

GREENWAYS AND BLUEWAYS: BICYCLE, PEDESTRIAN, & PADDLE PLAN

White County, Georgia



May 2024

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Produced by:



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As both a land and a community, White County, Georgia, is shaped by the Appalachian Mountains and foothills. The intricate valleys, dells, and waterways nestled between steep slopes and national forests have forged not only tight-knit communities of people but also endeared residents and visitors alike to seek an outdoor lifestyle, enjoying the scenic vistas and recreational opportunities ***“where Mother Nature comes to play!”***

To this end, White County, together with the Cities of Cleveland and Helen, routinely work together to bring about public facilities and infrastructure in support of this active lifestyle and public desire to celebrate the natural amenities that abound in the area. This document, the ***White County Greenways and Blueways: Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Paddle Plan***, represents a part of that broader effort by helping the governments and other partners organize their actions and strategies regarding all outdoor recreational activities on land and water for roads, trails, sidewalks, and along rivers and streams in a fashion that maximizes accessibility, allowing people to walk, bike, run, and paddle across many parts of the county and connecting with various amenities and destinations.



Figure 1. Yonah Preserve Creek Trail



Figure 2. Smithgall Woods ADA Trail

This 2024 edition of the plan represents an update of the original 2011 document, done to reflect the latest conditions and resources available to the communities as well as revising select goals and opportunities. It builds upon previous planning processes to identify/ratify a comprehensive system of bicycle, pedestrian, and paddle routes and facilities designed to serve a variety of users, integrate this system with the overall transportation systems, and identify design standards, specific projects, and potential funding sources. This Plan will serve as the guide for each local government and partnering agencies to ensure

coordination, maximization of resources, and the highest degree of connectivity possible for all White County.

A. THE PLANNING PROCESS



Citizens and visitors participate in active outdoor recreation each year. These people spend money, create jobs, and support the White County economic sector. Simple, healthy outdoor activities such as hiking, biking, paddling, camping, or wildlife viewing generate enormous economic power and fuel ripple effects throughout the County. Many people do not realize that having fun and staying healthy outdoors is essential to the continued growth of our economy. To thrive, this industry needs to be recognized, stimulated, and supported. This plan will explain how the impact of the Active Outdoor Recreation Economy is determined, how it interacts with the economy and the impact to the enhancement of the quality of life for White County residents and visitors.

Economic impact studies have been conducted by several non-profit agencies such as the Bikes Belong Foundation and the Rails to Trails Conservancy. These studies show how the presence of bicycle and pedestrian facilities increase business revenues, housing values, tourist traffic, and new residents in the area. Bicycle and pedestrian facilities become destination points for on and off-road cyclists.

Sporting events enhance tourism, enhance lifestyle, promote outdoor recreation, i.e. the **Hogpen Hill Climb** (annual foot race since 1979), **Gone Riding Georgia State Championship Series** Mountain Bike Racing (since 2006, www.goneriding.com), **TNGA** Trans North Georgia Adventure (since 2013, <http://ridetoextraordinary.com> self-supported bike adventure over a 350-mile mountain bike route through the mountains of North GA on trails, forest roads and paved roads featuring challenging terrain, beautiful scenery, and approximately 56,000 feet of climbing), and the Tour of Georgia Gran Fondo (in Helen since 2017, www.granfondonationalsseries.com).

The county is unique in the fact that visitors and residents can navigate from one end of the county to the other utilizing all these recreational modes of travel. Paddling the Chattahoochee River, cycling through Yonah Preserve, hiking along the Hardman trail or through Smithgall Woods, a visitor's imagination and amount of time is the only impediment to how much they want to explore and

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discover through the county's scenic wonders during a day, weekend, or weeklong visit. When these tourists visit the facility or park they are also spending money at local businesses for lodging, food, and souvenirs. Plus, individuals and families looking to relocate value the presence of bicycle and pedestrian facilities and paddle launch sites for recreational and alternative transportation values.

The ***White County Greenways and Blueways: Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Paddle Plan***, provides an overall vision and specific actions for supporting policies of the development of a countywide recreation system. This plan also identifies a comprehensive network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and existing and proposed paddle launch sites designed to serve the growing outdoor recreational demand of these activities, with supporting policies, programs, and projects, as well as specific design standards and actions for implementation.

The specific goals of the updated Plan are:

- Updating the goals and objectives for future bicycle, pedestrian, and water/paddle mobility using a comprehensive public involvement program
- Confirmation of design standards for consistent and safe design of facilities
- Identification of a comprehensive system of bicycle/pedestrian/water routes and facilities to serve a variety of users
- Maintaining a project implementation and funding timeline
- Identification of funding sources can include but is not limited to:
GOSP: Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program
Recreational Trails Grant Program
LWCF: Land and Water Conservation Fund
SPLOST: Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax

1. PUBLIC OUTREACH AND INVOLVEMENT

The planning process for this project is designed to incorporate multiple levels of input from a variety of stakeholders, ensuring that the updated Plan reflects the concerns and ambitions of White County stakeholders. It will feature multiple opportunities for direct public comment, as well as various measures designed to engage core stakeholder groups as identified by the County and Cities.

Advisory Committee

In October 2021, an Advisory Committee of several key local representatives and stakeholders was formed and tasked with helping to oversee the general planning process, providing GMRC and County staff with comments, questions, and guidance in assembling information and shaping the discussion of priorities and objectives. This group meets monthly to discuss the project and will continue doing so through the completion of the document and project in 2024. Their input also shaped how the process would seek out public involvement, with suggestions on where, when, and how to solicit comments. Meetings with the stakeholders focused on developing the final document, updating the survey for public feedback, and developing the maps that focused on existing and future activity corridors and their related points of interest.

Online Survey

An online survey was created in March 2022 to provide the public with an opportunity to rank priorities, identify key routes and destinations for improvements, and to provide other suggestions on how to improve pedestrian connectivity across the county. The survey was promoted via web

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sites and email alerts for the local government, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Convention and Visitors Bureau. **163 responses** were received **from March 2022 through May 2023 during the survey period**. This has far surpassed the thirty-eight responses received through public comment surveys in 2011. (These results from 2011 and a breakdown of the current survey are in Appendix B.) The following page underscores feedback for the project encompassing all White County and beyond.

White County Pedestrian and Bicycle Activity Survey

2022 White County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Update

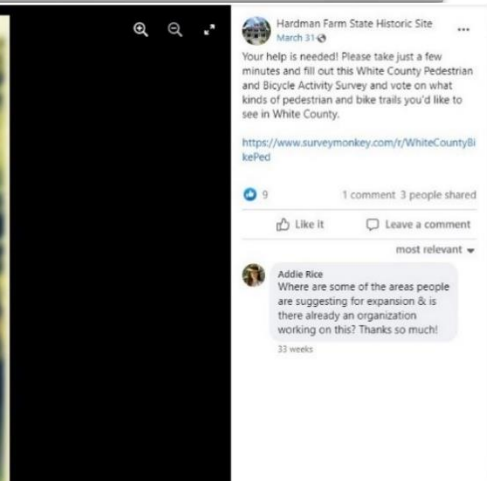
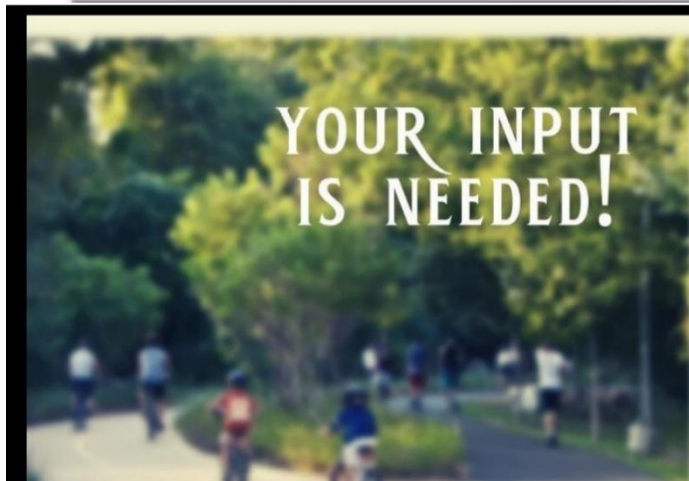
In 2011 the county and cities created a plan to assist stakeholders and planning officials to identify a comprehensive system of bicycle/pedestrian facilities designed to serve a variety of users, integrate this system within the overall transportation systems, and identify design standards, specific projects, and potential funding sources. The resulting plan was integrated with other planning efforts to aid future transportation improvements.

This plan is now being updated to ensure that it still adequately addresses the future needs of these user groups who frequent the county and cities pedestrian and bicycle networks, parks, trails, forest lands, and waterways.

Please answer the following questions so that we can ensure that White County and it's cities continue to develop these outdoor recreation systems for the benefit and enjoyment of its residents and visitors.'

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WhiteCountyBikePed>

Thank you for your time and caring about your outdoors!



White County Government
30-Mar-23

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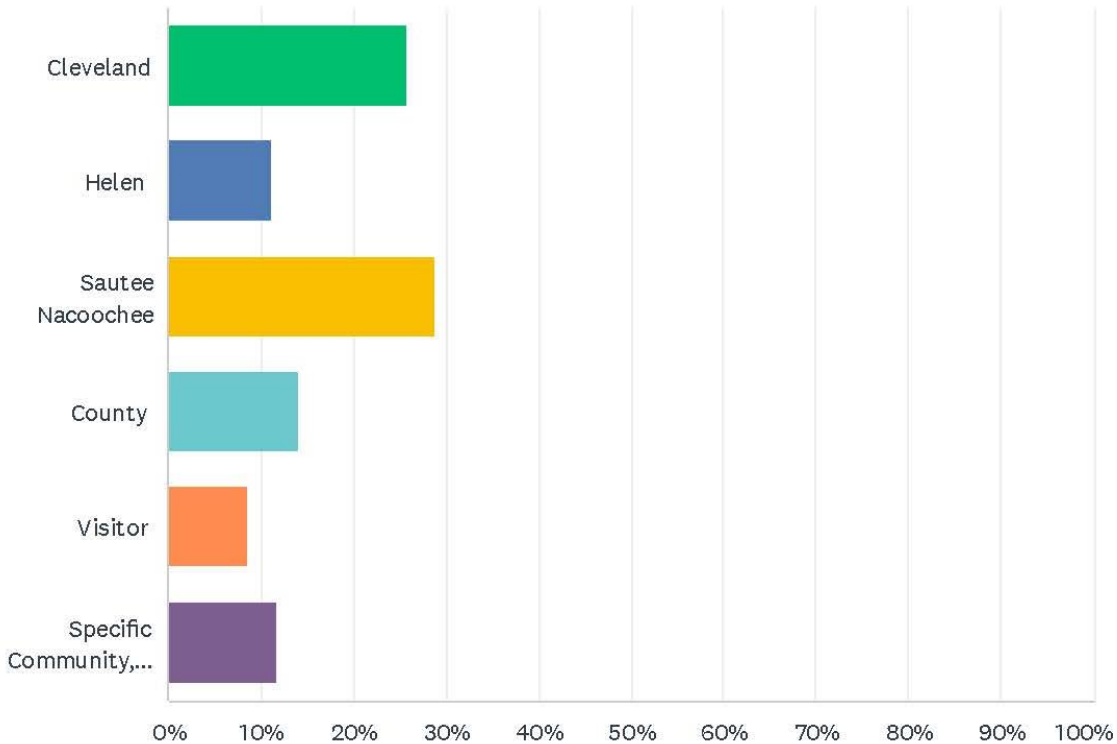
Please follow the link below and answer the following questions so that we can ensure that White County and it's cities continue to develop these outdoor recreation systems for the benefit and enjoyment of its residents and visitors.



White County Pedestrian and Bicycle Activity Survey

Q1 I am submitting comments as a resident of:

Answered: 163 Skipped: 1



Respondents to the 2022 – 2023 survey were received from:

- Cleveland, Sautee Nacoochee, Helen, and White County.

Individual communities/locations were represented near and far from more than **thirty areas** including:

- Town Creek, Clermont, Hall County, Hiawassee, Skylake, Elkmont, Habersham County, Clarkesville, Scorpion Hollow, Fannin County, Skits Mountain, the Sweetwater subdivision, Black Bear Ridge/Yonah Mountain, Cedar Hollow, Innsbruck, Kellum Valley, Rustic Ridge, Cornelia, Duncan Bridge/Whisperwood Way, Dahlonega, Laceola, Blairsville, Teel Mountain, Gwinnett County, Miner’s Mountain, Mt Yonah Scenic Estates, Towns County, Gainesville, Alto, Adair Mill, Fairview, Lumpkin County, Jennys Cove, Swiss Colony, Toccoa, and North Hall County.

Project Web Site/Social Media

In 2011 a webpage was created on the White County government website dedicated to the planning process. The page was used as a home for announcing events, posting records of past events, and including draft materials for people to review. The page also included contact information for GMRC staff so that anyone could submit comments and questions at any time.

