

## **APPENDIX A**

### **AGENCY AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

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## **AGENCY SCOPING**

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## United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service  
Blue Ridge Parkway  
199 Hemphill Knob Road  
Asheville, North Carolina 28803



[Date]

[Address]

Re: Development Concept Plan / Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Blue Ridge Parkway Regional Destination Visitor Center

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1500 to 1508), and the National Park Service (NPS) NEPA compliance guidelines (DO-12), the NPS has decided to prepare a Development Concept Plan (DCP) and Environmental Assessment (EA) for the construction of a regional destination visitor center (RDVC) for the Blue Ridge Parkway in Asheville, North Carolina.

The primary purpose of the RDVC is:

- 1.) Interpretation of natural and cultural resources along the Blue Ridge Parkway via an entertaining, immersive, and interactive format in which the public can participate through the use of state-of-the-art-technology.
- 2.) An educational forum via a range of programs, workshops, and media that facilitate learning for a broad range of visitors (i.e., area residents, school groups, college students, and the public).
- 3.) Information and orientation to the Blue Ridge Parkway and link the public to community functions and attractions within the Asheville community and the greater Western North Carolina region.

In order to achieve these goals, the RDVC will include a 250 seat immersive digital cinema, a 2,000 square foot visitor center, a 1,200 square foot interpretive center, a 50 person classroom, and support facilities. The RDVC would contain a maximum of 15,000 square feet, and the estimated cost of the facility is \$10 million. Parking facilities will be provided for bicycles and motorcycles, as well as 10 RV/ bus spaces and 170 auto spaces. The parking allocations are currently being evaluated and are subject to change.

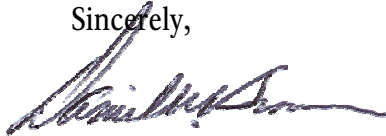


There are two sites being considered for the RDVC in the Asheville area. One site is located at Blue Ridge Parkway mile marker 382.0 at the Folk Art Center and the other site is located at mile marker 383 at the Parkway Headquarters site. Both sites are owned by the NPS. The RDVC is scheduled to open to the public in May 2007.

Please identify any resources within your purview that may experience potential impacts from this project. Please provide any comments or information within 15 days of receipt of this letter. Send responses to:

Daniel W. Brown, Superintendent  
Blue Ridge Parkway  
199 Hemphill Road  
Asheville, NC 28803-8686

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Daniel W. Brown', written over a horizontal line.

Daniel W. Brown  
Superintendent



## North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Richard B. Hamilton, Executive Director

### MEMORANDUM

TO: Daniel W. Brown, Superintendent  
Blue Ridge Parkway, National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior

FROM: Dave McHenry, Mountain Region Coordinator  
Habitat Conservation Program

DATE: December 6, 2004

SUBJECT: Development Concept Plan/Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Blue Ridge Parkway Regional Destination Visitor Center

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission received your letter dated November 11, 2004 regarding the subject project and the request for comments. Our scoping comments are provided in accordance with provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. 4332(2)(c)) and the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (48 Stat. 401, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 661-667d).

The project involves construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway Regional Destination Visitor Center either at mile marker 382 of the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Folk Art Center or at mile marker 383 and the Parkway Headquarters. An Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project will be developed.

The Commission has no specific comments to offer at this time regarding the proposed development sites and the potentially affected fish and wildlife resources in the vicinity of those sites. We recommend that the EA include a detailed assessment of the natural resources in the project area and discuss measures that would mitigate effects of the development on wetlands, surface waters and high-quality upland habitats. Additionally, to provide a meaningful review of the project's effects on fish and wildlife resources, we request that the following information be included in the EA, as applicable:

1. Include descriptions of fish and wildlife resources within the project area, and a listing of federally or state designated threatened, endangered or special concern species. When practicable, potential borrow or disposal areas to be used for project construction should be included in the inventories.
2. Include descriptions of any streams or wetlands affected by the project.
3. Include project maps identifying wetland areas. Identification of wetlands may be accomplished through coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE). If the COE is not consulted, the person delineating wetlands should be identified and criteria listed.

4. Provide a description of project activities that will occur within wetlands, such as fill or channel alteration. Acreage of wetlands impacted by alternative project designs should be listed.
5. Provide a description and a cover type map showing acreage of upland wildlife habitat impacted by the project.
6. Discuss the extent to which the project will result in loss, degradation or fragmentation of wildlife habitat (wetlands and uplands).
7. Discuss any measures proposed to avoid or reduce impacts of the project or to mitigate unavoidable habitat losses.
8. Discuss the secondary and cumulative impacts associated with the proposed project and compare these impacts for the different alternatives. Such discussion should weigh the economic benefits of the development against the costs of associated environmental degradation.
  - (a) Include specific measures that will be used to manage stormwater runoff from the project. Include specific requirements for residential, commercial and industrial developments and BMPs that will be required to address secondary development.
  - (b) Include specific measures that will be used to protect stream corridors, riparian habitat and a minimum of the 100-year floodplain from filling and development. Commitments by the project sponsors to protect area streams with riparian buffers through purchase or conservation easement are of particular interest.
  - (c) Include specific measures that will help mitigate the impacts to fish and wildlife in the region and help maintain the functions of the affected watershed/s.
9. Include a list of document preparers that shows each individual's professional background and qualifications.

In addition to providing the preceding information, we recommend that the project include measures that would protect the natural resources in the vicinity of the selected site. Measures to mitigate secondary and cumulative impacts can be found in the *Guidance Memorandum to Address and Mitigate Secondary and Cumulative Impacts to Aquatic and Terrestrial Wildlife Resources and Water Quality* ([http://www.newwildlife.org/pg07\\_WildlifeSpeciesCon/pg7c3\\_impacts.pdf](http://www.newwildlife.org/pg07_WildlifeSpeciesCon/pg7c3_impacts.pdf)). We also encourage the use of low impact development techniques to manage stormwater quantity and quality in developing areas (see [www.lowimpactdevelopment.org](http://www.lowimpactdevelopment.org) for information). Alternatives to traditional curb and gutter should be examined to provide better treatment of stormwater. Non-impervious materials to construct sidewalks, parking lots, and other facilities, particularly in developed or developing watersheds with a high percentage of impervious surfaces, are recommended.

The COE recognizes Buncombe County as a trout county. Therefore, the Commission will review any COE permit applications associated with the project and recommend conditions to the permit to protect aquatic species. Measures to avoid or minimize impacts to sensitive resources, including wetlands, should be implemented during construction. Where impacts to wetlands are unavoidable, we typically will recommend mitigation of the losses. In addition to providing wildlife habitat, wetlands perform important functions of flood control and water quality protection.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input in the early planning stages for this project. We look forward to providing more substantive comments when more detailed information about the project becomes available. Please contact me at (828) 452-2546 extension 24 if I can be of further assistance.

cc: B. Cole, Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Asheville





REPLY TO  
ATTENTION OF:

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
WILMINGTON DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS  
151 PATTON AVENUE  
ROOM 208  
ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA 28801-5006

November 30, 2004

Regulatory Division

Action ID No. 200530522

Mr. Daniel W. Brown, Superintendent  
Blue Ridge Parkway  
199 Hemphill Road  
Asheville, NC 28803

Dear Mr. Brown:

Reference is made to the letter dated November 11, 2004, submitted by you, regarding your plans to develop the Blue Ridge Parkway Regional Destination Visitors Center located at either the Folk Art Center or the Parkway Headquarters site along the Blue Ridge Parkway. The letter requested comments on the proposed work and a determination of Department of the Army permit requirements.

We have reviewed the subject documents and determined that the proposed activity may impact jurisdictional waters of the United States and their associated wetlands, which are subject to our regulatory authority pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Any discharge of excavated or fill material into waters of the United States and/or any adjacent wetlands, as well as the resultant flooding of adjacent wetlands, that may be present within the project limits will require Department of the Army (DA) permit authorization. The type of DA authorization required (i.e., general or individual permit) will be determined by the location, type, and extent of jurisdictional area impacted by the project, and by the project design and construction limits.

Due to the limited information provided regarding the extent of jurisdictional impacts associated with the project, we are unable to provide specific comments concerning DA permit requirements until additional data is furnished which details the extent of the jurisdictional impacts within the construction limits of the proposed project. When this information becomes available, you should forward it to our office for review and comment, as well as a determination of DA permit eligibility.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the development of the Blue Ridge Parkway Regional Destination Visitors Center; should you have any further questions related to DA permits for this project, please contact me at 828-271-7980, extension 232.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rebekah L. Newton".

Rebekah L. Newton  
Project Manager  
Asheville Regulatory Field Office



**North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources**  
**State Historic Preservation Office**

Peter B. Sandbeck, Administrator

Michael F. Easley, Governor  
Lisbeth C. Evans, Secretary  
Jeffrey J. Crow, Deputy Secretary

Office of Archives and History  
Division of Historical Resources  
David Brook, Director

December 9, 2004.

Mr. Daniel W. Brown, Superintendent  
Blue Ridge Parkway  
199 Hemphill Road  
Asheville, NC 28803-8686

Re: Blue Ridge Parkway Regional Destination Visitor Center, Buncombe County, ER 04-3044

Dear Mr. Brown:

Thank you for your letter of November 11, 2004 concerning the above project.

The Folk Art Center area has not been systematically surveyed to determine the location or significance of archaeological resources. The nearest recorded archaeological site, 31BN154, is less than 200 meters west of the existing facility and has not been evaluated for National Register eligibility.

The Parkway Headquarters location at Hemphill Knob was surveyed in 1987, prior to construction of the existing facility. One historic archaeological site, 31BN328\*\*, was identified during the archaeological survey, and it was determined ineligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

As plans are available for the Visitor Center, please forward them to us, along with a map showing the project location, so that we may continue our review. There are several areas beyond the previously surveyed area at the Hemphill Knob location and areas near the existing Folk Art Center that are considered to have a high probability for the presence of prehistoric or historic archaeological sites.

The above comments are made pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's Regulations for Compliance with Section 106 codified at 36 CFR Part 800.

Thank you for your cooperation and consideration. If you have questions concerning the above comment, please contact Renee Gledhill-Easley, environmental review coordinator, at 919/733-4763. In all future communication concerning this project, please cite the above-referenced tracking number.

