

From Rep. Mark Brody: One of the last pieces of legislation that was passed in the short session was a Senate and House compromise plan to close all NC coal ash ponds. Senate and House conferees reached a compromise on a plan to mitigate North Carolina's coal ash ponds, and passed bipartisan, groundbreaking legislation in both chambers. As a result, North Carolina has the strictest regulations on coal ash in the nation and is the first state to force the closure of all coal ash ponds.

"This collaborative coal ash legislation between the House, Senate and Administration to clean up North Carolina's decades-old coal ash problem will be the first in the nation to address this issue," said Speaker Thom Tillis (R-Mecklenburg). "This comprehensive plan we have developed for North Carolina will be the foundation of coal ash management across the nation and help safeguard our water for future generations. I want to thank Rep. Chuck McGrady (R), who is a past president of the Sierra Club, and our other House and Senate conferees for their hard work on this plan."

Senate Bill 729 sets a firm 15-year timetable for dewatering and closing all unlined coal ash ponds in North Carolina and eliminates the practice of wet ash disposal. The plan requires the Dan River, Asheville, Riverbend and Sutton coal ash ponds to be excavated and closed as quickly as practicable – and no later than 2019. The remaining ponds will be classified into three categories of risk. Sites determined to be high-risk must be closed within five years (by no later than 2019), intermediate-risk sites by no later than 2024 and low-risk sites by no later than 2029. High and intermediate-risk ponds may not be capped in place – instead, coal ash from those facilities must be stored in lined landfills or recycled toward a beneficial use such as concrete production or roadway construction. And low-risk ponds can only be capped in place if both DENR and an independent coal ash commission agree that this closure method is appropriate and long-term monitoring requirements are met.

Following several days of productive dialogue, conferees agreed to further strengthen the environmental protections related to low-risk sites. The conference report directs that proposed closure plans to cap a pond in place must be designed to prevent future groundwater contamination.

In addition, the bill mandates that all future coal ash disposal must be managed in new or existing lined landfills with extensive groundwater monitoring. It also requires pond owners to divert storm water away from ash ponds and phase out the disposal of wet ash – the sludge that spilled into the Dan River – within five years. And it immediately makes it illegal to construct or expand wet coal ash ponds statewide.

Join the Appalachian Trail Conservancy for Family Hiking Day September 27

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), along with its Appalachian Trail (A.T.) Community partners and 31 Trail maintaining clubs, invite families to take a hike on the A.T. during the fourth annual Family Hiking Day on Saturday, Sept. 27. Held trail-wide on National Public Lands Day, Family Hiking Day is a program developed by the ATC to introduce and welcome families to the A.T. and all of the benefits that come from spending time outdoors.

With studies showing that children are spending less time outdoors each year, the ATC developed this program to help get kids, youth, families and trailside neighbors outside and active. Hiking the A.T. is not only a good source of physical exercise, it also provides an opportunity to create lasting memories and long-term appreciation for protected public lands.

"The Appalachian Trail Conservancy is proud to host Family Hiking Day for the fourth year," said Ron Tipton, executive director/CEO of the ATC. "It's a great opportunity to engage families with the outdoors, promote physical exercise and encourage people to explore their natural and cultural heritage on the Appalachian Trail."

Families from Maine to Georgia are invited to enjoy the outdoors with volunteer-led hikes, or to plan an adventure on their own utilizing a list of family friendly hikes in their local area as well as trail-related games and activities. Guided hikes will be led by A.T. club volunteers, partners in A.T. Communities and health organizations like the YMCA near Asheville, North Carolina. RSVPs are required for guided hikes, and carpooling is encouraged.

For more information about Family Hiking Day, including guided hikes, a list of suggested hikes by state, and activities and tips, visit www.appalachiantrail.org/events.

The ATC was founded in 1925 by volunteers and federal officials working to build a continuous footpath along the Appalachian Mountains. A unit of the National Park Service, the A.T. ranges from Maine to Georgia and is approximately 2,185 miles in length. It is the longest hiking-only footpath in the world. The mission of the ATC is to preserve and manage the Appalachian Trail – ensuring that its vast natural beauty and priceless cultural heritage can be shared and enjoyed today, tomorrow, and for centuries to come. For more information, please visit www.appalachiantrail.org.

14th Annual SC Palmetto Hands Fine Crafts Exhibit at Burr Gallery

The Cheraw Arts Commission is pleased to feature the 14th annual SC Palmetto Hands Fine Crafts Traveling Exhibit at the Burr Gallery during the month of September. The SC Palmetto Hands Fine Craft Exhibition is the only statewide fine craft competition and exhibition. Created by the City of North Charleston Cultural Arts Department, this juried exhibit showcases artists working in an eclectic array of media that includes clay, metal, wood, fiber and mixed media.

The exhibit will be displayed from September 9 through 30 in the gallery located at the Cheraw Community Center, located at 200 Powe Street. Hours are 8:30 to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. There is no admission charge.

For additional information contact the Cheraw Arts Commission at 843-537-8420 ext. 12.

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