

## History of the North Carolina State Park System

by Alan Eakes, Lewis Ledford, and Don Reuter, 2011.

NC Division of Parks of Recreation, NC Department of Cultural Environment & Natural Resources.

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### Introduction

First came the miners. All they wanted were a few minerals and there were plenty.

Then came the lumberjacks. All they wanted were a few trees and there were plenty.

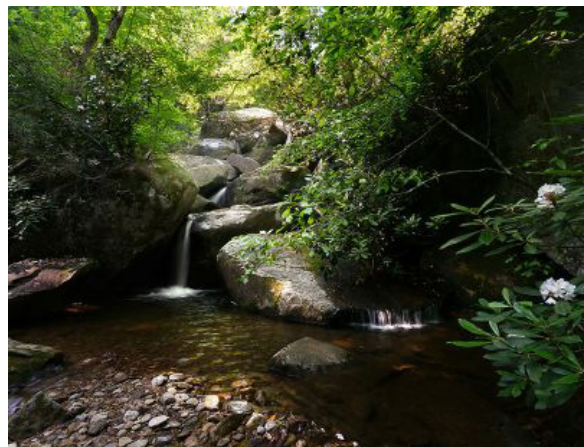
Then came the railroad men. All they wanted was a little space to travel up the mountain and there was plenty.

Then came the mill. Lumber was needed for construction and the mill made plenty.

And then came the lumber camps, housing, and loggers by the hundreds. Lots of men were needed for labor and the camps provided plenty.

The economy was booming. It was the land of opportunity. And everyone thought there was plenty – except for a few, who were afraid that soon there would be none.

Trees were cut by the hundreds. Whole forests were destroyed. And, the few became outraged and appealed to the governor who insisted that it stop, and he convinced the legislature to establish the first state park. And then there was one.



Peek, Charlie. 2012. "South Mountains State Park - Henry Fork." NC Division of Parks and Recreation.

That was in 1915. What started out as one small plot of public land has grown into 66 properties across the State. The 38 state parks and recreation areas, plus an additional 28 state rivers, lakes, trails and natural areas include 211,964 acres. The state parks system attracted more than 13.4 million visitors in 2007.

During 2007, the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation conducted a study that determined state parks are significant contributors to North Carolina's economy. Park visitors spent at least \$139 million annually; this sum includes money pumped straight into the communities surrounding the parks. State parks contribute \$289 million to local economies annually, as well as \$120 million to local residents' income according to the analysis conducted by North Carolina State University.

### **North Carolina State Parks Directors and Years of Service**

Thomas W. Morse,\* 1935 – 1961

Thomas C. “Red” Ellis, 1961 – 1974

Ronald D. Johnson, 1974 – 1977

James S. Stevens, Jr., 1977 – 1984

William “Wes” Davis, 1984 – 1989

Philip K. McKnelly, 1989 – 2003

Lewis R. Ledford, 2003 – 2014

Michael A. Murphy, 2014 to present

\*During the time Morse served in World War II, R.J. Pearce served in an acting role.

## Part 2: Birth of a State Park System, 1891-1933

In 1891, the Geological Survey was established to examine the mineral and timber resources of the state. The survey's reports brought attention to the permanent injury of our natural resources resulting from the denuding of the southern mountain slopes. These reports planted the first seeds of the conservation effort in North Carolina.

### Mount Mitchell—the First State Park

Early in the 20th century, efforts to preserve natural resources mounted when poor timbering practices alerted citizens to the devastation of Mount Mitchell. Logging was not only destroying a well-known landmark—the highest peak east of the Mississippi—it was also damaging the water quality as soil was washed in the streams and rivers.

Concern over this destruction led outspoken citizens to contact Governor Locke Craig who went to Mount Mitchell. Horrified by what he saw, he convinced the loggers to cease their operations until he could meet with the General Assembly. Upon his return to Raleigh, the governor began a campaign to save Mount Mitchell.



Appeals to preserve this glorious mountain were finally successful when, on March 3, 1915, the General Assembly passed a bill establishing Mount Mitchell as North Carolina's first state park. In accordance with this bill, the governor appointed a commission to buy as much land as it could for \$20,000.

Towering 6,684 feet above sea level, Mount Mitchell, a national natural landmark, was the site of much botanical research in the 18th century. Its climate and vegetation are more like Canada than North Carolina.

## **A Two-Park System**

Interested in expanding state parks, in 1923, the General Assembly authorized the director of Forestry to investigate the possibility of securing the Fort Macon Military Reservation. In September 1923, the federal government turned 410 acres of land and the fort over to the state for the sum of one dollar. When Fort Macon State Park opened in 1924, North Carolina acquired its second state park, with representation in the mountains and on the coast.



Beautiful beaches along with a fascinating Civil War history make Fort Macon unique among North Carolina state parks.

## **Creation of a New Department**

In 1925, the General Assembly created the Department of Conservation and Development and charged it with assuming the work of the Geological and Economic Survey. State forests and parks were assigned to this new department.

