



# North Carolina Trails Program **ANNUAL REPORT** 2025



division of parks and recreation

# NCTRAILS



NC DEPARTMENT  
OF NATURAL AND  
CULTURAL RESOURCES

DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION  
Brian Strong, Director

NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES  
Josh Stein, Governor | Pamela B. Cashwell, Secretary



Carolina Beach State Park - DPR Photo: J. Davis

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*Singletary Lake State Park - Photo: DNCR, C. Marimpietri*

Each year, the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation (the Division) submits a Trails Report to outline trail needs, describe additions to the State Trails System, and summarize the growing importance of trails across the state. This report is prepared by the Division's Trails Program (Trails Program) for the Secretary of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) in accordance with N.C.G.S. 143B-135.102.

The Trails Program originated in 1973 with the North Carolina Trails System Act and 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 paddle trails and off-road vehicle trails.

The staff of the Trails Program work to enable volunteers, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies to develop trail plans, preserve land corridors for trails, and manage trails for all trail users. Program staff provide technical assistance, administer federal Recreational Trails Program grants, and develop successful partnerships with local conservation and recreation advocates, including town, city, and county governments.

North Carolina is proud to lead the nation in trail development, investing nearly \$25 million in projects that bring the Great Trails State vision to life. Made possible through the support of the North Carolina General Assembly, these investments are transforming communities, opening doors to outdoor adventure, and setting a standard for trail infrastructure. From mountains to coast, our growing network of trails not only connects people with nature but also fuels local economies, strengthens community health, and celebrates the state's commitment to outdoor recreation as a defining part of who we are.

## 2.0 Incredible Value of Trails



Carvers Creek State Park



Dismal Swamp State Park



Stone Mountain State Park

### Trails Boost Local Economies

From Murphy to Manteo, trails directly contribute millions of dollars in economic benefits to local communities. As a major tourism draw, they provide a steady stream of customers for businesses — trail users, after all, need places to sleep, eat, and shop. These benefits are especially poignant for smaller rural towns. In Cherokee, the new Fire Mountain Trails have shown they yielded a regional impact of \$1.4 million in 2023 in a study from Appalachian State University.

In November, new data released from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) showed that outdoor recreation created \$16.2 billion in value added to North Carolina and accounted for 2.1% of North Carolina's gross domestic product.

A 2018 study by North Carolina State University's Institute for Transportation Research and Education evaluated the economic impact of 4 greenways across the Coastal, Piedmont, and Mountain regions of the state. The study found that greenways generated \$19.4 million in sales revenue at businesses along them, \$48.7 million in business revenue from their construction, and 790 jobs were supported annually through greenway construction. Every dollar spent on trail construction supports \$1.72 annually from local business revenue, sales tax revenue, and benefits reaped from healthier lifestyles and alternative transportation.

Across the state, trails, greenways, and blueways are a significant part of North Carolina tourism and industry. As noted in the 2021 General Assembly's House Bill 554 designating 2023 as the Year of the Trail, outdoor recreation is a \$28 billion industry in the state. The state benefits from tax revenues generated by trails, ensuring that money spent on trails provides excellent return on investment.

Trails also provide economic benefits to individuals. They create and support jobs — from trail construction and maintenance to the establishment of new businesses and successes of existing ones. The 2022 Carolina Thread Trail study showed that 15 jobs are supported by each trail mile; with over 300 miles of trails in the network, that adds up to 4,500 jobs in the Charlotte area alone.

Nationwide, a 2012 study commissioned by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials found that walking and biking trails created 17 jobs per \$1 million spent, more than any other type of infrastructure project.

### Trails Connect Communities

In 1990, the population of North Carolina was 6.6 million; the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that as of July 2024, there are over 11 million people living in North Carolina. These new residents need places to live, work, and study, and the state has continually lost open space to development and urbanization. As cities grow and expand into rural areas it increases the need for access to trails and natural spaces.

Trails not only provide green spaces to enjoy nature within cities, but they also allow for seamless connections to larger parks and more remote wilderness. Most planning corridors for state trails, for instance, connect larger towns and cities to state parks. Trails create places for people to meet, encourage active transportation, and support equitable access to recreation. By providing a low-cost means to travel to other communities and explore other areas of the state, trails help make outdoor recreation accessible to people from all walks of life.

Trails also foster social capital, as evident during North Carolina's 2023 Year of the Trail and Great Trails State Day celebrations. Many rural communities participated in the celebrations and encouraged their residents to explore their local trails. Special events have brought neighbors together outdoors. Even beyond Year of the Trail, trail building, use, and maintenance promote civic participation and engagement through volunteering and advocacy.

