



Trail Feasibility Study

Summersville Lake

**FAYETTE
TRAIL COALITION**



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Executive Summary

The Summersville Trails Project offers a strategic, phased approach to establishing a comprehensive and diverse trail network that enhances outdoor recreation, boosts tourism, and strengthens connections between natural and community assets.

This multi-phase initiative is aimed at expanding and enhancing recreational connectivity around Summersville Lake and the City of Summersville, West Virginia. This feasibility study explores constraints and opportunities for approximately 20+ miles of trail across U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) lands, Summersville Lake State Park, and adjacent public areas. These trails are envisioned to accommodate a variety of outdoor users—from casual walkers to advanced backcountry adventurers—while preserving the natural integrity of the landscape.

Phases one and two have a high level of feasibility and support from the partners engaged. The foundational phase establishes key trail linkages between the newly developed Summersville Lake State Park, the City of Summersville, and regional destinations like Salmon Run and climbing areas. The second phase introduces 7.5 miles of intermediate to advanced level trail around the southern edge of Summersville Lake along Hominy Creek that would provide an easily accessible backcountry-style experience.

Additional phases have varying levels of challenge present that will require significant effort in the regulatory or land acquisition level to become viable. As earlier phases progress, the potential for trails connecting the Gauley Dam to Hughes Bridge and Route 39 to Persinger Creek may come into better focus.

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Project Goals

Fayette Trail Coalition has commissioned Applied Trails Research to assess the feasibility of natural surface trail development in the Summersville Lake area. The team mobilized to the lake during drawdown and full pool conditions to gain perspective on the seasonal influence of the lake level on trail feasibility. More broadly, the team sought to identify:



Trail development to complement existing recreational offerings in the area (world-class rock climbing, whitewater, and general lake-based recreation);



Connectivity for the City of Summersville to these public lands to enhance tourism and quality of life for local residents through access and provision of healthy activities



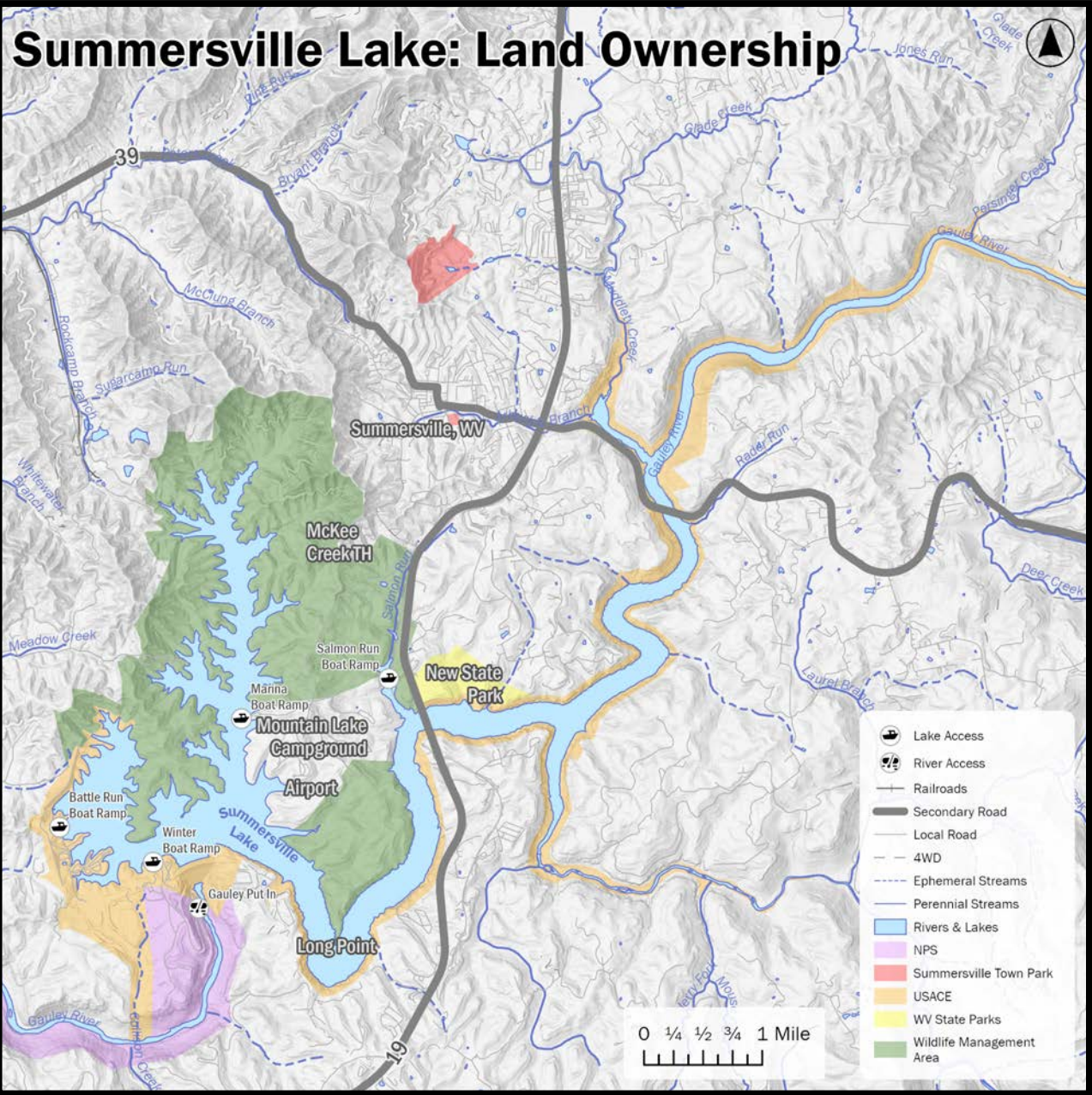
Support USACE and the Summersville Lake State Park in improved management and provision of recreational access, and



