

Gov. McCrory brings Connect NC bond message to parks

Gov. Pat McCrory combined celebration with a call to action in a visit to Hammocks Beach State Park June 30 to gather more support for the Connect NC bond initiative.

The celebration was for the addition of 289 acres on the mainland of the coastal park, the result of a settlement with the heirs of the Hurst family. The Governor met with members of that family who attended the event and congratulated them on maintaining the family's legacy of conservation.

McCrory asked the more than 100 state parks supporters present to contact members of the N.C. General Assembly to place the bond referendum before voters this year. Bond approval would result in \$67.3 million for capital and land acquisition projects at 28 state parks, including \$1.5 million to begin building recreation facilities on the property acquired at Hammocks Beach. The Governor made a similar plea June 11 at Pilot Mountain State Park where almost \$6 million would be earmarked for a visitor center and related facilities.



"Our investment in Hammocks Beach will allow the park to operate year-round by providing an expanded mainland area for environmental education and popular outdoor recreation areas," McCrory said. "Improvements at Hammocks Beach and other state parks will allow us to meet the needs of our growing state population and to ensure these cherished assets are preserved for generations to come."

Connect NC projects will benefit every community across the state while creating thousands of jobs along the way and taking advantage of record low interest rates. Because of the state's fiscal strength and strong balance sheet, no tax increase is needed to fund the bonds and the state's AAA bond rating would be preserved.

"We are very excited for this capital infusion in state parks, and I think our population will really benefit from the new visitor centers, new campgrounds, new trails and new day use facilities," said Mike Murphy, state parks director. "It will be a wide range of new opportunities for our citizens and visitors to enjoy the parks."

Chimney Rock State Park completes trail upgrades

An addition to the popular Outcroppings Trail at Chimney Rock State Park has been completed that restores access to three popular attractions on the mountain – the Subway, the Grotto and Pulpit Rock.

Each of the peculiar rock formations offers unique views of Hickory Nut Gorge, Lake Lure and surrounding mountains and they could be considered "opening acts" on the way to the commanding view from Chimney Rock itself near the mountain summit.

The Outcroppings Trail, which scrambles up the mountain, was renovated in 2011, and this new trail spur relies on the same construction techniques. Those include intricate boardwalks and stairs to navigate near-vertical terrain and to protect delicate vegetation. Some of the materials had to be delivered to the construction site by helicopter.

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Access to the three points of interest was lost in 2008 when an aging trail to that area of the mountain was among several trail segments declared unsafe. The closings spurred a determined effort to eventually restore access to hard-to-reach vantage points with new and renovated trails.

South Mountains watershed protected

Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina has partnered with the state parks system, the N.C. Clean Water Management Trust Fund and others to conserve what was one of the largest remaining unprotected watershed tracts in the South Mountains.

Together, the conservancy and the state parks system purchased a 2,207-acre tract known as Simms Hill on June 4. Of the total acreage, 757 acres were acquired for addition to South Mountains State Park, bringing the largest state park to more than 19,500 acres.

Foothills Conservancy will use the remaining 1,450 acres to establish the regional land trust's new South Mountains Headwaters Preserve for the protection and enhancement of water quality, biodiversity and wildlife habitat. A permanent conservation easement protecting 300-foot streamside buffer zones on 624 acres of the property was conveyed to the Clean Water Management Trust Fund, and, Foothills Conservancy acquired an additional 43-acre tract earlier this year, which will also be part of the new preserve.

"This latest acquisition by Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina will protect a Significant Natural Heritage Area in South Mountains State Park as well as water quality in the park's pristine streams," said Mike Murphy, state parks director. "It's a great example of the conservancy's commitment and our proven partnership to safeguard natural resources for future generations."

More than 16 miles of headwater streams lace the rugged, heavily forested mountain tract and feed the designated outstanding resource waters of the Henry Fork and Jacob Fork rivers. These rivers converge downstream to form the South Fork of the Catawba River, a major tributary of the Catawba River that ultimately supplies clean drinking water to more than two million people.

Trust fund authority approves state park projects

The N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund Authority approved \$2.4 million for critical repair and renovation projects and \$1.5 million for land acquisitions at several state parks and state natural areas.

The authority, meeting July 9, also approved \$1.48 million for remaining acquisition of mainland property at Hammocks Beach State Park and \$1.55 million to build a much-needed parking area for trail access at Grandfather Mountain State Park.

In April, the state announced the phased-in acquisition of a 289-acre mainland addition at Hammocks Beach. The waterfront tract has long been identified as a critical need for traditional park facilities and to protect water quality. Prior to the acquisition, the park included only 30 mainland acres.

The land acquisition allocations approved by the authority will be combined with other funding sources to purchase 1,389 acres at Bullhead Mountain State Natural Area and Lake James, Chimney Rock, Elk Knob, New River and Lumber River state parks.

Maintenance and repair funds will be used for systemwide major maintenance and trails work, building demolitions, elevator repairs at Chimney Rock, toilet renovations at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area and channel dredging for ferry service at Hammocks Beach.

The funding is contingent on inclusion of PARTF funding and approved of the state's budget by the General Assembly.

The authority also began the review process for PARTF local parks and recreation grants. The program has received 69 applications from towns and counties requesting \$13 million, and the amount of funds available for the grants has not been determined.

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