

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Wears Valley Mountain Bike Trail System

Public Scoping | Summer 2020

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



You are Invited to Participate

The National Park Service (NPS) is seeking public input on a proposed mountain bike trail system in the Foothills Parkways Section 8D corridor in Wears Valley, Tennessee. At this time, Great Smoky Mountains National Park (the Park) is initiating a 30-day public scoping period in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

As part of the comment period, NPS would like to solicit input on the proposed action, preliminary range of alternatives and elements, and potential natural and cultural resource impacts. NPS will also host two virtual meetings. You are invited to attend these meetings to learn more and ask NPS representatives any questions you may have. For additional information on the planning projects, the virtual meetings, and how to provide comments please visit <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/WearsValleyBikeTrails>.

PUBLIC MEETINGS DATES AND LOCATIONS



TUESDAY, JULY 28, 2020

Virtual Open House

5:00 – 7:00 pm



THURSDAY, JULY 30, 2020

Virtual Open House

5:00 – 7:00 pm





Background

Great Smoky Mountains National Park was created through donations of land early in the 20th century “for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.” The 800 square mile Park lies on the Tennessee- North Carolina border and is within a day’s drive of 50% of the U.S. population. Given its diverse vegetation, wildlife concentration and cultural significance, the Park has steadily grown in popularity and annual visitation.

In response to the traffic congestion in the early 1940’s, citizens of the middle eastern area of Tennessee petitioned the NPS and Congress to build a new roadway (Foothills Parkway). It was envisioned that this parkway would be located outside the main range of mountains and generally on the slopes of small secondary ridges in Tennessee to relieve the traffic pressure on the Park. On February 22, 1944, the 78th Congress approved Public Law 232 which “...authorized the acceptance of donations of land for the construction of a scenic parkway to provide an appropriate view of the Park from the Tennessee side of the park, and for other purposes...”

While portions of the road were constructed and opened for public use in the 1960s, the entire length of the Foothills Parkway has been acquired but not fully developed. One section that has not been developed is Section 8D, the corridor from Wears Valley to U.S. Highway 321, also known as the Gatlinburg Spur.



Purpose

The purpose of the proposed project is to enhance the visitor experience by providing a mountain bike trail system within the transportation corridor of the Foothills Parkway Section 8D.

Need

The proposed project is needed because recreational access and opportunities are currently limited along unfinished sections of the Foothills Parkway, including Section 8D. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park General Management Plan (1982) and the original Foothills Parkway Master Plan (1968), envisioned some form for recreational development in the Wears Valley area, but none currently exist. Community interest in exploring possible recreational opportunities along undeveloped sections of the Foothills Parkway has increased in recent years. In 2019, The Conservation Fund engaged NPS and community stakeholders to identify specific recreational opportunities that would not conflict with future completion of the Foothills Parkway as envisioned by Congress. This process identified mountain biking as a potentially compatible opportunity, with strong community interest in establishing a network of trails specifically designed for mountain bike use. Recommendations included further analysis of opportunities to develop a mountain bike trail system in the Wears Valley portion of Section 8D of the Foothills Parkway. While more than 800 miles of trails exist in the Park, less than 8 miles are open to biking and there are no by-design mountain biking trails. Most of the Park’s trails are in areas managed as wilderness where bikes are not permitted. The Foothills Parkway corridor, which is within the Park’s transportation management zone and is not managed as wilderness, could provide visitors new opportunities to experience the Park through mountain biking.



MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAIL DESIGN

How Do Mountain Bike Trails Differ from Hiking or Equestrian Trails?

By-design mountain bike-optimized trails differ from hiking or equestrian trails. A mountain bike-specific trail offers riders a different experience of riding a narrow roller-coaster with a rhythm of twists and turns without worry of conflicts with other types of trail users. This separated use strategy has proven to be effective in reducing user conflicts in high-use sites.

