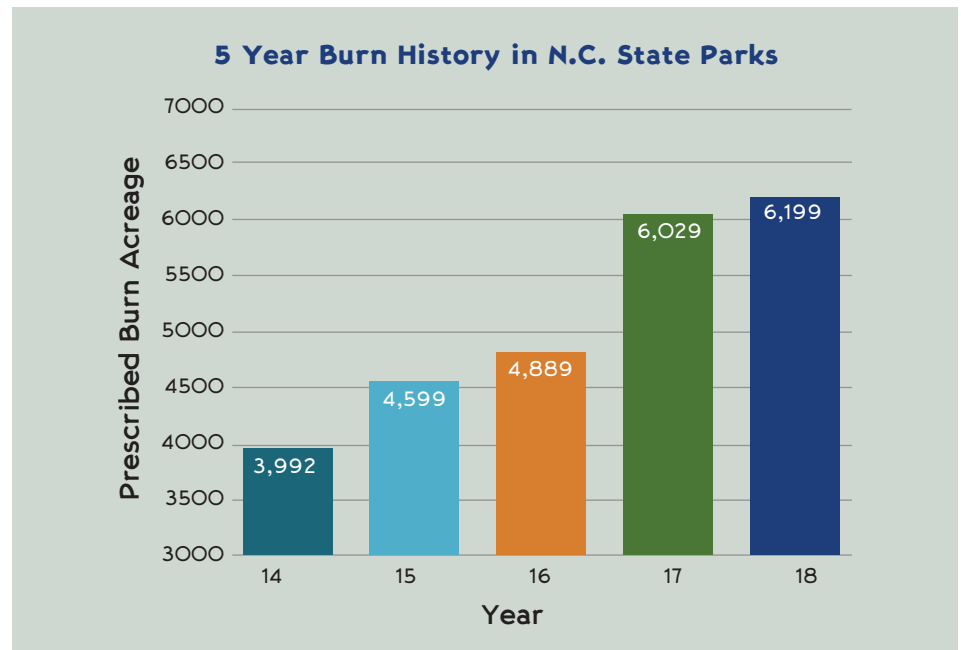
For complex fires, many of which require a helicopter for ignition and additional staff for management, the division's fire team works with the N.C. Forest Service. Other partners including The Nature Conservancy and the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission provide support in both the planning and execution of prescribed fire. Several division staff, including rangers and superintendents, attended Prescribed Fire Training Exchange in 2018 to update and improve their prescribed fire planning and management skills.



Prescribed burn at Pilot Mountain



Rafinesque's Big-eared Bat Banding



Monitoring Wildlife for Healthy Ecosystems

In early November 2018, division staff worked with N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission biologists to band and track two Rafinesque's Big-eared Bats at South Mountains State Park. The bats were outfitted with transmitters and radio-tracked for one week after capture. Rafinesque's Big-eared Bats are a threatened species in North Carolina. Our monitoring sheds light on the movements of the bats in and around the park. They were found to use standing snags (a standing dead or dying tree) and caves, including a new cave not previously known to state biologists. Knowing more about the bats helps us protect their habitat including important food sources and shelter.

Natural Resources Program, *continued*



Habitat Restoration at Carvers Creek State Park

Habitat Restoration: Bringing Up The Past

In order to maintain and enhance the natural communities found across our state parks system, park rangers and maintenance technicians work with natural resources program staff to deploy management tools that sustain and repair the conditions that support the park's ecosystems. Staff often use silviculture to improve tree species composition, to promote and invigorate native groundcover species, and enhance biodiversity.

The lands that later became Lake James State Park in Nebo, N.C. once hosted an eastern white pine plantation. Restoration projects implemented in 2018 including silviculture will shift the ecology toward a forest community made up of shortleaf pine, hickory, and oak. This new ecosystem will support native flora and fauna species of the area and reflect how these lands looked and thrived before they were planted and harvested for timber.

At Carvers Creek State Park, a longleaf pine area once overgrown with turkey oak and other hardwoods was thinned using careful silviculture so it can be maintained with prescribed fire—without the threat of high mortality to the species common with wildfire. The ecosystem will also establish new habitat areas for federally endangered and climate-threatened red-cockaded woodpeckers and a diverse group of other Sandhills species.



