



North Carolina Trails Program **ANNUAL REPORT** 2024



division of parks and recreation

NCTRAILS



NC DEPARTMENT
OF NATURAL AND
CULTURAL RESOURCES

DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION
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NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES
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Eno River State Park

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1.0 Introduction



Elk Knob State Park

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. General Statutes 143B-135.102.

The Trails Program originated in 1973 with the North Carolina Trails System Act and is dedicated to helping residents, 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, assist with other trail grant opportunities, and develop successful partnerships with local conservation and recreation advocates, including town, city, and county governments.

In July, Governor Roy Cooper signed into law the North Carolina Farm Act of 2024, which designated the third Saturday of October of each year as North Carolina Great Trails State Day. This designation brings permanence to North Carolina as the Great Trails State, and a day to celebrate the state's thriving trail networks and their connection to the natural beauty of North Carolina.

2.0 Incredible Value of Trails



Carvers Creek State Park



William B. Umstead State Park



Elk Knob State Park

Trails Boost Local Economies

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 western North Carolina, the small town of Old Fort has experienced a revitalization driven by its growing network of trails. These trails have attracted outdoor enthusiasts, boosting tourism and creating new opportunities for local business. Grassroots efforts from programs like People on the Move Old Fort and the G5 Collective have helped foster a stronger sense of community and pride, with residents rallying behind sustainable trail development. Old Fort's growing outdoor culture has positioned the town as a gateway to the region's outdoor adventures while reinvigorating its local economy. These efforts have been so successful that even after the catastrophic impact of Hurricane Helene, the town is already looking to begin rebuilding its trail system.

Bustling urban areas also enjoy economic boosts through trails. In 2022, North Carolina State University's Institute for Transportation Research and Education conducted a study on the impact of the Carolina Thread Trail on the Charlotte area and surrounding suburbs. Researchers looked at six newly completed trail segments, representing just 1% of the total Carolina Thread Trail network. The six segments alone are estimated to have an economic output of \$25.8 million, averaging \$2.1 million per trail mile. Additionally, the Division will be performing an economic impact analysis of its state trails in 2025 to gain insights on how these networks strengthen the state's economy.

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 have also been a boon to homeowners. A 2021 study by Econsult Solutions Inc. shows that there is a 2-5% property value premium for property within half mile of a regional trail. In a report commissioned by the East Coast Greenway Alliance in 2017, the greenway — now a North Carolina state trail as well — is estimated to provide a total of \$164 million rise in property values in the Triangle. In 2020, the National Association of Home Builders found that people with trails and other amenities that are conducive to walking are more satisfied with their quality of life.

Trails Connect Communities

In 1990, the population of North Carolina was 6.6 million; the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that as of the most recent U.S. Census reported estimate of July 2023, that number has reached nearly 10.8 million. 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, people get further and further away from access to natural surroundings.

The increase in trail use during the COVID-19 pandemic proved that given time and opportunity, many people will find solace in nature's beauty. 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. 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 Year of the Trail. Many rural communities participated in the celebrations and encouraged their residents to explore their local trails. Special events brought neighbors together outdoors. Even beyond Year of the Trail, trail building, use, and maintenance promote civic participation and engagement through volunteering and advocacy.



Mayo River State Park



Carolina Beach State Park



Chimney Rock State Park

Trails Protect the Environment

Population growth and urbanization have also 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.

Hiking and walking are consistently ranked as top recreational activities nationally. The huge influx of visitation to parks during the COVID-19 pandemic introduced many first-time users to outdoor activity, and many have continued to return to enjoy trails. 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. A 2021 study by the Capitol Trails Coalition calculated health savings of \$1,180 annually for active trail users in the Washington, D.C., area.

3.0 Making Parks and Trails More Accessible for All



Tunnel to elevator at Chimney Rock State Park

The Division is deeply committed to ensuring that every visitor enjoys a safe, inclusive, and fulfilling experience at the parks. We understand that barriers — both tangible and perceived — can limit access for some visitors, particularly those with disabilities. From physical obstacles to issues of comfort and security, the Division aims to reduce or eliminate these barriers to provide the best possible visitor experience.

A major milestone this year has been the receipt of an adaptive equipment grant from the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation. This grant will enable us to launch a pilot program that provides all-terrain electric wheelchairs to individuals with mobility impairments to explore our state parks. These pieces of equipment will allow visitors with disabilities to explore trails independently or with a guide, breaking down barriers that have historically limited their access to nature. The pilot program will begin at William B. Umstead and Raven Rock state parks. To support this new adaptive equipment program, Division staff will undertake training on how to assist visitors with disabilities and utilize the new equipment. This includes learning how to operate and maintain the adaptive wheelchairs, as well as understanding how to provide a safe and welcoming environment for all. The Trails Program will facilitate this new adaptive program, including managing requests for the equipment, conducting training for users and state park staff, maintaining a reservation system, and chaperoning users if desired. Providing outreach and education about the program will be a major focus to ensure success, as well as maintaining ongoing partnerships with other state organizations such as Visit NC's Outdoor NC program and the Department of Health and Human Service's Assistive Technology Program and private partnerships with groups such as Waypoint Adventures. As part of the adaptive equipment program, staff will collect feedback from participants through post-visit surveys. These surveys will help the Division assess various factors, such as the ease of using the equipment, the training provided by staff, and the overall visitor experience. By analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data, the Division will aim to continuously improve and expand the program to additional state parks in the future.

This program aligns with the Division's ongoing efforts to make North Carolina's parks not only more physically accessible but also more inclusive and welcoming to all. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 2.4 million North Carolinians live with some form of disability. The Division is excited to provide them with the tools they need to experience the outdoors in new and meaningful ways.

In June 2024, the Division began a new partnership with Waypoint Adventure of Black Mountain, N.C., to provide adaptive recreation programming for visitors with disabilities. Programs such as guided hikes, adaptive kayaking, and other outdoor activities have and will be offered. Waypoint Adventure has provided training to state parks staff in delivering accessible educational programs to individuals with different types of disabilities, allowing them to assist during the programs. Programs have and will continue to be offered at several parks, including Lake James, Lake Norman, Crowders Mountain, and Chimney Rock, where visitors can register for accessible kayaking and hiking experiences. This initiative will help the Division better understand and meet the needs of diverse visitors, while also providing opportunities for feedback that will guide future expansion of adaptive programming.

In July 2024, the General Assembly passed a provision that requires the Division to provide any State Parks Annual Pass at no cost to eligible veterans with disabilities. Though the Annual Pass Program largely focuses on swimming passes and equipment rentals, this new outreach will hopefully provide new outdoor experiences for individuals who have served the country honorably.

The Division is committed to making all parks, trails, and recreational areas more inclusive and accessible. The goal is to ensure that every North Carolinian, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to connect with nature and enjoy the physical and mental health benefits of outdoor recreation.

The adaptive equipment program and new partnerships are just the beginning. As the Division continues to assess their impacts, staff will look for ways to expand the accessibility, both in terms of the equipment available and the locations where it is offered. Additionally, the Division plans to further enhance park facilities, where feasible, to ensure that all visitors feel welcome and able to fully enjoy their experience. With the continued support of grants, community partners, and dedicated staff, the Division will continue to create opportunities for all visitors to explore, learn, and find joy in North Carolina's incredible natural resources.

4.0 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, 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

Per the legislative requirement in Session Law 2023-134, the Saluda Grade State Trail will be authorized as a state trail upon the completion of the purchase of the rail corridor that spans from Zirconia, N.C., to the South Carolina border in Tryon. The Division has worked closely with the Saluda Grade Conservancy (SGC) — especially Conserving Carolina, which is SGC's North Carolina-based member — to facilitate the purchase of the rail corridor. A contract and memorandum of understanding (MOU) were signed between SGC and DNCR for the funds allocated for the purchase. Feasibility studies related to corridor have been conducted, and the final drafts are being prepared. SGC is also under contract with Norfolk Southern for the purchase of the corridor. Lastly, an economic study projecting the regional impacts of constructing the Saluda Grade Trail has been completed, and estimates of the costs of constructing a trail and/or constructing a multipurpose active tourism rail line have been prepared.

Per the legislative requirement in Session Law 2023-134, the Division is studying the feasibility of combining a hiking trail in the former rail corridor with a multipurpose active tourism rail line between the state line and Zirconia, N.C. A multipurpose active tourism rail line primarily hosts trains for scenic train rides, offering unique perspectives of the landscape and the heritage of the region. This study will be complete by December 2024. Conserving Carolina, with Division support, commissioned a feasibility study of constructing a trail within the Saluda Grade corridor.

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 by 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.

In the 2023-24 fiscal year, 101.3 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.

The Division created a designation application for access sites on state trails that are blueways or paddle trails. While the river serves as the trail, trail users must access the river through safe, public access sites. These applications are reviewed by the North Carolina Trails Committee and final approval granted by the Secretary of DNCR, just as with the land-based trail designation applications. In the 2023-24 fiscal year, 8 paddle accesses were designated. Once paddle accesses are designated, the mileage between the designated accesses are recognized as the designated mileage on the paddle trail, presuming that it is a reasonable paddle between adjacent, designated sites. In 2023-24, paddle access designations led to 101.3 miles of river designated. In addition, the Roanoke River State Trail became the first state trail to reach the major milestone of being fully designated.

State Trail	Year Authorized	Planned Mileage	Designated Mileage (as of 8/1/24)	Percent Complete
Dan River State Trail (DNST)	2021	90	59.4	66%
Deep River State Trail (DRST)	Land: 2007 Paddle: 2021	125	Land: 4.3 Paddle: 12.2	Land: 3% Paddle: 10%
East Coast Greenway State Trail (EGST)	2023	795	102.1	13%
Equine State Trail (EQST)	2015	350	0	0%
Fonta Flora State Trail (FFST)	2023	100	34.3	34%
French Broad River State Trail (FBST)	1978	117	0	0%
Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail (HGST)	2000	50	28.1	56%
Haw River State Trail (HRST)	Land: 2017 Paddle: 2023	80	0	0%
Mountains-to-Sea State Trail (MST)	2019	1,400	684.48	49%
Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST)	2019	40	0	0%
Overmountain Victory State Trail (OVST)	2021	225	1.0	0%
Roanoke River State Trail (RRST)	2019	215	215	100%
Wilderness Gateway State Trail (WGST)	1985	170	2.0	1%
Yadkin River State Trail (YRST)	1973	162	139.1	86%

4.0 State Trails and Complete the Trails Program

State Trail	Paddle Accesses Designated
Dan River State Trail (DNST)	12
Deep River State Trail (DRST)	7
French Broad River State Trail (FBST)	0
Haw River State Trail (HRST)	1
Roanoke River State Trail (RRST)	15
Wilderness Gateway State Trail (WGST)	0
Yadkin River State Trail (YRST)	15

Complete the Trails 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 state trails, both because of the funding and the focus on partnerships. 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 identified state trail partners. The partners of the 12 state trails that were authorized prior to the legislation in 2021 (see table on page 7) 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 Trails 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-building funding in the 2023 budget. In addition, the Equine State Trail received some trail development and land acquisition funds. The fund also grew the Division's state trails planning program with a grant manager to assist with MOUs between the Division and the state trail and community partners.

These partners have signed a MOU with DNCR that formalizes the collaboration and cooperation between the Division and the partner organizations. One of the requirements of the MOU is that each partner develop a 5-year plan for their state trail. Each partner has developed and submitted a plan that outlines how the partner plans to spend the funds allocated for their trail; how the capacity building funds will be used; and anticipated partnerships. The plans also outline needed projects in each section of the state trail and further delineates the priorities of those projects. Priorities can and will shift depending on when new opportunities arise, but most of the priority projects are to be started within 5 years of the MOU. Each of the 5-year plans is included in the appendix to this report.

Each partner meets individually with the state trails planners at minimum every other month to share updates and brainstorm solutions to evolving issues.

Capacity-Building Funds

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, required documentation to qualify to contract with North Carolina, and an executed contract. As of fiscal year 2023-24, \$544,500 of the \$742,500 of the 2023 capacity-building funds have been contracted.

Trail Development Funds

The development funds of the Complete the Trails 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. Several projects are also in the beginning stages for completion in the coming years.