All design alternatives would include sustainable trail development features which reduce impacts related to stormwater and erosion. Surface runoff is allowed to quickly exit the trail system, minimizing potential for soil erosion. This sustainable “rolling contour” design approach is both environmentally and economically responsible, taking into account long term maintenance.

During mountain bike trail design, bike-optimized features are developed specifically to enhance the rider experience, offering users a progressive range of technical challenge, engaging riders of varying abilities. These could be natural features, enhanced natural features, and/or constructed features.

Berms, dips, and rollers help to drain surface water from the trail. These characteristics take advantage of the motion and momentum of a bike while blending harmoniously with the natural land character and site topography.

Areas requiring short lengths of steeper grades are typically hardened to resist erosion, also called armoring, while offering additional technical challenge.

Anchor features can include objects used to define the sides of the trail to reduce the potential for trail widening, control speed, and prevent shortcutting or off-trail use.





Preliminary Alternatives

The National Park Service has identified three preliminary alternatives for the mountain bike trail system. All three preliminary alternatives are designed with a “stacked loops” strategy which provides numerous ride options and includes shorter loops within greater loops. The proposed alternatives accommodate riders of all ability levels and would be desirable to a wide range of users. The easiest trail routes begin at the trailhead, with opportunities for shorter or longer loops. The mountain bike trail system could be operated and maintained by NPS, partner organizations, or through a concessionaire.

Elements common to all preliminary alternatives include:

- » 2 parking lots with 50 to 80 stalls
- » 1-mile access road in the footprint of the Section 8D road corridor
- » comfort station (rest rooms)
- » information and interpretive kiosk
- » water filling station
- » bike repair and bike wash station
- » shade and/or picnic shelters
- » possible retail or concession space

□ Preliminary Alternative 1

Preliminary Alternative 1 provides directional trails throughout the project area. The mountain bike trail system would include 3.5 miles of easy trail (green, less than 5% slope), 5.8 miles of moderate trail (blue, 5 to 10% slope), and 3.6 miles of advanced trail (black, 10 to 15% slope) for a total of 12.9 miles of mountain bike trails. This alternative would not include a separate trail for hikers within the project area.

