

**North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
State Historic Preservation Office**

Ramona M. Bartos, Administrator

Governor Roy Cooper
Secretary Susi H. Hamilton

Office of Archives and History
Deputy Secretary Kevin Cherry

May 1, 2020

MEMORANDUM

TO: Dave Head
Planning Program Manager
North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation

dave.head@ncparks.gov

FROM: Renee Gledhill-Earley
Environmental Review Coordinator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Renee Gledhill-Earley".

SUBJECT: Elk Knob State Park Master Plan, Ashe and Watauga Counties, GS 19-5132

Thank you for your email of March 18, 2020, transmitting the 90% complete draft of the Elk Knob State Park Master Plan. We have reviewed your submittal and offer the following comments.

Cultural Resources are mentioned frequently in the plan, without being clearly defined, or connecting the concept to actual sites and features within the park. We note and appreciate the use of NCHPO data in one of the maps present but find that the significance of that data is under-interpreted as those sites within the park boundaries (Osborne House and several cemeteries) are not discussed in the report.

Other resources within the park that have not been surveyed or evaluated such as the silo, cabin, and barn are identified in the report, one of them is even mentioned as being planned for demolition (barn). However, they are never discussed in detail.

We maintain our previous recommendations that the previously recorded archaeological sites be assessed for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, particularly if they are to be impacted by any of the projects proposed as part of the master plan. Please contact Deputy State Archaeologist, Lindsay Ferrante (Lindsay.Ferrante@ncdcr.gov) for more information on these site locations.

We have noted that there are several cemeteries shown on the maps within the master plan. We maintain our previous recommendation that avoidance plans be developed for cemeteries within the park, especially for those that are near existing or proposed trails and can be impacted by foot traffic. We also request that all cemeteries on state park property be identified and inventoried, pursuant to Chapter 70, Article 21 of the North Carolina General Statutes, and the inventory be furnished to the State Property Office and our Office of State Archaeology. Please contact Historic Cemetery Specialist, Melissa Timo (Melissa.Timo@ncdcr.gov) to discuss the cemetery avoidance plans and for more information on inventorying the cemeteries.

Finally, we request that individual improvement projects with associated ground disturbance, whether they be part of or separate from the master plan, be submitted to our office for review on a case by case basis.

Overall, it seems like a suitable planning document for natural and recreational facilities, but there is no content exploring, evaluating, or making specific recommendations for cultural resources, despite identifying cultural resources as being present and subject to interpretation.

As always, we strongly encourage the NC Division of Parks and Recreation to survey and evaluate resources on park property to ensure that historic properties are identified and maintained accordingly. Survey and evaluation would ensure that planning documents contain the most relevant and accurate information regarding the park's cultural resources.

These comments are made in accord with G.S. 121-12(a). If you have any questions regarding these comments, please contact Renee Gledhill-Earley, environmental review coordinator, at 919-814-6579. In all future communication concerning this project, please cite the above-referenced tracking number.

cc: Annie McDonald, NCDRCR
Jennifer Cathey, NCDRCR

Annie.McDonald@ncdcr.gov
Jennifer.Cathey@ncdcr.gov

RE: Elk Knob Master Plan

Head, David M <Dave.Head@ncparks.gov>

Wed 3/18/2020 11:03 AM

To: DCR - Environmental_Review <Environmental.Review@ncdcr.gov>**Cc:** Harville, Katie E <katie.harville@ncdcr.gov>; Gull, Thomas <thomas.gull@ncparks.gov> 1 attachments (26 MB)

2020-02-12_Elk Knob State Park_90% Set_Small.pdf;

All, please find attached the 90% version of the Elk Knob Master Plan for your review and comment. You have previously reviewed the 50% plan so hopefully your review will be a little easier having already being familiar with the document.

Again, the file is large, so please let me know that this was received.

If you have any questions, please reach out to either Thomas or myself.

Thanx

D

Dave Head

Planning Program Manager

NC Division of Parks and Recreation

1615 MSC Raleigh, NC 27699-1615

Email: dave.head@ncparks.gov

Phone: (919) 707-9310

NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS
Naturally Wonderful

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“We have not been given this earth from our parents to do with what we will. We have borrowed it from our children and we must be careful to use it in their interests as well as our own.” – **Moses Henry Cass**

From: DCR - Environmental_Review <Environmental.Review@ncdcr.gov>**Sent:** Friday, December 20, 2019 9:36 AM**To:** Head, David M <Dave.Head@ncparks.gov>**Subject:** RE: Elk Knob Master Plan

Our response is attached. Thank you.

Carolyn Gimbal

Environmental Review Assistant

State Historic Preservation Office

109 E. Jones St, Raleigh, NC 27699-4617

919.814.6571

Received 04/02/2020**State Historic Preservation Office****ER 19-5132****DUE:****A - 04/15/20****S - 04/15/20**

Elk Knob State Park Master Plan

(90% Master Plan Review)

North Carolina

Received 04/02/2020
State Historic Preservation Office

2020

ER 19-5132

DUE:

A - 04/15/20

S - 04/15/20

E2 Landscape
Architecture



DRAFT 90% PLAN



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Acknowledgments:

A special thanks to the following individuals and organizations who helped support the development of this plan:

NC State Parks Leadership Team:	Sharon Bischof, Mountain Region Biologist
	Dwayne Patterson, Director
	Amanda Smithson, Mountain Region Trail Specialist
	Carol Tingley, Deputy Director
	Jon Amoroso, GIS Specialist
	Mike Peveler, Environmental Review Coordinator
	Brian Strong, Chief of Planning & Natural Resources
	Dave Head, Park Planning Program Manager
	Thomas Gull, Park Planner
	Scott Crocker, Trail Program Manager
	Smith Raynor, State Trails Planner
	Adrian O’Neal, Operations Manager
	Jon Blanchard, Natural Resources Program Manager
	Katie Hall, Public Information Officer
	George Norris, Land Program Manager
	Sean McElhone, Regional Superintendent (Mountains)
	Tracy Minton, Superintendent (Elk Knob State Park)
	Organizations:
	Audubon Society
	Blue Ridge Conservancy
	Blue Ridge Hiking Club
	Catawba Outdoor Club
	Elk Knob State Park Advisory Committee
	Elk Knob Community Heritage Organization (EKCHO)
	Friends of High Country Parks
	NC Natural Heritage Program
	Plant Conservation Program
	The Nature Conservancy

Produced for:
North Carolina State Parks



Produced by:

E2 Landscape Architecture

37 Haywood Street
Asheville, NC 28801
828.253.6856

With 3D Rendering Assistance by:

visiondesign
collaborative, P.A.

CHAPTER

1 Introduction

The Proposed Park by the Numbers

What This Plan Proposes to Accomplish

Expand the park to further conserve important surrounding landscapes. Celebrate and preserve the park's natural, cultural, & viewshed resources.

One of the top priorities of this plan is to increase park size (in cooperation with landowners) by at least 1.5x its current size of 4,303 acres, for the purpose of trail connectivity and resources conservation.



**94%
PRESERVED**

94% of current park lands will be preserved, the remaining 6% of land will be used for park amenities which will be placed on lands that have been previously disturbed and have a lower conservation value.

Approximately **30 rare plants & animal species** and their habitat have been recorded within the park. Conservation and stewardship of these species is a high priority.



Connect the park to surrounding communities.



An estimated **4 million*** people live within a **2-hour drive** of the park. The park will serve to provide an unparalleled backcountry "highland" experience.

An estimated **71,000*** people live within a **25-mile radius** of the park. Many in this rural community have limited access to parks and recreation and will greatly benefit from increased front and backcountry access.

11+ Community Organizations Provided Input

Over eleven community organizations were actively involved in providing input for the development of this plan. Many of these organizations are interested in continuing or involving their partnerships with the park around event programming, stewardship & maintenance, and advocacy.



Improve the park user's experience with additional facilities & infrastructure to increase recreation access, connectivity, & enhance the unique opportunities that currently exist.

PROPOSED NEW TRAILS



~11 miles

of the Northern Peaks State Trail is proposed within the existing park boundary

5



New trailheads for the Northern Peaks State Trail and other trails within the park are proposed.



PROPOSED FRONTCOUNTRY OPPORTUNITIES

A VISITOR CENTER
with a warming foyer and a community room.



ACCESSIBILITY
One mile of universal access (ADA) trail.



A SCENIC OVERLOOK
that is easily accessible.

CAMPING
New group camping with easy frontcountry access as well as drive-in primitive and RV camping.

PAVILIONS, one of which, is proposed to be enclosable for year-round use.



PROPOSED BACKCOUNTRY OPPORTUNITIES

Backcountry shelters and/or primitive camp sites (number & locations to be determined).



4,000 acres

The park has nearly **4,000-acres of existing backcountry**, with plentiful scenic viewsheds and remote areas removed from any development. The size of the park is anticipated to increase, with the majority of acquisition anticipated to be part of the backcountry experience.

Executive Summary

Situated in the Amphibolite Mountains north of Boone, North Carolina, Elk Knob State Park is slated to be one of North Carolina's largest and most ecologically rich and innately "wild" parks. At 4,303 acres, spanning Watauga and Ashe Counties, it is broad in its reach, capturing not only a landscape imbued with ecological diversity, but also deep cultural history. This plan creates a clear & comprehensive 20-year vision for the future of Elk Knob State Park that highlights both recreation and conservation needs.

This plan prioritizes resource conservation while still providing varied recreation opportunities. The plan was crafted through engagement with, and dialogue between, the North Carolina State Park's Leadership Team, stakeholder groups, and the general public. To understand the complexity of the park's assets, an in-depth exploration included the evaluation of the Park's site conditions, establishment of opportunities and constraints, context in the surrounding region, identification of relevant planning efforts, and an assessment of partnerships. This analysis resulted in an informed plan including the proposed recreation amenities, conservation/preservation opportunities, park expansion, phasing, and cost.

A major focus of the park is expansion and land acquisition to increase connectivity of non-contiguous parcels, conservation of critical resources, and to connect the Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST). The park is likely to implement one of the first sections of the planned 40-mile NPST that will connect the region. This plan proposes diverse front and backcountry recreation experiences such as a Visitor Center, a campground, around 33 miles of new trail, new trailheads, and a Day Use Area.

Executive Summary & Proposed Park by the Numbers



OUR MISSION

The North Carolina
Division of Parks and Recreation
exists to inspire all
its citizens and visitors through
conservation, recreation and education.

CONSERVATION

To conserve and protect representative
examples of North Carolina’s natural beauty,
ecological features, recreational and cultural
resources within the state parks system;

RECREATION

To provide and promote safe, healthy
and enjoyable outdoor recreational
opportunities throughout the state; and

EDUCATION

To provide educational opportunities
that promote stewardship of the state’s
natural and cultural heritage.

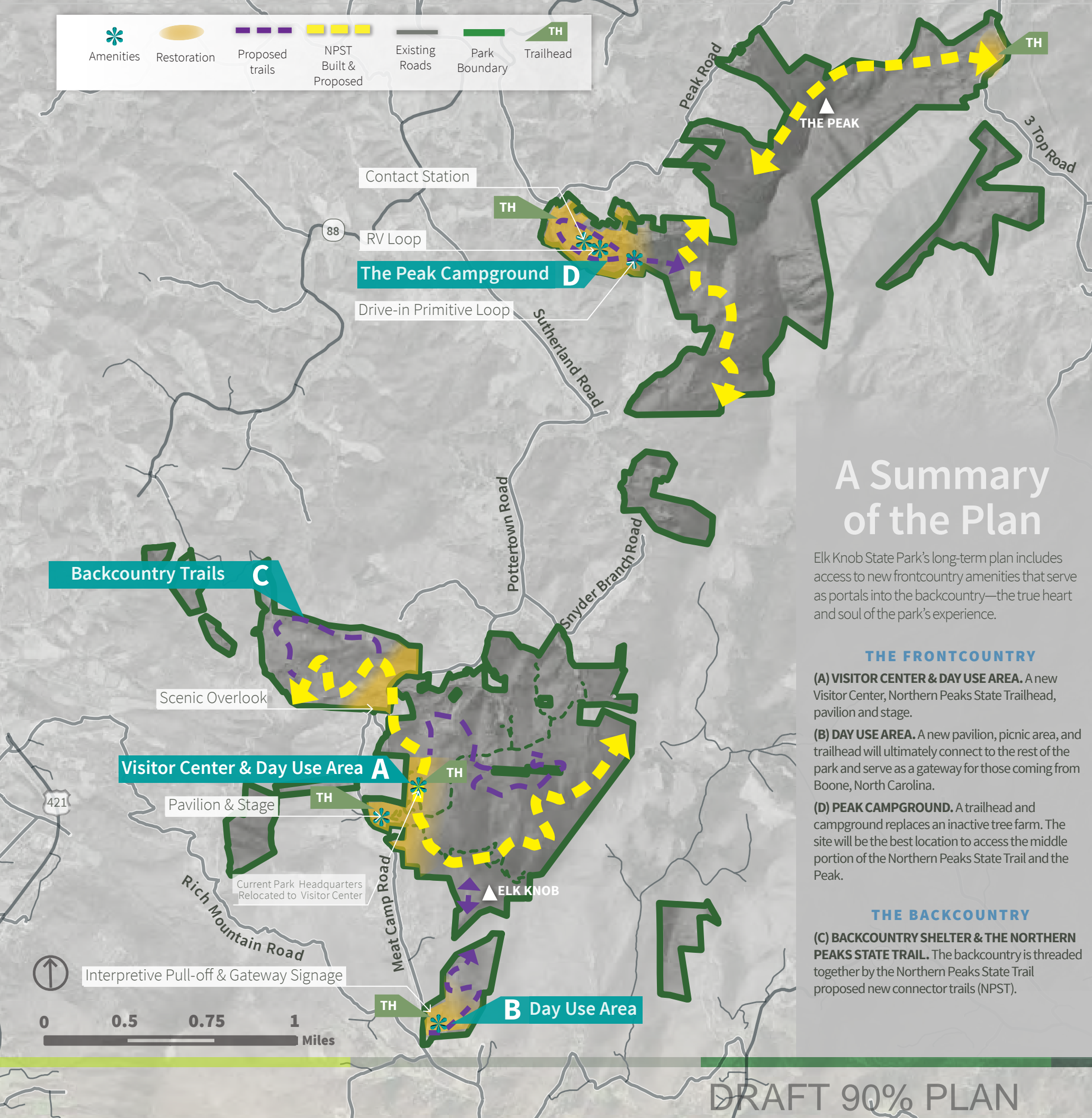


VISION

Elk Knob State Park preserves and interprets the rare Long Hope Valley ecosystem and Southern Appalachian culture. It allows for a diversity of front and backcountry recreation adventure that is designed to be ecologically sensitive. The park is a regional leader in education and celebration of the significance of the landscape and its cultural heritage.

GOALS

- Expand the park to further conserve important surrounding landscapes:** This includes sensitive and priority habitats and lands to support the Divisions’ goals.
- Connect the park to surrounding communities:** Create a connection between the park and the surrounding mountain communities, both physically and through outreach and collaboration. Bring community into the park by providing gathering spaces, event programming, and celebration of the local people and heritage.
- Celebrate and preserve the natural, cultural, and viewshed resources:** Habitat is conserved for the rare and endangered species. Cultural resources are conserved. Important viewsheds are conserved as one of the most important assets of the park.
- Improve the park user’s experience through facilities:** Increase the experience by providing visitor service facilities that will provide expanded educational and research opportunities, heritage learning and interpretation, all contained in environmentally conscious facility design.
- Increase recreation access, connectivity, and enhance what unique opportunities exist:** Incorporate the Northern Peaks Trail which will connect inaccessible areas. Establish hiking trails Elevate unique recreation activities like snow shoeing and cross-country skiing. Provide overnight accommodations and camping for visitors.



A Summary of the Plan

Elk Knob State Park's long-term plan includes access to new frontcountry amenities that serve as portals into the backcountry—the true heart and soul of the park's experience.

THE FRONTCOUNTRY

(A) VISITOR CENTER & DAY USE AREA. A new Visitor Center, Northern Peaks State Trailhead, pavilion and stage.

(B) DAY USE AREA. A new pavilion, picnic area, and trailhead will ultimately connect to the rest of the park and serve as a gateway for those coming from Boone, North Carolina.

(D) PEAK CAMPGROUND. A trailhead and campground replaces an inactive tree farm. The site will be the best location to access the middle portion of the Northern Peaks State Trail and the Peak.

THE BACKCOUNTRY

(C) BACKCOUNTRY SHELTER & THE NORTHERN PEAKS STATE TRAIL. The backcountry is threaded together by the Northern Peaks State Trail proposed new connector trails (NPST).

D The Peak Campground



A The Visitor Center



Summary of the Plan

DRAFT 90% PLAN



CHAPTER
2 Existing Conditions

P

Parking

⛶

Picnic

TH

Trailhead

▲

Backcountry
Camping

—

Stream

—

Park
Boundary

—

Road

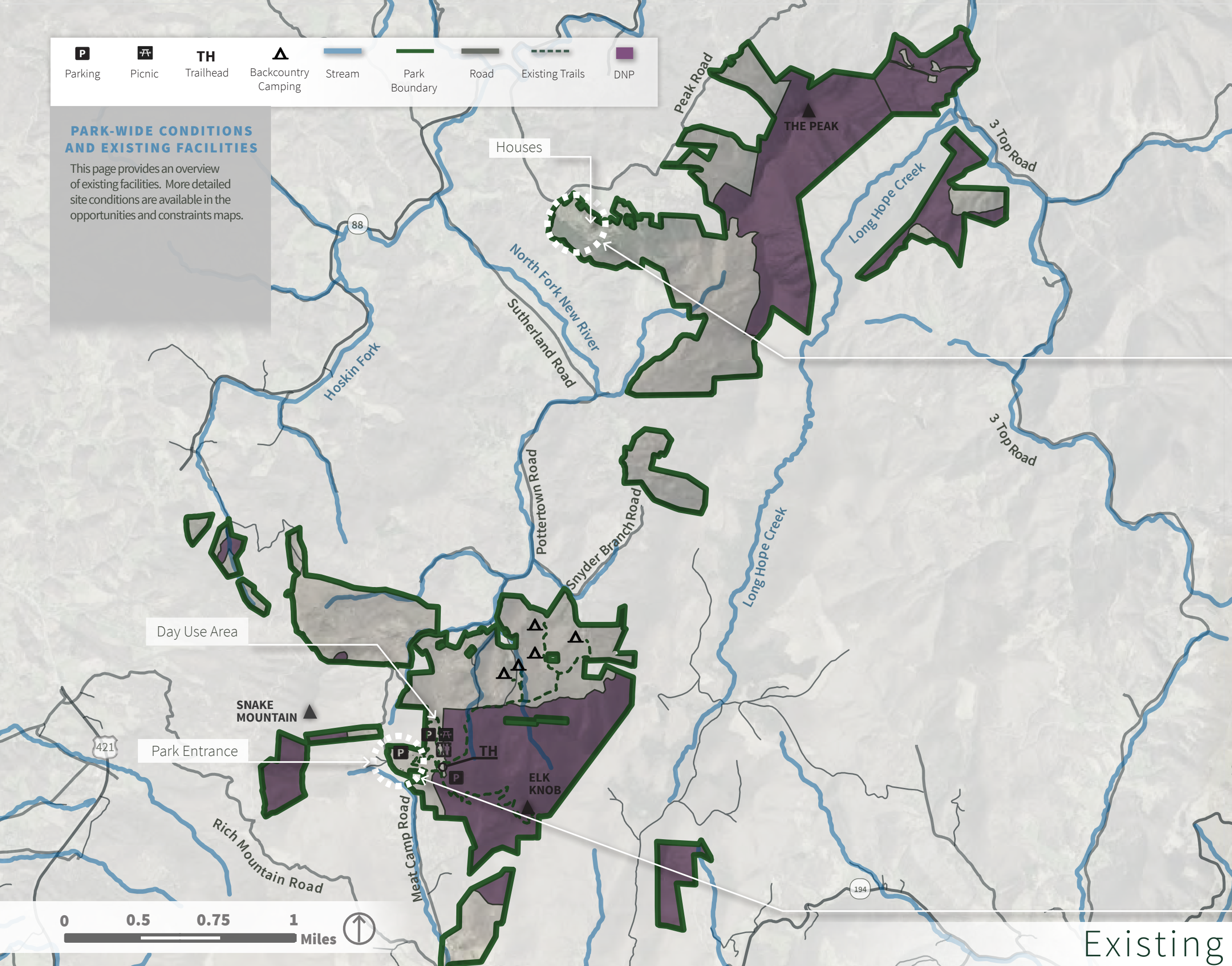
Existing Trails

■

DNP

PARK-WIDE CONDITIONS
AND EXISTING FACILITIES

This page provides an overview of existing facilities. More detailed site conditions are available in the opportunities and constraints maps.



old barn

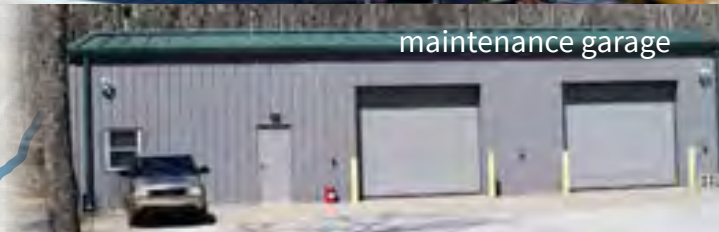


silos and small cabin

PEAK ROAD SITE EXISTING FACILITIES



vehicle shed



maintenance garage



vault toilet



amphitheater

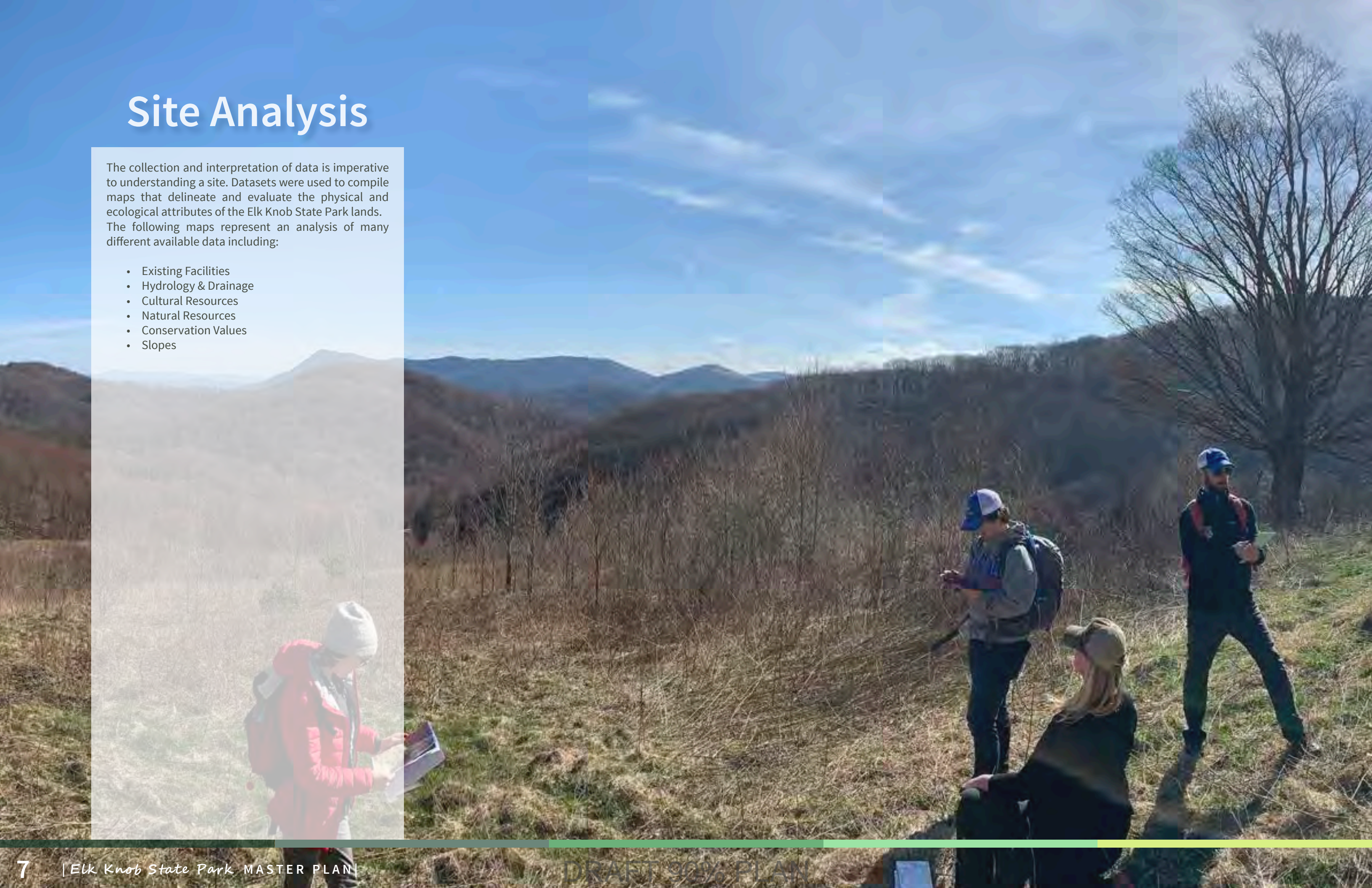
VISITOR CENTER SITE EXISTING FACILITIES

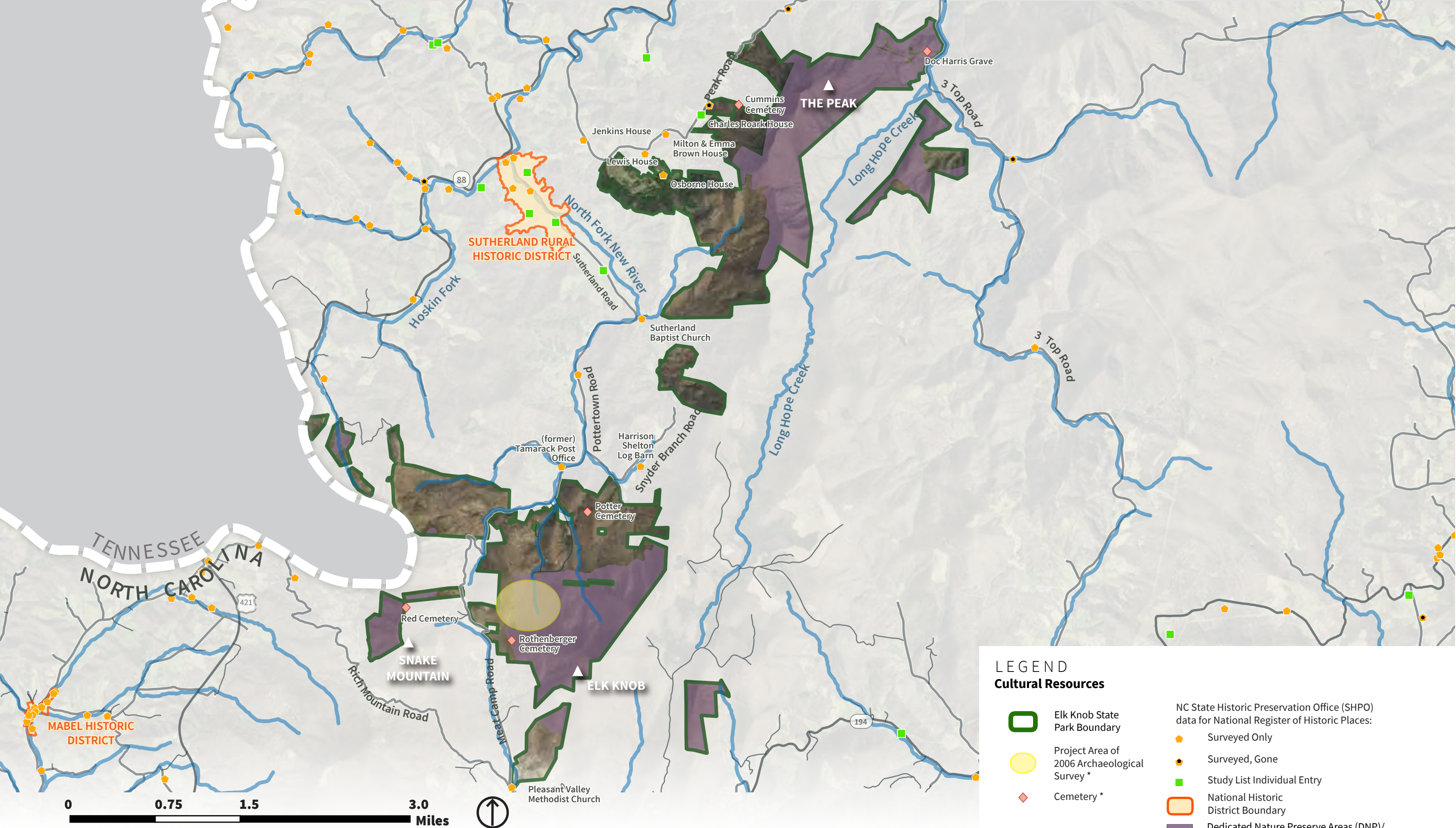
Existing Site Conditions

Site Analysis

The collection and interpretation of data is imperative to understanding a site. Datasets were used to compile maps that delineate and evaluate the physical and ecological attributes of the Elk Knob State Park lands. The following maps represent an analysis of many different available data including:

- Existing Facilities
- Hydrology & Drainage
- Cultural Resources
- Natural Resources
- Conservation Values
- Slopes





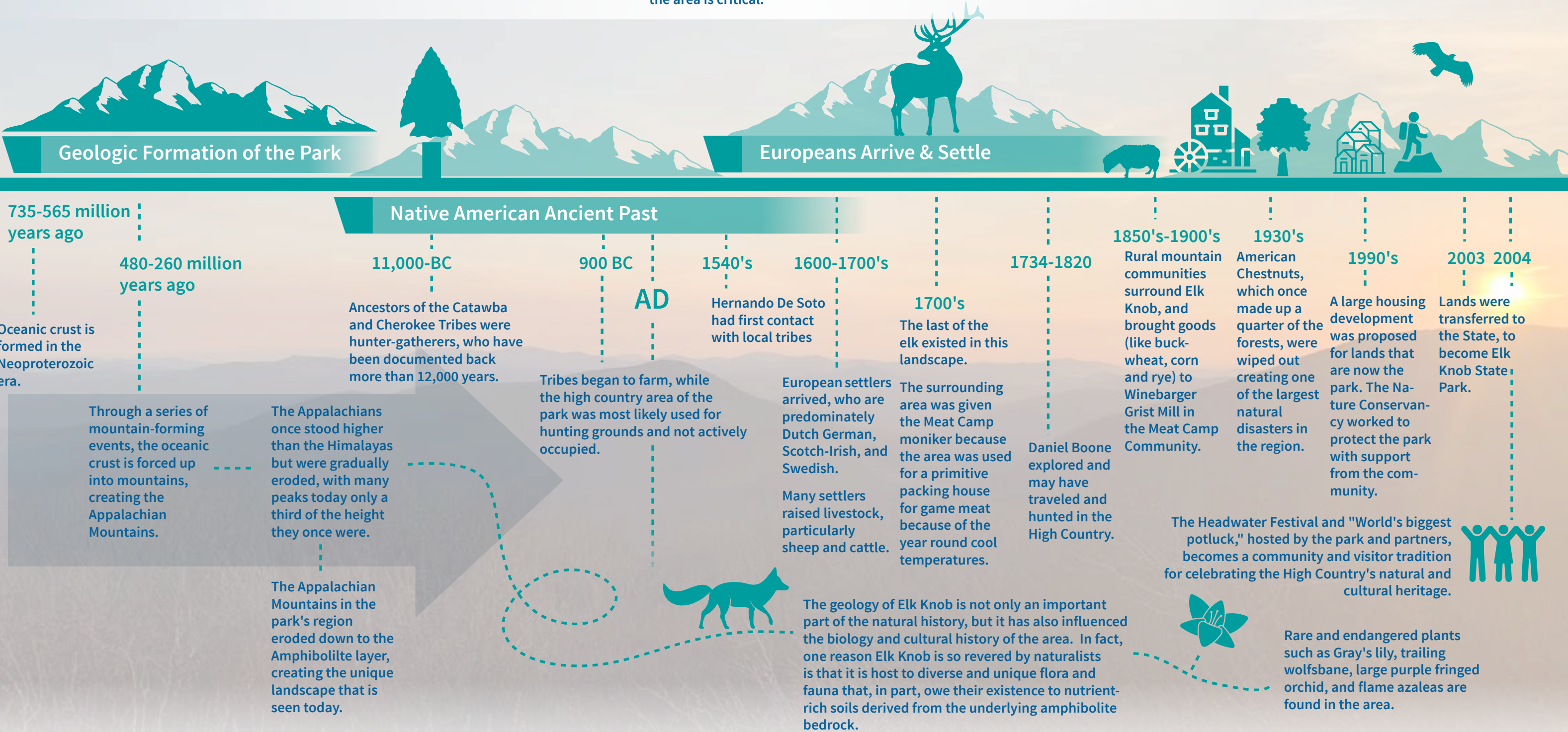
Cultural Resources

Heritage Themes and Timeline of the Park

The natural and cultural history of the park and surrounding landscape are intrinsically linked.

