

NC Mountains-to-Sea Trail through Orange County

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Mountains-to-Sea Trail?

The Mountains-to-Sea Trail (MST) is a 1,000-mile trail that will traverse the state from the Great Smoky Mountains in western North Carolina to Jockey's Ridge State Park on the Outer Banks. Partners across the state are helping to plan and build the trail that will link communities and serve as the backbone of a growing system of land and water trails in North Carolina.

In 2000 the NC General Assembly authorized the MST as unit of the North Carolina Parks System.

A map showing the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail across North Carolina is available at:

http://orangecountync.gov/deapr/nat_cul_resources/mst.asp

How many miles of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail are finished?

About 530 miles of dedicated trail — roughly half the planned length— has been completed to date and is open for hiking. A series of interim roadway connectors (bicycle routes and back roads) have been identified by the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail organization that knit together the completed sections of the MST across the state.

Some examples of completed trail in this area include the following:

- In Durham and Wake counties there are 60 miles of completed trail around Falls Lake
- In Alamance County there are 10 miles of the trail open or under construction, including Swepsonville River Park and a new trail segment at Glencoe
- Raleigh recently opened the first 6.5 miles of what will soon be a 28-mile Neuse River greenway trail and part of the NC Mountains-to-Sea Trail

Where will the trail go through Orange County?

The MST planning corridor through Orange County (from west to east) begins at the Haw River in the far southwest corner of the county, then parallels Cane Creek to the northeast through OWASA's Cane Creek Reservoir lands, then further northeast through the Seven Mile Creek Preserve and Occonechee Mountain State Natural Area. From Occonechee Mountain the trail will follow the Eno River along Hillsborough's Riverwalk and through land owned by Classical American Homes Preservation Trust and Eno River State Park into Durham County.

A map of the MST planning corridor across Orange County is available at:

http://orangecountync.gov/deapr/nat_cul_resources/mst.asp

How was the route chosen?

From 2005-2007, the NC Division of Parks and Recreation held stakeholder meetings to identify a suitable MST planning corridor through Alamance, Orange and Durham counties. Trail planners began by identifying existing trails on public lands and connected them to key natural features across the region. The result of that effort was a MST Trail Planning Corridor for consideration by local governments. The Orange County Board of Commissioners endorsed the MST Planning Corridor in April 2010 following review by advisory boards (Intergovernmental Parks Work Group, Parks and Recreation Council, Commission for the Environment) and town boards of Hillsborough, Chapel Hill and Carrboro.

Attachment 7

County staff are working in collaboration with the State Trails Program (a section of the NC Division of Parks and Recreation), Eno River State Park, the Town of Hillsborough, the Friends of Mountains-to-Sea Trail (FMST), and others to develop specific plans for the MST in Orange County—thereby transitioning the trail planning corridor to an actual “trail alignment.” The initial focus has been on determining the trail alignment through the County’s Seven Mile Creek Preserve and linking the Preserve with Occoneechee Mountain and the Hillsborough Riverwalk. A secondary focus is working with the Orange Water and Sewer Authority (OWASA) to identify a potential trail alignment through OWASA’s Cane Creek Reservoir lands in the southwestern part of the county, and then linking the Reservoir lands with the Alamance County section of the MST along the Haw River.

Are there any sections of the MST already completed and open in Orange County?

Yes. Sections of the MST are open in Hillsborough within River Park and Gold Park. East of Hillsborough, there are designated sections of the MST open in Eno River State Park. A section of the MST was also recently completed (although not yet dedicated) east of the Historic Occoneechee Speedway Trail on lands owned by Classical American Homes Preservation Trust.

Will the trail be on public or private property?

Several initial sections of the MST in Orange County will be constructed on public land, including Eno River State Park, Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area, Hillsborough’s Riverwalk, and Orange County’s Seven Mile Creek Preserve. Other sections may be on privately-owned land where the owner has granted a trail easement. For example, a section of MST near Hillsborough was constructed on a trail easement granted by Classical American Homes Preservation Trust to State of North Carolina.

