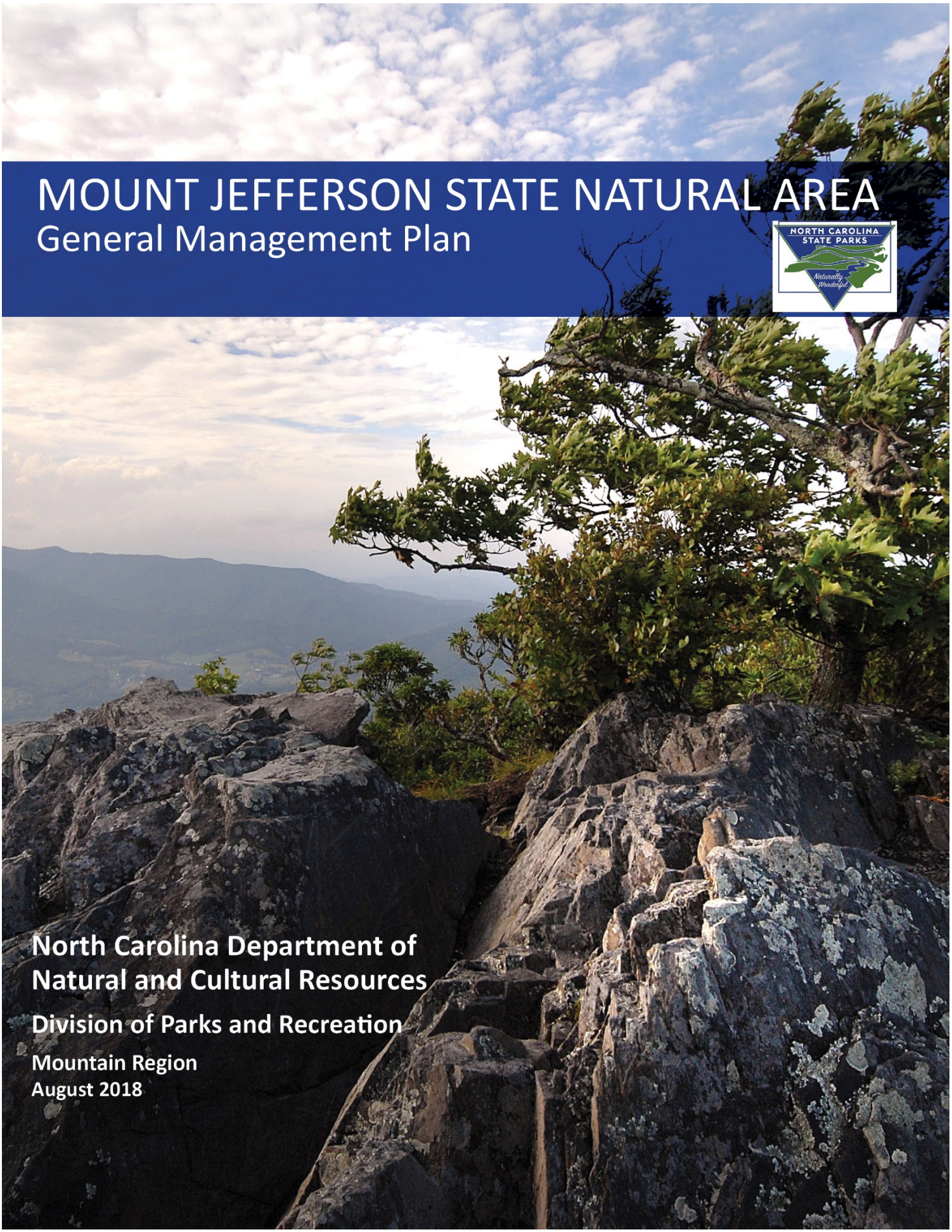

MOUNT JEFFERSON STATE NATURAL AREA
General Management Plan

North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

Division of Parks and Recreation

Mountain Region

August 2018

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Table of Contents

I. Mission and Purpose **1**

II. History **3**

III. Themes and Inventory **5**

IV. Planning **11**

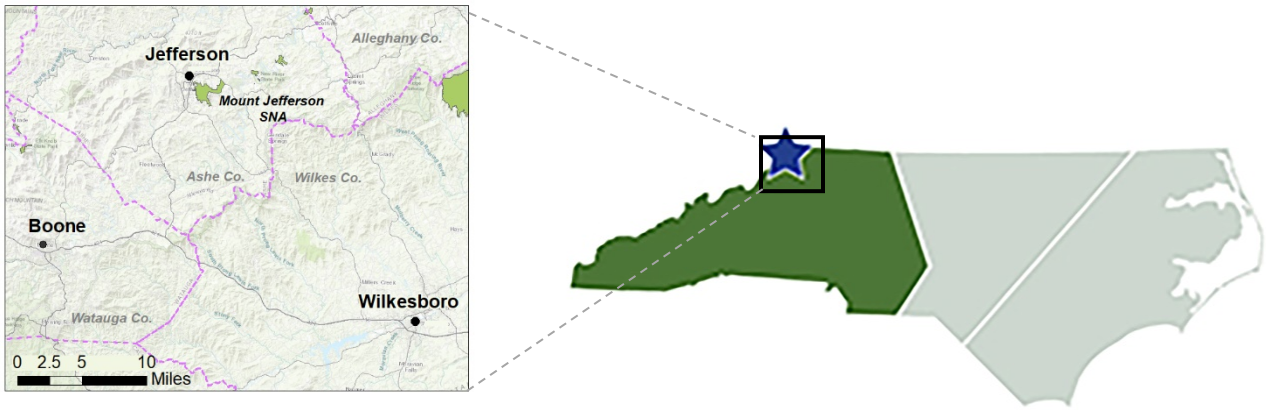
I. MISSION AND PURPOSE

General Management Plans:

The 1987 State Parks Act (G.S.143B – 135.40) requires each park to have an individual General Management Plan. As required, these plans seek to identify an individual parks purpose as a unit within the larger parks system and provide an analysis of the parks major resources and facilities. The GMP also identifies current and future needs of the park and prioritizes a list of proposed projects intended to meet those identified needs. These plans are considered living documents, recognizing the various and dynamic factors which influence the planning process. Each park's GMP is scheduled to be revisited every five years, or sooner if needed, to reflect the direction and vision of the State Parks Division.

State Parks Mission

The 1987 State Parks Act also defines the purpose of the state parks system. It establishes that: The State of North Carolina offers unique archaeologic, 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 Overview:

Located in the northwestern region of the state in Ashe County, Mount Jefferson is just 4 miles outside of the town of Jefferson. Located 26 miles northeast of Boone and 32 miles northwest of Wilkesboro and Mount Jefferson State Natural Area can be accessed from US 221.

PURPOSE:
Mount Jefferson State Park was established in 1956 when the efforts of local citizens led to the acquisition of 400 acres of land. The establishment was the culmination of an extensive local effort to create a public park on the scenic mountain top. The park serves residents and visitors of North Carolina by protecting wildlife and natural communities within the park; providing opportunities and facilities for viewing and enjoying the major scenic values of the area; providing opportunities for appropriate outdoor recreational use; and providing interpretive and environmental programs that educate park visitors on the plant life, geology, and ecology.

