

IV. THE FOOTHILLS VICINITY

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Foothills Parkway lies on the slopes of small secondary ridges of the Great Smoky Mountains. These foothills are a range of low mountains broken by narrow valleys and swift mountain streams. Soils are usually thin and rocky, and deep topsoil is found in isolated valley bottoms. Most of the countryside is a dense woodland of second or third-growth hardwoods and underbrush interspersed with pine. In this setting, farming and logging have long been the predominant land-use activities.

With the establishment of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, recreation as a land use greatly increased in importance. The foothills have many favorable recreational attributes; beautiful countryside, moderately sloping hillsides, and inspiring panoramic views. Roads through the foothills follow the valleys into the high mountains of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In many locations where valley terrain has permitted development, tourist-oriented communities have flourished. Extensive communities of summer homes have been developed on the moderate hillsides and many private campgrounds have been opened on valley sites near the park.

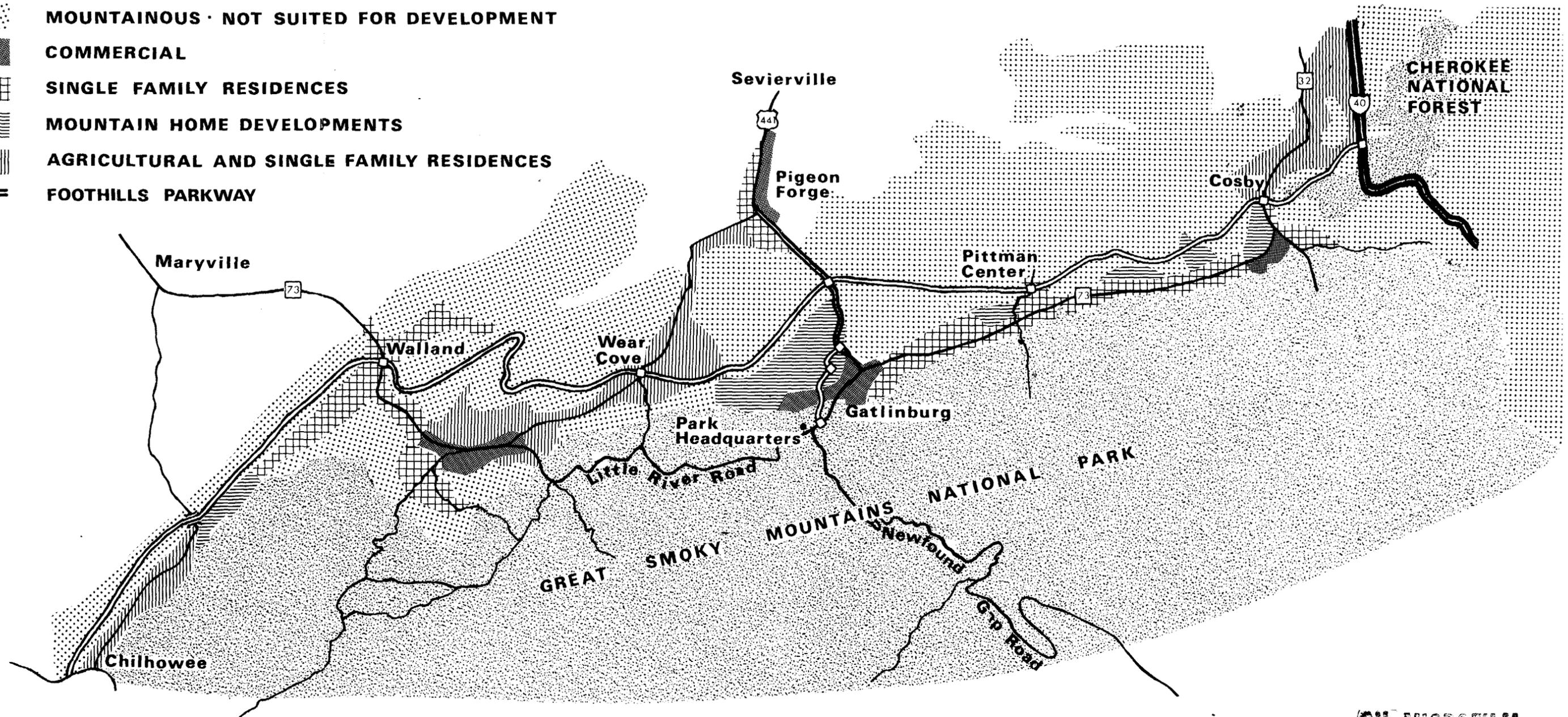
At the same time, the old row-crop farming on marginal land has given way to small crops of tobacco or to cattle raising. Poorer farms have been subdivided into mountain homesites or abandoned and allowed to revert to forest. While there has been some industrial development, it has been on the fringe of the foothills toward the valley of the Tennessee. In the past, population has declined as many of the region's young people sought jobs elsewhere. This trend is probably changing. People now come into the area for jobs with the tourist industry, to live in retirement, or to enjoy a summer home in the cool mountain air.

