

# NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS AND RECREATION

2014 Annual Report

GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN STATE PARK	2009
BEAR PAW STATE NATURAL AREA	2008
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PINEOLA BOG STATE NATURAL AREA	2006
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CAROLINA BEACH STATE PARK	1969
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PILOT MOUNTAIN STATE PARK	1968
WEYMOUTH WOODS STATE NATURAL AREA	1963
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HAMMOCKS BEACH STATE PARK	1961
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WILLIAM B. UMSTEAD STATE PARK	1941
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MORROW MOUNTAIN STATE PARK	.....
SALTERS LAKE	1929
WHITE LAKE	.....
FORT MACON STATE PARK	1924
MOUNT MITCHELL STATE PARK	1916



## CROWDERS MOUNTAIN STATE PARK IS THE NORTH CAROLINA 2013 PARK OF THE YEAR



*The cover photo of Crowders Mountain, the 2013 State Park of the Year, was taken by Charlie Peek.*



Crowders Mountain State Park in Gaston County has been named the North Carolina 2013 Park of the Year by the N.C. 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,” and specifically recognized for initiatives in natural resource management, volunteerism and expanded recreation opportunities.

During the year, Crowders Mountain arranged regular volunteer workdays to expand its 20-mile system of hiking

trails, enlarged and improved a popular family campground and safely hosted about 10,000 rock climbers. Its central parking area was doubled in size, yet consistently fills on weekends. The park developed aggressive plans to remove invasive species and schedule prescribed burns, and partnered with nearby Belmont Abbey College to complete a comprehensive plant survey.

The state parks system began choosing a Park of the Year in 2010 with nominations from each of four districts. Each of 41 state parks and recreation areas submits an annual report that is objectively scored on progress in recreation, natural resource protection, sustainability, public safety and environmental education.



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To learn more and to join the Friends of State Parks, please visit:

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## HIGH ATTENDANCE AT NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS CONTINUED IN 2013



*Fort Macon State Park*



*Jockey's Ridge State Park*



*Mayo River State Park*

For the fifth straight year, attendance at North Carolina's state parks and state recreation areas hovered at a record level with 14.2 million visits in 2013.

Among 41 state parks and state recreation areas, 19 reported increases in attendance in 2013. Fort Macon State Park in Carteret County reported the highest attendance at 1.19 million visits, followed closely by Jockey's Ridge State Park in Dare County with 1.18 million visits.

Over the past 25 years, the state parks system has seen a dramatic 80 percent increase in visitation. In 1988, 7.89 million people visited state parks and state recreation areas.

Weather over the course of a year can have a significant impact on state park attendance. Heavy rains in late spring and early summer

dampened visitation at many parks, but otherwise the system was not affected by winter storms, tropical storms or hurricanes during 2013.

Several relatively new state parks reported strong attendance, especially Carvers Creek State Park in Cumberland County with 38,740 visitors since it opened in September. Mayo River State Park in Rockingham County experienced a 69 percent jump in visitation,

while Dismal Swamp State Park in Camden County reported visitation up 40 percent.

The state parks system manages more than 220,000 acres within state parks, state recreation areas and a system of state natural areas dedicated to conservation of rare resources. Through its New Parks for a New Century initiative, twelve new units have been added to the system since 2003.



*Dismal Swamp State Park*



## LEWIS LEDFORD, STATE PARKS DIRECTOR, RETIRES

Lewis Ledford, the first entry-level ranger to serve as N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation, retired at the conclusion of 2013, ending a 37-year career with the state parks. He has been named as executive director of the National Association of State Parks Directors.

Ledford joined the state parks system as a ranger in 1976 and was the first person to rise through the ranks to the director's position. He served in many management capacities including superintendent of Mount Mitchell State Park, west district superintendent and superintendent of state parks. He succeeded Phil McKnelly as director in 2003.

Under Ledford's leadership, state park lands increased by more than 50,000 acres and the system has boasted a

record visitation level of more than 14 million. Ledford guided the creation of five new state parks including Chimney Rock and Grandfather Mountain, as well as a state trail and six state natural areas. He directed the launch of a full-service reservations system and numerous other technology innovations.

Ledford said that being one of only seven directors in the 98-year history of North Carolina's state parks was a "unique experience."