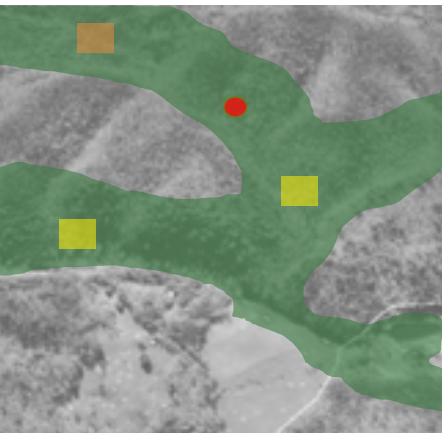
State Park, stakeholder, and public input indicates that experiencing, understanding, and celebrating the heritage of the area is critical.

This timeline outlines some of the major heritage themes to consider for the park.

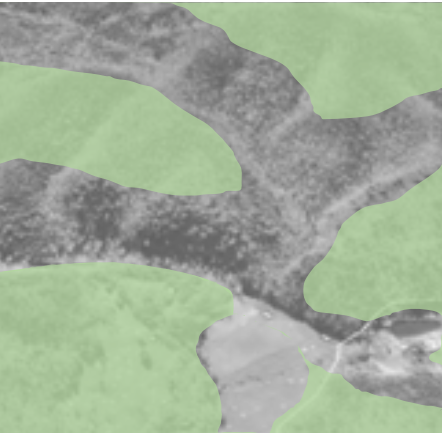


Cultural Summary / Resources

DEFINING
CONSERVATION
VALUES THROUGH
THE STATE
BIODIVERSITY &
WILDLIFE HABITAT
ASSESSMENT

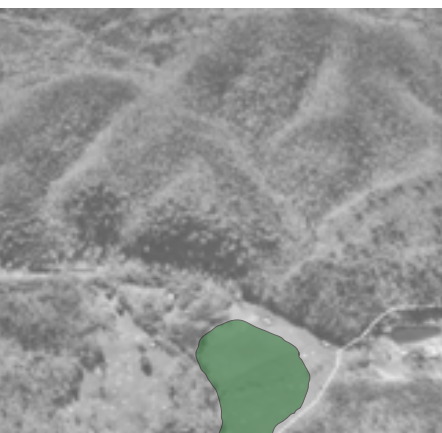


RARE SPECIES
AND NATURAL
COMMUNITIES
Element Occurrences are
ranked as one of the higher
value layers in the assessment.
These occurrences are often
assigned a large area that
represents their habitat.



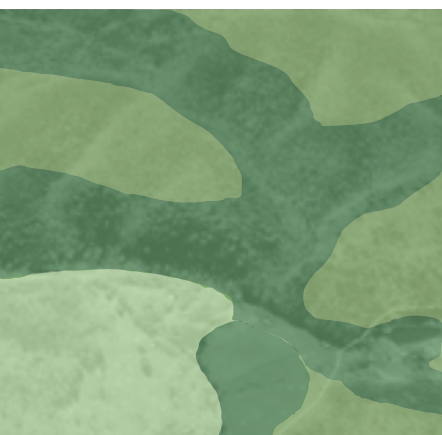
LARGE SCALE
LANDSCAPE
PRIORITIES

Landscape/Habitat
indicator guilds (LHIG),
Important Bird Areas (IBA),
and Significant Natural
Areas (SNA) are overlaid.



HIGH QUALITY RIPARIAN
RESOURCES

Wetlands, high quality waters,
stream buffers, and benthic
bioclassifications all go into
prioritizing hydro-related
resources highly.



CONVERTING THESE
LAYERS INTO THE
BIODIVERSITY &
HABITAT ASSESSMENT

All layers are overlaid and areas
with the highest overlap of values
get the highest conservation
value.

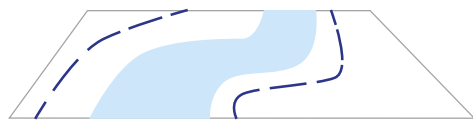
HOW THIS PLAN
REFINED THE
STATE MODEL

See the Natural
Resources &
Conservation Value
Map

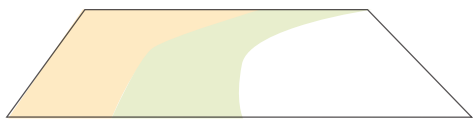
Highest ranking Element
Occurrences (EO)
added and buffered



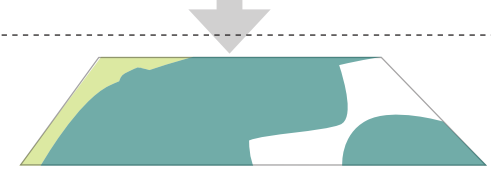
Primary
Conservation
Zone



Buffered EOs added to
the State BWHA, with
top tier EOs becoming
the top tier



Higher & medium
values are overridden
by the top tier value



How Were the Conservation Values Developed?

The Biodiversity and Wildlife Habitat Assessment (BWHA) was developed by the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program as part of the NC Conservation Planning Toolbox, which is designed to be utilized by land planners, managers, consultants, and conservation organizations in regional planning efforts. This plan relies heavily on the BWHA during the development of the Natural Resources & Conservation Zones map. The BWHA represents an analysis of many different available data, but generally includes the following layers:

- **Rare species and natural communities**
 - Element Occurrences
- **Large-scale landscapes**
 - Landscape/Habitat indicator guilds (LHIG)
 - Important Bird Areas (IBA), Note: the whole of the Amphibolite mountains are an IBA.
 - Significant Natural Areas (SNA)
- **High-quality and important riparian and wetland resources**
 - National Wetlands Inventory (NWI)
 - High Quality/Outstanding Resource Waters (HQW/ORW)
 - Buffers
 - Stream Benthic Bioclassifications

Top Tier Natural Resources Layer

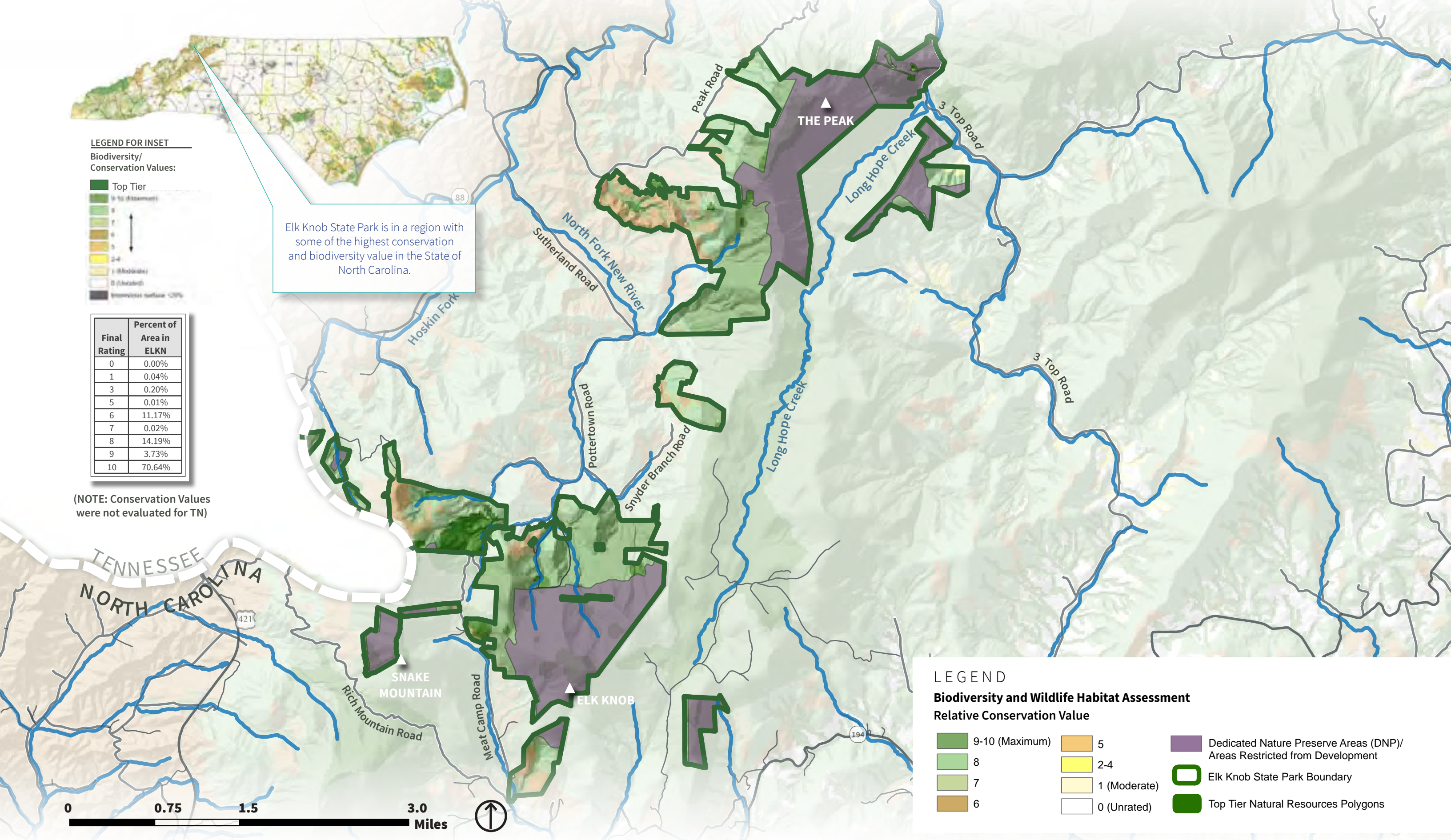
The top-tier natural resources layer was created by filtering known Element Occurrences within a one-half mile radius of the Park, selecting only those records with an S1/S2 or G1/G2 ranking. A 200' buffer was then applied to the selection in order to obscure singular elements. The resulting polygons were converted to a raster dataset, which was then incorporated into a selection of the BWHA dataset containing Elk Knob State Park data. The resulting dataset was reclassified to depict Top Tier areas as 'highest' quality. These highest quality areas were considered to be either "off-limits" during planning efforts or areas that require a high level of design and development sensitivity.

The Golden Winged Warbler

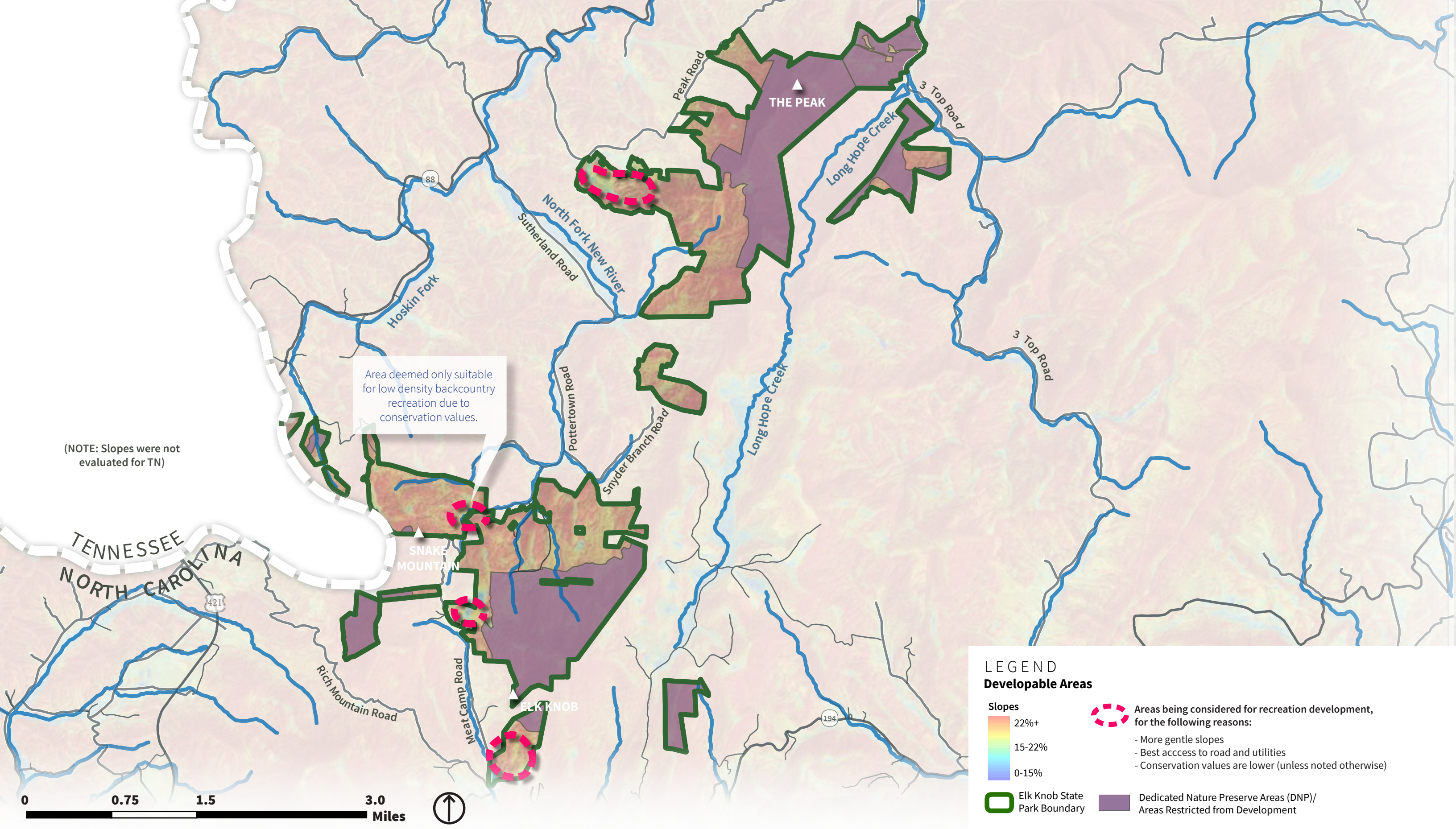
This warbler finds its summer breeding home in some of the open meadows of Elk Knob State Park. Due to international conservation concerns, their populations are greatly declining. This plan will identify where recreation amenities will work best to avoid negative impacts on this imperiled species.



Natural Resources & Conservation Values



Natural Resources & Conservation Values



Areas Suitable for Recreation Development

A photograph of a forest stream with large green plants growing along the banks. The stream flows through a wooded area with many bare trees in the background. The plants in the foreground are large and green, with broad leaves. The water in the stream is clear and flows over rocks.

Opportunities & Constraints

The Opportunities and Constraints Maps illustrate a methodology used by the consultant for identifying, collecting, and compiling the findings from previous chapters in this document, in addition to information collected on site.

Opportunities were seen as specific points identified in the field including, but not limited to:

- Views
- Previously altered ecosystems
- Prospect & Refuge
- Natural Assets
- Accessibility
- Potential for connectivity

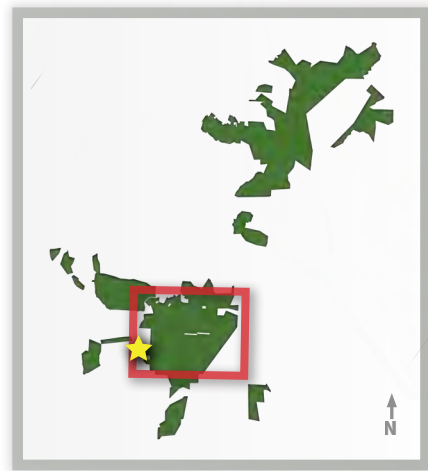
Constraints were primarily identified as ecological and infrastructural in nature:

- Conservations zones
- Seeps
- Rocky or eroded terrain
- Steep slopes, which were identified as 30% or greater
- 50 foot stream buffer around all blueline streams

It is important to note that the presence of a constraint does not necessarily mean that the land is rendered unsuitable for development.

Aggregating these resources (opportunities) and limitations (constraints) into a composite map provides a means of focusing community and stakeholder attention to existing issues and conditions that the consultant team employed to help drive design concepts.

These maps do not reach any conclusions or suggestions, rather they provide an additional layer to the Analysis Maps in which we were able to narrow our focus.



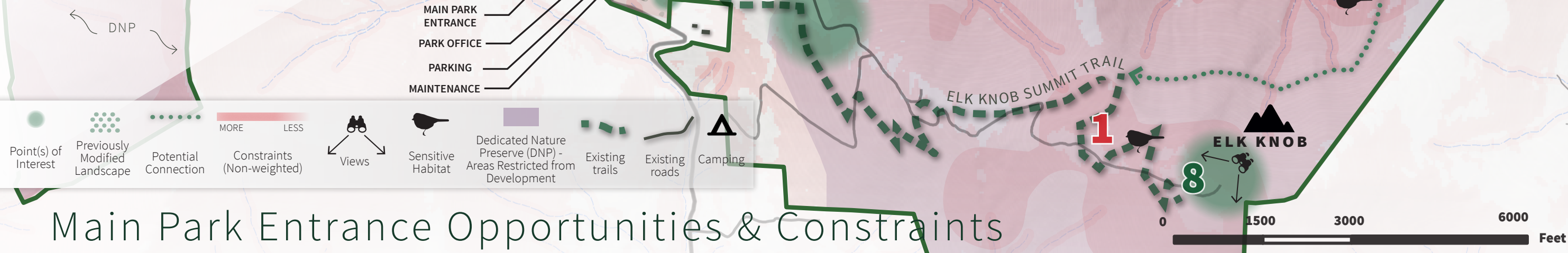
See North Site

OPPORTUNITY

- 1 Parcel currently functions as park entrance
- 2 Existing infrastructure
- 3 Vehicular access into parcel already exists
- 4 Previous disturbance of site provides opportunity to preserve as well as create new habitat
- 5 Existing Structures could be re-purposed
- 6 Trailhead
- 7 Flat area adjacent to water
- 8 Gentle slope, good views
- 9 Opportunity for connection
- 10 Relatively flat area

CONSTRAINT

- 1 Sensitive habitat — maintaining and providing new habitat is needed
- 2 Steep slopes
- 3 This portion of the Backcountry Trail was not built to sustainable standards, potential to look at relocation



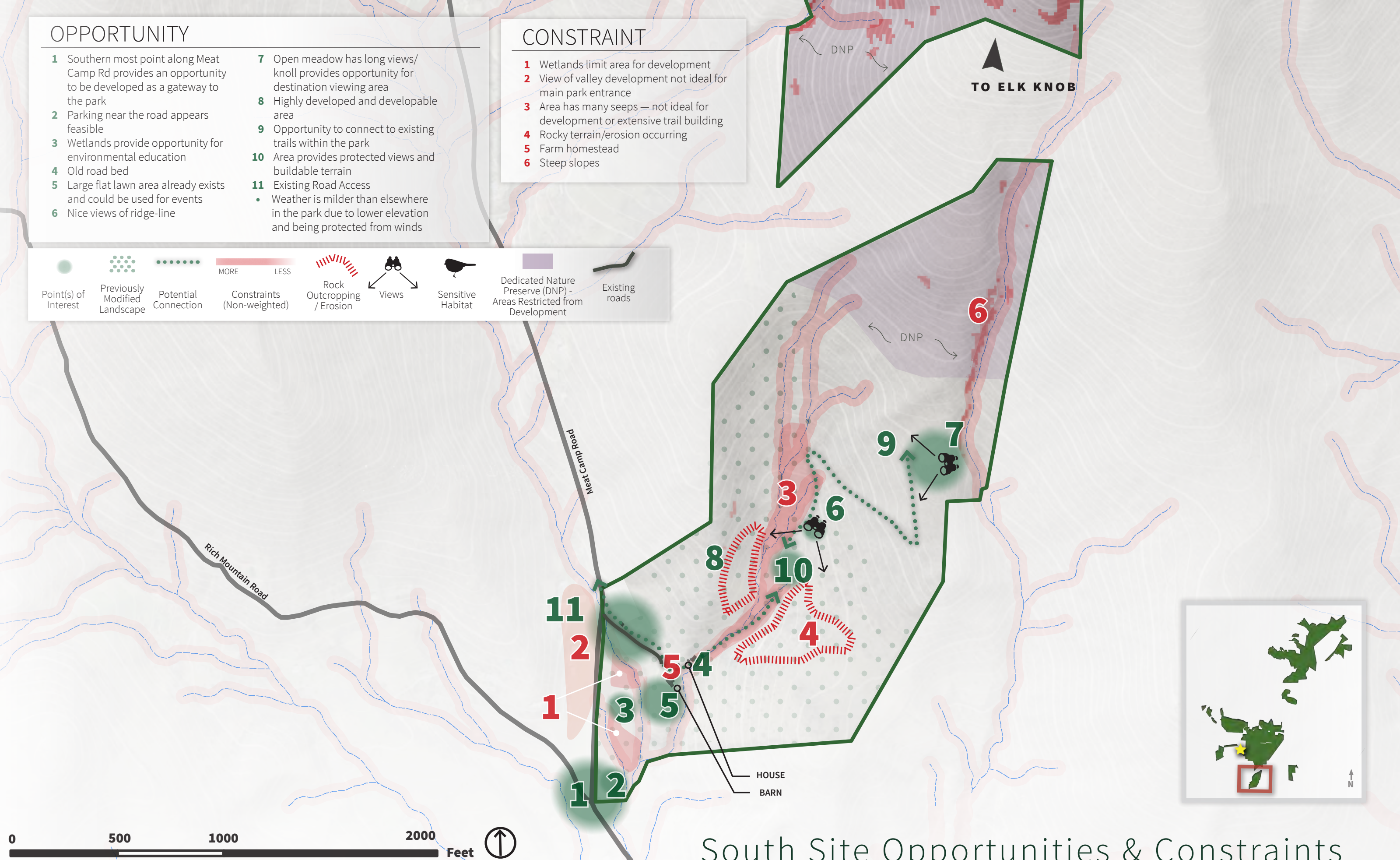
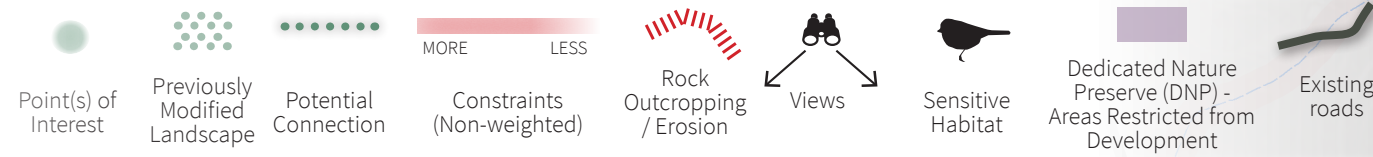
Main Park Entrance Opportunities & Constraints

OPPORTUNITY

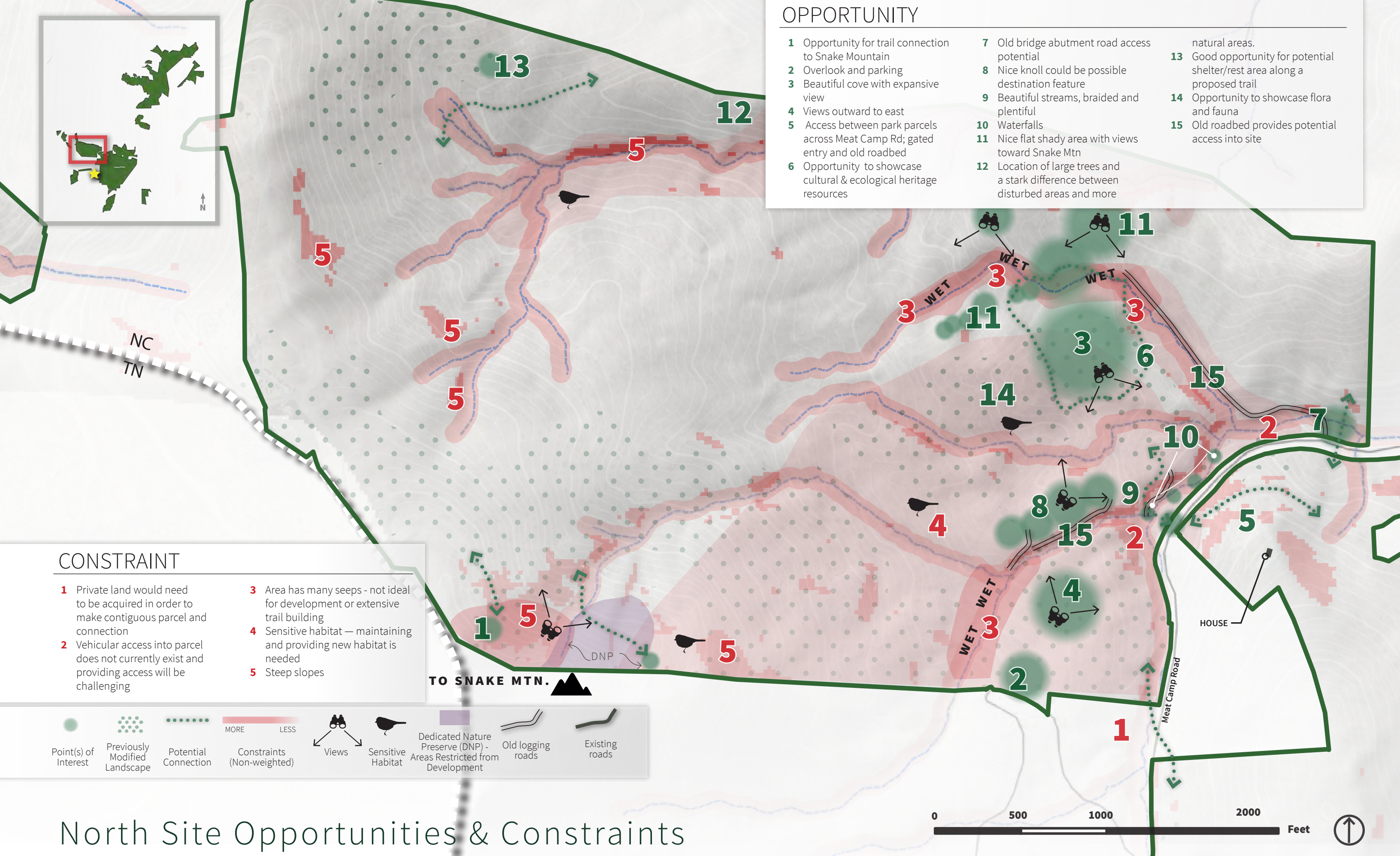
- 1 Southern most point along Meat Camp Rd provides an opportunity to be developed as a gateway to the park
- 2 Parking near the road appears feasible
- 3 Wetlands provide opportunity for environmental education
- 4 Old road bed
- 5 Large flat lawn area already exists and could be used for events
- 6 Nice views of ridge-line
- 7 Open meadow has long views/ knoll provides opportunity for destination viewing area
- 8 Highly developed and developable area
- 9 Opportunity to connect to existing trails within the park
- 10 Area provides protected views and buildable terrain
- 11 Existing Road Access
 - Weather is milder than elsewhere in the park due to lower elevation and being protected from winds

CONSTRAINT

- 1 Wetlands limit area for development
- 2 View of valley development not ideal for main park entrance
- 3 Area has many seeps — not ideal for development or extensive trail building
- 4 Rocky terrain/erosion occurring
- 5 Farm homestead
- 6 Steep slopes



South Site Opportunities & Constraints



North Site Opportunities & Constraints

OPPORTUNITY

- 1

Highly disturbed and developable
- 2

Access to parcel already exists off of Peak Road
- 3

Gentle slopes with interior views
- 4

Great view of The Peaks
- 5

Pine Plantation has potential as a restoration project
- 6

Pond could be used for fishing
- 7

Previous disturbance of site provides opportunity to preserve as well as create new habitat
- 8

Existing Orchards
- 9

Existing Structures could be re-purposed
- 10

Existing road provides access

CONSTRAINT

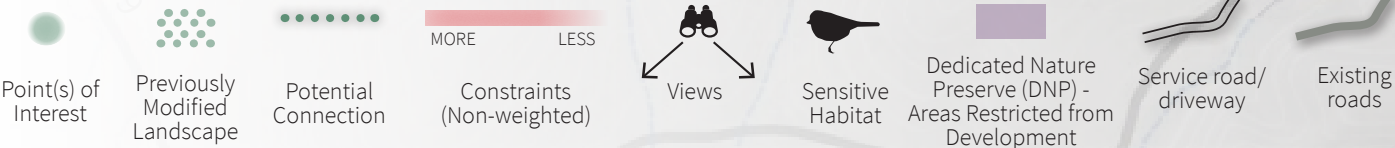
- 1

Sensitive habitat area
- 2

Steep slopes on southeastern portion of parcel
- 3

Sight-line Issue
- 4

Remote location (25 min. drive from park entrance)





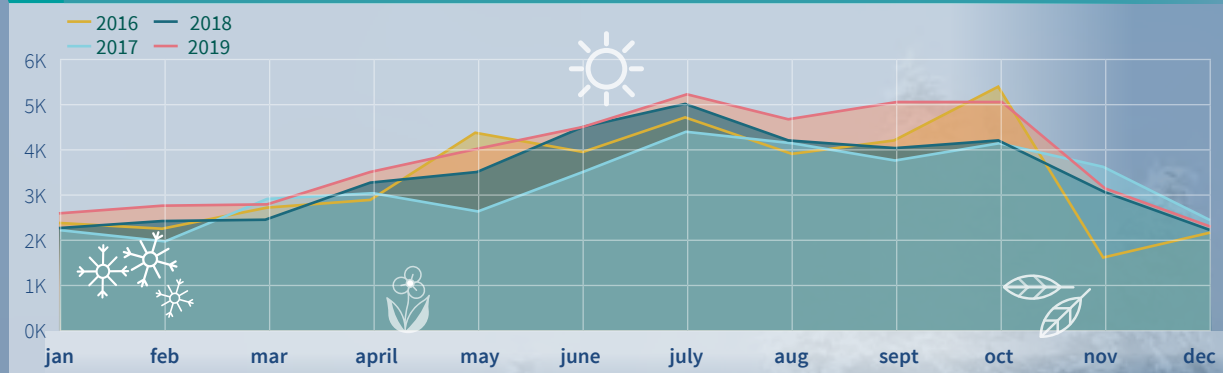
CHAPTER

3

Regional Context & Planning

National & State Trends in Outdoor Recreation

Trends in Visitation to Elk Knob State Park NC Division of Parks & Recreation, 2016-2019



Top 5 National Activities

Outdoor Recreation Report, Outdoor Industry Association, 2018

Top 5 For the State of North Carolina

NC Outdoor Recreation Plan, NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 2015

Running, jogging, trail running

Visiting a beach or lake

Hiking

Road, mountain, and BMX biking

Walking for pleasure or exercise

Fishing

Car, backpacking, and RV camping

Visiting parks or historic sites

An increase in racial and ethnic diversity is anticipated to alter future recreation trends, however, among all groups, activities like hiking, nature viewing, and visiting development recreation are very popular.

