

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT, EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

INTRODUCTION

This section describes the affected environment and environmental consequences associated with the alternatives. It is organized by impact topic and focuses on presentation of environmental consequences allowing a consistent comparison between alternatives. The National Environmental Policy Act requires consideration of context, intensity, and duration of impacts; indirect impacts; cumulative impacts; and measures to mitigate for impacts. National Park Service policy also requires that impairment of resources be evaluated in all environmental documents (National Park Service, 2000b).

PARK DESCRIPTION

The Blue Ridge Parkway connects the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia with the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina via a 469 mile scenic parkway. The parkway is ranked as “America’s most scenic drive” by leading travel writers (Blue Ridge Parkway Association, 2003). The parkway follows the crests and ridges of the Blue Ridge, Black, Great Craggy, Great Balsam and Plot Balsam Mountains. These five major mountain ranges are part of the central and southern Appalachian Mountains. Altitudes range from approximately 650 feet at James River in Virginia to nearly 6,050 feet at Richland Balsam in North Carolina. This sanctuary of high places encompasses a world of mountain forests, wildlife, and wildflowers thousands of feet above a patchwork of villages, fields, and farms. The parkway is known for spectacular mountain and valley vistas, quiet pastoral scenes, sparkling waterfalls, colorful flower and foliage displays, and interpretation of mountain history and culture. The toll-free parkway combines awesome natural beauty with the pioneer history of gristmills, weathered cabins, and split rail fences to create our country’s most popular National Park area.

Designed for recreational driving, the parkway provides visitors with quiet, leisure travel, free from commercial traffic and the congestion of high-speed highways. As its All-American Road status indicates, it is one of the most diverse and high quality recreational driving experiences in the world. National Park Service data indicates that annual recreational visitation rose from 16.9 million in 1990 to 19.2 million in 2000 (National Park Service, 2004c).

PROJECT SITE DESCRIPTION

Four alternative sites are being considered at two locations for the regional destination visitor center. Two of the sites are located at Hemphill Knob, location of the National Park Service Blue Ridge Parkway headquarters. Hemphill Knob is located in the area bounded by I-40, U.S.74 A, and the parkway. Primary access to the site is provided by a driveway located 0.5 miles north of U.S.74 A near Milepost 384 on the parkway. The

existing headquarters building is located on the southwestern portion of the site, along with a previously residential structure that is currently being used for offices. Sixty parking spaces for headquarters employees are located between the headquarters building and the other structure. An additional 28 parking spaces for visitors, as well as 4 bus/recreational vehicle parking spaces, are located to the north of the headquarters building. This parking is rarely utilized. The site and the location of the two alternatives at Hemphill Knob are shown in Figure 10.

Two other alternatives sites are located at the Folk Art Center. The entrance to the Folk Art Center is located near parkway Milepost 382, approximately 0.5 miles north of U.S. 70. The Folk Art Center is located in an area bounded by the parkway, Arnold Road, the Veterans Administration Hospital, and Riceville Road. The Folk Art Center building is located in the northeastern portion of the site. Visitor parking for 133 cars and 20 recreational vehicles is located east of the building. Employee and bus parking is located west of the building. The site and the location of the two alternatives at the Folk Art Center are shown in Figure 10.

METHODOLOGY

General Evaluation Methodology

Overall, the National Park Service based the impact analyses and conclusions in this document on the review of existing literature, Blue Ridge Parkway studies, information provided by experts within the National Park Service and other agencies, professional judgments and park staff insights, interested parties, and public input. For each impact topic, the analysis includes a brief description of the affected environment and an evaluation of effects.

The impact analyses involved the following steps:

- Identify the area that could be affected.

- Compare the area of potential effect with the resources that are present.

- Identify the intensity (negligible, minor, moderate, or major), context (local, park-wide, regional), duration (short- or long-term), and type (direct or indirect) of effect, both as a result of this action and from a cumulative effects perspective.

- Identify whether effects would be beneficial or adverse.

The criteria used to define the intensity and duration of impacts associated with the analyses are presented in Table 3, Impact Topic Threshold Definition . Impact analyses include implementation of mitigation measures taken to protect resources. Many of these measures were included in the “Mitigation Measures” section.

General Definitions

The following definitions were used to evaluate the context, intensity, duration, and cumulative nature of impacts associated with project alternatives:

Context is the setting in which an impact is analyzed, such as local, park-wide, or region. Council on Environmental Quality (1978) guidelines requires that impact analyses include discussions of context.

Impact Intensity and Duration are defined in the Impact Topic Threshold Definition Table (*Table 3*). These terms are consistent with the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (1978) that implement the National Environmental Policy Act. These impact analyses also are intended to comply with the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Direct and Indirect Impacts. A direct impact would be a direct result of the action, such as the additional traffic that is generated on a roadway as a result of the visitor center. An indirect impact would occur because of a change to another resource or impact topic. An example of an indirect impact would be a change in the air quality near the visitor center due to the additional traffic generated by the center.

Cultural Resource Analysis Methods

Impacts to cultural resources are described in terms of type (beneficial or adverse), context (site-specific, local, or even regional), duration (short-term, long-term, or permanent), and intensity (negligible, minor, moderate, or major). Definitions of intensity (negligible, minor, moderate, or major) vary by impact topic (*see Table 3*). In accordance with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (36 CFR Part 800, Protection of Historic Properties), impacts on cultural resources were identified and evaluated by:

- Determining the area of potential effects;

- Identifying cultural resources present in the area of potential effects that are either listed in or eligible to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places (National Register of Historic Places);

- Applying the criteria of adverse effect to affected cultural resources either listed in or eligible to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places; and

- Considering ways to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects.

Under the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's regulations, a determination of either adverse effect or no adverse effect must also be made for affected cultural resources. An adverse effect occurs whenever an impact alters, directly or indirectly, any characteristic of a cultural resource that qualifies it for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. For example, this could include diminishing the integrity of the resource's location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, or association.

Adverse effects also include reasonably foreseeable effects caused by the alternative that would occur later in time, be farther removed in distance, or be cumulative (36 CFR Part 800.5, Assessment of Adverse Effects). A determination of no adverse effect means there is an effect, but the effect would not diminish in any way the characteristics of the cultural resource that qualify it for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

The Council on Environmental Quality (1978) regulations and *Director's Order #12 and Handbook: Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision Making* (National Park Service, 2001a) call for a discussion of the appropriateness of mitigation, as well as an analysis of how effective the mitigation would be in reducing the intensity of a potential impact, such as reducing the intensity of an impact from major to moderate or minor. Any resulting reduction in intensity of impact because of mitigation, however, is an estimate of the effectiveness of mitigation under the National Environmental Policy Act only. It does not suggest that the level of effect as defined by Section 106 is similarly reduced. Although adverse effects under Section 106 may be mitigated, the effect remains adverse.

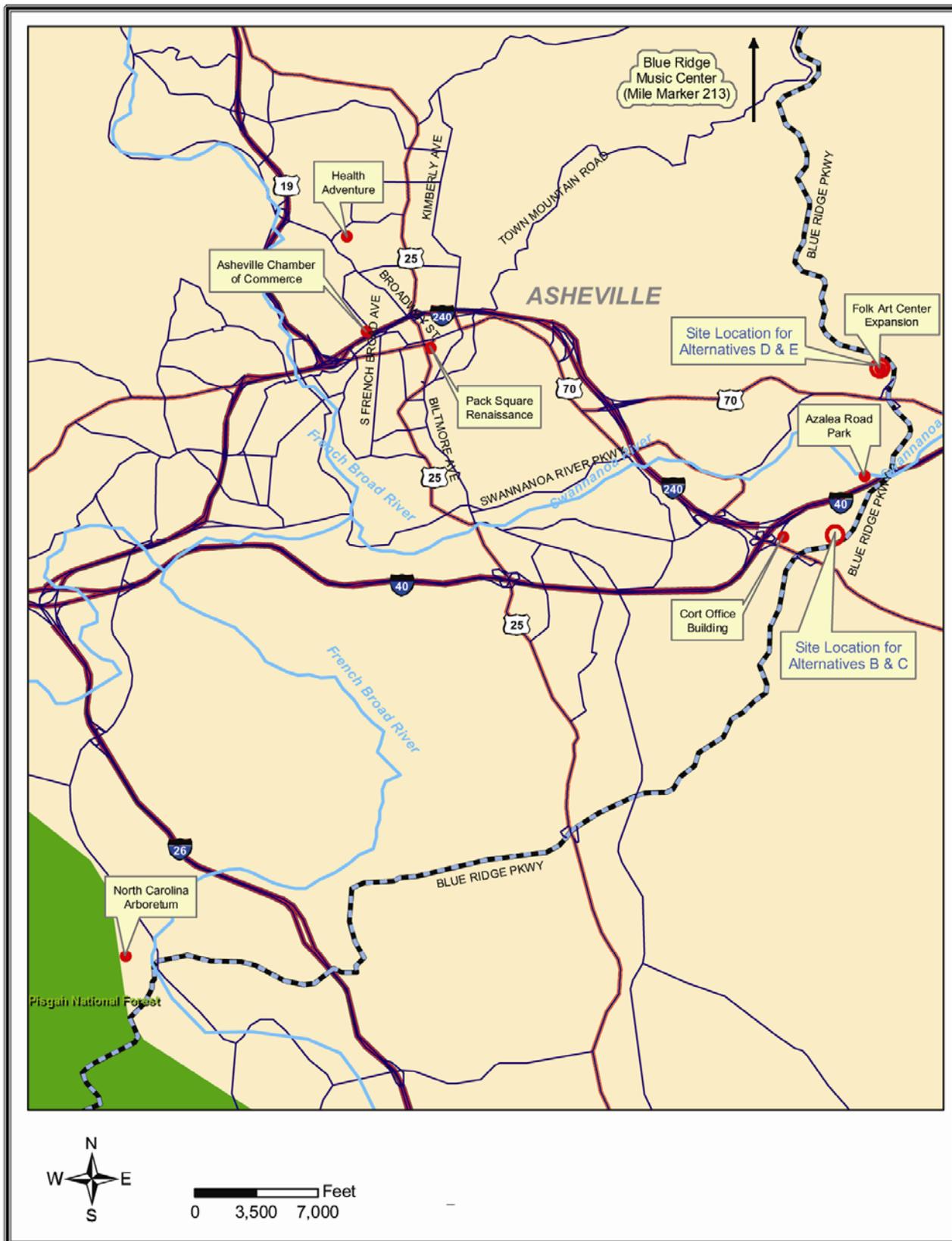
A Section 106 summary is included in the impact analysis for cultural resources. The summary is intended to meet the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and is an assessment of the effect of implementing the alternatives on cultural resources, based on the criterion of effect and criteria of adverse effect found in the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's regulations.

Cumulative Effects Analysis Method

The Council on Environmental Quality (1978) regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act requires assessment of cumulative effects in the decision making process for federal projects. Cumulative effects are defined as "the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions" (40 Code of Federal Regulations 1508.7).

Cumulative effects are considered for both no action and action alternatives. They are presented at the end of each impact topic analysis.

Cumulative effects were determined by combining the effects of the alternative with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Therefore, it was necessary to identify other past, ongoing, or reasonably foreseeable future actions along the Blue Ridge Parkway and in the area near the parkway headquarters and the Folk Art Center. Other actions that have the potential to have a cumulative effect in conjunction with this project include the projects described below. Figure 11 shows the location of the developments considered for cumulative effects.



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FIGURE II DEVELOPMENT'S CONSIDERED FOR CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

The Southern Highland Craft Guild, operator of the Folk Art Center, has plans to redesign the Folk Art Center. The 28,000 square foot facility would be enlarged to over 48,000 square feet. The Folk Art Center operations would be expanded to include a substantial permanent exhibits gallery, a small theatre, a library, archives, and other interpretive and environmental exhibits around the building and the grounds. The Southern Highland Craft Guild indicates that this expansion would allow them to be better equipped to augment statewide elementary and secondary school curricula focusing on North Carolina history and culture. Projections indicate that they may serve between 15,000 to 25,000 schoolchildren each year. The interpretive focus of the new exhibits at the Folk Art Center would be the evolution of the Southern Highland Craft Guild as placed within the context of the region's history. The role of the National Park Service would be another interpretive theme at the Folk Art Center. The creation of the parkway would be a part of the interpretation, according to the plans. The construction of the Folk Art Center expansion is not currently scheduled. (Southern Highland Craft Guild, undated).

The Blue Ridge Music Center is located at Milepost 213 on the parkway. The first phase of the center opened in 2001 and included an outdoor amphitheater, an instrument builders shop, and ancillary facilities. Numerous concerts have taken place at the center. Groundbreaking for the Interpretive Center occurred in the fall of 2003 and is planned for completion in spring of 2005. This facility would feature an exhibit gallery, a music sales and information area, a 99 seat auditorium, a listening library, and a classroom area. When completed, the Music Center would tell the full story of the music of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The city of Asheville has plans for Azalea Road Park, which would be located between I-40 and the Swannanoa River to the east of the parkway. It would be located on a beneficial fill site that the city accesses via an abandoned parkway bridge (number 11283) that is located adjacent to the current parkway bridge over the river. Access to the park would be provided by Azalea Road and Hemphill Road (SR 2766). There would be no access from the parkway to Azalea Road Park, either directly or indirectly. Construction of the park is to be phased over the period 2009 to 2014 and would include baseball and soccer fields, a gymnasium, and other recreational amenities.

The North Carolina Arboretum began construction of a demonstration greenhouse and gateway center in 2003. The arboretum is not a National Park Service facility, but is located near Milepost 393 of the parkway. The facility would function as the primary welcome and orientation facility for up to 750,000 annual visitors. The center would have both indoor and outdoor gathering space for information, orientation functions, and workshops and classrooms for educational programs. Phase I of the improvement is scheduled for completion in spring 2005.

The Pack Square Renaissance involves the renovation of Pack Square Park, an historic central square in downtown Asheville. The park would contain a large green space with the ability to stage concerts and new landscaping and fountains. Construction on the site is planned to begin in summer of 2005 and would be completed by 2007.

Health Adventure is currently located on Pack Square, but will be constructing a new facility on Broadway Avenue at W.T. Weaver Boulevard, near the University of North Carolina. Health Adventure is planned as an interactive health science and environmental education park. The 9 acre site would contain hiking trails and outdoor exhibits, as well as a 75,000 square foot building housing the interactive exhibits. Construction is planned to commence in 2006 and the facility would open in 2008. Approximately 185,000 to 200,000 persons per year are projected to attend the park. Many of the attendees would be school children.

The Asheville Chamber of Commerce is constructing a new headquarters and visitor center on Montford Avenue near Interchange 4C for I-240. The 4,000 square foot visitor center would provide hotel bookings, concierge service, kiosks and tickets for area attractions, and informational brochures. The facility should be open in fall of 2005.

The Cort office building is proposed for the southeast quadrant of the intersection of Gashes Creek Road and the I-40 eastbound access ramp. It is approved as a 30,000 square foot office building on 1.6 acres, but construction has not begun.

Impairment Analysis Method

Management Policies 2001 (National Park Service, 2000b) requires analysis of potential effects to determine whether or not actions would impair national park resources or values.

The fundamental purpose of the national park system, established by the Organic Act and reaffirmed by the General Authorities Act, as amended, begins with a mandate to conserve park resources and values. National Park Service managers must always seek ways to avoid, or to minimize to the greatest degree practicable, actions that would adversely affect park resources and values.

These laws give the National Park Service the management discretion to allow impacts on park resources and values when necessary and appropriate to fulfill the purposes of a park, so long as the impact does not constitute impairment of the affected resources and values. Although Congress has given the National Park Service the management discretion to allow certain impacts within parks, that discretion is limited by the statutory requirement (enforceable by the federal courts) that the National Park Service must leave park resources and values unimpaired, unless a particular law directly and specifically provides otherwise.

The impairment that is prohibited by the Organic Act and the General Authorities Act is an impact that, in the professional judgment of the responsible National Park Service manager, would harm the integrity of park resources or values, including the opportunities that otherwise would be present for the enjoyment of those resources or values. Impairment may result from National Park Service activities in managing the park, from visitor activities, or from activities undertaken by concessionaires, contractors, and others operating in the park.

An impact on any park resource or value may constitute impairment. However, an impact would be most likely to constitute impairment if it affected a resource or value whose conservation was:

Necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of the park;

Key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park; or

Identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other relevant National Park Service planning documents.

A determination on impairment is included in the impact analysis section for all impact topics relating to the Blue Ridge Parkway resources and values.

NATURAL RESOURCES

This section describes the characteristics of the existing environmental components previously identified as impact topics potentially subject to effects from implementing the proposed action or alternatives. The affected environment descriptions provide the baseline site information to be analyzed further for potential impacts. This approach allows for a standardized comparison between alternatives based on the most relevant issues.

AIR QUALITY

Affected Environment

The Asheville area is currently in attainment for National Ambient Air Quality Standards, including the new 8-hour ozone standard that became effective this year. During the 2003 ozone season from April through October, there were only 7 days that the ozone standard was exceeded in the Asheville area (Western North Carolina Regional Air Quality Agency, 2004). During the years 2000 to 2002, the air quality index for the Asheville area was good 74 percent of the days and moderate on 24 percent of the days. The air quality index was only considered unhealthy for approximately 2 percent of the days. The air quality index is an overall measure of air quality for an area that considers the concentration of five harmful pollutants in the air sample. Other North Carolina urban areas generally showed less favorable air quality index readings during that period.

The Blue Ridge Parkway is classified as a Class II clean air area under the 1977 amendments to the Clean Air Act (National Park Service, 2005a). Under Class II, increased pollution is allowed beyond baseline levels provided that the National Ambient Air Quality Standards are not exceeded (Redlodge Clearing House, 2005).

The Western North Carolina Regional Air Quality Agency indicated that air quality permits would be required for renovation of existing facilities that may contain asbestos,

or for new activities that would contain 1,800 new parking spaces or activity expansion that would increase existing parking spaces by 500.

Impacts of Alternative A: No Action

There would be no construction associated with Alternative A; therefore, there would be no short term, direct or indirect, adverse effects on air quality in the area surrounding either the Hemphill Knob site or the Folk Art Center site.

As there is no additional traffic generation associated with the Alternative A, the implementation of Alternative A would have no long term, direct or indirect, adverse effect on air quality in the area surrounding either the Hemphill Knob site or the Folk Art Center site.

Cumulative Effects. The Music Center, the Arboretum expansion, Azalea Road Park, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure project would have no direct effect on air quality near the Hemphill Knob site or the Folk Art Center site. The Folk Art Center expansion could affect air quality near the Folk Art Center site, but impacts would be negligible to minor, long term, indirect, and local.

Conclusion. The implementation of Alternative A would result in no short term, direct or indirect, adverse effect on air quality in the area, due to the fact that there would be no construction.

Alternative A would not produce major adverse effects on air quality whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of air quality as a result of the implementation of Alternative A.

Impacts of Alternative B: Hemphill Knob – Preferred Alternative

The heavy machinery involved in site preparation and the other internal combustion machines associated with construction would generate exhaust fumes that could affect air quality in the vicinity of the site. Dust would also become airborne during site work. Winds would disperse the pollutants, but winds from the east could push pollutants into the headquarters employee parking facility. The pollutants would be dispersed before reaching the residential area to the west along Gashes Creek Road. The contractor should implement best management practices to reduce air quality impacts during construction, including turning off engines when not in use and sprinkling the construction site with water to avoid dust. Therefore, the construction of Alternative B would have a minor, short term, local, indirect adverse effect on air quality in the area surrounding the Hemphill Knob site.

The majority of visitors would arrive in gasoline autos and light trucks, and the exhaust mix from these vehicles is becoming cleaner each year due to attrition of older vehicles. The average stay at the center is one hour and since many of the visitors would arrive in the warm weather months, cold starts would be minimized. Diesel buses and recreational vehicles would generally drop off their visitors, park, and turn off their engines during their stay. The traffic queues at the intersection of the driveway and the parkway should be short, which would help to avoid excessive idling at that location. There should be no air quality permits required for this alternative. The implementation of Alternative B would have a negligible, long term, local, indirect, adverse effect on air quality in the area immediately surrounding the Hemphill Knob site during the operation and use of the facility.

Cumulative Effects. The Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, and the Health Adventure project would have no direct effect on air quality at the Hemphill Knob site and would have a negligible, long term, indirect effect on regional air quality. The traffic generated by the Cort office building, to be located to the west of the Hemphill Knob site, could have a negligible, long term, local indirect adverse effect on the air quality at the regional destination visitor center during morning and afternoon peak traffic periods if the wind is from the west.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative B would have a minor, short term, local, indirect adverse effect on air quality in the area surrounding the Hemphill Knob site. The implementation of Alternative B would have a negligible, long term, local, indirect adverse effect on air quality in the area immediately surrounding the Hemphill Knob site. Alternative B would not produce major adverse effects on air quality whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of air quality as a result of the implementation of Alternative B.

Impacts of Alternative C: Hemphill Knob

The heavy machinery involved in site preparation and the other internal combustion machines associated with construction would generate exhaust fumes that could affect air quality in the vicinity of the site. Dust would also become airborne during site work. Winds would disperse the pollutants, but winds from the east could push pollutants into the headquarters employee parking facility. The pollutants would be dispersed before reaching the residential area to the west along Gashes Creek Road. The contractor should implement best management practices to reduce air quality impacts during construction, including turning off engines when not in use and sprinkling the construction site with water to avoid dust. Therefore, the construction of Alternative C would have a minor, short term, local, indirect adverse effect on air quality in the area surrounding the Hemphill Knob site.

The majority of visitors would arrive in gasoline autos and light trucks, and the exhaust mix from these vehicles is becoming cleaner each year due to attrition of older vehicles. The average stay at the center is one hour and since many of the visitors would arrive in the warm weather months, cold starts would be minimized. Diesel buses and recreational vehicles would generally drop off their visitors, park, and turn off their engines during their stay. The traffic queues at the intersection of the driveway and the parkway should be short, which would help to avoid excessive idling at that location. There should be no air quality permits required for this alternative. The implementation of Alternative C would have a negligible, long term, local, indirect, adverse effect on air quality in the area immediately surrounding the Hemphill Knob site during the operation and use of the facility.

Cumulative Effects. The Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, and the Health Adventure project would have no direct effect on air quality at the Hemphill Knob site and would have a negligible, long term, indirect effect on regional air quality. The traffic generated by the Cort office building, to be located to the west of the Hemphill Knob site, could have a negligible, long term, local indirect adverse effect on the air quality at the regional destination visitor center during morning and afternoon peak traffic periods if the wind is from the west.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative C would have a minor, short term, local, indirect adverse effect on air quality in the area surrounding the Hemphill Knob site. The implementation of Alternative C would have a negligible, long term, local, indirect adverse effect on air quality in the area immediately surrounding the Hemphill Knob site. Alternative B would not produce major adverse effects on air quality whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of air quality as a result of the implementation of Alternative B.

Impacts of Alternative D: Folk Art Center

The construction of Alternative D would have a minor to moderate, short term, local, indirect adverse effect on air quality in the area surrounding the Folk Art Center site. The heavy machinery involved in site preparation and the other internal combustion machines associated with construction would generate exhaust fumes that could affect air quality in the immediate vicinity of the site. Dust would also become airborne during site work. Visitors to the Folk Art Center could be affected as they walk between the building and the parking facility. Winds would disperse the pollutants, but winds from the north could push pollutants into the Veterans Administration Medical Center employee parking facility and into the Arnold Road residential area. The pollutants would probably not affect the patients that are indoors at the Medical Center or indoors at the Arnold Road residences, but could affect patients and homeowners that are outside. The contractor should implement best management practices to reduce air

quality impacts during construction, including turning off engines when not in use and sprinkling the construction site with water to avoid dust.

The implementation of Alternative D would have a negligible to minor, long term, local, indirect adverse effect on air quality in the area surrounding the Folk Art Center site. The vast majority of visitors will arrive in gasoline autos and light trucks, and the vehicle mix is becoming cleaner each year due to attrition of older vehicles. As the average stay is 75 minutes and many of the visitors will arrive in the warm weather months, cold starts will be minimized. Diesel buses and recreational vehicles will generally drop off their visitors, park, and turn off their engines during their stay. The traffic queues at the intersection of the driveway and the parkway should be short to avoid excessive idling at that location. However, the number of vehicles operating in the parking lot and queued in the driveway would be greater than the number associated with the Hemphill Knob site, as this site also contains traffic from the Folk Art Center. As this facility involves reconstruction of the Folk Art Center building, a permit for potential asbestos removal would be required.

Cumulative Effects. The Music Center, the Arboretum expansion, Azalea Road Park, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure project would have no direct effect on air quality at the Folk Art Center site and would have a negligible, long term, indirect effect on regional air quality. As Alternative D reconstructs the Folk Art Center building to create the combined regional destination visitor center/Folk Art Center, the Folk Art Center expansions could be affected.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative D would have a minor to moderate, short term, local, indirect adverse effect on air quality in the area surrounding the Hemphill Knob site. The implementation of Alternative D would have a negligible to minor, long term, local, indirect adverse effect on air quality in the area surrounding the Folk Art Center site.

Alternative D would not produce major adverse effects on air quality whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of air quality as a result of the implementation of Alternative D.

Impacts of Alternative E: Folk Art Center

The construction of Alternative E would have a minor to moderate, short term, local, indirect adverse effect on air quality in the area surrounding the Folk Art Center site. The heavy machinery involved in site preparation and the other internal combustion machines associated with construction would generate exhaust fumes that could affect air quality in the immediate vicinity of the site. Dust would also become airborne during site work. Visitors to the Folk Art Center could be affected as they walk between the

building and the parking facility. Winds would disperse the pollutants, but winds from the north could push pollutants into the Veterans Administration Medical Center employee parking facility and into the Arnold Road residential area. The pollutants would probably not affect the patients that are indoors at the Medical Center or residents that are indoors at the Arnold Road residences, but could affect patients and residents who are outside. The contractor should implement best management practices to reduce air quality impacts during construction, including turning off engines when not in use and sprinkling the construction site with water to avoid dust.