## **State Lakes Legislation**

In 1911, the General Assembly decided that all lakes containing 500 acres or more in the coastal plains counties of Bladen, Columbus and Cumberland “shall always be and remain property of the state of North Carolina for the use and benefit of all the people of the state.” The Public Laws of 1929 expanded upon this legislation stating that “all lakes now belonging to the state having an area of 50 acres or more should be administered as provided for other recreational areas now owned by the state.” These acts transferred Jones, Salters, Singletary, Phelps, Waccamaw, White and Black (now called Bay Tree) lakes to state parks.

These lakes are members of a series of elliptical depressions called Carolina bays. Running parallel to one another in a northwest-to-southeast orientation, most are overgrown with swamp-like vegetation. Though the state took

control of these unique bay lakes in 1929, land acquisition around most of them did not take place until much later.

### **Reliance on Donations**

Another action taken by the 1929 General Assembly was the enactment of a law (Chapter 282) which established that future acquisition would not be funded by the state; rather, expansion of state parks would rely upon “public spirited citizens” to donate land.

The addition of Fort Macon and the state lakes expanded the parks system but since the initial appropriation for Mount Mitchell, no money had been appropriated for new land.

### **Part 3: Expansion through Public Donations and Federal Public Works Programs, 1934-1941**

In response to the Great Depression, the Roosevelt administration placed millions of dollars into public works programs. These federal programs created nine state parks in North Carolina.

In the spring of 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) came to North Carolina. The first CCC camp was located at Fort Macon in 1934. Here they built a hard surface road and started reconstruction of the fort.

In 1935, a portion of the oldest mountain range in America—Morrow Mountain—was given to the state by J.M. Morrow. Citizens of Stanly County followed this donation by issuing \$20,000 in bonds for the purchase of parkland. Between 1937 and 1942 the CCC built roads, an office, maintenance buildings, a bathhouse and swimming pool.



Hanging Rock State Park, a series of scenic ridges and knobs made of erosion resistant quartzite, was created with the donation of 3,000 acres from citizens of Winston-Salem and Stokes County. In July 1935, the CCC impounded a 12-acre lake and built a bathhouse, picnic grounds and other facilities.

Cape Hatteras State Park, acquired by gift in 1935, was adjacent to the Cape Hatteras lighthouse. That same year the CCC repaired the lighthouse and did other work such as dune and beach erosion control. The area became part of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreation Area in 1952.

Between 1936 and 1941, the CCC developed facilities at Mount Mitchell. One of the major accomplishments of more than 100 workers was the construction of a wooden concession stand and restroom complex just below the summit.

The larger parks system created by these federal programs saw the establishment of the Branch of State Parks within the Division of Forestry in 1935. Thomas W. Morse became the first full-time Superintendent of State Parks.

### **Demonstration Parks**

In 1936, with local materials and talents, the Resettlement Administration constructed day-use facilities at Jones Lake. The park opened under a lease on July 1, 1939 as the first state park for African-Americans. In later years, the park became fully integrated. In October 1954, the land was given to the state by the federal government. Jones Lake State Park includes two Carolina bays, Jones and Salters Lakes.



In 1936, the National Park Service began two recreational demonstration projects in the state, Crabtree Creek and Singletary Lake. The objective of the program was to convert sub-marginal farmland to such uses as recreation, education and the conservation of natural resources.

In 1934, federal and state agencies bought 5,000 acres to develop Crabtree Creek. The CCC built four organized group camps and day-use facilities. Crabtree Creek State Park opened in 1937 and was sold to the state for \$1 in 1943. In 1950, 1,234 acres of the park was designated for use by black citizens and named Reedy Creek State Park. The name of the Crabtree Creek Section was changed to William B. Umstead State Park in 1955 in honor of the former governor. In 1966, both parks were united under the same name and opened to all people. Today, the park is a wilderness oasis surrounded by one of the state's largest metropolitan populations.

The history of the group camps at Singletary Lake is similar to that of Umstead. From 1936 to 1939, resettlement workers and local residents constructed the Singletary Recreation Center on sub-marginal farmland. In 1939, the park was leased from the federal government and in October of 1954, the land was deeded to the state.



In 1939, Pettigrew State Park was established to provide recreational use of Lake Phelps, the second largest natural lake in the state, and to preserve the historic plantations of Bonarva and Somerset. The Works Project Administration began restoration of Somerset Plantation, which was transferred to the Department of Archives and History in 1965. Bonarva, the home place of Gen. James Johnston Pettigrew, the Civil War hero for whom the park is named is adjacent to Somerset Place.

### **Park, Parkway and Recreation Area Study**

In 1940, the Park, Parkway and Recreation Area Study outlined the first comprehensive plan for the state park system. Unfortunately, this plan and the federally-funded projects in the state took a back seat to the main event of 1941—the outbreak of World War II.



## Part 4: WWII and Post WWII Developments

### World War II

Though visitation declined, North Carolina's state parks were by no means idle during the war. The group camps at Crabtree Creek were used as rest camps by British sailors and for extensive military maneuvers. Hanging Rock was used for field training of Army Signal Corps students. Soldiers used Morrow Mountain for bivouac and field training. Mount Mitchell was used for secret training and experiments with radar. Jones and Singletary lakes were used by the Camp David anti-aircraft artillery school, and Fort Macon was taken over by the army. The fort was re-garrisoned and armed with six-inch guns to protect the Beaufort Harbor area from German U-boat attacks.

