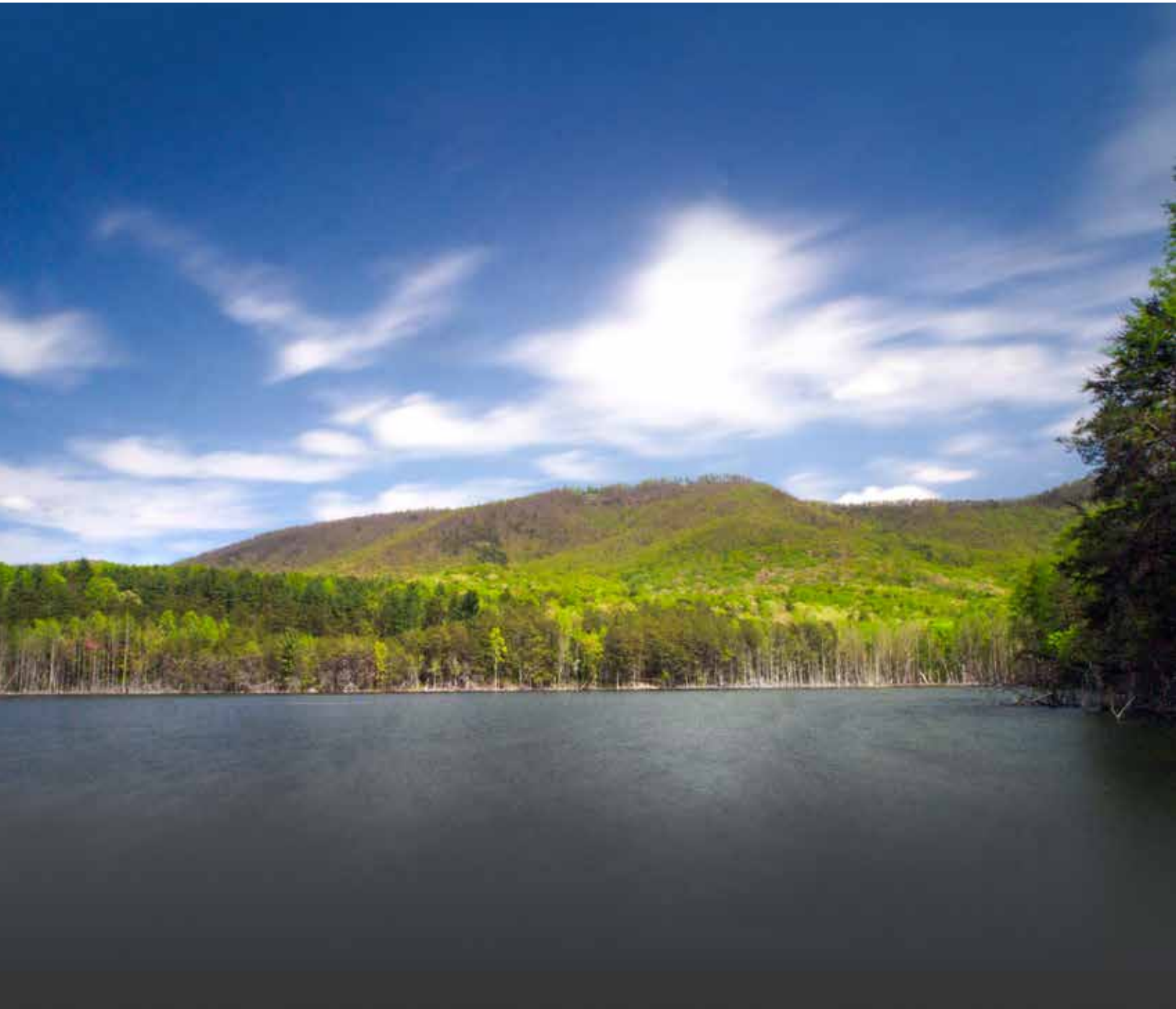




# North Carolina State Parks

# *Annual Report*

# 2018



**South Mountains**  
STATE PARK OF THE YEAR

## Message from the Director



Dear Friends,

We were expecting a relatively quiet year in 2017. The division received \$75 million in Connect NC Bond funds, and we prepared to lay out plans for park improvement and land acquisition projects across the state. The year quickly filled with challenges.

Landslides, high winds, heavy rains and snowfall across the state wreaked havoc from Mount Mitchell to Jockey's Ridge, damaging equipment, powerlines, and trails, causing park and trail closures and delayed projects. Still, 19.4 million

people visited the parks—a 25 percent increase from 2014. Jockey's Ridge and Fort Macon, on the coast, welcomed the most visitors, and six parks welcomed more than a million visitors each.

We broke ground on capital improvement projects funded by the Connect NC Bond, starting with renovated restrooms and a shaded beachside picnic site for the popular Fort Fisher State Recreation Area in New Hanover County. These projects are improving the way our parks serve their visitors—from more ways to access the parks to state-of-the-art visitor centers, modern campground amenities, community gathering places and more.

The division added 2,077 acres to the state parks system last year. Our partners, including the Coastal Land Trust, Foothills Conservancy of NC, The Nature Conservancy, The Conservation Fund, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy and Audubon NC, entrusted us with some of the most special lands in the state, enabling us to add three new natural areas and expand South Mountains and Lake Waccamaw state parks. The new state natural areas will protect vulnerable and rare ecosystems, historic artifacts, and some of the state's most beautiful and biodiverse places.

A master plan for Hammocks Beach State Park's new mainland property was completed and Hanging Rock's master plan, which includes planned uses of several historic properties and buildings, was drafted. These master plans will guide the development and management of these properties into the future by highlighting priorities and establishing goals for accessibility, use, maintenance and community engagement.

We welcomed big growth in the Trails Program. In the west, we received the legislative approval of a Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail that will pass through Chimney Rock State Park. Bike trails were completed at Raven Rock and Medoc Mountain state parks and plans for multi-use trails at Carvers Creek were completed.

State park staff accomplished a record year in natural resource management, using prescribed fire, invasive species management, and restoration of lands, streams and habitats to improve the health of ecosystems in our lands and waters across the state.

