

# EXPLORE PARK ADVENTURE PLAN



ROANOKE COUNTY PARKS, RECREATION AND TOURISM



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## ABOUT THIS PLAN

The Explore Park Adventure Plan provides Roanoke County, its residents, and its visitors with a long-term strategy to improve the recreational, environmental, and economic potential of the Park's 1,100 acres.

The plan sets out a vision for the Park and describes the background from which the plan was derived, the organization of the Park, its proposed development, recreational and infrastructural features and systems, and its component projects. Supplemental reports to this document also include phasing and prioritization based on a business plan, an inventory of the Park's existing natural and cultural features, and a record of the public engagement process that formed the plan.

The ***Executive Summary*** provides a high-level overview of the project. The ***Overview*** describes organizing principles and the physical and programmatic structure of the Park and its component parts and systems. ***Understanding Explore Park*** provides background information on the Park, the recreational programming, and its infrastructural and environmental management. ***Adventure Concepts*** describes in detail the approach to the facility development program and systems of the Park. ***Explore Park Adventure Plan*** describes in detail the features and systems of the Park. The ***Park Development Areas***, describes the areas, their facility programming, and their management. Finally, the ***Conclusion*** discusses management strategies and provides guidance on the Park's development progress and future, and summarizes the major steps and the possible opportunities to shape a broader narrative for Explore Park.





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SECTION I  
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**





## **ABOUT THE EXPLORE PARK ADVENTURE PLAN**

In 2013, Roanoke County assumed responsibility for the stewardship of the 1,100-acre Explore Park property, and the development of recreational amenities for public enjoyment of the Park. The Roanoke County Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department has lead this master plan effort to provide strategic guidance for the actions that will be taken over the next twenty years. This report documents the process used to develop the master plan, the foundational background for the plan, the major actions to be taken to improve the Park, and a framework for implementing those actions.

## **THE NEXT GENERATION OF EXPLORE PARK**

The Adventure Plan on the following page takes a different approach to the use of Explore Park from previous efforts to develop the property. The Park will be open to the public free of charge, and many of the planned activities will be free, such as hiking, paddling, and fishing. This plan emphasizes the authentic story of the land and the diverse experiences that will be possible through the many recreational activities that are planned. To help accelerate park development without burdening taxpayers, and to provide business opportunities for the private sector, a number of activities will be provided by private concessionaires on a fee basis. Examples include food service and certain recreation activities that require facilities and equipment, such as zip lines.

## **A NEW VISION FOR EXPLORE PARK**

The Park has always had great aspirations for its potential to serve the region. With a history dating to the establishment of the Virginia Recreational Facilities Authority (VRFA) in 1986, Explore Park has had several generations of approaches to its development. Despite stops and starts, this has resulted in establishing the identity of the Park, and the legacy of prior efforts creates a strong framework for the County's next steps. Major assets that are in place today include the 1.5 mile Roanoke River Parkway, a road system and parking, the Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Center, the Arthur Taubman Center, the Brugh Tavern and Mountain Union Church, and 14 miles of trails.

This plan builds on the strengths of the previous efforts of the Virginia Recreational Facilities Authority and proposes a new vision and ideas for how local residents can enjoy the Park and how the Park can attract and serve the recreational interests of visitors to the Roanoke Valley.

Set in a hilly, wooded landscape framing the Roanoke River, the Park will have over 22 activity zones for people of varied interests, ages, and abilities. The Park will serve as the Roanoke Valley's regional outdoor activity base camp and will introduce people to adventure recreation, bringing together many outdoor activities ranging from basic to moderate levels of challenge. The Park will provide a high quality range of experiences from refined to rugged, in a welcoming setting, with food, lodging, and attractive gathering places.



# A PLAN FOR ADVENTURE

The Explore Park Adventure Plan provides seven adventure nodes containing three villages, and 22 activity zones, linked by nine miles of park road and a 38.5 mile trail system, taking advantage of the Park’s rugged topography and riverside location.

LEGEND

ADVENTURE NODES

- Black Gum Summit
- Bedford Village
- Pine Mountain
- Riverside Village
- Adventure Village
- Roanoke Woods
- Rutrough Point

Activity Zones

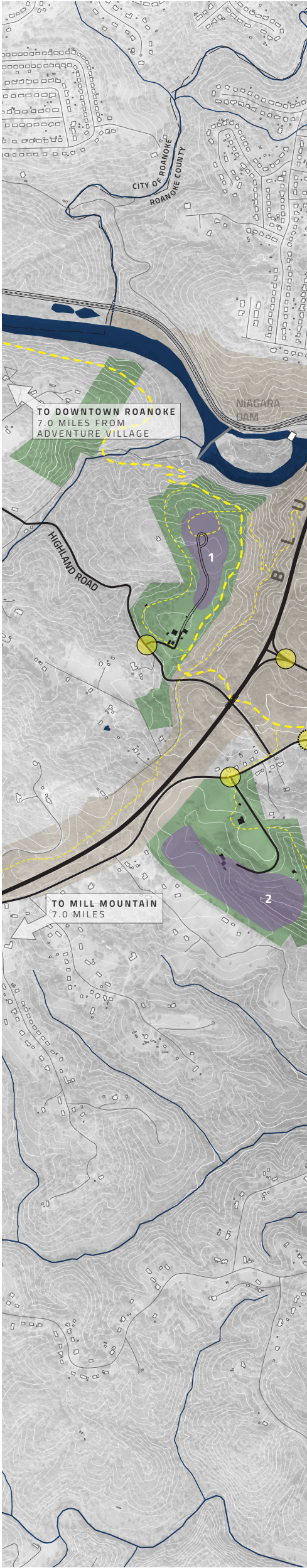
- 1 Niagara Equestrian Camp
- 2 Wolf Tree Disc Golf Course
- 3 Chestnut Oak Ridge Archery Range
- 4a Palmer’s Pond Campground Loop A
- 4b Palmer’s Pond Campground Loop B
- 5 Hickory Woods Campground
- 6 Riverside Camping Cabins + Yurts
- 7 Tall Pines Canopy Adventure Zone
- 8 Flexible Activity Zone A
- 9 Flexible Activity Zone B
- 10a Back Creek RV Campground A
- 10b Back Creek RV Campground B
- 10c Back Creek RV Campground C
- 11 Blue Ridge Mountain Bike Center
- 12 Roanoke Water Gap Geology Trail
- 13 Turkey Field Education Zone
- 14 Roanoke River Whitewater Course
- 15 Blue Ridge Meadows Event Lawn
- 16a Tulip Tree Tubing Hill
- 16b Saddle Run Tubing Hill
- 17 Shady Run Campground
- 18 Black Gum Summit Alpine Coaster

Trails

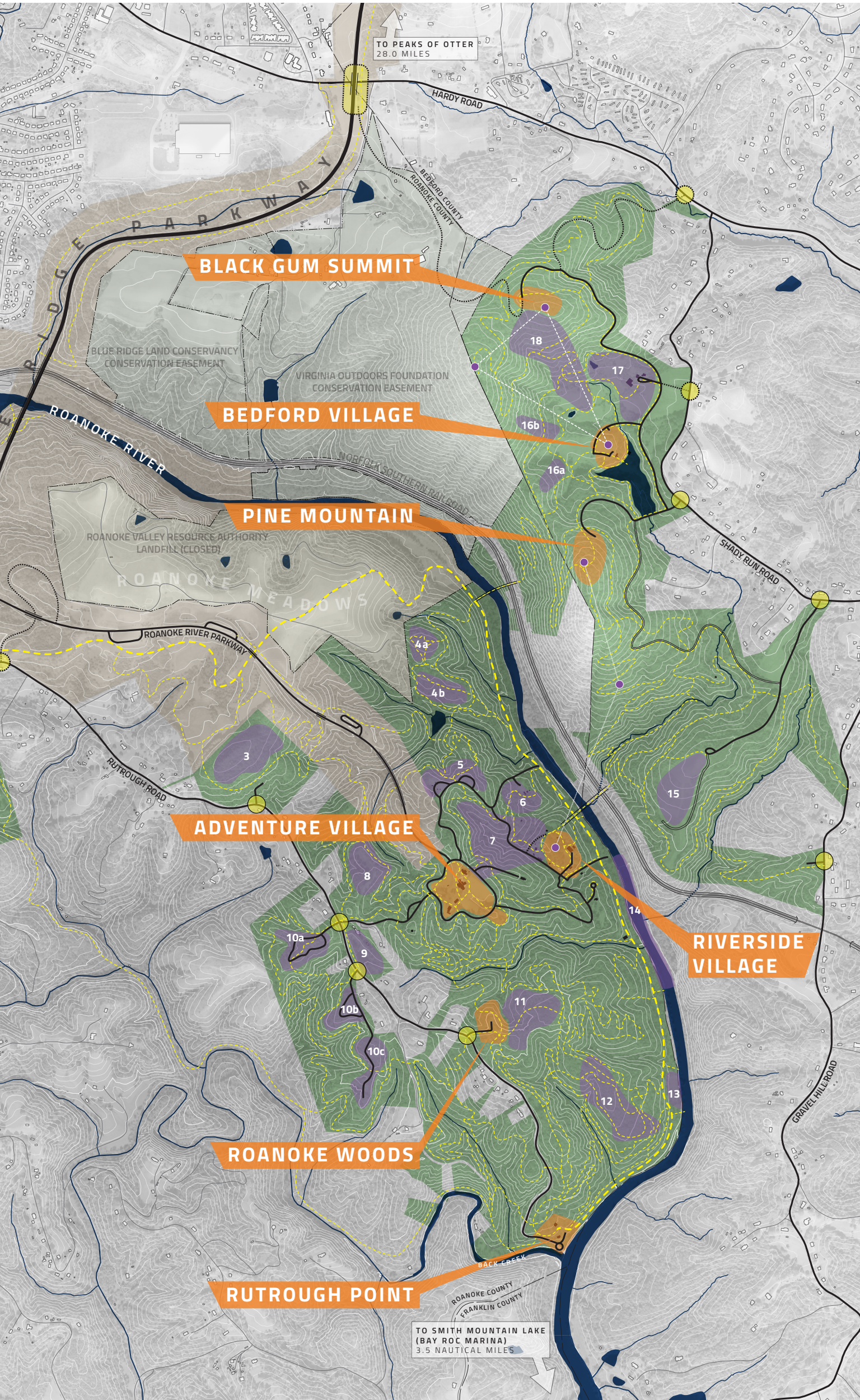
Roads

Roanoke River Greenway

Gateways









**THE NEXT GENERATION OF EXPLORE PARK**

As it stands, Explore Park is 1,100 acres of rugged terrain covered with forests and meadows, along the Roanoke River connected to the Blue Ridge Parkway, just outside of Roanoke, Virginia. The land lies in both Roanoke and Bedford Counties and contains two contemporary visitor use buildings and a number of relocated and reconstructed buildings dating from the 18th and 19th centuries.

The Roanoke County Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism will lead the development and management of the land as a public park accessible to all. Roanoke County’s new Explore Park will differ from the previous model in several significant ways. The County will be the primary steward and developer for the land, meaning it will be entirely accessible by the public. In addition, the Park will have many opportunities for private sector investment in the development of recreation, lodging, and food concessions, all of which will be guided and managed by the County.

**WHO IT IS FOR**

Explore Park is first and foremost a public park provided for the residents of Roanoke County. It is also a major amenity with the potential to attract visitors from throughout the Roanoke Valley and beyond. The Park’s direct access from the Blue Ridge Parkway, its relative proximity to Interstate 81, the Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport, and Amtrak make it accessible to tourists from Richmond, the Baltimore-Washington Metro area, and other regional cities.

**WHERE IT IS LOCATED**

Explore Park is in the heart of Virginia’s Blue Ridge Region, seven miles from downtown Roanoke and 18 miles from Interstate 81, and connected to the Blue Ridge Parkway by the 1.5 mile Roanoke River Parkway. The Park flanks the Roanoke River in Roanoke and Bedford Counties and is 3.5 miles from Smith Mountain Lake. Explore Park is larger than many realize, because roughly one third of the Park is east of the river, mostly in Bedford County, and is currently inaccessible by the public. Explore Park is divided by the Roanoke River into Explore Park West and Explore Park East.

**GETTING THERE**

Explore Park is currently reached regionally by the Blue Ridge Parkway and locally by Rutrough Road on the Roanoke County side, and by Shady Run and Gravel Hill roads on the Bedford County side. In the future, Rutrough Road will connect directly to the Roanoke River Parkway and eventually the east side will be accessible from Hardy Road. In the long term, a new connection to Explore Park East from the Blue Ridge Parkway will be examined.

**GETTING AROUND**

When fully developed, Explore Park will be accessed at 14 gateways: the existing major gateway from the Blue Ridge Parkway, a new Blue Ridge Parkway gateway at milepost 113, six gateways along Rutrough Road, one on Highland Road, one on Hardy Road, three on Shady Run Road, and one on Gravel Hill Road. From these gateways, a nine mile internal road system will connect to the places where activities are concentrated: the Adventure Nodes and Activity Zones.

Trail systems will connect parking lots and arrival points in the Adventure Nodes, and trailheads will provide direction to the buildings and Activity Zones. From these points, a comprehensive trail network will provide access throughout the Park, with two river crossings.





Orientation of Explore Park.

**THINGS TO DO**

Activities will be distributed throughout the Park to take full advantage of its 1,100 acres. Explore Park is planned to allow for a diverse range of outdoor activities for many abilities on land, water, and air. On land, activities include hiking, biking, horseback riding, camping, and performances. On water, there is paddling, fishing, and swimming. In the air, zip lining, canopy walks, treehouses, birdwatching, bridges that connect across the river, and a potential future gondola system.

**PLACES TO GO**

The arrival, orientation, and starting points for many activities will be located throughout the Park on level areas that allow for ease of access and facility development. The basic amenities at each development area will be some combination of parking, trailhead access, orientation signage, restrooms, bike racks, and seating. Many first time visitors will begin their visit at the Adventure Village, which will be the main point of orientation and the focus of the Park, with concessions and community activities. From there visitors may journey to one of six other Adventure Nodes at the river, lake, or forest. Additionally, there are 22 Activity Zones throughout the Park to allow for specialized programming with a more secluded and independent experience.

**WHAT THE EXPERIENCE WILL BE LIKE**

Explore Park will offer a very wide range of experiences to appeal to a diverse audience in four levels of outdoor interest and adventure. In the Village, the Park will offer opportunities for lodging, dining, and semi-formal and formal events such as weddings and receptions. In the River and Lake Centers, the Park will offer a range of activities for those interested in being immersed in the outdoors but still seeking a less intense experience. The Activity Zones throughout the Park will provide a more nature-based immersive experience. On the trails and river beyond the Activity Zones, visitors will find a more independent experience in a more secluded and rugged setting.

**REGIONAL IDENTITY: MOUNTAINS-RIVER-CITY**

What differentiates Explore Park will be the proximity of its mountain and river environment to the cultural attractions of the Roanoke Metro Region. The metro-mountain mix is a signature quality of Virginia’s Blue Ridge, and Explore Park could be seen as the heart of that experience. The Roanoke area has been a crossroads since pre-settlement and the famous pioneer routes such as the Carolina Trail, the Great Road, the Fincastle Turnpike, and Boone Road to Cumberland Gap all reinforce the region’s important place in American history, and are the forerunners of the system that connects Roanoke today.

**WHEN IT WILL HAPPEN**

Explore Park is strategically planned to balance the delivery of facilities and programs with the interest and demand for recreation and the cost of implementation. Park development is scheduled to occur in six phases over twenty years. These phases allow simple, early actions to open the Park to public use, staged development of the Roanoke County properties and Bedford County properties, and ultimately the potential extension of compatible recreational development and programming to the surrounding partnership lands.

**WHO WILL OPERATE IT**

Explore Park will be developed and operated by the Roanoke County Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism (the County). The County will take the lead in providing the core infrastructure needed to support facility development throughout the Park. The County will provide major roads, parking, trails and utilities (sewer, water, power and communications) to the core development areas. The County will provide concession lease agreements for fee-based recreation activities in the Activity Zones. Examples of fee-based activities include overnight accommodations (lodging and camping), food service, activities (zip lines), equipment rental, and guiding (biking and paddling), events, and performances. Lease agreements will rely on a combination of existing or new county-provided facilities, and in some cases concessioner-developed facilities. The Park will remain under the ownership of the Virginia Recreational Facilities Authority, from whom the County is in the third year of a 99-year lease.

**ADVENTURE NODES AND ACTIVITY ZONES**

Activities in the Park are organized in a hierarchy of experiences beginning with the seven Adventure Nodes and 22 Activity Zones. Within three of the Adventure Nodes, the Villages are positioned on prominent geographic features of the Park: the Roanoke Ridge, the Roanoke River, and the proposed Saddle Lake. The Villages contain clusters of programs and are the hubs of the trail system. The other four Adventure Nodes contain more specialized activities, and are located at Black Gum Summit, Pine Mountain, Roanoke Woods, and Rutrough Point. The 22 Activity Zones hold a range of individual uses such as boat access, camping, biking, zip lines, overlooks, disc golf, and equestrian camping.







## SECTION II **OVERVIEW**

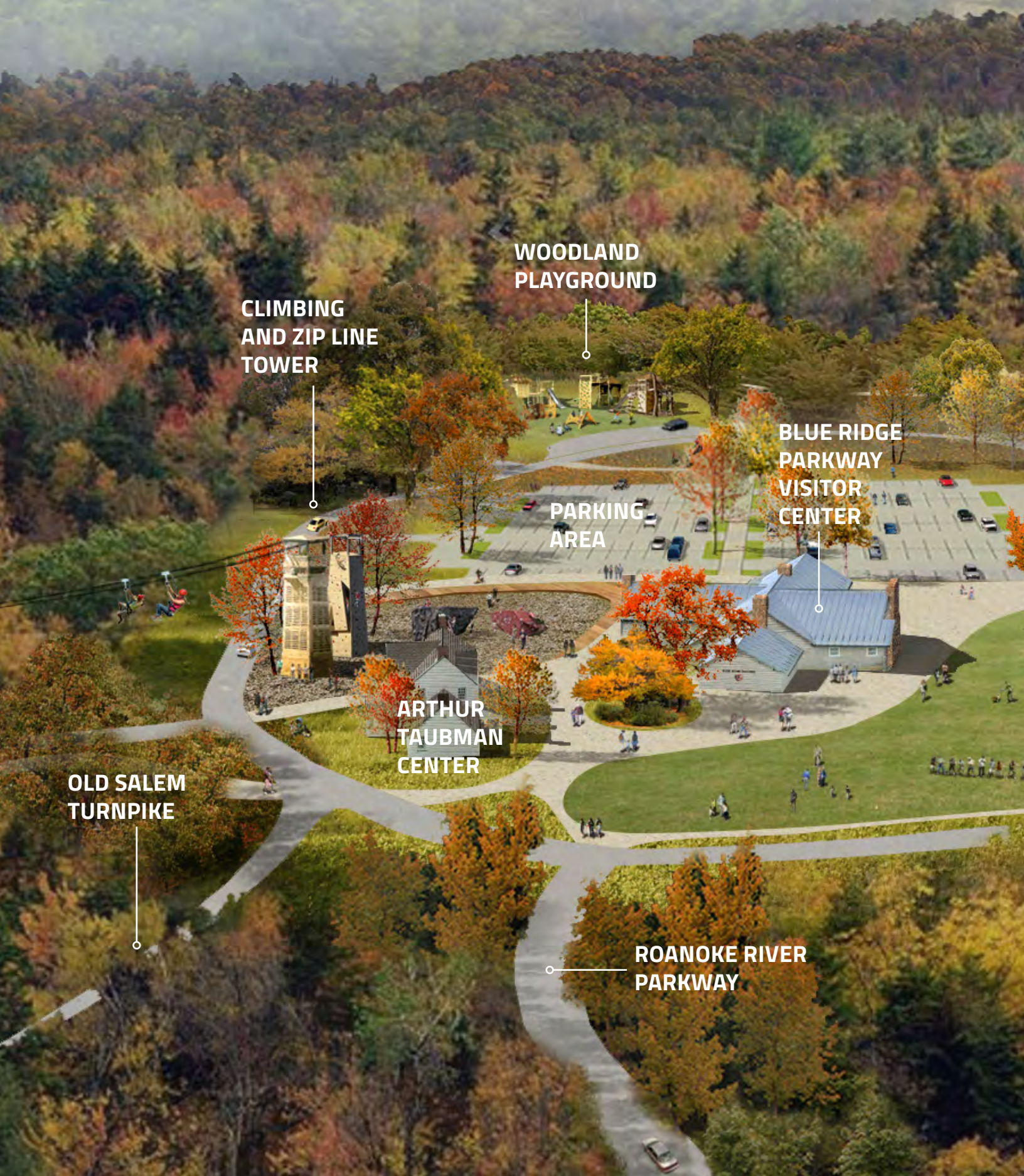


## RIDGE: ADVENTURE VILLAGE

### The Heart of Explore Park West

The Adventure Village lies atop the promontory at the core of Explore Park West. The Village is the arrival point for visitors from both the Blue Ridge Parkway and Rutrough Road. Visitors reaching the Village via the Roanoke River Parkway will first see the Village Green, programmed with activities, as the focal point of the Village. With the climbing and zip line tower in the background, the Green will be framed by the existing Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Center, Arthur Taubman Center, and Brugh Tavern.

Nearby, the Mountain Union Church will remain for weddings and services, and a proposed picnic pavilion will provide a gathering area for large groups. In the future, a wine/microbrew/spirits event center will complete the village structures. 184 parking spaces and bus drop-off will provide access to the Village. A new country store, gas and sanitary dump station will provide amenities for RV campers and visitors in the nearby Riverside and Hickory Woods Campgrounds. The Adventure Village is the orientation point of the Park. Visitors can park, check in, schedule activities, dine, and start their walking, zip, biking, or paddling excursions.



WOODLAND  
PLAYGROUND

CLIMBING  
AND ZIP LINE  
TOWER

BLUE RIDGE  
PARKWAY  
VISITOR  
CENTER

PARKING  
AREA

ARTHUR  
TAUBMAN  
CENTER

OLD SALEM  
TURNPIKE

ROANOKE RIVER  
PARKWAY





PICNIC  
PAVILION

BRUGH  
TAVERN

EVENT CENTER

VILLAGE  
GREEN

CORE LOOP ROAD

THE ADVENTURE VILLAGE.



**RIVER: RIVERSIDE VILLAGE**

**Gateway to the River**

The Riverside Village in Explore Park West, overlooking the Roanoke River, is reached from the Adventure Village by Journey's End Road, and is connected to Explore Park East by a pedestrian bridge of signature design. The Riverside Village includes boat access for the whitewater course, zip line landings from the Adventure Village and Pine Mountain Summit, fishing access, a picnic pavilion, an education node, and a performance barn.



**ZIP LINE  
FROM ADVENTURE  
VILLAGE**

**ZIP LINE  
LANDING TOWER**

**PICNIC  
PAVILION**

**PERFORMANCE  
BARN**





**ZIP LINE FROM  
PINE MOUNTAIN**

**PEDESTRIAN  
BRIDGE**

**FISHING ACCESS**

**WHITEWATER  
COURSE**



**LAKE: BEDFORD VILLAGE**

**The Heart of Explore Park East**

Bedford Village lies at the foot of Black Gum Mountain and the edge of Saddle Lake. Saddle Lake provides a visual and recreational focal point anchored by the boathouse and day lodge, a picnic pavilion, swim beach, fishing access, wildlife blind, and loop trail. The Village provides a base of operations for Explore Park East and is connected via road, trail, and zip line to the Shady Run Campground, Black Gum Mountain Alpine Coaster, Saddle Run and Tulip Tree Tubing Hills, and the Pine Mountain Adventure Node. Vehicle access to the village is reached from Shady Run Road via the Black Gum Access Road.







GONDOLA LOOP

ALPINE COASTER

DAY LODGE

BOATHOUSE

SADDLE LAKE AND BLACK GUM MOUNTAIN.





# THE NEXT GENERATION OF EXPLORE PARK

Explore Park will be the premier outdoor family adventure hub of Roanoke County and Virginia’s Blue Ridge. A hybrid between a high-amenity metropolitan and a remote backcountry park, Explore Park’s attractions will create opportunities for stays ranging from one hour to several days with sufficient diversity to attract repeat visitors. Adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Park is part of a larger open space system extending along the Parkway to the City of Roanoke’s Mill Mountain Park and along the Roanoke River Greenway to the core of the City.

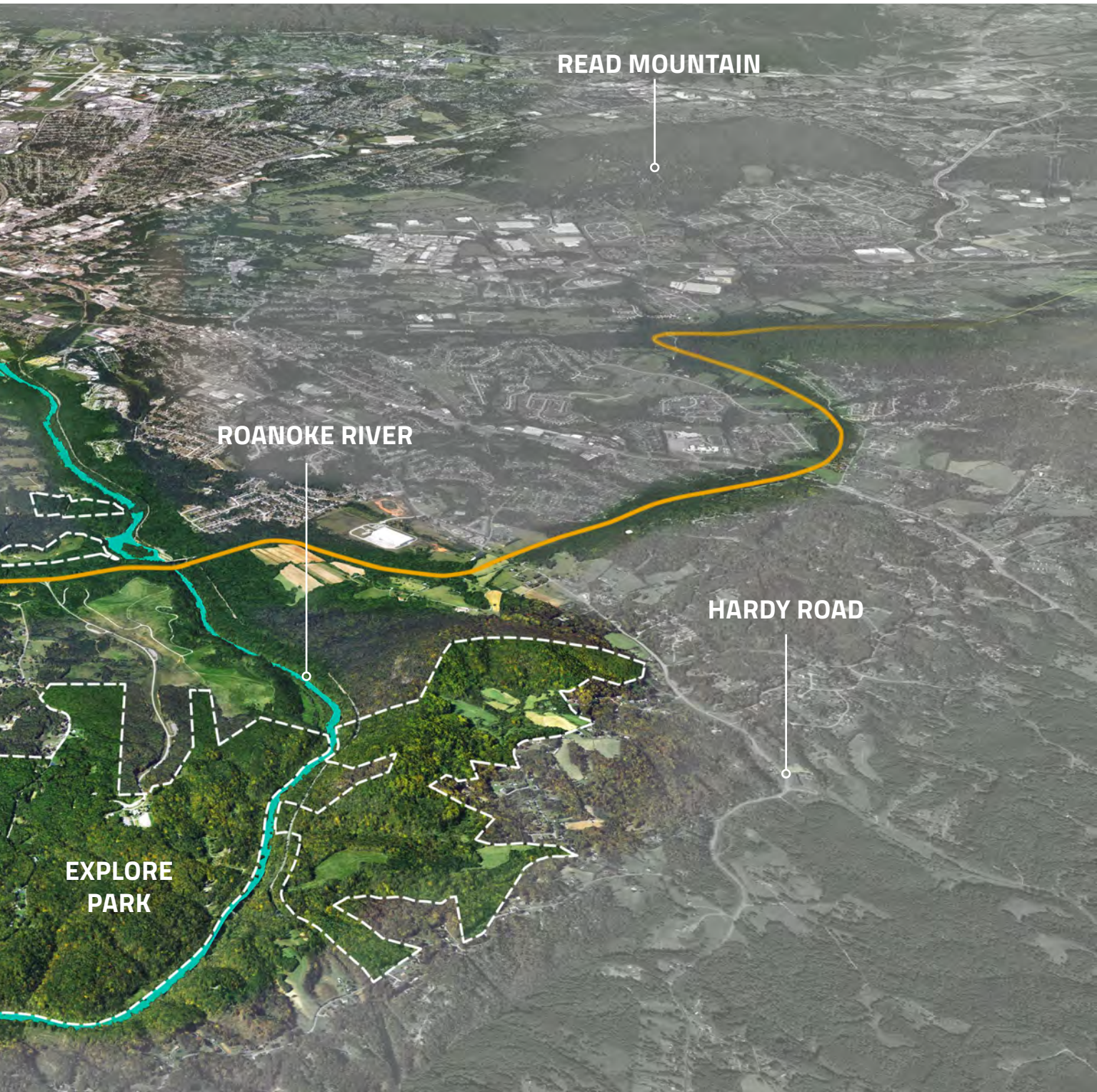
The Park’s 1,100 acres will be effectively utilized for a balance of natural resource preservation and park amenity development in the parkland in Roanoke and Bedford Counties on both sides of the river. The Park will be developed based on three principles: Adventure for All, Flexible Framework, and Total Access.

**Adventure for All** means that outdoor, nature-based recreational activities will be provided for a wide range of interests and capabilities in a three-tiered system of water, land, and air-based activities.

These activities will be developed over time in the Park’s **Flexible Framework**, which provides 22 venues both clustered and dispersed throughout the Park. The framework allows staged development of the activities and provides the ability to redevelop the zones to address evolving recreational trends.

A road and trail system will provide **Total Access** to the Activity Zones, allowing for visitor and service access and serving as a fundamentally important park experience in itself. Explore Park will be a top-notch entry-level outdoor introduction with selective opportunities for

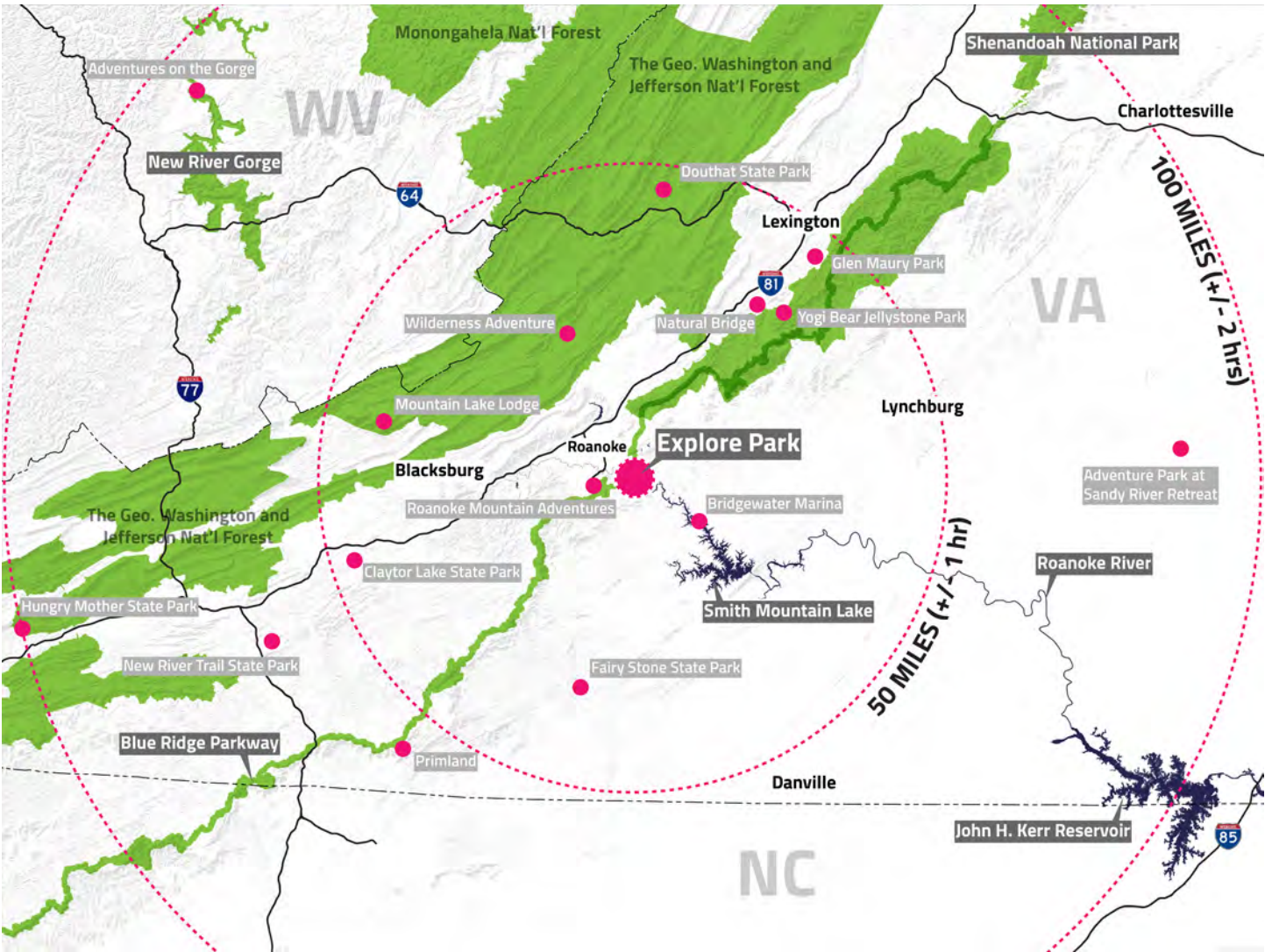




intermediate and advanced participants. In providing a diverse range of outdoor experiences, the Park will serve a regional purpose by introducing and educating novices and families to activities, the skills for which can be refined and applied in more remote and demanding conditions, at other regional outdoor recreation venues.