The current update for 2021 – 2024 has transitioned to having these announcements and public comment surveys regarding the plan on social media and through Survey Monkey. Sample slides from outreach can be seen on page 6.

Public Forums

Forums are planned for 2024 once the draft of the document and maps are completed to discuss the document and recommendations. It is anticipated that there will at least be a minimum of two public forums inviting anyone to come and review materials, see proposals, and offer comments and questions about issues and opportunities related to sidewalks and trails in White County.

B. ASSESSMENT

The first task in preparing the update to the plan included having the stakeholder committee review the 2011 document to analyze what had been accomplished and what new priorities had become imperative to achieve so that the county could have a robust outdoor network of trails and facilities for citizens and visitors alike. Subsequent actions included gathering, reviewing, and inventorying existing conditions that may impact outdoor mobility for bicycle, pedestrian, and paddle usage, including community needs, issues, and desires, as well as policies, plans, ordinances, and state statutes. This information provides the foundation for projects and aids in the identification of relevant policies and strategies. This section provides an overview of existing conditions and a baseline or snapshot of the area from which to build future recommendations.

1. COMMUNITY PROFILES

Household Income and Commutes to School and Work

Household income can correlate with the propensity to use alternate modes of transportation, such as bicycling, walking, or transit. Residents with lower household incomes have fewer resources available for operating and maintaining private automobiles and are therefore more likely to meet their transportation needs through alternate modes. Although single-occupancy vehicles clearly dominate White County commutes, there is evidence of bicycle and pedestrian work-related travel, indicating a need for facilities. Income levels in the City of Cleveland are significantly lower than the rest of the county. One fourth of the children under age 18 in Cleveland live below the poverty level. Increased bicycle and pedestrian facilities throughout White County would benefit the sector of the population who have historically had limited access to personal transportation. Any additional assistance in reaching employment or educational destinations could decrease the number of people living at or below the poverty level. White County currently has and will continue to have a considerable number of young and elderly persons who are likely to rely on walking or cycling.

Greenspace Preservation

White County does not currently have an official greenspace program to identify potential land acquisitions for green space preservation, parks, or potential stream green space corridors. In 2007 White County adopted conservation subdivision regulations to encourage the preservation of farmland and natural resources, contributing to an interconnected network of permanent open space in the community. These regulations provide the opportunity for developers to concentrate buildings in specific areas on the development site, allowing the remaining land to be used for common open space as well as passive and active recreation, including hiking trails and nature preserves. The information in this plan will help to identify desired locations for conservation subdivisions that can incorporate multiuse trails and origins/destinations for future recreational users.

AFFECTED POPULATIONS/POTENTIAL SYSTEM USERS

Survey material as seen on page 6 highlights that Individual communities/locations were represented near and far and expressed an interest in greater options for bicycle, pedestrian, and paddle recreation and connectivity.

- **29%** of the respondents were from Sautee Nacoochee, **26%** were from Cleveland, **13%** from the County, **11%** were from Helen, **9%** were visitors, and **12%** covered thirty specific communities as seen in the bullet below.
- Town Creek, Clermont, Hall County, Hiawassee, Skylake, Elkmont, Habersham County, Clarkesville, Scorpion Hollow, Fannin County, Skits Mountain, the Sweetwater subdivision, Black Bear Ridge/Yonah Mountain, Cedar Hollow, Innsbruck, Kellum Valley, Rustic Ridge, Cornelia, Duncan Bridge/Whisperwood Way, Dahlonega, Laceola, Blairsville, Teel Mountain, Gwinnett County, Miner's Mountain, Mt Yonah Scenic Estates, Towns County, Gainesville, Alto, Adair Mill, Fairview, Lumpkin County, Jennys Cove, Swiss Colony, Toccoa, and North Hall County.

In 2011 an additional assessment identified four affected populations or system users that can benefit from bicycle and pedestrian improvements at and around White County High School and Tesnatee Gap Elementary School can be identified based on their trip origin and primary route to the destination. These populations include the Sunset Vista/Sunset Valley users, Tesnatee Gap Valley/Jenny's Cove users, the City of Cleveland users, and White County's Cross-Country Teams. This assessment and information from that time for the 2011 document is still important to consider since these population groups connected to the High School will always desire greater transportation and recreation alternatives.

Sunset Vista/Sunset Valley is a residential node located along Georgia Highway 75 Alternate at Barker Trail. This origin for bicycle and pedestrian use falls slightly within the outer most extent of the High School and Tesnatee Gap Elementary School's functional bicycle and pedestrian service area. This route travels south along Georgia Highway 75 Alternate to US Highway 129, continuing south to the High School and Tesnatee Gap Elementary School. Bike lanes and/or wide shoulders should be placed along this route to provide a safe environment for bicycle and pedestrian users. This route is entirely managed by State and Federal agencies so construction of these facilities should occur in cooperation with the Georgia Department of Transportation. All bicycle and pedestrian facilities installed along this route should meet or exceed safety standards established by the appropriate design guidelines.

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Residents of the Tesnatee Gap Valley/Jenny’s Cove area are more apt to use bicycle and pedestrian facilities due to their proximity to both the High School and Tesnatee. Bicycle and pedestrian facilities such as bike safe lanes and wide shoulders should be placed along the full extent of Tesnatee Gap Valley Road at the entrance to the Tesnatee Gap Elementary School and across US Highway 129 at the intersection of US Highway 129 and Eugene Road to provide a linkage between the High School and the Tesnatee Gap Valley area. Due to heavy traffic volumes and high rate of vehicular speed associated with US Highway 129, a dedicated pedestrian bridge may be required to provide a safe crossing point of US Highway 129 to link the High School with Eugene Road.

Due to its high residential population density and existence of sidewalks within city limits, the City of Cleveland is a natural source for students prone to use bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Jess Hunt Road and Claude Sims Road provide excellent access from Cleveland to both the High School and Tesnatee Gap Elementary School due to the directness of the route, low traffic volumes (a result of a section of closed road along Claude Sims Road), and relatively slow speed limits on these roads. Proposed facilities should include the extension of sidewalks along Jess Hunt Road, bike safe lanes, wide shoulders, and/or sidewalks along Claude Sims Road, the construction of a connector from the Sports Complex to Claude Sims Road, and potentially the installation of additional traffic calming devices such as table breaks along both Claude Sims Road and Jess Hunt Road to ensure vehicular speed is limited to posted limits. These improvements will also provide ancillary benefits of providing bicycle and pedestrian access to the White County Head Start.

School Cross County Training Routes
Virgil Hunt Road
Town Creek Road from Virgil Hunt Road to Charlie Thomas Road
Charlie Thomas Road
Tesnatee Gap Valley Road
Sports Complex Entrance
Claude Sims Road
Jess Hunt Road
Twin Lakes Road
Albert Reid Road
Yonah Preserve
Unicoi State Park
Lynch Mtn. Rd.
ABC Drive
Poplar Stump Rd.

The White County Cross Country Teams are pedestrian users that require additional discussion. Cross Country Teams exist for both White County High School and White County Middle School. These teams provide numerous benefits to the participants and the community and should be supported to the full extent possible. Currently these teams use a variety of training formats, including training on the school’s track and on surrounding surface roads. In White County the use of surface roads are integral parts of the cross-country training process as the roads provide the only cost-effective means to achieve the needed exercise duration for long distance training. Typically, training occurs on surface streets located within the three-mile radius of either the High School or Middle School. As such, any proposed bicycle and pedestrian routes discussed above serve the dual purposes as student access to and from school and provision of a safe training facility for cross country runners.

However, cross country athletes have needs beyond those requirements described above. From a safety standpoint, cross country training can be accomplished on any pedestrian facility that meets appropriate design standards. However, from a physical standpoint, dirt and gravel surfaces provide increased shock absorption and decreases wear and tear on runners’ joints, muscles, and ligaments. Currently, cross country runners are frequently forced to run on narrow and uneven road shoulders

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constructed of dirt. Finally, cross country runners use the road system in a different manner than students commuting to school. The primary difference is that commuting students have a separate origin and destination and consistently use the same route. Cross country runners use the school as both the origin and destination but require a variety of training routes to reduce burnout from repetition. Similarly, these routes should provide connectivity to one another to provide a variety of trip lengths and difficulty levels. The following routes should, at a minimum, be modified through shoulder improvements to provide an adequate running surface for cross country teams and provide routing to acquire the needed training distances and connectivity for a variety of loop options. Additional bicycle and pedestrian facilities may be placed along these routes in the future as supplementary funding mechanisms become available.

Providing bicycle and pedestrian connectivity between the multiuse, natural surface trail loop at the High School and the Tesnatee Valley Nature Trail at the Tesnatee Gap Elementary School would offer the cross-country runners a substantial off-road trail network that could be incorporated into training exercises. High School students would also gain access to the nature trail's stream and wetland areas, providing a natural classroom setting for biology students.

2. ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Assessing issues and opportunities is an initial step in identifying barriers and/or constraints that must be overcome and potential avenues for implementation. It is critical to identify what the community sees as issues, barriers, and potential opportunities. The original plan in 2011 was assembled through community wide public meetings and specialized stakeholder meetings, several issues and/or barriers as well as potential outcomes for the bicycle and pedestrian plan were identified. In 2023 public forums will be held to continue the public outreach and data gained through the more than **163 surveys received from March 2022 to May 2023**.

The community identified user safety as a primary issue to be addressed by the plan in 2011 and 2022. Specifically, the community noted the existing conflict between pedestrians/bicyclists and vehicles caused by a lack of facilities, the limited separation of sidewalks from roadways, and a limited awareness of both bicyclists and drivers as to the rights of bicyclists on roadways. The community stated that the plan should address these issues by providing safe facilities and educating pedestrian/bicycle network users and drivers on the safe use of facilities and the rights of users of all systems.

The community also identified funding as a key issue in 2011. Limited funding is available to address problems with the existing network, including roads and existing bicycle/pedestrian facilities. As stated on page 4, there are specific funding sources available to aid in achieving some of the plan's priorities. These include: **GOSP**: Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program; **Recreational Trails Grant Program**; **LWCF**: Land and Water Conservation Fund; and **SPLOST**: Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, **BOLT**: Biking on Long-Distance Trails Act (federal legislation proposed but not approved/enacted yet).

The plan needs to clearly identify how bicycle and pedestrian facilities will help to alleviate current transportation problems as well as how to leverage existing funding and new avenues for funding. This could help obtain community support and understanding regarding the need, desire, and

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usefulness of a bicycle and pedestrian system. In addition, the community identified maintenance as a funding issue, because inadequate funding for maintenance will result in deteriorated facilities, thus inhibiting use.

The presence of physical barriers of White County includes moderate to steep slopes and water bodies, therefore placing severe limitations, challenges, and costs on development opportunities. Associated with steep slopes are shallow and sensitive soils placing additional limitations on development opportunities.

White County's natural resources are the native conditions and elements that contribute to the local character and livelihood. As the rivers and lakes supplying public water, mineral deposits that support local industry or a scenic park serving locals and tourists alike, these resources can serve a community's health, culture, and economy when effectively managed. Because these sites and conditions are highly susceptible to disturbance from human activity, they are regarded environmentally sensitive and need to be preserved for public benefit.

Agriculture and tourism are the two largest contributors to the local economy, with Helen being the tourism center. Additional tourism opportunities are emerging through heritage tourism venues and agricultural related tourism venues. The county and cities should develop programs to enhance these venues and promote them. Promotion of this plan will help keep tourism active, valuable, and contributing to the local economy. Both cities should continue to plan and update their public facilities to serve and concentrate on development of the document in appropriate designated areas.

The community identified a lack of facilities in key areas, including the downtown areas as a major issue to be addressed. The community stated that identifying a comprehensive network of facilities that connects key origins/destinations will help those areas already in need of these facilities and will help to promote future use. In addition, new facilities should be prioritized for areas where they would benefit existing economic development efforts.

3. EXISTING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

User Connectivity Routes and Points of Interest

The result of the ***White County Greenways and Blueways: Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Paddle Plan*** is the identification and selection of outdoor activity projects and routes for user connectivity to Points of Interest (POI's), solutions to issues and opportunities, best practice policies, and programs that support a regional bicycle and pedestrian system as well as a water-based recreation program. Existing conditions provide a base from which to start identifying needed projects, programs, and policies. Following this section identifies the community's goals and objectives for future recreational mobility opportunities, demand for facility types and locations, and preferences for those programs that will support an interconnected network throughout the county.

