

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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North Carolina Designates 2023 “Year of the Trail”

North Carolinians have something new to look forward to in 2023. Under the leadership of Representative Dean Arp, R-69 (Union), Representative Hugh Blackwell, R-86 (Burke), Representative Pat Hurley, R-70 (Randolph), Representative Larry Strickland, R-28 (Harnett, Johnston), the NC House and now the NC Senate on August 10, 2021 passed HB 554, designating 2023 as “*North Carolina Year of the Trail*”. This designation is supported by the North Carolina Great Trails State Coalition and the group will be spearheading the plans for the year.

Blackwell says, “Understanding the benefits trails and greenways bring to our North Carolina communities through increased economic activity, bike and pedestrian transportation, improved citizen health, and the conservation of our natural resources, I thought it was time to showcase these incredible state assets. Designating 2023 as the Year of the Trail in North Carolina is the perfect way to do that.”

Senator Bob Steinburg, R-District 1, who was instrumental in moving the bill through the Senate agreed with those sentiments commenting, “It is always a pleasure when there is an opportunity to work with legislative friends on something as important as trails are to our state economy. With this bill we recognize volunteers who spend so many hours working to develop our state trails and we promote the health of our local citizens who can use the trails.”

The House budget provides even more support for North Carolina’s trails with an appropriation of \$29.25 million for a Complete the Trails Fund to be managed by the NC Trails Program within the NC Division of Parks and Recreation. Rep. Dean Arp, R-69 (Union), Senior Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, and Representatives Blackwell, Mike Clampitt, R-119 (Haywood, Jackson, Swain) and Erin Pare, R-37 (Wake) have taken the lead on this funding effort with help from many other members of the House, and they will work to convince the Senate to include this funding in the final version of the budget.

What does the Year of the Trail really mean?

North Carolina is not the first state to declare a “*Year of the Trail*.” Ohio and Indiana declared a Year of the Trail in 2018 and 2021 respectively. However NC is the first to announce the designation with extensive plans to showcase, promote, and celebrate our trails. Special trail programs and events are planned throughout 2023 for all 100 counties, with a goal to increase awareness of trails, and boost local trail use and tourism.

North Carolina’s hiking, biking, paddling, off road vehicle, and equestrian trails showcase the splendor of our natural and urban landscapes. Trails and greenways are a vital part of community infrastructure. They provide significant health, economic and transportation benefits, and are the cornerstone of North Carolina’s \$28 billion outdoor recreation industry, the 6th largest in the US

(<https://outdoorindustry.org/resource/north-carolina-outdoor-recreation-economy-report/>).

Additionally, the “*Year of the Trail*” will showcase the vital role volunteers play in building and maintaining trails – from nature loops to long-distance, statewide trails.

Why 2023?

2023 marks the 50th anniversary of the 1973 North Carolina Trails System Act. The NC Trails System Act created North Carolina’s Trails Program which is housed in the Division of Parks and Recreation and is assisted by the North Carolina Trails Committee, a group of citizens representing users of different types of trails, including hiking, biking, paddling, horseback riding and off road vehicles. The 1973 Act also envisioned a State Trail System of long-distance State Trails that would be units of the North Carolina Park System. That trail system now includes 11 State Trails, with the Dan River State Trail and East Coast Greenway gaining State Trail status last month. NC State Parks’ annual theme in 2023 will also focus on trails.

“Year of the Trail will be a tremendous opportunity to highlight North Carolina’s exceptional network of trails, and educate the public and elected officials about their value to our residents and communities,” says Kate Dixon, Executive Director of Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, North Carolina’s flagship State Trail which extends 1175 miles from the Smoky Mountains to the Outer Banks.

Join us to celebrate North Carolina trails in 2023, and together, let’s show why North Carolina is the Great Trails State.

About the Great Trails State Coalition

The North Carolina Great Trails State Coalition, representing 27 trails, conservation, and outdoor recreation groups from across the State, advocated for Year of the Trail designation. Find out more and get involved at www.greattrailsnc.org. A Year of the Trail planning committee is meeting regularly to plan events and package recommendations for those hosting local events. For questions or suggestions, please contact Beth Heile at bzheile@gmail.com/828-390-6870.