

September 23, 2016

Letter of Intent (Trails)

Environmental Enhancement Grant Program

The Chatham County Parks and Recreation Department, a local government agency, is submitting this Letter of Intent for a proposed trail construction project within the Lower Haw River State Natural Area located in Chatham County. This proposal is for the long-term EEG program area.

Chatham County is collaborating with NC State Parks and the non-profit Friends of Lower Haw River State Natural Area to develop a network of trails within this area of state-owned land. The Lower Haw River State Natural Area (Lower Haw) consists of about 1,100 acres owned by NC State Parks along both sides of the Haw River in Chatham County. It stretches from above US 15-501 near Bynum to below US 64 at the Jordan Lake State Recreation Area. A State Natural Area is a unit within the state park system that focuses on conservation of special places. This section of river in Chatham County is designated as Nationally Significant by the NC Natural Heritage Program for rare aquatic species and their habitats, and the riverbank lands are designated as Statewide Significant for natural areas. State Parks does not have sufficient funds or staff to provide improvements such as trails, bridges, or interpretative signs in the Lower Haw, so Chatham County is collaborating with State Parks and non-profit organizations to seek grant funding.

Currently there are no official state park trails or bridges over tributaries that feed into the Lower Haw. What exists now are unofficial footpaths created by people walking along the river, and makeshift stream crossings. This proposal is to manage usage to mitigate potential damage to this ecosystem, by building designated trails in environmentally sustainable locations to guide people away from more sensitive habitat areas, building pedestrian bridges over streams to avoid erosion to streambanks and damage to streambeds from makeshift crossings, and installing signage that informs the public of appropriate uses and educates them about what makes this special place worth conserving.

This proposal is aligned with several of EEG program goals:

- EEG gives geographic preference to projects in the Cape Fear River Basin. The Haw River is not only in the Cape Fear River Basin, it joins with the Deep River to form the Cape Fear River.
- EEG's goal of protection of impaired surface waters, since the Haw River is considered impaired. Both the Haw River, and Jordan Lake formed by the Haw River, are a major source of drinking water.
- EEG's goal of conservation and protection of environmentally significant natural areas, since the Lower Haw River State Natural Area is both Nationally Significant and Statewide Significant.
- EEG's long-term objective for protection of natural areas through riparian buffers or greenways, by building an environmentally sustainable trail network and installing bridges over stream crossings to prevent erosion and protect water quality.

The request is for \$500,000 for up to 14 miles of trail construction and 2 pedestrian bridges, based on cost estimates of \$5 per linear foot for single use natural surface trail construction and \$300 per square foot for bridges of varying lengths that are six feet wide. The project within the Lower Haw may have up to 6 pedestrian bridges over stream crossings and approximately 5-7 miles of trails along each side of the river. However, this project could still move forward with a partial grant to fund fewer miles and/or bridges. Chatham County has also applied for a Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grant of \$100,000 with the county providing a 25% cash match for bridge construction over Pokeberry Creek and approximately one mile of trail. Friends of Lower Haw River State Natural Area is also applying for grants from foundations.

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