□ Preliminary Alternative 2

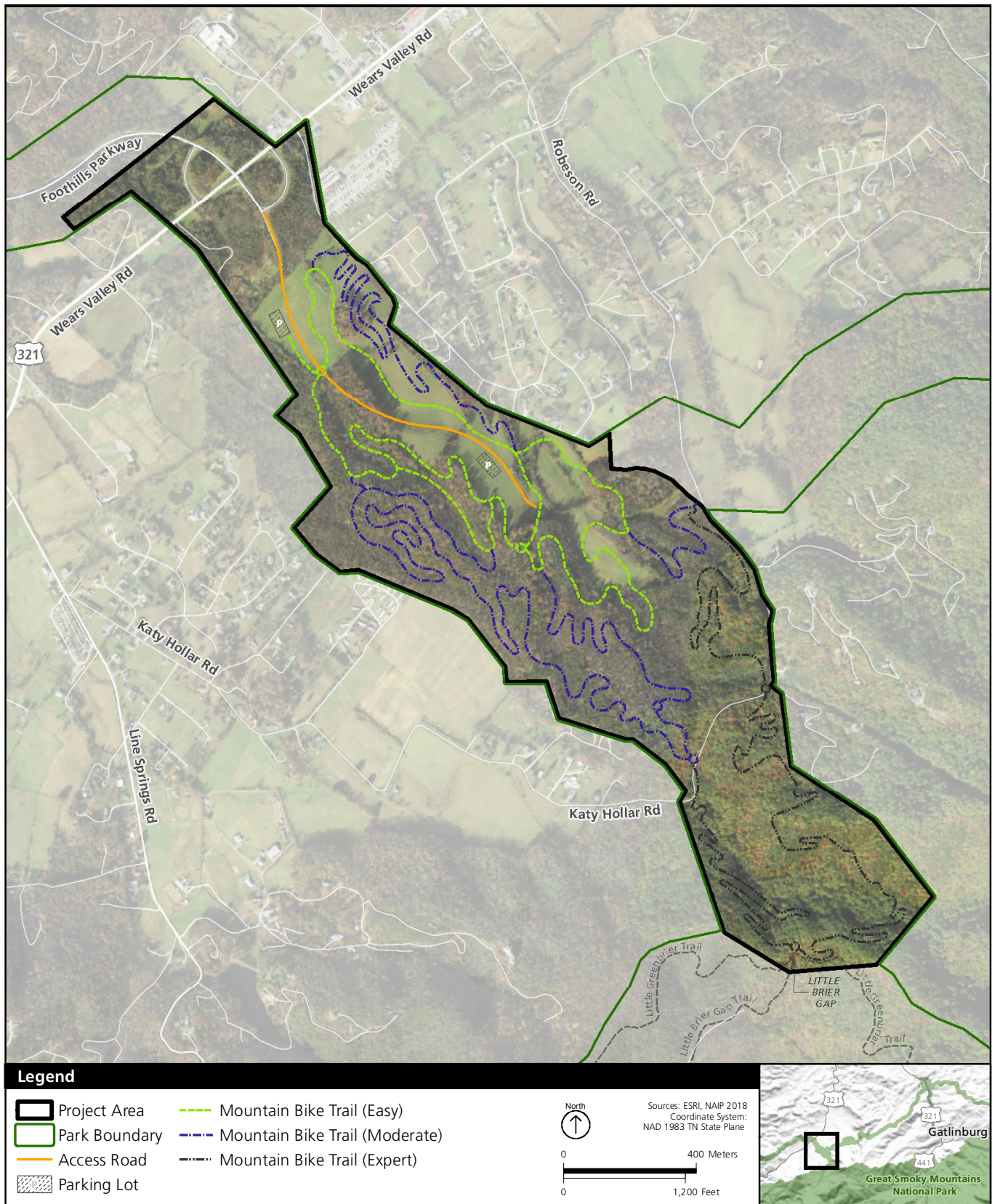
Preliminary Alternative 2 includes additional easy trails and buffers to further separate users from the proposed Foothills Parkway Section 8D. The mountain bike trail system would include 4.3 miles of easy trail (green, <less than 5% slope), 4.5 miles of moderate trail (blue, 5 to 10% slope), and 3.6 miles of advanced trail (black, 10 to 15% slope) for a total of 12.4 miles of mountain bike trails. Preliminary Alternative 2 includes a separate 2.5 miles of hiking/bird watching trails with minimal crossings for reduced user conflicts.

□ Preliminary Alternative 3

Preliminary Alternatives 3 reduces the miles of advanced trails and the mountain bike trail system would not extend across Katy Hollar Road to minimize the footprint and impacts on the steepest terrain. The mountain bike trail system would include 3.0 miles of easy trail (green, <less than 5% slope), 4.9 miles of moderate trail (blue, 5 to 10% slope), and 2.1 miles of advanced trail (black, 10 to 15% slope) for a total of 10.0 miles of mountain bike trails. Preliminary Alternative 3 includes 3.4 miles of hiking and birdwatching trails.

