

Gorges State Park General Management Plan



North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

Division of Parks and Recreation

Mountain Region

February 2017

I. MISSION AND PURPOSE

MISSION STATEMENT:

Conservation: To protect North Carolina’s natural diversity through careful selection and stewardship of state parks system lands;

Recreation: To provide and promote outdoor recreation opportunities in the state parks system and throughout the state; and

Education: To encourage appreciation of North Carolina’s natural and cultural heritage through diverse educational opportunities; for all citizens of and visitors to the State of North Carolina.

PURPOSE: The State of North Carolina offers unique archaeological, geologic, biologic, scenic and recreational resources. These resources are part of the heritage of the people of this State. The heritage of a people should be preserved and managed by those people for their use and for the use of their visitors and descendants.

PARK PURPOSE:

Prior to the Flood of 1916, the land that is now Gorges State Park was comprised of several large parcels of land owned by local citizens. Singer Sewing Machine Company purchased the property and used it for logging purposes in the 1920s and 1930s. Due to its steep topography and high levels of annual rainfall, the Gorges tract and surrounding lands offered potential for the development of hydro-electric power projects. This potential use enticed Duke Energy Corporation



Fall color along river

to purchase the property between 1940 and 1960. In the late 1970s, Duke began conducting conservation studies and limiting access to the property to protect the environment. Nearly 275 acres were placed on the North Carolina Registry of Natural Heritage Areas in 1982 due to the presence of numerous rare species. By the late 1990s, Duke Energy had determined that it no longer needed large areas of the Gorges property and offered to sell the land to both North and South Carolina. The State of North Carolina purchased 10,000 acres in Transylvania County in 1999 and

established Gorges State Park and the adjacent Toxaway Game Land.

A significant geologic feature, from which the park derives its name, is the abundance of deep gorges created in part by a dramatic change in elevation of over 2,000 feet in a little over three miles. This abrupt transition, combined with the high levels of annual rainfall and a large drainage area, produces an abundance of waterfalls that visitors seek and enjoy. Gorges State Park is unique within the state parks system in that it straddles two major geologic provinces and the Brevard

Fault Zone, which separates the two. The Brevard Fault Zone, one of the major ancient fault zones of the Appalachians, contains unusual rock types such as mylonite and marble. Mass slope movement features, such as the large slide on the east side of the Toxaway River, are evident. In addition, many boulder and cobble deposits have been identified along an 8,000-foot reach of the Toxaway River, attributed to flooding that followed an earthen dam failure at Lake Toxaway during August of 1916.

The exceptional terrain and climate within Gorges State Park supports a rich and unusual assemblage of flora and fauna. The Blue Ridge Escarpment extends for nearly 20 miles along the boundaries of NC, SC, and Georgia. The large and unbroken natural landscape includes high-quality examples of extensive natural communities such as Montane Oak-Hickory Forest, Chestnut Oak Forest, and Acidic Cove Forest, and widespread Pine-Oak/Heath Forest. Rich Cove Forest and Spray Cliff Forest, uncommon natural communities, occur in small patches within the park. The area contains a concentration of rare plants, such as Southern Oconee Bells (*Shortia galacifolia* var. *galacifolia*), that is significant for the state and the entire southern Appalachians. A particularly rich assortment of bryophytes and ferns, including a species more common to the tropical forests of Central America, is presumably owed to the high moisture and sheltered temperatures of the gorges. The animal diversity of natural communities in the park are also high, and rare mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and invertebrates are present.

The river and streams combine with topography to create a variety of scenic waterfalls that draw visitors to the park. Powerful waterfalls plunging over rocky cliffs, falls shrouded in mist, cascading waters and riffles offer sights and sounds that are among the park's more significant features. The park and the escarpment gorges protect the headwaters for five rivers including: Horsepasture, Toxaway, Thompson, Whitewater, and Chatooga. Higher up, ridgetop vistas extend for miles, offering panoramas of tree-blanketed slopes, rugged mountain ranges and lush vegetation. Overlooks offer spectacular views of the surrounding natural landscape, with the view from the Bearwallow Valley observation deck stretching up to 20 miles into South Carolina on clear days.

Gorges State Park offers many recreational opportunities that immerse visitors in its rich natural resources. Diverse bird species, from breeding residents to neo-tropical migrants, lure both the amateur and serious bird-watcher. Miles of trails offer hikers a range of experiences, from the easy Buckberry Ridge loop trail conveniently accessed from a picnicking area, to rugged overnight backpacking adventures deep within the park. Some old roadbeds are sufficiently constructed to allow a mix of trail uses such as horseback riding and mountain biking. Opportunities exist for group camping, picnicking, primitive camping, and tent and trailer camping. Fishing is permitted in the rivers, and streams. The large amount of undeveloped land and rugged terrain creates exceptional opportunities for visitors to experience wilderness.

Despite the rugged topography that typifies this portion of North Carolina, the area encompassed by the park has a history of human use that spans several thousand years. Archaeological investigations have documented numerous sites and features throughout the park. These include pre-historic sites used by Indians, such as small hunting camps, as well as historic sites used by European settlers, such as homesteads and cemeteries. The earliest pre-historic sites are believed to be up to 8,000 years in age, and sites established by Europeans date to the early 1700s.

Gorges State Park exists primarily to protect its outstanding geologic, biologic and scenic features, and recreational and archaeological resources. The Division of Parks and Recreation is charged with preserving these values and providing experiences within its units that promote pride in and understanding of the valuable natural heritage of North Carolina.

II. HISTORY

Although you might feel removed from civilization while walking deep into the Gorges wilderness, evidence of past human interaction with the environment surrounds you.



Club Line Falls

Significant, widespread damage to the Gorges environment occurred in 1916 when the dam containing Lake Toxaway, the largest private lake in the state, broke. Record amounts of water gushed southward down the river, destroying the communities in its path, scouring the gorges and leaving piles of debris 15 to 20 feet high. These debris piles still remain.

After the flood, local citizens eventually sold large land tracts in the Gorges to Singer Sewing Machine Company, which logged most of the land. Then, in the 1940s and 1950s, Singer sold the land to Duke Energy Corporation. The corporation purchased the land for its steep topography and high rainfall, which offered opportunities for development of hydropower projects. Crescent Land and Timber Corporation, a subsidiary of Duke Energy, managed the land, closing some roads and limiting access to protect the environment.

After the flood, local citizens eventually sold large land tracts in the Gorges to Singer Sewing Machine Company,



Foothills Bridge at Toxaway River

Conservation studies began in the area in the late 1970s. In 1982, nearly 275 acres of land was placed on the NC Registry of Natural Heritage Areas because of the numerous rare species. In the late 1990s, Duke Energy determined that it no longer needed large portions of the Gorges for future hydropower and offered the land for sale to natural resources agencies in North and South Carolina. The NC Division of Parks and Recreation stepped up to create, with the support of local citizens and the General Assembly, a unique state park. These acquisitions will help protect the water quality of Indian Creek, Rock Creek, Frozen Creek and Toxaway River.

III. THEMES AND INVENTORY

THEME TABLE FOR GORGES STATE PARK

Theme Type	Theme	Significance at Gorges	State Parks System Representation
Archeological/Historic	Industrial	High	Little
Archeological/Historic	Rural-Domestic	High	Adequate
Archeological/Prehistoric	Campsite/Activity Area	High	Adequate
Biological	Low Elevation Cliffs and Rock Outcrops	High	Moderate
Biological	Montane Oak Forests	High	Adequate
Biological	Mountain Cove Forests	High	Adequate
Biological	Piedmont and Mountain Dry Coniferous Forests	High	Adequate
Biological	Piedmont and Mountain Floodplains	High	Little
Biological	Upland Seepages and Spray Cliffs	High	Moderate
Geological	Cliffs	High	Adequate
Geological	Faults, Joints, and Related Features	High	Little
Geological	Gorges, Rapids, Waterfalls	High	Adequate
Geological	Unusual Rock Types	High	None
Scenic	Forests	High	Moderate
Scenic	Gorges	High	Moderate
Scenic	Reservoirs/Lakes	High	Moderate
Scenic	Rivers	High	Moderate
Scenic	Scenic Highways	High	Little
Scenic	Scenic Vistas	High	Moderate
Scenic	Waterfalls	High	Adequate

*See the System Wide Plan for references to Theme and Inventory terms. Themes have both actual and “potential” future needs to be at a park.

