



Mountains-to-Sea State Trail Plan: 2022-2027

Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail

- **Planned Length:** 1,400 miles
- **Complete the Trails Funds:** \$5,086,059
- **Miles Designated:** 691
- **Capacity Funds:** \$49,500

Capacity Building Funds:

We plan to use capacity building funds to add a new staff person to help increase our organizational visibility, help manage and expand our volunteer efforts, sustain and grow our membership, build relationships with stakeholders in key areas and organize celebratory events when new sections of trail open.

In areas where we plan to build, open and designate new trail, we want to increase our organizational visibility and footprint through outreach — educating communities about the trail to gain new volunteers and members. This base will ensure that we have the people power and community support necessary to maintain the trail for users and help us continue to build enthusiasm in areas where the MST has not traditionally been much of a presence. We also want to sustain and continue building our outreach efforts in areas where we have existing trail.

We also want to increase our promotion and outreach to more communities of color and marginalized communities as we aim to grow and diversify the universe of people who hike, promote and volunteer along the MST.

Finally, this new staff person will help us plan and organize ribbon cutting events and community celebrations when new trail sections open and create a statewide event schedule for 2023 to help us celebrate the Year of the Trail from the mountains to the sea.

We will be able to measure success in these areas by increase in membership numbers, especially in areas where new sections of MST will be opening or where there are not currently many MST miles off-road, volunteer task forces building and maintaining the trail, community leaders engaged, and corporate and local government support in key areas.

Trail Development

Mountains: Clingman's Dome to Pilot Mountain State Park

Blue Ridge Parkway – Environmental Assessment

- Investigate the feasibility of moving all areas of the MST along the Blue Ridge Parkway that currently use the road shoulder for hiking away from the shoulder as much as possible. We would also like to determine the feasibility of adding back-country camping areas along the MST route to provide locations for hikers to be able to camp for the night while hiking the trail.

MST Segment 1

- **Clingmans Dome:** MST Western Terminus Monument

MST Segment 4

- **Trail Development Plan:** Connecting the Fonta Flora, Overmountain Victory and Mountains-to-Sea Trails (North Fork of the Catawba River)
 - Small area with great opportunity for collaboration

MST Segment 5

- **Trail Repair:** Rough Ridge on the Tanawha Trail

MST Segment 6

- **Trail Development Plan:** Elkin to Pilot Mountain State Park (opportunity to collaborate with Yadkin River Trail)
 - Planning work already underway with Surry County. We hope to collaborate with Yadkin River State Trail too.
 - Trail construction opportunities along identified routes that result from the MST Planning Study

Elkin Area

- Bridge of Dreams in Elkin, planning for bridge already underway
- **Trail Repair:** Devils Garden Overlook to Stone Mountain

Mountains-to-Sea State Trail Plan 2022-2027

MST Segments 1–6 (All Mountain Segments)

- **Promotion:** continue to promote the MST online and offline through our website, trail guides and signage; find opportunities to improve signage and kiosks where possible; plan series of events to spotlight Year of the Trail and MST
- **Trail Maintenance:** work with our task forces and Task Force Leaders along all segments of the MST to ensure regular maintenance and repair of the trail so all users are able to safely enjoy it
- **Volunteers:** continue to support our task forces with volunteer workdays that help maintain, build, repair and reroute trail as needed; recruit new volunteers to assist in ongoing trail work efforts; create a structure for volunteers that want to be involved but don't want to do actual trail work in the field

Piedmont: Pilot Mountain State Park to Smithfield

- **Strategic Trail Development Plan: Piedmont Region** – We anticipate this master planning process for the Piedmont Region to identify a need for more focused trail development plans, similar to what we've already done in the Coastal Crescent, in the following areas:
 - Focus Area Trail Development Plan - Danbury to Oak Ridge (opportunity to collaborate with Dan River Trail)
 - Focus Area Trail Development Plan - Haw River Corridor from Oak Ridge to Saxapahaw
 - Focus Area Trail Development Plan - Saxapahaw to Hillsborough

MST Segment 7

Sauratown Trails

- Work with local stakeholders to protect access to MST between Pilot Mountain State Park and Hanging Rock State Park
- **Trail Repair:** RM Collins Trail — rerouting degraded sections and multiple bridges in need of repair and/or replacement

MST Segment 8

Hanging Rock to Danbury

- Trail construction to connect the MST through Hanging Rock State Park into Danbury on land recently acquired by State Parks. Building new trail here would add around 4-5 miles of new MST off-road and provide a great connection between the Town of Danbury and the State Park

Dan River

- **Focus Area Trail Development Plan:** Danbury to Oak Ridge (opportunity to collaborate with Dan River Trail)
- Potential land acquisition opportunities that could add new mileage to the MST near or along the Dan River (opportunity to collaborate with the Conservation Fund of N.C. who is already active in this area)

Belews Lake

- Finish ongoing survey work to identify potential trail corridors and land for conservation on Duke Energy property around Belews Lake.
- Once planning work is complete, we are hopeful that we will be able to design and build new trail that has the potential to add 5-13 miles of new MST
- Numerous opportunities for collaboration include Duke Energy, Piedmont Land Conservancy, Dan River Basin Association, Rockingham County, Guilford County, Stokes County, Forsyth County, and more.