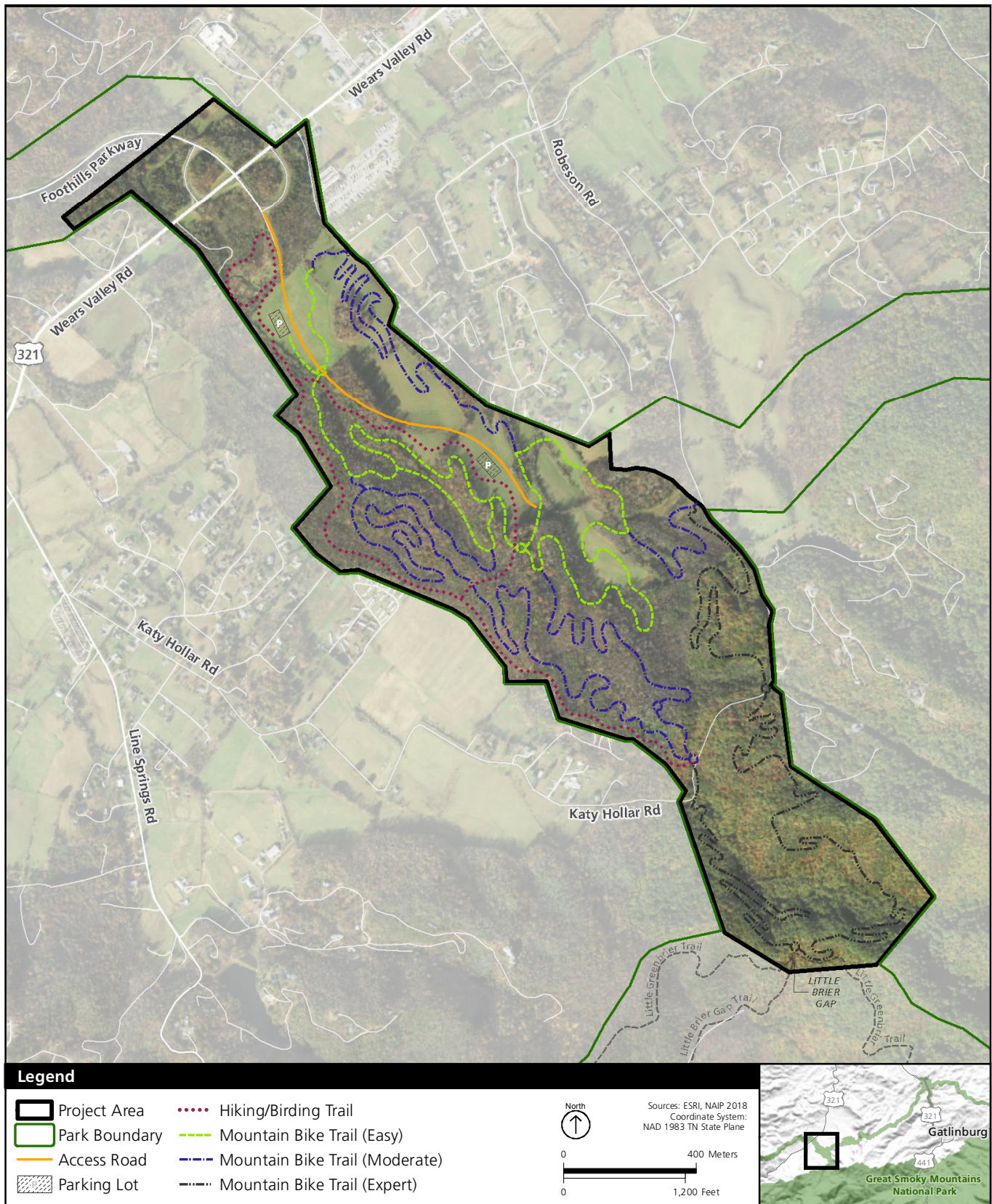


Preliminary Alternative 1



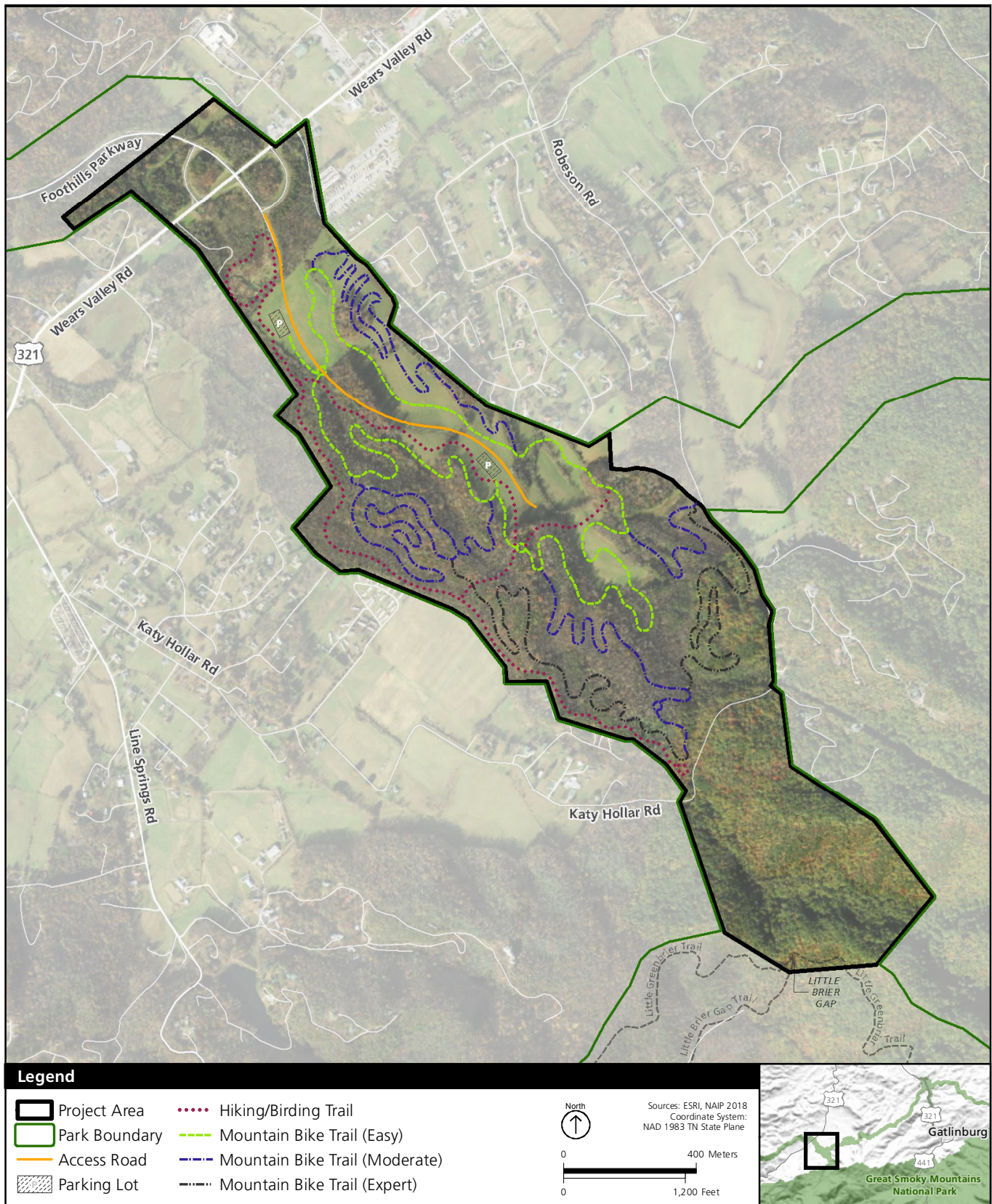


Preliminary Alternative 2





Preliminary Alternative 3





YOUR PARTICIPATION WILL HELP SHAPE THIS ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (EA)

HOW TO COMMENT

Between July 20 and August 19 there are a variety of ways you can comment:



Submit electronically (preferred method):
<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/WearsValleyBikeTrails>



Mail: Great Smoky Mountains National Park – Transportation and Recreation
Planning Projects, 107 Park Headquarters Road, Gatlinburg, TN 37738



Attend a virtual public meeting (see page 1)

SCHEDULE

JULY 20 – AUGUST 19, 2020	Public Scoping Period
AUGUST – OCTOBER 2020	Finalize Alternatives and Complete EA Analysis
NOVEMBER 2020	Release EA for Public Review and Comment
DECEMBER 2020	Respond to Substantive Public Comments and Select Alternative for Implementation

Please submit all comments before
Wednesday, August 19, 2020