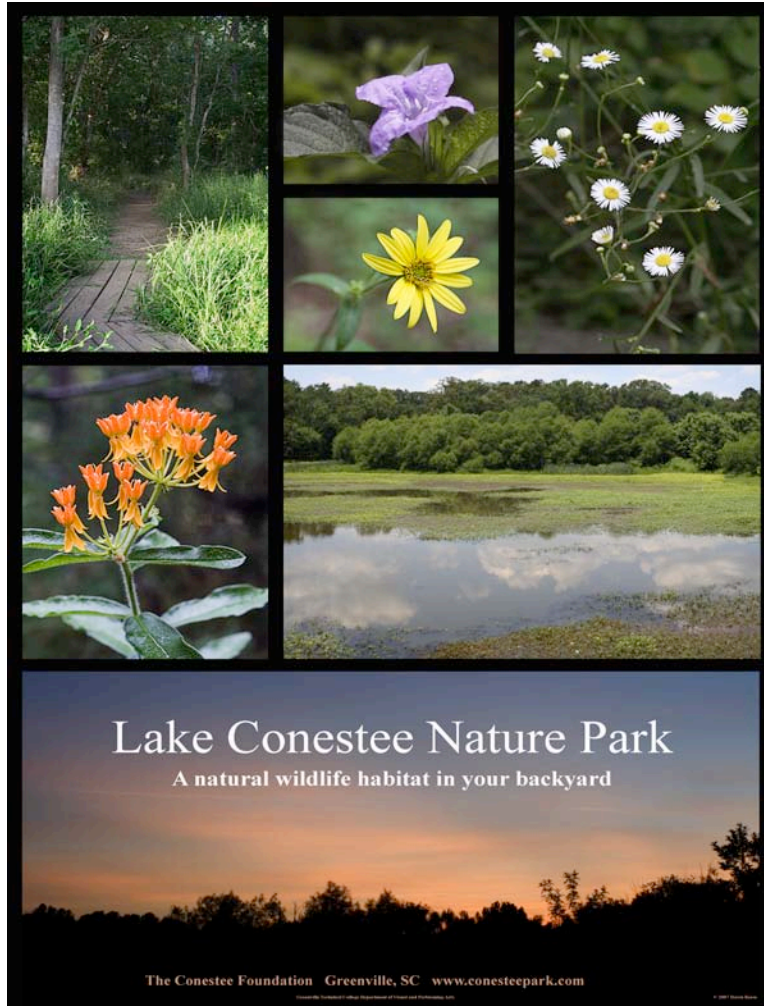




Master Plan

July 2008

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Foothills Resource Conservation & Development Council
Friends of the Reedy River
Furman University
Graham Foundation
Greenville County
Greenville County Bird Club
Greenville County Planning Commission
Greenville County Recreation District
Greenville County School District
Greenville County Soil & Water Conservation District
Greenville Forward
Greenville Technical College Department of Visual & Performing Arts
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Peace Center
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SC Department of Natural Resources
SC Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism
SC Department of Transportation
SC Mitigation Trust Fund
SC Native Plant Society
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US Army Corps of Engineers
US Environmental Protection Agency
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Wildlife Rehab



Photo Credit: Bess Krstovic & Greenville Technical College Department of Visual & Performing Arts

Lake Conestee Nature Park Master Plan

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List of Acronyms

CF	Conestee Foundation
GCRD	Greenville County Recreation District
LCNP	Lake Conestee Nature Park
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
ROW	Right-of-way
SCDHEC	South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control
SCNPS	South Carolina Native Plant Society
WCRSA	Western Carolina Regional Sewer Authority

Section I

Mission and Background

Conestee Foundation Mission Statement

The mission of the Conestee Foundation is to develop Lake Conestee and contiguous community lands into a nature park and wildlife sanctuary for public recreation. It will provide regional environmental education and research facilities, comply with appropriate site safety, regulatory and restrictive covenants, and support other entities developing the Swamp Rabbit Trail as a regional tourist attraction in Greenville County.

The original Lake Conestee was formed in the early 1800's as a result of damming the Reedy River to provide waterpower for small mills near the location of the existing Village of Conestee, SC. The base of the present dam was constructed prior to the Civil War. In about 1892, the dam was raised to its present height, creating a 130-acre millpond. Over many years approximately 90 percent of the original lake has filled naturally with sediments and soils from various upstream sources. Most of the former lakebed now consists of a rich diversity of wetlands, bottomland hardwoods, and wildlife habitat. A 1.5-mile stretch of the Reedy River also winds through the original impoundment. The sediments deposited in the original lakebed contain pollutants from the river's industrial past, but today the majority of the contaminants are covered by layers of more recent sediment and by a bottomland forest.

The Conestee Foundation, a 501C(3) conservation organization, was formed in 2000 to spearhead the revitalization of Lake Conestee and the surrounding community. One of its first tasks was to acquire the original 145-acre lakebed property. Subsequently, the Foundation successfully entered into a Voluntary Cleanup Contract (VCC) with the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) to safely manage both the legacy contaminants in place and the historic Lake Conestee dam, while creating a public wildlife and environmental educational park for citizens and tourists of the upstate. This project - conversion of a watershed-derived brownfield site into a public nature park that is led by a group of local volunteers – is nationally unique.

Managing the legacy contaminants and the dam are addressed in separate documents (i.e., the VCC and the associated Restrictive Covenant) and are not addressed in detail in this Master Plan. The Restrictive Covenant (RC) resulting from the VCC process specifies certain limits on activities in the lakebed. That is, for the protection of public safety and the environment, disturbance of soils, sediments and wetlands should be minimized, and there should be no swimming or taking of fish for consumption. Boating is not expressly restricted by the RC. However, the Foundation discourages boating in the lake and does

not support launching of boats within the lake, except for environmental study or maintenance activities. These activities must comply with precautions to minimize exposure to waters and sediments. Lake Conestee dam is also a regulated structure under the South Carolina Dams & Reservoirs Safety Act; and in order to protect downstream resources and public safety, the Foundation has submitted an Emergency Action Plan to SCDHEC that would be implemented in the event of failure of the dam.

Following the acquisition of the lake, and with funding provided by the South Carolina Conservation Bank, Greenville County, the City of Greenville and several local private foundations, the Foundation expanded the park to its current size of approximately 380 acres. This includes adjacent forests, farmlands and three miles of the Reedy River. With additional funding from the SC Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, Greenville County, the SC Department of Transportation and several local foundations, the Phase 1 trail system and boardwalks were completed and opened to the public in October 2006. The park welcomed over 500 guests in the first 10 days of its opening and visitation remains high.

The Foundation is now in the final engineering stages of a new pedestrian suspension bridge over the Reedy River and a new paved trail with additional boardwalks leading to the historic Conestee dam. Today the park is the southernmost destination of the 17-mile Swamp Rabbit Trail being constructed by the City and County of Greenville that will connect Travelers Rest to Conestee. To accomplish proper management and development of this growing park, the Foundation has entered into a primary partnership with the Greenville County Recreation District (GCRD). This partnership is receiving significant financial support from the Greenville County Hospitality Tax Program. The Foundation is responsible for continuing its primary role of planning and developing the park, including seeking funding for its infrastructure and programs. The GCRD is an integral part of this process, and additionally is providing the maintenance for current and future grounds and facilities of the park.

To document the exciting future of Lake Conestee Nature Park, and to guide its work, the Foundation developed a long range Master Plan. This plan was aided in its development through a series of stakeholder workshops with participants shown in Table 1-1.

The following sections of the Master Plan summarize the Foundation's primary goals, the site characteristics of the park, the design principles used for developing the park's proposed infrastructure, a strategy to implement the Foundation's objectives and ambitious plans for the future. Lake Conestee's future is bright. The Foundation welcomes your participation and enthusiasm in guiding our Master Plan towards its objectives.

Table 1-1
Master Planning Stakeholder Committee

Belmont Fire District
City of Greenville
City of Mauldin
Clemson University
Conestee Foundation Board of Directors and Staff
Friends of the Reedy River
Furman University
Greenville County
Greenville County Recreation District
Greenville County School District
Greenville Forward
Naturaland Trust
SC Native Plant Society
University of South Carolina
Upstate Forever
Western Carolina Regional Sewer Authority

Section II

Primary Goals

The primary goals of the Conestee Foundation reflect the diversity of the land comprising Lake Conestee Nature Park and its location near the heart of Greater Greenville, as shown in Figures 2-1 through 2-3. These goals consist of environmental stewardship, recreation and tourism, environmental education and research, watershed stewardship, and community enhancement.

