

# Haw River Trail in Chatham County



Chatham County Board of Commissioners Meeting 09/20/2021  
Presented By Gretchen Smith, President  
Friends of Lower Haw River State Natural Area

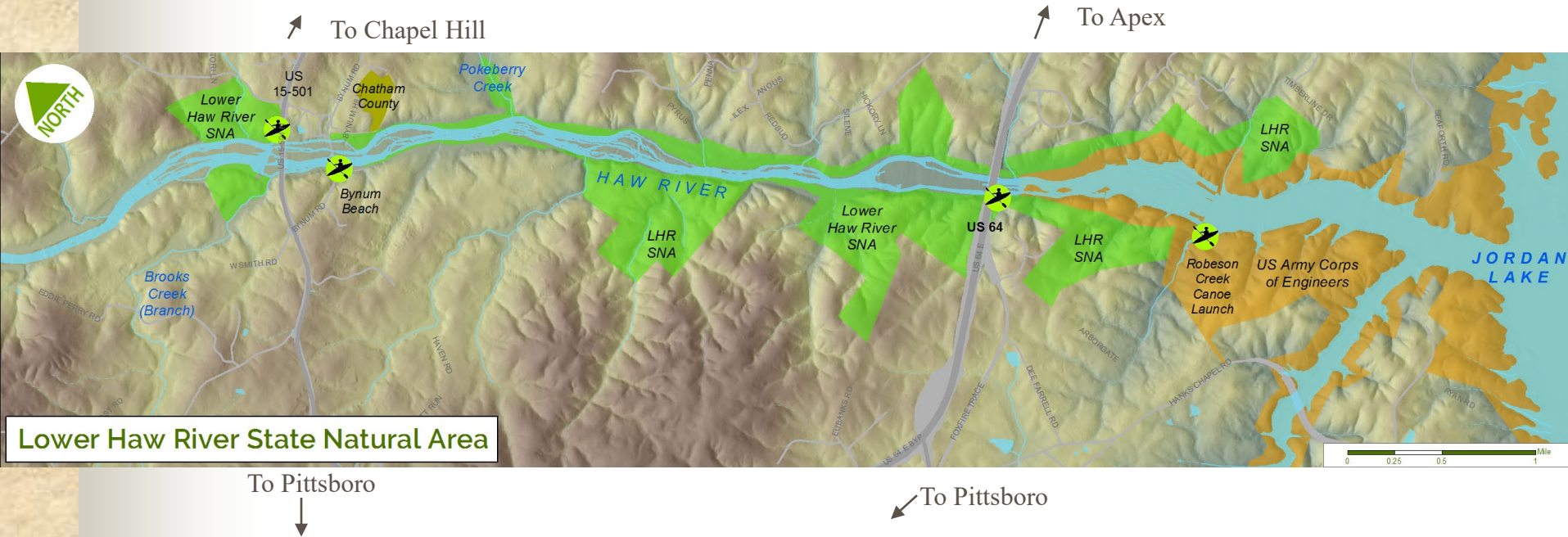


# About Friends of Lower Haw

- Local chapter of nonprofit Friends of State Parks
- All volunteer chapter, no paid staff
- Formed in 2016 to support Lower Haw River State Natural Area owned by State Parks
- Provide stewardship, education, and advocacy



# Lower Haw River State Natural Area



- Added to State Parks system in 2004, expanded in 2006 and 2007
- Over 1,025 acres along both sides of Haw River in Chatham County
- Stretches above US 15-501 near Bynum to below US 64 at Jordan Lake
- Undeveloped, but heavily used, unsustainable informal footpaths and paddle sites



# Using “Conservation Through Recreation” Strategy with the Haw River Trail

Allows the public to explore and appreciate the Haw River while helping to conserve and protect this important natural and scenic resource.



## Why Focus on the Haw River?

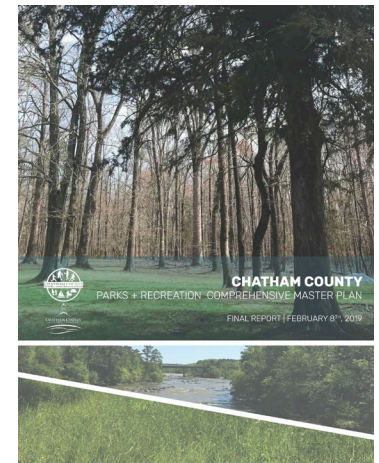
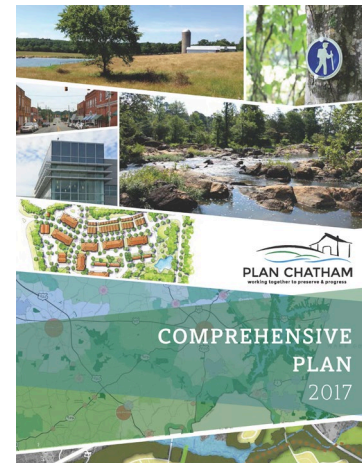
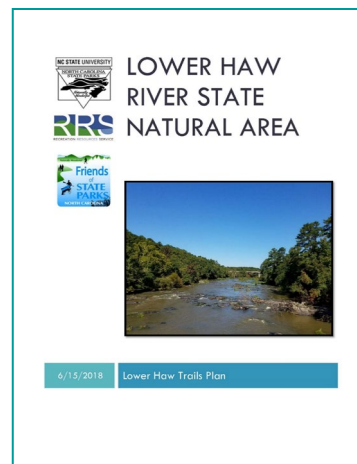
- Already have 1,000+ acres of public land along the Haw River owned by State Parks.
- Already have some public access owned or managed by Chatham County Parks & Recreation.
- Potential to connect to existing network of land & paddle trails in Alamance County to create regional network.
- Haw subject to major residential development pressures, greater than other rivers in Chatham.





