Grayson Highlands State Park
829 Grayson Highlands Lane
Mouth Of Wilson, VA 24363

GRAYSON HIGHLANDS STATE PARK

MASTER PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2011 UPDATE

Department of Conservation and Recreation
Division of Planning and Recreation Resources
203 Governor Street
Richmond, VA 23219

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Reviewed by the Board of Conservation and Recreation on June 17, 2011

Approved:

/S/ 9/2/2011

David A. Johnson, Director
Department of Conservation
and Recreation

Date

GRAYSON HIGHLANDS STATE PARK
MASTER PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2011 UPDATE

This Grayson Highlands State Park Master Plan Executive Summary is an update to the official unabridged master plan document adopted in 2005 by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). It is the most recent five-year review as described in §10.1-200.1 of the *Code of Virginia*. This master plan update is intended to set forth a clear vision for the future (based on phased development), while fulfilling the narrative text requirements of Chapter IV of the Virginia Capital Outlay Manual and §10.1-200.1 of the *Code of Virginia.* It outlines the desired future condition for Grayson Highlands State Park when it is fully developed.

Grayson Highlands State Park is located in western Grayson County in the Mount Rogers Planning District in the ridge and valley province of Virginia. The park lies in the mountains of southwest Virginia, approximately one mile north of the North Carolina state line and 8 miles west of Volney, Virginia, on State Highway 58. The park is approximately 50 miles east of Bristol and 135 miles southwest of Roanoke.

In 1964, the Commonwealth began purchasing the 73 individual farm tracts that make up Grayson Highlands. It was the first of eight parks acquired through the Virginia State Park Expansion Program. Funding was derived from Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) monies and matching state appropriations. The park was established in 1965 as Mount Rogers State Park. However, the original name created some confusion as it was relatively easy to conclude that the park was located on Mount Rogers, which is under United States Forest Service management. So in 1975, the park was renamed Grayson Highlands. The name was derived from the name of one of Virginia's first Senators, William Grayson, and the mountainous "highlands" location.

Work on the park's infrastructure began in 1967 with the first rough-graded road. By July 1970, the first phase of park development was complete, and the park opened with limited facilities in 1971. Work continued from 1971 to 1973 as Green Thumb employees, Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) workers, and park staff constructed trails and built stone and spilt-rail fences. Log cabins from the area were acquired, dismantled, then reconstructed throughout the park. Over time Grayson Highlands' stone and chestnut rail fences have become a symbol of Grayson County's mountain heritage.

Over the past four decades Grayson Highlands State Park has changed in many ways, however, the park's main focus continues to be interpreting the distinctive historical, cultural, and natural resources of the area. The park features some of the most unique natural resources and fascinating landscapes in Virginia. The park is situated adjacent to

Mount Rogers, the highest mountain in Virginia at 5,729 feet. Boreal forests cover much of the higher elevations of the park. These spruce and fir forests are uncommon to Virginia and are home to rare species from salamanders to flying squirrels. The park hosts significant events that highlight the culture and history of the area. Annually the Wayne C. Henderson Music Festival and Guitar Competition is scheduled in June and a Fall Festival is held on the last weekend in September. A pony herd grazes throughout the Wilburn Ridge and Massie Gap areas of Grayson Highlands State Park. Each year the ponies are rounded up at the Fall Festival and some are auctioned off.

This 2011 update focuses on connecting Grayson Highlands to other resources in the community. Nearby public lands include the George Washington and Jefferson National Forest (which includes Mount Rogers National Recreation Area and Little Wilson Creek Wilderness Area) and the Blue Ridge Parkway. The Appalacian Trail is one of the park borders, and other trails in close proximity to the park include Iron Mountain Trail, Virginia Creeper Trail, and Virginia Highlands Trail. The park is listed as a site on the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' Birding and Wildlife Trail, as well as the Crooked Road-Virginia's Heritage Music Trail. The Grayson Highlands State Park Regional Connectivity Map is an attachment to the full Master Plan document.

Grayson Highlands State Park received Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) in 1966 for land acquisition and in 1967 and 1973 for park facility development. In compliance with the LWCF Act of 1965 and amendments thereto, the Commonwealth of Virginia is required to maintain the park for public outdoor recreation in perpetuity.

While preparing the 2005 Grayson Highlands State Park Master Plan, meetings were held with DCR staff and a Master Plan Advisory Committee comprised of area citizens, local government officials, and representatives of agencies and organizations to assist with the development of the plan. The committee helped formulate a park purpose statement as well as park goals and objectives, which will guide future park operations and development. The DCR staff also conducted two public meetings to solicit input from the general public. Following the development of the master plan, it was recommended for approval by the Board of Conservation and Recreation and then approved by the DCR Director.