The implementation of Alternative E would have a negligible to minor, long term, local, indirect adverse effect on air quality in the area surrounding the Folk Art Center site. The vast majority of visitors would arrive in gasoline autos and light trucks, and the vehicle mix is becoming cleaner each year due to attrition of older vehicles. As the average stay is 75 minutes and many of the visitors would arrive in the warm weather months, cold starts would be minimized. Diesel buses and recreational vehicles would generally drop off their visitors, park, and turn off their engines during their stay. The traffic queues at the intersection of the driveway and the parkway should be short, which would help to avoid excessive idling at that location. However, the number of vehicles operating in the parking lot and queued in the driveway would be greater than the number associated with the Hemphill Knob site, as this site also contains traffic from the Folk Art Center. There should be no air quality permits required for this alternative.

Cumulative Effects. The Music Center, the Arboretum expansion, Azalea Road Park, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure project would have no direct effect on air quality at the Folk Art Center site and would have a negligible, long term, indirect effect on regional air quality. As Alternative D consumes most of the available space for parking on the site, the Folk Art Center expansions could be affected.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative E would have a minor to moderate, short term, local, indirect adverse effect on air quality in the area surrounding the Folk Art Center site. The implementation of Alternative E would have a negligible to minor, long term, local, indirect adverse effect on air quality in the area surrounding the Folk Art Center site.

Alternative E would not produce major adverse effects on air quality whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of air quality as a result of the implementation of Alternative E.

SOILS

Affected Environment

Hemphill Knob Site. Buncombe County soils in the vicinity of the National Park Service headquarters site are characterized as Clifton clay loam, and Evard-Cowee complex. The Clifton series consists of very deep, well drained soils on gently sloping to very steep ridges and side slopes of the southern Appalachian Mountains. The series formed in residuum weathered from intermediate and mafic igneous and high-grade metamorphic rocks such as hornblende gneiss, amphibolite, and gneiss or schist that is high in ferromagnesium minerals. The Evard series consists of very deep, well drained soils that formed in residuum that may be affected by soil creep in the upper part of the profile. It is weathered from felsic to mafic, igneous and high-grade metamorphic rocks such as granite, hornblende gneiss, mica gneiss, and schist. Typical Evard-Cowee soils include dark reddish brown to yellowish red to red clay loam; red loam to red loam saprolite and weathered, highly fractured amphibolite (USDA NRCS 2001).

Folk Art Center Site. Soils in the vicinity of the Folk Art Center are characterized as Clifton clay loam, Clifton –Urban land complex, and Urban land. The Clifton soils are described in the previous paragraph, and the Urban lands are soils that have been previously altered by earthwork, including fill and grading activities associated with construction (USDA NRCS 2001).

Impacts of Alternative A: No Action

No impacts to soils would occur as a result of the no-action alternative. There would be no construction and therefore no need for earthwork activities, such as filling, grading, or excavation. No erosion would occur as a result of the no action alternative.

Since no impacts would occur to soils as a result of the no action alternative, no mitigation for impacts would be required.

Cumulative Effects. There would be no cumulative effects as a result of the no action alternative. No construction would occur and no additional effects to the soil in the area would be required.

Conclusion. The no-action alternative would not result in any impacts to soils or soil resources. There would be no erosion, compaction, grading, excavation, or loss of fertility as a result of the no action alternative. Therefore there would be no measurable, indirect or direct, long or short term, adverse or beneficial, regional or local, effects on soils or soil resources.

Alternative A (no action) would not produce major adverse effects to soil resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently,

there would be no impairment of soil resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative A (no action).

Impacts of Alternative B: Hemphill Knob – Preferred Alternative

The implementation of Alternative B would require the disturbance of less than one acre of previously undeveloped land on the north end of the parking area and approximately 4 acres of graded and compacted soil and pavement. The graded soils would be used for auxiliary parking and turf grass and the pavement would be used for roadways and parking. The undeveloped portion of the site is currently in second growth hardwoods.

The site preparation for the construction of the regional destination visitor center would require grading, excavation, and filling to accommodate the building and drainage improvements. If any natural soil horizons exist, they would likely be lost during the earthwork. It is unlikely that any additional off-site fill would be required. Upon completion of the project, the soils in the construction would all be considered urban complexes, rather than native soil.

No rare or special soils are present in the vicinity of the Hemphill Knob site. The soils are the same or similar to the soils throughout this portion of the parkway. The alteration of the soils to accommodate the construction of the regional destination visitor center would not result in the loss of unique or rare soil formations or resources. The implementation of Alternative B would result in local, long term, direct, adverse effects to the soil surface in the area, but in the context of the regional soil characteristics, the effects would be negligible.

Best management practices would be implemented during construction to prevent soil erosion due to wind and rain. The erosion prevention practices would include using silt screening around any disturbed areas, mulching all exposed slopes, placing staked hay bales in drainages, and sprinkling exposed soil to prevent wind erosion. Upon completion of the construction project, all disturbed soils would be sodded or seeded with grasses to prevent erosion.

Cumulative Effects. The Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure project would have no cumulative effect on the soil resources at the Hemphill Knob site. Given the common nature of the soil types and the minor effects of the construction, the cumulative adverse effects of these projects would be minimal, short term, direct, and local.

Conclusion. The implementation of Alternative B would result in short-term, local, direct adverse effects on soil resources that would be negligible due to the relatively small construction site proposed and the current disturbed condition of the existing soil resources.

Alternative B (preferred alternative) would not produce major adverse effects to soil resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of soil resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative B.

Impacts of Alternative C: Hemphill Knob

The implementation of Alternative C would not require the disturbance of previously undeveloped land. The proposed construction area would encompass approximately 5.8 acres of existing pavement and previously graded land in turf grass. No new soil would be affected by this project in this configuration. The graded soils are used for auxiliary parking and turf grass and the pavement is used for roadways and parking.

The site preparation for the construction of the regional destination visitor center would require grading, excavation, and filling to accommodate the building and drainage improvements. If any natural soil horizons exist, the upper layers would likely be lost during the earthwork. It is unlikely that any additional off-site fill would be required. Upon completion of the project, the soils in the construction would all be considered urban complexes, rather than native soil.

No rare or special soils are present in the vicinity of the Hemphill Knob site. The soils are the same as or similar to the soils throughout this portion of the parkway. The alteration of the soils to accommodate the construction of the regional destination visitor center would not result in the loss of unique or rare soil formations or resources. The implementation of Alternative C would result in local, long term, direct, adverse effects to the soil surface in the area, but in the context of the regional soil characteristics, the effects would be negligible.

As with Alternative B, mitigation measures for Alternative C would include the implementation of best management practices during construction to prevent soil erosion due to wind and rain. The erosion prevention practices would include using silt screening around any disturbed areas, mulching all exposed slopes, placing staked hay bales in drainages, and sprinkling exposed soil to prevent wind erosion. Upon completion of the construction project, all disturbed soils would be sodded or seeded with grasses to prevent erosion.

Cumulative Effects. The Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure project would have no cumulative effect on the soil resources at the Hemphill Knob site. Given the common nature of the soil types and the minor effects of the construction, the cumulative adverse effects of these projects would be minimal, short term, direct, and local.

Conclusion. The implementation of Alternative C would result in short-term, local, direct adverse effects on soil resources that would be negligible due to the relatively small construction site proposed and the current disturbed condition of the existing soil resources.

Alternative C would not produce major adverse effects to soil resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of soil resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative C.

Impacts of Alternative D: Folk Art Center

Alternative D would require the largest land area of the four action alternatives, with over 7 acres needed to accommodate the proposed features. The proposed site plan, however, would encompass previously disturbed soils associated with the "built" environment of the existing Folk Art Center and the adjacent parking areas. No new soil disturbance would be required with the exception of some potential small, undisturbed soils within the landscaped areas. The majority of the soils in the vicinity of the Folk Art Center are described as urban land complexes, and the construction of the proposed regional destination visitor center would not change that designation. The effects of the implementation of Alternative D would be adverse, local, long term, direct and negligible.

As with the previous alternatives, mitigation measures for Alternative D would include the implementation of best management practices during construction to prevent soil erosion due to wind and rain. The erosion prevention practices would include using silt screening around any disturbed areas, mulching all exposed slopes, placing staked hay bales in drainages, and sprinkling exposed soil to prevent wind erosion. Upon completion of the construction project, all disturbed soils would be sodded or seeded with grasses to prevent erosion.

Cumulative Effects. The Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure project would have no cumulative effect on the soil resources at the Hemphill Knob site. Given the common nature of the soil types and the minor effects of the construction, the cumulative adverse effects of these projects would be minimal, short term, direct, and local.

Conclusion. The implementation of Alternative D would result in short-term, local, direct adverse effects on soil resources that would be negligible due to the relatively small construction site proposed and the current disturbed condition of the existing soil resources.

Alternative D would not produce major adverse effects to soil resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of soil resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative D.

Impacts of Alternative E: Folk Art Center

The construction of Alternative E would require a site of nearly 7 acres, and as with Alternative D, nearly the entire site is already in some form of "built" environment. No native soils would be disturbed in order to construct this version of the regional destination visitor center in this location. The implementation of Alternative E would result in local, long term, direct, adverse effects to the soils within the site, but the effects would be negligible due to the previously disturbed nature of the existing soils.

As with the previous alternatives, mitigation measures for Alternative E would include the implementation of best management practices during construction to prevent soil erosion due to wind and rain. The erosion prevention practices would include using silt screening around any disturbed areas, mulching all exposed slopes, placing staked hay bales in drainages, and sprinkling exposed soil to prevent wind erosion. Upon completion of the construction project, all disturbed soils would be sodded or seeded with grasses to prevent erosion.

Cumulative Effects. The Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure project would have no cumulative effect on the soil resources at the Hemphill Knob site. Given the common nature of the soil types and the minor effects of the construction, the cumulative adverse effects of these projects would be minimal, short term, direct, and local.

Conclusion. The implementation of Alternative E would result in short-term, local, direct adverse effects on soil resources that would be negligible due to the relatively small construction site proposed and the current disturbed condition of the existing soil resources.

Alternative E would not produce major adverse effects to soil resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of soil resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative E.

WATER QUALITY

Affected Environment

Water quality impacts can occur to surface and ground waters in construction projects such as the proposed action and alternatives for the regional destination visitor center. Impacts to surface waters can occur when pollutants carried in stormwater runoff from the site are discharged into receiving waters such as local streams, lakes, ponds, and rivers. Pollutants in stormwater runoff can include sediments, oil, grease, metals, and other pollutants from vehicle exhausts and discharges, and litter and debris from construction waste areas. During operations of the regional destination visitor center, the fertilizers and pesticides applied to the landscape could also be washed into receiving waters. Impervious surfaces such as roads, parking lots, building roofs, and other flat, paved surfaces, increase the amount of stormwater runoff and increase the amount of pollutants that discharge from the site.

Ground water impacts could occur when accidental spills allow pollutants to seep through the soil into the ground water. The most common ground water pollutants in projects such as this one may include hydrocarbons from spills of gas and oil, and from paint and solvents from construction waste sites. These potential impacts to water quality are present on every construction site and preventative measures are required to reduce the occurrence and the impacts of accidents.

Both of the locations of the four “build” alternatives fall within the French Broad River Basin, as does 93% of Buncombe County. Much of the basin is within Pisgah National Forest or Pisgah Game Lands. About one-half of the land in the basin is forested. Water quality is generally good throughout the basin, including the area within the vicinity of the proposed project. Trout waters are abundant within this watershed and many waters are classified as High Quality or Outstanding Resource Waters (NCDEM 1995).

Water bodies within the vicinity of the two sites include the Swannanoa River and Gashes Creek, but neither of these water bodies is within 300 feet of either site. There are no lakes, ponds, or other aquatic systems in the vicinity of the two proposed locations. The two locations proposed for the construction of the four “build” alternatives are situated on the summits of some of the higher hills in the surrounding area (NCDEM 1995).

Water quality is regulated in the state of North Carolina by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Division of Water Quality. During the scoping process for the proposed action, numerous regulatory agencies, including the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources, were provided a description of the proposed action and alternatives for their review and comment. Responses to agency letters are provided as an attachment to this Environmental Assessment in Appendix A.

Construction activities associated with the proposed action or alternatives would be conducted in accordance with Title 15 A of the North Carolina Administrative Code.

Specifically, the requirements contained in Subchapter 4B, would be met for erosion and sediment control; and the requirements of Subchapter 6H, would be met for soil and water conservation, including approval of best management practices for water quality protection for non-point sources. The best management practices utilized for the proposed action or alternatives would be structural and non-structural management-based practices used to reduce non-point source inputs to receiving waters in order to achieve water quality protection goals. Examples of best management practices that may be appropriate for the proposed action include the use of silt fences during construction activities; construction designs and plans for stormwater treatment facilities; and installation of ground cover to reduce or eliminate erosion following completion of construction. Ground water protection practices include the use of containers for waste storage and removal, spill protection systems for gas and oil, separate approved storage areas for paints and solvents, and preparing and following a work plan for the project.

Impacts of Alternative A: No Action

There would be no impacts to water quality as a result of the no action alternative. No erosion or sedimentation would occur, and no additional impervious surface would be created to increase the impacts of surface water runoff.

No mitigation measures would be required because no impacts would occur as a result of the no action alternative.

Cumulative Effects. There would be no cumulative effects of the no action alternative when considering the construction of the Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure projects.

Conclusion. The implementation of the no action alternative would not result in measurable, adverse or beneficial, short or long term, indirect or direct impacts to local or regional water quality.

Alternative A (no action) would not produce major adverse effects to water quality resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of water quality resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative A (no action).

Impacts of Alternative B: Hemphill Knob – Preferred Alternative

The construction of Alternative B at Hemphill Knob would require the same best management practices to limit or eliminate impacts to water quality as the other potential sites and designs. The only potential difference would be that this design would require the smallest amount of impervious area for its site plan, compared to the other “build”

alternatives, and would therefore have the least effect on the quality of stormwater runoff. The proposed project would be constructed in a manner to avoid impacts to water quality as a result of erosion or sedimentation, and the project would conform with all federal, state, and local water quality regulations and policies. Stormwater treatment facilities would be constructed prior to the construction of the facility, as per local regulations. The potential for groundwater impacts is negligible and the same for all “build” alternatives.

All appropriate best management practices would be implemented during construction to prevent degradation of local waters and watersheds. Post construction mitigation measures would include sodding or seeding all exposed soils to prevent erosion, performing routine maintenance on all stormwater treatment facilities, keeping trash and debris cleared up, and avoiding using chemical pesticides and fertilizers on the landscape. The effects of Alternative B on water quality would be adverse, and long term, but local, indirect and negligible.

Cumulative Effects. The construction of the Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure projects would all add to the non-point source pollution problems in the vicinity, but with proper maintenance of the stormwater treatment facilities and the use of non-toxic substances on the landscape, the cumulative effects would be negligible.

Conclusion. The addition of impervious surfaces into the watershed would usually result in adverse impacts to water quality, but with best management practices followed and mitigation measures implemented, those adverse effects would be long term, but local, indirect and negligible.

Alternative B (preferred alternative) would not produce major adverse effects to water quality resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park’s general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of water quality resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative B.

Impacts of Alternative C: Hemphill Knob

The construction of Alternative C would require approximately 5 acres of a mixture of impervious and semi-pervious surfaces to accommodate the site plan. The proposed project would be constructed in a manner to avoid impacts to water quality as a result of erosion or sedimentation, and the project would conform with all federal, state, and local water quality regulations and policies, as discussed in the Affected Environment. Stormwater treatment facilities would be constructed prior to the construction of the facility to prevent accidental discharges, as per local regulations. The potential for groundwater impacts is negligible and the same for all “build” alternatives.

All appropriate best management practices would be implemented during construction to prevent degradation of local waters and watersheds. Post construction mitigation measures would include sodding or seeding all exposed soils to prevent erosion, performing routine maintenance on all stormwater treatment facilities, keeping trash and debris cleared up, and avoiding using chemical pesticides and fertilizers on the landscape. The effects of Alternative C on water quality would be adverse, and long term, but local, indirect and negligible.

Cumulative Effects. The construction of the Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure projects would all add to the non-point source pollution problems in the vicinity, but with proper maintenance of the stormwater treatment facilities and the use of non-toxic substances on the landscape, the cumulative effects would be long term, local, indirect and negligible.

Conclusion. The addition of impervious surfaces into the watershed would always result in a degree of water quality degradation, but with best management practices followed and mitigation measures implemented, the adverse effects resulting from Alternative C would be long term, but local, indirect and negligible.

Alternative C would not produce major adverse effects to water quality resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of water quality resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative C.

Impacts of Alternative D: Folk Art Center

Alternative D at the Folk Art Center is the largest of the four site plans with the largest area of impervious surface and would therefore produce the greatest quantity of surface water runoff. The proposed project would be constructed in a manner to avoid impacts to water quality as a result of erosion or sedimentation, and the project would conform with all federal, state, and local water quality regulations and policies, as discussed in the Affected Environment. The Alternatives section of this document describes the construction practices and design alternatives used to minimize the adverse effects of the implementation of Alternative D. The potential for groundwater impacts is negligible and the same for all "build" alternatives.

All appropriate best management practices would be implemented during construction to prevent degradation of local waters and watersheds. Post construction mitigation measures would include sodding or seeding all exposed soils to prevent erosion, performing routine maintenance on all stormwater treatment facilities, keeping trash and debris cleared up, and avoiding using chemical pesticides and fertilizers on the

landscape. The effects of Alternative D on water quality would be adverse and long term, but local, indirect and negligible.

Cumulative Effects. The construction of the Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure projects would all add to the non-point source pollution problems in the vicinity, but with proper maintenance of the stormwater treatment facilities and the use of non-toxic substances on the landscape, the cumulative adverse effects would be long term, local, indirect and negligible.

Conclusion. The addition of impervious surfaces into the watershed would always result in a degree of water quality degradation, but with best management practices followed and mitigation measures implemented, those adverse effects would be long term, but local, indirect and negligible.

Alternative D would not produce major adverse effects to water quality resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of water quality resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative D.

Impacts of Alternative E: Folk Art Center

Alternative E at the Folk Art Center retains the existing building but would provide stormwater treatment for all new construction. The proposed project would be constructed in a manner to avoid impacts to water quality as a result of erosion or sedimentation, and the project would conform with all federal, state, and local water quality regulations and policies, as discussed in the Affected Environment. The Alternatives section of this document describes the construction practices and design alternatives used to minimize the adverse effects of the implementation of Alternative E. The adverse effects of the implementation of Alternative E would be long term, indirect, local, and negligible. The potential for groundwater impacts is negligible and the same for all "build" alternatives.

All appropriate best management practices would be implemented during construction to prevent degradation of local waters and watersheds. Post construction mitigation measures would include sodding or seeding all exposed soils to prevent erosion, performing routine maintenance on all stormwater treatment facilities, keeping trash and debris cleared up, and avoiding using chemical pesticides and fertilizers on the landscape. The effects of Alternative E on water quality would be adverse, and long term, but local, indirect and negligible.

Cumulative Effects. The construction of the Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the

Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure projects would all add to the non-point source pollution problems in the vicinity, but with proper maintenance of the stormwater treatment facilities and the use of non-toxic substances on the landscape, the cumulative adverse effects would be long term, local, indirect and negligible.

Conclusion. The addition of impervious surfaces into the watershed would always result in a degree of water quality degradation, but with best management practices followed and mitigation measures implemented, those adverse effects would be long term, but local, indirect and negligible.

Alternative E would not produce major adverse effects to water quality resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of water quality resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative E.

WILDLIFE

Affected Environment

This impact topic addresses issues associated with wildlife and wildlife habitats. The species considered include those that have the potential to be affected by the alternatives. The following discussions include wildlife species that occur in the vicinity of the Blue Ridge Parkway headquarters and the Folk Art Center, and could be affected by the proposed action or alternatives. The list of species has been compiled based on casual observations made by National Park Service staff (Nora Murdock and Robert Emmott, 2002-2004).

The sites chosen as potential locations of the proposed regional destination visitor center are located adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway in the "built" environment; therefore, human activity, especially vehicular traffic, contributes to the disturbed nature of the existing habitat. The disturbed nature of the second growth forest habitat does not attract special status species, nor does it provide any unique habitat that is important for the preservation of native species. At both locations, the habitat has been fragmented by roadways and further degraded by a dominance of nuisance exotic vegetation. The sites were surveyed by qualified park staff (National Park Service, 2004g) and characterized as poor habitat. The following sections provide a discussion of wildlife species commonly observed in the vicinity of the proposed action site. No fish are described because there are no wetlands in the vicinity and no direct or indirect impacts to aquatic resources are expected.

Birds. Bird species that have been observed in the vicinity of the Blue Ridge Parkway headquarters, and are known to breed in the area include: blue jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*);

eastern bluebird (*Sialia sialis*); northern cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*); gray catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*); cedar waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*); Carolina chickadee (*Poecile carolinensis*); cowbird (*Molothrus ater*); crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*); mourning dove (*Zenaidura macroura*); yellow-shafted flicker (*Colaptes auratus*); great-crested flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*); blue-gray gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila caerulea*); goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*); broad-winged hawk (*Buteo platypterus*); red-shouldered hawk (*Buteo lineatus*); red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*); sharp-shinned hawk (*Accipiter striatus*); ruby-throated hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*); indigo bunting (*Passerina cyanea*); white-breasted nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*); eastern phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*); American robin (*Turdus migratorius*); chipping sparrow (*Spizella passerina*); song sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*); barn swallow (*Hirundo rustica*); rough-winged swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*); scarlet tanager (*Piranga olivacea*); brown thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*); wood thrush (*Hylacichla mustelina*); tufted titmouse (*Parus bicolor*); rufous-sided towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*); wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*); red-eyed vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*); black and white warbler (*Mniotilta varia*); black-throated green warbler (*Dendroica virens*); hooded warbler (*Wilsonia citrine*); pine warbler (*Dendroica pinus*); downy woodpecker (*Dendrocopos pubescens*); pileated woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*); red-bellied woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*); and Carolina wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*).

The Blue Ridge Parkway follows the Appalachian Mountain chain; many bird species are observed on their migratory patterns during the changing seasons. The following migrant or transient species have been observed in the vicinity of the Blue Ridge Parkway headquarters: grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*); rose-breasted grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*); great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*); ruby-crowned kinglet (*Redulus calendula*); nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*); brown-headed nuthatch (*Sitta pusilla*); osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*); raven (*Corvus corax*); yellow-bellied sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*); chimney swift (*Cathartes aura*); Swainson's thrush (*Catharus ustulatus*); blue-headed vireo (*Vireo solitarius*); yellow-throated vireo (*Vireo flavifrons*); turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*); blackpoll warbler (*Dendroica striata*); black-throated blue warbler (*Dendroica caerulescens*); palm warbler (*Dendroica palmarum*); and yellow-rumped warbler (*Dendroica coronata*).

Reptiles and Amphibians. During the 2002-2004 field seasons, a parkway-wide herpetology inventory was conducted by Accipiter Inc. During this inventory, in the vicinity of the parkway headquarters, there were no plot-based or trap-associated records of reptiles and amphibians. The following species have been incidentally observed between Milepost 380 and Milepost 386 (not a complete list of all potential species): eastern box turtle (*Terrapene carolina carolina*); northern copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortrix mokasen*); northern black racer (*Coluber constrictor constrictor*); eastern garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*); Carolina mountain dusky salamander (*Desmognathus carolinensis*); black-bellied salamander (*Desmognathus quadramaculatus*); spring peeper (*Hyla crucifer*); five-lined skink (*Eumeces fasciatus*); and snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*).

Mammals. Eric Britske, a contractor to the National Park Service, conducted mammal inventory work on the parkway during the field season of 2004. He did not perform trapping or mist netting from Milepost 380 to Milepost 386, however, he did detect little brown bats and red bats during a mobile “Anabat” transect of this section of the parkway. Other mammals known to reside in the vicinity include various small rodents, eastern cottontail, gray squirrel, red fox, raccoon, opossum, and other common mammals.

Impacts of Alternative A: No Action

There would be no adverse or beneficial, direct or indirect, short or long term measurable impacts to wildlife as a result of the no action alternative. There would not be additional vehicular traffic or human activity in the area as a result of the construction, so the wildlife would likely continue to exist in the vicinity. No change in the species or population numbers would be expected to occur as a result of the implementation of the no-action alternative.

No mitigation would be required because there would be no measurable impacts as a result of the no action alternative.

Cumulative Effects. The construction of the Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure projects would continue to degrade and fragment wildlife habitat in the area. Forest fragmentation occurs when large, continuous forests are divided into smaller blocks, either by roads, clearing for agriculture, urbanization, or other human development. Increased fragmentation due to urban development poses a threat to biodiversity primarily in animal populations, as their habitats are chopped up (fragmented) into smaller and smaller pieces (Barry 2002). The habitat provided in these areas is marginal, but the loss of canopy and ground cover, foraging plants, and travel corridors, all add to the cumulative degradation of wildlife habitat and the decline of even once common species. The cumulative effects of these projects would be long term, direct and indirect, regional, and adverse. In the context of the existing habitat in this region, the cumulative impacts would be minor.

Conclusion. There would be no adverse or beneficial, direct or indirect, short or long term measurable impacts to wildlife as a result of the no action alternative.

Alternative A (no action) would not produce major adverse effects to wildlife resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park’s general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of wildlife resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative A (no action).

Impacts of Alternative B: Hemphill Knob – Preferred Alternative

The construction of Alternative B would require the clearing of a small area (less than an acre) of second growth hardwoods. The area proposed to be removed was surveyed by qualified park staff (National Park Service, 2004g) and described as poor habitat due to previous disturbances, a predominance of nuisance exotic species, and fragmentation and isolation of the habitat by roadways. The habitat is not unique or rare and does not support or potentially support special status species. Therefore, considering the small area and the current condition of the affected habitat, the effects of the construction and use of the regional destination visitor center at this location would be long term, local, and adverse, but negligible, especially considering the magnitude of the acreage of similar or substantially better habitat in the vicinity.

Mitigation for the minor loss of habitat would include the use of native trees, shrubs, and ground cover in the landscaping, removing the nuisance exotic vegetation in the remaining habitat, and providing educational materials and demonstration areas for the visiting public. The education materials would promote backyard habitat development and other ways homeowners can provide wildlife habitat.

