

Merchants Millpond State Park General Management Plan



North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

Division of Parks and Recreation

Coastal Region

May 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 natural and cultural heritage of North Carolina 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:

The park contains many significant biological resources representative of a coastal millpond and southern swamp, including an exceptionally rich aquatic flora. The swamp upstream from the pond is an excellent example of a black water stream that supports several types of swamp forest. Several old-growth stands of cypress-gum forests with Spanish moss and resurrection ferns dominate the pond and provide a canopy over its dark, acidic waters. A Mesic Mixed Hardwood Forest, dominated by beech, is located on the slopes adjacent to the millpond. The park supports an abundant faunal community, including many species requiring large tracts of wild land for survival. Approximately 1,900 acres have been designated as the Merchants Millpond Registered Natural Heritage Area. An unusual feature of the millpond is the dense scattering of massive stumps within the millpond itself, habitats for complex micro-ecosystems. Many plant species are at or near the limits of their range, with mountain species and northern species coexisting with more typical southern varieties.

Merchants Millpond has a variety of exceptional and unusual scenic resources. Opportunities exist to view wildlife while floating in an ecological wonderland. Lassiter Swamp, with its large cypress trees covered in Spanish moss, resembles an enchanted forest, with a pristine beauty and allure to be appreciated and admired. The beauty, serenity, peacefulness, and the natural wonders provide for an increased awareness and appreciation of a swamp environment.

The significant recreational resources include the millpond and adjacent land that may be suitable for limited development. The millpond provides a rare opportunity to experience near-wilderness conditions in a swamp environment. Canoeing the swamp provides solitude and a sense of discovery and exploration, with the tranquility interrupted only by the sounds of wildlife. The



Visitors Center

size of the millpond and placid nature create excellent fishing opportunities, and paddle-in camping accessible to novice boaters. Surrounding high ground is suitable for drive-in camping and picnicking. The trail system provides opportunities to study and photograph nature, and also provides access to backpack camping areas.

The significant archaeological resource is the cultural history of the millpond. Early Gates County residents were dependent upon farming and logging for their livelihoods. Thus, mills were constructed to process and market the farm products and lumber. With all the mercantile activity at the mills, this area soon became the trade center of Gates County.



Canoe storage

The most significant geological resources are the upland ridges around the millpond that are atypical in the Coastal Plain. The short steep slopes occurring near the edge of Bennetts Creek are more similar to those found in the Piedmont.

In 2012, Merchants Millpond State Park was recognized by the Albemarle Resource Conservation and Development Council for a paddle trail project it completed along Bennett's Creek.

Merchants Millpond was established as a state park so that its diverse biological, scenic, recreational, archaeological, and geological values could be protected. The North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation is charged with preserving these values and providing park experiences that promote pride in and understanding of the natural heritage of North Carolina.

II. HISTORY

Settlement in the Gates County area began in 1660. Residents of early rural communities made a living by farming and lumbering. In the early 1700s, Hunters Millpond was built at the head of Bennetts Creek to provide a means of processing and marketing regional produce.

Highway construction destroyed this millpond in 1922. But further downstream, Norfleets Millpond, which was built in 1811, thrived. Gristmills, a sawmill, a farm supply store and other enterprises made the area the center of trade in Gates County. Thus, the pond became known as Merchants Millpond. Aside from the mercantile business at the mill, it is believed that apple brandy was made in a still near the gristmills and served to customers. A post office with the postmark "Merchant Mills – N.C." operated here between the early 1880s and about 1915.

The millpond, first known as Norfleets Millpond, was formed when Bennetts Creek was impounded to serve a grist mill and sawmill in 1811. The millpond became known as Merchants Millpond in the early 1900s when the mill became the chief trading center of Gates County. Operations at the mill ceased shortly before World War II. After two attempts to develop the surrounding property failed, A. B. Coleman purchased the property in the 1960s. Merchants Millpond State Park was established in 1973 when Coleman donated 919 acres, including the millpond, to the state to protect the natural diversity of the area. In the same year, the Nature Conservancy contributed an additional 925 acres of woodlands to the park that now encompasses

more than 3,250 acres.



