

# MCDUFFIE COUNTY TRAILS CHARRETTE



UNIVERSITY OF  
GEORGIA

Archway Partnership  
Center for Community Design and Preservation  
College of Environment and Design

SPRING 2021

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

McDuffie County stakeholders want to increase recreational opportunities around Clarks Hill Lake, one of the largest man-made lakes east of the Mississippi River. The lake and adjacent land are controlled by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), which leases the majority of McDuffie County shoreline to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for a Wildlife Management Area (WMA). McDuffie County holds lakefront leases on two former Corps campgrounds – Big Hart and Raysville – and has successfully increased visitation numbers over the last five years.

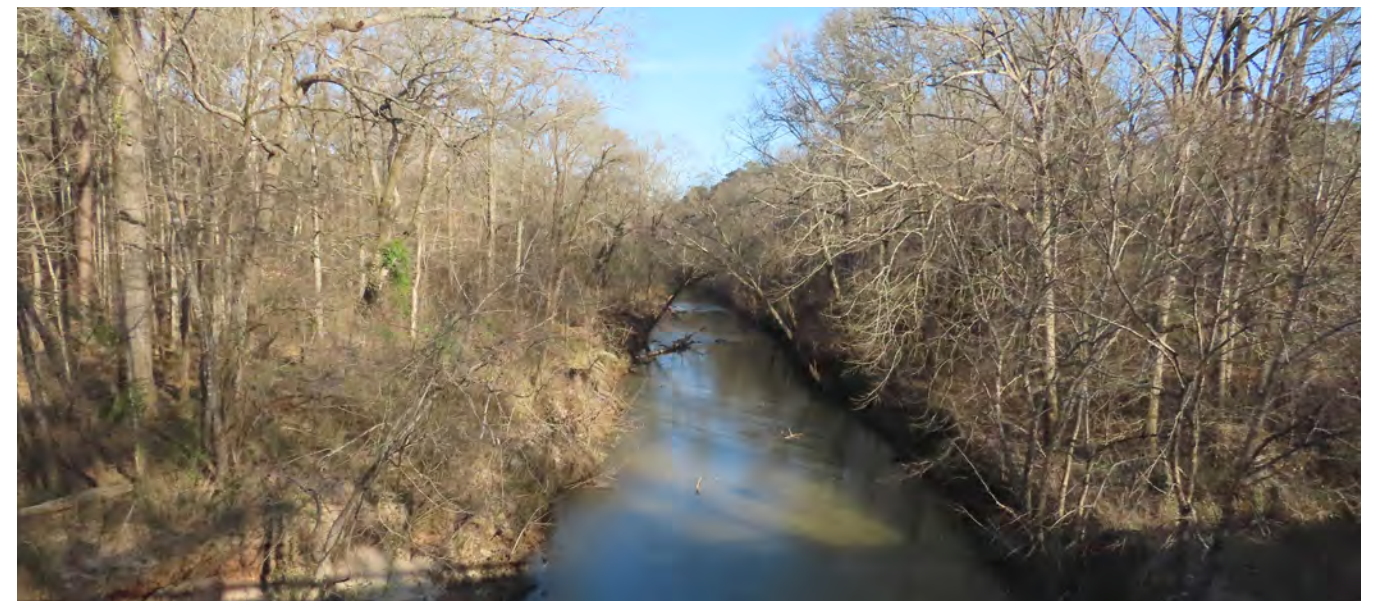
Also, in collaboration with the Georgia River Network, Wilkes and McDuffie Counties have established Georgia’s Little River Water Trail, a 20-mile paddling route along the McDuffie and Wilkes County borders. Students with the UGA College of Engineering have recently designed plans for a motor boat launch on the Little River at Highway 80, which would complete a group of four public access points on the water trail. Additionally, students with the Terry College of Business’s Institute for Leadership Advancement have researched the economic benefits of a trail system and explored marketing opportunities.

The McDuffie County Archway Partnership asked the Center for Community Design and Preservation (CCDP) at the College of Environment and Design (CED) to augment these efforts by developing concepts and an illustrative master plan for additional boat launches along the water trail and a land-based trail system to support their application for a Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program (GOSP) grant. Given that the GOSP grant funds large-scale projects, this presents an opportunity to

consider outdoor recreation improvements more broadly – including adding amenities to current boat launches and considering improvements to county-managed campgrounds as well as exploring concepts for hiking, biking, and equestrian trails.

CCDP used a design charrette – a multi-day brainstorming session between design experts and local stakeholders – to bring together a team of CED students in landscape architecture and planning to explore potential improvements. The goal of the charrette was to envision how to satisfy the county’s desire for recreational economic development with DNR’s priority to serve hunters and fishermen, and to incorporate best practices between different types of trail users. The charrette concentrated on the Little River Water Trail between Highway 80 and Highway 78 within the Clarks Hill Wildlife Management Area, as well as the McDuffie County campgrounds at Big Hart and Raysville. Due to Covid-19, this charrette was conducted with virtual meetings, two on-campus workdays, and extended periods of public input solicited through YouTube presentations and online surveys.

Using case studies, recreational industry best practices and public feedback, the proposed design concepts enhance the already attractive opportunities around the lake with new ideas meant to increase accessibility for a wider segment of the public. These concepts accommodate self-shuttling for paddlers on the Little River Water Trail, create a trail system for hikers and bike riders within the Big Hart and Raysville campgrounds, and suggest how equestrian trails may be included within the Clarks Hill Wildlife Management Area.