FACILITIES
GORGES STATE PARK

Camping:

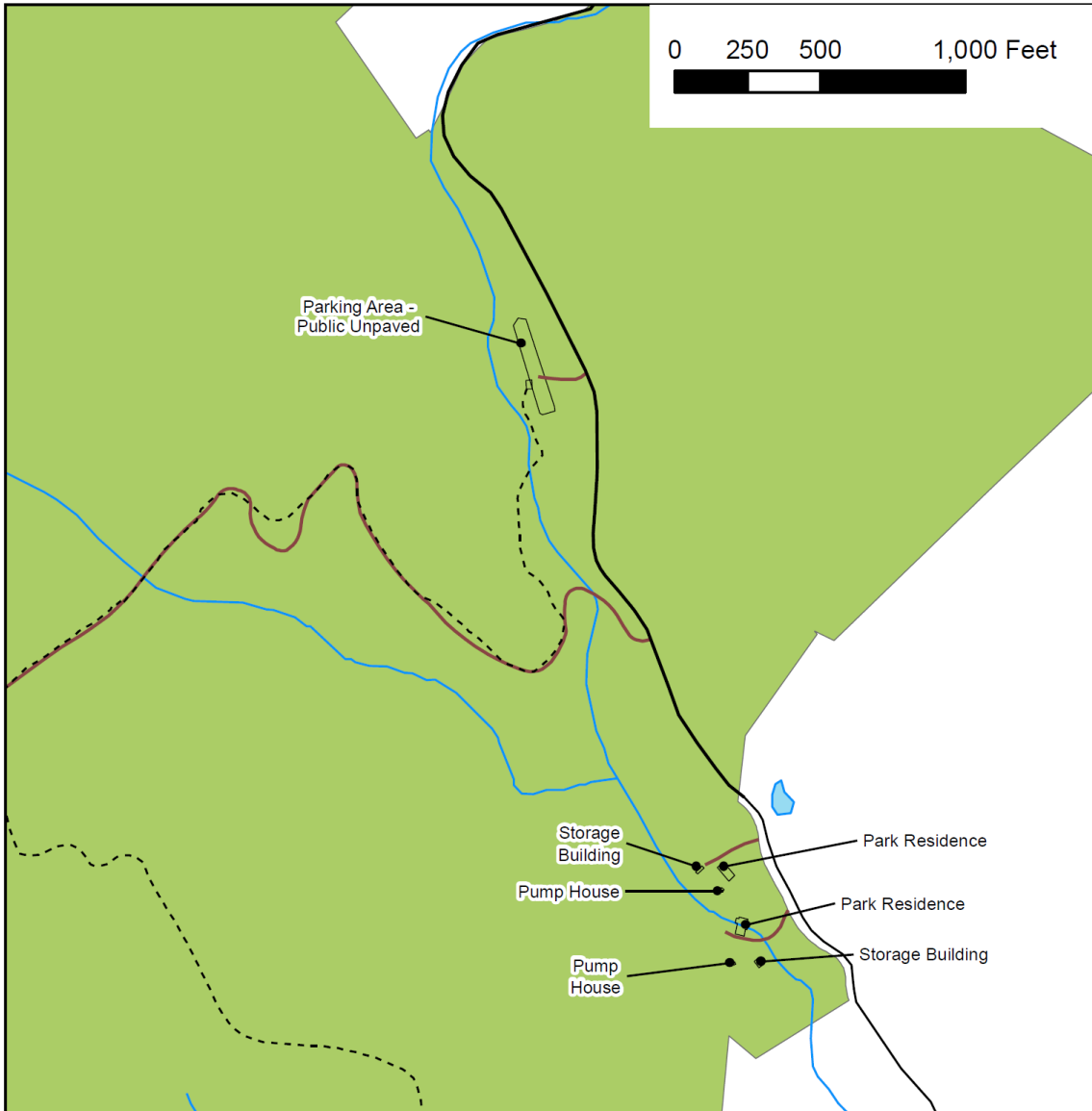
Gorges State Park offers primitive camping for backpackers in a natural, wilderness environment. Primitive camping is available from the Frozen Creek Access Area and the Grassy Ridge Access Area. There are (6) six designated backpack camping sites along the Foothills Trail near the southern boundary. These sites are free of charge and are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Access to the Foothills Trail at Gorges State Park is at the Frozen Creek parking lot. Follow the square yellow markers along the Cane Brake Trail.



Lake Jocassee

Primitive Camping can also be found at Raymond Fisher Campground. There are (8) eight designated sites with fire rings, picnic tables and lantern hooks and a vault toilet. Access to the Raymond Fisher Camp Area is at the Grassy Ridge parking lot. Follow the blue circle markers on the Raymond Fisher Trail for 0.75 miles. While camping, visitors can enjoy the scenery and the small Ray Fisher pond located within the camping area.