# Why Focus on the Haw River?

- Existing Haw River Trail Partnership MOU signed by Chatham County & Town of Pittsboro.
- Lower Haw Trails Master Plan exists for Lower Haw River State Natural Area.
- Master Plan exists to transform Earl Thompson Park into nature park adjacent to Lower Haw River State Natural Area.
- Haw River corridor is high priority in Comprehensive Plan and Parks & Recreation Master Plan.





Rockingham

Haw River Trail Partnership MOU:  
Proposed multi-use trail and  
natural resource preservation  
effort by regional governments.

Haw River  
State Park

Alamance

Guilford

Orange

Jordan Lake State  
Recreation Area

Chatham

**Legend**



Trailhead



Open Section of Trail



Trail in Development



Planned Trail Corridor

Haw River Trail Corridor

Haw River State Park to Jordan Lake State Recreation Area



# Haw River Trail Successes in Alamance County

## Resources

- Haw River Trail Coordinator position

## Conservation

- 475 acres conserved
- 60+ trail easements
- 32,000 linear ft Haw River conserved
- 15,000 linear ft perennial streams conserved

## Recreation

- 14 sustainable paddle accesses
- 40+ miles of paddle trail (complete!)
- 20+ miles of land trail built so far
- 3 nature parks & 1 natural area
- 470,000 visitors to Haw River Trail in FY19-20
- Top tourism draw for \$211 million in tourism spending in 2019

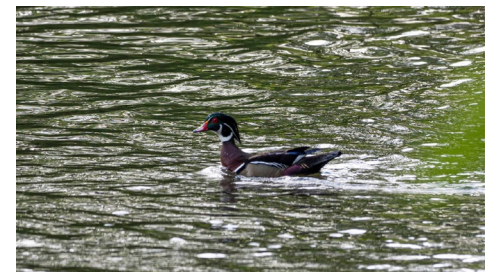
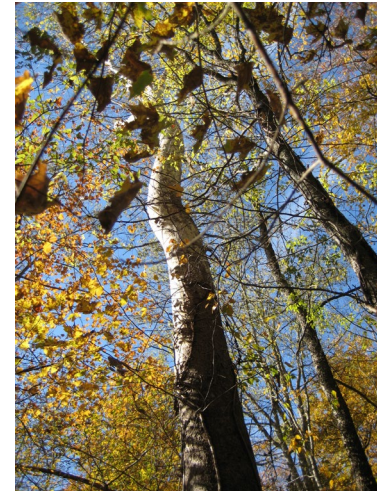


**Conservation in Alamance County all done with voluntary cooperation of willing landowners and local governments!**



# Chatham Has a Window of Opportunity!

- Windfall funds from American Rescue Plan (ARP)
- Strong revenue from Article 46 Sales Tax
- Bonds refinancing existing debt increases county's debt capacity
- Formation of Haw River Trail Steering Committee





## Window of Opportunity: American Rescue Plan

- \$14+ million windfall from American Rescue Plan (ARP).
- Once in a lifetime opportunity to invest in transformational projects that benefit our community.
- Spend money on bold new projects that are difficult to fund under normal circumstances.
- Local governments have latitude in deciding what to fund.
- Randolph County Commissioners will spend \$1 million of their county's ARP funds on land & paddle trails for tourism & public health.





