the GREAT TRAILS STATE

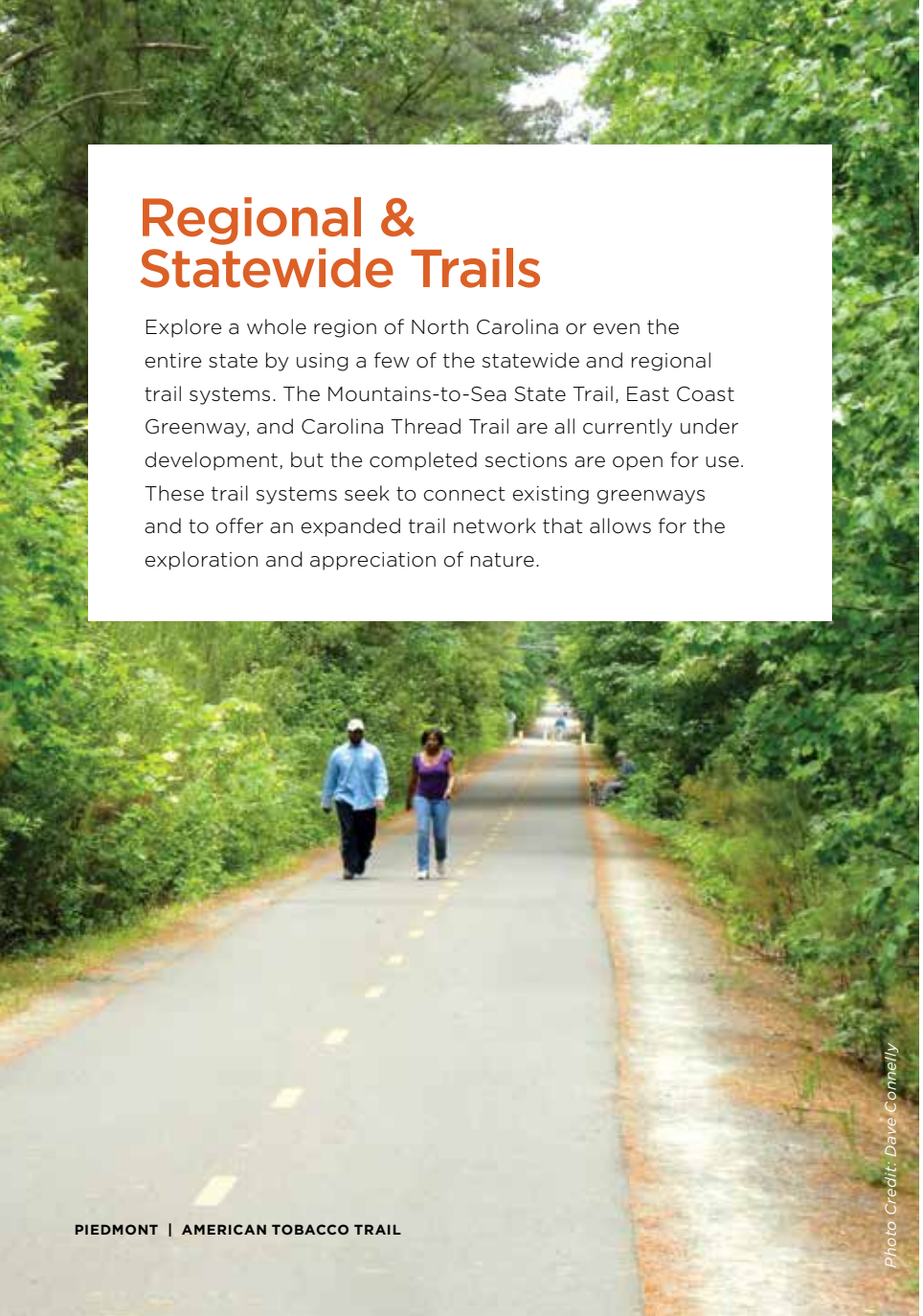
A Guide for Exploring the Trails of North Carolina

With an abundance of trails and diverse landscapes, North Carolina is a unique gem in the southeastern United States. Whether you're interested in climbing a mountain, paddling along a river, or biking along a coastal greenway, exploring the trails will allow you to experience the diverse landscapes and communities of North Carolina.

Photo Credit: Town of Duck
Cover: Yadkin River Greenway; Alta Planning + Design

Regional & Statewide Trails

Explore a whole region of North Carolina or even the entire state by using a few of the statewide and regional trail systems. The Mountains-to-Sea State Trail, East Coast Greenway, and Carolina Thread Trail are all currently under development, but the completed sections are open for use. These trail systems seek to connect existing greenways and to offer an expanded trail network that allows for the exploration and appreciation of nature.



PIEDMONT | AMERICAN TOBACCO TRAIL

Photo Credit: Dave Connelly

MOUNTAINS-TO-SEA STATE TRAIL

www.ncmountainstosea.org

The Mountains-to-Sea State Trail (MST) is a continuous off-road trail that will stretch about 1,000 miles from the Great Smoky Mountains to Jockey's Ridge State Park on the Outer Banks. The trail is a charming mixture of natural surface through remote wilderness and paved greenways through cities and towns, representing the diversity of North Carolina. Over 600 miles are already developed and in use.