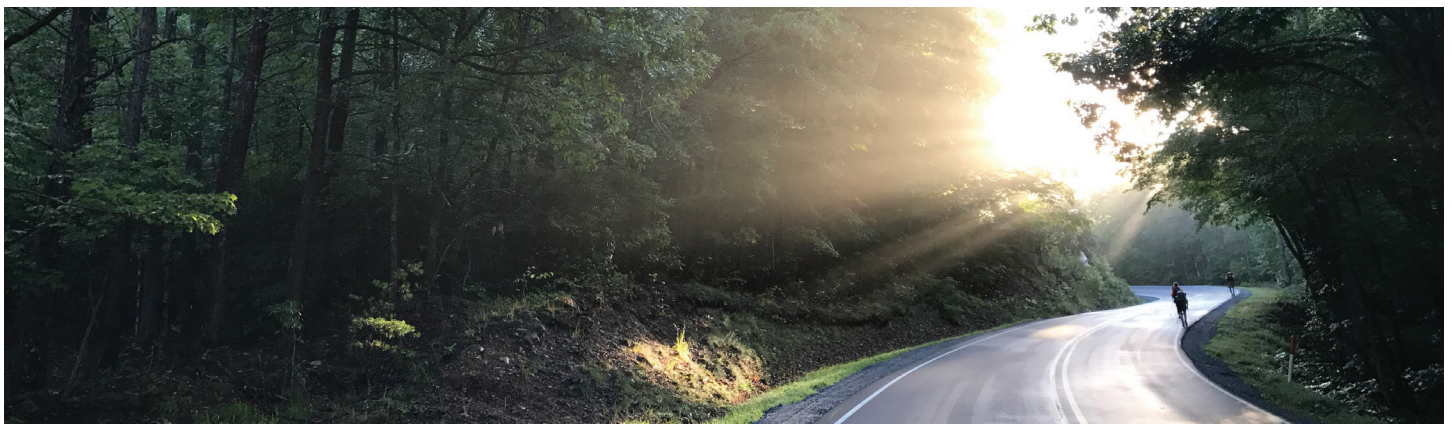
Hammocks Beach State Park

4.O State Trails and Complete the Trails Program

State Trail	Partner	Allocated 2021 CTP Funds	Allocated 2023 CTP Funds
Dan River State Trail (DNST)	Dan River Basin Association	\$507,375	\$100,000
Deep River State Trail (DRST)	Piedmont Land Conservancy	\$860,828 (land only)	\$100,000
East Coast Greenway State Trail (EGST)	East Coast Greenway Alliance	\$4,971,282	\$200,000 for Bertie, Chowan, Perquimans, Pasquotank or Camden counties
Equine State Trail (EQST)*	North Carolina Horse Council	\$0	\$350,000
Fonta Flora State Trail (FFST)	Friends of Fonta Flora State Trail	\$502,150	\$200,000
French Broad River State Trail (FBST)	MountainTrue	\$210,375	\$100,000
Haw River State Trail (HRST)*	Alamance County	\$0	\$0
Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail (HGST)	Conserving Carolina	\$358,678	\$200,000
Mountains-to-Sea State Trail (MST)	Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail	\$5,086,059	\$175,000
Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST)	Blue Ridge Conservancy	\$286,943	\$200,000
Overmountain Victory State Trail (OVST)	OVNCST-Friends	\$1,614,053	\$400,000
Roanoke River State Trail (RRST)	Roanoke River Partners	\$507,375	\$200,000
Wilderness Gateway State Trail (WGST)	Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina	\$1,219,506	\$200,000
Yadkin River State Trail (YRST)	Yadkin Riverkeeper	\$210,375	\$100,000
Total:		\$16,334,999	\$2,525,000

*Indicates state trails that were authorized after the Complete the Trails Program funds were first allocated in 2021

State Trail	Number of Projects	Development Funds Project Contracts
Dan River State Trail (DNST)	1	\$117,365
Deep River State Trail (DRST)	1	\$168,100
East Coast Greenway State Trail (EGST)	1	\$36,666
Fonta Flora State Trail (FFST)	2	\$215,000
French Broad River State Trail (FBST)	8	\$156,334
Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail (HGST)	6	\$27,575
Mountains-to-Sea State Trail (MST)	9	\$678,900
Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST)	1	\$286,943
Overmountain Victory State Trail (OVST)	5	\$365,697
Roanoke River State Trail (RRST)	1	\$364,650
Wilderness Gateway State Trail (WGST)	2	\$47,000
Yadkin River State Trail (YRST)	0	\$0
Total:	37	\$2,464,230



Mountains-to-Sea State Trail at Hanging Rock State Park

4.O State Trails and Complete the Trails Program



Mountains-to-Sea State Trail at Falls Lake State Recreation Area

Land Acquisition Grants

A second round of land acquisition grants closed in March 2024. The Division received a total of 18 applications requesting \$6,632,334 with a match of \$43,880,919. The applications represent a total of 6,863.7 acres. Awards have been recommended to the Secretary of DNCR.

Partnership with NCDOT

State trails were instrumental in the Great Trails State Plan released by the N.C. Department of Transportation (NCDOT) in 2022. The Division continues to work closely with NCDOT in their planning efforts related to the plan. This includes partnering to provide trail user access on bridge replacement projects that are along state trail routes. The Division has begun a conversation with NCDOT to provide signage on bridges over rivers that serve as paddle trails; NCDOT has already approved signage requested by Chatham County for the Haw River State Trail. This signage will be essential to increase safety and information along paddle trail routes. Additionally, the Division partnered with NCDOT on their committee to develop guidelines that would permit trail construction within the rights-of-way of roads in North Carolina.



Northern Peaks State Trail

Branding and Promotion

The Division has worked hard to develop consistent branding and promotion for all the state trails. These efforts resulted in an original design for a blaze for each state trail. While blazes are primarily used to mark a trail's path through the woods, these designs have also been incorporated into trailhead signage, mapping, and safety signage for paddle trails. Each of the designs incorporated input and approval from the partner organization. They are included in the following section that outlines the status of each state trail. Additionally, the Division's Trails Program website bolsters content relating to state trails throughout the year. The Division has developed a licensing agreement that enables partners to use the blaze designs on merchandise and other promotional materials.



Mountains-to-Sea State Trail at Jockey's Ridge State Park

5.0 5-Year Plan Summaries



Dan River State Trail (DNST)

The Dan River crosses the North Carolina and Virginia border eight times on its 214-mile journey from the Blue Ridge Mountains to Kerr Lake. Within North Carolina, 90 miles of the river were authorized as a state trail in 2021. The Dan River Basin Association (DRBA) is the partner for the DNST. This trail will be a blueway (paddle trail), requiring public accesses every 5-10 miles.

Excerpts from the DRBA 5-Year Plan:

Capacity-Building Fund Projects:

- Provide staff support
- Hire part-time DNST assistant
- Purchase ESRI (geographic information system) materials
- Purchase fieldwork tools and supplies
- Update website
- Conduct river safety information sessions
- Develop promotional information, volunteer recognition and events

Priority CTP Projects:

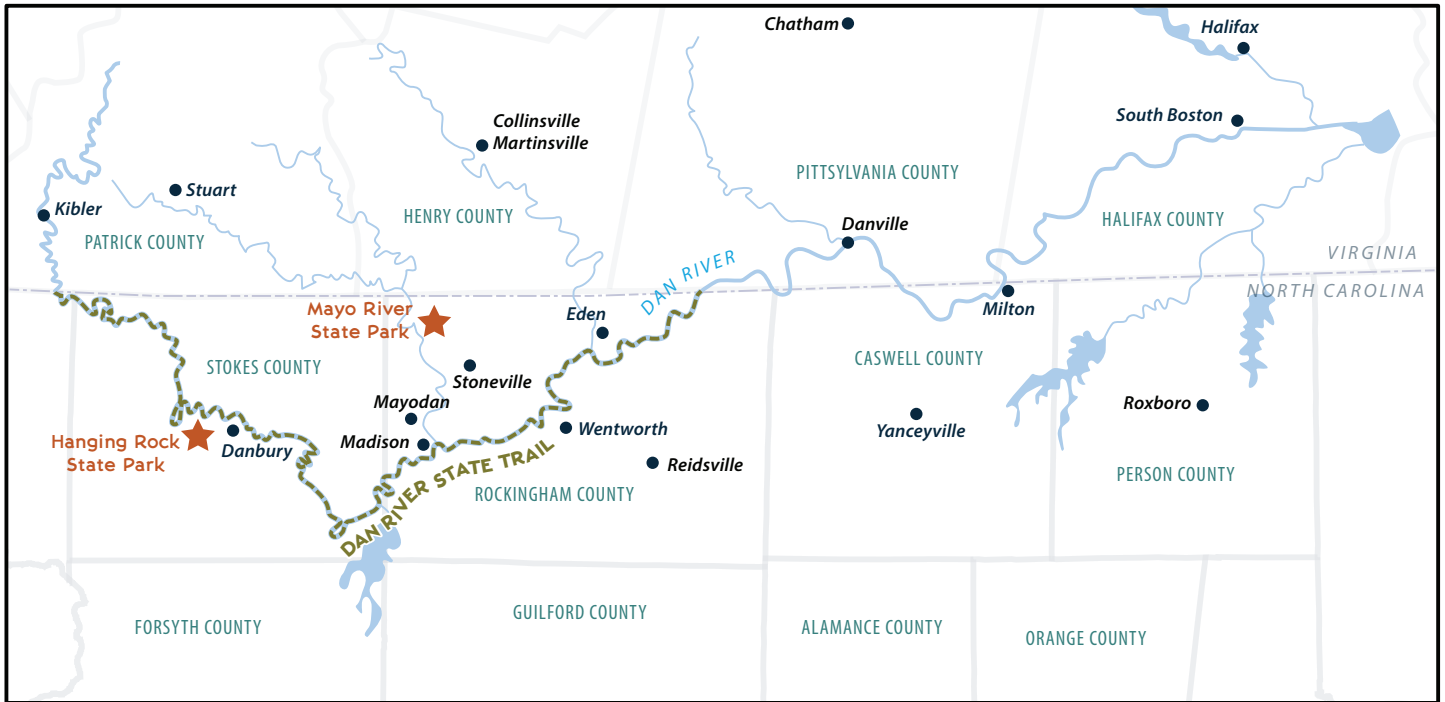
- Develop master plan for DNST
- Renovate and designate current public accesses
- Create signage plan for Stokes County
- Acquire land
- Service Settle Bridge Access permanent easement and/or purchase
- Complete priority accesses identified on master plan

Estimated cost for all priority projects	\$430,000
Estimated cost for all projects	\$665,000
CTP allocation	\$507,375

2024 Accomplishments:

- The annual Dan River Cleanup collected over 500 pounds of trash along the river and even saved a turtle! Over 30 participants enjoyed a paddle while taking care of the Dan River.
- DNST is currently in the final drafting of a master plan for the trail. Over 300 participants responded on the online survey and over 100 joined for in-person discussion. Projects are being prioritized and are listed to match the 5-year plan.
- 60 participants were able to enjoy a professional, American Canoe Association instructor course on beginner kayak safety, as part of the Division's annual kayaking 101 classes for National Safe Boating Week. Students learned injury prevention skills, including planning ahead, best paddling practices, and the importance of a lifejacket. Students were given "safety bags" that included key safety items such as hats, maps, whistles, and waterproof bags.
- DRBA, in partnership with other local communities, completed safety signage to be attached to local river accesses that share important tips about being on the river.
- Rack cards were created to share key safety tips with the public in varying ways. These cards are currently being translated to Spanish to assist with language barriers.
- DNST was a key participant in Rockingham County's Creating Outdoor Economies Program (CORE) through the North Carolina Department of Commerce. The local rivers and natural beauty were an important asset to the plan's development.
- Rockingham County participated in Visit NC's Trail Town Program; DNST was listed as an important feature and an article about the local state trail was drafted for the website.
- Partnerships with the town of Madison continued on the N.C. Highway 704 Access redevelopment. This will include an important accessible beach area and a ramped exit to the Dan River to complement the upstream Madison River Park.

5.0 5-Year Plan Summaries



LEGEND

- - - Planned Trail
- County Line
- - - State Line
- ★ State Park
- Municipality
- ~ Water



Blaze installation

Master plan meeting

Safety and education class



Deep River State Trail (DRST)

The Deep River State Trail was originally authorized in 2007 as, at the time, the only land and water state trail. The hiking/ biking and paddle trails will each be approximately 125 miles long. The trail starts near Jamestown, in Guilford County, continues through Randolph and Moore counties, forms the border between Lee and Chatham counties and ends at the confluence with the Haw River at Mermaid Point — where the rivers form the Cape Fear River. Piedmont Land Conservancy (PLC) is the partner for the DRST. Since 2007, Randolph County has led efforts with notable progress in development,

branding and promotion through the local tourism development authority. This year, there was significant coordination among all the jurisdictions along the entire trail and work on projects in the 5-year plan.

