



Department of Conservation and Recreation
Division of Planning and Recreation Resources
600 E Main Street, 24th Floor
Richmond, Virginia 23219



HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK **COMPREHENSIVE** **DRAFT MASTER PLAN**

1466 CAMP PARADISE ROAD, RICE, VIRGINIA 23966

HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK MASTER PLAN 2026

ADOPTION PAGE

The plan was reviewed by the Board of Conservation and Recreation on April 30, 2026.

On _____, 2026 the plan was adopted by DCR Director, Nicole M. Rovner.

Adopted



April 30, 2026

Hunter H. Ihrman, Chair, Board of Conservation and Recreation

Date

Nicole M. Rovner, Director, Department of Conservation and Recreation

Date

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
BCR	Board of Conservation and Recreation
CPSM	Virginia Construction and Professional Services Manual
DCR	Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation
FY	Fiscal Year
lf	Linear Foot
MPC	Master Planning Committee
MPT	Master Plan Team
PRR	DCR Division of Planning Recreation and Resources
sf	Square Feet (measurement of area)
SFHA	Special Flood Hazard Area
VOP	Virginia Outdoors Plan
YCC	Your Comments Count Survey

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

High Bridge Trail State Park provides a premier non-motorized, shared-use trail for pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians in the Heart of Virginia. The park, located within a half-day's drive of many of Virginia's most populated areas, features a wide, level, and stable trail surface, making it usable and accessible for people of all ages and abilities. The park is named for the remarkably high, historic railroad bridge across the Appomattox River, a popular focal point of the park that affords sweeping views of the river and surrounding countryside (see Figure 1). The access point closest to the High Bridge at High Bridge Station features a visitor center modeled after a historic train depot, picnic area, playground, and side trails to the bridge substructure, river, and historic fortifications, the site of a Civil War battle fought during Lee's retreat from Petersburg. An extension of the trail's western end in 2024 opened a total of 32.2 miles to the public from the Town of Pamplin City in Appomattox County to the trail's eastern terminus near the Town of Burkeville in Nottoway County.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN

The 2026 update to the High Bridge Trail State Park Master Plan is intended to set forth a clear vision and plan for the park's future based on a phased development approach, outlining the desired condition of High Bridge Trail State Park upon buildout. The 2026 High Bridge Trail State Park Master Plan replaces the previous master plan document adopted in 2007 and last updated in 2012. The 2012

Featuring the historic High Bridge as its centerpiece, High Bridge Trail State Park provides a premiere rail-to-trail experience showcasing the journeys of goods, people, and armies through and across the rural communities lying at the Heart of Virginia.

HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK MASTER PLAN



Figure 1 – Sunset on High Bridge during the Firefly Festival

update revised the Executive Summary with emphasis on the need to complete the trail, connect the High Bridge Trail to other regional destinations, expand partnership efforts with local communities, and develop recently acquired properties. The plan proposed a visitor center at what is now High Bridge Station, proposed day-use and overnight facilities at Rochelle and Piney Grove, and maintenance and service facilities serving the eastern and western sections of the trail. These recommendations were added to planned developments on the original right-of-way acquired since 2007, which included surfacing of the trail, access roads and trailhead parking areas, and decking and railings on the High Bridge to open it to public use, among other improvements.

DCR staff undertook this master plan update in accordance with the procedures established in the Code of Virginia and internal Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) guiding State Park Master Plan development. As part of this process, DCR staff reviewed the 2007 Master Plan and 2012 update to the Executive Summary. Staff determined that emerging trends with respect to recent acquisitions and improvements were sufficient to warrant a complete update of the master plan. A Public Information Meeting and Public Input Survey were conducted to solicit public input early in the process, ensuring ample opportunity for park visitors and the community to submit their recommendations for future improvements.



Figure 2 – The substructures of the original and current High Bridges

Although the overall desired future conditions at High Bridge Trail State Park have remained relatively constant (e.g., completion of the trail), the park’s specific facility needs have changed since the most recent master plan update. As a result, the phased development plan was revised to reflect projects completed since the last update, in addition to evolving park needs based on public input, changes in user demand, and conditions of current facilities. This master plan also updates associated construction cost estimates as well as staffing and operations costs to reflect desired future conditions. A public comment meeting was held on October 6, 2025, at which the public was invited to comment on the phased development plan, proposed development map, and staffing recommendations. Attendees were generally receptive to these recommendations as well as the main findings of the Visitor Experience Plan, including the park’s purpose statement, primary and secondary interpretive themes, essential visitor experiences, and experience area recommendations.

OVERVIEW OF THE PARK

High Bridge Trail State Park currently occupies 32.2 miles of the historic Southside Railroad in Central Virginia. The Southside Railroad connecting Lynchburg and Petersburg was chartered in 1846 and completed in 1854 to more efficiently transport people and goods, especially tobacco, from the Piedmont and points west to coastal ports. Much of the work grading the railroad bed, sawing ties, and laying the iron tracks was performed by enslaved workers leased from nearby plantations. Originally proposed to bypass Farmville, the section of rail line coinciding with the state park was only created after residents appealed for the planned railroad to link to their community. This connection, however, required railroad engineers to overcome a significant obstacle in the form of the Appomattox River valley four miles east of town. Their solution was to span the valley with the original 1854 High Bridge, later replaced in 1914 after 60 years of service with a steel trestle able to handle heavier trains (see Figure 2). Both the Southside Railroad and High Bridge played significant roles for over a century and a half in transportation and development in the region until service was discontinued, and the railroad subsequently abandoned, in 2004 (see Figure 3).



Figure 3 – One of the last Norfolk Southern diesel engines to cross over the High Bridge in 2005

Subsequent donation by Norfolk Southern to DCR of 31.2 miles of railroad right-of-way provided a historic opportunity to maintain this vital link among the rural communities in Central Virginia, albeit in a different form. DCR completed the first master plan for its newest rail-to-trail state park in early 2007 and began constructing the High Bridge Trail shortly thereafter, converting former railroad bridges to pedestrian and bicycle use and establishing trailhead parking areas at prominent access points. This initial work involved cooperation between DCR and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), Prince Edward County, the Town of Farmville, and other local and state partners that included donations of labor, materials, and equipment to bring the trail to fruition. The installation of decking, railings, and observation platforms on the High Bridge in 2012 marked a major milestone by opening the panoramic views from the bridge to visitors and reestablishing a continuous connection between the communities traversed by the railroad for modern exploration and recreation. Subsequent construction of a main entrance road, parking area, and picnic area less than a half mile from the High Bridge and restoration of the Civil War-era fortifications associated with the Battle of High Bridge improved public access and increased visitation to the bridge and its environs, as did construction of side trails underneath the bridge's eastern end to allow for exploration of the substructure and valley floor.

The last mile of right-of-way at the trail’s western end in Pamplin was acquired by DCR in 2020 along with land for construction of a trailhead parking area. In 2023, the trail was extended along the former railroad bed and, one year later, DCR opened this section of trail and the Pamplin trailhead parking area near the site where the remaining section of tracks rejoins the active Norfolk-Southern line. Currently, DCR is pursuing acquisition of the last mile of railroad right-of-way and additional land at the trail’s eastern end to create a trailhead in the Town of Burkeville and complete the High Bridge Trail along the entire length of the historic railroad between Burkeville and Pamplin. Extending the trail along this final mile of the former railroad is significant not only for extending the shared economic benefits of the trail to all localities through which the trail passes, but also to forge lasting partnerships between DCR and local communities to finish the work begun more than 20 years ago to build a first-rate, rail-to-trail experience in this part of Virginia.

Until recently, the park lacked an indoor facility for guests to take a respite from the elements, interact with park staff, or learn more about local history. In 2022, DCR undertook a truly unique addition to High Bridge Trail State Park by designing a visitor center based on historic plans for the railroad’s Standard Combination Passenger and Freight Station. Opened in 2025, the new visitor center harkens back to a bygone era, once again welcoming travelers to this historic railroad corridor and scenic trail connecting pastoral towns and villages in Central Virginia. The High Bridge Station Visitor Center represents a central hub for staff to conduct interpretive activities and relay the story of the people, events, and technologies that shaped Virginia’s Southside and connected the region to the wider world.

Today, High Bridge Trail State Park serves as a one-of-a-kind recreational trail for walking, hiking, running/jogging, and biking within an hour and a half of the population centers of Richmond, Charlottesville, and Lynchburg. Thousands of people visit the park each year to walk to the High Bridge, view the scenery, exercise, enjoy a bike ride, or simply experience a unique part of railroad history located in the Heart of Virginia (see Figure 4).



Figure 4 – Hikers of all ages enjoy the short trek from the visitor center to the High Bridge

PROPOSED BUILDOUT

The 2026 Master Plan update envisions the build-out of High Bridge Trail State Park as a day use park, and describes both new facilities needed at the park as well as improvements needed to existing facilities. New facilities should be designed and built with consideration for the natural surroundings while seeking to maximize the efficient use of space. Construction should also be in keeping with the protection of natural and cultural resources as described in the Natural Resource Management Plan, Cultural

Resource Summary, and Visitor Experience Plan for the park. In addition, all new development and improvements to existing infrastructure will be planned with regard to the efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

All future phases of park construction will be developed in an environmentally sensitive manner. Building and site design will implement green energy standards using energy-efficient and sustainable building materials and processes to the greatest extent practicable. New facilities will be carefully sited to minimize impacts to natural and cultural resources as well as scenic viewsheds within the park. Development activities will comply with the requirements set forth by the Virginia Erosion and Sediment Control (VESC) Law and Regulations, and the Stormwater Management Program (VSMP) Law and Regulations, including the Virginia Stormwater Management Handbook published by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

To the greatest extent possible, Virginia State Parks strive to meet the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). During discussions of park needs, accommodations for people with physical, sensory, and other disabilities emerged as a principal consideration insofar as park and agency staff sought not only to comply with minimum ADA requirements in the statewide building code but also to ensure that disabled persons have access to the same or equivalent high-quality recreational experiences enjoyed by able-bodied users. To that end, the recommendations of this master plan are intended to ensure that all people, regardless of ability level, can access and enjoy the premier outdoor recreation experiences afforded by High Bridge Trail State Park.

Phase 1

Phase 1 addresses the following immediate needs at the park aimed at completing the High Bridge Trail to the Town of Burkeville and enhancing the High Bridge and High Bridge Station trailhead to serve as a focal point of park visitation:

- **Complete the High Bridge Trail:** This project involves acquisition of the remaining mile of railroad right-of-way at the park's eastern end and construction of the High Bridge Trail to the Town of Burkeville.
- **High Bridge Decking:** This project will replace the wooden deck of the High Bridge with more sustainable and durable materials (e.g., masonry) to improve weatherability.
- **High Bridge Railings:** This project aims to replace wood-frame railings on the High Bridge with a more sustainable and durable material (e.g., composite wood) and increase the mesh size of the chain link for improved visibility.
- **Observation Ports:** As part of replacing the decking and railings, the park will install glass observation ports on the deck of the High Bridge and on each of the three railings at the two observation platforms.
- **First High Bridge Station Picnic Shelter:** The plan proposes a picnic shelter in the current picnic area on the interior of the looped parking lot at High Bridge Station.

- **Second High Bridge Station Picnic Area:** The plan proposes a second picnic area at High Bridge Station in the wooded area lying between Camp Paradise Road near the current gravel equestrian parking lot and the High Bridge Trail, including paving and striping of the parking lot.
- **Train Cars Exhibit:** This project will install an exhibit at High Bridge Station consisting of two mid-train cars (box car, passenger car, etc.) situated on a short section of restored railroad track to highlight the park's railroad past.
- **Additional Restrooms at High Bridge Station:** A restroom building will be constructed at High Bridge Station including a water bottle filling station.
- **Storage Building at High Bridge Station:** In keeping with the railroad theme of the visitor center, the proposed storage building at High Bridge Station will be designed to resemble a freight depot.
- **Building Demolition:** This project will demolish the dilapidated green building at the Rice trailhead.
- **Replace the Decks of the Farmville Bridges:** This project involves replacement of the wooden decks of the River Road, Mill Street, and Buffalo Creek bridges in Farmville with a more sustainable and durable material (e.g., masonry) for improved weatherability.
- **Remove the 3rd Street Parking Area:** The project aims to close and eliminate the underutilized 3rd Street trailhead parking area in Farmville.
- **Western Maintenance Area:** This park seeks to add a western maintenance area and building on park-owned property in Prospect.
- **Connection to Historic Downtown Pamplin:** This project involves a short extension of the High Bridge Trail from the parking area in the Town of Pamplin City to the park property line at the existing at-grade crossing of the Norfolk-Southern railroad. The project would be coordinated with the Town to allow for future construction of a shared-use trail or sidewalk linking High Bridge Trail to the historic downtown.

The total estimated cost for Phase 1 development is \$7,800,488.

Phase 2

Phase 2 addresses the following intermediate needs at the park involving further enhancements to the High Bridge for special events and increasing recreation amenities at trailheads in towns and villages located along the High Bridge Trail:

- **Accent Lighting on the High Bridge:** This project consists of wiring and installation of ground-level accent lighting on the High Bridge to illuminate the bridge deck for night events.
- **Pedestrian Lighting on the High Bridge Trail:** This project involves installation of railroad-themed lighting on the High Bridge Trail between the visitor center and High Bridge to illuminate the trail surface for night events.

- **High Bridge Station Side Trails:** The plan proposes additional side trails for hiking and biking at High Bridge Station. Additional side trails are proposed underneath the western end of the High Bridge.
- **Second High Bridge Station Picnic Shelter:** This project involves constructing a second picnic shelter at High Bridge Station in the second picnic area proposed during Phase 1 in the wooded area between Camp Paradise Road and the High Bridge Trail.
- **Contact Station:** The plan calls for a Contact Station on Camp Paradise Road to handle the increasing volume of future traffic expected at High Bridge Station.
- **River Road Parking Area:** To reduce the need for pedestrians to cross River Road and improve safety, this project will relocate the River Road trailhead parking area to the opposite (south) side of the road.
- **River Road Picnic Area:** Improvements proposed at the River Road trailhead include a picnic area and picnic shelter adjacent to the proposed parking area.
- **River Road Restrooms:** This project will replace the existing vault toilet at the River Road trailhead with restrooms including a water bottle filling station.
- **Accessible Playground:** This project will install an accessible playground at the River Road trailhead.
- **Piney Grove Trailhead:** The park will add a trailhead parking area on Piney Grove Road to provide public access to the Piney Grove tract.
- **Piney Grove Side Trails:** The plan calls for constructing hiking and mountain biking trails at Piney Grove.
- **Rice Trailhead Improvements:** The existing steel building at the Rice trailhead will be demolished to provide sufficient area for widening, paving, and striping of the Rice trailhead parking lot.
- **Rice Maintenance Building:** The plan calls for construction of a maintenance/ storage building at the Rice trailhead containing public restrooms and including a water bottle filling station.
- **Replace Split-Rail Fence:** The park will replace the split-rail fencing between the parking area and trail at the Rice trailhead with context-appropriate fencing.
- **Remove the East Osborn Road Parking Area:** This project aims to close and eliminate the underutilized East Osborn Road trailhead parking area in Farmville.
- **Buffalo Creek Bridge Railings:** This project will replace the existing wooden railings on the Buffalo Creek bridge with more sustainable and durable materials (e.g., composite wood) for improved weatherability.

- **Prospect Picnic Shelter:** The park will construct a picnic shelter at the Prospect trailhead designed to resemble a historic train depot.
- **Prospect Restrooms:** This project involves replacement of the vault toilet at the Prospect trailhead with restrooms including a water bottle filling station.
- **Pamplin Picnic Shelter:** The park will construct a picnic shelter at the Pamplin trailhead designed to resemble a historic train depot.
- **Pamplin Restrooms:** This project entails replacing the portable toilet at the Pamplin trailhead with restrooms including a water bottle filling station.
- **Caboose and Handcar Exhibit:** Improvements at the Pamplin trailhead include installation of a caboose and a handcar exhibit on the remaining section of railroad track.
- **Playground and Bicycle Skills Course:** This facility consists of a playground and bicycle skills course at the Pamplin trailhead.

The total estimated cost for Phase 2 development is \$9,198,931.

Phase 3

Phase 3 focuses on the following long-term park needs:

- **Observation Deck:** This project would construct an observation deck on the bluff west of the trail at the eastern end of the High Bridge.
- **High Bridge Floodlighting:** The park will install floodlighting to illuminate the southwest face of the High Bridge during night events as viewed from the proposed observation deck.
- **Farmville Trail Connections:** The park will coordinate with the Town of Farmville to construct trail connections from the High Bridge Trail to the park property line to allow for future connections to Wilck's Lake Park, Grove Street Park, and Riverside Park.
- **Prospect Trailhead Improvements:** This project entails paving and striping of the Prospect trailhead parking area and elimination of the western entrance.
- **Tiny Railcar Exhibit:** The park plans to install a tiny railcar or rail cart exhibit at the Prospect trailhead on a restored section of railroad track.

The total estimated cost for Phase 3 development is \$540,237.

The total cost to bring High Bridge Trail State Park to its desired future condition is \$17,539,655.

STAFFING AND OPERATIONS

Existing (FY 2025)

- Staffing: 5 FTE salary and benefits \$540,152
- Wage totals \$289,907
- OTPS \$159,249

Total \$989,308

Immediate Needs

- Staffing: 3 FTE salary and benefits \$302,277
- Wage totals \$119,820
- OTPS \$0

Total \$422,097

Needs with Phase 1 Buildout

- Staffing: 3 FTE salary and benefits \$365,089
- Wage totals \$59,910
- OTPS \$31,199

Total \$456,198

Needs with Phase 2 Buildout

- Staffing: 3 FTE salary and benefits \$298,717
- Wage totals \$59,910
- OTPS \$43,125

Total \$401,752

Needs with Phase 3 Buildout

- Staffing: 1 FTE salary and benefits \$99,572
- Wage totals \$59,910
- OTPS \$14,298

Total \$173,780

Full Buildout

- Staffing: 15 FTE salary and benefits \$1,605,807
- Wage totals \$589,457
- OTPS \$247,871

Full Buildout Total \$2,443,135



INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE MASTER PLAN

The purpose of a state park master plan is to guide the development, utilization, and management of the park and its natural, cultural, and historic resources. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) identified High Bridge Trail State Park for review and update as part of its 10-year review schedule. Planners and staff at DCR conducted this plan update in accordance with the requirements of Section 10.1-200.1 of the Code of Virginia, which requires that master plans be reviewed and updated at least once every 10 years. This 2026 revision is comprehensive in nature and was deemed necessary to address changes to existing conditions so that the master plan reflects the current context of the park within the local community, region, and the Virginia State Parks system. The plan includes revisions to the phased development plan based on current and projected needs during the next 30 years.

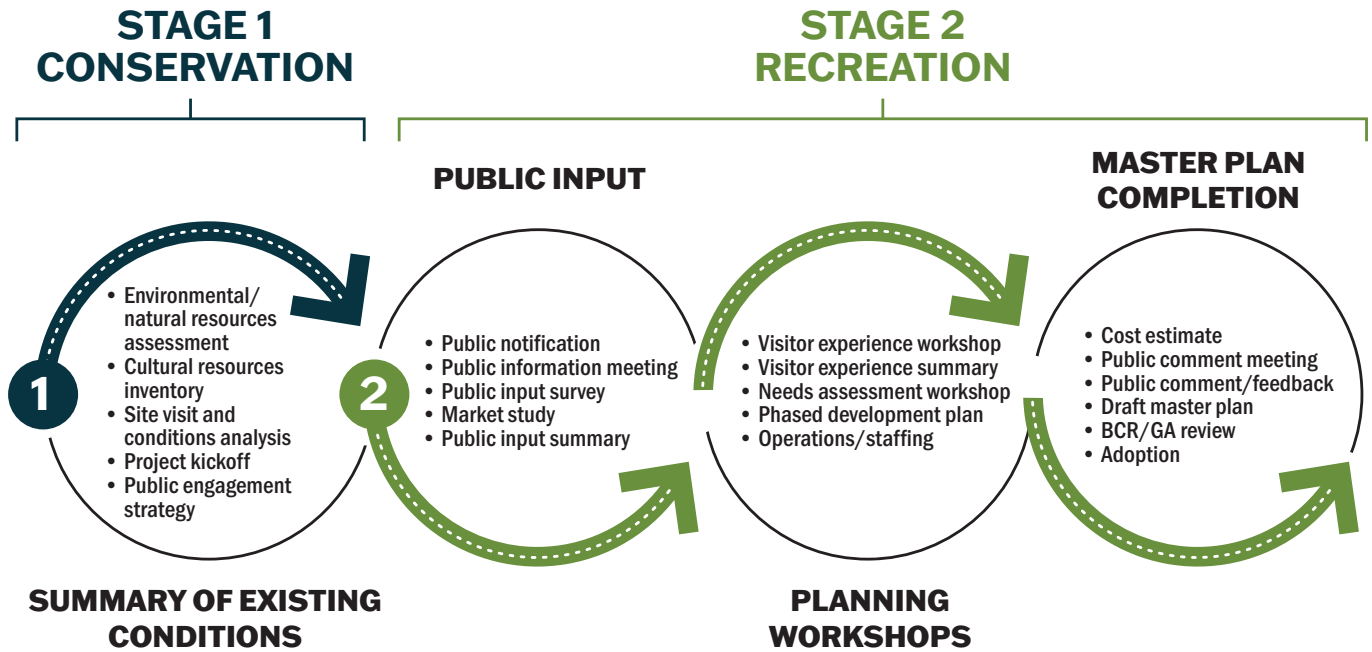


Figure 5 - Master Plan Process Diagram

MASTER PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The process for addressing the requirements of the Code of Virginia for state park master planning was reevaluated by DCR during the period from February to September of 2022. This effort culminated in a report, *Evaluation and Refinement of the Master Planning Process for Virginia State Parks*, developed in a collaborative effort with DCR personnel from PRR, Virginia State Parks, and other divisions and offices involved in this effort. A key deliverable of this report was the development of a refined master planning process summarized in Figure 6 that places an emphasis on preplanning, public engagement, and a renewed focus on incorporating the unique resources and desired visitor experience of each park.

The state park master planning process begins with an evaluation of existing conditions including property boundaries, inholdings, adjacent properties, and other characteristics such as slopes, water resources, soil conditions and types, natural resources, and cultural and historic resources. Staff developed maps and narratives describing these features in detail to inform discussions of the potential uses of various areas of the park and the feasibility of, and public demand for, new and improved recreational, educational, and service facilities. This first stage in the planning process culminated in the formulation of the overall purpose for the park and the goals and objectives that support and nurture this purpose.

The next stage in the master planning process utilized these results to hone in on the locations, types, and sizes of the facilities and associated infrastructure needed to achieve these planning objectives, address anticipated future visitation, and provide

essential experiences to visitors. These key details were discussed and developed by agency and park staff during staff workshops. This stage of work culminated in the phased development plan of proposed recreation amenities as well as other buildings, improvements, and infrastructure for public and staff use. The phased development plan is accompanied by a staffing plan that describes personnel needs and costs during each phase of buildout to ensure that operational, maintenance, and staffing needs are addressed at the same time as improvements in order to better protect and enhance the unique natural, historical, recreational, scenic, and cultural attributes of the park.

MASTER PLAN TIMELINE AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The timeline for the development of a master plan is driven by the scope of the project, which varies depending on whether it involves a new park, a 10-year update, a revision following the acquisition of land or prior to undertaking substantial improvements not documented in the plan, or for non-substantial amendments. The time requirements are also influenced by public engagement and reviews by, and feedback from, the DCR Director, Board of Conservation and Recreation (BCR), and General Assembly. The 2026 Master Plan for High Bridge Trail State Park represents a comprehensive update to the state park plan that required approximately two years to complete. The scope of the update was based on that of the previous update completed in 2012, as well as current DCR master planning standards, in conjunction with the availability and schedules of internal and external stakeholders.

Recognizing the importance of community involvement and public input in state park master planning, the process included two public meetings held on October 21, 2024, and October 6, 2025. The meetings were attended by local citizens who spoke directly with the MPT and DCR leadership to learn more about the planning process, request specific considerations for the future of the park, and provide feedback to guide the purpose, or mission, of the park. In addition, public engagement was ongoing throughout the master plan's development. In addition to public meetings, staff encouraged the public to participate in the Your Comments Count public input survey and provide comments during a 30-day period following each meeting. After the visitor center opened to the public in early 2025, respondents were able to rate their degree of satisfaction with all current day-use facilities within the park and register their need for additional improvements. This feedback was incorporated into the draft plan, which was also made available for public comment.

The internal and public engagement process culminated in the development of a 10-year update for the High Bridge Trail State Park Master Plan that was presented to the Board of Conservation and Recreation (BCR) in a final public forum on _____, 2026. The Board unanimously recommended approval of the plan before it was forwarded to the General Assembly for a 30-day review. On _____, 2026, the plan was adopted by the DCR Director, Nicole M. Rovner.

PARK BACKGROUND

Location and General Description

High Bridge Trail State Park provides a premier non-motorized, shared-use trail for pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians in the Heart of Virginia. The park, located within a half-day's drive of many of Virginia's most populated areas, features a wide, level, and stable trail surface, making it usable and accessible for people of all ages and abilities. The park is named for the remarkably high railroad bridge across the Appomattox River, a popular focal point of the park that affords sweeping views of the river and surrounding countryside (see Figure 6). The access point closest to the High Bridge at the High Bridge Station trailhead features a visitor center, picnic area, playground, and trails to the site of a Civil War battle fought during Lee's retreat from Petersburg. An extension of the trail's western end in 2024 opened a total of 32.2 miles to the public from the Town of Pamplin City in Appomattox County to the trail's eastern terminus near the Town of Burkeville in Nottoway County (see Figures 8.1-8.3).



Figure 6 - The High Bridge and surrounding countryside make for a stunning winter scene

The ruins of the historic 1854 bridge, including the piers and abutments, are listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register (VLR) and included on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). High Bridge, which at 2,400 feet is the longest recreational bridge in Virginia and among the longest in the United States, is a modern engineering marvel easily accessible by a short half-mile trek from the parking area to overlooks that give visitors a panoramic view of the surrounding countryside and Appomattox River far below. The properties near the bridge provide side trails for visitors to explore the magnificent substructures of both the current and former railroad trestles, the south bank of the Appomattox River, Civil War-era earthwork fortifications associated with the Confederate outpost known as Camp Paradise, and old roadbeds used for farming, logging, and other local industries long ago.

Side trails have been developed on the Rochelle property east of Farmville, allowing visitors to view the earthen embankment and stone culvert carrying Bad Luck Branch underneath the former railroad, along with a sample of the forests and meadows adjoining the trail corridor, including a remnant of rare Southern Piedmont Hardpan Forest. The large, mostly undeveloped property referred to as Piney Grove near Moran contains steep, wooded slopes flanking Marrowbone Creek, old farm roads, and natural communities that include the imperiled Piedmont Granitic Flatrock ecosystem. Otherwise, the variable-width trail right-of-way largely occupies a narrow strip of Central Piedmont landscapes that spans rural communities in Appomattox, Prince Edward, Cumberland, and Nottoway counties, including the incorporated towns of Pamplin City and Farmville and unincorporated villages of Elam, Prospect, Tuggle, Rice, and Moran (see Figures 8.1-8.3).

Property and Park History

High Bridge Trail State Park was created by the abandonment and donation of a segment of the Southside Railroad by Norfolk Southern beginning in 2004. The first 31.2 miles of the railroad were donated in 2006 and formally accepted by DCR in 2007 for conversion into the state's newest rail-to-trail state park. The first trail mileage was opened to the public in 2008, and on April 6, 2012, following 13 months of rehabilitation work, on the 147th anniversary of the Civil War battle, visitors for the first time were able to take in the magnificent views from atop the restored bridge at a vantage point 125 feet above the Appomattox River. An additional mile of the former railroad connecting to the Town of Pamplin City was acquired and opened to the public in 2024.

The history of the railroad corridor spans the period from the pre-contact Native American habitation until passenger rail service on the Southside Railroad was discontinued in 1979, followed by freight service in 2004. Within the confines of the park, many cultural resources have been documented by researchers, including architectural ruins, archaeological sites, and historic cemeteries, many of which were identified as part of previous Phase I cultural resource and architectural surveys. Additional resources have been identified on land adjacent to the state park.

Collectively, the park's cultural resources contribute valuable information about the people and communities of Virginia's Southside, including the transportation of people and goods to distant locations across the narrow swath of land encompassed within High Bridge Trail State Park. Today, remnants of the past dot the landscape and serve as continual reminders of the vital role the railroad played in connecting rural towns and villages in this region of Virginia to the rest of the Commonwealth and country. In addition to the High Bridge, the park preserves 33 miles of abandoned railroad infrastructure including bridges across Mill Street, River Road, and Buffalo Creek in Farmville; 94 culverts, including original 19th century stone and cast-iron culverts; concrete forms of former signals and mile markers; telegraph poles, and the remains of a historic train depot in Prospect, Virginia, among other railroad relics.

The park also contains fortifications and other reminders of the battle waged for the railroad and High Bridge during the waning days of the Civil War on April 6-7, 1865 (see Figure 7). The earthworks guarding the approaches to the bridge were defended by Louisianans of the



Figure 7 - A Civil War reenactor discharges his rifle at the restored earthworks at Camp Paradise

Donaldsonville Artillery, but conditions at the Confederate fortifications and nearby military camp were so comfortable and far removed from the fighting prior to the battle that the post was referred to as Camp Paradise. Today, visitors can view Civil War-era artillery pieces situated atop a cleared and restored portion of the historic earthworks from a side trail just southeast of the High Bridge and ponder what the battle was like for Confederate and Union soldiers fighting for the bridge more than a century and a half ago.

