

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2021

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HOUSE BILL 554

Short Title: Designate 2023 as Year of the Trail. (Public)

Sponsors: Representatives Blackwell, Hurley, Strickland, and Arp (Primary Sponsors).
For a complete list of sponsors, refer to the North Carolina General Assembly web site.

Referred to: State Government, if favorable, Rules, Calendar, and Operations of the House

April 15, 2021

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT DESIGNATING THE YEAR 2023 AS "NORTH CAROLINA YEAR OF THE
TRAIL."

Whereas, North Carolina has a comprehensive network of public trails and greenways constructed by local, State, and federal agencies and nonprofit partners (more than 618 miles within our 41 units of State Parks and on State Park lands and 938 miles of designated State Trails), and more than 3,500 miles of planned trail networks. Connecting trail segments is a powerful tool for economic and community development that should be actively facilitated; and

Whereas, outdoor trails are used for a variety of activities, including walking, hiking, biking, commuting, rolling, paddling, and horseback riding, and the many miles of trails that exist throughout North Carolina have allowed countless individuals to reflect on the splendor of the State's natural world. Without a doubt, these pathways are not only a source of pride for the communities they serve, providing significant economic and environmental benefits, but are also an important feature in helping to improve the quality of life in our society by promoting healthy lifestyles via recreation and active transportation; and

Whereas, trails bring people together, as they not only connect physical locations but also represent the bonds that create communities. By highlighting the numerous trails in our State, we also praise the innumerable people who have helped make them a reality, and their efforts celebrate the beauty of the world around us by providing accessible and functional transportation to all people, regardless of age, background, or ability; and

Whereas, during the pandemic, trails have served even more North Carolinians, providing crucial physical and mental health benefits during extraordinary times; and

Whereas, in 1973, the General Assembly enacted the "North Carolina Trails System Act." Modelled on the National Trails Act, the 1973 Act created a North Carolina Trails Program (NCTP) housed in the Division of Parks and Recreation and assisted by the North Carolina Trails Committee, a group of citizens appointed to represent users of different types of trails, including trails for hiking, biking, paddling, horseback riding, and off-road vehicles. The 1973 Act also envisioned a State Trail System to be made up of long-distance State Trails that would be units of the North Carolina Park System. That system has now grown to include nine State Trails, and two more are being proposed in the 2021 Legislative Session. One staff planner in the Division of State Parks is assigned to assist these nine trails; and

Whereas, the Department of Transportation, working with partners all across the State, completed the Great Trails State Plan in 2021, which is the first ever statewide trails plan for North Carolina, providing a detailed strategy to connect all 100 North Carolina counties by way of greenway paths; and



1 Whereas, outdoor recreation is a \$28 billion industry in North Carolina, and our trails,
2 greenways, and blueways are the infrastructure that supports that industry; and

3 Whereas, it is fitting to salute the individuals who have served as the caretakers of our
4 public resources. Through their hard work and enthusiasm, the citizens of North Carolina have
5 demonstrated an unparalleled spirit of cooperation, and applause and support should be given to
6 all those responsible for the success of these noteworthy trails that serve to repurpose land in
7 valuable ways; and

8 Whereas, to celebrate the "Year of the Trail," organizations and jurisdictions will offer
9 special programming, festivals, and events highlighting and promoting all types of trails all
10 across the State. The theme for the "Year of the Trail" has already been designated as North
11 Carolina State Parks' annual focus for 2023, with programs, festivals, and events in all State Parks
12 across the State celebrating this theme; Now, therefore,

13 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

14 **SECTION 1.** The State of North Carolina designates the year 2023 as "North
15 Carolina Year of the Trail" and encourages all North Carolinians to take advantage of their local
16 and regional trail networks, do their part to further enhance North Carolina's trail networks, and
17 pay tribute to everyone who has labored to maintain and enlarge these public amenities.

18 **SECTION 2.** This act is effective when it becomes law.