Millpond

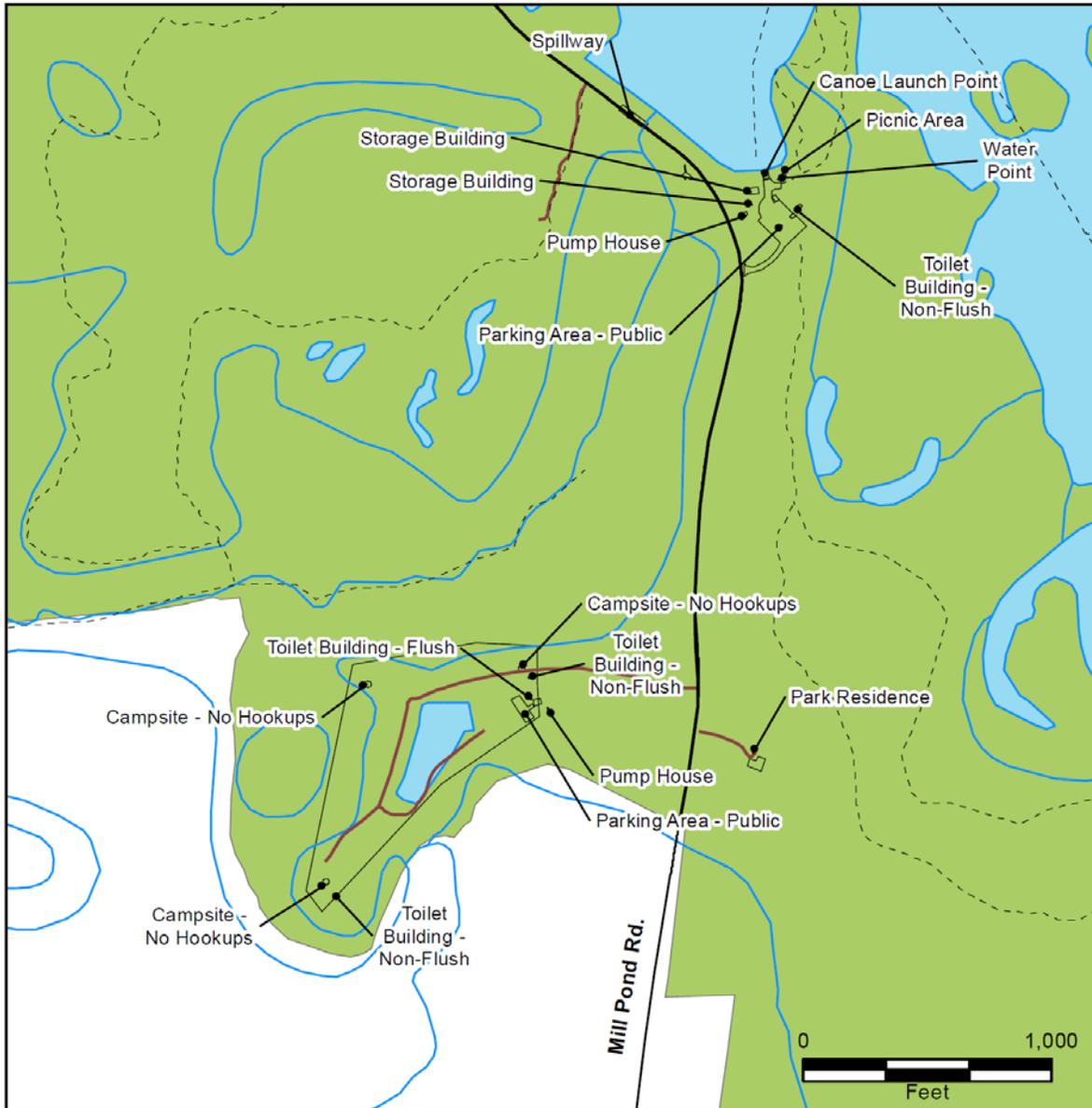
III. THEMES AND INVENTORY

THEMES OF MERCHANTS MILLPOND STATE PARK

Theme Type	Theme	Merchants Millpond Significance	State Parks System Representation
Archeological/Historic	Cemetery	High	Adequate
Archeological/Historic	Commercial	High	Adequate
Archeological/Historic	Industrial	High	Adequate
Archeological/Historic	Mills	High	Adequate
Archeological/Historic	Rural-Domestic	High	Adequate
Archeological/Historic	Transportation	High	Adequate
Archeological/Historic	Underwater	High	Adequate
Archeological/Prehistoric	Campsite/Activity Area	High	Adequate
Archeological/Prehistoric	Underwater	High	Adequate
Archeological/Standing Structure	Mills	High	Adequate
Biological	Brown water Coastal Plain Floodplains	Little	Little
Biological	Freshwater Tidal Wetlands	High	Moderate
Biological	Piedmont and Coastal Plain Mesic Forests	High	Moderate
Biological	Upland Seepages and Spray Cliffs	Little	Moderate
Geological	Fluvial Depositional Features	High	Adequate
Geological	Sedimentary Features	High	Adequate
Scenic	Forests	High	Moderate
Scenic	Islands	High	Little
Scenic	Meadows/Grasslands	High	Little
Scenic	Pocosins	High	Moderate
Scenic	Reservoirs/Lakes	High	Moderate
Scenic	Rivers	High	Little
Scenic	Scenic Vistas	High	Moderate
Scenic	Swamps	High	Adequate

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

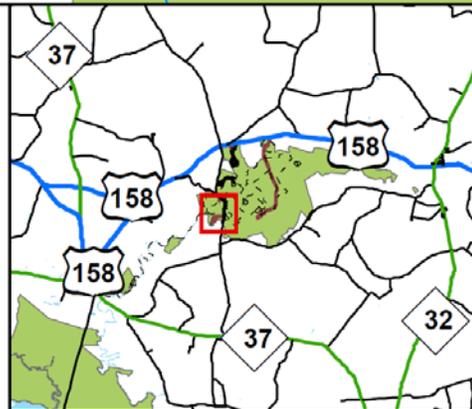
BENNETTS CREEK AREA
 MERCHANTS MILLPOND STATE PARK



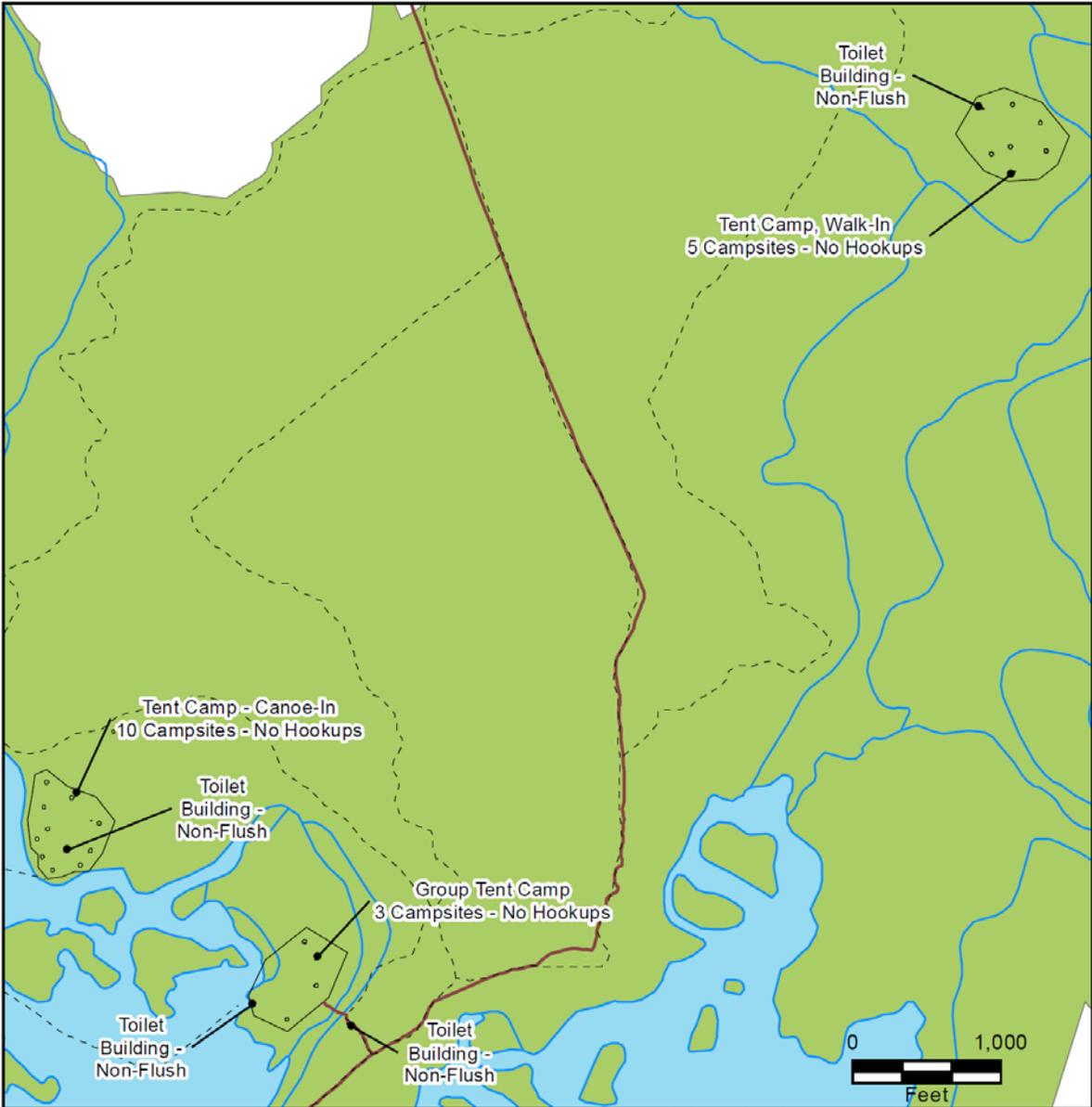
Merchants Millpond
 State Park
 Facility Inventory