FACILITY INVENTORY - FROZEN CREEK ACCESS
GORGES STATE PARK



Gorges
State Park
Facility Inventory

Frozen Creek Access

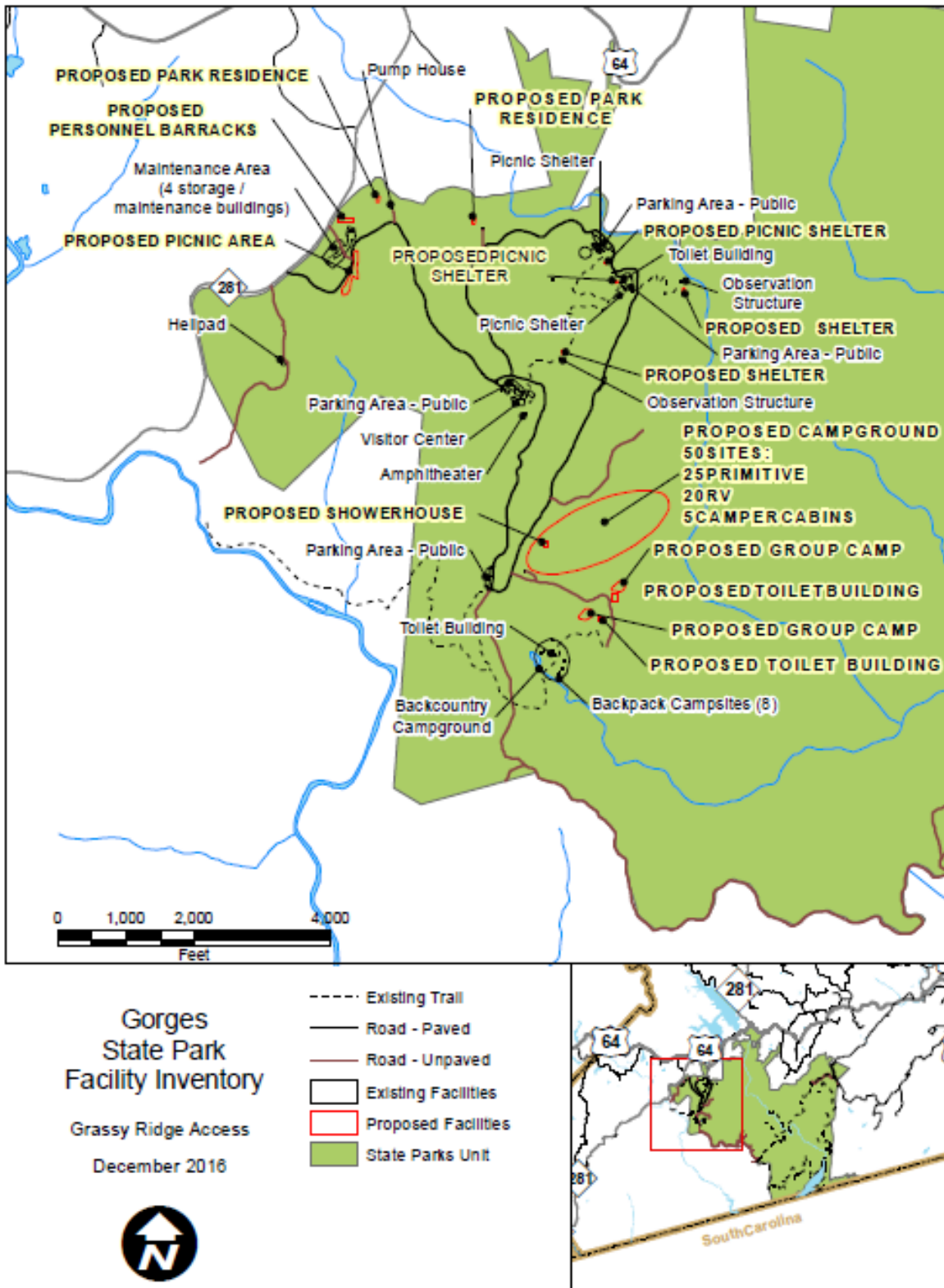
January 2016



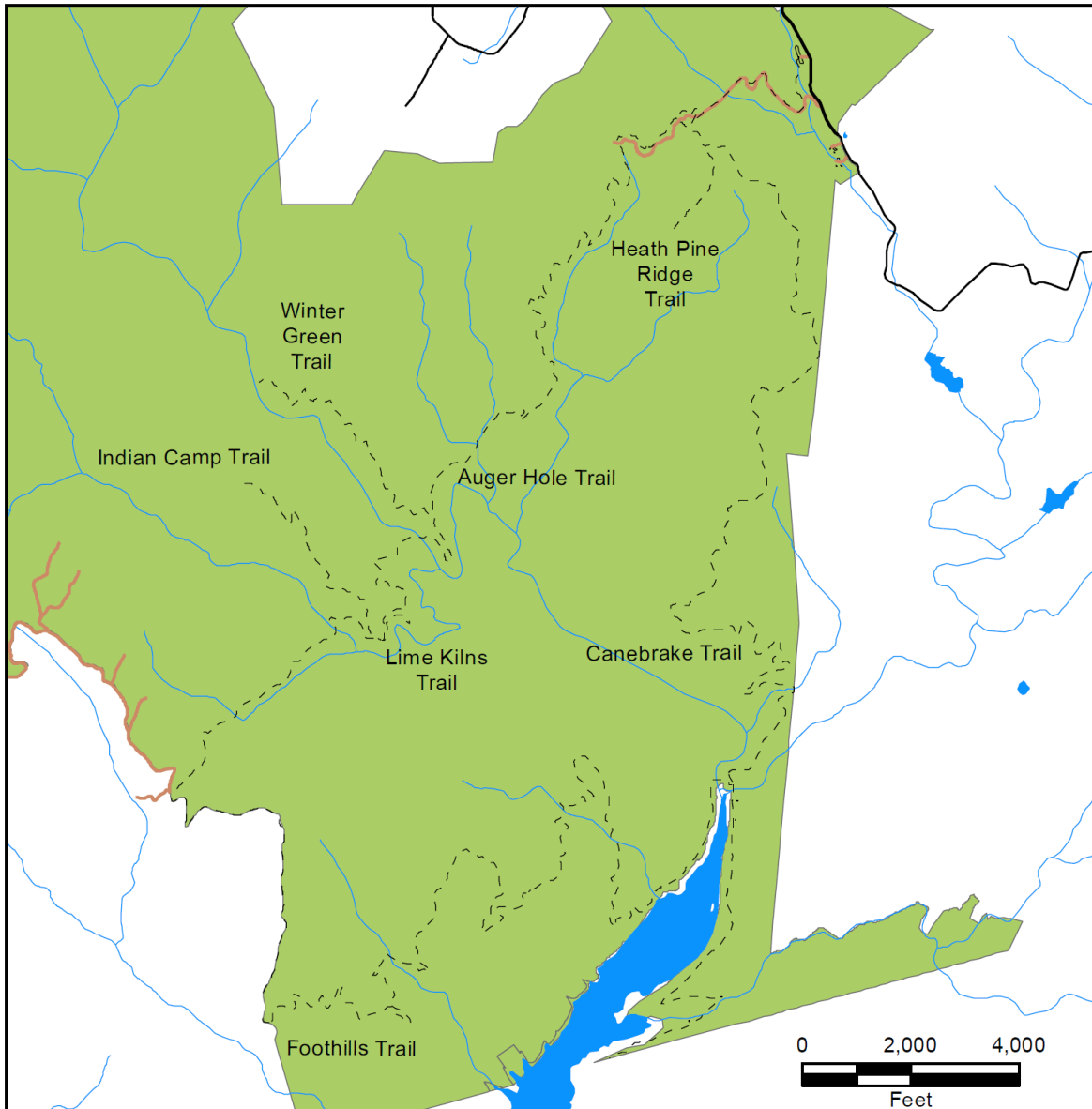
- Existing Trail
- Road - Paved
- Road - Unpaved
- Existing Facilities
- State Parks Unit



FACILITY INVENTORY- GRASSY RIDGE ACCESS
 GORGES STATE PARK



TRAIL INVENTORY – FROZEN CREEK ACCESS
 GORGES STATE PARK



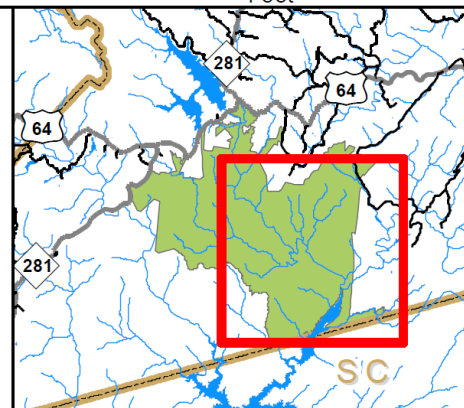
Gorges State Park
 Trail Inventory

Frozen Creek Access

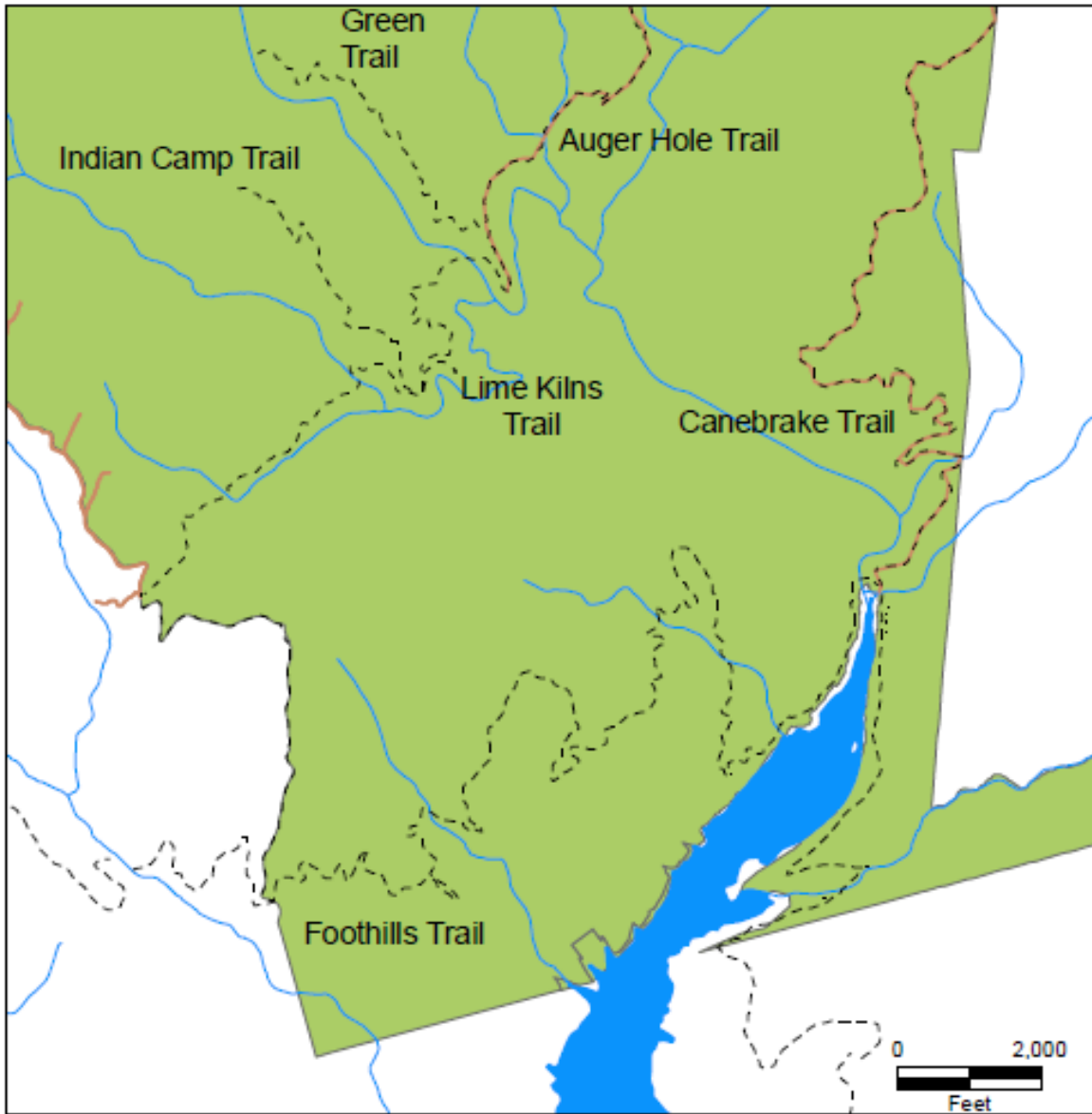
September 2016



- - - Existing Trail
- Road - Paved
- Road - Unpaved
- Facilities
- State Parks Unit