Excerpts from the PLC 5-Year Plan:

Capacity Building Fund Projects:

- Trail coordinator position
- Mapping
- Project coordination

Priority CTP Projects:

- Complete the trail from Franklinville to Sapona
- Complete the trail from Sapona to N.C. Textile Museum, including water access for the blueway

Complete the Trails Fund Project:

Franklinville to Sapona Section:

- Two trailheads
- Engineering, permitting and acquiring construction access for the Bush Creek bridge
- Two miles of trail construction

Other Projects:

- Construction of Sandy Creek bridge
- Clean-up event that picked up 600 pounds of trash

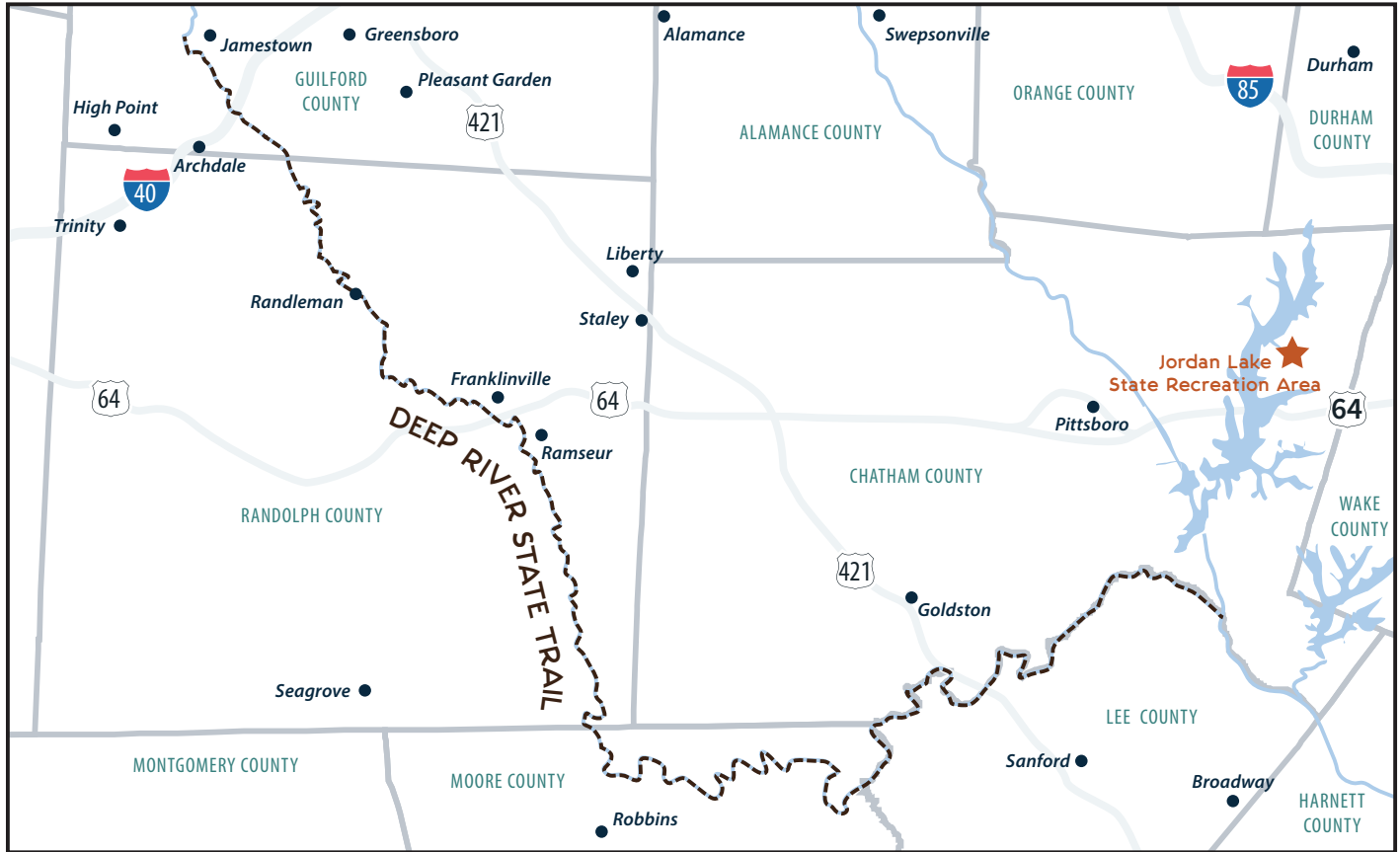
Estimated cost for all priority projects	Over \$1 million
Estimated cost for all projects	Over \$1 million
CTP allocation	\$860,828

2024 Accomplishments:

- The Deep River State Trail Steering Committee met regularly over the year.
- The Sandy Creek Bridge connecting Franklinville and Ramseur was completed. This project leveraged Randolph County funds with a federal Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grant. The ribbon cutting for the bridge/trail/trailhead is planned for Oct. 18, 2024, in conjunction with Great Trails State Day on Oct. 19. This project, which connects the Franklinville and Ramseur Rail Trail sections of the Deep River State Trail for 3.25 miles, is the top priority in the Deep River Trail Conceptual Plan adopted in 2017.
- DRST Signage on U.S. 64: NCDOT agreed to allow trailhead signage on U.S. 64 for an expanded trailhead near Sandy Creek Bridge. The Encroachment Agreement application was submitted early August 2024. The city of Asheboro, which designed the signage, will fabricate and install it at no cost.
- Ramseur has partnered with the conservation organization Unique Places to Save to leverage N.C. Land and Water Fund and Parks and Recreation Trust Fund grants, with an appropriation from the General Assembly, to extend the DRST land trail, provide a trailhead, and install a river access. These improvements are expected to be completed in spring 2025.
- DRST Steering Committee: DRST Day sponsored by Hometown Strong and PLC was May 18. The paddle near Sanford in the morning was rescheduled to June 8 due to high water levels. Both the hike/walk at Franklinville to the Sandy Creek Bridge construction site and June paddle were a success with a total of 45 participants.
- High Point Blueway: The city of High Point used a technical assistance grant to test the feasibility of a blueway from Deep River Road and Penny Road to City Lake Marina. The city of High Point will hold public meetings fall 2024 and construct the access in 2025.
- High Point University Trailhead: A paved parking lot was completed for Deep River Road access on the High Point/ Deep River Greenway.

5.O 5-Year Plan Summaries

- NCDOT Great Trails State Implementation Report: NCDOT completed its GTS Implementation Report, which has six equity projects and four state trail projects, including two for the Deep River State Trail: a loop trail connecting Randleman, Randleman Lake and Randleman High School in Randolph County, and Moncure to Rocky River in Chatham County.
- **Great Trails State:** PLC hosted the 2nd Annual First Day Outdoors event at Franklinville Rail/Faith Rock Trails on the Deep River State Trail on Jan. 1. PLC also participated in the Year of the Trail celebration on March 11, where DRST was mentioned several times. Representatives from DRST attended the Great Trails State Conference in September 2024. Mary Joan Pugh was awarded the Year of The Trail Spirit Award for the many trail events mostly on DRST. PLC also continued to participate in Great Trails State Coalition meetings including monthly executive committee, steering committee, legislative committee, and cities, towns, and counties for trails meetings.



LEGEND

- Planned Trail
- County Line
- Municipality
- ★ State Park
- Water





East Coast Greenway State Trail (EGST)

The East Coast Greenway State Trail is the North Carolina portion of a 3,000-mile greenway planned from Maine to Florida. In North Carolina, the EGST will be 795 miles long and shaped like a large “V” — with one arm passing through Raleigh, Durham, and Fayetteville (the spine) and the coastal section connecting Greenville and Jacksonville. The segments will meet in Wilmington. The East Coast Greenway Alliance (ECGA) is the partner for the EGST.

Excerpts from the PLC 5-Year Plan:

Capacity Building Funds:

- Staff time
- Travel and meetings

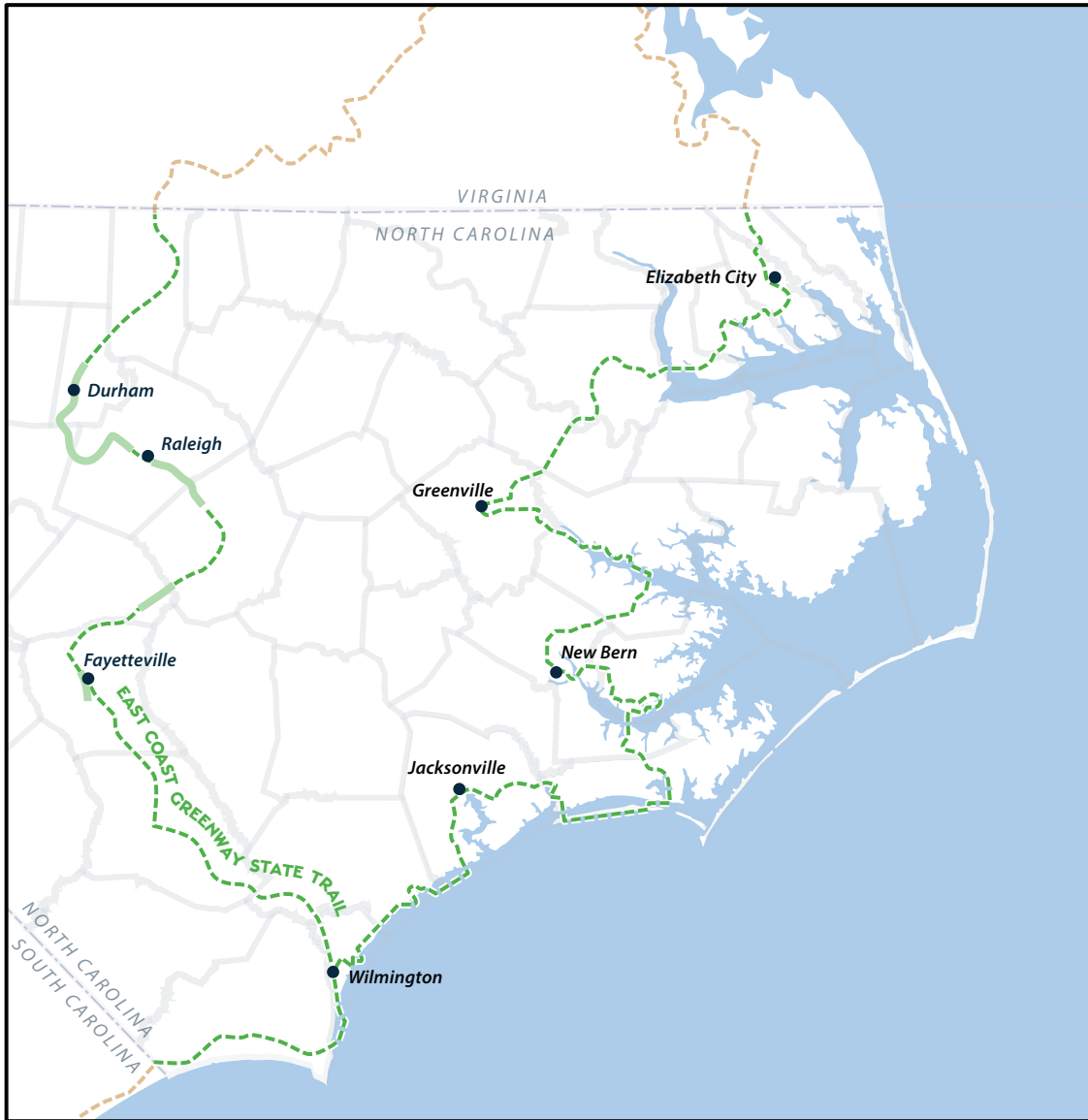
Priority CTP Projects:

- Planning and feasibility studies
- Neuse River Trail, Phase 2
- Kure Beach Island Greenway
- Pine Knoll Shores/Bogue Banks Path
- Dismal Swamp Canal Trail extension

Estimated cost for top 5 priority projects	\$5 million
Estimated cost for 38 projects	\$933 million
CTP allocation	\$4,971,282

2024 Accomplishments

- ECGA worked with local partners, state agencies and lead consultants to conduct four feasibility studies (predominantly begun summer 2023 and ending fall 2024) along the ECG route across the state: in Granville County (Oxford to Virginia state line), Johnston County (Smithfield to Benson), New Hanover County (Kure Beach to Fort Fisher), and Pitt/Beaufort counties (Greenville to Washington). These feasibility studies included virtual and in-person meetings with stakeholders, steering committees, and public. As each of these studies are being finalized and adopted by local jurisdictions, including a preferred alignment and implementation plan, it creates a roadmap for delivering new segments of the East Coast Greenway State Trail. These will be in addition to four other recently completed feasibility studies along the EGST route.
- ECGA submitted two scopes of work for Complete the Trails Program: one for a matching grant for the Durham-to-Roxboro Rail Trail and the other for a portion of the Wilson’s Mills segment of the Neuse River Trail extension in Johnston County. The Durham-to-Roxboro Rail Trail feasibility study is fully funded and expected to start in the fourth quarter of 2024. The Neuse River Trail extension Wilson’s Mills segment, of which the CTP scope is being amended, is also fully funded and is expected to go under design also in the fourth quarter of 2024, with construction expected to start in 2025.
- ECGA also submitted a \$1 million land acquisition grant through the CTP for the Durham-to-Roxboro Rail Trail. The acquisition of the corridor is in process, with a strong coalition of public, nonprofit, and community partners to deliver a flagship trail project.
- ECGA continued to advance new EGST segments in working with local public and community partners, including working with: the Western Carteret County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan to identify EGST route as a central spine in the regional system; the town of Butner to identify a possible segment for development from the completed feasibility study; the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail on a potential Onslow County Rail-with-Trail project; the town of White Lake on extending the existing White Lake Trail; Pender County to develop segments for both the spine and coastal routes, including pursuing funding for a priority segment from the N.C. Highway 210 feasibility study; the city of Raleigh on planning the Dix Strollway, which would close a longstanding critical gap in the EGST route through the Triangle region; Johnston County on advancing next segments along the Neuse River Trail extension from Wilson’s Mills towards Selma and Smithfield; Camden County and the Albemarle Rural Planning Organization to identify next steps for the Dismal Swamp Canal Trail Extension; Fayetteville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to identify connections to the Triangle region and potential for Great Trails State Plan implementation project; New Bern MPO to identify next steps for Great Trails State Plan implementation project; and several other local partners to continue planning and developing potential EGST projects.



