



**Grayson Highlands State Park
829 Grayson Highlands Lane
Mouth of Wilson, Virginia 24363**

**GRAYSON HIGHLANDS
STATE PARK
MASTER PLAN
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
2017 UPDATE**



**Department of Conservation and Recreation
Division of Planning and Recreation Resources
600 East Main Street, 24th Floor
Richmond, VA 23219**

GRAYSON HIGHLANDS STATE PARK

MASTER PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2017 UPDATE

Presented for review at a public meeting on July 13, 2016, then recommended for adoption by the Board of Conservation and Recreation on January 27, 2017, and then reviewed for 30 days by the Virginia General Assembly.

Adopted:

//S//

Clyde E. Cristman, Director
Department of Conservation
and Recreation

April 17, 2017
Date



GRAYSON HIGHLANDS STATE PARK MASTER PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2017 UPDATE

Park Purpose Statement

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.

Introduction

This Grayson Highlands State Park Master Plan was originally adopted on September 9, 2005, by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Director Joseph H. Maroon. An updated plan was approved on September 2, 2011, by Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Director David A. Johnson. This 2017 executive summary represents the most recent ten-year update as described in §10.1-200.1 of the *Code of Virginia*. This master plan update is intended to outline, through phased approach the desired future condition for Grayson Highlands State Park when it is fully developed.

Grayson Highlands State Park lies in the mountains of southwest Virginia, adjacent to Mount Rogers, the highest mountain in Virginia at 5,729 feet. The park is located in western Grayson County in the Mount Rogers Planning District, 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. The northern, northeastern and northwestern boundaries of the park are surrounded by Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, managed by the U.S. Forest Service.

In 1964, the Commonwealth began purchasing the 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 one of Virginia's first Senators, William Grayson, also namesake of the county established in 1793, 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, and then reconstructed throughout the park. Over time Grayson Highlands' stone and chestnut rail fences have become a symbol of Grayson County's mountain heritage.

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. Current acreage at the park is 4,502 acres.

This master plan executive summary includes information from the park's resource management plan and visitor experience plan, as well as information on park revenues and economic activity. This information guides the future of the park's development and management.

Park Resource Management Plan

The resource management plan consolidates all known resource information for a park and provides management direction for maintaining and enhancing those resources. The plans identify the physical, abiotic, and biotic characteristics of the park, and historic and archaeological resources, as well as a description of the legal constraints and limitations. The park is delineated into undeveloped areas based on the ecosystems found in these areas; unique management areas which are undeveloped areas with a specific purpose or function such as a historic battlefield or open field; and developed areas where park facilities are located yet have natural and cultural resources requiring specific management. The plan has defined management objectives and action recommendations that guide resource management and allow for continuity over time.

Located in the ridge and valley physiographic region, Grayson Highlands State Park has twenty-seven significant resources that consist of twelve unique or rare plant species and four natural community types. The predominant community types include Northern Hardwood Forest, Montane Mixed Oak / Oak-Hickory Forest, Oak – Heath Forest and Southern Appalachian Shrub and Grass Bald. Some of these plants and community types are federally and state imperiled sites that are rarely found anywhere else in the state of Virginia, as well as the East Coast. Many of these resources are a result of the high elevation where the park is located, past volcanic activity, historic grazing by cattle and wild ponies, and the protection of the resources since the land was purchased in the 1960's.

Wild ponies graze one of the unique natural community types helping maintain it as a Southern Appalachian Shrub and Grass Bald on Wilburn's Ridge. Also present on Wilburn's Ridge are high bush blueberries in plentiful numbers scattered throughout the open areas. Grayson Highlands also supports forests dominated by red spruce trees, which only grow above elevations of thirty-five hundred feet in this region of the United States. The headwaters of the Quebec Branch and the Sullivan Swamp, located near the

Frasier Fir Seed Orchard, are two Appalachian bogs that are very rare natural community types that contain a portion of the twelve unique and rare plant species. The Listening Rock is categorized as a High Elevation Outcrop Barren listed as a state imperiled site. The Listening Rock provides an ecosystem that supports a federally endangered plant found only in eight sites in the United States according to the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Wilson and Cabin Creeks have native brook trout populations monitored by the Virginia Department of Fish and Game and are open to the public for fishing under special regulations. The park's landscape is dominated by large boulders consisting of gray, volcanic rock called rhyolite, popular for viewing magnificent vistas and bouldering. The park features some of the most unique natural resources and fascinating landscapes in Virginia.