Bennetts Creek
 January 2017

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

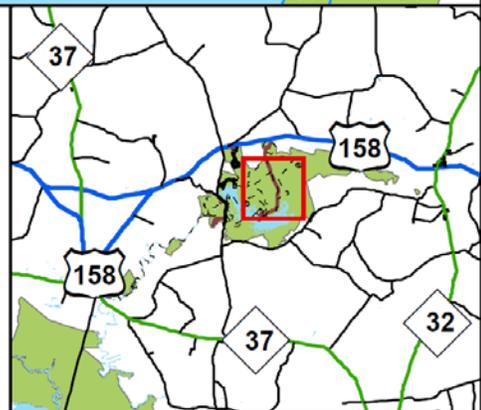


FACILITY INVENTORY - CANOE /BACKPACK CAMPING
 MERCHANTS MILLPOND STATE PARK

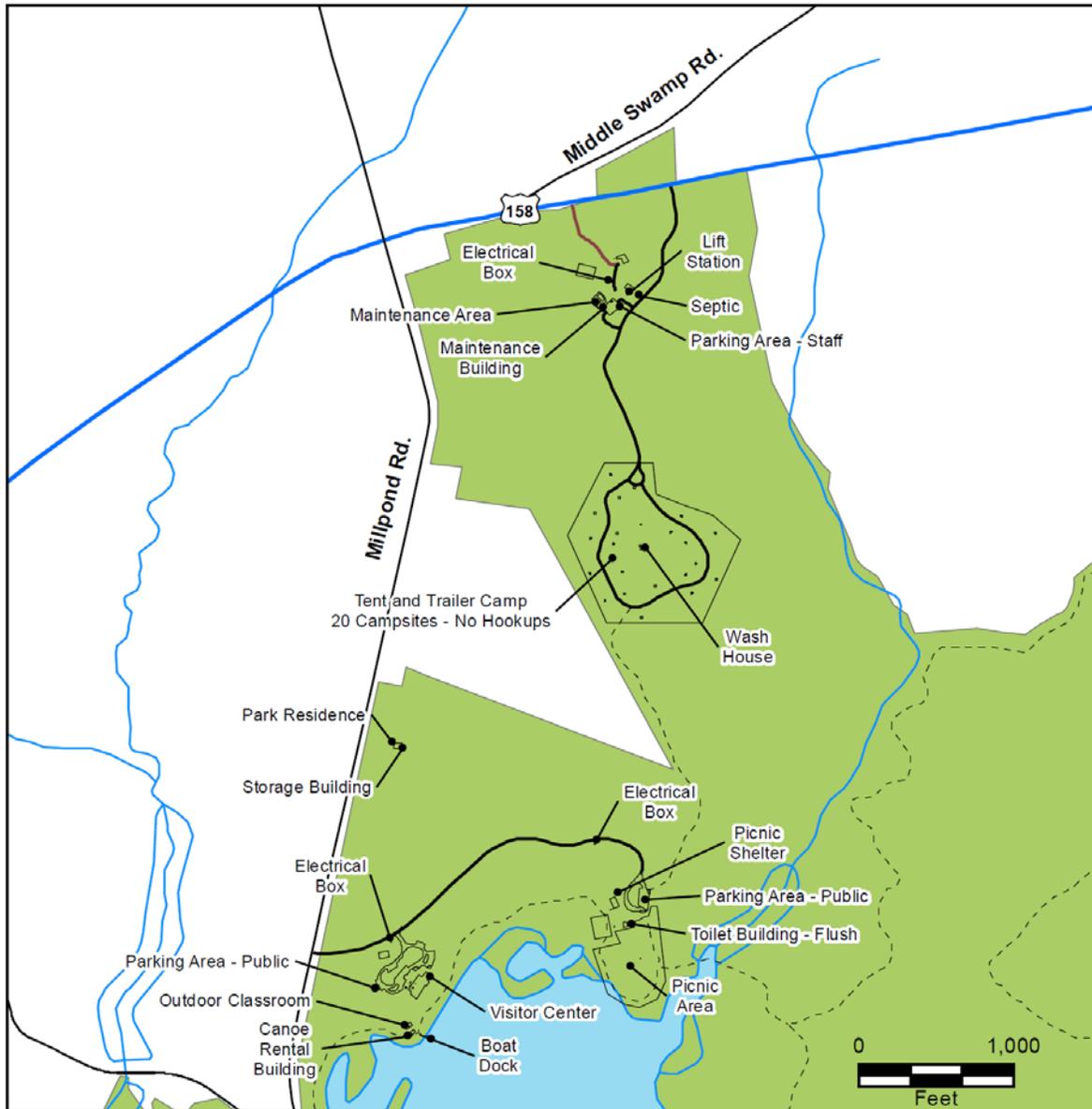


**Merchants Millpond
 State Park
 Facility Inventory**
 Canoe/Backpack Camping Area
 November 2016

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

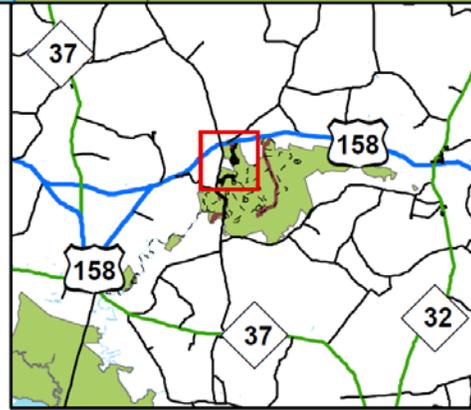


FACILITY INVENTORY - VISITOR CENTER /FAMILY CAMPING AREA
 MERCHANTS MILLPOND STATE PARK



Merchants Millpond State Park Facility Inventory
 Visitor Center/Family Camping Area
 January 2017

