## North Carolina's Mountains-To-Sea Trail

*Clingman's Dome*

The concept of a cross-state trail linking Clingman's Dome in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Jockey's Ridge State Park on North Carolina's outer banks was first announced in 1977 by the Secretary of Natural & Community Development, Howard Lee. The State Division of Parks and Recreation (the Division) began developing a plan for this trail called the North Carolina "Mountains-to-Sea Trail" (**MST**) in 1978. The plan identified a 20-mile wide corridor through which the proposed trail could be developed. Volunteers & task forces were recruited across the state to identify specific routes for the trail. Over the years these volunteers negotiated with government agencies, nonprofits and private owners for permission to cross land with the MST. Gaining legal access to cross private lands with a public trail continues to be a significant challenge.

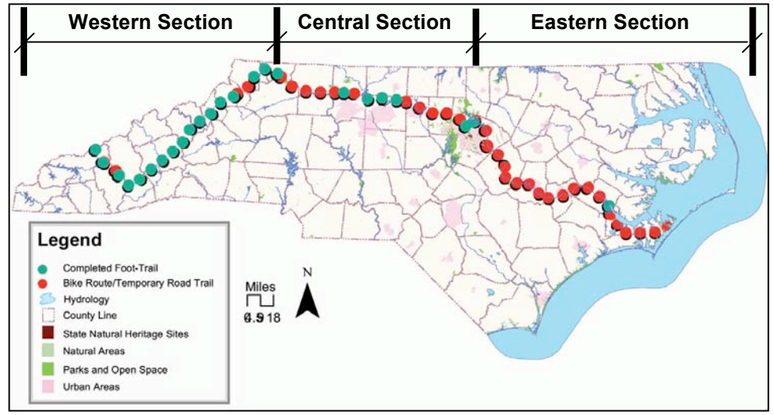
In 2000 the North Carolina General Assembly passed a bill recognizing the tremendous potential of the MST for protecting riparian buffers, providing corridors of wildlife habitat, and conserving biological, scenic, and recreational resources of statewide significance. This landmark legislation (G.S. 113-44.1) allows the Department of Administration to acquire and manage lands & easements for the MST and directs the Division to promote, encourage, and facilitate the establishment of dedicated trails through lands & easements managed by other entities to form a continuous trail across the state. With no funding specifically provided by the General Assembly, the Division has focused its efforts on promoting, encouraging and facilitating the development and management of the MST through lands owned and managed by other governmental agencies and non-profit organizations.

Over 400 miles of the proposed 900-mile trail are currently complete, the majority being located on National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service lands. A few sections have been opened in Guilford and Wake Counties; other sections traverse portions of the State Parks System. When completed, the MST will be an integrated land and water trail system with regular access points and trail heads to provide safe, convenient entry for residents and visitors to travel through the natural, historic and scenic areas of our beautiful state. Stops can be made along the way to visit in the towns and cities that serve as hubs along the route. The completed MST will also provide connections to additional trail systems linking communities and destinations not immediately on the MST route. This will involve collaborative planning among municipal, county, regional, state & federal agencies.

*Jockey's Ridge*

### Three MST Planning Sections

The proposed MST corridor consists of the following 3 planning sections:




- **Western Section** – From Clingman's Dome at the North Carolina / Tennessee border to Stone Mountain State Park in Wilkes County. This section contains 240 miles of completed trail segments running through national parks and forests and along much of the Blue Ridge Parkway National Park. An additional 92 miles of trails are planned, partially completed, or awaiting formal MST designation by the Division. When completed, this section of the MST will have a total of about 332 miles of trails, and will include spectacular views of North Carolina's scenic mountain ranges.

*Craggy Gardens – Blue Ridge Parkway*

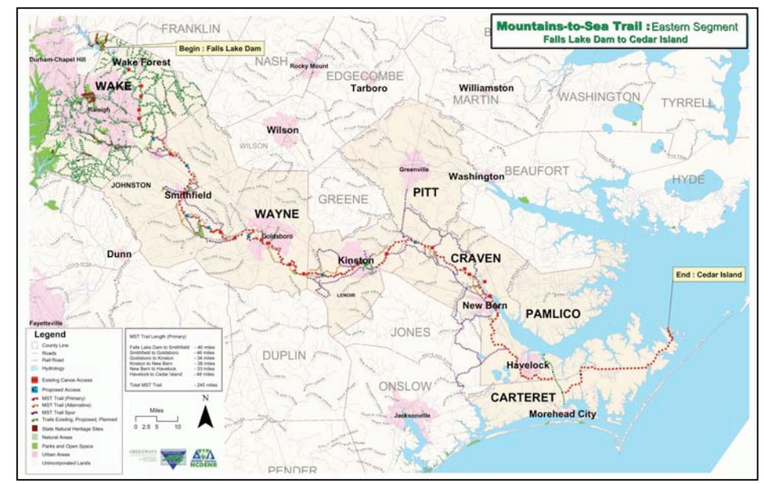
- **Central Section** – From Stone Mountain State Park to the Falls Lake Dam north of Raleigh. This section is the least complete and many of the temporary MST alignments are for foot and bike traffic along secondary roads. The central section includes two planning regions:
  - Western Piedmont Region – Efforts to identify MST routes from Stone Mountain to Lake Townsend (north of Greensboro) are planned in the near future for the western half of the Section.
  - Eastern Piedmont Region – Planning efforts are currently underway to establish primary and alternative MST routes within the Eastern Piedmont Region from Lake Townsend to the Falls Lake Dam (north of Raleigh) – See reverse side for preliminary route recommendations.

