Clear Creek Section

Park Access

Access into the Clear Creek section of the park from US Highway 64 is currently somewhat circuitous and confusing (Figure 31). Access requires three turns that are more akin to forks in the road than true intersections. These turns are from Jenkins Road to Clark Loop, from Clark Loop to Branstrom Orchard Street, and then remaining on Branstrom Orchard Street at a fork with Pearson Avenue. Though another satisfactory route of entry was not fully resolved through this master planning process, it is recommended that this issue receive further study. Until such time as a more direct route from US Highway 64 to the entrance to the Clear Creek facilities can be developed, it is recommended that the park visitor be directed along the current access way by signage that utilizes clear wayfinding language and graphics to indicate the route to the park entrance.

Two parcels of land directly across from the Clear Creek section park entry are proposed for acquisition. These two parcels will allow for improved park buffering from neighboring land uses, as well as allowing for any potential reconfiguration to Branstrom Orchard Street that might be deemed necessary in the future to create a safer entry into the Clear Creek section of the park.

Clear Creek Reservoir

The current water elevation of the lake is predicted to rise by approximately 10 feet with the completion of dam renovation taking place during this master planning process. The master plan graphics represent that approximate elevation increase of the lake. Any development within the vicinity of Clear Creek Reservoir stemming from this master plan must take current and future lake elevations into consideration.

Circulation

The design intent for the entry road to the Clear Creek section of the park is to protect the significant oak trees below the dam, to avoid grading in proximity of the dam in order to protect the

