

## Mebane Trail Rangers Advocate for Trail Awareness

Spring has sprung, which means hello warmer weather and longer days to frolic outside. Did you know more than 200 million people across the United States live within a 10-minute walk of at least one park or trail, reports the Trust for Public Land Organization? Outdoor recreation is vital for improving one's quality of life, and your mental health is significantly related to residential distance from parks or trails. According to Active Living Research, people living more than 1 kilometer away from a green space or trail have 50 percent higher odds of experiencing stress than those living less than 300 meters from a green space. The City of Mebane understands how vital trails and outdoor recreation are to the overall health of a community, which is why during the January 2023 City Council meeting, Mayor Hooks officially designated 2023 as the Year of the Trail. This proclamation was an exciting initiative to celebrate North Carolina's vast network of trails, greenways, and blueways (otherwise known as water trails), which showcase the state's diverse landscapes. Trails are the backbone of our state's growing \$28 billion outdoor recreation economy, and they boost endorphins while providing interaction with the beauty of nature.



North Carolina is home to many trails, and the City of Mebane is proud to be one of the many destinations along North Carolina's state hiking trail, the Mountains-to-Sea Trail (MST). The Mountains-to-Sea Trail was proposed in 1977 by Howard Lee, the Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Natural Resources and

Community

Development at the

time. Spanning from Clingman's Dome in the Great Smokey

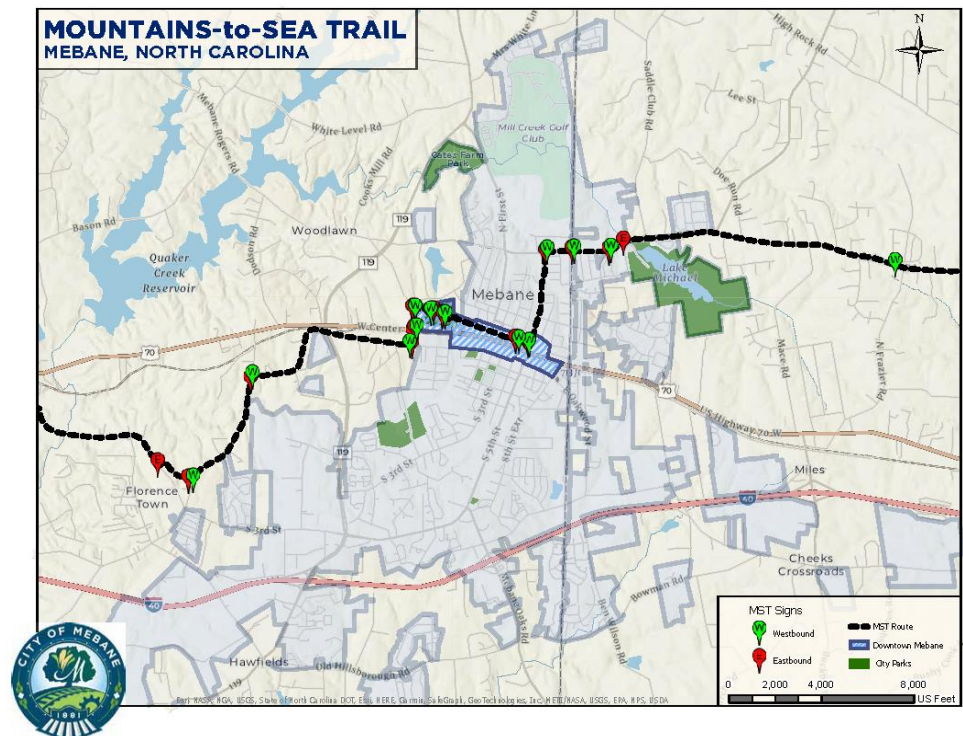
Mountains to Jockey's Ridge State Park in the Outer Banks, this trail