Other evidence of the park's agricultural past and the rich cultural legacy left by past inhabitants abound in the form of historic homes, farm buildings, and family cemeteries lying within and adjacent to the trail corridor. For a more detailed description of the history of the park and related resources, see the subsection on Cultural and Historic Resources in the Existing Conditions section.

Park Acquisition

The acquisition of land for a state park began when Norfolk Southern filed for abandonment of the right-of-way of the Southside Railroad in September of 2004. Abandonment of the railroad and construction of the High Bridge Trail by DCR and its partners proceeded in stages during the next several years:

- In January of 2005, the federal Surface Transportation Board (STB) approved the requested abandonment of the railroad right-of-way on the condition that Norfolk Southern leave intact the bridges, trusses and culverts, except for the track, ties and signal equipment for a period of 180 days to enable interested parties to negotiate acquisition of the line for public use.
- During the 2005 session, the General Assembly authorized DCR to accept donation of the railroad corridor for the creation of a state park, a process ultimately completed in 2007.
- For the next five years following acquisition, DCR converted the former railroad right-of-way into a shared-use trail state park and the High Bridge into a first-rate scenic overlook showcasing panoramic views of the farms and forests along the Appomattox River. By November of 2009, approximately 20 miles had been opened to the public, and by September 2010, an additional 10 miles of trail were opened for public use.
- The High Bridge was restored and opened to the public in 2012, and the Piney Grove and Rochelle properties were acquired by DCR in 2008 and 2010, respectively, to provide side trails and expanded recreational opportunities to visitors.
- The last mile of right-of-way at the former railroad's western end and land for construction of a trailhead parking area were acquired by DCR in 2020 to extend the trail to the Town of Pamplin City.
- DCR is currently engaged in ongoing negotiations with Norfolk Southern to acquire the final remaining mile of right-of-way at the corridor's eastern end to extend the trail to the Town of Burkeville and complete the High Bridge Trail along the entire route of the former Southside Railroad between Burkeville and Pamplin (see Figures 8.1-8.3 – Park Property and Public Recreation Resources Map).

Prior Park Planning Efforts

DCR began master planning the park in 2006, guided by an advisory committee comprised of federal, state, and local government officials, businesses, educators, adjacent landowners, and civic organizations. This effort culminated in recommendations to construct a compacted, stone-dust trail surface along the former railroad for use by pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians and to provide public access to the High Bridge and site of the Battle of High Bridge. A subsequent update focused on expanding day-use and overnight facilities for guests. Whereas most of the day-use facilities proposed in the 2012 update have since been constructed, including the High Bridge Station Visitor Center, which opened to the public in 2024, planned overnight areas and administrative facilities at Rochelle and Piney Grove have not, to date, materialized.

- The first park master plan, ultimately approved in 2007, proposed facilities in Phases 1 and 2 included connecting the first few miles of trail in Farmville to the High Bridge as well as constructing an access road, safety fencing, and bridge decking and railings to provide direct public access to the park's signature feature and namesake; these facilities were subsequently completed in the following years. The plan also proposed additional land acquisitions for establishing trailhead parking areas, picnic areas, overnight facilities, educational/interpretive facilities, maintenance areas, and staff residences.
- The 2012 master plan update focused on the need for access and improvements, including overnight accommodations, on properties acquired since the 2007 plan, and connections to other regional recreational areas and destinations. Developments recommended as part of this update included:
 - An access road, visitor center, and other amenities at what ultimately became High Bridge Station;
 - An access road to the Piney Grove property from Route 606 for a proposed environmental education center, primitive campground, and cabin area;
 - A group campground on the Rochelle property; and
 - Picnic areas and additional trails for horseback riding and mountain biking at Rochelle and Piney Grove, respectively.

The 2026 update to the master plan builds upon the 2012 update to the master plan by creating a framework for the development and operation of High Bridge Trail State Park; defining the purpose, goals, and objectives for the construction, expansion, and operation of park facilities during the next 30 years; and reinforcing the need to preserve and interpret natural and cultural resources and optimize visitor experiences by providing additional recreational opportunities and accommodations to the visiting public.

HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK PROPERTY AND PHYSICAL RESOURCES (WESTERN AREA)

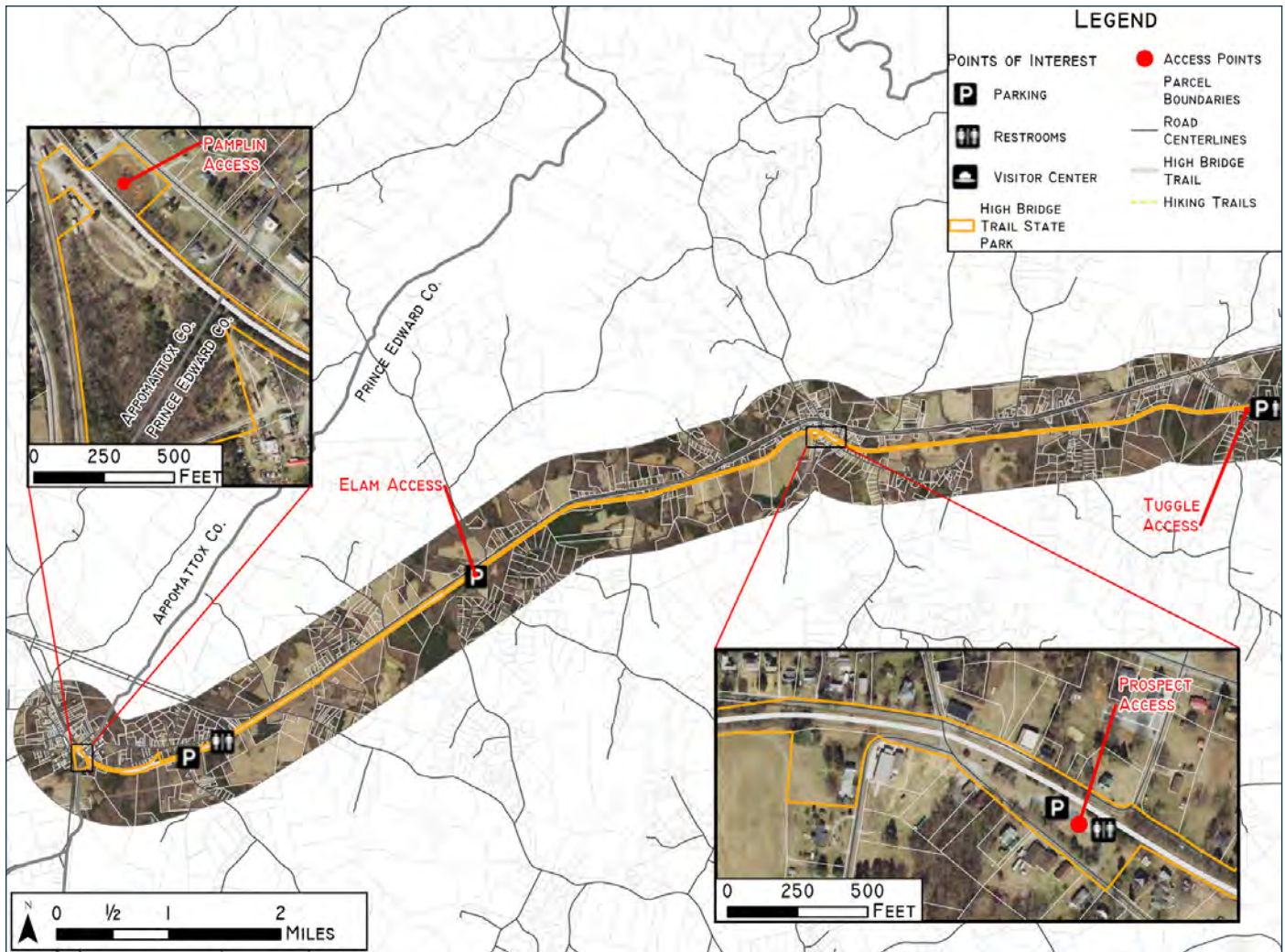


Figure 8.1 - Park Property and Public Recreation Resources Map, Western Area

HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK PROPERTY AND PHYSICAL RESOURCES (CENTRAL AREA)

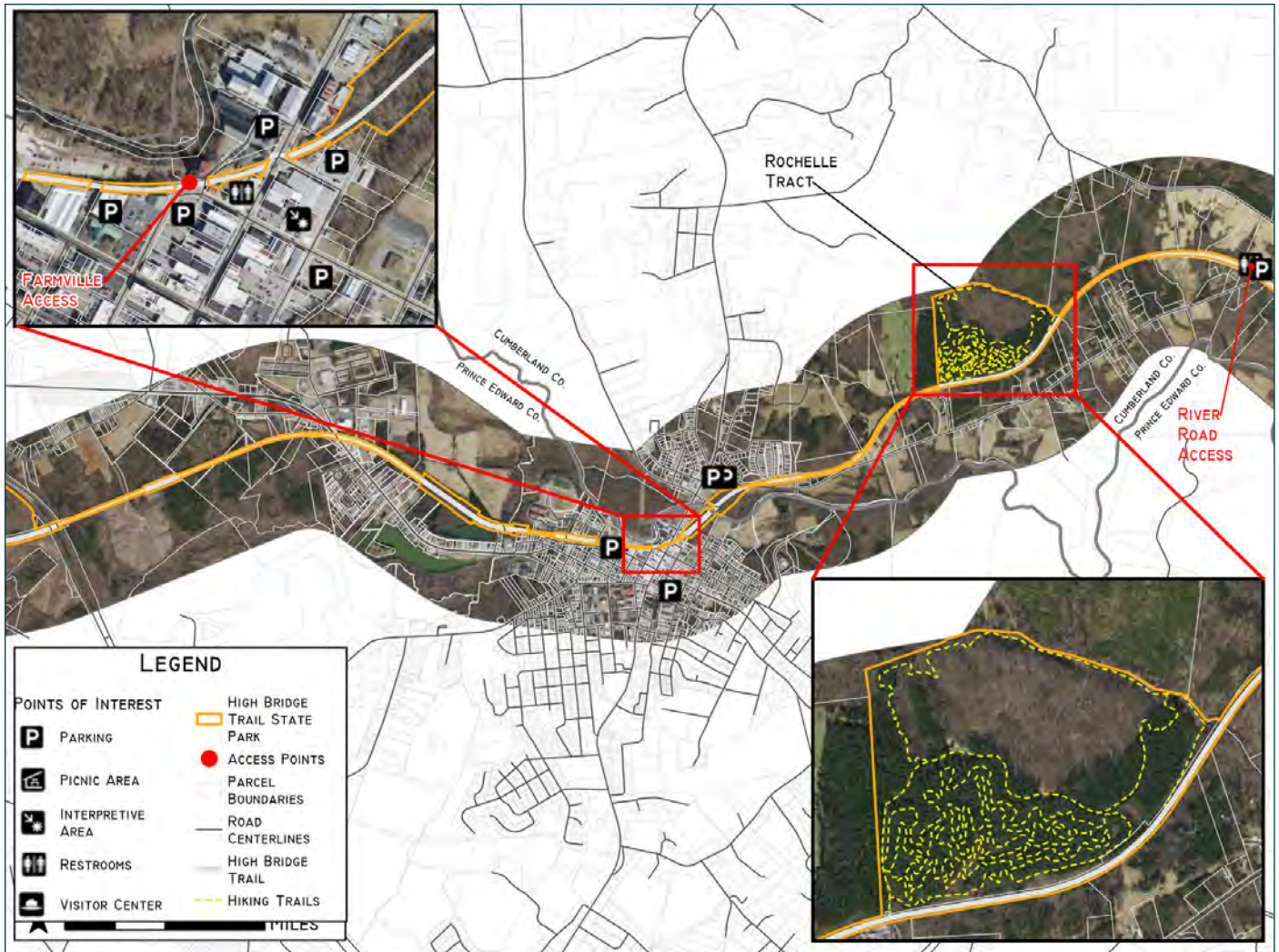


Figure 8.2 - Park Property and Public Recreation Resources Map, Central Area

HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK PROPERTY AND PHYSICAL RESOURCES (EASTERN AREA)

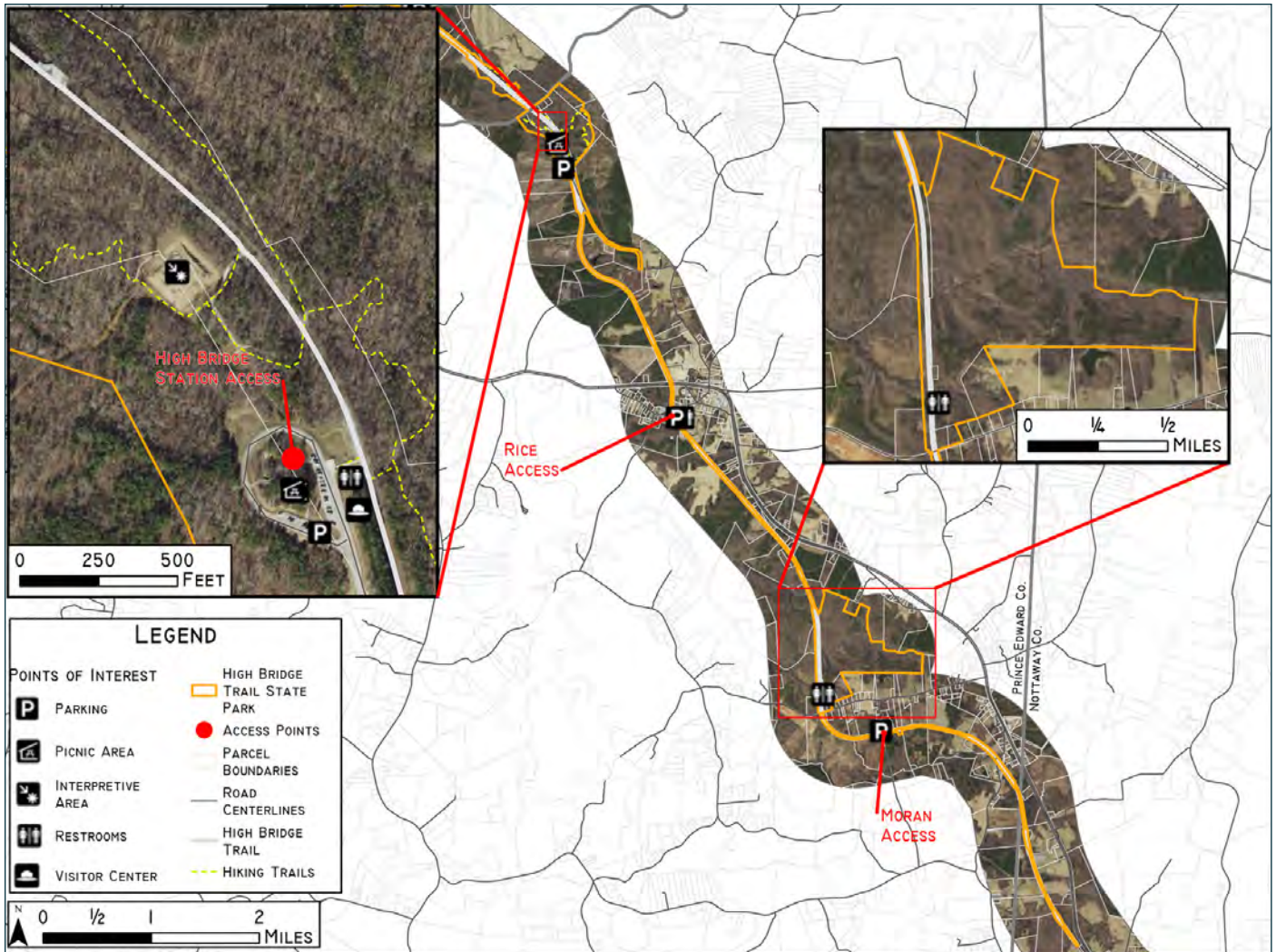


Figure 8.3 - Park Property and Public Recreation Resources Map, Eastern Area

Planning Context

High Bridge Trail State Park is situated in rural Appomattox, Prince Edward, Cumberland, and Nottoway counties and passes through the incorporated towns of Farmville and Pamplin City in addition to several unincorporated villages. Planning in these localities is guided by local comprehensive plans, including the recently adopted 2025 Prince Edward County Comprehensive Plan, *PEC2045: Forward Together*, which describes the importance of High Bridge Trail State Park as an alternative transportation mode, scenic asset, and outdoor recreation destination. Given the increase in energy development recently proposed or constructed in this part of Virginia, the plan includes separate strategies aimed at preserving rural and historic assets and rural character that recommend that the county establish, or consider establishing, an overlay zoning district



Figure 9 - High Bridge Trail State Park draws scores of visitors each year to Downtown Farmville

to protect valuable viewsheds, including the High Bridge Trail, from the visual impacts of industrial and alternative energy (i.e., utility-scale solar) facilities. The 2020 Town of Farmville Comprehensive Plan recognizes that High Bridge Trail State Park “is a major draw for visitors to the Town” (see Figure 9). Likewise, the recent comprehensive plans of Cumberland and Nottoway counties contain goals and objectives seeking to promote the park and its development or, in the case of the latter, to extend the trail within the county to expand outdoor recreational opportunities and boost tourism.

Except for a short segment lying in the Town of Pamplin City, High Bridge Trail State Park lies within Planning District 14 (Commonwealth Regional Council) comprised of Amelia, Buckingham, Charlotte, Cumberland, Lunenburg, and Prince Edward counties and the Town of Farmville. (Nottoway County is located within the district but is not currently a member of the Council). The Commission assists member localities with local planning and project implementation related to economic and transportation issues, among other concerns. The regional bicycle plan adopted in 2010 recognizes the importance of High Bridge Trail State Park as a key link in the region’s bicycle network and seeks to accommodate the needs of bicycle users of all ages and ability levels by building an expanded regional system of on- and off-road facilities to enhance outdoor recreation and tourism. To this end, the plan recommends several bicycle routes and trails that would connect existing trailheads at High Bridge Trail State Park to Hampton-Sydney College,

Longwood University, and destinations throughout the region, allowing for circuit and extended trips exploring the rural communities, historic sites, natural resource areas, and other points of interest. High Bridge Trail State Park and the recommendations of this master plan are intended to complement planning both regionally and locally by facilitating connections between communities in Virginia’s Heartland to advance travel, recreation, and business enterprises serving the needs of users, much as the Southside Railroad once did.

Virginia Outdoors Plan

The Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP) is the state’s comprehensive plan for land conservation, outdoor recreation, and open-space planning. The document helps all levels of government and the private sector identify trends and meet the needs of the public for access to land and water for outdoor recreation purposes. Not only is the VOP required for state participation in the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program, but the plan also provides guidance for the protection of land through the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF), which receives state funding for the protection of farmland, forests, lands of historic or cultural significance, natural areas, open spaces, and parkland through the Virginia Land Conservation Fund.

The 2024 VOP was developed using an online ArcGIS Hub and the StoryMaps application to create an online plan replete with interactive mapping, videos, photographs, links to related studies, and immersive content to identify past and present trends with respect to outdoor recreation during, and in the immediate aftermath of, the COVID-19 pandemic.

The VOP recognizes the substantial contributions to the Virginia economy from outdoor recreation and establishes recommendations and priorities to guide public use of parks, trails, greenways, waterways, and open spaces of all types for the next five years. Virginia State Parks provide a myriad of premier opportunities for outdoor recreation located across all regions of the Commonwealth (see Figure 10). The following major findings of the plan are relevant to recreational use of state parks generally and High Bridge Trail State Park specifically:



Figure 10 - High Bridge Trail State Park provides a myriad of opportunities for trail-related activities including cycling for beginner riders

- The COVID-19 pandemic prompted more people to participate in outdoor recreation, straining Virginia’s public lands and outdoor recreation venues. The public expressed a clear need for additional recreation inventory to meet increased demand resulting from factors that include changing population densities in certain regions and increased visitation to popular destinations. State parks are significant nodes in Virginia’s network of public lands and represent an important opportunity to expand recreational infrastructure across the Commonwealth.
- Virginians desire facilities and programs that are adequately funded, safe, resilient, and able to accommodate users having widely varying needs, backgrounds, experience levels, and abilities, particularly for the physical and mental health benefits such activities provide. The plan recommends prioritizing projects that expand outdoor recreation access, improve safety, give rise to better public health outcomes, and address climate challenges through resilient infrastructure and resources management.
- Learning about our natural surroundings, gaining new outdoor skills, and building on those experiences with repeated exposure and guidance encourages long-term interest in outdoor recreation pursuits. For these reasons, the plan recommends prioritizing projects that improve outdoor recreation access through immersive outdoor experiences and programming, outdoor skills- and confidence-building exercises, guided tours and instruction, and affordable (or free) rental of outdoor equipment.
- Access to outdoor recreation has not always been equally available to individuals of all races, cultures, and backgrounds. The plan aims to implement projects in communities that have been historically underserved, underfunded, and underdeveloped with respect to outdoor recreation and address common barriers that people with disabilities may encounter outdoors.
- Virginians ranked trails as the second most-needed outdoor recreation opportunity in Virginia (42.5%) and easy-to-use trails as the second most-needed facility for increasing public participation in outdoor recreation (42.7%). Most trail users cited pleasure or relaxation (75.4%), enjoyment of scenery and the natural environment (61.6%), and health and physical training (56.0%) as primary reasons for using trails. Public restrooms were cited as the most-needed trail amenity (69.4%), followed by adequate trailhead parking (45.0%) and drinking water (41.5%). The VOP recommends that trail development focus on building long-distance priority trails in Virginia, like the High Bridge Trail, that add to statewide recreation access and contribute to regional recreation-based economies.

The VOP notes the importance of protecting historically and culturally significant lands both for creating opportunities for the public to learn about American and Virginia history and to conserve open spaces for their natural habitat and environmental benefits. The plan also recommends that trails and other outdoor recreational opportunities utilize natural landscapes and engage visitors' interest in native habitats and local wildlife. Finally, the plan seeks to prioritize recreation facilities, like shared-use trails, that improve recreation experiences for all within a safe and accessible setting and make positive impacts on community health. This master plan aims to put these statewide recommendations into practice by highlighting the history of the region and maximizing the conservation of natural resources in planning for future recreation facilities and programs at High Bridge Trail State Park.





PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The basis for the long-range development plan for the park is the Constitution of Virginia, Code of Virginia, and mission statements of DCR and Virginia State Parks. The park purpose statement was written to be consistent with the missions of both the agency and state park system, which in turn guided the wording of the master plan goals and objectives to ensure that all provide consistent guidance regarding future improvements to High Bridge Trail State Park.

CONSTITUTION OF VIRGINIA, ARTICLE XI, SECTION 1

“To the end that the people have clean air, pure water, and the use and enjoyment for recreation of adequate public lands, waters, and other natural resources, it shall be the policy of the Commonwealth to conserve, develop, and utilize its natural resources, its public lands, and historic sites and buildings. Further, it shall be the Commonwealth’s policy to protect its atmosphere, lands, and waters from pollution, impairment, or destruction, for the benefit, enjoyment, and general welfare of the people of the Commonwealth.”

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION MISSION STATEMENT

“Conserve, protect, enhance, and advocate wise use of the Commonwealth’s unique natural, historical, recreational, scenic, and cultural resources.”

VIRGINIA STATE PARKS MISSION STATEMENT

“To conserve the natural, scenic, historic, and cultural resources of the Commonwealth and provide recreational and education opportunities consistent with the good stewardship of these lands, waters, and facilities that leave them unimpaired for future generations.”

HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK PURPOSE STATEMENT

“Featuring the historic High Bridge as its centerpiece, High Bridge Trail State Park provides a premiere rail-to-trail experience showcasing the journeys of goods, people, and armies through and across the rural communities lying at the heart of Virginia.”

MASTER PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals and objectives of the master plan encapsulate the central theme of protecting, conserving and enhancing park resources while offering a range of day-use recreational facilities and programming for education and interpretation. Implementing these goals involves working across sections, building partnerships, and administering and managing the park in a manner that establishes accountability and fosters the public’s trust. These goals and objectives provide inspiration and direction toward fulfilling the purpose of the park and the missions of the agency and Virginia State Parks during the projected 30-year phased development timeframe of the master plan.

Goal 1.0. Resource Protection: Protect the rich natural, historic, and scenery of the trail corridor and adjacent lands traversed by the former Southside Railroad and current High Bridge Trail State Park for the education and enjoyment of contemporary visitors.

- Objective 1.1 – Administer the park to conserve and interpret the legacy of the railroad and protect key resources associated with its history for the enjoyment of visitors.

- Objective 1.2 – Acquire lands adjacent to the trail corridor needed to preserve or expand access to recreational offerings while working with neighboring property owners to maintain compatible adjacent land uses, protect against encroachments, and mitigate impacts to scenic viewsheds from the trail and High Bridge.
- Objective 1.3 – Maintain the natural resources of the park by maximizing the conservation of parkland set aside as unimproved and passive use open space and minimizing impacts to areas containing rare, sensitive, or exemplary resources.
- Objective 1.4 – Implement the park’s Natural Resource Management Plan (NRMP) and review and update the NRMP at least once every five years.

Goal 2.0. Recreational Opportunities: Provide convenient access to the park for people pursuing trail-based recreation, exercise, and related activities aimed at achieving personal health and fitness based on their interests and desired activity level.

- Objective 2.1 – Address the continually changing needs of outdoor recreation enthusiasts through targeted communications and implementation of facilities that allow people to customize their exercise or excursion based on their personal interests and fitness objectives.
- Objective 2.2 – Expand access to undeveloped parcels as appropriate to meet the growing demand for outdoor recreation and showcase the unique history and natural setting of lands adjacent to the trail (see Figure 11).
- Objective 2.3 – Expand trails along the trail corridor for all types of users to increase possibilities for circuit hiking, biking, and horseback riding, and the pursuit of multiple modes of trail-based recreation as part of a single visit to the park.
- Objective 2.3 – Design and build facilities that meet the needs of users of all incomes, backgrounds, interests, and abilities so that all visitors can experience a wider range of recreational opportunities at the park.



Figure 11 - The forests along the High Bridge Trail contain a mix of hardwoods, pines, and shrubs

- Objective 2.4 – Design new and retrofit existing recreational facilities to seamlessly integrate access for people with disabilities, whether physical, visual, auditory, sensory, or other type, consistent with ADA standards.

Goal 3.0. Educational and Interpretive Programs: Enhance appreciation and understanding of the shared economic, transportation, and social history of the people and communities connected by the trail corridor using immersive programming, events, experiences, and exhibits.

- Objective 3.1 – Educate visitors about the importance of the cultural, historical, and natural resources of the park and Central Piedmont using interactive exhibits, events, and programs.
- Objective 3.2 – Establish partnerships with local schools, historical societies, museums, and interest groups to enhance and expand educational opportunities and better manage and conserve cultural and ecological resources in the park, local area, and region.
- Objective 3.3 – Continue student participation in educational programs for all learning abilities and levels aimed at increasing student knowledge of, and appreciation for, local history and native flora and fauna.
- Objective 3.4 – Educate visitors and the community about the importance of maintaining an active lifestyle and the role of outdoor recreation and exercise in improving physical and mental health.

Goal 4.0. Community Partnerships: Create and maintain effective partnerships with local businesses, organizations, and governments to establish High Bridge Trail State Park as a premier regional and statewide rail-to-trail destination.

- Objective 4.1 – Extend the trail along the former railroad right-of-way to the Town of Burkeville to establish the town as an additional strategic partner and Burkeville as a primary gateway to, and eastern hub of, High Bridge Trail State Park.
- Objective 4.2 – Partner with the Friends of High Bridge Trail State Park, volunteer groups, and similar organizations to assist with addressing unmet needs with respect to park staffing, operations, facilities, and maintenance.
- Objective 4.3 – Participate in local, regional, and state planning efforts involving area parks, greenways, and public recreational amenities to identify shared objectives and advance initiatives aimed at increasing connectivity and cooperation.
- Objective 4.4 – Collaborate with economic development departments, chambers of commerce, and tourism organizations to market High Bridge Trail State Park as an integral component of an interconnected regional network of destinations centered on the “Farmville Five” state parks located near Farmville (e.g. Bear Creek Lake, High Bridge Trail, Holliday Lake, Sailor’s Creek Battlefield, and Twin Lakes State Parks).

The Farmville Five refers to a group of five state parks all located within an hour’s drive of the Town of Farmville: Bear Creek Lake, High Bridge Trail, Holliday Lake, Sailor’s Creek Battlefield, and Twin Lakes.

- Objective 4.5 – Make the park a repository of public information about regional tourism and area destinations by promoting nearby shopping, dining, and lodging opportunities.

Goal 5.0. Public Engagement: Forge collaborative and positive relationships with local community, adjacent landowners and the general public to foster a shared sense of dedication to the stewardship and protection of lands within, and adjacent to, the trail corridor.

- Objective 5.1 – Develop and implement a Visitor Experience and Interpretive Plan to guide programming and events at the park for the benefit of the public and local community.
- Objective 5.2 – Provide opportunities for public participation in park activities by effectively communicating accurate information about park events to businesses, local governments, civic organizations, and the local community.
- Objective 5.3 – Provide up-to-date information to the public about trail conditions and the status of facilities to establish trust in the ability of users to access recreational facilities without compromising their enjoyment of the park.
- Objective 5.4 – Conduct events, activities, and programs that inspire appreciation for the role that state parks play in promoting and connecting local communities and foster repeat visitation, volunteerism, and employment at the park.