Explore options for connections on the Wildlife Management Area (WMA) managed portions of the property that balance fiscal, wildlife management and recreational goals



Site Overview

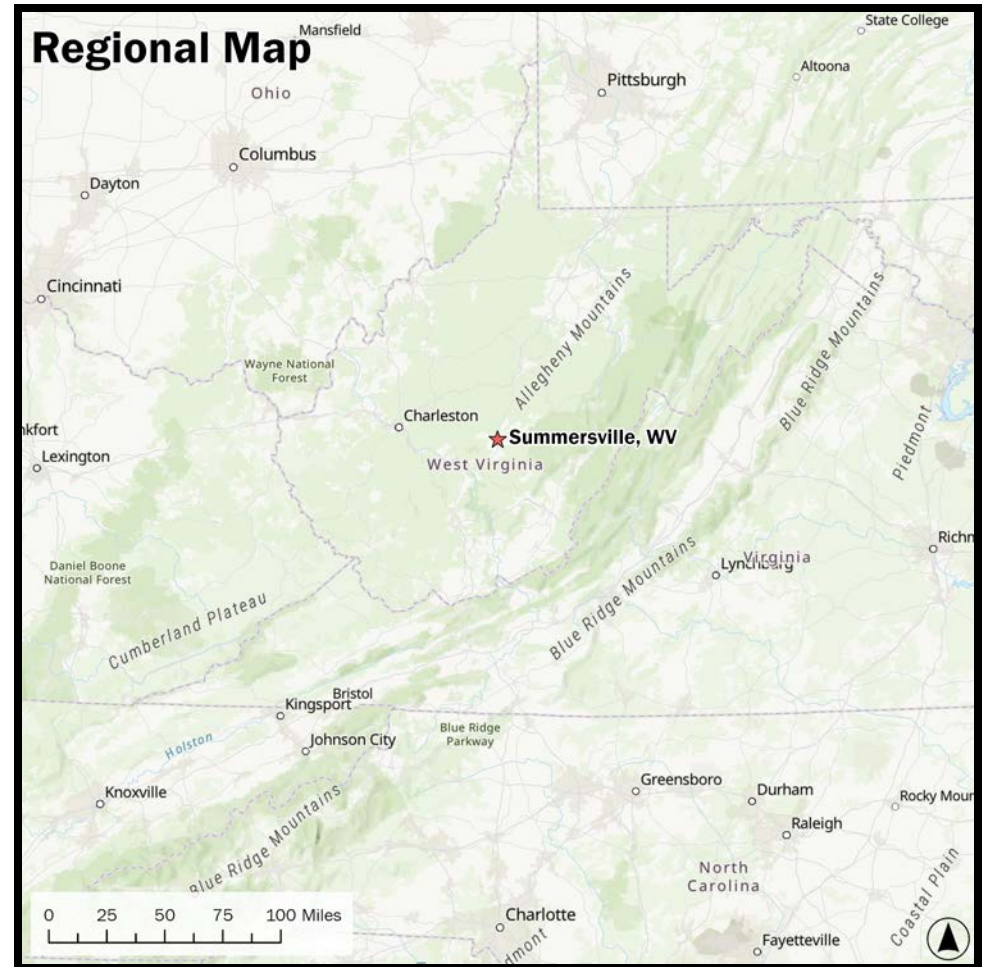


Area (acres) of Land Ownership by Agency	
Land Manager	Total
NPS	1,045
Summersville Town Park	145
USACE	2,440
WMA	3,664
WV State Parks	171
Total	7,466

The Summersville Lake area has land managed by several different entities. The US Army Corps of Engineers manages the lake itself and a number of streams. Surrounding the lake, much of the land is owned by the State, with a newly developing 171-acre State Park in the southeast surrounded by a 3,664-acre Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Below the dam, the National Park Service controls more than 1,000 acres. Northeast of the lake/WMA, the City of Summersville is developing a new 145-acre park planned to offer ball fields and shared-use trails among its facilities.

There are relatively few trails present within the Summersville Lake area. 8.5 miles of trails are located within the WMA. There are a number of climbing approach trails, both above the summer pool of the lake and below that lake level that are utilized during drawdown periods. A few miles of trail are located in the vicinity of Muddlety Creek.

The area has high outdoor recreation destination potential, with lake and river activities, rock climbing, a novel state park development, and potentially a large and diverse trail system located within a half day's drive from numerous metro areas.



Area	Length (mi)	Notes
WMA	8.5	no official trails database; some trails may be unofficial
Pirates Cove Climber Trails New State Park/ACOE	1.2	unofficial climber routes mostly on old roadbeds; length is a rough estimate; more routes are under the summer lake level that are used for winter climbing access
Muddlety Creek	2.4	Some trail on private property

Location	Drive Time to Summersville, WV
Cincinnati, OH	4.5
Columbus, OH	4
Charlotte, NC	4
Lexington, KY	4
Richmond, VA	4
Pittsburgh, PA	3

The team engaged with a number of potential stakeholder groups during the process, including:

- Fayette Trail Coalition
- City of Summersville, Mayors Office
- US Army Corps of Engineers, Summersville Lake
- Summersville Lake State Park, Director, Concession, Operations
- Wildlife Management Area, Local and Regional Offices
- West Virginia Office of Tourism

Transparent discussions with and between parties outlined both the opportunities and challenges present on the landscape. Those discussions framed the project goals stated above from the standpoints of the stakeholding parties.

