



# LOWER RICHLAND TOURISM PLAN

JUNE 2018



# CLIENT

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**DEDICATION TO SC HOUSE REP. JOE NEAL**

The Lower Richland Tourism Plan is dedicated to the memory of SC House Representative Joe Neal, who represented Lower Richland in the State Legislature for many years and was a major contributor to this planning effort. His leadership on many of the issues embodied in this plan, including conservation, agriculture, and economic development, will stand as a monument to his deep care for the people of Lower Richland.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**The Lower Richland Tourism Plan is a vision for a sustainable, inclusive tourism economy in Lower Richland that builds on and strengthens local nature and heritage assets.**

Lower Richland has an incredible wealth of natural and heritage resources. The region's history and culture are deeply intertwined with the Congaree bottomlands along the Congaree River, which are a world-class natural environment that features the Congaree National Park and large amounts of additional preserved bottomland habitat on private and county-owned properties. The Wateree River and Cook's Mountain represent additional opportunities to connect Piedmont and Lowcountry resources for visitors and residents of the Lower Richland area.

Meanwhile, Lower Richland residents and organizations maintain a deep interest in and knowledge of local history and heritage. Local historians have worked to uncover histories of African-American communities and inventories of local historic assets. As the newly-opened National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Visitor Center demonstrate, there is a deep interest nationwide in ensuring that stories of African-American enslavement, resistance, community, resilience, and progress can be shared and interpreted by visitors and residents of communities across the U.S. Lower Richland's historic resources and deep-rooted community present an ideal opportunity for telling the story of the African-American experience locally, but these resources must be connected, interpreted, and available to visitors in order to truly capture the power of the history that has shaped today's community.

This plan seeks to bring these natural and heritage resources to the forefront, while ensuring that Lower Richland residents are in the driver's seat -- meaning they are the

builders of local businesses that reap the dollars from increased visitation; they are the force and leadership behind the interpretation of local historical sites and heritage resources; and they are beneficiaries of increased open space, access to the natural environment and community services that also benefit visitors to the area. The measure of success for this effort is not simply increasing visitation to Lower Richland, but creating the connections to ensure increased tourism will help the local community thrive.

## **An Urgent, Sustainable, and Inclusive Vision for Lower Richland Tourism**

This plan builds on and supports several other ongoing planning initiatives, but most notably the Richland Renaissance, a multifaceted plan that seeks to leverage county-owned assets to improve the quality of life for county residents. The plan also comes at a time of incredible opportunity for Lower Richland to build its tourism market. In 2017, Congaree National Park attracted more visitors than in any previous year; over 160,000 people came to Lower Richland to visit this natural asset. Yet there are few services for these tourists either at the park or in the Lower Richland area. The large amount of designated wilderness area within the national park restricts its ability to provide more than basic boardwalks, limited paddling opportunities, and primitive camping facilities. Lower Richland contains no lodging options and few retail, restaurant, and dry goods options for residents or visitors. This situation offers immediate openings for recreational and tourism options that can complement the national park's offerings, and for new, locally-owned businesses to serve existing visitors as well as the increased visitation generated by new tourism options in the area.

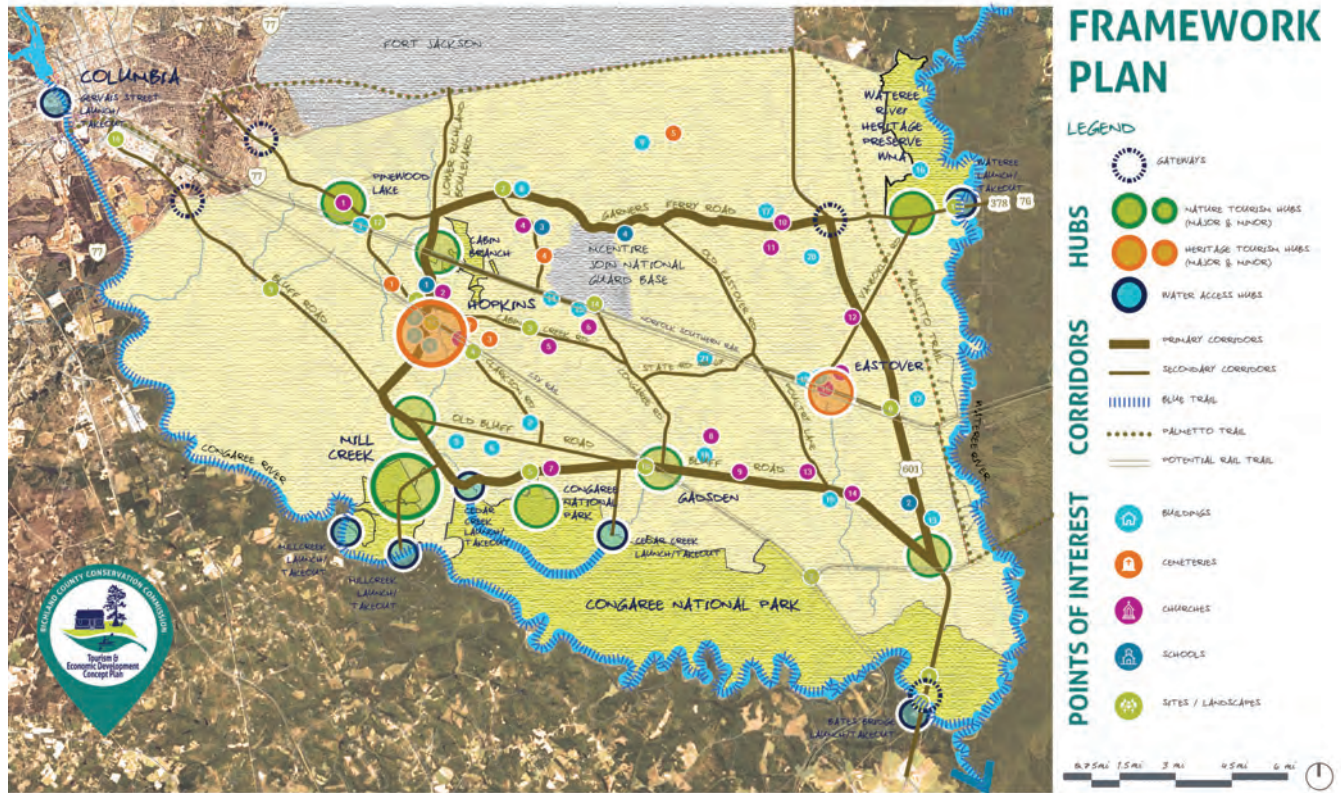
Opportunity to grow local tourism also stems from two new publicly-owned assets in the area: Richland County recently acquired two large conservation sites in the Lower Richland area, the Cabin Branch and Mill Creek tracts.



*The Lower Richland Tourism Plan provides a comprehensive framework for a sustainable tourism economy built around existing natural and cultural heritage.*

Cabin Branch is a 680-acre tract located on a number of former agricultural tracts just below the intersection of Garner’s Ferry Road and Lower Richland Boulevard. Mill Creek is a 2555-acre tract located directly on the Congaree River, close to the Congaree National Park, with access from Old Bluff Road. The county intends these tracts to serve multiple functions: as mitigation banks for stream and wetland restoration and conservation, as well as for the development of recreation, lodging, and sustainable tourism-oriented uses. Mill Creek, in particular, presents a major opportunity to showcase the Congaree bottomlands in an environment that can incorporate more creative and wide-ranging tourism uses than Congaree National Park and that can complement the amenities available at the national park, driving more tourism to both sites. Both the Cabin Branch and

Mill Creek sites are featured throughout this plan document, although the plan covers all of Lower Richland and includes many hubs, corridors, and natural and heritage assets in addition to these county-owned properties. Richland County and its residents are united in advancing the idea that tourism must be sustainable, meaning that it must leverage, support, and enhance local natural and heritage assets rather than harming these assets through overuse or highly intensive development. The plan also takes as a core principle the idea that tourism assets, and the economic opportunity they generate, must be inclusive and provide economic, recreational, and quality-of-life benefits for Lower Richland residents as well as enhancing visitation. Both of these ideas are explored further in the “Key Themes” section below.



## Framework Plan

The Framework Plan responds to the basic dictates of tourism planning: visitors need to have clear destinations that offer programming and resources to connect them to additional sites of interest; they need clear branding, wayfinding, and connections to be able to fully find and access local heritage and nature assets; and they need resources such as lodging, food, and retail that can serve their needs. The Framework Plan recommends overall infrastructure such as a shared, branded identity to attract visitors, a wayfinding system of signage to direct them once they arrive, and mobility improvements to alleviate potential traffic impacts and accommodate bicyclists as well as motorists.

The Framework Plan also responds to the desire of Lower Richland residents to clearly define and establish a path for tourism development that is located in the heart of the community, but still preserves large portions of the area for rural and agricultural uses rather than placing development haphazardly across

the region. The Framework Plan map therefore identifies certain places that can serve as hubs for tourism development. These hubs serve as primary tourism destinations and include:

- Mill Creek:* Mill Creek is the primary hub for nature tourism (in addition to Congaree National Park). It features a nature center, elevated boardwalks and canopy walk trails, lodging options including RV and river lodging, paddling opportunities on the Congaree and Goose Pond, and more.
- Hopkins Village Green:* The Hopkins Village Green is proposed as the primary hub for heritage tourism. It features a branch of the Richland Library which will function as a supportive asset for a heritage center and a small business incubator and will include a community porch and event venue. The Village Green also features a commercial kitchen, a simple structure to house a farmers' market, and a band shell that can be used for local events and festivals.





Places of Lower Richland (clockwise from top left): View of the Congaree River from the Mill Creek tract; Eastover; Gadsden Park Community Center; Cabin Branch tract; Hopkins

- Gadsden:** Gadsden is the “gateway to Congaree National Park.” Much like park gateway communities across the country, Gadsden will house lodging, restaurant, and retail resources that will be utilized by visitors and community members alike. Careful design standards as established through a proposed new zoning district will help define the character of development to fit the rural character of the community.
- Eastover:** Eastover serves as the historic commercial center of the Lower Richland area; its existing historic commercial corridor is ideal for historic preservation and adaptive reuse of existing buildings into restaurants, community-serving retail, and specialty retail such as antique stores. Connecting residents and small business owners with tax credits and tax abatement opportunities can help move opportunities forward in this corridor.

- Cabin Branch:** Cabin Branch offers opportunities for hiking and biking trails that allow visitors and residents to experience agricultural lands; as one of the first sites that tourists will encounter as they drive out of Columbia and down Lower Richland Boulevard, it also offers an opportunity to site initial kiosks, maps, and other local tourism wayfinding elements that can be used to orient visitors to the region.

The hubs provide connections to the many and diverse other sites of interest in Lower Richland. Existing recreational assets including Congaree National Park, Pinewood Lake Park, and the Wateree River Heritage Preserve Wildlife Management Area; heritage assets like the Harriet Barber House, Kensington Mansion, and numerous historic churches; and, many other sites of interest will be tied into the tourism framework through shared wayfinding, mapping, and clear mobility networks.

## Key Themes

The plan carries forward several key themes related to its existing conditions analysis and recommendations. These themes were identified through site analysis, research, and deep community and stakeholder engagement that included hundreds of local participants in community meetings and interviews with almost 200 stakeholders who are engaged in numerous sectors of Lower Richland.

### Theme 1:

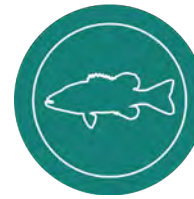
**Lower Richland needs to develop tourism infrastructure** - a shared identity for branding and wayfinding, a system of key hubs and corridors, and provision of essential services to enable targeted, thoughtful tourism growth. Tourism functions best when there are clear, accessible core destinations that offer concentrated attractions, as well as clear wayfinding systems, maps, and guides that help them explore the rest of the region. Tourists also need access to resources including lodging and retail options - few of which are available in Lower Richland today. Creating a clear network of tourism assets will help visitors clearly understand and appreciate the story of Lower Richland, and will focus development in certain areas in order to ensure that new development does not overwhelm the prized rural character of the community.

### Theme 2:

**Residents of Lower Richland must benefit and participate** in the economic growth and new amenities that result from this plan. The plan does not envision tourism as an end goal in itself - rather, the goal of increasing tourism is to increase quality of life, economic opportunity, and environmental benefits for the entire Lower Richland community.

### Theme 3:

**A successful tourism plan for Lower Richland is a three-legged stool** that involves nature tourism, heritage tourism, and small business development. A stool with only two legs will not stand - and all three of these areas are crucial to achieve residents' vision of a sustainable, inclusive future that builds on the local community's strengths and assets.



NATURE  
TOURISM



HERITAGE  
TOURISM



SMALL BUSINESS  
DEVELOPMENT

- Nature tourism capitalizes on the world-class environmental assets of the Congaree bottomlands and existing attractions like the Congaree National Park, and envisions the county-owned Mill Creek site as offering a diversity of complementary uses to the national park that can attract visitors and local residents alike.
- Heritage tourism celebrates the history and landscape of Lower Richland and enables visitors to access a core Heritage Center before traveling across the landscape to visit agricultural and historic sites of interest.
- Small business development reflects the need for Lower Richland residents to take the lead in building businesses and creating wealth within the growing tourism economy. The lack of businesses in Lower Richland today is a problem but also an opportunity; there is space for local businesses rooted in community tradition, knowledge, and resources. A Small Business Incubator will assist Lower Richland residents to understand the opportunities for tourism-serving businesses, take incremental steps that minimize risk and maximize reward, and access education, financing, and resources that will enable them to grow successful and sustainable businesses.



*Lower Richland Heritage Center precedent*



*Mill Creek Nature Center precedent*



*Small Business Incubator precedent*

## Major Projects

Each of the plan’s three core pillars of nature tourism, heritage tourism, and small business development feature a “major project” that will help support the Lower Richland community to grow the tourism economy. These major projects include:

- Mill Creek Nature Center:* Mill Creek Nature Center will be located at Mill Creek and will serve as a visitor center for that site that provides educational programming and recreation; an administrative facility for the lodging uses on the site; and a hub that will connect visitors to the other nature and heritage assets of Lower Richland by providing maps and tours. It should also incorporate a cafe or quick-serve restaurant that can serve visitors and local residents.
- Hopkins Heritage Center:* Co-located in the same building with a proposed branch of the Richland Library and the proposed Small Business Incubator, the Heritage Center offers oral histories, exhibits, special library collections, and video tours of Lower Richland heritage assets. It also offers maps and tours of heritage resources throughout the area, including historic buildings, churches, historic sites, cemeteries, and other heritage resources.
- Small Business Incubator:* Co-located with the Richland Library branch and the Heritage Center at the Hopkins Village Green, the Small Business Incubator includes meeting spaces and computer labs that will offer coordinated trainings by local university partners, agricultural specialists, lodging specialists, and more, and will bring in bankers, investors, and others for networking activities with local business owners. It also includes separate facilities (also on the Village Green site) for a Farmers’ Market and a Lower Richland Commercial Kitchen.

## Implementing the Plan

The *Major Projects* are significant but by no means the only way of implementing this plan. In the Recommendations chapter, this plan offers numerous other specific recommendations to grow the “three-legged stool” of nature tourism, heritage tourism, and small business development that defines a successful tourism economy for Lower Richland. These recommendations include projects, programs, and policies that can help move forward the *Framework Plan* and *Key Themes*, and can leverage the proposed major projects to craft a strategy for long-term success.

The Implementation chapter includes a comprehensive matrix which organizes the many recommendations by theme and time frame, along with resources, needs, and potential partners.

The Plan is conceived to be implemented in phases over time, as resources become available. However, it is critical that the plan maintain momentum, and the best way to achieve this is through incremental steps that show that the county and stakeholders are making progress and residents are positively impacted at each step.

The following offers a summary of the immediate next steps to help maintain momentum on implementing the plan over the next two years especially in regard to the *Major Projects*.

As the *Major Projects* in particular will require the most resources over time, the following next steps provide a means of acting on these ambitious initiatives through incremental efforts intended to build interest and support in the short term.

## Short-term Recommendations (2018 - 2020)

### General Recommendations

1. Form a committee of local resident stakeholders to oversee the development of a brand identity for Lower Richland Tourism.
2. Work with a branding consultant to develop the brand identity and website for Lower Richland tourism in collaboration with a committee of local resident stakeholders.
3. Conduct a feasibility study for all proposed Mobility Improvements in coordination with Richland County Planning Department, Richland County Public Works Department, as well as the Richland County Conservation Commission.
4. Coordinate with the Richland County Recreation Commission to ensure that all upcoming park and trail projects in Lower Richland County are aligned with the goals of this plan.
5. Investigate the available and underutilized right-of-way adjacent to the both the CSX and Norfolk Southern rail lines as feasible for potential rail trail segments.
6. Coordinate with Palmetto Conservation Foundation on ways to improve the conditions, access, and connectivity along the Palmetto Trail through Lower Richland.
7. Work with the Richland County Planning Department to apply appropriate zoning designations throughout Lower Richland in order to permit the proposed uses and character of development.
8. Develop and promote a range of interpretive trails to connect Lower Richland nature and heritage sites.

### **Lower Richland Heritage Center**

1. Explore and establish a partnership with the Richland Library System to help develop Heritage Center vision, archival collections, and temporary cultural programs.
2. Launch an oral history initiative in collaboration with the Richland Library System.
3. Create a Lower Richland Heritage advisory committee comprised of representatives of existing heritage organizations and local scholars to advise on Heritage Center projects and associated programs.
4. Explore potential sites for the Heritage Center in collaboration with the other Richland County Renaissance Plan initiatives.
5. Consolidate support for Lower Richland to be included in the existing South Carolina National Heritage Corridor (SCNHC) and advocate for this legislation.

### **Mill Creek Nature Center**

1. Develop design scope and identify sources of funding for full park and Nature Center development.
2. Introduce the project to all potential public and private funders and clarify opportunities and interest for funding various aspects of the project.
3. Work with key stakeholders including National Park Service, Richland County Recreation Commission, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, Friends of Congaree Swamp, and others to host event-based programs such as tours and environmental education to introduce the property to local residents and begin to activate the site.

### **Small Business Incubator**

1. Formalize an agreement with a partner institution such as the Richland Library System or Clemson University Cooperative Extension to establish and operate a small business incubator program in Lower Richland in a dedicated space and begin to offer educational resources to local residents prior to an established program.
2. Formalize agreements with a variety of other project partners to offer educational, networking, and financial support to emerging entrepreneurs.
3. Identify potential temporary locations for the Small Business Incubator that could be utilized until a more permanent space can be identified and developed.





**A VISION FOR LOWER RICHLAND  
TOURISM**

# The Need for a Tourism Plan

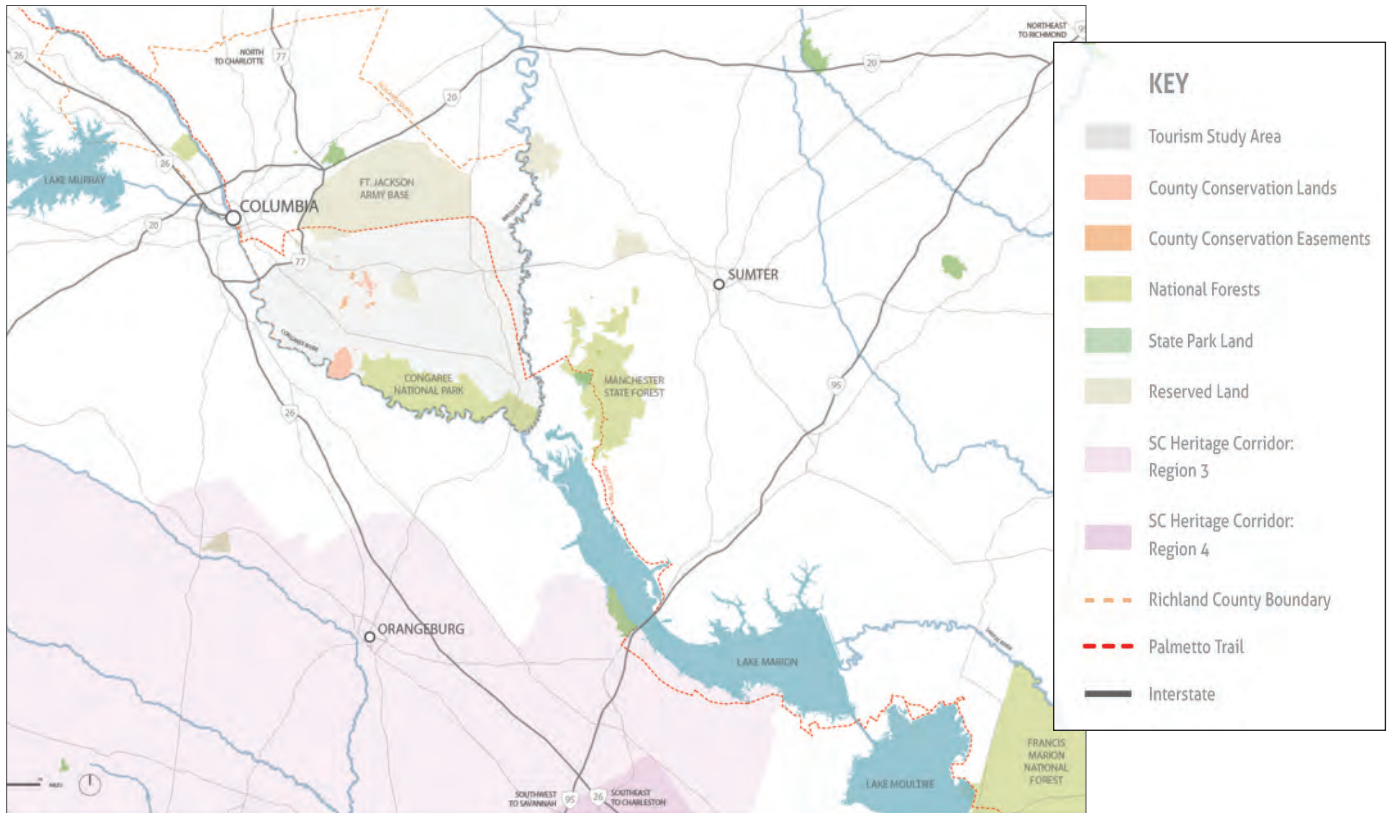
Lower Richland, as a community, is working to determine what kind of future development will best benefit local residents and preserve its incredible wealth of natural and heritage resources. As an historically rural and agricultural area, Lower Richland faces pressure to balance preservation of its landscapes and rural character while still offering economic opportunity, community-serving retail, and high-quality public services to its residents. In addition, current trends are bringing development pressure toward Lower Richland from the urbanized area near Columbia into the more rural regions of the county; local residents want to direct and manage that change and prevent sprawling development from taking over the area. In this context, the Richland County Conservation Commission asked a consultant team comprised of Asakura Robinson Company and Fermata, Inc. to explore opportunities for Lower Richland tourism based on the natural and heritage resources of the area. The consultants were asked to explore opportunities for tourism to provide economic development focused on local residents and businesses, leverage publicly-owned land to promote tourism opportunities, and provide a balanced strategy for development of local tourism assets that could also support the needs of the local population.

One core asset that Lower Richland tourism must build on is the area's world-class natural resources. Lower Richland is geographically bounded by the Congaree and Wateree Rivers, and represents the transition between South Carolina's Piedmont and Lowcountry regions. The Congaree bottomlands, over 26,000 acres of which are preserved within the Congaree National Park, are opportunities to view a unique habitat and ecology, and to see incredible natural phenomena like the annual "synchronous" firefly swarms that light up the bottomland forests by blinking at the same time during the early summer. Heritage assets, and their ability to tell

the story of Lower Richland through an interpretive network, are another important asset for bringing tourism that highlights the region's real character and importance in South Carolina and U.S. history. Lower Richland residents and organizations maintain a deep interest in and knowledge of local history and heritage. Local historians have worked to advance more inclusive narratives of the area that reveal histories of the African-American community which complement the more widely documented histories of plantation-owning families. As the newly-opened National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington D.C. and the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Visitor Center in Maryland demonstrate, there is a deep interest in ensuring stories of African-American enslavement, resistance, community, resilience, and progress can be shared and interpreted by visitors and residents of communities across the U.S., and expand our understanding of how American culture has been shaped. Lower Richland's historic resources and deep-rooted community present an ideal opportunity for telling the story of the African-American experience locally, but these resources must be connected, interpreted, and available to visitors in order to truly capture the power of the history that has shaped today's community.

In order to expand Lower Richland's markets for nature and heritage tourism, and ensure that visitors' dollars flow to the local community, this plan evaluates growth opportunities in both nature and heritage tourism that build upon local capacity and highlight local resources. The plan makes recommendations for programs, policies, and projects that will create a truly sustainable, and inclusive, Lower Richland tourism economy.





*Lower Richland is strategically and uniquely “twice framed”: first by nature, being bounded by the Congaree and Wateree Rivers; and second by regional commerce, being within a short drive time of multiple major transportation corridors. Its culture has been shaped by this condition.*



*View of the Congaree River from the Mill Creek tract*



*Mixed hardwood forest within the Cabin Branch tract*

# An Urgent Vision

This plan builds on and supports several other ongoing planning initiatives, but most notably the Richland Renaissance, a multifaceted plan that seeks to leverage county-owned assets to improve the quality of life for county residents. This plan also comes at a time of incredible opportunity for Lower Richland to build its tourism market. After years of debate about the kind of new development that is appropriate for Lower Richland, there is finally consensus that development which supports nature and heritage-based tourism will best serve the interests of local residents and the broader county. New data from the National Park Service confirms this: In 2017, Congaree National Park attracted more visitors than in any previous year; over 160,000 people came to Lower Richland to visit this natural asset, and recent research by the National Park Service shows that these visitors spent over \$7.3 million in nearby communities.

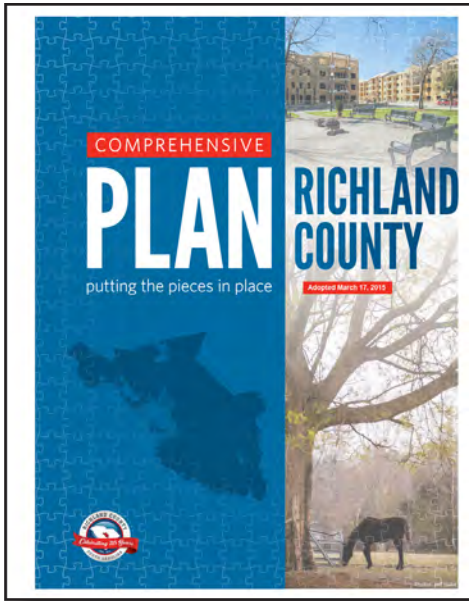
Despite the presence of the park, there are few places in the Lower Richland area for tourists to spend their dollars. The large amount of designated wilderness area within the national park restricts its ability to provide more than basic boardwalks and primitive camping facilities. Lower Richland contains no lodging options and few retail, restaurant, and dry goods options for residents or visitors. This situation offers immediate openings for recreational and tourism options that can complement the national park's offerings, and for new, locally-owned businesses to serve visitors.

Opportunity to grow local tourism also stems from two new publicly-owned assets in the area: Richland County recently acquired two large conservation sites in the Lower Richland area, the Cabin Branch and Mill Creek tracts. Cabin Branch is an approximately 680-acre tract located on a number of former agricultural tracts just below the intersection of Garners Ferry Road and Lower Richland Boulevard, while Mill Creek is a 2,555-acre tract located directly on the Congaree River, close



*Although Congaree National Park regularly attracts over 100,000 visitors annually, there exists almost no infrastructure in Lower Richland to support tourism; image: The State*

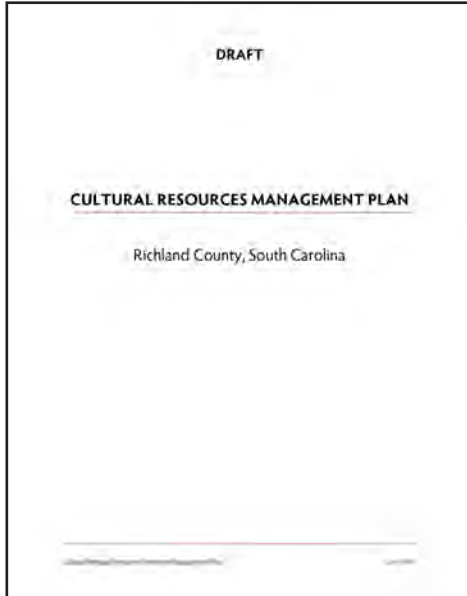
to the Congaree National Park, with access from Old Bluff Road. The county intends these tracts to serve multiple functions: as mitigation banks for stream and wetland restoration and conservation, as well as for the development of recreation, lodging, and sustainable tourism-oriented uses. Mill Creek, in particular, presents a major opportunity to showcase the Congaree bottomlands in an environment that can incorporate more creative and wide-ranging tourism uses than Congaree National Park and that can complement the amenities available at the national park, driving more tourism to both sites. Both the Cabin Branch and Mill Creek sites are featured throughout this plan document, although the plan covers all of Lower Richland and includes many hubs, corridors, and natural and heritage assets in addition to these county-owned properties.



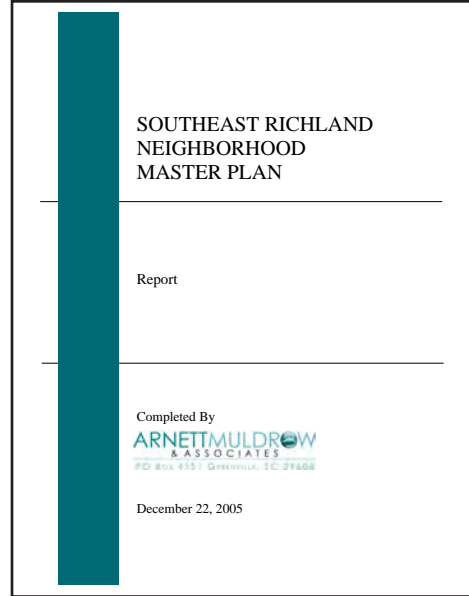
2015



2014



2009



2005

*The assets of Lower Richland have been addressed in numerous plans but only one, the Lower Richland County Strategic Community Master Plan (top right), has explicitly addressed tourism as a potential economic driver for the area.*

# A Sustainable Vision

Lower Richland residents and Richland County officials are united in advancing the idea that tourism must be sustainable, meaning it must leverage, support, and enhance local natural and heritage assets rather than harming these assets through overuse or highly intensive development. Nature and heritage tourism, which require the preservation and enhancement of natural and historical resources, are therefore clear opportunities for positioning Lower Richland for tourism growth. Opportunities in nature tourism are strong, as this is a growing industry nationwide. The following data are from the Outdoor Foundation's 2016 Topline Report.