As we leave a challenging but successful year behind, we look forward to the new and improved facilities, trails and lands that we will welcome into the state parks system as our Connect NC Bond projects and pursuits come to fruition. The greatest rewards will be the smiles on the faces of our visitors and the lasting memories they make for their families. More than anything, we always want to give them a reason to come back.

Sincerely,

  
Dwayne Patterson, Director

# South Mountains State Park Named Park of the Year

South Mountains State Park in Burke County was named Park of the Year for 2017. It was selected from the three regional winners, which included Jordan Lake and Fort Fisher state recreation areas.

The park was chosen for its exemplary contribution to stewardship, public service and education, and specifically recognized for work that went above and beyond in fighting the Chestnut Knob fire in 2017. During the fire, 97 park staff worked more than 3,700 hours over the three-week-long event.

Park staff were also lauded for their dedicated service and educational programming throughout the year. They provided training, served neighboring parks, completed major maintenance projects in-house, and offered 400 educational programs to 14,000 participants last year. They also developed programming that interprets the impacts of wildfire and promotes the benefits of prescribed fire.

South Mountains State Park was established in 1975 with just over 5,500 acres and is operated under the direction of Superintendent Jonathan Griffith. The park has grown to 20,871 acres—the largest in the system. The park welcomed more than 296,500 visitors in 2017.



# Millennials, Seniors, Families Flock to State Parks



*Campsite at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area's Poplar Point Campground*



*Hikers at Jockey's Ridge State Park*



*First Day Hike at Carolina Beach State Park*



*Family Day at Grandfather Mountain State Park*

North Carolina state parks welcomed more than 19.4 million visitors in 2017, the most in its history. Park staff kicked off the year by leading First Day Hikes, which were attended by over 2,500 people statewide despite especially cold temperatures.

Paddle for the Border at Dismal Swamp State Park brought visitors to the far east, while the Assault on Mount Mitchell brought cyclists to the western part of the state. The annual Kite Festival welcomed kite enthusiasts to the tallest dunes on the East Coast at Jockey's Ridge, while the International Downhill Federation's World Cup brought boarders from all over the world to Mount Jefferson State Natural Area in the quiet Jefferson community.

Similar to run clubs, hiking, paddling, paddleboard, and cycling groups came together to get outdoors and enjoy our state parks. New activities in new areas, like paddleboarding at Lake James and biking at Medoc Mountain, made the most of park resources and provided new reasons to visit different parks.

Special events bring excitement to parks including the total eclipse celebrated at Gorges State Park, which brought over 7,000 visitors to Sapphire Valley, along with new faces and new experiences. However, it is the everyday visits—the grandmother who hikes at William B. Umstead each morning or the family who picnics at Fort Fisher on summer weekends—that are the heart of our parks system. We strive to offer new, exciting opportunities to create lasting memories at our parks. We hope you will continue to enjoy all of the “Naturally Wonderful” experiences we have to offer.



*New mountain bike trails at Medoc Mountain State Park*

## Governor Cooper Signs Off on New State Natural Areas



Gov. Roy Cooper joined state parks staff and land conservancy partners at his mansion in July 2017 to sign a bill authorizing the addition of three new properties to the state parks system. Bobs Creek in McDowell County, Warwick Mill Bay in Robeson County and Salmon Creek in Bertie County represent diverse and rare ecosystems across the state. The General Assembly authorized the new natural areas on June 29, 2017.

Bobs Creek is a series of sheltered coves and ravines with rare flora and geology. Warwick Mill Bay is home to herons, egrets, anhingas, alligators, and the federally threatened wood stork, among other wildlife. Salmon Creek features cypress-gum swamps, freshwater tidal marshes and several archaeological sites.

“From the mountains to the coast, our state parks and state natural areas protect North Carolina’s treasured natural resources for all of us to enjoy,” said Gov. Cooper. “I’m proud to continue this tradition by adding these three unique properties to our state parks system.”

North Carolina’s state natural areas preserve and protect areas of scientific, aesthetic or ecological value with more limited recreation. Facilities are limited to those needed for interpretation, protection and maintenance.

## Secretary Hamilton Celebrates Connect NC Bond Project Completion



Susi Hamilton, secretary of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, joined park staff, volunteers, local leaders and emergency personnel for ribbon-cutting events to celebrate the completion of the first Connect NC Bond project in 2017. At Fort Fisher State Recreation Area, the group celebrated a renovated restroom pavilion on the beach and a shaded beachfront picnic area.



At Grandfather Mountain State Park, a new trail access with a large parking lot and restrooms offers a connection to the Profile Trail. Secretary Hamilton joined the celebration at the new access, where visitors previously faced parking challenges to reach the trail.

# Interpretation and Education

Our Interpretation and Education programs help people of all ages and backgrounds form meaningful connections to the natural environment through our state parks. Last year, more than 300,000 visitors attended programs to explore the science, art, history, culture and natural wonder offered at North Carolina's state parks.



Winning photo from Ansel Adams Photo contest

## Ansel Adams: Masterworks Exhibition Programs

The division partnered with the N.C. Museum of Art to bring art and nature together in the spirit of Ansel Adams. Guided photography walks at Morrow Mountain, Raven Rock, Weymouth Woods and William B. Umstead state parks allowed photographers of all ages and skill levels to share tips and strengthen skills together.



New citizens are sworn in at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area

## Naturalization Ceremony

The Interpretation and Education program partnered with U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services on April 14, 2017 to host the fourth annual Earth Day Naturalization Ceremony at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area. Eighty-eight new citizens representing 36 nationalities were naturalized. More than 250 people attended the ceremony, which included a call of nation, citizenship oath and ceremonial tree planting.



KELVIN, the N.C. Science Festival's spokesbot, at Haw River State Park

## Celebrating Science: N.C. Science Festival

North Carolina state parks hosted 30 programs and events during the North Carolina Science Festival throughout April 2017. The N.C. Science Festival is the world's largest of its kind. Among the most successful programs offered were eight statewide "Star Parties," which allowed visitors to study the sky through telescopes with NC State University's Astrophysics Group and park rangers. Visitors also participated in star-themed creative activities and learned how to estimate distances between objects in the sky using their hands.