Roanoke County will develop the Park in phases as funds and development interest permits, to the extent that the carrying capacity of the Park allows. In the future, as the Park is developed and its user base and cash flow increase, there are opportunities to extend recreational development to the Park’s neighboring lands, owned by the Roanoke Valley Resource Authority and the National Park Service (NPS).





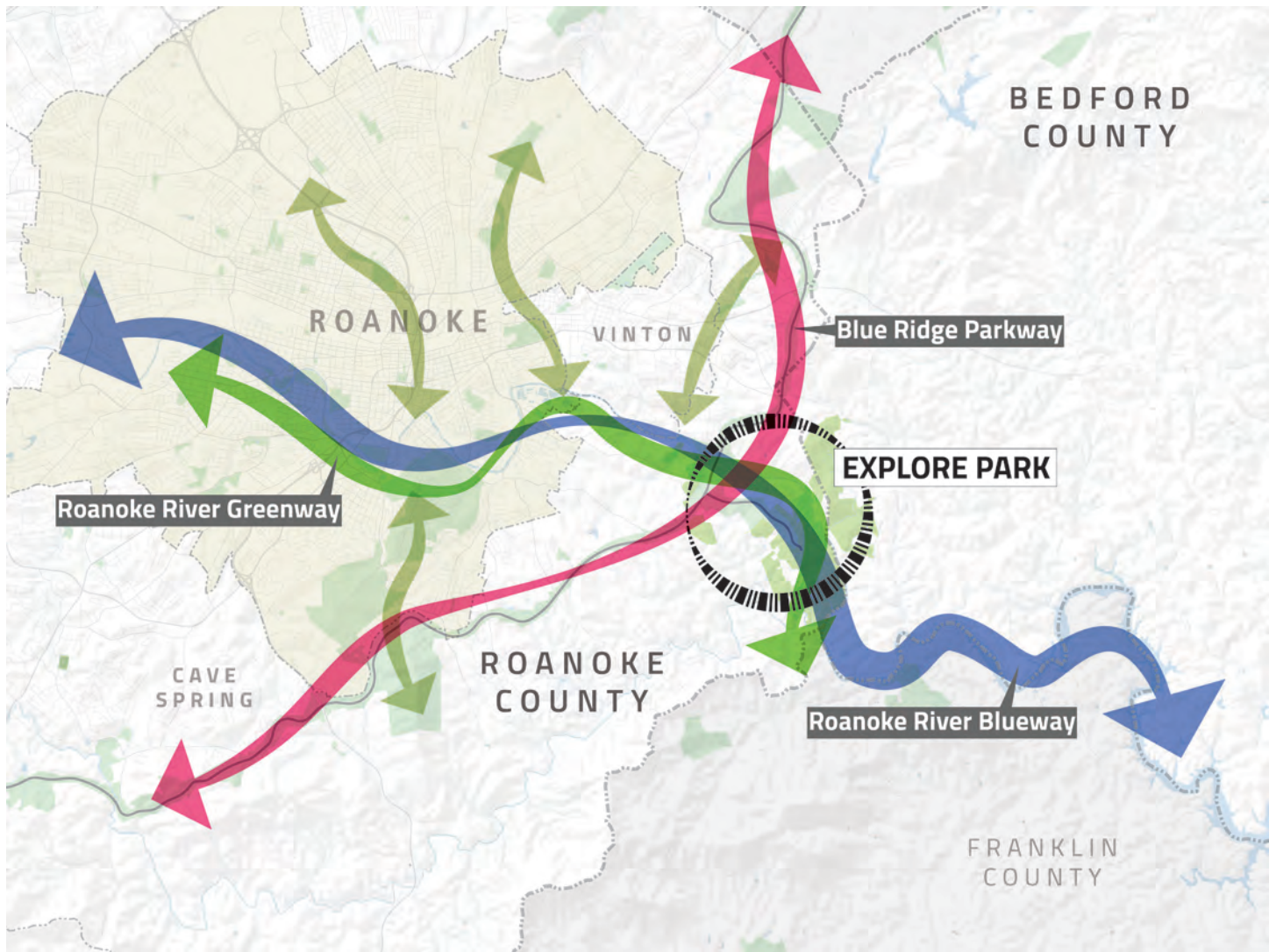
Regional adventure attractions within two hours of Explore Park.

# ADVENTURE HUB OF WESTERN VIRGINIA AND THE ROANOKE VALLEY

## Regional Context

Explore Park is located on the eastern edge of Roanoke County, about seven miles from the center of Roanoke. Roanoke is the seat of Virginia’s Blue Ridge, the area of western Virginia characterized by its mountains, valleys and rivers, linked by the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Like much of the landscape in the Blue Ridge, Explore Park is a combination of steep hillsides with gentler uplands and bottom lands. The western landscape of the taller and steeper Blue Ridge Mountains provides a backdrop and regional identity.



Location of Explore Park and its proximity to the City of Roanoke.

**City Context, County Context**

For residents of Roanoke City and County, Explore Park is closer than one might think. The same rugged rural setting that makes the Park seem farther away also creates the special sense of place once one is there.

**Reaching Explore Park by Car:**

The edge of Explore Park is less than 3 miles outside Roanoke city limits.

From the Park’s Adventure Village, it is:

- 1.5 miles to the Blue Ridge Parkway
- 7 miles / 16 minutes to Market Square
- 10 miles / 17 minutes to the Mill Mountain Star
- 11 miles / 26 minutes to Roanoke / Blacksburg Regional Airport
- 17 miles / 30 minutes to the Salem Civic Center
- 18 miles / 30 minutes to Interstate 81
- 31 miles / 46 minutes to Peaks of Otter Lodge
- 32 miles / 45 minutes to Smith Mountain Lake State Park
- 45 miles / 60 minutes to Blacksburg / Virginia Tech
- 58 miles / 1 hour 10 minutes to Lynchburg

**For those interested in water sports:**

Along the Roanoke River, from the put-in below Niagara Dam to Rutrough Point is 3.3 miles.

To Smith Mountain Lake points of interest:

- 20 miles to the Hales Ford Bridge
- 24 miles to Smith Mountain Lake State Park
- 31 miles to Smith Mountain Lake Dam





Special Place #17: The Saddle.

# THE STORY OF THE LANDSCAPE

## READING THE LANDSCAPE

It is possible to come to a deeper level of understanding about our landscape through close observation and basic knowledge of natural and cultural history. The landscape of Explore Park tells a story about the patterns of natural processes and the effects of human activity through its pre-settlement and settlement history. The land speaks for itself through its rock, soil, water, and trees, and the traces of human actions over the centuries of this story have been examined and recorded as a way to add a further dimension of interest to the Park experience.

Over three hundred points of field observation were cataloged to provide the background for this story. The field observations defined points of interest, larger areas of value, and specific landscape character features of interest. Twenty field observation points were selected as Special Places, for their significant contribution to Explore Park’s landscape. Selected Special Places are numbered and pictured on these pages.

The story of the landscape will be conveyed in several ways, including orientation at the Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Center, through self-guided and guided tours, and through cell phone interface. Special places will be featured as stops on the trail system.

It is a subtle story that reveals itself to those on foot, or perhaps bicycle, on the trail system throughout the Park. The story is divided into themes of natural and cultural processes that have shaped the landscape as we see it. These themes help us see the Park not as a final condition but as an evolving landscape, and to

appreciate the special features that define its character. Many of the names of the places and activity areas in the master plan were assigned based on the field research that has provided the background for this report. Please see the Special Places Inventory Report for further detail and a full list of numbered field observation points.

## RELOCATED 18TH AND 19TH CENTURY STRUCTURES

In a previous park iteration, several structures from around the region were deconstructed, relocated to the Park, and reassembled on site. As relics of a past era, these structures provide the visitor with a sense of the appearance and construction methods of this era, and will remain on site for the near future, described and interpreted as artifacts rather than authentic contextual features. Where feasible, the structures will continue their existing use (Mountain Union Church, Brugh Tavern) or be repurposed (the barn) or maintained as a possible future program resource (Mill and cabins).

As the Park develops, the structures will be evaluated to determine the cost-benefit ratio of their responsible upkeep in comparison with the amenity they afford and the educational value they provide. The County is committed to maintaining these structures until they are deemed unnecessary for park operations, and/or unsustainable, in which case, Roanoke County will work with the VRFA to determine if they will be moved to another location, donated, returned to their donor, or sold.



# SIGNIFICANT HERITAGE



Special Place #2: Cove Forest, Roanoke County.



Special Place #3: Ancient Roanoke River Rock Deposit



Special Place #4: Old Growth Red Oak, Roanoke County.



Special Place #6: Rock Outcrops on the Roanoke River.



Special Place #7: Bedford Homestead, Bedford County.



Special Place #8: North Roanoke Farm Pond



Special Place #14: Mountain Meadows, Bedford County.



Special Place #20: Roanoke River Access.



# A PARK FOR ALL

Since the start of the project, 14 meetings were held with county staff, the steering committee, and the general public.

In an effort to engage the community in shaping the future of Explore Park, the County conducted a broad public outreach program including designation of a steering committee with a wide range of representation. The County conducted meetings with the steering committee, stakeholders and general public both in person and by way of a user survey. Please refer to the Public Input Report for further details of the outreach program.

### Community Survey

A sixteen-question survey yielded 1,137 responses; a very strong representation. The results of the community engagement strongly reinforce the County’s direction to develop Explore Park as a place for diverse and dynamic outdoor recreation in the context of a well-managed natural landscape. The highlights of the survey outcome are summarized below. Please refer to the Public Input Report for the full survey results.

### Broad Category - Desired Experiences

In ranking broad categories of activities, the top ranking result was “adventure tourism.” Respondents ranked terms such as “recreation” and “adventure” higher than “relaxation” and “education” and favored active park uses over passive ones. Beauty also ranked very highly in the survey, serving as a reminder in planning to preserve the natural landscape.

### Specific Amenity Rankings

The top-ranked results involved better access to the wooded and river areas of the Park through low impact improvements such as hiking trails, river walk, canoe/kayak launch, observation areas, picnic areas, campsites, and biking trails. Survey responses reflect Roanoke County’s goal to design a park for the top 90% usage. Amenities with the highest rankings in this area were basic activities that are typically free to participate in. Where a fee typically applies, the top results were campsites, cabins, and zip lines / aerial park.

### Written Responses

Of 3,240 suggestions, the top results were zip lines / aerial park, hiking or v dirt trails, bike trails or bike park, and camping. When asked which needs were not being addressed through other local parks, the top three responses were high adventure activities, campgrounds, and river access. These three amenities/activities had a significantly higher response than other selections in the category, indicating respondents saw a clear need for them in our region.

Community meeting, Vinton War Memorial Hall.



During the first round of public input, consultants and staff spoke with approximately 230 meeting attendees including both citizens and interested stakeholders. The categories below demonstrate the top 10 most frequently recorded comments from these meetings - ranked in order of popularity.

TOP TEN PUBLIC COMMENTS

1. Trails and Connectivity

Participants were interested in the continued development of trails at Explore Park including:

- Various levels of difficulty, from paved walking paths for seniors or individuals with disabilities, to mixed-use dirt paths with better directional markers
- Multi-use paths including walking, biking, and equestrian
- Regional connectivity including the extension of the Roanoke River Greenway to the park, alternative ways to access the Park from downtown Roanoke, and water connections to Smith Mountain Lake
- More connectivity to the Bedford County side of the property, through recreational use and/or a bridge connecting the two sides of the river

2. Overnight Accommodations

Participants expressed the need for overnight accommodations at the Park. Solutions suggested included primitive or tent camping, rental cabins, RV parking with associated amenities, and a lodge or hotel.

3. Water Access

Participants recognized the Roanoke River frontage as a valuable asset, with the desire to preserve the natural beauty of this area while allowing access for fishing, canoeing, tubing, and kayaking. More specific ideas included creating an in-river kayak course, creating a delayed-harvest trout fishery, and improving the put-in/take-out points for boating.

4. Recreation Programs & Education

Participants saw the need for a variety of outdoor programs, especially those dealing with nature education and family recreation. Suggestions included a wide range of guided instructional activities led by Parks, Recreation and Tourism, as well as partnerships with schools and area cultural institutions.

5. Events & Venue Infrastructure

Participants offered many suggestions for reoccurring special events at the Park. These ranged from concert series and wine festivals to competitive races. The need was voiced for improved event infrastructure such as an amphitheater.

6. Nature Preservation

Participants confirmed that the community places a high value on retaining the natural beauty of the landscape at Explore Park. They were cautious of over-development, yet mindful of opportunities for the public to better experience nature through overlooks, maintenance and overall park design.

7. Shopping & Dining

Participants offered many suggestions regarding commercial opportunities at the Park including a restaurant or brewery, places to shop for crafts, and rental of outdoor recreation equipment.

8. Adventure Sports

Participants saw the opportunity for adventure-based outdoor recreation to play a large role in the Park. This includes activities such as a high-ropes course/zip line, mountain bike competitions, rock climbing, and target sports.

9. Cultural Heritage

Participants offered a wide variety of comments regarding cultural heritage at the Park. Many suggestions included re-purposing historical buildings on the site for other activities while preserving history through kiosks or interactive exhibits. Other suggestions included the preservation of our region’s art and music legacy at the Park.

10. Destination Attraction

Participants expressed the desire to see the Park developed as a quality attraction to bring in tourists from outside the area. The attraction should offer unique features that promote repeated visits to the Park. Park development should provide for both local resident use and tourist use through a well-balanced mix of recreation amenities.



## THREE BIG IDEAS

The spatial and experiential organization of Explore Park is carefully composed to take advantage of the entire property and provide a diverse as possible range of activities. Three “big ideas” shape the way the park development and experience is conceived.

# 1. ADVENTURE FOR ALL

A three-tiered system of water, land, and air-based activities provides a different take on outdoor recreation for the Park. These three tiers extend activities both horizontally and vertically through the landscape which, due to its topography, is already a dynamic three-dimensional experience. The stacked system allows activities to be vertically linked at certain points so that a visitor can switch among modes – from hiking to zip lines, from biking to paddling and other possibilities. Visitors will be able to customize scenarios that are tailored to their abilities, scaling the degree of challenge up or down.

# 2. FLEXIBLE FRAMEWORK

Parks evolve over time. The Adventure Plan takes advantage of this to make a park that will change and remain fresh as recreational trends evolve. The framework allows staged development of the activities and interchangeable spaces should activities grow in popularity. The location of 22 Activity Zones throughout the Park provides a combination of synergy among the areas and isolation for unique experiences.

# 3. TOTAL ACCESS

A road and trail system will provide Total Access to all activity areas throughout Explore Park. The integrated road and trail system is essential to unify the Park and create a coherent user experience that allows convenient access to all parcels. While it is not feasible to connect all park parcels with a single, unified park road, the combination of external public roads, the Blue Ridge Parkway, and internal park roads in Explore Park West and East will be conceived as a system that is consistently signed and communicated in maps.

The road and trail system will allow for visitor and service access and serve as a fundamentally important aesthetic park experience in itself. Total Access enhances the concept of Adventure for All and Flexible Framework by making it possible to travel conveniently among different use areas and combine different activities for differing adventure scenarios. Total Access applies vertically as well, and the ability to shift from water to path to zip line to complete a diverse recreational itinerary will be a defining characteristic of Explore Park.

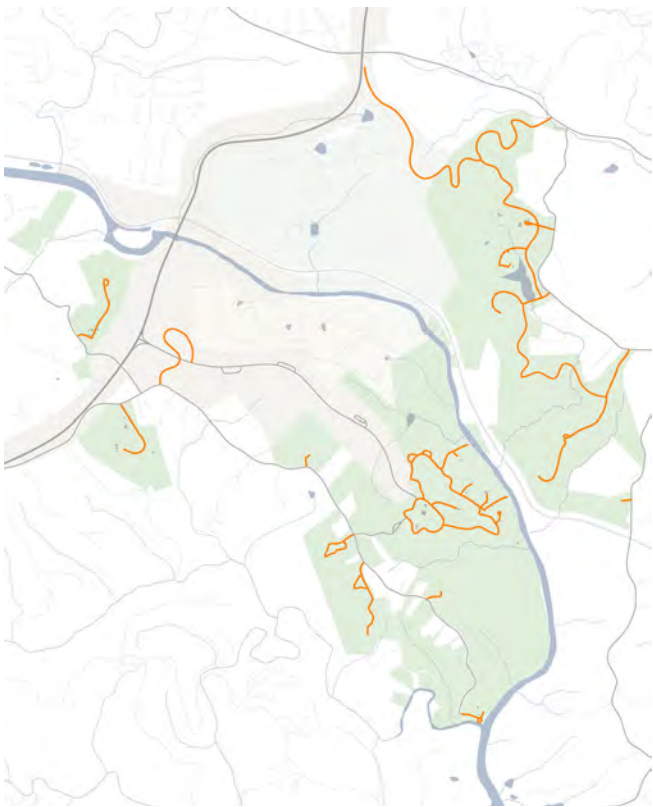
# THREE KEY SYSTEMS

The physical layout of Explore Park is divided into roads, trails, and development pods that accommodate programs. Roads are the first experience visitors have, trails connect people to the landscape, and the development pods are the places that are suited to facility development for recreation. The following description provides an overview of these three systems. Please refer to page 55 for further detail.



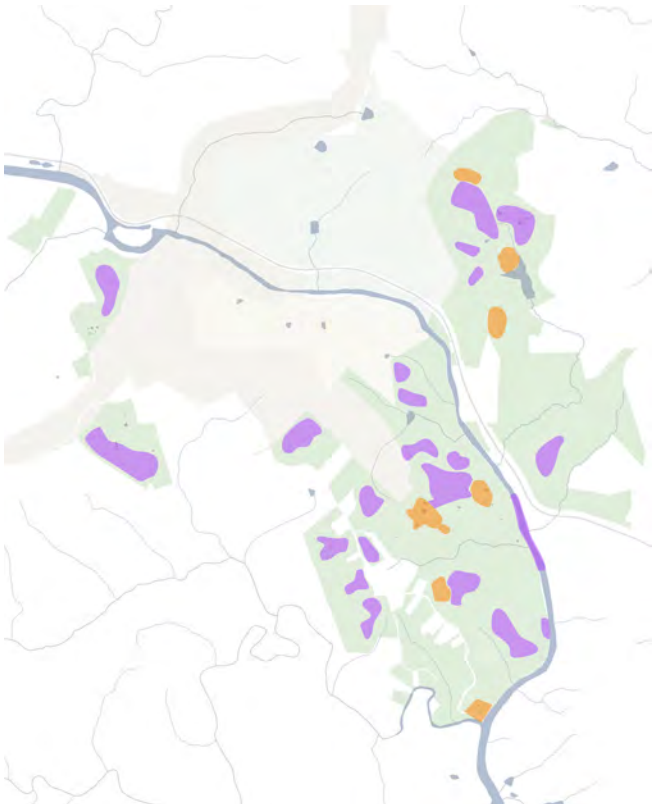
# 1. ROADS

Explore Park’s road system will help unify and make it easier to experience the entire property. Due to its size and the number and distribution of the parcels that comprise the property, Explore Park will be accessed from public roads at up to 14 locations. The primary entrance to the Park will remain at the existing location, via the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Roanoke River Parkway, with a proposed connection to Rutrough Road. A potential future access to the Blue Ridge Parkway would give more direct access to Explore Park East, and allow the parkway bridge to be used as part of the overall park circulation. The nine mile internal road system to each park parcel provides access and attractive and dramatic views of the park landscape. Scenic overlooks and trailhead parking provide access points for the Park’s trail system, activities, and special features.



# 2. TRAILS

Explore Park’s 38.5 mile trail system will connect visitors to the full 1,100 acres of the Park. The trail system is divided into several tiers of refinement and ruggedness, ease and difficulty, in developed and remote areas across the Park’s diverse landscapes and varying topography. The trails will connect trailheads in the villages, Adventure Nodes and Activity Zones, to the special natural and cultural places of the site. Trails will be conceived and routed in loops that allow visitors to create different journeys on different visits, each of varying challenge, length, and location. The loops can also offer thematic experiences or specific targets.



# 3. PODS

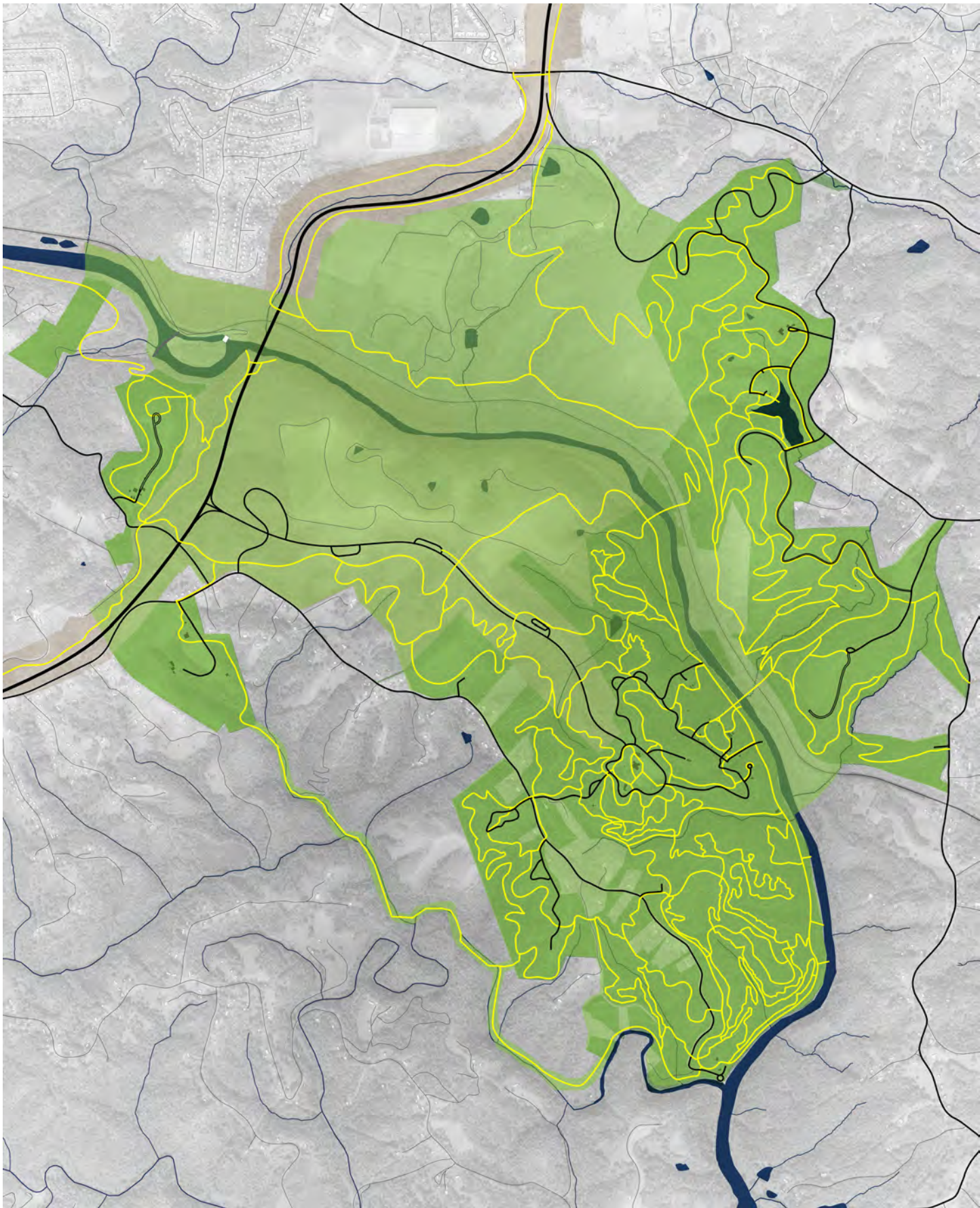
Twenty nine program areas, called Adventure Nodes and Activity Zones, will be distributed throughout Explore Park in development pods on level or sloping terrain as befits the activities and facilities. These will provide a wide range of outdoor activities suited to varying interests and abilities. The Adventure Nodes include the three major villages and four other key places. The Activity Zones include paddling, biking, zipping, camping, and many other pursuits. The development pods are flexible and can be developed over time and re-purposed as trends ebb and flow, or shifted to another location. This flexibility will allow the experience of Explore Park to remain interesting to repeat visitors over an extended time.

# ONE PARK

The long-term vision for Explore Park is to create partnerships with surrounding entities and citizens to create continuous loops and trail easements where feasible, to span both sides of the Roanoke River, and to anchor Virginia’s Blue Ridge as a major outdoor destination along the Blue Ridge Parkway and Western Virginia.

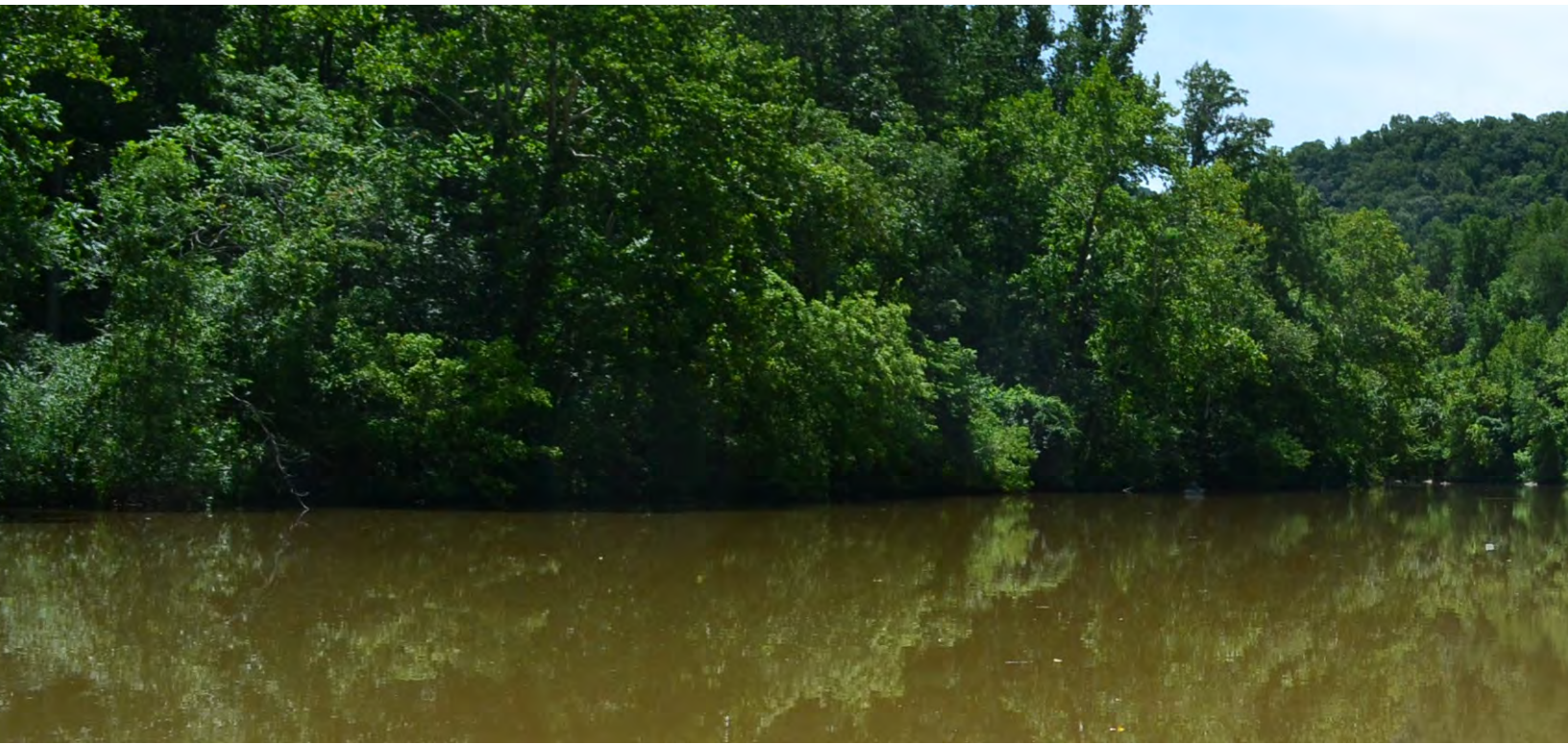


# FUTURE VISION

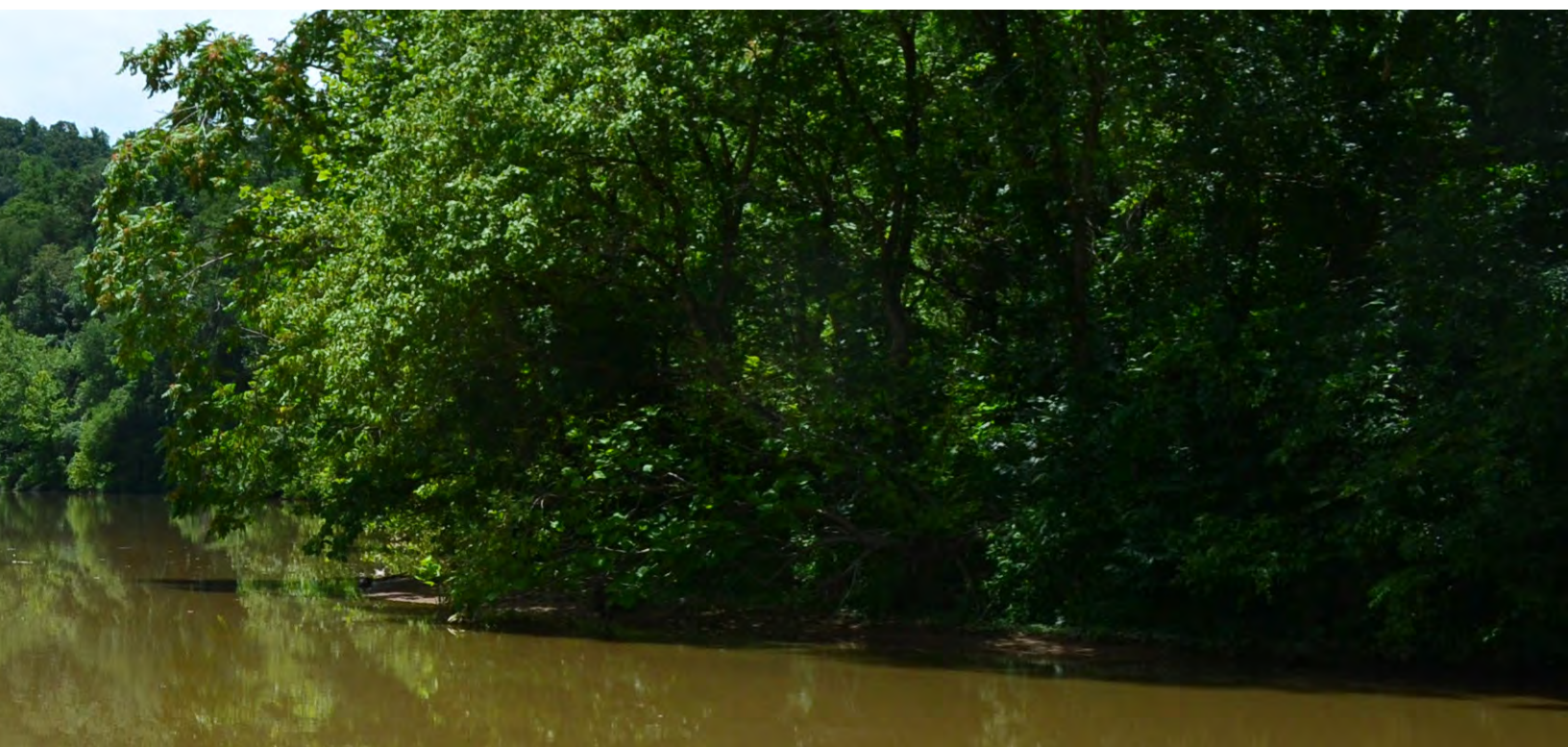


Potential area of connectivity of Explore Park and associated trails, shown in yellow.