TRAIL INVENTORY – Foothills Trail
GORGES STATE PARK



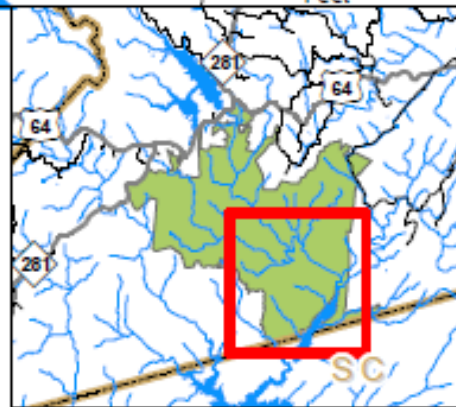
Gorges State Park
Trail Inventory

Foothills Trail

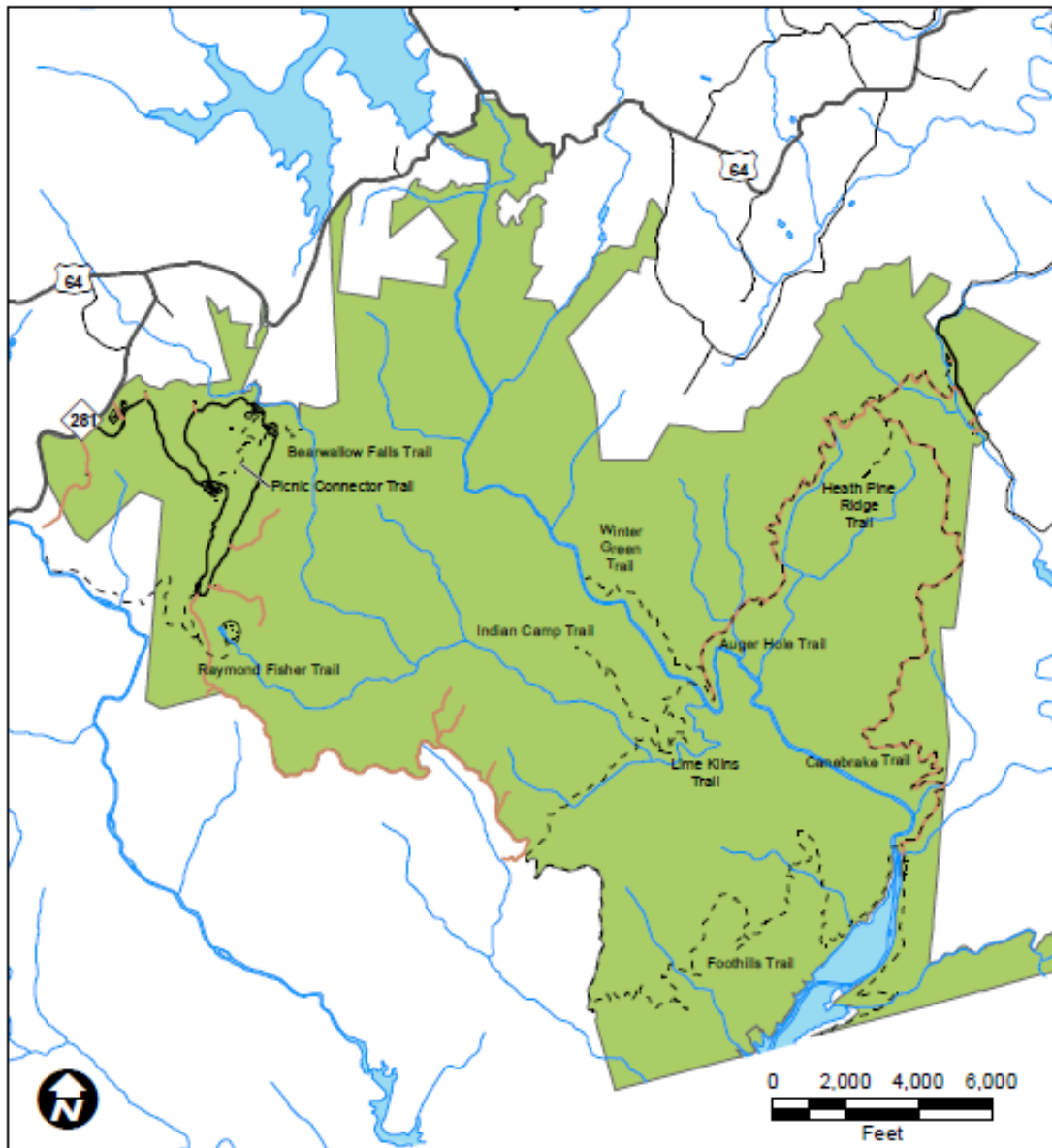
December 2016



- Trails
- Road - Paved
- Road - Unpaved
- State Parks Unit



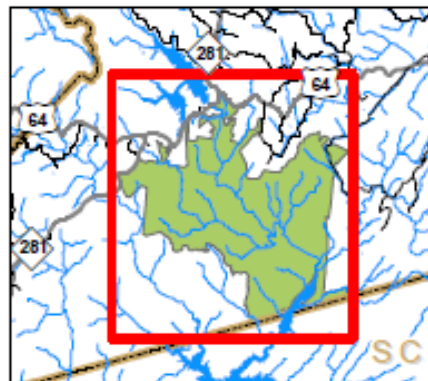
OVERALL TRAIL INVENTORY
GORGES STATE PARK



Gorges State Park
Overall Trail Inventory

December 2016

- Existing Trail
- Road - Paved
- Road - Unpaved
- Facilities
- State Parks Unit



GORGES STATE PARK
TRAIL INVENTORY

Trail Inventory	Hiking	Equestrian	Bike
Auger Hole Trail (out & back)	14.50	14.50	14.50
Bearwallow Valley Trail	0.35		
Canebreak Trail (out & back)	8.25		
Foothills Trail	6.70		
Heath Pine Ridge Trail (out&back)	0.80		
Indian Camp Trail (out& back)	2.00		
Lime Kilns Trail (out &back)	0.37		
Picnic Connector Trail	0.40		
Rainbow Falls Trail (out & back)	3.00		
Raymond Fisher Trail (out&back)	1.50		
Upper Bearwallow Falls Trail (out & back)	0.50		
Visitor Center Connector Trail (out&back)	0.50		
Winter Green Trail (out &back)	2.20		
Gorges SP Totals (miles)	41.07	14.50	14.50

HIKING TRAILS:

Auger Hole Trail: 14.50 miles. Use the Frozen Creek access area on Frozen Creek Road, in Town of Rosman. This access provides a picnic area and trailhead for the equestrian, mountain biking and hiking trail. Horses and mountain bikes are permitted on the Auger Hole Trail from the Frozen Creek access area to Turkey Pen Gap on the western boundary of Gorges State Park. Horses and mountain bikes are not permitted beyond Turkey Pen Gap. This trail also serves as a connector from Frozen Creek Access to the Foothills Trail.



Auger Hole Trail

Bearwallow Valley Trail: 1.00 mile for hikers. Use the Grassy Ridge Access entrance off of Highway 281, in Town of Sapphire. This trail access is at the Bearwallow and White Pines Picnic areas, and via the Visitor Center Connector trail. This is a short but moderate trail to the Bearwallow Valley observation deck. The trail utilizes the clearing of the powerlines, to give the visitor a great view of the park and Lake Jocassee.

Canebrake Trail: 10.40 miles round trip for hikers. The trailhead is located at the Frozen Creek access area near the Town of Rosman on Frozen Creek Road. This trail follows the eastern boundary of the park from Frozen Creek Access to Foothills Trail. This trail provides access to the camping along the Foothills Trail on the north reaches of Lake Jocassee.