The Summersville Lake area is a complex system of land ownership with numerous shared public-public and public-private boundaries. Each public entity has a different mission to serve and processes for project approval, implementation, and ongoing management. Developing a cohesive outdoor recreation system across these boundaries will be dependent on parties openly working together to identify where partnerships can be developed that resolve management challenges while protecting the natural resources functions and values that make the area special and unique.

But it is precisely the potential of the landscape to host a destination quality set of outdoor recreation offerings, and the number of motivated and locally based partners that can work together to make a shared vision into a reality.



Opportunities

Wild streams, a picturesque lake with unique rock climbing, a new and novel state park development, frontcountry and backcountry landscapes, and the adjacent City of Summersville to provide amenities to visitors, the Summersville Lake area is ideally positioned to be a multi-activity outdoor recreation destination that can easily serve a broad array of visitors and interests for a day to a week, with multiple annual repeat visits highly probable.

With the New River Gorge National Park's increasing visitation (above already very high levels, local communities are already working to diversify regional outdoor recreation offerings that can help extend visitor stays and enhance local business opportunities. The Summersville Lake area's proximity and potential complementary activities could geographically broaden the community and economic benefits along the HWY 19 and 39 corridors and into Summersville.

The momentum that is present within Summersville and at the lake with the new Summerville Lake State Park provide nodes of committed outdoor recreation development, services, and overnight accommodation that help to drive a broader regional vision.

The number and diversity of leadership partners and ideas, while always and logistical challenge, is inspiring and creates a natural resiliency to a shared vision that is rarely present and, when that vision becomes reality, is how truly special outdoor recreation destinations are developed and flourish. It is this community drive that visitors rarely see in their inspiring day in the area, but it is undoubtedly the most important asset in making that outdoor inspiration possible.





Constraints

Inspiring landscapes are not easy to develop into destination-quality outdoor recreation precisely because of their inspiring aspects. Cliffs, waterfalls, stream channels, dynamic lake levels, and steep terrain are not contained by humans' somewhat arbitrary boundaries. There are countless "pinch points" on this landscape that challenge recreational access and connectivity.

Management directives across the many public-public boundaries (also somewhat arbitrary) and, while serving the needs for consistency in a larger bureaucracy, provide hurdles to recreation development that crosses those boundaries. These are more opaque management pinch points. The access and connectivity challenges that these situations cause are not understood by the public and result in high levels of frustration, often for all parties involved.

Outdoor recreation development on these steep, wet, rugged landscapes is not easy or inexpensive, even when the access and connectivity challenges can be overcome. There are higher than average costs to maintain recreational infrastructure.

There are numerous locations where recreation access has been developed in an unauthorized manner. Lack of management into the future will further condone this situation where the public provides for its own interests, which can result in unnecessary resource damage. Changing these access and use patterns is often difficult, but only becomes more so over time.



Recommendations

Given the breadth and depth of physical and managerial challenges that are currently present, a phased approach to approval, design, and implementation is likely to be the most efficient manner to move trail development forward. This approach would allow partnerships to develop and provide time for more difficult issues to be managed, while building and maintaining momentum and stakeholder engagement in a larger overall vision.

Phase 1 would involve providing trail connectivity between the City of Summerville and Summerville Lake State Park along the western bank of the Gauley River. Approximately seven miles in length with relatively few access issues, this trail would serve local residents and visitors and further engage the public, and help management agencies with proof of concept for future phases.

