



FRIENDS OF FONTA FLORA STATE TRAIL

Since its designation as a state trail in 2015, the popularity of the Fonta Flora State Trail has grown rapidly within the region, and is now attracting visitors from all over. When completed, the trail will connect Burke, McDowell, and Buncombe counties with 100 miles of scenic hiking, biking and greenway trail from Morganton to Asheville. It will weave together the quaint communities of Black Mountain, Old Fort, Marion and Glen Alpine with parks, greenspaces and other attractions in the area, such as Lake

James State Park and the Mountains to Sea Trail. These communities are investing heavily in the Fonta Flora State Trail as a way to preserve their natural resources for the enjoyment of everyone and to harness the economic power of the booming outdoor recreation economy we have seen in Western North Carolina in recent years.

With this steady growth in popularity of the trail, it became evident at the end of 2019 that a more coordinated effort between the 9 jurisdictions was

needed to manage all the moving parts involved with completing a trail project of this scale. As a major advocate for the trail, the Friends of Lake James State Park (FLJSP) stepped up to the plate by initiating the formation of a Friends of Fonta Flora State Trail 501(3)(c). With his prolific work in the NC Legislature on State Parks and State Trails, it was a natural fit to ask FLJSP Vice President and Emeritus Member Judge Robert C. Hunter to take a leadership role in the new organization – to which he graciously

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Photo courtesy of Annette Bryant

NATURE NOTES

The changing seasons are as inevitable as the sunrise and sunset, and here at Lake James, Nature is transitioning from autumn to winter. For humans, that means bundling up in heavy clothes before hitting the trails and maybe a warm thermos of apple cider or coffee waiting back in the vehicle for the end of the trek. For wildlife, it means finding new sources of food and shifting periods of activity to allow for the shortening of daylight and cooler temperatures.

There has been a dramatic shift in the bird populations at the park following the fall migration. Gone are the wood thrushes, red-eyed vireos, summer tanagers and ruby-



throated hummingbirds of the breeding season. They have all left for warmer climes. Those migrants have been replaced by dark-eyed juncos, golden-crowned kinglets, yellow-bellied sapsuckers and hermit thrushes; all in from the North and perfectly adapted to handle our southern Appalachian winters.

For those critters unable to migrate to escape the cold, other strategies are required. Cold-blooded reptiles and amphibians must weather the season by hibernation underground. It is possible to see some of the heartier species like eastern box turtle, black rat snake and Spring peeper during those few warm and sunny days scattered throughout the season, but for the most part, this is a long stretch of inactivity.

Mammals change their ways during winter too. Some, like white-tailed deer, foxes and coyotes have shed their light summer coats for thicker fur to help them keep warm. Food is at a premium this time of year, so it's a great time to see animals on the move during daylight hours.

For the most part, trees have lost their leaves and understory plants have gone dormant. This makes it easier to observe wildlife because it can no longer hide behind a screen of green. Additionally, any vegetation with remaining fruits, nuts or berries will be in high demand and excellent spots to look for birds and mammals as they take advantage of these high-energy foods.

Late fall and winter see less human traffic at the park, but for those who dress for the weather, the rewards can be great. Hope to see you out on the trail.

WHO WE ARE

A group formed in 2010, made up of dedicated people work together to help Lake James State Park meet its mission of providing opportunities for public enjoyment and education while still protecting the natural beauty and historic integrity of the State Park.

BOARD MEMBERS

Eric Jenkins - President
Robert Hunter - Vice President
Mike Sewell - Secretary
Annette Bryant - Membership Coordinator
Randall Conley - Member at Large
George Milner - Member at Large
Greg Norell - Member at Large
Molly Sandfoss - Member at Large
Jeff Stark - Member at Large
Jim Williams - Member at Large
Mickey Lewis - Member at Large
Charles Abernathy - Member at Large
Bryant Lindsey - Member at Large
Blair Melton - Member at Large
Pete Colwell - Member at Large
Nancy Connelly - Member at Large

To contact the Friends of Lake James State Park Group please email info@lakejamesstatepark.org

YEAR OF FIRE

There's more progress to report in this final "Year of Fire" installment.

