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New Blue Ridge Snorkel Trail Launches This Spring

10 Pilot Sites to Open in Western North Carolina

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RALEIGH, N.C. (Feb. 28, 2023) –The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, in collaboration with partners, announced the premiere of the Blue Ridge Snorkel Trail, a unique wildlife recreation opportunity located in Western North Carolina that connects people to the fascinating underwater world through a series of publicly accessible river snorkel sites.

Ten unique sites have been identified for inclusion in the Blue Ridge Snorkel Trail, spanning across western North Carolina. The sites are hosted by partners and are slated to open in late spring. Each site on the trail will be designated by signage that provides information on water safety information and notable aquatic species that may be found at the site.



New Blue Ridge Snorkel Trail Launches This Spring

The ten pilot sites are:

- Catawba River Basin
 - [Joseph McDowell Historical Catawba Greenway](#), Town of Marion

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- French Broad River Basin
 - [Canton Recreation Park Boat Ramp](#), Town of Canton, Haywood Waterways Association, Inc.
 - [Mills River Park](#), Town of Mills River, Mills River Partnership
 - [Black Mountain Veterans Park](#), Town of Black Mountain
- Hiwassee River Basin
 - [Valley River Heritage Park](#), Town of Andrews
- Little Tennessee River Basin
 - [Bryson City Island Park](#), Town of Bryson City
 - [East LaPorte River Access Park](#), Jackson County
 - [Joyce Kilmer Bridge Fishing Access](#), United States Forest Service
 - [Queen Branch Nature Preserve](#), Mainspring Conservation Trust
- Yadkin River Basin
 - [Stone Mountain State Park](#), N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation

“River snorkelers will get to experience our rivers through the fishes’ eyes and explore all of the unique and beautiful species that are hidden just under the surface,” according to the Western Region Aquatic Wildlife Diversity Coordinator, Luke Etchison, Ph.D. of the Wildlife Commission’s Inland Fisheries Division. “You’ll get the chance to see crayfishes, mussels, aquatic snails, salamanders, aquatic insects, and fishes you don’t normally see, even if you fish.”

Snorkeling is quickly becoming a popular alternative to the traditional uses of rivers and lakes, and participation has increased dramatically over the years with different businesses and organizations leading groups of people on guided trips. As river snorkeling’s popularity has increased so has the economic stimulus to businesses and organizations in the region.

“The Blue Ridge Snorkel Trail is a logical partnership for us, given how it showcases the natural wonders of life under the water surface in our mountain region,” said Western Regional Director Callie Moore of MountainTrue, a Southern Blue Ridge environmental and conservation organization with strong aquatic monitoring and conservation programs. “Given the excitement already generated around the pilot sites, we are hoping to secure more funding to expand this program so that there is a snorkel site in each county in Western North Carolina.”

The timing of the trail’s opening is serendipitous given the North Carolina General Assembly designated 2023 as the Year of the Trail to bring attention to the numerous outdoor recreational attractions and networks of diverse trails that North Carolina has to offer.

While still under development, information about site kick-off events with guided snorkeling, the trail, and snorkel sites will be provided on blueridgesnorkeltrail.com in advance of the trail’s launch in late spring.

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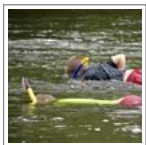
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