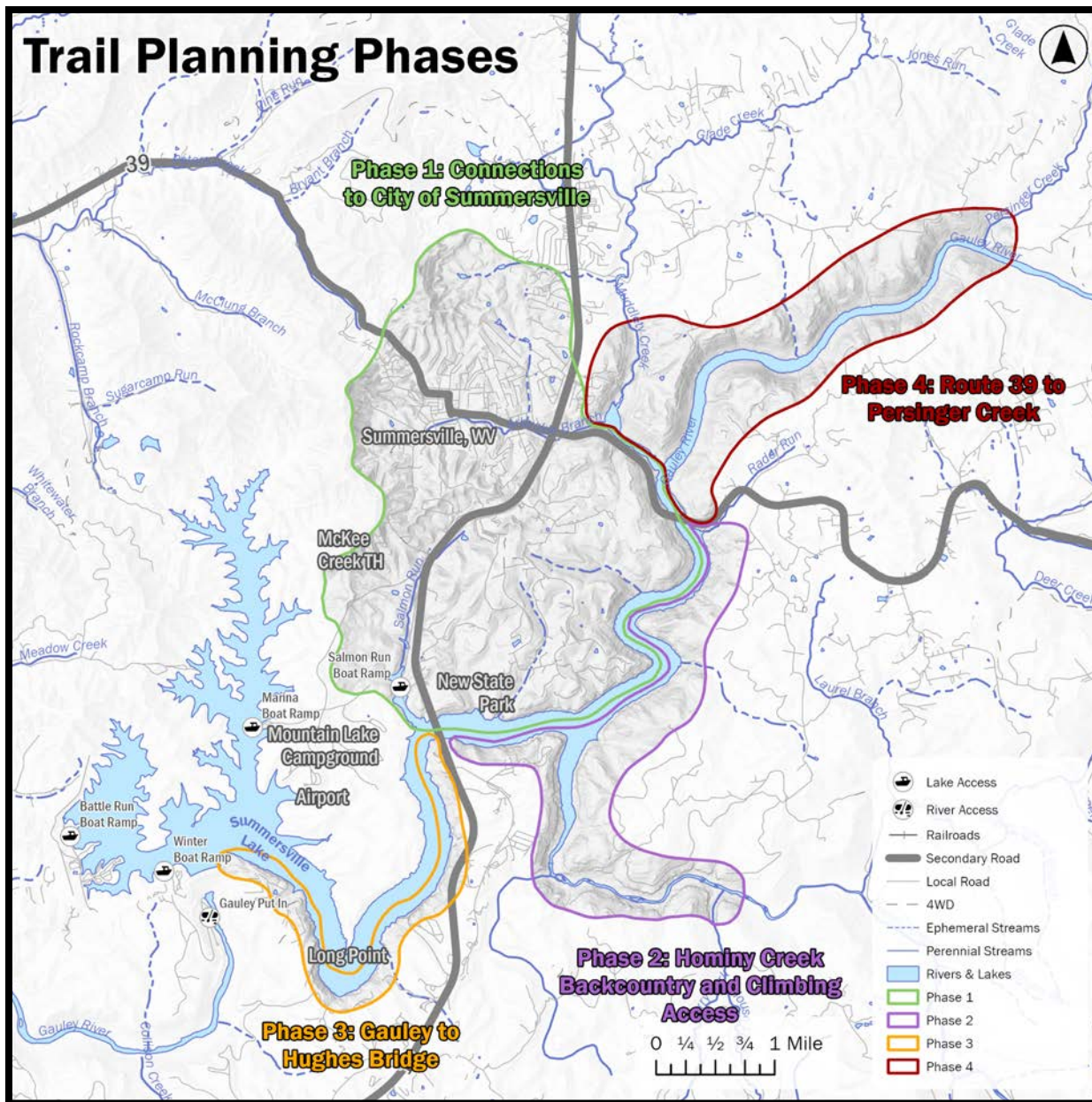
While Phase 1 takes shape, moving into a field-based planning and design for Phase 2 on the opposite bank of the Gauley

and around Hominy Creek with an approximately 12-mile trail corridor. This would further tie the City of Summerville, Summerville Lake State Park, and Summerville Lake together.

Phase 3 focuses on providing trail access from the dam to Hughes Bridge on US HWY 19 along an approximately 5-mile corridor.

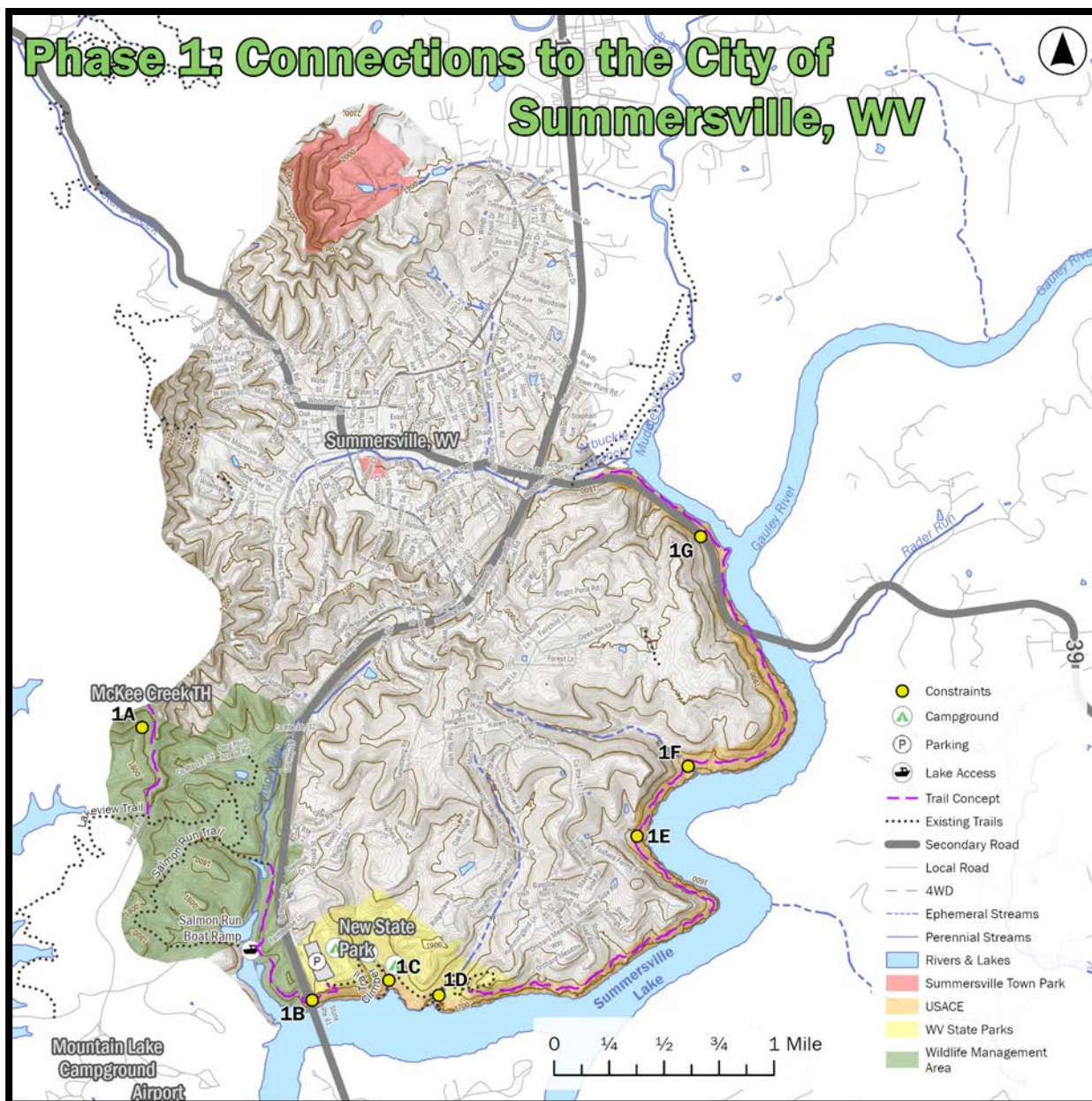
Finally, Phase 4, if deemed complementary and feasible, a backcountry extension of the trail system could be considered from HWY 39 to Persinger Creek along one bank or other of the Gauley.