Park Visitor Experience Plan

The visitor experience management plan provides a park-wide vision for the future of interpretation, education, recreation and other visitor experience opportunities. The plan addresses all elements of a park that affect visitor experiences, including personal services, media, facilities, and landscapes. It is a conceptual document that lays a foundation for subsequent phases of comprehensive interpretive planning: facility and media planning, design and production; and organization of staff and activities into annual visitor experience implementation plans.

The visitor experience plan for Grayson Highlands State Park has not been developed at the time of the 2017 master plan update. Once developed, the plan will include both primary and secondary themes for the park. A primary theme encompasses the overall park story. It is the single most important message all park guests should receive and remember. Secondary themes are important messages related to the primary theme that should be presented to park guests. Any other sub-themes and topics that may be interpreted at the park should be linked to these secondary themes.

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 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.

Park Master Plan

The Department of Conservation and Recreation Planners and State Park Staff conducted this master plan update in accordance with §10.1-200.1 of the *Code of Virginia*. As required by the *Code of Virginia*, it must be revisited every ten years to ensure that the development objectives outlined in the plan continue to meet the recreational and conservation needs of the citizens of the Commonwealth. This plan outlines the desired future condition of the park over a 30-year planning horizon.

While preparing the original 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 helps guide future park operations and development. DCR staff 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 adopted by the DCR Director.

As a part of the 2017 master plan process, the original 2005 master plan and 2011 park master plan update were reviewed. Planning staff met with park staff and conducted a site visit to the park to gather information for this plan update. A public meeting was held on July 13, 2016 to share the draft plan and receive public input.

Following the public meeting, the phased development plan and estimated costs were revised, as were the staffing and operational costs for the park for each phase of development. The final draft of the executive summary and map were developed.

The draft 2017 executive summary and map were presented to the Board of Conservation and Recreation at their January 27, 2017 meeting and was recommended for adoption. The documents were then placed on the DCR website for a 30-day review by the Virginia General Assembly. Following that review, the updated plan was presented to the DCR Director Clyde E. Cristman for adoption. Following adoption, the updated executive summary and map were placed online <http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/masterplans> for the public to access.

Attendance, Economic Impact and Park Revenues

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 Visitation – Grayson Highlands (Calendar Year¹)

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
117,846	130,008	127,810	126,139	139,379	143,795	143,716	142,032	135,899	143,005

¹Note that the calendar year ends 6 months after the fiscal year.

Economic activity is created by the park from three sources: Park visitation, the park operating budget (but only to the extent that it was not funded by park visitor revenues in order to avoid double counting), and park construction projects. The following table summarizes this economic activity for 2015:

Total Economic Activity including Visitation, Park Budget, and Construction (Adjusted to local economy)		Visitor Spending	Spending on Park Budget (excluding portion derived from visitation)	Spending on Park Construction	State and Local Taxes Created
Dollars	Jobs	Dollars	Dollars	Dollars	Dollars
\$ 3,776,472	53.1	\$ 3,557,777	\$ 227,399	\$ 6,454	\$ 303,962

In general, overnight visitors create the greatest amounts of economic activity but this park does not have cabins so the visitor impacts come about equally from campers and day users. A majority of the 53.1 jobs that are created by the park’s economic activity are local jobs that benefit the local rural community. It is also notable that this park generates state and local taxes in excess of the portion of the park budget that is not derived from visitor revenues. Master plan recommendations designed to increase visitation and improve the visitor experience, once implemented, should have a further positive impact on the region’s economic vitality

The following chart depicts revenue generated during the fiscal years 2008 to 2016:

Park Revenues - Grayson Highlands

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
\$382,828	\$363,967	\$381,462	\$421,892	\$449,641	\$412,403	\$469,893	\$537,973	\$606,977

In FY 2016, Virginia State Parks generated \$21,233,340 in total revenue, \$11,138,230 from overnight facilities, and \$10,095,110 from other sources. Grayson Highlands State Park contributed \$606,977 to the revenue total, \$274,497 in overnight revenue and \$332,480 from other sources. Revenue generated by Virginia State Parks is reinvested in the state park system to maintain and operate the parks. In FY 2016, 48% of the state park budget came from revenues generated in the parks.

