

# Park Life

## A WORD FROM THE PARKS

Fall 2020



North Carolina State Parks recently held their fifth annual Junior Ranger Jamboree event at Jones Lake State Park. The COVID-19 dynamic impacted this event as it has all walks of life in 2020. The Parks hosted a total of thirteen families and twenty-five Junior Rangers. Rather than grouping all of the families, the Parks moved families and Junior Rangers to individual camps. The Parks individualized programming using a rotation format by family. The Parks provided crafts and s'mores to each family - a special thanks to the NC Friends of State Parks for donating funds for the s'mores. We created a group picture Brandy Bunch style! Despite the alterations, one participant said, "We think it was great given all the restrictions." Another participant stated, "[We] appreciated you putting on the Jamboree with so many things cancelling this year." Overall, everyone had a great time!

To learn more about the Junior Ranger program, please visit the State Park's website: <https://www.ncparks.gov/junior-rangers>. Here you will find a printable version of the Junior Ranger activity guide, fun extension activities we call *Pocket Activities*, and details on how your child can become a Junior Ranger. Continue to *Learn, Protect, and Explore*.

By: *Brittney Hurtado, Interpretation and Education Specialist +Youth Programs Coordinator at NC State Parks*

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# IT FEELS GOOD TO BE BACK!

## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF FSP

I'm excited to greet you today through the medium of our newsletter, revived after many years of absence. This has been made possible by the willingness of Laura Haywood to serve as our Communications and Marketing Manager, a new position at Friends of State Parks. Please welcome Laura and know that she would love to hear from you with any news about state parks.

In these difficult times of COVID isolation communication about things we love is more important than ever. Our last visit to a state park and in-person FSP meeting was in January at Hammocks Beach, and what a special occasion that was! Our executive director David Pearson hosted the event which included a waterfront board dinner, a quarterly business meeting and a private boat tour of the sound and park islands. We have maintained our meeting schedule through the year but virtual video conferences are no substitute for being outside and visiting our "naturally wonderful" state parks!

The COVID pandemic has had a major impact on state parks with the closing of facilities causing a dramatic reduction in revenues from all sources, especially campgrounds, while at the same time, creating record visitor attendance. Weekend attendance at some of our most popular parks has been so overwhelming the parks have had to close as early as ten o'clock in the morning! The cancellation of park programs has caused a significant reduction in FSP grants for things like school field trips and youth programs. One of our 2020 priorities was to work with the Parks director on a Kids in Parks program but this barely got started before the COVID impact. We see getting complete classes of middle schoolers into parks for environmental education as a meaningful step in addressing the lack of diversity in parks.

Looking forward, there are a number of things that we want to focus on, including working with the Parks division on the just mentioned Kids in Parks program, advocacy with the legislature for more funding and the need catch up on years of deferred maintenance. The tremendous increase in park visitation cause by the pandemic along with the fast population growth of our popular state call for expanded facilities and more state parks across North Carolina.

To accomplish these goals we need more funds and volunteers to participate in our various committees and programs. We have openings on our board for people with different backgrounds and skills and would be happy to hear from anyone who would like to be an active contributor to FSP and our state parks.

Our NC State Parks system is one of the finest in the country and the current Covid experience has proved its attraction and value to a whole new segment of the population, so let's build on this experience and work to make it even better for the future.

Thanks, Jim

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

As you all know, the General Assembly has not enacted a complete budget bill since 2018. Since then, state spending has continued at the level of the previous year's recurring budget pursuant to the state's automatic spending law. For parks, that meant that \$20.2 million was appropriated to the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund ("PARTF") for FY19-20. The General Assembly this year again did not pass a full budget which means that the PARTF spending remains at \$20.2 M for FY 21.

Prior to adjourning for the year, the General Assem-

### What's next?

Next year will present challenges for parks advocates—

- ⇒ The General Assembly will likely continue to take a conservative approach to spending during the 2021 session due to the pandemic and a projected decline in State revenue.
- ⇒ Two key parks advocates, Representative Chuck McGrady (R-Henderson) and Senator Harry Brown (R-Onslow) are both retiring and will not be returning to Raleigh. Therefore, it is important to strengthen existing relationships with returning legislators and get to know new members.
- ⇒ In addition to our legislative advocacy, we should prioritize developing relationships between North Carolina Legislators and NCFSP, supporters of specific State Parks (local FSPs), and Parks staff. We plan to arrange a series of legislative visits to our State's parks and have identified key legislators from both chambers and parties, specifically members of the relevant committees. This effort seeks to showcase the tangible needs of our system including its facilities, staff, and programs and to build personal, long-lasting relationships with members that can impact funding. If any members have any existing relationships or would like to be involved in these visits, please let us know.