## Most Popular Adult Outdoor Activities By Participation Rate, Ages 25+

1. Running, Jogging and Trail Running (14.9% of adults, 31.6 million participants)
2. Fishing (Fresh, Salt and Fly) (14.6% of adults, 30.9 million participants)
3. Hiking (12.5% of adults, 26.4 million participants)
4. Bicycling (Road, Mountain and BMX) (12.3% of adults, 26.1 million participants)
5. Camping (Car, Backyard, Backpacking, and RV) (11.8% of adults, 25.0 million participants)

## Favorite Adult Outdoor Activities By Frequency of Participation, Ages 25+

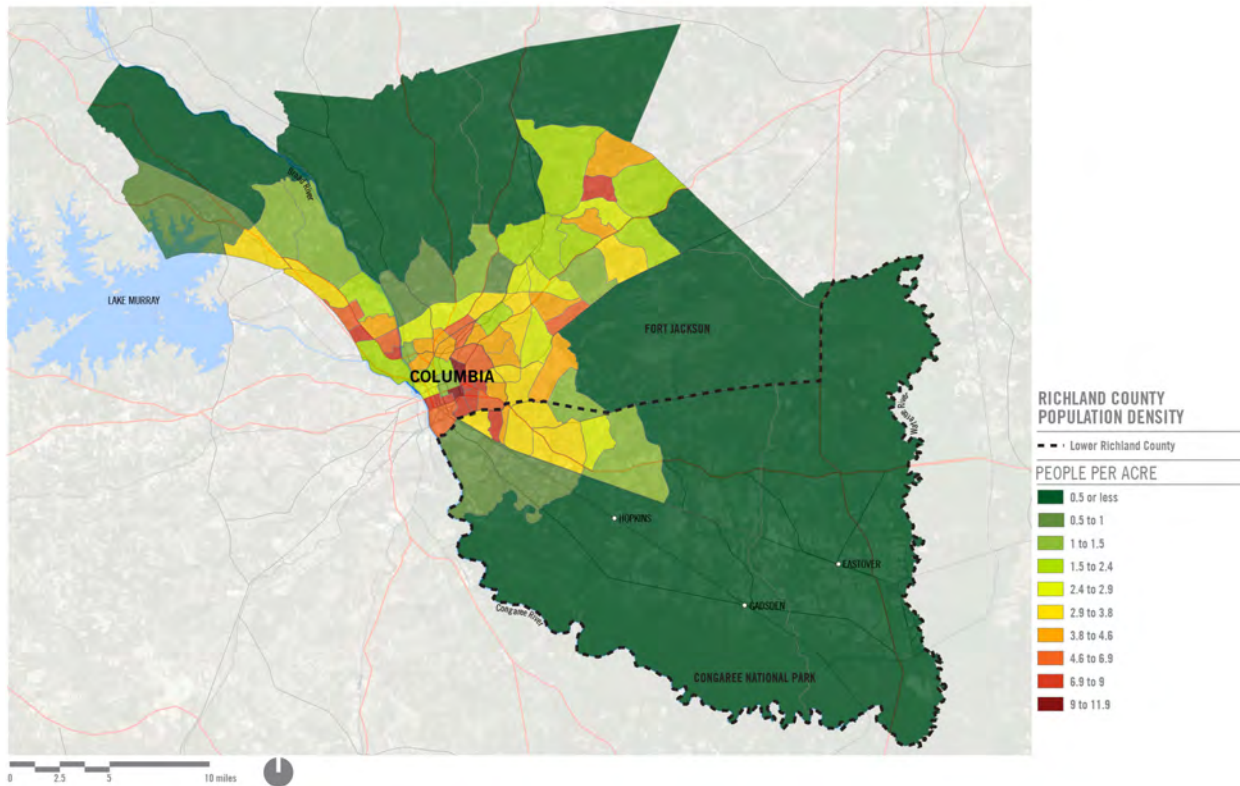
1. Running, Jogging and Trail Running (87.1 average outings per runner, 2.8 billion outings)
2. Bicycling (Road, Mountain and BMX) (54.2 average outings per cyclist, 1.4 billion outings)
3. Fishing (20.1 average outings per fishing participant, 621.5 million outings)
4. Birdwatching (40.6 average outings per birdwatcher, 422.3 million outings)
5. Wildlife Viewing (26.4 average outings per wildlife viewer, 413.4 million outings)

In addition to these highly popular activities, the Lower Richland area can focus on other nature-based recreations that are appropriate for the county's Mill Creek tract and that are showing strong rates of growth nationally.

- Canoeing (9.2 million participants, 1.3% growth)
- Kayaking (4.1 million participants, 5.3% growth)
- Kayak Fishing (2.3 million participants, 17.4% growth)

Heritage tourism is another growth industry that can help preserve, enhance, and share the history of the Lower Richland community with visitors from across South Carolina and across the country. With the appropriate "tourism infrastructure" that includes a central heritage center for interpretation of local history, and an interpretive network that directs visitors to the numerous assets in Lower Richland and helps interpret their meaning, these assets can be major economic drivers within the Lower Richland area. According to *The Economic Impact of Travel on South Carolina Counties, 2015*:

- In 2015, total tax revenue generated by domestic traveler spending in South Carolina reached \$1.8 billion, up 6.8 percent from 2014. On average, each travel dollar spent by domestic travelers in South Carolina produced 14.7 cents in tax receipts for federal, state, and local governments in 2014.
- Domestic traveler spending in South Carolina generated \$714.3 million for the federal government in 2015. This represents 38.9 percent of all domestic travel-generated tax collections in the state. Each dollar spent by domestic travelers in South Carolina produced 5.7 cents for federal tax coffers.



*Population density of Richland County*

- Spending by domestic travelers in South Carolina also generated \$738.6 million in tax revenue for the state treasury through state sales and excise taxes, and taxes on personal and corporate income. This composed 40.2 percent of all domestic travel-generated tax revenue for 2015 collected in the state. On average, each domestic travel dollar produced 5.9 cents in state tax receipts. Total tax revenue generated by domestic travel for South Carolina state government increased 8.7 percent from 2014.
- Local governments in South Carolina directly benefited from domestic travel as well. During 2015, domestic travel spending generated \$385.7 million in sales and property tax revenue for the local governments, 21.0 percent of total domestic travel-generated tax revenue in the state. Each travel dollar produced 3.1 cents for local tax coffers.
- Richland County ranked fifth in South Carolina in domestic travel expenditures in 2015 with \$640.2 million or 5.1 percent of the state total. These expenditures by domestic travelers supported \$115.3 million in payroll income and 6,700 jobs for the area residents.

# An Inclusive Vision

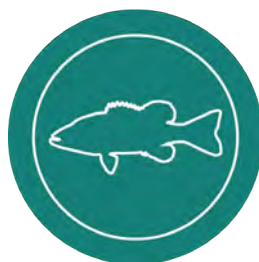
The Lower Richland Tourism Plan takes as a core principle the idea that tourism assets, and the economic opportunity they generate, must be inclusive and provide economic, recreational, and quality-of-life benefits for Lower Richland residents as well as visitors.

One key part of this plan is viewing local tourism development as a “three-legged stool” that includes nature tourism, heritage tourism, and small business development as essential components. Small business development is crucial to ensure that the benefits of increased tourism spending accrue to Lower Richland residents; currently, there is a market gap as few tourism-serving businesses like hotels, lodges, restaurants, equipment rental businesses, and other retail establishments are located in the area. Growing locally-owned and operated businesses within these sectors can provide wealth-building opportunities for local residents, and ensure that visitors are introduced to the region by those who know it best. However, building a new small business in a sector that residents may not be familiar with can be daunting and involve financial risk. This plan therefore provides recommendations that will help residents make the transition into small business ownership incrementally, testing the market while utilizing educational and financial resources to remove barriers to business development.

An inclusive vision for tourism also includes a “tourism framework” -- a shared identity or Lower Richland “brand” and an interpretive framework that ties local destinations and assets together. Successful tourism destinations rely on this type of branding to help draw visitors to the area and enable them to take advantage of all the local opportunities instead of coming to a single destination and then departing. A Lower Richland brand can also be beneficial for local businesses in ways that go beyond tourism; for example, a united set of agricultural producers with a Lower Richland brand may be able to stimulate demand for

local products in restaurants and specialty stores across the state and, as the brand grows, across the country.

A successful plan for Lower Richland tourism must represent all the facets of this deep-rooted community: its natural beauty, its African-American history and heritage, and its residents’ drive to create participatory development that benefits local residents and respects local values. It will build on existing assets while creating catalytic projects that draw new visitors to the area; and it will ensure that visitor spending benefits the local community through small business development and new financial tools. Inclusion of all Lower Richland residents in the benefits of this project is a core value and a key measure of this plan’s success.



NATURE  
TOURISM



HERITAGE  
TOURISM



SMALL BUSINESS  
DEVELOPMENT

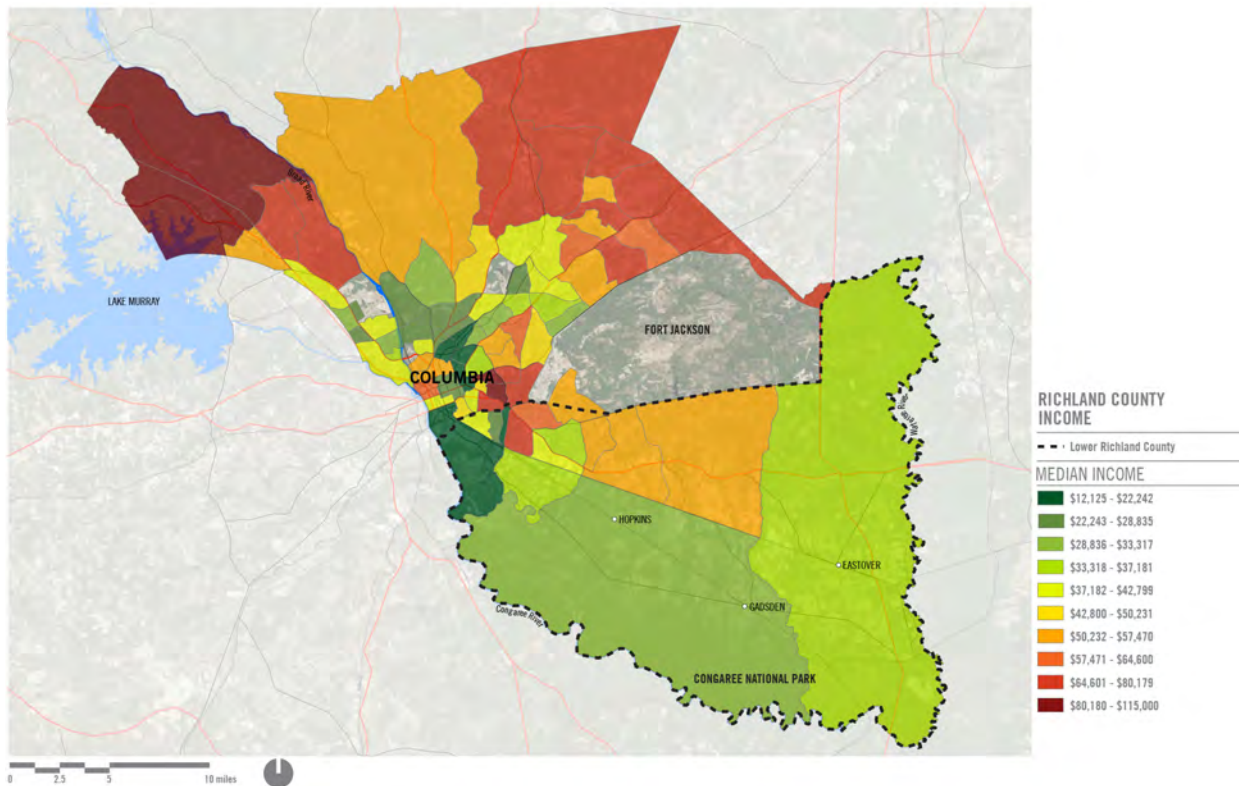
## Lower Richland Demographic Patterns

Although Lower Richland represents nearly half of the acreage of Richland County, it remains socially and economically detached from the rest of the county. The following maps provide a snapshot of the existing demographic character of Lower Richland based on data collected from the 2010 U.S. Census.

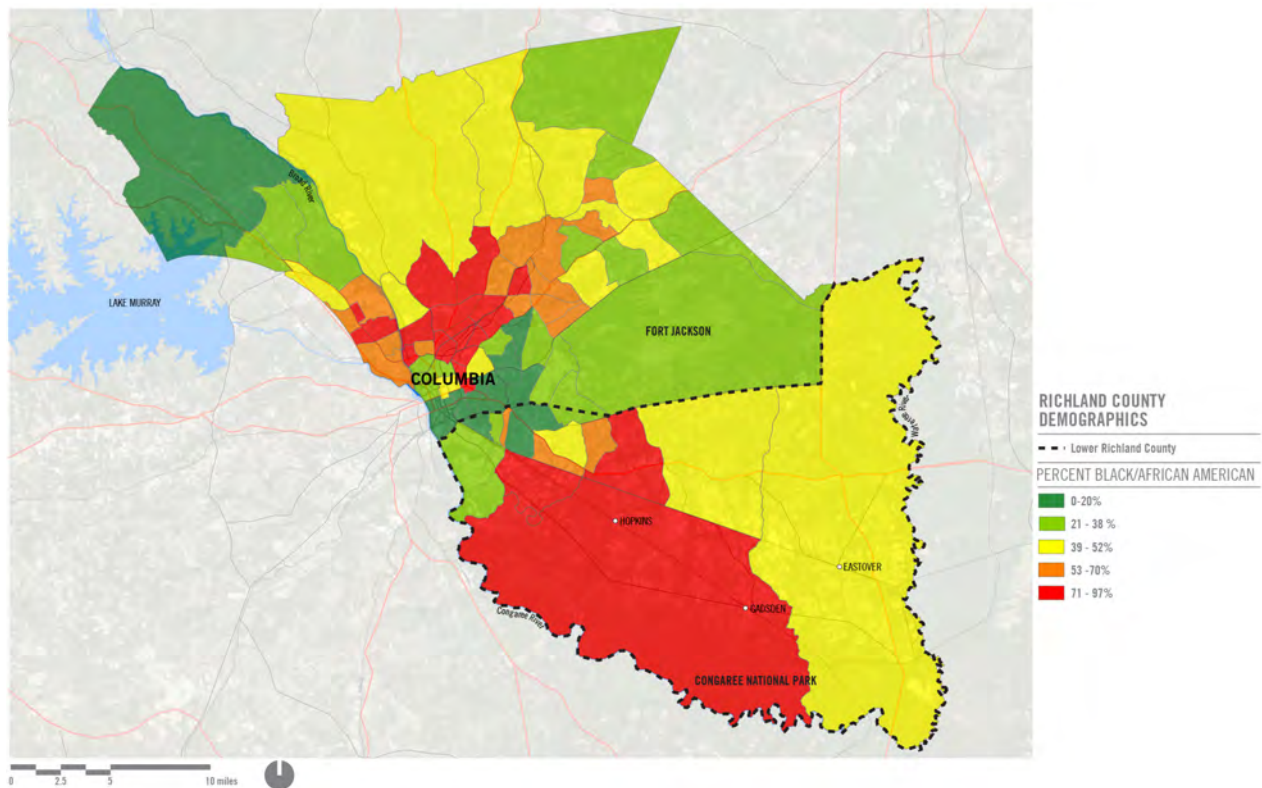
While the portrait of Lower Richland illustrated by these maps is well understood by those who live in or near Richland County, it is critical to provide a baseline understanding of the Lower Richland community as so much of the

Lower Richland Tourism Plan has been developed as response to longstanding social and economic needs of the area, including new opportunities for education, business development, recreation, and mobility.

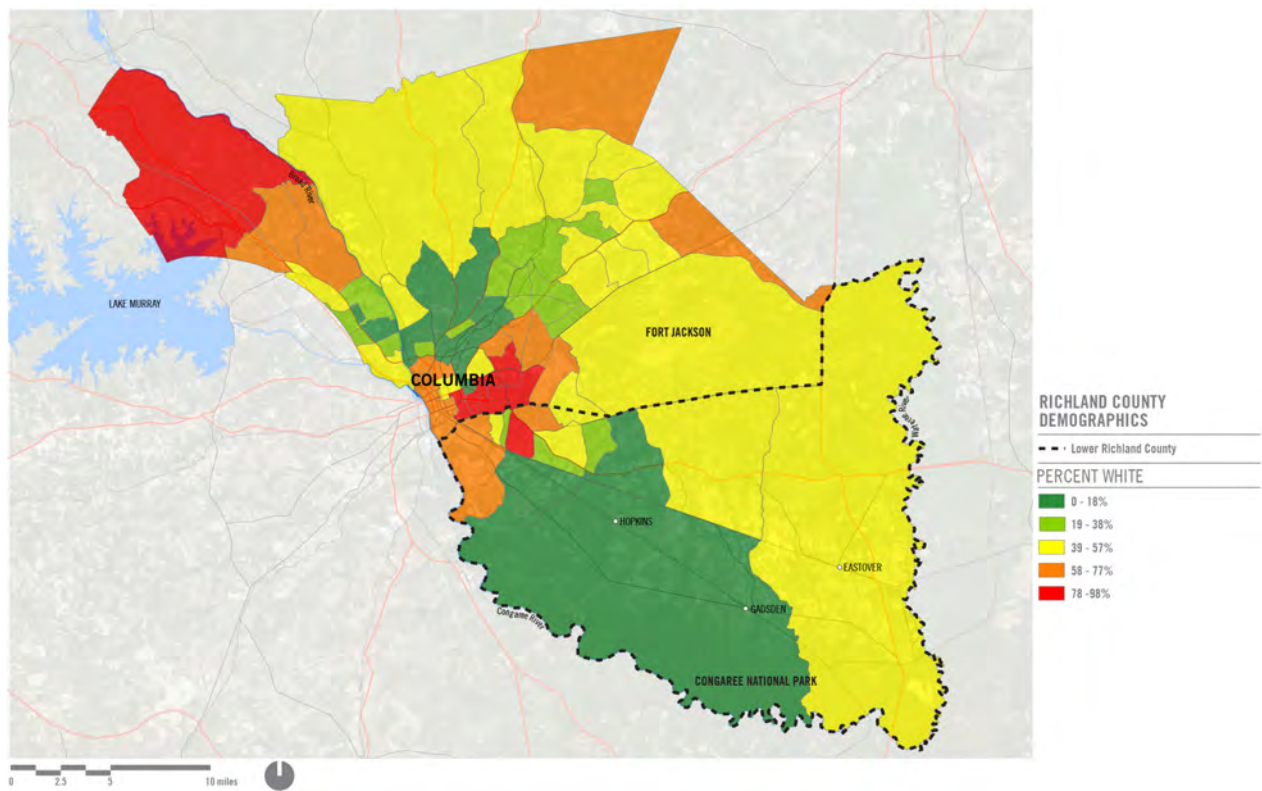
The maps illustrate a community that is split racially, possesses less income and educational attainment than much of the county, yet boasts a higher percentage of owner occupied property. From this, we can infer that the community of Lower Richland is extremely tied to the land on which it sits yet lacks adequate resources to leverage the value of this land toward greater economic benefits.



Median income demographics for Richland County

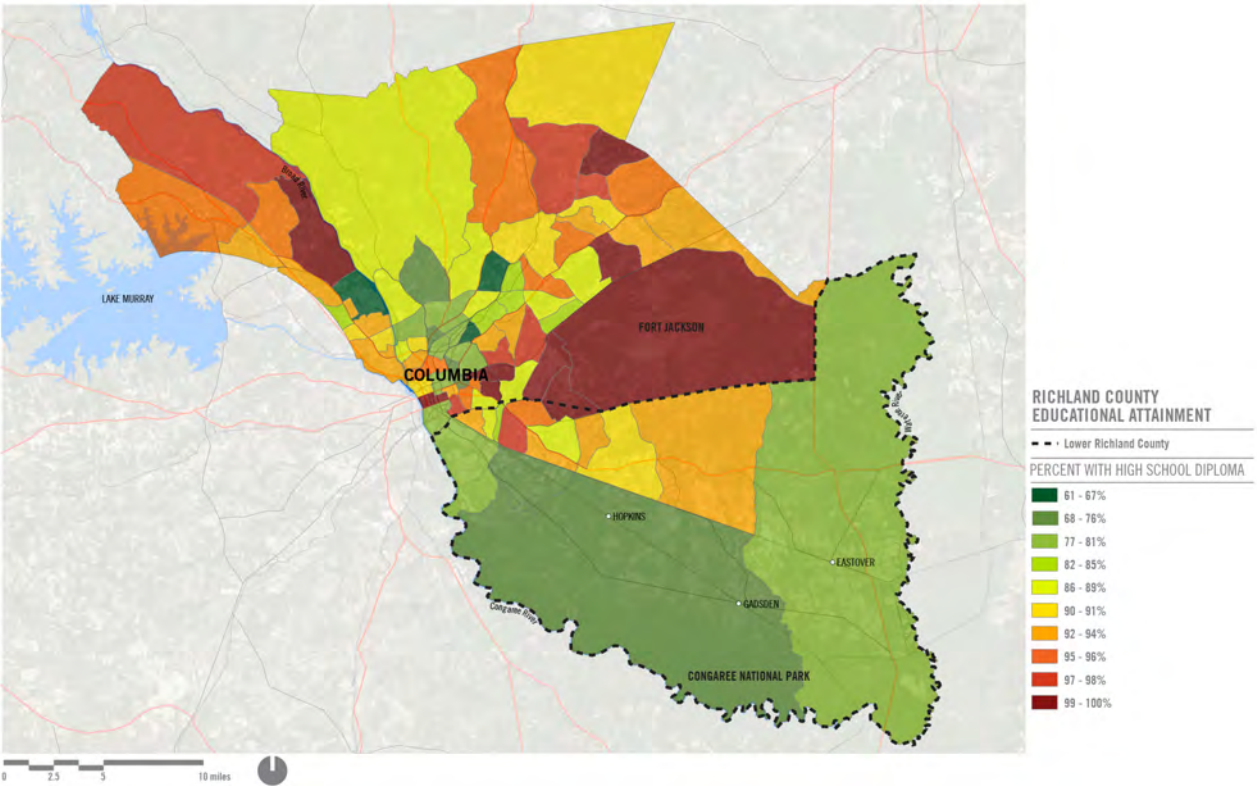


Racial demographics for Richland County

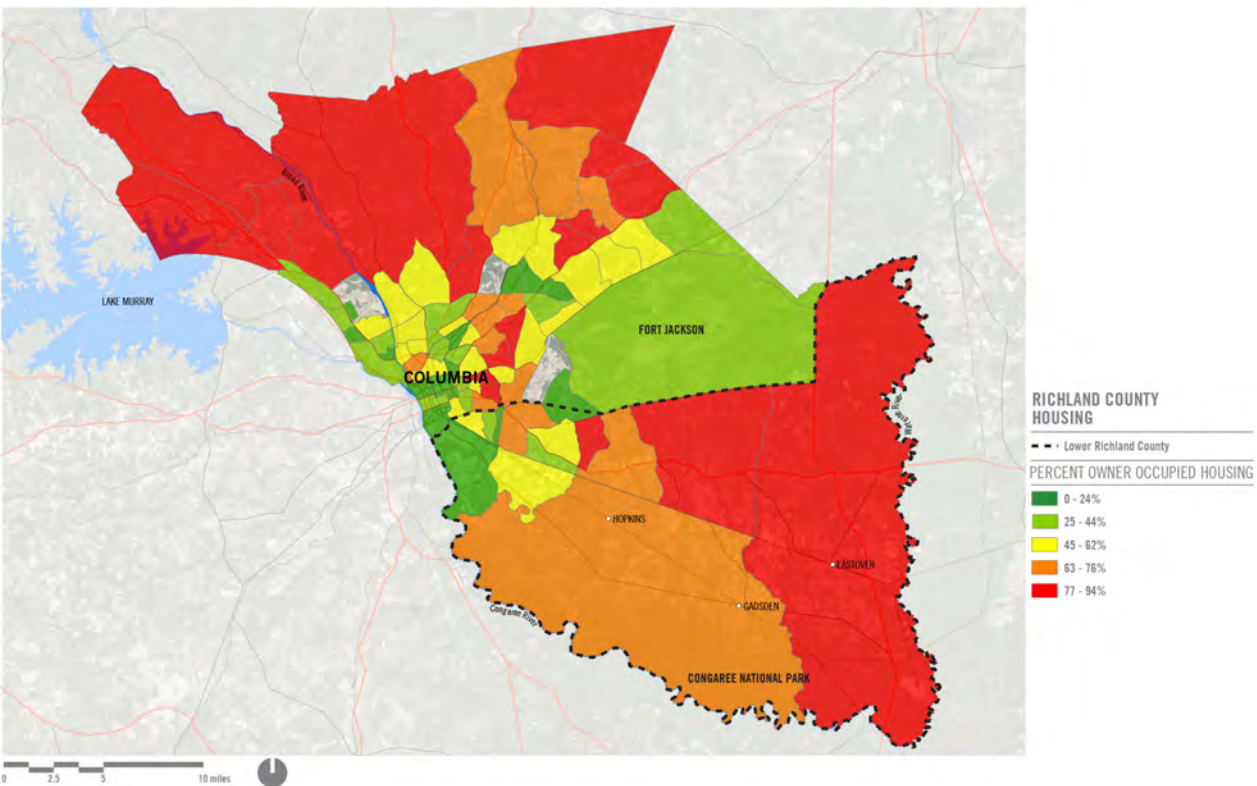


Racial demographics for Richland County





*Educational attainment demographics for Richland County*



*Home ownership demographics for Richland County*





**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

# Community Participation

## Engagement Strategy

The strategy for engagement included three major community meetings, a dedicated project website, and numerous smaller meetings with residents and stakeholders of Lower Richland. The first major community meeting was held on November 14, 2016, the second on January 23, 2017, both at the Hopkins Park Gymnasium, and the third on January 24, 2017, at the Lower Richland Sheriff Substation. These meetings were hosted by the RCCC, Council members Dalhi Myers and Norman Jackson, and the planning consultants from Asakura Robinson and Fermata, Inc.

As part of a larger planning effort, the first meeting was set to:

1. Introduce the project and project team
2. Answer questions about the project, including its background, vision, and goals
3. Share the project schedule
4. Gather input and ideas from residents to inform the plan
5. Allow as many residents as possible a chance to help author the plan and become invested in its success

Following an overview presentation by the planning team, the first meeting included breakout workshop sessions focused on sharing ideas, needs, and concerns about nature tourism, heritage tourism, and small business development in Lower Richland.

The second and third meetings focused on presentations and discussion, which included:

1. Highlights and lessons learned from the first community meeting
2. Highlights of draft recommendations and concept designs for community review
3. Site analysis of area

Following the presentations at the public meetings, an open-house style meeting was held to get comments from residents and community members about what was missing from the plan (i.e. a comprehensive Lower



*Planning team presentation at Community Meeting #1*



*Nature Tourism breakout session at Community Meeting #1*



*Presenting breakout session ideas at Community Meeting #1*

Richland brand, workforce development opportunities), what concerns they had (i.e. local business priority among new developments), and what they liked about the recommendations (i.e. preservation of natural infrastructure). Meeting participants were also provided with a survey form to provide additional comments following the meeting.

## Lower Richland Residents

There was an outpouring of interest and participation at the three public community meetings, which shows that the issues addressed by the plan are highly relevant and important to the community. The almost 200 attendees at these meetings gave invaluable input that has been incorporated into the plan to ensure that all of the recommendations are tailored to the needs of Lower Richland.

## Steering Committee

Councilmember Dalhi Myers  
Councilmember Norman Jackson  
Virginia Sanders, RCCC  
Cartha Harris  
Richard Jackson  
Rufus Mosley  
Heath Hill  
Marcella Sumter  
Levi Myers

Formed at the start of the planning process, the steering committee served as an important liaison between the planning team and the larger Lower Richland community. The committee included exclusively local residents ranging from advocates, to business leaders, to Commission members, and elected officials. Meeting at key junctures within the planning process, including at project kickoff, site visits, and prior to the second community meeting, the committee was able to provide specific input and knowledge of Lower Richland that helped to shape the goals and final content of the plan.



*Tour of Lower Richland with the steering committee*

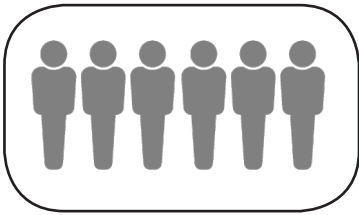
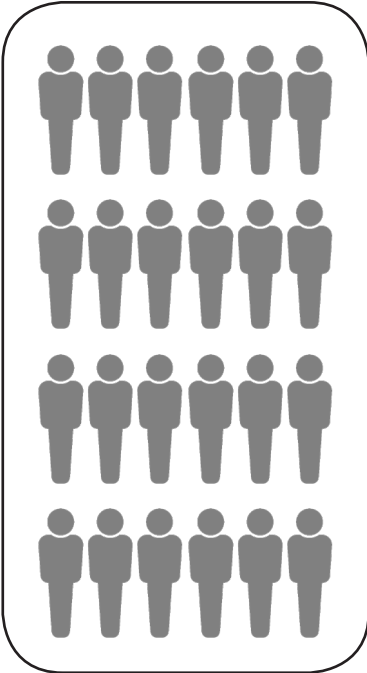
## Stakeholders

The planning team interviewed over 80 local stakeholders representing more than 50 organizations, including pastors from local churches; non-profits working to steward local natural and heritage resources; local universities; local, county, state, and federal agency representatives and government officials; owners and employees of local businesses; and local landowners. A list of stakeholders interviewed is available at the end of the Community Engagement section.

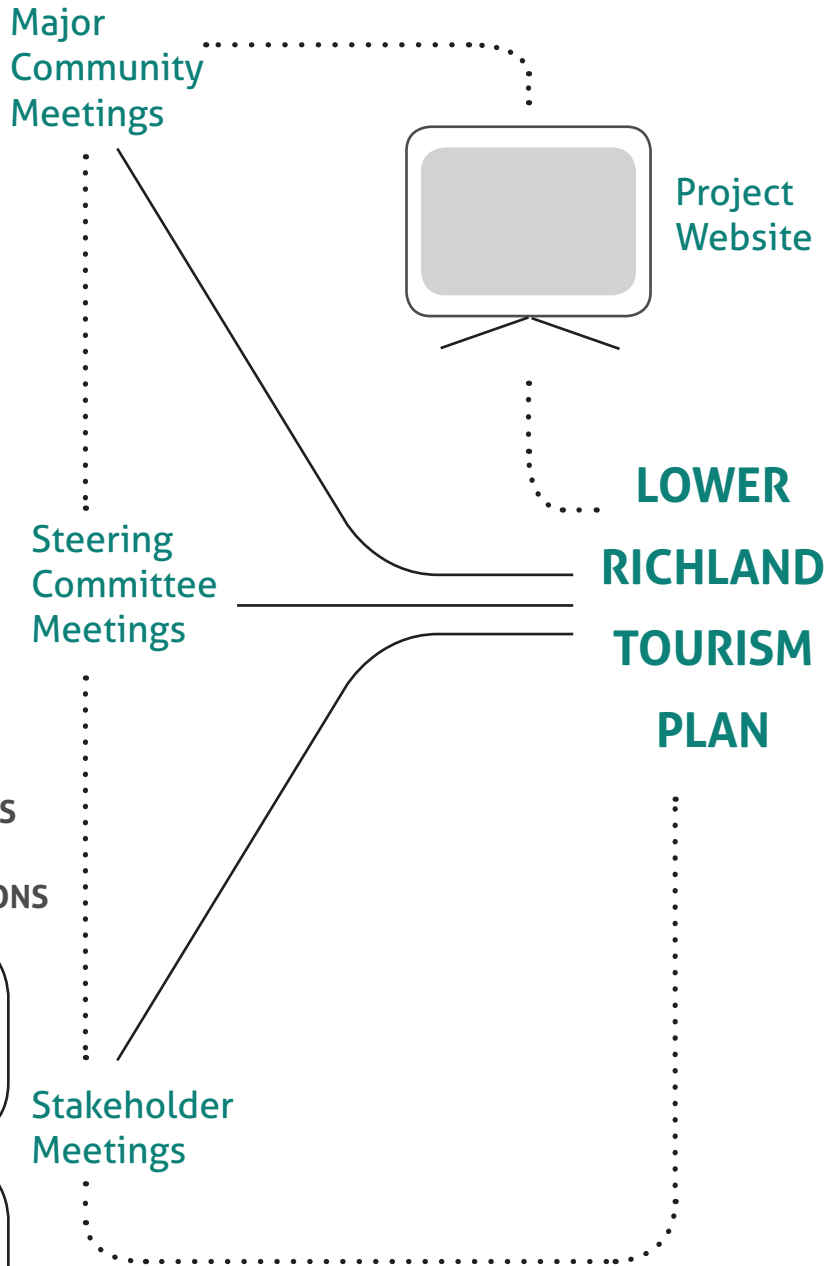
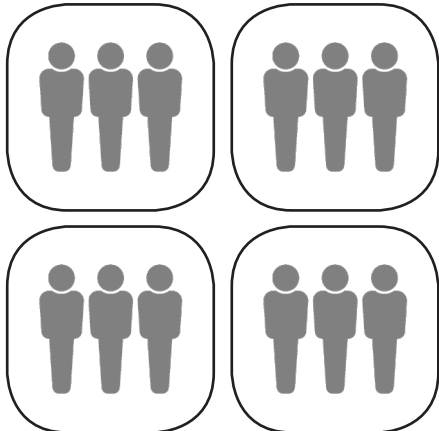
## Lower Richland Elected Officials

Richland County Council members Dalhi Myers and Norman Jackson were instrumental resources during the planning process, as was the late SC House Representative Joe Neal. These elected officials helped shape the plan and ensure strong community participation throughout. Mayor Geraldine Robinson of Eastover also gave generously of her time via a stakeholder interview. The planning team is deeply appreciative of these officials' contributions.

