





North Carolina Trails Program

ANNUAL REPORT

2025-2026



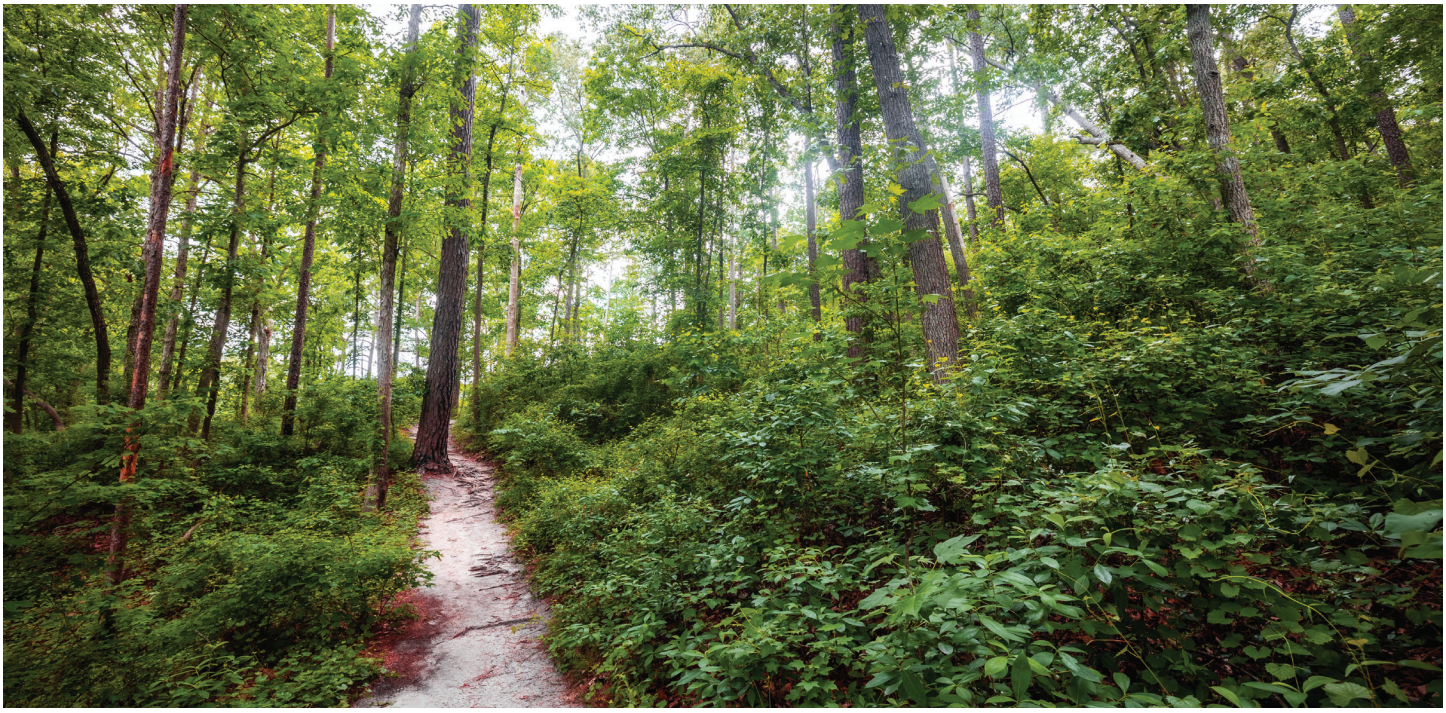
division of parks and recreation
NC TRAILS

NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS
Naturally Wonderful

DNCR North Carolina Department of Natural & Cultural Resources

DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION
Brian Strong, Director

NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES
Josh Stein, Governor | Pamela B. Cashwell, Secretary



Cliffs of the Neuse State Park

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All photos courtesy of N.C. State Parks unless otherwise noted.

Cover photos, from left to right: William B. Umstead State Park, Grandfather Mountain State Park, Falls Lake State Recreation Area, Hammocks Beach State Park

1.0 Introduction



Mountains-to-Sea State Trail at Jockey's Ridge State Park

Each year, the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation (the Division) submits a Trails Annual Report to outline trail needs, describe additions to the state trails system, and summarize the continual importance of trails across the state. This report is prepared by the Division's Trails Program for the Secretary of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) in accordance with N.C. General Statute §143B-135.102.

The Trails Program originated in 1973 with the North Carolina Trails System Act and is dedicated to helping residents, 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 work to enable volunteers, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies to develop trail plans, preserve land corridors for trails, and manage trails for all trail users. Program staff provide technical assistance, administer federal Recreational Trails Program grants, and develop successful partnerships with local conservation and recreation advocates, including municipal and county governments.

North Carolina is proud to lead the nation in trail development, investing nearly $30 million in projects that bring the Great Trails State vision to life. Made possible through the support of the North Carolina General Assembly, these investments are transforming communities, opening doors to outdoor adventure, and setting a standard for trail infrastructure. From the mountains to the coast, our growing network of trails not only connects people with nature but also fuels local economies, strengthens community health, and celebrates the state's commitment to outdoor recreation as a defining part its identity.

2.0 Incredible Value of Trails



William B. Umstead State Park



Hammocks Beach State Park



Hanging Rock State Park

Trails Boost Local Economies

From Murphy to Manteo, trails directly contribute millions of dollars in economic benefits to local communities. As a major tourism draw, they provide a steady stream of customers for businesses — trail users, after all, need places to sleep, eat, and shop. These benefits are especially poignant for smaller rural towns. In Cherokee, the new Fire Mountain Trails have yielded a regional impact of $1.4 million, according to a 2023 Appalachian State University study.

A 2017 study funded by the Outdoor Alliance found that mountain biking visitors spent an estimated $30.2 million dollars annually in communities surrounding the Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests in western North Carolina. This level of visitor spending demonstrates the significant role trails play in the local economy and underscores the importance of timely recovery and long-term resiliency in the wake of Hurricane Helene.

North Carolina State University's Institute for Transportation Research and Education evaluated in a 2018 study the economic impact of four greenways across the coastal, Piedmont, and mountain regions of the state. The study found that greenways generated $19.4 million in sales revenue at businesses along them and $48.7 million in business revenue from their construction, and supported 790 jobs annually through greenway construction. Every dollar spent on trail construction generates $1.72 annually from local business revenue, sales tax revenue, and benefits reaped from healthier lifestyles and alternative transportation.

Across the state, trails, greenways, and blueways are a significant part of North Carolina tourism and industry. As noted in the 2021 General Assembly's House Bill 554 designating 2023 as the Year of the Trail, outdoor recreation is a $28 billion industry in the state. The state benefits from tax revenues generated by trails, ensuring that money spent on trails provides excellent return on investment.

Trails also provide economic benefits to individuals. They create and support jobs — from trail construction and maintenance to the establishment of new businesses and successes of existing ones. A 2022 Carolina Thread Trail study showed that 15 jobs are supported by each trail mile. With over 300 miles of trails in the network, that adds up to 4,500 jobs in the Charlotte area alone.

Trails Connect Communities

In 1990, the population of North Carolina was 6.6 million; the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that as of July 2025, there are over 11.1 million people living in North Carolina. These new residents need places to live, work, and study, and the state has continually lost open space to development and urbanization. As cities grow and expand into rural areas the need for access to trails and natural spaces increases.

