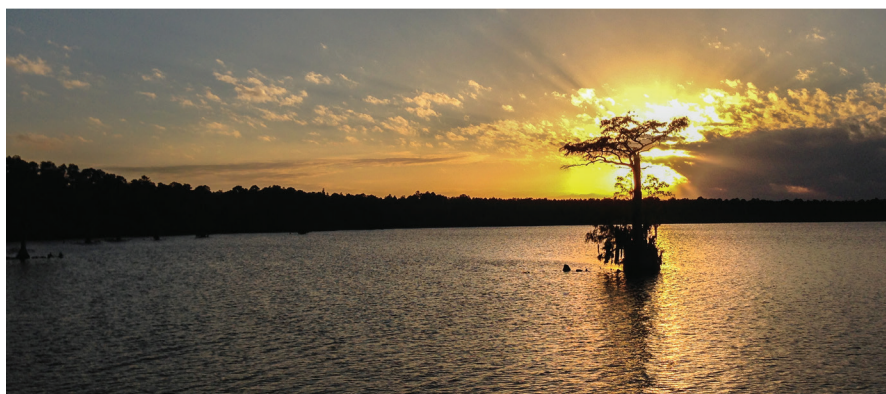




# North Carolina State Parks **ANNUAL REPORT** 2021



N.C. DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION  
N.C. DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES  
D. Reid Wilson, Secretary Roy Cooper, Governor



# Visitation Continues to Rise



State parks welcomed 23.4 million visitors in FY 20-21, marking the highest visitation in the system's history. Parks, trails and greenways provided much-needed relief mentally and physically for N.C. citizens. The outdoors became a safe space for activity as closures of gyms, yoga studios and other indoor gathering places for exercise and recreation increased.

Despite most parks closing for nearly six weeks to adopt and implement new protocols during the pandemic, and due to county requests for closure to reduce inter-county travel, several parks saw a 20 to 40 percent increase in visitation compared to 2019. Twelve state parks never closed during the pandemic and most of them welcomed more visitors than ever before.

## Parks and Recreation Trust Fund



The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund awarded 17 local grants totaling \$5.3 million for park, trail, greenway, and land acquisition projects for towns and counties. In addition, the trust fund distributed \$10.3 million to state parks for land acquisition, capital improvement projects, repairs and renovations.



Durham Street Beach Access, Atlantic Beach



Slocum Creek Park

Appropriation <sup>1</sup>	\$40.5 Million
Receipts <sup>2</sup>	\$22.4 Million
Appropriation-funded Positions	459 permanent and 271 temporary
Receipts-funded Positions	25 permanent and 19 temporary
Volunteer Hours	19,365
PARTF Appropriation	\$17,018,590*
	*\$10,287,764 of this amount is designated for state parks.

<sup>1</sup> The appropriation amount includes PARTF grants funded with appropriations.

<sup>2</sup> Receipts do not include funds transferred from appropriations to the Special Fund for PARTF grants.

# CONSERVATION



*Prescribed burn at Carvers Creek State Park*



*Herbaceous vegetation recovery at Pineola Bog*

Our natural resource management staff leads and assists in projects to conserve and improve natural resource conditions on public lands. These lands include state parks, recreation areas, and natural areas. Many of our natural resource management projects are done in collaboration with government agency and private partners, including the N.C. Forestry Service, land conservancies and trusts, and university researchers.

The natural resource program continues to perform cutting-edge, landscape-scale restoration projects across the state. Despite the pandemic and record visitation, staff were able to lead one of the most productive years for the natural resource program in the Division's history.

## Prescribed Fire

The natural resources team treated 8,572 acres of park and natural area lands with 78 prescribed burns. At Carvers Creek alone, 1,832 acres were treated with prescribed fire. Staff also led the first-ever prescribed fire at Pettigrew State Park.

## Restoration

At Deep River, the site of a developing state trail, staff completed a restoration harvest and continued a treatment program to control privet and Russian olive. Invasive sweetgum trees at Goose Creek were cleared and sprouts were treated. Prescribed fire projects and tree planting continued there. On the final restoration site at the Long Valley Farm section of Carvers Creek, staff began delineating the boundaries of the project. At Salmon Creek, the team planned the fire lines on the property.

