



You are Invited to Participate

The National Park Service (NPS) is seeking public feedback for multiple transportation and recreation planning efforts that will address visitor access, safety, transportation, and recreation in the Sevier County portion of Great Smoky Mountains National Park (the Park).

The four planning projects are:

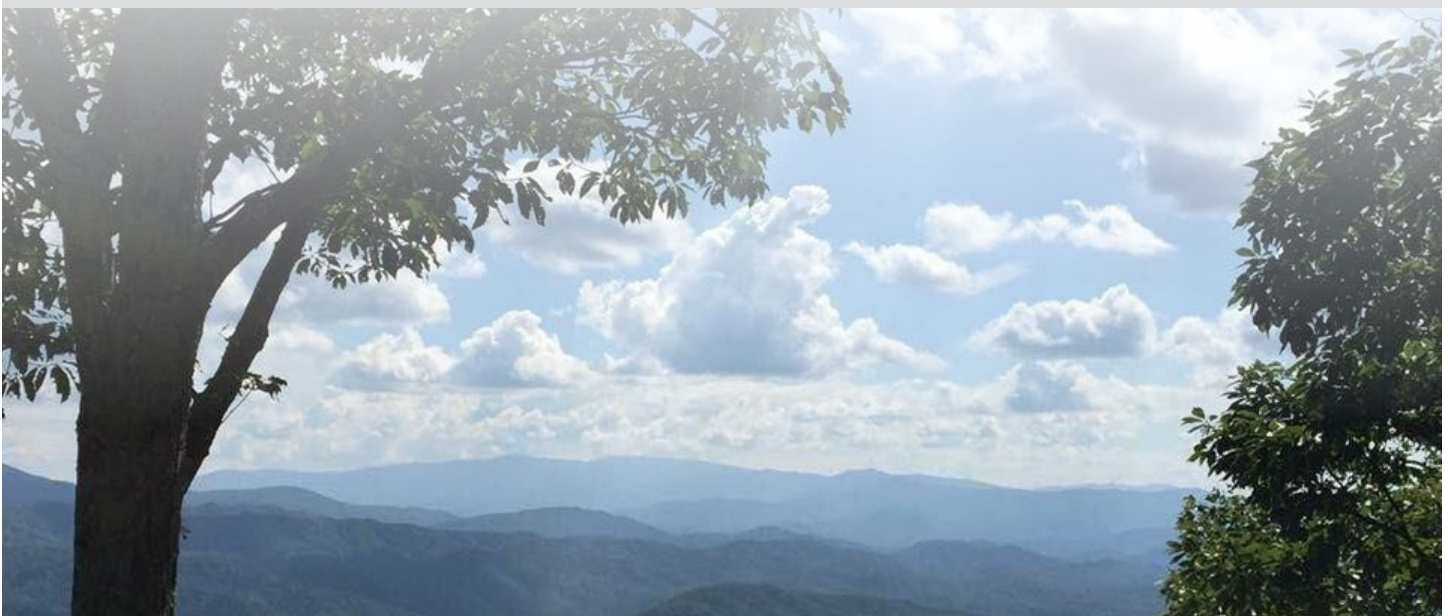
- Wears Valley Mountain Bike Trail Network Feasibility Study
- Metcalf Bottoms Access Improvements Feasibility Study
- Gatlinburg-Pigeon Forge Spur Safety Improvements Planning
- Gatlinburg-Pigeon Forge Spur Greenway Feasibility Study

As part of this process, we are reaching out to gather input by initiating a comment period. You are encouraged to share your observations, concerns, and ideas about the information presented in this newsletter to help us focus the planning efforts. The information obtained during this civic engagement period will be used to refine the concepts and alternatives under consideration, identify issues, and ensure the NPS has the information needed to move forward in the process.

After considering input received during this initial civic engagement period, the Park will develop a range of concepts and preliminary alternatives for each individual project and determine if it is appropriate to move forward with the formal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and other environmental compliance processes. The NEPA and NHPA processes for each project would include more opportunities for public involvement, including a public scoping period held at the beginning of the NEPA process and a public comment period held for the NEPA document prepared by the Park. Additional information for each planning project is provided in this newsletter.

