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Sierra Nevada to brew in N.C.

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As expected, the venerable craft beer pioneer Sierra Nevada Brewing Co. is coming to North Carolina.

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Gov. Bev Perdue announced Wednesday that the California-based brewery will locate an East Coast facility in Mills River in Henderson County, about 20 miles south of Asheville. It will also include a restaurant.

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The project will be partly funded by a \$1 million grant from the One North Carolina Fund. Sierra Nevada says it plans to have 95 full-time employees, and will invest \$107.5 million in the county over the next five years.

Another 80 part-time employees and about 60 construction and mechanical jobs are also planned during a two-year building phase. The jobs are expected to begin later this year and continue through 2013. The average wage will be about \$42,000, according to the company.

North Carolina is home to 21 brewpubs and 28 breweries, making it the most active of any Southern state, according to the governor's office.

200 sites in East mullied

Sierra Nevada was founded in 1980 in Northern California. It grew from a micro-operation to become the second-largest privately held brewery in the country. The original brewery in Chico, Calif., is near capacity.

A company spokesman said Sierra Nevada considered more than 200 sites east of the Mississippi before deciding on North Carolina.

The General Assembly late last year approved a change in state law to allow breweries, regardless of size, to offer tastings and sell beer onsite, even beers that are produced outside of North Carolina.

The law was aimed specifically at attracting Sierra Nevada, as well as the Colorado-based New Belgium.

Previously, state law reserved the beer-garden niche to breweries that produced less than 25,000 barrels a year, using the cap as a way to help regulate alcohol sales.

The Triangle and the Asheville area are home to the largest concentrations of breweries in the state. Both have more than a dozen.

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