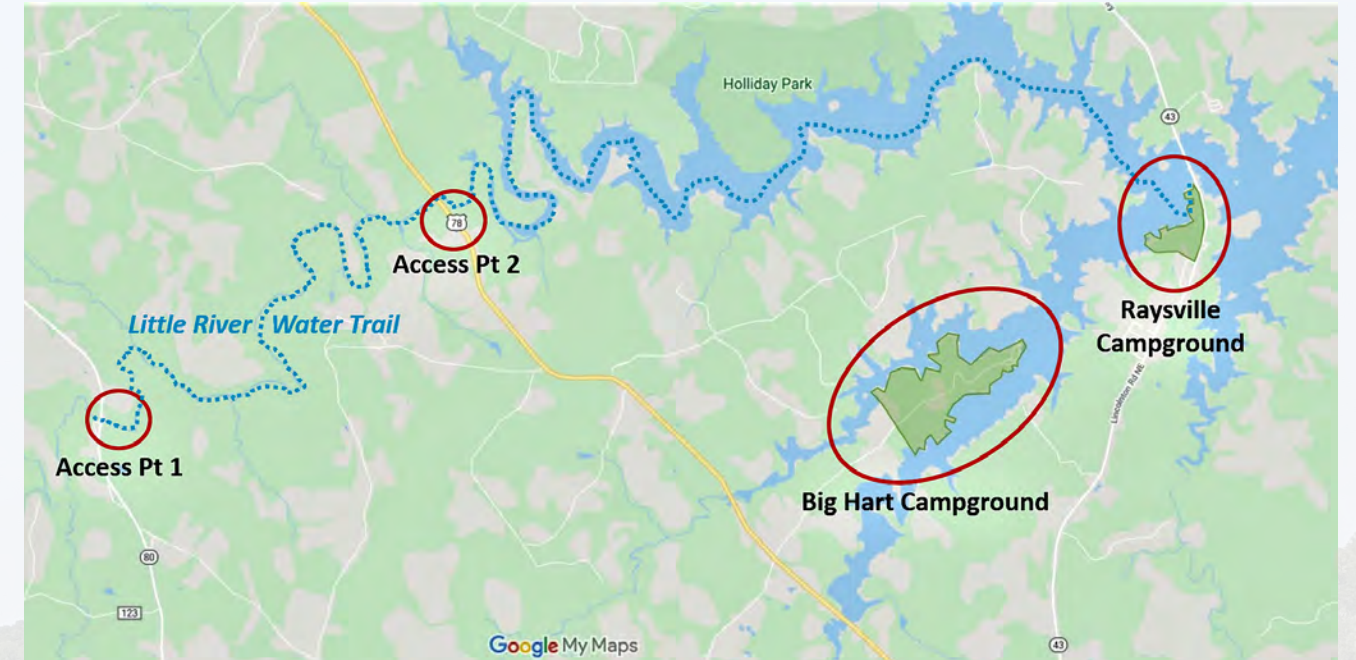


# FINAL CONCEPTS

## MCDUFFIE COUNTY TRAILS CHARRETTE



The final concepts in this section include potential recreational enhancements for hikers, paddlers, cyclists, and equestrians within the Clarks Hill Lake area of McDuffie County. Design ideas are presented by location, beginning with the Little River Water Trail, then Big Hart Campground and Raysville Campground, and includes areas in between that fall within the Clarks Hill WMA.



Improvements to the user experience on the Little River Water Trail received an abundance of support from survey respondents. Based on this feedback, the final designs for all Access Points suggest new amenities such as car and boat trailer parking with a drop-off lane, kayak/canoe launch, and restrooms are included. We removed a suggestion for a swimming hole due to a community member explaining that the area is unsuitable for this type of recreation, but a location for emergency access remains. Many respondents to the survey expressed interest in a hiking trail along the Little

River between Access Points 1 and 2, so this was explored.

Given the affirmation from the survey, the team incorporated hiking and biking trails at both campgrounds. The site with the biggest potential for biking and hiking trails is the Big Hart Campground. By following the natural contour lines of the site and ridge lines, various trails of low intensity were created that are suitable for hiking and casual cycling.

Since most equestrian trail riders are looking for trails between 10–20 miles long, separate from bikes, and with an overnight option, the team

suggests locating equestrian trails along the shorelines of the WMA at Big Hart Peninsula and along Big Creek between Highway 78 and the Raysville Campground, shown via a yellow dashed line.

While it has less acreage than Big Hart Campground, Raysville Campground also has the potential to add many desired amenities, such as a waterfront day-use area and hiking-biking trails. Future development could include an equestrian camping area if horseback riding trails are incorporated within the WMA.

# WATER TRAIL PLAN

Original Concept by David Evans and Freja Carlson  
Refined by Devin Butler and Jennifer Lewis

A few key upgrades to the existing Little River Water Trail between Access Points 1 and 2 will greatly improve the experience of paddlers along the river. This plan suggests expanded parking areas, separate kayak/canoe launches, restrooms, and a hiking-biking trail along the Little River between Access Points 1 and 2.

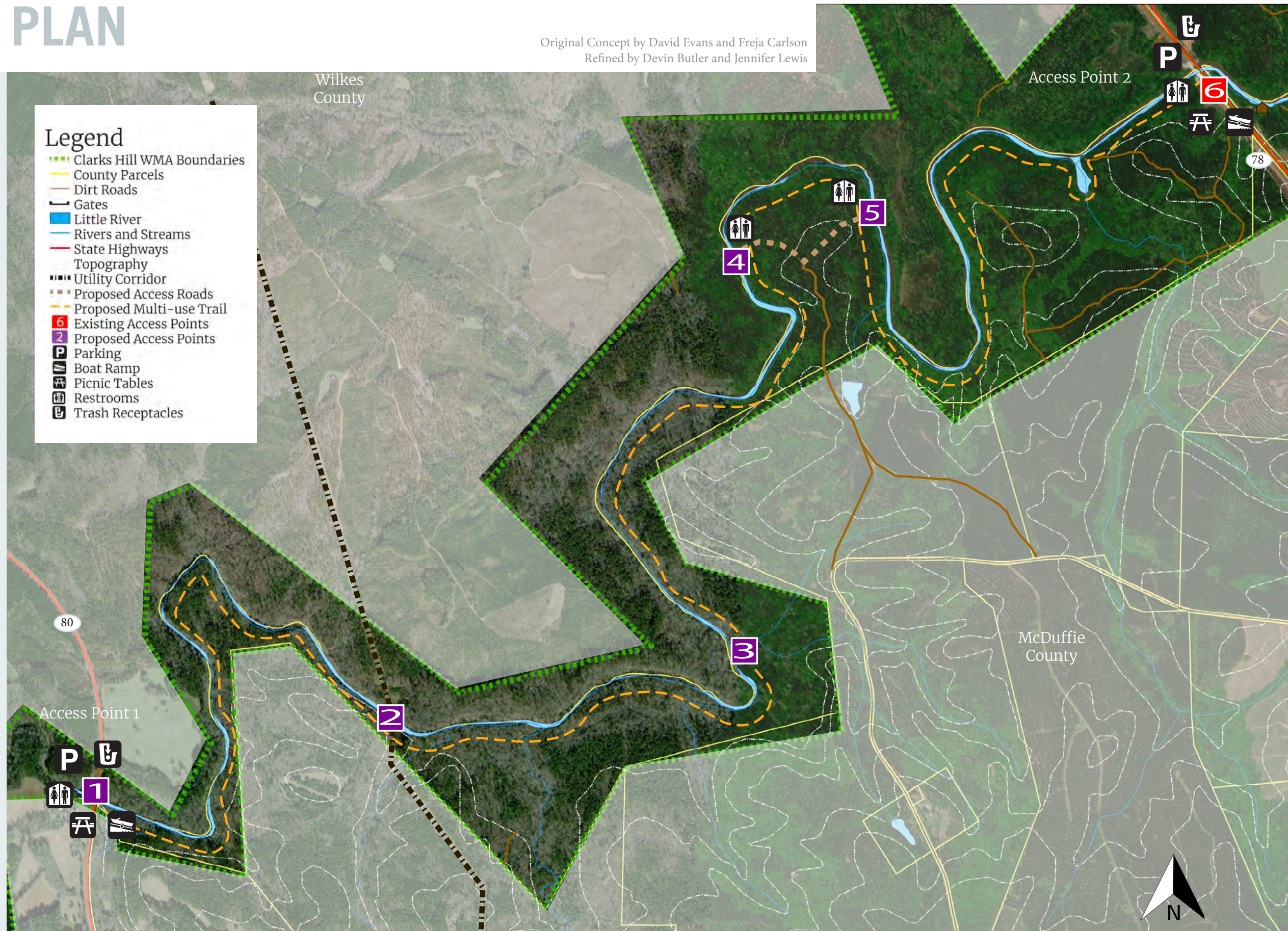
On the map, Number 1 marks the proposed location for Access Pt 1 at Hwy 80. Proposed amenities include parking for cars and boat trailers, a traditional motorboat ramp, a kayak/canoe launch, restrooms, a pavilion, and picnic tables.

