

Master Plan

Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve

June 2024



Acknowledgements

This plan is a result of the stakeholders' collaborative efforts to envision the future of Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve, including contributions from community members, elected officials, County staff, and the planning team:

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A special thanks to the citizens of DeKalb County and friends of Arabia Mountain, interviewees, and survey participants for their input.

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CHAPTER

I.

Introduction

Project Purpose

The Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve is DeKalb County's most significant and sensitive greenspace, spanning over 2,500 acres and representing a major recreational and ecological

asset. While the nature preserve has existed for over 50 years, it has done so without a unified master plan. This report aims to fill that void, by providing DeKalb County and the nature preserve's

other stakeholders with an **updated mission statement and vision, comprehensive assessment of existing conditions, and a roadmap for future investment.**

History of Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve

Before European settlers arrived, the area was a little-inhabited buffer between competing Creek and Cherokee Indians. They used the land as a transportation and trade route. It is believed to have served as a buffer between the tribes and as a transportation and trade area.¹ The core property was used for granite quarrying starting in the late nineteenth century and parts continued to operate until the 1960s. The cultural and industrial history is an integral part of the nature preserve and

passive park, which houses several stone structures used in the quarrying and other industrial artifacts, including the "old stone store" property.

The Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve (DAMNP) was established in 1972 when Charles Davidson, Jr. arranged for the Davidson Granite Company to donate the land to DeKalb County. Since then, DAMNP has grown from 535 acres to 2,550 acres and was designated as part of the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area in 2006, reflecting its historic, cultural, and environmental significance. It has also



become a beloved gem in the park system of DeKalb County and for the Atlanta metropolitan region and state as a whole.

¹ Price, Vivian. *The History of DeKalb County, Georgia 1822-1900*. Wolfe Publishing Company. Fernandiana Beach, FL. (1987)

Mission Statement & Vision

The mission statement drives decision making and investment in the nature preserve. The original mission statement for DAMNP, shown to the right, emphasizes preservation and environmental education. Passive recreation is part of the mission as well, but only so long as it does not interfere with preservation and environmental education.

The DeKalb County Department of Recreation, parks, and Cultural Affairs (RPCA) has its own mission statement and vision, which emphasizes quality of life for local residents. As part of the County parks system, DAMNP is also under the umbrella of this mission statement and vision.

This project included a thorough assessment of both mission statements.

EXISTING MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS

DAMNP

“The Preserve’s original mission statement, adopted by the Board of Commission for the original 535-acre rock outcrop preserve, listed three missions for the Preserve:

1. Preservation of the natural environment and cultural history.
2. Environmental education.
3. Passive recreation ‘as long as it does not interfere with the first two goals’.”

DEKALB COUNTY RPCA

Mission Statement

“The Parks and Recreation Department is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life of the citizens of DeKalb County by connecting communities to exceptional parks, recreational facilities, and cross-generational programs that promote healthy and active lifestyles.”

Vision:

“To Create and Connect Communities through its People, Parks, and Programs.”

MISSION STATEMENT FEEDBACK

The team solicited feedback on the vision and mission statement from stakeholders and attendees at the first round of public meetings. Based on the feedback, the community sees DAMNP as follows:

- a unique and undisturbed natural environment that acts as an oasis of natural beauty in an urban environment,
- an opportunity for therapeutic recreation and education about the rare flora that exists here,
- an opportunity to educate visitors about the importance of preservation as a means of balancing conservation and recreation, and
- a place for the community to congregate and connect. It is a destination that draws visitors from all over the Atlanta region, but local residents should be the priority audience.



UPDATED DAMNP MISSION STATEMENT

Based on community feedback, the mission statement should be updated as follows:

At Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve, our mission is to serve the local residents and surrounding communities by **preserving the delicate landscape and fostering a deeper connection to the natural world through education, passive recreation, and community engagement.**

We recognize the importance of recreation in **fostering a healthy and balanced lifestyle.**

In response to the needs of our community, we aim to enhance the system of trails that better connect the local communities. These recreational opportunities will provide therapeutic experiences and encourage physical activity in a serene and picturesque setting.

To further strengthen our bond with the community, **we actively engage in local outreach initiatives.** Through educational and volunteer

preservation programs, we empower individuals to actively participate in the conservation and restoration of this invaluable natural resource. By cultivating a sense of ownership and responsibility, we create a shared commitment to the long-term sustainability of the preserve.

The Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve is an **important asset to both local and regional residents.** Its services and features should strike a proper balance between the needs of these two groups.



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CHAPTER

II.

Existing Conditions Assessment

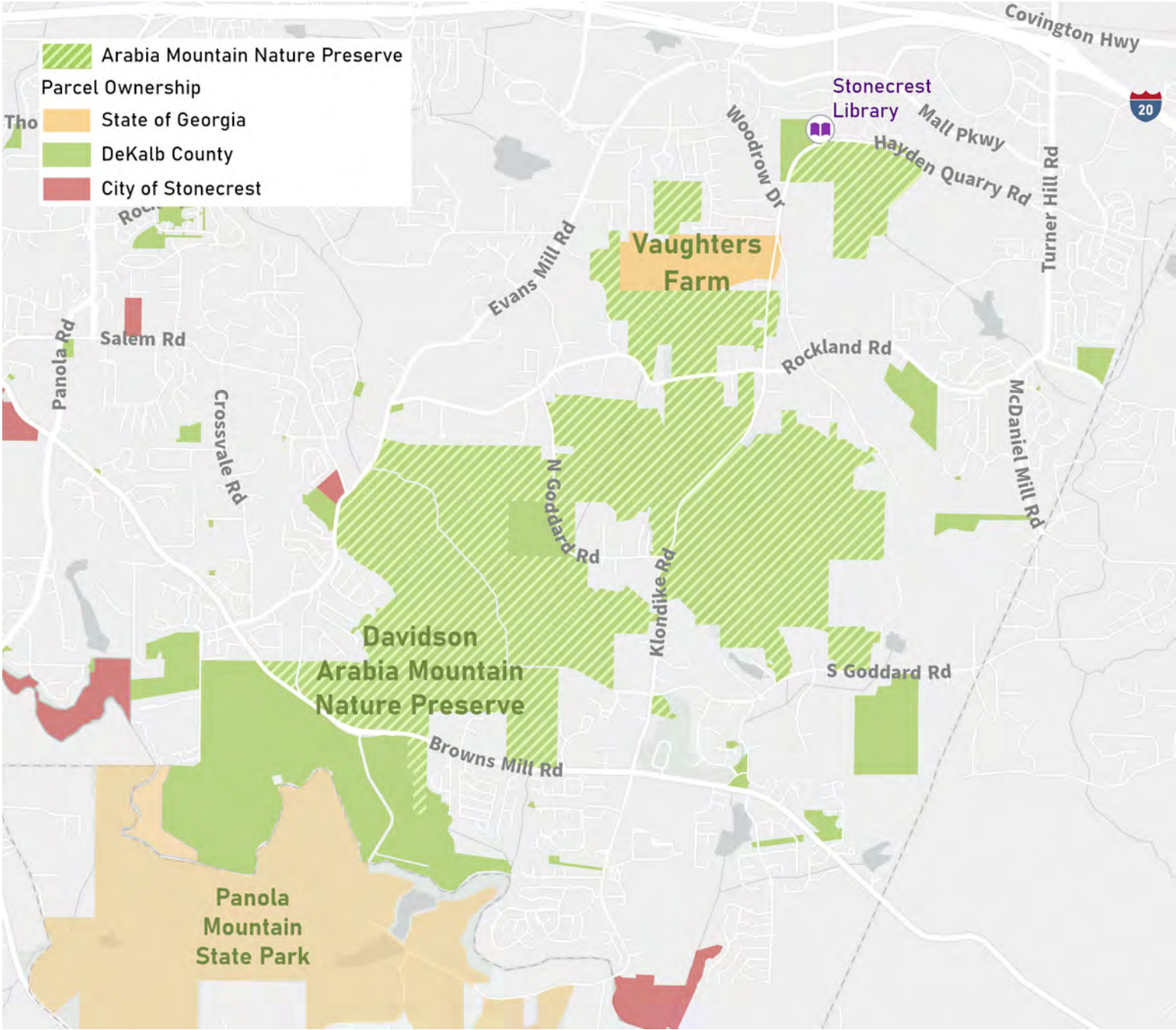
Overview

DAMNP is a mainly contiguous 2,500 acres. Adjacency to other county and state properties make the preserve feel “bigger” than the core DAMNP

land actually is. These adjacent lands include Panola Mountain State Park and Vaughters Farm, both owned by the Georgia Department of Natural

Resources, and other Stonecrest-owned lands. This chapter explores the details of DAMNP’s physical and programmatic features in depth.

Figure 1. Public Land Ownership



KEY FEATURES

Nature Center

The Nature Center, located along Klondike Road at the largest parking lot, greets visitors to the preserve, houses staff offices, and provides limited space for programs and events.



Arabia Mountain

Arabia Mountain is a critical space for ecology and endangered species. The peak and the hiking trail to the top are also the most popular attraction for visitors.



Historic Structures and Ruins

Several historic structures and ruins tell the story of the preserve as a place of settlement and industry.



Trails

The preserve has over 23 miles of paved and soft-surface trails that provide access around the perimeter of the property, onto the rock outcrops, and into the woods.



Lakes

The preserve's lakes diversify the habitat available to wildlife. They are also a key attraction for visitors, especially fishers.



Access Points

There are a handful of parking lots and trailheads where visitors can access the nature preserve. They provide space for amenities and end-of-activity rest.



AWARE Wildlife Center

The AWARE Wildlife Center is housed in a converted home at the base of Arabia Mountain. AWARE provides critical care services to native species.



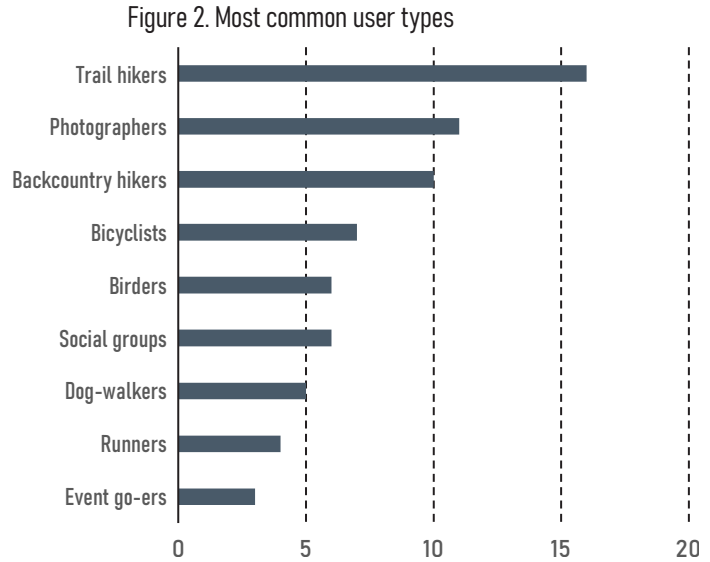
Other Natural Landscapes

In addition to the rock outcrops, there are several other natural ecosystems visitors can enjoy, including meadows and forests.



User Types and Behavior

There are a wide variety of users at DAMNP, but most users are there to hike or walk on the paved and soft-surface trails. The most popular times to visit are on the weekends, especially during good-weather weekends in the Spring and Fall.



According to feedback from the public meetings, the most common user types are trail hikers, photographers, and backcountry hikers.

TYPICAL USER TYPES

Trail Hikers



Trail hikers seek well-marked, paved or mountain trails, with varying difficulty levels, informational signage, and access to scenic views. They appreciate facilities such as trail maps, rest areas, water fountains, and restroom facilities along the trails.

Dog-Walkers



Dog walkers look for designated dog-friendly trails or off-leash areas, waste disposal stations, and agility courses. They value amenities such as dog-friendly water fountains, pet waste bags, and benches for resting.

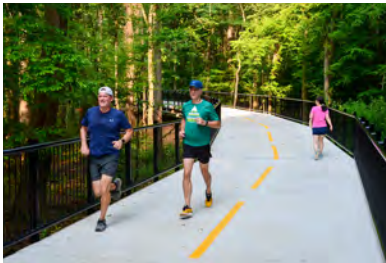
Bicyclists



Bicyclists prefer well-maintained biking trails or dedicated bike lanes, preferably with varying terrain and difficulty levels. They appreciate amenities like bike racks, repair stations, and rest areas with water fountains. They also enjoy mountain-biking trails, which are currently not offered at DAMNP.

TYPICAL USER TYPES CONTINUED

Runners



Runners seek paved or soft-surface running paths, preferably with distance markers and some elevation changes. They value amenities such as water stations, stretching areas, and outdoor fitness equipment for cross-training.

Backcountry Hikers



Backcountry hikers desire extensive trail systems, including remote and challenging routes, and prefer remote soft surface trails in the woods. They often require facilities like backcountry camping areas, trailhead parking, and clear signage for navigation.

Social Groups



Social groups, such as families or friends, look for picnic areas, playgrounds, and open spaces for group activities. They appreciate amenities like barbecue pits or grills, shelters, restrooms, and facilities for outdoor games.

Event Go-ers



Event goers may be in attendance for a specific program or organized group activity. They value open fields or amphitheaters for large gatherings, parking areas, restrooms, and concession stands.

Birders



Birders have a specific goal: finding and observing specific bird species, and often capturing them via photography. Birders tend to visit DAMNP very early or late in the day, and value a diverse and healthy ecosystem that attracts as much wildlife as possible.

Photographers



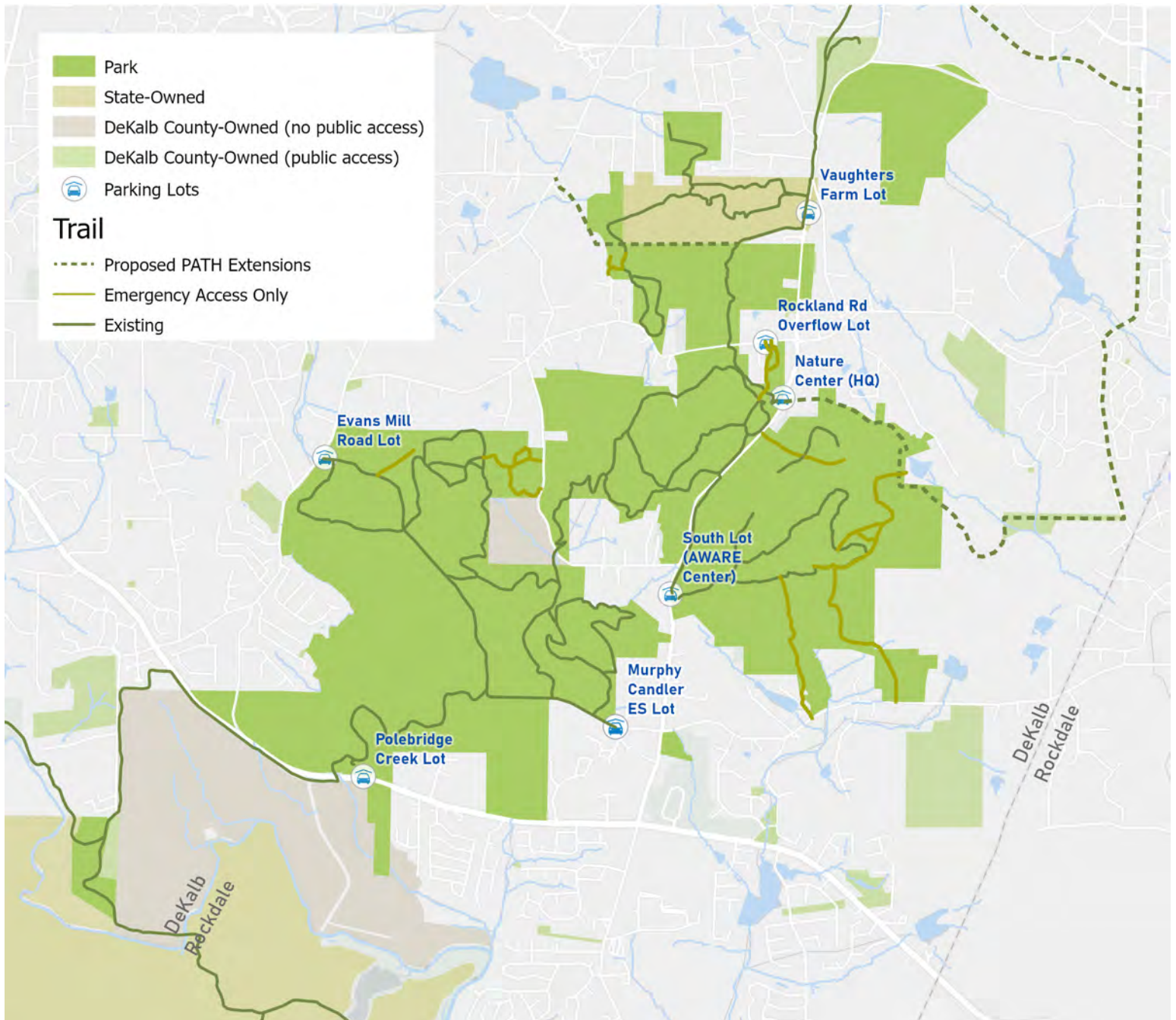
Photographers look for diverse landscapes, including scenic views, wildlife, and natural features. They value amenities like lookout points, bird blinds, and designated photography areas that provide unique perspectives.

Access Points

There are five major access points to the DAMNP, with a total of eight parking lots. Driving and parking is currently the most common way for visitors to arrive.

While there are many residents who are within walking distance, lack of sidewalks deters these residents from accessing the nature preserve on foot.

The trail network allows people to access the nature preserve on bike. Most trailheads include amenities like water, bike parking, and information kiosks.



Visitors perceive a lack of parking. In reality, parking is only in short supply during peak seasons and at the most popular locations, such as the Nature Preserve

and the AWARE Center. Parking observations were made by the team during several visits on weekdays and weekends over the course of six weeks in March and April 2023.

Additional details about each parking facility and results of the parking observations are shown below.

NATURE CENTER

The parking lot adjacent to the nature center is often considered the main “arrival point” for visitors. It provides direct access to the nature center, restrooms, an information kiosk, and hard and soft-surface trails.



Total Spaces

26

Observed Parking Utilization



NATURE CENTER OVERFLOW

In order to accommodate periods of high demand, DeKalb County added a larger overflow lot just north of the main Nature Center parking lot years ago. The lot is designed to accommodate 50 cars, and has space for larger buses for group events like school field trips. It is often parked well beyond designed capacity at peak hours.



Total Spaces

50

Observed Parking Utilization



Occupied



Unoccupied



Occupied, over-capacity

Each symbol represents 5 cars

AWARE CENTER

The parking lot at the AWARE Wildlife Center provides the most direct access to the hike up Arabia Mountain. As a result, it is one of the first lots to fill up during peak periods. It can accommodate 28 cars, tightly packed, and people often park along the road near the lot entrance.



Total Spaces

28

Observed Parking Utilization



ROCKLAND ROAD OVERFLOW

The Rockland Road Overflow lot is another overflow lot for very high visitation periods, located directly off of Rockland Road.



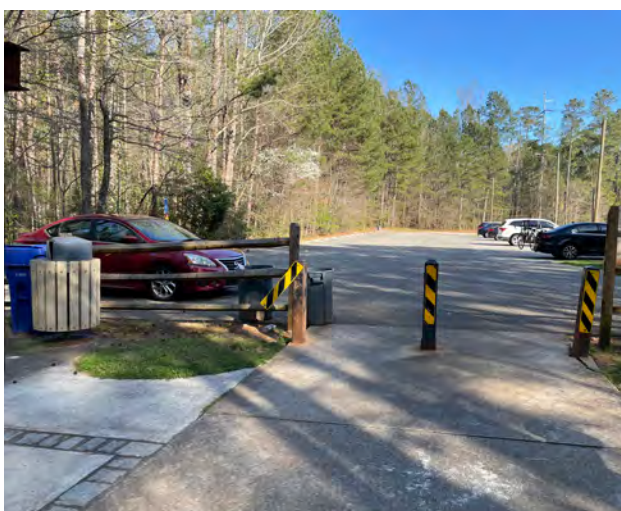
Total Spaces
DOZENS

Observed Parking Utilization



POLEBRIDGE TRAILHEAD

The Polebridge trailhead is located on the south end of DAMNP along Brown's Mill Road. It is one of the larger lots, but it has relatively low utilization because it is further away from the central attractions.



Total Spaces

40

Observed Parking Utilization



Occupied



Unoccupied



Occupied, over-capacity

Each symbol represents 5 cars

MURPHY CANDLER

Visitors can park along S Goddard Road at Murphy Candler Elementary School to access the hard-surface trail network. There is no formal parking lot, and there is no formal signage indicating that the on-street parking can be used for DAMNP access on weekends and during the summer.



Total Spaces
DOZENS

Observed Parking Utilization



VAUGHTERS FARM

Vaughters Farm Trailhead is located off of Rockland Road adjacent to Vaughters Farm and the Arabia Alliance office. It provides access to hard and soft-surface trails.



Total Spaces
46

Observed Parking Utilization



Occupied



Unoccupied



Occupied, over-capacity

Each symbol represents 5 cars

EVANS MILL

The Evans Mill Trailhead is located off of Evans Mill Road on the western side of DAMNP. It is one of the smaller trailheads, and it well utilized on both weekends and evenings. It appears to be a popular access point for its close proximity to the soft-surface trail along Polebridge Creek.



Total Spaces

10

Observed Parking Utilization



STONECREST LIBRARY

The Stonecrest Library Trailhead is located off of Klondike Road north of DAMNP. It is one of the smaller trailheads, and it is not within the Preserve grounds. However, the PATH trail does connect the library to Vaughters Farm to the south, and eventually the rest of DAMNP.



Total Spaces

150

Observed Parking Utilization



Occupied



Unoccupied



Occupied, over-capacity

Each symbol represents 5 cars

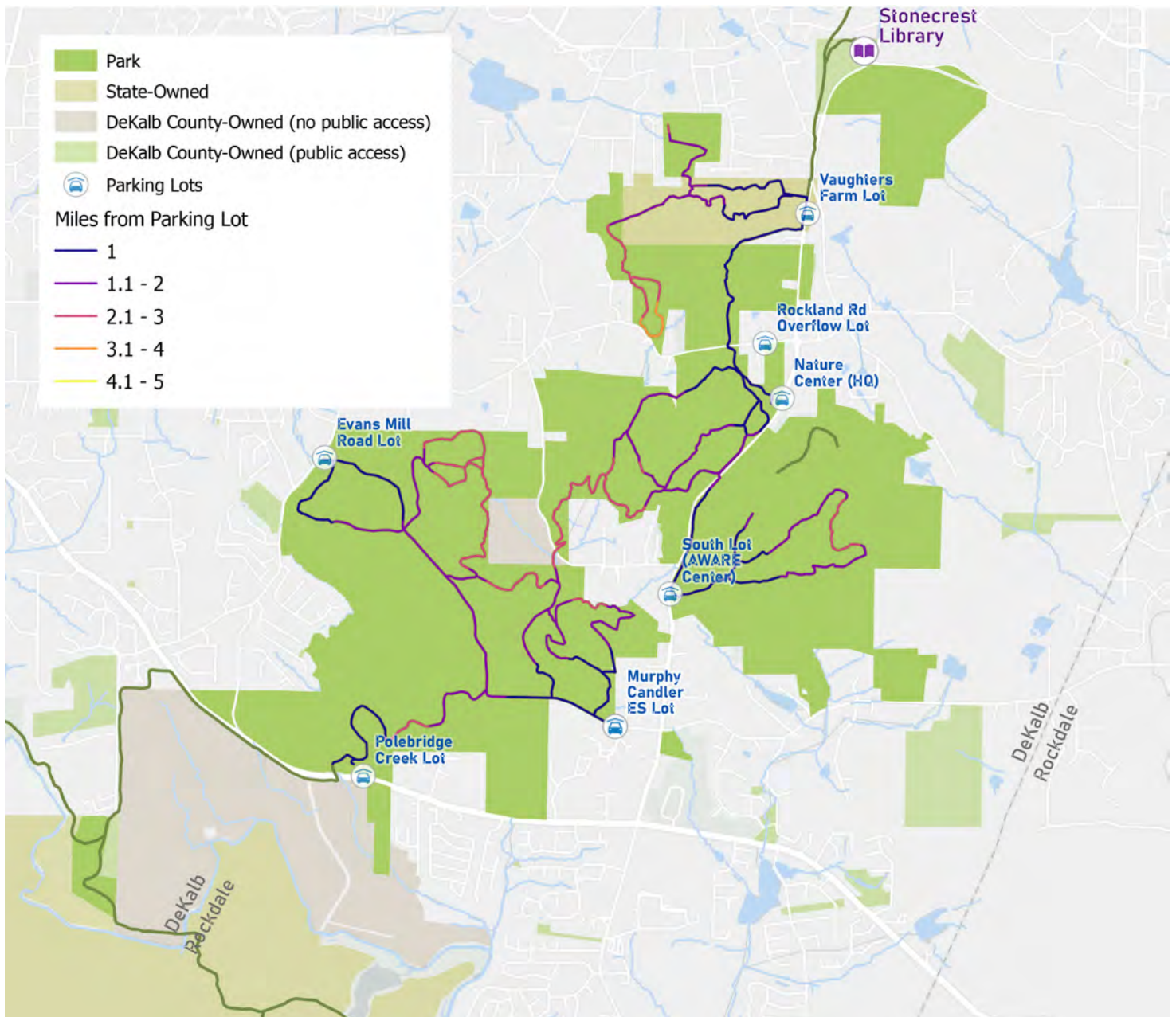
Trail Network

There are over 23 miles of trail within DAMNP’s land, which also connects to additional trails to the north and south. The trail network is a combination of soft surface trails in the woods and on the mountain, and hard surface trails. The County maintains the trails within the park boundaries and the PATH trails outside of the DAMNP.

Table 1. Existing and Future Trail Network

	EXISTING	FUTURE	TOTAL
Hard-Surface	10 mi	2.7 mi	12.7 mi
Soft-Surface	13.3 mi	0 mi	13.3 mi
Total	23.3 mi	2.7 mi	26 mi

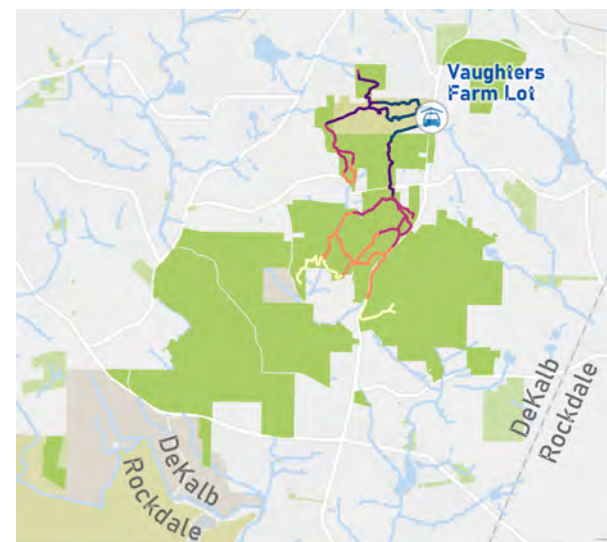
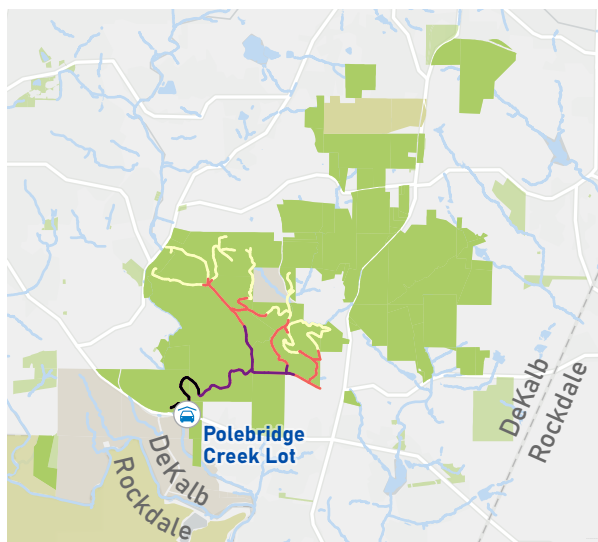
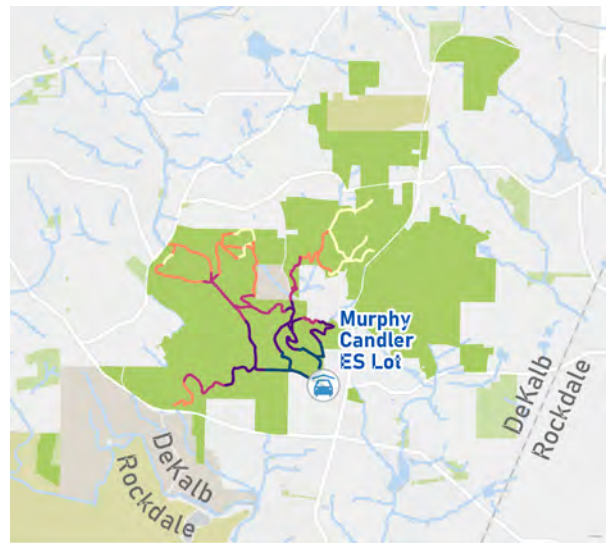
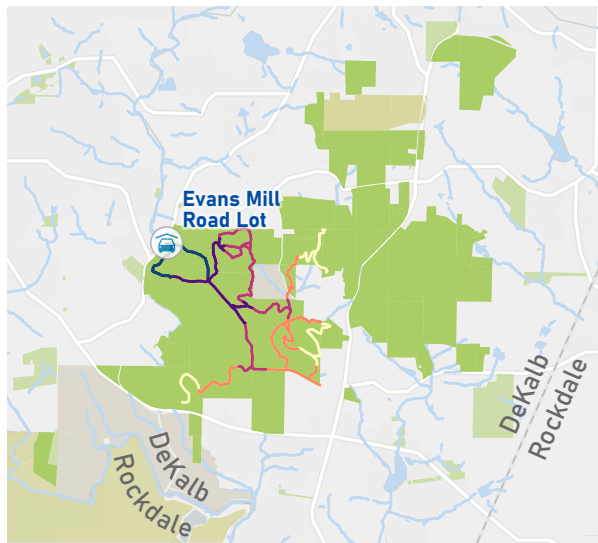
Note: Hard surface trails include paved and boardwalk



TRAIL ACCESS BY PARKING LOT

Maps below show the reach into the trail network from each access point, assuming a roundtrip of max 5 mi.

Roundtrip distance from parking lot: 1 mi 2 mi 3 mi 4 mi 5 mi



Programs

DAMNP offers longstanding, regularly scheduled guided hikes on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays. In addition to regularly scheduled programming, there are several seasonal and special events.

Staff celebrate holidays like World Mountain Day and International Volunteer Day and offer cultural programming during Black History Month and Native American Heritage Month. They meet with educators to best match field trips and content to state performance standards, support external hiking and adventure groups, and offer up a safe and beautiful place for 5K's and special events. They foster curiosity and creativity and engage citizens in hands-on learning. They also coordinate and host social events to build community, offer up hot drinks and a warm fire to encourage winter hiking, and celebrate our rich shared history with all who come.

