

NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Parks and Recreation
State Parks System Plan Update (G.S. 143B-135.48(d))

October 2017

Changes to the State Parks System Plan in 2017 were limited to Chapter Two of the document. A complete plan update will be prepared in 2018.

CHAPTER TWO

STATE OF THE SYSTEM

SYSTEM UNITS

As of July 1, 2017, the North Carolina State Parks System consists of 79 units, 41 of which are operated for the visiting public with on-site staff and regular gate hours. The remaining units are managed in one of the following ways: as part of an operated park, as a satellite unit, or through cooperative and partnership agreements. For example, Lake Phelps State Lake is managed as part of Pettigrew State Park. Run Hill State Natural Area is a satellite of Jockeys Ridge State Park. Hemlock Bluffs State Natural Area is leased to the Town of Cary in a cooperative agreement, and the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail is an example of a protection partnership with other agencies and organizations.

Table 2.1. Size of the State Parks System

SIZE OF THE NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS SYSTEM As of July 1, 2017			
Unit Type	Units	Size (Acres)	Length (Miles)
State Parks	34	161,685	
State Recreation Areas	4	13,256	
State Natural Areas	24	25,980	
State Lakes	7	29,135	
State Rivers	4	0	146
State Trails	6	2,052	922
TOTAL	79	232,108	
Land Area		202,973	
Water Area (State Lakes)		29,135	
Easements		961	
TOTAL		232,108	

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Table 2.2 - The State Parks System Units with Acreages as of July 1, 2017

STATE PARKS (land area only)	Size (acres)	STATE RECREATION AREAS (land area only)	Size (acres)
Carolina Beach	420	Falls Lake	5,035
Carvers Creek	4,347	Fort Fisher	287
Chimney Rock	6,892	Jordan Lake	4,558
Cliffs of the Neuse	1,097	Kerr Lake	3,376
Crowders Mountain	5,210	Total 4	13,256
Dismal Swamp	14,432	STATE NATURAL AREAS (land area only)	Size (acres)
Elk Knob	4,077	Bald Head Island	1,260
Eno River	4,204	Bay Tree	609
Fort Macon	424	Bear Paw	384
Goose Creek	1,672	Beech Creek Bog	120
Gorges	7,709	Bob's Creek	0
Grandfather Mountain	3,436	Bullhead Mountain	442
Hammocks Beach	1,611	Bushy Lake	6,343
Hanging Rock	7,899	Chowan Swamp	6,066
Haw River	1,429	Hemlock Bluffs	97
Jockey's Ridge	426	Lea Island	25
Jones Lake	1,669	Lower Haw River	1,025
Lake James	3,685	Masonboro Island	106
Lake Norman	1,937	Mitchell Mill	93
Lake Waccamaw	2,398	Mount Jefferson	1,123
Lumber River	12,309	Occoneechee Mtn.	190
Mayo River	2,509	Pineola Bog	91
Medoc Mountain	3,893	Run Hill	123
Merchants Millpond	3,519	Salmon Creek	0
Morrow Mountain	4,501	Sandy Run Savannas	3,133
Mount Mitchell	1,996	Sugar Mountain Bog	102
New River	2,929	Theodore Roosevelt	265
Pettigrew	5,945	Warwick Mill Bay	0
Pilot Mountain	3,872	Weymouth Woods	915
Raven Rock	4,810	Yellow Mountain	3,468
Singletary Lake	649	Total 24	25,980
South Mountains	19,830	STATE LAKES (water area only)	Size (acres)
Stone Mountain	14,351	Bay Tree	1,418
William B. Umstead	5,599	Jones	224
Total 34	161,685	Phelps	16,600
		Waccamaw	8,938
		Salters	315
		Singletary	572
		White	1,068
		Total 7	29,135
STATE RIVERS	Length (miles)		
Horsepasture	5		
Linville	13		
Lumber	102		
New	27		
Total 4	146		
STATE TRAILS	Size (acres)	Length Designated (miles)	
Deep River	1,274	0	
Fonta Flora	0	16	
French Broad River	0	117	
Hickory Nut Gorge	0	0	
Mountains-To-Sea	778	660	
Yadkin River	0	130	
Total 6	2,052	922	

TYPES OF UNITS

The State Parks Act of 1987 lists six types of units included in the North Carolina State Parks System: State Parks, State Natural Areas, State Recreation Areas, State Trails, State Rivers, and State Lakes.