Number 2 indicates a utility corridor with the potential for vehicular access in emergency situations. There is also potential for handicap access, which would lend itself well toward emergency accessibility.

Number 3 would be a great location for travelers to get out and stretch their legs as well as take in the sights along the curve of the river.

Numbers 4 and 5 indicate two options for restroom locations, as they occur midway on this first leg and are on flat areas where paddlers can access the shoreline easily. An existing dirt road serves as a place for potential emergency access.

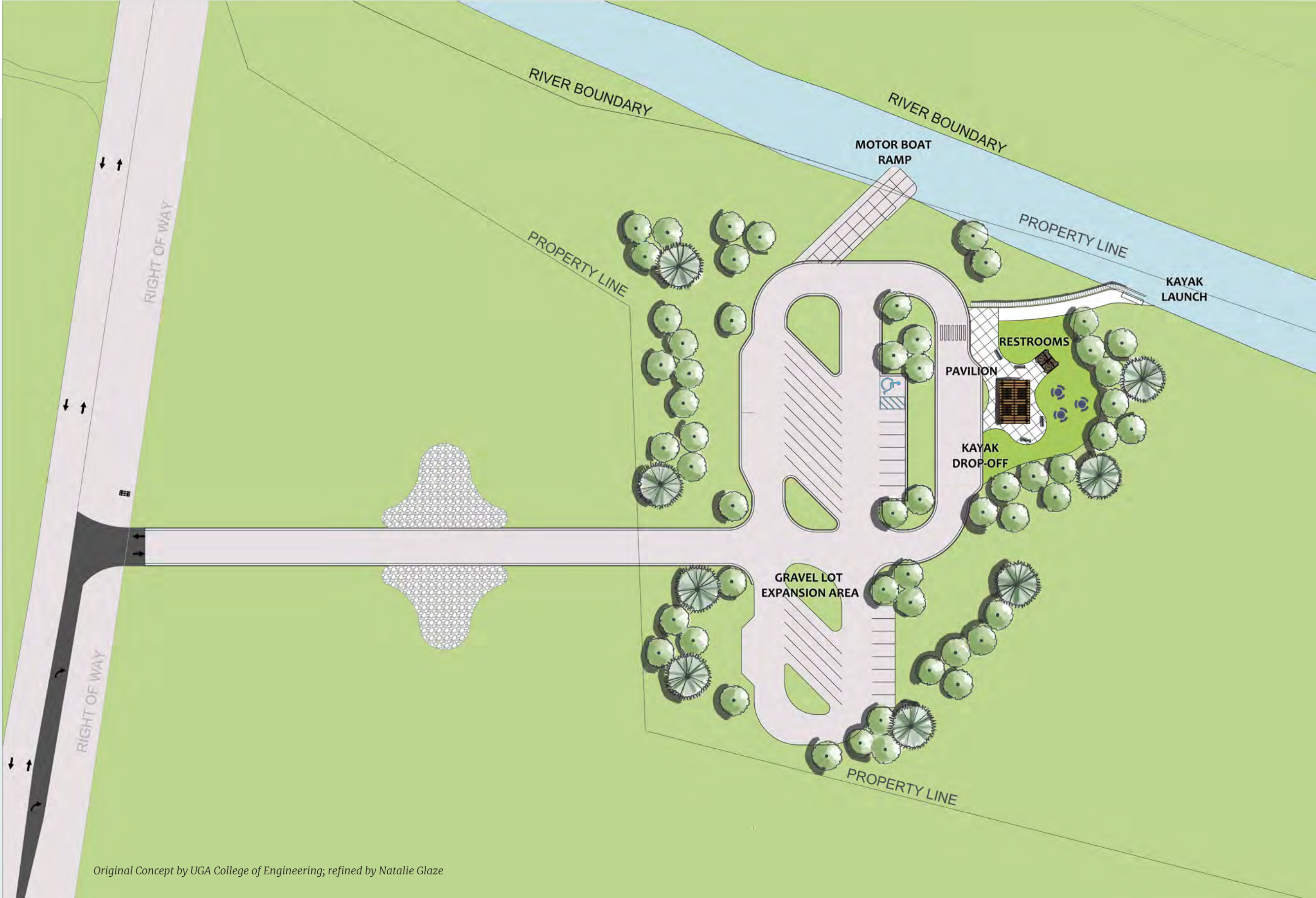
Number 6 marks Access Point 2 at Highway 78. Amenities suggested for this existing boat launch include an expanded parking area, an Outfitters, a handicap accessible kayak launch, picnic tables and restrooms.



# ACCESS POINT 1

Building off an initial plan produced for Access Point 1 by UGA Engineering students, the charrette team created an alternate parking lot design that retains existing trees and accommodates paddlers.

The new parking lot plan features 19 boat trailer parking spaces, 11 parking spaces, and 1 handicap space. There is a separate drive to drop off your kayak as close to the launch as possible. There is also a traditional motorboat ramp, restrooms, a pavilion, and picnic tables.