Sincerely,

*Renee Gledhill-Easley*  
Peter Sandbeck

ADMINISTRATION  
RESTORATION  
SURVEY & PLANNING

Location  
507 N. Blount Street, Raleigh NC  
515 N. Blount Street, Raleigh NC  
515 N. Blount Street, Raleigh NC

Mailing Address  
4617 Mail Service Center, Raleigh NC 27699-4617  
4617 Mail Service Center, Raleigh NC 27699-4617  
4617 Mail Service Center, Raleigh NC 27699-4617

Telephone/Fax  
(919)733-4763/733-8653  
(919)733-6547/715-4801  
(919)733-6545/715-4801



IN REPLY REFER TO:

## United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service  
Blue Ridge Parkway  
199 Hemphill Knob Road  
Ashville, North Carolina 28803

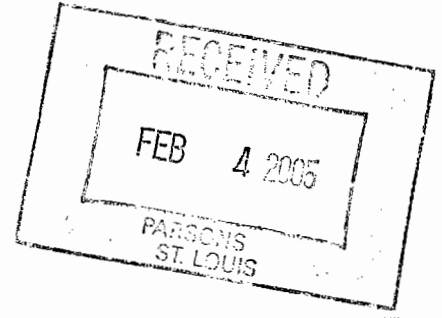


L7617

(PIN 10354)

JAN 31 2005

Renee Gledhill-Earley  
Environmental Review Coordinator  
North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources  
State Historic Preservation Office  
4617 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-4617



Re: Areas of Potential Effect (APEs) for the Blue Ridge Parkway Regional Destination Visitor Center, Buncombe County, ER 04-3044

Dear Ms. Gledhill-Earley:

We would like to formally initiate Section 106 consultation with your office. In accordance with 36 CFR 800.4(a)(1), we have identified the Areas of Potential Affect (APEs) for the Blue Ridge Parkway Regional Destination Visitor Center environmental assessment (EA). The APE for archaeological resources encompasses the footprint for all physical ground disturbances including building construction, landscaping, construction staging areas, road widening and any utility corridors. The APE for architectural resources (visual and noise effects) extends 200 feet beyond the APE boundaries for archaeological resources. We recognize that slight revisions in the APE for architectural resources may be required at a later point in the project if environmental analyses indicate a wider range of changes to the view shed from the Blue Ridge Parkway road.

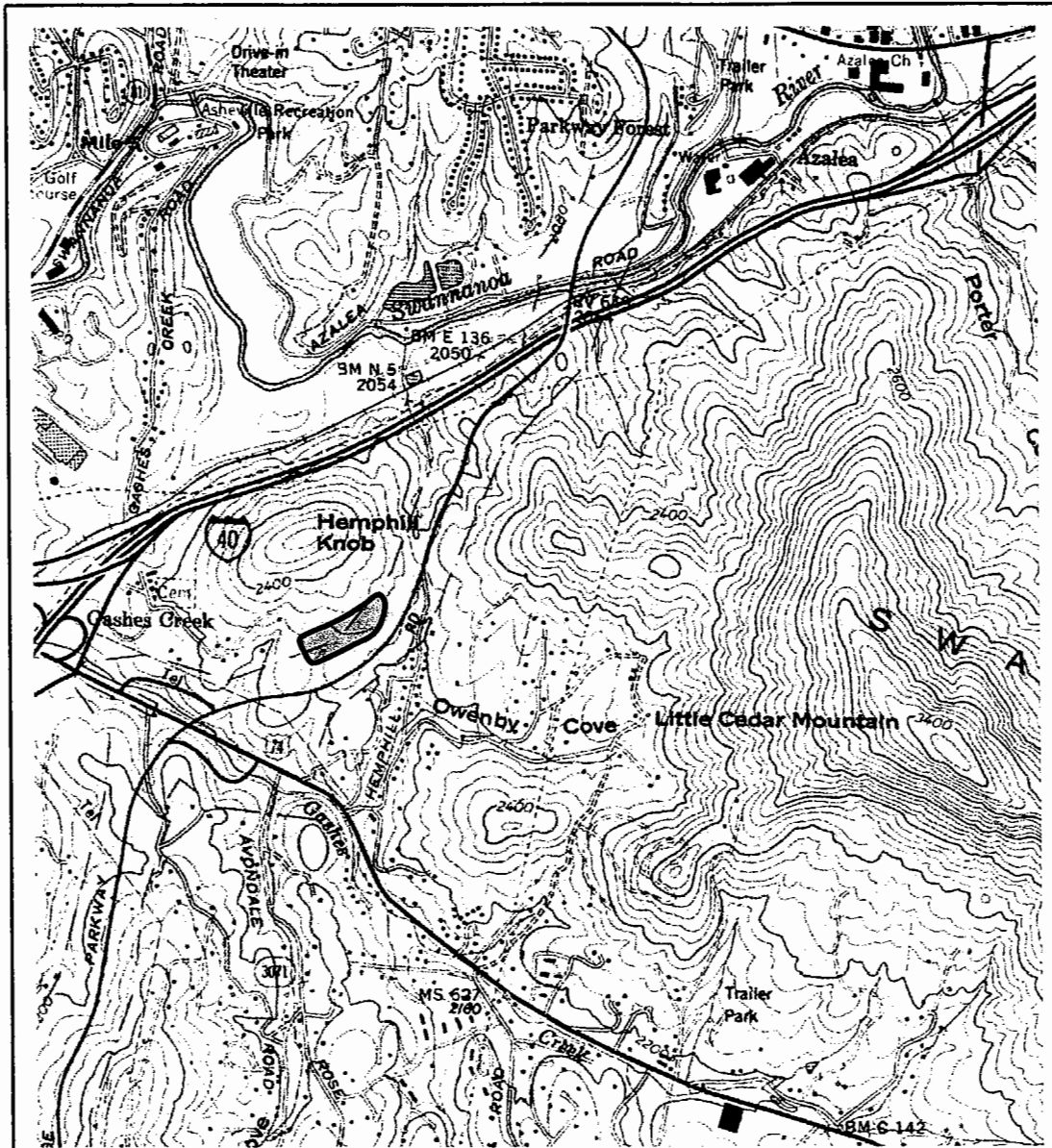
As requested in your letter dated December 9, 2004, please find attached project maps with APEs (USGS 7.5' Quads) for the two alternatives at both the Hemphill Knob and Folk Art Center locations along with the schematic drawings showing the two options at each location.

We will be submitting the Draft EA to your office for review this spring. In accordance with the 1999 revised regulations, 36 CFR 800.8(c)(2)(i), this Draft EA will serve as the Determination of Effect for cultural resources under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

If you have any questions regarding the environmental assessment, please contact John C. Martin of Parsons, our consultant for this project, at (813) 645-8551. For questions regarding cultural resources, please contact Susan L. Bupp at (703) 934-2359, also of Parsons. If we may be of further service or you wish to discuss any aspect of the project in detail, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned at (828) 271-4779.

Sincerely,

Daniel W. Brown  
Superintendent

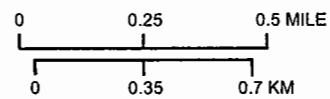


Legend:



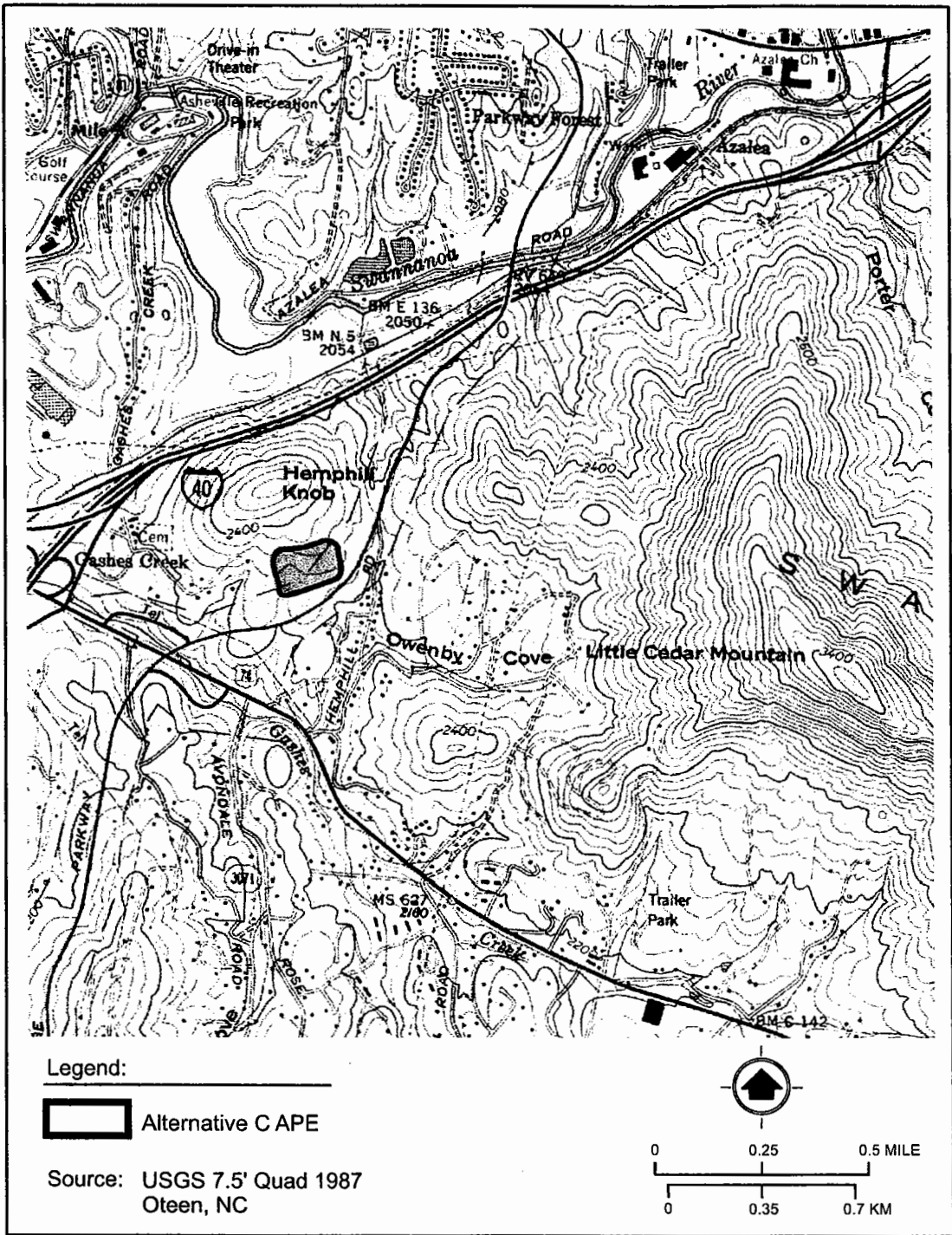
Alternative B APE

Source: USGS 7.5' Quad 1987  
Oteen, NC









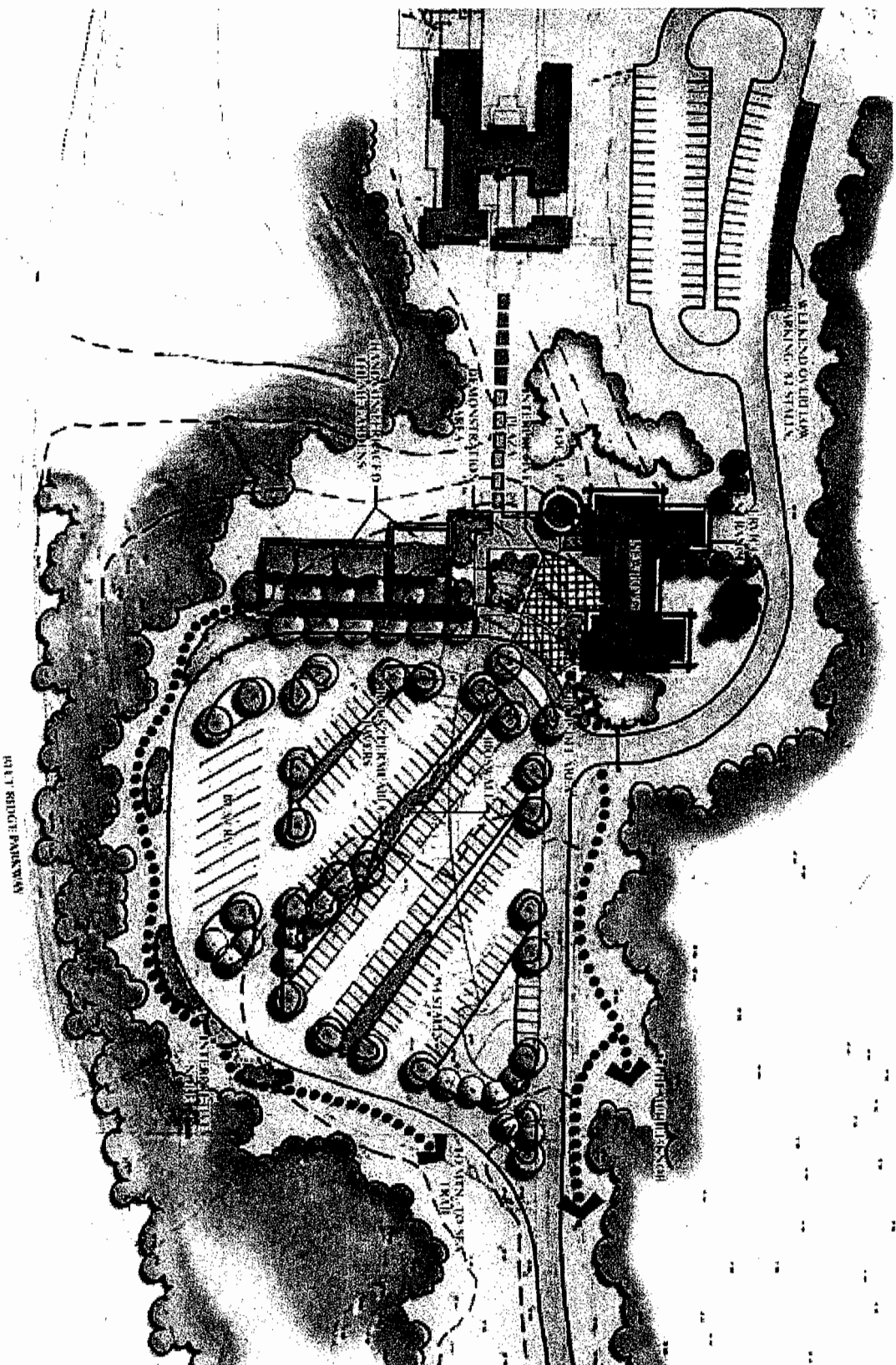
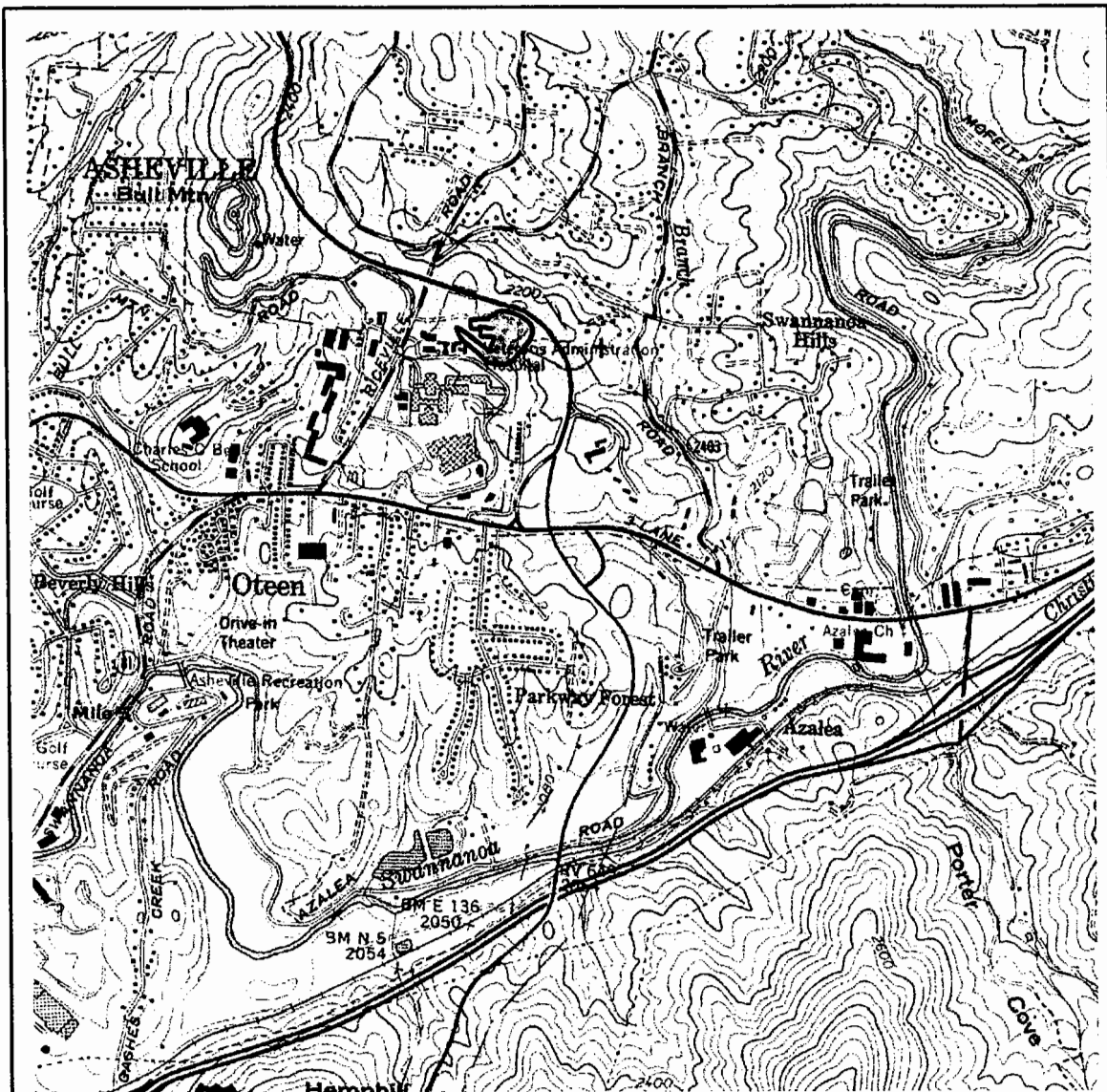


Figure 1: Alternative C

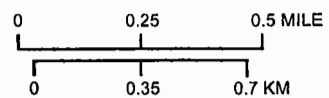


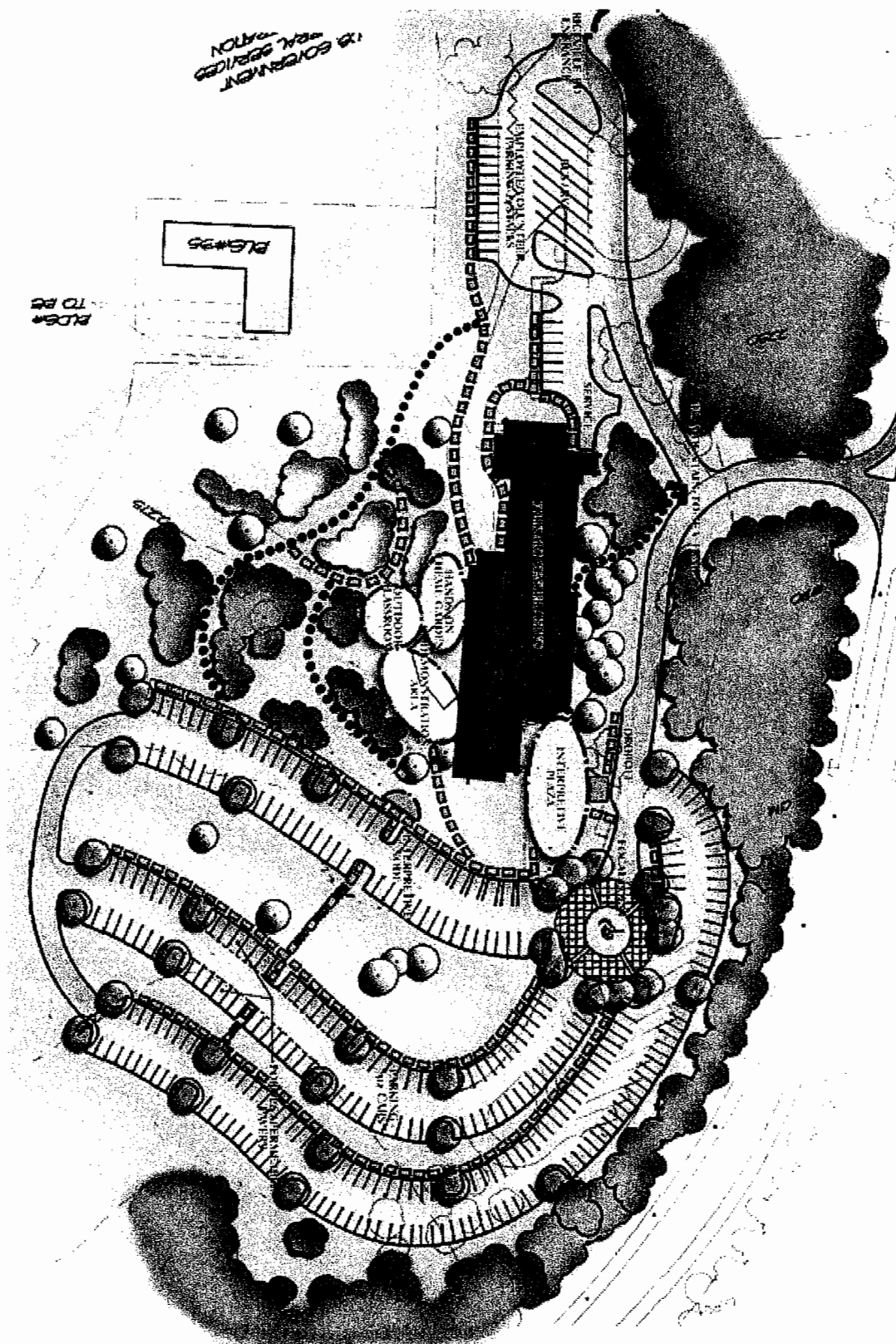


Legend:

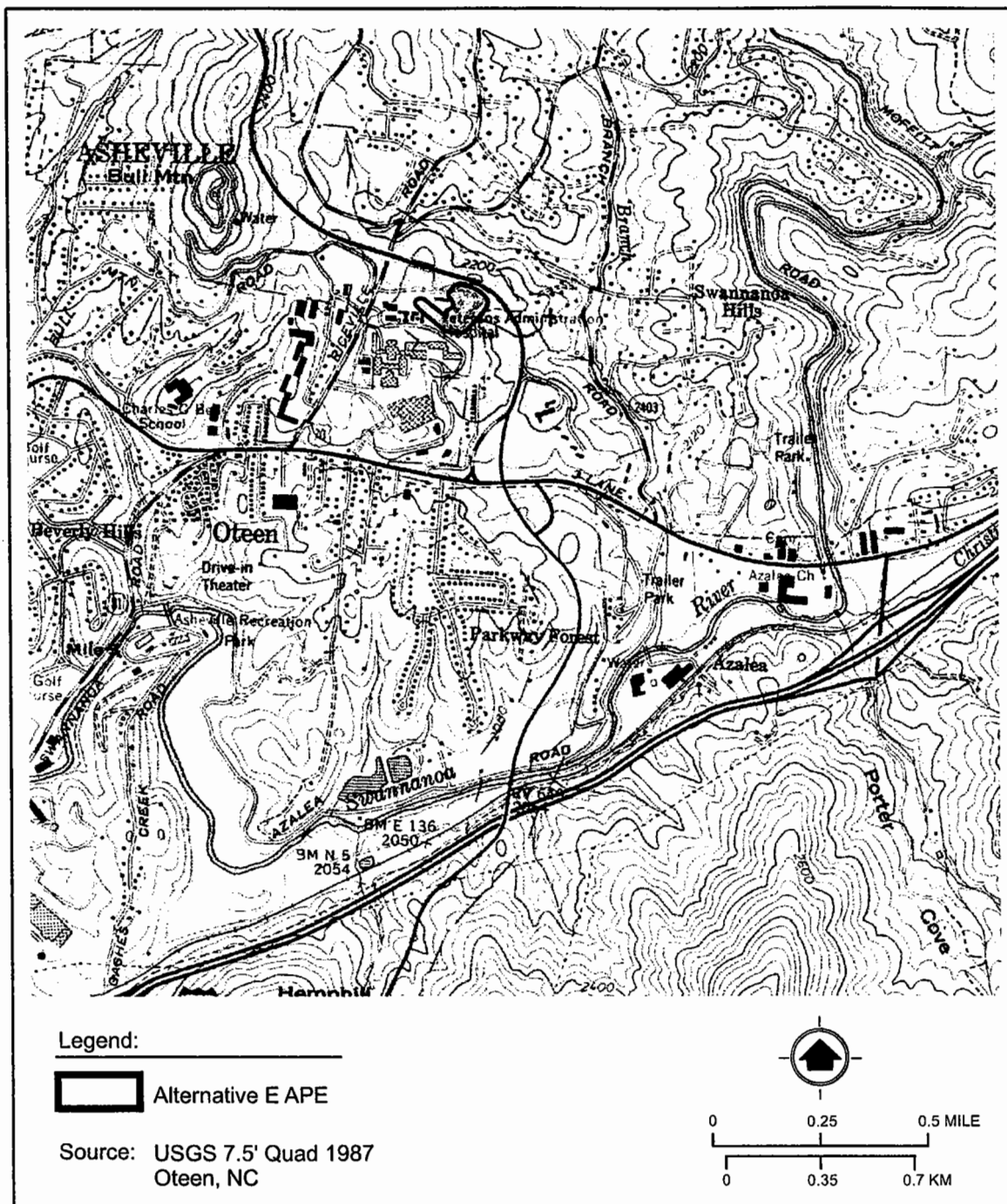
 Alternative D APE

Source: USGS 7.5' Quad 1987  
Oteen, NC





**Figure 1: Alternative D**





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## **STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS**

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**Task Three – Public Participation .....September 6-10, 2004**  
**Meetings Summaries**

**Background Information and Meeting Purpose**

This document is a summary of a meeting the afternoon of Tuesday September 7, 2004 between entity organizations that have partnered with park service staff, The National Park Service staff of the Blue Ridge Parkway and Parsons, the Design Concept Plan/Environmental Assessment team, at the Blue Ridge Parkway Headquarters conference room. This summary is not a word-for-word transcript.

**Meeting content**

We started with words of introduction from the people at this meeting:

Dale Carroll	Advantage West
Karen Searle	Eastern National
Diane Presley	Education & research consortium of the western Carolinas inc.
Julie Ann Gillespie	Blue Ridge Parkway Association
Mark Owen	Advantage West
John Hunter	Education & research consortium of the western Carolinas inc.
Tom McClure	Western Carolina University
Clifton Metcalf	Western Carolina University
	Conservation Trust
Gary Johnson	BLRI NPS
Phil Noblitt	BLRI NPS
Noel Fehr	Parsons
John Martin	Parsons
John Hager	Parsons

Mr. Johnson provided some introductory comments. He mentioned that we are recording this meeting and that we need their commentary of the presentation to be given to the general public later in the week.

Mr. Johnson introduced Mr. Fehr who summarized the past process started by Blue Ridge staff around 20 years ago. He also reviewed more recent activities including data collection started last month and some preliminary facility programming.

Parsons then showed the automated PowerPoint presentation that is to be shown at the public meeting later that week. After the presentation, Mr. Fehr mentioned that information is being gathered and more concrete design decisions will be made later in the process.

Mr. Fehr handed out copies of the five presentation boards to be shown at the public meeting Thursday afternoon including the preliminary facility program and project schedule. The questionnaire that will be handed out to the general public was also provided. After summarizing these handouts, Mr. Fehr asked the group what they would like to see in the proposed facility. The following is a summary of this discussion:





**Task Three – Public Participation .....September 6-10, 2004**  
**Meetings Summaries**

1. Using the visitor center as a satellite for the research database initiated at the local university level, for public use (especially for education).
2. To support the parkway as a newly established 11,000 square mile, 25 county (North Carolina) heritage area through exhibits or other displays.
3. A partnership with the National Park Service to establish a visitor information database.
4. That the facilities serve as a gateway to the parkway for visitors from all over the world.
5. Visitor links to key parkway attractions.
6. Employ technology, multimedia and a website where a visitor could get parkway information from home prior to a visit.

Mr. Fehr asked the group's opinion about the proposed digital immersive theater concept. The group felt that it was an important factor to the success of the facility. Once participant asked for further details of the theater which were not available at this preliminary stage.

Additional discussion included the following points:

1. Location – where should the facility be located on the parkway? The location should consider the sharing of resources and access to visitor center functions. It should also not compete with the Chamber of Commerce.
2. Will the history of the parkway be interpreted? While we are at a preliminary stage, this should receive consideration.
3. Will the facility be open year round? Yes, for optimum visitor access.
4. Will the center be limited to Blue Ridge Parkway only, or the Western North Carolina area? The center should interpret the parkway and the region as much as possible, including culture and attractions.
5. The ability for the center to be self sustaining. Studies regarding this issue have included charging a modest fee for the cinema experience which probably would be included in the concept plan for this facility. The potential for private sponsorship was also raised.
6. Concerns were raised regarding whether staff would be available for a new facility.

One participant asked if an environmental impact study has been completed for the Hemphill Knob site. An environmental assessment was done for the headquarters facility. For the visitor center facility, public meetings, the Choosing by Advantages process, the development concept plan and environmental assessment will help parkway staff narrow down a list of sites, concept plans and how the building will fit on the site. The design team needs to review the data including traffic impact and other facilities in area. An environmental impact statement would only be completed if the environmental assessment finds certain potential sources of impact that needs further analysis.

We started to discuss the pros and cons to the different sites. Some background was given as to the selection of the Hemphill Knob site. A primary tract was purchased at Hemphill Knob. Subsequent adjacent tracts have been acquired over time. It was explained that a headquarters site selection study was completed approximately 20 years ago, which recommended the purchase of the Hemphill Knob site. Meeting



**Task Three – Public Participation .....September 6-10, 2004**  
**Meetings Summaries**

participants inquired about any regional traffic studies that have been done at this point. It was mentioned that while a study for the region has not been completed, traffic counts have been taken at various points along the parkway. It was mentioned that traffic, as well as parking should be considered and addressed.

The group agreed that the Hemphill Knob site's proximity to major roadways, paired with natural amenities, makes it a fantastic opportunity. In terms of facility locations on the two sites, it was mentioned that various sites are being considered at each location. No further plans have been set in stone.

We talked about the importance of low visual impact from the parkway.

One participant asked if past theater consultants had looked at other theater models around the country. This participant felt that the latest theater looks fairly bare bones and small for a theatre, compared to other interpretive theaters. Also he described one facility he had visited which was automated.

He suggested that a 250-seat theater could possibly seem empty at times with smaller audiences. We felt that an immersive theater may be difficult to scale down to a smaller space. We discussed either a second smaller theater or the ability to section off the main theater which we agreed may be difficult.

The facility should cater to the region, not just the parkway. Therefore, the most recent facility might be too small. We discussed built facilities that have similar facilities to the regional destination visitor center. Some examples raised included Zion, Grand Canyon and a facility in Gatlinburg, Tennessee.

Mr. Fehr summarized site features and potential building locations on the Hemphill Knob site from one of the display board graphics in the room. We mentioned that the design team has been told that the facility is to be outside of a 200 foot buffer from the parkway.

Mr. Martin asked the group if there are any environmental concerns that the group is aware of on the two sites. No one mentioned environmental concerns but this led to a further discussion of desired vision for what the facility should provide to the general public. One participant mentioned that the facility should represent grass roots – cultural heritage, i.e. the Handmade in America, an organization that publishes crafts books. This participant also mentioned the importance of interpreting actual natural resources that could be connected to the facility. The center could be a place to promote local crafts.

Mr. Fehr mentioned that one of the questionnaire items asks participants where the facility should be located and he asked the group where they felt it should be located. The recent newspaper article was raised stating that the new regional destination visitor center would compete with the Folk Art Center. As the discussion returned to impact of site resources, Mr. Martin explained the Finding of No Significant Impact and that if an impact is found, an Environmental Impact Statement is completed. Mr. Martin mentioned that at this point they have been informed of no wetlands in the vicinity of either site.



**Task Three – Public Participation .....September 6-10, 2004**  
**Meetings Summaries**

Mr. Fehr handed out additional copies of the questionnaire and mentioned that we will be on hand for additional questions. Mr. Fehr answered yes to an inquiry regarding whether or not the form could be shared with others. Mr. Noblitt thanked the group for their participation.

This concluded the meeting.



