

NORTH CAROLINA

OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN

2015 - 2020



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Division of Parks and Recreation

N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

INTRODUCTION

North Carolina has been blessed with a rich and varied tapestry of lands and waters. The landscape stretches from the Tidewater's ocean beaches, sounds and marshes westward through flat Coastal Plain swamp forests to the rolling Piedmont and on to ancient and hauntingly beautiful mountains, well-known and loved not just by North Carolinians, but by millions of Americans nationwide. Traversing and connecting this landscape are beautiful rivers and streams. These lands and waters provide not only breathtaking scenery and magnificent settings for outdoor recreation, but also serve to support a rich diversity of plant and animal life. North Carolina is indeed "Naturally Wonderful".

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since passage of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act of 1965, preparation of a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) has been required in order for states to be eligible for LWCF acquisition and development assistance. Past SCORPs and this edition have provided a coordinated framework addressing the problems, needs, and opportunities related to the need for improved public outdoor recreation. The N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation, the state agency with authority to represent and act for the state for purposes of the LWCF Act, prepared this plan. LWCF funds have provided \$4.2 million for projects in North Carolina during the past five years, an average of \$850,000 annually. Since 1965, more than \$80 million of LWCF assistance has been provided for more than 900 projects.

The plan contents and format are shaped by the planning guidelines of the LWCF Act. The major requirements are comprehensiveness; an evaluation of the demand for and supply of outdoor recreation resources and facilities in the state; a wetlands priority component; a program for implementation of the plan; ample public participation in the planning process; and a description of process and methodology. The plan has been prepared to both meet requirements for continuing LWCF eligibility and meet the need for meaningful evaluation of state and local government public outdoor recreation projects.

Chapter 1 presents the setting for outdoor recreation in the state. Chapter 2 contains an estimate of the demand for outdoor recreation using data about recreation participation in North Carolina based on survey responses from over 17,000 state residents. In 2014, the Division of Parks and Recreation conducted an on-line survey and analyzed the responses received. The questionnaire asked North Carolinians about their preferences for outdoor recreation activities as well as their priorities for parks and recreation in the future.

Chapter 3 reports the results of an inventory of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities in North Carolina and makes comparisons county by county and statewide. Information was provided by local recreation agencies, state and federal agencies and geographic information databases. LWCF assistance will be awarded to counties showing higher relative needs using the state's Open Project Selection Process. Chapter 4 describes the roles and responsibilities of federal, state, local, private, and commercial outdoor recreation providers in the state. Chapter 5 presents information about the trails and greenways in the state which support some of the most popular recreational activities – walking

and hiking.

Chapter 6 presents the issues, goals and objectives identified for the next five years. The issues were developed following a review of the results of the citizen survey, a survey of recreation providers across the state and a review of the factors influencing the availability of outdoor recreation resources in North Carolina. In addition, these goals and objectives mirror many of the national goals established in the America's Great Outdoors, a 2011 initiative to develop a 21st Century conservation and recreation agenda. Chapter 6 also describes actions the state will be undertaking over the next five years to address the issues and needs identified in this plan.

While the level of LWCF apportionments recently available to North Carolina has lessened the LWCF program's impact, LWCF funds still serve to address issues of statewide importance and to help improve outdoor recreation in North Carolina.

Public involvement in the form of a public survey and meetings with stakeholders went into development of this plan. A final draft plan was also made available via the internet for public review and comment.

Key findings

Goal Statement: To meet the outdoor recreation needs of a growing population, to manage and protect North Carolina's natural resources for current and future citizens, and to achieve the related health and economic benefits for local communities and the state.

Outdoor recreation is important to the lives and livelihoods of nearly all North Carolinians in one way or another. Nearly every respondent to the survey conducted as a part of the North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan are participating in an outdoor activity. The most popular activities in North Carolina are visiting a beach or lake, walking for pleasure, visiting parks and historic sites, hiking on trails, freshwater fishing, viewing scenery, fishing from a boat, nature viewing, swimming. In addition, at least ten percent of residents participate in activities such as canoeing, picnicking, bird watching, bicycling, and tennis.

The 2012 Outdoor Industry Association Report notes that in North Carolina outdoor recreation generates \$19.2 billion in consumer spending annually, \$1.3 billion in state and local tax revenue, 192,000 North Carolina jobs, and \$5.6 billion in wages and salaries.

Supply of Park Acreage and Recreation Facilities

An inventory of federal, state and local park lands in North Carolina identified more than 3.5 million acres of land and water available for outdoor recreation. Local governments provide over 100,000 acres for close-to-home recreation such as walking, bicycling, team sports, picnicking and swimming. State parks, gamelands and historic sites offer more than 750,000 acres for activities that fit their missions such as hiking, camping, hunting and visiting significant natural and historic areas. Federal parks, forests, and refuges account for nearly 2.7 million acres and encompass the most popular national parks in the United States, the Great Smoky Mountains and Blue Ridge Parkway.

State parks have added more than 50,000 acres of park land in the past ten years as well as numerous visitor centers, trails and other improvements to better serve the public. Counties and municipalities continue to add more opportunities for their residents. In 2014, six cities had successful park and recreation bonds worth more than \$150 million. All were approved by more than sixty percent of the voters.

Demand

The state’s population has been rapidly growing in the past 25 years, among the fastest in the country. By 2015, North Carolina is projected to have more than 10 million residents, a fifty percent increase from 1990. More park land and opportunities are needed to keep pace.

Future park areas that are identified as most needed by recreation professionals are linear parks, nature parks, trail linkages to other jurisdictions, cultural / historic parks, and community parks. Unpaved trails, picnic shelters, wildlife / nature observation sites, and paved trails are among the top priorities for recreational facilities.

Issues and Objectives

Based on a review of the public survey, input from recreation providers and a review of current trends the following priority issues and objectives that are affecting outdoor recreation were identified.

Issue	Objective
Growing Population	Meet the needs of North Carolina’s rapidly growing population by maintaining and enhancing its outdoor recreation resources
Public Health	Support improvements in public health and fitness by increasing opportunities for physical activity
Access and Cooperation	Improve the visibility of and public access to public recreation areas and foster cooperation between public recreation managers
Outdoor Recreation and the Economy	Promote the economic advantages of the state’s recreation opportunities for communities across North Carolina
Conservation	Protect and conserve North Carolina’s high quality natural resources and landscapes
Public Awareness	Increase public awareness of the state’s natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities through education and outreach

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