

Notes From the President



John Graham

Falling leaves flutter to the ground, creating a carpet of colors, no two alike. Time to go to our favorite State Park and set foot on the trails. But before we let our fantasies take flight and our spirits soar let's take a few moments and look at ourselves and our parks.

In 2007

- FSP has assisted in the publication of the first ever *Annual Report on NC Division of State Parks*.

- The music you heard on "Nature Day", October 13 atop South Mountains State Park was courtesy of FSP and the musical talents of the group "Slight Departure".

- The FSP exhibit at the annual Eno River Festival attracted new memberships, purchases of *Snakes of North Carolina* and newly published *Exploring the Geology of the Carolinas* and inquiries concerning the license plate for NC State Parks.

- FSP contributed financially to the NC University Press publication of *Exploring the Geology of the Carolinas*. Fourteen of our state parks were study sites for this unique work including Mt. Mitchell and Jockeys Ridge.

- FSP sponsored awards for the winners of the Mount Jefferson Poetry contest (180 entries) who so wonderfully expressed themselves about Mount Jefferson.

- Ranger Tom Randolph at Mount Jefferson Natural Area has reached out

to elementary schools, exciting enthusiasm of both students and teachers for the wonders and mysteries of the life and natural beauty of this jewel. FSP contributed compasses for his orienteering classes.

- FSP exhibited at Old Fashion Day at Morrow Mountain State Park. The crafts and demonstrations of cherished hand tools and antique farm implements were reminders of the early stewards of this noble land.

- IT IS HERE! Thanks to Bob Sowa and Lea Beazley "North Carolina State Parks Map Guide" is in print and available through NCFSP.org. It is the most current publication available regarding your state parks. By design and on-line publishing it can be updated one page at a time as our parks are enlarged or new ones are added. A great gift for yourself or friends.

- Much is happening in your state parks. *New Parks for a New Century* is the blueprint of the future as the parks system expands. Deep River State Trail is the latest addition.

- In order to sustain this growth and to prepare for the exploding population - 12,000,000 residents in NC by 2025 - we must find the means to preserve our heritage for generations to come.

- FSP must prepare for expanded efforts with our Council of State, NC General Assembly, and state agencies that set personnel policies and procedures for the caretakers of our natural treasures. We will continue to be advocates for the policies that have brought our NC State Parks System to the highest levels of national recognition and to attract high caliber professionals to staff the system.

To do these things and to set new goals for FSP, we need YOU and your efforts. We need volunteers to act as park liaison, contacts with existing conservation groups, planners for fundraising, social events, FSP displays in parks and other areas, assistant newsletter editors, project planners and coordinators, website contributors and a youth recruitment coordinator.

Did you find your niche? Contact us via NCFSP.org, JohnG@ncfsp.org or me at 919-477-2601.

John E. Graham
President



FSP and OLF

Some of our Eastern Region members ask our support:

The US Navy plans to build an Outlying Landing Field in Eastern North Carolina and the proposed site is the heart of the Atlantic Flyway. These birds are protected by the International Migratory Bird Treaty and also there is obviously substantial risk of collisions between jets and the huge flocks of large migratory birds that winter in the area in addition to potential adverse impacts to a globally significant wildlife refuge.

The areas under consideration as possible locations for the Outlying Landing Field are close to five North Carolina State Parks, Dismal Swamp, Merchants Millpond, Pettigrew, Jockeys Ridge and Goose Creek. Parks are, of course, areas for relaxation and recreation. Tranquillity is a primary need in these refuges, yet current environmental studies make no mention of the parks.

In addition to the aesthetic and environmental issues there are significant economic factors that must be weighed. These five parks had, in 2006, more than two million visitors, many of them out-of-state tourists.

Friends of State Parks believes that these irreplaceable resources, the common heritage of all North Carolina's citizens, must be protected and that the Environmental Study must address the impact of the landing field on State Parks.

Of our North Carolina senators, Elizabeth Dole (555 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington DC 20510) serves on the Armed Services committee and is particularly influential. Richard Burr (217 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington DC 20510) has taken no position as yet and as a representative of North Carolina should speak out. A letter to either or both might be helpful. And perhaps also to Governor Mike Easley (20301 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-0301.)

Medoc Mountain State Park

Contributed by Bob Sowa

Medoc Mountain is a small jewel of a park only 1.5 hours from downtown Raleigh. There are no signs on I-95 although it's only 10 miles east. Still it's easy to find on any state map and there are signs once you leave the interstate. This is one of the most accessible and least crowded parks in the system making it a relaxing trip for hiking the trails, camping, picnicking, or paddling your canoe.

