



Photo courtesy of Laura Meeks

# North Carolina Trails Program

# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2020-2021



division of parks and recreation

# NCTRAILS



NC DEPARTMENT  
OF NATURAL AND  
CULTURAL RESOURCES

DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION  
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NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES  
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Elk Knob State Park

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*Carvers Creek State Park*



*William B. Umstead State Park*

Each year, a trails report is submitted to outline trail needs, describe additions to the State Trails System and summarize the growing importance of trails across the state. This report is composed by the N.C. Trails Program for the Secretary of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) in accordance with General Statute 143B-135.102.

The North Carolina Trails Program (Trails Program) originated in 1973 with the North Carolina Trails System Act and is dedicated to helping citizens, organizations and agencies plan, develop and manage all types of trails ranging from greenways and trails for hiking, biking and horseback riding to paddle trails and off-road vehicle trails.

The staff of the Trails Program works to enable volunteers, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies to develop trail plans, preserve land corridors for trails, and manage trails for all trail users. Trails Program staff provides technical assistance, administers federal Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grants, and develops successful partnerships with local conservation and recreation advocates, including town, city and county governments.

## 2.0 Trails Have Incredible Value



Lake James State Park

### ■ Trails Boost Local Economies

In North Carolina, regional and state trails directly contribute tens of millions of dollars to local businesses including retail shops, hotels and restaurants as well as provide jobs for local residents. Recent research from the Institute for Transportation Research and Education (ITRE, 2018) has shown that the American Tobacco Trail (a 22-mile trail in the Triangle area) contributes \$5.7M to the local economy annually, supports 78 jobs, and generates \$2.2M annually in labor income.

The conservation and recreation-based tourism industry preserves natural resources and increases the quality of life in a community. As its local textile industry floundered, Elkin, N.C. reinvented itself as a trail town—hosting both the Mountains-to-Sea and Yadkin River state trails. New trail-related businesses have rejuvenated the economy in and around the town. Elkin now hosts N.C. Trail Days, which in turn provides a boost to tourism and the local economy.

Regional trails have been shown to increase property values for homes located near the trail (ITRE, 2018). According to the National Association of Home Builders, trails are the most desired community amenity that homeowners seek when buying a home.

### ■ Trails Preserve North Carolina's Rural Landscape

In 1990, the population of North Carolina was 6.6 million; the U.S. Census from April, 2020 shows the population has reached approximately 10.5 million. Every new person that enters our state needs land for their home, school and workplace. We continue to acquire open space to accommodate our increasing population. At the same time, more and more people live and work in our cities and rarely experience the natural beauty of our state. Urban trails serve to preserve open space and are available to people from all walks of life.

### ■ Trails Protect the Environment

Surface runoff from our roads and lawns is one of the leading causes of pollution in our drinking water. The rapid development of land exacerbates this problem by increasing impervious surfaces that are unable to trap and filter pollutants. Protected natural corridors for regional trails and greenways can filter pollutants from runoff. Protecting land, especially near our rivers and streams, is a voluntary, cost-effective way to make our drinking water sources cleaner and reduce the cost of water treatment.

Protected corridors also serve as “highways” of habitat for many wildlife species. This protection is increasingly essential as our landscape is fragmented through development. Those trails that are planned to function as alternative transportation corridors also serve to reduce vehicle emissions and decrease traffic congestion.

### ■ Trails Promote Healthy Living

Hiking, biking, and walking are available to people from all economic levels and have been shown to combat diabetes, heart disease, hypertension and obesity. Hiking and walking are consistently ranked as a top recreational activity nationally. Where trails are available, people use them. One study has shown that for every dollar spent in trail development, \$3 are saved in health care costs (American Heart Association, 2011). Another important benefit is the increase in quality of life for people who continue to seek more time in a natural environment.

## 3.0 Trails and the COVID-19 Pandemic



Fort Macon State Park

In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic swiftly disrupted the lives of everyone in the nation. This disturbance has continued through the remainder of 2020 and through the first half of 2021 with uncertainty about when this pandemic will end or become more manageable. Adjustments were and continue to be made by the population of North Carolina and the nation, but we all continue to feel a variety of impacts and stress to daily life. Many frontline workers and other employees cannot work from home and have continued to face the daily threat of exposure. These stresses persist for individuals and families related to unemployment, risk of illness, remote learning, working from home and general uncertainty of when life may return to some semblance of normalcy.