### Post World War II Developments

In 1947, the General Assembly, in its first state park capital improvement appropriation, allocated \$500,000 to be used for the construction of public use facilities.

Cliffs of the Neuse State Park, donated by Lionel Weil and members of the Wayne Foundation, had opened in 1945 and received \$57,000 of the appropriation for a swimming area and bathhouse. The most prominent natural feature of this coastal plain park is a series of 90-foot cliffs, which were cut over millions of years by the Neuse River.



### First State Recreation Commission

In 1945, North Carolina created the first State Recreation Commission in the country. This commission operated separately from state parks until 1971.

In February 1948, Hiwassee Lake State Park was leased from the Tennessee Valley Authority. Included in the park were cabins and day-use facilities. The lease was terminated in December 1952 and the unit was removed from the state parks system.

### **Creation of a New Division**

The post-war era saw state parks elevated to a new status when on October 1, 1948, a Division of State Parks was created separate from State Forestry.

Demand for recreation increased after the war. With appropriations in 1947 and in 1949, the Division was able to purchase tracts for existing parks and to construct facilities. Another improvement financed by the appropriations was the hiring of additional staff, which allowed better public service and enhanced interpretive programs.

### **Transfer of Historical Parks**

For a number of years, state parks operated historic areas. Most of these state historic parks were acquired in the early 1950s. The first of these areas, Rendezvous Mountain, was donated in 1926. As its history was questionable and the acreage small, it was transferred to the Division of Forestry in 1956. Other historical parks included:

- Battle of Alamance – the site of sectional battles between the frontier and the eastern seaboard.
- Charles B. Aycock Birthplace – birthplace of Charles B. Aycock, Governor of North Carolina from 1901-1903.
- Brunswick Town – a leading seaport on the Cape Fear in 1725.
- James Iredell House – the Colonial home of James Iredell, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.
- Town Creek Indian Mound – an Indian cultural and religious center.
- Tryon Palace – the first fixed capitol of the royal colony.

In order to allow the Division to concentrate on developing recreational and scenic parks, the General Assembly transferred historic sites to the Department of Archives and History, which had been created in 1955. Fort

Macon, though of historic interest, was retained by parks because it offered unique coastal recreation.

In 1951, North Carolina leased land for recreation sites along Kerr Lake and created the Kerr Reservoir Development Commission to manage these areas. Kerr Lake became a popular recreation spot soon after opening.



### **Principles Governing State Parks**

In January of 1955, the Board of Conservation and Development adopted criteria for the establishment and management of state parks. These principles defined the purpose of the North Carolina state parks system and governed its functioning for years to come.

Infrequent and small appropriations over the years had done little to expand and support a well-rounded park system. Although the post-war period brought recognition, had it not been for federal work programs, North Carolina's park system would be little advanced from its beginnings.

## Part 5: Growth through Donations and LWCF Assistance, 1956-1970

On October 8, 1956, Mount Jefferson was established as a state park when 464 acres of land was accepted from individuals and organizations in Ashe County. Unusual vegetation qualified the area for designation as a National Natural Landmark in 1975. It was later re-classified as a natural area.

The state's second coastal park came on board in 1961. Bear Island, the primary feature of Hammocks Beach State Park, reached only by private boat or passenger ferry, is one of the most unspoiled barrier islands on the Atlantic seashore. Donated by the North Carolina Teachers Association, it was first designated for use by black citizens, but in later years was fully integrated.



Duke Power State Park was donated in 1962 by Duke Power Co. The park centers around man-made Lake Norman and includes camping, picnicking and a small lake for fishing and swimming. Duke Power experienced severe damage from hurricane Hugo in September 1989. The unit was later re-named Lake Norman State Park.

### Natural Areas

In 1963, the Board of Conservation and Development adopted principles for natural areas, and, in that same year, the state's first natural area, Weymouth Woods, was donated. This 900-acre nature preserve has an interpretive center and trails.

### Land and Water Conservation Fund

In 1965, the federal government created the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). The LWCF was a primary funding source for state parks, with

approximately \$21.2 million going into acquisition and development projects at 32 state parks, recreation areas and natural areas. The parks division has administered \$78 million in LWCF since its inception with \$16.9 million expended on state park land acquisitions. The balance and majority of the funds, over \$61 million, have been allocated to local parks and recreation agencies.

One of the first parks to receive LWCF assistance was Pilot Mountain, a monadnock made of erosion-resistant quartzite. In 1967, the Pilot Mountain Preservation and Park Committee promoted the sale of this commercial tourist attraction to the state. On July 19, 1968, the \$1 admission fee was cancelled and Pilot Mountain officially became public land. The park was designated as a National Natural Landmark in 1975.



LWCF funds again played a role in the purchase of parklands when Stone Mountain was acquired in 1969. The efforts of the Stone Mountain Preservation and Park Commission enabled the state to use a LWCF grant and money from the Appalachian Funds. A national landmark, Stone Mountain is a bare oval-shaped granite dome which rises more than 700 feet above the surrounding foothills.