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



TRAILS INVENTORY
 MERCHANTS MILLPOND STATE PARK

Trails Inventory	Hiking	Paddle
Bennetts Creek Trail	2.00	
Bike Trail	5.25	
Camping Paddle Trail (Bennetts Creek)		4.50
Coleman Trail	2.00	
Cypress Point Trail	0.33	
Family Canoe Paddle Trail (Orange)	0.75	0.75
Fire Road	2.21	
Gatesville Paddle Trail (Bennetts Creek)		5.70
Group Tent Camp Paddle Trail (Orange and Yellow)	1.25	1.25
Lassiter Trail	6.70	
Rental and Alternate Canoe Launch Trail	0.10	0.10
Total	20.59	12.30

Hiking:

Bennetts Creek Trail is a 2-mile easy trail located near Bennetts Creek.

Bike Trail: is a 5.25-mile loop trail which leaves from the 158 access parking area.

Camping Paddle Trail (Bennetts Creek) is a 4.50-mile designated paddle trail.

Coleman Trail: is a 2- mile round trip trail. The Merchants Millpond State Park TRACK Trail follows the Coleman Trail, an easy and flat 2-mile loop. Enjoy a leisurely stroll through the forest while exploring the habitats that surround Merchants Millpond.



Bennetts Creek Trail

Cypress Point Trail: This 0.33 mile, universally accessible hiking trail provides a self-guided interpretive trail along with views of the millpond.

Family Canoe Paddle Trail (Orange): is a 0.75-mile paddle trail that connects the campground to Cypress Point Trail and Canoe Launch Access.

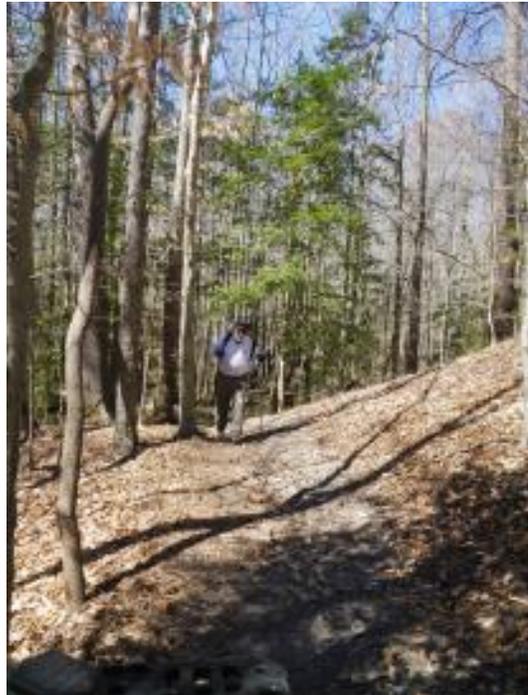
Fire Road is a 2.21 mile hiking trail.

Gatesville Paddle Trail (Bennetts Creek) is a 5.70-mile moderate paddle trail

Group Tent Camp Paddle Trail (Orange and Yellow): is a 1.25-mile paddle trail that connects the campground to Cypress Point Trail and Canoe Launch Access on the west side of the Millpond.

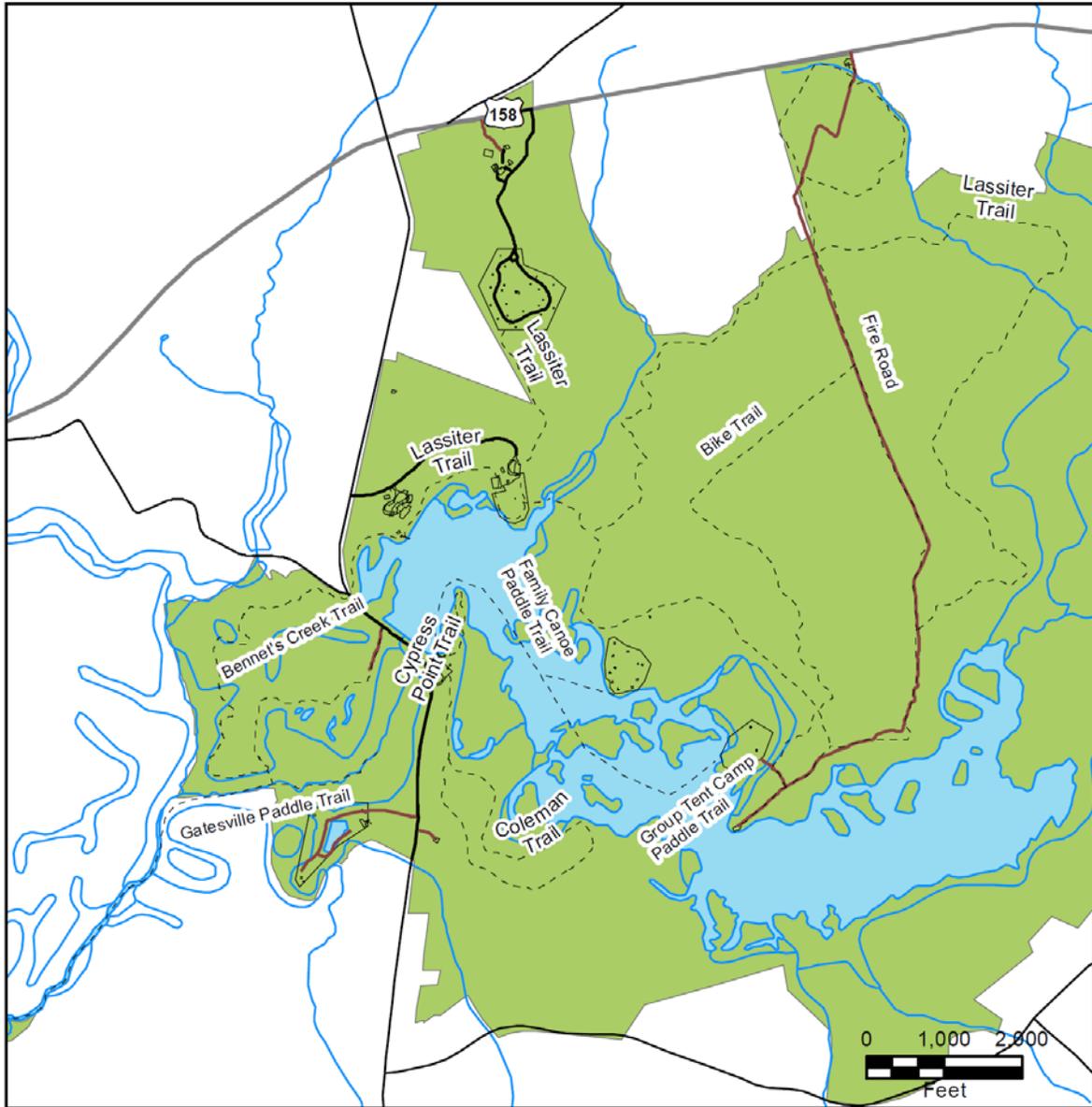
Lassiter Trail: is a 6.70-mile loop trail from Visitor Center. This section of Lassiter Trail shares a short section with bike trail.