Goal 6.0. Visitor Satisfaction: Optimize and expand visitor facilities and services along the trail to facilitate a safe and satisfying recreational trail experience for park guests and convenient access to accommodations that increase visitor satisfaction and encourage repeat visitation.

- Objective 6.1 – Acquire additional property to provide day use and overnight accommodations to guests with the aim of complementing and expanding visitation opportunities to the “Farmville Five” state parks and enabling extended visits to multiple parks offering an array of visitor experiences.
- Objective 6.2 – Provide sufficient space when designing day-use and overnight facilities to accommodate user demand while affording sufficient privacy to visitors.
- Objective 6.3 – Ensure that park facilities and infrastructure are well maintained and kept in a clean, safe, and operational condition for the convenience of guests.
- Objective 6.4 – Prioritize customer satisfaction by making surveys and comment opportunities known to guests and utilizing feedback to improve park management.
- Objective 6.5 – Upgrade facilities and equipment to provide shade and address the effects of heat waves on visitor attendance, comfort, and safety.

Goal 7.0. Staffing and Funding: Provide sufficient staffing and facilities to effectively carry out the park’s mission, provide positive interactions with visitors, and create a unique and memorable experience for people exploring High Bridge Trail State Park and the Heart of Virginia.

- Objective 7.1– Provide appropriate staffing levels and training needed to endow staff with the necessary skills to achieve the park’s mission and for professional advancement within the state park system.
- Objective 7.2 – Ensure the park has adequate staffing and revenue to sustain and support essential visitor experiences identified in the Visitor Experience section and ensure needed services are available to visitors along all sections of the trail.
- Objective 7.3 – Utilize the most recent market analysis and implement the recommendations of the study to maximize economic activity, revenue generation, local job creation, and retail sales of merchandise both online and at the park gift shop.
- Objective 7.4 – Maximize revenue generated by the park to support the park mission and create stable sources of funding to supplement revenues used to operate the park.
- Objective 7.5 – Plan and implement upgrades to vehicles, machinery, equipment, and information technology used by staff as needed to remain up to date with technological advancements.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Surrounding Land Use

The railroad right-of-way and other parcels comprising the park are surrounded primarily by agricultural and forestal land uses in Appomattox, Prince Edward, Cumberland, and Nottoway counties (see Figure 12), except where the trail passes through the incorporated towns of Farmville and Pamplin City and the unincorporated villages of Prospect and Rice, where residential, commercial, and small-scale industrial uses adjoin the trail corridor. Population growth and related development activity within this region of Virginia are most pronounced in and around Farmville, which may lead to an intensification of adjoining residential and non-residential land uses in the future. DCR and High Bridge Trail State Park will continue to monitor these trends and work with localities to ensure local land use policies and the siting of developments adjacent to the park minimize adverse impacts to viewsheds observed from the trail or degradation of the desired visitor experience.



Figure 12 - The agricultural and forestal landscape surrounding the park in Cumberland County

Park Boundaries

Currently, High Bridge Trail State Park consists of approximately 1,291 acres lying in Appomattox, Prince Edward, Cumberland, and Nottoway counties, including the incorporated towns of Farmville and Pamplin City. The park's area primarily consists of the abandoned, variable-width right-of-way of the Southside Railroad, with the notable exception of the easternmost mile located near and in the Town of Burkeville, which has yet to be acquired from Norfolk Southern. In terms of acreage, however, a significant portion of the park is located within four larger parcels of property situated adjacent to the railroad right-of-way, including the two largest: Rochelle (144 acres) and Piney Grove (282 acres).

Donation of the first 31.2 miles of the Southside Railroad right-of-way was completed by Norfolk Southern in 2006 and formally accepted by DCR in 2007 for conversion into the state's newest rail-to-trail state park. The Piney Grove and Rochelle properties were acquired by DCR shortly thereafter in 2008 and 2010, respectively, to conserve these areas and provide side trails and expanded recreational opportunities to visitors. Similarly, the 116-acre parcel at High Bridge Station on the western side of the trail was acquired in 2014 to create side trails from the trailhead parking area located closest to the High Bridge, including those leading beneath the structure to the southern bank of the Appomattox River. More recently, DCR in 2020 acquired the westernmost mile of former railroad right-of-way near Pamplin to extend the trail to its present western terminus, including acquisition in 2023 of a 0.57-acre parcel across the street from the former Pamplin Pipe Factory for construction of a trailhead parking area. Park properties also include an undeveloped forested parcel (54 acres) acquired in 2022 at the northeast corner of the U.S. Route 15 overpass west of Farmville. A map characterizing the boundaries, inholdings, and adjacent properties is depicted in Figures 8.1-8.3.

Topography

The park traverses a narrow slice of the rolling topography that characterizes the Central Virginia Piedmont, with elevations ranging from approximately 740 feet in Shields near the trail's western end to roughly 280 feet in the Appomattox River valley directly beneath the High Bridge (see Figures 14.1-14.3 – Environmental Features Map). The lowest elevation along the trail surface on the former railroad bed is approximately 320 feet just west of where the trail crosses Main Street in Downtown Farmville. Although elevations atop the former railroad bed vary by a little over 400 feet along the entire length of the trail, the steepness of the former railroad embankment leads to stark differences in elevation between the top of and bottom of the embankment in certain locations, particularly where bridges and culverts carry swift-moving rivers and creeks beneath the trail.

Watersheds and Hydrologic Units

A watershed is traditionally defined as all the area of land draining to a body of water at a single convergence point, whereas a hydrologic unit is a numerical code (referred to as a hydrologic unit code or HUC) assigned to a specific drainage area, including

watersheds, to fit all land in the United States into a multi-level, hierarchical land classification system. As described on the DCR Soil and Water Conservation webpage, hydrologic units, unlike watersheds, “may also accept water from one or more points outside of the unit’s boundary” and “may include associated surface areas whose drainages do not connect, thus resulting in multiple outlet points.” Thus, as stated on the webpage, “all watersheds are hydrologic units, but not all hydrologic units are watersheds” (Division of Soil and Water Conservation).

Today, there are two primary methods used in Virginia for labelling drainage areas by hydrologic unit: a 12-digit HUC12 code and a 4-digit VAHU6 code. Due to its long, linear shape, High Bridge Trail State Park is roughly divided into nine HUC12 watersheds associated, for the most part, with the Appomattox River and its tributaries (see Table 1, Figure 13, and Figures 14.1-14.3). The park is roughly divided into nine VAHU6 drainage areas, wherein the first two digits refer to the major stream name (JA = James River; RU = Upper Roanoke River) and the last two refer to a sequential numbering system designed to indicate drainage from the headwaters to the mouth of the waterway:



Figure 13 – High Bridge Trail State Park lies mostly within the Appomattox River watershed

Table 1: Hydrologic Units, High Bridge Trail State Park

HUC12	VAHU6
020802070101	JA04
020802070103	JA05
020802070204	JA06
020802070205	JA08
020802070206	JA09
020802070305	JA14
020802070402	JA16
020802070501	JA24
030101020302	RU77

Identifying the locations and extents of these drainage areas ultimately helps the Commonwealth fulfill its obligations pursuant to the regional interstate Chesapeake Bay Program partnership and the federal Clean Water Act for improving water quality so that the Chesapeake Bay, its tributaries, and all Virginia waters ultimately achieve “fishable and swimmable” status for the benefit of the public. The significance of these hydrologic

codes in terms of minimizing discharges of contaminants and enhancing the quality of receiving waters is heightened when these lands are disturbed during development of the facilities proposed in this plan. The design of buildings, infrastructure, and recreational facilities in the park's watersheds must strictly consider water quantity and quality standards of the Virginia Stormwater Management Regulations for minimizing the discharge of keystone pollutants (nitrogen, phosphorus, and Total Suspended Solids) during construction. In addition, permanent stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs) and facilities must be regularly maintained post-construction to achieve state and federal water quality goals. Finally, park and agency staff may be required to modify certain operational or land management practices in a particular watershed in the event a downstream waterbody is designated as impaired for contaminants in accordance with a Watershed Improvement Plan (WIP) and Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) instituted pursuant to the federal Clean Water Act.

Flood Zones

The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), provides flood insurance to property owners, renters, and businesses to assist them in recovery in the aftermath of a flood. As part of the NFIP, FEMA publishes and coordinates with participating local governments to regularly update Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) designating flood zones of high, moderate, and low flood risk in a community. A flood zone is a defined geographic area sharing the same flood hazard risk for the purpose of determining flood insurance requirements and costs. DCR is the state agency responsible for administering local NFIP compliance and participation in Virginia as part of the Virginia Floodplain Management Program. In accordance with §10.1-603 of Code of Virginia, all agencies and departments of the Commonwealth must adhere to applicable floodplain regulations when undertaking development activities, including the construction or rehabilitation of buildings and structures, on state-owned property located in a floodplain.

Flood zones are categorized in accordance with the probability and potential impact of flooding in a designated area. Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHAs) are high-risk areas inundated by the flood event having a one percent (1%) chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year (i.e., the 100-year floodplain) and include all A and V zones (including A, AO, AH, AE, A99, AR, AR/AE, AR/AO, AR/A, V, and VE). The shaded Zone X is a moderate-risk area lying between the limits of the one percent (1%) and the 0.2 percent (0.2%) annual chance flood (i.e., the 500-year floodplain), whereas the unshaded Zone X is classified as a low-risk area lying outside the 500-year flood zone. Zone D represents an area where the flood risk is undetermined.

As shown in Figures 14.1-14.3, a significant portion of the trail corridor located in and near Farmville falls within Zones A and AE, including approximately 25 acres of park property. This acreage includes low-lying areas along the trail west of Farmville and east of Farmville on the Rochelle property. An adjacent area near Farmville consisting of approximately four acres is categorized as a shaded Zone X. In addition, approximately 42 acres, including much of the Appomattox River floodplain beneath the High Bridge and the low-lying area west of High Bridge Station adjoining an unnamed tributary, lie within Zone A. A small

area on the Piney Grove tract adjacent to Marrowbone Creek is also located within Zone A. The floodplain regulations applicable to these riverine flood zones need to be taken into consideration during planning and implementation of future development in these areas. The remaining acreage at High Bridge Trail State Park is categorized as unshaded Zone X areas, or those exhibiting minimal flood hazard.

Wetlands

Wetlands are defined by the federal Clean Water Act (CWA) and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) as *“those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions”* (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2024). Section 404 of the federal Clean Water Act enables the USACE to regulate certain activities within waterways and wetlands, and various federal and state agencies administer laws and regulations for projects that impact surface waters, such as land clearing for construction, dredging, filling, excavating, draining, and ditching. Although not all wetlands fall within the regulatory jurisdiction of federal and state government agencies, those that do are referred to as jurisdictional wetlands.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) maintains the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI), a geospatial database and map of wetland areas organized into a hierarchical classification system comprised of wetland systems, classes, and modifiers. According to the NWI, High Bridge Trail State Park includes substantial Nontidal Riverine wetlands in the form of streams crossing the trail (see Figures 14.1-14.3). The High Bridge Station tract, featuring the High Bridge and surrounding lands, is notable for the Appomattox River (see Figure 15) and associated Nontidal Riverine Wetlands bounded by Freshwater Forested/Shrub Wetlands. Much of these wetlands are spanned by the High Bridge overhead.

- The Piney Grove tract includes several wetland areas, including Nontidal Riverine Wetlands bisecting the property and Freshwater Forested/Shrub Wetlands and Freshwater Emergent Wetlands flanking Marrowbone Creek.
- Freshwater Forested/Shrub Wetlands lie within the park boundary just east and west of Farmville.
- Immediately south of Pamplin, a small Freshwater Emergent Wetland is located primarily within the park boundary.

Although this area represents a small fraction of the total area of the park, the NWI is general in nature and may not accurately reflect the true extent of jurisdictional wetlands on the park property for the purposes of ensuring regulatory compliance at the time of development. For this reason, a wetland delineation should be undertaken and a preliminary jurisdictional determination from the USACE obtained prior to development within or in the vicinity of potential wetlands to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts.

HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES (WESTERN AREA)

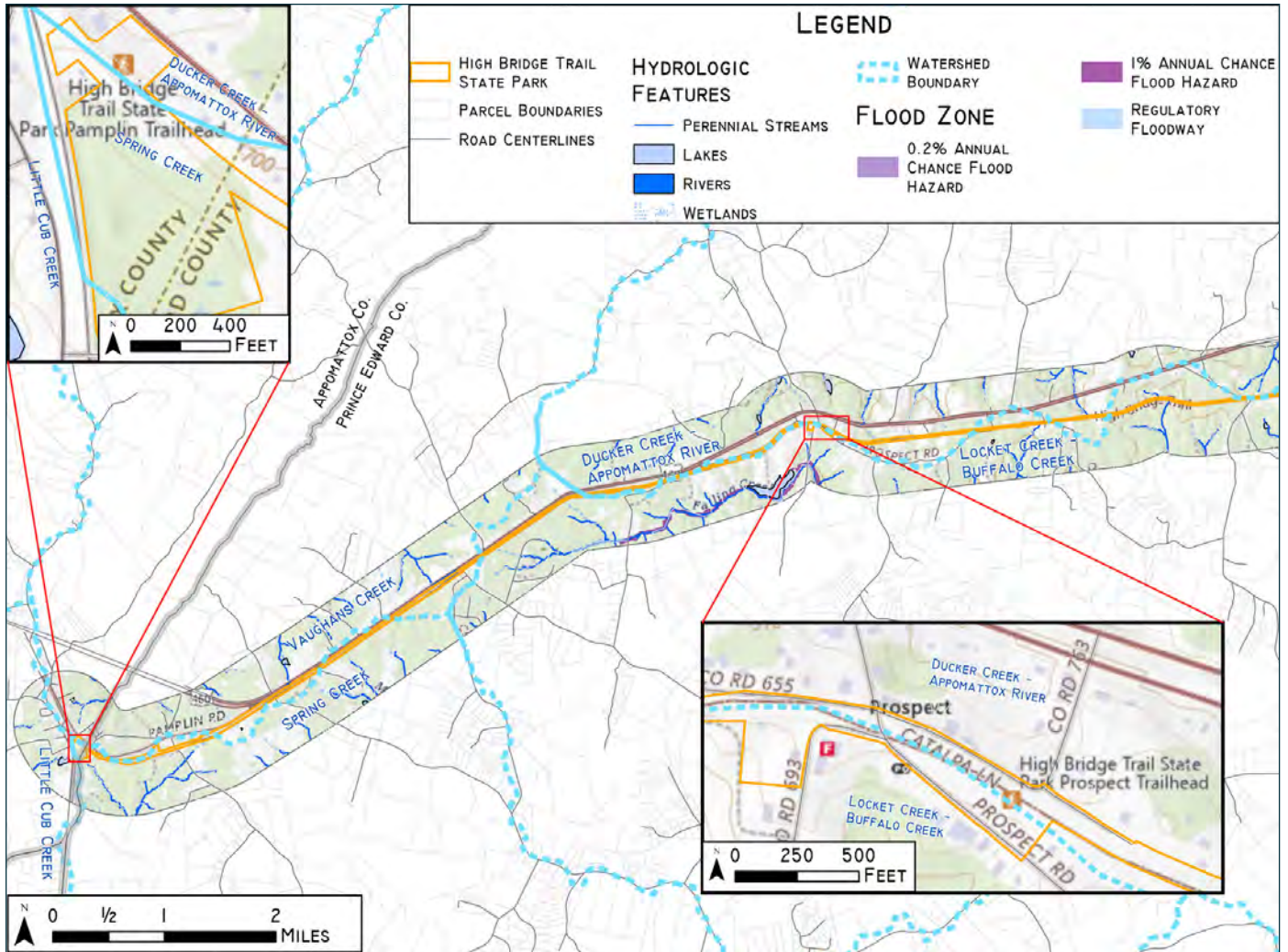


Figure 14.1 – Environmental Features Map, Western Area

HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES (CENTRAL AREA)

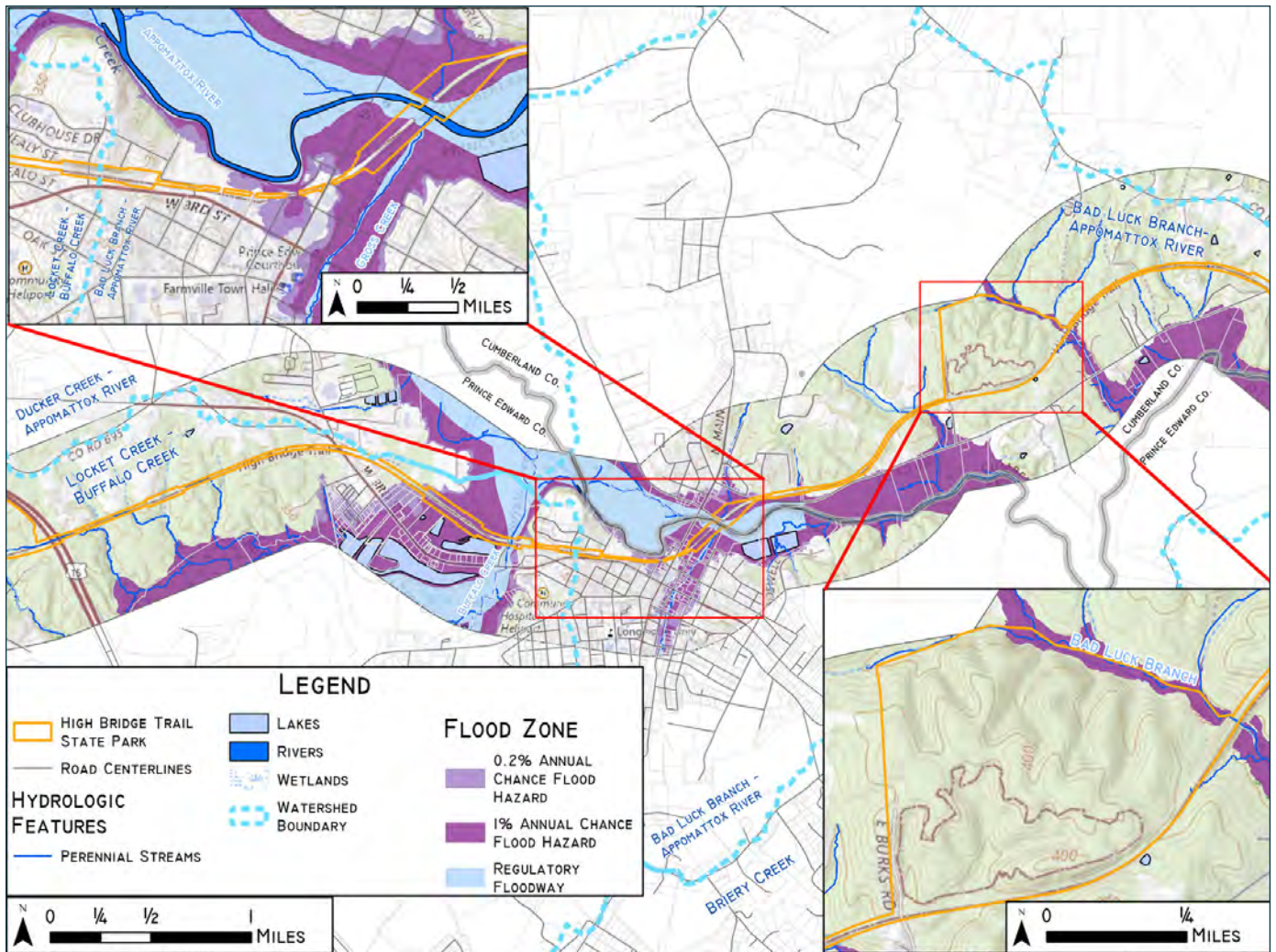


Figure 14.2 – Environmental Features Map, Central Area

HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES (EASTERN AREA)

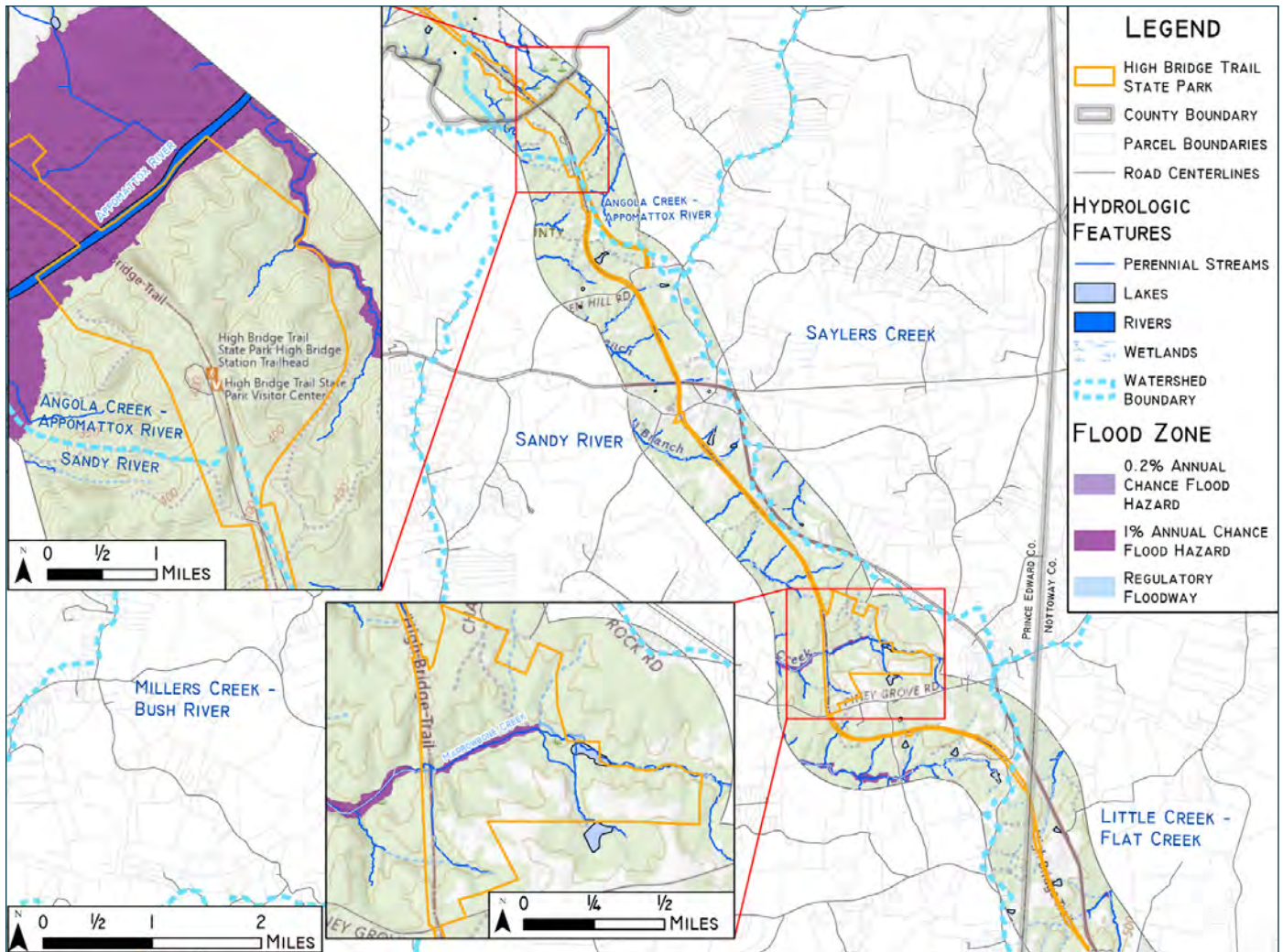


Figure 14.3 – Environmental Features Map, Eastern Area



Figure 15 – The Appomattox River winds through the landscape of the Central Piedmont and crosses the trail beneath High Bridge

Soil Conditions and Types

Soils are composed of four basic ingredients: minerals, organic material, air, and water. The National Cooperative Soil Survey, a collaboration led by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS), defines 12 major soil texture classifications (sand, loamy sand, sandy loam, loam, silt loam, silt, sandy clay loam, clay loam, silty clay loam, sandy clay, silty clay, and clay) whereby classifications are named for the primary constituent particle size or a combination of the most abundant particles sizes. The degree to which soil is composed of its three potential base materials (silt, clay, and loam) determines properties such as its water retention capacity and the type of plant life it can support. Understanding soil type, therefore, can better inform decisions regarding land planning and development, including trail construction and maintenance.

Much of the soil along the trail itself has been historically disturbed due to the construction of the railroad embankment and later the trail itself. The trail crosses more than 80 different mapped soil classifications per the National Cooperative Soil Survey. A variety of sandy loams predominate within the park, with the top five soil types identified in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Prevalent Soil Types, High Bridge Trail State Park

Map Unit Symbol	Map Unit Name	Approx. Area (Ac.)
39C2	Cecil fine sandy loam, undulating phase	126
32C2	Madison fine sandy loam, undulating phase	113
11B	Appling sandy loam, rolling phase	109
42B	Appling sandy loam, undulating phase	98
39B	Wilkes sandy loam, eroded hilly phase	66

NATURAL RESOURCES

Most of the park property is undeveloped and protects diverse ecosystems and biotic resources, some of which are unique and require specialized management practices.

Ecosystems

The various ecosystems in the park, and the recommended Desired Future Condition (DFC) for each ecosystem, form the basis of the park's resource management efforts. The Virginia State Parks Resource Management Team works with the DCR Division of Natural Heritage to map park ecosystems and keep them current. The sections below provide a brief overview of the unique ecosystems found within High Bridge Trail State Park.

- **Mesic Mixed Hardwood Forest:** One of the largest forest types at the park, the Mesic Mixed Hardwood Forest makes up a total of approximately 76 acres of land along the trail. Stands of this type are found at High Bridge Station, Piney Grove, and Rochelle, typically along ravines, lower slopes, and well-drained flatwoods, although stands may extend to upper slopes and crests with deep soils. Soils are characterized by their well-drained acidic, sandy, and silty loam composition. Most of these stands have seen recent disturbances and are therefore generally young. The most mature stands of this type are found on the Fowlkes Tract at High Bridge Station. The typical overstory for this ecosystem is dominated by American beech, northern red oak, tulip poplar, and white oak. The understory and shrub layer contains American beech, black tupelo, red maple, and sweetgum; the herbaceous layer contains many species such as Bosc's panicgrass, Christmas fern, creeping sedge, Canada enchanter's nightshade, licorice bedstraw, and New York fern. A variety of invasive species have been identified throughout the various mesic mixed hardwood forest blocks, including tree-of-heaven, Japanese stiltgrass, autumn olive, and Japanese honeysuckle.
- **Acidic Oak-Hickory Forest:** Covering approximately 44 acres of park land, this ecosystem occurs in the northeastern portions of the High Bridge Station tract along middle to upper slopes and crests. The natural community type is apparently secure or secure on the global and state levels (G4G5/S4S5), but it is known to include the hoary skullcap, a species that is considered imperiled in Virginia though secure on a global level (G5/S2). Soils in the area are medium moisture and fertility, made up of weathered biotite gneiss. These stands are generally comprised of more aged tree specimens, with diameter breast heights (DBH) of 60 centimeters or more. The typical overstory for this ecosystem is dominated by black oak, mockernut hickory, northern red oak, pignut hickory, and white oak; the understory/shrub layer is dominated by black tupelo, Blue Ridge blueberry, flowering dogwood, highbush huckleberry, red maple, and sassafras; and the herbaceous layer contains many species such as blue-stemmed goldenrod, Bosc's panicgrass, dollar leaf, naked tick-trefoil, perfoliate bellwort, poverty oatgrass, and smooth Solomon's seal. There are currently few invasive species identified at any of the stands of this ecosystem type throughout the park, but monitoring, early detection, prescribed fire, and treatment should be implemented to prevent the spread of invasive species into this area.

- **Coastal Plain/Piedmont Bottomland Forest:** This forest comprises a total of 34 acres of park land divided across three stands. These forests are typically associated with floodplains characterized by rich, well-drained alluviums or deep muck with pronounced hummocks and hollows. The two stands that lie underneath the High Bridge itself contain several vernal pools, which are inundated for a good portion of the year. The typical overstory for this ecosystem is dominated by American sycamore, green ash, pin oak, overcup oak, willow oak, and sweetgum. The understory and shrub layer is dominated by American hornbeam, pawpaw, Florida maple, and red maple; the herbaceous layer contains many species such as autumn bluegrass, blunt broom sedge, common cattail sedge, false nettle, nodding fescue, white aven, and wingstem. There are currently few invasive species identified at any of the stands of this ecosystem type throughout the park, but monitoring, early detection, and treatment should be implemented to prevent the spread of invasive species into this area.
- **Piedmont Hardpan Forest:** This ecosystem covers 11 acres of the park, distributed in four separate stands within the Rochelle tract. This ecosystem type is an oak-hickory forest composition that occurs in gentle to flat Piedmont uplands on impermeable clay subsoils; this particular area of Piedmont Hardpan on the Rochelle tract is the only known example in Virginia of the system occurring on soils with sandy loam upper soil horizons. It should also be noted that this ecosystem is a globally and state rare resource (G2G3/S2), meaning that Piedmont hardpan forests are vulnerable to imperiled at the global level as well as imperiled at the state level. The ecosystem faces high risk of elimination due to very restricted range, very few occurrences, steep declines, fire exclusion, and other factors. The typical overstory for this ecosystem is dominated by pignut hickory, post oak, and white oak; the understory/shrub layer is dominated by Blue Ridge blueberry, eastern redbud, eastern red cedar, white fringetree, and winged elm; and the herbaceous layer contains many species such as black oak grass, Bosc's panicgrass, bottlebrush grass, littlehead nutrush, poverty oatgrass, reflexed sedge, and twoflower melicgrass. The main threat to this system is fire suppression throughout the area, which has led to a decrease in the regeneration of oak and hickory species for this forest type. Instead, the system's lack of fire is leading to a transition towards dominance by pines, maples, and beech. A fire management strategy is being developed in the future to assist with oak and hickory regeneration in the understory. There are currently very few invasive species identified at any of the stands of this ecosystem type throughout the park, but monitoring, early detection, and treatment should be implemented to prevent the spread of invasive species into this area.
- **Basic Mesic Forest:** Covering only 3.4 acres of park land, the basic mesic forest is distributed across three small stands on the Rochelle tract that are largely surrounded by mesic mixed hardwood forest as well as Piedmont hardpan forest. The basic mesic forest blocks at High Bridge Trail grow on nutrient-rich soils from the weathered carbonite of mafic parent rock. The typical overstory for this ecosystem is dominated by American beech, northern red oak, slippery elm, tulip

poplar, and white oak (see Figure 16); the understory/shrub layer contains American hornbeam, northern spicebush, and pawpaw; and the herbaceous layer contains many species such as black cohosh, broad Beech Fern, Canadian Bloodroot, Canadian Wild Ginger, Eastern Enchanter’s Nightshade, mayapple, northern maidenhair fern, showy orchid, and Virginia spring beauty. There are currently few invasive species identified at any of the stands of this ecosystem type throughout the park, but monitoring, early detection, and treatment should be implemented to prevent the spread of invasive species into this area.

