

## Gov. McCrory, park supporters dedicate Lake Norman visitor center

Gov. Pat McCrory, the family of the late Park Superintendent Casey Rhinehart and more than 100 park supporters and officials together dedicated a new visitor center and district office April 23 at Lake Norman State Park.

The completion of the 11,000-square-foot facility and adjacent amenities, under the guidance of Rhinehart and Ranger Jarid Church, is a benchmark in the park's history and an example of sustainable development, designed to national green building standards. The project represents an investment of \$4.3 million from the N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.

Before cutting a ribbon with Rhinehart's family to open the facility, Gov. McCrory said it also represents an improvement in infrastructure such as those he seeks in a pair of proposed bond referendums now before the General Assembly. Investment in state parks – proposed at \$67 million within the total \$2.85 billion – are an important part of the bond package, he said.

"These parks give access for all citizens to these beautiful places," McCrory said. "The parks need to expand and be exposed to all income levels so that all can enjoy the best of North Carolina."

The role of state parks as contributors to quality of life and to local economies was a common theme for the event's speakers, including Jeff Archer, a park advisory committee member and owner of a local bike shop, David Pearson, executive director of Friends of State Parks, and W.E. "Bill" Russell, president of the Lake Norman Chamber of Commerce.

Mike Murphy, state parks director, said the visitor center as a place to educate is a tribute to Rhinehart, who died Feb. 25 of cancer after serving as superintendent at the park for 11 years.

Similar to visitor centers built at 22 state parks and state recreation areas since 1994, the Lake Norman facility offers an architectural design styled to its lakeside setting, classrooms and interior and exterior exhibits.



## Hammocks Beach State Park expands with 289 acres on mainland

The North Carolina state parks system is adding a premier property of 289 acres on the mainland at Hammocks Beach State Park.

The state initially acquired 199 acres of the property, and the Conservation fund purchased an adjacent 90 acres that eventually will also be added to the park. Both tracts were acquired from the heirs of John Hurst, son of a onetime slave who was caretaker of game lands owned by Dr. William Sharpe in the early 1900s.

The waterfront tract on Queen's Creek once was the site of popular summer camps, and has long been identified as a critical need for the state park for traditional park facilities and to enhance protection of water quality and scenic assets on the creek. Prior to the purchase, the 1,155-acre park encompassed 30 acres on the mainland, the site of a visitor center, along with Bear Island, Huggins Island and

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Jones Island.

The state's portion of the property was purchased for \$6.96 million, provided through the N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund and two-thirds bonds approved by the N.C. General Assembly. The Conservation Fund committed \$3.1 million for the remainder, which will be acquired by the state over the next three years. The Division of Parks and Recreation will manage both properties.

Authorized in 1961, Hammocks Beach State Park recorded 178,736 visitors in 2014.

## **Foothills Conservancy aids land acquisitions at South Mountains**

Two relatively small land acquisitions completed at South Mountains State Park and aided by Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina will have a big impact on future public access at the park in Burke County.

The projects add critical missing links between the park's western section near U.S. 64 south of Morganton and its eastern section reaching to the park's main entrance off Old N.C. 18. The state park is North Carolina's largest at 18,627 acres.

The larger acquisition of 95 acres provides a narrow link between the eastern and western sections near a central ridgeline. The state parks system received a grant in 2014 from the N.C. Clean Water Management Trust Fund to purchase the property and its Shoal Creek Falls from Foothills Conservancy.

A generous contribution from conservationists Fred and Alice Stanback of Salisbury, along with a loan from Conservation Trust for North Carolina supported the conservancy's purchase of this high-priority property. The Stanback gift allowed the conservancy to resell the property to the state at a discount.

A smaller acquisition of 37 acres was initiated during this same time period when Foothills Conservancy and the state parks system negotiated with William Barron, son of the late Dr. John Barron and Nelle Woodbury Barron. Dr. Barron had earlier worked with Foothills Conservancy to sell an adjoining 698 acres for the state park, extending the state park to U.S. 64.

The purchase of the Barron home and remaining land was completed with funding from the N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, and gives the state park more than a mile of frontage on U.S. 64 and Roper Hollow Road. This will improve visitor access to the park's western section. The park's master plan calls for eventual development of a residential environmental education center there.

## **Trout fishing introduced at Hanging Rock State Park**

Hanging Rock State Park decided its new fishing pier needed a little something extra...new fish. Rainbow trout are being introduced in the 12-acre lake in a joint effort of the state parks system and the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

The stocking program provides a unique opportunity for recreational trout fishing outside of traditional mountain trout waters and is particularly accessible to children, older anglers and mobility-impaired individuals. The wildlife agency will stock the lake with 2,400 catchable-sized rainbow trout in April and October of each year. The stocking effort complements a new, accessible pier built in 2013.

Although a North Carolina fishing license is required for anglers 16 years old and over at the lake, a separate trout fishing license will not be required. Anglers may harvest seven trout per day with no size limit, and there are no restrictions on bait or type of hooks used. Also, there is no closed season associated with this fishery, so anglers can fish the lake year round.

"For less mobile anglers, fishing for trout in lakes is much simpler than fishing in streams," said Kin Hodges, fisheries biologist for the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. "The opportunity to fish in a lake, combined with a handicapped-accessible fishing pier, makes Hanging Rock Lake an ideal location for handicapped anglers to fish for trout. These same qualities also make it the perfect place to introduce small children to trout fishing."

*The Steward is an e-newsletter of the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation. To learn how to subscribe to the complete version and have news of the North Carolina state parks sent directly to your email inbox, scan the QR code here with a smartphone app or visit [www.ncparks.gov](http://www.ncparks.gov), and click "News."*

