ARABIA MOUNTAIN HERITAGE AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN

MARCH 1, 2006

INTRODUCTION

As metro Atlanta's population continues to soar, its citizens need cherished places for recreation and for connecting with nature and history. The Arabia Mountain Heritage Area, a marvelous 40,000-acre collection of awe-inspiring natural wonders and historic treasures, is one such place. It can serve as the heart and lungs of this rapidly developing part of the country, especially DeKalb, Rockdale and Henry counties where the Heritage Area is located. A comprehensive Plan for a connected, well-managed Arabia Mountain Heritage Area will set the stage to create a popular destination for millions of people.

This Plan articulates a thoughtful framework with specific recommendations to connect and enhance the Heritage Area's rich offerings. The Plan is a result of extensive public input from citizens, governments and other stakeholders who are deeply committed to preserving and promoting the Heritage Area's special character. The Plan can serve as a model of public and private partnerships working together to implement "smart growth" policies that protect and connect the Heritage Area for future generations.

Though other National Heritage Areas around the country showcase places that are also rich in history, with mountains even higher or rivers even grander, there may be no other Heritage Area where so many stunning natural, cultural and historic legacies are concentrated so close together and so close to a major U.S. city.

Establishing a vision and road map for managing these diverse resources well is the purpose, and the challenge, of this Plan.

We invite you to become familiar with the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Management Plan and get involved in making it a reality.

Highlights of The Plan

The Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Management Plan ('the Plan') presents a comprehensive strategy for future management and protection of the Heritage Area's diverse historic sites, unusual natural habitats and cultural resources.

Developed with extensive public involvement, the Plan seeks to preserve the Heritage Area's assets, link key sites together and promote educational and tourism opportunities.
Its overarching vision is to protect, connect and educate through five specific means:
1. cultural preservation
2. natural conservation
3. interpretation and education
4. recreation
5. economic development

Five cultural Focus Areas have been identified. Each Focus Area is introduced to visitors at a Gateway, or place of entry with significance for showcasing the themes highlighted in each Focus Area. A special building and/ or place will serve as the Welcome Facility at each Gateway.

In addition, five Themed Routes will connect the Gateways and reinforce the messages of every Focus Area by providing designated routes to travel by foot, bicycle, car, shuttle bus, canoe or on horse back.

Focus Areas	Gateways	Welcome Facilities
Culture and Community	*Vaughters' Farm*	*Original home at Vaughters' Farm*
Natural Systems	*Panola Mountain State Park*	*Georgia State Park Education and Demonstration Center at Panola*
Early Settlement	*South River and Flat Rock Community*	*Lyon's Farm and homestead/ Flat Rock Cemetary*
Granite Industry and Technology	*City of Lithonia*	*Historic Lithonia Woman's Club building*
Spiritual Landscape	*Monastery of the Holy Spirit*	*Susong homestead at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit*

Five Themed Routes

Land of Rocks and Rivers
The backbone of the Route System and connecting all Gateways

Stone Cutters
featuring downtown Lithonia, historic quarries and cemeteries and former Arabia Mountain quarries

Early Settlers
featuring Native-American archeological sites, Klondike settlement, Lyon's Farm, Ragsdale home and Parker house and African-American communities such as Flat Rock

Ecosystem Excursion
featuring Arabia and Panola Mountains and other rock outcrops, South River and related tributaries

Spiritual Experience
featuring the Monastery of the Holy Spirit, Arabia and Panola Mountains and historic churches and cemeteries

Implementation

To meet the Plan's goals, it is recommended that all stakeholders officially endorse the Plan and consider the following action steps as first priorities.

1. Create a new management entity, building on the success of the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance
2. Create an identity system and marketing plan
3. Designate and mark the Gateways and venues
4. Create the Welcome Facilities
5. Designate and mark the Themed Routes

The Partners

The Plan is produced by the Arabia Alliance with the participation of its stakeholders working closely with its many partners including

DeKalb County
DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Department
Rockdale County
Rockdale County Parks and Recreation Department
Henry County

State of Georgia
Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Georgia Department of Transportation
City of Lithonia
National Park Service - Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program
Monastery of the Holy Spirit
PATH Foundation
The Conservation Fund
The Nature Conservancy
The Trust for Public Land
DeKalb County Board of Education
DeKalb County Visitors Bureau
DeKalb County Historical Society
Klondike Area Civic Association
South Rockdale Civic Association
Evans Mill / Salem Road Coalition
Chaparell Neighborhood
Mall at Stonecrest
Flat Rock Archive
Lithonia Woman's Club
Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation
Georgia Tech Research Corporation

The Funders

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Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance and private donors

The Plan was recently honored with two statewide awards:
Outstanding Planning Project award for 2005 from the Georgia Planning Association presented to the Arabia Alliance

Honor Award for Planning and Analysis for 2005 from the Georgia Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects

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Snapshot of Arabia Mountain Heritage Area (2006)

Location: 20 miles east of downtown Atlanta in three counties -- DeKalb, Rockdale and Henry

Size: 64 square miles and 40,000 acres

Significant tracts:

Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve -	535 acres
Panola Mountain State Park -	1,026 acres
Vaughters' Farm -	140 acres
Monastery of the Holy Spirit -	2,000+acres

Walking and biking trails created by the PATH Foundation:
eight miles complete wth 16 additional miles under construction and planned

Acres of protected greenspace and parkland: 4052 acres as of March 2006
(3500 acres projected for the future)

Population: approximately 912,100 in three counties as of 2004

DeKalb County:	675,725 which represents a 28% boom since 1990
Henry County:	159,506
Rockdale County:	76,821
City of Lithonia:	3,400

Number of special concern, rare, threatened and endangered plant species: approximately 43, with approximately 110 species of trees and plants in all

Number of mountains: 2
Arabia Mountain and Panola Mountain are excellent examples of granite outcrops or monadnocks. Panola is a National Natural Landmark.