- **State Park** - North Carolina's first State Park was established at Mount Mitchell in 1916 to protect the summit of the highest mountain in the eastern U.S. There are currently 34 State Parks in the system. Generally, State Parks are expected to possess both significant natural resource values and significant recreational values. State Parks are expected to accommodate the development of facilities, but may vary in the extent of development depending upon what can be provided without damage to the scenic or natural features. Facilities are planned and constructed to keep disturbance of natural resources to a minimum and to leave a large portion of each park undisturbed and free from improvements and structures, except for trails.
- **State Natural Area** - State Natural Areas were established as a separate type of system unit in 1963 with the adoption of separate principles for management. The first State Natural Area was created that same year. There are currently 24 State Natural Areas. The purpose of State Natural Areas is focused on preserving and protecting areas of scientific, aesthetic, or ecological value. Facilities are limited to those needed for interpretation, protection, and minimum maintenance. Generally, recreational and public use facilities such as camping, swimming, picnicking and the like are not provided in State Natural Areas.
- **State Recreation Area** - State Recreation Areas are sites where the primary purpose is outdoor recreation, rather than preservation. More intensive development of facilities is provided than in State Parks. Protection and enjoyment of the natural resources are still important, and the sites are expected to contain scenic and attractive natural features. Development is planned and constructed to keep a "reasonable amount" of each area undisturbed and free from improvements and structures. The first State Recreation Area was added to the system in 1971, and principles to guide the development and operation of State Recreation Areas were adopted in 1974. There are currently four State Recreation Areas.
- **State Trail** - The North Carolina Trails System Act was passed in 1973 to help provide for the state's outdoor recreation needs and to promote public access to natural and scenic areas. The act prescribed methods for establishing a statewide system of scenic trails, recreation trails, and connecting or side trails. The Trails System includes "State Trails", which are designated and managed as units of the state parks system, and regional connector trails managed by other governmental agencies or organizations. At present there are six State Trails.
- **State River** - The Natural and Scenic Rivers System was created by the 1971 General Assembly to preserve and protect certain free flowing rivers, their water quality and their adjacent lands for the benefit of present and future generations. The Natural and Scenic Rivers Act established criteria and methods for inclusion of components to the system. Components of the Natural and Scenic Rivers System are State Rivers, and are also units of the state parks system. Currently there are four State Rivers.

- **State Lake** - Chapter 165 of the Laws of 1929 specified that “all lakes now belonging to the State having an area of 50 acres or more” should be “administered as provided for other recreational areas now owned by the State.” This allowed the then-Department of Conservation and Development to assume management authority for seven Coastal Plain lakes that became units of the state parks system known as State Lakes. Most of these are administratively included as part of an adjoining State Park, but one of the lakes (White Lake) has no public ownership on its shoreline.

VISITATION

Total visitor attendance for 2016 was 18,762,600. Visitation fluctuates from year to year based on weather conditions, facility closures, and the state of the economy, but the trend over time is for increasing visitation (Figure 2.2).

Park units with the highest attendance have been the state recreation areas located on reservoirs (Kerr Lake State Recreation Area, Jordan Lake State Recreation Area, and Falls Lake State Recreation Area) as well as coastal parks and recreation areas located in popular vacation destinations (Jockey’s Ridge State Park, Fort Macon State Park and Fort Fisher State Recreation Area). These six park units accounted for over 6 million visits (Table 2. 3). The highest visitation recorded in 2016 was at William B. Umstead State Park in Wake County.