As a part of the 2011 master plan process, the 2005 park master plan was reviewed. It was determined that no significant changes occurred to warrant a full revision of the master plan. The goals and objectives and the desired future condition of the park have not changed since adoption of the 2005 plan. Planning staff met with park staff and toured the park to prepare this plan update. The phased development plan and costs have been revised to reflect projects that have been completed since 2005, and the park staffing and operations costs data have been also updated to reflect current conditions.

The park purpose statement is stated below:

The purpose of Grayson Highlands State Park is to provide in perpetuity the opportunity for visitors to enjoy the natural and scenic beauty of Virginia's High Country and to learn about the region's rich Appalachian Culture while providing access to the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

Visitors come to Grayson Highlands to take advantage of the unique family-oriented recreational opportunities provided in the park or to use the park as a base camp while visiting other natural and scenic resources in the area. The table below depicts annual average attendance during the last ten years. As can be seen from the chart, Grayson Highlands State Park attendance has been fairly steady over the past decade.

PARK ATTENDANCE TABLE

2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
140,302	132,797	119,733	120,446	111,285	117,846	130,008	127,810	126,139	139,379

In 2010, Grayson Highlands State Park had 139,379 visitors, 36,948 were overnight guests, while 102,431 were day use visitors. With this level of visitation, it is estimated that the park had an economic impact on the local economy of approximately $4,409,996. Master plan recommendations designed to increase visitorship and improve the visitor experience, once implemented, should have a further positive impact on the community's economic vitality.

Existing facilities at Grayson Highlands State park include: contact station; park office with public restroom and gift shop; Visitor Center; a maintenance area; three staff residences; an interpreter's cabin used to house volunteers, summer interpreters, and special guests; a picnic area with more than 50 picnic sites, plus two picnic shelters, a restroom facility, and well-house; two large picnic shelters; campground with 41 water/electric sites, 32 tent sites, one handicap accessible campsite, and two bathhouses; a playground; a country store; amphitheater seating 150; group camp; equestrian campground with 24 campsites, 38 covered horse stalls, and 29 open stalls, as well as a stable and a bathhouse.

The Homestead Area (which hosts the Grayson Highlands Fall Festival and the Wayne Henderson Music Festival) includes a performance stage, picnic area, and several historical cabins, sheds, and other outbuildings. These buildings from another time include the Weaver Log Cabin, which is completely furnished with 19th century pieces; the Woodshed, also called the Apple Butter Shed; the Springhouse; the Grainery; the restored Spencer Cabin, and an outhouse, Molasses Shed, and a Sugarcane Press.

Grayson Highlands State Park offers 20.4 miles of trails for hiking, biking, and horseback riding. Each trail is blazed with color codes and provides visitors with opportunities for a variety of unique experiences. Massie Gap Trailhead area, linking the park to the Appalachian Trail has two pit toilets and parking for both day and overnight hikers.

Park improvements since the writing of the 2005 master plan include construction of a group camp comfort station, erection of the performance stage, provision of water hook-ups at equestrian campsites, and upgrades to the upper loop campground bathhouse. Also, in 2011, DCR and the Department of Forestry (DOF) completed a land exchange. Approximately 300 acres at Grayson Highlands were exchanged for approximately the same acreage at Holliday Lake State Park. Because the land at Grayson Highlands will continue to be utilized in the same way, there will be little or no impact at the park.

This master plan update represents both new facilities and improvements to existing facilities. New facilities are sited to minimize impact to the park. To the greatest extent possible, Virginia State Parks strives to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards. Building and site design will implement green energy standards using energy-efficient and sustainable materials and process to the greatest extent possible. Green design initiatives will be considered during the design process for park renovations and new construction. These facilities will be carefully sited to minimize impacts to the views of the park from adjacent lands. Development activities will comply with requirements set forth by the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Best Management Practices (BMP) Handbook for Erosion and Sediment Control in order to protect water quality.

While no acquisition is anticipated at this time, additional land acquisition is recommended in this park to address irregularities in the park's boundary, as well as to enhance park offerings, buffer the park from inappropriate development or protect valued viewsheds. All lands acquired by sale or donation will only be negotiated with willing property owners. The placement of conservation easements on adjacent property to preserve the natural resources, cultural landscapes, and scenic resources in close proximity to the park is encouraged. In working cooperatively with neighboring landowners, the park will be enhanced and protected over time.

