

History of the North Carolina State Park System - Part 7: Reservoirs, Re-evaluations and New Initiatives, 1980-1989 ^[1]

History of the North Carolina State Park System - Part 7: Reservoirs, Re-evaluations and New Initiatives, 1980-1989

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

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Recreation Areas

[Jordan Lake State Recreation Area](#) ^[11] opened in 1981, followed by [Falls Lake State Recreation Area](#) ^[12] in 1983. Both of these areas were leased from the Army Corps of Engineers and joined Kerr Lake in providing water-based recreation for metropolitan populations. In 1986, [Fort Fisher](#) ^[13] became the system's fourth recreation area. Part of a peninsula, it contains a variety of undisturbed coastal communities.

A Drop in Appropriations

The momentum of the 1970s began to stall. [LWCF](#) ^[14] allotments declined sharply and most of the study commission's recommendations failed to materialize due to lack of funding. During the five-year period from 1979-1984, only four percent of the funding recommended by the second study commission was appropriated.

Third Study Commission

Needs of the system continued to receive publicity and a third Study Commission was created in 1983. Many deficiencies in the system were noted, just as they had been in 1968 and 1979. As had happened before, only a few of the commission's recommendations came to fruition. The study did, however, spur the General Assembly into action.

The \$25 Million Appropriation of 1985

In 1985, the General Assembly appropriated \$25 million for the purchase of critical park acreage. This appropriation exceeded the total state appropriations made over the entire history of the state parks system. While welcomed and needed, no additional personnel were funded to implement the acquisition process, so the program started slowly.

Progress was too slow for the General Assembly. By the time acquisition began, the appropriation had been cut from \$25 million to \$16,580,000. In spite of this adjustment, the appropriation was a needed boost to land acquisition efforts.

Community Service Worker Program

With \$1.2 million of the 1985 appropriation, the General Assembly created the Community Service Worker Program. Many offenders assigned by the courts fulfilled their sentences through construction and repair projects. The program boosted both the manpower and budget for park maintenance.

Adopt-A-Park Program

In May 1985 the [Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation](#) ^[15] awarded a \$35,000 grant to fund an Adopt-A-Park program. A mini-grant program was developed for groups who wanted to adopt a park. Projects included the development of trails, amphitheaters and educational materials. In 1989, the Division won a second grant to continue the program.

State Parks Act

In 1985, yet another Study Commission was authorized. The most important outgrowth of the study was an act establishing the purpose of the State Parks System. Prior to its passage, no law existed which defined this purpose,

therefore policies and direction were subject to change with administrations, personnel and public opinion. As a result of this act, the State Parks System is now protected by a legal mandate.

The State Parks Act defines the purpose of the State Parks System as protecting representative examples of North Carolina's unique biological, recreational, geological, scenic, and archaeological resources for future generations and providing for the public's enjoyment of these resources.

Two New Parks in 1980s

Local support and the efforts of the area's legislative delegation resulted in the establishment of 564-acre Lake James State Park ^[16]. Located in the foothills, nearby mountain ranges offer scenic surroundings for lake recreation and camping. Lawmakers also approved the designation of Lumber River ^[17] as a state park and state river in southeastern North Carolina.

Environmental Education

In 1987, the Division put forth a strong effort to bring environmental education and interpretation to the lives of all of the state's citizens, particularly school children. The larger department, which housed North Carolina state parks, further emphasized environmental education in August 1989 with the appointment of an environmental education team, which produced a set of recommendations, resulting in the creation of an Office of Environmental Education ^[18].

Law Enforcement

The need for stronger resource protection, along with a growing concern for visitor safety, led to the development of a formal law enforcement program for the state parks system for all rangers and superintendents. In July of 1988, the first group of rangers graduated from Basic Law Enforcement Training and were designated as special peace officers.

By the end of the decade, a changing, growing North Carolina was reflected in the park system. As the state continued to change, parks continued to be places for its citizens to refresh themselves through contact with nature.

Keep reading > Part 8: Financial Resources Committed to State Parks, 1990-1999 ^[9] 

References:

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

Additional resources:

NC Division of Parks and Recreation, NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources. <https://www.ncparks.gov/> ^[2]

NC Division of Parks and Recreation. "Annual Report of the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation." NC Digital Collections: <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/documents?search=163578861&searchtypes=Metadata|Full%20text&applyState=true> ^[19]

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