Davidson Arabia Mountain Public Programs <i>April 2023</i> Programs meet at the Nature Center: 3787 Klondike Road, Stonecrest GA Please bring a refillable water bottle and weather appropriate clothing.		
Morning Interpretive Hike with Arabia Park Naturalists Every Friday and Sunday at 8am Join a guided hike to learn about Arabia's ecology and human history. We'll share our favorite spots and how to hike safely and responsibly to reduce impact.	Walk it Out Wednesdays with Ranger Doffice Every Wednesday at 4pm Come with us, walking is great exercise and even better with friends! Walk it out to see and learn about the wonders of the Preserve.	Birds of Arabia with Georgia Audubon Saturday April 8th at 10am Join Georgia Audubon to learn about birding and the birds common to Arabia Mountain. Great for beginners, instruction and binoculars will be provided on this guided walk.
Forest Therapy with Deborah Fleming Thursday April 13th at 5:30pm Forest Therapy is an invitation for connection to the present. On a gentle slow walk, tap into Arabia Mountain with Deborah Fleming who will share prompts, plants, and conclude with a tea ceremony. RSVP required, limited space.	TGIF Wellness Walk Friday April 14th at 4:30pm Join DeKalb County Wellness Coordinator Michelle Walldorff on an afternoon walk for wellness. Come learn tips, receive support, and enjoy the health benefits of nature.	Finding Fungi with the Mushroom Club of Georgia Saturday, April 16th 10am--1pm Join Sam Landes of the Mushroom Club of Georgia to learn about the fascinating world and life of fungi. The workshop will include an indoor presentation as well as a walk in the Preserve to identify mushrooms in the field.
Contact Arabia at 770-484-3060 or riastrove@dekalbcountyga.gov Website: arabiaalliance.org Program Registration—Please follow the QR code to register for programs		



Programs listed in the April 2023 newsletter

DAMNP staff publicize programs through a monthly newsletter distributed via email and via the calendar on the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area website and through the County website.

The program's impact is measured through attendance, participation, and completed program evaluations. However staff also recognize and acknowledge qualitative impact and success when:

- First time hikers are seen returning multiple times on their own and previous participants in our programs return for more experiences.
- Students who participate in programs are seen hiking during the weekends with their families.
- Visitors stop in at the Nature Center based on recommendations, word of mouth or through numerous social media avenues.
- Undergraduate and graduate students are choosing Arabia for research, projects, and volunteer experiences.
- Teachers continue to seek additional engagement after an influential program for their students.
- Staff receives complements and positive feedback on

outstanding customer service, creative program offering and the conditions of the trails and grounds.

- Heartfelt thank you letters are received. Even a lost dog sent staff cookies when they assisted with finding its owner.
- Citizens and students bring staff artifacts and unknown items to identify or share demonstrating they view staff as trusting and knowledgeable professionals.
- Eagle scouts return to show off their projects, completed in years past, to close family and friends or when families return to visit that special tree they planted.
- Staff is recognized, engaged, and celebrated out in the community when they are off duty.

TYPES OF PROGRAMMING

The current and recent programming at DAMNP generally falls into the following categories:

Guided Hikes

Interpretive hikes with a Ranger or Naturalist about seasonal topics

Self-Guided Hikes

Hike on your own

Recreation based programming

Fishing, biking, walking

Programs about nature

Birds, trees, mushrooms, ecology, animals, geology, lichens

Wellness programs

Yoga, forest bathing, wild foods and tea, recreational hiking for exercise



DAMNP
50th anniversary flyer

Special events

5k walks, photography workshops, social clubs

Service and volunteer programs

Trail maintenance, invasive plant removal, clean ups

Events hosted by other groups or organizations

Programs and experiences hosted by other organizations such as but not limited to: Outdoor Journal, Latin-X hikers, Sierra Club, REI, etc

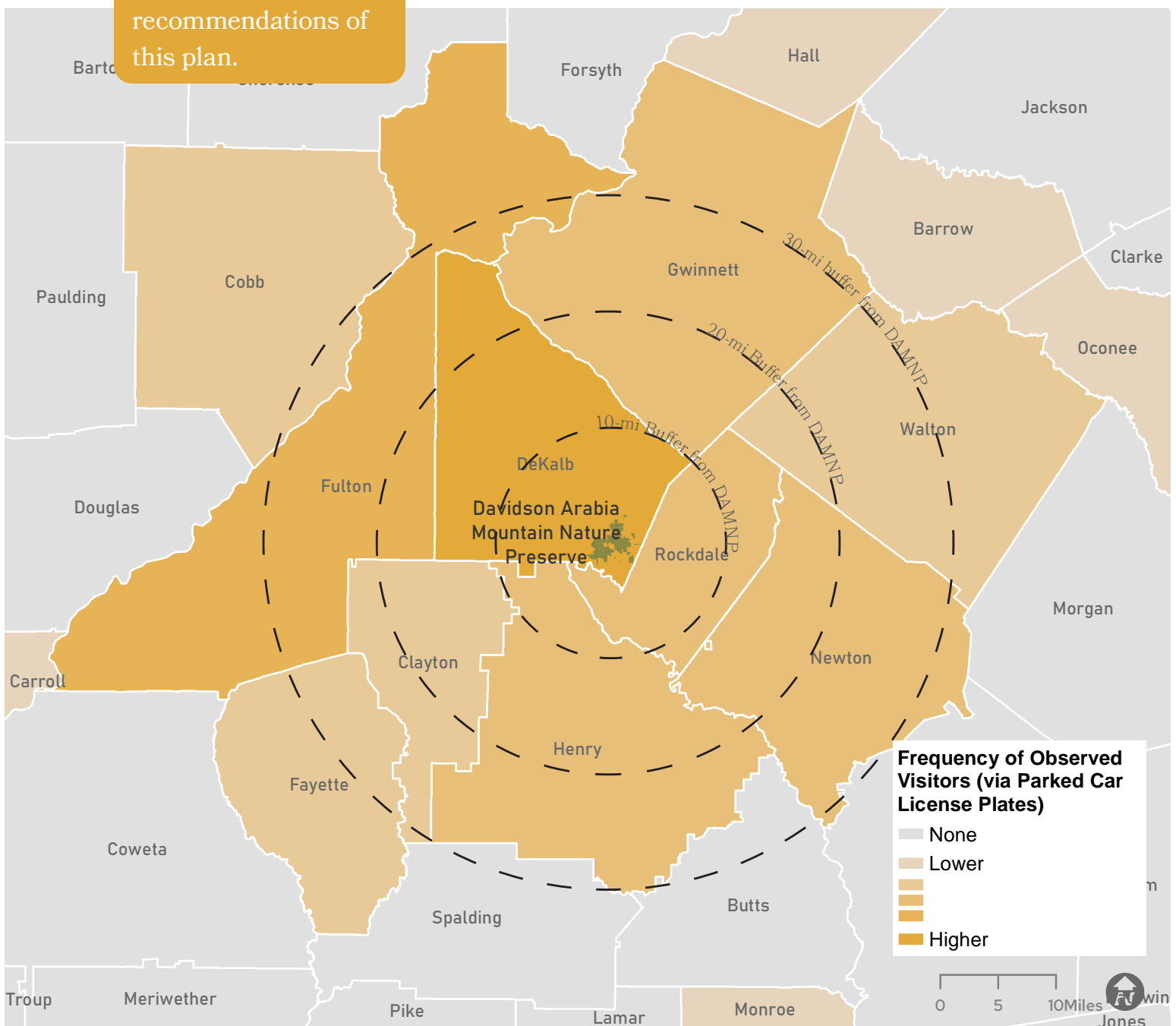
Balancing Recreation & Preservation

The question of how to balance preservation and recreation is a core pillar guiding the vision and recommendations of this plan.

The DAMNP's current mission statement states that recreation is part of the mission *only as long as it does not interfere with the preservation of the natural*

environment. However, DAMNP has become a beloved recreational asset for residents of DeKalb County and the Atlanta region as a whole. As

Figure 3. Map of observed visitation frequency to DAMNP by County



DeKalb County and the Atlanta region continues to grow in population, it is important to consider how this growth, and subsequent visitation growth, will put stress on DAMNP’s natural resources.

HOW WILL DEMAND GROW IN THE DAMNP’S CORE SERVICE AREA?

For the purposes of this analysis, DAMNP’s core service area is defined as the following counties: DeKalb, Cobb, Gwinnett, Fulton, Rockdale, Walton, Newton, Henry, Clayton, and Fayette. These counties represent the most frequent counties people come from to visit DAMNP.

During observation, license plates from the following counties were observed parked in the DAMNP parking lots:

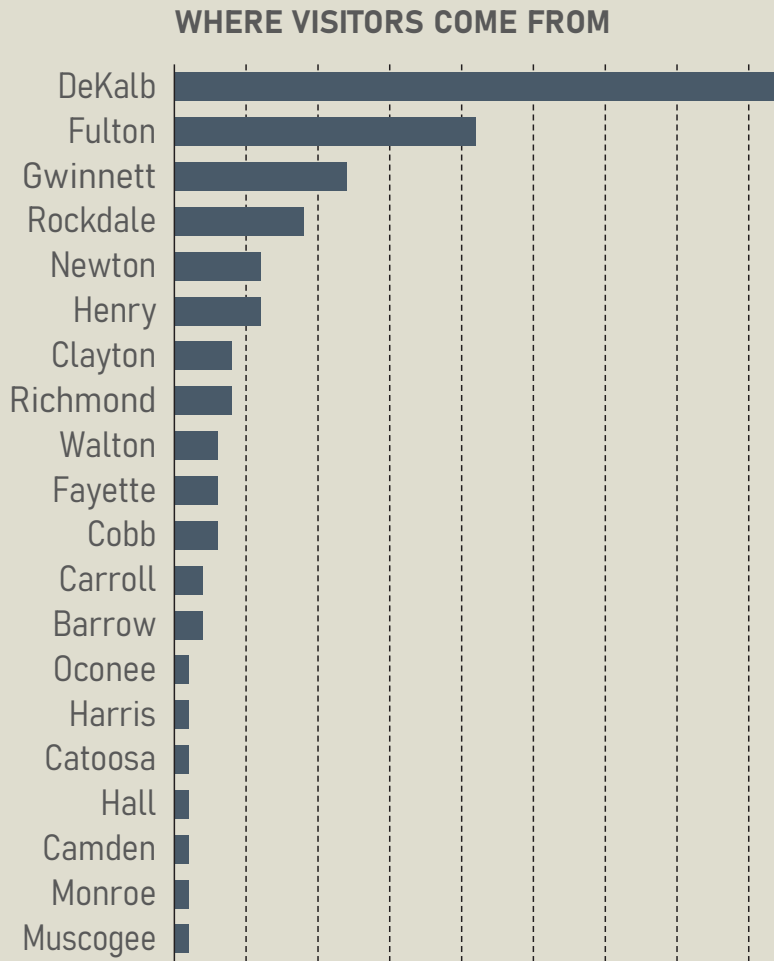
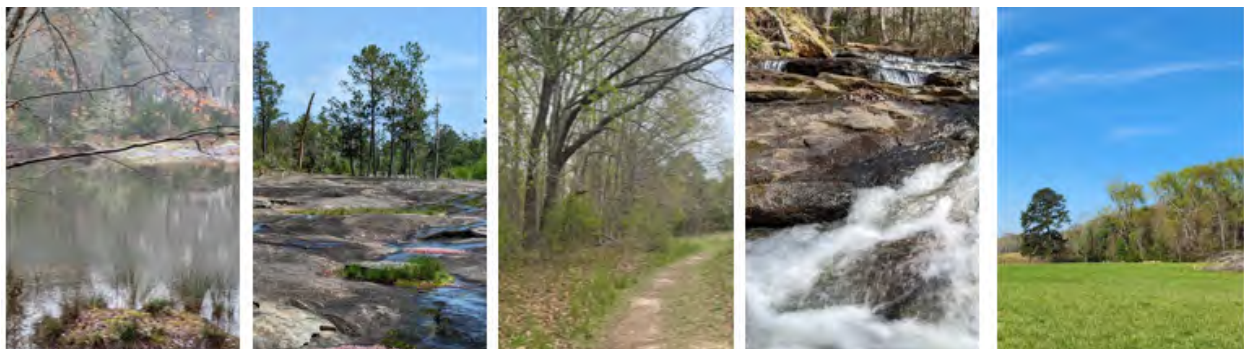
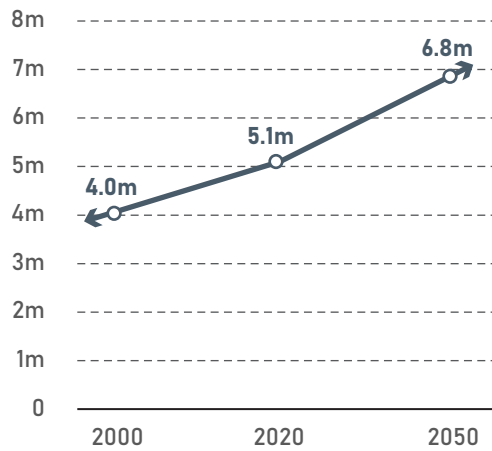


Figure 4. Observed visitation frequency to DAMNP by County (Chart)



Since 2000, the population of this area has grown by roughly 25%. **Over the next 30 years, the population is expected to rise by another 35%. This population growth introduces more potential visitors to DAMNP.** DeKalb County can make decisions and actions regarding access to encourage or discourage the potential increase in visitation.

Figure 5. Population Estimates & Growth in the DAMNP Core Service Area



Source: US Census Bureau, ARC Population Estimates

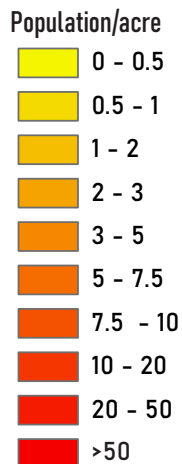
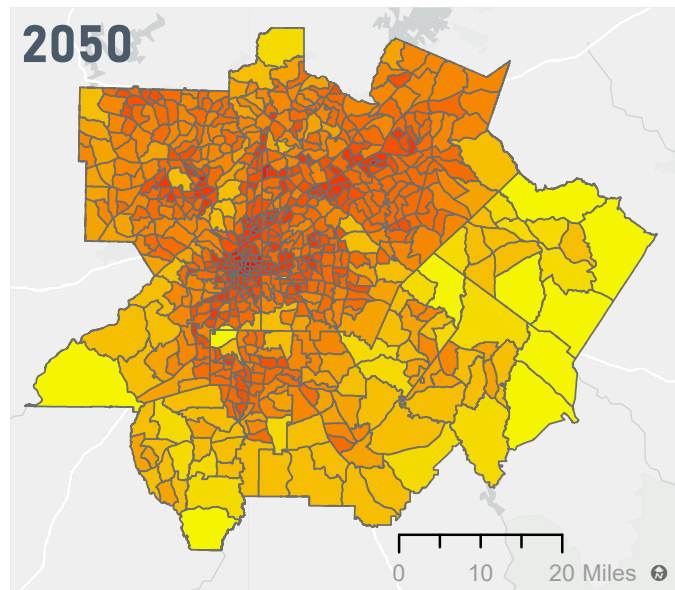
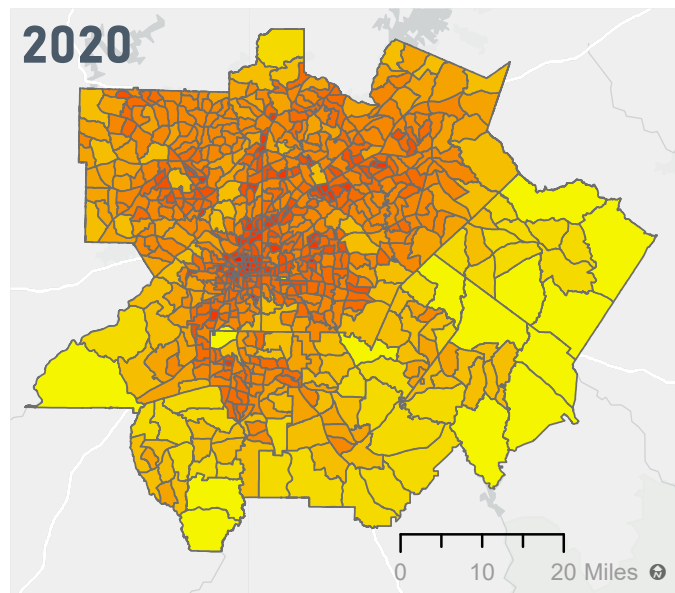
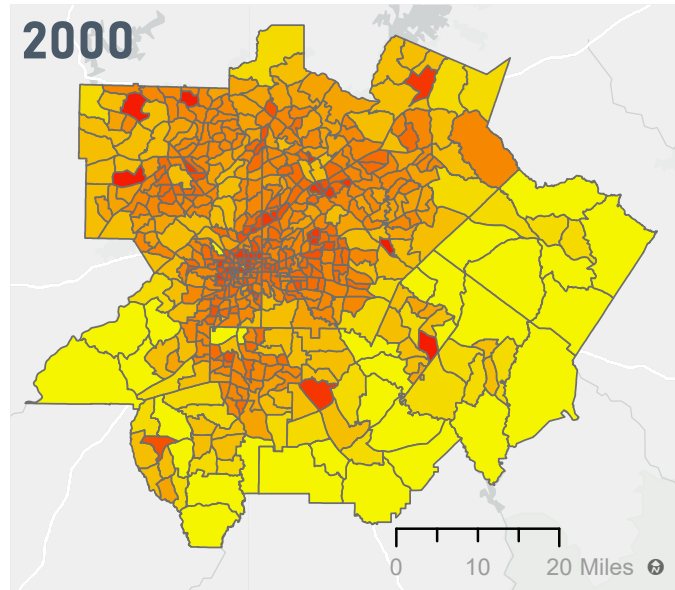


Figure 6. Population by Census Tract 2000-2050



LAND MANAGEMENT

Land management is a knowledge-based procedure that helps integrate land, water, biodiversity and environmental management to meet demands placed upon the land while sustaining ecosystem services.

It is necessary to meet the requirements of a growing population and the pressures the population places upon the landscape. Improper land management can lead to land degradation and reduction in productive and service functions of watersheds and landscapes.

Land Management and Operational Best Practices

The following describes six different approaches or practices related to the wide ranging topics of management and conservation of lands, from cultivated to wild. The approaches include land management, urban land management, natural

resource management, land rehabilitation, land conservation, and sustainable land management. **DAMNP can be viewed through the lenses of each of these management and conservation practices in developing plans that best suit the nature preserve for the long run.**

Land Management

Land management refers to the process of managing and making decisions regarding the use, development, conservation, and stewardship of land resources, and is typically carried out by governments, landowners, land managers, and various stakeholders. It involves a range of activities and practices aimed at achieving sustainable and optimal land use while considering social, economic, and environmental factors. It may include land use planning, land conservation, soil and water management, forest and natural resource management, and land monitoring and assessment.

WHY IS LAND MANAGEMENT IMPORTANT?

93% of land in Georgia is privately owned

DAMNP is over 2500 acres of protected land

DAMNP is a popular recreation destination with a sensitive landscape that's also being shaped by human activities

Land around the preserve continues to be developed into housing and commercial uses

Urban Land Management

Urban land management refers to the orderly zoning of urban functions through land use, structures, and service networks. Zoning regulations and land-use policies can play a role in protecting the areas immediately adjacent to DAMNP.

Natural Resource Management

Natural resource management is the handling of natural resources such as land, water, soil, plants and animals with a focus on stewardship, or how management affects quality of life for present and future generations. It combines elements of natural heritage management, land use planning, water management, bio-diversity conservation, and future sustainability of industries like agriculture, mining, tourism, fisheries and forestry. **Preserving natural resources is a primary purpose of DAMNP according to the current mission statement. Inherently as a nature preserve, it is essential to maintain ecological health, and biodiversity, with the added layer of recreational value offered to the communities served by the preserve.** Some methods of preservation include:

- ecological assessment and monitoring
- sensitive area designation
- trail management
- invasive species management
- native plant restoration
- wildlife habitat preservation
- restoration of disturbed areas
- limited infrastructure development
- educational programs
- sustainable landscaping
- water conservation
- public stewardship programs

Land Rehabilitation

Land rehabilitation refers to returning the land in a given area to some degree of its former state after some process, such as mining, farming, forestry, development or natural disaster, has resulted in its damage or degradation. To view DAMNP through the lens of land rehabilitation, one must first identify what needs to be rehabilitated. The delicate

federally protected flora is a product of a complex series of natural processes and cannot simply be “replanted”. Soil restoration could assist in this process, as well as serving as a base for environmental function. There are also many other species of plants in the park that, though not federally protected, are still key to a healthy ecosystem. These existing plants could be maintained and replanted.

Land Conservation

Land conservation is the long-term protection and management of unused or underused land resources, such as open space, farmland, and forest land. This may be achieved through the creation of agricultural and forest districts, conservation easements, land acquisition, purchase of development rights programs, and transfer of development rights programs. Arabia Mountain and the surrounding area was conserved as a protected site with the creation of the DAMNP in 1972.

Sustainable Land Management

Sustainable land management is the adoption of land-use systems that through appropriate management practices enable land users to maximize the economic and social benefits from the land while maintaining or enhancing the ecological support functions of the land resources. The goal is to recognize that land is a finite resource and that its use should not compromise the ability of future generations to use it. Selecting the right land uses, such as the aforementioned methods of land management, and determining how they interact with one another can minimize land degradation, rehabilitate already degraded land, and ensure the sustainability of a site's natural resources while maximizing resilience.

How to Quantify and Manage Capacity

The measure of resistance of a single locality and its power to take certain influences from the environment is known as capacity. Land quality indicators are used to quantify and measure capacity. **There are many different landscape quality indicators that may be used. The three ways that capacity may be assessed and applied in terms of conservation land management that we will focus on are: managerial, environmental, and experiential.**

1. Managerial Approach

The managerial approach seeks to set limits upon the use of the land to attain or maintain a predetermined level of impact. It takes into account the limitations of, in the case of DAMNP, park facilities and amenities, regulation enforcement, and personnel. The Managerial Approach is an active system of monitoring and balancing recreation and

conservation of the natural environment. Currently at DAMNP there are rules and guidelines that by and large lead to an honor system approach to conserving this environment that is freely open to the public. This may not be sufficient in terms of protecting the delicate ecological processes that occur in the passive park. Rules and regulations should be posted more clearly and regularly, along with educational signage stressing the importance of letting the park's natural processes occur without interruption. Clearly marked trails would help keep visitors off of the most sensitive areas of the landscape. It would also be beneficial to add staff to



Diamorpha at the top of Arabia Mountain

effectively educate visitors which would enforce these policies.

2. Environmental Approach

The Environmental approach seeks to measure the acceptable limits of change within the natural environment. This could be done by conducting a field survey to measure vegetation cover, plant composition, and conditions at the most populated and heavily used areas of the passive park, within the environmentally sensitive granite outcrops. The most important plant to survey is the *Diamorpha*, a red plant with succulent leaves found on solution pools on rocky outcrops. A more specific study would involve measuring damage to *Diamorpha* on public trails vs. more remote and untouched *Diamorpha* on site or at other sites in Georgia where little to no public access is granted, as a control group. The results establish realistic standards of ecosystem qualities based on the

natural range of variation (NRV – comparison to historical data for the area). This information can be used to prioritize the need to protect the landscape over recreational use, and lead to absolute restrictions or management processes to conserve the landscape.

3. Experiential Approach

The third approach is experiential and seeks to determine how many people can use/inhabit the land/landscape before the experience diminishes considering the spatial arrangements of use and conflicts therein. The experiential boundaries must be defined in order to be able to determine what the experience is and at what point there are diminishing returns based upon the capacity of the landscape. In the case of DAMNP the consensus opinion is the natural landscape is a peaceful serene place of contemplation and mainly quiet enjoyment/ time to commune with nature, especially on

the unique landscape of the rock outcrops. Visitor experience can be diminished by crowds of people, perceptions of safety, soundscape, conflict between users/uses, wildlife-human conflict, trail conditions, and quality of view, to name a few. Different spaces will have different standards. For example, one area might emphasize solitude while another might emphasize visitor services.

In the case of DAMNP, the balance of recreational carrying capacity of the land lies in a combination of the environmental and experiential approaches to land management. Together the answers will lead to a managerial approach that supports both the

Nature Center

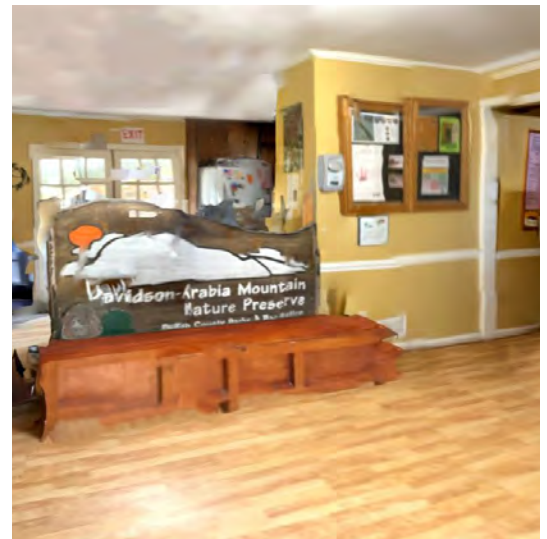
The Nature Center is considered the main arrival point for visitors.

It is open 8 AM to 4 PM daily. The “Closed” sign is sometimes put up if all staff are out of the building and working in the field. For staff and operations, it provides offices, a kitchen, and storage space. It provides both indoor and outdoor spaces for programs, and serves as the meeting point for regularly scheduled guided hikes.

The existing Nature Center on site is a single-story ranch type building that by design appears that it was originally built as a residential home. The main building is approximately 2700 sf and

has some additional storage below the classroom. The building is timber frame on concrete masonry unit (CMU) foundations with horizontal timber cladding on the outside walls. The roof is gabled and has asphalt shingles as weather proofing. There is a “cabin-in-the-woods” feel to the Nature Center but the main entrance is not the most welcoming and may leave newcomers confused about entering the building for information and guidance. Clear signs and labels along with a renovated main entrance would make the function of that building much clearer.

A full evaluation of the Nature Center Can be found in the appendices.



Safety & Security

A wide range of potential safety concerns exist, such as getting lost or injured, dehydration, and illegal drug use. Based on feedback from community members and stakeholders, **Car break-ins are the primary safety concern for DAMNP visitors and staff.** There are signs informing users of the risk, and advising them to lock their doors and not leave any valuables in the car while they are parked.

DeKalb County Police Department has a total of **192 crime reports from 2018 through May 28, 2023 in the DAMNP boundary. The vast**

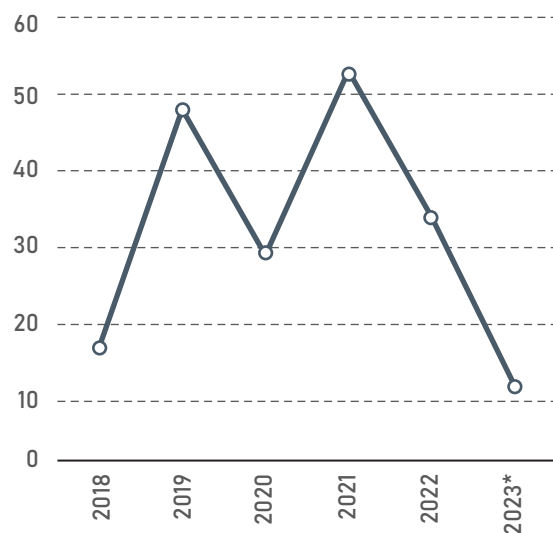
majority of reported crimes (187) were reports of car break-ins (“Entering-Autos”), with five total other crimes. DeKalb County PD reports that the vast majority of car break-ins are likely attributed to a small group of individuals, who have periodically been convicted of the crimes. As a result, there are significant fluctuations in car break-in activity based on when these individuals are most active and least incarcerated. Frequency of incidents has dropped in 2022 and 2023.

Most of the reports of “Entering Autos” represent a single vehicle, but some

of them may represent when multiple vehicles were entered, but only a single report was filed.

The **majority of car break-ins at the nature preserve occur on the weekends** (primarily Saturdays and Sundays, but also Fridays). The department estimates that over 90% occur on weekends. The remaining incidents occur somewhat evenly on the weekdays. Incident times typically range from the early afternoon to early evening (around sunset). It is difficult to determine the exact time the incident occurred due to the victims only knowing that it happened sometime between when they left their car and returned to discover it had been broken into.

Figure 7. Annualized Frequency of “Entering Auto” Reports from DAMNP



*2023 is annualized based on 6 occurrences in the first half of the year

Table 2. All Crime Reports from DAMNP (Jan 1 2018 - May 28 2023)

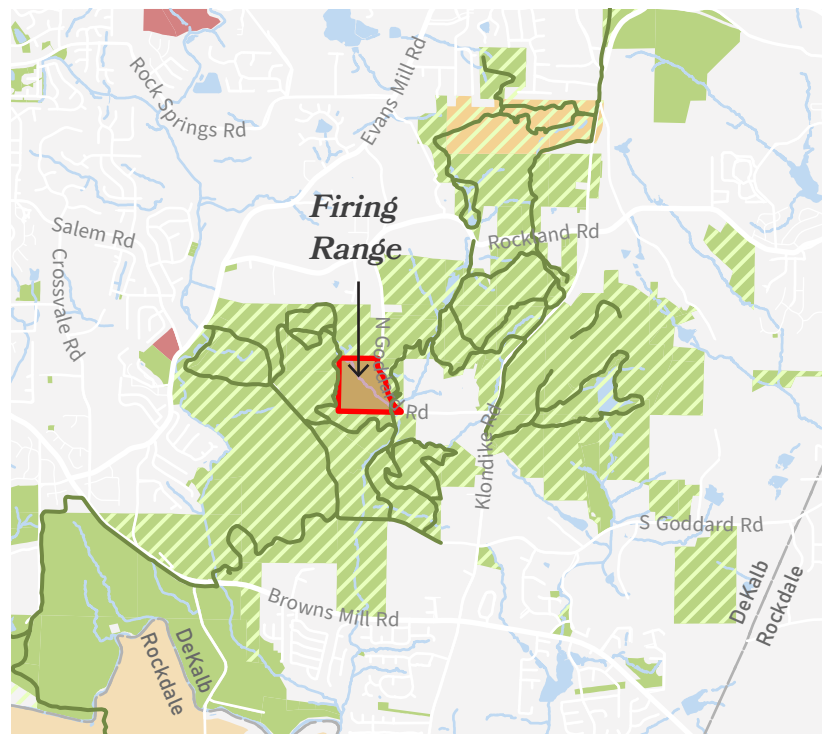
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023*	TOTAL
<i>Entering Autos</i>	17	48	29	53	34	6	187
<i>Burglary</i>	-	1	1	-	-	-	2
<i>Vehicle Theft</i>	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
<i>Robbery</i>	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
<i>Aggravated Assault</i>	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Total	18	49	30	53	35	7	192

*2023 data includes Jan 1 - May 28

Firing Range

The DeKalb County Police Department owns a parcel of land on N Goddard Road central to DAMNP that is utilized as a firing range. The range operates Monday - Friday from 7:00 AM to 4:00 PM. From the Police Department's perspective, the parcel works well for a firing range because it is surrounded by largely undeveloped county-owned land. The sound of the firing range can affect the nature preserve visitors. Safety around any gun range is paramount. A hiking trail in the preserve was rerouted to the far side of a ridge line, west of the range, to reduce risk of rare, errant bullets accidentally escaping the range. By nature the range firing zones are open space and earthen berms. Stormwater runoff from these areas can carry silt into the waterways within the preserve. The police department does not have any imminent plans to change operations at the firing range. Both the County Police and County Parks need to maintain regular communication

Figure 8. DeKalb County Firing Range Location Map



channels to best operate the two very different facilities in a manner that supports

Police, Parks, and the community equitably.