Cumulative Effects. The construction of the Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure projects would continue to degrade and fragment wildlife habitat in the area. Forest fragmentation occurs when large, continuous forests are divided into smaller blocks, either by roads, clearing for agriculture, urbanization, or other human development. Increased fragmentation due to urban development poses a threat to biodiversity primarily in animal populations, as their habitats are chopped up (fragmented) into smaller and smaller pieces (Barry, 2002). The habitat provided in these areas is marginal, but the loss of canopy and ground cover, foraging plants, and travel corridors, all add to the cumulative degradation of wildlife habitat and the decline of even once common species. The cumulative effects of these projects are long term, direct and indirect, regional, and adverse. In the context of the existing habitat in this region, the cumulative impacts would be minor.

Conclusion. The construction and use of the regional destination visitor center in this location would result in adverse, direct, and long term effects to the wildlife resources and habitat, but the effects would be negligible.

Alternative B (preferred alternative) would not produce major adverse effects to wildlife resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of wildlife resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative B (preferred alternative).

Impacts of Alternative C: Hemphill Knob

The construction of Alternative C, as with Alternative B, would require the clearing of a small area of second growth hardwoods, but even less area (less than half an acre) would be disturbed. The area proposed for removal includes the fringe of trees around the existing parking area. The area was surveyed by qualified park staff (National Park Service, 2004g) and described as poor habitat due to previous disturbances, a predominance of nuisance exotic species, and fragmentation and isolation of the habitat by roadways and development. The habitat is not unique or rare and does not support or have the ability to support special status species. Therefore, the effects of the construction and use of the regional destination visitor center at this location would be long term, local, and adverse, but negligible.

Mitigation for the minor loss of habitat would include the use of native trees, shrubs, and ground cover in the landscaping, removing the nuisance exotic vegetation in the remaining habitat, and providing educational materials and demonstration areas for the visiting public. The education materials would promote backyard habitat development and other ways homeowners can provide wildlife habitat.

Cumulative Effects. The construction of the Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure projects would continue to degrade and fragment wildlife habitat in the area. Forest fragmentation occurs when large, continuous forests are divided into smaller blocks, either by roads, clearing for agriculture, urbanization, or other human development. Increased fragmentation due to urban development poses a threat to biodiversity primarily in animal populations, as their habitats are chopped up (fragmented) into smaller and smaller pieces (Barry, 2002). The habitat provided in these areas is marginal, but the loss of canopy and ground cover, foraging plants, and travel corridors, all add to the cumulative degradation of wildlife habitat and the decline of even once common species. The cumulative effects of these projects are long term, direct and indirect, regional, and adverse. In the context of the existing habitat in this region, the cumulative impacts would be minor.

Conclusion. The construction and use of the regional destination visitor center, as proposed in Alternative C would result in long term, direct, adverse impacts to wildlife resources, but the effects would be negligible. The habitat lost would consist of the highly disturbed fringe of trees around an existing parking area.

Alternative C would not produce major adverse effects to wildlife resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of wildlife resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative C.

Impacts of Alternative D: Folk Art Center

The construction of Alternative D would require the loss of a few trees within the proposed site. The trees are located around the fringe of the parking areas and on the landscaped area south of the Folk Art Center. The area was surveyed by qualified park staff (National Park Service, 2004g) and described as poor habitat due to previous disturbances, a predominance of nuisance exotic species, and fragmentation and isolation of the habitat by roadways and development. The habitat is not unique or rare and does not support or have the ability to support special status species. Therefore, the effects of the construction and use of the regional destination visitor center at this location would be long term, local, and adverse, but negligible.

Mitigation for the minor loss of habitat would include the use of native trees, shrubs, and ground cover in the landscaping, removing the nuisance exotic vegetation in the remaining habitat, and providing educational materials and demonstration areas for the visiting public. The education materials would promote backyard habitat development and other ways homeowners can provide wildlife habitat.

Cumulative Effects. The construction of the Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure projects would continue to degrade and fragment wildlife habitat in the area. Forest fragmentation occurs when large, continuous forests are divided into smaller blocks, either by roads, clearing for agriculture, urbanization, or other human development. Increased fragmentation due to urban development poses a threat to biodiversity primarily in animal populations, as their habitats are chopped up (fragmented) into smaller and smaller pieces (Barry, 2002). The habitat provided in these areas is marginal, but the loss of canopy and ground cover, foraging plants, and travel corridors, all add to the cumulative degradation of wildlife habitat and the decline of even once common species. The cumulative effects of these projects are long term, direct and indirect, regional, and adverse. In the context of the existing habitat in this region, the cumulative impacts would be minor.

Conclusion. The construction and use of the regional destination visitor center at this location would require the loss of a few mature trees and understory vegetation that may provide habitat to common wildlife species. However, the habitat is highly degraded by previous clearing, fragmentation, invasive exotic species infestation and proximity to human activity and associated disturbances. Effects to wildlife resources would be adverse, long term and direct, but considering the degraded condition of the habitat and the very small area of impact, these effects would be negligible.

Alternative D would not produce major adverse effects to wildlife resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently,

there would be no impairment of wildlife resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative D.

Impacts of Alternative E: Folk Art Center

The construction of Alternative E, like Alternative D, would require the loss of a few trees within the proposed site. This alternative would actually remove the same number of trees in the same locations but would also remove more open space and turf grass. The trees are located around the fringe of the parking areas and on the landscaped area south of the Folk Art Center. The area was surveyed by qualified park staff (National Park Service, 2004g) and described as poor habitat due to previous disturbances, a predominance of nuisance exotic species, and fragmentation and isolation of the habitat by roadways and development. The habitat is not unique or rare and does not support or have the ability to support special status species. Therefore, the effects of the construction and use of the regional destination visitor center at this location would be long term, local, and adverse, but negligible.

Mitigation for the minor loss of habitat would include the use of native trees, shrubs, and ground cover in the landscaping, removing the nuisance exotic vegetation in the remaining habitat, and providing educational materials and demonstration areas for the visiting public. The education materials would promote backyard habitat development and other ways homeowners can provide wildlife habitat.

Cumulative Effects. The construction of the Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure projects would continue to degrade and fragment wildlife habitat in the area. Forest fragmentation occurs when large, continuous forests are divided into smaller blocks, either by roads, clearing for agriculture, urbanization, or other human development. Increased fragmentation due to urban development poses a threat to biodiversity primarily in animal populations, as their habitats are chopped up (fragmented) into smaller and smaller pieces (Barry, 2002). The habitat provided in these areas is marginal, but the loss of canopy and ground cover, foraging plants, and travel corridors, all add to the cumulative degradation of wildlife habitat and the decline of even once common species. The cumulative effects of these projects are long term, direct and indirect, regional, and adverse. In the context of the existing habitat in this region, the cumulative impacts would be minor.

Conclusion. The construction and use of the regional destination visitor center in this location would require the loss of a few trees and some understory vegetation that may provide habitat to common wildlife species. However, the habitat is highly degraded by previous clearing, fragmentation, invasive exotic species infestation and proximity to human activity and associated disturbances. Effects to wildlife resources would be adverse, long term and direct, but considering the degraded condition of the habitat and the very small area of impact, these effects would be negligible.

Alternative E would not produce major adverse effects to wildlife resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of wildlife resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative E.

VEGETATION

Affected Environment

The Blue Ridge Parkway botanist (National Park Service, 2004g) recently performed an inspection of both the Hemphill Knob and Folk Art Center prospective sites and did not find any federally listed plants or unique vegetation associations. Dr. Ulrey evaluated the sites for quality and listed the dominant vegetation, the amount of nuisance exotic vegetation present and the age of the stand.

The dominant plant species at Hemphill Knob site (Alternatives B and C) include: tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), and white pine (*Pinus strobes*). The dominant understory tree in this area is flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*). Common herbaceous stratum include Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*); and angelica (*Angelica venosa*).

The forest age is estimated at 50 to 75 years. Non-native exotic plants represent approximately 25% of the understory at the Hemphill Knob site. Non-native exotic species present include: oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*), privet (*Ligustrum sinense*); and Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*).

A North Carolina native ground orchid, spring coral root (*Corallorhiza wisteriana*), has been observed at the Hemphill Knob site. North Carolina ranks native orchids based on the Nature Conservancy's system of measuring rarity and threat status. The spring coral root orchid is considered imperiled in North Carolina because of rarity or other factors that make it vulnerable to extirpation from the state. The spring coral root orchid is on a watch list of species believed to be rare and of conservation concern in the state but not warranting active monitoring at this time. It is not on the state or federal list of protected species.

The Folk Art Center site (Alternatives D and E) dominant canopy species include: black locust (*Robinia pseudo-acacia*); tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*); and white pine (*Pinus strobus*). Understory dominant species are flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*) and sourwood (*Oxydendron arboretum*). American holly (*Ilex opaca*) is moderately abundant in the shrub stratum. Common herbaceous stratum include Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*); and Angelica (*Angelica venosa*). Stand age is approximately 40 to 50 years. Non-native exotic species include: bush honeysuckle (*Lonicera*

fragrantissima); multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*); oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*); privet (*Ligustrum sinense*); and Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*).

Impacts of Alternative A: No Action

There would be no impacts to vegetation as a result of the no action alternative. There would be no need to clear the second growth forest at either site, and the forests would continue to exist as they are.

There would be no need to mitigate because there would be no impacts to the vegetation as a result of the no action alternative.

Cumulative Effects. Other projects proposed for this area include the Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure projects. The construction of these projects would result in the loss of native vegetation, but most of the vegetation communities in undeveloped areas in this vicinity are degraded by exotic species infestations. In the context of this area, the proposed projects would have local, direct, long term impacts that are adverse, but because of the degraded vegetation replaced, the cumulative impacts would be minor to negligible in intensity.

Conclusion. There would be no adverse or beneficial, short or long term, regional or local, direct or indirect, measurable impacts to the vegetation at the two sites as a result of the no action alternative.

Alternative A (no action) would not produce major adverse effects to vegetation resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of vegetation resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative A (no action).

Impacts of Alternative B: Hemphill Knob – Preferred Alternative

The construction of Alternative B would result in the loss of several trees at the northeast end of the parking lot and less than 2 acres of turf grass. The trees lost are common native and exotic species found throughout the eastern temperate region. Many of the trees would be replaced as landscape features. In the regional context, the impacts to vegetation due to the implementation of Alternative B would be adverse, direct, short term, and negligible.

Cumulative Effects. Other projects proposed for this area include the Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure projects. The construction of these projects would

result in the loss of native vegetation, but most of the vegetation communities in undeveloped areas in this vicinity are degraded by exotic species infestations. In the context of this area, the proposed projects would have local, direct, long term impacts that are adverse, but because of the degraded vegetation replaced, the cumulative impacts would be negligible to minor in intensity.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative B would require the loss of less than an acre of tree canopy and understory vegetation, but the species lost are common to most areas of the eastern temperate region, so no substantial loss of vegetation would result. In the regional context, the impacts to vegetation due to the implementation of Alternative B would be adverse, direct, short term, and negligible.

Alternative B (preferred alternative) would not produce major adverse effects to soil resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of soil resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative B (preferred alternative).

Impacts of Alternative C: Hemphill Knob

The construction of Alternative C would require the loss of a small number of existing trees around the perimeter of the parking lot. No grand or unusual trees would be lost and all trees are second growth native hardwood and exotic species. The understory in the area to be impacted is predominantly nuisance vegetation such as oriental bittersweet, privet; and Japanese honeysuckle.

Cumulative Effects. Other projects proposed for this area include the Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure projects. The construction of these projects would result in the loss of native vegetation, but most of the vegetation communities in undeveloped areas in this area are degraded by exotic species infestations. In the context of this area, the proposed projects would have local, direct, long term impacts that are adverse, but because of the degraded vegetation replaced, the cumulative impacts would be negligible to minor in intensity.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative C would require the loss of less than an acre of tree canopy and understory vegetation, but the species lost are common to most areas of the eastern temperate region, so no substantial loss of vegetation would result. In the regional context, the impacts to vegetation due to the implementation of Alternative C would be adverse, direct, short term, and negligible.

Alternative C would not produce major adverse effects to vegetation resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or

opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of vegetation resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative C.

Impacts of Alternative D: Folk Art Center

The construction of Alternative D would require the loss of several large trees that currently shade the parking lot east of the Folk Art Center, as well as smaller trees in the landscaping and around the perimeter of the parking lot. A total of approximately one-half acre of forested area would be cleared for the construction of this alternative. No grand trees or unusual species would be lost as a result of this project. The trees would be replaced in the landscaping and ultimately would achieve the height and stature of the trees lost. Therefore, the adverse impacts to the vegetation resources in the vicinity of the Folk Art Center would be short term, direct, and negligible.

Cumulative Effects. Other projects proposed for this area include the Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure projects. The construction of these projects would result in the loss of native vegetation, but most of the vegetation communities in undeveloped areas in this vicinity are degraded by exotic species infestations. In the context of this area, the proposed projects would have local, direct, long term impacts that are adverse, but because of the degraded vegetation replaced, the cumulative impacts would be negligible to minor in intensity.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative D would require the loss of less than a half acre of tree canopy and understory vegetation, but the species lost are common to most areas of the eastern temperate region, so no substantial loss of vegetation would result. In the regional context, the impacts to vegetation resources due to the implementation of Alternative D would be adverse, direct, short term, and negligible.

Alternative D would not produce major adverse effects to vegetation resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of vegetation resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative D.

Impacts of Alternative E: Folk Art Center

The construction of Alternative E would require essentially the same loss of trees that would be lost for Alternative D. A total of approximately one-half acre of forested area would be cleared for the construction of this alternative. No grand trees or unusual species would be lost as a result of this project. The trees would be replaced in the landscaping and ultimately would achieve the height and stature of the trees lost.

Therefore, the adverse impacts to the vegetation resources in the vicinity of the Folk Art Center would be short term, direct, and negligible.

Cumulative Effects. Other projects proposed for this area include the Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure projects. The construction of these projects would result in the loss of native vegetation, but most of the vegetation communities in undeveloped areas in this area are degraded by exotic species infestations. In the context of this area, the proposed projects would have local, direct, long term impacts that are adverse, but because of the degraded vegetation replaced, the cumulative impacts would be negligible to minor in intensity.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative E would require the loss of less than a half acre of tree canopy and understory vegetation, but the species lost are common to most areas of the eastern temperate region, so no substantial loss of vegetation would result. In the regional context, the impacts to vegetation resources due to the implementation of Alternative E would be adverse, direct, short term, and negligible.

Alternative E would not produce major adverse effects to vegetation resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of vegetation resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative E.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Background Information on Historic Properties

As defined in the National Historic Preservation Act and its implementing regulations in 36 *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR) 800, historic properties are those buildings, Area of Potential Effects, sites, districts, artifacts, and remains that are related to culturally important places and events, and that are listed in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

The significance of historic properties is assessed by the property's ability to meet the following four criteria for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (36CFR60.4):

Association with events that made a substantial contribution to the patterns of our history;

Association with the lives of persons important in our past;

Sites that embody characteristics of a type, period, or methods of construction or that represent the work of a master, possess high artistic value, or represent a distinguishable entity; or

Have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important to prehistory or history.

Properties may be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places for contribution at the national, state, or local level. In order for a structure to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places, it must possess historic integrity of those features necessary to convey its significance, such as location, designs, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association in accordance with National Register guidelines (National Park Service, 2002b).

Overview of Cultural Resources

The National Park Service defines five categories of cultural resources: 1) archeological resources; 2) historic structures; 3) cultural landscapes; 4) ethnographic resources; and 5) museum collections (National Park Service, 1998). All of these types of cultural resources would be evaluated in this environmental assessment as they relate to the area of potential affect. The project area for the regional destination visitor center includes five alternatives: a no action Alternative and two alternatives each at the present Folk Art Center and the Hemphill Knob headquarters locations.

Brief History of the Blue Ridge Parkway

The parkway concept was first introduced in the United States in the 1860s by Frederick Law Olmstead and Calvert Vaux as a means to link city parks (Firth, undated b). Fostered by the advent of the automobile, parkways evolved into suburban thruways connecting urban areas like New York and Washington, D.C. to parks and recreational areas in those regions. In the 1930s, the National Park Service began developing long distance scenic parkways in rural areas, of which the Blue Ridge Parkway serves as the first example. Later parkways, constructed until the late 1950s, had little connection to parks at all but served as landscaped freeways.

In the period between 1933 and 1942, a concept for the first national parkway devoted to recreational driving through a rural setting was developed. Construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway actually began in 1935 in an effort to relieve unemployment and stimulate the economy under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal (Firth, undated b). The project was the subject of some political and social controversy but also fostered considerable design experimentation. The design philosophy reflected the regionalist movement and the rustic architectural aesthetic of the National Park Service. When construction ended in 1942, the Bureau of Public Roads had constructed about two thirds of the parkway road and the National Park Service was developing five recreational areas.

During a halt in work from 1943 to 1945 because of World War II, additional plans were made for postwar construction. Parkway land use maps were produced to provide for the maintenance of the landscape along the road right-of-way (Firth, undated b).

In the years following the war from 1946 to 1966, many of the wartime plans were implemented. The Mission 66 program, a government response to increasing popularity of national parks, funded the completion of the parkway road except for the portion crossing Grandfather Mountain. The most distinctive attributes of the parkway were the road itself, designed for recreational driving with a series of planned views, as well as the collection of exhibits portraying the ‘pioneer’ past of the area. Additional recreation areas were created in accordance with prewar plans, but were similar in design to recreational areas in other national parks (Firth, undated b).

Design plans for the final phase of roadway construction from 1967 to 1987 were altered due to environmental concerns. Proposals to extend the parkway into Georgia were discarded and the Linn Cove Viaduct (Milepost 304) was constructed in the final section of the roadway near Grandfather Mountain in 1978-1983.

More recent work along the parkway has consisted of additional development of recreational areas and the construction of the Folk Art Center to the north of Beverly Hills, and the headquarters building at Hemphill Knob (Firth, undated b).

Architectural Significance of the Blue Ridge Parkway

The Blue Ridge Parkway was constructed between 1935 and 1987 and serves as the premier representative of parkway design from the 1930s. The parkway has maintained its integrity for historic landscape design during several phases of construction. A 1993 draft Historic Resource Study recommended the Blue Ridge Parkway eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. It was considered eligible as a continuous historic district based on National Register of Historic Places Criteria A for its association with the New Deal, which made possible the construction of national parkways, and Criteria C because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of an important type and period of parkway construction and also possesses high artistic values (Firth, undated a).

The proposed Historic District consists of the 226 historic buildings, sites and roadway structures along its path (National Park Service 2004; Firth, undated a). Contributing elements are recognized from two periods of significance; the first includes elements designed and constructed from 1933 to 1945 which illustrate the development of the parkway design and are associated with important programs of the New Deal. The second period includes elements constructed from 1946 to 1966 which give the parkway its distinctive characteristic (Firth, undated a). Although it has not yet been formally nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, for the purposes of environmental and cultural resources compliance, it is treated as eligible, as are the resources contributing to its eligibility (National Park Service, 2004f).

Historic American Engineering Record documentation undertaken in 1996-1997 for the Blue Ridge Parkway Recording Project includes descriptions and photographs of various design attributes including the two-lane roadway, guard walls and parapets, waterways, tunnels, buildings, vistas and overlooks, memorials, bridges, and grade separation structures which comprise the Blue Ridge Parkway. Considered the most distinctive architectural elements of the Blue Ridge Parkway are 168 bridges and grade separation structures that carry the parkway over streams and over or under other roads. Approximately half of the grade separation structures and several bridges were constructed in a similar “rustic style”, with native stone facades that would enable them to blend in with the natural environment. Although they have the appearance of older stone arch bridges, many of the bridges actually reflected state-of-the-art architectural design at the time of their construction. The stonework creating the rigid frame arch rings, abutments, and spandrel walls served as the form for the internal concrete frame poured on steel reinforcing rods. Nearly all of the overpasses (grade separation structures carrying roadways over the parkway) as well as many of the underpasses (grade separation structures carrying the parkway over other roadways) are similarly constructed stone arch structures (Historic American Engineering Record, 1997).

Quarries located near the construction sites were typically the source of stone used in bridge and grade separation structure construction. Along the 469-mile length of the parkway, the color and type of stone varies, but is generally similar in appearance to the nearby rock outcroppings. Types of stone used include greenstone, schist, granite, and limestone. The massive stones were hewn or squared and laid in broken patterns (Historic American Engineering Record, 1997).

Arch shapes of the various structures vary in accordance with length of the span and terrain. Among the types of arches are the segmental, the elliptical and the circular. The majority of arches are segmental with a portion of the circle extending from straight-sided abutment walls. Elliptical arches carry the curvature of the arch to the ground. Less common is the circular arch found on some of narrower spans. Many of the structures cross roads or streams diagonally to preserve the curved path of the roadway (Historic American Engineering Record, 1997).

At present, a proposed National Historic Landmark District nomination is being prepared (Coffey, 2004; Firth, undated b). This nomination is an update to the draft Historic Resource Study and considers the Blue Ridge Parkway eligible as a National Historic Landmark (Firth, undated b). The Blue Ridge Parkway was determined eligible under both National Historic Landmark Criteria One and Four. Criteria One includes properties that are associated with events that have made a substantial contribution to and are identified with, or that outstandingly represent the broad national patterns of United States history and from which an understanding and appreciation of those broad patterns may be gained (similar to National Register of Historic Places Criterion A). Criteria Four includes properties that embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen exceptionally valuable for the study of a period, style, or method of construction, or that represent an important, distinctive, and exceptional

entity whose components may lack individual distinction (similar to National Register of Historic Places Criterion C) (36 CFR 65: National Historic Landmarks Program).

Previous Investigations

The National Park Service has conducted archaeological surveys in the proposed project areas (see Table 5). Although there are four distinct alternatives, they occupy only two separate locations. Alternatives B and C are located at the Blue Ridge Parkway headquarters at Hemphill Knob and Alternatives D and E are on the grounds of the Folk Art Center, north of Beverly Hills.

TABLE 5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND SURVEY STATUS BY PROJECT AREA

Alternative	Archaeological Survey Status	National Register of Historic Places- Eligible Archaeological Sites	Reference
A – No Action	N/A	N/A	N/A
B – Headquarters at Hemphill Knob	Complete	None	Snedeker and Ruesch 1987
C – Headquarters at Hemphill Knob	Complete	None	Snedeker and Ruesch 1987
D – Folk Art Center	Systematic subsurface survey required	Unknown	Dorwin 1975; Sandbeck 2004
E – Folk Art Center	Systematic subsurface survey required	Unknown	Dorwin 1975; Sandbeck 2004

In 1987, National Forest Service archaeologists conducted a survey for the proposed construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway headquarters at Hemphill Knob, in the area containing Alternatives B and C in this undertaking. The pedestrian survey included 30x30 centimeter shovel tests across the summit of Hemphill Knob. Soil from these tests was screened by trowel. In areas where the terrain was less steep, archaeologists cleared 1x1 meter areas of duff, leaf litter, and rocks and excavated 50x50 centimeter shovel tests. Along the small toe ridges, 50x50 centimeter shovel tests were placed 20 to 25 meters apart along two transects paralleling topographic contours. Soil from these tests was screened through one-quarter inch hardware cloth. Archaeologists also visually inspected randomly cleared patches of several old roads, road cut banks and other areas of soil exposure or disturbance for cultural material (Snedeker and Ruesch, 1987).

One historic archaeological site, 31BN328, was recorded during the investigation. The site consisted of a 5x5 meter depression with trash piles and was considered a recent outbuilding associated with the remains of another structure located 60 meters northeast. Because the area had been disturbed by construction of the Blue Ridge

Parkway and trash dumping, the site was determined not eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (Snedeker and Ruesch, 1987).

A portion of the area included in Alternatives D and E at the Folk Art Center was surveyed by archaeologists from Western Carolina University in 1975. Four locations for the proposed construction of the Folk Art Center were investigated. Location 1 in the 1975 survey corresponds with the approximate location of Alternatives D and E of the current proposed undertaking. The survey consisted of a walkover in six to eight transects spaced 50 to 100 feet apart across the survey area. At 50 foot intervals along each transect, small areas were cleared of brush and leaf litter to examine the ground surface for cultural material. No subsurface excavation was conducted. The investigation yielded no artifacts and the area was determined to have been previously disturbed, thereby destroying any cultural resources which may have been present (Dorwin, 1975).

Additional information on these project areas was obtained from the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office during the scoping process for this project. The North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office indicates that both the Hemphill Knob headquarters location and the Folk Art Center area have high probabilities for containing prehistoric or historic archaeological sites (Sandbeck, 2004). Because the 1975 survey of the Folk Art Center area did not include systematic subsurface testing, additional cultural resources investigations to identify and evaluate cultural resources would be required. The nearest known archaeological site, 31BN154, is less than 200 meters west of the existing facility and has not been evaluated for National Register of Historic Places eligibility (Sandbeck, 2004).

Linear corridors associated with construction and/or excavation of infrastructure such as roads and utility lines may be required beyond the proposed project areas. If these corridors occur in developed areas, intact archaeological sites are not likely to occur. However, if these corridors are located in undisturbed areas which have not been previously surveyed for cultural resources, additional archaeological sites may be identified in subsequent surveys and some may be considered National Register of Historic Places-eligible.

Previous Stabilization Projects

Some internal stabilization has occurred within the interior of the box culvert, 261 feet south of the centerline of the parkway headquarters access road; however, the exterior stone pattern and configuration are still intact.

Affected Environment

Historic Structures. Alternatives B and C are located at the Blue Ridge Parkway headquarters. About 150 feet south of the headquarters driveway, a small grade separation structure or masonry box culvert carries the parkway over a gravel and grass covered path which serves as a spur trail to the Mountain to Sea Trail and possibly for drainage as well. A wood guardrail sits on top of the structure on the road surface. Some

internal stabilization has occurred within the culvert interior; however the exterior stone pattern and configuration are still intact.

Although this specific structure was not evaluated in Historic American Engineering Record documentation or included in the draft National Register of Historic Places / National Historic Landmark nomination of the parkway, the segmental arch single span structure with a native stone facade reflects the “rustic style” embodied by other contributing elements along the parkway, and should also be considered a contributing element.

No historic structures have been identified in or near Alternatives D and E at the Folk Art Center.

