



# DESTINATION *Roanoke*

a traveler's guide to the roanoke river region

## DESTINATION *Roanoke*

Roanoke River Partners is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit group of organizations and individuals formed to create a positive, healthy vision and future for our unique region – the Roanoke River, Albemarle Sound and their communities – by encouraging sustainable development projects such as ecotourism.



### Roanoke River Partners

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## NORTH CAROLINA

*A better place to be*

Funded in part by a grant from the N.C. Division of  
Tourism, Film and Sports Development







IDA PHILLIPS LYNCH

# Roanoke

As it journeys from its headwaters in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia to the Albemarle Sound, the Roanoke River weaves together the natural and cultural landscape of five counties in northeastern North Carolina. Historically, residents of this region depended upon the bounty of the river and its floodplain: farming, hunting, fishing, and timbering sustained families and communities. Today, local communities and citizen groups are developing sustainable businesses and ecotourism attractions that celebrate the region's natural and cultural prosperity.

Every visit to the Roanoke region leads you to unexpected places. Paddle or hike through ancient swamp forests where colorful songbirds nest in the canopy. Wander the grounds of restored plantations and Civil War forts. Drive through scenic countryside enriched by history and the charm of small town life. Enjoy eastern North Carolina's famous Southern-style cuisine — and wash it down with sweet tea. Get off that worn-out beaten path. . .





dig into *history*



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WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA



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## BERTIE COUNTY

**Windsor** Visit the picturesque town on the blackwater Cashie River and learn about the water-based heritage of Windsor through its historic district, environmental education center, and river and swamp boardwalks. *See the Going Wild section.*

Windsor-Bertie County Chamber of Commerce  
102 N. York Street, Windsor, NC 27983-0572  
(252) 794-4277  
[www.windsor-bertie.com](http://www.windsor-bertie.com)

**Sans Souci Ferry** One of the last remaining 2-car inland ferries in North Carolina, the Sans Souci is located southeast of Windsor, .8 miles off NC 308 on the north side of the Cashie River, and about 13 miles off NC 17/13 on the south side of the river. If the ferry is on the other side of the river when you arrive, don't worry, just honk.

**Hope Plantation** The restored home of former North Carolina Governor David Stone and the Roanoke-Chowan Heritage Center capture the agrarian lifestyle of northeastern North Carolina in the late 18th and early 19th century. The plantation hosts an annual reunion for descendants of slaves that lived and worked on the plantation.

132 Hope House Road, Windsor, NC 27983  
(252) 794-3140  
[www.hopeplantation.org](http://www.hopeplantation.org)



HOPE PLANTATION

## HALIFAX COUNTY

**Historic Halifax** Founded in 1760, this hamlet on the banks of the Roanoke River was once a bustling river port and the site of the "Halifax Resolves," North Carolina's declaration of independence from England. Visit restored buildings and a visitor center that offers exhibits and guided tours.

(252) 583-7191  
[www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us/sections/hs/halifax/halifax.htm](http://www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us/sections/hs/halifax/halifax.htm)

**Roanoke Canal Trail** The eight-mile hiking and biking trail follows the route of a canal constructed between 1819 and 1823 to provide an alternate passage around rapids on the Roanoke River. The towpath between the towns of Roanoke Rapids and Weldon offers historic sights and good birdwatching for woodpeckers, migratory songbirds, and barred owls. A canal museum in Roanoke Rapids gives you the full scoop.

Halifax County Visitor's Center  
(800) 522-4282 or (252) 535-1687  
[www.visithalifax.com/roanokecanal.php](http://www.visithalifax.com/roanokecanal.php)

**Remembering Tillery Project** Explore the resettlement town of Tillery, an African American community established during the New Deal. Visit the History House (next to the Community Center), which features an exhibit of historical photos and artifacts provided by community members.

(252) 826-3244  
<http://members.aol.com/tillery/remtill.html>

**Sylvan Heights Waterfowl Center** The unique conservation and education center in Scotland Neck operates an extensive collection of rare waterfowl from around the world – 161 species of birds.

PO Box 36, Scotland Neck, NC 27874  
(252) 826-5038  
[www.sylvan-heights.org/](http://www.sylvan-heights.org/)





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## MARTIN COUNTY

**Williamston** Williamston's cultural attractions include a historic district and Moratoc Park, a county park on the banks of the Roanoke that offers picnic sites, fishing, and access to the one-mile Skewarkee Walking and Biking Trail. The Senator Bob Martin Eastern Agriculture Center, a state-of-the-art equestrian facility, hosts horse shows and other events.