"I'm excited to continue working with state parks," he said. "We're all truly standing on the shoulders of those who've come before. We've got to make those shoulders broad, whatever station in which we serve, if we are to make this state parks system great."

### New State Parks Director

Mike Murphy assumed the post of Director of State Parks on July 22, 2014. Mike has had a varied career including investment banking, non-profit administration, education and military service. Most recently he served as President of the Friends of the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences and as a teacher of astronomy and physics. Mike was also Chairman of MCNC, a non-profit that operates the broadband infrastructure for North Carolina's research, education, non-profit healthcare, and other community institutions.

*I am very excited to serve as Director of State Parks. As a lover of the outdoors and a proud citizen of North Carolina, it is truly an honor to help guide this wonderful system into its second century. I am humbled to follow in the footsteps of Lewis Ledford, who led State Parks during an era of unprecedented growth. I also thank Carol Tingley for her outstanding service as Acting Director during the interim. North Carolinians have much to be proud of in our State Parks system, and we in the Division of Parks and Recreation take our stewardship of the system very seriously.*

*Please visit us in the State Parks. We have many, many natural wonders to share with you.*

*Happy trails,*

*Mike Murphy*





## CARVERS CREEK STATE PARK OPENS TO THE PUBLIC

Carvers Creek State Park in Cumberland County opened in September, inviting North Carolinians to enjoy hiking, picnicking, fishing and interpretive programs at interim facilities at the historic Long Valley Farm access.

Authorized in 2005 as part of the division's New Parks for a New Century initiative, Carvers Creek encompasses 4,332 acres in two principal parcels. It is the seventh state park opened since 2000.

Carvers Creek was created in close partnership with The Nature Conservancy, which donated Long Valley Farm and aided in the acquisition of important tracts in the park's nearby Sandhills area adjoining the U.S. Army military installation at Fort Bragg. A 2012 master plan for the state park directs that the



2,912-acre Sandhills area will ultimately be the site for a visitor center, camping and other park amenities, but that much of the property, with its fragile ecosystem, will be preserved in its natural state.

The 1,420-acre Long Valley Farm was originally the estate of James Stillman Rockefeller, who bequeathed it to The Nature Conservancy upon his death in 2004. It was once part of the Rockefeller family's larger Overhills estate. At the site, traditional state park facilities such as hiking trails, picnic grounds, fishing areas and a ranger contact station have been integrated among



the historic structures. The estate's residence, built in 1939, is on the National Register of Historic Places and is complemented by a large pavilion, a 100-acre lake, a small mill/power plant and numerous agricultural outbuildings.

In addition to stands of longleaf pine, the farm is home to federally endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers, fox squirrels and carnivorous pitcher plants. Interim facilities at the park represent an investment of \$756,000 from the N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.





*Elk Knob State Park*

## FALL COLOR SEASON REPORTS PROVIDED IN NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS

For the first time, travelers in the fall of 2013 were able to keep track of peak color as it makes its way across the state through park ranger reports available online at [www.visitnc.com](http://www.visitnc.com).

Regular updates kept visitors posted on how fall color is progressing through the different types of forests in North Carolina, from the brilliant red of mountain sourwood to the rust-colored cedar in eastern wetlands. The fall season in the state truly lasts from late September into December.

State park reports on peak color to the N.C. Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development, which prominently features a fall foliage travel section on [www.visitnc.com](http://www.visitnc.com), will continue each coming fall.

## NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS NAMED AS NATIONAL GOLD MEDAL AWARD FINALIST

The North Carolina state parks system was named one of four finalists for the 2013 National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Parks and Recreation.

As a finalist, North Carolina advanced to the next round of consideration along with state parks systems in Florida, Missouri and Virginia. Florida was named as the winner in October.

The National Gold Medal Award, which is administered by the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration in partnership with the National Recreation and Parks Association, is the most prestigious award a park and recreation agency can receive and recognizes service excellence.