Canebrake Trail

Foothills Trails: 6.70 miles one way for hikers

The trailhead is located at the Frozen Creek access area near Town of Rosman on Frozen Creek Road. The trail was established by Duke Energy and winds along the southern portion of the state park then wraps around Lake Jocassee, where primitive campsites are available.

Heath Pine Ridge Trail: 0.80 mile out and back spur trail for hikers. This strenuous trail was completed in summer of 2016.

Indian Camp Trail: 2.00 miles round trip for hikers. This strenuous spur trail was completed in summer 2016.

Lime Kilns Trail: 0.37 mile round trip spur trail for hikers. This strenuous trail was completed in summer 2016.



Picnic Connector Trail

Picnic Connector Trail: 0.40 miles one way for hikers. Trailhead parking is found at Grassy Ridge Access entrance off of Hwy 281, in Town of Sapphire. This trail access is at the Bearwallow and White Pines Picnic areas. Trail runs between the two picnic areas at Bearwallow and White Pines.

Rainbow Falls Trail: 3.00 miles round trip for hikers

Use the Grassy Ridge Access entrance off of Hwy 281, in Town of Sapphire. This trail access is at the Grassy Ridge Trailhead. This popular trail is jointly maintained by Gorges State Park and the Pisgah Ranger District. The trail accesses the Horse Pasture River and Falls along the river.



Raymond Fisher Trail

Raymond Fisher Trail: 1.50 miles round trip for hikers

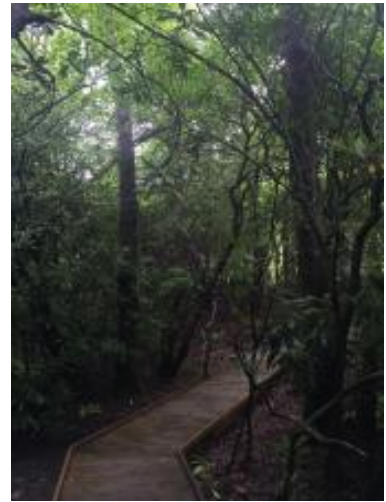
Use the Grassy Ridge Access entrance off of Hwy 281 South, in Town of Sapphire to access this trailhead. This trail access is at the Grassy Ridge Trailhead. Trail access eight primitive backpack

campsites at the Raymond Fisher campground. These sites can be reserved on a first-come first-served basis. Campers must register at the trailhead before occupying a site.

Upper Bearwallow Falls Trail: 1.00 mile for hikers. Use the Grassy Ridge Access entrance off of Hwy 281, in the Town of Sapphire. This trail access is at the Bearwallow and White Pines Picnic areas, and via the Visitor Center Connector trail. This is a short, but moderately strenuous trail to the Upper Bearwallow Falls observation deck.

Visitor Center Connector Trail 0.50 miles round trip

Use the Grassy Ridge Access entrance off of Hwy 281 South, in Town of Sapphire to access the trail. This trail access is at the Park Visitor Center. It connects with Bearwallow Valley Trail and then onto all the trails at White Pines and Bearwallow Picnic Areas. This trail provides an easy walk to the Bearwallow Valley observation deck. Hikers can then continue to the Bear wallow and White Pines Picnic areas and access the Bearwallow Falls Trail.



Visitor Center Connector Trail

Winter Green Trail: 2.20 mile round trip spur trail for hikers. This strenuous trail is new to the park and was completed in summer 2016.

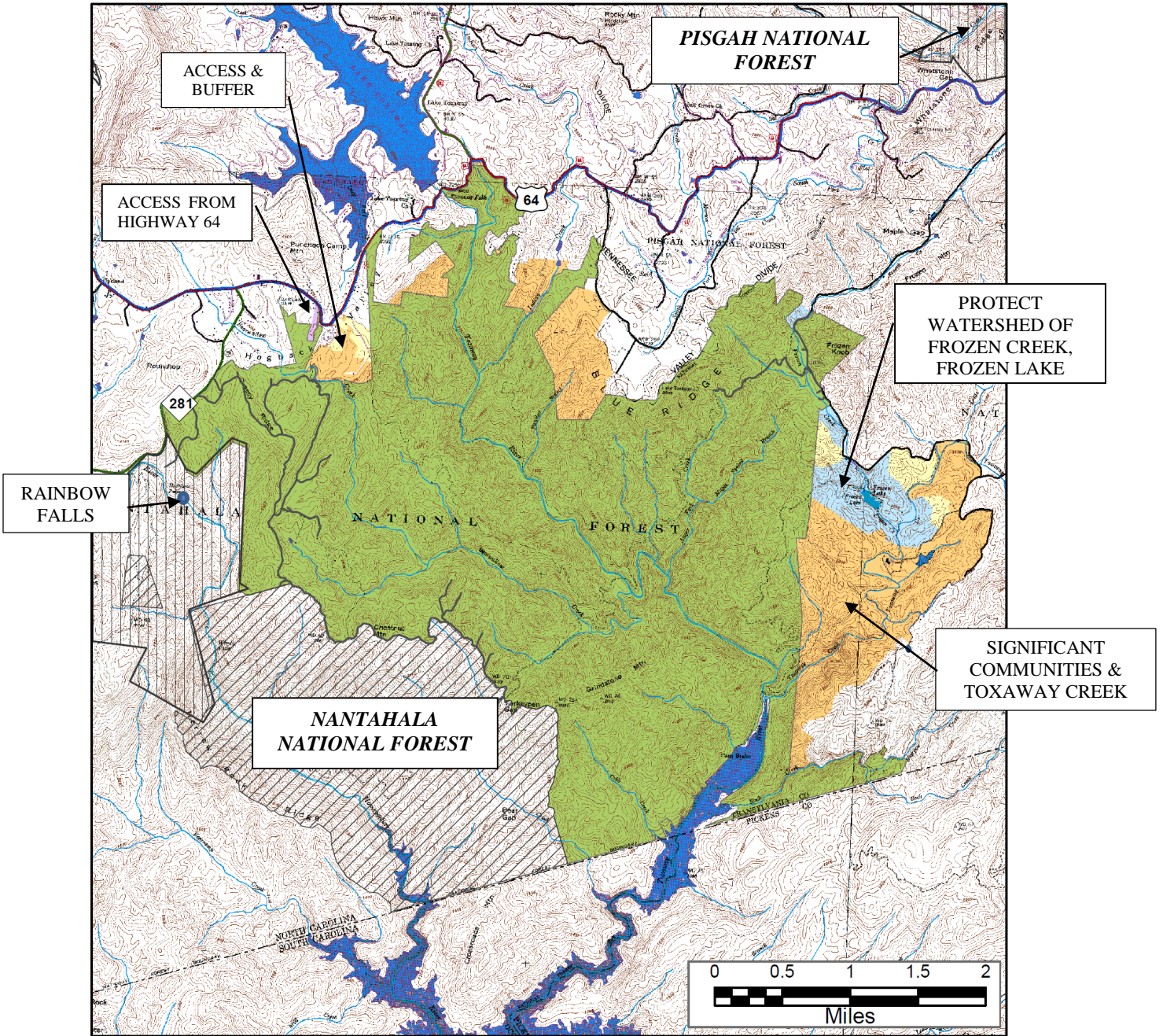
Mountain Biking and Horseback Riding:

Horses and mountain bikes are permitted on the Auger Hole Trail from the Frozen Creek access area to Turkey Pen Gap on the western boundary of Gorges State Park. The Frozen Creek Access Area near Rosman provides a picnic area and trailhead for the equestrian and hiking trail. Horses and mountain bikes are not permitted beyond Turkey Pen Gap due to steep slopes and NC WRC (Wildlife Resources Commission) regulations.