Martin County Travel & Tourism  
(800) 776-8566 or (252) 792-6605  
[www.visitmartincounty.com](http://www.visitmartincounty.com)

**Hamilton** Hamilton was once a busy commercial port, but historians believe that the Union Army burned many of the antebellum buildings during the Civil War. A walking tour map is available at the Hamilton Municipal Building or from Martin County Travel & Tourism.

*See above listing.*

**Fort Branch** Located on 100-foot bluffs overlooking the Roanoke River, the well-preserved earthen Civil War fort was built to protect the upper Roanoke Valley from Union gunboats.

2883 Fort Branch Road, Hamilton, NC 27840  
(252) 792-6605  
[www.fortbranchcivilwarsite.com](http://www.fortbranchcivilwarsite.com)

## NORTHAMPTON COUNTY

**Jackson** A walking tour of Jackson includes the historic courthouse and the Northampton County Museum, an interactive educational museum where you can view a restored general store (c. 1900) and country doctor's office (c. 1840).

Museum: (252) 534-2911  
Northampton County Chamber of Commerce  
(252) 534-1383  
[www.northamptonchamber.org](http://www.northamptonchamber.org)



## WASHINGTON COUNTY

**Plymouth** Begin your tour of the riverside community of Plymouth at the Port O' Plymouth Museum, where the curator will regale you with tales of the 1864 Civil War battle at Plymouth. View a replica of the CSS Albemarle, a Confederate ironclad ram, and visit the maritime museum and a replica of a lighthouse that guided ships through Albemarle Sound in the early 1800s.

Town of Plymouth  
124 E. Water Street, Plymouth, NC 27962  
(252) 793-9101  
[www.visitplymouthnc.com](http://www.visitplymouthnc.com)

Port O' Plymouth Museum  
302 Water Street, Plymouth, NC 27962  
(252) 793-1377  
[www.livinghistoryweekend.com/port\\_o.htm](http://www.livinghistoryweekend.com/port_o.htm)

**Somerset Place** The antebellum plantation on the shores of tranquil Lake Phelps was once one of North Carolina's most prosperous corn, rice, and wheat plantations. Somerset Place holds periodic homecomings for descendants of the more than 300 slaves that lived and worked on the plantation.

2572 Lake Shore Road, Creswell, NC 27928  
(252) 797-4560  
[www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us/sections/hs/somerset/Main.htm](http://www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us/sections/hs/somerset/Main.htm)





PHOTO MONTAGE IDA PHILLIPS LYNCH

## local *flavor*

Enjoy the local flavor and the local gossip by visiting the Roanoke region's unique eateries. In an unofficial survey\*, the area was voted "World's Best Place for Real

Eastern North Carolina Barbecue." Whether you prefer your "Q" sandwiched in a bun under a heaping helping of cole slaw, or served on a platter with Brunswick stew and hush puppies, the area's barbecue joints will not disappoint.

Other culinary thrills await you in the area's seafood restaurants. Some of these rustic oyster bars and weathered riverside grills have been lauded in national publications such as *Smithsonian* and *Southern Living*. Enjoy regional delicacies such as crisp fried herring and rockfish stew.

Don't worry if your tastes tend to be more terrestrial or vegetarian: There's no shortage of Southern-style home cooking in the Roanoke area. Think corn, black-eyed peas, butterbeans, and tomatoes. . .

And when your eyes begin to droop from all that grazing, relax – larger towns in the region offer a variety of lodging choices, from locally-owned B&Bs to chain hotels.

### GET THE SCOOP

Windsor-Bertie County Chamber of Commerce  
(252) 794-4277  
[www.windsor-bertie.com](http://www.windsor-bertie.com)

Halifax County Visitor's Center  
(800) 522-4282 or (252) 535-1687  
[www.visithalifax.com](http://www.visithalifax.com)

Martin County Travel & Tourism  
(800) 776-8566 or (252) 792-6605  
[www.visitmartincounty.com](http://www.visitmartincounty.com)

Northampton County Chamber of Commerce  
(252) 534-1383  
[www.northamptonchamber.org](http://www.northamptonchamber.org)

Washington County Travel & Tourism  
(252) 793-3248  
[www.visitwashingtoncountync.com](http://www.visitwashingtoncountync.com)

*\* Professional tasters conducted this highly scientific sampling and tasting study during an all-you-can-eat tour of several BBQ joints. Results? Delicious.*

DIGGING  
WITCHES  
WORMS



## going wild

Outdoorsy-types often struggle to find the right words to describe the Roanoke region. Words like “cool” and “awesome” seem to wilt in the face of the area’s beauty. Thankfully, some scientists have come to the rescue with a descriptive phrase: “The Roanoke is a brownwater river that sustains the most extensive unfragmented area of bottomland hardwood forest in the mid-Atlantic.”