# LOWER RICHLAND RESIDENTS



## COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS



*Community Engagement Process;  
Icons by Adrian Coquet from Noun Project*

# STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

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## LOCAL, COUNTY, STATE, AND FEDERAL

- Congaree National Park
- USDA Rural Development
- HUD – Community Development Block Grant
- SC Department of Natural Resources
- SC Department of Agriculture
- SC House Representative Joe Neal
- Clemson University Extension
- USC School of Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Mgmt.
- Richland County Economic Development Department
- Richland County Conservation Commission
- Richland County Planning Department
- Richland Library
- Council Member Dalhi Myers
- Council Member Norman Jackson
- Mayor Geraldine Robinson - Town of Eastover
- Columbia Metropolitan Convention & Visitors Bureau

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## NON- PROFIT

- Palmetto Conservation Foundation
- Congaree Land Trust
- Sustainable Midlands
- South Carolina Uplift
- Historic Columbia
- Southeast Rural Community Outreach (SERCO)
- Friends of Congaree Swamp
- COWASEE Basin Task Force

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## BUSINESSES

- River Runner Outdoor Center
- The Cycle Center
- Wavering Place Bed and Breakfast
- Carolina Bay Farms
- Cabin Branch Organic Farms
- Manchester Farms

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## OTHER

- Over 20 local church pastors
- Local landowners

# Community Input

## Nature Tourism

Participants in the community meetings discussed existing regional nature tourism assets, and conceptualized what improved access to nature in Lower Richland might look like. The participants also focused on opportunities to mitigate the potential issues and effects of increased tourism, such as increased vehicular and bicycle traffic, through the planning process. Participants identified areas where they felt increased nature tourism in Lower Richland was feasible, and discussed how these types of tourism uses might work on the Cabin Branch and Mill Creek sites owned by Richland County.

Three main topics emerged from these conversations:

1. Create and program new nature tourism opportunities throughout Lower Richland (e.g. hiking, cycling, kayaking, guided tours)
2. Take advantage of Cabin Branch and Mill Creek sites to think holistically about tourism as economic development; for example, using these sites to encourage locally-owned and operated businesses
3. Actively address community concerns, such as traffic and parking, taxes, and the potential for sprawl or problematic development

Residents felt that nature tourism activities should provide a local benefit by employing residents, involving children in the outdoors, and creating opportunities that both visitors and community members can enjoy.

## Heritage Tourism

Community participants expressed the importance of incorporating Lower Richland's heritage into any future tourism strategy. Residents conceptualized existing and future assets, attractions, and key themes that would provide visitors and community members with a compelling historical and heritage narrative.

From this discussion, the following ideas were identified:

1. Development of a Heritage Center to represent the history of Lower Richland for both locals and visitors
2. Create additional new locations and assets for interpretive history (e.g. farm, museum, grist mill, artist colony)
3. Tell the story of existing heritage assets, locations, and practices, from revitalizing local festival grounds, to interpreting the history of the African-American community, to highlighting local practices like quilting and sculpture
4. Connect heritage locations in innovative ways, including trains, trails, and scenic highways
5. Provide multiple local lodging options (e.g. RV parks, bed and breakfasts, hotels)

## Small Business Development

Participants were eager to consider how this planning process, and future tourism-related programs and investments, can create economic opportunities through tourism revenue for Lower Richland residents. Participants thought of several business types and opportunities that could emerge from tourism, and how these could overlap with a need for more community-serving businesses.

From these conversations, three themes emerged:

1. Target particular high-opportunity business sectors for small business development
2. Bring assets to the table that would help Lower Richland residents build successful businesses
3. Ensure that the plan will remove barriers to business development by presenting thoughtful proposals that would balance the need for new businesses with preserving the rural and natural character of the community.



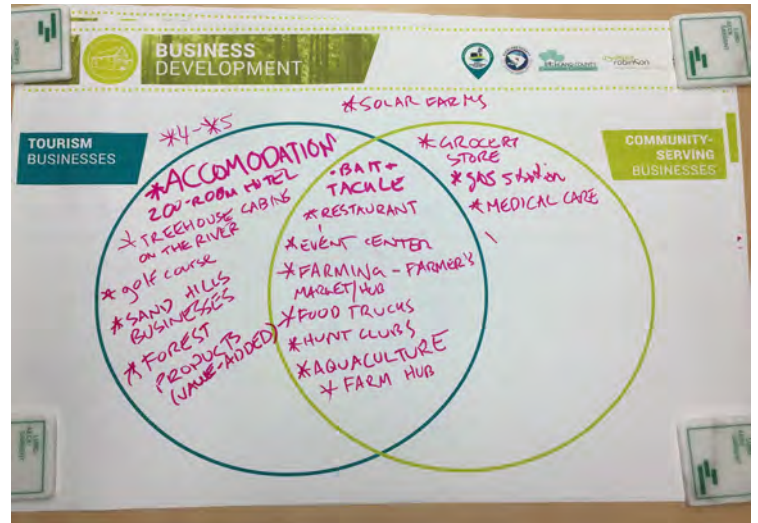
# SMALL BUSINESS

## TOP 3 THINGS

- 1. LIBRARY, MALL, HOSPITAL
- 2. LODGING / ACCOMMODATION
- 3. FOOD / RESTAURANTS
- 4. FARM COOP W/ HUB

NEEDED NEEDS

- 4. EDUCATION
- 5. ACCESS TO CAPITAL



# HERITAGE TOURISM

- SHARE CROPPING HISTORY
- FARM - LIVING HISTORY
- QUILTING MUSEUM
- ARTIST COLONY
- ANTEBELLUM PERIOD
- RR HISTORY DEPOT
- RICE, INDIGO
- GRIST MILL
- EXCURSION TRAIN
- OLD SCHOOLS
- SCENIC HWY
- CHURCHES
- DR. Clayton's OFFICE
- RV PARK
- HERITAGE CENTER / LODGE w/ LIBRARY FOR FAMILY HISTORY
- B & Bs

# NATURE - BASED TOURISM

- hiking
- cycling
- RV camping
- cabins
- food
- Farming - Farm-to-table restaurant
- Equestrian + horses
- Kayaking (for children)
- greenways
- Boy/Girl Scouts
- Fishing
- local benefit - skating RINK
- Boat ramp

Workshop sheets from Community Meeting #1





**EXISTING CONDITIONS**

# Scope of Analysis

The recommendations developed for the *Lower Richland Tourism Plan* rely heavily on both the input from local residents as well as an existing conditions assessment conducted by the planning team in the fall of 2016. The assessment included both a regional analysis of Lower Richland-- the area bounded by I-77 to the West, the Wateree River to the East, Fort Jackson to the North, and the Congaree River to the South-- and more localized site analysis of the Mill Creek and Cabin Branch tracts due to their public value and importance as future parkland.

## Key Questions

At both the regional and local scales, the assessment was oriented around several core questions related to the potential for increased tourism in Lower Richland:

- What are the places that best tell the stories of Lower Richland?
- What makes Lower Richland unique as a destination?
- What exists in Lower Richland to support tourism?
- What is missing in Lower Richland to support tourism?
- How do people get to Lower Richland?
- What are the challenges of getting to Lower Richland?
- What are the challenges of developing Lower Richland for tourism?

## Key Themes

To help answer these questions, the assessment was structured around three themes that would ultimately help to frame the tourism plan recommendations: *Nature Resources*, *Heritage Resources*, and *Tourism Infrastructure*. The themes give credence to what the planning team determined to be essential components of a future sustainable tourism economy in Lower Richland.

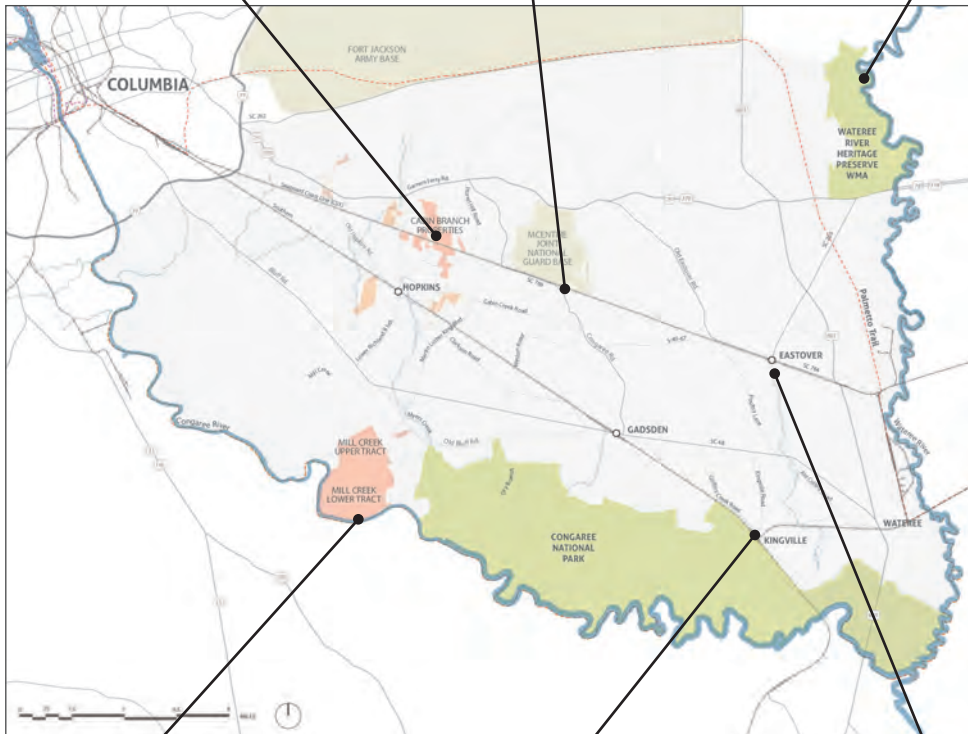
## Key Resources

Significantly, the assessment had the benefit of many resources to aid in collecting local information that was both technical and anecdotal. The resulting picture of Lower Richland illustrated by the information gathering is grounded in scientific rigor but animated by local experience.

Maps were compiled from GIS data provided by Richland County, the State of South Carolina and other sources to help provide base level information of both Lower Richland and the individual sites.

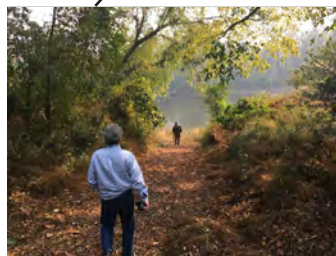
Numerous recent plans, studies, and guides of Lower Richland served as critical gateways to the area for the planning team including the *Lower Richland Strategic Community Master Plan* (Richland County Planning), *Lower Richland Heritage Corridor Visitor's Guide* (SERCO), *Cowasee Basin Tour Guide* (South Carolina Department of Natural Resources), and the *Congaree River Blue Trail Guide* (American Rivers).

Finally and most importantly, the planning team was guided by numerous Lower Richland community members, local stakeholders, Richland County staff, and elected officials who donated many hours of time to ensure that the view of Lower Richland included in the assessment would be comprehensive, inclusive, and authentic.



**KEY**

- Tourism Study Area
- County Conservation Lands
- County Conservation Easements
- National Forests
- Reserved Land
- Richland County Boundary
- Palmetto Trail
- Existing Bicycle Route
- Interstate
- State Highway
- Local Road
- Railroad



*Sites visits throughout Lower Richland*

# Natural Resources

## Lower Richland Assessment

### CONTEXT

Lower Richland is situated within a horseshoe formed by the Wateree River to the east, and the Congaree River to the west and south. The Broad River and the Saluda River merge to form the Congaree River, which then flows southeast for fifty miles before merging with the Wateree River immediately south of Richland County. The Congaree's entire watershed encompasses 689 square miles in Richland, Lexington, and Calhoun Counties. Numerous tributaries of the Congaree flow through this area including Rocky Branch, Cabin Branch, Congaree Creek, Gills Creek, Tom's Branch, Mill Creek, Cedar Creek, Sandy Run Creek, Big Beaver Creek, Butler's Gut, Bates Mill Creek, and Buckhead Creek. Mill Creek and Cabin Branch are of special interest to our study.

Land cover in the watershed is primarily forested land (54.2%), followed by forested wetland (21.8%), agricultural land (11.9%), urban land (7.4%), water (2.3%), barren land (2.0%), and non-forested wetland (0.4%). On the Richland County side of the Congaree River, 95% of existing land use is rural in nature with the remainder being suburban.

Lower Richland is a transition between the Piedmont (the plateau between the Appalachian Mountains and the Atlantic Coast) and the Lowcountry. This transition zone is known, in South Carolina, as the Sandhills. These sandhills are remnants of the ancient seacoast and dunes. In Lower Richland, these sandhills have been generally obliterated by the bottomlands of the Wateree and Congaree rivers.

Elements of the Piedmont, such as mountain laurel, barely enter Lower Richland at Cook Mountain. True Low Country only occurs

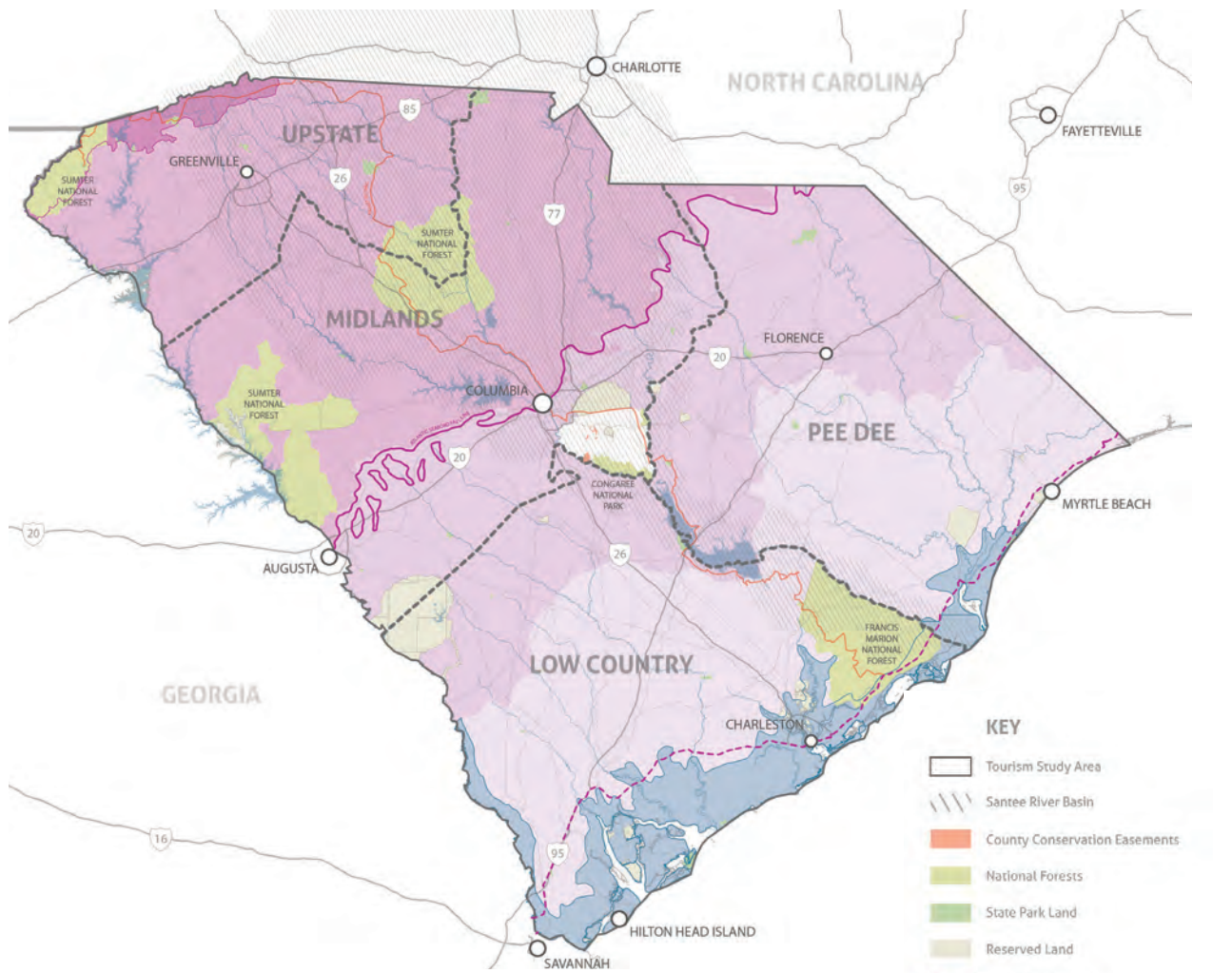


*Scene along the Fall Line. Painting by Eugene Dovilliers, c.1855; Image: South Carolina Digital Collections*

along the immediate coast. Therefore, it is best to consider Lower Richland a transition zone that has been sculpted by the forests and flooding of the two rivers that border the county.

Another transitional element to consider is the Fall Line or Fall Zone. The Atlantic Seaboard Fall Line is a 900-mile escarpment where the Piedmont and Atlantic Coastal Plain meet in the eastern United States. Much of the Atlantic Seaboard fall line passes through areas where no evidence of faulting is present. Examples of the Fall Zone include the Potomac River's Little Falls (Potomac River) and the rapids in Richmond, Virginia, where the James River falls across a series of rapids down to the tidal estuary of the James River. Columbia, South Carolina, is similar with the Congaree River.

Before navigation improvements such as locks, the fall line was often the head of navigation on rivers due to rapids and waterfalls. Numerous cities were founded at the intersection of rivers and the Fall Line. Washington D.C. was sighted on the Potomac River deliberately at the Fall Line for the same navigational reasons.



Lower Richland within South Carolina's predominant ecological regions.



The confluence of the Saluda and Broad Rivers which forms the headwaters of the Congaree River; Image: The Reserve

**The State of South Carolina, Department**

Account with *A. H. Hallie* Agent, to settle State Lands  
 paid in favor of the Purchasers named below:

Name of Purchaser	Name of Tract	No. of Lot	No. of Acres	Price Per Acre
<i>Caspe De Souch</i>	<i>Johnston</i>	1	84	1 30
<i>John De Bladith Johnson</i>	"	2	59	1 30
<i>Beaborn D. Johnson</i>	"	3	100	1 00
<i>James Grant</i>	"	4	48	1 50
<i>Woodes Perrier</i>	"	5	52 1/2	1 30
<i>Francis Taylor</i>	"	6	60	1 30
<i>Peter Johnston</i>	"	7	41	1 30
<i>Lucy Singleton</i>	"	8	30	1 50
<i>Paul Jones</i>	"	9	44	1 30
<i>Benjamin Hoppin</i>	"	10	36	1 30
<i>David Chaney</i>	"	11	46 1/2	1 30
<i>Benjamin Taylor</i>	"	12	36	1 30
<i>John Coppin Jr</i>	"	13	8 1/4	1 30
<i>W. H. H.</i>	"	14	2 1/2	1 30

Ledger from the South Carolina Land Commission

Cities that arose along the Fall Line attracted a diversity of residents and businesses. These cities served as hubs for products that were grown or manufactured inland and needed to be shipped to the ports, such as Charleston, along the coast. Columbia is one of those cities, and its influence in shaping Lower Richland, especially in recent times, is hard to overstate.

The history and development of Lower Richland is inextricably tied to the land. According to *Envisioning a Future - The Strategic Community Master Plan for Lower Richland County*, the Congaree Native American Tribe first found home in the bottomland hardwood forests of the river. Throughout the 1600s, many members of the tribe were captured in battle and/or sold into slavery. A smallpox outbreak in the late 1600s killed most of the remaining tribe.

Hernando DeSoto passed through the area and established Spanish outposts during his exploration of the southeastern United States. With the disappearance of the Congaree Native American Tribe, new European settlers obtained land grants from the King of England

until 1776, when the State of South Carolina assumed the right to distribute land to private owners.

Many of the first land grants in Richland County were located along the Congaree River, both opposite Friday's Ferry and near the mouths of Mill Creek and Gills Creek. Settlers farmed the fertile floodplain soil using enslaved Africans brought here as early as the 1740s. Enslaved labor was used to build agricultural dikes and cattle mounds which were constructed along the river to herd cattle grazing in the floodplain forests in times of floods; hay and feed could then be provided by boat. Some of the dikes and cattle mounds are still preserved within Congaree National Park.

Crops grown in the "rich land" such as indigo, rice, and tobacco were more easily grown on large-scale farms, leading to the domination of large plantations with many enslaved workers. By the end of the 18th century, farmers in Lower Richland were growing short-staple cotton, requiring even more enslaved workers, creating tremendous wealth for plantation





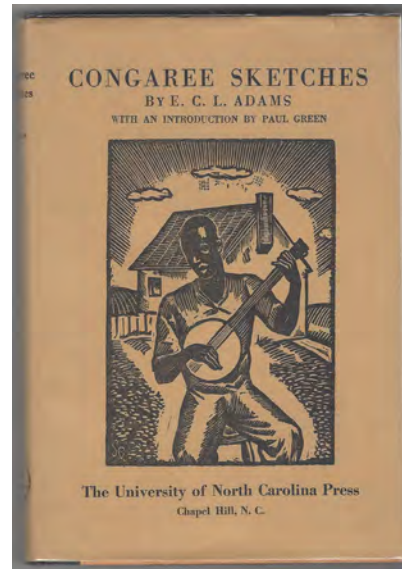


Launching point of the Congaree Blue Trail at the Gervais Street Bridge in downtown Columbia; Image: Ron Ahle

owners. By 1860, enslaved people made up 75% of the population of Lower Richland.

The Congaree River and its floodplain forests have been particularly important in the lives of African Americans. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, plantation and farm enslaved labor dominated. Published accounts show that slaves roamed these floodplain forests, seeking escape from the harsh realities of slave life.

After the Civil War and Reconstruction, the State of South Carolina, became “the only southern state to promote the redistribution of land for the benefit of freed men and women, as well as landless whites” through the South Carolina Land Commission. African Americans became landowners and farmers themselves, building homes and churches throughout Lower Richland. During the late 1800s, Lower Richland had the most population in the county second to Columbia. Along with the new farms, more families began to settle around the existing rail line connecting Columbia to the coast. Kingville, Acton, Eastover, Gadsden, Hopkins and Wateree all become centers of activity complete with post offices, merchants, schools, churches and other small agriculture-based operations.



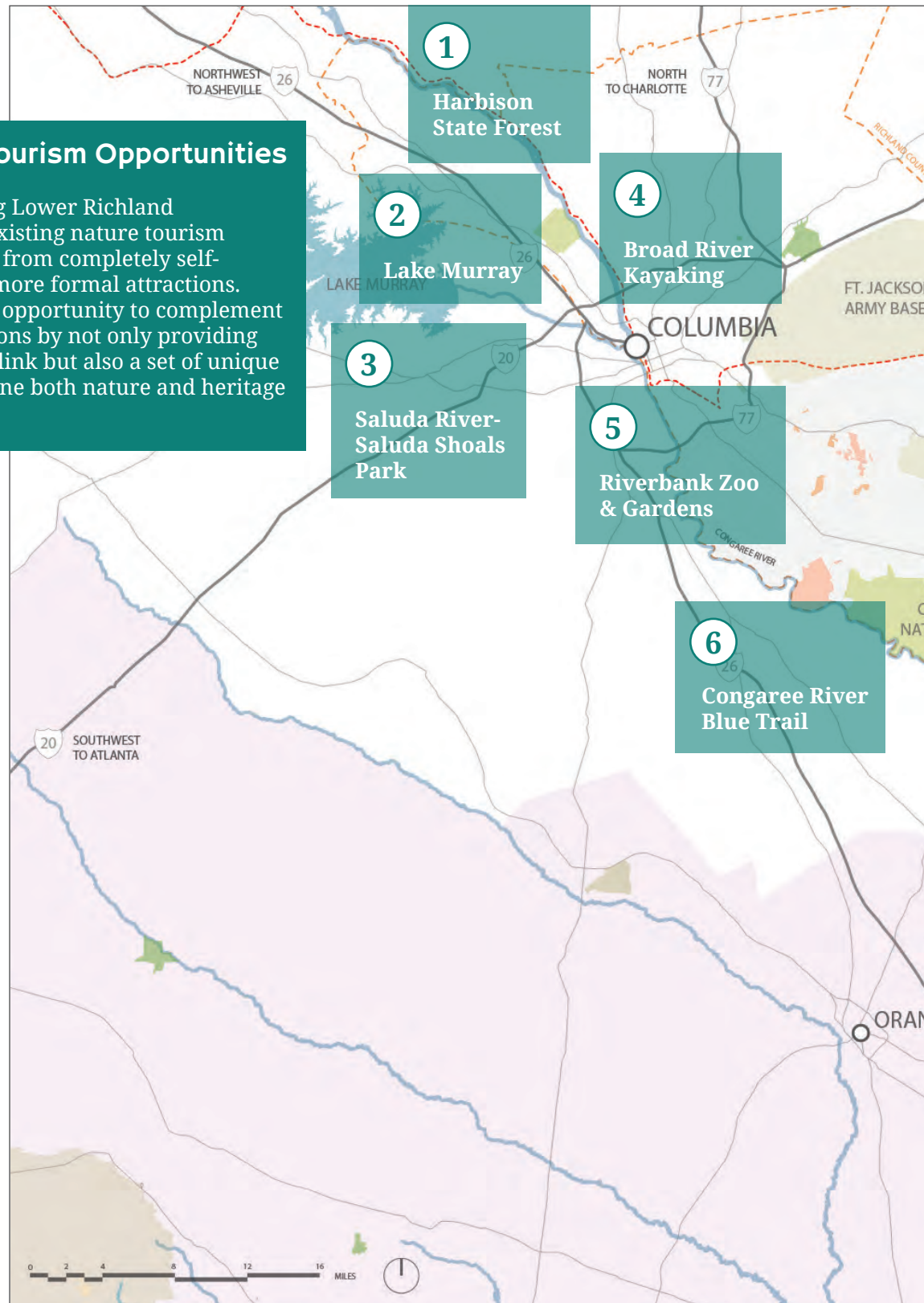
An intimate local knowledge of specific local landmarks (such as Bannister Bridge, Cowpen Lake, Jumpin’ Gut, and Goose Lake) was catalogued in the late 1920s by Edward C. L. Adams in his famous collection of African-American folklore, *Tales of the Congaree*.

Following World War II, the railroads were replaced by the interstate highway system and the population of Lower Richland slowly declined as more and more families moved from the country to the urban centers such as Columbia, Atlanta, and Chicago seeking employment opportunities.

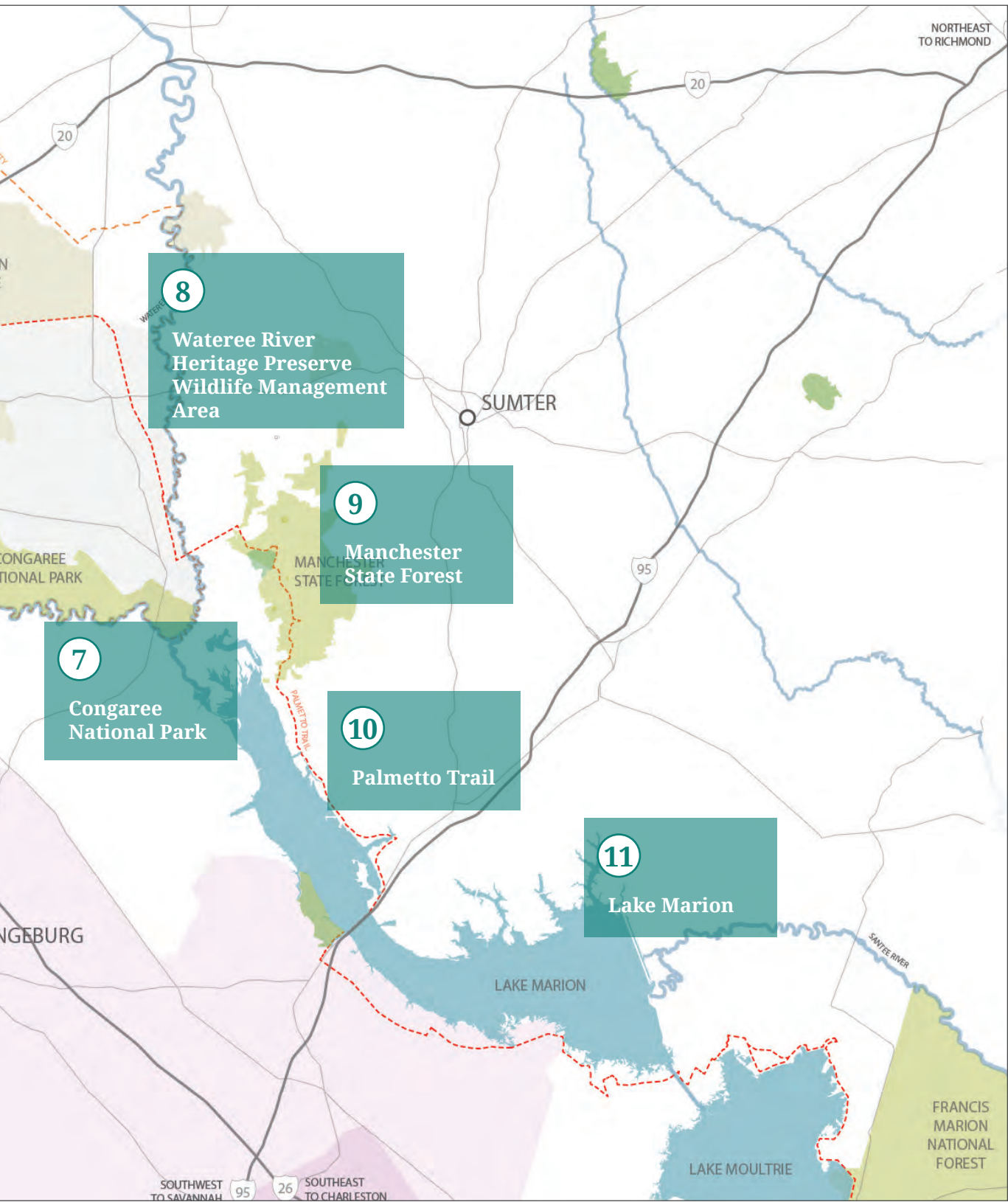
In recent history, the area has developed with the growth of three significant military operations, Fort Jackson, McCrady Army National Guard, and McEntire Air National Guard. Major employers such as Westinghouse and International Paper located facilities in the area. In 2003, the Congaree Swamp National Monument was designated as a National Park. This plan accommodates changes such as these in Lower Richland while preserving the area’s cultural identity and unique natural resources.

## Existing Nature Tourism Opportunities

The region surrounding Lower Richland includes a number of existing nature tourism destinations that range from completely self-guided experiences to more formal attractions. Lower Richland has an opportunity to complement these existing destinations by not only providing an obvious geographic link but also a set of unique experiences that combine both nature and heritage interests.



Map of existing nature tourism destinations around Lower Richland





*Synchronous Fireflies; image: National Parks Conservation Association*

## Synchronous Fireflies

Although there are 2,000 species of firefly in the world, the synchronous firefly (*Photuris frontalis*) is one of only three found in North America and Congaree National Park is one of the most accessible places to see them for around two weeks between mid-May and mid-June. During the evening hours of this period, visitors to the park can experience an incredible natural light show as the fireflies “synchronize” in searching for their mates within the sublime darkness of the national park.

While the show of synchronous fireflies is perhaps most renowned in Great Smoky National Park, where it has become a ticketed event, the rarity of the experience

has not been lost on the Columbia area as the owners of the City’s new minor league baseball team recently named the club The Fireflies.

Beyond the ecological importance of the mating ritual, the value of the event carries over into tourism for Lower Richland as interest in the phenomenon has reached a point where parking lots at the park are now filling up quickly and the park staff hosted a ‘Firefly Festival’ over Memorial Day weekend in 2017.

At only around two weeks per year, the fireflies won’t be able to support the tourism economy of Lower Richland on their own but they have become a strong indicator of the value and allure of nature tourism, and the potential to leverage local natural assets to draw more visitors to Lower Richland.

## ASSETS

There has been no development related to natural resources in Lower Richland of more consequence than the establishment of the Congaree National Park, the main recreational attraction of the region. The 26,276-acre park contains the largest area of old growth bottomland hardwood forest left in the United States, one of the highest concentrations of champion trees in the world, and in 2017 received more visitors-- over 160,000-- than any other year since its establishment as a national park in 2003. Prior to becoming a national park, the site was designated as Congaree Swamp National Monument by an Act of Congress in 1976, following a preservation campaign that began nearly a decade earlier.