Cultural Landscapes. The cultural landscape of the Blue Ridge Parkway incorporates both cultural and natural elements. The cultural elements include the roadway and the historic buildings and structures along its path which were constructed in a similar “rustic style”, with native stone facades. These stone facades enable the roadway structures to blend in with the natural environment. The natural elements include intact vegetation and scenic vistas in the original rural settings. Although a cultural landscape inventory has not been conducted, it is clear that the Blue Ridge Parkway constitutes a cultural landscape of which the roadway and the historic buildings and structures are the dominating cultural features.

Archaeological Resources. One archaeological site was identified in the Hemphill Knob parkway headquarters location. One historic archaeological site, 31BN328, was previously recorded in the vicinity of Alternative B and C but because the area had been disturbed, the site was determined not eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (Snedeker and Ruesch, 1987).

The Hemphill Knob area is considered a high probability zone for prehistoric or historic archaeological resources (Sandbeck, 2004) by the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office. Archaeological sites may occur in adjacent areas beyond those previously surveyed; some of these sites could be considered National Register of Historic Places-eligible.

Previous archaeological work at the Folk Art Center did not include subsurface testing and the presence of archaeological resources is undetermined. However, the Folk Art Center area is also considered a high probability zone for prehistoric or historic archaeological resources. Archaeological sites may occur in this area; some of these sites could be considered National Register of Historic Places-eligible.

Ethnographic Resources. No ethnographic resources have been identified at the proposed Hemphill Knob or Folk Art Center locations. An ethnographic overview and assessment has not been prepared for the Blue Ridge Parkway. The following groups are federally recognized Native American groups that may have been traditionally associated with the area around the Blue Ridge Parkway including the Catawba Indian Tribe,

Cherokee Nation, Oklahoma, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Tuscarora Nation, United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians.

Museum Collection. It is likely that no artifacts were collected or curated from the previous investigation at the Hemphill Knob parkway headquarters (Snedeker and Ruesch, 1987). Artifacts mentioned in the report include contemporary cans, bottles and jars as well as isolated fragments of glassware and one historic ceramic fragment. The assemblage is mostly modern refuse and it is likely that the artifacts were not retained.

No artifacts were recovered from the previous investigation at the Folk Art Center.

Impacts to Cultural Resources

Area of Potential Effect

An integral part of the identifying process is to determine the area within which cultural resources would be affected or likely to be affected (36 CFR 800.16(d)). The Area of Potential Effect for archaeological resources encompasses the footprint for all physical ground disturbance including building construction, landscaping, construction staging areas, road widening and any utility corridors. The Area of Potential Effect for architectural resources (visual and noise effects) extends 200 feet beyond the Area of Potential Effect boundaries for archaeological resources.

An undertaking is considered to have an effect on a historic property when the undertaking may alter characteristics of the property that may qualify the property for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. An effect is considered adverse when it diminishes the integrity of the property's location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, or association. Adverse effects on historic properties would include, but not be limited to:

- physical destruction, damage, or alteration of all or part of the property;
- isolation of the property from or alteration of the character of the property's setting when that character contributes to the property's qualification for the National Register of Historic Places;
- introduction of visual, audible, or atmospheric elements that are out of character with the property or alter its setting;
- neglect of a property resulting in its deterioration or destruction; and
- transfer, lease, or sale of the property (36 CFR 800.9[b]).

Any ground-disturbing action in the area of an National Register of Historic Places-eligible or potentially eligible archaeological site, or modification to such a site, can affect the integrity of that cultural resource, resulting in alteration or destruction of those characteristics or qualities which make it potentially eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

For the purposes of this document, a substantial impact under the National Environmental Policy Act would be defined as an ‘adverse effect’ under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Impacts of Alternative A: No Action

Historic Structures. Under Alternative A -no action, no construction activities would be conducted and no effect to historic structures would occur.

Cultural Landscape. Because no construction activities would be conducted, no effect to the cultural landscape would occur under Alternative A -no action.

Archaeological Resources. No construction activities would be conducted; therefore, no effect to archaeological resources would occur under Alternative A -no action.

Ethnographic Resources. Because no construction activities would be conducted, Alternative A - no action would have no effect on ethnographic resources.

Museum Collection. No museum collections would be affected with Alternative A -no action.

Cumulative Effects. The Alternative A-no action would not contribute to cumulative adverse effects to cultural resources in the region because no additional cultural resources would be impacted.

Conclusion. Alternative A-no action would have no effect on historic structures or archaeological resources. This alternative would have no effect on cultural landscape or currently unidentified ethnographic resources. Implementation of Alternative A-no action would have no effect for museum collections.

Alternative A would not produce major adverse effects to cultural resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park’s general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of cultural resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative A.

Impacts of Alternative B: Hemphill Knob – Preferred Alternative

Historic Structures. The historic masonry box culvert on the parkway to the south of the project area has been identified as a contributing element to the National Register of Historic Places- eligible district and proposed National Historic Landmark. The construction of a turn lane on the Parkway necessitating widening of the masonry box culvert would result in the destruction of the architectural design and loss of physical integrity of the resource, and subsequently, its ability to contribute to the National Register of Historic Places-eligible district and National Historic Landmark. Because

only one contributing element would be disturbed, Alternative B would have a moderate, long-term adverse effect on a contributing element of the National Register of Historic Places-eligible Blue Ridge Parkway. Rehabilitation of the masonry box culvert in conjunction with the road widening could result in a long-term beneficial effect by recreating the architectural features compatible with other contributing elements of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Visual and noise intrusions to the National Register of Historic Places-eligible Blue Ridge Parkway would occur during construction activities; however, these intrusions would be minor, local, direct, and short-term adverse effects..

Cultural Landscape. Alternative B would have a minor, short-term adverse effect during construction activities from vegetation removal and construction grading.

Archaeological Resources. No National Register of Historic Places-listed or National Register of Historic Places-eligible archaeological sites have been identified in the Area of Potential Effect for this Alternative. The North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office considers several areas beyond the previously surveyed areas to have a high probability for the presence of prehistoric or historic archaeological sites. Linear corridors for infrastructure could occur in undeveloped areas with intact archaeological sites, some of which may be National Register of Historic Places-eligible. Alternative B would have a moderate, long-term, local adverse effect on archaeological resources located in the infrastructure corridors.

Ethnographic Resources. Although an ethnographic overview and assessment has not been prepared, no ethnographic resources are anticipated in the project area. Alternative B is expected to have no effects on ethnographic resources.

Museum Collection. No effect to museum collections would occur under Alternative B.

Mitigation measures under Alternative B include, but may not be limited to, the following.

Mitigation treatments for architectural resources adversely affected may include avoidance or mitigation through documentation to Historic American Engineering Record standards. Although Historic American Engineering Record documentation has been executed for the parkway, the historic masonry box culvert on the Parkway south of the project area was not recorded. The historic masonry box culvert is included as a contributing element to a National Register of Historic Places-eligible and proposed National Historic Landmark historic district. An architectural evaluation and archival research of the masonry box culvert is recommended prior to construction if Alternative B is selected. This architectural information and historic context documentation would be submitted to the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Officer and local repositories.

All work would comply with the substantive and procedural requirements described in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archaeology and Historic Preservation. The materials, construction tools and

techniques used would be designed to preserve the integrity of the historic character and limit damage to intact architectural resources. Construction techniques would preserve existing character-defining features to the greatest extent possible and preserve as much historic fabric as possible. The exterior of the masonry box culvert would be reconstructed using architecturally compatible materials and original design of similar features that are contributing elements of the National Register of Historic Places-eligible Blue Ridge Parkway such as utilizing existing stone to veneer the new concrete abutment, wing and parapet walls.

Mitigation measures for the cultural landscape would include minimal disruption and disturbance of local vegetation, dust abatement, and replanting and re-landscaping any areas affected by construction activities.

Mitigation measures reduce adverse effects on archaeological sites. The assumed (and preferred mitigation under Federal guidelines) is avoidance. Avoidance may be accomplished through redesign of the proposed construction, utility corridors, construction staging areas and borrow pit excavations. Avoidance preserves the integrity of archaeological sites and protects their research potential (i.e., National Register of Historic Places eligibility). Avoidance also avoids costs and potential construction delays associated with data recovery. Traditionally, data recovery of archaeological sites through professional techniques such as surface collection, mapping, photography, subsurface excavation, technical report preparation and dissemination, has been the standard mitigation measure. However, data recovery is labor intensive (i.e., costly) but may be necessary if National Register of Historic Places-eligible sites cannot be avoided. Data recovery of archaeological information is now considered, in and of itself, an adverse effect under the revised Section 106 regulations (36CFR800.5(a)(2)(i)). Because intact prehistoric and historic archaeological sites may occur in undisturbed areas proposed for infrastructure corridors at Alternative B, a Phase I archaeological survey is recommended prior to construction. The Phase I survey would consist of a systematic series of shovel probes to identify archaeological sites and to determine their extent and integrity. If intact archaeological sites are identified, Phase II cultural resources studies should be designed in consultation with the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office and implemented to determine the National Register of Historic Places eligibility of the cultural resources. If National Register of Historic Places-eligible resources occur and cannot be avoided through project redesign, Phase III data recovery investigations should be developed in consultation with the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office and implemented prior to construction.

Cumulative Effects. In addition to the impacts of Alternative B, cumulative impacts could occur to additional cultural resources in the area as a result of other projects along the Blue Ridge Parkway and in the area near the parkway headquarters and the Folk Art Center such as the expansion of the Folk Art Center by the Southern Highland Craft Guild, the addition of an Interpretive Center at the Blue Ridge Music Center at Milepost 213, construction of recreational facilities at Azalea Road Park by the city of Asheville,

completion of a demonstration greenhouse and gateway center at Milepost 393 by the North Carolina Arboretum, the renovation of Pack Square Park in downtown Asheville, construction of a new facility for Health Adventure at W.T. Weaver Boulevard, near the University of North Carolina at Asheville, the construction of a new headquarters and visitor center for the Asheville Chamber of Commerce on Montford Avenue, and construction of the new Cort office building at Gashes Creek Road and I-40 eastbound access ramp.

Cumulative effects to cultural resources would include physical disturbance through ground disturbance, demolition, alteration of architectural traits, vandalism from increased access; structural instability through vibration; audio intrusions from increased traffic; and visual intrusions to historic settings and cultural landscapes. As a result of the possible construction of multiple projects, more National Register of Historic Places - eligible resources would be adversely affected resulting in additional loss of cultural resources within the overall regional cultural resource data base.

If National Register of Historic Places -eligible resources are identified in project areas associated with the expansion of the Folk Art Center, the construction of the Interpretive Center at the Blue Ridge Music Center, the construction of recreational facilities at Azalea Road Park, completion of a demonstration greenhouse and gateway center at Milepost 393, the renovation of Pack Square Park, the construction of a new facility for Health Adventure, the construction of a new Asheville Chamber of Commerce headquarters and visitor center, and construction of the new Cort office building, then cumulative effects would be adverse. More National Register of Historic Places -eligible resources would be adversely affected resulting in additional loss of cultural resources within the overall regional cultural resource data base.

Conclusion. Alternative B could have moderate, long-term adverse effects on historic structures and archaeological resources. Construction activity would have minor, short-term adverse effects on the cultural landscape. This alternative would have no effects on historic structures, ethnographic resources, or museum collections.

Alternative B would not produce major adverse effects to cultural resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of cultural resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative B.

Impacts of Alternative C: Hemphill Knob

Historic Structures. The historic masonry box culvert on the parkway to the south of the project area has been identified as a contributing element to the National Register of Historic Places -eligible district and proposed National Historic Landmark. The construction of a turn lane on the Parkway necessitating widening of the masonry box culvert would result in the destruction of the architectural design and loss of physical

integrity of the resource, and subsequently, its ability to contribute to the National Register of Historic Places-eligible district and National Historic Landmark. Because only one contributing element would be disturbed, Alternative C would have a moderate, long-term adverse effect on a contributing element of the National Register of Historic Places-eligible Blue Ridge Parkway. Rehabilitation of the masonry box culvert in conjunction with the road widening could result in a long-term beneficial effect by recreating the architectural features compatible with other contributing elements of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Visual and noise intrusions to the National Register of Historic Places-eligible Blue Ridge Parkway would occur during construction activities; however, these intrusions would be minor and short-term.

Cultural Landscape. Alternative C would have a minor, short-term, local adverse effect during construction activities from vegetation removal and construction grading.

Archaeological Resources. No National Register of Historic Places-listed or National Register of Historic Places-eligible archaeological sites have been identified in the Area of Potential Effect for this Alternative. The North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office considers several areas beyond the previously surveyed areas to have a high probability for the presence of prehistoric or historic archaeological sites. Linear corridors for infrastructure could occur in undeveloped areas with intact archaeological sites, some of which may be National Register of Historic Places-eligible. Alternative C would have a moderate, long-term adverse effect on archaeological resources located in the infrastructure corridors.

Ethnographic Resources. Although an ethnographic overview and assessment has not been prepared, no ethnographic resources are anticipated in the project area. Alternative C is expected to have no effects on ethnographic resources.

Museum Collection. No effect to museum collections would occur under Alternative C.

Mitigation measures under Alternative C include, but may not be limited to, the following.

Mitigation treatments for architectural resources adversely affected may include avoidance or mitigation through documentation to Historic American Engineering Record standards. Although Historic American Engineering Record documentation has been executed for the parkway, the historic masonry box culvert on the Parkway south of the project area was not recorded. The historic masonry box culvert is included as a contributing element to a National Register of Historic Places-eligible and proposed National Historic Landmark historic district. An architectural evaluation and archival research of the masonry box culvert is recommended prior to construction if Alternative C is selected. This architectural information and historic context documentation would be submitted to the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Officer and local repositories.

All work would comply with the substantive and procedural requirements described in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archaeology and Historic Preservation. The materials, construction tools and techniques used would be designed to preserve the integrity of the historic character and limit damage to intact architectural resources. Construction techniques would preserve existing character-defining features to the greatest extent possible and preserve as much historic fabric as possible. The exterior of the masonry box culvert would be reconstructed using architecturally compatible materials and original design of similar features that are contributing elements of the National Register of Historic Places-eligible Blue Ridge Parkway such as utilizing existing stone to veneer the new concrete abutment, wing and parapet walls.

Mitigation measures for the cultural landscape would include minimal disruption and disturbance of local vegetation, dust abatement, and replanting and re-landscaping any areas affected by construction activities.

Mitigation measures reduce adverse effects on archaeological sites. The assumed (and preferred mitigation under Federal guidelines) is avoidance. Avoidance may be accomplished through redesign of the proposed construction, utility corridors, construction staging areas and borrow pit excavations. Avoidance preserves the integrity of archaeological sites and protects their research potential (i.e., National Register of Historic Places eligibility). Avoidance also avoids costs and potential construction delays associated with data recovery.

Traditionally, data recovery of archaeological sites through professional techniques such as surface collection, mapping, photography, subsurface excavation, technical report preparation and dissemination, has been the standard mitigation measure. However, data recovery is labor intensive (i.e., costly) but may be necessary if National Register of Historic Places-eligible sites cannot be avoided. Data recovery of archaeological information is now considered, in and of itself, an adverse effect under the revised Section 106 regulations (36CFR800.5(a)(2)(i)).

Because intact prehistoric and historic archaeological sites may occur in undisturbed areas proposed for infrastructure corridors at Alternative B, a Phase I archaeological survey is recommended prior to construction. The Phase I survey would consist of a systematic series of shovel probes to identify archaeological sites and to determine their extent and integrity. If intact archaeological sites are identified, Phase II cultural resources studies should be designed in consultation with the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office and implemented to determine the National Register of Historic Places eligibility of the cultural resources. If National Register of Historic Places-eligible resources occur and cannot be avoided through project redesign, Phase III data recovery investigations should be developed in consultation with the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office and implemented prior to construction.

Cumulative Effects. In addition to the impacts of Alternative C, cumulative impacts could occur to additional cultural resources in the area as a result of other projects along the Blue Ridge Parkway and in the area near the parkway headquarters and the Folk Art

Center such as the expansion of the Folk Art Center by the Southern Highland Craft Guild, the addition of an Interpretive Center at the Blue Ridge Music Center at Milepost 213, construction of recreational facilities at Azalea Road Park by the city of Asheville, completion of a demonstration greenhouse and gateway center at Milepost 393 by the North Carolina Arboretum, the renovation of Pack Square Park in downtown Asheville, construction of a new facility for Health Adventure at W.T. Weaver Boulevard near the University of North Carolina at Asheville, the construction of a new headquarters and visitor center for the Asheville Chamber of Commerce on Montford Avenue, and construction of the new Cort office building at Gashes Creek Road and I-40 eastbound access.

Cumulative effects to cultural resources would include physical disturbance through ground disturbance, demolition, alteration of architectural traits, vandalism from increased access; structural instability through vibration; audio intrusions from increased traffic; and visual intrusions to historic settings and cultural landscapes. As a result of the possible construction of multiple projects, more National Register of Historic Places - eligible resources would be adversely affected resulting in additional loss of cultural resources within the overall regional cultural resource data base.

If National Register of Historic Places -eligible resources are identified in project areas associated with the expansion of the Folk Art Center, the construction of the Interpretive Center at the Blue Ridge Music Center, the construction of recreational facilities at Azalea Road Park, completion of a demonstration greenhouse and gateway center at Milepost 393, the renovation of Pack Square Park, the construction of a new facility for Health Adventure, the construction of a new Asheville Chamber of Commerce headquarters and visitor center, and construction of the new Cort office building, then cumulative effects would be adverse. More National Register of Historic Places -eligible resources would be adversely affected resulting in additional loss of cultural resources within the overall regional cultural resource data base.

Conclusion. Alternative C would have moderate, long-term adverse affects on historic structures and archaeological resources. Construction activity would have minor, short-term adverse effects on the cultural landscape. This alternative would have no effects on historic structures, ethnographic resources or museum collections.

Alternative C would not produce major adverse effects to cultural resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of cultural resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative C.

Impacts of Alternative D: Folk Art Center

Historic Structures. No National Register of Historic Places-listed or National Register of Historic Places-eligible architectural resources have been identified within the Area of

Potential Effect for Alternative D. Implementation of Alternative D would have no effect on historic structures.

Visual and noise intrusions to the National Register of Historic Places-eligible Blue Ridge Parkway would occur during construction activities; however, these intrusions would be minor, local, and short-term adverse effects.

Cultural Landscape. Alternative D would have a minor, short-term, local adverse effect during construction activities from vegetation removal and construction grading.

Archaeological Resources. Alternative D has not been systematically surveyed to identify and evaluate archaeological resources. Archaeological sites may be identified in the project area and some may be considered National Register of Historic Places-eligible. Implementation of Alternative D would have moderate, long-term, local adverse effects on archaeological resources.

Ethnographic Resources. Although an ethnographic overview and assessment has not been prepared, no ethnographic resources are anticipated in the project area. Alternative D is expected to have no effects on ethnographic resources.

Museum Collection. No effect to museum collections would occur under Alternative D.

Mitigation measures under Alternative D include, but may not be limited to, the following.

Mitigation measures for the cultural landscape would include minimal disruption and disturbance of local vegetation, dust abatement, and replanting and re-landscaping any areas affected by construction activities.

Mitigation measures reduce adverse effects on archaeological sites. The assumed (and preferred mitigation under federal guidelines) is avoidance. Avoidance may be accomplished through redesign of the proposed construction, utility corridors, construction staging areas and borrow pit excavations. Avoidance preserves the integrity of archaeological sites and protects their research potential (i.e., National Register of Historic Places eligibility). Avoidance also avoids costs and potential construction delays associated with data recovery. Traditionally, data recovery of archaeological sites through professional techniques such as surface collection, mapping, photography, subsurface excavation, technical report preparation and dissemination, has been the standard mitigation measure. However, data recovery is labor intensive (i.e., costly) but may be necessary if National Register of Historic Places-eligible sites cannot be avoided. Data recovery of archaeological information is now considered, in and of itself, an adverse effect under the revised Section 106 regulations (36CFR800.5(a)(2)(i)). Because the project area at Alternative D has not been systematically surveyed for archaeological resources and because intact prehistoric and historic archaeological sites may occur in undisturbed areas proposed for infrastructure corridors, a Phase I archaeological survey is recommended prior to construction. The Phase I survey would consist of a systematic series of shovel probes to identify archaeological sites and to

determine their extent and integrity. If intact archaeological sites are identified, Phase II cultural resources studies should be designed in consultation with the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office and implemented to determine the National Register of Historic Places eligibility of the cultural resources. If National Register of Historic Places-eligible resources occur and cannot be avoided through project redesign, Phase III data recovery investigations should be developed in consultation with the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office and implemented prior to construction.

Cumulative Effects. In addition to the impacts of Alternative D, cumulative impacts could occur to additional cultural resources in the area as a result of other projects along the Blue Ridge Parkway and in the area near the parkway headquarters and the Folk Art Center such as the expansion of the Folk Art Center by the Southern Highland Craft Guild, the addition of an Interpretive Center at the Blue Ridge Music Center at Milepost 213, construction of recreational facilities at Azalea Road Park by the city of Asheville, completion of a demonstration greenhouse and gateway center at Milepost 393 by the North Carolina Arboretum, the renovation of Pack Square Park in downtown Asheville, construction of a new facility for Health Adventure at W.T. Weaver Boulevard near the University of North Carolina at Asheville, the construction of a new headquarters and visitor center for the Asheville Chamber of Commerce on Montford Avenue, and construction of the new Cort office building at Gashes Creek Road and I-40 eastbound access ramp.

Cumulative effects to cultural resources would include physical disturbance through ground disturbance, demolition, alteration of architectural traits, vandalism from increased access; structural instability through vibration; audio intrusions from increased traffic; and visual intrusions to historic settings and cultural landscapes. As a result of the possible construction of multiple projects, more National Register of Historic Places -eligible resources would be adversely affected resulting in additional loss of cultural resources within the overall regional cultural resource data base.

If National Register of Historic Places -eligible resources are identified in project areas associated with the expansion of the Folk Art Center, the construction of the Interpretive Center at the Blue Ridge Music Center, the construction of recreational facilities at Azalea Road Park, completion of a demonstration greenhouse and gateway center at Milepost 393, the renovation of Pack Square Park, the construction of a new facility for Health Adventure, the construction of a new Asheville Chamber of Commerce headquarters and visitor center, and construction of the new Cort office building, then cumulative effects would be adverse. More National Register of Historic Places -eligible resources would be adversely affected resulting in additional loss of cultural resources within the overall regional cultural resource data base.

Conclusion. Implementation of Alternative D would have no effect on historic structures, but would have a moderate, long-term adverse effect on archaeological resources. The construction activity would have a minor, short-term, local adverse effect on the cultural landscape. This alternative would have no effects on ethnographic resources or museum collections.

Alternative D would not produce major adverse effects to cultural resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of cultural resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative D.

Impacts of Alternative E: Folk Art Center

Historic Structures. No National Register of Historic Places-listed or National Register of Historic Places-eligible architectural resources have been identified within the Area of Potential Effect for Alternative E. Implementation of Alternative E would have no effect on historic structures.

Visual and noise intrusions to the National Register of Historic Places-eligible Blue Ridge Parkway would occur during construction activities; however, these intrusions would be minor and short-term.

Cultural Landscape. Alternative E would have a minor, short-term, local adverse effect during construction activities from vegetation removal and construction grading.

Archaeological Resources. Alternative E has not been systematically surveyed to identify and evaluate archaeological resources. Archaeological sites may be identified in the project area and some may be considered National Register of Historic Places-eligible. Implementation of Alternative E would have moderate, long-term, local adverse effects on archaeological resources.

Ethnographic Resources. Although an ethnographic overview and assessment has not been prepared, no ethnographic resources are anticipated in the project area. Alternative E is expected to have no effects on ethnographic resources.

Museum Collection. No effect to museum collections would occur under Alternative E.

Mitigation measures under Alternative E include, but may not be limited to, the following.

Mitigation measures for the cultural landscape would include minimal disruption and disturbance of local vegetation, dust abatement, and replanting and re-landscaping any areas affected by construction activities.

Mitigation measures reduce adverse effects on archaeological sites. The assumed (and preferred mitigation under Federal guidelines) is avoidance. Avoidance may be accomplished through redesign of the proposed construction, utility corridors, construction staging areas and borrow pit excavations. Avoidance preserves the integrity of archaeological sites and protects their research potential (i.e., National Register of Historic Places eligibility). Avoidance also avoids costs and potential construction delays associated with data recovery. Traditionally, data recovery of

archaeological sites through professional techniques such as surface collection, mapping, photography, subsurface excavation, technical report preparation and dissemination, has been the standard mitigation measure. However, data recovery is labor intensive (i.e., costly) but may be necessary if National Register of Historic Places-eligible sites cannot be avoided. Data recovery of archaeological information is now considered, in and of itself, an adverse effect under the revised Section 106 regulations (36CFR800.5(a)(2)(i)). Because the project area at Alternative E has not been systematically surveyed for archaeological resources and because intact prehistoric and historic archaeological sites may occur in undisturbed areas proposed for infrastructure corridors, a Phase I archaeological survey is recommended prior to construction. The Phase I survey would consist of a systematic series of shovel probes to identify archaeological sites and to determine their extent and integrity. If intact archaeological sites are identified, Phase II cultural resources studies should be designed in consultation with the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office and implemented to determine the National Register of Historic Places eligibility of the cultural resources. If National Register of Historic Places-eligible resources occur and cannot be avoided through project redesign, Phase III data recovery investigations should be developed in consultation with the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office and implemented prior to construction.

Cumulative Effects. In addition to the impacts of Alternative E, cumulative impacts could occur to additional cultural resources in the area as a result of other projects along the Blue Ridge Parkway and in the area near the parkway headquarters and the Folk Art Center such as the expansion of the Folk Art Center by the Southern Highland Craft Guild, the addition of an Interpretive Center at the Blue Ridge Music Center at Milepost 213, construction of recreational facilities at Azalea Road Park by the city of Asheville, completion of a demonstration greenhouse and gateway center at Milepost 393 by the North Carolina Arboretum, the renovation of Pack Square Park in downtown Asheville, construction of a new facility for Health Adventure at W.T. Weaver Boulevard near the University of North Carolina at Asheville, the construction of a new headquarters and visitor center for the Asheville Chamber of Commerce on Montford Avenue, and construction of the new Cort office building at Gashes Creek Road and I-40 eastbound access ramp..