Operations, Staffing, and Maintenance

SHARED/CO-OP MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

In planning for the future of DAMNP this plan needs to consider staff to support the needs of the nature preserve and passive park in the next year, the next five years, and beyond five years needs should be based on the desired day to day operation and capital improvements that require staffing in the future. The staffing plan is used to identify head count additions and/or reductions as well as the different skills and knowledge needed to support the operation of the passive park.

GOALS

Based upon the feedback of the community and stakeholders, a number of goals emerged that require additional staff to support the operation of DAMNP. The goals can be reviewed in Chapter 4 of this report and the specific recommendations that

support those goals can be found in this chapter.

INFLUENCES

The factors that affect or influence the staffing plan have been identified through engagement with the community and stakeholders. This information has been synthesized with the existing conditions analysis of the passive park to provide this list of influencers that inform the need for additional staff. In no particular order, the influencers identified are:

Maintenance:

Ongoing and deferred maintenance needs within DAMNP (includes trails, boardwalks, parking lots, lighting, mowing, building upkeep, addressing vandalism, daily maintenance of restrooms, etc.)

Programming:

Active programming requires staff to prepare and lead. Passive programming requires

staff to prepare, but may be offered as self-guided based on the prepared information.

Safety:

A common concern within the park is safety. Presence of staff with eyes on the park, especially in areas prone to safety concerns can help alleviate the safety concerns. Technology such as cameras can also help to reduce the need for staff.

Seasonality:

DAMNP is not immune to the seasonal influx or dearth of visitors. Even within peak seasons, daily weather can significantly impact visitation. Beautiful days bring throngs of people. Yet a prime season Saturday could be a total washout due to storms. DAMNP sees seasonal upticks in visitation. More are pronounced on certain days of the week, typically weekends, so the need for staff is

greater on weekends even in peak season.

Visitation/use:

Hand in hand with seasonality, the visitation and use of the passive park is constantly in flux. Data provided estimates the annual visitation at DAMNP at more than 400,000 visitors. There is currently no on-site means of counting every visitor. The numbers were estimated by staff based on available parking spaces and assumptions for daily use and turnover. Inherently more visitors put more demands on the property and resources, and in turn staffing needs. DAMNP can implement a variety of smart tools for counting visitation through trail counters at key locations throughout the park and through cameras that anonymously count people.

Size of the Preserve:

DAMNP is over 2500 acres and may yet grow larger through future land acquisition. While not all areas of the park are accessible to visitors, there are multiple access points and more proposed, which do reach to ‘all corners’ of the passive park. Having the ability to properly visit the entire property on a reasonable basis is limited when staff is limited. This influences maintenance, safety and general operational needs.

Hours of Operation:

Currently DAMNP is open sunrise to sunset. At peak summer there are 14 hours of daylight and civil twilight adds another hour. In the dead of winter daylight is just under 10 hours and again twilight adds an hour. The typical accepted job shift is a minimum of 8 hrs with added breaks; shifts may even be 12 hours, but

the standard work week is typically recognized as 40 hours. DAMNP is a 7 day a week park. At the height of summer, taking into account opening and closing the park (assume 30 minutes before and after open/close) there are 112 hours in a week, whereas the heart of winter is closer to 84 hours. The average weekly operational hours of the park throughout the year is 98 hrs/week.

Resource Protection:

The mission of the DAMNP is rooted in preservation and conservation of the natural environment of the passive park. A quantifiable level of staffing can be determined based on the need to uphold the mission of the passive park.

Funding:

Staff need to be paid wages and may also have benefits. Funding can be the ultimate

influencer regarding staffing within the nature preserve and passive park. The other influencers in correlation with the recommendations should be quantified to make substantiated budget requests to support staff needs.

Skills:

A variety of skills are needed across the different staff positions a DAMNP, and are inherent to the other influencers described herein. Skills such as land management/ stewardship, education, maintenance and

construction, small engine repair, horticulture, wildlife knowledge, administrative skills, social skills are all needed to keep DAMNP running smoothly for visitors.

Public comment:

As the public provides feedback on this community resource, and requests are made to the existing DAMNP staff and County Parks Department, the county can quantify where the public is showing need for staff resources.

Table 3. Current Staff

ROLE/FUNCTION	HOURS/ WEEK	PRIMARY PERSON	IMPORTANCE
Natural Resource Manager	40	Robby Astrove	Mission Critical
Recreation Worker	35	Doffice Johnson	Mission Critical
Recreation Worker	35	Rick Kersey	Mission Critical
Recreation Worker	35	Open	Mission Critical
Park Naturalist	40	Shaundon Moore	Mission Critical
Administrative Assistant	40	Whitney Ball	Mission Critical



ARIZONA WILDLIFE NATURE PRESERVE
Master Plan

How Do Users Experience AMNP?

There are a variety of amenities and features that bring users to Arizona Wildlife Nature Preserve. What features draw you to the nature preserve? Place a sticker underneath the features that has the strongest draw for you.

THE MOUNTAIN & ENDEMIC SPECIES PAVED TRAIL LAKES



HIKING TRAILS IN THE WOODS

HIKING TRAILS TO THE MOUNTAIN



WILDLIFE



ARIZONA WILDLIFE NATURE PRESERVE
Master Plan

What Types of Users Visit AMNP?

There are a wide variety of user types who "thrust" at the Arizona Wildlife Nature Preserve. What types of users do you see most often? Place a sticker underneath the user types that you see most often. Place a sticker underneath the user types that you see least often. Place a sticker underneath the user types that you see most often.

TRAIL HIKERS DOG-WALKERS BICYCLISTS



RUNNERS

BACKCOUNTRY HIKERS



EVENT GO-ERS

BURGERS

PHOTOGRAPHERS



CHAPTER

III.

Community Voice

Overview

Information shared by the public and stakeholders provide a solid foundation on which this plan's recommendations rest. The team began the study process with a stakeholder meeting that included representatives from DeKalb County, Arabia Alliance, and other organizations that are pivotal to the operation and success of DAMNP. The public forum for the process included two rounds of public open houses. Finally, the team conducted small group discussions with stakeholders.

WHAT WE HEARD

Key themes from engagement included:

- We must find a long-term strategy to balance community access and preservation of the natural resources, especially as demand grows. The perception is human impacts are and will continue to negatively impact the natural habitat

Stakeholder
Engagement



Public Open
Houses

- Arabia Mountain is a treasured gem, it must be protected.
- There are several short-term, tactical improvements the County could make to vastly improve visitor experience, related to parking, security, trail maintenance, and trailhead amenities.
- Invite populations that could benefit from increased access, such as student groups and those in DeKalb County who don't have local greenspace.
- Publicize other parts of the nature preserve (other than the Arabia Mountain hike) to better disperse demand and show people all the nature preserve has to offer.
- Stakeholders, particularly property owners, need better communications infrastructure to direct questions to the appropriate party, such as a working group, 311-type technology, and/or signage telling visitors who to contact.

Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder Interviews were held with the individuals who play an important role in the past, present, and future of DAMNP. The goal of the stakeholder interviews was twofold: 1. to collect information about the preserve from those who know it best; and 2. to build consensus around a future for the preserve. Stakeholders were interviewed through small group sessions composed of stakeholders with similar focus areas:

DEKALB COUNTY PARKS DEPARTMENTS STAKEHOLDER GROUP

The DeKalb County Parks Department Stakeholder Meeting was held on August 29, 2023 with Parks Department staff. The main goal of this meeting was to understand **how to make the plan work for the people who would be directly responsible**

for adoption and implementation.

The meeting kicked off with a discussion of key elements required to make this plan successful. Parks staff focused on the need for a **practical, well-defined plan that has a clear implementation strategy**. The nature center is the core component of the National Heritage Area, but staff feel that the infrastructure doesn't do a satisfactory job of highlighting the cultural and environmental stories. **Several participants would like to see more "world-class" programs and facilities** at the nature preserve but the department is constrained by staff and funding resources, which make it difficult to keep up with even short-term maintenance needs. For example, staff would like to have an upgraded Nature Center to welcome visitors

Table 4. DeKalb County Parks Department Stakeholder Meeting Participants

NAME	ROLE
Paige Singer	Parks Division Manager
Marvin Billups	Deputy Parks Director
Robby Astrove	Natural Resource Manager
David Flaherty	Parks Division Manager
Chuck Ellis	Parks Director
Shaundon Moore	DAMNP Naturalist
Kelly Jordan	Arabia Alliance Board Treasurer
Jonah McDonald	Mason Mill Park Ranger/Naturalist
Jennifer McLaurin	Park Naturalist

and provide a central home for programs.

Resource allocation is a key issue for the plan to address. DAMNP is treated the same as any other park within the budgeting framework: it does not receive a dedicated budget year-to-year. There is currently not a data-driven framework for allocating funding to parks, partially due to the lack of usage data. Arabia Alliance was brought up as an additional resource that can help advocate for and pursue outside funding sources (e.g. by writing grant applications),

but they need to know what the priorities are in order to start that process. Parks staff want the plan to state clearly what the deficits are, how much they cost, and organize them into a phased plan so they can make the arguments in a practical and organized way. This includes highlighting what needs should be prioritized for County general funds, versus where staff or other stakeholders could pursue outside funding sources such as grants.

The group discussed the **possibility and challenges of revenue generation as an additional source of funding.** Potential sources of revenue could include parking fees or retail sales. The countywide parks system currently does have some revenue generation (about \$1.5m annually), but the department is not an enterprise organization that is expected to meet any designated cost recovery goal. Any revenue parks generate goes directly into the county general

fund. Therefore revenue generated at a particular park is not dedicated to that park. It could be possible to change this framework in the long-term, but would need to be part of a larger countywide effort, and could come with other unforeseen drawbacks (e.g. generated revenues could be seen as direct replacement for dedicated budget, as opposed to in addition to).

The group also discussed the management responsibilities shared among various partners and property owners, including Arabia Alliance, City of Stonecrest, Department of Watershed Management, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, and others.

Currently the partners work well together. However, it would be helpful to have formal agreements describing responsibilities. The responsibilities between the County and Stonecrest tend to be confusing for users, especially with

Panola Shoals. The group would like to have a better system for communicating to users, including whom to call depending on locations. Potential solutions include wayfinding signage that indicates the property owner/manager, and/or a more sophisticated 311 system where users have a central repository for comments/questions that get delivered to the proper organization and staffperson. The County does not currently have a systemwide wayfinding standard, but the ongoing Trails Master Plan will include trail wayfinding recommendations that could potentially be extended to the parks.

Since DAMNP is a key part of the trail system, that property could be a good potential “pilot” for a new signage system.

Staff are open to new technology to solve some issues, but are also skeptical of the risk of additional maintenance needs. The most appropriate technology

to adopt would be a reliable trail counter. Staff also voiced interest in technology that allows users to virtually engage with DAMNP, such as drone videos or real-time webcams.

Table 5. Arabia Alliance Stakeholder Meeting Participants

NAME	ROLE
Becky Kelley	Board Chair
Ron Williams	Board Vice Chair
Kelly Jordan	Board Treasurer
Clara Delay	Board Secretary
Elton Alexander	Board Member
Father Francis Micheal	Board Member
Marcia Glen Hunter	Board Member
Eric Hubbard	Board Member
Deborah Jackson	Board Member
Jonathan McCaig	Board Member
Andrew Schock	Board Member
Sue Sanders	Board Member
Joel Thibodeaux	Board Member
Revonda Cosby	Executive Director
Brigette Jones	Assistant Executive Director
Jeff Dinger	Communications Manager
Joel Slaton	Roving Ranger
Jennifer Dickie	Program Manager
Sasha Johnson	Project Coordinator

ARABIA ALLIANCE STAKEHOLDER GROUP

The Arabia Alliance Stakeholder Meeting was held on August 18, 2023 with Arabia Alliance board members and staff.

During the meeting, participants discussed the balancing act of managing the ecosystem while considering the challenges posed by new urban growth in the area. This led to conversations about maintenance issues and the establishment of a joint co-op structure for managing the passive park. A central manager was suggested to ensure

effective communication and coordination among stakeholders.

Preservation, security, collaboration among partners, and establishing clear standards for successful management were identified as important aspects of DAMNP’s future. The property should be recognized as a keystone of the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area.

Several participants expressed their perspectives on managing DAMNP. Some highlighted the importance of protecting the natural resources and endangered species through controlled access, such as guided tours. Others spoke of



the need to accommodate various recreational uses while prioritizing protection. The balance between accessibility and conservation was a recurring theme.

The meeting also addressed the role of Arabia Alliance and their partnership with DeKalb County Parks Department. The Alliance sees themselves as a key non-profit recreational partner that can leverage federal funding and collaboration with other environmental organizations to achieve common goals.

Participants discussed potential initiatives, including the need for a comprehensive management plan that addresses safety, security, staffing, and maintenance. The idea of a visitors center was explored, with varying opinions on its importance and funding. Funding sources, such as bond referendums and grants, were suggested to support these initiatives.

Trail maintenance, visitor education, and outreach were considered essential for DAMNP's future success. The potential for expansion, additional parking, and new facilities, like a nature center, were discussed in the context of serving both the local and regional community. Vaughters Farm was also brought up, focusing on its management, maintenance, and potential for hosting events.

Overall, the meeting revolved around finding a balance between preserving DAMNP's unique natural resources, accommodating visitors, and promoting sustainable growth in the face of increasing urban development. Discussions highlighted the importance of effective coordination, strategic planning, and securing funding to address these challenges and ensure DAMNP's continued success as a recreational and conservation destination.

NEIGHBORING RECREATIONAL DESTINATIONS STAKEHOLDER GROUP

The neighboring destinations stakeholder meeting was held on August 10, 2023. The focus of this meeting was to understand how the City of Stonecrest Parks Department and Panola Mountain State Park interact with DAMNP from a programmatic, physical, and operational perspective.

A significant focus of the meeting was the management of Vaughters Farm. DNR has an ongoing lease agreement with Arabia Alliance for Vaughters Farm, which is currently being renegotiated. Maintenance responsibilities are part of the current lease negotiations. DNR acknowledged that maintaining the property, including the barn, had become a challenge. The barn's condition needed

Table 6. Neighboring Destinations Stakeholder Meeting Participants

NAME	ORGANIZATION	ROLE
Tameika Porter	City of Stonecrest	Parks and Recreation, Interim Director of Parks and Recreation
Sheldon Fleming	City of Stonecrest	Parks & Recreation, Naturalist Coordinator
Lesley Mobley	Department of Natural Resources (DNR)	Panola Mountain State Park, Park Manager

substantial improvement for any potential use. It has been stabilized through repairs. Participants discussed the potential transfer of Vaughters property to the county and the challenges faced by both DNR and Stonecrest in effectively managing and promoting the area. DNR did not have any immediate or specific objections to the potential of transferring Vaughters Farm to County-ownership, and indicated the department would be open to discussing the idea in more detail with the County. It was discussed, and confirmed in a subsequent stakeholder meeting, that the way the land was acquired by the state makes any transfer unlikely. Vaughters Farm will remain a state-owned inholding among the county-owed park land.

Stonecrest Parks and Recreation staff expressed a strong desire to nurture partnership with DAMNP. They see DAMNP as a valuable asset for expanding their greenways and connectivity, which aligns with their master plan. The city has initiated various events and programs, including a summer camp, to encourage residents to engage with DAMNP and its natural beauty. They shared their interest in enhancing communication among DNR, Stonecrest, and DeKalb through an app similar to 311.

Stonecrest staff recognize the need to introduce local residents, many of whom were first-time users, to the natural wonders of the area. They discussed past collaboration with DAMNP for programs, such as an

Earth Day summit and the development of new trails and projects. However, there was a consensus that clearer communication channels were needed for handling issues like trail maintenance and upkeep.

Additionally, topics covered included the potential expansion of parking lots, engagement with the AWARE Center, and DNR’s guided hike policy to maintain the pristine ecosystem of Panola Mountain.

The key takeaways from the meeting included concerns about the management of Vaughters Farm, the commitment of Stonecrest Parks and Rec to nurture their partnership with DAMNP, the emphasis on introducing residents to the natural beauty of the area, the importance of clear communication for addressing maintenance issues, and ongoing discussions regarding property transfers and potential improvements to DAMNP’s facilities.

TOURISM / BUSINESS INTERESTS STAKEHOLDER GROUP

The Business & Tourism Interests Stakeholder Meeting was held on August 18, 2023 with Stonecrest Business Alliance board members and Discover DeKalb staff.

The meeting discussions related to the development and promotion of the National Heritage Area as an asset that can help support economic development and tourism in the area. The group recognizes the immense role of recreation in bringing more people to the area, and that DAMNP already draws people from across the region to visit and spend money in Stonecrest and DeKalb County.

The goal is to extend the length of these visits and increase the number of stays in hotels. Discover DeKalb is actively working

toward this goal by using geofencing campaigns for targeted advertising.

One stakeholder brought up the potential for a new loop trail at the Big Ledge quarry site to the north of I-20 (not part of the Nature Preserve or this master plan). Only a small portion of the quarry is actively used for industrial activity, so the current property owner is interested in potentially allowing other parts of the property to be used for active recreation. In addition to a trail loop, potential recreational amenities included “glamping” facilities such as yurts.

The group discussed Stonecrest Mall as a property that can further

support DAMNP activity, and serve as a connection point between the nature preserve and its economic impact. The Mall could be transformed into a regional destination that connects Arabia Mountain and Stonecrest, with a visitor center and shared marketing efforts. The mall could also serve as overflow parking for the nature preserve, with a shuttle to ferry visitors between the locations.

Stakeholders proposed creating low-impact pop-up commerce spaces in the passive park to attract visitors and enhance the overall experience.

Stakeholders mentioned MARTA’s future service into Stonecrest as another

Table 7. Tourism/Business Interests Stakeholder Meeting Participants

NAME	ROLE
Siri Emereje	Discover DeKalb, Marketing Manger
Stacy Thibideaux	Stonecrest Business Alliance Board Member; Real Estate Broker; Stonecrest Resident
Bernard Knight	Stonecrest Business Alliance Board Member; Attorney for Heidelberg materials
Kelly Jordan	Arabia Alliance Board Treasurer
Vaughn Irons	Stonecrest Business Alliance Board Member; Past President of Homeowners Association; Stonecrest Mall Property Owner and Investor

opportunity for bringing people into the nature preserve. and the goal of integrating public transportation with the National Heritage Area.

Overall, the meeting centered on enhancing tourism, creating recreational opportunities, and improving connectivity within the National Heritage Area.

MUNICIPALITIES & NEIGHBORHOODS STAKEHOLDER GROUP

The recent DAMNP stakeholder meeting

Table 8. Municipality and Neighbor Stakeholder Meeting Participants

NAME	ROLE
Donald Dejarnette	City of Lithonia, City Manager and Police Chief
Tara Graves	City of Stonecrest Councilwoman, District 2
Alecia Washington	Stonecrest City Councilwoman, District 3
Dave Marcus	Founder/President of Friends of Arabia, regular user of the nature preserve
Cheryl Moore-Mathis	Board President of Flat Rock Archive, 30-year DeKalb resident, President of Klondike Area Civic Association

drew together a range of dedicated individuals and organizations, each with a vested interest in the future of the preserve.

Stakeholders highlighted the importance of addressing access concerns. Particularly, stakeholders noted that there is no way for nearby neighbors to access the nature preserve without driving because the local streets lack sidewalks. This exacerbates parking concerns. Stakeholders were particularly interested in adding sidewalk along Klondike Road.

Councilmembers shared that many of their constituents, who do not live close to DAMNP, have never been to the nature preserve because they are unaware of it and/or have no way of getting there because they do not own cars. They highlighted the need to do specific outreach to bring those

populations into the nature preserve by providing direct transportation options.

The group was also interested in expanded access for school groups specifically. It was noted that by exposing youth groups to the nature preserve, they can then expose their families to the nature preserve. There are a handful of schools (mainly out of Buckhead area) that have partnered with Flat Rock Archive to do tours, but there has been less interest from local schools even though the nature preserve is right in their backyard.

Flat Rock Archive (FRA), an African American museum, would like to establish stronger ties and partnership opportunities with DAMNP. FRA is eager to become more involved in programming, having secured funding from grants, tour fees, and donations. They do tours of their museum and other facilities. They are also working on stabilizing the barn and other projects.

One stakeholder emphasized the need for a comprehensive management structure for the entire greenspace, encompassing DAMNP and surrounding areas. Cooperative management of invasive species and visitor activities was discussed, as both tend to transcend boundaries. The group discussed whether to build more parking lots or establish an offsite visitor center with a shuttle service to disperse visitor activities across the entire greenspace. Consideration was given to determining the carrying capacity of the mountain in terms of visitors.

One stakeholder stressed the need for the county to reaffirm the preserve’s mission statement and allocate a proper budget for staffing and maintenance. Deferred maintenance issues were noted, including erosion at Arabia Lake dam. Suggestions were made to restore the dam and expand the PATH trail with additional spurs.

Concerns were raised about the firing range’s noise disturbance and its impact on the peaceful atmosphere of the preserve.

In summary, the stakeholder meeting demonstrated a shared commitment to preserving DAMNP’s natural beauty and expanding access to a broader audience. Discussions revolved around cooperative management, equitable access, infrastructure improvements, and education to enhance the preserve’s long-term sustainability and visitor experience. The stakeholders emphasized the importance of collaboration and planning for the future of Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve.

PROGRAMS, ENVIRONMENTAL & HISTORICAL PARTNERS STAKEHOLDER GROUP

The Programs, Environmental & Historical Partners Stakeholder Meeting brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including representatives from Georgia Audubonn, now named Birds Georgia, and the University of Georgia.

Adam Beutel and Gabe Andrle from Birds Georgia highlighted their organization’s commitment to preserving and protecting the unique bird habitats at DAMNP. They discussed the expansion of the

Table 9. Program, Environmental, and Historical Stakeholder Meeting Participants

NAME	ROLE
Adam Betuel	Birds Georgia, Director of Conservation
Gabe Andrle	Birds Georgia, Habitat Manager
Anna Wyngaarden	University of Georgia Grduate Student, studying pool species at across Georgia, including at DAMNP

Atlanta Urban Ecology Program, which offers free bird walks at sites like Arabia. The group expressed interest in grant opportunities to enhance bird habitat conservation. They emphasized the need for invasive species management in certain park areas and discussed the annual Birdfest event, which includes field trips and educational workshops. The consensus was that birdwatchers prefer minimal amenities, reliable access points to diverse environments, and clear trail signage.

Anna Wyngaarden, a graduate student at UGA specializing in pool species, shared her research on plant conservation at DAMNP. She mapped various pools, including those along the main trail to the peak of Arabia Mountain, and shared drone images of these locations. Her four-year study on the isoetes species, commonly known as quillworts, aims to understand population abundance patterns and

factors affecting their growth. While pool sprite populations seem stable, more data is needed to assess isoetes. The group acknowledged the challenge of maintaining a sensitive ecosystem open to the public.

Discussion focused on the balance between public access and conservation efforts. DAMNP is unique for its abundance of pools and habitat diversity. Anna noted that DAMNP's population is comparable to less-visited locations on private properties. While signs discourage pool disturbances, the general consensus was that educating visitors about the ecosystem's fragility may deter harm.

The meeting concluded with a discussion on signage, emphasizing the need to be intentional and considerate in information sharing. Notably, the presence of coachwhip snakes, a rare species, was highlighted. Participants suggested that signage should be subtle, catering

to those who actively seek detailed information about the park's unique features.

In summary, the meeting underscored the importance of preserving DAMNP's biodiversity while providing opportunities for public engagement in birdwatching and conservation. The need for continued research and data collection, balanced with effective signage, was a central theme throughout the discussion. The collaboration between various stakeholders highlights a commitment to ensuring the long-term sustainability of Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve.

ONE-ON-ONE STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

DeKalb County Police Department

Officer Lambotte from the DeKalb County Police Department provided ongoing support throughout the project. Particularly, the Police Department provided data and context on incident reports, which were used to inform the review of safety and security in the park. The police department also advised on usage of the firing range located off of Goddard Road. The police Department indicated there were no near term plans to cease or change use of the firing range.

DeKalb County Watershed Department

The planning team held a one-on-one interview with Brent Zern from the DeKalb County Watershed Department on Tuesday September 6, 2023. The main goal of this interview

was to discuss the Watershed-owned site to the south of Browns Mill Road. Currently, the PATH trail circumvents the property to connect to Panola Mountain on the south side. Watershed indicated that only a small portion of the property is currently used for active water treatment. If watershed were to decide that they do not need the property for water treatment, it could be appropriate to transfer the land to parks as additional greenspace. Studies may be required to confirm that the former sprayfields are safe for recreational use.

NON- PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

The following organizations were contacted to participate in stakeholder interviews but were unable to attend:

Table 10. Non-Participating Organizations

NAME
US Fish and Wildlife Service
The Nature Conservancy
Georgia State University
Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation
Fernbank Science Center
REI

Public Meetings

ROUND ONE: APRIL 2023 MEETINGS

The first round of public meetings for the Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve (DAMNP) Master Plan were held on April 24th and 26th. The attendees shared how they use DAMNP today, and their vision for the nature preserve's future. The following is a summary of the key findings from the meeting:

Mission Statement

PRINCIPAL SERVICES

The top priority identified was the preservation of the delicate landscape through education. Other

priorities included adding bike trails, improving the trail system to better connect local communities, and conducting outreach programs for education and volunteer preservation. The preservation of natural resources and education about the natural world were mentioned as top priorities.

IMPORTANCE OF DAMNP

The nature preserve is a unique natural environment that provides natural beauty in an urban setting. It serves as a place for community gathering, therapeutic recreation,

and education about rare flora. Preserving the natural beauty of the area, recreation, community building, and education were highlighted as the primary purposes of DAMNP.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Attendees suggested that the nature preserve should primarily serve local residents and visitors from surrounding communities.

The target audience was described as anyone who wants to visit the passive park, with a focus on serving DeKalb and nearby communities.

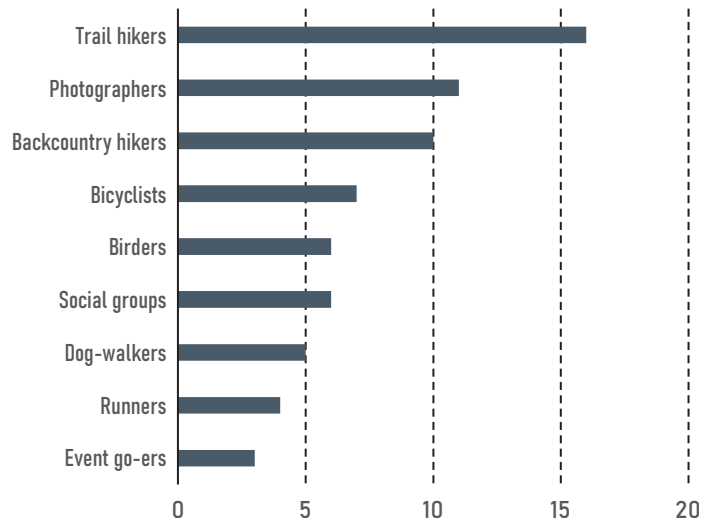


User Types and Activities

Most attendees report that they explore the nature preserve on foot through trail hiking, photography, and backcountry hiking.

More people were observed spending time on the trails in the woods compared to hiking on the granite.

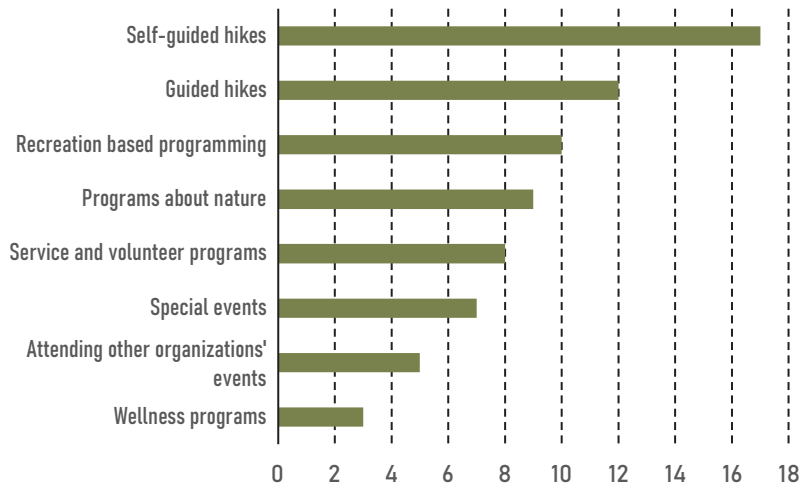
Figure 9. Poll Results: What user type best describes you?



Programs

Self-guided hikes were the most popular program type, followed by guided hikes and recreation-based programming.

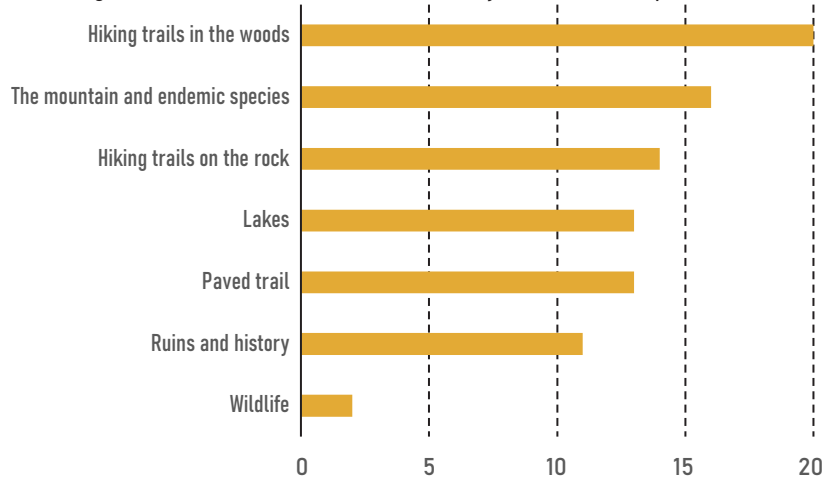
Figure 10. Poll Results: What programs do you currently engage in at DAMNP?



Features

Hiking trails in the woods were the most popular features, followed closely by the mountain and endemic species.