EAST COAST GREENWAY

www.greenway.org

The East Coast Greenway is a shared-use trail system that will provide a continuous route along the eastern coast from Canada to Florida. In North Carolina, the current route runs through the Triangle, Sandhills region, Fayetteville, and the Cape Fear River. Currently, about twenty-five percent of the trail is on traffic-free greenways in NC, offering safe and accessible corridors for users of all abilities and ages.

CAROLINA THREAD TRAIL

www.carolinathreadtrail.org

The Carolina Thread Trail is a regional network of over 220 miles of greenways, blueways, conserved corridors, and trails that connect 15 counties and two states. The vision for the Carolina Thread Trail originated from a regional process that identified open space preservation as a top priority. Activities offered along this trail include hiking, biking, and paddling.

Photo Credit: Dismal Swamp State Park

Trails in State Parks

Conservation, recreation, and education are hallmarks of the state park system. The North Carolina state parks system encompasses more than 225,000 acres of land and seeks to preserve the natural resources of the state while offering outdoor recreation opportunities. Hundreds of miles of trails with varying levels of difficulty can be found within the state parks. Aside from activities like hiking and biking, there are also equestrian, paddle, and accessible trails for persons with disabilities.

Visit www.ncparks.gov

MOUNTAIN STATE PARKS	Bicycling	Walking/Hiking	Equestrian	Paddle
Chimney Rock		●		
Crowders Mountain		●		
Elk Knob		●		
Gorges	●	●	●	
Grandfather Mountain		●		
Hanging Rock	●	●	●	●
Lake James	●	●		
Lake Norman	●	●		
Mount Jefferson		●		
Mount Mitchell		●		
Morrow Mountain		●	●	
New River		●		●
Pilot Mountain		●	●	●
South Mountains	●	●	●	
Stone Mountain		●	●	

PIEDMONT STATE PARKS	Bicycling	Walking/Hiking	Equestrian	Paddle
Carvers Creek		●		
Eno River		●		●
Falls Lake	●	●		
Haw River		●		
Jordan Lake		●		
Kerr Lake		●		
Lumber River		●		●
Mayo River		●		
Occoneechee Mountain		●		
Raven Rock		●	●	
Weymouth Woods		●	●	
William B. Umstead	●	●	●	

COASTAL PLAIN STATE PARKS	Bicycling	Walking/Hiking	Equestrian	Paddle
Cliffs of the Neuse		●		
Dismal Swamp	●	●		●
Goose Creek		●		●
Jones Lake		●		
Lake Waccamaw		●		
Medoc Mountain		●	●	
Merchants Millpond	●	●		●
Pettigrew	●	●		
Singletary Lake		●		
Carolina Beach		●		
Fort Fisher		●		
Fort Macon		●		
Hammocks Beach		●		●
Jockey's Ridge		●		

BICYCLING WALKING/HIKING EQUESTRIAN PADDLE

Photo Credit: ITRE

PIEDMONT | NEUSE RIVER TRAIL

North Carolina's Longest Trails

NEUSE RIVER TRAIL (LONGEST GREENWAY)

The Neuse River Trail offers scenic views of the Neuse River, winding wetlands, boardwalk, historical sites, interpretive signs, and agricultural fields. Open to cyclists and pedestrians, the Neuse River Trail is the longest greenway trail in North Carolina, spanning 28 miles with connections to the Raleigh Capital Area Greenway System. The trail is a section of the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail, and a portion of it is designated as the East Coast Greenway.

NEUSE RIVER PADDLE TRAIL (LONGEST PADDLE TRAIL)

If strolling the Neuse River Greenway Trail doesn't satisfy, users can paddle the river instead. With canoe launches along the river, a quick trip can be made to relax and view wildlife or a several-day camping adventure can be had from Falls Dam to New Bern. A main feature along the 142 mile paddle trail is the Cliffs of the Neuse State Park, with breathtaking riverside cliffs that soar 70 feet above the water.