Trails not only provide green spaces to enjoy nature within developed areas, but they also allow for seamless connections to larger parks and more remote wilderness. Most planning corridors for state trails, for instance, connect larger towns and cities to state parks. Trails create places for people to meet, encourage active transportation, and provide access to nature. By providing a low-cost means to travel to other communities and explore other areas of the state, trails help make outdoor adventures accessible to people from all walks of life.

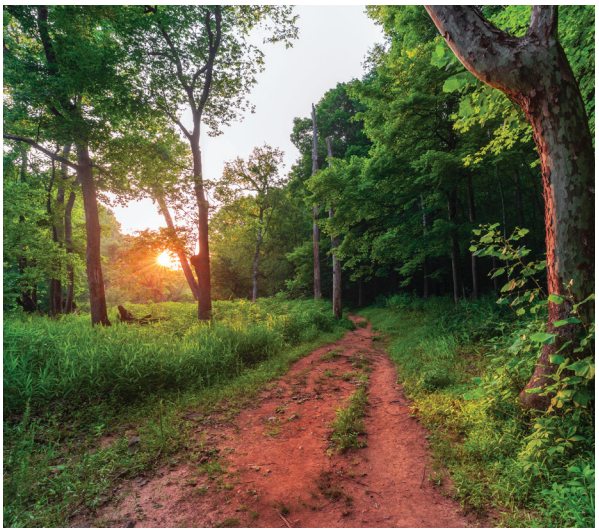
Trails also foster social capital, as evident during North Carolina's 2023 Year of the Trail and annual Great Trails State Day celebrations. Many rural communities participate in the celebrations and encourage their residents to explore their local trails. Special events have brought neighbors together outdoors. Even beyond Year of the Trail, trail building, use, and maintenance promotes civic participation and engagement through volunteering and advocacy.



Morrow Mountain State Park



Fort Macon State Park



Eno River State Park

Trails Protect the Environment

Population growth and urbanization have also changed the state's landscape dramatically. Trails help reclaim natural land and mitigate human impacts on the environment. By providing opportunities to enjoy and experience the outdoors and nature, trails can inspire users to take responsibility and stewardship of the world around them. Many trail organizations are also eco-minded and seek to teach low-impact recreation and Leave No Trace principles.

Trails provide a choice for North Carolinians to reduce their carbon footprint by utilizing alternate methods of transportation. Creating a network of interconnected trails makes it easy for someone to walk, hike, or bike to their destination and curtail vehicle emissions. Trails improve water quality, too. Surface runoff from roads and lawns is one of the leading causes of pollution in the drinking water supply. Protected natural corridors for regional trails and greenways can filter pollutants from runoff. Land conservation efforts, especially near rivers and streams, help make drinking water sources cleaner and reduce the cost of water treatment.

Municipalities have started to utilize trails and greenways as natural floodplains to mitigate flood risk and damage to people and properties. Conservation efforts through trail advocacy also protect sensitive areas like wetlands and nature preserves in urban and rural areas alike. Most importantly, trails help address habitat fragmentation. They can serve as protected "highways" for wildlife, allowing species access to more land and resources. These wildlife corridors also help strengthen biodiversity by reducing ecological isolation.

Trails Promote Healthy Living

Trails have become an important part of health and wellness and have been proven to increase quality of life. Compared to other outlets for physical activity, trails are usually free, offer a variety of activities, and provide picturesque surroundings to enjoy. People from all socioeconomic levels can use trails, and many trails — especially greenways — are accessible to individuals with limited mobility or disabilities.

Those with safe access to trails and greenways tend to be more physically active. Trails can also add a social element to physical activity that further encourages consistent participation; guided hikes, walking meetups, and running groups can utilize trails without being limited by cost or space. Trails also provide stress relief and other mental health benefits as users enjoy nature — with others or even alone.

The health benefits from trails can be quantified by studies that look at the impact of trail use on health care costs. A 2017 East Coast Greenway Alliance study estimated $1.4 million in healthcare cost savings annually for Triangle residents. The 2022 Carolina Thread Trail study calculated an average impact of $310,000 in healthcare savings per trail mile, potentially adding up to $93 million for the whole trail network.

3.0 Hurricane Helene Recovery



Profile Trail at Grandfather Mountain State Park



Profile Trail at Grandfather Mountain State Park

Hurricane Helene hit in the fall of 2024, causing devastating damage to communities, infrastructure, and trails in western North Carolina. Though its effects are long-lasting, significant recovery progress has been achieved. All 13 state parks impacted by the storm have reopened, and staff along with assisting agencies worked tirelessly to clear more than 300 miles of storm-damaged trail. As of September 1, 2026, approximately 95 percent of all affected trail mileage within state parks has now reopened. Western North Carolina's economic vitality depends heavily on tourism, with visitors drawn to the region's outdoor recreation opportunities and its exceptional natural beauty. Trails are central to that experience, supporting local businesses, sustaining rural economies, and helping communities recover. Although many trail networks have reopened after Helene, ensuring the full recovery of the system — and safeguarding it against future storms — will require continued investment in trail resilience, sustainable design, and long-term maintenance.

4.0 Adaptive Trails



Kayaking at Lake James State Park – Courtesy of Waypoint Adventure



William B. Umstead State Park



Rock climbing at Chimney Rock State Park – Courtesy of Waypoint Adventure

The Adaptive Trails Program is a growing, systemwide effort to remove barriers to outdoor recreation and ensure that North Carolina's state parks are welcoming and accessible for visitors of all abilities. Launched in early 2025 with support from the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation, the program introduced electric off-road wheelchairs for use at William B. Umstead State Park and established an Adaptive Trails Specialist position to build the program and expand community outreach. Since then, more than 40 individuals have used the adaptive equipment. Many of the users noted this opportunity allowed them access to the outdoors for the first time in years or now gave them the ability to join their friends and families outdoors. In addition to expanding adaptive equipment and services, the program is now conducting detailed accessibility assessments across state parks to identify barriers within facilities and trails. These assessments will guide future action plans and give visitors clearer, more reliable information so they can confidently plan their outdoor experiences.

In July 2026, the Division was also able to hire an intern through the Department of Health and Human Services' Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities (EIPD) Division to support these assessments and action plans, which has strengthened capacity and improved the quality of evaluations. Bringing in a team member with lived experience has added an essential voice from the disabled community, ensuring the program reflects the perspectives of those it is designed to serve. The program also supports ongoing Division partnerships with organizations such as Waypoint Adventure and Catalyst Sports, both of which specialize in providing adaptive outdoor recreation opportunities and expanding access for individuals with disabilities. The program has also hosted adaptive equipment demonstration events that allow state park staff and other agencies to test a range of devices and identify solutions that best fit their park and community needs. According to the NC Office of State Human Resources, approximately 13 percent (1.4 million residents) of the state's population lives with a disability. Continued growth and investment into the program will be essential to meet rising needs as the state's population grows and to facilitate the program's vision of becoming a national model for accessible outdoor recreation.