Number of rivers: 2
South River and Yellow River

Number of lakes: several
including Arabia Lake, Alexander Lake, Harps Lake, Joels Lake and Davidson Lake

Significant cultural assets:

Flat Rock - one of the oldest African-American settlements in Georgia, surviving slavery, the Civil War and suburban development

Vaughters' Farm - the last remaining dairy farm landscape in a county that once had over 50 dairy farms

Lyon's Farm - the oldest continuously occupied building in the Heritage Area, built circa 1823

Infrastructure assets:

Nature Center at Arabia and Panola Mountains

Partially completed PATH trail system with parking

Newly improved, $45 million exits and access road system on Interstate I-20 greatly increasing accessibilty and visibility in the Heritage Area

Future environmental school campus in DeKalb County, eventually K-12

Mall at Stonecrest, hotels, and restaurants and other related services

Snapshot of Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area (2011)

Location: 20 miles east of downtown Atlanta in three counties -- DeKalb, Rockdale and Henry

Size: Approximately 64 square miles and 40,537 acres

Significant tracts:

Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve -	2,000 acres
Panola Mountain State Park -	1,319 acres
Vaughters' Farm -	140 acres
Monastery of the Holy Spirit -	2,275+acres

Walking and biking trails created:

20 miles of completed, interconnected multi-use trails created by the PATH Foundation with 6 miles scheduled to come on-line in the next 2 years.

6.5 miles of soft trails at Panola Mountain State Park

10 miles approx. of soft trails at Davidson–Arabia Nature Preserve

Acres of protected greenspace and parkland: 5,000 acres approx.

Population in 2010:

DeKalb County:	691,893
Henry County:	203,922
Rockdale County:	85,215
City of Lithonia:	1,924

*source Atlanta Regional Commission / US Census

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Flat Rock - one of the oldest African-American settlements in Georgia, surviving slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction and suburban development

Vaughters' Farm - the last remaining dairy farm landscape in a county that once had over 50 dairy farms

Lyon's Farm - one of the oldest continuously occupied homesteads in the Heritage Area, built circa 1823

The Parker House - now part of Panola Mountain State Park, the oldest home in Rockdale County built circa 1822

Historic Klondike - placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2003 as an example of a rural Georgia crossroads community

Historic Lithonia - noted for its granite buildings and home to DeKalb's first library, The Lithonia Woman's Club, a National Register of Historic Places nomination is pending

Monastery of the Holy Spirit - an expansive conservation area, 40 Cistercian monks who live here have built a community grounded in conservation and contemplation since their arrival in 1944, the church and abbey, built of poured concrete, have been called "Georgia's Most Remarkable Concrete Building"

Infrastructure assets:

Nature Center facilities at Panola and Arabia Mountains

Expanded parking facilities at Davidson-Arabia Nature Preserve

LEED silver certified Arabia Mountain High School opened in 2009, first graduating class in May 2011

Mall at Stonecrest offering shopping and lodging amenities

Visitor Center and Monasticism Museum opening at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit, May 2011

Overnight camping accommodations soon available at Panola Mountain State Park

ARABIA MOUNTAIN HERITAGE AREA
MANAGEMENT PLAN

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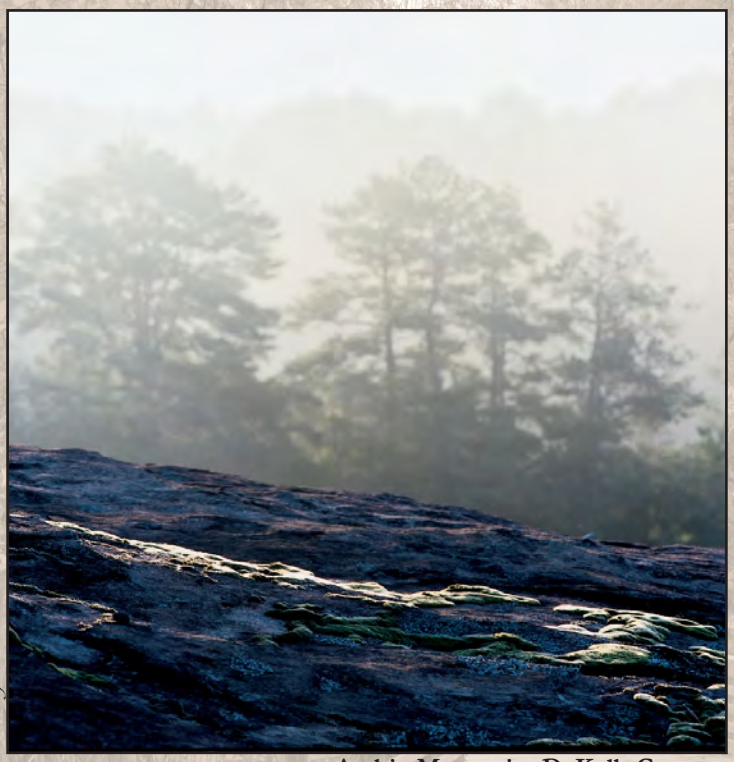
CHAPTER 1:

PLAN OVERVIEW



Kathryn Kolb

Arabia Mountain, DeKalb County

Without adequate planning, it is certain that the Heritage Area's exceptional landscape will be changed forever. This Plan provides strategies to preserve precious resources and engage visitors in learning about the Heritage Area's cultural and historic treasures. It embodies the vision that will protect diverse assets, link key sites together, and communicate the region's irreplaceable heritage by educating and entertaining new audiences.

Large portions of the Heritage Area remain relatively intact ecologically. Open landscapes blend seamlessly with pine and oak forests and hillsides. In addition to Arabia and Panola, smaller granite outcroppings pepper the landscape. On these smaller granite outcroppings, rare ecosystems and a wide variety of microclimates offer one-of-a-kind habitats for plants and animals.

Urban growth from all directions is surrounding the Heritage Area at a rapid pace, bringing with it single-family subdivisions and widened roads to accommodate increased traffic, a regional shopping mall and numerous related developments. Impacts on the South River watershed are likewise escalating, making it urgent to protect and restore riparian systems and retain the benefits of these living filters for polluted runoff.

This Plan will help to protect natural features, creating sanctuaries that allow rare and delicate habitats to thrive and continue to fulfill their role within the ecosystem.