Rental and Alternate Canoe Launch Trail: a 0.10-mile connector trail that leads renters from the Visitor Center to Family Canoe Paddle Trail (Orange). This is an alternate launch for paddlers.



Lassiter Trail

TRAIL INVENTORY
 MERCHANTS MILLPOND STATE PARK

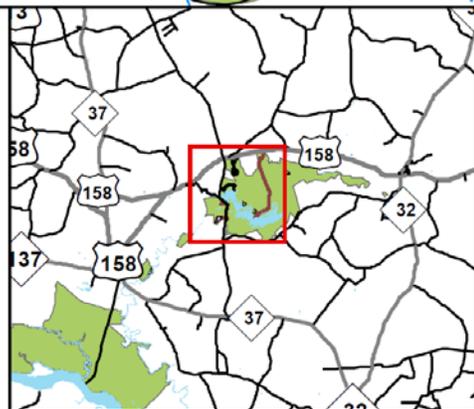


Merchants Millpond
 State Park
 Trail Inventory

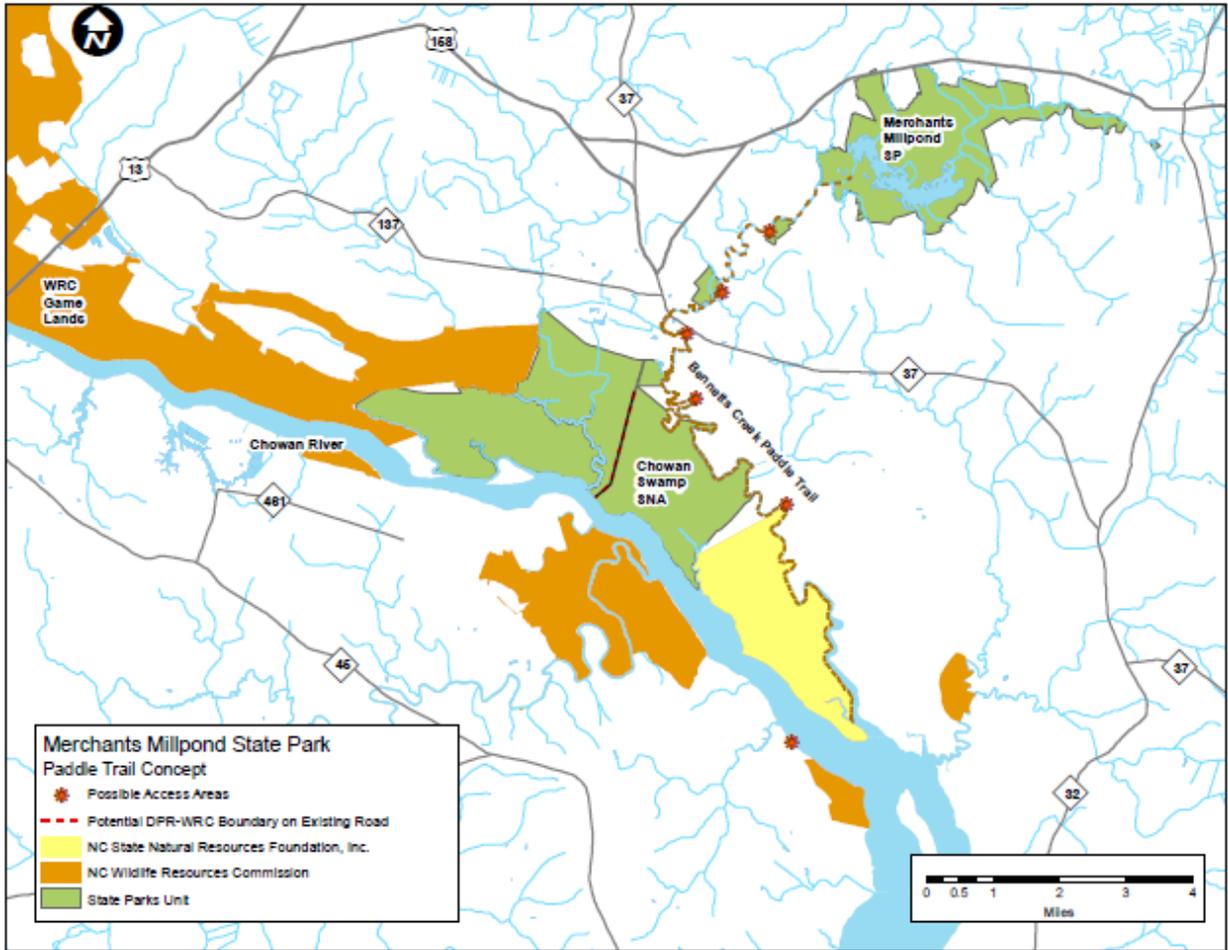
January 2017



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