### **Study Commission**

In 1967, the General Assembly created the State Parks and State Forests Study Commission and directed it to examine outdoor recreation in North Carolina and assess the “desires and needs of the populace.” The commission recommended that the acquisition of fast-disappearing resources must take priority over development. Special emphasis was placed upon acquiring sites that would support water-related activities and developing day-use facilities. Most of the recommendations were never implemented as sufficient funding never materialized. However, as a direct result of the study, an immediate search for potential state park property began.

### **First Appropriation for Land Since Mount Mitchell**

The 1969 purchase of Carolina Beach State Park marked a milestone in state park history—the first state expenditure for parkland since the 1916 purchase of Mount Mitchell. Carolina Beach was acquired to establish an intracoastal waterway park that would be both a natural area and allow public recreation at area beaches.

Raven Rock State Park was acquired by state and matching federal funds in February 1970 through the efforts of the Raven Rock Preservation and Park Committee. The rock face stretches for a mile along the Cape Fear River in a series of quartzite formations more than 100 feet high.



Appropriations for land acquisition spurred by the Study Commission report were, however, short-lived; the state soon returned to relying on donations. Through 1970, gifts to the State Parks System accounted for more than 80 percent of the system's total acreage.

## Part 6: Program and Park Expansion, 1971-1979

In 1971, Boone's Cave was donated to the state by the Daniel Boone Historical Association. Located on the Yadkin River, the cave is believed to have been the hideaway of Daniel Boone in the 1750s. Due to its small size, it was later turned over to Davidson County for management.

### **Merger of State Parks, Kerr Lake and the Recreation Commission**

Kerr Lake became the system's first recreation area when the Kerr Reservoir Development Commission, along with State Parks and the Recreation Commission was merged into one agency—the Office of Recreation Resources—within the Department of Natural and Economic Resources.

### **Natural and Scenic Rivers**

The Natural and Scenic Rivers System was created by the 1971 General Assembly to preserve and protect certain free-flowing rivers, their water quality and adjacent lands for the benefit of present and future generations.

The New River and the Linville River were the first rivers included in the system through legislation passed in 1976. The New River is the oldest river in the Americas and the second oldest river in the world. In 1976, a 26.5-mile segment of the river was designated as a National Wild and Scenic River. Designation of the Linville River as a state natural river came in June of 1975. The 13-mile designated segment flows through the Linville Gorge.



The Horsepasture River was added to the system in June 1985. The four-mile segment is distinguished by rugged gorges and spectacular waterfalls. In 1989, a 102-mile segment of the Lumber River, a blackwater river running

through bottomland hardwood swamp, became part of the system. Over the years, numerous other rivers have been found to qualify for designation, however lack of funding and local opposition have prevented expansion.

### **Major State Appropriations**

Early in the 1970s, heightened awareness of the state's outdoor recreation needs made state parks a priority for the governor and the General Assembly. A 1974 appropriation of \$13.9 million gave a needed boost to the parks system. Although smaller in amounts, appropriations continued through the end of the decade. Over this six-year period, the size of North Carolina's park system more than doubled. Eight new state parks and six natural areas were created during this period.

The Association for the Preservation of the Eno River Valley played a vital role in state land acquisition efforts at Eno River, and in 1973, land for Eno River State Park was purchased from The Nature Conservancy.

Merchants Millpond was established in 1973 through a gift of 919 acres and a donation of 925 acres from The Nature Conservancy. The preservation of Merchant's Millpond saved a rare swamp forest.



In 1973, the sounds of a bulldozer flattening Jockey's Ridge for development thrust locals into action. Through the appeals of People to Preserve Jockey's Ridge, the dune was declared a National Natural Landmark. LWCF funds matched those designated by the legislature, and in 1975 the tallest sand dune on the east coast became a state park.

In 1973, a delegation from Nash County proposed that a park be established in the area. Medoc Mountain was chosen as an appropriate site and the park was opened in 1974. This biotite granite formation is not really a mountain, but an erosion-resistant ridge.



In 1974, Crowders Mountain State Park was added to the system. The threat of strip mining had motivated local citizens to seek its preservation. In October 1974, Crowders Mountain was opened to the public. Impressive rock formations and sheer vertical cliffs are scenic features of the park.

In 1974, Goose Creek State Park was purchased with state funds. Located on the Pamlico River, stately live oaks and pines draped with Spanish moss provide beautiful surroundings for recreation activities.



The 1975 purchase of South Mountains State Park with state and LWCF funds once again saved North Carolina forests from timbering operations. Today, large trees, narrow mountain streams and beautiful waterfalls highlight the park. The park has grown to over 18,000 acres, making it North Carolina's largest state park.

Lake Waccamaw, one of the unique Carolina bay lakes, became part of a state park in 1976 when a 273-acre tract of land around the lake was purchased, creating Lake Waccamaw State Park.

### **State Trails Act**

The North Carolina Trails System Act was passed in 1973 to provide for a statewide trails system. The state trails program contains 15 trails which travel for 650 miles. Volunteer efforts have been paramount in the success of the trails program, especially in developing the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, which upon completion will travel 900 miles from the Great Smoky Mountains to the Outer Banks. By 2008, about 485 miles of the trail had been completed.

## **Natural Heritage Program**

The Natural Heritage Program, mandated to inventory and preserve the state's natural heritage, was created in 1976 with seed money from the Babcock Foundation and the Reynolds Foundation, and technical assistance from The Nature Conservancy.