## 2.0 Incredible Value of Trails



Medoc Mountain State Park



Hammocks Beach State Park



Mount Jefferson State Natural Area - Photo: DNCR, C. Marimpietri

### Trails Protect the Environment

Population growth and urbanization have changed the state's landscape dramatically. Trails help reclaim natural land and mitigate human impacts on the environment. By providing opportunities to enjoy and experience the outdoors and nature, trails can inspire users to take responsibility and stewardship of the world around them. Many trail organizations are also eco-minded and seek to teach low-impact recreation and Leave No Trace principles.

Trails provide a choice for North Carolinians to reduce their carbon footprint by utilizing alternate methods of transportation. Creating a network of interconnected trails makes it easy for someone to walk, hike, or bike to their destination and curtail vehicle emissions. Trails improve water quality, too. Surface runoff from roads and lawns is one of the leading causes of pollution in the drinking water supply. Protected natural corridors for regional trails and greenways can filter pollutants from runoff. Land conservation efforts, especially near rivers and streams, help make drinking water sources cleaner and reduce the cost of water treatment.

Cities have started to utilize trails and greenways as natural floodplains to mitigate flood risk and damage to people and properties. Conservation efforts through trail advocacy also protect sensitive areas like wetlands and nature preserves in urban and rural areas alike. Most importantly, trails help address habitat fragmentation. They can serve as protected "highways" for wildlife, allowing species access to more land and resources. These wildlife corridors also help strengthen biodiversity by reducing ecological isolation.

### Trails Promote Healthy Living

Trails have become an important part of health and wellness and have been proven to increase quality of life. Compared to other outlets for physical activity, trails are usually free, offer a variety of activities, and provide picturesque surroundings to enjoy. People from all economic levels can use trails, and many trails — especially greenways — are accessible to individuals with limited mobility or disabilities.

Those with safe access to trails and greenways tend to be more physically active. Trails can also add a social element to physical activity that further encourages consistent participation; guided hikes, walking meetups, and running groups can utilize trails without being limited by cost or space. Trails also provide stress relief and other mental health benefits as users enjoy nature — with others or even alone.

The health benefits from trails can be quantified by studies that look at the impact of trail use on health care costs. The 2017 East Coast Greenway Alliance study estimated \$1.4 million in healthcare cost savings annually for Triangle residents. The 2022 Carolina Thread Trail study calculated an average impact of \$310,000 in healthcare savings per trail mile, potentially adding up to \$93 million for the whole trail network.

## 3.0 Hurricane Helene Recovery

Hurricane Helene rolled through the state in the fall of 2024 causing devastating damage to western North Carolina. The effects of Helene are still being felt and will be for a long time to come. Whole communities were impacted and some destroyed due to the storm. While not at the level of the impact to the communities, trails were severely impacted during the hurricane as well. Many trails have not yet reopened hampering the economic recovery of western North Carolina. Western North Carolina economic vitality is based largely on tourism with many people traveling there to take part in outdoor recreation, a large part of that being hiking trails to take in the incredible natural beauty of western North Carolina. While trails are re-opening there is still much work to be done for the trail system to fully recover from the impact of Helene.



## 4.0 Great Trails State Program



*Mountains-to-Sea State Trail*



*Fonta Flora State Trail*



*Fort Fisher State Recreation Area*

In 2023, the North Carolina General Assembly created the Great Trails State Fund — a landmark \$25 million investment to advance the state’s vision as the “Great Trails State.” Administered by the Division of Parks and Recreation, the program offers competitive matching grants to local governments, nonprofits, and regional partners. Eligible uses include planning, design, land acquisition, and construction of greenways, natural-surface trails, and paddle-trail access points. Match requirements are scaled by county tier to ensure equitable access across rural and urban areas.

The program’s launch drew strong demand with 89 applications requesting nearly \$28 million. Projects spanned the mountains to the coast, with requests ranging from corridor acquisitions that secure future trail alignments to construction dollars completing long-awaited connections.

The impact of these investments will be evident. Communities will accelerate trail project development, build new partnerships, and expand access to outdoor recreation. Trails funded through the program are expected to deliver wide-reaching benefits: increased physical activity and health outcomes, enhanced local economies through tourism and business growth, conserved natural resources, and stronger community connections.

The Great Trails State Fund is historic not only in size but in design — balancing fiscal leverage with equitable access. By pairing state investment with local commitment, the program will help communities statewide turn trail visions into reality, strengthening North Carolina’s standing as a national model for outdoor recreation and truly embodying the title of the Great Trails State.

## 5.0 State Trails and Complete the Trails Program

North Carolina's 14 state trails are essential components to its identity as the Great Trails State. Authorized by the General Assembly, each state trail is a unit of the North Carolina State Parks system. However, unlike the more traditional state parks, the state trails are not owned, managed, or maintained by the Division, unless the trail segment is located within a state park. Instead, the state trails are accomplished through dedicated partnerships.