Civic Engagement Opportunities

The Park will be utilizing newsletters and the Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website to share project information and request public feedback. The Park has modified plans for in-person meetings due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional opportunities to learn about planning efforts, discuss thoughts, and ask questions will be developed in the future through in-person meetings, as appropriate, or virtual meetings online as the situation allows.

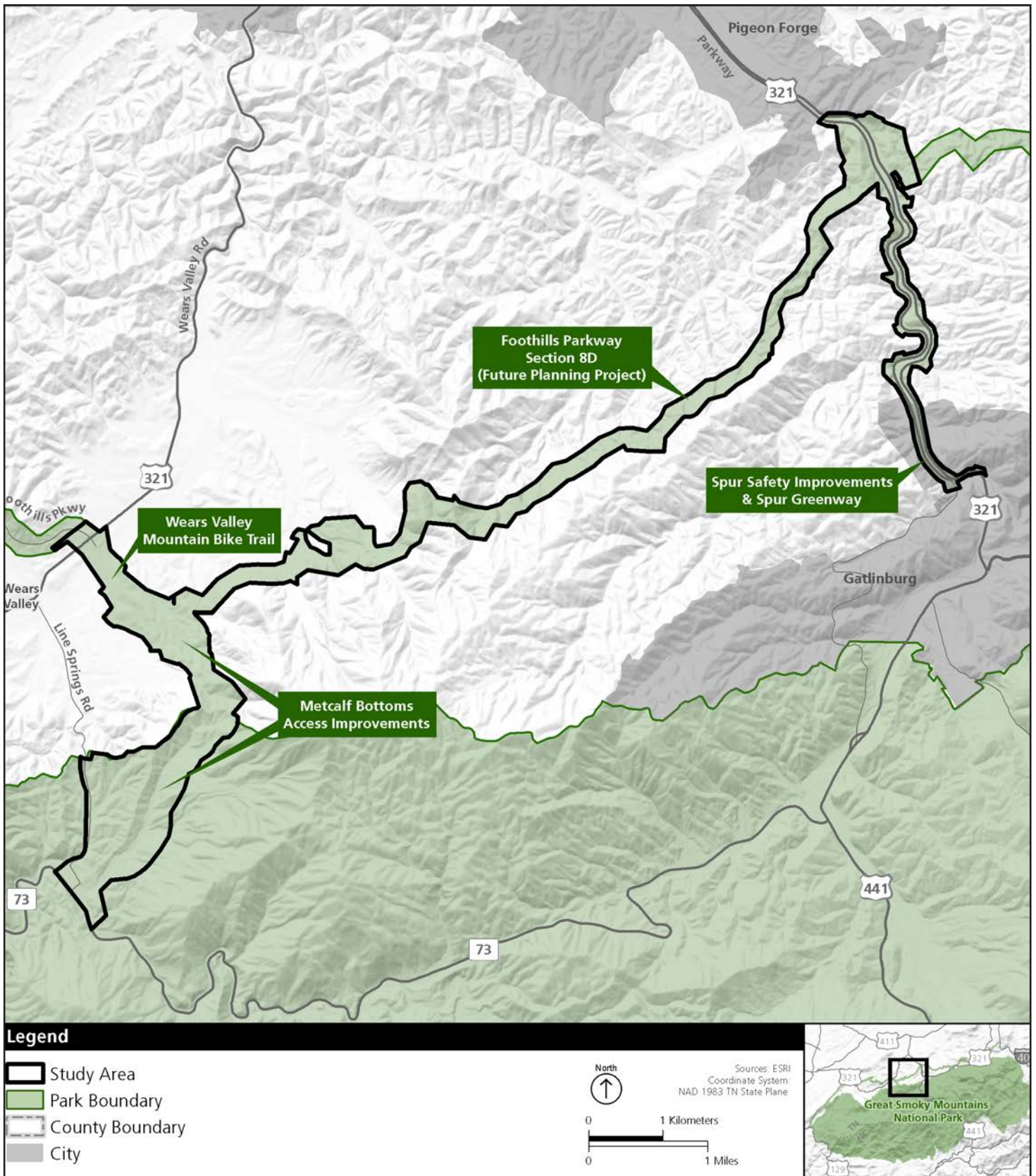


Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Transportation and Recreation Planning

