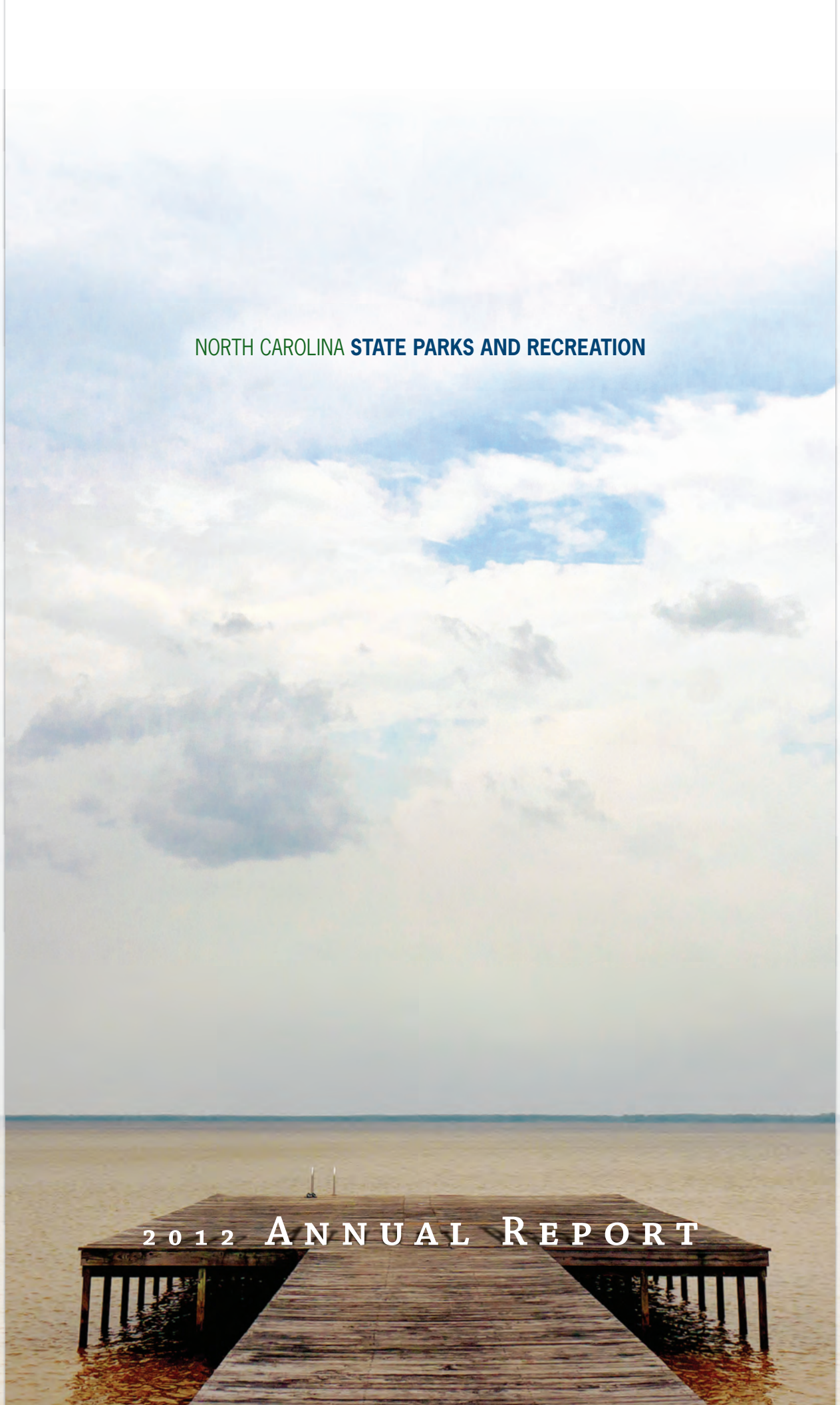

NORTH CAROLINA **STATE PARKS AND RECREATION**

2012 Annual Report

GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN STATE PARK 2009
BEAR PAW STATE NATURAL AREA 2008
YELLOW MOUNTAIN STATE NATURAL AREA
DEEP RIVER STATE TRAIL 2007
PINEOLA BOG STATE NATURAL AREA 2006
SUGAR MOUNTAIN BOG STATE NATURAL AREA
SANDY RUN SAVANNAS STATE NATURAL AREA
CARVERS CREEK STATE PARK 2005
CHIMNEY ROCK STATE PARK
MAYO RIVER STATE PARK 2003
HAW RIVER STATE PARK
LOWER HAW RIVER STATE NATURAL AREA
ELK KNOB STATE PARK 2002
BEECH CREEK BOG STATE NATURAL AREA
BULLHEAD MOUNTAIN STATE NATURAL AREA 2000
LEA ISLAND STATE NATURAL AREA
MOUNTAINS-TO-SEA STATE TRAIL
GORGES STATE PARK 1999
OCCONEECHEE MOUNTAIN STATE NATURAL AREA 1997
RUN HILL STATE NATURAL AREA 1995
LUMBER RIVER STATE PARK 1989
FRENCH BROAD RIVER STATE TRAIL 1987
LAKE JAMES STATE PARK
YADKIN RIVER STATE TRAIL
FORT FISHER STATE RECREATION AREA 1986
HORSEPASTURE STATE RIVER 1985
FALLS LAKE STATE RECREATION AREA 1982
JORDAN LAKE STATE RECREATION AREA 1981
BALDHEAD ISLAND STATE NATURAL AREA 1979
BAYTREE LAKE STATE PARK
SOUTH MOUNTAINS STATE PARK 1978
BUSHY LAKE STATE NATURAL AREA 1977
HEMLOCK BLUFFS STATE NATURAL AREA 1976
LAKE WACCAMAW STATE PARK
MASONBORO ISLAND STATE NATURAL AREA
MITCHELL MILL STATE NATURAL AREA
JOCKEY'S RIDGE STATE PARK 1975
NEW RIVER STATE PARK
LINVILLE STATE RIVER
DISMAL SWAMP STATE PARK 1974
GOOSE CREEK STATE PARK
CHOWAN SWAMP STATE NATURAL AREA 1973
CROWDERS MOUNTAIN STATE PARK
ENO RIVER STATE PARK
MERCHANTS MILLPOND STATE PARK
MEDOC MOUNTAIN STATE PARK
THEODORE ROOSEVELT STATE NATURAL AREA 1971
RAVEN ROCK STATE PARK 1970
CAROLINA BEACH STATE PARK 1969
STONE MOUNTAIN STATE PARK
PILOT MOUNTAIN STATE PARK 1968
WEYMOUTH WOODS STATE NATURAL AREA 1963
LAKE NORMAN STATE PARK 1962
HAMMOCKS BEACH STATE PARK 1961
MOUNT JEFFERSON STATE NATURAL AREA 1956
KERR LAKE STATE RECREATION AREA 1952
CLIFFS OF THE NEUSE STATE PARK 1945
WILLIAM B. UMSTEAD STATE PARK 1941
PETTIGREW STATE PARK 1939
JONES LAKE STATE PARK
SINGLETARY LAKE STATE PARK
HANGING ROCK STATE PARK 1935
MORROW MOUNTAIN STATE PARK
SALTERS LAKE 1929
WHITE LAKE
FORT MACON STATE PARK 1924
MOUNT MITCHELL STATE PARK 1916

The cover photo of Lake Waccamaw, the 2011 State Park of the Year, was taken by Martin W. Kane.

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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Lewis Ledford, Director of N.C Division of Parks and Recreation

Economic conditions at the state and federal levels have presented significant challenges as we continue to try to provide quality recreational experiences, safe and clean facilities and protect North Carolina's most outstanding natural resources. It has not been easy, but it has served to show us how many people are friends and supporters of North Carolina state parks.

We are eternally grateful for the hard work of our friends groups, park advisory committee members, volunteers, land conservation partners, local parks and recreation programs and so many others. One terrific example of that effort is the first-ever statewide gathering of park friends groups in state park system history. You can learn about that and so many other events of 2011, which included land protection, grant awards, major construction projects, environmental education programs, disaster response, and increased use of new technology, elsewhere in this report.

North Carolina has a deep-rooted tradition of protecting its stunning natural resources and making them accessible at low cost to citizens and visitors. That would not be possible without all of us working together on their behalf. The record-setting attendance we continue to experience is testimony to the appreciation North Carolinians and our guests have for conservation, access to natural resources and recreation.

Every visit to a state park is an opportunity for the entire family to learn and interact with natural and cultural history. The exhibits, visitor centers, trails and other amenities complement self-discovery and interpretive programs offered by our rangers, and broaden the visitor experience.

I also wish to tell you about the dedication, hard work and commitment demonstrated each and every day by our park rangers,

Lake Waccamaw State Park

maintenance staff, administrative staff in Raleigh and across the state and the seasonal employees who help us make it through peak seasons and provide invaluable support. These are hallmark traits we will also celebrate in 2016 at the 100-year anniversary of the state parks system.

The North Carolina state parks system's staff members have shown their mettle through creativity, innovation and determination. They are as much a treasure to the people of this great state as the natural ones they protect.

Our new visitor centers provide a focal point for the park and a gathering place for visitors. The centers are places to learn about the state park and its natural resources. They offer an integrated exhibit hall, a teaching auditorium and classrooms. They are also great places to conduct gatherings, civic functions and all sorts of community events.

I hope you will take the time to read and learn more about our efforts to improve the visitor experience, enhance natural resource management efforts, increase planning and expand recreational opportunities across our state parks system. We are also an essential component of North Carolina's travel and tourism industry. State parks valuable economic engines in the communities where they are located.

We take great pride in the work we do and hope all our citizens have the opportunity to come visit our state parks and enjoy something naturally wonderful in 2012.

Sincerely,

Lewis Ledford

Participants brainstorm on ways to expand memberships and increase partnerships.

FRIENDS STAGE FIRST CONFERENCE

To learn more and to join the Friends of State Parks, please visit:
www.ncfsp.org

More than 100 friends of North Carolina state parks, including local support groups, park advisory committee members and volunteers, gathered in Nags Head in early 2011 on their own time and dime to discuss the many ways nonprofit organizations can help individual state parks and the system as a whole.

It was the first-ever statewide conference of Friends of North Carolina State Parks.

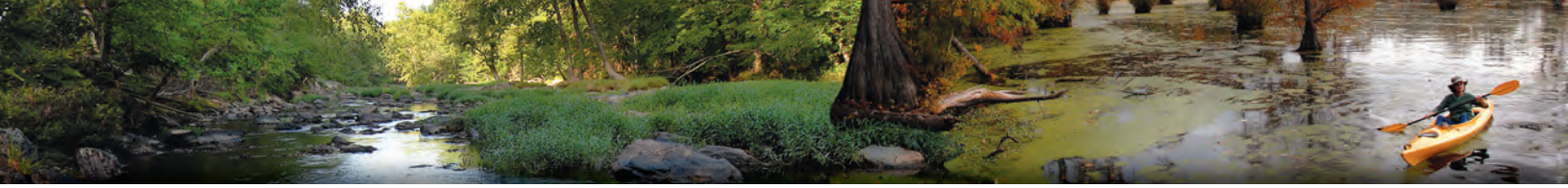
David Pearson, president of Friends of State Parks, told participants the information they collected through multiple programs and many experts and speakers will be extremely beneficial.

"The people in this room are the local state parks' conduit to their business, elected, appointed and community leaders," he said. "We're here to provide tools to help you do the best job possible back home."

The FSP effort to be a statewide umbrella organization has been enhanced under Pearson's leadership. Efforts have ranged from helping create new advocacy friends groups to being better legislative advocates.

Programs on the conference agenda explored partnership objectives, forming and growing friends groups, and financial and tax code guidance for nonprofits.

The keynote address was delivered by state Sen. Harry Brown, Senate majority leader.



RECORD-LEVEL ATTENDANCE AT NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS CONTINUED IN 2011

Visitation at North Carolina's state parks and state recreation areas continued at a record level in 2011, with 14.25 million visits, matching the all-time record set in 2009 and posting a slight increase from 14.19 million visits in 2010.

Among 39 state parks and state recreation areas, 15 reported increases in attendance in 2011. Jockey's Ridge State Park in Dare County reported the highest attendance at 1.32 million visits, down slightly from 1.47 million the year before.

"State parks make a strong contribution to North Carolina's tourism economy as well as to the economies of local communities in which they're located," said Lewis Ledford, director of the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation. "Their continued record attendance reflects the value that North Carolinians and visitors to this state place on outdoor recreation and our natural resources. In addition, families continue to benefit from the affordable recreation and education opportunities in these special places."

A 2008 economic study revealed that travelers spend an average of $23.56 a day to enjoy the state parks. The analysis by North Carolina State University's Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management estimated the state parks system's total annual economic impact at more than $400 million. For every $1 invested by the state, between $1.80 and $25.10 were generated for local economies.

During the past 25 years, the state parks system has seen a dramatic 102 percent increase in visitation. In 1986, 7 million people visited state parks and recreation areas.

Several state parks that reported higher attendance in 2011 were able to offer new amenities to visitors. A new 700-foot swim beach and picnic area at Lake James State Park opened for its first full season, and the park experienced a 70 percent jump in visitation. Improvements at other state parks contributed to increased visitation, including a renovated marina at Carolina Beach State Park, a new equestrian trail network at Medoc Mountain State Park and a number of hiking trail projects, including a volunteer-built summit trail at Elk Knob State Park.