### State Trail Authorizations

The Saluda Grade Conservancy purchased a 31.5-mile railroad corridor between Inman, South Carolina, and Zirconia, North Carolina, from Norfolk Southern. The North Carolina General Assembly appropriated \$16.25 million for the land acquisition through S.L. 2023-134 and S.L. 2024-57. The corridor is federally railbanked, a program established in the 1970s to preserve transportation rights-of-way for future rail use while allowing interim public uses such as trails. Originally constructed in the 1870s to connect Spartanburg, South Carolina, with Asheville, North Carolina, the Saluda Grade Railroad included the steepest standard-gauge mainline in the United States. The 16-mile portion within North Carolina will serve as the foundation of the Saluda Grade State Trail. With the acquisition complete, State Parks staff will collaborate with the Saluda Grade Conservancy to develop a master plan that honors the corridor's rich rail history, highlights the region's breathtaking scenery, and upholds the standards of a North Carolina state trail.

### Trail Designations

As trail segments are constructed on land-based trails and paddle accesses are developed on blueways (paddle trails), they are not part of the state trail until they are officially designated by the Secretary of DNCR. This process includes an application from the land manager to the corresponding state trails planner, evaluation by Division staff, a site visit, and a formal recommendation by the North Carolina Trails Committee.

Generally, the length of the newly designated land-based trail is calculated to the nearest tenth of a mile. The process for the blueways, or paddle trails, is not as intuitive. The Department designates specific paddle accesses — the places where users can safely and legally enter or exit the river. The designated mileage for paddle trails is the distance from the designated access downstream to the next public access location, even if it is not yet designated.

In the 2024-2025 fiscal year, 117.9 miles of trail were designated as part of a state trail. Increasing designations in the coming years is another benefit of the strengthened partnerships resulting from the Complete the Trails Program.

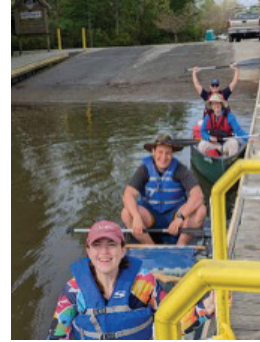
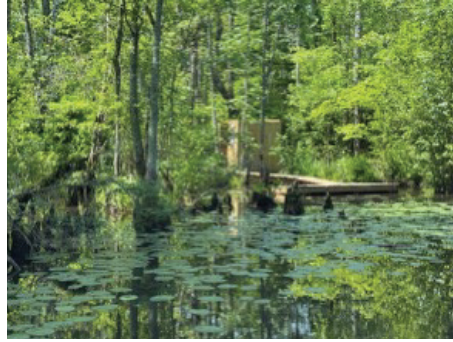
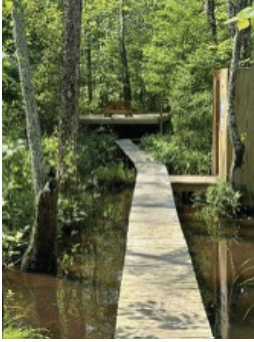
Table 5-1: State Trail Overview

State Trail	Year Authorized	Planned Mileage	Designated Mileage	Percent Complete
Dan River State Trail (DNST)	2021	90	60.1	67%
Deep River State Trail (DRST)	2007	Land: 125 Paddle: 125	Land: 4.28 Paddle: 12.15	Land: 3% Paddle: 10%
East Coast Greenway State Trail (EGST)	2021	795	102.14	13%
Equine State Trail (EQST)	2023	350	0	0%
French Broad River State Trail (FBST)	1978	117	0	0%
Fonta Flora State Trail (FFST)	2015	100	34.6	35%
Haw River State Trail (HRST)	2023	Land: 80 Paddle: 80	Land: 0 Paddle: 4.2	Land: 0% Paddle: 5%
Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail (HGST)	2017	50	28.1	56%
Mountains-to-Sea State Trail (MST)	2000	1400	684.48	49%
Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST)	2019	40	0	0%
Overmountain Victory State Trail (OVST)	2019	225	1.0	0%
Roanoke River State Trail (RRST)	2021	232	232	100%
Wilderness Gateway State Trail (WGST)	2019	170	2.0	1%
Yadkin River State Trail (YRST)	1985	166	162.5	98%

## 5.O State Trails and Complete the Trails Program

### 2024-2025 Highlights and Accomplishments

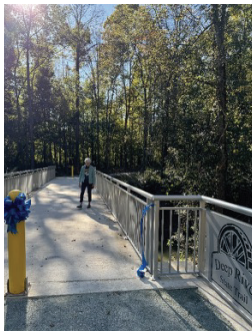
- The Roanoke River State Trail became the first State Trail to be fully designated.