Existing facilities:

Contact station

Park office with public restroom and gift shop

Visitor Center

Maintenance area

Staff residences (3)

Interpreter's cabin used to house volunteers, summer interpreters, and special guests

Picnic area with more than 50 picnic sites

Picnic shelters (2 Large)

Campground with (41) water/electric sites, 32 tent sites, one accessible campsite

Bathhouses (2)

Playground

Country store

Amphitheater (seating 150)

Group camp

Trails (20.4 miles) for hiking, biking and equestrian

Equestrian campground (24 sites), covered horse stalls (38), and open stalls (29), as well as a stable and bathhouse.

The Homestead Area includes a performance stage, picnic area, several historical cabins, sheds, and other outbuildings. These buildings include the Weaver Log Cabin, which is completely furnished with 19th century pieces; the Woodshed, also called the Apple Butter Shed; the Springhouse; the Granary; the restored Spencer Cabin, and an outhouse, Molasses Shed, and a Sugarcane Press.

Massie Gap Trailhead area, linking the park to the Appalachian Trail has two pit toilets and parking for both day and overnight hikers.

Connectivity

This 2017 update focuses on connecting Grayson Highlands to other resources in the community. Special places within the George Washington and Jefferson National Forest include Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, Seng Mountain and Bear Creek national scenic areas, Mount Rogers Crest Zone and Whitetop Mountain special management areas and four wilderness areas: Raccoon Branch, Lewis Fork, Little Dry Run and Little Wilson Creek. The Appalachian Trail follows one of the park borders, and other long-distance trails nearby 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 and the Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail. `Round the Mountain: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Network and Back of the Dragon driving tours are nearby. Sections of routes 58, 91, 600, 603 and 749 are Virginia Scenic Byways and sections of routes 16, 91 and 603 are part of the National Forest Mount Rogers Scenic Byway. Whitetop, Laurel Creek, New River and the Middle and South Fork of the Holston are designated scenic rivers. U. S. Bike Route 76 and Surviving Smyth County Challenge are two bike routes in the area. The Museum of the Middle Appalachians and Virginia's Salt Trail are both in Saltville. The Clinch

Mountain Wildlife Management Area and the Buller Fish Hatchery are within a short drive. The Grayson Highlands State Park Regional Connectivity Map is an attachment to the full Master Plan document.

The Virginia Outdoor Plan (VOP) identifies land conservation and outdoor recreation resources. The VOP Mapper <http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/vopmapper> identifies these resources both within and around state parks to encourage cross promotion, physical links and other collaborative efforts. The mapper is updated on an annual basis.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

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.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

To the greatest extent possible, Virginia State Parks strives to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards.

Land Acquisition/Viewshed Protection

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, establish connective trail corridors 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.

Environmental/Design Guidance

This 2017 master plan update describes both proposed facilities and improvements to existing facilities. New facilities are sited to minimize impact to the park, and in keeping with the prescriptive management areas as defined by the Park Resource Management Plan and the guidelines of the Park Visitor Experience Plan, when available. New facilities at this park should be designed and built with consideration to the original design and layout of facilities. These facilities will be carefully sited to minimize impacts to the views in the park and of the park from adjacent lands and water bodies. Consideration will be given to eliminate excessive, misdirected, or obtrusive artificial light in the park in order to maximize the dark sky effect and encourage astronomy and night-sky viewing.

Building and site design will implement green energy standards using energy-efficient and sustainable materials and procedures to the greatest extent possible. Green design initiatives will be considered during the design process for park renovations and new construction. Development activities will comply with requirements set forth by the Department of Environmental Quality's best management practices for erosion, sediment control and storm-water management in order to protect water quality.

There are potential challenges of overuse and crowded conditions, which may require management actions to protect the resources and the quality of the park experience. Issues related to resource carrying capacity and social carrying capacity should be evaluated prior to developing new facilities.

Special Park Challenge

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.

Phased Development Plan

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 30-year timeframe. Estimates are based on 2017 cost figures.