Young visitor reading a storywalk panel

## Storywalks®

In spring of 2017, North Carolina state parks launched StoryWalks® in several parks including Dismal Swamp and Raven Rock. StoryWalks® allow children and adults alike to enjoy a nature-themed book as they walk along a park trail. The program also enhances partnerships between parks and local libraries, which share education as a cornerstone of their missions. The union of reading and hiking is a wonderfully effective way to get children engaged in both activities while learning about the natural world.

## Interpretation and Education (continued)



Family Fishing Fiesta at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area



Visitors using the video microscope in the new Weymouth Woods-Sandhills Nature Preserve Discovery Room

### Family Fishing Fiesta

More than 1,000 visitors attended the second annual Family Fishing Fiesta, also known as Fiesta Pesca, at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area on April 8, 2017. The annual event welcomes Hispanic families to enjoy fishing and other types of outdoor recreation. This event is organized through a partnership of more than a dozen natural resource education organizations including the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and the American Fisheries Society.

### Re-Discovering Weymouth Woods

Where a dark, outdated exhibit room once stood adjacent to the visitor center, staff at Weymouth Woods-Sandhills Nature Preserve opened a new Discovery Room they designed and constructed themselves. The new learning space has a bright, naturally lit open floor plan with a special emphasis on families with young children. It includes a wildlife-watching station, a video microscope for close-up nature discovery, a puppet theater where rangers offer educational and entertaining performances, and activity boxes full of specimens and games. Visitors to the new facility agreed that the room made for a more enjoyable and educational visit to Weymouth Woods.

## A Special Thanks to All Our Friends Groups



Friends of Bay Lakes  
 Friends of Cliffs of the Neuse State Park  
 Friends of Dismal Swamp State Park  
 Friends of Goose Creek

Friends of Haw River State Park  
 Friends of Lower Haw River State Natural Area  
 Friends of Merchants Millpond State Park  
 Friends of Medoc Mountain State Park

Friends of the South Mountains State Park  
 Friends of Weymouth Woods Nature Preserve

# Volunteers: Worth Their Weight in Gold!



Volunteers are priceless partners and participants in our parks. They are vital in helping us protect our natural resources and natural heritage. Improving services and support for our visitors, their tireless efforts allow park staff more flexibility to spend time educating visitors and tending to time-sensitive park needs.

People choose to volunteer for a variety of reasons. For some, it offers the chance to give something back to the community or make a difference to the people around them. For others, it provides an opportunity to develop new skills or build on experience and knowledge. Volunteers at North Carolina state parks make an enormous impact to both the park and park staff. Our volunteers protect and enhance natural resources, help make parks more accessible and safe, provide support during important events and celebrations, and do so much more.

The average value of volunteer time was estimated at \$24.14 per hour in 2017 by the Independent Sector, a nationally known coalition of nonprofits, foundations and corporate giving programs. Volunteers contributed more than 62,300 hours for state parks in 2017—a value of \$1.5 million!

## State Park Retail Reaches Milestone



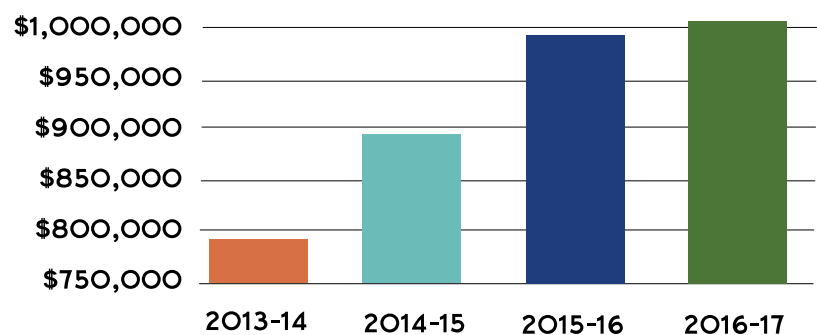
North Carolina state parks reached the million-dollar milestone in retail sales for the first time in 2017. Mount Mitchell led the parks in retail sales, with more than a quarter of a million dollars in collectibles and refreshments sold.

Our parks continue to expand their retail spaces and offerings to provide the visiting public with the conveniences they expect and novelties they seek to commemorate their visit. Retail items can be purchased at the parks or on the web store at [www.ncparkstore.com](http://www.ncparkstore.com). The web store now offers more than 400 items to commemorate visits to state parks.

The division also began offering annual and family passes last year to make visiting our reservoirs, enjoying our swimming areas, and renting recreational equipment easier and more affordable than ever before.