5.0 Great Trails State Program

In 2023, the North Carolina General Assembly created the Great Trails State Program — a landmark $25 million investment to advance the state's vision as the "Great Trails State." Administered by the Division, the program offers competitive matching grants to local governments, nonprofits, and regional partners. Eligible uses include planning, design, land acquisition, and construction of greenways, natural surface trails, and paddle trail access points. Match requirements are scaled by county tier to ensure access across rural and urban areas.

The program's launch drew strong demand with 89 applications requesting nearly $28 million in funding. Projects spanned from the mountains to the coast, with requests ranging from corridor acquisitions that secure future trail alignments to construction dollars completing long-awaited trail connections. Through this historic legislation, 79 trail projects were funded *(Table 5-1)*. An additional $44.5 million was leveraged in matching funds, bringing a total investment for trails at $69.3 million through the program. Building upon this success, the 2026 Appropriations Act (Session Law 2026-41) allocated an additional $14 million to trails, which will be divided between the Great Trails State Program for local grants and the Complete the Trails Program for authorized state trails.

The impact of these investments will be evident. Communities will accelerate trail project development, build new partnerships, and expand access to outdoor recreation. Trails funded through the program are expected to deliver wide-reaching benefits: increased physical activity and improved health outcomes, enhanced local economies through tourism and business growth, conserved natural resources, and stronger community connections.

The Great Trails State Program is historic not only in size but in design, balancing fiscal leverage with access. By pairing state investment with local commitment, the program will help communities statewide turn trail visions into reality, strengthening North Carolina's standing as a national model for outdoor recreation and truly embodying the title of the Great Trails State.

Table 5-1: 2026 Great Trails State Program Recipients

Organization	County	Application Type	Project Name	Awarded Amount
Alamance County	Alamance	Design and Engineering	Haw River State Trail – Riverwide Enhancements	$150,000
Alamance County	Alamance	Acquisition and Construction	Shallow Ford Expansion and Enhancements	$190,000
Town of Apex	Wake	Design and Engineering	Design and Engineering for Reedy Branch Greenway	$200,000
AppHealthCare	Alleghany	Design and Engineering	Pathways to a Greener Future – Designing the First Greenway in Alleghany County	$150,000
City of Archdale	Randolph	Design and Engineering	Hope Valley Road Trail Extension	$143,250
City of Asheboro	Randolph	Design and Engineering	North Asheboro Greenway Design and Engineering	$134,000
Town of Blowing Rock	Watauga	Acquisition and Construction	Glen Burney Trail Improvements	$500,000
Blue Ridge Conservancy	Ashe	Construction	Northern Peaks State Trail – Three Top Mountain Section	$150,000
Blue Ridge Conservancy	Ashe	Acquisition	Lansing Creeper Trail Park Expansion	$312,000
Blue Ridge Conservancy	Watauga	Construction	Angler Park on the Middle Fork Greenway	$500,000
City of Brevard	Transylvania	Design and Engineering	Filling the Gaps: Engineering the Final Sections of Brevard's Estatoe Trail Greenway	$112,333
Burke County	Burke	Construction	Burke County Fonta Flora and Overmountain Victory State Trails Construction – Paddy Creek	$399,819
Burke County	Burke	Construction	Burke County Fonta Flora and Overmountain Victory State Trails Repairs and Construction	$363,067
Town of Butner	Granville	Acquisition and Construction	East Lyon Station Greenway Extension	$500,000
Camp Grier	Burke, Caldwell, McDowell	Construction	Grandfather Ranger District Trail Expansion	$499,197
Carolina Climbers Coalition	Rutherford	Acquisition and Construction	Lower Ghost Town Land Acquisition and Trail Expansion	$341,060
Catawba Lands Conservancy & Carolina Thread Trail	Gaston	Construction	Spencer Mountain Trail Construction	$500,000

Table 5-1: 2026 Great Trails State Program Recipients Continued

Organization	County	Application Type	Project Name	Awarded Amount
Town of Chapel Hill	Orange	Construction	Construction of Tanyard Branch Trail Neighborhood Connector	$399,000
Chatham County	Chatham	Construction	Haw River State Trail Pegg Tract Improvements	$251,294
Chatham County	Chatham	Planning and Feasibility	Deep River State Trail Feasibility Study for Chatham County	$75,000
Cleveland County Water	Cleveland	Construction	Stagecoach Greenway – Narrows Segment	$500,000
City of Concord	Cabarrus	Construction	Concord McEachern Greenway Extension	$500,000
Town of Cramerton	Gaston	Construction	Riverlink Greenway Trail Extension	$500,000
Dare County	Dare	Maintenance	Marshall and Gussie Collins Walkway Maintenance Project	$269,000
Durham County	Durham	Acquisition	Durham-to-Roxboro Rail Trail Corridor Acquisition	$500,000
City of Durham	Durham	Maintenance	American Tobacco Trail Maintenance	$500,000
East Coast Greenway Alliance	Pender	Design and Engineering	East Coast Greenway Country Club Drive Corridor NC-210 MUP	$177,200
City of Elizabeth City	Pasquotank	Planning and Feasibility	Pasquotank Blueways Feasibility Study	$100,000
Elkin Valley Trails Association	Wilkes	Construction	Bridge of Dreams	$500,000
Town of Elkin	Wilkes	Acquisition and Construction	Elkin Creek Headwaters Trail Phase I	$377,988
Town of Fletcher	Henderson	Acquisition and Construction	Expanding and Improving the Cane Creek Greenway System	$293,441
Foothills Regional Commission	Rutherford, McDowell	Planning and Feasibility	Peavine to Thermal Belt Rail-Trail Connector Planning	$100,000
Town of Franklinton	Franklin	Acquisition and Construction	Franklinton Nature Preserve	$500,000
Freedom Org	Edgecombe	Acquisition and Planning	Princeville Heritage Trail Expansion	$265,985
Friends and Neighbors of Swannanoa	Buncombe	Planning and Feasibility	Swannanoa Greenway Feasibility Study Update	$100,000
Friends of Panthertown	Jackson	Construction	Panthertown Valley Trail and Bog Bridge Project	$86,667
Graham Revitalization Economic Action Team (GREAT)	Graham	Design and Engineering	Robbinsville Greenway Project	$285,600
City of Greenville	Pitt	Construction	Wildwood Park to River Park North Boardwalk	$500,000
Harnett County	Harnett	Acquisition	South River Road Greenway – Phase I	$230,538
Town of Hertford	Perquimans	Design and Engineering	Hertford Riverfront Boardwalk Plan	$160,000
City of Hickory	Catawba	Construction	Reconstruct the Elevated Boardwalk at Glenn C. Hilton, Jr. Memorial Park	$500,000
Town of Holly Springs	Wake	Planning and Feasibility	Middle Creek to Camp Branch Greenway	$300,000
Johnston County	Johnston	Acquisition	Neuse River Trail – Talton Property	$225,000
City of Kannapolis	Cabarrus	Acquisition	Irish Buffalo Creek Greenway Phase II	$145,000
Town of Louisburg	Franklin	Planning and Feasibility	Joyner Park Trail Project	$100,000
Village of Marvin	Union	Acquisition and Construction	Marvin Loop Greenway Completion Project	$491,925
Town of Mayodan	Rockingham	Construction	Farris Memorial Park Trail	$251,185
McDowell County	McDowell	Construction	Curtis Creek Bridge – Old Fort Fonta Flora Complex – Phase II	$500,00
McDowell County	McDowell	Construction	Joseph McDowell Historical Catawba Greenway – Phase III (STIP Project No. EB-5916)	$500,000
City of Morganton	Burke	Construction	Morganton Greenway and Mountain Bike Extension	$374,000
Town of Morrisville	Wake	Construction	Sawmill Creek Greenway	$417,297