Cumulative effects to cultural resources would include physical disturbance through ground disturbance, demolition, alteration of architectural traits, vandalism from increased access; structural instability through vibration; audio intrusions from increased traffic; and visual intrusions to historic settings and cultural landscapes. As a result of the possible construction of multiple projects, more National Register of Historic Places -eligible resources would be adversely affected resulting in additional loss of cultural resources within the overall regional cultural resource data base.

If National Register of Historic Places -eligible resources are identified in project areas associated with the expansion of the Folk Art Center, the construction of the Interpretive Center at the Blue Ridge Music Center, the construction of recreational

facilities at Azalea Road Park, completion of a demonstration greenhouse and gateway center at Milepost 393, the renovation of Pack Square Park, the construction of a new facility for Health Adventure, the construction of a new Asheville Chamber of Commerce headquarters and visitor center, and construction of the new Cort office building, then cumulative effects would be adverse. More National Register of Historic Places -eligible resources would be adversely affected resulting in additional loss of cultural resources within the overall regional cultural resource data base.

Conclusion. Implementation of Alternative E would have no effect on historic structures but would have a moderate, long-term adverse effect on archaeological resources. The construction activity would have a minor, short-term, local adverse effect on the cultural landscape. This alternative would have no effects on ethnographic resources or museum collections.

Alternative E would not produce major adverse effects to cultural resources whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of cultural resources or values as a result of the implementation of Alternative E.

Section 106 Summary

This environmental assessment provided detailed descriptions of five alternatives (including a no action alternative), analyzed the potential impacts associated with possible implementation of each alternative, and described the rationale for choosing the preferred alternative. Also contained in this environmental assessment are proposed mitigation measures for adverse effects on cultural resources.

Formal consultation with the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office has been initiated (see correspondence in Appendix A), and the State Historic Preservation Officer has been invited to participate in the planning for this project. This environmental assessment would be forwarded to the State Historic Preservation Office for review and comment, and would be the vehicle for Section 106 consultation for this project.

SOCIOECONOMICS

Affected Environment

Asheville is located in Buncombe County, North Carolina. The 2003 population of Buncombe County is over 212,000 and the population has grown over 3 percent since 2000 (epodunk, 2004). The growth in population appears to be slowing in the county as the population grew 18 percent between 1990 and 2000 (Asheville Metro Business Center, 2004b). Asheville is the largest city in Buncombe County and contained nearly 69,000 residents in 2000. The average age of a resident of Buncombe County, 39.2 years,

is approximately three years older than the age of an average North Carolina resident indicating that the County has a mature population composition. The per capita income in Buncombe County is nearly identical to the statewide average of \$20,307, but the median household income in the county (\$36,666) is nearly 7 percent lower than the statewide average median household income, indicating that the average household contains fewer wage earners in Buncombe County. According to the Asheville Metro Business Research Center, health services and private education was the industry sector with the highest 2004 employment in the Asheville metropolitan area with 19,900 employees and the government sector was second highest with 15,300 employees (Asheville Metro Business Center, 2004a). The leisure and hospitality industry was third highest with 14,800 employees, followed by retail trade (14,300 employees) and manufacturing (13,900 employees). The construction industry was ranked seventh with 6,600 employees.

The parkway has been shown to provide a major benefit to the North Carolina economy. A survey taken from October 1995 to October 1996 by the North Carolina State University indicated that the average non-resident traveling the parkway in North Carolina spent nearly \$56 for each day of their trip on the parkway (North Carolina State University, 1996). The survey report indicated that the direct expenditures of these travelers totaled over \$1.3 billion during that period, which in turn generated an additional \$1.6 billion in indirect and induced sales for a total benefit of \$2.9 billion in industrial output.

A study performed for the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority indicated that the typical year around tourist stays in the Asheville area for about two days (Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority, 2003). In the spring and summer, the typical tourist stays in the Asheville area for four to seven days. The Biltmore Estate is the most popular reason for visiting the Asheville area, followed by scenic mountain destinations, previous Asheville experiences, and the Blue Ridge Parkway.

A 2000 survey by the Craft Organization Directors Association entitled “The Impact of Crafts on the National Economy” indicated that the direct impact of sales from handmade crafts in the United States totals \$14 billion (Craft Organization Directors Association, 2001). There are an estimated 127,000 artists working in the craft industry nationwide, and approximately 78 percent of those artists are associated with a craft organization. The average sales/revenue of craftspeople is \$76,025 per year. The 1999 median income of a craft household is \$50,000, which is substantially higher than the 1999 national median household income of \$39,657. Approximately 44 percent of the \$50,000 median household income in a craft household is derived from craft income. Craftspeople in North Carolina reported lower average median household income (\$42,000) than the national average; however, the median household income in North Carolina is also lower (\$37,057) than the national average. Craftspeople with employees have three times the household income and ten times the sales/revenue of those who work alone. Most of the sales/revenue comes from craft fairs (52 percent), while studio

retail sales account for 27 percent and commission sales account for nearly 15 percent of total sales.

Impacts of Alternative A: No Action

Implementation of the no action alternative would result in no short term, direct or indirect, beneficial or adverse effects on the economy of the area. There would be no construction activity, so there would be no local workers involved in the regional destination visitor center construction and no materials purchased locally.

Implementation of the no action alternative would result in no long term, direct or indirect, beneficial or adverse effects on the economy of the area. There would be no visitors destined to the features of the regional destination visitor center and the Folk Art Center would continue to act as the parkway visitor center in the Asheville area. There would be no effect on the income of the artisans that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop in the Folk Art Center.

Cumulative Effects. The Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, and the Health Adventure project would all act to increase visitation along the parkway and in the Asheville area which would produce a minor, long term, regional, direct beneficial effect on the economy of the area. Azalea Road Park is assumed to be primarily oriented to residents and is not expected to increase visitation by itself. Each of the projects would complement one another, and could help to encourage visitors to remain in western North Carolina for a longer period. The Cort office building is anticipated to be commercially oriented and could produce a negligible, long term, direct, beneficial effect on the economy of the area.

Conclusion. Implementation of the no action Alternative would result in no short term or long term direct or indirect, beneficial or adverse effects on the economy of the area.

Impacts of Alternative B: Hemphill Knob – Preferred Alternative

The construction of the regional destination visitor center would have a minor, short term, local, indirect beneficial effect on the economy of the Asheville Metropolitan area. The company that is hired to construct the regional destination visitor center would probably be located in the Asheville area and the materials used to construct the regional destination visitor center would probably be purchased in the Asheville area.

The implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob would have a minor, long term, regional, indirect beneficial effect on the economy of the Asheville area. However, the implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob could also have a minor to moderate, long term, indirect, local adverse affect on the income of artisans that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center. As the center is designated as a regional destination visitor center, a portion of the visitors are expected to visit the regional destination visitor center specifically to take advantage of its features, such as the immersive digital cinema and the

learning center. Regular parkway travelers would also stop at the regional destination visitor center to enjoy those features as well as the interpretive center and the orientation center. One of the goals of the regional destination visitor center is to encourage visitors to spend an extra half-day in the Asheville area. The regional destination visitor center would not likely cause any reduction in length of stay in the area and the orientation center would provide information to tourists that could serve as an incentive to spend additional time in the Asheville area. The additional dollars spent in the area as a result of the regional destination visitor center would provide a minor, long term, indirect, regional boost to the area economy.

Locating the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob could reduce the number of visitors at the Folk Art Center. Currently, the Folk Art Center is the only designated visitor center in the Asheville area. If the regional destination visitor center is constructed at Hemphill Knob, visitors that are traveling the parkway and want to stop at a visitor center would have the choice between the Folk Art Center and the regional destination visitor center. It is likely that some of the visitors would stop at the regional destination visitor center instead of the Folk Art Center, and as a result, the visitation at the Folk Art Center could be reduced. However, the reduction in visitation at the Folk Art Center could be partially offset by visitors at the regional destination visitor center who learn about the Folk Art Center from the informative displays and choose to visit the Folk Art Center. The informative displays could provide information to Asheville area visitors who would otherwise not learn about the features of the Folk Art Center. The reduced visitation at the Folk Art Center has the potential to reduce the craft sales at the Allanstand Craft Shop. It should be noted that the Folk Art Center is a destination, as well as a visitor center, and National Park Service staff that work at the Folk Art Center have estimated that two-thirds of the visitors to the Folk Art Center are visiting the Folk Art Center as a destination and only one-third of the visitors are using it as a visitor center (National Park Service, 2004d). The National Park Service staff also indicated that the greatest share of the craft sales at the Allanstand Craft Shop are to those visitors who come to the Folk Art Center as a destination and that the casual visitor rarely purchases crafts at the shop. The Southern Highland Craft Guild, who operates the Allanstand Craft Shop, also operates Guild Crafts, located at 930 Tunnel Road, less than 2 miles from the Allanstand Craft Shop. Eighteen of the attractions along the parkway currently sell gifts and/or crafts, including 8 shops that are within 100 miles of the Folk Art Center. One of these shops, the parkway Craft Center located at the Moses Cone Manor (Milepost 294) is also operated by the Southern Highland Craft Guild. It should be noted that the regional destination visitor center is not expected to sell crafts that would compete with the Allanstand Craft Shop. In addition, this alternative would allow the planned expansion of the Folk Art Center to occur, which could make it a larger destination attraction, and would increase the visitation at the Folk Art Center. As a result of these factors, it is expected that the implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob could have a minor to moderate, long term, indirect adverse affect on the income of artisans that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center.

Mitigation for the potential reduction in visitation to the Folk Art Center would include the provision of a kiosk or other promotional device inside the regional destination visitor center that would provide information regarding the location and features of the Folk Art Center to encourage Parkway visitors to visit the Folk Art Center.

Cumulative Effects. The Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, and the Health Adventure project would all act to increase visitation along the parkway and in the Asheville area which would produce a minor, long term, regional, direct beneficial effect on the economy of the area. Azalea Road Park is assumed to be oriented to residents and is not expected to increase visitation. Each of the projects would complement one another, and could help to encourage visitors to remain in western North Carolina for a longer period. The Cort office building is anticipated to be commercially oriented and could produce a negligible, long term, direct beneficial affect on the economy of the area.

Conclusion. The construction of the regional destination visitor center would have a minor, short term, local, indirect beneficial effect to the economy of the Asheville Metropolitan area. The implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob would have a minor, long term, regional, indirect beneficial effect on the economy of the Asheville area. However, the implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob could also have a minor to moderate, long term, indirect, local adverse affect on the income of artisans that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center.

Impacts of Alternative C: Hemphill Knob

The construction of the regional destination visitor center would have a minor, short term, local, indirect beneficial effect to the economy of the Asheville Metropolitan area. The company that is hired to construct the regional destination visitor center would probably be located in the Asheville area and the materials used to construct the regional destination visitor center would probably be purchased in the Asheville area.

The implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob would have a minor, long term, regional, indirect beneficial effect on the economy of the Asheville area. However, the implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob could also have a minor to moderate, long term, indirect, local adverse affect on the income of artisans that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center. As the center is designated as a regional destination visitor center, a portion of the visitors are expected to visit the regional destination visitor center specifically to take advantage of its features, such as the immersive digital cinema and the learning center. Regular parkway travelers would also stop at the regional destination visitor center to enjoy those features as well as the interpretive center and the orientation center. One of the goals of the regional destination visitor center is to encourage visitors to spend an extra half-day in the Asheville area. The regional destination visitor center would not likely cause any reduction in length of stay in the area and the orientation center would provide information to tourists that could serve as an incentive to spend

additional time in the Asheville area. The additional dollars spent in the area as a result of the regional destination visitor center would provide a minor boost to the area economy.

Locating the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob could reduce the number of visitors at the Folk Art Center. Currently, the Folk Art Center is the only designated visitor center in the Asheville area. If the regional destination visitor center is constructed at Hemphill Knob, visitors that are traveling the parkway and want to stop at a visitor center would have the choice between the Folk Art Center and the regional destination visitor center. It is likely that some of the visitors would stop at the regional destination visitor center instead of the Folk Art Center, and as a result, the visitation at the Folk Art Center could be reduced. However, the reduction in visitation at the Folk Art Center could be partially offset by visitors at the regional destination visitor center who learn about the Folk Art Center from the informative displays and choose to visit the Folk Art Center. The informative displays could provide information to Asheville area visitors who would otherwise not learn about the features of the Folk Art Center. The reduced visitation at the Folk Art Center has the potential to reduce the craft sales at the Allanstand Craft Shop. It should be noted that the Folk Art Center is a destination, as well as a visitor center, and National Park Service staff that work at the Folk Art Center have estimated that two-thirds of the visitors to the Folk Art Center are visiting the Folk Art Center as a destination and only one-third of the visitors are using it as a visitor center (National Park Service, 2004d). The National Park Service staff also indicated that the greatest share of the craft sales at the Allanstand Craft Shop are to those visitors who come to the Folk Art Center as a destination and that the casual visitor rarely purchases crafts at the shop. The Southern Highland Craft Guild, who operates the Allanstand Craft Shop, also operates Guild Crafts, located at 930 Tunnel Road, less than 2 miles from the Allanstand Craft Shop. Eighteen of the attractions along the parkway currently sell gifts and/or crafts, including 8 shops that are within 100 miles of the Folk Art Center. One of these shops, the parkway Craft Center located at the Moses Cone Manor (Milepost 294) is also operated by the Southern Highland Craft Guild. It should be noted that the regional destination visitor center is not expected to sell crafts that would compete with the Allanstand Craft Shop. In addition, this alternative would allow the planned expansion of the Folk Art Center to occur, which could make it a larger destination attraction, and would increase the visitation at the Folk Art Center. As a result of these factors, it is expected that the implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob could have a minor to moderate, long term, indirect adverse affect on the income of artisans that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center.

Mitigation for the potential reduction in visitation to the Folk Art Center would include the provision of a kiosk or other promotional device inside the regional destination visitor center that would provide information regarding the location and features of the Folk Art Center to encourage Parkway visitors to visit the Folk Art Center.

Cumulative Effects. The Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor

Center, and the Health Adventure project would all act to increase visitation along the parkway and in the Asheville area which would produce a minor, long term, regional, direct beneficial effect on the economy of the area. Azalea Road Park is assumed to be oriented to residents and is not expected to increase visitation. Each of the projects would complement one another, and could help to encourage visitors to remain in western North Carolina for a longer period. The Cort office building is anticipated to be commercially oriented and could produce a negligible, long term, indirect beneficial effect on the economy of the area.

Conclusion. The construction of the Alternative C would have a minor, short term, local, indirect beneficial effect to the economy of the Asheville Metropolitan area. The implementation of Alternative C would have a minor, long term, regional, indirect beneficial effect on the economy of the Asheville area. However, the implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob could also have a minor to moderate, long term, indirect, local adverse affect on the income of artisans that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center.

Impacts of Alternative D: Folk Art Center

The construction of the regional destination visitor center would have a minor, short term, regional, indirect beneficial effect on the economy of the Asheville Metropolitan area. The company that is hired to construct the regional destination visitor center would probably be located in the Asheville area and the materials used to construct the regional destination visitor center would probably be purchased in the Asheville area. However, the construction of the regional destination visitor center could have a moderate, short term, direct adverse effect on the income of artisans that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center. Alternative D involves rebuilding of the Folk Art Center to create the regional destination visitor center/Folk Art Center, and the disruption to current activities at the Folk Art Center could result in the loss of sales at the Craft Shop. Alternative access to the property and to the Allanstand Craft Shop would be provided so the shop would not have to completely cease operations during construction. Signs would be posted on the parkway listing the activities and operations at the Folk Art Center that are open despite the construction and directions around the construction would be provided to minimize the effects of construction on the operation of the Folk Art Center and the Allanstand Craft Shop.

The implementation of the Alternative D would have a minor, long term, regional, beneficial effect on the economy of the Asheville area. The implementation of the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center could also have a long term minor to moderate beneficial effect on the income of artisans that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center. As the regional destination visitor center is designated as a regional *destination* visitor center, a portion of the visitors are expected to visit the regional destination visitor center specifically to take advantage of its features, such as the immersive digital cinema and the learning center. Regular parkway travelers would also stop at the regional destination visitor center to enjoy those features as well as the interpretive center and the orientation center. One of the goals of

the regional destination visitor center is to encourage visitors to spend an extra half-day in the Asheville area. The regional destination visitor center would not likely cause any reduction in length of stay in the area and the orientation center would provide information to tourists that could serve as an incentive to spend additional time in the Asheville area. The additional dollars spent in the area as a result of the regional destination visitor center could provide a minor, long term, indirect, beneficial effect on the area economy.

The implementation of the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center could also have a long term, minor to moderate, beneficial effect on the income of artisans that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center. Locating the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center could increase the number of visitors at the Folk Art Center. As the Alternative D facility would be a combined regional destination visitor center/Folk Art Center and it would also be the only designated visitor center in the Asheville area, visitors that are traveling the parkway and want to stop at a visitor center would stop at the regional destination visitor center/Folk Art Center. As the regional destination visitor center is also a destination, visitors that are destined for the regional *destination* visitor center would also visit the Folk Art Center, and would be exposed to the Allanstand Craft Shop. While National Park Service staff have indicated that few casual visitors purchase crafts from the Folk Art Center, the increased pedestrian traffic at the regional destination visitor center/Folk Art Center could potentially increase craft sales at the Craft Shop.

Mitigation for the potential reduction in visitation to the Folk Art Center would include the provision of a kiosk or other promotional device inside the regional destination visitor center that would provide information regarding the location and features of the Folk Art Center to encourage Parkway visitors to visit the Folk Art Center.

Cumulative Effects. The Music Center, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, and the Health Adventure project would all act to increase visitation along the parkway and in the Asheville area which would produce a minor, long term, regional, direct beneficial effect on the economy of the area. Azalea Road Park is assumed to be oriented to residents and is not expected to increase visitation. Each of the projects would complement one another, and could help to encourage visitors to remain in western North Carolina for a longer period. The planned Folk Art Center expansion could be affected as the regional destination visitor center has reconstructed the Folk Art Center building. The Cort office building is anticipated to be commercially oriented and could produce a negligible, long term, direct, beneficial effect on the economy of the area.

Conclusion. The construction of the Alternative D would have a minor, short term, regional, indirect beneficial effect on the economy of the Asheville Metropolitan area. However, the construction of the regional destination visitor center could have a moderate, short term, direct adverse effect on the income of artisans that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center. The implementation of the Alternative D would have a minor, long term, regional, beneficial effect on the economy

of the Asheville area. The implementation of the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center could also have a long term, minor to moderate, beneficial effect on the income of artisans that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center.

Impacts of Alternative E: Folk Art Center

The construction of the regional destination visitor center would have a minor, short term, indirect, regional beneficial effect to the economy of the Asheville Metropolitan area. The company that is hired to construct the regional destination visitor center would probably be located in the Asheville area and the materials used to construct the regional destination visitor center would probably be purchased in the Asheville area. However, the construction of Alternative E could have a minor to moderate, short term, indirect adverse effect on the income of artisans that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center. Alternative E involves constructing the regional destination visitor center in the parking lot of the Folk Art Center, and the disruption to current activities at the Folk Art Center could result in the loss of sales at the Craft Shop. Alternative parking would be provided during construction for Folk Art Center visitors and signs would be placed on the parkway indicating that the Folk Art Center is operational. The implementation of Alternative E would have a minor, long term, regional, beneficial effect on the economy of the Asheville area. The implementation of the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center could also have a minor, long term, indirect beneficial effect on the income of artisans that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center. As the regional destination visitor center is designated as a regional *destination* visitor center, a portion of the visitors are expected to visit the center specifically to take advantage of its features, such as the immersive digital cinema and the learning center. Regular parkway travelers would also stop at the regional destination visitor center to enjoy those features as well as the interpretive center and the orientation center. One of the goals of the regional destination visitor center is to encourage visitors to spend an extra half-day in the Asheville area. The regional destination visitor center would not likely cause any reduction in length of stay in the area and the orientation center would provide information to tourists that could serve as an incentive to spend additional time in the Asheville area. The additional dollars spent in the area as a result of the regional destination visitor center could provide a minor, long term, indirect, beneficial effect on the area economy.

The implementation of the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center site could also have a long term, minor, beneficial effect on the income of artisans that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center. Locating the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center could increase the number of visitors at the Folk Art Center. As the Alternative E facility would be located adjacent to the Folk Art Center and both would also be designated visitor centers in the Asheville area, visitors that are traveling the parkway and want to stop at a visitor center would stop at the regional destination visitor center/Folk Art Center site. As the regional destination visitor center is also a destination, visitors that are destined for the regional destination

visitor center may also choose to visit the Folk Art Center that is located next door, and would be exposed to the Allanstand Craft Shop. While National Park Service staff have indicated that few casual visitors purchase crafts from the Folk Art Center, the increased pedestrian traffic at the regional destination visitor center could potentially increase craft sales at the Allanstand Craft Shop in the Folk Art Center.

Mitigation for the potential reduction in visitation to the Folk Art Center would include the provision of a kiosk or other promotional device inside the regional destination visitor center that would provide information regarding the location and features of the Folk Art Center to encourage Parkway visitors to visit the Folk Art Center.

Cumulative Effects. The Music Center, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, and the Health Adventure project would all act to increase visitation along the parkway and in the Asheville area which would produce a minor, long term, regional, direct beneficial effect on the economy of the area. Azalea Road Park is assumed to be oriented to residents and is not expected to increase visitation. Each of the projects would complement one another, and could help to encourage visitors to remain in western North Carolina for a longer period. The Cort office building is anticipated to be commercially oriented and could provide a negligible, long term, direct, beneficial effect on the economy of the area. As Alternative E consumes most of the land that is available for parking, the expansion of the Folk Art Center could be affected if additional parking is required for that expansion.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative E would have a minor, short term, indirect, regional beneficial effect to the economy of the Asheville Metropolitan area. However, the construction of Alternative E could have a minor to moderate, short term, indirect adverse effect on the income of artisans that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center. The implementation of the Alternative E would have a minor, long term, regional, beneficial effect on the economy of the Asheville area. The implementation of the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center could also have a minor, long term, indirect beneficial effect on the income of artisans that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center.

VISITOR USE AND EXPERIENCE / VIEWSHED

Affected Environment

The Blue Ridge Parkway received nearly 23.5 million visitors in 2002, the highest visitation of any park in the National Park system (National Park Service, 2004c). Visitation at the parkway was slightly lower in 2003, with 20.3 million visitors. The parkway has received over 20 million visitors each year since 1997. As the parkway is 469 miles long, not all visitors travel the entire length of the parkway. A study prepared for the National Park Service in 2002 determined that less than 4 percent of the parkway visitors traversed the entire length of the parkway (National Park Service, 2002a). Particularly near urban areas, commuters may use the parkway as a shortcut during their commute, as the non-toll road has no at-grade intersections, no stop signs, and no traffic

signals. In that configuration, the parkway could be considered a two-lane freeway, although it has a speed limit of only 45 miles per hour. However, the Blue Ridge Parkway Transportation Study determined that only 3 percent of the survey respondents in the section near Asheville were using the parkway for business purposes, such as commuting (National Park Service, 2002a). However, it should be noted that the interviews took place at various attractions along the parkway where people had stopped. Commuters are generally in a hurry to get to work or to get home and would normally not stop at a visitor center or an overlook. It is expected that the proportion of business related travel along the parkway is much higher than 3 percent. This is reinforced by the fact that the Asheville area has the highest access ramp counts, with US 25 displaying the highest ramp counts along the entire parkway. However, these motorists are not driving too far on the parkway, as the section of the parkway with the highest traffic volume is between Cumberland Knob Visitor Center and the town of Blowing Rock, North Carolina. This section is located approximately 90 miles north of the Asheville area.

The Blue Ridge Parkway is one of the primary attractions in the Asheville area. A survey prepared for the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority stated that 34 percent of first time visitors and 24 percent of repeat visitors indicated that the parkway was one of the primary reasons for visiting the Asheville area (Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority, 2003). During October, this figure rose to 44 percent overall due to the attraction of driving the parkway during the fall color change.

A survey was prepared for the National Park Service that interviewed visitors at various visitor centers and lookouts along the parkway (University of Vermont, 2002). This study indicated that 92 percent of the survey respondents stated that they were traveling the parkway for the purpose of recreation. Over 60 percent of the survey respondents stated that they were stopping at a visitor center along the parkway and over 32 percent of the respondents had either visited the Folk Art Center or planned to visit the Folk Art Center. As a result, the Folk Art Center was the fourth most popular place to visit along the parkway, behind Linville Falls, the Linn Cove Viaduct, and Moses H. Cone Memorial Park. Over 2 percent of the survey respondents were traveling the parkway primarily to either go to the Folk Art Center or to view art or take photographs.

Visitor centers are located at the following twelve locations along the parkway.

Humpback Rocks	Linn Cove Viaduct
James River	Linville Falls
Peaks of Otter	Museum of North Carolina Minerals
Rocky Knob	Craggy Gardens
Cumberland Knob	Folk Art Center
Moses H. Cone Memorial Park	Waterrock Knob

Many of these visitor centers are primarily visitor contact stations that supply trail maps, publications, and local area information. Interpretive programs, if available, are generally limited to the local features of that particular attraction. For instance, the

interpretive program at the Museum of North Carolina Minerals focuses on mining activities and the program at the Folk Art Center focuses on mountain crafts.

As mentioned, 92 percent of the parkway travelers that were surveyed were driving the parkway for the purpose of recreation. Sight seeing is the primary form of recreation along the parkway. It is generally recognized that parkway visitors value natural viewshed with limited development (Friends of the Blue Ridge Parkway, 2004). The National Park Service tries to limit development along the parkway to areas that cannot be easily seen from the parkway, except for historic attractions such as Mabry Mill.

Impacts of Alternative A: No Action

Implementation of Alternative A would result in no short term, adverse, direct or indirect effects on visitor use and experience during the construction period. No construction is required for Alternative A.

Implementation of Alternative A would produce no long term, beneficial, direct or indirect effects on visitor use and experience. The parkway currently has no visitor center that provides interpretation for the overall parkway. This condition would remain under the no action alternative. Implementation of Alternative A would produce no long term, adverse, direct or indirect effects on viewshed. The regional destination visitor center would not be constructed and would not affect the view from the parkway.