Availability of water is a major a major challenge and key barrier to further development at Grayson Highlands State Park. It is recommended that further research be conducted to determine if there are additional water resources available to support existing and proposed park developments. Furthermore, the park should further explore and implement water conservation methods to lessen the demand for water at the park.

Proposed developments for Grayson Highlands State Park are presented in priority order. Completion of all of the projects in this list will represent total build-out (completion of the master plan) and covers a 20-year timeframe.

PHASE I

Construct a picnic shelter at Visitor Center
Upgrade electric for (41) campsites in campground
Construct two camping cabins in campground
Resurface roads and parking lots throughout park.
Expand trails to connect points of interest inside and outside the park.
Landscaping, including additional stone walls and rail fencing.

The total estimated cost for Phase I development is $3,522,636

PHASE II

Expand Country Store at campground
Construct comfort station/showers at Massie Gap (water and electric utilities needed)
Construct a staff residence
Expand trails to connect points of interest inside and outside the park.
Landscaping, including additional stone walls and rail fencing.

The total estimated cost for Phase II development is $3,067,740

PHASE III

Expand maintenance area
Construct cabin area (10 cabins- 1-6BR, 3-3BR, 6-2BR)
Expand picnic area with shelter and comfort station
Expand trails to connect points of interest inside and outside the park.
Landscaping, including additional stone walls and rail fencing.

The total estimated cost for Phase III development is $7,567,560

The total cost to bring Grayson Highlands State Park to its desired future condition is $14,157,936

Staffing and Operations

Staffing and operational costs at Grayson Highlands State Park are presently budgeted at $689,000 annually, including salaries for 6 staff positions. With the current facilities and operational requirements, the park has an identified need for 6 additional positions and $305,000 in funding. At complete build out of the proposed 3 phases of development, 1 additional staff will be needed along with an additional $198,000 in operating funds. In order for the park to operate effectively and efficiently at full build out, the park requires the projected staffing and operating funds identified in the budget as "existing additional needs" and the funds for the 3 development phases. The total budget for Grayson Highlands at full build out is projected to be $1,192,000 with 13 staff positions.

GRAYSON HIGHLANDS OPERATING AND STAFFING REQUIREMENTS					
EXISTING (FY 11)	**EXISTING ADDITIONAL NEEDS ***	**PHASE 1**	**PHASE 2**	**PHASE 3**	**FULL BUILD OUT**
STAFFING					**STAFFING**
Park Manager					Park Manager
Asst. Park Mgr					Asst. Park Mgr
Chief Ranger	Chief Ranger				Chief Ranger (2)
	Educ. Specialist				Educ. Specialist
Park Ranger (2)	Park Ranger (4)				Park Ranger (6)
				Housekeeper	Housekeeper
Office Manager					Office Manager
SALARY TOTAL					**SALARY TOTAL**
$324,000	$260,000			$40,000	$624,000
WAGE TOTAL					**WAGE TOTAL**
$132,000	$38,000	$7,000	$3,000	$61,000	$241,000
OTPS TOTAL					**OTPS TOTAL**
$233,000	$7,000	$6,000	$5,000	$76,000	$327,000
TOTAL BUDGET (FY11 dollars)					**TOTAL BUDGET (FY11 dollars)**
$689,000	$305,000	$13,000	$8,000	$177,000	$1,192,000

NOTE – All costs (salary, wage, OTPS (Other than Personnel Services)) are based on FY11 budget projections.
* Existing additional needs represents staff shortages that were identified as part of the 2002 re-benchmarking effort, and/or staff positions and operating costs reduced due to multiple years of state wide budget reductions.