Tourism and recreational development have been growing at an ever-increasing pace. With the advancement of parkway construction, awareness of the region's scenic and recreational resources has spread.

The foothills vicinity can be regarded as one fairly homogenous economic unit, sparsely settled by mountain farmers, but increasingly oriented toward recreation, tourism, and summer homes.

SCHEMATIC LAND USE ANALYSIS MAP

-  MOUNTAINOUS · NATIONAL PARK AND FOREST LAND
-  MOUNTAINOUS · NOT SUITED FOR DEVELOPMENT
-  COMMERCIAL
-  SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENCES
-  MOUNTAIN HOME DEVELOPMENTS
-  AGRICULTURAL AND SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENCES
-  FOOTHILLS PARKWAY



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LAND USE CATEGORIES

Most of the land adjacent to the parkway is mountainous and not suited for development, except for a few accessible flat valleys and coves crossed by the parkway. The largest agricultural and rural residential area along the parkway is Wear Cove, a well-established community with good access.

The mountainous area is heavily forested, relatively inaccessible, and generally used only for private wood lots. The logging industry is sporadic, unpredictable, and often unprofitable.

The existing land uses fit into six general categories:

Mountainous - National Park and Forest Land

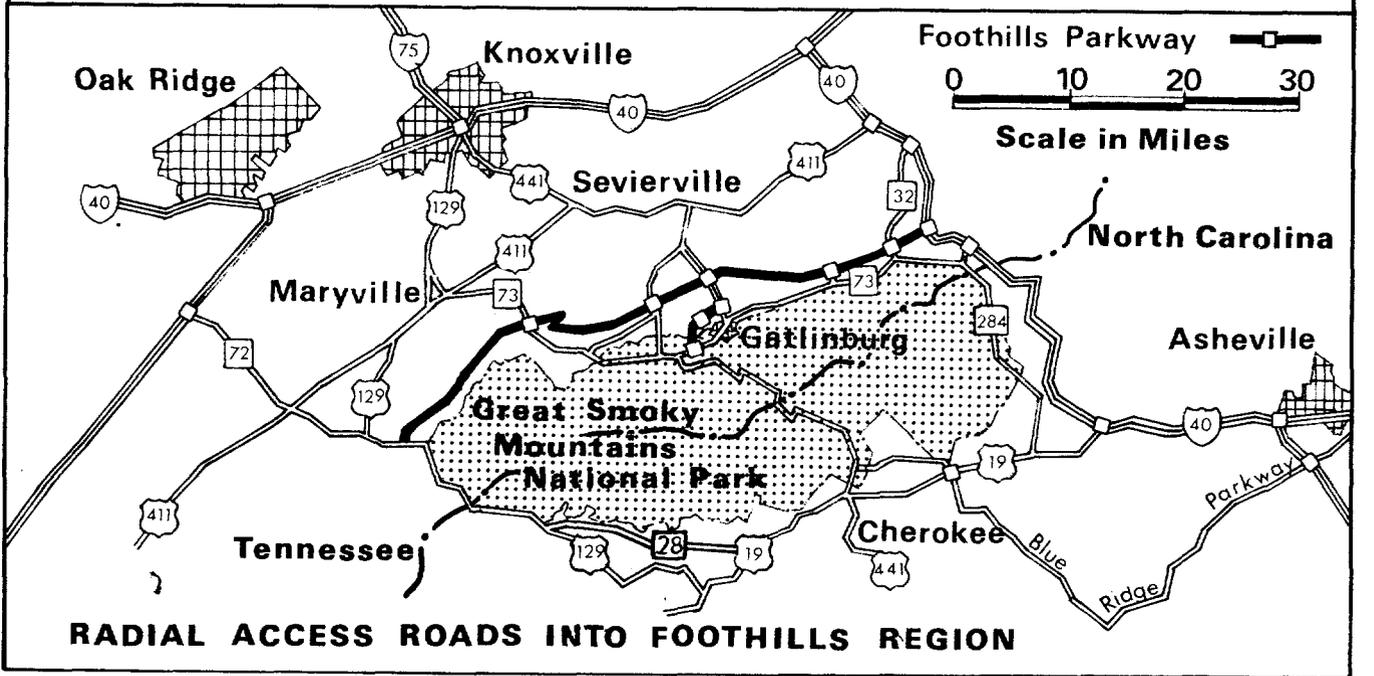
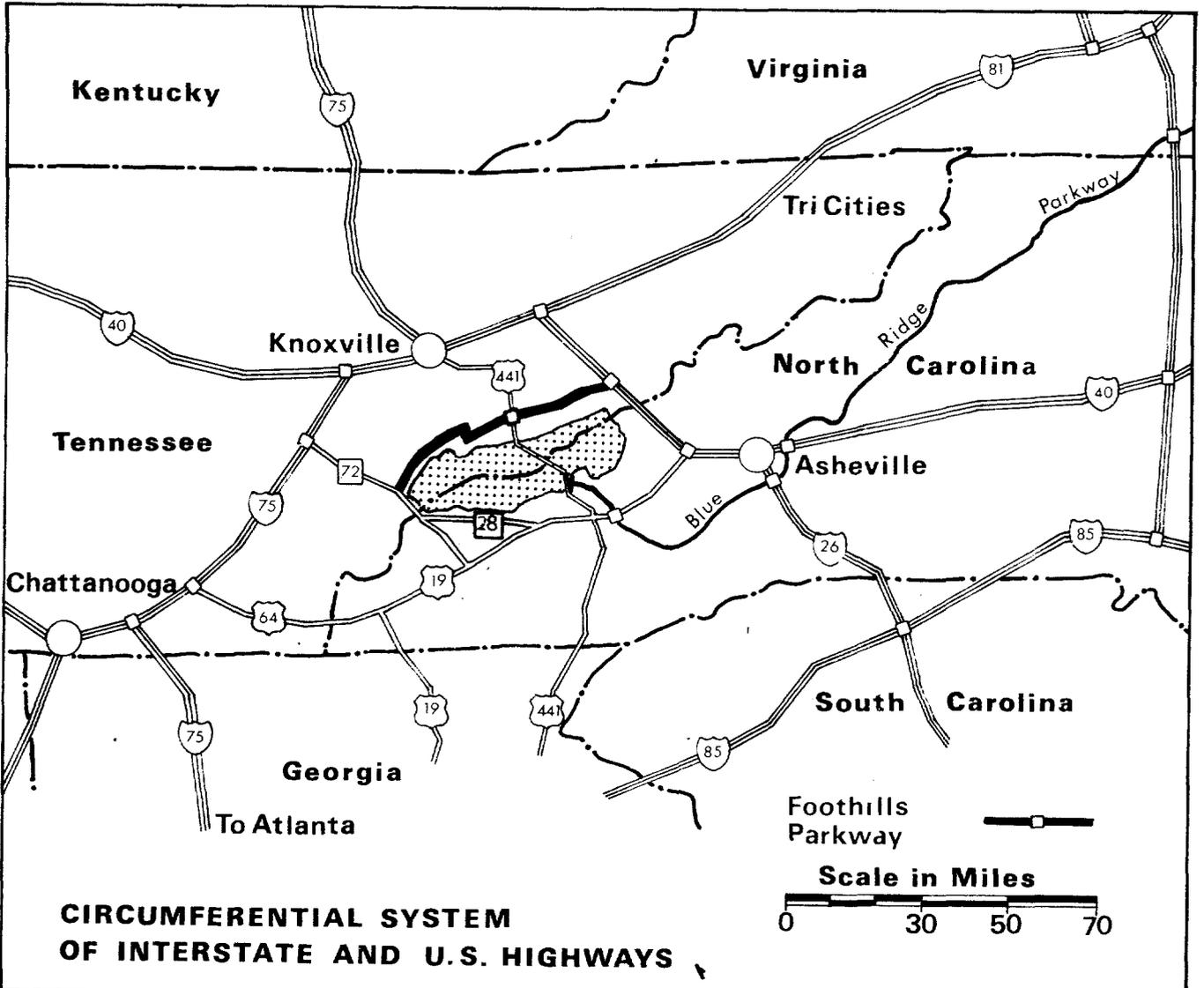
Mountainous - Not suited for development