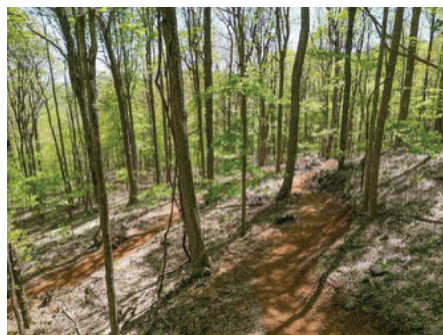
- State Parks completed the Saluda Grade Multipurpose Active Tourism Rail and Hiking Corridor Feasibility Study per the legislative requirement in Session Law 2023-134.
- Successfully installed various signage along State Trails to improve safety and the visitor experience.



- Completed the construction of the Sandy Creek bridge on the Deep River State Trail.



- Completed construction at Paddy Mountain Park, the first segment of the Northern Peaks State Trail.



## 5.0 State Trails and Complete the Trails Program

### Complete the Trail Program

The Complete the Trails Program (CTP) that was introduced and funded in the 2021 North Carolina budget has greatly strengthened state trail partnerships. The result has been transformational for our state trails, both because of the funding and for the focus on partnership. The legislation directed that the funding provided for state trails be administered by DNCR for the planning, construction, promotion, and maintenance of state trails. The funds have been distributed, where practicable, through the identified state trail partners based on their 5-year plans. The partners of the 12 state trails that were authorized prior to the legislation in 2021 (Table 5-1, page 8) were eligible for capacity building and development funds through the CTP, which allows them to truly focus on developing their state trail. In 2023, the General Assembly authorized additional funding for the Complete the Trail Program. This funding included directed allocations for trail development for 13 of the 14 authorized state trails, and additional capacity building funding. The two additional authorized state trails, Haw River State Trail and Equine State Trail were also granted capacity funding in the 2023 budget. The Equine State Trail also received some trail development and land acquisition funds. The fund expands the Division's state trails planning program with a time-limited grant manager to assist with MOUs between the Division and the state trail and community partners.

#### Capacity Building

Most of the partners have chosen to invest their capacity building funds into additional staffing to significantly increase the planning and development of the state trails. Recurring capacity funding would do much to enable partners to continue their focus on their state trail. To receive the initial capacity building funds of \$49,500, each partner had to have an accepted 5-year plan, signed MOU, submitted required documentation to qualify to contract with North Carolina, and an executed contract. \$544,500 of the \$742,500 of the 2023 capacity building funds have been contracted as of fiscal year 2023-24.

In 2024, the General Assembly authorized an additional \$750,000 of capacity building funding for the 14 authorized state trails in addition to the Saluda Grade trail available once the rail corridor purchased is completed (Table 5-2).

**Table 5-2: Complete the Trail Program Capacity Building Funds Awarded**

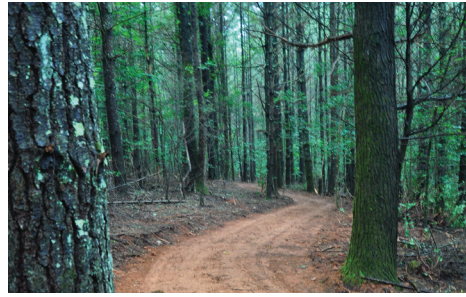
State Trail	Allocated 2024 CTP Funds
Dan River State Trail (DNST)	\$50,000
Deep River State Trail (DRST)	\$50,000
East Coast Greenway State Trail (EGST)	\$50,000
Equine State Trail (EQST)*	\$50,000
Fonta Flora State Trail (FFST)	\$50,000
French Broad State Trail (FBST)	\$50,000
Haw River State Trail (HRST)*	\$50,000
Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail (HGST)	\$50,000
Mountains-to-Sea State Trail (MST)	\$50,000
Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST)	\$50,000
Overmountain Victory State Trail (OVST)	\$50,000
Roanoke River State Trail (RRST)	\$50,000
Wilderness Gateway State Trail (WGST)	\$50,000
Yadkin River State Trail (YRST)	\$50,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$700,000</b>

\*Indicates State Trails that were authorized after the Complete the Trail Program funds were allocated in 2021

## 5.0 State Trails and Complete the Trails Program



Merchants Millpond State Park - Photo: DNCR, C. Marimpietri



Lake James State Park



Elk Knob State Park

### Trail Development Fund

The development funds of the Complete the Trail Program were allocated in September 2022 to the partners of the 12 state trails that were authorized at the time of the legislation in 2021, and most of the partners have used portions of these funds to make progress on the development of the state trails (Table 5-3).