1.1 Heritage Area Location

- The 40,000-acre Heritage Area is located 20 miles southeast of downtown Atlanta. It spans DeKalb, Rockdale and Henry counties, including the City of Lithonia and smaller unincorporated communities of Flat Rock, Rock Chapel and Klondike. The Heritage Area also includes
- Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve
- Panola Mountain State Park
- other local and State parkland
- South River and its tributaries
- Vaughters' Farm, Lyon and Parker homes and other historic homesteads
- numerous historic cemeteries
- sites of Civil War skirmishes
- active and historic quarries
- religious institutions including the Monastery of the Holy Spirit
- numerous schools including the planned environmental high school at Arabia Mountain
- numerous businesses and private residences
- Native American sites

The boundaries of the Heritage Area were established by the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area Feasibility Study (February 2001), conducted for the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance ('Arabia Alliance') a non-profit entity established to create and protect the Heritage Area. Later expanded, the Heritage Area now covers 64 square miles.

CHAPTER 2

HERITAGE AREA HISTORY

ECOS

Vaughters' Farm, DeKalb County

When visitors experience the striking landscapes of such large granite outcrops as Arabia and Panola Mountains, they quickly realize they are in a special place. Early settlement dates back at least 10,000 years, as evidenced by archeological findings of pottery shards in the Miners Creek area along the South River.

Human settlement patterns are intimately tied to the profusion of granite and nearby rivers. Archeological sites and historic structures still in existence help paint a picture of Native American, African-American and European cultures. The region has retained much of its historic integrity, delicate ecosystems and unusual habitats, making the Heritage Area even more remarkable in light of its close proximity to urban downtown Atlanta, just 20 miles away.

Irreplaceable assets include historic quarries and Civil War sites, historic cemeteries and magnificent granite outcroppings. Of cultural significance, the area around Lithonia, pivotal to the quarry industry, was the source of granite for structures throughout the eastern United States. Early African-American settlements offer a valuable window on a slice of history that is often under represented.

2.1 Additional History and Overview

Heritage Area Landscape

The Heritage Area is part of Georgia's Piedmont region, and its granite outcrops reflect underlying bedrock composed of granite and metamorphic rock. Though Arabia and Panola are called mountains, technically they are monadnocks - too large to be granite outcroppings or rocky hills, yet not large enough to be an actual mountain. Stone Mountain, located north of the Heritage Area, is another prominent nationally known monadnock.

The evolution of these granite monadnocks led to the formation of vernal pools, which are dips and concave pools of varying sizes that collect rainwater. Vernal pools provide habitats for a number of federally listed rare, threatened and endangered plant species that can only survive in these specific conditions. Many plants are endemic to the Heritage Area. The Nature Conservancy of Georgia rated the Arabia Mountain area as one of the top 20 examples of this type of ecosystem globally.

The type of granite found in the Heritage Area is unique to the Piedmont region, and launched a quarrying industry that employed generations of Scottish, Welch and other immigrants to the United States, as well as generations of African-Americans. Local quarries provided stone for famous buildings across the nation, such as West Point and Annapolis academies, and reportedly the foundation of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. and New York City's Brooklyn Bridge, as well as paving blocks for streets in cities throughout the country.

The City of Lithonia became the heart of the granite industry, named after the Lithonia Hills in Scotland. In Greek, Lithonia means "place of rock." Lithonia's distinctive granite architecture remains evident throughout the city and the surrounding area.

Donated by the Davidson family interests in 1992, the original 535-acre Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve is a haven for rare plant species that exist only on these granite outcrops including nearby Panola Mountain State Park, designated a National Natural Landmark. Panola Mountain is considered one of the finest rock outcrops in the eastern United States, and like Arabia is home to several rare plants as well as delicate mosses and lichens that can take almost 100 years to grow one inch.

In addition to Arabia and Panola Mountains, numerous rivers and streams provide marvelous recreational opportunities for residents and visitors, and crucial habitat for wildlife. Primary watersheds are the upper South River and middle Yellow River, which make up part of the upper Ocmulgee River Basin. The division between these two watersheds occurs along Stone Mountain-Lithonia Road and runs through the City of Lithonia. These waterways are also the site of significant cultural and historical landmarks. Development in these watersheds is escalating, making it increasingly important to protect and restore these riparian systems and the natural benefits they provide.

The South River is the third largest river in the Atlanta metropolitan area. The river flows from the City of Atlanta for 50 miles into Jackson Lake and is a primary source of surface water recharge, meaning it allows storm water to filter slowly into the underlying aquifer, an important benefit. Notable tributaries include Pole Bridge Creek and Stephenson Creek. The Yellow River is another significant waterway, and is linked to the history of Native American and European settlement. There are also numerous small lakes including Arabia Lake near Arabia Mountain and Alexander Lake next to Panola Mountain.

Heritage Area Archeological and Historic Resources

Several archeological sites and historic structures document the settlement of Native American, European and African-American cultures. Historic sites along the South and Yellow Rivers indicate that these cultures relied on the rivers for transportation. For example, soapstone artifacts found in an area along the South River, known today as Soapstone Ridge, show that the region supported soapstone quarrying and trading during the Archaic Period (8000 BC - 1000 BC). Also along the South River, Miners Creek contains an extensive area of artifacts from the more recent Middle Woodland Period (200 BC - 900 AD).

Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance

South River, Rockdale County

The Monastery of the Holy Spirit property in Rockdale County has yielded many impressive Native American artifacts, including arrowheads that date back as least 10,000 years. Native American burial areas at Miners Creek and the Monastery of the Holy Spirit indicate that indigenous people chose to live along the South River for centuries, providing fascinating source material for archeologists to share with visitors.

Heritage Area Settlement

Pre-European History

Evidence suggests that humans first lived in this region about 10,000 years ago during the Paleoindian Period (13000 BC - 7900 BC), when early nomadic peoples traveled the waterways to gather, fish and hunt. The region was densely forested and presumably rich in wildlife. Throughout the Archaic Period (8000 BC - 1000 BC), indigenous people developed tools of increasing sophistication, along with agricultural techniques that allowed for a sedentary lifestyle.

During the Archaic Period, indigenous people settled in Soapstone Ridge along the South River, making it an early site of trade and commerce. Archeologists have identified more than 110 sites along Soapstone Ridge containing various artifacts. Soapstone was initially used to make cooking utensils, bowls, tools and ornaments, and was an important product for trade.