Original Concept by UGA College of Engineering; refined by Natalie Glaze

# WATER TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS

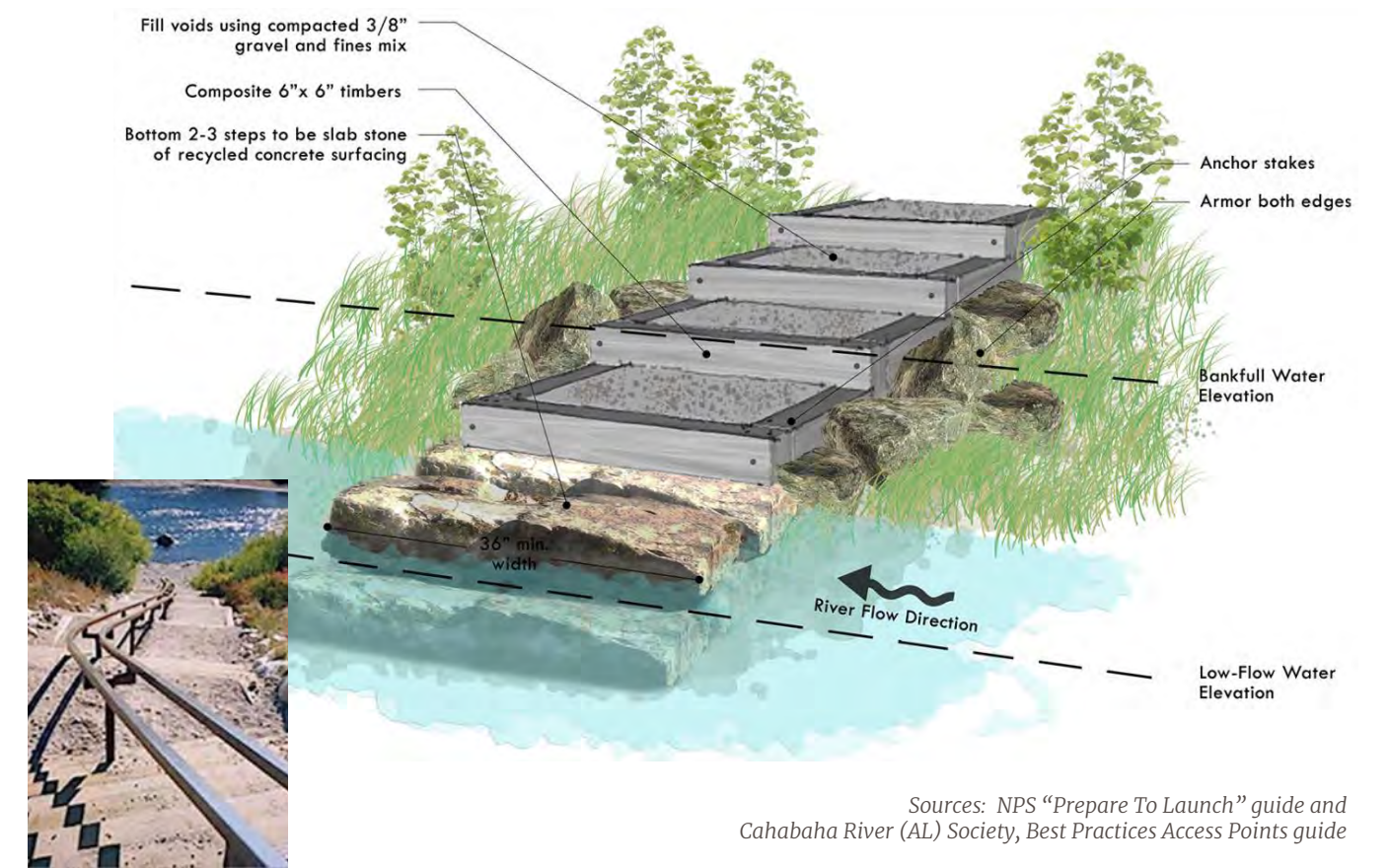


Based on design standards recommended in the National Park Service’s guide, “Prepare to Launch”, for moving water bodies with steeply banked sides, the kayak launch at Access Point 1 is designed as a natural dirt path with wide, deep steps down to the water. If the distance from the drop-off zone to the water’s edge seems extremely long for hand-carrying boats, a double handrail can serve as a boat slide to assist users with getting their kayak to the water.

Based on local feedback, Access Point 1 is kept minimalistic and as natural as possible. Therefore, the restrooms shown are a simple wood structure, and an outfitters is not included at this location. This pit toilet design can be used elsewhere along the water trail as well.



Concept and Rendering by Devin Butler



Sources: NPS “Prepare To Launch” guide and Cahabaha River (AL) Society, Best Practices Access Points guide



Rendering by Hannah Lewis

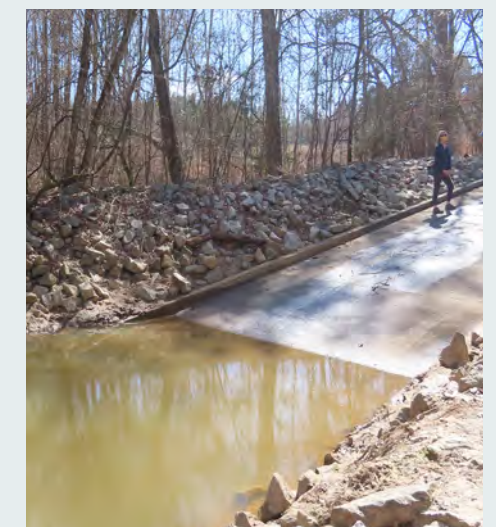
# ACCESS POINT 2



Original Concept by Natalie Glaze;  
Refined by Devin Butler

Acreage exists to expand the existing parking area and include a kayak launch, thereby adding room for paddlers to self-shuttle a second car and return to Access Point 1 to float down river. The parking area should remain a naturalized gravel lot and be expanded in a way that preserves as many trees large as possible. A launch for kayaks and canoes extends from a drop-off area and should be handicap-accessible, as the bank may lend itself to a dock installation.

This site could accommodate a small outfitters for boat rentals, shuttle service, restrooms, fishing supplies, and even a restaurant. Having the outfitters at Access Point 2 allows the outfitters to be in a central and easily accessible location, providing a variety of paddle trip options.



# WATER TRAIL OUTFITTERS

The outfitters includes approximately 5,000 square feet of retail space and a storage shed for additional kayaks. In addition to providing boat rentals and a shuttle service, this multi-purpose building could provide restrooms, a pavilion, and picnic tables as well as food and drinks.



Many respondents suggested a need for kayak launches that were handicap accessible. Accessible kayak launches allow an adult in a wheelchair to self-launch a kayak. Accessible launches are enjoyed by able-bodied paddlers as well, as the stabilizers and assistive supports make it easier to get in and out of a low boat, no matter one's physical abilities.



Sources: Nantahala Outdoor Center and [www.thedockdoctors.com](http://www.thedockdoctors.com)



Rendering by Freja Carlson



# LITTLE RIVER HIKING-BIKING TRAIL

If both Access Points 1 and 2 are developed with parking and restrooms, a supplemental land trail could easily accommodate hikers originating from either location. The distance between locations measures approximately 10 miles, providing a maximum 20 mile out-and-back trail, which could be reduced at the user's discretion. A connecting trail on land would also provide easy access for picnic spots that could be used by hikers and paddlers.

Challenges to creating this trail include the topography, which is steep closest to the river. Given the narrowness of the WMA acreage in this location, there is not a lot of variety as to where the trail could be located, potentially resulting in steep grades. Also, having a hiking trail alongside the water trail could disturb a serene area of the river, which is a concern brought by paddlers familiar with the quiet beauty of this section.

Another concern is introducing non-hunters into an area prioritized for hunting and fishing. The narrow area of the Clarks Hill WMA west of Highway 78 in which this trail is proposed is approximately 845 acres. This represents 7.5% of the WMA acreage within McDuffie County, and 4.8% of the total WMA acreage. It is a narrow portion relative to the total WMA, and local officials suggest that there is likely not a lot of hunting activity in this section. State officials do not have data on the number of hunters who use the WMA, but do know that private property surrounding this area has private lease hunting activity as well.



