

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2025

H.B. 140
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HOUSE PRINCIPAL CLERK

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HOUSE BILL DRH30054-MH-24

Short Title: Authorize Gullah Geechee Heritage Trail. (Public)

Sponsors: Representative Iler.

Referred to:

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT TO ADD THE GULLAH GEECHEE GREENWAY/BUEWAY HERITAGE TRAIL
TO THE STATE TRAILS SYSTEM.

Whereas, the history of the Gullah Geechee culture is an important part of the story and formation of the United States; and

Whereas, the Gullah Geechee peoples of coastal Africa were forcibly brought centuries ago to the coastal areas and the sea islands of southeastern North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida because of their experience in rice cultivation, and the rice plantations that formerly lined the western side of the Cape Fear River in Brunswick County thus became the focal point of Gullah Geechee culture in this State; and

Whereas, many reminders of the Gullah Geechee culture remain on the west side of the Cape Fear River in Brunswick County, including Reaves Chapel, Moore's Chapel, former rice plantations, and pine tar pits used to repair wooden ships; and

Whereas, numerous local governments and regional organizations, including Brunswick County, the Towns of Navassa, Leland, and Belville, the Wilmington Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, and the Cape Fear Council of Governments have partnered with many local and regional nonprofit entities to delineate and sponsor sites important to Gullah Geechee culture along or near the west bank of the Cape Fear River; and

Whereas, this partnership has led to the creation of the Gullah Geechee Greenway/Blueway Heritage Trail, which will include 9 segments utilizing existing rights-of-way stretching 21 miles from northern Brunswick County to the Brunswick Nature Park; and

Whereas, the extensive planning envisions a multiuse trail for bicycle and pedestrian use, as well as points of historical interest, such as the restored Reaves Chapel; and

Whereas, the Gullah Geechee Greenway/Blueway Heritage Trail can become a part of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, a National Heritage Area established by the U.S. Congress, to recognize the unique culture of the Gullah Geechee people; and

Whereas, benefits of the Gullah Geechee Greenway/Blueway Heritage Trail include tourism, economic development, transportation mobility, and the connection of communities, which are important to this traditionally economically disadvantaged area; Now, therefore, The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. The General Assembly authorizes the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources to add the Gullah Geechee Greenway/Blueway Heritage Trail (Heritage Trail) in Brunswick County to the State Parks System as a State trail, as provided in G.S. 143B-135.54(b). The Department shall support, promote, encourage, and facilitate the establishment of trail segments on State park lands and on lands of other federal, State, local, and



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private landowners. On segments of the Heritage Trail that cross property controlled by agencies or owners other than the Department's Division of Parks and Recreation, the laws, rules, and policies of those agencies or owners shall govern the use of the property. The requirement of G.S. 143B-135.54(b) that additions be accompanied by adequate appropriations for land acquisition, development, and operations shall not apply to the authorization set forth in this section; provided, however, that the State may receive donations of appropriate land and may purchase other needed lands for the Heritage Trail with existing funds in the Land and Water Fund, the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, and other available sources of funding.

SECTION 2. This act is effective when it becomes law.