Identifying the most appropriate networks to meet the goals and objectives identified above and the need for White County is dependent on a variety of elements. A sidewalk network provides access for short trips, usually less than ¼ mile in length. Therefore, most facilities radiate from specific origins/destinations and/or districts and usually connect to other travel modes (i.e., the bicycle

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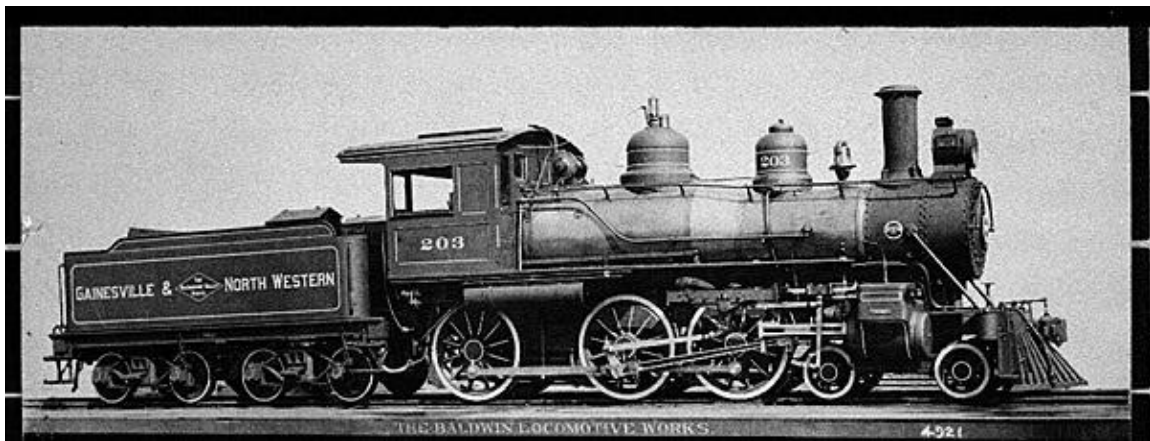
and/or the car). A single sidewalk network does not necessarily have to connect to other sidewalk networks. A bicycle network, on the other hand, provides access for longer trips, is more comprehensive in nature, and radiates from a single trunk line. White County's bicycle network is currently better connected than the pedestrian network on a county-wide scale since unlike pedestrians, bicyclists are permitted to use travel lanes on all public surface streets. Appropriately designed canoe and kayak launch facilities allow users to access the county's waterways.

A variety of considerations were factored into creating project evaluation criteria to select and prioritize projects for the network in the following pages, these include predominant user types in White County, conditions along existing roadways and waterways, and facility type.

USER CONNECTIVITY NETWORK

A network of routes both existing and proposed weaves its way throughout the county as greenways and blueways. They have the potential to link users to both natural and historical points of interest with Cleveland, Helen, Sautee Nacoochee and beyond the county. Map of this route network available in Appendix 1B.

- A. Gainesville Northwestern RR:** This 37-mile abandoned railway line went from Gainesville to North Helen and was built between 1912-1914. It went through these towns: New Holland, Clark, Autry, Dewberry, Brookton, Clermont, County Line, Campground, Meldean, Cleveland, Asbestos, Mt. Yonah, Yonah, Nacoochee, and Helen. The line was abandoned in 1932 - 1933.



The historic rail bed of the Gainesville and Northwestern Railroad is currently being researched as future rails to trails project. This rail bed stretches from Downtown Gainesville to Robertstown, north of Helen. The creation of this trail project could create a regional bicycle and pedestrian facility, adding to the options for cyclists and pedestrians in White County. The rail bed follows US Highway 129 closely and leaves Hall County in the Clermont area and enters White County, going through Cleveland and Helen, terminating in Robertstown. The linear nature and extended reach of this facility would create an ideal trunk line through Hall and White Counties. Existing and future routes could branch from this facility, creating an ideal central location for parking, restrooms, and other trail head amenities.

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GAINESVILLE & NORTHWESTERN RAILROAD COMPANY.				
"THE NACOOCHEE VALLEY ROUTE."				
R. M. McCOMBS, President,				St. Louis, Mo.
C. D. MATTHEWS, Jr., Vice-President and Treas.,				Sikeston, Mo.
B. S. BARKER, Vice-Prest. and Gen. Manager,				Gainesville, Ga.
A. R. BYRD, Jr., Secretary,				St. Louis, Mo.
S. B. JEFFERIES, General Counsel,				"
T. H. BURNS, Auditor and Car Accountant,				Gainesville, Ga.
H. C. ERWIN, General Freight and Passenger Agent,				"
TIME-TABLE.—Effective July 22, 1917.				
<i>(Eastern time.)</i>				
	MIs	No. 4	No. 2	
[LEAVE]				
Gainesville!	0	*4 25 P M	\$9 25 A M	
Gainesville! (Bradford St.)	...	4 30 "	9 30 "	
New Holland Junction	2	4 34 "	9 34 "	
Clark	7	4 45 "	9 45 "	
Dewberry	11	4 58 "	9 59 "	
Brookton	14	5 11 "	10 11 "	
Clermont	16	5 20 "	10 20 "	
County Line	18	5 29 "	10 29 "	
Meldean	22	5 43 "	10 43 "	
Cleveland	26	5 57 "	10 57 "	
Asbestos	30	6 09 "	11 09 "	
Nacoochee	34	6 25 "	11 25 "	
Helen	36	6 32 "	11 32 "	
Robertstown	arr.	6 40 P M	11 40 A M	
STATIONS.				
	MIs	No. 1	No. 3	
[LEAVE]				
Robertstown	0	*7 10 A M	\$2 10 P M	
Helen	1	7 15 "	2 15 "	
Nacoochee	3	7 23 "	2 23 "	
Asbestos	7	7 36 "	2 36 "	
Cleveland	11	7 49 "	2 49 "	
Meldean	15	8 02 "	3 02 "	
County Line	19	8 20 "	3 20 "	
Clermont	21	8 27 "	3 27 "	
Brookton	23	8 34 "	3 34 "	
Dewberry	26	8 42 "	3 42 "	
Clark	30	8 55 "	3 55 "	
New Holland Junction	35	9 10 "	4 10 "	
Gainesville (Bradford St.)	...	9 15 "	4 15 "	
Gainesville	arr.	9 20 A M	4 20 P M	

Train No. 2 connects with So. Ry. train No. 12 at Bradford St. and waits thirty minutes for connection in event Southern train No. 12 is late; and that train No. 4 connects at Bradford St. with So. Ry. No. 39, and waits thirty minutes for connection when necessary.

Trains marked * run daily; § Sunday only.

Connections.—¹With Southern Ry. and Gainesville Midland Ry.



Figure 3. Gainesville & Northwestern Railroad Trestle at the Chattahoochee River, 1928

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B. Helen Hwy: Currently Helen Highway has bike/turn lanes to Asbestos Road. The opportunity is available to continue the right of way for bike lanes and a more pedestrian friendly network in future traffic management phases with a right-of-way center turn lane.

C. Smithgall Woods State Park: Smithgall Woods has a considerable trail system open to both bicycle and pedestrian users. The existing trail system covers a wide variety of terrain and difficulty levels, but modifications will need to be incorporated if these trails are to become part of a county-wide bicycle and pedestrian network.



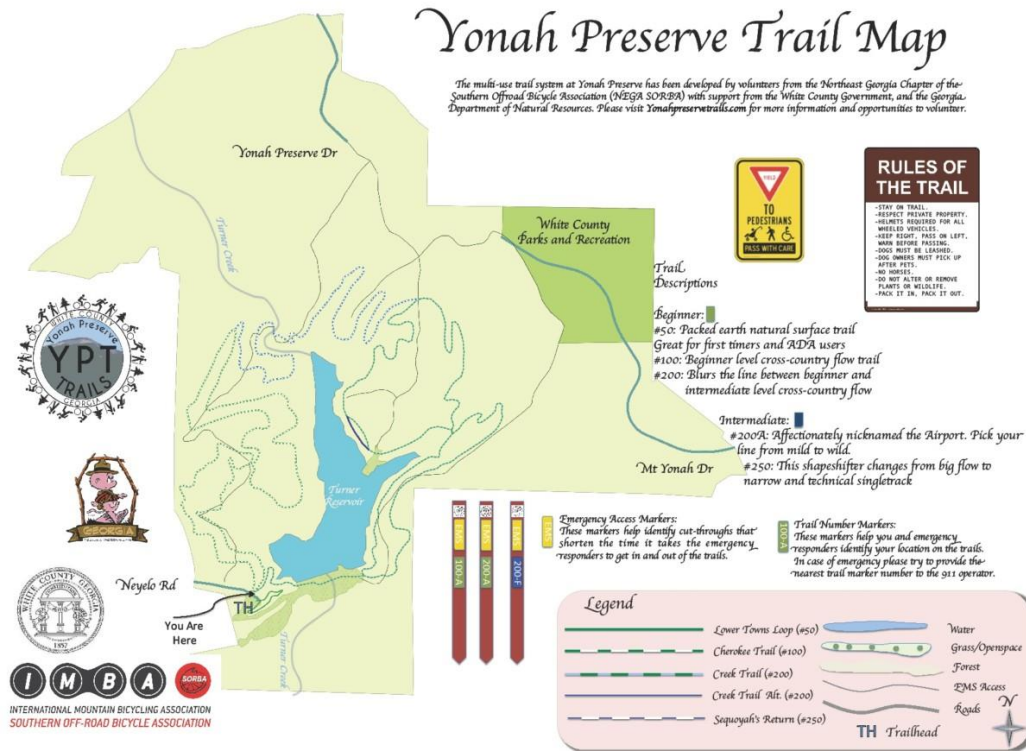
The existing trail system covers a wide variety of terrain and difficulty levels, but modifications will need to be incorporated if these trails are to become part of a county-wide bicycle and pedestrian network.

This state managed conservation area also covers approximately 5,664 acres of north central White County. The area contains twenty-three miles of roads and trails open to both bicycles and pedestrians. The trails range from easy to difficult. There are natural trails and also paved trails that are ADA accessible. Trails are maintained by park maintenance crews and Friends of Smithgall Woods.

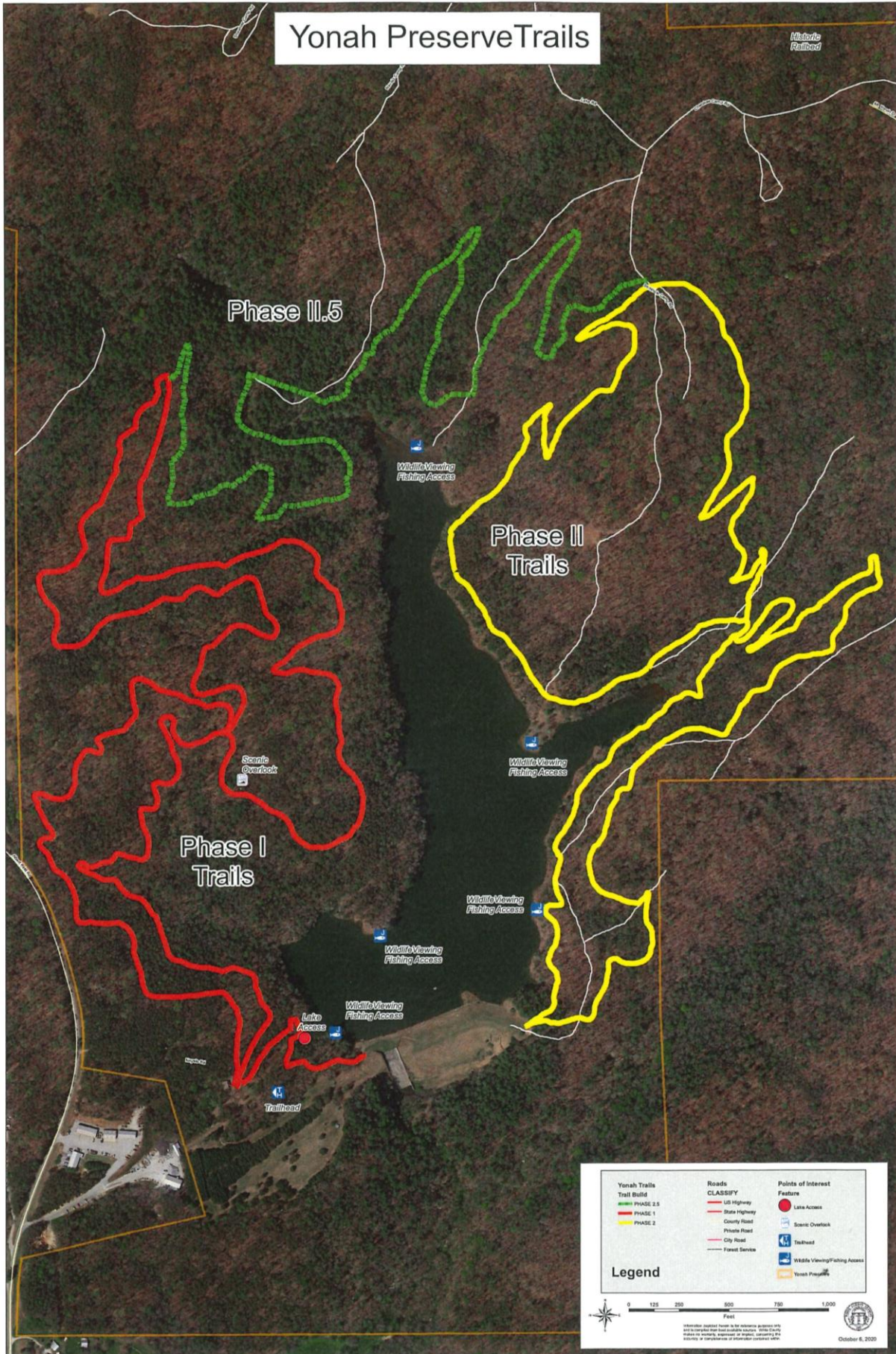


White County Greenways and Blueways: Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Paddle Plan White County, Georgia

D. Yonah Preserve/ Yonah Preserve Trails (YPT): Yonah Preserve Trails are a multi-use trail system for mountain biking, hiking, trail running, and dog walking situated on a 1000-acre tract in White County. The trails have been designed by IMBA Trail Solutions and the first two phases have been completed. The first two phases were built by Flowmotion Trail Builders from Anniston, AL with funding from grants received through the Georgia RTP program, along with many other private grants and fundraising efforts by the local members of Northeast Georgia SORBA.