covers 1,175 miles of diverse landscapes and spectacular views. The

trail has been around for 45 years, with 725 miles being on natural terrain

and 400 miles being on the road. In an effort to aid cyclists, hikers, and

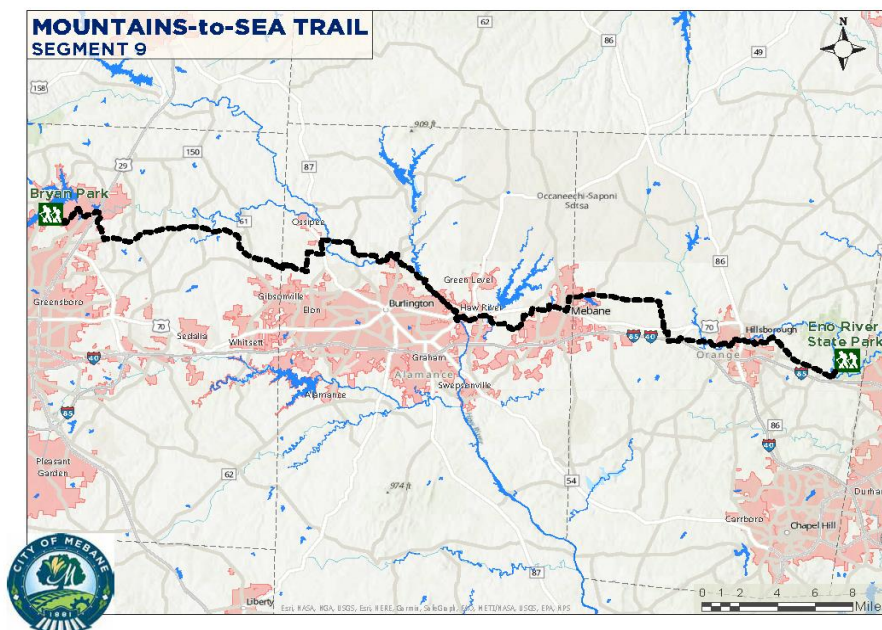
explorers with finding



and staying on the trail, the Mebane Trail Rangers have installed MST signage.

The Mebane Trail Rangers (MTR), a Mebane Woman’s Club division under the Mebane on the Move initiative, was formed in 2021 and held its first public meeting in 2022. The mission of the MTR is to promote, support, and help maintain the trails in Mebane while providing educational workshops and advocating for health and wellness in nature. The motivation for forming the MTR was to bring awareness of the MST to the community of Mebane. To get started, Sherri Seagroves, MTR founder, met with Mebane’s city officials and asked for their support in forming a Mebane Trail Rangers organization. This led to entering a Memorandum of Understanding between the MTR and the City of Mebane’s Recreation and Parks Department. The Recreation and Parks Department, under the guidance of Director Aaron Davis, allows the MTR to meet on their property at no charge for monthly meetings and provides support for ongoing events. The MTR promotes local trails at festivals and through speaking to varied groups in our community. They also created a QR code showcased in downtown businesses' windows linking you to all trailheads in Mebane.

North Carolina’s hiking trail, the MST, has traversed through our historic downtown since its inception, yet very few citizens are aware of it. One of the first projects the MTR tackled was coordinating the location and implementation of MST signage. The MST connects directly to Downtown Mebane, while a portion of the trail goes past Lake Michael and through the community park. “The City wanted to provide a route through the community park so MST patrons could have quick and easy access to restrooms and water. The city plans to add a water bottle filling station at the community park in the summer of 2023,” states Aaron Davis. While the trail does not directly connect you to any of the City’s other parks, it is located near Cate’s Farm Park, Giles & McKinley Street Pocket Park, and North First Street Pocket Park. Since Mebane is in Segment 9 of the MST trail, the City, and MTR-have installed signage



along each street within our City street system. The North Carolina Department of Transportation will be doing the same within the road system in the near future.

In the beginning of the Mebane Trail Rangers (MTR), explorers and travelers passing through our city had no or limited options for camping along the MST trail. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of the MTR, Mebane now has four families that operate as Trail Angels for hikers, providing vital help and access to lodging, camping, showers, meals, shuttles, and more. The work to improve people's cognizance of trails and parks in the community and stressing their importance gave way to the creation of the Mebane Junior Trail Rangers. In April 2023, the MTR rolled out the Mebane Junior Trail Rangers program. Within one week, they were at capacity with 35 Junior Rangers registered to participate in the free kids' summer program. The program's significant themes include trail safety, Leave No Trace principles, trail exploration, wildlife on the trail, and more. The Junior Rangers will be out and about in their purple bandanas this summer, so be sure to keep an eye out! "In honor of the 2023 NC Year of the Trail, we hope to inspire people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds to try out the trails and demonstrate the importance of these trails to elected officials. The MTR commitment to Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) aspires to cultivate greater strength and resilience within and beyond the organization as we work together to protect our community trails. We welcome all people who have a passion for the great outdoors," states Sherri Seagroves.

The Mebane Trail Rangers hope to advance diversity and inclusion on trails while promoting a healthier, active lifestyle during the Year of the Trail. Their goal is to promote the safe and responsible use of trails while boosting outdoor recreation tourism across our state through Year of the Trail events in all 100 counties. Aaron Davis, Recreation and Parks Director says, "The City of Mebane is happy to have such a wonderful partnership with the Mebane Trail Rangers, who are taking the lead on so many fantastic programs and initiatives during the Year of the Trail. We believe that providing trail use opportunities to the citizens of Mebane will lead to a happy and healthy community and are committed to expanding the current systems in place to allow for safe connectivity to our beautiful downtown and parks."

If you want to learn more about the Mebane Trail Rangers, please visit <https://mebanetrailrangers.org>. For more information on the Mountains-to-Sea trail, check out [mountainstoseatrail.org](http://mountainstoseatrail.org).