Figure 11. Poll Results: What features draw you to the nature preserve?



SWOT Analysis

The main **strengths** of the nature preserve are its natural beauty and unique landscape, attracting visitors from other counties and providing psychological benefits of outdoor experiences.

Opportunities suggested included increased marketing, security measures, and protection of natural features.

Highlighted **weaknesses** include security and maintenance of trails and amenities, which could be mitigated by increased staff presence and installation of security cameras.

The main **threats** identified were adjacent development and a lack of funding, with concerns about increased traffic and potential damage if capacity is mismanaged.



Pigeonhole Survey Results

Meeting attendees were asked to participate live in the presentation via Pigeonhole, a mobile-device based engagement tool.

Participants mainly visit the nature preserve for exercise and to experience nature, primarily through walking on the mountain and in the woods.

Participants mainly arrive via the trailheads at the nature center or the AWARE Center.

Figure 12. Poll Results: Why do you visit the nature preserve?

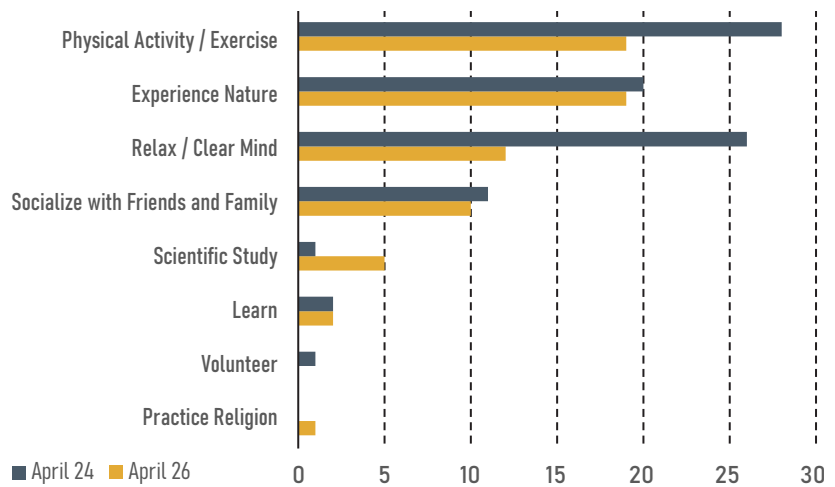


Figure 13. Poll Results: How do you utilize the nature preserve?

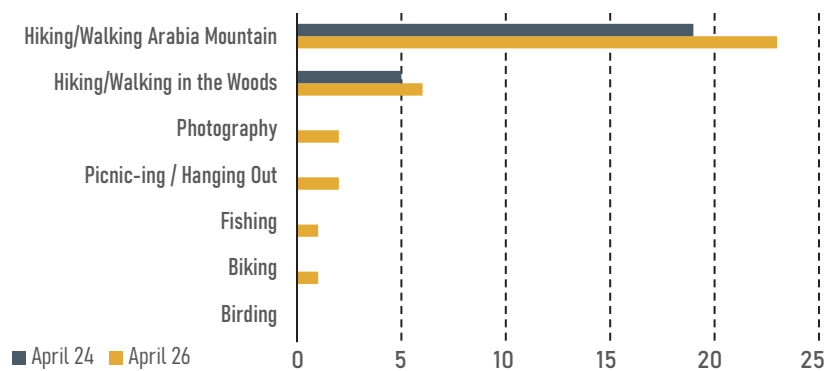


Figure 14. Where do most often you arrive?

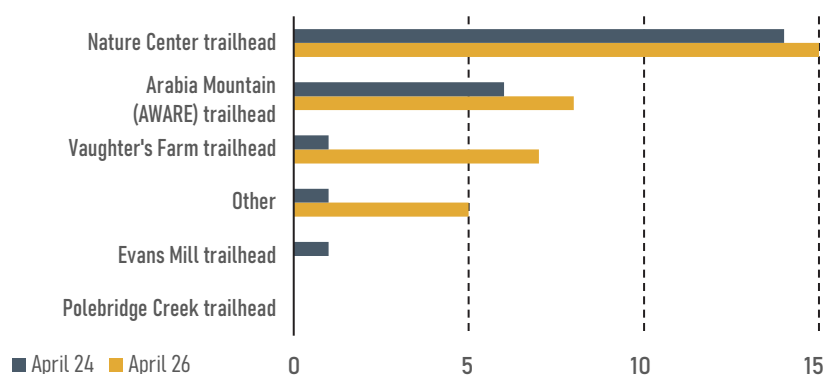
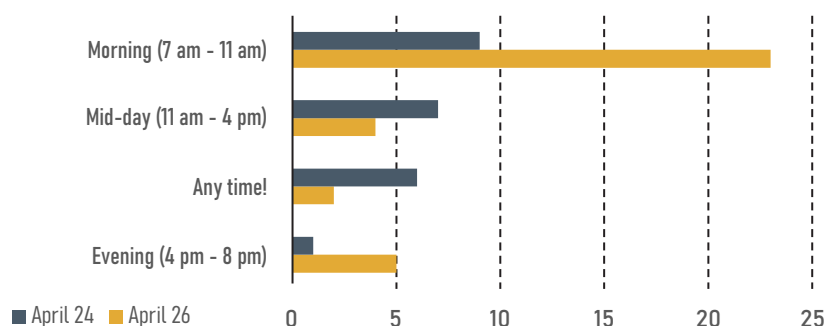


Figure 15. When do most often you arrive?



The participants' home locations varied depending on the meeting date, with common locations including East Atlanta, Tucker, Medlock, Decatur, Stonecrest, and Stone Mountain.

Additional Notes and Comments from Audience

Concerns were raised about the need for more funding for personnel and infrastructure, preserving the nature preserve's unique characteristics, and managing visitation to prevent harm to the preserve.

Discussions involved stakeholder involvement, potential impacts of adjacent development, security and safety measures, maximum visitor capacity, partnerships with schools, restroom facilities, and the possibility of membership or parking fees.

Figure 16. Poll Results: Where do you live (April 24th Meeting)

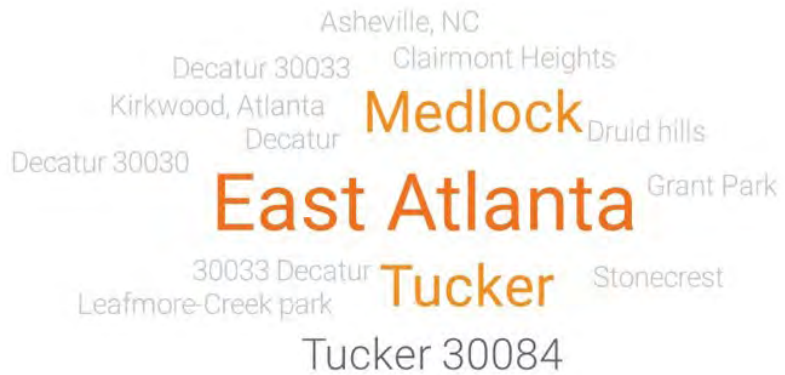


Figure 17. Poll Results: Where do you live (April 26th Meeting)



Overall, the public meeting provided valuable insights into the preferences and concerns of attendees regarding the future of the Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve. These findings will inform the development of the DAMNP Master Plan.

ROUND TWO: MARCH 2024 MEETING

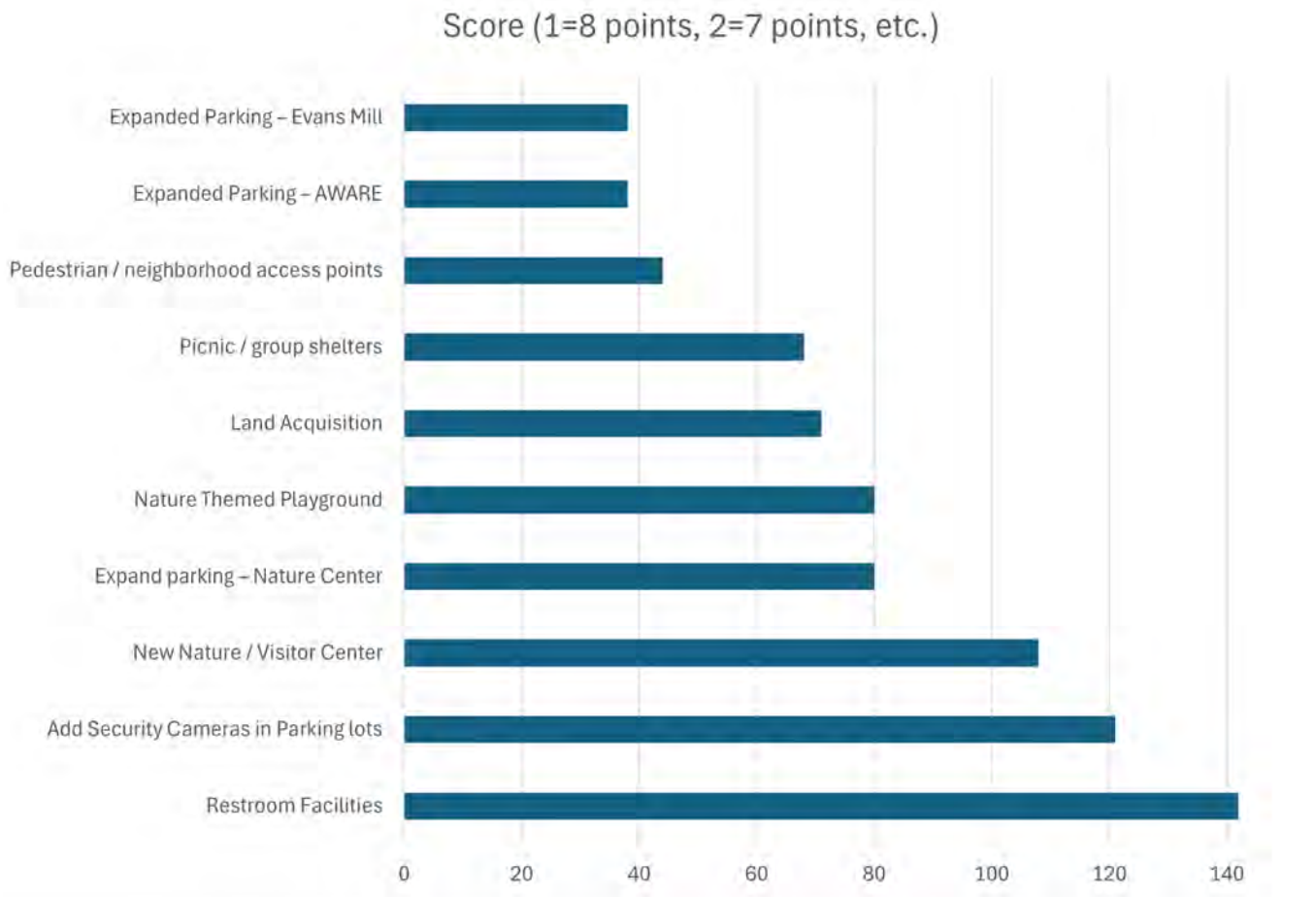
The final public meeting for the Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve (DAMNP) Master Plan was held on March 19th. Attendees heard a

presentation sharing key recommendations from the plan and voted on preferred recommendations. The following is a summary of the key findings from the meeting:

Capital Recommendations

The capital recommendations attendees felt were most important were new restroom facilities, adding security cameras in parking lots, and a new Nature Center/ Visitor Center.

Figure 18. Capital Recommendation Scores



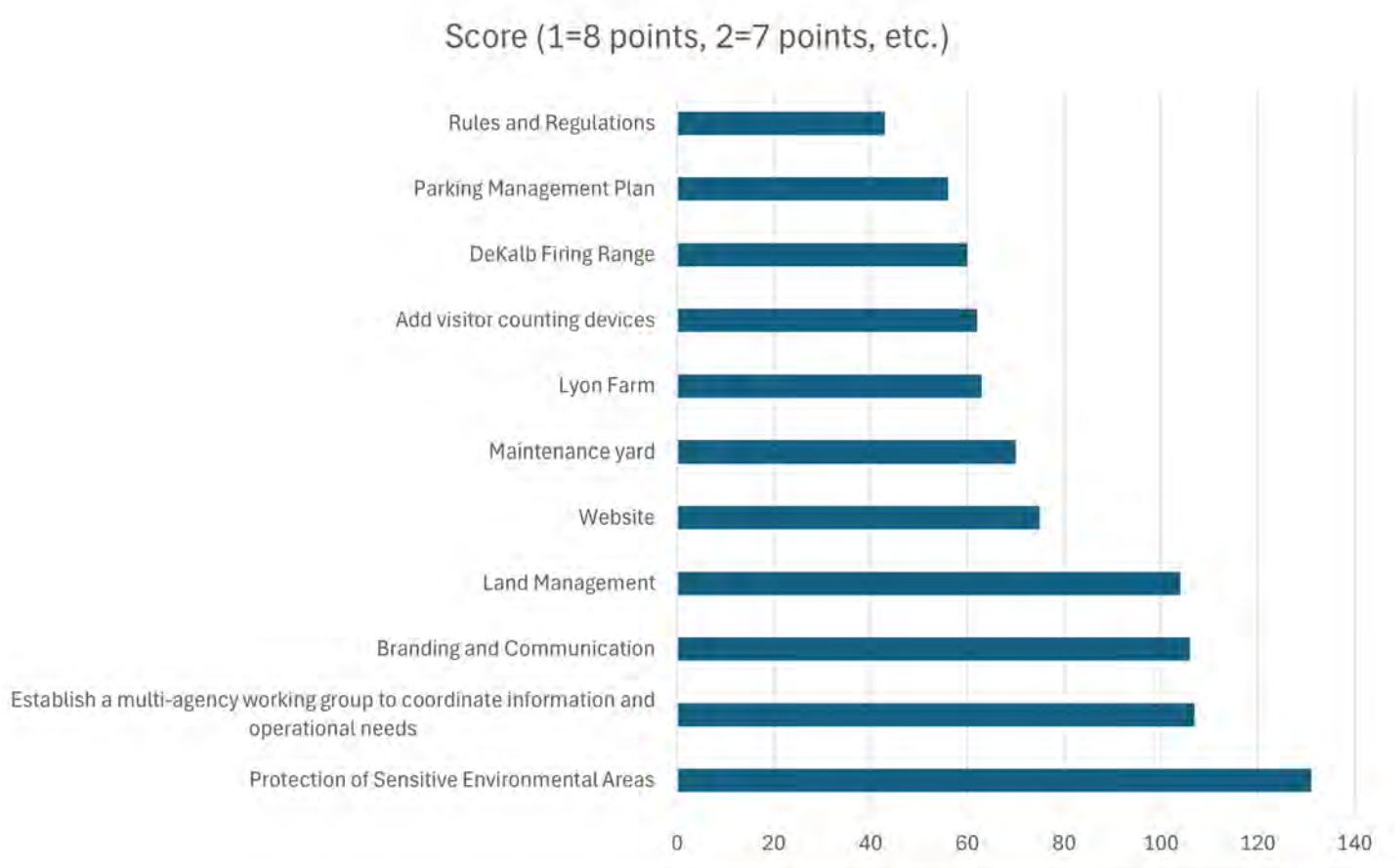
Note: A full description of the recommendations, along with estimated costs, timeframe, and priority level are included at the end of Chapter 5.

Operational Recommendations

The top operational recommendation attendees overwhelmingly voted for was the protection of sensitive environmental areas. After that, the top choices were establishing a multi-agency working

group for coordination, updating branding and communication, and a land management study. Two recommendations were not rated as highly, but still received votes. Those were developing a dedicated DAMNP website and a separated maintenance yard.

Figure 19. Operational Recommendation Scores



Note: A full description of the recommendations, along with estimated costs, timeframe, and priority level are included at the end of Chapter 5.



Master Plan

Capital Recommendations

CAPITAL RECOMMENDATION	RECOMMENDATION DESCRIPTION	TOTAL COST	STATUS
East County Center Parking	Full replacement of existing parking structure at East County Center. Estimated cost: \$10,000,000.	\$10,000,000	Planned
Professional, neighborhood bike paths	Full replacement of existing bike paths in professional and neighborhood areas. Estimated cost: \$5,000,000.	\$5,000,000	Planned
Parkway gray station	Full replacement of existing gray station at Parkway. Estimated cost: \$2,000,000.	\$2,000,000	Planned
Land acquisition	Acquire land for future development. Estimated cost: \$1,000,000.	\$1,000,000	Planned
Low Income Center Transit Center	Full replacement of existing transit center at Low Income Center. Estimated cost: \$8,000,000.	\$8,000,000	Planned
Expanded parking Center	Expand existing parking structure at Center. Estimated cost: \$3,000,000.	\$3,000,000	Planned
Expanded parking #1002	Expand existing parking structure at #1002. Estimated cost: \$2,000,000.	\$2,000,000	Planned
Expanded parking Lane 102	Expand existing parking structure at Lane 102. Estimated cost: \$2,000,000.	\$2,000,000	Planned
Business building	Full replacement of existing business building. Estimated cost: \$1,000,000.	\$1,000,000	Planned
Water Street Expansion	Full replacement of existing water street expansion. Estimated cost: \$1,000,000.	\$1,000,000	Planned

Master Plan

Capital Recommendations

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Master Plan

Capital Recommendations

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Master Plan

Capital Recommendations

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Map of the area

This map shows the location of the proposed projects. The map is overlaid on a grid of streets. The numbers 6, 7, and 8 are placed on the map to indicate the locations of the projects. Location 6 is a green area, 7 is a yellow area, and 8 is a blue area.



CHAPTER

IV.

Goals & Priorities

Updated DAMNP Mission Statement

At Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve, our mission is to serve the local residents and surrounding communities by **preserving the delicate landscape and fostering a deeper connection to the natural world through education, passive recreation, and community engagement.**

Goals

1. Address safety and security concerns related to break-ins in the parking lots
2. Address parking demands at peak times
3. Enact a staffing plan that is congruent with the park operational needs
4. Add more access points to the park for immediate neighbors to ‘walk-in’ without having to drive to the various trailhead
5. Disperse visitor activity to additional areas of the park & promote the other areas of the DAMNP as destinations in their own right
6. Add more passive recreational opportunities to the preserve that do not impede on the the preservation of the most sensitive habitats
7. Incorporate the Lyon Farm into the preserve programming and passive interpretation
8. Establish a ‘Working Group’ for better communication between DeKalb Parks, The City of Stonecrest, GA State Parks, and the Arabia Alliance
9. Continue to preserve the natural landscape and protected and endangered species found within the park
10. Add more land to the preserve where large parcels can be acquired and provide value to the preserve & passive park system
11. Increase programming and outreach, especially to schools & students
12. Build a new Nature Center to provide a facility with modern accomodations and resources expected by visitors of a property of this magnitude
13. Create a long-term plan for the AWARE Center cooperative agreement

Note: These goals are not prioritized. Rather they are the most commonly requested or stated goals from stakeholders and community members.

CHAPTER

V.

Recommendations: Future of DAMNP



Parking

Parking in DAMNP is at times in very high demand, but it is not a continual 7-day a week issue. Parking demand peaks seasonally and during particular days and times of the week.

To address the need for increased parking during peak hours at the most popular locations, there are options to consider.

The first, and most typical approach, is to expand on-site parking, at the lots affected. This includes the Nature Center, AWARE Center, and Evans Mill. Any reasonable amount of additional parking at these three locations is likely to be full on peak days and times, resulting in a surplus of underutilized pavement much of the rest of the year. For example, a total of 50 new parking spots could be developed, 30 at the Nature Center, 10 at the AWARE lot, and 10 at Evans Mill. The addition of the spaces will impact the surrounding landscape and additional clearing would be needed to add spaces. The overflow spaces could

be developed as ‘grass-pave’ or similar pervious surface to help mitigate runoff and leave a greener site when not in use. It may provide a temporary reprieve. However the peak demand is likely to quickly fill and over-fill the available spaces in short order. The formalization of the Rockland Road overflow parking area would be beneficial. This lot could be a green lot used only at peak times as it is now, but if formalized and maximized could add many on site spaces. Utilizing the existing clearing, 40-50 spaces should easily be accommodated with minimal impact to the land. With some clearing and land development, 100 or more space could be added in the Rockland Road overflow area. It is just a short 1300 foot / quarter mile walk to the nature center from this location.

Another option would be to continue operating at the current baseline. Viewing the park’s total parking capacity, the overcrowding

POTENTIAL ALTERNATIVES

1. Expand on-site parking at the busiest parking areas.
2. Continue operating at baseline, allowing parking to serve as a limitation that manages the number of visitors at any given time
3. Establish a parking fee
4. Explore shuttle system options

is limited to three lots, while the other lots have underutilized parking spaces. Actively managing parking when the most popular destination lots are full and directing visitors to other lots would require additional support staff and would certainly impact visitors seeking to reach particular locations within DAMNP. This option would require the least amount of capital investment and could alleviate the issue of peak time overcrowding. This option would require

active staff management of the inflow and outflow of vehicles and communication of directions to alternative parking locations. At a minimum placing one staff person at each of the 3 locations would be necessary to manage vehicles in and out. The very busy Nature Center lot and Aware Lot could benefit by having two support staff to manage vehicles at peak times. This option is feasible for the present, and could be a long term solution, that over time could ease the burden by training visitors to seek alternative parking locations or days and times to visit DAMNP. While it could prove to be upsetting to visitors at first, if communicated well, it could lead to a significant benefit to managing visitation and impacts of parking on both the park and safety of visitors.

Establishing a parking fee is another way to manage access, increase security, and generate revenue for the park system. Utilizing

a gate system that allows paid vehicles to enter and stops allowing vehicles to enter when the lot is full would provide a mostly unmanned approach to parking management. The system is not infallible and policing the parking during peak times by staff would be necessary. Paid parking could also be implemented without a gate arm, utilizing parking apps on phones, and strict enforcement of parking only in approved spots. Unpaid vehicles would need to be issued citations to make either of these scenarios enforceable and viable. Matching the current fee of nearby Panola Mountain State Park of just \$5 per vehicle (which has not increased with inflation for many years) could generate a reasonable amount of revenue to support the park system. Reduced cost parking permits could be provided to priority groups such as DeKalb residents or income-qualifying visitors. If just the 3 peak use lots (Nature Center, AWARE, Browns Mill)

charged for parking on weekends (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday) year-round, assuming one-third of the weekends experience maximum peak demand and the remaining weekends see one full turn at capacity, parking fees could potentially generate \$150,000 in gross revenue.

Whether actively managed by staff as parking lots fill-up or by gates and pay stations, there is the potential for traffic to back-up awaiting entry into the park, if not immediately redirected to other parking locations. The ultimate solution will require additional engineering feasibility and implementation to manage traffic safely during peak times.

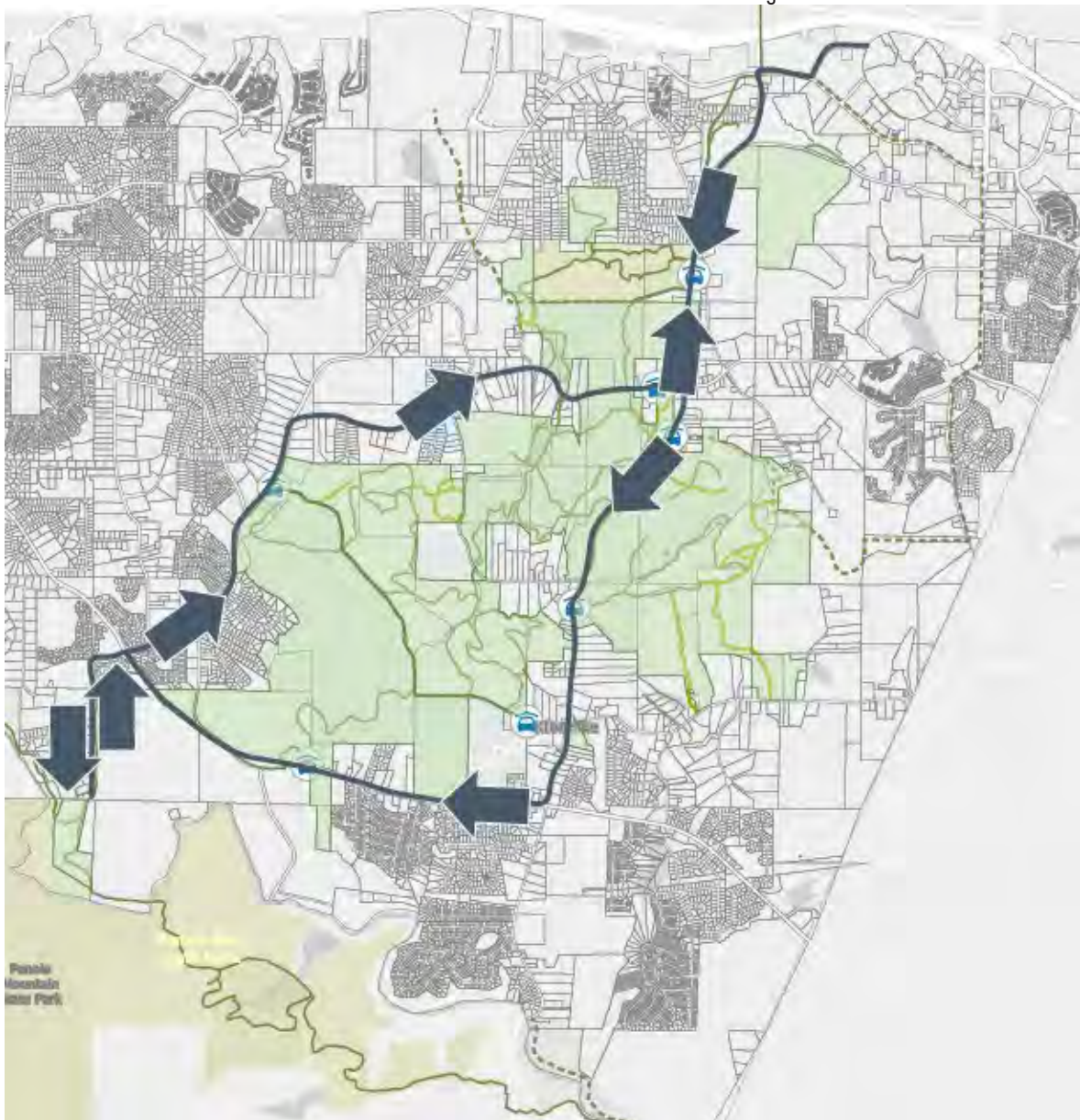
Another solution would be to eliminate public parking at the AWARE Center lot and in its place add a shuttle bus that operates from the Nature Center Parking lot on non-peak days, and during peak days, adds an off-site parking location at the Mall at

Stonecrest to accommodate all visitors. The shuttle would serve all trailheads within the passive park. In the near term, adding an off-site shuttle service would reduce on-site parking overcrowding and provide

visitors the opportunity to be dropped off at a variety of trail heads around the passive park. A map of the potential route is shown on the following page.

However, a shuttle system will be the most expensive solution to implement. On non-peak days, the shuttle could be operated only between the Nature Center and AWARE lots, or it could

Figure 20. Potential Shuttle Bus Route



also provide hourly service to the other trailheads in the preserve. On peak days service to the AWARE and the Nature Center lots would be vital, while a loop either hourly, on the half hour, or as frequent as every 15 minutes serving the other access points to the preserve would be beneficial.

Should an offsite Visitor Center be developed, a shuttle service would be required if the decision was made to eliminate parking inside the preserve. An offsite Visitor Center and maintaining parking inside of DAMNP would not require a shuttle. However a shuttle could be a benefit to visitors.

Implementing a shuttle system would require more accurate data quantifying the number of visitors per hour on peak days to simply ensure a viable service. In the spring of 2023, observations on busy days at the AWARE lot trailhead showed that more than 100 visitors per hour was common. If shuttles only

served the trail head every 20 minutes, conceivably there could be +/-30 visitors arriving or departing the mountain at each pickup/drop-off. Utilizing a shuttle system would require infrastructure changes for safe entry and exit of the shuttle and ease of turnaround. Shuttle buses are typically available in configurations of ~16, 24, 33, and 44 passenger seats, depending on the make, model, and configuration. 16 person shuttles may not be enough to serve the number of visitors. Larger shuttles are more expensive to purchase and require even larger turnarounds. The walk from the Nature Center Parking area to the AWARE lot Trailhead is approximately 1.15 miles. This is at least a 20-minute walk for most people. Unless they are not capable of walking that distance, the headways between shuttles delivering visitors to the trailhead would need to be more frequent than the time it takes to return to that location. If there is no parking in the preserve,

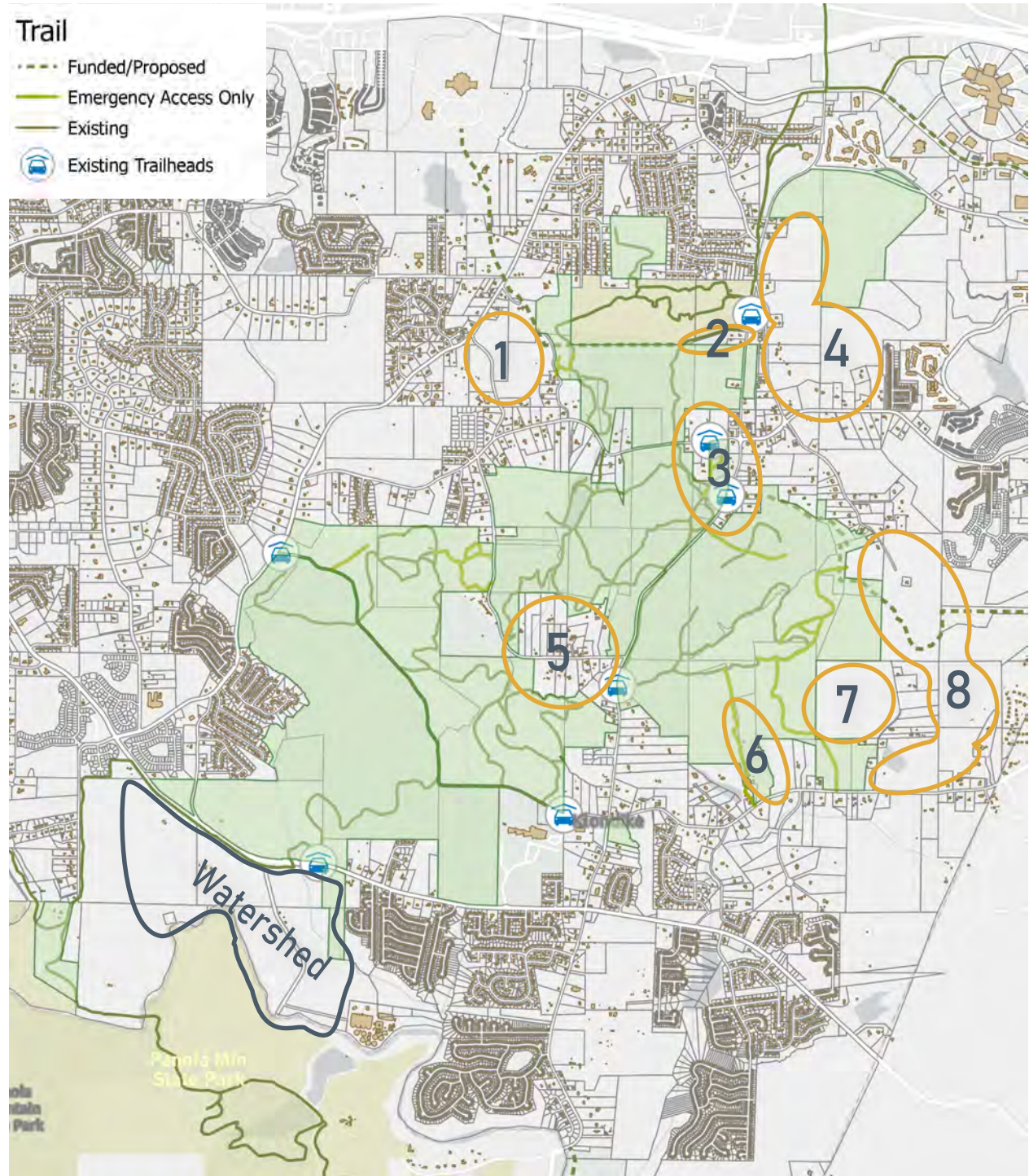
and shuttles originate at an offsite visitor center that is not walkable, then headways of 20-30 minutes would be acceptable, assuming shuttles were large enough not to create a backlog of visitors waiting 2 or 3 cycles to catch a ride back to their car or next destination.