- Oak/Heath Forest:** The oak/heath forest ecosystem at High Bridge Trail makes up approximately two acres of park land, residing on a dry convex slope in the southern end of the Piney Grove tract. Soils under this ecosystem are extremely infertile and sandy. The typical overstory for this ecosystem is dominated by chestnut oak, tulip poplar, and white oak. The understory and shrub layer contains black oak, black tupelo (*Nyssa sylvatica*), flowering dogwood, and red maple; the herbaceous layer contains many species such as black huckleberry, Blue Ridge blueberry, deerberry, poverty oatgrass, and spotted wintergreen. There are currently few invasive species identified at any of the stands of this ecosystem type throughout the park, but monitoring, early detection, prescribed fire, and treatment should be implemented to prevent the spread of invasive species into this area.
- Piedmont Granitic Flatrocks:** This ecosystem is one of the smallest in the park, only covering 0.8 acres of exposed, flat to gently sloping granite outcroppings at the park on the Piney Grove tract. These flatrock ecosystems are typically home to a wide range of lichens, mosses, and other sparse vascular plants. The site of these flatrocks is directly adjacent to the east side of the Chief Ranger’s residence and is bordered by agricultural fields to the north and east. This ecosystem is a globally and state rare resource (G2/S2). This means the Piedmont granitic flatrocks are imperiled at both the global and state levels, at high risk of elimination due to very restricted range, very few occurrences, steep declines, or other factors. This ecosystem is dominated by herbaceous species such as annual fimbry, Appalachian sandplant, eastern prickly pear, orange-grass St. John’s wort, quill flower, rock spike moss, rough buttonweed, and Willdenow’s croton. In the past, foot and ATV traffic



Figure 16 – Wood decay fungi are common on rotting logs and stumps in the park’s hardwood forests

have threatened this imperiled system, but it is now inaccessible to park guests and there is little danger of these threats continuing. Unfortunately, it was also previously used as a trash dump site, and remnants of the dump remain, awaiting further clean-up. Invasive species are also common, with tree-of-heaven, Chinese privet, autumn olive, and Callery pear identified. Lastly, the site falls under a powerline; DCR recommends that the sensitivity of this site be communicated to the power company staff to avoid spraying and clearing immediately under the line where it crosses this system.

- **Pine Forest:** The park features various tracts of pine throughout, especially as a part of its larger tracts. Roughly 10 acres of Virginia pine-hardwood successional forest are scattered across seven individual stands at High Bridge Station. These pine forest areas are remnants of a clear-cut that occurred in 2019, which has been left to natural succession. Before the cut, the site was likely an acidic oak-hickory forest, but the disturbance has altered the species composition. Optimally, this area should be managed over time to eventually transition it to a Desired Future Condition (DFC) of an acidic oak-hickory forest once again. On the Rochelle tract, approximately 86 acres of land are currently dominated by a planted loblolly pine forest. The DFC for this area is yet to be determined, and there is a possibility of developing it into a pine savannah, but it should be noted that the area is currently utilized for some of the park's few mountain bike trails. At Piney Grove, approximately 110 acres of land make up a mixed successional forest that grows upon extremely infertile, sandy soils on a dry convex slope along the southern end of the tract. The DFC for this area is to transition it into either an oak/heath forest or a mesic mixed hardwood forest.

Element Occurrences

The DCR Division of Natural Heritage has developed and manages an inventory of rare, threatened, and endangered plant and animal species as well as exemplary natural communities, collectively referred to as Element Occurrences (EOs). The exact locations of these EOs are protected information and therefore not shared with the public. However, their locations are relevant for planning purposes to avoid or minimize disturbances to sensitive species from planned development.

The relevant codes from the NatureServe system used by DCR to rank the relative abundance of species, subspecies, and communities both globally and statewide are described below:

- **Global/State Rank:** Critically Imperiled (G1/S1), Imperiled (G2/S2), Vulnerable (G3/S3), Apparently Secure (G4/S4), and Secure (G5/S5).
- **Subspecies Rank:** A "T-rank" following a species' global rank ("T" followed by a number) represents the rank or status of a subspecies/variety on an identical scale from Critically Imperiled (T1) to Secure (T5).
- **Inexact Rank:** A question mark ("?") denotes an inexact numeric rank.

Currently, known EO species, subspecies, and communities present at High Bridge Trail State Park include:

- **Hoary Skullcap (*Scutellaria incana*):** This G5/S2 species is located on the High Bridge Station tract and overlaps the eastern portion of the Piedmont acidic oak-hickory forest. While secure on a global level, this species is imperiled at the state level, generally with 6-20 occurrences statewide and/or covering less than 618 acres in the aggregate or covering a larger area that is threatened by destruction or modification. As such, identification and protection of remnant populations is paramount.
- **Northern Rattlesnake-master (*Eryngium yuccifolium* var. *yuccifolium*):** This G5T5/S2 plant species is known to occur within bottomlands throughout a 3-mile area running east to west north of Farmville that overlaps the park at least twice. While secure on a global level, this species is imperiled at the state level, generally with 6-20 occurrences statewide and/or covering less than 618 acres in the aggregate or covering a larger area that is threatened by destruction or modification. As such, identification and protection of remnant populations is paramount.
- **Virginia False Gromwell (*Lithospermum virginianum*):** West of Moran, a small population of this G4/S2 species has been documented in the park as recently as 2019 in the dry sandy banks and old railroad cinders of the former railroad cut. While this species is apparently secure on the global scale, on the state level it is classified as imperiled, generally with 6-20 occurrences statewide and/or covering less than 618 acres in the aggregate or covering a larger area that is threatened by destruction or modification.
- **Virginia Quillwort (*Isoetes virginica*):** A small population of this G1/S1 species was first documented in multiple locations between the trail and Wilck's Lake Park in western Farmville. The first known records of this species in the area were in the 1930s and again in the 1990s; whether the species can be found within park boundaries currently is unknown. The species prefers sphagnum hummocks in flatwoods that are found in this area. Since this species is critically endangered on both the global and state levels, and at very high risk of elimination, identification and protection of remnant populations is paramount.
- **Piedmont Acidic Oak-Hickory Forest:** This forest type is dominated by species such as but not limited to white oak, red oak, mockernut hickory, flowering dogwood, and naked-flowered tick-trefoil. Approximately 44 acres in total size, mainly located on the northern side of the High Bridge Station tract, this community is ranked as a G4G5/S4S5, meaning that it is secure to apparently secure at both the global and state levels.
- **Southern Piedmont Hardpan Forest:** This forest type is dominated by species such as but not limited to post oak, white oak, pignut hickory, winged elm, eastern needlegrass, and little-headed nutrush. Approximately 11 acres in total size within the Rochelle tract, this community is ranked as a G2G3/S2, meaning that it is vulnerable to imperiled on a global scale, at risk due to restricted range,

few occurrences, population declines, and other reasons. On a state scale, it is also imperiled, generally with 6-20 occurrences statewide and/or covering less than 618 acres in the aggregate or covering a larger area that is threatened by destruction or modification.

- **Piedmont Granitic Flatrocks:** This ecosystem type is dominated by species such as but not limited to roundleaf fameflower, Appalachian sandwort, rough buttonweed, glade rushfoil, and other herbaceous vegetation. Approximately 0.8 acres in total size, mainly located on the eastern edge side of the Piney Grove tract near an existing ranger residence, this community is ranked as a G2/S2, meaning the Piedmont granitic flatrocks are imperiled at both the global and state levels, at high risk of elimination due to very restricted range, very few occurrences, steep declines, or other factors.

Predicted Suitable Habitat

The Division of Natural Heritage utilizes species habitat modeling to create Predicted Suitable Habitat (PSH) areas for rare plants and animals. A known species occurrence would be an Element Occurrence; this tool, however, allows for a filtered approach when determining a potential area for a rare species. The following predicted suitable habitat was identified at High Bridge Trail State Park:

- **Virginia Quillwort (*Isoetes virginica*):** Habitat modeling predicts habitat for this species close to its previous known location just west of the Town of Farmville in the vicinity of Wilck’s Lake Park. Since this species is critically endangered on both the global and state levels, and at very high risk of elimination, the identification and protection of remnant populations is paramount.



Figure 17 - Native thistle is common along the edges of the trail where forest cores meet open areas like the historic railroad bed underlying the High Bridge Trail

Ecological Cores

The DCR Division of Natural Heritage utilizes satellite imagery to determine areas throughout Virginia that contain at least 100 acres of undisturbed natural area. These areas, called ecological cores, can include forested areas, marshes, dunes, and beaches. Cores are assigned an Ecological Integrity Score from C1 to C5 based on factors such as biodiversity, environmental diversity, and water quality benefits. The scores rank as follows: C1-Outstanding; C2-Very High; C3-High; C4-Moderate; C5-General. Ecological cores represent important background information for utilization in planning future developments in the park to avoid disturbing or fragmenting these areas (see Figure 17).

The ecological cores found in the park include:

- The tract of land northwest of the trail's intersection with U.S. Route 15 is part of a C5 Core of General Significance totaling approximately 288 acres; at least 50 acres are located on park land.
- The Rochelle tract is part of a C3 Core of High Significance totaling approximately 766 acres; approximately 140 acres are located on park land.
- Park land at High Bridge Station, located south and west of the trail, is part of a C1 Core of Outstanding Significance totaling approximately 3,264 acres, the vast majority of which is outside of the park boundary.
- Park land at Camp Paradise, located north and east of the trail, is part of a C4 Core of Moderate Significance totaling approximately 999 acres, the vast majority of which is located outside of the park boundary.
- The Piney Grove tract, particularly the northern portions, is part of a C4 Core of Moderate Significance totaling 495 acres; more than 190 acres are located on park land.

Unique Management Areas

High Bridge Trail State Park contains a Unique Management Area (UMA) consisting of a 2.8-acre section of the trail identified as an Upland Pollinator Area. Unlike many pollinator-focused areas in parks, this area was not planted but rather represents a unique section located between Piney Grove Road and Moran Road that presently features unique pollinator plants along large granite outcrops on both sides of the trail. This ecosystem is dominated by herbaceous species such as big bluestem, Desmodium, Eupatorium, indiagrass, little bluestem, purple disc sunflower, Small's ragwort, and Solidago. This area is also known to feature Virginia false gromwell, imperiled at the state level although apparently secure globally (G4/S2).

Resource Management Priorities

The following Resource Management Priorities were identified with the assistance of the District 4 Resource Specialist. These are ongoing long-term projects that should begin or continue over the next five years at the park:

1. **Invasive Species Monitoring and Treatment:** Due to the high levels of disturbance along the trail corridor, large populations of invasive species are present throughout the park. It is important to continually monitor and prioritize treatment of these stands in accordance with the invasive species management plan for the respective species. Currently at the park, the top priority for treatment is tree-of-heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), a woody invasive species that can rapidly take over an area in a matter of years, depleting the soil of nutrients, water, and limiting sunlight for understory species. It is also a host tree for the spotted lanternfly, an emerging invasive insect throughout the Commonwealth. Treatment priorities throughout

the park include the mesic mixed hardwood forest, Piedmont granitic flatrocks, hardpan forest stands, pine timber stands, and unique management areas. Other woody species that have been prioritized include *Paulownia* and *Elaeagnus*, as well as a large kudzu patch along the trail in Farmville. With the exception of the newly found wavyleaf basketgrass, herbaceous invasive species are generally of secondary concern. Resource management staff should take care to document the locations of wavyleaf basketgrass as it is found in order to maintain a live, working database for state records.

- 2. Upland Pollinator Habitat:** The trail cuts through a rocky outcrop just south of the Piney Grove tract that provides a unique environment for a variety of pollinator plants to grow, including Virginia false gromwell (*Onosmodium virginianum*), an Element Occurrence. Efforts should be made to maintain these plants' natural ecosystem by removing any invasive species that appear along these outcrops and on surrounding areas of the trail. There should also be periodic clearing of any woody species that pop up to help maintain the area as an open upland pollinator habitat.
- 3. Piedmont Granitic Flatrocks Cleanup:** The G2/S2 granitic flatrocks ecosystem discussed above (see *Element Occurrences and Ecosystems*) was unfortunately once used as a dump site for trash before it was added to the park. Additionally, various invasive species such as tree-of-heaven, *Elaeagnus*, Chinese privet and Callery pear have also crept into this disturbed area. Continued clean-up of both trash debris and these woody invasives is needed to help the area recover and develop into a pristine example of this community type.

CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

The cultural resources of the park tell the story of the various people who occupied and utilized the land throughout history. Much of this history described below has been condensed for conciseness and to obscure the precise locations of archeological artifacts to prevent their removal, damage, and destruction.

The High Bridge Trail State Park Cultural Resource Inventory was prepared by Virginia State Parks in June 2025. The information presented in the report derives from reconnaissance field survey work involving High Bridge Trail State Park staff, professional cultural resource reports, and summaries obtained from the V-CRIS database maintained by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR). Information also comes from primary source research and secondary historical sources. The Inventory describes the history of the park property by historical era, from Native American history all the way to the discontinuation of train service on the Southside Railroad in the early 2000s.

Native American History

The park is located within an area bordering on the ancestral territory of three different Native American groups: The Sappony to the south, the Monacan to the north, and the Appamatuck to the east. The groups that likely occupied the land near High Bridge Trail State Park during both Pre- and Post-Contact periods were Eastern-Siouan speaking

peoples such as the Sappony, who lived in palisaded villages along rivers with dome-shaped homes made from bark and reed mats. Lithic artifacts located within or near the park, including at a site along the Appomattox River just outside of Farmville, demonstrate the presence of these people through time. They were agriculturalists who grew a wide variety of domesticated crops, including corn, beans, squash, sunflowers, fruit trees, wild grapes, and nuts. They traded goods with their Powhatan and Iroquois neighbors and were often written about by early colonists and explorers as traders and guides for the English seeking to explore to the west. A Sappony man, Ned Bearskin, famously served as a guide for William Byrd’s 1728 survey of the dividing line between Virginia and North Carolina; indeed, the Sappony continuously appear in colonial records all the way up to the American Revolution. However, by the late 18th century, many Sappony moved north to Pennsylvania and New York. Those who chose to stay appear as small groups in North Carolina and Virginia records during in the latter half of the 18th century and are the ancestors of the modern Sappony and Haliwa-Saponi tribes. Today, many citizens of the Sappony tribe still reside in the communities of High Plains in North Carolina and in Virgilina in Virginia, where the Sappony tribal center is located. One site containing lithic artifacts from the Archaic Period is located within the park, and three sites have been discovered near the park’s boundaries (Charland, Marshall, and McMillan, 2025).

The Southside Railroad and Original High Bridge

Beginning in the 1830s, canals were developed in the region, with the main canal being the Upper Appomattox Canal, a lock-and-dam system for batteaux designed by the engineer John County. Piedmont and Southside farmers and merchants grew frustrated with the slow and costly canal and land transportation systems to ship and receive their goods. In addition, growing cities such as Petersburg, Richmond, and Norfolk wanted to capture the trade from the interior of the state. By 1840, over 90% of the Commonwealth’s tobacco was produced in Virginia’s Piedmont and needed to be transported eastward to ports. At a convention in Danville in 1835, participants advocated for the construction of a railroad to serve the needs of the Southside community and connect the region to the East Coast. Around the same time, city leaders in Petersburg, the second largest city in Virginia at the time, began discussing proposals for a rail connection to the west to connect the city with Danville, Farmville, and Lynchburg.



Figure 18 – The original High Bridge spans the Appomattox River east of Farmville in this 1857 lithograph by German artist Edward Beyer

On March 6, 1846, a bill was passed and signed into law to incorporate the South Side Rail Road Company. Following appeals by residents of Farmville for the line to connect to their community, the law was amended in 1849 prior to the start of construction in December of that year. Since the descent into the half-mile wide Appomattox River valley about four miles east of Farmville was deemed too costly and would have necessitated the use of lighter trains producing less revenue, Chief Engineer Charles O. Sanford proposed a wooden bridge 2,392 feet long connecting embankments built of rubble masonry measuring a combined 1,008 feet (see Figure 18). Construction of the bridge began in August 1851. As Mr. Sanford reported to stockholders in 1852 during construction:

It was evident to me that while this bridge ought to be built at any reasonable cost to sustain the 16 feet grade, still great economy should be used in its plan, having due regard to its stability, for there are higher bridges but not so long, and other longer bridges but not so high, so far as I have been able to learn; then taking the length and height together it is one of the longest, if not the longest, bridges in the world (Charland, Marshall, and McMillan, 2025).

The original High Bridge was supported by 21 piers made of bricks manufactured from clay excavated near the site, measuring 8 by 22 feet at the top, 14 by 27 feet at the bottom, and 82 feet in height above the ground and resting on foundations extending as much as eight feet below the ground (Smith, 2019). The wood superstructure was anchored to the foundation by iron rods that passed through the piers in shafts. The bridge iron rail was purchased from Carrn, Kelyn and Blama Iron Works in Wales and delivered to the terminal at City Point, Virginia before being transported to the site. Contractor Francis Carr was awarded the contract to build the wooden trestle superstructure and Flournoy and McDearmon to install the masonry; the latter was succeeded by contractor Silvanus Johnson, who completed the brickwork (Charland, Marshall, and McMillan, 2025).

Construction of the railroad from Petersburg to Lynchburg was completed in 1854, the same year that construction of the High Bridge finished. When the line initially opened for service on November 2, 1854, many travelers expressed trepidation when crossing High Bridge, causing the railroad to lose business. In response, a speed limit was imposed requiring engineers to greatly reduce their speed while crossing the bridge, leading the railroad's President William Pannill to report thereafter, "The Board is pleased to say that the apprehension of the public in regard to the safety of High Bridge has subsided and they feel very confident that there is not a more secure half mile on any railroad in the United States" (Smith, 2019).

The ruins of the 1854 High Bridge, including the abutments and 13 of the 21 original brick piers, are listed on the VLR and NRHP and represent one of the few remaining examples of a pre-Civil War bridge in Virginia. Other remnants include vernal pools likely created as borrow pits for extracting clay used in the bridge's construction and remains of a nearby pug mill used to squeeze the clay into a moldable form for making bricks. In addition, the entire 33-mile stretch of the rail line is considered potentially NHRP-eligible due to the significant role it played in the development of regional transportation in Virginia's

Southside. The park contains the ruins of one historic train depot, the Prospect Depot, which was built as a dual-duty facility in the 1850s for both cargo and passengers. Despite being mostly destroyed by fire in 2000, the depot played a prominent role in the final days of the Civil War and is a contributing resource to the proposed Prospect Historic District. Other railroad remnants described in the Cultural Resources Inventory include wood cribbing, concrete forms for railway signals, and telegraph poles containing Hemingway 42 insulators. The park contains at least 94 recorded culverts, including prominent 19th-century stone culverts used to carry larger streams such as Bad Luck Branch under the railway embankment (Charland, Marshall, and McMillan, 2025).

The Civil War and its Aftermath

Throughout the war, the South Side Railroad served as an important artery of supplies from the Virginia Piedmont to the front. However, because the Southside of Virginia was spared from conflict for most of the Civil War, High Bridge was not garrisoned by Confederate troops until the U.S. Army of the Potomac reached the James River in June 1864. Thereafter, a battery of the Louisiana Donaldsonville Artillery and elements of the 3rd Virginia Reserves were stationed at the bridge, where they established a camp, the main quarters of which were located just outside of the present-day park boundary northwest of the High Bridge. The Louisiana men dubbed the outpost “Camp Paradise” and, for the most part, enjoyed the easy life stationed at a post located far from the front (Charland, Marshall, and McMillan, 2025).

All of this changed rather abruptly for the garrison guarding the bridge in early April 1865 as Confederate General Robert E. Lee’s army retreated westward from Petersburg in a last-ditch effort to link up with General Joseph E. Johnston’s army in North Carolina. On the morning of April 6th, Union General Edward O.C. Ord of the Army of the James, under



Figure 19 - A cannon sits atop the restored Civil War redoubt that once guarded the eastern end of the High Bridge

orders to destroy any bridges the Confederates might use to escape westward, organized a small task force comprised of roughly 780 men from the 54th Pennsylvania Infantry, the 123rd Ohio Infantry, and three companies of the 4th Massachusetts Cavalry. Hearing word that the bridge-burning party was setting off from Burkeville, Confederate General James Longstreet dispatched Confederate cavalry toward the bridge to interdict the Union force, a move countered by Ord, who dispatched Brevet Brigadier General Theodore Read to take over command of the raiding force.

Upon scouting the bridge and finding the eastern approach strongly guarded by earthen redoubts (see Figure 19), Union cavalry commander Colonel Francis Washburn elected to outflank the fortifications by attacking them from the rear, forcing the garrison's 30 defenders to retreat toward High Bridge (Calkins, 2006). Hearing firing at Major Watson's Farm, where Read's infantry was coming under attack by dismounted Confederate cavalry, Washburn rode south to reunite with the rest of the task force before repeatedly charging into the three lines of advancing Confederate troops under Major General Thomas L. Rosser. After fierce fighting that included hand-to-hand combat, General Read was killed, Colonel Washburn mortally wounded, and the 4th Massachusetts all but annihilated, forcing the remaining Union infantry units to engage in a fighting retreat north toward the High Bridge as a small detail made a last-ditch, and ultimately unsuccessful, effort to fire the bridge. As Confederate reinforcements pressed their pursuit to the steep rocky hills near the bridge and down to the riverbank, the remaining Union troops eventually surrendered, ending the first day of fighting at High Bridge. The initial Confederate victory, which included the capture of most of the attacking U.S. troops and preservation of the Confederates' means of escape, came at great cost. Confederate General John Dearing was mortally wounded, becoming the last Confederate general to die of wounds received in action, and prominent officers Major James Thomson, Colonel Rueben Boston, and Colonel John Locher Knott were all killed in the fighting (Calkins, 2024).

Having secured safe passage, now it was the Confederates' turn to attempt the bridge's destruction to prevent Union forces from pursuing. On the evening of April 6th, as his forces were retreating from Sailor's Creek toward Farmville, Lee ordered General William Mahone and General John B. Gordon to destroy the High Bridge and its adjacent wagon bridge once all Confederate forces were across. Due to various delays, this was not accomplished until the morning of April 7th when Confederate engineers destroyed one of the two redoubts on the southeastern side and set fire to both the High Bridge and the wagon bridge in the valley below. By then, the first Union troops of the 19th Maine Infantry had arrived. After heavy skirmishing, they managed to drive away the remaining Confederates before extinguishing the flames on the wagon bridge using water from the swollen Appomattox River (Calkins, 2006). Meanwhile, Union engineers attempted to extinguish the flames quickly overtaking the first four wooden spans on the western side of the High Bridge, all while under continuous fire from Confederate sharpshooters. As Union forces attempted to put out the fire, the fourth span fell, sparing the fifth as well as the rest of the bridge from destruction.

Mahone's forces attempting to retake the charred wagon bridge were repulsed by Union reinforcements from the Union II Corps including Colonel William Olmstead's third brigade, General Thomas Smyth's first brigade, and General Nelson Miles's first division, allowing Union forces to cross the river on the damaged, but still usable, wagon bridge. As a park interpretive sign marking the location attests, General Smyth was mortally wounded by a Confederate sniper in pursuit of Gordon's rearguard retreating along the road toward Farmville, becoming the last Union general to die of wounds received in action. The spoils of the Union victory were counted mostly in material rather than manpower. The Federals captured eight artillery pieces belonging to the Donaldsonville Artillery from the two forts on the southeast side of the bridge and 10 more from the two on the northwest side along with 500 Enfield rifles from units stationed at Camp Paradise and High Bridge during the latter years of the war (see Figure 20).

Since neither side prevented the other from crossing the Appomattox River at this location, the significance of the Battle of High Bridge perhaps lies more in the battle's immediate aftermath than the battle itself. Convinced that the bridges over the river had been destroyed and that his forces were temporarily free from imminent attack from the rear, Lee made a fateful mistake by moving his army north across the Appomattox River in Farmville to Cumberland Heights before ordering the railroad and wagon bridges in town burned to prevent continued Federal pursuit. Conferring afterwards with Secretary of War John J. Breckinridge and First Corps artillery commander General E.P. Alexander, Lee prepared to meet the oncoming Federal threat on the north side of the river



Figure 20 – Civil War reenactors fire a cannon at High Bridge Trail State Park

as Union troops poured into the streets of Farmville from the south and east, capturing the town and preventing Lee from reversing his error. As Alexander purportedly told the General-in-Chief of the Confederate States Army at the time, his army's best hope was to remain on the south side of the river and follow the road along the Southside Railroad to have any chance of reaching Johnston in North Carolina. He later wrote in his journal:

Indeed, no man who looked at our situation on a map, or who understood the geography of the country, could fail to see that General [Ulysses S.] Grant had us completely in a trap...we were now in a sort of jug shaped peninsula between the James River and Appomattox and there was but one outlet, the neck of the jug at Appomattox Court House, and to that Grant had the shortest road!

That evening, Lee refused a written entreaty from Grant at his headquarters in Farmville to surrender Confederate forces and finally end the bloodshed that had gripped the country for the past four years (Calkins, 2024). The die was cast: If Grant's forces could beat Lee to Appomattox and cut off any retreat to the south, the Confederates would be trapped between the much larger Union army and the James River to the north. This, of course, is precisely what happened a mere two days later when Lee was outflanked and forced to surrender his army to Grant at Appomattox Courthouse on April 9, 1865, leading to the end of the bloodiest conflict in American history.

Within months of the end of the war, the damaged spans of the High Bridge were repaired as the region braced for major changes to its agricultural economy and workforce of emancipated enslaved persons. During Reconstruction, many former

slaves took up low-wage labor as sharecroppers and tenant farmers as the region saw a rise in small farm holdings and corresponding decrease in arable acreage as well as production of tobacco, cotton, and wheat. Other emancipated slaves left the agricultural sector altogether to work in towns and cities. As the economy of the region experienced industrialization and a corresponding increase in heavier train traffic, railroad engineers in 1870 replaced the High Bridge wood superstructure with a metal structure and, in 1886, the Fink trusses with lighter, stronger Pratt trusses. At the same time, the Southside Railroad underwent mergers in 1870 and 1881, becoming part of the larger, expanded Norfolk and Western Railroad.

Known cultural resources from this period within the park include four earthen fortifications that guarded the High Bridge on either end, one of which has been cleared of trees and improved with a side trail, interpretive signage, and a Civil War-era cannon. Two of these fortifications, which were constructed in 1864, are contributing resources to the Battle of High Bridge National Historic District; the other two are considered likely contributing resources and historically significant to the District (Charland, Marshall, and McMillan, 2025).

A New Century, A New Bridge

As the 20th century dawned, the advent of heavier trains necessitated upgrades to the High Bridge, now approaching 50 years old. In 1901, the steel spans were reinforced by a fourth superstructure that added a third truss and metal floor system. Due to vibrations from the heavy traffic, cracks developed near the tops of the piers, requiring engineers to wrap them with steel bands connected to metal corner bracing to prevent their collapse. Finally, after a study found further deterioration, the railroad finalized plans in 1912 to replace the bridge with a taller, double-track steel bridge supported by steel towers to be constructed just 20 feet from the existing structure (Charland, Marshall, and McMillan, 2025). Due to eastbound coal traffic, the railroad was required to maintain a grade of no more than 0.3%, necessitating construction of approaches 1,800 feet in length on the bridge's western end and 400 feet on the eastern end utilizing fill dirt excavated from nearby borrow pits. The design of the bridge was directed by railroad engineers led by Charles S. Churchill, Chief Engineer, Charles C. Wentworth, Principal Assistant Engineer, and J.E. Crawford, Bridge Engineer.



Figure 21: A steel span of the 1914 bridge soars above one of the original bridge's brick piers as viewed from below

The Roanoke-based Virginia Bridge and Iron Company furnished and installed the steel, and contractor W.W. Boxley and Company, also from Roanoke, built the masonry and approaches. Although designed to support two tracks, girders for only one track were ultimately installed. The new bridge's design included 43 spans connecting 21 steel towers, each 107 feet in height and situated atop four pyramidal concrete pedestals (84 in total) resting on bedrock, resulting in a new bridge seven feet higher than the original stretching 2,418 feet between approaches (see Figure 21).