In addition to the daily and lingering stress of the pandemic there is the cumulative stress of dealing with the pandemic for well over a year. While dealing with these stresses, many exercise and recreational outlets like gyms and health clubs have reduced operations and restricted class sizes. With reduced opportunities for physical exercise, an abundance of people discovered parks and trails were a relatively safe and healthy option for exercising and recreating. Record-setting increases in visitation back up these observations.

Several parks experienced visitation increases in excess of 25 percent compared to 2019, including Carolina Beach (78 percent), Mayo River (92 percent), Raven Rock (32 percent) and Grandfather Mountain (32 percent). The month of December was the busiest December on record, with South Mountains up 98 percent, William B. Umstead up 68 percent, Hammocks Beach up 67, and Hanging Rock up 57 percent more visitors for the month.

Parks and green spaces provided much-needed relief to citizens, both mentally and physically. The outdoors has continued to be a safe space for exercise. Our state parks offer open spaces, over 600 miles of trails to explore as well as many scenic destinations. Even with the green spaces and miles of trail we offer, it was apparent that there is an appetite for even more opportunity for exercise and stress relief in the outdoors. Parks and trails at many of the highly visited parks became busy with visitors eager to explore while trying to remain socially distant. The importance of trails is widely accepted but, through the pandemic, it was clear they provide a much-needed avenue to help the public ease these stresses that continue to impact their lives.

The surge in visitation and anecdotal observations by park staff demonstrate how the state park trails system provided an incredible resource for recreation and an exercise outlet for citizens of N.C. during the pandemic. The

### 3.0 Trails and the COVID-19 Pandemic



*Widened and compacted trail tread on Profile Trail, Grandfather Mountain State Park*



*Reworking the trail tread on Profile Trail at Grandfather Mountain State Park*

increased demand has certainly resulted in even more heavy usage on a trail system that is already stressed and in need of constant maintenance. The impact of increased usage combined with social distancing has resulted in widened trail treads that do not properly shed water. Trails, such as the Profile Trail at Grandfather Mountain State Park, were designed to function properly at four feet wide but are trampled to a width exceeding eight feet in many places. (See Profile Trail photo) These are behavioral factors that weren't common and therefore not considered in trail design standards and future maintenance needs.

Increased use highlighted the need to maintain and improve the existing trail system while identifying options to expand a system that is near capacity. In addition to routine maintenance practiced by park staff, the Division partnered with the Conservation Corps of North Carolina (CCNC) to tackle some extensive trail maintenance needs on the Profile Trail (see photos above).

The N.C. Trails Program is actively pursuing a long-term strategy to redesign each state park trail system into a sustainable trail system that is more resilient and cost-effective to manage to handle ever-increasing demand on these recreational resources. The N.C. Trails staff has nearly completed design for a new sustainable trail system for Morrow Mountain State Park. These trails will be designed to better handle normal wear and tear due to weather while withstanding the impacts that come with heavier visitor usage, we are certain to continue to see in the coming years.

## 4.0 State Trails

Each state trail is a unit of the state parks system and must be authorized by the General Assembly. When any new state trail is added to the system, the Division of Parks and Recreation (Division) engages in a planning process, including a feasibility study for the new trail. Effective planning is essential to determine a corridor for the trail and identify potential partners. Planning includes extensive data collection, outreach to potential partners, public input, and mapping of the trail corridor.

State trails are comprised of multiple connected sections. Each of these sections is sponsored by a governmental agency or private landowner, which is often a land conservancy. These section sponsors build, maintain, and manage their segment of trail and maintain authority on lands under their jurisdiction. The Division works hard to inform, coordinate, and support these partners.

While a state trail is authorized by the General Assembly and the Division undertakes planning to determine the trail corridor, the trail does not officially become a state trail until constructed and designated by the Secretary of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. All designation applications are evaluated for approval by Division staff and the North Carolina Trails Committee.