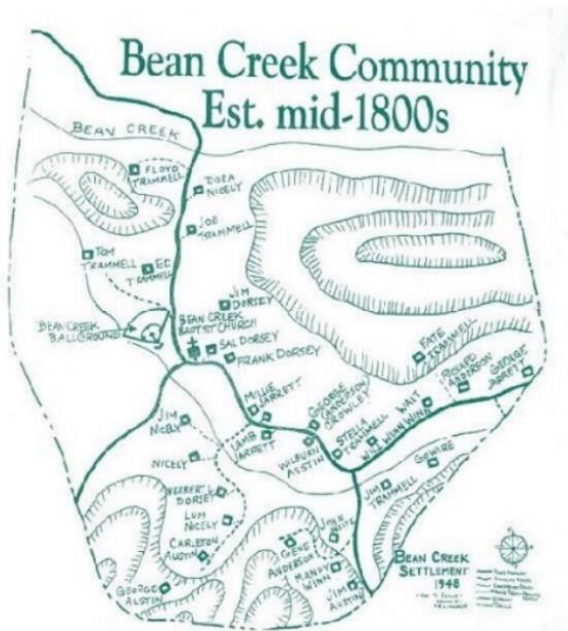


White County Greenways and Blueways: Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Paddle Plan
White County, Georgia



**White County Greenways and Blueways: Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Paddle Plan
White County, Georgia**

- E. Hardman Rd:** Hardman Road is the connector road to Bean Creek Road and was historically called Old Bean Creek Road.
- F. Bean Creek Rd:** Bean Creek Road is a paved/gravel road. Historically workers from the Bean Creek Community used this road to walk from their homes to work at Hardman Farm. Further information regarding the community is available in the July 2006 Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network/ GA State Historic Preservation publication: Reflections and titled: "Interpreting African American Life in the Sautee-Nacoochee Valley: The Bean Creek Historic Project".



This 1948 map identifies landmarks that are significant to the Bean Creek community and the places where family residences are located. Map reprinted courtesy of the Bean Creek History Project.



This photo shows Andy Allen's great-grandmother, Mary Ann Nicely (left) who was born enslaved in the Sautee-Nacoochee Valley. She is pictured in front of a log cabin with Allen's grandmother and grandfather, Lessie and Ed Nicely. Photo courtesy of Andy Allen



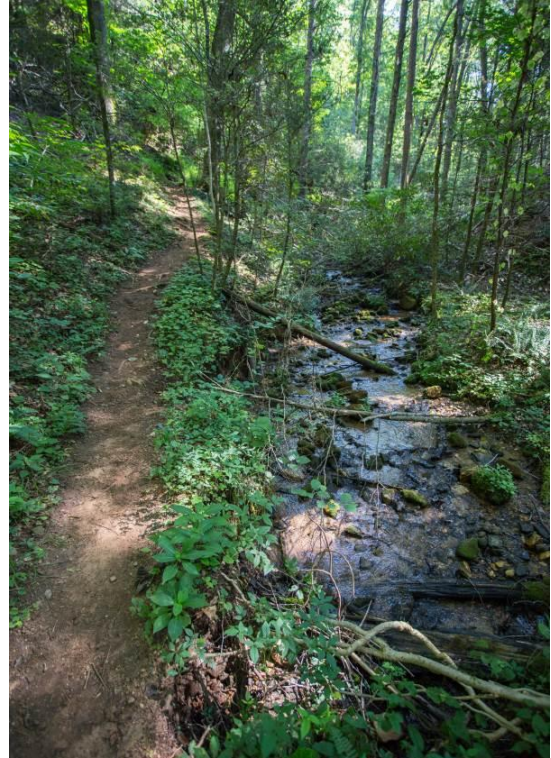
Bean Creek Missionary Baptist Church is a landmark in the African American community. The Old Bean Creek Cemetery is located on the hillside surrounding the church. The cemetery is the final resting place for generations of Bean Creek families. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque



This photo shows the slave cabin resting on the original rock piers in its new home at the Nacoochee Valley African American Heritage Site & Nature Preserve. Stone mason David Vandiver will reassemble the rock chimney and hearth. Photo by Jeanne Cyriaque

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- G. Smith Creek Trail:** The Smith Creek Trail spans just under 9 miles, round trip, following the Sautee Ditch, a historic gold mining waterway, from Unicoi State Park to Anna Ruby Falls.



White County Greenways and Blueways: Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Paddle Plan
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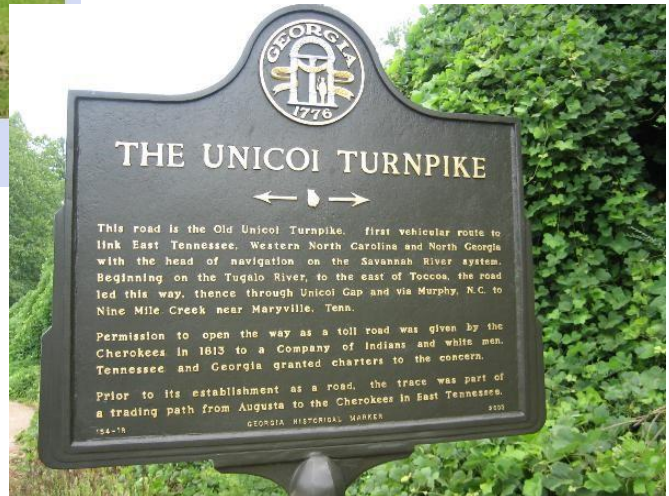
H. Unicoi Turnpike: The Unicoi Turnpike was used as a Native American highway and was the only trail across the Great Smoky Mountains between northeastern Georgia and the French Broad River Gorge. A portion of the old trail runs northwest across White County, coming out of Habersham County along GA Highway 17, through Helen, and into Towns County along GA Highway 75 North. Preliminary investigations have discovered portions of the trail preserved within the forest. Complete or partial restoration of this historic trail would provide additional facilities for cyclists and hikers, preserving an historic resource in the process.



Old Unicoi Turnpike
historic photo



roadbed of Unicoi Turnpike
on Hardman farm today



“This road is the Old Unicoi Turnpike, first vehicular route to link East Tennessee, Western North Carolina, and North Georgia with the head of navigation on the Savannah River System. Beginning on the Tugalo River, to the east of Toccoa, the road led this way, thence through Unicoi Gap and via Murphy, N.C. to Nine Mile Creek near Maryville, Tenn.

Permission to open the way as a toll road was given by the Cherokees in 1813 to a Company of Indians and white men. Tennessee and Georgia granted charters to the concern.

Prior to its establishment as a road, the trace was part of a trading path from Augusta to the Cherokees in East Tennessee.”

White County Greenways and Blueways: Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Paddle Plan
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I. Chattahoochee River/Paddle Launch Sites: Canoe paddle launch locations are located along the Chattahoochee River.

UPPER CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVER Water Trail

The Upper Chattahoochee River Water Trail is a 36.2-mile section of waterway in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The goal of the water trail is to create recreational boating opportunities along the Chattahoochee while promoting land stewardship and conservation. This paddle card provides information pertaining to the boating sections of the Upper Chattahoochee River Water Trail.

CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVERKEEPER®
 Keeping Watch Over Our Waters
www.chattahoochee.org

Wildwood Outfitters
www.wildwoodoutfitters.com

UPPER CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVER Water Trail

- 1** PUT IN: Sautee Creek Bridge on Lynch Mountain Road
 TAKE OUT: Hwy 255 Bridge
 DISTANCE: 5.8 miles CLASSIFICATION: Class I
 DESCRIPTION / FEATURES: Starts in Sautee Valley on Sautee Creek, beautiful scenery; lively mountain stream with several Class I rapids.
- 2** PUT IN: Hwy 255 Bridge TAKE OUT: Hwy 115 Bridge
 DISTANCE: 4.2 miles CLASSIFICATION: Class I (II)
 DESCRIPTION / FEATURES: Mainly Class I rapids, pools and flat water. Smith Island Shoals (3 1/2 miles downstream) is the only Class II rapid.
- 3** PUT IN: Hwy 115 Bridge
 TAKE OUT: Wildwood Outfitters on Duncan Bridge Rd.
 DISTANCE: 4 miles CLASSIFICATION: Class II (III)
 DESCRIPTION / FEATURES: Whitewater section; the most popular route on the Upper Chattahoochee. This section features three class II (III) rapids. Buck Shoals State Park offers riverside camping with permit.
- 4** PUT IN: Wildwood Outfitters on Duncan Bridge Rd. (Hwy 384)
 TAKE OUT: Belton Bridge
 DISTANCE: 10.2 miles CLASSIFICATION: Class I (II)
 DESCRIPTION / FEATURES: Mainly flatwater paddling with class I (II) rapids. Mossy Creek State Park offers a put in/take out option just below the cascades of Mossy Creek at the 5 mile mark of this section.
- 5** PUT IN: Belton Bridge TAKE OUT: Lula Park Bridge (Hwy 52)
 DISTANCE: 3.2 miles CLASSIFICATION: Lake to Flat River
 DESCRIPTION / FEATURES: All flat water; river flow begins to slow down as Lake Lanier's backflow becomes present.
- 6** PUT IN: Lula Park Bridge TAKE OUT: Clarks Bridge (Hwy 284)
 DISTANCE: 8.8 miles CLASSIFICATION: Lake to Flat River
 DESCRIPTION / FEATURES: This entire section is on Lake Lanier in Northern Hall County. Take out is at the Clarks Bridge Olympic Rowing Center. Camping is available at Don Carter State Park at the 3.5 mile mark of this section.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- The Upper Chattahoochee River Water Trail offers superb paddling for kayakers and canoeists, however, some experience is advisable in attempting Sections 2 and 3.
- Respect private property rights; the only access points open to the public are at the road crossings and parks shown on this map.
- Always wear a PFD (Personal Flotation Device) and a helmet (if in a kayak).
- Travel with a buddy - or at least inform someone of your paddling plans.
- Know about current river conditions and water levels - information and reference gages can be found on <http://ga.water.usgs.gov>.
- Carry food and water as necessary.

For more information contact WILDWOOD OUTFITTERS: (706) 865-4451

The above pamphlet details efforts in 2012 after the initial 2011 Bike/Ped plan to outline blueways and paddle opportunities on the Chattahoochee River. It is now recommended to utilize the 2024 maps from this document for the most updated information on proposed and existing putin locations.

DESTINATIONS/POINTS OF INTEREST

Chattahoochee National Forest



Hiking and mountain biking trails can be found in the northern portion of White County, where approximately 41,000 acres of the Chattahoochee National Forest are located. Here elevations and terrain provide a more challenging environment than other areas of the county. These forest lands are managed through directives identified within the Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) and include habitat conservation, watershed management, wood product management, aesthetic quality, and recreation opportunities.

The Appalachian Trail follows the northern border of White County from Cowrock Mountain to Tray Mountain. The Appalachian Trail is directly accessible in White County at Richard Russell Scenic Highway, Highway 75N, and Tray Mountain Road. The Logan Turnpike and Andrews Cove hiking trails, located at lower elevations in White County, provide indirect access to the Appalachian Trail. In all, White County contains approximately thirty miles of hiking trails maintained by the Chattahoochee National Forest. Some of these include Raven Cliffs Trail, Dukes Creek Falls Trail, Whitley Gap Shelter Trail, Horse Trough Falls Trail, Anna Ruby Falls Trail, Smith Creek Trail, and the newly created Mt. Yonah Trail.