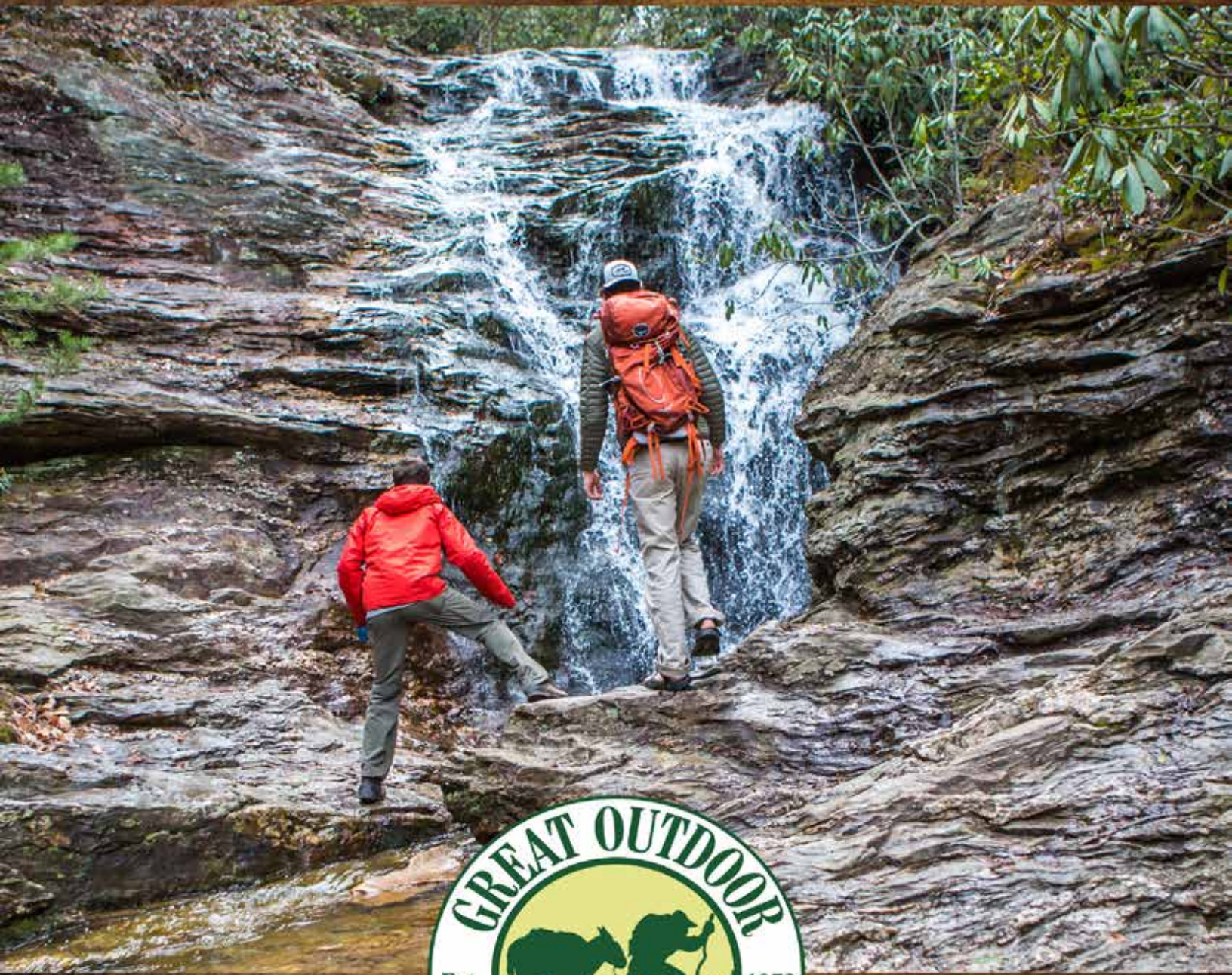


### Retail Revenue





# GOPC Loves Our State Parks



Chapel Hill -- Charlotte -- Greensboro -- Greenville  
Raleigh -- Wilmington -- Winston-Salem

# Parks and Recreation Trust Fund



## 2017 PARTF Members

**Neal Lewis, Chairman**  
New Hanover County

**Ann Babcock**  
Buncombe County

**Lydia Boesch**  
Moore County

**Chad Brown**  
Gaston County

**Vinnie Goel**  
Wake County

**Lewis Ledford**  
Wake County

**Cynthia Tart**  
Brunswick County

**Lisa Wolff**  
Alamance County

**Edward Wood**  
Chowan County

The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF), administered by the Division of Parks and Recreation, is supported through appropriation from the General Assembly. Members of the Parks and Recreation Authority, which directs PARTF, are appointed bi-annually by state leaders. PARTF monies are used for land acquisition and capital improvement projects in state parks (61 percent); matching grants for local government parks and recreation projects, such as building greenways and recreational facilities (30 percent); the Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Access Program, which improves and ensures public access to beaches and is managed by the North Carolina Division of Coastal Management (5 percent), and for the NC Forest Service (4 percent).

In the 2016-17 fiscal year, the total revenue available for allocation was \$28.3 million. The state parks system received \$17.9 million; 32 local governments received \$8.2 million; and the Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Access Program received \$1.4 million.

The division used these funds to purchase and protect 3,154 acres of land across the state, including a 449-acre addition to Hanging Rock State Park and a 114-acre addition to Chimney Rock State Park. The division applied \$11 million to capital improvement projects, including infrastructure improvements at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area and the construction of Cove Bridge at Lake James State Park.

Sixty-six local governments applied for available PARTF funds that were ultimately awarded to 32 projects, including Royal Giants Park renovation in East Spencer and land acquisition for Mebane Community Park.

The Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Access Program approved funding for 12 coastal communities with access projects, including Holden Beach Park in Brunswick County and Neuse River Gateway Park in New Bern.

As part of the Connect NC Bond package approved by voters in 2016, \$3 million was made available to enable children and veterans with disabilities to participate in recreation and sports. These projects will fund new facilities or the renovation of existing facilities that meet the unique needs of children and/or veterans with physical and developmental disabilities. Forty-five applicants with combined requests of more than \$9 million were considered by the trust fund authority for funding. Authority members approved 18 accessibility grants across the state including an accessible sports field at Massey Hill Park in Fayetteville.

## North Carolina State Parks PASSPORT PROGRAM

Explore the parks, collect stamps and  
earn prizes with the North Carolina State Parks  
Passport Program!

Pick your passport up at a park near you!

Learn more at [www.ncparks.gov/passport-program](http://www.ncparks.gov/passport-program)



## Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (continued)

### Matching Grants Awarded to Local Governments - FY 2016-17

Local Government	County	Project	Grant Amount
Asheville	Buncombe	French Broad River East Bank	\$350,000
Beaufort	Beaufort	Wrights Creek Phase 2	\$100,605
Bertie	Bertie	Albemarle Sound Public Waterfront Access	\$500,000
Bessemer City	Gaston	North Park Phase 1	\$500,000
Brunswick	Brunswick	Ocean Isle Beach Phase 2	\$300,000
Canton	Haywood	Recreation Park Redevelopment	\$350,000
Conover	Catawba	City Park Expansion	\$119,992
Denton	Davidson	DREAM Play Structure at Harrison Park	\$15,000
East Spencer	Rowan	Royal Giants Park Renovations	\$300,000
Fuquay Varina	Wake	Fleming Loop Recreational Park Development	\$500,000
Granite Falls	Caldwell	Shuford Recreation Park Redevelopment	\$196,875
Harnett	Harnett	Government Complex Park Phase 1	\$400,000
Henderson	Henderson	Bell Trail Park	\$350,000
Iredell	Iredell	Jennings Park	\$419,718
Jacksonville	Onslow	Jacksonville Marina	\$350,000
Kill Devil Hills	Dare	Bay Drive Multi-Use Path Extension Phases 3 & 4	\$250,000
Lake Lure	Rutherford	Weed Patch Mountain Recreational Park	\$350,000
Laurel Park	Henderson	Rhododendron Lake Nature Park Phase 3	\$80,000
Lenoir	Caldwell	Mulberry Optimist Park Expansion	\$327,200
Lexington	Davidson	Tri-Distributor Land Acquisition	\$250,000
Littleton	Halifax	Littleton Pocket Park	\$78,300
Lucama	Wilson	Lucama Community Park, Phase 3	\$25,000
Mebane	Alamance	Mebane Community Park Land Acquisition	\$355,802
Nags Head	Dare	Dowdy Park Phase 2	\$250,000
Pineville	Mecklenburg	Lake Park	\$361,460
Pleasant Garden	Guilford	Volunteer Park	\$234,387
Rockingham	Rockingham	Planters Road Dan River Environmental Park & Access	\$27,850
Siler City	Chatham	Siler City Aquatic Facility	\$480,035
Star	Montgomery	Forks of Little River Passive Park Improvements	\$5,000
Teachey	Duplin	Teachey Playground	\$30,000
Wake	Wake	Robertson Millpond Reserve	\$251,097
White Lake	Bladen	White Lake Multi-Use Trail	\$305,285