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





## INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION

State parks connect visitors with North Carolina's most unique natural wonders. Rangers and other staff interpret the park through guided programs, hikes, exhibits and general customer service. Park educators offer science-based environmental education programs through school field trips, teacher training and Junior Ranger programs. In 2013, 414,087 visitors joined a guided North Carolina State Parks Interpretation & Education program.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources received a \$256,956 federal grant in 2013 to launch the Americorps Mountains to the Sea program. Twenty



full-time Americorps members (including seven in state parks) were placed within DENR agencies to increase education and customer service. They will help state parks meaningfully connect with an additional 20,000 visitors annually through educational programs, hikes and volunteer opportunities.

In 2013, Lake James State Park opened the new Holly Discovery Trail, which brings hands-on nature exhibits into the outdoors. The trail was



awarded First Place in Wayside Exhibits by the National Association for Interpretation.

Activity stations along the self-guided nature trail compel adventurers into creative play and hands-on discovery. State parks staff built sign posts and activity structures with rustic timbers salvaged from storm-damaged trees. A new concept for the state parks system, the project's low-cost yet effective design is being used as a model for other park systems throughout the country.





## INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION: KIDS IN PARKS

A partnership with the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation has helped state parks open 19 new self-guided trails for children. These Kids In Parks trails (<http://kidsinparks.com>) offer brochures full of scavenger hunts and games. After completing a trail and registering their hike online, kids earn incentives such as patches, nature journals and hiking sticks. North Carolina state parks plan to expand the program to a total of 30 parks by the end of 2015. Funded largely by Blue Cross Blue



Shield of North Carolina, the Kids In Parks trails program fosters partnerships for healthy kids, healthy parks and healthy communities.

State Parks are ideal places for teachers and students to explore science, history and social studies. A new field trips



feature helps public school teachers and administrators better align park excursions with the Essential Standards for learning. More than 150,000 students attended a North Carolina state parks educational program as part of a field trip in 2013.







## EVENTS CONNECT CHILDREN AND VOLUNTEERS WITH NATURE IN STATE PARKS

Parents, grandparents and caregivers helped children connect with nature—and can get involved and give back to nature themselves—during special events at North Carolina’s state parks in September.

Take A Child Outside Week Sept. 24-30 featured special ranger-led programs for young and old at all state parks in a concerted effort to introduce young people to the outdoors and healthful activity. A touchstone of the week is National Public Lands Day Sept. 28 when many state parks offered opportunities to volunteer and build an ethic of natural resources stewardship.

[www.takeachildoutside.org](http://www.takeachildoutside.org)

North Carolina’s state parks join environmental groups everywhere in presenting special nature programs during Take A Child Outside Week. The global celebration originated in 2006 in North Carolina. Take A Child Outside Week offers both a rallying call and a website full of resources to help kids choose nature trails and fresh air over video games. Research has shown that engaging

children in nature promotes learning, creativity and healthy lifestyles.

Along with special interpretive programs during the week, all state parks offered an award-winning Junior Ranger program for kids ages 6-12 who wish to discover even more while earning distinctive patches from the parks. And, 12 state parks offer self-guided Kids in Parks TRACK trails.





## VOLUNTEERING IN NC STATE PARKS 2013

Volunteers are critical partners of and participants in our parks. They are vital in helping us protect our natural resources and natural heritage. They build community by demonstrating strong park stewardship and commitment to public lands.

Volunteers serve N.C. state parks in a number of functions including oyster shell bagging, constructing picnic tables, working special events, tree planting and repairing bridges. Some familiar organizations are behind our volunteers such as AmeriCorps, Big Sweep, Boy/Girl Scouts, Eagle Scouts and local universities and colleges.

The average value of volunteer time was estimated at \$22.55/hr. in 2013 by the *Independent*

*Sector*, a nationally known provider that studies charitable impacts. Volunteers contributed about 44,851 hours to state parks. That equates to a value of \$1,011,390 in volunteer hours. Each volunteer receives a hand-written thank you note and those that volunteer significant hours are awarded DPR gifts.

Two teams of teens from the N.C. Youth Conservation Corps have been working in six state parks this summer helping build trails, improve campsites, repair facilities, conduct educational programs and remove invasive species.

Volunteers at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area removed 310 bags of trash and 55 tires from the New Hope Overlook.



*Volunteer Day at Chimney Rock*

They were assisted by park staff, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and the NCSU fishing club.