The engineer responsible for supervising the day-to-day construction was Resident Engineer Willis W. Vail, who led a team of young engineers on the site he affectionately referred to as “the boys.” In addition to coordinating the various stages of construction, Vail's responsibilities included drafting plans for temporary and incidental projects. These included temporary standard- and narrow-gauge rails for hauling construction equipment and materials on rail cars from the main line to the valley below, a barge named the “Titanic” used for excavating sand from the river to make concrete in an on-site plant, and wood-framed trestles buried with fill dirt to create the eastern and western approaches. Unlike the old bridge that had been built using hand labor, workers used powerful steam-powered locomotives, cranes, and shovels similar to equipment used to build the Panama Canal. Vail took copious notes and photographs, not only to document the project as work progressed, but also to record scenes of daily life for the laborers who worked on, and lived in temporary dormitories near, the site. Construction began in April 1913 and took 15 months to complete, finishing in June of 1914 when the first trains were diverted from the old bridge to the new.

Within six weeks of completion, beginning on the western end and working eastward by span, a steam crane dismantled the old bridge, initially leaving all but one of the brick piers as a testimony to its years of service to the railroad and region (Flippen and McClintock, 2014). Later during World War II, seven of the 20 remaining piers were dismantled by Mottley Construction Company of Farmville so that the bricks could be reused in local building projects that included the Craddock-Terry Shoe Factory (currently Green Front Furniture) in Farmville, Prospect Elementary School, and Cumberland County home of local builder R. Edmund Garnett. The railroad continued to serve as a vital link in the provision of freight and passenger service during the 20th century, allowing residents to travel between Norfolk, Virginia and Cincinnati, Ohio across a bridge renowned for affording travelers a feeling of being suspended high above the Appomattox River and panoramic views of the surrounding farmland until, in 1979, passenger rail service was discontinued altogether.

The current steel, plate-girder trestle bridge is eligible for listing on the VLR and NRHP for its importance to the history of the railroad, contributions to development of the region, and embodiment of technological advances in bridge design and construction (Charland, Marshall, and McMillan, 2025).

Everyday Life on Virginia's Southside

The late 19th century system of small farm holdings, sharecropping, and tenancy by Black and White farmers continued into the early 20th century, largely devoted to the cultivation of tobacco. Following the Civil War and prior to the Great Depression, the production of tobacco pipes reached its zenith at the Pamplin Smoking Pipe and Manufacturing

Company, the remnants of which are located just outside the park boundary on the opposite side of Pamplin Road near the trailhead parking lot. The factory’s signature product was a novelty pipe called the “Powhatan Pipe” or “Tomahawk Pipe” bearing the profile of a stereotyped Native American wearing a feathered headdress. Despite advertising the production of a million pipes per month in 1935, profits declined due to increased competition from cigarettes, ceasing altogether around 1950. The Pamplin Pipe Factory was listed in the VLR and NRHP in 1980.

For the region’s Black population, the years following the Civil War up to the late 20th century were marked not only by the perils of everyday life but also the ongoing struggle for equal rights as a response to the system of racial segregation on Virginia’s Southside, particularly with respect to unequal access to public education. Tragedy struck a bus of students from Farmville’s Moton High School at the crossing of the Southside Railroad in Elam on March 13, 1951, when foggy and rainy conditions obscured the driver’s view of an oncoming train. A historical marker stands near the location where the train hit the rear of the bus, killing five students. Shortly thereafter, on April 23, 1951, Moton High School experienced a student walkout led by Barbara Johns, a 16 year old sophomore, in protest of inferior, so-called “separate but equal” educational facilities for Black students, initiating a 13-year struggle for civil rights in education as part of the aftermath



Figure 22 – A grave marker at one of the park’s historic family cemeteries

of the case *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, one of five cases later consolidated into the famous U.S. Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*. In that landmark decision, on May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court’s effectively ruled that segregation in public education was unconstitutional and illegal. The former R. R. Moton High School is now the Moton Museum and located about a mile from the park at 900 Griffin Blvd. in Farmville.

The legacy of small farming and tobacco production can still be seen today, most notably the tobacco barns along the old

rail line, the warehouses visible from the trail in Farmville, and the rail depots dotting the landscape. Resources within the park that speak to the lives of the Southside residents during this period also include historic cemeteries, archaeological sites, and historic structures, many of which lie in ruins. At least four historic cemeteries have been identified on park property, one of which, the Jeter family cemetery near High Bridge, reflects the presence of a sizable African American community dating back to the

periods before and after Emancipation, making it potentially eligible for inclusion on the National Register (see Figure 22). In addition to the cemeteries themselves, researchers discovered a 19th century roadbed and 20th century domestic artifact scatter near one cemetery along with a 19th century stone-lined well and ruins of a 20th century machine shop near another. Archaeological sites within the park include evidence of a mid-19th to early-20th century dwelling as well as ruins of the 20th century Folkes family house and barn along the section of trail in Prince Edward County.

The only historic buildings still standing on park property are the main dwelling and tenant residence associated with the Prospect House, built around 1924. The dwelling is a two-story, three-bay structure containing two small additions and a one-story, hipped-roof porch supported by masonry piers. The tenant house is a one-story, three-bay building built on a stone foundation. Although not individually eligible for inclusion on the National Register, the property lies within the anticipated boundary of the proposed Prospect Historic District. In addition, several architectural resources situated near the park boundaries are associated with the history of the park and either listed, or eligible for listing, on the NRHP and/or VLR. These include the restored Pamplin Depot, built with Flemish brick bond and featuring a hipped slate roof and dormers on either end, as well as a brick home near High Bridge that is likely the original Overton House (c. 1840), a dwelling of a former stockholder in the railroad that entertained Confederate soldiers stationed at nearby Camp Paradise during the Civil War (Charland, Marshall, and McMillan, 2025).

PHYSICAL RESOURCES

Buildings, structures, and other physical resources at High Bridge Trail State Park are described below beginning with the park's first master plan adopted in 2007 (see Figures 8.1-8.3 – Park Property and Public Recreation Resources Map).

Trail Construction

Following acquisition of the first 31.2 miles of railroad and approval of the first master plan in 2007, DCR began designing and constructing the infrastructure necessary to convert the former railroad into Virginia's newest non-motorized, shared-use trail and rail-to-trail state park. An all-weather, crushed stone trail surface 10 feet in width was installed where railroad tracks previously carried trains filled with travelers to once again transport people through the pastoral landscape of Virginia's heartland, if by different mode. Locked gates were installed at public and private road crossings to prevent unauthorized vehicular access. Trailhead parking areas, vault toilets, and picnic tables were constructed at prominent public access points lying at regular intervals along the trail in Pamplin, Prospect, Tuggle, River Road east of Farmville, and Rice. Railroad bridges and overpasses along the route were converted for pedestrian, bicycle, and equestrian use via installation of surfaces of crushed stone (for the 3rd Street, Buffalo Creek, and U.S. Route 460 bridges) or wood decking (for the Mill St. and River Rd. bridges) supplemented by wood-frame, chain link railings. Work proceeded quickly, with the first trail mileage opened for public use in 2008. By November of 2009,

approximately 20 miles had been opened to the public, with an additional 10 miles of trail opened by September 2010.

Restoring the High Bridge

Despite opening most of the High Bridge Trail for public use, the state park's signature attraction and namesake remained fenced off and closed to public use until after renovations were undertaken in 2011-2012. A Farmville company, Keith Barber Construction, was selected as the general contractor for the project, beginning work in March of 2011. A floor system consisting of beams, curbs, and wood decking was constructed along with

wood-frame handrails and additional steel framing to support the two observation areas, installed by subcontractor R.L. Farris of Forest, VA, jutting out from the bridge's northern side approximately 530 feet from each end (see Figure 23). After the wood decking was added, steel benches covered by small shelter structures resembling the type historically found at passenger rail stations were constructed at each observation area for the comfort of visitors (Hougland, 2011). On



Figure 23 – The observation area directly above the Appomattox River near the eastern end of the High Bridge

April 6, 2012, following 13 months of work and on the 147th anniversary of the Civil War battle, visitors for the first time were able experience the incredible views from atop the restored High Bridge, the longest recreational bridge in Virginia and one of the top 10 longest in the United States.

The High Bridge remains a focal point of visitation to the state park and represents one of the top man-made scenic overlooks in Virginia. The eastern observation platform is situated at the bridge's highest point directly over the Appomattox River; the western platform provides foreground views of forests and background views of gently rolling farmland characteristic of the Virginia Piedmont. The entire length of the recreational bridge provides a bird's eye, panoramic view from which to observe the forest canopy below and surrounding countryside beyond in all directions. At each of the two approaches, a wide area on the northern side of the trail features benches and

interpretive signs, giving visitors a place to linger and observe this impressive feat of engineering by peering straight across the valley parallel to the structure and down to the foundations of the towers far below.

Park Expansion

Once the High Bridge was opened to the public, efforts shifted to constructing an access road and parking area to bring visitors closer to the bridge. Initially, the closest road crossing and parking area was located at River Road, about a one mile walk along the trail to the bridge's western end. At the eastern end, the nearest public road crossing is Aspen Hill Road, approximately 1.8 miles distant. In 2015, DCR constructed a 1.5-mile gravel entrance road from Aspen Hill Road to a new parking area located only 0.3 miles from the bridge. In addition to restoring the Civil War earthworks, a vault toilet, side trails, picnic area, and playground were installed at the new trailhead initially named "Camp Paradise" after the nearby Civil War site. The access road and parking lot were later paved in 2024, at which time the trailhead was rebranded "High Bridge Station" in honor of the park's railroad history and the new visitor center being constructed at the time.

Despite the construction of a primary trailhead closer to High Bridge, the park had long lacked a centralized facility for the public to speak to a park ranger, learn about the history of the railroad and bridge, or simply take a break from the outdoors. This was remedied with plans for a new visitor center modeled on plans by Norfolk & Western Railway dating back to 1914 for the company's Standard Combination Passenger and Freight Station. General contractor Paddox, LLC from Leesburg, Virginia was hired to construct the project, which, in addition to on-site utilities, included a large outdoor deck overlooking the trail, ornamental lighting, exhibit space, small gift shop, administrative offices, and public bathrooms. Funding for the project came from Virginia Public Building Authority (VPBA) bonds and federal State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds authorized as part of the American Rescue Plan Act. Groundbreaking for the project commenced on October 24, 2022. After months of construction, High Bridge Trail State Park unveiled its new visitor center at a ribbon cutting ceremony on April 7, 2025, welcoming guests to one of the most unique visitor centers in the Virginia State Parks system (Wells, 2025).



Figure 24 - Railroad-themed park bench in Pamplin

At around the same time that plans for the visitor center were being advanced, DCR took a major step in 2020 toward completing the trail along the entire length of the former Southside Railroad by acquiring the final westernmost mile of right-of-way from Heights

School Road in Prince Edward County to the Norfolk Southern line in Pamplin, along with an additional 30 acres lying on the southern side of the railroad tracks. Subsequently, DCR finalized and recorded a half-acre donation for a western trailhead in Pamplin on August 23, 2023 as work began on extending the trail using funding from a Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grant (Wells, 2024). One year later, at a ribbon cutting ceremony on April 22, 2024, DCR opened the last mile of trail at the state park’s western end, which includes a paved parking lot and unique park bench constructed on the axle and wheels of an old railroad car on what remains of the tracks of the Southside Railroad (see Figure 24).

Side Trails

The side trails at High Bridge Trail State Park provide excellent opportunities to explore the lands adjoining the rail-to-trail corridor. There are eight side trails totaling approximately 9.5 miles, seven of which are rated as having a difficulty level of “Easy” or “Medium” in terms of distance, grade, and total elevation change. The Burnside Trail and Early Trail (the latter rated “Difficult”) in the Rochelle area constitute the park’s single-



Figure 25 – The High Bridge and remnants of the original structure as viewed from the Camp Paradise Trail.

track, mountain biking-only trails. The other two trails at Rochelle, named after generals Smyth and Dearing, provide a hiking or biking circuit featuring a lovely section of Bad Luck Branch that includes the impressive 19th century stone culvert conveying the stream underneath the steep railroad embankment.

The park's other side trails are located at High Bridge Station, including the popular one-mile Camp Paradise Trail loop. When hiked counterclockwise, the trail brings visitors downhill from an intersection with the High Bridge Trail to the southern bank of the Appomattox River for a close-up view of the original bridge piers and the current bridge foundations before winding back uphill to the restored Civil War fortifications near the parking area (see Figure 25). The 1.5-mile Spur Line Trail and 0.2-mile Spur Line Connector offer a peaceful circuit hike through a forest of mature hardwoods crisscrossed by former logging roads. Taken together, the park's side trails provide a substantial degree of quiet and solitude relative to adjacent sections of the High Bridge Trail that experience comparatively greater visitation.

Staff Facilities

High Bridge Trail State Park includes several properties and facilities containing maintenance facilities and staff residences. The primary service facility consists of a former VDOT maintenance facility on Green Bay Road that contains two steel shop buildings, a small office, pole shed, fuel canopy, and large laydown area. The Rice parking area property includes sufficient space for an additional maintenance building to store equipment and materials near the eastern end of the trail closer to where they may be needed.

Staff residences include a one-story, ranch-style house on the Piney Grove property, the two-story Prospect House on Campbell Hill Road across from the fire station in Prospect, and a two-story farmhouse on Green Bay Road where the park manager resides.



VISITOR EXPERIENCE

INTRODUCTION

As part of the master plan process, Virginia State Parks hosted a Visitor Experience workshop to better define the desired experience that the park should provide to guests. The primary purpose of the Visitor Experience planning work was to define the following to provide a solid foundation for future interpretive efforts at the park:

- Audience Types
- Visitor Wants, Needs, and Expectations
- Park Purpose
- Themes and Subthemes
- Essential Experiences
- Experience Areas

Creating the visitor experience first requires identification of the various audience types using the park. Once those audiences are identified, their specific wants, needs, and expectations can be evaluated, and suitable experiences, themes, messages, and programming can be planned. The summary description of park audiences and their wants, needs, and expectations are included in Appendix A.

PARK INTERPRETIVE THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

Theme 1: Across miles and centuries, the former South Side Railroad connects communities, creates culture, and encourages commerce across the Central Piedmont of Virginia. (see Figure 26)

Subtheme 1: Railroad Heritage through Time, including but not limited to:

- The history of the South Side Railroad
- The shaping of the railroad’s path through the Central Piedmont
- The railroad as an engineering marvel
- Historic culverts
- Historic train depots

Subtheme 2: The Importance of the former railroad to the community today, including but not limited to:

- The High Bridge Trail community
- The trail as an economic hub
- Partnerships with Farmville, Burkeville, Pamplin and other towns

Subtheme 3: The history of commerce in the Central Piedmont, including but not limited to:

- The role of the Appomattox River in regional commerce
- Native American heritage with Siouan-speaking peoples and their “Three Sisters” society
- Early agriculture and forestry products from the Central Piedmont
- Connections to the Petersburg port
- Canals and batteaux boats
- Freight and passenger rail
- Telegraph pole system
- The Pipe Factory



Figure 26 – A concrete railroad mile marker west of High Bridge

Theme 2: Towering above the Appomattox River, the historic High Bridge features accessible, ever-changing views of fireflies, foliage, and a starfield stretching from horizon to horizon. (see Figure 27)

Subtheme 1: The historic High Bridge, including but not limited to:

- The construction of the 1854 Bridge
- The use of materials from the 1854 Bridge for building in Farmville
- The construction of the 1914 Bridge
- The role of the bridge in commerce, connections, and the Civil War

Subtheme 2: Seasonal scenic views, including but not limited to:

- Birding from above
- Fireflies
- Foliage throughout the seasons
- Stargazing with a 360-degree viewshed



Figure 27 – Stars shine overhead as fireflies light up the forest below during the annual Firefly Festival at High Bridge

Theme 3: In the waning days of the American Civil War, successive attempts by Union and Confederate forces to destroy the High Bridge to prevent the other side from crossing both failed, leading the armies to forge ahead to Appomattox and the war’s final act: the envelopment and surrender of Lee’s Army on April 9, 1865.

Subtheme: The role of the High Bridge and surrounding encampments in the Civil War, including but not limited to:

- Camp Paradise
- The two-day Battle of High Bridge
- Role in the greater Appomattox Campaign leading to Lee’s eventual surrender

Theme 4: Today, High Bridge Trail State Park offers convenient access to healthy recreational activities where visitors can immerse themselves in a progression of Piedmont ecosystems, landscapes, stunning scenery, and rich history from east to west and treetop to river’s edge.

Subtheme 1: The recreational activities now available on or along the trail, including but not limited to:

- Biking
- Hiking
- Running
- Walking

Subtheme 2: The diverse natural resources seen along the trail, including but not limited to:

- Ecosystems and natural communities
- Invasive species challenges
- Wildflower and pollinator areas along the trail



Figure 28 – Sunset at the High Bridge

Theme 5: Visitors to High Bridge Trail State Park traverse a corridor once ruled by trains, where historic bridges, telegraph poles, and cultural remnants bring to life the monumental shifts in American engineering, transportation, and telecommunications that reshaped the nation between the 19th and 20th centuries.

Subtheme: The engineering and transportation marvels seen along the trail, including but not limited to:

- Engineering and manufacturing of the two bridges
- Evolving modes of transportation from the river to the rails and beyond
- Stories of the individuals who built the bridges and the rail corridor
- Transportation history

PARK PURPOSE

Featuring the historic High Bridge as its centerpiece, High Bridge Trail State Park provides a premiere rail-to-trail experience showcasing the journeys of goods, people, and armies through and across the rural communities lying at the Heart of Virginia.

ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCES

Staff discussed the following essential experiences as opportunities for visitors to immerse themselves in the park, its resources, and its story. These experiences are the most unique opportunities at the park that truly allow for the guest to get a full experience of all that High Bridge Trail State Park has to offer:

For visitors with just an hour or two to spend in the park, the following essential experiences are recommended:

1. **Experiencing the bridge and taking in the view above and below:** Park at High Bridge Station and walk or bike to the historic High Bridge, take in the vast viewsheds, sights and sounds from above the Appomattox, then follow the Camp Paradise Trail to enjoy a unique perspective of the bridge from the river and valley below (see Figure 28).
2. **Use Farmville as a base:** Use Farmville as your base for exploring the central portion of High Bridge Trail, taking time to enjoy the many shops and restaurant options in the historic downtown.
3. **Stand amidst Civil War history at High Bridge Trail:** Explore Camp Paradise at your own pace, taking in the scene, and imagining the final days of the Civil War.
4. **Immerse yourself in the exhibits at the High Bridge Station:** Spend some time at the brand-new High Bridge Station to soak in the railroad exhibits, grab a snack, and buy a souvenir for the road.

For visitors with just a half day to spend in the park, the following essential experiences are recommended:

1. **Take a mountain bike ride on the Rochelle Tract:** Park at the River Road lot and ride in to explore the Burnside Trail and other mountain biking opportunities on the Rochelle Tract.
2. **Attend a nighttime Ranger-led program:** Enjoy a Ranger-led hike or festival, such as the Firefly Festival or night sky viewing opportunities, on one of the special nights that the park is open after dusk.

For visitors with multiple days to spend in the park, the following Essential Experience is recommended:

1. **Enjoy the complete High Bridge Trail Experience:** Bring or rent a cruiser bike, eBike, or mountain bike and pedal the entire High Bridge Trail from one end to another, starting in Pamplin and heading east (and largely downhill) towards Burkeville.

EXPERIENCE AREAS

The experience areas of a state park are often distinct portions of the park, each with its characteristics, resources, and landscapes, as well as corresponding stories and interpretive values. Once the essential experiences were described, work shifted to mapping out of High Bridge Trail’s Experience

Areas, including a discussion of each area’s character, audiences, current and future needs in preparation for the High Bridge Trail Master Plan Needs Assessment (see Table 3 and Figures 29.1-29.3 below). These results were compared to past and present market analyses of the park to ensure that visitor satisfaction trends expressed in the key findings and takeaways are accurately reflected below for each experience area (see Market Analysis section).

Table 3: Visitor Experience Areas, High Bridge Trail State Park

Experience Area (Audiences)	Current Structures	Future Development Needs	Interpretive Opportunities
Arrival Corridor (All)	Entry road	New Contact Station on Camp Paradise Road	Wayfinding and other signage
Day Use Area #1 – Pamplin towards Elam (Active Recreators, Low Impact Recreation Users, Natural Resource Special Interest Users, Volunteers)	Main rail-to-trail, portable restroom and enclosure, paved parking lot	Look into a safe pedestrian railroad crossing and connection to Downtown Pamplin at the western end of the park	Interpretive signage, Roving Rangers
Day Use Area #2 – Elam towards Prospect (Active Recreators, Low Impact Recreation Users, Natural Resource Special Interest Users, Volunteers)	Main rail-to-trail, parking lot	N/A	Interpretive signage, Roving Rangers
Day Use Area #3 – Prospect towards Tuggle (Active Recreators, Low Impact Recreation Users, Natural Resource Special Interest Users, Volunteers)	Main rail-to-trail, ranger residence, vault toilet, parking lot	Western maintenance area, comfort station with water fill-up station, picnic shelter with potential theming as a railroad depot (per the former Prospect Depot)	Interpretive signage, Roving Rangers
Day Use Area #4 – Tuggle towards Farmville (All Users)	Main rail-to-trail, 3rd Street Bridge, Buffalo Creek Bridge, Mill Street Bridge, vault toilet, parking lots	Keep Tuggle lot, but shut down 3rd Street lot	Interpretive signage, Roving Rangers
Day Use Area #5 – Farmville towards River Road (All Users)	Main rail-to-trail, River Road Bridge	Trail map for existing kiosk signage at the Rochelle Tract	Interpretive signage, Roving Rangers

Experience Area (Audiences)	Current Structures	Future Development Needs	Interpretive Opportunities
<p>Day Use Area #6 – River Road towards High Bridge Station (All)</p>	<p>Main rail-to-trail, High Bridge, vault toilet, parking lot</p>	<p>Move existing parking lot to the eastern side of River Road to the side where the picnic area exists, pave the new lot, add a comfort station with water fill-up station, improve the general visitor experience at River Road with an engineered and/or vegetative screen from the power substation, and consider a pedestrian bridge across the Appomattox (resembling the old wagon bridge). For the High Bridge itself, consider a more permanent resurfacing option, bridge lighting (perhaps incorporate telegraph pole design), and potential viewing/interpretive platform at the eastern abutment deck.</p>	<p>Interpretive signage, Roving Rangers</p>
<p>Day Use Area #7 – High Bridge Station towards Rice (All)</p>	<p>Main rail-to-trail, US-460 Bridge, vault toilet, comfort station, parking lot, High Bridge Station Visitor Center</p>	<p>Purchase inholdings, expand trails, improve drainage at picnic area and add one or two shelters, delineate, mark and protect cemetery, and replace vault toilet with comfort station. Add a train car for interpretive opportunities and storage.</p>	<p>Interpretive signage, Roving Rangers, train car</p>
<p>Day Use Area #8 – Rice towards Moran (Active Recreators, Low Impact Recreation Users, Natural Resource Special Interest Users, Volunteers)</p>	<p>Main rail-to-trail, vault toilets, camp paradise</p>	<p>Upgrade existing storage and maintenance building, shift the trail or demolish existing steel building to expand parking to accommodate more vehicles, pave the parking lot and provide better separation between the two than the existing split rail fencing.</p>	<p>Interpretive signage, Roving Rangers</p>
<p>Day Use Area #9 – Moran towards Orchard Road (Active Recreators, Low Impact Recreation Users, Natural Resource Special Interest Users, Volunteers)</p>	<p>Main rail-to-trail, parking lot</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>Interpretive signage, Roving Rangers</p>

Experience Area (Audiences)	Current Structures	Future Development Needs	Interpretive Opportunities
<p>Day Use Area #10 – Moran towards Orchard Road <i>(Active Recreators, Low Impact Recreation Users, Natural Resource Special Interest Users, Volunteers)</i></p>	Main rail-to-trail, parking lot	The top priority in this section is eventually connecting the park into Burkeville (potentially leaving the track for interpretive and programming value). Also, investigate potential connections to Twin Lakes State Park	Interpretive signage, Roving Rangers
<p>Passive Recreation and Habitat Management #1 – Rochelle <i>(Active Recreators, Low Impact Recreation Users, Natural Resource Special Interest Users, Volunteers)</i></p>	Main rail-to-trail, hiking, mountain biking, and equestrian trails	N/A	Interpretive signage, Roving Ranger
<p>Passive Recreation and Habitat Management #2 – High Bridge Station <i>(Active Recreators, Low Impact Recreation Users, Natural Resource Special Interest Users, Volunteers)</i></p>	Main rail-to-trail, hiking trails	Purchase inholdings, expand trails, improve drainage	Interpretive signage, Roving Ranger
<p>Passive Recreation and Habitat Management #3 – High Bridge Station <i>(Active Recreators, Low Impact Recreation Users, Natural Resource Special Interest Users, Volunteers)</i></p>	Main rail-to-trail, Ranger residence	Hiking, mountain biking and/or equestrian trails. Potential overnight uses such as camping or cabins. Investigate VDOT road issues for potential access, which ultimately may impact what can be done on this site.	Interpretive signage, Roving Ranger
<p>Interpretive Area #1 – High Bridge <i>(All)</i></p>	The historic high bridge(s)	Additional trails, river access, bridge improvements	Interpretive signage, interpretive elements added to bridge, Roving Ranger

HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK VISITOR EXPERIENCE AREAS (WESTERN AREA)

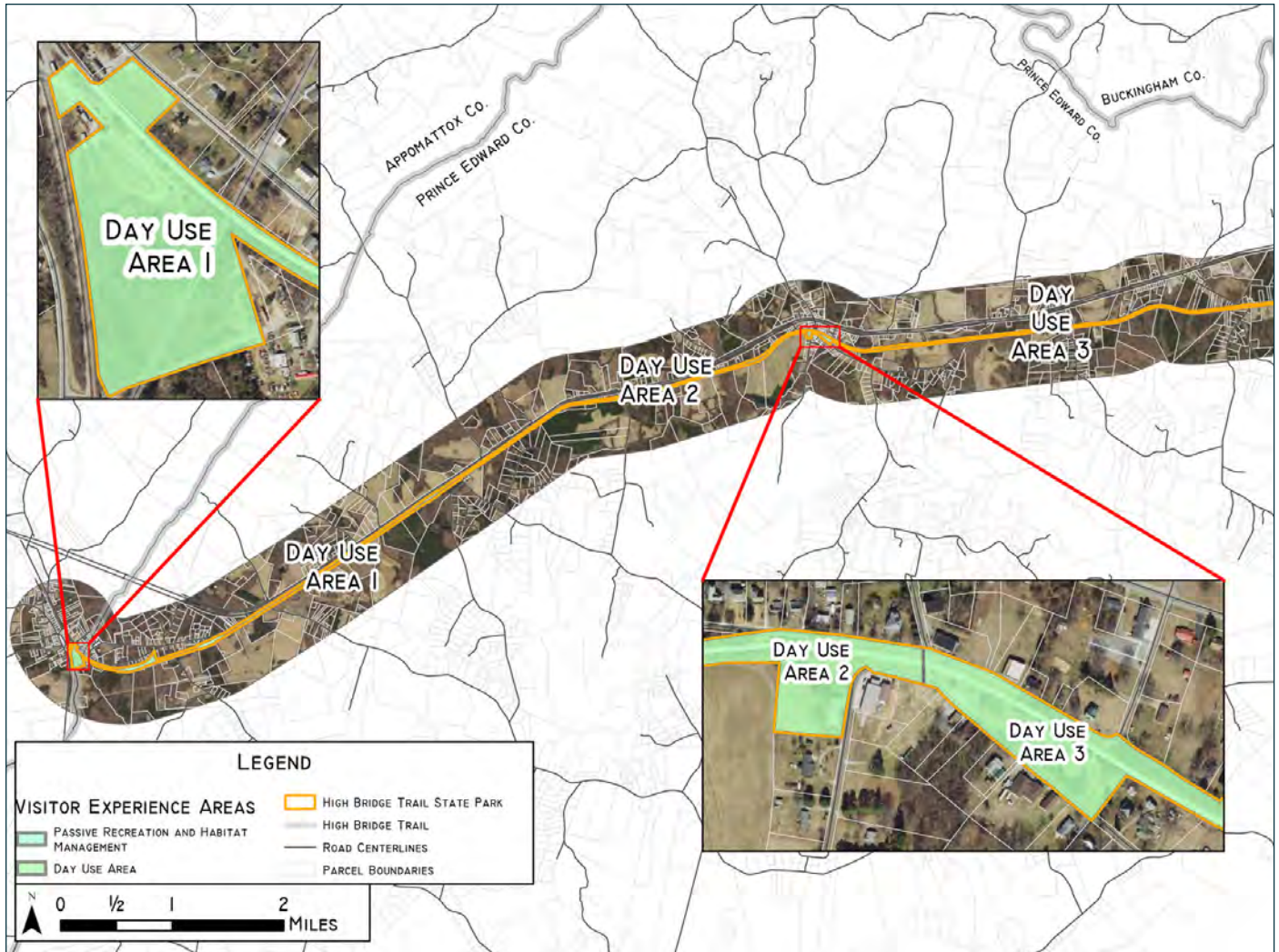


Figure 29.1 – Visitor Experience Areas Map, Western Area

HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK VISITOR EXPERIENCE AREAS (CENTRAL AREA)