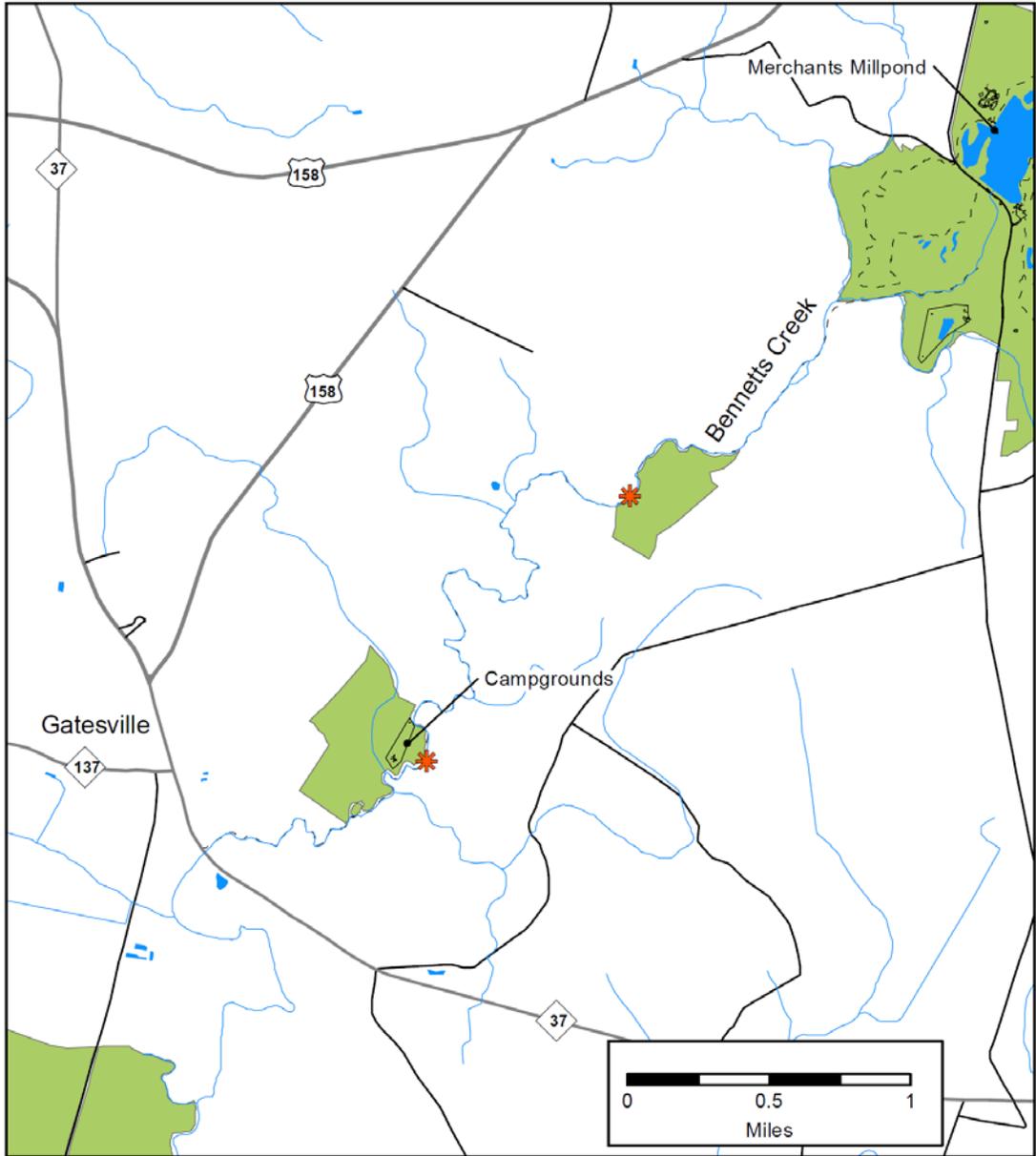


PADDLE TRAIL ACCESS
MERCHANTS MILLPOND STATE PARK

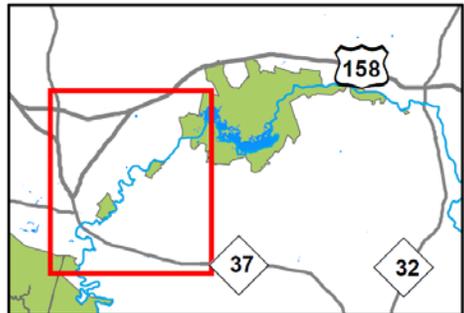


FLOATING DOCK FOR PADDLE ACCESS

REGIONAL PADDLE TRAIL ALONG BENNETTS CREEK
 MERCHANTS MILLPOND STATE PARK



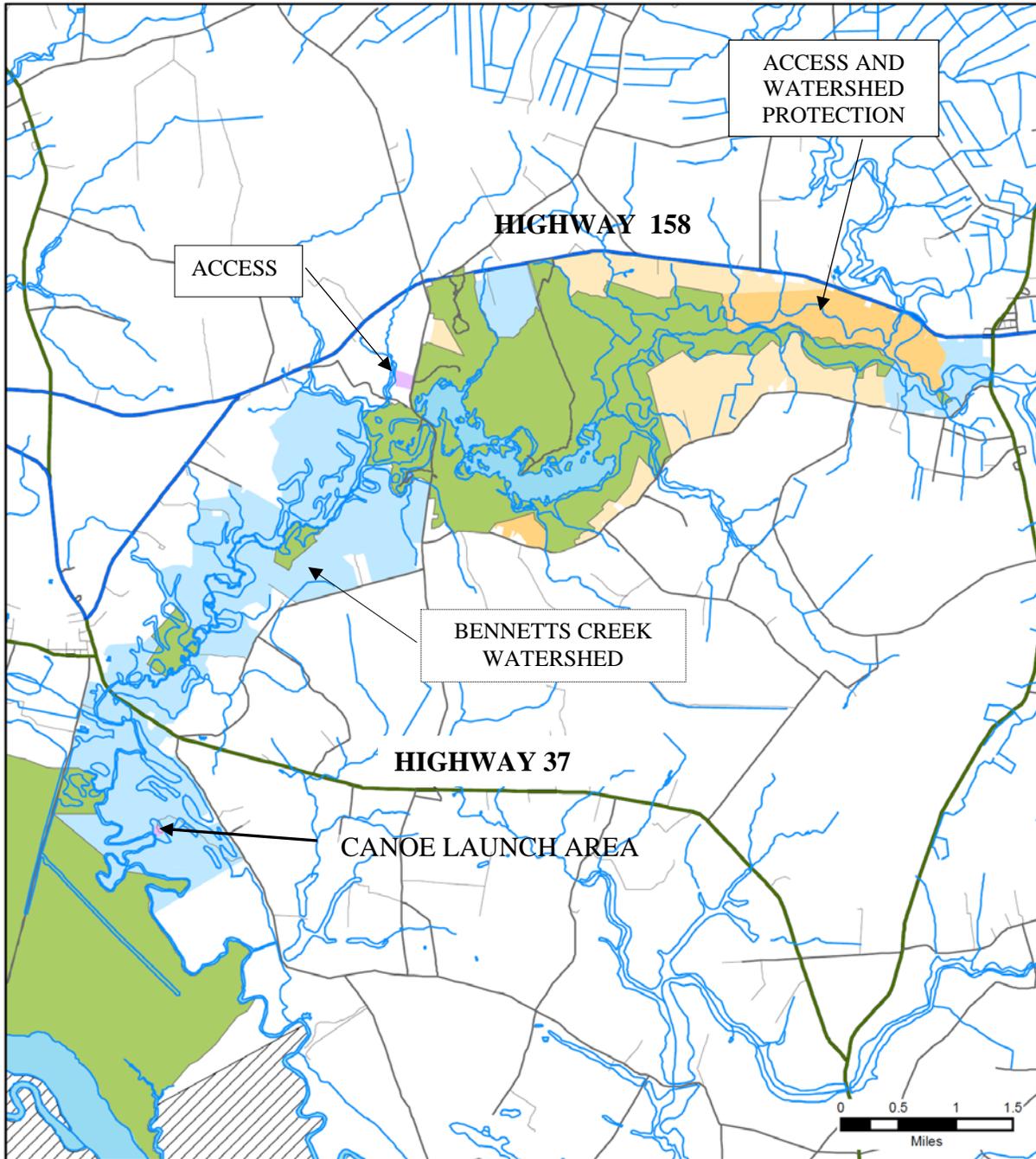
- Merchants Millpond State Park
- Bennetts Creek
- 
-  Bennetts Creek Access
-  Existing Trails
-  Existing Facilities
-  State Parks Unit



IV. PLANNING



LAND PROTECTION PLAN
 MERCHANTS MILLPOND STATE PARK



