

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2023**

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HOUSE BILL 124

Short Title: Authorize Haw River State Trail. (Public)

Sponsors: Representatives Ross and Riddell (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

February 16, 2023

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT TO AUTHORIZE THE HAW RIVER STATE TRAIL AND TO PROVIDE FOR ITS
ADDITION TO THE STATE PARKS SYSTEM.

Whereas, the Haw River is a significant natural, geological, cultural, historical, and economic resource to the people of North Carolina and an important part of the State's common heritage; and

Whereas, the valley of the Haw River features beautiful rugged scenery such as rock outcrops and scenic bluffs and provides habitat for several endangered and rare plant and aquatic species; and

Whereas, the Haw River includes segments of whitewater rapids that are popular with paddlers, and these rapids also provided the power for numerous historic textile mills; and

Whereas, archaeological sites that predate European settlers still exist on the banks of the Haw River where Native American people known as the Sissipihaw, also called the Saxapahaw, lived; and

Whereas, the historic Indian Great Trading Path, also called the Occaneechi Path, crossed the Haw River and was an important route for immigration of European settlers to the interior of North Carolina; and

Whereas, there is public interest in protecting scenic natural resources as the State grows and develops; and

Whereas, many sections of the Haw River are examples of the high quality sites suitable for fulfilling the mission set out in the State Parks Act to preserve and manage the unique archaeological, geological, biological, scenic, and recreational resources of the State; and

Whereas, the North Carolina General Assembly has declared 2023 as the "Year of the Trail" to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1973 North Carolina Trails System Act and to showcase, promote, and celebrate all types of trails; and

Whereas, local governments, State agencies, and nonprofit organizations are working together to increase public access to the Haw River for outdoor recreation opportunities and to grow the outdoor recreation industry in the region; and

Whereas, the Triangle J Council of Governments has received a Travel, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration on behalf of Alamance and Chatham Counties to conduct a Haw River trail corridor feasibility study and economic development impact analysis as part of the goal to develop a regional Haw River Trail with over 70 miles of land and paddle trails; Now, therefore,
The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. The General Assembly makes the following findings:



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- 1 (1) A paddle, hiking, and multiuse trail along approximately 80 miles of the Haw
2 River corridor between Haw River State Park and the Jordan Lake State
3 Recreation Area would make efficient use of public dollars, link key
4 resources, and provide for the development and sustainment of local Haw
5 River natural resource preservation efforts.
- 6 (2) The Haw River trail corridor contains a wide range of outstanding and unique
7 natural, geological, cultural, and historic resources and provides habitat for
8 several endangered and rare plant and aquatic species. Preservation of these
9 resources within the Haw River trail corridor provides a wide range of
10 outstanding existing and potential recreational and economic development
11 opportunities and would support multiple goals of balancing natural resource
12 protection, recreation, water quality, historical and cultural preservation, view
13 shed protection, and economic development.
- 14 (3) The Haw River and its tributaries flow through multiple municipalities,
15 counties, and four multicounty planning regions. In addition, certain portions
16 of the trail corridor traverse public lands owned by municipalities, counties,
17 the State of North Carolina, and may also cross privately held land managed
18 by private nonprofit agencies or land under conservation easements held by
19 either the State, municipal, county, or private nonprofit agencies.
- 20 (4) The inclusion of the Haw River Trail as a State trail in the State Parks System
21 would be beneficial to the people of North Carolina and further the
22 development of North Carolina as "The Great Trails State."

23 **SECTION 2.** The General Assembly authorizes the Department of Natural and
24 Cultural Resources to add the Haw River Trail in Rockingham, Guilford, Alamance, Orange, and
25 Chatham Counties, between Haw River State Park and Jordan Lake State Recreation Area, to the
26 State Parks System as a State trail, as provided in G.S. 143B-135.54(b).

27 **SECTION 3.** The Department shall support, promote, encourage, and facilitate the
28 establishment of trail segments on State park lands and on lands of other federal, State, local, and
29 private landowners. On segments of the Haw River State Trail that cross property controlled by
30 agencies or owners other than the Department's Division of Parks and Recreation, the laws, rules,
31 and policies of those agencies or owners shall govern the use of the property.

32 **SECTION 4.** The requirement of G.S. 143B-135.54(b) that additions be
33 accompanied by adequate appropriations for land acquisition, development, and operations shall
34 not apply to the authorization set forth in this act; provided, however, that the State may receive
35 donations of appropriate land and may purchase other needed lands for the Haw River State Trail
36 with existing funds in the Land and Water Fund, the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, the
37 Complete the Trails Fund, the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, and other available
38 sources of funding.

39 **SECTION 5.** This act is effective when it becomes law.