Jenkins Road right turnoff ahead to Clark Loop

Clark Loop with right turn to Branstrom Orchard Street

Existing gravel parking lot at Clear Creek section access area

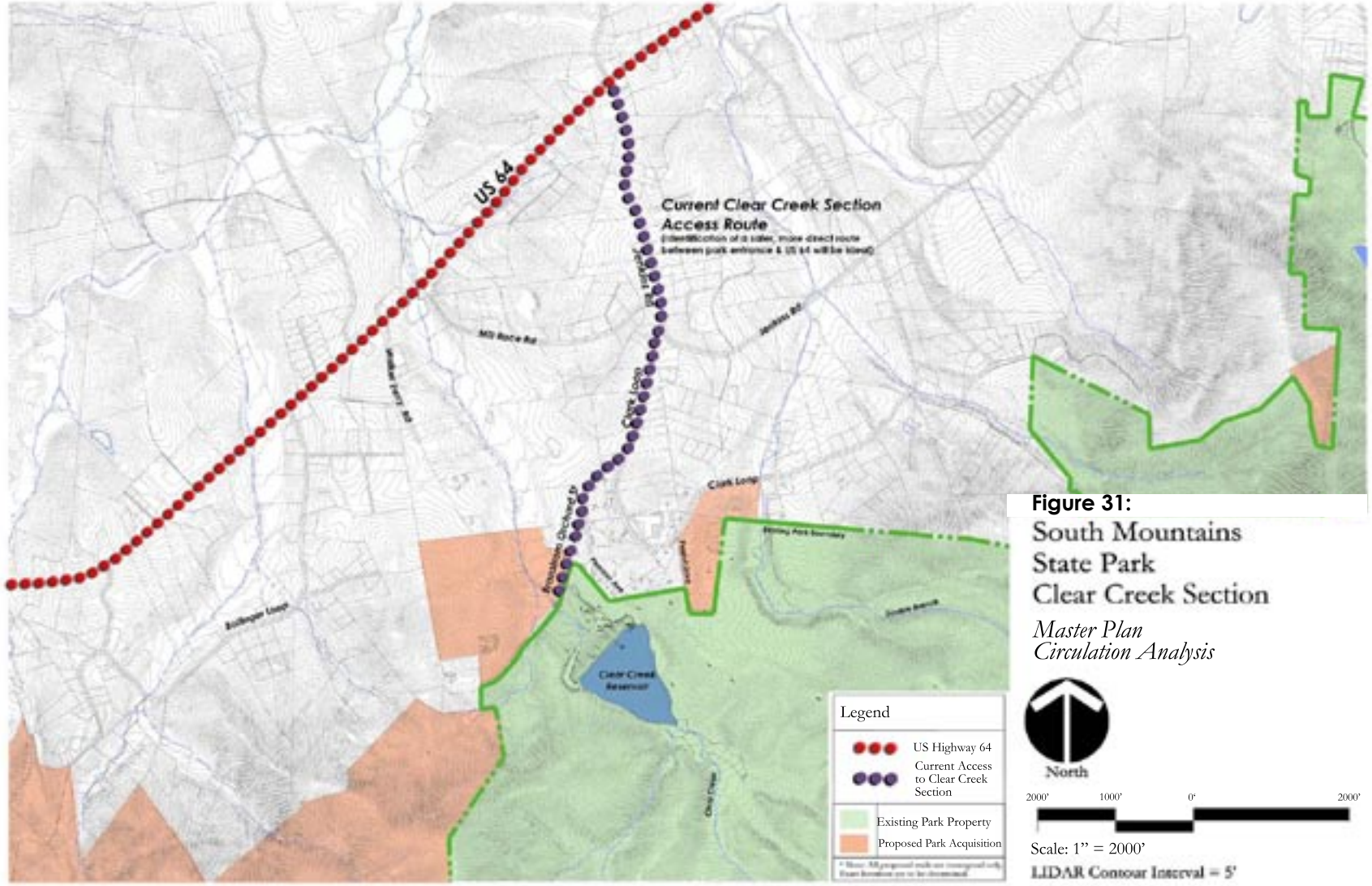


Figure 31:
South Mountains State Park
Clear Creek Section

Master Plan Circulation Analysis

integrity of the dam, and to allow for some curvature in the road to smooth out the slopes.

Figure 32 illustrates the master plan for the Clear Creek section of the park. The entry road within the park will be realigned from its current configuration. The beginning of the road will be in approximately the same location as the existing gravel parking lot. A gated entry with an external backup space will highlight transition into the park property.

In order to achieve appropriate slopes on the entry road, the road will increase in grade earlier than the current gravel access road. The road will be located more to the north, closer to the park property line. In later design stages for the entry road, special attention will be given to buffering the park from adjacent properties.

The entry road will curve around to a drop-off/turnaround and parking for an Environmental Education Center described later in this section. A side road will intersect with the entry road, and will lead to group cabins, group camping, ranger residences, and a maintenance area.

Existing access road along edge of dam

Day-Use Picnic Area

Figure 33 illustrates the master plan recommendations in the vicinity of Clear Creek Reservoir.

A day-use picnic area ① will be located below the dam, just to the right as one enters the park. This site was selected for day use because of its proximity to the park entrance, the flat topography, and its proximity to Clear Creek and large oak shade trees.

This area will be served by a 25-40 space visitor parking area and will contain a picnic shelter/toilet facility and a septic area located away from Clear Creek (minimum 100 feet from stream). The picnic shelter, sized to accommodate at least 12 tables, will be centrally sited, along with 20 scattered picnic sites to be located among the large oak trees on suitably flat land.

A pedestrian bridge ② will cross Clear Creek below the dam and lead to an open play field ③ . This site has been selected due to its flat topography, excellent proximity to the public road, and its