Phase	Miles
1	6.1
2	8.4
3	3.6
4	5.2
Total:	23.3



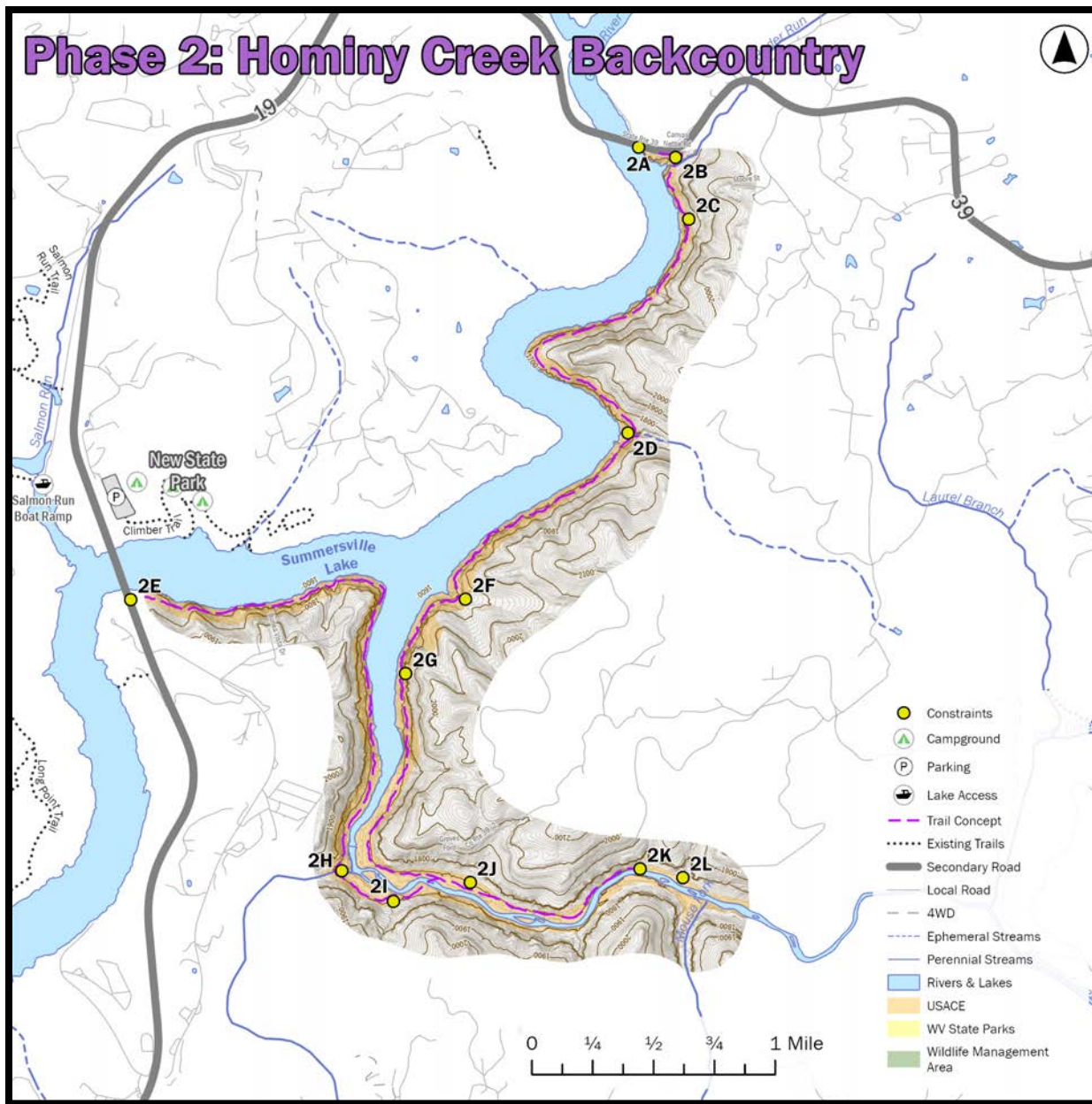
The primary phase focuses on development of connectivity between existing regional destinations (Salmon Run and climbing on the USACE lands around this portion of the lake) and the newly developed Summersville Lake State Park. Trail development picks up at the eastern edge of Summersville Lake State Park to connect to Route 39 just east of the City of Summersville near Muddelty Run. This 4.5 miles of trail will provide connectivity for the City of Summersville and Summersville State Park and improve access to numerous overlooks and recreational attractions along the USACE lands flanking Summersville Lake. Additional connectivity to the residential development adjacent to this leg of trail could be considered.