Thank you for your support for North Carolina's State parks.



## RIDGELINE TRAIL AT CROWDERS MOUNTAIN RECEIVES A FACELIFT



On September 26<sup>th</sup> 2020, National Public Lands Day, 34 volunteers came together at The Boulders access area of Crowders Mountain State Park to make needed repairs to the Ridgeline Trail. This trail is part of the Carolina Thread Trail network and connects two states and three parks.

Volunteers ranged from nine years of age to those well into their seventies! We split the group into three smaller groups to accommodate social distancing and to attack various areas of the trail. Volunteers picked up litter, refurbished water diversions and worked on de-berming, trip hazard removal and other up-keep. This was our first organized workday in six months and everyone was eager and willing to get work done! Trail crew leaders from our Friends' group led the work effort based on areas identified by park staff. REI provided swag! In addition, Vanessa Covington, the Engagement and Volunteer Manager for the Catawba Lands Conservancy/Carolina Thread Trail, organized volunteers from her group and provided lunch for all.

The Friends of Crowders Mountain are grateful for the support our park receives year round and to those individuals, groups, and park staff who support our efforts. Our wonderful park would not remain a central attraction to our area if not for all of those who choose to take part in maintaining Crowders Mountain.

By: Dewey T. Matherly, President, Friends of Crowders Mountain

## ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING HIGHLIGHTS.

The annual meeting opened at 10 am on Saturday, October 31st, with Acting Director John Fullwood giving an update on the Division of Parks and Recreation. Followed by the board approving the minutes and financial reports for the previous quarter. David Pearson, the Executive Director, updated the membership on the hiring of Laura Haywood for the new position of Communications and Marketing Manager. And the work he has completed on an environmental endowment agreement and related policies for gifts and investments. The membership approved the endowment agreement and policies.

There were no new YIP-EE field trips due to Covid-19, however FSP approved three grants for park projects including the purchase of "Beetles" books for the Division Interpretation & Education programs.

The membership approved bylaw changes to allow FSP to hold electronic meetings more easily. Directors and Officers were elected with Jim Richardson remaining President, Larry Ragsdale remaining 2nd Vice President, and Jane Hunt remaining as a Director for two more years. The membership also approved the 2021 budget.

There was much discussion during new business resulting in the membership approving financial support from unrestricted net assets to fund two full time positions for up to two years for the purpose of enhancing Friends of State Parks communication to local groups, general membership, and state park visitors and to increase funding through grants, foundation gifts, and corporate contributions.

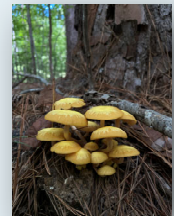
The meeting was adjourned at 12:40 pm.

## Nature Spotlight By Laura Haywood

I've spent a lot of time hiking in the Mountains and Piedmont of North Carolina. I have been trying to cover several miles on foot but I've been distracted. Why you might ask? There's more color in the flora and fauna! No, I am not referring to the change in leaves. That too, but more specifically something else. The blossoms of summer wildflowers are now accompanied by a several varieties of fungus.



*Calostoma cinnabarinum*



*Omphalotus olearius*

Fungi pepper the forest floor and add unique color combinations throughout - and I can't help but stop and admire.

So let me ask: when you are out exploring, do you see what I see? I encourage you to stop and admire the wonders of our environment. Ask yourself what in nature stops you in your tracks?

Have a submission for the Nature Spotlight? Submit your write-up and photo to [LauraH@NCFSP.org](mailto:LauraH@NCFSP.org)

## VIRTUALLY KEEPING EYES ON THE ENO

Like many faced with program cancellations, the Eno River Association moved much of their community engagement to the digital world. We have updated our website and social media platforms with the latest responses to the pandemic, trail closings, and guidelines for safe recreation, trail etiquette, and leave-no-trace principles. We created a weekly series that highlighted lesser-known areas along the Eno River, "Hidden Gems on the Eno," to help park users access alternatives for lower-density recreation. We also transitioned our weekly guided hike series into digital photo galleries, videos, and trail maps so people could self-guide to these locations.