PHASE I

Upgrade utilities including replacing water lines and enhancing phone service.
Comfort station/shelter at Massie Gap
Construct a staff residence (demo current structure)
Yurts (4) in campground
Upgrade electric for (45) campsites in campground
Replace bathhouse in lower loop of campground.
Redesign and expand park office as welcome center, with 2 offices and meeting space.
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 \$9,055,323

PHASE II

Expand picnic area with shelter and comfort station
Expand and upgrade Country Store, including shelter and overhang.
Expand maintenance area
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 \$4,034,815

PHASE III

Renovate bathhouse in upper loop of campground
Picnic shelter/SST with water/electric at visitor center parking lot
Upgrade horse stalls (10)
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 \$2,695,399

The total cost to bring Grayson Highlands State Park to its desired future condition is \$15,785,537

Staffing and Operations

Staffing and operational costs at Grayson Highlands State Park are presently budgeted at \$831,000 annually, including salaries for 6 staff positions. With the current facilities and operational requirements, the park has an identified need for 5 additional positions and \$305,000 in funding. At complete build out of the proposed 3 phases of development, 1 additional staff will be needed and an additional \$115,000 in operating funds. In order for the park to operate effectively and efficiently at full build out, the park will require the projected staffing and operating cost identified as “existing additional needs” and the costs for the 3 development phases. The total budget for Grayson Highlands at full build out is projected to be \$1,251,000 with 12 staff positions.

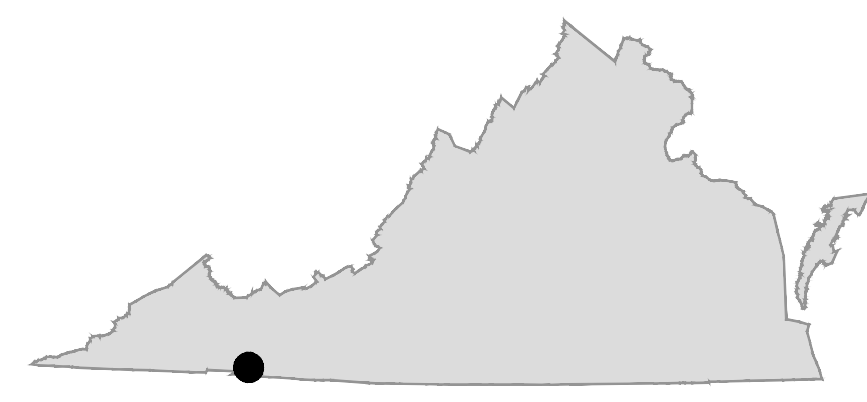
GRAYSON HIGHLANDS OPERATING AND STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

EXISTING (FY 17)	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 (2)	Park Ranger			Park Ranger (5)
Office Manager					Office Manager
	Prog Support Tech				Prog Support Tech
SALARY TOTAL					SALARY TOTAL
\$424,000	\$279,000	\$52,000			\$755,000
WAGE TOTAL					WAGE TOTAL
\$196,000	\$14,000	\$24,000	\$8,000	\$7,000	\$249,000
OTPS TOTAL					OTPS TOTAL
\$211,000	\$12,000	\$13,000	\$6,000	\$5,000	\$247,000
TOTAL BUDGET (FY17 dollars)					TOTAL BUDGET (FY17 dollars)
\$831,000	\$305,000	\$89,000	\$14,000	\$12,000	\$1,251,000

NOTE – All costs (salary, wage, OTPS (Other than Personnel Services)) are based on FY17 budget projections.

* Salary estimates include associated personnel costs.

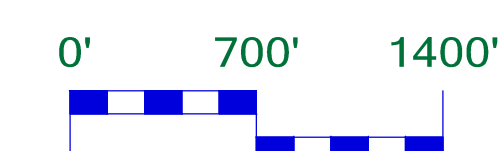
** Existing additional needs represents staff positions and operating costs not fully funded due to prior state wide budget reductions.