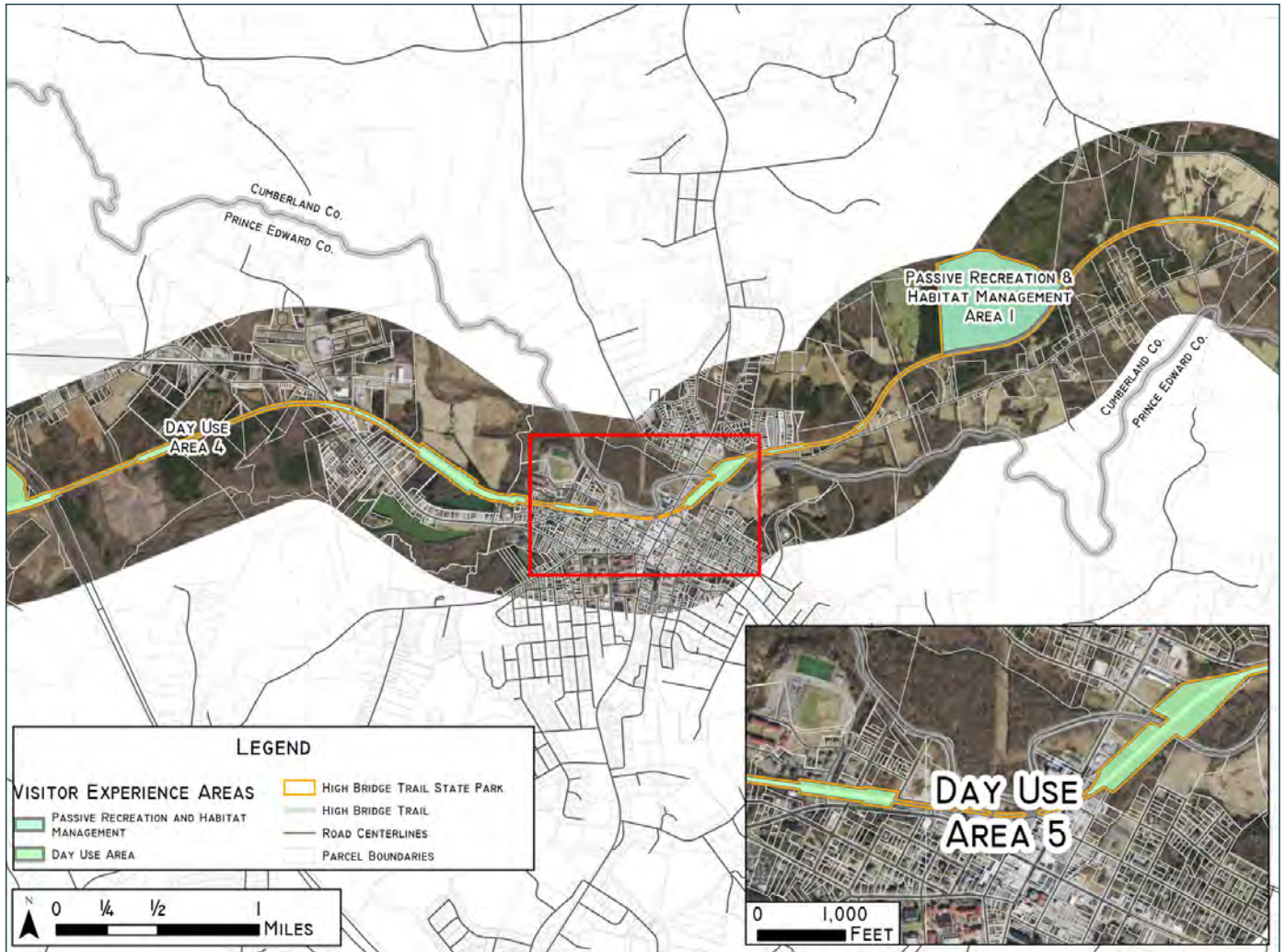


Figure 29.2 – Visitor Experience Areas Map, Central Area

HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK VISITOR EXPERIENCE AREAS (EASTERN AREA)

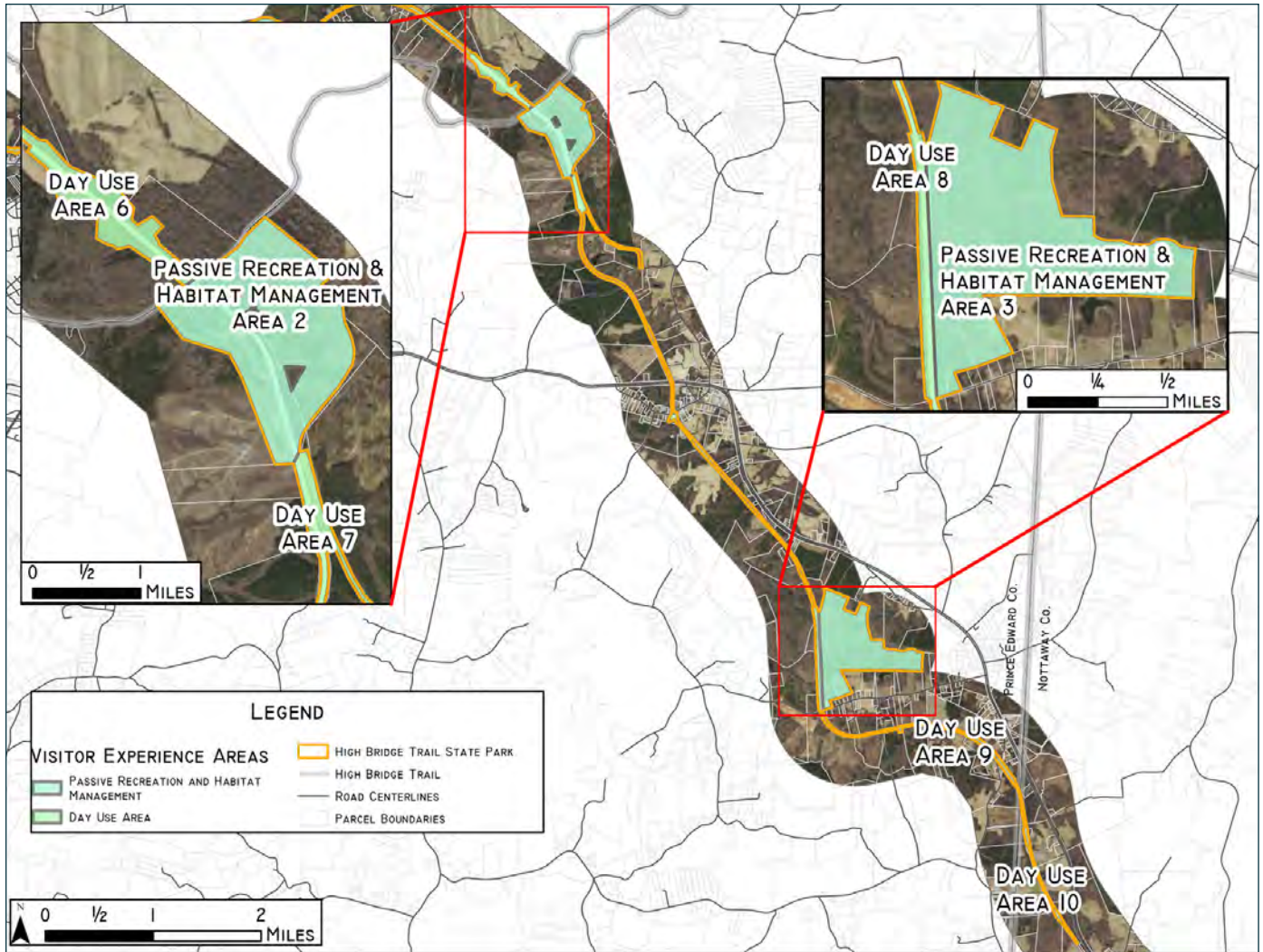


Figure 29.3 – Visitor Experience Areas Map, Eastern Area



MARKET ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

To reflect changing market and economic conditions that impact a state park, a market analysis should be updated once every five years and the latest data and findings incorporated into the master plan. Additional information may be provided in the master plan to guide updates to the market analysis and provide high-level guidance on the park service areas and economic conditions. A park market analysis, therefore, is not intended to supersede the information or recommendations of the master plan, but rather to supplement the plan with the most up-to-date economic data to better guide decision-making and target funding of limited budgetary resources.

The updated market analysis for High Bridge Trail State park, prepared by Vincent P. Magnini, Ph.D. of the Longwood University College of Business and Economics in 2025, is a key component of the master planning process. Dr. Magnini conducts market analyses through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Longwood University and

DCR using a variety of local, state, and national data sources on outdoor recreation usage trends, lodging supply and demand, tourist flow data, demographic trends, and climate. In addition, each analysis evaluates responses to the Virginia State Parks *Your Comments Count* survey and direct interactions with DCR leadership, park management, and staff to garner insights pertaining to the prioritization of future recreation offerings. By synthesizing primary and secondary data sources, the study is intended to inform future decisions made by park and agency leadership regarding the prioritization of capital investments pertaining to facilities, marketing, outreach, partnerships, operations, park design, staffing, and revenue generation (Magnini, 2025).

The qualitative and quantitative research conducted in the development of the market analysis is summarized by 38 key takeaways (KTs). For brevity, only takeaways most relevant to master planning are summarized in this section.

SERVICE AREA DEMOGRAPHICS

As depicted in Figure 30, the primary service area was specified using a two-hour driving radius around the park. The secondary service area encompasses a five-hour driving radius which extends to Harrisburg, PA to the north, and Columbia, SC to the south.

The primary service area for High Bridge Trail State Park is moderately populated; 2.78 million people reside in the primary service area. In recent years, the most significant growth in the primary service area has occurred in localities on the west side of the Richmond metropolitan area; Chesterfield, Goochland, and Louisa counties rank among the top in the state in population growth. The total population of the primary service area is projected to increase 10.8% by 2029, while the population of the secondary service area is projected to grow 11.84% during the same period. Both service areas have experienced considerable growth in the 65+ age cohort as a percentage of the overall population, which is forecasted to continue during the next five years. The actual and projected changes in the demographic characteristics of the primary and secondary service areas over time are shown in the graphs below in Figures 31 and 32 below.



Figure 30 - Primary and Secondary Service Areas

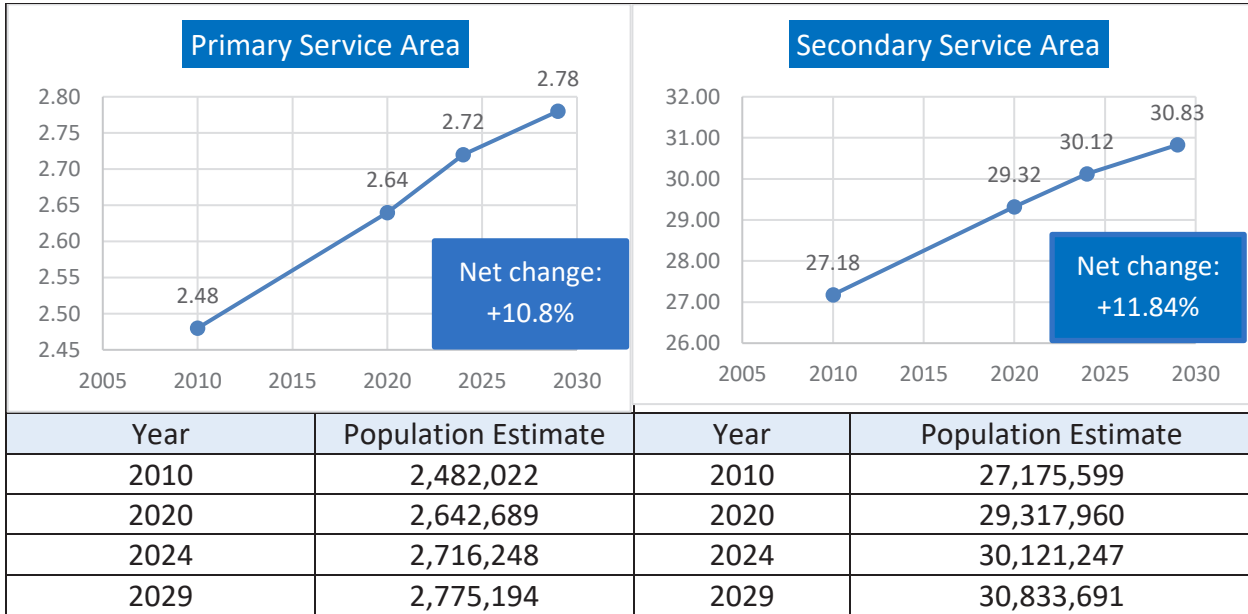


Figure 31 - Actual/Projected Population Change in the Primary and Secondary Service Areas

Age Category	Primary Service Area (Percent of Population)				Secondary Service Area (Percent of Population)			
	2010 Census	2020 Census	2024 Estimated	2029 Projected	2010 Census	2020 Census	2024 Estimated	2029 Projected
0-4	5.9%	5.3%	5.2%	5.1%	6.4%	5.5%	5.5%	5.4%
5-9	6.1%	5.7%	5.6%	5.2%	6.5%	6.0%	5.9%	5.4%
10-14	6.3%	6.1%	5.7%	5.6%	6.5%	6.4%	6.0%	5.9%
15-19	7.2%	6.7%	6.5%	6.2%	6.9%	6.6%	6.4%	6.1%
20-24	7.0%	6.7%	6.7%	6.4%	7.0%	6.7%	6.7%	6.5%
25-34	12.2%	13.0%	12.9%	12.8%	13.3%	13.4%	13.4%	13.3%
35-44	13.1%	11.9%	12.6%	13.0%	13.8%	12.8%	13.4%	13.5%
45-54	15.3%	12.3%	11.8%	11.8%	14.9%	12.7%	12.4%	12.3%
55-64	12.9%	14.0%	13.0%	11.9%	12.0%	13.2%	12.5%	11.8%
65-74	7.7%	11.1%	11.4%	12.0%	7.0%	9.9%	10.3%	11.0%
75-84	4.4%	5.4%	6.4%	7.6%	4.0%	4.8%	5.6%	6.7%
85+	1.8%	2.0%	2.1%	2.5%	1.6%	1.8%	1.9%	2.2%

Figure 32 - Actual/Projected Population Change By Age in the Primary and Secondary Service Areas

Other key takeaways of the market analysis with respect to changing demographics in the primary and secondary service areas were:

1. Projected growth in the primary and secondary service areas in the 65+ age cohort over the next five years has implications for design decisions related to universal accessibility and how the park is marketed and promoted as an accessible recreational venue.
2. In both the primary and secondary service areas, the U.S. Census Bureau's "White alone" demographic category has decreased significantly, and the "Hispanic Origin" demographic category has increased significantly in relative size in comparison to other race/ethnic categories in recent years. This trend is forecasted to continue throughout the coming years, which has implications for marketing, signage, programming, and routine operations as the park continues its efforts to be welcoming to all visitors.
3. The median household income in the primary service area is lower than the median household income in the secondary service area and nationally (approximately eight percent lower). An estimated 18.1 percent of residents in Prince Edward County live below the poverty line, including an estimated one-quarter of children, figures significantly higher both Virginia and national figures. An established body of research demonstrates strong correlations between poverty and obesity and links between childhood outdoor recreation participation and participation during later life stages. These findings have significant implications for how the park is marketed and promoted as a relatively inexpensive, accessible recreational and fitness venue to children and adults.

TOURISM AND RECREATION TRENDS

The market analysis noted the following takeaways regarding tourism and recreation participation trends applicable to master planning for High Bridge Trail State Park:

1. Tourists' recreational and retail spending in Prince Edward County are slightly lower than the median amount recorded across all Virginia municipalities. However, tourists' spending on lodging and restaurants in Prince Edward are slightly higher than the median amount recorded across all Virginia municipalities.
2. Within park's primary service area, the popularity of walking for exercise, horseback riding, birdwatching, freshwater fishing, camping, and barbequing exceed national averages. This master plan adds opportunities and amenities for visitors wishing to engage in these pursuits.
3. Within the park's secondary service area, the popularity of jogging/running, walking for exercise, hiking, backpacking, mountain biking, birdwatching, freshwater fishing, camping, and barbequing exceed national averages. This master plan adds opportunities and amenities for visitors wishing to engage in these pursuits.

4. In both the primary and secondary service areas, residents' expenditures on sports and recreational equipment exceed national averages. The availability and affordability of equipment rentals such as bicycles and e-bikes is a key consideration for increasing visitation and expanding access to individuals of different abilities, interests, and incomes.

ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change could have an influence on the park in the coming years. Consequently, the park should consider the following measures:

1. Installing more shaded picnic areas and adding more shade to existing picnic areas.
2. Having robust plans for invasive species control and removal.
3. Knowing that soft demand during peak summer hours will persist and may even further soften as the area experiences an increased number of 90-plus degree days.
4. Actively marketing "beat the heat" trail visits in dawn and dusk summertime hours and actively marketing its lodging options year-round.
5. Displaying signage encouraging visitors to carry mobile devices that can alert them of weather hazards such as tornado watches.
6. Installing more water stations along the trail.
7. Actively marketing High Bridge Trail State Park as a four-seasons experience that can be a great way to get fresh air and de-stress during the cooler months.

VISITOR SENTIMENTS AND PERCEPTIONS

Visitors' ratings of natural and historic resources, activities and programs, facilities, parking, grounds, fees, cleanliness, and staff are mostly positive and are not significantly different than the park system-wide average. Visitors rated the High Bridge and the quality of the views from the bridge as favorite aspects of the park, and many respondents expressed a desire for an increased number of programs occurring on bicycle. A full 100 percent of respondents would recommend the park to a friend.

The market analysis identified the following several key takeaways regarding visitor satisfaction that pinpoint potential areas for improvement to facilities and programs:

1. Visitors place the highest value on the High Bridge and views from the bridge. Visitors also value the recreational uses of the trail, the history of the bridge, and the accessibility of the park.

2. Visitors' ratings of High Bridge Trail State Parks' staff availability for security and assistance are significantly lower than the park system-wide average, likely driven by the fact that, since High Bridge Trail is a 32-mile-long trail park, many visitors may never encounter a member of park staff.
3. The desire for a visitor center was addressed by completion of the High Bridge Station Visitor Center in April 2025.
4. Visitors were clear regarding their desires for what should be added to the park, namely the installation of more potable water stations along the trail and gradually replacing the current vault-style toilets along the trail with more permanent restroom facilities.

BALANCING MARKET DEMAND AND CAPACITY

The research underlying the market analysis found that the park successfully balances supply and demand for park facilities at High Bridge Trail State Park, particularly when the park hosts organized events, such as races, throughout the year. Even during the busiest months, as a 32-mile trail, the park can accommodate many visitors simultaneously without reaching capacity.

For High Bridge Trail State Park, the most formidable attendance obstacle is the summer heat. To address this challenge, the park hosts summer events during cooler hours closer to dawn or after dusk. The success of this approach is demonstrated by the highly successful Firefly Festival in mid-June that begins at 9:00 p.m. and sells out every year. Semi-structured events are also hosted in the summer with staggered participation times to help beat the heat. In these types of events, participants are provided with time slots so that not everyone is using the trail at a single time.



NEEDS ASSESMENT AND PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

This section of the report describes the process DCR followed to determine the need for improvements and upgrades to facilities at High Bridge Trail State Park. These efforts resulted in a proposed plan for phased development of potential facilities and infrastructure as well as development cost and operational, maintenance, and staffing needs. These proposals include details regarding the sizes, types, and locations of facilities and associated infrastructure, including roads and utilities.

The needs assessment for the park involved an evaluation of key sources of input including the 2022 Virginia Outdoors Survey, 2025 Market Analysis, 2024-2025 *Your Comments Count* survey results for the park, DCR (including PRR) staff, Virginia State Parks staff, and the public at two public meetings held specifically for this purpose.

EVALUATION OF PARK NEEDS

Using the results of the Visitor Experience exercise, the agency conducted a Needs Assessment workshop to identify opportunities for expanding recreational offerings with the goal of fulfilling the evolving needs of users within the park's Visitor Experience Areas while protecting natural and cultural resources. These discussions were guided by survey results and other public input collected at the statewide, local, and park level regarding user preferences, visitation trends, and recreational activities pursued at the park.

The assessment harnessed various sources of public input, the results of which are summarized in the sections that follow, in addition to the knowledge of park staff, to guide planning recommendations with respect to locations and extents of future facilities and infrastructure. This plan also considers both present and future development, operational and maintenance costs, and staffing to determine how best to address the specific needs of various user groups while prioritizing improvements by development phase to ensure that the facilities most needed for public safety, or to protect park resources, are constructed earliest during implementation of the proposed development plan.

PUBLIC INPUT

Virginia Outdoors Survey

The Virginia Outdoors Survey is conducted every five years to inform DCR's statewide strategy for outdoor recreation contained in VOP. The most recent survey was fielded between June and September 2022 utilizing both a statistically significant probability sample, designed to allow for generalizations of the population statewide and within four geographic regions of the state, and a second crowd-sourced approach to understand the perspectives of more motivated user groups. The results of the survey provide feedback from Virginians regarding which types of recreation activities are most popular, ways in which outdoor recreation can be improved, and how respondents' perspectives varied depending on demographic as well as other differences.

Table 4 below compares the statewide results of questions aimed at respondents' preferred activities for both the probability sample and crowd-source surveys. Probability sample respondents were statistically sampled and therefore considered more representative of views of the broader statewide population. Crowd-sourced respondents, whether having a basic interest in outdoor recreation or belonging to an interest group associated with a specific recreational activity, were self-selected individuals who chose to participate in an online survey. The crowd-source effort is helpful for understanding the perspectives of more motivated users and groups that may not have been included in large numbers in the probability-based survey. Notably, crowd-source survey participants tended to be slightly younger, more affluent, more active, and more likely to engage in outdoor recreation for exercise or simply to experience nature than those in the probability sample.

The table below demonstrates respondents’ answers for the probability sample and crowd-source survey with respect to trail-based recreation and related activities undertaken mostly in Virginia during the past 12 months. The survey was initiated amidst a backdrop of ancillary data demonstrating that, in general, the public is not only seeking additional opportunities to explore the outdoors, but also varied and novel ways to enjoy and interact with the outdoor environment once they arrive. Only activities that received at least a 10 percent (%) response rate statewide on either survey are included in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4: Trail-Based Activities, Activity Occurred Mostly in Virginia, Probability and Crowd-Source Surveys, 2022 Virginia Outdoors Survey

Activity	Percent (%) Response Probability Sample	Percent (%) Response Crowd-Source
Walking for pleasure	70.4	75.9
Visiting parks (local, state, national)	38.5	61.4
Nature-based tours/trails	30.5	48.1
Visiting natural areas	29.6	48.9
Visiting historic areas	27.1	38.4
Hiking/backpacking day trips	23.3	46.1
Viewing scenery	22.9	42.3
Jogging/running	22.0	24.9
Picnicking away from home	20.8	32.3
Paved or gravel bicycle trails	17.0	27.4
Walks/runs/challenge-based events	12.1	16.1
Mountain biking	9.0	14.2
Horseback riding	5.9	12.0

These results demonstrate that the most popular trail-based activities received significantly higher responses for the crowd-source survey than the probability sample. Since crowd-source respondents tend to be highly motivated, more frequent trail users, they have the potential for generating greater impacts than their numbers would otherwise indicate. For that reason, understanding the differences between such users and less frequent, casual visitors that are more likely to engage in passive pursuits is critical to ensuring that facilities address the varying impacts, and cater to the different needs, of both types of users.

Table 5: Needed Activities, Probability Sample and Crowd-Source Surveys, 2022 Virginia Outdoors Survey

Activity	Percent (%) Response Probability Sample	Percent (%) Response Crowd-Source
Walking for pleasure	48.0	53.7
Visiting parks (local, state, national)	35.1	47.1
Nature-based tours/trails	34.1	52.1
Visiting gardens/arboretums	30.2	36.8
Visiting natural areas	28.9	42.8
Visiting historic areas	26.1	29.6
Picnicking away from home	24.3	25.1
Hiking/backpacking day trips	22.9	40.0
Paved or gravel bicycle trails	20.7	29.9
Jogging/running	19.2	17.1
Viewing scenery	19.0	29.1
Fitness trail, not jogging	18.3	15.1
Walks/runs/challenge-based events	18.1	15.9
Horseback riding	17.2	20.7
Mountain biking	11.1	16.7
Cross country ski/snowshoe	10.9	19.7

Comparisons of other top recreational activities pursued by trail enthusiasts relative to the needs cited by these same users reveal important clues about the need for new or expanded facilities at rail-to-trail parks. Notably, if a significantly higher percentage of respondents indicated a need for a specific activity than engaged in that activity in Virginia, one may reasonably infer that the need for that facility exceeds its availability and, furthermore, that additional facilities for that activity would help reduce this disparity and fulfill the unmet need.

Of the trail-based activities that experience the highest levels of participation in Virginia, walking for pleasure, visiting a park, nature-based trails, visiting natural and historic areas, hiking, viewing scenery, and jogging/running were cited as being needed less frequently, or at roughly the same rate, as being conducted by respondents during the previous year. One takeaway from this comparison is that opportunities for pursuing these activities in Virginia are relatively abundant and that respondents, for the most part, were sufficiently able to access trails for these purposes. High Bridge Trail State Park is one of many popular trail destinations located within an hour-and-a-half drive of Richmond that

support these activities; many visitors come to the park to explore its history, natural beauty and scenery; hike, walk for pleasure, or exercise on park trails; or engage in a combination of these pursuits. As a result, the park caters to recreational trail needs that are among the foremost of Virginians as expressed in the 2022 statewide survey. The recommendations of this master plan recognize and reflect the need to maintain this level of service to the public by continuing to foster and improve opportunities for these pursuits at High Bridge Trail State Park.

In terms of other popular trail-based activities, bicycle trails, picnicking, walking or running challenge-based events, mountain biking, and horseback riding were cited on one or both surveys as being needed at a higher rate than being conducted in Virginia, indicating a potential need for these activities that exceeds current participation rates. Accordingly, the recommendations below prioritize the potential for new and expanded facilities for such activities on the properties comprising the state park, where appropriate.

Although the park does not currently contain overnight facilities, this master plan includes an evaluation of the statewide survey data pertaining to overnight accommodations at Virginia State Parks to determine the relative statewide demand for, and satisfaction with, such facilities. Probability sample respondents expressed a clear preference for staying at state parks that have cabin rentals rather than those having only campgrounds, although only 20.4 percent of respondents had attempted to reserve either a cabin or campsite at a state park during the past year. Of those, more than half (55.4%) were unable to make a reservation primarily due to a lack of availability on their preferred dates. A larger share of respondents had engaged in drive-in camping at a Virginia State Park during the past year; the majority rated flush toilets, electric hook-ups, hot showers, security patrols, electric/water hook-ups, and a camp store as important or very important to their camping experience. The survey results indicate that demand for overnight facilities at Virginia State Parks tends to exceed availability of prospective users' preferred accommodation on preferred dates, indicating a need to expand cabins, lodges, and campsites where feasible, particularly where park- or district-level data support statewide findings.

Public Meetings

The agency held two public meetings as part of the master plan process. Both meetings were held at the Farmville Town Council Meeting Chambers at the Town Hall in Farmville, Virginia. The Public Information Meeting was held on October 21, 2024 to introduce the public to the master plan process, discuss critical resources in the park, and respond to questions from attendees. This meeting also gave participants an initial opportunity at the beginning of the master plan process to express their ideas about what should be added and improved at the park. The second public meeting was the Public Comment Meeting conducted on October 6, 2025, at which staff presented the Visitor Experience summary and proposed development plan for the park and received comments from those in attendance. The meeting was followed by a 30-day public comment period during which the public was invited to comment on the plan's recommendations by emailing DCR staff.

Your Comments Count

In addition to the public input survey, Virginia State Parks solicits public input for individual state parks on its website via the *Your Comments Count* (YCC) survey, responses for which are compiled quarterly. In addition to questions related to customer satisfaction, the survey includes questions specifically aimed at master planning that focus on user attitudes, activities, and sensibilities. Due to its high participation rate, the YCC survey represents a valuable tool for gauging user sentiments and preferences for state park planning.

The master plan utilized survey data for 2024-2025 during which the master planning process was ongoing. Responses received to questions most relevant to the planning of current and future recreational facilities and improvements at High Bridge Trail State Park are summarized in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Summary of Responses, “Your Comments Count” Survey, 2024 –2025

Question	2024	2025
Distance from the park	Within 50 miles (46.1%) Within 50 miles (42.7%)	Within 50 miles (42.7%) 50 miles or more away (57.3%)
Day use activities during this visit	Hiking (41.0%) Bicycling (26.9%) Picnicking (4.9%) Birding (4.9%) Educational programs (4.4%)	Hiking (55.2%) Bicycling (17.2%) Educational programs (6.0%) Picnicking (6.0%) Birding (6.0%)
Satisfaction with day use facilities used during your stay*	Trails (4.81) Playgrounds (4.55) Disability access (4.39) Picnic areas (4.34) Restrooms (4.3)	Visitor Center** (4.87) Trails (4.87) Restrooms (4.72) Picnic areas (4.65) Disability access (4.53) Playgrounds (4.25)
Natural/historic resources*	4.72	4.82
Park activities/ programs*	4.55	4.74

* Numbers represent the average rank on a scale of 1 (unacceptable) to 5 (excellent).

