Georgia Mountains Regional Commission

INTRODUCTION

A region's cultural, historic, and natural resources constitute native conditions and elemental quality; each contributes equally to local character and livelihood. As the rivers and lakes supplying public water, mineral deposits that support local industry, or a scenic park serving locals and tourists alike, these resources can, properly managed, greatly serve a community's health, vigor, and economy. Because these sites and conditions are highly susceptible to disturbance from human activity, they are regarded as being inherently sensitive and significant. As such, each regionally significant resource requires protection, preservation, and correct interpretation for public benefit.

This document, the Georgia Mountains Regional Resource Plan, was developed by staff at the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC) over the course of 2009 and 2010, with input and guidance by representatives from our member governments and private individuals and organizations. It is intended to serve as an inventory and assessment of those historic, cultural, and natural resources considered vital to the character, ecology and overall well being of the 13 county area. It is also to serve as a guide for incorporating the preservation and promotion of these resources amidst the varying layers of management applied by local, state and federal government organizations as well as private stakeholders. In conjunction with the other elements of the Regional Plan, this document will help provide for the appropriate level of protection as the region and its local communities work towards achieving their respective visions for a better, healthier, and more environmentally sound Georgia Mountains region.

Purpose

The Georgia Planning Act of 1989 authorizes the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to establish specific rules and procedures for the identification and planned protection of Regionally Important Resources. The rules require that the GMRC, with the involvement of stakeholders, prepare a comprehensive *Regional Resource Plan* for protection and management of the identified resources. This plan must include a Regional Resources map that includes all of the important natural and cultural resources and attempts to link these to form a continuous regional green infrastructure network, as well as providing guidance for appropriate development practices that should be utilized by local

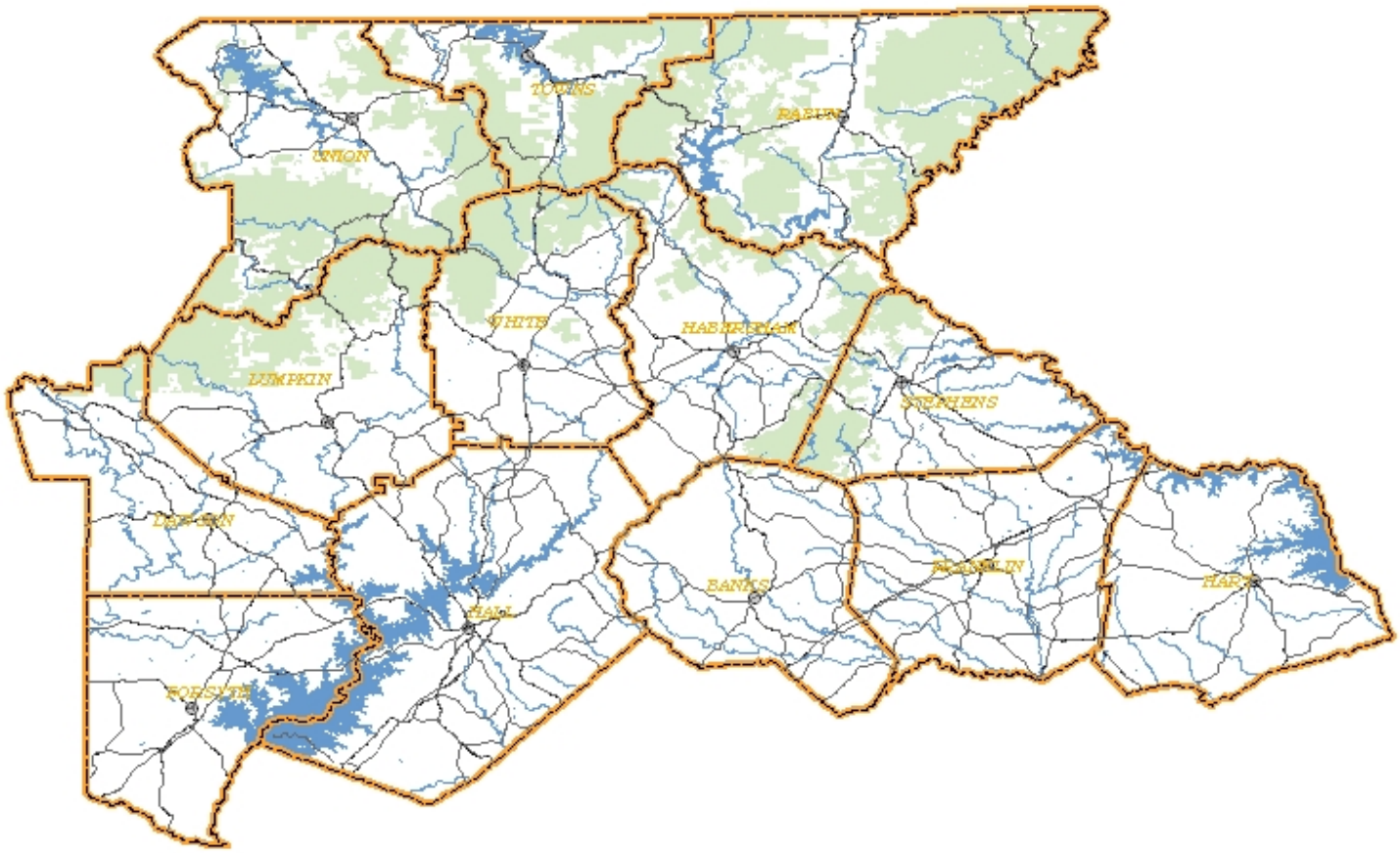
governments and private organizations for managing development located within one mile of Regionally Important Resources;

The *Regional Resource Plan* is utilized in subsequent development of the Regional Plan and is actively promulgated by the Regional Commission in an effort to coordinate activities and planning of local governments, land trusts and conservation or environmental protection groups active in the region, and state agencies toward protection and management of the identified Regionally Important Resources.

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission

The GMRC is one of 12 regional government offices within Georgia working to foster economic development and to provide community planning and information services. The GMRC provides services and technical assistance directly to its 13 counties and 38 municipalities as well as developing regional initiatives and supporting the programs of various State Departments. Originally founded as the Georgia Mountains Area and Planning Development Center in 1962, the GMRC has evolved in the common services provided but continually works to assist its member governments in efforts that preserve local character, encourage sustainable resource management and progressive economies, and contribute to improving the overall well being of the region and its communities.

Currently the GMRC employs 13 staff in the realms of planning, economic development, information technology, human resources and general administration. The Council for the GMRC consists of two representatives from each county, one from the County Commission and one mayoral representative from all the cities within that county, as well as 5 appointees from the State legislature.



Georgia Mountains Region Counties and Cities

Banks County
Homer
Maysville

Dawson County
Dawsonville

Forsyth County
Cumming

Lumpkin County
Dahlonega

Union County
Blairsville

Towns County
Hiawassee
Young Harris

Stephens County
Toccoa
Avalon
Martin

Rabun County
Clayton
Dillard
Mountain City
Sky Valley
Tiger

Franklin County
Carnesville
Canon
Franklin Springs
Lavonia
Royston

Habersham County
Clarkesville
Alto
Baldwin
Cornelia
Demorest
Mt. Airy
Tallulah Fall

Hall County
Gainesville
Clermont
Flowery Branch
Gillsville
Lula
Oakwood

White County
Cleveland
Helen

Hart County
Hartwell
Bowersville

Region Profile

The Georgia Mountains region is comprised of 13 counties within the extreme northeast corner of Georgia, bordered by North Carolina to the north and South Carolina to the east. Eleven of the counties are classified as rural, while Forsyth County is included as part of metropolitan Atlanta and Gainesville/Hall County are their own urban unit for metropolitan transportation planning purposes. Taken all together, the Georgia Mountains region covers approximately 3,500 square miles and a current population just under 600,000 people.

The region includes parts of two physiographic provinces: The Piedmont Province in the southeastern part of the region and the Blue Ridge Province elsewhere. Topographically, over half of the area is mountainous with the remainder being rolling land and hills. Seven of the thirteen counties (Dawson, Habersham, Lumpkin, Rabun, Towns, Union and White) are either totally or partially located in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Twelve of the thirteen counties are in the Appalachian Region. The highest mountain in the region is Brasstown Bald (elevation 4,784 feet above sea level) located in Towns County. This is also the highest point in Georgia. Rabun Bald exceeds 4,600 feet elevation and several other prominent peaks rise above 4,000 feet.

To the south, the upper Georgia Piedmont ranges in elevation from 1,400 feet to 1,800 feet. Prominent mountain peaks in the Piedmont include Yonah and Wauka. Mount Yonah, with an elevation of 3,173 feet, is the highest peak on the Georgia Piedmont. There are many broad, fertile, level bottom valleys in the area such as the Nacoochee, the Sautee, the Chestatee, the Chattahoochee, the Soque, and the Etowah.

The Georgia Mountain region is blessed with a variety of and some very unique flora and fauna. The natural vegetation of the area is forest cover with a predominance of hardwoods. Smaller species, flowering shrubs for example, grow in abundance throughout the region. There are also a variety of small plants including some rare and very rare species. Wildlife in the region consists of deer, bear, squirrel, rabbit, raccoon, quail, doves, turkey, grouse, as well as several non-game animals and birds. The streams and lakes provide a large variety of aquatic life. In the colder upland streams are trout, while in the water waters of the lakes and Piedmont streams bass, bluegills, walleyes and catfish can be found.

The largest body of water in the state is Lake Lanier located on the Hall-Forsyth County line. The 38,500 acre lake was created during 1954-57 by damming the Chattahoochee River at Buford, Georgia. Lake Lanier boasts over 20 million visitors each year, the most visited lake in the United States. Another sizable reservoir is 56,000 acre Lake Hartwell. This lake was created on the Savannah River near Hartwell, Georgia. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers operates both lakes which provide flood control, electrical power, major recreational facilities and water supply in the GMRDC area. In the northern part of the region, Lake Chatuge and Lake Nottely are operated by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Other lakes in the region are (Burton, Rabun, Seed, Tallulah, Tugaloo, and Yonah) are operated by the Georgia Power Company.

Major streams in the region include the Chattahoochee, the Savannah, the Chattooga, the Broad, the Little Oconee, the Chestatee, the Etowah, and the Little Tennessee Rivers.

The natural scenic beauty of the Georgia Mountains area is one of its most important resources. Nine of the thirteen Georgia Mountain Counties have National Forest Lands located in them. Approximately 463,013 acres of the Chattahoochee National Forest lies in the northern section of the region. Nine state parks in the area provide safe access for visitors who wish to hike, camp canoe or enjoy wildlife. The Appalachian Trail and the Bartram Trail wind through the Blue Ridge Mountain in the northernmost counties. Visitors to Travelers' Rest, in Toccoa, and the Gold Museum in Dahlonega, can glimpse life of the early settlers of Georgia and their relationship with the mountains.

Over the past three decades, the GMRDC area has experience tremendous growth. Some of its counties are among the fastest growing in the United States. All counties have experience continued positive growth, with most higher than the state average. Much of the growth can be attributed to migration resulting from economic factors, retirement populations and the spillover from metropolitan Atlanta.

A major economic factor in the Northeast Georgia area is tourism. Visitors are attracted by the history, outdoor activities, museums, mountain arts and crafts, antiques, natural scenic beauty and unique cuisine. Numerous festivals throughout the year, such as *Octoberfest* in Helen,

White County or the *Georgia Mountain Fair* in Hiawassee, Towns County, draw hundreds of thousands of visitors from many places. Outlet trade centers located in Banks County and Dawson County attract a heterogeneous mixture of shoppers/visitors year round. The tourism industry is nearly a billion dollar a year industry in the Georgia Mountains area.

