

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2025

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SENATE BILL 329

Short Title: Recognizing South Fork Passage State Trail. (Public)

Sponsors: Senators Overcash, Hollo, and Alexander (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to: Rules and Operations of the Senate

March 19, 2025

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT TO AUTHORIZE THE SOUTH FORK PASSAGE STATE TRAIL AND TO
PROVIDE FOR ITS ADDITION TO THE STATE PARKS SYSTEM.

Whereas, the South Fork of the Catawba River (South Fork) has rich cultural, historical, natural, economic, and recreational value to the people of this region and North Carolina; and

Whereas, the South Fork was the site of the Battle of Ramsour's Mill during the American Revolution, in which local patriots, outnumbered more than 3-to-1, defeated a Loyalist militia; and

Whereas, during the Civil War, a detachment of Union soldiers marched to destroy the Pinhook Mill on the banks of the South Fork, but upon discovering the mill owner was a childhood neighbor of the soldiers' commanding officer, the mill was spared and only the adjacent bridge across the South Fork was burned, leaving only the bridge's stone pillars which still stand in the South Fork today; and

Whereas, the South Fork generated the hydropower for the region's textile and industrial boom in the 19th and 20th centuries, and many of the historic structures from that era remain today along the riverbanks; and

Whereas, there are currently 3,600 acres of protected land along the banks of the South Fork River, and these lands and the river are home to rare, diverse, and ecologically important animals and plant species, including bald eagles, bigleaf magnolias, seagreen darters, bog turtles, monarch butterflies, Schweinitz's sunflowers, and Santee chubs; and

Whereas, the Metropolitan Statistical Area through which the South Fork River flows is home to 2.7 million people, which is 25% of the population of North Carolina; and

Whereas, this rapidly growing region has no State-designated recreational facilities; and

Whereas, the South Fork would connect to the Wilderness Gateway State Trail, a State trail in Catawba, Burke, McDowell, and Rutherford Counties, which connects to the Overmountain Victory State Trail and Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail; and

Whereas, 15 miles of land trail and 10 miles of paddle trail are already completed; Now, therefore,

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. The General Assembly finds:

- (1) The proposed South Fork Passage Trail corridor offers numerous economic benefits by expanding and enhancing the existing tourism industry. The diverse hydrology of the river in the corridor includes shoals, flatwater, class II rapids, and river tributaries that support a variety of recreational uses.



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- 1 (2) The South Fork Passage Trail corridor is home to Spencer Mountain, the third
2 highest peak in the Charlotte region, and the corridor passes through terrain
3 that is emblematic of the Piedmont region of the State.
- 4 (3) The South Fork Passage Trail corridor also contains ecologically important
5 habitat, including diverse wetlands, hardwood forests, and grasslands, that
6 supports numerous State and federal threatened or endangered species.
- 7 (4) The creation of a 60-mile hiking and paddling trail connecting Jacob Fork
8 Park in Catawba County through Betty G. Ross Park in Lincoln County to
9 George Poston Park, Goat Island Park, and Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden in
10 Gaston County would expand existing recreational offerings and support
11 ongoing efforts to conserve the South Fork of the Catawba River watershed.

12 **SECTION 2.** The General Assembly authorizes the Department of Natural and
13 Cultural Resources (Department) to add the South Fork Passage Trail in Catawba, Lincoln, and
14 Gaston Counties to the State Parks System as a State trail, as provided in G.S. 143B-135.54(b).
15 The trail, which will run alongside the South Fork River, shall begin at the confluence of the
16 Henry Fork and Jacob Fork at Jacob Fork Park and end at the boundary between the State and
17 South Carolina on Lake Wylie.

18 **SECTION 3.** The Department shall support, promote, encourage, and facilitate the
19 establishment of trail segments on State Park lands and on lands of other federal, State, local, and
20 private landowners. On segments of the South Fork Passage State Trail that cross property
21 controlled by agencies or owners other than the Department's Division of Parks and Recreation,
22 the laws, rules, and policies of those agencies or owners shall govern the use of the property.

23 **SECTION 4.** The requirement of G.S. 143B-135.54(b) that additions be
24 accompanied by adequate appropriations for land acquisition, development, and operations shall
25 not apply to the authorization set forth in this act; provided, however, that the State may receive
26 donations of appropriate land and may purchase other needed lands for the South Fork Passage
27 State Trail with existing funds in the Land and Water Fund, the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund,
28 the Complete the Trails Fund, the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, and other available
29 sources of funding.

30 **SECTION 5.** This act is effective when it becomes law.