The General Assembly authorized two new state trails in 2021: East Coast Greenway and Dan River. The governor signed both authorization bills at a ceremony at the North Carolina Museum of Art in June 2021. The East Coast Greenway is a multimodal path planned to connect Maine to Florida. There are 795 planned miles of this trail in North Carolina—both as a spine route through Durham, Raleigh and Fayetteville and as a coastal route connecting Greenville, Jacksonville, and Wilmington. Although this is a national trail, only the segments in North Carolina are included as a state trail. State Parks and the East Coast Greenway Alliance continued our strong partnership as we encouraged municipalities with constructed segments to apply for state trail designation.

The Dan River was also authorized as a State Trail. While planning has yet to begin, it is likely to be a paddle trail or blueway. The Dan River meanders around the border of North Carolina and Virginia. Approximately 90 miles of the 200+ mile river are in North Carolina. While only the sections in North Carolina will be included in the state trail, State Parks will attempt to coordinate efforts with our counterparts in Virginia to create a seamless experience for the blueway user.

Along with typical challenges like weather, the pandemic continued to affect progress on constructing and maintaining state trails in 2021. Volunteer workdays resumed, but to provide social distancing, they drew far fewer workers than usual.

Guided hikes, like the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail's birthday hikes, became solo treks. However, it was clear that visitation continued to increase on trails in outdoor recreation venues across the state in 2021. Both the Friends of the MST (FMST) and the Friends of the Fonta Flora (F3ST) developed hiking challenges related to the state trails that they support. The overall effect of these challenges was increased awareness, support and use of our state trails.

Substantial trail planning efforts continued in 2021. Although authorized in 2007, the Deep River State Trail has never had a comprehensive master plan. Master planning efforts for this trail commenced this year.

Primary support organizations for each of the state trails were identified in 2021. One of the many efforts to strengthen these partnerships was the drafting of an Memorandum of Understanding between State Parks and these organizations. This MOU is in the final stages of internal approval.

Detailed trail design, a required prerequisite to construction, started on an initial segment of the Wilderness Gateway State Trail in McDowell County.

The Division continued to partner with NCDOT in their Great Trails State planning effort to ensure that state trails would be included in the plan—either as destinations or spine routes. Adoption of this plan will facilitate many aspects of planning and construction of the Division's state trails in the future. Additionally, the NCDOT partnered with the Division to provide pedestrian access on several bridges slated for replacement along state trail routes.

Partnerships are essential to enable the Division to plan and coordinate over 3,300 miles of planned and constructed state trails throughout the state.

## 4.O State Trails



Cove Bridge, Fonta Flora State Trail – Photo courtesy of F3ST

### Deep River State Trail (DRST)

Authorized in 2007, the DRST is both a land trail and a blueway, or paddle trail, which will extend from Jamestown in Guilford County to Moncure in Chatham County. The blueway will require access to the river every 5 to 10 miles along the river. The trail will require the accessed land to be owned or a permanent easement granted to a governmental agency or land conservancy. This land may be areas just large enough for a paddle access without a land connection between them. This year, the Division began developing a partnership with the Piedmont Triad Regional Water Authority, the organization that controls the Randleman Reservoir. The Reservoir separates Guilford County and High Point from the rest of the DRST.

There are 4.35 miles of designated trail for the DRST. There is a very active task force working on the Randolph County portion. They have received grants to continue the trail and to begin the blueway in Randolph County. In 2021, they actively pursued and obtained funding to begin design a large pedestrian bridge that will be required on the route between Ramseur and Franklinville.

Much of the planned route for the DRST trail portion in Randolph, Moore and Chatham Counties has been included as a spine route in the draft of NCDOT's Great Trails State Plan. This will facilitate partnering with NCDOT to continue extending the trail eastward.