### Background Information and Meeting Purpose

This document is a summary of a meeting held Wednesday September 8th between The **Southern Highland Craft Guild**, The National Park Service staff of the Blue Ridge Parkway and Parsons, the Design Concept Plan/Environmental Assessment team, at the Blue Ridge Parkway Headquarters conference room. This summary is not a word-for-word transcript.

### Meeting content

We started with words of introduction including the people at this meeting:

Mr. Tom Bailey	Director of the Guild
Ms. Nancy	Current Guild Board Member
Mr. Jim Gentry	Gatlinburg, Board Member since 1970
Mr. Lee Davis	Board Member since 1976
	Guild Member 23 years,
Mr. Michael Huey	artisan/publisher
Gary Johnson	NPS BLRI Resource Manager
Noel Fehr	Parsons, DCP/EA Project Manager
John Hager	Parsons, DCP
John Martin	Parsons, EA

Mr. Johnson gave some introductions to the power point presentation. Mr. Fehr proceeded to review the overall project schedule and the steps of the process and explained that we are in the preliminary stages of gathering information. After we showed the group a presentation that we were to show at the public meetings the following evening, we heard comments and concerns from Guild members. They were concerned that the Folk Arts Center had been ignored in the presentation and that they consider themselves a visitor's center. It was explained to the Guild that their input is an important part of this preliminary stage of the process.

Guild members asked what acreage would be required for the building site. Parsons staff mentioned approximately 4 acres. The Hemphill Knob site was chosen early in the approximately 20 year process. When Guild members asked if Blue Ridge Parkway staff had considered adding on to the Folk Arts Center, it was explained that planning for this Folk Arts Center had taken place now for approximately 20 years and that the Blue Ridge Parkway objective is to create a more full service visitor's center that interprets a larger parkway area.

A Guild member mentioned that while this is an exciting proposal, and may benefit the economy of the area by boosting local business, it would economically harm Guild members who live in the Asheville area. Blue Ridge staff mentioned that the initial idea was that of a "mountain experience center." A Guild member asked if the mountain experience center concept was a local initiative. Guild members asked more specific questions regarding economic sustainability studies that had been done. Blue Ridge staff mentioned that they had met last March with Destination Cinema Inc. Parkway's staff met with Destination Cinema to get a better handle on what a destination center might entail and how the park service may be able to operate the Folk Arts Center in an economically viable manner. The center would be economically supported by a very



high-quality digital film and concessions (vending). At this time, Lord, Aeck, Sargent, the building consulting team entered the room and was introduced.

The Guild asked about the economic impact analysis that the National Park Service may be completing if any. It was mentioned that the stakeholder's meetings would yield impact topics to be further reviewed i.e. marketing, economic impact. One Guild member was concerned that the proposed retail portion would be selling Appalachian goods not from the region. It was explained that the shop would probably sell books and related materials that tell visitors about the broader region; focusing on the parkway and not just the Asheville region. One Guild member mentioned that they have a current master plan that includes expansion. Parkway staff mentioned that the timing of the Folk Arts Center master plan occurred after the regional destination center plans of the '90s. Parkway staff mentioned that the Folk Arts Center is different from the intended visitor center and may lose its identity if it was on the same site. There were five to six other sites considered in the Asheville area for a Visitor's Center. The Hemphill Knob Site was chosen for easy access from Interstate 40.

Guild members mentioned that they had been left out of the process. Blue Ridge staff mentioned that it's probably not too late for their involvement.

One Guild member was concerned that the visitor's center at the Hemphill Knob Site would overshadow the Folk Arts Center due to the close proximity. It was pointed out that the Hemphill Knob Site is paid for by the federal government but that the negatively affected livelihood of Guild members would not be. One Guild member said that while there are 900 members of the Guild, most Guild members have employees so that an estimated 4000 people could be impacted. It was mentioned that people stop for not only for crafts' information but for general information or simply to use the restroom.

The Guild said that while they have a strong presence and a 75 year history felt they would be negatively impacted by a potentially competing regional destination visitor center in close proximity. The Guild said that they would like to reach a win-win situation for everyone. It was reiterated that of the purpose of the meetings this week is to better define the scope of the project and that this meeting has been helpful in that effort.

Guild members were asked features uses and Folk Arts Center that could be key components of a visitor's center. They mentioned making the restrooms easily accessible and recognizable, visitors typically are thirsty for more than just water and they mentioned a play area as a place to calm children down is important. Once they are calmed down, families will look and will be inclined to buy something. The Guild felt that their current retail space is small but they do have a theater space, archival space, parking and other support Folk Arts Center so that the two uses could co-locate with additions and renovations.

Specific questions were asked regarding parking capacity for current Folk Arts Center needs. It was mentioned that parking is seldom full to capacity even during special events. They have many visitors in buses and recreational vehicles. Some general statements were made regarding length of stay. It depends on the purpose of the visit. Some people park and use adjacent trails. Some arrive for events and stay for one to two hours. No studies are available from the Guild.



Guild members inquired about the schedule of the final built project. It was mentioned that the regional destination center is scheduled be finished in late '08 or early '09. The Guild asked about when the environmental assessments are completed versus an environmental impact statement prior to the construction of the headquarters Folk Arts Center. It was mentioned that on an already developed site with few outwardly evident sensitive features, an environmental assessment is typically completed. If during the environmental assessment process identifies items of concern that warrant further detail an environmental impact statement is completed. Socio-economic impact is also reviewed during the environmental assessment.

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### Background Information and Meeting Purpose

This document is a summary of a meeting the morning of Wednesday September 8th between The **National Parks Conservation Association**, The National Park Service staff of the Blue Ridge Parkway and Parsons, the Design Concept Plan/Environmental Assessment team, at the Blue Ridge Parkway Headquarters conference room. This summary is not a word-for-word transcript.

#### Attendees:

Greg Kidd	National Parks Conservation Association
Dan Brown	BLRI NPS
Noel Fehr	Parsons
John Martin	Parsons
John Hager	Parsons

### Meeting content

Mr. Kidd introduced himself as the director of one of several regional offices. He covers all North Carolina National parks, including the Smokey Mountain National Park. He mentioned that they are interested in the status of this project.

Mr. Fehr gave some background information. He mentioned that this is one of several stakeholder meetings. He distributed copies of the five presentation boards to be shown at the public meeting Thursday afternoon. Mr. Fehr gave a brief rundown of the project schedule and a brief history of the studies that have been completed in the past for a visitor center and the purchase of the Hemphill Knob site.

Mr. Kidd asked what the likelihood was of receiving a Finding of No Significant Impact letter for the site. He noticed that there was no mention of an Environmental Impact Statement process in our project schedule. The Parsons team mentioned that there are few outwardly visible environmental issues at the Hemphill Knob site, but if the Environmental Assessment yields more serious environmental issues, an Environmental Impact Statement would be completed. Mr. Kidd thought that given the size and scope of the project and the amount of people that the facility is anticipated to serve, the impact of the site could possibly be greater than originally thought.

Mr. Fehr mentioned that the theater proposed in the past is larger than the latest proposed National Park Service facilities. Mr. Kidd had asked further questions about the purpose of the theater including the content of what might be shown. It was mentioned that part of the reason for this trip is to ask what interpretive stories that might be told. Some topics mentioned have included the history of the construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway, Cherokee Indian heritage and regional Appalachian culture. The movie would tell an interpretive story of the area and would not show a typical "Imax" movie of unrelated topics.

It was mentioned that the partners on the previous day had mentioned that the educational interpretation could focus on the region. Mr. Kidd asked why this kind of entrepreneurial facility is to be built at an additional expense and additional impact to the





parkway. He wondered why such a facility could not be developed outside of the parkway. The Parsons team mentioned that their purpose for being here is to receive that sort of input.

We proceeded to show Mr. Kidd the audio-visual Power Point show that would be shown at the public meeting on Thursday. Midway through the power point presentation, we offered Mr. Kidd a map for orientation. We pointed out that the Hemphill Knob site is within 2 miles of the intersection of Interstate 40 and highway 74 A. We also showed him a site plan of the existing headquarters facility.

Mr. Dan Brown entered the room and provided some background input. He mentioned that the parkway currently has no means of interpretation and the cinematic experience as selected is a way to get people's attention and respond to people in a format that they can appreciate. Mr. Brown cited the improvement of the mineral museum as a related interpretive experience and stated that it has increased visitation to the facility. Mr. Brown said that while it is an economically tight time, this is a tremendous opportunity to build a sustainable facility that will last 100 years.

Mr. Kidd mentioned that he is supportive of education and stated that he also knows there is a certain amount of politics involved in this project. He asked how the park service could develop a site so that an entrepreneur (referring to a company supporting the facility, i.e. an independent movie vendor) promoting economic viability of western North Carolina makes money off the parkway. He reiterated that money could be made at a site off of the parkway to remove any impact to it. Mr. Kidd mentioned that the theater might be a "hard sell."

Mr. Brown mentioned that the movie experience would benefit the public by providing an exciting experience and that the movie would help pay for the facility. Mr. Kidd mentioned that the PowerPoint presentation stated that part of the objective is to extend the stay of visitors. He said that while he has not formed an opinion as yet, he felt that as we present this to the public and stakeholders, some individuals might make potential site impact an issue. He mentioned that in the flow chart, he saw no mention of a potential Environmental Impact Statement.

A summary of Mr. Kidd's concerns is as follows:

- Resources/site impact - he feels the facility of this nature could be built elsewhere, including possibly the Folk Arts Center site.
- Mr. Kidd supports the educational aspect of the project but feels that due to the potential traffic impact of the parkway and the impact of resources, there should be mention of a potential Environmental Impact Statement.
- He was concerned about the potential commercialism of the movie experience and local commercial promotion. Mr. Brown mentioned that it is not the intent of the National Park Service to promote local businesses as places to visit.

In closing, Mr. Kidd mentioned that on September 25th the National Parks Conservation Association will have a public forum on the parkway. Dan Brown and Gary Johnson

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will be speaking at this event. The keynote speaker will be Carl Abbott, son of the original Blue Ridge Parkway designer.

This concluded the meeting.

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A meeting was held between the National Park Service, its contractors, and the Asheville Chamber of Commerce on September 8, 2004.

**Attendees:**

Mr. Dan Brown	National Park Service BLRI
Mr. Richard Lutovsky	President and CEO, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce
Ms. Phyllis Fiscus	Chamber of Commerce, Director of Visitor and Convention Services
Mr. Noel Fehr	Project Manager, Parsons
Mr. John Hager	DCP, Parsons
Mr. John Martin	EA, Parsons
Mr. Jack Cook	Denver Service Center
Mr. Ray Todd	Denver Service Center
Mr. John Starr	Lord, Aeck, Sargent, Building Architects
Mr. Hank Houser	Lord, Aeck, Sargent, Building Architects
Ms. Andrea Rollerli	Van Sickel, Rollerli, Exhibit Planning
Mr. Gary Johnson	Resource Manager, National Park Service BLRI

Mr. Dan Brown gave some words of introduction relating to the project background, then left the room for work related emergencies.