MST Segment 9

- **Focus Area Trail Development Plan:** Haw River Corridor from Oak Ridge to Saxapahaw (partially in Segment 8 too)
- **Focus Area Trail Development Plan:** Saxapahaw to Hillsborough

Alamance County:

- Shallow Ford Natural Area expansion through possible land acquisition opportunities and new trail construction (opportunity to collaborate with the Haw River Trail and Alamance County)

Orange County

- To finish routing the MST through Orange County, we will need to secure access to land through easements. We will work closely with the county to help identify and secure those needed easements
- We hope to begin trail construction in southwest Orange County in the near term, which could add up to four miles of MST off road
- Trail construction to connect Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area to Hillsborough and to Seven Mile Creek Natural Area in the near term. Land or easement acquisition may be necessary to finish the connecting trails
- Establish connection between Hillsborough and Eno River State Park. State Parks already owns land that can be used to connect much of the MST here. Completing this connection will get hikers off the temporary route along Hwy70 between Hillsborough and Pleasant Green access at Eno River State Park.

Mountains-to-Sea State Trail Plan 2022-2027

MST Segment 10

- **Trail Repair:** Falls Lake — boardwalk replacement and extension and several bridge repairs and/or replacements

MST Segment 11

Johnston County

- There is currently an ongoing Neuse River Trail Feasibility Study spearheaded by Johnston County, which will yield plans for a trail connection from Clayton to Smithfield, much of which can be integrated into the MST
- We are working with a private company to explore an opportunity for the MST to connect through some private walking trails they have built on their property near Clayton.
- Working with the Triangle Land Conservancy to support their ongoing efforts to conserve land along the Neuse River in Johnston County

MST Segments 7-11 (All Piedmont Segments)

- **Promotion:** continue to promote the MST online and offline through our website, trail guides and signage; find opportunities to improve signage and kiosks where possible; plan series of events to spotlight Year of the Trail and MST. Collaboration with Friends of Johnston County Parks on their annual events.
- **Trail Maintenance:** work with our task forces and Task Force Leaders along all segments of the MST to ensure regular maintenance and repair of the trail so all users are able to safely enjoy it
- **Volunteers:** continue to support our task forces with volunteer workdays that help maintain, build, repair and reroute trail as needed; recruit new volunteers to assist in ongoing trail work efforts; create a structure for volunteers that want to be involved but don't want to do actual trail work in the field

Coast: Neuse River Route – Smithfield to Jockey's Ridge State Park

- **Strategic Trail Development Plan:** Neuse River Corridor

Goldsboro

- Opportunity to collaborate with Center for Environmental Farming Systems, Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, the N.C. Conservation Fund, the Environmental Defense Fund, NC State, and Goldsboro Dept. of Parks and Recreation on a trail and open space plan

MST Segment 17

North River Wetlands Preserve

- Land acquisition opportunities for MST
- Trail construction opportunities

MST Segment 18

Jockey's Ridge re-route and MST Eastern Terminus Monument

- A minor re-route of the MST at Jockey's Ridge State Park following completion of Visitor Center renovations
- Construction of an eastern terminus monument at the State Park

MST Segments 16-18 (Croatan National Forest to Outer Banks)

- **Promotion:** continue to promote the MST online and offline through our website, trail guides and signage; find opportunities to improve signage and kiosks where possible; plan series of events to spotlight Year of the Trail and MST
- **Trail Maintenance:** work with our task forces and Task Force Leaders along all segments of the MST to ensure regular maintenance and repair of the trail so all users are able to safely enjoy it
- **Volunteers:** continue to support our task forces with volunteer workdays that help maintain, build, repair and reroute trail as needed; recruit new volunteers to assist in ongoing trail work efforts; create a structure for volunteers that want to be involved but don't want to do actual trail work in the field

Coast: Coastal Crescent Route: Smithfield to Croatan National Forest

Planning Projects along Coastal Crescent Route

- Sampson County Trail Development Plan
- **Rail with Trail Development Plan:** Camp Lejeune Railroad (opportunity to collaborate with East Coast Greenway Alliance)
- **Trail Development Plan:** Wilmington Area – Moore's Creek to Wilmington to Burgaw (opportunity to collaborate with East Coast Greenway Alliance)