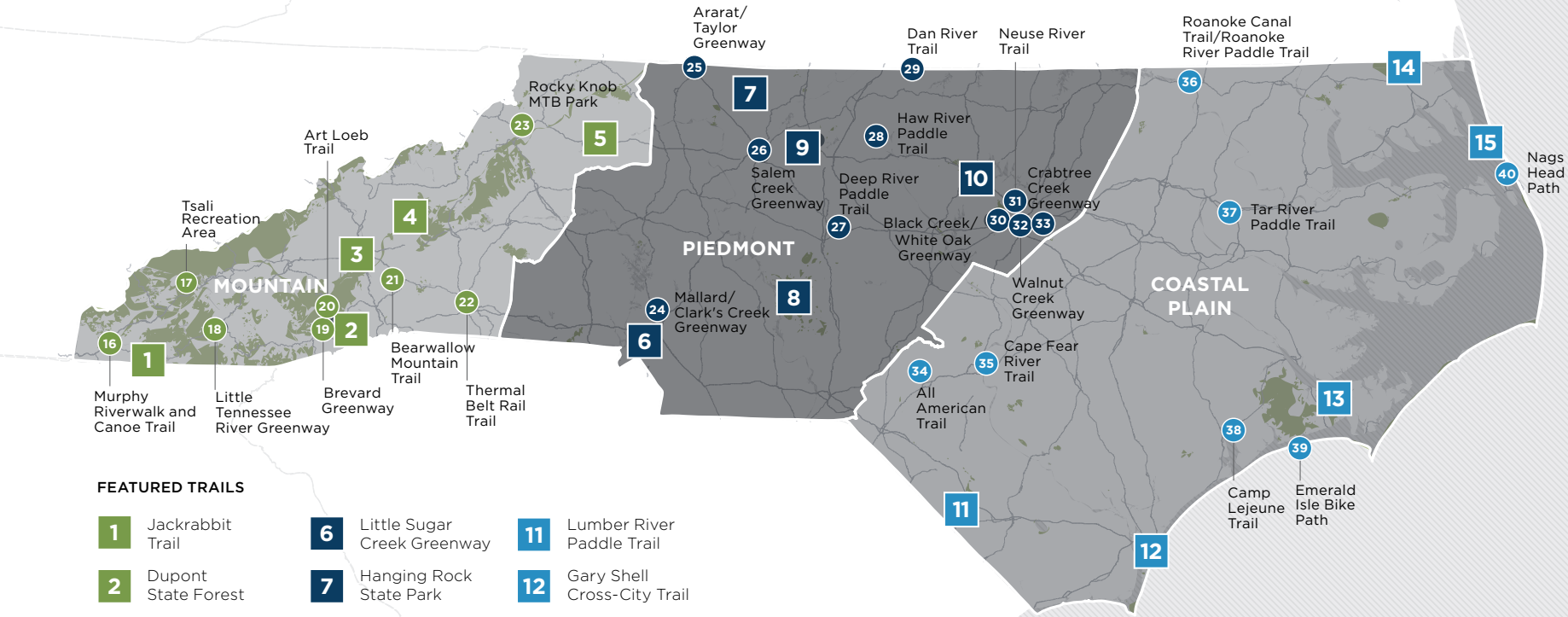
MOUNTAINS-TO-SEA STATE TRAIL: BALSAM TO STONE MOUNTAIN STATE PARK SEGMENT (LONGEST HIKING TRAIL)

This 270-mile segment of the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail provides stunning mountain vistas and dramatic waterfalls. As you hike some of the most challenging terrain in the state, you will be able to see four states from the top of Waterrock Knob, walk through the ghost forest at Graveyard Falls, and immerse yourself in the history of this place and its people. The route follows part of the Blue Ridge Parkway and passes through Pisgah National Forest, Biltmore Forest, Mount Mitchell State Park, and Grandfather Mountain State Park.

Explore

NORTH CAROLINA'S TRAILS

These are just a sampling of North Carolina's greatest trails. These were selected based on input from residents and visitors about their favorite trails, trail length, and a desire to feature a variety of trail types across the state. North Carolina is fortunate to have many great trails, and this booklet may be updated in future years to feature more of them.