### Fonta Flora State Trail (FFST)

Authorized in 2015, the FFST will connect Morganton to Asheville with a dual use trail. Included in the trail is a loop around Lake James. The trail will traverse Lake James State Park, part of Pisgah National Forest, and Fonta Flora County Park in Burke County. It will connect with the Overmountain Victory Trail, Mountains-to-Sea State Trail, Old Fort and Black Mountain. Currently, there are over 18 miles of trail designated as part of the FFST. Much of the FFST through Lake James State Park, approximately seven miles, has been constructed. The Division received a grant to construct more of the trail south of the park's visitor center. That work began in 2021. One of the signature sights along the Fonta Flora is sure to be the Cove Bridge that was completed in 2021. This bridge will link the visitor center to the trail heading south. The Division is working to complete the more challenging segments of the FFST through the park.

The Friends of Fonta Flora State Trail (F3ST) was chartered in 2020. They are actively working to extend the trail, especially in the Old Fort area. Division staff were given ex officio status on the Board of F3ST. Several tracts in the Old Fort area were purchased using Connect NC Bond funds. These will facilitate trail connections and the development of a trailhead. Trail was constructed on a larger property, between Old Fort and Black Mountain, that was purchased using the Connect NC bond funds. A designation application is anticipated by the end of calendar year 2021.

## 4.O State Trails



Future vista on the HGST



Hikers on the Mountains to Sea State Trail

### French Broad River State Trail (FBST)

The FBST was established in 1978 on the third oldest river in the world. The 117-mile blueway flows north from Rosman, N.C. to the Tennessee border, through Buncombe (including the heart of western North Carolina's largest city, Asheville), Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania counties. Multiple partner organizations maintain access sites along the length of the blueway. The Division has continued to partner with NCDOT to minimize impacts of road and bridge construction on the blueway. MountainTrue is becoming a major partner for the FBST, especially in engaging volunteers. The French Broad River State Trail is complete, with all 117 miles designated.

### Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail (HGST)

The HGST was authorized in 2017. Conserving Carolinas is the major partner for the HGST. The trail is planned to be approximately 50 miles long. The planning process will be complete in 2021 and the Division will start accepting designation applications for trail segments. Currently, there are over 17 miles of trail completed within the planning corridor. The trail will offer beautiful vistas of the Hickory Nut Gorge, Chimney Rock and Lake Lure.

### Mountains-to-Sea State Trail (MST)

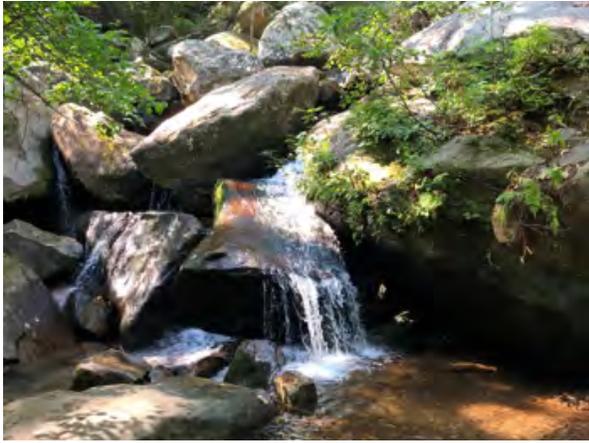
The MST is North Carolina's flagship state trail. When completed, it will stretch from Clingman's Dome on N.C.'s border with Tennessee to the Atlantic Ocean at Jockeys Ridge State Park. It will offer major loops in the Piedmont that incorporate Winston-Salem and Hanging Rock State Park. The trail will also stretch through the southern coastal plain, including a path along the Neuse River and a "Coastal Crescent Route" through Sampson, Cumberland, Bladen, Pender, and Onslow Counties.

The Division has completed a regional planning study in the southeastern part of North Carolina. This included the Coastal Crescent Route of the MST. The Friends of the MST were one of the major stakeholders in this effort.

### Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST)

Authorized in 2019, the NPST will reach approximately 40 miles from Boone in Watauga County to Mount Jefferson in Ashe County. Due to the delicate ecosystems along the trail route, only hiking will be allowed on the trail. It will cross through Elk Knob State Park, which will likely host the first constructed segments of the trail. Construction of those segments will proceed once the appropriate environmental review has been completed and when adequate funding is obtained. The Division, in partnership with Blue Ridge Land Conservancy, continue to plan and promote this trail.