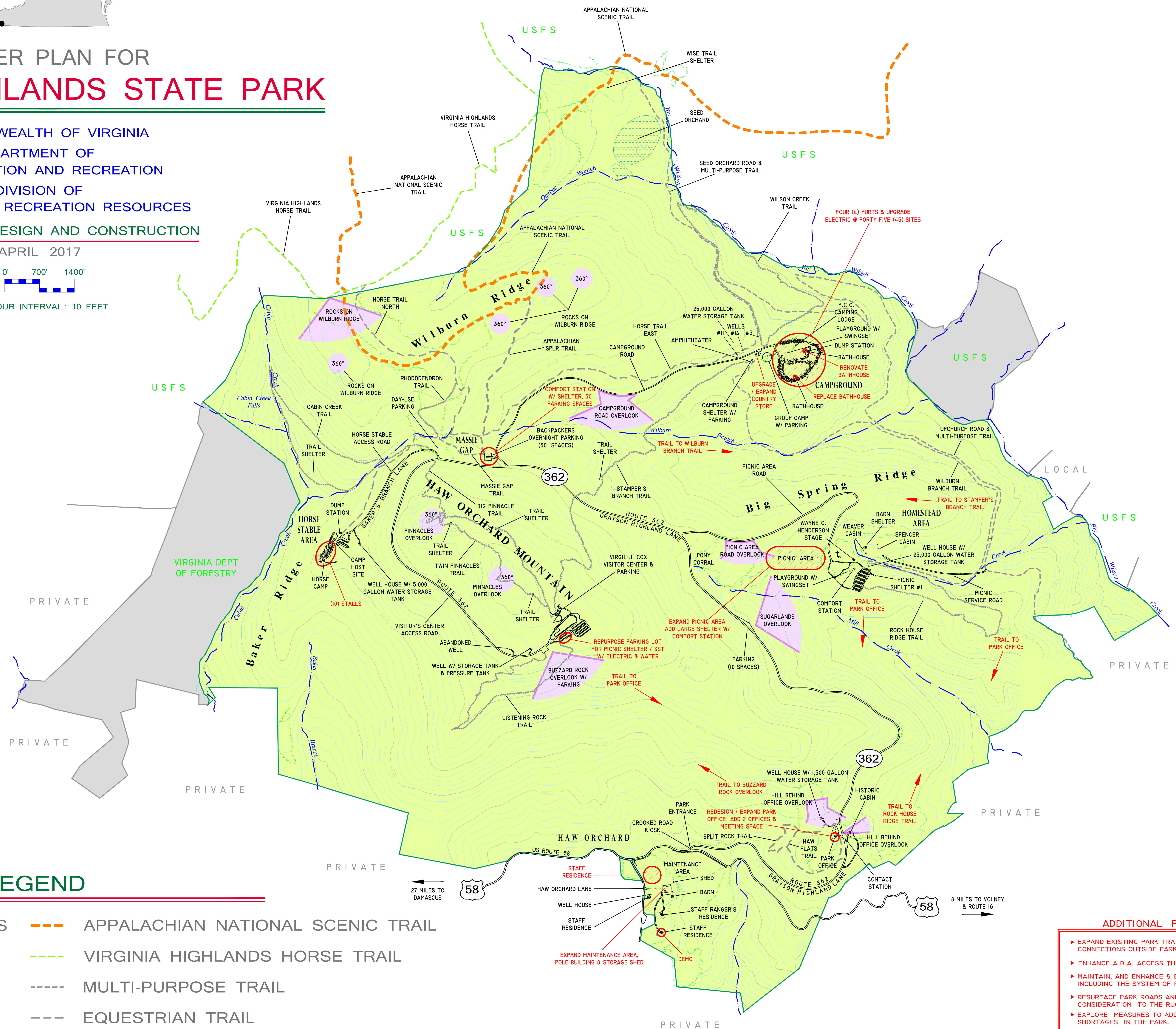
MASTER PLAN FOR GRAYSON HIGHLANDS STATE PARK

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF
CONSERVATION AND RECREATION
DIVISION OF
PLANNING AND RECREATION RESOURCES
PREPARED BY DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

APRIL 2017



CONTOUR INTERVAL: 10 FEET



LEGEND

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

- 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 & EXPAND 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.
 - ▶ UPGRADE PARK UTILITIES INCLUDING WATER & PHONE SERVICE.

GRAYSON HIGHLANDS STATE PARK IS 4,502 ACRES
LOCATED IN GRAYSON COUNTY, VIRGINIA.