*North Carolina Youth Conservation Corps members hard at work*





## TREATMENT OF LAKE WACCAMAW FOR HYDRILLA INFESTATION BEGINS

Onsite treatment of a significant hydrilla infestation at Lake Waccamaw State Park began in early June 2013.

A contractor conducted three applications of the chemical fluridone in an effort to control the fast-growing, invasive aquatic plant, which threatens to curtail recreational use of the 8,938-acre lake. Treatment was concentrated in the northwest area of the lake near a public boat ramp.

Researchers with North Carolina State University and the state parks system recorded the hydrilla outbreak in 2011.

Hydrilla is a submersed aquatic plant that can create nearly impenetrable mats of stems and leaves on a lake's surface. An invasive species from central Africa, hydrilla impedes recreational use of waterways, crowds out native vegetation and can ultimately harm fish and other aquatic species. Its spread is often attributed to boats that are trailered from lake to lake.

This is the first recorded hydrilla infestation of a Carolina bay lake. Lake Waccamaw is the largest of the natural bay lakes in southeastern North Carolina and home to a number of rare species of fish and mollusks. The lake holds the status of National Natural Landmark.

The total cost for the treatment was \$401,000. The cost was paid for with funding contributed by the NCDWR Aquatic Weed Program, Town of Lake Waccamaw, Columbus County and the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.





## STATE PARKS SYSTEM

The purposes of the North Carolina state parks system are to preserve and protect our state's most outstanding natural features, to provide healthful outdoor recreation for citizens and visitors, and to encourage good stewardship of our natural resources by education and by example.

### NC STATE PARKS SYSTEM AT A GLANCE (January 1, 2014)

State Parks	35
State Recreation Areas	4
State Natural Areas	20
State Lakes	7
State Rivers	4
State Trails	4
Total Parks System Acres	223,390
Attendance (FY 2012-13)	14,200,000
Full-time Employees	462.5
Seasonal Staff	500+
Operating Cost (FY 12-13)	\$36,373,380

North Carolina's state parks system compares favorably with systems in other states, protecting high quality natural resources and serving large numbers of visitors at a very reasonable cost.

### STATE PARKS COMPARISON (Statistical Report of State Park Operations: 2011-2012)

		Rank
Park System Percent of Total State Size	0.69%	21
Population per State Park Acre	45.27	15
Visitors per State Park Acre	68.10	28
Operating Expense per capita Population	\$3.46	47
Operating Expense per Visitor	\$2.30	33

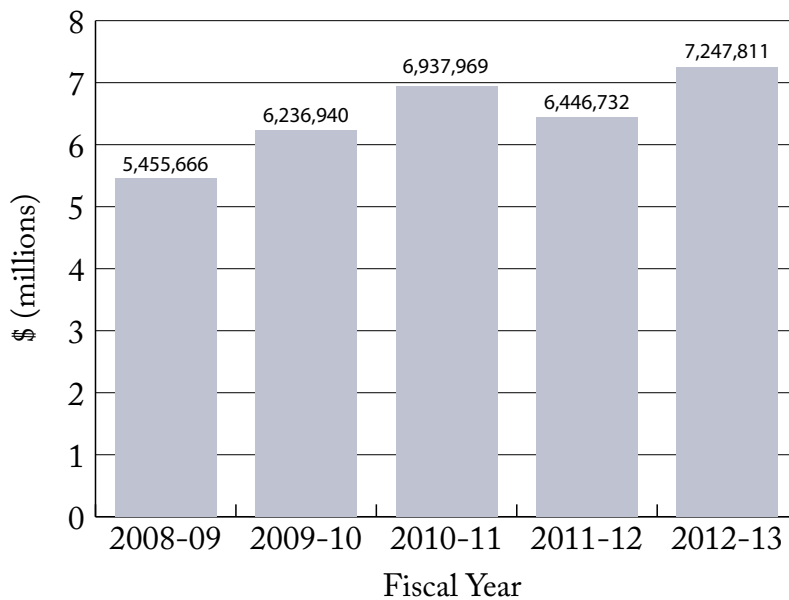




## STATE PARKS REVENUE

The state parks system generates revenue from fees for camping and swimming, rental of shelters and other facilities, sale of food and retail items, operating contracts for marinas and restaurants, and fees for pier permits at the state lakes. With a new Centralized Reservation System, parks are growing revenue by increasing occupancy rates for park facilities. The parks system is also expanding retail sales at the parks and on the web store, and is renewing operating contracts at more favorable rates. Revenues fluctuate from year to year based on weather, facility construction and closures, and other factors, but the overall revenue trend is up.