The bottomlands that define Congaree National Park also define the character of Lower Richland. With the entire region formed from the drainage of the Congaree and the Wateree Rivers, these major hydrologic features not only frame the landscape but dictate the topography in between which flows towards one of these rivers. Therefore, it is the rivers which provide the most immediate natural asset to Lower Richland in expanding the opportunities for recreation and tourism. The existing Blue Trails along the Congaree and the Wateree are significant footholds in developing recreation along these corridors, as well as the Palmetto Trail which traverses the area as it connects the South Carolina's highlands and lowlands across the state. But none of these trails is developed enough to draw visitors in the numbers needed to support a tourism economy in Lower Richland. They all require additional access points, adjacent visitor infrastructure, and connections to other attractions.

The Congaree National Park is the only destination in Lower Richland that currently draws significant tourism. However, the economic impact of these visitors to the Lower Richland area is extremely limited due to restrictions within the park and a lack of a tourism infrastructure outside of the park.

There is no reason to believe that the national park will liberalize public use. Therefore, river recreation and tourism development will need to focus on other properties along the river that are not so restrictive. Fortunately, the county's purchase of the Mill Creek tract offers an ideal solution to this conundrum.

The importance of Congaree National Park as a globally-recognized resource, and the adjacent Mill Creek as a potential tourism and recreation venue, needs to be repeated. Congaree National Park protects an unrivaled old-growth bottomland hardwood forest that escaped the saws and axes of the post-Civil War South. The Congaree River, Wateree River, and several tributaries periodically flood the park, bringing rich silt that encourages tree growth. Approximately 90 species attain heights and girths found nowhere else in the state. The Mill Creek site, at over 2500 acres, offers an unparalleled opportunity to expand the offerings of the national park and provide a more accessible destination for residents and visitors alike.

In the vicinity of the national park, and along Lower Richland Boulevard, Lower Richland also boasts a large intact Carolina Bay. Approximately 100 acres in size on adjacent private land, this is a unique feature supporting an array of species that if preserved could become a significant draw for nature-loving visitors. A link between the Bay to the county's recently created conservation corridor along the Cabin Branch would also help anchor the nature tourism industry in Lower Richland.

The Wateree River Heritage Preserve Wildlife Management Area is the only other site in Lower Richland that has the potential to draw significant numbers of visitors on its own. With a spectacular view of the Wateree River from Cook's Mountain, an expansive protected forest, and many nearby heritage sites including Goodwill Plantation, the Wateree River Heritage Preserve Wildlife Management Area demands more visibility, programming, and links to other area features.

## CHALLENGES

The bottomlands which are Lower Richland's most significant draw for nature tourism are also its most significant handicap. These are by nature low-lying floodplain areas limited by lack of access, prone to seasonal flooding, and in the case of the Congaree National Park, restricted by the congressional Wilderness designation.

Per the National Park Service, in 1988, Public Law 100 - 524 (102 Stat. 2606) designated approximately 15,010 acres of Congaree National Park (then known as Congaree Swamp National Monument) as wilderness. The law also designated more than 6,800 acres, as "potential" wilderness [which has now been reclassified as wilderness]. The Wilderness Act, signed into law in 1964, established the highest level of conservation protection for federal lands. It prohibits permanent roads and commercial enterprises, except commercial services that may provide for recreational or other purposes of the Act. Wilderness areas generally do not allow motorized equipment, motor vehicles, mechanical transport, temporary roads, permanent structures or installations. The park now manages and protects approximately 21,700 acres as wilderness. That is about 82 percent of the park's total acreage.

While the provisions of the Wilderness Act are not unique to Congaree National Park, as Lower Richland's only current hub for tourism its impact on potential tourism revenue is significant. The wilderness designation has also had the unintended consequence of alienating the park from a significant portion of the local community, who see limited value in a park which cannot offer many of the amenities commonly found at other national parks, let alone state parks and local parks. Of course, this does not discredit the value of the wilderness preservation, but it amounts to a challenge for broadening the spectrum of nature tourism opportunities in Lower Richland. Moreover, expanding the tourism



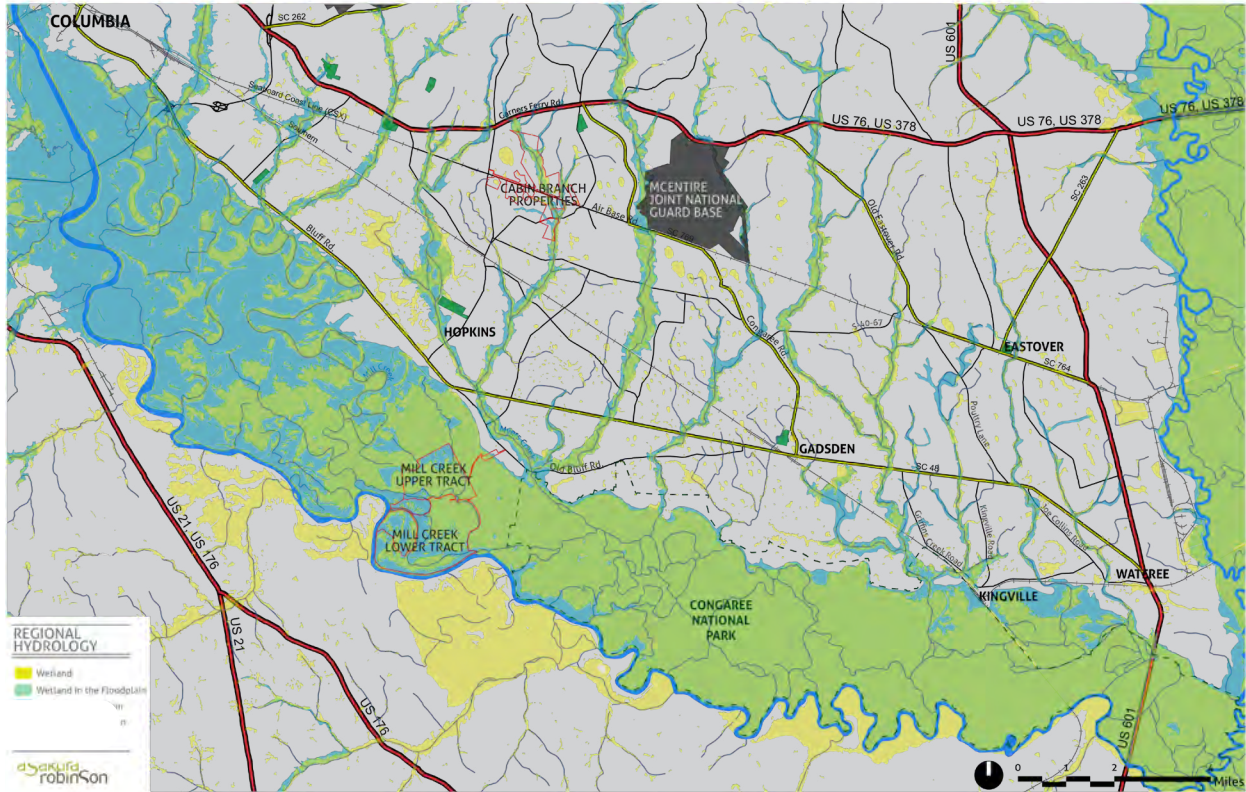
*Congaree bottomlands at Mill Creek*



*Wilderness boundary at Congaree National Park*



*Cyclist on Bluff Road*



*Flood plains occupy a substantial portion of Lower Richland*

economy in Lower Richland hinges heavily on the inclusion of local residents to participate in this economy, which means that Congaree National Park needs to be seen as an asset to the area. Park staff have made significant efforts in recent years to mitigate this effect and help the local community to find value in the park. While its uncertain if those efforts are impacting the number of visits specifically from locals, in 2017 the park increased total annual visitors by 15% from the previous year.

Access will be an ongoing challenge. While a primary benefit of the Mill Creek tract is its ability to support many of the programs restricted at the national park, its topography is just as susceptible to flooding. While not impacted by the Congaree River, the Cabin Branch tract has significant wetlands that will limit program options for the site.

Access to Lower Richland’s upland areas is far less of a concern. With clear major arteries including Bluff Road, Garners Ferry Road, Lower Richland Boulevard and Hwy. 601, arriving at many of Lower Richland other natural resources assets is more straightforward. What these routes lack, and by extension much of Lower Richland, is any ability to support modes of transportation other than motorized vehicles. There is a noticeable demand for more cycling routes through the area to connect with nature resource sites. Despite no dedicated bikeways, cyclists regularly brave the narrow roads of Lower Richland, and groups will regularly use the parking lot at Congaree National Park as a departure point for biking the area. Developing safe routes for cyclists is possible in Lower Richland but there is no standard condition from which to plan and the edges of most roadways typically fall off quickly into the natural landscape.

## Mill Creek Natural Resources Assessment

### CONTEXT

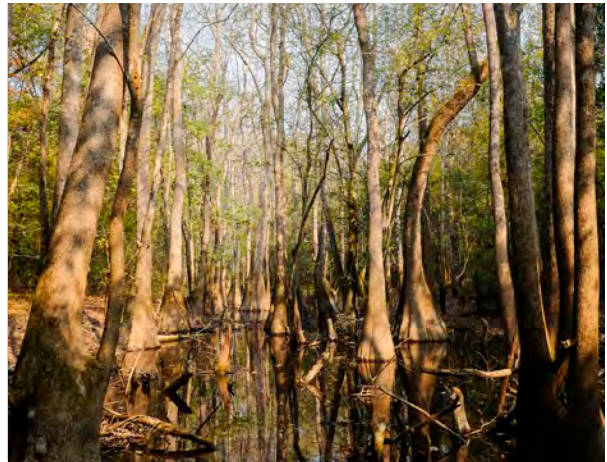
Purchased by Richland County in 2014 with the primary goal of providing mitigation credits to county public works projects, the 2,555 acres which comprise the Mill Creek site include some of the most beautiful and representative natural lands within Lower Richland. This is an area that has long been in private hands, but with very limited development, and largely inaccessible to the public for much of its recent history. Nevertheless, the site has supported various forms of recreation-- primarily hunting and fishing-- and agriculture in the form of cattle and timber for over 200 years.

The site has also long provided an important ecological link between the uplands and the bottomlands of Lower Richland, specifically from Old Bluff Road to the Congaree River, a link that is also provided by the nearby Congaree National Park, located only a half mile to the east. The two sites share much in regard to ecological and hydrological features, from extensive riverfront and bottomland hardwood forest, freshwater streams and wetlands, upland hardwood forest and pine forest. The habitat values of the two sites are essentially identical with similar corridors for aquatic, avian and terrestrial communities populating both sites. Moreover, both sites are equally impacted by their flood plain conditions which cause them to be inundated by flooding from the Congaree several times each year while at the same time transporting valuable nutrients and sediments across the landscape which in turn nourish and rejuvenate the ecosystem.

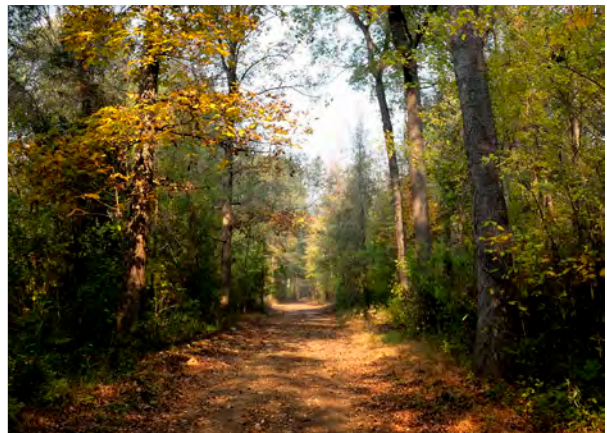
Where the Mill Creek differs most significantly from Congaree National Park is its regulations and access. Whereas approximately 85% of the national park is regulated by the Wilderness Act of 1964 which places strict



*Congaree River frontage*



*Bottomland forest*



*Upland forest with carriage trail*





Mill Creek tract existing conditions map

limits on its activities and visitor access, Mill Creek is comparatively far less regulated. Approximately 1400 acres of the total Mill Creek site is regulated as the mitigation bank, and currently being restored to allow for greater ecological functioning, but even this area is significantly more accommodating to recreation and access needs than the wilderness areas of the national park. In fact, all of the existing roads which traverse the site are excluded from the mitigation bank. The remaining portion of the site is currently only regulated by the same local and federal mandates, such as the Clean Water Act, that guide any development in sensitive and floodplain areas.

### ASSETS

With its significant acreage and natural features closely approximating those of Congaree National Park, the Mill Creek tract is without question the most suitable site for expanding Lower Richland's recreational development, especially sustainable recreational development, in a way that can contribute to increased tourism. Add to this the fact that the Mill Creek tract is not bound by the same restrictions as the national park, and it is straightforward to see how it could dramatically expand the area's recreational offerings.

Moreover, the foundation for this recreational development already exists at Mill Creek. The site has been operated as a private hunt club for many years, complete with a lodge that can house up to 24 people. A well-maintained network of carriage roads exists and over three miles of frontage on the Congaree River. These assets along with the numerous wetlands, streams, ponds, bluffs, and food plots would comfortably support numerous sustainable recreational uses such as hiking, biking, camping, birding, hunting, all types of boating and paddling, fishing, and environmental education programming, even within the boundaries of the mitigation bank. In short, recreations that are disallowed in the Congaree

National Park's wilderness areas are allowed on the Mill Creek tract. And, facilities that are unavailable in Congaree National Park can be developed at Mill Creek. This amounts to an ideal opportunity for both Richland County and the National Park Service. The national park can continue to focus on resource protection of the old-growth bottomland forest and the county can develop those recreational opportunities and support services that will complement the park.



*Access to the Congaree River at the Mill Creek tract*

In addition to being situated close to the national park, the Mill Creek site is located along the popular Congaree Blue Trail and sits approximately halfway between the major paddler put-in point at the Gervais Street Bridge and the major take-out point at the 601 Bridge. Given that a primary shortcoming of the Blue Trail is the limited number of access points, new facilities at the Mill Creek site has the potential to dramatically expand the use of the trail. With new access to the river at the Mill Creek site, paddlers will have the option of doing a much shorter itinerary or splitting the longer trip with improved accommodations. Additionally, with over three miles of river frontage at the Mill Creek site, there is potential to add two distinct access points to create a much shorter paddle route for novice paddlers or visitors with limited time.

## CHALLENGES

Given all of its notable natural assets and potential to accommodate many new visitors, the primary challenge to expanding recreational opportunities at the Mill Creek site will be in its management. At a preliminary level, any future steward of the site will need to coordinate new recreational development and visitor access with the goals of the mitigation bank. In practice, this will require public education, access strategies, and programming that are sensitive in and around the mitigation bank.

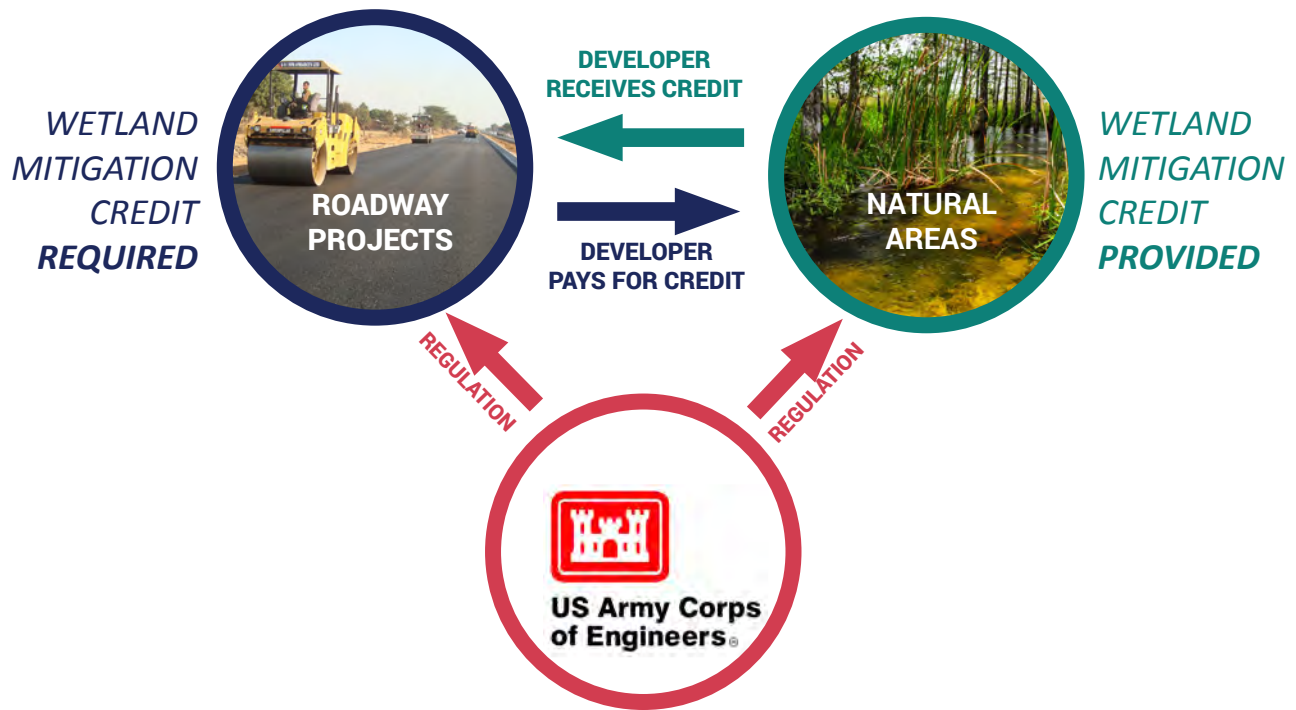
The introduction of more vehicles on the site will also pose some challenges given that the site has limited infrastructure for large groups of people to park. How and where parking is located will need to be carefully considered to insure sufficient access while not contributing to degradation of the site's natural features. In a similar vein, the site currently has only limited utility connections to the existing hunting lodge, and servicing any new amenities across the site will require sensitivity.

In general, the floodplain conditions which define the majority of the site will dictate the design and management of any new facilities and program areas. Both the course of the Congaree River and Mill Creek itself have moved considerably over time leading to significant changes in the landscape.

## Excerpt from the Mill Creek Mitigation Bank Study

The goal of the Bank is to preserve, enhance, and restore streams and wetlands associated with the Congaree River in order to generate credits that can be sold to permittees in need of compensatory mitigation for impairments of stream and wetlands associated with authorized (permitted) impacts occurring within the Bank's service area. Specific goals within the Bank include:

- Preserving the forested wetlands that provide filtration of floodwaters and habitat corridors within the floodplain of the Congaree River;
- Preserving the channels that connect hydrology and ecology within the Congaree River floodplain;
- Restoring multidirectional hydrologic connections and normal flow regimes within channels impacted by a dam and riser (UT 2, UT 3, UT 9, and Dead River) and existing roadways (UT 8) to promote exchange with the Congaree River;
- Improving connectivity and naturalizing hydraulics for biocomplexity;
- Enhancing the connectivity of floodplain wetlands to the Congaree River in order to promote the exchange of surface waters and natural hydrologic regimes;
- Establishing natural hydroperiods and hydrodynamics in floodplain wetlands impacted by ditches, culverts, and risers;
- Reconnecting floodplain wetlands to floodplain stream channels to promote the exchange of surface waters and natural hydrologic regimes;
- Restoring a natural bottomland hardwood floodplain community in areas converted to open fields or planted pine; and,
- Preserving and enhancing foraging habitat for colonial birds, shore birds, and the federally threatened wood stork.



## Mitigation Banking

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), “a mitigation bank is a wetland, stream, or other aquatic resource area that has been restored, established, enhanced, or (in certain circumstances) preserved for the purpose of providing compensation for unavoidable impacts to aquatic resources permitted under Section 404 [of the Clean Water Act] or a similar state or local wetland regulation. A mitigation bank may be created when a government agency, corporation, nonprofit organization, or other entity undertakes these activities under a formal agreement with a regulatory agency.”

The federal Clean Water Act (CWA), established by Congress in 1972, provided a range of protections for surface waters of the U.S.

According to the EPA, “Section 404 of the CWA establishes a program to regulate the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States, including wetlands. The basic premise of the program is that no discharge of dredged or fill material may be permitted if: (1) a practicable alternative exists that is less damaging to the aquatic environment or (2) the nation’s waters would be significantly degraded.”

The first mitigation banks, were established in 1983 as an effective means of meeting the requirements of Section 404 of the CWA. Commonly referred to as compensatory mitigation, the guidelines which define the creation and management mitigation banks have evolved considerably since 1983 and the national database which monitors the mitigation banks now includes over 1,800 sites.



## Cabin Branch Natural Resources Assessment

### CONTEXT

The multiple tracts which comprise the Cabin Branch site were purchased by Richland County in 2014 for mitigation and to protect water quality, riparian habitat, and remnant agricultural lands along the Cabin Branch stream corridor. From a natural resource perspective, conservation around the Cabin Branch is significant in that its riparian area is largely intact, immediate surrounding areas are not yet heavily developed, and the stream is a tributary to the Congaree River though it does not connect directly. At its southern terminus, Cabin Branch connects with Myers Creek which in turn flows into Congaree National Park where it becomes Cedar Creek. But unlike Cedar Creek which provides a paddling opportunity within the national park, Cabin Branch is not navigable, and its flow is significantly hampered where it meets Air Base Road and the adjacent railroad line.

Although the site is located in close proximity to the busy commercial corridor of Garners Ferry Road and the primary north-south corridor of Lower Richland Boulevard, it is nearly unnoticeable to passing motorists as it lacks any significant frontage along these corridors. The site does flank Air Base Road and from here the public currently has its best visual access of the site. Formalized physical access is currently facilitated by only a very minor utility access road. Although the site currently totals approximately 700 acres, it lacks any significant infrastructure for public use and some of the tracts remain largely disconnected with private lands in between, some of which offer impressive conservation opportunities.



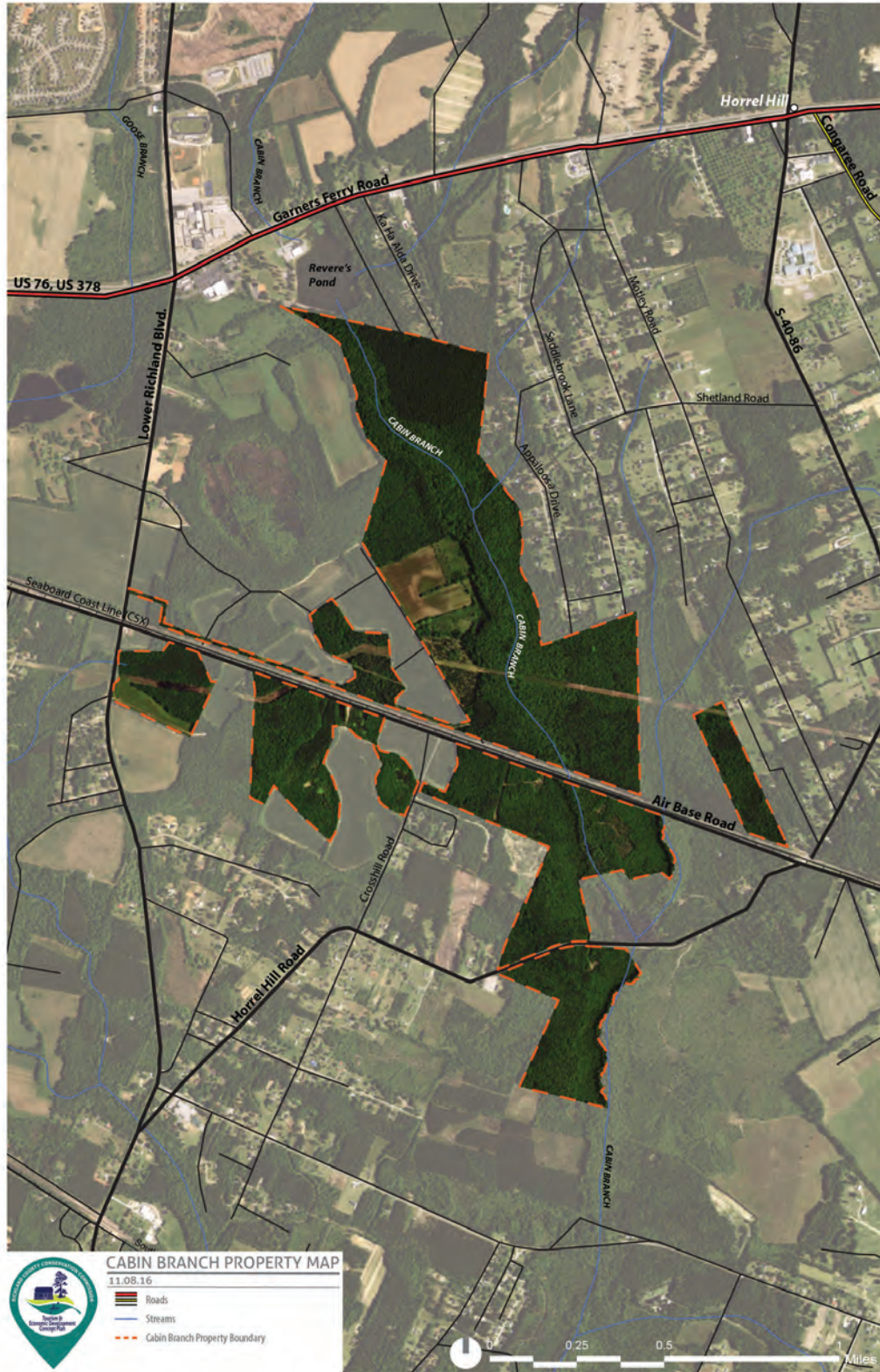
*Sunflower fields currently maintained by dove hunters*



*Wooded trails*



*Cabin Branch stream meeting Air Base Road*



Cabin Branch tract existing condition map

## ASSETS

The greatest potential for the Cabin Branch site to become a publicly accessible natural resource and contribute to Lower Richland tourism lies in its very intact riparian area and remnant agricultural lands in close proximity to major transportation corridors. Situated along a tributary to the Congaree River, there is significant value in a conservation corridor that would start at the current Cabin Branch site and wind its way to the national park. A feature such as this would fulfill multiple goals for Lower Richland: Cabin Branch water quality and ultimately the water quality of the Congaree River, would be protected; Lower Richland residents and visitors would gain a recreational corridor with trails connecting sites of interest; habitat areas would be protected and enhanced; and potentially agricultural lands would be preserved to not only support an emerging economy but help to communicate the heritage of Lower Richland. Given that the growth of tourism in Lower Richland will rely on maintaining the rural character of the area, concepts such as the Cabin Branch Corridor which string together multiple properties will be critical to ensuring this vision.

Another significant natural asset of the Cabin Branch site, though currently not protected, is an adjacent intact Carolina Bay. These unique geological features scattered along the Atlantic seaboard are not only unusual topographical features-- essentially large wetland depressions in the landscape-- but as with most wetland environments, harbor an extraordinary diversity of plant and animal species. If protected and connected to the Cabin Branch site, the Carolina Bay has the potential to be an anchor feature for the site and a gateway experience for visitors as it would help to connect the current Cabin Branch site to Lower Richland Boulevard. In fact, the owners of Carolina Bay Farms, located on Lower Richland Boulevard, and connecting to the Carolina Bay, are actively using their access to the bay for environmental education programming with area schools.



*Carolina Bay; image: Carolina Bay Farms*

## CHALLENGES

The Cabin Branch site does face a set of fairly significant challenges in regard to managing its natural resources for tourism. Access and lack of infrastructure for even the most basic of visits are perhaps the most obvious deficiencies. In its current condition, the site is not contiguous enough to be easily accessed by local residents let alone visitors to the area. It is still effectively, 'off the map', given that few of the Lower Richland residents who participated in this plan's engagement efforts had any familiarity with the site. In addition, much of the site is within the floodplain and defined by very boggy conditions, ensuring that navigation in and around the site may be extremely challenging at times. The Cabin Branch stream itself is not well defined through the site, and has limited flow at times. Needless to say, all of these issues are eminently resolvable but efforts to leverage the natural resources of Cabin Branch site should begin with a clear public access strategy that mitigates potential conflicts with adjacent property owners and provides interpretive information to better orient visitors to the site's natural assets.





*Cabin Branch as seen from the railroad line*

# Heritage Resources

## Lower Richland Assessment

The Congaree bottomlands have shaped the face and character of the Lower Richland people. Through a confluence of influences (Piedmont, Fall Line, Lowcountry, colonial, English, revolutionary, antebellum, Civil War, enslaved people, freedmen, farming), a unique culture has arisen in Lower Richland. This culture offers the area an opportunity to reach out to the traveling public and attract visitors and their economic impact.

Indeed, there is already an abundance of published secondary sources of historic information, and the planning team has benefited tremendously from access to these documents. Ranging from the scholarly to the self-published travel guide, these documents are a testament to the recognized value of Lower Richland's heritage.

Lower Richland heritage is a fusion of what appear to be disparate parts. Yet, out of this fusion comes something new. The challenge for Lower Richland is to bring this heritage to the attention of the traveling public. In doing so, tourists and residents will benefit alike.

This diverse culture has resulted in an abundance of heritage sites in Lower Richland and this is well documented in published secondary material, including the Lower Richland Heritage Corridor Visitor's Guide published by SERCO and the 1986 Lower Richland County Multiple Resource Area (LRCMRA) nomination of multiple sites to the National Register of Historic Places. The sites include historic homes, businesses, institutions such as churches and schools, and landscapes of cultural significance such as cemeteries and agricultural areas. Indeed, the picture of Lower Richland illustrated by all of these sites is a place rooted in faith, hard work, and a deep attachment to the land.



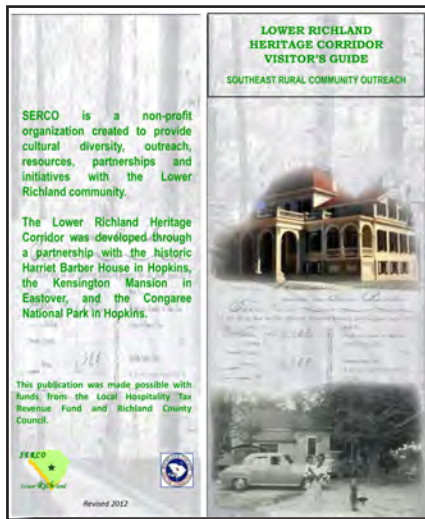
*Harriet Barber House in Hopkins*



*Kingville historic marker*



*Cotton fields*



*Lower Richland Heritage Corridor Visitor's Guide published by SERCO*

There is no doubt that Lower Richland has sufficient heritage resources to attract visitors. The LRCMRA nomination included seventeen distinct properties for consideration, twenty historical markers dot the landscape, and the tour guide developed by SERCO includes dozens of churches, cemeteries, historic homes, and the like, and

Yet, none of these sites, except Kensington, can be considered a tourism destination, in the sense that none have sufficient historical and cultural assets to attract a wide audience. Certainly, there are events in the area, such as Congaree Swampfest, that attract a diverse audience. But, for the most part Lower Richland heritage is evidenced at disparate and disconnected sites.