The White County portion of the Chattahoochee National Forest does not contain any official bicycle routes, but there are plenty of areas where bicycling is allowed. The Forest Plan states that, unless otherwise marked, bicycle users can ride on all open and closed roads. Approximately sixty miles of open and closed forest service roads exist within White County that can be traversed by bicycle. These routes are primarily gravel surfaced roads that have elevation changes of several hundred feet to several thousand feet and are therefore only suited for dedicated mountain bikes and riders in excellent physical condition. Currently these Forest Service routes are under used due to a combination of the challenging terrain, general preference for single track trails, public awareness of the trail's existence, and confusion concerning Forest Service policy regarding where and when bicycles are allowed on Forest Service Roads.

Unicoi State Park

Unicoi State Park is located between the City of Helen and the Chattahoochee National Forest, covering an area of approximately 1,063 acres. The park contains 4 hiking trails and one mountain biking trail, equaling 12 total miles of trails. These trails provide excellent coverage of the park and bicycle and pedestrian linkages from the City of Helen to Highway 356, the Chattahoochee National Forest, and Anna Ruby Falls Scenic Area. The hiking trails range from easy to moderate in difficulty. The mountain biking trail was designed primarily for competitions and is rated difficult. All the trails are maintained through a combination of park maintenance crews, Friends of Unicoi State Park, and SORBA.



Figure 4. Pedestrian Trail at Anna Ruby Falls.

OTP-Appalachian Wilderness Camp

OTP-Appalachian Wilderness Camp, a Georgia Department of Human Resources facility, served troubled youths from 1974 until it closed in 2010. That 1,000-acre plot of land is located in north central White County on Albert Reid Road and includes a 53-acre Lake. The White County Government eventually leased this property from DNR with the stipulation that the County shall create a multi-use recreational playground. In 2013, SORBA/IMBA made a formal presentation to the County proposing a network of Multi-Use Trails on the “OTP Land,” approximately 20 miles of trail. That 1,000-acre plot of land is Yonah Preserve Trails, 1054 Albert Reid Road, Cleveland, GA, and was officially opened in June 2018. To date, some 10-miles of trail serves hikers, runners, cyclists, dog walkers; the 53-acre lake offers fishing and non-motorized boating; the Pavilion offers picnic tables, restrooms, and water fountain. Hundreds of citizens and tourists visit Yonah Preserve Trails every day. In May 2019, White County dedicated the new Yonah Preserve ball fields, a part of White County Park and Recreation.



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Buck Shoals State Park



Buck Shoals State Park is located along the Chattahoochee River in southeast White County. The site has recently been acquired by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and encompasses approximately six hundred acres. Occasional visitation is allowed via guided tours provided by staff from Smithgall Woods, but the area has not yet been opened to the public.

This property was formerly a private residence with accompanying agricultural and forestry lands, creating a system of existing roads and trails across the property. If these resources are utilized, additional trails and amenities could be created on the property. The beautiful setting, complex topography, and moderate elevation change within the park provides a variety of environments well suited for diverse recreational experiences. To date, only preliminary discussions with park officials regarding the true feasibility of developing a trail system have occurred. The initial concept identifies the possibility for as many as ten miles of trails to be placed within the park boundaries.

Chattahoochee National Forest

One of the primary goals White County hopes to achieve with completion of this bicycle and pedestrian plan is to develop the area as a regional ride center. Final implementation of the regional ride center concept may include using lands managed by the US Forest Service to provide additional off-road cycling activities within White County. Ideally, these trails would be within proximity to the City of Helen, providing linkages to a county-wide cycling network. These plans are currently preliminary at best and collaboration with the US Forest Service on trail locations has yet to begin.



Figure 5. Dangerous Conditions for cyclists.

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Tray Mountain

Tray Mountain Loop is one of the most popular off-road cycling routes in White County. Riders often begin their trip at Unicoi State Park and travel the long single-track grade to Tray Mountain Road. The loop continues to climb, passing near the summit of Tray Mountain, before descending Tray Mountain Road's gravel double track to GA Highway 75 North. To complete the loop from the intersection of Tray Mountain Road to Unicoi State Park, riders must travel approximately 2.5 miles on GA Highway 75 North and GA Highway 356, heavily traveled roads that lack bike lanes or shoulders because of close guardrails and rocky outcroppings. This creates a dangerous situation which cannot be remedied due to the rugged topography. The safest and most cost-effective solution is to construct a 0.5-mile single track route linking the lower reaches of Tray Mountain Road with the eastern portion of Unicoi State Park. This trail would allow riders to bypass both GA Highway 75 North and GA Highway 356. Due to the overwhelming safety issues along these roads, one of the recommendations of this plan is for White County to pursue this connector trail with the cooperation of the USDA Forest Service, Unicoi State Park, and SORBA. Other safety issues in this area are terrain damage from an August 2005 tornado and erosion from a nearby spray field operation. These hazards may be so severe in areas that re-routing the trail path may be in order.

Babyland General

Babyland General, home of the famous Cabbage Patch Kids, is Cleveland's most significant tourist attraction. To accommodate more visitors, a new facility was constructed in 2009 on five hundred acres north of the city. Plans for the remainder of the 500-acre site include development of a tourism and recreation hub. Multiuse trails on the site would serve both Babyland General and the community due to the site's setting and orientation. The site has direct access to several important transportation corridors, including US Highway 129, Albert Reid Road, and Hulsey Road. Due to the large size of the tract, numerous multiuse trails can be constructed on the property. The provision of a linkage from US Highway 129 and Albert Reid Road to Nok Drive would be a critical part of a county wide system. The Gainesville and Northwestern Historic Rail Bed also runs through the Babyland General property. Constructing a multiuse trail along this property would not only serve citizens of White County as a recreational facility, but it could also serve as an additional tourist attraction linking various sites throughout the county.

Hardman Farm Trail

Provides bicycle and pedestrian access to the Hardman Farm and is a great opportunity for Helen to diversify its leisure offerings and increase the city's recreational and educational appeal. An abandoned roadbed and bridge serve as the bicycle and pedestrian route. This scenic route begins in Helen at the southernmost intersection of Edleweisse Strasse and Brucken Strasse and travels along the banks of the Chattahoochee River for 0.8 miles, terminating on the old Hardman Road at Hardman Farm. The Hardman Farm has been



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restored and serves as a high quality interactive educational facility with historically themed interpretive tours, trade demonstrations, and other attractions.

Private Facilities

A limited number of designated, privately maintained hiking and biking facilities do exist in White County. Sky Lake Subdivision, located in northeast White County, has the most substantial privately maintained trail network. The subdivision was developed in the 1970's and includes almost six hundred lots with approximately three hundred acres of greenspace. Within this greenspace approximately 6 miles of hiking, walking, and mountain biking trails have been constructed. The trails vary in difficulty from moderate to strenuous.

Educational Institutions

Providing a safe environment for the school age population of White County is a primary concern of this plan. Schools in White County require special attention due to the increasing combination of bicycle, pedestrian, and vehicular traffic at all campuses. As such, providing a safe environment for all three user types is paramount. Bicycle and pedestrian use associated with schools falls within a two-mile radius of the campus. This two-mile boundary marks the general area where bicycle and pedestrian improvements are most effective in creating a safer biking and walking environment for children and parents.

- ***White County High School/ Tesnatee Gap Elementary School*** - Existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities at White County High School consist of a 1.5-mile multiuse, natural surface trail surrounding the campus. This trail was built by school staff and originally used as a mountain biking loop. This facility has also been used by members of the White County Cross Country Team and as an outdoor classroom for such courses as botany and biology. Due to inconsistent maintenance, the trail has fallen into disrepair.

The Tesnatee Valley Nature Trail is located at the Tesnatee Gap Elementary School. This facility is a network of natural surface trails, approximately 3,000 linear feet in length for hikers, walkers, etc. The trail system was originally designed for fitness activities along with historic and environmental education, but the system has never been completed. The completed portions of the trail have fallen into a state of moderate disrepair.

Because the White County High School multiuse trail and the Tesnatee Valley Nature Trails are both managed by the White County Board of Education and are located within proximity to one another, development and implementation of a joint maintenance schedule is recommended. This schedule would ensure the trails receive regular maintenance and reach their full potential as a community resource. Due to funding limitations of the White County Board of Education, labor and additional funding could be obtained through agreements with the Boy Scouts of America, White County High School Construction Department, and other community organizations.

- ***White County 9th Grade Academy, White County Middle School, Jack P. Nix Primary School*** - The 9th Grade Academy, Middle School, and Primary School are all located within the City of Cleveland. The city currently has an extensive sidewalk network that provides

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connectivity to all three educational facilities as well as to the surrounding city. Continued maintenance and expansion, if necessary, is recommended for these facilities.

White County High School and Tesnatee Gap Elementary School

Improving bicycle and pedestrian facilities surrounding White County High School and Tesnatee Gap Elementary School should be a high priority since there are no existing alternative transportation facilities that currently serve these schools. High school students are especially prone to use these facilities and travel a great distance on them due to the high level of independence associated with this age group. Although bicycle and pedestrian facilities are needed, the installation of these facilities at both schools poses some unique challenges. Primarily these challenges include the schools' rural settings which make a cost-effective cost solution to the proposed regional system difficult. Also, the heavily trafficked US Highway 129 poses additional difficulty as it is the most direct route to most residential areas surrounding the schools as well as the most direct route to Cleveland. Therefore, any bicycle and pedestrian facilities placed along this highway should be well thought out and designed due to the route's inherent dangers. With these considerations in mind, plan implementers should strongly focus attention to the prioritization of bicycle and pedestrian facilities in direct connection to the goals of the project and student needs. Multiuse trails and bicycle lanes may serve as the best solution to the safety issue by separating cyclists and pedestrians from vehicular traffic.

Mossy Creek Elementary School

Mossy Creek Elementary School is in southern White County near the intersection of US Highway 129 and Westmoreland Road. This location is rural and is not located within proximity to a large population center. Nonetheless, three corridors have been identified that would enhance bicycle and pedestrian access and mobility to Mossy Creek Elementary School from surrounding population nodes. These corridors include Westmorland Road, Tommy Coward/Partin Road, and Collins Road.

Westmoreland Road serves as a primary east to west connector route in White County. To achieve maximum effectiveness for Mossy Creek Elementary School, bicycle and pedestrian facilities should be placed along Westmoreland Road from Maypop Circle to GA Highway 75 South. As with White County High School, the crossing of US Highway 129 at Westmoreland Road poses a serious safety concern, and a pedestrian bridge may be required to provide adequate access to both sides of US Highway 129. This section of Westmoreland Road should include sidewalks along both sides and be identified as a bicycle safe route. The eastern extent of Westmoreland Road's bicycle and pedestrian facilities will terminate at GA Highway 75 South, but will provide county-wide linkages via the Appalachian Gateway Trail, Georgia State Bicycle Route 55, passing through Gainesville and Cleveland on a northward track from Suwanee to Robertstown.

From a county-wide standpoint, US Highway 129 poses a safety concern for all bicycle and pedestrian users. Due to this concern, parallel routes that have lower traffic volumes have been identified within this plan to serve as the host for bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Tommy Cowart Road and Partin Road are parallel routes to US Highway 129 South and provide a measure of connectivity to the City of Cleveland and Mossy Creek Elementary School. This route is also important as it supplies a source of alternative transportation for low to moderate income families located along US Highway 129 South. The three-mile service area for bicycle and pedestrian facilities extends beyond the northern terminus of Tommy Cowart Road. Therefore, it is recommended that these facilities extend from the northern most section of Tommy Cowart Road, at its terminus with US Highway 129, south along

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Partin Road, and then south along a short section of US Highway 129 to provide connectivity with the proposed Westmoreland Road bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Bicycle and pedestrian facilities along this route should include sidewalks and bicycle lanes or extended paved shoulders.

Rolling Meadows subdivision and Brookwood Village subdivision are both served by Collins Road. Because of the high housing density of these neighborhoods and proximity to Mossy Creek Elementary School, Collins Road should be fitted with sidewalks and bicycle lanes from the intersection of Tow Road to the intersection of Westmoreland Road.

Mount Yonah Elementary School

Mount Yonah Elementary School is located on Duncan Bridge Road, GA Highway 384, near Helen Highway. This location is near several large neighborhoods including Swiss Colony, Sky Mountain Estates, Yonah Mountain Lake gated community, Bakers Fjord, Alpine Terrace, and Panorama Estates. To take advantage of this high density of residential housing, sidewalks should be placed along Duncan Bridge Road from Sonny's Circle to Glenns Drive. Proper timing for this improvement is important as GDOT has proposed several alignment and grade modifications to Duncan Bridge Road. Collaboration with GDOT to incorporate the necessary bicycle and pedestrian upgrades should be made to coincide with existing upgrades planned by GDOT for Duncan Bridge Road. Duncan Bridge Road is a primary route to connect Buck Shoals State Park with Smithgall Woods Conservation Area and the Hardman Farm property. Therefore, Duncan Bridge Road from Buck Shoals State Park to Helen Highway needs bicycle lanes. Further, homeowner associations in neighboring subdivisions to Mount Yonah Elementary School should be encouraged to install bicycle and pedestrian facilities within their respective subdivisions as necessary to provide students safe passage to Duncan Bridge Road and Mount Yonah Elementary School.