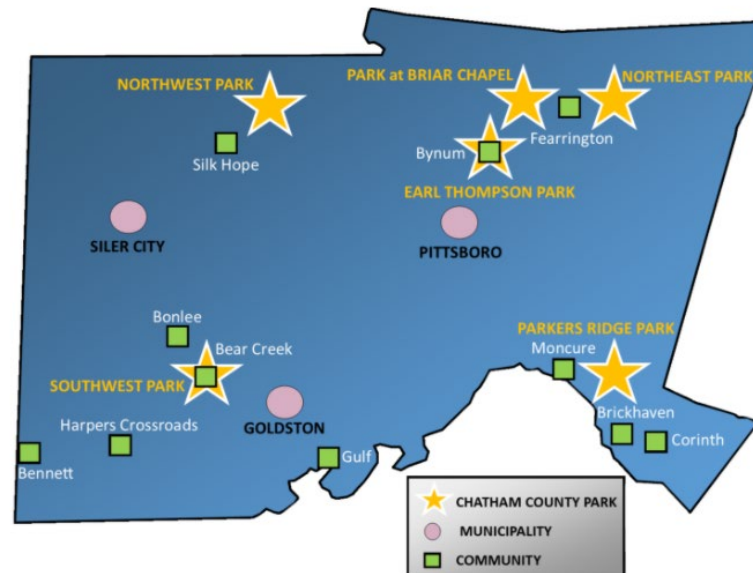
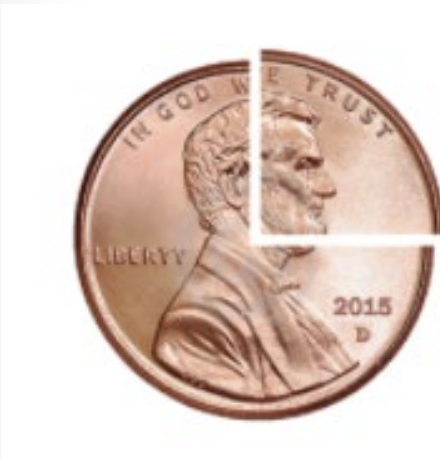


## Justification for Use of ARP Funds for Trails

- Trails & trail bridges are infrastructure providing stormwater management, water quality, and flood resiliency benefits.
- Trails benefit the local economy as tourism assets:
  - Every \$1.00 spent on trail construction generates \$1.72 annually from local business revenue, sales tax revenue, and benefits related to health & transportation.
  - Alamance County's Haw River Trail & Cedarock Park are top 2 tourism draws for Alamance's \$211 million in tourism spending for 2019 (compare to Chatham's \$38 million).
- Trails benefit physical & mental health for communities.
- Need to address adverse effects on Lower Haw River State Natural Area from increased use during the pandemic by:
  - Creating sustainable trail infrastructure to support current & future use with minimal effects to natural areas.
  - Expanding sustainable trail infrastructure along the Haw River corridor to spread out the increasing visitation from population growth.

# Window of Opportunity: Article 46 Sales Tax

- \$1.6 million in revenue estimated for this fiscal year.
- Parks & Recreation is one of the 4 categories for allocation.
- New revenue source for bold investment in trails & river access for economic, environment, and public health benefits.





# Window of Opportunity: Bonds

- County is refinancing for more favorable terms that lower cost of debt, improves county's debt capacity.
- Increased debt capacity provides opportunity to pursue parks, trails, and open space bonds successfully used by other counties & municipalities.



\$18.8 million



\$48 million



\$21.5 million



\$18 million



\$20 million



\$13 million



\$120 million

# Window of Opportunity: Haw River Trail Steering Committee

- Formed this spring by Friends of Lower Haw & Chatham County government.
- Partnership with stakeholders supportive of land & paddle trails in Haw River corridor who can help make it happen.





# Goal of Haw River Trail Steering Committee

- To develop the Haw River Trail network of land and paddle trails in Chatham County.





# Objectives of Haw River Trail Steering Committee

- Identify projects for developing the Haw River Trail (HRT).
- Develop a paddle trail plan that identifies key access points and includes safety planning.
- Develop a land trail plan that identifies desirable trail locations and access points.
- Secure diversified, sustainable funding sources.
- Acquire land and easements.
- Natural resource preservation and protection along the HRT.
- Implement development and management of the HRT.
- Coordinate connections with trail systems in our region, including but not limited to the HRT in Alamance County.
- Connect the public to nature through the HRT.





## Measurements for Haw River Trail Steering Committee

- Amount of funding obtained.
- Number of miles of land trail built.
- Number of paddle access sites built and/or restored.
- Number of linear feet of riverbank conserved through land acquisitions or easements.
- Number of linear feet of streambank restored.
- Amount of associated land conserved.
- Amount of visitation to the HRT (metric: car and trail counters are used at State Parks).

# To develop the Haw River Trail in Chatham County, we need:

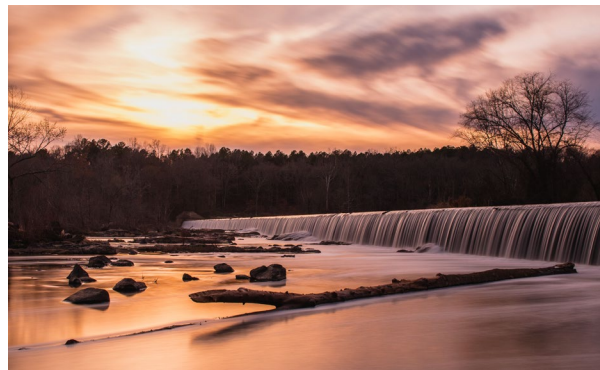
- Prioritization by local governments and State Parks.
- Partnerships committed to making things happen.
- Diversified sustainable funding that does not depend exclusively on grants.
- Voluntary land acquisition and easements.





# Seize this window of opportunity!

- Go big
- Be bold
- Be transformative
- Invest in a showcase Haw River Trail for Chatham County



# Thank You!

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*Friends of*

**LOWER HAW RIVER**

*State Natural Area*