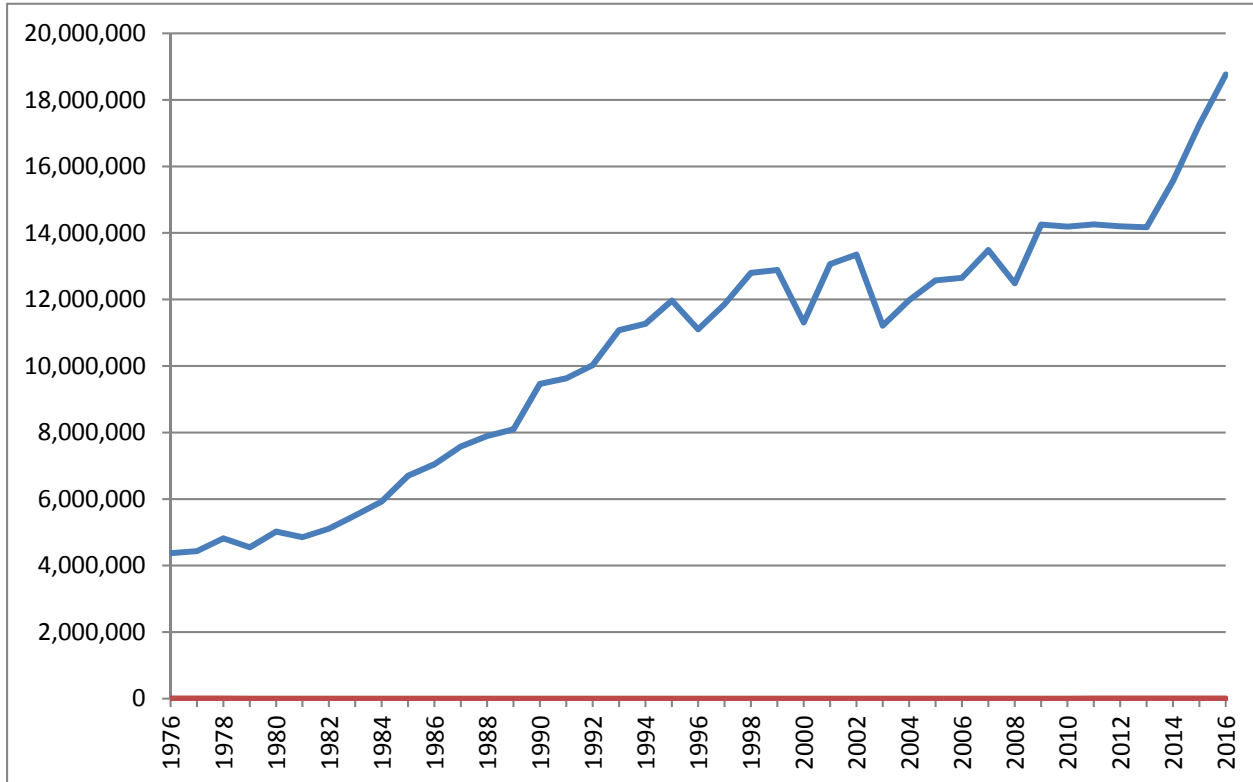


Figure 2.2. State Parks System Visitation 1975-2016

Table 2.3. State Park Visitation by Park Unit 2016

North Carolina State Parks System Unit	Total Visits 2016
Carolina Beach State Park	661,606
Carvers Creek State Park	59,567
Chimney Rock State Park	267,164
Cliffs of the Neuse State Park	218,406
Crowders Mountain State Park	797,553
Dismal Swamp State Park	134,427
Elk Knob State Park	39,745
Eno River State Park	519,960
Falls Lake State Recreation Area	1,107,858
Fort Fisher State Recreation Area	890,151
Fort Macon State Park	1,329,708
Goose Creek State Park	283,275
Gorges State Park	186,834
Grandfather Mountain State Park	87,012
Hammocks Beach State Park	196,239
Haw River State Park	54,608
Hanging Rock State Park	651,942
Jones Lake State Park	135,218
Jordan Lake State Recreation Area	1,479,791
Jockey's Ridge State Park	1,313,423
Kerr Lake State Recreation Area	1,146,846
Lake James State Park	544,758
Lake Norman State Park	917,445
Lake Waccamaw State Park	134,009
Lumber River State Park	65,730
Mayo River State Park	58,415
Merchants Millpond State Park	251,103
Medoc Mountain State Park	107,251
Mount Jefferson State Natural Area	121,904
Mount Mitchell State Park	398,091
Morrow Mountain State Park	512,427
New River State Park	256,713
Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area	96,086
Pettigrew State Park	80,065
Pilot Mountain State Park	771,589
Raven Rock State Park	232,028
Singletary Lake State Park	22,241
South Mountains State Park	267,393
Stone Mountain State Park	455,582
Weymouth Woods State Natural Area	61,177
William B. Umstead State Park	1,847,260
System Total	18,762,600

VISITOR FACILITIES