Merchants Millpond SP



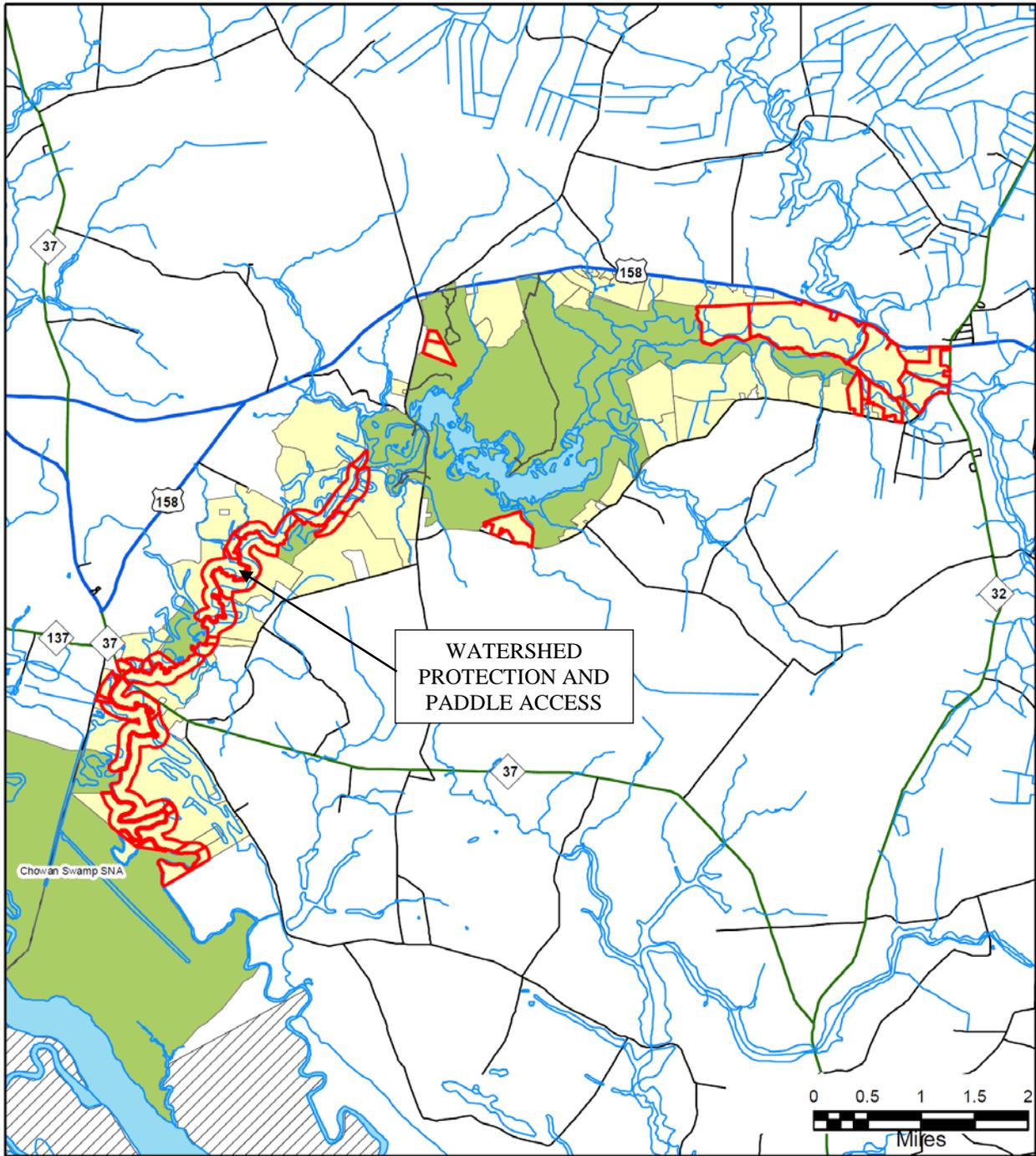
December 2014

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

- Other Conservation Land**
- Federal
 - Other
 - State



LAND PROTECTION PLAN – CRITICAL ACRES
 MERCHANTS MILLPOND STATE PARK



Merchants Millpond SP



Sept 2015

- | | | |
|---------------|-------------------------|---------|
| Critical need | State Parks Unit | Federal |
| Future need | Other Conservation Land | State |
| | | Other |