The Mountain Region hosted Spring Bog Week workdays to treat or remove tag alder, multiflora rose, english privet, and reed canary grass in Pineola Bog properties near Grandfather Mountain. Staff worked with N.C. Wildlife Resources biologists to continue mark-recapture surveys for American Alligators around Lake Waccamaw. Finally, at Weymouth Woods-Sandhills Nature Preserve, rare species were identified and protected, ground-cover improved, and prescribed fire implemented.

# RECREATION



*Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail*



*New campground at Raven Rock State Park*



*New campground at Lake Norman State Park*

division of parks and recreation

## NCTRAILS

The State Trails Program, in collaboration with the division's planning team, completed a master plan for Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail. The state trail was authorized in 2017 and will wind through the N.C. foothills, connecting Chimney Rock and Lake Lure to Weed Patch Mountain, Bat Cave, Bearwallow Mountain and more. The team also completed a master plan for Wilderness Gateway State Trail, which will extend from Stone Mountain State Park west to Chimney Rock, and east to the towns of Valdese and Hickory.

In Stone Mountain State Park, over 11 miles of the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail were designated, completing the portion of trail that connects the park to Clingman's Dome in Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

The trails planning team also completed a Regional Trails Plan for our state's 21 southeastern counties and supported DOT's Great Trails State Plan, which will establish multiuse paths connecting all 100 counties with a focus on connections between population centers and North Carolina state parks.

### Other Recreation Opportunities

Construction for a playground at Medoc Mountain began, while campground upgrades neared completion at Carolina Beach and Lake Norman. A new campground including RV hookups and camper cabins will open next spring at Gorges. After a few delays, Raven Rock's new campground opened, more than doubling camping opportunities at the highly popular park. Over the summer, construction began on new restroom facilities at Mount Mitchell and construction began to repair the drawbridge at Dismal Swamp.

# EDUCATION



*Our Big Canoe, "Hellbender," at Morrow Mountain State Park*

## Schools in Parks

The Schools In Parks program provides memorable learning experiences in North Carolina state parks for every student during their K-12 public school journey. Teacher Collaboratives, hosted each summer in partnership with the UNC Institute for the Environment, connect teachers to their local state parks through hands-on, inquiry-based activities integrated across content areas. This program assists underserved populations by providing resources and training to teachers and catalyzing conservation, recreation, and education through increasing field trips to our state parks.

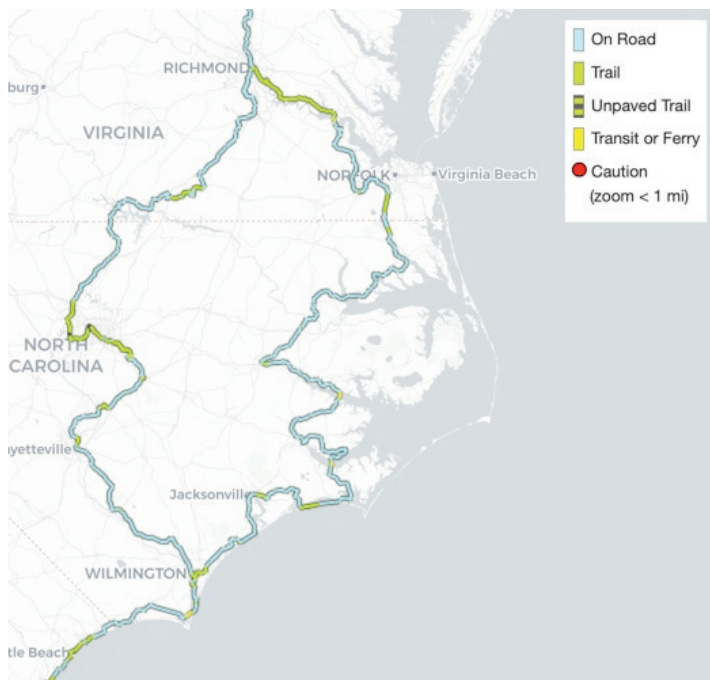
Schools in Parks was able to expand virtually to include teachers from 17 counties from the mountains to the coast. Ranger presentations, Nature Neighborhood activity kits developed with the UNC Institute for the Environment, and open houses at several state parks were offered for the enrichment of students and teachers.