Significant biological resources at Mount Jefferson include high-elevation plant communities which occur above 4,000 foot of elevation, as well as diverse forests on the lower slopes. The high elevation plant communities include Red Oak Forest and the exposed Rock Summit community and Heath Bald community. The fragile plant communities associated with the rock outcroppings at higher elevations include several rare species. American chestnut once dominated many of the lower slopes, but these now grade from Northern Hardwood Forest and Rich Cove Forest on the northern slopes, to Montane White Oak Forest on other slopes. The mountain was established as a National Natural Landmark in 1974.

Amphibolite outcroppings at the mountain peak are the most significant geological resources. These outcroppings are particularly evident at two locations, the Luther's Rock Overlook and a second area extending from the peak down along the eastern ridge of the mountain.

The panoramic views from Mount Jefferson are the most significant scenic values in the park. The mountain vistas toward the Blue Ridge Mountains have attracted visitors for decades and generated the local interest in the establishment of the park. The best views are from the granite outcroppings on the peak that rise 1,600 feet above the surrounding area. The mountain is an important scenic landmark on the local landscape.

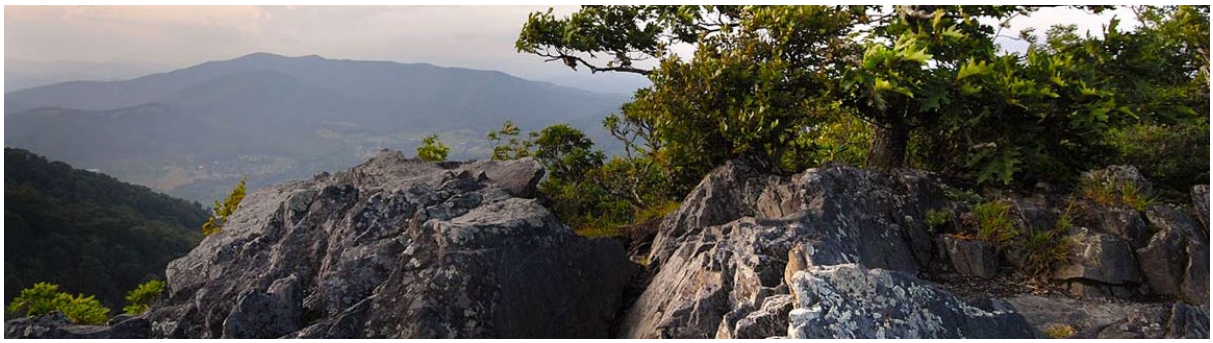
II. HISTORY

Mount Jefferson lies along the drainage divide between the north and south forks of the New River—one of the oldest rivers in North America and in the world. This drainage system had an important influence on the size and shape of the mountain.

Mount Jefferson and its nearby peaks are remnants of a once mountainous region that existed throughout much of the western part of the state. Weathering and the erosive action of streams throughout millions of years wore away the softer, less resistant rocks. More resistant rocks, including the amphibolite and metagraywacke of Mount Jefferson, were slower to erode. These and other rocks comprise the peaks standing above their surrounding plateau.

Luther Rock

Though there is no evidence of permanent Native American settlements in the Ashe County area, game was plentiful and both the Cherokees and the Shawnees claimed it as a hunting ground. The first settlers in the area were from Virginia. Few North Carolinians, other than adventurous individuals like Daniel Boone, had ventured westward beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains.



Panoramic Scenic views

Before the revolution, Mount Jefferson was known as Panther Mountain, perhaps because of a legend that tells of a panther that attacked and killed a child there. Area residents gave the mountain other names until 1952 when Mount Jefferson received its official name. The name was chosen in honor of Thomas Jefferson and his father, Peter, who owned land in the area and surveyed the nearby North Carolina-Virginia border in 1749. Around the time of the Civil War, legend holds that the "caves" beneath ledges of Mount Jefferson served as hideouts for escaped slaves traveling to freedom on the Underground Railroad.

(Which) Overlook

People took an interest in creating widespread access to the mountain in the 1930's during the Great Depression. Mount Jefferson State Park has early stages of development when the Works Progress Administration constructed a two-mile-long road to the summit of Mount Jefferson. In 1939, local officials wanted to have the road improved, but the State could not provide funds for a private road. Thus, two prominent local citizens donated 26 acres of land for a public park and thereby attained the road improvements.

In 1941, efforts to have the local park accepted as a State Park failed, and in 1952 the area became a state forest wayside park. Continued efforts to attain State Park status were unsuccessful as standards adopted in 1955 required that a State Park contain a minimum of 400 acres. Undaunted by continuous obstacles, local citizens obtained a 300-acre donation and succeeded in raising funds to buy an additional 164 acres for the park. Because of their determination, Mount Jefferson became a State Park in October 1956.

Since 1956, Mount Jefferson has continued to be operated as a unit of the state parks system. In 1974, the mountain was designated as a National Natural Landmark by the National Park Service because of its diverse plant communities. Because of its steep slopes, fragile soils, high quality natural communities and rare species, park development has been necessarily limited. In the 1990's, the park name was changed to Mount Jefferson *State Natural Area* to the focus upon the natural resource protection and environmental education.

III. THEMES AND INVENTORY

Themes

The significant archeological, geologic, scenic, recreational and biological resources of North Carolina should be represented in the State Park system. These resources, as cited in the State Parks Act, are divided into sub-categories called resource "themes". There have been 108 themes identified that should be protected to preserve representative examples of unique resources. For this General Management Plan, only themes that are of high significance to Mount Jefferson State Natural Area are shown.

Table 1 - Theme Table

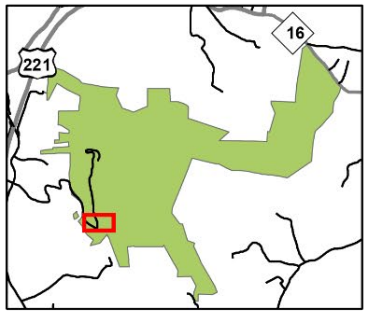
Theme Type	Theme	Mount Jefferson Significance	State Parks System Representation
Archeological/Historic	Recreation	High	Adequate
Archeological/Prehistoric	Campsite/Activity Area	High	Adequate
Archeological/Prehistoric	Quarry-Other	High	Moderate
Archeological/Prehistoric	Rock Art	High	Moderate
Archeological/Prehistoric	Shelter/Cave	High	Adequate
Biological	Grass and Heath Balds	High	Moderate
Biological	High Elevation Rock Outcrops	High	Moderate
Biological	Montane Oak Forests	High	Adequate
Biological	Mountain Cove Forests	High	Adequate
Biological	Northern Hardwood Forests	High	Adequate
Biological	Piedmont and Mountain Glades and Barrens	High	Moderate
Biological	Upland Seepages and Spray Cliffs	High	Moderate
Geological	Folds and Related Features	High	Little
Geological	Inselbergs (Monadnocks)	High	Adequate
Geological	Metamorphic Features	High	Adequate
Scenic	Caves/Cliffs	High	Moderate
Scenic	Forests	High	Moderate
Scenic	Rock Outcrops	Moderate	Moderate
Scenic	Scenic Highways	High	Little
Scenic	Scenic Vistas	High	Moderate