Trends in Popularity of Outdoor Recreation (Nationally, Percent Change Per Capita Between 2008 and 2030) Federal Outdoor Recreation Trends, USFS, 2016

+4.4% Birding

+3.1% Backcountry hiking

+0.7% Developed site use

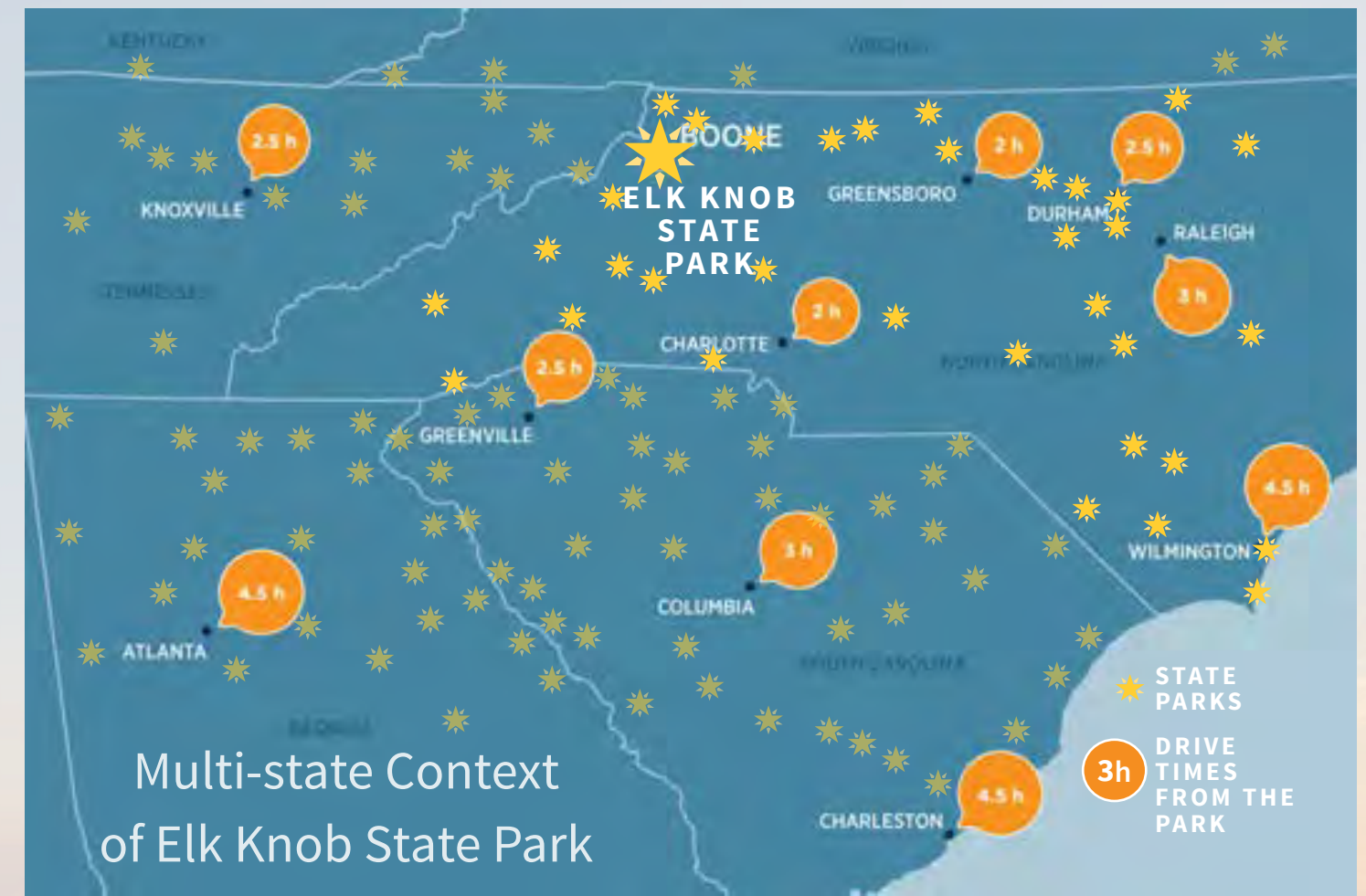
+3.2% Visiting interpretive areas

-2.6% Undeveloped skiing

-2.6% Fishing

Note that winter sports are projected to decline possibly further due to climate change.

Trails are the #1 desired amenity by the public in the state of North Carolina
NC Outdoor Recreation Plan, NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 2015



Multi-state Context of Elk Knob State Park

Emerging Trends

Use of Technology

Elk Knob State Park already embraces the use of technology through the Kids in Parks mobile app. Eco Explore, another NC-based mobile app is growing in popularity and encourages youth to be naturalists and record their findings.



Lodging

State Parks compete with the rise of glamping and vacation websites that provide unique experiences (like "glamping") at relatively low cost. Tree huts, "tiny-homes", yurts, and other rentals are beginning to proliferate in the market, especially in Western North Carolina.



Partnerships

Increasingly, many State Parks are increasingly depending on cooperative partners that collaborate on programming, management, stewardship, and other activities. Bio Blitzz and other collaborative projects are examples of cooperative management.



Trends in State Parks

RELEVANT PLANNING EFFORTS & INITIATIVES TO THE PARK

STATE-WIDE

North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan (2015, Update Currently Underway)

The plan has six main objectives and under those objectives, strategies. Some of the strategies that are relevant to the park include: promote public-private partnerships, redesign facilities to ensure universal access, expand the State and National trails systems, improve communication and collaboration within the planning and tourism community (including sponsoring events and programs that bring outside dollars, provide information about state park's economic impact, identify key lands for acquisition, and seek partnerships for conservation.

System-wide Plan for North Carolina State Parks (2018)

The most recent 2018 plan has some of the following goals that relate to Elk Knob:

Continued Park Expansion: The plan proposes a significant expansion of Elk Knob State Park.

Improve Natural and Cultural Resource Stewardship: Special mention of management that would apply to the park includes prescribed fire management, invasive species control, restoration of forests and streams, monitoring and inventories, and research.

Green Building: Principles that should be addressed in facilities and operations include ecological site design, sustainable material use, waste reduction, and more.

Top Desired Amenities: The public's top choice for amenity use include hiking trails, nature trails, picnic tables with grills, multi-use trails, and observation decks.

Gateway and Access Improvement to the Park

The Zionsville Gateway: Watauga County's Comprehensive Plan calls for development of a gateway in the nearby Zionsville area, concentrating on efforts for economic development.

Hwy 421 Widening: The 2020-2029 State Transportation Improvement Program calls for the widening improvement to Hwy 421 beginning in 2030. Drive times to the park may be slightly reduced for some areas of the region.

Outdoor Recreation Development and the Northern Peaks State Trail

The Boone Area Outdoor Recreation Plan: In 2011, the Watauga County Tourism and Development Authority oversaw the development of a plan that identified projects related to greenways, long distance trails, blueways, and mountain and road biking, which resulted in a project list. Elk Knob was identified as a possible location for future mountain biking expansion. Meat Camp Road, passing through the park, was identified as an important regional road route for bikes. The Northern Peaks State Trail was identified as an important regional project.

The Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST): The NPST has been a concept for years by many partners. In 2017 a plan was developed for an approximately 50-mile corridor that would connect Elk Knob to both downtown Boone and West Jefferson. In 2019 the trail was designated by the NC legislature as a state trail. Planning efforts within Boone may realize some portions of the trail, but Elk Knob State Park may provide opportunity to plan and implement one of the larger sections of the trail within current boundaries.

Land Preservation / Park Expansion / Scenic Vista Protection

Land Protection Partnerships: The Nature Conservancy and the Blue Ridge Conservancy have both been critical partners in helping acquiring lands for Elk Knob State Park. Conservation organizations continue to actively partner in conserving land for and around the park.

Farmland Protection: Agricultural preservation is likely one of the best tools to help preserve the rural landscape. Both Watauga and Ashe counties consider farmland preservation a high priority, especially the scenic viewsheds of Elk Knob, Snake Mountain, and potential views from the Northern Peaks State Trail.

RECREATION AMENITIES AVAILABLE REGIONALLY

Camping Camping is available locally through several private resort and some public options, including:

RV Camping/Resort Camping (within a 30 minute radius)

Vanderpool Campground is an RV park with 37 full hookup sites. It is approximately 30 minutes from the park.

Blue Bear Mountain promotes itself as a spacious, low-density camping experience. It has 10 RV sites (no septic hookups) and 6 primitive sites. It also offers cabin and tepee "glamping." It is approximately 11 minutes from the park.

The Boone KOA is a camping resort that has over a 100 RV sites, several cabins (from camper cabin to full kitchens), and some primitive camping. It is approximately 15 minutes from the park.

Winter Sports

Skiing and snowshoeing

Boone is a mecca for winter sports in the southeast. Elk Knob State Park, along with Moses Cone, is currently is one of the best locations for snowshoeing and cross country skiing. Boone Outfitters are the closest location for snow sport gear rental.

Other areas used for winter sports are the Blue Ridge Parkway, Roan Mountain, Beech Mountain (private), and Boone's Greenway Trail.

Day Use Recreation

Picnicking, group recreation, and passive recreation

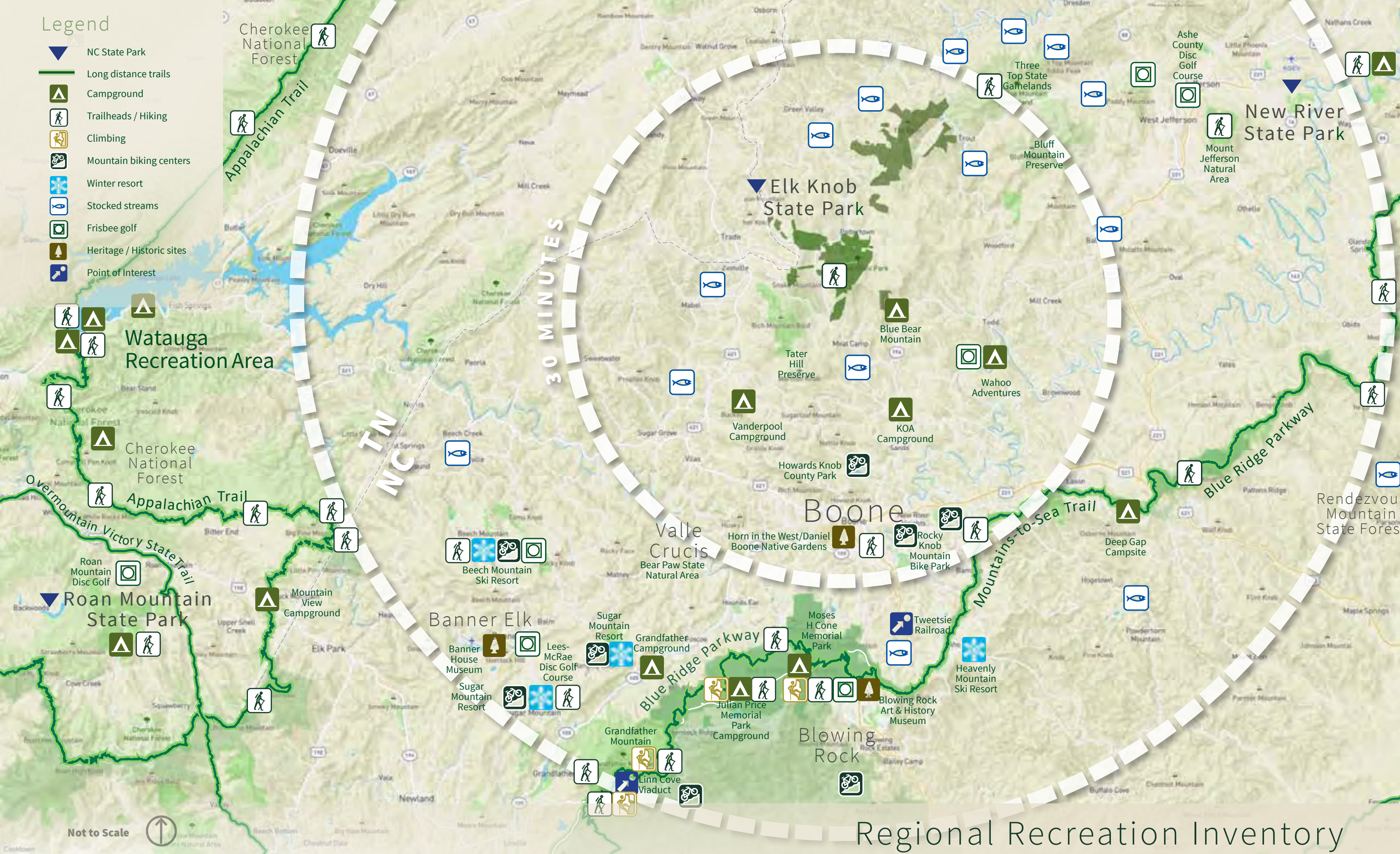
Elk Knob State Park serves a vital role in providing public gathering space for the more rural areas of Watauga and Ashe counties. Stakeholder feedback suggests that day use recreation that can cater to group gatherings would provide a critical service to locals and local cultural events. Picnic and group picnic opportunities are minimal in the region north of Boone.

LOCAL & REGIONAL

Regional Plans, Partnerships, and Amenities

Legend

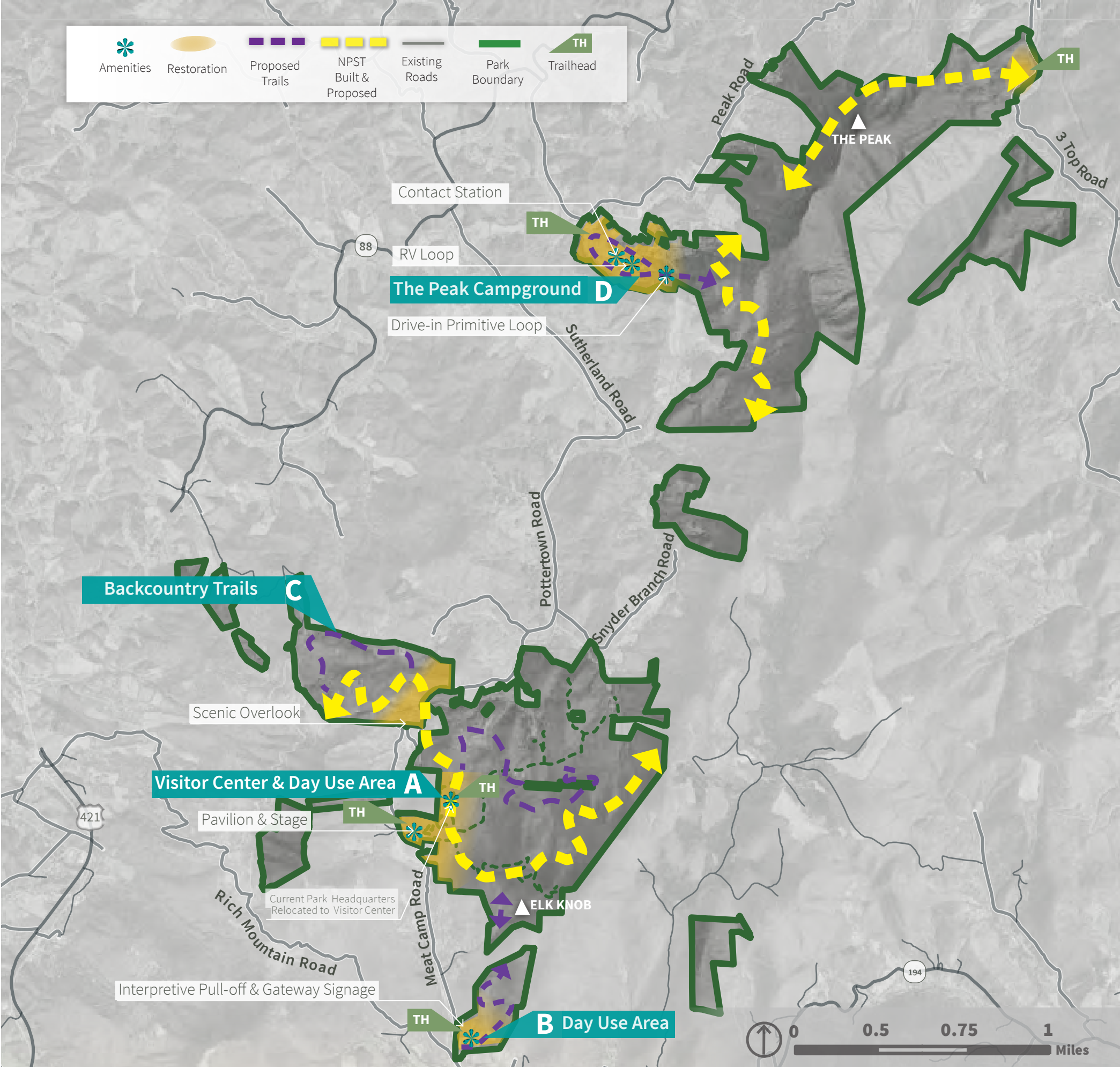
- NC State Park
- Long distance trails
- Campground
- Trailheads / Hiking
- Climbing
- Mountain biking centers
- Winter resort
- Stocked streams
- Frisbee golf
- Heritage / Historic sites
- Point of Interest





CHAPTER

4 The Plan



The Visitor Center & Day Use Area

A



Visitor Center at Gorges State Park



Gift Shop & Information Center



Nature Play



Warming Foyer

Day Use Area

B



Picnic Area



Pavilion

Backcountry Trails

C



Backcountry Shelter



Tent Platform

The Peak Campground

D

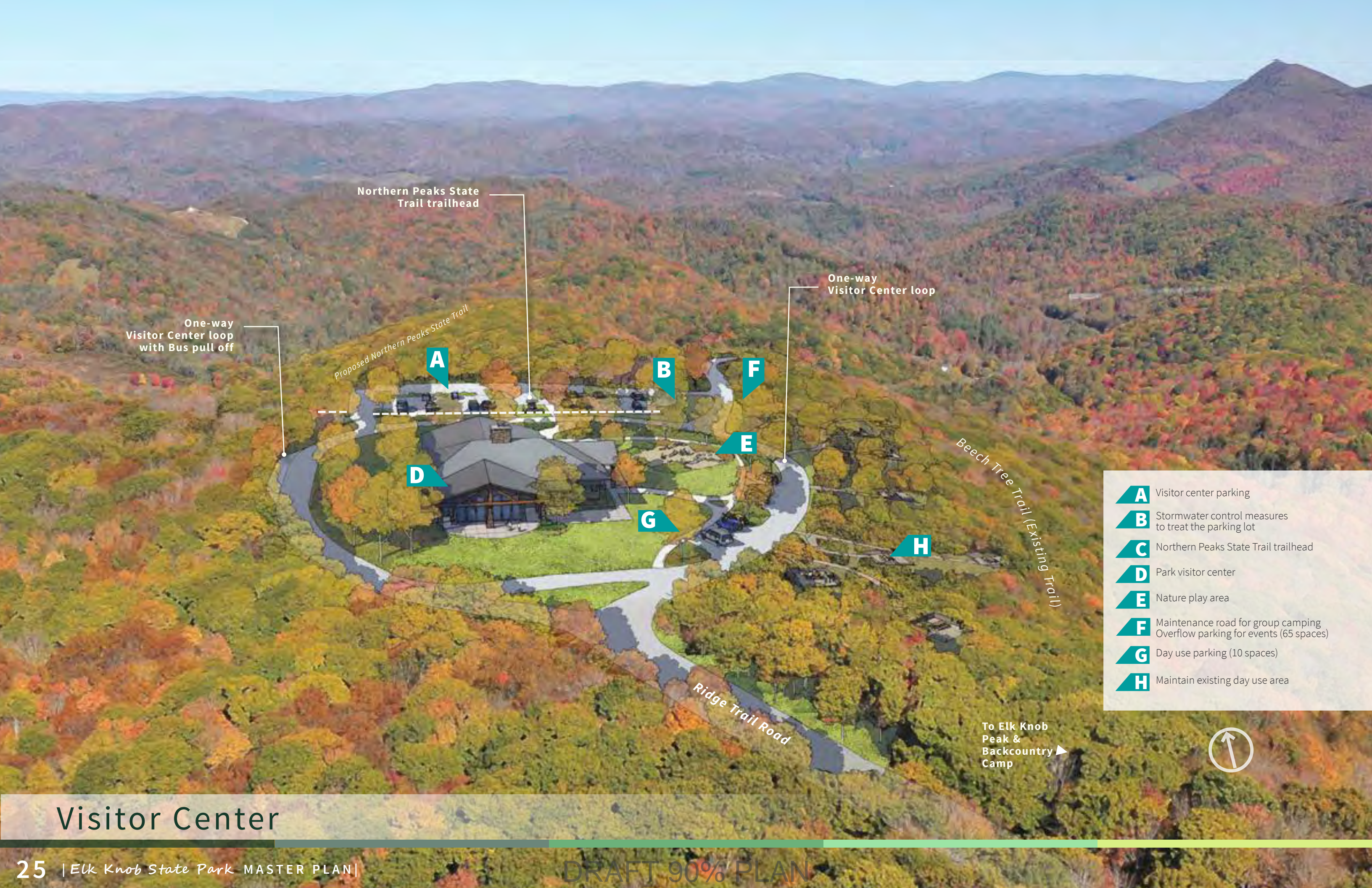


Campground



Cabin

Master Site Plan (Entire Park)



Northern Peaks State Trail trailhead

One-way Visitor Center loop with Bus pull off

Proposed Northern Peaks State Trail

One-way Visitor Center loop

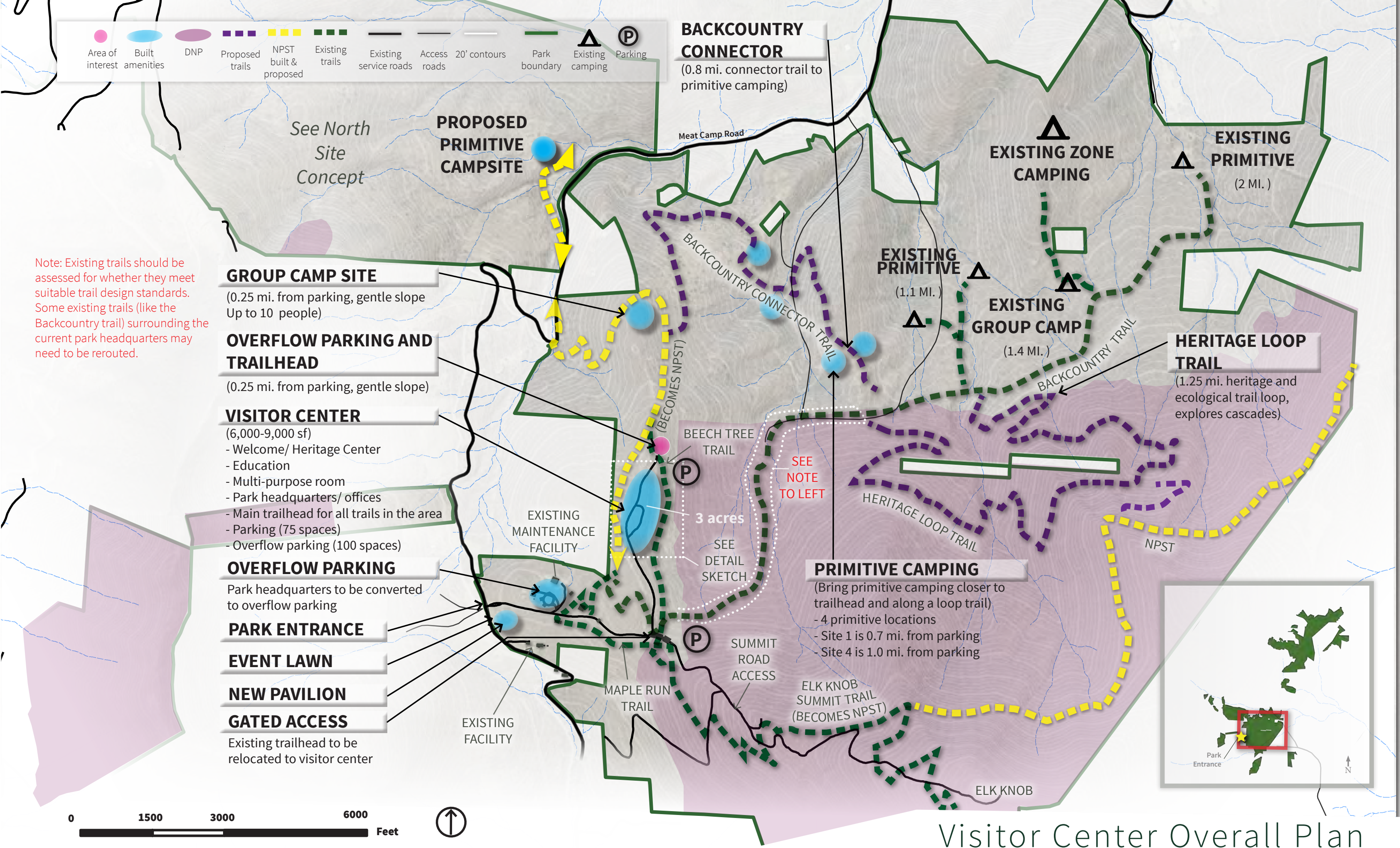
Beech Tree Trail (Existing Trail)

Ridge Trail Road

To Elk Knob Peak & Backcountry Camp

- A** Visitor center parking
- B** Stormwater control measures to treat the parking lot
- C** Northern Peaks State Trail trailhead
- D** Park visitor center
- E** Nature play area
- F** Maintenance road for group camping
Overflow parking for events (65 spaces)
- G** Day use parking (10 spaces)
- H** Maintain existing day use area

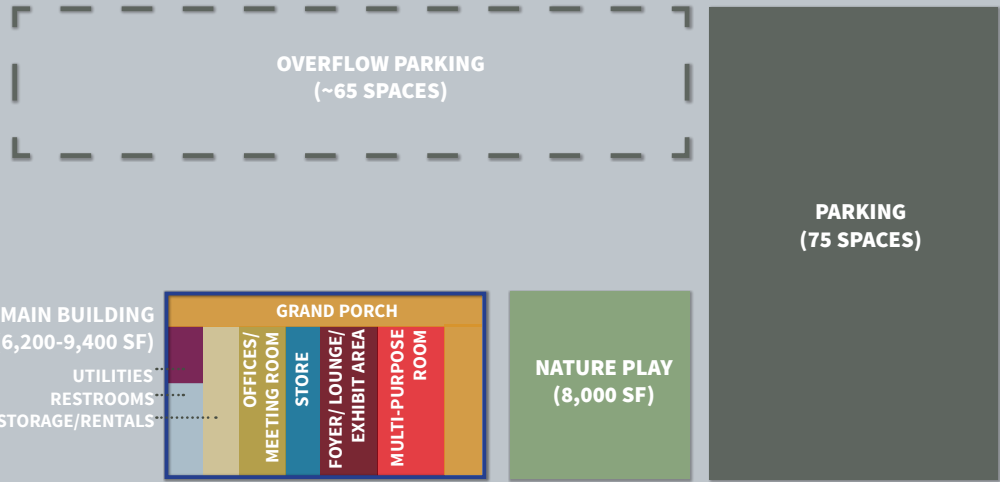
Visitor Center



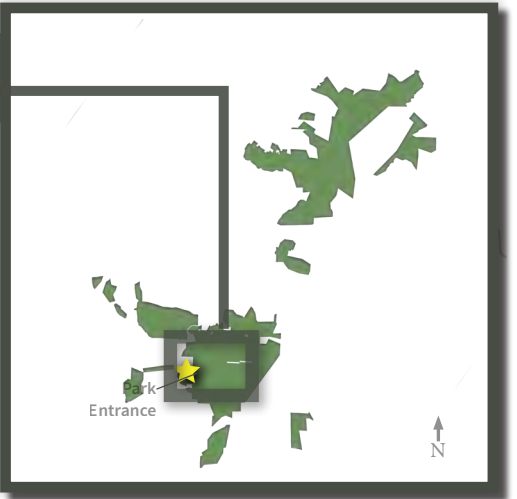
Note: Existing trails should be assessed for whether they meet suitable trail design standards. Some existing trails (like the Backcountry trail) surrounding the current park headquarters may need to be rerouted.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE VISITOR CENTER

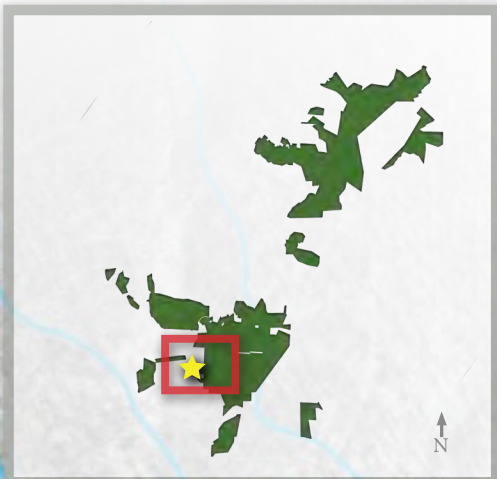
A central component of the Elk Knob Master Plan, the Visitor Center could serve as the central facility for park programming and operations. The Visitor Center will be designed to be welcoming in all seasons. It will be a place for education, community, gathering, events, and respite. Amenities of the proposed Visitor Center are depicted by relative area in the diagram below.



