

High Bridge Trail State Park Master Plan

Public Comment Meeting

October 6, 2025



Housekeeping

- Please mute your phones
- Please hold questions until the end of the presentation
- Additional comments will be received until **November 6, 2025** via email to:
PlanningResources@dcr.virginia.gov
- This presentation will be made available after the meeting and be posted at:
<https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/hb-masterplan>

Agenda

- **Meeting Purpose** – Josh Bateman, Environmental Program Planner
- **Introduction to State Parks** – Melissa Baker, VSP Director
- **Overview of High Bridge Trail State Park** – Daniel Jordan, Park Manager
- **Planning Authority, Purpose & Process**
- **Public Engagement & Input**
- **Market Analysis**
- **Visitor Experience** – David Bryan, State Parks Planner
- **Master Plan Goals**
- **Proposed Phased Development Plan**
- **Staffing Plan**
- **Next Steps & Public Comment**

Meeting Purpose

The purpose of this meeting is to:

- share status/progress of master planning and draft master plan
- summarize and report on the key takeaways of the public input survey
- present key recommendations of the state park master plan including mission statement, interpretive themes, essential visitor experiences, goals and objectives, and proposed development plan
- provide an opportunity for the public to give ask questions and give feedback on these key recommendations

VIRGINIA STATE PARKS

District 1 - Tidewater

BI - Belle Isle State Park
CP - Chippokes State Park
FC - False Cape State Park
FL - First Landing State Park
KP - Kiptopeke State Park
MA - Machicomoco State Park
YR - York River State Park

District 2 - Potomac

CA - Caledon State Park
CB - Culpeper Battlefields Historical State Park
LA - Lake Anna State Park
LE - Leesylvania State Park
MN - Mason Neck State Park
SN - Sweet Run State Park
WE - Westmoreland State Park
WW - Widewater State Park

* under development

District 3 - Shenandoah

DO - Douthat State Park
HF* - Hayfields State Park
JR - James River State Park
NB - Natural Bridge State Park
SE - Seven Bends State Park
SH - Shenandoah River State Park
SK - Sky Meadows State Park

District 4 - Central

BC - Bear Creek Lake State Park
HB - High Bridge Trail State Park
HL - Holliday Lake State Park
PO - Pocahontas State Park
PW - Powhatan State Park
SB - Staunton River Battlefield Historical State Park
SC - Sailor's Creek Battlefield Historical State Park
TL - Twin Lakes State Park

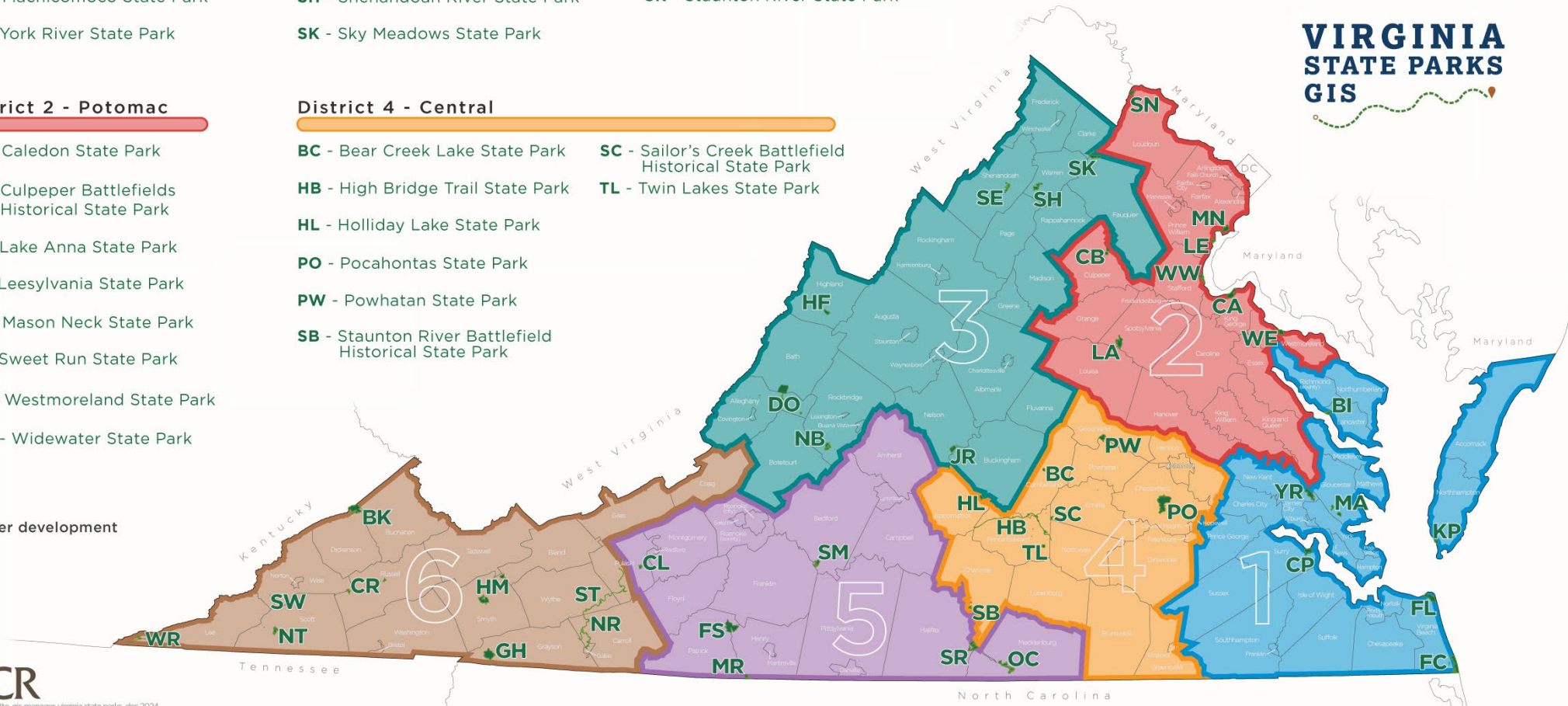
District 5 - Piedmont

CL - Claytor Lake State Park
FS - Fairy Stone State Park
MR* - Mayo River State Park
OC - Oconeechee State Park
SM - Smith Mountain Lake State Park
SR - Staunton River State Park

