

Redistricting in North Carolina

Jillian Curtis, Staff Writer

The Senate is currently reviewing a bill advocating change to the North Carolina redistricting process. Redistricting is the process of redrawing the district lines that voters are registered in. Each district is represented by a legislator. In the past, the districts have been created by elected officials. The new bill proposes having the district lines redrawn every ten years by the nonpartisan Legislative Service Office.

Proponents of this bill believe it will remove partisan political influence and restore fairness to North Carolina's political system. The bill was modeled after the nonpartisan redistricting process in Iowa. According to Independent Weekly, since adopting the redistricting process four years ago, Iowa voters have had a renewed trust and faith in the political system. Therefore, many North Carolinians are in favor of the redistricting process.

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However, many believe the bill is merely a strategy by the Republican Party to maintain political power in upcoming elections. Those opposed believe the bill is unconstitutional and poses a serious threat to female legislators, minorities and the North Carolina voting process.

One of the biggest flaws associated with the redistricting bill is that the new district lines have unnecessarily displaced millions of voters into different legislative districts, resulting in a complicated and confusing voting process. Voters may be unsure which legislator is representing them or where they will be voting. This confusion could lead to incorrect voting procedures.

In addition, the new districts have grouped many minorities into the same district. For example, large numbers of African Americans have been relocated into similar districts. Some claim this is an attempt to prevent minority influence in other districts, making them more likely to vote Republican. Registered Democrats have also been corralled into similar districts.

Another issue created by the redistricting bill is debunking, which means that two legislators are forced into the same district. Because of how the new lines have been drawn, 40 legislators have been debunked: they will choose to either run against one another or resign. Incidentally, a large majority of women legislators have been debunked. According to The-Dispatch.com, Davidson County's News Source, of the 25 Democratic female legislators serving in the General Assembly, 40% have been placed into districts with another legislator, making re-election nearly impossible.

According to Catawba College Professor of politics and history Dr. Michael Blitzer, 90% of the seats are drawn with a Republican advantage, virtually guaranteeing that the party will hold majority control in the legislature for the next decade (democracy-nc.org).

Many Meredith students and faculty are concerned about the new redistricting bill. "At first I thought redistricting was a good idea because it would make everything more fair," stated senior Sara Shaw, "But now, as I learn more and more about the bill, I've realized that this is just creating even more political drama. It is just another political ploy for power."

The bill has been passed by the House and is currently being reviewed in the Senate. The bill continues to cause controversy on both a state and national level. Democracy North Carolina will join three other non-profit organizations in filing a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the redistricting plans. These advocacy groups want the May 8th primaries to be delayed until after the lawsuits are settled.

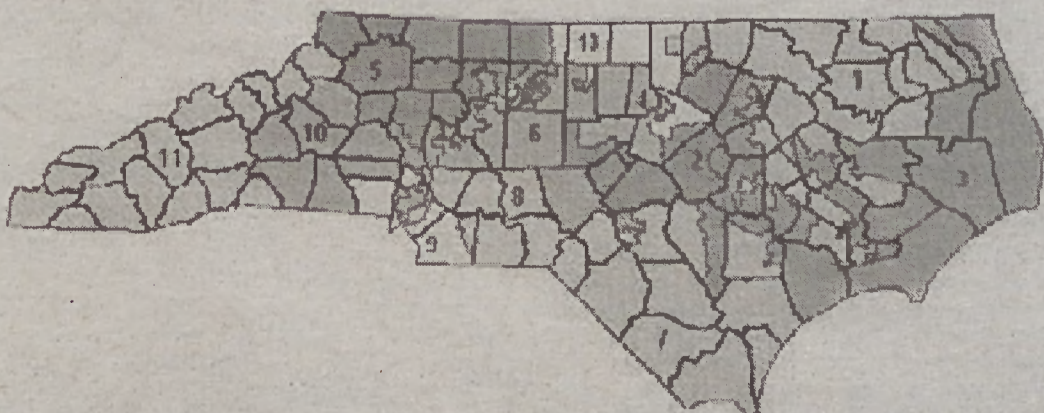


image via Swing State Project

NC Parks and Rec. Possible Winter Shutdown

Danielle Smith, Staff Writer



image via City of Raleigh

According to North Carolina's Program Evaluation Division's report, closing 39 of North Carolina's outdoor parks and recreation areas from December through February could save approximately 2.4 million dollars annually. Although nothing has been set in stone, the study has been sent from the legislative oversight committee to a subcommittee for further review.

The study was conducted because Republican leaders are looking for ways to reduce or consolidate government costs and transfer them to the private sector or nonprofits. As it stands right now, North Carolina spends around 19 million dollars a year in order to run state parks and recreation areas.

Even though no bill has been passed, there is already an outcry against the suggestion. The director of the state Division of Parks and Recreation, Lewis Ledford, has stated that closing a state park is easier said than done. According to Ledford, parks are not designed to keep people out, and trying to close them for the winter could potentially pose both safety and security risks for people and facilities. "We have to make sure that parks are being operated in a safe manner for public visitation," Ledford said, "When you have waterfalls and cliffs and riptides at the seashore, you've got to make sure that you're providing places that are safe for the visiting public."

Taylor Buchanan, a local hiking enthusiast, said, "The last set of budget cuts caused state parks to charge for primitive camping, which has been free for years and years. These new possible changes

will not only limit the experiences offered by the park but also turn people away from something that should always be available. Limiting nature and state's parks is not the way that cutting costs should be handled. If anything, people need to experience state parks in order to understand what we should be trying to save."

There has been an overwhelming number of negative responses much like that of Buchanan, and in light of the fact that there was a record 14.25 million visits to state parks and recreation areas in 2011, it is easy to see where the numbers are coming from. State parks provide many different benefits to the general public, including being an outlet for people, especially during the long winter months when people are looking for something different to do. State parks also provide a haven for campers and hikers who take advantage of the parks on a regular basis. Biking, trail riding, fishing and many more activities would be a sad thing to eliminate from people's lives all because North Carolina's leaders can't think of better ways to cut down on spending and costs to the state. The report also suggested that the North Carolina Zoological Park in Asheboro plus three state aquariums are thinking about outsourcing for their operations, and furthermore that they should increase partnerships with outside booster groups in order to reduce their reliance on state funds.

For now, hikers, campers and nature lovers await the results of the subcommittee, which will report back in March.