Proposed day-use picnic area

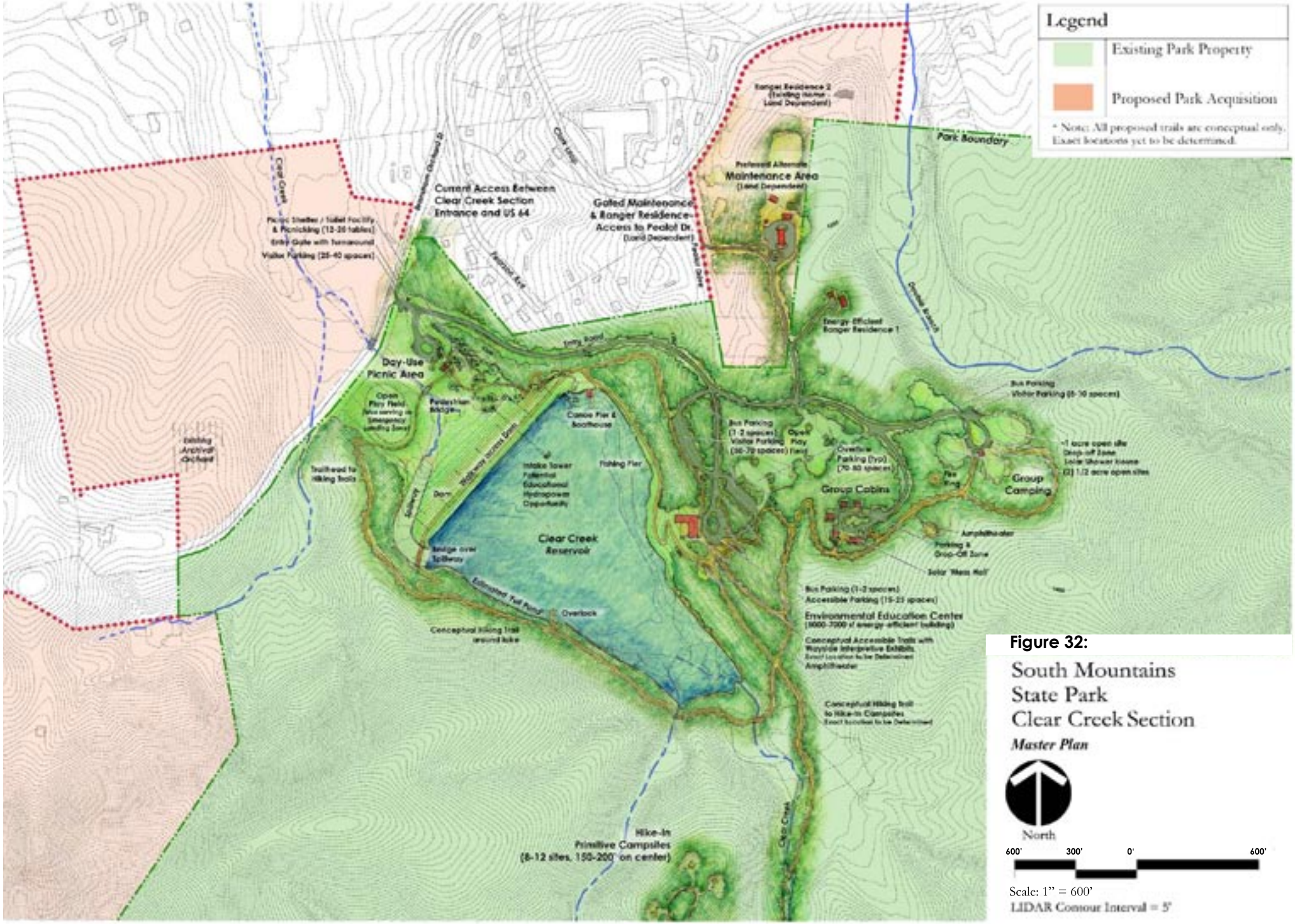


Figure 32:

South Mountains State Park Clear Creek Section

Master Plan

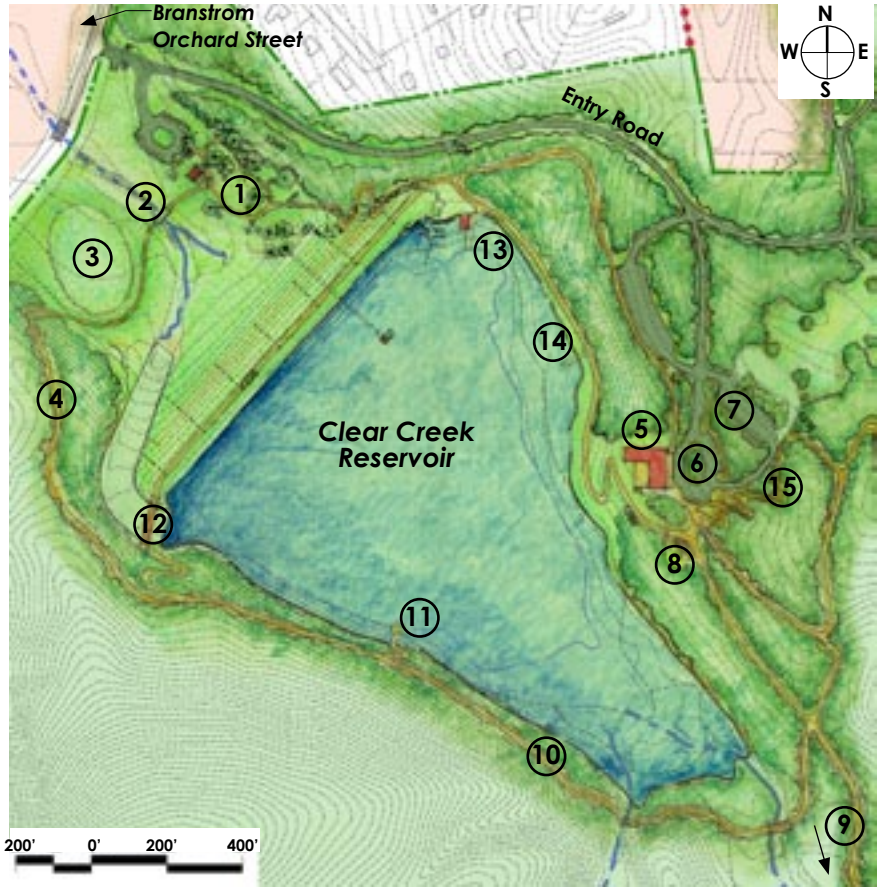


Figure 33: Proposed Facilities & Interpretive Trails

compatible use as an emergency landing zone (100-foot radius). The pedestrian trail will skirt the open field and will lead to an interpretive/educational hiking trail ④ around the lake. The trail plan is described in more detail under the Facilities and Interpretive Trails section to follow.

Environmental Education Center

The NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the NC Department of Health and Human Services (Appendix A) entered into a joint agreement to assist in obtaining funds for the development of an Environmental Education Center (EEC) in the Clear Creek section of the park. When implemented, it will be a 5,000 to 7,000 square foot energy-efficient building, with a focus on serving people of all abilities, with special attention to universal design for populations with special needs.

A potential site for the EEC ⑤ has been identified as a small, relatively flat patch of land near an area that has been invaded by kudzu on the eastern side of the Clear Creek Reservoir. Figure 33 illustrates the site for the EEC and its surroundings. The site will have good access to the lake as well as views to the lake and mountain range in the distance. The building will be sited to leave an ample buffer around the lake and allow room for stormwater/water quality features. Some minor adjustments to the site of the EEC may be required during design or development once the reservoir achieves its new high water elevation.

The program activities for this facility include classrooms, a resource room, an auditorium, staff conference room, main lobby/exhibit hall, offices, break room, and public toilets.

The building will have a southerly exposure, providing passive solar opportunities. If enough slope advantage is gained due to the changing grades around the site, there may be opportunity for a lower level storage area.

Previously impacted land proposed for EEC

Vehicular Circulation and Parking

Figure 33 illustrates a drop-off/turnaround area ⑥, sized to accommodate buses, recommended in direct relationship to the front door of the EEC. Fifteen to 25 parking spaces will be located in close proximity to the entrance. Additional parking ⑦ for the center will terrace up the adjacent slope to the north and northeast. An additional 50-70 spaces will be provided to serve the EEC, as well as 70-80 overflow spaces ideally as stable and grassed lots. These grassed lots also will serve as open play fields. Parking for three to four buses will be accommodated in close proximity to the EEC.

Facilities and Interpretive Trails

Pedestrian trailheads will be located at the EEC, leading to trails and amenities surrounding the lake, including the following (illustrated in Figures 32, 33 and 34):

- ⑧ Amphitheater in close proximity to the EEC for outdoor interpretive presentations and other events
- ⑨ Hike-in Primitive Campsites
- ⑩ Interpretive trail surrounding the lake
- ⑪ Overlook across the lake from the EEC
- ⑫ Trail crossing and pedestrian bridge over the spillway and dam
- ⑬ Canoe Pier and Boathouse
- ⑭ Fishing Pier
- ⑮ To Parking and Group Cabins and Group Camping

All trails and trail destinations will be opportunities for wayside interpretive signage and educational exhibits. All signage and exhibits will incorporate Braille for accessibility to those with varying sight abilities.

Group Cabins

Group overnight facilities have been sited in an area with slopes predominantly less than 10%, with predominant vegetation type of successional pine forest due to historical agricultural activities in this area, and within reasonable walking distance from the EEC.