To operate a shuttle service, multiple shuttle vehicles and drivers would be needed to serve peak demand. Additionally, the vehicles would need to be housed and maintained, requiring either a fleet service facility near DAMNP or use of an existing County facility that shuttles would come from daily, to serve the preserve. Fuel is a significant cost of operating the shuttles. Rather than operating the shuttle service, the County could contract the service. Either way, when considering the cost of vehicles, operators, fuel, and maintenance, the cost to operate could quickly climb to tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands per year depending on

the level of service to be provided. If the shuttle is provided free of charge, with no cost recovery, it is an even larger cost burden on the Parks Department that would likely divert budget that could be better spent on staff, programs, maintenance, and conservation in the preserve.

In the future, autonomous shuttles could be considered, but currently the technology is not street ready nor affordable for the county to consider.

Land Acquisition Opportunities



There are eight parcels (or collections of parcels) that DeKalb County can target for land acquisition as a strategy to expand the nature preserve and protect these lands from private development.

In the future, if the park were to expand to provide increased trail access, parking, or other passive park services, there are several areas surrounding the park that could be brought under park management. These parcels are privately owned. Therefore the county would need to engage the owners to acquire the lands to preserve as natural space.

1. These parcels east of Evans Mill and Ragsdale Roads are undeveloped but currently are unprotected from future development, and expanding the park to Ragsdale and Evans

Mill Roads would allow for additional public and emergency access (~67 acres).

2. Two parcels along Klondike Road that border Vaughters Farm would create a continuous park boundary west of Klondike (~6.7 acres)
3. Several parcels east of the park's boundary along Rockland Road could add space to the existing parking lot there, or make the park's boundary more contiguous (~35 acres).
4. This large portion east of Vaughters Farm is currently undeveloped, with dense forest and embedded rock outcroppings. This would offer future protection from development and provide more trail space in the northern portion of the park (~238 acres).
5. West of Klondike Road along both sides of N Goddard Road lie several single-family

homes. While this area is already developed, adding this portion would connect the gap in the park's boundary from the AWARE Center Trailhead and the trails on the west side of the park, while adding protection to the waterways in the area and eliminating "in-holdings" internal to the surrounding park (~107 acres).

6. This collection of parcels north of S Goddard Road is mostly undevelopable land due to streams and buffers, which would be a good conservation addition to the DAMNP (~41 acres).
7. This parcel is primarily granite outcrop and would be ideal to protect within the park boundaries (~77 acres).

This collection of mostly forested parcels could help expand the park's boundary to the east, while providing protection from future developments (~259 acres).

The parcels labeled “Watershed” in the bottom left of the map are currently owned by DeKalb County Watershed Management. Should Watershed cease to utilize these properties for their operations, county departments should discuss the viability of it being used for public recreation/ greenspace.

Capacity & Land Management

Through the research and engagement effort for this DAMNP Master Plan, **evidence points to the primary area of concern being the human activities surrounding the most popular attraction within the preserve, and the perceived impacts of these activities.** As noted, there is ongoing research by UGA Graduate Student Anna Wyngaarden that indicates, despite the visitor activity, the landscape of the mountain is more resilient and healthy than one might imagine without data and comparative analysis. This does not mean that the status quo is in order, and that additional visitation would not have an impact on the landscape and delicate species of the nature preserve. Beyond the mountain outcrop and view from the top, the main attraction, the visitor demand and impacts can reach into other areas of the passive park, namely the parking at the base of the mountain, and at the nature center, as well as the pathways and access points

between these high-use areas and the mountain top.

Visitor demand peaks on certain days, times of day, and times of year depending on the weather and the bloom cycle of the landscape. Demand is not constant nor equal through all days nor all seasons. A solution to resolve the peak demands may seem out of place or not relevant to all other visitors at non-peak times. In order to manage the human impacts to the landscape it is important to educate all visitors equally on the repercussions of their actions within the landscape. This information should constantly be available in a passive manner at all access points to sensitive areas, through the use of signage and potentially the use of technology. While we do not wish to create light or noise pollution, there are ways of creating notifications that can be visually and audibly communicated to park visitors to bring awareness as they enter sensitive areas. For example, visitors

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Explore options for enhanced signage or other education tools that communicate rules and why it is important to follow them
2. Encourage visitation to less popular (and environmentally sensitive) parts of the nature preserve
3. Undertake a science-based assessment to develop a tailored land management plan
4. Install a counter system to get more accurate visitation data
5. Develop an invasive species management plan
6. Monitor wildlife for any population increases that adversely impact the ecosystem
7. Identify appropriate habitat management measures, such as burns or invasive species removal
8. Identify and manage point source water pollution to the aquatic habitats

already pass through a rustic kiosk with park information to be read before interacting with the mountain landscape. It would be possible to create an enhanced entry kiosk that as visitors pass through triggers a notification and brief educational activity to bring new and returning visitors' attention to the importance of their actions on the mountain, both in terms of impact to the landscape and impact to the fellow park visitors.

At peak times, a system described above would become overwhelmed and less effective. The County could add additional Park Rangers or interpreters to intercept, introduce and educate visitors on their responsibilities within the passive park. Guided hikes could be required. If the intent is to mitigate impacts, we must recognize that guided hikes change the user experience. No longer is the visitor on a self-guided tour of this area of the preserve, unless they visit at non-peak times.

Guided hikes could become more frequent and therefore more educational during peak visitation times.

While the majority of visitors want to visit the top of the mountain, the preserve has much more to offer, and many visitors do explore the trails in other areas of the passive park. However it's fair to say the visitation is tilted toward the mountain. While the mountain is likely to never lose its allure, the County can do more to promote the other areas of the passive park and engage visitors to explore the larger offerings in an attempt to diffuse peak visitation. One option is to actively manage the parking areas, which means additional staff would be needed during peak times. Having a ranger or park guide available to direct visitors to other parts of the passive park, different access points, and to manage the in- and out-flow of traffic at the parking areas could go a long way to introducing visitors to other areas of the passive

park, while educating them about better times to visit the mountain for those who have that option.

Parking was often raised as a concern and potential solution to the problem of visitation crowding in the nature preserve. While adding more parking lots near the mountain or providing an offsite shuttle in lieu of convenient parking may be thought to alleviate the immediate concern of overcrowding during peak times, adjustments to parking policies may not address the root concern of managing visitor's actions within the sensitive areas of the nature preserve landscape. As recommended above, more active and engaging outreach and education are necessary to guide or change visitor behavior.

Land management and operational practices are site specific. While generalizations can be made, it is necessary for DeKalb County to undertake a science-based assessment and

research of the conditions at DAMNP to develop a tailored management plan. Beneficial management plans identify and assess the landscape and major habitats present within the preserve, and the species they support, in particular threatened and endangered species. Management challenges are quantified based on scientific research, and management actions are established to support the management objectives that result from the research.

DAMNP is a near-natural habitat already in a protected status. This master plan has identified community and stakeholder concerns related to the preservation, conservation, and recreational aspects of the preserve and passive park. Best Practices, which need to be tailored to DAMNP's specific needs include:

Visitor Management:

The preserve is freely open to any visitors; rules are posted and through programming some level

of community involvement is achieved. Information gathered in the development of this master plan indicates general concern for the protection of the landscape that is unique to the mountain, as well as the preserved landscapes more typical of the Georgia Piedmont. Research by a UGA student indicates the mountain landscape is generally in good health/condition. More quantifiable research is needed to make definitive changes to visitors' access to the passive park, primarily the mountain landscape.

Understanding Visitor

Activity: Implement tools for counting park visitation. Trail counters can be used to anonymously count users on the paved multi-use trails as well as the hiking trails. A variety of counter types exist and different applications can be used. Simple counters can be utilized on nature trails to count hikers/runners, while systems can be installed on the trails that will distinguish between

pedestrians and cyclists. Capturing the number of visitors entering the passive park on foot or bike would be valuable information. There are also smart cameras that utilize AI technology to anonymously count people. It would be recommended to count people in parking lots or at trail heads to better determine the number of annual visitors so this more accurate data can be used to inform land management decisions.

Invasive Species

Management: Invasive species are a concern throughout Georgia and beyond. Developing a plan for managing and removing invasive species in and adjacent to the preserve is a recommended best practice, but further scientific study of the land is necessary to develop a proper species management plan, including public education and engagement.

Wildlife Management:

While no major concerns were raised related to any

specific animal species being problematic to the health of any of the habitats within the preserve, it is possible a species could rise to a level of concern. White-tailed deer is a common species that finds protection in lands such as DAMNP as development pressures reduce their natural habit. The preserve managers should monitor wildlife and study any potential population increases that have negative impacts within the preserve's ecosystem.

Habitat Management: After studying and documenting the various habitats within the preserve, specific management measures should be taken to preserve the landscape, such as prescribed burns, invasive species removal, or active management of disease or infestations.

Water Resource Management: Aquatic habitats exist in the form of lakes, streams, and wetlands. Point source impacts to these waters should be identified and

managed. Sources could be immediately outside or some distance from the boundaries of the nature preserve and passive park. DAMNP is within the South River Watershed, a river that has historically been prone to pollution and degradation due to development pressures. The nature preserve and passive park can contribute to and promote water quality in and adjacent to the its boundaries.

The Evans Mill Trailhead is a prime example of a location within the preserve where visitors have quick and easy access to Polebridge Creek. This is an opportunity to communicate and educate visitors on the importance of land management and water resources within the nature preserve and passive park, and the impacts their activities can have on the health of the landscape and ecosystems.

The following examples are nature preserves operated by cities, counties, and universities – all public

institutions. Each takes a site-specific approach to managing the land based on the quantification of the land's history, status, and established goals. Tift Nature Preserve has a particularly robust online presence that provides ample information about the preserve, its management, current research on site, programs, events, and how to visit and support the preserve and its mission. The other examples provide a range of approaches to communication of information and approaches to management plans.

Tift Nature Preserve,
Buffalo, NY

<https://www.tift.org/>

<https://www.tift.org/ecological-management/strategy/>

Binghamton University
Nature Preserve,
Binghamton, NY

<https://www.binghamton.edu/nature-preserve/management/plan.html>

Mock Nature Preserve
Columbus, OH

<https://columbusrecreparks.com/facilities/nature-preserves/management-plans/>

Bell Creek Nature Preserve,
Hillsborough County, FL

<https://www.hillsboroughcounty.org/en/locations/bell-creek-preserve>

Feasibility of Mountain Biking, Horseback Riding, and Other Uses

MOUNTAIN BIKING

As a matter of practicality, the southwest portion of the preserve is nearly 500 acres of pine and hardwood forest on rolling terrain, west of Snapfinger Creek and west of the PATH trail that connects the Evans Mill trailhead to the Polebridge parking area. This area can accommodate 8 to 10 miles of mountain bike or hiking trails, or combination of loops of varying degrees of difficulty. A detailed field study of trail routing would potentially yield additional miles within this quadrant of the park.

Taking into account regional access to trails, the closest trails are ~5.5 miles at Yellow River Park, ~9 miles at the Georgia International Horse Park (the remnants of the Olympic Games trails), and ~5 miles in South Rockdale Community Park. The Mountain bike trails in the South Rockdale Community Park are accessible from the PATH South River Trail

system. Additional miles of trails are proposed within the South Rockdale Community Park.

Taking into account current demand and typical usage of the hiking trails within DAMNP, there is not an immediate need or pressure to add more hiking trails to the park. Due to the proximity of other mountain bike trails in the region, the need/demand to open mountain bike trails inside of DAMNP is not a pressing need.

Because DAMNP is a passive conservation park, it is reasonable to leave areas of the preserve untouched or inaccessible to visitors, so that it remains in a natural, wild condition. While this 500 acre quadrant of the park is enticing to open to additional trails, it is equally enticing to remain undeveloped and in a natural state of conservation and even restoration.

As demand grows over time, this area can be considered for additional

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Preserve land as undeveloped, and monitor parks needs for future expansion of hiking trails
2. Enhance Polebridge parking area with additional amenities, such as dog park, playground, and/or pavilions
3. Establish an equestrian egress on the current emergency access route that connects S Goddard Rd to the Mountain View Trail

trails to expand hiking and access, as well as introduce visitors to landscape conservation and restoration.

PARK AMENITIES & OTHER RECREATIONAL USES

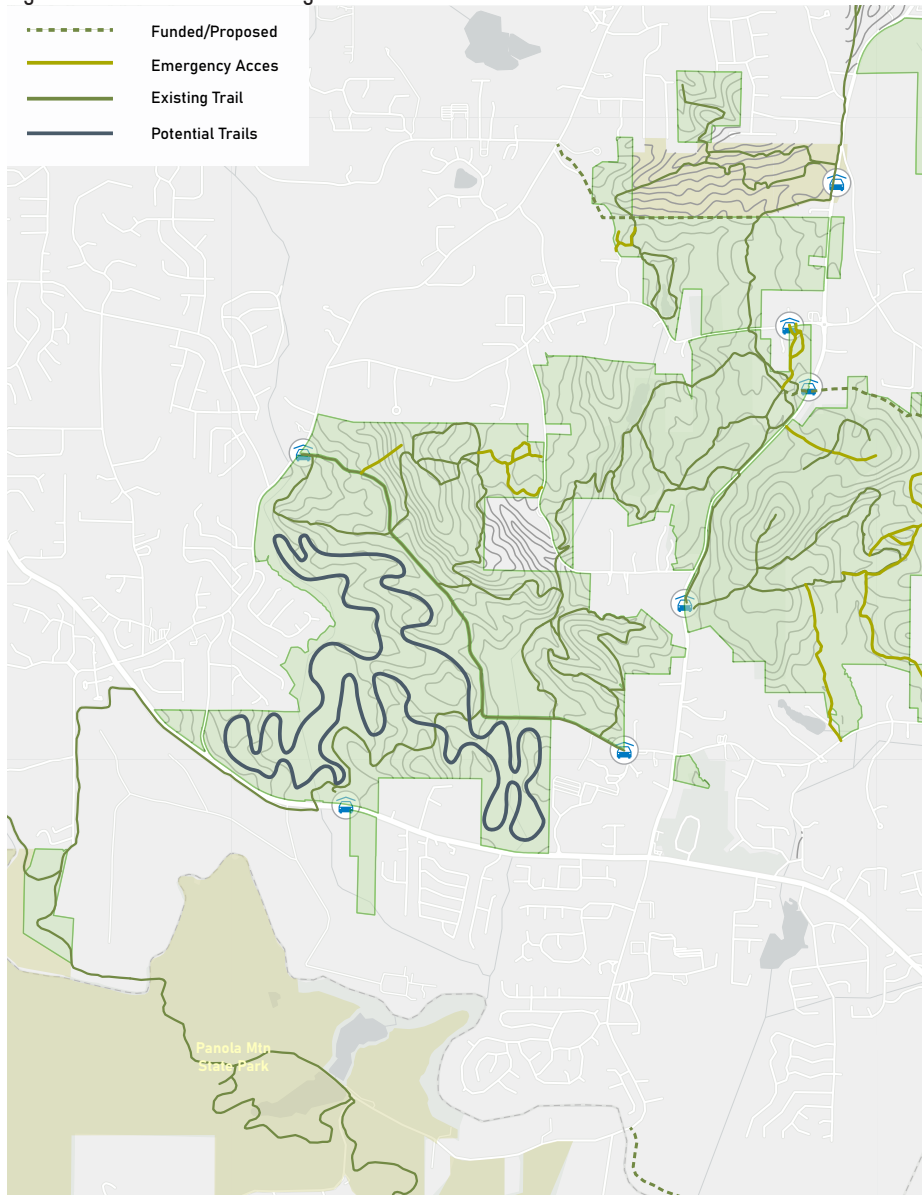
DAMNP is a great place to visit for those actively walking, hiking,

biking, birding, fishing, or other similar activities that the passive park accommodates, but aside from a few picnic tables, there are not shelters/pavilions or places for families or small groups to

Figure 21. Possible Future Hiking Trail

gather for picnics or other group events. A range of pavilions placed in the passive park at trailheads / near parking areas would be valuable additions that expand the passive park offerings. The Polebridge

Trailhead is a viable location for the addition of potential ‘traditional’ park amenities that could draw certain users away from the more congested trailheads and attractions toward the northeast. The original



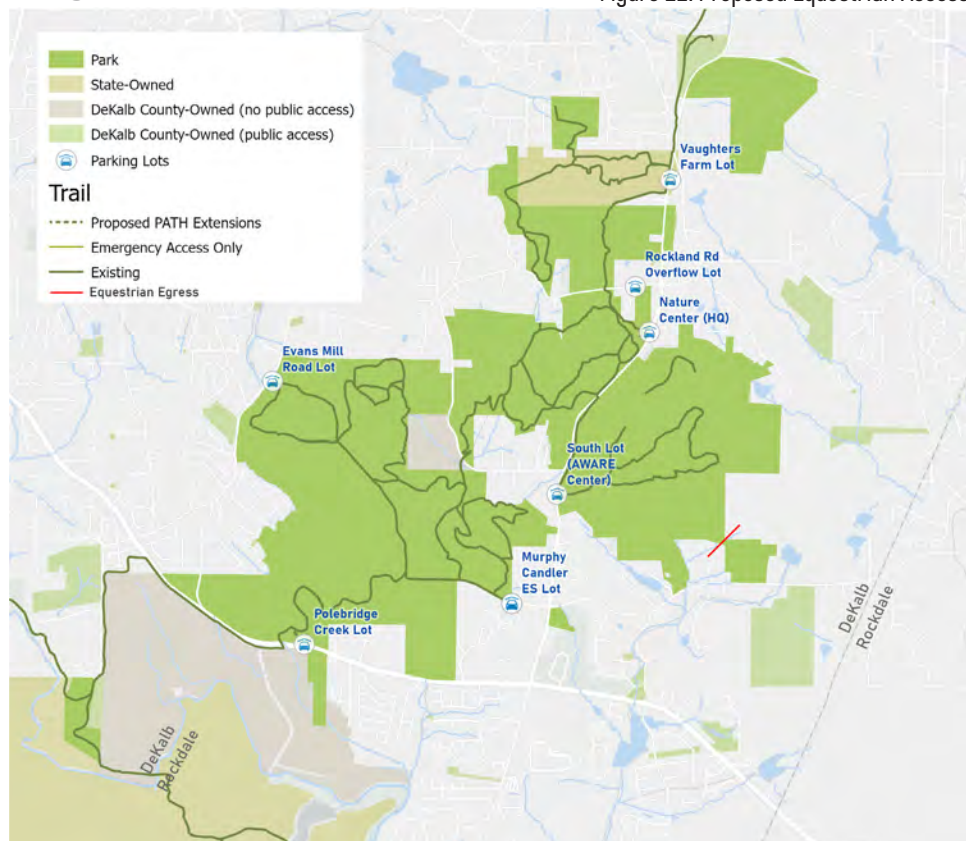
plan for the parking lot was twice as large as what was installed. The remaining open lawn area is half an acre of relatively flat land that is ripe for new park amenities. The entire space could be an off-leash dog park. While the rural context of the community may suggest such a facility isn't viable, dog parks are surprisingly social spaces and dog walkers are among the most common types of users. The half acre would support a viable dog park. Instead of a dog park, the open space could support a playground and pavilions, creating a community space where visitors can spend time in the park picnicking or playing. The open space and ample parking could also support the development of an outfitter location, where park visitors could visit to rent bikes, canoes, or kayaks, or other recreational

equipment to support their adventures in the park or on the South River. Should the Watershed properties across Brown's Mill Road from the Polebridge trailhead ever become available for recreational uses, the county could install 'traditional' park amenities or expansion of mountain bike trails to complement the South Rockdale Community Park trails, or both.

EQUESTRIAN TRAIL

Public open house attendees mentioned equestrian access as a desired improvement. They requested access through the preserve along the current emergency access route that connects to S Goddard Road in the southeast quadrant to the Mountain View Trail, shown in Figure 20.


Figure 22. Proposed Equestrian Access





Access Expansion


Miles from Parking Lot

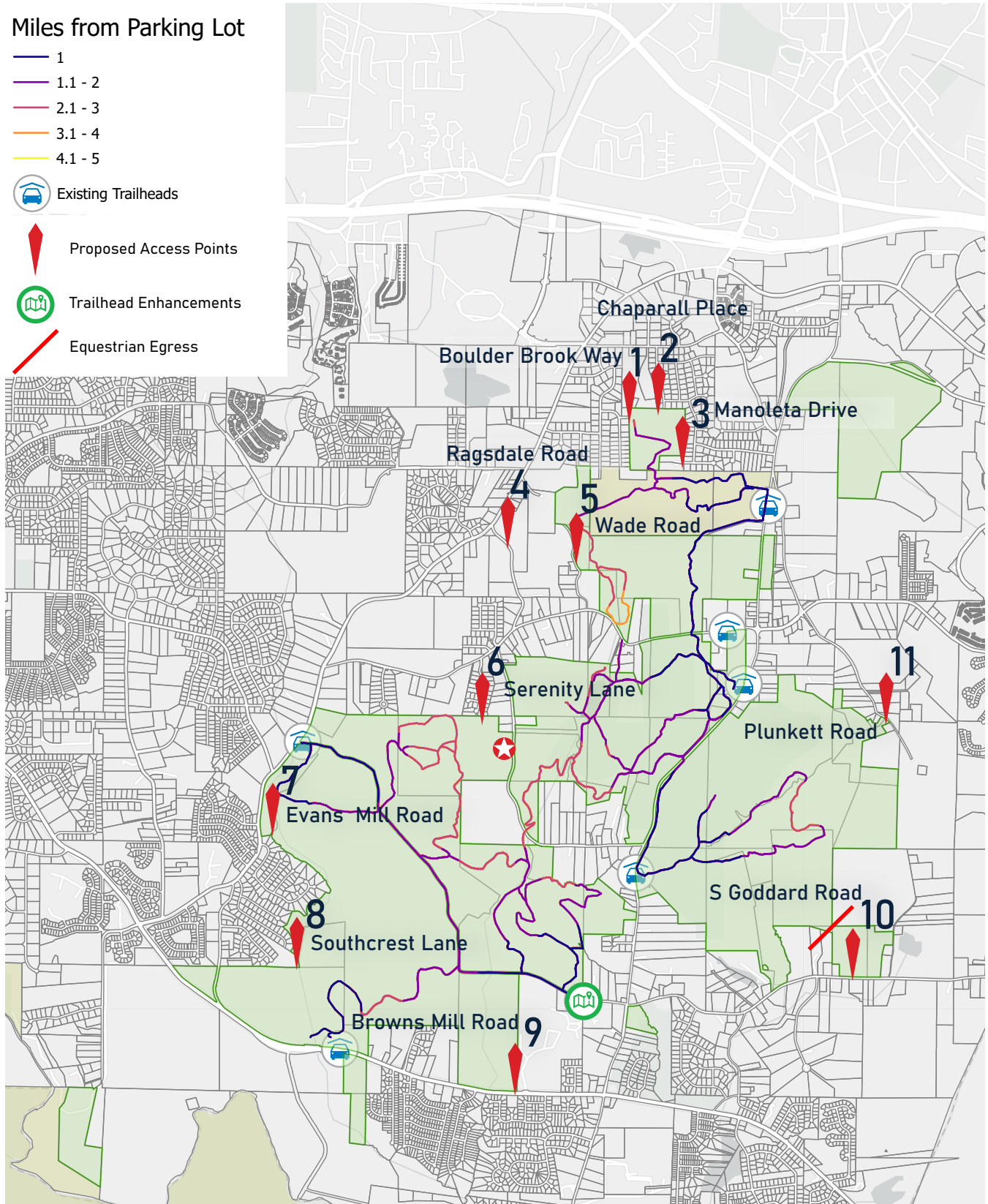
- 1
- 1.1 - 2
- 2.1 - 3
- 3.1 - 4
- 4.1 - 5

 Existing Trailheads

 Proposed Access Points

 Trailhead Enhancements

 Equestrian Egress



This plan recommends eleven new pedestrian access points to expand access for neighbors within walking distance of the nature preserve.

Increasing access to the passive park for the surrounding areas is an important goal of this plan. While the passive park currently has seven trailheads, there are several areas that lack immediate access. Creating a network of pedestrian access points, minor entryways onto soft-surface nature trails, can increase park access for areas not served by the existing trailheads. These access points would also help alleviate the parking and overcrowding concerns at high-volume trailheads by providing pedestrian access to those within walking distance.

The following are a list of proposed access point locations and the neighborhoods they serve, shown in the map on page 76:

1. End of Boulder Brook Way to serve neighborhoods off of Evans Mill Road
2. End of Chaparral Place to serve Chaparral subdivision and the Villas at Stonecrest
3. End of Manoleta Drive to connect to the Chaparral subdivision
4. East of Ragsdale Road to serve the Spring Lake and Lionsgate Estates subdivisions (Would require parcel acquisition)
5. End of Wade Road to serve homes along Rockland Road, including the Heritage Estates subdivision
6. End of the cul-de-sac on Serenity Lane to connect the Serentiy Village subdivision and other homes along Rockland Road
7. East side of Evans Mill Road to serve the Belmont Ridge, Brooks Mill, and Windermere subdivisions
8. Ends of Southcrest Lane and Windermere Drive to serve the Windermere and Southcrest subdivisions, as well as the Flat Rock Hills subdivision
9. North side of Browns Mill Road to serve the subdivisions of Garden City, Gatewood, and Idlewood Crossing
10. North side of S Goddard Road to allow access for homes along Highway 212 in the southeast corner of the preserve
11. West side of Plunkett Road to connect to nearby homes

Trail enhancements are recommended at the Murphy Candler Trailhead, including a kiosk, rules and regulations signage, map, water, trash receptacles, and dog bags. This will help spread visitors to the southern part of the nature preserve, and develops a pedestrian connection to future improvements at Oak Grove Junction. RPCA should work with Arabia Alliance and DeKalb County Schools to implement these improvements.

Emergency Access

Providing emergency access to the Davidson Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve is critical to ensure the safety of visitors and enable rapid response to incidents. Emergency access not only includes well-maintained routes into the preserve, but it also includes location identifier services and coordination with well-trained DAMNP staff.

EMERGENCY ACCESS ROUTE MAINTENANCE

Emergency access routes need to be well-maintained to allow rescue teams to reach their destination quickly. Maintenance and upkeep of roads, bridges, and access points ensure that first responders can reach any part of the preserve in a timely manner. It may be necessary to create specialized trails or routes for emergency vehicles. Unobstructed access, regular maintenance, and the reduction of hazards

can reduce the risk of injury for first responders as well.

The PATH trail is a primary access route through the passive park and provides access to many of the other natural trails deeper in the passive park. Emergency services can and should continue to utilize this trail as a primary access point. The boardwalk sections will limit certain emergency vehicles from getting into the core of the passive park. The county emergency services need to be aware of the limitations and alternative vehicle needs to reach the most remote areas of the preserve. Nature trails are meant to be minimally impactful upon the land and may not always be wide enough to accommodate ATVs. Emergency services may need to reach some visitors by foot, and should be trained for back-country emergency response and care.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Maintain clear access for emergency routes
2. Install emergency call boxes
3. Install location identification placards
4. Engage in regular first-aid training for DAMNP staff

EMERGENCY CALL BOXES

In many serious emergencies, such as heart attacks, strokes, severe injuries, or severe allergic reactions, rapid medical intervention is essential. Emergency call boxes and location identification placards are two strategies that can help reduce the amount of time required to respond and begin treatment. Location identifier services for emergencies are crucial for ensuring the rapid response of both visitors and emergency personnel during critical situations.