Developing key connections from Summersville Lake State Park to USACE's Salmon Run day use area further connect and anchor use of this recreationally dense area of the project. A one-half mile long trail connects from the State Park's proposed parking area and lodge, under the Hughes Bridge to the boat launch at Salmon Run. Additional trail connects users to the sidewalk on Hughes Bridge and to the existing WMA trails further up Salmon Run's access road. Trails in this phase would be



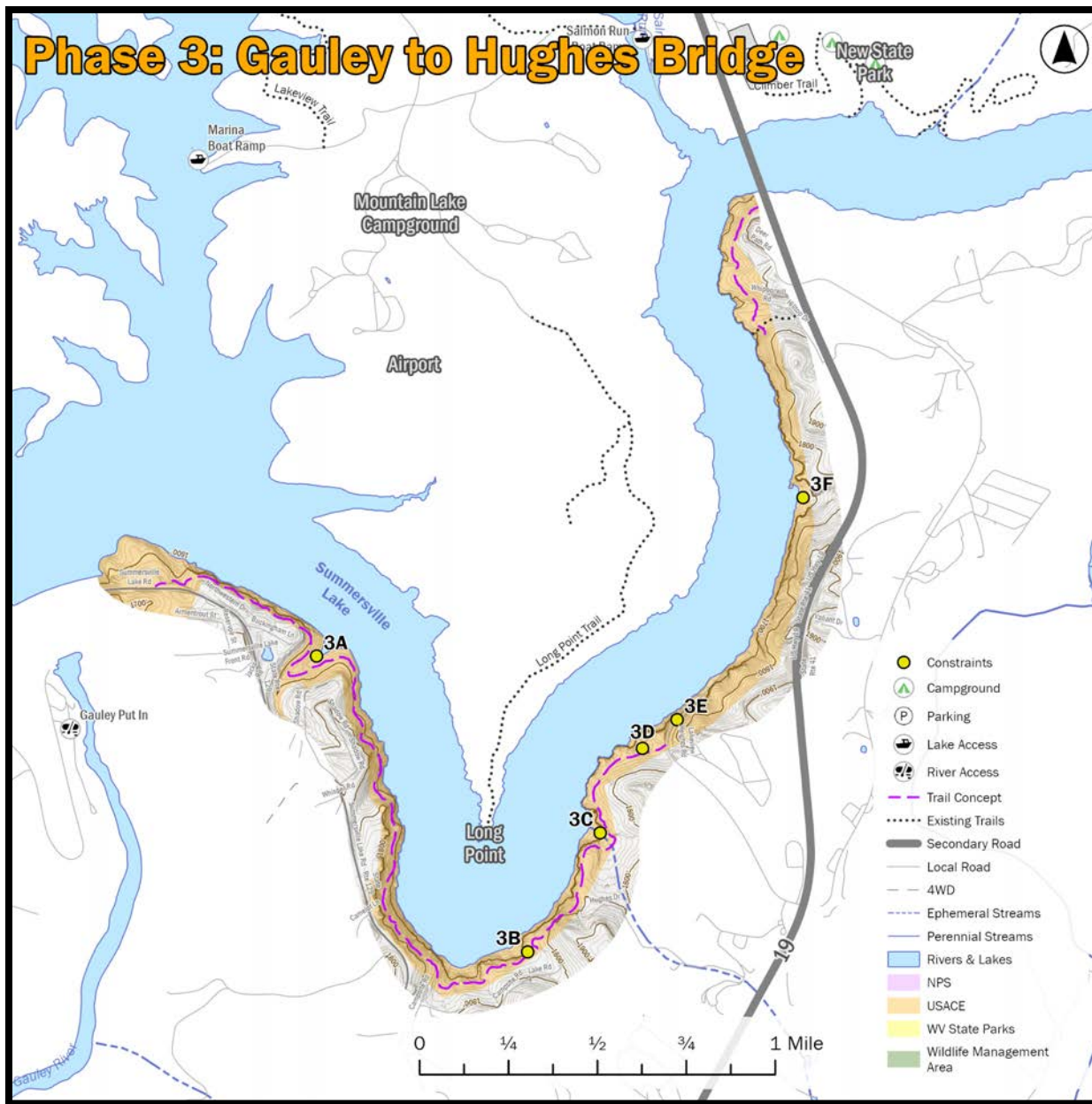
developed to accommodate a wide range of shared use. Trail connecting Salmon Run to Summersville State Park should consider surfacing to allow for all-weather use and high levels of use will require it to be constructed and maintained to a wider (6-8') specification.

A final optional connection closes a "loop" of access to the City of Summersville. A 0.6 mile long connection from Lakeview Trail to the McKees Creek trailhead within the WMA would complete the circuit to the City of Summersville with users being able to cycle or hike along the McKees Creek corridor. Trails in the WMA and from the State Park to Summersville should be built with native surface and a narrower (24-32"), more backcountry feel specification.