Environmental Stewardship

The rapid rate of development and conversion of open lands to residential, commercial, and industrial property are major concerns of the residents and leadership of Greenville County. Recent studies by the Strom Thurmond Institute at Clemson University reveal that development of land in the Upstate is proceeding at five times the rate of population increase. Therefore, preservation of open space and protection of wildlife habitat have become critical. With the vast majority of its land comprised of hardwood forest and wetlands, Lake Conestee Nature Park represents the major protected land of this type in the metropolitan Greenville area.

Environmental stewardship of this land is of critical importance to the Conestee Foundation. To this end, the Foundation has placed its parklands under a formal conservation easement that has been granted to Upstate Forever. This conservation easement requires protection and management of wildlife and wildlife habitat, protection of native plant species, preservation of forest and riparian lands, and protection of water quality. The easement allows for the construction and maintenance of trails, boardwalks, picnic shelters, an environmental education center and other typical features of a passive recreation environmental park. Construction of features that are not stipulated in the conservation easement agreement require prior approval by Upstate Forever to assure compliance with the intent of preserving the ecological resources of these lands.

Recreation and Tourism

Its location in the heart of Greater Greenville, only 5 miles from downtown, makes the Park highly accessible to the community. Its proximity to numerous hotels and restaurants, the area's other attractions, make an easily accessible Lake Conestee Nature Park a logical tourist destination. In addition, the Park's location immediately adjacent to the currently unused Greenville Municipal Stadium property and the capped City landfill property just to the north along the Reedy River (see Figure 2-3), means that the current 380 acre park will be expanded to a mixed-use park complex which will enhance its draw for tourism. This mixed-use park complex will be well over 500 acres, approaching the size of the Furman University campus or Central Park in New York City. Because the Conestee Foundation has control only over its own lands, the focus of this Master Plan is on the development of the Foundation's property. However, the Foundation is mindful of its role in the development and enhancement of the greater park complex to provide a

broad spectrum of recreational opportunities and draw visitors from outside the Greenville area.

Passive recreational activities are the main objectives of the Foundation in planning and developing the Park's recreational facilities. Passive recreational activities include walking and hiking, bicycling, wildlife and plant observation, and nature photography. Educational opportunities, as discussed below, will also be developed, and will draw additional visitors to the area.

Environmental Education and Research

The history and diversity of the lands comprising Lake Conestee Nature Park are a rich resource for environmental education and research. The wetlands and forests found throughout provide a wonderful natural habitat for a wide variety of wildlife, including raccoon, fox, opossum, skunk, beaver, river otter, and other mammals. Over 150 species of birds have already been documented in the Park, including wild turkey, raptors, waterfowl, wading birds such as herons, egrets, and shore birds and a myriad of songbirds. Reptiles and amphibians are also abundant.

The diversity of habitats in the Park (including upland and bottomland forests, emergent wetlands, beaver ponds, upland meadows, lake, river, and stream waterways) provides a significant resource for basic and applied ecological research and field biology education.

The nature of the former lakebed, which contains the chemical record of Greenville's industrial past in its sediments, provides a unique opportunity to observe and evaluate the natural recovery processes which have been going on for over 100 years. Additional aspects of the Park which provide educational and research opportunities include the former lakebed's function as a flood dissipation basin and the impact of sediment transport and siltation in an urban watershed.

A principal goal of the Conestee Foundation is to develop rich educational and research programs based upon the wonderful opportunities provided in the Park through actively engaging the Greenville County School System, local private schools, Clemson University, the University of South Carolina, Furman University, Wofford College, and other institutions of research and education.

Watershed Stewardship

The former lakebed portion of the Nature Park is the largest single flood control basin in Greenville County. The park's impact in dampening peak flows in the Reedy during flood conditions provides protection to downstream structures all the way to Lake Greenwood. The lakebed property is also one of the largest collectors of the trash dumped along Greenville's roadsides which is ultimately washed into the Reedy River during heavy rains. The simple act of cleaning up the Park and maintaining Park

facilities and vegetation protects the entire Reedy River watershed downstream of the Park. Therefore, watershed protection is one of the primary goals of the Foundation.

Community Enhancement

Prior to 1920, the Conestee community was a thriving mill town. However, between 1890 and 1915 the number of textile mills and supporting mill villages upstream of Lake Conestee increased from 2 to more than 12, and all of these mills and mill villages discharged their wastes directly into the Reedy River or its tributaries. The City of Greenville and other industries grew dramatically in this same period, and all discharged their wastes into the Reedy. In 1892 the City of Greenville built its first sewers which discharged raw sewage into the Reedy River. The raw sewage and industrial discharge contaminants reaching the river flowed downstream, where they settled out in the lake (mill pond) behind the dam at Conestee Mill. The impact of these discharges ultimately made life in the Conestee community untenable, and the mill and the town community began a decades-long decline.

Following the advent of the Clean Water Program in the early 1970s, the water quality in the Reedy River has significantly improved, and several decades of sedimentation have covered the earlier industrial contaminants in the lakebed. The area can once again be a desirable place to live. The Conestee Foundation believes that development of Lake Conestee Nature Park will enhance the community. One of the Foundation's principal goals is to work with community leaders to develop the Park in a manner compatible with overall community goals and objectives.

Section III

Site Characteristics

Opportunities and Constraints

The master planning process has consisted of a series of workshops involving the Conestee Foundation Board of Directors, staff and community stakeholders (see Table 1-1) over an 18 month period. The master planning was supported by conceptual design studies and renderings completed by students of three studio design courses in the Clemson University Architecture and Landscape Architecture programs. The Clemson work was funded by a grant to the Foundation from Naturaland Trust.

The Clemson conceptual design student projects display a wide variety of approaches to development of Lake Conestee Nature Park lands and facilities. These designs were used as resources by the master planning stakeholder group to understand opportunities and constraints and to assist in arriving at this master plan document. The Clemson projects will continue to be used as the Foundation refines this master plan and develops future park educational and public participation programs. A report on the Clemson work is provided in this master plan as Appendix 1.

Additionally, the Conestee Foundation Board of Directors and master planning stakeholders developed a summary of opportunities and constraints for park activities and tourism that is provided in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1
Activities & Tourism Evaluation – Lake Conestee Nature Park

Activity	Description	Possible Benefits	Possible Negative Impacts	Appropriate Locations	Recommendations
Walking/Jogging	Southern hub of Swamp Rabbit Trail. Trails designed for walking/ jogging	• All trails can be used for this purpose • Tourism	• None identified	• Lakebed • Henderson • Forrester • City Parcel • Landfill	Some trails could be developed only for foot traffic (all trails within lakebed); possible side trails/loops off main stretches to allow separation from bikers
Mountain Biking	Southern hub of Swamp Rabbit Trail. Trails designed for mountain biking	• Allow additional uses of park trails • Tourism	• Damage to trail network • Additional signage to label areas where biking is permitted	• Henderson • Forrester • City Parcel	Allow on designated trails
School Field Trips	Classroom visits to park; could include equipment lockers (dip nets, waders, gloves); tour the park and/or take samples for field or in-class observation	• Increased awareness and use of park facilities • Develop partnership with Greenville County School District and individual schools • Opportunities for funding	• Groups could be disruptive to passive users and wildlife • Careless sampling could cause damage and be a liability • Would require additional staff to develop programs and lead trips	• Lakebed • Henderson • Forrester • Overlook • City Parcel	Careful control would be necessary. All participants would need to sign liability waivers. Water sampling should be restricted to more advanced classes. Focus on middle and high school levels

Table 3-1
Activities & Tourism Evaluation – Lake Conestee Nature Park

Environmental Education Complex	Main education facility with classrooms, meeting rooms, conference facility, office space, labs, etc.	• Allow additional classes to visit • Meeting spaces can be used by other organizations (rental) • Lab facilities allow for more advanced research • Corporate/Municipal /Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO)/ retreats and community events	• Additional staff needed for expanded facilities and programs	• Forrester	• Events by outside organizations to be organized by partner/sponsor organization; CF would only provide facility
Outdoor Classrooms	Small structure or pavilion to provide seating and a work area for students; anything from picnic shelters to an outdoor laboratory	• Enclosed area for demonstrations and to organize students • Allows students to participate in field studies • Store equipment (microscopes, water testing materials, etc.) • Provides shelter in case of bad weather	• Security issues— keep structures secure when not in use	• Taylor’s Island (pole barn structure) • Henderson-barn-like structure (smaller satellite location with classroom and lab) • City Parcel-low priority	
Bird and Wildlife Observation	Passive observation of animals from trails and decks	• Tourism – park has become a highly used site by regional bird watchers • Partnerships with local wildlife groups	• Straying from approved trail network	• All open trails and observation decks	“Research passes” are available to give select visitors permission to utilize closed trails. Park boundaries should be clearly marked.