The state parks system manages more than 215,000 acres. In addition to the 39 state parks and state recreation areas, there are 20 natural areas, seven state lakes, four state rivers and four state trails dedicated to conservation of rare resources. Through the New Parks for a New Century initiative, six new state parks have been added to the system since 2003.

Parks with significant increases in visitation include Dismal Swamp State Park in Camden County (34 percent), Elk Knob State Park in Watauga County (50 percent), Jones Lake State Park in Bladen County (26 percent), Kerr Lake State Recreation Area in Vance County (24 percent) and Medoc Mountain State Park in Halifax County (31 percent).

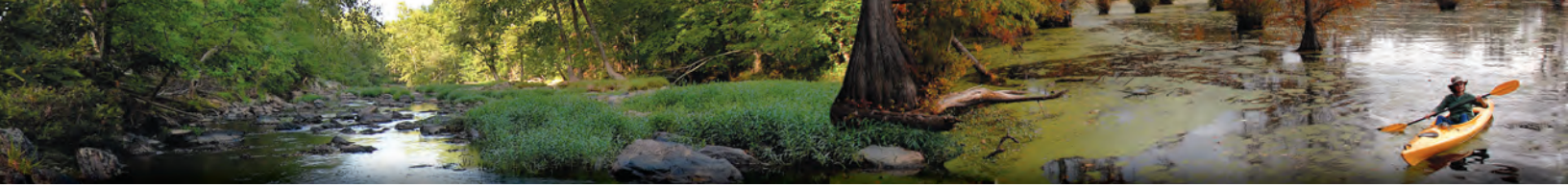
Submerged canoes at Pettigrew State Park

INTERPRETATION & EDUCATION: EYES AND EARS ON EXCEPTIONAL RESOURCES

Tossing a ball or Frisbee is a healthy way to enjoy the outdoors. The goal of park interpretation, however, is to focus our visitors' attention on the resources. Each of our state parks protects a unique natural and cultural resource.

At Pettigrew State Park, it's a pristine natural lake with dozens of American Indian dugout canoes thousands of years old, hidden beneath the water. At Stone Mountain State Park, it's a colossal rock dome jutting 600-feet from the surrounding meadows, foothills and trout streams. Park visitors form lifelong memories when carefully crafted programs and dedicated staff help them discover the park's exceptional resources.

Visitors at Stone Mountain State Park



The Junior Ranger program received a 2011 Media Award from the National Association for Interpretation. More than 1,000 junior rangers statewide have completed the program, which includes an activity book and a park service project. More than 500 families receive the quarterly newsletter sponsored by the Great Outdoor Provision Company and Friends of State Parks.

The state parks system was honored as the 2011 Outstanding Partner by the Environmental Educators of North Carolina. In addition to reaching 250,000 visitors through interpretive programs, parks support the efforts of many other educational organizations. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America, 4-H Youth Development, the Society for Hispanic Professionals, Big Brothers and Big Sisters Program and Audubon North Carolina are just a few of these partners.

Parks are ideal outdoor classrooms for field trips and summer camps. More than 100,000 students participated in a science, history or service-learning project at a state park in 2011.

During 2011, the Year of the Turtle, parks offered 350 distinct turtle-themed programs. In 2012, park visitors will be "hanging out" to celebrate the Year of the Bat. During the third annual theme, interpretive programs and special events will teach visitors about these misunderstood critters and the conservation challenges they face.

State parks celebrated the transition to 2012 by joining with the National Association of State Park Directors for a national effort. First Day Hikes led by rangers and volunteers at 28 state parks were a healthy and fun way for more than 1,300 people to ring in the New Year. The tradition will grow in 2012, with hikes in most state parks suitable for all ages and abilities.

2011 LAND PROTECTION EFFORTS

In 2011, more than 1,200 acres were added to the state parks system in nine transactions at seven units at a cost of $6.1 million (and, valued at $10.6 million). The state conservation trust funds were leveraged with more than $4.5 million of private funds or donated value through the land trusts.

A large acquisition on the east side of Little Yellow Mountain was completed for the recently authorized Yellow Mountain State Natural Area. This 470-acre tract is within the nationally significant natural heritage area and will help protect water quality, high quality natural communities and views from the Appalachian Trail.

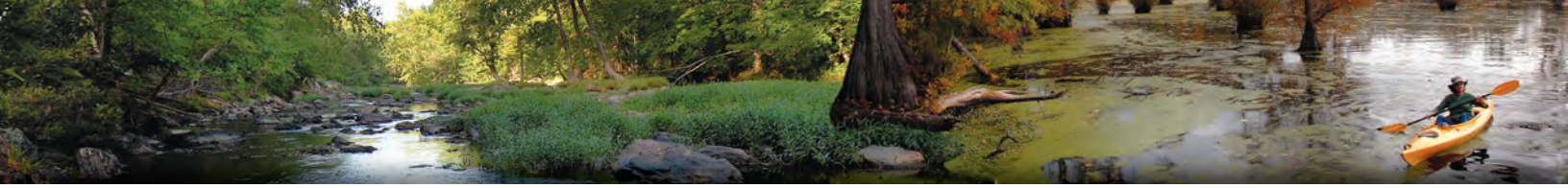
A key addition to Carvers Creek State Park was completed this year. A 255-acre tract on the north side of the Sandhills section was added to the park. This property contains most of the land base for recreation facilities set out in a master plan. This addition also benefits Fort Bragg by providing buffers from incompatible land uses on its boundaries.

Two critical tracts along the Eno River were acquired in 2011. A 24-acre tract was a missing link from Cabes Ford to Eno River State Park's trail system. This acquisition project was a partnership with the Eno River Association, which provided extensive staff hours in working with heirs of the property. The other addition to Eno River State Park was a one-acre donation along the river needed for future trail connections. Other work at Eno River State Park helped develop a template for trail easements, which will be used across the state.

Two Scuppernong River corridor tracts were added to Pettigrew State Park. These tracts increased the state-owned river buffer by 189 acres and would not have occurred without the assistance of the N.C. Coastal Land Trust.

A 66-acre donation at Gorges State Park, which will help protect the water quality in Indian Creek, a tributary to the Toxaway River, was completed in 2011.

Gorges State Park



NC STATE PARKS ANNOUNCES MOBILE PHONE APPLICATION FOR PARK VISITORS

A free mobile phone application with comprehensive information about North Carolina's state parks has been introduced in partnership with Friends of State Parks and ParksByNature Network, a developer of mobile, interactive tour guides.

The downloadable Pocket Ranger® Mobile Tour Guide for Apple iPhone and Android smartphones allows visitors to plan and explore state parks with details readily at hand about park locations, trails, facilities, reservations, events and special news alerts.

Both the iPhone and Android offers GPS-aided, state-of-the-art navigation of state parks, storage of detailed topographic maps and enhanced interactive features, such as waypoint recording and sharing and mapping guide. A portion of proceeds from the app will go to benefit the nonprofit Friends of State Parks.

"This mobile application fits our commitment to broaden the visitor experience in our 39 state parks and state recreation areas, and it captures the diversity and excitement of outdoor recreation in North Carolina," said Lewis Ledford, state parks director. "The ParksByNature project is becoming the standard for state park mobile applications elsewhere in the nation and is a solid platform for further development of this technology."

Once downloaded, the quick-search information in the Pocket Ranger® Mobile Tour Guide is accessible to smartphone users even when cell phone service is unavailable. This includes official park and campground maps plus details on natural features, activities, fees and regulations. A social networking tool allows users to share their state park experiences and photos in real time.

"We're excited to be part of this project," said David Pearson, president of Friends of State Parks. "Development of this app not only benefits park visitors but the state parks as well, since proceeds from the upgraded version go directly to develop education programs in the parks and toward efforts to protect our natural resources."

The Pocket Ranger® Mobile Tour Guide can be downloaded from the iTunes Store and Android Play – by searching NC State Parks or NC Pocket Ranger.

PARKS ADOPT QR CODES

The state parks brochure program is taking a technological step forward with a new element. All new printed brochures will contain a QR (quick response) code that will direct people to Internet resources.

QR codes are matrix barcodes or two-dimensional barcodes with contents that can be decoded at high speed by devices including smartphone mobile apps such as Red Laser or Barcode Scanner. Users' smartphones are then directed to a website, or will display any information that the QR code developers design, such as comparative pricing or nearby sources for products.

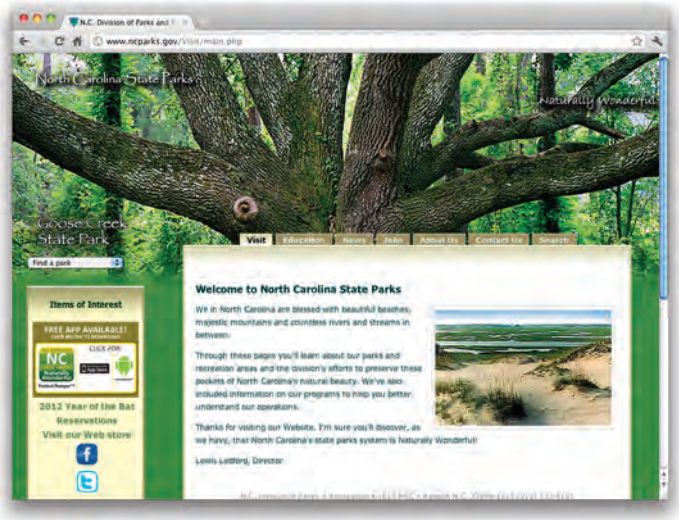
QR codes originally debuted in Japan for the purpose of tracking parts in vehicle manufacturing, but they have been quickly adopted by other industries for making large amounts of information quickly accessible.

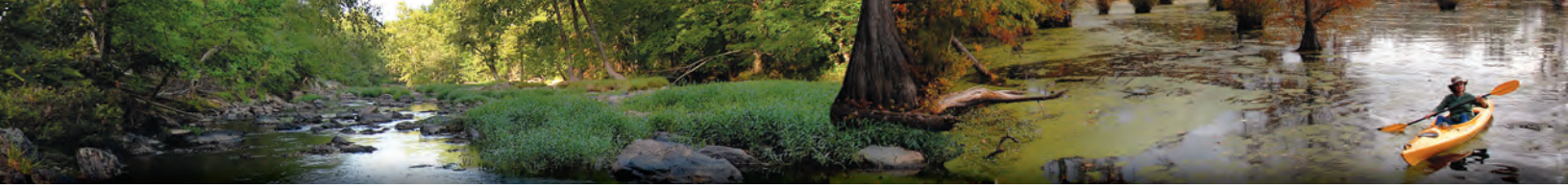
They can now be spotted on ads, magazines, brochures and business cards. The state parks system used its website QR code on last year's recent annual report.

State park brochures, which include detailed maps, are produced for each state park and state recreation area and are available at park offices and visitor centers.

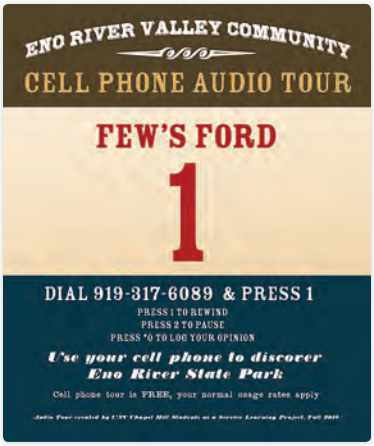
There is considerable potential for other uses of the QR codes by the state parks system, including displays in exhibit halls, wayside exhibits, campgrounds, trailheads and trail markers.

This QR code, when scanned, will take you to http://www.ncparks.gov





NEW TECHNOLOGY TELLS OLD STORIES



Twenty UNC-Chapel Hill freshmen have worked to share some of Eno River State Park's rarely told stories…by cell phone.

A unique service learning project in the students' English 101 class helped them improve creative writing skills, form a personal connection to the park and gain a lifelong commitment to volunteer service.

With the help of park staff and interpretive specialists, graduate instructor Tucker LaPrade guided students in creating four brief narratives of Eno River history that are accessible by a cell phone number posted at park historic sites.

Visitors at the site can call the number and get a short, lively history lesson. The audio tours are available on the state parks system's website and small signs with the cell phone number are posted at several locations in the park.

The students began by surveying weekend visitors to find out what they were most interested in learning, and worked in teams to write research papers on specific natural and cultural features of the park.

They shared their research with UNC staff and park friends group members and embarked on the challenge of turning five pages of research into four audio tours of roughly 60 seconds each.

A UNC Service Learning grant of $600 funded the first year of the technology approach.

"We'll use this year as a pilot study to get an idea of how audio tours can help our interpretive and education efforts at other parks," said Sean Higgins, head of the parks' Information and Education program.

LaPrade received the prestigious Robert E. Bryan Public Service Award for his efforts, and is now considering a similar project for William B. Umstead State Park.

LAKE WACCAMAW STATE PARK IS 2011 NORTH CAROLINA PARK OF THE YEAR

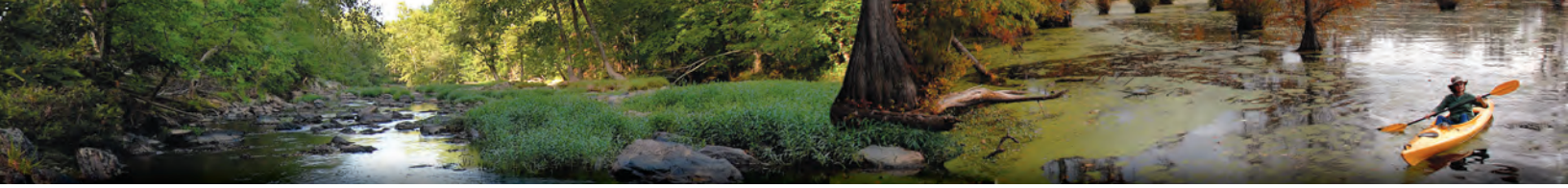
Lake Waccamaw State Park in Columbus County was named the North Carolina 2011 Park of the Year by the Division of Parks and Recreation.