Land use in the Georgia Mountains region is primarily rural in nature, the exceptions being Forsyth and Hall Counties. The majority of land is undeveloped or used for agriculture or forestry. Most residential land use is concentrated around the small towns located throughout the region, with some retirement communities located in the mountain areas of the region. Commercial and industrial development tends to be located where necessary infrastructure is in place (ie., along major transportation corridors and where water and sewer amenities are available). Because of its rural character, there are very few local land use regulations in the Georgia Mountains counties. Those regulations that do exist tend to be weak not because of the regulations themselves, but due to lack of enforcement. However, the recognition of the need for land use regulations or guides is being expressed by local governments and citizens as they observe the fast paced growth taking place within their communities.

With the large variety of resources and its favorable location as well as the quality of life that is offered, the Georgia Mountains region will more than likely continue to experience tremendous, if not explosive growth. One of the region's most important concerns will be to continue to pursue quality development while protecting and conserving its limited and precious resources. The challenge therein is found with effective regional planning that inventories and monitors its resources and manages them to meet the needs and vision of the future Georgia Mountains Region.

METHODOLOGY

The general process used for developing the Regional Resource Plan is defined as follows:

- Inventory and assessment of cultural, historic and natural resources
- Selection of critical resources as Regionally Important
- Development of guidance measures and strategies for protection of those resources

Not only is the goal of the process to produce a guide for the optimum long-term management of those resources considered most vital to the region, but also to work towards creating a "green infrastructure" plan that will foster a truly sustainable ecology. As these resources are identified and preservation measures are implemented, the various stakeholders in the region can come together and more effectively work to ensure the region will be environmentally sound, retaining the scenic and cultural elements that are the most critical to the identity and fabric of the Georgia Mountains region.

Regional Valuation Criteria

In developing the inventory of resources certain areas were pre-qualified based on the *Rules and Regulations* established by the Department of Community Affairs. To distinguish other certain areas as regionally important, some general criteria was developed that could provide a threshold for consideration. This criterion would be used in evaluating the value of nominated properties and their appropriateness for inclusion in the Regional Resource Plan.

While properties that don't obviously satisfy the above stated criteria may still be considered, these conditions provide a barometer for identifying the relative value of properties and help ensure the ultimate selection of resources satisfies the goals of the Plan.

Additional consideration will be given to potential resources based upon their ability to achieve the objectives of correlating State, federal and/or local government resource management plans. As part of the research for this document GMRC referenced the local comprehensive plans of all member governments as well as the guiding documents or strategies for such organizations as the US Forest Service, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the current *Georgia Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)*. Properties that may benefit the goals for one or more of these stakeholder organizations were reviewed for possible nomination as Regionally Important Resources.

Identification of Resources

After confirming the preliminary RIR criteria, the GMRC began a coordinated resource identification process. Certain properties and conditions would be included as RIRs by State definition (discussed below); beyond these sites the

Regionally Important Resource Consideration Criterion

- Preserves the quality of prevalent water resources, ecological habitat or significant forest and agricultural lands.
- Preserves areas or resources of historical or cultural significance to the region
- Preserves significant areas of greenspace available for active or passive use
- Protects greenspace that provides connections between other Regionally Important Resources

identification process would seek additional properties for consideration based on the GMRC criteria and the context created by the progress with the *Green Infrastructure Map*. Nominations for RIRs were then pursued by soliciting comments from the public and local governments, discussions with the GMRC Council, and through independent staff investigation.

The process began with the confirmation of existing conservation areas and vital environmental areas already identified by the State and other organizations. These resources were immediately recognized for their importance and qualification based on the RIR criteria, and would be used as the baseline areas for inclusion within the *Green Infrastructure Map*. In almost all cases, these areas feature natural landscape or limited existing development, as well as management or governance to provide existing levels of resource protection. While the *Regional Resource Plan* does not supersede any of the regulations and management plans in place for these resources, it will help ensure the various organizations and objectives are being coordinated for maximum effect as well as working to identify opportunities for enhanced protection where needed.

Once these resources were identified the GMRC began working with our local governments to incorporate their interests and concerns into the process. A general notice inviting participation was provided to each government while GMRC staff reached out to various local government offices for direct communication. This involved speaking with staff from local planning departments, public works divisions, water system managers and other personnel considered to have valuable insight to the environment interests of their communities. This process lasted throughout the fiscal year, resulting in responses from approximately 30 different local government personnel from more than 25 communities.

Concurrently with the above outreach, GMRC staff developed an inventory of environmental policies and objectives found within local comprehensive plans, searching for guidance on what member communities regarded as high priorities or already pursuing in terms of resource protection. This was done to help the GMRC position itself for providing the best support possible to these local efforts and, again, find any opportunities for coordination or cooperation of projects. This was

GMRC Critical Stakeholder Groups

- *1071 Coalition*
- *Lake Lanier Association*
- *Chattooga Conservancy*
- *Etowah Riverkeeper*
- *Georgia River Network*
- *Georgia Lakes Society*
- *Elachee Nature Center*
- *US Forest Service*
- *National Park Service*
- *US Fish and Wildlife*
- *Savannah Riverkeeper*
- *Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D*
- *Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper*
- *Upper Oconee Riverkeeper*
- *Soque River Watershed Association*
- *Metro North Georgia Water Planning District*
- *Broad River Watershed Association*
- *Little Tennessee Watershed Association*
- *Hiawassee River Watershed Coalition, Inc.*

considered critical in areas where resources crossed jurisdictional boundaries and faced varying degrees of threats, management and protection. With this information the GMRC staff was able to review the resource maps and consider target areas for inclusion in the RIR process based upon their ability to contribute to the goal for green infrastructure and/or the need to balance resource management among multiple stakeholders.

As an additional measure for consideration, the GMRC consulted with various stakeholder groups about their plans and objectives in an effort to identify further potential RIRs. This included networking with organizations such as the US Forest Service, NRCS and others and working to incorporate their knowledge and goals into the *Regional Resource Plan*.

Stakeholder Involvement

The GMRC strives to involve various stakeholders as part of every regional planning process. In developing the *Regional Resource Plan* the GMRC worked with stakeholders from several interest groups on behalf of environmental management and historic preservation, as well as communicating with local governments about their interests and efforts. Their input and guidance will regularly be considered as the GMRC completes the full *Regional Comprehensive Plan* update and in the promulgation of this document.

During the fall of 2009 and through the spring of 2010 GMRC then reached out to critical stakeholder groups such as water resource advocacy groups, various State and federal organizations and private stakeholders to gauge their interests and concerns. Beginning with existing contact information readily employed for DRI and local plan reviews, the Planning Department sought additional names and organizations for inclusion in the process. Copies of notices about the process and invitations to comment/submit nominations were distributed to the parties on this list through fax, email and conventional mail. A list of the priority stakeholder groups is included below. These efforts were not only to find possible new nominations for RIRs, but also to learn about other, comparable resource protection efforts and concerns that the RC could address at a regional level.

Open Nominations

In addition to the outreach described above and using the data for existing critical resources, the GMRC maintained opportunities for public input throughout the planning process. Specific for the development of this plan the GMRC created an *RIR Nomination Form* (see Appendix) for use by the general public and other organizations to openly recommend an area or resource for consideration. This form was then actively distributed to all local governments and the stakeholder groups identified above during the fall of 2009, with indication that the forms were to be shared and made available to the public where able. Communities were also asked to help promote the effort through posting informational flyers directing the public to the GMRC web site for details and nomination opportunities. All this was done to identify potential RIRs not otherwise revealed throughout the process.

Open nominations were accepted throughout the planning process but the GMRC actively solicited comments in June and July of 2009 and again in August and September of 2010. Seven formal nominations were received, several of which were already identified elsewhere in the planning process.

Public Nominations Received

Resource	Nominee	Result/ Comment
Big Creek Watershed Forsyth County	Claudia Castro Smart Growth Forsyth County	Inclusion incomplete in first draft; Included in amended draft.
Settles Bridge Forsyth County	Donna Garret	Subject property included within Chattahoochee River corridor
Upper Etowah River Watershed Dawson Co./ Lumpkin Co.	Diane Minick Upper Etowah River Alliance	Included within Plan
Stekoa Creek Grist Mill and Tallulah Falls RR bed City of Clayton	Nicole Hayler Chattooga Conservancy	Included within Plan
Green Street Historic District City of Gainesville	Jessica Tullar City of Gainesville	Included within Plan

Lake Lanier Dawson, Forsyth, Hall and Lumpkin Counties	Eric Stradford YouthUSA	Included within Plan
Dawson Forest WMA Dawson County	David McKee Dawson County Planning Dept.	Included within Plan

Resource Management Measures

In order to achieve the level of resource protection desired, the *Regional Resource Plan* includes a series of measures to guide land use and development within and around RIRs. These include recognition of existing codes and regulations that must be enforced, as well as procedures and advisory measures designed to enhance protection efforts. As established within the rules for regional planning, these have been presented in the following two categories, as defined by DCA's rules for regional planning:

Guidance for Appropriate Development Practices
The *Regional Resource Plan* must include a listing of best practices to be considered by developers for designing new developments to be located within one mile of any area included on the *Regionally Important Resource Map* above. This listing will also be used by the Regional Commission for reviewing Developments of Regional Impact (DRI) located within one mile of any area included on the *Regionally Important Resource Map*. This list must include standards for development within Regionally Important Resource areas specific enough to enable DRIs to be reviewed for consistency with these standards.

General Policies and Protection Measures
The *Regional Resource Plan* must include a list of *General Policies and Protection Measures* recommended for appropriate management of the areas included on the *Regionally Important Resources Map*. At a minimum, this list should include recommended local government policies and ordinances intended primarily as guidance for local governments in planning or decision-making that affects the Regionally Important Resource area. But the Regional Commission will also utilize the *General Policies and Protection Measures* for:

1. Reviewing local comprehensive plans for consistency with regional plans as provided in the Local Planning

Requirements, Chapter 110-12-1-.08.

2. Encouraging local governments and other actors in the region to adopt protection measures, policies, and enhancement activities that will promote protection of these areas included on the *Regionally Important Resource Map*, as provided at section 110-12-4-.02(4).

These will be provided for each major classification of resources throughout the Plan. However, specific resources may also feature special, additional policies or development guidelines as needed.

DESIGNATION OF REGIONALLY IMPORTANT RESOURCES

As previously mentioned the process for identifying the Regionally Important Resources began by taking an inventory and assessment of the existing critical resources and conservation areas already recognized for their importance and receiving a level of protection. Building off this information the GMRC staff then researched for additional nominations and collected several open nominations for consideration, ultimately compiling a list that could be used to preview the scope and scale of green infrastructure throughout the region.

State Vital Areas

The RIR effort was begun by recognizing all resources identified by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as State Vital Areas. Within the Georgia Mountains Region this includes several resources covered by the *Environmental Planning Criteria*. The Criteria was establish through the Georgia Planning Act as a method of identifying minimum standards that should be implemented to protect Georgia's most sensitive natural resources including wetlands, water supply watersheds, protected rivers, groundwater recharge areas, and mountain protection areas. Local governments are encouraged to adopt regulations for the protection of relevant natural resources to maintain their eligibility for certain state grants, loans, and permits. DNR has developed model ordinances to be used as guides for local governments as they develop the necessary regulations to meet EPD standards.

Two observations should be noted about State Vital areas as

they relate to the *Georgia Mountains Regional Resource Plan*. First, because the incidents of Mountain Protection zones occur within other, identified conservation areas those are not discussed as a stand-alone item in this Plan. Second, while the State has a defined list of protected river corridors, the list of waters discussed in this Plan includes additional major rivers and streams. The prevailing terrain and variety of demands on the rivers within the region have helped everyone recognize the critical role these features play and how sensitive they can be. While the DNR Part V criteria would protect many of these waters within the region because of their relative value to societal needs, the broader category applied for this Plan will encompass all the major waters and thus ensure a more uniform approach to protection and help preserve local ecology. This is not to imply that all rivers should automatically be assigned protected river status and regulation, but rather that comparable standards or management are ideal objectives.

