

Explore the Trails of Polk County

By Dave Mathern

Dave Mathern is serving as the AmeriCorps Trails Coordinator for Polk County Recreation. He is part of a larger AmeriCorps Program called Project Conserve which promotes environmental conservation and education across Western North Carolina. Dave has gained experience working on trails in North Carolina, California and Hawaii. Polk County Recreation is a strong supporter and participant in the Polk Fit, Fresh & Friendly (PF3) health coalition and appreciates this opportunity on PF3's behalf to share outdoor recreation options.

Spring is here and now is the perfect time to get out and explore the trails that Polk County has to offer. Whether you are looking for exercise, a reprieve from the daily grind, or a connection to nature there are trails that will meet your needs. All of the trails offer beautiful views of our natural world whether they are on top of a mountain or down along streams and rivers.

For beginning hikers the Vaughn Creek Greenway is a great location. Just outside Tryon, the greenway runs along Vaughn Creek which creates a soothing atmosphere for the leisurely hike. Not too far into the trail, Siller's Falls can be seen on the left. If you go after a rainstorm the water will be really moving and a wonderful sight.

For a moderate hike, visitors can check out Little Bradley Falls in the Green River Game Lands. Little Bradley Falls is a very beautiful 40 foot waterfall and a very relaxing spot to hang out for a picnic or snack. This trail has two unimproved stream crossings so bring your waterproof boots or some water shoes. As spring and summer roll around, dipping your feet in the water could be very refreshing. Right across the street is the trailhead that takes hikers to a view looking at Bradley Falls and the valley it flows into. This trail also has an unimproved stream crossing that hikers need to get across. Visitors coming to this area can easily conquer both waterfall hikes in one day.

The well-seasoned and experienced hikers should check out the main Green River Game Lands named trails for a challenge. With eight connected trails and more than 14 miles, there is a lot to explore. Plan out your route ahead of time and make sure to bring plenty of water and a snack to refuel. Hunting is allowed in the Green River Game Lands so make sure to wear something bright and be aware of your surroundings. Information on hunting seasons and regulations can be found at <http://www.ncwildlife.org/>. The Green River Games which is a multi-sport competition featuring mountain biking, kayaking and trail running will be hosted there May 21st -22nd and always brings out a large crowd. On the first Saturday of November every year, kayakers come from across the nation, gathering in the Game Lands to participate in the Green Race which goes through the infamous "Narrows" and "Gorilla" class 5 rapids.

There are multiple partner agencies that keep and maintain trails in our area including Pacolet Area Conservancy, Saluda Community Land Trust, the Town of Tryon, and the Wildlife Resources Commission. To find more information on the current public trails of Polk County check out our Trail Database at http://www.polknc.org/trails-outdoor_recreation.php. Each trail has a description, difficulty rating, printable map and directions on how to get to the trailhead. We also have a calendar of Outdoor Events, <http://www.polknc.org/docs/Events.pdf>, as well as news and pictures from past trail workdays and events http://www.polknc.org/outdoor_events_and_trails_news.php.

Trails do not maintain themselves and we rely heavily on volunteer labor to cut down trees and reroute trails. Thank you to anyone who has already helped keep our trails clear for others to enjoy. We are looking for Trail and River Bosses that will monitor a section of the trail or river for maintenance needs. If you or anyone you know are interested in volunteering, contact Dave Mathern at trails@polknc.org, no prior experience necessary.

Polk Fit, Fresh and Friendly (PF3) is a group of 80+ community members, leaders and health professionals, all working together to plan and implement effective strategies to promote wellness in our community. We welcome any individual who is interested in joining us to make our community a healthier place for all. For more information and a list of our 2016 meeting dates, please visit our website at www.polkfitfreshandfriendly.org.