District 6 - Southwest

BK - Breaks Interstate Park
CR - Clinch River State Park
GH - Grayson Highlands State Park
HM - Hungry Mother State Park
NR - New River Trail State Park
NT - Natural Tunnel State Park
ST - Shot Tower Historical State Park
SW - Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park
WR - Wilderness Road State Park

**VIRGINIA
STATE PARKS
GIS**



Overview of High Bridge Trail State Park

Summary of Existing Park Amenities

- **High Bridge Station**
 - Visitor Center w/ Comfort Station, Picnic Area, Playground, High Bridge
 - Side Trails to Substructure, Civil War Earthworks, and Appomattox River
- **Trailhead Parking Areas**
 - Pamplin, Prospect, Elam, Tuggle, Farmville, River Rd., Rice, & Moran
- **Rochelle Area**
 - Mountain Biking and Hiking Trails
- **Bridges and Culverts**
 - 3 Additional Bridges: Buffalo Cr., Mill St., & River Rd.
 - 94 Culverts, including Historic Stone Culverts
- **Staff and Service Areas**
 - Ranger Residences on Piney Grove Rd., Green Bay Rd., & Campbell Hill Rd. (Prospect)
 - Green Bay Rd. Maintenance Facility

Existing Facilities



Planning Authority, Purpose, and Process

State Park Master Planning Code

§ 10.1-200.1. State park master planning

- (i) for all **existing state parks**, (ii) substantial **land acquisitions**, and (iii) prior to **major improvements**
- A **guide for the development, utilization and management** of a Parks natural, cultural, and historic resources
- Developed in stages with public input at each step

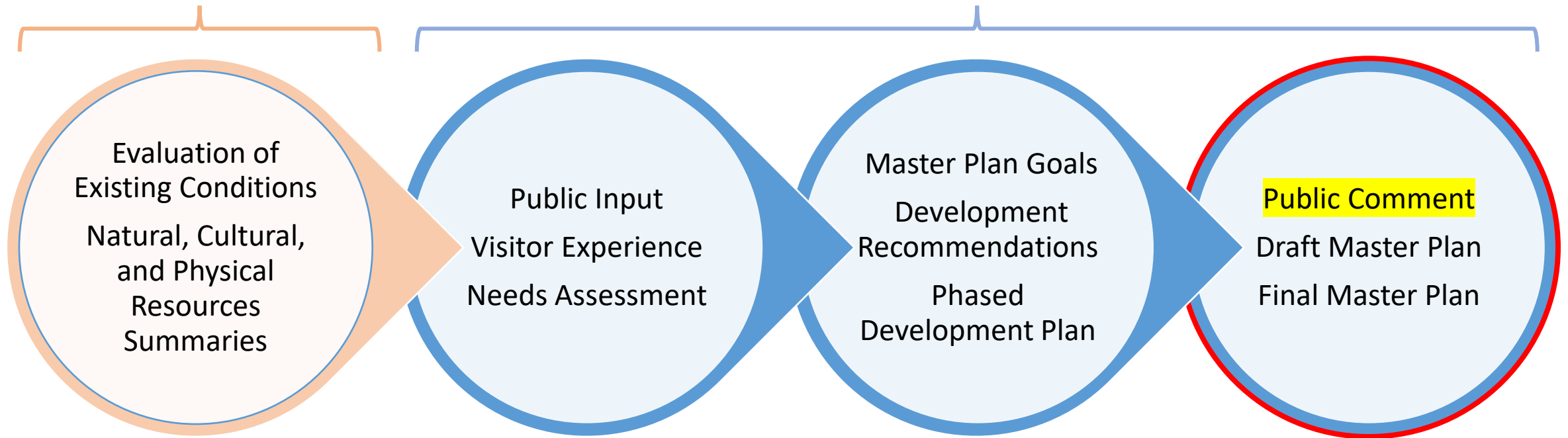
Purpose of Planning

- Keep the state park's Master Plan up to date based on changes to existing conditions and trends in outdoor recreation relative to the park's context within the local community, region, and Virginia State Parks system
- Establish the plan's framework by crafting the state park's mission statement, interpretive themes and subthemes, planning goals and objectives, and identifying development/improvement needs within each of the park's experience areas
- Develop a phased development plan that prioritizes developments/improvements based on projected needs
- Develop a staffing plan to adequately staff the park during each phase of park buildout

Planning Process

Stage 1 - Conservation

Stage 2 - Recreation



Public Engagement & Input



Public Input

- Virginia Outdoors Survey (2022)
- *Your Comments Count* Survey (2024 – 2025)
- Market Analysis (2025)

Virginia Outdoors Survey (2022)

Why are people using trails?

Which activities are most pursued/needed?

Which amenities are most desired?

- Reason for using trails: Pleasure or relaxation (75.4%), enjoyment of scenery and the natural environment (61.6%), and health and physical training (56.0%)
- Trail-based activities ($\geq 10\%$): Current participation versus most needed
 - **Participation $\geq$ Need**: Walking for pleasure, visiting parks, nature-based trails, visiting natural/historic areas, hiking/backpacking, viewing scenery, and jogging/running,
 - **Need $>$ Participation**: Picnicking, [bicycle trails](#), walks/runs/challenge-based events, [mountain biking](#), and [horseback riding](#)
- Trail amenities: Public restrooms (69.4%), trailhead parking (45.0%), drinking water (41.5%), and information kiosks (39.3%)

Your Comments Count Survey (2025)

