

PREPARING AND TEACHING THE WHOLE CHILD

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Presentation Title: Finding Awe, Biodiversity and Belonging on NC's Mountains to Sea Trail

In 1977, Howard Lee, then Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Natural Resources and Community Development, proposed a bold vision: a 1,175-mile trail that would stretch from Kuwohi in the Smoky Mountains to Jockey's Ridge on the Outer Banks. The **Mountains-to-Sea Trail (MST)** was born — a continuous path that links national parks, state parks, rural farmland, urban centers and coastal ecosystems. Today, it also represents something more: a thread that connects all North Carolinians across generations, geography and experiences.

As educators, we can help students find their space on the trail — both literally and metaphorically — as they explore STEM through the lens of biodiversity, sustainability, wellness and identity. The MST becomes a classroom without walls, where students collaborate, lead, persevere and discover joy.

Together, we will explore how STEM is not just about microscopes and molecules — it's about **roots and relationships**. It's about giving students access to the science of their own communities, empowering them to become problem-solvers, stewards and future innovators.

Presentation Target:

Middle & High School Audiences

Presenter(s):

1. Shannon Hardy, STEM Leader, Math, Wake Young Men's Leadership Academy
2. Betsy Brown - Associate Director, Friends of the Mountains to Sea Trail