Will there be any condemnation (or “taking”) of private land for the trail?

No. All lands for the future MST in Orange County will be acquired through voluntary means.

Who will build the trail?

In Orange County, the MST will be planned, constructed, managed and maintain by partnerships involving local governments, land trusts, private landowners, local citizens, the NC Division of Parks and Recreation, and Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail.

Overall, the MST is an official part of the State Parks system, however due to its statewide expanse, many segments of the trail are managed by different agencies and local governments. Local communities help connect the trail through links to greenways and urban trails. Land trusts and other interested parties help acquire land using a combination of public and private funds. The Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail organization provides volunteers, public support, and serves as a clearinghouse for trail information.

How is the trail marked?

The blaze designating the Mountains-to-Sea Trail is a white circle approximately three inches in diameter. This mark is sometimes used in conjunction with other trail blazes if the trails overlap.

What will I see along the route?

The MST will pass through a variety of landscapes in Orange County. Depending on the section of the trail, you may see rolling Piedmont farms, weathered tobacco barns, the Hillsborough historic district, a former textile village, country churches, flowing streams, hardwood and pine forests, and lake views.

Attachment 7

Who will use the trail? Will it be for hikers only, or will it be open for biking and horseback riding?

The MST is intended primarily for backcountry hiking, but the landowner or land management agency responsible for a particular section of trail will decide on the types of uses that are allowed. The vast majority of the MST will be natural surface trail with only a three-foot-wide tread and to 6-8 feet of clearance through forested areas. In some places, the MST will pass through urban areas (including Hillsborough) where the trail is a paved greenway used by walkers, runners, cyclists, strollers and people in wheelchairs.

How will people access the trail?

There will be legal, managed access points along the trail, which will provide parking and trail information. Thus far there are formal access points in Eno River State Park and at River Park (downtown Hillsborough), Gold Park (West Hillsborough), and Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area. Another access point will be developed at Seven Mile Creek Preserve (adjacent to historic Moorefields). Additional locations in southwestern Orange County will be identified and secured as the actual trail route (the MST “trail alignment”) is determined through that area.

How can I learn more about the Mountains-to-Sea Trail in Orange County and across the state?

- Orange County Dept. of Environment, Agriculture, Parks and Recreation
Rich Shaw, Land Conservation Manager
rshaw@co.orange.nc.us or 919-245-2514
http://orangecountync.gov/deapr/nat_cul_resources/mst.asp
- N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation – State Trails Program
Darrell McBane, State Trails Program Manager
darrell.mcbane@ncdenr.gov or 919-707-9315
http://www.ncparks.gov/About/trails_mst.php
- Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail
Kate Dixon, Executive Director
kdixon@ncmst.org or 919-698-9024
<http://www.ncmst.org/>

How can I find the trail?

For information on the Mountains-To-Sea State Trail, please see the NC Division of Parks and Recreation website at http://www.ncparks.gov/About/trails_mst.php

The Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail website (<http://www.ncmst.org/>) has general descriptions of trail sections with mileage and information about available guidebooks.

When will the entire Mountains-to-Sea Trail be completed?

The Mountains-to-Sea Trail remains a work in progress. With the help of more volunteers, the pace of progress has picked up in recent years. More than 24 miles were completed in 2009. Land along some sections of the trail corridor remains privately owned, and acquisition or easements will be needed to extend the trail. The goal is a 1,000-mile trail from Clingmans Dome to Jockey’s Ridge.

Attachment 7

How can I get involved?

- An online survey is being developed and will be available in late August 2012 at: http://orangecountync.gov/deapr/nat_cul_resources/mst.asp
- You can volunteer to build trail by contacting the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail at <http://www.ncmst.org/> or contact Rich Shaw, Land Conservation Manager with Orange County DEAPR at <rshaw@orangecountync.gov>
- You can sign up for the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail (FMST) e-mail newsletter to keep informed of progress and opportunities to get involved. You can also become a member of the FMST—a non-profit organization that promotes the trail, coordinates trail building activities and serves as a clearinghouse for information.