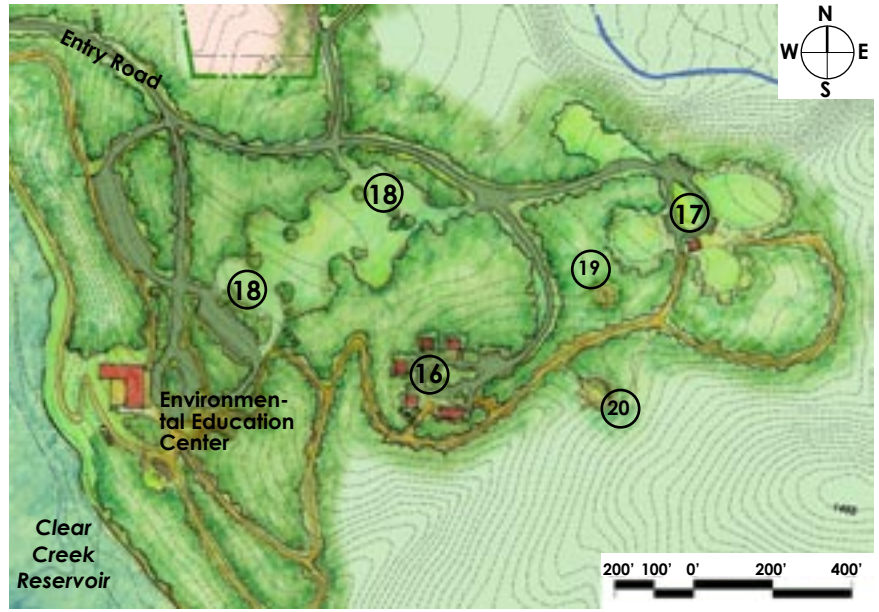


Figure 34: Proposed Environmental Education Center and Group Overnight Facilities

Figure 34 illustrates a pod of four barracks-style group cabins ⑯ located to the east of the EEC. These cabins are intended to provide an overnight opportunity to meet the needs of people of all abilities, with special emphasis on populations with special needs. The group cabins will be sleeping rooms with wash and toilet facilities. Additional space is available in the vicinity for future expansion if needed.

A 'mess hall' type dining facility will be associated with the group cabins. This facility will include a kitchen/prep room, a dining/public gathering room, and toilet facilities. Parking for the group cabins will be adjacent to the structures, with vehicular drop-off capability extending directly into the pod at each cabin in order to aid accessibility for special populations.

Group Camping

Figure 34 also illustrates group camping ⑰ farther up the slope from the group cabins, to the east. It will include two open camping fields approximately ½-acre in area each, and a larger, approxi-

mately 1- acre open camping field. Open areas will be separated by a woods edge in order to facilitate support of one large group or several small groups. An additional open field may be located to the north for future expansion of the group camping area. One wash house, that includes hot showers and flush toilets, will be centrally located in relation to the three camping areas.

For accessibility to people of all abilities, drop-off access will be as close to the use area as possible, with several parking spaces in close proximity. One bus parking space will also be in close proximity. For larger groups with more vehicles, additional parking will be available in overflow lots ⑱ down the hill.

Amphitheaters and Fire Ring

Within a short walk from the group camping facilities and the group cabins will be a fire ring ⑲ and an amphitheater ⑳ for group activities. These facilities are proposed to be open to the night sky and are illustrated in Figure 34.

Ranger Residences

For the purpose of public safety and security, two ranger residences will be in close proximity to the EEC and associated facilities. These residences are illustrated in Figure 35. The location for one new residence 21a will be the bluff above Double Branch, near the former pealot area of the park.

A second ranger residence 21b is proposed on land-dependent property to the north of the bluff area described above. The existing residence will be evaluated for use as a ranger residence. This location could provide direct access to Clark Loop as well as access to the EEC, group cabins, camping, lake, and other facilities for increased public safety and security.

Maintenance Area

Acquisition of additional property off of Clark Loop is proposed for a maintenance area 22 to serve this section of the park. This location and schematic layout are illustrated in Figure 35. This area is proposed on the adjacent property due to its relatively flat topography and the lack of a suitable site on park property that would

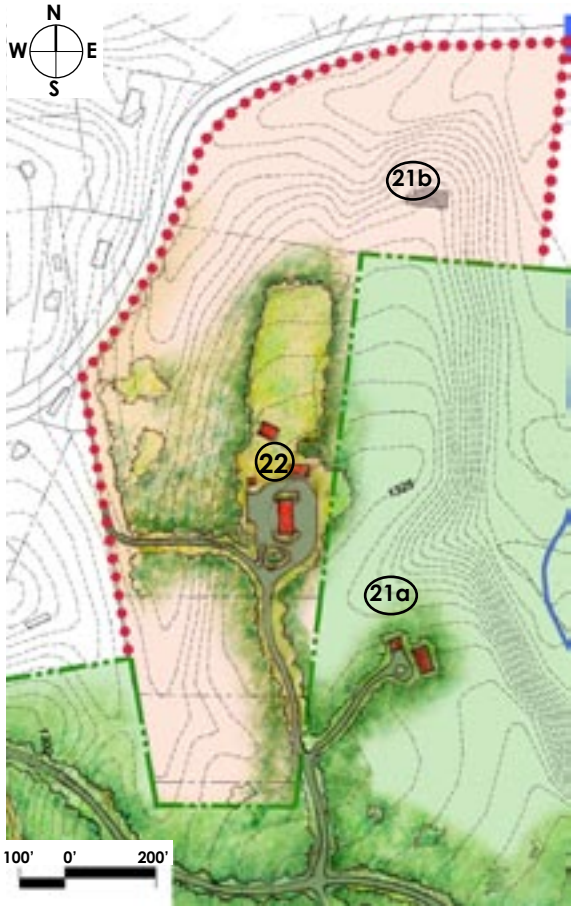


Figure 35: Proposed Maintenance Area and Ranger Residences

allow for appropriate buffers to adjacent land uses. The proposed acquisition land would also allow for a secondary access of maintenance vehicles and delivery trucks to the maintenance area from Clark Loop without having to pass through the main activity areas of the park.