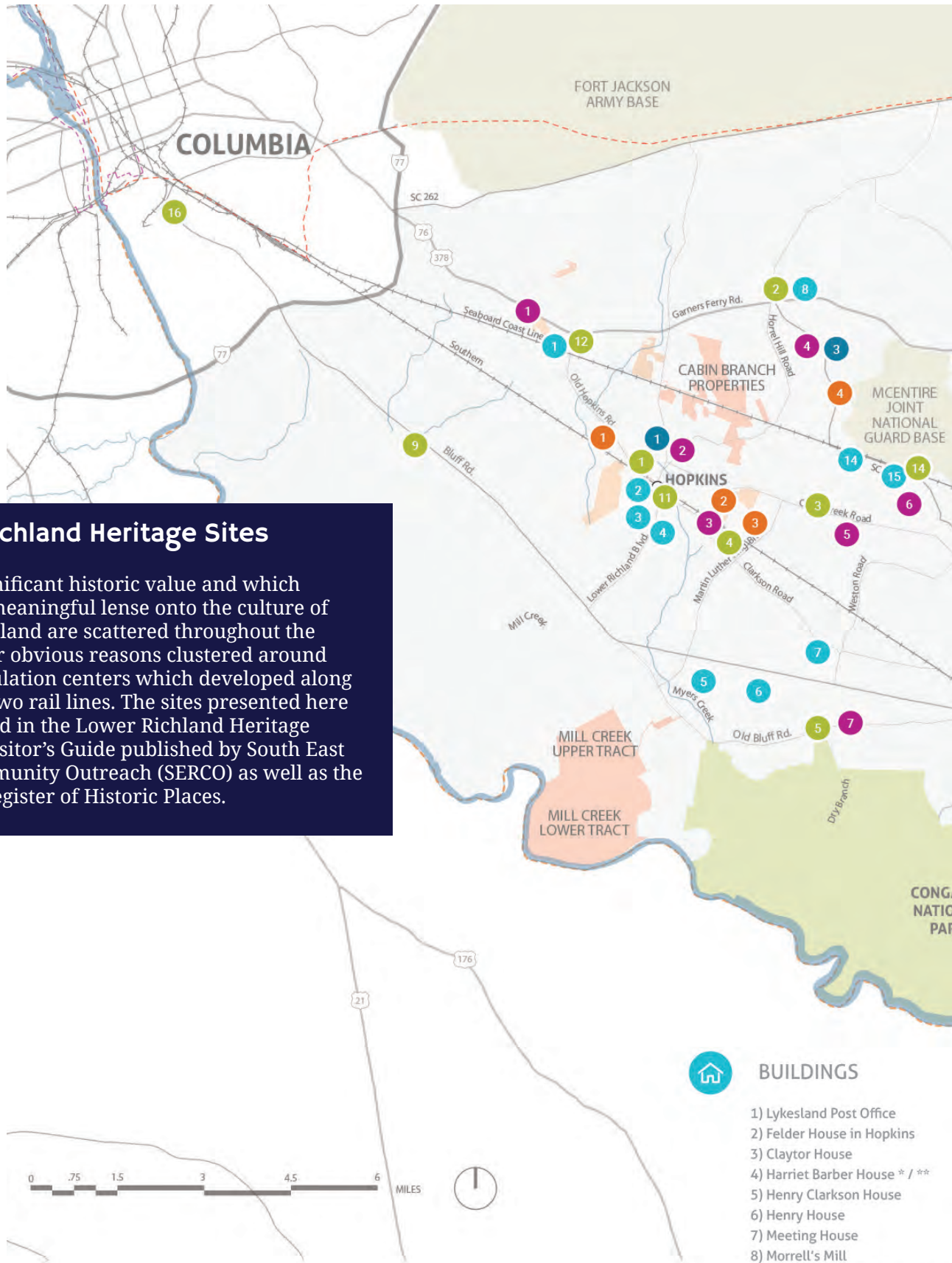
What is perhaps most striking about this disconnect is just how *connected* all of these sites once were. Lower Richland's development owes much to the arrival of the railroad, and nearly all of the area's population centers-- which in turn is where we find the majority of the heritage sites-- were originally linked by rail. Today, we find ourselves looking for new ways of connecting these sites via roadways

that are either poorly maintained or cannot support the range of transportation modes desired by visitors to the area.

Given the rise of the movement to convert rails to trails throughout the U.S., including many active lines with enough right-of-way to support an adjacent trail, it is hard to not imagine the potential boon to tourism from a trail along either of Lower Richland's two existing freight rail lines, currently managed by CSX and Norfolk Southern. There is no mistaking the feasibility challenge of such an idea but it needs to be explored.

Tourism struggles in areas where a destination is lacking. By destination, we are referring to a place of interest where tourists visit, typically for its inherent or exhibited natural or cultural value, historical significance, natural or built beauty, offering leisure, adventure and amusement.

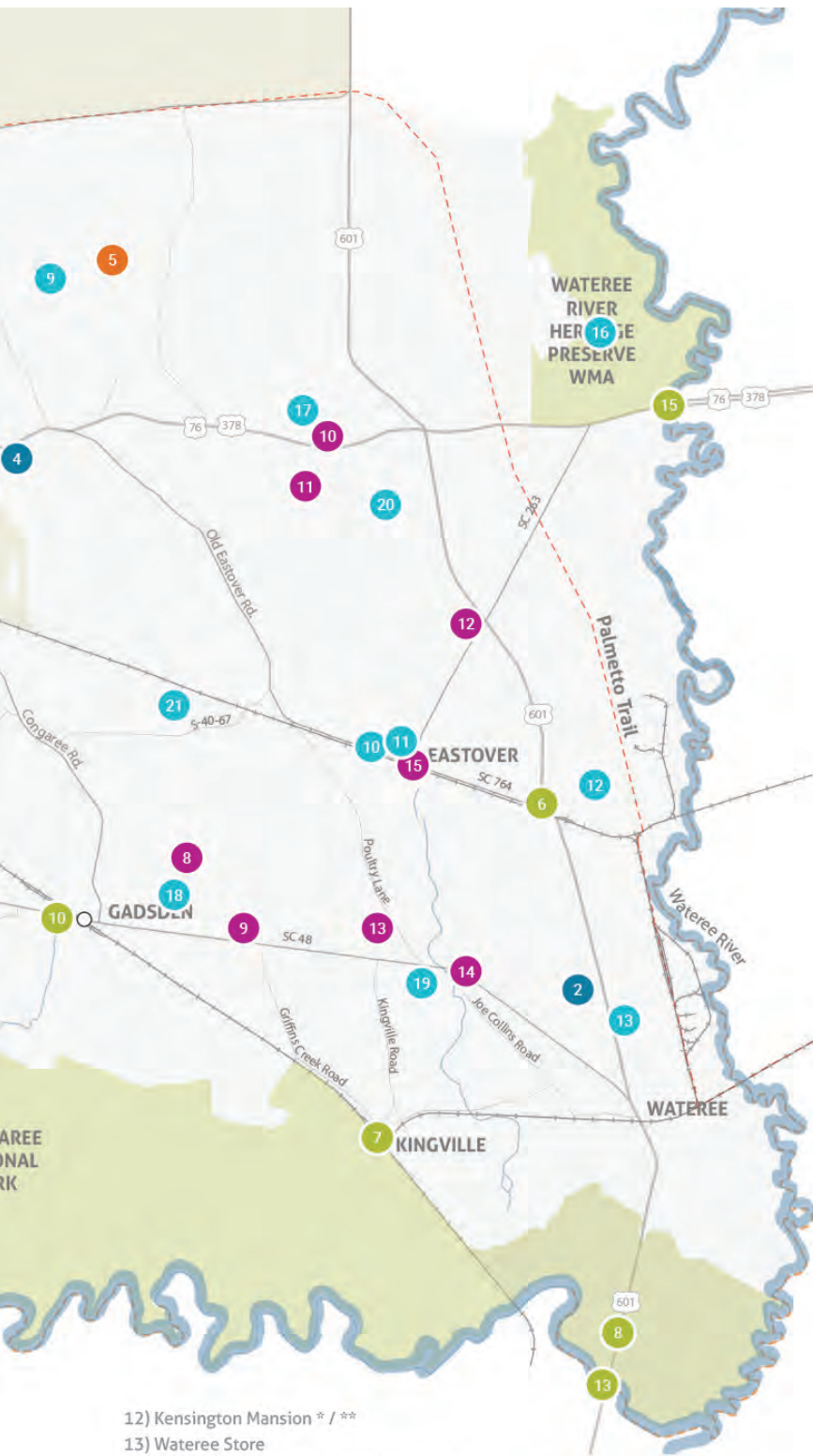
A recent study from the University of South Carolina's Smart State Center of Economic Excellence in Tourism and Economic Development has revealed that African-American tourists are responsible for \$2.4 billion in economic impact for South Carolina, an impact that is associated with approximately 26,302 jobs and \$789.5 million in labor income. Just a 5% increase in visitation from African-Americans will result in an economic impact of \$118.6 million in annual output, and an additional 1,315 jobs and \$39.5 million in labor income for South Carolinians. But the surveys showed that awareness is still low, with 55% of African-American visitors unfamiliar with African-American cultural attractions in South Carolina. This report concludes that "the state needs to invest in promoting African-American culture." In the estimation of the planning team, there is no better place to increase African-American visitation, and to promote African-American culture, than in Lower Richland.



**Lower Richland Heritage Sites**

Sites of significant historic value and which provide a meaningful lense onto the culture of Lower Richland are scattered throughout the area but for obvious reasons clustered around major population centers which developed along the area's two rail lines. The sites presented here are included in the Lower Richland Heritage Corridor Visitor's Guide published by South East Rural Community Outreach (SERCO) as well as the National Register of Historic Places.

- BUILDINGS**
- 1) Lykesland Post Office
  - 2) Felder House in Hopkins
  - 3) Claytor House
  - 4) Harriet Barber House \* / \*\*
  - 5) Henry Clarkson House
  - 6) Henry House
  - 7) Meeting House
  - 8) Morrell's Mill
  - 9) Keziah Goodwyn Hopkins Brev
  - 10) J.A. Byrd Mercantile Store \*\*
  - 11) Eastover Farmers and Mercha



- 12) Kensington Mansion \* / \*\*
- 13) Waterree Store
- 14) Magnolia Plantation / Wavering Place \*\*
- 15) Grovewood Plantation \*\*
- 16) Goodwill Plantation \*\*
- 17) Laurelwood Plantation \*\*
- 18) Kaminer House \*\*
- 19) Oakwood / Trumble Cottage \*\*
- 20) Claudius Scott Cottage \*\*
- 21) Bellaire



### CEMETERIES

- 1) Hopkins Family Cemetery \*\*
- 2) Government Cemetery
- 3) Goodwyn Cemetery
- 4) Beulah Cemetery
- 5) Logues Creek Cemetery

### HERITAGE SITES KEY

- \* South Carolina Historic Marker
- \*\* National Register of Historic Places



### SITES / LANDSCAPES

- 1) Hopkins Turnout/Old Post Office Site \*
- 2) Horrell Hill \*
- 3) Minervaville \*
- 4) Ephraim DeVeaux-Neal Property
- 5) Congaree National Park\*\*
- 6) Eastover \*
- 7) Kingville \*
- 8) Congaree River Ferries \*
- 9) Early Richland County Settlements \*
- 10) Gadsden \*
- 11) Hopkins \*
- 12) Grave of Joseph Reese \*
- 13) John M. Bates Bridge \*
- 14) James H. Adams \*
- 15) Waterree River Ferries \*
- 16) Friday's Ferry \*



### CHURCHES

- 1) Mill Creek United Methodist
- 2) Hopkins Presbyterian Church \* / \*\*
- 3) St. John's Baptist Church
- 4) New Light Beulah Baptist Church
- 5) Zion Benevolent Baptist Church
- 6) St. John's Episcopal Church
- 7) Mount Moriah Baptist Church
- 8) Red Hill Church
- 9) Congaree Baptist Church \*
- 10) Good Hope Baptist Church \*\*
- 11) Antioch AME Zion Church
- 12) St. Thomas Protestant Episcopal Church \*\*
- 13) Old Richland Presbyterian Church \* / \*\*
- 14) Mt. Nebo Baptist Church
- 15) Eason Memorial Baptist



### SCHOOLS

- 1) Old Hopkins School \* / \*\*
- 2) St. Phillip School \*\* / St. Phillip AME Church \*
- 3) Siloam School \*\*
- 4) Bellwood

## Key Sites

While there exists substantial documentation of the heritage sites in Lower Richland, most of these sites lack sufficient tourism infrastructure to effectively support a tourism economy in Lower Richland. The following are specific sites identified in the heritage assessment that have a greater potential role in a new tourism economy if provided with strategic investments to better serve visitors. These are sites that the planning team believes to be the most significant examples of Lower Richland heritage typologies-- historic homes, historic churches, historic schools, historic businesses, historic cemeteries, and historic places and landscapes are some examples-- as well as sites that could catalyze a greater appreciation for Lower Richland and encourage additional investment.



*Historic buildings on Main Street in Eastover listed on the National Register of Historic Places*



*Wateree Store*



*Harriet Barber House*



*Hopkins Grade School*



*Good Hope Baptist Church*



*Kensington Mansion*



*Goodwyn Cemetery*



*Kingville*



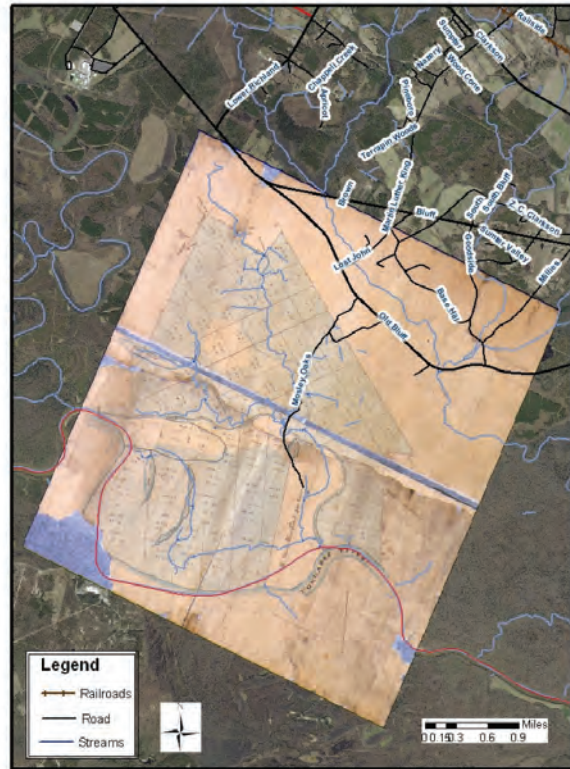
*Congaree Baptist Church*

## Mill Creek Heritage Resources Assessment

Although the more prominent value of the Mill Creek conservation area is in the natural resources of the site, there are significant heritage elements as well which demand greater visibility.

According to the Public History Program of the University of South Carolina's *Lower Richland County African-American Heritage Program*, the Mill Creek properties date to the original 5,165 acre O'Hanlon Tract which was one of seven large tracts subdivided as part of the South Carolina Land Commission in 1870, a Reconstruction-era program unique to South Carolina aimed at enabling formerly enslaved people to acquire lands. Although the properties have been long since consolidated, the original tract was divided into at least 170 original parcels and records show that land was purchased from the South Carolina Land Commission between January 1870 and May 1887 by about seventy-eight original purchasers. Only about fifteen of those completed making payments and secured a deed for their land. Today, traces of these parcels have been erased from the landscape but there is a significant story to tell given the impact of the South Carolina Land Commission program on land ownership in Lower Richland.

Historic and literary documents also provide a glimpse of the Mill Creek lands' cultural value to Lower Richland residents over several generations. Although a visitor to the area today may easily miss the properties as they drive along Old Bluff Road, historically the lands provided an important link between Old Bluff Road and the Congaree River for recreation. One of the most revealing accounts of this comes in E.C.L. Adams' short story collection *Congaree Sketches*, originally published in 1927 and republished in 1987 as part of a compilation of Adams' other



Copyright 2009 Public History Program of the University of South Carolina for the Lower Richland County African-American Heritage Project.

*Map of the original land parcels which comprise the Mill Creek site; Source: Public History Program of the University of South Carolina for the Lower Richland County African-American Heritage Program.*

work. In the short story "Goose Pond," Mill Creek's notable upland water feature is the subject of a conversation between the two primary characters, but the pond itself is the true character. Alternatively described as a harrowing place full of wildlife and a stunningly beautiful landscape, the piece illustrates how the Mill Creek site fit into the regular life of Lower Richland residents, both black and white.

As a site that has been a part of the cultural fabric of Lower Richland for generations, Mill Creek is also somewhat unique in its distance from the railroad. The vast majority of heritage sites in Lower Richland are close to population centers originally tied to development along the railroads. Mill Creek is neither and almost exclusively in the floodplain. Nevertheless, the site's historic value has been as a link from Old Bluff Road to the river and this will continue.



In fact, one of the site's earliest known developments was Howell's Ferry, also known as Russell's Ferry, an early Congaree River crossing that has been documented in accounts from both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. Reportedly built around 1766 as part of a road system for Lower Richland developed by Thomas Howell, a prominent cattle rancher and landowner. The road leading to the ferry is by some accounts considered one of the first public roads in Richland County.

Just as the site links Old Bluff Road to the river, it also links the river with Old Bluff Road. With the Congaree Blue Trail continuing to draw visitors to Lower Richland, the Mill Creek area is ideally situated to serve as critical link between nature and heritage experiences as part of Lower Richland's tourism strategy.

## Cabin Branch Heritage Resources Assessment

As with the Mill Creek site, the primary tourism value of the Cabin Branch site is in its natural resources. Yet, there is heritage value to this area and it exists primarily in the agricultural lineage of the lands. This is not insignificant given the predominance of agriculture to the Lower Richland identity and its prevalence to the area's evolving landscape.

Beginning with the plantation settlement of the Hopkins family in the mid-1700's, continuing through to today with several smaller niche farms in operation or with plans to break ground, the Cabin Branch site offers a unique lens onto this historic trajectory. Indeed, the ways in which farming has impacted the landscape of Lower Richland are numerous and it is impossible to appreciate the area, let alone understand it, without a grounding in how centuries of farming have changed the landscape.



*Remnant farm equipment near the Cabin Branch site.*

This impact of agriculture can be interpreted in several ways on the existing site. The parcelization of the site combined with the limited remnants of development are perhaps the most obvious cues to the historic usage of the land. Following these aspects, the site's prevailing vegetation patterns are noticeably agricultural in character and contrast markedly with the riparian edges of the site which border Cabin Branch. There is no doubt an abundance of stories embedded in this landscape that are looking for a way to be shared. Treating the Cabin Branch site as a place for agricultural heritage can ultimately serve two primary purposes: it can help to better orient visitors to the landscape and culture of Lower Richland in a location not far from the heavily trafficked Garners Ferry Road; and it can also inspire others in the community to consider new forms of agriculture and agritourism as a part of a viable economy for Lower Richland.

One specific site that could be better leveraged within the Cabin Branch site area, and potentially tying into the agricultural heritage, is the Goodwyn Cemetery. This abandoned and nearly inaccessible site has been researched in recent years through funding from Richland County and could become an asset along a Cabin Branch conservation corridor.

# Tourism Infrastructure

## Commercial Development and Economic Activity

The scarcity of retail activity in Lower Richland presents issues for residents in navigating their day-to-day household needs, as well as for tourists, who have little ability or incentive to spend their dollars within the Lower Richland area or to remain in Lower Richland for more than a day trip to the Congaree National Park. Currently, commercial activity tends to be concentrated along Garners Ferry Road, particularly along the western portion of Garners Ferry that abuts Columbia; community-serving retail like a Food Lion grocery store and a locally-owned Ace Hardware are located in this area. South of Garner's Ferry, residents and tourists have few retail options; the primary options are two Dollar General stores located in Gadsden and Eastover, and convenience stores which often provide enhanced services such as prepared foods, bait and tackle items, and other items needed to meet local demand.

Much of the economic activity in Lower Richland is based on large industrial plants, which are an important source of revenue for South Carolina counties and municipalities; a variety of industrial processes take place in Lower Richland, including a large nuclear fuel facility operated by Westinghouse, a quail processing plant (Manchester Farms) which distributes to restaurants nationwide, and the International Paper plant which is a major employer in the area. The planned Pineview industrial park and Shop Road extension will add new employers and industrial activity. In order to complement these industrial activities with sustainability-oriented and agriculture-oriented businesses, residents and the county are interested in exploring opportunities in agriculture and agribusiness as well as in the sustainable tourism industry that is the focus of this plan.



*This page and facing page: existing locally-owned businesses in Lower Richland which also specialize in locally-sourced products*

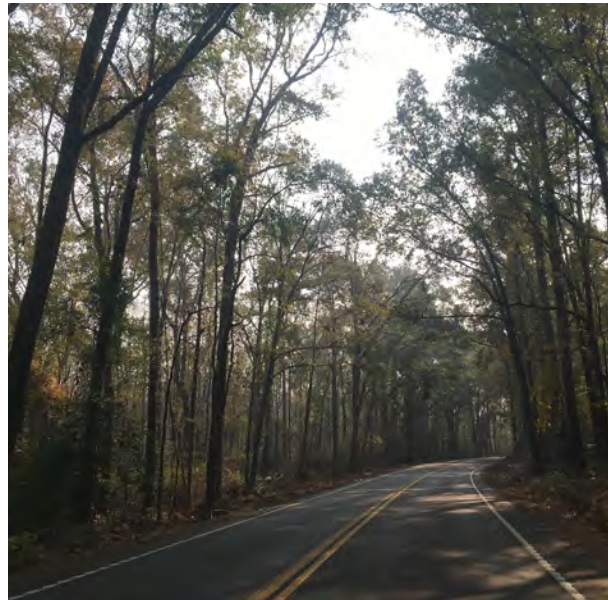


## Mobility

As in many rural areas, mobility in Lower Richland is limited to a basic roadway network with very few options for other transportation modes beyond motorized vehicles. The roadway network includes every major roadway type ranging from interstate highway down to local roads, with a large predominance of local roads of varying conditions. Bus service to the area is also a relatively new feature, and although the current Route 47 now serves a large portion of Lower Richland, it runs only on weekdays and on 120 minute intervals.

With such a basic circulation network, access to Lower Richland is very straightforward via Garners Ferry Road (US 76), Bluff Road (SC 48), and McCord's Ferry Road (US 601). Of these three arterials, Garners Ferry receives by far the most traffic and suffers from regular congestion during peak travel times. Safety is also a concern along Garners Ferry Road with a high frequency of turn lanes. At the present, none of these roadways is equipped to accommodate cyclists. Bluff Road offers the best potential to support a future bikeway that would connect Lower Richland to Columbia. Not only does Bluff Road see lighter traffic in general, its edge conditions generally offer sufficient space to fit a trail, although there is no typical condition. Bicycle facility improvements are also planned for streets which connect with Bluff Road within Columbia. The sewer line running from Columbia follows Bluff Road and has recently cleared area along the right-of-way for pipe installation. Whether this easement could be utilized for a bike trail is unclear, but worth investigating further.

Connectivity between population centers and places of interest in Lower Richland is generally very limited. Even within population centers such as Hopkins, Gadsden and Eastover, there is insufficient pedestrian infrastructure to connect even key sites. It is



*Garners Ferry Road (top) and Old Bluff Road (bottom) represent the range of typical roadway conditions in Lower Richland*

clear that beyond providing a bikeway that connects Lower Richland to Columbia, a secondary network of roadways which are safe for pedestrians and cyclists, and connect to key places in Lower Richland, is sorely needed.

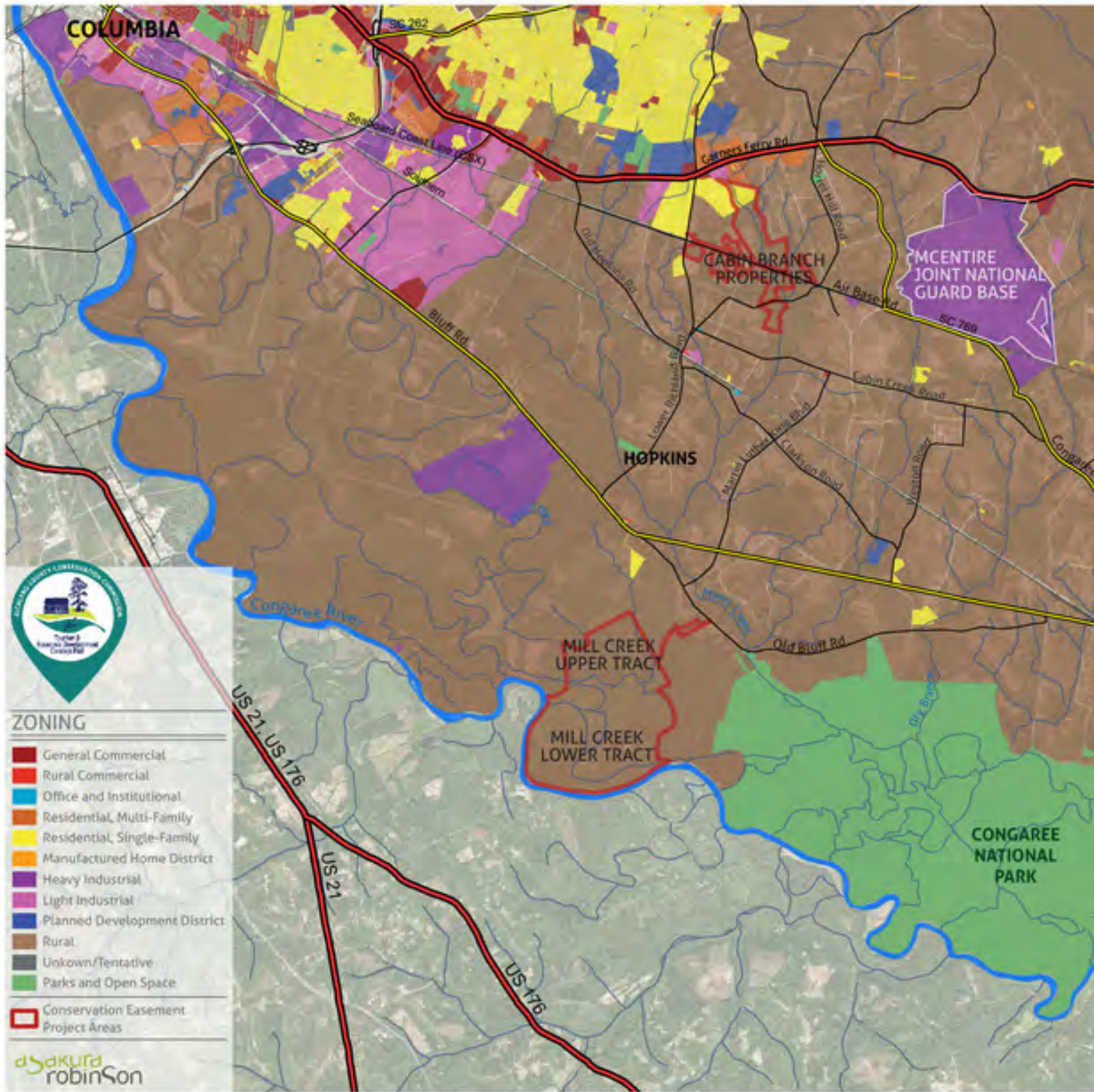
## Existing Tourism Programs

While Lower Richland lacks the kind of targeted marketing campaign customary of most successful tourist destinations, it can claim a variety of programs that have certainly helped to promote various aspects of the area if not in a coordinated manner.

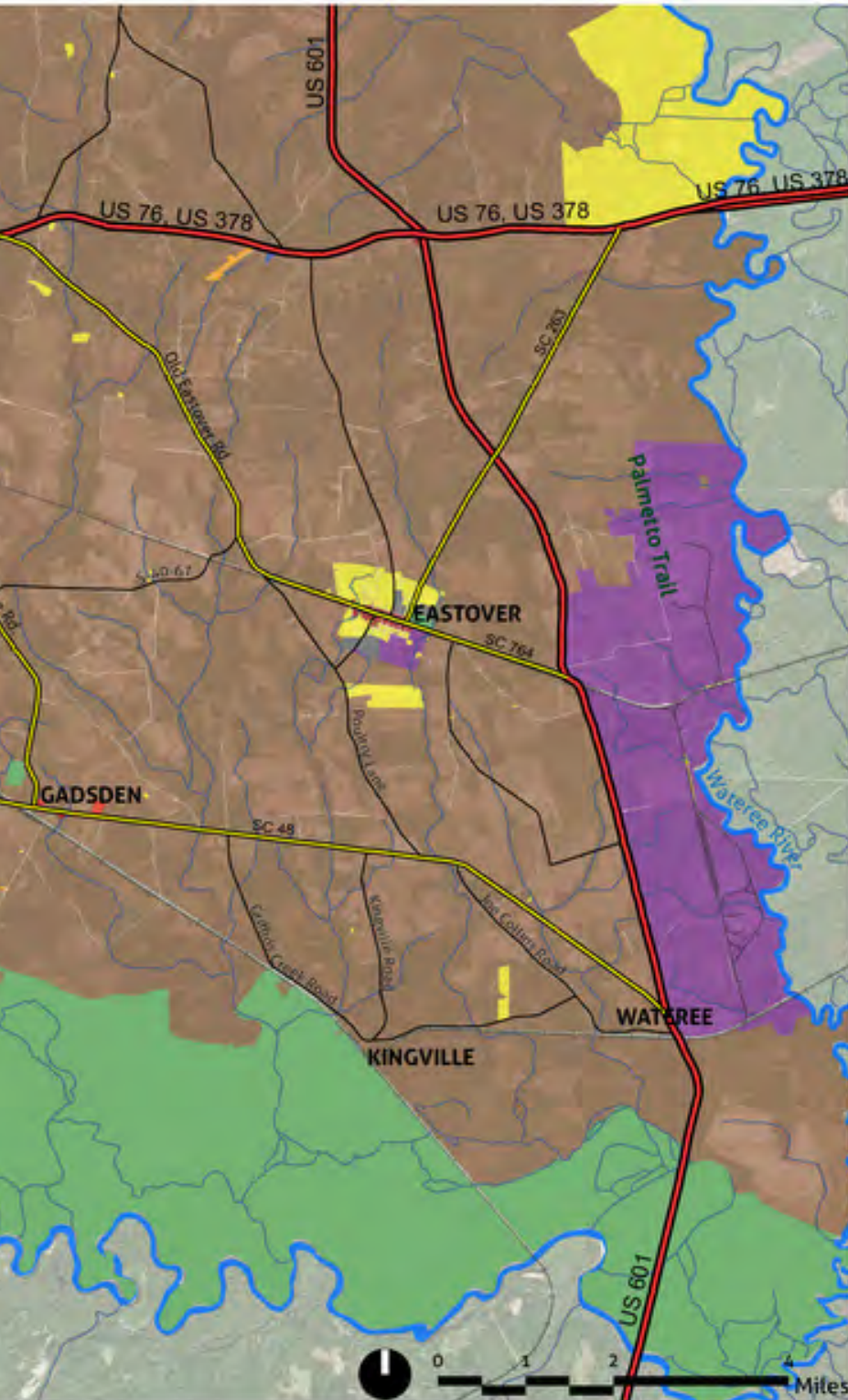
- The Columbia Convention & Visitors Bureau visitor's guide now includes a one page section on Lower Richland's most significant attractions. The list includes both natural and heritage sites.
- The South Carolina Historic Preservation Office's historic marker program has facilitated the placement of 20 markers throughout Lower Richland.
- The National Register of Historic Places recognizes 21 sites of historic significance in Lower Richland.
- Southeast Rural Community Outreach (SERCO) publishes the Lower Richland Heritage Corridor Visitor's Guide and offers companion tours.
- A consortium of environmental organizations publishes the Congaree River and Wateree River Blue Trail maps which offers key information for those considering a paddle trip.
- The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, in partnership with other organizations, publishes the Cowasee Tour Guide which offers driving tours and site descriptions for numerous natural resources and heritage sites.



*Columbia Convention & Visitors Bureau visitor's guide for the Columbia region now includes a section on Lower Richland*



Lower Richland existing land use and zoning map



## Regulatory Framework

Lower Richland’s zoning predominantly falls into the “Rural” land use category established by the county’s Land Development Code, with small pockets and individual parcels of “Rural Commercial” that often reflect existing commercial uses, and larger areas of heavy industrial zoning along the Wateree River and in the industrial park areas.

- The Rural land use category focuses on agriculture, forestry, certain types of recreation, and extremely low-intensity residential and commercial uses; it allows for single-family detached housing on lots or tracts of at least 33,000 sqft., and allows some community-serving businesses including beauty salons and barber shops and day care facilities. It also permits bed-and-breakfast lodging uses which must be owner-occupied and have nine or fewer units for guest occupancy.
- The “Rural Commercial” land use category is fairly permissive and allows a wide range of commercial and transportation-focused uses, including most types of retail uses, drive-thru facilities, warehousing and auto repair uses, department stores, and other high-intensity uses.