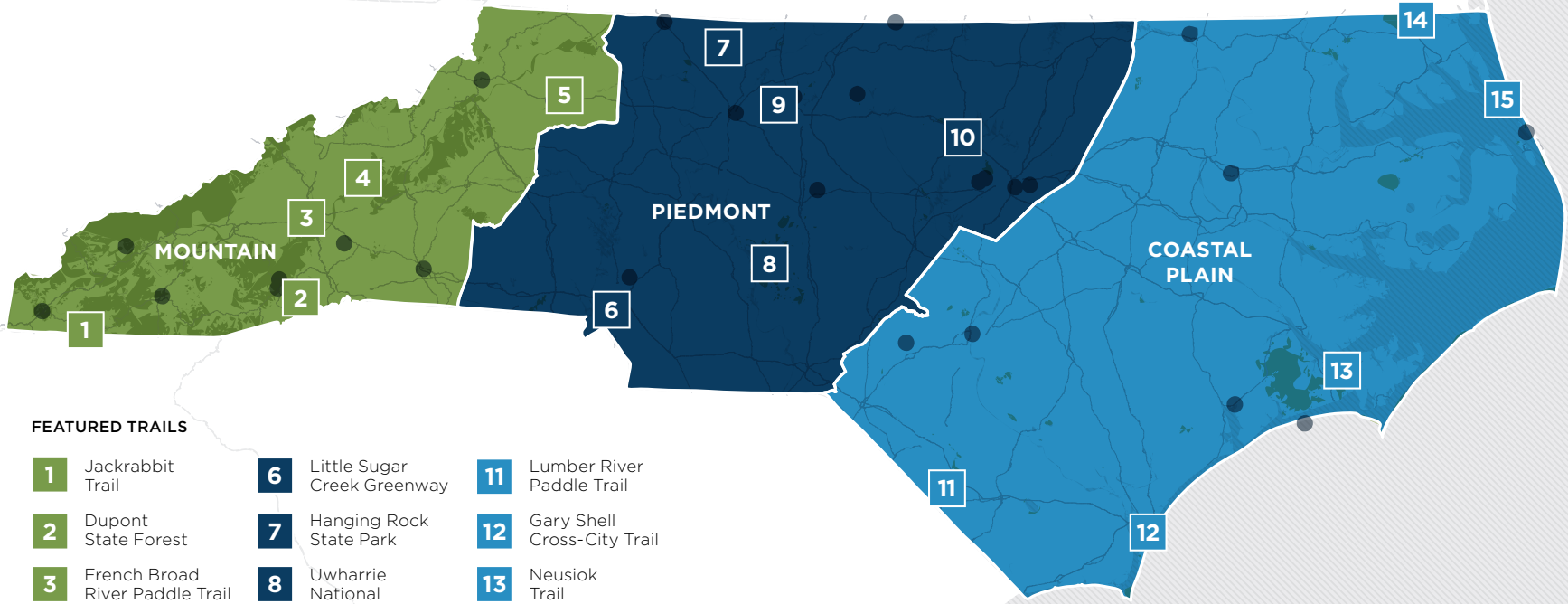
FEATURED TRAILS

1. Jackrabbit Trail
2. Dupont State Forest
3. French Broad River Paddle Trail and Greenway
4. Mount Mitchell State Park
5. Yadkin River Greenway and Paddle Trail
6. Little Sugar Creek Greenway
7. Hanging Rock State Park
8. Uwharrie National Recreation Trail
9. Bicentennial Greenway
10. American Tobacco Trail
11. Lumber River Paddle Trail
12. Gary Shell Cross-City Trail
13. Neusiok Trail
14. Dismal Swamp Canal Trail and Paddle Trail
15. Duck Trail and Boardwalk

Explore

NORTH CAROLINA'S TRAILS

The rest of this booklet is organized by the state's three distinct regions—Mountain, Piedmont, and Coastal Plain—and features five trails within each region. Get ready to start exploring the great trails of North Carolina.



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15 Duck Trail and Boardwalk

● OTHER NC TRAILS

MOUNTAIN REGION

1. Jackrabbit Trail
2. Dupont State Forest
3. French Broad River Paddle Trail and Greenway
4. Mount Mitchell State Park
5. Yadkin River Greenway and Paddle Trail

As its name suggests, the Mountain region is characterized by mountain ranges that weave through the western part of the state. The region showcases a number of natural features, including waterfalls, valleys, lakes, rivers, and streams. In the fall, make your way up to one of the 6,000-foot peaks to enjoy scenic views of foliage and wild flora. Forests and parks are plentiful in the Mountains region, including the Pisgah National Forest, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and the Nantahala National Forest.

Photo Credit: Alta Planning + Design

Photo Credit: WNCOutdoors

1

Jackrabbit Trail

A regional favorite, the Jackrabbit Mountain Recreation Area and Trail offers adventure for all skill levels with its looping network of hiking and mountain biking trails running along the edges of a peninsula jutting into Chatuge Lake. Trails are defined by unique features, length, difficulty, elevation, and activities along the spectacular lakeside setting. Originally inspired by a local afterschool and summer program, the trail system is now managed as a partnership between community organizations and the US Forest Service.

Distance
13.7 miles

Surface Type
Dirt

Location
105 Cherokee Point
Hayesville, NC 28904

Activities

Photo credit: WNCOutdoors

2

Dupont State Forest

Do you enjoy hikes with a reward at the end of the trail? Look no further than Dupont State Forest! Best known for its many waterfalls, this multi-use recreational forest will satisfy a variety of outdoor pursuits. Located in the Blue Ridge Mountains, Dupont State Forest consists of 10,400 acres of forest accessible by more than 80 miles of paved road and an extensive hiking, biking, and equestrian trail network.

Distance
83.4 miles

Surface Type
Dirt

Location
Dupont State Forest
1400 Staton Rd, Cedar Mountain, NC 28718

Activities

MOUNTAIN REGION

Photo Credit: Jeff Rich

3

French Broad River Paddle Trail and Greenway

Paddle, bike, and play along the French Broad River Paddle Trail and Greenway. Nearly three miles of the greenway consists of paved biking and walking trails that connect parks along the river. For the water sports enthusiast, the French Broad River offers access to a 140-mile recreational watercraft trail between Rosman, North Carolina and Douglas Lake, Tennessee. Take a day trip or complete a 10-day journey from start to finish. Paddle-in campsites can be found every 12 to 15 miles along the river.

Distance
2.8 miles paved,
140 miles paddle trail

Surface Type
Paved, Paddle Trail

Location
French Broad River Park
508 Riverview Drive
Asheville, NC 28806

Activities

Photo credit: NC State Parks

4

Mount Mitchell State Park

As the highest peak in the Appalachian Mountains and highest peak east of the Mississippi River, Mount Mitchell is a must-see in a region of spectacular trails. The park offers a museum, an extensive trail network, and access to nearby wilderness areas. Whether you're looking for a quick trip to the easily accessible observation deck to admire the dense spruce-fir forest, a short self-guided nature trail, or a more strenuous trek to the summit, Mount Mitchell offers something for everyone.

MOUNTAINS-to-SEA
NORTH CAROLINA STATE TRAIL

Distance
16 miles

Surface Type
Dirt

Location
Mt Mitchell State Park
2388 NC-128
Burnsville, NC 28714

Activities

MOUNTAIN REGION

Photo Credit: Alta Planning + Design

"The Yadkin River Greenway provides beautiful scenery and an opportunity for families to be together while enjoying exercise and a time together outdoors."