Wetlands& Floodplains

Wetlands are specialized habitats that exhibit typically moistened Wetlands play an important role in maintaining environmental quality by providing habitat for a variety of rare and sensitive species and serve human needs by storing natural flood waters and storm water, purifying water through filtration, and providing open space and recreation areas. Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, as administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, provides a measure of protection through a permitting and mitigation process for all activities that impacts wetlands. In addition, the Environmental Planning Criteria recommends local regulations develop a list of unacceptable uses for wetland areas such as receiving areas for toxic or hazardous waste, or sanitary waste landfills.

Floodplains are the category of drainage basins that represent the primary overflow area for perennial streams and water bodies. Often these coincide with wetlands and feature a similarly high degree of water retention and a specialized habitat. In their natural or relatively undisturbed state, floodplains provide three broad sets of values: (1) water maintenance and groundwater recharge; (2) living resource benefits, including habitat for large and diverse populations of plants and animals; and (3) cultural resource benefits, including archeological, scientific, recreational, and aesthetic sites. In addition, some sites can be highly

productive for agriculture, aquaculture, and forestry where these uses are compatible. Additionally, proper management of development around floodplains can ensure minimal adverse impacts to both the environment and man-made structures.

Guidance for Appropriate Development Practices for new development within one mile of wetlands and floodplains:

- Maintain or exceed all applicable local, State and federal regulations regarding wetlands and floodplains
- Where possible, employ conservation design measures that minimize impervious surfaces, limit land disturbance and concentrates development away from sensitive resources
- Where possible, restore disturbed landscape using appropriate, native vegetation in sustaining or expanding the functional wetlands area

General Policies and Protection Measures for local governments and stakeholders in managing wetlands and floodplains:

- Ensure local regulations meet or exceed State and federal minimum standards
- Ensure regulations encourage conservation design and promote best management practices
- Ensure local review process considers RIRs
- Maintain up to date parcel data, NFIP maps and inventory of wetlands for use in review procedures
- Work with area stakeholders to consider and pursue land banks and other measures for conserving sensitive resources
- Pursue development and implementation of local greenspace plan
- Regularly review best management practices with other stakeholders

Groundwater Recharge Areas

Groundwater recharge areas are drainage basins that direct water into underground aquifers for possible water supplies. Like watersheds they represent a catchment area for rainfall that will replenish the resource, only in this instance that

resource is an aquifer and as such the recharge area may feature different habitat conditions than conventional watersheds or wetlands. When combined with severe conditions for soil types and slope conditions, recharge areas lose their ability to naturally treat potential contaminants and efficiently replenish underground aquifers.

Prescribed management measures for these sensitive areas also includes limitations on the volumes of impervious surfaces and the on-site use and storage of chemicals and toxins. By limiting the potential for degradation of the natural landscape, or for outside chemicals to infiltrate the environment, the recharge areas can sustain their ability to treat rain water and feed the aquifer.

Guidance for Appropriate Development Practices for new development within one mile of groundwater recharge areas:

- Maintain or exceed all applicable local, State and federal regulations regarding groundwater recharge areas
- Where possible, employ conservation design measures that minimize impervious surfaces, limit land disturbance and concentrates development away from sensitive resources
- Where possible, restore disturbed landscape using appropriate, native vegetation
- Where possible, locate on-site storage and use of chemicals, toxins and other possible contaminants away from recharge zones

General Policies and Protection Measures for local governments and stakeholders in managing groundwater recharge areas:

- Ensure local regulations meet or exceed State and federal minimum standards
- Ensure regulations encourage conservation design and promote best mgmt. practices
- Ensure local review process considers RIRs
- Maintain up to date parcel data and inventory of recharge areas for use in review procedures
- Work with area stakeholders to consider and pursue land banks and other measures for conserving sensitive resources

- Pursue development and implementation of local greenspace plan
- Regularly review best management practices with other stakeholders

Water Supply Watersheds

Watersheds are the complete drainage basins for any surface water body, the catchment area for rain water that will replenish the streams, lakes and rivers. Water supply watersheds include all areas within a watershed that are located upstream of a public water supply intake, representing the portion of the full watershed that impacts the source water for the intake. Proper land use management within these areas is therefore critical to ensure that raw public water supplies are of high quality and do not become degraded to the point where it cannot be treated to meet drinking water standards.

In order to protect the quality of drinking water, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources encourages the adoption of Georgia Planning Act Part V Criteria for the protection of water supply watersheds. Different criteria apply based on the size of the watershed and on the proximity to the intake. Large watersheds are those 100 square miles or more in size and as such are considered less vulnerable to contamination by land use development. In this region the Chattahoochee River, the North Fork of the Broad River, and the Etowah River fall into the large watershed category. Most of the water supply watersheds for the Georgia Mountains Region fall into the small water supply watershed category, meaning they are less than 100 square miles. Because of the compact drainage area and relative proximity to intakes, tighter controls are placed on small water supply watersheds. In both cases the focus of these guidelines is on the location and volume of impervious surface area and on the storage and management of toxic wastes and chemicals. By restricting development within these sensitive areas we are minimizing the risk to the public water supply as well as the prevailing wildlife.

As with all surface water conditions in the mountains, vulnerability for the Region's water supply watersheds is considered relatively high. Steep slopes and narrow channels typically amplify the affects of storm water runoff, a condition which can be made worse in the presence of rock or impervious surfaces. As increased demand for

development moves into the Georgia Mountains Region there will be less and less natural land within the watersheds, making it critical that the right amounts and locations of property is left undisturbed, so that the integrity of the watershed remains intact.

Guidance for Appropriate Development Practices for new development within one mile of water supply watersheds:

- Maintain or exceed all applicable local, State and federal regulations regarding water supply watersheds
- Where possible, employ conservation design measures that minimize impervious surfaces, limit land disturbance and concentrates development away from sensitive resources
- Where possible, restore disturbed landscape using appropriate, native vegetation
- Where possible, locate on-site storage and use of chemicals, toxins and other possible contaminants away from shorelines and stream banks in excess of minimum standards and with aggressive layers of filtration in between.

General Policies and Protection Measures for local governments and stakeholders in managing water supply watersheds:

- Ensure local regulations meet or exceed State and federal minimum standards
- Ensure regulations encourage conservation design and promote best mgmt. practices
- Ensure local review process considers RIRs
- Maintain up to date parcel data and accurate information about the watershed for use in review procedures
- Work with area stakeholders to consider and pursue land banks and other measures for conserving sensitive resources within the watershed
- Pursue development and implementation of local greenspace plan
- Regularly review best management practices with other stakeholders

- Regularly review water testing data; Compare with land use and development activity to monitor possible causes of any contamination.
- Maintain Source Water Protection Plans for all public intakes
- Support implementation of *Metro North Georgia Water Planning District* guidelines and measures; Encourage comparable measures throughout region

Water Supply Watersheds – Georgia Mountains Region

COUNTY	BASIN	NAME	PIPE
Cobb	Chattahoochee	Cobb County - Marietta Water Auth.	Chattahoochee R. Pump Station
Cobb	Chattahoochee	Cobb County - Marietta Water Auth.	Chattahoochee River
Gwinnett	Chattahoochee	Dekalb County Water System	Chattahoochee R. Pump Station
Cherokee	Coosa	Cherokee Co. Water and Sewer Auth.	Etowah River
Cherokee	Coosa	City of Canton	Etowah River
Dawson	Coosa	Etowah Water Authority	Etowah River
Floyd	Coosa	City of Rome	Etowah River
Floyd	Coosa	City of Rome	Oostanaula River
Gilmer	Coosa	Ellijay - Gilmer County Water Auth	Cartecay River
Gordon	Coosa	City of Calhoun	Coosawattee River
Gordon	Coosa	City of Calhoun	Oostanaula River
Lumpkin	Coosa	U.S.A. Camp Frank D. Merrill	Black's Farm Creek (old)
Lumpkin	Coosa	U.S.A. Camp Frank D. Merriill	Black's Farm Creek (new)
Murray	Coosa	USCE Resource Mgr. Office	Carters Lake
Pickens	Coosa	Big Canoe Subdivision	Pettit Lake
Baldwin	Oconee	City of Milledgeville	Oconee River
Barrow	Oconee	City of Winder	Mulberry River
Clarke	Oconee	City of Athens - Clarke County	Middle Oconee River
Clarke	Oconee	City of Athens - Clarke County	Sandy Creek
Clarke	Oconee	City of Athens - Clarke County	North Oconee River
Greene	Oconee	City of Greensboro	Lake Oconee
Hancock	Oconee	City of Sparta	Lake Sinclair
Laurens	Oconee	City of Dublin	Oconee River
Putnam	Oconee	Georgia Power Co. - Plant Branch	Lake Sinclair
Banks	Savannah	Banks County	Mountain Creek Reservoir
Chatham	Savannah	Savannah I & D	Abercorn Creek
Elbert	Savannah	City of Elberton	Beaver Dam Creek
Franklin	Savannah	City of Royston	North Fork Broad River
Franklin	Savannah	City of Lavonia	Crawford Creek
Jackson	Savannah	City of Commerce	Grove River Reservoir
Richmond	Savannah	City of Augusta - Richmond County	Augusta Canal
Stephens	Savannah	City of Toccoa	Lake Toccoa (Cedar Creek)
Fannin	Tennessee	City of McCaysville	Toccoa River
Fannin	Tennessee	City of Blue Ridge	Toccoa River
Rabun	Tennessee	City of Clayton	Black's Creek
Rabun	Tennessee	Rabun Gap Nacoochee School	Sutton Branch
Towns	Tennessee	City of Hiawassee	Lake Chatuge
Union	Tennessee	Notla Water Authority	Lake Nottely
Union	Tennessee	City of Blairsville	Nottely River

State Protected Rivers

Broad River (Middle and North Forks)
Chatooga River
Chattahoochee River
Chestatee River
Etowah River
Hudson River
Nottely River
Tallulah River

Other Significant Rivers

Chauga River
Hiwassee River
Little River (East and West Forks)
Little Tennessee River
Middle Oconee River
North Oconee River

River Corridors

River corridors are essential to maintain the proper functioning of a stream and its associated natural environments. Often featuring flood plains and/or wetlands, a river corridor serves as a filtration system for storm water entering into the stream, an area to store excess floodwaters, and habitat for numerous plant and animal species. These areas also serve as significant educational, scenic, and recreational opportunities.

Georgia's 1991 Mountain & River Corridor Protection Act designated any portion of a river that has a minimum average annual flow of 400 cubic feet per second as a Protected River. As with watersheds and other Part V elements, the DNR criteria for Protected River Corridors focuses on the location and volumes of impervious surfaces and land disturbance, requiring setbacks to preserve the natural vegetative buffer along the stream banks. In addition, measures to control the use of septic tanks and/or on-site chemicals are established to limit the potential to contaminate the water way. Protection of the Chattooga River is aided by its federal designation as a Wild & Scenic River, which imposes its own strict criteria.

Five river basins are partially located in the region: The Coosa River Basin, the Tennessee River Basin, the Chattahoochee River Basin, the Savannah River Basin, and the Oconee River Basin. As a result of the topography and configuration of counties, the 13-county area includes the headwaters of several major rivers and streams that, along with their tributaries, are all considered sensitive due to the topography and the high demands placed on these resources. Because of these conditions, several other major rivers have been identified as regionally significant in addition to the identified State Protected Rivers. These are all large enough to be classified as rivers and most feature regional roles as resources for water supplies, recreation and scenic tourism, and as critical ecological habitats.

