

**Whitfield County**  
**Rocky Face Ridge Summit Trail and**  
**Restroom**

Environmental Assessment

## **I. Purpose, Need, and Background**

Whitfield County plans to construct a trail to the summit of Rocky Face Ridge.

The project will consist of a pre-construction archaeological study, the creation of two trail routes to the summit of Rocky Face Ridge, and the installation of a vault restroom at Rocky Face Ridge Park. The first route will be a 7,700-foot switchback trail, at no less than 48” wide. Cutting across the middle of this trail will be a second route consisting of a set of stairs built into the existing rock formations that will include handrails for safety. The southern end of the trail will feature a vault restroom to improve the visitor experience for families and other trail users. The Rocky Face Ridge Summit Trail and Restroom project will include land disturbing activity, which will include cutting and digging the trail by hand, vertical ground disturbance for a hole in which the vault restroom will sit and cutting through rock to build steps and a handrail that runs across the trail.

Rocky Face Ridge has one of the largest collections of intact Civil War earthworks anywhere in the country; the crown jewel of which is the rock wall located at the summit. Parts of the ridge, rock wall, and earthworks system at Rocky Face Ridge are not easily accessible to the public. Due to this, people who own private land in the area have experienced others cutting across their property to visit the ridge and earthworks. This option is neither safe nor legal for users. The proposed Rocky Face Ridge Summit Trail will allow users to access these resources safely and legally.

## **II. Description of Alternatives**

The considered alternatives for this project; no-action or development of the trails. The no-action alternative is not acceptable to Whitfield County. If this alternative is selected, Whitfield County will not have recreational activities for residents on the west side of the County and will not be able to utilize the park to its fullest potential. Whitfield County is choosing to develop the switchback trail and the second trail to cut across the middle of the switchback trail and will consist of a set of stairs built into the exiting rock formations. This alternative also aligns with the *Whitfield County Parks and Recreation Master Plan* which states that the County should “develop new parks to serve County neighborhoods that fall outside of the service areas for existing community parks.”

Whitfield County currently has an open Land and Water Conservation Fund grant. Plans for this project include a pre-construction archaeological study, the installation of a driveway, parking lot, restroom and pavilion. The restrooms will have ADA standards and the pavilion will contain ADA compliant picnic tables. Additionally, the lake located on the property will be developed with a fish habitat. Work was scheduled to start in early 2020, but due to a wet spring and the COVID-19 Pandemic, construction was delayed. Work recommenced in November 2020.

## **III. Affected Environment**

The project is located in Whitfield County, in northwest Georgia. Rocky Face Ridge has one of the largest collections of intact Civil War earthworks anywhere in the country; the crown jewel of which is the rock wall located at the summit. Parts of the ridge, rock wall, and earthworks system

at Rocky Face Ridge are not easily accessible to the public. Residential areas border the park to the north, south, and east. To the west, the Park is bordered by mountainous terrain.

#### **IV. Environmental Impacts**

##### **a. Geological Resources**

The switchback trail and stairs through the rock formation for the second trail is necessary on the project site due to its topography. No soils will be removed from the site, and no unique or significant landforms will be affected by the project. The county will ensure minimal impact to geological resources. The southern end of the trail will feature a vault restroom, which will require no plumbing or electricity.

##### **b. Air Quality**

The Rocky Face Ridge Summit Trail and Restroom will have minimal impact on air quality.

##### **c. Sound/Noise**

Sound/noise is expected to have little impact because of the project. Sounds/noises would include recreation users walking, hiking, running, families, heritage tourists, school groups, and environmental groups exploring the Ridge.

##### **d. Water Quality/Quantity**

Wetland areas will remain undisturbed by the project. There will be little to no impact to water quality or quantity as a result of the project. Whitfield County will commit to researching and following best management practices for water quality/quantity based on written policies.

##### **e. Stream Flow Characteristics**

Little Chickamauga Creek is located to the north of the project site. The county is cognizant of the stream and will ensure that the creek is not affected by the project, as creating the trail will not be conducted near or around the creek.

##### **Coahulla Creek (0315010103) [SWAP High Priority Watershed] (TR), on or within immediate vicinity of site**

Little Chickamauga Creek (0602000109) [SWAP High Priority Watershed] (TR), approx. 1.3 mi N of site

##### **f. Floodplains/Wetlands**

There are no 100-year floodplains located on the project site. No state or federal permits related to wetland disturbance will be needed.

**g. Land Use and Ownership**

In 2016, Whitfield County partnered with the Civil War Trust and Georgia Piedmont Land Trust to preserve the greenspace within Grant Farm Park by acquiring 300 acres of the property. Under the purchase agreement, the Civil War Trust acquired the property and granted a conservation easement to the Georgia Piedmont Land Trust. The Civil War Trust then transferred the property to Whitfield County. The County continues to partner and work with Georgia Piedmont Land and Trust (GPLT), and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) as stakeholders to ensure that the Historic property is preserved and developed appropriately.