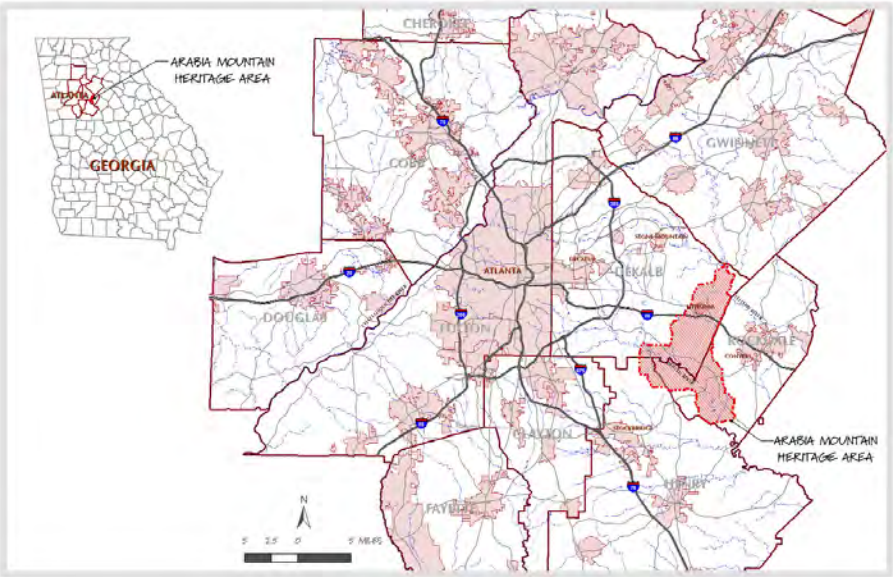
Soapstone was plentiful and easy to work, yet difficult to transport. When ceramic pottery developed along the Savannah River in South Georgia around 2500 BC, it gradually replaced the use of soapstone to make bowls. In the Heritage Area, we believe this transition prompted people to leave Soapstone Ridge for sites more conducive to agriculture.

During the Woodland (200 BC - 900 AD) and Mississippian Periods (900 AD - 1700 AD), villages were generally located on higher ground, overlooking waterways. Settlement sites from these periods have been located along the Yellow River near Lithonia. On the South River, Miners Creek Preserve contains evidence of settlement spanning 400 years during the "Panola Phase" of the Middle Woodland Period.

Our knowledge of Native American culture in the Heritage Area is limited to oral tradition, known artifacts and written observations by early European travelers and settlers. When early European settlers arrived, Native American culture in the region was divided between the Cherokee and Creek nations. Land that today comprises DeKalb, Henry and Rockdale counties was largely Creek territory, yet sparsely inhabited. This landscape was regarded as a buffer and hunting zone between the two cultures. Native American settlement remains evident today in the existence of footpaths, still visible, dating from the pre-European era, as well as archeological sites and soapstone quarries. Browns Mill and other roads are examples of trails being adopted as part of the contemporary roadway and rail system.

Early Settlement to the Civil War

Most documented European history for North Georgia dates to the late 18th century. European settlement had an extreme impact on Native American cultures, whose populations dropped dramatically from exposure to foreign diseases, and involvement in wars with the English, Spanish and French. Early Europeans initially settled north of the future site of Atlanta along the Chattahoochee River. Settlement increased tremendously in the Heritage Area after 1821 when Creek Indians ceded a large land tract to the State of Georgia that encompassed present-day DeKalb, Henry and Rockdale counties. Land lots were distributed by lottery to qualified settlers such as the Lyon family. Initially, early settlers followed Native American trails to travel through the region, yet the influx of settlers required construction of roads and rail.



Heritage Area Context Map

James Diamond, the first surveyor in DeKalb County, reportedly moved to Rock Chapel in 1820. Thus, Rock Chapel at Rock Mountain became the first European community in the Heritage Area. Another early community known as Cross Roads evolved at the junction of two major roads. In 1856, it was chartered and renamed Lithonia. In 1845, a rail line linked Marthasville (an early name for Atlanta) to Augusta on the Savannah River through the area that would be known as Lithonia.

African-American Experience

The Heritage Area is also rich in early African-American history. Former slaves remained in the vicinity and others were drawn there in search of farmland. The community of Flat Rock is one of the oldest African-American settlements in Georgia, dating back to 1820, and one of the oldest African-American cemeteries in the state still exists there. The grave of U.S. serviceman Lucious Sanders, who founded the Lithonia Civic League in the 1940s to promote voting rights, lies in the Lithonia African-American cemetery.

Agriculture and Mills

Not long ago, there were more than 50 dairy farms in DeKalb County, which was known as the dairy farm capital of Georgia. Today, Vaughters' Farm has been preserved as the last remaining dairy farm landscape, providing an excellent educational tool to share this lifestyle with future generations.

Throughout the 19th century, the Heritage Area remained largely agricultural. Another fine example of agricultural living during this time is evident at the Lyon family home, spared by Sherman's troops, and the oldest continuously occupied structure in the Heritage Area, circa 1823. The Klondike community was named in the 1830s in hopes that gold would be found. Instead, farming became the staple business. As the Heritage Area was settled, many mills were built along creeks and rivers, using water power to grind grains and mill cotton. Though a complete mill structure does not exist today, the legacy lives on in names such as Browns Mill, Evans Mill and McDaniels Mill roads. By 1860, Georgia ranked fourth among the states in cotton production, though cotton production peaked in the South in the late 1800s. Cotton remained, however, the most important agricultural product until the end of the century, when granite quarrying on a large scale developed.

Granite's Role in the Heritage Area

The success of the granite quarrying industry had a lasting impact. From the 1880s to 1920s, the industry flourished from new technologies and increasing demand. The expanding railroad system facilitated industrial production and transportation of granite. The use of dynamite enabled efficient quarrying and allowed large slabs to be separated intact. Another development, the steam drill, was first used around 1883 to facilitate granite production. The most successful quarry district included Stone Mountain, Lithonia and Conyers, located in western Rockdale County. While other parts of Georgia also developed around the quarry industry, the Lithonia-Stone Mountain-Conyers district remained the most productive.

