



The STEWARD DIGEST



NC DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION
www.ncparks.gov

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South Mountains State Park staff

South Mountains Celebrates New Acreage, Access, Accolades

South Mountains State Park staff welcomed 50 guests and local elementary school students to the park April 20 to celebrate recent successes. Students from Hildebran Elementary School joined rangers in a ribbon cutting to open the newly re-routed Chestnut Knob Trail, which had been closed in 2016 due to wildfire damage.

Friends, volunteers, visitors and park staff came together to celebrate the park, which was named the 2017 Park of the Year—an award given each January based on a park's accomplishments the year prior. Representatives from The Conservation Fund and Foothills Land Conservancy of North Carolina joined the gathering to celebrate the partnership with state parks that added over 1,000 new acres of land to the park last year, bringing the size of South Mountains State Park to over 20,000 acres—by far the largest in our state parks system.



Map of acquired land at Umstead State Park Crabtree entrance

Umstead Swaps Land; Plans Safer Crabtree Entrance

In a recent agreement between the Division of Parks and Recreation and affiliates of Anderson Automotive Group, Inc., parcels of land near the Crabtree Creek entrance of William B. Umstead State Park will be exchanged. The exchange will alleviate long-standing traffic and safety issues at the existing park entrance. More than 825,000 people used the Crabtree entrance to access Umstead State Park last year.

The property acquisition will allow the park to re-route the park entrance to a traffic signal at Glenwood Avenue and Triangle Drive. Additional funds received in the deal due to a land value differential will be earmarked by the division to acquire other important lands adjacent to the park.



Burn crew visits completed prescribed burn site

Prescribed Burns Catalyze Return to Native Ecosystems

The Division of Parks and Recreation has used prescribed burns for decades to manage natural resources in state parks. Many natural communities are adapted to fire and cannot thrive without periodic burning. Prescribed fire teams have managed burns across 5,388 acres throughout the state parks system this year and expect to set a new record for most acres burned by year's end. Thanks to partners, including the N.C. Forest Service, fire teams completed 45 prescribed fires at 23 park units before the start of summer. Fire teams also achieved the first-ever prescribed burns at Jockey's Ridge, Hammocks Beach, and Gorges state parks as well as the first prescribed burn at Oconeechee Mountain State Natural Area in Orange County since the land became part of the parks system.

Parks staff and partners completed a 226-acre burn around the summit of Medoc Mountain and a 240-acre burn at Merchants Millpond State Park. Carvers Creek State Park, one of the newest units in the system, hosted seven prescribed burns totaling 1,300 acres. Carver's Creek is already experiencing outstanding rejuvenation of native ecological communities typical of the Sandhills region and serves as a great example of the value and purpose of prescribed burns for effective and affordable natural resource management.



Electric car charging stations

Amped-up: Parks Get Electrical Upgrades

Work is well underway at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area to upgrade electrical hookups at campgrounds, thanks to Connect N.C. Bond funds. Camping loops C and F at the park's Poplar Point campground will re-open this fall with upgraded 50-amp hookups, a major boost from the existing 30-amp hookups. The shower houses serving these areas will also be renovated.

New electric car charging stations are now installed at Crowders Mountain, Lake James, and Lake Norman state parks thanks to a grant from Duke Energy. Mountain Region Superintendent Sean McElhone pursued the grant with the goal of allowing electric vehicle owners to make round-trip drives to state parks in the mountain region.



NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

Roy Cooper
Governor

Susi H. Hamilton
Secretary, DNCR

Parks Tackle Invasive Species

All state parks struggle with invasive species of various types. Management of these species, both flora and fauna, is critical to ensure native species thrive. Invasive species can reduce nutritious food sources for native species, crowd out habitat, or degrade water quality by changing light, shade, dissolved oxygen, and pH in the area. Invasive species often do not provide nutritional value to local wildlife.

Carolina Beach State Park staff and partners at the N.C. Division of Water Resources have battled an invasive species of phragmites at Carolina Beach State Park since 2010. Four feet high, thick and sharp, the invasive grass grows quickly and takes over the habitat of everything surrounding it.

To manage the spread of phragmites, park staff clear-cut dead reeds in winter and treat sprouting reeds in the spring. In unaffected areas of the park, brackish marshes host diverse native plant life and bustling ecosystems.

