

# Wilderness Road State Park Master Plan Update Public Information Meeting

March 4, 2026





# Agenda

- Welcome
- Introduction to the Virginia State Parks
- Park Purpose and Background
- Meeting Purpose, Goals and Master Planning Process
- Master Plan Goals
- Park Physical, Natural and Cultural Resource Inventories
- Public Input Opportunities
- Wrap Up

# Housekeeping



- Sign-In Sheets
- Restrooms and Exits
- Materials and links will be posted to DCR website after the meeting
- Additional comments will be received until April 4, 2026
- Please hold questions until the end of the presentation

# Meeting Purpose

- Introduce attendees to the park and Master Planning process
- Present existing site conditions and analysis
- Give the public an opportunity for questions



# Welcome to the Park



# VIRGINIA STATE PARKS

## HEART OF APPALACHIA

- BK** - Breaks Interstate Park
- CR** - Clinch River State Park
- NT** - Natural Tunnel State Park
- SW** - Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park
- WR** - Wilderness Road State Park

## BLUE RIDGE HIGHLANDS

- CL** - Claytor Lake State Park
- GH** - Grayson Highlands State Park
- HM** - Hungry Mother State Park
- NR** - New River Trail State Park
- ST** - Shot Tower Historical State Park

## SOUTHERN VIRGINIA

- FS** - Fairy Stone State Park
- MR** - Mayo River State Park \*
- OC** - Occoneechee State Park
- SB** - Staunton River Battlefield Historical State Park
- SR** - Staunton River State Park

## VIRGINIA MOUNTAINS

- DO** - Douthat State Park
- HF** - Hayfields State Park \*
- SM** - Smith Mountain Lake State Park

## SHENANDOAH VALLEY

- NB** - Natural Bridge State Park
- SE** - Seven Bends State Park
- SH** - Shenandoah River State Park
- SK** - Sky Meadows State Park

\* Under development

## CENTRAL VIRGINIA

- BC** - Bear Creek Lake State Park
- HB** - High Bridge Trail State Park
- HL** - Holliday Lake State Park
- JR** - James River State Park
- PO** - Pocahontas State Park
- PW** - Powhatan State Park
- SC** - Sailor's Creek Battlefield Historical State Park
- TL** - Twin Lakes State Park

## NORTHERN VIRGINIA

- CB** - Culpeper Battlefields Historical State Park
- LA** - Lake Anna State Park
- LE** - Leesylvania State Park
- MN** - Mason Neck State Park
- SN** - Sweet Run State Park
- WW** - Widewater State Park

## CHESAPEAKE BAY

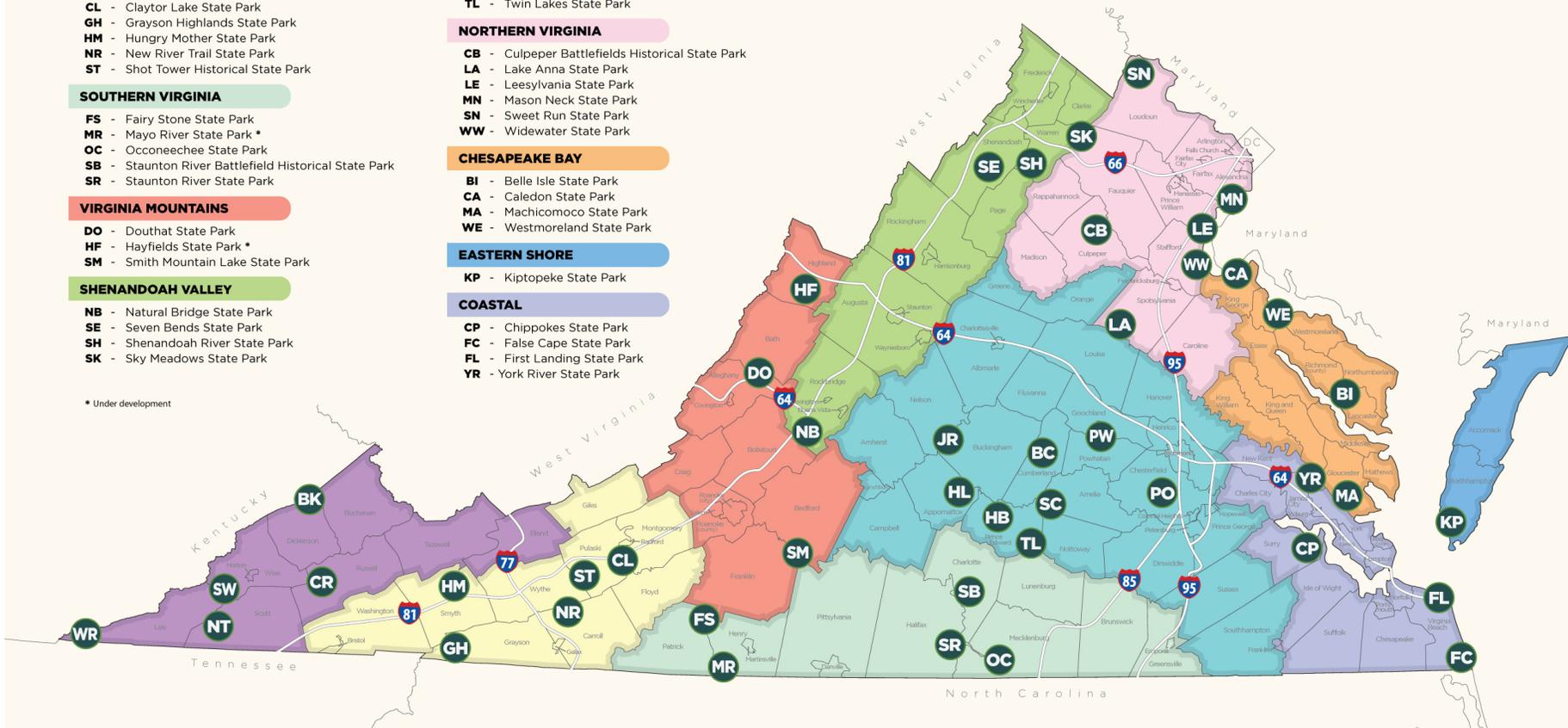
- BI** - Belle Isle State Park
- CA** - Caledon State Park
- MA** - Machicomoco State Park
- WE** - Westmoreland State Park

## EASTERN SHORE

- KP** - Kiptopeke State Park

## COASTAL

- CP** - Chippokes State Park
- FC** - False Cape State Park
- FL** - First Landing State Park
- YR** - York River State Park



# Park Purpose

*“The purpose of Wilderness Road State Park is to tell the story of the migration westward to the “wilderness.” Also to celebrate the cultural, historical, and natural resources of the Cumberland Mountain Region, fabled in the explorations of Daniel Boone.”*

*- Wilderness Road State Park Master Plan  
Executive Summary 2014 Update*





# Park Background

- 1992: Bond issue identified Lee County as integral.
- 1993: Site purchased by DCR
- 2008: Gilbert tract acquired
- Wilderness Road Trail deeded to Commonwealth in 2013
- Today the park encompasses 392.7 acres.