## RECOMMENDATIONS

# Tourism Framework

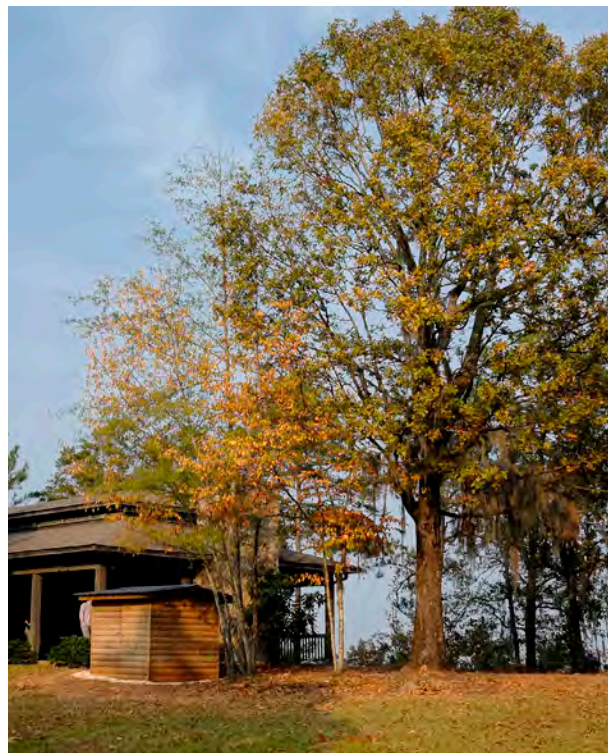
## The Framework Plan

The Framework Plan provides the underlying strategy to create, grow, and support a sustainable tourism economy for Lower Richland that emphasizes new opportunities for both visitors and residents alike. With the majority of Lower Richland's existing tourism oriented exclusively around Congaree National Park, and a local community with a strong desire to participate in the development of a tourism economy, the Framework Plan is firstly aimed at expanding the vision of tourism in Lower Richland to include three principal areas of focus: Nature Tourism, Heritage Tourism and Small Business Development. Secondly, with very little of the needed tourism infrastructure currently in place to support a future influx of visitors let alone the current tourist population, the Framework Plan offers a set of recommendations for defining and implementing the new tourism infrastructure enhancements over time. Thirdly, the Framework Plan is a spatial strategy that organizes Lower Richland's expansive network of environmental and cultural assets into a set of coherent experiences that is accessible and inviting for potential visitors. Each of these aspects of the Framework Plan is further articulated in the following sections of this chapter.

The vision for Lower Richland tourism relies on an integrated approach where Nature Tourism, Heritage Tourism and Small Business Development work in a complimentary manner-- each area of focus reinforces the other and in turn produces a set of tourism opportunities and experiences that are highly tailored to the character of Lower Richland. Within Nature Tourism, the Framework Plan addresses a range of sites from existing and proposed parks, to specific natural resources such as the Congaree and Wateree Rivers, to explicit landscapes that define the image of Lower Richland. Heritage Tourism is seen broadly to represent those elements which give form to the culture of Lower Richland.

This includes the more discrete and tangible elements such as buildings and places, and less tangible- but no less impactful- elements such as stories and experiences. Lower Richland's significant history of agricultural production and its resonance on the prevailing landscape of the region figures prominently into both Nature Tourism and Heritage Tourism. Finally, but perhaps most critically, Small Business Development is intended to grow and sustain both the commercial development needed for tourism, but also the community of local entrepreneurs needed to develop these businesses.

The Framework Plan proposes a set of infrastructure needed for tourism to succeed over time in Lower Richland. In the context of the plan, infrastructure is defined loosely as a kit of parts which forms the tourism experience in Lower Richland and this broadly includes the variety of defined places that

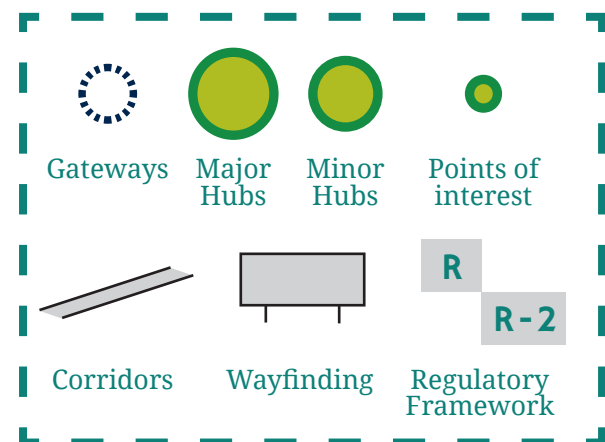


*The Wateree River Heritage Preserve Wildlife Management Area at Cook's Mountain is an example of a site that should ultimately combine nature and heritage tourism.*

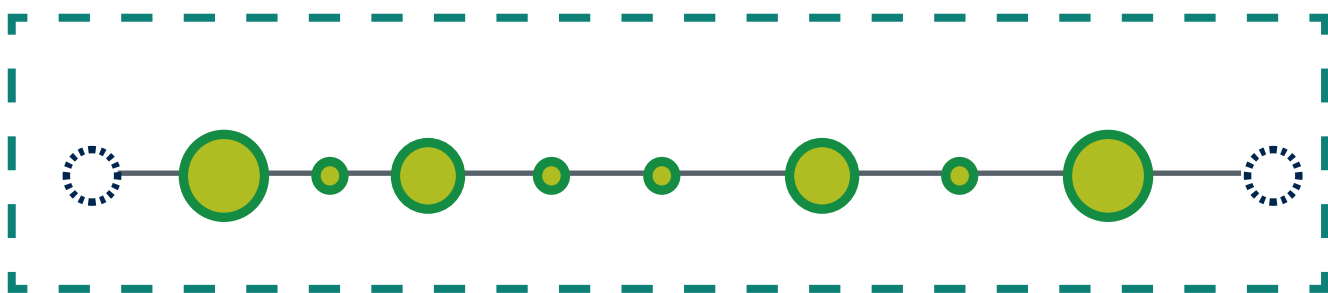
## Tourism Vision



## Tourism Infrastructure



## Spatial Strategy



tourists will visit, the improved physical connections needed to insure these places are accessible, and the enhanced policies and programs needed to encourage investment around tourism in Lower Richland. Given the significant investment needed to establish a tourism economy in Lower Richland, the Framework Plan envisions a phased approach to implementing necessary infrastructure that begins with critical investments in the places that have the potential to draw a significant influx of new visitors in the near term.

The spatial strategy proposed by the Framework Plan is driven by a few key understandings: Lower Richland is defined by an environmental and cultural diversity; there are a variety of existing places in Lower Richland that demand greater visibility and broader appreciation; none of these key places can support a tourism economy alone; tourism

requires attractions which can draw people; and finally, economic impacts from tourism are contingent upon having sufficient goods and services to attract these expenditures. With this in mind, the Framework Plan proposes a strategy for organizing Lower Richland around specific places and connections that can form a coherent and impactful tourism experience. This strategy highlights specific places as hubs based on their ability to attract visitors, to serve as entry points to Lower Richland, to inform a multi-faceted appreciation of Lower Richland, and provide the goods and services needed for successful tourism. It also advocates for key transit corridors between these places, offering accessibility to motorists, cyclists, pedestrians and paddlers, and desirable views of Lower Richland’s diverse landscape adding to a memorable and nuanced experience of the area.



*Crossing the Congaree River on State Highway 601 is one of four primary gateways to Lower Richland*

## Elements of the Framework Plan



### GATEWAYS

At the locations where the majority of visitors will first enter the Lower Richland area, the Framework Plan proposes a set of highly visible gateways signs to welcome visitors and passersby to the area. Examples of these gateway signs are further described below in Wayfinding description.



### MAJOR HUBS

The Framework Plan proposes a series of key places within Lower Richland that will serve as primary entry points to tourism experiences and feature the Major Projects described below. The Major Hubs have been selected based on their favorable location for visitors coming from outside Lower Richland as well as their existing concentration of resources.



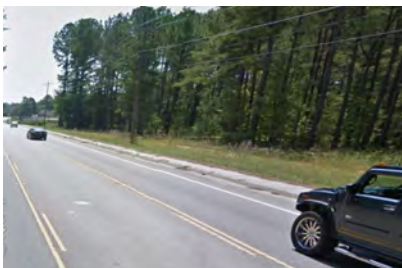
### MINOR HUBS

Working in tandem with the Major Hubs is a set of Minor Hubs which play an equally critical role in the plan but are identified as secondary entry points to the area where visitors would find key goods and services, additional tourism information, and specific nature and heritage tourism sites.



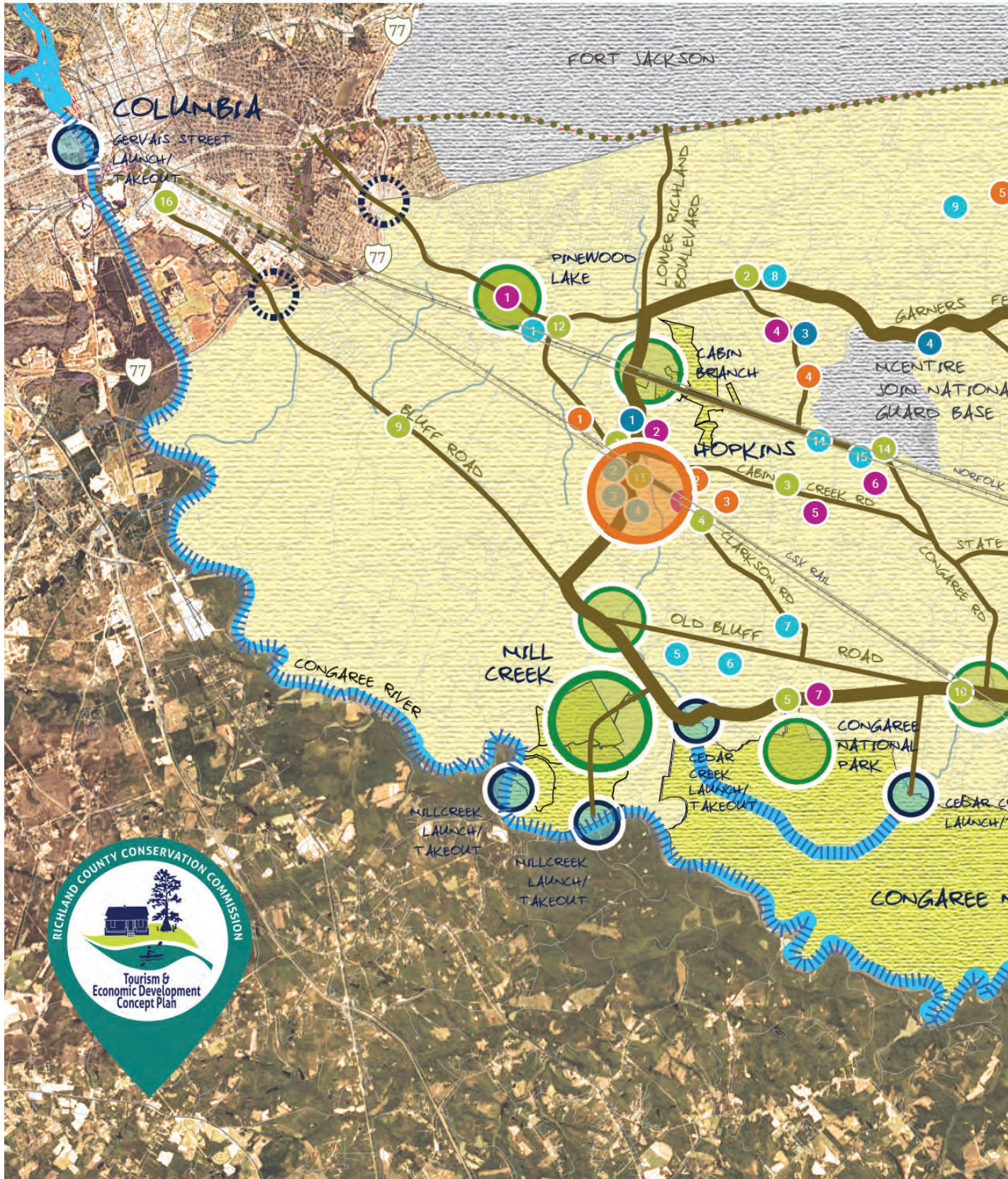
### POINTS OF INTEREST

The Framework Plan acknowledges that the tourism experience in Lower Richland will rely on the many nature and heritage sites that currently exist in the area but which cannot support the tourism economy on their own and must be integrated into an areawide network. Each of these diverse sites, ranging from historic structures to parks to cemeteries, helps to inform a broad appreciation of Lower Richland, but are identified in the Framework Plan as places that visitors would be directed to from the Major and Minor Hubs, and for this reason are identified as Points of interest.

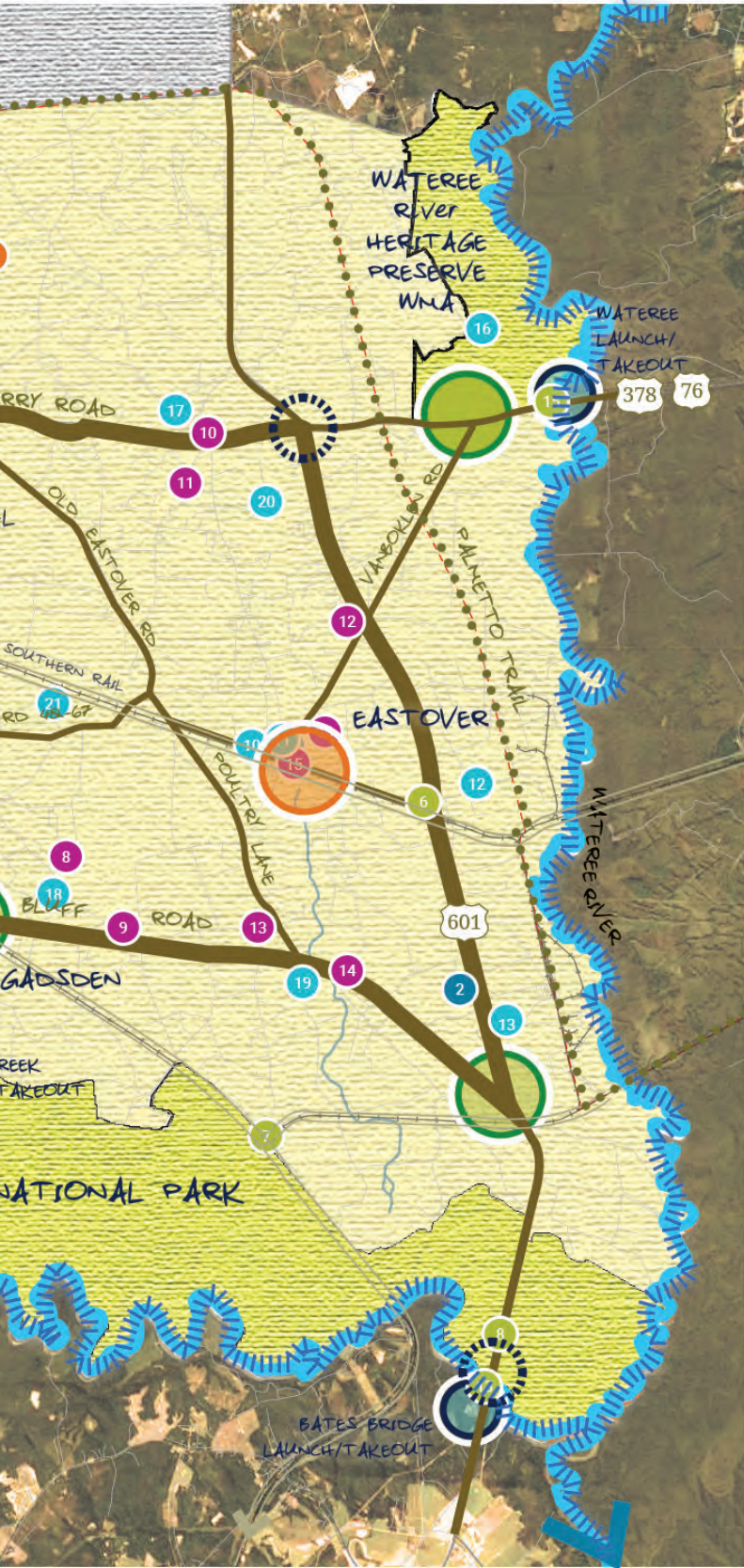


### CORRIDORS

All of the key sites in the Framework Plan-- the Gateways, the Major Hubs, the Minor Hubs and the Points of interest-- require clear, accessible and inviting connections to insure that visitors to Lower Richland can comfortably navigate the area. The Framework Plan identifies these connections as Corridors which serve as the primary routes through the Lower Richland. These routes would offer strategic wayfinding signage and phased roadway improvements to potentially accommodate cyclists and pedestrians in some areas or simply enhanced edge landscaping to improve the roadway experience for visitors.



# FRAMEWORK PLAN



## LEGEND

<b>HUBS</b>		GATEWAYS
		 NATURE TOURISM HUBS (MAJOR & MINOR)
		 HERITAGE TOURISM HUBS (MAJOR & MINOR)
<b>CORRIDORS</b>		WATER ACCESS HUBS
		PRIMARY CORRIDORS
		SECONDARY CORRIDORS
		BLUE TRAIL
		PALMETTO TRAIL
<b>POINTS OF INTEREST</b>		POTENTIAL RAIL TRAIL
		BUILDINGS
		CENETERIES
		CHURCHES
		SCHOOLS
		SITES / LANDSCAPES




## Major Projects

The tourism infrastructure envisioned by the Framework Plan begins with a set of three Major Projects that serve as catalysts for Nature Tourism, Heritage Tourism and Small Business Development in Lower Richland and the economic impacts anticipated from each focus area. These capital intensive projects-- the Lower Richland Heritage Center, the Mill Creek Nature Center and the Lower Richland Small Business Incubator-- are envisioned as projects that would be best initiated and led by Richland County but ideally in collaboration with other institutional partners. The projects are sited in places that are significant to the Framework Plan-- places which are seen as significant entry points to a Lower Richland tourism experience and places where a concentration of existing resources would encourage a collateral economic impact to adjacent areas with a targeted investment.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

See specific Major Project recommendations in the Nature Tourism, Heritage Tourism and Small Business Development sections below.







*The Colleton Museum and Farmers Market in Walterboro, SC, is a precedent for the Lower Richland Heritage Center proposed for an existing open space in Hopkins.*



*The Edge Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Tuscaloosa, AL is a precedent for the Lower Richland Small Business Incubator space proposed as an extension of the Heritage Center.*



*Shangri-La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center in Orange, Texas, is a precedent for the Mill Creek Nature Center proposed for the recently acquired Mill Creek conservation area.*

## Shared Identity

Lower Richland is an area with a seeming abundance of stories passed down through generations of residents, but for tourism to succeed, the essence of Lower Richland must be distilled in a way that allows it to be communicated easily and broadly to more people, and in a way that will resonate well beyond Lower Richland. A shared identity is needed that is authentic, inclusive, and representative of all those who have helped create the Lower Richland culture, and which provides cues to the many stories that will inform a visitor's experience of Lower Richland. The shared identity is by nature a simplification of something much more complex-- a sound bite or visual branding that will do justice to hundreds of years of lived experience and environmental change which has defined Lower Richland as a unique place. Numerous other cultural regions have found success in developing their shared identities and we can look to these places for inspiration and guidance in creating a shared identity that is tailored to Lower Richland. Places like the Black Belt of Alabama have articulated their shared identities through various forms of media which have allowed others to see these places as culturally and geographically specific and worth a visit.

The shared identity for Lower Richland emphasizes three key distinguishing features:

- A rich landscape formed at the confluence of major river systems
- Enduring communities born from their relationship to the land and still tied to it.
- Diverse heritage sites which preserve the lasting impact of Lower Richland residents on the land.



*Precedent for the Lower Richland shared identity website*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Determine which agency and staff within Richland County government is best situated to oversee the development and management of a Lower Richland branding effort.
2. Form a committee of local resident stakeholders to oversee the development of the brand identity and to ensure that the brand development process is closely connected to the Lower Richland resident community.
3. Work with a branding consultant to formalize the shared identity into an authentic brand for Lower Richland that can be used across various forms of media and utilized to promote every tourism destination in Lower Richland. Ensure the branding consultant has experience working in similar tourism contexts.
4. In conjunction with the development of the Lower Richland brand identity, work with a consultant to develop a dedicated website for Lower Richland tourism information.



Alabama Black Belt Heritage Area branding study



Where the stories are as rich as the land

*Precedent for the Lower Richland shared identity logo*

## Wayfinding

An unheralded but critical aspect of tourism is the specific wayfinding system that allows a place to be sufficiently navigated, explored and appreciated by visitors seeing it for the first time, or further discovered on a repeat visit. How wayfinding signage is realized can truly be the difference between visitors returning or not. With no existing dedicated signage in place, a customized set of wayfinding signage specific to Lower Richland is needed to properly orient visitors and help to celebrate and reinforce the Shared Identity of the area. Successful wayfinding signage is both directional and thematic: it helps to orient people by providing guidance while also reinforcing the identity of an area through a consistent visual style. In Lower Richland, the wayfinding system would operate at multiple scales, and include signage oriented to motorists as well as pedestrians, cyclists and paddlers. The signs would be located at all key junctures in the tourism experience: at the Gateways to Lower Richland where visitors become aware they are entering the area, along the Corridors where visitors need direction to specific Hubs and Points of interest, and at the Points of interest themselves where the various sites can be enhanced with identification, educational, and interpretive signage.

pedestrian scale



destination

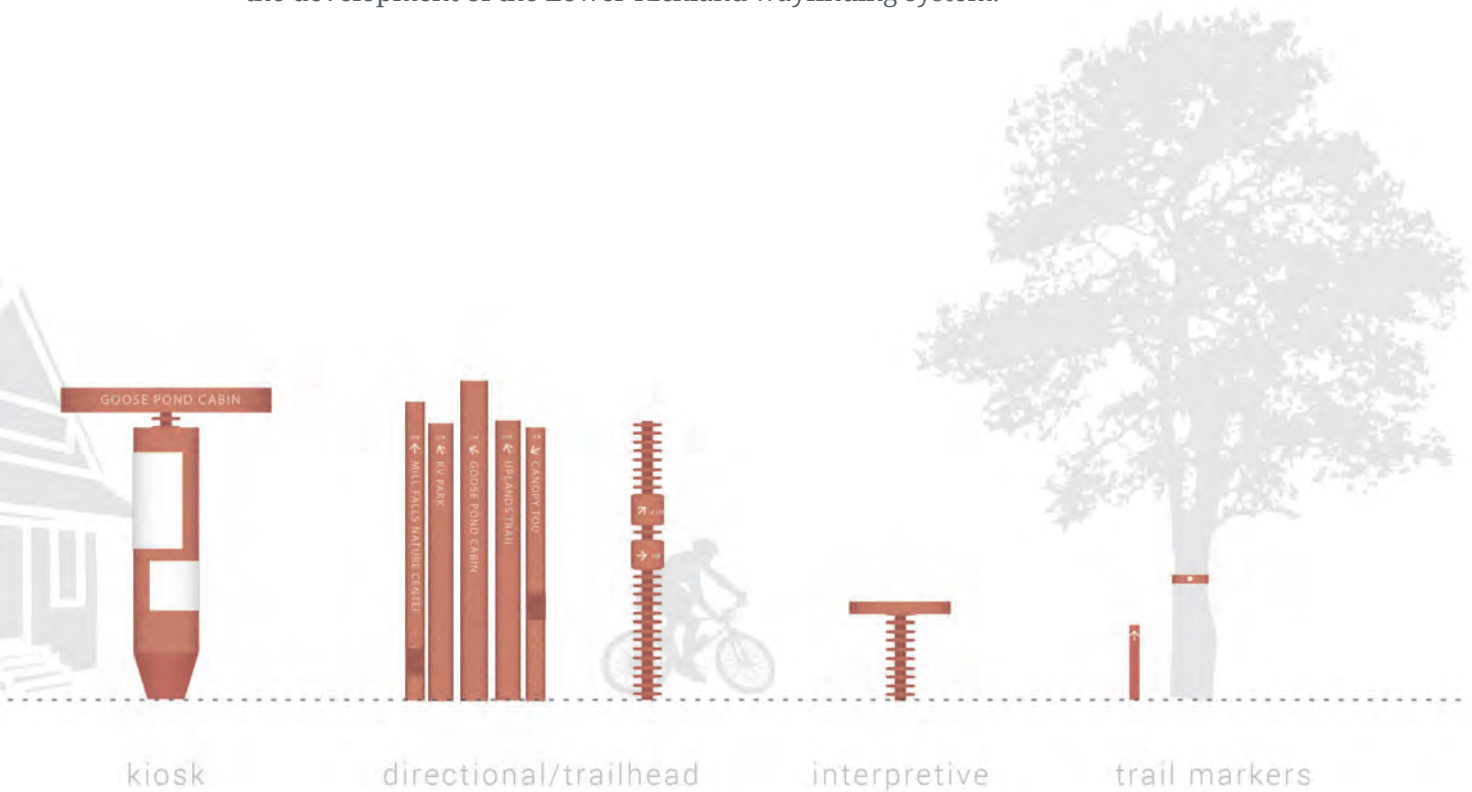
vehicular scale



wayfinding

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In conjunction with the development of the Lower Richland brand identity, work with a consultant to create a unique and comprehensive wayfinding signage system and interpretive plan for Lower Richland that will successfully orient and educate visitors as well as celebrate and reinforce the identity of Lower Richland.
2. Ensure that the Lower Richland wayfinding system is coordinated with all other local and regional signage mandates.
3. Utilize the same committee of local resident stakeholders from the branding effort to oversee the development of the Lower Richland wayfinding system.



kiosk

directional/trailhead

interpretive

trail markers



gateway



Lower Richland currently has no roads safe for cyclists despite a growing demand for bikeways.

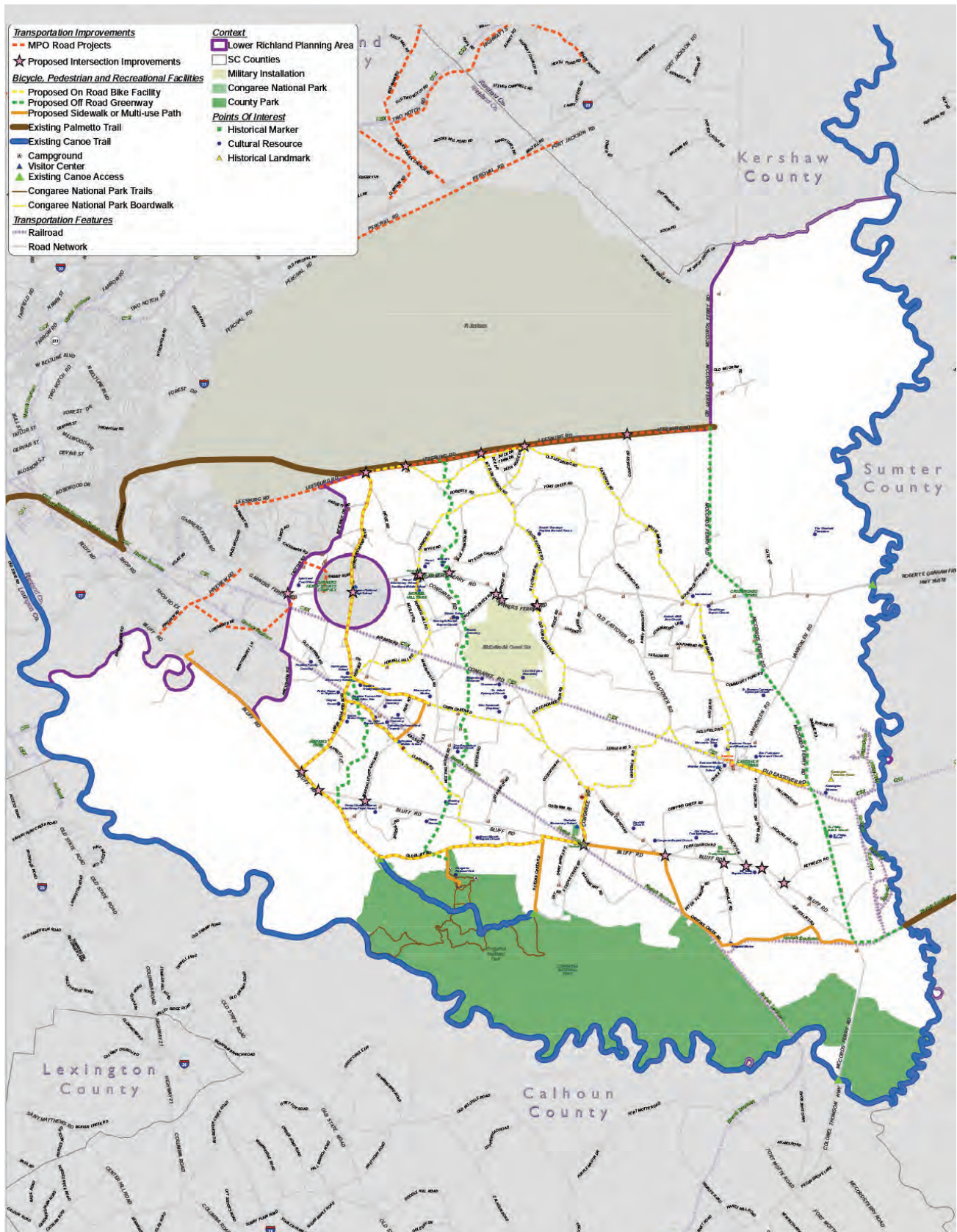
## Mobility Improvements

In coordination with the Wayfinding system, the Framework Plan proposes a set of Mobility Improvements to ensure that Lower Richland is accessible, safe, and inviting for visitors as well as residents. The recommendations are consistent with the *Lower Richland County Strategic Community Master Plan (2014)* which proposed both on-street and off-street trails, sidewalks, and shared-use paths, as well as intersection improvements.

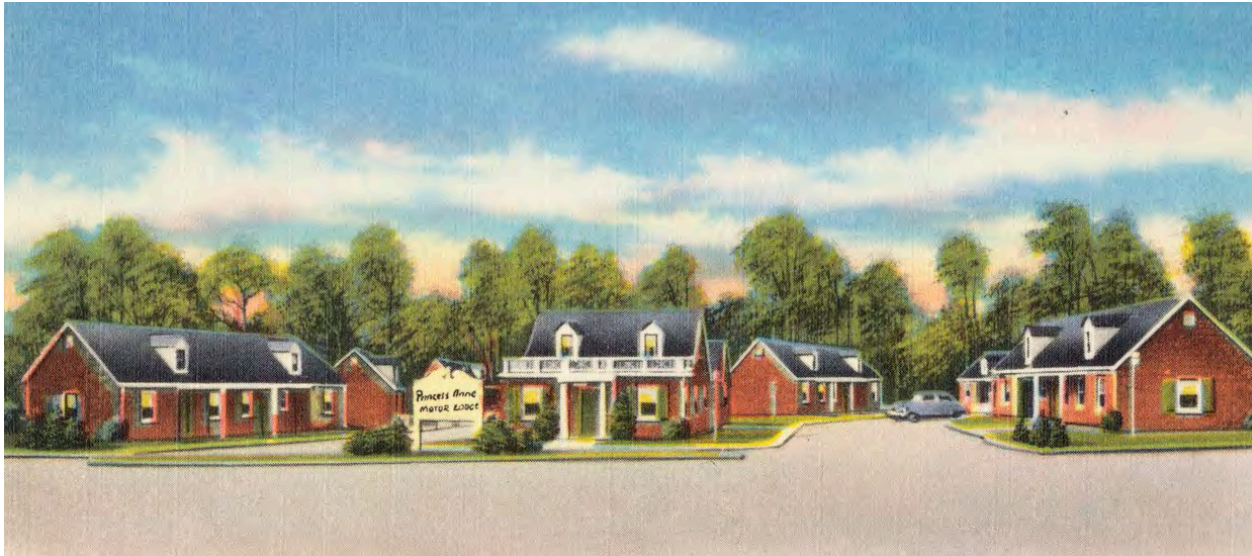
The primary goal of the mobility improvements is simply to provide safe ways for visitors and residents to navigate Lower Richland by bike and foot that minimize conflicts with motor vehicles. Moreover, the improvements are aimed at both getting people to Lower Richland as well as from place to place once they are in the area. There are several ways to realize this goal of multi-modal mobility: existing public rights-of-way along the proposed Corridors may contain excess space that could accommodate on-street or off-street trails; utility easements alongside the proposed Corridors may be able to accommodate new off-street trails; existing rights-of-way along the freight rail lines running through Lower Richland may be able to accommodate adjacent trails that will connect many of the Hubs and Points of interest in the Framework Plan. All of the proposed improvements will require further feasibility study and input from relevant Richland County and State of South Carolina agencies, and potentially other stakeholders.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Refer to the recommendations from the *Lower Richland Strategic Community Master Plan* for guidance on the mobility needs of the Tourism Framework.
2. Work with a qualified planning consultant to conduct a feasibility study for all proposed Mobility Improvements in coordination with Richland County Planning and Public Works staff as well as the Richland County Conservation Commission.
3. Investigate the potential for an immediate off-street trail aligned with the route of the planned sewer line.
4. Investigate the available and underutilized right-of-way adjacent to both the CSX and Norfolk Southern rail lines to understand if more than the 50ft. of necessary right-of-way exists for a feasible rail trail along any portion of these lines. If sufficient right-of-way exists, work with the Rails to Trails Conservancy to determine next steps for planning the trail segments.
5. Ensure that future comprehensive planning for Richland County considers the proposed Mobility Improvements as part of broader capital improvement recommendations.
6. Coordinate with Palmetto Conservation Foundation on ways to improve the conditions, access and connectivity along the Palmetto Trail through Lower Richland.