The Chattahoochee River is arguably the most important water resource in the region and possibly the state. It originates in the Blue Ridge Mountains and flows in a southerly direction through the Piedmont and Coastal Plain. It is the longest river in Georgia - 436 miles from its source in northeastern Georgia to the Florida line. The drainage area of the Chattahoochee River in the Georgia Mountains region is

1,179 square miles, including all of White County and portions of Hall, Habersham, Lumpkin, Dawson and Forsyth Counties. Smaller tributaries to the Chattahoochee River in the region include the Soquee and Little Rivers. The river is dammed to form Lake Lanier south of Gainesville, the first of several impoundments on the river. Below Buford Dam, the Chattahoochee is very heavily used by local governments in the Atlanta region, and supplies 70 percent of metropolitan Atlanta's water needs and over half of the State's residents. The Chattahoochee River is thus a major water resource not only to White County, but the region, State of Georgia and other states as well.

The Chestatee River runs primarily through Lumpkin County and provides another major artery for Lake Lanier. This river features popular spots for fishing, non-motorized watercraft and its tributaries also serve as public water supplies.

The Etowah River originates in Lumpkin County before winding through Dawson County and flowing westward, where it eventually empties into Lake Allatoona. The Etowah is recognized as a critical habitat for many listed federally endangered and threatened species of plants, fish and other animals. As recognized by one nominating party, *"…this watershed is more biologically diverse than the Columbia River Watershed and the Colorado River Watershed combined,"* due largely to the water's purity. The Etowah also serves as a water supply resource for Lumpkin, Dawson, Forsyth, Pickens and Cherokee Counties.

In Georgia, water bodies that are subject to contamination from non-point sources are managed through the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) program. This program seeks to assess land use and development conditions with the watershed of the impaired water body in an effort to identify the land area contributing the greatest amount of contaminants, and then identify possible remediation measures that will restore water quality to required levels. The program has developed hundreds of implementation plans and their updates, and these in turn have helped local governments and their stakeholders better manage infiltration and pollution of perennial water bodies.

For the purposes of this plan TMDL streams were reviewed but not included within the listing of RIRs because their impacts are being managed through other elements, such as the protected rivers category. Further, TMDL streams may change their condition based on the progress with

remediation measures. However, these are being referenced in this Plan as a reminder of the need for the GMRC, the local governments and other stakeholders to review and monitor impaired water bodies in order to restore healthy water conditions.

Vulnerability of the rivers stems from their susceptibility to infiltration and contamination, the loss of habitat and tree cover to support natural conditions, and the encroachment from new development that threatens to impact the ecology. Continued development may also increase flooding conditions in narrower corridors. All surface waters within the region have a high sensitivity to runoff related issues due to the general topography. If the region is to maintain the overall quality of the rivers and streams it is imperative that stream banks and river corridors are preserved to the best extent possible.

Historically development and agricultural operations have been permitted direct access to the streams, and while this has been generally curtailed there remains a need for further education and enforcement regarding legal rights and best management practices in this area.

Guidance for Appropriate Development Practices for new development within one mile of river corridors:

- Maintain or exceed all applicable local, State and federal regulations regarding river corridors
- Where possible, employ conservation design measures that minimize impervious surfaces, limit land disturbance and concentrates development away from sensitive resources
- Where possible, restore disturbed landscape using appropriate, native vegetation
- Where possible, locate on-site storage and use of chemicals, toxins and other possible contaminants away from shorelines and stream banks in excess of minimum standards and with aggressive layers of filtration in between.

General Policies and Protection Measures for local governments and stakeholders in managing river corridors:

- Ensure local regulations meet or exceed State and federal minimum standards

- Ensure regulations encourage conservation design and promote best mgmt. practices
- Ensure local review process considers RIRs
- Maintain up to date parcel data and accurate information about the river for use in review procedures
- Work with area stakeholders to consider and pursue land banks and other measures for conserving sensitive resources within the watershed
- Pursue development and implementation of local greenspace plan
- Regularly review best management practices with other stakeholders
- Regularly review water testing data; Compare with land use and development activity to monitor possible causes of any contamination.
- Support local stakeholders like *Riverkeeper*s and *Adopt-a-Stream*, reviewing reports about local waterways at least annually
- Pursue the development of, and implementation of, Implementation Plans for all TMDL streams within your community

Reservoirs

The state of Georgia does not feature any naturally occurring lakes. However, the topography and landscape of the Georgia Mountains Region places an emphasis on surface water and also aids in the potential for reservoirs. As a result, the region has several reservoirs already constructed with several more planned or already in the permitting phase.

The resulting water bodies add to the scenic beauty of the region as well as adding options for recreational use, but they are also a source for water supplies, provide flood management and harbor a vast and dynamic variety of wildlife. The reservoirs within the region also provide tourism and hydroelectric power on major metropolitan scales, providing significant economic attractions for the region.

Portions of these water bodies are protected by facets of the above stated DNR criteria, including Protected Rivers and Water Supply Watersheds. However, there is a need to protect more than simply those few water bodies for matters of ecological sustainability and some tourism, particularly against encroaching development that may yet reach currently undeveloped watersheds. Recognizing these water ways in a simple, comparable fashion should assist in the overall resource management and provide for more effective and efficient resource protection.

Regional Reservoirs – Georgia Mountains Region

Lake	***Shoreline (miles)***	***Water Volume (acres)***	***Visitors/ Year***	***Manager***	***Use***
Lake Lanier	692	38,000	7.5 M	USACE	Hydro, Flood Control, Water Supply
Lake Chatuge		7,050		TVA	Hydro, Water Supply
Lake Hartwell	962	56,000	10.0 M	USACE	Hydro
Lake Nottley		4,180		TVA	Hydro
Lake Burton		2,775		Ga Power	Hydro, Water Supply
Lake Seed	13	240		Ga Power	Hydro
Lake Rabun		834		Ga Power	Hydro
Lake Tallulah Falls	3.6	63		Ga Power	Hydro
Lake Tugalo	18	597		Ga Power	Hydro
Lake Yonah				Ga Power	Hydro

All of these lakes are considered highly valuable to local culture and economies, drawing visitors from within and from outside the region in addition to providing power and water sources. This high level of demand has increased the pressure to not only maintain the quality and quantity of water within the reservoirs but lead to a call for new reservoir construction, as well. There is an increased chance the region will be exporting more water in the future depending on developments throughout the state, and the primary use of some existing reservoirs is subject to change.

The sensitivity of all these reservoirs is rated high, particularly those experiencing the most visitors and pressure for surrounding lakeside development. Threats from infiltration and degradation of habitat and shoreline are the most prominent issues, as well as concerns for overuse and mismanagement. Now that they have attained such a crucial role in the region's economy and character

they must be more critically monitored and managed.

Lake Lanier is considered arguably the most valuable reservoir within Georgia, based upon its present use as a major source of public water supply, electric power generation, recreation, flood control and for assisting with downstream navigation for the Chattahoochee River. The reservoir is managed by the US Army Corps of Engineers and is the most popular singular attraction within the Georgia Mountains Region and a major source of economic development. More than two dozen parks and public access points line the lake shore, as well as several private marinas and resorts.

Currently Lanier is at the heart of a legal matter involving the States of Georgia, Alabama and Florida, specifically dealing with the ability of metro Atlanta governments to continue to draw as much water from the reservoir as currently done. At the same time, the Corps is revisiting the lake's management plan and has undertaken a 9 month long public commenting process leading up to their assessment of needs and demands. The outcomes from these efforts will impact stakeholders' interests in keeping the lake at or near full pull and making sure the region's residents have ample water supply throughout the Chattahoochee River watershed. Regardless of the eventual outcomes, however, Lake Lanier will continue to serve as a major resource and demands as much protection as possible. The lake has been a spark for higher end development and is the impetus for many small businesses within at least 4 counties.

Like Lanier, Lake Hartwell is another prime tourist attraction that provides power generation and water supply. As a whole Lake Hartwell sees more tourists than Lanier, though not all of this can be credited to Georgia or the region as much of the lake lies within South Carolina. Lake Hartwell has spurred growth in the eastern part of the region, especially as industrial development has taken hold along I-85 and SR 17.

Lake Burton is the first of a series of lakes located along the Tallulah River in Rabun County: Lake Burton, Seed Lake, Lake Rabun, Tallulah Falls Lake, and Lake Tugalo. Each of these reservoirs is predominantly fed through the Tallulah River, with the exception of Lake Tugalo which is also replenished by the Chattooga River. According to recent DNR data each of Rabun County's reservoirs fully supports their designated use but several streams in the watersheds are listed as

impaired. Maintaining water quality in reservoirs is most effectively accomplished by regular monitoring and mitigation or restoration efforts throughout the watersheds.

Georgia Power published the Lake Burton Ecosystem Status Report in 2004, which summarizes the company's efforts as it monitors water quality of its reservoirs on a three-month cycle for a number of indicators including dissolved oxygen, water temperature, pH, total phosphorus, chlorophyll, turbidity, and fecal coliform. The study found that over the past 10 years water quality measurements have remained very consistent and overall water quality has not been degraded. Siltation is cited as the number one concern, as significant inputs of sediment have been recorded from the feeder streams of Lake Burton, especially from the Tallulah River and Timson Creek. It is estimated that 75% of Lake Burton's sediment comes from unpaved roads or road construction activities, runoff from building constructions, and homeowner's activities, respectively. Because of similar land use throughout the entire Tallulah River watershed, water quality of the reservoirs downstream can be assumed to be vaguely similar to that found on Lake Burton.

Georgia Power also estimates that the housing density around Lake Burton has increased by 100% over the past 10 years, the majority of which are summer or vacation homes. Year round populations are estimated at 25% of all residents. Because of the limited land area available in Rabun County, due to the large land holdings of the USDA Forest Service and Georgia Power, continued development is expected around Lake Burton.

Lake Tugalo is the most downstream reservoir of the Georgia Power lakes in Rabun County, located at the confluence of the Tallulah and Chattooga Rivers. Rabun County, Habersham County, and South Carolina's Oconee County all converge at Lake Tugalo. This lake is worthy of special note because of its pristine environmental setting, where canyon-like walls rise nearly 1,000 feet above the surface of the water. The Chattahoochee National Forest (Georgia) and the Sumter National Forest (South Carolina) largely manage the land surrounding Lake Tugalo.

Guidance for Appropriate Development Practices for new development within one mile of reservoirs:

- Maintain or exceed all applicable local, State and federal regulations regarding reservoirs

- Where possible, employ conservation design measures that minimize impervious surfaces, limit land disturbance and concentrates development away from sensitive resources
- Where possible, restore disturbed landscape using appropriate, native vegetation
- Where possible, locate on-site storage and use of chemicals, toxins and other possible contaminants away from shorelines and stream banks in excess of minimum standards and with aggressive layers of filtration in between.

General Policies and Protection Measures for local governments and stakeholders in managing reservoirs:

- Ensure local regulations meet or exceed State and federal minimum standards
- Maintain communication with the *Army Corps of Engineers*, *Tennessee Valley Authority* or other third party reservoir managing authority
- Ensure regulations encourage conservation design and promote best mgmt. practices
- Ensure local review process considers RIRs
- Maintain up to date parcel data and accurate information about the watershed for use in review procedures
- Work with area stakeholders to consider and pursue land banks and other measures for conserving sensitive resources within the watershed
- Pursue development and implementation of local greenspace plan
- Regularly review best management practices with other stakeholders
- Regularly review water testing data; Compare with land use and development activity to monitor possible causes of any contamination.
- Support local stakeholders like *Riverkeeper*s and *Adopt-a-Stream*, reviewing reports about local waterways at least annually

Protected Mountains

As implied by the name, mountains are a critical environmental feature within the Georgia Mountains region. This is not only for their role in the area's scenic beauty and tourism, but also in how the mountains have shaped the prevailing culture and ecology. The fragile nature of mountain areas, with their sensitive environmental setting and intrinsic visual qualities, has created the need for special protection of these locations. Mountain Protection is included in the DNR's minimum planning standards, which local governments must develop and implement. Areas to be designated under mountain protection include all areas above the 2,200' elevation line as well as those areas that have slopes of 25 percent or greater. Some ridge tops, crests and summits may still fall within this designation even if they do not meet the established conditions to establish continuity of space and ecological integrity.