Emergency call boxes should be installed at strategic locations within the preserve, such as trailheads, parking areas, and heavily visited areas. These call boxes allow visitors to quickly call for help and provide their location to emergency responders. Prominently displayed location placards at key points through the preserve will allow visitors to report their location to emergency responders. These placards are identified with a unique code or number that represents a GPS location point for emergency responders to find injured and ill visitors. Visitors should be able to download visitor maps and mobile apps that include interactive maps and location services. These apps can use GPS services to display the user's real-time location and provide emergency contact information. It should be noted that current cell service is spotty in large swaths of the nature preserve, so calling for help via phone may not

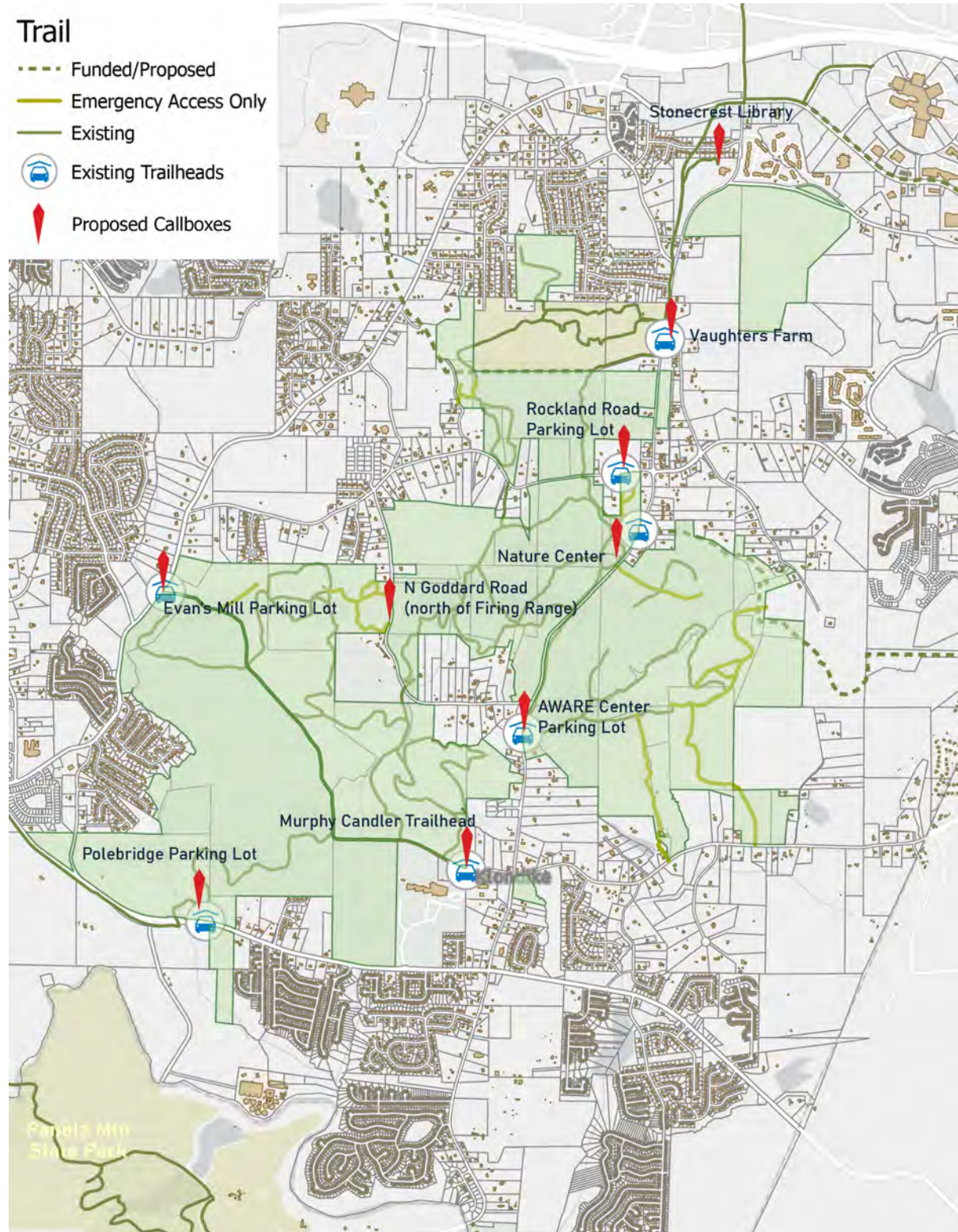
be possible in some circumstances.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE TRAINING

DAMNP staff will likely be the first on the scene. Training equips them to initiate response efforts promptly, which can be especially critical in remote or wilderness areas where emergency services may take longer to arrive. Staff trained in wilderness first aid could also provide crucial steps towards stabilization in time sensitive medical emergencies. Effective communication through radio or other means is essential to relay important information to responders, such as location and the nature of the emergency. Trained preserve staff could also play a role in preventing emergencies by educating preserve visitors about safety measures and by participating in emergency preparedness planning.

Together, clear emergency access routes, emergency call boxes, location placards, and a well-trained staff can ensure a swift and effective response to incidents, which can make a significant difference in saving lives.

Figure 23. Proposed Emergency Callbox Locations



Rules and Regulations Review

DAMNP RULES

The observed rules and regulations of Davidson Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve are listed as such:

- Avoid stepping in any puddles, pits, and sandy patches.
- Stick to the naked rock outcrop.
- Pets must be on a leash at all times.
- Obey all posted rules and regulations.
- DAMNP hours: dawn until dusk
- Bicyclists and skaters must approach pedestrians cautiously and pass on the left.
- Motorized vehicles are prohibited (except wheelchairs)
- Alcoholic beverages are prohibited.
- Do not remove, damage, or destroy any plant life or property.
- It is prohibited to kill, trap, or harm the wildlife (except those with a fishing license)

DEKALB COUNTY PARK RULES

All relevant Dekalb County Park rules are as follows:

- Parks and recreation facilities shall open at 7 a.m. and close at sunset.
- It shall be the duty of any person to keep an animal under restraint and control at all times
- It shall be unlawful to remove or disturb any living or dead native creatures in county parks, including mammals, birds, fish, amphibians, and reptiles, or the parts or progeny thereof, such as nests, eggs, or antlers.
- It shall be unlawful for any person to dig up, cut, damage or remove any tree, tree limb, shrubbery, flowers, rock, mulch or other vegetation/ natural fixture located in any park or other area owned or operated by the county for recreational purposes.

- It shall be unlawful for any person to dig in or otherwise disturb the ground in a park or other area owned by the county for recreational purposes, except under the circumstances permitted.
- Prohibitions: It shall be unlawful for any person or persons to dump, deposit, throw, or leave or to cause or permit the dumping, depositing, placing, throwing, or leaving of litter on any public or private property or waters in the unincorporated area of the county, unless:
 - The property is designated by the county for the disposal of litter and the person is authorized by the proper public authority to use such property;
 - The litter is placed into a litter receptacle or container installed on such property; or

- The person is the owner or tenant in lawful possession of such property or has first obtained consent of the owner or tenant in lawful possession or unless the act is done under the personal direction of the owner or tenant, all in a manner consistent with the public welfare.
- Paint: It shall be unlawful for any unauthorized person to possess paint, in any form, in or on any park or other area owned or operated by the county for recreation purposes.
- Bicycles on park trails and paths.
 - No person shall ride, carry, push or otherwise manually transport a one-, two- or three-wheeled cycle on or through any trails owned or operated by the county and designed solely for pedestrian use.
 - This subsection does not prohibit the use of such cycles on trails or paths specifically designated for bicycling or multi-uses that include cycling. No person shall operate a one-, two- or three-wheeled cycle or a trailer attached to a cycle on trails specifically designated for bicycling or multi-uses that include cycling, if the width of the trailer or cycle exceeds 36 inches as measured from the outer rim of the back tires.
 - This section does not prohibit persons with disabilities from using a wheelchair as defined in section 19-28 as an auxiliary aid on county-owned or county-operated trails and paths.
- No person shall operate a motorized vehicle of any kind or nature in or on any county park, bicycle path, or other area owned or operated by the county for recreational purposes.
- This section does not prohibit persons with disabilities from using a wheelchair as an auxiliary aid in or on any county park, bicycle path, or other area owned or operated by the county for recreational purposes.
- Glass containers. No person shall possess a glass container in or on any park or other area owned or operated by the county for recreation purposes.
- It shall be unlawful for any person other than law enforcement officers to shoot, use, carry, or employ any weapon or similar device in any park or other area owned or operated by the county for recreational purposes.

- It shall be unlawful for any person to build or maintain a fire in any park or other area owned or operated by the county for recreational purposes except in designated areas clearly marked by signs or defined by the existence of county-approved fire rings.
 - Permanently mounted grills may be used and personal grills may be used in designated authorized areas.
 - Camp fires may be allowed with written authorization from the director of the parks department or his/her designee for organized groups allowed in any park or other area owned or operated by the county for recreational purposes after closing time. The written authorization must be on site with the event organizer or his/her designee and available for inspection at the time of the camp fire.
- Swimming is prohibited in lakes, ponds, or creeks located inside any park or other area owned or operated by the county for recreational purposes.
- No person shall serve, consume or transport in open containers any alcoholic beverage within a county park or recreation facility, except at a group function for which a permit has been issued by the parks and recreation department.

FINDINGS

The DAMNP and DeKalb County sets of rules do not contradict each other in any major way. The only minor contradiction is that the park hours are listed as dawn to dusk at Davidson Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve, while the DeKalb County ordinance states that parks open at 7 a.m.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Highlight and emphasize the rules prohibiting possession of glass and paint.
2. Use security cameras or staff presence to deter vandalism and rule-breaking.
3. Consider update current rules to allow for the use of a broader set of micro-mobility devices, such as scooters and e-bikes.
4. Increase signage in strategic locations to make users more aware of the rules and the sensitive plant species.
5. Develop a comprehensive signage standard package that is consistent with the countywide park system.

Commonly Violated Rules

There is an excess of broken glass observed around the mountain. It is recommended to highlight the existing county rule prohibiting the possession of glass in the parks. Graffiti is also present, and is a common plight of parks and public spaces. It is recommended to highlight and emphasize the rule prohibiting the possession of paint and warning of consequences to those who deface the mountain. With such a large, freely accessible park it is difficult to police the activities of all users. The presence of security cameras at key locations within the park could help identify perpetrators of vandalism. The presence of more staff with the time and task of engaging visitors could also help to deter vandalism, accidental and intentional rule breaking.

Micro-Mobility Devices

Motorized vehicles such as scooters, e-bikes, one-wheels, and motorized skateboards have become commonplace forms of transportation, and are appearing on multi-use trails on a regular basis. While there is concern around the presence of these devices, the reality is that users are required to be in control and operate them accordingly wherever they ride. In Georgia, at the state level, there are limited rules related to the operation of ebikes. The regulation of ebikes, electric scooters, and other micro-mobility devices has largely been addressed locally by individual municipalities, often with a knee-jerk reaction to ban, block, or greatly limit their use. The reality is these devices are here to stay and provide mobility benefits to a broad range of people. The incorporation of micro-mobility devices is larger than just DAMNP and the multi-use trails that pass

through the park. The County should address the current rules and update them to allow for the use of these devices. Banning these devices is not recommended. The county should revise rules to guide the safe operation of these devices on multi-use trails throughout the county.

Signage

Currently, signage displaying the rules of DAMNP is rather limited, intentionally so. The rules are accessible in a small area in the corner of the maps at the entry kiosks, and in a park map pamphlet that requires regular restocking. There is no need to visually clutter DAMNP with an unnecessary amount of signage. However there are opportunities for more signs in the park to communicate important rules, guidelines, emergency information, and wayfinding. It is equally the responsibility of the visitor to be aware of the park conditions and rules, but the information needs to be

readily available. Additional signage in parking areas could be utilized to lead visitors to the information kiosks and park rangers, to inform themselves of the rules and conditions of the park prior to venturing into the many acres of available for exploration. More signage educating the public about the importance of not impacting the protected flora of the park should be considered.

DeKalb County currently doesn't have comprehensive branding, signage, and wayfinding standards for the Parks and Recreation system. A typical park identification sign is the most common visual theme across all parks, and the existing signs have no visual consistency, or connection to a theme. It would benefit the county to develop a comprehensive signage standards package that defines the appearance and fabrication of a full range of signs that can be deployed throughout the parks system to identify facilities, improve

wayfinding, communicate rules, and identify parks at a variety of scales. Having such a signage program brings brand identity to the entire system and even though there may be more signs, the visual impact is inherently positive due to the visual consistency across all sign sizes and types. As of 2023, the County is working on a countywide trails plan that includes signage recommendations. The trail wayfinding system may be adjusted to work as a parks signage system as well for added cohesion.

Nature Center

RENOVATION VS REPLACEMENT COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS

While the existing DAMNP Visitor Center is serviceable for its current uses, the facility assessment did identify a number of elements that need to be addressed to maintain the facility in its current operational condition. These items are detailed in the Facility Assessment Report that can be found in the appendix.

The visitor center is a former residential home that was adapted to serve as the park office, visitor information center, nature, and education center. While it has a rustic aesthetic which blends quietly into the preserve's natural setting, its location, curb appeal, and layout can also be detractors. The current visitor center does not have a prominent or inviting placement in the passive park. The visitor center visually 'takes a back seat'

to staff parking, county maintenance and operations vehicles, and maintenance sheds. If maintained in its current configuration, the visitor center will arguably no longer provide a truly useful level of service to the DAMNP for another 50 years. The facility has served a viable use for many years. However, based on the community and stakeholder feedback, a new visitor center programmed to the preserve's goals of conservation and education, coupled with growing staff, management, and operations needs, a new facility is recommended.

NEW VISITOR CENTER LOCATION OPTIONS

The existing nature / visitor center could be renovated or completely rebuilt on or near its current location to provide better, modern facilities that will be viable at the 100th anniversary of the preserve. As the preserve has developed

KEY RECOMMENDATION

Build a new world-class nature center to better accommodate the program and staff needs. The new nature center could be in its current location, on the current Rockland Road overflow lot, or on N Goddard Rd just west of Klondike Rd.

over the years with parking, trails, overflow parking, and other amenities, the current location makes a lot of sense as it is in a central location and proximate to significant features of the preserve. Utility services already exist at this location, and it is a known entity to long-term visitors.

The Rockland Road overflow lot is an alternative location that should be studied in more detail. The preserve has 450 feet of frontage along Rockland Road, a short distance from Klondike Road. These parcels are

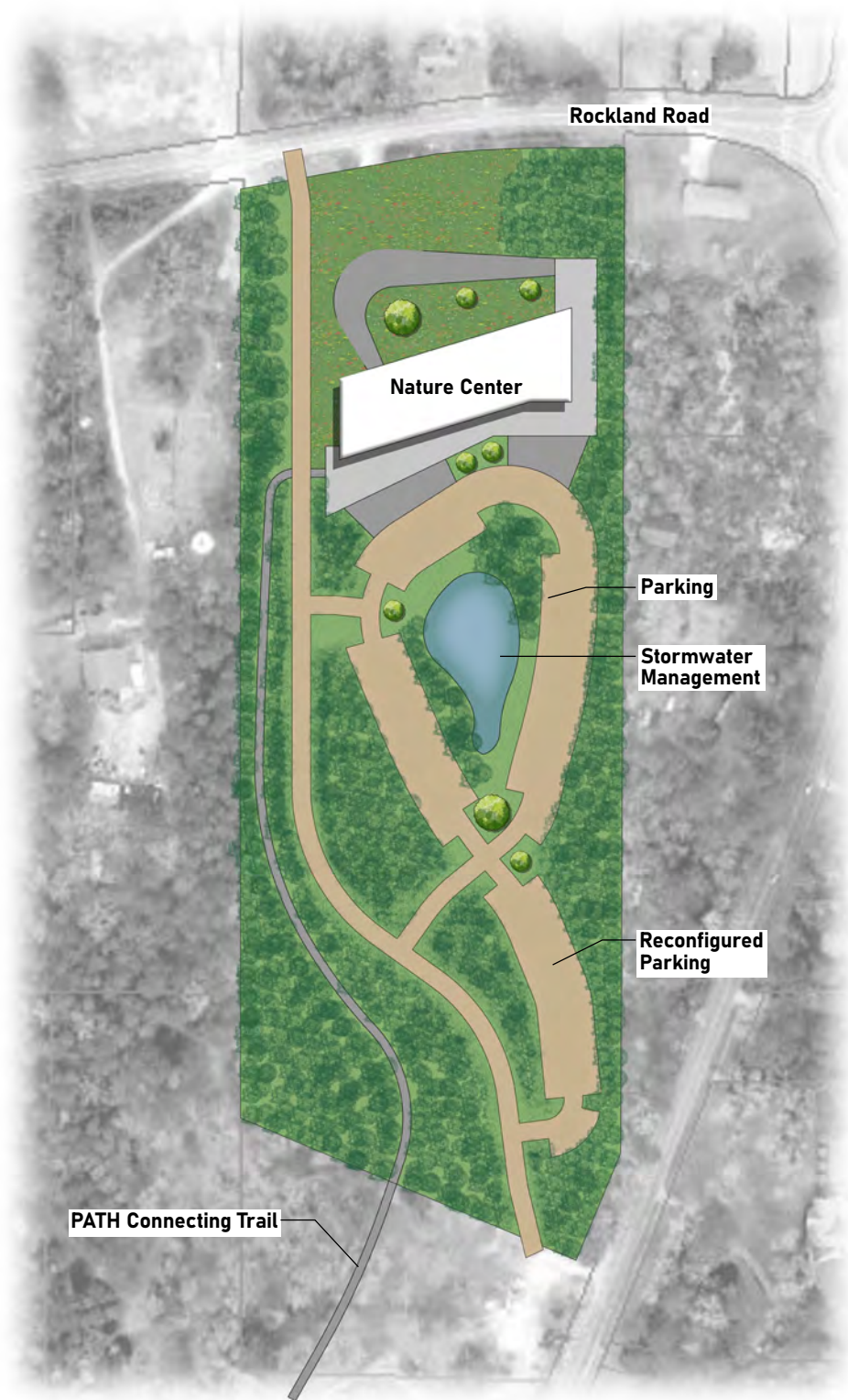


Figure 24. New Nature Center Concept (Rockland Road location)

only separated from the main visitor center and parking areas by a mix of pines trees and deciduous trees, while a portion of the landscape is open space. This location could expand parking options, while moving the main entrance to the preserve away from the busy Klondike Road, thereby improving safety. Other benefits include keeping the main access point for the preserve in generally the same location and freeing up the current nature center location to be reconfigured into a maintenance facility. No additional land would need to be acquired. Figure 22, on page 90, shows how a new nature center could be configured on the parcel.

A third location to consider is on N. Goddard Rd, just west of Klondike Rd. As noted in the land acquisition section of this report, these single family home in- holdings could be long-term acquisitions to expand the size of the preserve and create additional traditional passive park amenities.

Depending on the ability to acquire land, between 4 and 24 acres could be acquired and consolidated to develop a new visitor center and main access point to the passive park. Similar to the Rockland Rd location, this would move the preserve's main entry off of the busy Klondike Rd corridor, while keeping it rather central to the overall preserve with access to the existing PATH, and moving it much closer to the AWARE lot trailhead and main attraction, the hike up the mountain, that so many visitors come to experience. A primary drawback to this location is the need to acquire land, and the demolition costs associated with existing facilities The County would need willing sellers as well. Based simply on county appraised values, land costs could be expected to be half a million to more than two million dollars depending on the amount of land acquired at fair market value.

Through stakeholder conversations, the idea of an off-site Visitor Center, located near the Mall at Stonecrest was offered for consideration. A couple of primary reasons were offered in support of an off-site visitor center. One justification is based on the premise of incorporating DAMNP into the economic fabric of the area and bringing a larger prominence to the National Heritage Area in combination with a Nature Preserve Visitor Center. Another reasoning for an off-site visitor center is based on the idea of excluding all parking in the nature preserve and requiring visitors to arrive first at the visitor center and then be shuttled into the passive park for hikes and access, unless visitors chose to enter on bike.

Placing the visitor center at the mall puts it more than 2.5 miles from the current location in the heart of the passive park. Visitors will no longer be able to reasonably walk to

the park. If the approach is to eliminate parking, then a tremendous added cost of providing regular, frequent shuttle service to all points within the passive park will be required to support the tens of thousands of annual visitors. A hybrid approach could be to locate the visitor center away from the park but maintain parking in DAMNP. This would likely result in a status quo of most visitors to the passive park and little engagement with the visitor center miles away, offsite. A visitor center at the mall would also not be efficient for park staff. Office and storage space would still be required on site; therefore a separate facility would still be necessary to provide onsite support for staff and park needs.

People visit the passive park to experience nature and the unique landscape of the mountain. The experience of programs offered in the park are enhanced by being in the setting of the natural environment. DAMNP is different than a state park

or a national park where there are often limited entry and access points to the property. Inherently seeking to limit access to DAMNP would be challenging. Simply eliminating parking is an approach, but it would also upset county residents that have freely accessed the park for decades. The primary concern for limiting or managing visitor access revolves around the mountain and landscape of the outcrops. Most of the rest of the passive park is and should remain accessible at the various trailheads by foot, bike, and car.

TRANSITION PERIOD

If regular maintenance items are addressed in the current Nature Center, it can be maintained and utilized as it is currently operated, without major renovation, while funds are raised or identified and design and construction is implemented for a new, world class nature center. Funding, design, and

construction should take five years or less. If the current Nature Center is intended to be utilized for more than five years, additional maintenance and capital costs will be required, and opportunities for expanded services and programming will be limited until a new center is open to the public.

COSTS

Cost to renovate versus cost to build a new DAMNP Visitor Center will vary greatly based on final programming, location, and size of the building.

Renovation Costs: The existing Nature Center is ~4300 square feet, including the exterior spaces. Current renovations costs for a significant gut and overhaul of the entire building would range from \$250 to \$350 per square foot, resulting in an estimate of \$1.075M to \$1.5M to modernize and renovate the existing facility. Adding any additional square footage would add cost to the building.

New Construction Costs:

Developing a new nature center, including the cost of land development and new infrastructure to support the facility, costs \$550 to \$650 per square foot, as an estimate. Therefore, a new 10,000 to 15,000 SF facility could be expected to cost \$8-\$12 million, and including the site work, exhibits, and specialty uses of a world class facility, the total cost could be \$15-\$20 million.

AWARE Center

The AWARE Wildlife Center has existed at DAMNP since 2006 and has rehabilitated thousands of injured and orphaned native Georgia wild animals since its inception. AWARE educates the public about peaceful coexistence with wildlife, and is a mutually beneficial partner to the County and the preserve. The AWARE Wildlife Center seeks to expand its services and facilities, and remain a long time partner with DeKalb County. The

adjacent Gregory house site has been utilized as storage for AWARE. This is not the highest and best use of this site. The AWARE Center will build a new state of the art facility on the site of the Gregory House and replace the current facility with a new education center. The opportunity exists for the Education Center to mutually benefit the Preserve and AWARE. The reconfiguration of the site will open the AWARE lot for more parking, while

the Education Center itself can provide restrooms accessible from the outside of the building, year-round, and outside of the Education Center's normal operating hours. The Education Center will be able to separate the hospital facilities from the public interest spaces and allow for education on wildlife, the landscape of Arabia Mountain, and the surrounding Heritage Area, as all are intimately connected.

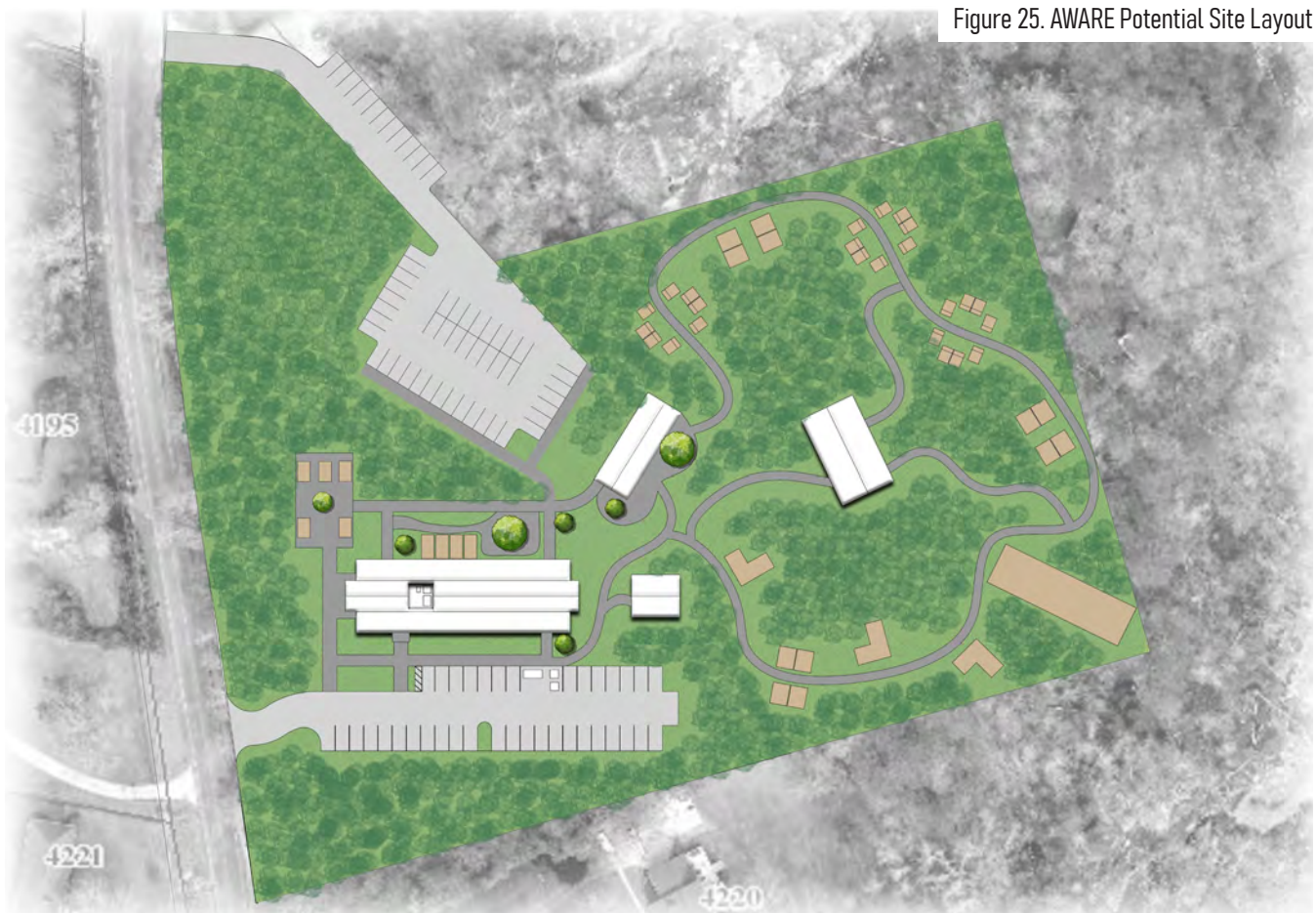


Figure 25. AWARE Potential Site Layout

Historic Structures



Retreat House: The house on Rockland Road was constructed in the late 1980s and has no known historical or architectural significance. It is currently a liability with no programmed uses and will require renovations to bring it up to code and functional use. The county shall seek non-profit partners that will find benefit in a renovated Retreat House for meeting/office space. These NPOs should contribute to the costs to rehabilitate the building. A partial demolition/ deconstruction of the house could also result in the creation of an open air pavilion as an overnight camp for scouts or small groups. If neither of these options come to fruition in a reasonable timeframe, it is recommended the retreat house be demolished and the landscape restored in its place.



Oak Grove Junction: The 1900 stone building is a former commercial space, last used as a convenience store. It could serve as a small museum and/or gallery space with rotating exhibits. Utilizing the building for active programming will offer another opportunity for exploration and education in a high visibility location. The modern gas station canopy should be removed. The 2+ acres of open land behind the building can be used for small events; parking could be accommodated across the street at the elementary school on weekends during events.



Ragsdale House: This house was originally built at the intersection of Rockland & North Goddard Rd. and was home to Ms. Ruby Ragsdale and her family for over 100 years. It was saved from demolition by DeKalb County and relocated to its new location about a half mile south on North Goddard Rd, inside of DAMNP. The Ragsdale House represents another opportunity to interpret the history of the area. It could be renovated, including adding bathrooms, into a house museum or another craftsman / artists space and opened to the public for docent led tours.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Seek non-profit partners to rehabilitate the Retreat House
2. Convert the Oak Grove Junction building into a small museum or gallery space
3. Convert the Ragsdale House into a house museum or craftsmen/artists space, including adding bathrooms

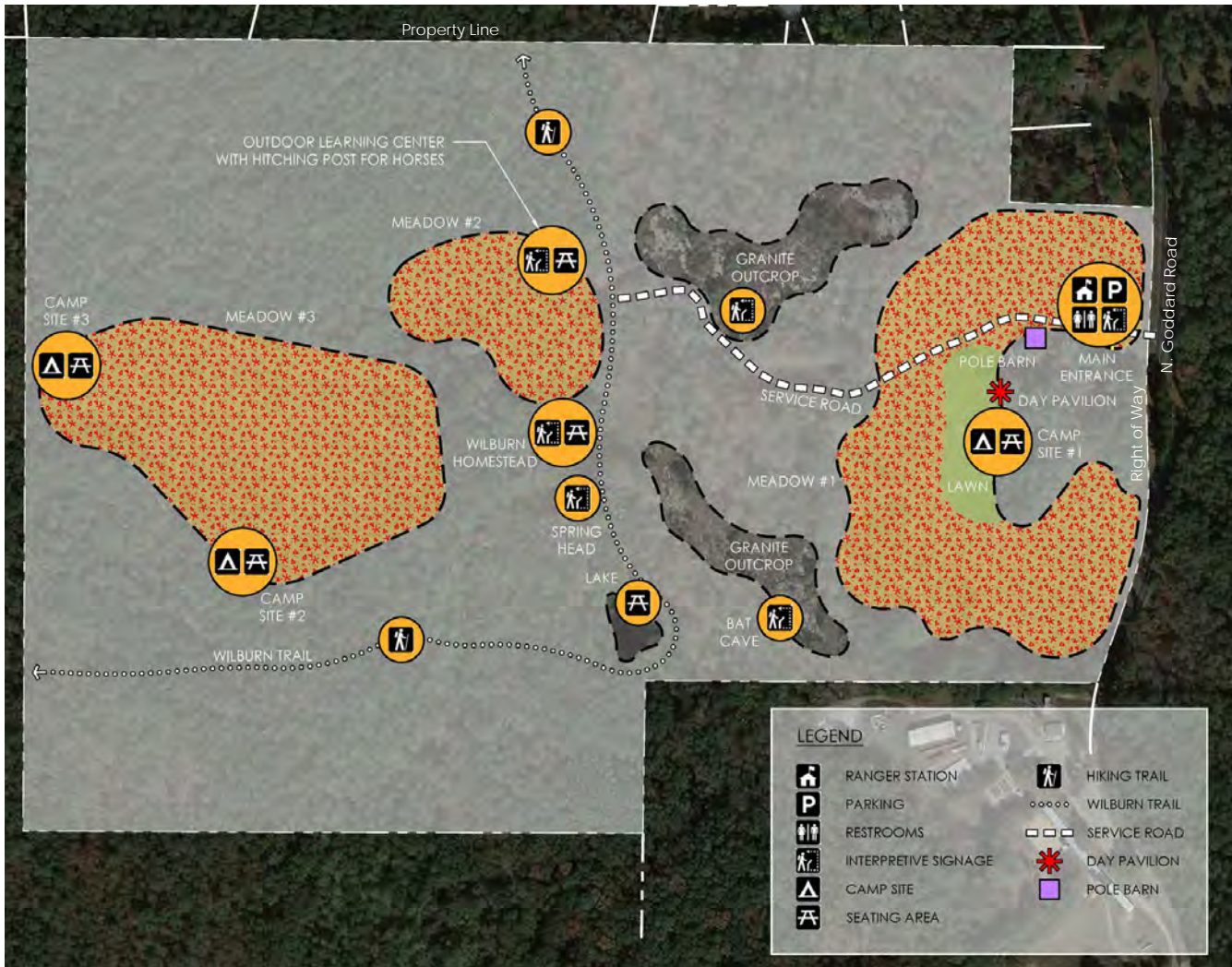
Primitive Camping Area

In October of 2020, the Arabia Alliance submitted a Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program application for grant consideration for a new DAMNP Ragsdale Primitive Camping Area. The camping area is proposed on the west side of N Goddard Road, just north of the firing range. As described in the application documents, “the vision for the project is to develop a primitive camp site set within a rustic nature preserve that provides safe, easy and convenient outdoor recreational activities, restores and enhances ecological systems and highlights the historic and cultural resources within the property.” The application explains that the proposed camp sites “will provide one of the largest opportunities for easily accessible primitive camping within Metro-Atlanta. Improvements to and expansion of the existing trail system will give visitors access to spectacular cultural and

natural resources such as the Wilburn Homestead ruins, the near pristine granite outcrops, and a beautiful spring fed lake.” The application noted that “The main entrance (to the primitive camping area) provides a new identity for the park with the renovation of the Historic Ragsdale House as the centerpiece”, and that “restoration of large native grass and wildflower meadows will provide abundant wildlife habitat as well as endless educational opportunities.” There is also a proposed pavilion and outdoor learning center that will support activities and events. A proposed budget of nearly \$1.9M was provided at the time. These plans are still valid and the stakeholders support the eventual development of this primitive camping area which will support the master plan goals of expanding passive recreational offerings within the preserve while drawing visitors to other activities and portions of the preserve.