Overall Study Area

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Planning Projects 1 & 2

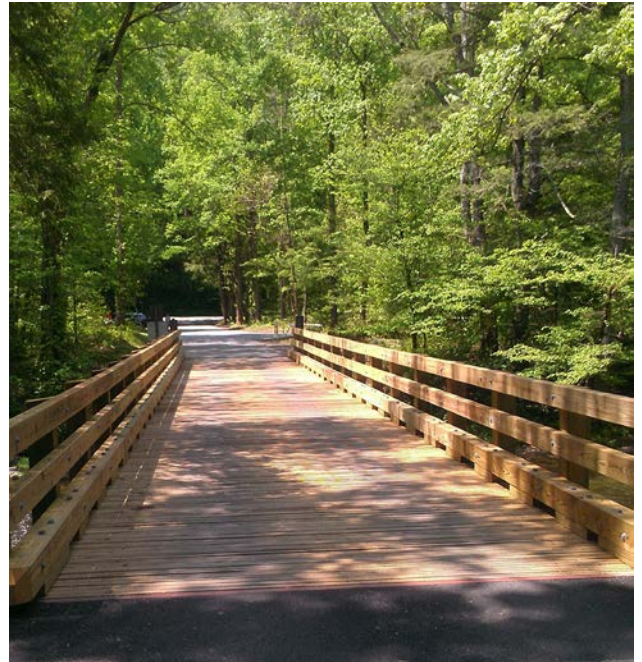
Wears Valley Mountain Bike Trail Network and Metcalf Bottoms Access Improvements Feasibility Study

The Park is initiating two separate planning efforts in the vicinity of Wears Valley and the Metcalf Bottoms Picnic Area. While these are separate projects, the Park is initially looking at the feasibility of both efforts together based on their proximity.

The Park will evaluate options for improving traffic flow from the planned Foothills Parkway Section 8D in Wears Valley to Little River Gorge Road in Metcalf Bottoms. The Metcalf Bottoms area is currently accessible from U.S. 321 in Wears Valley via Line Springs Road/Wear Cove Gap Road. This narrow two-lane paved road was not designed to serve as a primary entrance to the Park or to support current levels of visitor and local traffic. Use of this route as an entrance has resulted in increased traffic through the Metcalf Bottoms Picnic Area and safety incidents caused from large recreational vehicles attempting to navigate the one-lane bridge over the Little River. A range of alternatives will be analyzed during the planning process to address the deficiencies on Wear Cove Gap Road and to explore opportunities to improve the visitor experience and alleviate safety issues with oversized vehicles. A preliminary range of alternatives that could be considered during the planning process include:

- Close Wear Cove Gap Road at the Park boundary and Metcalf Bottoms Picnic Area to prevent its use as an alternative entrance to the Park or as a commuter route.
- Convert Wear Cove Gap Road to a one-way, exit-only road.
- Improve Wear Cove Gap Road within its general existing alignment and include possible options such as a turnaround for oversized vehicles that cannot navigate the one-lane bridge over Little River, replacing the existing bridge with a two-lane bridge, and widening the road.
- Construct a new connector road from the planned Foothills Parkway Section 8D in Wears Valley to Little River Gorge Road in Metcalf Bottoms as envisioned in the original Foothills Parkway Master Plan. Possible options include various road alignments, two-lane entrance and exit road, and one-lane entrance-only or exit-only road.

In addition to the potential access improvements, the Park is analyzing options to enhance the visitor experience with development of a mountain bike trail network along the Foothills Parkway Section 8D corridor.



Existing vehicular and pedestrian bridge over the Little River at the Metcalf Bottoms Picnic Area

Why is the Park Considering Mountain Bike Trails?

- Provide visitors additional opportunities to enjoy the scenic beauty of the Foothills Parkway corridor outside of their vehicle.
- Bike trails would be compatible with possible future Foothills Parkway construction.
- With more than 800 miles of trails throughout the park, less than 8 miles are currently open to biking.
- Most of the Park's trails are in areas managed as wilderness where bikes are not permitted.
- The Foothills Parkway corridor is within the Park's transportation management zone, which is not managed as wilderness.
- Community interest in establishing a network of trails specifically designed for mountain biking use.