# What is a Master Plan?

- Pursuant to Virginia State Code all state parks must have a master plan
- Identifies natural, cultural, and physical resources as well as park needs and visitor experiences
- Highlight what makes the park unique in the state park system
- Goal to create a functional, long-range master plan that guides future development and management of the park
- Develop park mission statement and goals

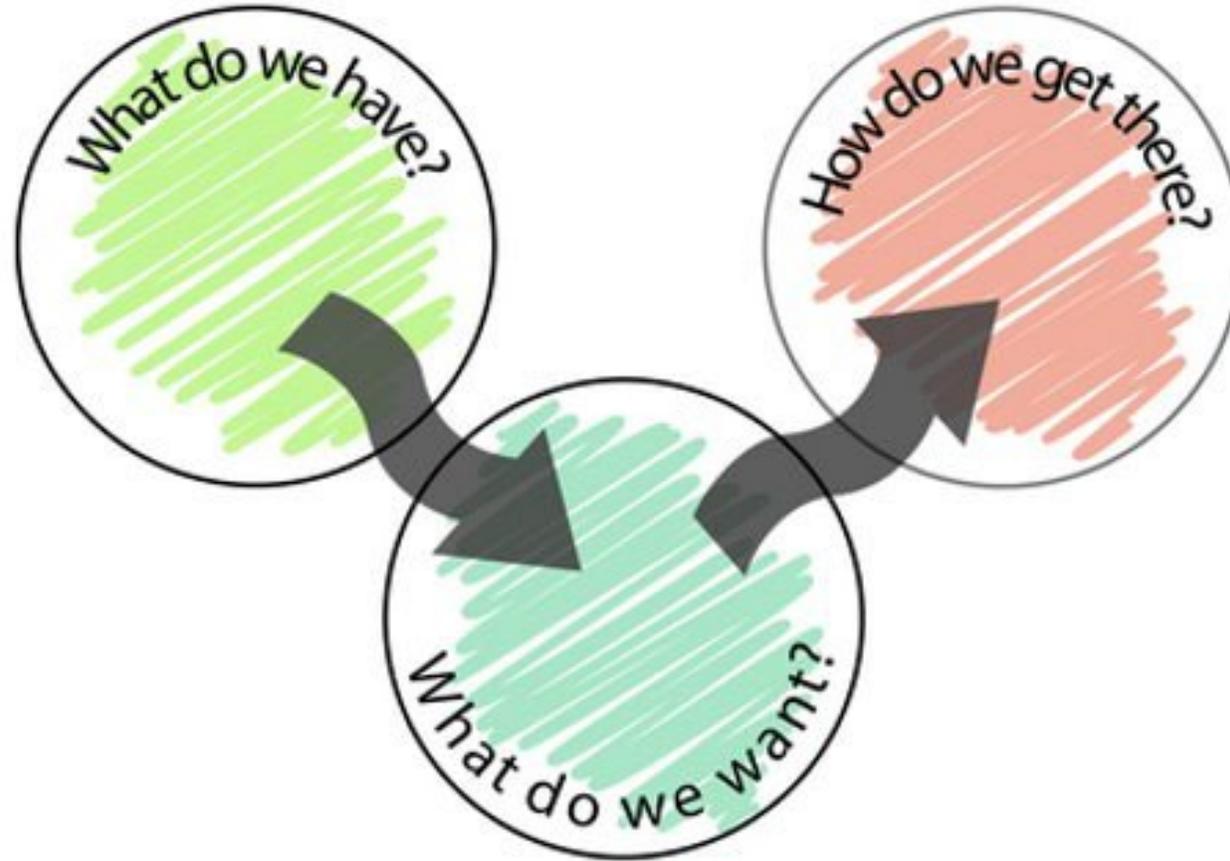




# Master Plan Goals

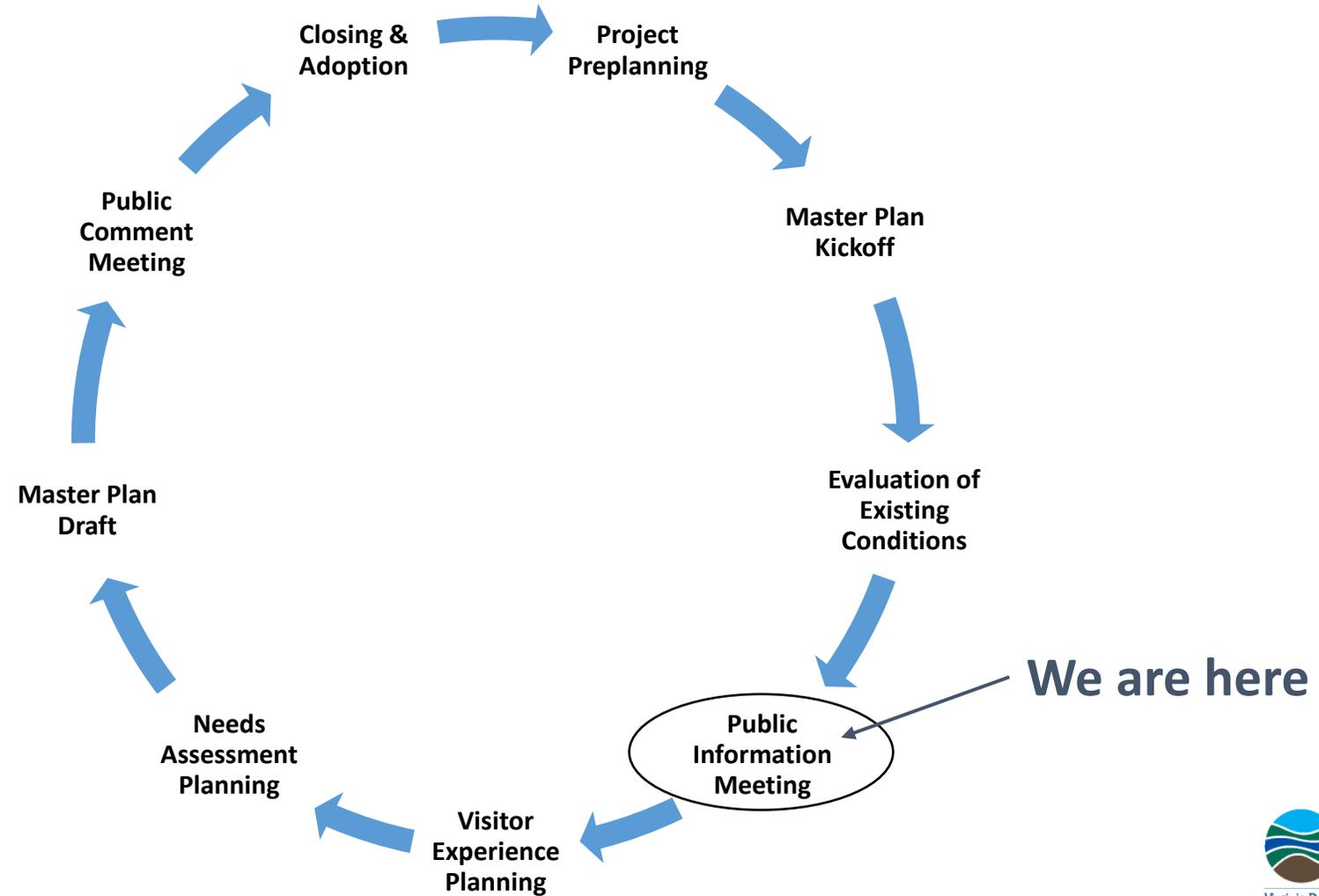
- Natural, historic and cultural resource conservation
- Variety of recreation opportunities
  - Day use and overnight
  - Education
- Phased Development Plan
  - Guided and informed by Resources
  - Consistent with Visitor Experience themes and objectives
- Incorporates Public Input

# Master Planning Vision



(Source: Fairfax County Park Authority, 2022)

# Master Planning Process



# Resource Review

Natural, Physical and Cultural Resources

at

Wilderness Road State Park



# Resources Lead the Way

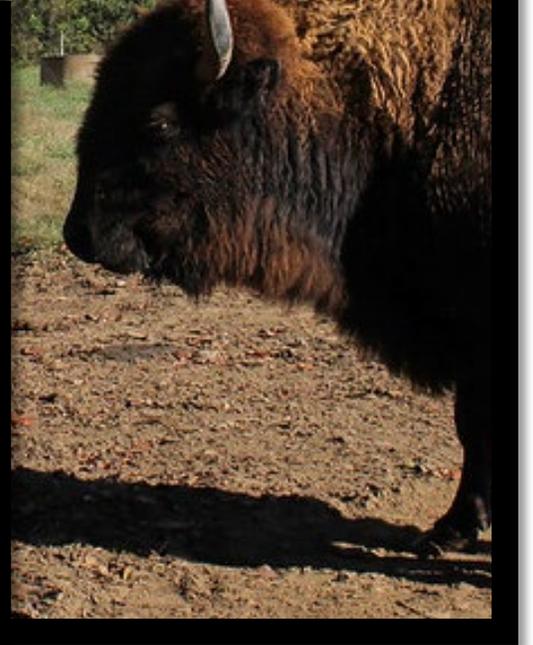
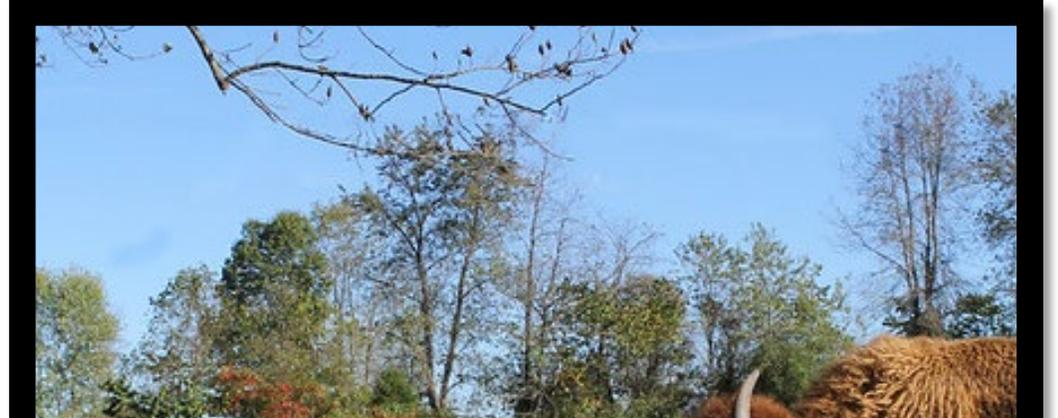
The Virginia State Parks mission is to conserve the **natural, scenic, historic and cultural resources** of the Commonwealth of Virginia and to provide recreational and educational opportunities consistent with good stewardship of these lands, water and facilities that leaves them unimpaired for future generations.