## 4.O State Trails



*Future vista on the WGST*



*Donnaha Access on the YRST*

### Overmountain Victory State Trail (OVST)

The Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail stretches roughly 330 miles from its southern terminus in South Carolina through North Carolina and into Tennessee and Virginia. It follows the paths that the patriot militia took as they mustered to fight the Battle of Kings Mountain in 1780. This battle proved to be pivotal in the Revolutionary War.

The Overmountain Victory State Trail will follow 225 miles of the planned route of the National Historic Trail that passes through North Carolina. The Division is working with the National Park Service, Overmountain Victory Trail Association, county and municipal governments and local sponsors on the development of the trail.

The Division participated in several landowner outreach events as part of the master planning efforts for the Morganton to Rutherfordton segment of the OVST in the past year.

### Wilderness Gateway State Trail (WGST)

The WGST will meander through Catawba and Burke counties and along the border of Rutherford and McDowell counties. Part of this trail will include a paddle trail in Catawba County. The planned trail will connect Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail and South Mountains State Park with the towns of Valdese and Hickory. Part of the trail will follow the same route as the Overmountain Victory State Trail.

The planning corridor for the WGST is approximately 150 miles long and includes a 34-mile blueway (paddle trail) on the Henry Fork and Jacob Fork Rivers. Foothills Land Conservancy (FLC) is a major partner in the effort and has assisted the Division in acquiring land that will be needed for paddle accesses on the blueway portion. In addition, FLC received a grant to construct the first portion of the trail. Detailed trail design started in 2021.

### Yadkin River State Trail (YRST)

The YRST was established in 1985. The blueway extends through Wilkes, Surry, Yadkin, Forsyth, Davie, Davidson, Rowan, Stanly, and Montgomery counties.

In 2020, the Division received a grant to partner with the Yadkin Riverkeeper to update the mapping of the trail and signage along the river. In 2020 and 2021, the Division met several times with stakeholders to map the trail and develop updated signage for the access sites and along the river. Preliminary mapping has revised the length of the YRST from 130 miles to 158 miles.

## 5.0 Actions for Great Trails in NC, 2020-2021



Catawba River Greenway, Morganton, NC



North Clayton Park, MST Greenway



Eno River State Park

### Support Trail Development

- **State Transportation Funding:** G.S. 136-189.11(d)(3)c prohibits the use of state funds for independent bicycle and pedestrian projects, even as a match for federal funds. This provision significantly hinders the development of greenways, particularly in rural and underserved areas. This prohibition should be evaluated to determine if it continues to be in the best interests of the citizens of North Carolina.
- **Additional State Funding for a Trail Grant Program:** The NC Trails Program continues to receive more than twice as many applications for trail and greenway funding as the federal Recreational Trails Program grants is able to fund. Additional funding to supplement federal funding would facilitate and expedite completion of trails and greenways.
- **The Adopt-a-Trail Program** (G.S. 143B-135.112) was previously funded to provide small trail grants to communities and non-profits, but funding was discontinued in 2014. Additional funding would foster opportunities to fund trail projects beyond the federal Recreational Trails Program. This funding could be administered through the NC Trails Program and utilize the structure of the Adopt-a-Trail program or create a new trails grant program for the state.

### Southeastern NC Council of Governments (COG) Regional Trails Plan

The NC Trails and NC State Parks Planning programs completed a significant regional trails plan for the 11 counties in southeastern North Carolina. The plan identifies regional loops and connector trails for each Council of Government in the 11 county region: Lumber River, Cape Fear, Mid-Carolina and Eastern Carolina Councils of Government. Stakeholders in the plan included trail organizations, state agencies, Lumbee tribe, land trusts, military installations and each of the councils of government. Additionally, the routes of the East Coast Greenway and the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail's Coastal Crescent Route were confirmed through the region. The plan provides the local governments a system for prioritizing, planning and funding trails within their jurisdictions. The planning effort was funded by utilizing Recreational Trails Program (RTP) funds.