Land Protection Plan



PROJECT EVALUATION PROGRAM LIST
 MERCHANTS MILLPOND STATE PARK

Project	Project Title	Cost
1	Campground Improvements	\$ 870,750
2	Campground Improvements - Phase 2	\$ 375,642
3	Trail Improvements	\$ 711,394
4	Maintenance Area Improvements	\$ 600,693
TOTAL		\$ 2,558,479

** Estimated project cost does not include contingencies, design fee, nor escalation.

1. Campground Improvements

Scope of work includes upgrading utilities at existing campsites to 100-amp electric, and a dump station. The 20-site tent-and-trailer campground does not have electric or water hookups. Install a universal vault toilet in the center of the tent and trailer campground loop



Family campsite

2. Campground Improvements Phase 2

A proposed 20-site tent-only primitive campground loop will be developed south of existing tent-and-trailer campground. This primitive campground will not have electric hookups.

Scope of work includes: 1,800 linear feet of road extension, water spigots will be spaced every four (4) sites, and universal vault toilet, and 20 primitive campsites.

3. Trail Improvements

Three (3) trail improvements are proposed in this project. The first improvement is an extension of the Coleman Trail. The existing trail is two miles long and provides an easy looped hike. The extension of the Coleman Trail will add 1.3 miles of trail along the southern edge of the park along the edge of the millpond. Boardwalks will be constructed in wetland or floodplain prone areas.

The second improvement is a campground connector trail of 0.50 mile. This trail connection will allow access to the parks trail network without driving to the other side of the park.

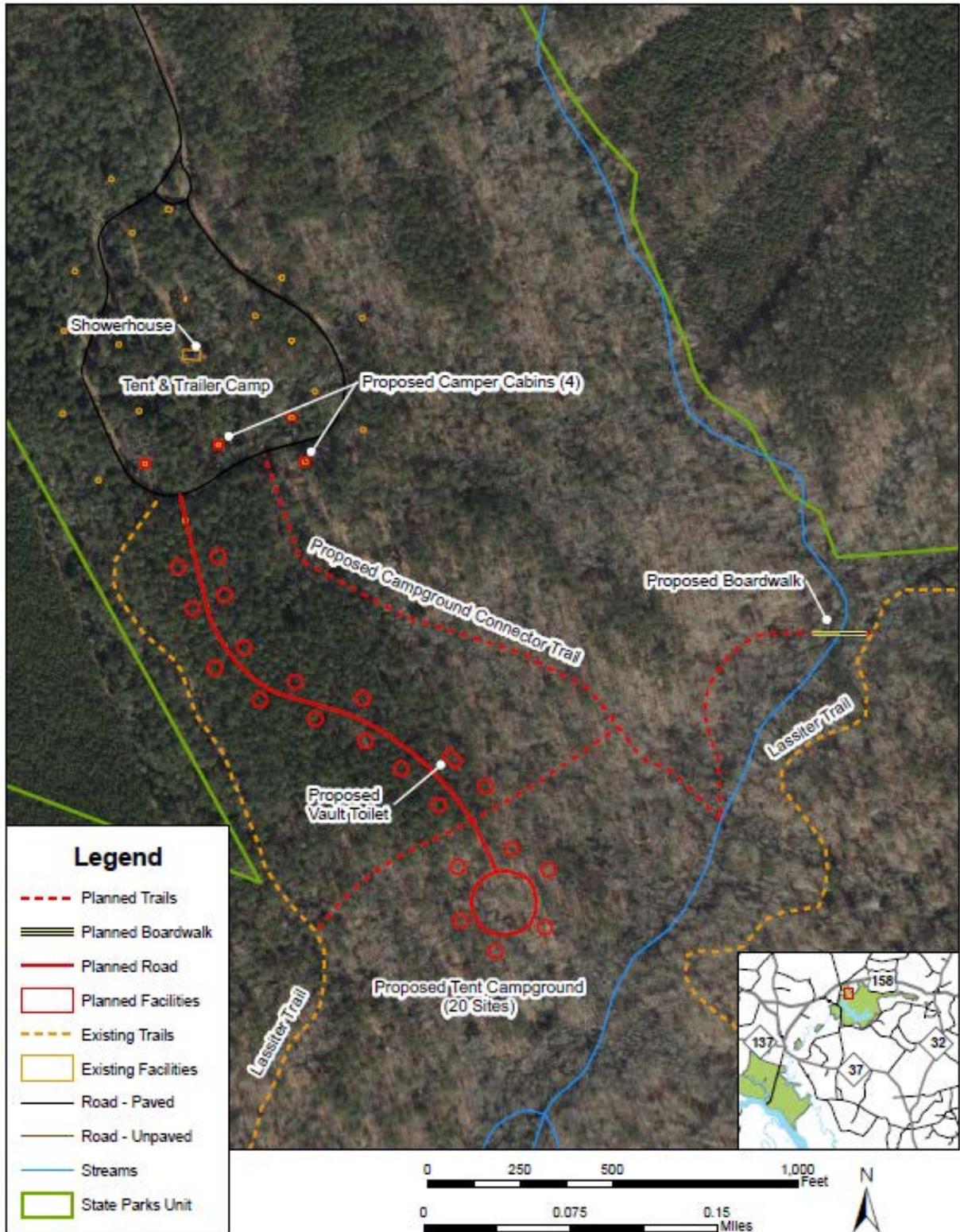
4. Maintenance Area Improvements

When the Visitor Center was constructed in 2008, the former park office was abandoned. This project will renovate the old office as a storage building for the maintenance area.

Scope of work includes: a vehicle maintenance building and pole barn, a flammable

storage building; 6' tall security & chain-link fence around the perimeter; enlarge graveled service area; and upgrade electrical service.

PROJECT #1 & 2: CAMPGROUND IMPROVEMENTS
 MERCHANTS MILLPOND STATE PARK



PROJECT #3: TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS
 MERCHANTS MILLPOND STATE PARK



PROJECT #4: MAINTENANCE AREA IMPROVEMENTS
 MERCHANTS MILLPOND STATE PARK –



PARK MAP
 MERCHANTS MILLPOND STATE PARK