# Resources Review

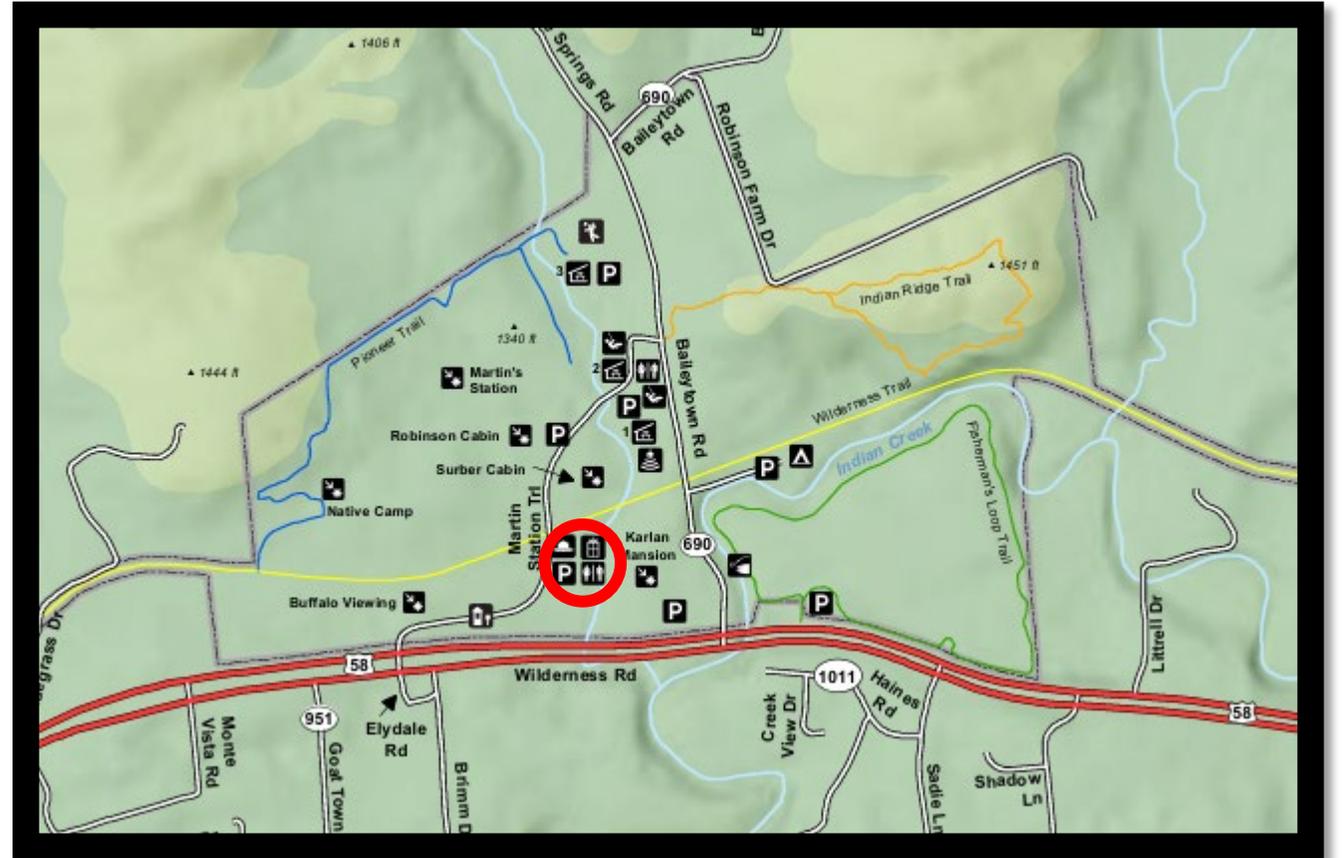
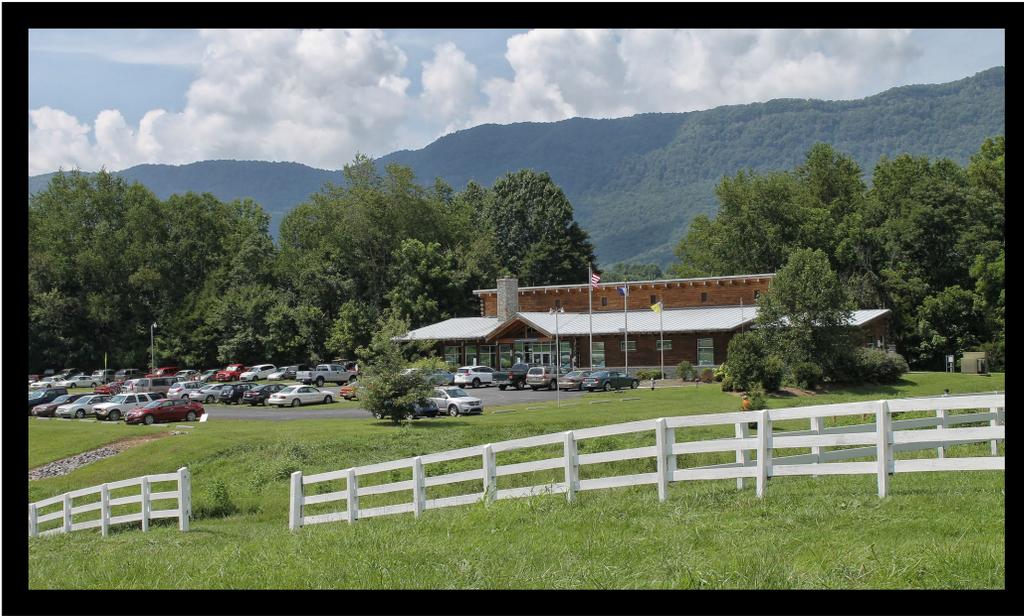
What Makes The Park Special