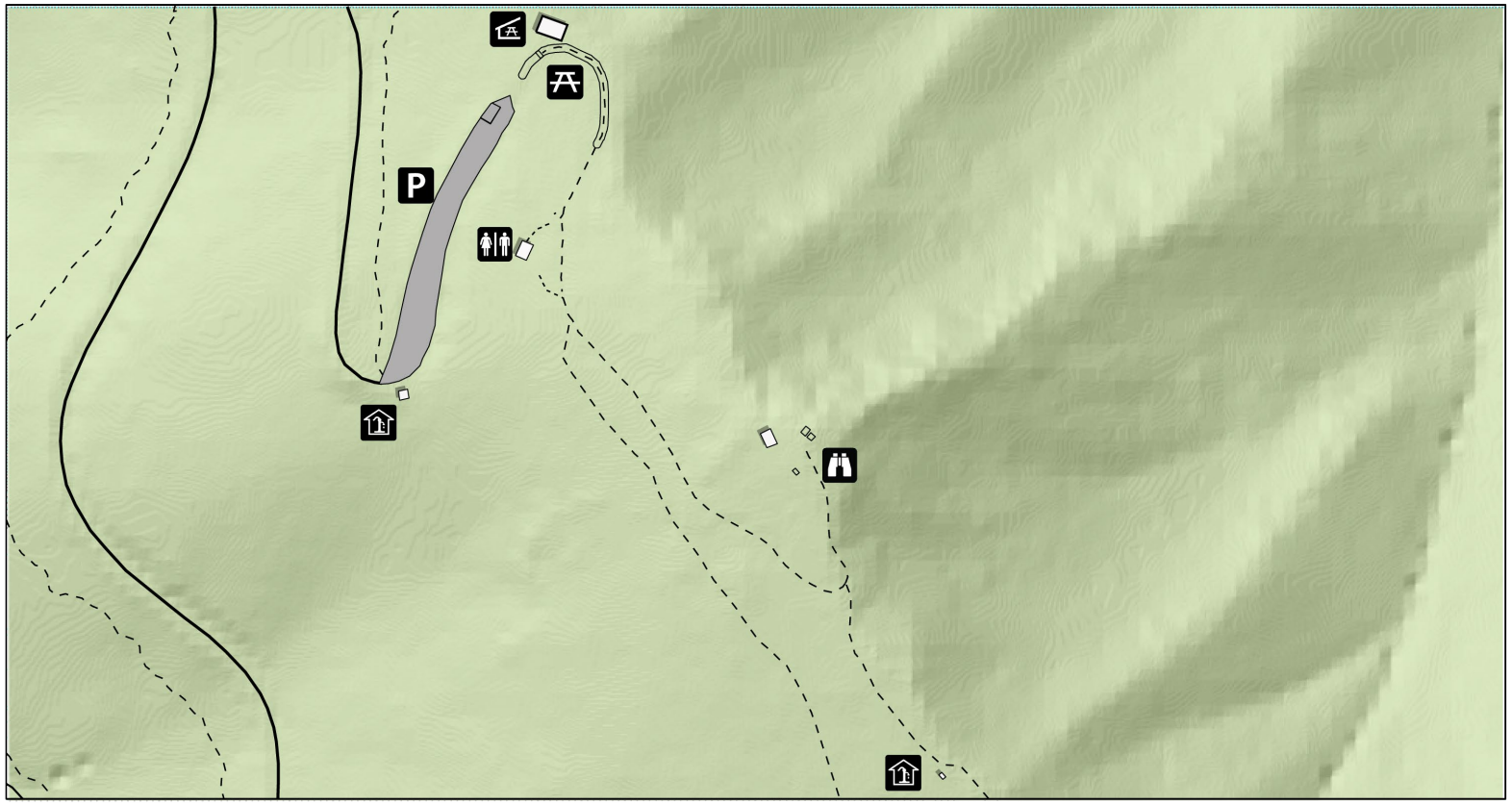
*See the Systemwide Plan for references to Theme and inventory terms. Themes have both actual and "potential" future needs to be at a park.

Mount Jefferson
State Natural Area
Facilities Inventory: Entrance

Septemeber 2018

Trails
Facilities
Steam/creek
State Parks Unit
Well House
Storage Building
Tractor Shed
Fuel Shed
Maintenance Shop
Park Office
Restroom
Parking lot
Ranger Residence



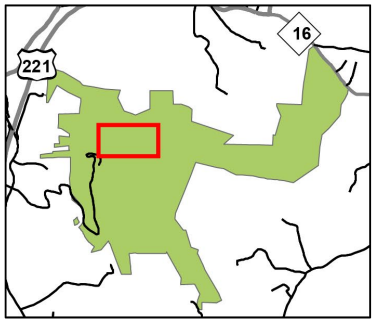


Mount Jefferson
State Natural Area
Facilities Inventory: North

September 2018

State Parks Unit
Trails
Facilities
Picnic shelter
Picnic area

Parking area
Restroom
Well / pump house
Look out location



TRAILS INVENTORY

Trail Inventory	Hiking
Lost Province Trail	0.75
Mountain Ridge Trail	2.0
Rhododendron Trail	1.1
Spur Trail	0.5
Summit Trail	0.3
Luther Rock Trail	0.05
Mt Jefferson SNA Totals (miles)	**4.70**

HIKING:

Lost Province Trail

Lost Province Trail: The Lost Province Trail is a 0.75 mile loop trail accessible from the Rhododendron Trail: along the south-eastern facing slope of Mount Jefferson. The moderate Lost Province Trail explores a virgin oak/chestnut forest, where false Solomon seal and other understory species can be seen.

Mountain Ridge Trail: This 2 mile trail follows the main internal roadway, meanders through diverse plant communities and offers hikers views from various outlooks . This strenuous trail begins at the park office, ascending the mountain through each overlook, and ends at the upper parking area.

Rhododendron Trail

Rhododendron Trail: The trailhead for the 1.1 mile long Rhododendron Trail is located near the terminus of the summit trail. The self-guided Rhododendron Trail follows a ridge southeast along the crest of the mountain from the summit to *Luther Rock*, an outcrop of metamorphosed amphibolite. This black volcanic rock is what gives Mount Jefferson its dark appearance. Hikers may look back along the horseshoe-shaped ridge to the summit and tower. Beyond is a spectacular view of neighboring valleys and peaks. On clear days, the New River is visible to the east. Bluffs extend along the ridge below the trail where outcrops of amphibolite are visible in winter.

Spur Trail: Beginning at the Sunset overlook, the Spur trail ascends .5 miles up the mountain, and intersects with the Mountain Ridge trail at the rock staircase. This trek makes for a great "out-and-back" hike. The spur trail is a one mile round trip.