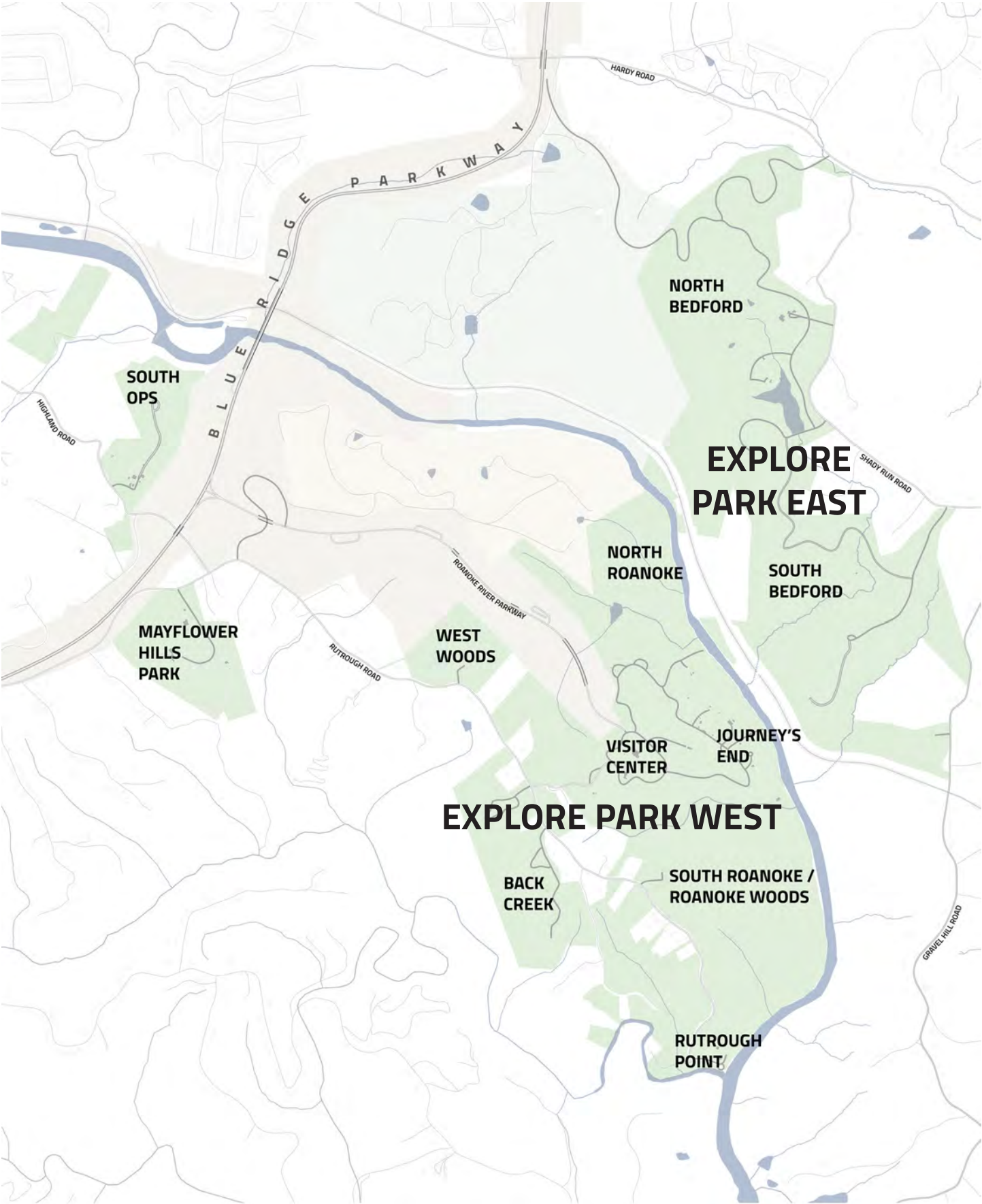




SECTION III  
**UNDERSTANDING EXPLORE PARK**







**NOMENCLATURE**

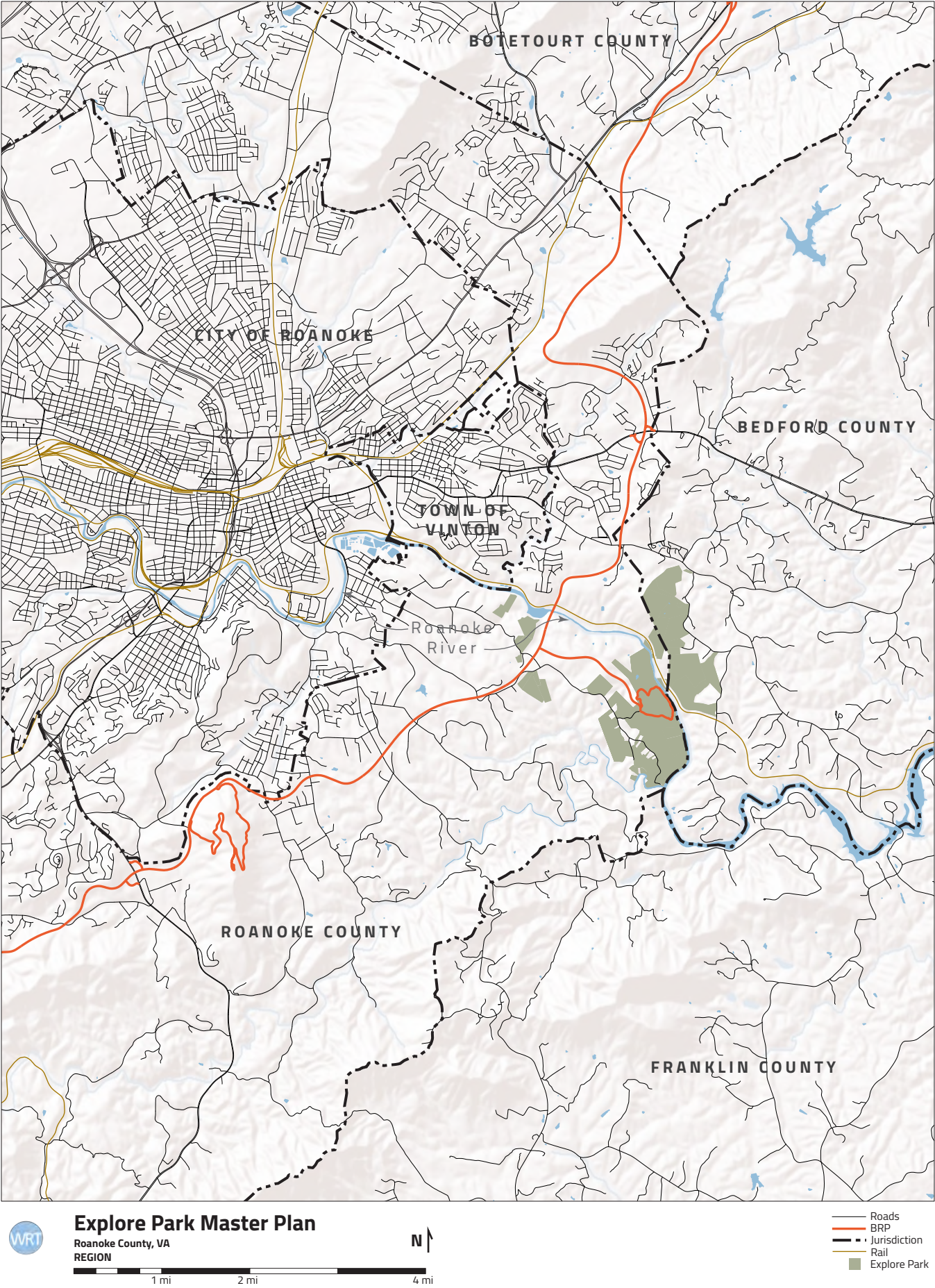
The property of Explore Park is spread across 1,100 acres with numerous disconnected parcels. The size and arrangement of the property necessitated an informal naming system. These place names were brought together from county staff, local community members, and Michael Gaige, a subconsultant who spent many days documenting the woods and hills of the Park.

These names evolved over the course of the project to become more nuanced and grounded

in the landscape features they represented, as the team learned more about Explore Park.

The plan builds on these place names in the designation of Adventure Nodes and Activity Zones. It should be noted that some names changed and do not appear on the final master plan map, but nonetheless this was a useful early orientation to Explore Park.



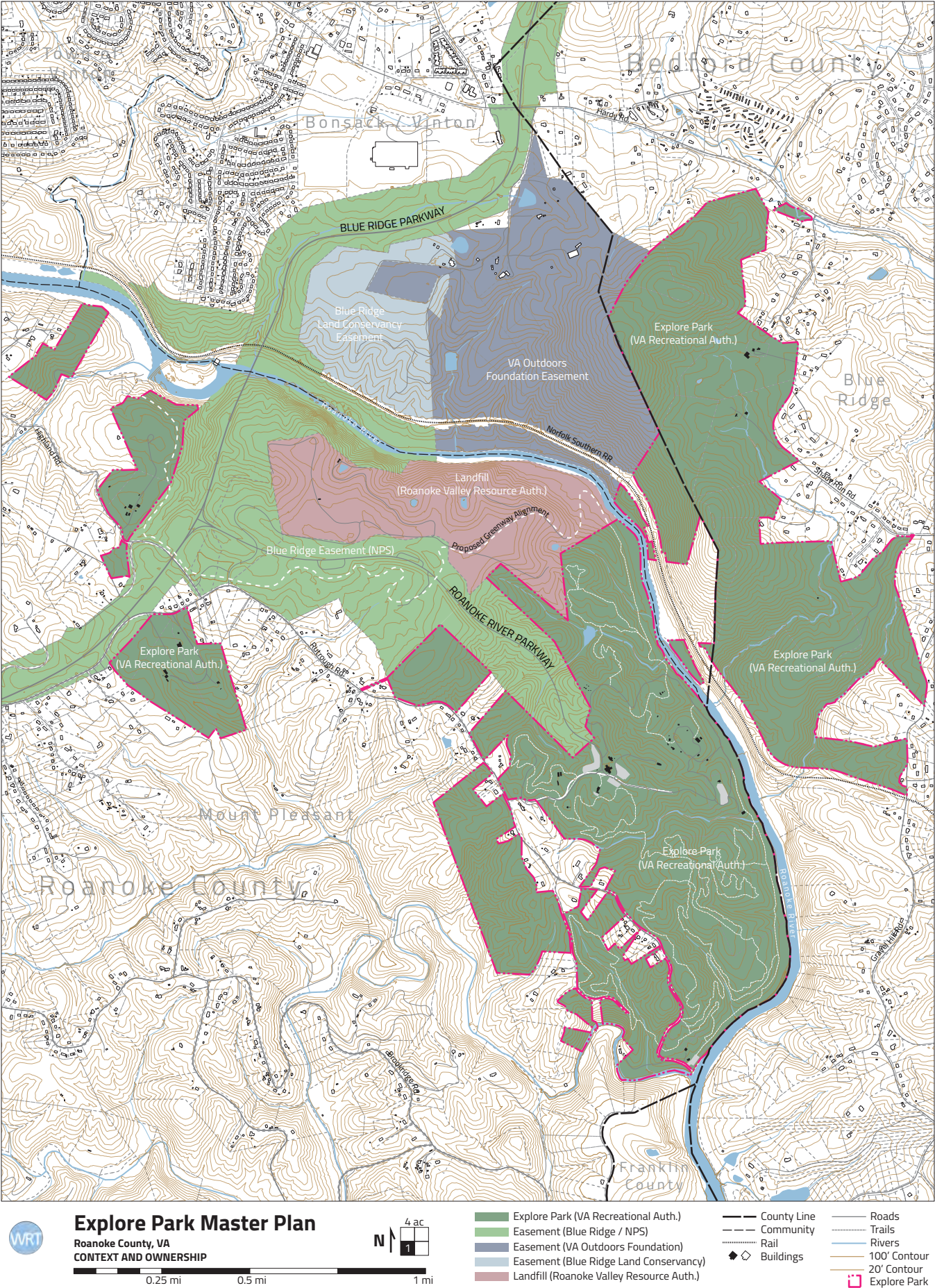


THE REGION

Explore Park sits at the crossroads of the Roanoke River and the Blue Ridge Parkway. The core of the park is seven miles from downtown Roanoke.

The location sets up a park relationship with both local residents and seasonal tourists.





CONTEXT AND OWNERSHIP

Park land is split between two counties, with about 700 acres in Roanoke County, and another 400 in Bedford County.

Adjoining parcels are controlled by conservation easements and the National Park Service, with additional private landholdings existing within and around the rest of the Park.





VEGETATIVE LAND COVER

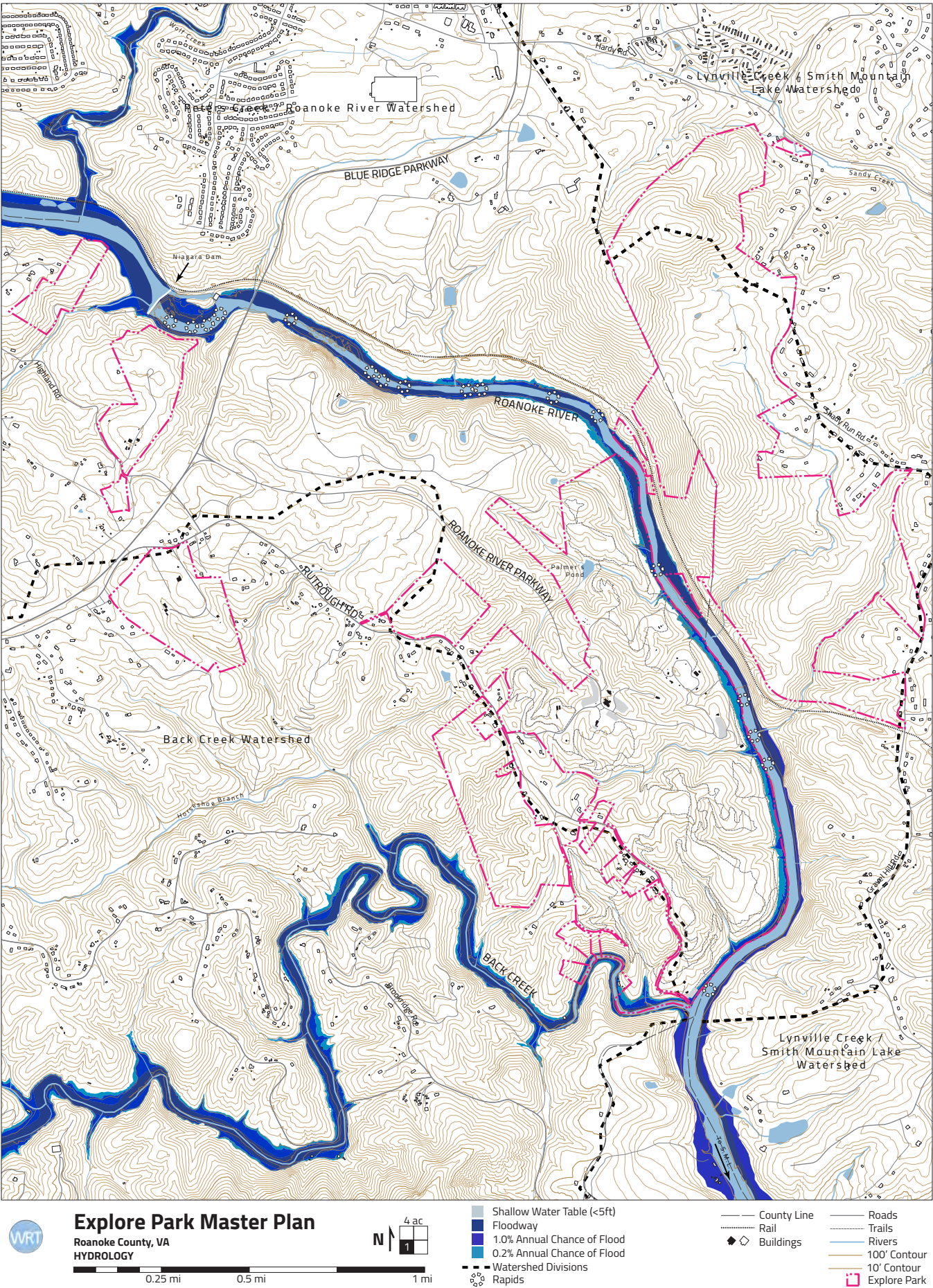
The area within and surrounding Explore Park is largely forested. There are pockets of clearings, along the riverbanks and in areas of past disturbance, but the only large meadows and fields occur where agricultural operations are ongoing.

The largest open area, immediately west of the Park, is the former Roanoke Valley Resource Authority landfill site, which has been closed and capped with clean fill, and now offers expansive

views and a welcoming plateau through which visitors approach Explore Park.

On the Bedford County side, farming settlements cleared areas of level ground, while the steep ravines and creekbeds remain wooded. Meadow areas that have been maintained offer sweeping views of the surrounding countryside.





HYDROLOGY

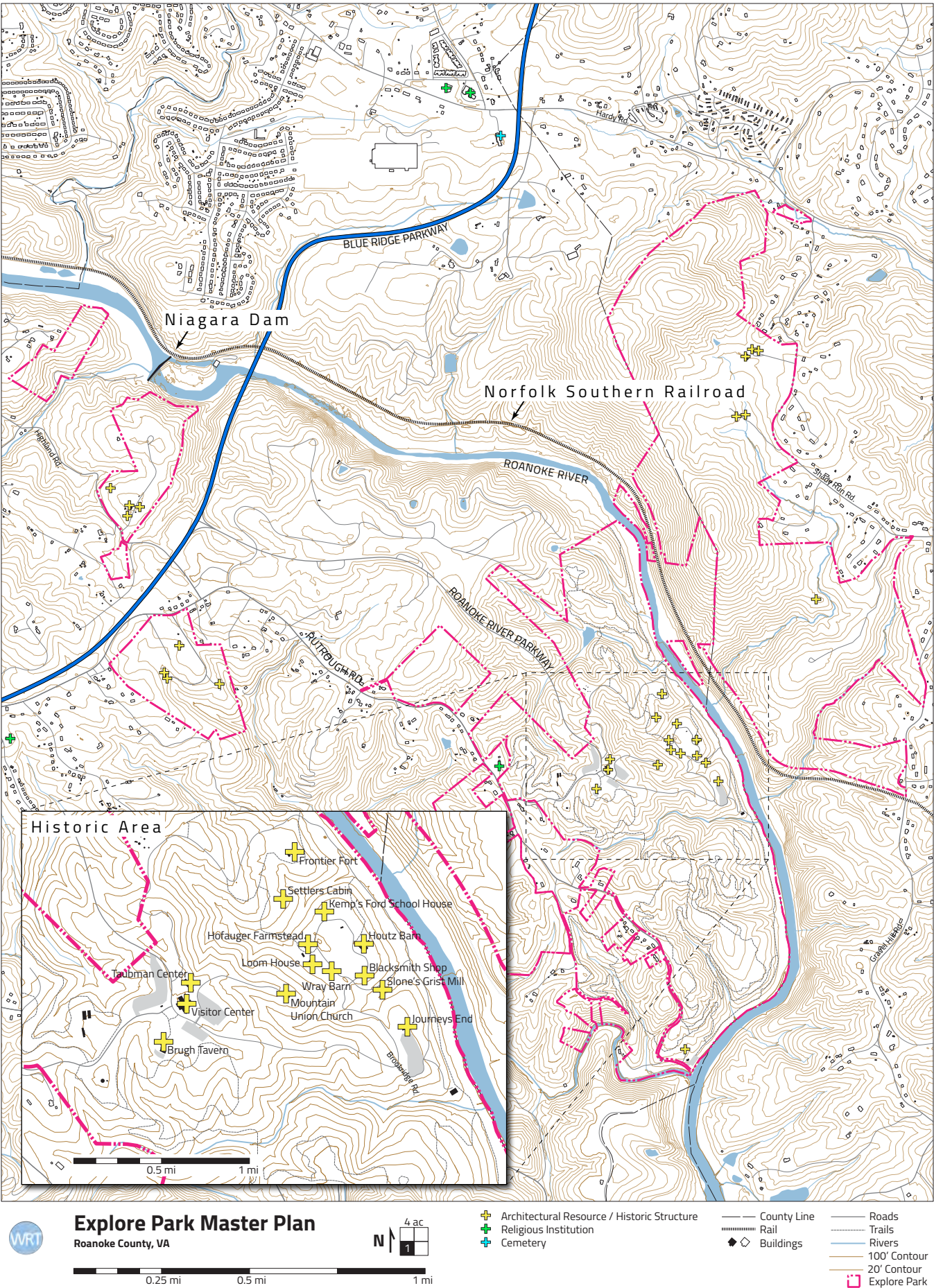
The Roanoke River is the dominant hydrological feature of Explore Park. The river depth varies throughout the seasons, breaches its banks periodically during heavy storms, and creates significant whitewater rapids in certain areas. This makes the River popular for kayakers and canoeists.

The largest tributary of the Roanoke River in the area surrounding Explore Park is Back Creek, a meandering, shallow stream that forms an

impressive gorge to the south of the Park before joining the Roanoke at Rutrough Point. This confluence is a significant point of interest in the Park.

In addition to these two main waterways, there are many tributary streams in Explore Park that join the Roanoke River. These waterways form ravines and valleys in the Park, and add significant visual interest and resource value to the landscape.





CULTURAL RESOURCES

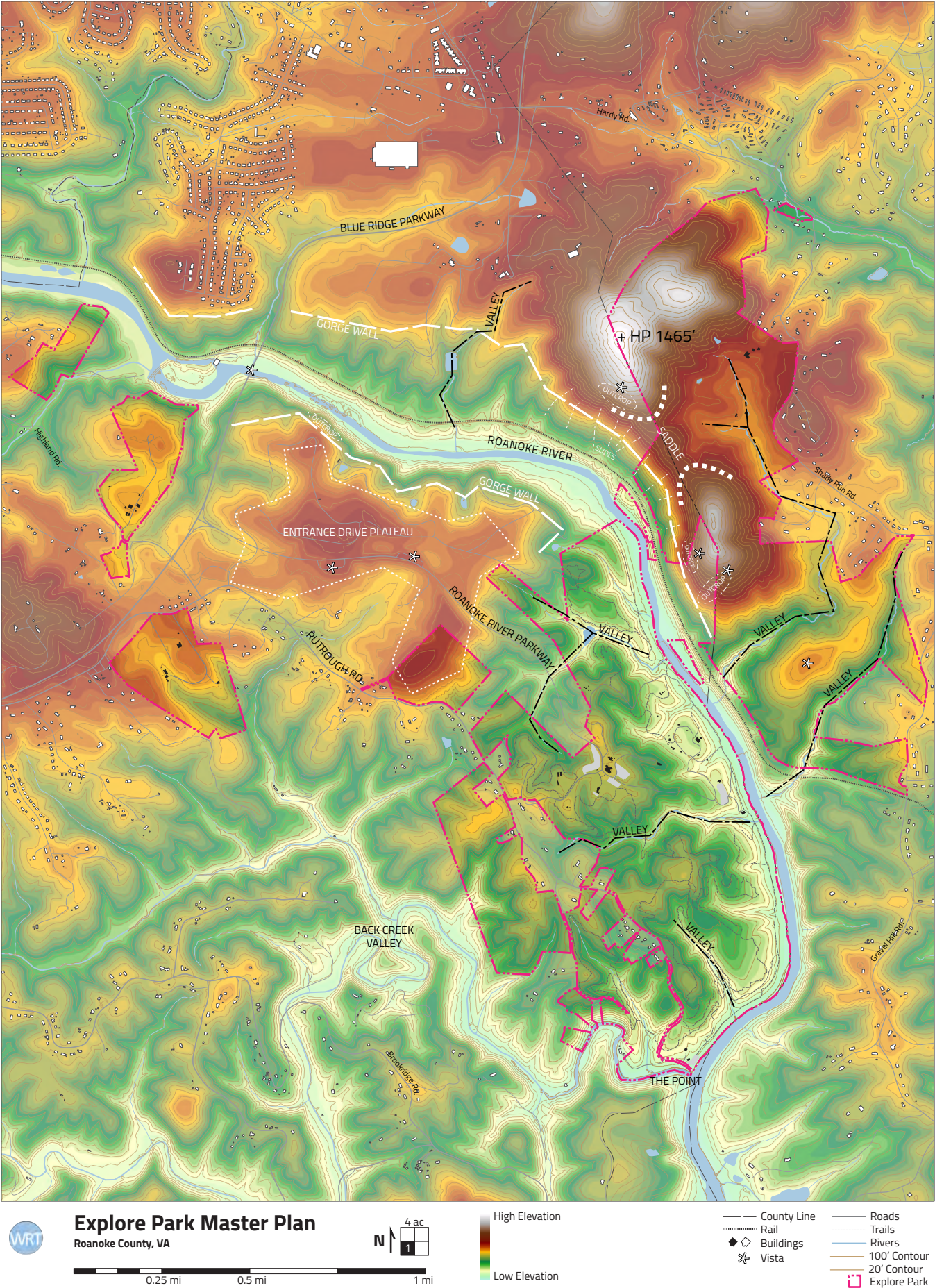
The Historic Area of Explore Park contains many structures, mapped here, that were brought together from locations outside the Park and reconstructed to create a model village.

However, through this master planning process, the team discovered many other existing but abandoned or neglected buildings that were inhabited in Explore Park long before the property came to be in the public domain. These “native” structures provide a level of authenticity

and cultural context for visitors to understand. The activities of these early settlers are also visible in the landscape, whether as forest clearings, stone walls, or old roadbeds.

The Norfolk Southern Railroad cuts along the Explore Park East parcels, connecting the Park to its history as a major trade route through the mountains to the coastal piedmont. The Niagara Dam on the Roanoke River also showcases the infrastructural heritage of this region.





NATURAL RESOURCES

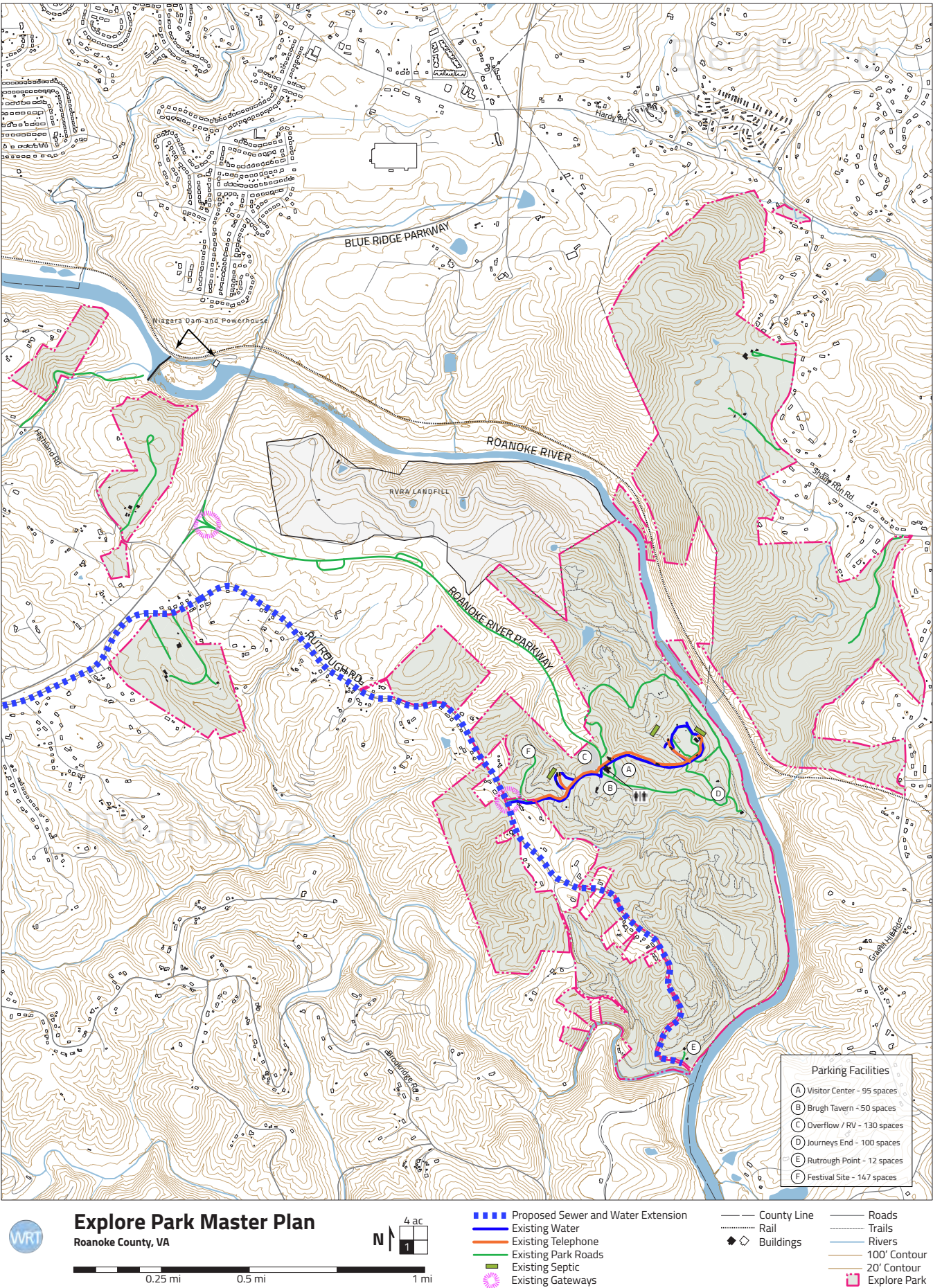
Explore Park is dominated by rugged terrain, with slopes ranging from relatively flat to almost vertical. The Roanoke River cuts a defined gap through the Park and the Appalachian Mountains here, with a narrow floodplain. The Park property rises 600’ from the riverbed to its highest point.

The Roanoke County side of the Park is marked by a series of ridges, split by creek valleys that run down to the River. The only level areas in the Park are found on top of these ridges, and in

select areas along the River. The highest parts of the Park are found along the county line, at the summits of Pine Mountain (1362’) and Black Gum Mountain (1,465’).

Deep ravines cut around a central plateau in the southern part of the Bedford County parcel, creating an elevated zone that is difficult to approach from the river, but easily accessed from Shady Run Road.





UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION

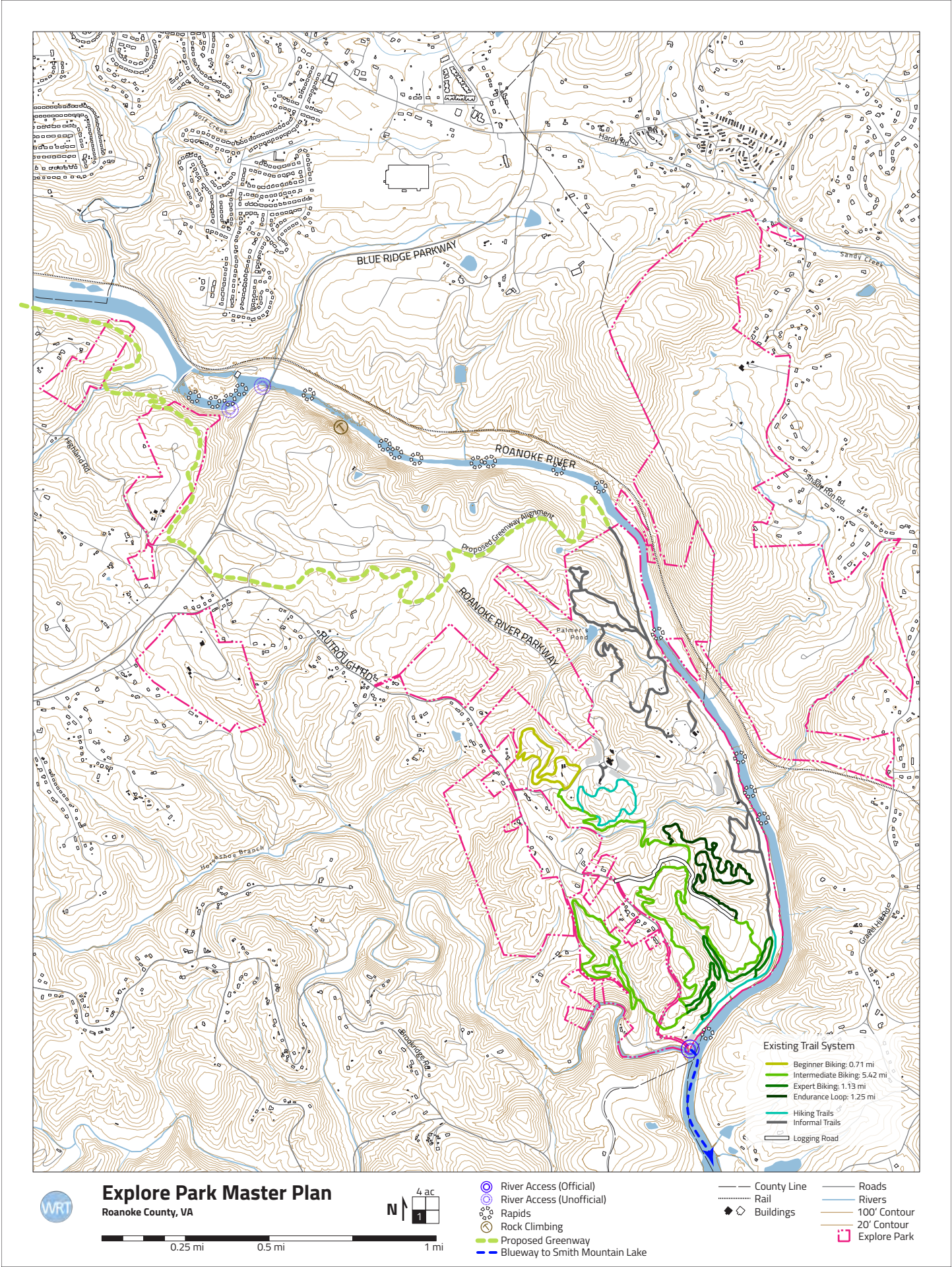
Utilities are clustered in Explore Park West, and access roads lead visitors to parking lots behind the Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Center.

The existing loop road, known as the Old Salem Turnpike, provides access to the Historic Area. This gravel road frequently washes out or is rendered impassable. The outlying Mayflower and South Ops parcels have paved access points, with dirt roads that continue past locked gates. All existing roads in Bedford County are narrow

dirt or gravel tracks that act as driveways for remaining property owners or as access points for Roanoke County maintenance vehicles.