** The visitor center opened to the public in April 2025.

Hiking and bicycling were the most popular day-use activities in 2024 and 2025, although hiking experienced an increase in popularity, while bicycling experienced a modest decline, in 2025 compared to 2024. The new visitor center at High Bridge Station, completed and opened to the public in April 2025, ranked highest in terms of visitor satisfaction along with the park’s trails. Construction of the visitor center added restrooms with flush toilets to an area that previously contained only a vault toilet, resulting in a substantial increase in visitors’ satisfaction with park restrooms. The adjacent picnic area and access to the park for visitors with disabilities also ranked higher

in 2025 than 2024 (see Figure 33), while the playground was the only facility for which visitor sentiment declined. The park’s natural and historic resources and, particularly, educational programs and activities both ranked higher in 2025 than 2024, indicating a high and rising level of satisfaction generally with park resources, programs, and activities.

Although the park does not currently contain overnight facilities, DCR compiled and analyzed occupancy rates for cabins, lodges, and campgrounds at nearby state parks, namely Bear Creek Lake, Holiday Lake, and Twin Lakes, to determine the relative need for overnight facilities at High Bridge Trail State Park. The Bear Creek Lake campground experienced the highest occupancy; weekend occupancy including closures during peak (summer) season was 93.1% compared to 90.3% occupancy at all state park campgrounds during FY2023-2024. Campground occupancy at Holiday Lake (86.6%) and Twin Lakes (87.1%) was likewise high during the same period, resulting in a combined weekend occupancy rate of 89.3% for all three parks during peak season. Of these, cabins are present only at Bear Creek Lake and Twin Lakes; weekend occupancy during the summer months (inclusive of closures) for lodging at these parks was 94.3% for cabins and 90.7% for lodges, similar to rates for the entire state park system. In essence, both campgrounds and cabins at nearby state parks are nearly fully occupied on weekends during the summer months, indicating that demand for overnight accommodations at nearby state parks likely exceeds the availability of campsites and cabins during times of peak demand.



Figure 33 – Picnic area at High Bridge Station

PARK VISITATION

Virginia State Parks tracks monthly and annual visitation to all state parks including High Bridge Trail State Park. Table 7 depicts total park attendance during the period from 2021 to 2025.

Table 7: High Bridge Trail State Park Visitation

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Total	159,990	138,235	320,771	203,905	326,874

In 2025, High Bridge Trail State Park had 326,874 visitors, an average annual increase of 26.1% since 2021. The park experienced a significant spike in visitation in 2023, which declined to a more modest number in 2024 before rising sharply again in 2025

to more than twice as many visitors as 2021. The master plan recommendations, once implemented, are expected to improve the experiences of visitors and further increase visitation to the park during the planning timeframe. This increase, in turn, will have a positive impact on tourism and spending in the region, generating positive impacts on local and regional economic activity. A more detailed analysis of park visitation trends and their projected impacts are detailed in the High Bridge Trail State Park Market Analysis, which is summarized above in a separate section of this plan.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT APPROACH

The needs for state parks vary significantly depending on a variety of factors including the purpose of the park, existing conditions, user characteristics, desired visitor experiences, and proposed and existing infrastructure in both the park and the surrounding community.

DCR utilized the following approach for conducting the Needs Assessment for High Bridge Trail State Park:

1. Staff compiled and evaluated the 2024-2025 results of the *Your Comments Count* survey, 2025 Market Analysis, and visitation data during the past five years within the larger context of statewide and regional outdoor recreation preferences and trends as identified in the 2022 Virginia Outdoors Survey. Updated summaries of these results were presented to the Master Plan Team at the Visitor Experience and Needs Assessment workshops as well as to the public at the Public Comment Meeting on October 6, 2025. Staff utilized public input throughout the planning process as a basis for identifying future development needs and the locations and details for proposed facilities at the park.
2. Staff conducted an internal Needs Assessment workshop at the High Bridge Station Visitor Center involving the Master Plan Team. Participants discussed the locations of new, expanded, and renovated facilities within the Experience Areas of the park. Participants then prioritized developments into one of three phases whereby Phase 1 represented the most immediate and significant development needs and Phases 2 and 3 corresponded to intermediate-term and long-term needs, respectively.
3. Staff presented the map of proposed developments and the phased development plan to the public at the Public Comment Meeting and reviewed comments received during the following 30-day period to ensure that the needs and concerns of visitors and local communities were reflected in the recommendations.

The Master Plan Team identified resolution of the following issues involving connections to adjacent uses, trailhead accommodations, bridges, and overnight facilities as critical and a necessary initial step for planning developments and improvements at the park:

- Acquisition of the remaining right-of-way and extension of the trail to the Town of Burkeville along the easternmost section of the former railroad would complete the High Bridge Trail and represents a top priority of the master plan.

- The High Bridge remains the most popular park destination and a focal attraction, including for night events like the park’s signature Firefly Festival. The master plan recommends enhancements to the bridge to improve the viewing experience, increase visitor interest, and encourage public participation at special events and night activities.
- Since initial construction, the wooden deck on the High Bridge has already been replaced once at a cost of nearly \$360,000. The estimated cost of redecking the High Bridge at present is more than double that amount and is expected to continue to rise in coming years due to escalating material and construction costs. This master plan addresses the need to replace the bridge’s deck and railings with longer-lasting materials to reduce the need for more frequent and costly future replacements.



Figure 34 – High Bridge Station Visitor Center

- The new High Bridge Station Visitor Center has increased visitation to the park and improved visitor satisfaction generally, creating the need for additional recreation amenities, parking, and contact station to serve this central park hub offering the shortest access to the High Bridge (see Figure 34).
- The park aims to make existing trailheads in rural towns and villages an integral part of the local community by enhancing visitors’ and residents’ sense of place, establishing physical connections between High Bridge Trail State Park and the community, adding context-appropriate recreational amenities, and facilitating local tourism and economic development initiatives. By contrast, certain remote trailhead parking areas or access points that lack visibility or “eyes on the street” necessary for creating a sense of safety and security were identified for elimination, particularly if they are seldom used or the site of reported vandalism, trash, or illicit activities.
- The park’s current larger properties, including Piney Grove, Rochelle, and High Bridge Station, are not optimally suited for overnight use due to various site constraints, including proximity to adjacent uses, topography, lack of adequate road access or frontage, presence of potential historic resources, and related factors. The Master Plan Team agreed to prioritize potential acquisition of suitable property for future overnight uses rather than proposing such facilities on existing properties that are not particularly suited for overnight accommodations. DCR will continue

to explore potential land donations and acquisition of additional properties for High Bridge Trail State Park specifically for the construction of camping and lodging facilities. In addition, the agency will continue to pursue new and expanded overnight facilities at nearby Farmville Five parks to meet demand in District 4 and the Virginia State Parks system.

- Although High Bridge Trail State Park permits horseback riding on the main rail-to-trail and features an equestrian parking area at High Bridge Station, the park has not historically experienced significant usage or demand by equestrians. Survey data suggests equestrian users prefer adjacent state parks that offer better trail riding experiences and amenities. Consequently, additional equestrian facilities are not included in the recommendations below.

Following discussion and resolution of these concerns, staff identified additional needs and issued recommendations regarding the sizes, types, and locations of day-use and staff facilities, including parking, utilities, and associated infrastructure. These proposed improvements were categorized in terms of immediate (Phase 1) priorities, intermediate (Phase 2) needs, and long-term (Phase 3) improvements. This ranking exercise and subsequent input by agency and Virginia State Parks leadership resulted in the Phased Development Plan described in detail below and shown on the maps in Figures 37.1-37.7.

PHASED DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Phase 1

Phase 1 addresses the following immediate and high-priority needs at the park focusing on completing the trail to Burkeville and enhancing the High Bridge and High Bridge Station area as a focal point of park visitation:

- Acquisition of the remaining railroad right-of-way and extension of the High Bridge Trail to the Town of Burkeville.
- Replacement of the wooden deck of the High Bridge with a more sustainable and durable material (e.g., masonry).
- Replacement of the existing wood-frame railings on the High Bridge with more sustainable and durable materials (e.g., composite wood) and increasing the mesh size in the chain link for improved visibility.
- Installation of glass observation ports on the deck of the High Bridge and on each of the three railings at the two observation areas.
- Construction of the first picnic shelter in the existing picnic area on the interior of the looped parking lot at High Bridge Station.



Figure 35 – Existing railroad crossing in the Town of Pamplin City

- Construction of a second picnic area at High Bridge Station in the wooded area lying between Camp Paradise Road near the gravel equestrian parking lot and the High Bridge Trail, to include paving and striping of the parking lot.
- Installation of an exhibit at High Bridge Station consisting of two mid-train cars (box car, passenger car, etc.) situated on a short section of restored railroad track.
- Additional restrooms at High Bridge Station including a water bottle filling station.
- Construction of a small storage building at High Bridge Station designed to resemble a freight depot.
- Demolition of the small dilapidated (green) building at the Rice trailhead.
- Replacement of the wooden deck of the River Road, Mill Street, and Buffalo Creek bridges in Farmville with a more sustainable and durable material (e.g., masonry).
- Elimination of the 3rd Street trailhead parking area in Farmville.
- Construction of a western maintenance area and building on park-owned property in Prospect.
- Extension of the trail from the parking area in Pamplin to the property line at the existing, at-grade public street crossing of the Norfolk-Southern railroad to allow for future construction (by others) of a trail or sidewalk linking High Bridge Trail to the historic downtown (see Figure 35).

Phase 2

Phase 2 addresses the following intermediate needs at the park aimed at further enhancing the High Bridge for special events and improving trailheads in rural towns and villages located along the High Bridge Trail:

- Installation of ground-level accent lighting on the High Bridge to illuminate the deck for night events.
- Installation of railroad-themed lighting on the High Bridge Trail between the visitor center and High Bridge to illuminate the trail surface for night events.
- Expansion of side trails at High Bridge Station.
- Construction of side trails underneath the western end of the High Bridge.
- Construction of a second picnic shelter at High Bridge Station in the second picnic area proposed during Phase 1 in the wooded area between Camp Paradise Road and the High Bridge Trail.

- Construction of a contact station on Camp Paradise Road.
- Relocation of the River Road trailhead parking area to the opposite (south) side of the road.
- Construction of a picnic area and picnic shelter at the River Road trailhead.
- Replacement of the existing vault toilet at the River Road trailhead with restrooms including a water bottle filling station.
- Installation of an accessible playground at the River Road trailhead.
- Construction of a trailhead parking area on Piney Grove Road for access to the Piney Grove tract.
- Construction of hiking and mountain biking trails at Piney Grove.
- Demolition of the existing steel building at the Rice trailhead and widening, paving, and striping of the Rice trailhead parking lot.
- Construction of a maintenance/storage building at the Rice trailhead containing public restrooms and including a water bottle filling station.
- Demolition of the vault toilet at the Rice trailhead.
- Replacement of the split-rail fencing at the Rice trailhead with context-appropriate fencing.
- Elimination of the East Osborn Road trailhead parking area in Farmville.
- Replacement of the existing wooden railings on the Buffalo Creek bridge with more sustainable and durable materials (e.g., composite wood).
- Construction of a picnic shelter at the Prospect trailhead designed to resemble a historic train depot.
- Replacement of the vault toilet at the Prospect trailhead with restrooms including a water bottle filling station.
- Construction of a picnic shelter at the Pamplin trailhead designed to resemble a historic train depot.
- Replacement of the portable toilet at the Pamplin trailhead with restrooms including a water bottle filling station.
- Installation of a caboose and a handcar exhibit at the Pamplin trailhead.
- Installation of a playground and bicycle skills course at the Pamplin trailhead.

Phase 3

Phase 3 includes the following long-term improvements to the park:

- Construction of an observation deck on the bluff west of the trail at the eastern end of the High Bridge (see Figure 36).
- Floodlighting to illuminate the southwest face of the High Bridge during night events.
- Construction of trail connections from the High Bridge Trail in the Town of Farmville to the property line to allow for connections (by others) to Wilck's Lake Park, Grove Street Park, and Riverside Park.
- Paving of the Prospect trailhead parking area and elimination of the western entrance.
- Installation of a tiny railcar or rail cart exhibit at the Prospect trailhead on a restored section of railroad track.

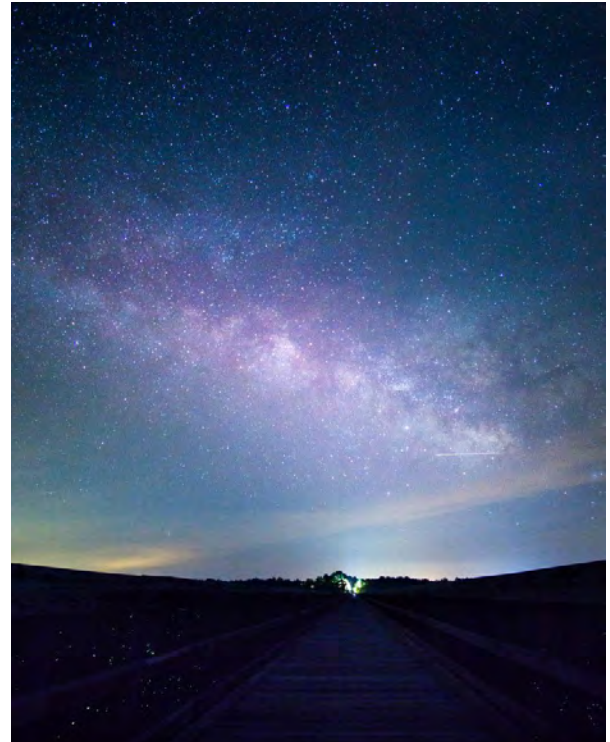


Figure 36 – The proposed observation deck will enhance viewing of the night sky at High Bridge

HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK PHASED DEVELOPMENT PLAN (PAMPLIN)

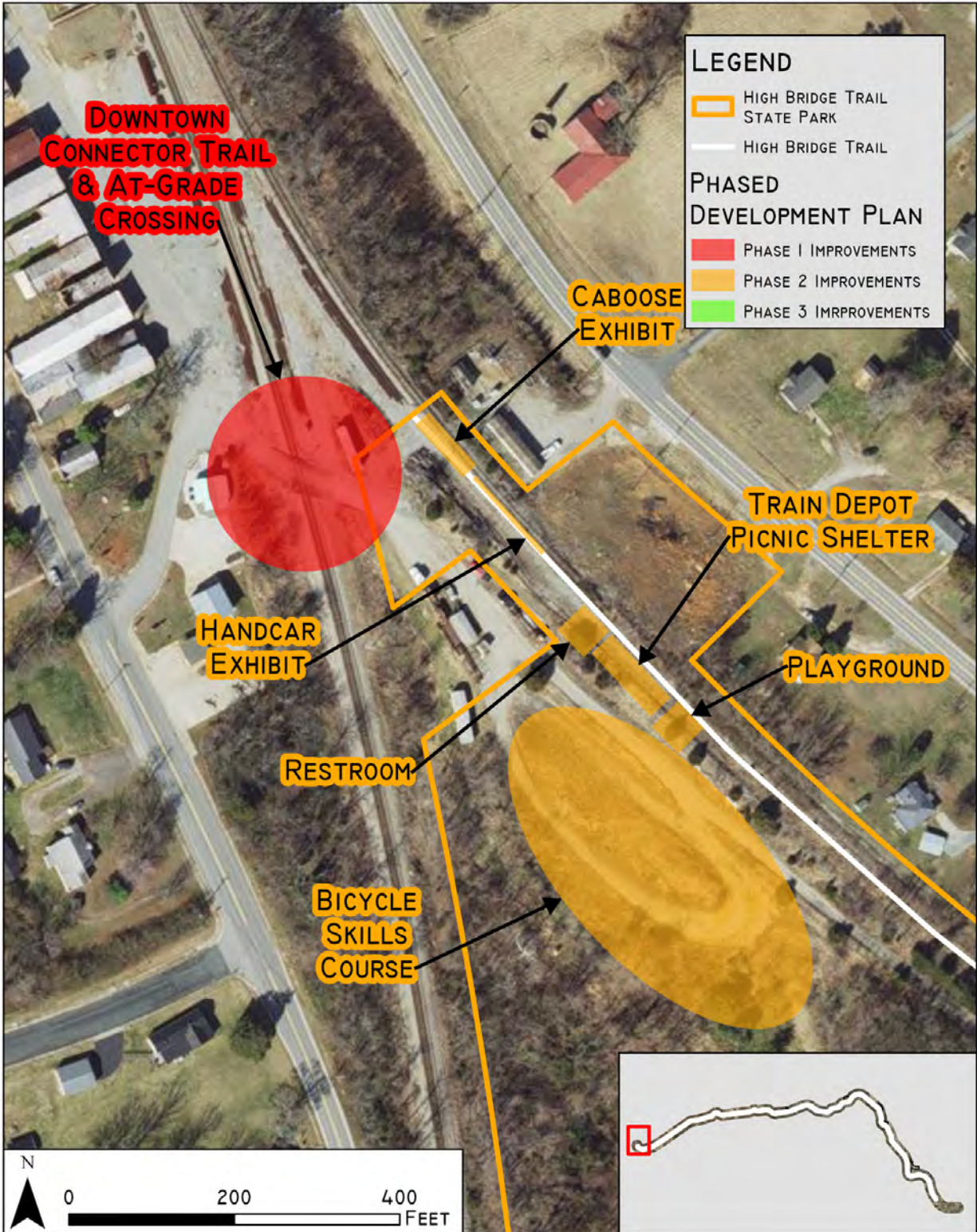


Figure 37.1 – Phased Development Plan, Pamplin

HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK PHASED DEVELOPMENT PLAN (PROSPECT)



Figure 37.2 – Phased Development Plan, Prospect

HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK PHASED DEVELOPMENT PLAN (FARMVILLE)

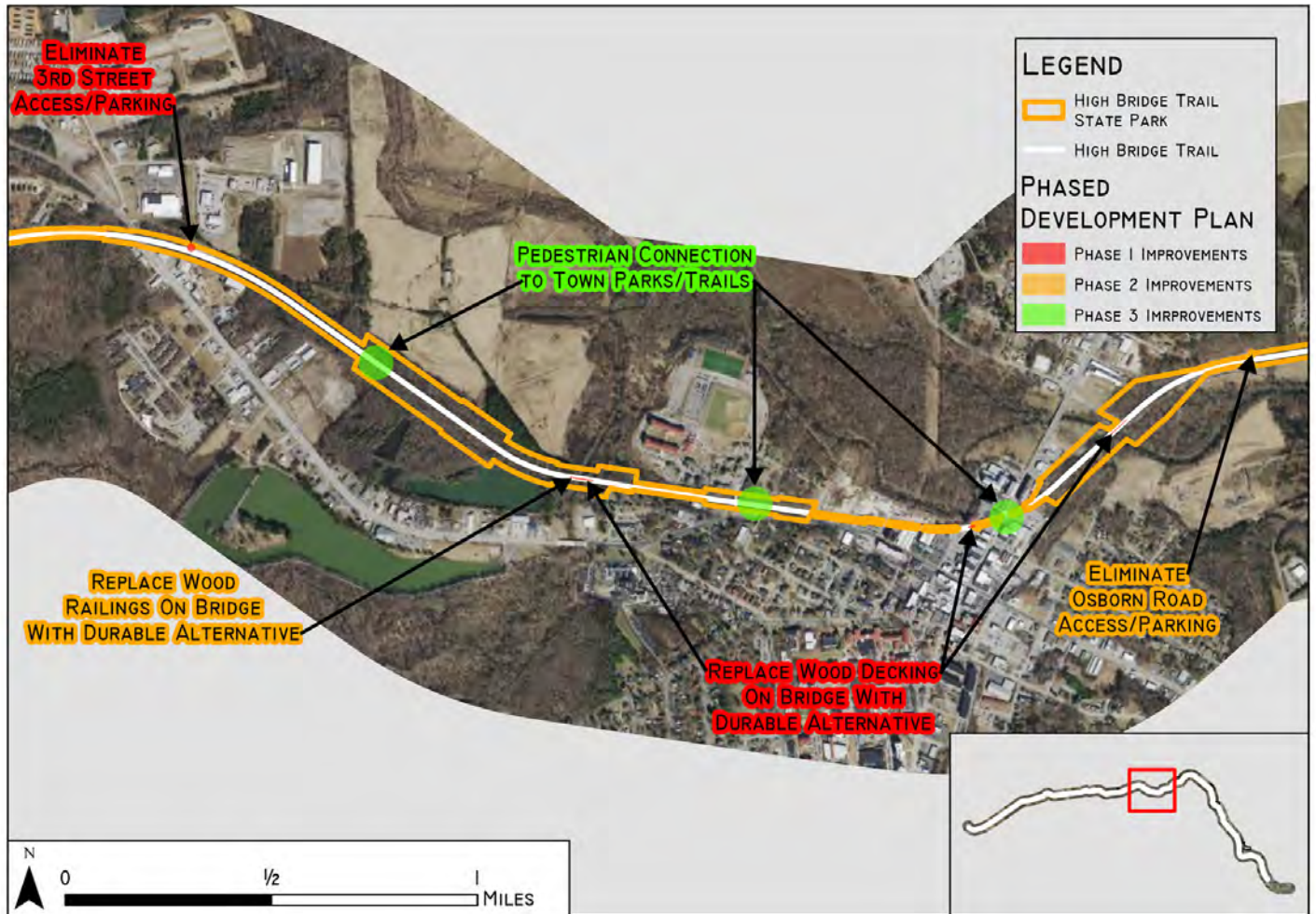


Figure 37.3 – Phased Development Plan, Farmville

HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK PHASED DEVELOPMENT PLAN (RIVER ROAD)

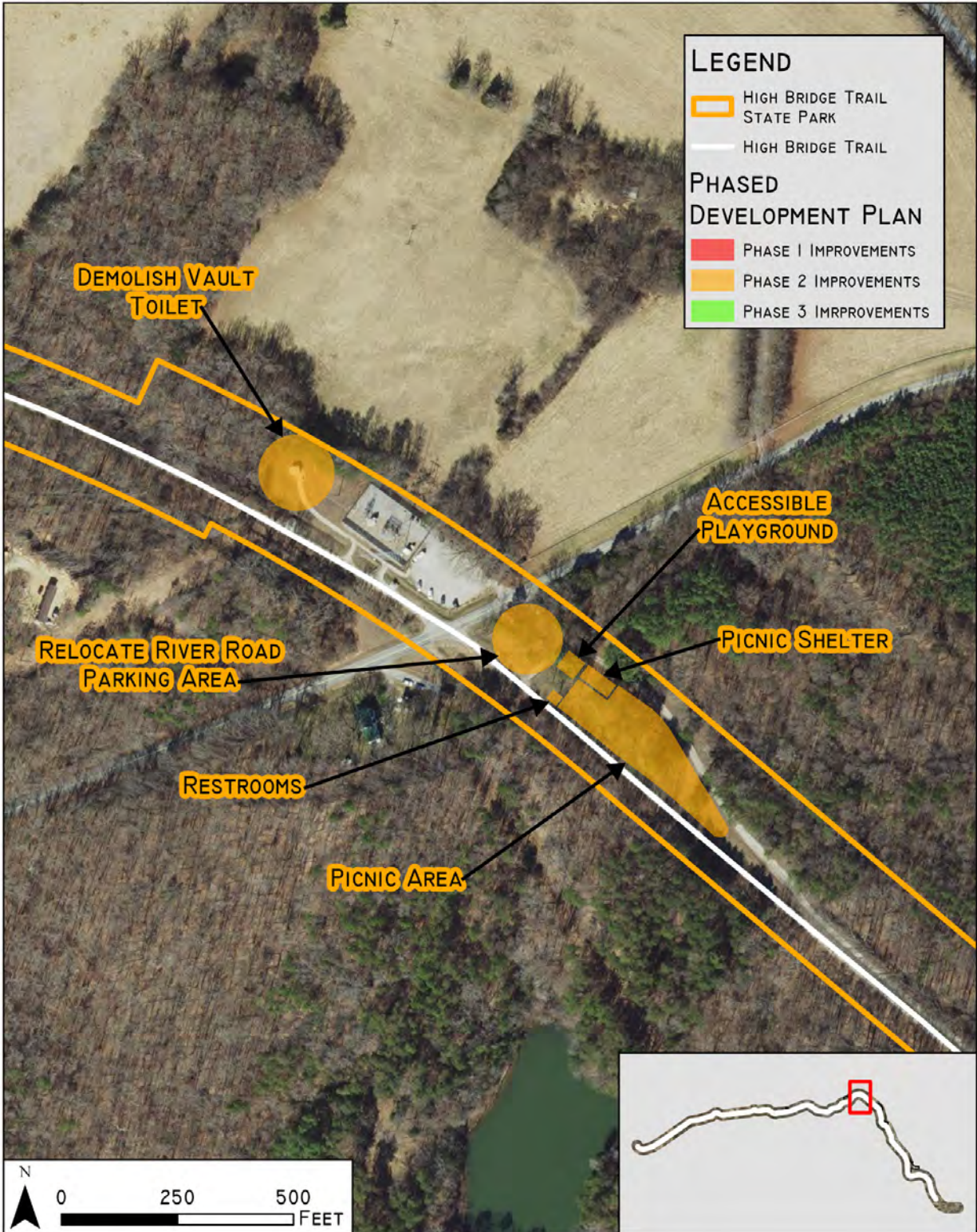


Figure 37.4 – Phased Development Plan, River Road

HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK PHASED DEVELOPMENT PLAN (HIGH BRIDGE STATION)

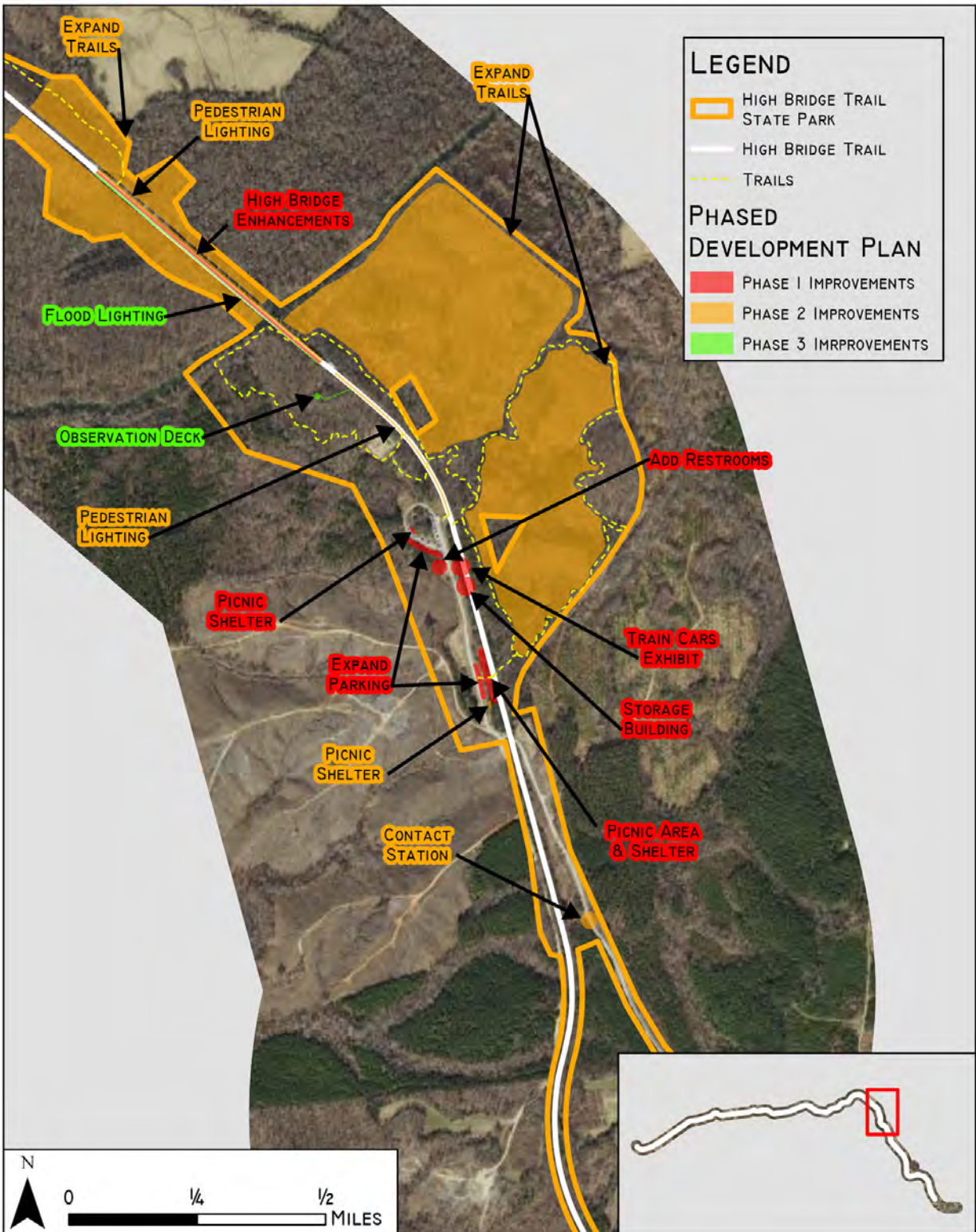


Figure 37.5 - Phased Development Plan, High Bridge Station

HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK PHASED DEVELOPMENT PLAN (RICE)



Figure 37.6 – Phased Development Plan, Rice

HIGH BRIDGE TRAIL STATE PARK PHASED DEVELOPMENT PLAN (PINEY GROVE)