To engage younger Eno River visitors, the Association created free downloadable coloring pages of Eno River flora & fauna and a treasure hunt, and launched an *Eyes on the Eno* Educational Video Series. These videos feature natural, cultural, and historic education about the Eno River, including a reptile & amphibian safari, a fishing adventure, a geological and biological survey of the Bacon Quarry within Eno River State Park, and a biography of a historical figure for which a portion of Eno River State Park is named, Fanny Breeze. These can be found on the Association's iHeartTheEno YouTube channel. *By: Emily Hill, Director of Development, Eno River Association*

**Eyes on the Eno Educational Videos**  
5 videos • 331 views • Last updated on Jun 1, 2020

**1 Eno River Herpetology Safari**  
IHearttheEno  
WATCHED 21:08

**2 Fanny Breeze: A Formative Figure in Eno River History**  
IHearttheEno  
WATCHED 25:49

**3 Fantastic Fish of the Eno**  
IHearttheEno  
WATCHED 26:36

**4 Of Rock and Water**  
IHearttheEno  
WATCHED 28:09

**5 Wildflowers of Penny's Bend, April**  
IHearttheEno  
WATCHED 14:25

## FRIENDS OF THE HAMMOCKS AND BEAR ISLAND, INC. FALL MARSH CRUISES

Each year, Friends of the Hammocks and Bear Island, Inc. (FHBI) offers fall marsh cruises around Bogue Sound. The one and a half to two-hour interpretive tour leaves the Hammocks Beach State Park mainland and navigates the waterways around Bear Island, Huggins Island and Swansboro on a Coast Guard-inspected pontoon boat. Each fall FHBI holds approximately 21 marsh cruises to promote Hammocks Beach State Park. COVID-19 considerations have reduced the capacity for this year's trips which take place on Wednesday's and Saturday's during the months of September, October, and November.



*By: Pam Pearson, Friends of the Hammocks and Bear Island*

Friends of the Hammocks and Bear Island has helped fund several recent projects:

- 5 kids' kayaks to assist with the children's kayaking orientation and camp
- A touch tank for live specimen programs
- Materials for a story walk trail
- Two projectors in the auditorium for programs
- Materials and supplies for special events and ongoing education

Proceeds this year will go toward events, educational programs, special projects, as well as, any assistance that may be requested by Hammocks Beach State Park or the Division of Parks and Recreation.



## WALK THE MST TRAIL BUT RUN TO GRAB YOUR COPY! -MST 40 DAY HIKES

Fall is a great time of the year to get started on the 40 Hike Challenge! The Challenge is met by successfully completing every hike in the new trail guide Great Day Hikes on North Carolina's Mountains-To-Sea Trail. The guide features 40 hikes carefully chosen by Friends to appeal to hikers of all experience levels.

The MST spans 1,175 miles across North Carolina—meandering through small towns and historic sites, within national and state parks and on footpaths through places of astounding natural beauty. The 40 hikes that make up the Challenge are spread across the state and are representative of the many natural and cultural gems that are connected by the MST. Walking any or all of the MST is a path to experiencing the state in a whole new way.

Hike all 40 of the Great Day Hikes before March 31, 2023 to be eligible for completion of the challenge. When you submit the hike tracking form, online or by mail, you will earn a special patch recognizing your feat. The downloadable form from our website is also a great way to keep track of completed hikes.

Great Day Hikes on North Carolina's Mountains-to-Sea Trail is available through Friends' online store and in local bookshops.

While hiking, share photos and stories on Facebook and Instagram by using hashtag #MST40Hike. We'll be posting firsthand stories from the 40 Hikes throughout the duration of the challenge – so watch for some inspiration to help you decide where to hike next. Please make sure to follow proper social distancing, wear masks if applicable, and most importantly, have a back-up plan if the trail head appears full.

Start exploring North Carolina—one day hike at a time.