- GREAT TRAILS USER

5

Yadkin River Greenway and Paddle Trail

History abounds along the Jefferson Turnpike Trail, located within the Yadkin River Greenway. This trail follows the Reddies River along the site of a long water-holding trough that is used to carry logs to the mill. The trail is part of the larger Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail, a 330 mile trail which runs through four states. A portion of the Turnpike Trail offers a 7.5 mile meandering, riverside path for walkers and bicyclists of all abilities.

Distance
7.5 miles
125 miles paddle trail

Surface Type
Paved, Paddle Trail

Location
1411 Willow Lane
North Wilkesboro, NC
28659

Activities

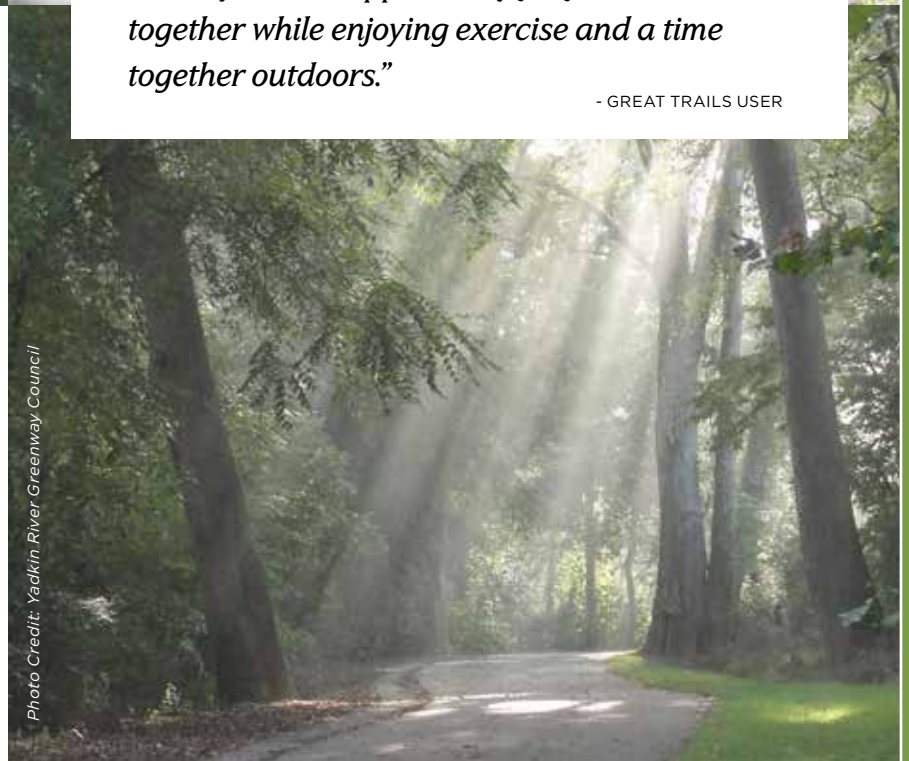
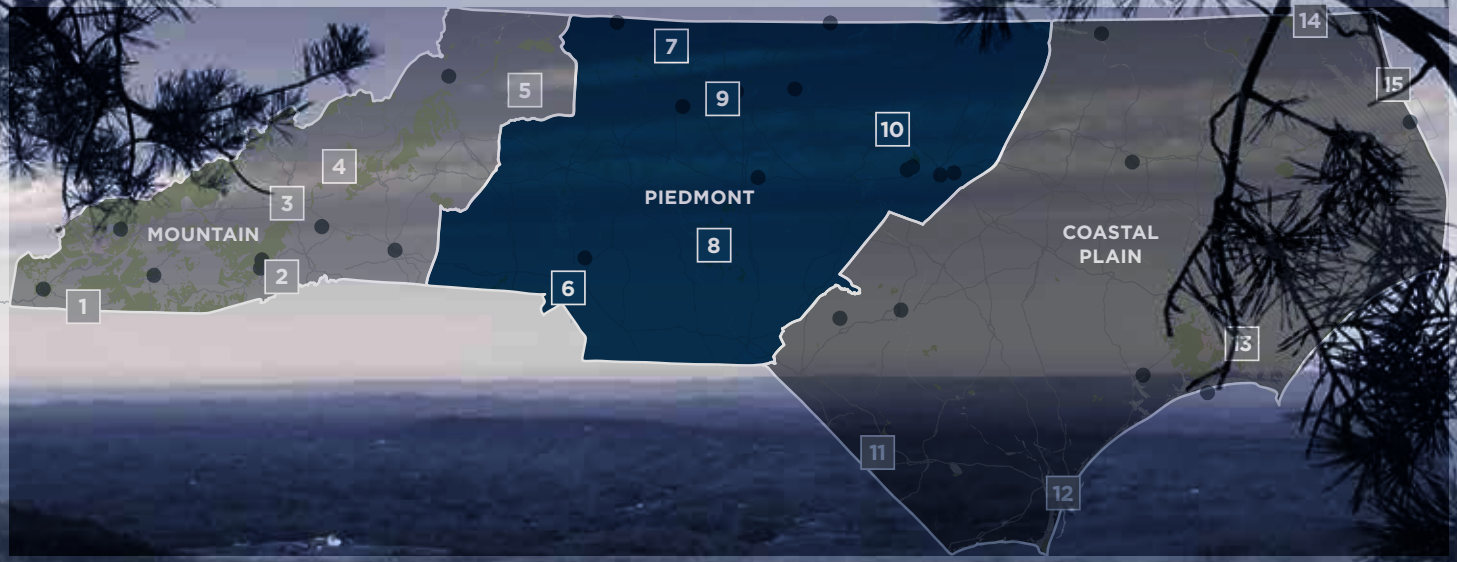