The park was chosen for its "exemplary contribution to the North Carolina state parks mission of stewardship, public service and education" through initiatives in environmental education, community partnerships and special events planning.

The park has been heavily involved in community events such as Big Sweep, a summer science enrichment camp, water quality monitoring, the Waccamaw River Paddle Trail initiative and the Take-the-Lake Personal Endurance Event. During the year, it also increased its interpretive programming and increased the acreage of prescribed burns for natural resource management.

The state parks system began choosing a Park of the Year in 2010 with nominations from each of four districts. Each of 35 state parks and four state recreation areas submits an annual report that is objectively scored on progress in recreation, natural resource protection, sustainability, public safety and environmental education. Final judging is by senior and district administrators.

To honor the Park of the Year, a medallion is attached to a hiking staff that is passed to the current award recipient each year. South Mountains State Park in Burke County captured the first award in 2010.



HANGING ROCK STATE PARK CELEBRATES 75TH ANNIVERSARY

Of course, it's scenery and green space and habitat. But a state park can be much more, and people whose own histories are intertwined with the history of Hanging Rock State Park reflected on that during the park's 75th anniversary in October.

Superintendent Dave Cook arranges a group photo.

Several couples who met and/or were married in the park attended the celebration, as did elderly gentlemen whose lives were shaped as "CCC boys" and retirees who came of age as rangers on Hanging Rock's ridges.

The reunion drew 59 current and former staff members from as far away as Kansas and Idaho.

For $10 in 1936, the state of North Carolina purchased land that was to become a core of Hanging Rock State Park from the Stokes County Committee for Hanging Rock and the Winston-Salem Foundation.

Stone bathhouse built by the CCC.

Those early conservation groups seized an opportunity when developers who had planned a mountaintop resort on the land went bust.

This was roughly a year after 240 men of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) had arrived and set up camp on the property. They cleared land and began building roads, a dam and structures with native stone, including a massive bathhouse, picnic shelters and maintenance sheds.

The park opened its gates to the public in 1937 and immediately became a source of jobs for area residents, often young people who lived in the old CCC barracks during the summers.

Hanging Rock was one of five state parks created with the help of Depression-era works projects. Added to Mount Mitchell and Fort Macon, they became the nucleus of the state parks system.

The park has since doubled in size to 7,049 acres, and it welcomed more than a half million visitors in 2011.

View from the Hanging Rock.

CLIFFS OF THE NEUSE STATE PARK DEDICATES NEW VISITOR CENTER

A new 7,000-square-foot visitor center at Cliffs of the Neuse State Park in Wayne County, which was built to national green building standards, was formally dedicated June 3.

Barbara Byers of the park's advisory committee told guests that the event marks a benchmark in the park's 66-year history. Byers said her own life's journey had many moments at Cliffs of the Neuse, including a marriage proposal, family picnics and the creation of an annual Earth Day event.

"We are all looking forward to where this journey goes from here," Byers said.

Similar to visitor centers built at 20 state parks and state recreation areas since 1994, the facility offers a unique design reflecting the park's character.

The project features an exhibit hall, teaching auditorium and classroom along with administrative offices for both the park and the state parks system's east district. The facility represents an investment of $2.4 million from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, the principal funding source for state park capital projects and land acquisition.

Lewis Ledford, state parks director, noted that the Cliffs of the Neuse area has witnessed much North Carolina history, including American Indian activity and Civil War skirmishes. The visitor center, with its cultural and natural history exhibits, is now a storehouse for some of that history and will long be a landmark in the community, he said.

"Beyond being a focal point for the park and a gathering place for the community, it will be a place to learn for nearly 200,000 visitors who enjoy the state park each year, and will add to their experience," he said.

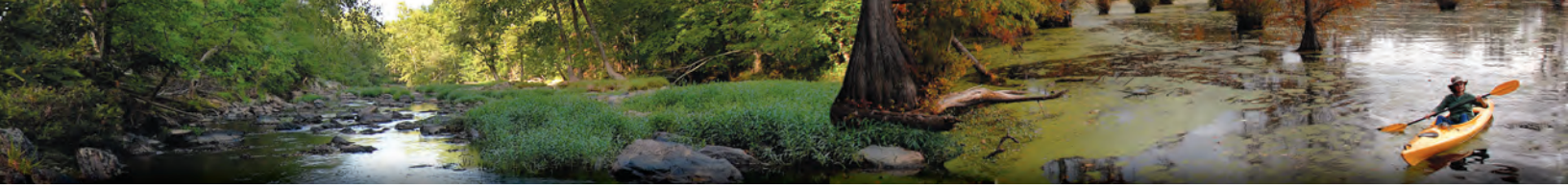
Principal Chief Cecil Hunt and Chief Elijah Locklear of the Tuscarora Nation of North Carolina, participated in the event by offering up a blessing for the facility, as they did during groundbreaking ceremonies in 2009.

Museum-quality exhibits in the visitor center explore the natural history and the unique geologic events that resulted in the landscape of the state park, including the bluffs that loom over the Neuse River.

The state parks system has increased its commitment to sustainability by seeking certification for all large projects by the national Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program of the U.S. Green Building Council.

Features at the Cliffs of the Neuse facility that will contribute to certification include active and passive solar energy systems, low-energy, water-source heat pumps and water-saving fixtures.

The structure was designed by Schema Architecture of Raleigh, and general contractor was Blue Ridge Enterprises of Mount Airy. The exhibits were designed by Design Dimension,Inc. of Raleigh and fabricated by Studio Displays, Inc. of Charlotte.



CHIMNEY ROCK MASTER PLAN COMPLETED

The most complex master plan ever developed for the state parks system was completed in July as Chimney Rock State Park unveiled its vision for development during the coming decades.

The master plan was the culmination of more than 18 months of work by administrative staff, park staff and Greenways Inc., a Durham-based environmental planning and landscape architecture firm responsible for its creation.

The process involved a near-endless stream of in-house meetings plus site visits, mapping, research of natural resources, public meetings and public comment periods and discussions with various stakeholder groups and local government officials.

The plan is available on the state parks system's website (www.ncparks.gov), linked from the Chimney Rock State Park main page.

Chimney Rock State Park in the Hickory Nut Gorge was authorized in 2005 and now encompasses more than 4,500 acres spanning the corners of four counties, though its epicenter is in Rutherford County. The Nature Conservancy, the Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy and the Foothills Conservancy were all involved in helping to amass acreage for the park.

A critical step came in 2007 when the Morse family agreed to sell the private attraction – the Chimney Rock itself – to the state for inclusion in the park.

The scenic, but very rugged, terrain of the gorge presented unique challenges to the planning effort, as did the abundance of rare species. Those elements combined to severely limit areas of intensive park development.

The master plan calls for a visitor center and central visitor-receiving area in what's known as the Meadows, a 15-acre parcel at the base of Chimney Rock Mountain. A 6,500-square-foot visitor center will be sited there as well as picnic areas, trailheads and a gate where visitors can gain access to the road and elevator leading to the spire and the higher elevations of the park's southern area.

The principal entrance to the park will be on a new road connection to be built from U.S. 64 in Lake Lure and leading to the Meadows. The existing, narrow entrance road to the area from Chimney Rock Village will become a one-way exit route.

This will substantially alter tourist traffic habits in the gorge, and the master plan envisions an innovative partnership among the local governments to create a bus shuttle system that can get tourists to the state park as well as local retail attractions and motels.

Arrayed around this central point will be three day use areas – at World's Edge, a high-value natural area with an escarpment that overlooks the Piedmont plain, the Bottomless Pools, a dormant

Continued on page 25.

The Rockefeller homestead on Long Valley Farm at Carvers Creek State Park.

DRAFT MASTER PLAN PREPARED FOR CARVERS CREEK STATE PARK

A draft master plan for Carvers Creek State Park in Cumberland County was made available for public review and comments in 2011. Comments will be considered for the final master plan expected to be completed during 2012.

A state park's master plan is essentially a blueprint for long-term development of facilities and recreation opportunities and a guide for protection of natural resources. Initial design alternatives were publicly presented in 2010 by Susan Hatchell Landscape Architecture of Raleigh, the firm responsible for completing the master plan.

The N.C. General Assembly authorized Carvers Creek State Park in 2005, and 4,076 acres in Cumberland and Harnett counties has been acquired in partnership with The Nature Conservancy and the state's dedicated conservation trust funds.

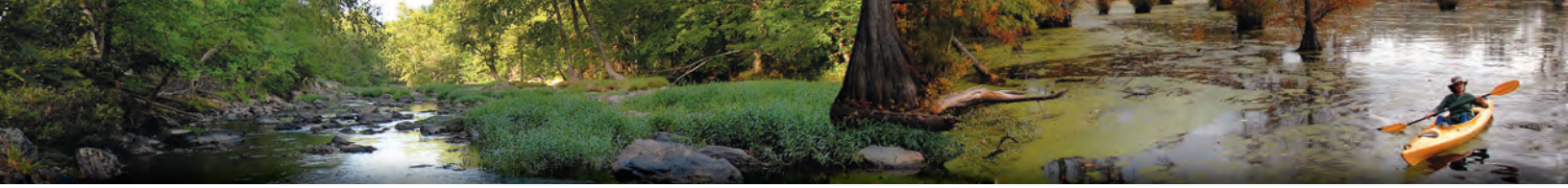
Marsh at Hammocks Beach State Park.

MARSH CRUISES AT HAMMOCKS BEACH STATE PARK SUPPORT WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT

The popular autumn marsh cruises at Hammocks Beach State Park were staged this year to honor a fallen service member who worked at the park, and proceeds benefited the Wounded Warrior Project.

Visitors were able to enjoy a boat cruise of up to 90 minutes in the marsh waters surrounding the park and nearby Swansboro with dramatic scenery, views of wildlife and narrative about the natural and cultural history of the region. Admission was a monetary donation to the Wounded Warrior Project with its mission to honor and empower wounded service members.

A helicopter crash in Afghanistan claimed the life of a community member, Petty Officer Christopher Campbell, a U.S. Navy SEAL who worked as a lifeguard at Hammocks Beach in 1995 and 1996 and expressed a wish that the project be supported.



FORT MACON HAS ITS HEARTBEAT BACK

Retracing the route of its predecessors, a replica Civil War era, 32-pounder cannon made its way down the Neuse River basin and onto the ramparts of Fort Macon.

Instead of Confederate soldiers, this cannon was accompanied by a group of students from Wayne Community College, who fabricated the first aluminum gun carriage to be used at the state park. The artillery piece rode on a flatbed truck making ceremonial stops at historic sites in Kinston and New Bern. It was then loaded by crane onto the fort.

A dedication ceremony and the first firing of the cannon with a five-pound gunpowder charge in early 2011 was the climax of a partnership between the state park and the community college. The partnership saved the state at least $20,000, and the cannon will add realism to fort tours.

Park Superintendent Randy Newman told a local newspaper, "The fort finally has its heartbeat back."

For several years, the park staff had hoped to replace two non-working fiberglass cannon replicas on wooden carriages that have added atmosphere – but no bang – to the visitor experience. The staff was also discouraged having to periodically replace wooden gun carriages that gave way to the coastal salt spray.

Gene Peacock, the eastern district interpretation specialist and maintenance supervisor Johnny Johnson struck a deal with the mechanical engineering department at the college to create aluminum carriages similar to those used at many federal historic sites.

The project eventually involved dozens of mechanical drawing, metal fabrication, welding and painting students.

The work was completed for the cost of materials, mostly rectangular aluminum tubing and wheels provided by a contractor. The materials were used in classroom instruction and saved state parks money.

Using an exhibit maintenance allocation from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, the park ordered its first operable cannon replica from a private firm in New Windsor, Md. The 10-foot-long, 4,200-pound cannon was delivered to the college in 2010 for final fitting on the carriage.

The cannon replicates a Model 1841 naval seacoast gun. Originals from the Norfolk naval yard were capable of hurling a 32-pound ball or an artillery shell up to three miles from the entrance to Beaufort Harbor.

RESERVATIONS AT NORTH CAROLINA'S STATE PARKS INCREASE 19.5 PERCENT IN 2011

The number of visitors using reservations at North Carolina's state parks jumped 19.5 percent in fiscal 2011, and the total number of reservations rose 10.9 percent over the previous year.

During the year, 330,455 visitors used 68,240 reservations. State recreation areas at Jordan Lake, Falls Lake and Kerr Lake were the most popular destinations for visitors making reservations, followed by Hanging Rock, Carolina Beach and Stone Mountain state parks.