## **Expansion of Natural Areas**

In 1971, the state established its second natural area – Theodore Roosevelt. A gift from the heirs of the Roosevelt family, the area is brackish marsh and maritime forest. Other state natural areas include:

- Dismal Swamp (1974), a forested peat-bog on a gently sloping hillside; later reclassified as a state park.
- Chowan Swamp (1974), a large expanse of wetland;
- Hemlock Bluffs (1976), an 80 foot bluff with disjunct populations of hemlock 200 miles east of their typical habitat;
- Masonboro Island (1976), a nine-mile long pristine barrier island with a variety of maritime communities;
- Mitchell Mill (1976), a classic example of granite outcrops;
- Bushy Lake (1977), one of the best remaining pocosin-dominated Carolina bays; and
- Baldhead Island (1979), a rare barrier island complex of diverse natural communities.

## **Second State Parks Study Commission**

In 1977, a Second State Parks Study Commission was created to report on the needs of parks and recreation in North Carolina. In response, a five-year (1979-1984) plan, which reflected a shift in focus from land acquisition to improving existing units, was developed. Unfortunately, as with previous plans, few of the recommendations were implemented.

In 1979, the city of Goldsboro along with Wayne County and the Old Waynesborough Commission donated 201 acres. Waynesborough Park, which opened in May 1986, was the site of the first incorporated town in Dobbs County (area that now comprises Wayne, Lenoir and Green counties). Due to

its small size and limited natural resource value, the park was returned to the city of Goldsboro for management.

Throughout the seventies, new programs were added, the number of state park units doubled and the acreage of many units increased. Though state appropriations had been made for six years straight, the second State Parks Study Commission highlighted many needs still to be addressed.

## Part 7: Reservoirs, Re-evaluations and New Initiatives, 1980-1989

### Recreation Areas

Jordan Lake State Recreation Area opened in 1981, followed by Falls Lake State Recreation Area in 1983.

Both of these areas were leased from the Army Corps of Engineers and joined Kerr Lake in providing water-based recreation for metropolitan populations. In 1986, Fort Fisher became the system's fourth recreation area. Part of a peninsula, it contains a variety of undisturbed coastal communities.



### A Drop in Appropriations

The momentum of the 1970s began to stall. LWCF allotments declined sharply and most of the study commission's recommendations failed to materialize due to lack of funding. During the five-year period from 1979-1984, only four percent of the funding recommended by the second study commission was appropriated.

### Third Study Commission

Needs of the system continued to receive publicity and a third Study Commission was created in 1983. Many deficiencies in the system were noted, just as they had been in 1968 and 1979. As had happened before, only a few of the commission's recommendations came to fruition. The study did, however, spur the General Assembly into action.

### The \$25 Million Appropriation of 1985

In 1985, the General Assembly appropriated \$25 million for the purchase of critical park acreage. This appropriation exceeded the total state

appropriations made over the entire history of the state parks system. While welcomed and needed, no additional personnel were funded to implement the acquisition process, so the program started slowly.

Progress was too slow for the General Assembly. By the time acquisition began, the appropriation had been cut from \$25 million to \$16,580,000. In spite of this adjustment, the appropriation was a needed boost to land acquisition efforts.

### **Community Service Worker Program**

With \$1.2 million of the 1985 appropriation, the General Assembly created the Community Service Worker Program. Many offenders assigned by the courts fulfilled their sentences through construction and repair projects. The program boosted both the manpower and budget for park maintenance.

### **Adopt-A-Park Program**

In May 1985 the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation awarded a \$35,000 grant to fund an Adopt-A-Park program. A mini-grant program was developed for groups who wanted to adopt a park. Projects included the development of trails, amphitheatres and educational materials. In 1989, the Division won a second grant to continue the program.

### **State Parks Act**

In 1985, yet another Study Commission was authorized. The most important outgrowth of the study was an act establishing the purpose of the State Parks System. Prior to its passage, no law existed which defined this purpose, therefore policies and direction were subject to change with administrations, personnel and public opinion. As a result of this act, the State Parks System is now protected by a legal mandate.

The State Parks Act defines the purpose of the State Parks System as protecting representative examples of North Carolina's unique biological, recreational, geological, scenic, and archaeological resources for future generations and providing for the public's enjoyment of these resources.

## **Two New Parks in 1980s**

Local support and the efforts of the area's legislative delegation resulted in the establishment of 564-acre Lake James State Park. Located in the foothills, nearby mountain ranges offer scenic surroundings for lake recreation and camping. Lawmakers also approved the designation of Lumber River as a state park and state river in southeastern North Carolina.



## **Environmental Education**

In 1987, the Division put forth a strong effort to bring environmental education and interpretation to the lives of all of the state's citizens, particularly school children. The larger department, which housed North Carolina state parks, further emphasized environmental education in August 1989 with the appointment of an environmental education team, which produced a set of recommendations, resulting in the creation of an Office of Environmental Education.

## **Law Enforcement**

The need for stronger resource protection, along with a growing concern for visitor safety, led to the development of a formal law enforcement program for the state parks system for all rangers and superintendents. In July of 1988, the first group of rangers graduated from Basic Law Enforcement Training and were designated as special peace officers.

