

Governor launches Connect NC campaign at Stone Mountain

Gov. Pat McCrory's launch of the \$2 billion Connect NC bond campaign included a stop at Stone Mountain State Park Oct. 22, where he signed a ceremonial copy of the 2015 legislation and touted the proposal's benefits to the state parks system.

If approved by voters in March, the Connect NC bonds would direct \$75 million to 45 projects in state parks, recreation areas and natural areas across North Carolina. The identified projects include: \$20.8 million for new or improved visitor centers and community buildings in 11 parks; \$18.8 million for new or expanded campgrounds and cabins in 12 parks; \$21.3 million for other visitor facilities in 12 parks; and, \$14.1 million for land acquisition at 10 park units.

"Today, we are enjoying and benefiting from the investments made by our parents and grandparents," McCrory said. "New university and community college facilities and improved state parks are long-term investments that will support our growth and make North Carolina more attractive to businesses and residents."

The Governor spoke to a crowd of more than 100 supporters along a trail below the granite face of Stone Mountain. He introduced Robert Orr, former associate justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court, who heads a bipartisan committee to advocate for passage of the bond referendum.

A complete overview of the Connect NC bond proposal is at www.connect.nc.gov.



Trails program grants awarded

State officials in November announced the award of \$3.1 million in grants through the federal Recreational Trails Program to 38 local governments in 35 North Carolina counties.

The matching grants, recommended by the North Carolina Trails Committee will help fund healthful recreation opportunities for hikers, cyclists, paddlers, equestrians and off-highway vehicle (OHV) users throughout the state and will promote natural resource tourism.

"North Carolina is known for its excellent trails throughout the state for a variety of trail enthusiasts," said Susan Kluttz, Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. "I am thrilled to continue to see this program grow and thrive."

The Recreational Trails Program is administered by the Division of Parks and Recreation of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, with Federal Highways Administration funding routed through the N.C. Division of Transportation. Since 1999, North Carolina has been awarded more than \$28 million for sustainable trail projects.

Due to changes in the federal funding cycle, grant awards for two fiscal years were concurrent. For fiscal year 2015 funding, the program received 38 grant requests totaling \$3.1 million, and the North Carolina Trails Committee recommended awards for 20 projects totaling \$1.6 million. For fiscal year 2016 funding, the program received 61 grant requests totaling \$4.9 million, and the trails committee recommended awards for 18 projects totaling \$1.5 million.

Continued Other Side



NC DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION
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Music on the mountain

Strains of “Pretty Little Dog” and “Cumberland Gap” were bouncing across the rock ledges of Pilot Mountain State Park on a fall weekend. It was a small crowd but a very big stage that greeted the Southern String Band, which traveled from Raleigh.

There are a few surprises being planned for the 2016 centennial of the state parks system. One of those is a video being prepared by Tom Earnhardt, a regular contributor to UNC-TV and a long-time friend and supporter of the state parks.

Earnhardt decided an al fresco performance by the Southern String Band might be the perfect thing to get video viewers in the mood. So, fiddles, banjos, guitars, a mandolin and bass were carefully carted down the Sassafras Trail to the sunny side of the iconic mountain.

There also is a series of videos being prepared that celebrate the splendors and history of individual state parks. Much of the footage for those was captured by our rangers.



Grants directed to local, state parks projects

The N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund Authority awarded \$3.9 million for local parks and recreation projects at its October meeting. Local governments submitted 67 applications requesting \$12.6 million.

The authority also allocated \$1.5 million to purchase properties for addition to Lake James, Raven Rock, Pettigrew and Grandfather Mountain state parks. The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund provides dollar-for-dollar matching grants to local governments for parks and recreation projects to serve the public. The trust fund is the primary source of funding to build and renovate facilities in the state parks and to buy land for new and existing parks.

At the meeting, Division Director Mike Murphy provided a summary of the recently completed session of the General Assembly and provided updates on recent activities and events in the division, the agency’s move to the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources and the upcoming bond referendum, which includes \$75 million for state parks.

Pilot Mountain opens new trail

Pilot Mountain State Park’s newest trail – a 4.5-mile loop near the base of the mountain – was inspired by a firebreak hastily constructed with a bulldozer in 2012 and completed by park staff and volunteers from Friends of Sauratown Mountains.

The Mountain Trail rambles around the slopes at about 1,500 feet elevation, at one point connecting with the Grindstone Trail near the park’s campground and also accessible from near the visitor center and from a remote parking area on Pinnacle Hotel Road (aka Surry Line Road) that serves as a trailhead for the Corridor Trail.

Park Superintendent Matt Windsor estimated the contribution of the Friends of Sauratown Mountains, which cleared the route, and park staff that cut larger trees, at about \$23,000.

A 2012 prescribed burn that briefly escaped control prompted the N.C. Forest Service to construct a firebreak around the mountain’s base. Although the firebreak was never really tested by the blaze, parks system officials considered it as a potential trail. Though much of the bulldozed route was found to be too rocky and unstable for a trail, the idea persisted. Most of the new Mountain Trail was routed slightly farther uphill, though a few sections of the bulldozed path were used.

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, and click “News.”