**Table 5-3: Complete the Trails Program Development Funds Expended**

State Trail	Number of Projects	Development Funds Project Contracts
Dan River State Trail (DNST)	1	\$117,365.00
Deep River State Trail (DRST)	2	\$860,828.00
East Coast Greenway State Trail (EGST)	3	\$847,867.10
Equine State Trail (EQST)*	0	\$0
Fonta Flora State Trail (FFST)	2	\$215,000.00
French Broad State Trail (FBST)	9	\$154,774.37
Haw River State Trail (HRST)*	0	\$0
Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail (HGST)	7	\$92,585.00
Mountains to Sea State Trail (MST)	14	\$2,116,425.03
Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST)	1	\$286,943.00
Overmountain Victory State Trail (OVST)	7	\$434,697.00
Roanoke River State Trail (RRST)	1	\$364,650.00
Wilderness Gateway State Trail (WGST)	3	\$359,842.00
Yadkin River State Trail (YRST)	1	\$40,104.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$5,891,080.50</b>

\*Indicates State Trails that were authorized after the Complete the Trail Program funds were allocated in 2021

### Land Acquisition

A third round of Land Acquisition Grants is currently open and applications will be recommended to the Secretary for award in the spring of 2026.

## 6.0 Recreational Trails Program



Elk Knob State Park - Photo: DNCR, C. Marimpietri

The Division manages the federal Recreational Trails Program (RTP) for the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. RTP leverages local funds to develop trails and trail-related recreational amenities to provide low-cost infrastructure and economic development opportunities through natural resource tourism.

From 1999 to 2025, the Division has received approximately \$80,987,664 in requests for RTP funding. Of those requests, the state has awarded \$43,520,375 to sustainable RTP trail projects statewide. These RTP funds, combined with in-kind services and matching funds totaling \$71,001,174, have been applied to trail and greenway projects for the citizens of North Carolina. RTP is currently enabled by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2021, which reauthorized the program from fiscal years 2022 through 2026. RTP funding comes from the Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) through the North Carolina Department of Transportation and is administered by the Division's Trails Program. Since 1993, RTP funding in North Carolina has been used to provide recreational opportunities for hikers, equestrians, bicyclists, paddlers, and off-highway vehicle (OHV) users. Funding through RTP has been able to move forward through continuing resolutions.

The Division received 24 RTP final application requests totaling \$2,147,000 for the 2024–2025 grant year. In North Carolina, Trails Program staff request applicants submit applications several months prior to review by the North Carolina Trails Committee (NCTC) so that applicants receive comments and suggestions. This process has resulted in higher quality, shovel-ready projects presented to the NCTC. Grant applications are reviewed and recommended for funding by the NCTC, a citizen board established in N.C.G.S. 113A-88. The NCTC recommended awards for 13 RTP construction projects totaling \$1,224,932 to leverage \$306,233 of grantee matching funds (Table 6-1, page 13).

### The Safety and Education Grant (SEG)

The Safety and Education Grant is a sub-award of the Recreational Trail Program (RTP) that supports educational programs promoting trail safety and environmental protection (Table 6-2, page 14).

Eligible projects include developing and operating safety and environmental education programs, trail accessibility and sustainability training, and producing trail-related educational materials. Grants can also cover costs related to educational events, including speaker fees and space rental. Trail patrols are another eligible activity, focusing on monitoring trail conditions, providing emergency assistance, and educating users on environmental protection. Training programs related to trail planning, construction, maintenance, and assessment are also supported, provided they focus on safety and environmental protection. Additionally, collaboration with youth conservation or service corps for training and patrol activities is encouraged.