Mountains-to-Sea State Trail Plan 2022-2027

MST Segment 12

Bentonville Battlefield/Johnston County

- Goals are to get hikers safely from Smithfield to the southernmost part of Johnston County, to connect the MST through Howell Woods and expand the MST at Bentonville Battlefield
- Trail construction projects could begin in the near future at the “Let Lones” (Brogden Bottomlands and Howell Woods) to traverse challenging wet areas and at Bentonville Battlefield

Sampson County Trail Development Plan

Roseboro/Pondberry Bay Preserve

- Our plan is to build a brick-paved walking trail through downtown Roseboro as part of the MST and the first phase of that will begin in Spring 2022. The goal is to connect this trail with the Pondberry Bay Preserve
- To access the Pondberry Bay Preserve and open up more than five miles of total trail inside the preserve, including around 3.5 miles of MST, there is a need to construct a small parking lot on land adjacent to the preserve
- Land acquisition opportunities to connect the trails

Bushy Lake State Natural Area

- Land acquisition opportunities to move the MST off-road and connect with existing trail
- The planning phase (trail routing, stakeholder engagement, and budgeting) is complete
- If land is acquired and all land managing partners agree on a route, trail construction can begin to add an additional 17.5 miles of new trail to the MST here. That would create a total of 19 miles in this immediate area, which currently has only four miles of “forest road” to hike now

MST Segment 13

Kelly (Bladen County)

- Opportunities along the 14.5-mile White Oak Dike, an earthen levee that historically protected a portion of the Cape Fear River’s Northern Floodplain prior to breaching during hurricane Florence in 2018.
- Bladen County is working to find a way to get the structure repaired and has expressed interest in the MST as a mechanism for keeping the structure monitored and well maintained

Three Lakes (Jones Lake State Park/Bladen Lakes State Forest/Turnbull Creek Educational State Forest)

- The goal is to connect Jones Lake State Park, Bladen Lakes State Forest and Turnbull Creek Educational State Forest along the MST
- Extensive planning and design work is already complete
- With the construction of two bridges, one at Jones Lake Drain and the other over Turnbull Creek, the MST can add seven miles of new trail to the existing five miles in the area from Salters Lake to White Lake
- Upon completion, this would become the second longest off-road hiking trail in the NC Coastal Plain and would connect two campgrounds (Jones Lake State Park campground and Camp Chamblee)
- No land acquisition necessary

White Lake

- Land acquisition opportunities
- Create a multi-use path around White Lake in collaboration with Town of White Lake and East Coast Greenway Alliance

MST Segment 15

Holly Shelter Game Land

- Land acquisition opportunities
- Trail construction opportunities exist here that would create the MST’s first trail at Holly Shelter off forest roads and allow for campsite creation and a hiker-oriented trailhead
- **Trail Repair:** Stones Creek Game Land – repairing areas damaged by forest management activities and replacement of bridge over Stones Creek
- **Rail with Trail Development Plan:** Camp Lejeune Railroad (opportunity to collaborate with East Coast Greenway Alliance)

MST Segments 12–15 (Coastal Crescent Route)

- **Promotion:** continue to promote the MST online and offline through our website, trail guides and signage; find opportunities to improve signage and kiosks where possible; plan series of events to spotlight Year of the Trail and MST
- **Trail Maintenance:** work with our task forces and Task Force Leaders along all segments of the MST to ensure regular maintenance and repair of the trail so all users are able to safely enjoy it

Mountains-to-Sea State Trail Plan 2022-2027

- **Volunteers:** continue to support our task forces with volunteer workdays that help maintain, build, repair and reroute trail as needed; recruit new volunteers to assist in ongoing trail work efforts; create a structure for volunteers that want to be involved but don't want to do actual trail work in the field

Complete the Trail (CTF) Projects:

