Mountains-to-Sea Trail

50th Anniversary

Community Toolkit

2027 Year-Long Celebration

We invite you to:

1. Help raise awareness about the MST in your area
2. Bring people together on the trail or in your community
3. Have fun and be creative as we celebrate the MST in 2027!

MountainsToSeaTrail.org

On September 9, 1977, fifty years ago, Howard N. Lee, then the NC Secretary of Natural Resources and Community Development, made an audacious speech at a national trails meeting in Lake Junaluska. Lee proposed that:

"North Carolina should build a state trail from the mountains to the coast, a trail leading through communities as well as natural areas... a trail that would give North Carolinians and national visitors a real feel for the sights, sounds and people of this state. It would be a trail that could help -- like the first primitive trails -- bring us together - help us know a little more about ourselves and how the other person lives."

Trail enthusiasts across the state then began the exciting and challenging process of building a trail from the mountains to the sea.

Now fifty years later, the dream of walking across the state on the Mountains-to-Sea Trail (MST) is a reality. More than 725 miles of trail are on the ground, with the route using back road connections where the trail has not yet been built to stitch together a route of 1,175 miles from Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Jockey's Ridge State Park on the Outer Banks.

People take short walks close to home, day hikes with their families, overnight backpacking trips with friends, and even cross-state treks, which become adventures of a lifetime.

In keeping with the spirit of the original vision for the MST, the trail today is not purely a wilderness trail. By design, the trail connects the people, communities and culture of North Carolina in addition to our state's stunning natural beauty.

The Mountains-to-Sea Trail is as diverse as North Carolina. The trail passes by mountain vistas, rolling meadows, picture postcard colonial towns, weathered tobacco barns, old textile villages, country churches, rushing mountain streams, coastal swamps, hardwood and pine forests, lighthouses, sand dunes, miles of seashore, and friendly people. The path also connects us with our neighbors and helps us know a little more about those who call North Carolina home.

The MST is so much more than just a simple footpath — it is a growing and robust community of dreamers, doers, hikers, trail maintainers and trail supporters. Friends of the MST is the only nonprofit focused solely on constructing new trail, maintaining what is currently on the ground, advocating for the trail and providing information for people to safely explore the trail.

We invite you to join that community and help us celebrate 50 years of the MST in 2027. For the last 50 years, North Carolinians from all backgrounds have dedicated themselves to making the dream of the MST become a reality. **In 2027, we are celebrating the Golden Anniversary of the MST, and we encourage you to become a part of the movement!**

The MST is an integral part of our communities, providing recreation and respite, a place to exercise and improve mental health, routes for human powered transportation and environmental stewardship, and economic development. So much to celebrate!

From the Great Smokies to the Outer Banks, we welcome all communities and partners to be a part of the 50th anniversary year. Friends of the MST is coordinating the year-long celebration of where we've been and most excitingly, what the next 50 years will unveil as there is still trail to build, hiker services to provide and awareness to raise. **The MST is North Carolina's flagship state trail, and your community's involvement in the 50th is just the start of what we can build together!** The trail simply would not exist without local support from the special communities that the MST passes through.

From leading a group hike at sunset or hosting an MST hiker workshop at a local outfitter, to coordinating with local media to promote the trail or bringing schoolkids out to learn about plants and wildlife, we encourage communities to promote the trail and plan a unique celebration that reflects what makes each part of the MST so special. With an overabundance of diversity across the state, there are limitless ways to get involved. This toolkit should help get your juices flowing!

Our staff is eager to help your community celebrate the 50th anniversary with promotions and events that will attract folks from near and far to visit your section of the MST.

Our goals for the 50th anniversary are pretty straightforward. We want to boost the MST's profile and bring new people onto the trail and into the trail community. And you can help!

Friends of the MST has set a goal to connect with 5,000 new trail users statewide. In your region, you can help us meet that ambitious goal by raising awareness of the MST locally and by doing fun and creative public engagement to bring people together on the trail or in the community to learn about the MST and what we do.

As you read this toolkit, think about ways you can participate and know that our staff is here to help, and we look forward to partnering and making this a year to remember on the trail.

Simple Ways to Participate

While there are countless ways to be a part of the MST's 50th anniversary celebration, this toolkit contains ideas to engage the public and promote the trail in your communities.

At the most basic level, we encourage you to promote the MST 50th anniversary on your social media channels or other public platforms. We've created custom samples for your part of the MST that can be found online to download. See additional materials at the end for more info.

As you post and promote the MST, please be sure to tag us on Instagram @mountainstoseatrail, Facebook @Mountains-To-Sea Trail or LinkedIn @Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail.

Want to engage in a deeper, more meaningful way?

Host an organized event on the MST or in your community:

- Coordinate a guided hike on the trail.
- Create a scavenger hunt on the MST.
- Introduce the MST Junior Explorer program to kids for a family-friendly idea.
- Trivia night at a local brewery or pub.
- Find many more event ideas, including an event checklist, in the additional materials.

Host an MST booth at one of your local festivals, farmers markets or other community events:

- We can coordinate getting you a booth kit with all the materials you need and even help find a volunteer to host the booth if needed.
- Contact Sherri Seagroves at Friends of the MST (sseagroves@mountainstoseatrail.org) to coordinate details.