## 6.O Recreational Trails Program

**Table 6-1: 2024 RTP Development Projects**

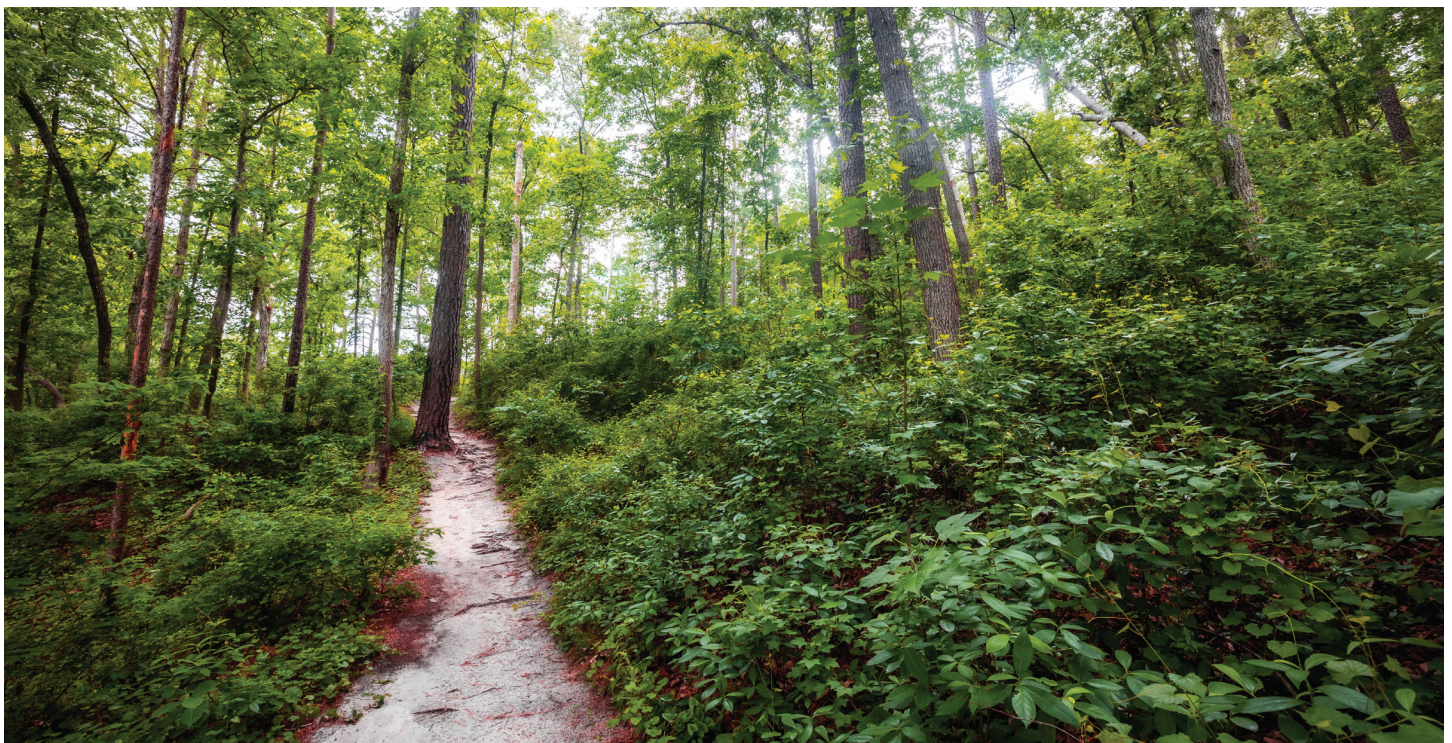
Grantee	Project	Award Amount	Project Counties Served	Project Description
USDA Forest Service	Brown Mountain OHV – 2024 Maintenance	\$100,000	Burke	Maintenance for portions of Trails 2 and 9 in the Brown Mountain OHV area.
USDA Forest Service	Brown Mountain OHV – Mini Excavator	\$100,000	Burke	Purchase of a mini excavator for routine trail maintenance and restoration at Brown Mountain OHV area, and future new trail construction.
Town of Rolesville	Granite Acres Greenway Connection Project	\$100,000	Wake	Add 220 linear feet of new greenway and a 50-foot bridge to link the only affordable housing community in Rolesville (Granite Acres) to Sanford Creek Elementary. This project will allow students in this community to walk to school safely and reliably.
Alamance Parks on behalf of Friends of Haw River State Trail	Haw River State Trail – Paddle and Land Trail Improvements	\$78,000	Alamance, Rockingham, Guilford	Add paddle trail markers on DOT bridges, replace paddle access steps, and replace a 40-foot pedestrian bridge along the Haw River Trail.
Chatham County	Haw River State Trail – Pegg Tract Improvements	\$100,000	Chatham	Construct a new paddle launch consisting of 6-foot wide concrete steps into the river and landing pad, and 6,225 linear feet of new natural surface trail – including a 45-foot pedestrian bridge over Miles Branch creek.
Blue Ridge Conservancy	Northern Peaks State Trail – Three Top Mountain – Phase 1	\$100,000	Ashe	Construct 4.2 miles of new natural surface sustainable hiking trails.
Town of Sylva	Pinnacle Park Recreation Trails	\$92,000	Jackson	Construct 1.9 miles of sustainably built hiking trails and a creek crossing in a public park.
Town of Boone	Northern Peaks State Trail – Rivers House Park	\$54,932	Watauga	Construct approximately one mile of trails at Rivers House Park in downtown Boone, future site of the Southern Terminus of the Northern Peaks State Trail.
Town of Rosman	Rosman Riverfront Park – Phase 1	\$100,000	Transylvania	Construct 1,300 feet of new multiuse greenway, renovation of existing river access and parking lot, supplemental facilities.
Catawba Lands Conservancy	Spencer Mountain Trail Construction	\$100,000	Gaston	Construct 1.2 miles of adaptive (6-8 feet. wide), improved (gravel, concrete, etc.) natural surface trail, a 50-foot fiberglass reinforced polymer bridge, and two 32-foot long boardwalks to connect hikers, cyclists, and people with mobility limitations to the summit of Spencer Mountain.
Cleveland County Water	Stagecoach Greenway – Narrows Segment	\$100,000	Cleveland	Develop approximately 2,045 linear feet of greenway. The overall scope of the larger project includes: site preparation of the greenway corridor to include the stormwater improvements, river overlook deck, picnic shelter, and parking for public recreation along the First Broad River.
City of Rocky Mount	Sunset Park New Multiuse Natural Surface Trail, Joint Trailhead, and Renovation of Sunset Tar River	\$100,000	Nash	Provide 7,920 linear feet of new multiuse, natural surface trail, renovate 6,000 linear feet of greenway, relocate and renovate the Tar River Paddle Trail access, and provide a trailhead kiosk for all three trail types. All three trails will connect to existing like-trails, expanding the current systems.
Camp Grier	Woods Mountain Trail Restoration	\$100,000	McDowell	Restore and maintain a 4.8-mile long section of the Woods Mountain/Mountains-to-Sea State Trail that is in dire need of maintenance due to extensive use of hiking, bicycling, and equestrians. This trail will be rebuilt using USFS sustainability guidelines.