- **Physical Resources**
- **Natural Resources**
- **Cultural Resources**



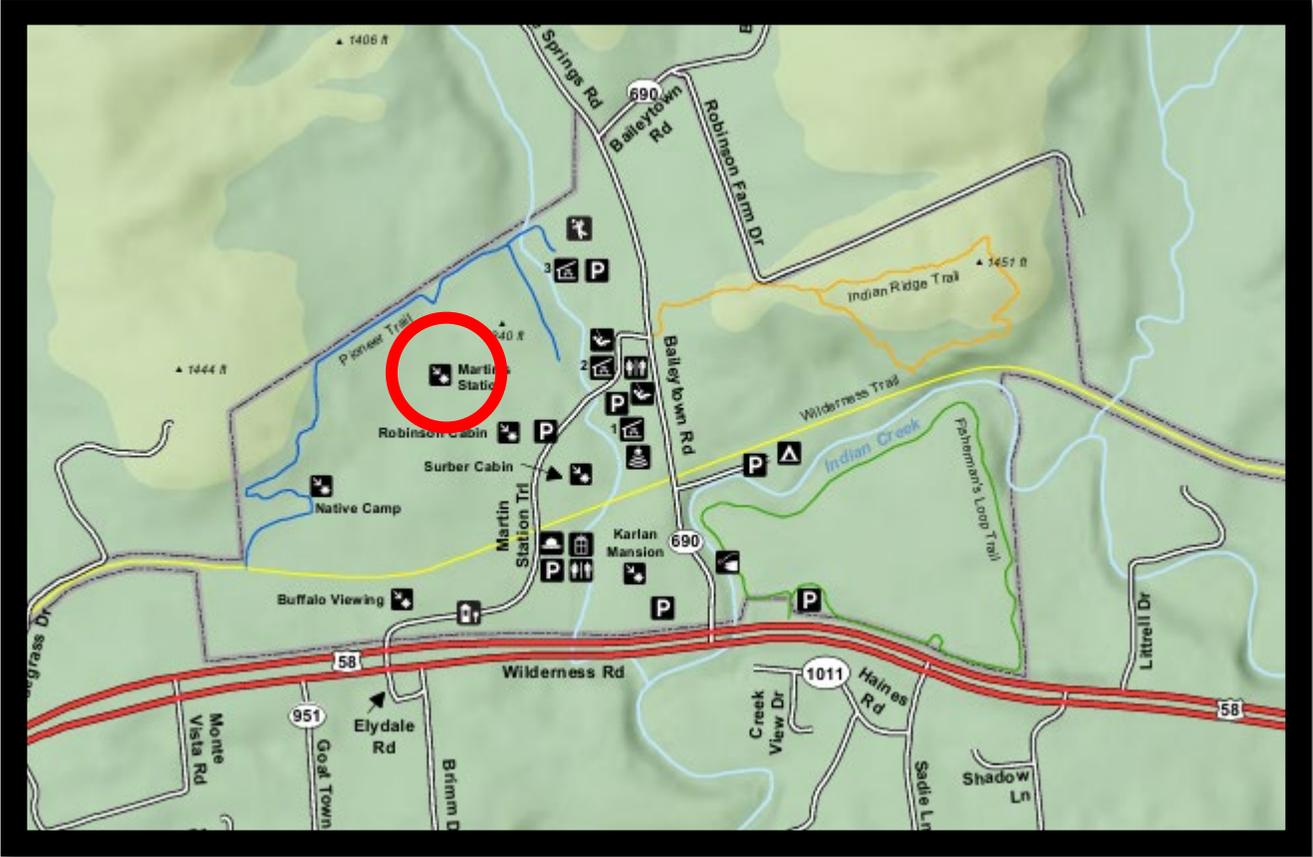
# Visitor Center

## And Administrative Offices

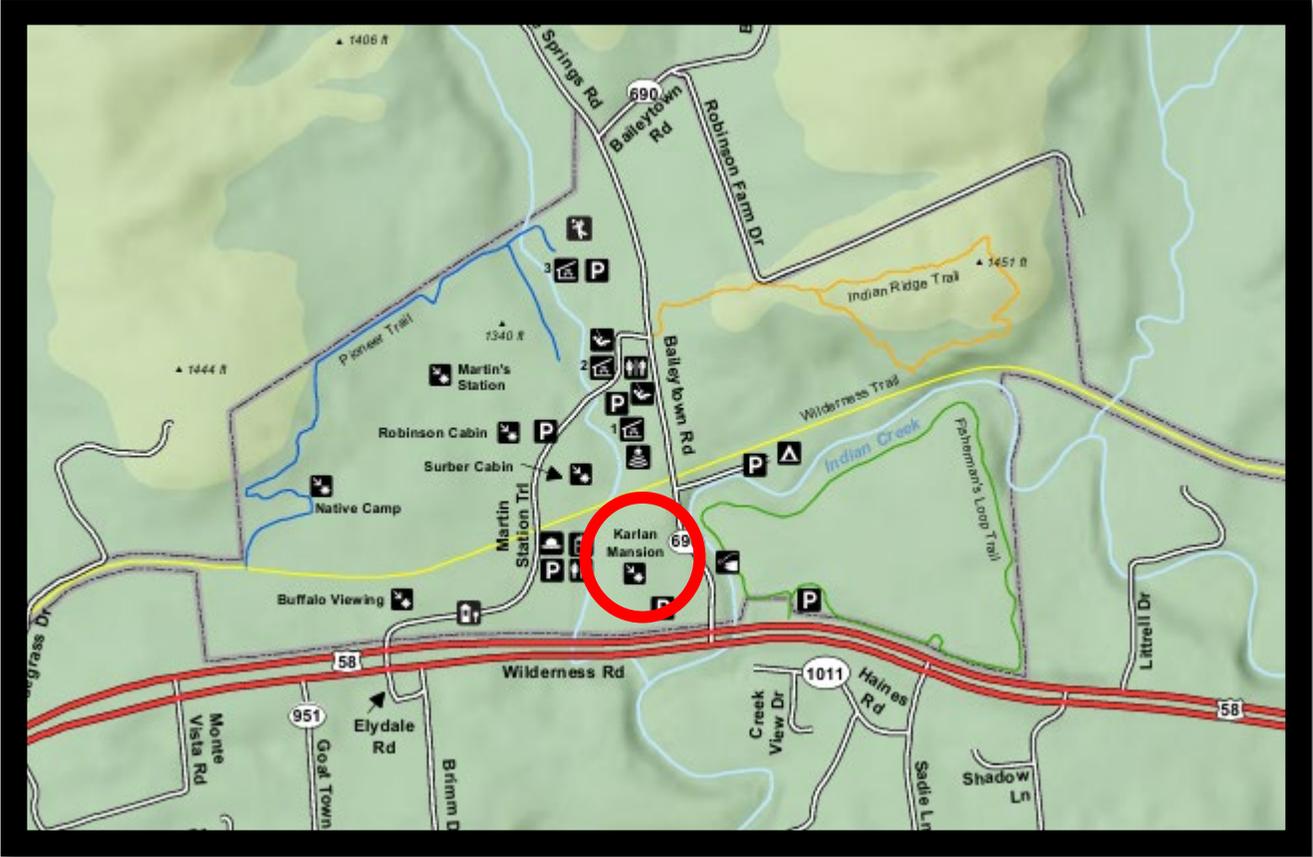


# Martin's Station

The Heart of the Park

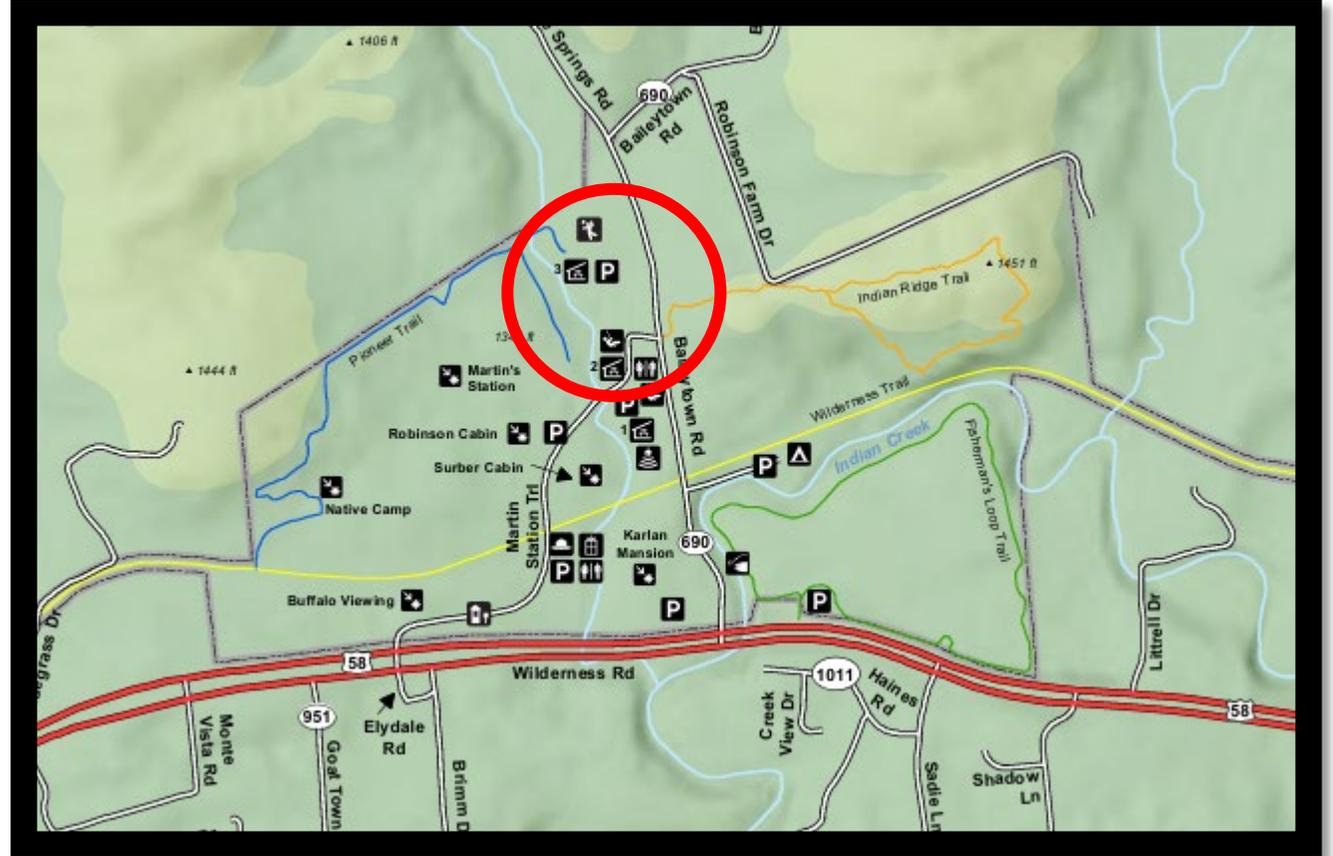


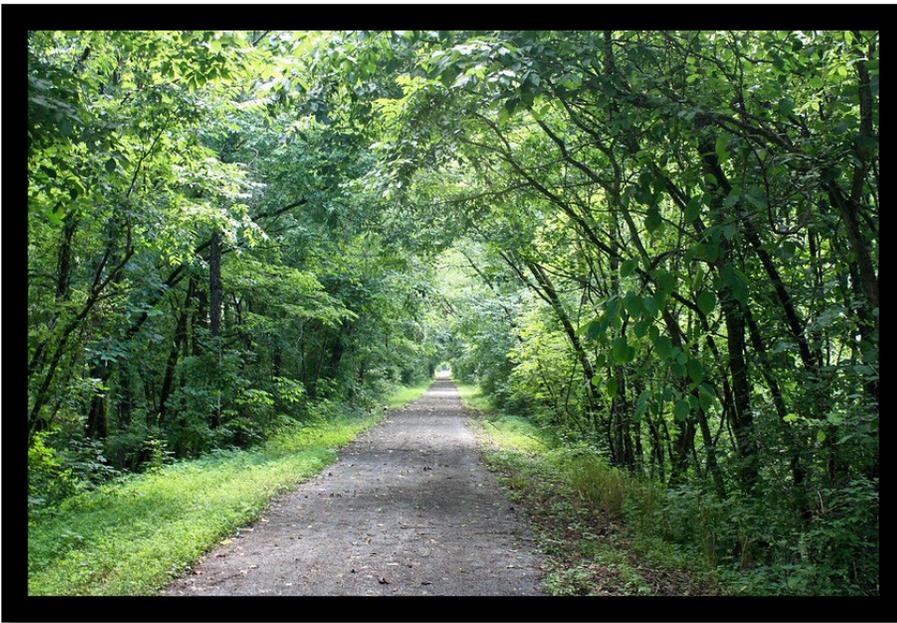
# Karlan Mansion



# Primary Day Use Area

Playground, Picnic Shelters and Tables