The Chamber of Commerce members clarified that the Convention and Visitor's Bureau is a division of the Chamber of Commerce housed in the same building. Mr. Johnson gave some introductions to the power point presentation. Mr. Fehr proceeded to review the overall project schedule on the boards, the steps of the process and roles of participating consultant teams. It was explained that we are in the preliminary stages of gathering necessary information for the project.

Mr. Lutovsky explained that they currently have 165,000 visitors per year and will start construction on a 33,000 square foot facility; 4,000 square feet will be dedicated to a visitor's center. The Chamber of Commerce mentioned that they also look at theirs as a destination center. They will be breaking ground in early October. The Chamber of Commerce requested that the parkway carefully consider what the facility is called. The relationship between the two causes confusion amongst the public. The Chamber of Commerce is projecting 250,000 visitors per year and they are working on signs to direct the public to their facility. They mentioned that their facility will be one of the most advanced visitor's centers in the country and will have an outlet post at the new Pack Square downtown. Phyllis is in charge of the visitor's center and they are looking towards a partnership with the Parkway. The narrative in the power point presentation mentions regional Chambers of Commerce. It was pointed out that Asheville is the only major Chamber in the area.



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Gary mentioned that we are in the preliminary planning stages and are looking more broadly to interpret the South Carolina, Virginia and the parkway corridor regions. National Park Service has used some basic models for square footage calculations. National Park Service said that they don't want to compete with other visitor's centers including signage references on the interstate. National Park Service wants to complement what is done at Asheville Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber of Commerce mentioned that they have taken a formal stance of support and mentioned that they supported a preference to The Folk Arts Center considering the potential economic synergy at this site. When asked how Asheville Chamber of Commerce sees participating as a partner, they mentioned that they maybe interested in helping to better define marketing centers and may be willing to contract with Blue Ridge staff. At this point, Mr. Johnson said that we need to do a workshop. The Chamber of Commerce agreed that there are many items to be discussed regarding Visitor's Center and that a workshop would involve the concept planning team and the building design team. The workshop would be important for better media and facility design.

The Parkway asked if Chamber of Commerce had completed or knew of recent marketing studies that address potential concerns regarding nearby competition of a proposed facility. The Parkway also was interested in any studies available of the Asheville area regarding what visitors look for when they visit this area. Chamber of Commerce does not look at competition of facilities as a major factor, there could be synergy or there could be a wash. A visitor's center may or may not benefit The Folk Arts Center. The Chamber of Commerce said that the Parsons team could benefit from a branding exercise they are in midst of to come up with a new theme and phrase for Asheville. They have hired a consultant to tabulate focus groups' reactions to various phrases. Chamber of Commerce should have feedback this month. They also have reviewed a survey completed by Iowa State that they offered to share. The length of stay at the Asheville Visitor's Center is typically short – give info, get them to the destinations that they sponsor.

National Park Service confirmed that the Asheville Folk Arts Center will not have a theater. Chamber of Commerce said that they will have a gift shop, booths, concierge and local craftsperson demonstrations celebrating downtown Asheville artisans.

When asked what do people like/dislike in a visitor's center, the Chamber the Commerce said that it should be family oriented. When asked if they had visitor data for the Folk Arts Center, they said there is no current mechanism to capture that data once they leave the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor's Center.

The Chamber of Commerce said that they are located at the same interstate exit as present but located on northwest quadrant, instead of the southeast quadrant.

Mr. Johnson mentioned that any data that the Chamber of Commerce has relating to visitation would be useful.

The planning team also asked if there were other data related to socioeconomic or visitor traffic that the Chamber of Commerce might have.



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When asked if there is an interest site for the area and what website information that can be obtained prior to getting here, Chamber of Commerce said their website, [www.exploreasheville.com](http://www.exploreasheville.com) has many options for visitors to build their trip to the area based on options a user may choose.

The parkway staff has had previous discussions about the name of their visitor's center. They knew that they wanted it to be more than a typical National Park Service visitor's center but wanted it to combine traditional National Park Service visitor's center qualities with a regional orientation from a marketing standpoint. We decided that it is important to brand the center so that people will be able to distinguish between Asheville's center and the National Park Service center. National Park Service felt that they will be able to work together with the help of the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber of Commerce said that they have visited many visitor's centers. Some of their favorites are at Charleston and the Oklahoma State Visitor's Center. When asked about important site facilities, the Chamber of Commerce mentioned quiet areas for children and a dog park.

When asked about local Asheville area development, the Chamber of Commerce mentioned two contacts - Mr. Jim Coman, county planner and Mr. Scott Shufford, city planner that the planning team may consider contacting.

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**Background Information and Meeting Purpose**

This document is a summary of a meeting the afternoon of Wednesday September 8th between the **public sector**, including various federal, state and local agencies, The National Park Service staff of the Blue Ridge Parkway and Parsons, the Design Concept Plan/Environmental Assessment team, at the Blue Ridge Parkway headquarters conference room. This summary is not a word-for-word transcript.

**Meeting content**

After some introductory words, Mr. Fehr proceeded to review the overall project schedule, the steps of the process that have led us to where we currently are and explained that we are in the preliminary stages of gathering information. He then played the automated PowerPoint presentation to be shown at the public meeting that evening.

After this audio-visual presentation, participants were engaged into a discussion regarding their desires for a regional destination visitor center. The main points of this discussion are summarized below:

1. One participant asked if we visited the arboretum and proceeded to give background information for the facility. He mentioned that it is part of the university system and was established approximately 20 years ago. Part of the arboretum's mission is to educate the public on stewardship of natural resources. They are located on U.S. Forest Service land. He also mentioned that the facility is part of the Frederick Law Olmstead vision to lead visitors past the context of the Biltmore Estate.

He thinks that a regional destination visitor center would be a wonderful facility and that the park service has gone through a long process to get to where they are. The goal could be to highlight the aspects of its unique location within the geographic context of North Carolina. He felt that with active partnerships, the project can be a win-win situation for everyone involved. He hopes that they can develop a partnership with the National Park Service where one facility can have a presence at the other, forming a gateway for the parkway. He mentioned that they do not have a direct interest in the Folk Art Center but they do in the craft industry.

2. One participant asked what the parameters and central focus of the region will be. The response was South Carolina, Western NC, East Tennessee and southwestern Virginia area plus Shenandoah to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The facility would provide a broad context with the greatest focus on western North Carolina.
3. A visitor center is needed as a selling point for the area. The facility could "pull people in." People don't know about resources/attractions and the area needs a voice. This could be done through static display, kiosk, interactive exhibits and all would bring a visual understanding of what opportunities are available in the region. The mud island model of the Mississippi river in Memphis Tennessee





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- was raised as an appropriate hands-on display. Focus needs to be on people visiting the region and its attractions instead of one or two destinations, i.e., the Biltmore Estates. A regional destination visitor center would provide a logical extension from the Biltmore that Olmstead had in mind in his original plans.
4. It is important that the regional destination visitor center does not compete with other facilities and that it is built with minimal impacts to resources.
  5. The meaning of the marketing component on one of the presentation diagrams should be evaluated. The center can show/give contacts, visitor options, convey the regional context specifics, which cover a wide range of services – explore the concept of what the marketing center is.
  6. Who is running and/or operating the visitor's center and how do we display ownership of the facility? This is related to a potential further discussion of facility naming issues and functional aspects of the Center. It is also related to the planning that is taking place for the Blue Ridge Heritage area. The regional destination visitor center should be gateway for this.
  7. A regional destination visitor center should inform visitors – even when the building is closed and staff is not present.
  8. It is important to consider agreements for what is interpreted in addition to keeping the center profitable. An example was made of the facility in Knoxville, Tennessee, the Gateway Regional Visitor Center that was comprised of a partnership with various entities. It was found to be unprofitable after one year. It was in the wrong location. The naming of the facility and signage directing people to the facility may have contributed to its demise, as well as a parking shortage. Close proximity to the resource is important. The location on the Blue Ridge Parkway should not be a problem. This participant added that real business planning is important to affect long term impact. Facility staffing and how it is funded will have a long term impact.
  9. Mr. Johnson summarized Congressman Taylor's magnet triangle concept that prompted the question of what is appropriate as a marketing center within a National Park Service location. This center is an attraction, not just a visitor center. Most park centers aren't cooperative – this is a different ball game.
  10. There may be a conflict between federal government and business interests–commercialism concerns.
  11. A visitor center should be a destination that includes a wide range of information. The design team was encouraged to check out similar visitor centers throughout the country.
  12. What about the learning center concept (including classrooms, etc.)? See where the two fit together.



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13. This is a region and not just a locale. The view could be broadened and redefined to include not simply the building, but the area as well. The geographic area could be used to the center's advantage. Regional support would be necessary.
14. The city of Asheville is underestimated in its importance to the region.
15. Figure out the function of the center before the form of the building. Expand the vision of the parkway impact area and its associated partnerships including towns, universities, organizations and others. The park service should be viewed as a value added entity.
16. Is this going to be a federally funded entity? Yes In terms of capital investment (building a project) but not operationally. The park service is still in the process of forming potential roles and responsibilities for operational partnerships.
17. Preliminary profitability numbers have been run by Destination Cinema affiliated with National Geographic that has managed other facilities, based on movie charges and desire for a visitor center.
18. The visitor center should be "the place" to come to. Other groups feel it should be 'a place.' The center should not be perceived as a competitor to existing facilities in the area.
19. Integrate online learning with Blue Ridge Parkway archive collections. Blue Ridge Parkway has current staff that handles archive collections.
20. Is input from potential customers being gathered? Customers are from out of area – there might be things they might say that aren't being considered. The Chamber of Commerce spent lots of money to find out that kind of information. They are working with the National Park Service with that information regarding customer base and interest.
21. It will be a challenge to pull all the components of the plan together.
22. How many alternatives will be considered?
23. Will the public be able to voice their opinions via website availability?  
Considered posting presentation on website. Easier to track responses. A database will be created as well – public can look at documentation, flyers, etc. Policy is that information including names is public and should be available, unless requested otherwise.
24. Does there have to be one 'central' office? Could satellite National Park Service offices be added/adapted to a variety of locales?

**Task Three – Public Participation .....**September 6-10, 2004  
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This concluded the meeting.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS  
REGIONAL DESTINATION VISITOR CENTER  
FIRST PUBLIC MEETING  
SEPTEMBER 9, 2004**

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**Regional Destination Visitor Center - Blue Ridge Parkway  
Comment Form Summary**

Sep-04

**1 What are some characteristics that you value most about the Blue Ridge Parkway in the Asheville region?**

a1 •Quick access to long range views, both north and south of the Asheville area.

**2 Currently, how do you (or your group) use the Blue Ridge Parkway and associated facilities - more specifically, what characteristics, features, amenities, and facilities do you use and value the most?**

a1 •The motor road itself, access to trails.

a2 •Mtn to Sea at so many points (??).

a3 •The Craggy Gardens area.