Lithonia granite was superior because it withstood weathering, was harder than other types and retained its color and pattern. Compared to Stone Mountain granite located farther north, Lithonia granite was easier to quarry and more readily split. According to the Cultural Resources Report for Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve, Lithonia granite is similar to granite found only in Russia and Norway. Lithonia granite was used throughout the U.S. including at the West Point Academy, the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, state and federal offices in Atlanta, reportedly for the foundation of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., the Brooklyn Bridge and other structures throughout New York City. It was also widely used as "Belgian" paving blocks in streets across the nation. The peak use of this type of granite spanned the 1890s to the 1920s.

Quarries in the Heritage Area were known by names such as Big Ledge, Arabia Mountain, Pine Mountain and Rock Chapel. Many families began quarries around Lithonia, and large quarrying companies later acquired these smaller operations. Both the Davidson and Venable families were prominent in the quarrying business, operating quarries in Lithonia. The granite industry attracted skilled immigrants from Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Scandinavia and Italy, as well as African-Americans who migrated to Lithonia after the Civil War.

The thriving granite industry helped Lithonia develop both economically and culturally. New streets and homes were built, and granite details and architecture became a distinctive feature of the downtown. One of Lithonia's most prominent buildings, originally known as The Seminary, is on the National Register of Historic Places and is currently under renovation. Other well-known granite structures include a Masonic lodge chartered in 1849 and the Lithonia Woman's Club building.

The Great Depression ended quarrying operations at Arabia Mountain and slowed production at Big Ledge and Pine Mountain, both Davidson family businesses. The family survived the Depression by inventing new uses for granite and expanding into other products. For example, in the 1920s, innovative methods were used to isolate minerals from granite, enabling portions to be used for applications ranging from pottery and glass production to agriculture. Granite aggregates were used as poultry grit, a food supplement to help chickens digest corn. Later, crushed stone from the Big Ledge quarry was used for road construction, while the Pine Mountain quarry became a source for finished stone.

The Heritage Area Today

After World War II, DeKalb County communities were strongly impacted by Atlanta's booming economy and urban growth, and Lithonia's granite industry made a comeback. While this period was productive socially and economically, a darker side of history was always present. Beginning in the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan had become active again in the Atlanta area, burning crosses on nearby Stone Mountain. However, Lithonia's African-American community flourished. Popular gathering spots such as the Lithonia Speedway and the Lithonia Country Club opened in the 1940s, and boasted musical acts such as B.B. King and James Brown. Lucious Sanders, an African-American activist and veteran, challenged racial discrimination by forming the Lithonia Civic League in the 1940s.

During this time, the character of the Heritage Area transformed from a largely rural landscape to one with a more suburban character. This change rose from the decline of the quarry industry and the influx of residential and commercial development. From 1970 to 1990, DeKalb County reported the third largest population increase in the United States. Before this population surge, DeKalb County created the Parks and Recreation Department in 1953 to provide recreational opportunities and manage open spaces. The State of Georgia purchased Stone Mountain in 1959, establishing Georgia's largest granite outcrop as a recreational park and tourist destination. Panola Mountain State Park was created by the State of Georgia Department of Natural Resources in 1969 and designated as a National Natural Landmark in 1980. Arabia Mountain was gifted to DeKalb County by the Davidson family, and designated as the Davidson-Arabia Nature Preserve in 1992.

Today, the Heritage Area experiences increased pressures of residential and commercial growth. The Mall at Stonecrest, developed in the late 1990s, has brought an influx of new residents and retail services, and will remain a catalyst for future economic development in DeKalb and Rockdale counties. Multi-family housing, single-family subdivisions and retail establishments dot the landscape surrounding the mall. This growth has brought added demands on infrastructure and services for existing residents. Communities are actively working with the counties to determine appropriate measures for retaining the Heritage Area's high quality of life through the Arabia Alliance's efforts including this Plan.

Recreational and educational improvements have enhanced the Heritage Area in the 21st century. At the Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve, PATH Foundation has completed eight miles of paved walking and bike trails throughout the Nature Preserve, creating a continuous linear park from the City of Lithonia to Arabia Mountain and on to Panola Mountain. These attractive trails wind through a variety of landscapes including Vaughters' Farm, forests, wetlands and granite outcrops. Planned additions to the trail system include connecting along the South River to the Monastery of the Holy Spirit, the largest contiguous greenspace in Rockdale County.

In the near future, one of the most significant additions will be an environmental high school built by DeKalb County Public Schools. The actual

ECOS

Multi-use trail through Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve

building, as well as the curriculum, will actively engage students in environmental studies with emphasis on natural systems found in the Heritage Area. The site is connected to the PATH trail system.

Another Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve innovation will be a future development to cluster a public library, police station and fire station together, directly along the PATH trail. Normally, these community amenities are separate. By locating them together in one place, all three become more accessible to the public. School groups can more easily enjoy tours of the fire station; young and old can walk or bike to the library; the trails will be used by police and fire fighters.

In 2004, Atlanta Wild Animal Rescue Effort (AWARE) opened on Klondike Road and has become a trusted source for protecting wildlife and their habitat. Through an active environmental education and animal rescue program, AWARE (www.awareone.org) has saved hundreds of birds and animals in the Heritage Area.

Three fulltime rangers are now employed at Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve by the DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Department. In addition, the relocated historic Ragsdale home will soon be restored, and expanded parking and trailhead facilities have recently been added to the Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve.

Recognizing the importance of Panola Mountain State Park to the metropolitan Atlanta, the Georgia Parks and Historic Sites Division has created a new park master plan that will introduce outdoor recreation, environmental education and sustainable stewardship to millions of Georgia citizens and visitors. The Division is pursuing additional property acquisitions to buffer existing park property, protect the natural landscape, expand the opportunity for recreational developments and connect the park to Rockdale County properties downstream along the South River. The park master plan calls for reorienting the park entrance, creating expanded day-use and family activity areas, developing overnight camping areas, expanding hiking and walking trails, wildlife viewing areas, river access points, and stabilizing and restoring the historic Parker Home. The master plan also includes the development of an environmentally sustainable outdoor recreation educational center which could house the Division's state headquarters offices. See Appendix G for the Panola Mountain State Park master plan.