LEGEND

- - - Planned Trail
- Existing Trail
- County Line
- Municipality
- State Line
- ~ Water





Equine State Trail (EQST)

Authorized in 2023, the Equine (ee-kwine) State Trail entails an equestrian (ee-kweh-stree-uhn) trail that loops through Chatham, Cumberland, Harnett, Hoke, Lee, Montgomery, Moore, and Richmond counties, and has opportunities to connect Jordan Lake State Recreation Area, Weymouth Woods Sandhills Nature Preserve, Carvers Creek State Park, and Raven Rock State Park. The North Carolina Horse Council is the partner for EQST.

Upon completion, the Equine State Trail will provide ample mileage for long-distance and multi-day trail rides. This is critical for equestrians across the state due to the speed of a horse's gait, and it will help fill a gap in the North Carolina state parks system. The trail will allow for opportunities of equestrian camping along the route, as well as support a large variety of equestrian recreation.

Excerpts from the N.C. Horse Council 5-Year Plan:

Capacity Building Funds:

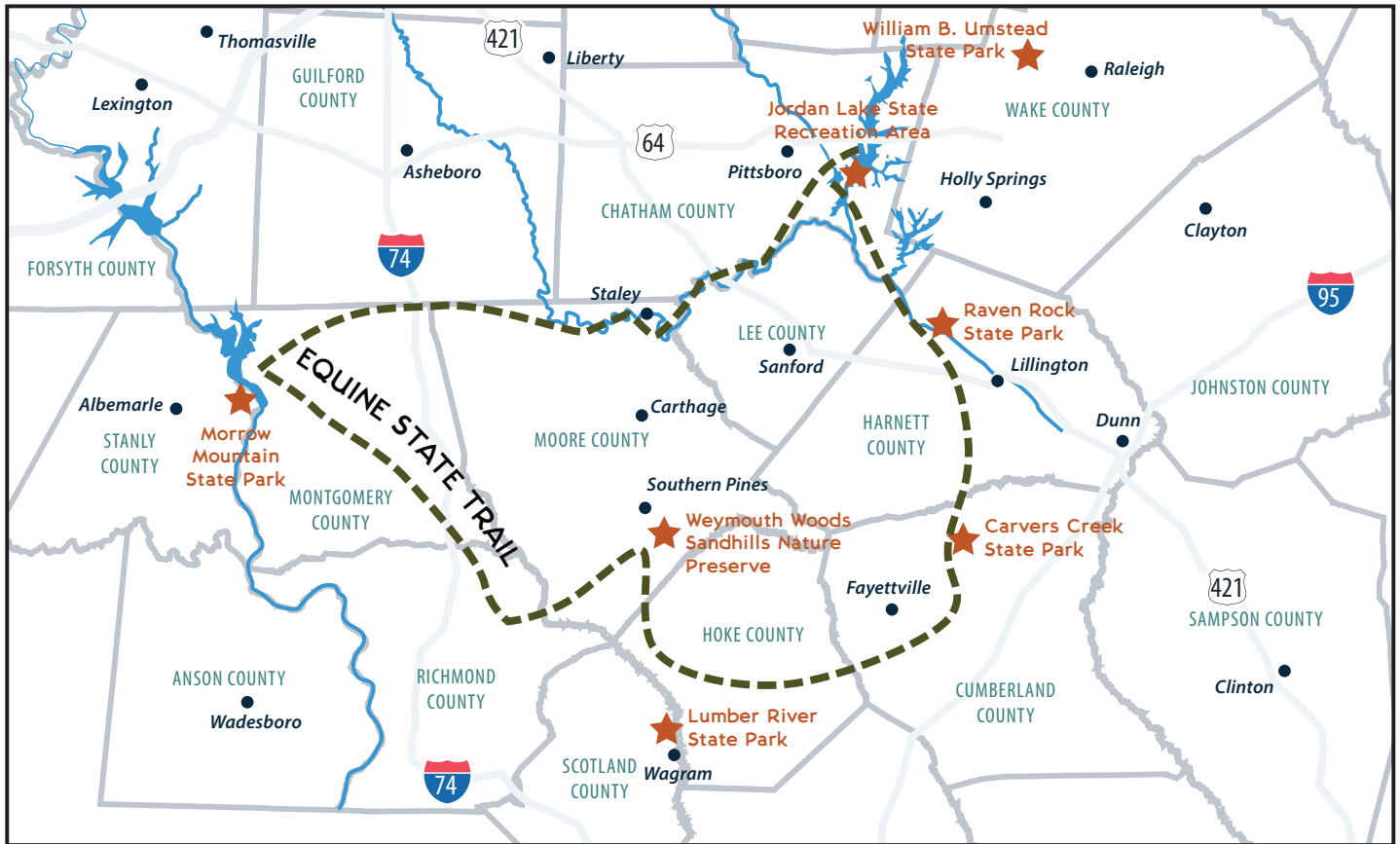
- Staff time

Priority CTP Projects:

The current priority for the N.C. Horse Council is to complete the master plan for the Equine State Trail. This will inform the development of priority CTP projects.

2024 Accomplishments

- The N.C. Horse Council signed the MOU to officially become the partner organization for the EQST.
- The group also created the blaze design for the state trail.



LEGEND

- Planned Trail
- ★ State Park
- County Line
- Municipality
- Roads
- Water





Fonta Flora State Trail (FFST)

Authorized in 2015, the Fonta Flora State Trail will connect Morganton to Asheville with a hiking and biking trail. Included in the trail is a loop around Lake James. The trail will traverse Lake James State Park, part of Pisgah National Forest, and Fonta Flora County Park in Burke County. It will also connect to the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail and State Trail and the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail.

It is named after the local settlement of Black sharecroppers, whose homes were flooded when the Catawba River was dammed to create Lake James. The feather icon of this state trail was inspired by the national bird, the bald eagle. Artwork incorporating the feather has been used along the trail and at the trailheads, particularly in Burke County. When it is complete, the Fonta Flora State Trail will be approximately 100 miles long. The Friends of Fonta Flora State Trail (F3ST) is the partner for the FFST.

Excerpts from the F3ST 5-Year Plan:

Capacity-Building Funds:

F3ST is using their capacity-building funds to pay approximately 40% of the salary of a full-time executive director over fiscal years 2022-23 and 2023-24. It is only through the support of their members and local municipalities that they can complete this full-time position funding.

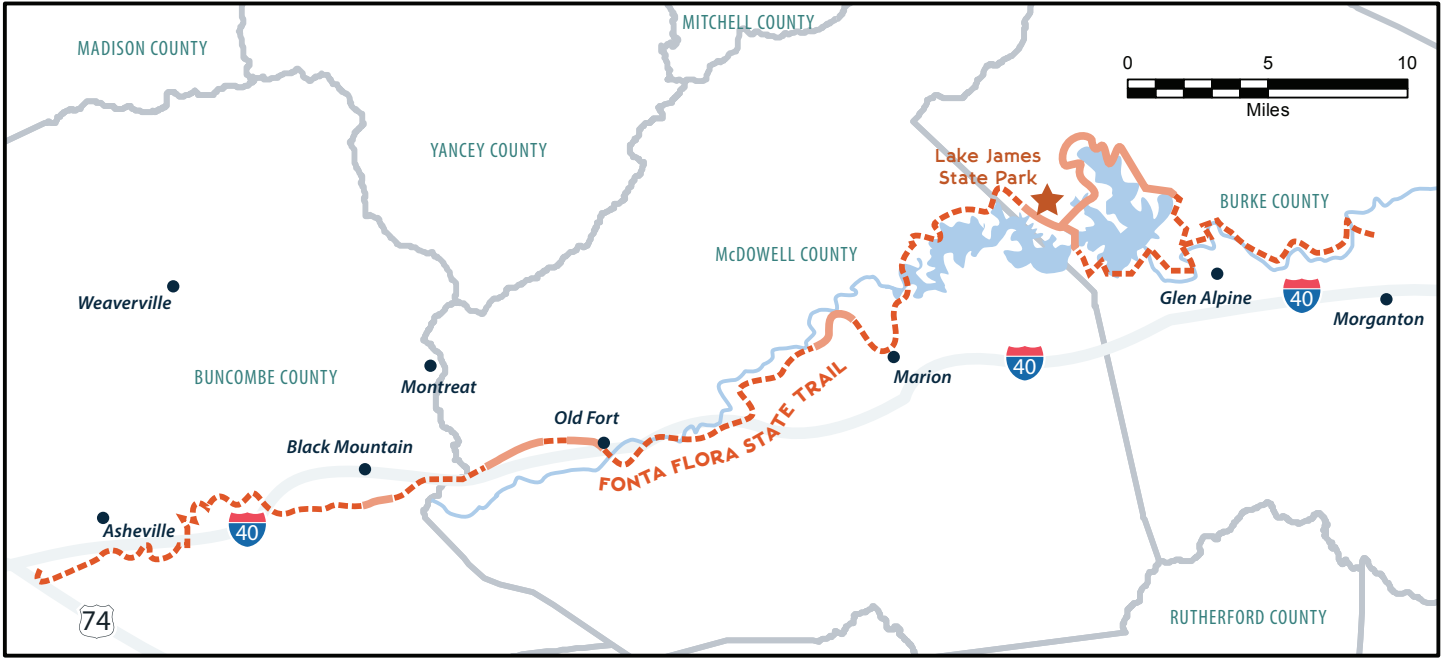
Priority CTP Projects:

- Canal Bridge Project: 0.2 mile (Partnership with the Overmountain Victory North Carolina State Trail-Friends)
- Commerce Street to Copper Ridge Trailhead: 1.27 miles (Partnership with the Foothills Conservancy of N.C. for Easements and Acquisition) (Dogwood Health Trust Feasibility Study)
- Copper Ridge to Point Lookout: 0.65 mile (Partnership with the U.S. Forest Service) (Dogwood Health Trust Feasibility Study)
- River Ridge Complex Project: 1.29 miles (Partnership with Asheville Unpaved and city of Asheville)
- 1780/Enclave: 2.2 miles (Partnership with OVNCST-Friends)

Estimated cost for all priority projects	\$700,000
Estimated cost for all projects	\$2.7 million
CTP allocation	\$502,150

2024 Accomplishments

- F3ST completed the N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund project for the Old Fort Trailhead and Park.
- Working with the town of Old Fort, F3ST received \$89,050 in CTP funding in September 2024 to acquire land that will allow for an entrance road to the trailhead for the FFST at Arrowhead Park in Old Fort.
- Working with the FCNC, the city of Marion, and McDowell County, F3ST received \$106,979 in CTP funding in February 2024 to acquire land for a trailhead at Greenlee Park in Marion.
- Working with Burke County, DNCR, National Park Service, and Overmountain Victory State Trail, F3ST requested \$150,000 in CTP funding to widen the Canal Bridge along Lake James, which will provide safe passage for both Fonta Flora State Trail and the Overmountain Victory State Trail recreational users.
- Working with Burke County and OVNCST-Friends, F3ST requested \$65,000 in CTP funding for a design and engineering study for the remainder of the FFST in Burke County.
- F3ST was awarded a \$20,000 capacity grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission.
- F3ST was also awarded a \$10,500 Creating New Economies Fund grant from The Conservation Fund.



LEGEND

- Existing Trail
- - - Planned Trail
- County Line
- Municipality
- ★ State Park
- ~ Water



Old Fort Trailhead and Park groundbreaking



French Broad River State Trail (FBST)

The French Broad River State Trail was established in 1987 on the third oldest river in the world. The 117-mile blueway flows north from Rosman, N.C., to the Tennessee border, through Buncombe (including the heart of western North Carolina’s largest city, Asheville), Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania counties. MountainTrue is the partner for the FBST.

Excerpts from the MountainTrue 5-Year Plan:

Capacity-Building Funds:

MountainTrue hired a paddle trail recreation manager to oversee the implementation of the state funds, as well as organize and coordinate all aspects of managing the paddle trail. This includes coordination with partners, business and marketing planning, reservation system coordination, upkeep on access points and campsites, paddle trail guidebook management, and website upgrades.