**3 What should be the most important programmatic goals for the Asheville area Regional Destination Visitor Center?**

a1 •To make visitors aware of the other historical and cultural destinations in the Asheville area.

**4 What features, facilities and uses are most important and should be included in the visitor center building?**

a1 •Restrooms

a2 •A snack facility.

a3 •Information about geographic, cultural and historical locations in WNC.

**5 What outdoor activities and/or facilities should be included in the visitor center planning?**

a1 •If the Hemphill Knob site is used, a trail to the top of the Knob, a covered shelter at the top, some picnic tables.

**6 How would you (or your group) use a visitor center?**

a1 •I would refer visitors to the center.

**7 What sites do you think the planning team should investigate during the site evaluation?**

a1 •If an IMAX type theatre is used, consider the existing theatre at the Folk Arts Center.

**8 Do you anticipate there being any natural, social or physical environmental issues with the development of the visitor center?**

**9 What other thoughts or ideas on this project would you like to share with the planning team?**

a1 •Could the planned expansion of the Folk Arts Center include the IMAX theatre theme, using the existing auditorium. Then a visitor's center could be built at the headquarters site, focusing on area information and a hiking trail to the top of the Knob. So many visitors never leave their car, this might encourage a walk. I do not want this to

*Draft*  
**Regional Destination Visitor Center - Blue Ridge Parkway  
Comment Form Summary**

Sep-04

- 1 What are some characteristics that you value most about the Blue Ridge Parkway in the Asheville region?
  - a1 •Having a beautiful place to take a ride.
  - a2 •Having the trails to hike.
  - a3 •Also the pull-offs to sit and enjoy scenery.
- 2 Currently, how do you (or your group) use the Blue Ridge Parkway and associated facilities - more specifically, what characteristics, features, amenities, and facilities do you use and value the most?
  - a1 •Hiking trails
  - a2 •Walking
- 3 What should be the most important programmatic goals for the Asheville area Regional Destination Visitor Center?
  - a1 •To provide information to visitors on a broad basis.
- 4 What features, facilities and uses are most important and should be included in the visitor center building?
  - a1 •Should have people with good knowledge of area to talk to visitors and provide them with useful information.
- 5 What outdoor activities and/or facilities should be included in the visitor center planning?
- 6 How would you (or your group) use a visitor center?
  - a1 •To gather information to plan trips and outings.
- 7 What sites do you think the planning team should investigate during the site evaluation?
  - a1 •US 74A being so close to I-40 would provide easy access for more people.
- 8 Do you anticipate there being any natural, social or physical environmental issues with the development of the visitor center?
  - a1 •No.
- 9 What other thoughts or ideas on this project would you like to share with the planning team?

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**Regional Destination Visitor Center - Blue Ridge Parkway  
Comment Form Summary**

Sep-04

1 What are some characteristics that you value most about the Blue Ridge Parkway in the Asheville region?

a1 •Tourism

2 Currently, how do you (or your group) use the Blue Ridge Parkway and associated facilities - more specifically, what characteristics, features, amenities, and facilities do you use and value the most?

a1 •Folk Art Center

3 What should be the most important programmatic goals for the Asheville area Regional Destination Visitor Center?

a1 •All involved in Folk Art Center.

4 What features, facilities and uses are most important and should be included in the visitor center building?

a1 •All already existing in Folk Art Center.

5 What outdoor activities and/or facilities should be included in the visitor center planning?

a1 •Not needed in new facility.

6 How would you (or your group) use a visitor center?

a1 •We would not consider it needed.

7 What sites do you think the planning team should investigate during the site evaluation?

a1 •Folk Art Center

8 Do you anticipate there being any natural, social or physical environmental issues with the development of the visitor center?

a1 •Waste of money.

9 What other thoughts or ideas on this project would you like to share with the planning team?

a1 •I feel that money could be used better by using present building, not duplicating facility.



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**Regional Destination Visitor Center - Blue Ridge Parkway  
Comment Form Summary**

Sep-04

- 1 What are some characteristics that you value most about the Blue Ridge Parkway in the Asheville region?
- 2 Currently, how do you (or your group) use the Blue Ridge Parkway and associated facilities - more specifically, what characteristics, features, amenities, and facilities do you use and value the most?
- 3 What should be the most important programmatic goals for the Asheville area Regional Destination Visitor Center?
- 4 What features, facilities and uses are most important and should be included in the visitor center building?
- 5 What outdoor activities and/or facilities should be included in the visitor center planning?
- 6 How would you (or your group) use a visitor center?
- 7 What sites do you think the planning team should investigate during the site evaluation?
- 8 Do you anticipate there being any natural, social or physical environmental issues with the development of the visitor center?
- 9 What other thoughts or ideas on this project would you like to share with the planning team?
- ai •I'm for this thing being at the Folk Art Center - period.

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**Regional Destination Visitor Center - Blue Ridge Parkway  
Comment Form Summary**

Sep-04

**1 What are some characteristics that you value most about the Blue Ridge Parkway in the Asheville region?**

a1 •Excellent way to get to natural beauty and views - we travel in both directions many times per year.

**2 Currently, how do you (or your group) use the Blue Ridge Parkway and associated facilities - more specifically, what characteristics, features, amenities, and facilities do you use and value the most?**

a1 •Drive to different areas.

a2 •Eat at Pisgah Inn (??).

a3 •Visit Cradle of Forestry.

a4 •Go to Linville Falls.

a5 •Gem and Mineral Museum.

a6 •Hike from one point to another.

**3 What should be the most important programmatic goals for the Asheville area Regional Destination Visitor Center?**

a1 •Serve as introduction to other similar venues off the Parkway - use it to integrate positives of Parkway to positives of area.

**4 What features, facilities and uses are most important and should be included in the visitor center building?**

a1 •Theatre

a2 •Interactive displays

a3 •Kiosks

a4 •Links to other area attractions and activities, including Smoky Mountain National Park.

**5 What outdoor activities and/or facilities should be included in the visitor center planning?**

a1 •At the Grand Canyon, they are planning an outdoor trail that integrates with indoor movie and exhibits.

**6 How would you (or your group) use a visitor center?**

a1 •Serve as a focus for visitors, use with Boy Scouts and other youth groups.

a2 •Integrate in with other educational activities (like for home school kids).

**7 What sites do you think the planning team should investigate during the site evaluation?**

a1 •The current headquarters site at Hemphill Knob.

**8 Do you anticipate there being any natural, social or physical environmental issues with the development of the visitor center?**

a1 •Non-intrusive to views from the Parkway.

**9 What other thoughts or ideas on this project would you like to share with the planning team?**

a1 •Similar look and feel to other National Parks.

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**Regional Destination Visitor Center - Blue Ridge Parkway  
Comment Form Summary**

Sep-04

**1 What are some characteristics that you value most about the Blue Ridge Parkway in the Asheville region?**

- a1 •Peace and quiet.
- a2 •Natural beauty.

**2 Currently, how do you (or your group) use the Blue Ridge Parkway and associated facilities - more specifically, what characteristics, features, amenities, and facilities do you use and value the most?**

- a1 •Recreational driving - primarily simply use the parkway.
- a2 •Often use it to walk and hike on during winter months on sections that have been closed.

**3 What should be the most important programmatic goals for the Asheville area Regional Destination Visitor Center?**

- a1 •To enhance the Parkway mission and history at an economically viable level.
- a2 •To not support any commercial aspects - not advertise local attractions.

**4 What features, facilities and uses are most important and should be included in the visitor center building?**

- a1 •Depends on projected usage but primarily features - usage should center on history, building, construction, engineering, environment i.e. those aspects that are educational - bring in some kids and give them history.

**5 What outdoor activities and/or facilities should be included in the visitor center planning?**

- a1 •Parking

**6 How would you (or your group) use a visitor center?**

- a1 •Education
- a2 •Entertainment
- a3 •Place to bring guests.

**7 What sites do you think the planning team should investigate during the site evaluation?**

- a1 •Sites that expose the visitor to enough of the parkway so they can appreciate what they'll see at the center.

**8 Do you anticipate there being any natural, social or physical environmental issues with the development of the visitor center?**

- a1 •Yes.

**9 What other thoughts or ideas on this project would you like to share with the planning team?**

- a1 •Would like to see names of all the companies receiving contracts - how much they receive and for what purpose.
- a2 •Would like to see projected costs in some detail especially costs of different alternatives.
- a3 •Would like to see status of congressional appropriations and park service requests for these appropriations.

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**Regional Destination Visitor Center - Blue Ridge Parkway  
Comment Form Summary**

Sep-04

- 1 What are some characteristics that you value most about the Blue Ridge Parkway in the Asheville region?
  - a1 •The scenic beauty of the parkway is unsurpassed.
  - a2 •I love making quiet drives in the early morning with no traffic or billboards, only nature.
- 2 Currently, how do you (or your group) use the Blue Ridge Parkway and associated facilities - more specifically, what characteristics, features, amenities, and facilities do you use and value the most?
  - a1 •Hiking trails.
  - a2 •Bike riding on the parkway.
  - a3 •Programs at the Folk Art Center.
- 3 What should be the most important programmatic goals for the Asheville area Regional Destination Visitor Center?
- 4 What features, facilities and uses are most important and should be included in the visitor center building?
- 5 What outdoor activities and/or facilities should be included in the visitor center planning?
- 6 How would you (or your group) use a visitor center?
- 7 What sites do you think the planning team should investigate during the site evaluation?
  - a1 •The alternative of using the existing Folk Art Center site - expand that facility.
- 8 Do you anticipate there being any natural, social or physical environmental issues with the development of the visitor center?
  - a1 •You are helping to destroy the income producing source of the oldest craft guild in the country.
- 9 What other thoughts or ideas on this project would you like to share with the planning team?
  - a1 •The parkway has complained about budget cuts for years. Why not put the money saved by the current Folk Art Center with the visitor center - to hire more rangers, etc.

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**Regional Destination Visitor Center - Blue Ridge Parkway  
Comment Form Summary**

Sep-04

1    **What are some characteristics that you value most about the Blue Ridge Parkway in the Asheville region?**

a1    •Beautiful road with no commercial attractions.

2    **Currently, how do you (or your group) use the Blue Ridge Parkway and associated facilities - more specifically, what characteristics, features, amenities, and facilities do you use and value the most?**

a1    •Folk Art Center, meeting place.

3    **What should be the most important programmatic goals for the Asheville area Regional Destination Visitor Center?**

a1    •Should be combined with Folk Arts Center.

4    **What features, facilities and uses are most important and should be included in the visitor center building?**

a1    •Maps

a2    •Restrooms

a3    •Sales by regional artists.

5    **What outdoor activities and/or facilities should be included in the visitor center planning?**

a1    •Folk Art Center grounds building could be used as a starting point for any new stuff needed for a visitor center.