These safety improvements are the focus of the Safe Routes to Schools Program. The purpose of SRTS is to enable and encourage children to walk and bike to school. To accomplish these goals, SRTS to school focuses on pedestrian and bike safety, encouragement of a healthy lifestyle from an early age, and the planning, development, and implementation of projects and activities that improve safety, reduce traffic, and reduce air pollution in the vicinity of schools.

Funding is provided for infrastructure such as sidewalks, bike lanes, crosswalks, and lighting that increase the safety of children as they walk or bike to and from school. The project being funded must be within a 2-mile radius of the school. Upon being awarded SRTS funding, the project is completed via a Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) consultant.

The Georgia Safe Routes to School Resource Center provides guidance and assistance to communities who are interested in promoting pedestrian and cycling activities within their school districts. The Resource Center focuses on non-infrastructure activities such as education, enforcement, encouragement, and evaluation. The Resource Center has divided the state into six regions with an outreach coordinator assigned to each region. The Georgia Mountains Region is included in the Northeast Region and the outreach coordinator assigned to this region is available for technical assistance. This technical assistance includes writing travel plans for your school and providing free educational and promotional materials for your school's pedestrian or cycling events.

School systems and individual schools can gain the most benefits from the Resource Center by becoming a Friend or Partner of the Georgia Safe Routes to School Resource Center. Within the Georgia Mountains Region there are a total of twenty-one schools signed up as Partners. Friends of

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the Georgia Safe Routes to Schools Resource Center serve in a supportive role to those schools that are Partners. Friends in the Georgia Mountains Region include the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission and the White County Child Safety Committee.

Jack P. Nix Elementary School

Jack P. Nix Elementary School is located at 342 West Kyle Street in Cleveland. The elementary school is popular for fitness due to the close proximity to downtown and parking at the school. Fitness opportunities include utilizing the one-mile loop route at ABC Drive/Warrior Path towards the White County Middle School (parking also available at the middle school where the cross-country team utilizes this route as well) and playground facilities at the elementary school. Sidewalks along GA Hwy 115/W. Kyle Street are also available for a safe bike/ped environment.

Truett McConnell University

Truett McConnell features a network of activity paths for exercise and recreation but note that currently this is for students only.

White County



Figure 6. 1957 Centennial Celebration at Historic White County Courthouse

The extent of bicycle and pedestrian facilities within White County is limited. Until 2010 the White County Recreation Department operated a 40-acre facility on Asbestos Road containing fields for baseball, softball, and soccer, a basketball court, and a swimming pool. The area also includes picnic areas, a trail, and a sports complex near the intersection of Tesnatee Gap Valley Road and Highway 129 N, adjacent to the Tesnatee Gap Elementary School. White County has contracted with a nonprofit organization to run the facilities while the county maintains ownership. This allows the programs to be more efficiently managed and provides additional resources for expansion and improvement such as one mile fitness trails.

White County has a limited network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Dedicated bicycle lanes and sidewalks by GDOT are along both sides of GA Highway 75/Helen Highway north of Cleveland. These facilities extend for 1.5 miles. No additional bicycle or pedestrian facilities are in the unincorporated portion of White County that are maintained by GDOT or White County.



Figure 7. Bike Lanes and Sidewalks along GA Hwy 75

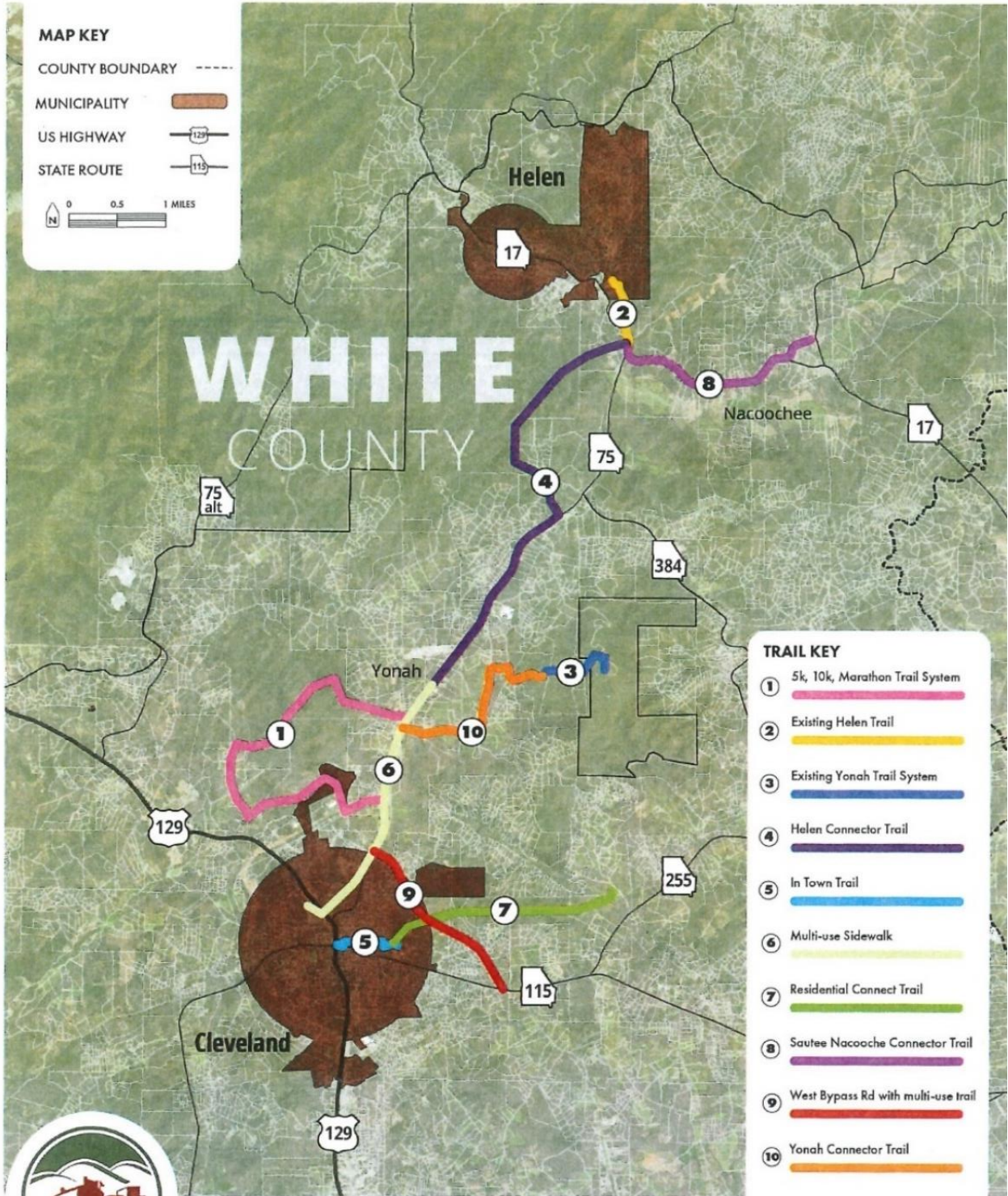
In 2021, White County completed an update to the Comprehensive Plan. Each county and city in Georgia are required to have a current

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Comprehensive Plan and completely update this plan every ten years. A community's Comprehensive Plan is used to guide quality growth, devise effective strategies, and make implementation decisions. The implementation portion of the Comprehensive Plan includes a Short-Term Work Program detailing the specific actions a community will take to implement the policies and goals of the plan. This Short-Term Work Program must be updated on an annual basis. The county also updates its Economic Development Plan frequently to focus on new projects to improve these systems.

In 2022, White County completed a Greenspace & Trail Plan to guide development of these amenities.

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GREENSPACE & TRAIL PLAN
 WHITE COUNTY | GEORGIA
 MAY 10, 2022



City of Cleveland



Proposed extensions to the existing sidewalk system in Cleveland will link key residential areas and recreation facilities while improving safety for pedestrians in critical areas of the city. Cleveland is one of the oldest cities in the region. During development, narrow streets were constructed making cyclists unsafe when attempting to share the road with vehicular traffic. Retrofitting city streets with bicycle lanes and widened shoulders is usually restricted due to narrow rights-of-way. Existing utility easements, including water and sewer rights-of-way, do not include provisions for recreational uses. The establishment of future easements and rights-of-way should include provisions of bicycle and pedestrian facilities. An additional recommendation is for the City of Cleveland to implement a series of bicycle routes within the city limits. The routes would facilitate bicycle use on existing roads using lower speed limits, traffic calming devices, and improved signage.

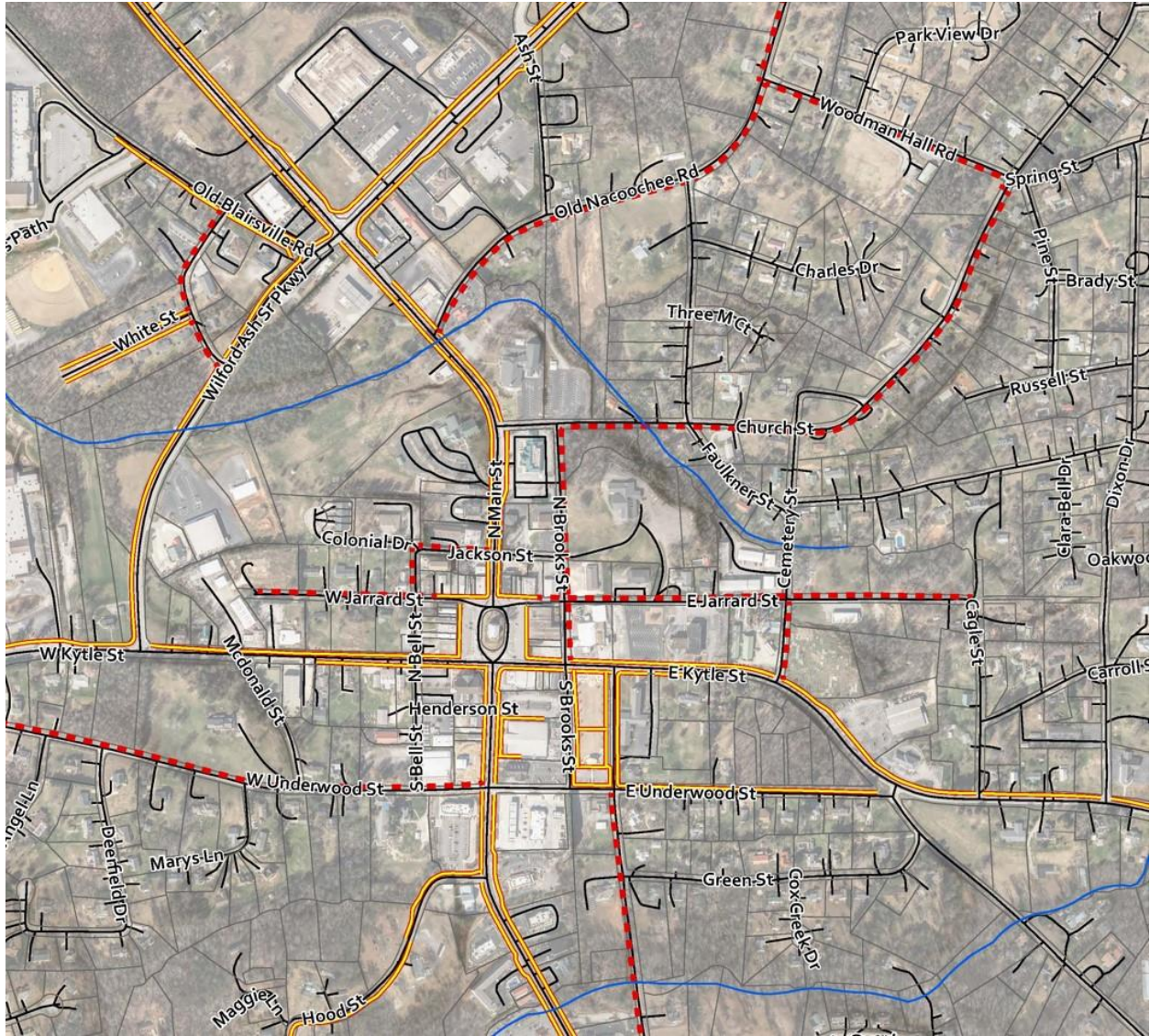
Within Cleveland, a 6-mile system of sidewalks provides access to all the public facilities located within the city including schools, city hall, and public safety centers. Most of the commercial centers are also accessible via the sidewalk network including the city square and large shopping nodes. The sidewalk system with the City of Cleveland is focused along US Highway 129, GA Highway 115, Helen Highway, Wilford Ash Sr. Parkway, and Truett McConnell University.

