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NORTH CAROLINA AQUARIUM AT FORT FISHER TRAIL BECOMES PART OF EAST COAST GREENWAY

You may think of the North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher as a place to go for entertainment and education, but have you ever thought of it as a way to walk or ride your bike to Florida or Canada? On November 10th, the Aquarium Trail was officially designated as part of the East Coast Greenway, a 3,000-mile trail that stretches from Calais, Maine to Key West, Florida.

The 0.4-mile paved trail is located between Loggerhead Road (the Aquarium driveway) and US Highway 421, allowing non-motorized travelers to bypass Fort Fisher Boulevard and enjoy interpretive displays and scenic views. Now that it is part of the East Coast Greenway (ECG) trail network, the Aquarium Trail will attract non-motorized, recreational tourists to explore the region's trails, environment, culture and history.

The designation as ECG was endorsed by Aquarium Director Donna Moffitt, who agreed that the Aquarium would install and maintain ECG trail markers to help long-distance travelers find their way. In North Carolina, there are 9 trails designated as ECG, comprising nearly 30 miles of multi-use trail. The Carolina Beach Greenway was also recently designated.

The Aquarium Trail already connects to the bike lanes on the Aquarium driveway and the bike lanes along Fort Fisher Boulevard. The Wilmington Metropolitan Planning Organization has hired a consultant to complete initial planning for the Dow Road Widening and Extension from the area near Carolina Beach State Park to Fort Fisher State Recreation Area. This roadway should include an adjacent off-road multi-use path, extending opportunities in the area for walkers, cyclists, and other non-motorized travelers.

The East Coast Greenway – which is often referred to as an “urban Appalachian Trail” – passes through 15 states and Washington, D.C., linking cities and towns along the way using urban greenways, park paths, abandoned railroad corridors, waterfront esplanades, and scenic roads. Nearly a quarter of the route is already on traffic-free, firm-surface trail, while much of the remainder – largely on safe and scenic roads for now – is currently in development. Eventually the entire trail will be off-road, allowing families and people of all abilities to travel safely from city-to-city, state-to-state, or within their own community without the use of motorized transportation.

The project is spearheaded by the East Coast Greenway Alliance (ECGA), a non-profit based in Wakefield, Rhode Island. While the ECGA itself does not build the trail, it promotes the vision for connecting local trails and provides strategic assistance for states, counties and municipalities that do build trail. The entire route will be publicly owned and operated and free for all to use.

For more information about the East Coast Greenway, please visit: www.greenway.org
For more information about the Aquarium, please visit: www.ncaquariums.com/ff/ffindex.htm

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