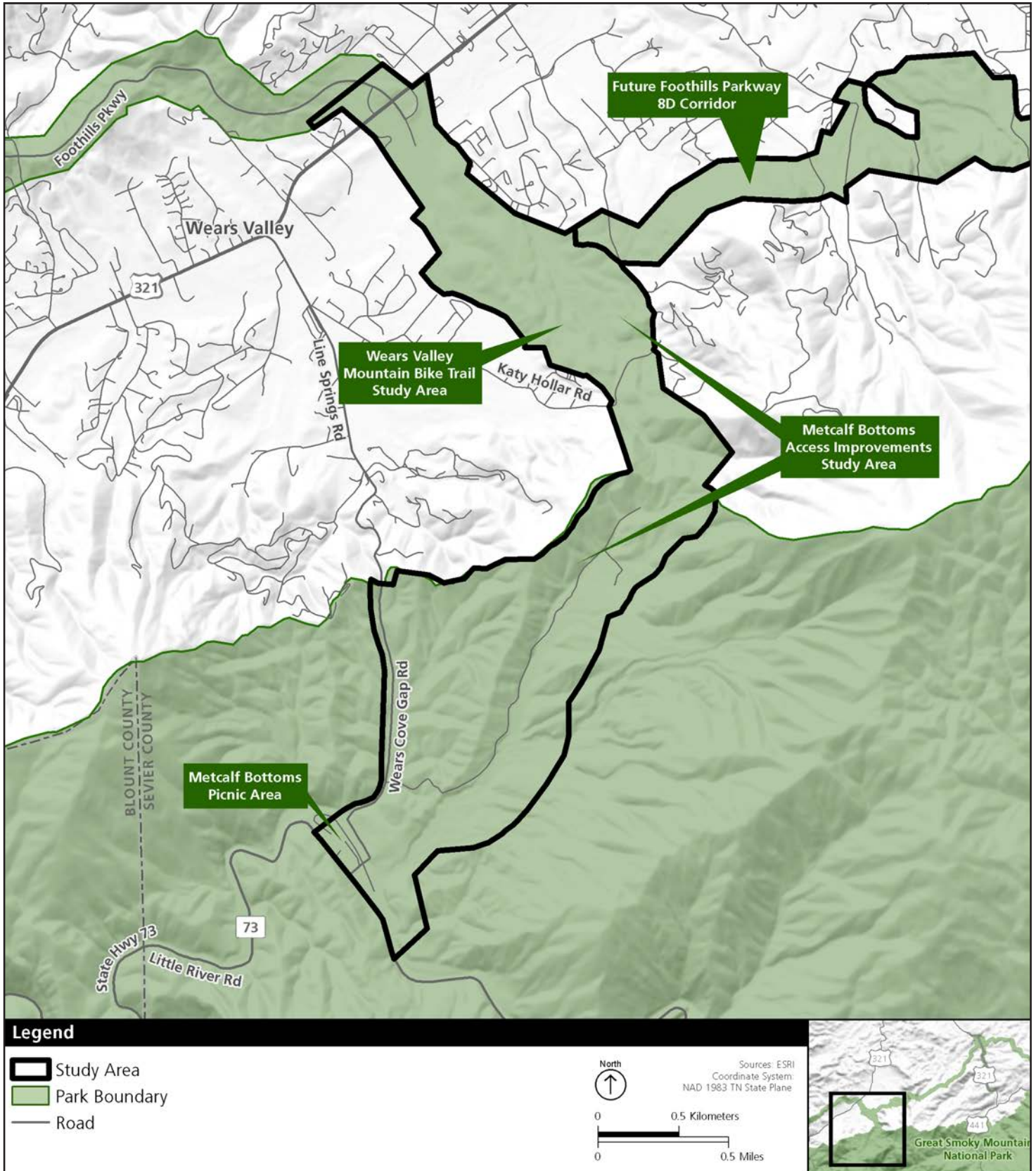
Schedule

The Park is beginning a feasibility study to determine the potential options that may exist to implement these two projects. After considering public comments and completing natural and cultural surveys, the feasibility study will provide the Park with a preliminary range of alternatives for analysis. If feasible, the NPS would then begin the NEPA process later in 2020, which would include a public scoping period to solicit additional public feedback, this time on specific alternatives identified through the feasibility study.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Metcalfe Bottoms/Wears Valley Study Area