Habitat Restoration at Lake James State Park

Stopping Invasives, Embracing Natives

The term “invasive species” may sound a bit dramatic, and it is. After habitat loss, invasive species are the greatest threat to biodiversity in an ecosystem. This is because invasive species tend to grow rapidly and crowd out native species, starving them of prey, nutrients, sunlight and space. As many as 42 percent of endangered and threatened species are at risk primarily due to invasive species. It's also estimated that the damage caused by invasive species costs 120 billion dollars every year.

The Lake Waccamaw Hydrilla Project completed its seventh and final herbicide treatment year in 2018. The project began as a collaborative effort across state and local agencies after hydrilla was discovered in the lake in Fall 2012. The original treatment area, 956 acres, was reduced last year to 455 acres thanks to the effectiveness of the program in prior years. Staff at the N.C. Division of Water Resources worked with our natural resources team to treat these areas. Expertise and skills from across several disciplines enabled the team to have great success in invasive species management.



Invasive Hydrilla at Eno River State Park

Planning: Vision with Purpose



Lake Waccamaw State Park



New lands for Mount Jefferson State Natural Area

General management plans (GMPs) for each state park, recreation area and natural area are mandated by North Carolina law and provide an analysis of the major resources and facilities of the park that exist or are needed to achieve the park's goals as part of the division's mission. These plans are revised periodically as needed. GMPs include a park history; a description of its resources and facilities; a summary of interpretive themes based on the park's natural and cultural history; an analysis of demand and trends; and an analysis of natural and cultural resource management, including external and internal threats and research needs.

In 2018, the division's planning group completed GMPs for Lake Waccamaw State Park, Mount Jefferson State Natural Area, Morrow Mountain State Park and Lower Haw River State Natural Area. The planning team also prepared for the development of six GMPs and GMP updates for 2019.

Master Plans, which focus on facilities and amenities in state parks, were begun for both Lumber River and Elk Knob state parks. Development of a master plan for the new Mayo River State park began in 2019.

In addition to planning for the state's existing parks and natural areas, staff also assessed several properties recently obtained or are under consideration for purchase to determine the appropriate development, if any, on these properties.

Planning staff continues to assist with long term trail planning in the state and in 2019 will undertake the South Eastern Council of Governments Regional Trail Study. This study will include trails in the 21 counties of the Lumber River, Mid-Carolina, Cape Fear and Eastern Carolina councils of government.

Land Program Highlights

Acquiring new land is a critical part of improving the state parks system for our citizens and visitors. It supports economies across the state and protects lands and waters for better quality of life, opportunities for recreation and environmental health. Whether a parcel is good land for a new park or an important addition to an existing park or natural area, it is crucial to be able to acquire important lands when they are available. Priority lands may be identified by their proximity to the park, their natural resources, accessibility or suitability for facilities, campgrounds, or trails.

In 2018, the division's land program closed on nearly 4,000 acres. At Hanging Rock State Park alone, the division closed on four parcels totaling 706 acres. Land totaling 994 acres was acquired for the new Salmon Creek State Natural Area and 976 acres for Warwick Mill Bay State Natural Area. Mount Mitchell State Park nearly doubled in size, and Grandfather Mountain State Park added 211 acres along a ridgeline that is home to three endangered plant species.

The division's land acquisition program is successful because of our tireless and dedicated conservation partners across the state. The Conservation Fund, Blue Ridge Conservancy, N.C. Coastal Land Trust, The Eno River Association, National Committee for the New River, ThreeRivers Land Trust, Foothills Conservancy, Piedmont Land Conservancy, Triangle Land Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy and many others raise funds and purchase important lands and provide the opportunity for the division to purchase them when state funds or grant funds become available.



Bobs Creek State Natural Area



Salmon Creek State Natural Area

Parks and Recreation Trust Fund

2018-19 PARTF Members



Parks and Recreation Authority Celebrates 25th Anniversary



Recreation Resources Service Consultants

The North Carolina General Assembly funds the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund each year. Along with the Governor, the Speaker and President Pro Tem appoint members of the Parks and Recreation Authority, a citizen board that allocates PARTF funds to local grant applicants and for state capital improvement and land acquisition projects. A nine-member group has selected grant recipients and allocated money from the fund since 1997. Innovative, high-quality park projects in all 100 North Carolina Counties have been awarded PARTF funds for 25 years.

