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Local Trails Update

Thermal Belt Rail Trail

The Rail Trail is primed for a major expansion. More than 5 miles of new trail is expected now that the town of Forest City has acquired a 99-year lease on that extension. A master plan is underway for the more than 13-mile corridor. That plan will produce costs estimates for construction on the new trail and potential improvements to the existing trail. The current paved section will be widened and connect to the extension into Forest City. Plans are to make all paved sections 12-foot wide where feasible.

As part of the planning process, a [community survey](#) is being done to gather input about the trails plans. If you have not had a chance to fill one out, it is still open and can be found [at this link](#).

Purple Martin Greenway

The Purple Martin Greenway, the Town of Rutherfordton's first official greenway, is about to expand! The current 1 mile, 10-foot wide, paved greenway is heading north with Phase 2. This phase will double the trail's length and take the trail to Industrial Road.



Phase 2 is expected to open later this month. Planning for Phase 3 which will get the trail close to Charlotte Road, has already begun. Eventually, the trail will continue north near downtown and ultimately, connect to the Thermal Belt Rail Trail. See a map of the current trail and the next phases [at this link](#).

Isothermal Community College Trails

Trail wide updates including new trail maps and signage are scheduled for late May. New, easier to see trail markers and small trail maps installed at each intersection will make the ICC trails easier to navigate for all trail users.

Dittmer-Watts Nature Trail Park

New signage has been installed throughout the Dittmer-Watts trail system. The trails are now better marked and the signs now include mileage for each trail on the 3 mile looped trail system.



Buffalo Creek Park

The section of the Buffalo Creek Park Loop Trail damaged by fire suppression efforts was repaired back in January. The repairs, done by Trail Dynamics, were completed ahead of schedule and under budget.

An additional 1,300 acres of conservation land will be transferred to Lake Lure within the next few months, bringing Buffalo Creek Park to 1,500 acres with 15 miles of trail planned (see Weed Patch Mountain Trail below).

There are future plans in place to improve and expand the public parking for Buffalo Creek Park. The Town of Lake Lure and Chimney Rock State Park are jointly working on those parking plans.

Trail to Eagle Rock (Weed Patch Mountain Trail)

The construction on the trail continues. When completed the trail will be 8.5 miles long starting at the top of the Buffalo Creek Park Loop Trail with the last 1.5 miles ending in Chimney Rock State Park. There will be a rugged quarter mile long spur trail off of the main trail that will lead through a cave to the base of Eagle Rock. This spur trail will allow access for climbers to the area. Projected opening for this trail is the fall 2017.

Young's Mountain

Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy, Rutherford County and partners have been working to acquire land and build trails in the Young's Mountain Area.

The first and foremost concern for CMLC is land conservation, and this area is a delicate habitat for the endangered green salamander. CMLC has been working with conservation partners to protect the green salamanders while also working to gain access for people to use and connect with the lands. The project has been approved by the NC Wildlife Resource Commission to move forward and is waiting on final approval. Trail construction could begin as early as mid-summer.

Chimney Rock State Park - Skyline Trail

The Skyline Trail at Chimney Rock State Park will once again get people to the top of Hickory Nut Falls! A new route has been laid out extending from Exclamation Point, past Peregrine's Rest to the top of the falls. Most of the trail construction is done with a few key additions pending. The more than one-mile trail is expected to open this fall.

Upper Hickory Nut Gorge - Little Bearwallow Falls and Trombatore Trails

CMLC's Little Bearwallow Trail is now complete. The trail ascends 1.1 miles to Little Bearwallow Falls, passes by Wildcat Rock at 1.6 miles, then ends at the summit of Little Bearwallow Mountain with a total distance of 2.8 miles. The project is funded for a 2 mile connector trail with



Bearwallow Mountain. The area must go through environmental review before construction begins in 2018.

The current Trombatore Trail starts at the Bearwallow Mountain trailhead and heads west and north to a open pasture. The next phase is to extend the trail to highway 74-A and ultimately to the Florence Preserve. The extension to 74-A is expected to happen in 2018.

To see a map of the current and proposed trails in the upper gorge open the printable [trail map at this link](#).

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