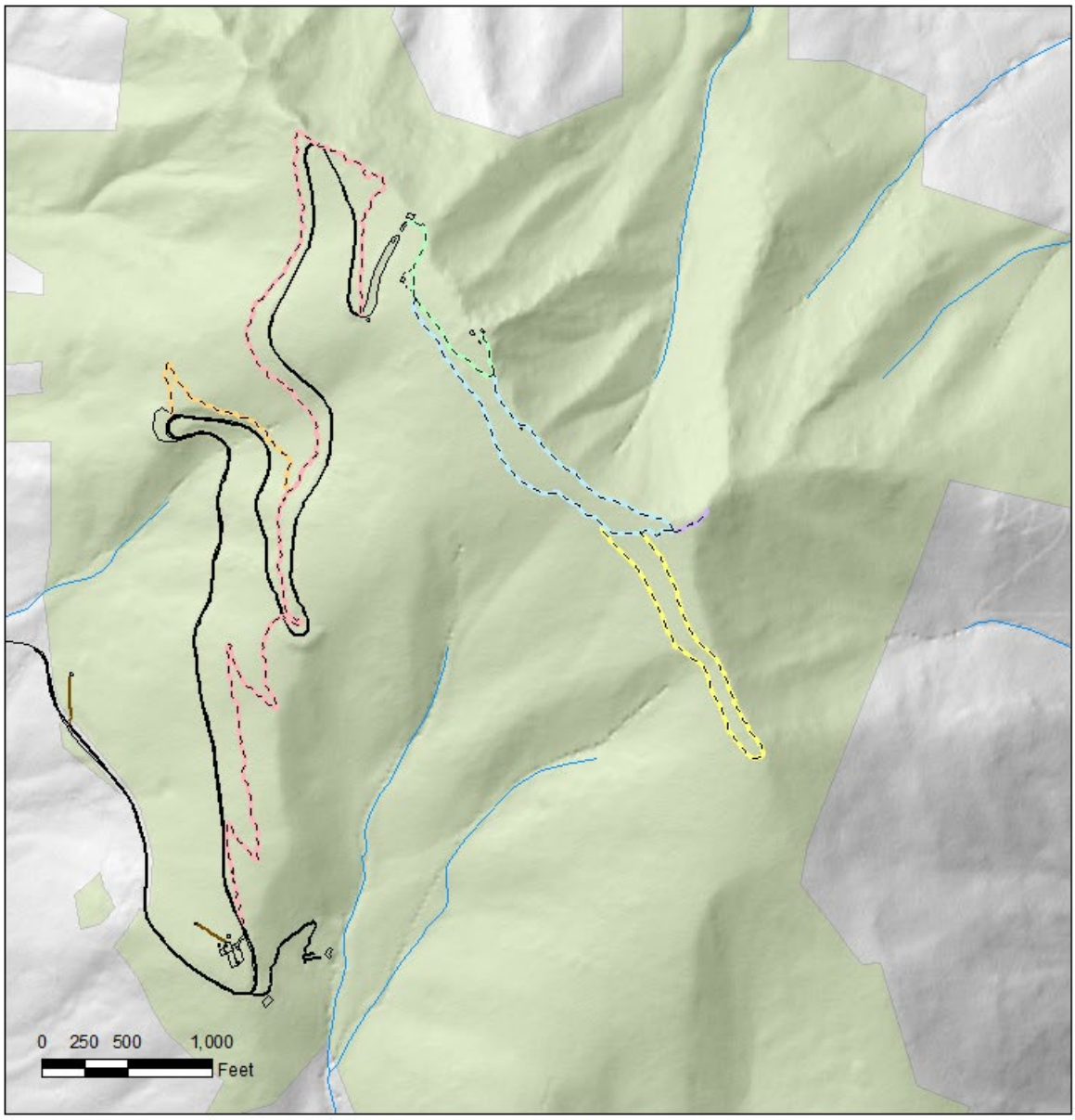
Spur Trail

Summit Trail: 0.3 miles in length, strenuous, (one way). Beginning at the parking lot, Summit Trail passes through the picnic ground and ascends 0.3 miles to the highest point on Mount Jefferson. Nearby overlooks provide panoramic views that make this gentle hike an excursion.

Track Trail: The Mount Jefferson Track Trail is an activity themed trail located on the Rhododendron Trail loop which is 1.1 miles long. The Activity Brochure Kiosk is located in front of the bathhouse along the summit trail.

Track Trail

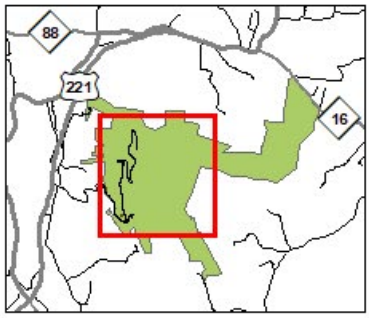
TRAILS INVENTORY



Mount Jefferson
State Natural Area
Trails Inventory

September 2018

- Lost Province Trail 0.75 mile
- Luther Rock Trail 0.05 mile
- Mountain Ridge Trail 2.0 mile
- Rhododendron/Track Trail 1.1 mile
- Spur Trail 0.5 mile
- Summit Trail 0.3 mile
- Facilities
- Streams / creeks
- State Parks Unit

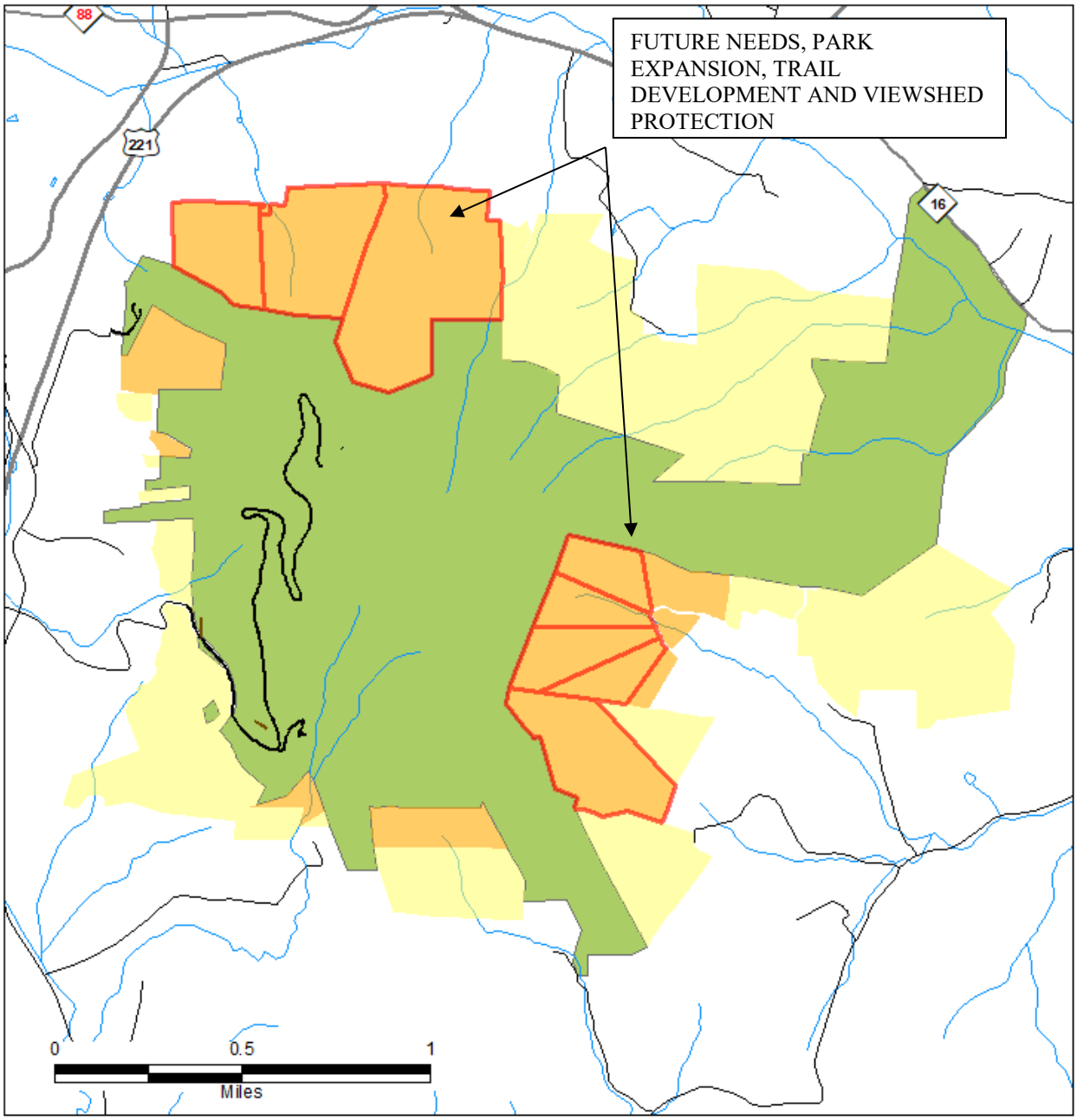


IV. PLANNING

Land Acquisition for State Parks

In order to achieve the highest level of connectivity between park properties already owned by the State of North Carolina, further acquisition of land is expected to take place. Additional land will ensure the maximum protection of natural resources, scenic preservation, outdoor recreation and public access. Each park has several tracts of land that have been distinguished as a future need or a critical need for the park. The following map shows Land Acquisition needs for Mount Jefferson State Natural Area.

