

## **History of the North Carolina State Park System - Part 6: Program and Park Expansion, 1971-1979** <sup>[1]</sup>

### **History of the North Carolina State Park System - Part 6: Program and Park Expansion, 1971-1979**

by Alan Eakes, Lewis Ledford, and Don Reuter, 2011.

NC Division of Parks of Recreation<sup>[2]</sup>, NC Department of Cultural Environment & Natural Resources.

Reprinted with permission from Beanblossom, Robert. ed. 2011. *Histories of southeastern state park systems* Association of Southeastern State Park Directors.

Part 1: [Introduction](#) <sup>[3]</sup>; Part 2: [Birth of a State Park System, 1891-1933](#) <sup>[4]</sup>; Part 3: [Expansion through Public Donations and Federal Public Works Programs, 1934-1941](#) <sup>[5]</sup>; Part 4: [WWII and Post WWII Developments](#) <sup>[6]</sup>; Part 5: [Growth through Donations and LWCF Assistance, 1956-1970](#) <sup>[7]</sup>; Part 6: Program and Park Expansion, 1971-1979; Part 7: [Reservoirs, Re-evaluations and New Initiatives, 1980-1989](#) <sup>[8]</sup>; Part 8: [Financial Resources Committed to State Parks, 1990-1999](#) <sup>[9]</sup>; Part 9: [Planning for the Future and Growing Parks and Conservation in a Rapidly Growing State, 2000-2011](#) <sup>[10]</sup>

In 1971, Boone's Cave was donated to the state by the Daniel Boone Historical Association. Located on the Yadkin River, the cave is believed to have been the hideaway of Daniel Boone in the 1750s. Due to its small size, it was later turned over to Davidson County for management.

#### **Merger of State Parks, Kerr Lake and the Recreation Commission**

[Kerr Lake](#) <sup>[11]</sup> became the system's first recreation area when the Kerr Reservoir Development Commission, along with State Parks and the Recreation Commission was merged into one agency – the Office of Recreation Resources – within the Department of Natural and Economic Resources.

#### **Natural and Scenic Rivers**

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 adjacent lands for the benefit of present and future generations.

The [New River](#) <sup>[12]</sup> and the Linville River were the first rivers included in the system through legislation passed in 1976. The New River is the oldest river in the Americas and the second oldest river in the world. In 1976, a 26.5-mile segment of the river was designated as a National Wild and Scenic River. Designation of the Linville River as a state natural river came in June of 1975. The 13-mile designated segment flows through the Linville Gorge.

The Horsepasture River was added to the system in June 1985. The four-mile segment is distinguished by rugged gorges and spectacular waterfalls. In 1989, a 102-mile segment of the Lumber River, a blackwater river running through bottomland hardwood swamp, became part of the system. Over the years, numerous other rivers have been found to qualify for designation, however lack of funding and local opposition have prevented expansion.

#### **Major State Appropriations**

Early in the 1970s, heightened awareness of the state's outdoor recreation needs made state parks a priority for the governor and the General Assembly. A 1974 appropriation of \$13.9 million gave a needed boost to the parks system. Although smaller in amounts, appropriations continued through the end of the decade. Over this six-year period, the size of North Carolina's park system more than doubled. Eight new state parks and six natural areas were created during this period.

The Association for the Preservation of the Eno River Valley played a vital role in state land acquisition efforts at Eno River, and in 1973, land for [Eno River State Park](#) <sup>[13]</sup> was purchased from The Nature Conservancy.

[Merchants Millpond](#) <sup>[14]</sup> was established in 1973 through a gift of 919 acres and a donation of 925 acres from The Nature Conservancy. The preservation of Merchant's Millpond saved a rare swamp forest.

In 1973, the sounds of a bulldozer flattening [Jockey's Ridge](#) <sup>[15]</sup> for development thrust locals into action. Through the appeals of People to Preserve Jockey's Ridge, the dune was declared a [National Natural Landmark](#) <sup>[16]</sup>. LWCF funds matched those designated by the legislature, and in 1975 the tallest sand dune on the east coast became a state park.

In 1973, a delegation from Nash County proposed that a park be established in the area [Medoc Mountain](#) <sup>[17]</sup> was chosen as an appropriate site and the park was opened in 1974. This biotite granite formation is not really a mountain, but an erosion-resistant ridge.

In 1974, Crowders Mountain State Park <sup>[18]</sup> was added to the system. The threat of strip mining had motivated local citizens to seek its preservation. In October 1974, Crowders Mountain was opened to the public. Impressive rock formations and sheer vertical cliffs are scenic features of the park.

In 1974, Goose Creek State Park <sup>[19]</sup> was purchased with state funds. Located on the Pamlico River, stately live oaks and pines draped with Spanish moss provide beautiful surroundings for recreation activities.