These staff-focused funds have been matched with local sources to include the Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority, MADE X MTNS, paddle trail campsite and map sales, sponsorships, private donations, and other grants.

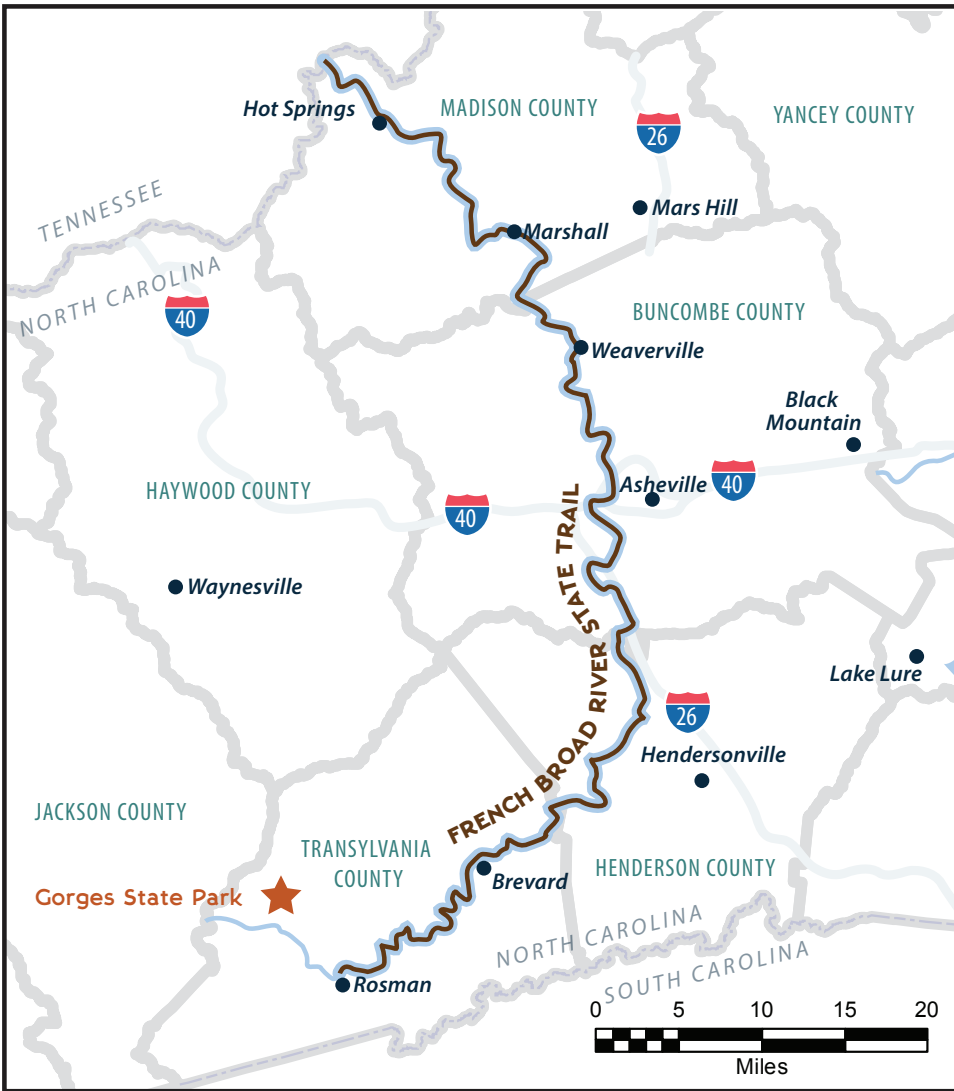
Priority CTP Projects:

- Implement river access signage
- Complete improvements to five campsites
- Implement Transylvania County new river access (leverage funds from Transylvania County TDA, Conserving Carolina, and N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission)
- Clear Mud Creek of debris jams and work on signage and new river access points
- Complete improvements to Stackhouse access

Estimated cost for top 5 priority projects	\$177,000
Estimated cost for all projects	\$342,000
CTP allocation	\$210,375

2024 Accomplishments

- MountainTrue has continued to employ a French Broad Paddle Trail Manager who is overseeing the stewardship and administration of the French Broad Paddle Trail, including routine maintenance, site-specific projects, events, fundraising, and coordination with the Division on behalf of their agreement in relation to the French Broad River State Trail.
- A new website has been launched at frenchbroadpaddle.com, which better outlines opportunities to access the French Broad Paddle Trail and contains several resources for planning a trip, including flow and gauge information; a web map with access points, campsites, mile markers, and hazards such as fallen trees, construction projects, and dams; a new campsite booking platform; and other helpful pages.
- A new print map is in the works, with completion estimated for spring of 2025.
- Many workdays and celebratory floats were hosted, including several river clean-ups supported in-part by local TDA funding, and no-cost guided river trips with communities of color through a MADE X MTNS grant.



LEGEND

-  Trail
-  County Line
-  State Line
-  Municipality
-  State Park
-  Water



Picnic table and fire ring

5.0 5-Year Plan Summaries



Haw River State Trail (HRST)

The Haw River State Trail is both a paddle and land trail that will connect Haw River State Park to Jordan Lake State Recreation Area. Each component of this trail will be approximately 80 miles long. Alamance County is the partner for HRST.

Excerpts from Alamance County's 5-Year Plan:

Capacity-Building Funds:

The Haw River Trail coordinator position is funded by Alamance County, so the HRST steering committee is using the capacity funds as match for several grants. These grants, if approved, will provide signage on all bridges along the length of the river and fund a master plan for the entire trail.

Priority CTP Projects:

Currently, the HRST has not received any trail development funds through CTP.

- Conduct planning for Guilford and Rockingham counties to identify paddle access locations and potential land trail routes
- Provide pedestrian access at N.C. Highway 70 in Alamance County
- Develop paddle access on Division property (Pegg tract) along the Lower Haw
- Install signs on highway bridges along the length of the Haw River to aid paddlers in determining their location

2024 Accomplishments:

- Alamance County established a steering committee with representation from every county and municipality along the trail corridor.
- The first paddle access in Chatham County was designated.
- Alamance County received a grant to install signage on all NCDOT bridges spanning the river in Chatham County.
- Alamance County received a grant to install electronic bulletin boards focused on safety on the river for paddle accesses in Chatham County.
- Trail coordinator presented at the Great Trails State Conference.



LEGEND

-  Planned Trail
-  State Park

-  County Line
-  Municipality

 Water





Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail (HGST)

The Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail will connect with the Wilderness Gateway State Trail near Buffalo Creek Park, and will meander through Rutherford, Henderson, and Buncombe counties to connect to Chimney Rock State Park, Conserving Carolina’s Upper Hickory Nut Gorge trails, and the town of Lake Lure’s Buffalo Creek Park. Conserving Carolina is the partner for the HGST.

Excerpts from the Conserving Carolina 5-Year Plan:

Capacity-Building Funds:

- Paid staff time to support Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail development during 2022 and 2023.
- Deliverables include trail and trailhead maintenance and management, state trail designation application development, grant management and landowner outreach.

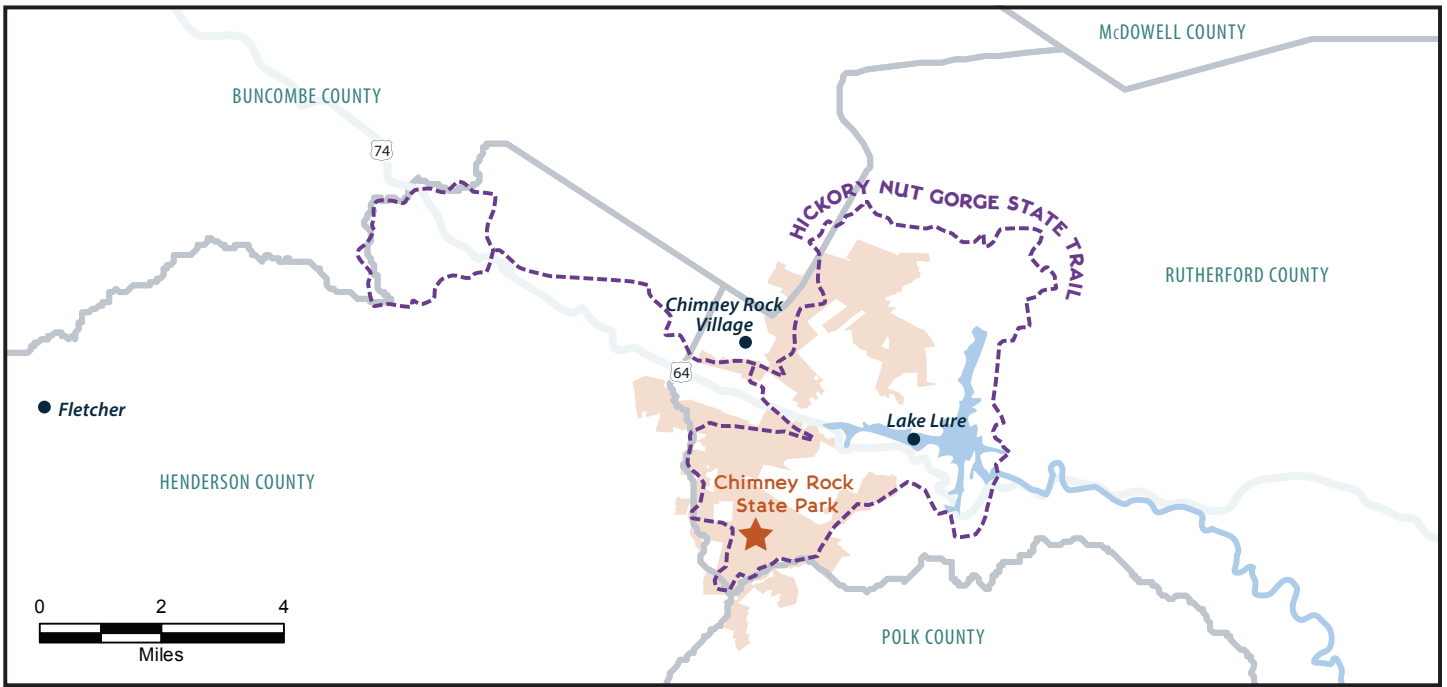
Priority CTP Projects:

- Purchase Youngs Mountain trailhead parcels and trail easements
- Construct 1.5 miles trail on Youngs Mountain, including signage and blazing
- Construct new Youngs Mountain trailhead
- Acquire additional tracts for Youngs Mountain Trail
- Construct 2 miles trail on Youngs Mountain Phase 3 to connect to Buffalo Creek Park/Weed Patch Mountain Trailhead

Estimated cost for top 5 priority projects	\$1 million
Estimated cost for all projects	\$1.6 million
CTP allocation	\$358,678

2024 Accomplishments:

- Conserving Carolina was awarded a land acquisition grant to purchase 21 acres of land adjacent to Lake Lure’s Buffalo Creek Park. This parcel is part of the land needed to link Weed Patch Mountain Trail with Youngs Mountain Trail.
- Conserving Carolina worked with the Carolina Climbers Coalition on the design and layout of the Upper Boulders Trail extension through the newly acquired property.
- Four new segments of HGST totaling 10.5 miles were designated by the Secretary of DNCR.
- Conserving Carolina, with assistance from the Rock Crushers Trail Crew and AmeriCorps Project Conserve members, replaced and installed rock steps at Youngs Mountain, Trombatore, Bearwallow and Strawberry Gap. In addition, AmeriCorps Summer of Service members assisted with remediating damage caused by cows to the Wildcat Rock Trail. All of this trail work was paired with ongoing vegetation management.
- Conserving Carolina hosted a guided hike on the Youngs Mountain Trail as part of the 2023 Fall Hiking Series.
- Rutherford Trail Collaborative members installed HGST blazes on all designated sections of the Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail to commemorate the Year of the Trail. Chimney Rock State Park held a special sunset hike to commemorate the state trail designation.



LEGEND

- - - Planned Trail
- County Line
- ★ State Park
- Municipality
- ~ Water





Mountains-to-Sea State Trail (MST)

The Mountains-to-Sea State Trail, or the MST, is North Carolina’s flagship state trail. The notion of a trail extending across the width of North Carolina was proposed in 1977 by Howard Lee, who was then the Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Natural Resources and Community Development. In 2000, the MST became a state trail and a unit of the state parks system. In 2017, the General Assembly authorized a major addition to the MST: the Coastal Crescent route that traverses through southeastern North Carolina. The Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail (FMST) is the partner for the MST.

Excerpts from the FMST 5-Year Plan:

Capacity-Building Funds:

FMST is using the capacity-building funds to add a new staff person to help increase organizational visibility, help manage and expand our volunteer efforts, sustain and grow our membership, build relationships with stakeholders in key areas and organize celebratory events when new sections of trail open.