In July 2017, the state parks system contained more than 1,300 roofed buildings. This figure does not include bridges, walkways, pavement, trails, or other structures.

Table 2.4. Summary of Visitor Facilities in the North Carolina State Parks System

Facility	Total	Facility	Total
Amphitheater	24	Interpretive Building	8
Auditorium	16	Laboratory	1
Bathhouse	18	Lodge	8
Boat Dock	70	Meeting Room	14
Boat Ramp	41	Museum	2
Boathouse	6	Museum/Exhibit Hall	24
Cabin - Group	68	Park Office	21
Cabin - Improved	20	Picnic Area	63
Campsite - Electric Hookups	511	Picnic Shelter	121
Campsite - Equestrian	20	Pier	8
Campsite - No Hookups	1319	Play Area	3
Campsite - Water & Electric	755	Play Area w/Equipment	26
Canoe Launch Point	23	Pool	2
Canoe Rental Building	1	Primitive Campsite – Boat In	30
Classroom	19	Primitive Campsite - Drive To	26
Community Building	8	Primitive Campsite - Hike In	71
Concession	11	Primitive Campsite - Paddle To	31
Dining Hall	7	Primitive Campsite - Walk In	133
Disc Golf Hole	9	Restaurant	3
District Office	1	Shelter	9
Entrance Station	24	Showerhouse	74
Environmental Ed. Center	6	Swimming Area - Freshwater	18
Fishing Pier	24	Swimming Area - Ocean or Sound	5
Group Campsite - Drive To	62	Toilet Building	113
Group Campsite - Hike In	9	Toilet Building - Flush	13
Group Campsite - Walk In	28	Toilet Building - Non-Flush	76
Group Campsite - Paddle In	9	Visitor Center	26
Historic Building	70	Water Tank	6
Information Station	6		

FUTURE NEEDS

Park master plans and general management plans have identified future needs for land acquisition and facility development in each park. Table 2.5 shows new construction and renovation needs and Table 2.6 shows identified land acquisition needs for each park.