**Totals: 32 projects**

**\$8,413,606**

# Natural Resources - *Being "Naturally Wonderful" takes a lot of work*



Monarch Butterfly at South Mountains State Park

## Celebrating Biodiversity

A **bio-blitz**—the gathering of experts to undertake an extensive inventory of species—is a very useful tool for cataloging biodiversity in state parks. In 2017, 25 park staff and biology experts participated in a bio-blitz at Pilot Mountain State Park. The team documented as many species as possible during the project, including the first recorded mole salamanders near the park office and multiple observations of Gulf Coast spiny softshell turtles in the Yadkin River. At a bio-blitz for Carolina Beach State Park, experts documented chicken turtles, southern hognose snakes and an American alligator, to name a few.



Burn crew members starting a prescribed burn

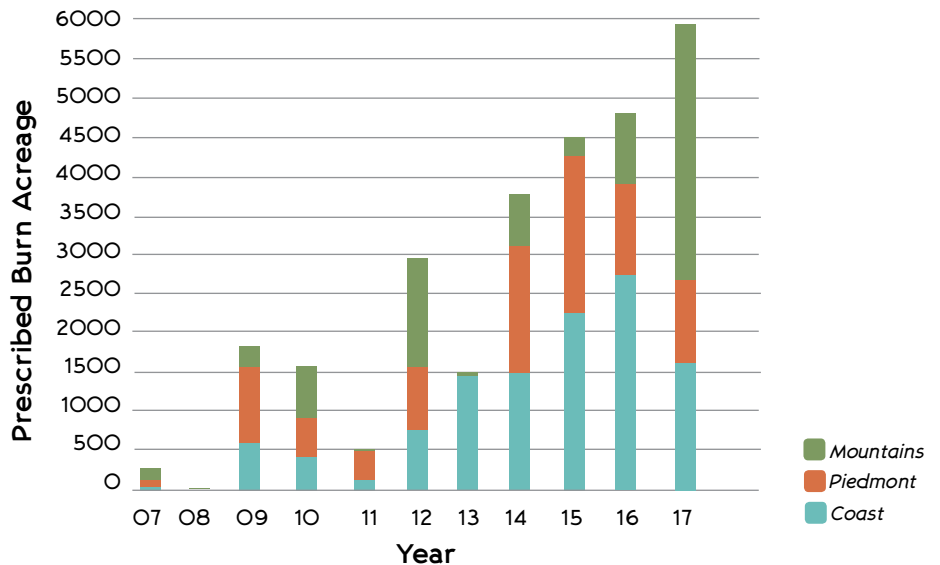
## Prescribed Fire Program Booms

The Natural Resources Program led an unprecedented year for prescribed fire in our state parks, with 67 burns at 17 state parks and state natural areas. Prescribed fire was introduced to New River and Gorges state parks for the first time. The division managed a 1,000-acre burn at Jones Lake State Park, in cooperation with the NC Forest Service, on adjoining sites with Bladen Lakes State Forest. One-third of the acreage at Weymouth Woods and Carvers Creek was burned in 2017, bringing those lands up to what resource managers call the “desired fire return interval” an extent and frequency of prescribed fire that mimics natural fire intervals. Fire teams also undertook two of the most complicated prescribed burns in its history — one at Stone Mountain and one at Hanging Rock.



Staff planning an upcoming burn

Prescribed Burning at N.C. State Parks 2007-2017



Big brown bat being tagged at Goose Creek State Park

## Going Batty

Along with Three Oaks Engineering, the division surveyed bats at Goose Creek State Park using a process known as mist netting. Resource managers managed to capture and tag 22 bats representing four different species, including two species not previously known to live at the park. One brown bat was recaptured from the same survey process in 2016.

## Natural Resources (continued)



Rafinesque's big-eared Bat

### Bat Roost Gets a Boost

In June 2017, researchers from Tennessee Technological University, the NC Wildlife Resources Commission and private consulting agencies convened at Singletary Lake State Park to collect data on the resident maternity roost of the Rafinesque's big-eared Bat. During this event, 15 Rafinesque's big-eared bats were banded at the park for conservation research purposes. Samples taken from the wings of each bat will join a range-wide genetics study on the species. Park staff at Singletary Lake, who have monitored this population for several years, will continue to play an important role in studies of the species.



Vegetation recovery in Pineola Bog following shrub removal

### Restoration Invites Rejuvenation

In addition to prescribed fire, the division's restoration projects include mountain bog renewal, stream restoration and complete forest recovery. At Goose Creek and Lake James state parks, the first step to recovering the forest was removing plantations of invasive pines established prior to state ownership. At Goose Creek, the natural resources teams and park staff are planting longleaf pine, which will overtake herbaceous groundcover that moved in and return the ecosystem to its natural state. At Lake James, a white pine plantation was removed to plant and establish a shortleaf pine and hardwood forest, the native ecology of the site. Native grasses are already reappearing.