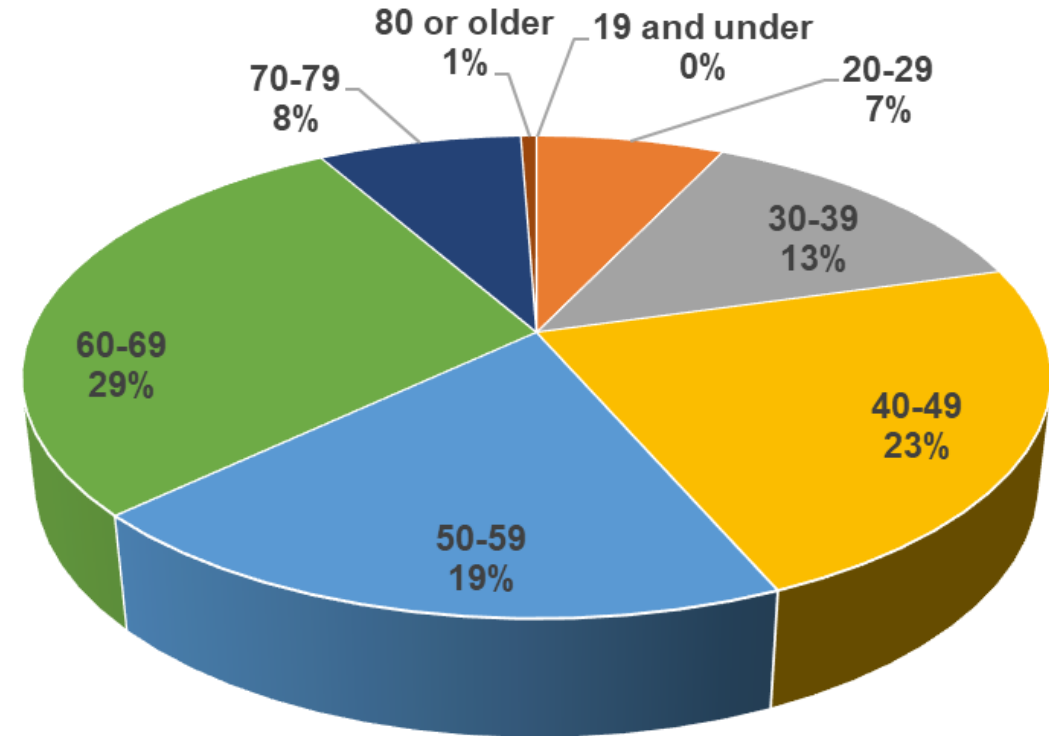
Recreational Activities Conducted

- #1 Hiking (69.7%)
- #2 Bicycling (28.6%)
- #3 Other* (12.6%)
- #4 Educational Programs (9.1%)
- #5 Picnicking (8%)
- * Walking/Running (5.6%), Ranger Talk/Tour (4.6%)

Satisfaction w/ Day-Use Facilities

- #1 Visitor Center (4.83)
- #2 Trails (4.82)
- #3 Restrooms (4.62)
- #4 Picnic Area (4.55)
- #5 Disability Access (4.46)

Age of Respondents (2025)



Your Comments Count Survey (2025)

Distance from park

- Within 50 miles: 38%
- More than 50 miles: 62%

Best aspect of park visit:

1. High Bridge
2. Trails (including side trails)
3. Views and scenery
4. Staff

Top three words/phrases to describe what you value about this park:

1. Trails (value for recreation/exercise)
2. History/Beauty (tie)
3. Views and scenery
4. Access and convenience

One thing to add to this park:

1. Trails (all types)
2. Parking
3. Camping
4. Drinking water/restrooms

Market Analysis

Market Analysis (2025)



FIGURE 8: POPULATION SIZE TRENDS WITHIN SERVICE AREAS

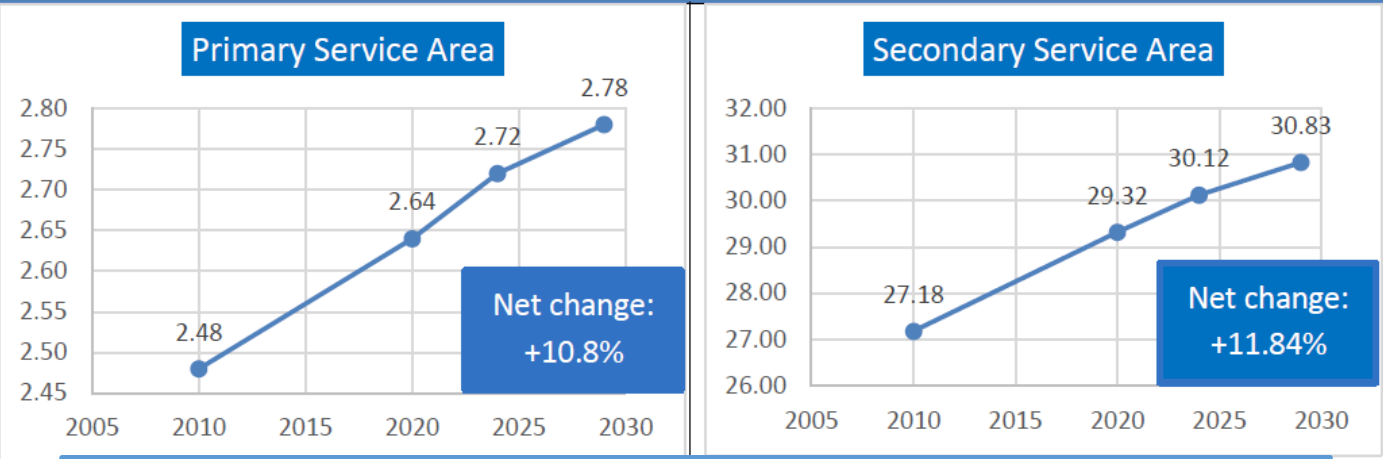
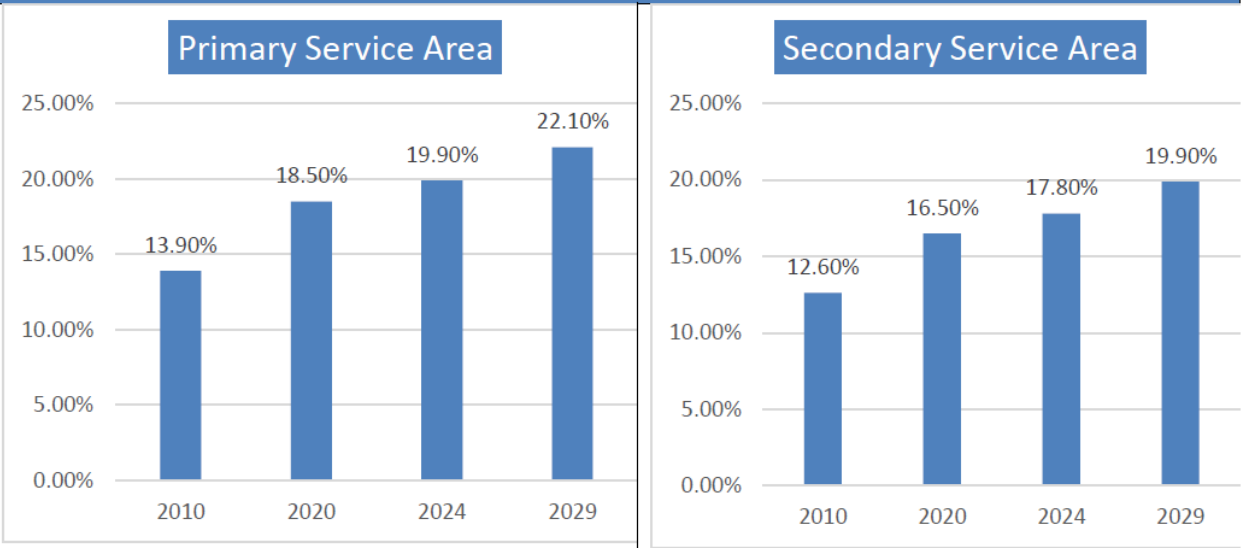