Everything lined up on September 7 for another prescribed fire in the 2016 timber harvest unit, across the road from the Catawba River Area gate. Drier conditions and a bit more wind than the August 27 attempt made for productive fire effects on the thick hardwood and pine regeneration that threatened to crowd out the native grasses and plants trying to gain a foothold at the 86-acre site.

Over the next few years, natural resource managers hope to re-establish a highly diverse habitat of understory plants and grasses growing amid an open canopy of oaks, hickories and pines. Prescribed fire will be an important tool to achieving that goal, but the journey will also require some chemical treatment of invasive species, like kudzu, tree-of-heaven and Chinese wisteria, as well as further mechanical thinning of aggressive, early successional trees, like yellow poplar, sweet gum and Virginia pine.



As the plants and trees revert to their natural, fire-adapted state, other species will follow. Bird species like field sparrows, yellow-breasted chats, prairie warblers, red-headed woodpeckers, American woodcock and indigo buntings will find the food and cover they need to nest and raise their young. It's possible, over time, the unit could support bobwhite quail, American kestrels and whip-poor-wills.

With several western states suffering through an unprecedented wildfire season, it's important to recognize the added benefits of a robust prescribed fire program throughout the state park system in North Carolina. Carefully administered prescribed fire removes much of the dry fuels that can stoke a catastrophic wildfire. By periodically consuming dead, woody debris on the forest floor, prescribed fires protect natural and human resources.

As 2020 comes to a close, there's certainly a lot to reflect upon. To say we've had a challenging year would be an understatement. Hopefully these bi-monthly installments have given you assurance that, no matter what

else is happening in the world, the folks at N.C. State Parks are dedicated to protecting and enhancing the beautiful, natural places we've been charged to oversee for the people of North Carolina.

CAMPFIRE COOKING

RANGER VICK'S OLD FASHIONED PYRE FIRED PEPPERONI PILED PERSONAL PAN PIZZA-PALOOZA!

*Pizza and camping
is the new peanut
butter and jelly!!!!*



Makes 6 personal pan pizzas

- 1 pack of 12-inch flour tortillas
- 1 BIG bag of shredded mozzarella
- 2 jars pizza sauce
- 2 packs pepperoni
- Dried oregano (to taste)
- 2 (yes 2) 12-inch cast iron skillets
- 2 oven mitts

Directions

1. At your campsite, place a 12-inch skillet over a hot campfire or charcoal to begin heating.
2. While heating, take the second skillet and place it on top of the one already on the heat, face down. You want the two pans touching rim to rim, like a clam. By doing this you will effectively create a very hot oven chamber inside of the pans for baking the pizzas.
3. While the "oven" is heating, find a nearby tree and make three observations about it. What do the leaves look like? Is the bark thick? How old is the tree?...
4. Thoughtful tree observations will allow time for the pan oven to be nice and hot and YEEHAW, it's time to go to work.
5. Very carefully, wearing your oven mitts, take the hot pan "lid" off the top of the skillet on the coals.
6. Take a tortilla and place it inside the hot pan over the coals. Push the tortilla down into the pan. The sides of the tortilla will ride up the sides of the pan. This is good.
7. Once the tortilla has been pushed down into the bottom of the hot pan, sprinkle it with a liberal amount of the shredded mozzarella.
8. Place a second tortilla on top of this cheese covered tortilla, like a quesadilla.
9. On top of this cheesy, uncooked quesadilla, you will add the pizza sauce. Use a camp spoon to smooth out the sauce and cover the tortilla pizza evenly. Stay about an inch from the edges; even coverage, but not too thick.

CLAY'S CORNER

MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAIL CLOSURES EXPLAINED

Have you swung into the park after a hard day's work with visions of a fast, flowy afternoon, gliding through rollers on the bike trail and sweaty high fives at the end of your run, only to be met with the unexpected and unexplained "Trail Closed" sign? You aren't alone. Many Lake James State Park mountain bikers have been left scratching their heads or grinding their teeth over this scenario. Why would the trails be closed?