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Gatlinburg-Pigeon Forge Spur Safety Improvements

The portion of U.S. 441/321 known as the Gatlinburg-Pigeon Forge Spur (Spur) is managed by the Park and connects the cities of Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg, Tennessee. The Spur is a divided, four-lane roadway. The West Prong of the Little Pigeon River flows in between the north- and southbound lanes. Multiple bridges connect the divided roadway. The Spur experiences a substantial increase in traffic volumes during the area's peak visitation seasons. The corridor also experiences a peak in daily traffic, due to commuter travel patterns.

A traffic study for the Spur completed in July 2019 indicates a need to address existing safety issues, manage traffic congestion conditions, and begin planning future improvements. The traffic study team worked with Park staff to develop road improvement concepts

to address existing and anticipated future safety and operational deficiencies. Using this traffic study, Park staff have identified four main areas along the Spur where roadway improvements should be considered: the southbound Spur/northbound Bypass Intersection, Wiley Oakley Drive Crossover Bridge, Huskey Grove Road on-ramps, and Gum Stand Crossover Bridge. Improvement concepts under current consideration for this project include the following:



Gatlinburg-Pigeon Forge Spur and West Prong of the Little Pigeon River

Intersection-specific improvement concepts could include:

- Modify circulation patterns and expand merge lanes at existing bridges and intersections to provide traffic relief during peak traffic hours
- Flyover (a high-level overpass across the Spur) or additional bridge construction

Corridor-wide concepts could include:

- Adjustments to alignments of roadway
- Shoulder widening
- Curb and gutter treatments to improve drainage
- Rockfall mitigation
- Intelligent Transportation Systems to potentially improve visitor expectations and safety with traffic cameras, variable message boards, speed monitoring signs, ice detection, and other roadway system technologies
- Wildlife crossings, signage, or other methods to decrease wildlife collisions