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**Regional Destination Visitor Center - Blue Ridge Parkway  
Comment Form Summary**

Sep-04

- 1 What are some characteristics that you value most about the Blue Ridge Parkway in the Asheville region?
  - 1a •I value the natural beauty and wildness of the Parkway.
  - 1b •I appreciate that there are very few buildings along the Parkway.
  - 1c •I love the "slow down" environment of the Parkway.
  - 1d •I like the fact that there are no big signs on the parkway - no billboards, anything "commercial" is quiet about it.
  
- 2 Currently, how do you (or your group) use the Blue Ridge Parkway and associated facilities - more specifically, what characteristics, features, amenities, and facilities do you use and value the most?
  - 2a •We travel the Parkway from time to time. We enjoy the book stores and chance to appreciate a natural wonder of America.
  - 2b •I have worked at Allenstand several Octobers, and volunteered in the galleries at the Folk Art Center.
  - 2c •Occasionally a bicyclist comes in simply to use the restroom. But thousands of people, including lots of families, go through the whole facility. They often verbalize their admiration of craftsmen's skills, their enjoyment of exhibits and how impressed they are by the beauty of the facility itself.
  - 2d •We also go to special events and meetings at the Folk Art Center.
  
- 3 What should be the most important programmatic goals for the Asheville area Regional Destination Visitor Center?
  
- 4 What features, facilities and uses are most important and should be included in the visitor center building?
  - 4a •Same as in the Folk Art Center.
  
- 5 What outdoor activities and/or facilities should be included in the visitor center planning?
  - 5a •More picnic tables - people love 'em.
  
- 6 How would you (or your group) use a visitor center?
  
- 7 What sites do you think the planning team should investigate during the site evaluation?
  - 7a •Somehow incorporate the Folk Art Center. Add on? Attached building? Or put a new building far away from the FAC.
  
- 8 Do you anticipate there being any natural, social or physical environmental issues with the development of the visitor center?
  
- 9 What other thoughts or ideas on this project would you like to share with the planning team?
  - 9a •The only people negatively impacted by a new facility, 2 miles away, are Southern Highland Craft Guild members. Many of them make all or part of their living selling through Allenstand at the Folk Art Center.
  - 9b •Where's the money going to come from to staff, maintain and sustain the Hemphill Knob facility? Have any of your ever heard of a building project that came in under or even on budget?
  - 9c •Thank you for listening to another viewpoint today.
  - 9d •I'm confused: the movie shows the hands of a potter - it claims to have the new 'visitor center' promote and educate about area heritage and crafts - and you're going down a road that will negatively impact hundreds of craftspeople. Huh?
  - 9e •No visitor's center on the Blue Ridge Parkway near Asheville right now? Give me a break!

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**PUBLIC COMMENTS  
REGIONAL DESTINATION VISITOR CENTER  
SECOND PUBLIC MEETING  
NOVEMBER 9, 2004**



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**REGIONAL DESTINATION VISITOR CENTER  
BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY  
COMMENT FORM SUMMARY**

On November 9, 2004 a second public meeting was held on the campus of A-B Tech, Simpson lecture hall Asheville, N.C. Full transcripts of this public meeting are available upon request through the Blue Ridge Parkway Headquarters. This summary is provided due to the length of these transcripts.

Soon after this first public newsletter was mailed, this meeting was held to show the public the four action alternatives being considered, two at the Hemphill Knob site and two at the Folk Art Center site. The meeting was open to the general public and was held in an effort to gain public input for the four regional destination visitor center alternatives completed at both sites. These alternatives, A, B, C and D were later refined after the Choosing by Advantages process November 29 through December 3, 2004 and renamed Alternatives B, C, D, and E. The general agenda for the meeting was as follows:

Participants reviewed the alternatives and supporting information on a series of display boards provided by Parsons. The boards included the four concept plans, the purpose and need text for the project as well as a series of support text, photographs and other graphics for the building and site program.

Introductory comments were made by Mr. Dan Brown with the Blue Ridge Parkway and Mr. Noel Fehr of Parsons. A short PowerPoint presentation was then made by Mr. Fehr that summarized the steps that the National Park Service has taken to this point, the project schedule, a summary of the questions and responses from the previous public meeting, and the building and site program. Mr. Fehr then summarized the four alternatives.

The audience was informed of the planning, environment and public comment (PEPC) website as a way to provide comments by the November 29th, 2004 deadline; participants were also provided green cards with written instructions regarding how to access to this site

The public meeting was opened for individual public commentary. Twenty individuals offered commentary within the allotted three minute time period for each individual. A summary of the comments is provided below:

Prior to the individual public commentary, a question was raised regarding whether or not the general public could provide input for attributes considered at the Choosing by Advantages process that the National Park Service was about to undertake. Mr. Gary Johnson of the Blue Ridge Parkway offered some background explanation of this process. He indicated that although the public does not have the opportunity to offer input for the Choosing by Advantage factors, the public will have the opportunity to evaluate both the factors derived by the participants as well as the preferred alternative published in the Development Concept Plan and Environmental Assessment report. Mr. Johnson mentioned this as a standard procedure on many National Park Service projects.

A question was also raised regarding whether a weight would be assigned to public comment throughout the alternative selection process. Mr. Johnson mentioned while no weight is assigned, the National Park Service considers whether the comment is substantive. He used the public's input regarding the consideration of the Folk Art Center site for the regional destination visitor center as an example of how a substantive comment affected the process. Mr. Johnson also mentioned that the Development Concept Plan will describe the process that led to the preferred alternative.

Another participant asked if the Choosing by Advantages process is a National Environmental Policy Act or a park service process. Mr. Johnson mentioned it is part of the NEPA process. Another person asked what advantages the Park Service reviews. Mr. Sussman from National Park Service Southeast Regional office mentioned that the advantages have not been determined. Mr. Johnson mentioned that cost is only one factor and that generally we review an alternative's pros and cons. Mr. Fehr added that we also review the potential impacts to resources that an alternative may have.

Once these questions were addressed, individual commentaries were received. The first participant mentioned that she was given short notice of this meeting and that she and other Folk Art Center members had difficulty providing comments online. After receiving telephone assistance from Blue Ridge Parkway headquarters, she shared these verbal instructions with other persons associated with the Folk Art Center. This participant made several comments in support of local craftsman and artisans.

The next participant was also supportive of the guild. This participant mentioned that locating a facility at the Hemphill Knob site would be competitive with the Folk Art Center.

The next participant offered comments as a guild member, a member of the board of trustees and as a taxpayer. She mentioned that this meeting offered an opportunity for open communication with the guild. She was in support of redevelopment of the Folk Art Center into a Visitor Center.

The next two participants felt that the facility at the Hemphill Knob site would be redundant, would cause unnecessary environmental impact and would be wasteful. These participants spoke in support of rebuilding the Folk Art Center into the combined facility.

This next participant announced that he was not representing any particular group and felt that the destination center should be developed at the Folk Art Center. This participant also supported rebuilding the Folk Art Center into the combined facility.

The next participant supported the Folk Arts Center site.

The next participant mentioned that the park service has previously expressed a preference for of the Hemphill Knob site. He felt that visitors should be required to stop at just one location for interpretation opportunities.

The next participant condemned marketing the center as a tourist destination center when there is a national movement to reduce tourism impact in national parks. He mentioned that a Visitor Center at the Folk Art Center site would supplement the current activities at the Folk Art Center.

The next two participants stated that if there are two separate facilities that offer similar public opportunities close to one another, one is likely to fail. Two facilities would create unnecessary competition that may affect the livelihood of those that depend upon the Folk Art Center. They also felt that the proposed elements of the alternatives would be too “touristy.”

The next participant commented on the fast pace of the process. He had not received adequate prior notice about this meeting and stated that a follow-up public meeting should have occurred after the first meeting that was affected by Hurricane Francis.

The next participant stated his concern regarding the website, the ambiguity of the Choosing by Advantages process, questioned if the destination center is actually a marketing center, and wanted clarification of the term “immersive digital cinema.” This participant also felt that monies could be used elsewhere for other items such as needed personnel and infrastructure.

The next participant commented that the four alternatives lack future planning for expansion.

The next participant commented on the lack of recognition for the mountain-to-sea trail. In his concluding remarks, Mr. Fehr stated that the trail is mentioned on each of the alternatives and apologized for not mentioning the trail in his concept summaries.

The next participant in the formal comment process was in favor of locating a visitor center on Hemphill Knob, due to its easily accessible location making it an orientation point for visitors.

Remaining commentators had similar input to previous participants regarding potential duplication of services with two separate facilities, costs savings by constructing at the Folk Art Center site and potential affected livelihood of craftsmen if the center was built at the Hemphill Knob site.

Mr. Fehr asked for final questions. A participant asked if 80% of commercial profits would be kept within the Blue Ridge Parkway system if a visitor center is built with a commercial component, such as a bookstore. Mr. Dan Brown mentioned that a modest visitor fee would probably be assessed for the immersive cinema presentation. Mr.

Brown also mentioned that the destination center represents an opportunity to partner with local communities to convey the local interpretive opportunities in their respective areas, to offer visitors a more sustainable experience.

Mr. Brown went on to say that the National Park Service - Southern Highland Craft Guild relationship is important. The destination center is meant to provide a visitor orientation and understanding of the parkway not currently offered by an existing facility and that visitors need to understand that the parkway is a unit of the National Park Service. He stated that the Blue Ridge Parkway headquarters has developed an understanding of visitor needs through surveys that they have taken. One item that the Parkway has learned is that visitors often do not understand that the parkway is a unit of the National Park System. He stated that the Hemphill Knob location offers an opportunity to address large volumes of visitors where they enter and leave the parkway. Mr. Brown mentioned that if alternatives D or E are chosen, the new facility would no longer be the Folk Art Center operated by the guild.

Another participant suggested that the National Park Service allow more time for the process. Another participant mentioned that it would make better economic sense for the guild and the National Park Service join forces at one location.

Additional participant questions were raised regarding when monies are set aside and when they are allocated for the planning process. A participant asked how the numbers of visitors were calculated for the theater volume and for bus parking. Mr. Fehr mentioned that the theater capacity is being refined as is the length of stay. These factors drive other program elements such as parking numbers. Mr. Fehr added that the public will have an additional opportunity to provide comment as the development concept plan is finalized.

A participant asked if there would be an advantage to having the visitor center adjacent to the current headquarters function. Mr. Brown mentioned that the proximity issue may be advantageous but shall be addressed as part of the process. He also mentioned that the headquarters was previously located in downtown Asheville. After the Hemphill Knob site was selected for the headquarters, the park announced that the chosen site involved a potential visitor center.

A participant asked how the park service would address staffing concerns and mentioned that with alternative D, Folk Art Center staff could be utilized on a daily basis. Mr. Brown mentioned that staffing would be addressed as part of the process.

Concluding remarks were made by both Mr. Brown and Mr. Fehr as the meeting concluded at approximately 9:00 p.m.