LAND PROTECTION PLAN



Mount Jefferson State Natural Area
Land Protection Plan

July 2018

Critical Need
Primary resource protection
Scenic protection
State Parks Unit

PROJECT LIST

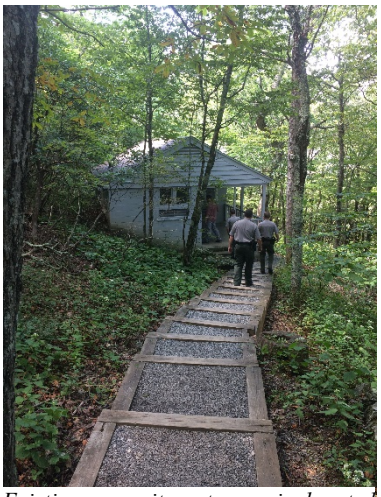
Project #	Project Title	Probable Cost
1	Summit Toilet	$ 525,100
2	Vannoy Property Phase I – Day Use	$322,900
3	Vannoy Property Phase II - Facilities	$4,109,700
4	Trail development (General)	$178,900
TOTAL		**$5,136,600**

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

1. Summit Toilet Facilities

This project consists of a proposed 800-square-foot restroom facility at the Summit area including adequate parking, potable water, electrical, and septic.

The existing toilet building serving picnickers and hikers near the summit cannot be reasonably renovated to current building code standards or winterized for year-round use, and it is not handicap accessible. A proposed restroom building closer to the parking lot will better meet all park visitor needs. The old toilet building will be demolished.



Existing summit restroom is located away from the summit trail and is not handicap accessible

Vannoy Property

This project consists of construction of various facilities located off Highway 16 on the west side of the park, broken down into two phases. This will provide the park with another day use access area at lower-elevation and operationally will provide a section which could remain open during inclement weather. Currently, inclement weather requires that staff close of the main entrance road to the summit on the west side. This facility will provide an additional picnicking, parking and hiking trails, as well as significant educational and interpretive opportunities.

2. Vannoy, Phase I – Day Use:

The first phase will establish day use facilities to provide initial access to the Vannoy property. Scope of work includes: a gravel access road into the property with a gate, a 26 car gravel parking area in the field adjacent to Highway 16, a vault toilet, and a few picnic tables placed along the trails.

3. Vannoy, Phase II - Facilities:

The second phase will include repairing the vehicular bridge crossing over Naked Creek; the addition of 3,100 linear feet of paved double lane road terminating at a circular turn-around; a 40-car parking lot; a 3,000 sq ft educational building which will double as a rentable event space; two picnic shelters; and 28 scattered picnic tables. This work also includes connection to Ashe or Alleghany County water, sewer and electricity services.

The existing house and structures will be removed, part of the existing road re-naturalized and ~ 100 feet of culvert removed from a tributary stream, restoring it to its natural course.

A storage/maintenance area will be constructed to support maintenance needs of the property.

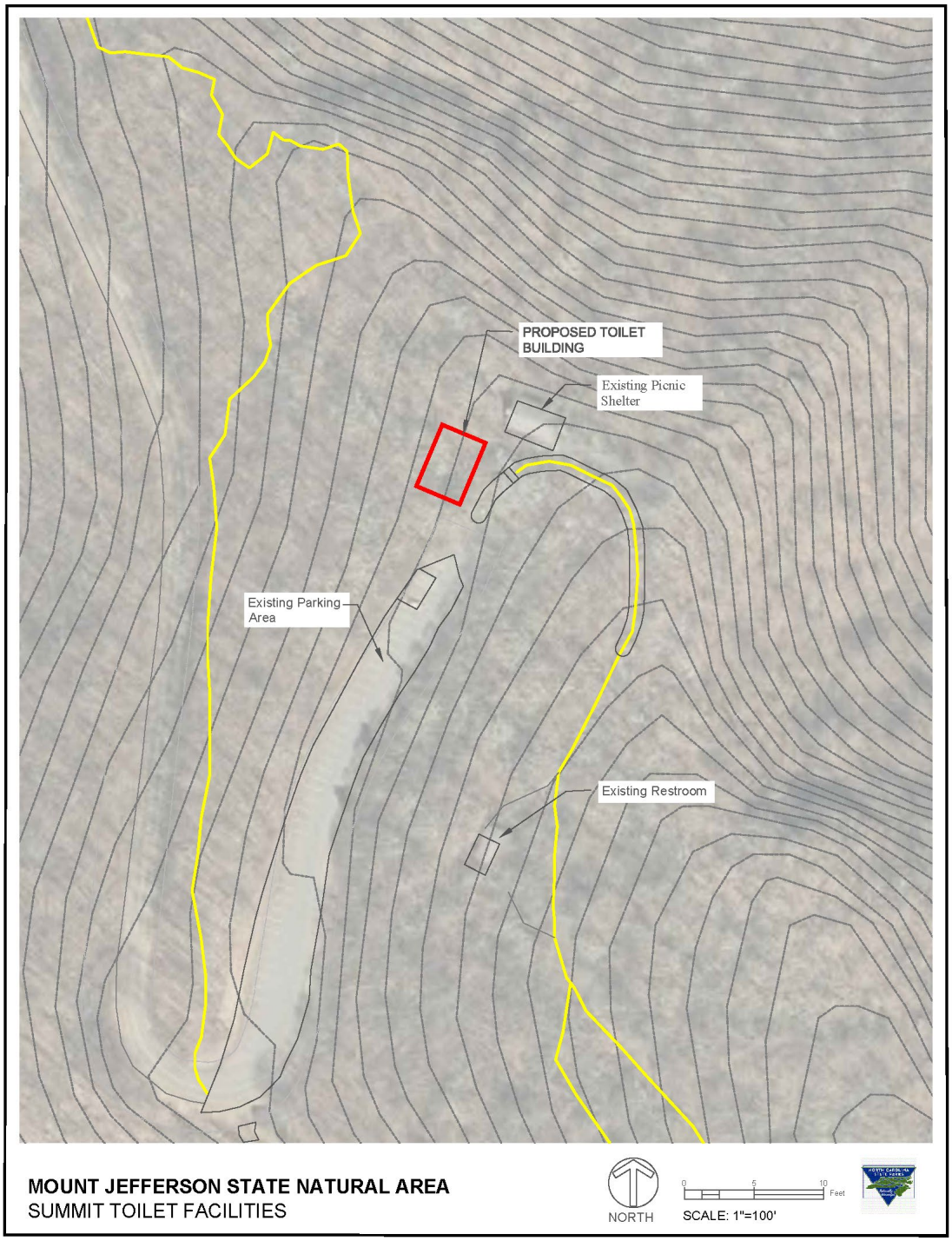
3: Trail Development

The Vannoy property provides sufficient acreage for the planning and development of multiple miles of hiking trails, across gentler terrain and differing ecologies then those found at Mount Jefferson. These trails will expand the hiking options for locals and park visitors and provide alternative recreation opportunities during the winter months when the summit is closed. Best practices will be utilized to develop a trail network that is safe and sustainable.