Table 2.5. Construction and Repair Needs at Existing Parks

Park Name	New Construction	Repair & Renovation	Total Cost
Baytree Lake	\$2,028,698	\$0	\$2,028,698
Carolina Beach	\$1,701,610	\$1,456,083	\$3,157,693
Carvers Creek	\$30,375,730	\$4,778,120	\$35,153,850
Chimney Rock	\$35,333,294	\$1,099,885	\$36,433,179
Cliffs Of The Neuse	\$1,645,308	\$2,245,696	\$3,891,004
Crowder's Mountain	\$1,911,484	\$4,279,198	\$6,190,682
Deep River Trail	\$1,707,787	\$0	\$1,707,787
Dismal Swamp	\$2,686,513	\$1,320,732	\$4,007,245
Eno River	\$10,126,306	\$1,982,108	\$12,108,414
Falls Lake	\$8,746,816	\$5,681,432	\$14,428,248
Fort Fisher	\$606,599	\$0	\$606,599
Fort Macon	\$1,119,664	\$369,320	\$1,488,984
Goose Creek	\$3,732,847	\$528,929	\$4,261,776
Gorges	\$5,625,361	\$0	\$5,625,361
Hammocks Beach	\$2,584,369	\$1,832,809	\$4,417,178
Hanging Rock	\$5,310,105	\$222,753	\$5,532,858
Haw River	\$25,983,975	\$100,304	\$26,084,279
Jockey's Ridge	\$1,083,572	\$1,002,034	\$2,085,606
Jones Lake	\$1,023,226	\$1,389,360	\$2,412,586
Jordan Lake	\$653,951	\$20,544,859	\$21,198,810
Kerr Lake	\$17,062,815	\$16,849,315	\$33,912,130
Lake James	\$20,971,549	\$314,816	\$21,286,365
Lake Norman	\$2,308,823	\$5,681,995	\$7,990,818
Lake Waccamaw	\$7,691,291	\$0	\$7,691,291
Lower Haw River	\$271,309	\$0	\$271,309
Lumber River	\$18,864,640	\$0	\$18,864,640
Medoc Mountain	\$17,250,925	\$0	\$17,250,925
Merchants Mill Pond	\$662,411	\$1,995,684	\$2,658,095
Mitchell's Mill	\$247,853	\$0	\$247,853
Morrow Mountain	\$10,225,255	\$2,453,224	\$12,678,479
Mount Mitchell	\$0	\$4,474,387	\$4,474,387

Park Name	New Construction	Repair & Renovation	Total Cost
Mount Jefferson	\$2,560,397	\$0	\$2,560,397
New River	\$3,873,490	\$0	\$3,873,490
Occoneechee Mountain	\$1,592,322	\$0	\$1,592,322
Pettigrew	\$14,435,425	\$553,394	\$14,988,819
Pilot Mountain	\$19,454,183	\$4,061,775	\$23,515,958
Raven Rock	\$3,824,201	\$2,037,111	\$5,861,312
Singletary Lake	\$2,291,484	\$0	\$2,291,484
South Mountain	\$54,516,726	\$0	\$54,516,726
Stone Mountain	\$3,393,121	\$5,827,134	\$9,220,255
Weymouth Woods	\$1,519,807	\$1,096,517	\$2,616,324
William B. Umstead	\$1,010,888	\$24,499,789	\$25,510,677
GRAND TOTAL:	\$348,016,130	\$118,678,763	\$466,694,893

Table 2.6. State Parks System Land Acquisition Needs

NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS SYSTEM LAND ACQUISITION NEEDS as of July 1, 2017						
Unit	Planned Acres	Current Acres	Critical Acres	Important Acres	Total Future Needs Acres	Est. Cost
Bald Head Island	1,280	1,260	0	20	20	\$200,000
Bay Tree	1,455	609	766	80	846	\$1,200,000
Bear Paw	826	384	0	442	442	\$1,200,000
Beech Creek Bog	777	120	176	481	657	\$3,250,000
Bob's Creek	New Unit	0	Plan pending			
Bullhead Mountain	1,246	442	186	618	804	\$3,460,000
Bushy Lake	7,832	6,343	774	715	1,489	\$3,100,000
Carolina Beach	562	420	143	0	143	\$5,000,000
Carvers Creek	8,316	4,347	268	3,701	3,969	\$20,000,00
Chimney Rock	11,407	6,892	857	3,658	4,515	\$17,500,00
Chowan Swamp	6,066	6,066	0	0	0	\$0
Cliffs of the Neuse	3,506	1,097	402	2,007	2,409	\$1,860,000
Crowders Mountain	5,942	5,210	347	386	732	\$5,900,000
Dismal Swamp	14,963	14,432	354	177	531	\$500,000
Elk Knob	12,131	4,077	1,484	6,570	8,054	\$10,600,00
Eno River	6,406	4,204	1,393	809	2,202	\$19,000,00
Falls Lake	5,042	5,035	0	7	7	\$300,000
Fort Fisher	289	287	0	2	2	\$300,000
Fort Macon	582	424	0	158	158	\$1,000,000
Goose Creek	2,518	1,672	236	611	847	\$750,000