Cumulative Effects. The Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, and the Health Adventure project would produce minor, long term, direct, local beneficial effects toward the experience of visitors to the parkway and the Asheville area. Each of the projects would complement one another, without competing for the visitors' attention. The Cort office building is not expected to contain attractions that would enhance visitor experience.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative A would result in no short term or long term, direct or indirect, adverse or beneficial effects on visitor use and experience.

Impacts of Alternative B: Hemphill Knob – Preferred Alternative

Construction of Alternative B would result in negligible, short term, local, direct adverse effects on visitor use and experience / viewshed during the construction period. Few visitors currently stop at the Hemphill Knob headquarters building for parkway information, as it is not signed as a visitor contact center. However, those visitors that stop would be required to drive and walk around construction activity. The construction activity could possibly be seen from the parkway, particularly in the winter months and that may detract slightly from the visitor experience. However, as sections of the parkway are often closed during the winter months, most parkway travelers are traveling to a destination and are not sight seeing.

Implementation of Alternative B would produce moderate to major long term, regional, direct beneficial effects on visitor use and experience. All visitors traveling the parkway in this area as well as visitors and residents in the greater Asheville area and western North Carolina would benefit from Alternative B. The parkway currently does not have a visitor center that provides interpretation for the overall parkway which the regional destination visitor center would provide. The digital immersion theatre is an attraction in itself and would provide entertainment to the visitor, but it also would provide information about the parkway that is not available elsewhere. The classrooms would be used for both elementary and secondary students, as well as adults. The marketing and orientation area provides information regarding other attractions in the western North Carolina area, so visitors may elect to spend some additional time in the vicinity.

Alternative B would result in minor, long term, local, direct beneficial effects from opportunities to view the surrounding viewshed from the regional destination visitor center and minor, long term, local, direct adverse effects to the viewshed from the parkway. The view from the entrance plaza would be the parking facility with distant mountains in the background. This is a desirable view for a parkway visitor that is expected as part of the Blue Ridge Parkway experience. The facility could be easily seen from the parkway in the winter months, but would be somewhat shielded from view by vegetation during the summer months.

Cumulative Effects. The Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, and the Health Adventure project would all produce minor, long term, direct, local beneficial effects toward the experience of visitors to the parkway and the Asheville area. Each of the projects would complement one another, without competing for the visitors' attention. The only duplication in experience would be that both the expanded Folk Art Center and the regional destination visitor center plan to provide interpretation on the creation of the parkway. Also, the Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center and the regional destination visitor center would both provide information on area attractions, but the service at the Chamber center would also provide ticket sales and kiosks. The Cort office building is not expected to contain attractions that would enhance visitor experience.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative B would result in negligible, short term, local, direct adverse effects on visitor use and experience / viewshed during the construction period. Implementation of Alternative B would produce moderate to major long term, regional, direct beneficial effects on visitor use and experience. Alternative B would result in minor, long term, local, direct beneficial effects from opportunities to view the surrounding viewshed from the regional destination visitor center and minor, long term, local, direct adverse effects to the viewshed from the parkway.

Impacts of Alternative C: Hemphill Knob

Construction of Alternative C would result in negligible, short term, local, direct adverse effects on visitor use and experience / viewshed during the construction period. Few visitors currently stop at the Hemphill Knob headquarters building for parkway

information, as it is not signed as a visitor contact center. However, those visitors that stop would be required to drive and walk around construction activity. The construction activity could possibly be seen from the parkway, particularly in the winter months and that may detract slightly from the visitor experience. However, as sections of the parkway are often closed during the winter months, most parkway travelers are traveling to a destination and are not sight seeing.

Implementation of Alternative C would produce moderate to major, long term, regional, direct beneficial effects on visitor use and experience. All visitors traveling the parkway in this area as well as visitors and residents in the greater Asheville area and western North Carolina would benefit from Alternative C. The parkway currently has no visitor center that provides interpretation for the overall parkway which the regional destination visitor center would provide. The digital immersion theatre is an attraction in itself and would provide entertainment to the visitor, but it also would provide information about the parkway that is not available elsewhere. The classrooms would be used for both elementary and secondary students, as well as adults. The marketing and orientation area provides information regarding other attractions in the western North Carolina area, so visitors may elect to spend some additional time in the vicinity.

Alternative C would result in moderate, long term, local, direct beneficial effects from opportunities to view the surrounding viewshed from the regional destination visitor center and minor, long term, local, direct adverse effects to the viewshed from the parkway. The view from the plaza entrance would be some mid-range mountains in the background over a corner of the parking facility. This is a desirable view for a parkway visitor that is expected as part of the Blue Ridge experience. The facility could be easily seen from the road during the winter months, but would be somewhat shielded during the summer months.

Cumulative Effects. The Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, and the Health Adventure project would all produce minor, long term, direct, local beneficial effects toward the experience of visitors to the parkway and the Asheville area. Each of the projects would complement one another, without competing for the visitors' attention. The only duplication in experience would be that both the expanded Folk Art Center and the regional destination visitor center plan to provide interpretation on the creation of the parkway. Also, the Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center and the regional destination visitor center would both provide information on area attractions, but the service at the Chamber of Commerce center would also provide ticket sales and kiosks. The Cort office building is not expected to contain attractions that would enhance visitor experience.

Conclusion. Construction of Alternative C would result in negligible, short term, local, direct adverse effects on visitor use and experience / viewshed during the construction period. Implementation of Alternative C would produce moderate to major, long term, regional, direct beneficial effects on visitor use and experience. Alternative C would result in moderate, long term, local, direct beneficial effects from opportunities to view

the surrounding viewshed from the regional destination visitor center and minor, long term, local, direct adverse effects to the viewshed from the parkway.

Impacts of Alternative D: Folk Art Center

Construction of Alternative D would result in moderate, short term, local, direct adverse effects on visitor use and experience during the construction period. Nearly one-third of the parkway visitors stop at the Folk Art Center, either as a primary destination or as a parkway visitor center. This alternative involves major renovation of the existing Folk Art Center building which could limit certain activities at the Folk Art Center during the construction period. Alternative access to the property and to the Allanstand Craft Shop would be provided so the shop would not have to completely cease operations during construction. Signs would be posted on the parkway listing the activities and operations at the Folk Art Center that are open despite the construction and directions around the construction would be provided to minimize the effects of construction on the operation of the Folk Art Center and the Allanstand Craft Shop. Construction of Alternative D would result in moderate, short term, local, direct adverse effects on viewshed during the construction period. The construction activity could possibly be seen from the parkway, particularly in the winter months and that may detract slightly from the visitor experience. The construction activity would be seen more easily than Alternatives B and C. However, as sections of the parkway are often closed during the winter months, most parkway travelers are traveling to a destination and are not sight seeing.

Implementation of Alternative D would produce moderate, long term, local, direct beneficial effects on visitor use and experience. All visitors traveling the parkway in this area as well as visitors and residents in the greater Asheville area and western North Carolina would benefit from Alternative D. The parkway currently has no visitor center that provides interpretation for the overall parkway which the regional destination visitor center would provide. The digital immersion theatre is an attraction in itself and would provide entertainment to the visitor, but it also would provide information about the parkway that is not available elsewhere. The classrooms would be used for both elementary and secondary students, as well as adults. The marketing and orientation area provides information regarding other attractions in the western North Carolina area, so visitors may elect to spend some additional time in the vicinity. However, this alternative would adversely affect the Southern Highland Craft Guild's plans to increase the size of the Folk Art Center and expand the programs offered at the Folk Art Center. As this alternative involves reconstructing the existing Folk Art Center building and using parts of the existing building for the regional destination visitor center, this would not only adversely effect the Southern Highland Craft Guild planned programs, but could also adversely affect the current Southern Highland Craft Guild programs at the Folk Art Center.

Implementation of Alternative D would result in minor, long term, local, direct, adverse effects on the viewshed. The view from the entrance plaza would be a parking facility with a forested area in the background. The regional destination visitor center/Folk Art

Center could easily be seen from the parkway during the winter months, and can be seen from several vantage points on the parkway during the summer months.

Cumulative Effects. The Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, and the Health Adventure project would all produce minor, long term, direct, local beneficial effects toward the experience of visitors to the parkway and the Asheville area. Each of the projects would complement one another, without competing for the visitors' attention. The only duplication in visitor experience would be the Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center and the regional destination visitor center would both provide information on area attractions, but the service at the Chamber center would also provide ticket sales and kiosks. The Folk Art Center building and program expansion could be affected by Alternative D. The Cort office building is not expected to contain attractions that would enhance visitor experience.

Conclusion. Construction of Alternative D would result in moderate, short term, regional, direct adverse effects on visitor use and experience during the construction period. Construction of Alternative D would result in moderate, short term, local, direct adverse effects on viewshed during the construction period. Implementation of Alternative D would produce moderate, long term, local, direct beneficial effects on visitor use and experience; however, the planned expansion of the Folk Art Center by the Southern Highland Craft Guild could be affected. Implementation of Alternative D would result in minor, long term, local, direct effects on the viewshed.

Impacts of Alternative E: Folk Art Center

Construction of Alternative E would result in moderate, short term, local, direct adverse effects on visitor use and experience and moderate, short term, local, direct adverse effects on viewshed during the construction period. Nearly one-third of the parkway visitors stop at the Folk Art Center, either as a destination or as a visitor center. This alternative involves construction of the regional destination visitor center in the parking lot of the existing Folk Art Center building, as well as construction of new parking facilities for the combined Folk Art Center/regional destination visitor center. During construction, much of the existing Folk Art Center parking would undergo reconstruction, which could involve restricting certain activities at the Folk Art Center during the construction period. Alternative parking would be provided during construction for Folk Art Center visitors and signs would be placed on the parkway indicating that the Folk Art Center is operational

Those visitors that stop at the Folk Art Center would be required to drive and walk around construction activity. The construction activity could be seen from the parkway during all months of the year, as the regional destination visitor center building is located adjacent to the parkway.

Implementation of Alternative E would produce moderate to major, long term, regional, direct beneficial effects on visitor use and experience. All visitors traveling the parkway in this area as well as visitors and residents in the greater Asheville area and western

North Carolina would benefit from Alternative E. The parkway currently has no visitor center that provides interpretation for the overall parkway which the regional destination visitor center would provide. The digital immersion theatre is an attraction in itself and would provide entertainment to the visitor, but it also would provide information about the parkway that is not available elsewhere. The classrooms would be used for both elementary and secondary students, as well as adults. The marketing and orientation area provides information regarding other attractions in the western North Carolina area, so visitors may elect to spend some additional time in the vicinity. However, this alternative could adversely affect the Southern Highland Craft Guild's plans to increase the size of the Folk Art Center and expand the programs offered at the Folk Art Center if additional parking is required as part of the Folk Art Center expansion. The 336 parking spaces proposed for this alternative consume nearly all of the available space at this site. Additional parking would require a multi-level structure.

Implementation of Alternative E would result in moderate, long term, local, direct adverse effects on viewshed. The view from the entrance plaza would be a parking facility with the Folk Art Center in the background. The regional destination visitor center would be located 150 feet from the parkway and could easily be seen from the parkway year around. As there is parking provided between the parkway and the regional destination visitor center, a vegetation buffer cannot be planted to help conceal the regional destination visitor center from the parkway view.

Cumulative Effects. The Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, and the Health Adventure project would all produce minor, long term, direct, local beneficial effects toward the experience of visitors to the parkway and the Asheville area. Each of the projects would complement one another, without competing for the visitors' attention. The only duplication in visitor experience would be that the Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center and the regional destination visitor center would both provide information on area attractions, but the service at the Chamber of Commerce center would also provide ticket sales and kiosks. The Folk Art Center building and program expansion could be affected by Alternative E if additional parking is required. The Cort office building is not expected to contain attractions that would enhance visitor experience.

Conclusion. Construction of Alternative E would result in moderate, short term, local, direct adverse effects on visitor use and experience and moderate, short term, local, direct adverse effects on viewshed during the construction period. Implementation of Alternative E would produce moderate to major, long term, regional, direct beneficial effects on visitor use and experience. Implementation of Alternative E would result in moderate, long term, local, direct adverse effects on viewshed.

SOUNDSCAPE / NOISE

Affected Environment

The parkway is an unusual park as it is essentially a relatively narrow strip of federal land that forms a 469 mile ribbon through the mountains of Virginia and North Carolina. Throughout that length, it is surrounded by both federal and privately owned land. In the Asheville area, the parkway is generally surrounded by privately owned land in urban and suburban land uses. The soundscape at the Hemphill Knob site and the Folk Art Center site is generally the sound of the suburbs including distant motor traffic and other urban sounds. The parkway itself contributes to the urban soundscape at each of these sites. While there may be areas along the parkway where a more natural soundscape is evident, these alternative sites in the Asheville area are not examples of those types of sites. Each site is partially bounded by forested areas that may harbor birds, insects, and wildlife that may create natural sounds, but the overriding sound at each location is suburban.

No ambient sound monitoring was conducted specifically for this project. The Hemphill Knob site is bounded on the east and south by the parkway and bounded on the west and north by I-40. Limited residential and commercial activities are located along Gashes Creek Road to the southwest of the site. The elevation of the knob provides a barrier to the noise from I-40, but the noise from the parkway is restricted only by several hundred feet of forest. Low traffic volumes, low vehicle speeds, and limited commercial traffic on the parkway result in relatively low ambient noise levels at the site. Current activities at the headquarters create very little noise. The Folk Art Center site is bounded by the parkway on the east and north, Riceville Road on the west, and the Veterans Administration Hospital on the south. Arnold Road, a residential street paralleling the parkway, is also located to the south of the Folk Art Center site. While the parkway is closer to the regional destination visitor center sites at the Folk Art Center than at Hemphill Knob, neither site has overbearing noise associated with it. The Folk Art Center occasionally has outdoor programs at the amphitheatre which faces the Veterans Hospital, but hospital officials indicated there have been no noise problems associated with the Folk Art Center activities (Asheville Veterans Administration Medical Center, 2004).

Impacts of Alternative A: No Action

As Alternative A requires no construction, there would be no short term or long term, direct or indirect, adverse effects as a result of construction of Alternative A. The implementation of Alternative A would have no long term or short term, direct or indirect effects on soundscape and noise in the area surrounding the Hemphill Knob site. The ambient noise at Hemphill Knob and the Folk Art Center would not change as a result of Alternative A.

Cumulative Effects. The Music Center, the Arboretum expansion, Azalea Road Park, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure project would have no direct or indirect, long

term or short term adverse or beneficial effect on soundscape and noise at the Hemphill Knob site. The expansion of the Folk Art Center would have a minor, short term and long term, indirect, adverse affect on soundscape and noise at the Folk Art Center site.

Conclusion. As Alternative A requires no construction, there would be no short term or long term, direct or indirect adverse effects as a result of construction of Alternative A. The implementation of Alternative A would have a no long term or short term, direct or indirect effects on soundscape and noise in the area surrounding the Hemphill Knob site.

Alternative A would not produce major adverse effects on soundscape whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of soundscape as a result of the implementation of Alternative A.

Impacts of Alternative B: Hemphill Knob – Preferred Alternative

The construction of Alternative B would have a minor, short term, local, direct, adverse effect on soundscape and noise in the area surrounding the Hemphill Knob site. The heavy machinery that is involved in site preparation and the other machines associated with construction would create noise that could be heard from the employee parking facility and possibly inside the headquarters building. Residential uses on Gashes Creek Road could possibly hear some of the construction noise, but the noise should be limited to daytime. As most of the construction activity for Alternative B would occur over 100 yards further away from the headquarters building and the residences on Gashes Creek Road, the construction noise heard in those locations would be less than Alternative C. The contractor that constructs the regional destination visitor center would comply with best management practices to reduce the effects of construction noise on the surrounding area. Heavy equipment and truck engines would be properly muffled and would be turned off when not in use.

The implementation of Alternative B would have a negligible, long term, local, indirect, adverse effect on soundscape and noise in the area surrounding the Hemphill Knob site. As mentioned, the ambient noise in the area is currently suburban in nature, and the noise created by the operation of the regional destination visitor center would primarily be slow moving autos traveling through a driveway and parking lot. A few diesel trucks, buses and recreational vehicles may also visit the regional destination visitor center, but they would probably park and turn off their engines instead of idling for a long period of time. A park ranger may give a presentation at the outside exhibits, but the ranger would not use amplification equipment and the sound should be localized. The sounds from Alternative B may carry to the headquarters employee parking lot, but it is doubtful whether the sound could be heard inside the headquarters building or at the residences on Gashes Creek Road.

Cumulative Effects. The Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, the Arboretum expansion, Azalea Road Park, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure project would have no direct or indirect, long term or short term, adverse or beneficial effect on soundscape and noise at the Hemphill Knob site.

The construction of Alternative B would have a minor, short term, local, direct, adverse effect on soundscape and noise in the area surrounding the Hemphill Knob site. The implementation of Alternative B would have a negligible, long term, local, indirect, adverse effect on soundscape and noise in the area surrounding the Hemphill Knob site.

Alternative B would not produce major adverse effects on soundscape whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of soundscape as a result of the implementation of Alternative B.

Impacts of Alternative C: Hemphill Knob

The construction of Alternative C would have a minor, short term, local, direct effect on soundscape and noise in the area surrounding the Hemphill Knob site. The heavy machinery that is involved in site preparation and the other machines associated with construction would create noise that could be heard from the employee parking facility and possibly inside the headquarters building. Residential uses on Gashes Creek Road could possibly hear some of the construction noise, but the noise should be limited to daytime. The contractor that constructs the regional destination visitor center would comply with best management practices to reduce the effects of construction noise on the surrounding area. Heavy equipment and truck engines would be properly muffled and would be turned off when not in use.

The implementation of Alternative C would have a negligible, long term, local, direct effect on soundscape and noise in the area surrounding the Hemphill Knob site. As mentioned, the ambient noise in the area is currently suburban in nature, and the noise created by the operation of the regional destination visitor center would primarily be slow moving autos traveling through a driveway and parking lot. A few diesel trucks, buses and recreational vehicles may also visit the regional destination visitor center, but they would probably park and turn off their engines instead of idling for a long period of time. A park ranger may give a presentation at the outside exhibits, but the ranger would not use amplification equipment and the sound should be localized. The sounds from Alternative C may carry to the headquarters employee parking lot, but it is doubtful whether the sound could be heard inside the headquarters building or at the residences on Gashes Creek Road.

Cumulative Effects. The Folk Art Center expansion, the Music Center, Azalea Road Park, the Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of

Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure project would have no direct or indirect, long term or short term, adverse or beneficial effect on soundscape and noise at the Hemphill Knob site.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative C would have a minor, short term, local, direct effect on soundscape and noise in the area surrounding the Hemphill Knob site. The implementation of Alternative C would have a negligible, long term, local, direct effect on soundscape and noise in the area surrounding the Hemphill Knob site.

Alternative C would not produce major adverse effects on soundscape whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of soundscape as a result of the implementation of Alternative C.

Impacts of Alternative D: Folk Art Center

The construction of Alternative D would have a minor to moderate, short term, local, direct adverse effect on soundscape and noise in the area surrounding the Folk Art Center site. The heavy machinery that is involved in site preparation and the other machines associated with construction would create noise that could probably be heard from the Veterans Administration Medical Center and the residences located along Arnold Road. Currently, the Medical Center has employee parking and administrative offices nearest the Folk Art Center. The administrative offices are located approximately two hundred yards from the Alternative D building site and hospital buildings containing patient rooms (where silence is important) are located further to the southwest. Residential uses on Arnold Road are over three hundred yards from the building site. Both the administrative building and the residences could probably hear some of the construction noise, but the noise should be limited to daytime. The contractor that constructs the regional destination visitor center would comply with best management practices to reduce the effects of construction noise on the surrounding area. Heavy equipment and truck engines would be properly muffled and would be turned off when not in use.

The implementation of Alternative D would have a minor, long term, local, indirect, adverse effect on soundscape and noise in the area surrounding the Folk Art Center site. As mentioned, the ambient noise in the area is currently suburban in nature, and the noise created by the operation of the regional destination visitor center would primarily be slow moving autos traveling through a driveway and parking lot. A few diesel trucks, buses and recreational vehicles may also visit the regional destination visitor center, but they would probably park and turn off their engines instead of idling for a long period of time. As the parking facility for Alternative D is for the combined regional destination visitor center/Folk Art Center, there would be more traffic moving through the driveway and parking facility than for Alternatives B and C. A park ranger may give a presentation at the outside exhibits, but the ranger would not use amplification equipment and the

sound should be localized. The sounds from Alternative D may carry to the Medical Center employee parking lot, but it is doubtful whether the sound could be heard inside the Medical Center administration building or at the residences on Arnold Road.

Cumulative Effects. The Music Center, the Arboretum expansion, Azalea Road Park, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure project would have no direct or indirect, long term or short term, beneficial or adverse effect on soundscape and noise at the Folk Art Center site. As Alternative D reconstructs the Folk Art Center building to create the combined regional destination visitor center/Folk Art Center, the Folk Art Center expansion could be affected.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative D would have a minor to moderate, short term, local, direct adverse effect on soundscape and noise in the area surrounding the Folk Art Center site. The implementation of Alternative D would have a minor, long term, local, indirect, adverse effect on soundscape and noise in the area surrounding the Folk Art Center site.

Alternative D would not produce major adverse effects on soundscape whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of soundscape as a result of the implementation of Alternative D.

Impacts of Alternative E: Folk Art Center

The construction of Alternative E would have a short term minor to moderate adverse effect on soundscape and noise in the area surrounding the Folk Art Center site. The heavy machinery that is involved in site preparation and the other machines associated with construction would create noise that probably could be heard from the residences located along Arnold Road and the Veterans Administration Medical Center. Currently, the Medical Center has employee parking and administrative offices nearest the Folk Art Center. The administrative offices are located over 250 yards from the Alternative E building site and hospital buildings containing patient rooms (where silence is important) are located further to the southwest. Residential uses on Arnold Road are over three hundred yards from the building site. Both the administrative building and the residences could probably hear some of the construction noise, but the noise should be limited to daytime. The contractor that constructs the regional destination visitor center would comply with best management practices to reduce the effects of construction noise on the surrounding area. Heavy equipment and truck engines would be properly muffled and would be turned off when not in use.

The implementation of Alternative E would have a minor, long term, local, indirect adverse effect on soundscape and noise in the area surrounding the Folk Art Center site. As mentioned, the ambient noise in the area is currently suburban in nature, and the

noise created by the operation of the regional destination visitor center would primarily be slow moving autos traveling through a driveway and parking lot. A few diesel trucks, buses and recreational vehicles may also visit the regional destination visitor center, but they would probably park and turn off their engines instead of idling for a long period of time. As the parking facility for Alternative E is for the both the regional destination visitor center and the Folk Art Center, there would be more traffic moving through the driveway and parking facility than for Alternatives B and C. A park ranger may give a presentation at the outside exhibits, but the ranger would not use amplification equipment and the sound should be localized. The sounds from Alternative E may carry to the Medical Center employee parking lot, but it is doubtful whether the sound could be heard inside the Medical Center administration building or at the residences on Arnold Road.

Cumulative Effects. The Music Center, the Arboretum expansion, Azalea Road Park, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure project would have no direct or indirect, long term or short term, beneficial or adverse effect on soundscape and noise at the Folk Art Center site. As Alternative E consumes most of the area that would probably be needed for parking for the Folk Art Center expansion, the Folk Art Center expansion could be affected.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative E would have a short term minor to moderate adverse effect on soundscape and noise in the area surrounding the Folk Art Center site. The implementation of Alternative E would have a minor, long term, local, indirect adverse effect on soundscape and noise in the area surrounding the Folk Art Center site.

Alternative E would not produce major adverse effects on soundscape whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation of the park, (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or (3) identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, there would be no impairment of soundscape as a result of the implementation of Alternative E.

PARK OPERATIONS

Affected Environment

The superintendent of the Blue Ridge Parkway is responsible for managing the parkway, its staff, concessionaires, all programs, attractions, and its relations with persons, agencies and organizations, community services, facilities management, and fee collection.

The Blue Ridge Parkway has 192 permanent park staff and 124 seasonal employees who provide the full scope of functions and activities to accomplish management objectives

and meet requirements in law enforcement, emergency services, public health and safety, science, resource protection and management, visitor services, interpretation and education, community services, utilities, housing, and fee collection. The parkway currently has 10 staff involved in planning for the regional destination visitor center on a part time basis.

The Southern Highland Craft Guild operates the Folk Art Center as a cooperating association with the parkway. Several parkway employees are stationed at the Folk Art Center and provide interpretation for the visitors. Eastern National, another cooperating association, operates the bookstore at the Folk Art Center. The Guild is responsible for maintenance of the facility.

Impacts of Alternative A: No Action

The implementation of Alternative A would result in no long term or short term, direct or indirect adverse effects on park operations. As there is no construction involved in Alternative A, there would be no effects to parking at either the headquarters or the Folk Art Center, nor would there be effects to the interpretive program at the Folk Art Center.

The implementation of Alternative A would result in no long term, direct or indirect adverse effects to park operations. The current interpretive program at the Folk Art Center would continue.

Cumulative Effects. The Arboretum expansion, Azalea Road Park, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure project would have no direct, long term or short term, adverse or beneficial effect on park operations. However, the attraction of additional visitors to the Asheville area could result in additional visitors to the parkway which could increase the burden on park staff. This could create a minor, indirect, long term adverse effect on park operations. The Folk Art Center expansion and the Music Center could increase the need for additional park employees depending on the program at each of these attractions. This could also create a minor, direct, long term adverse effect on park operations.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative A would result in no long term or short term, direct or indirect, adverse effects on park operations. The implementation of Alternative A would result in no long term or short term, direct or indirect, adverse effects on park operations.

Impacts of Alternative B: Hemphill Knob – Preferred Alternative

The construction of Alternative B would result in minor, short term, local, direct adverse effects on park operations. The construction activity at Hemphill Knob would primarily affect the visitor parking facility which is rarely used, as the headquarters Building at Hemphill Knob is not a designated visitor center. Most of the visitors to the headquarters are on official business and usually park in the employee parking facility which contains adequate spaces for most activities. During construction, a driveway to

the employee parking facility would need to remain open for staff access, and visitors can be directed to the employee parking lot as well. Several National Park Service staff would need to be involved on a part time basis with the construction management, but it is expected that existing staff would be used for this activity and no new staff would be required. This would result in added workload for these employees for the short term during construction.