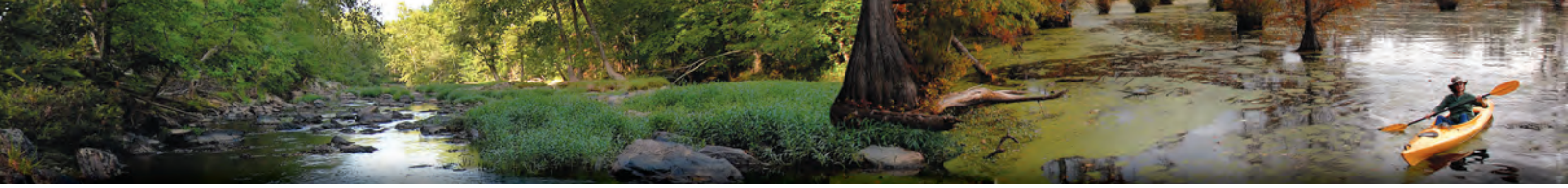
The increased use of reservations for campsites, picnic shelters and other amenities was revealed in an analysis of the state parks system's Internet – and call center-based reservations system in its second full year of operation from July 2010 through June 2011.

The state parks system reported record attendance in 2011 of 14.2 million, matching an all-time high set in 2009. Consistently high attendance has combined with the reservations system for strong contributions to local economies in North Carolina. A 2008 economic study by North Carolina estimates the total impact to local economies conservatively at $400 million, with each "tourist" visitor spending $23.56 locally each day.

The state parks system partnered with Active Network to offer the central reservations system for its 3,000 campsites, 106 picnic shelters and community buildings, vacation cabins and visitor center auditoriums and meeting rooms. The system is supported solely by a $3 surcharge for each reservation or night's stay.

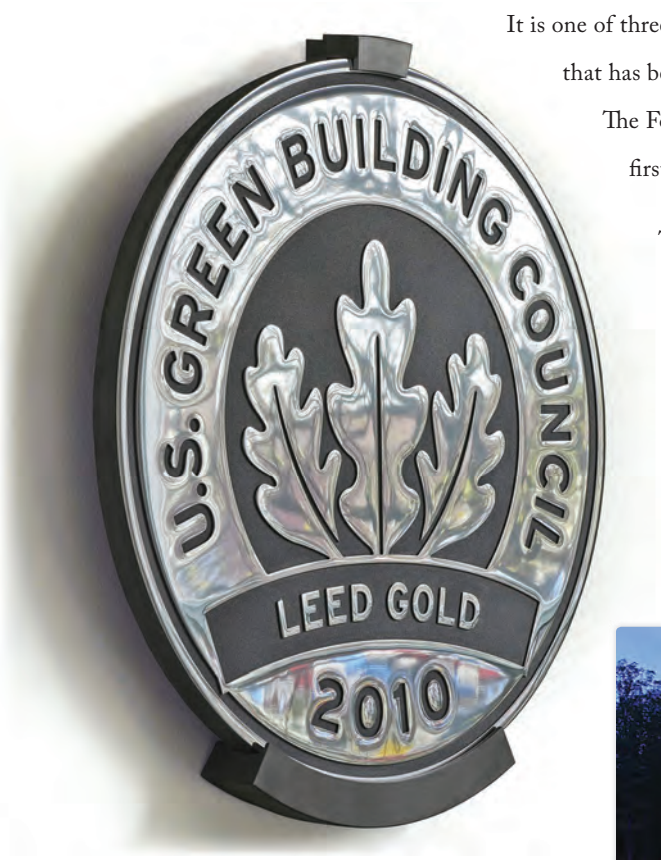
The state parks attracted visitors from 19 nations during the year with Canada, Germany and the United Kingdom contributing the most foreign visitors, but reservations also originated in far-flung locations such as Australia, Argentina, New Zealand and New Caledonia.

Reservations for campsites peaked in the months April-June with visitors making reservations an average of 46 days before their planned visit. State park visitors were most comfortable making reservations in person at a state park (46.2 percent), while 38.8 percent of reservations were made online and 15 percent were made through a call center. Visitors can camp without a reservation if a site is available when they arrive. Reservations can be made up to 48 hours in advance at most parks, online at www.ncparks.gov or by calling toll-free 1-877-7 CAMP NC (722-6762).



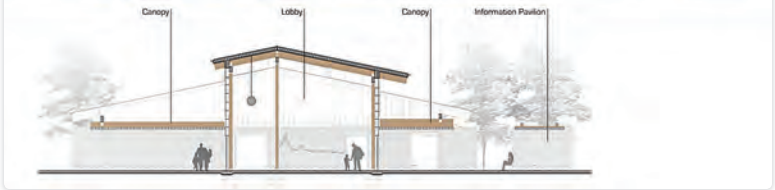
RAVEN ROCK STATE PARK FACILITY EARNS GOLD RATING FROM U.S. GREEN BUILDING COUNCIL

The new Raven Rock State Park Visitor Center has earned a gold rating in the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program of the U.S. Green Building Council.



It is one of three state park facilities to earn the gold rating in the certification program that has become an industry standard for environmentally sensitive construction. The Fort Macon State Park Coastal Education and Visitor Center became the first state-owned, non-university project to earn gold certification in 2010.

The 7,190-square-foot visitor center at Raven Rock was dedicated in July 2010. Sustainable features that contributed to the gold rating include a geothermal heat pump, solar hot water heating and low-flow water fixtures, the use of natural lighting along with low-energy lighting fixtures and solar-powered lighting in the parking area, preferred parking for fuel-efficient vehicles, the use of recycled building materials and natural landscaping.



STATE PARKS CONSTRUCTION TEAMS WIN STATE BUILDING COMMISSION AWARDS

The teams that built educational visitor centers at Fort Macon and Raven Rock state parks were honored by the State Building Commission with awards for excellence in project implementation.

The commission recognized designers and contractors for the facilities, as well as the state parks system's design and development program with the only two merit awards presented at its annual conference.

Although not a specific criteria for the awards, both visitor facilities have earned gold ratings in the U.S. Green Building Council's program of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design.

The facilities were supported by the N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, the major funding source for state park capital improvements and land acquisition.

The Fort Macon State Park Coastal Education and Visitor Center opened in 2009 and exhibits were installed in 2010. It is the largest visitor center in the state parks system and is devoted to environmental education about that park's fragile coastal ecosystem. The brick-and-block facility was designed in a style reflecting the fort by Hobbs Architects of Pittsboro, and general contractor was Daniels & Daniels Construction Co. of Goldsboro.

The Raven Rock State Park Visitor Center opened in 2010 with exhibits and a teaching auditorium and accompanied by upgrades to the park's entrance and its picnic grounds and an accessible nature trail. It was designed by LS3P Associates Ltd. of Raleigh and the general contractor was Harrod and Associates Constructors Inc. of Raleigh.

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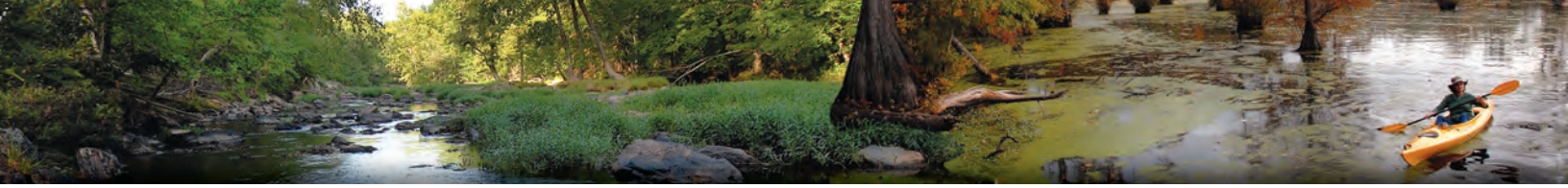
http://www.facebook.com/NorthCarolinaStateParks



OLD CAMPS GET NEW LIFE

A small army of volunteers, fueled by a grant from outdoors cooperative REI, completed an exhaustive project to rehabilitate 105 buildings in four historic group camps at William B. Umstead State Park.

A core group of volunteers was drawn from the staff of the Umstead 100-Mile Endurance Run. The volunteers contributed more than 3,600 hours of labor, and more than 100 gallons of stain have been brushed onto the Depression-era cabins, dining halls and meeting rooms. Siding, columns, beams, decking, shutters and windowpanes were replaced in many of the buildings.

The four camps receiving refurbishment were camps Sycamore, Lapihio, Crabtree and Whispering Pines.

Aside from the runners, volunteers were recruited from state employees – using paid community service time – from the Umstead Coalition, a park support group, from some local companies and just about any other group to which the organizers pitched the project.

Park Superintendent Scott Letchworth said he has been stunned by the results.

"What they have accomplished is nothing short of amazing," he said. "When we first took on this project, I had no idea what volunteers would be able to accomplish and have been absolutely amazed at the amount of work that has been completed."

REI was impressed as well, with executives of the company visiting at times. An original grant of $20,000 (twice the usual amount for such a project) was augmented with an additional $15,000. The Umstead Coalition also contributed generously once it realized the potential.

Young men of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) built the group camp buildings of rough-cut lumber milled from the park's trees during the late 1930s and 1940s.

The state parks' maintenance staff did some of the initial and more complex repairs and helped instruct some of the volunteers on the proper repair techniques.

A volunteer helps refurbish facilities at William B. Umstead State Park.

NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS RECOGNIZED IN NATIONAL GOLD MEDAL PROGRAM

The North Carolina state parks system was once again honored by the 2011 National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Parks and Recreation Management.

As a finalist, North Carolina advanced to the final round of consideration along with state parks systems in Florida, Missouri and Michigan, which was recognized with the grand award by the National Recreation and Parks Association at its annual meeting. The Gold Medal Program is the most prestigious recognitions a park and recreation agency can receive and recognizes service excellence.

It honors communities and states throughout the United States that demonstrate excellence in long-range planning, resource management and agency recognition.

Judges for the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration considered criteria including the quality of long-range planning, the response to population and economic trends, the extent of public support, the quality of natural resource protection and the types of services to special population groups.

EAGLE SCOUT BUILDS ON SUCCESSES

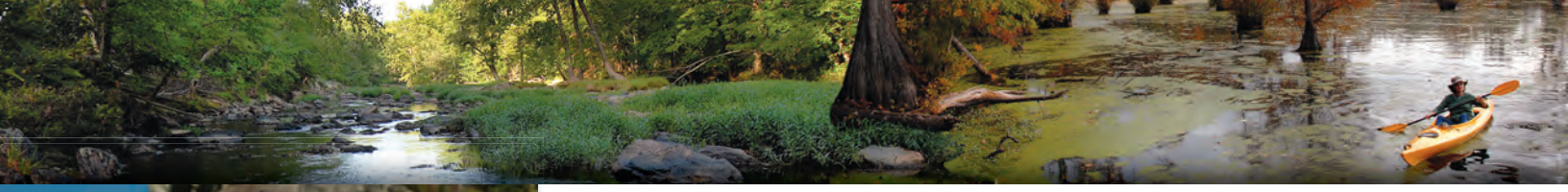
Kyle Kittelberger earned his Eagle Scout rank at Falls Lake State Recreation Area and then kept building on that success.

For his efforts, the Ravenscroft School junior was presented a President's Environmental Youth Award from the Environmental Protection Agency. The award is one of only 10 such awards presented nationally.

Kittelberger improved a wildlife trail at Sandling Beach. The trail now is a destination for more than 30 groups each year for educational programs.

Following his initial project in which he built an 80-foot-long wetland boardwalk and observation deck, Kittelberger added a hillside staircase to prevent erosion on one troubling stretch of the trail. Then, he constructed eight wooden recycling centers for the picnic shelters and a boat ramp.

He followed that with an invasive species eradication project removing autumn olive and sweetgum from the trail area.



LEDFORD RECEIVES AWARDS FOR CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Gov. Bev Perdue honored Lewis Ledford, director of the state Division of Parks and Recreation, with a 2011 Governor's Award for Excellence, the highest honor state employees can receive in North Carolina for dedicated service to the state. The ceremony was held in November 2011 at the North Carolina Museum of History in Raleigh.

Ledford, a 35-year veteran of the state parks system, received an award for Outstanding Government Service. He began his career as an entry-level park ranger and assumed the director's post in 2003. As director, he has been instrumental in developing partnerships with conservation organizations, landowners and government agencies that have helped make North Carolina's parks system one of the nation's best.

During his tenure, the state parks system has grown by more than 40,000 acres and created new state natural areas and seven new state parks. Those include two North Carolina icons at Chimney Rock and Grandfather Mountain. The award also recognized Ledford for developing an economic analysis of the state parks, creating a central reservations system as well as a new mobile phone application for visitors and putting in place sustainable building practices at numerous new facilities.

Ledford was also named Conservationist of the Year Award in August in a presentation of the 48th annual Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards. The event is sponsored by the North Carolina Wildlife Federation and the National Wildlife Federation.

In addition, Kyle Kittelberger, a volunteer and seasonal employee at Falls Lake State Recreation Area, was named Youth Conservationist of the Year. Kyle also received national recognition from the EPA as part of a separate awards program for his efforts. And, Great Outdoor Provision Co., a Raleigh-based outdoors retailer and frequent partner of the state parks system, was chosen Business Conservationist of the Year.

The program highlights individuals and organizations that have exemplified conservation activism across the state.

The organizations said that Ledford "shaped the state parks system to be the envy of the nation, with programs as far-ranging as energy efficiency and massive and much-needed expansion."

Great Outdoor Provision Co. was recognized for its contributions to stewardship and land protection, including the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, a unit of the state parks system. The company also supports the Junior Ranger program in the state parks.

The Conservation Organization of the Year award went to the Muddy Sneakers program that introduces youngsters in mountain areas to their natural heritage. They are frequent visitors to state parks including Chimney Rock and Gorges.