1. **Bushy Lake State Natural Area:** land dependent, planning complete, new trail construction could add close to 18 miles of new trail. Estimated cost: \$1,130,000 (land and construction).
2. **Dan River:** trail development plan from Danbury to Oak Ridge, potential land acquisition opportunities to add new MST miles near or along Dan River. Estimated cost: \$327,500 (planning, land and construction). Plan to leverage other funds
3. **North River Wetlands:** land dependent, new trail construction to connect to existing protected land and move MST off roads. Estimated cost: \$1,185,000 (land and construction). Plan to leverage other funds
4. **Holly Shelter Game Land:** land opportunities, trail construction for MST's first trail at Holly Shelter off forest roads and campsite and trailhead creation. Estimated cost: \$290,000 (land and construction).
5. **Hanging Rock to Danbury Trail:** new trail to connect State Park to downtown Danbury. Estimated cost: \$145,000 (trail construction).
6. **Three Lakes:** connect Jones Lake State Park, Bladen Lakes State Forest and Turnbull Creek Educational State Forest along the MST, extensive planning and design work already complete, construction of two bridges can add seven miles of new trail to existing five miles. Estimated cost: \$70,000 (trail construction). Plan to leverage other funds
7. **Elkin-Bridge of Dreams:** bridge planning underway, land has been acquired. Estimated cost: \$100,000 (help with bridge construction). Plan to leverage other funds
8. **Orange County:** land dependent, trail construction to fill key gaps in the MST, some planning work. Estimated cost: \$116,000 (planning, land and construction). Plan to leverage other funds
9. **Belews Lake:** finish ongoing survey work to identify potential trail corridors and land for conservation, trail construction could add 5-13 miles of new MST. Estimated cost: \$195,000 (trail construction). Plan to leverage other funds
10. **Bentonville:** expand MST at Bentonville Battlefield State Historic Site by 1-2 miles. Estimated cost: \$59,500 (trail construction). Plan to leverage other funds
11. **Blue Ridge Parkway Environmental Assessment:** study moving MST away from the Parkway shoulder where feasible, determine feasibility of adding back-country camping areas along MST. Estimated cost: \$150,000 (planning)
12. **Jockey's Ridge and Monument:** minor re-route of MST, construction of eastern terminus monument. Estimated cost: \$25,000 (trail construction). Plan to leverage other funds
13. **Roseboro/Pondberry Bay Preserve:** build brick walking trail through downtown Roseboro, open trails in Pondberry Bay Preserve, land dependent to connect the two. Estimated cost: \$410,000 (land and construction). Plan to leverage other funds
14. **Haw River Corridor:** trail development plan from Oak Ridge to Saxapahaw. Estimated cost: \$65,000 (planning).
15. **Sauratown Trails:** protect access to MST between Pilot Mountain State Park and Hanging Rock State Park. Estimated cost: \$40,000 (land).
16. **Yadkin River Corridor:** trail development plan. Estimated cost: \$50,000 (planning).
17. **Sampson County:** trail development plan. Estimated cost: \$50,000 (planning).
18. **Eno River State Park – West:** establish connection between Hillsborough and Eno River State Park. Estimated cost: \$24,000 (trail construction).
19. **Clingmans Dome Monument:** construction of MST western terminus monument. Estimated cost: \$20,000 (construction).
20. **Let Lones:** trail and bridge construction near Brogden Bottomlands and Howell Woods. Estimated cost: \$1,055,000 (trail construction). Plan to leverage other funds
21. **DOD Rail w/ Trail (Jacksonville to Havelock):** planning around Camp Lejeune Railroad. Estimated cost: \$100,000 (planning).
22. **Kelly to Black River (Bladen/Pender):** trail development plan. Estimated cost: \$40,000 (planning).
23. **North Fork of Catawba River:** trail development plan. Estimated cost: \$5,000 (planning).
24. **New Kiosks:** creation and placement of new trailhead kiosks across the state. Estimated cost: \$25,000 (construction). Plan to leverage other funds
25. **Neuse River Corridor:** strategic trail development plan. Estimated cost: \$60,000 (planning). Plan to leverage other funds
26. **Trail repair:** trail maintenance on sections of MST identified by volunteer leaders as in need of repair. Estimated cost: \$187,000 (trail construction).
27. **Shallow Ford Natural Area:** possible land acquisition and new trail construction. Estimated cost: \$530,000 (land and construction). Plan to leverage other funds
28. **White Oak Dike:** potential opportunity for MST along dike. Estimated cost: \$595,000 (planning, land and construction).

Mountains-to-Sea State Trail Plan 2022-2027

- 29. Goldsboro:** develop trail and open space plan. Estimated cost: \$270,000–\$235,000 (trail construction); \$35,000 (planning). Plan to leverage other funds
- 30. Neuse River Trail (Johnston County):** support land conservation efforts along the Neuse River in Johnston County. Estimated cost: \$35,000 (land). Plan to leverage other funds
- 31. White Lake Path:** support efforts to create path around White Lake to help close gap in MST. Estimated cost: \$375,000 (land and construction). Plan to leverage other funds
- 32. Wilmington Area Planning:** trail development plan from Moore’s Creek to Wilmington to Burgaw. Estimated cost: \$75,000 (planning).

2023 Year of the Trail Celebrations Planned/Anticipated:

We plan to unveil new sections of trail in as many areas of the state as possible in 2023, but we’re particularly excited about those opportunities in eastern NC where there are currently limited or no hiking opportunities. Our goal is lift up these trail openings through ribbon cutting events and community celebrations, which we hope will help highlight the enthusiasm and passion for trails across the state.

In addition, we plan to host a series of events and hikes in 2023 that highlight all sections of the trail, from Clingmans Dome in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Jockey’s Ridge State Park along the Outer Banks.

Needed technical/other assistance needed from State Parks:

Interacting with State Construction Office, permitting and other help when trail construction is done on State Parks property, assisting with state trail designations, providing support letters for projects if needed, potential to help coordinate with other agencies, land managers or partners