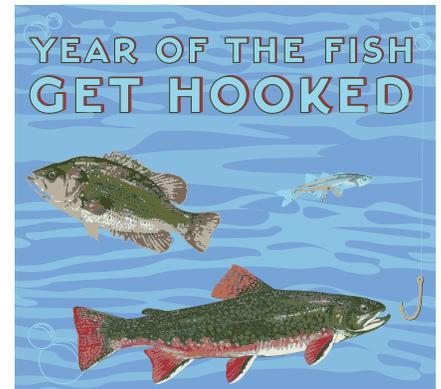
At Eno River State Park, another invasive species requires a different approach. Hydrilla is an invasive submersed aquatic plant that grows fast, forming thick mats at the water's surface. The plant outcompetes native vegetation, causing a decline in natural biodiversity. Hydrilla can harm birds and fish by affecting dissolved oxygen and the pH of the water for extended periods of time. When dense, Hydrilla beds can even produce a toxin that can be deadly to waterfowl. In spring and summer of each year, Hydrilla is treated in infested sections of the river thanks to a partnership with the N.C. Division of Water Resources and others. A task force of local leaders and invasive species experts is in place to continue to evaluate the presence of Hydrilla in the Eno and develop and execute treatment plans as needed.



Hydrilla in the Eno River

Something's Fishy This Year at State Parks!

Each year, the division's interpretation and education team selects a theme as a focus to inspire events and education throughout the state parks system. "Get Hooked" will focus on the role of fish in our state parks, from their recreational value to the services they provide our ecosystems. Thanks to the diverse geology across our state and parks system, visitors of all ages can learn about fish in various ecosystems. Anglers can fish for trout that abound in fresh mountain streams at Stone Mountain and South Mountains state parks or search for the Red Drum that live in the waters near coastal state parks like Goose Creek and Hammocks Beach.



FEMA Relief Funds Help Lumber River Clear Debris from Hurricane Matthew

The eye of Hurricane Matthew swept through the coastal plain of our state in October 2016, causing catastrophic flooding across eastern North Carolina and damage across most of the state. As far south as Fair Bluff, where the Lumber River ambles over the South Carolina border and tracking just east of Medoc Mountain State Park, the storm flooded fields and forests, destroyed homes and businesses, deposited debris in communities and across farmland, and littered rivers and streams with fallen trees and limbs.

One of the hardest hit areas of the state included Lumber River State Park. The debris the flooding deposited in and around the river obstructed boater and paddler access and navigation. Thanks to FEMA funds, the division hired contractor Horner Services, LLC, which began clearing debris in the river Feb. 10. To quickly improve recreational opportunities on the river, the contractor made a 10-foot wide passage through the middle of the river by cutting and removing fallen trees and debris, clearing over 85 miles of the river. Ultimately, the crews removed nearly 1,500 tons of debris from the river. Work was completed May 11.



Obstruction in the Lumber River

Exciting New Projects Coming Online

Cliffs of the Neuse State Park has two new camper cabins. The cabins are the same as ones that are a huge hit with visitors at Carolina Beach State Park since they opened there in 2017. The park is also renovating the bathhouse serving its family campground, which will be closed from October to March while the project is completed. Extensive new bike trails are nearly complete at Raven Rock, bringing top-notch mountain biking opportunities to the area. Nearly 14 miles of trail through the park's undulating terrain offer an exciting ride reminiscent of mountain trails.



Camper cabin at Cliffs of the Neuse State Park

Waterfall Safety: Modern Risks Compound Classic Safety Challenge

Our visitors love hiking to waterfalls at our parks. They brave icy trails to see them frozen in a cold winter, and they trudge up rugged paths to marvel at them throughout the remaining year. Unfortunately, in the excitement of the experience, visitors sometimes make unsafe decisions. Leaving the trail or viewing areas to get closer to waterfalls, visitors often slip and fall. The novelty of a waterfall also inspires visitors to swim in dangerous areas with underwater obstacles that can cause serious injury and even death. That's why we're embarking on a campaign to remind our visitors about their responsibilities in waterfall safety. You can visit the new waterfall safety page at ncparks.gov/waterfall-safety.



 **We're Social!**  *The Steward is a Newsletter of the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation. To learn how to subscribe and have news of the North Carolina State Parks sent directly to your email inbox, scan the QR code with a smartphone app, or visit www.ncparks.gov/newsroom.* 