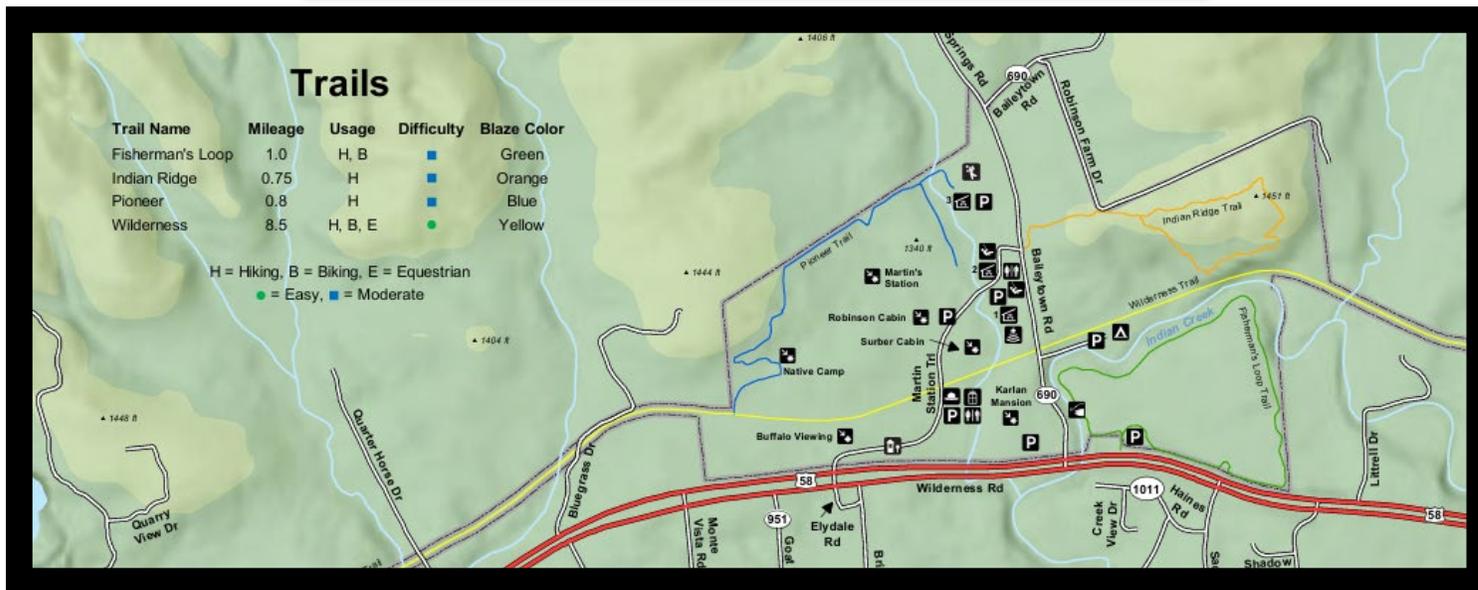




# Trails

## Hiking, Biking, Equestrian

- 4 Total Trails
  - ~11 total miles
  - All available for hiking
  - Fisherman's Loop also allows biking.
  - Wilderness Trail, a rail-to-trail, provides 8.5 miles of biking and equestrian opportunities.





# Other Supporting Infrastructure

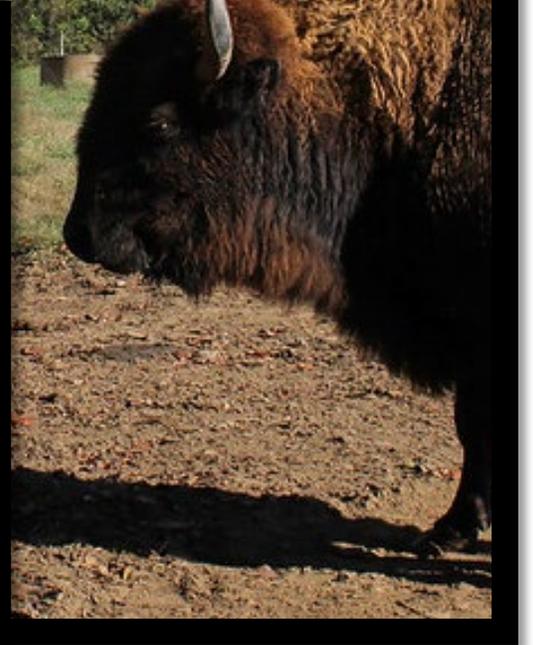
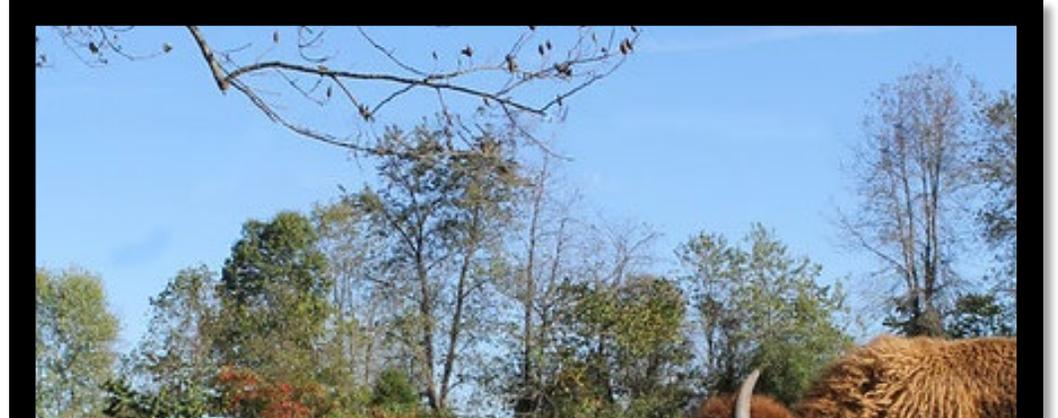
## Critical Support for the Park