**State Parks System Operating Revenue**





# NORTH CAROLINA PARKS AND RECREATION TRUST FUND (PARTF)



North Carolina is a growing state whose people love the outdoors. There is a high demand for parks, trails and greenways at both the state and local levels. The NC Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) helps to address this demand by supporting the development of the state parks system and by providing matching grants for local park and recreation projects.

Parks and Recreation Trust Fund Allocations FY 2012-13

Allocation	Amount
State Park Capital Improvements	\$9,324,758
State Park Land Acquisition	1,393,355
State Park Debt Repayment	7,184,996
Local Government Matching Grants	8,262,973
Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Access Grants	\$1,692,952
Temporary Redirect for State Park Operations	6,000,000
<b>TOTAL PARTF REVENUE FY 2012-13</b>	<b>\$33,859,034</b>

For Fiscal Year 2013-14, the General Assembly restored the \$6 million redirect for state park operations back to PARTF, transferred the debt repayment of more than \$7 million per year from PARTF to the General Fund, and appropriated \$11 million to PARTF. The appropriation is supplemented by revenue from personalized license plates.

The PARTF local grant program has continued to be very popular, consistently attracting significantly more applications than funds available and encouraging local investment in matching funds. Refer to our website at [www.ncparks.gov](http://www.ncparks.gov) for a list of grants.





# NORTH CAROLINA PARKS AND RECREATION TRUST FUND (PARTF)

The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) provides dollar-for-dollar matching grants to local governments for parks and recreational projects to serve the public.



The state's Parks and Recreation Trust Fund Authority awarded \$8.3 million in grants to 47 local governments for parks and recreation projects.

The matching grants will help fund land acquisition, development and renovation of public park and recreation areas. The authority considered 73 grant applications requesting more than \$20 million. A maximum of \$500,000 can be awarded to a single project.

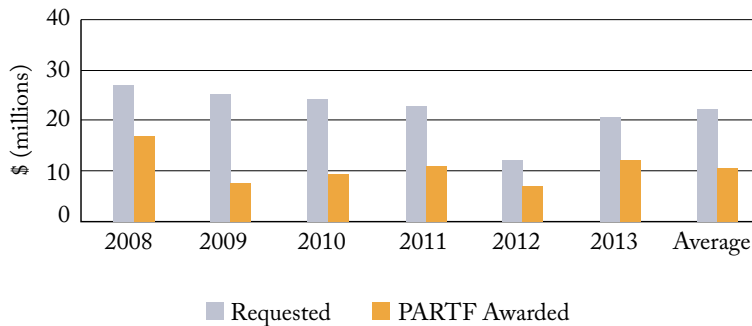
The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund is administered through the state Division of Parks and Recreation and was established in 1994 by the North Carolina General Assembly. The revenue is distributed to three programs: 65 percent to the state parks system for repairs, capital improvements and land acquisition; 30 percent for matching grants to local parks and recreation programs for

development and land acquisition; and 5 percent to the coastal beach access program.

Since 1995, the Parks and Recreation Authority has received 1,425 grant applications with requests totaling about \$307 million. The board has awarded 768 grants for \$173 million.

The Parks and Recreation Authority is a 9-member group which makes decisions on how money from the PARTF is allocated. The authority is made up of the following members: Ann Babcock, Lydia Boesch, Westin Bordeaux, Paul Herbert, Jason Kay, Neal Lewis, Cynthia Tart, Lisa Wolff and Edward W. Wood.

PARTF Local Grant Program  
Funds Awarded and Funds Requested  
(2008-13)





## IT'S GOOD TO HAVE FRIENDS

In order to better support North Carolina's expanding state parks system, Friends of State Parks (FSP) has vigorously pursued the creation of local park friends groups as chapters of the statewide organization.



Having a local friends group for each park provides readily available support, financial help and development of a volunteer pool that can be much more responsive to a park's needs than the statewide FSP. This can be especially helpful when executing park projects in difficult economic times with limited budgets.

