

III. REGIONAL RECREATIONAL SETTING

A master plan for a parkway must be based on regional considerations as well as on parkway resources. The Foothills Parkway and the associated lands and resources of its immediate environs, its scenic views and access then constitute the study area. The parkway lies on a line which divides two distinct physiographic regions in eastern Tennessee, the Appalachian Mountains and the Tennessee Valley. These regions are complementary.

The Valley - This physiographic region occupies a 50-mile wide valley between the Appalachian foothills and the Cumberland Escarpment to the west. The primary natural assets of this great valley are the Tennessee River and its several tributaries, and the rippling series of parallel ridges and valleys which traverse the State from northeast to southwest. Topography, climate, and vegetation combine to make this an area with remarkable potential for natural environment recreation. Extensive recreation developments exist throughout the region, principally along the lakes created by Tennessee Valley Authority dams, which are also major attractions. The region is served additionally by five game management areas, six State parks, many local parks and a number of significant historic sites, two of which are administered by the National Park Service.

The Mountains - The Appalachian Mountain physiographic region of eastern Tennessee contains the highest, oldest, and most complex mountains in the entire Appalachian chain. Known variously as the Unakas, Blue Ridge or Great Smokies, these Southern Appalachians are by far the most scenic part of the State. The beauty of this region is enhanced by a variety of plant life, including dense hardwood forests, rhododendron and, on the highest peaks, spruce, balsam fir, and other Canadian life-zone vegetation as well as by abundant wildlife and fish.

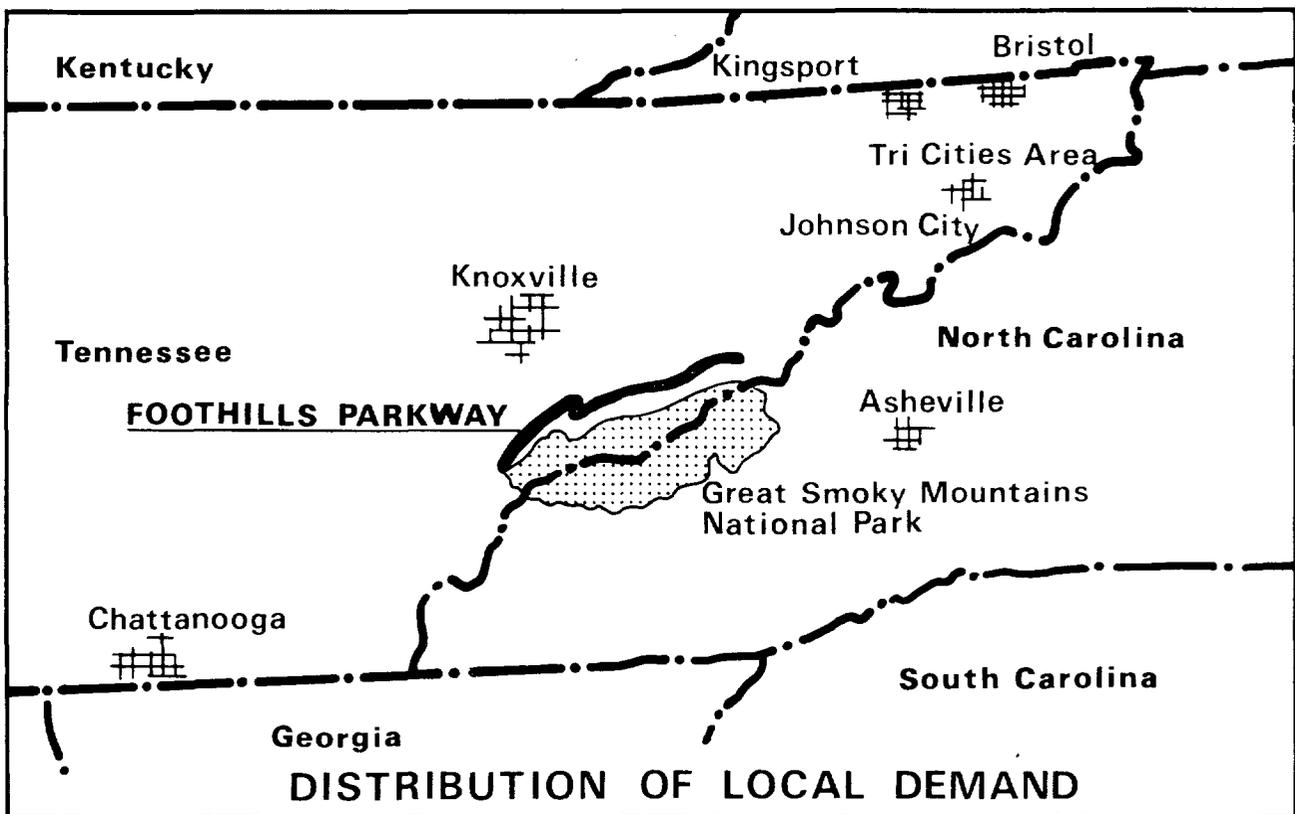
Fortunately, almost half of the lands within this lovely mountain region are set aside for public recreational use. Nearly three-quarters of the acres devoted to recreation are under Federal management (primarily in Cherokee National Forest and the Tennessee portion of Great Smoky Mountains National Park). The State program in the mountain region at present is chiefly one of game management on lands leased from the U.S. Forest Service and from private lumber companies.

The suitability of this region for natural environment and primitive-area types of development is reflected in the distribution of recreation acreage among the six Bureau of Outdoor Recreation categories. Of the 873,499 recreation acres in the Tennessee Southern Appalachian mountain region, 763,484 are

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Views of the mountain region from Look Rock atop Chilhowee Mountain.



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classified as Natural Environment (Class III) or Outstanding Natural Features (Class IV). It is recommended by Tennessee's Plan for Outdoor Recreation that any proposed development should be carefully assessed from a regional viewpoint to assure that it would not compromise the wilderness-like character of the mountains. This wilderness is particularly worthy of preservation as it represents the largest remaining tract east of the Mississippi River.

The variety and distribution of east Tennessee's recreation resources harmonize to a great extent with the distribution of local demand. The well developed resources of both the valley and the mountains are readily available to the metropolitan populations of Knoxville, Chattanooga, and the Tri-Cities areas, the sources of the greatest local demand. However, the abundant recreational resources of east Tennessee appeal to visitors from all other sections of Tennessee, from the environs of Asheville, North Carolina, and from adjoining states. In addition, as east Tennessee is centrally located in the eastern United States, its natural appeal is enhanced by its accessibility.