

Wilson Creek Wild and Scenic River

About the Wilson Creek Visitor Center

Once the Wilson Creek Wild and Scenic River was designated, Caldwell County began work on the creation of a visitor/education center to promote the outstanding values of Wilson Creek. Led by efforts of Caldwell County Commissioners, the County purchased 6.4 acres along Wilson Creek using grants from the NC Natural Heritage Trust and the NC Clean Water Management Trust in January 2001. Later that year, funds for the construction of the visitor center were received from the NC Dept of Transportation's Enhancement Funds. Construction of the visitor center began in May 2002.

On October 14, 2002, the visitor center officially opened its doors to the public. Many dignitaries were on hand to celebrate this occasion.

Welcome and enjoy your visit. The center is open 7 days a week from April 1 to November 30.

History of Wilson Creek

Wilson Creek has a full and vibrant history. The area was once used as summer hunting grounds for the Cherokee Indians. Shortly after 1750, pioneers settled here and began logging the dense forests. Mortimer, the largest community, was the site of the Ritter Lumber Company sawmill and a small textile mill, which provided jobs for the community's 800 residents. Substantial logging took place between Wilson and Steel Creeks, and the trees were hauled to the mill via a narrow-gauge railroad.

In 1916, a fire burned from Grandfather Mountain to Wilson Creek, and was immediately followed by a flood which destroyed the logging railroad. In 1925, a second fire swept through, this time from Upper Creek to the south. The railroad, which had been rebuilt, was lost once again. When a second flood hit the area in 1940, it washed away both the sawmill and the textile mill. The foundation of the textile mill can still be seen from the road.

During the late-30s, early-40s, Mortimer was the site of one of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps which operated across the United States. The main structure still stands serving as a Forest Service work center. The old CCC camp at Mortimer is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

On May 11, 1999, U.S. Congressman Cass Ballenger introduced H.R. 1749 to designate Wilson Creek as a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, which was supported by U.S. Senators John Edwards and Jesse Helms. On August 18, 2000, this bill became Public Law 106-261.

Now, the USDA Forest Service, in cooperation with the Caldwell County and various State agencies, is developing a Comprehensive Management Plan to protect that outstanding remarkable values which led to the designation of Wilson Creek as a Wild and Scenic River. A draft will be available for public review this summer.

Wilson Creek Fun Fact

Wilson Creek begins on the upper slopes of Calloway Peak (elevation 5920 feet) on Grandfather Mountain in Avery County and flows in a southerly direction for 23.3 miles where it joins Johns River (elevation 1020 feet) in Caldwell County. Although virtually surrounded by the Pisgah National Forest, Wilson Creek only flows through the Forest for nine miles. The Wilson Creek corridor lies within two physiographic provinces-- the Southern Piedmont and the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Wilson Creek Trails

The trails in the Wilson Creek area are generally rugged, so be prepared. Most are signed at trailheads, but few have internal signs or blazes on the trees. The descriptions below are for a few of the more popular trails. Use these descriptions in conjunction with a map of the area. All of these trails are open to hiking and a few are open to mountain bikes. The Mountains-to-Sea Trail, blazed with white circles, crosses through the area. Please share any information you would like to see added to these tables with the folks at the Visitor Center.

Trail #	Trail Name	Miles (one way)	Elevation		Comments
			Beginning	Ending	
239	N. Harper Creek Falls <i>blazed in yellow</i>	1.3	--	--	This parking area for this trail is located off Forest Road 464. It connects to Trail 266.
258	Wilson Creek	6.0	--	--	Parking is located north of Edgemont off Hwy 90. Trail follows the Wilson Creek to its intersection with FS 192.
260	Harpers Creek <i>blazed in orange</i>	5.0	1,460	2,200	Moderate trail. 0.2 miles to Harpers Creek Falls.
263	Huntfish Falls	0.7	2,400	1,800	Part of the MST. Winds down a scenic cove hardwood forest to a 20-foot waterfall. The steepest section is the last 0.1 mile as the trail descends to Lost Cove Creek.
265	Yellow Buck <i>blazed in red</i>	2.1	2,200	1,600	Parking is located off FS 464. The trail follows an old logging road through pine, chestnut and oak forest. It starts to climb the ridge gradually, but soon becomes very steep as it ascends Yellow Buck Mtn. This trail can be combined with Trail 260, 266 and 270 for a 5-mile loop.
266	N. Harper Creek <i>blazed in blue</i>	6.9	3,175	1,860	This trail is accessed from either Kawana Road, FS 58, or from Wilson Creek Road via Trail 260. This trail is relatively easy trail with the only strenuous part being in the North Harper Creek Falls area.
268	Greentown (Bikes and Hiking) <i>blazed in blue</i>	6.6	2,800	2,360	Access this trail off Hwy 181. The trail starts off through a small apple orchard and follows an old logging road down to Upper Creek. It is a moderately steep grade for 1.5 miles, then travels along Burnthouse Branch. It junctions with FS 198. Follow road for 0.5 mile. The trail continues to the north until it junctions with Trail 277.
269	Wilson Ridge (Bikes and Hiking)	14.7	1,280	2,200	Follows along ridge on east side of Wilson Creek. The trail can be accessed off Wilson Creek Road and Hwy 90. Additional parking areas are being researched this year. This trail has not been maintained, so use caution.