Local governments have the responsibility to develop and adopt a Mountain Protection Plan that addresses the effects of activities that are located within the Mountain Protection designation. Specific concerns of the Mountain Protection Plan include the health, safety, welfare, and private property rights of county constituents. Unique features of the mountain habitat including threatened or protected plants and animals, visual qualities, ground-water and surface-water resources, and the plan's influence on surrounding natural areas should be addressed.

Most of the region's protected mountains lie within the Chattahoochee National Forest and/or State Parks. What peaks that do reside outside these protected areas are managed by the local governments but subject to more pressure for development or access, and as such are at risk for adverse impacts. Some residential development has already encroached upon select ridge lines, as well as occasional antennae or cellular towers. *If the integrity of the region's mountains is to remain as pristine as possible, this type of development must be properly managed, both for the sake of the scenic beauty and local ecology*.

PARKS & CONSERVATION AREAS

The Georgia Mountains Region contains an abundance of natural or cultural resource areas already under some form of preservation, such as state parks, wildlife management areas and US Forest Service lands. These areas may include

designated activities or forms of permitted development, but do include stringent environmental protection standards and constitute a large portion of the existing natural landscape within the region.

State Parks

The same scenic beauty that defines the Appalachian culture of the Georgia Mountains Region is also at the heart of why these 13 counties contain the most State Parks of any region in Georgia. Some of these properties are coincidental with the Chattahoochee National Forest, carving out key portions of the conserved lands to permit more public access to many waterfalls, trails and viewsheds. Ten parks are already established within the region with 2 more scheduled to come online pending final development plans and funding, and local governments are working more closely with park managers to ensure their viability and maximize their appeal.

GEORGIA
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
STATE PARKS & HISTORIC SITES

State Parks – Georgia Mountains Region

State Park	Address	City	Zip	Acres
Black Rock Mtn.	3085 Black Rock Mountain Parkway	Mountain City	30562	1,743
Tallulah Gorge	338 Jane Hurt Yarn Dr	Tallulah Falls	30573	2,739
Moccasin Creek	3655 Highway 197	Clarkesville	30523	32
Tugaloo	1763 Tugaloo State Park Rd	Lavonia	30553	393
Hart (ORA)	330 Hart Park Road	Hartwell	30643	147
Vogel	405 Vogel State Park Road	Blairsville	30512	233
Unicoi	1788 Highway 356	Helen	30545	1,050
Smithgall Woods	61 Tsalaki Trail	Helen	30545	5,664
Victoria Bryant	1105 Bryant Park Rd	Royston	30662	502
Amicalola Falls	418 Amicalola Falls Lodge Rd	Dawsonville	30534	829
Total				***13,332***

General Assessment - The value of these lands is considered immense both in terms of expanse of natural landscape preserved but also for their economic development. The State Park facilities are critical economic drivers for the Georgia Mountains Region, and for the State, in two major ways: Collectively, these parks are responsible for much of the millions of tourists that comes to the Georgia Mountains Region, in the form of hikers, campers, outdoor enthusiasts and general visitors simply longing for a sample of the mountains. Further, the availability of on-site amenities such as restrooms, visitors' centers, lodges and other facilities allows the Parks to host a greater variety of demographics not otherwise able or willing to experience the natural wilderness of the National Forest. This has been crucial as the region draws more visitors from expanding metro Atlanta, and in terms of selling the quality of life available to new full-time residents within the area. For these reasons the State Parks are considered invaluable resources for the region and the State, and the prevailing trends suggests the tourist demand for this access will continue to increase.

The State Park system is managed through the Department of Natural Resources, which features an overall guidance plan for the system as a whole as well as individual management plans for each park. Through these internal measures the Department is careful not to allow the demands of tourism overburden the local environment or ecology, and works routinely with the US Forest Service, US Army Corps of Engineers and other partners in balancing all interests.

Due to the State ownership and oversight by the DNR, vulnerability factors for the State Parks is considered low with regard to immediate loss or degradation of environment and habitat. Remaining concerns lie within the realm of management of surrounding properties, or the loss of funding to properly manage the Parks. As the region grows in population and in terms of tourist appeal, it is a near certainty the demand for these lands and facilities will remain high, which should permit DNR greater opportunity to secure funding but it may yet need to require continued outside support to sustain the level of service desired.

State Parks are not susceptible to direct loss of habitat like unprotected lands but they can be adversely impacted from encroaching development or from incompatible land uses at adjoining properties. As surrounding habitat is taken away, the result is increased demand on the park land from animals

and visitors. There is also the possibility of overuse or mismanagement, as well as regular threats from fire, criminal actions, and various forms of vandalism.

(Note: General descriptions of individual parks may include language taken directly from the www.gastateparks.org web site. Such text will be indicated in parentheses.)

Black Rock Mountains State Park

Black Rock Mountain State Park, named for its sheer cliffs of dark-colored biotite gneiss, encompasses some of the most outstanding country in Georgia's Blue Ridge Mountains. Located astride the Eastern Continental Divide at an altitude of 3,640 feet, Black Rock Mountain is the highest state park in Georgia. Numerous scenic overlooks provide spectacular 80-mile vistas of the Southern Appalachians, and several hiking trails lead visitors past wildflowers, cascading streams, small waterfalls and lush forests. The summit visitor center and picnic tables are popular with travelers in northeast Georgia. Nearby are Tallulah Gorge State Park, Moccasin Creek State Park, and the town of Clayton with art galleries, restaurants and shops, as well as the Foxfire Museum and proposed Tallulah Falls Rails-to-Trails Greenway.

Rental cottages with mountain views and a modern campground make this a great mountain getaway. Tent campers can even choose from more secluded "walk-in" sites or primitive backpacking sites. Campers with RVs should be aware that the park entrance includes a two-mile climb with a 10% grade, and the campground has a number of tight turns. Most camping rigs exceeding 25 feet are not recommended. Due to the incline and the high elevation, the park may close during periods of icy weather.

Tallulah Gorge State Park

One of the most spectacular canyons in the eastern U.S., Tallulah Gorge is two miles long and nearly 1,000 feet deep. Visitors can hike rim trails to several overlooks, or they can obtain a free permit (limit 100 per day) to hike down to the gorge floor. A suspension bridge sways 80 feet above the rocky bottom, providing spectacular views of the river and waterfalls. Exhibits in the park's Jane Hurt Yarn Interpretive Center highlight the rich history of this Victorian resort town, as well as the rugged terrain and fragile ecosystem of the area. Additionally, an award-winning film takes viewers on a dramatic journey through the gorge.

Permits are required for all people accessing the gorge floor or rock climbing/rappelling, but not exploring the rim trails. The only approved trail for entering or leaving the gorge floor is the Hurricane Falls staircase. Both the Hurricane Falls staircase and gorge floor are very strenuous. Trails entering or exiting the gorge, as well as those on the gorge floor, are very strenuous. Tallulah Gorge State Park is operated by a public-private partnership with Georgia Power Company. Many facilities, including the campground, are operated by Georgia Power rather than the Department of Natural Resources.

Moccasin Creek State Park

Known as the park "where spring spends the summer," Moccasin Creek is nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains on the shores of lovely 2,800-acre Lake Burton. Despite its mountain location, the park is relatively flat, offering easy navigation for large RVs, children's bicycles and wheelchairs. A fully accessible fishing pier sits above a trout-filled creek open only to physically challenged visitors, senior citizens and children. Tour the adjacent trout rearing station, hike on several nearby mountain trails or simply relax in this peaceful setting. The park's central location makes it a perfect jumping off spot for mountain exploration.

Unicoi State Park

Nestled in the north Georgia mountains, situated on 1,063 acres between the Chattahoochee National Forest and the Alpine Village of Helen, Unicoi is one of Georgia's most beloved state parks. Throughout the year, the park offers outstanding programs which focus on natural, cultural, historical and recreational resources. Outdoor enthusiasts will enjoy hiking and biking on scenic mountain trails, especially those leading to Helen and Anna Ruby Falls. Guests can enjoy the park's 12 miles of nature and hiking trails, lake and trout stream fishing, four lighted tennis courts, softball and volleyball area, picnic facilities, world class mountain bike trail and numerous picnic tables located throughout the park

The lodge has 100 guest rooms with mountain views, spacious conference rooms from a traditional ballroom to the unique Beach House on the lake, wireless internet, coffeemakers, irons/ironing boards and individual climate

control. Craft lovers should not miss the lodge gift shop specializing in hand-made quilts and local pottery.

Vogel State Park

One of Georgia's oldest and most popular state parks, Vogel is located at the base of Blood Mountain in the Chattahoochee National Forest. Driving from the south, visitors pass through Neel Gap, a beautiful mountain pass near Brasstown Bald, the highest point in Georgia. Vogel is particularly popular during the fall when the Blue Ridge Mountains transform into a rolling blanket of red, yellow and gold leaves.

Hikers can choose from a variety of trails, including the popular four-mile Bear Hair Gap loop, an easy one-mile lake loop, and the challenging 13-mile Coosa Backcountry Trail. Cottages, campsites and primitive backpacking sites provide a range of overnight accommodations. The park's 22-acre lake is open to non-motorized boats. During summer, visitors can cool off at the scenic lakeside beach.

Smithgall Woods/ Dukes Creek CA

Smithgall Woods is an elegant mountain retreat perfect for romantic getaways, intimate weddings and outings with friends. Five beautifully decorated cottages provide a total of 14 bedrooms with private baths, telephones and television. A one-mile trail leads from the cottages to Dukes Creek Falls (cottage guests only).

North Georgia's premier trout stream, Dukes Creek, runs through this spectacular mountain property and is a favorite for catch-and-release fishing. Southern Living Magazine called it "the holiest of holies in Georgia trout-catching circles." Reservations for trout fishing are offered only on certain days, so visitors should call for a current schedule. Five miles of trails and 18 miles of roads allow hikers and bicyclists to explore hardwoods, streams and wildlife.

This quiet mountain retreat was acquired by the state in 1994 as a gift-purchase from Charles A. Smithgall, Jr., a noted conservationist and businessman. The Dukes Creek Conservation Area is adjacent to Smithgall Woods, with the two properties jointly managed by DNR.

Tugaloo State Park

Situated on a wooded peninsula, Tugaloo's cottages and most campsites offer spectacular views of 55,590-acre Lake Hartwell in every direction. Some cottages even have private boat docks for overnight guests. Tent campers can choose between the developed campground or primitive campsites located a short walk from the parking area.

Fishing is excellent year-round, and large-mouth bass are swimming, water skiing, sailing and boating. A six-lane megaramp with restrooms and trailer parking opened in July 2010. Both the Sassafras and Muscadine trails wind through oak, walnut, mulberry and cherry trees. The name "Tugaloo" comes from an Indian name for the river which once flowed freely prior to the construction of Hartwell Dam.

Hart State Recreation Area

This self-registration campground is open on a first-come, first-served basis from March 15 through September 15. Most campsites are near the scenic shore and all feature water and electrical hook-ups. A comfort station with hot showers and a pumping station are nearby. Law enforcement personnel make regular rounds through the park. The nearest location for ice and sundries is in Hartwell about two miles away. The day-use boat ramp will remain open year-round.