The *2019-2023 Joint Comprehensive Plan* supports recreation projects and conservation of natural resources. The *Whitfield County Parks and Recreation Master Plan*, recommends pursuing greenspace preservation opportunities and development of connected greenways with trails. The *Future Development Map* adopted with the *Comprehensive Plan*, also shows a significant amount of greenspace to be preserved within the County. Also, recreation and conservation of natural resources is a strong theme throughout the *Whitfield County Parks and Recreation Plan*.

**h. Circulation and Transportation**

The primary access to the project site is from Crow Valley Road NW, which is a 2-lane road with no congestion or capacity issues at this time.

**i. Plant and Animal Species of Concern and Habitat**

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Resources Division has provided a list of “Known occurrences of natural communities, plants, and animals of highest priority conservation status on or near LWCF” for the project. Any animal listed below is aquatic in nature, except for the **Erynnis martialis, (Mottled Duskywing)** which is a species of butterfly. The Mottled Duskywing butterfly has not been seen on the Rocky Face Ridge, but its primary food source is the New Jersey Tea plant (see attached photo). Whitfield County will make sure that there is no impact on this plant as the summit trail is being created. Whitfield County will commit to researching and following best management practices for plant and animal species based on written policies. In speaking with Lisa Kruse at GA DNR, she indicated that a plant survey may have to be conducted for species during the appropriate time of year, which could be the end of April – the end of September. If a plant survey is to be conducted, she advised the County would reach out to GA DNR for consulting on specific plant survey needs and methods. If an on-the-ground survey is required, GA DNR will enlist the assistance of a qualified biologist.

## Animal Species:

*Cambarus distans* (Boxclaw crayfish) in Tanyard Creek (AQ), approx. 2.4 mi NW of site  
GA *Cambarus extraneus* (Chickamauga Crayfish) in Tanyard Creek (AQ), approx. 2.4 mi NW of site  
*Cambarus manningi* (Greensaddle crayfish) in Mills Creek (AQ), approx. 10.8 mi NE of site  
*Cambarus stockeri* (Cocoa Crayfish) (AQ), approx. 6.4 mi E of site  
*Cambarus stockeri* (Cocoa Crayfish) in Pitner Branch (AQ), approx. 7.4 mi N of site  
*Cambarus stockeri* (Cocoa Crayfish) (AQ), approx. 11.3 mi NE of site  
*Erynnis martialis* (Mottled Duskywing) [Historic] (TR), approx. 2.5 mi S of site  
*Etheostoma jessiae* (Blueside Darter) in East Chickamauga Creek (AQ), approx. 8.2 mi SW of site  
*Etheostoma jessiae* (Blueside Darter) in East Chickamauga Creek (AQ), approx. 4.1 mi W of site  
GA *Etheostoma rupestre* (Rock Darter) in Coahulla Creek (AQ), approx. 8.7 mi SE of site  
US *Etheostoma trisella* (Trispot Darter) in Coahulla Creek (AQ), approx. 9.7 mi NE of site  
US *Etheostoma trisella* (Trispot Darter) in Mill Creek (AQ), approx. 1.4 mi S of site  
US *Etheostoma trisella* (Trispot Darter) in Mill Creek (AQ), approx. 4.5 mi SE of site  
GA *Graptemys pulchra* (Alabama Map Turtle) [Historic] at Conasauga River (AQ), approx. 9.0 mi SE of site  
US *Hamiota altilis* (Finelined Pocketbook) [Historic] in Coahulla Creek (AQ), approx. 6.2 mi E of site  
US *Hamiota altilis* (Finelined Pocketbook) [Historic] in Coahulla Creek (AQ), approx. 5.8 mi NE of site  
*Lasmigona etowaensis* (Etowah Heelsplitter) in Poplar Spring Creek (AQ), approx. 1.1 mi E of site  
*Lasmigona etowaensis* (Etowah Heelsplitter) [Historic] in Mills Creek (AQ), approx. 10.7 mi NE of site  
*Lasmigona holstonia* (Tennessee Heelsplitter) [Historic] in South Chickamauga Creek (AQ), approx. 7.2 mi NW of site  
*Lioplax cyclostomaformis* (Cylindrical Lioplax) [Historic] in Coahulla Creek (AQ), approx. 6.6 mi SE of site  
GA *Macrhybopsis etnieri* (Coosa Chub) in Mill Creek (AQ), approx. 6.7 mi SE of site  
US *Medionidus acutissimus* (Alabama Moccasinshell) [Historic] in Coahulla Creek (AQ), approx. 6.1 mi E of site  
GA *Notropis asperifrons* (Burrhead Shiner) [Historic?] in Coahulla Creek (AQ), approx. 12.4 mi NE of site  
GA *Percina lenticula* (Freckled Darter) in Coahulla Creek (AQ), approx. 8.6 mi SE of site  
GA *Percina sciera* (Dusky Darter) in East Chickamauga Creek (AQ), approx. 4.1 mi W of site  
US *Pleurobema decisum* (Southern Clubshell) [Historic] in Coahulla Creek (AQ), approx. 6.2 mi E of site  
*Pleurocera pyrenella* (Skirted Hornsnail) in Mill Creek (AQ), approx. 1.4 mi S of site  
*Pleuronaia barnesiana* (Tennessee Pigtoe) in East Chickamauga Creek (AQ), approx. 5.8 mi SW of site