By the end of the decade, a changing, growing North Carolina was reflected in the park system. As the state continued to change, parks continued to be places for its citizens to refresh themselves through contact with nature.



## **Part 8: Financial Resources Committed to State Parks, 1990-1999**

The 1990s opened with increased public awareness about the state parks system's funding needs for land acquisition, repairs and new facilities. The Division embarked on a strategic public awareness campaign identifying the diverse and significant natural resources protected in the state parks system but stressed insufficient funding levels for operations, management, development, renovations and growth. North Carolina began experiencing unprecedented population increases at the time and open space began disappearing. The grassroots strategy led to significant media coverage and public support and invigorated interest by the state's political leaders.

In response, the state held an overwhelmingly successful \$35 million bond referendum for state park funding in 1993, and the General Assembly created the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund in 1994. In 1995, Governor Jim Hunt commented that the creation of a dedicated funding source for the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund was "one of my finest days as governor ... this trust fund will be a legacy for years to come."

Jonathan Howes, then Secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and later the Chairman of the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund Authority, praised the team effort that played a major role in passage of the legislation. More than 200 organizations supported and lobbied for the dedication of the deed transfer tax to fund PARTF.

The permanent source of funding created an unparalleled opportunity to make a difference by acquiring park land and building recreational facilities in communities and the state park system across North Carolina. At the same time, the opportunity created high expectations and a challenge to realize the fund's potential while continuing to foster the widespread public support that made PARTF possible.

The PARTF grant program is a partnership between state and local governments. Cities, counties, and public authorities have made PARTF a very popular program by submitting 955 applications requesting more than \$174 million since 1996.

In turn, by late 2008, the Parks and Recreation Authority had awarded 585 grants worth \$125.6 million to North Carolina counties and municipalities.



With local matching funds of over \$213 million, the total value of these PARTF projects is nearly \$339 million.

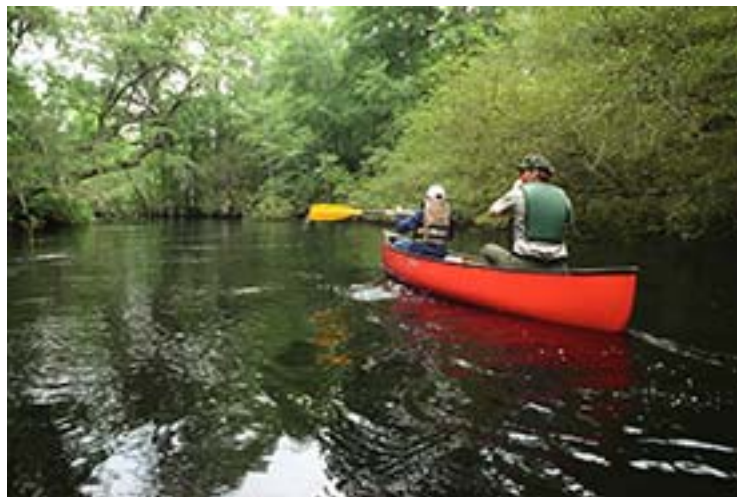
Since its inception, the trust fund has provided much-needed financial support for improvements in the state's park system, grants for local governments and increasing public access to the state's beaches. Since its creation, the trust fund has provided \$171.3 million to protect more than 38,132 acres of land and water within the state parks system and \$159.4 for capital improvements.

### **More Hands on the Plow**

The 1990s also saw the addition of maintenance mechanics and office assistants for each of the parks. For many years, parks operated without support in either of these key areas. The Division also began publishing Environmental Education Learning Experiences (EELEs) for each park. The EELEs focus on the primary interpretive themes of each park and offer pre-visit, on-site and post-visit activities designed for different aged groups. The EELEs are accompanied by teacher's guides.

In accordance with the State Parks Act, the Division set about creating park advisory committees and general management plans for every state park.

In the early 1990s, the state parks division made a major commitment to a "Web presence" on the newly developing Internet and World Wide Web. The state park system was one of the first agencies in North Carolina to engage in this effort, and shared at the annual ASSPD [Association of Southeastern State Park Directors] conference in 1995 the opportunity and partnership that UNC has provided the division in this endeavor.



Two North Carolina rivers received significant designations during this decade. The Lumber River became part of the national Wild and Scenic River System in 1998. In that

same year, the New River was designated as the first national Natural Heritage River, one of only 14 in the nation. The designation earned the park a visit from President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore.

## **Part 9: Planning for the Future and Growing Parks and Conservation in a Rapidly Growing State, 2000-2011**

The new century began with an energizing call from outgoing Governor Jim Hunt to preserve a million acres in North Carolina over the coming decade. Lawmakers heeded his call and enacted legislation mandating the state's pursuit of the lofty goal.

However, over the next few years, North Carolina experienced significant budget shortfalls so spending for park expansions was severely limited. During that time, the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation embarked on its New Parks for a New Century initiative, which identified sites in the state - among some of the most treasured and threatened of natural resources—as potential additions to the state parks system. This list of sites is regularly updated through a formal planning process. Important examples of the state's natural diversity are examined using scientific criteria as well as by rating their suitability for recreation.