### Expand Existing State Trails

- **State Trails Coalition:** The Division has advised and attended meetings of the Great Trails State Coalition—a group comprised of various land conservancies and trails and environmental organizations. This group formed to promote trails in North Carolina. A subcommittee that Division staff have been particularly active on is tasked with preparing for the Year of the Trail

## 5.0 Actions for Great Trails in NC, 2020-2021



Piedmont Region Trail Specialist using mini-excavator to finish grading trail cut by trail dozer at Crowders Mountain State Park



Mountain Region Trail Specialist, Amanda Smithson, learning trail dozer operations at Crowders Mountain State Park

- **Strategic Planning:** The NC Trails Program should continue to partner with NCDOT's Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation to identify priority corridors for state and regional trails in a strategic plan for a statewide network of bicycle and pedestrian accommodations that will link county seats, state parks, state trails, community colleges, and state/national forests. This plan should address criteria for including pedestrian and bicycle accommodations on all non-interstate highway bridge replacements.

The Great Trails State network is planned as a system of multiuse trails. A multiuse path surface is inappropriate for specific state trails, such as the Northern Peaks State Trail. In those cases, the spine network will connect to trailheads. Adoption of DOT's Great Trails State plan will facilitate many aspects of planning and construction of state trails in the future.

- **Partnerships:** The Division should continue to strengthen and formalize partnerships with the various organizations which support state trails. Additionally, the Division should coordinate with these organizations to recognize and support the volunteers who labor to construct and maintain our State Trails.
- **Deep River State Trail Plan:** In 2021, The Division continued the master planning process for the Deep River State Trail. Stakeholder outreach was robust in the beginning of the year including the Piedmont Regional Water Authority who controls the Randleman Reservoir. Heretofore, this group has declined in advancing the planning and construction of the Deep River State Trail.
- **Blueway Access Designation:** The Division should develop and implement an application for designation of access sites along State Trails which are blueways. This will insure continued safe, public access to these waterways.

### Provide trails-related education and technical assistance throughout North Carolina

- **Information for Elected Officials:** The N.C. Trails Program should offer to coordinate a presentation or panel on trails and greenways for the Association of County Commissioners annual conference and other appropriate venues as pandemic conditions allow.
- **Technical Assistance and Education:** The pandemic has impacted training opportunities available nationwide but prior to the pandemic the NC Trails Program received trail building training using heavy, specialized equipment. These skills will be passed on to other partners and Division staff to assist with efficiently tackling trail building projects in the future. The NC Trails Program has partnered with the State Historic Sites to visit properties in the coming year and advise on trail building on their sites. This will provide additional opportunities for the public to enjoy green spaces as well as increase visitation and interpretation of the sites. We will continue to provide technical assistance for trail design, maintenance, and sustainability to local communities and state parks by conducting or sponsoring one or more workshops or webinars for trail advocates and trail builders as COVID policies and conditions allow.

## 6.0

# State Parks Partnership with Conservation Corps of NC (CCNC), 2020-2021



*Making gravel to stabilize compacted, wet area on Profile Trail at Grandfather Mountain State Park*



*Piedmont Trail Specialist, Ben Rippe, cutting in trail with a Trail Dozer at Falls Lake State Recreation Area*

In the 2020 – 2021 fiscal year, the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation continued building on the partnership with the Conservation Corps of North Carolina (CCNC) to create sustainable trails while providing employment and on-the-job training to young adults. The N.C. Trails Program’s Regional Trail Specialists provided expert trail design and trained the CCNC crews in sustainable trail construction techniques. This collaboration produced trail construction, trail maintenance, corridor clearing and downed tree removals at several parks across the state while providing new skills and experience to CCNC youth. From July 2020 to June 2021, trail projects were completed at Cliffs of the Neuse, Crowders Mountain, Eno River, Grandfather Mountain, Hammocks Beach, Hanging Rock, Lakes James, Lake Waccamaw, Morrow Mountain, Raven Rock and New River state parks as well as Falls Lake State Recreation Area.