LOCATION: Main Park Entrance (Existing Site Images)



Amenities of the Visitor Center



Visitor Center Site Concept



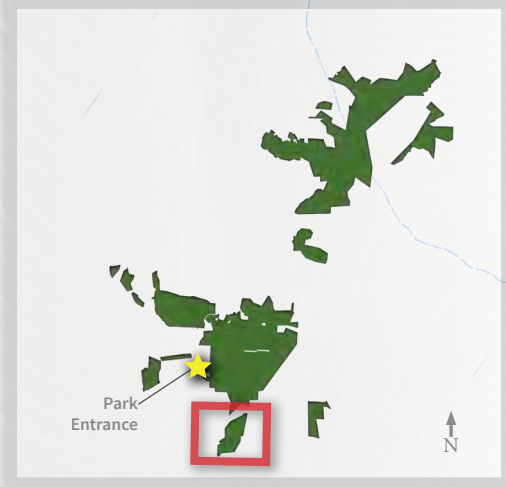
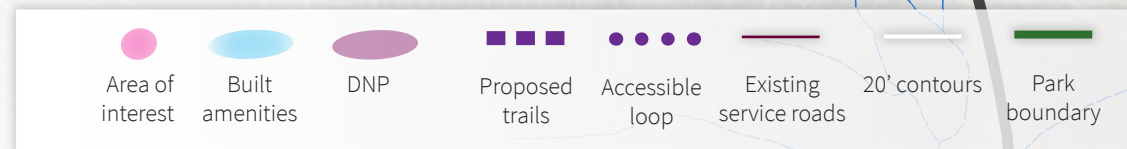
▲
To
Elk Knob

Elk Knob South Slope Trail

Meat Camp Creek

- B** Stormwater control measures to treat the parking lot
- C** Overflow parking
- D** Mini-maintenance area
- E** Parking
- G** Pavilion with restrooms
- H** Creekside picnic area
- J** ADA walking path
- K** Lawn and picnic
- L** Native plant meadow
- M** Trailhead and wayfinding

Day Use Area Concept Diagram



ELK KNOB SOUTH SLOPE TRAIL

(Potential trail connection of 2-3 miles)
Seek acquisition opportunities to make trail connection to Elk Knob Trail and the Northern Peaks State Trail

VIEW/ OVERLOOK

MAINTENANCE FACILITY

- House to be demolished and converted to mini-maintenance area

EXISTING BARN

- Barn to be demolished and reused in new architecture where possible

DAY USE AREA

- Picnic shelters and/or pavilion (potentially enclosed), with attached restrooms
- Open space/lawn
- ADA parking
- ADA trail loop
- Parking (30 spaces)

PROPOSED TRAILHEAD

ENTRANCE

New bridge and entrance to site (realign entrance for better line-of-site)

PULL-OFF/GATEWAY

Pull-off with way-finding as the first point of contact for visitors

DAY USE ADA WALKING PATH (APPROX. 0.25 MILES)

2 acres

1.8 mi loop

MEAT CAMP ROAD

RICH MOUNTAIN RD.



Day Use Area Overall Concept

A CLOSER LOOK AT DAY USE AREAS IN ELK KNOB STATE PARK

With its regional and local draw, Elk Knob State Park could benefit from a day use area fully stocked with all the amenities for a full day of recreation. A day use area can also serve as a frontcountry gateway to backcountry sites. To the right are images reflecting potential day use amenities:

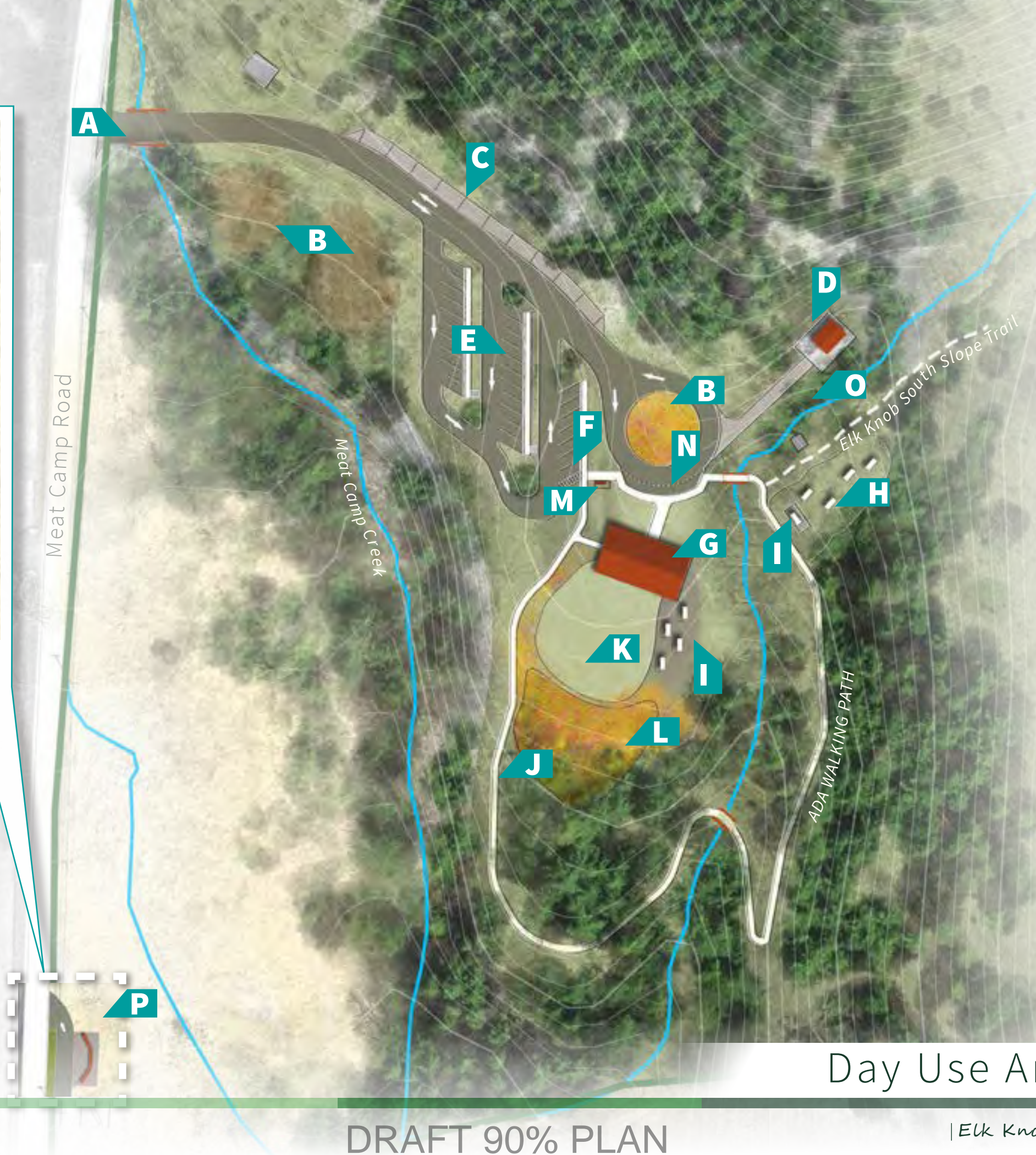
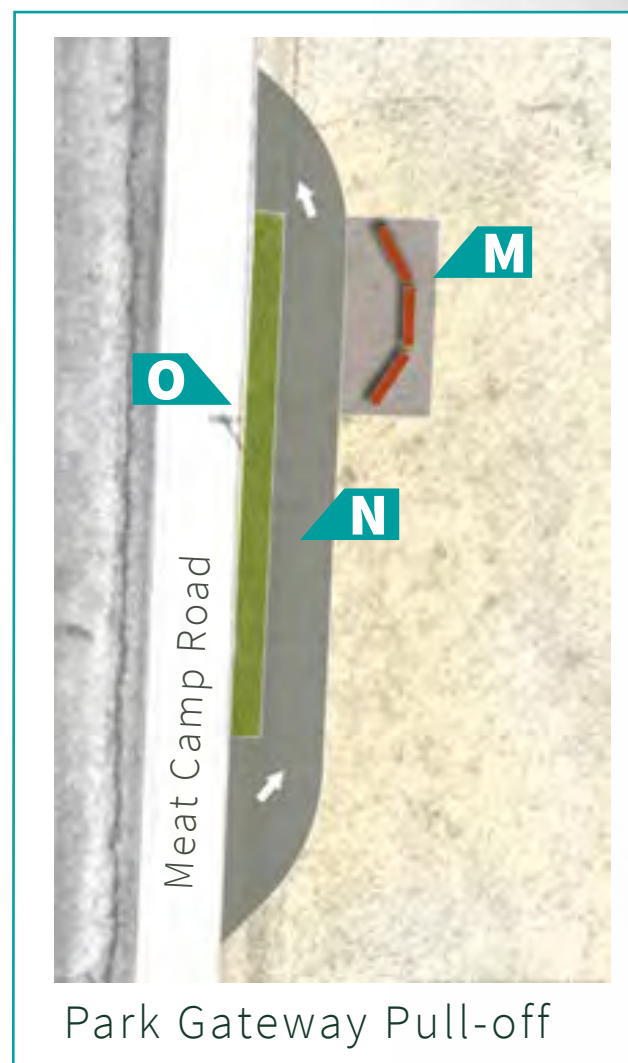
- Large pavilion with fireplace or large pavilion with bay doors that allow for enclosure and heating during inclement weather (G)
- Picnic tables (H)
- Grills(H)
- Trails and a trailhead, including accessible trail loops (J)
- Open space (K)
- Native plant meadow (L)
- Way-finding and park signage (M)



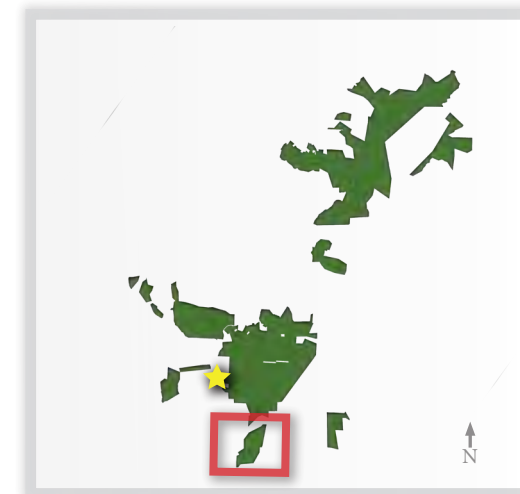
LOCATION: South Site (Existing Site Photos)



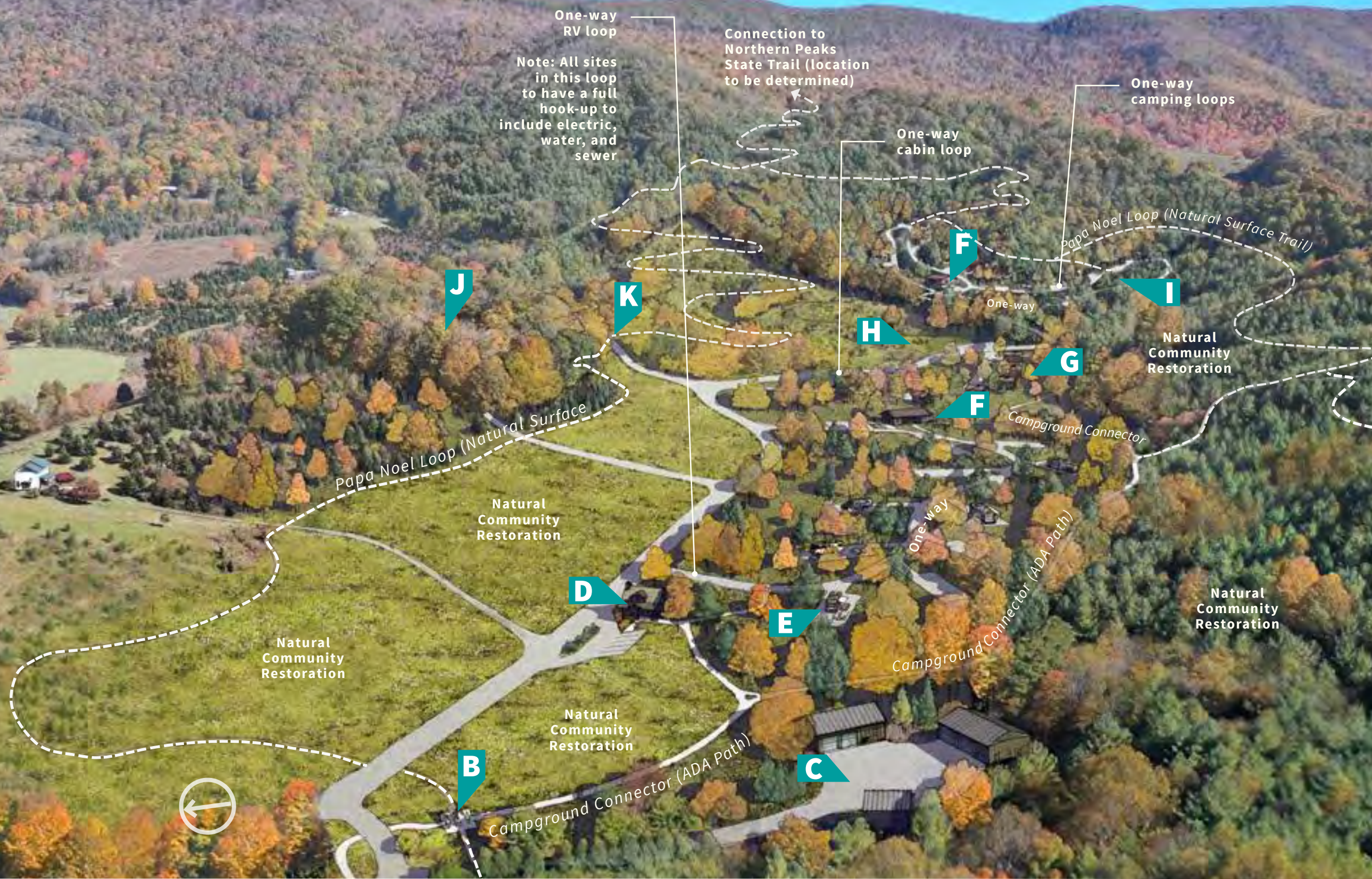
Amenities of the Day Use Area



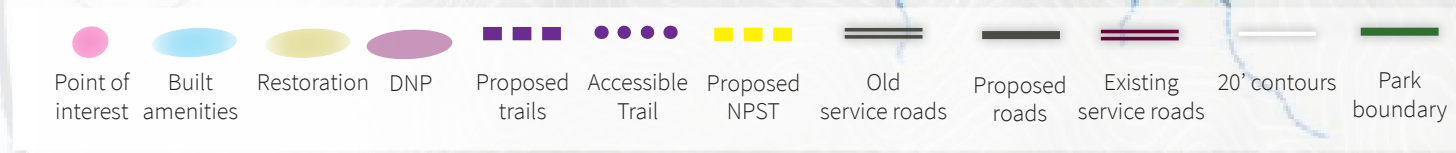
- A** New bridge & road access
 - B** Stormwater control measures to treat the parking lot
 - C** Enhanced shoulder for overflow parking (10 parallel spaces)
 - D** Mini-maintenance area & shed (existing house to be demolished)
 - E** One-way parking (28 spaces)
 - F** ADA parking
 - G** Pavilion with restrooms (outside access), enclosable bay doors, and a heat source
 - H** Creekside picnic area (additional space for when large groups are using the pavilion)
 - I** ADA accessible picnic tables
 - J** ADA Walking Path (decomposed granite)
 - K** Lawn
 - L** Native plant meadow
 - M** Way-finding, park map, & interpretive signs
 - N** Paved pull-off (16-foot wide)
 - O** Vegetated buffer
 - P** Park gateway pull-off
-  Park Boundary



Day Use Area Site Concept



Peak Campground, Cabin, & Backcountry Access



GATE ACCESS

CONTACT STATION

- Basic supplies - Trailhead
- Campground check-in
- Restroom

ENTRANCE SIGNAGE

DAY USE AREA

- NPST parking & trailhead
- Picnic tables
- Day use parking

MAINTENANCE FACILITY

RV CAMPING

CAMPGROUND CONNECTOR

(0.5 mi. accessible path)

SHOWERHOUSE

EXISTING BARN (Demolished)

ACCESSIBLE TRAIL

CABINS

CAMPGROUND

- 27 Tent and trailer
- Showerhouse

NATURAL COMMUNITY RESTORATION

WETLAND RESTORATION OPPORTUNITY

NATURAL COMMUNITY RESTORATION

PAPA NOEL LOOP

(approx. 2-3 mi. loop)

PEAK CONNECTOR TRAIL

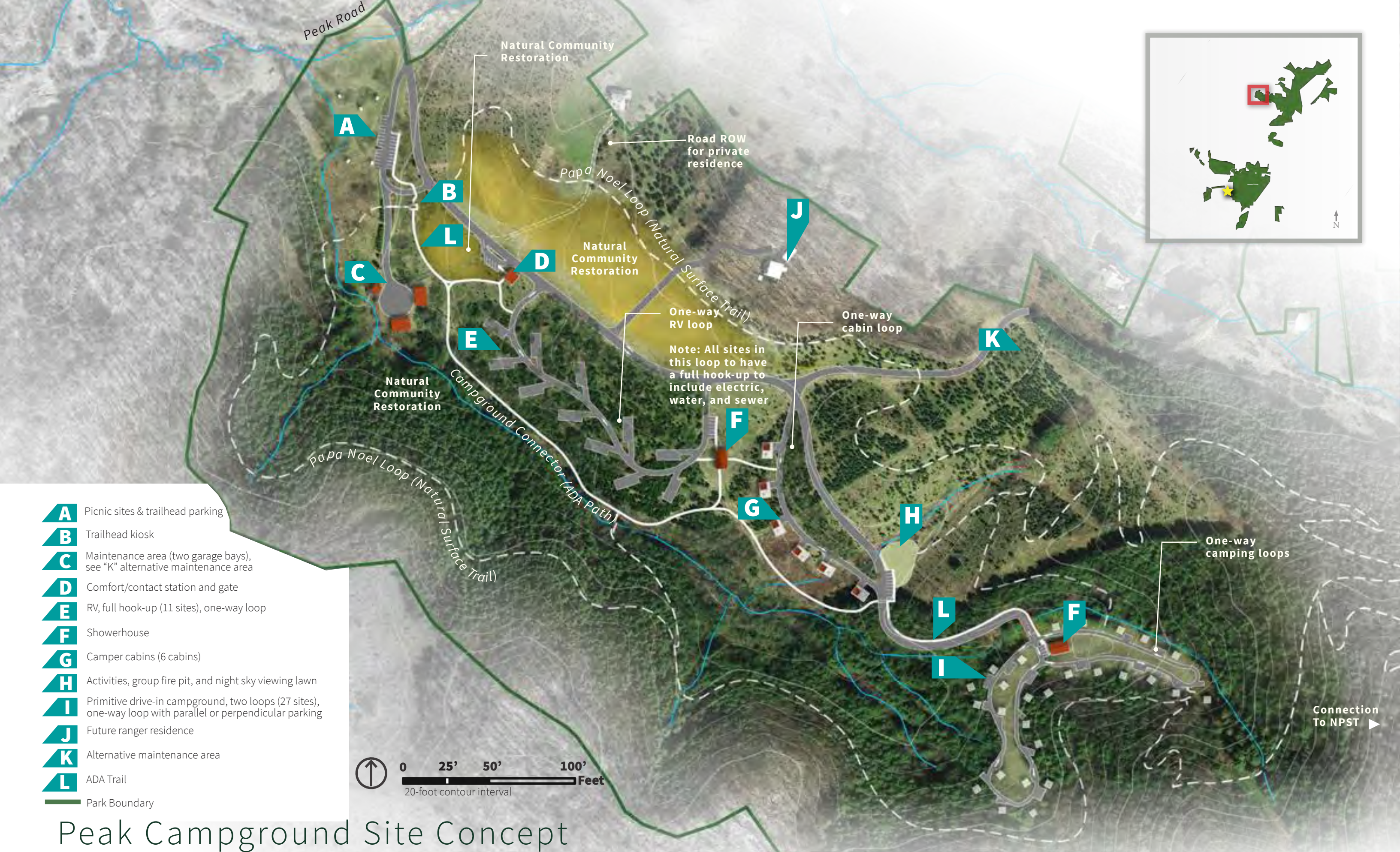
2-3 mi. trail to NPST
1130 ft elevation gain

PROPOSED NORTHERN PEAKS TRAIL

NOTE: THE FUTURE LOCATION OF THE NPST WILL BE DETERMINED BASED ON A THOROUGH ASSESSMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES. THE ROUTE WILL STAY OFF OF THE SUMMIT OF THE PEAK BUT A LOCATION THAT IS NORTH OR SOUTH IS TO BE DETERMINED.

0 1000 2000 4000 Feet

Peak Campgrounds, Cabin, & Backcountry Access Overall Concept



Peak Campground Site Concept

A CLOSER LOOK AT CAMPING IN ELK KNOB STATE PARK

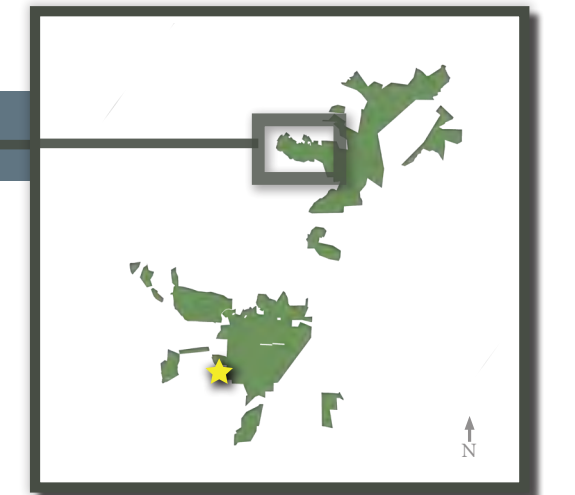
Elk Knob State Park is considering several camping options:

- Cabins (G)
- Drive-in camping (dedicated parking at campsite with bathhouse) (I)
- RV camping (dedicated hook-ups for RVs) (E)
- Showerhouse (F)

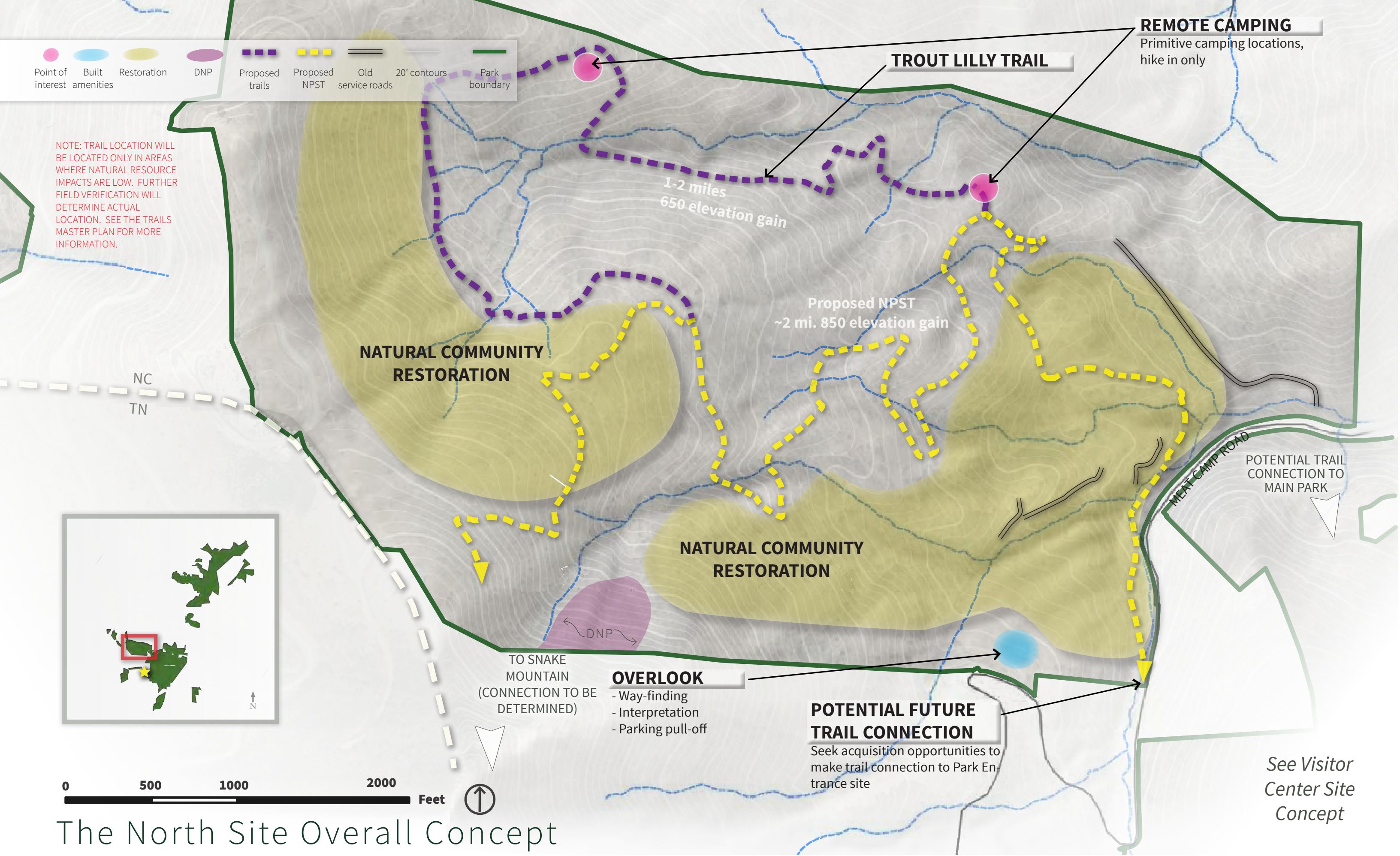
The potential camping offerings can take advantage of the diversity in experience that Elk Knob State Park has to offer. Key considerations would include: backcountry/frontcountry experience, ecological sensitivity, and access.