**Total Awarded: \$1,224,932**

## 6.O Recreational Trails Program

Table 6-2: 2024 RTP Safety and Education Grant Awards

Grantee	Project Name	Award Amount	Project Counties Served	Project Description
Dan River Basin Association	Public Water Safety Classes for Recreational Boaters	\$5,000	Rockingham, Caswell, Stokes	Fund an ACA-certified guide service that teaches six kayak safety courses on the river and lakes in the Dan River Basin. Classes will include how to plan a trip, read a river map, research waterways online, proper safety checklists, flatwater and river paddling skills, and a guided paddle on a waterway.
McDowell County	McDowell Trails Tool and Education Fund	\$4,960.48	McDowell	Purchase of tools to support maintenance for the four state trails and regional trails in McDowell County.
McDowell Tech Community College	McDowell Tech Trail School	\$5,000	McDowell	Support costs for advanced trail courses at McDowell Tech Community College.
Carolina Mountain Club	Certification of Carolina Mountain Club Sawyers	\$4,900	Buncombe, Madison, Haywood	Provide training and recertification of CMC Sawyers to remove blowdowns and clear trails on the MST and Appalachian trails. Provide funding for safety equipment such as helmets, chaps, first aid kits, and more.
Camp Grier	Usability and Sustainability Program for Volunteer Trail Crew	\$4,988.41	McDowell	Provide funding for the G5 Trail Collective to purchase tools, equipment, instruction manuals, and personal protection equipment for the volunteers working on the USFS Grandfather Ranger District.
<b>Total Awarded</b>		<b>\$24,848.89</b>		



Cliffs of the Neuse State Park - Photo: DNCR, C. Marimpietri



Transporting rocks at Eno River State Park



Training at Haw River State Park

In fiscal year 2024-2025, the Division its partnership with the Conservation Corps North Carolina (CCNC) to support trail work in our parks. A program of Conservation Legacy, CCNC is a corps program that engages North Carolina's young adults in conservation service projects that benefit local communities. The partnership is also supported by an AmeriCorps grant from the North Carolina Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service.

In its seventh year, the partnership has vastly improved trail sustainability in state parks while providing young adults with a paid job, valuable on-the-job training, and an AmeriCorps education award. A six-person crew tackled various trail projects under training and direction from Trails Program staff. From July 2024 to July 2025, crews completed projects at Haw River, Rendezvous Mountain, and Eno River State Parks. Accomplished work included trail maintenance, new trail structures, and improvements to make our trails more resilient to environmental and visitor impacts.

## CCNC 2024-2025 State Park Projects

**Haw River:** DPR and CCNC collaborated on initial trail training for crew members in June 2025. Crew members and DPR staff were also trained and certified as Wilderness First Responders, an essential skill for backcountry safety. This proved to be a successful model which we will continue to strengthen our partnership with CCNC and foster the future trail stewards of tomorrow. During and after the initial training, crew members conducted maintenance on 4 miles of trail at the park.

**Eno River:** Crew members were able to learn more advanced trail techniques by constructing several new rock and timber steps on areas of trail with steep grades and erosion issues. Trail maintenance was also conducted at nearby Occoneechee Mountain, which is managed by Eno River State Park.

**Rendezvous Mountain:** Over the course of two hitches, CCNC and DPR collaborated on extensively renovating the Talking Tree Trail to bring the trail up to modern sustainable trail standards. This loop trail is anticipated to be a popular amenity at the park and provides ample interpretive opportunities to learn about the parks' resources.

## CCNC Individual Placement Program

In 2024, through CCNC's Individual Placement (IP) program, the Trails Program continued its 11-month Trails Assessment Technician position to assist with the thorough and challenging task of conducting a comprehensive assessment of the state parks trail system. The position continued to provide much-needed support to the Trails Program. This position assessed the condition of trails throughout state parks, conducted onsite data collection and recommendations, assisted with trail layout and design, and facilitated CCNC trail crew projects. The additional field staff has also allowed for better reporting of on-the-ground conditions, which allowed for quick deployment of trail crews for repairs. Data compiled from the assessments improved the identification and prioritization of trail projects through objective measures. Those in the position benefit from learning a broad range of skills that will prepare them for a variety of natural resources jobs and careers, including those that can support state parks. DPR was able to fill the newly vacant Mountain Regional Trails Specialist with our former IP corpsmember, who came with invaluable experience from their time serving in this program. With over 700 miles of trails throughout state parks and only three regional trails staff, positions such as these temporarily provide much-needed assistance. The position's value was underscored in response to Hurricane Helene trail damage assessments, which helped shape recovery efforts for our trail systems. DPR will continue this successful program and hopes to expand the partnership in the future. Ultimately, the Trails Program would benefit from more permanent positions that could continue to support trail monitoring and project development.