In addition, local people are better placed to gain support from the neighboring businesses and community, resulting in a greater appreciation of the park by local residents. The State Parks System is very fortunate to have so many supporters and advocates across North Carolina. Visit their website at [www.ncfsp.org](http://www.ncfsp.org).

## FIRE MANAGEMENT

The Division performed 34 controlled fires for a total of 1,500 acres in 2013, building on recent successes in improving the division's fire management program. Controlled (also called "prescribed") fires are used as a resource management tool in many locations by the state parks system. Some plant communities and animal species rely on periodic fire for their existence. The prescribed burns also reduce the amount of potential wildfire fuel and help protect a park's resources and neighboring landowners if lightning, arson or carelessness sparks a wildfire. Our goal is to have more prescribed fires to help regulate our park's ecosystems.







## MOUNTAINS-TO-SEA STATE TRAIL

Several significant new sections of the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail (MST) were opened in 2013. The Town of Clayton opened the 4-mile Clayton River Walk at a ribbon-cutting ceremony in April, and later that same month the City of Raleigh opened the latest and longest part of their popular Neuse River Greenway Trail. Both of these are part of the 1000-mile Mountains-to-Sea State Trail, which will extend from Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Jockey's Ridge State Park at the beach. More than 600 miles of the MST are now complete, with about 400 miles left to finish.

### NORTH CAROLINA TRAILS COMMITTEE

The North Carolina Trails committee is a seven-member citizens committee that advises the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation on all trails issues. The members of the committee include: Lawrence Russell Duke, Barbara Oslund, Brian Sears, Terry Smith, Henry Clark Ward.

## NATURAL RESOURCE INVENTORY

In 2013, a major milestone was reached in our knowledge about state parks – the 200,000th individual observation of species was logged into the park system's Natural Resource Inventory Database. The parks are known to contain more than 10,500 species of plants and animals, and more are being found every year. "Bioblitzes" were held at Weymouth Woods and Lake Waccamaw in 2013, resulting in several hundred new species records. Observations of these species are tracked in the database to improve our knowledge of park resources. Besides the pure science of it, the database helps natural resource managers and park planners make good decisions about managing and operating the parks.





# LOOKING AHEAD

## LAKE NORMAN VISITOR CENTER

Lake Norman State Park in Iredell County broke ground on a new \$3.9 million Visitor Center and West District Office that will be completed in 2014. Funded by the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, the project includes a LEED® design for a 6,500 square foot Visitor Center and additional space for the Division’s West District Office. The park was established in 1962 and has never had a visitor center. The park office and West District office have shared a 1,876-sq ft converted residence for many years. The new visitor center will include an auditorium for public use, a classroom for educational programming, and innovative educational exhibits. Lake Norman State Park hosts more than 500,000 visitors each year.



## STATE PARKS CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

In 2016, North Carolina will celebrate the state park system’s 100th anniversary. Championed by Governor Locke Craig, Mount Mitchell State Park was authorized as the first state park through legislation passed March 3, 1915, and initial land acquisition of 795 acres for the park was completed in 1916. North Carolina was among the first states to create a state parks system. For the 2016 Centennial year, the state parks system is planning a year-long series of special events, exhibits and activities at every park.





## N.C. STATE PARKS STORE

North Carolina is blessed with beautiful beaches, majestic mountains and an abundance of radiant rivers in between. To express your pride in our naturally wonderfully state parks you can visit our webstore at [www.ncparkstore.com](http://www.ncparkstore.com). We offer a multitude of products including tees, sweatshirts, bags, and even bandanas for your pets who enjoy our parks just as much. There are car decals and instructions to purchase the N.C. State Parks license plate as well. You can also purchase park brochures and prints, to learn more about each of our parks. To see all we have to offer and to support state parks please visit our webstore.



# FREE APP AVAILABLE!

Introducing North Carolina State Park's app created by ParksByNature Network, available on smart phone platforms. The app features reservations, maps, activity searches and much more.

*Discover why North Carolina State Parks are Naturally Wonderful!*



**DOWNLOAD OUR FREE APP**

**GET ALL OF OUR MAPS!**



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# THE APPROVED GUIDE FOR NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS NATURALLY WONDERFUL



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