Photo Credit: Yadkin River Greenway Council

MOUNTAIN REGION



PIEDMONT REGION

6 Little Sugar Creek Greenway

7 Hanging Rock State Park

8 Uwharrie National Recreation Trail

9 Bicentennial Greenway

10 American Tobacco Trail

Positioned in the central part of the state, the Piedmont is known for its gently rolling foothills. Its relatively flat topography provides ideal conditions for mountain biking and bike touring. Outdoor recreation is easily within reach for those who live in cities and towns; a number of trails and greenways in this region link communities together. For those in the Piedmont looking for a more secluded adventure close to home, visit the Uwharrie National Forest for camping, hiking, and other outdoor activities, or one of the many local trails found in cities and towns throughout the Triangle, Triad, and Charlotte regions.

Photo Credit: GetGoingNC

Photo Credit: Mecklenburg County

6

Little Sugar Creek Greenway

Located near Downtown Charlotte, this greenway offers a quiet retreat for joggers, bicyclists, and pedestrians. The greenway provides connections to popular destinations such as Freedom Park and the Metropolitan shopping area. Visitors and residents can rent bikes from one of the four bike share stations that are located along the greenway. The greenway is part of the Carolina Thread Trail, a planned regional network of greenways, blueways, conserved corridors, and trails that will eventually connect 15 counties and two states.

CAROLINA THREAD TRAIL

Distance
5 miles

Surface Type
Paved

Location
1910 Freedom
Park Service Road
Charlotte, NC 28203

Activities

Photo Credit: GetGoingNC

7

Hanging Rock State Park

Stunning rock outcrops, mountain vistas, lakes, and waterfalls greet hikers and bicyclists at Hanging Rock State Park. Wooded passageways form a network of trails and includes part of the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail. Mountain bikers enjoy a single track with rock ledges, fast-flowing stream crossings, and spectacular views of the Sauratown Mountains. Hikers can explore diverse trails and discover the hidden gems of this park, including a mountain cave. Some trails are accessible by wheelchair.

MOUNTAINS-to-SEA
NORTH CAROLINA STATE TRAIL

Distance
34 miles

Surface Type
Dirt

Location
1790 Hanging
Rock Road
Danbury, NC 27016

Activities

PIEDMONT REGION

Photo Credit: GetGoingNC

8

Uwharrie National Recreation Trail

The Uwharrie National Recreation Trail offers year-round access for day hikes or multi-day backpacking treks through the Uwharrie National Forest in the central Piedmont. The trail follows a former trapping route through long stretches of isolated wilderness in the Uwharrie Mountains, which are the oldest mountains in North America. Varied vegetation will delight hikers as they travel the trail through a variety of landscapes—oak-hickory forest to short-needled pines, and mountain meadows to mossy streams. Mountain biking, paddling, and equestrian activities are also supported in the Uwharrie National Forest.

Distance
20 miles

Surface Type
Dirt

Location
Hwy 109 North
Troy, NC 27371

Activities

Photo Credit: Tiffany Stodart

9

Bicentennial Greenway

The longest paved trail in the Triad Region, the 15-mile Bicentennial Greenway connects multiple communities. As part of the larger network of greenways in and around Greensboro, the Bicentennial Greenway allows for extensive exploration by hikers, runners, birders, and naturalists of all stripes. It's known as one of the most diverse and family-friendly stretches of greenway. Be sure to visit the four-mile stretch through the Piedmont Environmental Center located along the west bank of High Point Lake.

Distance
15 miles

Surface Type
Paved, Gravel

Location
3610 Drawbridge Pkwy
Greensboro, NC 27410

Activities

PIEDMONT REGION

Photo Credit: Alta Planning + Design

10

American Tobacco Trail

At more than 22 miles, the American Tobacco Trail (ATT) is the longest rail-trail in the state. The route, which is part of the East Coast Greenway, crosses through the City of Durham, Durham, Chatham, and Wake counties, and several communities on its extensive path. Recognized for their utilization of existing railroad corridors as safe, accessible, and efficient trail routes, trails like the ATT give dormant tracks life again while providing transportation and recreation options.

East Coast Greenway

Distance
22 miles

Surface Type
Paved, Gravel

Location
Jackie Robinson Drive and Blackwell Street
Durham, NC 27701

Activities

Photo Credit: TTRE

"Beautiful scenery running near neighborhoods and shopping centers, but also near Jordan Lake and crossing numerous streams. Love the bridge over I-40 near Southpoint Mall."