Table 3-1
Activities & Tourism Evaluation – Lake Conestee Nature Park

Picnicking	Picnic tables and shelters for picnickers	• Tourism- areas to rest and eat during visit to park • Meeting areas for school groups and other organizations	• Require more frequent cleanup	• Henderson • Forrester • City Parcel • Landfill	Number of tables/shelters should be proportional to size of parcel
Dog Park	An area of land set aside to allow dogs to run and play off-leash	• Much needed amenity in County/City • Social/gathering area	• Damage to property • Liability- dog fights/attacks • Dog waste (close proximity to Reedy River)	• Landfill	The area should be large enough to avoid conflict between dogs. It should be fenced off from other activities. A dog waste disposal area should be maintained and users should be encouraged to clean up after pets.
Link to Donaldson (biking)	Paved trail connecting Lake Conestee Nature Park (LCNP) to Donaldson (Perimeter Rd.). Component of Swamp Rabbit Trail Hub	• Tourism - additional users (road bikes) – Perimeter Rd. currently active bike training area • Connection to Michelin- increase park usage by employees	• None identified	• Hendricks Property	Purchase Hendricks Property, then consider connection (and possible bike lanes along Perimeter Rd. through a SC Department of Transportation grant)
Frisbee golf	A course is designed with trees or targets/baskets as “holes” to throw a Frisbee at	• Easy to set up and inexpensive to maintain • Growing number of participants • Tourism - possibility for tournaments (fundraising)	• Get in the way of other visitors	• Landfill (old borrow pit)	

Table 3-1
Activities & Tourism Evaluation – Lake Conestee Nature Park

Boating	Canoe or kayak	• Allow better access to areas around the lake • Participate in Paddlefest • Partnerships with local boating organizations	• Liability associated with water sports and water/sediment contact • Possible damage or disruption of sediments	• Lake/River	Boating should be allowed by special permit only , primarily education/research, or possibly for special events.
Ropes Course	High or low ropes; series of challenging, problem-solving activities designed to develop leadership, communication and teamwork skills	• Team building events (schools/corporate/government/NGO groups) • Opportunity for camps/retreats • Income generating	• Liability • Obstruct views; unsightly • Require trained staff	• City Parcel	Would need to be approved by GCRD; to be operated and maintained by GCRD staff; low priority
Demonstration/ Model Gardens	Carolina Fence Garden, Certified backyard habitat, Rain garden, etc.	• Eco-tourism • Provide example for visitors of how they can design their own property in an environmentally-sensitive manner • Outreach and education • Partnerships with other organizations	• Requires maintenance • Design work needed	• Forrester	To be led by partner organization

Table 3-1
Activities & Tourism Evaluation – Lake Conestee Nature Park

Organic Community Gardens	Organic garden plots (generally vegetables and herbs) maintained by local community members and/or school groups	• Opportunity for additional community support • Good project for school group • Fundraising opportunity • Partnership with local garden clubs/organic food organizations • Allow personal plots for individual gardening	• Requires regular attention; strong volunteer base or dedicated school group • Would need staff or volunteer/ partner organization to take lead	• Henderson • Forrester	Assess community interest
SC Native Plant Society Gardens	Research and display plots for use by SC Native Plant Society members and for tourist destination	• Eco-tourism • Outreach and education opportunities • Re-vegetation along trails with native plants	• None identified	• Landfill • Henderson • Forrester	To be managed by SC NPS
Wildlife Rehab Shelter	Shelter and office space to rehabilitate injured animals	• Much needed facility for this organization • Educational opportunities	• None identified	• Landfill • Henderson (Fork Shoals house)	To be led by partner organization
Recycling Center	New recycling facility designed and paid for by City of Greenville	• Outreach opportunities • Build on partnership with City • Link with Wenwood soccer fields (active recreation)	• None identified	• Mauldin Rd. across from Forrester	To be led by City of Greenville

Table 3-1
Activities & Tourism Evaluation – Lake Conestee Nature Park

Art Exhibits	Permanent or temporary displays within the park	• Broaden scope of educational offerings • Partner with art-based organizations • Fundraising opportunity (art show) • Outreach • Tourism	• Detract from natural look of park along trails	• Landfill • Forrester	To be led by partner organization; only on landfill or near entrance
Memorial Park	Memorial plots are purchased to be placed within park (tree, boulder, etc.)	• Provide alternative to traditional burial • Generate funds • Natural area for family to remember deceased • Natural markers would not be noticeable	• Maintain list of markers/locations • Close area of park for memorial ceremony?	• City Parcel	No actual burials; GPS could be used to locate markers
Farmer's Market	Allow space at park for sale of local produce	• Venue for sale of local produce • Bring in visitors who may not otherwise know about LCNP • Outreach opportunity • Tourism	• Would require a lot of planning	• Forrester • Landfill	Would need to be led by partner organization
Private Functions (reunions, weddings)	Area of park that can be rented to hold private events	• Generate funds • Natural setting for functions • Tourism	• Keep track of rentals (additional staff time) • Maintenance/ cleanup after events	• Henderson • Forrester	Assess interest

Section IV

Design Principles

Existing Infrastructure and Future Plans

The natural terrain, size, and diversity of Lake Conestee Nature Park provide ample opportunity to meet the Foundation's mission. Many facilities have already been constructed, and the second phase of design and construction is currently underway. Although there is still a long way to go to complete the "built-out" park, these Phase 1 and Phase 2 projects provide a significant base for the enjoyment of the Park by the public and establish many of the basic design criteria for future Park facilities.

Existing Facilities and Facilities Scheduled for Completion in 2008

Trails and Boardwalks:

The park currently has 2.2 miles of unpaved, natural surface hiking and biking trails and approximately 650 feet of 6-foot wide boardwalks. The trails were constructed in 2006 with a \$100,000 grant from the SC Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism and \$25,000 in matching funds and volunteer labor provided by the Foundation. These natural surface trails access the Henderson Farm parcel which consists primarily of upland hardwoods and meadows. Additionally these trails and boardwalks course through the northern portion of the lakebed property (see Figure 2-3 and 4-1), opening to the public its bottomland forests and wetlands, as well as a half-mile of the western bank of the Reedy River. A 32-foot by 12-foot observation deck also was constructed in the wetlands portion of the Park in 2006 using funds donated by the Priester Foundation and Dana Leavitt. In 2007 a grant from the SC Department of Transportation and Greenville County was used to construct a 0.6 mile long, 10-foot wide paved handicapped accessible trail that courses through Henderson Farm's hardwood forest and provides access to a large meadow. These two trails represent the Phase 1 Trail System that was initially opened to the public in October 2006. The general locations of all existing trails are shown on Figure 4-1.

Phase 2 of the Park's trail and boardwalk system is currently under design, with construction scheduled to start in July 2008. Phase 2 will consist of three separate construction projects. The first project consists of three separate 8-foot wide boardwalks, with a combined length of nearly 1000 feet, which will be a part of the Phase 2 Paved Trail system extension. This project also includes 3550 feet of new natural surface trail on the east side of the Reedy River and over 200 feet of 6-foot wide boardwalk associated with this trail. All of the ends of the three boardwalks for the paved trail will be constructed flush with the trail surface, making the entire length of this trail extension handicapped accessible.

The second project under the Phase 2 trail system will consist of approximately 1.2 miles of 10-foot wide paved trail extending south, from the existing paved trail constructed on the Henderson Farm parcel in 2007 and running along the western edge of the lakebed

property to the edge of the remaining open lake just west of the existing Conestee Mill. This paved trail will cross the three boardwalks described in the preceding paragraph. The combined Phase 1 and Phase 2 paved trails, shown in Figure 4-1, provide a handicapped accessible paved trail system over 2 miles long. Funding for the first two contracts under Phase 2 will be provided by the Greenville County Hospitality Tax in collaboration with the GCRD.

The third project included in Phase 2 provides for construction of a 216 foot long pedestrian suspension bridge across the Reedy River, connecting the proposed Park welcome center and environmental education center at the Forrester Farm property on the Mauldin Road side of the Reedy River via a trail on the 15-acre river bluff property next to the baseball stadium (see Figures 2-3 and 4-1) with the Phase 1 and Phase 2 trail systems on the west side of the river. This bridge will be 18 feet above the normal water level of the river and provide spectacular views upstream and downstream. Funding for this pedestrian footbridge is provided primarily by a new \$100,000 grant from the SC Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, a nearly \$30,000 grant from Greenville Women Giving, and additional funds provided by the Greenville County Hospitality Tax. Design for this important new feature of the Park, which will link the facilities on both sides of the Reedy River, is currently underway. Construction is anticipated to begin in the last quarter of 2008.