Translation, please? (This big chunk of wild mucky swampland is a refuge for critters, plants, and humans who don’t mind a little mud between their toes.)

Luckily, a significant portion of the Roanoke region’s natural areas are protected in private and public refuges and preserves. The area boasts phenomenal birdlife (219 bird species); charismatic mammals such as black bear, bobcat, and river otter; and enough fish to make an angler bug-eyed. If you like the great outdoors, you’ll like it here.

### TRAVEL TIPS

- > The NC Coastal Plain Paddle Trails Guide is available at: [www.ncsu.edu/paddletrails](http://www.ncsu.edu/paddletrails)
- > For information about boating visit [www.ncwildlife.org](http://www.ncwildlife.org) and click on Boating/Waterways in the left column.
- > The Roanoke region is a popular hunting area, so be aware of this when walking in game lands. Visit [www.ncwildlife.org](http://www.ncwildlife.org) and click on Hunting in the left column.



WILDLIFE IN NORTH CAROLINA

**Roanoke River Paddle Trail** Since the trail opened in 1999, several thousand people from all over the country have enjoyed the singular experience of “roosting” in the Roanoke’s diverse habitats. Incredible scenery, comfortable camping platforms, and fabulous wildlife-watching await paddlers of all ages and skill levels. Bring your favorite companion or group of friends, and spend a day, a night, or a week.

Roanoke River Partners  
[www.roanokeriverpartners.org](http://www.roanokeriverpartners.org)  
(252) 792-3790 or (252) 798-3920

**Cashie Wetlands Boardwalk** Located in Windsor, the boardwalk winds through a swamp forest and offers great birding for woodpeckers, owls, herons, and nesting songbirds in the spring. Canoes available.

Windsor-Bertie County Chamber of Commerce  
(252) 794-4277  
<http://www.windsor-bertie.com>

**Roanoke/Cashie River Center** The ecotourism facility on the banks of the Cashie River offers educational exhibits, programs, canoe rentals, and a boardwalk.

112 W. Water Street, Windsor, NC 27938  
(252) 794-2001

**Nature Conservancy Preserves** The nonprofit conservation organization owns several nature preserves in the region that are open to the public through periodic field trips.

**Devil’s Gut Preserve** contains an old-growth bottomland hardwood forest with 130’ tall cypress trees that are visible on satellite photos.

**Samassia Slopes** and **Larkspur Ridge Preserves** are high bluffs that host a natural gala every spring: rare wildflowers bursting out and birds buzzing around in amorous flights of fancy.

Roanoke River Project Office  
The Nature Conservancy  
PO Box 568/117 Coulborn Lumber Road, Windsor, NC 27983  
(252) 794-1818 or (919) 403-8558  
<http://nature.org/northcarolina>





**Medoc Mountain State Park** The park offers a remnant mountain range that peaks at 325 feet, 11 miles of hiking trails, fishing, paddling, camping, and more.

Medoc Mountain State Park  
1541 Medoc State Park Road, Hollister, NC 27844  
(252) 586-6588  
[www.ncsparks.net/memo.html](http://www.ncsparks.net/memo.html)

**Roanoke River Wetlands and Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuge** The US Fish and Wildlife Service and NC Wildlife Resources Commission own 26,506 acres within the lower Roanoke floodplain extending from Northampton County to the Albemarle Sound. The area is home to large mammals such as black bear, large flocks of wintering waterfowl, heronries, and neotropical migrants (birds that winter in the Tropics and nest in North America in the spring). This popular hunting and fishing area is mainly accessible by boat.

The publicly owned lands are only open during daylight hours and camping is prohibited on the national wildlife refuge.

The **Charles Kuralt Trail** offers good birding for pileated woodpecker, barred owl, summer tanager (in the spring and summer), and white-breasted nuthatch.

As you head north from Williamston on Hwy 13/17, the parking area and trailhead are one mile north of the Roanoke River bridge.