PARKS WIN SUSTAINABILITY AWARDS

Green grass and clean sand got the judges' attention this year as two state parks were recognized with Sustainability Awards from the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Superintendent Paul Donnelly accepts the award for Hammocks Beach State Park.

Superintendent Matt Windsor accepts for Pilot Mountain State Park.

Pilot Mountain State Park won for a project to replace high-maintenance fescue grass with native grasses. Also, Hammocks Beach State Park and Ranger Jake Vitak were honored for establishing a trash-free beach zone on Bear Island.

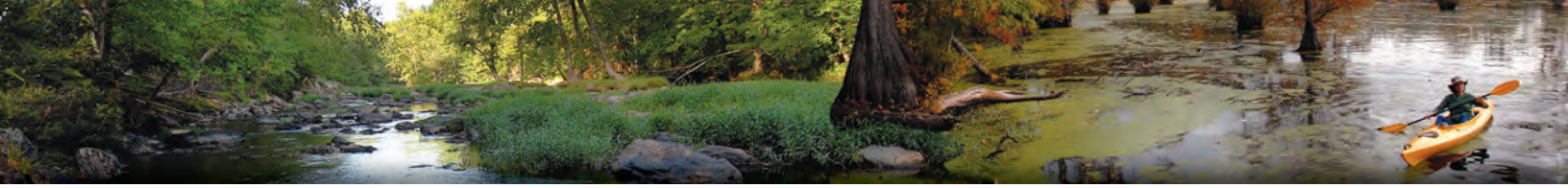
Staff at Pilot Mountain carefully replaced acres of fescue with native grasses along roadways and in open areas last summer. The deep root systems of the native grasses reduce stormwater runoff and provide better habitat for wildlife.

The project reduced a wide mown shoulder along four miles of roadway to a two-foot width that requires mowing only occasionally – or in some areas, annually – rather than demanding at least eight hours of mowing time each week.

The Hammocks Beach effort was the result of Vitak's service project for environmental education certification. Trash receptacles were removed from the pristine barrier island prior to the 2010 season, and visitors were educated on ways to pack out trash using free plastic bags.

Vitek recruited funding help for trash bags and educational materials from the Swansboro Rotary Club, the Crystal Coast Fishing Association and the Friends of Hammocks and Bear Island Inc.

Hammocks Beach Ranger Jake Vitak was recognized for developing a trash free zone on Bear Island. The project included the trash bags with a trach-free message and associated environmental education materials.



CRS RECEIVES NATIONAL RECOGNITION

The National Association of State Chief Information Officers recognized the state parks system's centralized reservations system (CRS) as a national finalist for its 2011 Recognition Awards. The CRS entry, which was submitted in the "Digital Government: Government to Citizen" category, was among 30 finalists selected from more than 100 nominations in 10 categories.

The Division of Parks and Recreation established the reservations system as part of its e-commerce initiative after it became one of the most requested services of park visitors. The parks system, working with state information technology and purchase and contract staffs, established a contract for the creation, management and support for the reservations system.

The overall service includes a fulfillment center, a call center and all of the related hardware, software, and telecommunications equipment needed for a fully functioning "turnkey" system.

Overnight visitors to the state parks system are now able to register for campsites online via the Internet or by calling in to a call center operator. Customers can also reserve picnic shelters and other facilities as part of the new system. This new service is one of the most significant advances in terms of visitor service in the history of the state parks system.

The state parks system launched the full-service Internet – and call center-based reservations system in July 2009 for its nearly 3,000 campsites as well as picnic shelters, cabins, community buildings and other facilities.

Demographic information, visitor use patterns and other critical information gathered through the CRS provide vital facts and figures that enhance the ability to manage and operate facilities and plan for the future.

The CRS has increased the state parks system's exposure and led to increased visitation and revenues, which increase the opportunity to reach more citizens with the message of environmental stewardship.

Visitors also now have the peace of mind to know, unlike before, that a campsite is available and reserved for their use upon arrival. Under previous practices, campsites and facilities were only available on a first-come, first-served basis at most parks.

CHIMNEY ROCK MASTER PLAN COMPLETED

Continued from page 15

streamside tourist attraction, and Rumbling Bald, a rugged area on the gorge's north side popular with rock climbers.

Development at each of these areas depends on further land acquisitions, but much of the necessary property is being held for conservation purposes by the various nonprofit organizations.

MERCHANTS MILLPOND RECOGNIZED FOR TRAILS PROJECT

Merchants Millpond State Park was recognized by the Albemarle Resource Conservation and Development Council for a paddle trail project it completed on Bennett's Creek. The park's superintendent Jay Greenwood accepted the award.

HISPANICS EXPAND SCIENCE HORIZONS

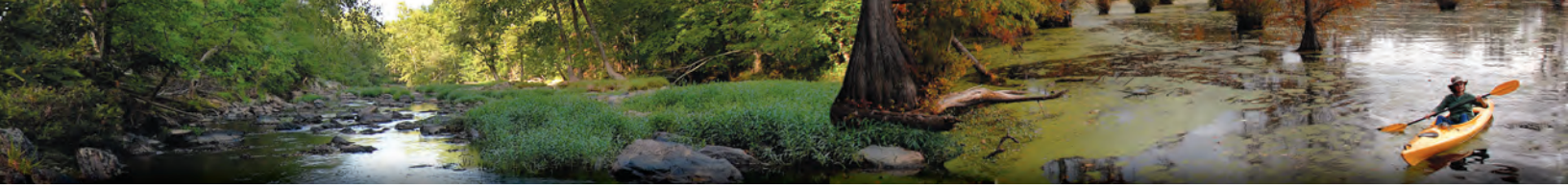
Seventeen Hispanic students practiced hands-on science in four state parks last summer in the second year of a four-year partnership between the state parks system and the Society for Hispanic Professionals.

The rising seventh and eighth graders visited Eno River and Hammocks Beach state parks and Jordan Lake and Falls Lake state recreation areas for water-quality testing and lessons on ecology.

The program is supported through a grant from the Burroughs Wellcome Fund.

According to a national assessment, many Hispanic students score poorly in science education, and are underrepresented in science careers.

To try to reverse that trend, the Society of Hispanic Professionals contacted the state parks system to design a pilot program in summer science enrichment last year, and the Good Stewards of the Environment program was launched. Its success secured the corporate grant.



GRAND CAMP

This is the fourth year the environmental education center at Haw River State Park has staged Grand Camp and it's been wildly popular. A second, three-day camp was added and some grandparents have asked about adding another night to the stay. Most of the participants are from central North Carolina and many have returned for a second or third year. Pizza-making sessions have been added to augment more traditional state park fare such as nature hikes, crafts, campfire sessions, canoeing and fishing.

MEMORIAL TO JOHN GRAHAM

Family and friends gathered in November at Haw River State Park – the Summit to present the John E. Graham memorial bench and plaque. John's memorial bench offers a wonderful place to pause and reflect on the surrounding beauty. The presentation occurred during a park superintendent's conference. The event was scheduled to occur in the presence of many of John's park ranger friends. A Ridgeline Trail display in memory of John will be erected at a later date at Crowders Mountain State Park which borders South Carolina, John's native state.

VISITOR AND STAFF SAFETY REMAINS TOP DIVISION PRIORITY

Providing a safe work environment for staff and a safe experience for park visitors continues to be the focal point of the division's safety program.

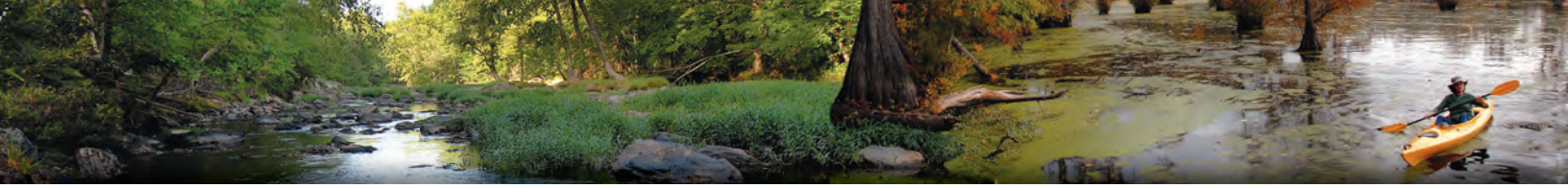
The division strives to provide the best training to park staff that may respond to a medical emergency, a lost visitor or other incident. With the help of the Safety and Occupational Health Council, several initiatives enhance the division's safety program.

An example of the dedication to safety training and preparation was the quick response of Pilot Mountain State Park staff when a park visitor collapsed while hiking and went into cardiac arrest. The quick action of park staff and the availability of an automated external defibrillator allowed the hiker to leave the hospital less than a week later. The value of having trained staff and quick access to an AED are critical links in the chain of survival.

After incidents such as this, it is important to allow staff to debrief in a safe environment. To meet that need, the division keeps a team drawn from different sections on standby. Five new members who completed the Critical Incident Stress Management Training course offered by N.C. Division of Emergency Management were added to that team.

The Division Safety Council continues to focus on water safety. One step is the life jacket loaner program established at Jordan, Falls and Kerr lakes with help from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. In 2011, the division expanded the program with 600 new life jackets. These were distributed to other parks identified through safety audits. Shortly after they were distributed, the program was credited with saving the life of an individual who suffered a seizure while swimming.

The division has also partnered with the University of North Carolina, N.C. State University and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health to conduct a study on the effectiveness of insect repellent-impregnated clothing. The study aims to determine how the clothing can reduce exposure to ticks and other disease carrying insects. Volunteers from the division's uniform field staff agreed to take part in a two-year study.



CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2011

Despite limited funding from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund due to the economy, the division's Design and Development Section completed several important construction projects and initiated others during 2011. These included:

- A maintenance facility at Pettigrew State Park completed in August;
- Group camp improvements at Stone Mountain State Park completed in May;
- Courtesy dock replacement at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area completed in October. This included 15 courtesy docks at nine recreation sites.
- Boathouse replacement and shoreline improvements at Morrow Mountain State Park completed in December;
- The first of three phases to replace the aging trail structure at Chimney Rock State Park from the Sky Lounge to the upper parking area. The final two phases are under construction and expected to be completed by spring 2012;
- Road and parking improvements at Pilot Mountain State Park completed in May.
- Henderson Point Campground improvements at Kerr Lake State Recreation Area completed in April;
- The Nutbush development at Kerr Lake completed at the end of the year.

Construction projects initiated in 2011 include:

- Dam repairs at Cliffs of the Neuse State Park to be completed in spring 2012;
- Dam repairs at Mayo River expected to be completed by summer 2012;
- Construction of a visitor center, maintenance facility and two day-use areas at Gorges State Park;
- Renovation of the Sky Lounge and improvements to restroom facilities and elevator facilities at Chimney Rock State Park expected to be completed in spring 2012.

An Americops volunteer pitches in at Pilot Mountain State Park.

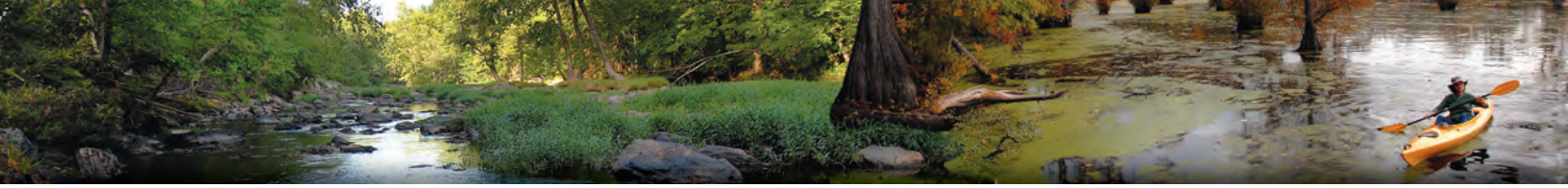
PARK VOLUNTEERS MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE IN 2011

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. Volunteers are advocates for our agency and for the resources we try to protect. They support our programs and work to protect North Carolina's natural heritage.

Volunteers build community by demonstrating strong park stewardship and commitment to public lands. Volunteers serve North Carolina state parks in a number of functions including being a camp host, doing trail work, and working at the front desk in the visitors' centers. Some familiar organizations are behind our volunteers such as the Annual Birding Count sponsored by the Audubon Society, Big Sweep, Boy/Girl Scouts, and Eagle Scouts. Other intriguing examples of volunteering include guarding sea turtle nests, helping restore oyster populations, and planting marsh grass.

One outstanding example of volunteer accomplishment stands out this year for our parks. Beginning in January 2006 and ending in September 2011, more than 6,000 volunteer hours were recorded to complete the trail to the 5,520 foot summit at Elk Knob State Park. In 2011, the N.C. State Parks Volunteer Program logged 63,386.1 volunteer hours. That is the equivalent of 7,923 eight-hour days. Kerr Lake State Recreation Area had the largest number of volunteer base hours at 12,588.

The national average value of a volunteer hour is $21.36. So what does this mean for state parks? That is the equivalent of $1,353,927 that did not come out of our budget. Volunteers enable park staff to devote much-needed time to other necessary park projects. Without our volunteers, we would have a difficult time providing our visitors with the exceptional quality they expect.