Since this process began in 2002, some sites that were once on the list have been added to the parks system as state natural areas or state parks. The Division determined that adding new units to the state parks system should focus on preserving sites of statewide significance, on ensuring that representative examples of the state's resources are protected and on providing state park services to areas of the state currently underserved.

### **Ranger and Maintenance Staff Pay**

With departmental and General Assembly support, funding was provided to implement the recommendations of a 2004 study to raise salaries of all rangers and park superintendents in the state parks system by an initial average 6.95 percent. The salaries were increased again in the next year. In a related move, funding was provided to improve salaries of maintenance personnel, with increases to range from 3.2 to 9.7 percent.

For the better part of the state's 90-year history, state park superintendents and rangers were under-compensated on several fronts when compared to professionals working elsewhere in state government. That problem was exacerbated after park rangers formally entered into the law enforcement field in the late 1980s. The pay disparity had prompted advocates to

encourage the General Assembly to order a study by the Office of State Personnel in 2004. The study found that rangers in North Carolina were being paid 10-14 percent less than their counterparts in other states when performing the broad duties required.

The salary adjustment alleviated an inequity in pay that had existed since at least 1988, when law enforcement certification began to be required for rangers and superintendents. The change made it easier for the Division to recruit and retain entry-level rangers.

The study noted that it is difficult to compare the job of park rangers and superintendents with other law enforcement jobs such as police officers and deputies, or even those elsewhere within the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, such as marine fisheries and wildlife enforcement officers. Beyond law enforcement duties, North Carolina rangers are responsible for natural resource management, environmental education and visitor services.

### **Significant Expansion via Special Indebtedness**

Also in 2004, an agreement was reached with Crescent Resources Inc., the real estate arm of Duke Energy to acquire 2,915 acres to expand Lake James State Park. The acquisition, representing about 30 miles of shoreline, protected critical watershed and view-shed areas in Burke County, and is one component of a regional development and conservation plan fashioned by state and local governments, Crescent and land conservation trusts. The acquisition was made possible by a negotiated bargain sale from the utility company and also made use of a creative financing instrument—certificates of participation—authorized by the 2004 General Assembly is a bond-type indebtedness that borrows against future revenues of the trust fund.

### **90 Years of Natural Resource Stewardship**

In 2006, the state parks system's 90th Anniversary year, 5,101 acres of land were brought into conservation in partnership with the private conservation community and with support from the Parks and Recreation, Clean Water Management and Natural Heritage trust funds.

That same year, land conservation efforts advanced the division's New Parks for a New Century initiative by establishing the recently authorized Carvers Creek Sandhills State Park with 1,393 acres and Hickory Nut Gorge State Park (later re-named Chimney Rock State Park) with 2,264 acres. Land acquisition efforts continue at those new parks, as well as two others: Mayo River and Haw River state parks.



Additionally, two rare ecosystems became represented in the parks system as the North Carolina General Assembly authorized the Mountain Bogs and Sandy Run Savannas state natural areas.

The first land acquisition of 101 acres for Sandy Run in Pender County was completed with the help of The Nature Conservancy. The existing Beech Creek Bog State Natural Area will be combined with similar bog areas elsewhere in Avery County.

Other significant land acquisitions during the year included the largest single addition ever to New River State Park at 638 acres. The acquisition protects 1.6 miles of river shoreline just downstream of the Wagoner Road Access.



And, 549 acres were added to Elk Knob State Park, protecting the summit area of The Peak, the highest mountain in Ashe County.

## Leading On Sustainability

The Division made a commitment during this time to promote planning and construction practices of infrastructure and buildings that are environmentally responsible, profitable, and healthy places to live, work and enjoy. The agency adopted a policy requiring the pursuit of LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification through the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED Green Building Rating System for all new, or significantly renovated, buildings having 5,000 square feet or more.

For buildings less than 5,000 square feet, project team members are to be familiar with the use of LEED as a tool to help guide the project. Sustainable and green buildings typically require some additional services and result in additional deliverables. In most cases, additional costs are recovered within a few years based upon energy savings and other factors.

A major expansion of the campground at Stone Mountain State Park was completed. And, at Hanging Rock State Park, four vacation cabins were built and six existing cabins were renovated. Among capital projects, a new 7,500-square-foot visitor center at South Mountains State Park was dedicated in December 2006, representing an investment of \$2.6 million.



Also, new visitor centers were constructed at South Mountains, New River, Dismal Swamp, Merchants Millpond and Raven Rock. A 22,500 sq. ft. coastal education center at Fort Macon State Park is the largest visitor center, and is also LEED certified. The division's design and development group completed a swing-span access bridge across the Dismal Swamp Canal to open the way for that project.

### **Additional Lands Purchased**

In 2007, the state parks system brought 8,042 acres of land into conservation at 16 units with support from the Parks and Recreation, Clean Water Management and Natural Heritage trust funds. A premier partnership effort involving the trust funds, the General Assembly, land conservancies and local communities resulted in the acquisition of the 996-acre, private nature attraction Chimney Rock Park to be integrated into Chimney Rock



State Park now in development. Chimney Rock Park began as a private nature attraction in 1902. Its dominant feature is a 315-foot-tall rock spire that offers 75-mile views. The park also has a nature center and a network of hiking trails leading to unusual geologic features and the 404-foot Hickory Nut Falls. It has also been featured in a number of motion pictures, including Last of the Mohicans.