The implementation of Alternative B would result in moderate, long term, park-wide, direct beneficial effects to the operations of the parkway. National Park Service staff has estimated that the regional destination visitor center would be staffed with 8 full time personnel and 13 volunteers. It is estimated that 5 of the full time personnel would be National Park Service staff personnel and the remainder would be non-government employees. The 5 National Park Service staff would be current interpretive employees who would be transferred to the regional destination visitor center from the Folk Art Center and no new National Park Service employees would be required. The National Park Service interpretive activities at the Folk Art Center would be discontinued and that activity would shift to the regional destination visitor center. The interpretive program would be improved due to the superior interpretive resources that would be available at the regional destination visitor center.

Cumulative Effects. The Arboretum expansion, Azalea Road Park, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure project would have no direct, long term or short term, adverse or beneficial effect on park operations. However, the attraction of additional visitors to the Asheville area could result in additional visitors to the parkway which could increase the burden on park staff. This could create a minor, indirect, long term adverse effect on park operations. The Folk Art Center expansion and the Music Center could increase the need for additional park employees depending on the program at each of these attractions. This could also create a minor, direct, long term adverse effect on park operations.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative B would result in minor, short term, local, direct adverse effects on park operations. The implementation of Alternative B would result in moderate, long term, park-wide, direct beneficial effects to the operations of the parkway.

Impacts of Alternative C: Hemphill Knob

The construction of Alternative C would result in minor, short term, local, direct adverse effects on park operations. The construction activity at Hemphill Knob would primarily affect the visitor parking facility which is rarely used, as the headquarters Building at Hemphill Knob is not a designated visitor center. Most of the visitors to the headquarters are on official business and usually park in the employee parking facility which contains adequate spaces for most activities. During construction, a driveway to the employee parking facility would need to remain open for staff to use, and visitors can be directed to the employee parking lot as well. Several National Park Service staff would need to be involved on a part time basis with the construction management, but it

is expected that existing staff would be used for this activity and no new staff would be required. This would result in added workload for these employees for the short term during construction.

The implementation of Alternative C would result in moderate, long term, park-wide, direct beneficial effects to the operations of the parkway. National Park Service staff has estimated that the regional destination visitor center would be staffed with 8 full time personnel and 13 volunteers. It is estimated that 5 of the full time personnel would be National Park Service staff and the remainder would be non-government employees. The 5 National Park Service staff would be current interpretive employees who would be transferred to the regional destination visitor center from the Folk Art Center and no new National Park Service employees would be required. The National Park Service interpretive activities at the Folk Art Center would be discontinued and that activity would shift to the regional destination visitor center. The interpretive program would be improved due to the superior interpretive resources that would be available at the regional destination visitor center.

Cumulative Effects. The Arboretum expansion, Azalea Road Park, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure project would have no direct, long term or short term, adverse or beneficial effect on park operations. However, the attraction of additional visitors to the Asheville area could result in additional visitors to the parkway which could increase the burden on park staff. This could create a minor, indirect, long term adverse effect on park operations. The Folk Art Center expansion and the Music Center could increase the need for additional park employees depending on the program at each of these attractions. This could also create a minor, direct, long term adverse effect on park operations.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative C would result in minor, short term, local, direct adverse effects on park operations. The implementation of Alternative C would result in moderate, long term, park-wide, direct beneficial effects to the operations of the parkway.

Impacts of Alternative D: Folk Art Center

The construction of Alternative D would result in moderate, short term, local, direct adverse effects on park operations. The construction activity at the Folk Art Center building would affect the operation of the Folk Art Center and the National Park Service interpretive activities that occur at the Folk Art Center. These activities include Junior Ranger programs that occur from June to August, and daily park orientation programs and Discovery Zone programs featuring native animals that occur from June to October. The Folk Art Center is currently the only designated visitor center for the parkway in the Asheville area and these operations would be affected. As the parking for the regional destination visitor center/Folk Art Center is reconstructed, Folk Art Center parking would also be affected. Several National Park Service staff would need to be involved on a part time basis with the construction management, but it is expected that existing staff

would be used for this activity and no new staff would be required. This would result in added workload for these employees for the short term during construction.

The implementation of Alternative D would result in minor to moderate, long term, park-wide, direct beneficial effects to the operations of the parkway. National Park Service staff has estimated that the combined regional destination visitor center/Folk Art Center would be staffed with 10 full time personnel and 13 volunteers. It is estimated that 5 of the full time personnel would be National Park Service staff personnel and the remainder would be non-government employees. The 5 National Park Service staff would be current interpretive employees who are currently located at the Folk Art Center and would be transferred to the regional destination visitor center/Folk Art Center. No new National Park Service employees would be required. The interpretive program would be improved due to the superior interpretive resources that would be available at the regional destination visitor center.

Cumulative Effects. The Arboretum expansion, Azalea Road Park, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure project would have no direct, long term or short term, adverse or beneficial effect on park operations. However, the attraction of additional visitors to the Asheville area could result in additional visitors to the parkway which could increase the burden on park staff. This could create a minor, indirect, long term adverse effect on park operations. The Music Center could increase the need for additional park employees depending on the program at this attraction. This could also create a minor, direct, long term adverse effect on park operations. As the regional destination visitor center is now located in the reconstructed Folk Art Center building, the Folk Art Center expansion could be affected.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative D would result in moderate, short term, local, direct adverse effects on park operations. The implementation of Alternative D would result in minor to moderate, long term, park-wide, direct beneficial effects to the operations of the parkway.

Impacts of Alternative E: Folk Art Center

The construction of Alternative E would result in minor, short term, local, direct adverse effects on park operations. The construction activity at the Folk Art Center site would affect the parking for the Folk Art Center. As the Folk Art Center is currently the only designated parkway visitor center in the Asheville area, visitors may find it is more difficult to access the site and alternative parking locations may need to be provided. The National Park Service also has several interpretive programs at the Folk Art Center, including Junior Ranger programs that occur from June to August, and daily park orientation programs and Discovery Zone programs featuring native animals that occur from June to October. The construction activity could also have an effect on these interpretive programs. Several National Park Service staff would need to be involved on a part time basis with the construction management, but it is expected that existing staff would be used for this activity and no new staff would be required. This would result in added workload for these employees for the short term during construction.

The implementation of Alternative E would result in moderate, long term, park-wide, direct beneficial effects to the operations of the parkway. National Park Service staff has estimated that the regional destination visitor center would be staffed with 8 full time personnel and 13 volunteers. It is estimated that 5 of the full time personnel would be National Park Service staff personnel and the remainder would be non-government employees. The 5 National Park Service staff would be current interpretive employees who are currently located at the Folk Art Center and would be transferred to the regional destination visitor center. No new National Park Service employees would be required. The interpretive program would be improved due to the superior interpretive resources that would be available at the regional destination visitor center.

Cumulative Effects. The Arboretum expansion, Azalea Road Park, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, the Cort office building, and the Health Adventure project would have no direct, long term or short term, adverse or beneficial effect on park operations. However, the attraction of additional visitors to the Asheville area could result in additional visitors to the parkway which could increase the burden on park staff. This could create a minor, indirect, long term adverse effect on park operations. The Music Center could increase the need for additional park employees depending on the program at this attraction. This could also create a minor, direct, long term adverse effect on park operations. As the regional destination visitor center is now located at the Folk Art Center site, the Folk Art Center expansion could be affected as there is limited room for additional parking.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative E would result in minor, short term, local, direct adverse effects on park operations. The implementation of Alternative E would result in moderate, long term, park-wide, direct beneficial effects to the operations of the parkway.

TRANSPORTATION

Affected Environment

The Blue Ridge Parkway is a 469 mile two-lane scenic roadway with few at-grade intersections and a 45 mile per hour speed limit. The parkway connects the Great Smoky Mountain National Park in North Carolina with the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia. The parkway traverses the crests and ridges of the Blue Ridge, Black, Great Craggy, Great Balsam and Plot Balsam Mountains. These five major mountain ranges are part of the Central and southern Appalachian Mountains.

The parkway is open year around, but certain sections of the parkway are often closed in the winter due to snowfall. The parkway is generally not plowed in the winter; however, sections of the parkway near Asheville between U.S. 74 A and the parkway headquarter at Hemphill Knob and between U.S. 70 and the Folk Art Center are plowed and kept open year around. Other sections of the parkway are closed during snow events by a gate. In the Asheville area, gates are located at Craven Gap (Milepost 377.4), north of the Folk Art Center, at U.S. 70, at U.S. 74 A, and at U.S. 25.

The accident rates on the parkway are lower than similar facilities in North Carolina. From 2001 to 2004, the parkway had an overall accident rate of 0.24 accidents per million vehicle miles, while the rate for North Carolina two lane undivided rural state routes was 2.83 accidents per million vehicle miles (National Park Service, 2004b). The rate on the parkway in the Asheville area is higher than the overall parkway rate at 0.35 accidents per million vehicle miles, but is still well below the statewide average. Only 30 accidents occurred on the parkway in the Asheville area between March 2001 and March 2004. The accidents included only 4 injuries and no fatalities.

In 2002, average weekday peak season traffic volumes along the parkway ranged from 840 vehicles per day at Milepost 189.5, near Laurel Fork, Virginia to 2,760 vehicles per day at Milepost 286, near Boone, North Carolina. Average weekend peak season volumes were higher and ranged from 1,920 vehicles per day to 3,690 vehicles per day at the same two stations. Average peak season traffic volumes collected at Milepost 378 in the Asheville area were 1,650 vehicles per day for an average weekday and 2,350 vehicles per day for an average weekend day (National Park Service, 2004b). All of these daily traffic volumes correspond to a level of service A or level of service B condition for a two lane undivided roadway with very few at-grade intersections and no signalized intersections. Level of service is an indicator of congestion along a roadway that ranges along a continuum from level of service A (free flow conditions) to level of service F (bumper to bumper congestion).¹

Average peak season daily traffic volumes on the parkway in the Asheville area are projected to increase to 1,790 vehicles per day for an average weekday and 2,710 vehicles per day for an average weekend day by 2010 (National Park Service, 2004b). Daily level of service volumes are projected to remain at level of service B.

There are several major arterial roadways that intersect the parkway in the Asheville area near the proposed regional destination visitor center sites. U.S. 74 A is a 5 lane arterial with 2002 average annual daily traffic of 28,000 to 32,000 vehicles per day in the vicinity of the parkway (French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization, 2004). U.S. 74 A is operating at an average daily level of service B-C in the vicinity of the parkway. U.S. 70 is a 5 lane arterial with 2002 average annual daily traffic of 18,000 vehicles per day in the vicinity of the parkway. U.S. 70 is operating at an average daily level of service B near the parkway. Peak hour traffic volumes were not available for these facilities. However, a one day August 2002 traffic study indicated that the intersection of the parkway with U.S. 74 A operated at level of service A-C during the AM and PM peak hours, depending on the turning movement analyzed. This study also indicated that the intersection of the parkway with U.S. 70 operated at level of service A-B during the AM and PM peak hour (National Park Service, 2004b). This study also indicated that the level of service at these intersections would not degrade by 2010, even though no improvements to either facility are planned during that period.

¹ (The Florida Department of Transportation has developed a handbook to assist in estimating level of service for various roadway facilities based on criteria in the Highway Capacity Manual – 2000 prepared by the Transportation Research Board (Florida Department of Transportation, 2002)).

The headquarters building at Hemphill Knob has 63 parking spaces for employees and 28 auto/light truck spaces for visitors. It also has 4 recreational vehicle/bus parking spaces. The visitor parking is often empty, as the headquarters is not designated as a visitor center on the parkway. The Folk Art Center has 150 auto/light truck parking spaces and 10 recreation vehicle / bus spaces. An August 2002 survey indicated that the 150 spaces at the Folk Art Center were only 24 percent occupied (National Park Service, 2004b). This survey was taken on a weekday and does not represent peak demand during a weekend event. National Park Service employees indicated that the Folk Art Center parking lot completely fills during one or two summer weekend special events held at the Folk Art Center each year and visitors are forced to park along the driveway and along the parkway (National Park Service, 2005b). Up to 2,000 visitors may attend those events during a weekend day and many of the visitors remain at the Folk Art Center for several hours (Folk Art Center, 2004). The Folk Art Center has received over 3,400 visitors during the fall color change, but parking demand is lower as the visitors spend a shorter time at the Folk Art Center.

Impacts of Alternative A: No Action

Implementation of Alternative A would result in no short term, adverse, direct or indirect effects on transportation during the construction period. No construction is required for Alternative A.

Implementation of Alternative A would produce no long term, adverse, direct or indirect effects on transportation. There would be no additional trips attracted to the parkway due to the regional destination visitor center. However, plans for expansion of the Folk Art Center could continue, which could attract additional trips to the parkway.

Cumulative Effects. Azalea Road Park, Pack Square Renaissance, the Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, and the Health Adventure project would generate additional vehicle trips near their sites, but it is doubtful if the trips would use the parkway to access those sites. If additional visitors are attracted to the Asheville area by these projects, it is likely that some of the visitors may choose to travel the parkway during their visit to Asheville. As the Cort office building is located near the parkway interchange with U.S. 74 A, some of the traffic accessing the Cort building could choose to use the parkway for access. However, this building would generate little traffic on peak season weekends. The Music Center would attract additional trips to the parkway, but it is located approximately 170 miles north of Alternative A and few trips destined for the Music Center would probably pass through the area of Alternative A. The Arboretum is located only 10 miles from Hemphill Knob and 12 miles from the Folk Art Center, and some of the visitors traveling to the expanded Arboretum could choose to utilize the parkway for access. The Folk Art Center building and program expansion would likely attract additional trips onto the parkway. Currently, most of the special events held at the Folk Art Center are held in the summer months instead of during the fall color change when travel along the parkway is at its peak. While some of these cumulative effects could create a negligible to minor, long term, local, indirect adverse effect on the parkway

traffic conditions near Hemphill Knob and the Folk Art Center, the additional traffic is not expected to deteriorate traffic conditions to unacceptable levels of service.

Conclusion. Implementation of Alternative A would result in no short term, adverse, direct or indirect effects on transportation during the construction period. No construction is required for Alternative A. Implementation of Alternative A would produce no long term, adverse, direct or indirect effects on transportation.

Impacts of Alternative B: Hemphill Knob – Preferred Alternative

The construction of Alternative B would result in minor, short term, local, indirect adverse effects to the transportation system in the area near Hemphill Knob. It is assumed that most of the construction employees and the trucks that deliver materials and supplies for the construction of the regional destination visitor center would come from Asheville and would use U.S. 74 A and the parkway to access the site. As the level of service on U.S.74 A, the parkway, and the interchange of these two facilities is currently operating at level of service C or better conditions, the additional construction traffic should not lower traffic levels of service to unacceptable conditions, defined as level of service E or worse conditions in the Asheville Metropolitan area. In addition, the construction related traffic would only drive on the parkway for one-half mile to access the site.

The operation of Alternative B would result in minor, long term, local, indirect, adverse effects to the transportation system in the area near Hemphill Knob. The greatest regional destination visitor center attendance is expected on October weekends, although National Park Service staff has indicated that special events would not be held at the regional destination visitor center during October when the traffic on the parkway is heaviest due to the fall leaf change. During the October peak, it is expected that most of the trips attracted to the regional destination visitor center would be trips that are already on the parkway enjoying the fall colors, not visitors that are attracted to the regional destination visitor center for an event. According to National Park Service staff, the special events at the regional destination visitor center, such as mountain music or clogging, would take place during the evening hours on a summer weekend, after the normal closing hours of the regional destination visitor center, The regional destination visitor center would also be available for public meetings that would be held on weekday evenings after the normal closing hours of the regional destination visitor center. Traffic on the parkway is generally lower in the evening hours; therefore, the traffic generated by the regional destination visitor center in the evening hours would not constitute the greatest impact.

On a weekend during the October peak season, it is estimated that 180 vehicles would arrive at the regional destination visitor center during a mid-day peak hour and 180 vehicles would also leave the site during that peak hour (see Appendix C). It is estimated that 80 percent of these vehicles are already driving the parkway and that 20 percent of the vehicles are new trips that are attracted to the regional destination visitor center. This would result in 36 additional vehicles on the parkway arriving and departing the regional destination visitor center during the mid-day peak hour. Assuming that 15

percent of the daily traffic would be on the parkway during the peak hour, this would result in level of service B conditions along the parkway near the site. The level of service at the driveway to the regional destination visitor center /headquarters complex at Hemphill Knob would operate at level of service A-B conditions. A northbound to westbound left turn lane is being constructed as part of this alternative. Truck trips to the center are anticipated to be minimal. National Park Service staff estimated two deliveries by van each day and only one tractor-trailer delivery per month (National Park Service, 2004e). Also, in order to maintain the speed limit at 45 miles per hour near the intersection, sight distance must be a minimum of 450 feet in both directions along the parkway. If sight distance is less than 450 feet, the speed limit must be lowered according to park road standards (National Park Service, 1984). The traffic generated by the regional destination visitor center would have a negligible effect on U.S. 74 A or the other arterial roadways in the area (see Appendix C).

There would be 182 auto/light truck parking spaces provided with Alternative B, as well as 5 bus/recreational vehicle spaces. The estimated peak demand for parking during an October weekend is 180 autos/light trucks and 5 buses/recreational vehicles. On those weekends when demand exceeds the available parking spaces in the visitor center lot, there are 60 Headquarter employee parking spaces available for overflow. On weekends, there should be few employees using these spaces.

Cumulative Effects. Azalea Road Park, Pack Square Renaissance, the Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, and the Health Adventure project would generate additional vehicle trips near their sites, but it is doubtful if the trips would use the parkway to access those sites. If additional visitors are attracted to the Asheville area by these projects, it is likely that some of the visitors may choose to travel the parkway during their visit to Asheville. As the Cort office building is located near the parkway interchange with U.S. 74 A, some of the traffic accessing the Cort building could choose to use the parkway for access. However, this building would generate little traffic on peak season weekends. The Music Center would attract additional trips to the parkway, but it is located approximately 170 miles north of Alternative B and few trips destined for the Music Center would probably pass through the area of Alternative B. The Arboretum is located only 10 miles from Alternative B, and some of the visitors traveling to the expanded Arboretum could choose to utilize the parkway for access. The Folk Art Center building and program expansion, located less than two miles north of Alternative B, would likely attract additional trips that would pass the Alternative B site. Currently, most of the special events held at the Folk Art Center are held in the summer months instead of during the fall color change when travel along the parkway is at its peak. While some of these cumulative effects could create a negligible to minor, long term, local, indirect adverse effect on the parkway traffic conditions near Alternative B, the additional traffic is not expected to deteriorate traffic conditions to unacceptable levels of service.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative B would result in minor, short term, local, indirect adverse effects to the transportation system in the area near Hemphill Knob. The operation of Alternative A would result in minor, long term, local, indirect adverse effects to the transportation system in the area near Hemphill Knob.

Impacts of Alternative C – Hemphill Knob

The construction of Alternative C would result in minor, short term, local, indirect adverse effects to the transportation system in the area near Hemphill Knob. It is assumed that most of the construction employees and the trucks that deliver materials and supplies for the construction of the regional destination visitor center would come from Asheville and would use U.S. 74 A and the parkway to access the site. As the level of service on U.S. 74 A, the parkway, and the interchange of the park and these two facilities is currently operating at level of service C or better conditions, the additional construction traffic should not lower traffic levels of service to unacceptable conditions, defined as level of service E or worse conditions in the Asheville Metropolitan area. In addition, the construction related traffic would only drive on the parkway for one-half mile to access the site.

The operation of Alternative C would result in minor, long term, local, indirect adverse effects to the transportation system in the area near Hemphill Knob. The greatest regional destination visitor center attendance is expected on October weekends, although National Park Service staff has indicated that special events would not be held at the regional destination visitor center during October when the traffic on the parkway is heaviest due to the fall leaf change. During the October peak, it is expected that most of the trips attracted to the regional destination visitor center would be trips that are already on the parkway enjoying the fall colors, not visitors that are attracted to the regional destination visitor center for an event. According to National Park Service staff, the special events at the regional destination visitor center, such as mountain music or clogging, would take place during the evening hours on a summer weekend, after the normal closing hours of the regional destination visitor center. The regional destination visitor center would also be available for public meetings that would be held on weekday evenings after the normal closing hours of the regional destination visitor center. Traffic on the parkway is generally lower in the evening hours; therefore, the traffic generated by the regional destination visitor center in the evening hours would not constitute the greatest impact.

On a weekend during the October peak season, it is estimated that 180 vehicles would arrive at the regional destination visitor center during a mid-day peak hour and 180 vehicles would also leave the site during that peak hour (see Appendix C). It is estimated that 80 percent of these vehicles are already driving the parkway and that 20 percent of the vehicles are new trips that are attracted to the regional destination visitor center. This would result in 36 additional vehicles on the parkway arriving and departing the regional destination visitor center during the mid-day peak hour. Assuming that 12 percent of the daily traffic would be on the parkway during the peak hour, this would result in level of service B conditions along the parkway near the site. The level of service at the driveway to the regional destination visitor center /headquarters complex at Hemphill Knob would operate at level of service A-B conditions. A northbound to westbound left turn lane is being constructed as part of this alternative. Truck trips to the center are anticipated to be minimal. National Park Service staff estimated two deliveries by van each day and only one tractor-trailer delivery per month (National Park

Service, 2004e). Also, in order to maintain the speed limit at 45 miles per hour near the intersection, sight distance must be a minimum of 450 feet in both directions along the parkway. If sight distance is less than 450 feet, the speed limit must be lowered according to park road standards (National Park Service, 1984). The traffic generated by the regional destination visitor center would have a negligible effect on U.S. 74 A or the other arterial roadways in the area (see Appendix C).

There would be 182 auto/light truck parking spaces provided with Alternative B, as well as 5 bus/recreational vehicle spaces. The estimated peak demand for parking during an October weekend is 180 autos/light trucks and 5 buses/recreational vehicles. On those weekends when demand exceeds the available parking spaces in the visitor center lot, there are 60 Headquarter employee parking spaces available for overflow. On weekends, there should be few employees using these spaces.

Cumulative Effects. Azalea Road Park, Pack Square Renaissance, the Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, and the Health Adventure project would generate additional vehicle trips near their sites, but it is doubtful if the trips would use the parkway to access those sites. If additional visitors are attracted to the Asheville area by these projects, it is likely that some of the visitors may choose to travel the parkway during their visit to Asheville. As the Cort office building is located near the parkway interchange with U.S. 74 A, some of the traffic accessing the Cort building could choose to use the parkway for access. However, this building would generate little traffic on peak season weekends. The Music Center would attract additional trips to the parkway, but it is located approximately 170 miles north of Alternative C and few trips destined for the Music Center would probably pass through the area of Alternative C. The Arboretum is located only 10 miles from Alternative C, and some of the visitors traveling to the expanded Arboretum could choose to utilize the parkway for access. The Folk Art Center building and program expansion, located less than two miles north of Alternative C, would likely attract additional trips that would pass the Alternative C site. Currently, most of the special events held at the Folk Art Center are held in the summer months instead of during the fall color change when travel along the parkway is at its peak. While some of these cumulative effects could create a negligible to minor, long term, local, indirect adverse effect on the parkway traffic conditions near Alternative C, the additional traffic is not expected to deteriorate traffic conditions to unacceptable levels of service.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative C would result in minor, short term, local, indirect adverse effects to the transportation system in the area near Hemphill Knob. The operation of Alternative C would result in minor, long term, local, indirect adverse effects to the transportation system in the area near Hemphill Knob.

Impacts of Alternative D – Folk Art Center

The construction of Alternative D would result in minor, short term, local, indirect adverse effects to the transportation system in the area near Hemphill Knob. It is assumed that most of the construction employees and the trucks that deliver materials and supplies for the construction of the regional destination visitor center would come from Asheville and would use U.S. 74 A or U.S. 70 and the parkway to access the site. As

the level of service on U.S.74 A, U.S. 70, the parkway, and the interchange of the parkway and these two facilities is currently operating at level of service C or better conditions, the additional construction traffic should not lower traffic levels of service to unacceptable conditions, defined as level of service E or worse conditions in the Asheville Metropolitan area. In addition, the construction related traffic would only drive on the parkway for one-half mile from U.S. 70 or 2.6 miles from U.S. 74 A to access the site.

The operation of Alternative D would result in minor to moderate, long term, local, indirect adverse effects to the transportation system in the area near Hemphill Knob. National Park Service staff has indicated that special events would not be held at the regional destination visitor center during October when the traffic on the parkway is heaviest due to the fall leaf change, Irregardless, the greatest regional destination visitor center attendance is expected on October weekends. National Park Service staff stated that the special events at the regional destination visitor center, such as mountain music or clogging, would take place during the evening hours on a weekend after the normal closing hours of the regional destination visitor center. The regional destination visitor center would also be available for public meetings that would be held on weekday evenings after the normal closing hours of the regional destination visitor center. Traffic on the parkway is generally lower in the evening hours; therefore, the traffic generated by the regional destination visitor center in the evening hours would not constitute the greatest impact.

Although the traffic generated by the regional destination visitor center would be greatest on an October weekend, Alternative D is located in the same building as the Folk Art Center. Therefore, the traffic associated with the Folk Art Center must also be considered. When considering the traffic generated by the Folk Art Center along with the traffic generated by the regional destination visitor center, a July weekend has the potential to attract the largest number of trips to the Alternative D site. On a Folk Art Center event weekend during the July peak season, it is estimated that 270 vehicles would arrive at the regional destination visitor center / Folk Art Center during a mid-day peak hour and 270 vehicles would also leave the site during that peak hour (see Appendix C). As this represents an event that attracts visitors to the site as a destination, it is estimated that about half of these vehicles are already driving the parkway and about half of the vehicles are new trips that are attracted to the regional destination visitor center/Folk Art Center site. This would result in approximately 131 additional vehicles on the parkway arriving and departing the Alternative D site during the mid-day peak hour (see calculations in Appendix C). Assuming that 12 percent of the daily traffic would be on the parkway during the peak hour, this would result in level of service B conditions along the parkway near the site. The level of service at the driveway to the regional destination visitor center / Folk Art Center complex would operate at level of service A-C conditions. The eastbound to northbound left turn lane is the movement that is projected to operate at level of service C conditions. This would primarily affect visitors leaving the site. This site currently has a 250 foot northbound to westbound left turn lane. This turn lane should be adequate for the anticipated traffic at this intersection. Truck trips to the center are anticipated to be minimal. National Park

Service staff estimated two deliveries by van each day and only one tractor-trailer delivery per month (National Park Service, 2004e). Also, in order to maintain the speed limit at 45 miles per hour near the intersection, sight distance must be a minimum of 450 feet in both directions along the parkway. If sight distance is less than 450 feet, the speed limit must be lowered according to park road standards (National Park Service, 1984). The traffic generated by the regional destination visitor center / Folk Art Center would have a negligible effect on U.S. 74 A or the other arterial roadways in the area (see Appendix C).