Table 5-1: 2026 Great Trails State Program Recipients Continued

Organization	County	Application Type	Project Name	Awarded Amount
Town of Murphy	Cherokee	Construction	Murphy Riverwalk Primitive Loop Improvements	$500,000
Town of Nags Head	Dare	Design and Engineering	Design for South Croatan Highway Multi-use Path Extension	$100,000
New River Conservancy	Ashe	Acquisition	New River Paddle Trail Expansion	$130,666
Orange County	Orange	Construction	Seven-Mile Creek Natural Area Mountains-to-Sea State Trail Expansion	$101,178
Piedmont Triad Regional Council	Forsyth	Design and Engineering	Piedmont Greenway – Triad Park/Reedy Fork Segment – Phases I and II	$500,000
City of Raeford	Hoke	Design and Engineering	City Pond Trails and Park Design and Engineering	$175,480
City of Raleigh	Wake	Construction	Forest Ridge Park Mountain Bike Trail Extension Project	$350,000
City of Raleigh	Wake	Planning and Feasibility	Marsh Creek Trail Corridor Planning and Feasibility Study	$400,000
Randolph County	Randolph	Design and Engineering	Deep River State Trail Harlan Creek Bridge Design/Engineering	$175,000
Randolph County	Randolph	Construction	Randleman Dam to Randleman Blueway/ Paddleway	$172,000
Roanoke River Partners, Inc.	Martin	Construction	Hamilton Rosenwald River Center and Amenities	$400,000
Rockingham County Tourism Development Authority	Rockingham	Construction	Hogan's Creek Trail	$298,872
City of Rocky Mount	Edgecombe, Nash	Design and Engineering	Tar River Paddle Trail Access Renovation (Mile 88 to 124)	$162,600
Town of Selma	Johnston	Acquisition and Construction	Selma Mountains-to-Sea State Trail Nature Preserve Trail Phase I	$500,000
City of Shelby	Cleveland	Construction	Shelby R.A.I.L. – Regional Access Improvement Line	$500,000
Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards	Clay, Graham, Haywood, Macon	Maintenance	Urgent Wilderness Restoration: Trail Stewardship and Recovery After the Storm	$253,731
Town of Spencer	Rowan	Construction	Stanback Educational Forest – Rocky Branch Loop Trail	$460,000
Town of Summerfield	Guilford	Construction	Bandera Farms Park Trails: Piedmont Greenway and Equestrian Trails	$500,000
The Village Green of Cashiers, Inc.	Jackson	Maintenance	Resurfacing, Enhancing, and Maintaining Trails in The Village Green	$233,673
City of Thomasville	Davidson	Design and Engineering	Memorial Park Drive Greenway Expansion Design and Engineering	$100,000
Triangle Land Conservancy	Durham, Wake	Acquisition and Construction	Old Creedmoor Trail System	$137,092
Warren County	Warren	Construction	Buck Spring Trail Accessibility Improvements	$100,000
Town of Waxhaw	Union	Construction	Twelve-Mile Creek Greenway – Prescot Connector	$250,000
Town of Wendell	Wake	Construction	Buffalo Creek Greenway Phase I	$500,000
Western Piedmont Council of Governments	Burke, Catawba	Planning and Feasibility	Burke-Catawba Blueway Planning and Feasibility Study	$100,000
Town of Wilkesboro	Wilkes	Construction	Bridge Between the Boros	$499,100
City of Wilmington	New Hanover	Construction	Bridge and Boardwalk Reconstruction in Greenfield Park	$500,000
Town of Woodfin	Buncombe	Construction	Riverside Park Expansion and Improvement	$500,000

6.0 State Trails and Complete the Trails Program



Deep River State Trail



Northern Peaks State Trail



Fonta Flora State Trail

North Carolina's 16 state trails are essential components to its identity as the Great Trails State. Authorized by the General Assembly, each state trail is a unit of the North Carolina state parks system. However, unlike the more traditional state parks, the state trails are not owned, managed, or maintained by the Division, unless the trail segment is located within a state park. Instead, the state trails are accomplished through dedicated partnerships.

State Trail Authorizations

South Fork Passage State Trail was authorized in 2025. As laid out in the legislation, the trail will be a 60-mile hiking and paddling trail starting at Jacob Fork Park at the confluence of the Henry Fork and Jacob Fork Rivers. It will traverse through Betty G. Ross Park, George Poston Park, Goat Island Park, and Daniel Stow Botanical Garden, ending at the South Carolina border on Lake Wylie. Catawba Lands Conservancy/Carolina Thread Trail is the lead partner organization for the new state trail. Work on the master plan for South Fork Passage will begin later in 2026.

The **Saluda Grade Trail** is progressing with the land acquisition process. The Saluda Grade Conservancy purchased a 31.5-mile railroad corridor between Inman, S.C. and Zirconia, N.C. from Norfolk Southern. The N.C. General Assembly provided $16.25 million in funding for the land acquisition through S.L. 2023-134 and S.L. 2024-57. This corridor is federally railbanked, as part of a federal program started in the 1970s to protect transportation rights-of-way. This ensures that if the corridor is ever again needed for essential rail use, it can be converted if necessary. This corridor was originally part of the Saluda Grade Railroad that was constructed in the 1870s to link Spartanburg, S.C. with Asheville, N.C. It held the distinction of including the steepest standard-gauge mainline railroad in the country. The 16-mile portion of the rail corridor that is in North Carolina is the anchor for what will be the Saluda Grade State Trail. Upon the completion of the land acquisition, State Parks staff will work with the Saluda Grade Conservancy to develop a master plan for the state trail that honors the history of the Saluda Grade, showcases the breathtaking beauty of the area, and meets the standards for a North Carolina state trail.

Trail Designations

As trail segments are constructed on land-based trails and paddle accesses are developed on blueways (paddle trails), they are not part of the state trail until they are officially designated by the Secretary of DNCR. This process includes an application from the land manager to the corresponding state trails planner, evaluation by Division staff, a site visit, and a formal recommendation by the North Carolina Trails Committee.

Generally, the length of the newly designated land-based trail is calculated to the nearest tenth of a mile. The process for the blueways, or paddle trails, is not as intuitive. The Department designates specific paddle accesses — the places where users can safely and legally enter or exit the river. The designated mileage for paddle trails is the distance from the designated access downstream to the next public access location, even if it is not yet designated.

In the 2025-2026 fiscal year, 45.2 miles of trail were designated as part of a state trail. Increasing designations in the coming years is another benefit of the strengthened partnerships resulting from the Complete the Trails Program *(Table 6-1 and 6-2)*.