Recent increases in the number of recreational amenities has laid the groundwork to create popular attractions for Atlanta-area residents and families seeking activities in nature, all in close proximity to where they live.

CHAPTER 3:

HERITAGE AREA PLANNING PROCESS

ECOS

Community members review analysis maps of the Heritage Area

PREFACE

Before delving into the technical details of the Management Plan and its recommendations, let's take a moment to visualize the end result. Look into the not-so-distant future to imagine the Heritage Area ready to welcome thousands of first-time visitors. A beautifully designed signage system with entertaining stories and graphics and inviting Gateways begin to reveal the mystery behind the history, and bring it to life.

IMAGINE yourself at a secluded monastery where generations of monks have devoted their lives to silent meditation, communing with the divine. Leave the traffic and skyscrapers behind as you stroll this 2,000-acre property, permanently protected from development. Now imagine Native Americans living on the same land 10,000 years ago. Perhaps they believed that everything in nature was divine.

IMAGINE walking through Vaughters' Farm along the PATH trail. Try to imagine the sweet scents of home-baked pies coming out of the oven in a house made of granite from a nearby quarry on Arabia Mountain. Walk over to the original barn, where you can rent a bicycle and ride the trail to Arabia. Explore the same route used by an old railroad that once hauled granite to cities around the U.S. Walk inside old quarry buildings, full of character, now abandoned and being reclaimed by nature.

If it's springtime, you'll marvel at the radiant, red diamorpha plants blooming in almost every vernal pool on Arabia Mountain. If it's fall, the mountain will be covered in bright yellow daisies in full bloom, both plants defying logic to flourish in such harsh, rocky conditions.

As you return to Vaughters' Farm Gateway, IMAGINE a herd of dairy cows in the open fields in front of you. If this type of grass, once food for cows, was replaced with a native grass, this same field could entice very different species to live here, such as indigo buntings, henslow's sparrows, blue birds and other migrating song birds.

IMAGINE the fields around the Ragsdale house being plowed with mules, very slowly, before tractors. Think about how much work it took to prepare the fields for crops, all planted by hand. IMAGINE what farm life was like for women. Every meal was made from scratch with food grown or raised right here on their own property. Every piece of clothing was sewn by hand for every member of the family.

IMAGINE 150 Irish, Welch and Scottish artisans sweating and hammering at the same time, chipping away at solid granite to loosen large slabs. Look closely, and you'll see the actual scars of quarrying still there. So are the holes drilled by hand. Volunteer guides are happy to show you an original hand drill to see how hard it is to break granite by the force of one's own strength, before dynamite and other power tools were invented.

Though the history of slavery has been widely told, those stories become real as you walk through Flat Rock Cemetery, reading faded words on a tombstone, hand carved from local granite almost 200 years ago. You can imagine how hard life was, before and after slavery, as you listen to the voices of their descendants, sharing personal memories on an audio tour downloaded to your portable CD player.

IMAGINE looking at faces in historic photographs, of people born as slaves and later freed. The pride and dignity in those faces comes shining through, as if they knew they were paving the way for future business and political leaders to rise to the top of their fields and continue to live in DeKalb, Rockdale and Henry counties today.

IMAGINE biking on the trail and coming upon a group of teenagers at DeKalb County's first environmental high school. They are using Arabia Lake as an outdoor laboratory to monitor water quality. It's one of many hands-on assignments in a newly developed curriculum with in-depth lessons for understanding rare natural habitats found throughout the Heritage Area.

IMAGINE a gentle mist whispering on the surface of Mountain Creek just after sunrise. It makes you stop and appreciate this random gift of beauty, never to be repeated just like this.

At Panola Mountain Nature Center, your children marvel at a taxidermy display of most of the mammals and reptiles that live nearby. All in one view, you can stand six inches from a real grey fox, the larger red fox with luxurious tail, a mink, a spotted bobcat and an opossum hanging upside down from a tree, by its wiry tail.

IMAGINE getting into a canoe at Panola Mountain, in a cleaner South River at a spectacular waterfall known as Panola Shoals. Your gentle ride may not be that different from the way Native American hunters traveled this same river thousands of years ago. You pass by the same granite rocks and curves in the river, arriving at the 60-year-old Monastery of the Holy Spirit at Honey Creek in the heart of the largest, continuous greenspace in Rockdale County, tended by generations of Trappist monks. After exploring fascinating exhibits on butterflies, Native American artifacts and the Japanese bonsai trees that these monks are famous for, catch a free ride back to your car on a clean-fuel Heritage Area shuttle.

IMAGINE standing on a weathered boardwalk in Panola State Park. It's an early winter morning; the sky is granite grey. There's a spectacular view of Stone Mountain straight ahead, looming large on the horizon. All the leaves are down, and you realize this vista hasn't changed in millions of years.

Can you even IMAGINE 475 million years? That's how long Arabia Mountain has been here, frozen in time. Is it possible that this granite mound has a soul or holds secrets?
Its primordial boulders are remnants of an ancient mountain, stripped over millennia by rain and wind. An airplane passes overhead, bringing you back to the mechanized now.

How to best manage the Heritage Area's special elements effectively is the purpose of this Plan. By establishing a steering committee of diverse stakeholders, the Heritage Area planning effort became a true collaboration between private, public and non-profit partners who developed a common vision to protect, connect and educate the public about the many wonders of the 40,000 acre Arabia Mountain Heritage Area.

3.1 Planning Summary

The nine-month planning process for the Management Plan began with a steering committee of key stakeholders defined in the Feasibility Study. The steering committee consisted of voting members from DeKalb, Rockdale and Henry counties, the City of Lithonia, and the State of Georgia Department of Natural Resources ('the jurisdictions'), as well as community residents and local businesses. A non-voting advisory group provided assistance in decision-making. The steering committee offered valuable insight into the current climate and future goals of the Heritage Area, the Plan elements, potential strategies and direction for community meetings.