Money from PARTF is allocated as follows:

- 65 percent for N.C. state parks capital projects, repairs, renovations, and land; 4 percent of these funds are allocated to DuPont State Recreational Forest;
- 30 percent for local government grants on a dollar-for-dollar basis, which create or improve parks and recreation projects;
- Five percent for the Coastal and Estuarine Water Beach Access Program.



Ribbon cutting ceremony at the Rumbing Bald access at Grandfather Mountain State Park

Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, *continued*

The tables below and on page 10 show the funds allocated to the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation for capital improvement projects and land acquisition projects in Fiscal Year 2018-2019.

**Table 5-1: NORTH CAROLINA PARKS AND RECREATION TRUST FUND
STATE PARKS SYSTEM LAND ACQUISITION PROJECTS, FISCAL YEAR 2018-19**

Unit	Acres	PARTF Funds	Description
Bobs Creek State Natural Area	1,500	\$1,000,000	Initial acquisitions for the recently established Bobs Creek Natural Area that contain rugged mountainous terrain, coves, and waterfalls.
Chimney Rock State Park	116.5	\$836,500	Four critical inholding tracts will protect natural resources and the viewshed of Rich Mountain when incorporated into the park.
Crowders Mountain State Park	5	\$31,000	The Kakassy Tract will help prevent unauthorized ATV access into The Pinnacle section of the park.
Elk Knob State Park	50	\$565,000	The Smith tract and Mary Honey Coan tract buffer the peak on the west and provide road access and connectivity between the Elk Knob and Peak sections.
Hanging Rock State Park	265	\$585,000	Hedgecock Tract connects Mill River tracts to Flat Shoals mountain, providing resource protection and space for future day use area.
Jockey's Ridge State Park	0.3	\$455,750	Acquisition of approximately 0.3 acres and 2 structures adjacent to the park to incorporate the Jockeys Ridge dune area that has encroached to within 20 feet of the structures.
Lake James State Park	22	\$103,500	Acquired property bordered by the park on three sides will protect natural resources and buffer part of the trail system.
Lake Norman State Park	4	\$240,000	This critical tract will provide a ranger residence and incorporate an inholding into the park.
Merchants Millpond State Park	1	\$20,000	Acquisition of about one acre on Millpond Road, north of the visitor center entrance, that will help move the park boundary to Millpond Road.
Morrow Mountain State Park	25	\$87,500	Acquisition will provide water quality protection and preserve the Stony Hill Church Hardwoods designated natural area that contains rare species including timber rattlesnake, Carolina Creekshell Mussel and Ringed Witchgrass.
Mount Mitchell State Park	2	\$35,000	Salerno Tract — will incorporate a critical inholding in the middle of the new Laurel Branch section of the park.
New River State Park	5	\$40,000	Acquisition incorporates an inholding into the park and allows the completion of a planned trail along the river.
South Mountains State Park	271	\$112,000	Property protecting the headwaters of Ivy Creek, a tributary of the Henry Fork River, which is an Outstanding Resource Water.
Systemwide	N/A	\$350,000	Funds for land acquisition-related costs such as surveys, appraisals, property taxes, legal fees, and title insurance.
Totals	2,267	\$4,461,250	



Ararat River Greenway Project, Mt. Airy, N.C.