## 8.0 Actions for the Future of the Great Trails State

### N.C. Trails Program Recommendations

**Evaluate State Transportation Funding Limitations:** N.C.G.S. 136-189.11(d)(3)(c) prohibits the use of state funds for independent bicycle and pedestrian projects, even as a match for federal funds. This provision significantly hinders the development of greenways, particularly in rural and underserved areas. This prohibition should be evaluated to determine if it continues to be in the best interests of the citizens of North Carolina.

**Provide State Recurring Funding for a Trail Grant Program:** The N.C. Trails Program continues to receive more than twice as many applications for trail and greenway funding as the federal Recreational Trails Program grants can fund. Additional recurring state funding to supplement federal funding would facilitate and expedite the completion of trails and greenways across the state. The need for recurring funding for trails can also be seen by the popularity of the Great Trails State Program funds as there were \$28 million in applications for \$25 million in legislatively allocated funding.

**Re-Establish the Adopt-a-Trail Program:** Under N.C.G.S. 143B-135.112, this program was previously funded to provide small trail grants to communities and nonprofits, but funding was discontinued in 2014. Additional funding would foster opportunities to fund trail projects beyond the federal Recreational Trails Program. This funding could be administered through the N.C. Trails Program and utilize the structure of the Adopt-a-Trail Program or create a new trail grant program for the state. Although significant new funding was provided through the Complete the Trail Program, this funding cannot be used on trail projects that are not affiliated with state trails.

**Provide Recurring Funding for State Trails:** As non-recurring funds for capacity building funds are running out, making these capacity building funds for state trail partner organizations recurring would allow them to consistently focus on developing the state trails.

**Apportion Budgets with State Trail Authorizations:** Any new state trail that is authorized should have an appropriated budget to support initial development and should be planned to extend at least 100 miles. Trail concepts considered for state trail authorization should also focus on areas of the state not currently served by a state trail.

**Add Safety Signage for Paddle Trails:** DNCR and NCDOT need to develop an MOU to provide safety signage on bridges that span paddle trails throughout North Carolina. At a minimum, the signage should identify the roadway, the paddle trail, and any portages that are nearby downstream.

**Continued Partnership with the Great Trails State Coalition:** The Great Trails State Coalition is a group of land conservancies, trails and environmental organizations, and industry partners formed to promote trails in North Carolina. The Division should continue to advise and coordinate with the Coalition, especially in promoting N.C. as the Great Trails State.

**Develop Strategic Planning:** The N.C. Trails Program should continue to partner with NCDOT's Integrated Mobility Division to identify priority corridors for state and regional trails in a strategic plan for a statewide network of bicycle and pedestrian accommodations that will link county seats, state parks, state trails, community colleges, and state/national forests. This plan should address criteria for including pedestrian and bicycle accommodations on all non-interstate highway bridge replacements.

The Great Trails State network is planned as a system of multiuse trails. A multi-use path surface is inappropriate for specific state trails, such as the Northern Peaks State Trail. In those cases, the spine network will connect to trailheads. NCDOT's Great Trails State plan will facilitate many aspects of planning and construction of state trails in the future.

**Formalize and Coordinate Partnerships:** The Division should continue to strengthen and formalize partnerships with the various organizations that support state trails. Additionally, the Division should coordinate with these organizations to recognize and support the volunteers who labor to construct and maintain the state trails.

### Priorities for the Next Fiscal Year

**Helene Recovery Projects:** The Trails Program will continue its ongoing recovery efforts for Helene-related trail damage. Helene recovery projects remain a top priority for our program. The improvements planned for trails will emphasize sustainable design and construction methods, ensuring that repairs not only address current damage but also strengthen the system's resilience to withstand future events. This is a fiscally responsible approach intended to reduce long-term maintenance costs and protect trail access.

**Adaptive Trails Program:** In early 2025 the Division began its pilot Adaptive Trails Program with the purchase of electric wheelchairs, made possible by the Dana and Christopher Reeve Foundation. The program's goal is to make our trails more accessible to those with disabilities. An 11-month Adaptive Trails Specialist position was created to develop the program and provide community outreach. The Trails Program will be seeking additional resources to purchase more adaptive equipment in the upcoming year to provide more recreation opportunities for our park visitors and continue our outreach and collaborative efforts to bring awareness to the program.