A consultant team was engaged to complete the Plan and the accompanying Environmental Assessment, as required by Congress and the Secretary of the Interior under the National Heritage Area Designation. The selected consultant team consists of Ecos Environmental Design, Inc. (land planning and community facilitation), Planners for Environmental Quality (PEQ) (community facilitation), ICON architecture, inc. (heritage planning) and The Media Kitchen (interactive website design and maintenance).

The Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance, ('Arabia Alliance') a non-profit advocacy group spearheaded the volunteer effort to build consensus among residents, civic-minded individuals, non-profit organizations, political leaders, government agencies and community activists. In 2001, the group engaged well known Heritage Area planners ICON architecture to undertake the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area Feasibility Study ('the Feasibility Study'). Highlights include:

- Creating a National Heritage Area based on key findings that fit designation criteria proposed by the National Park Service.
- Creating a proposed boundary for the Heritage Area.
- Defining key stakeholders including DeKalb, Rockdale and Henry counties, City of Lithonia, State of Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GA DNR), Evans Mill, Klondike, South Rockdale and Flat Rock communities, Monastery of the Holy Spirit, local churches, Mall at Stonecrest and others.
- Identifying possible themes to enhance the visitor experience based on the area's vivid history and culture.
- Recommending the completion of a Management Plan (this Plan) to comprehensively preserve and interpret the Heritage Area's natural, scenic, cultural and historic legacies.

The consultant team collected, interpreted and analyzed all data pertinent to the Heritage Area, and completed a series of inventory and analysis maps of natural, cultural, historic, scenic, recreational and economic resources. (See Appendix A).

The team implemented a Management Plan website as a communication tool throughout the planning process. The website provided additional means for gathering public input. An electronic newsletter was distributed periodically to keep stakeholders informed of the process. Maps, data, events and news items were posted on the website for public display and comment, providing many opportunities for local residents and stakeholders to become actively engaged in the Plan. Monthly meetings of the steering committee, an all-day steering committee concept charrette meeting and three broader community meetings were conducted to present findings, receive information and collect comments. During the meetings, the community was engaged in various interactive sessions, such as prioritizing

site preservation and interpretation, verifying potential venues, determining the preferred concept and selecting appropriate implementation strategies.

Summary of Community Meetings

September 2004: The consulting team, planning process, purpose and schedule were introduced. Accomplishments within the Heritage Area were highlighted, and community members provided feedback on environmental issues, challenges and educational, economic and marketing opportunities.

ECOS

Committee members review three Plan concepts for the Heritage Area

October 2004: The steering committee met for an all-day charrette to explore why the area is unique, determine what stories should be told, and where interpretation should occur. The committee analyzed community comments and determined goals. Three alternative concept plans were created.

November 2004: The consultant team refined and presented the three alternatives for community comment. Close review of data and maps was also conducted to ensure that significant resources were properly documented.

Based on comments from the community and steering committee, the consultant team merged the preferred elements from each of the three concepts into one draft concept plan. The draft concept plan was presented to the steering committee for initial feedback.

March 2005: After further design, analysis and refinement, the draft concept plan was presented at the third community meeting. Participants offered feedback on the primary elements and commented on proposed strategies and implementation priorities. The draft concept plan was amended based on community comments and the final, preferred concept plan was presented to the steering committee.

Throughout the process, the consultant team completed other necessary sections of the Plan document. First, the Environmental Assessment (Chapter 8) was prepared to determine the appropriate approach for the Heritage Area based on National Park Service (NPS) DO-12 requirements, established to determine impact assessment and resource conservation. The Environmental Assessment, and accompanying Environmental Screening form, compares the preferred concept to several alternative approaches, describing how each impacts the Heritage Area's resources, as well as the overall vision.

Second, the Interpretation Strategy (Chapter 4) details the Heritage Area themes and describes the appropriate approach for highlighting resources through potential venues and initiatives. The third section is the Implementation Program (Chapters 5-7) which completes the document and

- inventories Heritage Area resources
- outlines objective and goals
- explains proposed strategies
- identifies the responsibility of key players
- proposes a timeline and phasing of strategies and programs
- creates a funding strategy
- and describes the structure of the management entity.

At the heart of the Plan is a comprehensive framework for explaining the intriguing inter-relationships of people to their environment over time -- a cycle that will continue as the Heritage Area's rich legacy is managed in the future.

3.2 Heritage Area Plan Objectives

The overarching vision of the Plan is to protect, connect, and educate.

Adoption of this Plan by all stakeholders, including government entities, community organizations and Gateway property owners, will establish guidelines and strategies that:

- Preserve distinctive natural, historic and cultural resources as large-scale environmental and educational opportunities.
- Preserve existing landscapes from incompatible commercial and residential development.
- Limit negative environmental impacts such as air and water pollution.
- Build on partnerships between private, public and non-profit organizations to accomplish the Plan's goals.
- Create a sustainable Heritage Area that successfully achieves a balance in economic, social and environmental issues.
- Create engaging educational materials at key locations to encourage visitors to experience natural and cultural sites in new ways.
- Focus interpretation at significant landmarks or Gateways.

This Plan will

- Protect natural resources to create opportunities for fun, education and recreation.
- Educate visitors and residents about the Heritage Area's history and culture.
- Stimulate diverse tourism, filling the current void in attracting people with cultural and historic interests, as well as those interested in recreational opportunities and unique ecosystems.
- Extend the Heritage Area's existing multi-use trail system, by connecting to Stone Mountain and Atlanta.
- Provide an opportunity for the Heritage Area to become a test bed for sustainable practices, by expanding alternative transportation, preserving ecosystems, restoring riparian habitats and encouraging youth activities.
- Integrate historic preservation with ecosystem conservation.
- Engage public-private-non-profit coalitions to improve quality of life in the Heritage Area.

3.3 Heritage Area Plan Goals

The goals evolved from initial planning efforts, and were further defined and prioritized during the steering committee and community meetings.

Cultural Preservation Goal: To protect cultural and historic resources such as:

- City of Lithonia - its historic granite structures, corridors and communities.
- Existing and former quarries and related resources.
- Existing and former farms, mill sites and other culturally significant structures.
- Cemeteries and other sacred sites.
- Native American and African-American settlements.