Gorges	9,431	7,709	462	1,261	1,722	\$5,000,000
Grandfather Mountain	4,651	3,436	458	756	1,215	\$3,300,000
Hammocks Beach	1,842	1,611	0	231	231	\$7,000,000
Hanging Rock	14,948	7,899	2,742	4,307	7,049	\$9,500,000
Haw River	7,220	1,429	1,779	4,012	5,791	\$19,000,00
Hemlock Bluffs	97	97	0	0	0	\$0
Jockeys Ridge	430	426	0	4	4	\$700,000
Jones Lake	1,734	1,669	0	65	65	\$100,000
Jordan Lake	4,558	4,558	0	0	0	\$0
Kerr Lake	3,537	3,376	0	161	161	\$2,000,000
Lake James	6,007	3,685	540	1,783	2,322	\$4,350,000
Lake Norman	2,039	1,937	28	74	102	\$1,275,000
Lake Waccamaw	6,504	2,398	2,158	1,948	4,106	\$6,000,000
Lea Island	117	25	0	92	92	\$1,000,000
Lower Haw River	3,487	1,025	150	2,312	2,462	\$7,300,000
Lumber River	22,125	12,309	1,419	8,398	9,816	\$9,200,000
Masonboro Island	106	106	0	0	0	\$0
Mayo River	7,260	2,509	838	3,913	4,751	\$7,000,000
Medoc Mountain	6,813	3,893	945	1,975	2,920	\$10,000,00
Merchants Millpond	8,380	3,519	1,613	3,249	4,861	\$4,350,000
Mitchell Mill	149	93	0	56	56	\$450,000
Morrow Mountain	7,169	4,501	1,582	1,086	2,668	\$3,500,000
Mount Jefferson	2,252	1,123	335	795	1,129	\$8,200,000
Mount Mitchell	7,979	1,996	5,318	666	5,983	\$23,000,00
New River	6,891	2,929	788	3,174	3,962	\$19,000,00
Occoneechee Mtn.	273	190	19	64	83	\$1,500,000
Pettigrew	10,892	5,945	103	4,844	4,947	\$7,000,000
Pilot Mountain	6,465	3,872	564	2,030	2,593	\$7,500,000
Pineola Bog	191	91	7	93	100	\$1,500,000
Raven Rock	8,151	4,810	78	3,263	3,341	\$7,400,000
Run Hill	123	123	0	0	0	\$0
Salmon Creek	New Unit	0	Plan pending			
Sandy Run Savannas	9,391	3,133	0	6,258	6,258	\$3,250,000
Singletary Lake	823	649	0	174	174	\$0
South Mountains	21,412	19,830	466	1,116	1,582	\$1,650,000
Stone Mountain	18,600	14,351	375	3,874	4,249	\$1,300,000
Sugar Mountain Bog	333	102	0	231	231	\$2,600,000
Theodore Roosevelt	265	265	0	0	0	\$0
Warwick Mill Bay	New Unit	0	Plan pending			
Weymouth Woods	1,573	915	232	426	658	\$3,500,000
William B. Umstead	5,990	5,599	340	51	391	\$3,000,000
Yellow Mountain	12,489	3,468	6,964	2,057	9,021	\$4,600,000

Table 2.7. State Parks System Trail Needs

State Trail Unit	Current Size (acres)	Designated Length (miles)	Planned Length (miles)
Deep River	1,274	0	90
Fonta Flora	0	16	100
French Broad River	0	117	117
Hickory Nut Gorge	0	0	50
Mountains-to-Sea	778	660	1,400
Yadkin River	0	130	130
Total	2,052	922	1,887