Roaring River at Stone Mountain State Park before restoration

### All About the Trout

Nearly 149,000 trout anglers enjoy about 1.6 million fishing -days per year in our state, adding an estimated \$383 million to North Carolina's economy, according to a study completed last year for the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. Rainbow trout (introduced), brook trout (native) and brown trout (introduced), are only found in mountain streams in the western part of the state due to the chilly water in which they thrive. A restoration project to improve trout habitat was completed in 2017 on Powdermill Creek within Yellow Mountain State Natural Area. The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and Trout Unlimited were partners in this project.



Roaring River at Stone Mountain State Park after restoration

### Now Streaming at Stone Mountain

The east prong of the Roaring River restoration project was completed in Stone Mountain State Park in 2017. This project was a collaboration with the NC Division of Water Resources, the Clean Water Management Trust Fund, the Resource Institute and North State Environmental. Heavy rains have since tested the integrity of the restoration showing that it effectively stabilized the bank to reduce erosion in to the river. It also improved the natural aesthetic of the area.

# Recreation Resources Service (RRS)



RRS is a technical assistance program for parks and recreation agencies in North Carolina. It provides technical assistance, applied research, and continuing education for the state. Services are available to government agencies, citizen boards, civic and service groups, schools, youth agencies, hospitals, senior centers, commercial and nonprofit organizations.

RRS plays an important role in administration for the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, Land and Water Conservation Fund and the newly instituted Connect NC Bond grants in all the state's 100 counties.



## Collaboration for Recreation

In 2017, RRS sponsored several teleconferences across the state using the North Carolina Research and Education Network. An estimated 250 professionals participated in these events, which addressed park maintenance, volunteerism, summer camps, partnerships and collaboration, inclusive parks and programs, emerging technologies in parks, adventure recreation, and athletic programming.

The RRS team also worked with the Health Matters Program from N.C. State University in two project areas across several eastern county units. Health Matters is a research project funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to improve the quality of life of young people.

The National Playground Safety Institute, a training course offered by the National Recreation and Park Association, was sponsored by RRS in 2017 and certified 85 participants in playground safety.

RRS also organized the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Women's Leadership Conference in Greensboro, which drew 126 women from across the country to explore individual experiences with public lands and their histories, work/life balance, mentoring, professionalism, motivation, and goal setting. In addition, the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Aquatics Workshop, a professional development program for recreational swimming pool operators and staff, was held in Charlotte and attended by more than 40 professionals.

The Growing Greenways in WNC Conference with sessions on engaging minority and rural members of the community, connecting with corporate citizens, techniques to overcome project barriers, and regional case studies. Partners in this event were the division's Trails Program, the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration, the NC Arboretum, Friends of Connect Buncombe, Equinox, Destinations by Design, and RiverLink.

The RRS worked with the N.C. Forest Services to create a user survey for DuPont State Recreational Forest. The user preferences survey will help identify how users want to see the recreational forest managed in the long term. It will be distributed through various online and print outlets, and in face-to-face surveys in the forest to be conducted by staff and volunteers.

# N.C. Trails Program: Clearing the Way for Adventure

The NC Trails Program, which began in 1973 with the North Carolina Trails System Act, is dedicated to helping citizens, organizations and agencies plan, develop and manage all types of trails, ranging from greenways and trails for hiking, biking and horseback riding to river trails and off-road vehicle trails. The program is responsible for providing trail assessment, planning and design and layout services to units of the state parks system and to other governmental agencies, nonprofit organizations and volunteers. Our regional trails specialists directly support the state parks system through trail planning, design and corridor flagging for new trail and trail renovation projects within state parks.

Recognizing that our park visitors are increasingly seeking their outdoor adventures on a trail, the division set out to breathe new life into the state trails system and offer new recreational opportunities in the beautiful places we have preserved across the state. Led by former park ranger Scott Crocker and a new team of regional trails specialists, the program enjoyed a year of explosive growth and progress in 2017.



Fonta Flora State Trail at Lake James State Park

## Meanders over Mountains

In **Grandfather Mountain State Park**, trails staff designed and flagged a half-mile trail to connect a new section of the Profile Trail to the old section, forming a loop trail. This trail will become the new Kids in Parks TRACK Trail. A 0.2-mile reroute was designed to align the trail in a more sustainable manner.

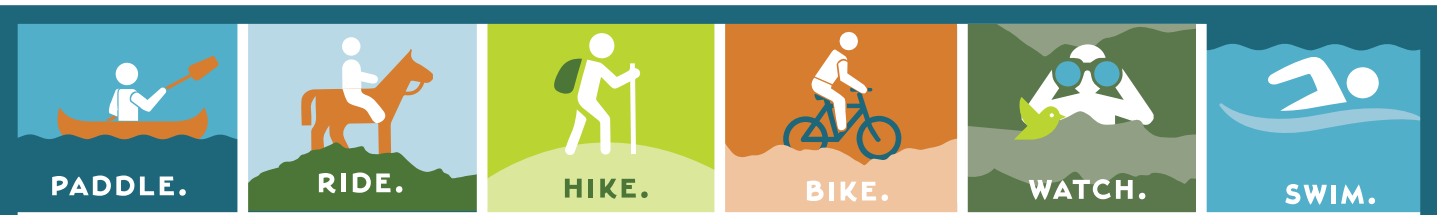
In partnership with Burke County, **Lake James State Park** and N.C. Trails Program staff finalized the design of a multi-use trail on the park's Long Arm Peninsula. This will become part of the Fonta Flora State Trail and will complete a major section of a proposed 29-mile loop around Lake James.



Map of the route for the new section of the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail at Stone Mountain State Park

A 1.3-mile section of the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail (MST) was designed and marked at **Stone Mountain State Park**. This vital connector will take MST hikers off of the road and onto the park's existing trail network. Construction began in 2018 in partnership with the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail.

In the new Moore's Springs area of **Hanging Rock State Park**, 9.8 miles of beginner and intermediate bike trails are nearing completion. To serve equestrians and hikers, more than 2.5 miles of the Ruben Mountain Trail is also nearly complete.



Explore the outdoors, log your miles and earn fun prizes!