Priority CTP Projects:

- Bushy Lake State Natural Area: land acquisition and new trail construction could add close to 18 miles of new trail
- Dan River: trail development from Danbury to Oak Ridge
- North River Wetlands: land acquisition and trail construction
- Holly Shelter Game Land: land acquisition and trail construction
- Hanging Rock to Danbury Trail: new trail to connect State Park to downtown Danbury

Estimated cost for top 5 priority projects	\$3.1 million
Estimated cost for all projects	\$7.8 million
CTP allocation	\$5,086,059

2024 Accomplishments:

- FMST built and installed a new eastern terminus marker for the MST at Jockey’s Ridge State Park and hosted a community celebration ribbon cutting event.
- FMST built and opened a new 1-mile section of the MST at Bentonville Battlefield State Historic Site in Johnston County and hosted a ribbon cutting event. This new section has been officially designated MST by the Secretary of DNCR.
- FMST created a master plan for the MST extension at Holly Shelter Game Land.
- FMST volunteers rerouted a badly eroded and unsustainable part of the MST in Linville Gorge.
- FMST hosted their annual event, the Gathering of Friends, in Black Mountain.
- A community celebration and ribbon cutting for the MST was hosted in Roseboro.
- Progress continued on planning and design for a nearly 200-foot bridge over Turnbull Creek in Bladen Lakes State Forest.
- A portion of the MST on U.S. Forest Service roads in the Croatan National Forest was rerouted to provide an improved hiker experience.
- Trail progress continued in and around Elkin.
- FMST represented the MST at dozens of festivals and events across the state.
- FMST updated all MST trail guides to ensure accurate information for hikers.
- New trail was built for future MST in Alamance County.
- FMST created signage and online information to highlight the historic Fish Dam Road between Hillsborough and Falls Lake and its relationship to the MST.
- FMST finalized and signed a memorandum of agreement for trail at the Pondberry Bay Preserve with the N.C. Plant Conservation Program and Sampson County.
- Kiosk Construction Manual for new standard MST kiosk design was finalized.
- New kiosk, bollards, and access gate were installed at trailhead to Turnbull Creek Educational State Forest.
- FMST designed and installed public art panels along the MST in Roseboro.
- FMST developed plan for trailhead kiosk panels at all Falls Lake trailheads.
- The “Trail” webpage was revised on the FMST website to provide additional guidance on available MST informational resources.

5.O 5-Year Plan Summaries



LEGEND

- Existing Trail
- - - Planned Trail
- County Line
- Municipality
- ★ N.C. State Park





Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST)

Northern Peaks State Trail will connect Boone, Elk Knob State Park, and Mount Jefferson State Natural Area. The planning corridor is approximately 40 miles long, beginning in Boone and ending at Mount Jefferson in Ashe County. Blue Ridge Conservancy (BRC) is the partner for NPST.

Excerpts from the BRC 5-Year Plan:

Capacity-Building Funds:

BRC increased staff capacity to plan, design, construct and maintain the NPST. A new trails staff position was created by leveraging additional funds with the capacity-building grant. This staff position is the main contact for the NPST and will partner with the Division; N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission; N.C. Plant Conservation Program; Ashe and Watauga counties; the town of West Jefferson, Jefferson, and Boone; and private landowners to create the NPST. The trails coordinator assists with biological study, general trail alignment and management of trail construction projects.

Priority CTP Projects:

- Construct 4 miles of new trail, rehabilitate 2 miles of existing trail at Elk Knob State Park and construct one new parking area
- Construct 8 miles of new trail at Three Top Mountain Game Land, upgrade two existing parking areas and construct one new parking area. CTP funds must be leveraged to help with trail construction and parking facilities.
- Land acquisition along the proposed trail corridor from Snake Mountain to Mount Jefferson. CTP funds will be leveraged to help with land acquisitions.

Estimated cost for all priority projects	\$6.2 million
Estimated cost for all projects	over \$6.2 million
CTP allocation	\$286,943

2024 Accomplishments:

Paddy Mountain:

- BRC secured PARTF grant and directed legislative allocation for Paddy Mountain Park.
- A groundbreaking ceremony was held for the beginning of construction.
- Trail construction is well underway with an anticipated completion date of October 2024.
- BRC held an invasives removal day.
- BRC is partnering with Carolina Timberwork on a timber frame welcome sign to PMP (CTW is donating sign, valued at \$10,000 to \$20,000).
- Keep Ashe Beautiful is donating \$2,000 for bear-proof trash cans at PMP.

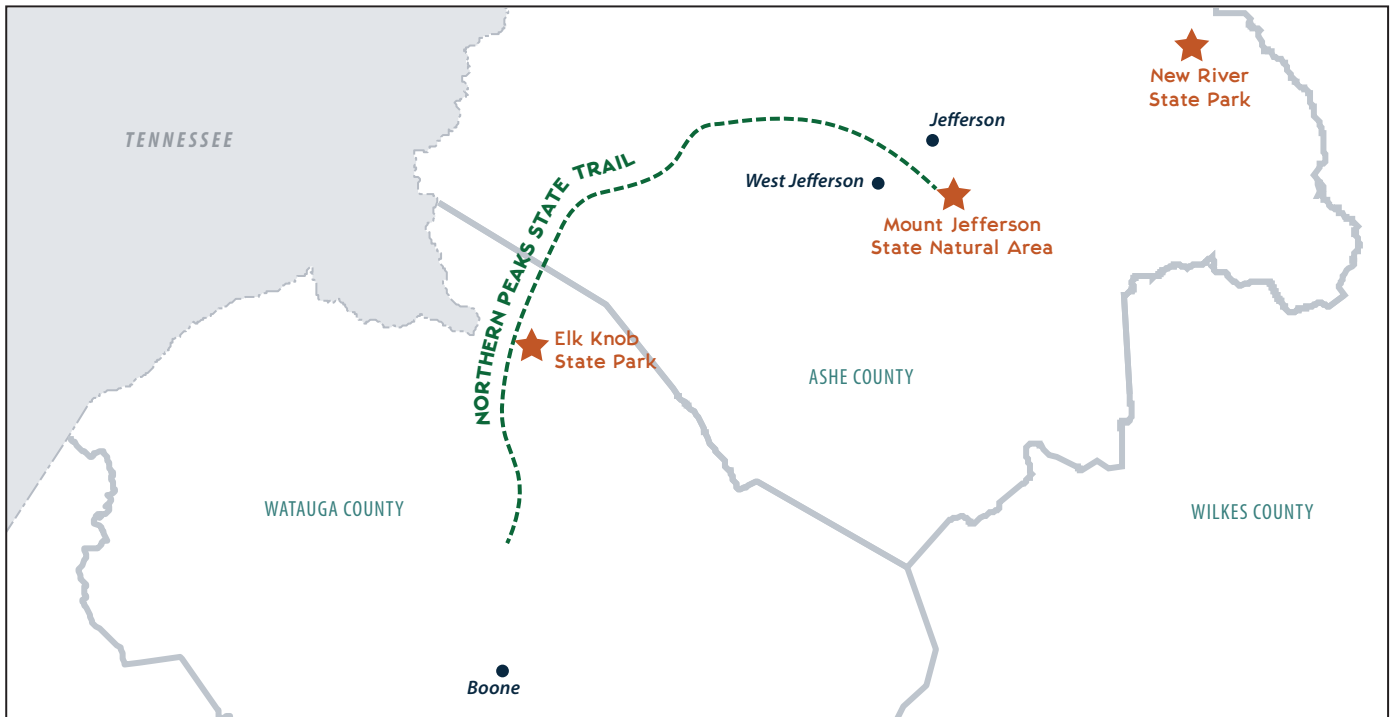
Three Top Mountain:

- Design of the trail has been completed, and the needed permits are underway.
- BRC completed construction on the Ben Bolen parking lot.
- BRC applied for multiple grants for the remainder of the project costs.

Boone:

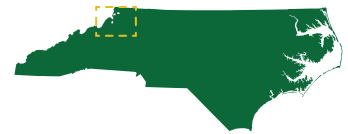
- BRC secured local support and funding for Rivers Street Park, which will be the southern terminus of the state trail.
- BRC applied for an RTP grant for the trail construction.
- BRC was awarded \$80,000 for a NCDOT Integrated Mobility Division Feasibility Study to connect West Jefferson to Jefferson.
- BRC met with multiple stakeholder groups, organizations, and municipalities to garner support.
- BRC staff presented at the Professional TrailBuilders Association Conference.
- Two land acquisition grants to add parcels to Mount Jefferson State Natural Area have been submitted.

5.O 5-Year Plan Summaries



LEGEND

- - - Planned Trail
- County Line
- ★ State Park
- Municipality



Ben Bolen parking lot



Paddy Mountain Park groundbreaking



Overmountain Victory State Trail (OVST)

The Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail stretches roughly 330 miles from its southern terminus in South Carolina through North Carolina and into Tennessee and Virginia and follows the paths that the Patriot militia took as they mustered to fight the Battle of Kings Mountain in 1780. This battle proved to be pivotal in the Revolutionary War. The Overmountain Victory State Trail will follow the 225 miles of the planned route of the National Historic Trail that passes through North Carolina. The partner for the OVST is the OVNCST-Friends.

Excerpts from the OVNCST-Friends 5-Year Plan:

Capacity-Building Funds:

OVNCST-Friends are using their capacity-building funds to hire a part-time Executive Director to complete administrative duties and cover administrative costs for fiscal years 22-23 and 23-24. Funding will also be used to develop a website to increase awareness of the organization and trail and fund a contractor for project development and oversight services as needed.

Priority CTP Projects:

- Section Master Plans for the Tennessee state line to Spruce Pine and W. Kerr Scott Reservoir to Lenoir
- Norris Recreation Complex – Phase I, 0.25 miles
- Cub Creek Connector, 0.75 miles
- Smoot Park Trailhead Gateway
- Black Bear Project, 3.5 miles (Partnership with F3ST and Burke County)




Estimated cost for top 5 priority projects	\$550,000
Estimated cost for all projects	\$3 million
CTP allocation	\$1,614,053

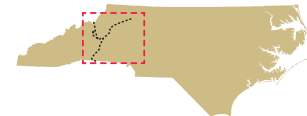
2024 Accomplishments:

- The boardwalk was replaced at Cathey’s Plantation Trail along Gassy Creek in Mitchell County. This is where the Overmountain men camped on September 28, 1780.
- OVNCST-Friends initiated section master plans for the Tennessee state line to Spruce Pine and W. Kerr Scott Reservoir to Lenoir.
- OVNCST-Friends collaborated with the Friends of Fonta Flora State Trail to fund projects in areas where the OVST and FFST are overlap.



LEGEND

-  Trail
-  County Line
-  Municipality
-  State Park
-  Water





Roanoke River State Trail (RRST)

Authorized in 2021, the Roanoke River State Trail is a paddle trail extending from Roanoke Rapids to the Albemarle Sound. Meandering through the Coastal Plain for 215 miles, this paddle trail offers a unique wilderness experience to all who venture along its length. While there are some opportunities for day trips on either end of the river, most paddlers need to be prepared for a multiday journey on this state trail. Riverside camping platforms make spending the night along the river a true adventure.

The tent in the RRST blaze is reminiscent of the camping platforms that are available (reservations are required) along the wilder stretches of the Roanoke. Roanoke River partners is the Partner for this trail.

Excerpts from the Roanoke River Partners 5-Year Plan:

Capacity-Building Funds:

Capacity-building funds are being used to support a regional and a paddle trail coordinator. Duties of this coordinator will include:

- Program development and administration
- Maintain records and documents related to Complete the Trails Fund projects on the RRST
- Volunteer recruitment and training
- Marketing and communications
- Seeking additional grant funding
- Paddle trail promotion

Priority CTP Projects:

- Camping platform repair/renovation
- Campsite(s) construction at RRP Mile Markers 35, 44, 50 and 85
- Town of Hamilton boat ramp – floating dock and kayak rack at RRP Mile Marker 72
- Rosenwald visitor center renovations at RRP Mile Marker 72

Estimated cost for priority projects	\$1.03 million
Estimated cost for all projects	over \$1 million
CTP allocation	\$507,375

2024 Accomplishments:

Complete the Trails:

- Eleven platforms were renovated at the cost of over \$117,900 during this period
- Blazes were installed at all camping platforms and designated accesses.

Designations:

- New access at Weldon designated by the Secretary of DNCR.
- The remaining length of the RRST was officially designated by the Secretary of DNCR, becoming the first fully designated state trail in North Carolina.