Roanoke River NWR  
114 W. Water Street, Windsor, NC 27983  
(252) 794-3808  
[www.fws.gov/roanokeriver](http://www.fws.gov/roanokeriver)

## Roanoke River Wetlands

[www.ncwildlife.org](http://www.ncwildlife.org) – Visit the website to download maps.

**Pettigrew State Park** The park is centered around Lake Phelps, a shallow rain-fed lake ringed by ancient bald cypress. The lake's clean, clear waters attract boaters, anglers, and campers. Hiking trails through cypress and hardwood forests are home to champion trees and abundant birdlife.

Pettigrew State Park  
2252 Lake Shore Road, Creswell, NC 27928  
(252) 797-4475  
[www.ncsparks.net/pett.html](http://www.ncsparks.net/pett.html)

**Scuppernong River** The free-flowing blackwater river journeys 26 miles through Tyrrell and Washington Counties before emptying into Albemarle Sound. Paddle through swamp forests and watch for some of the 60 species of breeding birds that inhabit the floodplain. The Scuppernong offers several boat launches and access areas.

Visit the Pettigrew State Park website (see above) to download a paddle trail map.

**Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge** The 110,106-acre refuge protects a medley of habitats, including pocosin (an Algonquian term meaning “swamp on a hill”). The forests and open fields are home to large flocks of waterfowl in the winter and raptors and migratory songbirds in the spring and summer. Black bears and a growing population of red wolves (once extinct in the wild) also inhabit the refuge. The refuge is open for hiking, birding, wildlife observation, and hunting.

Pocosin Lakes NWR  
PO Box 329/205 South Ludington Dr.  
Columbia, NC 27925  
(252) 796-3004  
[www.fws.gov/pocosinlakes](http://www.fws.gov/pocosinlakes)





## critters calling

### BIRDING AKA BIRDWATCHING AKA TWITCHING

Did you know that the Roanoke region is a birding hotspot? The Roanoke River and Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuges are among the American Bird Conservancy's "500 Most Important Bird Areas in the U.S."

With 219 bird species recorded in the lower Roanoke floodplain, including 88 breeding species, the area has the highest diversity of breeding birds in the North Carolina Coastal Plain. The Nature Conservancy has called the area a "neotropical songbird factory" because it harbors 35 nesting species of neotropical migratory birds, including uncommon species such as Swainson's and cerulean warblers and Mississippi kite. Other nesting migrants include: Louisiana waterthrush, wood thrush, scarlet tanager, American redstart, Kentucky warbler, prothonotary warbler, and great crested and Acadian flycatchers. Barred owl, red-shouldered hawk, and great blue heron are among the species easily observed in the area.

The region's avifauna includes a large resident wood duck population, wintering waterfowl such as hooded merganser and black duck, and a number of landbirds, including the federally listed threatened bald eagle and six species of woodpeckers.

Mid-April through June is the best time for viewing nesting birds. Birds quiet down during the hotter summer months. Fall offers good numbers of migratory birds. Winter birding can also be rewarding, as tundra swans congregate in open fields and large flocks of sparrows, blackbirds, and other wintering birds are drawn to the area's diverse habitats.

Some of the most productive and accessible birding spots in the region are described in the Going Wild section.



### FISHING

The Roanoke River region offers world-class fishing. Anglers flock to the Roanoke every spring when striped bass or rockfish make their spawning run from Albemarle Sound upstream to their principal spawning grounds near Weldon. March through early May is the best time to fish for stripers on the Roanoke. Lake Phelps (at Pettigrew State Park) offers excellent bass fishing. Visit [www.ncwildlife.org](http://www.ncwildlife.org) and click on Fishing in the menu on the left.

### HUNTING

The Roanoke Region is a popular hunting spot. Although much of the land in the area is privately owned, hunting is permitted at certain times on publicly owned state and federal game lands. Visit [www.ncwildlife.org](http://www.ncwildlife.org) and click on Hunting/Trapping in the menu on the left.

### HANDY TRAVEL GUIDES

*Exploring North Carolina's Natural Areas.* Dirk Frankenberg, Ed. UNC Press, 2000.

*North Carolina Afield.* Ida Phillips Lynch. The Nature Conservancy, NC Chapter, 2002.

*North Carolina Atlas & Gazetteer.* DeLorme, 2004.

*Vision Quest.* Carl V. Galie, Jr. Red Maple Press, 1998.

[www.roanokeriver.com](http://www.roanokeriver.com)