Transportation recommendations from the Lower Richland Strategic Community Master Plan



*Small-scale hotels of less than 30 rooms should be permitted in Lower Richland provided there are controls to ensure design sensitivity to the surrounding context.*

## Regulatory Strategy

Richland County’s existing Traditional Recreation Open Space (TROS) zoning designation focuses on conservation and open space uses and would be appropriate for use on the portions of the Mill Creek and Cabin Branch sites that are dedicated to open space uses. TROS allows for public recreation facilities and specifies certain active recreational uses such as athletic fields, parks, driving ranges that are allowed. However, the TROS category does not allow for RV parks or other lodging uses, libraries, or other slightly more intensive uses that are contemplated in portions of the Mill Creek and Hopkins Village Green sites. It also may not permit cafes and other tourism-oriented retail uses to be co-sited with projected major projects such as the Heritage Center and Mill Creek Nature Center.

Based on the need for a limited, targeted set of retail and lodging uses that will facilitate tourism and serve the community throughout Lower Richland, this plan proposes the creation of an additional zoning designation to complement the TROS designation. The “Rural Tourism and Community Service” (RTCS) land use designation that would serve

to permit intermediate-intensity usage in portions of the Mills Creek, Cabin Branch, and Hopkins Village Green sites, as well as along corridors and within certain other hubs in Lower Richland. The RTCS district would serve to bridge the gap that currently exists between the Rural and Rural Commercial land use categories in terms of land use intensity and character. Currently, the Rural land use permits essentially no retail development (although it does allow bed and breakfast lodging development with up to nine guest rooms and one owner-occupied room). The Rural Commercial land use, however, is extremely permissive, allowing many types of commercial and retail development with few restrictions on the character and nature of development - for example, it allows such uses as appliance repair, warehouses, self-storage facilities, group homes, radio towers, and other uses that would not serve the needs of tourists and could harm the character of local rural corridors. A land use category that provides a middle ground between these two uses would be a major asset for allowing sensible, sustainable, and appropriately-scaled development of retail and lodging uses that serve both tourists and local residents.





*The small bed & breakfast at Wavering Place Plantation in Lower Richland is a scale that other property owners could emulate.*



*Context-sensitive basic service retail is a desired outcome of the regulatory strategy;  
Image: Mike Mozart*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Rural Tourism and Community Service (RTCS) designation should permit the following land uses designed to provide essential “tourism infrastructure” and community-serving assets, while prohibiting highly-intense development and uses that would harm the character of local corridors.

- Retail uses including restaurants, neighborhood grocery stores, antique stores, art dealers, bicycle sales / repair / rental shops, specialty food stores, fruit and vegetable markets, caterers, gift shops, bakeries, full-service dine-in and delivery/ carry out restaurants (but not drive-thru restaurants), candy stores, candle shops, hardware stores, beauty shops and salons, and other small-scale retail uses that can either provide essential community services or serve a tourism need. Design standards for all retail uses should specify parking in the rear of the building, landscape standards that beautify corridors, and signage consistent with the rural character of Lower Richland’s corridors.
- Lodging uses including bed and breakfast inns of up to 9 rooms and RV parks (RV parks should include specific site screening standards for corridor landscaping so

as not to harm corridors’ character.

A new lodging use called “boutique hotel” allowing hotels of 30 rooms or less should be introduced as a specific type of hotel and motel use that could be allowed along specific corridors with special review to ensure design sensitivity to corridors and the local environment.

- Community-serving uses including public recreation facilities, libraries, and day care facilities should be permitted.
- Uses including gas stations, neighborhood-oriented convenience stores, and pharmacies should be allowed with special design review and detailed landscaping and signage standards.
- Within the RTCS district, Lower Richland should consider measures to discourage chain restaurants in order to provide additional market opportunity for locally-owned restaurants and businesses, or at minimum require chain restaurants and businesses to develop in a manner consistent with the local character and landscape. Examples of appropriate restrictions include: requiring parking to be located at the rear of the property; reducing the height, size, and area permitted for freestanding signs in this district; and, prohibiting drive-through facilities.

# LOWER RICHLAND TRANSECT DIAGRAM



## COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR

Appropriate for community-led business enterprise but susceptible to outside development; acts as gateway to Lower Richland.

## SMALL BUSINESS / AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT

A mix of farmland mixed with rural residential and some limited open space. Ideal for agricultural expansion, specifically with organic agricultural practices and/or processing facilities for organic/sustainable farming. Growing number of farms makes this area appropriate for cultivating agri-tourism as a subset of heritage and nature tourism efforts. Open space can provide some small nature-based recreation opportunities. Heritage sites throughout contribute to the larger network of sites in Lower Richland.

## TOWN CENTER

An initial destination for visitors interested in heritage tourism throughout Lower Richland. Community gathering space that promotes local business and houses a small business incubator.

## SMALL-BU...

Primarily rural residential but with many opportunities for industry through small lodging, food service, heri...

## ZONING RECOMMENDATION



COMMERCIAL



RURAL TOURISM & COMMUNITY SERVICE



RURAL TOURISM & COMMUNITY SERVICE

## TOURISM PLAN FOCUS



NATURE-BASED TOURISM



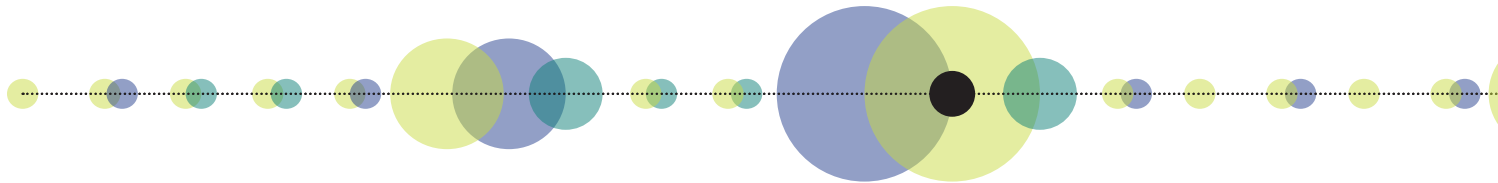
COMMUNITY-LED BUSINESSES



HERITAGE TOURISM



COUNTY-LED CAPITAL PROJECT



## ELEVATION (ABOVE SEA LEVEL) + SATELLITE

GARNER'S FERRY ROAD: 250 feet

FARMLAND ON LOWER RICHLAND BLVD: 180feet

HOPKINS: 165 feet



RECOMMENDATIONS



**BUSINESS / RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT**

Opportunities for small-scale entrepreneurs to benefit from an expanded tourism package including tourism services, and nature tourism services.

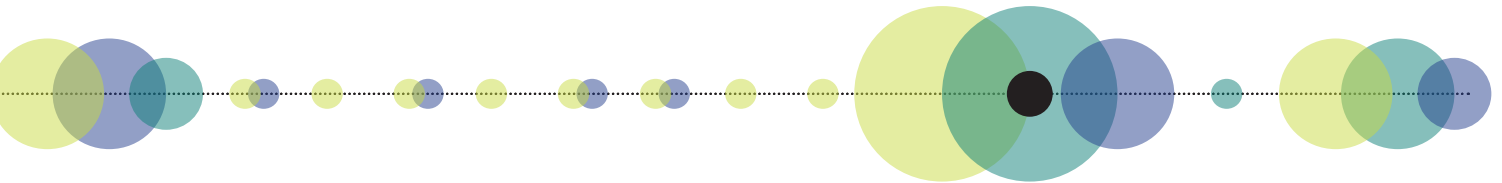


**NATURE TOURISM DISTRICT**

Appropriate for community-led business enterprise but susceptible to outside development; acts as gateway to Lower Richland.

**NATURAL CORRIDOR**

Appropriate for community-led business



**BLUFF ROAD:**  
120 feet

**OLD BLUFF ROAD:**  
108 feet

**MILL CREEK UPLANDS:**  
106 feet

**CONGAREE RIVERFRONT:**  
100 feet



## Plan Themes

Coursing through the various components of the Tourism Framework and the following recommendations are a number of underlying themes which speak to the values and intent of the overall plan. These themes evolved from the existing conditions analysis and deep engagement with the Lower Richland community, and they help to define a plan that is uniquely tailored to the needs of the community.

### **Theme 1: Lower Richland needs to develop tourism infrastructure**

The plan is as much about identifying tourism experiences in Lower Richland as it is about identifying the need for tourism infrastructure in Lower Richland: a shared identity for branding and wayfinding, a system of key hubs and corridors, and provision of essential services to enable targeted, thoughtful tourism growth. Tourism functions best when there are clear, accessible core destinations that offer concentrated attractions, as well as clear wayfinding systems, maps, and guides that help them explore the rest of the region. Tourists also need access to resources including lodging and retail options - few of which are available in Lower Richland today. Creating a clear network of tourism assets will help visitors clearly understand and appreciate the story of Lower Richland, and will focus development in certain areas in order to ensure that new development does not overwhelm the prized rural character of the community.

### **Theme 2: Residents of Lower Richland must benefit and participate**

Ultimately tourism infrastructure for Lower Richland should be the infrastructure needed not just for visitors but for Lower Richland residents to benefit from the tourism economy, namely the economic growth and new amenities that result from this plan. The plan does not envision tourism as an end goal in itself - rather, the goal of increasing tourism is to increase quality of life, economic opportunity, and environmental benefits for the entire Lower Richland community. To

achieve this, the plan identifies numerous ways for local residents to become involved in building Lower Richland's tourism economy at the ground floor, and ways for them to grow as the economy grows.

### **Theme 3: A successful tourism plan for Lower Richland is a three-legged stool**

The plan involves nature tourism, heritage tourism, and small business development in equal measure. A stool with only two legs will not stand - and all three of these areas are crucial to achieve residents' vision of a sustainable, inclusive future that builds on the local community's strengths and assets.

- *Nature tourism* capitalizes on the world-class environmental assets of the Congaree bottomlands and existing attractions of Congaree National Park, and envisions the county-owned Mill Creek site offering a diversity of complementary uses to the national park that can attract visitors and local residents alike.
- *Heritage tourism* celebrates the history and cultural landscape of Lower Richland, and enables visitors to access a core Heritage Center before traveling across the landscape to visit diverse agricultural and historic sites of interest.
- *Small business development* reflects the need for Lower Richland residents to take the lead in building businesses and creating wealth within the growing tourism economy. The lack of businesses in Lower Richland today is a problem but also an opportunity; there is room for locally-based growth of businesses that are rooted in community tradition, knowledge, and resources. A Small Business Incubator will assist Lower Richland residents to understand the opportunities for tourism-serving businesses, take incremental steps that minimize risk and maximize reward, and access education, financing, and resources that will enable them to grow successful and sustainable businesses.



*The growth and success of local-owned businesses, especially food service operators is a critical piece of the Tourism Framework.*





# Nature Tourism

**The Congaree bottomlands define Lower Richland's character and its people.**

Lower Richland contains the largest remaining area of old growth bottomland hardwood forest in the United States. The Congaree River, Wateree River, and their watersheds make up much of the natural identity of Lower Richland and dominate the landscape. Without question, these rivers and bottomlands played a major role in identifying recommendations for nature tourism for Lower Richland. Both existing sites and county-owned sites slated to be opened for public access will provide visitors a view into this ecosystem iconic to the southeastern United States with countless opportunities to engage in diverse recreational opportunities both on the rivers and throughout the forests and wetlands of the area.

## Major Project Mill Creek Nature Center



Much of what makes tourism successful in geographically expansive areas such as Lower Richland is a single primary destination or set of key points of interest for visitors new to the region. The Mill Creek Nature Center will serve as a destination for visitors and members of the local community interested in nature-based recreation and environmental education in Lower Richland.

As a starting point for nature-loving visitors,

the Mill Creek Nature Center would provide 5 primary services to visitors, the local community, and the nature tourism network of Lower Richland:

- 1. Orient visitors to nature-based recreational opportunities both on the Mill Creek tract and throughout Lower Richland such as paddling, hiking, and biking trails.**
- 2. Provide the infrastructure to accommodate groups for social gatherings and environmental education**
- 3. Provide a base camp for environmental science research and education occurring on or near the Mill Creek Tract**
- 4. Provide a stopping point for campsite or other restricted use check-in**
- 5. Provide space for an outfitter to run a primary or satellite business oriented around Mill Creek's nature tourism opportunities**



Precedent projects:

### **SHANGRI LA NATURE CENTER**

The Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center, located in Orange, Texas, is a 252 acre site providing visitors with trails winding through a cypress-tupelo swamp and along Adams Bayou and Ruby Lake; indoor and outdoor gathering spaces; an exhibit hall and visitor orientation theatre; botanical gardens with passive use space; a visitor center that serves daily visitors, summer campers, and staff; and a small cafe. Facilities may be rented out for weddings, private parties, receptions, meetings and corporate functions, reunions, and other special events. Evening, summer, and weekend programming focuses on fun, science and nature for both children and adults. Seven large events occur annually on site, including large community trash pick-ups, festivals, an eco-fest and butterfly release, and craft workshops.

### **SALUDA SHOALS PARK**

Saluda Shoals Park is a 400 acre riverfront park that emphasizes natural systems and environmental sensitivity. Visitors experience educational, recreational and cultural opportunities made richer by the park's location along the banks of the beautiful Saluda River. On-site, visitors will find an 11,000-square-foot Environmental Education Center and Exhibit Hall; a 10,000 square-foot state-of-the-art conference facility called the River Center; Administrative Offices for the Irmo Chapin Recreation Commission; Paved/unpaved trails for hiking, biking, and horseback riding; a River Observation Deck; a Boat Ramp/Canoe/Kayak Launch; Picnic Shelters; a dog park; and, playgrounds. Many of the facilities can be rented for everything from family picnics to weddings and conferences. Ornithology, water quality, mosquito, and vegetation research is ongoing at Saluda Shoals. Environmental education programming reflects this research and the identity of Saluda as an "outdoor laboratory."



*Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center, Orange, Texas*



*Saluda Shoals Park, Columbia, SC*

## Nature Tourism Network



*Cook's Mountain within the Wateree River Heritage Preserve Wildlife Management Area is a key point of interest within the Nature Tourism Network but could be more visible to potential visitors and better connected to other resources.*

While a primary destination is important to a tourism industry, such as the Mill Creek Nature Center, a network of nature-based tourism opportunities is necessary to support industry growth. Lower Richland has no shortage of beautiful natural spaces. From the Congaree River to the Wateree River and everything in between, Lower Richland offers visitors a suite of nature tourism opportunities, an experience made even more significant through an intertwined network of heritage sites. Our vision is one that allows visitors the freedom to create their own itinerary of visits and adventures through Lower Richland's open spaces - whether for 4 hours or 4 days.

### GOALS

1. Leverage Lower Richland's impressive natural resources toward greater tourism through improved access, unparalleled outdoor experiences, coordination among multiple sites, and shared marketing.
2. Expand on the existing resources at Congaree National Park with new recreational opportunities at the Mill Creek site and elsewhere in Lower Richland.
3. Ensure that improvements to park sites throughout Lower Richland, and especially the Mill Creek site and the Cabin Branch site, consider the needs and desires of both tourists and local residents.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Promote Gadsden as a nature tourism hub and gateway community to Congaree National Park and consider economic incentives to encourage business development which can support tourism.
2. Use the recommendation from the Lower Richland Strategic Community Master Plan to create a minor hub and catalyst project at the ‘rural crossroads’ where Bluff Road meets Old Bluff Road. This project would serve as a visible gateway for Congaree National Park and provide wayfinding information to tourists coming from Columbia. Additionally, a general store would be well-placed near this location to serve both tourists and residents alike.
3. Create interpretive course for area guides and outfitters to better connect nature tourism to heritage tourism.
4. Develop a range of interpretive trails to connect Lower Richland nature and heritage sites.
5. Program the Mill Creek site to complement opportunities at Congaree National Park.
6. Study new put-in/take-out spots for paddlers at Mill Creek to enhance the existing Congaree River Blue Trail.
7. Study new put-in/take-out spots for paddlers along the Wateree Blue Trail especially in or near the Wateree River Heritage Preserve WMA .
8. Work with South Carolina DNR to provide enhanced signage and wayfinding for the Wateree River Heritage Preserve WMA and new passive program opportunities in keeping with the preserve’s management strategy.
9. Invest in Pinewood Lake Park’s amenities and wayfinding signage from Garner’s Ferry Road so that it can serve as a nature tourism hub.
10. Improve general conditions and access points along Palmetto Trail and link to adjacent features and other proposed interpretive trails.



*New put-in/take-out locations at the Mill Creek tract will allow paddling on the Congaree River to be more accessible to more people.*



*Pinewood Lake Park is strategically located on a primary corridor through Lower Richland and a gateway location where visitors should receive information about other Lower Richland points of interest.*

### GADSDEN NATURE TOURISM HUB

With its proximity to Congaree National Park, and specifically the park’s Cedar Creek paddle launch, the community of Gadsden is ideally situated to become a hub for nature tourism in Lower Richland and serve as the “gateway” to Congaree National Park and Mill Creek. The plan envisions Gadsden as a place that can provide many of the essential goods and services needed to support nature tourism: food service, lodging, equipment rentals and merchandise. Existing institutions in the vicinity of Gadsden including the Wateree Retreat Center and the Neal Ecological Preserve should be part of this vision. The town needs to be a critical part of the nature tourism network.

### INTERPRETIVE COURSEWORK

**Creating interpretive courses for area guides and outfitters would better connect nature tourism to heritage tourism.** Aside from the noteworthy natural systems of Lower Richland, visitors to this region have a unique opportunity to to experience the natural and cultural stories in tandem. However, up to this point, the communities advocating for those stories to be told have not overlapped outside of the programs at Congaree National Park.

River guides taking visitors along the Congaree, as well as other nature tourism providers, currently have little opportunity to gain knowledge of the historic and cultural significance of Lower Richland in ways that could be integrated with their trips. Within the guide and outfitter community, there is recognition that the dissemination of these stories would only improve the services they are providing and encourage greater stewardship of both natural resources and historic and culturally significant places.

### INTERPRETIVE TRAILS

**Developing a range of interpretive trails to connect Lower Richland nature and heritage sites will provide a sense of identity and convey the interconnectedness of natural and heritage sites throughout Lower Richland.** The stories of Lower Richland residents, natural systems, histories, and



**The Certified Interpretive Guide Program**

ROGER RIGOLD



ELIZABETH



KELLY FABELL

The Certified Interpretive Guide program is designed for anyone who delivers interpretive programs to the public. It combines both the theoretical foundations of the profession with practical skills in delivering quality interpretive programming to visitors.

This 32-hour course includes:

- history, definition, and principles of interpretation
- making your programs purposeful, enjoyable, relevant, organized, and thematic
- using tangible objects to connect audiences to intangible ideas and universal concepts in interpretive programs
- presentation and communication skills
- certification requirements (50-question literature review; program outline; 10-minute presentation)
- all materials, workbook, and CIG course textbook

**Requirements for the CIG Course**

Anyone age 16 or over with a desire to increase their knowledge and skills related to interpretation may participate. Membership in NAI is not required, but NAI members may pay a discounted fee to participate in the program. You can also elect to take the training without becoming certified. You do not have to be an NAI member to take the training course.

To find a course near you, visit [www.interpret.net/certification](http://www.interpret.net/certification).

**NAI** 230 Cherry St  
Fort Collins, CO 80521  
970-484-8283  
[www.interpret.com](http://www.interpret.com)

*The Certified Interpretive Guide Program (CIG) is a popular and very accessible short course that would allow local residents to become certified guides.*



*Precedent for a trailhead that serves as a visible beacon for an interpretive trail, provides key information, and includes seating as well.*

cultural spaces would be told as visitors journey through the Lower Richland Interpretive Trail system and would be aided by region-wide wayfinding and branding.



Precedents for interpretive trail signage that are highly adaptable to various types of information, sensitive to their surroundings, and communicate a sense of place; images: Heine Jones



*Congaree National Park will continue to be a magnet for visitors to Lower Richland but can be significantly complemented by new programming at the Mill Creek tract.*

### PROGRAMMING MILL CREEK

Mill Creek is positioned to be able to fill the recreational service gaps left by Congaree National Park because much of the Mill Creek Tract has less restrictive policies guiding its development. Trails at Mill Creek should provide sustainably designed improved access for visitors to experience the interior of some of the most well-preserved ecosystems in the region. Uses such as mountain biking, where appropriate, would be allowed within the tract. Lodging options that are not available in the national park - which currently only offers primitive camping - would be allowed on the Mill Creek Tract including cabins and RV Camping. Finally, there is some opportunity to collaborate with potential lodging, food, or recreational outfitters to become vendors on the Mill Creek site.

### CONGAREE RIVER BLUE TRAIL

Mill Creek is situated along the American Rivers designated Congaree River Blue Trail. A paddling trail stretching from the urban core of Columbia to the 601 bridge adjacent to Congaree National Park. A 50 mile paddle in it's entirety, Mill Creek provides a 21-mile stopping point for paddlers interested in staying overnight at Mill Creek's lodge, proposed cabins, or proposed campsites. Currently, paddlers have limited options between Columbia and the end of the Blue Trail and are often left stranded if the river's sandbars are not present to camp on overnight.

### WATEREE RIVER BLUE TRAIL

Starting north of Camden, SC, near the Lake Wateree Dam, the Wateree River Blue Trail currently provides only limited access as it courses through Lower Richland. However, it is the recommendation of this plan to work with local Blue Trail partner organizations and South Carolina DNR to create new access points within or near the existing Wateree River Heritage Preserve Wildlife Management Area, near the confluence with the Congaree River, and potentially other points in between



*The take-out point at the Bates Bridge landing is currently one of the few access points for the Congaree Blue Trail within Lower Richland.*



*The W.T. "Billy" Tolar Boat Ramp at Garner's Ferry Road is one of the few access points for the Wateree Blue Trail and the only location in Lower Richland.*

to create shorter paddling itineraries within Lower Richland. With its adjacency to the Palmetto Trail, Cook's Mountain, Kensington Mansion, and Congaree National Park downstream, the Wateree River Blue Trail is an significantly underutilized recreation asset for the Lower Richland.

### **PINEWOOD LAKE PARK**

As a gateway to Lower Richland, Pinewood Lake Park has the potential to be more than just a community park but also a hub where visitors can gain broader information about the region and get fully oriented to Lower Richland before visiting other destinations.

### **PALMETTO TRAIL**

The Palmetto Trail is a state-wide hiking and biking trail stretching from the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Walhalla, SC to Awendaw on the Intracoastal Waterway northeast of Charleston, SC. Sections of the trail, called passages, range in length from 1.3 to 47 miles. The trail currently consists of 350 miles of established trail with an additional 150 miles planned in the Midlands and Uplands to complete the route. Eventually, thru-hikers could potentially complete the



*Wayfinding sign point to the Palmetto Trail along McCord's Ferry Road, but access is limited.*

entire 500 miles without any disconnections in their journey.

On the southern border of Fort Jackson, 16.2 miles of trail called the Fort Jackson Passage exist with connections to Columbia. A major stumbling block is connecting the trail from the eastern end of the Fort through private lands to the section of trail RCCC funded along Hwy 601 through SCE&G property. The organization building the trail, Palmetto Conservation Fund, also has plans to build a spur from the southern end of the trail section where it comes from the Wateree River to Congaree National Park. County assistance to purchase trail use easements and help with trail construction would go a long way to making a much needed hiking and biking amenity in eastern Lower Richland that will foster tourism. The Foundation's Palmetto Conservation Corps could also be engaged for other trail-building needs elsewhere in Lower Richland.

## Nature Tourism Key Sites: Mill Creek



*Existing roadway at the Mill Creek tract*

Mill Creek has the potential to offer some of the best access in Lower Richland to healthy bottomland hardwood swamp and the Congaree River. A comparable, albeit smaller tract as compared to Congaree National Park, Mill Creek provides an opportunity to sustainably create nature tourism attractions and infrastructure where there are fewer political or legal barriers than in federally protected park space. Many of the amenities missing in the National Park can be provided on site in Mill Creek and the site can become the primary destination for nature-based recreationalists in the region. The framework for developing amenities should promote local benefit through opportunities for Lower Richland residents to both operate and become employed through nature tourism and supporting business endeavors at Mill Creek.

### GOALS

1. Reconnect Lower Richland residents to the Congaree River, Goose Pond and forested areas with new access and amenities.
2. Connect Lower Richland visitors to the river heritage by providing a gateway destination to Lower Richland.
3. Provide high quality amenities that will be appealing to both residents and visitors.
4. Provide program offerings that both complement and exceed the offerings at Congaree National Park.
5. Provide small business opportunities for local residents through concessions or other arrangements.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### SITE WIDE

1. Clarify long-term manager: study benefits to Lower Richland as a county, state or federal site and formalize management structure.
2. Define site hubs of activity and necessary amenities
3. Define vehicular access corridors, trail system, and parking options, and install a comprehensive wayfinding signage system consistent with the Lower Richland tourism identity
4. Complement Congaree National Park by “filling the gaps” that Congaree cannot offer: lodging, trail, and other amenities that take advantage of this site of national significance.
5. Define use zones to ensure habitat protection.
6. Treat full site as a bird watching destination and coordinate programming with the local chapter of the Audubon Society.
7. Define access fee structure to include discount for local residents.
8. Define use permit structure (camping permits, boat launch, etc.)

## Major Project Mill Creek Nature Center



*Camping platforms are a simple and cost-effective amenity that can make camping more appealing for more people in places that flood regularly.*



*Comprehensive wayfinding signage will need to be a critical early investment into Mill Creek given its size and diversified features.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS RIVER + BOTTOMLANDS

1. Prioritize non-motorized (canoe and kayak) boat access
  - Define the take out/put in points - and infrastructure needed
  - Design for multiple itineraries: long-distance experienced paddlers; short-distance day trip
  - Connect efforts with Congaree River Blue Trail
2. Fishing access
  - Provide multiple options - dock, pier and banks
  - Locate a fishing pier - out of view of sausage plant
  - Study parking infrastructure needs
  - Study opportunity for bait & tackle vendor and other relevant retail
3. Rustic river cabins for paddlers
  - Conceived as a 'hut system' that could relate to other river lodging upstream and downstream
  - Study potential for county as developer to facilitate other projects
4. Combination of boardwalk and canopy walking trails due to regular flooding.
5. Study zip line opportunity to ensure habitat protection and potential vendor opportunity.



Congaree River frontage at the Mill Creek tract



Concept plan for a riverfront area at the Mill Creek tract



*The existing lodge at the Mill Creek tract*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### GOOSE POND + UPLANDS

1. Create campsite plan near lodge to include combination of options including tent camping and cabins sleeping 4-6 people.
2. Identify upland sites for temporary-only RV campground.
3. Study potential for additional conservation around Goose Pond.
4. Create vendor opportunities including canoe/kayak rental at Goose Pond, and bike rental at the lodge.
5. Treat the lodge as a revenue generator: Target schools, scouts, and other groups for lodge rental
6. Create enclosed information office/kiosk below lodge.



*Goose Pond*

## SITE HUBS + USE ZONES

At 2,555 acres, Mill Creek is situated to provide both an extensive conservation area as well as a suite of amenities on site to support its recommended status as the primary nature tourism hub. Within this study, types of recreational amenities are proposed including the necessary infrastructure needed to support those amenities. However, future development should further address siting of amenities and circulation between different parts of the Mill Creek site. Great care should be taken to ensure “use zones” are designated in a way that distributes use impacts, especially closeby to any particularly sensitive systems on the Mill Creek tract (i.e. riparian buffers near creeks and wetland systems). This plan envisions four main activity hubs on the Mill Creek site: 1. The Nature Center and gateway to Mill Creek; 2. Goose Pond; 3. The Northwest Congaree Riverfront; and, 4. The Southeast Congaree Riverfront.

### *The Nature Center and Gateway to Mill Creek*

Upon arrival at Mill Creek, visitors will be greeted by the Mill Creek Nature Center, an initial stopping point to orient visitors to all of the amenities, lodging, and recreational opportunities throughout Mill Creek as well as providing a space for environmental education programs and gatherings. Large groups will find overnight accommodations in the Mill Creek Lodge - an ideal space for youth groups, girl and boy scouts, and large families with enough space for 24 individuals. Visitors traveling via recreational vehicle (RV) can utilize the RV area of Mill Creek located in close proximity to the entrance of Mill Creek and both the Nature Center and lodge. Electrical hook-ups, low-impact RV pads, and a site designated for RV waste disposal are necessary infrastructure for an RV park.

### *Goose Pond*

Goose Pond’s natural beauty makes it an ideal location for campsites. Areas near the shoreline and into the forest should be prioritized for car camping. Infrastructure

should be put in place to provide potable water stations for campers. Campsites can offer a variety of amenities to campers - from tent platforms with existing canvas tents, empty platforms, or designated tent areas on ground-level.

### *Northwest Congaree Riverfront*

The Northwest Congaree Riverfront offers the best opportunity for visitor access to the waterfront for those interested in journeying to the Southeast Congaree Riverfront via canoe or kayak; or for visitors interested in staying in lodging along the waterfront. Because land in this area is not impacted by mitigation restrictions, this is the only area on the waterfront where some higher use activity, mandating more substantial infrastructure, can be developed. Canopy tours and zip line adventures through the bottomlands from river to swamp interior should start at the NW Riverfront. Additionally, the NW Riverfront should serve as the river-side gateway into Mill Creek for paddlers on the Congaree River Blue trail and should act as a half-way point for long-distance paddlers coming from Columbia on their way to the 601 bridge.

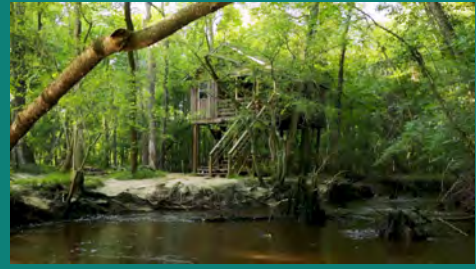


*Paddle sport access is major opportunity at the Mill Creek tract but the design of the launch will depend on bank conditions*

## EDISTO RIVER CABINS

The Edisto River Cabins in Canadys, South Carolina have received national acclaim as a nature-tourism destination. Some of the accolades include:

- *Top 10 “Magical Treehouses” from around the World, USA Today, May 2015*
- *“Ultimate Treehouses – Ingenuity and Engineering,” Animal Planet, Treehouse Master Pete Nelson’s special: August 14, 2015*
- *“Most Unique Place to Spend the Night in Every State,” Weather.com, September 2015*
- *“Favorite off-the-beaten-path Adventure in South Carolina” Outside Magazine, July 2013*
- *“Top 5 Southern Summer Escapes,” Garden & Gun Magazine, June/July 2013*
- *“The 25 Greatest Adventures To Do Now!” National Geographic Adventure, Nov. 2003*
- *“50 Amazing Places Like Nowhere Else on Earth,” National Geo Adventure, October 2003*
- *“100 Great Escapes for 2002” Travel & Leisure, January 2002*



### *Southeast Congaree Riverfront*

The Southeast Congaree Riverfront should serve two main purposes: 1. Provide a location for paddlers who departed from the NW Riverfront an opportunity to take out their boats; and, 2. Act as the primary fishing site on the river at Mill Creek. Because of this sites proximity to sensitive habitats and the designated mitigation bank, care should be taken to minimize development and use impacts as much as possible.

