

## Local parks and rec stakeholders brainstorm with new state office

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Maggie Schram, 3 and her five-year-old brother, Dexter Schram, play in the water at Satterwhite Point.  
MILES BATES / Dispatch file

One of North North Carolina's newest created offices gained input from the Tri-County region on Monday.

The North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Industry Office was created through the state's budget last year and works through the N.C. Department of Commerce.

North Carolina is the fourth state in the nation to create the office.

David Knight, director of the N.C. Outdoor Recreation Industry Office, is hosting outdoor recreation listening sessions throughout the state.

The Granville County Expo and Convention Center was on his list to stop Monday.

"It's exciting. It's new. We've got to figure out how we want it to look," Knight said.

Representatives from Vance, Granville, Warren, Franklin and other counties in the North Central Prosperity Zone weighed what outdoor recreation assets exist in the region and what areas can be improved upon.

Local assets highlighted within the prosperity zone included: Kerr Lake, Fox Pond Park, Lake Gaston, the Tar River, Lake Holt, Lake Devin, Lake Rogers, Lake Royale, Granville County greenways and 160,000 acres of game land in Warren County.

Monday's discussion included: efforts to keep activities year-round, whether there are enough public entryways to the lakes, what boat manufacturers and lake tour guides are in the area, if food trucks and pop-up businesses have the opportunity to grab crowds coming off the lakes, if there's enough paddleboard, kayak and boat outfitters located near the lakes and growing public-private partnerships.

Discussions about marathons and races turned toward local residents signing up for races in Wake Forest and Wake County, whether local roadways and shoulders accommodate runners, joggers, bikers and pedestrians, and ways to attract "millennials."

Granville County Tourism Director Angela Allen said there are annual ambulance chases and a girls run in downtown areas.

Charla Duncan, a Warren County resident who is a management analyst for Granville County, said she is one of those "millennials" who prefers the term young professional instead.

Duncan said she thinks broadband can be better utilized for state parks.

"You need a soundtrack for your vacation... if I can't use my Spotify, it didn't happen," she said.

In terms of overall recreation, she said she would like to see plans include "inclusive recreation" for residents with special needs.

Kendrick Vann, Henderson-Vance Recreation and Parks director, said some of the amenities a professional biker wants might not be same as a local resident who doesn't have the funds to afford the same thing.

"We try to have amenities for everyone," Vann said.

He also cited the annual car show as another example that brings in people from across the country and is promoted regionally.

Allen said movie nights in parks or near the lake in the Creedmoor area are different opportunities than those in Oxford, which already have facilities like pools.

"It all has to work together to drive the community as a whole," she said.

The purpose of the listening tours, Knight said, is to gain feedback of how the outdoor recreation industry can help the local area economically, socially and culturally.

Reports will be created from each session that note local needs and common themes statewide.

Knight said he intends to create a statewide advisory council to help direct goals and objectives.

The National Outdoor Industry Association estimates \$88.7 billion is spent annually nationwide toward outdoor industry, and more than 7.6 million jobs are created.

The association ranks North Carolina No. 7 in the nation based on consumer spending and jobs, with the state generating an estimated \$28 billion toward outdoor recreation consumer spending.

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