The "mountain" only rises 325 feet over the coastal plain but it does support a patch of mountain laurels that is a rare sight this far east. The mountain takes its name from a wine making area in France, the name given during the mid 19th century when this area was the site of the second largest American winery. The summit was the site of one of the earliest Boy Scout of America's camps. Each year the park hosts a local festival that offers the community fun and games together with free health checks. Within the park Little Fishing Creek provides a great trip for beginning canoeists. Be sure to call ahead to check on stream levels. As you can imagine there is not much water this season.

The park is growing with recent land acquisitions, additional staff, and has a new superintendent, Joe Shimel. Stop by and see what they are up to.

Bob Benner Receives Recognition ...

FSP member Bob Benner has been working as a volunteer on the North Carolina Mountains-to-the-Sea Trail for the past 35 years. Bob leads the Central Blue Ridge Task Force, which covers the 76-mile stretch from Black Mountain Campground to Beacon Heights. The 900-mile trail is made up of footpaths, roads and state bike routes and Bob together with a crew of volunteers planned, built and maintains this section of the trail.

In May, in recognition of his efforts, EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson presented Bob with the President's Volunteer Service Award. FSP extends our congratulations to Bob and the thanks of all who enjoy North Carolina's parks and trails.

The Great Dismal Swamp – A multifaceted, mysterious gem

Contributed by Alice Zawadzki

The Great Dismal Swamp has a rich history of mystery and intrigue. Human occupation began nearly 13,000 years ago. The original million-acre swamp lies 30 miles west of the Atlantic Ocean between the James River in Virginia and the Albemarle Sound in North Carolina.

In 1665 William Drummond, the first governor of North Carolina (1663-1667), discovered the 3100-acre natural lake that bears his name. In 1728 a controversy between Virginia and North Carolina forced their governors to have the land surveyed to draw the dividing line between the two states. William Byrd II headed the survey team, which because of a drought, was able to progress 15 miles in 10 days through the great morass. Byrd believed the bleak place could be reclaimed and suggested forming a company using slave labor to drain portions of the swamp to produce hemp. In 1763 George Washington visited the swamp. He suggested draining it and digging a canal that connected the Chesapeake Bay with the Albemarle Sound. Together with Anthony Bacon and John Robinson, he organized the Dismal Swamp Land Company, which purchased 40,000 acres for \$20,000 that same year. By the end of the 1770s the 5-mile long Washington Ditch on the western edge of the swamp to Lake Drummond and Riddick Ditch were complete. The task of draining the swamp was given up to concentrate on lumbering the cypress trees for shipbuilding and the Atlantic Cedars for shingles. By the 1950s the last 20,000 acres of virgin timber were removed.

In 1973, Union Corporation donated its Virginia swamp holdings to the Nature Conservancy, which deeded it to the U.S. Department of Interior to form the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. Today the Refuge consists of 107,000 acres of forested wetlands surrounding Lake Drummond. The State of North Carolina purchased 14,300 acres adjacent to the Refuge for a State Natural Area. In the early 1990s, it was the dream of Penny Leary-Smith, the director of the Dismal Swamp Canal Welcome Center on US 17 in North Carolina, to offer more of the Dismal Swamp to the public.



*The bridge access to Dismal Swamp
Photo: Bob Sowa*

In early 2008, Joy Greenwood, Superintendent of the newly named Dismal State Park, will host the dedication of the Visitors/Education Center. The park shares the vehicle entrance with the Welcome Center on mile 3 of US 17 in NC in South Mills. Boaters on the 22-mile long Dismal Swamp Canal at mile 28 on the Intracoastal Waterway can tie up to the 150-foot dock to spend the night. Pedestrians will be able to access the Dismal Swamp State Park from the Welcome Center and Dock via a new 80-foot long swing bridge across the historic canal. Adjacent to the bridge is a new canoe and kayak launch.

The park will have 20 miles of hiking and mountain biking trails, all of which will run along old logging routes. Interpretive programs on the cultural and natural history will take place throughout the year. A special area in the exhibit hall will tell the story of the Great Dismal Swamp and its role in the Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.

Humans have drastically altered the Great Dismal Swamp over the past two centuries. It is in our hands to be good stewards in making the decisions and doing the work needed to protect this special place.

Winter Meeting

Mark your calendar, our winter meeting is January 26 at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area. We will meet in the park office off Hwy 64 at 10 am. Come and join us.

Friends of State Parks
P.O. Box 37655, Raleigh, NC 27627

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- ___ North Carolina State Parks Map Guide @ Public Price \$19.95 + \$3 S+H = \$22.95 each

Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City & Zip _____



This 121 page 8.5" x 11" coil bound book works as a coffee table book for trip planning and as a back pack reference guide. There is a detailed map of each park showing trails and facilities. The accompanying text gives a brief description of the park, directions to the park, information on available visitor facilities, and trail descriptions. The coil binding makes it easy to view the maps by allowing the pages to lie flat.

The book comes with a free service for FSP members who can receive updates as maps are added or updated.