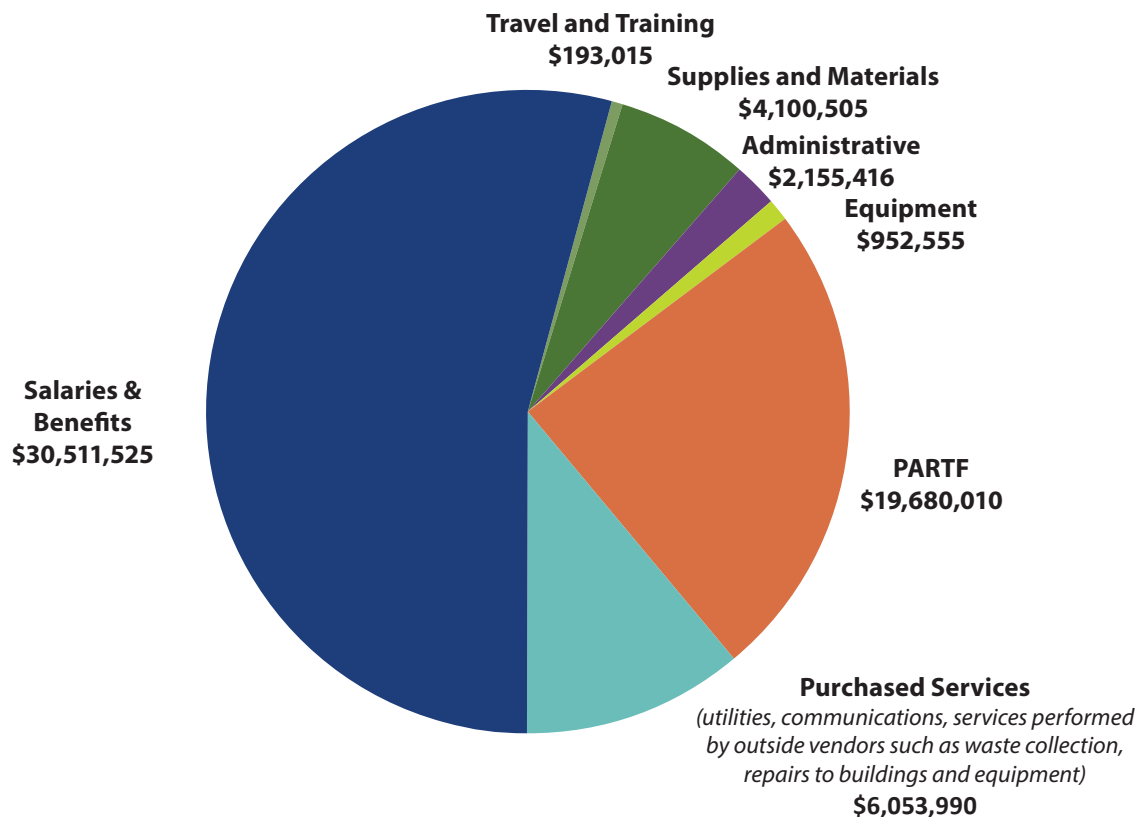
Royal Lane Phase 1 Ribbon Cutting, Clinton, N.C.

Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, *continued*

**Table 5-2: NORTH CAROLINA PARKS AND RECREATION TRUST FUND
STATE PARKS SYSTEM CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS, FISCAL YEAR 2018-19**

Park	Project	Cost
Crowders Mountain State Park	Expanded Parking and Improved Access	\$350,000
Goose Creek State Park	New Campground	\$866,000
Gorges State Park	Grassy Ridge Campground	\$812,500
Hanging Rock State Park	Visitor Center Repairs	\$650,000
Jockeys Ridge State Park	Sand Relocation	\$800,000
Lake James State Park	Visitor Center and Cove Bridge	\$2,200,000
Mayo River State Park	Master Plan	\$100,000
Mount Mitchell State Park	Summit Improvements	\$165,000
Systemwide	Demolitions	\$250,000
Systemwide	Exhibits Maintenance	\$50,000
Systemwide	Facility Demand Study	\$100,000
Systemwide	Major Maintenance	\$2,215,186
Systemwide	Trails Maintenance	\$500,000
Total		\$9,058,686

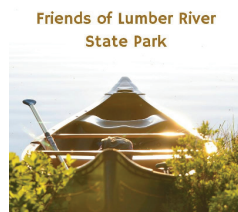
N.C. State Parks Budget Fiscal Year 2018-19



A Special Thanks to All Our Friends Groups



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



- 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



North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation
1615 Mail Service Center ■ Raleigh, NC 27699-1615
919.707.9033 ■ www.ncparks.gov



NC DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
Roy Cooper, *Governor* ■ Susi H. Hamilton, *Secretary* ■ Dwayne Patterson, *Director*