TABLE 2: RELATIVE SIZE OF POPULATION 65+ YEARS OLD WITHIN SERVICE AREAS



Market Analysis

Key takeaways and recommendations most relevant to master planning are:

- About half of the population of the PSA resides in the **Richmond area**. The most significant growth in the PSA has occurred on the **west side of Richmond**.
- Both service areas have seen significant growth in the **65+ age cohort**, driving a need to **make park trails and trailhead facilities universally accessible**.
- **Tourist spending on lodging and restaurants** in Prince Edward Co. were higher than the median in Virginia.
- Popularity of **walking for exercise, horseback riding, birdwatching, freshwater fishing, overnight camping, and barbecuing** in the PSA exceeds national averages.
- In addition to the above activities, the popularity of **jogging/running, hiking, backpacking, and mountain biking** in the SSA exceeds national averages.
- In response to rising temperatures, the park should install **more shaded picnic areas** and potable **water refill stations**.
- **Visitors' rating of trails was higher** than the system-wide average. **Staff availability and security were rated lower** than system-wide averages.
- The **three top improvement needs** expressed by the public were: (1) more potable **water stations**; (2) a **visitor center**; and (3) additional **permanent restrooms**.

Visitor Experience

Visitor Experience

Visitor Experience (VE) is a broad term encompassing the overall journey, activities and interactions of park users, as well as their personal, subjective feelings, impressions and level of satisfaction with the park.

Master Planning looks at VE to understand and/or develop:

- Audiences (i.e. User Groups)
- Interpretive Themes and Subthemes
- Park Purpose Statement
- Essential Experiences
- Experience Areas



Audiences & User Groups

- Active Recreators
 - Bikers, Hikers, Racers, Trail Runners
- Cultural Special Interest Users
 - Ancestry Seekers, History Buffs
- Education Users
 - Homeschool and Public School Groups
- Low Impact Recreation Users
 - Casual Trail Users, Dog Walkers, Photographers, Picnickers, Visitors with Accessibility Needs, Walkers
- Natural Resource Special Interest Users
 - Birders, Stargazers, Wildlife Watchers
- Volunteers

Essential Experiences

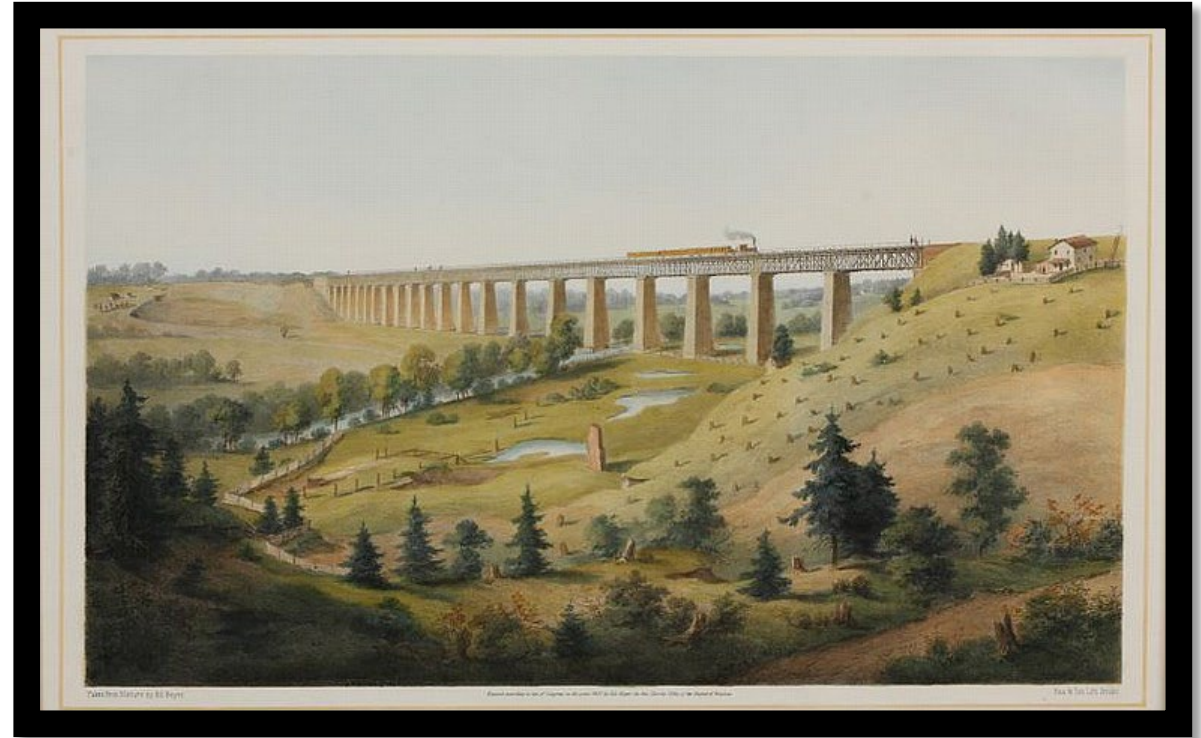
Immersive Opportunities offered by the Park that visitors should enjoy to fully take in its story and resources:

- 1-2 Hours:
 - Experiencing the Bridge and taking in the view above and below
 - Using Farmville as a base to explore the central portion of the park
 - Stand amidst Civil War history at High Bridge Trail
 - Immerse yourself into the exhibits at High Bridge Station
- Half Day:
 - Take a mountain bike ride on the Rochelle Tract
 - Attend a nighttime ranger-led program
- Full or Multiple Days:
 - Enjoy the High Bridge Trail experience from Pamplin to Burkeville



Visitor Experience Themes

- Theme:
 - *Across miles and centuries, the former Southside Railroad connects communities, creates culture, and encourages commerce across the Central Piedmont of Virginia.*
- Subthemes:
 - *Railroad heritage through time*
 - *Importance of the former railroad to the community today*
 - *The history of commerce in the Central Piedmont*



Visitor Experience Themes

- Theme:
 - *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.*
- Subthemes:
 - *The historic High Bridge itself*
 - *Seasonal scenic views*





Visitor Experience Themes

- Theme:
 - *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.*
- Subthemes
 - *Camp Paradise*
 - *The two-day Battle of High Bridge*
 - *Role in the Appomattox Campaign*

Visitor Experience Themes

- Themes:
 - *Today, High Bridge 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.*
- Subthemes:
 - *Recreational activities now available on or along the trail*
 - *Diverse natural resources seen along the trail*



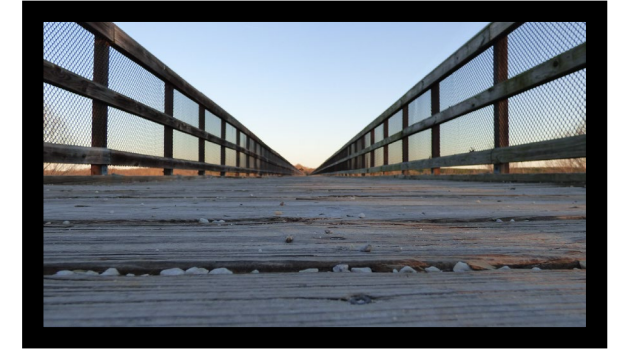
Visitor Experience Themes

- Themes:

- *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.*

- Subthemes:

- *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*
- *Telecommunications history*





Purpose Statement

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

Master Plan Goals

Master Plan Goals

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.

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 regardless of their interests or desired activity level.

Goal 3.0. 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.

Master Plan Goals

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.