VOLUNTEERS, PARK STAFF CONSTRUCT ELK KNOB TRAIL

Elk Knob State Park staff joined a cadre of loyal volunteers in early fall to celebrate the completion of a 1.8-mile summit trail at Elk Knob State Park in Watauga County, a project that consumed more than 6,000 hours of labor during 5 ½ years.

Elk Knob Superintendent, Larry Trivette, congratulates volunteers upon completing the trail to the summit at Elk Knob State Park.

Almost every Saturday dawned on the staff and the volunteers inching the trail toward a crest about 1,500 feet above the park's entrance.

The trail has already become the focal point of the young state park.

When Elk Knob State Natural Area was created in 2003, rangers found a barely navigable, steep and exhausting vehicle trail as the only route to the summit. At 5,520 feet, it's the highest peak entirely within Watauga County and offers stunning views of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The land was re-designated a state park in 2007 and austere interim facilities were completed in 2008, including a ranger station, picnic grounds and parking areas.

Hikers enjoy the new trail at Elk Knob.

Many volunteers were recruited from the student body at Appalachian State University. Others came from scout groups, outdoors clubs and civic organizations. Their ages ranged from six to 74.

Together, they saved the state of North Carolina an estimated $425,000. The park spent $43,054, mostly for hand tools and gravel.

The resulting trail has already drawn high praise from hikers. It offers a gradual climb, its single-track lined by native stone for much of the way and punctuated by stone steps and trailside benches. It encourages hikers to stop and ponder the rare mountain plant species along the way.

NORTH CAROLINA PARKS AND RECREATION TRUST FUND (PARTF)

PARKS AND RECREATION AUTHORITY

The North Carolina Parks and Recreation Authority, a 15-member board which oversees the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, was created by the General Assembly with the Authority's powers and duties becoming effective July 1, 1996. The Governor appoints five members, including the chairperson. The General Assembly appoints 10 members, five upon the recommendation of the President Pro Tempore of the Senate and five upon the recommendation of the Speaker of the House.

Authority members can serve two-consecutive three-year terms before rotating off the board. The 2010-11 Parks and Recreation Members are:

Bill Ross, Chairman
Chapel Hill

H. Boyd Lee
Greenville

Lydia Boesch
Pinehurst

Philip K. McKnelly
Raleigh

Loretta Clawson
Boone

Monroe Pannell
Conover

Daryle Bost
Charlotte

Jennifer D. Scott
Pittsboro

Robert Epting
Chapel Hill

John S. Stevens
Asheville

Ashley B. (Brownie) Futrell Jr.
Washington

Lisa Wolff
Burlington

Cody Grasty
Maggie Valley

Edward Wood
Wilmington

Woodard (Woody) Gurley
LaGrange

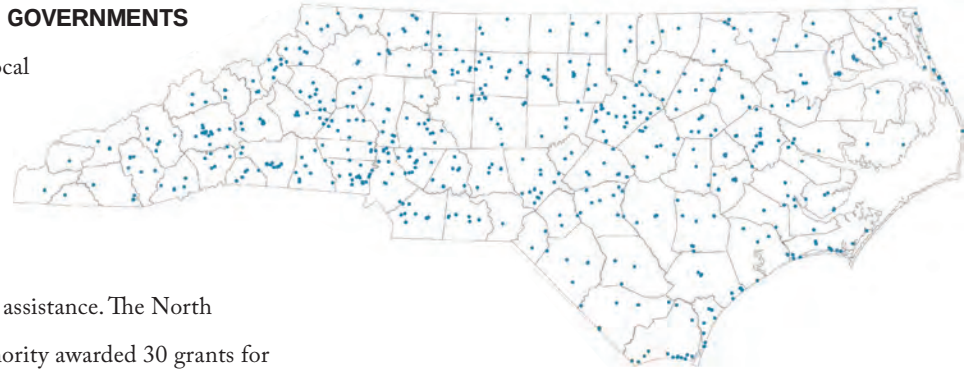
GRANT PROGRAM FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The North Carolina General Assembly established the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) on July 16, 1994. The PARTF program provides dollar-for-dollar matching grants to local governments to acquire land and/or to develop parks and recreational projects that serve the public. Building park and recreation facilities creates jobs and stimulates local economies.

- The Parks and Recreation Authority has awarded grants to more than 350 different communities and counties.
- Local governments in 99 out of North Carolina's 100 counties have received a PARTF grant.

GRANTS AWARDED TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The PARTF revenues allocated to local grants for fiscal year 2010-11 were $6,999,745. Eighty (80) local units of government submitted PARTF applications, requesting $23.4 million in PARTF assistance. The North Carolina Parks and Recreation Authority awarded 30 grants for $8,734,569. The difference between the amount awarded and the fiscal year revenues is $1,734,824 from various cancelled projects, reductions in the scope of work or projects completed under budget.



Parks and Recreation Trust Fund Grand Awards 1995–2011

There remains a significant need to create local parks and greenway systems throughout North Carolina. Local governments have reported about $600 million in unmet parks and recreation needs across the state. Since 2000, the PARTF program awarded monies to 500 projects, which is almost 60 percent of the 852 projects for which applications were received. PARTF funds have been leveraged by local governments with funds from other sources. Each $1 of PARTF grants funds has been matched with nearly $2 of local funds.

NORTH CAROLINA PARKS AND RECREATION TRUST FUND (PARTF)

2011 GRANTS TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Applicant	County	Grant Amount	Project
Alamance County	Alamance	$375,000	Mountains-to-Sea Trail – Southern Alamance Section
Ayden	Pitt	$499,888	Ayden District Park
Banner Elk	Avery	$213,500	Tate-Evans Park
Bath	Beaufort	$18,000	Lawson's Walk
Beaufort County	Beaufort	$67,000	Crisp Landing Acquisition
Buncombe County	Buncombe	$285,500	Collier Property Acquisition
Clayton	Johnston	$300,000	North Clayton Park – Mountains-to-Sea Trail Trailhead Acquisition
Concord	Cabarrus	$425,000	Rocky River Greenway, Northwest Phase I
Conover	Catawba	$333,744	Conover Station Park
Enfield	Halifax	$58,000	Enfield Community Park Phase II
Farmville	Pitt	$176,250	Municipal Athletic Park Improvements
Goldsboro	Wayne	$132,750	Stoney Creek Park
Graham	Alamance	$500,000	Jim Minor Road Land Acquisition
Harnett County	Harnett	$500,000	Anderson Creek Park, Phase I
Iredell County	Iredell	$183,650	Scotts Rosenwald Park
Lenoir	Caldwell	$156,750	Aquatic and Fitness Center Renovation
Lenoir County	Lenoir	$500,000	Woodmen Water Park
Lincoln County	Lincoln	$415,000	Rock Springs Nature Preserve Park
North Wilkesboro	Wilkes	$238,665	Smoot Park Improvements
Saratoga	Wilson	$41,138	Saratoga Town Park
Spindale	Rutherford	$44,600	Deviney Park Improvements
Spring Hope	Nash	$55,000	Spring Hope Park Renovation
Stanley	Gaston	$500,000	Harper Park
Stantonsburg	Wilson	$100,000	Statonsburg Town Park
Sunset Beach	Brunswick	$400,000	Sunset Beach Town Park
Trinity	Randolph	$500,000	Center City Park
Troutman	Iredell	$500,000	Troutman-ESC Park
Wake County	Wake	$242,161	Turnipseed Preserve Property
Walkertown	For`syth	$472,973	Walkertown Town Center Park
Wesley Chapel	Union	$500,000	Dogwood Park
TOTAL		**$8,734,569**	

HIGHLIGHTS FROM COMPLETED PARTF GRANTS

EMERALD ISLE BOATING ACCESS AREA

The town of Emerald Isle led efforts to secure the 23-acre site, which was the last suitable site for a public boating access in the community. The Emerald Isle Boating Access area includes four launch ramps, 18 single-vehicle parking spaces, and 112 vehicle /trailer parking spaces, making it the largest public boating access area on the North Carolina coast. The project is the result of a great partnership between state and local government to ensure perpetual boating access for local residents and thousands of visitors from North Carolina and other states.

TOWN OF BLACK MOUNTAIN-LAKE TOMAHAWK PARK RENOVATIONS

Receiving the PARTF grant has allowed the town of Black Mountain to replace a swimming pool at Lake Tomahawk Park. Public use of the new pool has surpassed the town's expectations, doubling attendance numbers. The higher attendance has generated additional revenue for the town since the renovations were completed. This has been especially helpful to the town during the current economic conditions.

NORTH CAROLINA PARKS AND RECREATION TRUST FUND (PARTF)

STATE PARKS SYSTEM PROJECTS FUNDED BY PARTF

LAND ACQUISITION PROJECTS

For fiscal 2010-11, the Parks and Recreation Authority approved $2,960,191 for land acquisition projects in the state parks system. These projects will help address the need for additional acreage at six state park units. However, it will cost an estimated $176 million to purchase the 43,752 acres needed to complete all current state park units.

Unit	Acres	Description
Carvers Creek State Park	245	Two tracts for the Sandhills section to provide land for facilities and public access
Chimney Rock State Park	37	Partial funding for a tract on Rumbling Bald, within a nationally significant natural heritage area
Chimney Rock State Park	74	Two critical tracts for resource protection and future public access. One tract on the top of Round Top Mountain, the other eastern half of Bottomless Pools
Elk Knob State Park	55	Multiple small tracts, including inholdings, for resource protection and access control
Mount Mitchell State Park	4	Small tract adjacent to existing state ownership in nationally significant high elevation natural communities in the Black Mountains
Weymouth Woods State Nature Preserve	15	Small tract in the Paint Hill section. Fee simple ownership is needed for management of rare species on this tract
Associated Costs		The state covers associated costs such as title opinion, appraisals, surveys and phase one environmental assessments of acquisition projects along with land trust overhead and interest payments.
TOTAL	**430**	**$ 2,960,191**

CONSTRUCTION AND RENOVATION

During fiscal year 2010-11, the Parks and Recreation Authority approved state park construction and renovation projects totaling $8,494,889 which consists of $4,981,210 from fiscal 2010-11 and $3,513,679 from projects from previous years that were completed under budget. With PARTF funds, the division continues to address a lengthy backlog of construction and renovation projects in the state parks system. However, approximately $417.6 million is required to meet all the needs for new construction and renovation for the state parks system.

State Park Unit	Description	Costs ($)
Chimney Rock State Park	Elevator and Sky Lounge Improvements	1,414,900
Chimney Rock State Park	Trail and Egress Improvements	900,000
Cliffs of the Neuse State Park	Dam Repair	134,000
Crowders Mountain State Park	Family and Group Camp Improvements	664,000
Crowders Mountain State Park	Visitor's Center and Campground Parking Lot Expansion	172,000
Deep River State Trail	Justice Tract-Paddle Access	50,000
Haw River State Park	Church Street Section Interim Development	141,648
Lake James State Park	Mountain Bike Trails	225,000
Jordan Lake Recreation Area	Repair and Upgrade to Water System	608,341
Mayo River State Park	Dam Repair	370,000
Medoc Mountain State Park	Mountain bike Trails	225,000
Morrow Mountain State Park	Group Camp Improvements	40,000
Morrow Mountain State Park	Mountain Overlook Toilet Building	450,000
Park System	Major Maintenance Funds	1,500,000
Park System	Demolition Funds	200,000
Park System	Trail Maintenance	500,000
Park System	Exhibit Maintenance Repair Funds	50,000
Pilot Mountain State Park	Water System Improvements	200,000
South Mountains State Park at the Jacob Fork Section	Renovate Primitive Campground	650,000
TOTAL		$ 8,494,889

KEY BENEFITS PROVIDED BY PARKS AND RECREATION

Parks and recreation provide a multitude of benefits to individuals and communities. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) recently reported on the current research about these benefits.

1

PHYSICAL HEALTH

- Obesity, including childhood obesity, is widespread in the United States. Obese children are two to three times as likely to be hospitalized. Physical activity is an essential part of the solution.
- Multiple studies indicate that time outdoors is the strongest correlate of children's physical activity.
- A study of senior citizens found that residents of neighborhoods with walkable green spaces lived longer and reported better physical abilities.

2

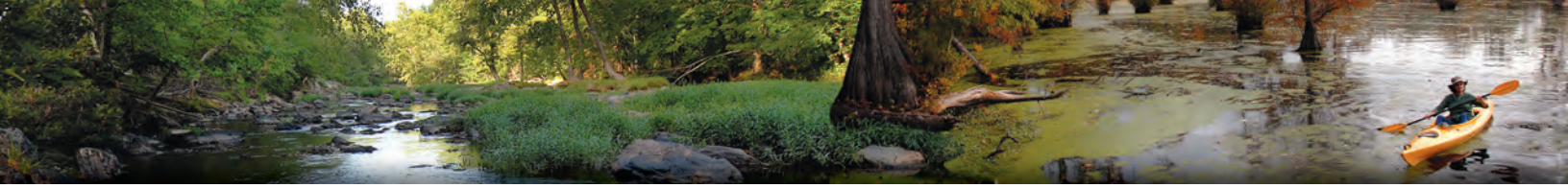
ECONOMIC IMPACT

- By promoting physical activity, parks and recreational facilities provide a way to address the direct and indirect costs of obesity, estimated to be nearly $150 billion annual in the U.S.
- Building park facilities provides needed construction jobs to North Carolina communities.
- Parks provide economic benefits to local governments by attracting businesses that bring additional jobs and tourists who spend money at hotels, shops and restaurants.
- Increased property values for homes close to greenways and open spaces increase local tax revenue.