Sign up for the 100-Mile Challenge at  
[www.nc100miles.org](http://www.nc100miles.org)

## N.C. Trails Program (continued)



Bike trail at Raven Rock State Park

### Progress in the Piedmont

**Raven Rock State Park's** 6.1-mile beginner difficulty bike trail was completed in 2017 to accommodate handcycles, offering a recreational opportunity for those who are not able to use standard mountain bikes. Construction is nearly complete on a 2.5-mile intermediate difficulty and 3.2-mile advanced difficulty bike trails, which will total nearly 12 miles of mountain bike trail offered at Raven Rock.

Thanks to a Recreational Trails Program grant, **Carvers Creek State Park** will complete a multi-use trail system through renovation of a degraded trail along with construction of new trail. The 10-mile trail system will allow hiking, biking and equestrian use.



Field Stone Trail at Eno River State Park

Construction of the Field Stone Trail at **Eno River State Park** is nearly complete. This 0.6-mile trail includes a bridge and will connect Holden Mill Trail with park campsites that are adjacent to the Ridge Trail.

Finally, a Recreational Trails Program grant awarded to the Umstead Coalition in 2017 will fund a reroute of 1.4 miles of the Cedar Ridge multi-use trail at **William B. Umstead State Park**.

### Coastal Connections

Down east, **Carolina Beach State Park** opened the Sand Live Oak Trail, a 1.5-mile trail that connects to the Sugarloaf Trail. It was made possible by a federal-state partnership that approved the passage of the new trail through federal property.



Sand Live Oak Trail at Carolina Beach State Park

At **Hammocks Beach State Park**, the 5.6-mile Bear Inlet Paddle Trail opened. It begins at the park office and winds paddlers through the marshes, ending at Bear Inlet on the west side of Bear Island. The trail is marked with posts to guide paddler's navigation and was constructed by Eagle Scouts at no cost to the division.

A new trail segment and boardwalk will connect to **Fort Macon State Park's** 3.2-mile Elliot Coues Nature Trail. This new section of the trail will allow pedestrians to walk from Atlantic Beach to Fort Macon on a path away from traffic.

### Mountains-to-Sea State Trail (MST)

In 2017, completed portions of the MST reached a total of 659.5 miles across the state. New segments include 2 miles through the town of Hillsborough, across River Park in Orange County, 5 miles in Morehead City, and 10 miles through the North River Wetlands Preserve. New segments were made possible by partnerships with local governments and nonprofit organizations.

These and other new segments were celebrated at "MST In A Day," hosted by the Friends of the MST, in which all designated segments of trail were hiked and local partners were celebrated.

Also in 2017, the NC General Assembly authorized the addition of the Coastal Crescent Loop as an alternate route of the MST. This secondary route, which traverses southeastern North Carolina, increased the planned mileage of the trail from 1,000 miles to at least 1,400 miles.



Ribbon cutting for the new North River segment of the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail



## N.C. Trails Program (continued)



Children hiking on the Fonta Flora State Trail  
Photo credit: Amy Swanson, burkenc.org

### Fonta Flora State Trail

The Fonta Flora State Trail, authorized by the NC General Assembly in 2015, will connect Morganton with Asheville, including a scenic loop around Lake James. In 2017, Burke County established a 4.4-mile segment of the trail at Fonta Flora County Park, bringing the state trail to 15.7 designated miles in its second year of construction.



Fonta Flora State Trail, Lake James segment

### Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail

The Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail was authorized by the N.C. General Assembly in 2017. Over eons, the Rocky Broad River has cut through the mountainous terrain to create the 14-mile gorge, which drops about 1,800 feet between the towns of Gerton and Lake Lure. It is considered an ecological treasure with dozens of rare plant and animal species. This trail will be about 100 miles long and will include sections in and around Chimney Rock State Park, Lake Lure, Bearwallow Mountain and Bat Cave.



Vista from the future Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail

### Rugged Meets High-Tech

The trails program acquired high-efficiency trail assessment process (HETAP) instrument in 2017. This new equipment allows for precise assessments and measurements of the state's trail network. The technology will be used to gather baseline trail conditions for needs assessments, including maintenance and accessibility improvements.



Mountains-to-Sea State Trail brick marker in downtown Goldsboro

### North Carolina's Federal Recreational Trails Grant Program

The Department of Natural and Cultural Resources received 53 grant requests for the federal Recreational Trails Program grants totaling \$4,433,872. Of those requested funds, the NC Trails Committee recommended and the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources Secretary, Susi Hamilton approved awards for 25 grant projects totaling \$2,063,822 that will leverage a further \$1,377,900 of grantee matching funds. These trail projects will provide economic development and recreational resources to 15 North Carolina counties.

# Marketing and Communications



State parks booth at the State Fair



12 Days of Webstore Buys campaign



Viewing the eclipse at Gorges State Park

We embraced the importance of social media in connecting with our visitors and neighbors during our centennial year celebrations in 2016. We continued to build our social media presence and value during 2017. Facebook, where we share stories, opportunities, blogs, news and more, now has over 122,000 followers. Our Twitter presence, used to share links and brief alerts, now has the attention of over 12,200 followers. Instagram, where we share some of our favorite photos of our parks and encourage our visitors to share theirs, grew by 10,000 followers last year and now has more than 21,500 followers.

To direct visitors to our sometimes overlooked and off-the-beaten-path parks, we launched a Park of the Month initiative in 2017, with features on our website like engaging educational materials, park history and blogs about the park. Those featured in 2017 include Medoc Mountain, Mount Jefferson, Lake Waccamaw, Pettigrew and Haw River. The program catalyzed an increase in our website visits, increased attendance at featured parks, and grew social media engagement.

Our Passport Program, launched during our centennial year, became very popular in 2017. The program finished the year with more than 10,000 passports in circulation and 1,000 prizes redeemed by visitors who had explored 10 or more parks. This program encourages visitors to explore parks all over the state and provides information about each park.

The 100-Mile Challenge Program wrapped-up its first full year in 2017 with more than 5,400 participants and a renewed partnership with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina for the HikeNC initiative. Participants remained engaged in the program, claiming 740 prizes for meeting mileage goals throughout the year.