Key design criteria developed during Phase 1 were utilized in the design of the Phase 2 trails and boardwalks and will also be utilized in design of future trails and boardwalks. Key design criteria for the future include the following:

- All boardwalks constructed in the floodplain will be supported on galvanized steel helical piles to minimize disturbance to existing sediments during construction.
- All boardwalks constructed in the floodplain will be securely anchored to prevent flotation during flood conditions.
- All boardwalks with the ends constructed flush with the paved trail will be guarded at each end with collapsible bollards, anchored in concrete, to prevent motorized vehicles from entering the boardwalks.

Park Entrance/Access (Trailheads):

The three existing entrances to the designated public use areas of the Park currently are located at the end of Henderson Avenue, at the intersection of Fork Shoals Road and Whitehorse Road Extension, and at the new Belmont Fire District Station. Each of these entrances provides ample parking, and their locations are shown on Figure 4-1.

- The Henderson Avenue trailhead parking lot accommodates approximately 20 vehicles, including one van-accessible handicapped parking space. This lot provides direct connection to the northern end of the existing paved trail.

- The parking lot at the intersection of Fork Shoals Road and Whitehorse Road Extension, located at the western end of the existing paved trail, also provides van-accessible handicapped parking and space for about 20 vehicles. Both of these gated parking lots consist of crushed stone (except for the paved handicapped parking spaces), and include kiosks containing information on the park and trail maps.
- The parking lot behind the Belmont Fire Station is paved and only includes parking for about 12 vehicles – 7 adjacent to the kiosk and up to 5 on the opposite side of the fire station. No handicapped parking is provided at this trailhead as the trail leaving this location is not handicapped accessible. No gate is provided at this location since the fire station is staffed at all times.

Overflow parking is currently provided by staging vehicles at the former Greenville Municipal Baseball Stadium and shuttling guests to one of the designated entrances. Such use of overflow parking has only been required to-date for major park cleanup efforts, where large numbers of volunteers participate. Use of this overflow parking approach requires prior permission from the City of Greenville.

Additional trailhead parking will be constructed as part of the Phase 2 Paved Trail project at the southern end of the new paved trail. The parking lot at this trailhead will be paved and will provide 16 conventional parking spaces and two van-accessible handicapped parking spaces.

Restroom Facilities:

At present, public restroom facilities at the park are very limited. One unisex, handicapped accessible public restroom is available at the Belmont Fire District Station trailhead. The public can access this restroom either by walking a natural surface (non-handicapped accessible) trail or by driving to this trailhead parking lot from one of the other two trailheads.

Utilities:

At present, there are no water or power services within the portions of the park accessible to the public.

Conceptual Design of Future Facilities

Trails and Boardwalks:

After completion of the Phase 2 Trails, Boardwalks, and Bridge, the principal objective will be to link the northern end of the existing paved trail, near the Henderson Avenue trailhead, with the Swamp Rabbit Trail currently being constructed by the City of Greenville. The City is currently constructing a portion of the Swamp Rabbit Trail south from Cleveland Park to Greenville Technical College, and has recently issued a Request for Qualifications to engage a design engineer to extend the City's portion of the Swamp Rabbit Trail south to Interstate 85. The Conestee Foundation has committed to extend its existing paved trail system north to join the City's trail at I-85, completing a paved

greenway trail all the way from Conestee Mill in the south to the northern terminus of the Swamp Rabbit Trail in Travelers Rest.

Funds for the Conestee Foundation's portion of the paved trail north to I-85 are currently budgeted for a 2009 Hospitality Tax capital expenditure managed by the GCRD. GCRD and the Conestee Foundation are currently exploring joining forces with the City of Greenville to consolidate design of the Swamp Rabbit Trail all the way from Greenville Tech to the existing Conestee Phase 1 paved trail. Such a joint design effort would likely reduce design costs and improve coordination for completion of this common greenway trail.

The general alignment of the paved Swamp Rabbit Trail north to I-85 is shown on Figure 4-2. The Conestee Foundation currently owns all lands required for the trail alignment north to nearly 2000 feet from the junction with the existing paved trail. Much of the trail will entail a side-hill alignment as the trail descends from the high ground of the existing trail into the flood plain. At this point, there are three available options for the alignment: 1) along the west bank of the Reedy River through an easement which must be obtained from existing land owners; 2) west along an existing public right-of-way (ROW) to Churchill Circle and then along Churchill Circle to a location where the trail can cut through to Foundation property; and 3) across the river to City landfill property for about 1500 feet before crossing back across the river to the Foundation's 81-acre parcel on the west side of the river that was recently deeded by the City of Greenville to the Foundation.

Once on the 81-acre parcel, the Swamp Rabbit Trail alignment follows the west bank of the Reedy River northward across Brushy Creek and then across Western Carolina Regional Sewer Authority (WCRSA) land. This land is almost entirely in the flood plain, and the land consists of beautiful bottomland forest and wetlands. A considerable portion of this trail will likely consist of boardwalks and small bridges. The existing WCRSA treatment plant is totally hidden from view by the dense forest vegetation.

When the trail alignment emerges from the bottomland forest on WCRSA land, it proceeds northeasterly along the Reedy River, and across a single paved road utilized by WCRSA for truck traffic. Traffic and pedestrian controls at this road crossing will be essential, and WCRSA will have approval authority for the approaches selected for such control. After crossing this road, the Swamp Rabbit Trail must at some point cross over the Reedy River in order that it can cross under Mauldin Road on the eastern bank. Several options exist for the crossing location, and WCRSA will have final approval regarding the selection of the location. After passing under Mauldin Road on the easterly bank, the trail will proceed north along the Reedy River to cross beneath I-85 and link up with the City's portion of the Swamp Rabbit Trail. The general location of this paved trail alignments, as well as proposed paved spur trails, are shown on Figure 4-2.

Extensions of the natural surface trail system are envisioned for the near future, and many can be constructed using budgeted Hospitality Tax funds allocated to the Conestee Foundation in 2009. One of these trail extensions, shown on Figure 4-2, consists of a

trail and boardwalks running south between the east bank of the Reedy River and the open water of the east lobe of Lake Conestee. This trail will be completely in the floodplain and will likely require a significant sections of boardwalks and bog bridges. As second desirable trail system feature is a boardwalk across the very southern end of Marrow Bone Creek, just before it joins the Reedy River, connecting the Phase 2 paved trail with the existing natural surface trail south of the existing observation deck.

Welcome Center and Environmental Education Center:

Design and construction of a new park entrance, welcome center, and environmental education center on the Forrester Farm parcel on the hill just east of the east lobe of Lake Conestee is a major thrust for the Foundation in the next few years. The Foundation is currently working with the GCRD, the City of Greenville, and the Greenville Little League to create an integrated public park complex incorporating the City's currently decommissioned stadium and surrounding land as well as a portion of the Conestee Foundation Forrester Farm property located south of the stadium property. A conceptual view of such a possible integrated park complex is shown in Figure 4-3. The Foundation believes that this concept provides the maximum benefits to the Greater Greenville community. Principal advantages of such a joint use approach include: preservation of the riparian buffer along the east bank of the Reedy River and its use for trails accessing the new suspension bridge; the development of up to four new Little League baseball fields and the restoration of the existing stadium; and a joint-use parking area.

The detailed conceptual design of the welcome/environmental education center complex is of high priority to the Foundation and will be undertaken as soon as funding for this effort can be secured. Preliminary ideas for incorporation into this facility include offices for Foundation staff, a small museum featuring displays directly related to the Park and the Conestee area, space for exhibits related to the Park ecology, office space and a small laboratory facility for on-site research efforts, and a classroom available to visiting middle school and high school teachers for on-site instruction, and possibly a small conference center. More details regarding possible research activities at this center are provided later in this section.

An important Foundation objective is to promote responsible environmental stewardship through the preservation of natural resources and wildlife habitat. To that end, the various activity centers and park architecture will embrace “green” building initiatives in their colors, materials and forms. All structures will fully meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements and be designed to minimize impacts on natural resources. The Foundation will coordinate with the Native Plant Society of the Upstate regarding use of native plants in the landscaping for the welcome center/environmental education center and will explore having the Native Plant Society construct and maintain a garden area featuring native plants of the upstate at this location.

The location of the proposed welcome/environmental education center on the Forrester Farm parcel provides direct access to the edge of the lake where the Foundation proposes to construct a new observation deck. This location offers wonderful opportunities to observe waterfowl and other wildlife attracted by the open lake waters, including beaver

and river otter. The Foundation proposes to construct a new observation deck on the lake's shore at this point to enhance the experience of visitors and students.

The welcome/environmental education center would also be the principal location of public restroom facilities in the Park.