Table 6-1: State Trail Progress Overview

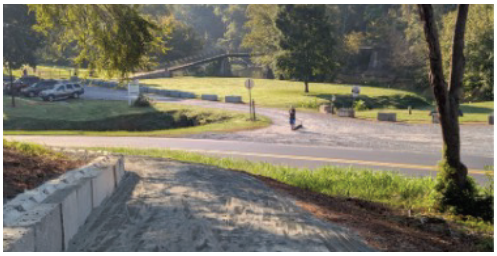
State Trail	Year Authorized	Planned Mileage	Designated Mileage	Percent Complete
Dan River State Trail	2021	90	60.1	67%
Deep River State Trail (land)	2007	125	4.28	3%
Deep River State Trail (paddle)	2007	125	12.65	10%
East Coast Greenway State Trail	2021	795	102.14	13%
Equine State Trail	2023	350	0	0%
Fonta Flora State Trail	2015	100	36.04	36%
French Broad River State Trail	1978	115	20.3	18%
Haw River State Trail (land)	2023	80	0	0%
Haw River State Trail (paddle)	2023	80	22.07	28%
Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail	2017	50	30.5	61%
Mountains-to-Sea State Trail	2000	1,400	685.88	49%
Northern Peaks State Trail	2019	40	0.55	1%
Overmountain Victory State Trail	2019	225	1.7	1%
Roanoke River State Trail	2021	232	232	100%
South Fork Passage State Trail (land)	2025	60	0	0%
South Fork Passage State Trail (paddle)	2025	60	0	0%
Wilderness Gateway State Trail	2019	170	2	1%
Yadkin River State Trail	1985	166	162.5	98%
	Total	**4,325**	**1,373**	**32%**

Table 6-2: State Trail Segments Designated FY 25-26

State Trail	Segment Name	Segment Sponsor	Designated Miles
Deep River State Trail	Moncure Access	NC State Parks (Jordan Lake State Recreation Area)	0.5 mile
French Broad River State Trail	Blantyre Park	Henderson County	6.5 miles
French Broad River State Trail	Horse Shoe Boating Access Area	Henderson County	10.9 miles
French Broad River State Trail	Westfeldt Park	Henderson County	2.9 miles
Fonta Flora State Trail	Black Bear County Park	McDowell County	1.4 miles
Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail	Trombatore Trail	Conserving Carolina	2.4 miles
Haw River State Trail	Bynum Mill Access	NC State Parks (Lower Haw River State Natural Area)	3.5 miles
Haw River State Trail	Glencoe Paddle Access	Alamance County	5 miles
Haw River State Trail	Graham Paddle Access	City of Graham	1.8 miles
Haw River State Trail	Great Bend Park	Alamance County	0.5 mile
Haw River State Trail	Swepsonville Lower Paddle Access	Alamance County	5.5 miles
Haw River State Trail	Swepsonville Upper Paddle Access	Alamance County	0.6 mile
Haw River State Trail	Valley Paddle Access	City of Burlington	1 mile
Mountains-to-Sea State Trail	Bay Trail	NC State Parks (Jones Lake State Park)	1.4 miles
Northern Peaks State Trail	Northern Peaks State Trail Access at Paddy Mountain Park	Town of West Jefferson	0.25 mile
Northern Peaks State Trail	Rivers Park/State Champion Trail	Town of Boone	0.3 mile
Overmountain Victory State Trail	Overmountain Victory Trail at Norris Park	Town of Rutherfordton	0.7 mile



DRST – Bush Creek Bridge



DRST – Franklinville Trail connection to Faith Rock



FBST – Beech Bluff Campsite



FBST – Lyons Mountain River Access



HGST – Round Top Mountain



MST – Hurricane Helene Recovery

Branding and Promotion

The Division has worked diligently to create consistent branding and promotion for all state trails, resulting in a unique blaze design for each one. While these blazes primarily serve to mark trail routes, their distinctive designs are also used on trailhead signs, maps, and safety signage for paddle trails. Each blaze features a white outer circle with the trail name and an inner circle showcasing a unique symbol that represents that specific trail. Partner organizations provided input and approval for every design. In addition, the Division's Trails Program website (trails.nc.gov) promotes state trail content throughout the year. To support broader use, the Division has established a licensing agreement that allows partner organizations to use the blaze designs on merchandise and other promotional materials.

2025-2026 Highlights and Accomplishments

- **Deep River State Trail (DRST):**
  - **Bush Creek Bridge:** The construction of a 150-foot long bridge with a 10-foot wide walking surface was completed, marking the end of the second phase of construction for the Franklinville to Sapona section of the Deep River State Trail. This project was funded by the Complete the Trails Program.
  - **Franklinville Trail along the lake and connection to Faith Rock:** This 0.75-mile natural surface trail connects directly to the trail in Franklinville. It leads to the top of a 50-foot blue stone outcrop as it juts into the Deep River. The preserve is permanently protected by the Piedmont Land Conservancy. From the trailhead, cross the historic bridge and follow the trail through the woods where you'll find beautiful views of Deep River to the top of Faith Rock, a natural heritage site home to several rare plants.
  - **Moncure River Access:** A ribbon cutting event was held for the Moncure River Access on October 25, 2025. This access sits on 760 acres managed by NC State Parks' Jordan Lake State Recreation Area and is the terminal paddle access for the Deep River State Trail.
- **French Broad State Trail (FBST):**
  - **Beech Bluff Campsite:** Thanks to a partnership with Conserving Carolina and funding from AllTrails, MountainTrue opened a new campsite along the French Broad Paddle Trail near Horse Shoe in Henderson County. Called Beech Bluff, this campsite is just downstream from Horse Shoe Boating Access Area and features a set of hand-built locust log steps, a white oak picnic table, metal fire ring, informational signage, open grassy area, and elevated composting toilet — all beneath the shade of a large beech tree.
  - **Lyons Mountain River Access:** Lyons Mountain River Access near Rosman in Transylvania County was rebuilt to include a concrete boat ramp, boulder seating area, and updated signage. These amenities will help improve accessibility and comfort at this heavily used public access along one of the most scenic sections of the river.
- **Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail (HGST):**
  - **Round Top Mountain (Lower Ghost Town):** In November of 2025, the Carolina Climbers Coalition purchased 16.5 acres on the southern slopes of Round Top Mountain, near Lake Lure. The property helped create a public land connector and conservation buffer linking the Village of Chimney Rock and Chimney Rock State Park. The property is a key connector for the HGST and includes desirable rock climbing opportunities. In December 2025, the CCC began trail construction on the newly acquired property. This project was funded and achieved through the support of the Great Trails State Program, Access Fund, Conserving Carolina, OnX Maps, and many CCC volunteers and donors.
- **Mountains-to-Sea State Trail (MST):**
  - **Hurricane Helene Recovery:** Significant progress has been made in reopening the MST from Buncombe County to Alleghany County following Hurricane Helene. As of July 1, 2025, much of the trail remained closed, but by June 2026 it had been restored almost entirely, except for approximately 10 miles to the east of Mount Mitchell and the section surrounding the destroyed bridge over the North Fork of the Catawba River. MST volunteer crews, along with staff from the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and other partners, worked together to rebuild and reopen hundreds of miles of trail — an effort vital to outdoor recreation and the well-being of both residents and visitors.