- **Eastern Section** – From the Falls Lake Dam to Jockey's Ridge on Cedar Island in Carteret County. This section will follow the Neuse River Corridor and will be a combined water and land trail when completed. The eastern section has three planning regions:
  - Western Coastal Plain – Wake and Johnston Counties
  - Central Coastal Plain – Wayne, Lenoir and Pitt Counties
  - Eastern Coastal Plain – Craven and Carteret Counties

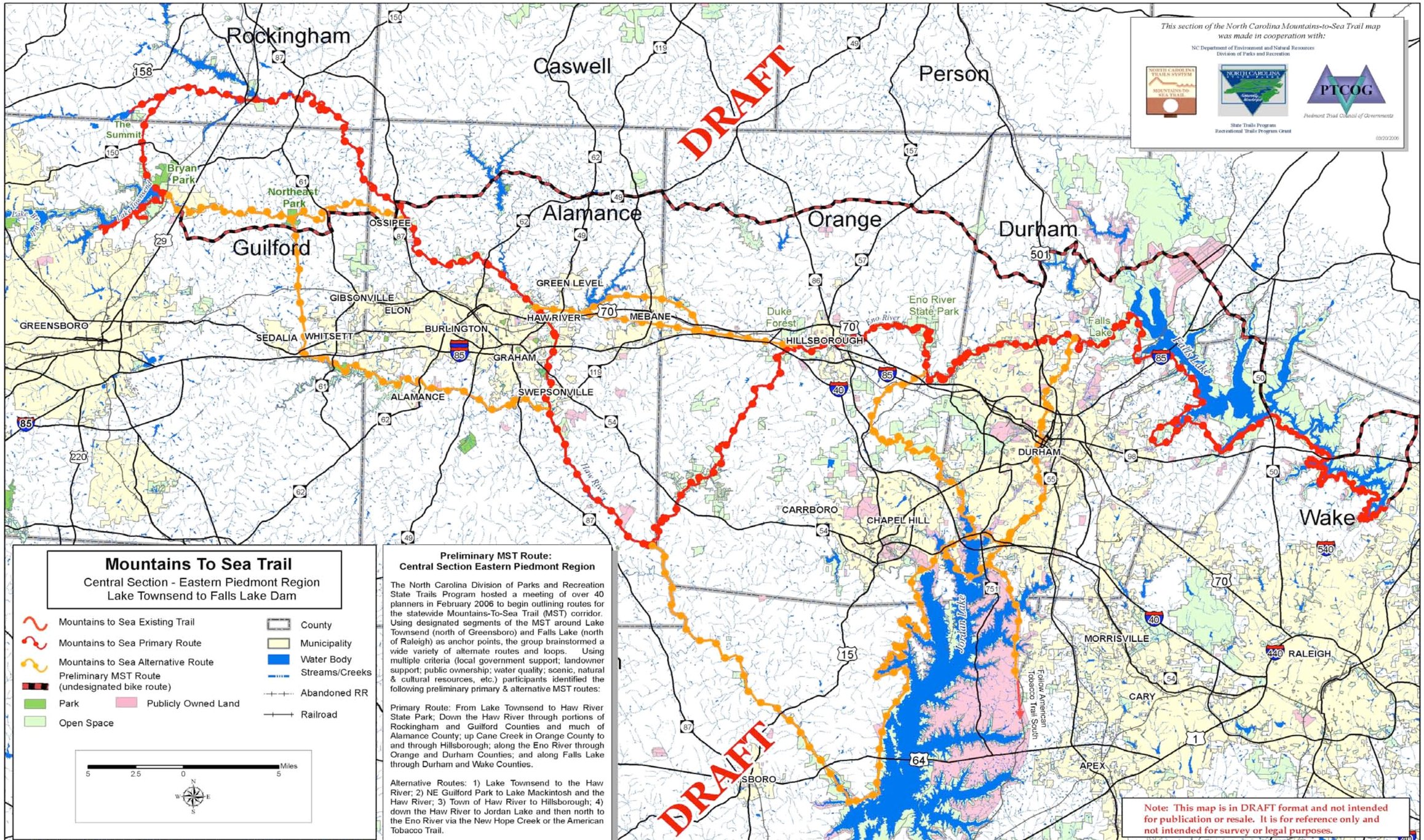
### Conceptual Plan for the MST Eastern Section

The Division began meeting with local government representatives along the Neuse River corridor in 2001 to promote the planning & development of the MST through eastern North Carolina. Participants shared information about existing and planned local trail segments that could become part of the statewide trail corridor and requested the Division to sponsor a conceptual plan for the eastern section of the MST corridor.