LOCATION: Peak Road Site (Existing Site Photos)



Amenities of the Peak Campground



The North Site Overall Concept

A CLOSER LOOK AT BACKCOUNTRY IN THE NORTH SITE

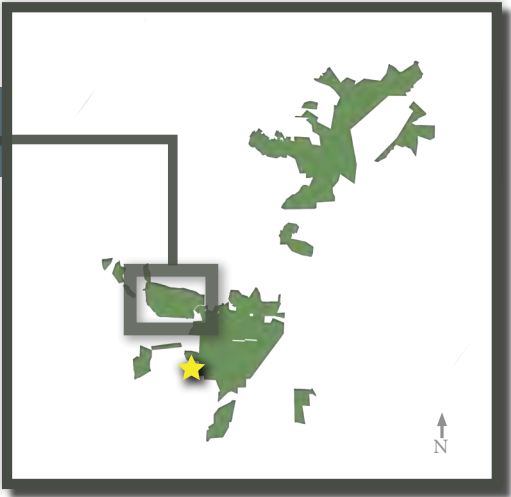
The north site contains a wealth of natural resources, from its biodiversity to its view sheds. Elk Knob State Park is considering backcountry amenities that would encourage visitation and appreciation of these natural resources while leaving a very small footprint.

Such amenities include:

- Remote camping with a primitive shelter (A)
- Backcountry hiking trails (B)
- Overlook off Meat Camp Road (C)
- Natural community restoration (D)
- Birding opportunities (habitat conducive to birding) (E)



LOCATION: North Site (Existing Site Photos)



Amenities of the North Site



LONG HOPE VALLEY
(VIEW FROM ELK KNOB)



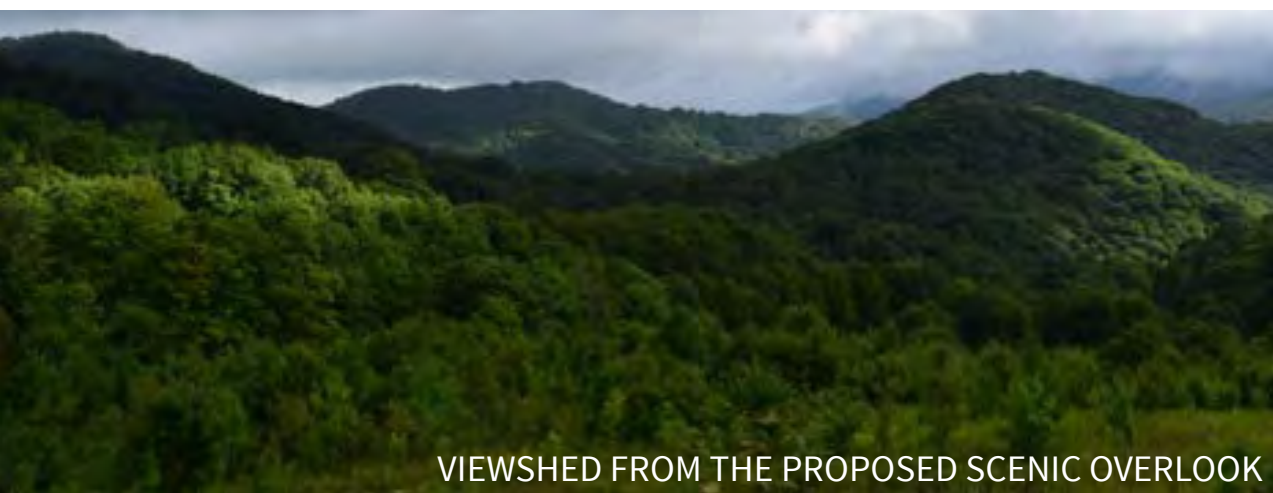
SNAKE MOUNTAIN



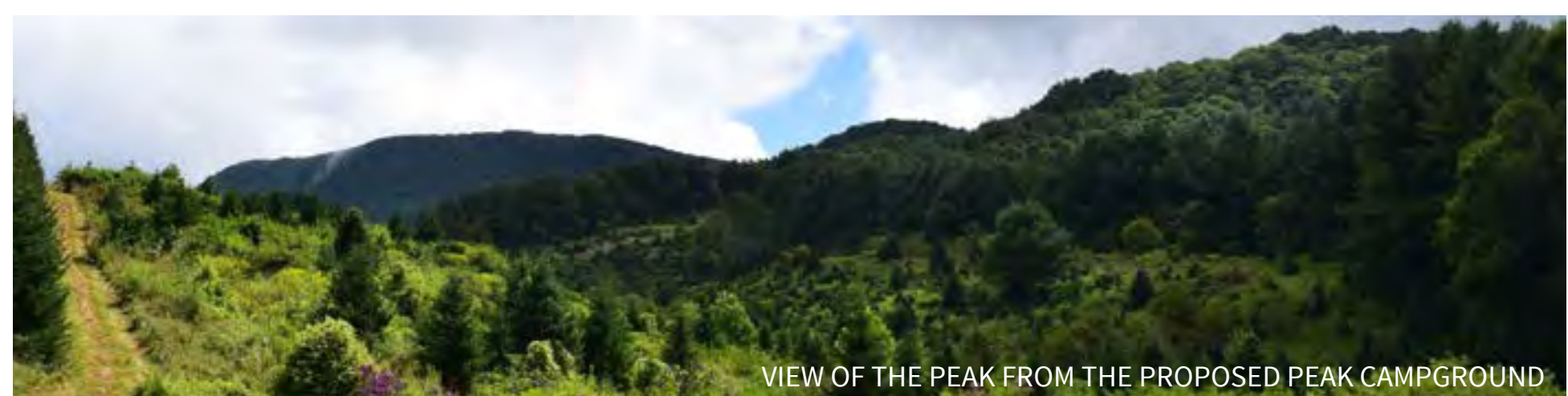
THE PEAK



HIGH PRIORITY NATURAL RESOURCES



VIEWSHED FROM THE PROPOSED SCENIC OVERLOOK



VIEW OF THE PEAK FROM THE PROPOSED PEAK CAMPGROUND

Land Acquisition Priorities



The Strategy



Acquisition for the Northern Peaks State Trail

Four to five miles of new trail corridor needs to be obtained for the trail and secure gaps between current park property.



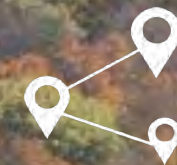
Acquisition for High Priority Conservation Areas

Landscapes surrounding the park have some of the highest value and most rare natural resources in the state. Priorities are based on preservation of habitat for rare and threatened flora and fauna. This includes unique landscapes such as the high mountain bog and golden wing warbler habitat.



Viewshed and Soundscape Protection

Views from Elk Knob and Snake Mountain are priority as well as the viewshed from the planned amenities of the park. Surrounding land use, impact to views and noise can have a detrimental impact on park experience, especially for those in the backcountry.



Acquisition for Park Connectivity

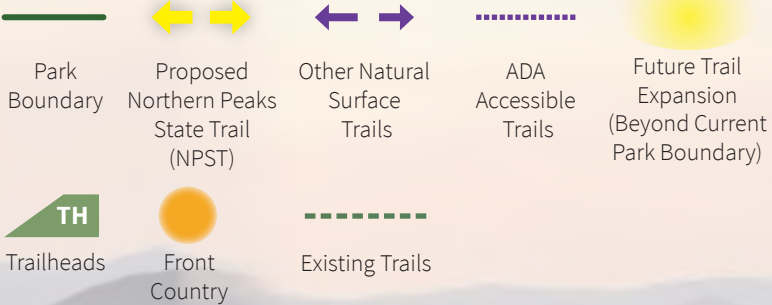
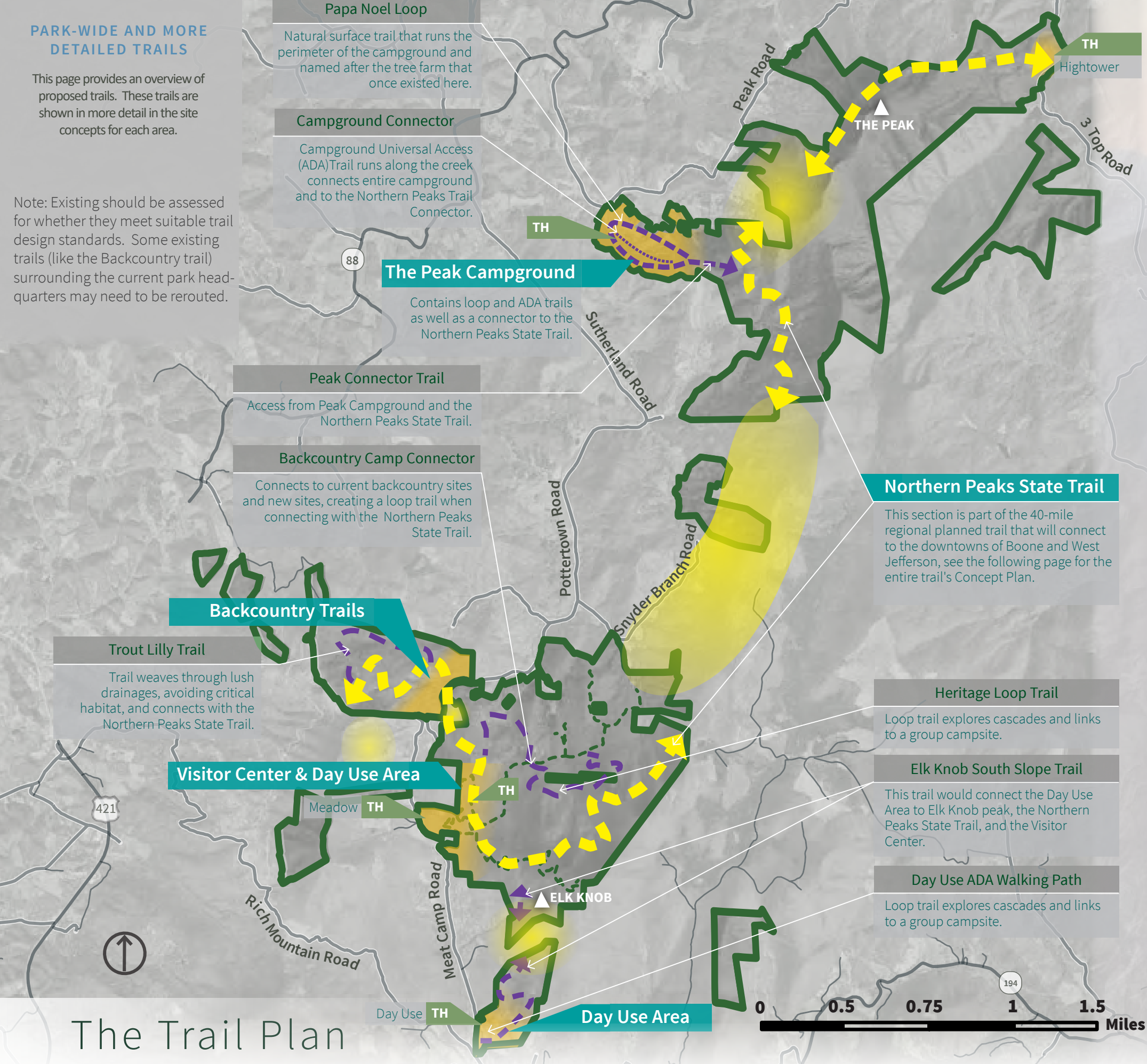
Acquisition to create a continuous park boundary can help to maintain park experience, allow connectivity of wildlife corridors, and simplify park boundary monitoring and maintenance.

Land Acquisition Priorities

PARK-WIDE AND MORE DETAILED TRAILS

This page provides an overview of proposed trails. These trails are shown in more detail in the site concepts for each area.

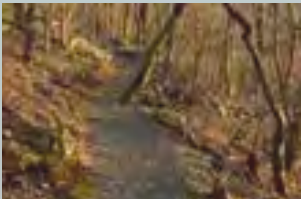
Note: Existing should be assessed for whether they meet suitable trail design standards. Some existing trails (like the Backcountry trail) surrounding the current park headquarters may need to be rerouted.



Proposed Trail Plan

NAME	APPROXIMATE MILEAGE
Northern Peaks State Trail	9-11 MILES*
*Only represents mileage within current park boundary. An additional 3-4 miles would be needed to connect the northern and southern portions of the park.	
VISITOR CENTER (MAIN PARK CENTER)	
Backcountry Camp Connector	0.5-1 MILE
Heritage Loop	1-1.5 MILES
DAY USE AREA (SOUTHERN SITE)	
Elk Knob South Slope Trail	2-3 MILES
Day Use ADA Walking Path	0.25 MILES
PEAK CAMPGROUND AREA	
Papa Noel Loop	2-3 MILES
Peak Connector Trail	2-3 MILES
Campground Connector (ADA)	0.5 MILES
DAY USE AREA (SOUTHERN SITE)	
Trout Lilly Trail	1-2 MILES
TOTAL NEW TRAIL MILEAGE	19-27 MILES
TOTAL NEW & EXISTING TRAIL MILEAGE	25-33 MILES

TRAIL TYPES



Natural Surface Trail



Crushed Stone Trail

TYPE	3-4-foot natural surface	3-6-foot crushed limestone
SURFACE	Bare mineral soil	Decomposed granite or limestone crushed fines
NOTES	Trail designed to sustainable trail standards for grade, sensitivity to natural resources, etc.	Crushed limestone surface designed to ADA standards

Process for Design & Construction of Trails in North Carolina State Parks

Good trail design and construction practices can protect park visitors; preserve the environment; and provide a profound connection to nature. However, poor design can lead visitors into harm; degrade the environment and the visitor experience; and sever connection to the natural world.

North Carolina State Parks takes care in designing and constructing any new trails. Once a new trail is proposed, the following process occurs:

Trail Proposal & Funding. The park superintendent completes an internal evaluation for the need and the availability of funding for the new trail. This evaluation includes a justification and a map of a potential route for the new trail that is developed by a regional trails specialist.

Desktop Routing. If the trail proposal is approved, then the trails specialist uses GIS to map a sustainable alignment for the proposed trail on the computer. This alignment includes feedback gained during the internal evaluation.

The trails specialist lays out a sustainable trail corridor on the ground—paying attention to the rules of sustainability and using a clinometer:

- Trail grade should not exceed half the grade of the side slope it traverses
- The overall trail grade should not exceed an average of 10%
- Grade reversals, or rolling grade dips, are designed into the trail route to ensure that water gets off the trail as soon as possible
- Avoid water crossings whenever possible
- Avoid ridgelines, base of slopes and flat land (no slope) whenever possible

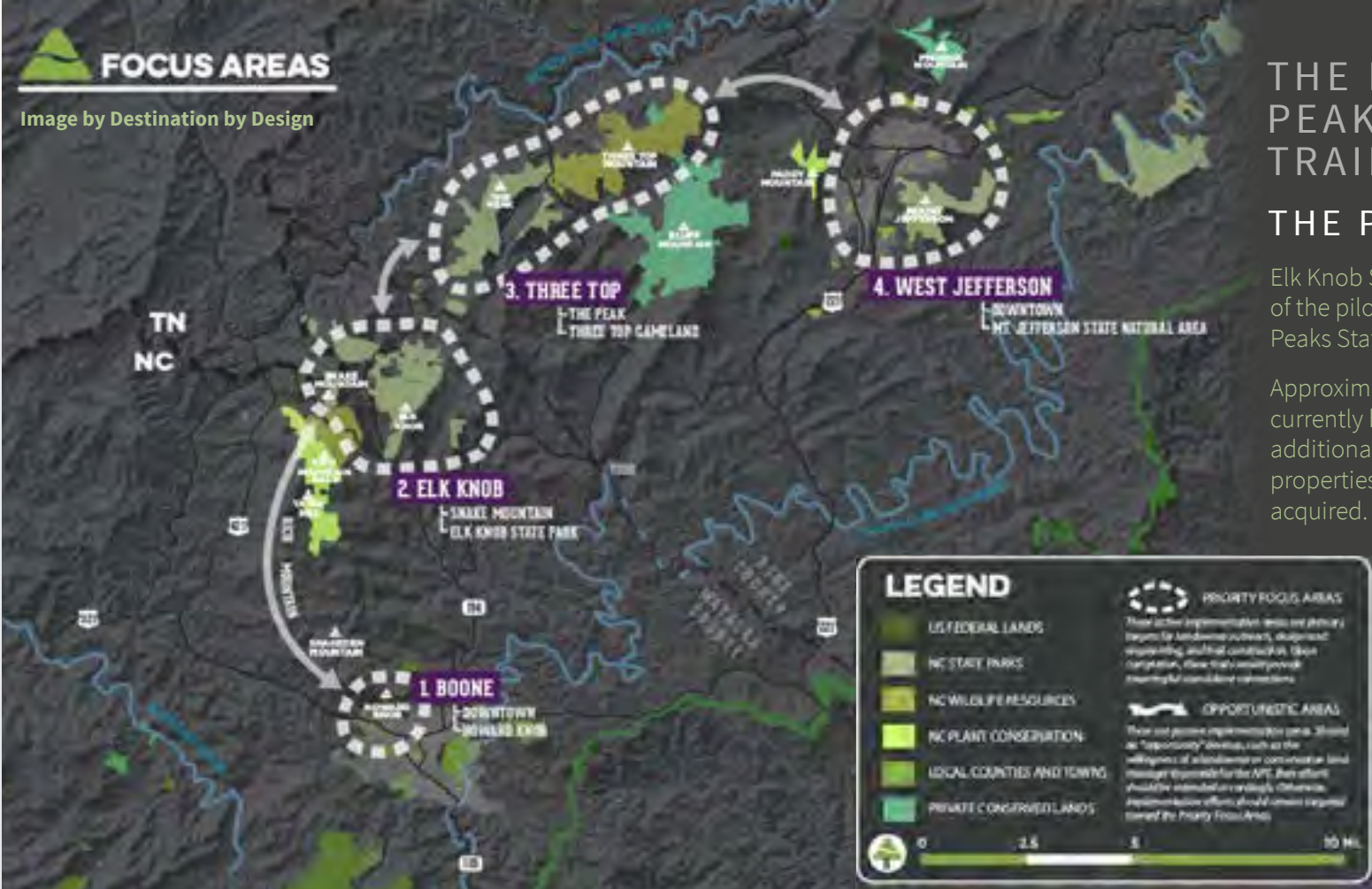
Field Design, Vetting, & Construction. Once the corridor is designed, other staff, including the park superintendent, regional biologist and environmental review coordinator, walk the alignment and work with the regional trails specialist to make any necessary changes.

- The trails specialist pin flags the exact route of the trail, within the sustainable corridor.
- The trail is constructed, using sustainable building techniques, by either a professional trail builder, park staff, or qualified volunteers. The sustainable techniques include:
 - Full bench cut—the full width of the trail is cut into the hillside
 - Trail is outsloped at about 3-5%, but varies based on the grade
 - Trail surface is compacted
 - The backslope, the area uphill of the trail surface, is gently sloped to reduce erosion

Post Construction. Once constructed, the regional trails specialist and park staff review the completed trail and record its final location with GPS. This GPS track will be included in our GIS database of all park trails.

Once the trail is constructed, it is not opened for use until it has had time to “season”—ideally through a couple of rain events.

After the trail is opened, periodic maintenance is essential to trim vegetation, move downed trees, debern, and look for any signs of erosion or new hazards.



THE NORTHERN PEAKS STATE TRAIL

THE PILOT PROJECT

Elk Knob State Park can serve as one of the pilot sections for the Northern Peaks State Trail.

Approximately 10-miles of trail could currently be built within the park with additional miles added if adjacent properties or easements can be acquired.



The Trail Plan

Phases of this Plan

- 1

Land Acquisition
- 2

Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST): Part 1
- 3

Visitor Center & Day Use Area (Main Park Area)
- 4

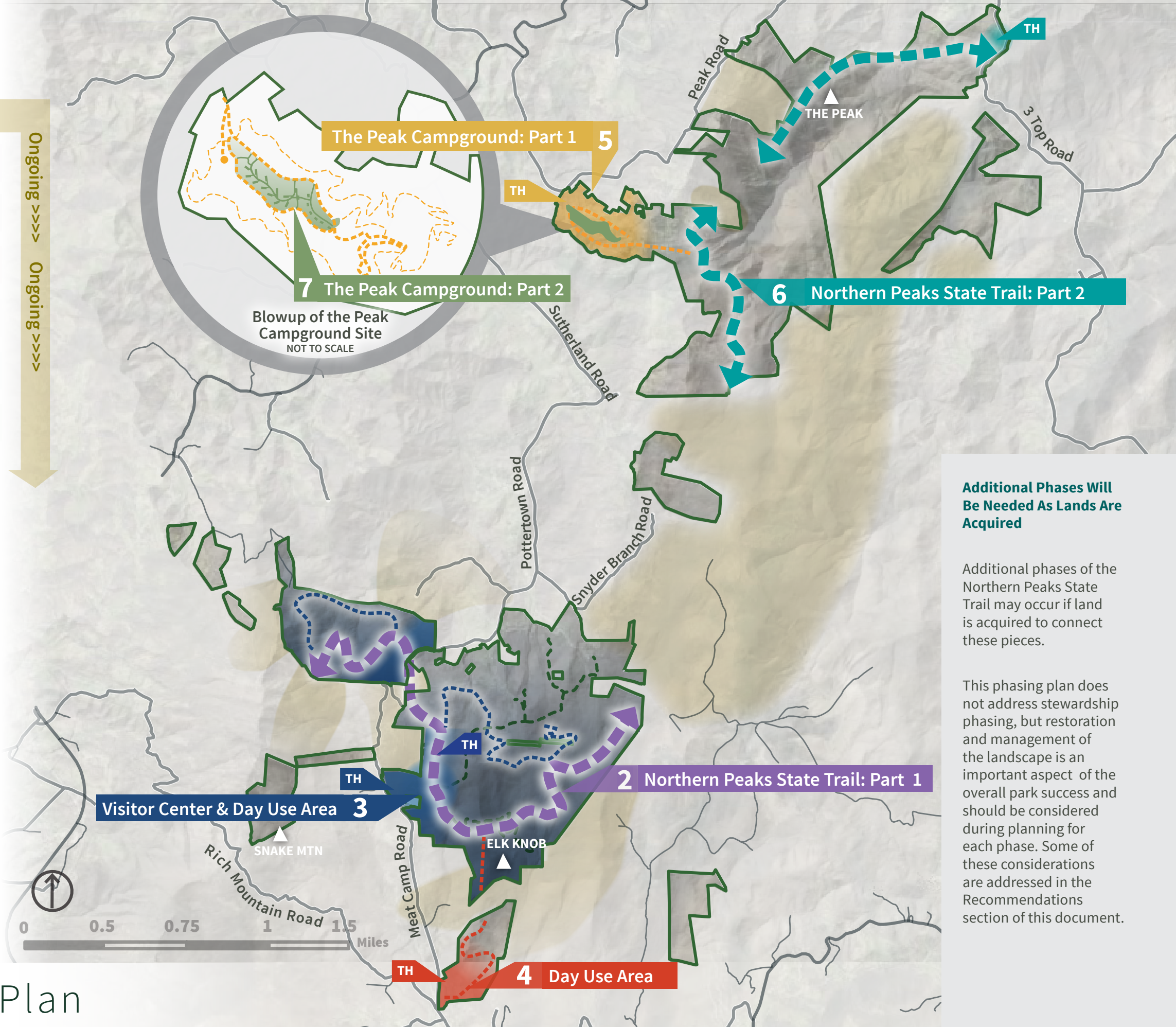
Day Use Area
- 5

The Peak Campground: Part 1
- 6

Northern Peaks State Trail: Part 2
- 7

The Peak Campground: Part 2

Ongoing >>>> Ongoing >>>>



Additional Phases Will Be Needed As Lands Are Acquired

Additional phases of the Northern Peaks State Trail may occur if land is acquired to connect these pieces.

This phasing plan does not address stewardship phasing, but restoration and management of the landscape is an important aspect of the overall park success and should be considered during planning for each phase. Some of these considerations are addressed in the Recommendations section of this document.

Phasing of the Master Plan

Phase Details

1 Land Acquisition

Land Acquisition is Critical to Trail Connectivity. Acquisition can be phased throughout to maximize the benefit of each phase of development. More details about land acquisition strategy are outlined in the land acquisition map.

2 Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST): Part 1

Build Out the Core of the NPST. Part 1 of the NPST includes building approximately 5-6 miles of new trail. It is recommended to add a new trailhead, a high visibility crossing on Meat Camp Road, and land acquisition (or a dedicated easement) off of Meat Camp Road. The NPST can be used as part of a stacked loop system once Phase 3 occurs.

3 Visitor Center & Day Use Area (Main Park Area)

Build a Place to Welcome & Warm. The core amenities of this phase are the Visitor Center with a warming foyer, a nature play area, a day use picnic area, a new pavilion that can accommodate large groups, an amphitheater/stage area at the entrance lawn, and parking. Additionally, a primitive group campsite just north of the Visitor Center is proposed. New trails are proposed (5-6 miles) to build out a full stacked loop system, including trails in the North Site.

4 Day Use Area

A Place for Gathering and Backcountry Access. The Day Use Area is proposed to be phased next, as it is the closest to a population center and has the greatest chance for year-round use because of its lower elevation. Proposed is a large group pavilion with enclosable doors, a lawn, a picnic area, a mini-maintenance area, and a trailhead for the 2-3-mile Elk Knob South Slope Trail. A wayfinding and interpretive pull-off is also proposed on Meat Camp Road.

5 The Peak Campground: Part 1

Camping and Access to Backcountry. Part 1 of the campground is the primitive drive-in campground loop, a shower house/restroom, an interpretive group fire pit area, and trailhead parking. Additionally, this area will include 6-7 miles of trail, of which 0.5 miles would be the Campground Connector ADA trail.

6 Northern Peaks State Trail: Part 2

Build the Most Remote Part of the Trail. Part 2 proposes 5-6 miles of the NPST to be built in the most remote section of the park. The 3 Top Road Trailhead is also proposed as part of this phase.

7 The Peak Campground: Part 2

Complete the Build Out. Part 2 of the campground includes the RV/trailer campground loop, a shower house/restroom, and the campground's comfort station.

Ongoing >>>>

Ongoing >>>>

Ongoing >>>>

Notes on the Probable Cost Estimate

- Estimates are rounded up and may vary slightly from the detail cost estimates in the Appendix.
- Costs are based on recent bid or cost estimates. *Inflation of 3-4% annually to estimates beyond the year 2020.*
- *Estimates assume a 25% contingency, 10% design fee, and 5% mobilization for each phase.* A larger contingency fee may be applicable due to the remoteness of much of the park.
- *Costs not included in this estimate include:* Utilities (beyond septic for campground), geotechnical/soils investigation, rock removal, surveying, permitting, bonding requirements, archeology investigations, septic investigations, and demolitions.

Total Estimated Cost
\$26,223,150

Probable Cost Estimate

PHASE	PHASE NAME	COST
1	Land Acquisition	Cost not included in this estimate
2	Northern Peaks State Trail: Part 1 5-6 new miles of trail & a trailhead kiosk	\$556,770 (TOTAL)
3	Visitor Center & Day Use Area (Main Park Area) Visitor Center, natural play area, site work, parking, a day use area, mobilization, etc..... Stage and pavilion..... Overlook..... Trails.....	\$11,693,000 (TOTAL) \$11,043,000 \$292,000 \$150,000 \$208,000
4	Day Use Area Sitework, mobilization, pathways, and traffic control..... Pavilion..... Bridge..... Mini-maintenance area..... Pull-off (interpretive & wayfinding)..... Natural community restoration..... Trails.....	\$2,884,700 (TOTAL) \$2,114,500 \$270,000 \$60,000 \$139,200 \$32,000 \$76,100 \$192,900
5	The Peak Campground: Part 1 Sitework, mobilization, pathways, and traffic control..... Structures, maintenance, bridges..... Campground (showerhouse, pads, etc)..... Trails (ADA and other)..... Natural community restoration..... Other general amenities.....	\$5,856,400+ (TOTAL) \$3,455,280 \$862,500 \$928,300 \$296,020 Cost TBD \$314,300
6	Northern Peaks State Trail: Part 2 5-6 new miles of trail & a trailhead kiosk	\$776,730 (TOTAL)
7	The Peak Campground: Part 2 Mobilization, sitework, traffic & stormwater control..... RV Sites (includes hookups)..... Cabins..... Comfort station..... Showerhouse/sewer pre-treatment	\$4,455,530 (TOTAL) \$2,248,605 \$731,800 \$429,600 \$300,000 \$745,525

Phase Details & Probable Cost Estimate



Land Acquisition

- Make land acquisition a top priority.** State Parks, stakeholders, and the general public all expressed this as a priority. Continue outreach with surrounding landowners of the identified priority lands in order to dispel concerns of a “land grab.”
- Prioritize areas with the highest conservation value** surrounding the park, like the Long Hope Valley landscape.
- Prioritize lands that would help connect the Northern Peaks State Trail.**
- Determine which acquisition is critical for each phase** to have the greatest benefit to park connectivity and the community.
- Reassess the park master plan as lands are acquired.** Major land acquisitions should be assessed in how they fit into the goals and program of the park. The plan may need to be updated every 5-10 years to assess how new acquisitions are incorporated into the master plan.

Development of the Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST)

- Develop the NPST in the core part of the park first.** Implement the first phase in the existing core part of the park where the current visitor center exists.
- Determine best route for the NPST in the stretch by The Peak.** Consensus is that the NPST should stay off the ridgeline of The Peak. Staying halfway downslope from the top and avoiding sensitive natural resources should be the highest priority. Other factors should be taken into consideration, like the preference for a remote backcountry experience (on the Long Hope Valley or south side) or a frontcountry experience that has greater ease of access (north side).
- Determine the best route traveling southwest and connecting out of the park .** Snake Mountain was originally proposed as the route for the Northern Peaks State Trail, but resource sensitivity may dictate the trail goes elsewhere. Land acquisitions would also need to occur for this route. Further consensus with State Parks and other resource agencies will determine if the Snake Mountain route is infeasible. If so, routing the NPST south into the Day Use Area/South Site and then up Rich Mountain Road could be an alternative option.

