

History of the North Carolina State Park System - Part 5: Growth through Donations and LWCF Assistance, 1956-1970 ^[1]

History of the North Carolina State Park System - Part 5: Growth through Donations and LWCF Assistance, 1956-1970

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

[NC Division of Parks of Recreation](#) ^[2], NC Department of Cultural Environment & Natural Resources.

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

On October 8, 1956, [Mount Jefferson](#) ^[11] was established as a state park when 464 acres of land was accepted from individuals and organizations in Ashe County. Unusual vegetation qualified the area for designation as a [National Natural Landmark](#) ^[12] in 1975. It was later re-classified as a natural area.

The state's second coastal park came on board in 1961. Bear Island, the primary feature of [Hammocks Beach State Park](#) ^[13], reached only by private boat or passenger ferry, is one of the most unspoiled barrier islands on the Atlantic seashore. Donated by the North Carolina Teachers Association, it was first designated for use by black citizens, but in later years was fully integrated.

Duke Power State Park was donated in 1962 by Duke Power Co. The park centers around man-made Lake Norman and includes camping, picnicking and a small lake for fishing and swimming. Duke Power experienced severe damage from hurricane Hugo in September 1989. The unit was later re-named [Lake Norman State Park](#) ^[14].

Natural Areas

In 1963, the Board of Conservation and Development adopted principles for natural areas, and, in that same year, the state's first natural area, [Weymouth Woods](#) ^[15], was donated. This 900-acre nature preserve has an interpretive center and trails.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

In 1965, the federal government created the [Land and Water Conservation Fund](#) ^[16] (LWCF). The LWCF was a primary funding source for state parks, with approximately \$21.2 million going into acquisition and development projects at 32 state parks, recreation areas and natural areas. The parks division has administered \$78 million in LWCF since its inception with \$16.9 million expended on state park land acquisitions. The balance and majority of the funds, over \$61 million, have been allocated to local parks and recreation agencies.

One of the first parks to receive LWCF assistance was [Pilot Mountain](#) ^[17], a monadnock made of erosion-resistant quartzite. In 1967, the Pilot Mountain Preservation and Park Committee promoted the sale of this commercial tourist attraction to the state. On July 19, 1968, the \$1 admission fee was cancelled and Pilot Mountain officially became public land. The park was designated as a National Natural Landmark in 1975.

LWCF funds again played a role in the purchase of parklands when Stone Mountain was acquired in 1969. The efforts of the Stone Mountain Preservation and Park Commission enabled the state to use a LWCF grant and money from the Appalachian Funds. A national landmark, [Stone Mountain](#) ^[18] is a bare oval-shaped granite dome which rises more than 700 feet above the surrounding foothills.

Study Commission

In 1967, the General Assembly created the State Parks and State Forests Study Commission and directed it to examine outdoor recreation in North Carolina and assess the "desires and needs of the populace." The commission recommended that the acquisition of fast-disappearing resources must take priority over development. Special emphasis was placed upon acquiring sites that would support water-related activities and developing day-use facilities. Most of the recommendations were never implemented as sufficient funding never materialized. However, as a direct result of the study, an immediate search for potential state park property began.

First Appropriation for Land Since Mount Mitchell

The 1969 purchase of [Carolina Beach State Park](#) [19] marked a milestone in state park history – the first state expenditure for parkland since the 1916 purchase of Mount Mitchell. Carolina Beach was acquired to establish an intracoastal waterway park that would be both a natural area and allow public recreation at area beaches.

[Raven Rock State Park](#) [20] was acquired by state and matching federal funds in February 1970 through the efforts of the Raven Rock Preservation and Park Committee. The rock face stretches for a mile along the Cape Fear River in a series of quartzite formations more than 100 feet high.

Appropriations for land acquisition spurred by the Study Commission report were, however, short-lived; the state soon returned to relying on donations. Through 1970, gifts to the State Parks System accounted for more than 80 percent of the system's total acreage.

Keep reading > [Part 6: Program and Park Expansion, 1971-1979](#) [7]  [7]

References:

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

Additional resources:

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[21]

Subjects:

[Government agencies](#) [22]

[Parks](#) [23]

Authors:

[Eakes, Alan](#) [24]

[Ledford, Lewis](#) [25]

[Reuter, Don](#) [26]

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[NC Division of Parks and Recreation, NC Dept. of Natural and Cultural Resources](#) [27]

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