Preservation is best achieved by explaining the relevance of the Heritage Area through interpretive opportunities that allow visitors to understand and experience the Area's uniqueness and rare beauty first hand.

Natural Conservation Goal: To protect and restore natural resources, such as:

- Rivers, streams, lakes, waterfalls and wetlands.
- Arabia and Panola Mountains and other granite outcrops with rare plant habitats.
- Remaining wildlife such as turkeys, bob cats, owls, salamanders, song birds and habitat for migratory birds.
- Other features such as fields, forests and special micro-environments.

Future protection of the Heritage Area's distinctive landscapes and environments is critical to its sustainability. These resources are finite, and must be properly explored, viewed, and protected while

simultaneously engaging visitors and residents to appreciate their beauty and importance.

Interpretation and Education Goal: To tell the Heritage Area's diverse stories specifically:

- The geology and the land
- Granite quarrying and its impacts
- Unique ecosystems for animals and plants

By engaging the Heritage Area's schools and organized groups, the objective of protection, connection and education can be promoted throughout the region. Learning opportunities will be designed to increase:

- Appreciation of the Heritage Area's cultural and natural resources through interactive, hands-on experiences.
- Appreciation of the history of the people and their architecture.
- Appreciation of environmental education by completing an environmental school campus in DeKalb County to eventually include students K-12
- Knowledge of the region's historic impact throughout the United States.
- Knowledge of sustainable preservation and "smart growth" practices. (According to the Urban Land Institute, "smart growth" is growth that is economically sound, environmentally friendly and supportive of community livability growth that enhances quality of life.)

What do we mean by Interpretation?

Interpretation is simply an invitation to take an interest in something, to draw you in with engaging stories, hands-on activities and memorable experiences. Interpretation can take many forms in the Heritage Area. Possibilities include:

- Well designed signs and site markers
- Graphics, maps and photographs
- Video kiosks
- Audio tours on CDs, cassettes or MP3 that can be downloaded. Visitors can play sections of interest on portable audio players while walking the trails.
- Live performances, recorded music, storytellers
- Artifacts and crafts
- Guided tours with a naturalist, historian, archeologist or scientist
- Special events, festivals and re-enactments
- Unforgettable museum displays

There are always elders, still alive, such as the Goddards and the Lyons, or people already recorded in interviews by the Arabia Alliance such as the Vaughters, who have poignant stories to tell, stories that can be heard forever once captured by technology.

Recreation Goal: To expand open space and recreation opportunities by:

- Continuing to build the multi-use trail network to promote recreation and healthy transportation between residential and commercial centers, schools, parks and recreation sites.
- Promoting outdoor recreation opportunities for all ages and incomes.
- Adding acreage to existing parks and protected greenspace.
- Adding needed public facilities.

Greenspace and recreation are primary criteria for determining the livability of an area. Increasing greenspace is necessary for improved air and water quality and wildlife habitat protection, especially in a region whose pores are being paved over in concrete.

Economic Development Goal: To encourage "smart growth" and sustainability by:

- Supporting leading edge "smart growth" management techniques.
- Engaging in tourism and economic development activities that respect Heritage Area resources.
- Enhancing key publicly owned landscapes including Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve, Panola Mountain State Park, South Rockdale Community Park, Vaughters' Farm and others to stimulate economic vitality of the broader community.
- Encouraging a partnership team approach to interpretation and management that promotes a balance between the interests of governments and residents. Much of the Heritage Area is experiencing rapid residential development, due to its attractiveness and proximity to metro-Atlanta. Increasing tourism, providing recreational and educational facilities and

promoting community development opportunities will bring desired economic benefits. This Plan recommends a template for ways to efficiently handle future residential and commercial demands in ways that also protect the Heritage Area's quality of life and character. See Appendix H for more information on economic development potential of the Heritage Area.

3.4 Determining the Plan Concept

The diverse stories of the Heritage Area must be easily understandable by all ages. To effectively manage recreation activities, the visitor experience, environmental concerns and fiscal issues, the consultant team, steering committee and community members analyzed and evaluated five alternative approaches.

The recommended Hybrid approach, alternative 5, was selected and is presented here. For summaries of the other four alternatives considered, see Appendix I. The Hybrid Plan combines the strengths of the others to create inter-connected Routes, Focus Areas and Gateways, all designed to enhance the visitor's experience and appreciation of the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area. Following is a description of the recommended approach.

Alternative 5: Hybrid Approach: Combines characteristics of Alternatives 2, 3 and 4, and creates a central Visitors Center. This concept combines primary routes discussed in the Network Concept (alternative 2), the enhancement of key landscapes and environments in the Area Concept (alternative 3) and the Gateways in the Cluster Concept (alternative 4). The Hybrid alternative simplifies the other concepts by engaging the visitor at a primary Gateway, located at Vaughters' Farm, a preserved agricultural landscape, then directing visitors to secondary Gateways located at themed Focus Areas.

The proposed Gateways are currently under different levels of protection; most are under public ownership.

The Visitors Center, or primary Gateway, located at Vaughters' Farm, provides an all-encompassing historic and cultural account of the Heritage Area. The proposed Visitors Center is the central focus of interpretation, offering an overview of every Focus Area including significant wildlife, plant habitats and historic architecture. Each Gateway facility and Focus Area will highlight and interpret a different theme. Culture and Community is the theme at the primary Gateway since it is located at an historic agricultural landscape. This Gateway is to be found along existing driving and pedestrian routes, and is centrally located within the Heritage Area, close to Interstate 20, allowing visitors to easily access the other four Focus Areas and Gateways:

- Panola Mountain State Park (Natural Systems Focus Area)
- South River and Flat Rock Community (Early Settlement Focus Area)
- Lithonia Woman's Club (Granite Industry and Technology Focus Area)
- Monastery of the Holy Spirit (Spiritual Landscapes Focus Area)

Each Gateway and Focus Area, can be easily visited by an existing or proposed driving, biking, pedestrian or water route. Each route is also themed based on five distinct interpretive opportunities:

Route 1: Land of Rocks and Rivers
Route 2: Stone Cutters
Route 3: Early Settlers
Route 4: Ecosystem Excursions
Route 5: Spiritual Experience