- Various Historic Cabins & Structures throughout the Park
- Maintenance Facility and Miscellaneous Storage Barns/Sheds
- 2 Ranger Residences
- Contact Station

# Resources Review

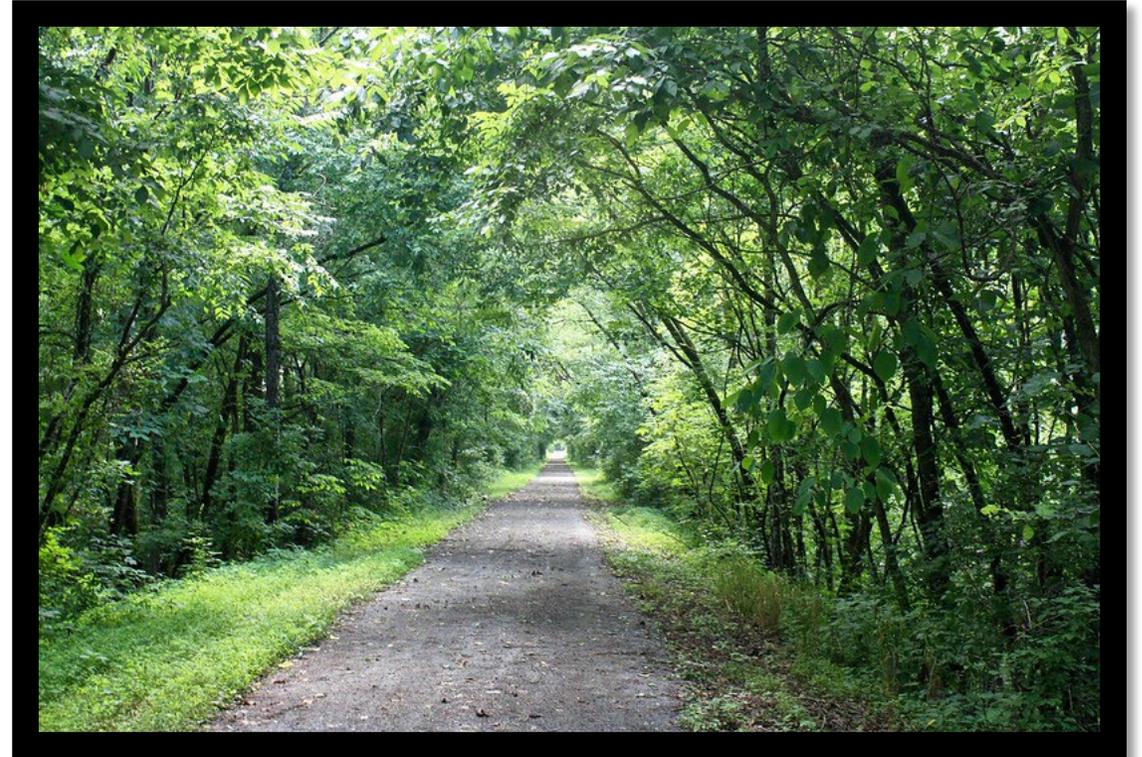
What Makes The Park Special

- Physical Resources
- **Natural Resources**
- Cultural Resources



# Natural Resources Overview

- Resources:
  - Watersheds and Flood Zones
  - Soils and Wetlands
  - Ecological Cores
  - Ecosystems
  - Sensitive Species
  - Unique Management Areas (UMAs)



# Natural Resources

## Watersheds:

- Park wholly within the Tennessee-Powell River watershed

## Flood Zones:

- ~370 acres of parkland are categorized by minimal flood hazard
- ~23 acres in the 100-year floodplain and ~1 acres in the 500-year floodplain; this is all mostly associated with Indian Creek.



# Natural Resources

## Soils:

- Over 15 soils have been mapped on the property.
- Wide soil variety from rock outcrops in the northern portions of the park to lowland loams in the southern portions of the park.

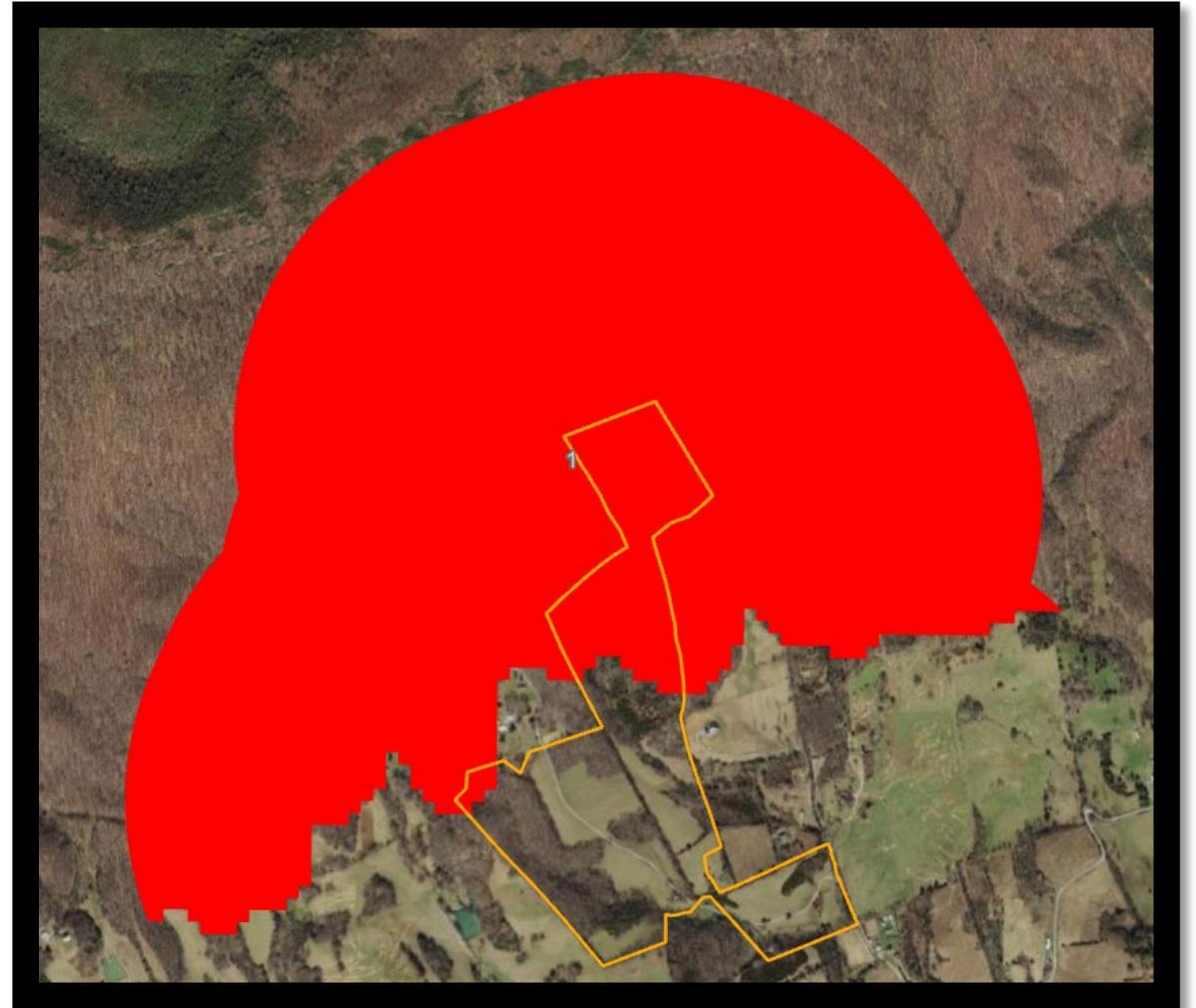
## Wetlands:

- ~9 acres of wetlands, mostly associated with perennial and intermittent streams throughout the property, particularly Indian Creek.