Sustainable Design

- Pursue sustainable design wherever possible.** A large part of the park’s land acquisition was funded to help protect the headwaters of the New River. Measures should be taken to develop to limit impact to natural resources when developing any facilities. Through ground-truthing and data analysis, this plan has identified areas to avoid. More detailed analysis will occur before trails or facilities are developed. Sustainable Sites, LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design), and the Living Building Challenge all provide excellent guidelines for sustainable design. Some common guidelines these programs share are:
 - Follow sustainable natural surface trail design principles.** This process is detailed further in the section that presents the park’s trail master plan.
- Sustainably manage water:**
 - Treat stormwater runoff of any proposed facilities.** Use innovative stormwater treatment around impervious surfaces such as parking lots and buildings.
 - Use Low Impact Development (LID) techniques to minimize impacts** from infrastructure development. A few examples of these techniques are, porous asphalt or pavers, narrow roads, and the use of natural areas to filter stormwater.
 - Restore degraded aquatic ecosystems adjacent to new park infrastructure improvements** and address any existing bank erosion or streambank stability problems.
 - Avoid or minimize use of water for landscape irrigation.** If water is needed for irrigation collect rainwater for this purpose.
- Sustainably manage soil and vegetation:**
 - Site plants properly around heated or air-conditioned buildings to minimize building energy use.
 - Reduce the urban heat island effect in parking area using plants.
 - Plant and restore native vegetation and plant communities.
 - Utilize fire-wise landscape design.
- Utilize sustainable building materials:**
 - Consider pursuing LEED certification or the Living Building Challenge for any new amenity development.**
 - Use regional and sustainable materials.**
 - Reuse and repurpose salvaged materials from barns and/or other structures** slated to be removed or demolished.
 - Use of harvested timber,** for natural community restoration (i.e. the white pine at the proposed Peak Campground site), should be considered.
 - When there are several material options, use those with the least amount of chemicals.**
 - Consider alternative energy** sources (solar, geothermal, etc.).
 - Avoid light pollution by minimizing use of lights,** using lights with angled cut offs to direct light towards the ground, or avoiding use of street and parking lights altogether.

Goals Accomplished Through These Recommendations:

- Expand the park to further conserve important surrounding landscapes.
- Connect the park to surrounding communities.
- Improve the park user’s experience through facilities.
- Celebrate and preserve the natural, cultural, and viewshed resources.
- Increase recreation access, connectivity, and enhance what unique opportunities exist.

Recommendations

Sustainable Design (continued)

Goals Achieved

- Maintain healthy and improve degraded habitats:**

 - Manage invasive species,** prioritizing primary and secondary conservation areas first.
 - Install native plants that support existing and potential habitat for specific species** (pollinators, bird species, etc.).
 - Conserve healthy soils and rare & threatened habitat & vegetation.**
 - Avoid or minimize impacts to streams and wetlands.** If crossing a stream with a road use arch culverts or bridges. For wetland areas utilize boardwalks to minimize impacts while providing access or bypass wetlands all together.
- Provide for a healthy human environment:**

 - Provide areas for recycling and composting.**
 - Promote equitable and universal site use, access, and wayfinding.**

Stewardship, Restoration, & Preservation

- Develop a resource management plan that explores management strategies for stewardship, restoration, and preservation.** Many important and rare species live within the landscape. Some landscapes that have a heavier human impact (like the proposed Peak Road Campground site) have excellent opportunities for natural community restoration. The recommendations below are some of the greatest opportunities to steward the park.
- Identify prescribed fire opportunities.** The most prevalent forest type in the park is upland forest, consisting mainly of northern hardwoods. Literature from the Forest Service indicates that climatic factors (such as ice storms, wind events, and concentrated heavy rain events), more so than fire, cause the majority of disturbance within northern hardwood forests. However, in portions of the Park that contain golden winged warbler habitat, prescribed fire could potentially be useful in maintaining successional habitat to benefit the species. Ultimately, prescribed fire should be researched further in order to better understand the potential benefits or adverse effects it could have on the park’s ecosystems.
- Steward wetlands.** Wetlands are reservoirs of biodiversity. The South Site (future Day Use Site) contains a suite of wetlands that appear to be managed by mowing and therefore do not achieve the natural vegetative diversity present in many undisturbed wetlands. These areas could benefit from a cessation of mowing and the installation of targeted plantings to establish shrub and tree strata in order to enhance diversity. Although not a wetland per se, there is an old pond at the Peak Road Site that contains a historic record for the presence of bog turtle. This pond presents a potential opportunity for augmentation to restore wetland habitat for the species, which would require detailed consultations with state and federal agencies.
- Restore forest where mono-cultures/pine plantations exist.** The Peak Road Site (future campground area) currently contains a large acreage of planted white pines as well as smaller areas of planted Fraser fir trees that were part of a former Christmas tree farm operation. This presents an opportunity for large-scale forest restoration involving the removal of plantations and the reestablishment of appropriate native hardwoods. Considering the size and extent of the plantations on site, any restoration project would require a long-term, science-based, phased approach and would require detailed biological surveys to identify presence/absence of rare species that are known to occur nearby.

Wayfinding & Interpretation

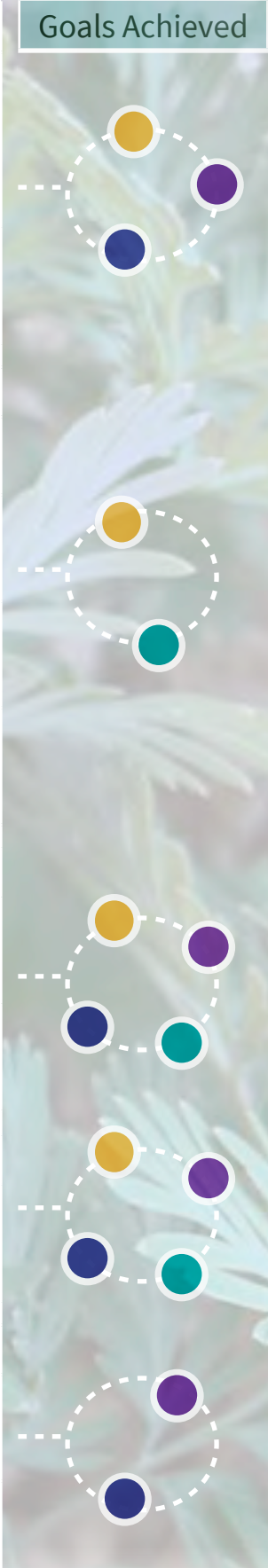
- Develop a comprehensive wayfinding strategy.** Until the park becomes a contiguous unit, wayfinding is critical to the park user’s sense of arrival. Road wayfinding on state routes as well as sign monumentation at the different park entrances will aid users, especially as the northern stretches of the park have spotty cellular service. The Day Use Area (South Site) is proposed to have an interpretive and wayfinding pull-off that can quickly orientate park visitors to the various ways to enter the park. This signage will serve as the gateway into a sense of arrival to the park.
- Develop a comprehensive interpretation strategy.** The park’s unique natural and cultural heritage may not be apparent to most visitors. Through subtle interpretation, user’s appreciation and responsible use may be ensured. The proposed Visitor Center’s warming foyer, the scenic overlook, and frontcountry trailheads all provide interpretation opportunities. Programming that highlights the surrounding area’s heritage should be explored. One option for tying the fragmented park together, would be to develop a “historic/scenic” driving tour that connects the disparate parcels and could even highlight outside park features like the nearby Sutherland Historic District.

Community Connectivity

- Continue to provide opportunities to build community.** The Elk Knob Community Headwaters Day, which is hosted at the park, will be entering a second decade in the next few years. This festival has played a critical role in building and connecting a rural community surrounding the park. The Visitor Center and the Day Use Area will both provide more opportunities for community building in addition to hosting out-of-area visitors. Many of the park’s partner organizations have expressed interest in collaborating on programming, especially related to the area’s Appalachian heritage.

Park Operations & Management

- Increase staffing and budget as phases of implementation occur.** Increased staffing, maintenance, and other operations will be needed as phases of implementation occur. Locating ranger housing and staffing close to the different concentrations of amenities should be considered. The park recently has acquired several potential housing facilities which can aid in this. The maintenance budget will also need to increase as phases occur. Both the proposed Peak Campground and Day Use Area have suggested maintenance areas where equipment could be staged.
- Determine future use of existing facilities.** The current Visitor Center and the vault toilet in the current Day Use Area are not conveyed in future plans. Decisions should be made as to the reuse, relocation, or elimination of the facilities. Much of this may come down to the cost-benefit of reuse or relocation.



Recommendations (continued)

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Stakeholder & Public Input in the Master Planning Process

CHAPTER

5

Involvement in the Plan

The North Carolina State Parks Leadership Team

The Leadership Team. The leadership team is comprised of leadership staff from State Parks including the Director, Park Planners, Natural Resource Program Specialists, the State Trails Planner, and others.

Role of the Leadership Team. The leadership team provided guidance through every step of the master planning process. The key actions and steps that involved the leadership team included:

- Establishment of vision and goals
- Development of criteria for considering amenities
- Identification of stakeholders
- Participation at public open house
- Decided as a team the preferred concept and program elements based on public & stakeholder feedback
- Provided feedback at the 25%, 50%, and 90% complete plan

Stakeholders

Role of Stakeholders. Many stakeholders were engaged in this planning process and were crucial in providing input, advice, and vision for what could be. Stakeholders participated in focus groups which represented the following categories: elected officials, recreation, natural resources, health, and economic development/tourism. Much of the feedback has been incorporated into this document, the site design, and into recommendations.

Stakeholder Group Members. The stakeholder group is made of members from the following community partners:

- Blue Ridge Hiking Club
- Watauga County Planning Department
- Elk Knob Community Heritage Organization (EKCHO)
- The Nature Conservancy
- Catawba Valley Outdoor Club
- Elk Knob Park Advisory Committee
- Appalachian State Recreation Management Program
- North Carolina Natural Heritage Program
- Audubon Society
- Blue Ridge Conservancy
- The NC Natural Heritage Program

The Public

The Public Open House #1/Fall of 2019. The purpose of the Public Open House was to get intensive feedback from the community and organizations that have a vested interest in the project. It also included intensive site visits to simultaneously document and plan around features of the site. Once stakeholder input was gathered, two conceptual plans (shown on the following



The Public (Continued)

page) were developed. Stakeholders and the general public were then invited to provide comment and weigh-in on the proposed Big Ideas, potential types and location of amenities.

The Public Open House #2/Winter of 2019. The main goal of this open house was to get feedback on the detailed recreation amenities concepts (Visitor Center, Peak Campground, and Day Use Area) and to ascertain the public's opinion on what is priority. Details of public input is in *Appendix B: What We Heard*. The highest priorities were land acquisition and the Northern Peaks State Trail.

The Online Survey. To get more public feedback on the two proposed concepts, The North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation distributed an online link to a survey allowing the public to provide comment and vote on their preferred concept.

Some of the top responses from the public feedback via workshop and survey are summarized here. Detailed results can be found in *Appendix B: What We Heard*.

Online Public Comment on the Final Plan. Placeholder for summary of comments.



Summary of Stakeholder & Public Input

Key Feedback Themes

The voices we heard are overwhelmingly in support of increasing the Park’s footprint; highlighting the area’s deep cultural history through establishment of a Visitor Center and Day Use Area to promote cultural/heritage events; strengthening community engagement; and expanding and diversifying front and backcountry recreational and experiential opportunities. This should all be done while ensuring that the innate sense of wildness and along with the world-class, sensitive natural resources contained within Elk Knob State Park and the greater Amphibolite Mountains is conserved.



Land Acquisition and Expansion of the Park Should Be the Major Priority.

The Long Hope Valley and areas of high natural resource conservation should be conserved.



Natural Resources Should be Paramount to State Anything That Happens.

Don’t provide access to The Peak (which is part of the park) to protect its sensitive natural resources and pursue the acquisition of the Long Hope Valley.



Improve Opportunities to Make This Park a Year-round Attraction.

The park is one of the best places for cross country skiing and snowshoeing, but it needs a place for visitors to get warm, whether a visitor center, warming hut, or backcountry shelter with a chimney.

“What, if any, facilities and hiking will be available for handicapped people(?) My husband is in a wheelchair but used to love to hike.” —Survey Respondent

“The development of the park should minimize the footprint of the buildings and RV Camping sites. Continued land acquisition should be the #1 priority for the park.”— Survey Respondent

“The more trails we can connect the better!” — Survey Respondent



Provide A Gathering Space to Celebrate the Local Heritage and Community.

Provide space for small community gatherings and festivals. The park serves as a defacto community center, gathering space, and space for celebration of heritage for the rural community that surrounds it.



Provide for All Abilities.

The park does not currently provide opportunities for those with physical challenges or the elderly. Consider locating walking trails or other amenities that provide for this type of user.



Prioritize Trail Connectivity & the Backcountry.

Prioritize trail building and access over the backcountry over building other amenities. While there is some discord in opinion over built amenities, the public universally wants trails and backcountry access.

PUBLIC FEEDBACK SUMMARY

{ Nearly 140 people provided feedback through an open house and online survey, which is summarized here }

Elk Knob State Park

TOP GOALS



Increase recreation access and connectivity



Expand the park to further conserve important surrounding landscapes

FRONTCOUNTRY VS. BACKCOUNTRY



70%

Of respondents said they are more likely to use the **BACKCOUNTRY** than the frontcountry.

AMENITIES OF THE PARK

TOP RANKED AMENITIES

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Northern Peaks State Trail | 5 Campground |
| 2 Backcountry Camping | 6 Scenic Vistas |
| 3 Day Use Area | 7 Cabins |
| 4 Visitor Center | |

The Visitor Center



6.5/10

Respondants showed major support for a Visitor Center, when asked to rank 1-10, 10 being the most supportive, the response averaged 6.5.

Summary of Stakeholder & Public Input



CHAPTER
6 Appendices



APPENDIX

A

Concept Options

Based on site analysis, opportunities, and constraints, four sites were explored as good opportunities for programming. These four sites provided different opportunities to explore the front country-back country connection.

Each site was evaluated on its suitability for the main programming elements under consideration. As one of the key elements, the placement of the visitor center is crucial. Several pros and cons are weighed between two main sites, the south site and the north site. Other main considerations of the four sites were lodging, camping, preservation, and restoration.

The current park entrance site was examined for levels of enhancement and expansion. Finally, the plantation site was explored in two diametric concepts of heavier development (family adventure) and forest restoration.

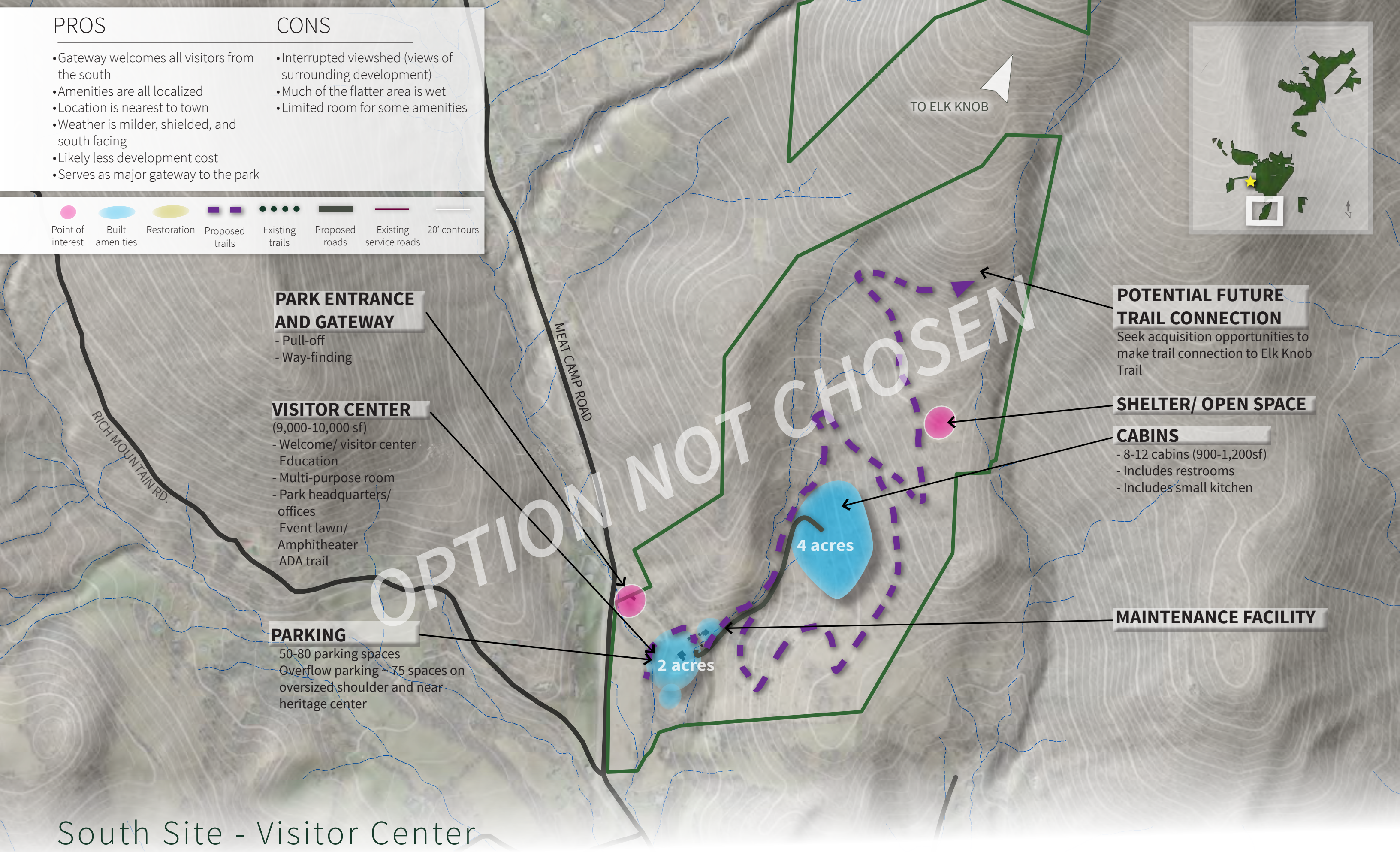
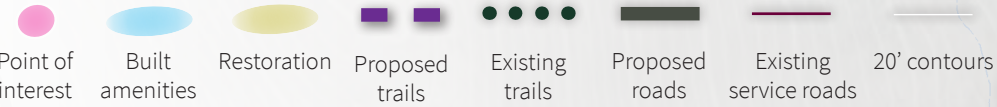
The pros and cons of each site are outlined on the following maps.

PROS

- Gateway welcomes all visitors from the south
- Amenities are all localized
- Location is nearest to town
- Weather is milder, shielded, and south facing
- Likely less development cost
- Serves as major gateway to the park

CONS

- Interrupted viewshed (views of surrounding development)
- Much of the flatter area is wet
- Limited room for some amenities



South Site - Visitor Center

PROS

- Gateway welcomes all visitors from the south
- Day use area acts as a node from frontcountry to backcountry
- Amenities are all localized
- Location is nearest to town

CONS

- Heritage center is further from town and in area with more extreme weather (northern option)
- First gateway experience may be confused as main park entrance

Point of interest

Built amenities

Restoration

Proposed trails

Existing trails

Existing service roads

20' contours

TRAILHEAD

GATEWAY

- Wayfinding
- Parking (30-50 spaces)
- Trailhead
- Kiosk

WETLAND
ENHANCEMENT

VIEW/ OVERLOOK

MAINTENANCE FACILITY

DAY USE AREA

- Picnic shelters and/or pavilion
- Restrooms
- Open space/ lawn
- Nature play
- ADA parking
- ADA trail

South Site - Day Use

PROS

- Expansive 360 views of all park peaks and of idyllic pastoral lands
- Size can accommodate many amenities
- Becomes a central park feature for front & backcountry experiences
- Potential trail access to Snake Mtn.
- Backcountry amenities

CONS

- Rare species habitat occurrence (see conservation zones map & opportunity and constraints map)
- Climate is harsher (wind & cold)

●

Point of interest

●

Built amenities

●

Restoration

●

DNP

—

Proposed trails

—

NPST built & proposed

—

Existing service roads

—

20' contours

▲

Camping

Ⓟ

Parking

GROUP CAMP SITE
(0.25 mi. from parking, gentle slope)

CAR CAMPING
- 2 car parking
- 20-30 sites

NATURAL COMMUNITY RESTORATION

CONTACT STATION
- Camp store
- Trailhead
- Wayfinding
- Restrooms

ENHANCED EVENT LAWN/STAGE

DAY USE AREA
- Pavilion
- Picnic tables

PRIMITIVE
▲

ZONE CAMPING
▲

PRIMITIVE
(2 MI.)
▲

PRIMITIVE
(1.1 MI.)
▲

GROUP CAMP
(1.4 MI.)
▲

HERITAGE LOOP TRAIL
(1.25 mi. heritage and ecological trail loop, explores cascades)

PRIMITIVE CAMPING
(Bring primitive camping closer to trailhead and along a loop trail)
- 4 primitive locations
- Site 1 is 0.7 mi. from parking
- Site 4 is 1.0 mi. from parking

SUMMIT ROAD ACCESS

SUMMIT TRAIL
(BECOMES NPST)

ELK KNOB



Park Entrance Site - Enhanced

PROS

- Expansive 360 views of all park peaks and of idyllic pastoral lands
- Size can accommodate many amenities
- Becomes a central park feature for front & backcountry experiences
- Potential trail access to Snake Mtn.
- Backcountry amenities

CONS

- Rare species habitat occurrence (see conservation zones map & opportunity and constraints map)
- Climate is harsher (wind & cold)
- Infrastructure is most costly of all options

Point of interest

Built amenities

Restoration

Proposed trails

NPST built & proposed

Proposed roads

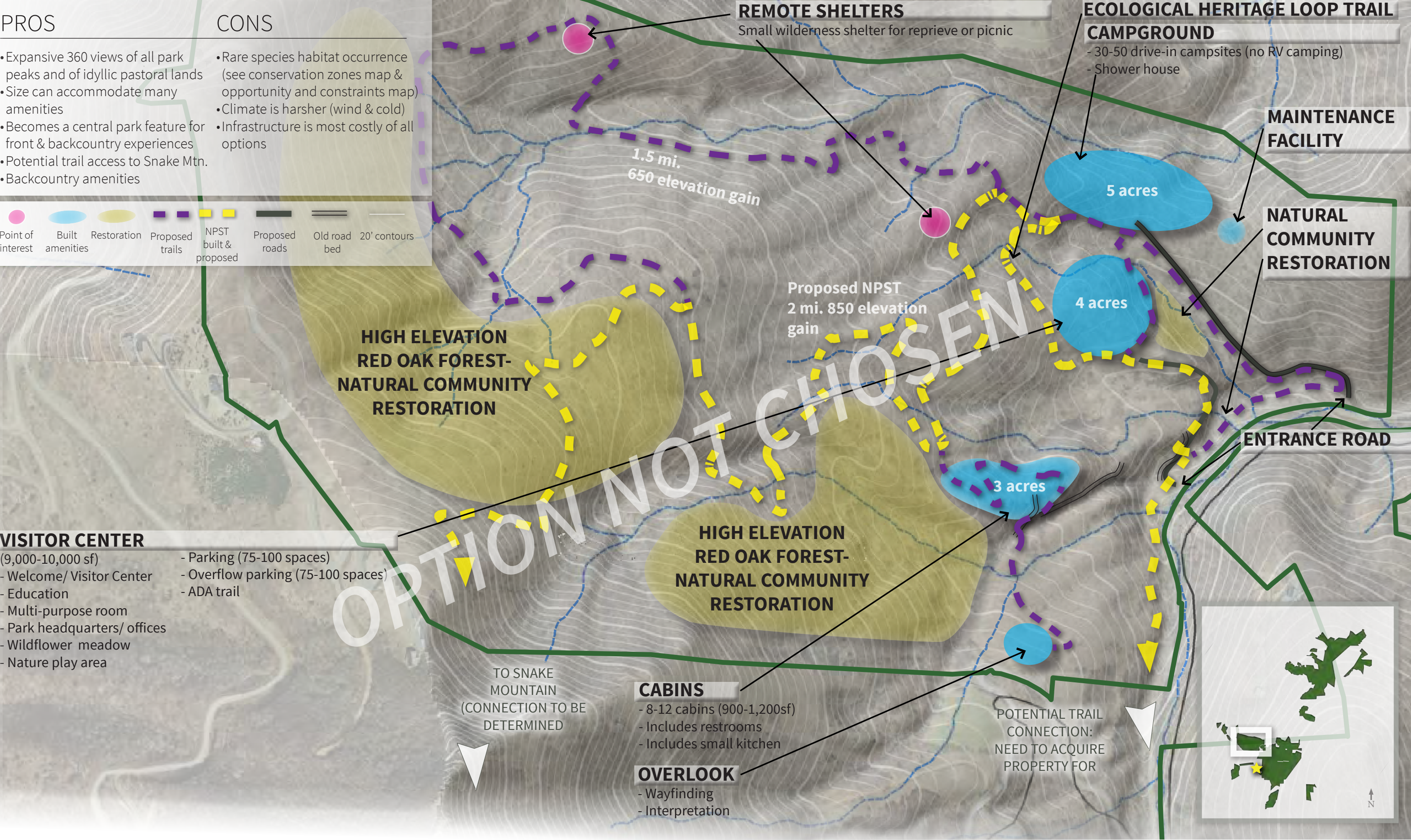
Old road bed

20' contours

VISITOR CENTER

- (9,000-10,000 sf)

- Welcome/ Visitor Center
 - Education
 - Multi-purpose room
 - Park headquarters/ offices
 - Wildflower meadow
 - Nature play area
- Parking (75-100 spaces)
 - Overflow parking (75-100 spaces)
 - ADA trail



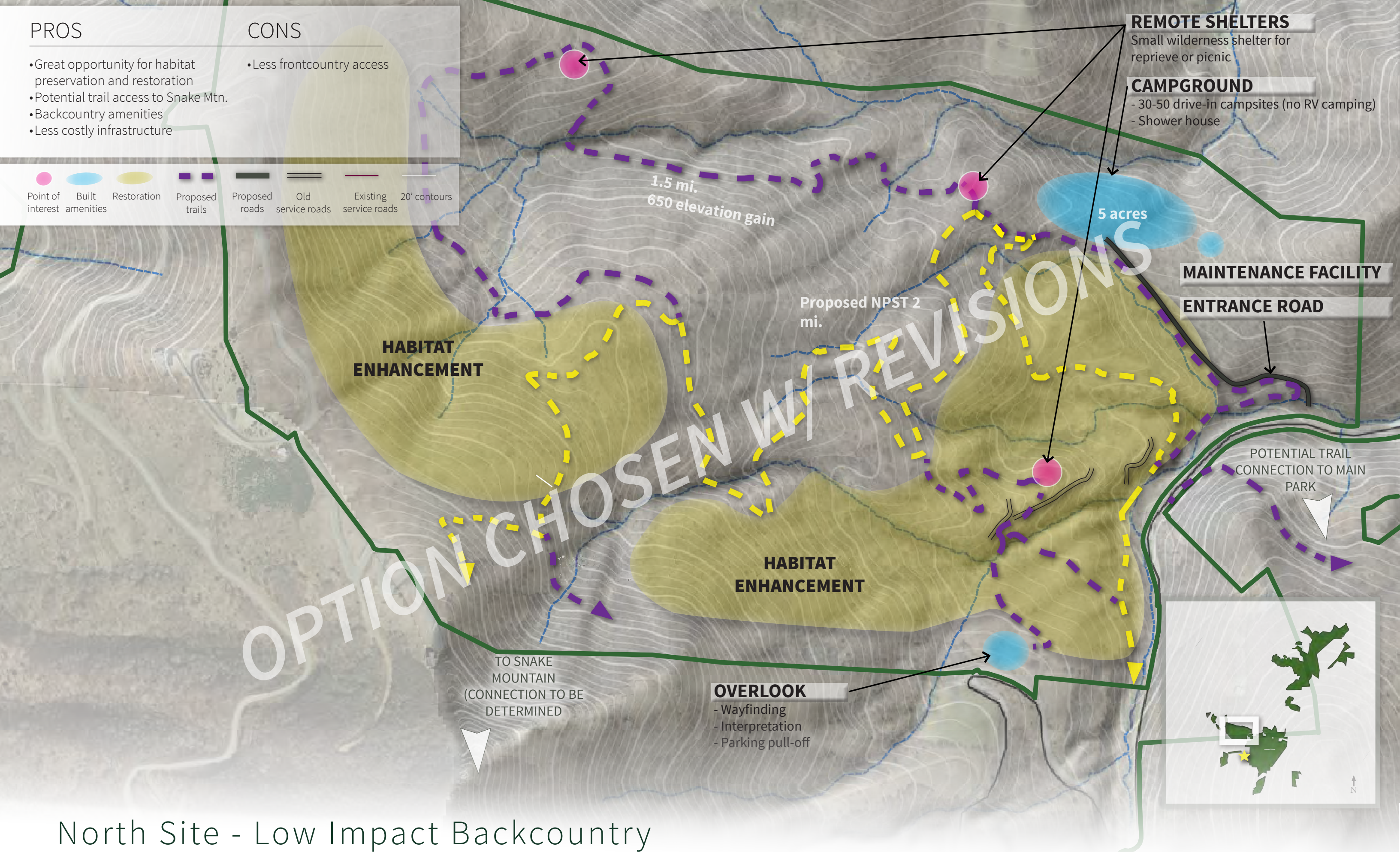
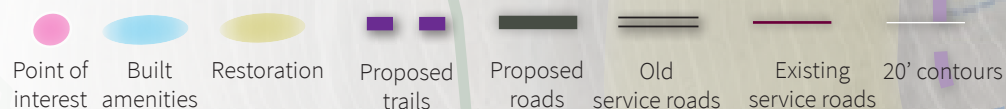
North Site - Visitor Center

PROS

- Great opportunity for habitat preservation and restoration
- Potential trail access to Snake Mtn.
- Backcountry amenities
- Less costly infrastructure