- GREAT TRAILS USER

Photo Credit: Dave Connelly

PIEDMONT REGION

COASTAL PLAIN REGION

11 Lumber River Paddle Trail

12 Gary Shell Cross-City Trail

13 Neusiok Trail

14 Dismal Swamp Canal Trail and Paddle Trail

15 Duck Trail and Boardwalk

Categorized by low, flat lands, the Coastal Plain includes 300 miles of barrier island beaches and two national seashores. The iconic coast boasts seven lighthouses, small towns, breathtaking waterfront views, and coastal hikes. For water enthusiasts, the Coastal Plains has an impressive network of paddle trails where you can kayak or canoe through its many rivers and creeks. Birding and fishing are other activities that visitors can enjoy while exploring the cypress swamps and slow-moving blackwater streams.

Photo Credit: Town of Duck

Photo Credit: Lumber River Conservancy

11

Lumber River Paddle Trail

Recognized as one of the country's few designated Wild and Scenic Rivers, the Lumber River holds protected status for its free-flowing route and spectacular natural value. It's the only blackwater river in North Carolina with this distinction. Your next excursion could entail paddling, fishing, or just taking in the scenery. One of the best ways to experience the Lumber River is by canoe or kayak, where one can admire the geologic features, vegetation, and wildlife along miles of remote natural areas.

Distance
81 miles

Surface Type
Paddle Trail

Location
Lumber River
State Park
2819 Princess
Ann Road
Orrum, NC 28369

Activities

Photo Credit: City of Wilmington

12

Gary Shell Cross-City Trail

East Coast Greenway

This trail connects four beautiful city parks, Cameron Art Museum, the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, and the Intracoastal Waterway, as well as restaurants, coffee shops, bike shops, and neighborhoods along the way. Combine the trip with the nearby Rivers-to-Sea Bikeway, an 11-mile on- and off-road bike route that connects the waterfront attractions of Historic Downtown Wilmington to one of North Carolina's most popular beach towns, Wrightsville Beach.

Distance
15 miles

Surface Type
Paved

Location
Halyburton Park
4099 S. 17th Street
Wilmington, NC 28412

Activities

COASTAL PLAIN REGION

Photo Credit: James Lee, Courtesy of the Friends of the MST

13

Neusiok Trail

Located within the Croatan National Forest, one of four National Forests in North Carolina, the Neusiok Trail is known for its ecological diversity and rich history. Nature enthusiasts of all ages can travel the easy 20-mile trail across sandy beaches and through cypress swamps, hardwood forest, longleaf pine, savannahs, and shrubby bogs. Along the trail, there are opportunities to spot signs of wildlife such as otters, wild turkeys, and black bears. The Neusiok Trail is part of the 1,000+ mile Mountains-to-Sea State Trail.

MOUNTAINS-to-SEA NORTH CAROLINA STATE TRAIL

Distance
20 miles

Surface Type
Dirt, Boardwalk

Location
1300 Ferry Road
Havelock, NC 28532

Activities

Photo Credit: Camden County Tourism Development Authority

14

Dismal Swamp Canal Trail and Paddle Trail

Kayak, canoe, hike, or bike along the amber-colored waters of the historic Dismal Swamp Canal. This popular multi-purpose trail offers a unique wilderness experience in a landscape with a rich history and opportunities to explore by foot, water, or horseback. Sections of the canal and surroundings were surveyed by George Washington's company and it is nationally recognized as a stop on the Underground Railroad. Today it serves as home to thousands of migratory birds in the fall and spring.

East Coast Greenway

Distance
22 miles paddle trail,
3 miles paved

Surface Type
Paddle Trail, Paved

Location
Dismal Swamp
State Park
2356 US-17
South Mills, NC 27976

Activities

COASTAL PLAIN REGION

Photo Credit: Town of Duck

15

Duck Trail & Boardwalk

This picturesque and popular trail in the oceanside town of Duck, nestled on a narrow sliver of land along the Atlantic Ocean, traverses the length of the town. The Duck Trail and Boardwalk is accessible to pedestrians, bicyclists, and in-line skaters, with boardwalk access to kayaks and canoes. Shopping and dining options can be found along the waterfront. The boardwalk is a prime location for bird watching, as well as to soak in the beauty of the Outer Banks.