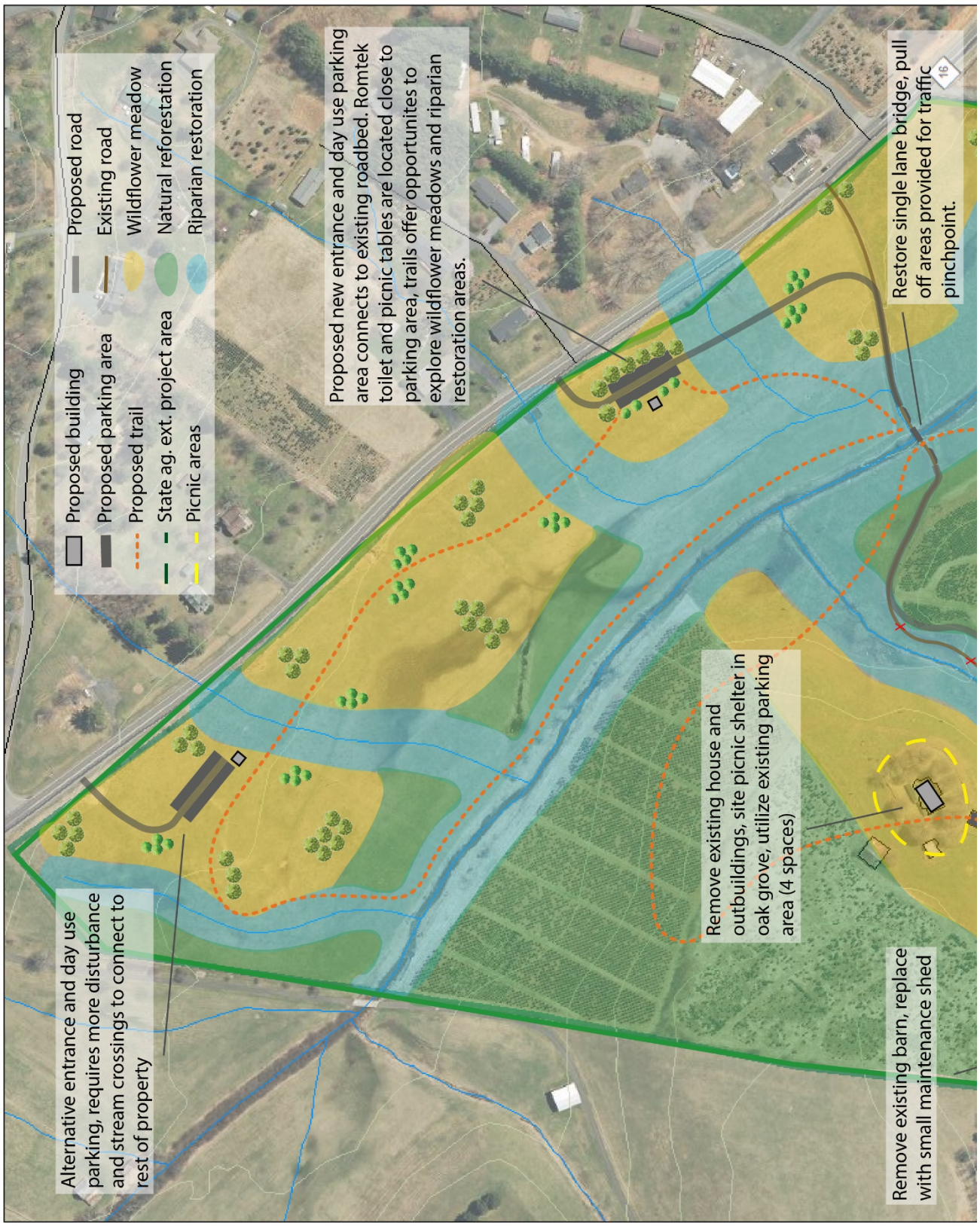
Demand exists for additional regional hiking trails in the Ashe county area. With the popularity of other area trails like the Profile Trail at Grandfather Mountain and the recent completion of the Summit Trail at Elk Knob, it is recommended to further review the feasibility of constructing a trail at Mount Jefferson starting the Vannoy Property area and continue up the mountain to the summit area or existing trails. Trails staff will determine sustainable building practices for an efficient trail connection.