MST – Western Terminus Marker at Kuwohi



MST – North River Wetlands



MST – Pondberry Bay Preserve Trail Opening




WGST – Completed Wolfpen Loop Trail

- **MST Western Terminus Marker at Kuwohi:** In April 2026, Friends of the MST unveiled a new marker atop Kuwohi in Great Smoky Mountains National Park to officially mark the western terminus of the MST. The Division and Friends of the MST are grateful to partners at Friends of the Smokies and the National Park Service for making this landmark possible, complementing the eastern terminus marker established at Jockey's Ridge State Park in 2023.
- **North River Wetlands Property Acquisition:** In partnership with the North Carolina Coastal Federation, Friends of the MST helped acquire nearly 800 acres of land in Carteret County in the spring of 2026 that will be home to a significant section of the MST. When combined with the existing trail on the neighboring North River Wetlands Preserve, also managed by the N.C. Coastal Federation, this acquisition creates the opportunity to add roughly 11-12 miles of new MST trail.
- **Pondberry Bay Preserve Trail Opening:** In November 2025, Friends of the MST and partners held a ribbon cutting to open the trail at the Pondberry Bay Preserve in Sampson County that will one day be part of the statewide MST route. Currently, the trail is open as a 5.5 mile out-and-back and is the first natural surface hiking trail open to the public in the county.

- **Roanoke River State Trail (RRST):**
  - **Bridge Signs:** Roanoke River Partners continues to work with the N.C. Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to install bridge signs at crossings along the RRST. NCDOT Division 4 has the signs prepared and will install them as work occurs at those sites, while Division 1 is currently reviewing and awaiting approval for their placement.
  - **Cow Creek Platform:** With a team of volunteers, Roanoke River Partners completed redecking the Cow Creek platform, which is the final campsite along the trail in need of renovation.
  - **Rosenwald River Center:** This circa-1920 Rosenwald School will provide the headquarters for Roanoke River Partners, Inc. and the Roanoke River State Trail. The facility and associated enhancements will equip this site to serve as a community center for the Town of Hamilton and for the entire Roanoke River Region. This is an ongoing project and the Roanoke River Partners have completed the environmental review process, and gained approval for a sole-source bid. The contractor is currently working on final construction plans. Funding for this project includes the Great Trails State Program and Complete the Trails Program.
- **Wilderness Gateway State Trail (WGST)**: Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina (FCNC), the Wilderness Gateway State Trail partner, recently completed the Wolfpen Loop Trail, a future segment of the Wilderness Gateway State Trail. This 10.5-mile loop links Bob's Creek State Natural Area to Box Creek Wilderness in southern McDowell County and was designed to accommodate adaptive mountain bikes (aMTB). Because most adaptive trails tend to be short, flat loops, opportunities for more advanced experiences are limited; the Wolfpen Loop offers trail users of all ages and abilities a place to test their limits, build skills, and explore a more challenging route. By expanding a trail network that includes and supports aMTB riders, Western North Carolina has the potential to become a national destination for adaptive recreation, bringing new tourism to the region as it continues recovering from Hurricane Helene. FCNC has already begun constructing an additional 6 miles of trail in Burke County, with an 18-mile section in Rutherford and McDowell counties planned next. Together, these projects highlight the beauty of the South Mountains Conservation Corridor and showcase a new kind of trail experience designed for everyone.



Aerial photo of the North River in Carteret County



Lazy Otter River Access on the French Broad River State Trail

Complete the Trails Program

The Complete the Trails Program (CTP) introduced and funded in the 2021 North Carolina budget has greatly strengthened state trail partnerships. The result has been transformational for state trails, both because of the funding and for the focus on partnership. The legislation directed that the funding provided for state trails be administered by DNCR for the planning, construction, promotion, and maintenance of state trails. The funds have been distributed, where practicable, through the identified state trail partners based on their 5-year plans. The partners of the 12 state trails that were authorized prior to the legislation in 2021 *(Table 6-3)* were eligible for capacity building and development funds through the CTP, which allows them to truly focus on developing their state trail. In 2023, the General Assembly authorized additional funding for the Complete the Trails Program. This funding included directed allocations for trail development for 13 of the 16 authorized state trails and additional capacity-building funds. The two additional authorized state trails, Haw River State Trail and Equine State Trail, were also granted capacity funding in the 2023 budget. The EQST also received some trail development and land acquisition funds. The fund expanded the Division's state trails planning program with a time-limited grant manager to assist with memorandums of understanding (MOUs) between the Division and the state trail and community partners. The South Fork Passage State Trail was authorized after these funds and, therefore, is not included in the allocation.

Capacity Building

Most of the partners have chosen to invest their capacity-building funds into additional staffing to significantly increase the planning and development of the state trails. Recurring capacity funding would do much to enable partners to continue their focus on their state trail. To receive the initial capacity building funds of $49,500, each partner had to have an accepted 5-year plan, signed MOU, required documentation to qualify to contract with North Carolina, and an executed contract.

Trail Development Fund

The development funds of the Complete the Trail Program were allocated to the state trails that were authorized at the time of the legislation in 2021 and 2023, and most of the partners have used portions of these funds to make progress on the development of the state trails.

Table 6-3: Complete the Trails Program Development Funds Expended

State Trail	Funding Opportunity	Project Amount	Number of Projects
Dan River State Trail (DNST)	2021 Development	$117,365	1
	2023 Development	$0	
Deep River State Trail (DRST)	2021 Development	$860,828	2
	2023 Development	$0	
East Coast Greenway State Trail (EGST)	2021 Development	$847,867	3
	2023 Development	$0	
Equine State Trail (EQST)*	2021 Development	$0	0
	2023 Development	$0	
French Broad State Trail (FBST)	2021 Development	$154,774	10
	2023 Development	$99,000	
Fonta Flora State Trail (FFST)	2021 Development	$215,000	2
	2023 Development	$0	
Haw River State Trail (HRST)*	2021 Development	$0	0
	2023 Development	$0	
Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail (HGST)	2021 Development	$186,585	8
	2023 Development	$0	
Mountains-To-Sea State Trail (MST)	2021 Development	$2,366,425	14
	2023 Development	$0.00	
Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST)	2021 Development	$286,943	1
	2023 Development	$0	
Overmountain Victory State Trail (OVST)	2021 Development	$1,171,421	9
	2023 Development	$0.00	
Roanoke River State Trail (RRST)	2021 Development	$364,650	1
	2023 Development	$0	
South Fork Passage State Trail (SFST)†	2021 Development	$0	0
	2023 Development	$0	
Wilderness Gateway State Trail (WGST)	2021 Development	$645,077	4
	2023 Development	$0	
Yadkin River State Trail (YRST)	2021 Development	$40,104	1
	2023 Development	$0	
	Total	**$7,356,039**	**56**

** Indicates State Trails that were authorized after the Complete the Trail Program funds were allocated in 2021*
† Indicates State Trails that were authorized after the Complete the Trail Program funds were allocated in 2023

7.0 Recreational Trails Program



Burton Trail – Onslow County



Town of Boone



Haywood County



The Division manages the federal Recreational Trails Program (RTP) for the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. RTP leverages local funds to develop trails and trail-related recreational amenities to provide low-cost infrastructure and economic development opportunities through natural resource tourism.