The principal entrance point to Explore Park is from the Roanoke River Parkway via the Blue Ridge Parkway. This road is subject to closure during the winter season or inclement weather by the National Park Service, which significantly decreases the accessibility of Explore park.





RECREATIONAL AMENITIES

Currently the major recreational features of Explore Park consist of trails that provide hikers and mountain bikers with access to the main park parcel along the Roanoke River.

The hiking trails are limited in their connectivity and variety, and many are overgrown and in need of upkeep. The biking trails are well-defined and provide visitors with trails of varying difficulty and duration. The proposed Roanoke River Greenway will approach Explore Park from

downtown Roanoke in the west, providing access through the landfill and a connection to the NPS trails near the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The Roanoke River’s informal access points give boaters a chance to paddle its waters and run different sets of rapids when the water is high.

There are currently no recreational amenities in Explore Park East.









SECTION IV  
**ADVENTURE CONCEPTS**







# DESIGN PRINCIPLES



**1**

LOOPS OF CIRCULATION MAKE IT EASY FOR VISITORS TO NAVIGATE THROUGH THE PARK AND EXPERIENCE ITS DIFFERENT OFFERINGS.

**2**

ADVENTURE NODES PROVIDE COMMON MEETING POINTS FOR THE CONVERGENCE OF EXPERIENCES, ALLOWING FOR CONCENTRATED DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE.

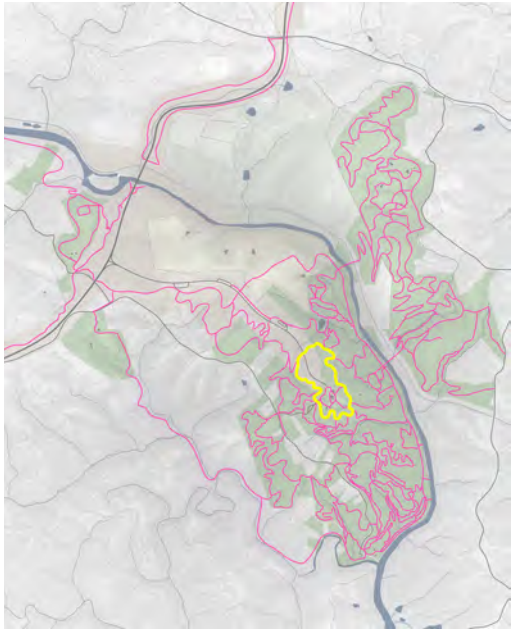
**3**

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR DIFFERENT USER GROUPS PROMOTE PARK STEWARDSHIP AMONG MANY CONSTITUENTS.

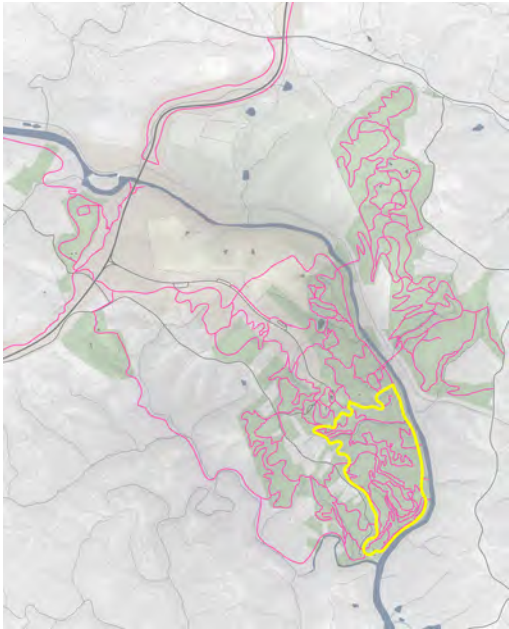
**4**

DIFFERENT AND INTERESTING EXPERIENCES DRIVE RETURN VISITS.

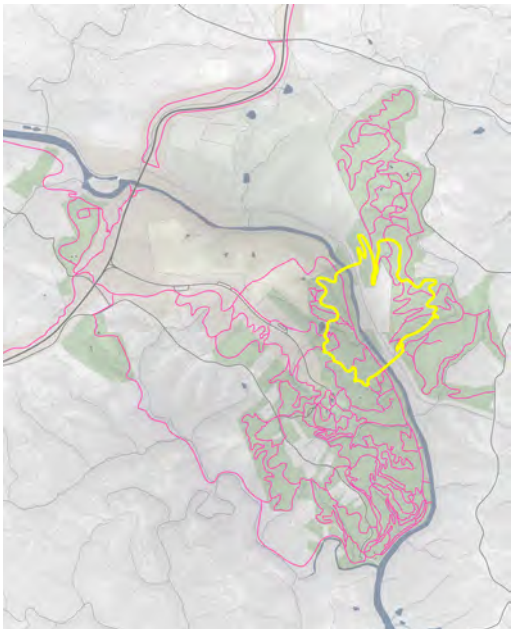




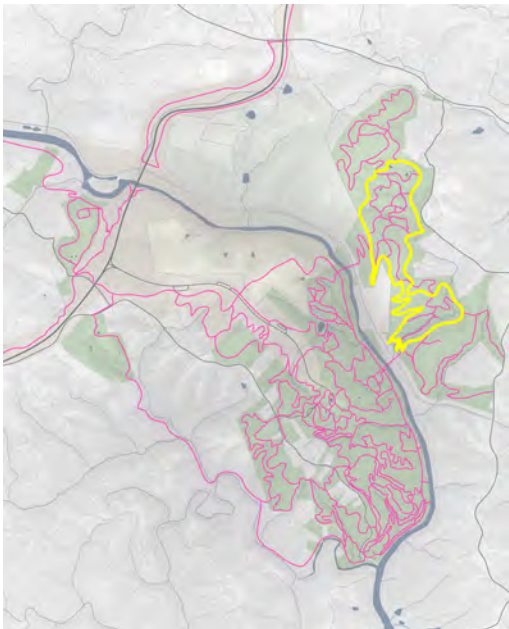
Core Loop: 1.3 miles / 30 minutes / Mellow



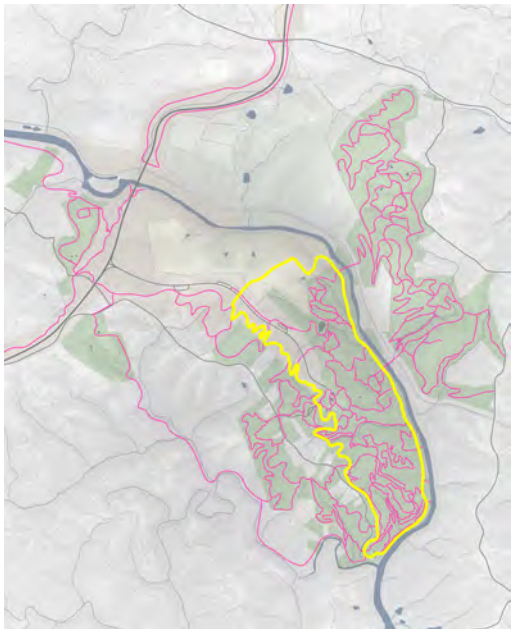
South Loop: 2.8 miles / 50 minutes / Mellow



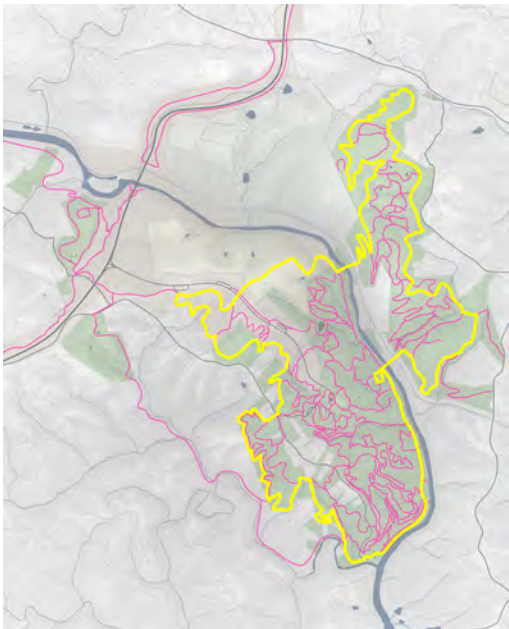
Central Loop: 3.4 miles / 1.5 hours / Moderate



East Loop: 3.9 miles / 2 hours / Moderate



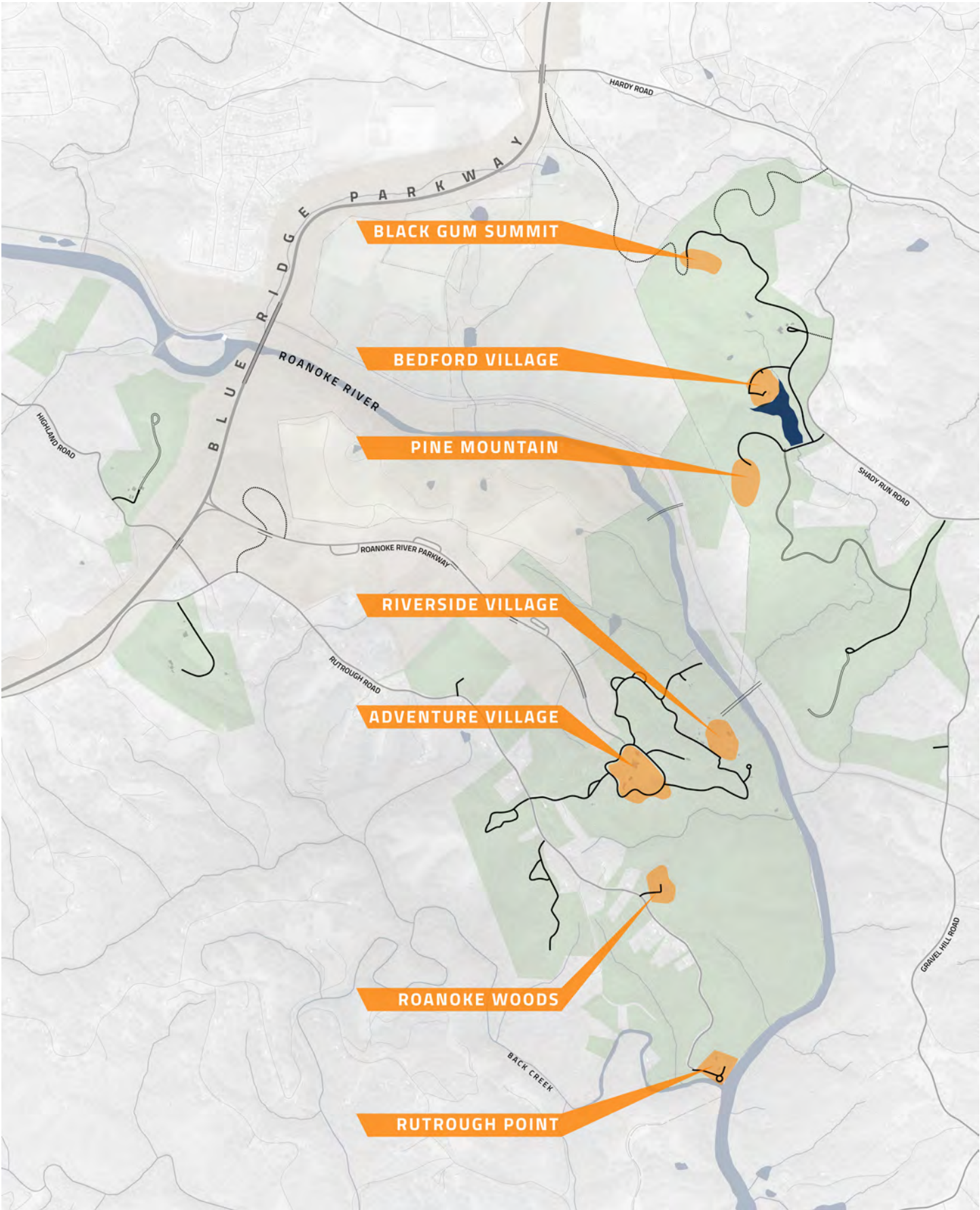
South Loop: 5.1 miles / 3 hours / Challenging



Outer Loop: 11.6 miles / 5 hours / Challenging

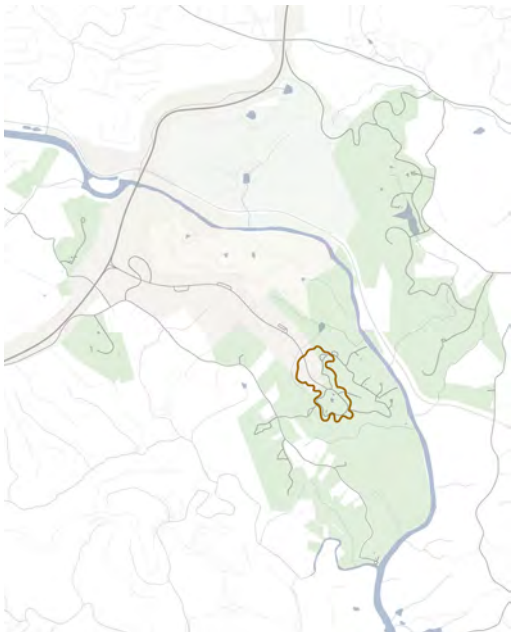
**1    LOOPS OF CIRCULATION MAKE IT EASY FOR VISITORS TO NAVIGATE THROUGH THE PARK AND EXPERIENCE ITS DIFFERENT OFFERINGS.**





**2 ADVENTURE NODES PROVIDE COMMON MEETING POINTS FOR THE CONVERGENCE OF EXPERIENCES ALLOWING FOR CONCENTRATED DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE.**





Core Loop, Hiking Only



Mountain Biking Only



Shared Trails



Hiking Only



Equestrian Only



Roanoke River Greenway, Shared

**3 ACCOMMODATIONS FOR DIFFERENT USER GROUPS PROMOTE PARK STEWARDSHIP AMONG MANY CONSTITUENTS.**





**4 DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES DRIVE RETURN VISITS.**



# ADVENTURE SCENARIOS

The following are example adventures for various user groups, showcasing different experiences for locals, visitors, children, adults, kayakers, bikers, and other kinds of outdoor enthusiasts. The possible combinations are limitless.

## SCHOOL FIELD TRIP

Explore Park is well positioned to handle multiple groups of students coming for a full day of adventure. Check-in and orientation is held in the Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Center, and excursions of varying lengths and difficulty can be chosen to suit the needs of the group, depending on age, group size, experience, or educational topic.

While learning about ecological processes and the value of our natural resources, the students will be hiking through the woods and geologic features, viewing wildlife, tackling the climbing tower, and exploring the Roanoke River. Overnight accommodations would make for a true adventure, with group camping areas available at the Shady Run Campground.



## EMPTY-NESTER ROAD TRIP

For folks who are looking for a mellower adventure, Explore Park has a wealth of resources and accommodations ready to answer the call. Due to its easy access off the Blue Ridge Parkway, many road-trippers will find Explore Park to be a necessary stop along the journey.

The Park will attract travelers by providing lodging and dining options and the opportunity to spend some time off the motorcycle or out of the car. Those visitors intending only to stop for gas or a restroom may find themselves wanting to stay and explore, and come back another time.



## PADDLING TRIP

In spring the Roanoke River runs high, and whitewater rapids appear at many points along its three mile length through Explore Park. The Park could be seen as a starting point for paddlers making their way towards Smith Mountain Lake, or also as a resting point along a longer Roanoke River trip.

By providing numerous access points for paddlers, along with outfitters and potentially river guides, Explore Park will become a destination for visitors looking for a water-based adventure.





**AFTER WORK MOUNTAIN BIKE SESSION**



The ideal place to take a quick ride after work, with easy access off Rutrough Road, Explore Park offers mountain bikers a welcoming network of trails of varying length and difficulty.

A looping route through the southern end of the Park covers over four miles, while the maze of switchback trails and technical riding above the Roanoke River offers an opportunity for more challenge. Just off the parking area is the bike skills course and jump track, both of which could be filled with riders showcasing their talents in the evening hours.

**FAMILY VACATION**



For an extended summer vacation destination, Explore Park offers an excellent mix of activity and excitement with events and down time to fill a week and keep everyone happy.

Guests that arrive by RV will find the conveniences of the service station and a well-apportioned parking pad with necessary hook-ups. From the RV campground it’s only a short walk to either the Adventure Village or down to Rutrough Point along the Roanoke River.

With miles of walking trails, challenge courses for all ages, and family-friendly entertainment, Explore Park will become a popular year-round destination.

**ADVENTURE RACE**



The rugged and varied terrain of Explore Park, in addition to its size, gives adventure racers a real challenge. By combining a land race with river elements, crossing into both counties, and linking adventure elements with natural features, racers will find the course exhilarating and demanding.

With plenty of room around the Adventure Village, staging areas and start/finish zones are easily accommodated. Vendor tents, spectator areas, and post-race events can all be handled by the size and capacity of Explore Park.









SECTION V  
**EXPLORE PARK  
ADVENTURE PLAN**



ROADS

The Blue Ridge Parkway is the primary tourist route to the Park and serves residents who arrive from beyond the immediate vicinity. The Blue Ridge Parkway currently connects to the Park by way of the Roanoke River Parkway, designed as a 1.5 mile extension of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The Roanoke River Parkway was developed by the National Park Service on NPS land, to its standards for parkways, and as such provides a very attractive and impressive passage to the Park. Rutrough Road serves as a local access point to the Park, at a service entrance on Chestnut Ridge Road. There is no developed access to Explore Park East.

The proposed plan retains the Blue Ridge Parkway / Roanoke River Parkway access and expands upon it by providing a new half-mile connection for local traffic from Rutrough Road. The connection follows the route of a landfill maintenance driveway from Rutrough Road, crossing beneath the Roanoke River Parkway by way of an existing underpass, and connecting to the Roanoke River Parkway at a T intersection. This will direct most traffic to the grand parkway entrance of Explore Park.

The Chestnut Ridge Road access point will remain as a secondary gateway, providing service access to the Adventure Village, a vehicular connection to Rutrough Point, and a link between the proposed RV campground west of Rutrough and the Village, gas station/sanitary dump station, and country store. Two access points will be provided to the parcel west of Rutrough Road to reach the development pods proposed as an RV campground complex. Access points from Rutrough Road will provide access to the Mayflower parcel and from Highland Road to the South Ops parcel.

To connect Explore Park West and Explore Park East, a new vehicular river crossing was studied. The connection is feasible but costly. The master plan allows for the decision to be made for either a pedestrian only or combined pedestrian-vehicular bridge if development pressure demands it. The plan is presently configured for a pedestrian-only bridge.

Explore Park East is currently inaccessible. The proposed plan recommends five potential access points at Hardy Road (1), Shady Run Road (3) and Gravel Hill Road (1) that could be developed individually to limit the need for an internal park road. However, an internal road will become increasingly important to the user experience and viability of major activity programs in Explore Park East.

Depending on development strategy and the desire to limit entrance points, the number of

access points could be reduced if and when an internal park road is constructed. At such time certain access points could be gated for use as service access or to manage traffic from major events.

A potential future connection to the Blue Ridge Parkway is proposed at the Hardy Road bridge crossing. This would provide high visibility access to this side of the Park, a more convenient access point for those coming from Explore Park West, open up the recreational development potential of the private conservancy parcels, and better establish the Explore Park identity in Bedford County.

Internal park roads are proposed for all parcels. The existing road system alignment in Explore Park West will be retained and improved for all weather access and engineering performance. In future phases, the Adventure Village circulation system will transition from the existing crossroads intersection in the center of the Village to a half-mile loop road that will serve as a hub for the five roads that converge on the ridge. The loop / hub concept will remove vehicles from the core of the Village, allowing for a safer, more attractive and family friendly pedestrian space at the Village.

The proposed condition will also create a dramatically improved entry from the Parkway, presenting the Village Green as the first view of Explore Park proper, rather than a parking lot. It is believed that this action plus the proposed pedestrian bridge will have the greatest beneficial experiential and visual impacts on the Park, and best signify the new Explore Park.

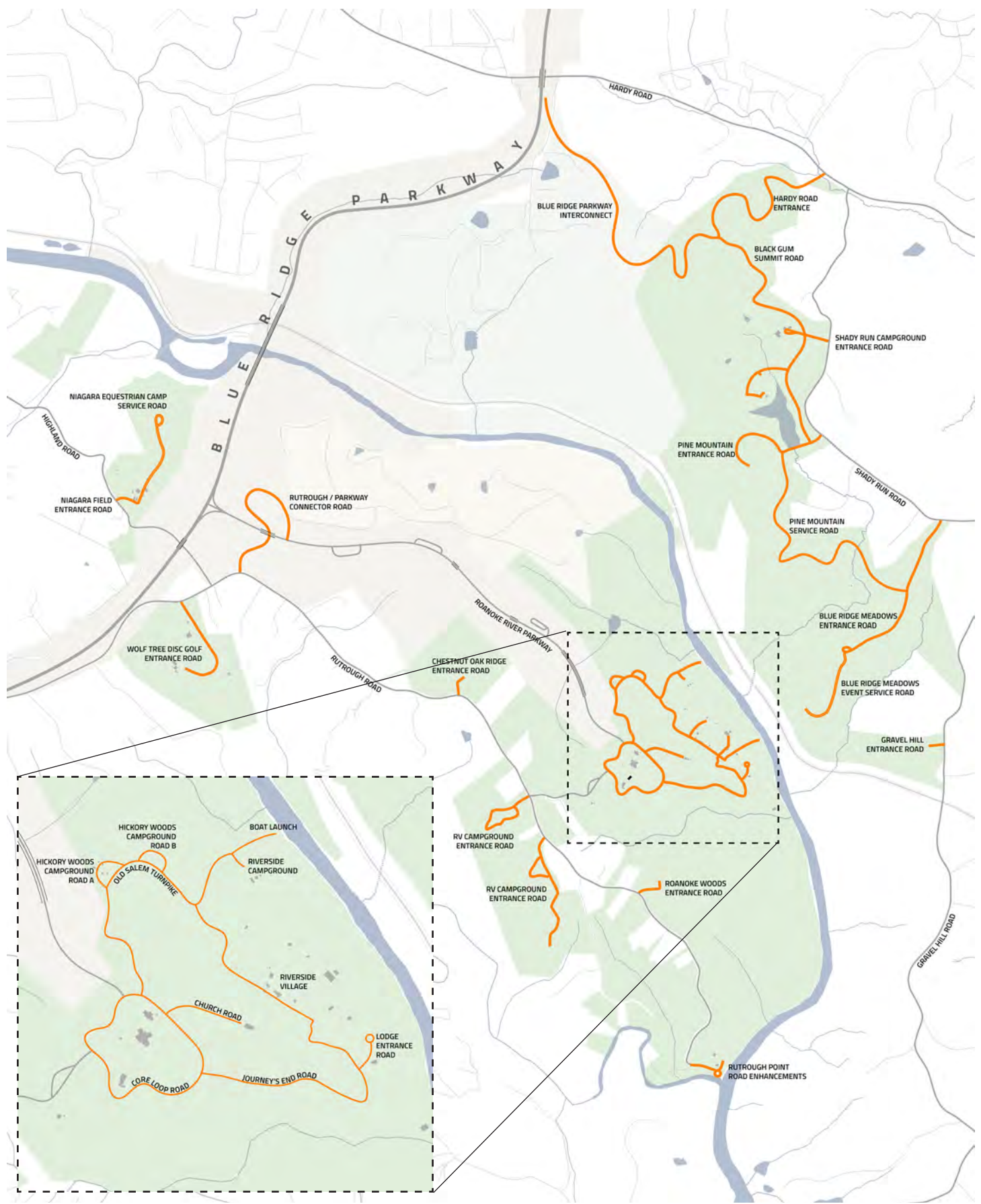
The Journey’s End Road will follow the existing alignment from the ridge to the lower slope connecting to the Lodge, then will traverse northwest to connect with the Old Salem Turnpike, which provides access to the Riverside Campground, Hickory Woods Campground, and the boat launch.

The three-quarter mile Back Creek RV camping complex roads will provide access from Rutrough Road connecting two pods with one road and one with another, providing flexibility for phasing the camping program.

The Mayflower parcel will be accessed from Rutrough Road, by the existing farm road which will be improved to park standards and extended to the former farm compound.

The Niagara (South Ops) Parcel will be accessed from Highland Road. The existing farm road will be improved to the proposed trailhead parking lot and barn complex. From there a gravel road will provide access to the equestrian parking area.





Road System of Explore Park.



TRAILS

Explore Park’s proposed trail system includes 38.5 miles of trails designed to accommodate a wide range of abilities and interests. The system is divided into categories, based on surface material and design, and difficulty.

Outside the Park and connecting to it are the National Park Service trails on the Blue Ridge Parkway, and approaching the Park from downtown Roanoke is the Roanoke River Greenway, which is proposed to extend into the Park along the River. Within the Park, in order of challenge and formality from easiest to hardest are the Village Green Loop, the Core Loop, Primary Trails, Secondary Trails and Tertiary Trails. Trails are also set aside for mountain bikers and equestrians. The trail system will connect all activity areas and most major features in the Park. Trails will be accessible from trailheads located throughout the Park.

Explore Park will be connected to the Blue Ridge Parkway’s extensive proposed trail network which includes hiking and equestrian trails, and via the proposed Roanoke River Greenway, to Roanoke and other connecting greenways in the Roanoke Valley Greenway system.

The trail system of Explore Park starts with the extensive 14 mile network of hiking and biking trails that currently exists. From this base, a new hierarchical stacked loop system presents different trail experiences and lengths for users with different skill levels or timeframes.

As the primary arrival and orientation point in the Park, the Adventure Village provides the easiest and most refined trail around the Village Green, a level, paved walk of about 1/4 mile, with a design character suited to the more developed village. Coupled with a segment of the Core Loop Trail, it offers an easy walk of about 1/2 mile around the outer perimeter of the Village.

The Core Loop Trail will be a 1.25 mile ADA-accessible route around the village and north to a bridge underpass beneath the Roanoke River Parkway.

The Primary Trail System will connect the villages and adventure nodes and connect Explore Park East and West at the proposed pedestrian and the proposed catenary “swinging bridge” farther north. Primary trails will be paved, eight feet wide, and generally ADA-accessible.

Secondary Trails will provide loops off the primary trails and connect other features such as

Activity Zones and special features. Secondary trails will be four feet wide, paved where steepness and erosion resistance dictates, and traverse steeper grades and may not be ADA accessible.

Tertiary Trails will be more rugged single track trails suited for backcountry hiking and mountain biking. These trails will be two feet wide and will traverse slopes that range from level to very steep and challenging.

Trailheads will generally include vehicular access, parking, an orientation kiosk, trash receptacles, and signage.

Trail Junctions at trail intersections will include some combination of signage, seating, and design elements such as a wall, stonework, and planting. Trail Nodes including overlooks, special features, and other stopping points will include some combination of design elements such as widened path surface, seating, stonework, and planting.

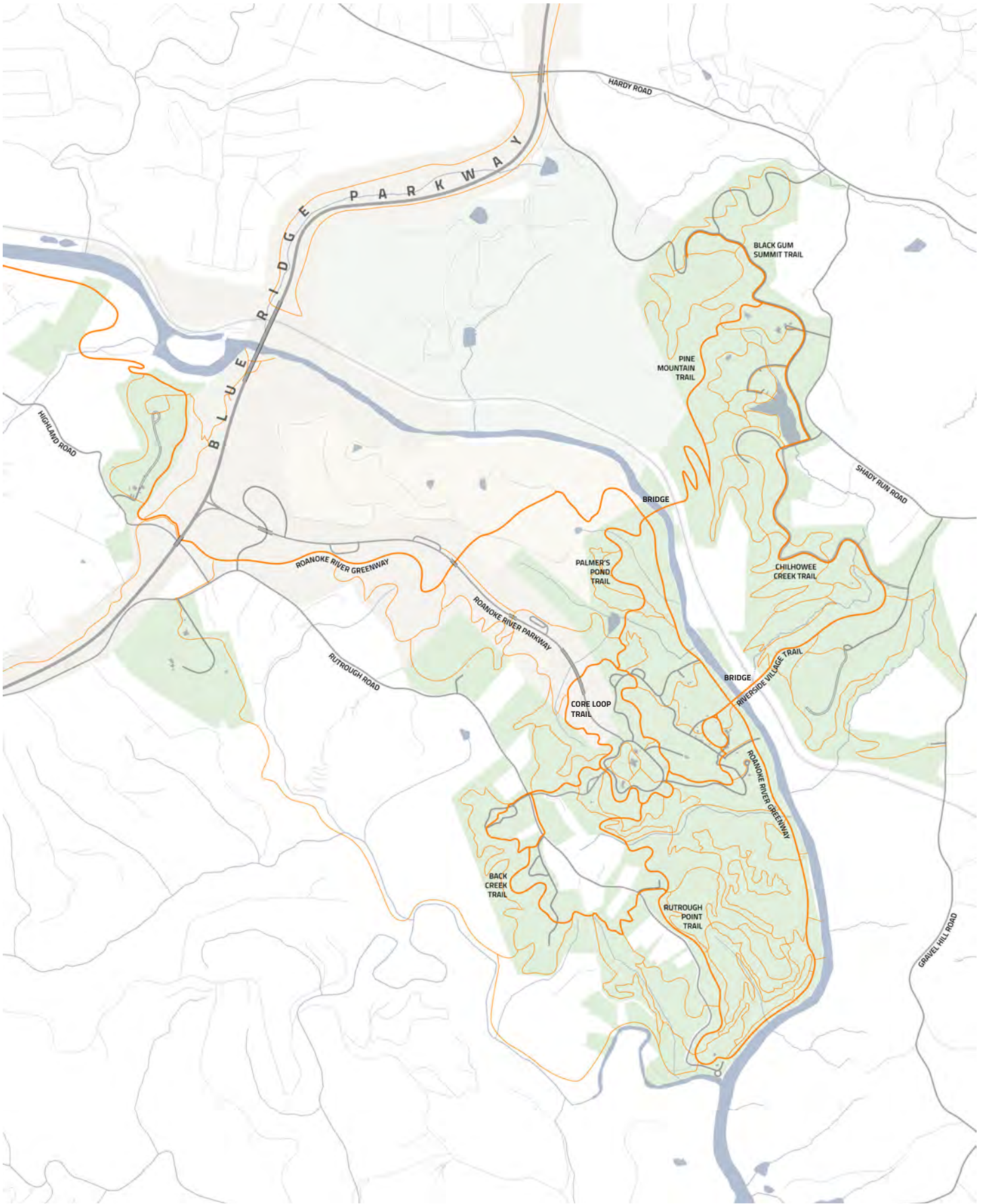
The two bridges will provide a unique experience of crossing the river and will be designed as signature elements of the Park and Roanoke River Gorge. To avoid conflict with the Norfolk Southern Railroad line in Explore Park East, the bridges will pass above the rail line with sufficient minimum clearance. This elevation will eliminate flood damage and will place the bridges high enough to be seen as major aerial features in the gorge, thus requiring special attention to design to complement the scenic quality of this special landscape. The pedestrian bridge connecting from Riverside Village will be twelve feet wide and able to accommodate light service vehicles such as gators. The “swinging bridge” will be a more adventurous catenary or cable suspension design that will be for pedestrians only.

This map shows major trails that connect the various areas of Explore Park. Secondary and tertiary trails exist within this framework, as well as the existing and expanded mountain bike trail network.

Trails that have been removed will be allowed to return to forest condition and fenced off so that they don’t continue to cause conflict and confusion with new trails.