Allow me to explain. To start with, the last thing the park staff wants to do is surprise anyone with the disappointment of a closed trail. There are two easy ways to determine if there has been a trail closure: Prior to your commute to the park, and especially if there has been significant rainfall in the recent past, call ahead to the park office at 828-584-7728 for daily trail information. We typically know the trail status for the day by the time the office opens at 8:00 a.m. For those of you with access to a computer or smart phone, you can visit the park's website at www.ncparks.gov/lake-james-state-park. There you will see alerts listed in red, just below the uppermost picture. One of these alerts will indicate the mountain bike trail status for the day. If the date stamp is not current, it's best to call ahead.

The park's mountain bike trails are occasionally closed. Park staff will only



close trails due to safety or maintenance issues and do not take the decision lightly. Sometimes trails are closed due to damage to the trail surface or to bridges and trees from severe weather. However, the most likely culprit is rain. A dry trail surface is a stable trail surface, but when a trail becomes saturated with water the material breaks down and erodes easily. This erosion quickly becomes significant with the impact of bicycle tires combined with the flow of water down or across the trail. Our intent is to minimize this erosion and trail degradation as well as decrease runoff to surrounding streams, while also limiting any negative impact to visitors who want to enjoy an afternoon ride. The decision to close a trail will be made as early as possible each morning and is done by a visual inspection of the trail. Rainfall, wind, sunlight and other conditions affect the drying time and how long the trail will remain closed. Rainfall closures typically do not affect hiking trails. When the park's mountain bike trails are

closed, all sections of the Fonta Flora Trail within the park are closed as well.

Thinking of ignoring a trail closure because you traveled all the way from Charlotte and failed to call ahead? Think again. North Carolina State Rangers are charged with protecting all park resources and are authorized by North Carolina General Statute 143B-135 to protect them by citation when

necessary. We've done it before, but would certainly prefer you choose an alternate option for the day. That cruise around a closed gate is a misdemeanor that could cost you upwards of \$200. Don't risk it.

On a side note, electric bikes are quickly increasing in popularity. Lake James State Park currently allows electric, pedal-assist bikes on our trails however, fully electric, motorized bikes and skateboard platforms are not allowed on any trail within the park. Thank you all in advance for your cooperation in the effort to protect and improve our trails. If you would like to serve as a volunteer during an upcoming trail workday, please contact the park office for information.

Ranger Clay Veasey is a 17-year veteran of the North Carolina State Parks system and serves as Lake James State Park's lead law enforcement ranger.