Henderson Meadow Area Facilities:

Approximately 12 to 15 acres of former pastureland on the Henderson Farm property, located just south of Henderson Avenue, are currently open meadow. In 2007 most of the non-native trees which had become established in this area were removed, and the Foundation has determined that keeping this meadow in its existing state is in keeping with the overall purpose of the Park. Accordingly, development in this area will be limited and in keeping with the overall South Carolina piedmont farmland environment. Facilities envisioned in this area are shown conceptually in Figure 4-4 and include the following:

- A picnic pavilion and picnic tables located near the center of the meadow in the vicinity of the three large water oaks.
- A small open amphitheater located at the southern side of the meadow, near the edge of the existing forest, that can be used for classroom instruction and presentations to groups.
- A greenhouse for use by the Native Plant Society and constructed by that group.
- An area for community gardens if desired by members of the local community.
- If there is determined to be a demand for it, a small public event center which can be rented by groups for their use. It is envisioned that this center will have an architectural design reflecting farmland buildings such as a large barn.

Other Areas

Donaldson Center Extension:

Currently the entire north side of the Donaldson Center Property consists of a beautiful but unused greenway between Marrow Bone Creek and Perimeter Road. There is presently no access to this green space. The Foundation proposes to work with the Donaldson Center management to extend a paved greenway trail along Marrow Bone Creek to connect with Perimeter Road. Such a paved trail connection would provide direct access between Perimeter Road, which is already heavily used by bicyclists, and the paved Swamp Rabbit Trail. The trail could be constructed westerly from the Fork Shoals Road trailhead, within the ROW for White Horse Road Extension, to the existing closed public road ROW south to Perimeter Road, and then along this ROW to Marrow Bone Creek and Perimeter Road, as shown on Figure 4-4.

City Landfill Property:

The Foundation believes that development of the southern two-thirds of the capped former City landfill site into a recreational area would be a tremendous addition to the overall park complex at Conestee. With only a relatively small amount of work, this landfill, which now resembles an open pasture in appearance, could become a tremendous recreational facility. The condition of the landfill material which lies beneath the earthen cap, and State and Federal regulations relative to this landfill, will limit its potential uses to those that do not require construction of significant structures or require level surfaces. For example, continued subsidence of land filled materials would preclude construction of baseball fields, which require a very level-playing surface. However, many other potential recreational uses for this land exist, including the following:

- Dog park
- Picnic area
- Pitch and putt or Frisbee golf
- Wildlife rehabilitation shelter
- Native plant restoration and research.

The site belongs to the City of Greenville, and only the City can determine future uses of this potential park area. The Conestee Foundation will actively work with the City to integrate any recreational and educational facilities which the City may determine to be feasible at the site into the overall Lake Conestee Nature Park complex.

Signage Systems:

A comprehensive sign system is important to inform and direct visitors. Although a rather modest sign system is in place today, primarily for trail blazes and closures and directions to the park from primary roads, it will be expanded in the future to include signs identifying park entrances, centers of activity, information kiosks, new trails, mile markers, policy signs, interpretive signs and property identification signs. These signs will be made vandal and weather resistant and meet SC Department of Transportation regulations where necessary. Other informational materials, including maps, graphic images and photographs will be maintained at various kiosks and entrances for park visitors.

Currently, natural surface trails are designated only by color-coded blazes on trees, and the paved trail and boardwalks have no formal naming designations. As the trail system expands, and location within the trail system becomes more critical, it will be important to have a more definitive naming system throughout. In addition, naming of various facilities offers fund raising opportunities through naming rights. For example, through their donation of nearly \$30,000 for the new suspension bridge, Greenville Women Giving was given naming rights for the bridge. The Foundation believes that developing a formal naming system for its facilities, and possibly granting naming rights in exchange for large donations to the Foundation, must be seriously considered in the near future.

Given the educational nature of the park, it is desirable that some limited portions of the trail system be provided with plant identification signs and interpretive signs which will help educate the Park users. Because it is desired to keep much of the park in its natural state, use of such educational signage should be judicious.

Best Management Practices and Development Phasing:

Natural resources within the park are very special assets and will be protected during any earth moving or construction activities. Best management practices will be employed in all design and development phases to minimize construction runoff and promote accessible sites with stable terrain. The precise timetable for future development necessarily will be a function of the funding available and adjusted accordingly. Any modifications to the original timetable or activities embodied in the original Master Plan will be evaluated by members of the Conestee Foundation and its various partners in implementing the Plan.

Recreation Programs

With the exception of the previously described Little League Baseball complex integrated into the location at the Mauldin Road park entrance and welcome center, and the possibility of developments such as a pitch and putt or Frisbee golf course at the City's capped landfill site, recreation at Lake Conestee Nature Park will be limited to passive recreation opportunities such as hiking, trail biking, wildlife observation, nature photography, and plant observation.

The Park offers a unique opportunity to escape the urban landscape within a short drive of everyone in the Greater Greenville area. As the southern terminus of the Swamp Rabbit Trail, it provides the opportunity to “get back to nature”, enjoy the outdoors, and get beneficial exercise without the requirement of membership in a health club. Dogs are permitted, but must be on a leash, kept out of the water, and away from wildlife.

Education and Research Programs

Paris Mountain State Park and Roper Mountain Science Center have excellent programs aimed at elementary school students. In general, however, similar environmental education opportunities for middle school and high school students are lacking. The contaminated nature of the sediments in the former lakebed dictates that any “hands-on” approach to environmental education within the lakebed parcel requires a degree of maturity not found in elementary school students. Based on these two factors, the Conestee Foundation has elected to focus *student* environmental education efforts at Lake Conestee Nature Park on middle school and high school age students as well as university students.

However, by observing common sense safety measures (i.e., avoiding direct contact with surface waters and their sediments and limiting activities to the trail ways), many environmental education opportunities certainly are available for elementary grades and the general public. Moreover, this lakebed portion of the park requiring such practices is

only approximately 1/3 of the existing parkland, and will eventually encompass only approximately 25% of the fully built 500+ acre park. The remaining 75% of the completed park will comprise rich upland and bottomland habitats that will be available for education functions and do not require the special protocols of the lakebed parcel. Thus, environmental education opportunities abound for all ages and many types of organizations.

In addition to environmental education, the Park offers wonderful opportunities for both undergraduate and graduate level research in both engineering and the sciences. To date, four Master's Degree theses and one PhD dissertation have focused on the park environment. Specific areas of research provided by the Park and its environment include the following:

- Fauna and flora population biology and ecology research
- Ecological restoration design and practice
- Historic site contamination and recovery
- Ecological toxicology
- Parks and tourism utilization/management/planning studies
- Sedimentation and siltation effects
- Flood dissipation and control

Each of these areas offers a myriad of research opportunities. The Foundation will actively work with the colleges and universities in the area to develop research at Lake Conestee Nature Park and to provide the on-site facilities to enhance such research. In addition, as opportunities arise, Conestee Foundation staff will be encouraged to seek research grants of their own in conjunction with local universities.

Section V

Development Strategy

Proposed Actions

Timely completion of the facilities and programs presented in Section 4 requires an organized approach to detailed planning, funding, and implementation. Construction of capital facilities requires that the Foundation coordinate with several public agencies, particularly the Greenville County Recreation District (GCRD), the City of Greenville, and the Western Carolina Regional Sewer Authority (WCRSA). Implementation of environmental educational programs will require the involvement of the Greenville County School District, the University of South Carolina, Clemson University, Furman University, Wofford College, and other educational organizations. The discussion in this Section presumes that all of the capital facilities being constructed in Phase 2, as described in Section 4, are successfully completed.

Capital Project Development

Mauldin Road Park Entrance and Environmental Education Center:

Detailed planning of the joint use park complex on Mauldin Road has already begun. Currently GCRD, the Greenville Little League, the City of Greenville, and the Conestee Foundation are actively engaged in discussions to work out the arrangements and funding strategy for development of a combined park entrance off Mauldin Road for the Lake Conestee Nature Park and the Little League Baseball complex. GCRD has budgeted \$4 million in Hospitality Tax funds for this complex, including renovation of the existing stadium. These funds would cover construction of a well designed entrance to the park complex and joint-use parking facilities for both the Little League Baseball fields and the Lake Conestee Nature Park welcome center, main trailhead, and environmental education facilities. Beyond this step, completion of the Nature Park welcome/environmental education center will require the following:

- Completion of a detailed facilities plan, including functional design criteria (purposes to be served), sizing, layout and design criteria development, architectural and landscape renderings, and planning level cost estimates.
- Securing the approval of the SC Conservation Bank (which was a major source of funding for the 41 acre Forrester property on which this facility will be built) for construction of baseball fields on a small portion of the property in exchange for securing the 15-acre riparian buffer along the east bank of the Reedy River for inclusion in the Lake Conestee Nature Park.
- Development of a strategy to secure funding for the complex.
- Detailed design and construction.