# Ecological Cores

- From the Virginia Natural Landscape Assessment (VaNLA) developed by the DCR Division of Natural Heritage.
- The northern half of the Gilbert Tract, bordering the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, is currently classified as a C1 Core of Outstanding Significance.
- To the extent possible, ecological continuity and integrity should be prioritized in this area.



From Virginia Natural Landscape Assessment, DCR-DNH, Sept. 2023

# Native Upland Ecosystems

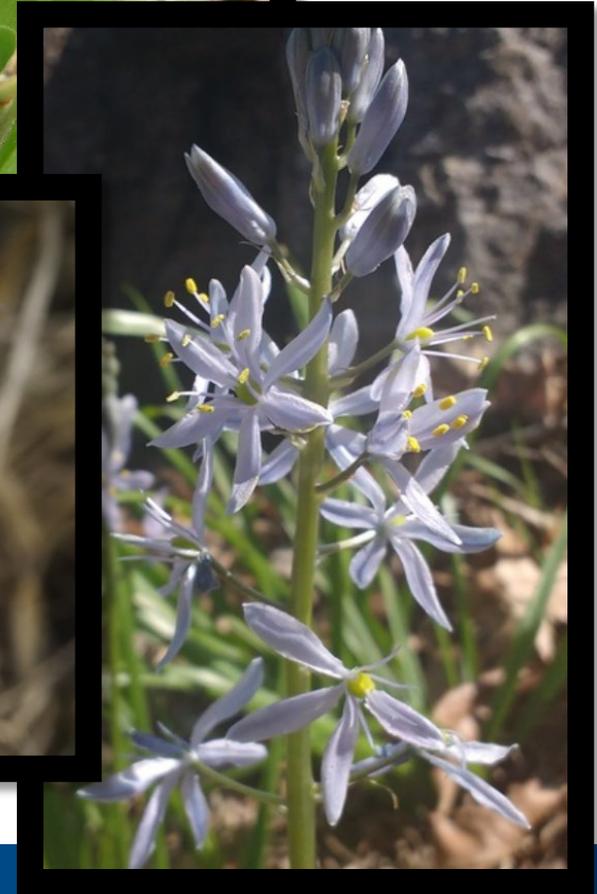
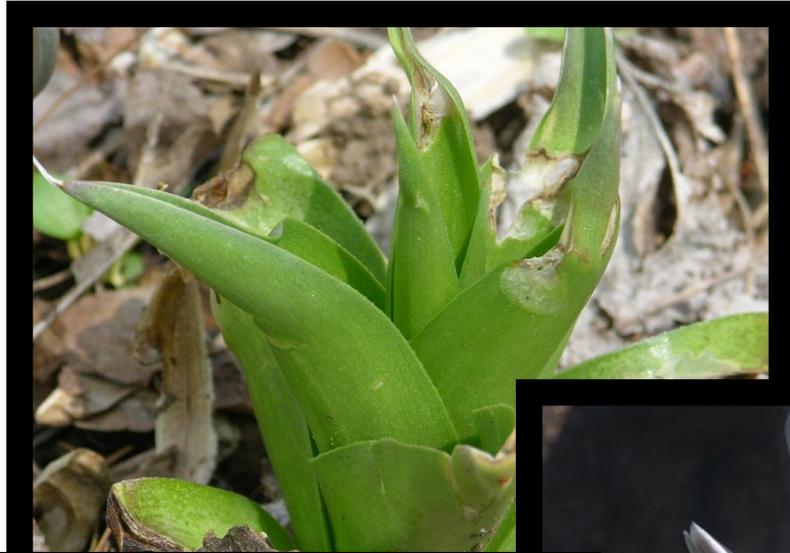
- 4 Key Ecosystems:
  - Montane Dry and Dry-Mesic Calcareous Forest
    - 82 acres across 12 units (i.e. most forested land in park)
  - Montane Mixed Oak and Oak-Hickory Forest
    - 13 acres in 1 unit in northern Gilbert Tract
  - Oak/Heath Forest
    - 5 acres in 1 unit in northern Gilbert Tract
  - Piedmont/Mountain Floodplain Forest and Swamp
    - 8 acres across 3 units along Indian Creek and its tributaries



Credit: TN-KY Plant Atlas

# Sensitive Species

- Eastern False-aloe (*Agave virginica*):
  - Global Rank: Secure
  - State Rank: Imperiled
- Mullein Foxglove (*Dasistoma macrophyllum*):
  - Global Rank: Apparently Secure
  - State Rank: Critically Imperiled
- White Blue-eyed Grass (*Sisyrinchium albidum*):
  - Global Rank: Likely Secure
  - State Rank: Likely Vulnerable
- Wild Hyacinth (*Camassia scilloides*):
  - Global Rank: Secure
  - State Rank: Critically Imperiled
- Tennessee Pigtoe (*Pleuironaia barnesiana*):
  - Global Rank: Vulnerable to Imperiled
  - State Rank: Imperiled
- Efforts to avoid, protect and help these species prosper are important considerations for both resource management and planning.



# Unique Management Areas (UMAs)

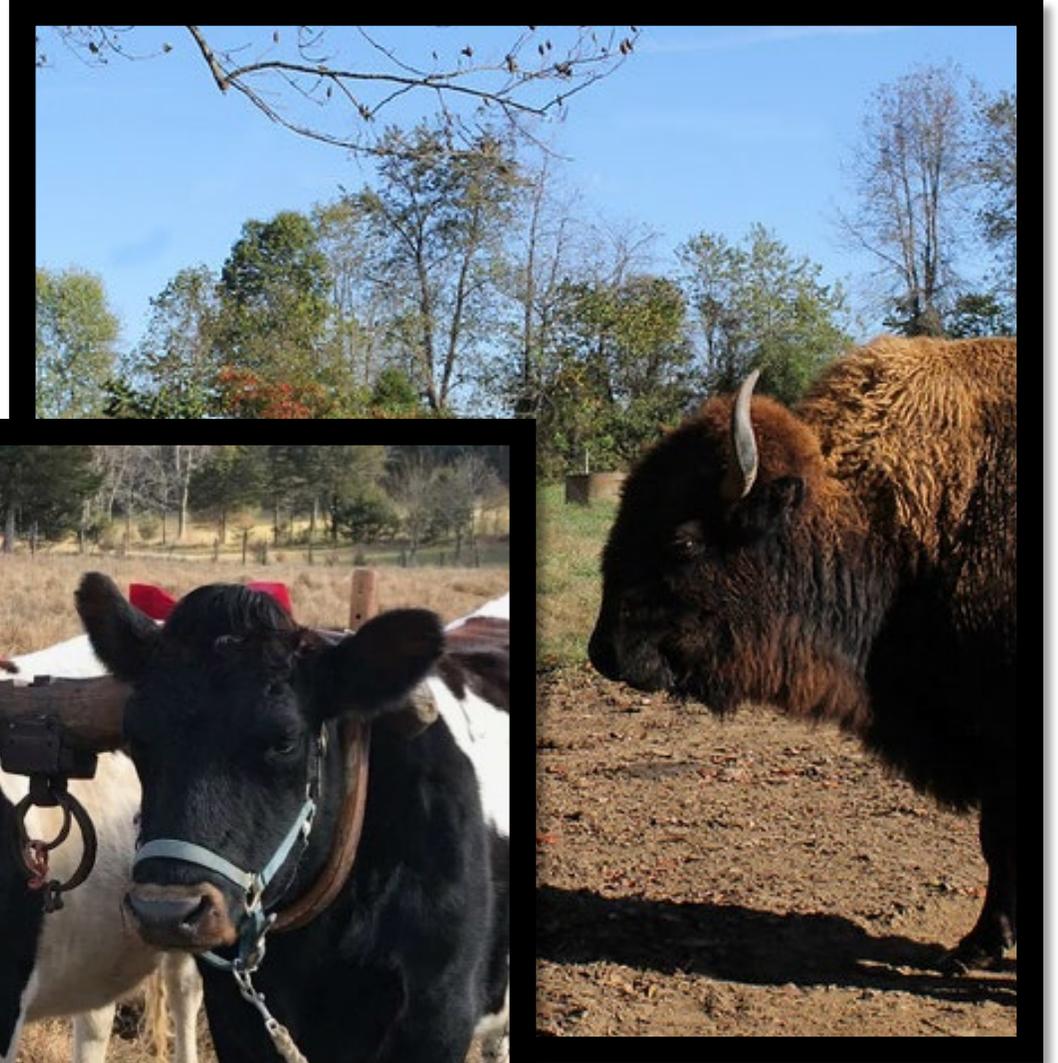
- Disturbed lands, many of which were formerly agricultural or hayfields, totaling around 40 acres – largely managed for three purposes:
  - Fields being transitioned to native wildflower meadows and managed via prescribed fire.
  - Fields that are leased out on haying contracts and/or used for animals (e.g. bison).
  - Fields that are routinely mowed and kept open for events, overflow parking and viewshed protection.