The city has minimized gaps in the existing sidewalk system and developed a connected pedestrian system that provides a means of alternative transportation to major commercial centers and educational facilities. The City of Cleveland also requires sidewalk facilities for all new apartment and townhome developments. Codes should also ensure connection of these new facilities to the existing network if economically feasible for the developer. Development of an annual inventory and assessment of the sidewalk system would ensure that this investment is maintained to proper

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specifications and minor repairs can be made prior to the exacerbation of any issues. The only designated bicycle routes within the City of Cleveland are the bicycle lanes along GA Highway 75/Helen Highway that extend into unincorporated White County.

The city has also created several greenspaces for bike/ped destinations. The White County Water Authority on Claude Sims Road is a potential long-term opportunity over the next thirty years where once the wastewater plant ponds have been decommissioned, the area could be repurposed as a future activity lawn.



Legend

- Cleveland Proposed Sidewalks
- Existing Sidewalks
- Parcel
- Rivers and Streams
- Lakes and ponds
- City of Cleveland Boundary

City of Cleveland Sidewalk Map

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- Legend**
- Cleveland Proposed Sidewalks
 - Existing Sidewalks
 - Parcels
 - Rivers and Streams
 - Lakes and ponds
 - City of Cleveland Boundary

City of Cleveland Sidewalk Map



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City of Helen

Helen is one of the most popular tourist destinations in North Georgia. The city is strongly pedestrian oriented due to the various festivals and activities held throughout the year. Due to elevated levels of vehicular congestion during peak tourism season, pedestrian travel becomes a more efficient way of navigating the city. The city contains approximately 3.3 miles of sidewalk, plus an additional downtown pedestrian zone composed of alleyways, open areas, and fountains. The network connects the major commercial districts and public facilities, including restaurants, hotels, and shopping venues. Many residents drive to the free public parking lots and walk throughout the city as a part of their regular fitness regime.



The only designated bicycle routes within the City of Helen are the bicycle lanes along GA Highway 75/Helen Highway that extend into unincorporated White County. There are currently no dedicated bicycle lanes or bicycle routes within the city but because the area is popular with cyclists, vehicles and pedestrians have learned to share the road. The City of Helen has even implemented a bicycle patrol to improve response times for police officers during the busy season.

Most residential development in the City of Helen is located along small side streets with proximity to the existing sidewalk network. Only a handful of new sidewalks will be required to fill in the gaps of the existing network and provide complete coverage of the city. In 2022, the city upgraded pedestrian crosswalks throughout Main Street, Helen.

The City of Helen has a unique setting and is bounded by Unicoi State Park to the northeast, Smithgall Woods Conservation Area to the west, and the Hardman Farm to the south. Existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities provide access to Unicoi State Park.



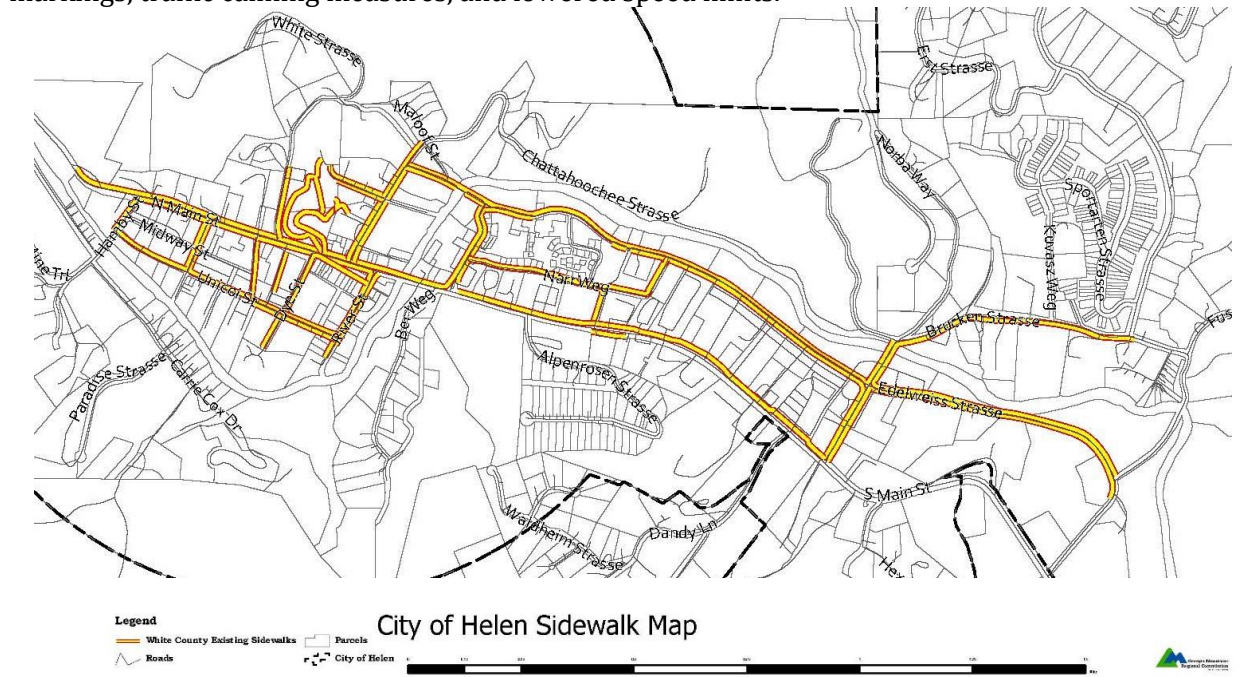
Figure 8. Pedestrian Bridge in Helen

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Expansion of these facilities to include access to Smithgall Woods Conservation Area and the Hardman Farm would provide additional alternative transportation and recreation opportunities for visitors and residents, safely removing this traffic from the vehicle travel lanes. These linkages would complete a vital part of a county and region wide trail system.

Less than half a mile separates Helen's existing sidewalks from the existing trail network of Smithgall Woods. While the extension of the sidewalk system along Carrie Cox Road and Tower Road to Smithgall Woods is a simple matter, providing access to the park at Tower Road for the public will require adjustments to the operating procedures of the park. Currently Smithgall Woods Conservation Area has a single entrance located several miles away on GA Highway 75 Alternate. All visitors use this entrance and must register at the Visitors Center. Coordination with Smithgall Woods, GA DNR, the City of Helen, and White County would be required to provide an additional entrance near Helen while simultaneously developing a solution to meet Smithgall Woods' need for visitor registration and management.

As linkages are created to its neighboring parks, the City of Helen will have the great distinction of being the only city in Georgia with direct access to three separate state park facilities. This unique attribute can be used as a marketing tool to attract a new clientele to Helen. This clientele will be an extension of the already growing cycling culture in Helen as the vast network of trails surrounding the city will be most easily toured on two wheels. With an increasing number of cyclists visiting Helen, improving bicycle mobility within the city will become increasingly important. As in Cleveland, dedicated bike lanes in Helen are rare and the existing road structure is not well suited for the addition of these lanes. One of the recommendations of this plan is for the City of Helen to develop a series of safe bike routes. These routes should mimic the existing sidewalk system in that they provide connectivity between the city's commercial center, lodging areas, and state park access points. A special focus should be placed on efficient route selection that minimizes traffic conflicts and additional congestion, provides safe street crossings, and provides the necessary levels of community connectivity. These routes should be enhanced for safety using signage, pavement markings, traffic calming measures, and lowered speed limits.



C. ESTABLISHING THE VISION

1. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals and objectives provide the basis for the type of recommendations and policies that should be a result of this plan and provide a mechanism, through performance measures, to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan over time. The following goals and objectives are based on public input and provide a vision for future bicycle and pedestrian mobility.

Quality of Life is a degree of well-being. It consists of physical and psychological components which help to provide a positive emotional state.

Goal #1: Implement an interconnected bicycle and pedestrian network that meets community needs in a cost effective and coordinated manner.

Objectives:

- Promote projects that provide bicycle and pedestrian access to key origins and destinations, including but not limited to, schools, downtowns, tourist attractions, shops, and parks, thereby providing for both transportation and recreational needs.
- Provide a system that serves the needs of the transportation disadvantaged.
- Prioritize projects that eliminate existing gaps within the bicycle and pedestrian network and connect neighborhoods to nearby destinations, with future phases to provide cross county and regional connections.
- Adopt local development ordinances and guidelines that support the community's desired level of bike and pedestrian facilities.
- Develop a forum that provides for ongoing bicycle and pedestrian planning.
- Maximize resources through use of public rights of way (with proper retrofitting) and corridors such as roadways, easements, and by coordinating with planned projects.

Goal #2: Improve the quality of life through the provision of a bicycling and pedestrian network with supporting amenities.

Objectives:

- Coordinate the provision of bicycling and walking facilities with designated destinations in land use plans, and especially in high growth areas, schools, and key destinations.
- Maximize economic development potential through provision of strategically located bicycle and sidewalk facilities.
- Provide ancillary facilities such as bicycle parking and storage, lighting, landscaping, and signalization where appropriate and encourage funding participation toward amenities.

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- Support education and awareness programs that increase awareness of walking and bicycling benefits, including health, recreation, and energy savings.

System Users

White County has many types of cyclists, ranging from riders who use the bicycle as their primary form of transportation to riders who strictly use the bicycle as a form of recreation. Within both categories you also have experienced and novice riders with varying skill levels. In addition, White County has a variety of pedestrians, ranging from children to the elderly and from those who walk out of necessity to those who walk for recreational purposes. Recreational bike riding and pedestrian activity has increased steadily over the years all over White County due to a thriving tourist industry. The natural features and cultural destinations of White County draw year-round visitors from the state and region. The following definitions of users provided a basis from which the project team began to identify the types and locations of facilities needed.

Pedestrian Users

The Atlanta Regional Commission's (ARC) 2002 Regional Transportation and Pedestrian Walkways Plan defined adult pedestrians, child pedestrians, and pedestrians with disabilities. Environmental justice community participants are defined by the federal government. These definitions, adapted for applicability in White County, provided a basis for identifying to whom this plan is intended, facility types, project locations, and project prioritization. Definitions are provided below:

- **Adult Pedestrians:** Adult pedestrians use facilities for commuting, recreation, and exercise. Adult pedestrians are aware of the rules of vehicular traffic. Adult pedestrians can have difficulty crossing high-speed, multi-lane streets that lack median refuge islands or pedestrian signals.
- **Child Pedestrians:** Child pedestrians see and hear the world differently than adults. Children often have trouble judging traffic speed, gaps in traffic, or whether a car is coming, going, or standing still. Children are shorter than adults and have limited peripheral vision. Neighborhood streets with sidewalks and shared-use facilities can accommodate child pedestrians.
- **Environmental Justice Community Participants:** Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, education level, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws. Environmental justice seeks to ensure that minority and low-income communities have access to public information relating to human health and environmental planning, regulations, and enforcement. Environmental justice ensures that no population, especially the elderly and children, are forced to shoulder a disproportionate burden of the negative human health and environmental impacts of pollution or other environmental hazards.
- **Accessibility: Pedestrians with Disabilities:** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits discrimination of pedestrians with disabilities. Pedestrians who are blind, deaf, or rely on wheelchairs have needs specific to their type of disability. For instance, people who are deaf need visible warnings about crossing vehicular traffic. People with vision

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impairments need tactile indications that they are approaching an intersection or other hazard. Because they cannot see safety signs, they need audible indicators to inform them of proper times to cross the street. When planning for trail upgrades it is imperative to consult the USDA Accessibility Guidebook for Outdoor Recreation and Trails.

Accessibility Guidebook for Outdoor Recreation and Trails



Roadway Network

Land use and transportation are the main factors of community development planning. Ensuring the best balance of land uses, levels of accessibility and the overall sustainability of a community requires an understanding of development trends and issues.

Vast amounts of White County are undeveloped, forested lands under the management of the United States Forest Service. The county consists of scattered rural residential and agricultural land uses. The largest concentrations of residential and other development occur in and surrounding the Cities of Cleveland and Helen, and along the corridors of 129 and 75.

Topography and steep slopes are major factors in the placement of developments throughout the County. In the northern half of White County especially, topography forces all land uses to co-exist in narrow mountain valleys. Careful planning of mountains, valleys and corridors for a variety and mixture of land uses is the most significant challenge. Local regulations currently meet many of these challenges.

Support Agencies



Several volunteer organizations are active in White County. These organizations are not only promoting biking and hiking as recreational activities and methods of alternative transportation but are also supporting natural resource conservation and dedicated to being mindful stewards of the land. Friends of Georgia State Parks and Historic Sites serve as a support system for the statewide network of parks and historic sites. Members participate in activities such as event coordination and participation, trail maintenance, and various other site improvement activities. Two branches located within White County are the Friends of Unicoi State Park and Friends of Smithgall Woods.

The Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association (SORBA) and the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) have a large presence in White County and the surrounding area. The mountains of north Georgia are popular areas for both on and off-road cyclists. Members of both these organizations work with land managers throughout the southeast United States to create trails and trail systems for bicyclists and others to enjoy.

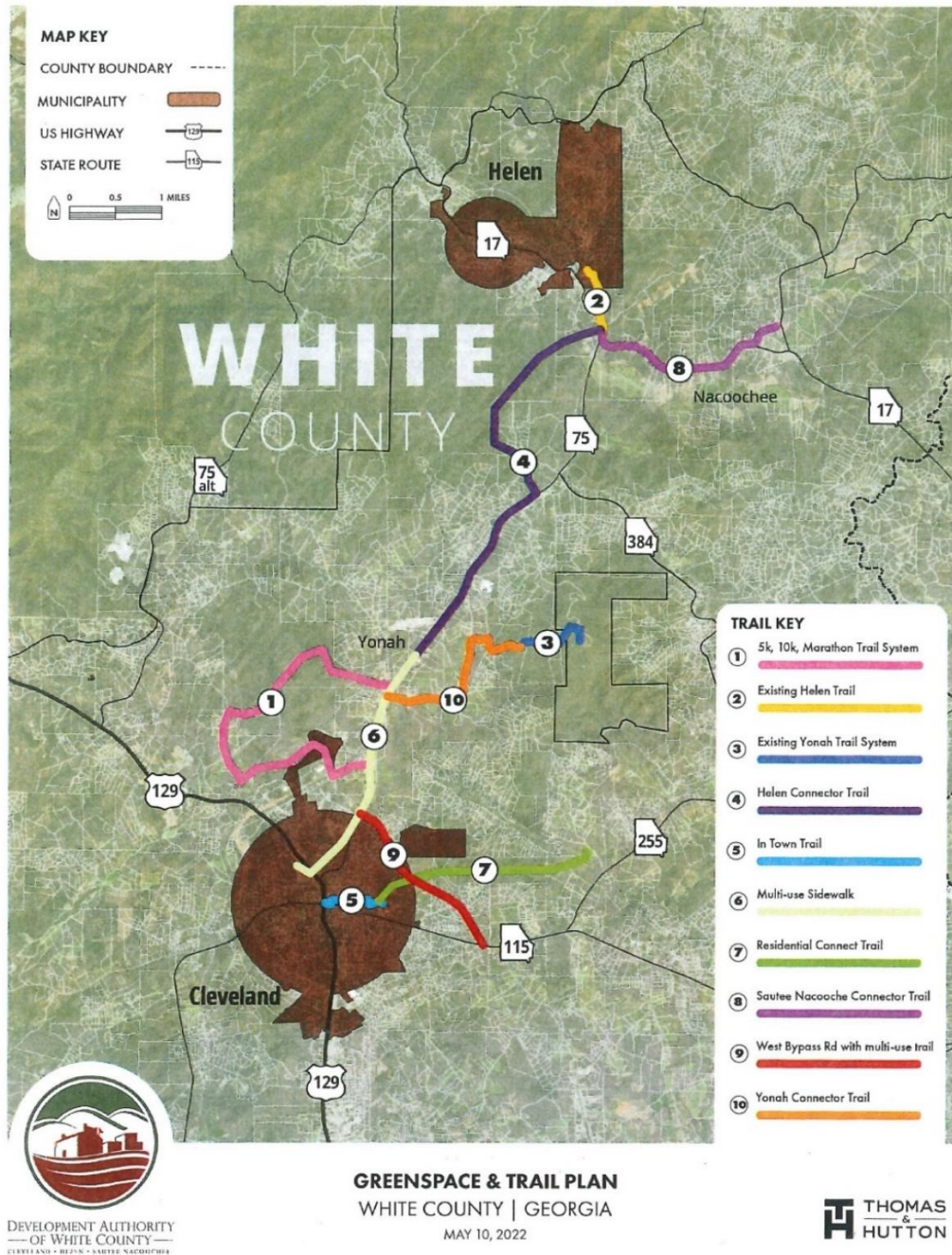
Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety/Assessment Methodology

In 2011 the below table was used to evaluate road conditions for users. A critical component in identifying conditions is analyzing the existing transportation network for suitability for bicycle travel. This assessment methodology was not used in 2022's update but it is still a good reference for identifying where specific activities should occur. In 2011, the criteria used assessed the suitability of existing corridors were applied to each roadway in White County classified as a collector or above. Although designed to analyze bicycle activity, the table can also be used to support where pedestrian activity is the safest under existing situations. This analysis was supplemented with input from stakeholders and geographic information system (GIS) data. The criteria, shown in the table below, are based on a Type B user as described in the Guide for Development of Bicycle Facilities, published by AASHTO. Corridors were assessed further using relevant GIS data by assigning a rating for each of the bicycle suitability criteria. After all criteria had been evaluated for a corridor, the ratings were totaled, and an overall ranking was assigned.

Criteria	Most Suitable	Suitable	Not Suitable
Traffic Volume (Observed)			
Light	X		
Medium		X	
Heavy			X
Roadway Width			
Existence of Shoulders (2' min. width)	X		
No Shoulders (lane width 11' or greater)		X	
No Shoulders (lane width less than 11')			X
Driveways			
Very Few Driveways	X		
Mainly Residential Driveways		X	
Numerous Driveways (including commercial)			X
Automobile Traffic Speed (posted and observed)			
Less than 35 Miles Per Hour	X		
Between 35 and 45 Miles Per Hour		X	
More than 45 Miles Per Hour			X
Truck Traffic (observed)			
Light	X		
Medium		X	
Heavy			X
Terrain			
Smooth Grades, Excellent Sight Distance	X		
Moderate Grades, Moderate Sight Distance		X	
Severe Grades, Short Sight Distance			X
Pavement Surface			
Smooth	X		
Some Uneven Surfaces		X	
Uneven and Cracked Surface, Drainage Grates			X

2. MASTER PLAN

This plan serves as a launching point for county, city, and private organizational efforts at working to bring these recommendations to fruition. Specific projects and areas discussed will utilize this information for economic development purposes and to guide development to ensure that alternative transportation options instead of the automobile are considered when updating land development policy. This plan is also meant to support other outdoor recreational plans such as the 2022 White County Greenspace & Trail Plan.



3. IMPLEMENTATION

This section identifies the policies, programs, and funding sources (page 11) that will create a bicycle and pedestrian system that supports the goals and objectives identified by the community. This section also includes funding recommendations, regional coordination, and plan monitoring, which are essential to accomplish the goals and objectives of the bicycle and pedestrian plan. Demands for the region's resources are high and funding is often scarce. White County and its partners must demonstrate that they are willing to undertake significant implementation measures. Interest from the private sector and nonprofit organizations is also required to ensure long-term success. The following action items are the initial responsibility of White County and are separated into short- and long-term actions based on the available staffing and funding of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

Plan Summary

The purpose of this project is to create a Greenways and Blueways: Bicycle, Pedestrian and Paddle Plan for White County to include all of White County, including the member jurisdictions of Cleveland and Helen. However, there is no comprehensive inventory for a route network that links the entire county and beyond for bicycles, pedestrian, and water-based activity facilities. This plan will identify a comprehensive system of bicycle/pedestrian/water activity facilities designed to serve a variety of users, integrate this system with the overall transportation system, and identify specific design standards, implementation actions, and potential funding sources. The resulting document will be a phased action plan with specific policies, strategies, and projects with cost estimates and identified funding opportunities.

The purpose of this Public Involvement Plan is to create a plan that meets countywide needs and is supported by the community. Public involvement ensures that the public is a partner in the process of determining strategies to be undertaken. In addition, federal regulations mandate that plans include a certain level of public involvement in the development of long-range transportation plans. The following federal regulations will provide guidance to this plan: National Environmental Policy Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century.

The following plan is designed to take the public beyond information and engage them in the discussion of this study. The activities described below are organized by type: Outreach, Involvement and Measures of Effectiveness.

Implementation Schedule

To complete existing and proposed bicycle and pedestrian projects in White County, a realistic schedule must be created to maximize staff time, funding, and other available resources. This can be accomplished by prioritizing those projects requiring the least number of materials, time to completion, and right-of-way costs. Larger projects should be thoroughly planned before construction begins.

The planning stages of the larger projects should begin as soon as staff time and resources permit. As details of the larger projects emerge, these specifics should be included in any updates to this plan, the White County Comprehensive Plan, and the Georgia Mountains Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan as soon as possible. When opportunities for funding present themselves, having specific projects in a plan will enable the county to create an application more quickly. Smaller projects already

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included in this plan, the White County Comprehensive Plan, or the Georgia Mountains Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan should be the first ones to be completed. Additional projects to be included in short term plans should be the bridging of any gaps within the existing sidewalk, multi-use trail, or biking trail network, especially around schools. Funding for these projects can be obtained through programs such as Safe Routes to Schools grant or Transportation Enhancement grants. These projects will show a commitment to bicycle and pedestrian facilities by the county and cities. This commitment is also looked upon favorably during a grant or loan application process.

Mid-range goals and projects should center on improving any existing facilities such as bike trails. Maintenance, additional amenities, and expansions that connect with other facilities would require more funding and more staff time but would make great strides toward creating a county-wide, and eventually a region-wide, bicycle and pedestrian network.

Long term goals and projects should center on creating a non-profit or partnering with an existing non-profit such as SORBA: Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association, IMBA: International Mountain Bicycling Association, and others to champion the Gainesville & Northwestern Railroad Trail & Greenway. This project has the potential to become the backbone of a county-wide bicycle and pedestrian network. All current and future projects should take the location of this historic rail bed into account and work toward s creating a connection to these areas.

Programs

A key component in promoting multimodal accessibility is providing the actual facilities along which to walk and/or bike. However, there are additional programs that can help to create a multimodal environment. The following received the most community support:

There are four goal areas that potential projects should relate to:

- Increase job opportunities and per capita income in Appalachia to reach parity with the nation.
- Strengthen the capacity of the people of Appalachia to compete in the global economy.
- Develop and improve Appalachia's infrastructure to make the Region economically competitive.
- Build the Appalachian Development Highway System to reduce Appalachia's isolation.

Potential projects must be consistent with the priorities identified in the Governor's Annual Strategy Statement and contribute to an economic development strategy.

ARC recognizes the economic value of the region's culture, heritage, and heritage tourism. Bicycle and pedestrian projects could be classified as an economic development strategy that "build(s) on existing resources – natural, cultural, structural and leadership – to create valued products and services that can be sustained for local benefit."

Bicycle and pedestrian projects could also meet several objectives of the Appalachian Regional Commission's (ARC) Strategic Plan such as pursuing tourism development as an economic development tool and supporting efforts to develop intermodal transportation corridors in Appalachian Georgia.

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Design

Design standards should follow recommendations from **USFS**: United States Forest System Standard Trail Plans and Specifications, **IMBA**: International Mountain Bicycling Association, **ADA**: Americans with Disabilities Act, **GDOT** and other recognized design professionals to ensure the system adheres to established best practices for trails and greenways. Trail networks should also take into consideration other trail connections located outside White County to maximize the success and viability of the system. Additional information on design standards is covered in Appendix: 3 Design Standards.

Safety

Safety criteria should take into consideration the following:

- Adequate design to serve all users: those with mobility disabilities, walkers, runners, cyclists, off-road cyclists, etc.
- Lighting
- Safety kiosks
- Wayfinding and course map identification
- Safety patrol as needed, trail ambassadors
- Opportunities to connect businesses and users

Plan Monitoring

Active monitoring is critical to successful implementation of the bicycle and pedestrian plan. Performance measures are important for tracking the progress of the plan and how well projects are meeting the plan goals and objectives. Data associated with the performance measures must be collected on a regular basis. The plan should be updated regularly, based on analyses of performance measures, as transportation conditions in the White County area change.

Performance Measures

Performance measures provide a mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of the existing bicycle and pedestrian system and the success of the White County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan over time. The following performance measures are based on the goals and objectives of the plan and should be quantifiable meaning actual data is available or can be collected to evaluate changing conditions:

Key origins and destinations connected by bicycle and pedestrian facilities:

- Government Offices
- Schools
- Commercial Centers
- Parks
- Health Care Centers

Statistics to reference when determining when and where to construct bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Percentage of population or employment within one mile of a bicycle facility and percentage within ¼ mile of a sidewalk.

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Number of Census blocks with a lower-than-average vehicle per household rate within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of bicycle or pedestrian facilities.

Amount of funding dedicated to bicycle/pedestrian facilities.

Percentage of jurisdictions that adopt recommended design standards.

Number of pedestrian injuries and fatalities.