FRIENDS OF FONTA FLORA STATE TRAIL

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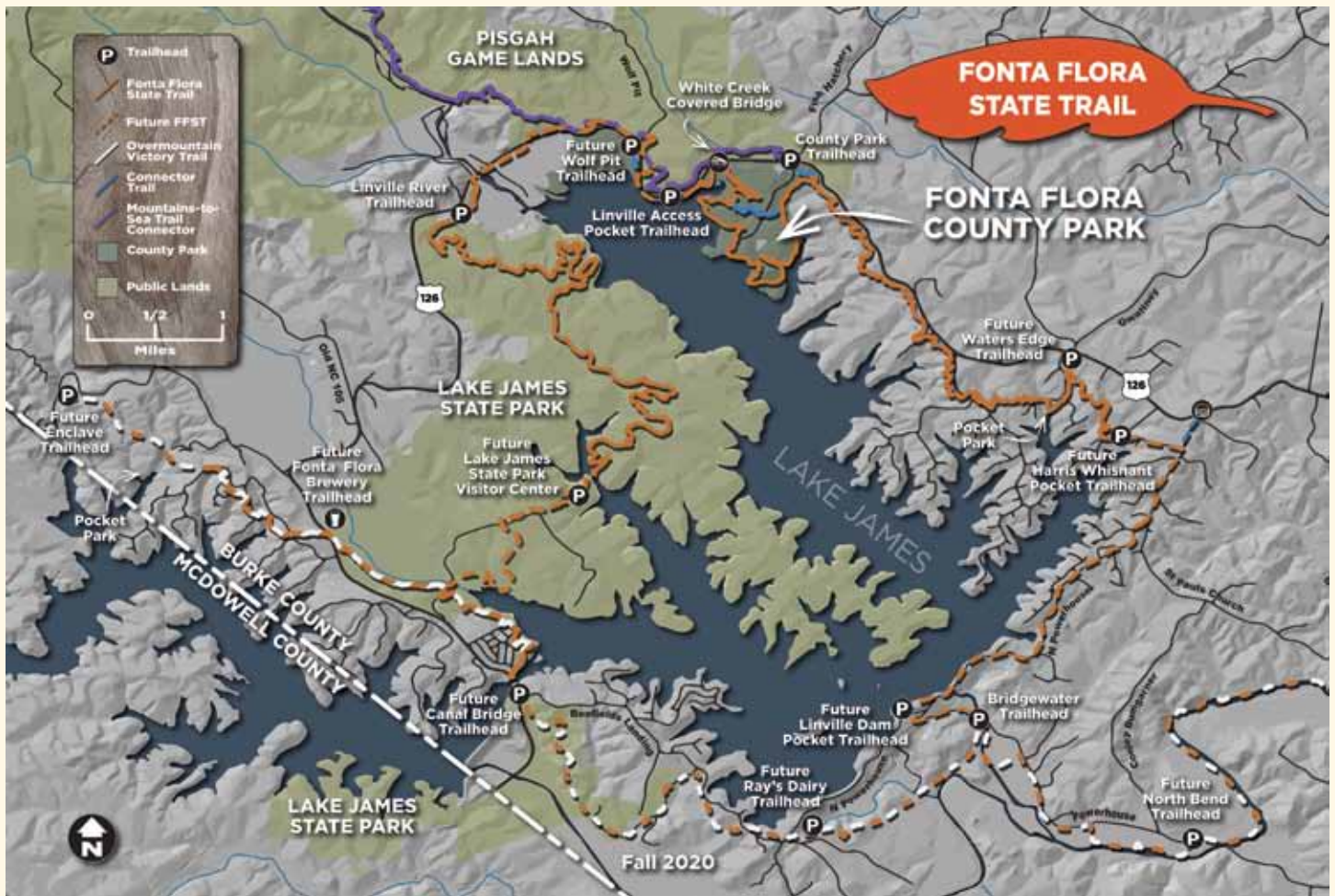
formation of the Friends of the Fonta Flora State Trail, Inc. (F3ST). The event was a great success with close to 100 people in attendance, including state and local officials, businesses, conservation groups and enthusiastic public supporters of the trail.

Since that event, F3ST hit the ground running. McDowell County generously “loaned” staff member Blair Melton to help get the new organization off the ground. With the help of Shane Prisby from Burke County, Heather Cotton with the City of Marion, McDowell County

Economic Development Director Charles Abernathy and Josh Harrold, Town Manager for the town of Black Mountain – the team developed bylaws and put together the foundational strategy for an effective 501(3)(c) organization. In the spring of this year, the world was unfortunately turned on its head due to COVID-19, but the team was able to adjust and move forward.

F3ST now has its 501(3)(c) status and a fully formed Board of Directors with equal representation of the 9 jurisdictions. The Board of Directors is composed of five representatives

from each of the three counties (3 local government representative, a trails representative, and an economic development representative) plus designated seats for the Friends of Lake James State Park, Inc. the Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina, Inc. the YMCA of Western North Carolina, NC State Parks and a member from the WNC Bridge Foundation. This board is supported by an Advisory Council of 20 members made up of employees and volunteers from the various stakeholder groups and local governments working to get the trail on the ground.



FRIENDS OF LAKE JAMES STATE PARK

Friends of Fonta Flora Board of Directors

County	Local Government	Local Business	Local Organizations
Burke	Burke County	Jonnie Carswell	Chairmen Commissioner
	City of Morganton	Butch McSwain	Councilmen
	Town of Glen Alpine	Bob Benfield	Mayor
	Trails Economic	Beth Heile Ed Phillips	Founder of Friends of the Valdese Rec C.E.O of Burke Co Tourism
McDowell	McDowell County	David Walker	Chairmen Commissioner
	City of Marion	Woody Ayers	Councilmen
	Town of Old Fort	Jerome Effler	Aldermen
	Trails Economic	Steve Pierce Steve Bush	President of the McDowell Trails Association Director McDowell Chamber of Commerce
Buncombe	Buncombe County	Carol Peterson	Parks, Greenways, and Rec Advisory Board
	City of Asheville	Gwen Wisler	Vice Mayor
	Town of Black Mountain	Larry Harris	Councilmen
	Trails Economic	Jennifer Billstrom Eric Oelschlaeger	Velo Girls Ride/ Kitsbow Apparel Epsilon Inc
	Friends of Lake James	Judge Robert Hunter	Emeritus Board Member
	Foothills Conservancy of NC	Andrew Kota	Executive Director
	WNC YMCA	Tim Blenco	Chief Operating Officer
	Healthcare Foundation	Meg White	Senior Programs Officer
	North Carolina State Parks	Smith Raynor	State Trails Planner