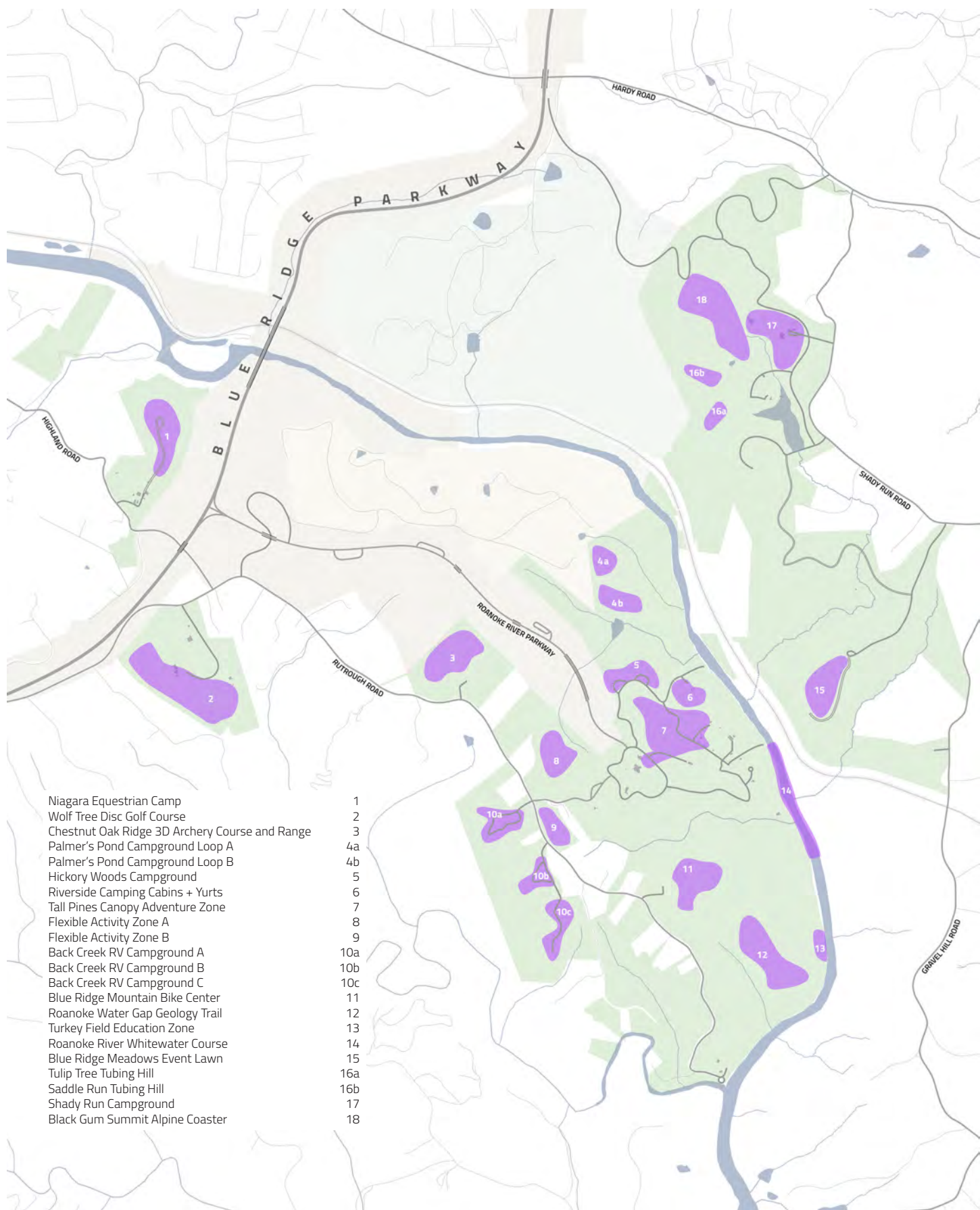
Trails in Bedford County have been designed to utilize old farm and forest roads where possible, while running parallel to topography to limit erosion potential.





Major trails of Explore Park.





ACTIVITY ZONES

Activity Zones in Explore Park include program areas that are located to take advantage of natural terrain features, such as the gentle sloping lawn of Blue Ridge Meadows, or the relatively flat plateaus set aside for RV camping.

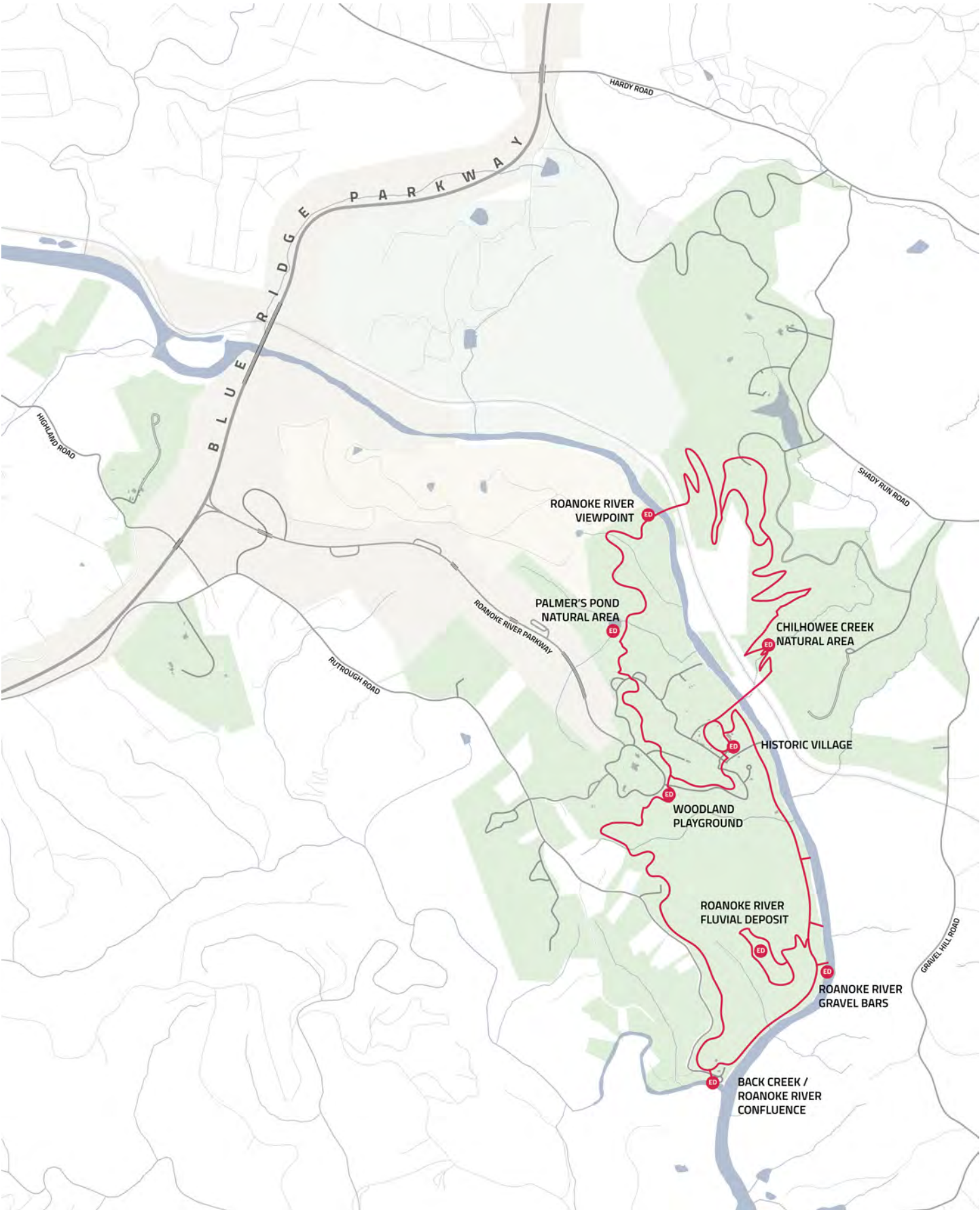
The uses are also laid out so that they are easily reachable along major trails and circulation routes. By placing Activity Zones at trail junctions and providing parking, they become easier to find and easier to access.

Those uses that might cause conflict if they were found in more populated areas, such as the Archery Range and Disc Golf Course, are set aside to create separation from busy core areas.

River uses follow this pattern, with the active whitewater course set apart from fishing access points.

Please refer to Section VI, which begins on page 67 for detailed descriptions.





EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

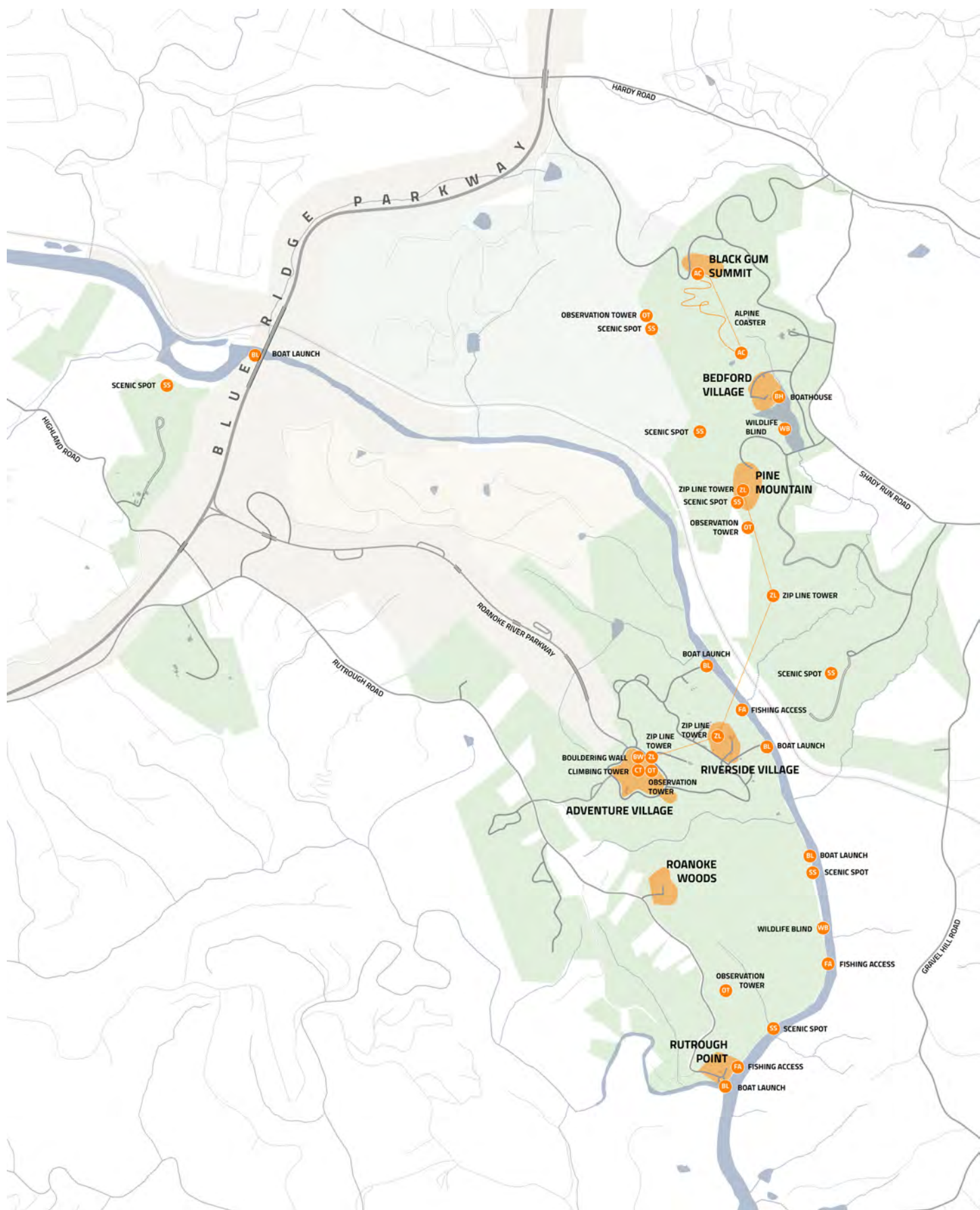
Numerous educational opportunities (ED on the map) are presented by Explore Park, both from an ecological and historic perspective. The Special Places Inventory Report details these opportunities.

Of note are the Palmer’s Pond Natural Area, and the ancient Roanoke River Fluvial Deposit. These are areas of the Park that have been largely preserved. The pond area did not attract much overuse because of its boggy condition, and the

rocky debris of the deposit did not make for good mountain biking or hiking, thus sparing it any real harm from erosion or compaction.

Many more points in the Park, from old stone walls, old growth trees, and signs of former settlement make for an interesting and layered educational foundation. The above map shows sample routes that highlight some of the educational features of the Park.





ADVENTURES

The points shown on the map are facilities where the public may engage in park activities that present challenges or go beyond the standard hiking trails and picnic pavilions.

These facilities include the zip lines, high ropes courses, whitewater, fishing, observation towers, scenic viewpoints, and many more. They are spread across the Park in such a way that allows

visitors to set off from an Adventure Node and begin a journey that can last the morning, all day, or multiple days.

By presenting them this way, each visitor can choose their experience and link together their own adventure. When these facilities are layered with events and hospitality choices, a trip to Explore Park becomes different every time.





EVENT VENUES

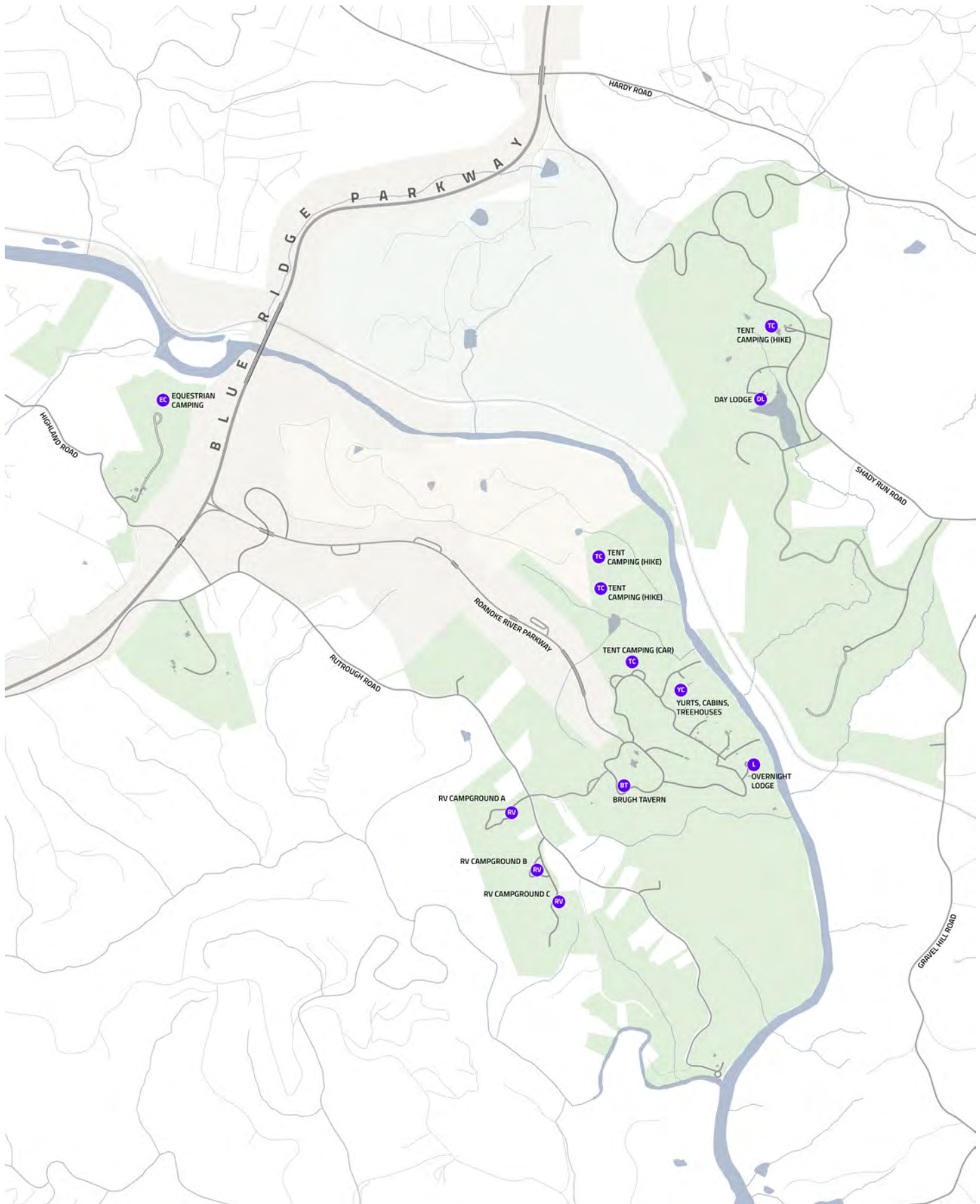
Event venues found in Explore Park are designed to meet the requirements needed for all different types of performances and gatherings. Small Picnic Pavilions allow groups to come together for lunch or dinner, and the 7.2 acre Blue Ridge Meadows Event Lawn could hold thousands of people for an outdoor concert.

Indoor events are also accommodated at the Exhibition Hall and the Conference Center. These

facilities are designed to host evening events or multi-day gatherings.

The Mountain Union Church remains and is served by a better access road and parking for its central location in the Park. Care has been taken to keep incompatible uses away from the Church vicinity.





HOSPITALITY

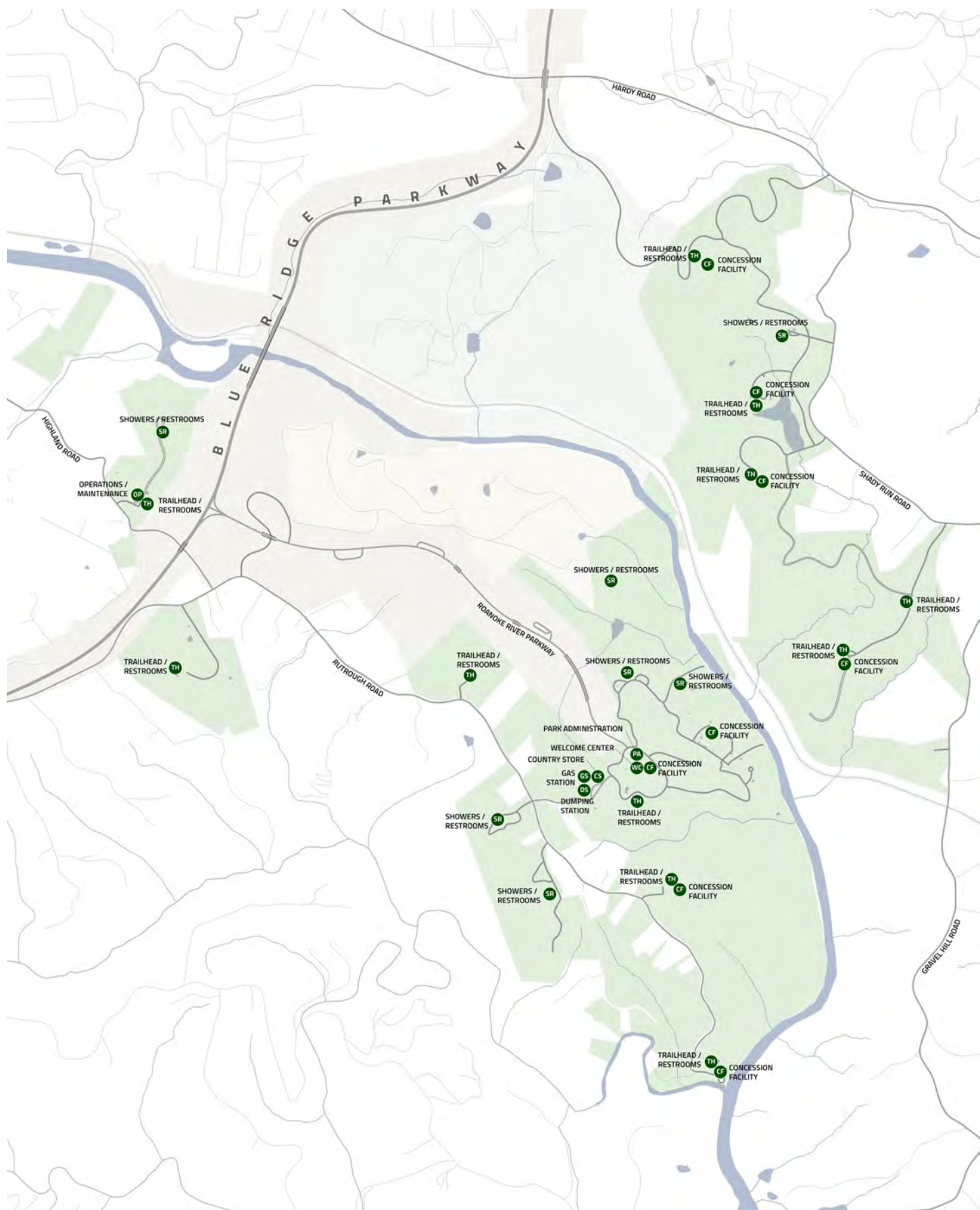
Diverse overnight accommodation options will be available in Explore Park. Primitive tent camping is found after a short hike, and car camping is set back in the woods, but still easily accessed by vehicles. Yurts, cabins, and treehouses present a signature experience for families or groups.

RV travelers can easily continue into their campgrounds from the main park entrance, and find hookups to access all their modern conveniences. An improved Brugh Tavern is

located in the Adventure Village, providing dining options for all park guests.

In Bedford County, the Shady Run Campground provides tent camping sites, and is sized to accommodate larger groups of campers. The Day Lodge provides respite for visitors to the Park that just need facilities for daily use.





ADMINISTRATION, OPERATIONS, AND SERVICES

The plan calls for a centrally-located Park Administration facility, located in the Arthur Taubman Center. From here, guests can get information and check in to their campsites, and offices are provided for park officials.

The Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Center continues to provide visitors with the larger perspective on the region through exhibits and educational talks. The Center includes information about activities and maps of the Park, which are also found

scattered throughout the grounds at the various trailhead shelters located at key trail junctions. These shelters have informational kiosks and restrooms, and give park visitors a consistent, recognizable element to help them navigate the Park.

The Operations Center for the Park, which includes storage for maintenance vehicles and equipment, and staff meeting space and lockers, is located in the South Ops parcel.









SECTION VI  
**PARK DEVELOPMENT AREAS**



# A PLAN FOR ACTIVITIES

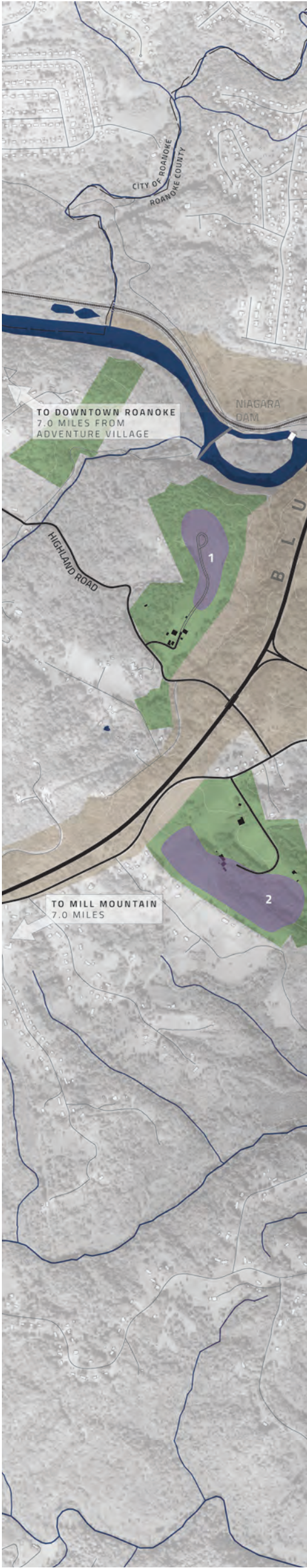
The following pages describe in detail the various Activity Zones that make up the programs found within Explore Park. These zones are loosely defined areas, intended to indicate places where uses and resources correspond to benefit user experiences.

LEGEND

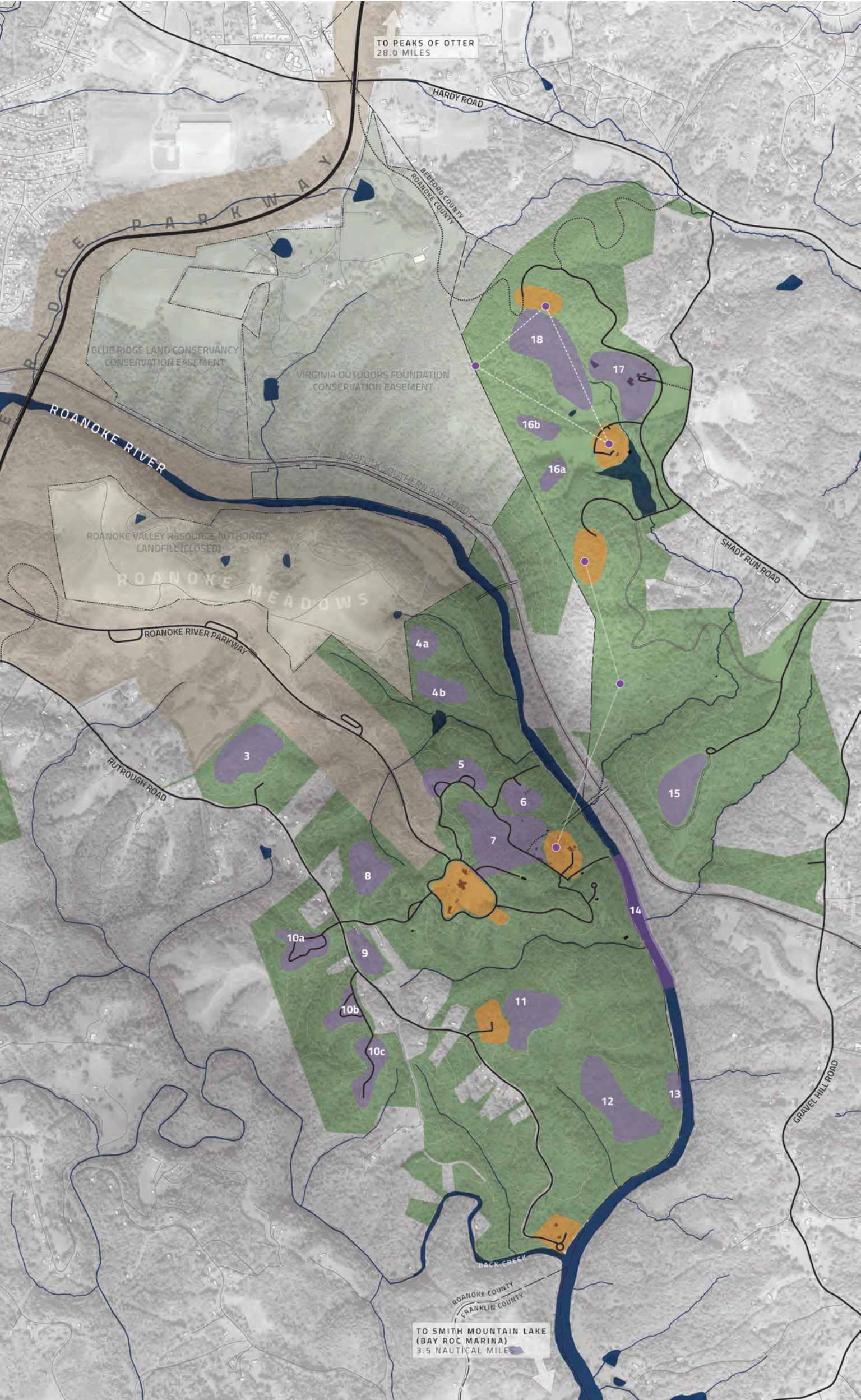
Activity Zones

- 1 Niagara Equestrian Camp
- 2 Wolf Tree Disc Golf Course
- 3 Chestnut Oak Ridge Archery Range
- 4a Palmer’s Pond Campground Loop A
- 4b Palmer’s Pond Campground Loop B
- 5 Hickory Woods Campground
- 6 Riverside Camping Cabins + Yurts
- 7 Tall Pines Canopy Adventure Zone
- 8 Flexible Activity Zone A
- 9 Flexible Activity Zone B
- 10a Back Creek RV Campground A
- 10b Back Creek RV Campground B
- 10c Back Creek RV Campground C
- 11 Blue Ridge Mountain Bike Center
- 12 Roanoke Water Gap Geology Trail
- 13 Turkey Field Education Zone
- 14 Roanoke River Whitewater Course
- 15 Blue Ridge Meadows Event Lawn
- 16a Tulip Tree Tubing Hill
- 16b Saddle Run Tubing Hill
- 17 Shady Run Campground
- 18 Black Gum Summit Alpine Coaster

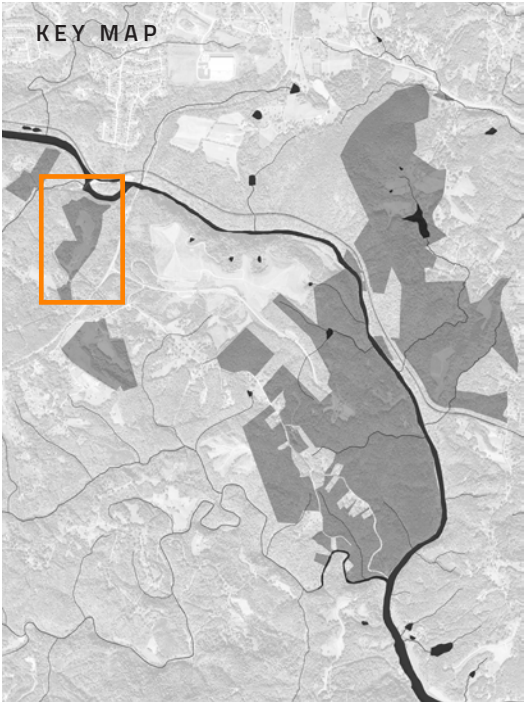
Roads











THE SOUTH OPS PARCEL

Parcel size: 49.3 acres  
Activity zone: 8.4 acres

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Niagara Equestrian Camp sits on a stand-alone parcel of Explore Park known colloquially as “South Ops.” The parcel abuts the NPS Blue Ridge Parkway easement, and is accessed from Highland Road.

A number of structures near the entrance contain supplies and machinery from previous park operations, and currently serve as storage areas for maintenance equipment.

A gravel/dirt track leads farther into the property, terminating in a large clearing before the forest drops steeply away to the Roanoke River and the spillway below Niagara Dam.

PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

A new entrance gateway off Highland Road leads to a parking lot for 25 vehicles. A trailhead and restroom facility will also be constructed, at the intersection with the new Roanoke River Greenway.

Across the driveway from the parking lot will be the primary operations center for park maintenance and administration. Old buildings will be repurposed or maintained as storage, and a new structure will house equipment and vehicles, along with park operations offices.

From here a tertiary trail will wind its way along the west side of the property to connect with

the Greenway. In addition, a service road will continue past the operations center northwards to a turnaround in the clearing. This will provide equestrian campers and users access to loading and unloading points, and campsites. A shower and restroom facility, along with a large picnic pavilion will serve both campers and greenway users.

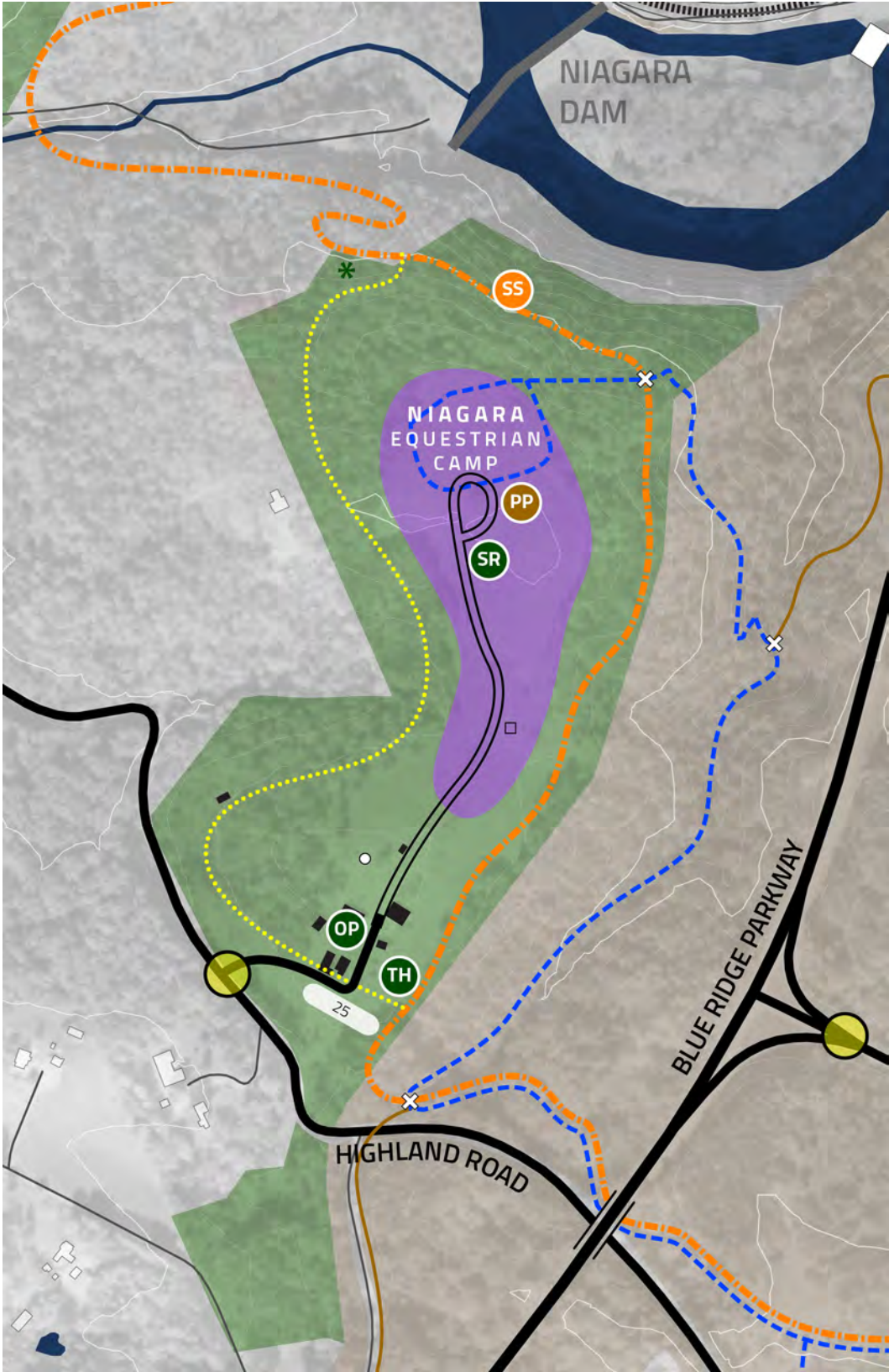
From this point, the Niagara Dam is easily heard, and in winter is visible. This is a backdrop and connection to the river that should be celebrated and maintained. A scenic viewpoint could be built along the greenway, to give visitors a chance to pause and either view or listen for the water flowing over the dam.