Boating, water skiing and fishing at Lake Hartwell are prime reasons to visit this site in northeast Georgia. Large mouth bass, hybrid bass, striper, black crappie, bream, rainbow trout and wall-eyed pike can be found in the sparkling waters of this 55,590-acre reservoir. The day-use boat ramp offers easy access to all water sports.

Victoria Bryant State Park

Nestled in the rolling hills of Georgia's upper piedmont, this is one of northern Georgia's best kept secrets. A beautiful stream flows through the park, providing the perfect setting for an after-picnic stroll. Hikers can follow either the short nature trail or the longer perimeter trail that winds through hardwoods and crosses creeks. Animal lovers should keep an eye out for wildlife while passing food plots along the perimeter trail. Two ponds are open for public fishing (license required). Golfers will enjoy Highland Walk Golf Course with clubhouse, golf pro and junior/senior discounts.

Amicalola Falls State Park

Amicalola Falls State Park *is one of Georgia's most popular state parks,* especially during the fall for the changing colors of the leaves. *Amicalola, a Cherokee Indian word meaning "tumbling waters," is an appropriate name for these 729-foot falls ~~ the tallest cascading waterfall east of the Mississippi River. An 8.5-mile approach trail leads from the park to Springer Mountain, the southern end of the famed 2,135-mile Appalachian Trail. However, numerous other trails are available for shorter journeys.*

A beautiful lodge at the top of the mountain is popular with guests who prefer traditional hotel comforts, while the cottages and campgrounds are more rustic. The park's Maple Restaurant is known for its spectacular views and Sunday brunch buffet. For hikers who enjoy more adventure, a 5-mile trail leads to the backcountry Len Foote Hike Inn that serves the southern terminus for the Appalachian Trail.

Wildlife Management Areas

Within Georgia's DNR, the Wildlife Resources Division (WRD) *is charged with conserving, enhancing and promoting Georgia's wildlife resources, including game and nongame animals, fish and protected plants. WRD is comprised of four sections – Game Management, Fisheries Management, Law Enforcement and Nongame Conservation, which regulate hunting, fishing and boat operation, protect nongame and endangered wildlife, provide conservation education and enforce laws for the protection and use of Georgia's natural resources.*

This Division is responsible for more than 90 Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) throughout the state, including one within an hour's drive of every Georgian. The WMA system permits licensed hunters access to nearly one million acres of land managed specifically for hunting opportunities and for conservation of natural resources. The WMA lands provide habitat for a wide variety of game species including white-tailed deer, wild turkey, waterfowl, bobwhite quail, rabbit and other small game species.

Within the Georgia Mountains Region there are 11 Wildlife management Areas comprising more than 110,000 acres. As with the State Parks, some of these are located within or

adjacent to the Chattahoochee National Forest, and serve to build a network of habitats that support wildlife and protect the environment.

Wildlife Management Areas
Georgia Mountains Region

WMA	Chattahoochee NF	Acres
Chattahoochee	Y	25,150
Dawson Forest		25,000
Hart County		1,000
Allen Creek		
Wilson Shoals		2,800
Chestatee	Y	25,000
Warwoman	Y	15,800
Swallow Creek	Y	19,000
Lula Bridge		513
Lake Russell	Y	17,300
Coopers Creek	Y	30,000
Total		***110,413***

Chattahoochee National Forest

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS) is a Federal agency that manages public lands in national forests and grasslands. The Forest Service is also the largest forestry research organization in the world, and provides technical and financial assistance to state and private forestry agencies. The mission of the USFS is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. Within Georgia the USFS has two national forests, the Chattahoochee and the Oconee, administered by one Forest Supervisor headquartered in Gainesville, GA.

The Chattahoochee National Forest encompasses a total of 749,689 acres (1,171 square miles) in 18 counties within northern Georgia. It attracts many visitors each year due to its mountain vistas, whitewater streams and scenic landscapes. In addition to its recreational opportunities, the Chattahoochee National Forest has valuable resources of timber, fuel wood, and minerals and serves as a major preserve for vital environmental resources and habitats.

The Chattahoochee National Forest as a whole is comprised mostly of cove hardwoods and upland hardwoods forest types, dominated by tree stands aged 40 to 80 years. Major tree species include white and red oak, hickory, yellow poplar, shortleaf pine, Virginia pine, and eastern white pine. For animals, over 500 species of wildlife are known to exist in

the Chattahoochee National Forests, including major game such as deer, turkey, squirrel, grouse, quail, raccoon, fox, dove, woodcock and bear. The area also contains 19,352 acres of public lakes and numerous trout streams that support wild populations of brook, brown and rainbow trout.

Recreation areas and sites are composed of "dispersed" recreation (hiking, camping, picnicking, fishing, hunting and riding) and "developed" recreation (camping, picnicking, swimming and boating). Major recreational areas within the Chattahoochee National Forest is include the Appalachian Trail, several State Parks and Wildlife management Areas, many popular waterfalls and a variety of additional hiking trails.

Vulnerability - The Land and Resource Management Plan (*Forest Plan*) for the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forests establishes long-range goals and objectives, specific management prescriptions for 10-15 year time periods, standards and guidelines for management, and monitoring procedures to assure plan implementation. The Forest Plan should be referenced for information relating to the management of National Forest Lands within the Georgia Mountains Region, and the latest version cites the following local issues for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests:

- *Chattooga River Watershed - Issue Statement: How can the National Forests manage the Chattooga River watershed for desired social and ecological benefits while protecting the outstanding values of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River corridor?*

- *Red-cockaded Woodpecker - Issue Statement: (1) What portions of the Oconee National Forest should be designated as a habitat management area (HMA) for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW). (2) Should it be a Forest Plan goal to acquire lands in order for the Oconee to be a recovery area for the RCW, or maintain current land ownership and be a support area for the RCW?*

- *Recreational Gold Collecting - Issue Statement: How will recreational gold collecting be authorized on the Chattahoochee National Forest to meet public demand and minimize impacts to other resources?*

- *Special Uses - Issue Statement: How should the special uses of communication sites, utility corridors,*

and recreation residences be authorized on the Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forests?

Private Conservation Lands

In addition to the lands owned by the State and federal authorities, there are several private properties throughout the region that feature land set aside for conservation. These can include lands for passive recreation but also features a measure of environmental preservation. They are emblematic of the Appalachian heritage in the Georgia Mountains Region and how the economy and culture aspire for a relationship with the natural landscape.

These areas are often much smaller in size than State Parks or Wildlife Management Areas, but they do play an important role in building the collective ecological infrastructure for the region. By preserving these lands as additional habitat for plants and animals, and by buffering the natural landscape from continued development, these conservation lands contribute to the rural character and scenic beauty of the Georgia Mountains.

Private Conservation Land Holders within the Georgia Mountains Region

Ducks Unlimited	The Nature Conservancy of Ga.	North American Land Trust
Chattowa Open Land Trust	Georgia Land Trust	Atlanta Botanical Garden
Chattooga Conservancy	Camp Moccasin	Brasstown Valley Resort
Chicopee Woods Nature Preserve	Georgia Land Trust	Sautee Nacoochee Community Association

Highlights of select private conservation lands

Chicopee Woods Nature Preserve

Chicopee's 150-foot suspension bridge

The **1,500 acre Chicopee Woods Nature Preserve** is one of the largest greenspaces in the state of Georgia and features rolling topography and four diverse habitats - woodland, lake, stream and wetland. At Chicopee, thirteen miles of hiking trails lace through the preserve offering a view of the area's variety of beautiful flora and fauna species. As a protected area, all plants, animals, and natural materials must not be disturbed or taken from the preserve but are here to be enjoyed by all visitors now and in the future. Across the Preserve from the main complex is the Chicopee

Woods Aquatic Studies Center and Chicopee Lake, accessed by a 2.5 mile hike or a 10 minute car ride around the perimeter of the preserve. The lake and surrounding wetland provide a perfect spot for the study of pond life, wetland inhabitants, and birds, who favor this site as home or a stop on their migration route.

The larger **Chicopee Woods Area Park** is also home to the Chicopee Woods Golf Course, Chicopee Woods Agricultural Center, and SORBA (Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association) Mountain Bike Trails.

Also located in the Preserve is the Elachee Nature Science Center, one of the premier environmental education centers in Georgia serving over 35,000 students from more than 35 school systems and an additional 30,000 visitors to the museum and preserve each year. Elachee is celebrating more than 30 years of building environmental literacy for Georgians through quality educational experiences, museum exhibitions, special programs, and resources for schools and the general public. Elachee is a private not-for-profit institution supported by program fees, memberships, fundraising events, museum admissions, and donations from corporations, foundations, and individuals, and serves as the trustee for the Preserve in concert with the Chicopee Woods Park Commission.

Brasstown Valley Resort

Brasstown Valley Resort & Spa is a 134 room resort in Young Harris, Georgia, surrounded by the Blue Ridge Mountains at 2,150 foot elevation. It sits on 503 acres overlooking the valley, adjacent to the highest mountain in Georgia (Brasstown Bald). Brasstown Valley Resort is home to a links style championship golf course , features an adjacent spa and stables with 5 miles of riding trails. In addition, the Resort features 9 miles of hiking trails including connection to the Appalachian Trail.

Sautee Nacoochee Community Land Trust

Sautee Nacoochee Valley in central White County features a predominant part of the upper Chattahoochee River watershed and two historic districts listed in the National Register of Historic Places. As a sensitive environmental area this watershed includes several tributaries to the river, several concentrations of steep slopes along the mountain

sides, some wetlands and established agricultural lands.

This SN Land Trust holds property within the valley to protect the environment as well as two historic districts. The two historic districts contain a total of 86 historic sites with architectural styles including Italianate and Gothic Revival and a variety of house types including Plantation Plain, Double Pen, and Hall and Parlor. One of the most significant aspects of the Sautee and Nacoochee Valley Historic Districts is the relationship of the structures' setting, the valley landscape and distant views. This relationship is important to preserve and becomes more important than the architectural significance of the valleys' structures.

Guidance for Appropriate Development Practices for new development within one mile of parks and conservation areas:

- Maintain or exceed all applicable local, State and federal regulations regarding land development
- Where possible, employ conservation design measures that concentrates development away from sensitive resources
- Consider maximum buffers around the park/ conservation area for the purposes of protecting the landscape and integrity of the park
- Where possible, restore disturbed landscape using appropriate, native vegetation
- Where possible, integrate new trails and pathways with existing infrastructure within parks and conservation areas

General Policies and Protection Measures for local governments and stakeholders in parks and conservation areas:

- Review land use plan for management around parks and conservation areas
- Maintain communication with the Dept. of Natural Resources, US Forest Service or other managing authority
- Ensure regulations encourage conservation design and promote best mgmt. practices
- Ensure local review process considers RIRs

- Maintain up to date parcel data and accurate information about the watershed for use in review procedures
- Work with area stakeholders to consider and pursue land banks and other measures for conserving land around parks and conservation lands
- Pursue development and implementation of local greenspace plan
- Consider land use policies that require larger (3+ acres) minimum lot sizes in rural areas, and concentrate development and utilities in urban neighborhoods
- Ensure land use plan directs more intensive uses (manufacturing, regional commercial) away from parks and conservation areas.
- Develop policies that minimize or prohibit commercial signage and heavy lighting around parks and conservation areas
- Develop a trail, sidewalk and pathway plan that integrates trails within parks with access to adjoining residential areas and other destinations.

