

Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail

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STATE RELEASES CONCEPTUAL PLAN FOR EASTERN SECTION OF MOUNTAINS-TO-SEA TRAIL

RALEIGH -- The N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has approved a 256-mile corridor along the Neuse as the route for the eastern North Carolina link of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail.

A conceptual plan to identify the corridor, located in Wake, Johnston, Wayne, Lenoir, Pitt, Craven and Carteret counties, was developed with input from local governments along the route and organizations and individuals supporting establishment of the trail counties.

In a letter to the Friends of the Mountains to Sea Trail, DENR Secretary Bill Ross said over the next three to five years a state MST East Task Force that includes DENR and the state departments of Commerce and Transportation will focus on two initiatives. One is assisting construction of the trail from Cliffs of the Neuse State Park in Wayne County to the Craven County line. The second initiative will be to work with Raleigh, Smithfield, Wake County, Clayton and Johnston County to develop a multi-modal section of the trail from Falls Lake Dam to Smithfield.

“My hope is that through these two focused efforts we can all learn how to apply for and target existing funding sources to acquire, build and open these trails,” Ross said.

Existing trails in the seven-county region will serve as a foundation for establishing the MST in the east. Those include 20 miles on state recreation areas at Falls Lake in Wake County, the Smithfield Riverwalk in Johnston County, Stoney Creek Greenway and Cliffs of the Neuse State Park in Wayne County. The 20-mile Neusiok Trail on federal lands in Carteret County is already part of the MST. Access for canoes is available at 21 points along the Neuse.

“The planning process generated a lot of interest in Eastern North Carolina to build the trail in that section of the state,” said Jeff Brewer, president of the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail. “There’s increasing awareness of how trails along rivers can be good for the economy as well as outdoor recreation.”

The Mountains-to-Sea Trail will eventually stretch 940 miles from Clingman’s Dome in the Great Smokies to the top of Jockey’s Ridge on the Outer Banks. The state has designated approximately 450 miles of the trail for inclusion in the park. The vast majority of those miles are on state and federal lands in the mountains, Piedmont and along the Outer Banks.

Efforts to establish a statewide trail began over 25 years ago. The idea was hatched by the then state N.C. Secretary of Natural and Community Development Howard Lee of Chapel Hill. In the last few years approximately a half dozen people have hiked the entire 940 miles straight through. Others are doing a segment at a time or just using it for day hikes.

The Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail is a non-profit organization of volunteers that devotes tens of thousands of hours each year to construction and maintenance of the trail.

Additional information about the trail can be downloaded from the Friends web page at www.ncmst.org, or by requesting a CD from the Division of State Parks and Recreation in Raleigh by contacting Darrell.McBane@ncmail.net.