The site maintenance area for the Clear Creek section will be similar in character and function to that in the Jacob Fork section, except with fewer amenities. There are fewer constraints on the proposed land for this facility than in the Jacob Fork section, so it

is estimated to require approximately 1½ acres. The entire area will be enclosed by a security fence.

The facility will contain the following amenities:

- Two 30-foot by 70-foot buildings, including garage bays, carpenter's shop and office, auto shop, storage, office space, restrooms
- Six-bay vehicle storage shed
- Dry storage
- Outdoor vehicle wash area
- Above-ground gas/diesel pumps
- Paved parking (10 spaces)
- Septic appropriately sized for restrooms and equipment wash water
- In addition, the site is large enough to accommodate a barracks facility (with washroom) for seasonal employees.

Drive access width and radii will be sized to accommodate tractor trailers. A filtering system will be provided for stormwater runoff, and the area will be well buffered from adjacent land uses.

Trail Access and Hike-In Primitive Camping

Site analysis reveals much of the Clear Creek section of the park to have inherent constraints for the development of any trail system. These constraints include its bowl-shaped form with slopes exceeding 65% in the upper portions of the watershed. In addition, there are areas that contain sensitive plants as well as high quality natural communities, and many areas that have not yet been fully studied in that respect.

Extensive study of the Clear Creek watershed to try to identify potential trail links between this section of the park and the Henry Fork section led to the conclusion that the lower region of the Clear Creek Watershed, behind and above the proposed Environmental Education Center and group overnight facility development, is fairly gentle and would lend itself well to some shorter hiking loops of one to two miles. It will be important to perform more ecological studies of the lower portions of the watershed, particularly during the spring and summer, in order to identify a sustainable trail alignment that will not impact sensitive plants and natural communities in this area. This will be included in the comprehensive trails assessment recommended in an earlier section of this master plan.

A hike-in, primitive camping area will be located on the crest of a ridge, within this lower portion of the watershed, overlooking the Clear Creek Reservoir (illustrated in Figure 32). There will be 12 sites cleared and spaced at a minimum of 200 feet on center for a backcountry type of experience along with a backcountry toilet facility. This location is a relatively short hike from the proposed Environmental Education Center.

In the future, equestrian access will not be provided into the Clear Creek section of the park for the following reasons:

1) The agreement made between the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the NC Department of Health and Human Services during property transfer of 454 acres of NC School for the Deaf land to DENR through South Mountains State Park, was to work together on the design, financing, and development of a "fully accessible, year-round, residential environmental education facility.... The facility will be located on the western side of South Mountains State Park." This agreement further focused this center on state-of-the-art universally designed facilities available for the benefit of people of all ages and abilities (*McKnelly, 2003*).

   It is anticipated that special attention to universal-design details in this section of the park will lead to an increase in field trips by groups of special needs populations. It is unsafe to allow equestrian trail use in the lower portions of the property in association with these anticipated higher visitation numbers of special populations.

2) The upper slopes of the Clear Creek watershed are extremely steep and contain sensitive natural communities. Construction and long-term maintenance of equestrian trails in this terrain would be extremely costly and environmentally damaging.