FACILITIES

- Scenic Spot (Potential Viewing Platform)
- Picnic Pavilion (50 - 100 visitors)
- Restroom/Showers (for equestrian users)
- Operations Center (offices, vehicle/machine storage)
- Trailhead/Restroom (for trail users, with kiosk)
- Parking Lot (25 vehicle spaces)

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY:

- 1. Maintain clearing through seasonal mowing.
- 2. Manage erosion on hillside.
- 3. Control invasive species.



PARK LEGEND

SERVICES

CF

Concession Facility

CS

Country Store

DS

Dump Station

GS

Gas Station

OP

Operations / Maintenance

PA

Park Admin. / Taubman

SR

Showers / Restrooms

TH

Trailhead / Restrooms

WC

Welcome Center

ADVENTURES

AC

Alpine Coaster

BH

Boathouse

BL

Boat Launch

BW

Bouldering Wall

CT

Climbing Tower

FA

Fishing Access

GL

Gondola Loop

OT

Observation Tower

SS

Scenic Spot

WB

Wildlife Blind

ZL

Zip Line

EVENT VENUES

CC

Conference Center

EH

Exhibition Hall

ES

Event Stage

MU

Mountain Union Church

PA

Picnic Area

PP

Picnic Pavilion

RL

Riverside Lawn

VG

Village Green

ED

Educational Zone

HOSPITALITY

BT

Brugh Tavern

DL

Day Lodge

EQ

Equestrian Camping

L

Lodge

RV

RV Camping

TC

Tent Camping

YC

Yurts / Cabins

CIRCULATION

Roads

Service Roads

Local Roads

Future Park Roads

Railroad

Core Loop (Hike Only)

Greenway (Hike/Bike)

Primary (Hike/Bike)

Secondary (Hike/Bike)

Secondary (Hike/Horse)

Secondary (Bike Only)

Secondary (Hike Only)

Tertiary (Hike Only)

NPS Trail System

Trail Junction

Parking Area

Gateway

Future Gateway

FEATURES

Old Growth Tree

Old Structure

Old Foundation

Rock Outcropping

Rock Cairn

Water Body

Rivers

Park Buildings

Private Buildings

LAND OWNERSHIP

Explore Park

Resource Authority

Protected Lands

National Park Service

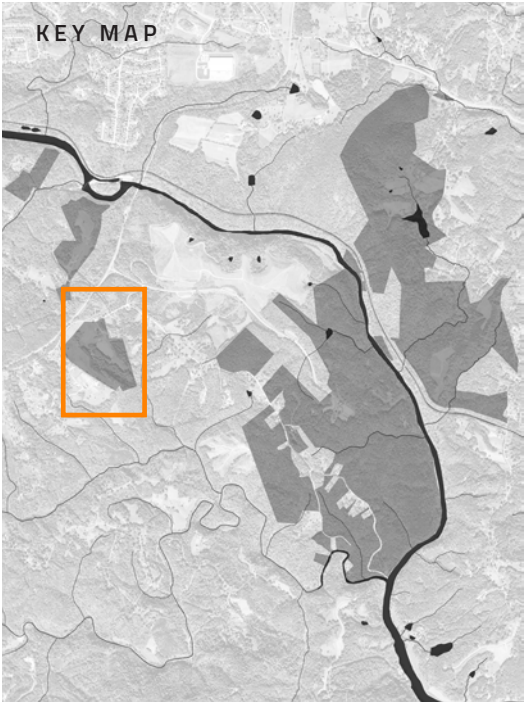
County Line

Contour interval = 20 Feet

N

200'





### MAYFLOWER HILLS PARK

Parcel size: 50.7 acres  
Activity zone: 18.4 acres

#### EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Mayflower parcel of Explore Park is bordered on the north by Rutrough Road and the NPS Blue Ridge Parkway easement. Currently there is a small playground, athletic field, parking lot, and picnic shelter, and farm buildings scattered towards the back of the property.

A small drainage runs down the middle of the parcel, to a dammed pond. A number of other nearby structures are in disrepair, and are currently used for storage or empty.

Of note is the sinkhole found in the northern field, demarcated with a fence, and stable for the time-being.

In addition to open fields and meadow grasses, this parcel has extensive forest cover, made of pine and mixed deciduous trees. The creek flows through the forest to the southeast, to the Horseshoe Branch, then meets Back Creek before joining the Roanoke River.

Currently the site is accessed by an entrance off Rutrough Road, with a paved drive leading to the parking lot and ending with a locked gate. The road from the gate onwards is a dirt track.

#### PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Of primary concern to this parcel is the removal of the abandoned structures, repaving

and grading of the entrance drive, and the establishment of a new trailhead and parking area for 25 cars.

This parking lot will serve visitors that arrive to use the proposed Wolf Tree Disc Golf Course, which will be laid out along the southwest half of the property. Pins and tee boxes will be arranged to make use of the rolling terrain and mix of open fields and forest spaces, to make an attractive and challenging course capable of drawing a regional user base.

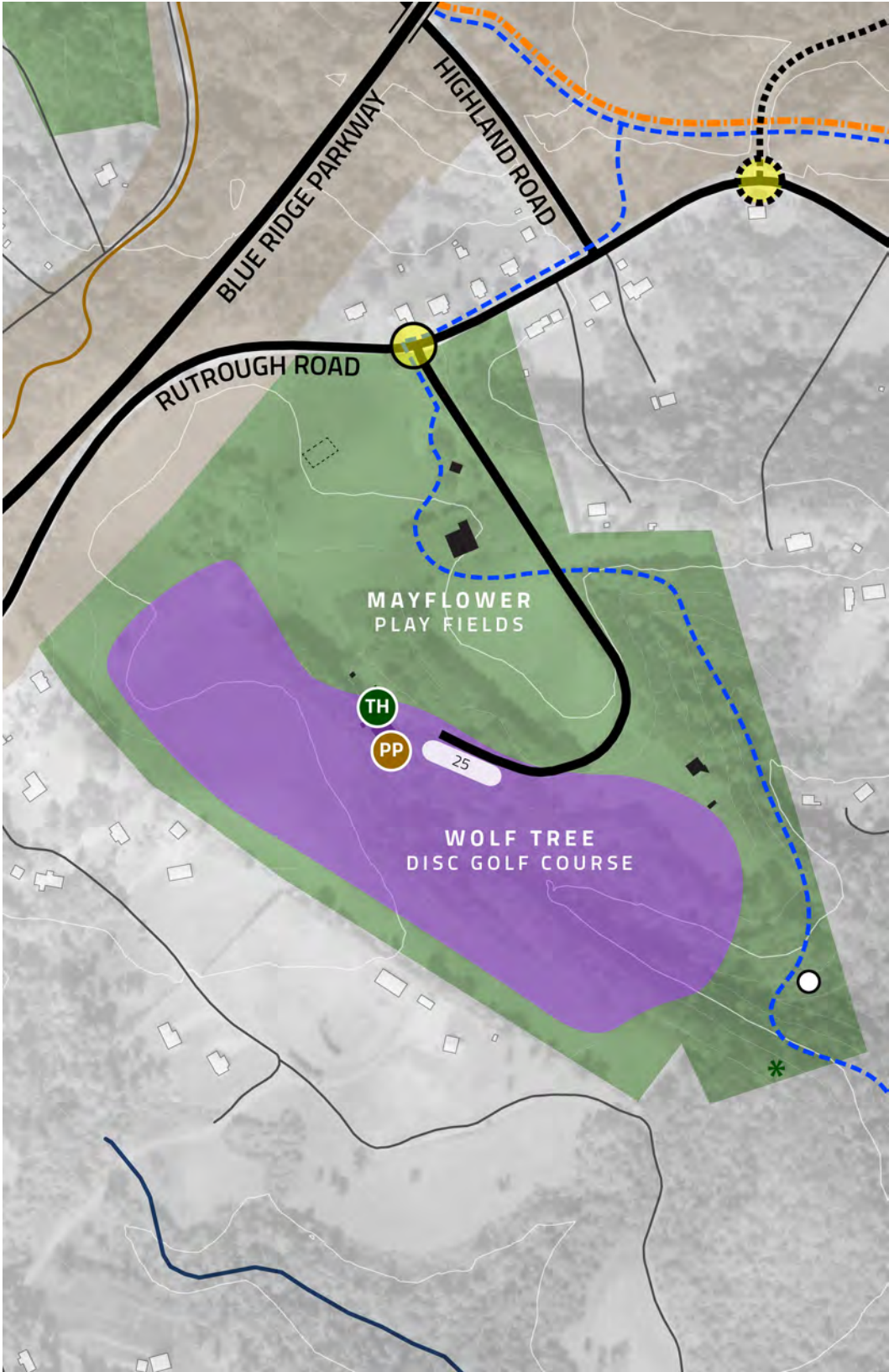
A new trailhead kiosk and restroom, along with a picnic pavilion, are provided in this area. The existing playground, play fields, parking area, and small picnic pavilion will remain. New signage and entrance features will enhance the gateway from Rutrough Road.

#### FACILITIES

- Trailhead/Restroom (playfield users and disc golfers)
- Picnic Pavilion (25 - 50 visitors)
- Parking Lot (25 vehicle spaces)

#### LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY:

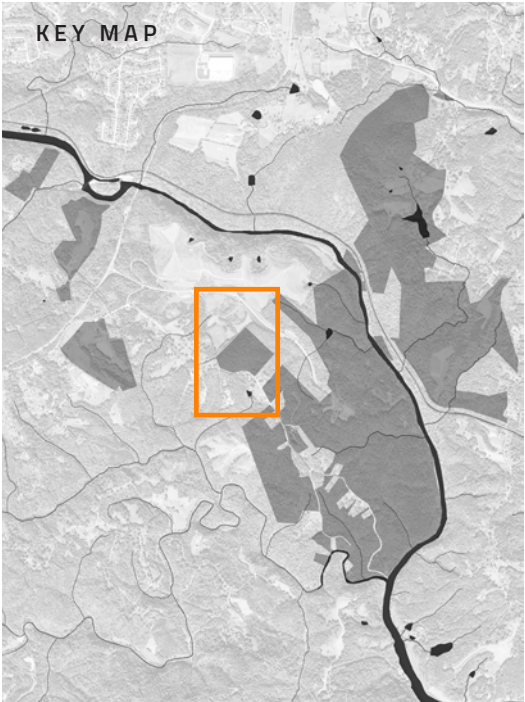
1. Control invasive species.
2. Maintain clearing / forest mix.
3. Manage compaction and erosion from disc golfers.



PARK LEGEND

SERVICES	CF	Concession Facility
	CS	Country Store
	DS	Dump Station
	GS	Gas Station
	OP	Operations / Maintenance
	PA	Park Admin. / Taubman
	SR	Showers / Restrooms
	TH	Trailhead / Restrooms
	WC	Welcome Center
ADVENTURES	AC	Alpine Coaster
	BH	Boathouse
	BL	Boat Launch
	BW	Bouldering Wall
	CT	Climbing Tower
	FA	Fishing Access
	GL	Gondola Loop
	OT	Observation Tower
	SS	Scenic Spot
	WB	Wildlife Blind
	ZL	Zip Line
EVENT VENUES	CC	Conference Center
	EH	Exhibition Hall
	ES	Event Stage
	MU	Mountain Union Church
	PA	Picnic Area
	PP	Picnic Pavilion
	RL	Riverside Lawn
	VG	Village Green
	ED	Educational Zone
HOSPITALITY	BT	Brugh Tavern
	DL	Day Lodge
	EQ	Equestrian Camping
	L	Lodge
	RV	RV Camping
	TC	Tent Camping
	YC	Yurts / Cabins
CIRCULATION		
		Roads
		Service Roads
		Local Roads
		Future Park Roads
		Railroad
		Core Loop (Hike Only)
		Greenway (Hike/Bike)
		Primary (Hike/Bike)
		Secondary (Hike/Bike)
		Secondary (Hike/Horse)
		Secondary (Bike Only)
		Secondary (Hike Only)
		Tertiary (Hike Only)
		NPS Trail System
		Trail Junction
		Parking Area
		Gateway
		Future Gateway
FEATURES		
		Old Growth Tree
		Old Structure
		Old Foundation
		Rock Outcropping
		Rock Cairn
		Water Body
		Rivers
		Park Buildings
		Private Buildings
LAND OWNERSHIP		
		Explore Park
		Resource Authority
		Protected Lands
		National Park Service
		County Line
		Contour interval = 20 Feet
		North Arrow
		Scale: 200'





THE WEST WOODS PARCEL

Parcel size: 26.4 acres  
Activity zone: 8.8 acres

EXISTING CONDITIONS

This parcel is dominated by Chestnut Oak trees, last logged between 80 - 100 years ago. Rock outcroppings protrude at the peak of the ridge. The parcel also has many tip-up mounds from toppled trees, creating an undulating surface that shows layers of forest regeneration over time.

The parcel is adjacent to the NPS easement, which has been cleared of trees. In the west corner, an old roadbed connects the property out to Rutrough Road.

PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Signage and gateway features will be created at a new entrance off Rutrough Road. From here, visitors will continue up a short entrance drive to a new parking lot for 25 vehicles. Those using the access point for hiking will find a welcoming trailhead kiosk with maps and information, along with a restroom. The trail from the parking lot offers two choices - head west towards NPS lands, or head east towards the Adventure Village.

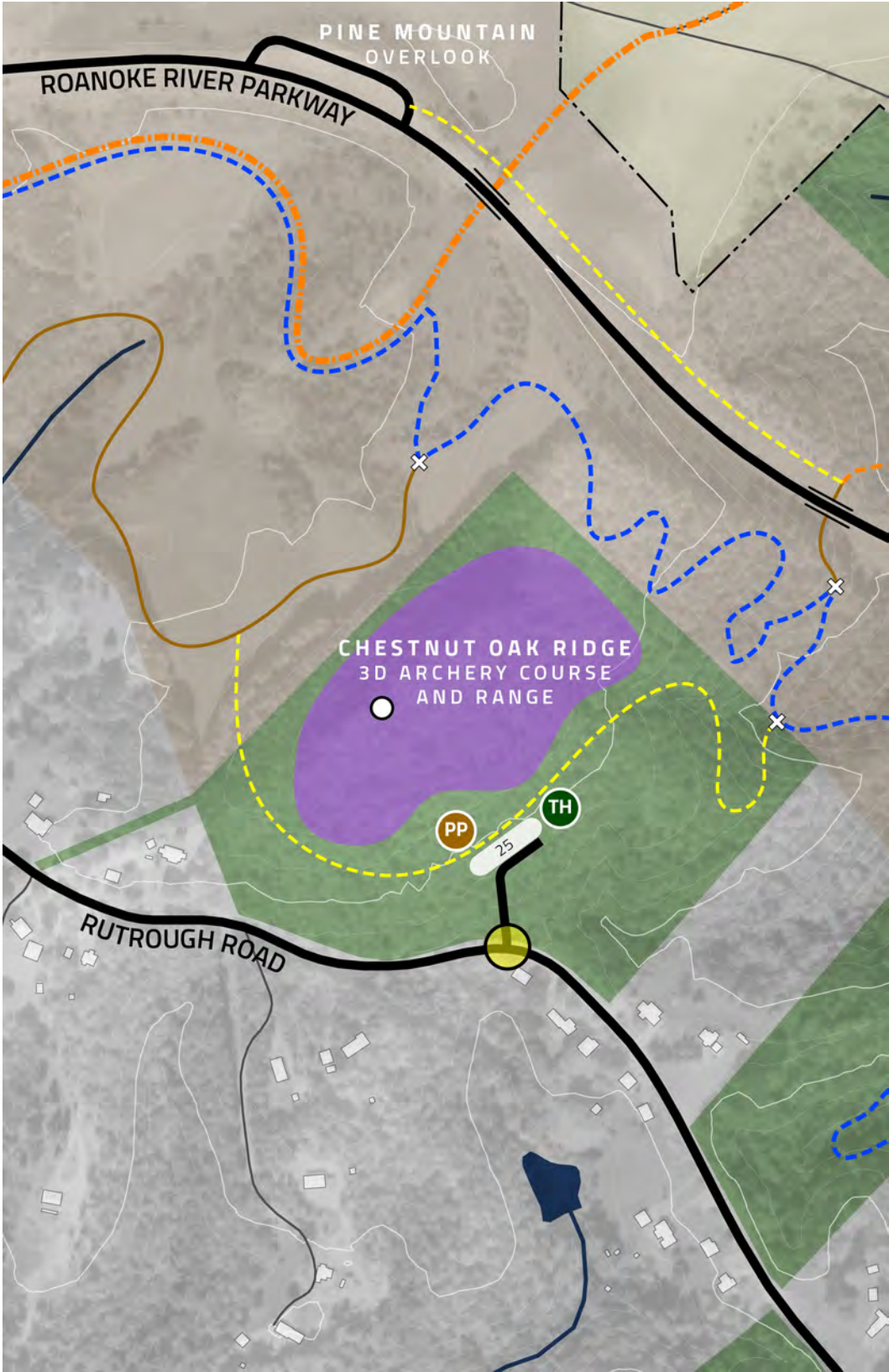
This trailhead facility will also serve visitors that are arriving to use the Chestnut Oak Ridge 3D Archery Course and Range. By placing the archery range in this parcel, conflict with other park users will be limited. The thick woods will provide interest and cover for targets, while a range will have to be cleared of trees to create the necessary zone for various distances and competitive shooting.

FACILITIES

- Trailhead/Restroom (for hikers and archers)
- Picnic Pavilion (25 - 50 visitors)
- Parking Lot (25 vehicle spaces)

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY:

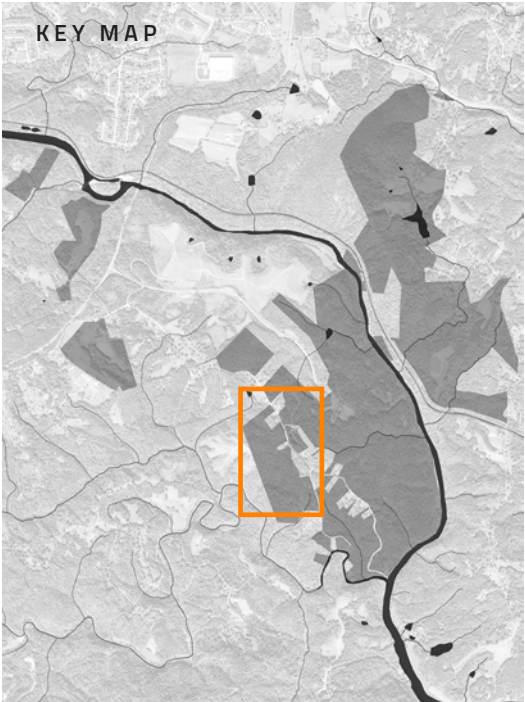
1. Maintain healthy oak forest through selective thinning.
2. Maintain tip-up mounds for educational purposes. Allow newly fallen trees to remain.



PARK LEGEND

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HOSPITALITY	BT	Brugh Tavern
	DL	Day Lodge
	EQ	Equestrian Camping
	L	Lodge
	RV	RV Camping
	TC	Tent Camping
	YC	Yurts / Cabins
CIRCULATION		Roads
		Service Roads
		Local Roads
		Future Park Roads
		Railroad
		Core Loop (Hike Only)
		Greenway (Hike/Bike)
		Primary (Hike/Bike)
		Secondary (Hike/Bike)
		Secondary (Hike/Horse)
FEATURES		Secondary (Bike Only)
		Secondary (Hike Only)
		Tertiary (Hike Only)
		NPS Trail System
		Trail Junction
		Parking Area
		Gateway
		Future Gateway
LAND OWNERSHIP		Old Growth Tree
		Old Structure
		Old Foundation
		Rock Outcropping
		Rock Cairn
		Water Body
		Rivers
		Park Buildings
		Private Buildings
		Explore Park
		Resource Authority
		Protected Lands
		National Park Service
		County Line
		Contour interval = 20 Feet
		N
		200'





### CHESTNUT RIDGE AND THE BACK CREEK PARCELS

Flex Pod A:	5.5 acres
Flex Pod B:	3.4 acres
RV Campground A:	5.3 acres
RV Campground B:	3.4 acres
RV Campground C:	5.1 acres

#### EXISTING CONDITIONS

Currently the site of Flex Pod A is a grassy field used as overflow event parking. An access road enters this clearing from Chestnut Ridge Road. Beginner mountain bike trails also weave through the woods.

Flex Pod B was recently purchased by Roanoke County. The lot is thick with planting, and has a driveway, residence, and a small pond.

Each of the Back Creek RV Campground options sits on a flat area set back in the woods away from Rutrough Road. Currently there is no public vehicular access to these parcels. The terrain slopes steeply down from these campgrounds, until it eventually hits Back Creek.

There are many old growth trees in these woods, including White Oak and American Beech. A large portion of the woods near RV Campground A show signs of disturbance and logging from about 100 years ago.

#### PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

The existing overflow parking area of Flex Pod A will be maintained in its current use, but made available for future development should the Park decide upon a better use for the Activity Zone. Flex Pod B also has no current use proposed, but could provide a nice link between the trail along Chestnut Ridge Road and the RV campgrounds to the south.

RV camping is proposed on three activity zones, with the intention that a campground developer will choose two areas for full facility build-out. The Explore Park business plan calls for 100 RV campsites, which is attainable either by choosing Sites A + B or Sites B + C, all of which will require new road access.

Depending on the development taken, each campground zone would need to be provided with restrooms and shower facilities, in addition to pad sites and hookups. RV users would also have access to the proposed Gas Station and Dumping Station along Chestnut Ridge Road.

A primary trail will connect all the RV sites back to the Adventure Village, and a secondary trail brings users down to Rutrough Point. A hike/ horse trail, and a mountain bike trail loop around the campgrounds along the hillside.

New gateways will be provided along Rutrough Road where campground entrances are placed.

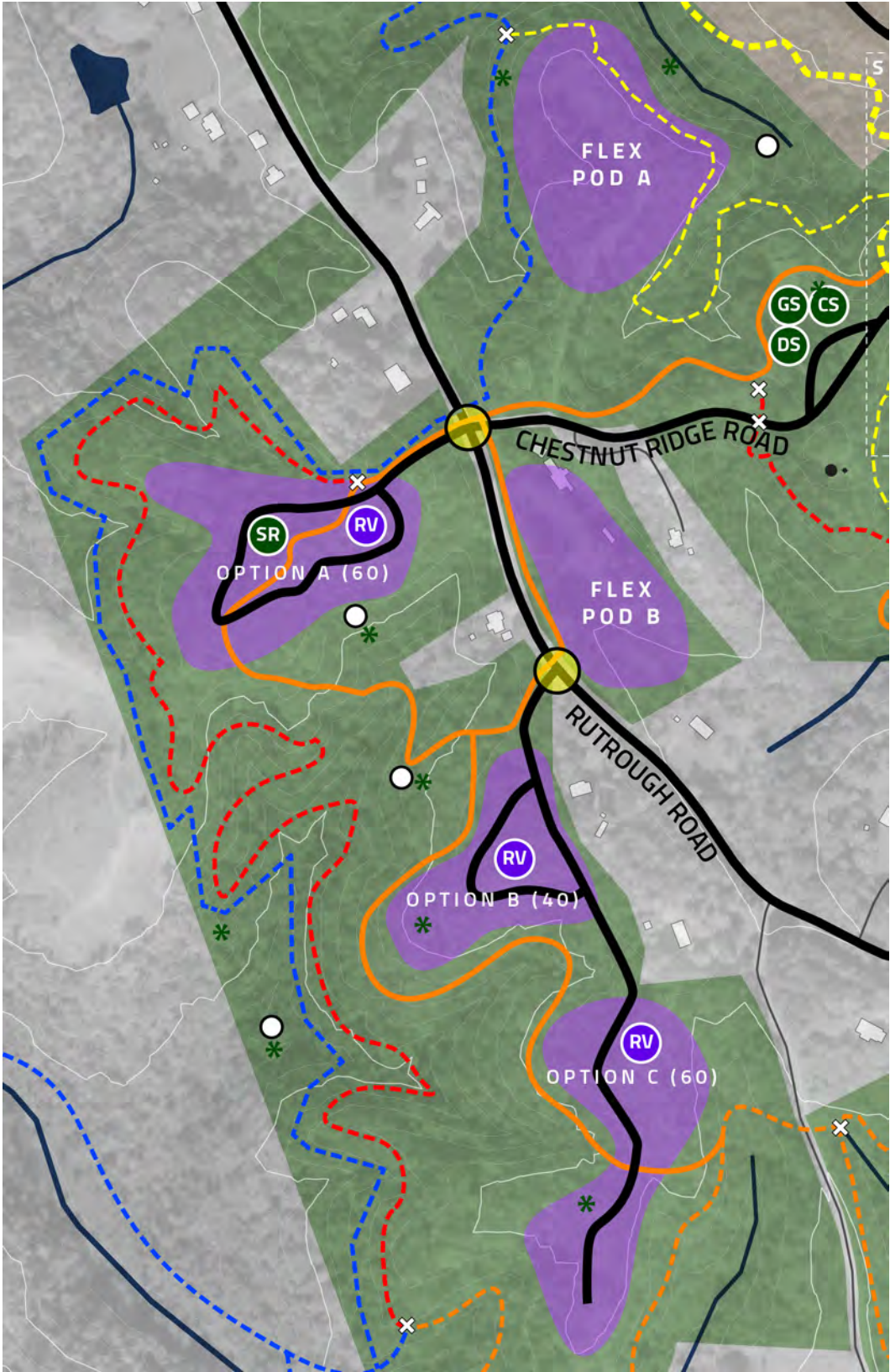
#### FACILITIES

Showers/Restroom (for each campground zone)

#### LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY:

- 1. Protect old growth trees.
- 2. Clear detritus / barbed wire from former pasture.
- 3. Maintain as dense forest around RV clearings.

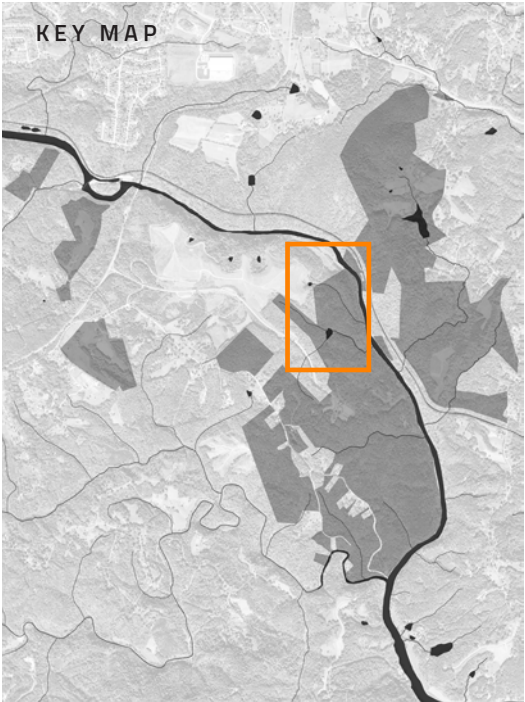




PARK LEGEND

SERVICES	CF	Concession Facility
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		NPS Trail System
		Trail Junction
		Parking Area
		Gateway
		Future Gateway
FEATURES	*	Old Growth Tree
	X	Old Structure
	□	Old Foundation
	○	Rock Outcropping
	○	Rock Cairn
		Water Body
		Rivers
	◆	Park Buildings
	◇	Private Buildings
LAND OWNERSHIP		Explore Park
		Resource Authority
		Protected Lands
		National Park Service
		County Line





### NORTHSIDE CAMPGROUNDS

Palmer’s Pond Campground Loop A: 2.8 acres  
Palmer’s Pond Campground Loop B: 3.9 acres  
Hickory Woods Car Camping: 5.1 acres

#### EXISTING CONDITIONS

The northern portion of Explore Park on the Roanoke County side abuts the Roanoke Valley Resource Authority landfill, which was closed in 1994 and capped with clean fill. Three creeks found in this area, referred to as North Creek, Mayflower Creek, and Palmer’s Creek (named for purposes of identification in this report), flow towards the Roanoke River. Between these creeks are high, relatively flat and well-forested areas.

Mayflower Creek flows into Palmer’s Pond, an old farm pond with an earthen dam. This area exhibits wetland qualities, and is most likely a popular spot for wildlife.

Currently winding narrow trails lead from the Old Salem Turnpike down to Palmer’s Pond and up into the flat area between North Creek and Mayflower Creek.

Along the Roanoke River is a wide trail that terminates in a field as it enters Resource Authority property. This trail can be taken south to meet Journey’s End and the main part of the Park.

#### PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

The plan calls for two types of camping to take place in this part of the Park. On the high ground between North Creek and Palmer’s Pond, two loops of primitive tent camping sites will be established. These will include cleared level areas for different sized groups, and will share a common Shower/Restroom facility.

These tent sites are accessed only on foot, with users hiking in from the Adventure Village or from parking located on the Old Salem Turnpike. Twenty-five vehicle spaces have been allocated for tent campers, and an additional 50 vehicle spaces are divided between two road loops for car camping in the Hickory Woods Campground. These sites have flat areas for tents, potentially with platforms, and will feature picnic tables and campfire rings. The car camping sites will also have access to a central shower and restroom facility.

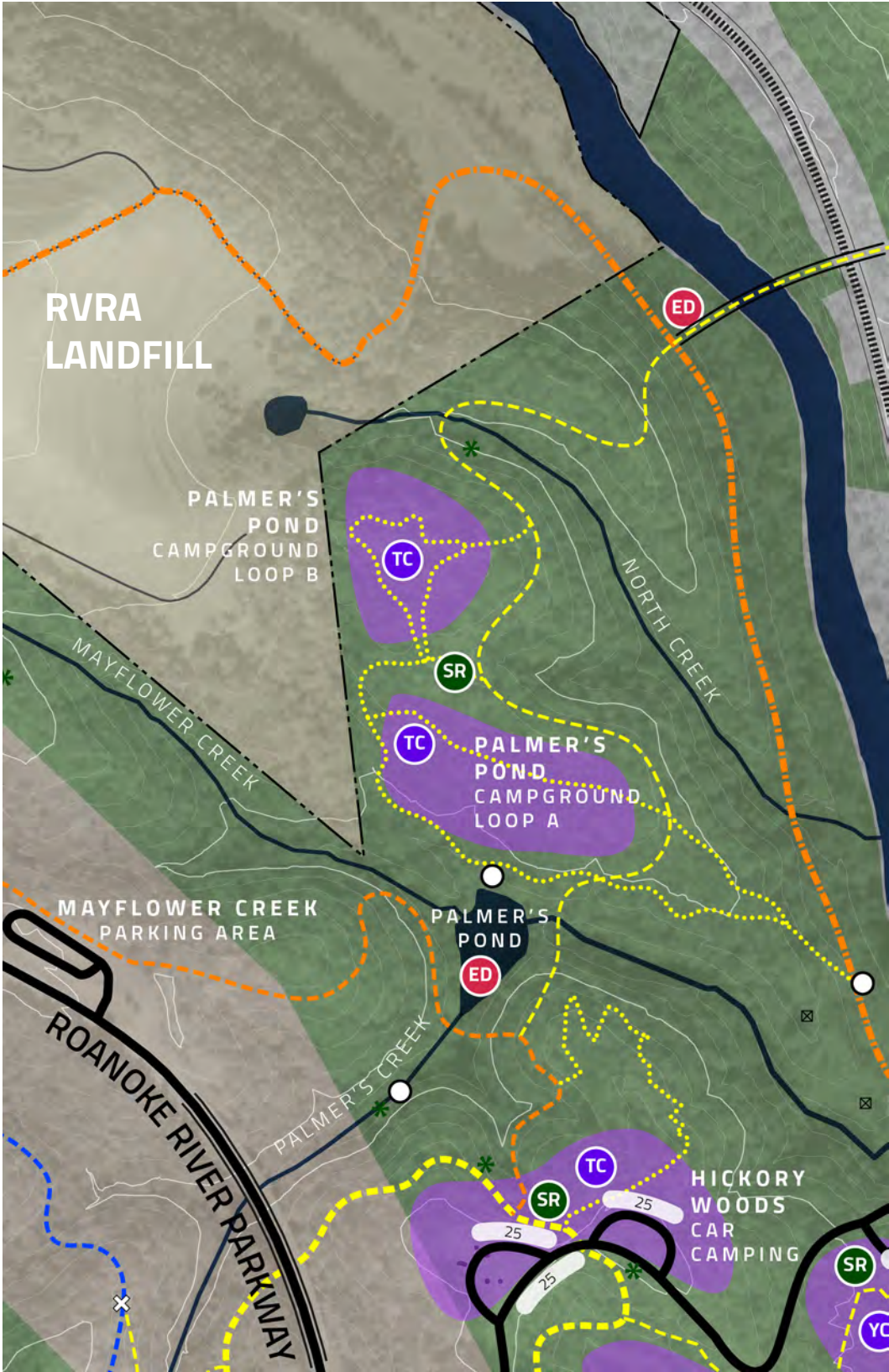
The Core Loop Trail meanders through the car camping zone, and offshoots of secondary and tertiary trails take hikers into the northern area of the Park. A shared secondary trail also takes visitors up to the Mayflower Creek Parking Area on the NPS easement.