The *Conceptual Plan for the MST Eastern Section* defines a route and alignment for a foot trail and paddle trail through seven eastern counties of North Carolina. Completed in 2003, the plan envisions a 250-mile land and water trail system along the Neuse River from Falls Lake Dam to Cedar Island. The land-based trail will primarily be a footpath for hiking. However, as the trail corridor extends through towns and cities, these communities may build multi-use trails for hiking, biking, and other uses. Additional points of access are also needed along the existing water-based paddle trail to create a more user friendly experience. Decisions about the usage and design of the MST will be made by the agencies and organizations responsible for long-term development and management of trail sections. Local participation in these efforts will be critical.




The Division's State Trails Program hopes these on-going planning efforts will serve as a catalyst for development of North Carolina's Mountains-to-Sea Trail. When completed, this trail will become the primary east-west spine of our statewide trail network, linking multiple regional and local trail systems together. Portions of the trail will serve as protected natural areas. Other areas will serve as alternative transportation corridors for walkers, cyclists, paddlers and the equestrian community. In the future, the MST may also serve as a link to other interstate trail systems. One day, in the not-so-distant future, North Carolinians and visitors will be able to walk, bike, paddle or ride from one end of the state to the other on a publicly accessible system of interconnected trails. For more information on how you can become a part of this exciting effort, please call Darrell McBane with the State Trails Program at (919) 715-8699 or visit our website at http://ils.unc.edu/parkproject/trails/home.html.


This section of the North Carolina Mountains-to-Sea Trail map was made in cooperation with:
NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources
Division of Parks and Recreation
State Trails Program
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PTCOG
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03/20/2006
DRAFT
Rockingham
Caswell
Person
Guilford
Alamance
Orange
Durham
Wake
The Summit
Bryan Park
Northeast Park
OSSIPEE
GREEN LEVEL
GIBSONVILLE
ELON
GREENSBORO
SEDALIA
WHITSETT
BURLINGTON
HAW RIVER
MEBANE
GRAHAM
ALAMANCE
SWEPSONVILLE
Duke Forest
HILLSBOROUGH
Eno River State Park
Eno River
Falls Lake
Falls Lake
DURHAM
CARRBORO
CHAPEL HILL
Haw River
Jordan Lake
MORRISVILLE
RALEIGH
CARY
APEX
Follow American Tobacco Trail South
Mountains To Sea Trail
Central Section - Eastern Piedmont Region
Lake Townsend to Falls Lake Dam
Mountains to Sea Existing Trail
Mountains to Sea Primary Route
Mountains to Sea Alternative Route
Preliminary MST Route (undesignated bike route)
Park
Publicly Owned Land
Open Space
County
Municipality
Water Body
Streams/Creeks
Abandoned RR
Railroad
Miles
5 2.5 0 5
N W E S
Preliminary MST Route:
Central Section Eastern Piedmont Region
The North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation State Trails Program hosted a meeting of over 40 planners in February 2006 to begin outlining routes for the statewide Mountains-To-Sea Trail (MST) corridor. Using designated segments of the MST around Lake Townsend (north of Greensboro) and Falls Lake (north of Raleigh) as anchor points, the group brainstormed a wide variety of alternate routes and loops. Using multiple criteria (local government support; landowner support; public ownership; water quality; scenic, natural & cultural resources, etc.) participants identified the following preliminary primary & alternative MST routes:
Primary Route: From Lake Townsend to Haw River State Park; Down the Haw River through portions of Rockingham and Guilford Counties and much of Alamance County; up Cane Creek in Orange County to and through Hillsborough; along the Eno River through Orange and Durham Counties; and along Falls Lake through Durham and Wake Counties.
Alternative Routes: 1) Lake Townsend to the Haw River; 2) NE Guilford Park to Lake Mackintosh and the Haw River; 3) Town of Haw River to Hillsborough; 4) down the Haw River to Jordan Lake and then north to the Eno River via the New Hope Creek or the American Tobacco Trail.
Note: This map is in DRAFT format and not intended for publication or resale. It is for reference only and not intended for survey or legal purposes.