Through analysis of the strengths and challenges identified during the trail work in 2019 and 2020, the Division developed a strategy to better utilize the assets of CCNC and the NC Trails Program. Staff identified several parks in which the partnership could tackle more advanced trail projects by combining the technical expertise and guidance of the trails program staff with the enthusiasm and energy of the CCNC teams. This fiscal year, the trails program staff implemented mechanized trail equipment training and deployed new equipment to do the most labor-intensive part of trail construction, which is the first cutting of the trail that requires moving a large amount of soil and rock. The CCNC crews were able to see the benefits of mechanized trail construction techniques while also providing the hands-on finishing of the trail surface. This combination resulted in maximizing the strengths of each program to increase trail construction efficiency and have a superior trail project outcome.

## Conservation Corps of NC Projects in State Parks

- **Crowders Mountain:** 0.6 miles of new trail was constructed during a mechanized equipment training that also included hand finishing all the entire trail surface by CCNC crews. The new trail replaced a heavily eroded section of trail that is very popular with visitors. CCNC staff were able to observe the techniques learned during the class that will be used for additional CCNC projects for the year.
- **Lakes James:** A 1.4-mile trail was constructed to connect the mountain bike parking lot and the new visitor center. The trail corridor was cleared by CCNC staff and Division staff cut trail using a trail dozer. CCNC crews performed all the hand finishing work along this trail.
- **Grandfather Mountain:** CCNC crews performed heavy maintenance along 0.6 miles of the Profile Trail. This popular trail was heavily impacted by visitors due to increase in use since the beginning of the pandemic.
- **Falls Lake State Recreation Area:** Division staff utilized a newly-purchased trail dozer to assist with the CCNC crew building a 2,200-foot connector trail between the visitor center and Mountains-to-Sea State Trail.

## 6.O State Parks Partnership with Conservation Corps of NC (CCNC), 2020-2021



CCNC crews learned to use motorized dump buggies to place stone in wet sections of trail at Lake Waccamaw State Park



CCNC group performing finishing work with hand tools on the connector trail at Falls Lake State Recreation Area

- **Hanging Rock:** A 1,200-foot connector trail was hand-built by CCNC crews to create a new connection to the Hanging Rock Trail from the lake parking lot.
- **Morrow Mountain:** CCNC crews hand-built a new equestrian loop to replace an unsustainable portion of the Short Loop Trail.
- **Raven Rock:** A new connector trail was constructed between the new campground and the visitor center. 3,100 feet of trail was cut by trails program staff utilizing a trail dozer and the trail was then hand finished by CCNC crews.
- **Cliffs of the Neuse:** Multiple crews built 3,100 feet of new trails with sustainable reroutes to replace unsustainable sections on several trails in the park.
- **Hammocks Beach:** 1.3 miles of trail maintenance was performed by a CCNC crew to remove stumps and tripping hazards from the trail surface.
- **Lake Waccamaw:**
  - 3 CCNC crew deployments delivered 250 tons of stone along 1.5 miles of the Lake Trail that filled low, wet areas and improved this scenic trail that connects the visitor center to the campground.
  - 2 CCNC crews replaced approximately 600 feet of boardwalk railing and decking boards on one of the parks most visited boardwalks.

## 7.0 Recreational Trails Program (RTP) Grants



RTP Project: Jackrabbit Mountain Bike expansion



RTP Project: Black Mountain Trail Relocation



Vista from Youngs Mountain Trail RTP project

The Division of Parks and Recreation manages the Federal Recreational Trails Program (RTP) for the N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. The intent of the RTP is to leverage local funds to develop trails and trail-related recreational amenities in an effort to provide low-cost infrastructure and economic development opportunities through natural resource tourism.

From 1999 to 2020, our state has received approximately \$74,456,080 in requests for RTP funding. Of those requests, the state has awarded \$39,101,680 to sustainable RTP trail projects statewide. These RTP funds, in combination with in-kind services and matching funds totaling \$67,771,020, have been applied to trail and greenway projects for the citizens of North Carolina.

RTP in North Carolina is enabled by the legislation “Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act” (MAP-21), which reauthorized the RTP Program for the 2021 fiscal year. RTP funding comes from the Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) through the N.C. Department of Transportation and is administered by the State Trails Program within the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation. Since 1993, RTP funding in North Carolina has been used to provide recreational opportunities for hikers, equestrians, bicyclists, paddlers, and off-highway vehicle (OHV) users. Funding through RTP has been able to move forward through continuing resolutions.