- Work with the Upstate Native Plant Society to determine what, if any, participation they would like to have related to native plant gardens, etc., and how they propose to implement this involvement.

Swamp Rabbit Trail from Henderson Avenue Trailhead to I-85:

Greenville County Hospitality Tax funds for design and construction of this portion of the Swamp Rabbit Trail are already allocated to the Foundation for 2009 as part of the GCRD Transportation and Civil Engineering Program. GCRD and the City are working together to hire a single design engineer for both the City's portion of the Swamp Rabbit Trail (Greenville Tech south to I-85) and the Conestee Foundation/GCRD's portion (I-85 south to existing Conestee Phase 1 Paved Trail). The Conestee Foundation supports the concept of retaining a single qualified design engineer for the two projects as well as contracting construction to a single firm. The following actions are required on the part of the Conestee Foundation:

- Actively participate in the discussions between the GCRD and the City to establish a basis for retaining a single design firm.
- Work with the selected design engineer in the determination of appropriate design criteria for the joint projections.
- Continue to work with the GCRD and the City throughout the design, bidding, award, and construction phases of the project.

Should the joint approach to design and construction of the Swamp Rabbit Trail not materialize, the Conestee Foundation must work with GCRD alone to accomplish the above tasks and to coordinate the tie-in of the two separate portions of the Swamp Rabbit Trail.

Henderson Meadow Area Facilities:

Before proceeding with detailed planning and design of the possible facilities described in Section 4, the Foundation must investigate the need/desirability of the proposed facilities with appropriate stakeholders. Only after determining that there is a real need/desire for any or all of these facilities, and that the facilities will be well used if constructed, should the Foundation proceed with fund raising, planning, design, and construction. The stakeholders and interested parties include:

- Amphitheater: GCRD; Greenville County School District; various other educational systems, including universities and colleges; environmental organizations
- Picnic Pavilion and Picnic Tables: GCRD
- Community Gardens: community leaders and citizens; representatives of local churches

- Native Plant Society Greenhouse: Native Plant Society
- Public Event Center (“Event Barn”): GCRD; Greenville County School District; various other educational systems, including universities and colleges

Following a determination that there is a real demand for any or all of these facilities, the Foundation must proceed to identify funding sources, obtain the needed funds, and design and construct the facilities. In the case of facilities which would be funded and constructed by others, such as the Native Plant Society Greenhouse, the Foundation must develop acceptable design criteria to ensure that the proposed facility is compatible with the nature and vision of the Park.

Other Capital Facilities:

In regard to all other capital facilities, with the exception of facilities constructed by the City on the capped landfill property, the Foundation should first review the facility's concept and need with the GCRD. Under the existing operations and maintenance agreement with GCRD, that agency will operate and maintain the physical aspects of any new facilities. Therefore, before any new facilities are designed and constructed, GCRD must approve funds and manpower for their operation. Only after obtaining the concurrence of GCRD should the Foundation proceed with fund-raising, planning, design, and construction of these new facilities.

Signage:

The Foundation will take the following actions in regard to signage at the Lake Conestee Nature Park:

- Prepare a formal policy regarding the sale of naming rights for individual facilities as a fund raising tool.
- Develop a more descriptive and user-friendly trail and boardwalk naming policy for facilities already constructed or those that will be paid for by the Hospitality Tax Program.
- Develop formal standards for the appearance of Park signage and for signage on public roads directing people to the park.
- Determine which areas of the trail system are suitable for interpretive signage and develop a list of subjects for possible future interpretive signs.

Education and Research Program Development:

Prospective education and research programs have been generally described in Section 4. A specific and comprehensive program will be developed in the future in collaboration with education stakeholders. Implementation of this program will require securing sustainable funding that will support day-to-day operations and staffing needs. This

education program will require the Conestee Foundation and GCRD to determine their future respective roles in directing and operating the program.

Development Phasing

The extension of the paved Swamp Rabbit Trail north from the existing trail system to connect to the City-funded trail at I-85 is already funded by the 2009 Hospitality Tax Program. The 2009 Hospitality Tax Program also includes funding for additional natural surface trails and boardwalks on the existing lakebed and Henderson Farm properties. Construction of a Mauldin Road Park entrance and trailhead parking will result from completion of a successful agreement between GCRD, the City, Greenville Little League, and the Conestee Foundation. Due to the availability of funding, these projects logically can be considered Phase 3 of the Park capital improvement program. Specific trail/boardwalk projects of Phase 3 include the following, in addition to the main paved Swamp Rabbit Trail up to I-85 (see Figure 4-2):

- The trail/boardwalk along the east bank of the Reedy River from the Mauldin Road entrance trailhead south to the farthest stable location on the edge of the open water of the lake with a view across to the dam and the mill.
- The boardwalk connection from the Phase 2 Paved Trail across the lower end of Marrow Bone Creek to the existing trail south of the existing observation deck.
- A simple loop trail in the Henderson Farm Meadow connecting with the existing Phase 1 Paved Trail. (This should be a natural surface trail until the final arrangement of facilities in this area is more firmly established.)
- The paved trail extension extending west from the Phase 3 Swamp Rabbit Trail to provide access from the Augusta Acres subdivision through the 81-acre parcel recently transferred to the Foundation by the City of Greenville.
- An observation deck in the east lobe of Lake Conestee near the new Mauldin Road park entrance.

Development of the Welcome Center and Environmental Education Center is the highest priority facility with no current funding. The Foundation's fund raising and planning efforts should be heavily focused on this key facility. Development of formal educational programs and research efforts are highly dependent upon completion of this facility.

Simultaneously with planning and fund raising efforts for the Welcome Center and Environmental Education Center, the Foundation should implement detailed planning for facilities in the Henderson Farm meadow. An extension of the paved trail system up to the Donaldson Center (see Figure 4-2), while important, is of somewhat lower priority than the other facilities. However, the Foundation should begin exploring possible funding sources for this trail. If a funding source can be confirmed, this trail can move up in the priority list.

Development and implementation of signage policy should commence as soon as possible. The cost for signage is much less than for all other facilities presented in this Master Plan.