Celebrations:

- October 2023: Chicken Mull Festival – Bear Grass
- April 2024: Jamesville Herring Festival
- June 2024: Bear Festival & Paddle: Plymouth
- July 2024: RRST became the first N.C. State Trail to be officially designated for its entire length.
- August 2024: River Fest: Windsor

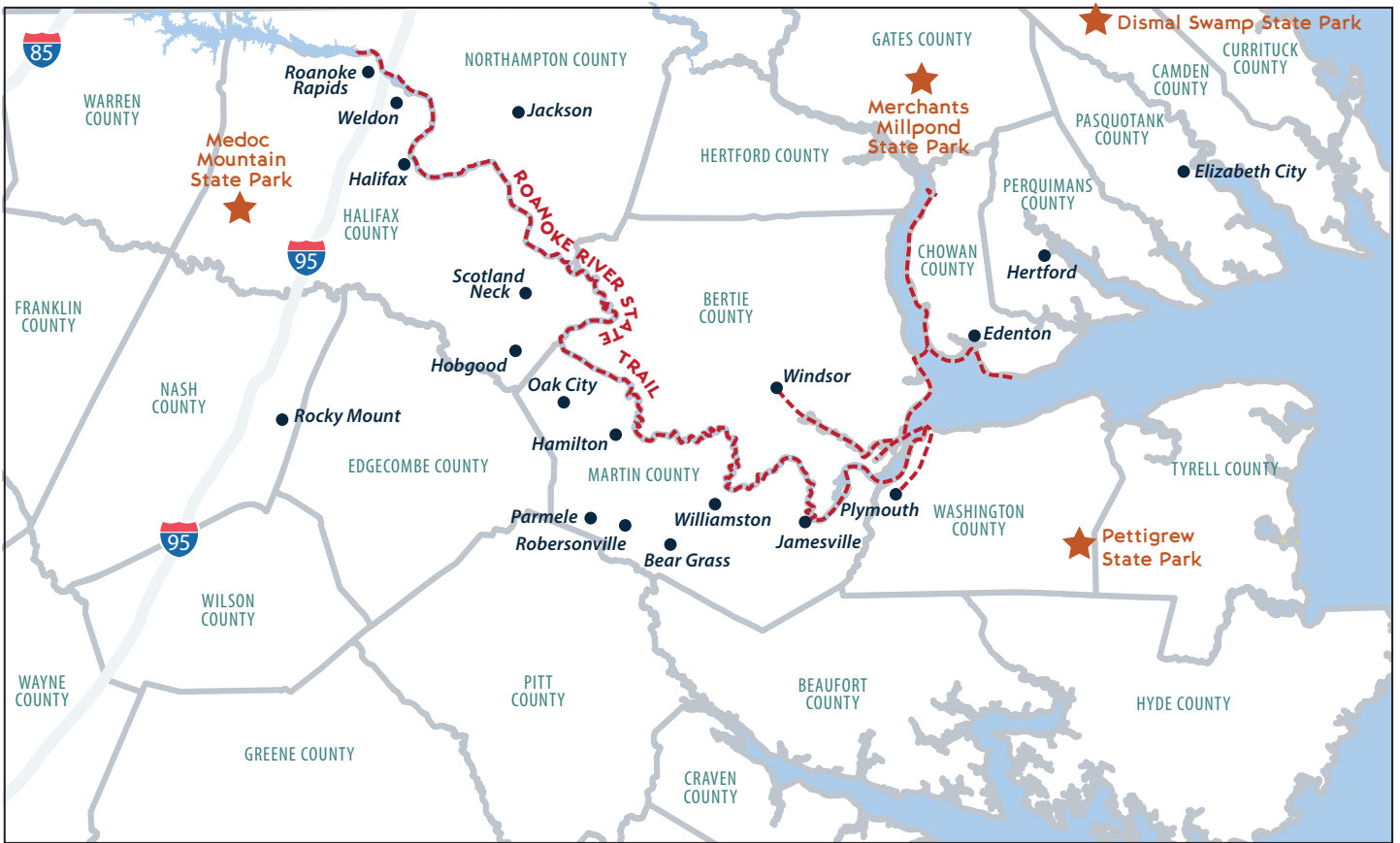
Rosenwald School: Future RRST trailhead and interpretive center

- RRP has completed the environmental review process.
- RRP obtained funding:
 - > \$20,000 from Dominion Energy
 - > \$200,000 directed allocation from fall 2023 state budget

Publications / Publicity:

- Paddle Trail in spring edition 2024 of Gear Patrol
- Atlas Obscura: 4 videos: Unexpected Adventures in N.C.
- Vessel Magazine

Camping: RRP signed new lease for future primitive campsite on Cooke Property



LEGEND

- - - State Trail
- ★ State Park
- County Line
- Municipality
- ~ Water
- Highway





Wilderness Gateway State Trail (WGST)

The Wilderness Gateway State Trail will wind through Catawba and Burke counties and along the border of Rutherford and McDowell counties for 170 miles. Part of this trail will include a paddle trail in Catawba County. The planned trail will connect Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail and South Mountains State Park with the towns of Valdese and Hickory. Part of the trail will follow the same route as the Overmountain Victory State Trail. Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina (FCNC) is the partner for the WGST.

Excerpts from the FCNC 5-Year Plan:

Capacity-Building Funds:

- Hired full-time WGST trail program manager to oversee trail planning, alignment, and construction projects
 - › Develop and maintain relationships and partnerships with stakeholder and volunteers / volunteer groups
- Grow FCNC Volunteer Program
 - › Recruit 1 volunteer per mile of trail built
 - › Host monthly volunteer workdays to maintain the trail starting in 2023
 - › Train lead volunteers

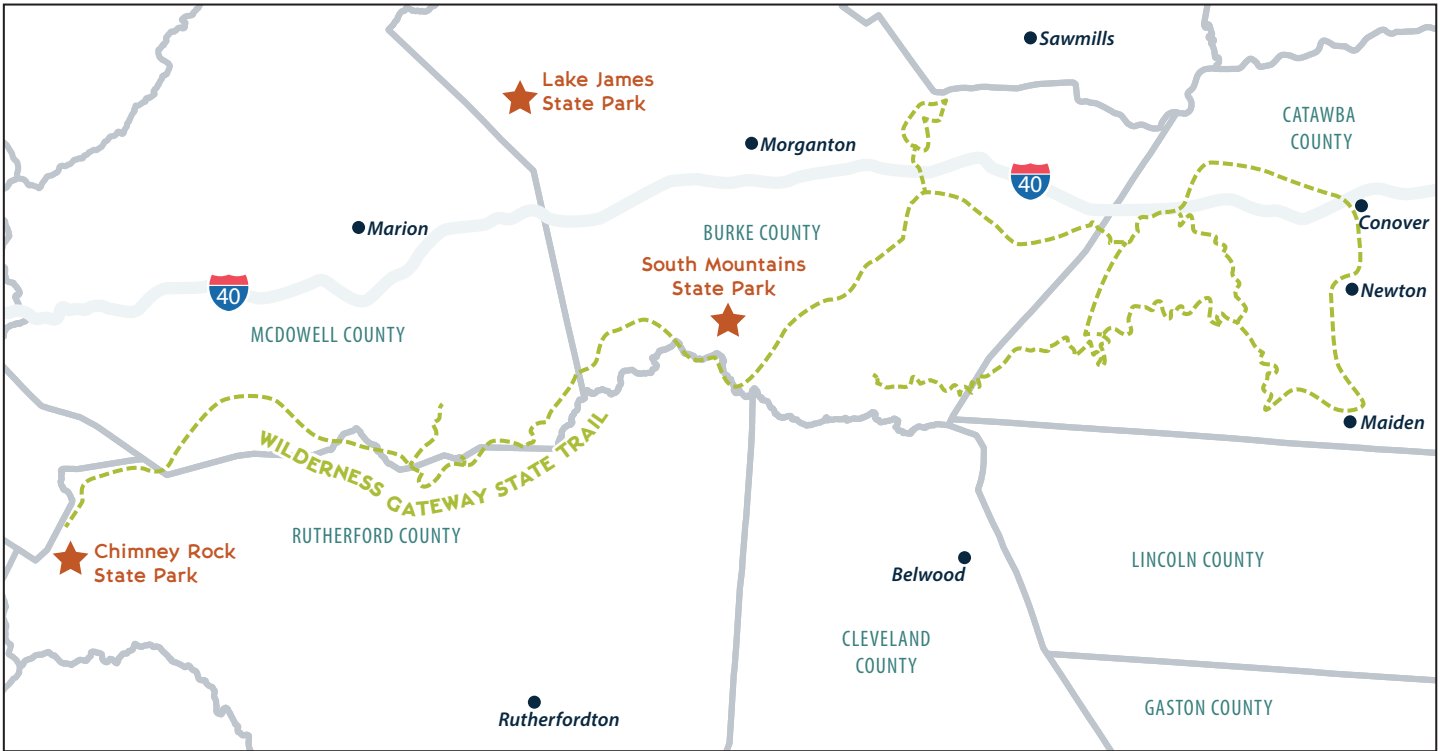
Priority CTP Projects:

- Segment 2: Land Acquisition – Pinnacle Mountains West
Other funds: N.C. Land and Water Fund; donated land value
- Segment 6: Land Acquisition – Prospect Ridge property
Other funds: donated land value; (possibly NCLWF)
- Segment 6: Trail Planning and Alignment – FCNC Henry Fork River Preserve
- Segment 6: Trail Construction – around 8 miles of trail on FCNC Smiths Cliffs / Henry Fork River Preserve.
- Other funds: RTP; private funds
- Segment 2: Trail Planning and Alignment Pinnacles East and West
Other funds: Rutherford County Trails Collaborative

Estimated cost for top 5 priority projects	\$1.4 million
Estimated cost for all projects	\$10.2 million
CTP allocation	\$1,219,506

2024 Accomplishments:

- FCNC leveraged funds from the Recreational Trails Program, Community Foundation of North Carolina, and the McDowell County and Rutherford County tourism development authorities to start on three segments of WGST. Nearly 30 miles of trail are underway, from permitting to construction.
- FCNC was awarded \$378,700 in land acquisition grants to acquire 1,653 acres to support development of the WGST. FCNC also leveraged \$8.2 million in other funds.



LEGEND

- - - Planned Trail
- County Line
- ★ State Park
- Municipality





Yadkin River State Trail (YRST)

The Yadkin River State Trail was established in 1985. The blueway extends for 162 miles through Wilkes, Surry, Yadkin, Forsyth, Davie, Davidson, Rowan, Stanly, and Montgomery counties. The Yadkin River is one of the longest rivers in North Carolina, originating near the Blue Ridge Parkway and flowing east and south until it joins with the Uwharrie River to form the Pee Dee River.

The state trail starts in the tailrace of the W. Kerr Scott Dam and extends all the way to Morrow Mountain State Park. The Yadkin Riverkeeper (YRK) is the partner for the YRST.

Excerpts from the YRK 5-Year Plan:

Capacity-Building Funds:

Yadkin Riverkeeper used the capacity-building funds to work with public and nonprofit partners to:

- develop and implement a plan to allocate a portion of the Complete the Trails Program (CTP) funds to access area improvements,
- develop grant proposals for access area land acquisition/improvement projects,
- facilitate the placement of mile markers and access area signage, and
- promote the YRST through YRK’s website, social media and Historic Paddle Series.

Priority CTP Projects:

- Access area improvements
- Access road improvements and site development on the Ararat River near its confluence with the YRST on Pilot Mountain State Park land
- Rockford access (N.C. Land and Water Fund application submitted by Piedmont Land Conservancy on behalf of Surry County). CTP funds would potentially be used for access infrastructure (i.e., put in ramp or steps).
- Purchase YRST mile marker signs
- Update and maintain online map, website and develop trail brochures