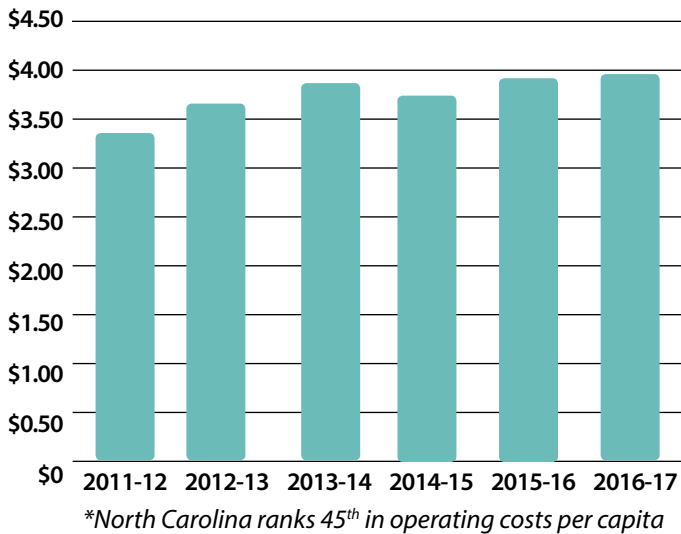
Over the holiday season, a new **12 Days of Webstore Buys** merchandise campaign launched, bringing record sales at a 328 percent increase over December 2016 and closing out 2017 with annual sales up 133 percent from 2016.

The division hosted exhibits at the Mountain State Fair and North Carolina State Fair in 2017 with newly designed features to highlight improved recreation and unique opportunities in our parks, including new mountain bike trails, hang gliding at Jockey's Ridge and paddleboarding at Lake James.

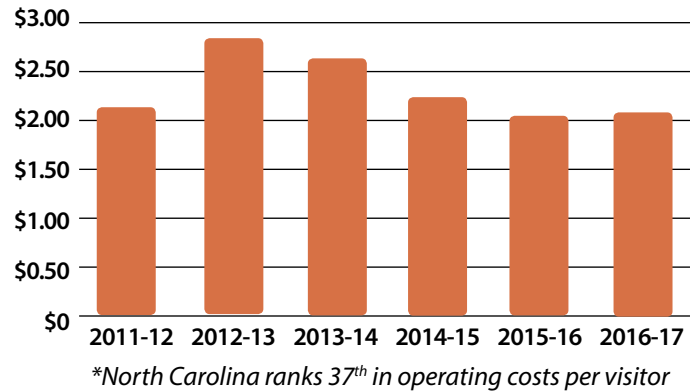
## **Making the Most of it: Total Eclipse at the Park**

When staff at Gorges State Park heard that the park would be in the narrow path to view the total eclipse of the sun on August 24, 2017, they wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to welcome some excitement to the quiet park. More than 7,000 people from all over the world began arriving at the park beginning at 4 a.m. the morning of the event. The event included food trucks, live music, local artisans, high-powered telescopes and hands-on educational activities about nature and the science behind the eclipse.

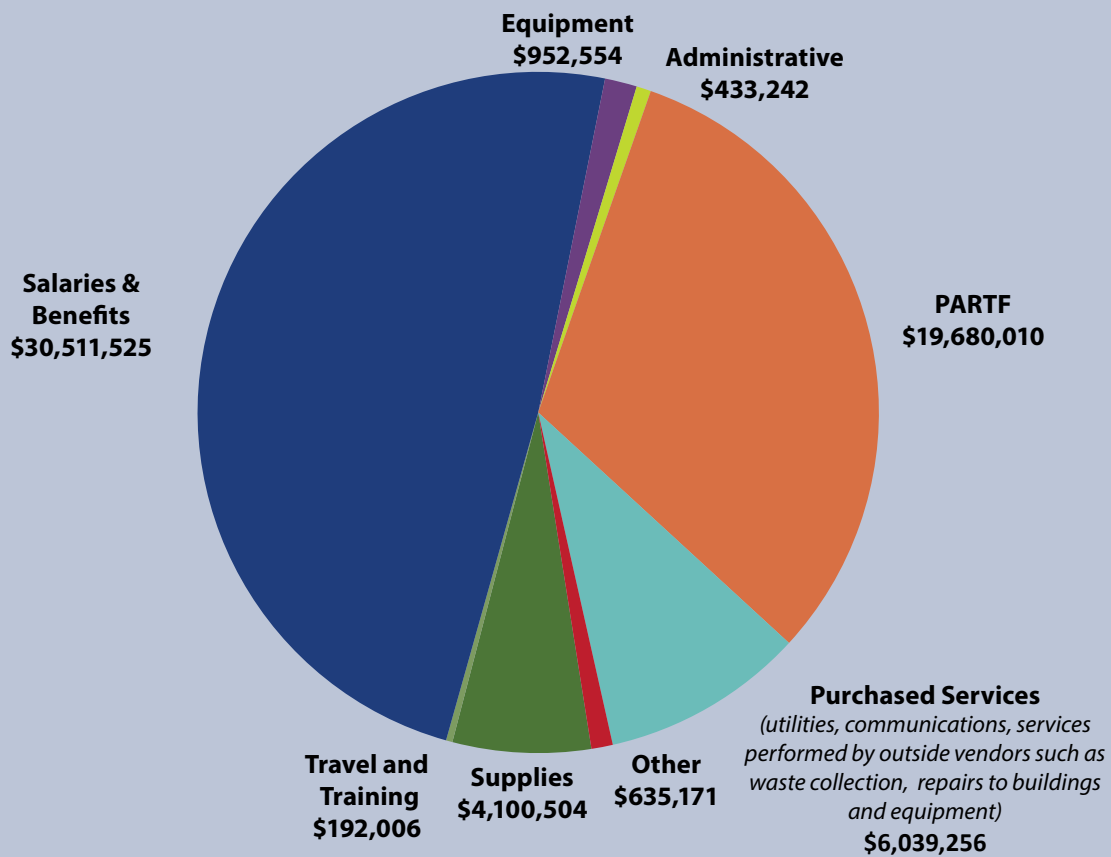
## NC State Park Operating Expenses Per Capita



## NC State Park Operating Expenses Per Visitor



## NC State Parks Budget 2017-18





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NC DEPARTMENT OF  
NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES