

Research Guidelines

Overview

The North Carolina state parks system includes more than three dozen state parks, nature preserves, lakes and recreation areas that are managed by the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation. Natural resource management in the state parks system is guided largely by the division's resource management policy, which states that the preservation and protection of resources will take priority over visitor access or the development of facilities.

Although an emphasis is placed on allowing ecosystems to operate with minimal human interference, our understanding of these systems is far from complete. Appropriate stewardship of the state parks system's natural and cultural resources demands that scientific research be an ongoing part of each park's management. Because many state parks protect large, reasonably undisturbed environments, they offer unique research opportunities. In recognition of the value of parks as natural laboratories, scientists and students are encouraged to use the state parks system for scientific research and training. The division's research program is intended to help park managers better understand the natural resources and processes that they manage and to provide the scientific community and the general public with greater insight into the long-term management and protection of natural resources.

The North Carolina state parks system's research program is administered by the division's resource management program and is open to any researcher affiliated with a professional, scientific, governmental or educational institution. Park research projects are intended to provide park managers with information ranging from simple descriptive data to studies involving complex, ecosystem-scale processes. Although specific research topics are diverse, the research program focuses on baseline inventories of each park's resources, long-term monitoring studies and long-term cooperative agreements to ensure continued research.

In order to conduct scientific research in the North Carolina state parks system, you must first submit a detailed research proposal and obtain a Scientific Research and Collecting Permit. A copy of the permit is included in this website, as well as details about the application process.

Activities that require a research and collecting permit:

A permit is required for any project involving the collection, removal or disturbance of any natural or cultural resource of any state park unit and for projects that require placing monitoring equipment in any state park unit.

Activities that occur as part of a typical visit to any state park, such as wildflower photography or wildlife observation, do not require a permit. Requests for personal or commercial collecting, or for projects that do not address specific research needs, will be denied. Manipulative or destructive research is generally not permitted. School trips for

North Carolina Division of Parks & Recreation Research Guidelines

purposes of simple observation do not require a permit. However, classes that visit the park to collect specimens or to conduct experiments that are not part of a scheduled park educational program are required to obtain a permit. Teachers should contact the park superintendent in advance of their arrival to determine if a permit is needed.

Activities that require additional permits: Certain research projects may require compliance with other environmental and administrative regulations. It is the applicant's responsibility to determine if additional permits are required, to contact the appropriate agencies and obtain those permits. The Division of Parks and Recreation will not issue a park research permit until all other required permits have been obtained. Regulations that require compliance may include but are not limited to: the Endangered Species Act, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act and the Coastal Area Management Act. Other agencies that may require permits include the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the NC Department of Agriculture's Plant Conservation Program.

Suggested research topics:

Researchers are free to select from research topics that have been previously identified or to develop projects that address park management needs. Opportunities exist in a wide variety of disciplines, including botany, zoology, ecology, history, archaeology and anthropology. Although all levels of research are encouraged, the state parks system's most serious research and management needs are generally appropriate for advanced undergraduate or graduate students. Opportunities to design and conduct thesis or dissertation-level research are diverse and occur virtually throughout the parks system. Examples include:

- Systematic inventories of terrestrial and aquatic species of flora and fauna
- Systematic cultural and archaeological inventories and investigations
- Endangered, threatened and rare species identification, monitoring and management
- Wildlife carrying capacity, population ecology and management
- Fire ecology
- Natural community restoration and rehabilitation
- Exotic and pest species identification, monitoring and management
- Fisheries management, including fish stocking and comprehensive aquatic surveys
- Geological surveys
- Sea turtle ecology
- Breeding bird surveys
- Coastal processes including dune formation, geological history and migration
- Resource management planning and guidelines
- Development of monitoring programs for natural and cultural resources
- Determinations of recreational carrying capacity
- Impacts in and management of rock climbing sites