Concept and Rendering by Freja Carson



# ACCESS POINT 4

EXISTING DOCK WITH ADA ACCESSIBLE KAYAK DOCK

EXISTING MOTOR BOAT RAMP

RESTROOMS

PAVILION

KAYAK DROP-OFF

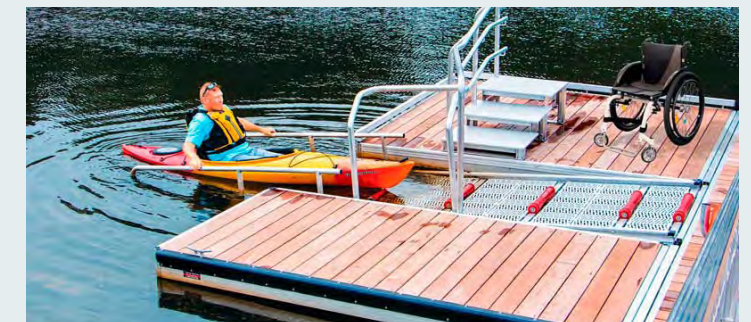
BEACH KAYAK LAUNCH

BEACH AREA

SWIMMING AREA

Original Concept by Natalie Glaze;  
Refined by Devin Butler

Access Point 4 on the Little River Water Trail is at the Raysville Campground. The same amenities suggested for Access Point 2 have been applied here to enhance usability for launching kayaks and canoes. A redesigned parking area features 12 boat trailer spaces, 10 parking spaces, and 1 handicap space. Restrooms, a pavilion and tables are added. The existing dock could be modified to include an accessible kayak launch.


















According to the National Park Service's guide on boat launches, the lake's gradually sloping shoreline would also lend itself to a beach launch. Natural surface launches have minimal impact and provide a stable boat launch for kayaks and canoes. Expanding this concept to also include a swimming beach would enhance this site as a full Day Use area, like Big Hart Campground has. In turn, the Day Use beach at Big Hart could accommodate paddlers by creating a launch at its swimming beach.

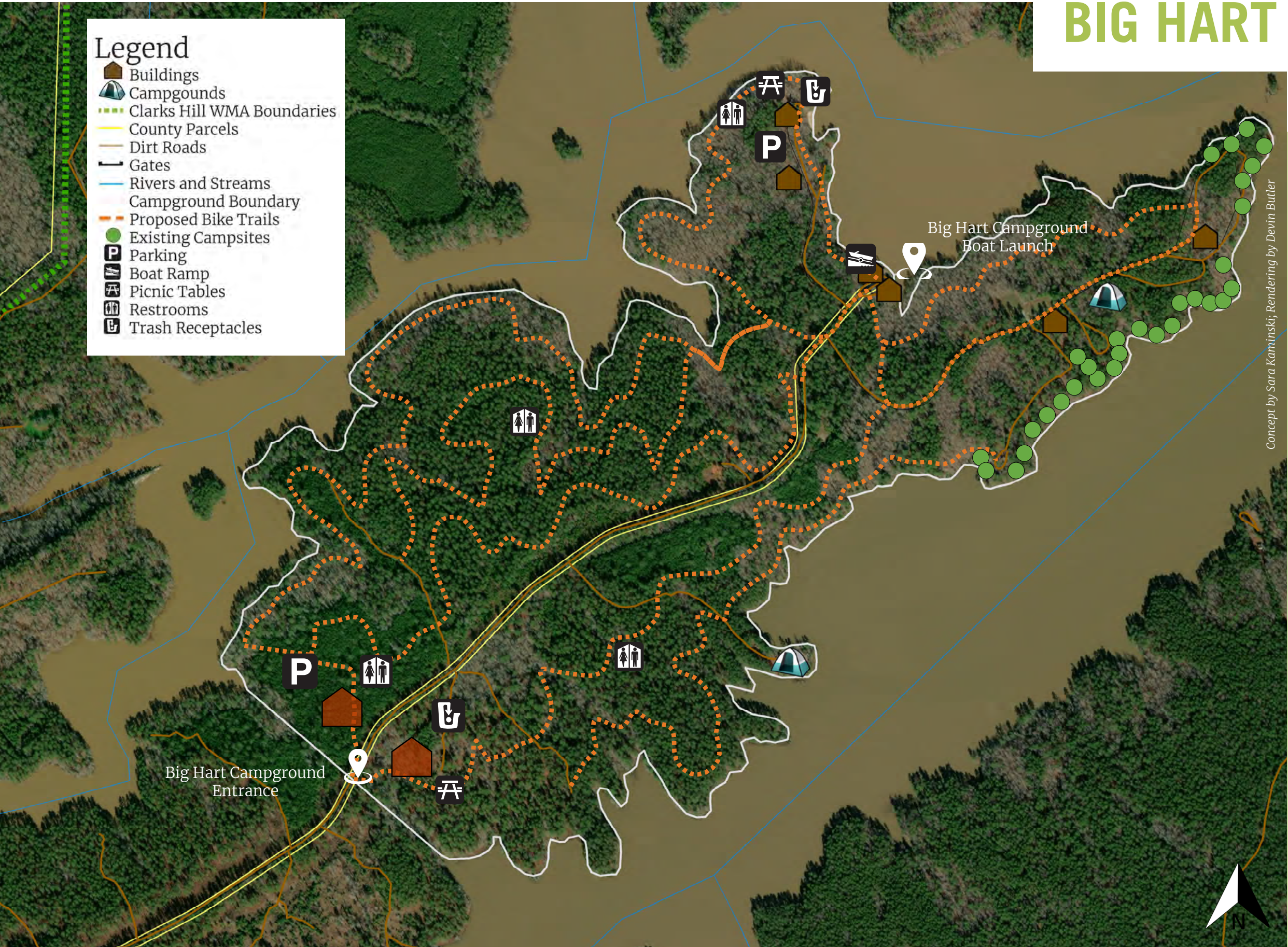


Sources: dockdoctors.com (top) and NPS "Prepare to Launch" guide

# BIG HART CAMPGROUND TRAILS

**Legend**

-  Buildings
-  Campgrounds
-  Clarks Hill WMA Boundaries
-  County Parcels
-  Dirt Roads
-  Gates
-  Rivers and Streams
-  Campground Boundary
-  Proposed Bike Trails
-  Existing Campsites
-  Parking
-  Boat Ramp
-  Picnic Tables
-  Restrooms
-  Trash Receptacles



Concept by Sara Kaminski, Rendering by Devin Butler

Big Hart Campground presents a good opportunity to create bike paths for more casual riders as well as hikers. This plan includes a new network of trails that takes advantage of the existing road system to create multiple options and loops. Most trails shown follow the topography, resulting in fairly flat pathways that would appeal to riders of all abilities. Having a series of loops near camping areas and away from vehicles provides a safe space for kids to ride independently, whereas longer rides would provide an adventurous challenge for all ages. A trail connecting the day-use playground and swimming area to the campsites is intended to be the easiest and safest, with children biking in mind. Having more of the shoreline accessible by bike creates more access for bank fishing, as well. All totaled, this plan provides for 10 miles of multi-use trails.

Additionally, establishing a formal campground entrance helps delineate the end of the hunting zone and provide campground amenities, including bike rentals.