IV. PLANNING



LAND PROTECTION PLAN
GORGES STATE PARK



Gorges SP



Other Conservation Land

- Federal
- State
- Other

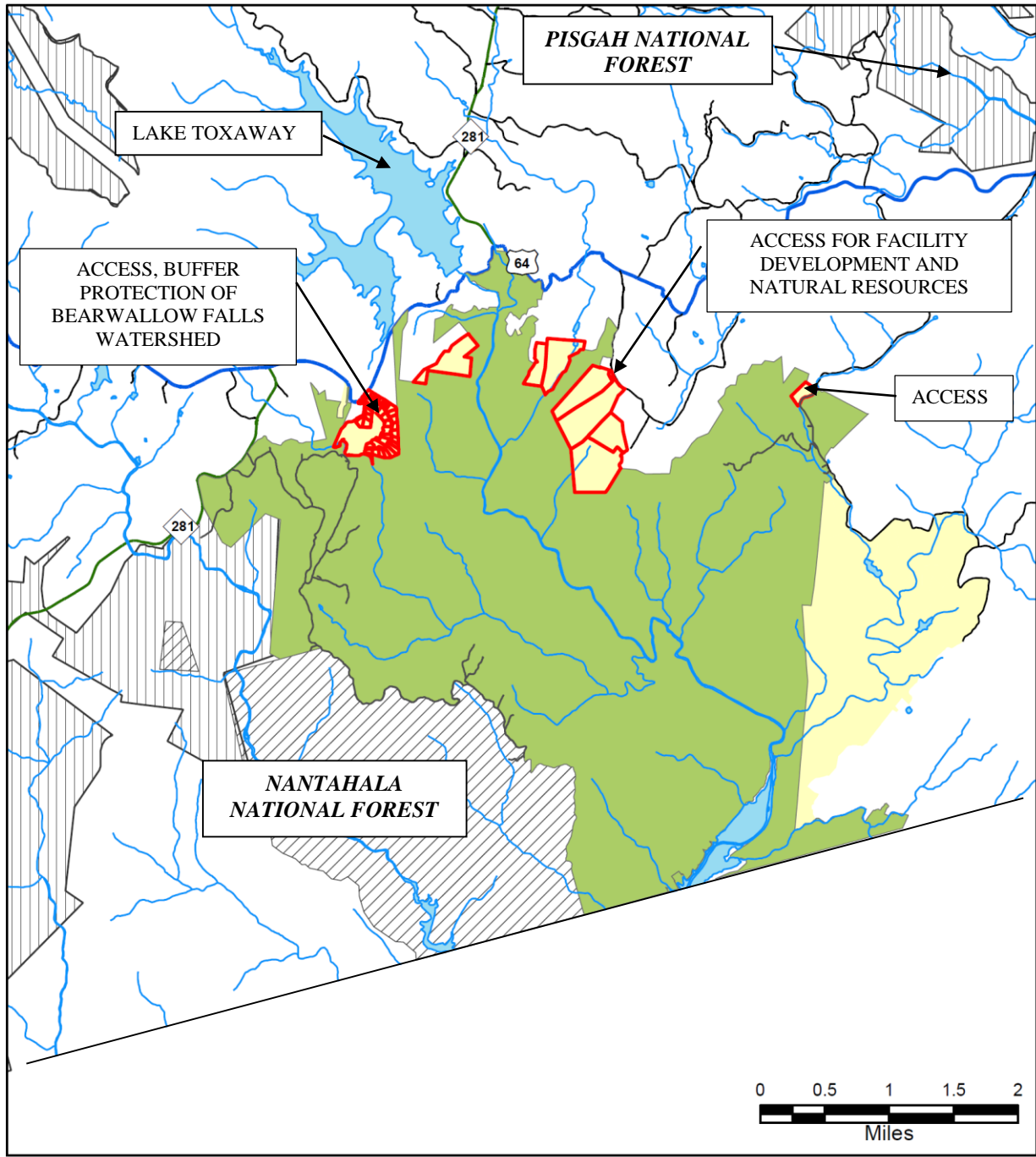
State Parks Unit

- State Parks Unit
- Land Protection Plan
- Primary resource protection
- Inholding
- Scenic protection
- Water quality protection
- Facilities development
- Buffer

October 2015



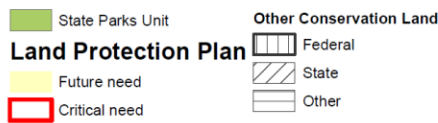
LAND PROTECTION - CRITICAL ACRES
GORGES STATE PARK



Gorges SP



January 2016



PROJECT EVALUATION PROGRAM LIST
GORGES STATE PARK

Project	Project Title	Cost
1	Grassy Ridge Campground and Parking Facilities	\$3,834,670
2	Frozen Creek Access	\$1,076,661
3	Grassy Ridge Access	\$1,568,210
TOTAL		\$6,479,541

1. Grassy Ridge Campground and Parking Facilities

Project scope of work includes: Fifty campsite campground development with a centrally located shower house. Twenty of the sites will include traditional RV utility hook-ups (water, sewer, and 100-amp electric service); five of the sites will include small camper cabins (approximately 300-SF with electric only); and the remaining 25 sites will not include any utilities.

Day Use and Parking Facilities: Scope of work includes an accessible restroom facility at the Grassy Ridge parking area and an additional parking area with a capacity of at least 100 spaces, one (1) ranger residence located on the north side of the property to provide security and emergency response capabilities for the family campground.

2. Frozen Creek Access

Scope of work includes: a parking area (55 vehicle capacity), picnic area, six (6) primitive campsites with a universal restroom, office space and maintenance storage area for staff vehicles.

3. Grassy Ridge Access

The main access area at Grassy Ridge Access is located off NC 281. The scope of work includes seasonal barracks (with sprinkler system), a picnic area, and one ranger residence for operations and security purposes. Barracks are needed due to limited affordable housing in this area.



View south on NC 281 at new main entrance location



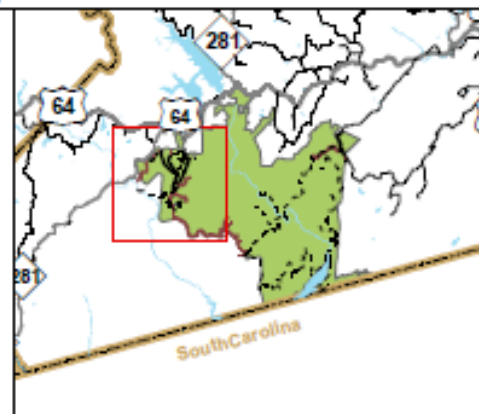
View north on NC 281 at new main entrance location