Visitor Center Hours of Operation

April 1 - May 31 (10 am to 4 pm; Sun 1 pm to 4 pm)
 June 1 - August 31 (10 am to 6 pm; Sun 1 pm to 6 pm)
 September 1 - November 30 (10 am to 4 pm; Sun 1 pm to 4 pm)

Road Names

Forest Road 464: Pineola Road
 Forest Road 981: Roseboro/Edgemont Road
 Forest Road 192: Roseboro/Gragg Road

Trail #	Trail Name	Miles (one way)	Beg.	End	Comments
270	Persimmon Ridge <i>blazed in yellow</i>	3	2,600	2,200	This trail starts at Kawana Road, FS 58, and climbs up for a short distance to the top of Persimmon Ridge. It follows the ridge then passes through a rhododendron thicket before descending steeply for 0.5 mile to N.Harper Creek and N.Harper Creek Trail.
271	Big Lost Cove Cliff	1.5	3,460	3,400	This trail starts at an old logging road and ascends to a broad, open hardwood ridge at Big Lost Cove ridge. After one mile on the logging road, the trail descends steeply towards Big Cove Cliffs. The trail levels off near a fork in the logging road. Bearing to the left at this fork and the next, the trail will lead to the cliffs.
271A	Little Lost Cove	1.3	3,000	3,000	This trail starts on an old logging road. It goes through a small orchard about 0.25 mile from the parking area. For a short distance, the trail ascends steeply out of the backside of the orchard. The trail levels off and goes through a predominately oak forest. There are two spur trails that take off to the right that goes to the lower cliffs. At the top of the cliffs, there is almost a 360-degree view, including Grandfather Mountain.
277	Raider Camp <i>blazed in yellow</i>	2.3	1,560	2,200	Access this trail from Trail 260 off Wilson Creek Road, or off Kawana Road, FS 58. S. Harper Creek Falls is the main attraction on this trail. The falls cascade 200 feet down a large granite rock formation. The trail grade is relatively easy, but becomes a bit steeper as it descends toward the ridge above Raider Camp Creek.
279	Thorps Creek-Schoolhouse Ridge (Bikes and Hiking)	5.8 loop	1,600	1,580	This is a loop trail that begins at Mortimer Campground and follows Thorps Creek for 2.4 miles passing the falls. The trail reaches the headwaters of Thorps Creek at Wilson Ridge. Bearing to the left, at each intersection will bring you to Schoolhouse Ridge

Places to Bike

Caldwell County has written a *Master Plan for Bikeways, Walkways and Multi-purpose Pathways*. This plan addresses the development of multi-purpose, non-motorized pathways and greenways throughout Caldwell County. It provides for parking areas and rest shelters along several Forest Service roads and trails in the Wilson Creek and surrounding area. In the past year, the County has installed two bike shelters and developed a sign plan with the Grandfather Ranger District.

Camping

Dispersed camping is allowed throughout the forested area, staying at least 100 feet from any water.

There is one developed campground at Mortimer. The campground has 21 sites for tents and small campers. It has fire rings, water and picnic tables. It has 2 bathhouses with flush toilets and showers. There is a host on site during the camping season. The fee is \$10.00 per night.

Wildlife and Fish in the Wilson Creek Corridor

The Wilson Creek area provides habitat for a variety of wildlife species such as deer, black bear, turkey, ruffed grouse, squirrel and rabbit. Late-spring and summer birds include the wood thrush, catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*), chestnut-sided warbler (*Dendroica pensylvanica*), ovenbird, and near Wilson Creek the least flycatcher (*Empidonax minimus*) and warbling vireo (*Vireo gilvus*). Wilson Creek is also known as a good site for watching the autumn hawk migrations.

There are no threatened or endangered wildlife species (including fish and other aquatic species) have been identified in the Wilson Creek corridor.

Hunting and Fishing

The Forest Service, in cooperation with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, manages both land and water for fish and wildlife. The Forest Service manages the habitat while the Commission manages populations along with hunting/fishing regulations. Before heading out on a hunting or fishing trip, it is highly recommended that you obtain and read the latest version of the hunting/fishing regulations for license information and localized rules.

Wilson Creek is one of the best fishing destinations in the region. The portion of Wilson Creek on National Forest lands in Avery County is considered ***catch and release***-artificial lures only. From the Avery County line to Phillips Branch is classified as *wild trout waters*. In *wild waters*, each person may ***catch and keep*** four trout with a minimum size limit of seven inches. Lures are restricted to those with one single hook. From Phillips Branch to Brown Mtn. Beach Dam, about 6.5 miles, is classified as *hatchery-supported waters* and is regularly stocked by the Wildlife Resources Commission. In *hatchery-supported waters* each person may ***catch and keep*** seven trout with no size limit. There is also no lure restriction.

For more information
Check out www.ncwildlife.org or
www.cs.unca.edu/nfsnc

Please Remember....

...the following are NOT ALLOWED on National Forest land along Wilson Creek:

- Possession of an alcoholic beverage
- Building or maintaining a campfire
- Camping within 500 feet of Wilson Creek.
- Parking outside designated areas.

Respect Private Property! Stay on the trail or road.