IMPLEMENTATION AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Implementation of the Regional Resource Plan will involve the direct pursuit of the policies and management measures identified throughout the document, promulgation of the Plan to all stakeholders, and the continued effort to establish and build upon the "green" environmental infrastructure of the region. GMRC staff will be responsible for acting upon the individual development guidelines and other management measures recommended for all Regionally Important Resources, and will produce a status report on the progress with every measure on an annual basis. Staff will also look to regularly produce a summary of the state of all RIRs and will monitor land use and development trends for evolving impacts on the region.

Green Infrastructure

The Georgia Departments of Community Affairs and Natural Resources recognize the need to preserve minimum standards and conditions in order for local resources and ecology to prove sustainable. To support this level of wise stewardship across the state, one goal of the *Regional Resource Plans* being written by the RCs is to build towards a vast and connected array of preserved areas: Natural landscapes with limited development that connect with one another as best as possible and allowing the vegetation and wildlife to flourish as a form of green infrastructure.

To this end, the *Regional Resource Plan* includes a map that shows how the various elements within the plan come together in the Georgia Mountains region. This will allow the GMRC and other stakeholders to view the region with an understanding of where there are preserved areas, how they fit within the regional context and how they should be managed so as to maximize their environmental health and viability. This map will be used in conjunction with the guidance measures for each resource to coordinate regional planning activities and as a guide for development within and around those resources.

Connectivity between Resources

As GMRC staff work to promote and implement the Plan, there will also be an effort to research the areas between confirmed Regionally Important Resources for the

purposes of identifying lands that could be used to establish future connections among conservation areas. In some cases these lands may not individually satisfy the criteria defined at the front of this Plan, but will aid the overall, regional environmental effort by expanding the green infrastructure and therefore aspiring for a more sustainable local ecology.

Broadcasting of the Regional Resource Plan

Upon adoption the *Regional Resource Plan* will be promulgated within the region by the Regional Commission through consultation with the local governments and with other stakeholder groups participating in the conservation and management of land and natural and cultural resources. This will include distribution of the Plan and regular communication with all parties about the coordination of implementation measures and supporting actions.

In working with the local governments GMRC staff will to encourage them to include the established *Regionally Important Resource Map* as conservation areas in their local comprehensive plan, and adopt all necessary protection measures, policies, and enhancement activities that will promote the preservation of these areas. To assist with this effort the GMRC will discuss the RIRs in their FY11 planning workshops, and will include reference to the *Regional Resource Plan* as a line item in comprehensive plan review materials.

GMRC staff will also consult with all land trusts and conservation or environmental protection groups active in the region in an effort to coordinate activities and foster greater protection of the areas identified on the *Regionally Important Resources Map*. Staff will seek to participate in meetings and workshops that promote the awareness of the *Regional Resource Plan*, and in turn alert the RC to events and conditions that may impact the identified resources. These stakeholder groups will also be invited to offer comment that can assist with the monitoring of implementation activities and help shape future updates to the Plan.

Update and Amendment Process

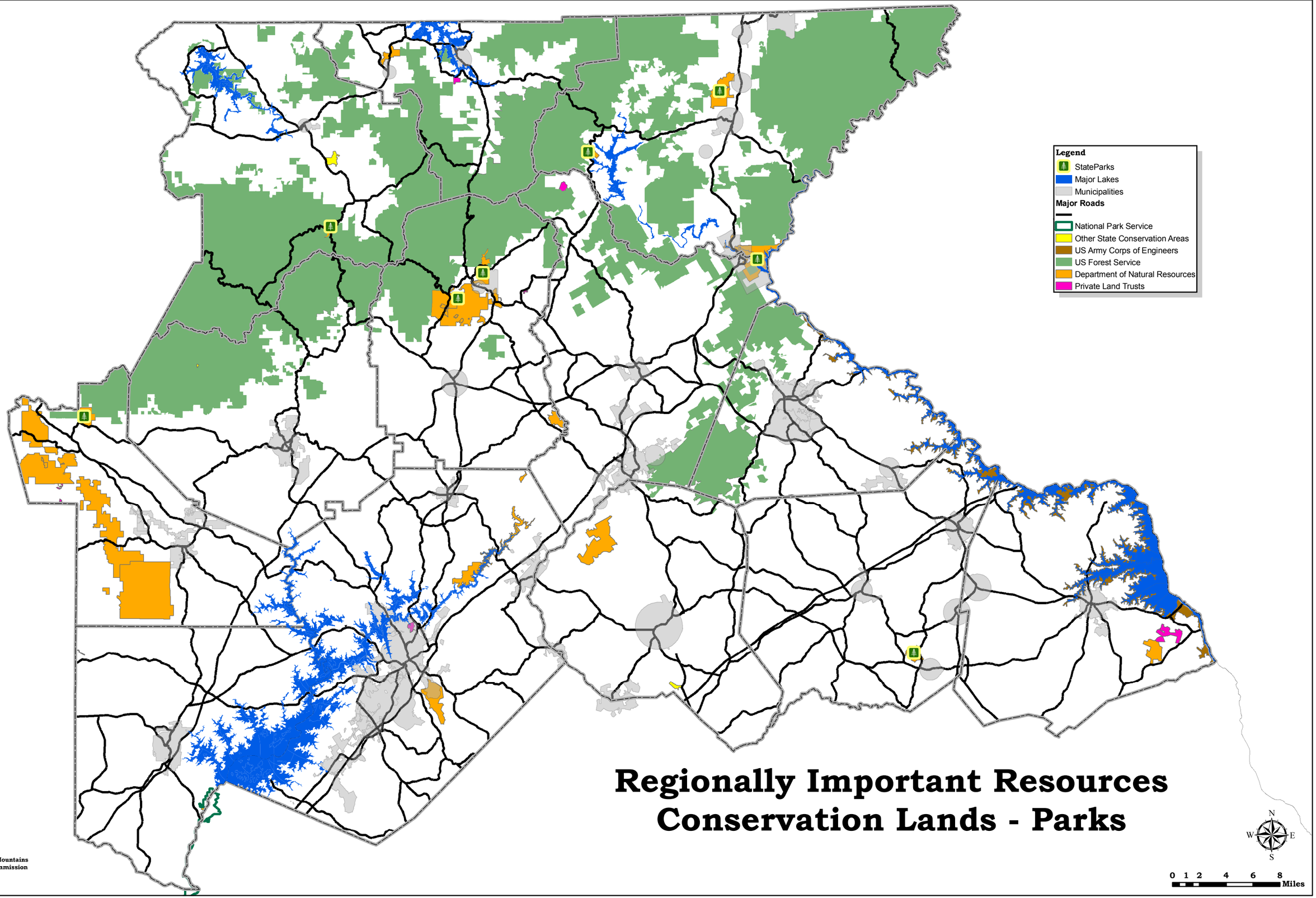
The GMRC will provide an annual summary of progress related to Plan implementation along with the annual

update of the Regional Agenda required by DCA. This will give GMRC staff and the Council an opportunity to regularly reflect on the status of regionally important resources and related management and conservation efforts. Further, the Plan will be updated at least every five years with a revised assessment of current conditions and a report of accomplishments regarding implementation measures.

Notable changes in conditions or the introduction of possible new threats will be used to trigger a review of the *Regional Resource Plan* and consideration for update or amending. Amendments may also be requested at the discretion of local governments and identified stakeholders. Amendments to the Plan will follow the rules and minimum standards outlined by DCA, and will include at least one public hearing in addition to outreach to the potentially affected stakeholders. If the Plan is ever amended then revised editions will be distributed to all member governments as well as all identified stakeholder groups within the region.

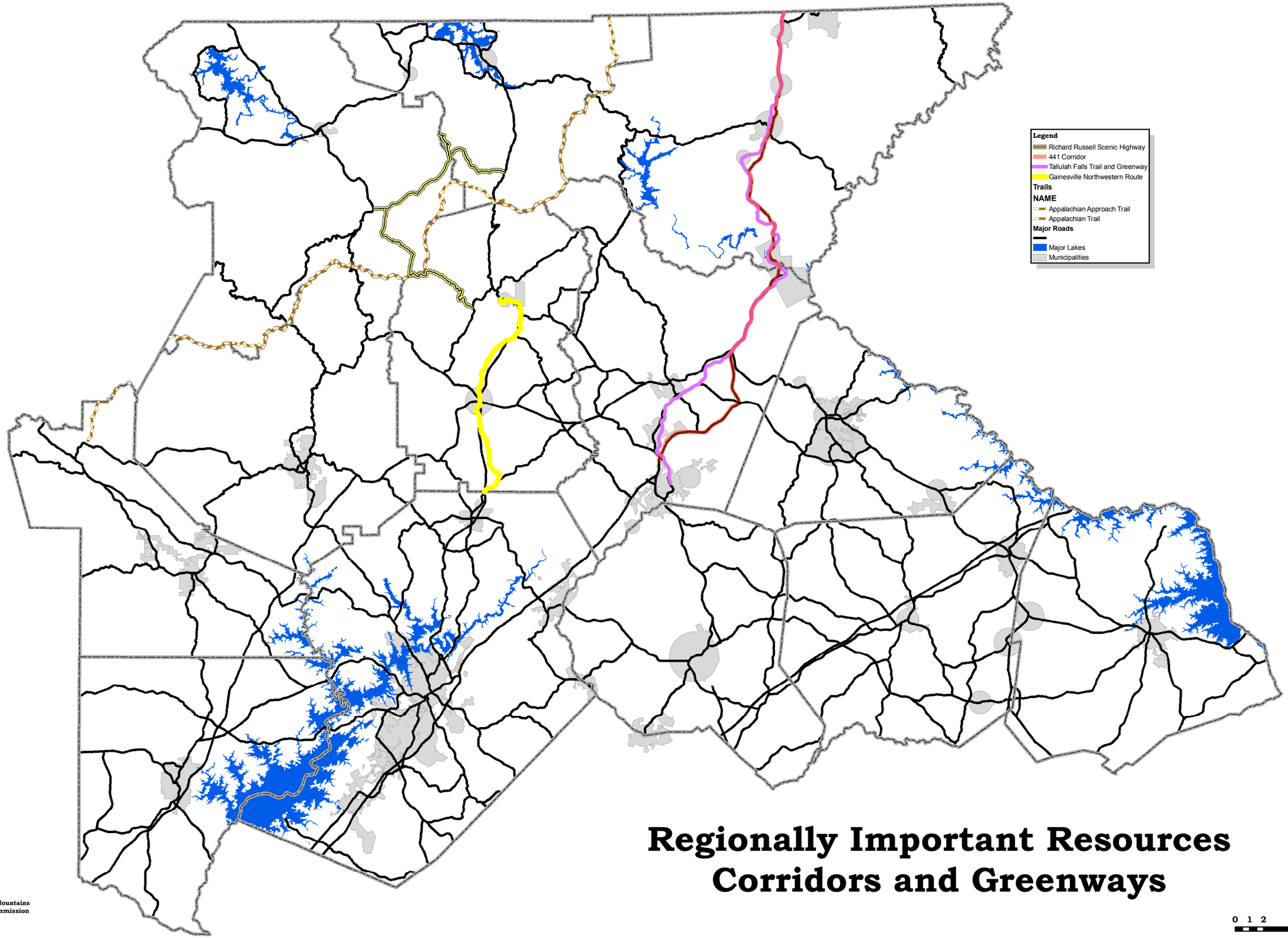
Alternative Dispute Resolution

Alternative dispute resolution of conflicts relating to the *Regional Resource Plan* may be initiated in accordance with the *Rules for Alternative Dispute Resolution* adopted by the State Board of Community Affairs.