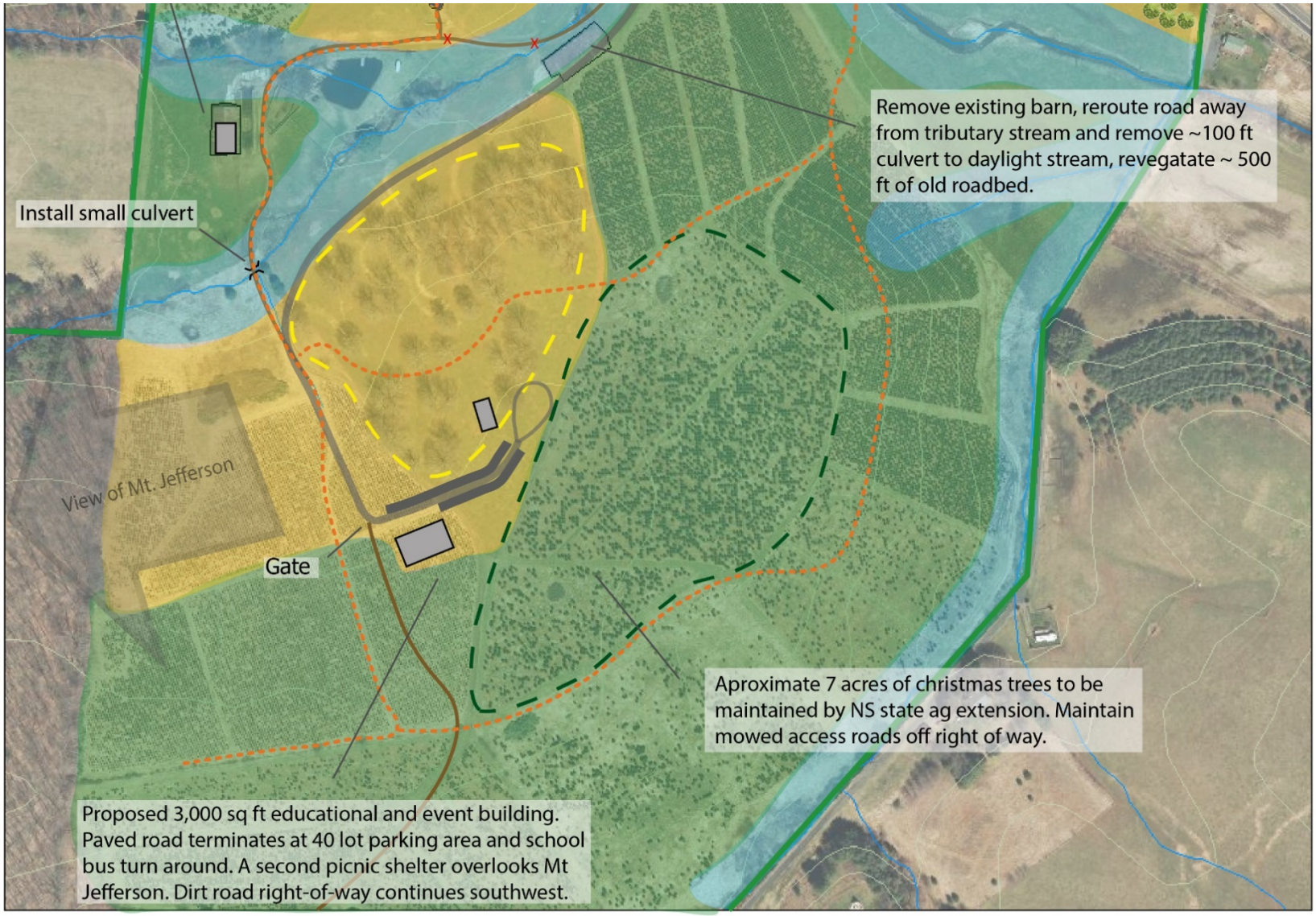
Naked Creek

PROJECT #1: SUMMIT TOILET FACILITIES



PROJECT # 2: Vannoy Property





Mount Jefferson State Natural Area

Vannoy propoerty Initial Concept

September 2018

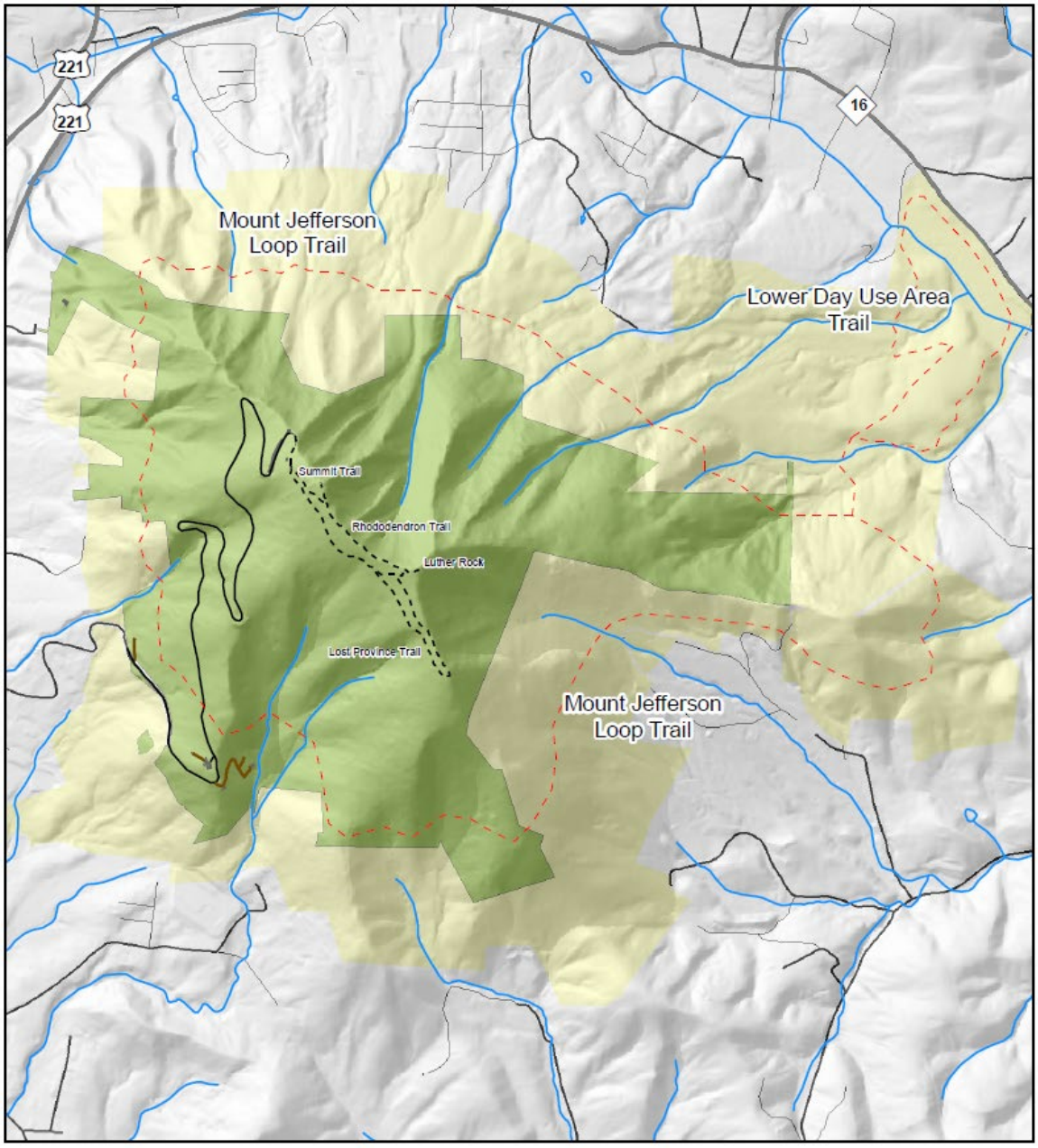
N

0 125 250 500 Feet

A picnic shelter situated on the hilltop near the old homesite provides a shady spot to overlook the meadows.

A conceptual sketch of the parking area and day use facilities at proposed entrance of Vanoy property.