From 1999 to 2026, the Division received approximately $83 million in requests for RTP funding. Of those requests, the state has awarded $44.8 million to sustainable RTP trail projects statewide. These RTP funds, combined with in-kind services and matching funds totaling $71.3 million, have been applied to trail and greenway projects for the citizens of North Carolina. RTP is currently enabled by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2021, which reauthorized the program from fiscal years 2022 through 2026. RTP funding comes from the Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) through the North Carolina Department of Transportation and is administered by the Division's Trails Program. 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.

The Division received 20 RTP final application requests totaling over $2.1 million for the 2025-2026 grant year. In North Carolina, Trails Program staff request applicants submit applications several months prior to review by the North Carolina Trails Committee (NCTC), so that applicants receive comments and suggestions. This process has resulted in higher quality, shovel-ready projects presented to the NCTC. Grant applications are reviewed and recommended for funding by the NCTC, an appointed board established in N.C. General Statute §113A-88. The NCTC recommended awards for 12 RTP construction projects totaling over $1.3 million to leverage over $339,000 of grantee matching funds *(Table 7-1)*.

Table 7-1: 2025 RTP Development Projects

Project Sponsor	Project Title	Project Award	Project Description	Primary Trail User	Project County
Person County Recreation, Arts & Parks	Rotary Club of Roxboro Centennial Park	$50,000	Construction of 2 miles of multi-use trail and supporting trail information signage.	Multi-Use	Person
Town of Elkin	Elkin Creek Headwaters Grant	$100,000	Project will add 5,700 feet of multi-use doubletrack trail providing additional connectivity and trailhead upgrades.	Biking	Wilkes
Southeastern Community College	A Pathway to Wellness: Creating a Community Greenway	$100,000	A 1-mile loop trail will be the county's first centrally located greenway. It will serve as the framework for a future trail network in a community in need of safe, healthy outdoor activities.	Multi-Use	Columbus
Access Fund	Amphitheater Access Trail	$99,000	This project will design and build the newly designated Amphitheater Access Trail in Linville Gorge. This new trail will be a spur off the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail and provide sustainable access to the Amphitheater region of the Linville Gorge Wilderness.	Hiking	Burke
Sound Rivers, Inc.	Tar-Pamlico Water Trail Renovations	$38,500	Project will renovate 11 camping platforms located on the Tar-Pamlico Water Trail.	Paddle	Beaufort
Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina	Oak Hill Community Park and Forest Trails – Phase III	$100,000	Construction of 3.1 miles of new multi-use trail at Oak Hill Community Park.	Multi-Use	Burke
Camp Grier	Rostan Trail Equestrian Access Expansion	$75,000	Expanded equestrian access via the Rostan Trail, with reinforced bridges, widened corridors, and improved parking at Camp Grier's Equestrian Center – creating a safe, inclusive trailhead that connects to Old Fort's growing trail network.	Equestrian	McDowell
City of Hendersonville	Clear Creek Greenway	$100,000	A 2.5-mile multi-use trail, crossing two streams and an interstate, will connect the east side of town to the park system and downtown, while connecting over 1,000 residents to the business districts and existing trail system.	Multi-Use	Henderson
Town of Walnut Cove	Walnut Cove Lagoon Trail	$95,040	Walnut Cove Lagoon Trail will be a 1-mile natural surface trail linking downtown Walnut Cove to Town Fork Creek, with safe public access to the creek and surrounding natural areas.	Hiking	Stokes
National Forests in North Carolina	Badin OHV System Maintenance	$400,000	Routine maintenance of trails, trailheads, access roads, and trail-side overnight sites in the OHV complex. The system includes 17 miles of OHV trail, 21 miles of gravel access roads, and multiple trailheads and trail-side overnight sites, each requiring annual maintenance.	Off-Highway Vehicle	Montgomery
Town of Cramerton	Cramer Mountain Trail Project	$100,000	Approximately 4,300 linear feet of 6-foot wide improved natural surface trail (finished with recycled crushed concrete), three parking spaces, and two kiosks to facilitate connections to important destinations within Cramerton.	Multi-Use	Gaston
Randolph County	Deep River State Trail Franklinville to Bush Creek Bridge Trail Section	$100,000	Construction of a trailhead with a gravel parking lot, fencing around the adjoining hydroelectric plant/dam and a 0.35-mile trail along the former railroad bed to the recently constructed Bush Creek Bridge. The trail will be 12 feet wide with hard-packed screenings on a fabric liner.	Hiking	Randolph
			Total Projects Awarded	**12**	
			Total Funds Awarded	**$1,357,540**	

The Safety and Education Grant (SEG)

The Safety and Education Grant (SEG) is a sub-award of the Recreational Trail Program (RTP) that supports educational programs promoting trail safety and environmental protection. Eligible projects include developing and operating safety and environmental education programs, trail accessibility and sustainability training, and producing trail-related educational materials. Grants can also cover costs related to educational events, including speaker fees and space rental. Trail patrols are another eligible activity, focusing on monitoring trail conditions, providing emergency assistance, and educating users on environmental protection. Training programs related to trail planning, construction, maintenance, and assessment are also supported, provided they focus on safety and environmental protection. Additionally, collaboration with youth conservation or service corps for training and patrol activities is encouraged. In 2025-2026, seven Safety and Education Grants were awarded, totaling over $33,000 *(Table 7-2)*.

Table 7-2: 2025-2026 RTP Safety and Education Grant Awards

Project Sponsor	Project Title	Project Award	Project County
Carolina Mountain Club	Training and Recertification of CMC Sawyers	$4,959	Buncombe
Trail Partners Foundation	Slow and Say Hello Safety and Resource Protection Program	$4,883	Henderson
Friends of Panthertown	Sustainable Trail Design and Layout, Construction, and Maintenance Training	$5,000	Jackson, Transylvania
Town of Burlington	Guilford Mackintosh – Safety and Educational Trail Signage	$5,000	Guilford
Piney Point Trails	Connecting Community to Nature through Safe and Educational Trails	$5,000	Carteret
Piedmont Land Conservancy	Piedmont Legacy Trails 2026 Summit	$3,875	Forsyth
Town of Duck	Clearing the Way – Protecting Trails and Wetlands	$4,956	Dare
	Total Projects Awarded:		**7**
	Total Funds Awarded:		**$33,673**

8.0 State Parks Partnership with Conservation Corps NC



Jones Lake State Park



Jones Lake State Park



Eno River State Park

In fiscal year 2025-2026, the Division continued its partnership with the Conservation Corps North Carolina (CCNC) to support trail work in state parks. A program of the Conservation Legacy, CCNC engages North Carolina's young adults in conservation service projects that benefit local communities. The partnership is also supported by an AmeriCorps grant from the North Carolina Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service.

In its eighth year, the partnership has vastly improved trail sustainability in state parks while providing young adults with a paid job, valuable hands-on training, and an AmeriCorps education award. Six-person crews tackled various trail projects under training and direction from Trails Program staff. From July 2025 to July 2026, crews completed projects at four state parks. Work accomplished included trail maintenance, new trail structures, and improvements to make trails more resilient to environmental and visitor impacts.