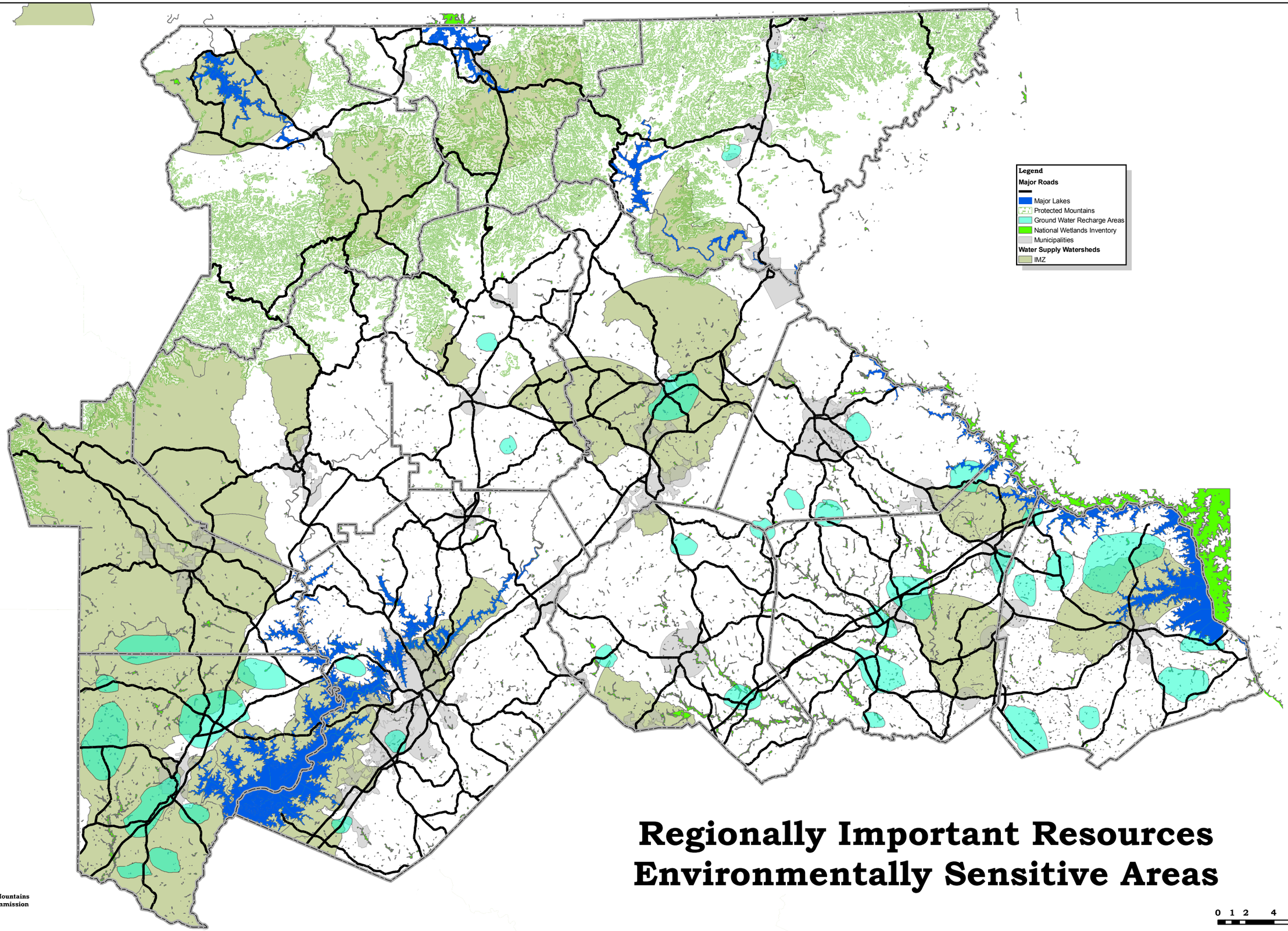
Regionally Important Resources
Conservation Lands - Parks

Georgia Mountains Regional Commission



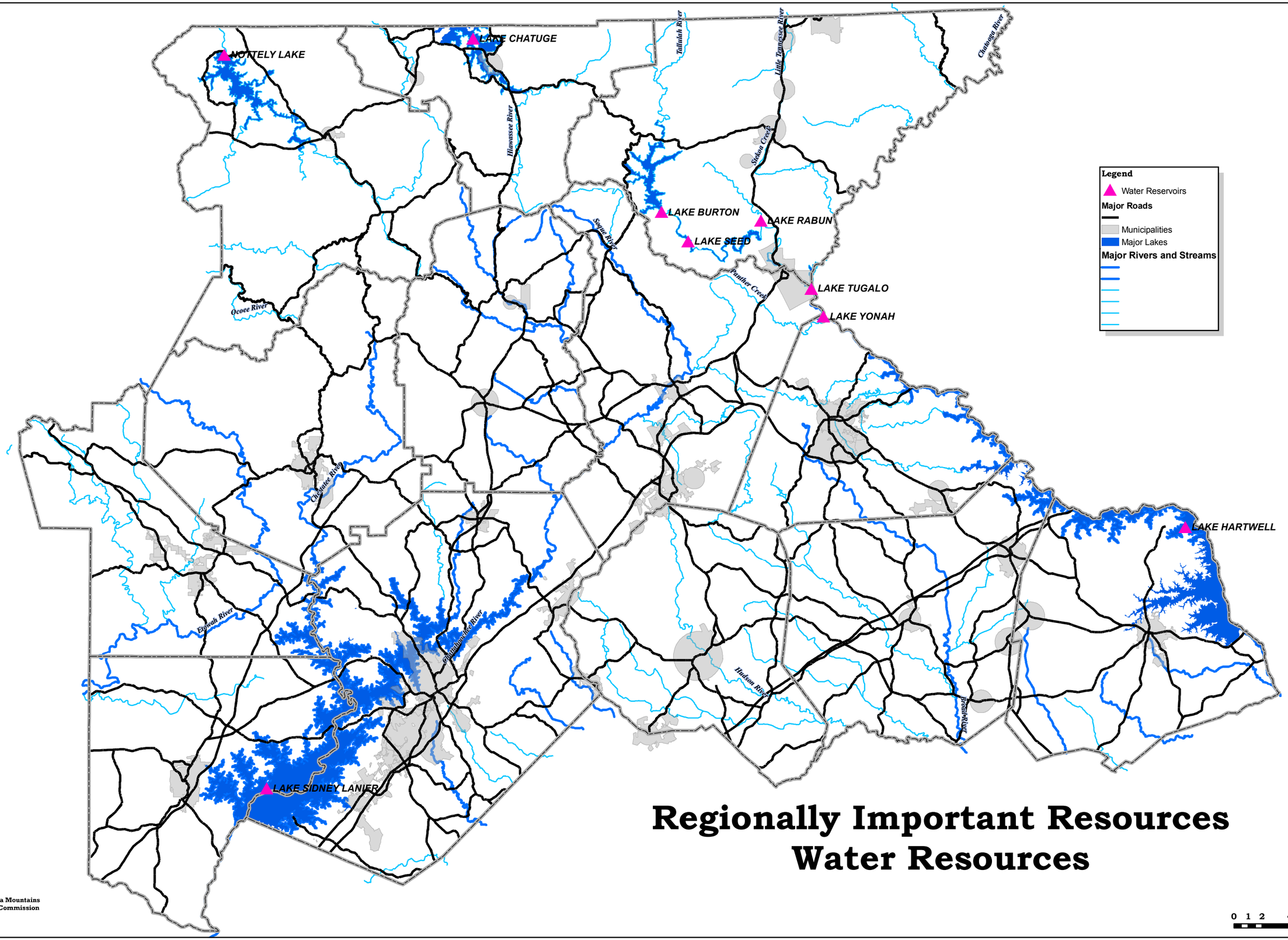
Regionally Important Resources
Corridors and Greenways

Georgia Mountains Regional Commission



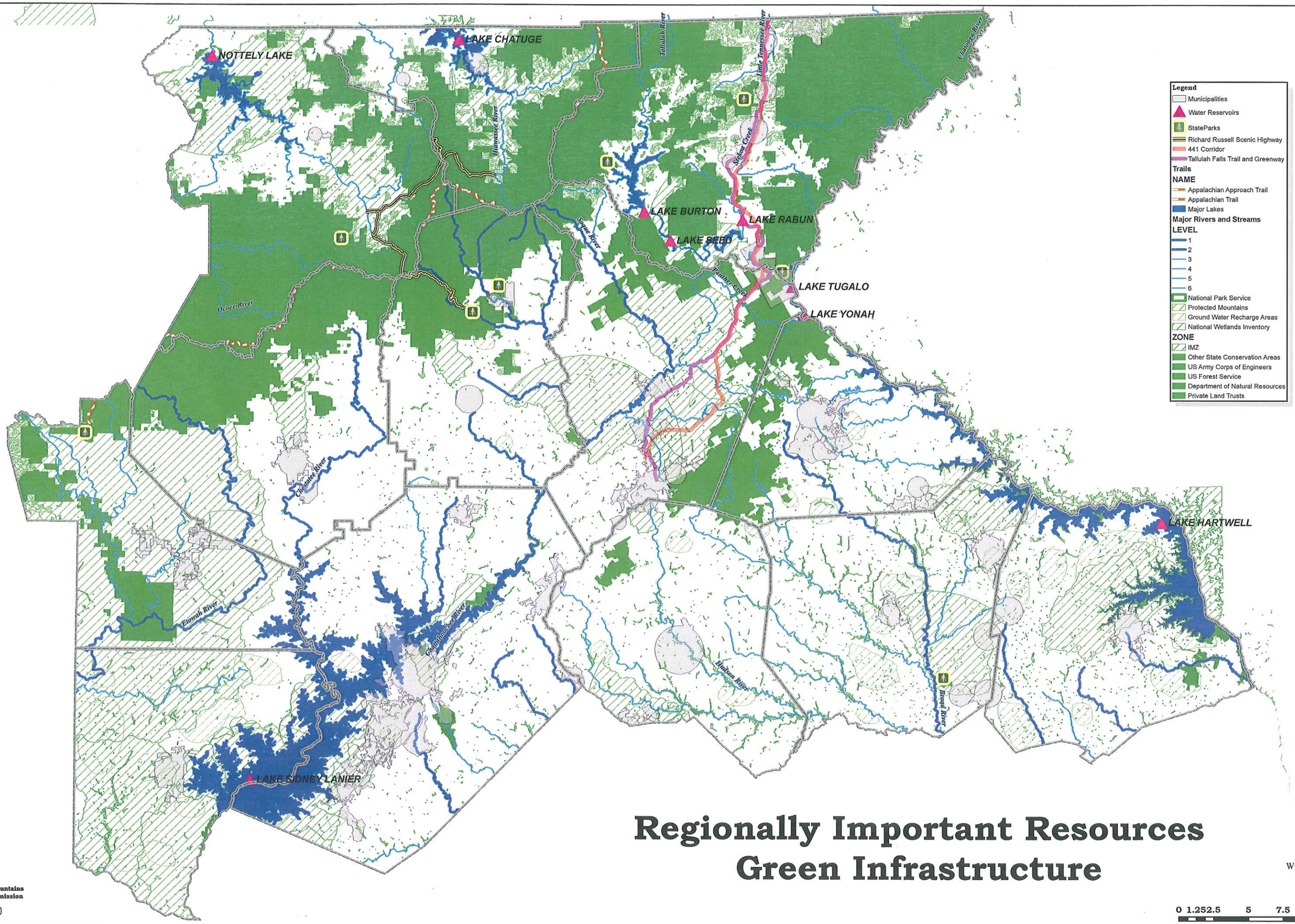
Regionally Important Resources
Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Georgia Mountains Regional Commission



Regionally Important Resources
Water Resources

Georgia Mountains Regional Commission



Regionally Important Resources
Green Infrastructure

Georgia Mountains Regional Commission

Revised: December 16, 2010