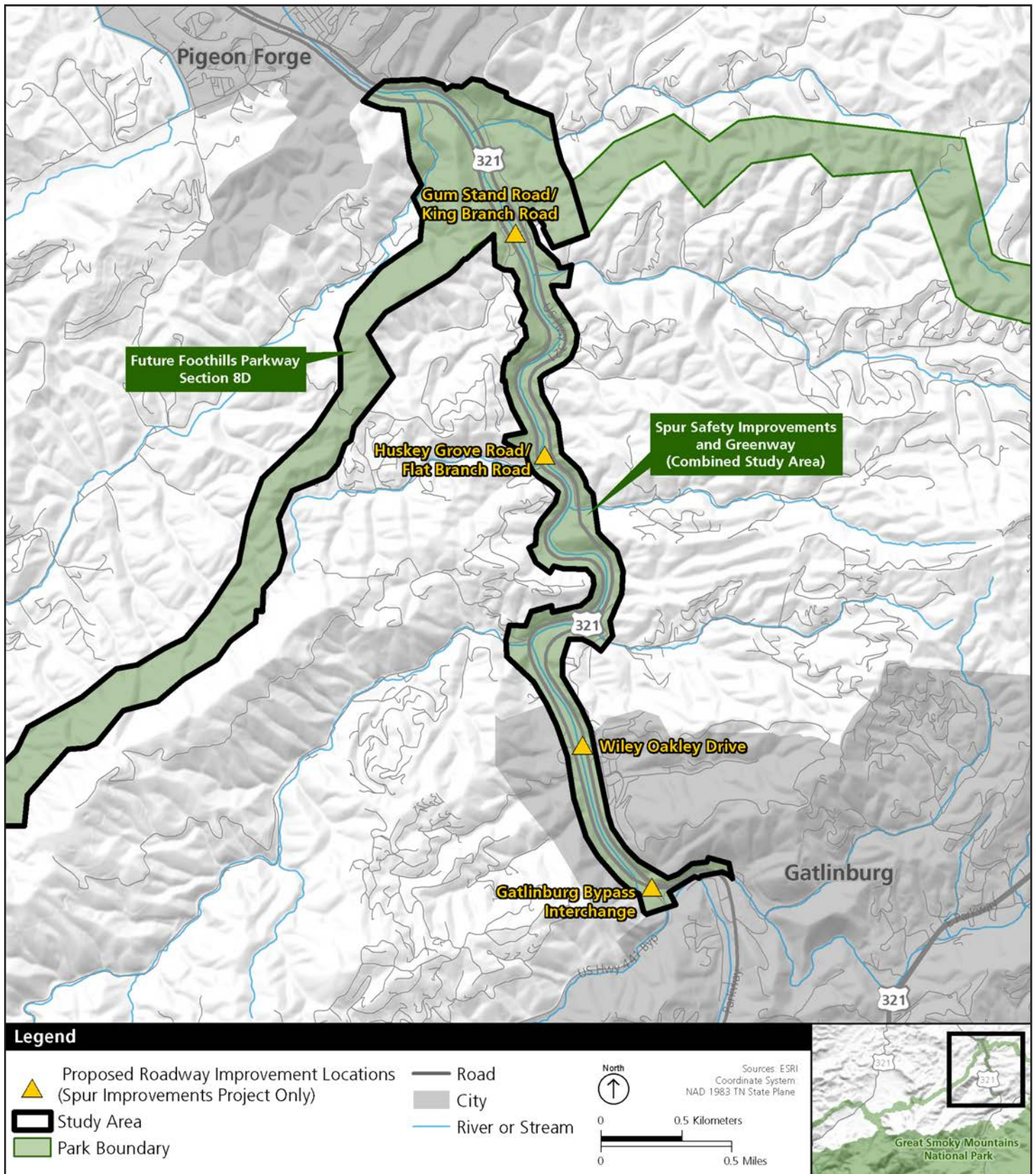
Schedule

Using the initial recommendations from the traffic study, the park is soliciting public feedback before developing a full range of alternatives for each proposed improvement. During 2020, the Park will complete natural and cultural resource surveys that will inform the range of alternatives. After considering public input and resource survey findings, NPS anticipates the NEPA process could begin in 2021, which would include a public scoping period to solicit public feedback on a range of alternatives identified through this feasibility study.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Spur & Greenway Study Area

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Gatlinburg-Pigeon Forge Spur Greenway

In the same study area as the Spur Safety Improvements, the Spur Greenway project will explore the feasibility of a multi-use (pedestrian and bicycle) trail between Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge to connect with existing and future greenways within these gateway communities. The project aims to encourage visitors to be active and enjoy the park outside of their vehicles.



Study area for the Gatlinburg-Pigeon Forge Spur Greenway along the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River (both photos)

Schedule

Similar to the Metcalf Bottoms Access Improvements and Wears Valley Mountain Bike Trail, this project is beginning a feasibility study to determine if development of a greenway is possible within this corridor. Once the feasibility study is completed, the Park may proceed with NEPA compliance on the same timeframe as the Spur Safety Improvements project.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Please provide your comments before May 22

- Submit electronically (*preferred*):
<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/GRSM>

- Mail:

Transportation & Recreation Planning Projects
Great Smoky Mountains National Park
107 Park Headquarters Road
Gatlinburg, TN 37738

Questions to Consider When Providing Input

- What options should be considered to address deficiencies of Wear Cove Gap Road?
- Would visitors and residents benefit from a new connector road into Metcalf Bottoms?
- Is mountain biking an appropriate use for the Foothills Parkway corridor in Wears Valley?
- What type of mountain biking experience would you prefer?
- What type of visitor amenities should be provided in a mountain biking area?
- If mountain biking trails were constructed with parking and restrooms, would you be willing to use them regardless of whether they were operated by the Park or by a concessioner?
- Should the number of users be controlled or managed to ensure mountain biking trails do not become overcrowded?
- How could safety be improved on the Spur?
- Should one or more flyover bridges be considered along the Spur if identified as the best manner to address safety and congestion at side road intersections?
- Would a Spur Greenway provide you with an enjoyable visitor experience?