Distance
7.8 miles

Surface Type
Paved, Boardwalk

Location
1200 Duck Road
Duck, NC 27949

Activities

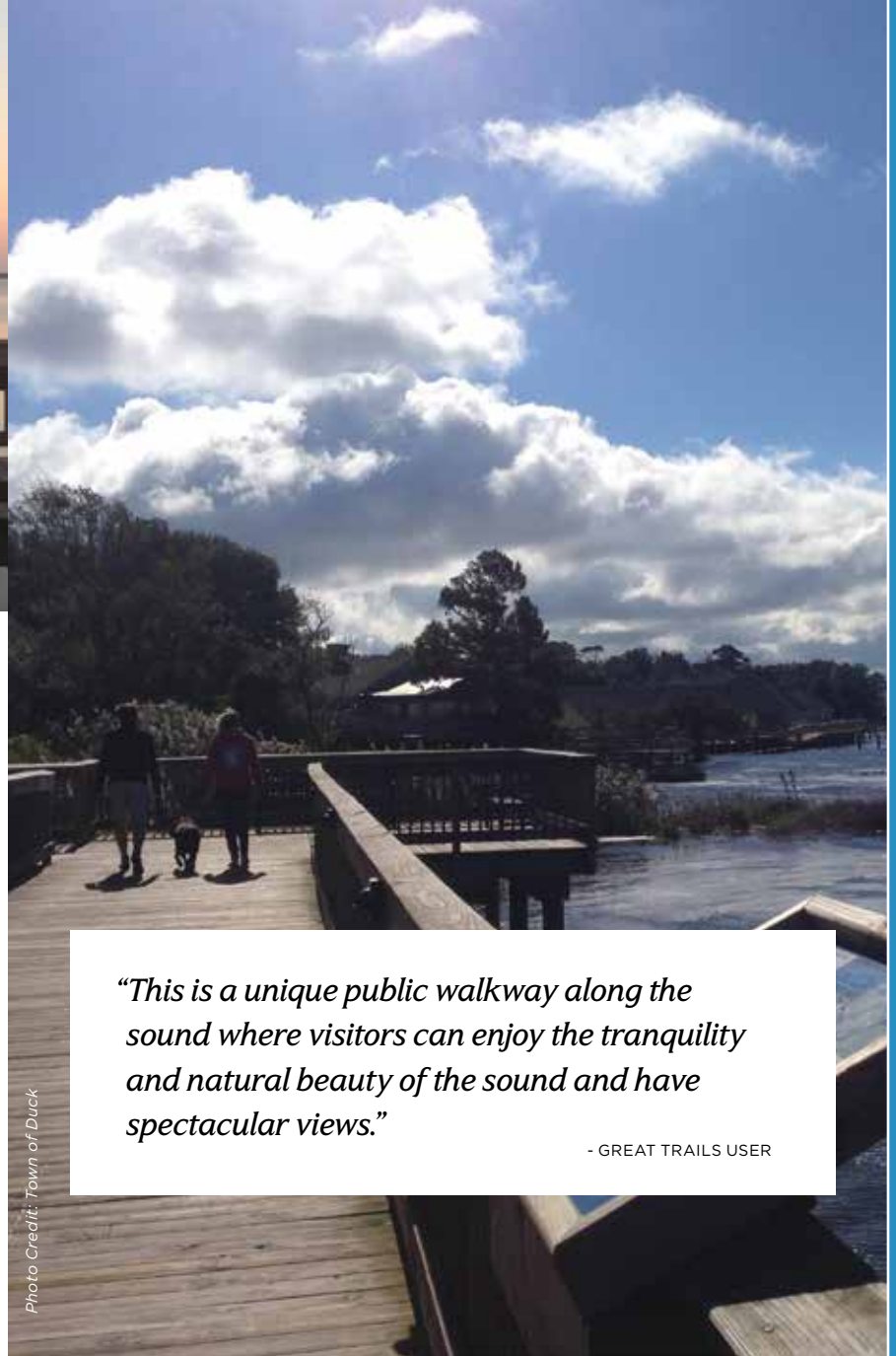


Photo Credit: Town of Duck

"This is a unique public walkway along the sound where visitors can enjoy the tranquility and natural beauty of the sound and have spectacular views."

- GREAT TRAILS USER

COASTAL PLAIN REGION

Benefits of Trails

ECONOMIC AND TOURISM BENEFITS

Trails often yield high returns on investment through economic revitalization, recreational tourism, and small business opportunities. Residents have repeatedly identified trails as desired neighborhood amenities. Communities that have trails and greenways often see increases in property values and enhanced tax revenue. **To read more about leading research on the economic impacts of greenway and trails, visit www.ncdot.gov/bikeped/researchdata or www.americantrails.org/resources/economics**

HEALTH AND WELLNESS BENEFITS

Trails and greenways offer safe and accessible opportunities for physical activity. People who utilize trails are able to connect with places that they want or need to go. A 2012 study that quantified health benefits of trails found that for every dollar spent on trails, nearly three dollars of public health benefits are produced. Other health impacts studied as a result of building more walkable and bikeable communities can be found within the state's bicycle and pedestrian plan, Walk Bike NC. **Check out www.walkbikenc.com for more information.**

TRANSPORTATION BENEFITS

Trails can be implemented at a low cost and serve as part of a multi-modal transportation system. In areas where public transit doesn't offer direct routes to employment centers, trails can serve as important connections between transit stops and workplaces. **To learn more about how to design and fund a bicycle or pedestrian project, please visit www.ncdot.gov/bikeped/Design-Prioritization-Funding**

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

Decreasing reliance on automobiles and reducing congestion by utilizing trails will lead to improved air quality. Trails and greenways serve as a tool for conserving open space and preserving wetlands.

Source: www.railstotrails.org/experience-trails/benefits-of-trails

RESOURCES

www.walkbikenc.com/pillars-of-plan

www.americantrails.org

www.railstotrails.org

Published in 2016 by the North Carolina Department of Transportation with support from the NC Division of Parks and Recreation and other state agency partners. This inaugural booklet showcases examples of great trails across North Carolina.

To find more trails, visit **www.ncparks.gov** or your local parks department. All text and quotes included are the property of the North Carolina Department of Transportation. All photographs used with permission from sources noted. Designed by Alta Planning + Design.