Educators are now hosting virtual and in-person experiences for teachers statewide. This year, our Interpretation and Education Rangers began working with local teachers at their nearby parks to provide grade-appropriate lesson development for use in the classroom and on a field trip to a state park.

## NC Student Connect

In the midst of the pandemic as demand for access to Wifi for remote learning soared, state parks partnered with state agencies to provide resources and technology for educators and students. Wifi hotspots were installed at several state parks in Wifi desert areas, including Lumber River and Medoc Mountain. The creation of accessible "park and learn" sites allowed students without reliable Wifi to have a safe space to consistently participate in their school's remote learning.

# ON THE HORIZON



East Coast Greenway

In 2021, Governor Cooper signed into law the approval of two new state trails—East Coast Greenway and Dan River state trails. The section of the East Coast Greenway that will become a state trail already extends through 23 counties from the southeastern corner of the state through the Triangle to the north central Virginia border. The state trail will be part of 3,000 miles of greenway traversing 450 cities and towns from Maine to Florida. The Dan River Trail traverses Stokes and Rockingham counties. Designating these trails as units of the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation allows the State Trails Program to ensure they continue to develop and are well maintained with the goal of expanding access to trails for every community.

Construction of new visitor centers is under way at Eno River and Lake James and complete at Pilot Mountain, which debuted a new summit overlook this year. Major renovations began on Hanging Rock’s visitor center, and extensive dam repairs at Carvers Creek were completed, with the promise of more space and opportunity for recreation and education at both parks.

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The Division is working to improve diversity and inclusion of staff, the future parks and recreation workforce, and visitors to state parks and trails by identifying where improvements are needed and creating or adopting effective, steady initiatives for improvement. New develop recruiting strategies will build an applicant pool by visiting HBCUs, employment agencies, career centers and networking events to connect with minority candidates. We have also instituted diversity requirements on interview panels to improve the diversity of our pool of selected employees.

To engage and inspire diverse and underserved populations entering the workforce, the division established an annual HBCU internship program, which invites students from local HBCUs to work in various capacities in our state parks both in the field and with administration. The program will help develop a workforce from underrepresented communities that will catalyze long-term improvement of diversity across our workforce. The first class of interns completed the program in August 2021.

In June, the Division hosted its first state-wide celebration of the Juneteenth holiday, by offering Story Walks at several parks to celebrate the story of Juneteenth.

Parks leadership and staff have engaged in several meetings and outdoor experiences as part of DNCR’s budding partnership with Black Folks Camp Too to encourage participation and engagement with diverse communities through the department’s new Parks and Trails for Health (PATH) initiative. PATH combines physical activity in parks, greenways, and other outdoor spaces in North Carolina with educational opportunities for health and stewardship.



Intern at Jones Lake State Park



Juneteenth

# PATH FUNDING

NORTH CAROLINA

# PATH

PARKS AND TRAILS FOR HEALTH

Parks and Trails for Health (PATH) is an initiative of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources to encourage physical activity in parks, trails, greenways, and other outdoor spaces in North Carolina. The campaign is part of a broader agency initiative to expand outdoor recreation opportunities that improve physical and mental health, use state and local parks for outdoor learning experiences, and provide open space resources to diverse communities.

To achieve these goals, the department is focused on adding and improving trails and facilities, increasing outdoor educational opportunities and investing in maintenance and staffing at state parks and trails.

Visit [www.ncdcr.gov/PATH](http://www.ncdcr.gov/PATH) to learn more about PATH and links to suggested activities at state parks, historic sites, museums, and the zoo.

PATH funding was a tremendous support for state parks operations during the peak of the pandemic, providing UTV's for medical response, trail repair and building equipment, radio equipment for park rangers and maintenance staff, traffic counters to help manage park crowding, and new medical equipment including expanding our inventory of life-saving AEDs.

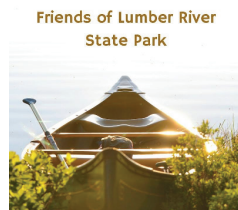


Carvers Creek State Park

# A Special Thanks to All Our Friends Groups



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



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North Carolina Department of  
Natural and Cultural Resources  
Roy Cooper, *Governor*  
D. Reid Wilson, *Secretary*  
Dwayne Patterson, *Director*

- 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