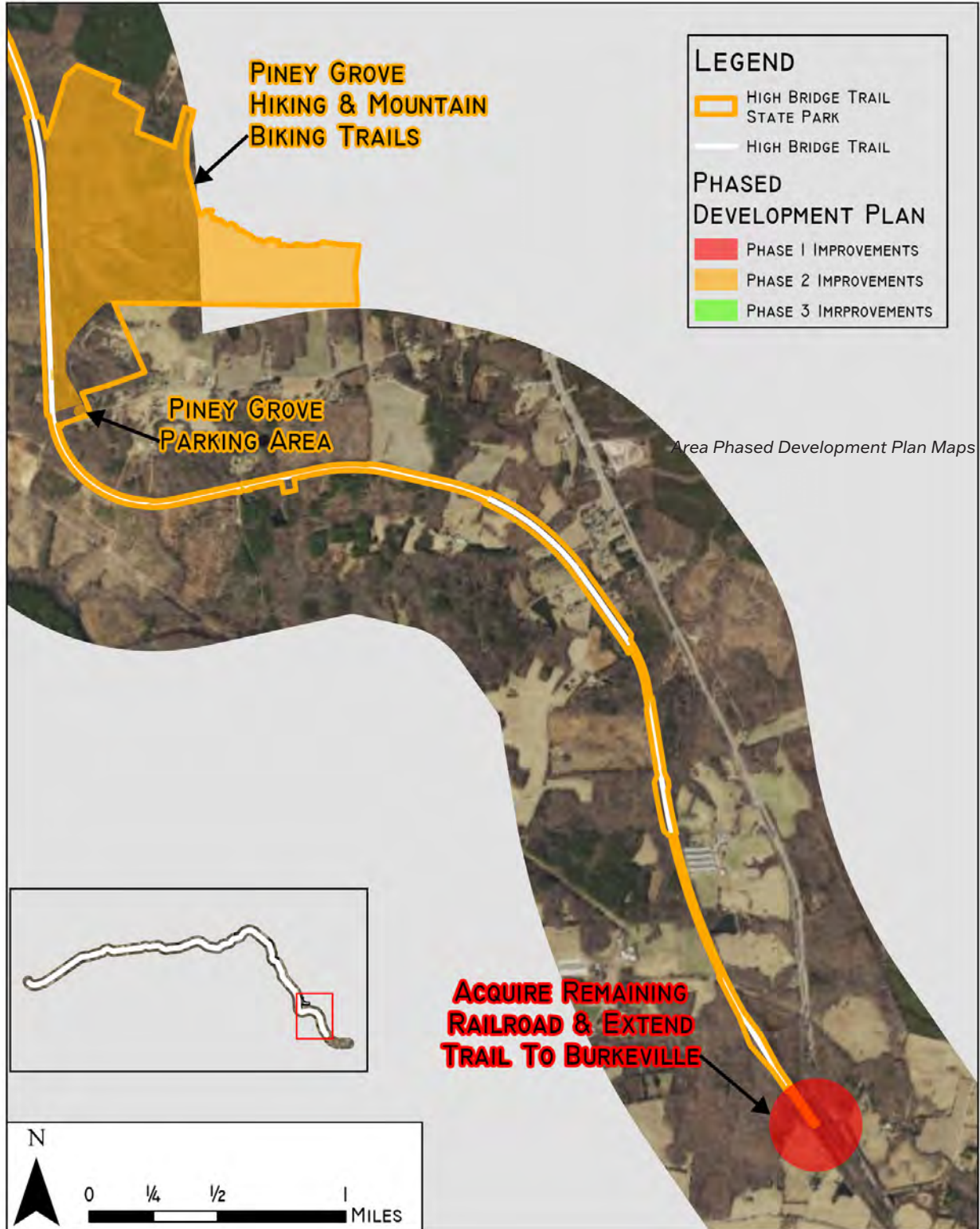


Figure 37.7 – Phased Development Plan, Piney Grove

**Table 8:
PLANNING BUREAU COST ANALYSIS – Estimated Cost
High Bridge Trail State Park Master Plan Phase 1**

Description	Quantity	Unit	Unit Cost	Total
Phase 1				
High Bridge Station				
Replace Wood Bridge Decking with Durable Alternative	25,000	SF	\$ 50	\$1,250,000
Replace Wood Railings with Durable Alternative	5,600	LF	\$ 80	\$448,000
Install Observation Ports in Bridge (Structural Upgrades)	3	EA	\$ 150,000	\$450,000
Install 5' X 4' Glass Railing Sections (6)	120	SF	\$ 600	\$72,000
Picnic Area Adjacent to Current Equestrian Parking Area	6	EA	\$ 15,000	\$90,000
Replace Equestrian Parking with Paved Lot - 10 sp.	400	SY	\$ 150	\$60,000
Large Picnic Shelter in Current Picnic Area	1	LS	\$ 150,000	\$150,000
New Restroom at High Bridge Station	1	LS	\$ 400,000	\$400,000
Sewer - Drainfield	1	LS	\$ 75,000	\$75,000
Water	500	LF	\$ 50	\$25,000
Electric	500	LF	\$ 50	\$25,000
Storage Building (Freight Depot Themed)	1,600	SF	\$ 400	\$640,000
Train Cars Exhibit (2)	2	LS	\$ 50,000	\$100,000
Pamplin				
Pedestrian Trail to Existing At-Grade Railroad Crossing Connecting to Historic Downtown	80	LF	\$ 300	\$24,000
Prospect				
Western Maintenance Building	1,500	SF	\$ 300	\$450,000
Water - New Well	1	LS	\$ 100,000	\$100,000
Sewer - Drainfield	1	LS	\$ 75,000	\$75,000
Water	500	LF	\$ 50	\$25,000
Electric	500	LF	\$ 50	\$25,000
Farmville Area				
Replace Wood Decking with Durable Alternative - River Rd. Bridge	4,000	SF	\$ 100	\$400,000
Replace Wood Decking with Durable Alternative - Mill St. Bridge	400	SF	\$ 100	\$40,000
Replace Wood Decking with Durable Alternative - Buffalo Creek Bridge	2,500	SF	\$ 100	\$250,000
Eliminate 3rd Street Parking Area	1	LS	\$ 10,000	\$10,000

Description	Quantity	Unit	Unit Cost	Total
Phase 1				
Rice				
Demo. Existing Green Building	1	LS	\$ 50,000	\$50,000
Piney Grove and Burkeville Area				
Acquire Property for Connection to Burkeville				
Extend Trail to Burkeville - 10' wide crushed stone	7,800	LF	\$ 50	\$390,000
PHASE 1 CONSTRUCTION SUBTOTAL				\$5,624,000
A/E Fee (17% see note 1) includes stormwater management and E&S control measures				\$956,080
SUBTOTAL				\$6,580,080
Contingency (10% see note 2)				\$562,400
Other Project Costs (10% see note 3)				\$658,008

Phase 1 Total **\$7,800,488**

**Table 9:
PLANNING BUREAU COST ANALYSIS – Estimated Cost
High Bridge Trail State Park Master Plan Phase 2**

Description	Quantity	Unit	Unit Cost	Total
Phase 2				
High Bridge Station and River Road				
New Contact Station on Camp Paradise Rd.	250	SF	\$ 400	\$100,000
Water - New Well	1	LS	\$ 100,000	\$100,000
Sewer - Drainfield	1	LS	\$ 75,0000	\$75,000
Water	500	LF	\$ 50	\$25,000
Electric	500	LF	\$ 50	\$25,000
Accent Lighting to Illuminate HB Deck Surface - spaced every 40' for 2,400 LF	2,400	LF	\$ 50	\$120,000
Lighting Along Trail Between High Bridge Station and Eastern End of Bridge (Railroad Theme)	60	EA	\$ 500	\$30,000
Expand Trails at High Bridge Station - 1.5 mi.	7,920	LF	\$ 50	\$396,000
Add Trails Underneath Western End of Bridge - 1.5 mi.	7,920	LF	\$ 50	\$396,000
Large Picnic Shelter in Proposed Picnic Area at High Bridge Station	1	EA	\$ 150,000	\$150,000
New Restroom at River Rd.	1	LS	\$ 400,000	\$400,000
Water - New Well	1	LS	\$ 150,000	\$150,000
Sewer - Drainfield	1	LS	\$ 75,000	\$75,000
Water	500	LF	\$ 50	\$25,000
Electric	500	LF	\$ 50	\$25,000
Demo. Vault Toilet at River Rd.	1	LS	\$ 25,000	\$25,000
Relocate River Rd. Parking Area - 20 sp.	800	SY	\$ 150	\$120,000
Small Picnic Shelter at River Rd. Parking Area	1	EA	\$ 100,000	\$100,000
Accessible Playground at River Rd. Parking Area	1	LS	\$ 75,000	\$75,000
Pamplin				
Large Picnic Shelter (Train Depot Theme)	1	LS	\$ 150,000	\$150,000
Caboose Exhibit	1	LS	\$ 75,000	\$75,000
Handcar Exhibit	1	LS	\$ 30,000	\$30,000
Bicycle Skills Course (Pump Track)	1	LS	\$ 30,000	\$30,000
Playground	1	LS	\$ 75,000	\$75,000
New Restroom at Pamplin	1	LS	\$ 400,000	\$400,000
Water - Connect to Town system	500	LF	\$ 50	\$25,000
Sewer - Connect to Town system	500	LF	\$ 50	\$25,000
Electric	500	LF	\$ 50	\$25,000

Description	Quantity	Unit	Unit Cost	Total
Phase 2				
Prospect				
Small Picnic Shelter (Train Depot Theme)	1	LS	\$ 150,000	\$150,000
New Restroom at Prospect	1	LS	\$ 400,000	\$400,000
Water - New Well	1	LS	\$ 150,000	\$150,000
Sewer - Drainfield	1	LS	\$ 75,000	\$75,000
Water	500	LF	\$ 50	\$25,000
Electric	500	LF	\$ 50	\$25,000
Demo. Vault Toilet at Prospect	1	LS	\$ 25,000	\$25,000
Farmville Area				
Replace Wood Railings with Durable Alternative - Buffalo Creek Bridge	500	LF	\$ 50	\$25,000
Eliminate Osborn Road Parking Area	1	LS	\$ 15,000	\$15,000
Rice				
Demo. Steel Building	1	LS	\$ 25,000	\$25,000
Widen and Pave Parking Lot	175	SY	\$ 150	\$26,250
Replace Ex. Fence with Context-Appropriate Fence	200	LF	\$ 100	\$20,000
Maintenance and Storage Bldg. with Public Restrooms	1	LS	\$ 400,000	\$400,000
Water - New Well	1	LS	\$ 150,000	\$150,000
Sewer - Drainfield	1	LS	\$ 75,000	\$75,000
Water	500	LF	\$ 50	\$25,000
Electric	500	LF	\$ 50	\$25,000
Demo. Vault Toilet at Rice	1	LS	\$ 25,000	\$25,000
Piney Grove and Burkeville Area				
Access Road at Piney Grove	500	LF	\$ 100	\$50,000
Parking Area at Piney Grove - 12 sp.	600	SY	\$ 150	\$90,000
Hiking Trails at Piney Grove - 3 mi.	15,840	LF	\$ 50	\$792,000
Mountain Biking Trails at Piney Grove - 3 mi.	15,840	LF	\$ 50	\$792,000
PHASE 2 CONSTRUCTION SUBTOTAL				\$6,232,250
A/E Fee (17% see note 1) includes stormwater management and E&S control measures				\$1,127,483
SUBTOTAL				\$7,759,733
Contingency (10% see note 2)				\$663,225
Other Project Costs (10% see note 3)				\$775,173
Phase 2 Total				\$9,198,931

**Table 10:
PLANNING BUREAU COST ANALYSIS – Estimated Cost
High Bridge Trail State Park Master Plan Phase 3**

Description	Quantity	Unit	Unit Cost	Total
Phase 3				
High Bridge Station and River Road				
Observation Deck at Eastern End of High Bridge	600	LF	\$ 200	\$120,000
Floodlighting to Illuminate Bridge from Below	12	EA	\$ 3,000	\$36,000
Prospect				
Pave Parking Area and Remove Western Entrance	890	SY	\$ 150	\$133,500
Tiny Railcar/Rail Cart Exhibit	1	LS	\$ 50,000	\$50,000
Farmville Area				
Pedestrian Connections to Town Parks	1,000	LF	\$ 50	\$50,000
PHASE 3 CONSTRUCTION SUBTOTAL				\$389,500
A/E Fee (17% see note 1) includes stormwater management and E&S control measures				\$66,215
SUBTOTAL				\$455,715
Contingency (10% see note 2)				\$38,950
Other Project Costs (10% see note 3)				\$45,572
Phase 3 Total				\$540,237
TOTAL MASTER PLAN COST				\$17,539,655

Notes:

Note 1 - A/E Fee - 17% includes site visits, code reviews, agency reviews, plan reviews, bidding, construction administration, project close out

Note 2 - Contingency - 10% due to minimal project scope and unknown site conditions

Note 3 - Other Project Costs - 10% includes project mgmt/inspection, equipment & furnishings, exhibits, site survey, abatement, geotech, materials testing, document printing / bid ads, utility connection fees - all as per the Construction & Professional Services Manual

STAFFING NEEDS

The Virginia State Park Staffing Buildout outlined below identifies the staffing needs of the park, both currently and as development of the park progresses in the future, based on the evolving nature of visitor usage and park operations, characteristics and sizes of proposed facilities, frequency and types of educational programs and special events, and needs with respect to the protection of park resources. The immediate needs listed below are based on the Field Operations Staffing Matrix, which applies a complex formula to identify the optimal staffing complement of a state park based on a combination of considerations regarding the park's size and resources, condition and character of recreational and other facilities, and types of programming needed to effectively deliver high-quality visitor experiences while optimizing public safety and protecting park resources. Additional staffing numbers per phase have been coordinated with the Phased Development Plan to optimize the efficiency of park operations and provide a best-in-class visitor experience.

Existing Staffing

The park employs five full-time employees, exclusive of wage and seasonal staff:

- Park Manager (1)
- Office Manager (1)
- Park Ranger – Maintenance (1)
- Public Safety and Law Enforcement Ranger (2)

Immediate Needs

Virginia State Parks begins staffing a state park with four core full-time employees (FTEs). Beyond that, staffing buildout should logically follow capital buildout as the park is developed. Since many parks have not historically experienced staffing increases to the levels optimally needed to operate and maintain facilities, Virginia State Parks in 2019 completed the Field Operations Staffing Matrix, an internal study which examined park tier, overnight lodging, day use infrastructure, programs and activities, natural/cultural resources, and other unique management factors to calculate the total FTEs recommended per park and compare existing staffing to recommended staffing levels. This comparison is utilized by Virginia State Parks' planning, business administration, and operations staff to identify the gap between a park's current and optimal staffing level before proposed developments occur to determine which positions are most needed at the park today. Utilizing the information generated by this tool combined with staff knowledge and expertise regarding a particular park, Virginia State Parks develops a list for planning purposes representing the most urgently needed positions based on parks having similar infrastructure and visitation.

The following full-time positions represent immediate staffing needs at the park to optimize visitor experience, maintenance, and safety:

- Chief Park Ranger – Visitor Experience (1)
- Park Ranger – Maintenance (1)
- Public Safety and Law Enforcement Ranger (1)

Phase 1

The following full-time positions are anticipated staffing needs during Phase 1 of development not only to operate, manage, and maintain physical resources and infrastructure added to the park during the first phase of development, but also to augment existing administrative and operational capabilities as the park undergoes expansion and an expected rise in visitation, particularly at High Bridge Station. Additionally, a resource management position is needed as the park grows to better manage and interpret the significant natural and cultural resources along the 32.2-mile length of the High Bridge Trail corridor:

- Assistant Park Manager (1)
- Chief Park Ranger – Operations (1)
- Park Ranger – Resource Management (1)

Phase 2

The following full-time positions are anticipated staffing needs during Phase 2 to ensure continued and expanded administrative and maintenance capabilities for existing and additional day-use facilities installed during this phase as smaller trailhead hubs are improved to serve growing numbers of visitors to the rural towns and villages connected by the trail corridor. In addition, an existing wage position will be converted into a full-time salaried position to supervise volunteer personnel and activities:

- Office Assistant (1)
- Volunteer Coordinator (1)
- Park Ranger Maintenance (1)

Phase 3

Phase 3 is anticipated to generate the need for the following additional full-time position to increase and enhance interpretive programming and special events at the park for the enjoyment of park visitors:

- Education Specialist (1)

The total number of full-time staff people and associated salary, wage, and OTPS costs are shown in Table 11 below.

Table 11: Projected Staffing Buildout, High Bridge Trail State Park

POSITION (FY25)	EXISTING POSITION	IMMEDIATE NEEDS VIA STAFFING MATRIX*	NEEDS WITH PHASE 1 BUILD OUT	NEEDS WITH PHASE 2 BUILD OUT	NEEDS WITH PHASE 3 BUILD OUT	TOTAL AT FULL BUILD OUT
Park Manager	1					1
Assistant Park Manager			1			1
Chief Park Ranger - Operations			1			1
Chief Park Ranger - Visitor Experience		1				1
Office Manager	1					1
Office Assistant				1		1
Volunteer Coordinator				1		1
Education Specialist					1	1
Park Ranger - Maintenance	1	1		1		3
Park Ranger - Resource Management			1**			1
Public Safety & Law Enforcement Positions***	2	1				3
FTE SALARY WITH BENEFITS TOTAL						
---	\$540,152	\$302,277	\$365,089	\$298,717	\$99,572	\$1,605,807
WAGE TOTAL						
---	\$289,907	\$119,820	\$59,910	\$59,910	\$59,910	\$589,457
OTPS**** TOTAL						
---	\$159,249	\$0	\$31,199	\$43,125	\$14,298	\$247,871
TOTAL CURRENT BUDGET						
---	\$989,308	\$422,097	\$456,198	\$401,752	\$173,780	\$2,443,135

Note: All costs such as salary, wage, and “Other than Personnel Services” (OTPS) are based on FY25 budget projections.

- * The Virginia State Park Staffing Matrix identifies the staffing complement of a park based on size and resources, number and type of facilities, as well as types of programming and activities. The staffing complement will be re-evaluated with the addition of new facilities.
- ** Need for Park Ranger – Resource Management may also be fulfilled by additional full-time District Resource staff positions.
- *** The placement of Public Safety & Law Enforcement (PS&LE) rangers within the Division of State Parks is guided by the Career Specialization & Career Path Optimization plan developed for the PS&LE section. The addition or reduction of PS&LE staff at a particular location may occur to meet the spirit and intent of this optimization plan.
- **** OTPS stands for “Other Than Personnel Services” and covers all of the non-staffing expenses necessary to open and operate a Virginia State Park, including but not limited to routine maintenance, equipment, supplies, utilities (e.g. power, sewer, water), and resource management. OTPS does not include costs for salaried employees, wage and seasonal staff.

CONCLUSION

The master plan for High Bridge Trail State Park recommends improvements to recreational facilities to meet the needs of visitors and enhance the overall visitor experience at one of Virginia's truly unique state parks. The plan also includes recommendations for upgrading staff facilities and operational capabilities to better fulfill the park's overall purpose. These recommendations are based on analysis and evaluation of the park's existing resources; demographics of the primary and secondary service areas; wants, needs, and expectations of primary visitor groups; and analysis of which types of recreation opportunities and experiences the park should provide to meet the evolving outdoor recreation needs of visitors and Virginians generally while protecting park resources.

The phased development plan represents a comprehensive plan for the physical development of the park, not only for the ensuing decade until the park's next master planning effort gets underway, but also for the entire 30-year buildout period following adoption. As such, implementation of the plan will be an iterative process affecting the need for, and prioritization of, future park developments. Proposed developments are divided into phases such that each development phase is designed to be implemented holistically during the initial and subsequent decades until the park's short-, medium-, and long-term needs are addressed in full. Thus, improvements needed during Phases 2 and 3 are anticipated to become future Phase 1 needs during future updates, assuming implementation of the plan proceeds as intended and future needs assessments generate similar findings. Implementation of these recommendations piecemeal as part of a particular phase or as funding permits should be done thoughtfully so that any preliminary and related improvements necessary to accommodate such developments, such as building demolitions or utility upgrades, are likewise designed, funded, and constructed as part of that effort.

High Bridge Trail State Park has been meeting the needs of recreational trail users since its inception. This master plan recognizes the enormous contributions of park and agency staff in the development of the plan as well as the work they do every day to advance the overall mission of Virginia State Parks by providing premier outdoor recreational and educational opportunities to Virginians of all backgrounds, abilities, and interests.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PARK AUDIENCES & VISITOR WANTS, NEEDS, AND EXPECTATIONS

Audiences

Staff first listed out the wide variety of audiences that routinely utilize the park, then grouped the audiences into categories based on similar characteristics, and ended with a discussion of each group's wants, needs, and expectations when visiting High Bridge Trail State Park. The following audiences were identified:

- Ancestry Seekers
- Bikers (e.g. cruisers, e-bikers, mountain bikers)
- Birders
- Casual Trail Users (e.g. most come to see the High Bridge, often with strollers)
- Dog Walkers
- Hikers
- History Buffs
- Homeschool Groups
- Photographers
- Picnickers
- Public School Groups (i.e. not many currently, but desired in the future)
- Paddlers, including Canoers, Kayakers and Paddleboarders
- Racers
- Stargazers
- Trail Runners
- Visitors with Accessibility Needs (e.g. mobility, sensory, cognitive, linguistic, hearing, visual, etc.)
- Volunteers
- Walkers
- Wildlife Watchers

Visitor Wants, Needs, and Expectations

For simplification, the diverse audiences identified in the previous exercise were combined into the user groups listed and described below based on their shared wants, needs, and expectations when visiting the park.

1. Active Recreators
 - a. **Audiences:** Hikers, Bikers, Trail Runners, Racers
 - b. **Wants:** Active Recreators typically visit High Bridge Trail State Park to take advantage of this long, linear trail corridor affording a premier location for exercising. These visitors are seeking very specific experiences, particularly in the form of biking (e.g. cruiser, e-bike, or mountain bike). Many enjoy experiencing a

section of the trail alone or in small groups that include close friends or family. This group is typically very goal-oriented, and their experiences often involve some sort of personal challenge with measurable achievements. Often this comes by participating in a formal race. From entry-level 5K races to the Freight Train Ultra Marathon, the park provides organized opportunities for runners of all experience levels and abilities.

- c. **Needs:** As a long, linear park, this audience can readily utilize most of the park for their activities. However, they need clear information regarding access points along the trail and especially locations where water, food and restrooms are available. Since this group often comes to the park well prepared, they need clear online information about community resources as well as maps to guide their trip (e.g., Avenza). Once they arrive, this group is primarily interested in finding a safe parking area and accessing high-quality, well-maintained trails where they can have fun in the pursuit of personal challenges.
- d. **Expectations:** These users expect safe and clean facilities, restrooms, hydration stations, and waste receptacles. Regarding their trail experience, they expect quality trails that are well marked and maintained, and consistent with available trail maps for wayfinding as well as determining distances to amenities and other points of interest. Due to the presence of mileage marker signs along the trail, this may not be an issue on the main trail itself, but staff will need to periodically monitor hiking and mountain biking trails off of the main corridor to inspect their condition. This audience also expects that if trails are closed for any reason, notices and updated information about trail conditions are sent out using the website and social media before their arrival. To facilitate an efficient visit, they expect adequate parking and room for loading and unloading. A public safety presence, at least “on call,” is also expected in case of emergencies.

2. Low Impact Recreation Users

- a. **Audiences:** Casual Trail Users, Walkers, Dog Walkers, Photographers, Picnickers, Visitors with Accessibility Needs
- b. **Wants:** This broad group of users generally comes to the park wanting opportunities for low-intensity, low-impact recreation on good weather days in



Figure 38 - Cyclists take a moment to stretch their legs at the western overlook on High Bridge

the spring and fall. Many come solely to see the High Bridge and soak in the views above the Appomattox River before leaving. While at the park, these visitors want uncrowded facilities, trails that are clear of trash, and clear directional and interpretive signage that guides them to the High Bridge. Visitors who have accessibility needs also want clear information ahead of their visit so that they know the opportunities or challenges they may face at the park.

- c. **Needs:** Upon arrival at the park, this group needs adequate parking with nearby picnic areas, trails, and open viewsheds to explore at their own pace. Once on the main trail, these users need intuitive directional signage, interpretive signage, and well-maintained side trails, as well as clear rules and guidelines.
- d. **Expectations:** These user groups expect safe and clean facilities, restrooms, hydration stations, and waste receptacles. They expect a high-quality state park experience on world-class trails whereby they can quickly reach the High Bridge and soak in the views. A public safety presence, at least “on call,” is also expected in case of emergencies. Many expect to shop for uniquely themed merchandise that they can take home with them as a memory of their adventure.

3. Cultural Special Interest Users

- a. **Audiences:** History Buffs, Ancestry Seekers
- b. **Wants:** This audience typically visits the park to learn more about the respective roles of the High Bridge, Camp Paradise, and the general region in the Appomattox Campaign during the closing days of the Civil War, typically through a casual stroll and review of the historic resources associated with interpretive signage and programming. They may also desire to trace their own lineage to former soldiers who fought in the battle as part of the Confederate or Union forces.
- c. **Needs:** These enthusiasts need specific experiences such as planned programs that are well advertised and communicated to the public via the DCR website, in local media, and at the park. They also need interpreters helping them to understand where and how historic events unfolded at the park.
- d. **Expectations:** This audience expects safe and clean facilities, restrooms, hydration stations, and waste receptacles. They expect that park maps will clearly show them how to get to the High Bridge and the earthworks associated with Camp Paradise, which are often their top two locations of interest sought out in the park. Many expect to purchase food, drinks, and themed merchandise that they can take home with them as a memory. A public safety presence, at least “on call,” is also expected in case of emergencies.

4. Education Users

- a. **Audiences:** Public School Groups, Homeschoolers
- b. **Wants:** Education users typically visit the park to learn something new, whether formally or informally. Many desire curriculum-based programs or activities

provided by the park that are in line with the Virginia Standards or Learning, commonly referred to as the SOLs. Optimally, these users want to be able to take advantage of programs led by interpretive rangers, particularly hikes and interactive classes. A diversity of topics that connect their classroom experiences to the real world is important to this user group. They also value informal education in the form of high-quality exhibits, interpretive signs, ambassador animals, and self-guided activities. They often want information before they arrive, opportunities for online signup, and merchandise to take home.

- c. **Needs:** These groups often are looking for affordable opportunities at low or no cost, with pre-trip engagement and post-trip follow-up. They need a Chief Ranger - Visitor Experience, interpretive staffing and/or volunteer assessment at a higher level than most other user groups, including a clear description of opportunities at the park such as interpretive programs and guided hikes. A location such as an amphitheater or meeting facility would be optimal for hosting these guests. Parking for large groups and even buses is also an important need for this group.



Figure 39 - Virginia State Parks Youth Conservation Corps members tour the Civil War earthworks at Camp Paradise

- d. **Expectations:** These users desire safe and clean facilities that are appropriate for use by children of all ages and differing abilities. They expect access for hydration and restrooms at more than one location in the park, as well as other basic comfort needs. Well-maintained trails and wayfinding at the park are critical for this group to avoid lost child situations. Similarly, a public safety presence is important, especially if there is a need to seek out a lost child in the park. While numerically the primary makeup of these groups is typically children or teenagers, these groups are typically led by a teacher or Scout Master that provides oversight and guidance to the group. This leader typically requests advanced information from the Virginia State Parks website or directly from staff or park volunteers which will provide added value to their group’s visits. A primary contact “point person” at the park is often expected to assist with planning unique adventures, high quality interactions with nature, and tailored programs. Finally, these groups often bring petty cash for spending in a gift shop on snacks or exciting merchandise offerings.

5. Natural Resource Special Interest Users

- a. **Audiences:** Birders, Wildlife Watchers, Stargazers

- b. **Wants:** This audience typically visits the park to enjoy its plants, wildlife and ecosystems and experience the transition in ecological communities along the trail as it traverses the Central Piedmont. Or they may simply want to view the fireflies and stars from the vantage point of the High Bridge at night.
- c. **Needs:** These users often need more information about the species that they desire to find at the park, including specific biological and ecological information. For firefly enthusiasts or stargazers, they need access to the park, and particularly the High Bridge, at night.
- d. **Expectations:** As with so many other groups, this audience expects safe and clean facilities, restrooms, hydration stations, and waste receptacles. Many birders and other wildlife watchers desire uniquely themed merchandise that they can take home with them as a memory. A public safety presence, at least “on call,” is also expected in the case of accidents, especially for the hunters.

6. Volunteers

- a. **Audience:** Volunteers
- b. **Wants:** Volunteers are a wide-ranging group of community members that willingly give their time, talents and energy to the park. They generally want a good relationship with the park, information on current conditions, timely communication, and aligned goals. They also desire fun and rewarding experiences that provide real, tangible benefit to the park, particularly where they can utilize or otherwise show off their special skills. They also often want recognition for their efforts, and thus picnics, community events, recognition ceremonies and awards can all be useful tools to show appreciation.
- c. **Needs:** Volunteers need a place for orientation and direction, storage space, and a visitor center featuring meeting space, among other needs. They need well-trained staff to provide guidance and oversight, and may also require proper tools and equipment to get the job done.
- d. **Expectations:** Individual volunteers and groups expect ongoing, meaningful projects that will benefit the park and its resources and guests. They also expect a streamlined and efficient professional volunteer application process, good two-way communication with staff, and feedback concerning their efforts.

