

Good Times at the FMST Gathering
by Randy Fluharty

The annual Gathering of the Friends of the Mountains to Sea Trail was held March 22-25 in Surf City, NC. This area was hard hit by Hurricane Florence last fall, and is still working to recover. But the people here showed nothing but a positive spirit and warm hospitality, and they had all services up and running. Most of the evidence of the storm was in the torn away stairs leading down to the beach and the absence of dunes which were washed away. An army of carpenters was busy rebuilding stairs and other workers were busy with beach reclamation projects, determined to have things ready in time for the tourist season. Although the season is not here yet, the people of Surf City opened their businesses and their arms to us in welcome.

There were several service opportunities and other excursions Friday during the day, but the official agenda got underway Friday night with a reception and tour of the Karen Beasley Turtle Rescue and Rehabilitation Center. This is a unique facility, housing injured sea turtles and working toward re-releasing them to the sea. We learned a lot about these endangered creatures and got to observe them up close.

Saturday's meeting included remarks by Dwayne Patterson, Director of the NC Parks and Recreation Department, a State of the Trail overview by Kate Dixon, and a presentation by our keynote speaker, Walker Golder, Director of the Audubon Atlantic Flyway Coastal Initiative. Mr. Golder's presentation was filled with wonderful slides of birds and other wildlife and stories of the coastal ecological community.

In the afternoon, there were more workshop and excursion opportunities, including getting out on the MST. Then at 6:00 we all gathered in a park and walked across the new bridge that connects the island with the mainland. The 300 or so attendees crossing the bridge on the pedestrian walkway part of the bridge made quite an impressive sight.

So, if you are heading to the coast this summer, stop by Surf City and take in a bit of the coastal MST and the hospitality of the people there.

