**N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation**

**Monthly Activity Report**

**August 2014**

***North District***

**Hanging Rock**

* **Vade-Mecum/Moore Springs** - The first meeting of the Vade-Mecum Operations Planning Team was held August 27.
* **Ruben Mountain Trail -** The final walk through on the proposed re-route of the Ruben Mountain horse trail was done August 27. The trail re-route was necessitated by the failure of a private landowner to renew his lease with the Sauratown Trail Association. The loop is moving entirely onto the park and onto a sustainable route.

**Mayo River**

* **Maintenance Building** - Construction on the MARI metal maintenance and storage building commenced in August. As of the Aug. 25, the concrete pad had been poured. This is a major maintenance project.

**Eno River**

* **Murder Investigation -** There was murder at ENRI August 4. The victim was not located until August 10 when the suspect confessed.

***East District***

**Hammocks Beach -** The Facility Condition Assessment Program (FCAP) review will be conducted on the new property within in the next two months.

***West District***

* **Staff Vacancies -** The WEDI continues to struggle to manage with 20 current vacancies.

Staff from almost every WEDI park have spent a considerable amount of time covering the operations at Mount Mitchell. MOMI currently has only one commissioned officer. WEDI rangers have been assisting at MOMI six days per week.

**Chimney Rock**

* **World Ranger Day -** On July 31the park honored rangers around the world for their service. The film Thin Green Line was shown several times during the day at the park’s restaurant, and donations for the family of slain Forest Ranger Jason Crisp of Burke County were collected.
* **Search and Rescue: Suicidal Subject -** On August 16, staff assisted the Lake Lure Police Department and Rutherford County Sheriff’s Office in searching for a potential suicidal subject. The subject was not found at the park.
* **Race to the Rock -** On August 17, the park hosted the annual Race to the Rock, a 3K foot race from Chimney Rock Village to the base of Chimney Rock itself. Top runners made it up the 7% grade in less than 25 minutes. A 25K bike race also took place that morning and finished at the Chimney as well.

**Crowders Mountain**

* **Parking Lot Management Meeting -** In anticipation of large crowds this fall, staff met with representatives from the Gastonia Police Department and Gaston County Police Department on August 18. Gastonia and Gaston County PD pledged their assistance with handling any traffic that causes safety issues on the roadways outside the park gate, and gave several suggestions for providing more efficient parking management with minimal manpower.

**Elk Knob**

* **Beech Tree Trail Opens -** The one-mile loop trail was completed this month and opened to the public.

**Gorges**

* **Attendance -** August continued to be an extremely busy month. The Grassy Ridge Parking area has been full on every weekend and many times during the week. Staff has been utilizing three over flow parking areas in an attempt to accommodate the large number of visitors.
* **Increased Revenue -** Retail sales have been brisk. The summer time monthly retail sales average is nearly $6,900, up from a monthly average of $3,700 last summer.
* **Bearwallow Connector Trail Opens -** On August 22, this new 1/2 mile trail opened to the public. Originating at the visitor center, it connects to the Bearwallow Observation platform and the both picnic areas. It was built by park staff and volunteers.

**Grandfather Mountain**

* **Friends Donation -** The Friends of the High Country State parks donated $620 for a new wayside display on the Profile Trail.
* **Family Days -** The annual event was held on August 23 with poor weather in the morning, attendance was low at this year's event.

**Lake James**

* **Goats -** The goats/kudzu eradication project made great progress. The goats were in place on a three-acre patch for a 30 day cycle and ate most of the understory kudzu. The goats will return in October for another 30-day period.
* **The Prescribed Fire Council visit** - Participants stopped at LAJA during the annual conference on August 13th to review the recent success with getting the park under prescription, as well as the community outreach and cooperation that took place. The result was a joint effort by NC State Parks, NC Forest Service, the Railroad, and our park neighbors.

**Lake Norman**

* **Mountain Biker injured -** On August 16, a mountain biker with a deep laceration and sever bleeding from his leg was carried off the trail by park staff and local responders and taken to the Lake Norman Regional Medical Center.
* **Visitor Airlifted from park -** On August 16, 2014 a park visitor was found unconscious at the park swimming area, but had a good pulse and was breathing. Staff administered first aid until EMS arrived. The patient was air lifted to Carolina Medical Center with diabetic complications.
* **Visitor Center Construction -** Construction continues on the new visitor center/west district office. The project is approximately 88 percent complete.

**New River/Mount Jefferson**

* **AmeriCorps Team Constructing a New Trail -** A 9-member team has been working the entire month of August on constructing a new trail at MOJE. The team is federally funded with the park providing housing. The team has also been involved in the community doing service projects at the local library and Department of Social Services Office.
* **New River Celebration Day -** Celebration Day was held Aug 2 with assistance from the west district I&E specialist, Grandfather Mountain staff and N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission with a live hellbender. Several programs were presented, a live hellbender was on display, and Snotty our salamander mascot was present. Attendance was lower than normal due to poor weather forecast. However, a good time was had by all.
* **Media Contacts: Radio and TV Show, and Promotional Video -** Superintendent Shimel has made multiple appearances on the "Happy Times Show" which airs on 580AM, 93.5FM, and Skyzone HDTV. The topics include the new trail construction on MOJE and services and programs offered at NERI and MOJE. Superintendent Shimel utilized a new advertising technique. He filmed and edited a short promotional video for a program at NERI that was posted on Friends of High Country State Parks and NNorth Carolina State Parks Facebook pages.