The 1975 purchase of South Mountains State Park <sup>[20]</sup> with state and LWCF funds once again saved North Carolina forests from timbering operations. Today, large trees, narrow mountain streams and beautiful waterfalls highlight the park. The park has grown to over 18,000 acres, making it North Carolina's largest state park.

Lake Waccamaw <sup>[21]</sup>, one of the unique Carolina bay <sup>[22]</sup> lakes, became part of a state park in 1976 when a 273-acre tract of land around the lake was purchased, creating Lake Waccamaw State Park.

## State Trails Act

The North Carolina Trails System Act was passed in 1973 to provide for a statewide trails system. The state trails program contains 15 trails which travel for 650 miles. Volunteer efforts have been paramount in the success of the trails program, especially in developing the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, which upon completion will travel 900 miles from the Great Smoky Mountains to the Outer Banks. By 2008, about 485 miles of the trail had been completed.

## Natural Heritage Program

The Natural Heritage Program <sup>[23]</sup>, mandated to inventory and preserve the state's natural heritage, was created in 1976 with seed money from the Babcock Foundation and the Reynolds Foundation, and technical assistance from The Nature Conservancy.

## Expansion of Natural Areas

In 1971, the state established its second natural area – Theodore Roosevelt. A gift from the heirs of the Roosevelt family, the area is brackish marsh and maritime forest. Other state natural areas include:

Dismal Swamp <sup>[24]</sup> (1974), a forested peat-bog on a gently sloping hillside; later reclassified as a state park.

Chowan Swamp (1974), a large expanse of wetland;

Hemlock Bluffs <sup>[25]</sup> (1976), an 80 foot bluff with disjunct populations of hemlock 200 miles east of their typical habitat;

Masonboro Island <sup>[26]</sup> (1976), a nine-mile long pristine barrier island with a variety of maritime communities;

Mitchell Mill (1976), a classic example of granite outcrops;

Bushy Lake (1977), one of the best remaining pocosin-dominated Carolina bays; and


Baldhead Island (1979), a rare barrier island complex of diverse natural communities.

## Second State Parks Study Commission

In 1977, a Second State Parks Study Commission was created to report on the needs of parks and recreation in North Carolina. In response, a five-year (1979-1984) plan, which reflected a shift in focus from land acquisition to improving existing units, was developed. Unfortunately, as with previous plans, few of the recommendations were implemented.

In 1979, the city of Goldsboro along with Wayne County and the Old Waynesborough Commission donated 201 acres. Waynesborough Park, which opened in May 1986, was the site of the first incorporated town in Dobbs County (area that now comprises Wayne, Lenoir and Green counties). Due to its small size and limited natural resource value, the park was returned to the city of Goldsboro for management.

Throughout the seventies, new programs were added, the number of state park units doubled and the acreage of many units increased. Though state appropriations had been made for six years straight, the second State Parks Study Commission highlighted many needs still to be addressed.

Keep reading > Part 7: Reservoirs, Re-evaluations and New Initiatives, 1980-1989 <sup>[8]</sup> 

1 January 2011

---

Source URL: <https://www.ncpedia.org/history-north-carolina-state-park>

### Links

[1] <https://www.ncpedia.org/history-north-carolina-state-park> [2] <https://www.ncparks.gov/> [3] <https://www.ncpedia.org/history-north-carolina-state-park->

1 [4] <https://ncpedia.org/history-north-carolina-state-park-2> [5] <https://ncpedia.org/history-north-carolina-state-park-3> [6] <https://ncpedia.org/history-north-carolina-state-park-4> [7] <https://ncpedia.org/history-north-carolina-state-park-5> [8] <https://ncpedia.org/history-north-carolina-state-park-6> [9] <https://ncpedia.org/history-north-carolina-state-park-7> [10] <https://ncpedia.org/history-north-carolina-state-park-0> [11] <https://www.ncparks.gov/state-parks/kerr-lake-state-recreation-area> [12] <https://www.ncpedia.org/rivers/new> [13] <https://www.ncparks.gov/state-parks/eno-river-state-park> [14] <https://www.ncparks.gov/state-parks/merchants-millpond-state-park> [15] <https://www.ncparks.gov/state-parks/jockeys-ridge-state-park> [16] <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1582/index.htm> [17] <https://www.ncparks.gov/state-parks/medoc-mountain-state-park> [18] <https://www.ncparks.gov/state-parks/crowders-mountain-state-park> [19] <https://www.ncparks.gov/state-parks/goose-creek-state-park> [20] <https://www.ncparks.gov/state-parks/south-mountains-state-park> [21] <https://www.ncparks.gov/state-parks/lake-waccamaw-state-park> [22] <https://www.ncpedia.org/carolina-bays> [23] <https://www.ncnhp.org/> [24] <https://www.ncparks.gov/state-parks/dismal-swamp-state-park> [25] <https://www.carync.gov/recreation-enjoyment/parks-greenways-environment/parks/stevens-nature-center-at-hemlock-bluffs-nature-preserve> [26] <https://www.deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/coastal-management/nc-coastal-reserve>