KEY RECOMMENDATION

Develop a primitive camping area along N Goddard Road just north of the lake on Evans Mill Trail.



Above: Conceptual Site Plan

Below: Main Entrance & Camp Site Enlargement Plans



Operations, Staffing, and Maintenance

Based upon the nature of DAMNP, the size of the passive park, the desire to have a more active role in the interpretation, conservation, and preservation of the site, and the need to manage peak visitation, additional staff are warranted simply to support the current park operations 7-days a

week, sun-up to sundown. Should the County implement additional recommendations of this master plan, such as a new Nature Center, additional staffing would need to be calculated based on the Nature Center programming and operation.

KEY RECOMMENDATION

Additional staff is needed to support current operations and future program improvements and day to day operational needs.

Table 11. Recommended Additional Staffing

ROLE/FUNCTION	HOURS/WEEK	PRIMARY PERSON	IMPORTANCE	ESTIMATED COST	NOTES
Recreation Assistants (4 positions)	Seasonal, hourly to support peak visitation	Part-time Staff	Important	\$42k/yr (plus benefits = \$69k) Mid-Range Salary x2 FTE = 138k/yr cost	Utilized mainly for visitor support / parking management; free full time staff to focus on programs and operations.
Park Maintenance Worker (3 positions)	40	Staff	Mission Critical	\$42k/yr (plus benefits = \$69k) Mid-Range Salary x3 FTE = \$207k/yr cost	Remove DAMNP from county maintenance contract, bring in-house as full time staff
Interns (1-4 positions)	Part-time, seasonal	Student	Support	~\$15/hr	Opportunity to engage youth / have extra seasonal hands available
Program Instructors	Part-time	Contractual	Support	At \$125/hr X 8hr X 50 times/yr = \$50,000/yr	Expand active program offerings to engage more visitors

Under the current system of County services contracts, DAMNP receives support services from a variety of county contracts, such as Landscape Maintenance Services, through either dedicated weekly services or as-needed services when uncommon, irregular needs arise, such as significant repairs to boardwalks, downed trees, or other ‘heavier lift’ work beyond ongoing, repetitive maintenance.

Under the current Landscape Maintenance Services for County Parks contract, with the term of service from March 2022 to December 2024, DAMNP is divided into 8 sites or service areas including the Nature Center and PATH, Oak Grove Junction, the Polebridge and Evans Mills Trailheads and associated PATH, the AWARE property and house, and other identified sections of PATH within the preserve. Each area is slated to receive service 52 times per year, except Oak Grove Junction which is

serviced 26 times per year. The total contract value for the services provided to DAMNP is just over \$380,000. These services include all personnel and equipment necessary to meet the contractual requirements, which includes, Mowing, String Trimming, Playground Weed Removal (N/A at DAMNP) Mechanical Edging, Litter Pickup and Trash Removal, Blowing (of hard surfaces), Herbicide Application, Landscape Maintenance, Nature Trails and Paved Trails including PATH. Per the contract the sites are to be maintained on Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday, Maintenance Thursday through Sunday is not allowed without prior approval. The Landscape Maintenance season is approximately 8 months from the first week of March through the first week of November. PATH maintenance intensifies in the fall to keep trails clear of leaves and debris, and may wind-down in Dec based on leaf fall.

Based on the existing contract, just for landscape maintenance services, DAMNP is visited up to 3 days each week over the course of 8 to 9 months. Per the Bureau of Labor Statistics September 2023 Employer Costs for Employee Compensation, 61.9% of total employer compensation costs for state and local government workers covers wages and salaries while the remaining 38.1% of costs covers employee benefits. Using this as a rule of thumb, this means a 1.65 multiplier is applied to an employee’s wages to determine total wages plus benefits costs. Therefore, an employee with an annual salary of \$70,000 has an actual cost to the employer of \$115,500 annually.

For the sake of comparison, three full time employees earning \$70,000, would be a realized cost of \$346,500 annually, utilizing the recent BLS data; actual DeKalb County costs may vary. Taking into account holidays, vacation, and sick

time, these 3 employees would translate into nearly 5000 labor-hours of work annually. In this example scenario, the remaining balance of \$33,500 can be applied to equipment needs.

It is therefore feasible for the County to consider, that for a generally equivalent labor cost, the County could hire 3 to 4 full-time staff of varying levels of experience, to provide maintenance needs year-round within the preserve. Equipment acquisition and maintenance costs are in addition to the labor needs. With County purchasing contracts, the County should be able to procure the necessary mowers, blowers, hand tools, trailers, and vehicles to support the preserve while maintaining a similar or more favorable overall cost, while increasing the labor hours dedicated to the preserve on a weekly and annual basis. Having these additional full time staff, their schedules can be managed to provide 7-day a week availability to provide

support for maintaining restrooms, trails, and other needs within the park, while providing continuous staffing for regular maintenance and small project needs in the preserve.

Capital maintenance projects such as boardwalk replacement, concrete repairs, or other more significant needs will still require the as-needed on-call contracts to accomplish with the proper skills and tools.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Staffing recommendations call for adding full-time park maintenance workers dedicated to DAMNP. Hand-in-hand with maintenance staff is the tools and facilities to support the staff and their tasks within the passive park. Facility needs to support a dedicated DAMNP crew include a fenced maintenance compound including a storage yard, single story building with open office area, break room, lockers, a covered area/pole barn for equipment.

Equipment Needs

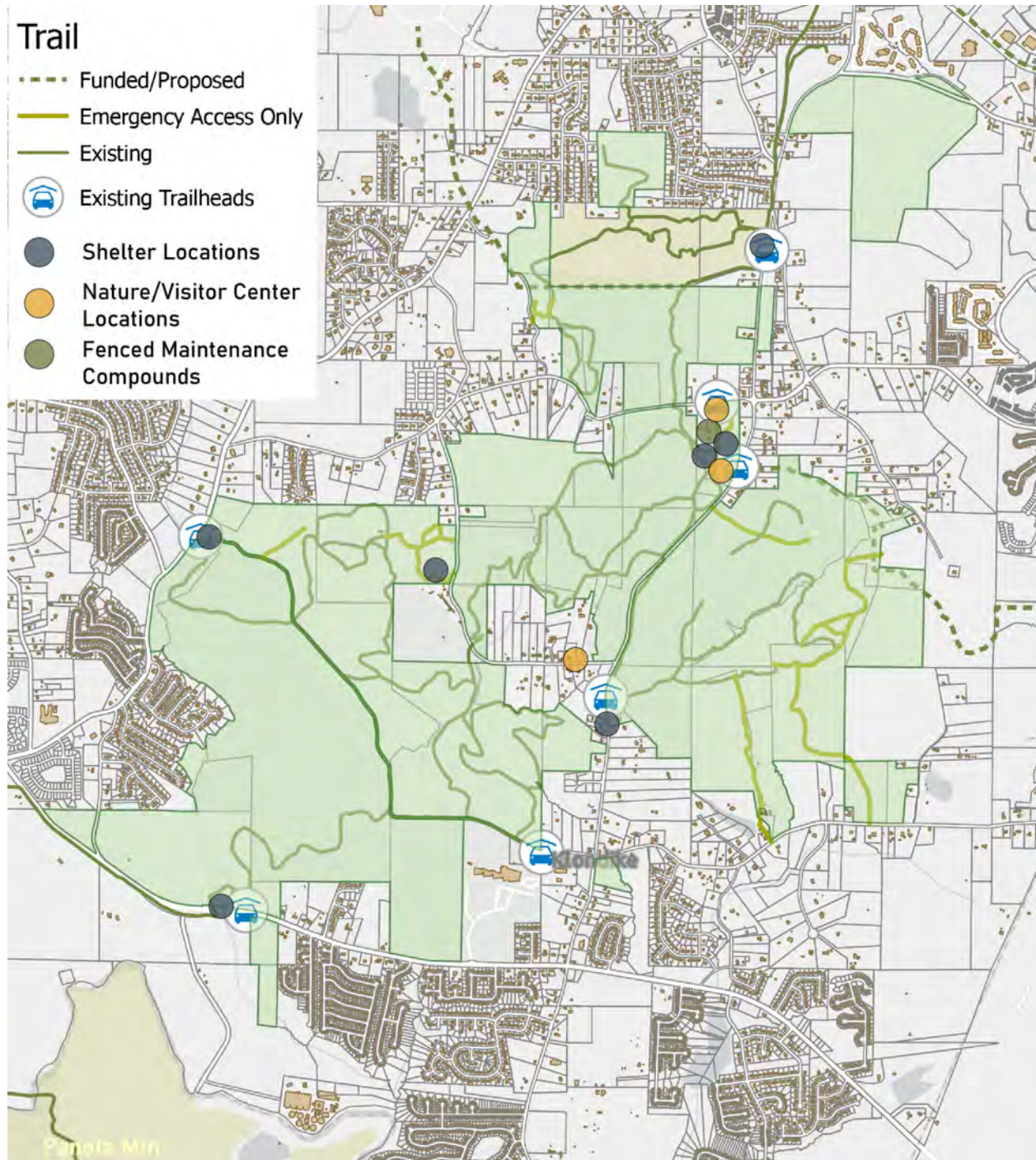
- Two 4x4 pickup trucks with brush guards; at least 1 needs to be crew cab
- Trailer to transport mowing/landscaping/maintenance equipment and tools
- Tractor/mower
- Hand and power tools

Potential New Buildings

This map below shows the potential locations for shelters or pavilions, a

new nature/visitor center, and fenced maintenance compounds for storage.

Figure 26. Proposed New Building Locations



Cooperative Management Structure

DAMNP is a County-owned passive park. It is unique in that it is the largest park in the county and a highly passive park that draws visitors from far beyond County lines. The passive park is within the City of Stonecrest, and adjacent to Panola Mountain State Park, and includes a state-owned piece of land – the Vaughters Farm parcel. Another layer to the complexity of the park’s presence in southeast DeKalb County is that it is the centerpiece of the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area. The Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance has long been a partner, supporter, and champion of the creation and growth of DAMNP. Given the number of stakeholders and land-owners involved, there is some interest in pursuing a cooperative management structure.

Throughout this planning process, the project team interviewed stakeholders and gathered information

related to the layers of operation of the preserve.

DeKalb County provides the staff to operate and maintain the preserve.

There is not a single dedicated budget for DAMNP, or any DeKalb County park, as different funding sources and contracts provide the shared services and materials/supplies needed to operate the county’s many parks. The county provides general information on a webpage dedicated to the preserve, to communicate activities and general park information.

The Arabia Mountain National Area Alliance is a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit, mandated by an act of Congress in 2006, but has been in operation since 1998, with a mission to promote and preserve the natural, scenic, cultural, and historic resources within the National Heritage Area.

The Alliance has a keen interest in the DAMNP, but is tasked with promoting, preserving and conserving

the full 40,000 acre heritage area. The

Alliance maintains an office across from Vaughters Farm.

Both the Alliance and DAMNP exist within the limits of the City of Stonecrest. The city also maintains two city-owned parks in the immediate vicinity around DAMNP.

Panola Mountain State Park is mostly within Rockdale County, with a small portion in DeKalb, just to the other side of the South River, south of DAMNP, yet still fully within the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area, and maintains the same mission and goals as the Alliance and DAMNP.

Each of these entities has their own responsibilities, but also understands they are all interconnected through the overlapping areas of interest and adjacencies to one another, in this network of conserved public lands. Most visitors don’t readily distinguish the

difference between a city park, and a county park or a state-owned parcel of park land within a county park, nor do they distinguish the difference between county park staff and Arabia Alliance staff when both

are present and accessible within the bounds of the preserve. Lines of distinction are not readily apparent. The Alliance has a robust website that promotes all of the sites of interest within the National Heritage Area including

DAMNP and Panola Mountain State Park. The top Google search result for “Arabia Mountain” leads searchers to the Alliance’s website. It’s easy to see how the Alliance may be seen as the de facto administrator of all things Arabia.

Table 12. SWOT Analysis of a Cooperative Management Structure

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES (CHALLENGES)
Multiple agencies, similar missions	Communication among agencies
Reach - ability of the Alliance, City, County, and State to reach a wide audience	Community understanding of roles/physical boundaries
Community support	Funding
Longevity - City of Stonecrest is the youngest organization, while the County, State Parks, and Alliance have long histories and track records/resources	Delayed resolution to issues on site when not communicated to the proper agency
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Improve communication between agencies	Liability due to unresolved issues
Improve visitor experience by directing concerns/ feedback/needs to the right agency(s)	Loss of valuable resources/natural landscape due to lack of coordination/communication
Increased preservation/conservation	Community backlash / misdirected ire

SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Based upon the stakeholder engagements, it is clear that each agency has its own responsibilities, but has a shared interest in the value of the DAMNP as the heart of the National Heritage Area. In terms of day to day management of DAMNP, that charge should remain solely with DeKalb County as the legal landowner and park operator. However, because of the overlapping and invisible lines between each of these agencies, all have a responsibility to collaborate and contribute knowledge, and when agreed upon, resources to the betterment of DAMNP. Other recommendations within this report will support the clarification of roles and responsibilities.

It is recommended that a Memorandum of Understanding be drafted among the four main entities, with DeKalb

County serving to lead a working group, established under the MOU. The MOU will outline the responsibilities of each to support the County and DAMNP for the betterment of all. It is recommended the MOU outline a minimum number of representatives from each agency, plus a representative of nearby residents and/or landowners, including a primary and secondary participant to attend regular meetings. All participants shall convene a meeting at a time and frequency to be determined, but recommended at no less than quarterly. In these meetings, the agencies will update one another on recent and upcoming activities since the last meeting, and issues that have arisen that affect one or more of the agencies. This forum will induce regular communication resulting in action items that benefit DAMNP and each of the adjacent agencies. Due to the lines of communication this working group will

KEY RECOMMENDATION

Draft a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between DeKalb County, City of Stonecrest, Arabia Alliance, and Georgia Department of Natural Resources to establish a working group and outline the responsibilities of each entity.

maintain, when issues arise between standing

meetings, there will be a clear roadmap developed for communication and resolution of issues, as they pop-up and need to be communicated to the proper party. No financial obligation is necessary as part of the MOU. As has occurred in the past, as opportunities arise, the relevant parties can establish ad-hoc agreements for financial contributions to needs within DAMNP or collective needs that impact

Budget & Revenue Streams

Adequate funding ensures proper operation, maintenance, and improvement of the passive park, but the availability and allocation of funds can be hindered by budgetary constraints, competing priorities, and the overall economic climate. As a result, park organizations must engage in advocacy efforts to secure funding in various ways. Funding for parks, beyond dedicated county appropriations/ tax dollars, within the state of Georgia can come from a combination of different sources such as grant programs, user fees, privatization, and philanthropy.

The State of Georgia offers four grant programs that are applicable to Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve.

The first is the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which is a federal program authorized by congress for the purpose of acquiring federal lands and assisting states and local governments with

funds to acquire lands and to develop and/or renovate outdoor recreation facilities. LWCF funds are appropriated by Congress to the U.S. Department of the Interior, the National Park Service, and NPS allocates the funds through state agencies as a grant program to state and local governments. Grantees must match the grant award dollar for dollar. It is awarded on a bi-annual grant cycle.

Minimum grant request:

\$25,000 (\$50,000 total project)

Maximum grant request:

\$500,000 (\$1,000,000 total project)

Grant timeline:

- April 1- Grant cycle opens
- May 31- Grant cycle closes/competitive pre-application due
- June-July- Applications reviewed and ranked
- September- Project selections announced

February- 2nd level applications due

RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM

The second program is the Recreational Trails Program. It is a federal grant program funded by the Federal Highway Administration and administered at the state level by the GA DNR. The purpose is to support recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both nonmotorized and motorized recreational trail uses. The county must apply for pre-application between September and November annually . The grant cannot fund sidewalks/paths adjacent to a road for an extended length, as those are funded by the Transportation Dept. It operates as a reimbursement grant.

Minimum grant request:

No minimum

Maximum grant request:

\$200,000

Grant timeline:

- September 1 - Pre-application window opened
- November 1 - Pre-application window closed
- February - Successful Pre-applicants invited to start Second-level Applications
- March 31 - Second-level Application period closes
- Final approval of Projects anticipated

Previous recipients:

- Town of Braselton- Mulberry Riverwalk Rehabilitation-Phase 2; \$200,000.00
- City of Cedartown- Silver Comet Accessibility Improvements and Rehabilitation Project; \$134,505.00
- City of Leesburg- Central Park

- Recreational Trail; \$200,000.00
- City of Thomasville- Thomasville Community Trail-Phase 4; \$110,500.00
- Columbus Consolidated Government- Dinglewood Park Trail; \$200,000.00
- Bartow County- Mountain Bike Trail at wilderness Camp Greenspace; \$200,000.00
- Gilmer County- Carters Lake Mountain Bike & Hiking Trail, Ridgeway Recreation Area; \$78,774.00
- Harris County- Ellerslie Park Trails-\$49,000.00
- Lumpkin County- Yahoola Creek Trails-\$62,424.00

GEORGIA OUTDOOR STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

The third program is the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program. This program is a dedicated funding mechanism that supports parks and trails and protects and acquires lands critical to wildlife, clean water and outdoor recreation across the state of Georgia. The park organization must apply for pre-application between August and October annually. A 25% minimum must be matched by the local government.

Minimum grant request:

\$500,000

Maximum grant request:

\$3,000,000

Grant timeline:

- August 1 - Pre-application window opens
- October 13 - Pre-application window closes

- Spring - Successful Pre-applicants notified
- Spring - Second-level Application window opens
- Summer - Final Approval of Projects

Previous recipients:

- Cherokee County- Long Swamp Creek Recreation Area; \$600,000
- Carroll County- Expansion of McIntosh Reserve; \$1,950,000
- Chatham County- Green Island Nature Reserve and Recreational Area; \$3,000,000
- McIntosh County- Fort Barrington/ Harper lake Campground Improvements; \$1,190,000
- Forsyth County- Eagles Beak Park; \$2,250,000

GEORGIA WILDLIFE VIEWING GRANT

The fourth grant program is the Georgia Wildlife Viewing Grant. This grant delegates funds for Wildlife-viewing opportunities that increase public awareness and appreciation of nongame wildlife, rare native plant species and natural habitats. The program applies to parks containing federally protected plants, of which the park contains two species: black-spored quillwort (*Isoetes melanospora*) and little amphianthus (*amphianthus pusillus*).

Minimum grant request:
n/a

Maximum grant request:
\$3,000

Grant timeline:

- February 7 – Proposal deadline
- March 24 – Successful Applicants notified
- December 1 – Deadline to spend

Previous recipients:

- DeKalb County- Arabia Mountain trail viewing platform and signage; \$3,000
- Athens-Clarke County-Oconee Rivers Greenway; \$2,823
- Gwinnett County- various Gwinnett parks; \$2,198

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Non-profit organizations have historically been a source of funding for many parks and greenspaces in the Metro Atlanta area. The most prominent source of grants from an NPO is Park Pride. The steps to apply for a grant are listed below:

- Attend a grant application info session. The sessions for 2024 grants over \$5,000 have unfortunately ended, so another to nine months would need to pass before this becomes a viable option

- Develop and submit a project scope.
- Submit the letter of intent. Once submitted, the Grant Review Committee will review the proposal and either, invite you to move forward in the grant application process, give suggestions on how to strengthen your proposal, or defer your project until a later grant cycle.
- If the project moves forward, the applicant must host a site visit for the Grant Review Committee.
- A letter of support must then be obtained from the County.
- Once all of these steps have been taken, a final application will be submitted.

It should be noted, that while grants have matching dollar requirements, by no means should a project

value be beholden to the combined dollar value of grant and match. For example, a project with a \$1M budget could benefit from a grant of a maximum of \$200,000 such as a Recreational Trails grant project. Grants can often be combined so long as grant requirements are not in conflict and timelines for implementation and grant spending can be coordinated. This is not an exhaustive list, but a representation of readily available grants that DAMNP can benefit from.

USER FEES

User fees are a common way of generating revenue. In FY22, Georgia Department of Natural Resources generated 43% of their revenue from user fees in state parks. DAMNP currently has no user fees, so there is an opportunity to generate revenue to be tapped, should the County wish to pursue this avenue which is not typical of the County's approach to providing access to

parks. User fees typically get directed to the general fund, in this case at the County level. The downside of this is that the revenue generated in the park is not directly returned to the park for park needs. If user fees could be reinvested directly back into the maintenance, improvements, and conservation of the park that generated the revenue, in addition to annual budget appropriations, this would be a compelling reason to consider park-specific fees. Revenue generated at DAMNP should not be leveraged as a reason to reduce annual budget appropriations needed for the basic maintenance and operation of the park. Revenues generated should be tracked through a transparent accounting system that assures visitors and stakeholders that the funds generated at the park are being used to enhance the park.

The largest amount of revenue generation within the Georgia State Parks that is a relevant reference point to DAMNP come from parking passes/access fees. At many state parks, daily park pass fees are paid on the honor system at payboxes through cash envelopes or cash apps. Additional site specific planning is needed to realize a parking pass system in DAMNP as the site is very porous with numerous access points. User fees may also include different types of rental/reservation systems for things such as fishing poles and bicycles, activity/program fees; seasonal or peak time dynamic pricing could also be integrated into the fee system, however this creates a complex system to maintain and communicate to visitors. Unless the revenue is guaranteed to return to DAMNP and not result in a reduction of annual budget assignments, then the effort to generate the funds may not be feasible to implement. Any consideration for

reservation fees and park entry fees should be determined through a lens of equity and in relation to the County's philosophy and approach to providing access to parks. Currently, DeKalb County has no cost recovery goal in the operation of the parks and recreation facilities. Adding fees may negatively impact park users who cannot afford the cost, forcing longtime visitors to reduce or eliminate their access to the DAMNP altogether. Free or reduced price passes may be offered to income-qualifying residents to reduce the barrier to entry, but it would still require these users to go out of their way to acquire such a pass.

PRIVATE CONTRACTORS

Private companies and contractors may exist within the park as concessionaires to operate gift shops, equipment rentals, or other services. They may also run park programs and events. Concessionaires

are a logical solution to reduce the burden of operation on the County Parks department while generating revenue, especially for activities or services that may require specialty resources, skills, or certifications.

DEKALB COUNTY ANNUAL BUDGETING

Direct funding in the form of annual budget allocations from the County is the current source of funding for DAMNP. Annually a budget request is submitted with an estimation of the needs of the park for operation and maintenance. These needs typically include purchased/contracted services such as sanitation, supplies, landscape maintenance, staffing, and capital needs. A purchase order is submitted to the parks department when a more immediate or unplanned need arises or exceeds annual budgets. Approval of the budget

and additional requests are at the discretion of the county budget department. DAMNP currently receives landscape maintenance via a countywide landscaping contract. It is recommended, due to the size of the park and the nature of the plant life within, that a dedicated landscape and maintenance team should be assigned to DAMNP.

Action Plan & Priorities

The recommendations from the preceding sections have been sorted into the following priorities and action plan based on community, stakeholder, and staff input. Community members and stakeholders voted on their priorities during the second public meeting. Staff then used

the voting results to identify top priorities.

The action plan on the following pages provides details on each item, a cost estimate, and a proposed timeframe to pursue implementation. Some of the larger efforts, such as the new nature center, may

require initiation in the short-term but will likely not be completed until the mid- or long-term timeframes. For the purposes of this study, timeframes are assumed as follows:

- Short-term = 0-5 years
- Mid-term = 6-10 years
- Long-term = 10+ years

TOP-TIER PRIORITIES

Capital Recommendations

1. Restroom Facilities
2. New Nature Center / Visitor Center with Expanded Parking
3. Add Security Cameras in Parking Lots
4. Land Acquisition
5. Picnic / group shelters
6. Expanded Parking - AWARE
7. Expanded Parking - Evans Mill
8. Maintenance yard

Operational Recommendations

1. Parking Management Initiative
2. Add visitor counting devices
3. Establish a multi-agency working group to coordinate information and operational needs
4. Land Management and Conservation Area Studies
5. Increase staff for DAMNP

SECOND-TIER PRIORITIES

Capital Recommendations

1. Pedestrian / neighborhood access points
2. Nature Themed Playground
3. Ragsdale House Camping Area
4. Lyon Farm
5. Retreat House

Operational Recommendations

6. Protection of Sensitive Environmental Areas
7. DeKalb Firing Range
8. Website
9. Rules and Regulations
10. Branding and Communication
11. Polebridge Trailhead Activation

CAPITAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 13. Capital Action Matrix

CAPITAL ITEM	DESCRIPTION	COST EST.	TIMEFRAME	PRIORITY LEVEL
Add Security Cameras in Parking Lots	Add high-definition security cameras in parking lots; connect to DeKalb County Police network of cameras; add security lighting as needed.	\$90,000 to \$140,000	Short-term (0-5 years)	1
Maintenance yard	Separate from the Nature / Visitor Center, develop a maintenance facility for the storage, cleaning, repair, and security of the tools and vehicles necessary for the ongoing upkeep and operation of the property. This is a critical step that would allow DAMNP to expand maintenance staff and capacity.	\$150,000 to \$250,000	Short-term (0-5 years)	1
Picnic / group shelters	Add picnic / small group shelters in the park, near the visitor center, at the Polebridge Trailhead, at the Evans Mill Trailhead, at the Vaughters Farm Trailhead to provide spaces for the community to gather. Include picnic tables, trash receptacles, grills, etc.	\$30,000 to \$100,000 each, size varies	Short-term (0-5 years)	1
Land Acquisition	Develop a plan for land acquisition to expand and protect the preserve. Contact owners of critical parcels and negotiate terms for acquisition. Priority parcels for acquisition should be those that include rock outcrops, streams and wetlands, and substantial forested land immediately adjacent to similar landscape within the existing preserve boundaries.	\$3.25 to \$4.8M More than 1,000 acres to consider; 500 to 700 priority acres	Begin immediately, continue over the mid- and long-term	1
New Nature Center / Visitor Center with Expanded Parking	Build a new 'World Class' Nature / Visitor center in the preserve. A programming and conceptual design effort shall be completed determine size, operation, and budget. The Rockland Road site is the primary site to be studied further for the new center. In concert with the design of a new Nature / Visitor center, additional parking should be implemented. The new parking areas should be pervious parking surfaces utilizing a grass-pave or pervious pavement, as these will be peak demand parking areas. The Rockland Rd overflow area can be formalized, with or without a new nature center at this location.	\$15m to \$20m	Begin studying conceptual options in short-term, with completion in long-term (10+ years)	1

CAPITAL ITEM	DESCRIPTION	COST EST.	TIMEFRAME	PRIORITY LEVEL
Expanded Parking - AWARE	The County and the AWARE Wildlife Center shall collaborate on the redevelopment of the Gregory House site and the existing AWARE facilities, to maximize the function and operation for both AWARE and the Preserve, improving parking and adding restroom facilities.	\$250,000 to \$500,000 (excludes AWARE's cost to build new facilities)	Short-term (0-5 years)	1
Expanded Parking - Evans Mill	With minimal grading and clearing the Evans Mill Trailhead parking lot could at a minimum be doubled in size, by simply mirroring the existing pavement on the northern edge of the lot. The lot could also be lengthened to the east to add more spaces.	\$40,000 to \$60,000	Short-term (0-5 years)	1
Restroom Facilities	Restroom facilities are a top request/need within the preserve. The AWARE lot needs a new standalone facility and/or accessible restrooms in partnership with the AWARE campus rebuild. A small prefab unit shall be installed at the Evans Mill and Polebridge Trailheads. Until a new Nature Center is constructed, an additional facility at the main lot is recommended.	\$150,000 to \$200,000 each	Short-term (0-5 years)	1
Nature Themed Playground	In concert with the development of a new Nature / Visitor center, a nature themed playscape should be designed. It can include traditional play pieces such as slides and climbing structures, but should also include natural landscape materials – boulders, earth mounds, landscape and other tactile natural materials for children to engage.	\$300,000 to \$500,000	Mid-term (6-10 years)	2
Pedestrian / neighborhood access points	Add neighborhood/pedestrian access points to natural surface trails for surrounding residents to more passive park for hiking/walking/running.	\$40,000 to \$60,000	Mid-term (6-10 years)	2
Ragsdale House Camping Area	Develop a primitive camping area along N Goddard Road just north of the lake on Evans Mill Trail. The main entrance (to the primitive camping area) provides a new identity for the park with the renovation of the Historic Ragsdale House as the centerpiece. First steps would be to revisit and reapply for the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program.	\$1.9m	Mid-term (6-10 years)	2

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 14. Operational Action Matrix

OPERATIONAL ITEM	DESCRIPTION	COST EST.	TIMEFRAME	PRIORITY LEVEL
Add visitor counting devices	Add visitor counting devices (beam counter, cameras) on trails and at trailheads to quantify visitation in different areas of the passive park.	\$2,000 to \$5,000 each depending on technology	Short-term (0-5 years)	1
Parking Management Initiative	Immediately enact an active parking management plan for peak demand days. Additional staff shall actively monitor parking lot and redirect visitors to other parking areas when lots are full.	\$50,000 to \$60,000 - based on part time staff ~2,000 man hrs/yr	Short-term (0-5 years)	1
Increase staff for DAMNP	Expand DAMNP-dedicated staff with new recreation assistants (4), park maintenance workers (3), interns (1-4) and part-time program instructors. See more details on p. 98.	See details on p. 98.	Short-term	1
Establish a multi-agency working group to coordinate information and operational needs	Led by DeKalb County, a working group consisting of representatives from the City of Stonecrest, Arabia All Georgia DNR/Panola Mountain State Park, shall voluntarily convene on a quarterly basis to discuss recent activities or concerns that relate to the operation of each of their related entities, as well as upcoming events or needs that may impact any of the properties. A contact list should be maintained for ease of directing public needs related to the specific properties.	Only staff time to coordinate and participate	Short-term (0-5 years)	1
Land Management	An ecological study of the preserve should be performed to document intrusions of invasive species, and plans for removal and management should be implemented. The ecological study should look beyond the boundaries of the park to private land that may be contributing to the invasive species intrusion and cooperative agreements with affected neighbors can be developed to mitigate the species to support long term management. The study should also examine wildlife and document any needs related to wildlife management within the preserve.	\$100,000 to \$150,000	Mid-term (6-10 years)	1

OPERATIONAL ITEM	DESCRIPTION	COST EST.	TIMEFRAME	PRIORITY LEVEL
Conservation Area Studies	Perform studies and data collection in order to determine which, if an areas of the preserve should be designated as non-activity/no access zones set aside for strict restoration and conservation of the natural habitat and resources.	\$100,000 to \$200,000; may collaborate with student scientists from local universities	Mid-term (6-10 years)	1
Protection of Sensitive Environmental Areas	Utilizing the ecological study, determine if particular areas of the preserve need to be off-limits or restricted access. Until such a time, implement a visitor engagement plan, at a minimum, on peak visitation days and times, where park staff greet visitors at the base of the mountain trailhead and give a brief overview of the rules of conduct on the mountain. Working in pairs, staff can momentarily hold visitors at the entrance and allow small groups to advance to the briefing by the other staff person prior to allowing them onto the mountain. Continually monitor visitor impacts to the preserve and visitation trends to determine if at a future date certain areas of the preserve should be off-limits or only accessible via guided tour.	\$60,000 to \$90,000 Based on two part-time staff	Mid-term (6-10 years)	2
DeKalb Firing Range	DeKalb Parks and Police leadership should meet to review the current operations of the firing range and ensure that operation are clear and communicated. The departments should reconvene at least twice a year to verify mutual operations are in accordance with one another and address any known future needs/changes. At any given time that there is an immediate need or concern, both departments should meet to resolve the issue. Should the range ever cease operations, Parks should have first right of refu transfer the property to the Parks Department / DAMNP.	Only staff time to meet and coordinate	Short-term (0-5 years)	2
Website	Support Arabia Alliance's website to become the dedicated online hub for DAMNP. The site should be the singular point of information for visitors seeking to learn more about and to visit the property. It should be robust with information, maps, programs, and real time information about activities and conditions within the preserve. The County website should direct people to the Arabia Alliance website.	Staff time to coordinate	Short-term	2

OPERATIONAL ITEM	DESCRIPTION	COST EST.	TIMEFRAME	PRIORITY LEVEL
Rules and Regulations	The county should update its rules and regulations about the use of motorized vehicle on multi-use trails to address and allow for the presence of ebikes, scooters, one-wheels, and other micro- mobility, individual transportation devices.	Staff time to coordinate	Long-term	2
Branding and Communication	While there is National Heritage Area signage and wayfinding, the county does not have a comprehensive system of signs for use throughout all parks and trails. DAMNP can be a catalyst for the development of a comprehensive parks brand and wayfinding system of signs for the county parks system.	\$100,000 to \$150,000 to develop standards	Short-term	2
Lyon Farm	Work cooperatively to support Arabia Alliance as the lead programmer for Lyon Farm property	Staff time	Ongoing	2
Retreat House	Engage with non-profits organizations that will provide a mutual benefit to their presence within the preserve, which would benefit from having office and meeting space at the Retreat House. Collaborate on renovation for use by NPOs. Bring building up to code, provide ADA, provide parking.	\$200,000+	Mid-term (6-10 years)	2
Polebridge Trailhead Activation	Develop a Sources Sought request for concessionaires to provide potential services such as outdoor recreation outfitters (bike rentals, canoe/kayak rentals; guided tours, etc) to be based out of a facility that could be constructed at the Polebridge Trailhead.	Staff time to develop and review sources sought	Long-term	2



APPENDIX

A

Facility

Assessment



Executive Summary

The existing visitors center on site is a single-story ranch type building that by design appears that it was originally built as a residential home. The main building is approximately 2700 sf and has some additional storage below the classroom. The building is timber frame on CMU foundations with horizontal timber cladding on the outside walls. The roof is gabled and has asphalt shingles as weather proofing. There is a cabin in the woods feel to the visitors center but the main entrance is not the most welcoming and might leave newcomers confused if they are supposed to enter the building for information and guidance. Clear signs and labels along with a renovated main entrance would make the function of that building much clearer.