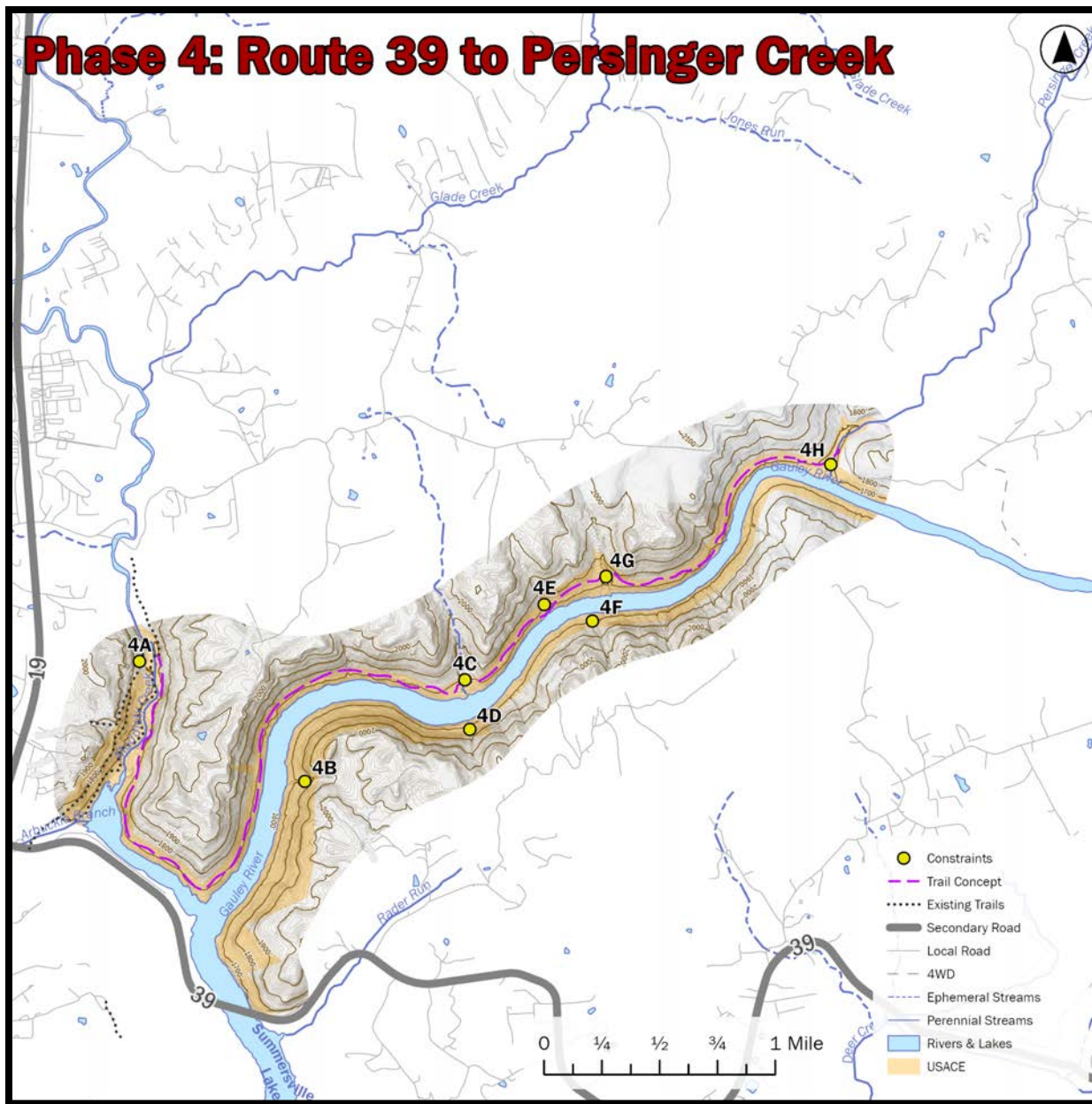


The USACE lands around Hominy Creek currently provide numerous opportunities for dispersed recreation. Camping, ATV/OHV, fishing and climbing use dominate portions of the area of this land base currently. This phase would develop a 7.5 mile trail to connect from Hughes Bridge to the Route 39 Bridge around this southern edge of Summersville Lake. A bridge (cost TBD) to cross at the former road/bridge location on Hominy Creek will be needed to complete this phase. This trail would formalize access for recreational use and provide an additional intermediate to advanced level trail user experience that can be “looped” with the trails developed in Phase 1. Specifications for this natural surface trail that would provide a narrow (24-32”) backcountry experience with significant texture and grade to provide challenge for the intended users.

Development of an approximately 1-mile long spur along the north shore of Hominy Creek will formalize access to additional destinations in this area. This spur utilizes the abandoned road corridor for much of its length.



This phase of the project stretches from the Gauley Dam to the Hughes Bridge on the south side of the lake. Tight property boundaries, steep slopes, cliffs, and stream crossings are significant constraints to trail development in this area. Trail development is feasible for three miles east of the Gauley Dam; when the lake is at summer levels, limited land is available between the lake and private property, but a trail could be constructed that avoids cliffs. Large, impassable cliff bands and limited public land make trail development unreasonable between Lakeview Heights Road (Old Gauley Road) and the existing trail from Whippoorwill Road (Hilltop Drive) to the lakeshore; construction is not recommended in this area, however, trail users could use Hwy 19 to pass through and connect. 1/2 mile of trail could be constructed between Whippoorwill Road and the Hughes Bridge.