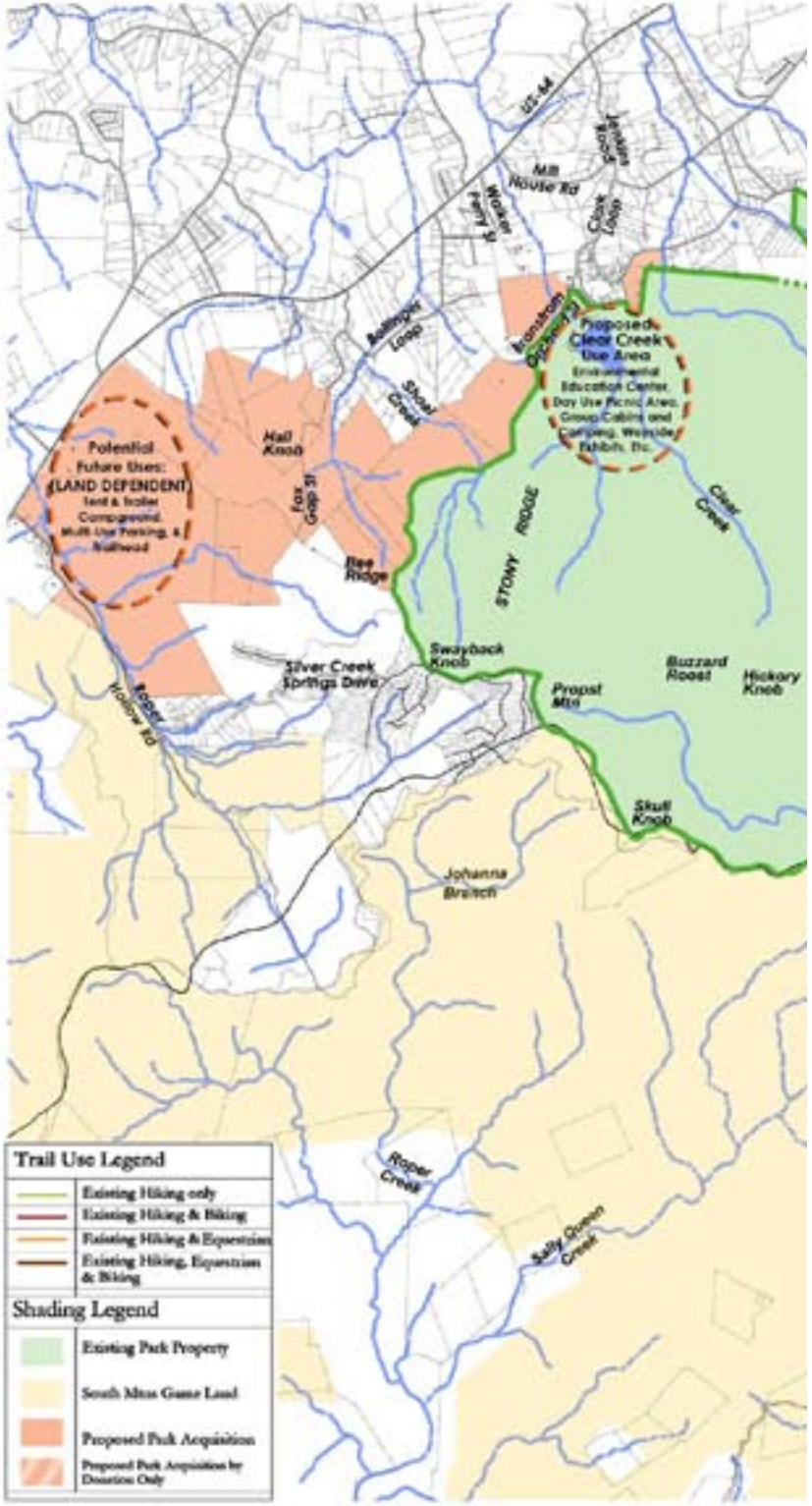
Acquisition Plan

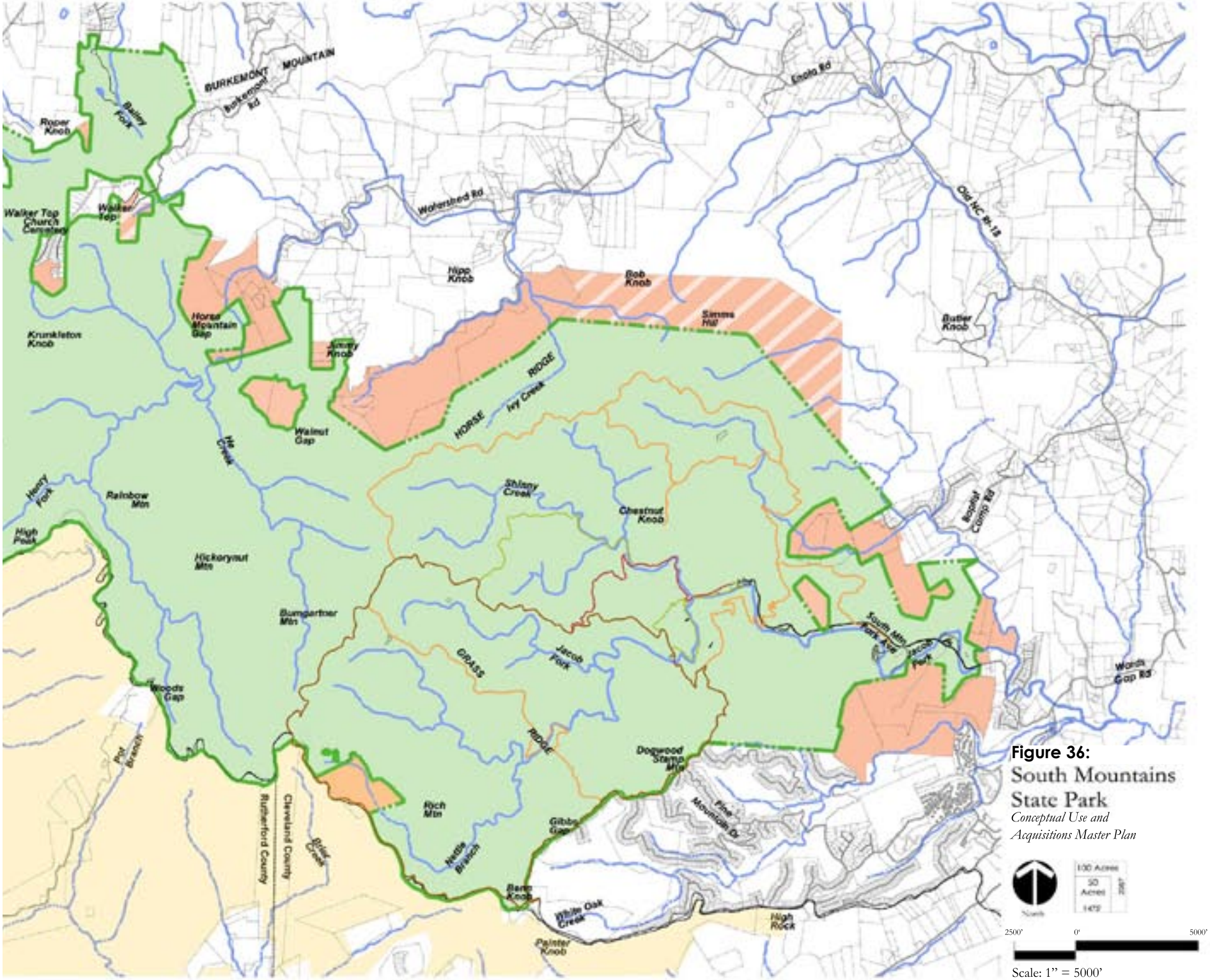
Figure 36 illustrates an overall acquisition plan for South Mountains State Park.

The current park size is 17,481 acres. The properties shown proposed for acquisition total approximately 3,380 acres, bringing the total planned size of the park to 20,861 acres.

In addition to properties mentioned in earlier sections, the NC Division of Parks and Recreation will also evaluate the potential for acquisition of several parcels of land to the west of the Clear Creek section of the park.

Currently, no multi-use trail connection has been identified between Clear Creek and these western parcels proposed for acquisition due to the presence of extremely steep slopes and high quality natural communities. However, additional land acquisition may support other opportunities for multi-use trail connections from the vicinity of US Highway 64. Further field review will be needed.




BURKEMONT MOUNTAIN
Burkemont Rd
Bailey Fork
Roper Knob
Walker Top Church Cemetery
Walker Top
Wolershed Rd
Enola Rd
Old NC Rt 18
Hipp Knob
Bob Knob
Simms Hill
Butler Knob
Horse Mountain Gap
Krunkleton Knob
Jenny Knob
HORSE RIDGE
Ivy Creek
Walnut Gap
Hit Creek
Henry Fork
Rainbow Mtn
High Peak
Shiny Creek
Chestnut Knob
Bethel Camp Rd
Hickorynut Mtn
Bumgartner Mtn
South Mtn Park Rd
Jacob Fork
GRASS RIDGE
Worth Gap Rd
Woods Gap
Pot Branch
Dogwood Stamp Mtn
Pine Mountain Cr
Rich Mtn
Gibbs Gap
Rutherford County
Cleveland County
Brier Creek
Hettie Branch
Berry Knob
White Oak Creek
High Rock
Painter Knob
Figure 36:
South Mountains State Park
Conceptual Use and Acquisitions Master Plan
100 Acres
50 Acres
1475'
2500'
0'
5000'
Scale: 1" = 5000'