CONS

- Less frontcountry access



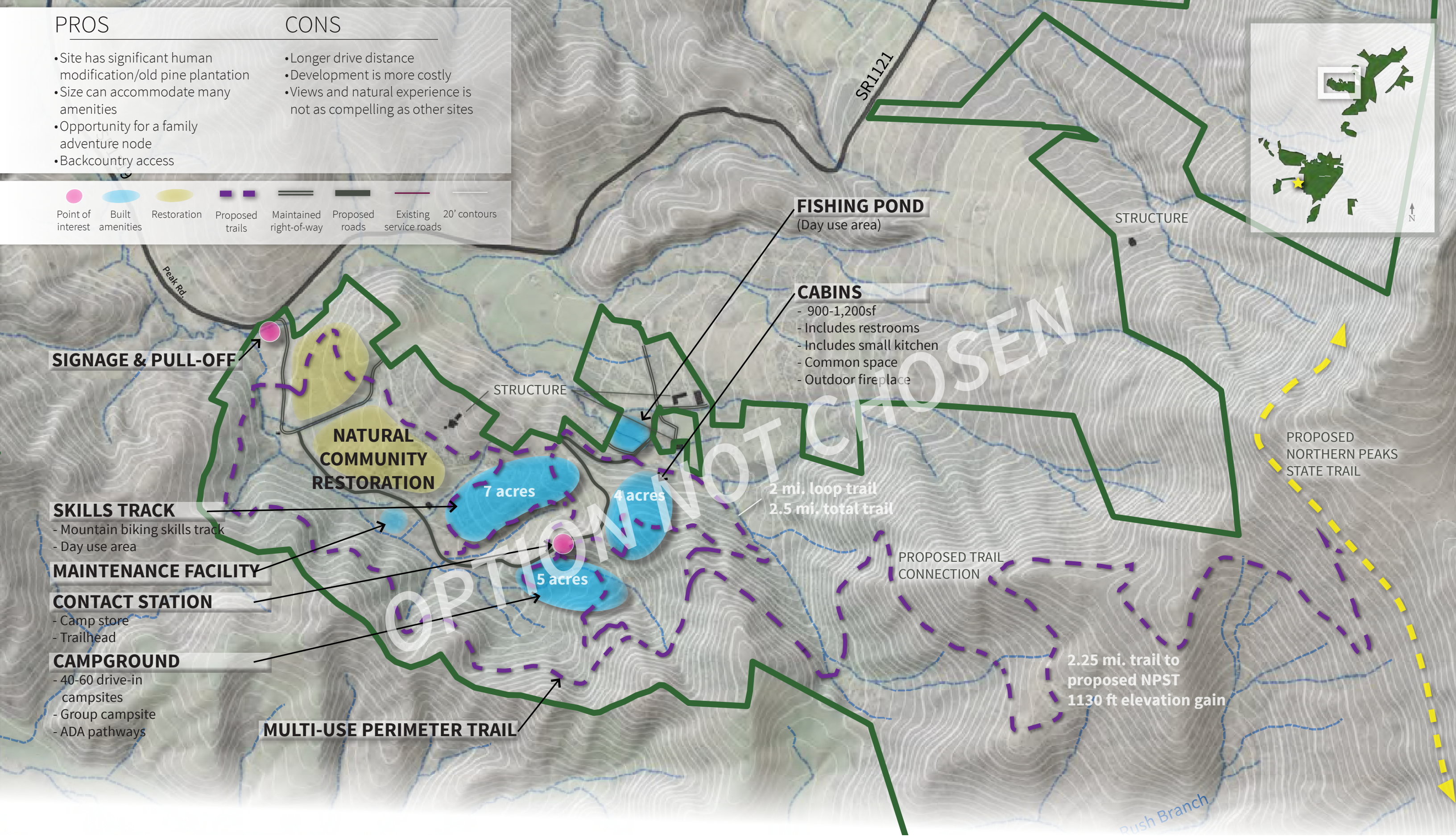
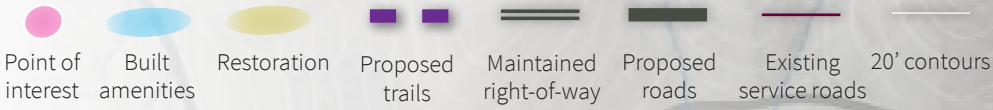
North Site - Low Impact Backcountry

PROS

- Site has significant human modification/old pine plantation
- Size can accommodate many amenities
- Opportunity for a family adventure node
- Backcountry access

CONS

- Longer drive distance
- Development is more costly
- Views and natural experience is not as compelling as other sites



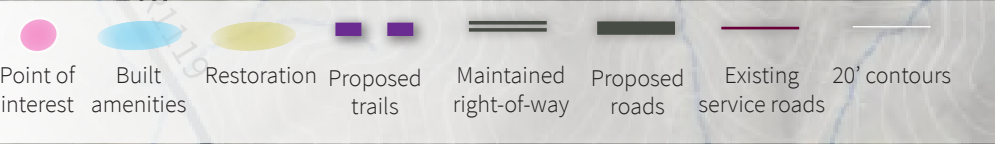
Peak Road Site - Family Adventure

PROS

- Pine plantation/opportunity for restoration
- Backcountry amenities
- Connection to the Northern Peaks Trail

CONS

- Minimal viewshed from campground
- Longer drive access
- View and natural experience not as compelling as other sites



SIGNAGE & PULL-OFF

MEADOW RESTORATION

FOREST RESTORATION

MAINTENANCE FACILITY

GROUP CAMP

- 10-20 Primitive sites
- Group campsites

CONNECTION STATION

- Simple supplies
- Trailhead

STRUCTURE

STRUCTURE

PROPOSED TRAIL CONNECTION

PROPOSED NORTHERN PEAKS TRAIL

2.25 mi. trail to NPST
1130 ft elevation gain

Rush Branch

Peak Road Site - Restoration

B

What We Heard

KEEP IT WILD & CELEBRATE HERITAGE

A broad audience was approached as part of stakeholder engagement, soliciting input from community organizations, user groups, higher education partners, advisory boards, cultural heritage groups conservation organizations, county officials, and the NC Natural Heritage Program.

The voices we heard are overwhelmingly in support of increasing the Park's footprint, highlighting the area's deep cultural history through establishment of a Heritage Center, strengthening community engagement, and expanding and diversifying front and backcountry recreational and experiential opportunities. This should all be done while ensuring that the innate sense of wildness and the world-class, sensitive natural resources contained within Elk Knob State Park and the greater Amphibolite Mountains is conserved.

Stakeholder Feedback

Note: comments directly from stakeholder survey and were not edited for clarity or grammar

What organization are you associated with?

Blue Ridge Hiking Club
Watauga County Planning Department
None but I grew up on Proffitt farm.
EKCHO occasionally
I am not associated with an organization. I grew up on the Proffitt Farm, which is undeveloped and considered a Natural Area.
Elk Knob Community Heritage Organization (EKCHO)
EKCHO
Helped start EKCHO 14 years
EKCHO
The Nature Conservancy
Catawba Valley Outdoor Club
Elk Knob Park Advisory Committee; Professor in Recreation Mgmt. at App State
North Carolina Natural Heritage Program
Park Advisory Committee (Blue Ridge Conservancy)
Park Advisory Committee
Park Advisory Committee (Audubon Society)
Park Advisory Committee

Twenty years from now, how would you envision Elk Knob State Park different than it is today?

Not so different
Very remote feels like wilderness. That’s good. Keep that feel. Meat Camp Road will restrict how much draw it can have. Expansion towards Long Hope Knob and Tater Hill. Acquisition needs a light touch. Not many would object if expanded.
Walking trails in the open instead of all wooded and public education on the joys and hardships of mountain life.
Would hope it is much larger and has a wider variety of recreational opportunities.

I would like to see the Proffitt Tract used to offer some activities for the public, such as hiking trails, camp sites, and picnic areas. The views are spectacular from the Proffitt mountain tops - looking at the base of Elk Knob and Snake Mountain.

Like to see it have a building the community could use for weddings, family reunions, etc.

Would like for most of the park to remain undeveloped and wild in nature. A lot of people don’t know about the park, so want to see more coming, but not too much that it would negatively impact the park. Want to see frontcountry (accessible paths and places to get warm) and backcountry opportunities (lots of trails).The remoteness should be captilized on. Make common frontcountry space more utilized.

Hope it would have opportunity for entertainment and a museum. More trails and camping.

I would hope for more trails going into some of the Proffitt tract owned by our state.

If possible I’d love for it to have a bigger footprint - if State Parks & conservation partners can continue to acquire property around the peak, and to expand protection of the New River watershed. I don’t think it needs more recreation opportunities or even interpretive programs to bring a lot of folks in; what is there and currently offered seems adequate to me, though I admit I have limited experience at the park.

Really would like to see a visitor center and locate it as close to Boone, which is where most people drive from. Elk Knob will be a major access/trailhead system for the Northern Peaks Trail. All of Snake Mountain will be part of the park. Put a campground on the newly acquired 400 acre property.

I can envision the park having a state of the art visitor center with interactive exhibits that speaks not only to the park but the surrounding area. It would also serve as a place for park staff, educators and researchers to use for in-house learning, as well as a base for field-based learning. I can see more land acquisitions that allow the park to be much more contiguous, as such expanding opportunities for hiking, nature appreciation, research and education, including overnight backpacking opportunities.

N/A

Still hike to Elk Knob; state park larger in size, more land added for management; more amenities while keeping a similar feel as today’s park.

Addition of Heritage Center and a facility for public programs that can extend the season. Activities could include workshops, education, cultural interpretation; A Cultural Library that acknowledges rich cultural history of the area; native Americans, settlers, long hunters, history of American chestnuts, civil war stories (Pottertown) and Southerland (Tennessee border town), musical traditions, early 20th Century farming practices, wildcrafting, mining; Celebration of park’s protection of the headwaters of the New River, general hydrologic abundance.

Amenities for more tent camping, restrooms (for visitors and public, community), K-12 programming; physical expansion of Park territories in Watauga and Ashe counties.

Newly-acquired properties (and connections) need abundance of recreational opportunities; Echoes heritage of the Park; Heritage Center Opportunity (can be a draw and asset for locla schools and tourists); as acquisition increases, does mountain biking, bouldering/climbing become viable? Those sports are trending upward on a National level and ELKN might be able to offer them (maybe); Rustic picnic areas for families, more covered areas for rapidly changing weather; Camping, backpacking, and multi-use trails (designated directional use);

What is unique about Elk Knob State Park that you think should be capitalized on in future plans for the park?

Even though I live near by, and have for 35 years, I am an outsider. I understand from news items that there is a sizeable community support and participation aspect in park events, and I think that is great.

Wilderness feel is a good feeling. Capitalize on that. Make it feel remote.

The lower property has land not yet overgrown.

The lower portion is growing up and is more visible and better suited for buildings, parking and has potential open land.

It is one of the highest and most beautiful peaks in the area. I would like to see more hiking trails extending into the Sarah Miller Tract and the Proffitt Tract.

The altitude makes it a beautiful Park.

Trails. Good 360 degree views in certain places. Amazing landscapes. Capitalize on regional connections and opportunities. How do we draw folks from Boone and the parkway here. Strengthen connections to the university.

The views. Picnicing, covered shelters at the park would be great. One year had 475 people to the festival.

Trails around different parts of the park.

I suppose the opportunity for snow sports is unique - though I don’t necessarily think it should be expanded. Its history includes elk and I’d love to imagine seeing elk grazing through my binoculars from up top.

The Summit trail (Elk Knob Peak), one of the most beautiful peak trails and very well built (hand made trail). The park has a lot of beautiful vistas. The Summit Trail is easy enough but still a good workout. Families can hike it and you won’t get lost.

Its wildness and significant natural resources.

Rare species and natural communities representative of the Amphibolite Mountains area should be protected and managed appropriately.

Stakeholder Feedback

The park has high ecological significance; could be a lot more unique with expanded trails on currently-owned lands. Elevation is a unique element to the Park and creates opportunities (cool in summer, winter sports off season); Vantage Points; Relatively undeveloped nature of the Park; Limited facilities limit attendance.
Elevation, accessible views, variety of flora/fauna @ varying elevations. Ecosystem Access- extending trails through areas for interpretation; Headwaters and general water abundance, high springs, New River starts at North Fork; History- opportunity to celebrate farming and hunting, place walking trails along cattle paths;
Bigger is Better; the Park serves as a lynchpin for conservation of high priority species in the Amphibolite Mountains (taking a serious stewardship role); Golden winged warbler habitat management planning; protecting natural heritage while balancing with increaseing attendance; Balance: seek partnerships with networks to maximize the benefits of the land; Active Management should be a long-term theme.
Park is close to population centers: creates an opportunity to NOT love it to death by spreading out amenities, which will spread out concentrated use. Thoughtful placement of amenities is key; Pastoral Setting is unique; Opportunity for acquisition (farm on the Boone side great for secondary access to the Knob summit; There is no current use issue, but the tipping point is closer than we think. 90% usage is on summit trail; People Management will be important to protect the Park’s resources.

What are the biggest opportunities for Elk Knob State Park? These can be opportunities in the current park or those in the surrounding landscape that would benefit the park.

Frankly, the work required to hike up to the view point is a bit more strenuous than I, at 77 am looking for. I am much more likely to take a walk on Boone’s Greenway, which is level, smooth, and convenient to my daily activites of shopping etc. I would think that a fairly “easy” trail that went through the woods, might lead me to visit Elk Knob Park more often.
Again, keep it wilderness-like.
A needed Park Office, Visitor Center and Cultural Center could be put on the Proffitt farm where it is visible, weather friendly and ideal for a rustic design and the potential of viewing a old copper mine site, a beautiful view of the SE where the first American settlers came up the Daniel Boone trail. Open property that is sheltered from the NE wind and the knobs fog and could also offer fruit and berries along trails with wildlife sighting and a glimpse back into the the joys hardship of Appalachian Mountain life. Parking would be easier to build and maintain and the small stream is a haven for the native trout and also their spawning area.

The Proffitt farm or lower part needs to be used for public enjoyment as well as it is better suited for buildings and helicopter landing along with having better weather and some open land needs to be preserved and used for enjoyment not possible on other Elk Knob Park land.
More hiking trails and picnic areas on the surrounding tracts.
Would like to see some of the other land have some trails to hike.
Really like the education and heritage center concept. Would love for folks to learn more about how the surrounding land was used and about local heritage. Find more opportunities for things for people to do that kind hike/ the elderly. Reach out to the schools, find a way to engage them through field trips or other means. There are lots of visitors who drive the area in the fall and there are no real good places to stop for overlook viewing. Find ways to provide viewing areas.
Not sure.
I would love to see more gatherings of the community than just one time per year. Maybe Saturday evening music of local musicians.
More land protection, access points for snowshoeing and XC skiing in addition to the existing hiking and picnicking opportunities
Programming at the visitor center. Trails, especially the Northern Peaks Trail.
Serving as a hub for north northwestern NC to speak to the park and surrounding area and its current and expected changes due to climate disruption.
Conservation of nearby natural areas would benefit the species and natural communities represented within the park, and enhance the landscape context.
Uniqueness, community roots, involvement, engagement; Roots, offer interpretive options without limits! Between history and ecology, people will remember how they felt -valued guests, their visit matters. Loop trails, kids trails. Watch out for “experience degradation” on busy days, currently there’s no way to minimize traffic and trail wear to the summit, but a loop would be great and could increase visitors and purify the experience.

What amenities would you like to see that can be developed within the next 20 years? Think of what kind of recreation amenities are missing in the region or what would complement the unique assets of the park.

See above. Another possibility that might be considered, would be an area set aside for astronomical viewing. It would be unique, as I am not aware of any other park offering such an opportunity. It would need to be an area with an unobstructed view of the sky, no artificial lighting, a lights out policy, and near a parking area so that those with larger scopes might have ready access. Viewing could perhaps be designated on only some nights if the lights out policy would be an issue. The 4 or 5 annual meteor showers would be natural events and attractions. Likely someone from ASU would be willing to serve as intrepreter for special occasions. Keep in mind that best viewing for serious astrophiles is after midnight in the winter. Years ago I obtained a smart phone app that indicated best viewing locations for where ever you were located. Elk Knob or perhaps Snake areas were pointed out, as being nearly equidistant Boone, Mt. City and West Jefferson. The further from towns the better. I had wondered about the feasibility of establishing a commercial campground catering to amateur astronomers a number of years ago, such as at the head of Howard’s Creek Rd., but dismissed it as likely too specialized, but it is done at several locations in the Southwest. An astronomer’s small campground could be ideal for the astronomers, given that the best viewing is after midnight, when most lights go out, and the need to spend time setting up, dark adapting the eyes, etc., might make having a camp setup particularly attractive. Participants could set up their camp, and their scopes at a distance, catch some zz’s, arise after midnight, and enjoy the sights. This would need to be promoted nationally, as the density of amateur astronomers is not that great. Articles and regular postings in “Sky and Telescope” and in “Astronomy” would do it.
Really like small cabins, scenic vistas. Primitive camping.
Hikeing trails that are not all woods
Some of the land growing up offers opportunities for walking in the sunshine and seeing wildlife and fruits and berries not on other Elk Knob property.
A campground on the Miller, or Proffitt Tract.
A community center. A camping area.

Bathrooms are very much needed. Campgrounds would be good. It would be nice to have a playground near the visitor center (nature based, not too park feeling) that will draw the local community. This is one of the few places the local community can come to play. The existing amphitheater is ok, but it would be nice to have one integrated in with the field where the festival is. Consider having a facility that can permanently house sound equipment, or permanent amphitheater that houses music, presentations, etc. Grandfather Mountain has a really big example of a facility that would accomodate, but not sure the scale is appropriate. Having a warming shelter in the winter would be great. Skiers and snowshoers can come in to warm up and have a coffee or hot chocolate (Keurig) would be easy to do. Consider having rentals for snowshoes at the visitor center.

No thoughts

I’m in favor of keeping it “primitive” versus developing a bunch of amenities. Maybe just an interpretive sign or 2 (I can’t recall seeing any of these though it’s been some time since I visited).

A visitor center (with an interpretation room) that has good info. South Mountain SP has a visitor center where you can sit down and watch a short video, something like this would be very helpful. Don’t overload the park with amenities.

I actually don’t want to see much more added to the park from a recreation standpoint other than possibly some limited multi-use trails developed for mtn. biking, horsepacking, and hiking. No motorized use. I could see some limited campground development that allows for small RV’s (under 25 feet) and tent camping, providing a bathhouse with electricity, utility sinks, and potable water. This same campground might include limited sundry items, and an electrified amphitheater with covered stage for programming and special events. I would NOT like to see electrical hookups or waste disposal stations for RV’s - they need to be completely self sufficient with generators only allowed during designated hours. I would also like to see NO paved roads and instead remain unimproved groomed gravel roads.

Public access designed appropriately to protect sensitive resources, such as trails that are routed away from sensitive areas including rock outcrops and seeps.

What are your thoughts on these following amenities that are already being considered? A heritage center (visitor education, interpretation; would also serve staff) a campground (non-RV); the Northern Peaks Trail with backcountry shelters; small cabins; scenic vista pull-offs; and a more extensive hiking trail system within the park

I think that any opportunity to document and portray local hx, esp given that there is already a supportive local community group, would be a great idea. There is a bit of quite interesting local distinction re the area known as Pottertown. Unfortunately, many of those with memories of interesting characters, I am in particular thinking of Allen Trivette who recently passed, are no longer with us. Even as an “outsider” I have known people who grew up in this community, and/or had business (tax assessor), and told me stories of a very unique community, and a time gone by. I believe there are also families of mixed race living nearby, that almost no one knows anything about.

Keep low-key remote feel. Don’t have strong feelings about the visitor center. Make it like a cabin. Link to Daniel Boone heritage.

Offices and centers or museums would better serve the public if they were visible at all times along with helicopter accessibility.

Not sure about small cabins until there are more recreational possibilities but see the need for the others and more now.

I love it! I would hope the visitor center would include a space large enough to seat 100 people for various events.

I like it.

Everyone agreed the heritage/visitor center seems the highest priority. Consider an entrance that is not as difficult to get to, weather conditions are more mild. Consider yurts?

No thoughts on this.

More extensive hiking trails

Of all these possibilities, the NPT is most appealing to me, because I’m generally supportive of long-haul trails, though I would like to see backcountry shelters limited to 1 or 2. Even backpackers leave a trace... I’m not excited about a new campground, cabins, pull-offs, or a heritage center. If staff need a facility, I think it can be constructed for that purpose but it doesn’t need a big public component; maybe just an interpretive sign or two and a couple bathrooms like a miniature version of what Grandfather Mtn. SP has at the Profile Trailhead.

Like everything that is being proposed.

I support each of these except cabins, unless very rustic with limited electricity provided.

Areas appropriate for all of the amenities being considered are present within the park. New infrastructure and facilities should be planned outside of the Dedicated Nature Preserve or should be consistent with the Articles of Dedication. Trails and primitive campsites are allowed within the Dedicated area. These should be planned to avoid impacts to rare species and sensitive habitats.

Heritage center needs a community room/meeting space, and educational spaces;

Heritage center needs to be supportive of neighbors and community, as the Park would not be without that strong relationship with community. Mutualism is the concept. An indoor space for the community would be good, sometimes maybe just a space to get warm;

Center should strongly focus on ecological interpretation and involve the community, let them provide input on what they’d want to see;

Heritage Center should have thoughtful layout, “rustic-modern” in design to maintain character, preserve heritage; interpretive trail through barns past a simple mountain cabin; could be an opportuntiy for a cultural working exhibit;

Non-RV Campgrounds: currently the in-and-out nature of trails means people don’t camp that much, providing tent pads or clustered tent camp area would be nice; Consider amenity hubs: bathrooms, water (drinking, hot for showers -Lake James SP a good example), elec?

NPT: Blue Ridge Conservancy supports the trail and has assisted with acquisition along the planned route; care should be taken with layout, construction, and sustainable design is a must; buffer against wear and tear.

MPT: Yes, a good idea

NPT: Audubon supports it; public engagement needed to understand usage; caveat is environmental sensitivity; sufficient planning and data gathering necessary to monitor the vector system the trail will inevtiably create; mindful planning; Invasive species quarantine protocols;

NPT: huge supporter, would love to see it implemented; there are many economic impacts beyond trails users; boot wash station to reduce invaive species spread?

Cabins: must be staffed or else subject to vandalism, wear and tear;

Cabins: need to be sited close to populated areas;

Cabins: backcountry shelters (AT-style) that are open-sided would work better than enclosed cabins.

Are there current or future conservation efforts at the park or in the surrounding landscape you think should be considered within the next twenty years?

No idea, sorry.
A lot of conservation efforts-New River and Blue Ridge Conservancy. Voluntary farmland preservation program. Citizen’s Plan (Comp plan) encourages protection of those.
Adding on to the Park property.
Adding to the Park especially to the North (Long Hope, Finley Bald) which is unique in the many recreational possibilities not to mention its year around beauty.
Some small tracts of land joining the park on the Meat Camp side have sold to individuals for home sites. I would like to have seen them added to the park.
Long Hope Valley-would be a global draw. The history and plant life of Long Hope is very important. Connect Elk Knob to Peak Mountain.
Oh yes, conservation of the Amphibolite Mountains and the New River Headwaters should definitely be considered. Development is a big threat.
NO.
Continue to add to the park acreage thru strategic land acquisitions that balance use with preservation.
It would be appropriate to add ecologically significant natural areas in the surrounding landscape to the park, if possible.
Keep buying land! Expand the park, maximize its footprint;
Covered in above conversations.

Are there priorities of your organization that can be addressed through this master plan, over the next twenty years?

Our hiking group is over 200 members, with rather diverse needs and interests as hiking goes. Elk Knob is regularly scheduled by hike leaders in the club as a moderate to strenuous hiking experience, and is usually well attended. A number of hikes begin at Elk Knob, but include other nearby peaks. It would be well to keep in mind that this area is unusually well endowed with hiking opportunities, either right at hand vis a vis the BRP, or available with a short drive, Roan Mt, Mt. Mitchell, Grayson Highlands, and on and on. If there were some way to distinguish Elk Knob, it might boost attendance in a pretty competitive market.

No-the county has no zoning and doesn’t plan to zone the area any time soon. Doesn’t feel like there is now pressure with second home/subdivision development in the area. Have high impact land use ordinance that could be used, but this is for heavy industrial and there really is very little chance that would happen because of transportation limitations.
Rember the seniors, we especially enjoy nature parks
Community and seniors
N/A
EKCHO is working towards highlighting the arts, tool making, hide tanning, flint napping, etc. These events could be hosted at the heritage center. They do workshops, would be nice to have a bigger space. The fall festival has remained the same the past 10 years. Would nice to do music more often like they do at Valle Crucis or Jones House.
TNC has a rich history of land acquisition and management in this area, so yes.
Our club is aging, so committing to much in the future is a challenge. In the past the club has volunteered to do a lot of maintenance and construction of trails as well as leading group hikes to the park.
Speaking for the PAC and App State, sustainable development with the weight mostly falling on environmental concerns versus social or economic interests is a priority to me. I would like the park to remain as wild and scenic first and foremost, even if that means some residents of NC and other states/countries may not be able to take advantage of the park. There are plenty of other spaces and places in NC and the southeast that are 100% accessible for all.
The priorities of the Natural Heritage Program include administering the Dedicated Nature Preserve agreement and working with DPR to ensure the long term viability of the rare species and natural communities of the park. The master plan should include appropriate management for the different ecological areas of the dedicated nature preserve. Monitoring rare species, natural conditions, and visitor impacts is also a priority.

How does your organization currently partner with the park? Are there ways to partner, establish/improve partnership with your organization going forward?

Not formally. I was there years ago, with a small group of member workers, the first volunteer work day to construct the new trail to the Knob. We worked all day, and did not return. I am not sure why. It may be simply that no one reached out to us that day?
Not that they can think of.
EKCHO could expand community to all that would preserve the scenic beauty and add as practical and available to Elk Knob State Park.

The Sept. Elk Knob Festival
N/A
Helping host an annual her day.
Want to continue to partner on festival, host workshops, integrate arts into what the park does.
We assist with the Elk knob community day held the second Saturday in September
TNC conveyed its interest to State Parks to form Elk Knob SP, and remains invested in the park through relationships with NC State Parks staff and adjacent landowners, including conservation easement landowners.
See above answer.
N/A
The Natural Heritage Program and DPR work together to inventory and monitor the rare species and natural conditions at the park. We work together to identify priority natural areas and establish Dedication agreements. As new lands are added to the park, NHP staff inventory the natural areas and propose dedication and management recommendations. Such agreements are required when new tracts are purchased with funding from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund. We appreciate frequent communication among agencies as questions and issues arise.

Do you have any concerns about Elk Knob State Park?

Not that I am aware of.
Think the Northern Peaks Trail is going to be a big challenge. Usually the community is pretty split.
The possibility of expanding North to the Finley Bald, Long Hope area the Richardson Family owns could probably happen with the States promise of never selling and should happen soon if possible.
I hear that a huge portion of the land North of Elk Knob could be a gift to our State with the promise that it could never be sold. I have camped and explored on part of this land with brothers 65 years ago and grieve because I feel this would be one of the best gifts NC has ever obtained.
Just that I would like to see the park branch out some, rather than keep everything at the current location. Natural areas are good too, but the surrounding property owned by Elk Knob is too beautiful to grow up in briars and brambles.
No
Concerned about lack of funding. Concerned about new developments that will impact the park. Staffing currently seems very strained, need to increase staffing.

I would love to see more attendants in the park
I’m not aware of any staffing shortages specific to Elk Knob, but in general our State Parks seem to lack capacity to manage the natural resources and also meet demands of the public - that would be my top concern.
Need more staff! The park is currently understaffed and if expanded, this would be very important.
My only concern is “development and profit driven” politicians in Raleigh may try to turn the park into a “must make a profit” place. That would be sad.
Although Elk Knob has large areas that are suitable for public recreation, some high elevation rock outcrops, seeps, bogs, and the rare species that occur in these habitats are sensitive to trampling from hikers and erosion. These areas should be carefully protected from visitor impacts. Some of the locations with scenic views support rare and sensitive species. If public access is provided to these areas, impacts from trampling and harm to the rare species populations would be almost unavoidable. When planning new trails, care should be taken to route trails away from rare species areas. National Park Service studies at scenic places such as Devil’s Courthouse have demonstrated that signage, barriers, and educational materials are not sufficient to deter public trampling of fragile areas. Natural Heritage Program staff are available to help identify areas that are most suitable for new trails and public amenities. Managing new trails and increased visitors would require more park staff, in order to maintain visitor safety and the viability of fragile habitats.
More rangers are needed, staffing will become an unavoidable issue;
Traffic dispersal with park expansion; fragility of the ecosystem; mindful planning
Balance: maintaining resilient ecosystems; monitoring long term health of the Park and ecosystems;
Lack of staff, understaffed or current staff at capacity; our duty is stewardship and protection of resources, which will be challenging.

Are there models or examples from other state or national forests or parks that you think could be applied to Elk Knob State Park? We are looking for examples of amenities and programs that you think would fit well within the park and directly align with the mission of North Carolina State Parks?