#### FACILITIES

- Parking Lot at Old Salem Turnpike (25 vehicle spaces for tent camping)
- Parking Lot in Hickory Woods (50 spaces for vehicles accessing car camping sites)
- Shower/Restrooms (Hickory Woods)
- Shower/Restrooms (Palmer’s Pond)

#### LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY:

1. Maintain forest within and around campsites.
2. Protect and enhance Palmer’s Pond habitat.
3. Control invasive species along River.



PARK LEGEND

SERVICES

CF

Concession Facility

CS

Country Store

DS

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Park Admin. / Taubman

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Showers / Restrooms

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Welcome Center

ADVENTURES

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Wildlife Blind

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EVENT VENUES

CC

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Event Stage

MU

Mountain Union Church

PA

Picnic Area

PP

Picnic Pavilion

RL

Riverside Lawn

VG

Village Green

ED

Educational Zone

HOSPITALITY

BT

Brugh Tavern

DL

Day Lodge

EQ

Equestrian Camping

L

Lodge

RV

RV Camping

TC

Tent Camping

YC

Yurts / Cabins

CIRCULATION

Roads

Service Roads

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Future Park Roads

Railroad

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Secondary (Hike/Horse)

Secondary (Bike Only)

Secondary (Hike Only)

Tertiary (Hike Only)

NPS Trail System

Trail Junction

Parking Area

Gateway

Future Gateway

FEATURES

Old Growth Tree

Old Structure

Old Foundation

Rock Outcropping

Rock Cairn

Water Body

Rivers

Park Buildings

Private Buildings

LAND OWNERSHIP

Explore Park

Resource Authority

Protected Lands

National Park Service

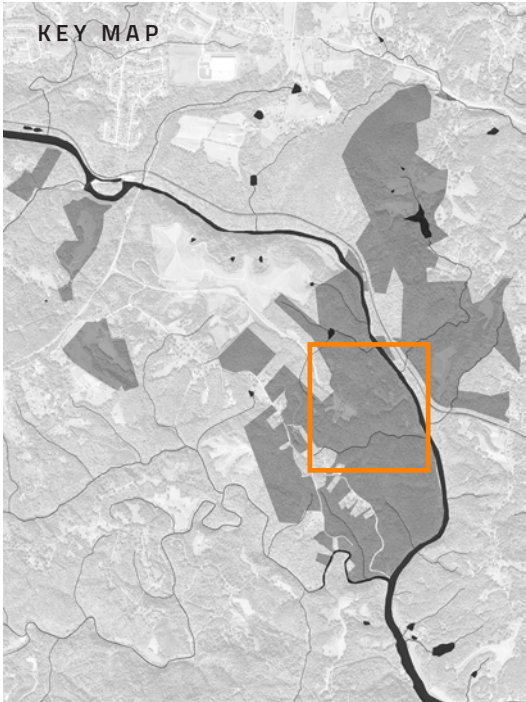
County Line

Contour interval = 20 Feet

N

200'





## ADVENTURE VILLAGE AND RIVERSIDE VILLAGE

Riverside Campground: 3.3 acres  
Tall Pines Canopy Adventure Zone: 15.1 acres

### EXISTING CONDITIONS

This is the most developed area of Explore Park. It is the major arrival gateway and has extensive parking facilities. The trails and forest fall away from this large flat area, with limited vehicular access. The roads that do exist are often rendered impassable, and typically are navigated by trucks or 4x4 vehicles. By the river are a number of historic structures that have previously been imported to the Park. The Roanoke River itself can be reached by a wide trail along the shoreline, but informal access points and eroded banks make hiking treacherous during high water.

### PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

The Adventure Village will feature updates to existing park structures, including the Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Center with a revamped Nature Center, an expanded and improved Brugh Tavern, and park administration and campground check-in facilities in the Arthur Taubman Center.

Next to these buildings will be the launch point for the new zip line down to the Riverside Village. Here users will also find a climbing and observation tower, and a bouldering wall. A concession facility will control ticketing for these features and provide space for staff use and equipment storage. The Canopy Adventure Zone spills down the hill from this location, providing linked challenges through trees and man-made structures. This course is designed to form a loop with the lower Riverside Village, which has a zip line terminus for both routes from Pine Mountain and the Adventure Village.

A concession facility in the Riverside Village will allow visitors to sign up for the Canopy Adventure Zone or the Whitewater Course, located in the Roanoke River. Users will rent kayaks and be able to access the river from a new boat launch just below the Riverside Village. At the end of the course, a take-out point will be constructed to bring visitors back up to the start.

Immediately above the Whitewater Course, on a small promontory, will be the new Lodge and Conference Center, with a parking lot for 100 vehicles. A primary trail links this location with the Adventure Village, Riverside Village, and new Pedestrian Bridge over the Roanoke River. Below this bridge will be a new fishing access point.

Up on the ridge, the parking lot in the Adventure Village is designed to hold 184 vehicles, though this configuration can be adapted according to parking needs. Across the road from the parking lot is a Natural Playground, which allows children to interact with structural logs and platforms and boulders, and accomplish small challenges.

A picnic pavilion is located nearby, providing shelter for large groups arriving at the Park. A small parking lot is provided for both the pavilion and the Playground. Additionally, a new parking area is defined for the Mountain Union Church.

Visitors will also find a shorter trail within the Core Loop Road, providing an easy walking route around the Village Green. An Event / Exhibition Hall will be built at one end of the green.

The Riverside Campground is located off the Old Salem Turnpike, and provides overnight accommodations in cabins, yurts, and treehouses. A parking lot and Shower/ Restroom facility will be provided, and a boat launch will be created where the road meets the Roanoke River Greenway.

Finally, users arriving off the Blue Ridge Parkway will find the Gas Station and Country Store on Chestnut Ridge Road to help them restock before continuing their trip.

### FACILITIES

#### Adventure Village

- Park Administration (Arthur Taubman Center)
- Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Center
- Brugh Tavern
- Exhibition Hall
- Trailhead / Restroom (information kiosk)
- Picnic Pavilion (50 - 100 users)
- Concession Facility
- Zip line Launch Point

#### Riverside Village

- Picnic Pavilion at Riverside Village (50 - 100 users)
- Concession Facility
- Climbing / Observation Tower
- Bouldering Wall
- Zip line Landing Point
- Lodge + Conference Center (75 rooms)
- Boat Launch (private whitewater course entry)

#### Riverside Campground

- Shower / Restroom at Riverside Campground
- Boat Launch (public)
- Fishing Access below Pedestrian Bridge (platform)
- Gas Station
- Dumping Station (for RV users)
- Country Store

### LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

1. Balance forest maintenance with canopy elements.
2. Maintain forested separation of campgrounds from other zones, and forest surrounding Adventure Village.
3. Control invasive species along River.



**LEGEND**

**SERVICES**

- CF Concession Facility
- CS Country Store
- DS Dump Station
- GS Gas Station
- OP Operations / Maintenance
- PA Park Admin. / Taubman
- SR Showers / Restrooms
- TH Trailhead / Restrooms
- WC Welcome Center

**ADVENTURES**

- AC Alpine Coaster
- BH Boathouse
- BL Boat Launch
- BW Bouldering Wall
- CT Climbing Tower
- FA Fishing Access
- GL Gondola Loop
- OT Observation Tower
- SS Scenic Spot
- WB Wildlife Blind
- ZL Zip Line

**EVENT VENUES**

- CC Conference Center
- EH Exhibition Hall
- ES Event Stage
- MU Mountain Union Church
- PA Picnic Area
- PP Picnic Pavilion
- RL Riverside Lawn
- VG Village Green

**HOSPITALITY**

- ED Educational Zone
- BT Brugh Tavern
- DL Day Lodge
- EQ Equestrian Camping
- L Lodge
- RV RV Camping
- TC Tent Camping
- YC Yurts / Cabins

**CIRCULATION**

- Roads
- Service Roads
- Local Roads
- Future Park Roads
- Railroad
- Core Loop (Hike Only)
- Greenway (Hike/Bike)
- Primary (Hike/Bike)
- Secondary (Hike/Bike)
- Secondary (Hike/Horse)
- Secondary (Bike Only)
- Secondary (Hike Only)
- Tertiary (Hike Only)
- NPS Trail System
- Trail Junction
- Parking Area
- Gateway
- Future Gateway

**FEATURES**

- Old Growth Tree
- Old Structure
- Old Foundation
- Rock Outcropping
- Rock Cairn
- Water Body
- Rivers
- Park Buildings
- Private Buildings

**LAND OWNERSHIP**

- Explore Park
- Resource Authority
- Protected Lands
- National Park Service
- County Line

Contour interval = 20 Feet

N 200'





# EXPLORE PARK ADVENTURE VILLAGE

Roanoke County, Virginia



The Adventure Village represents the heart of Explore Park, the central point from which circulation routes extend out into all areas of the Park. Anchored by the Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Center, this area will be the most visited part of the Park.

Visitors arriving by car, bus, motorcycle, or RV encounter the Core Loop Road at the Village

Green, which guides them along a circuitous route to the parking lots located behind the village buildings. From here, the Visitor Center is easily accessible, and guests can begin exploring the various program options found in the Village.

By aligning the road with existing terrain, the space available for village facilities and activities is well defined and easily navigable either on foot





ROANOKE COUNTY PARKS, RECREATION, AND TOURISM

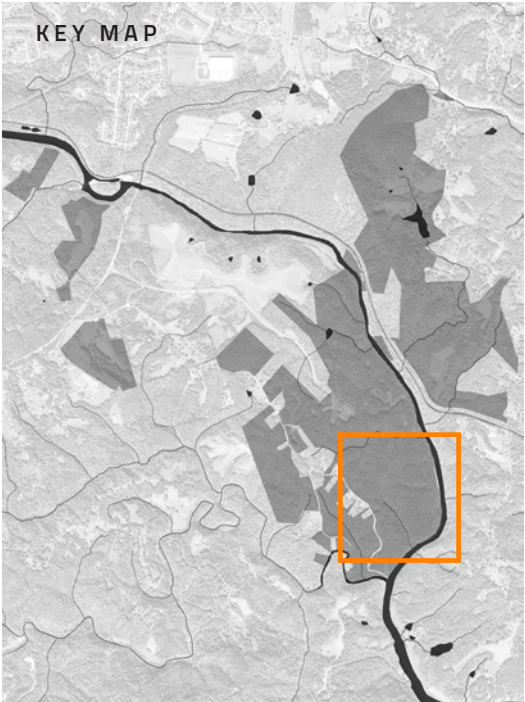
or by vehicle. The loop road creates a hub off which various park roads extend.

Around the loop road lies the Core Loop Trail, which represents the simplest and easiest way for visitors to experience Explore Park. This winding, level strolling path makes its way through the edge of the woods, and from

this trail all other trails branch off to different experiences.

On the whole, the design of the Adventure Village seeks to create the sense of arrival and destination that visitors to Explore Park seek. It should be seen as the launch point from which all the Park’s adventures can be reached.





## ROANOKE WOODS

Blue Ridge Mountain Bike Center: 7.9 acres  
Roanoke Water Gap Geology Trail: 11.1 acres  
Turkey Field: 1.7 acres

### EXISTING CONDITIONS

This section of the Park contains the majority of the existing mountain bike trails, set among some of the deepest woods of Explore Park. The terrain is rugged, falling away to the Roanoke River.

There is a path along the River that in some areas appears as a drivable dirt track, and in others becomes a barely passable overgrown deer trail. Notable features include the clearing, known colloquially as Turkey Field, which is one of the few meadow areas found in this part of the Park. The riverbank itself is a constantly changing feature, with new silt deposited from spring meltwater, and shallow gravel beds revealed later in the summer as the river level lowers.

Another key feature found in this part of the Park is a large field of river stones, deposited by the ancient path of the Roanoke River. This area is significant to the geologic story of Explore Park and the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Two tributary streams exist here, and they divide this section of the Park from the Adventure Village and Rutrough Point. The streams and their ravines contribute to the feeling that this part of the Park is separate, and the sense of solitude found here can be exhilarating.

### PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

The plan first calls for the improvement and maintenance of the existing mountain bike trail network, and calls for enhancements to connectivity and redirections that will ensure uninterrupted riding. These steps will also benefit non-riders, who can still make their way through this part of the Park without having to use biking trails.

The main shared resource is the primary trail from the Adventure Village that comes through the new Mountain Bike Center. At this point it will intersect with a new entrance drive from Rutrough Road, with a parking lot for 25 vehicles and a Trailhead/Restroom facility which is also designed to provide shelter. The concession facility here is for a vendor to rent bikes, and to provide a location for users to drop off bikes that have been rented in other parts of the Park. Additionally, tickets can be purchased here for the bike skills park and challenge course.

The geologic deposit is envisioned to be accessed by a new hiking trail, both from the primary trail and from the Roanoke River Greenway, which runs along the River north to south through this section of the Park.

Along the length of the Greenway are a series of facilities that encourage interaction with the River and its surroundings. The end of the Whitewater Course has a Boat Launch that will both collect kayakers looking to head back up-river, and allow other users to head down-river. An associated scenic spot will provide a viewing point to watch the kayakers.

At Turkey Field, a wildlife blind is proposed, positioned to let visitors keep an eye on the River and the meadow. A fishing access point is proposed just below this point, where gravel bars protrude into the Roanoke River.

Finally, an Observation Tower is proposed along the primary trail to Rutrough Point. The location was chosen for its prominent position overlooking the hillside down to the River.

### FACILITIES

Scenic Spot (Viewing Platform for whitewater course)  
Observation Tower (structure with height to provide views to river)

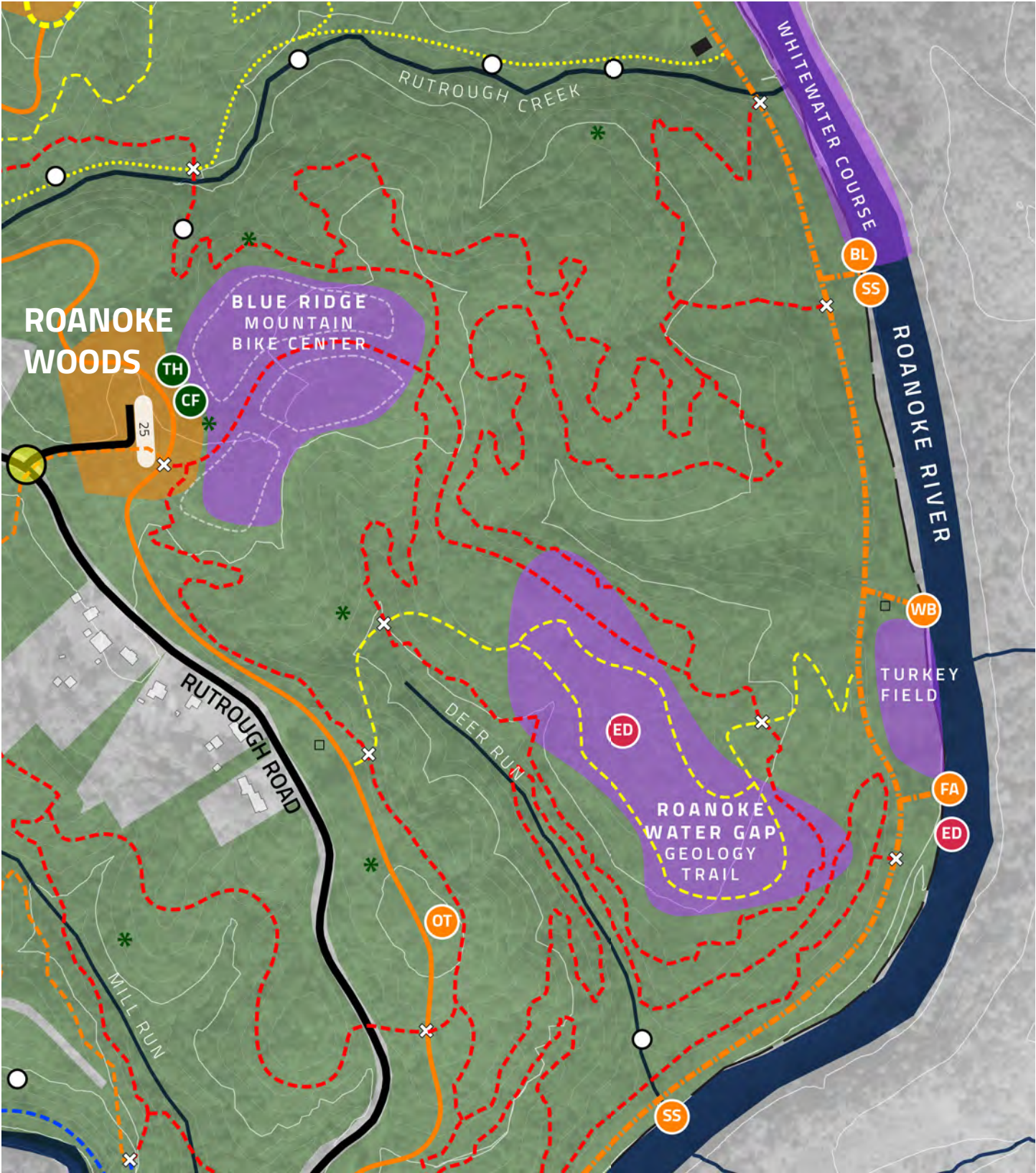
**Turkey Field**  
Wildlife Blind (for meadow and river observation)  
Fishing Access (platform at river’s edge)

**Blue Ridge Mountain Bike Center**  
Trailhead/Restroom (shelter structure provides respite for bikers and hikers)  
Parking Lot (25 vehicle spaces)  
Concession Facility (biking vendor)

### LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY:

1. Manage erosion on mountain bike trails.
2. Control invasive species along River.
3. Maintain and keep geologic deposit clear.

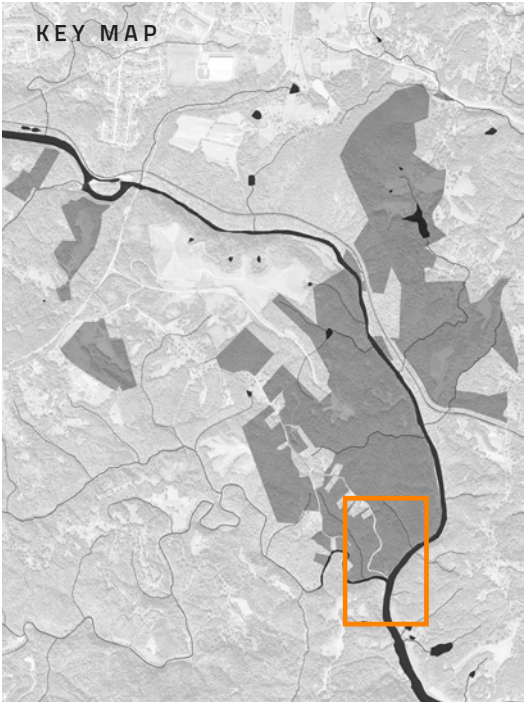




PARK LEGEND

SERVICES	CF	Concession Facility	EVENT VENUES	CC	Conference Center	CIRCULATION	—	Roads	FEATURES	*	Old Growth Tree
	CS	Country Store		EH	Exhibition Hall		—	Service Roads		⊠	Old Structure
	DS	Dump Station		ES	Event Stage		—	Local Roads		□	Old Foundation
	GS	Gas Station		MU	Mountain Union Church		—	Future Park Roads		○	Rock Outcropping
	OP	Operations / Maintenance		PA	Picnic Area		—	Railroad		○	Rock Cairn
	PA	Park Admin. / Taubman		PP	Picnic Pavilion		—	Core Loop (Hike Only)		■	Water Body
	SR	Showers / Restrooms		RL	Riverside Lawn		—	Greenway (Hike/Bike)		—	Rivers
	TH	Trailhead / Restrooms		VG	Village Green		—	Primary (Hike/Bike)		◆	Park Buildings
	WC	Welcome Center		ED	Educational Zone		—	Secondary (Hike/Bike)		◇	Private Buildings
				BT	Brugh Tavern		—	Secondary (Hike/Horse)		■	Explore Park
ADVENTURES	AC	Alpine Coaster	HOSPITALITY	DL	Day Lodge	LAND OWNERSHIP	—	Secondary (Bike Only)		■	Resource Authority
	BH	Boathouse		EQ	Equestrian Camping		—	Secondary (Hike Only)		■	Protected Lands
	BL	Boat Launch		L	Lodge		—	Tertiary (Hike Only)		■	National Park Service
	BW	Bouldering Wall		RV	RV Camping		—	NPS Trail System		—	County Line
	CT	Climbing Tower		TC	Tent Camping		—	Trail Junction		Contour interval = 20 Feet	
	FA	Fishing Access		YC	Yurts / Cabins		—	Parking Area		N 200'	
	GL	Gondola Loop					—	Gateway			
	OT	Observation Tower					—	Future Gateway			
	SS	Scenic Spot					—				
	WB	Wildlife Blind					—				
	ZL	Zip Line					—				





## RUTROUGH POINT

### EXISTING CONDITIONS

The property slopes steeply down to this point, where Back Creek meets the Roanoke River. Visitors park along Rutrough Road or in the small gravel parking area defined by large boulders, transported to the site for the Back Creek restoration project.

This site consists of the parking area, a grassy lawn, an abandoned farmhouse, and a step down canoe/kayak launch. Behind the farmhouse, in the woods, are a number of other structures that are overgrown and in disrepair.

The streambank is eroded and the boat launch is easily overwhelmed during flood events, along with the river trail that heads upriver to the northeast. This footpath is only a few feet wide and overgrown and washed away in many places.

### PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to repaving and regrading the end of Rutrough Road, a new parking area is proposed to hold 25 vehicles, angled head-in, on the side of the road. Boaters will be able to then pull down to the point, and use the turnaround to unload their boats and circle back to park. Larger vehicles, such as for an outfitter of river kayaks, could be accommodated in a dead end parking space near the turnaround.

The abandoned farm house is proposed to be repurposed as the headquarters for such an outfitter. This shop would not only rent canoes and kayaks, but also fishing supplies, stand up

paddleboards, and floating tubes. A snack and refreshments area could also be included.

Behind the outfitter at the end of the Roanoke River Greenway will be a trailhead structure, with maps, restrooms, and park information. A picnic pavilion will be located along the river, along with a fishing pier.

The existing boat launch will be realigned and rebuilt, with easier access for different user groups and greater resistance to flooding.

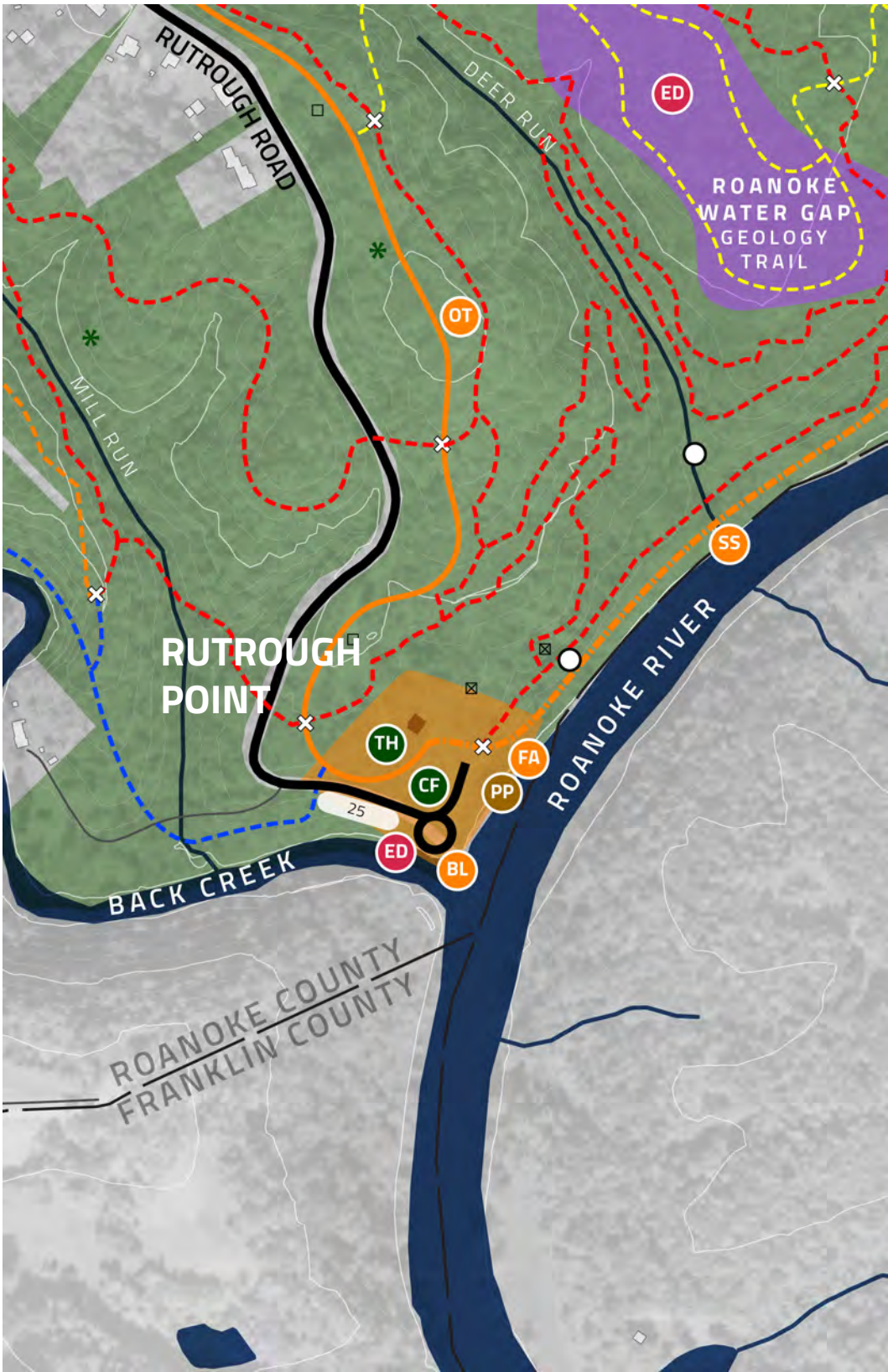
Many trails come together at this point, including the Greenway, a primary trail from the Adventure Village, multiple mountain bike trails, and the hike / horse trail from along Back Creek. The convergence of these trails along with the boat launch makes Rutrough Point a key Adventure Node for Explore Park.

### FACILITIES

- Picnic Pavilion (25 - 50 visitors)
- Fishing Pier (accessible deck along shoreline)
- Trailhead/Restroom (shelter and information kiosk)
- Concession Facility (river outfitter / food + beverage)
- Parking Lot (25 vehicle spaces with turnaround)
- Scenic Spot (Viewing Platform along river)

### LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

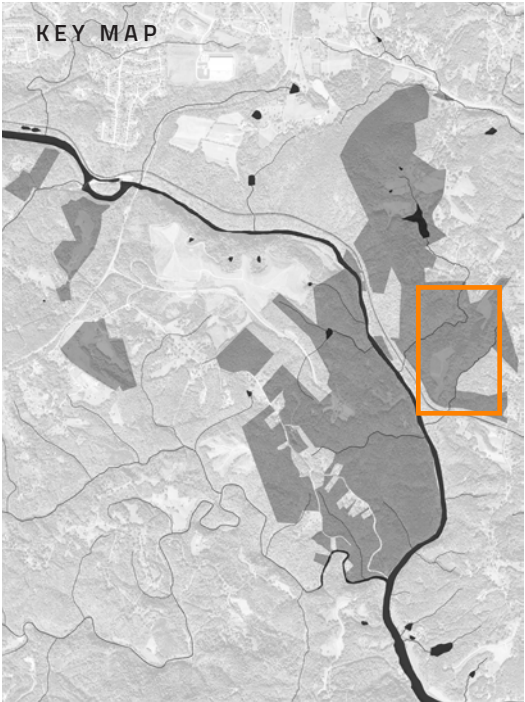
1. Control invasive species along River.
2. Manage erosion on mountain bike trails.
3. Manage erosion of riverbanks.



PARK LEGEND

SERVICES	CF	Concession Facility	EVENT VENUES	CC	Conference Center	CIRCULATION	—	Roads	FEATURES	*	Old Growth Tree
	CS	Country Store		EH	Exhibition Hall		—	Service Roads		⊠	Old Structure
	DS	Dump Station		ES	Event Stage		—	Local Roads		□	Old Foundation
	GS	Gas Station		MU	Mountain Union Church		—	Future Park Roads		○	Rock Outcropping
	OP	Operations / Maintenance		PA	Picnic Area		—	Railroad		○	Rock Cairn
	PA	Park Admin. / Taubman		PP	Picnic Pavilion		—	Core Loop (Hike Only)		■	Water Body
	SR	Showers / Restrooms		RL	Riverside Lawn		—	Greenway (Hike/Bike)		—	Rivers
	TH	Trailhead / Restrooms		VG	Village Green		—	Primary (Hike/Bike)		◆	Park Buildings
	WC	Welcome Center		ED	Educational Zone		—	Secondary (Hike/Bike)		◇	Private Buildings
							—	Secondary (Hike/Horse)		■	Explore Park
ADVENTURES	AC	Alpine Coaster	HOSPITALITY	BT	Brugh Tavern	LAND OWNERSHIP	—	Secondary (Bike Only)		■	Resource Authority
	BH	Boathouse		DL	Day Lodge		—	Secondary (Hike Only)		■	Protected Lands
	BL	Boat Launch		EQ	Equestrian Camping		—	Tertiary (Hike Only)		■	National Park Service
	BW	Bouldering Wall		L	Lodge		—	NPS Trail System		—	County Line
	CT	Climbing Tower		RV	RV Camping		—	Trail Junction		Contour interval = 20 Feet	
	FA	Fishing Access		TC	Tent Camping		—	Parking Area		N 200'	
	GL	Gondola Loop		YC	Yurts / Cabins		—	Gateway			
	OT	Observation Tower					—	Future Gateway			
	SS	Scenic Spot					—				
	WB	Wildlife Blind					—				
	ZL	Zip Line					—				





## BLUE RIDGE MEADOWS

Blue Ridge Meadows Event Lawn: 7.2 acres

### EXISTING CONDITIONS

Currently accessed by dirt track off Shady Run Road, this portion of the Park is noted for its large clearing and long views. The road in winds its way past old farm and mill equipment, before emerging and descending into a long meadow. The field itself drops away to the woods, where the terrain then cuts steeply down to the Norfolk Southern Railroad tracks before reaching the Roanoke River.

On either side of the field are steeply sloping hillsides that fall away into ravines created by Cairns Creek and Chilhowee Creek (named for purposes of identification in this report). This enhances the promontory effect of the field on the hilltop and creates a space that has great views to the west and south.

### PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

The gateway to this site from Shady Run Road will have to be extensively realigned and expanded. The plan calls for the woods along the entrance road to remain, with an event parking lot for 200 cars placed in the first clearing. Visitors will then come to a trailhead and restroom facility, offering tertiary trails down to Cairns Creek or a primary trail towards Chilhowee Creek and Pine Mountain. Here there will also be an additional parking lot for 50 cars in a second clearing.

The entrance road continues to a turnaround, offering drop-off space for event attendees that

do not wish to make the walk from the parking lots. Here there is another Trailhead/Restroom facility, meant to serve visitors that have come across the bridge from the Riverside Village, or those that are attending an event. This facility will have to be supplemented during large events to provide necessary sanitary accommodations.