3

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

- Urban parks improve air quality through air pollution removal, carbon removal and temperature reduction.
- Urban forests in the lower 48 states are estimated to remove nearly 800,000 tons of pollution per year. Poor air quality more acutely affects senior citizens and children through respiratory disease.



NORTH CAROLINA'S STATE TRAILS PROGRAM

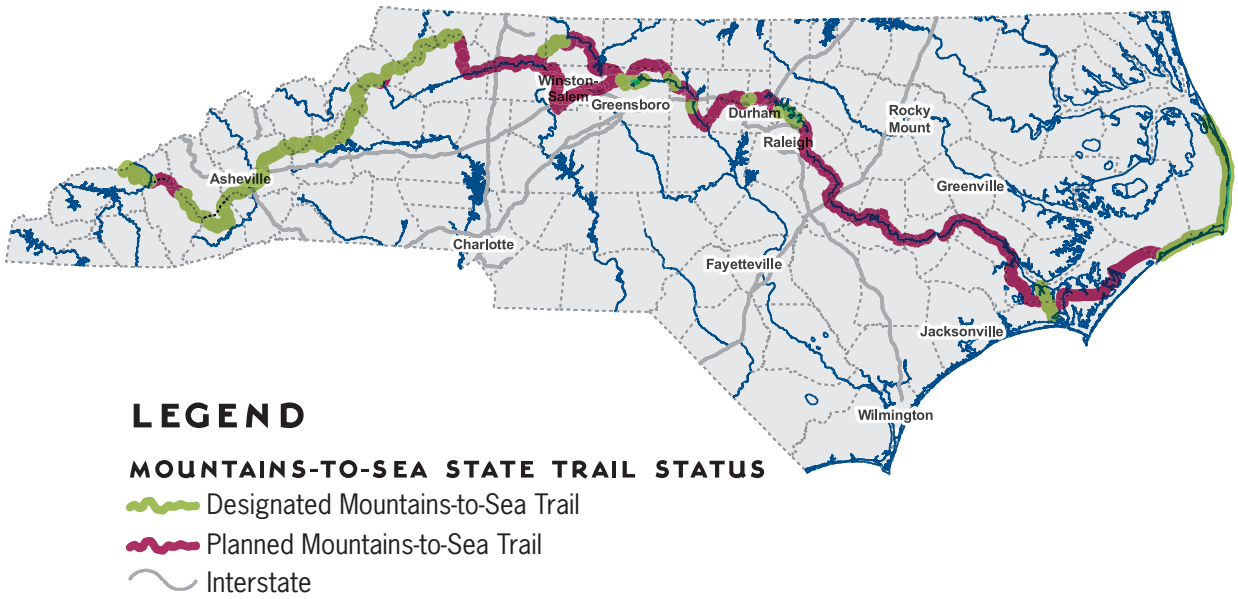
The trails program's mission, as mandated in the North Carolina Trails System Act, includes establishing trails in natural, scenic areas and in and near urban areas and coordinating and complementing local trails. Program services include trail assessment for state parks and sharing knowledge about sustainable trail design and construction, GIS analysis and trail recommendations for planners.

Trail planning initiatives exist for the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail, the Deep River State Trail, the Waccamaw River Trail, the Yadkin Valley Heritage Corridor, the Dismal Swamp Canal Trail and the Croatan Regional Bike and Trail. Working with parks and contractors, the program assisted some significant state park projects in 2011 including new sustainable trail construction at Stone Mountain, Morrow Mountain, Raven Rock, Lake James and South Mountains state parks. Also, design and contracts are in the works for new sustainable trails at Lake James, Morrow Mountain, Hanging Rock and Haw River state parks and Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area, and a trails assessment is under way at Eno River State Park.

NORTH CAROLINA TRAILS COMMITTEE

The trails program is advised by the seven-member North Carolina Trails Committee appointed by the secretary of the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Committee members, representing different types of trail users, are also responsible for making federal Recreational Trails Program and state Adopt-A-Trail grant recommendations. Current members are Barbara Oslund (chairperson) of Pittsboro, Paul Elliot of Cary, Joe Jacob of Pittsboro, David Lee of Wilson, Leslie Love of Weaverville, Brian Sears of Granite Falls and Terry Smith of Morehead City.

NORTH CAROLINA'S MOUNTAINS-TO-SEA TRAIL



North Carolina designated and opened three new segments of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail in 2011 increasing the overall length of this trail by 21 miles. The trail is an effort to connect Clingman's Dome in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Jockey's Ridge State Park on the Outer Banks, a distance of more than 900 miles.

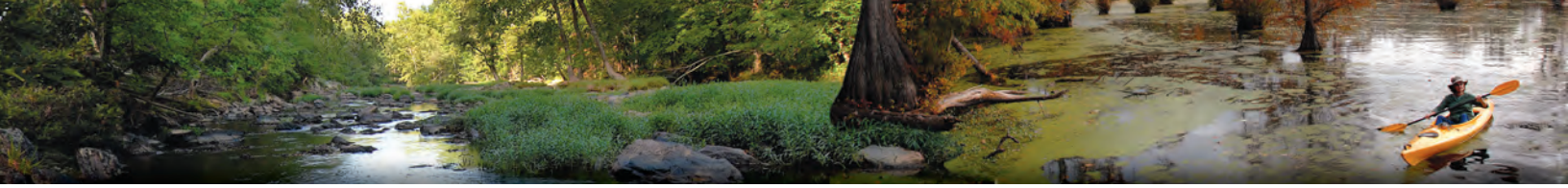
Alamance County was awarded recognition for building one mile of new trail in the Shallow Ford Natural Area. Pilot Mountain State Park was recognized for 12.6 miles of existing trail within the park, and the city of Raleigh was recognized for construction of 6.5 miles on the Neuse River Greenway.

More than 546 miles of the MST are open for public use. More information about the project can be found at the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail's website, www.ncmst.org.

TRAILS GRANT PROGRAMS

The trails program administered 21 federal Recreational Trails Program grants totaling more than $1.3 million to applicants for trail and greenway projects. The N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation received 48 applications requesting more than $3 million.

The awarded 24 state Adopt-A-Trail grants totaled $108,000 to applicants for trail and greenway projects. There were 48 applications requesting more than $230,000.



FRIENDS OF TRAIL CELEBRATE 'FIRSTS'

A record 130 people attended the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail's annual meeting in February at Haw River State Park to help celebrate a series of "firsts" for the organization, including a trail hike by President Barak Obama and the First Lady.

Volunteer hours to build and maintain the trail in 2010 exceeded 18,000. Nearly 50 volunteers were recognized for donating more than 75 hours, with eight of them volunteering 200 or more hours.

"Volunteer and public support for the trail just keeps building," said Kate Dixon, executive director. "Our partners at state parks have been and will be critical to keeping that momentum going."

Howard Lee, former N.C Secretary of Natural Resources and Community Development, was the keynote speaker. As secretary, Lee proposed the trail in 1977 at a National Trails Conference.

Lee said the work by volunteers has been one of the most extraordinary achievements in the state's history. He said the influence of the trail now stretches far beyond its corridor, as it has been a catalyst for trails in other parts of the state and a rallying point for bringing people together.

His inspirational speech also commended some early pioneers of the trail, including former state parks employee Jim Hallsey, current trails program chief Darrell McBane and longtime trail champion Allen DeHart.

He encouraged those attending to keep building and enlist others to help.

"The North Carolinians I know take great pride in helping others," he said. "We just need to keep tapping into that strength and sense of purpose."

PIEDMONT TRAIL EXTENDS MST VISION

A 6.5-mile trail segment created by Raleigh was added to the Piedmont span of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail in November.

Dee Freeman, secretary of the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources, designated the Neuse River Trail as a part of the MST just before a dedication event at the trailhead next to the Falls Lake Dam.

The trail is part of Raleigh's expanding greenway system and, for practical purposes, extends a 31-mile MST segment that had already been designated and which rambles across the Falls Lake State Recreation Area to the dam.

In turn, the new 6.5-mile trail will eventually grow to 28 miles, extending eastward to the Johnston County border.

U.S. Rep. Brad Miller, of Wake County, told a crowd of more than 50 attending the dedication that the trail is one of many drawing cards for businesses considering relocation in the Triangle.

"In addition to just being totally cool, it has an environmental benefit and an economic benefit and I'm glad to be part of that," he said.

RRS CONTINUES SERVICES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The division continued its service to local parks and recreation agencies through Recreation Resources Service, the nation's oldest technical assistance program. The program is administered alongside North Carolina State University's Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management.

In 2011, RRS provided technical assistance to local governments in all 100 North Carolina counties.

With its team of four regional consultants, RRS helps local governments submit grant proposals for the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund and follows through with project inspections, application processing, conversion issues and closeout processing. Last year, local governments submitted 79 grant applications.

RRS consultants were also involved in Land and Water Conservation Fund issues including conversions, inspections and reimbursements.

RRS also provides continuing education opportunities for parks and recreation professionals and citizen board members. In 2011, RRS sponsored eight teleconferences in 11 locations using the North Carolina Research and Education Network. Topics included: pesticide certification, summer camps, aquatics, public input, customer service, mobile applications and youth sports psychology. Statewide teleconferences were also held regarding the PARTF grant process and financial data reporting.

Haw River State Park Improvements

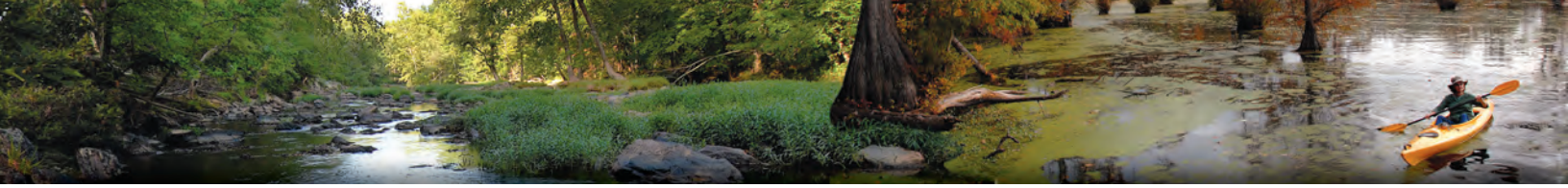
Renovated Youth Conference Building

New Retaining Wall

Youth Conference Building Elevator

New Sprinkler System.

Renovated Restrooms with Green Building features



MAINTENANCE PROGRAM MAKING BIG IMPROVEMENTS AT HAW RIVER STATE PARK

For the past two years, the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation has had several on-going projects at Haw River. The largest project is the renovation of the roundhouse, which includes adding an elevator for handicapped accessibility and improving the sprinkler system. One of the goals for the renovations is to bring the building up to the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act. This included the installation of the new elevator and renovating the bathrooms upstairs and downstairs. These improvements will allow camps such as Hugs, a camp for mentally and physically challenged people, the ability to transfer from the Roost (upstairs) to the Den (downstairs) without having to go outside.

The downstairs bathroom renovations also included providing shower facilities for physically impaired visitors. This renovation included updating bathrooms in the main lodge as well.

The sprinkler system was adequate for the building, but needed some updating. A major update included installing a 25,000-gallon tank next to the building, which provided an instant source of water in case of a fire. The contractor installed additional sprinkler heads to increase coverage. To ensure safe egress for handicap visitors, the decking around the building was renovated. This included taking out the stairs on each end. The deck now connects directly to the parking lot.

The project also included improved lighting and plumbing, solar tubes, electrical upgrades and a rain garden. All lights in the restrooms are compact fluorescent and motion activated, so electricity is not wasted when unneeded. Waterless urinals were installed in the men's restrooms to decrease the amount of water usage. These urinals along with motion sensor sinks, should result in a measureable reduction in the parks' water usage. Lastly, with the installation of hand blowers, the use of paper products within the park will be reduced.

Along with the main renovation of the roundhouse and lodge bathrooms, the division installed energy efficient lighting in the gym. The old lighting system (more than 20 years old) took a long time to warm up and wasted a lot of energy. Now, new fluorescent light bulbs are quick to turn on and save the park energy.

One other project included with the renovations was the replacement of the large retaining wall next to the main lodge. The old railroad ties were replaced with interlocking bricks, and a terraced wall ideal for visiting groups to produce group photos was created. To enhance the courtyard, an herb garden for the kitchen will be added on one side and native flowers will be added on the other.

STATE PARKS SERVE AS OUTDOOR LABORATORIES

In the world of science, state parks are outdoor laboratories, and research opportunities exist in disciplines such as botany, geology, zoology, ecology and archaeology/anthropology.

The long-range goal of the division's research program is to analyze each park's resources through scientific studies ranging from simple descriptive inventories to complex, ecosystem-scale analyses.

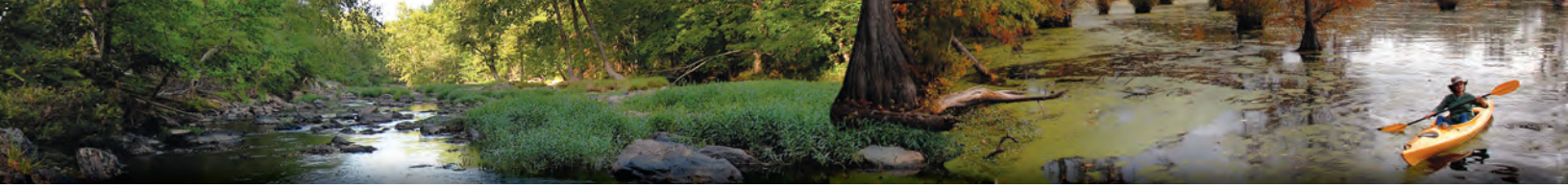
In 2011, research staff continued long-term surveys at Scuppernong River, Baytree Lake, Sugar Mountain Bog and Pineola Bog, and an inventory report was completed for Sandy Run Savannas State Natural Area. Monitoring efforts focused on several species of salamanders, Venus flytrap, red-cockaded woodpecker, eastern hellbender, common mudpuppy, and Neuse River waterdog.