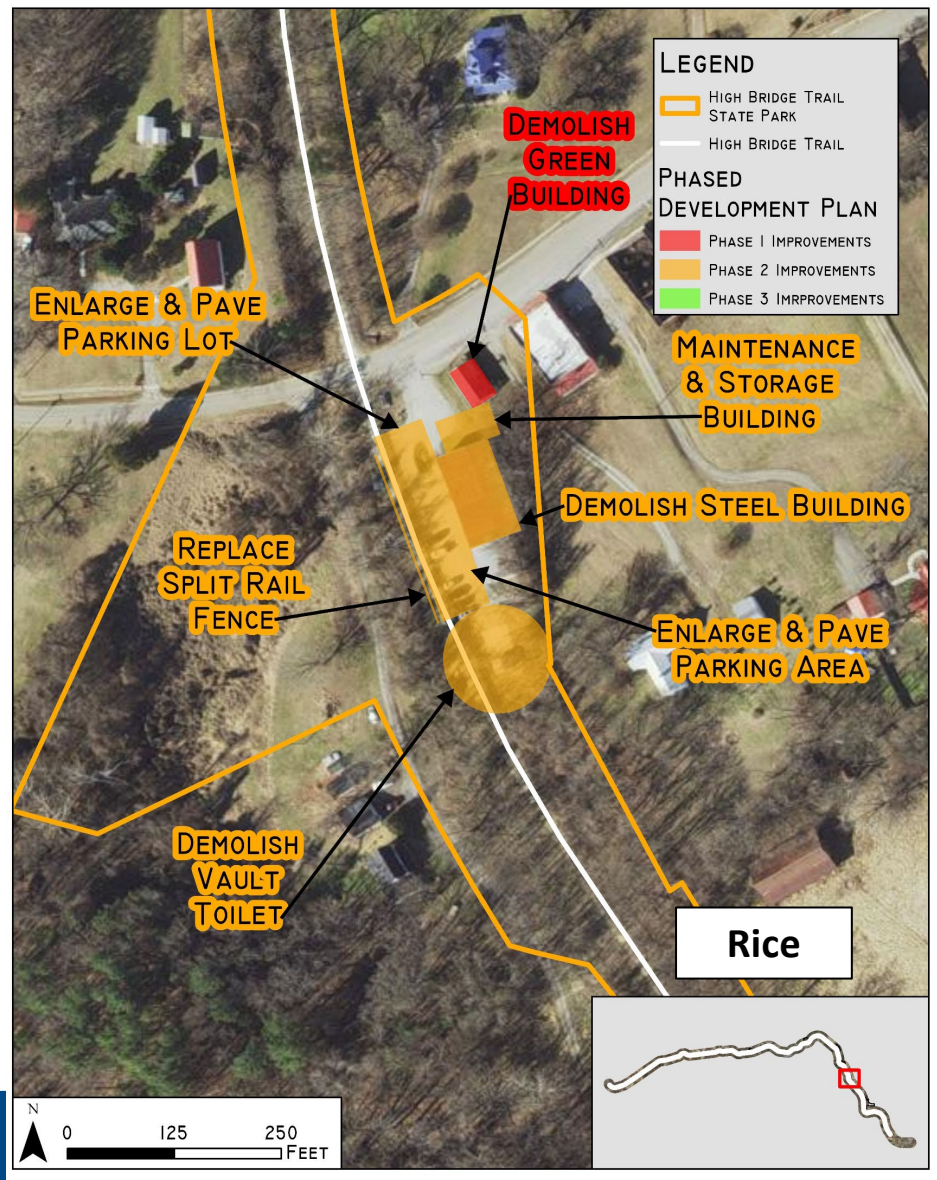
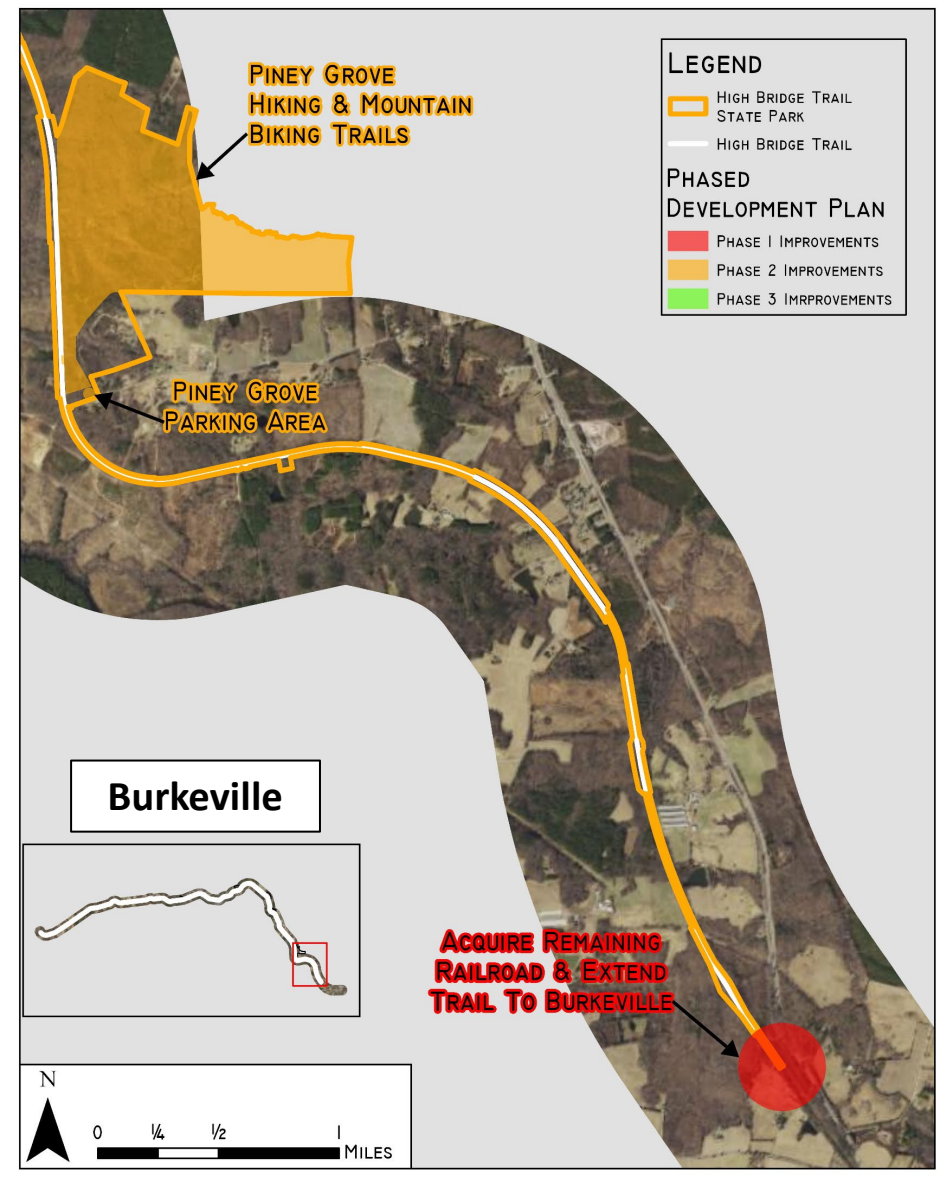
Goal 5.0. Public Engagement – Forge collaborative and positive relationships with local landowners and the public to foster a shared sense of dedication to the stewardship and protection of lands within, and adjacent to, the trail corridor.

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.

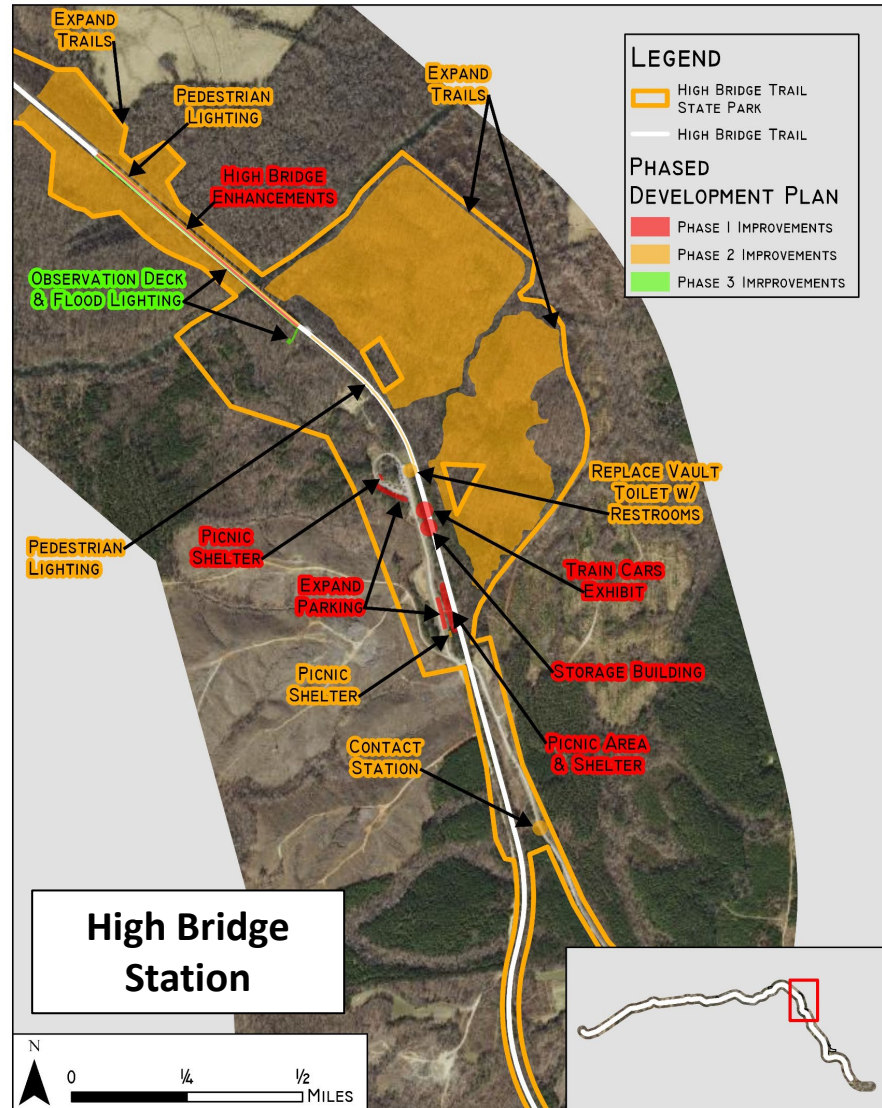
Goal 7.0. Staffing, Funding, and Equipment – Provide sufficient staffing and facilities to effectively carry out the park mission, provide positive interactions with visitors, and create a unique and memorable experience for people exploring High Bridge Trail State Park and the Heart of Virginia.