## Plant Species:

*Mertensia virginica* (Virginia Bluebells) (TR), approx. 1.3 mi SW of site  
*Mertensia virginica* (Virginia Bluebells) (TR), approx. 2.2 mi SE of site  
GA *Crataegus triflora* (Three-flower Hawthorn) (TR), approx. 0.8 mi S of site  
*Delphinium tricorne* (Dwarf Larkspur) (TR), approx. 1.7 mi S of site  
GA *Sabatia capitata* (Cumberland Rose-gentian) (TR), approx. 2.9 mi N of site

US *Scutellaria montana* (Large-flowered Skullcap) (TR), approx. 1.4 mi SW of site  
*Stachys nuttallii* (Nuttall's Hedge-nettle) (TR), approx. 0.8 mi S of site  
*Trillium lancifolium* (Lanceleaf Trillium) (TR), approx. 2.6 mi SE of site  
*Triosteum angustifolium* (Narrowleaf Wild Coffee) (TR), approx. 0.8 mi S of site  
*Villosa nebulosa* (Alabama Rainbow) in Pitner Branch (AQ), approx. 7.5 mi NE of site  
*Villosa trabalis* (Cumberland Bean) [Extripated] (AQ), approx. 7.2 mi NW of site  
*Villosa vanuxemensis* (Mountain Creekshell) in Hopkins Branch (AQ), approx. 4.1 mi SW of site  
*Villosa vanuxemensis* (Mountain Creekshell) [Historic?] in Mill Creek (AQ), approx. 5.9 mi S of site

**j. Unique Ecosystems**

No impact to threatened and endangered, or otherwise unique or important wildlife and habitat are proposed.

**k. Unique or Important Wildlife/Habitat**

No impact to threatened and endangered, or otherwise unique or important wildlife and habitat are proposed. However, Whitfield County will commit to researching and following best management practices for wildlife based on the written policies.

**l. Introduction of Invasive Species**

No invasive species, plant or otherwise, will be introduced to the site.

**m. Recreation Resources, Land, Parks, Open Space, etc.**

This project will positively affect the County's park and recreational resources by creating a summit trail which can be safely accessed. The *Future Development Map* adopted with the *2019-2023 Joint Comprehensive Plan*, shows a significant amount of greenspace to be preserved within the County. Also, recreation and conservation of natural resources is a strong theme throughout the *Whitfield County Parks and Recreation Plan*.

**n. Accessibility for Populations with Disabilities**

Areas of Rocky Face Ridge do have ADA accessible facilities. However, due to the nature of the trail, wheelchair access is not feasible. The second trail, which will go through the rock formation, will have handrails for recreation users to access the trail, but will not be wheelchair accessible.

**o. Overall Aesthetics, Special Characteristics**

Rocky Face Ridge has one of the largest collections of intact Civil War earthworks anywhere in the country; the crown jewel of which is the rock wall located at the summit.

**p. Historic/Cultural Resources**

SHPO reviewed the project and provided a response dated October 22, 2020 (see attachments). SHPO indicated that the proposed project was within the National Register of Historic Places as the Rocky Face Ridge Battlefield. SHPO recommended a Phase I archaeological survey be conducted by a professional archaeologist that meets the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualifications.

Once this information is available it will be provided to the SHPO.

**q. Socioeconomics**

The project will have little or no impact on population or income. Its purpose is to provide a recreational resource for the County neighborhoods that fall outside of the service areas for existing community parks.

**r. Minority and Low Income Populations**

Minority and low-income populations will be served by this facility, as will all Whitfield County residents and visitors. Neither minority populations nor poverty rates appear to be concentrated in the vicinity of the project site. No negative impacts are expected to be experienced by residents of the area.

**V. Coordination and Consultation**

Whitfield County requested the assistance of the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission (NWGRC) for the completion of this Environmental Assessment. The Community and Economic Development team, including the Preservation Planner, also assisted with the project pre-application and formal application. NWGRC staff also consulted with DNR staff regarding plant and animal species of concern. In assisting the city, NWGRC staff were knowledgeable and thorough throughout the application process.

The NWGRC coordinated with staff at DNR and multiple agencies in completing the Historical Review process and Intergovernmental Review Process in addition to submitting the formal application.

**Minimum 30 day public review and comment period**