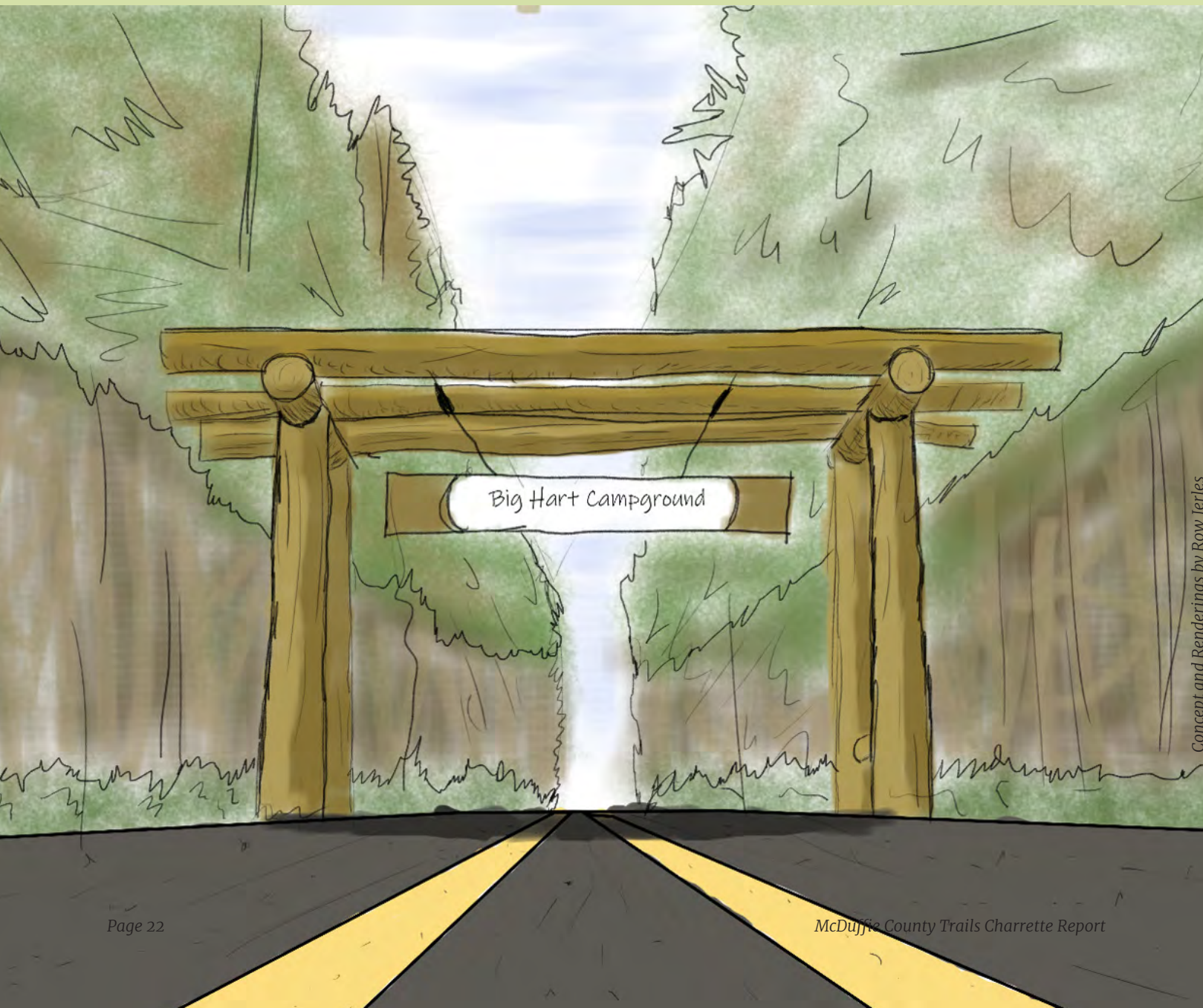


# BIG HART CAMPGROUND ENTRANCE

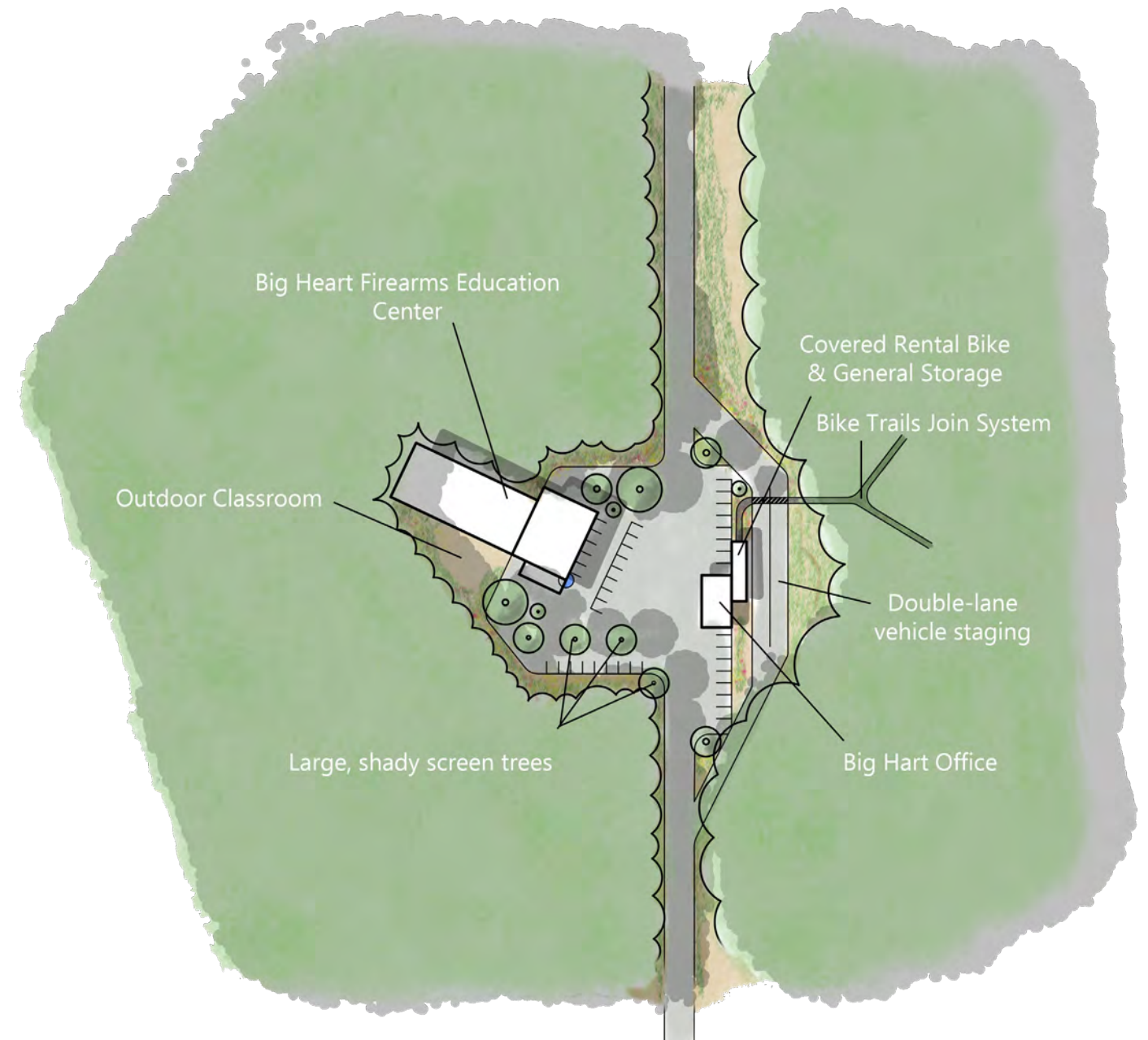
A formal entrance to Big Hart Campground would not only mark the arrival to the campground, but also serve as an indicator for where hunting is no longer allowed throughout the open forest.