Phased Development Plan

Burkeville to Rice



High Bridge Station



Phase 1

- Replace Decking & Railings on HB
- Install Observation Ports in HB Decking & Railings
- Picnic Area, Picnic Shelter, & Paved Parking Expansion
- Picnic Shelter in Exist. Picnic Area
- Train Car Exhibits
- Freight Depot-Themed Storage Building

Phase 2

- Accent Lighting on HB
- Lighting along HBT b/w VC & HB
- Expand Trails at HBS and Add Trails Under Western End of HB
- Picnic Shelter in New Picnic Area
- Replace Vault Toilet w/ Restrooms
- Feasibility Study for HB Eastern End Observation Deck
- Contact Station

Phase 3

- Observation Deck at Eastern End of HB
- Floodlighting of HB for Night Events

River Road to Farmville

Phase 1

- Replace Decking on River Rd., Mill St., & Buffalo Cr. Bridges in Farmville
- Eliminate 3rd St. Parking in Farmville

Phase 2

- Relocate River Rd. Parking & Picnic Area to Opposite Side of Road
- Picnic Shelter at River Rd.
- Replace Vault Toilet w/ Restrooms at River Rd.
- Accessible Playground at River Rd.
- Replace Railings on Buffalo Cr. Bridge
- Eliminate E. Osborn Rd. Parking