PROJECT # 3: TRAIL DEVELOPMENT AT NAKED CREEK DAY USE AREA



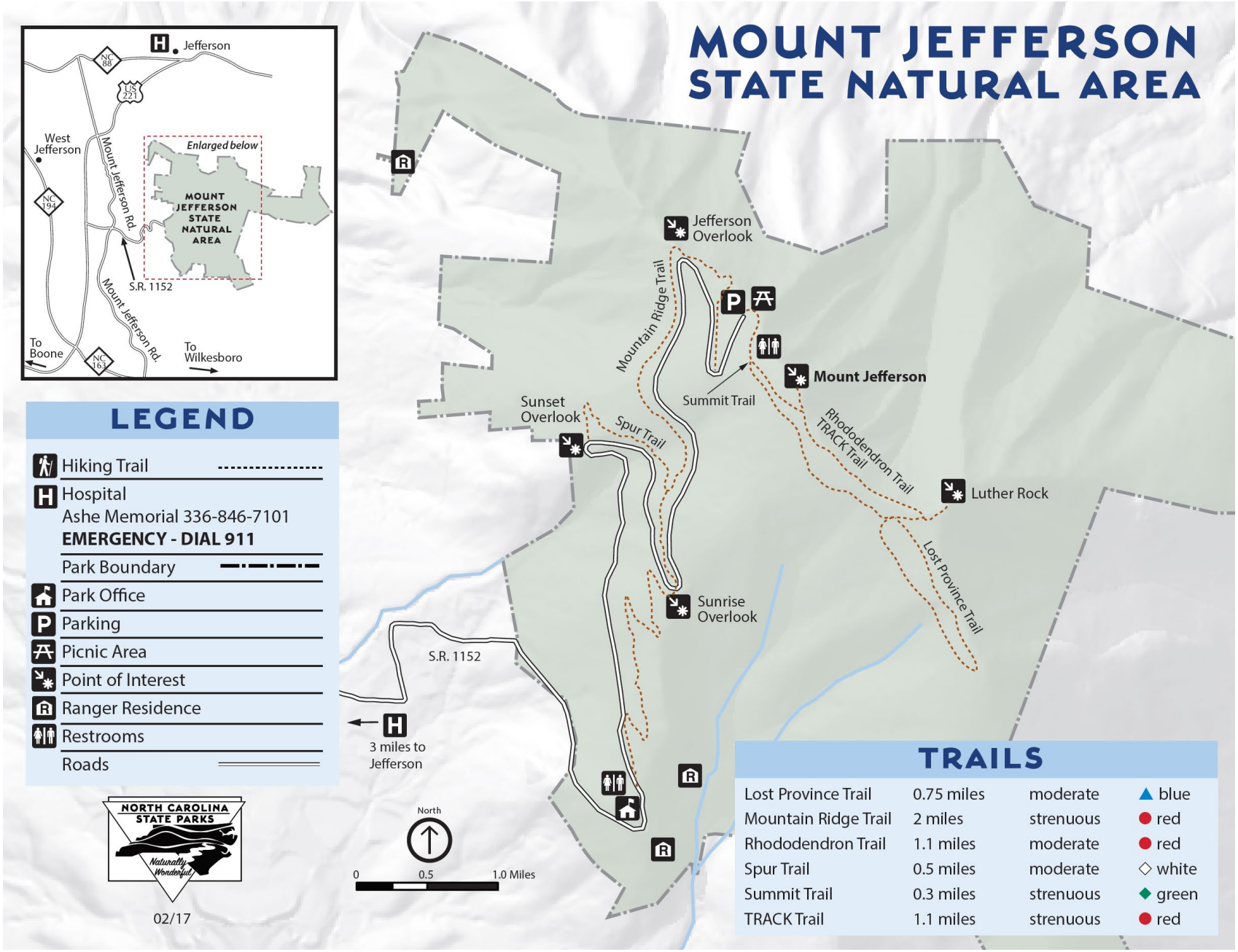
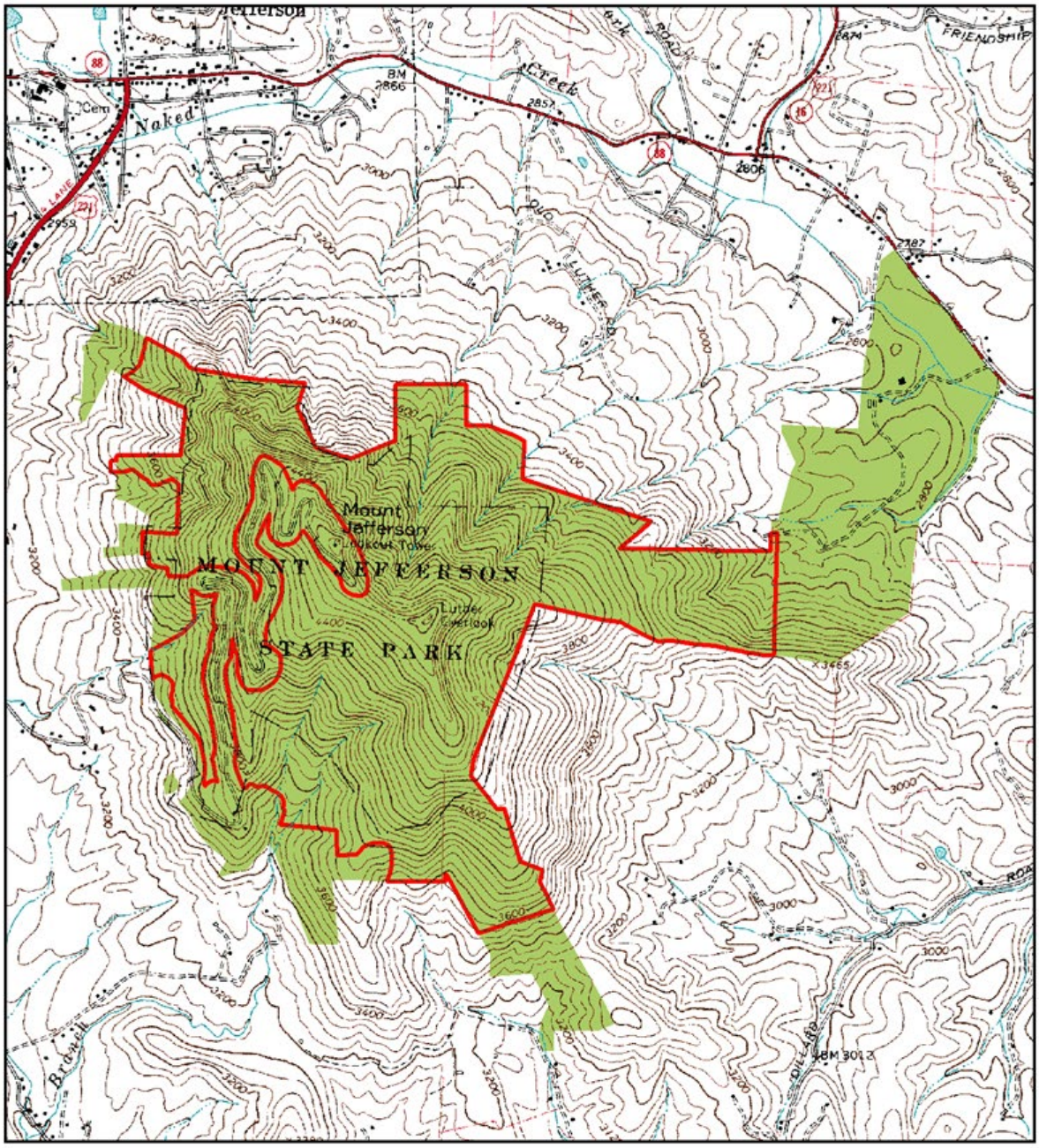
Mount Jefferson
State Natural Area

Trails Plan
November 2010

Park Boundaries
State Natural Area
Future Need

Trail Plan
Existing
Planned

0 1,000 2,000
Feet


MOUNT JEFFERSON
STATE NATURAL AREA
Jefferson
NC 88
US 221
West Jefferson
NC 194
Mount Jefferson Rd.
Enlarged below
MOUNT JEFFERSON STATE NATURAL AREA
S.R. 1152
Mount Jefferson Rd.
To Boone
NC 163
To Wilkesboro
LEGEND
Hiking Trail
Hospital
Ashe Memorial 336-846-7101
EMERGENCY - DIAL 911
Park Boundary
Park Office
Parking
Picnic Area
Point of Interest
Ranger Residence
Restrooms
Roads
NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS
Naturally Wonderful
02/17
Jefferson Overlook
Mountain Ridge Trail
Mount Jefferson
Summit Trail
Sunset Overlook
Spur Trail
Rhododendron Trail
TRACK Trail
Luther Rock
Lost Province Trail
Sunrise Overlook
S.R. 1152
3 miles to Jefferson
North
0
0.5
1.0 Miles
TRAILS
Lost Province Trail 0.75 miles moderate blue
Mountain Ridge Trail 2 miles strenuous red
Rhododendron Trail 1.1 miles moderate red
Spur Trail 0.5 miles moderate white
Summit Trail 0.3 miles strenuous green
TRACK Trail 1.1 miles strenuous red

DEDICATED NATURE PRESERVE