Commercial

Single Family Residences

Mountain Home Developments

Agricultural and Single Family Residences



ACCESS AND CIRCULATION

Access to the fringes of the foothills is probably as good as to any major city. New Interstate 40 forms the northeast border of the Foothills Parkway vicinity and provides direct access. Upon completion of Interstates 40 and 75 through Knoxville, there will be no part of the parkway more than 20 miles distant from a limited access highway.

Tennessee routes 72, 73, and 32 and U.S. routes 129 and 441 provide radial access into the foothills from the circumferential Interstate and U.S. highway systems. These access routes have existed for many years and have channeled traffic from all points to converge on two park roads (Little River Road and Newfound Gap Road). Additionally, the Blue Ridge Parkway with auto sightseers from North Carolina, Virginia and other points in the Northeast terminates on the Newfound Gap Road on the North Carolina side of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Traffic congestion on the park roads has reached catastrophic proportions on weekends during the travel season.

Existing park access roads are in valley locations which provide few, if any, long-range panoramic views. Also, motorists must pass through heavy concentrations of development, thereby adding to existing congestion. Gatlinburg is a prime example of this congestion. The New Entrance Road (Gatlinburg Bypass) was built through the

foothills north of Gatlinburg so that through traffic could avoid the town's congested streets. But to find connections from one radial access route to another, travelers usually have to detour several miles over substandard county routes, following deep valleys, that generally do not provide a pleasant driving experience. The Chilhowee portions of Foothills Parkway provides the first opportunity for automobile sightseers to escape the valley and view the Smokies without the annoyance of congested stop-and-go traffic.

The vast majority of visitors to the Foothills, arrive by private automobile, first using the Interstate Highway System to approach the region and then traveling over Federal and State primary systems into the Foothills vicinity.

East Tennessee is also well-served by transcontinental buses and several scheduled airlines use the McGee-Tyson (Knoxville) airport near Maryville. Small airstrips throughout the vicinity serve private aircraft.

VISITOR USE

The Interstate Highway System has improved automobile access to such a degree in the Eastern United States that automobile travelers are no longer restrained by former physical barriers. Population centers which in the past contributed lightly to a recreation area suddenly have become prime contributors. Consequently, the Foothills Parkway will probably have a more diversified state-of-origin pattern than present travel into Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In the Cosby area today sections of I-81, I-75, and I-40 carry increasing traffic from the Tri-Cities area. I-40, opened to traffic across the Appalachians from Asheville is expected to bring a rapidly increasing number of visitors from the coastal states. Asheville will be less than an hour's driving time from Cosby and, like Knoxville, will be a heavy contributor to parkway travel and use.

The potency of a better national highway system is shown by comparing the 1947 and 1963 origin of visitors statistics in Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Origin of Visitors to Great Smoky Mountains National Park

<u>State</u>	<u>1947</u>	<u>1963</u>
Tennessee	39.3%	22.0%
North Carolina	16.5%	3.4%
From other points	44.2%	74.6%

It is anticipated that future parkway visitor use patterns will resemble those of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, where an

estimated three-fourths of park visitors are primarily automobile sightseeing participants. Facilities within the foothills will generate traffic from other than adjacent population centers and there is no accurate way to gauge the latent demand until parkway facilities are provided. Much of the anticipated increase in visitor use will come from people who avoided the area in the past because of traffic congestion. The scenic roads within the Cherokee National Forest, and TVA's Tellico Dam project south of the parkway will be additional attractions to parkway users from the large urban centers in the east.



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