This phase of the project includes the areas north of the State Route 39 bridge. Trail development on the north side of the lake could connect from existing trails along Muddlety Creek to Persinger Creek and Persinger County Road. This section of trail would require several stream crossings which are feasible based on slopes and property boundaries.

Trail development is not recommended on the southern shore of the lake north of the State Route 39 bridge due to the difficulty of making a meaningful connection to other trails or trailheads; there is no existing bridge over the Gauley River / Summersville Lake to connect to the Persinger Creek area and there are no roads that access this part of the lake, so trails on the southern side of the lake would only offer out-and-back routes.

Appendix A

Access Challenges Table

Constraints

Type	Name	Length	Notes
Stream	1A		May be able to use an existing road (visible in hillshade).
Road Crossing	1B		There is ample room for a trail to pass under Hughes Bridge; the biggest constraint is crossing the wildlife fencing.
Stream	1C		An unimproved crossing of the stream is possible well above cliff. Interface with State Park land would be helpful.
Stream	1D		
Stream	1E		Good terrain above cliffs, existing road/trail visible in hillshade.
Stream	1F		
Road / Boundary	1G		Tight boundary with highway splitting. One creek crossing to descend/ascend through. Recommend staying high above culvert on roadway embankment. Possible to run just behind guardrail.
Road	2A		Trail will need to stay above this area due to steep slopes, cliffs, and property boundaries; concept shifted upslope to accommodate these factors. Further assessment and collaboration will be needed to determine land ownership to access State Route 39 from Rader Run.
Stream	2B		Can use old highway. Tight property boundaries with steep slopes
Access	2C		Wider land ownership with mellow landform grades. Some cliffs are constant and need to be navigated but it looks like there is terrain above that can allow turns to ascend/descend to avoid these. Inlets to streams will be the tightest points.
Stream	2D		
Road Crossing	2E		Trail can pass under Hughes Bridge here. Concept includes a short spur to provide access to the roadway.
Stream	2F		Wider land ownership with mellow landform grades. Some cliffs are constant and need to be navigated but it looks like there is terrain above that can allow turns to ascend/descend to avoid these. Inlets to streams will be the tightest points.
Stream	2G		Limited space between private property and cliffs.
Stream	2H		Stream crossing is tentatively feasible; concept shifted upslope to most likely crossing location.
Stream	2I	200 ft	Adjacent to the old bridge abutments and crossing of Hominy Creek. Potential to reestablish a footbridge here; bridge would be 200ft (+/-) with two intermediate piers.
Stream	2J		Narrow land base with prominent cliff band. This section would be remote and engaging for backcountry users. It would be challenging to build with large boulders on stream banks, steep side slopes, and cliffs to negotiate constantly in a narrow ACOE parcel.
Stream	2K		Inlet stream and cliffs would make trail development east of this point expensive and difficult; the current concept ends at 2K.
Stream	2L		Cliffs, narrow corridor, and inlet streams make this a difficult and expensive location for trail development; trails are not recommended here.
Stream	3A		All public land is below the flood line.
Stream	3B		Can stay above cliffs.
Stream	3C		Concept moved upslope to remain above cliffs.
Stream	3D		Old highway 19 is useful to access this area. Cliffs limit trails heading south to AC5. This flank has 20-40' cliff bands flanking shoreline and narrow ACOE ownership. The area will be impassable during high water and difficult/expensive to build due to cliff constraints.
Road	3E		

Cliffs / Property Boundary Pin	3F	800 ft	Cliffs and property boundaries constrain trail development in this area; trail concept has been removed from this section due to the difficulty and expense of trail construction in this area.
Property Boundary	4A		Upper trail crosses private property; lower trail is on public land. Further collaboration with ACOE needed to determine legality of trail in this area.
Stream	4B		Trail development on this side of the lake is not recommended due to property boundaries, steep slopes, and stream crossings.
Stream	4C		Stream crossing is tentatively feasible.
Stream	4D		Trail development on this side of the lake is not recommended due to property boundaries, steep slopes, and stream crossings.
Stream	4E		Stream crossing is tentatively feasible.
Stream	4F		Trail development on this side of the lake is not recommended due to property boundaries, steep slopes, and stream crossings.
Stream	4G		Stream crossing is tentatively feasible.
Stream	4H		Stream crossing is tentatively feasible. Concept shifted upslope to most likely crossing location.

Appendix B

Preliminary Cost Estimation

Phase	Length (ft)	Length (mi)	Construction Support				
			Field Design	Permitting	(CDs, Bidding, Award, Oversight)	Construction Low	Construction High
1	32,024	6.1	\$ 6,500.00		\$ 28,682.61	\$ 297,174.00	\$ 396,614.80
2	44,587	8.4	\$ 9,800.00		\$ 46,305.83	\$ 488,255.75	\$ 709,053.65
3	18,877	3.6	\$ 4,200.00		\$ 25,778.26	\$ 231,858.25	\$ 378,949.15
4	27,689	5.2	\$ 6,500.00		\$ 33,224.66	\$ 365,745.25	\$ 457,816.55
Trail Total:	123,177	23.3		\$ 78,000.00	Cost Total:	\$ 1,461,033.25	\$ 2,020,434.15