Not quite what you are looking for, but consider this: Over a period of say 15 years of the life of the club I have experienced, with over 200 members, to my knowledge, only 2 persons from the local community have ever hiked with us. Neither of these two have been on a hike with us for over a year, or a bit longer. I think they very much enjoyed the hikes they participated in, and while they were active, attended quite a few hikes. These are names that would be widely recognized in Boone. They never brought other friends along. There is something strange, in my way of thinking, to be decoded here. I can think of quite a few hypotheses, but these would just be guesses. In part, hiking, or even walking, does not apparently occur to many local people when they consider getting some exercise. As far as I can tell, about the only activities considered are ball games (spectators) or golf (the cart). I am on the Boone Greenway about 5 days a week. I see #1 Dog Walkers, #2 Mothers with small kids, #3 joggers, cyclists, cross country folk, #4 The Walking Dead. The latter are always gentlemen who appear to be undertaking an extremely serious and monumental task. They are not smiling. They look like they are working very hard. They look like their doc just told them something like “Walk or die.” I never see them twice. Nearly every week, in the news, are published studies indicating that walking, esp in the woods, on a regular basis, does wonders for a persons health and state of mind. This country is sliding into a monumental health and health services crises. Hiking could be a very low cost armament in what is coming.
No.
Hungry Mother State Park in Va. is one with cabins but also has water that isn’t possible without expanding North.
Cade’s Cove has a beautiful valley but not the valley and view just North of Elk Knob or the recreational possibilities.
N/A
Any improvements would be helpful. We have a lot of visitors at the park.
Grayson Highlands State Park great example. Cabins at State Parks they like: Roane Mountain, Douglas Cedar Falls, Falls Creek Falls. Hot Springs, NC has elevated small cabins along the river. Rockefeller Center at Woodstock does a lot of cultural/heritage events that is entwined with the natural aspect of the center.
Grandfather Mountain
New River State Park has rev campground sites yah would be nice for the proffitt property

Not sure - I don’t know this park particularly well and each park is so different from the next.
South Mountain SP welcome center and video a create way to get an intro to a park. Accessibility is important, make the park feel accessible.
I lean towards national forests for ideas due to limited amenities and infrastructure (e.g., Pisgah’s Grandfather District), versus state and national parks that tend to lean more heavily on amenities and infrastructure, sometimes at the expense of wildlife and other natural resource concerns.
Elk Knob State Park is a model example of visitor access, stewardship, and protection of natural areas within a public park.

Stakeholder Feedback

Community Feedback

Note: comments directly from stakeholder survey and were not edited for clarity or grammar

Open House #1 August 22nd, 2019

Do you have any comments or questions on what is being proposed?

Build few structures, maintain current trails, add additional trails. Keep it wild, not groomed.
Very excited!
I feel Elk Knob is best suited for back-county focused development. Please focus on developing distance hiking and backpacking possibilities.
Damaging more of the natural beauty of the area for more tourists in this small town is a bad idea. When will the building and destroying stop???
" I feel the priority for Elk Knob State Park should be land preservation at this time. There are still many beautiful large acreage parcels available all around the Elk Knob State Park Boundaries. There are at least 60 acres adjacent the Papa Noel Section of Elk Knob State Park for sale currently on West Peak Road that joins the current Park Boundaries. The property is listed with Realty One Group Results - MLS# 213657 -
https://www.landandfarm.com/property/28_06_Acres_in_Ashe_County-9304144/
The time to protect these types of land is now. Development of facilities and infrastructure can come latter in my opinion. The long term value and legacy of expanding the park now while you still can will outweigh development of cabins, RV sites, etc. Trail development would be my second priority in order of importance. Land Protection/Park expansion first then Trail development, and then Park infrastructure development."
Thank you for asking for input!
Please expand trails with designated backcountry campsites to protect and conserve off-trail areas.

To be honest, I think your top priority should always be preservation of the environment and the protection of the flora and fauna. I am not impressed by the Northern Peaks Trail and its focus on connecting more remote areas -- this may very well lead to degradation of all land involved, as well as potential harming of local residents' property. Where are the plans to protect habitat for animals, birds, trees, plants? Please limit new trails, camping, and construction-based amenities. I just hiked the Summit Trail a couple of weeks ago -- it is peaceful and beautiful the way it is -- how can you improve on nature that is still virtually untainted by people? Why do we keep trying to make Disneylands out of relatively unspoiled parkland? Please make non-human animals (and plants) your top priority, as opposed to always seeing a park from the human perspective. I am strongly in support of (legally) enlarging park boundaries to include more land -- but your first priority must be to keep it safe and pristine for the animals, birds, and plants that already live there.
Expedite the building of the Northern Peaks Trail. It will be a unique resource for Western North Carolina and the entire Mid-Atlantic region. Ensure cell service in the park for safety reasons.
I would like more formalized cross country ski trails and also a small cross country ski rental facility. This is something unique this park can offer.
So excited about the Northern Peaks trail!
I am pleased that this area has become a state park and continuing, methodical efforts are underway to make it even more of a resource for our community and visitors to the area. Thank you!
My only complaint is that The Peak is a special mountain on its own. It needs more recognition than just park of Elk Knob State Park. It will be AWESOME to have an accessible trail on that side of Creston. Keep up the good work and know this will benefit generations to come.
"I'm curious to know more about the South Site along Meat Camp Road. Is that going up Snake Mountain? Also, how will The Peak be incorporated? What's the timeframe?
Please email luke.weir96@gmail.com! Willing to provide more input as a frequent hiker of the High Country."
What, if any, facilities and hiking will be available for handicapped people. My husband is in a wheelchair but used to love to hike.
I would love to see a low profile observation platform at the summit of Elk Knob that would allow for possible 360 degree views. I encourage you to include the Elk Knob Mine as a possible destination or at least highlight its history.
Elk Knob is one of my favorite places. I'm thrilled the park is expanding. THANK YOU!

I'd like to know more about proposed view shed control and proposed expansion.
Would like to see access and at least one trail developed in the Bear Paw Area which I understand is managed by Elk Knob.
I would love to see the property on Meat Camp road be put to a use for the public. Maybe a camp site or picnic area along the road above pleasant valley Methodist church. Would it be possible for elk knob trails to finish on the Proffitts property, which is owner by the state also. Thank you for your consideration for this. Juanita Miller Sent from my iPad
I am excited by the prospect of more trail development, but would like to see other developments kept to a minimum (eg visitor center, campsites) and others not done at all (cabins, RV parking). The latter will decrease the experience for those unable to hike far into the back country and make the area louder, more polluted, and less wild.
Please keep doing what you are doing and just leave nature be and preserve it as is. Not everything has to be for humans.
No
More trails please!
As big as we can get it, with as many trails as possible, protecting as much habitat as possible--it's already overused at current small size. Would be nice to emphasize saving old-growth and native plant areas, eradicating non-native invasive flora/fauna Thank you.
I live near the park and visit frequently. Looking forward to future developments.
Hard to choose between such great options. Love the Northern Peaks Trail concept and think preserving rare species and viewsheds and community engagement are equally critical.
Continue requisition of connected conservation area should be a primary goal. Purchase and protect Long Hope Valley. Protect sensitive area during construction and route the NPT away from sensitive ecological areas such as rock outcroppings and bogs.
You need to have education exhibits noting geology and biology.
You need to have education exhibits noting geology and biology. Contact Yick Corporation for easement through Long Hope Valley. This is all amphibolite and these ancient lava flows should be described along with the geologic history. Elk Knob should also be tied to Howards Knob.
The development of the park should minimize the footprint of the buildings and RV Camping sites. Continued land acquisition should be the #1 priority for the park.

Approximately 30 people attended Open House #1 & 134 people took the online survey

Open House #1 Feedback

As mentioned try to identify the NPT route to a zone of possible location versus a specific line. I realize that is your intent. Hyper sensitive people will seize on the line as the exact location.
Conservation of rare species. Keep the trail off the ridge.
Please avoid destroying rare plant communities.
Connect the Peak and Elk Knob tracts by purchasing the Richardson tract. Continue to expand park properties. Be very deliberate with trail construction around plant communities.
Elk Knob is marvelous place which deserves highest consideration for continued development.
Trailheads and Peak Road seem great.
Beautiful plan. Exciting!
Elk Knob is my favorite part in the area. I really don't want to see it turned into an area full of swimming pools, cabins and bathhouses. I'd like it to stay more natural.
Protecting the natural resources of the Amphibolite range should be the top motivation for all activities and guide infrastructure development.
I love the idea of it connecting to other parks/areas/trails etc. I would love to see backcountry camping options as well as drive up camping options. I love the idea of a Visitor Center (especially with a warming room as this park aims to stay open throughout the winter months- what if this warming room had a huge fireplace and lots of comfortable rocking chairs, so that visitors felt like there were guests in someone's keeping room? We are thinking of retiring to this area and would want to utilize the park as much as possible. Thank you
Can we consider adding mountain biking trails. I am sure we can get lots of volunteers to help build them and maintain. This part of the state is starving for more natural trails. Except Rocky Knob in Boone, there is limited mtn bike trails across the northwestern part of the state. Compared to Pisgah and many other areas in the south western parts of NC. You can email me at Ejlongo@nc.rr.com. My name is Gene Longo.
the name Northern Peaks Trail is dumb. It should be the Amphibolite Trail.
More trails!
The more trails we can connect the better!
Concentrate efforts on expanding the parks boundaries and opening up access to those areas via trails. The Northern Peaks trail would be a huge help in increasing backcountry access in the region. As it stands now, most of the trails in the region are front country with easy access to the parkway. A dedicated back country trail experience so close to Boone would be phenomenal.

"Please make land conservation and the expansion of Elk Knob State Park a priority! More special lands and farms are being purchased by developers every year and the time to really conserve and expand the state park is now. Park infrastructure can be expanded after land protection and park expansion opportunities have been exhausted. By expanding the park as much as possible a legacy will be created that can enjoyed by future generations. Please target large tracts and old farms bordering or near the current State Park boundary."
Based on this map, are you proposing to connect with the old Snake Mountain Trail via the Northern Peaks Trail?
Buy Snake Mountain and include it.
No. Beautiful park!
The Northern Peaks Trail is a very exciting idea. If you pursue it further, I know you will be incredibly sensitive to the rare and endangered plant species that could be affected by traffic on the trail. I think the way Rough Ridge was developed is a good example of such sensitivity.
I'm excited about this park!
Elk Knob and surrounding natural areas should NOT be built up for human use. This is a very sensitive ecosystem that should be protected and left intact.
It would be great for their to be camping amenities here, the other two North of Boone State Parks also lack traditional rv/tent/bath house campground and would be utilized. I've been to Elk Knob a few times and its lack of amenities probably keep your more lax day trippers away, better signage and awareness is also needed to get people to know the park is there and how to get there. Love the Park system, keep it up
I would like to see the park remain more like a SNA than a highly developed amenity based park. The location, natural, cultural and historical resources, need extra protection from the masses. We already have many other easy access, more devoloped places to recreate in the High Country; no need for more at Elk.
"#2 Do not like the idea of front or backcountry ""leave the beauty and natural feel of this precious gift as is. #3 Don't Enable the public they need to enjoy it without commercializing this wonderful place! #4 Trails but leave less disturbed, not signage everywhere --too obtrusive, rv sites - god no!, backcountry camping - possibly, day use--not a huge pavilion, the picnic sights here are sufficient #5 I use to drive from Greensboro to Elk Knob (for the daywhen it first opened. I like it as is (a quiet, undisturbed park) Why, ruin a good thing with commercializing this sacred place? I'm opposed to ANY MORE DEVELOPMENT"
A classroom/indoor presentation space is most needed. Exhibits (interactive would be nice) featuring and allowing exploration of geological and cultural park features would be useful. Yurts or primitive cabins would generate income and be desired. Primitive campsites/shelters would fit well with the North Peaks Trails. Connector trails forming loops routes would be used often and draw hikers. A water feature (pond with wild life exhibits would work well as would renovation of a barn on premises.

Park Amenities would like to see the green space and event stage for the Heritage Day event
As for amenities at park would like to see the green space and event stage for the Annual Heritage Day / EKCHO
Develop facilities in tandem with area econ development and tourism authorities. Facilitate programs jointly w. private sector (businesses) and public/private educators.
By creating trails in a manner that take into consideration sensitive flora foot traffic in these delicate peak areas can be directed instead of the spider web of self trails being created by folks exploring that is happening now. Also ,no cabins, or if cabins, very simple. You are competing against an AirBnb culture.
connect to northern peaks. vista site near north site.
Visitors Center is a high priority. I believe that it should focus on history and culture of the area. **Trail access at peak road site is also a priority

Open House #1 Feedback

Community Feedback

Open House #2 December 17th, 2019

Elk Knob State Park Master Plan Questionnaire

Note: The responses below, as well as the filled-out form to the left, represent the compilation of all attendee responses averaged.

What would you build first at the Peak Campground site? Circle the number based on priority.

- 3rd PICNIC & TRAILHEAD PARKING (A) / Not a Priority 1-----2-----3-----4●-----5 High Priority
- 6th COMFORT STATION & RV CAMPING LOOP (D & E) / Not a Priority 1-----2●-----3-----4-----5 High Priority
- 4th SHOWER HOUSES (F) / Not a Priority 1-----2-----3●-----4-----5 High Priority
- 5th CAMPER CABINS (G) / Not a Priority 1-----2●-----3-----4-----5 High Priority
- 5th ACTIVITES/GROUP AREA (H) / Not a Priority 1-----2●-----3-----4-----5 High Priority
- 2nd PRIMITIVE DRIVE-IN CAMPGROUND (I) / Not a Priority 1-----2-----3-----4●-----5 High Priority
- 1st TRAILS / Not a Priority 1-----2-----3●-----4-----5 High Priority

What would you build first at the Visitor Center site? Circle the number based on priority.

- 1st VISITOR CENTER & DAY USE AREA (A-H) / Not a Priority 1-----2-----3-----4●-----5 High Priority
- 2nd PAVILION WITH FIREPLACE / Not a Priority 1-----2-----3-----4●-----5 High Priority
- 3rd EVENT LAWN & STAGE / Not a Priority 1-----2-----3●-----4-----5 High Priority

Do you have any comments or questions on what is being proposed?

Note: comments directly from attendee survey and were not edited for clarity or grammar

Would like to see low profile observation deck included in plan for summit of Elk Knob.

One of my concerns in the short term is that much of the southern slope of the Elk Knob is open to development, potentially threatening the view of the Elk Knob for visitors driving up Meat Camp Road! A high priority for me would be to try and save some of this especially tracts that are for sale.

Love that we are seriously planning. Time...waits for no one!!

{ Approximately 20 people attended Open House #2 }

Open House #2 Feedback

Public Comment

Note: North Carolina State Parks posted the 100% plan, soliciting public comments. These comments were taken directly from that comment period and were not edited for clarity or grammar

TO BE UPDATED IN
MARCH-APRIL 2020

C

Probable Cost Estimates

NOTES ON THE PROBABLE COST ESTIMATE

These are planning level cost estimates and should not be used to estimate for construction.

Estimates are rounded up in the cost summary and may vary slightly from the detail cost estimates here.

Costs are based on recent bid or cost estimates. *Inflation of 3-4% annually to estimates beyond the year 2020.*

Estimates assume a 25% contingency, 10% design fee, and 5% mobilization for each phase. A larger contingency fee may be applicable due to the remoteness of much of the park.

Costs not included in this estimate include: Utilities (beyond septic for campground), geotechnical/soils investigation, rock removal, surveying, permitting, bonding requirements, archeology investigations, septic investigations, demolitions, environmental surveys, and stream and wetland determinations.

1

PHASE 1: Land Acquisition (cost not included)

2

PHASE 2: Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST): Part 1

Probable Cost Estimate from Master Plan 2020

Cost estimates are preliminary and subject to change

	Units	Quantity	Cost Per Unit	Costs
Mobilization				
Mobilization (includes mobilization for all work)	LS		5% of Construction Cost	\$19,594
			SUB-TOTAL	\$19,594
Grading & Trail Work				
Trails (natural surface)	LF	34900.0	\$8.00	\$279,200
			SUB-TOTAL	\$279,200
Structures				
Stream crossings (trail) or other trail structures	EA	14.0	\$6,600.00	\$92,400
			SUB-TOTAL	\$92,400
Traffic Control				
High visibility crosswalk (Meat Camp Rd.)	EA	1.0	\$5,175.00	\$5,175
			SUB-TOTAL	\$5,175
General Amenities				
Wayfinding signage/other signage	LS	1.0	\$5,000.00	\$5,000
Trail kiosk	EA	1.0	\$10,100.00	\$10,100
			SUB-TOTAL	\$15,100
Units:				Sub-Total Cost
EA= each				25% Contingency
LS= lump sum				10% Design/Engineering/Permitting
LF= linear foot				Total Cost
TN= ton				\$411,469
SY= square yard				\$102,867
MI= Mile				\$51,434
				\$565,770

Notes on the Probable Cost Estimate

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- *Estimates assume a 25% contingency, 10% design fee, and 5% mobilization for each phase.* A larger contingency fee may be applicable due to the remoteness of much of the park.
- *Costs not included in this estimate include:* Utilities (beyond septic for campground), geotechnical/soils investigation, rock removal, surveying, permitting, bonding requirements, archeology investigations, septic investigations, demolitions, environmental surveys, and stream and wetland determinations.

3

PHASE 3: Visitor Center & Day Use Area (Main Park Area)

Probable Cost Estimate from Master Plan 2020

Cost estimates are preliminary and subject to change

	Units	Quantity	Cost Per Unit	Costs
Mobilization				
Mobilization (includes mobilization for all work)	LS		5% of Construction Cost	\$404,952
			SUB-TOTAL	\$404,952
Grading, Trail work, Hard surface				
Clearing and grubbing	AC	7.2	\$10,000.00	\$72,000
Earthwork	AC	6.9	\$27,000.00	\$186,300
Fine grading	SY	7900.0	\$18.00	\$142,200
Storm drainage	LF	160.0	\$50.00	\$8,000
Asphalt surface	SY	7800.0	\$50.00	\$390,000
Concrete paths	CY	93.0	\$400.00	\$37,200
Gravel parking	CY	700.0	\$60.00	\$42,000
Trail kiosk	EA	2.0	\$10,100.00	\$20,200
Erosion control	AC	7.2	\$23,000.00	\$165,600
			SUB-TOTAL	\$1,063,500
Visitor Center				
Building	SF	9500.0	\$640.00	\$6,080,000
Natural play	LS	1.0	\$34,000.00	\$34,000
Plantings	AC	0.8	\$70,000.00	\$56,000
Enhance picnic area	LS	1.0	\$35,000.00	\$35,000
			SUB-TOTAL	\$6,205,000
Additional Structures				
Stream crossings (trail)	EA	3.0	\$6,600.00	\$19,800
Stage	LS	1.0	\$100,000.00	\$100,000
Pavilion	SF	2400.0	\$80.00	\$192,000
Overlook	LS	1.0	\$150,000.00	\$150,000
Primitive camping sites	EA	4.0	\$5,500.00	\$22,000
Stormwater control measures	EA	3.0	\$24,000.00	\$72,000
			SUB-TOTAL	\$555,800
Traffic Control				
Crosswalk	EA	5.0	\$2,300.00	\$11,500
Parking striping	LS	1.0	\$11,000.00	\$11,000
Wheel stops	EA	103.0	\$80.00	\$8,240
Parking lot gate	EA	1.0	\$2,500.00	\$2,500
			SUB-TOTAL	\$33,240
General Amenities				
Wayfinding signage	LS	1.0	\$5,000.00	\$5,000
Interpretive signage	EA	3.0	\$1,500.00	\$4,500
Picnic tables	EA	12.0	\$1,300.00	\$15,600
Trash & recycle receptacles	EA	4.0	\$2,100.00	\$8,400
Trails (natural surface) (Northern Peaks is separate-see phase two)	LF	26000.0	\$8.00	\$208,000
			SUB-TOTAL	\$241,500
Units:				Sub-Total Cost
EA= each				25% Contingency
LS= lump sum				10% Design/Engineering/Permitting
LF= linear foot				Total Cost
TN= ton				\$8,503,992
SY= square yard				\$2,125,998
MI= Mile				\$1,062,999
				\$11,692,989

Probable Cost Estimates

PHASE 4: Visitor Center & Day Use Area (Main Park Area)

Probable Cost Estimate from Master Plan 2020
Cost estimates are preliminary and subject to change

	Units	Quantity	Cost Per Unit	Costs
Mobilization				
Mobilization (includes mobilization for all work including grading)	LS	1	5% of Construction Cost	\$99,904
			SUB-TOTAL	\$99,904
Grading, Trail Work, Hard surface				
Clearing and grubbing	AC	3.5	\$10,000.00	\$35,000
Earthwork	AC	1.9	\$29,000.00	\$55,100
Fine grading	SY	5300.0	\$18.00	\$95,400
Storm drainage	LF	65.0	\$50.00	\$3,250
Asphalt surface	SY	3990.0	\$50.00	\$199,500
Concrete paths	CY	882.0	\$400.00	\$352,800
Gravel parking	CY	2300.0	\$60.00	\$138,000
Crushed stone paths (ADA)	SY	735.0	\$23.00	\$16,905
Trail kiosk	EA	1.0	\$10,100.00	\$10,100
Erosion control	AC	3.5	\$22,000.00	\$77,000
			SUB-TOTAL	\$983,055
Structures				
Stream crossings (pedestrian)	EA	2.0	\$2,500.00	\$5,000
Vehicular bridge (90' with 60" culvert)	EA	1.0	\$60,000.00	\$60,000
Pavilion (roll down doors)	LS	1.0	\$270,000.00	\$270,000
Maintenance building	SF	1200.0	\$116.00	\$139,200
Interpretive pull-off	LS	1.0	\$32,000.00	\$32,000
			SUB-TOTAL	\$506,200
Traffic Control				
Parking striping	LS	1.0	\$3,500.00	\$3,500
Wheel stops	EA	28.0	\$77.00	\$2,156
Gate	EA	1.0	\$2,500.00	\$2,500
			SUB-TOTAL	\$8,156
General Amenities				
Stormwater control measures	EA	3.0	\$23,000.00	\$69,000
Wayfinding signage	LS	1.0	\$8,000.00	\$8,000
Interpretive signage	EA	2.0	\$1,500.00	\$3,000
Lawn	SY	1040.0	\$24.00	\$24,960
Plantings	AC	0.4	\$68,000.00	\$23,800
Picnic tables	EA	21.0	\$1,300.00	\$27,300
Trash & recycle receptacles	EA	3.0	\$25,000.00	\$75,000
Trails (natural surface)	LF	22000.0	\$8.00	\$176,000
Park sign (park gateway and plantings)	LS	1.0	\$17,500.00	\$17,500
			SUB-TOTAL	\$424,560
Natural Community Restoration				
Stream buffers and wetland enhancements	AC	2.4	\$30,500.00	\$73,200
Meadow	AC	0.2	\$14,500.00	\$2,900
			SUB-TOTAL	\$76,100
Units:				Sub-Total Cost
EA= each				25% Contingency
LS= lump sum				10% Design/Engineering/Permitting
LF= linear foot				Total Cost
TN= ton				\$2,097,975
SY= square yard				\$524,494
MI= Mile				\$262,247
				\$2,884,715

Notes on the Probable Cost Estimate

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- *Estimates assume a 25% contingency, 10% design fee, and 5% mobilization for each phase.* A larger contingency fee may be applicable due to the remoteness of much of the park.
- *Costs not included in this estimate include:* Utilities (beyond septic for campground), geotechnical/soils investigation, rock removal, surveying, permitting, bonding requirements, archeology investigations, septic investigations, demolitions, environmental surveys, and stream and wetland determinations.

PHASE 5: The Peak Campground: Part 1

Probable Cost Estimate from Master Plan 2020
Cost estimates are preliminary and subject to change

	Units	Quantity	Cost Per Unit	Costs
Mobilization				
Mobilization (includes mobilization for all work)	LS	1	5% of Construction Cost	\$202,819
			SUB-TOTAL	\$202,819
Grading, Trail Work, Hard Surface				
Clearing and grubbing	AC	13.3	\$10,000.00	\$133,000
Earthwork	AC	12.0	\$29,000.00	\$348,000
Fine grading	SY	20800.0	\$18.00	\$374,400
Storm drainage	LF	60.0	\$50.00	\$3,000
Asphalt surface	SY	13520.0	\$50.00	\$676,000
Concrete paths	CY	27.0	\$400.00	\$10,800
Crushed stone paths (ADA)	SY	1740.0	\$23.00	\$40,020
Trail kiosk	EA	1.0	\$10,100.00	\$10,100
Erosion control	AC	13.3	\$23,000.00	\$305,900
			SUB-TOTAL	\$1,901,220
Campground				
Camping pads (hook, fire ring, pad, and picnic table)	EA	27.0	\$7,000.00	\$189,000
Shower house	LS	1.0	\$530,000.00	\$530,000
Plantings	AC	2.8	\$67,000.00	\$187,600
Dumpster	EA	1.0	\$21,700.00	\$21,700
			SUB-TOTAL	\$928,300
Additional Structures				
Stream crossings (pedestrian)	EA	3.0	\$2,500.00	\$7,500
Vehicular bridge (Arch crossing ~50LF)	EA	1.0	\$75,000.00	\$75,000
Ranger residence (house rehab)	LS	1.0	\$55,000.00	\$55,000
Maintenance buildings (two poll barns and a garage)	SF	4750.0	\$100.00	\$475,000
Sewer pre-treatment	LS	1.0	\$250,000.00	\$250,000
			SUB-TOTAL	\$862,500
Traffic Control				
Crosswalk	EA	3.0	\$2,300.00	\$6,900
Parking striping	LS	1.0	\$10,000.00	\$10,000
Wheel stops	EA	41.0	\$77.00	\$3,157
Entrance gate (electric sliding gate by comfort station)	EA	1.0	\$30,000.00	\$30,000
			SUB-TOTAL	\$50,057
General Amenities				
Wayfinding signage	LS	1.0	\$7,500.00	\$7,500
Interpretive signage	EA	3.0	\$1,500.00	\$4,500
Entry monument and plantings	LS	1.0	\$16,000.00	\$16,000
Fire pit and viewing lawn	LS	1.0	\$12,000.00	\$12,000
Picnic tables	EA	6.0	\$1,300.00	\$7,800
Trash & recycle receptacles	EA	5.0	\$2,100.00	\$10,500
Trails (natural surface)	LF	32000.0	\$8.00	\$256,000
			SUB-TOTAL	\$314,300
Natural Community Restoration				
Forest		Price to be determined by state parks		\$0
Meadow		Price to be determined by state parks		\$0
			SUB-TOTAL	\$0
Units:				Sub-Total Cost
EA= each				25% Contingency
LS= lump sum				10% Design/Engineering/Permitting
LF= linear foot				Total Cost
TN= ton				\$4,259,196
SY= square yard				\$1,064,799
MI= Mile				\$532,399
				\$5,856,394

Probable Cost Estimates

6

PHASE 6: Northern Peaks State Trail: Part 2

Probable Cost Estimate from Master Plan 2020
Cost estimates are preliminary and subject to change

	Units	Quantity	Cost Per Unit	Costs
Mobilization				
Mobilization (includes mobilization for all work)	LS	1	5% of Construction Cost	\$26,900
			SUB-TOTAL	\$26,900
Grading & Trail work				
Trails (natural surface)	LF	30000.0	\$8.00	\$240,000
3 Top trail head (kiosk and parking for 15 cars)	LS	1.0	\$225,000.00	\$225,000
			SUB-TOTAL	\$465,000
Structures				
Stream crossings (trail), other structures	EA	21	\$3,000.00	\$63,000
			SUB-TOTAL	\$63,000
General Amenities				
Wayfinding signage	LS	1	\$10,000.00	\$10,000
			SUB-TOTAL	\$10,000
Units:	Sub-Total Cost			\$564,900
EA= each	25% Contingency			\$141,225
LS= lump sum	10% Design/Engineering/Permitting			\$70,613
LF= linear foot	Total Cost			\$776,738
TN= ton				
SY= square yard				
MI= Mile				

Notes on the Probable Cost Estimate

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- *Estimates assume a 25% contingency, 10% design fee, and 5% mobilization for each phase.* A larger contingency fee may be applicable due to the remoteness of much of the park.
- *Costs not included in this estimate include:* Utilities (beyond septic for campground), geotechnical/soils investigation, rock removal, surveying, permitting, bonding requirements, archeology investigations, septic investigations, demolitions, environmental surveys, and stream and wetland determinations.

7

PHASE 7: The Peak Campground: Part 2

Probable Cost Estimate from Master Plan 2020
Cost estimates are preliminary and subject to change

	Units	Quantity	Cost Per Unit	Costs
Mobilization				
Mobilization (includes mobilization for all work)	LS	1.0	5% of Construction Cost	\$154,304
			SUB-TOTAL	\$154,304
Grading and Hard surface				
Clearing and grubbing	AC	6.0	\$8,500.00	\$51,000
Earthwork	AC	5.7	\$27,500.00	\$156,750
Fine grading	SY	7,140.0	\$15.00	\$107,100
Storm drainage	LF	70.0	\$46.00	\$3,220
Asphalt surface	SY	7,140.0	\$44.00	\$314,160
Concrete	CY	157.0	\$400.00	\$62,800
Erosion control	AC	6.0	\$22,000.00	\$132,000
			SUB-TOTAL	\$827,030
Structures				
RV sites (include hook ups and plantings)	LS	1.0	\$731,800.00	\$731,800
Cabins (include utilities and plantings)	EA	6.0	\$71,600.00	\$429,600
Shower house	LS	1.0	\$520,525.00	\$520,525
Comfort station	LS	1.0	\$300,000.00	\$300,000
Sewer pre-treatment	LS	1.0	\$225,000.00	\$225,000
			SUB-TOTAL	\$2,206,925
Traffic Control				
Parking striping	LS	1.0	\$3,200.00	\$3,200
Wheel stops	EA	38.0	\$77.00	\$2,926
			SUB-TOTAL	\$6,126
General Amenities				
Stormwater control measures	EA	2.0	\$23,000.00	\$46,000
			SUB-TOTAL	\$46,000
Natural Community Restoration				
Meadow	Price to be determined by state parks			\$0
			SUB-TOTAL	\$0
Units:	Sub-Total Cost			\$3,240,385
EA= each	25% Contingency			\$810,096
LS= lump sum	10% Design/Engineering/Permitting			\$405,048
LF= linear foot	Total Cost			\$4,455,529
TN= ton				
SY= square yard				
MI= Mile				

ALL PHASES

Total Cost	\$26,232,135
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Note that this amount is rounded up in the Phase Details and Probable Cost Estimate





DRAFT 90% PLAN