Other results from more than 200 active acquisition projects included expanding Medoc Mountain State Park with 1,507 acres of former International Paper Corp. land, 10 properties containing 301 acres added to the developing Mayo River State Park and 249 acres in an important watershed added to Lake Norman State Park.

Improvements to the U.S. 221 Access at New River State Park, included a 14,000-square-foot visitor center, campground, picnic grounds and maintenance complex were dedicated. The Division also focused its attention on a new observation platform at Mount Mitchell State Park and development of infrastructure at Gorges State Park. In addition, master plans were completed for the 3,000-acre addition at Lake James State Park and for South Mountains State Park. Master plans were authorized for Chimney Rock, Haw River and Carvers Creek state parks in 2008.

## **Blazing New Trails**

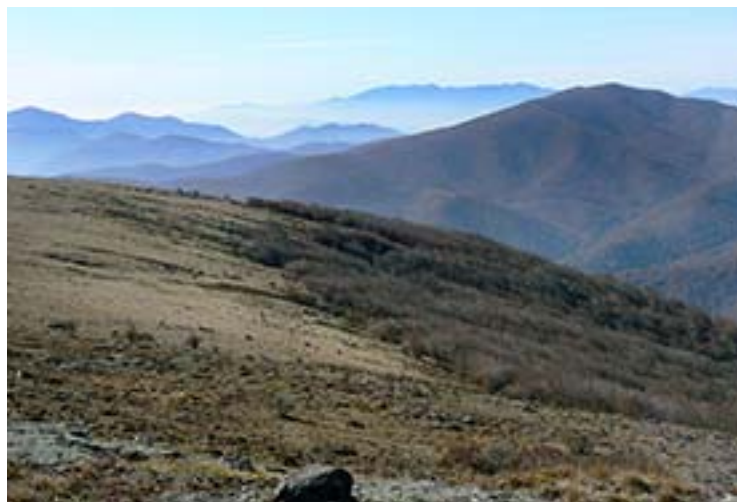
The General Assembly authorized the Deep River State Trail as a network of conservation and recreation lands along the river. And, the Division established the Pineola Bog and Sugar Mountain Bog state natural areas with acquisitions of 91 acres and Sandy Run Savannas State Natural Area with 2,357 acres. Lawmakers also authorized \$120 million in 2007 through certificates of participation for land acquisition in the state. The General Assembly followed up in 2008 with an additional allocation of \$50 million in COPs for land acquisition through the trust funds. It is notable that 2008 COPS indebtedness is to be repaid from the state general fund, instead of future revenue from the trust fund.

The Division's State Trails Program initiated a corridor plan with local governments for the Mountains-to-Sea Trail in the western piedmont from Stone Mountain State Park through Guilford County and continues to fine tune corridor plans for the piedmont and eastern sections of the 1,000-mile route. A 15.1-mile segment of the trail along the Blue Ridge Parkway was dedicated.

During this time, the Division's resource management team stepped up efforts to protect the state parks' natural resources, particularly in the areas of prescribed burns, invasive species and stream restoration.

## **New Additions**

Between 2000 and 2008, more than 42,000 acres were added to the North Carolina state parks system. During the 2008 General Assembly, lawmakers authorized two new state natural areas in western North Carolina. The



authorization of the Yellow Mountain and Bear Paw state natural areas, both centered in Avery County, allowed the state parks system to begin the land acquisition process. The Yellow Mountain State Natural Area is part of the



Roan Highlands region, which boasts at least 76 rare species and an array of natural communities including grassy balds, cliffs, high elevation ridges and streams. The Bear Paw State Natural Area is of national ecological importance and includes Hanging Rock Ridge, Four Diamond Ridge and the headwaters of Dutch Creek. And, it contains an outstanding example of a rare high elevation, rocky summit supporting nine rare species including the federally endangered Virginia big-eared bat.

### **Buying an Iconic Mountain**

In fall 2008, Gov. Mike Easley announced that the state would acquire 2,456 acres on Grandfather Mountain to become North Carolina's newest state park. Under an agreement with Grandfather Mountain Inc., the state parks system would acquire the undeveloped portion of the famous tourist destination, as well as an easement on 749



acres to be retained by the heirs of the late Hugh Morton, at a price of \$12 million, well below its appraised value. Upon passage by unanimous vote early in the 2009 Session of the North Carolina General Assembly, Gov. Beverly Perdue signed the authorization bill establishing Grandfather Mountain State Park. Aside from being one of the state's signature landmarks, Grandfather Mountain is a premier natural resource, boasting 16 distinct ecological communities and 73 rare species and had been the only privately held property recognized as an International Biosphere Reserve.

As North Carolina's state park system nears the centennial mark, it has realized the emergence of new approaches to conservation, as well as new programs, partnerships and new standard of professionalism. And, visitors are discovering new ways to use the parks as the state faces rapid urbanization. Yet still, it enjoys long held, bedrock traditions such as citizen involvement in the development of state parks and deeply held sense of responsibility for stewardship for the state's natural heritage.



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