Provided by: Friends of Mountain-to-Sea Trail  
Visit them at [www.mountainstoseatrail.org](http://www.mountainstoseatrail.org)

## MORROW MOUNTAIN STATE PARK RECEIVES 1,000 ACRE DONATION

Please Note: The following is a press release from the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation. The North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation accepted the donation of more than 1,000 acres to Morrow Mountain State Park in Stanly County on May 14. The donation, which brings the park's total area to 5,881 acres, is part of ALCOA Corporation's Federal Energy Regulatory Commission relicensing agreement that was finalized in 2013.

"This is a substantial addition to this treasured state park," said Secretary Susi H. Hamilton. "Morrow Mountain has been a beloved destination for families from Stanly and nearby counties for generations. The opportunity to have this amount of Piedmont land for conservation, recreation, and education is extraordinary."

The property is situated on the north-northwest side of the park and along the Yadkin River. It will provide new recreational opportunities including new trails, water access, and potential for camping. Nesting bald eagles, timber rattlesnakes and the rare Yadkin River Goldenrod make their homes on the acreage with its large boulder fields, scenic vistas and unique wildlife habitat. It also includes the historic Hardaway site.

"We are so grateful to have this addition to Morrow Mountain State Park," said superintendent Jeff Davidson. "This major addition will conserve important ecosystems and make a little more room for recreation to serve nearby communities as well as the growing Piedmont population."

By: Stanly News & Press Wed. May 27, 2020

*Pilot Mountain  
State Park's  
New Visitor  
Center is OPEN!*



The new visitor center opened at Pilot Mountain State Park in August using Phase 2 guidelines. If you haven't been by stop in and check out the exhibit center and the new gift shop. The view is spectacular from the windows of the center. In September a wheelchair accessible telescope was installed by the visitor center that provides exceptional views of the pinnacle. The telescope was purchased by Friends of Sauratown Mountain and matching grant money from Friends of State Parks. We greatly appreciate the Friends of State Parks supporting this project!



## NEW(ER) KIDS ON THE BLOCK MAKING BIG IMPACTS - FRIENDS OF LOWER HAW RIVER

Our Friends chapter formed in 2016 to support the Lower Haw River State Natural Area (LOHA) through stewardship, education, and advocacy. We are one of the newer kids on the block, and support a state natural area instead of a park or state recreation area. LOHA consists of over 1,025 acres along both sides of the Haw River in Chatham County, from above the Bynum Dam at US 15-501 to below US 64 where it adjoins the Jordan Lake State Recreation Area. State Parks considers LOHA undeveloped since there are only informal footpaths and paddle put in/take out. Friends of Lower Haw River State Natural Area (FLOHA) received a grant from the Triangle Community Foundation to hire consultants to develop a Lower Haw Trails Plan in collaboration with State Parks, the public and other stakeholders. This plan was completed in June 2018 and will help guide future development of LOHA. We also hired Destination by Design to produce two short videos on LOHA and the plan. We are fortunate that the Connect NC Bond included some funding for development of the Bynum Mill Access area of LOHA, and look forward to the start of that bond project in 2021.

Our chapter offers educational programming like guided hikes and projects that connect people with nature like our wildlife cameras and bird house monitoring. We installed trash cans at popular access points to help reduce litter, and a volunteer team empties the trash cans on a weekly basis since State Parks does not have the staff to do it. We organize river clean-up events and invasive plant species removal workdays, although we have temporarily suspended those due to COVID-19.



Volunteer invasive plant species workday with State Parks Biologists  
February 2020



Volunteer team for one of FLOHA's river clean-up events  
March 2019

We are fortunate to have a terrific team of volunteers who have been able to carry on with our trash can, bird house, and wildlife camera projects in LOHA that can be done alone or with family. LOHA has remained open during the pandemic, but with our group outings on hold, we've been exploring LOHA virtually with our "Enjoying Nature Through a Lens" feature in our e-newsletters. LOHA is a popular place for nature photography and we're fortunate to have fabulous photographers willing to share their images for use in our e-newsletters and social media. During the pandemic, LOHA has taken a beating with the dramatic increase in visitation and the resulting increase in problems with trash, graffiti, and illegal activities like camping, campfires, and alcohol parties.