PROJECT #1: GRASSY RIDGE ACCESS: CAMPGROUND & PARKING FACILITIES
 GORGES STATE PARK

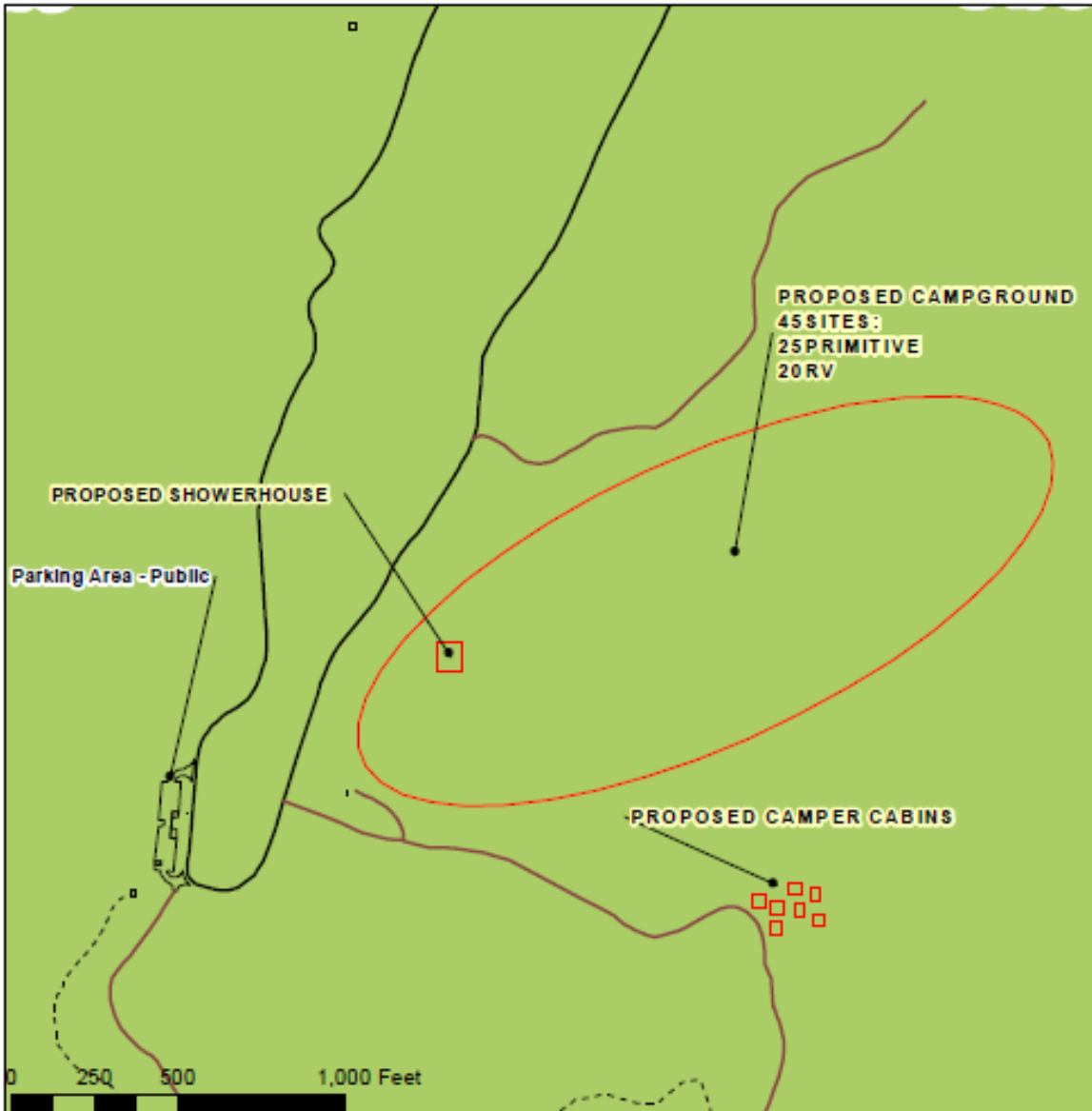


Gorges
 State Park
 Facility Inventory
 Grassy Ridge Access
 December 2016

- Existing Trail
- Road - Paved
- Road - Unpaved
- Existing Facilities
- Proposed Facilities
- State Parks Unit



PROJECT #1: GRASSY RIDGE CAMPGROUND AND PARKING FACILITIES –
 ENLARGED AREA
 GORGES STATE PARK

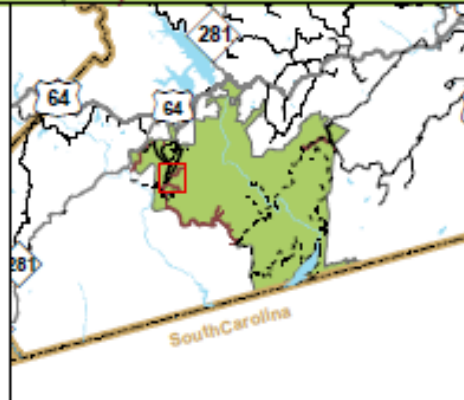


Gorges State Park
 Facility Inventory

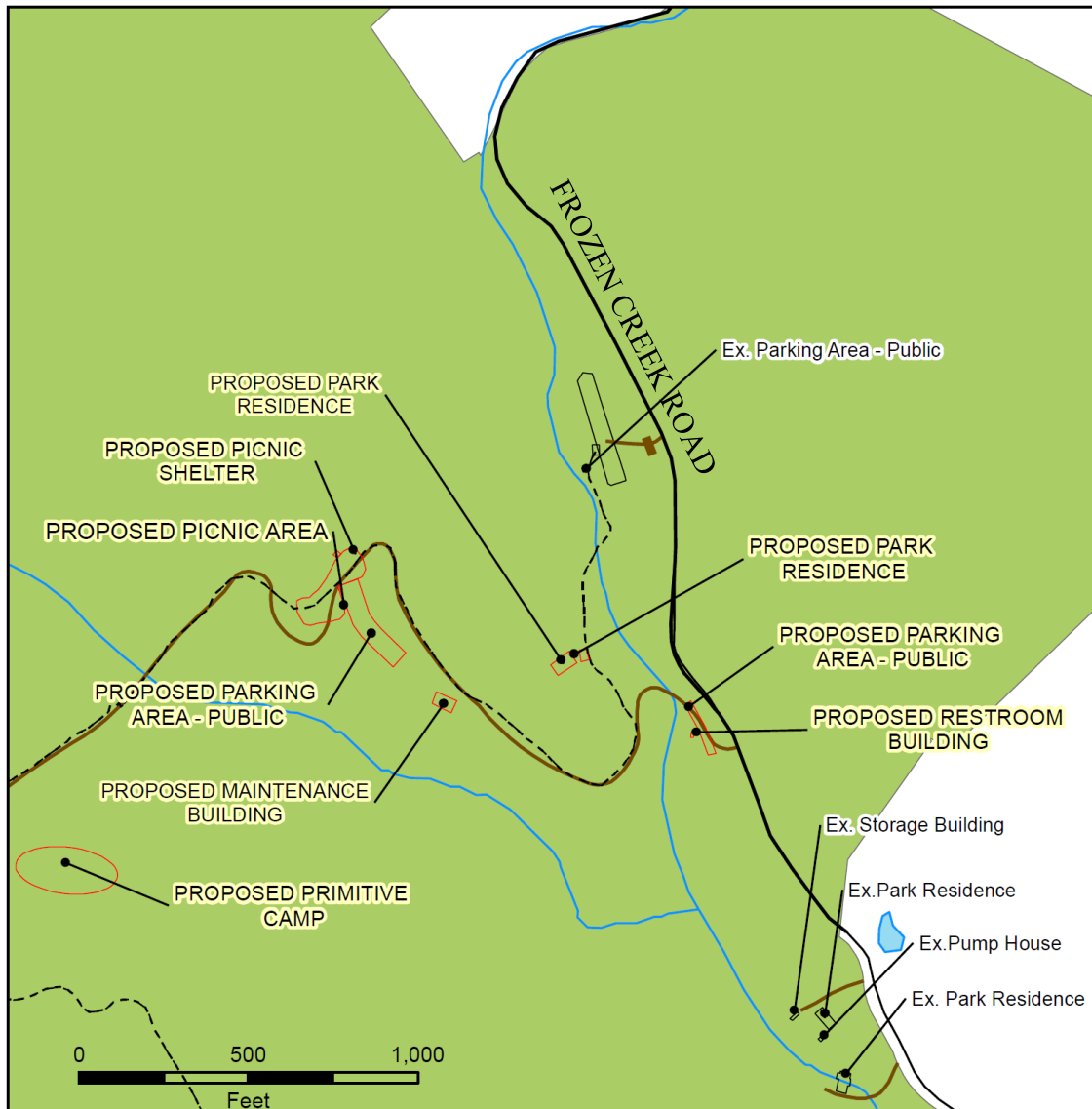
Grassy Ridge Access
 Enlarged Area
 February 2017



- Existing Trail
- Road - Paved
- Road - Unpaved
- Existing Facilities
- Proposed Facilities
- State Parks Unit