There would be 336 auto/light truck parking spaces provided with Alternative D, as well as 13 bus/recreational vehicle spaces. The estimated peak demand for parking during an October weekend is 338 autos/light trucks and 13 buses/recreational vehicles. On those weekends when demand exceeds the available parking spaces in the visitor center lot, there are no parking spaces available for overflow. Currently, parking overflows onto the edge of the driveway and onto the parkway.

Cumulative Effects. Azalea Road Park, Pack Square Renaissance, the Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, and the Health Adventure project would generate additional vehicle trips near their sites, but it is doubtful if the trips would use the parkway to access those sites. If additional visitors are attracted to the Asheville area by these projects, it is likely that some of the visitors may choose to travel the parkway during their visit to Asheville. As the Cort office building is located near the parkway interchange with U.S. 74 A, some of the traffic accessing the Cort building could choose to use the parkway for access. However, this building would generate little traffic on peak season weekends. The Music Center would attract additional trips to the parkway, but it is located approximately 170 miles north of Alternative D and few trips destined for the Music Center would probably pass through the area of Alternative D. The Arboretum is located only 12 miles from Alternative D, and some of the visitors traveling to the expanded Arboretum could choose to utilize the parkway for access. The Folk Art Center building and program expansion could be affected with this alternative, as the building is being used for the regional destination visitor center. While some of these cumulative effects could create a negligible to minor, long term, local, indirect adverse effect on the parkway traffic conditions near Alternative D, the additional traffic is not expected to deteriorate traffic conditions to unacceptable levels of service.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative D would result in minor, short term, local, indirect adverse effects to the transportation system in the area near the Folk Art Center. The operation of Alternative D would result in minor to moderate, long term, local, indirect adverse effects to the transportation system in the area near the Folk Art Center.

Impacts of Alternative E – Folk Art Center

The construction of Alternative E would result in minor, short term, local, indirect adverse effects to the transportation system in the area near Hemphill Knob. It is assumed that most of the construction employees and the trucks that deliver materials and supplies for the construction of the regional destination visitor center would come from Asheville and would use U.S. 74 A or U.S. 70 and the parkway to access the site. As

the level of service on U.S.74 A, U.S. 70, the parkway, and the interchange of the parkway and these two facilities is currently operating at level of service C or better conditions, the additional construction traffic should not lower traffic levels of service to unacceptable conditions, defined as level of service E or worse conditions in the Asheville Metropolitan area. In addition, the construction related traffic would only drive on the parkway for one-half mile from U.S. 70 or 2.6 miles from U.S. 74 A to access the site.

The operation of Alternative E would result in minor to moderate, long term, local, indirect adverse effects to the transportation system in the area near Hemphill Knob. National Park Service staff has indicated that special events would not be held at the regional destination visitor center during October when the traffic on the parkway is heaviest due to the fall leaf change. Irregardless, the greatest regional destination visitor center attendance is expected on October weekends. National Park Service staff stated that the special events at the regional destination visitor center, such as mountain music or clogging, would take place during the evening hours on a weekend after the normal closing hours of the regional destination visitor center. The regional destination visitor center would also be available for public meetings that would be held on weekday evenings after the normal closing hours of the regional destination visitor center. Traffic on the parkway is generally lower in the evening hours; therefore, the traffic generated by the regional destination visitor center in the evening hours would not constitute the greatest impact.

Although the traffic generated by the regional destination visitor center would be greatest on an October weekend, Alternative E is located on the same site as the Folk Art Center. Therefore, the traffic associated with the Folk Art Center must also be considered. When considering the traffic generated by the Folk Art Center along with the traffic generated by the regional destination visitor center, a July weekend has the potential to attract the largest number of trips to the Alternative E site. On a Folk Art Center event weekend during the July peak season, it is estimated that 270 vehicles would arrive at the regional destination visitor center / Folk Art Center during a mid-day peak hour and 270 vehicles would also leave the site during that peak hour (see Appendix C). As this represents an event that attracts visitors to the site as a destination, it is estimated that approximately half of these vehicles are already driving the parkway and approximately half of the vehicles are new trips that are attracted to the regional destination visitor center/Folk Art Center site. This would result in approximately 131 additional vehicles on the parkway arriving and departing the Alternative E site during the mid-day peak hour (see calculations in Appendix C). Assuming that 12 percent of the daily traffic would be on the parkway during the peak hour, this would result in level of service B conditions along the parkway near the site. The level of service at the driveway to the regional destination visitor center / Folk Art Center complex would operate at level of service A-C conditions. The eastbound to northbound left turn lane is the movement that is projected to operate at level of service C conditions. This would primarily affect visitors leaving the site. This site currently has a 250 foot northbound to westbound left turn lane. This turn lane should be adequate for the anticipated traffic at this intersection. Truck trips to the center are anticipated to be minimal. National Park

Service staff estimated two deliveries by van each day and only one tractor-trailer delivery per month (National Park Service, 2004e). Also, in order to maintain the speed limit at 45 miles per hour near the intersection, sight distance must be a minimum of 450 feet in both directions along the parkway. If sight distance is less than 450 feet, the speed limit must be lowered according to park road standards (National Park Service, 1984). The traffic generated by the regional destination visitor center / Folk Art Center would have a negligible effect on U.S. 74 A or the other arterial roadways in the area (see Appendix C).

There would be 336 auto/light truck parking spaces provided with Alternative E, as well as 13 bus/recreational vehicle spaces. The estimated peak demand for parking during an October weekend is 338 autos/light trucks and 135 buses/recreational vehicles. On those weekends when demand exceeds the available parking spaces in the visitor center lot, there are no parking spaces available for overflow. Currently, parking overflows onto the edge of the driveway and onto the parkway.

Cumulative Effects. Azalea Road Park, Pack Square Renaissance, the Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, and the Health Adventure project would generate additional vehicle trips near their sites, but it is doubtful if the trips would use the parkway to access those sites. If additional visitors are attracted to the Asheville area by these projects, it is likely that some of the visitors may choose to travel the parkway during their visit to Asheville. As the Cort office building is located near the parkway interchange with U.S. 74 A, some of the traffic accessing the Cort building could choose to use the parkway for access. However, this building would generate little traffic on peak season weekends. The Music Center would attract additional trips to the parkway, but it is located approximately 170 miles north of Alternative E and few trips destined for the Music Center would probably pass through the area of Alternative E. The Arboretum is located only 12 miles from Alternative E, and some of the visitors traveling to the expanded Arboretum could choose to utilize the parkway for access. The Folk Art Center building and program expansion may be affected if the expansion requires additional parking. There is no available room for additional parking at the site, without building a multi-level structure. While some of these cumulative effects could create a negligible to minor, long term, local, indirect adverse effect on the parkway traffic conditions near Alternative E, the additional traffic is not expected to deteriorate traffic conditions to unacceptable levels of service.

Conclusion. The construction of Alternative E would result in minor, short term, local, indirect adverse effects to the transportation system in the area near Hemphill Knob. The operation of Alternative E would result in minor to moderate, long term, local, indirect adverse effects to the transportation system in the area near Hemphill Knob.

CONCESSION OPERATIONS / COMMERCIAL SERVICES

Affected Environment

Commercial service is an umbrella term that is used by the National Park Service to encompass any service or facility use in the park that involves the exchange of money. The National Park Service generally does not operate the businesses located within the Park boundaries, but contracts the operation of the business to a commercial operation. The two main types of commercial service authorizations are concession contracts and incidental business permits. Commercial services at the parkway are administered by personnel located at the headquarters in Asheville, North Carolina. The parkway staff administers concessions contracts and issues incidental business permits.

The Blue Ridge Parkway has a number of concession operations. The concessions provide services determined to be “Necessary & Appropriate” at various locations along the parkway. The concessions include:

Virginia Peaks of Otter Company operates the following:

 Otter Creek Restaurant and Gift/Craft Shop at Milepost 61.

 Peaks of Otter Lodge, Restaurant, Gift/Craft Shop, Country Store, Lounge, and Sharp Top Bus Trip at Milepost 86.

Forever/NPC Resorts, LLC operates the following:

 Rocky Knob Housekeeping Cabins at Milepost 174.

 Mabry Mill Restaurant and Gift/Craft Shop, Mabry Grist Mill Product Sales at Milepost 176.

 Doughton Park/Bluffs Lodge, Restaurant, Service Station, Gift/Craft Shop, Camp Store at Milepost 241.

 Price Park Lake Canoe/Boat Rentals, limited snack and beverage sales at Milepost 297.

 Crabtree Meadows Snack Shop, Gift/Craft Shop, Camp Store at Milepost 339.

Northwest Trading Post, Inc. operates a gift/craft shop, limited food items at Milepost 259.

Southern Highland Craft Guild operates the following:

 Parkway Craft Center (Concession Contract) – Gift/Craft Shop, Craft Demonstrations at Milepost 294.

 Folk Art Center (cooperative agreement) – Gift/Craft Shop, Programs and Craft Demonstrations, Craft Exhibits at Milepost 382.

Parkway Inn, Inc. operates the Pisgah Inn, Restaurant, Gift/Craft Shop, Country Store, and Laundromat at Milepost 408.

In addition, the following incidental business permits were filed during 2004 for businesses operating along the parkway.

Blowing Rock Horse Rentals, LLC
Blowing Rock, North Carolina
Guided Horseback Riding on the Cone
Manor Estate

Carolina Tailwinds, Inc.
Winston-Salem, NC
Bicycle Tours

Westglow Spa, Inc.
Blowing Rock, North Carolina
Guided Fitness Hikes

Triple R Ranch
Chesapeake, Virginia
Rock Climbing

Backcountry at Montreat College
Montreat, North Carolina
Hiking and Marathon Runs

Virginia Living Museum
Newport News, Virginia
Environmental Education Tours

Camp Broadstone
Appalachian State University
Boone, North Carolina
Rock Climbing and Rappelling

New England Hiking Holidays
North Conway, New Hampshire
Guided Hiking Tours

Southern Waterways
Asheville, North Carolina
Water Access

Western Spirit Cycling
Moab, Utah
Visitor Transport

Black Bear Adventures
Columbus, North Carolina
Bicycle Tours

Impacts of Alternative A: No Action

Implementation of Alternative A would result in no short term, direct or indirect, beneficial or adverse effects on the commercial services at the park. There would be no construction activity, so there would be no disruption to concession or business operations at the parkway.

Implementation of Alternative A would result in no long term, direct or indirect, adverse or beneficial effects on the commercial services along the parkway. There would be no changes to current commercial operations at the parkway. There would be no effect on the income of the artisans that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop in the Folk Art Center.

Cumulative Effects. The Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, Azalea Road Park, the Health Adventure project, and the Cort office building would have no long term or short term, direct or indirect adverse or beneficial affect on commercial services along the parkway. Implementation of the Folk Art Center expansion and the Music Center may result in changes to commercial operations associated with those facilities.

Conclusion. Implementation of Alternative A would result in no short term, direct or indirect, adverse or beneficial effects on the commercial services at the parkway. Implementation of Alternative A would result in no long term, direct or indirect, adverse or beneficial effects on the commercial services along the parkway.

Impacts of Alternative B: Hemphill Knob – Preferred Alternative

The construction of the regional destination visitor center would have no short term, direct or indirect, adverse or beneficial effect on the commercial services at the parkway. There are no commercial services operations at Hemphill Knob which could be affected by the construction activity.

The implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob would have a minor, long term, regional, direct beneficial effect on the commercial operations associated with the parkway. Food services are anticipated at the regional destination visitor center and those services would be provided by a food concession contract. This would be a new concession authorization. The digital immersion theatre would be operated either by a partner with the parkway or a concession contract. As this service is currently not provided along the parkway, the operator would likely be a new commercial entity that is not currently under contract with the parkway. Eastern National would operate a bookstore as part of Alternative B, but they are considered a cooperating association with the parkway and not a concession operation. A marketing center would also be located at the regional destination visitor center, and would be operated either by a concession or a cooperating association.

However, the implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob could also have a minor to moderate, long term, indirect, local adverse affect on the Southern Highland Craft Guild cooperative agreement that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center. Locating the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob could reduce the number of visitors at the Folk Art Center. Currently, the Folk Art Center is the only designated visitor center in the Asheville area. If the regional destination visitor center is constructed at Hemphill Knob, visitors that are traveling the parkway and want to stop at a visitor center would have the choice between the Folk Art Center and the regional destination visitor center. It is likely that some of the visitors would stop at the regional destination visitor center instead of the Folk Art Center, and as a result, the visitation at the Folk Art Center could be reduced. However, the reduction in visitation at the Folk Art Center could be partially offset by visitors at the regional destination visitor center who learn about the Folk Art Center from the informative displays and choose to visit the Folk Art Center.

The informative displays could provide information to Asheville area visitors who would otherwise not learn about the features of the Folk Art Center. The reduced visitation at the Folk Art Center has the potential to reduce the craft sales at the Allanstand Craft Shop. It should be noted that the Folk Art Center is a destination, as well as a visitor center, and National Park Service staff that are located at the Folk Art Center have estimated that two-thirds of the visitors to the Folk Art Center are visiting the Folk Art Center as a destination and only one-third of the visitors are using it as a convenience visitor center (National Park Service, 2004d). The National Park Service staff also indicated that the greatest share of the craft sales at the Allanstand Craft Shop are to those visitors who come to the Folk Art Center as a destination and that the casual visitor rarely purchases crafts at the shop. The Southern Highland Craft Guild, who operates the Allanstand Craft Shop, also operates Guild Crafts, located at 930 Tunnel Road, less than 2 miles from the Allanstand Craft Shop. Thirteen of the attractions along the parkway currently sell gifts and/or crafts, including 5 shops that are within 100 miles of the Folk Art Center. One of these shops, the Parkway Craft Center located at the Moses Cone Manor (Milepost 294) is also operated by the Southern Highland Craft Guild. It should be noted that the regional destination visitor center is not expected to sell crafts that would compete with the Allanstand Craft Shop. In addition, this alternative would allow the planned expansion of the Folk Art Center to occur, which could make it a larger destination attraction, and would increase the visitation at the Folk Art Center. As a result of these factors, it is expected that the implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob could have a minor to moderate, long term, indirect adverse affect on the Southern Highland Craft Guild cooperative agreement at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center.

Mitigation for the potential reduction in visitation to the Folk Art Center would include the provision of a kiosk or other promotional device inside the regional destination visitor center that would provide information regarding the location and features of the Folk Art Center to encourage Parkway visitors to visit the Folk Art Center.

Cumulative Effects. The Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, Azalea Road Park, the Health Adventure project, and the Cort office building would have no long term or short term, direct or indirect adverse or beneficial affect on concession operations or commercial services along the parkway. Implementation of the Folk Art Center expansion and the Music Center may result in changes to commercial services associated with those facilities.

Conclusion. The construction of the regional destination visitor center would have no short term, direct or indirect, beneficial or adverse effect on the commercial services at the parkway. The implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob would have a minor, long term, regional, direct beneficial effect on the commercial operations associated with the parkway. However, the implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob could also have a minor to moderate, long term, indirect, local adverse affect on the Southern Highland Craft Guild cooperative agreement that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center.

Impacts of Alternative C: Hemphill Knob

The construction of the regional destination visitor center would have no short term, direct or indirect, beneficial or adverse effect on the commercial services at the parkway. There are no commercial services operations at Hemphill Knob which would be affected by the construction activity.

The implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob would have a minor, long term, regional, direct beneficial effect on the commercial operations associated with the parkway. Food services are anticipated at the regional destination visitor center and those services would be provided by a food concession contract. This would be a new concession authorization. The digital immersion theatre would be operated either by a partner with the parkway or a concession contract. As this service is currently not provided along the parkway, the operator would likely be a new commercial entity or cooperator that is not currently under contract or agreement with the parkway. Eastern National would operate a bookstore as part of Alternative C, but they are considered a cooperating association with the parkway and not a concession operation. A marketing center would also be located at the regional destination visitor center, and would be operated either by a concession or a cooperating association.

However, the implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob could also have a minor to moderate, long term, indirect, local adverse affect on the Southern Highland Craft Guild cooperative agreement that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center. Locating the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob could reduce the number of visitors at the Folk Art Center. Currently, the Folk Art Center is the only designated visitor center in the Asheville area. If the regional destination visitor center is constructed at Hemphill Knob, visitors that are traveling the parkway and want to stop at a visitor center would have the choice between the Folk Art Center and the regional destination visitor center. It is likely that some of the visitors would stop at the regional destination visitor center instead of the Folk Art Center, and as a result, the visitation at the Folk Art Center could be reduced. However, the reduction in visitation at the Folk Art Center could be partially offset by visitors at the regional destination visitor center who learn about the Folk Art Center from the informative displays and choose to visit the Folk Art Center. The informative displays could provide information to Asheville area visitors who would otherwise not learn about the features of the Folk Art Center. The reduced visitation at the Folk Art Center has the potential to reduce the craft sales at the Allanstand Craft Shop. It should be noted that the Folk Art Center is a destination, as well as a visitor center, and National Park Service staff that work at the Folk Art Center have estimated that two-thirds of the visitors to the Folk Art Center are visiting the Folk Art Center as a destination and only one-third of the visitors are using it as a visitor center (National Park Service, 2004d). The National Park Service staff also indicated that the greatest share of the craft sales at the Allanstand Craft Shop are to those visitors who come to the Folk Art Center as a destination and that the casual visitor rarely purchases crafts at the shop. The Southern Highland Craft Guild, who operates the Allanstand Craft Shop, also operates Guild Crafts, located at 930 Tunnel Road, less than 2 miles from the Allanstand

Craft Shop. Thirteen of the attractions along the parkway currently sell gifts and/or crafts, including 5 shops that are within 100 miles of the Folk Art Center. One of these shops, the Parkway Craft Center located at the Moses Cone Manor (Milepost 294) is also operated by the Southern Highland Craft Guild. It should be noted that the regional destination visitor center is not expected to sell crafts that would compete with the Allanstand Craft Shop. In addition, this alternative would allow the planned expansion of the Folk Art Center to occur, which could make it a larger destination attraction, and would increase the visitation at the Folk Art Center. As a result of these factors, it is expected that the implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob could have a minor to moderate, long term, indirect adverse affect on the Southern Highland Craft Guild cooperative agreement at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center.

Mitigation for the potential reduction in visitation to the Folk Art Center would include the provision of a kiosk or other promotional device inside the regional destination visitor center that would provide information regarding the location and features of the Folk Art Center to encourage Parkway visitors to visit the Folk Art Center.

Cumulative Effects. The Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, Azalea Road Park, the Health Adventure project, and the Cort office building would have no long term or short term, direct or indirect adverse or beneficial affect on commercial services along the parkway. Implementation of the Folk Art Center expansion and the Music Center may result in changes to commercial operations associated with those facilities.

Conclusion. The construction of the regional destination visitor center would have no short term, direct or indirect, beneficial or adverse effect on the commercial services at the parkway. The implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob would have a minor, long term, regional, direct beneficial effect on the commercial operations associated with the parkway. However, the implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob could also have a minor to moderate, long term, indirect, local adverse affect on the Southern Highland Craft Guild cooperative agreement that sell crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center.

Impacts of Alternative D: Folk Art Center

The construction of the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center site would have a moderate, short term, local, direct adverse effect on the commercial services at the parkway. The Southern Highland Craft Guild currently operates a gift and craft shop at the Folk Art Center. Alternative access to the property and to the Allanstand Craft Shop would be provided so the shop would not have to completely cease operations during construction. Signs would be posted on the parkway listing the activities and operations at the Folk Art Center that are open despite the construction and directions around the construction would be provided to minimize the effects of construction on the operation of the Folk Art Center and the Allanstand Craft Shop.

The implementation of the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center would have a minor, long term, local, indirect beneficial effect on the commercial operations associated with the parkway. Food services are anticipated at the regional destination visitor center and those services would be provided by a food concession contract. This would be a new concession authorization. The digital immersion theatre would be operated either by a cooperating association with the parkway or a concession contract. As this service is currently not provided along the parkway, the operator would likely be a new commercial entity that is not currently under contract with the parkway. Eastern National would operate a bookstore as part of Alternative D, but they are a cooperating association with the parkway and not a concession operation. A marketing center would also be located at the regional destination visitor center, and would be operated either by a concession or a cooperating association.

However, the implementation of the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center could also have a minor to moderate, long term, indirect, local beneficial affect on the Southern Highland Craft Guild cooperative agreement that sell gifts and crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center. Locating the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center site could increase the number of visitors at the Allanstand Craft Shop. The increased visitation at the regional destination visitor center/Folk Art Center has the potential to increase the craft sales at the Allanstand Craft Shop. It should be noted that the Folk Art Center is a destination, as well as a visitor center, and National Park Service staff that are located at the Folk Art Center have estimated that two-thirds of the visitors to the Folk Art Center are visiting the Folk Art Center as a destination and only one-third of the visitors are using it as a visitor center (National Park Service, 2004d). The National Park Service staff also indicated that the greatest share of the craft sales at the Allanstand Craft Shop are to those visitors who come to the Folk Art Center as a destination and that the casual visitor rarely purchases crafts at the shop. It should be noted that the regional destination visitor center is not expected to sell crafts that would compete with the Allanstand Craft Shop. As a result of these factors, it is expected that the implementation of the regional destination visitor center at Hemphill Knob could have a minor to moderate, long term, indirect beneficial affect on the Southern Highland Craft Guild cooperative agreement at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center.

Cumulative Effects. The Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, Azalea Road Park, the Health Adventure project, and the Cort office building would have no long term or short term, direct or indirect adverse or beneficial affect on commercial services along the parkway. Implementation of the Music Center may result in changes to concession or commercial operations associated with that facility. The Folk Art Center expansion could be affected as this alternative utilizes the Folk Art Center as the regional destination visitor center.

Conclusion. The construction of the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center site would have a moderate, short term, local, direct adverse effect on the commercial services at the parkway. The implementation of the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center would have a minor, long term, local, indirect

beneficial effect on the commercial operations associated with the parkway. However, the implementation of the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center could also have a minor to moderate, long term, indirect, local beneficial affect on the Southern Highland Craft Guild cooperative agreement that sell gifts and crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center.

Impacts of Alternative E: Folk Art Center

The construction of the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center site would have a moderate, short term, local, indirect adverse effect on the commercial services at the parkway. The Southern Highland Craft Guild currently operates a gift and craft shop at the Folk Art Center. Alternative access to the property and to the Allanstand Craft Shop would be provided so the shop would not have to completely cease operations during construction. Signs would be posted on the parkway listing the activities and operations at the Folk Art Center that are open despite the construction and directions around the construction would be provided to minimize the effects of construction on the operation of the Folk Art Center and the Allanstand Craft Shop.

The implementation of the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center would have a minor, long term, local, indirect beneficial effect on the commercial operations associated with the parkway. Food services are anticipated at the regional destination visitor center and those services would be provided by a food concession contract. This would be a new concession authorization. The digital immersion theatre would be operated either by a cooperating association with the parkway or a concession contract. As this service is currently not provided along the parkway, the operator would likely be a new commercial entity that is not currently under contract with the parkway. Eastern National would operate a bookstore as part of Alternative E, but they are a cooperating association with the parkway and not a concession operation. A marketing center would also be located at the regional destination visitor center, and would be operated either by a concession or a cooperating association.

However, the implementation of the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center could also have a minor, long term, indirect, local beneficial affect on the Southern Highland Craft Guild cooperative agreement that sell gifts and crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center. Although the regional destination visitor center and the Folk Art Center are separate buildings in Alternative E, locating the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center site could increase the number of visitors at the Folk Art Center. The increased potential visitation at the Folk Art Center has the potential to increase the craft sales at the Allanstand Craft Shop. It should be noted that the Folk Art Center is a destination, as well as a visitor center, and National Park Service staff that work at the Folk Art Center have estimated that two-thirds of the visitors to the Folk Art Center are visiting the Folk Art Center as a destination and only one-third of the visitors are using it as a visitor center (National Park Service, 2004d). The National Park Service staff also indicated that the greatest share of the craft sales at the Allanstand Craft Shop are to those visitors who come to the Folk Art Center as a destination and that the casual visitor rarely purchases crafts at the shop. It should be

noted that the regional destination visitor center is not expected to sell crafts that would compete with the Allanstand Craft Shop. As a result of these factors, it is expected that the implementation of the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center site could have a minor, long term, local, indirect beneficial affect on the Southern Highland Craft Guild cooperative agreement located at the Folk Art Center.

Cumulative Effects. The Arboretum expansion, Pack Square Renaissance, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, Azalea Road Park, the Health Adventure project, and the Cort office building would have no long term or short term, direct or indirect adverse or beneficial affect on commercial services along the parkway. Implementation of the Music Center may result in changes to commercial operations associated with that facility. The Folk Art Center expansion could be affected if additional parking is required for its operation. The regional destination visitor center is utilizing most of the available space at the site for its parking requirement and any additional parking would involve a multi-level structure.

Conclusion. The construction of the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center site would have a moderate, short term, local, indirect adverse effect on the commercial services at the parkway. The implementation of the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center would have a minor, long term, local, indirect beneficial effect on the commercial operations associated with the parkway. The implementation of the regional destination visitor center at the Folk Art Center could also have a minor, long term, indirect, local beneficial affect on the Southern Highland Craft Guild cooperative agreement that sell gifts and crafts at the Allanstand Craft Shop located at the Folk Art Center.

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