



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ENO RIVER ASSOCIATION HELPS CELEBRATE THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF ENO RIVER STATE PARK

Half a Century of Conservation and Recreation

Durham, North Carolina - This week marks the 50th anniversary of the first parcel of land acquired for Eno River State Park, a linear park that stretches across 4,600 acres of northern Durham and Orange counties, North Carolina. With a proud history of conservation, education, and recreational opportunities, Eno River State Park is a haven for nature enthusiasts, hikers, families, and history buffs alike.

The Eno River Association, in partnership with the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation, is celebrating this anniversary with daily activities August 20 - August 27, a free raffle for all park visitors, commemorative merchandise, and a \$50,000 fundraising challenge.

"We are thrilled to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Eno River State Park," says Jessica Sheffield, Executive Director for the Eno River Association. "This milestone is a testament to the collective efforts of the dedicated staff, volunteers, and community partners of the Association and the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation who have worked tirelessly to grow and maintain the park's ecological integrity and share its wonders with the public."

Origins in Organizing

In the late 1960s, the wild, picturesque, and historic Eno River was threatened: the City of Durham planned to dam the river and create a drinking water reservoir for its growing population. Concerned about the city's plans, an informal group came together to raise awareness and stop the project from happening. On October 14, 1966, they formed the Association for the Preservation of the Eno River Valley, Inc (now known as the Eno River Association).

In addition to the traditional advocacy methods of engaging with government officials and media outlets, Association members scheduled hikes, canoe trips, and slide shows, created river maps, researched mill histories, and conducted wildlife inventories.

“Public awareness-building accompanied political action to put the plight of the Eno in the public eye. When you love something, you’ll fight for it. It was incredibly effective, and many of these activities are the same that we provide our community to build love of the Eno today,” shares Sheffield.

Seven years later, thanks to a cooperative effort between the City of Durham, Orange County, the State of North Carolina, the Nature Conservancy, and the Association, Eno River State Park was welcomed as part of the NC State Parks system. The park celebrates its birthday annually on the date of the first land acquisition, August 22, 1973.

50 Years of Growth

Since then, Eno River State Park has grown to more than 4,600 acres of protected natural areas, with much of that expansion driven by the Association’s land protection team. Five access areas – The Cabe Lands, Cole Mill, Few’s Ford, Pleasant Green, and The Pump Station – and numerous neighborhood entries provide access to over 36 miles of trails in this largely unspoiled river environment. Park staff and resources also support Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area, and by the end of 2023, Historic Occoneechee Speedway and the James M. Johnston Nature Preserve in Hillsborough.

Currently, the park welcomes over one million annual visitors, one of the top ten most frequently visited in the State Parks system. The park supports a diverse range of activities and experiences that captivate visitors year-round including hiking trails, historic sites, campsites, picnic shelters, and more. Located within the busy Triangle region, the Park serves as a natural sanctuary where visitors can connect with nature, just minutes from the I-85/I-40 corridor.

The park’s pristine landscapes boast miles of scenic trails meandering along the Eno River, providing breathtaking views of water features, lush forests, and diverse wildlife. These trails were built and are maintained by not only by park staff, but also by dedicated staff and volunteers from the Eno River Association and the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, a statewide nonprofit that supports the long-distance trail for hiking and backpacking that traverses North Carolina from the Great Smoky Mountains to the Outer Banks.

Nearly 50 volunteers have “adopted” trails to monitor and maintain, as part of the Association’s Trail Stewards program.

“Volunteers are critical to our mission and to the health of our trail systems. While park staff do a fantastic job maintaining the assets of Eno River State Park, volunteers, especially Eno Trail Stewards, are the eyes and ears of the 36 miles of trail throughout the park. These volunteers maintain the trails and ensure that they are safe and accessible to patrons.” says Kim Livingston, Director of Conservation and Stewardship at the Eno River Association.

The State Park’s master plan envisions a 6,700 acre park footprint that will provide recreation opportunities, vital water quality protection, wildlife habitat, and preservation of historic resources.

“We will be proud to continue to support the park for the next 50 years and beyond, by engaging our entire community as environmental stewards, and maintaining climate resilient natural areas for the health and wellbeing of all who depend on them,” says Sheffield.

Birthday Celebration Plans

The Park and the Association have planned a series of special activities from August 20 to the 27 to honor the birthday. Guests can hear the origin-story of the park, go off the trail on a wilderness hike, learn about bats, and more through a variety of free programs offered daily. A Ribbon Cutting and Open House on Friday, August 25 from 2-4pm for the park’s new Visitor Center. This much-anticipated addition to the park was finished earlier this year as part of a 2016 Connect NC Bond Program, which provided over \$75 million in funding for NC State Parks. This center will be a beacon for visitors to engage with the park’s rich history and envision its future. The Open House will feature remarks, music, educational activities, and birthday cake in honor of the 50th.

“Eno River State Park stands as a witness to those who came before us. People have lived and worked this land for centuries and I am honored to be here for this moment when the park celebrates the 50th anniversary of its founding. This designation in 1973 means that this beautiful river and its valley will be cared for, protected, and enjoyed for generations to come.” shares Kimberly Radewicz, Superintendent of Eno River State Park.

Fans of the park are being thanked with a free 50th Birthday Raffle organized by the Association. The raffle features over a dozen prizes from gorgeous art and collectables, to Eno River merchandise, to donations from park partners like the Friends of the Mountain-to-Sea Trail, Triangle Fly Fishers, and more. Those wanting to enter the raffle can get a free entry by finding the QR codes on signs at park entrances from August 20 through the 27th, or by donating through the Association’s website.

Finally, the Association and some of its longtime donors have challenged the community to raise \$50,000 in honor of the 50th. Donations will be matched dollar-for-dollar up to \$25,000 now through August 22nd. Funds will support the Eno River Association’s efforts to grow protected land within the river’s watershed, ensure climate resiliency of those lands, and provide educational opportunities to build the next generation of environmental stewards.

“For 50 years, the Eno River Association has been the Park’s official Friends organization, supporting its initial establishment and its continued expansion. We’re proud to help organize a celebration around this important milestone – to engage the community, thank park visitors, and inspire people to support the Park for the next 50 years!” adds Sheffield.

For more information about Eno River State Park’s 50th anniversary events and activities, and to make a donation in honor of the 50th, guests are encouraged to visit the State Park Visitor Center or the Association’s website, enoriver.org.

About the Eno River Association

The Eno River Association is an accredited land trust and watershed nonprofit founded in 1966 with a mission to protect the natural, historical, and cultural resources of the Eno River basin in northern Durham and Orange counties. One of the early projects the Association championed was the creation of Eno River State Park, and since then, the Association has supported the Park through land acquisitions, education program delivery, advocacy, and awareness. The Association is the Park's official "Friends" group, and the Association board of directors also serves as the Park's advisory committee.

In addition to Eno River State Park, the Association helped create other local, state, and regional nature parks along the Eno and its tributaries, including Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area, West Point on the Eno City Park, Penny's Bend Nature Preserve, Little River Regional Park, Panther Branch Natural Area, and the Confluence Natural Area. The Association continues to acquire land and secure easements, as well as provide stewardship, education programs, and events like the annual Festival for the Eno to inspire others to prioritize our local, natural resources. Learn more or make a donation at www.enoriver.org.