MASTER PLAN FOR

GRAYSON HIGHLANDS STATE PARK

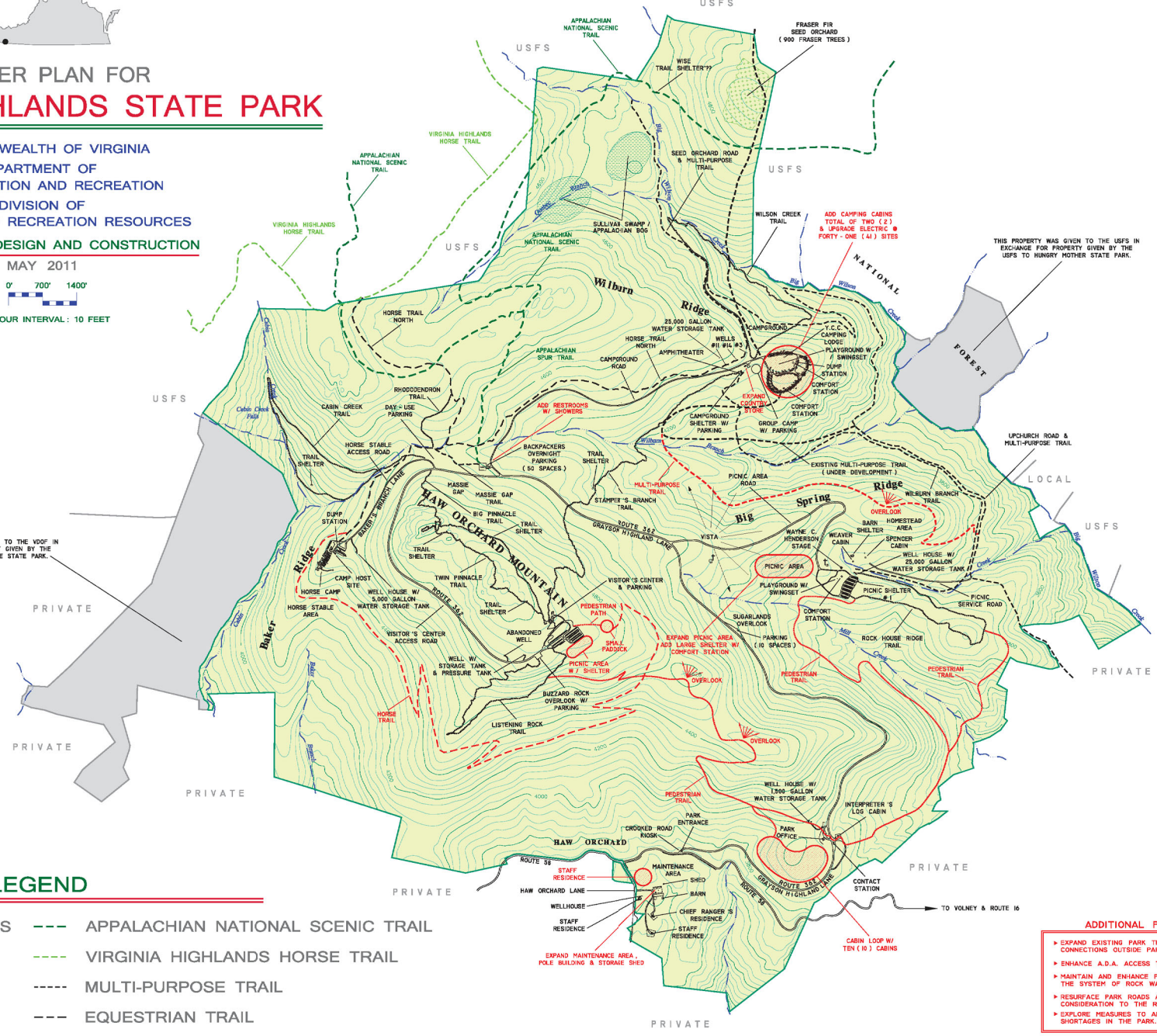
COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF
CONSERVATION AND RECREATION
DIVISION OF
PLANNING AND RECREATION RESOURCES

PREPARED BY DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

MAY 2011

0' 700' 1400'

CONTOUR INTERVAL: 10 FEET



LEGEND

- PROPOSED FACILITIES
- EXISTING FACILITIES
- PARK PROPERTY
- OTHER PROPERTY
- PARK BOUNDARY
- APPALACHIAN NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL
- VIRGINIA HIGHLANDS HORSE TRAIL
- MULTI-PURPOSE TRAIL
- EQUESTRIAN TRAIL
- HIKING TRAIL

ADDITIONAL PROPOSED ITEMS

- EXPAND EXISTING PARK TRAILS AND EXPLORE NEW TRAIL CONNECTIONS OUTSIDE PARK BOUNDARIES.
- ENHANCE A.D.A. ACCESS THROUGHOUT THE PARK.
- MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE PARK LANDSCAPING, INCLUDING THE SYSTEM OF ROCK WALLS.
- RESURFACE PARK ROADS AND PARKING AREAS, WITH CONSIDERATION TO THE RUGGED CLIMATE.
- EXPLORE MEASURES TO ADDRESS THE WATER SUPPLY SHORTAGES IN THE PARK.