Host an event or speaker where guests can learn more about the MST:

- Movie night at your local theater, library or community center with "I Am the MST," a one-hour documentary (in four parts) that can be accessed on our website. Consider adding a Friends of the MST staff member or area volunteer for Q&A after.
- Guest speaker (or panel of speakers) from Friends of the MST staff, board or an active volunteer at your local library, park or a fun venue.
- Consider hosting the event where people already gather for events or socializing — meet people where they are!

Host a volunteer trail workday:

- We can coordinate with our area trail leaders to organize a volunteer workday on the trail to help with trail maintenance, litter pickup and more.

Want to go above and beyond to support the MST's 50th anniversary celebration?

Help raise money to support our work to build, maintain and promote the MST. Every dollar raised is important to our work and draws more people to the MST. Easy ideas include:

- A local shop or restaurant rounding up charges to donate the difference.
- A brewery night where $1/beer comes back to Friends of the MST.
- A special food sale where a portion of the proceeds are donated.
- A direct donation from your organization to support our work.
- You could even host a ticketed fundraising event in conjunction with us.

When can you participate?

The short answer is… all year round!

One date to rally around is the actual anniversary – **September 9**. We're planning a statewide signature event the weekend of September 9-12. Stay tuned for details and how to get involved.

At Friends of the MST, we plan to highlight different regions of the trail during their ideal hiking months, and we invite you to align your participation with those months if it makes sense with your schedule and calendar of events.

For your planning purposes, Friends of the MST is looking at the following monthly schedule:

- January through March (Southeastern NC and Outer Banks): Bladen, Pender, Onslow, Carteret, Craven, Hyde and Dare Counties. MST Segments 13-18.
- April through June (Foothills and Western Piedmont): Wilkes, Surry, Stokes, Forsyth and Guilford Counties. MST Segments 6-8.
- July through September (Mountains): Swain, Jackson, Haywood, Transylvania, Buncombe, Henderson, Yancey, McDowell, Burke, Avery, Caldwell, Watauga, Ashe and Alleghany Counties. MST Segments 1-5.
- October through December (Triangle and Coastal Plain): Alamance, Orange, Durham, Wake, Johnston, Sampson and Cumberland Counties. MST Segments 9-12.

We want to know when your events are so we can help promote and keep a record of them. You'll find forms on our 50th anniversary webpage to let us know when and where your events are being held and to report back afterward to let us know how they went.

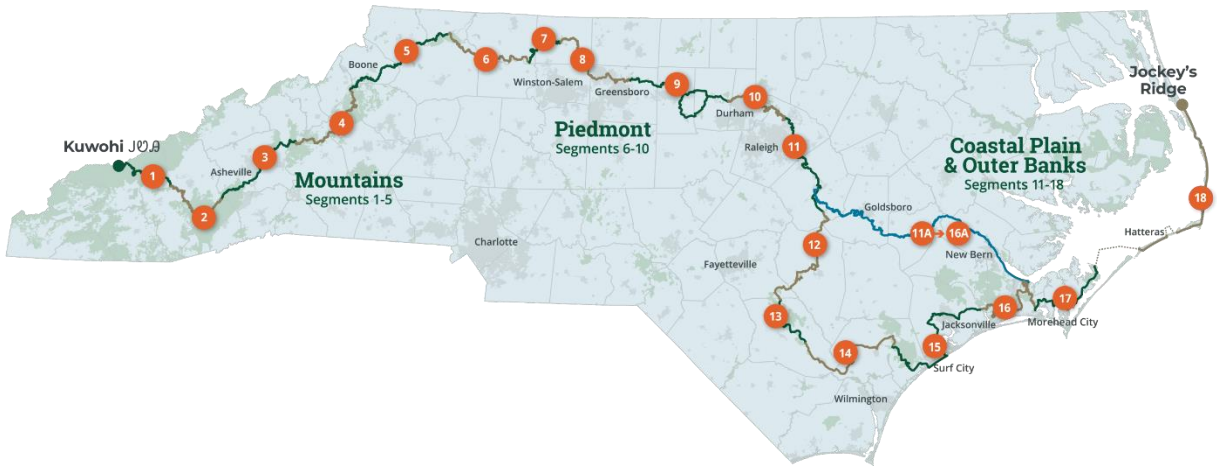
Additional Materials

Additional materials are available for download and review on our website at mountainstoseatrail.org/50years.

Additional materials include:

- 50th anniversary logos that you can use
- Social media sample posts
- Event ideas
- Event checklist
- Event reporting form
- Group hike waiver
- Calendar of celebratory days in 2027

For any additional questions, thoughts or ideas, please contact Betsy Brown, Associate Director with Friends of the MST, at bbrown@mountainstoseatrail.org.



Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail
3509 Haworth Drive, Suite 210, Raleigh, NC 27609 | 919.825.0297

Brent Laurenz, Executive Director | blaurenz@mountainstoseatrail.org
Betsy Brown, Associate Director | bbrown@mountainstoseatrail.org
Sherri Seagroves, Membership & Engagement Coordinator | sseagroves@mountainstoseatrail.org

50 YEARS FRIENDS OF THE Mountains-to-Sea Trail NORTH CAROLINA