Venus flytrap monitoring continued at four southeastern park units, with the highest totals recorded at Sandy Run Savannas, as well as a first park record of roughleaf loosestrife, a federal and state endangered species.

Searches for red-cockaded woodpeckers on the Scuppernong River were conducted in November and December. Individual birds were observed three times, as were new nesting cavities in live loblolly pines.

Hellbender and mudpuppy surveys at New River State Park were successful. Five of the hellbenders and mudpuppies were marked, and three adults were re-captured. Participants from Davidson College, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, N.C. State University's College of Veterinary Medicine, and others provided field help. Neuse River waterdog surveys were conducted at Eno River State Park. One adult male was observed.

Non-staff research on state parks system property requires a research permit. The 61 permits issued in 2011 represent a better-than-average year. They ranged from sampling of fungal collections and surveys at various parks, to ant research, to collections of tissue from plants in the genus Yucca. Additionally, 53 previous permits continued into the year, for a total of 114 active permits in 2011.



DETERMINING WATER VOLUME AT THE ENO RIVER

Following discovery of significant mortality of vegetation in a large wetland complex along Main Road at Goose Creek State Park, Liz Ward, a graduate student from N.C. State University's Department of Forestry and Environmental Resources, conducted hydrologic research of the area as her master's degree project.

The purpose of the project is to contribute to a basic understanding of how sea level rise affects wetland ecosystems and how human structures, such as Main Road, interact with this relationship. It will also help establish a basic hydrologic observatory in Goose Creek State Park and guide Natural Resource Program management recommendations for park and division staff. The results will be disseminated in peer reviewed literature and outreach activities associated with the park.

Determining water volume at the Eno River.

NATURAL RESOURCE PROGRAM COVERS THE STATE IN 2012

The Natural Resources Program was heavily involved in the 2011 fire season, which was characterized by many wildfires that started early in the season in the mountains and other severe wildfires that impacted Bushy Lake and Dismal Swamp State Park.

On the planned burning for resource benefits, the prescribed fire acreage decreased significantly from previous years due to the severe fire weather and staffing limitations. The number of acres burned by wildfires greatly outnumbered the prescribed fires. The new burn coordinator held a workshop on ecological burning in the fall with 20 attendees. This is one of the last hurdles for a number of staff to become burn bosses for the division.

HYDRILLA STUDY AT ENO RIVER STATE PARK

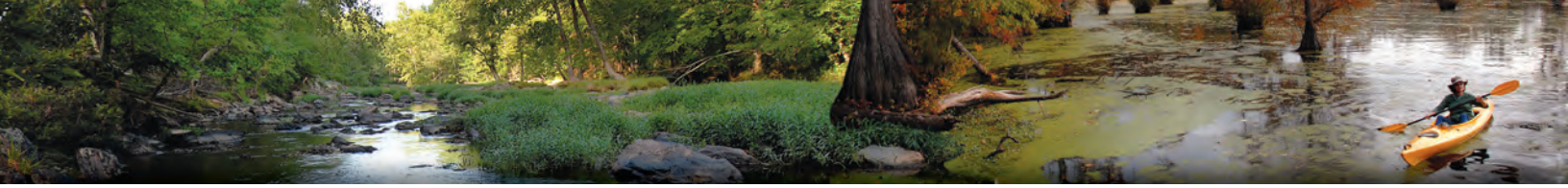
Natural Resources and Eno River State Park staff worked cooperatively with N.C. State University and the North Carolina Aquatic Weed Program in 2011 to perform a test treatment on the Hydrilla infestation in the Eno River. Experts from the North Carolina State Weed Science program performed some lab experiments on hydrilla, as well as some of the native plants that occur in the river, in order to determine the best treatment options. The fall of 2011was the first time a test treatment was performed in the river itself. Although the results of the test treatment weren't optimal, they will inform future treatment strategy decisions. Natural resources staff are planning to host a hydrilla management meeting in 2012 to discuss the next steps that should be taken.

STUDENTS INSTALL WATER GAUGES AT HAW RIVER STATE PARK

An earthen dam on a farm pond at Haw River State Park was breached during a rain event in late September 2010. Natural resources program staff organized a meeting with various resource agency staff and N.C. State University's Biological & Agricultural Engineering Department to evaluate potential mitigation measures. A short-term dam stabilization project was completed in May 2010 to be followed by a longer term aquatic habitat restoration project.

The purpose of this project is to conduct a headwater stream and wetland restoration project to achieve the highest water quality and aquatic habitat potential for an unnamed tributary to the Haw River. The existing pond bed will be converted to a wetland with a small stream meandering through its flat floodplain. Downstream of the former dam will be a step-pool stream realigned toward the center of the valley to reconnect with the stable stream approximately 600 feet downstream.

The existing sediment-inundated and unstable stream will be abandoned and re-configured as a series of floodplain wetlands. Two downstream culverts will also be removed to improve upstream aquatic passage and stream structural stability. This site will serve as a demonstration/education and research project to help determine best management practices for restoring natural stream functions in watersheds that suffer from excessive nonpoint source pollution (especially sedimentation) resulting from historic land uses and farm pond dam failures. This objective fits well with the educational and research missions of the state Division of Parks and Recreation and N.C. State University.



DISMAL SWAMP HYDROLOGY

The Great Dismal Swamp complex is one of the largest contiguous wetland areas in the eastern United States. But the swamp's extensive ditch network, which was constructed during the last three centuries to drain the swamp for agriculture and logging, has disrupted its natural hydrology. Those hydrologic changes have had negative impacts on the swamp's plant communities and have made it more susceptible to catastrophic wildfires.

In 2010, Natural Resources and Dismal Swamp State Park staff teamed up with The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, and Christopher Newport University to obtain a $75,000 grant from the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program. A portion of that money will pay to install hydrologic monitoring wells at several locations in Dismal Swamp State Park.

The data collected from these wells will be used to determine the best methods and locations for future hydrologic restoration in the park. Typically, this type of restoration involves the installation and management of water control structures in the ditches, which will allow park staff to raise the water table and to mimic natural seasonal hydrologic fluctuations.

By preventing water from flowing out of the swamp through the ditch network, the water control structures will benefit the native plant and animal communities adapted to wet conditions. Some additional benefits of the proposed restoration are the improved ability to control wildfires in the swamp, and the increased capacity of the swamp to sequester carbon and pollutants such as nitrates and mercury.

AMERICORPS

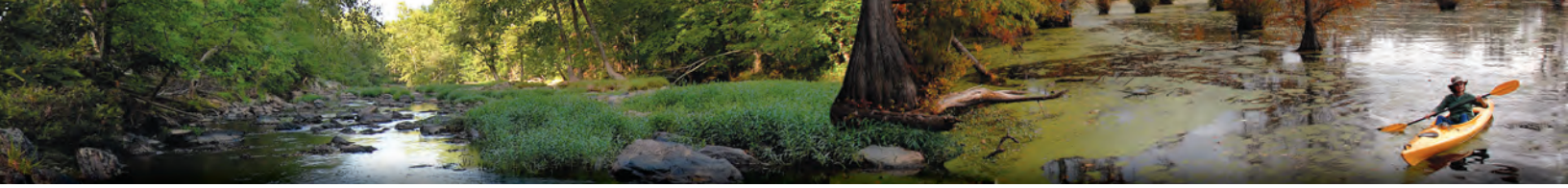
The Division was fortunate to once again host a team from AmeriCorps in early 2011. The team, known as 'River 4,' consisted of 11 young men and women trained as wildland firefighters.

The team lived in the seasonal employee barracks at William B. Umstead State Park in Raleigh, but traveled to outlying parks to prepare firelines, conduct prescribed burns, and fight the Jude's Gap wildfire at Chimney Rock State Park, the largest wildfire in the country at the time.

The crew was on the line for many days as they fought fire, cut firebreaks, conducted daytime and nighttime burnouts, and assisted with mop-up along the fire's perimeter. For their exemplary work, the AmeriCorps crew was recognized by the N.C. Forest Service at the final morning briefing and presented with certificates of appreciation.

Although the weather was often not conducive for prescribed burning during their time here, the team stayed busy controlling invasive exotic plant infestations at Falls Lake State Recreation Area and at Mitchells Mill State Natural Area.

Invasive species removal continued in the mountains in 2011. Highlights included the removal of significant bamboo stands at Pineola Bog and Stone Mountain, follow-up treatments of colts foot at the summit of Mount Mitchell, and the removal of kudzu at Lake James.



DIVISION STATEWIDE DISASTER RESPONSE

For park rangers and other park staff, the work day is never routine. From presenting educational programs to patrolling the campgrounds for violations, park employees are truly jacks of all trades.

Over the past year, along with other duties within the parks, rangers and other staff have participated in numerous emergency response incidents outside the parks. As part of the N.C. Division of Emergency Management's State Emergency Response Team (SERT), the state park system staff supports statewide emergency response operations when called upon by the state or local governments.

Beginning in February, ranger and maintenance staff from multiple districts, helped fight the Judes Gap Wildfire, a 1,400-acre fire in Polk County. This fire included a large tract of rugged terrain of Chimney Rock State Park. Parks such as South Mountains, Lake James, Lumber River, Hanging Rock, Crowders Mountain and others sent staff to assist the N.C. Forest Service with firefighting operations.

Following the devastating North Carolina tornados in April, rangers from Medoc Mountain, Merchants Millpond, and Kerr Lake were deployed to Roanoke Rapids in Halifax County to help local law enforcement agencies with security and other law enforcement operations.

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In June, Pender County experienced the Juniper Bay wildfire. This fire grew to 32,000 acres, including portions of Sandy Run Savannah State Natural Area, before it was contained. Again, rangers from several eastern parks answered the call. Rangers from Hammocks Beach, Fort Fisher, and Lumber River supported operations with security of vital access points for firefighting equipment.

Also in June, park employees from Jones Lake helped the N.C. Forest Service fight the nearly 6,000-acre Simmons Road wildfire in Cumberland and Bladen counties.

Then in August, the state faced the Lateral West wildfire that started on federal land in the Great Dismal Swamp, and then encroached on Dismal Swamp State Park. Staff members from Dismal Swamp and Merchants Millpond supported fire-fighting operations in and around the 7,000-acre wildfire in Camden County. Operations involved working with multiple government entities including with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the N.C. Forest Service and other local agencies.

Then, Hurricane Irene, the first big hurricane to impact our state in several years, made landfall in September. Numerous eastern North Carolina parks were damaged and some were forced to close due to the damages.

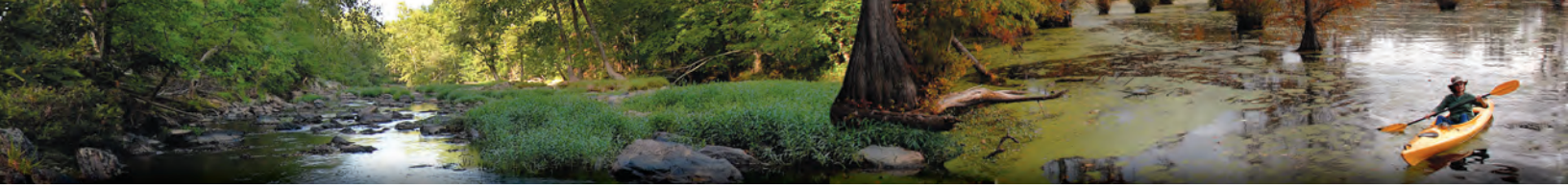
Even with the enormous aftermath and cleanup facing the parks, the division never shied away from its obligations with the State Emergency Response Team. Upon receiving the call for assistance, the division deployed rangers from state parks at Raven Rock, Lumber River, Kerr Lake, Carvers Creek, Jordan Lake and Jones Lake to Dare County. Staff spent two weeks assisting the Dare County Sheriff's Office and other local law enforcement agencies with security operations on the mainland near Manteo, as well as on the heavily damaged Hatteras Island.

Although 2011 seems to have been a busy year for state parks, park rangers and other employees historically respond to many emergency incidents each year.

From participating in search and rescue operations for missing hikers to providing security at Red Cross shelters, division employees are prepared for any challenges they might face.

Assistant Secretary David Knight visits the fire site.

The Lateral West Fire began on Aug. 4, 2011. It was caused by a lightning strike in the old burn scar of the 2008 South One Fire on the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. The wildfire crossed into the Dismal Swamp State Park on Aug. 11. At the height of the fire, 475 people were fighting the blaze. The fire, which burned for 111 days, was declared extinguished on Nov. 21 with an estimated cost of $12.5 million. The fire was out at the park one week after Hurricane Irene (12.5 inches of rain fell during the hurricane). The fire burned 6,574 total acres, including about 200 acres of park property. Park staff worked closely with the Southern Blue Type I Incident Response Team, the N.C. Forest Service and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service during the incident.



Haw River Trail

Butterfly at Pilot Mountain State Park

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