PROJECT # 2: FROZEN CREEK ACCESS
 GORGES STATE PARK



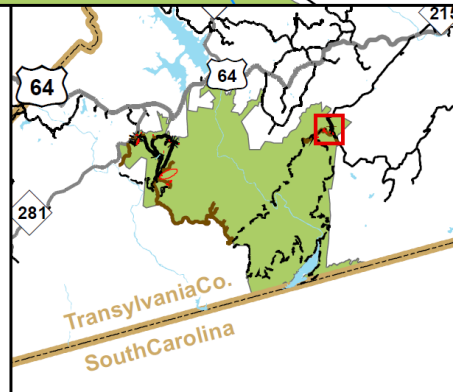
Gorges
 State Park
 Facility Inventory

Frozen Creek Access

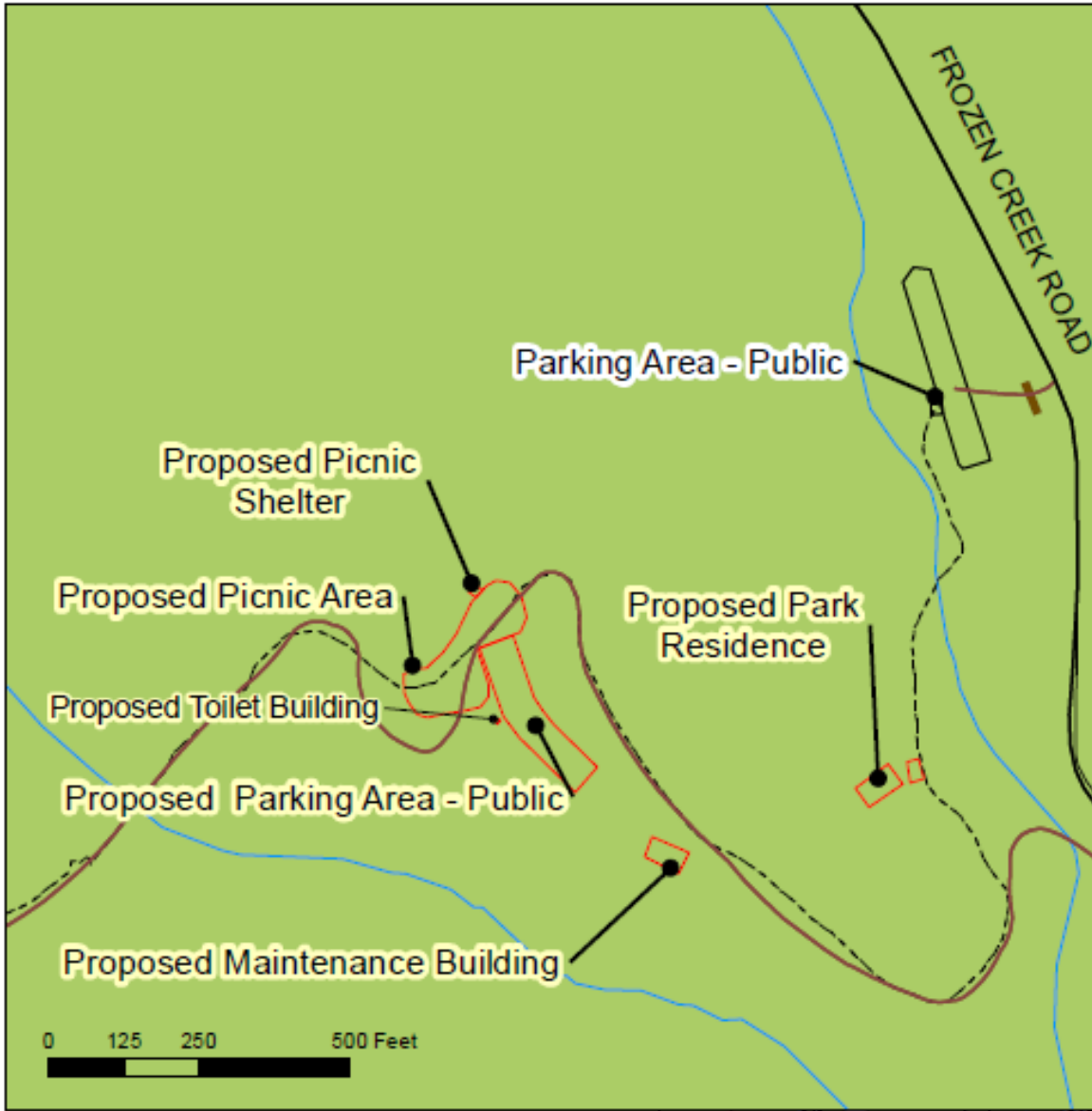
October 2015



- Existing Trail
- Road - Paved
- Road - Unpaved
- Existing Facilities
- Proposed Facilities
- State Parks Unit



PROJECT # 2: FROZEN CREEK ACCESS – ENLARGED AREA
 GORGES STATE PARK



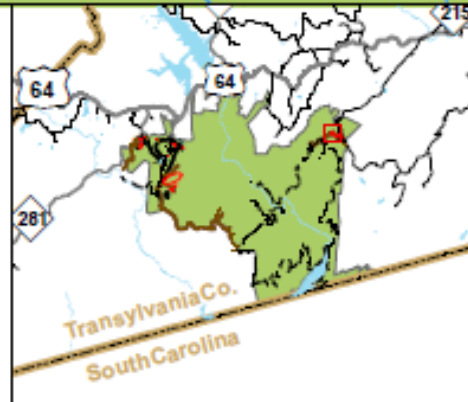
Gorges
 State Park
 Facility Inventory

Frozen Creek Access
 Enlarged Area

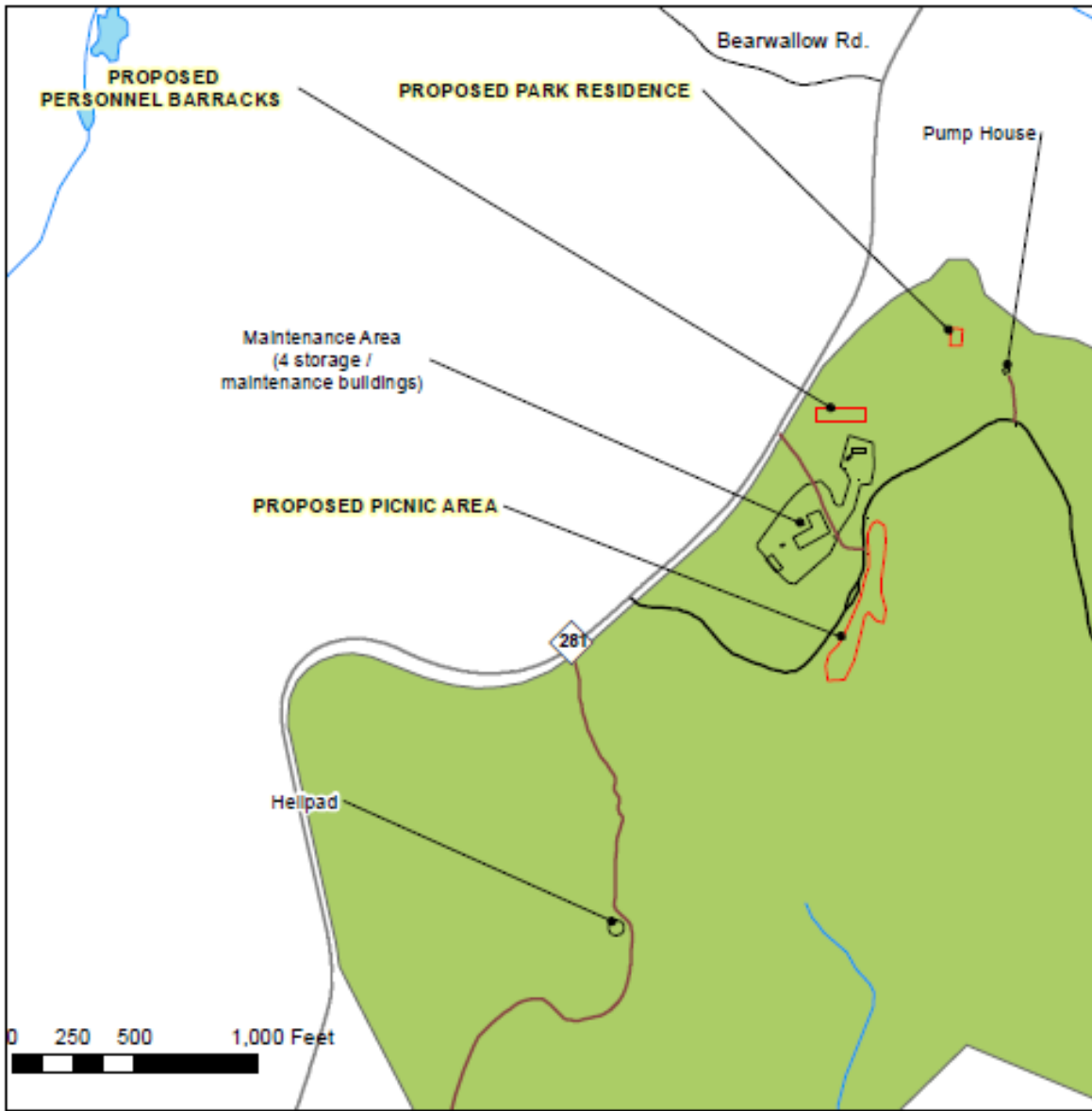
February 2017



- Existing Trail
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PROJECT #3: GRASSY RIDGE ACCESS
GORGES STATE PARK



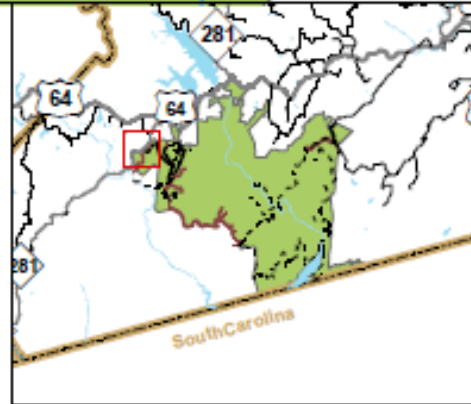
Gorges
State Park
Facility Inventory

Grassy Ridge Access
Enlarged Area

February 2017



- Existing Trail
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PARK MAP
GORGES STATE PARK