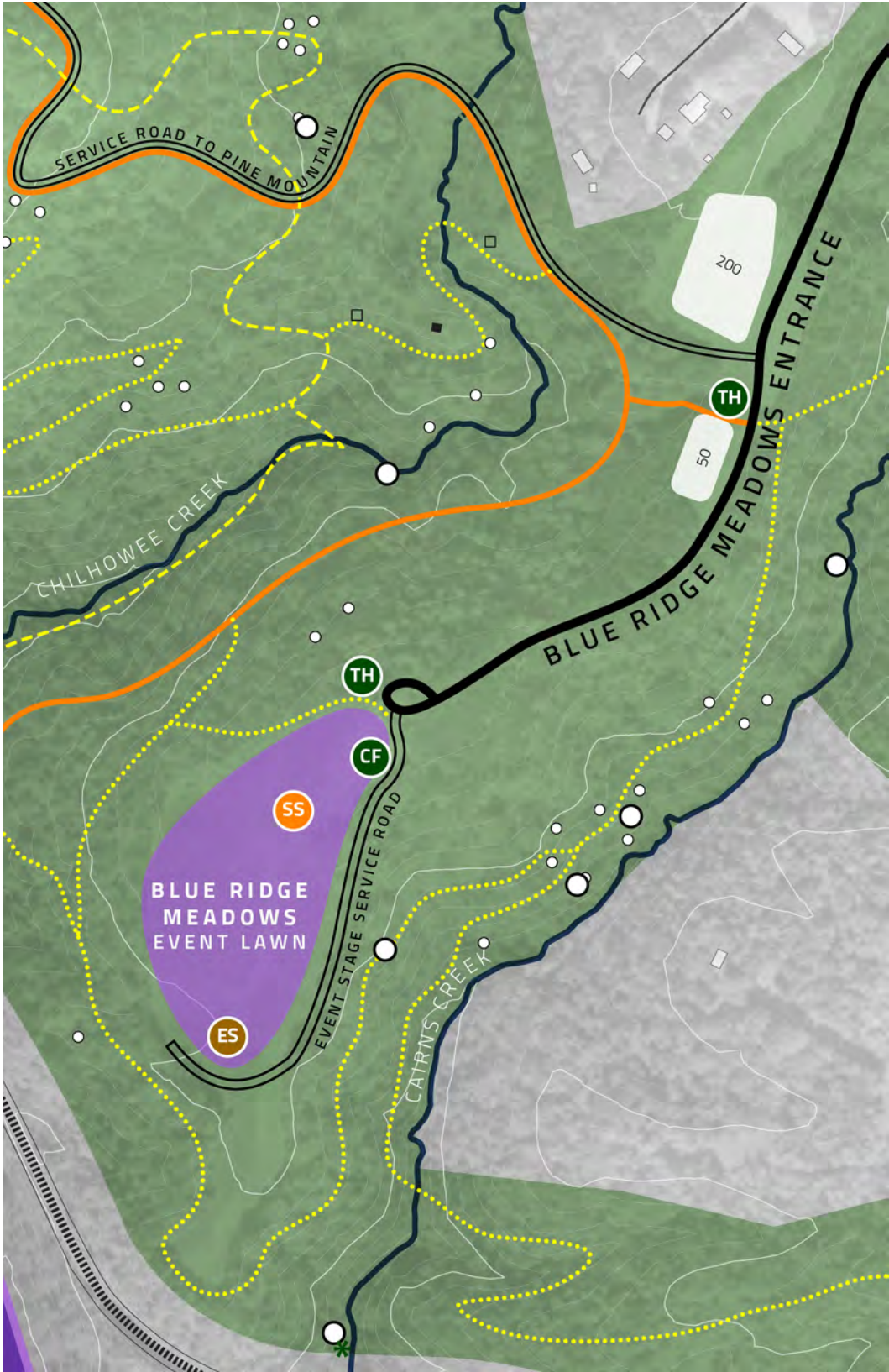
This point also contains the concession facilities and trailer / truck pads and hookups for event vendors. From here, hikers can take a tertiary trail down to the Chilhowee Creek trail, and event organizers can use the service road to bring materials and equipment down to the stage, found near the southwest corner of the field.

### FACILITIES

- Trailhead/Restroom at Parking Lot (shelter + information kiosk)
- Trailhead/Restroom at Event Lawn (information kiosk)
- Parking Lot (200 vehicle spaces for events)
- Parking Lot (50 vehicle spaces for daily visitors and event VIP)
- Scenic Spot (Potential Viewing Platform)
- Concession Facility (space and hookups for event vendors)
- Event Stage (permanent structure for performances)

### LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

1. Maintain clearing through seasonal mowing.
2. Manage erosion of hillside trails.
3. Ensure free-flowing creek channels at culverts.



PARK LEGEND

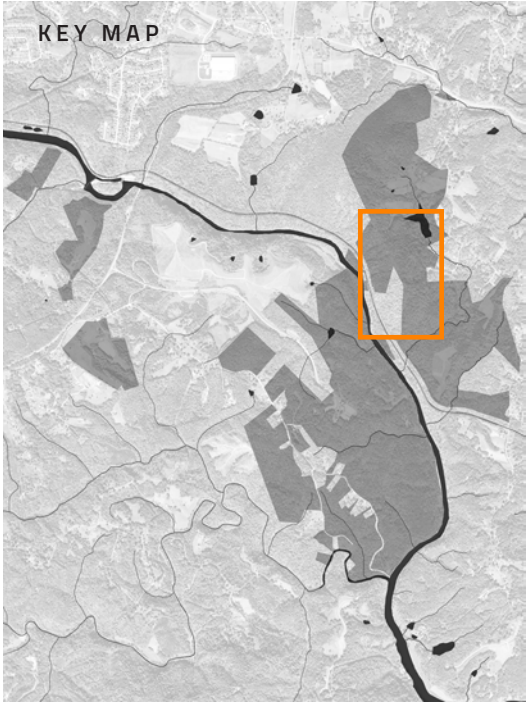
SERVICES	CF	Concession Facility
	CS	Country Store
	DS	Dump Station
	GS	Gas Station
	OP	Operations / Maintenance
	PA	Park Admin. / Taubman
	SR	Showers / Restrooms
	TH	Trailhead / Restrooms
	WC	Welcome Center
ADVENTURES	AC	Alpine Coaster
	BH	Boathouse
	BL	Boat Launch
	BW	Bouldering Wall
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	SS	Scenic Spot
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	ZL	Zip Line
EVENT VENUES	CC	Conference Center
	EH	Exhibition Hall
	ES	Event Stage
	MU	Mountain Union Church
	PA	Picnic Area
	PP	Picnic Pavilion
	RL	Riverside Lawn
	VG	Village Green
	ED	Educational Zone
HOSPITALITY	BT	Brugh Tavern
	DL	Day Lodge
	EQ	Equestrian Camping
	L	Lodge
	RV	RV Camping
	TC	Tent Camping
	YC	Yurts / Cabins
CIRCULATION		Roads
		Service Roads
		Local Roads
		Future Park Roads
		Railroad
		Core Loop (Hike Only)
		Greenway (Hike/Bike)
		Primary (Hike/Bike)
		Secondary (Hike/Bike)
		Secondary (Hike/Horse)
		Secondary (Bike Only)
		Secondary (Hike Only)
		Tertiary (Hike Only)
		NPS Trail System
		Trail Junction
		Parking Area
		Gateway
		Future Gateway
FEATURES		Old Growth Tree
		Old Structure
		Old Foundation
		Rock Outcropping
		Rock Cairn
		Water Body
		Rivers
		Park Buildings
		Private Buildings
LAND OWNERSHIP		Explore Park
		Resource Authority
		Protected Lands
		National Park Service
		County Line

Contour interval = 20 Feet

N

200'





## PINE MOUNTAIN

### EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Pine Mountain Adventure Node is a forested area on the Bedford County side of Explore Park. The high point is just under 1400’ above sea level, but views are limited by existing vegetation.

The area shows signs of logging and fire disturbance, and has the remains of former road and trail cuts leading up to the summit. The downward slope to the north of the summit has wooded pasture qualities, with little ground cover and large trees.

### PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

A new gateway off Shady Run Road will lead visitors to a small parking lot for 25 vehicles. From here, users can begin hiking on the primary trail by Saddle Lake, heading either north to the Bedford Village or south to Blue Ridge Meadows.

If they choose to keep driving, a road to the right will take them to Bedford Village and Black Gum Summit. The Pine Mountain entrance drive continues straight, winding up the hillside and skirting the woodland pasture park. At the end of the road is another parking lot for 25 vehicles.

Visitors to this location will find a Trailhead/ Restroom facility, next to a concession for zip line tours. There is also a picnic pavilion for 25 to 50 people, located near the zip line tower.

A short walk along a tertiary trail will lead visitors to an observation tower near the summit of Pine Mountain, where they can see across the Roanoke River to the Adventure and Riverside Villages, and watch zip liners fly past to the east side of the summit.

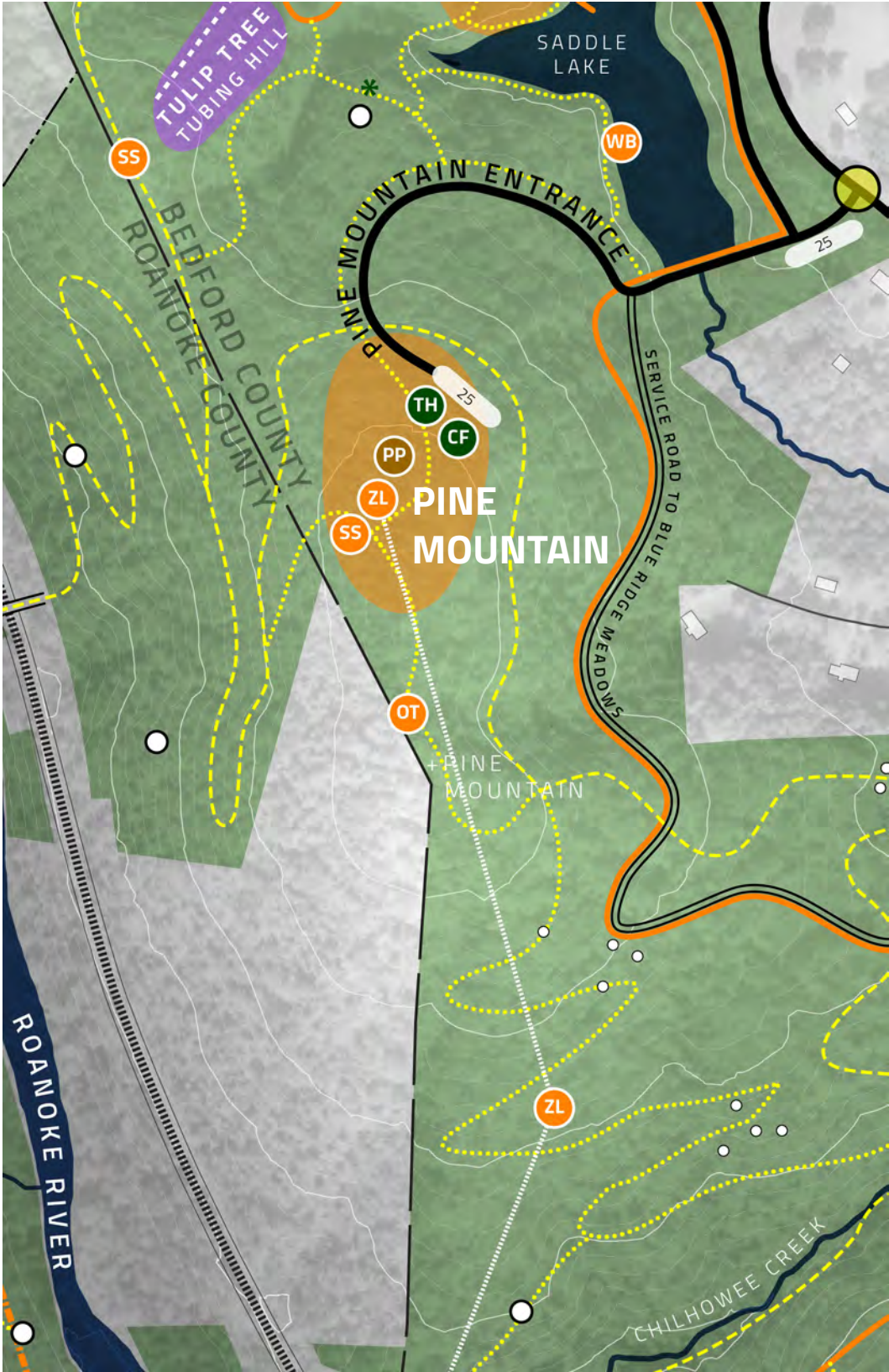
Hikers will find this location a good starting point for secondary and tertiary trails leading to all areas of the Park, including crossing over the Catenary Bridge to the Roanoke side.

### FACILITIES

- Parking Lot at Shady Run gateway (25 vehicle spaces)
- Parking Lot at Pine Mountain (25 vehicle spaces)
- Trailhead/Restroom (information kiosk)
- Concession Facility (vendor for zip line course)
- Picnic Pavilion (25 - 50 visitors)
- Zip line Tower (necessary height for required span towards south face of Pine Mountain)
- Scenic Spot (Potential Viewing Platform)
- Observation Tower (necessary height for 360° views)

### LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

1. Control erosion on hillside trails.
2. Keep viewsheds clear of overgrowth.
3. Maintain pasture park character along Pine Mountain entrance drive.



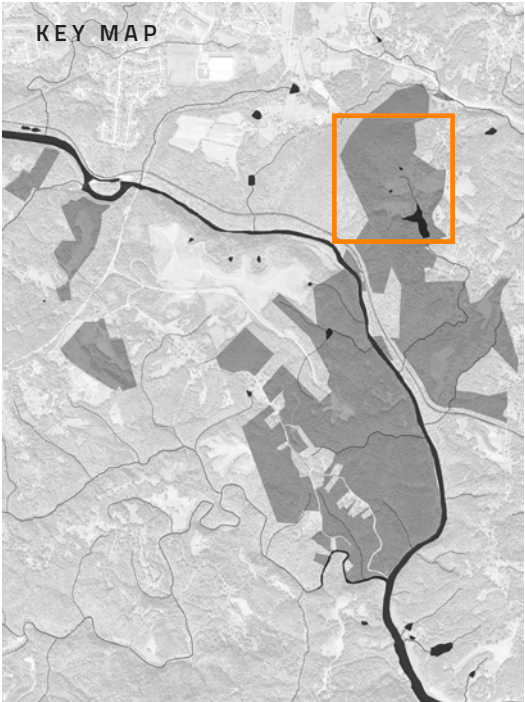
PARK LEGEND

SERVICES	CF	Concession Facility
	CS	Country Store
	DS	Dump Station
	GS	Gas Station
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	PA	Park Admin. / Taubman
	SR	Showers / Restrooms
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		Tertiary (Hike Only)
		NPS Trail System
		Trail Junction
		Parking Area
		Gateway
		Future Gateway
FEATURES		Old Growth Tree
		Old Structure
		Old Foundation
		Rock Outcropping
		Rock Cairn
		Water Body
		Rivers
		Park Buildings
		Private Buildings
LAND OWNERSHIP		Explore Park
		Resource Authority
		Protected Lands
		National Park Service
		County Line

Contour interval = 20 Feet

N 200'





## BEDFORD VILLAGE

Tulip Tree Tubing Hill: 2.1 acres;  
Saddle Run Tubing Hill: 2.6 acres  
Black Gum Mountain Alpine Coaster: 14.3 acres  
Shady Run Campground: 10.1 acres

### EXISTING CONDITIONS

The site of Bedford Village currently exists as a farm. The upper reaches of Chilhowee Creek flow out of the hillside and down through the fields, past a few farm structures and through a small pond.

The distinctive bowl valley formed by the backdrop of Black Gum and Pine Mountains is the dominant feature of this parcel. Rocky outcroppings intersperse with large old growth trees, and the farm fields provide open views towards the Saddle between the mountains.

The summit of Black Gum Mountain (1,465') is the highest point in the Park, but views are limited due to existing vegetation. This area contains some of the most pristine woodland in Explore Park.

### PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Chilhowee Creek, as it flows over the level farming areas of this corner of Explore Park, will be dammed to create a 5-acre recreational lake with an interesting shoreline and space for boating and fishing. Along the western shore of this lake will be small trails and a wildlife blind. The eastern shore will have a new primary trail that parallels a new road.

This road will take visitors to the Bedford Village entrance drive, which has a parking lot for 100 cars, a Day Lodge for food, refreshments, restrooms, and park information, a Boathouse for renting boats and fishing equipment, a picnic pavilion for large groups, and a Gondola Station with Concession Facility.

The Gondola Loop will take visitors to the top of Black Gum Mountain, the highest point in the Park, and provide a unique way to view the landscape of Explore Park and the surrounding Blue Ridge Mountains.

Also at Bedford Village is a Trailhead/Restroom facility, and a primary trail which creates a loop around the low areas and fields below Black Gum Mountain. Other secondary and tertiary trails are also accessed from this point, creating an Adventure Node for activities on land, water, and air. In addition, for the winter season, this area of the Park has two tubing hills, to be developed in tandem or singularly.

Shady Run Campground provides tent sites for large groups or individuals on an area of sparsely wooded flat land. There is a potential access road from Shady Run Road, with new gateway features. A parking lot for 25 vehicles is provided, along with a Shower/Restroom facility.

Visitors that drive up the road to Black Gum Summit will find a Trailhead/Restroom facility, a parking lot for 50 vehicles, a picnic pavilion for small groups, and a concession facility that lets them choose from multiple activities. From here they can ride the Alpine Coaster down the south side of Black Gum Mountain, take a short hike over to the Black Gum Mountain Observation Tower, or board the Gondola Loop for a relaxing ride.

### FACILITIES

Wildlife Blind (positioned for viewing the lake)  
Scenic Spot (viewing platform on the Saddle)  
Scenic Spot (viewing platform on Black Gum Mtn.)  
Observation Tower (structure on Black Gum Mtn.)  
Gondola Loop (connecting Bedford Village and the two peaks of Black Gum Mtn.)  
Alpine Coaster (raised track winding down Black Gum Mtn. and return conveyance track)  
Shower / Restroom facility (for Shady Run campers)

#### Black Gum Summit

Picnic Pavilion (25 - 50 users)  
Trailhead / Restroom (information kiosk)  
Concession Facility (tickets for Alpine Coaster and Gondola Loop)

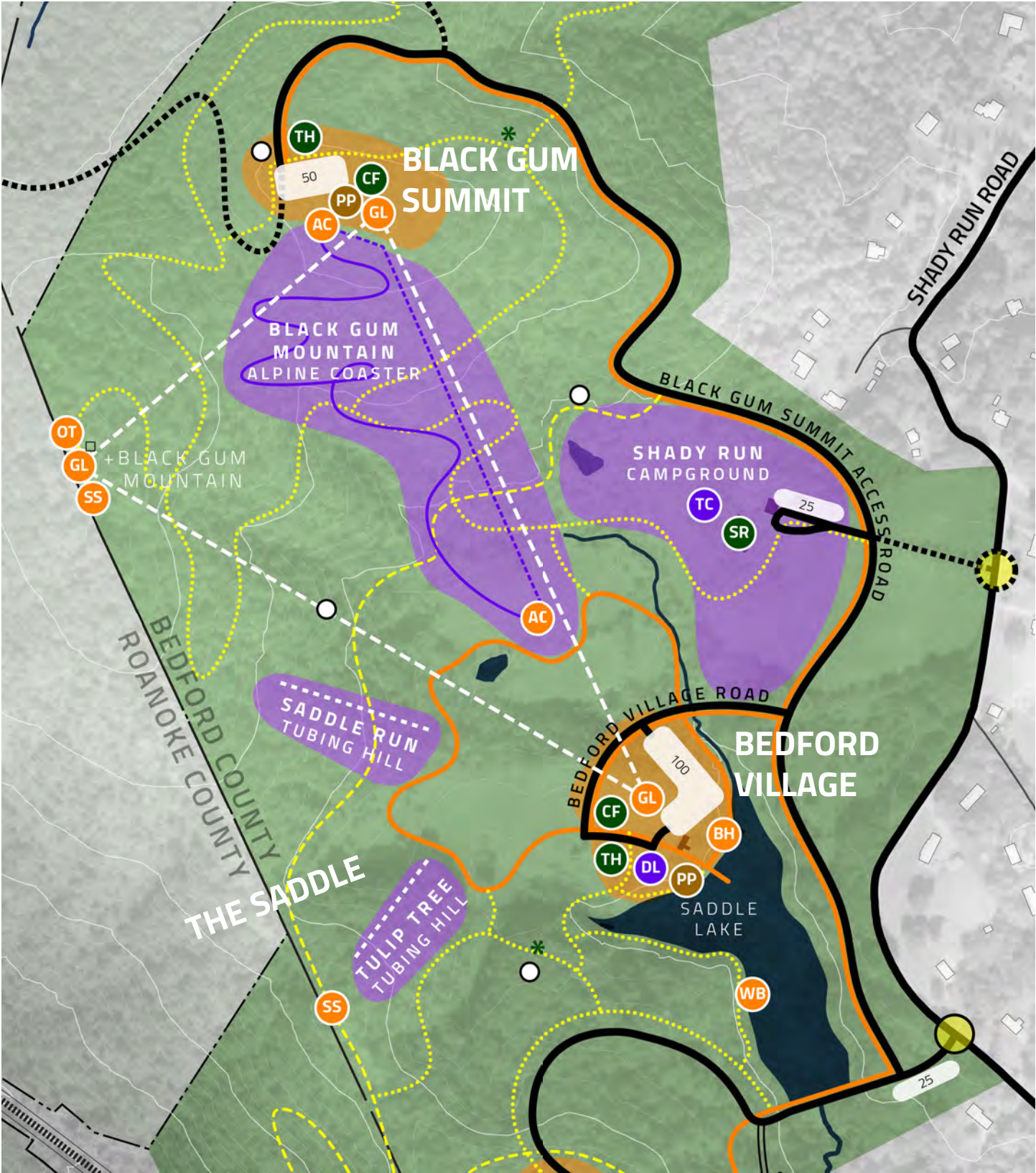
#### Bedford Village

Picnic Pavilion (50 - 100 users)  
Trailhead / Restroom (information kiosk)  
Concession Facility (tickets for Alpine Coaster and Gondola Loop)  
Boathouse (vendor for boat and fishing rentals)  
Day Lodge (dining, restrooms, shelter for 200 visitors)

### LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

1. Maintain pasture character near Saddle Lake.
2. Maintain clearings through seasonal mowing.
3. Manage erosion on Black Gum Mountain.
4. Control water levels in Saddle Lake for optimal ecological and recreational benefit.

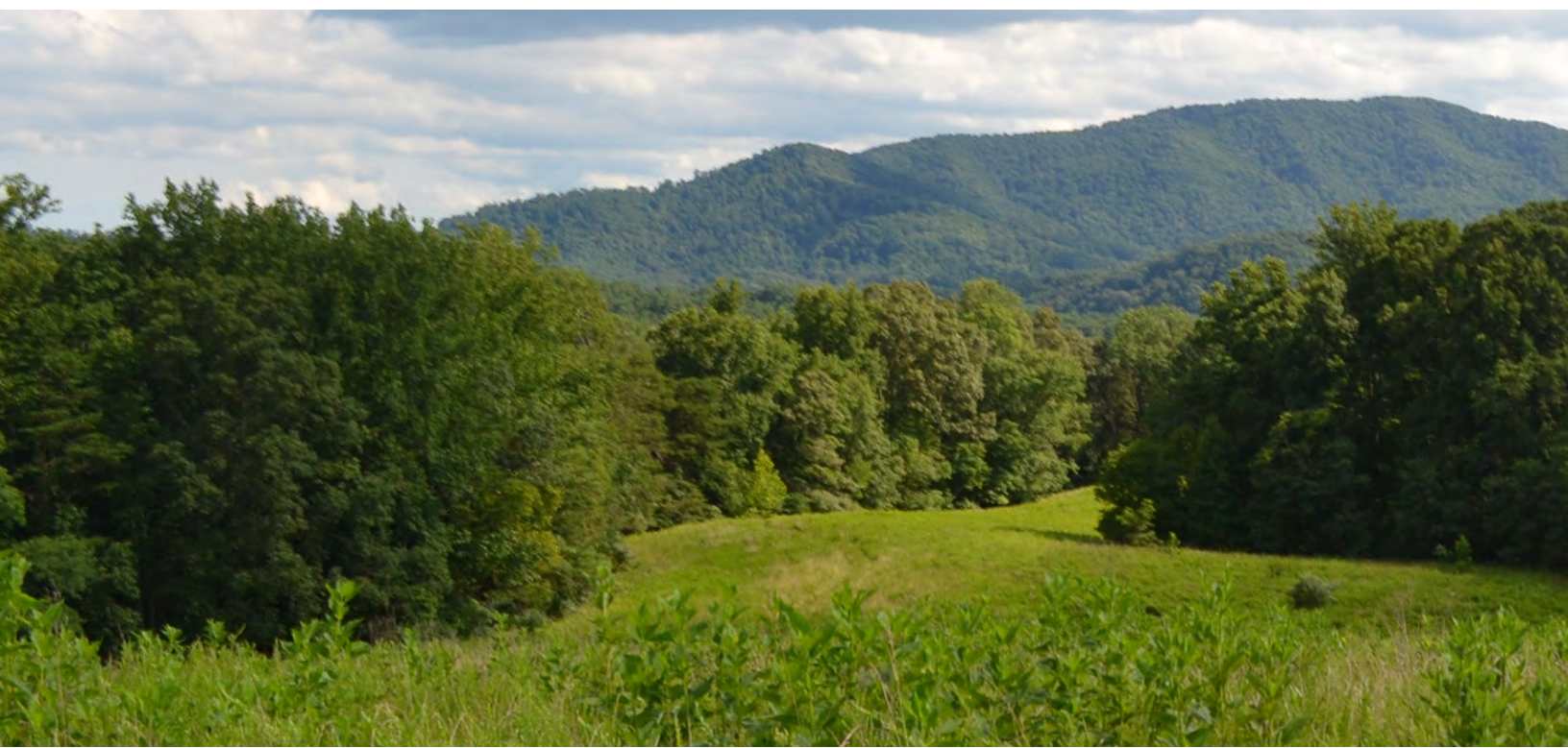




PARK LEGEND

SERVICES	CF	Concession Facility	EVENT VENUES	CC	Conference Center	CIRCULATION		Roads	FEATURES		Old Growth Tree
	CS	Country Store		EH	Exhibition Hall			Service Roads			Old Structure
	DS	Dump Station		ES	Event Stage			Local Roads			Old Foundation
	GS	Gas Station		MU	Mountain Union Church			Future Park Roads			Rock Outcropping
	OP	Operations / Maintenance		PA	Picnic Area			Railroad			Rock Cairn
	PA	Park Admin. / Taubman		PP	Picnic Pavilion			Core Loop (Hike Only)			Water Body
	SR	Showers / Restrooms		RL	Riverside Lawn			Greenway (Hike/Bike)			Rivers
	TH	Trailhead / Restrooms		VG	Village Green			Primary (Hike/Bike)			Park Buildings
	WC	Welcome Center		ED	Educational Zone			Secondary (Hike/Bike)			Private Buildings
	ADVENTURES	AC		Alpine Coaster	HOSPITALITY		BT	Brugh Tavern			Secondary (Hike/Horse)
BH		Boathouse	DL	Day Lodge			Secondary (Bike Only)		Resource Authority		
BL		Boat Launch	EQ	Equestrian Camping			Secondary (Hike Only)		Protected Lands		
BW		Bouldering Wall	L	Lodge			Tertiary (Hike Only)		National Park Service		
CT		Climbing Tower	RV	RV Camping			NPS Trail System		County Line		
FA		Fishing Access	TC	Tent Camping			Trail Junction	Contour interval = 20 Feet			
GL		Gondola Loop	YC	Yurts / Cabins			Parking Area	 N	 200'		
OT		Observation Tower					Gateway				
SS		Scenic Spot					Future Gateway				
WB		Wildlife Blind									
ZL	Zip Line										









## SECTION VII

### **CONCLUSION**



NATURAL AREAS MANAGEMENT

Explore Park’s primary impact and value is as a mostly undeveloped landscape representative of the subtle part of Virginia’s Blue Ridge character. The Park is a mosaic of habitats affected by human influence which has evolved over time to the current condition. It is not a pristine landscape, yet has grown back from early farming and logging practices to the appearance of a more wild landscape that many people may think of as wilderness. Mostly forested, the Park depends on the health of its tree canopy to ensure the quality of its wildlife habitat and aesthetic value to visitors. Due to the impact of climate change and other diseases and pests that affect forests everywhere, as well as the importance of day to day stewardship and visitor experience programming, it is strongly recommended that Roanoke County conduct a study to determine an adaptive management plan (AMP) for the Park to help ensure its long term economic value to the county. Eastern forests have changed and endured many threats, from Chestnut blight to Gypsy Moths, but for a key economic resource such as Explore Park, a proactive plan to address current and future threats is essential. Ideally the AMP would include the adjacent land areas on which Explore Park depends for the integrity of its context, and which may at some point in the future be a part of the larger Explore Park vision.

The Park is part of the larger Roanoke Valley ecosystem. Explore Park spans two ecoregions. Explore Park West is in the Southern Limestone/ Dolomite Valleys and Low Rolling Hills. Explore Park East is in the Northern Inner Piedmont ecoregion. Explore Park is immediately north of the southern Crystalline Ridges and Mountains. This is what accounts for the existing variety and interest in the physical form of the landscape, the range of habitats, and the wildlife that populate them.

The master plan establishes a clear pattern of forest and open land, including both meadows and maintained designed landscape areas. The intention is to use the landscape to define and reinforce the user experience. The AMP should provide detailed guidance for the short, medium, and long term actions needed to maintain what is healthy and successful, change what is problematic, and begin to address the long term transition of plants to a suite of species better suited to a warmer climate. The AMP should provide specific management prescriptions

for fully stratified forest, open woodland, meadows, savanna, lawns, stream corridors, the river corridor, ponds, and the lake. Developed areas should be designed in harmony with the context of natural landscape to avoid jarring and incompatible imagery. The character of Explore Park should be considered as a point closer to the more rugged and remote ridgetop landscapes than the more parklike and urban landscapes of the city and suburbs. The Park’s AMP should be coordinated with (and possibly structured similarly to) the National Park Service’s natural area management plans and policies in general and the Blue Ridge Parkway specifically.

It is vital to the adventure aesthetic and regional integrity of the Park that native species be used exclusively with the exception of lawn areas and other areas on a carefully reviewed case by case basis. This is of particular importance in the early stages when the Park is being developed, because the resulting disturbance creates opportunities for incursions of invasive exotic species into what is presently a fairly stable and intact native forest habitat.

The limited areas of development in the Park should take on a rugged character compatible with a rural aesthetic. To guide the unified development of the Park and create a special and distinctive high quality image, design guidelines should be prepared for all development features: architecture, site furnishings, pedestrian and vehicular circulation, bridges, new planting, lighting, and signage. The overall habitat goals for the Park should strongly reflect biodiversity both for its intrinsic value and its importance to the educational and experiential value to visitors. In this model, the Park’s landscape would be actively managed for the interest of diverse forest, shrub-scrub grassland and riparian habitats that support the full range of potential species. Watchable wildlife is of particular economic value, so the AMP should consider bird and pollinator species and manage populations of species such as white tailed deer that may threaten diversity if allowed to grow to unsustainable numbers.

The entire visitor experience of wildlife should be coordinated from a philosophic and experiential point of view to ensure a consistent message of stewardship, from fishing, to controlled hunting, to birdwatching.

**VISITOR MANAGEMENT**

As Explore Park develops it will require a policy and action document to provide strategic direction, consistent structure, and day to day guidelines for leadership and staff level public interactions. To address this need the County should prepare a visitor management plan (VMP) to provide a mechanism to ensure high quality experiences that do not adversely affect the environment of the Park.

The plan should include goals and objectives for visitor use, programming, and adaptive management of visitor use of facilities and trails, and special events. In addition to providing a structure for these facets of visitor management, the plan should address carrying capacity and provide guidance to the County for ways to address heavy use. Examples of tools to manage carrying capacity include Limits of Acceptable Change and Visitor Experience and Resource Protection, used by the National Park Service and other federal land management agencies.

**LOOKING AHEAD**

As the County develops Explore Park and the public increases its use and appreciation of it, there will be opportunities to extend recreational use and stewardship to the adjacent properties owned and managed by the National Park Service, Roanoke Valley Resource Authority, Virginia Outdoors Foundation, and Blue Ridge Land Conservancy.

This will allow the group of land owners to pool their resources to create a larger critical mass of recreational potential by extending the trail system, water access, compatible private development opportunities, and improved vehicular access. Additionally, Explore Park will be increasingly better connected to the Roanoke regional greenway and blueway system. The Roanoke River and Mill Mountain Greenways will compress the modest distance to Roanoke, allowing Explore Park and Roanoke to be increasingly seen as a combined experience in a way that reinforces the tourism leadership’s metro-mountain mix brand. The connection to Smith Mountain Lake as a major recreational destination will be enhanced by promoting the vehicular connections and further examining the potential for a more formalized water route.

The master plan provides the County with a flexible vision for the Park that can be logically developed over a short or long period, expanded at will to accommodate increased use and enhanced to appeal to an ever more aspirational range of local and distant visitors.





CONCLUSION

Having taken the responsibility for developing and managing Explore Park, the County has created a plan for its future that preserves what is best about the property, builds on the strength of the park’s previous incarnations, provides a very broad spectrum of dynamic recreational opportunities, and invites a diverse range of private investment, and does so in a flexible framework that can be developed incrementally and expanded considerably if and when increased use dictates it. This master plan lays the foundation for this strategy, and should be followed up by specific plans such as design guidelines, natural areas management, and visitor use plans to ensure the quality of development, wise land stewardship, and effective visitor engagement.

The public and stakeholders and County leadership and staff have affirmed a confident and optimistic view of the Park’s potential, as embodied in this plan. Coupled with the accompanying business plan, the Explore Park Adventure Plan creates both a responsible and visionary way forward to validate and leverage the federal, state, and county investment in this property.