Just past the entrance gate, this plan suggests a Campground Office and General Store located on the right-hand side, and an Education Center on the left. The Campground office includes parking in front as well as a double lane behind the building to accommodate guests checking in that are towing campers.

Given the noise disruption that an outdoor shooting range would cause, the students suggest an indoor range instead, if desired, perhaps in combination with an educational center. This center could provide



Concept and Renderings by Row Jerles



classes on myriad outdoor subjects. The shooting range should be as insulated as possible from excessive noise permeating the campgrounds. Stalls should be limited to a small number to keep the impact minimized for courtesy's sake.

While firearm safety and the promotion of shooting sports could be conducted downstairs, the upstairs could be used as an educational center for certification in subjects such as: CPR, Bushcraft, tying fly-fishing lures, and many more. The shooting range may be closed or restricted to certain hours on days with classes unrelated to firearm training so that courses may proceed without interruptions.

A Campground Office and General Store is a nice amenity for campground guests, as it provides a place to get local recommendations, replenish forgotten supplies, and purchase souvenirs. This area could incorporate an additional parking area for visitors who were interested in biking the trails, thereby leaving existing parking areas for boaters, fishermen and day-use picnickers. Plus, the office could also provide bike rentals for campers and day users, with the trails easily accessible from this location.

# BIG HART CAMPGROUND OFFICE AND GENERAL STORE



Concept and Rendering by Jennifer Lewis

# RAYSVILLE CAMPGROUND TRAILS

Since the existing campsites of Raysville Campground are adjacent to the west side of the road along the water, there is additional acreage that could be developed into hiking-biking trails. Shown in this plan in orange and located on the opposite side of the road from the campsites, these trails follow the current road and topography to create four miles of easily accessible paths for walkers or riders.

Also, an adjacent section of the WMA, indicated with the dashed green line, may be available in the future to expand the Raysville campground. If this 60-acre parcel could be used for trails, it could add an additional 3 miles to the proposed trail network.



Concept by Sara Kaminski  
Rendering by Devin Butler

# CLARKS HILL WMA EQUESTRIAN TRAILS

Since most equestrian trail riders are looking for trails between 10–20 miles long, separate from bikes, and with an overnight option, this plan proposes equestrian trails along the shorelines of the WMA at Big Hart Peninsula and along Big Creek between Highway 78 and the Raysville Campground, shown here as a yellow dashed line. Incorporating feedback from local riders, this trail system is looped rather than out-and-back and is exclusively for horseback riding.

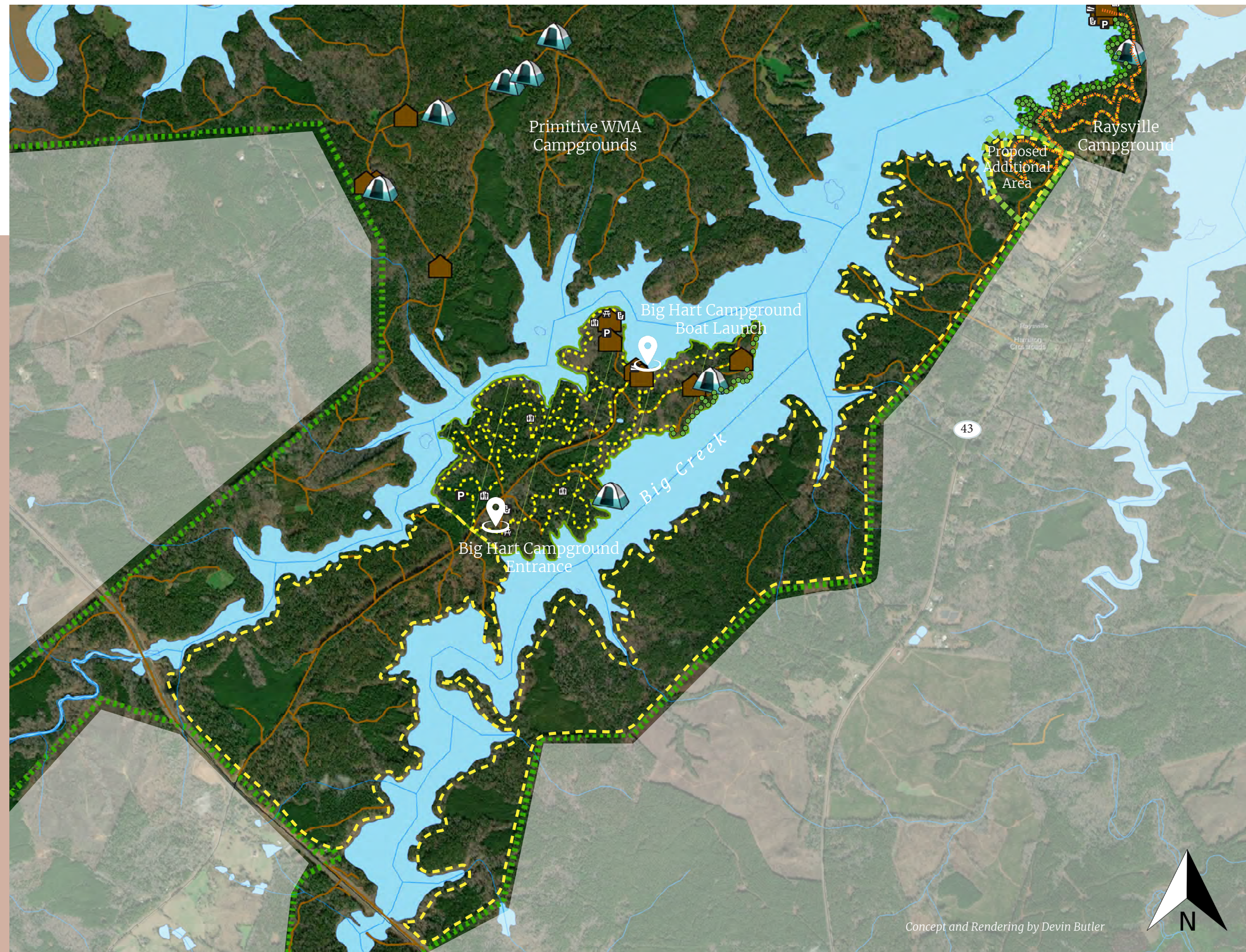
The proposed shoreline trail system on the Big Hart Peninsula will provide a 6-mile equestrian-only trail system that is separate from the proposed biking and hiking trails within the campground.