**South Mountains**

* **Park receives grant -** The park received a $1000 grant from the CarMax Foundation.
* **Park and NRC pursue possible land donation -** Staff met with representatives of the Pine Mountain Estates to discuss a possible substantial donation to the park, which would protect the White Oak Creek watershed and includes several scenic waterfalls.
* **Summer Kids Club a success -** The park completed the Summer Kids Club programming with great success; offering many programs over 10-week period for 447 participants.

***Trails Program***

* **Planning Communities LLC., Contracted to Develop North Carolina’s Mountains-to-Sea State Trail Master Plan -** The Mountain to Sea State Trail Master Plan contract has been signed with Planning Communities. An kick-off meeting was held Aug. 7 and work has begun on the first deliverable, a website which will be used throughout the planning process.
* **Destination by Design Firm Delivers First Draft of the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail - Sub Section Plan - Stone Mountain to Pilot Mountain State Park Master Plan -** The initial draft of the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail - Sub Section Plan - Stone Mountain to Pilot Mountain State Park Master Plan was submitted by Destination by Design for staff review. Staff reviewed and provided a list of required changes, comments on the entire document, and a contract completion summary.
* **North Carolina Trails Committee’s August 15, 2014 Meeting -** The North Carolina Trails Committee (NCTC), our seven member advisory committee, met Aug. 15 to review applications received for potential funding through the Federal Recreational Trails Program (RTP). The RTP is a federal grant program administered by the Division of Parks and Recreation. The division received 37 grant applications requesting a total of $ 2,999,516 for grant projects in 2014. The NCTC recommended awards for 27 grant projects totaling $2,225,758 to leverage $4,557,225 of grantee matching funds to provide economic development and recreational resources to 27 counties with North Carolina.
* **Sustainable Trails Education -** On August 21, trails program staff presented at the Woodland Steward Series in Asheville sponsored by NC State University.  This series of workshops empowers forest landowners to manage their properties to promote environmental and forest health through increased awareness, experience and access to resources.
* **Assistance to NC Division of Land Resources -** On Aug. 26, trails program staff assisted the NC Division of Land Resources staff with a trail inspection in western North Carolina.  Erosion and sedimentation control issues were examined with DLR staff and the land manager, and trails program staff offered recommendations for problem areas identified in the field.
* **Final Walk-Through for the Ruben Mountain Trail at Hanging Rock State Park -** On Aug. 27, trails program staff joined park, natural resources, and planning program staff to conduct a final walk-through of the proposed Ruben Mountain Trail alignment at HARO.  It is planned for this major maintenance funded trail project to be put out for contract by the end of 2014.
* **Meeting with Land Managers to Complete the Missing Link of the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail in Western North Carolina -** On Aug. 29, trails program staff met with staff from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Blue Ridge Parkway, and Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indian to discuss several proposed routes to complete the MST in WNC.  There currently exists an approximately 10 mile gap in the MST.  When this gap is complete, it will connect approximately 300 miles of completed MST in the mountains of WNC.
* **Meeting with the American Conservation Experience -** On Aug. 29, trails program and other DPR staff met with the American Conservation Experience (ACE).  ACE is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing rewarding environmental service opportunities that harness the idealism and energy of a volunteer labor force to help restore America's public lands.  DPR staff attended this meeting to learn more about the ACE program and discuss the possibility of providing opportunities within State Parks for participants in the ACE program.
* **Recreational Trails Program Grant Final Inspections -** Trails staff performed final inspections on projects funded by the RTP in the Croatan National Forest and Pettigrew State Park. Final inspections ensure that the work funded by the RTP is complete. The project in the Croatan National Forest constructed 5 miles of mountain bicycle trail in the Flanner’s Beach recreation area. At PETT, the grant funded boardwalk from the park office to Lake Phelps.
* **Program Collaboration -** Staff from the trails program and the burn program met to coordinate efforts in both designing trails and conducting prescribed burns. Procedures were established to insure that trail marking materials will not be damaged during prescribed burns.
* **Raven Rock State Park - East Loop Re-Route Finalized -** Trails staff met with park, district and natural resources staff to finalize the alignment of a portion of the East Loop Equestrian Trail that needs to be re-routed for safety and natural resources concerns. Additionally, trails staff worked with park and district staff to formulate strategies to decrease user conflicts on the equestrian trails.

***Engineering & Construction***

* Bid for Haw River Church Street Entrance project awarded Aug. 18
* Bid opening for Fort Macon Bathhouse Renovations project Aug. 6; working on award
* Bid opening for Haw River Youth Cabins Renovations project Aug. 13; negotiating with low bidder and working for award

***Grants and Special Studies***

* **2013-14 NC Parks and Recreation Trust Fund Annual Report:**  The PARTF Annual Report which highlights the FY 2013-14 revenues and distributions for State Parks, Local Governments, and the Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Program is due September 1, 2014 for review.  It is due for submission to the Governor’s office October 1, 2014.
* **NC Parks  and Recreation Authority meeting:**  The next meeting of the NC PARTF Authority is scheduled for October 16 & 17 in Charlotte, at the tail-end of the NRPA Conference.  Details of this meeting are still being discussed due to the logistics of several members planning to attend the conference and the Authority meeting.
* **Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP):** The North Carolina SCORP, which must be revised every five years, is prepared to meet the requirements for continuing Land Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) eligibility, as well as to meet the need for a meaningful evaluation of state and local government public outdoor recreation projects.  During the last five years, North Carolina has received an average of $850,000 from LWCF. The SCORP will be presented to DENR for review by November 14, 2014.  It will be submitted to the Governor’s office for review by January 12, 2015.  Following approval, the SCORP will be submitted to the National Park Service in February of 2015.