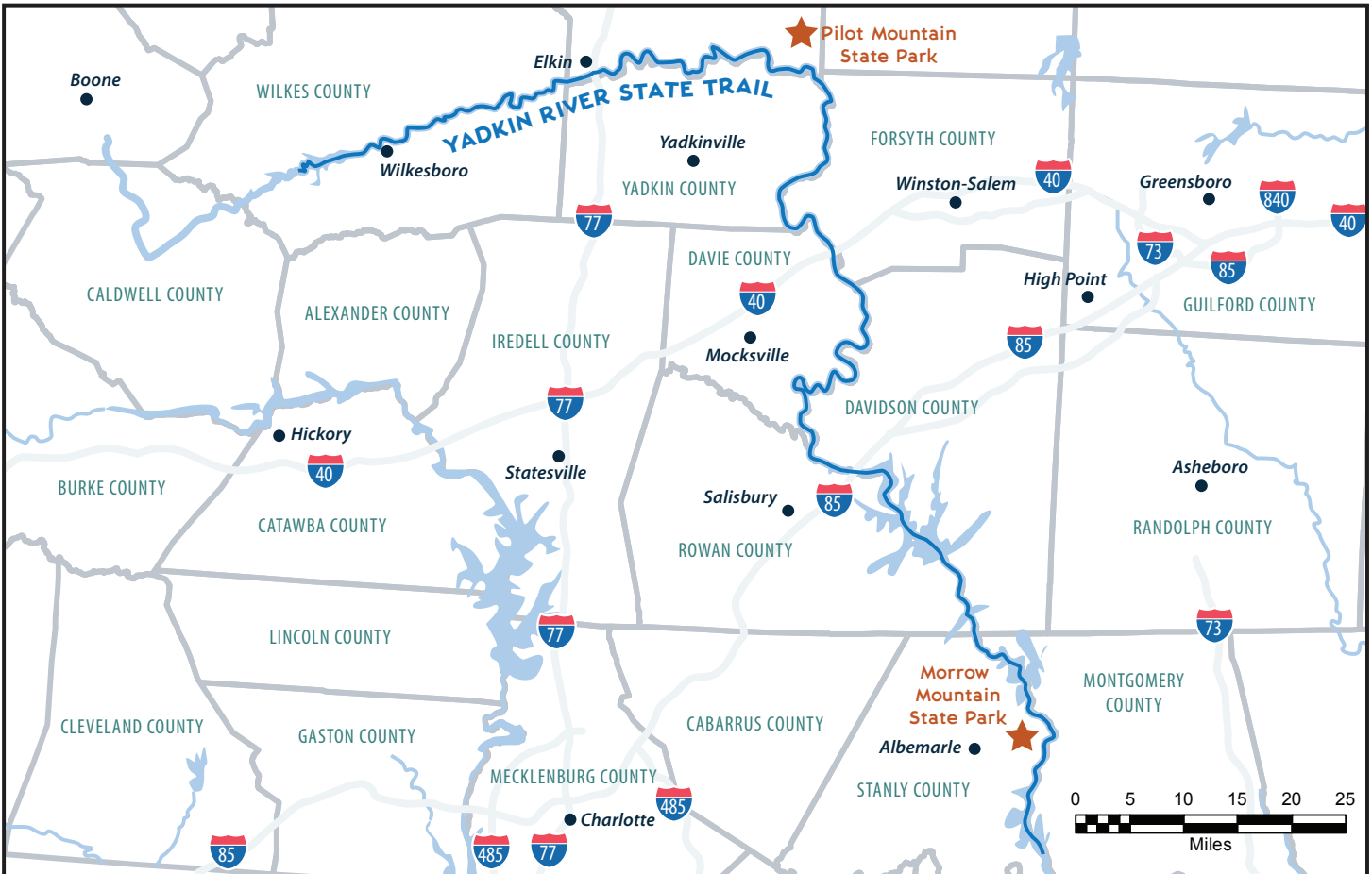
Estimated cost for priority projects	\$205,000
Estimated cost for all projects	over \$205,000
CTP allocation	\$210,375

2024 Accomplishments:

- YRK secured the future of Burch Station Access by purchasing it with CTP land acquisition funding and turning it over to Surry County.
- YRK hired a fulltime coordinator for the Yadkin River State Trail.
- Two sites, Bringle Ferry and Flat Creek, on the Tuckertown Reservoir, were designated by the Secretary of DNCR, which increased the designated trail length an additional 20 miles.
- YRK installed mile markers 92, 86 108, 122, 127.
- YRST blazes was installed at 14 accesses: Old U.S. 421, Tanglewood, Kerr Scott Reservoir Tailrace, Roaring River, Crater Park, Yadkin Shores, Huntsville/Bob Pate, U.S. Hwy 64 access, York Hill, Burch Station, Shoals, Smoot Park, Bringle Ferry, and Flat Creek.
- YRK distributed almost all 4,000 copies of the YRST printed map and 1,000 copies of the YRST marketing brochure.
- YRK sponsored a Kayaking 101 safety paddle training with the American Canoe Association and Pilot Mountain State Park with 11 participants and 8 staff from U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, Yadkin Riverkeeper and the ACA.
- YRK intern worked through paddle to document river conditions, access areas and safety hazards. They also wrote blog post for YRK website: “Paddling Through the River: My Journey on the Yadkin River State Trail.”
- YRK sponsored a river clean-up from Ronda to Elkin with 38 volunteers collecting 1.000 pounds of trash and numerous tires as part of N.C. Trail Days.
- YRK hosted outdoor journalists Lisa and Jack Ballard for a paddle on the Daniel Boone Heritage Canoe Trail segment of the YRST.
- YRK represented YRST and promoted the paddle trail at these events, Pilot Mountain Outdoor Adventure festival, Craft Half Marathon, Earth Jam Salisbury, Reynolds ESG Day, N.C. Trail Days, South Yadkin River Race, Happy Valley Jamboree, and the Great Trails State Conference.
- A panel of state paddle trail nonprofit representatives was organized to discuss ongoing projects, challenges and lessons learned at the 2024 Great Trails State Conference in September. There was an open house at YRK’s office during the conference and a post-conference hike and paddle for conference participants to build awareness about the YRST.

5.O 5-Year Plan Summaries

- YRK worked with the Ronda Town Council to get approval for designated the Ronda Memorial Park access as part of the YRST in the next round of designation.
- A letter of support was obtained from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for extending the YRST through and above Kerr Scott Reservoir managed by the USACE.
- YRK participated in the Happy Valley Jamboree and removed debris on the upper Yadkin and continued scouting the upper river for new access areas and campsites to potentially become part of the YRST.



LEGEND

- Trail
- County Line
- Municipality
- ★ State Park
- Water



ACA Kayaking 101 Training



Blaze installation



Blaze installation

6.0 Actions for the Future of the Great Trails State

NC Trails Program Recommendations

■ Develop Standards for State Trail Authorization

Any new state trail that is authorized should be planned to be at least 100 miles long, span multiple jurisdictions or counties, have a budget allocation to allow for initial trail development, and be included in an adopted plan. Trail concepts considered for state trail authorization should be prioritized in areas of the state not currently served by a state trail.

■ Provide Recurring Funding for State Trails

The capacity-building funds for the state trail partner organizations would benefit from being recurring so that the organizations can continue to focus on developing the state trails.

■ 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 residents of North Carolina.

■ Continue Support of the Great Trails State Program Fund

The Great Trails State Program Fund, which was created in Session Law 2023-134 House Bill 259 Section 14.6, shows every promise of being a transformational source of funding for all types of trails throughout North Carolina. Continued state funding will facilitate and expedite the completion of trails and greenways throughout the state.

■ 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 Trails Program and Great State Trails Program, the CTP funding cannot be used on trail projects that are not affiliated with state trails and the GTSP funds have a minimum application amount of \$100,000. The Adopt-a-Trail Program could supply funds for the small projects allowing communities to better perform maintenance on trails in their communities.

Opportunities for Collaboration

■ Add Safety Signage for Paddle Trails

The Division and NCDOT should partner 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.

■ Continue 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 North Carolina 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 and 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 multiuse 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.

6.0 Actions for the Future of the Great Trails State



Mayo River State Park



Mount Jefferson State Natural Area



Merchants Millpond State Park

Priorities for the Next Fiscal Year

■ Technical Assistance and Trail Education

The N.C. Trails Program will continue to seek opportunities for technical trail building education, so those skills may be passed on to other partners and Division staff to assist with efficiently tackling trail projects in the future. The program will continue to provide technical assistance for trail design, maintenance, and sustainability to local communities and state parks.

■ Comprehensive Trail Assessments

In 2022, a long-held goal of conducting parkwide trail assessments began. These assessments began in the mountain region of the state, with the goal of expanding the initiative throughout the state. This allows for efficient and objective identification of trail needs and project prioritization. This endeavor was made possible with a partnership with Conservation Corps North Carolina's Individual Placement program, which placed a full-time Trail Assessment Technician with the Trails Program through 2024, with the goal of continuing this partnership.

■ Trail Usage Monitoring and Data Collection

The Division should create a program to better count and understand the usage of trails within state parks so that better prioritization of funds can be created for trail projects. The See Insights trails counters can be used to count trail users in locations determined by the Trails Program as needed.

■ Adaptive Trails Program

The N.C. Trails Program will continue to grow its new pilot program offering adaptive recreation equipment, education, and outreach at state parks. Feedback generated from this year's launch will guide the expansion of the program, making parks more inclusive to visitors of all abilities.

7.0

State Parks Partnership with Conservation Corps NC



CCNC Summer 2024 Crew at Stone Mountain State Park



CCNC Summer 2024 Crew at Stone Mountain State Park



Arey Clark, CCNC Individual Placement Program Trails Technician

In the fiscal year 2023-2024, the Division used recurring funds appropriated in the 2023 state budget to continue its partnership with the Conservation Corps North Carolina (CCNC) to support trail work. 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 fifth year, the partnership has vastly improved trail sustainability in state parks while providing diverse young adults a paid job, valuable on-the-job training, and an AmeriCorps education award. Crews of six to eight AmeriCorps members tackled various trail projects under training and direction from Trails Program staff. From July 2023 to July 2024, crews completed projects at Elk Knob, Lake James, Lake Norman, South Mountains, and Stone Mountain state parks. Accomplished work included trail maintenance, new trail construction, and improvements to make trails more resilient to environmental and visitor impacts.

CCNC 2023-2024 State Parks Projects

- **Elk Knob:** Crews completed work on nearly 2 miles of the park's flagship route, the Summit Trail. Their accomplishments included retrofitting and restoring drainage structures, vegetation management, eliminating social trails, and restoring the trail back to its original design, allowing for better resilience.
- **Lake James:** Crews put finishing touches on a newly built connector trail to the park's visitor center. Crews also performed maintenance on the West Wimba Bike Loop to restore drainage features and bring the trail back to sustainable trail standards.
- **South Mountains:** Crews restored 2.6 miles of the Chestnut Knob Trail with a focus on construction of drainage structures and additional rock steps. Crews also repaired 1.5 miles of the Hidden Cove Trail.
- **Lake Norman:** Crews focused on improving the Wildlife Bike Loop back up to its original designed standards, with a focus on improving drainage and removal of social trails.
- **Stone Mountain:** Heavy maintenance was performed by crews on 1.5 miles of the Wolf Rock Trail, building drainage structures and bringing the trail up to modern trail standards. Crews also undertook repair of the extensively impacted lower 0.5 mile of the Stone Mountain Loop Trail. The crew reshaped the original tread and brought the corridor back to its designed width, while eliminating a multitude of social trails that have been created on this popular section of trail.

CCNC Individual Placement Program

In November 2022, through CCNC's Individual Placement (IP) program, the Trails Program hired an 11-month Trails Assessment Technician to assist with the thorough and challenging task of conducting a comprehensive assessment of the state parks trail system. The position was continued for an additional term into 2024 and is currently based in the mountains and assisting the regional trails specialist. This position assesses the condition of trails throughout state parks, conducts onsite data collection and recommendations, assists with trail layout and design, and facilitates CCNC trail crew projects. The additional field staff has also allowed for better reporting of on-the-ground conditions, which allows for quick deployment of trail crews for repairs. Data compiled from the assessments improves the identification and prioritization of trail projects through objective measures. In addition, the technician benefits from learning a broad range of skills that will prepare them for a variety of natural resources jobs and careers. With over 700 miles of trails throughout state parks and only one regional trails staff position currently filled, roles such as these temporarily provide much-needed assistance. To date, the Trails Assessment Technician has assessed more than 200 miles of trail in mountain region parks and led six trail maintenance crews on 10-day tours of duty. Ultimately, the Trails Program would benefit from more permanent positions that could continue to support trail monitoring and project development.

8.0 Recreational Trails Program

The Division manages the federal Recreational Trails Program (RTP) for DNCR. 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 2023, the Division has received approximately \$78,840,664 in requests for RTP funding. Of those requests, the state has awarded \$42,295,443 to sustainable RTP trail projects statewide. These RTP funds, combined with in-kind services and matching funds totaling \$70,694,941, have been applied to trail and greenway projects for North Carolina. RTP is currently enabled by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2021, which reauthorized the program from fiscal years 2022 through 2026 as a set-aside from the Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside under the Surface Transportation Block Grant. RTP funding comes from the Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) through NCDOT 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 North Carolina Trails Committee will meet Dec. 6, 2024, to consider RTP grant applications for the 2024 cycle, where recommendations for awards will be made to the Secretary of DNCR.

The Safety and Education Grant

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

Eligible projects include developing and operating safety and environmental education programs, providing 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.

2024 SEG Awards

Grantee	Project Name	County	Project Description	Award Amount
Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail	MTDC Chainsaw Class (2025)	Wake	Funding to hire instructor to certify volunteers for chainsaw use and purchase of PPE	\$5,000
Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail	MTDC Chainsaw Class	Wake	Funding to hire instructor to certify volunteers for chainsaw use and purchase of PPE	\$5,000
Friends of Panthertown	Sustainable Trail Design and Layout, Construction, and Maintenance Training	Jackson, Transylvania, Macon	Funding to hire an instructor to teach volunteers sustainable trail principles for construction and maintenance.	\$5,000
OBX Way	Outer Banks Trail Center	Dare	Production of trail safety publications and information displays	\$5,000
North Carolina State University	N.C. Great Trails State Conference	Forsyth	Event space rental to host the Great Trails State Conference	\$5,000
Total RTP Safety & Education Awards FY2024				\$25,000

**Note: the 2023 RTP cycle awards were included in the 2022-2023 Trails Report. Due to a shift in grant timelines, the 2024 awarded projects will appear in the following year's report. 2024 RTP grant award recipients will be posted on the Trails.NC.Gov website.*