LJSP TRAILS



CATAWBA RIVER AREA:

- Fishing Pier Trail (0.3 mile, easy)
- Fox Den Loop Trail (2.25 miles, moderate)
- Lake Channel Overlook Trail (1.5 miles, moderate)
- Sandy Cliff Overlook Trail (0.5 mile, easy)

PADDY'S CREEK AREA:

- Holly Discovery Trail (0.75 mile, easy)
- Mill's Creek Trail (3.6 miles, moderate)
- Overmountain Victory Trail (2.0 mile, moderate)
- Paddy's Creek Trail (2.0 miles, moderate)
- Tindo beginners' mountain bike trail (4.0 miles)
- Wimba intermediate mountain bike trail (11.25 miles)

PARK GENERAL INFO

- Gate hours for November are 7 a.m. until 8 p.m and for December are 7 a.m. until 7 p.m.
- At the time of this writing, the swimming area at Paddy's Creek remains closed. Concessions and canoe/kayak rentals are suspended.
- The Paddy's Creek Area office and gift shop is open everyday, from 9 a.m. until 5:30 p.m.
- The Catawba River Area office and gift shop is open Monday - Friday, from 8 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. and is closed Saturdays and Sundays.

FRIENDS OF LAKE JAMES STATE PARK

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Do you have an interest in Lake James State Park? Whether you enjoy hiking the trails, swimming at the beach or just picnicking with your family, there is some part of the park for everyone.

Join the Friends of Lake James State Park group and learn about all the opportunities to help make the park a better place for everyone to enjoy. The Friends of Lake James State Park focus on working together to help Lake James State Park meet its mission of providing opportunities for public enjoyment and education while still protecting the natural beauty and historic integrity of the State Park.

There are a variety of opportunities to get involved from trail work days, to volunteering at RiverFest and other festivals. Become a member of Friends of Lake James State Park, and know that you are helping to preserve the natural beauty and historic resources of Lake James for generations to come.

FRIENDS CONTRIBUTIONS

The Friends of Lake James State Park is proud to support the hardworking staff at Lake James State Park and contribute wherever we can to help improve park operations and offer new recreational opportunities to visitors. If you think these efforts are meaningful, please consider joining our group using the form at the bottom of this page.

- Boat Camping Project; partially funded, purchased equipment including rebar driver and auger
- Stand-up Paddleboards; purchased two for rental fleet and one for lifeguard use
- Funded instructor for Waterfront Safety training for lifeguards
- Linville Overlook picnic area
- Assisted with Overmountain Victory Trail 2 construction
- Holly Discovery Trail; partially funded and dedicated, annual funding for upkeep
- Park of the Year celebration
- Sponsored night rides on mountain bike trails
- RiverFest Sponsor

HOW TO JOIN THE FRIENDS OF LAKE JAMES STATE PARK GROUP

Become a member of Friends of Lake James State Park, and know that you are helping to preserve the natural beauty and historic resources of Lake James for generations to come.

For more information please visit www.lakejamesstatepark.org or email info@lakejamesstatepark.org.

FRIENDS OF LAKE JAMES STATE PARK - MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Be a Friend of Lake James State Park

Select class of annual membership:

- Individual \$10
- Family \$25
- Corporate \$50
- Patron/Industry \$100 - \$999 \$_____
- Lifetime \$1000 (or more) \$_____

I would like to be contacted about volunteer opportunities with the Friends of Lake James State Park

Where did you hear about us? _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

Phone _____

**Return to:
Friends of Lake James State Park, Inc.
P.O. Box 1327
Nebo, NC 28761**

Friends of Lake James State Park, Inc. is a registered 501(c)3 charitable organization. Receipt of membership will be supplied upon request.