Phase 3

- Connections to Town of Farmville Parks/Trails

River Road



DEMOLISH VAULT TOILET

ACCESSIBLE PLAYGROUND

PICNIC SHELTER

RELOCATE RIVER ROAD PARKING AREA

RESTROOMS

PICNIC AREA

Farmville



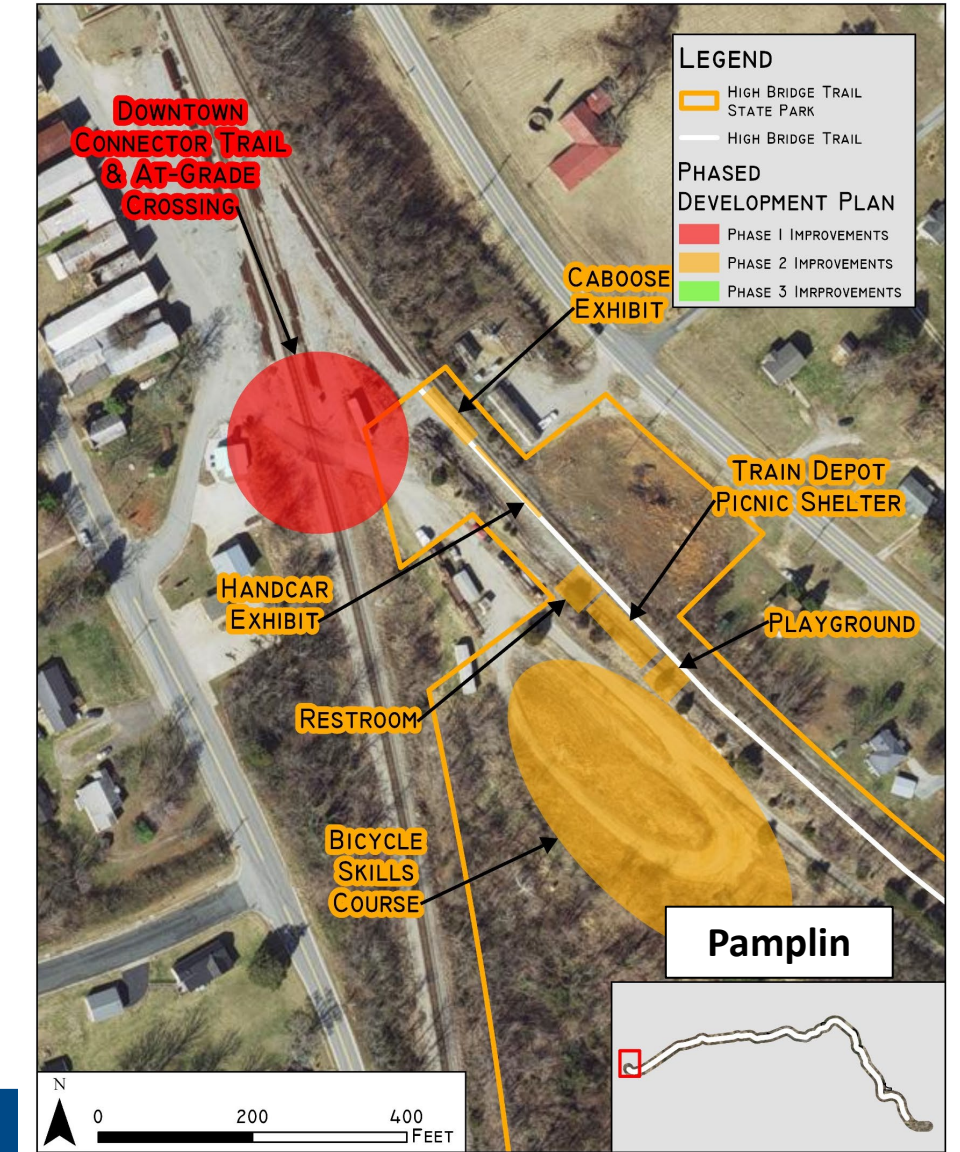
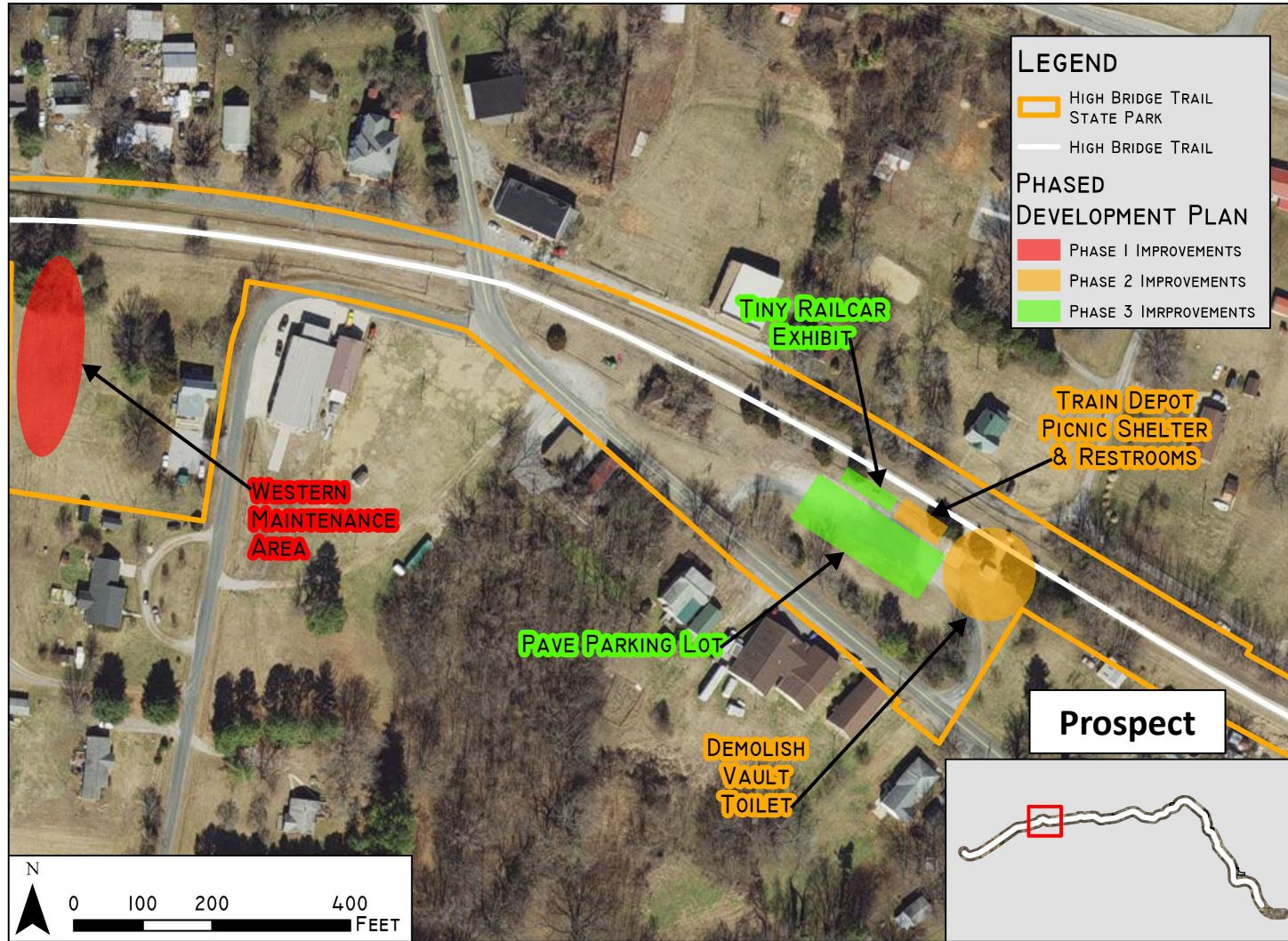
PEDESTRIAN CONNECTION TO TOWN PARKS/TRAILS

REPLACE WOOD RAILINGS ON BRIDGE WITH DURABLE ALTERNATIVE

REPLACE WOOD DECKING ON BRIDGE WITH DURABLE ALTERNATIVE

ELIMINATE OSBORN ROAD ACCESS/PARKING

Prospect to Pamplin



Staffing Needs

Existing Staff Positions

5 Current FTE Positions (plus Wage & Seasonal Staff):

- Park Manager
- Chief Ranger – Law Enforcement (x2)
- Office Manager
- Park Ranger – Maintenance



Staffing Needs

Immediate

- Chief Park Ranger – Visitor Experience
- Park Ranger – Maintenance
- Public Safety & Law Enforcement position

Phase 1

- Assistant Park Manager
- Chief Park Ranger – Operations
- Park Ranger – Resource Management

Phase 2

- Office Assistant
- Volunteer Coordinator
- Park Ranger - Maintenance

Phase 3

- Education Specialist

Next Steps



Timeline for Next Steps

- **Tonight:** Public Comment Meeting followed by a 30-day comment period
- **Winter 2026:** Presentation to the Board of Conservation and Recreation (BCR) and additional opportunity for public input
- Following public comment and approval from BCR, Master Plan will be made available to the General Assembly for a 30-day review
- **Spring 2026:** Final adoption by the DCR Director

Thank you for attending!

Please submit any additional comments to
PlanningResources@dcr.virginia.gov
by **November 6th, 2025**

Questions?

Please contact Josh Bateman,
Environmental Program Planner at the
email noted above!

All emails and questions will be taken under
consideration and responses provided



Visit us on the web for project updates and
presentation materials!

[https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-
planning/hb-masterplan](https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/hb-masterplan)