# Resources Review

What Makes The Park Special

- Physical Resources
- Natural Resources
- **Cultural Resources**



# Cultural Resources

## Overview of Cultural Heritage:

- Native American Heritage
- Frontier Settlement
  - Wilderness Road as a major route for westward expansion.
  - Ely Family Settlement, which became one of Lee County's most prominent families.
- 19th-Century Development of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad



# Cultural Resources

## Native American Heritage

- Mississippian Period:
  - Evidence of mound-building traditions and regional trade networks near park.
- Cherokee Presence:
  - Use of the Wilderness Road corridor for hunting and travel prior to European settlement.

*Drawing of Chief Ostenaco during his visit to London, 1762, by Sir Joshua Reynolds*



*Depiction of Mississippian houses, courtesy of Hampson Archeological Museum State Park*

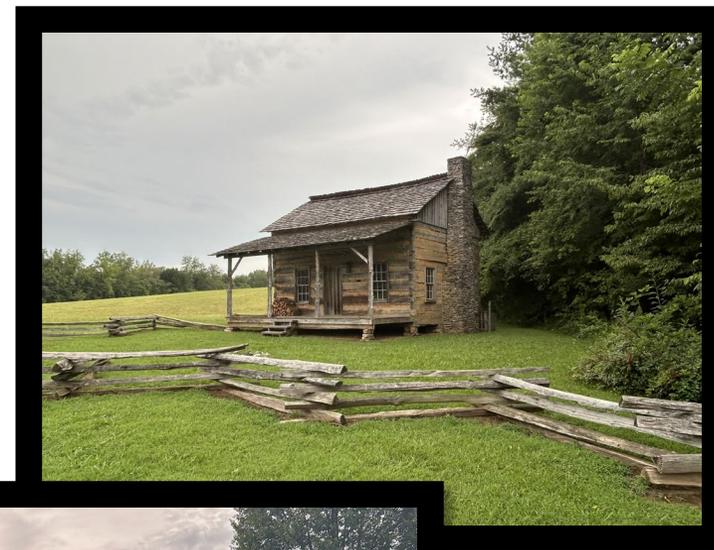
# Cultural Resources

## Frontier Settlement

- Wilderness Road was a major route for westward expansion after its “discovery” by Thomas Walker.
- Joseph Martin established his “station” first in 1769 and then again in 1775; acted as the last resting place for settlers and long hunters before they crested the Cumberland Gap.
  - Martin also acted as a land agent for Transylvania Land Company, and officer in the Continental Army.

*“We immediately set to work and built several strong cabins and Stockaded them, which made it a good fort for defense. We then fenced in with brush and rails a large portion of the old field in which we made a large crop of corn.”*

*-John Reed, 1775*



# Cultural Resources

## Elydale

- Ely Family Settlement:
  - Established along the Wilderness Road in the 1790s; became one of Lee County's most prominent families.
- 19th Century Development in Lee County
  - Structures and landscapes in the park reflect early settlement patterns, including relocated cabins.
  - Robert M. Ely had his home, "Elydale," built by 1878.
  - Much of the property's 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings have disappeared and were replaced later during Harris family's ownership.
  - Elydale's appearance has also changed significantly since its original construction but still maintains a lot of its historic integrity.

"Elydale," c.1892



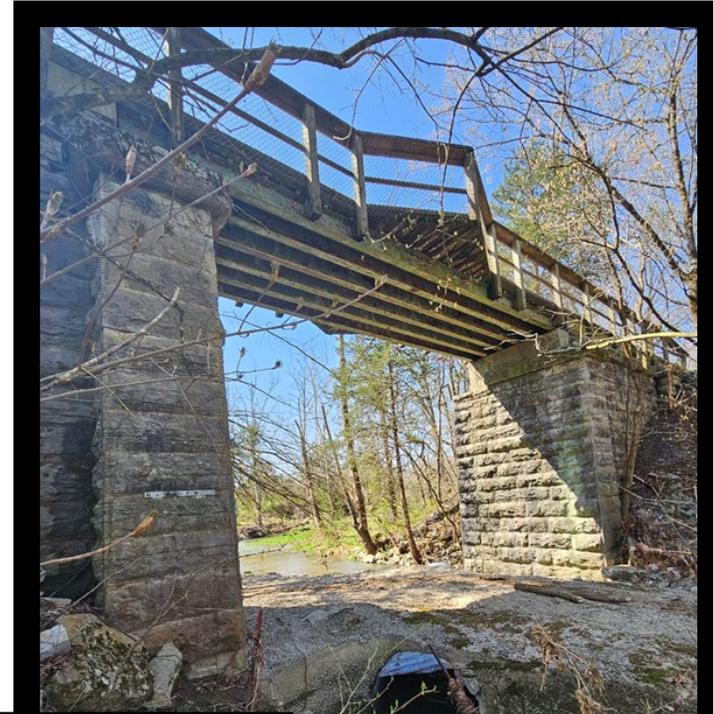
Robert and  
Susan Ely



# Cultural Resources

## Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Railroad Development

- Expansion into Southwest Virginia:
  - The Louisville & Nashville Railroad (L&N) extended its lines into Southwest Virginia during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, overcoming challenging terrain.
- Economic Impact:
  - L&N's presence spurred industrial growth in the county, particularly in coal mining and timber industries, by enabling large-scale extraction and shipment of resources.
  - The railroad provided a reliable link between isolated Lee County communities.
- Much of the railroad's original infrastructure is still intact, including the Dry Branch Bridge, stone culverts and abutments.



# Public Comments

We want to hear from you!

- Public comment period for 30 days (April 5, 2026)
- Email [PlanningResources@dcr.virginia.gov](mailto:PlanningResources@dcr.virginia.gov) with “Wilderness Road SP Master Plan” in the subject line.
- Your comments count survey <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/other/your-comments-count>



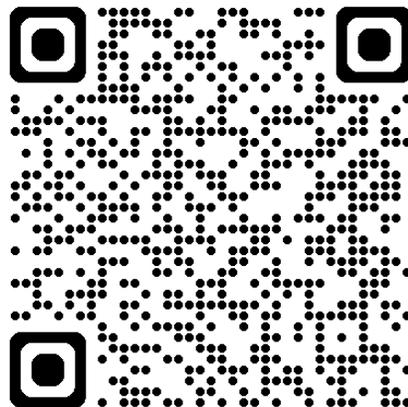
# Contact Information

## Email

**[PlanningResources@dcr.virginia.gov](mailto:PlanningResources@dcr.virginia.gov)**

## Project Website:

**<https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/wr-masterplan>**





**Thank you!**

**Please email comments by April 4th, 2026**

**[PlanningResources@dcr.virginia.gov](mailto:PlanningResources@dcr.virginia.gov)**

**With “Wilderness Road SP Masterplan” in the subject field.**

**Meeting materials will be available at:**

**<https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/wr-masterplan>**