Figure 2-1

Location Map

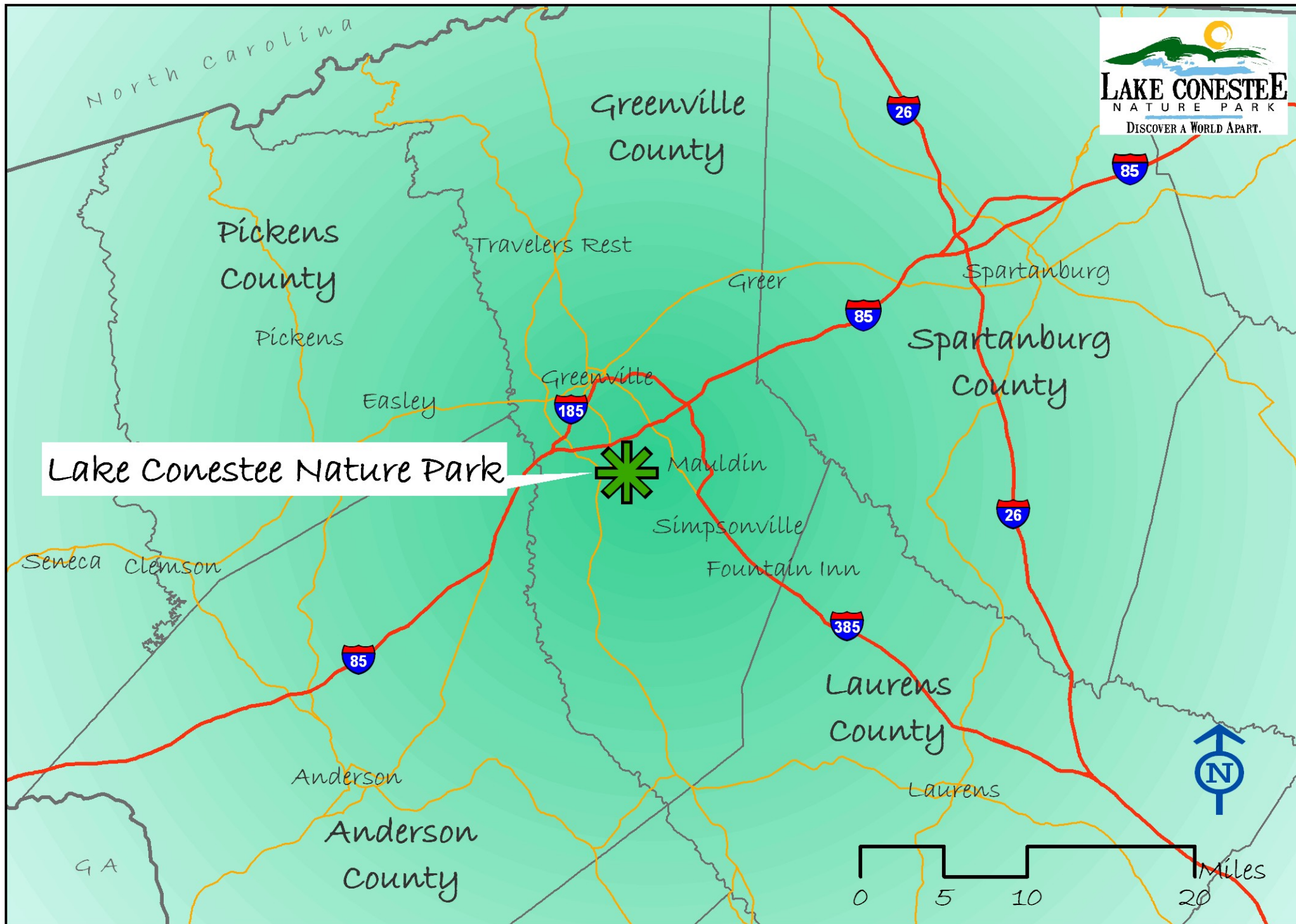


Figure 2-2

Vicinity Map

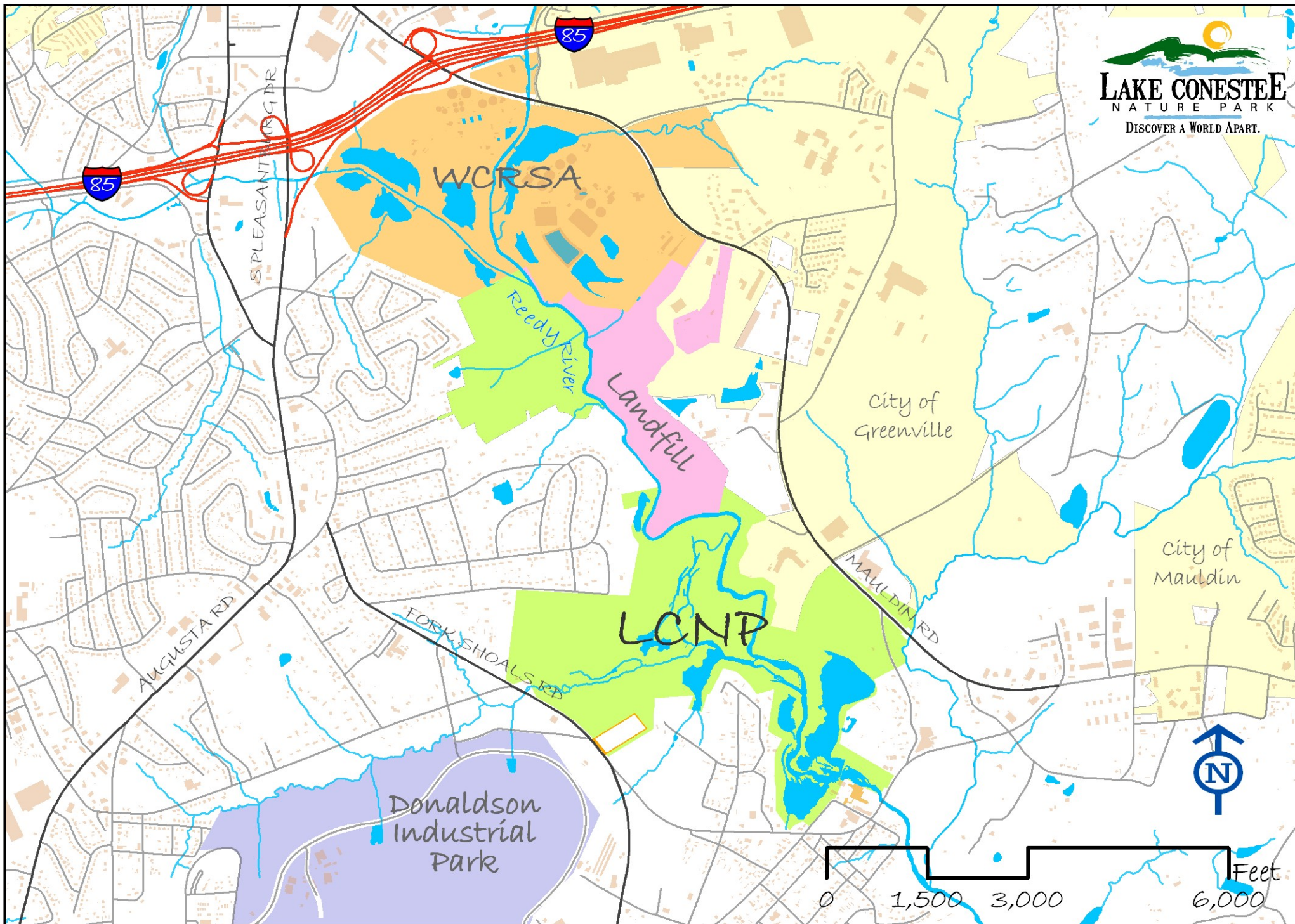


Figure 2-3

LCNP Properties

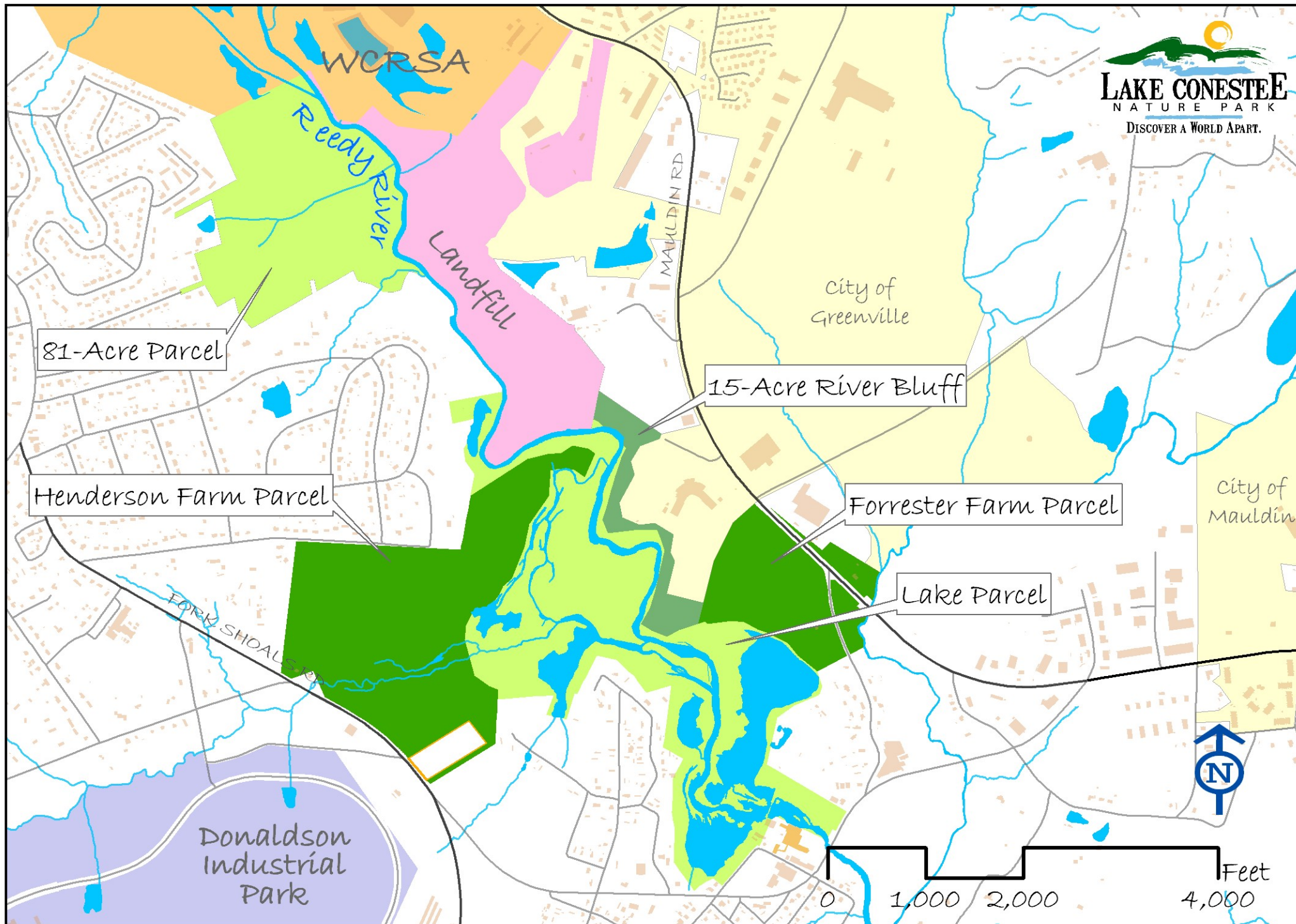
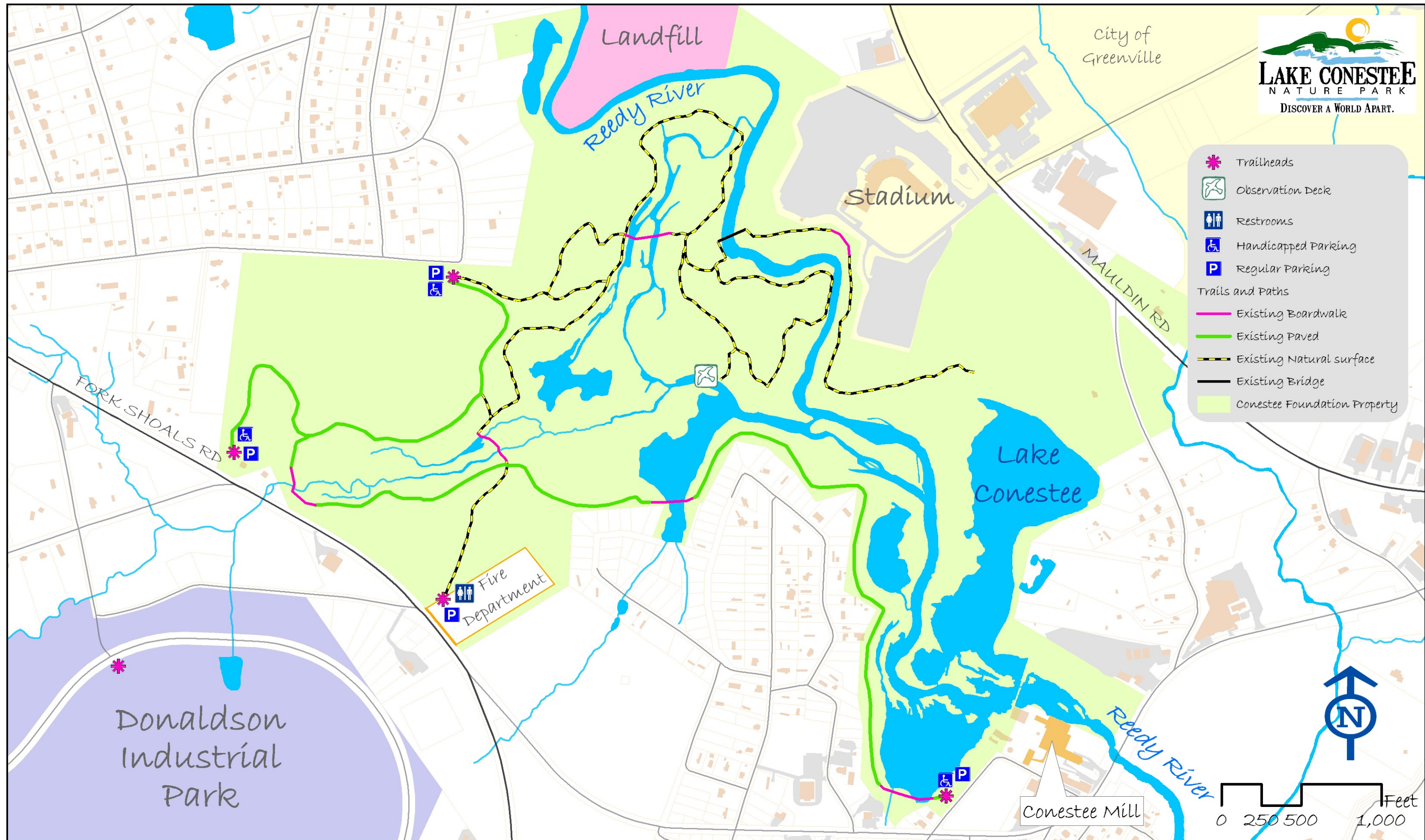
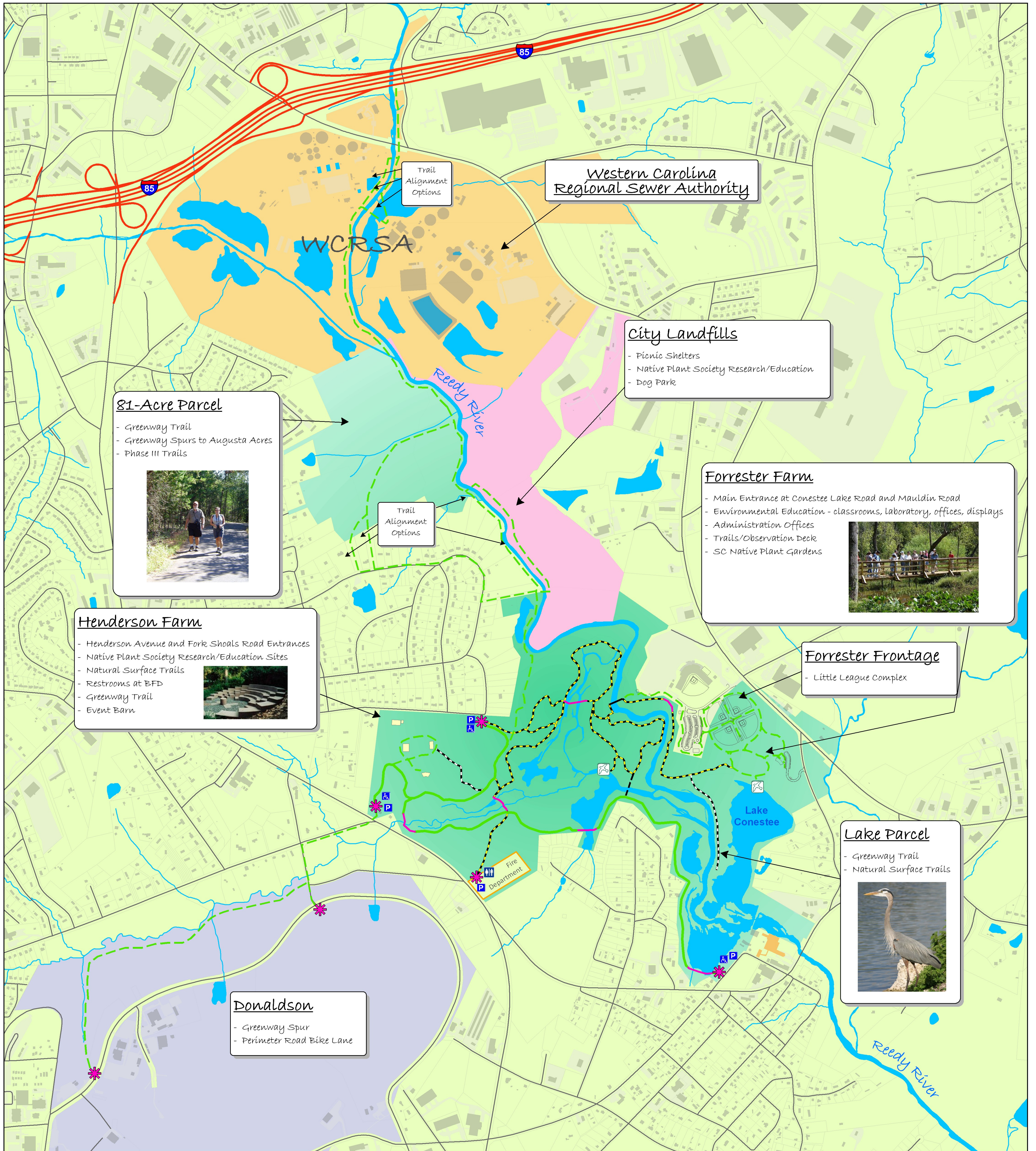


Figure 4-1 Existing Facilities as of 31 Dec 2008



LAKE CONESTEE NATURE PARK

DISCOVER A WORLD APART.



0 1,000 2,000 4,000 Feet

Figure 4-2
Master Plan

Figure 4-3

Integrated Park Complex



Figure 4-4

Integrated Park Complex



Figure 4-5 Henderson Farm Proposed Facilities