Through the N.C. Trails Program, the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation received 46 RTP final application requests totaling \$6,184,000 for the 2021 grant year. In North Carolina, we request applicants submit an application several months prior to review by the North Carolina Trails Committee (NCTC) so that applicants receive comments and suggestions from the Trails Program staff. This process has resulted in higher quality, more shovel-ready projects presented to the NCTC. The NCTC recommended awards for 20 grant projects totaling \$3,018,500 to leverage \$768,463 of grantee matching funds to provide economic development and recreational resources to 14 counties within North Carolina. The NCTC also recommended awards for five Safety and Education training programs totaling \$23,750 and leveraged \$7,356 of grantee matching funds. These events will be held in Buncombe, Jackson, Madison, and Wake counties.

## 7.0 Recreational Trails Program (RTP) Grants

**Table 1: 2021 RTP Grant Awards**

Grant Recipient	Project Title	County	Region	User Group	Award Amount
Onslow County Parks and Recreation	Burton Park Trail	Onslow	Coast	Mountain Biking	\$249,200
Town of Kitty Hawk	Kitty Hawk Park Connector Trail Project	Dare	Coast	Multi-Use/ Greenway	\$69,408
USDA Forest Service	Marks Mountain Trail Construction	Avery	Mountain	Mountain Biking	\$99,792
Lake James State Park	Overmountain Victory NHT & Fonta Fonta Flora State Trail: Benfield's Landing Section	Burke	Mountain	Multi-Use/ Greenway	\$248,644
Foothills Conservancy of NC	Catawba Meadows Bike Trail	Burke	Mountain	Mountain Biking	\$100,000
NC High Peaks	Mount Mitchell Trail Renovation Project: Phase Four (Section Five Re-Route)	Yancey	Mountain	Hiking	\$65,600
Foothills Conservancy of NC	Wilderness Gateway State Trail - Segment 3 - Sections 5 & 6	McDowell	Mountain	Hiking	\$243,700
Rutherford County Tourism	Broad River Paddle Trail: US-221A Duke Energy Access	Rutherford	Mountain	Canoe / Kayak	\$50,000
City of Lenoir	Lenoir OVNHT Greenway Link Project	Caldwell	Mountain	Multi-Use/ Greenway	\$250,000
USDA Forest Service	2021 Brown Mountain OHV Restoration	Burke	Mountain	Motorized (OHV / ATV)*	\$107,119
Morrow Mountain State Park	Morrow Mountain Equestrian Trails Reroute	Stanly	Piedmont	Equestrian	\$198,300
USDA Forest Service	Morgan Equestrian Trail Reroute and Trail Maintenance	Montgomery	Piedmont	Equestrian	\$85,000
City of Rocky Mount	Battle Park multi-use natural surface 5K trail	Nash	Piedmont	Multi-Use/ Greenway	\$99,999
Hanging Rock State Park	Hanging Rock Trail Reroute	Stokes	Piedmont	Hiking	\$69,894
Greensboro Fat Tire Society	Greensboro Watershed Trails	Guilford	Piedmont	Mountain Biking	\$83,845
Randolph County	Randleman Deep River Greenway Phase III	Randolph	Piedmont	Multi-Use/ Greenway	\$100,000
USDA Forest Service	Dickey Bell Trail Construction and Reroute Project	Montgomery	Piedmont	Motorized (OHV / ATV)*	\$236,000
USDA Forest Service	Lakeview Trail Reroute Construction Project	Montgomery	Piedmont	Motorized (OHV / ATV)*	\$250,000
USDA Forest Service	Kodak Rock Closure & Stabilization on Rocky Mt. Loop Trail	Montgomery	Piedmont	Motorized (OHV / ATV)*	\$162,000
USDA Forest Service	Badin Lake Motorized Trails, Trailheads, and Access road maintenance	Montgomery	Piedmont	Motorized (OHV / ATV)*	\$250,000
					<b>\$3,018,500</b>

\*Motorized (OHV / ATV) projects required to be at least 30% of total award amount