CCNC 2025-2026 State Park Projects

- **Mayo River State Park:** The Division and CCNC continued their collaboration on initial trail training for crew members in June 2026. This has proved to be a successful model that will continue to foster the future trail stewards of tomorrow. Trails Program staff and CCNC leadership provided hands-on training along the Mayo Mountain Loop Trail, focusing on identifying trail issues and applying sustainable remedies.
- **Eno River State Park:** Crew members were able to learn more advanced trail techniques by providing extensive Tropical Storm Chantal recovery work on the Dunnagan, Cox Mountain, and Cole Mill trails, restoring damaged tread, improving drainage, and rerouting flood-damaged sections. Project accomplishments included 1.5 miles of trail enhancements, the construction of roughly 1,306 linear feet of new trail, the installation of nine rock steps and eight timber check steps, and substantial drainage upgrades — all critical improvements that strengthen the trail's long term resiliency and ability to withstand future storms.

  Crews also completed a reroute of the Cole Mill Trail, cleared trail corridors of downed trees and debris, installed retaining structures, and revegetated 50 feet of decommissioned trail. Improvements along the Dunnagan Trail included a rock hop, five rock steps, and a quarter mile of tread repairs.
- **Rendezvous Mountain:** Over the course of two 10-day work stints, CCNC and the Division collaborated on extensively renovating 0.6 mile of the Talking Tree Trail to bring the trail up to modern sustainable trail standards. This loop trail is anticipated to be a popular amenity at the park and provides ample interpretive opportunities to learn about the park's resources.
- **Jones Lake State Park:** Along the Cedar Loop Trail, where park visitors have the unique opportunity to see rare Atlantic white cedar trees, crews conducted vegetation management as well as graveled nearly a half mile of trail.

CCNC Individual Placement Program

CCNC's Individual Placement Program places members directly into the workforce alongside government, land management, and community organizations, providing meaningful career experiences while boosting organizational capacity. The Division began using this model in 2024, and its impact was clear, with the first placement member joining the N.C. Trails team full-time at the end of their service term. Building on this success, the Trails Program established a Trails Geographic Information Systems Technician position in 2026 to support the growing need to capture high-quality spatial data and provide mapping tools for the program. This new role is central to ongoing accessibility work, assisting with the collection and management of data from statewide park accessibility audits and leading the development of the Division's first online, interactive park maps featuring trails, facilities, points of interest, and accessibility information. These tools will give visitors clearer, more reliable information so they can make informed decisions ahead of their visit. The position will also strengthen project scoping and trail management efforts across the Division, improving internal collaboration and efficiency.

9.0 Actions for the Future of the Great Trails State



Elk Knob State Park

NC Trails Program Recommendations

- **Evaluate State Transportation Funding Limitations:** N.C.G.S. §136-189.11(d)(3)(c) prohibits the use of state transportation 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 legislation should be evaluated to determine if it continues to be in the best interest of the residents of North Carolina. In contrast, Florida's Shared-Use Nonmotorized Trail Network (SUN) program provides an example of a different approach, where the state invests dedicated transportation funds — approximately $50 million annually from redistributed motor-vehicle tag revenues — into planning, designing, and constructing a statewide paved trail network that supports alternative transportation, recreation, economic development, and conservation.
- **Provide Recurring State Funding for a Trail Grant Program:** The NC Trails Program continues to receive more than twice as many applications for trail and greenway projects as the federal Recreational Trails Program can support, underscoring the growing demand for trail development across the state. Recurring state funding would help accelerate the completion of these projects and better meet community needs. This demand is further reflected in the Great Trails State Program, which saw $28 million in applications for the $25 million in legislatively allocated funding. Importantly, the 2026 state budget strengthened this momentum by allocating an additional $14 million for trail investments, an encouraging step that highlights the state's recognition of the value of outdoor recreation. Sustaining and expanding this level of support will be essential to keep pace with rising demand, ensure access to high-quality trails, and continue to strengthen North Carolina's brand as the Great Trails State and as a national destination for outdoor recreation. In addition to capital funding, administrative support is equally critical. Managing recurring grants requires significant ongoing staff capacity, as most projects span 3-5 years and involve comprehensive support throughout the grant lifecycle — including application development, technical assistance, review, scoring and selection, project management, and reimbursement processing. Securing dedicated administrative funding would help ensure these programs run efficiently and deliver the support required to shepherd projects from application to completion.
- **Provide Recurring Funding for State Trails:** Providing recurring capacity building funds for state trail partner organizations would allow them to consistently focus on developing the state trails. Additionally, removal of the provision within the 2021 Complete the Trails Program legislation (S.L. 2021-180) that restricts trail development projects to natural surface trails would significantly improve program eligibility and future access to the growing state trail network.
- **Apportion Budgets with State Trail Authorizations:** Any new state trail that is authorized should have an appropriated budget to support initial development and should be planned to extend at least 100 miles. Trail concepts considered for state trail authorization should also focus on areas of the state not currently served by a state trail.

Opportunities for Collaboration:

- **Add Safety Signage for Paddle Trails:** DNCR and the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) should develop an Memorandum of Understanding to provide safety signage on bridges that span paddle trails throughout North Carolina. At a minimum, the signage should identify the roadway, the paddle trail, and any portages nearby downstream.
- **Continued Partnership with the Great Trails State Coalition:** The Great Trails State Coalition is a group of land conservancies, trails and environmental organizations, and industry partners formed to promote trails in North Carolina. The Division will continue to advise and coordinate with the Coalition, and continue strengthening the partnership.
- **Develop Strategic Planning:** The NC Trails Program will continue collaborating with NCDOT's Integrated Mobility Division to identify priority corridors for state and regional trail development as part of a strategic, statewide network connecting county seats, state parks, state trails, community colleges, and state and national forests. This plan should also establish clear criteria for including pedestrian and bicycle accommodations in all non-interstate bridge replacement projects. As the NCDOT's Great Trails State Plan network grows as a system of multi-use paths, continued coordination will be essential — especially where multi-use surfaces are not suitable for certain state trails, such as the Northern Peaks State Trail, and where spine routes must instead link to trailheads. Continued strengthening of the collaboration with NCDOT will not only support ongoing implementation of the Great Trails State Plan but also help inform future statewide updates and the development of region-specific plans that ensure trail infrastructure meets the diverse needs of communities across North Carolina.

Priorities for the Next Fiscal Year

- **Helene Recovery Projects:** The Trails Program will continue its ongoing recovery efforts for Helene-related trail damage. Helene recovery projects remain a top priority for the program. The improvements planned for trails will emphasize sustainable design and construction methods, ensuring that repairs not only address current damage but also strengthen the system's resilience to withstand future events. This is a fiscally responsible approach intended to reduce long-term maintenance costs protect trail the natural resources, and ensure continued trail access.
- **Adaptive Trails Program:** Building on the early success of this new initiative, the Division will continue to develop the program by adding new and diverse adaptive equipment to support a wider range of trail experiences, conducting ongoing accessibility assessments, and implementing access improvement plans across parks statewide. Currently, the program's work is carried out by a single temporary employee. Establishing full-time dedicated staff would significantly expand the program's capacity to advance accessibility and enhance visitor experience.
- **Cross-Agency Coordination:** Natural-surface trail construction is a specialized process that differs significantly from traditional infrastructure development, often requiring unique methods, materials, and environmental considerations. Strengthening collaboration with key trail stakeholders and partner government agencies could help streamline project planning, permitting, and implementation. Expanding these partnerships could support more efficient statewide trail development and maintenance.