

Friends OF **HIGH BRIDGE** *Trail* STATE PARK

High Bridge Trail State Park is Virginia's newest state park. The park was created when Norfolk Southern Railway Company donated a 31 mile rail corridor in 2006 to be converted into a hiking, bicycling and horseback riding trail. The first four miles of trail were opened on August 22nd, 2008 and all 31 miles will soon be open. The park's namesake, High Bridge is 2400 feet long and 160 feet high and spans the Appomattox River and river valley. The original High Bridge was constructed in 1853 and was the scene of two Battles during the last days of the American Civil War. The current steel tower bridge was constructed in 1914. The bridge is being rehabilitated with a decking and handrail system that will allow park guests to cross as part of the trail. The decking and handrails will be complete in spring 2012.

The Friends of High Bridge Trail held their first organizational meeting on February 4, 2009 at the Office of Economic Development and Tourism in Farmville. Provisional officers were elected to serve the organization. Sherry Swinson was elected President; Brian Eckert, Vice President; Woody Ligon, Treasurer and Ann Ligon, Secretary. 501(c)3 status was established on March 16, 2011 and state form 102 was accepted on September 1, 2011. Current officers (January 2012) are David Buckalew, President; Bruce Bellenir, Vice President; Jo Smith, Treasurer and Ann Ligon, Secretary.

The Friends have actively participated in the support of High Bridge Trail State Park through volunteer activities, advocacy and fundraising. The group has had 54 members in its three years of existence and has supported the park with over 1300 hours of volunteer service. The Friends volunteer projects have been numerous and varied. They have included: clean-up days, transplanting trees (and watering them), providing refreshments at certain park programs, sharing park information at a variety of events including the Farmville Heart of Virginia Festival and Appomattox Railroad Festival. The Friends have also played an important role in the park's National Trails Day celebrations, including being an event partner for the park's 5K race this past June. A joint social event has been held with Friends of Sailor's Creek Battlefield State Park and the desire is to have more joint programs and projects with them. The Friends of High Bridge Trail received funding from the Friends of Sailor's Creek Battlefield to cover the expense of applying for 501(c)3 status. In return, the Friends of High Bridge Trail donated funds to the Friends of Bear Creek Lake to cover their expenses for 501(c)3 application.

The latest Friends projects include creating and posting a newsletter on-line and cleaning and refinishing railroad spikes to sell for a fund raiser. A very significant project that the Friends have participated in is a fundraising project called "First to Cross". Partnering with local businesses the Friends have created a contest for the opportunity to be selected as the first person to cross High Bridge at the completion of the rehabilitation project. The project is raising awareness about the rehabilitation of the bridge and raising funds for the group. The funds raised will be used to purchase 70 glass negatives containing images of the 1914 construction of the current High Bridge. The negatives will then be donated to the park to be preserved and archived.