Because State Parks is not been ready to start development of LOHA, we are collaborating with Chatham County Parks & Recreation on making improvements to two popular public access areas to LOHA and the Haw River that are managed by the county. We obtained grants to build kiosks and create signage, refurbish a shade shelter, install a metal staircase paddle access, regrade an eroded footpath, and create a pollinator meadow garden on county managed access sites. Our newest volunteer project is holding workdays this fall to give the new meadow garden some much needed attention with weeding and adding more native plants so we'll get even more wildflowers and native grasses next year.

By: Gretchen Smith, President, Friends of Lower Haw River



# SUPPORTING GORGES STATE PARK AMIDST A PANDEMIC: CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY

Gorges State Park's entry gates were locked to nearly everyone, the visitors center was shuttered to the outside world and the trails were strangely quiet. The NC State Park System was effectively closed from March to May due to the COVID crisis. We knew that finding the resources to support the park would be a huge challenge but could present a unique opportunity to grow.



The Friends of Gorges State Park started their annual Friendship Drive in late summer. The drive took on a different energy this year. We crafted a very direct messaging strategy to emphasize how drastically the pandemic impacted the park.

Friendship Chair, Tom Rickard spearheaded an expanded platform for businesses. Regional businesses of all sizes received his message with unqualified support and generosity. We invested time and resources to update our website with current images and a streamlined avenue to provide support. We wanted to make clear that in addition to purchasing a Friendship membership or making a donation, the public could purchase merchandise or support our Facebook fundraiser. We used social media engagement, to highlight successful events, like Gorgeous Gorges Colors, and projects like the TRACK Trail just outside the Visitors Center.

Our favorite piece of the campaign was a blog post and video interview with outgoing Superintendent Rob McGraw and Ranger Alyssa Coburn. These two great friends provided insight into their day-to-day work and what they love about Gorges State Park. Not surprisingly, they both truly love the backcountry aspect of the park. You can see their passion when they talk about the Canebrake and Foothills trails. Our hope was to humanize the park and it was a joy to share these pieces with a wider audience.

We want to offer a huge thank you to everyone who took the time from their own 2020 trials to support our cause and support the wonderland that is Gorges State Park! We hope you stay healthy and adventurous!

By: *Katie Sweeney from Four Leaf New Media, Communications for Gorges State Park*



## SUPPORT THE FRIENDS: MAKE A DONATION TODAY

***Make a donation today to highlight a special occasion, to honor a friend or loved one or to commemorate a lost loved one. Also consider making a donation in support of a specific Friends group.***

*Send gifts to:*

*Friends of State Parks, Inc.,  
PO Box 37655  
Raleigh, NC 27627*

*Make donations by scanning the **QR Code** using your phone camera or visit us **online at [www.NCPARKS.org](http://www.NCPARKS.org)***



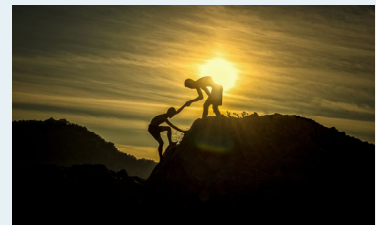
## Local Friends' Group On The Move

A message from Kate Henning,  
President of Friends of Stone  
Mountain

Friends of Stone Mountain is happy to announce their first purchase of a GoPro Camera Pack for Stone Mountain State Park. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all in-person educational programs have been cancelled. This camera pack will allow the park staff to submit environmental educational programs to social media for online viewing for school groups and the public.

The Friends group also recently received several large donations. One larger donation - \$2,500 - was donated for trail maintenance.

We thank everyone for their support and hope they continually enjoy the beauty of Stone Mountain State Park.





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There are many ways to get involved in the State Parks. Visit us to learn more.  
**NCFSP.org**

If your current membership has expired, please visit our website today [www.NCFSP.org](http://www.NCFSP.org) and click on 'Join' to renew or use our form below. New members, please complete the form and become a supporter of your parks!

*To become a member, fill out the form, clip and mail with your check to:*

**Friends of State Parks, PO Box 37655, Raleigh, NC 27627**

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___ Family _____ \$30.00	___ Patron _____ \$100.00
___ Benefactor _____ \$500.00	___ Philanthropist _____ \$1,000.00
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Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### 2021 Board Meetings

January 30th	10 am	Virtual (online) Meeting
April 24th	10 am	To Be Determined
July 31st	10 am	To Be Determined
October 30th	10 am	To Be Determined

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