Site Conditions

Project Name: Master Plan for Arabia Mountain

Project Number: 1230011

Date & Time: March 10th 10:00am

Address: Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Center, Stonecrest, GA 30038

Weather: Overcast and rainy

Evaluators:

(Mitchell Davis), Pond – Architecture

(Kat Maines), Pond – Planning

(Olver Thorarinsson), Pond – Architecture

(Matt Wilder), Pond – Planning



EXTERIOR

General Observations

- As you walk from the parking lots towards the trail the first thing you see are a few ancillary buildings, the first of which is the public toilets. The location of the toilet is good right by the end of the parking lot and start of the trail, but it is not clear what the building is until you get right up to it, so it would benefit from some signs or clear labeling. The next structure you come across is the information kiosk. It's located right before entering the trail and has quite a lot of information on the trails and the nature of the surrounding area. It's very visible from the parking area and it is clear that there is some information and guidance to be found there. When looking from there towards the main visitor's center, the appearance of the building does not come across as welcoming for guests to enter. The building has more of a staff only feel to it, so for newcomers and those who don't know, they might be reluctant to approach the main visitors center in its current appearance. This could be amended with clear signage and some renovations.

Ancillary Buildings

1. Toilets



- Observations
 - The exterior of the restroom building on site is in good condition. The roof has some debris and vegetation on it.
- Recommendations
 - Roof and wall exteriors should be pressure washed and cleaned.
 - Recommend both interior and exterior be painted.

Good	Fair	Poor
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2. Vestibule



- Observations
 1. The vestibule is leaning away from the building entrance. The posts are showing signs of deterioration. Roof of vestibule has holes in it.
 - a. Walkway has voids where posts are missing. Existing posts are rotten and deteriorated.
- Recommendations
 - a. Demolish the existing vestibule.
 - b. Rebuild the vestibule and integrate the structure with the adjacent roofline.
 - c. Replace the bollards and chain link fence in kind.

Good	Fair	Poor
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3. Shed



- Observations
 - a. Storage shed is in good condition.
 - b. There is algae and vegetation on the roof.
- Recommendations
 - a. Exterior surfaces to be pressure washed.
 - b. Paint exterior siding.
 - c. Apply protective oil or stain on wood.

Good	Fair	Poor
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4. Information Kiosk



- Observations
 - a. Kiosk is in good condition.
 - b. The wood structure looks undamaged and sturdy.
 - c. The stone base is in good condition.
 - d. The roof has some algae and moss growing on it.
- Recommendations
 - a. Existing roof shingles should be replaced.
 - b. Timber structure to be cleaned and protective oil or stain applied.

Good	Fair	Poor
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Foundation

- Observations
 - a. The foundations are CMU and are in good condition. No signs of damage or cracking were observed.
- Recommendations
 - a. If the building is to be renovated or maintained a thorough inspection of the slab and foundation is recommended.



Good	Fair	Poor
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Pavement

- Observations
 - a. There are no visual signs of damage or cracking in the pavement.
 - b. There is algae and organic growth on the pavement that can create slip hazard.
- Recommendations
 - a. A power wash would improve the appearance and slip resistance of the pavement.



Good	Fair	Poor
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Decking

- Observations
 - a. The wood deck is showing significant signs of deterioration.
 - b. High traffic and regular wear and tear along with lack of maintenance with protective oil or stain has left the wooden deck exposed to the elements.
- Recommendations
 - a. The decking and stairs need to be replaced.
 - b. Further inspection would be needed to see if the structure can be salvaged.
 - c. If the structure is in good condition, then a low maintenance composite decking system would be ideal for this location.



Good	Fair	Poor
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Door and Windows

- Observations
 - a. The glass pane doors and glazing at the windows are in fair condition.
 - b. The wood frame around the back patio door has signs of rotting.
 - c. A staff member informed us that under certain weather conditions the eastern exterior door in the classroom gets water seeping under it.
- Recommendations
 - a. Repair the wood framing around the doors.
 - b. Clean and paint doors and windows.
 - c. The water penetration in the classroom would need to be investigated and addressed.



Good	Fair	Poor
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Cladding

- Observations
 - a. Wood siding is in fair condition. There are spots where the siding is showing signs of weathering.
 - b. A few panels have been replaced but not stained to match.
- Recommendations
 - a. Replace any damaged or missing panels and apply protective oil or stain.



Good	Fair	Poor
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Meters and Cables

- Observations
 - a. Visual inspection suggests they are in good condition.
- Recommendations
 - a. Get an electrician to confirm they are in good condition and up to code.
 - b. All electrical wiring and equipment should be brought up to code if found not to be up to code currently.



Good	Fair	Poor
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Cameras

- Observations
 - a. Existing but according to employee nonoperational.
 - b. There is one camera on the back of the building and one on the right side of the building when standing in front of the main entrance.
- Recommendations
 - a. Replace the system with modern cameras that provide functioning surveillance and vandalism / break-in deterrent.
 - b. Include coverage of the parking lots where a lot of the vandalism and break-ins take place.



Good	Fair	Poor
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External Storage/ Garage

- Observations
 - a. The storage itself looks dry and is in fair condition. The security of this storage shed is not appropriate for a vehicle storage. Work vehicles are stored here overnight. The door shows signs of wood rot from being exposed to the elements and not having adequate protection.
- Recommendations
 - a. Replace the doors and locking mechanism with new doors and locks fit for purpose that would provide a longer lasting shelter from the elements and stronger protection from burglary and vandalism.



Good	Fair	Poor
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Gutters

- Observations
 - a. Visual inspection suggests the gutters are in good condition.
- Recommendations
 - a. Clean and clear the gutters and apply a leaf filter to help keep them in good condition.



Good	Fair	Poor
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Roofing

- Observations
 - a. The roof has moss growing on it suggesting it is aging. Other than that, it appears to be in fair condition.
 - b. Some cladding and flashings around the chimney and edges are missing.
- Recommendations
 - a. Remove the moss to prolong the life of the roofing material, clean and make necessary repairs to ensure water is not entering the building from the roof.



Good	Fair	Poor
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INTERIOR

Overall Interior

-Flooring

- The majority of the flooring in the main building is vinyl with a light wood appearance. Other than normal wear and tear it is in fair condition.
- The floor is on different levels, there is a ramp and two steps down from the entrance lobby to the fireplace room and classroom and then there are four steps from the classroom up to the office/storage room at the back of the classroom.
- There is ADA accessibility to all common rooms of the building.

-Walls

- There was no sign of visible moisture or damage on the walls and apart from being original to the building and needing some fresh paint and design coordination they looked to be in good condition.

-Doors & Windows

- Exterior windows and doors did not have any visible sign of damage or moisture, as with the rest of the building they are dated but in good condition.

-Cabinets

- Cabinets in the classroom and kitchen seem to be in good working order. Wood finishes with silver hardware.

-Ceiling

- The ceiling, in general, does not show any signs of leaking or moisture damage and generally in good condition, could benefit from a fresh coat of paint.

Good	Fair	Poor
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Room by room interior

Entrance Lobby

-Flooring

- Wood-look vinyl flooring in good condition.

-Walls

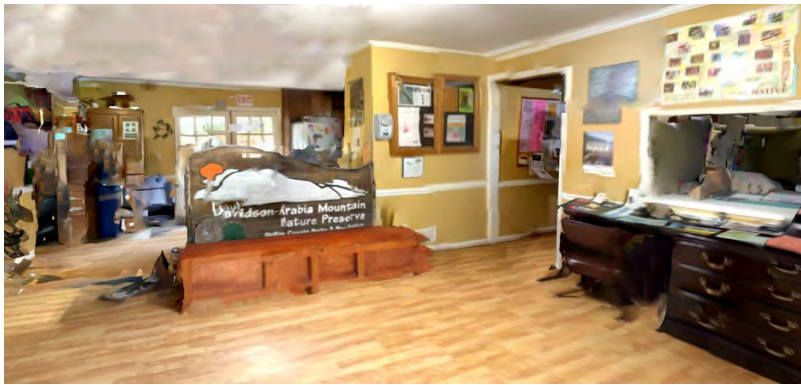
- The painted walls look dry and there are no signs of moisture or other visible damage.

-Doors & Windows

- Exterior doors are original but in good condition.
- Windows are original but look dry and no visible signs of damage or rot.

-Ceiling

- The ceiling has no signs of leaks or moisture damage.



Good	Fair	Poor
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Kitchen

-Flooring

- Wood-look vinyl flooring in ok condition.

-Walls

- The painted walls look dry and there are no signs of moisture or other visible damage.

-Doors & Windows

- Windows are original to the building and there are no visible signs of damage or rot.

-Cabinets

- Kitchen cabinets are original but in good condition, appliances are very dated. Appliances are in good working order and used on regular basis.

-Ceiling

- The ceiling has no signs of leaks or moisture damage.



Good	Fair	Poor
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Utility Room

-Flooring

- Plain white tiles, they look like they are in good condition.

-Walls

- The painted walls look dry and there are no signs of moisture or other visible damage.

-Doors & Windows

- Exterior doors look a bit dated but in good condition.
- Windows original but look dry and there are no visible signs of damage or rot.

-Ceiling

- The ceiling has no signs of leaks or moisture damage.



Good	Fair	Poor
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Front Office

-Flooring

- Wood-look vinyl flooring in ok condition.

-Walls

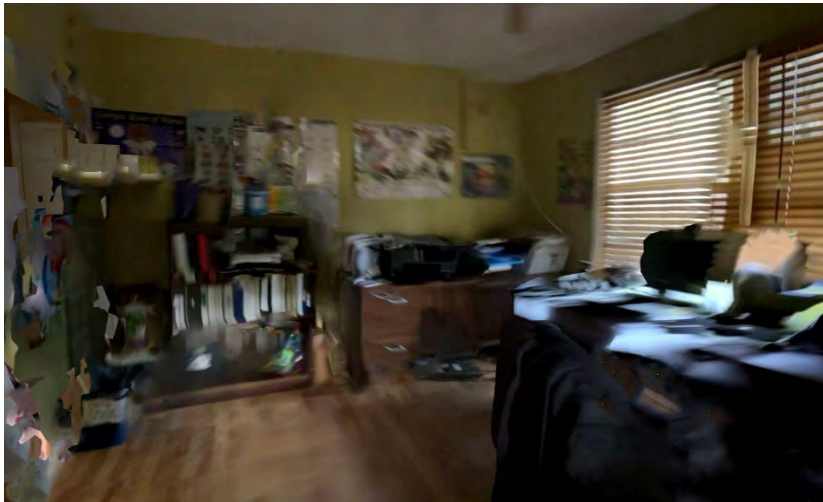
- The painted walls look dry and there are no signs of moisture or other visible damage.

-Doors & Windows

- Windows original but look dry and there are no visible signs of damage or rot.

-Ceiling

- The ceiling has signs of leaks or moisture damage.



Good	Fair	Poor
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Back Office

-Flooring

- Wood looking vinyl flooring in ok condition.

-Walls

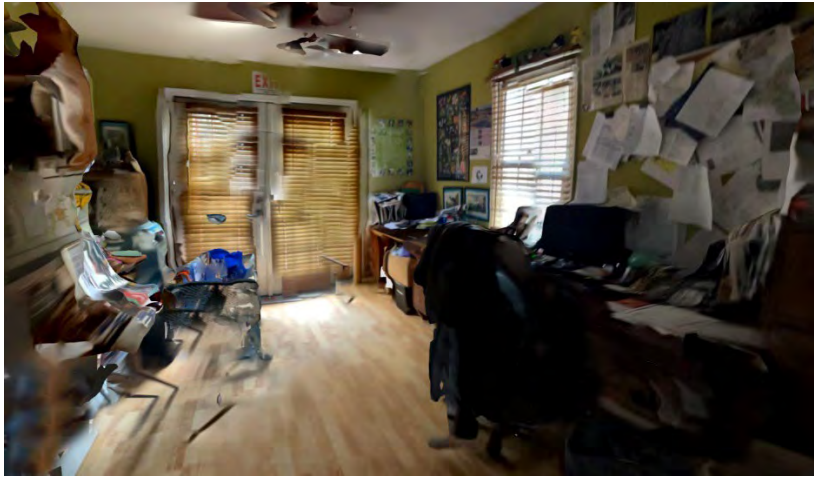
- The painted walls look dry and there are no signs of moisture or other visible damage.

-Doors & Windows

- Windows are dated but look dry and there are no visible signs of damage or rot.

-Ceiling

- The ceiling has no signs of leaks or moisture damage.



Good	Fair	Poor
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Sitting Room/ Fireplace Room

-Flooring

- Wood-look vinyl flooring in ok condition.

-Walls

- Wood panel cladding is dry and in good condition apart from being dated.
- The display boxes built into the wall are in good condition.
- The stone wall around the fireplace has no visible faults or imperfections
- The painted walls look dry and there are no signs of moisture or other visible damage.

-Doors & Windows

- The door to the classroom is in good working order.
- Windows original to the building but look dry and there are no visible signs of damage or rot.
- Skylights look like they are in good order and there is no sign of leaks or moisture around them.

-Ceiling

- The ceiling has no signs of leaks or moisture damage.



Good	Fair	Poor
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Classroom

-Flooring

- Multicolored vinyl flooring that is worn but in fair condition.

-Walls

- Wood panel cladding is dry and in good condition. It looks like it used to be exterior cladding.
- The painted walls look dry and there are no signs of moisture or other visible damage.

-Doors & Windows

- The door to the front room is in good working order.
- Under certain weather conditions water comes in under the eastern exterior door of the classroom. This would need to be addressed.
- Windows look dry and there are no visible signs of damage or rot.
- Skylights look like they are in good order and there is no sign of leaks or moisture around them.

-Ceiling

- Ceiling has no signs of leaks or moisture damage.



Good	Fair	Poor
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Executive Summary

This is a brief overview of what some of the other buildings within the preserve could be utilized for, if investment was made to renovate them. Facilities within the preserve/Parks Department responsibility range from old gas stations (Oak Grove Junction) to unfinished new build residential homes (Retreat House on Rockland Rd). Some are more suited for re-purposing and others are better suited for decommissioning.

Site Conditions

Project Name: Master Plan for Arabia Mountain

Project Number: 1230011

Date & Time: March 10th 10:00am

Address: Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Center, Stonecrest, GA 30038

Weather: Overcast and rainy

Evaluators:

(Mitchell Davis), Pond – Architecture

(Kat Maines), Pond – Planning

(Olver Thorarinsson), Pond – Architecture

(Matt Wilder), Pond – Planning

Other Buildings on the property

1. Aware Center

- Observations
 - a. The overall site and building appear to have had little or no ongoing maintenance over the years. The outside cages and exhibition space is in very poor condition. Inside the floor of the facility is uneven in places indicating some instability in the foundations. There is rather a strong odor from the animals that would probably be hard to eliminate.
- Recommendations
 - a. If the property is to continue to be used in the same manner as it is now the whole site should be more acutely assessed for needed renovations and compliance with health and safety codes.
 - b. If the site were to be repurposed for a different use a complete reconstruction is recommended.



Good	Fair	Poor
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2. Unfinished home of Klondike Road – AKA the Gregory House

- Observations
 - a. This property is an unfinished ‘new’ construction single floor residential home.
 - b. Visual inspection indicates it is in a reasonably good condition and no obvious sign of serious leaks or damage.
 - c. There is a good size plot around the property with a mixture of woods and open lawn.
- Recommendations
 - a. This building could be re purposed as a museum for the rich history of Arabia Mountain and Information center relating to the unique nature in the area.
 - b. It could also be renovated to be a rangers house or staff housing for seasonal staff working in the park.



Good	Fair	Poor
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3. Old Gas station, AKA Oak Grove Junction

- Observations
 - a. Qualifies as an historic structure; team did not get access inside this building; from the outside it is a very characteristic granite building constructed from local stone.
 - b. A standalone fuel canopy remains in the lot in front of the building where the gas pumps were previously located.
 - c. There is a big open field on the property that is maintained as a mown field.
- Recommendations
 - This property could be repurposed as:
 - a. Small restaurant, canopy could support outdoor seating/dining
 - b. Small convenience store / local market
 - c. Historic Museum and/or Gallery Space
 - d. Art gallery
 - e. Ranger Station



Good	Fair	Poor
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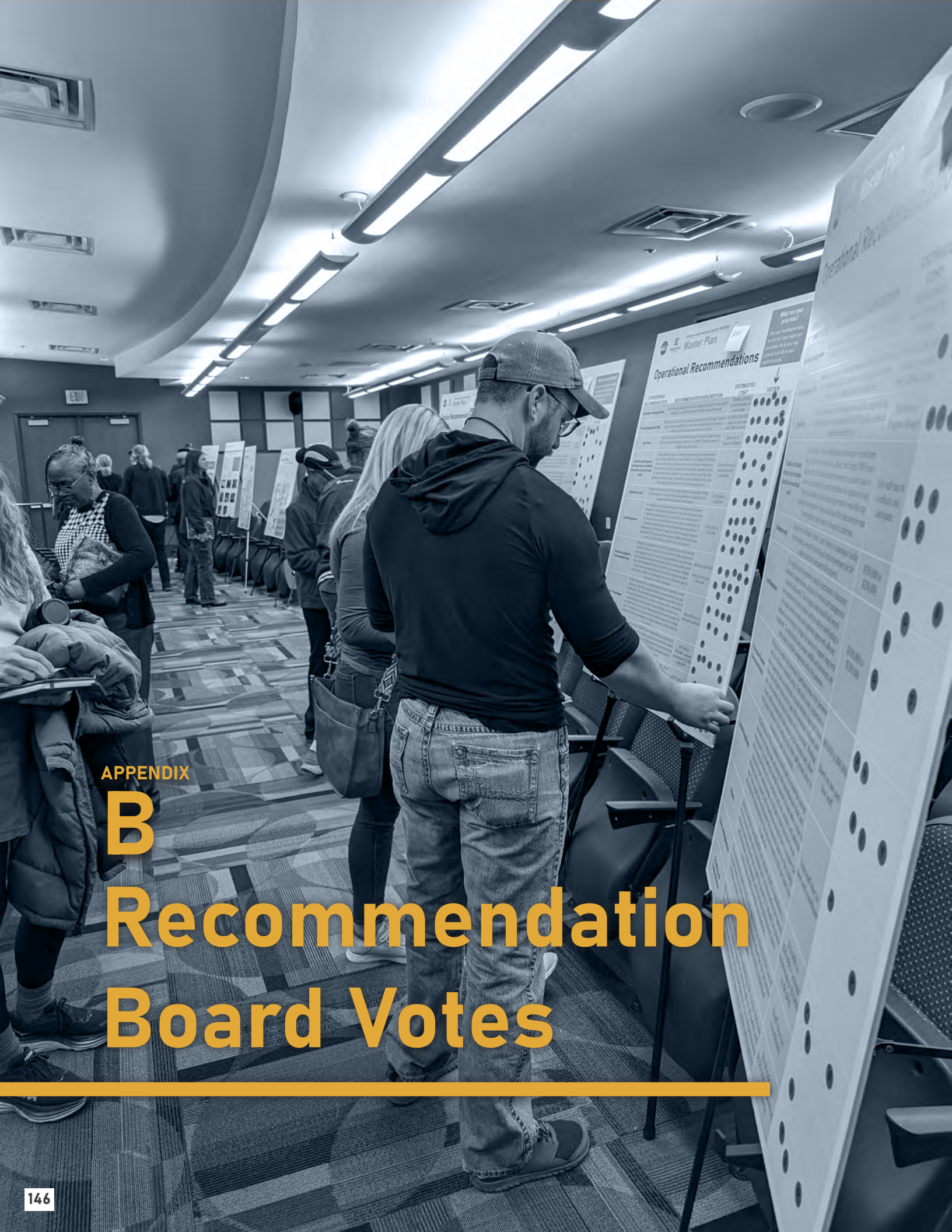
4. Retreat House, 6420 Rockland Rd, Lithonia, GA 30038

- Observations
 - a. This is a charming 3 bed single family home on a 10.8 Acre lot. Bult in 1989 and approximately 2000 sqft.
 - b. It sits close to and with a view of a small lake. And is situated right at the edge of Arabia Mountain Park.
 - c. The building looks like it has been vacated for some time and has become somewhat derelict.
- Recommendations
 - a. The building has great potential to be renovated and used as an Air B’n’B or other form of short-term rental for people that want to hike and enjoy the all the beautiful nature Arabia Mountain has to offer.
 - b. Staff or intern residence – the facility could be utilized as permanent or rotating residence for a full-time ranger or rotating seasonal interns.
 - c. Partial deconstruction / Adaptive reuse into a multi-story open air camping shelter
 - d. If not regularly occupied and maintained for a functional or profitable use, it will become a liability and removal should be considered.



Good	Fair	Poor
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APPENDIX

B Recommendation Board Votes

Capital Recommendation	Description	Estimated Cost	Score (1=8 points, 2=7 points, etc.)	# of Dots	Avg. Score/Dot
Restroom Facilities		\$250,000 to \$300,000	142	20	7.1
Add Security Cameras in Parking lots	Add high-definition security cameras in parking lots; connect to DeKalb County Police network of cameras; add security lighting as needed.	\$90,000 to \$140,000	121	18	6.72
Nature / Visitor Center and AWARE Center Relocation Study	Conduct a feasibility study for a new combined Nature/Visitor Center and AWARE Center	\$75,000 to \$125,000	108	21	5.14
Design & Construct New Nature / Visitor Center	Build a new Nature / Visitor center in the preserve. A programming and conceptual design effort should be carried out for both the existing and the Rockland Road locations.	\$2.75 to \$3.25M	108	21	5.14
Install new signage	Manufacture and install new signage per recommendations of the Branding & Wayfinding Plan (see separate item recommended in the operational action plan)	\$200,000 to \$400,000	21	106	5.05
Expand parking – Nature Center	In concert with the design of a new Nature / Visitor center, additional parking should be implemented. The new parking areas should be pervious parking surfaces utilizing a grass-pave or pervious pavement, as these will be peak demand parking areas. The Rockland Rd overflow area can be formalized, with or without a new nature center at this location.	\$250,000 to \$300,000	80	18	4.44
Nature Themed Playground	In concert with the development of a new Nature / Visitor center, a nature themed playscape should be designed. It can include traditional play pieces such as slides and climbing structures, but should also include natural landscape materials – boulders, earth mounds, landscape and other tactile natural materials for children to engage.	\$300,000 to \$500,000	80	19	4.21
Picnic / group shelters	Add picnic / small group shelters in the park, near the visitor center, at the pole bridge trailhead, at the Evans Mill Trailhead, at the Vaughter's Farm trailhead to provide spaces for the community to gather. Include picnic tables, trash receptacles, grills, etc.	\$30,000 to \$100,000 ea, size varies	68	17	4
Pedestrian / neighborhood access points	Add neighborhood/pedestrian access points to natural surface trails for surrounding residents to more easily/readily access the park for hiking/walking/running.	\$40,000 to \$60,000	44	12	3.67
Expanded Parking – Evans Mill	With minimal grading and clearing the Evans Mill Trailhead parking lot could at a minimum be doubled in size, by simply mirroring the existing pavement on the northern edge of the lot. The lot could also be lengthened to the east to add more spaces.	\$40,000 to \$60,000	38	16	2.375
Land Acquisition due diligence	Develop a plan for land acquisition to expand and protect the preserve. Contact owners of critical parcels and negotiate terms for acquisition. Priority parcels for acquisition should be those that include rock outcrops, streams and wetlands, and substantial forested land immediately adjacent to similar landscape within the existing preserve boundaries.	\$75,000	71	16	4.44
Land Acquisition	Acquire priority parcels as identified through the land acquisition due diligence activity.	\$3.25 to \$4.8M	71	16	4.44
Expanded Parking – AWARE	While the Gregory house is a storage space for the AWARE center, it is an underutilized facility/property. Recommend demolishing the Gregory House, coordinating with AWARE to build an appropriately sized storage building, and then repurpose a portion of the property to add overflow parking. 40 to 50 spaces could easily be accommodated in combination with removal of the house. Maintain vehicular access from the current AWARE driveway on Klondike Road; exit only from Gregory house parcel.	\$300,000 to 350,000	38	10	3.8

Operational Recommendation	Description	Estimated Cost	# of Dots	Score (1=8 points, 2=7 points, etc.)	Avg. Score/Dot
Protection of Sensitive Environmental Areas	Utilizing the ecological study, determine if particular areas of the preserve need to be off-limits or restricted access. Until such a time, implement a visitor engagement plan, at a minimum, on peak visitation days and times, where park staff greet visitors at the base of the mountain trailhead and give a brief overview of the rules of conduct on the mountain. Working in pairs, staff can momentarily hold visitors at the entrance and allow small groups to advance to the briefing by the other staff person prior to releasing them onto the mountain.	\$60,000 to \$90,000	25	131	5.24
Establish a multi-agency working group to coordinate information and operational needs	Led by DeKalb County, a working group consisting of representatives from the City of Stonecrest, Arabia Alliance, and Georgia DNR/Panola Mountain State Park, shall voluntarily convene on a quarterly basis to discuss recent activities or concerns that relate to the operation of each of their related entities, as well as upcoming events or needs that may impact any of the properties. A contact list should be maintained for ease of directing public needs related to the specific properties.	Only staff time to coordinate and participate.	21	107	5.1
Branding & Wayfinding Plan	While there is Heritage Area signage and wayfinding, the county does not have a comprehensive system of signs for use throughout all parks and trails. DAMNP can be a catalyst for the development of a comprehensive parks brand and wayfinding system of signs for the county parks system. The County should conduct a Branding and Wayfinding plan to develop new sign standards and develop a placement plan for signs in the park.	\$100,000 to \$150,000 to develop standards	21	106	5.05
Land Management	An ecological study of the preserve should be performed to document intrusions of invasive species, and plans for removal and management should be implemented. The ecological study should look beyond the boundaries of the park to private land that may be contributing to the invasive species intrusion and cooperative agrees with affected neighbors can be developed to mitigate the species to support long term management. The study should also examine wildlife and document any needs related to wildlife management within the preserve.	\$100,000 to \$150,000	21	104	4.96
Lyon Farm	The Lyon Farm while on Watershed property should be integrated into the overall programming and operation of DAMNP. Develop a series of programs around the farm.	Staff time for Programs Manager	15	63	4.2
DeKalb Firing Range	DeKalb Parks and Police leadership should meet to review the current operations of the firing range and ensure that operations are clear and communicated. The departments should reconvene at least twice a year to verify mutual operations are in accordance with one another and address any known future needs/changes. At any given time that there is an immediate need or concern, both departments should meet to resolve the issue. There should also be discussed the long-term plans for the facility, and should it be decommissioned, the step necessary to fold the land into the preserve.	Only staff time to meet and coordinate	15	60	4
Rules and Regulations	The county should update its rules and regulations as relates to the use of motorized vehicle on multi-use trails to address and allow for the presence of ebikes, scooters, one-wheels, and other micro-mobility, individual transportation devices.	Staff time to coordinate	11	43	3.9
Website	Develop a dedicated www.DAMNP.com website which is optimized to be the top search result and the singular point of information for visitors seeking to learn more about and to visit the property. It should be robust with information, maps, programs, and real time information about activities and conditions within the preserve.	\$10,000 to \$25,000 + annual maintenance \$2,000 to \$6,000	16	75	4.69
Maintenance yard	Separate from the Nature / Visitor Center, develop a maintenance facility for the storage and security of the tools and vehicles necessary for the ongoing upkeep and operation of the property.	\$150,000 to \$250,000	17	70	4.12
Add visitor counting devices	Add visitor counting devices (beam counter, cameras) on trails and at trailheads to quantify visitation in different areas of the park.	\$2000 to \$5000 each depending on technology	18	62	3.44
Parking Management Plan	Immediately enact an active parking management plan for peak demand days. Additional staff shall actively monitor parking lots and redirect visitors to other parking areas when lots are full.	\$50,000 to \$60,000 – based on part time staff ~2000 man hrs / yr	13	56	4.31

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