To put this amount of impacted property in context, the Big Hart peninsula is approximately 1156.8 acres in total. The WMA's half of the peninsula proposed for shoreline equestrian trails is approximately 726 acres, or 6.4% of the WMA acreage in McDuffie County, and 4% of the overall WMA.

On the Raysville side, the proposed equestrian-only trail system could provide a 16-mile trail connecting the Raysville Campground and the Wildlife Management area.

This proposed area of the WMA is 1208 acres representing 11% of the WMA in McDuffie County, and 7% of the overall WMA acreage.

If more trails are needed, then consider alternating the days that horseback riding and biking are allowed on the same trail system.



Concept and Rendering by Devin Butler

# RAYSVILLE CAMPGROUND EQUESTRIAN CAMPSITE

Respondents to the survey expressed a desire to come from out of town to ride a large trail system if they could camp overnight with their horses. If the 60-acre parcel adjacent to the Raysville Campground is annexed in, rather than it being used for hiking and biking trails, it could be designed as an equestrian camping facility.

Our plan suggests a central area for grazing and trailer parking as well as 3 connections to the new equestrian trails.

We have also suggested 18 new campsites which would include the standard camp amenities in addition to a horse corral, which could accommodate up to 3 horses. A corral may be an intermediate solution, with a tie line being a first phase amenity and stables coming in a later phase. Local saddle clubs have been instrumental in developing equine campgrounds in the area, such as at Bussey Point Recreation Area, and should be tapped for their expertise.



Concept and Renderings by Devin Butler





<https://wkdq.com/horse-owners-urging-deer-hunters-to-double-check-their-prey/>



Source: iceagetrail.org

# BEST PRACTICES FOR WMA TRAIL SYSTEMS



Because the Clarks Hill Wildlife Management Area prioritizes hunting and fishing and is open to hunting most of the year, it is important to remember that additional regulations and safety precautions will be needed to implement many of the design ideas that have been suggested.

Our charrette team researched other Wildlife Management Areas, such as Rich Mountain Wildlife Management Area, Cary Wildlife Management Area, and Lake Russell Wildlife Management Area in order to determine some of the practices they utilize to ensure the safety of hikers, cyclists, riders, and hunters. These Wildlife Management Areas do not have any special buffers or physical regulations hunters in the area but have a series of aids and regulations meant for hikers and riders to follow for their safety. This includes but is not limited to:

- All riders and hikers in the Wildlife Management Areas must wear a minimum of 500 sq. in. of hunting orange on both the human and the horse.
- Limiting the time pedestrians, cyclists, and horseback riders are able to use the trails within the Wildlife Management Area, such as not before 10am or after dusk.
- Providing alternating schedules for cyclist and horseback riders such as Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for cyclists and hikers only, and Tuesday and Thursdays for horseback riders and hikers only.
- Keeping all pedestrian and equestrian trails within the 200 ft. safety buffer from roads and buildings, where hunters are not allowed to fire.

Comparing these safety regulation examples with what may already exist for the Clarks Hill WMA will be key, as will conveying this information to the general public. Websites for the Big Hart and Raysville Campgrounds as well as for the WMA should make aware the relation between the areas. Using various communication techniques is a best practice, including maps, posted on-site regulations, camper check-in information packets, and videos.



Concept and Rendering by Devin Butler and Freja Carson

# CONCLUSION



Most of the design proposals presented in this report occur within county-managed parcels (i.e., campgrounds) or are not in conflict with Wildlife Management Area activities (i.e., boat launches). However, some of our design suggestions fall within the existing WMA, which prioritizes hunting and fishing and is open to some type of hunting most of the year. Therefore, it is important to remember that new regulations and additional safety precautions will be needed to implement some of the design suggestions.

Expanding user groups for WMAs is beneficial for enhancing an appreciation for shooting sports and angling. A shared arrangement and scheduling protocol that includes an educational campaign, prevalent signage, and seasonal priority groups would allow for a wider group of users in the safest manner possible. As stated in Georgia's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (2017-21), "Public parks, trails, open spaces and recreation facilities can help every Georgia community thrive and become more sustainable. The greater the visitation to our parks and outdoor resources, the greater economic benefits to the surrounding communities."

It was the experience of the charrette team, all but one of whom are not hunters, that understanding the regulations and periods of "hunting season" are complex and not user-friendly to non-hunters who may want to recreate in WMAs. Perhaps this is by design to prioritize an insider clientele. Clarity would surely increase public safety and eliminate conflicts that arise due to misunderstandings. If the state intends to fulfill its potential as a regional recreation destination, a more balanced approach will be needed in regard to WMAs.

By ensuring that each access point along the Little River Water Trail has adequate parking, restrooms, and launches that

are designed for those carrying their boats by hand, the usability of the water trail is greatly increased. By adding additional amenities such as picnic spots, emergency access, and an outfitters to rent boats and provide a shuttle service, the trail becomes a recreation destination for an even wider audience who may be getting on the water for the first time. A hiking trail between these two access points enhances the destination further, providing a scenic retreat for increasing personal health and appreciation of the natural world. If the WMA shoreline is available to fishermen without conflicting with hunting, then perhaps considerations could be made for hikers as well.

McDuffie County has the opportunity to improve on its already attractive campgrounds by adding amenities that recreational tourists have come to expect, like a general store and a trail system. With these improvements, both campgrounds can serve as a regional attraction, providing safe ways for locals and visitors to enjoy cycling and hiking with family or friends while generating minimal impact on the environment.

Equestrian trails within Wildlife Management Areas are a relatively common practice throughout various states. If equestrian trails are pursued within the Clarks Hill Lake area, incorporating best

practices and safety measures from other trails, state parks and WMAs that attract saddle clubs would accommodate a wider user group and further add to the recreational opportunities in the region.

A phased approach to the development of these recreational enhancements would allow for immediate gains. Concentrate on areas of mutual agreement between federal, state, and local partners. Based on jurisdiction and public interest, the following phased implementation is proposed:

Phase 1: Access Point 1 launch, restrooms, parking; Access Point 2 restroom, kayak launch

Phase 2: Access Point 2 Outfitters; Raysville Campground hiking-biking trails

Phase 3: Big Hart Campground hiking-biking trails, office/general store, entrance gate

Phase 4: WMA Equestrian Trails; Raysville Campground equestrian campsite

In conclusion, enhancing the natural resource-based outdoor experiences in McDuffie County with a wide variety of users in mind will provide value far beyond the local market, extending opportunities to a regional audience. An investment in recreational tourism provides generous returns in the form of natural resource protection, economic development, and health promotion.



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