### **CIRCULATION + ACCESS**

Circulation and public access areas of Mill Creek need to be carefully considered to minimize negative environmental impacts. While some areas, specifically the Nature Center, RV sites, and campsite areas in close proximity to the Nature Center will need to be able to be accessed by visitors in their private vehicles, access to other areas should be limited to an on-site outfitter. Access to the riverfront areas of Mill Creek could be facilitated through a shuttle that takes visitors back and forth from main parking areas located in less environmentally sensitive areas of the site around the Nature Center. Exceptions should be made for visitors with disabilities and plans for development on

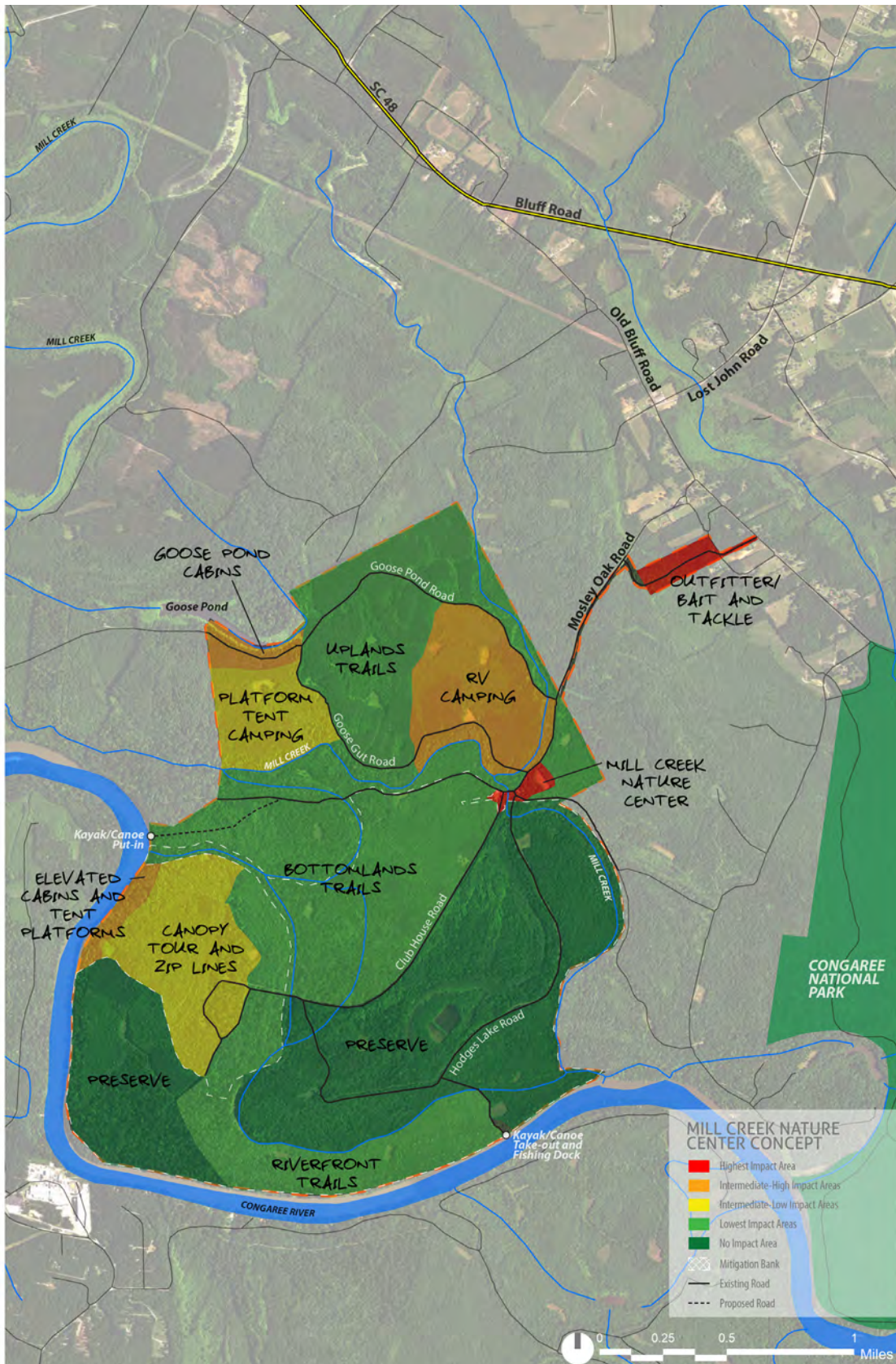
Mill Creek should include the creation of designated handicapped parking at all activity areas. The only other private vehicle access to the riverfront areas would be for visitors staying in riverfront cabins.

Access to the site by car includes the existing single entrance from Old Bluff Road. It should be made clear to visitors navigating the site that Moseley Oaks Road does not lead to an alternate public entrance.

Access by water, i.e. the Congaree River, includes the Northwest and Southwest Riverfront areas of Mill Creek - though primary access should be located at the NW location to minimize negative environmental impacts to the areas surrounding the SE Riverfront.

### **FEES + PERMITTING**

A study of nature area access, lodging, programming, and outfitter fees throughout South Carolina and the Southeast should be conducted to best inform the fee structure at Mill Creek. Particular attention should be given to allowing reduced or no-fee access to local residents and to visitors or groups with limited financial means.



Overall concept plan for the Mill Creek tract



*Trail amenities should be considered for their value to birding as a primary activity at the Mill Creek tract.*

### **BIRDWATCHING DESTINATION**

Mill Creek's ecosystems provide an ideal habitat for many local and migratory bird species popular among bird enthusiasts. The site's position on the Congaree River specifically orients itself as a prime stopover for birds utilizing the river as a protected habitat corridor. Limiting the number of vehicles allowed to travel throughout Mill Creek will reduce road noise and, being cognizant of noise at each of Mill Creek's hubs will minimize the impact of activity on sensitive bird populations. Ensuring roadways are not wider than necessary and that roadways and cleared use areas maintain healthy forested buffers will also minimize the negative impact on birds. Key areas on the site ideal for bird watching should be identified with the help of local birding groups including the local chapter of the Audubon Society and the Riverbanks Zoo. Low-impact access for visitors should be provided along with interpretive materials and signage emphasizing the important role visitors can play as stewards.

A canopy tour, including a series of raised boardwalks at various heights throughout



*Canopy walks are a successful means of introducing birding to more audiences.*

the tree canopy to the forest floor, would add an amenity to the Mill Creek site not only as an attraction for families and amateur bird watchers, but for avid birders as well.

### **MANAGEMENT + FURTHER STUDY**

Designating long-term management of the Mill Creek site is of vital importance to the success of Mill Creek as a Nature Tourism destination. Further study should be done to understand the economic feasibility and benefit of county, state, or federal management roles. Concessions agreements should be considered for some recreational amenities and supporting services on site and should give preference to business models that have been proven in other markets or to local entrepreneurs, specifically those who have engaged with or completed any program and/or business development with Lower Richland's Small Business Incubator.

## Nature Tourism Key Sites: Cabin Branch

The Cabin Branch site is positioned in close proximity to Garners Ferry Road with a variety of adjacent land uses. Much of the land in the tract is riparian - i.e. often wet and uneven vegetative buffer areas protecting Cabin Branch from runoff. This has perhaps kept this land from being used for farming or residential use as much of the adjacent land has. Agri-tourism and nature-based tourism potentially intertwine at this site, making it an ideal location for interpretive trails both on site and on nearby farmland that weave together the story of this ecosystem with that of centuries of farming that has occurred all around Cabin Branch. This plan envisions enabling public access to a site with minimal infrastructure development and urges the consideration of recreational bike and equestrian trails - though further feasibility study is needed.

### GOALS

1. Connect residents to conservation and heritage lands through new trails and programming that complements existing park programming nearby and access to new opportunities.
2. Draw on the site's diverse agricultural and ecological history and emerging niche agricultural enterprises nearby to create a heritage destination for both residents and tourists.
3. Clarify access with trailheads and additional conservation.

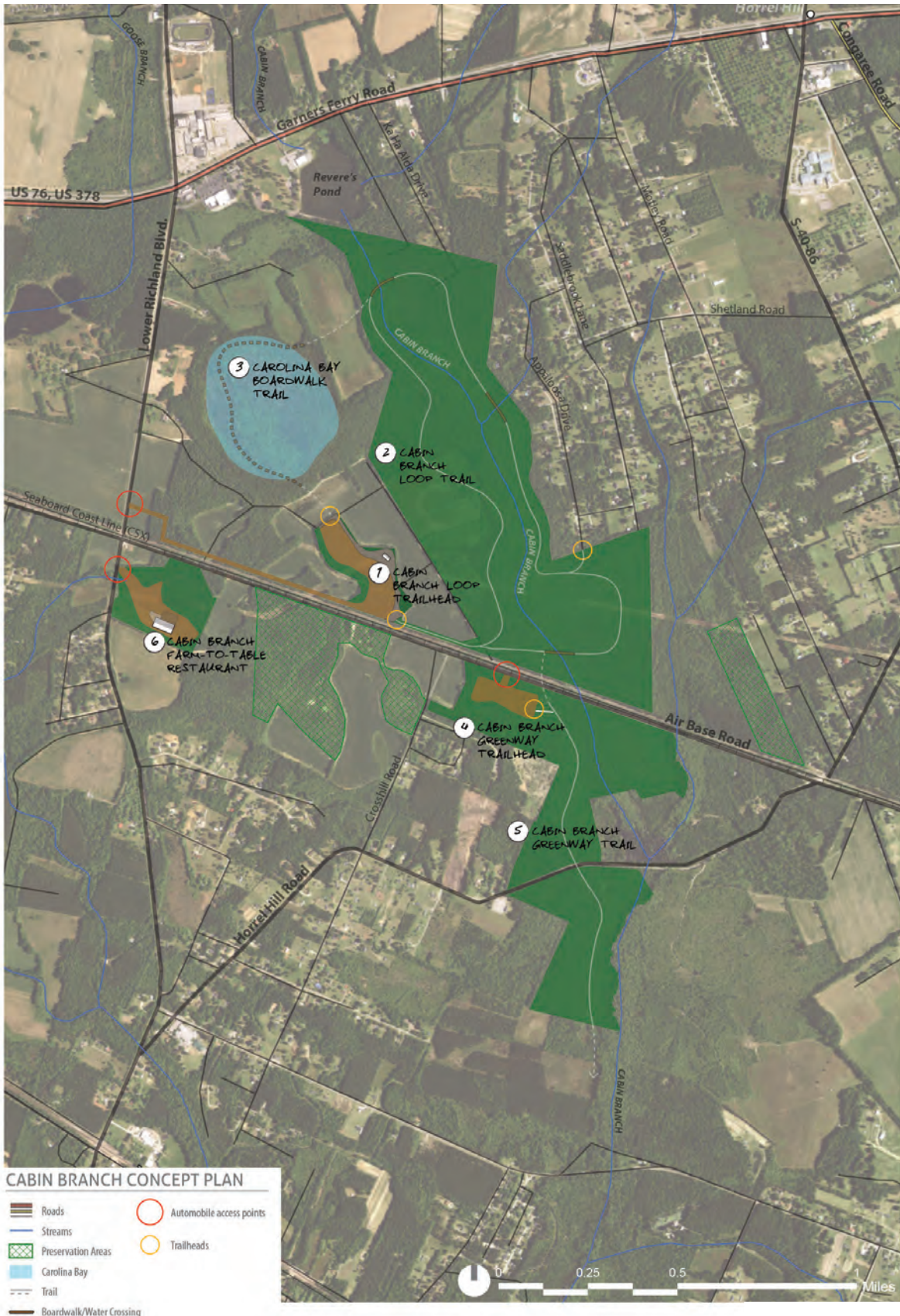
### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Locate a modest parking area near access to Lower Richland Blvd. and include an unstaffed trailhead/information kiosk.
2. Development site framework to include new trails, trailheads, interpretive signage and connections to nearby heritage features.
3. Identify site for signature farm-to-table restaurant.
4. Coordinate with organic farmers currently nearby.
5. Work with adjacent landowners to develop access points and easements that complement existing trails on the Cabin Branch site, including access from major roads as well as access to natural features like Mistletoe Bay.



*Precedent for a modest trailhead/information kiosk at the Cabin Branch tract*





Concept plan for the Cabin Branch tract

## TRAILS

A trail system at Cabin Branch would be an ideal amenity for a site that, due to its fragmented and sometimes narrow nature does not easily lend itself to more substantial or higher-use nature-tourism amenities. Low-impact trail design should guide trail development specifically due to the sensitive nature of Cabin Branch's riparian zones. In particularly sensitive and regularly flooded areas, boardwalks should be utilized to both minimize trail closures due to flooding and to minimize erosion from foot traffic on wet soils. Additionally, pairing trail design with interpretive planning and weaving a trail from riparian zones into agricultural zones (with permission from landowners through easements) can tell a unique story of Lower Richland's agricultural history and current day agricultural economy.

Further study should assess the environmental impact of bicycle and pedestrian trails on site as both trail types are currently absent in this part of the region despite substantial demand for both.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing opportunities at Cabin Branch comes from its location adjacent to one of the largest Carolina bays in the region - Mistletoe Bay. With landowner approval and appropriate easements, a spur trail, including a boardwalk that weaves into the bay, should be created to provide visitor access to the unique natural site.

Branding recommended for Lower Richland's Tourism industry should be consistent with some minimal trail and kiosk signage throughout the parking, trailhead, and trail areas of the Cabin Branch site.

## ACCESS + PARKING

Access to the Cabin Branch site should be provided by automobile via Lower Richland Blvd where the property comes into contact with the road just north of Air Base Road. This access would lead to the main Cabin Branch Loop trailhead and should provide parking, signage and educational materials at a kiosk, minimal restroom facilities, and potable water. From the parking lot, two trailhead access points are recommended - one to the east feeding into a loop trail that traverses the riparian areas of Cabin Branch, and another to the north that would provide access to Mistletoe Bay with approval from the current landowner.

Further study should be done about the feasibility of connecting the Cabin Branch Loop Trail to county-owned land south of Air Base Road. The position of the Seaboard Coast Line (CSX) rail line imposes a significant barrier to connecting Cabin Branch properties from north to south.



*The Sewee Shell Ring Interpretive Trail in Francis Marion National Forest is a precedent for a future trail link across the Carolina Bay*



*Carolina Bay Farms is one of the existing farms located adjacent to the Cabin Branch tract that is part of the broader site narrative*

In the near-term, a secondary parking area and trailhead access on the south side of Air Base Road is recommended to provide access to the recommended Cabin Branch Greenway Trail. In the long-term, acquisition of land further south along Cabin Branch would provide an ideal opportunity to create a linear greenway trail through Lower Richland.

Two properties, shown in the Cabin Branch Concept Plan as “Preservation Areas” are not recommended for access in initial phasing of this plan because of their fragmented nature relative to other properties.

#### **PARTNERSHIPS WITH FARMERS**

Part of the story that should be told at Cabin Branch is the rich agricultural history of the site and current day industry adjacent to the county-owned open spaces. Collaborating with adjacent landowners - especially those who are actively farming - can further bolster the nature and heritage tourism economy by providing a site for agri-tourism through farm site visits. Additionally, with landowner approval and appropriate security precautions in place, trails could weave through both the riparian areas on the county-owned land and the margins of agricultural lands nearby,



*A farm-to-table restaurant is proposed for a portion of the Cabin Branch tract that would have frontage on Lower Richland Boulevard and Air Base Road*

allowing hikers a view into agricultural production in Lower Richland.

#### **FARM-TO-TABLE RESTAURANT**

The concept plan for the Cabin Branch site shows a farm-to-table restaurant sited with frontage on Lower Richland Blvd. The county should incentivize local Lower Richland-based entrepreneurs to develop and operate a farm-to-table restaurant on site that both complements the nature/agricultural interpretive trails on the rest of the Cabin Branch property, but also provides economic benefit for the local economy by providing a food service for visitors that features food grown in Lower Richland.



# Heritage Tourism

**One of Lower Richland’s strongest assets is barely visible to someone not familiar with the area: the concentration of diverse heritage sites and the stories that animate their histories.**

Although none of these sites can carry an emerging tourism economy on its own, Lower Richland boasts a community of residents with a strong desire to tell these stories and make these sites more inviting and accessible to a broader audience. Limited resources and a lack of shared vision have hampered efforts to leverage the area’s heritage for economic development. The recommendations in the following section focus on ways of organizing, promoting, leveraging and sustaining Lower Richland’s heritage assets so that, coupled with the area’s significant natural resources, they may become the foundation for a sustainable tourism economy.



Major Project Lower Richland Heritage Center



Farmers Market



Community Porch at the heritage center



Bandshell

RECOMMENDATIONS

This project is envisioned as a major gateway destination and community resource to Lower Richland that can provide new space for telling the stories of Lower Richland residents through exhibits, presentations, educational programs, community space and guides to the many existing heritage sites in Lower Richland.

We believe that for heritage tourism to thrive, Lower Richland and its partners will need to develop a *Heritage Tourism Center*. The purpose of the Center, at least from a tourism perspective, is to offer travelers a single destination for learning about Lower Richland heritage. At the Center, travelers will be introduced to the various heritage sites around Lower Richland.

This strategy utilizes a traditional hub-and-spoke strategy to connect visitors to Lower Richland heritage. Visitors would begin their travel at the Center, be introduced to the heritage storylines and stories for the region, and then continue to visit the specific sites spread around Lower Richland. Examples of such a heritage center include the new Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State Park in Maryland and the Colleton Museum and Farmers Market in Walterboro, South Carolina.

The Center is envisioned as much more than a tourism attraction. The Center should contain a library, community meeting spaces, a reunion hall, a historical archive, and the like. The agricultural heritage of Lower Richland should be interpreted in the Center, including the establishment of an adjacent working farm. The current conceptual plan for a Richland Library in Hopkins should be integrated into this overarching plan with the Richland Library system taking a leadership role in the Center's development.

The agricultural heritage of Lower Richland is a critical component in the area's sustainable tourism and recreation strategy. A critical part of this strategy is the development of value-added products. Currently, most of Lower Richland agriculture is invested in commodity production. What is needed is a concerted effort to develop consumer end or farm-to-table products.

The Center can help to facilitate this new market by including a community commercial kitchen where residents could have access to the space and equipment necessary to produce locally-sourced, value-added, consumption-ready products. Tours of local farms that are engaged in farm-to-table production should also be developed by the Center.

As envisioned, the heritage center will attract a diversity of travelers. The rewards that come from this diversity can be significant. For example, a recent study from the University of South Carolina's Richardson Family SmartState Center of Economic Excellence in Tourism and Economic Development has revealed that African-American tourists are responsible for \$2.4 billion in economic impact for South Carolina, an impact that is associated with approximately 26,302 jobs and \$789.5 million in labor income. Just a 5% increase in visitation from African-Americans will result in an economic impact of \$118.6 million in annual output, and an additional 1,315 jobs and \$39.5 million in labor income for South Carolinians. But the surveys showed that awareness is still low, with 55% of African-American visitors unfamiliar with African-American cultural attractions in South Carolina.

The USC report concludes that "the state needs to invest in promoting African-American culture." Where is there a better place to increase African-American visitation, and

## Major Project Lower Richland Heritage Center

to promote African-American culture, than in Lower Richland? The development of the Center is a critical step forward in attracting this burgeoning market to the rich African-American heritage of Lower Richland.

Richland County has been very involved with the Slave Dwelling Project. The county has funded condition assessments on five slave cabins in Richland County, as well as funded the restoration of the Laurelwood cabin in upper Lower Richland. We recommend the organization of a specific antebellum tourism and interpretive strategy in conjunction with the development of the new Center.



*Colleton Museum & Farmers market in Walterboro, SC, which features a highly successful commercial kitchen for community use.*



**COLLETON  
MUSEUM &  
FARMERS MARKET**

**KEY**

- ENTRANCE FROM WASHINGTON ST. 1.
- ENTRANCE FROM EXISTING MUSEUM 2.
- ENTRANCE FROM PARKING LOT 3.
- RETAIL DISPLAY AREA 4.
- RESTROOMS 5.
- RETAIL COUNTER & FOOD SERVICE AREA 6.
- DRY STORAGE & REFRIGERATION 7.
- SAUCE & JAM KITCHEN 8.
- BOTTLING & LABELING 9.
- BAKING KITCHEN 10.
- SCULLERY 11.
- TEACHING SPACE 12.

**Precedent project:**

**COLLETON MUSEUM & FARMERS MARKET**

Established as a strategy to preserve and promote the historical, natural, cultural, and agricultural heritage of Colleton County, the Colleton Museum in Walterboro, SC, offers one of the best precedents for the Lower Richland Heritage Center in regard to similar program scope and scale of operations. With its integral farmers market and commercial kitchen, the museum provides a convincing proof of concept for the proposed strategy of combining research and interpretation-based heritage programs with the living heritage of agri-tourism.

**Precedent project:**



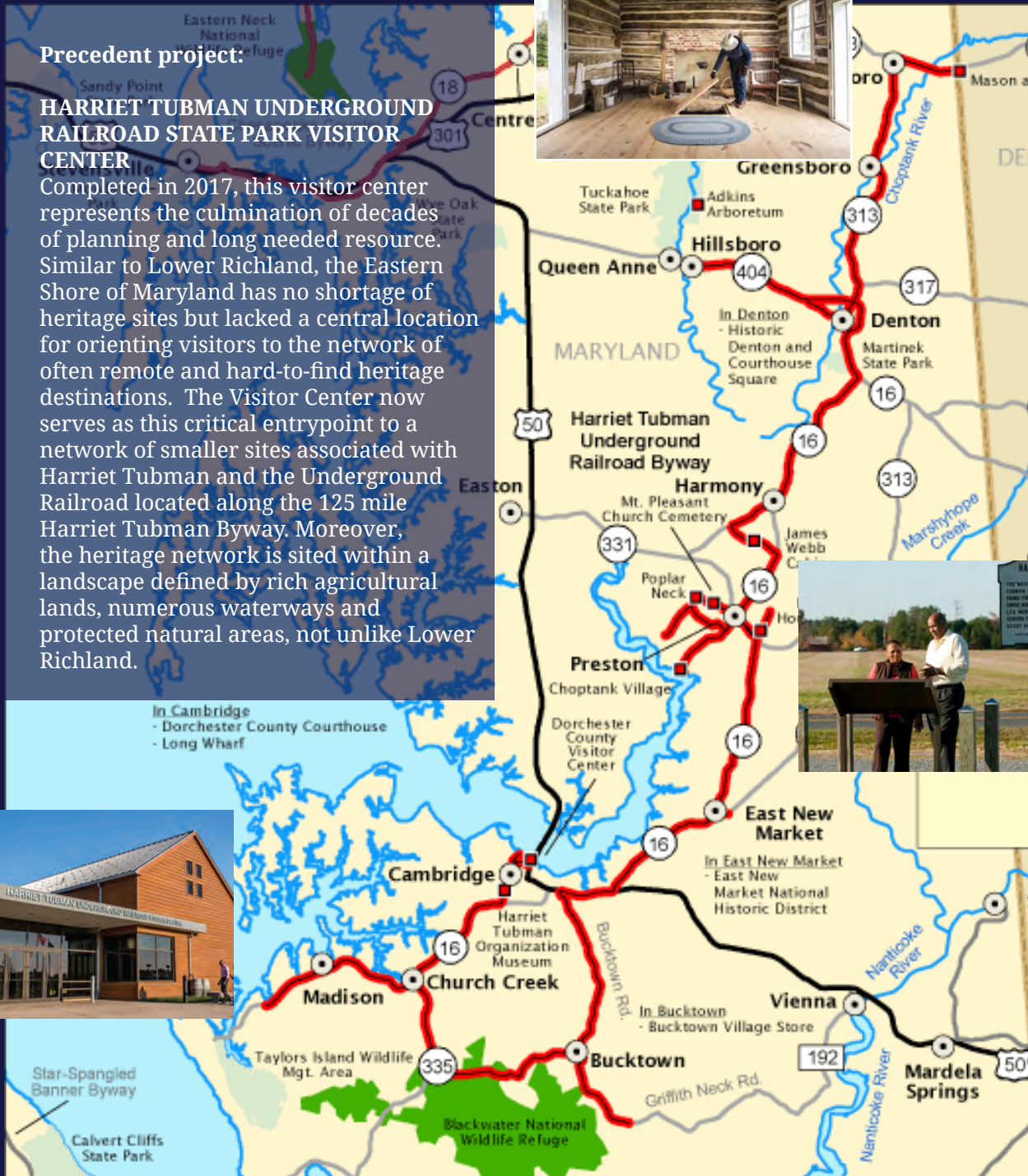
EXTERNAL LANDSCAPING TO CONSIST OF COMMUNITY GARDENS, HERB GARDENS & PUBLIC ARTWORK



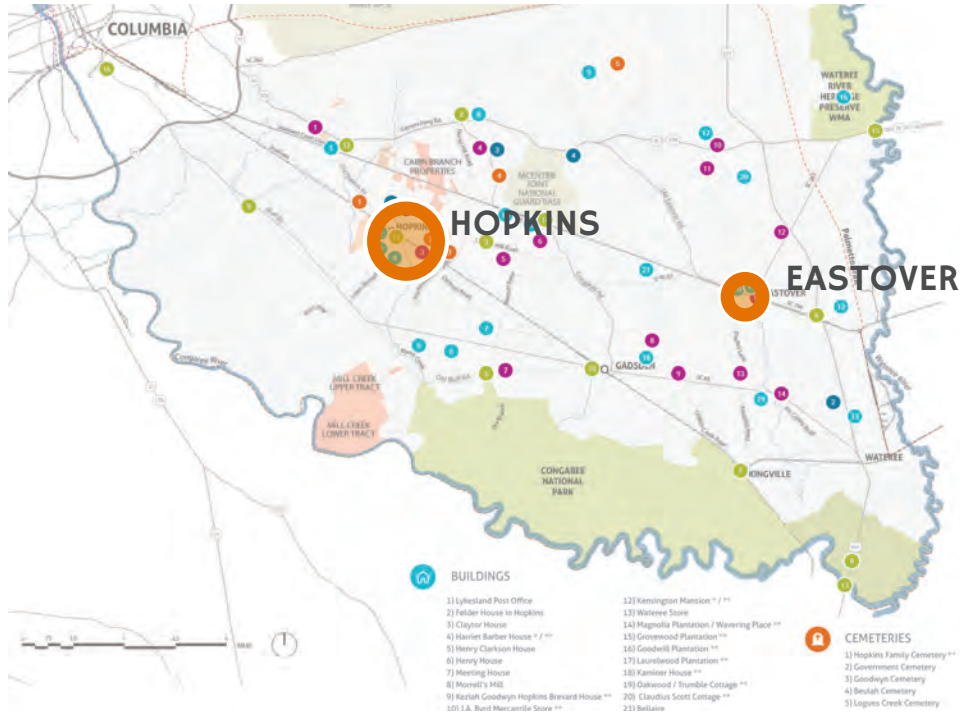
**Precedent project:**

**HARRIET TUBMAN UNDERGROUND RAILROAD STATE PARK VISITOR CENTER**

Completed in 2017, this visitor center represents the culmination of decades of planning and long needed resource. Similar to Lower Richland, the Eastern Shore of Maryland has no shortage of heritage sites but lacked a central location for orienting visitors to the network of often remote and hard-to-find heritage destinations. The Visitor Center now serves as this critical entrypoint to a network of smaller sites associated with Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad located along the 125 mile Harriet Tubman Byway. Moreover, the heritage network is sited within a landscape defined by rich agricultural lands, numerous waterways and protected natural areas, not unlike Lower Richland.



## HERITAGE TOURISM NETWORK



Key map for the heritage tourism network

The Heritage Tourism Network proposed for Lower Richland builds on the numerous heritage sites scattered throughout the area but relies on investment in two specific hubs to insure that the network is visible, accessible and inviting. The primary hub resides at the center of Hopkins where an existing open space, often commonly referred to as the *Hopkins Village Green*, is envisioned as a cluster of new public facilities. At the core of this cluster is a proposed new institution, the Lower Richland Heritage Center, which would be adjacent to three other key resources: a community commercial kitchen for producing small batch value-added locally sourced food products, the Lower Richland Small Business Incubator space, a dedicated covered farmers market space, and a band shell for performances. As the minor hub, Eastover is seen as a place where an existing concentration of underutilized historic structures can be adaptively reused. The town’s current plan to relocate its City Hall into an historic building on Main Street is envisioned as a catalyst for additional historic redevelopment that can bring new services to the area while orienting visitors to Lower Richland heritage at the same time.

### GOALS

1. Improve the visibility of all Lower Richland heritage sites and reinforce their long-term preservation
2. Improve the connectivity between all heritage sites in Lower Richland through improved access and shared identity
3. Provide new opportunities to tell the Lower Richland story to an expanded audience
4. Identify sources of funding for new initiatives through public/private partnerships

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Major Project Lower Richland Heritage Center

1. Consolidate support for Lower Richland to be included in the existing *South Carolina National Heritage Corridor* (SCNHC) and advocate for this legislation.
2. Leverage the existing heritage resources including the SERCO guide as a basis for more robust interpretive trail network.
3. Help existing Lower Richland nonprofits grow their capacity and be better positioned for future funding opportunities.
4. Utilize county funds to develop a branding identity for Lower Richland tourism that can be used to promote all heritage sites.
5. Based on the Lower Richland brand, develop a wayfinding signage system with coordinated website and other outreach materials to better link the existing sites and advance their shared identity.
  - Coordinate with the South Carolina Parks, Recreation and Tourism for potential funding assistance through the *Tourist-Oriented Directional Signage program (TODS)*, *Emerging Destination Marketing Grant* program, as well as other grant opportunities.
6. Explore the potential to use one of the rail corridors as a trail to connect numerous sites of significance in Lower Richland.
  - Work with the Rails to Trails Conservancy to conduct a feasibility study on this effort.
7. Develop the Hopkins Village Green into a multi-faceted community commons oriented around a Lower Richland heritage center, a park that can serve as a festival grounds, a covered pavilion that can serve as a ‘community porch’, and a bandshell that can anchor a performance space.
  - Explore the concept of restoring an existing historic building as part of the heritage center.
  - The project would be an ideal county initiative or public/private partnership with the addition of an integrated retail component.
8. Support the City of Eastover’s continuing efforts to rehabilitate its historic building on Main Street.
9. Explore tax abatements and other incentives for adaptive reuse retail development within the historic structures along Eastover’s Main Street.
10. Utilize county funds to launch a Lower Richland oral history initiative immediately .
  - Commission a local videographer to oversee the project.
  - The project should include both new oral histories as well as help to gather and make accessible previously recorded oral histories.
  - Make the oral histories fully accessible on the Lower Richland tourism website and the Richland Library system.
11. Explore potential partnerships with the Richland Library system to help develop the heritage center project and associated programs.
12. Coordinate with Palmetto Conservation Foundation on ways to better connect the Palmetto Trail to existing heritage sites in Lower Richland.

## EXPANDED DESCRIPTIONS FOR SELECT RECOMMENDATIONS

**INCLUSION IN NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA**  
**Recognition within a National Heritage Area would provide significant boost to Lower Richland’s nascent tourism economy and the area deserves this recognition.** As envisioned, the proposed Heritage Center will work to organize and consolidate heritage tourism opportunities for the entire region. This structure (Center with connecting heritage sites) is the basic platform for creating an official heritage area. Interestingly, just such a heritage area already borders Lower Richland, the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor (SCNHC). However, the corridor inexplicably excludes Lower Richland.

According to the National Park Service:  
*“A National Heritage Area (NHA) is a designation given by the United States Congress to an area that has places and landscapes that collectively represent a unique, nationally important American story. An NHA can be any size and is intended to encourage historic preservation and an appreciation of the natural, cultural, historic, and scenic resources that have been shaped by the area’s geography and history of human activity.”*

“...National Heritage Areas (NHA) are places where natural, cultural, historic, and scenic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally important landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography.”

### EASTOVER HERITAGE HUB

As the only incorporated municipality in Lower Richland and the only town with a conventional ‘main street’ plan, Eastover represents a unique opportunity to catalyze investment around heritage tourism and serve as a key hub within the heritage tourism network.

Recent plans to relocate the town’s City Hall to a nearby historic structure has the potential to trigger other adaptive reuse efforts in adjacent buildings. Eastover has already received some



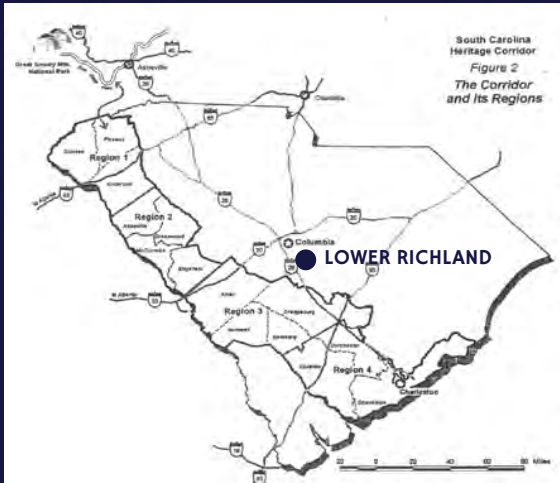
*Logo for the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor*



*Architectural detail in Eastover*

financial support from the county for its City Hall project. This plan proposes additional support to ensure the project is realized as well as additional regulatory measures such as tax abatement and historic preservation incentives to encourage more redevelopment of the town’s vacant storefronts. With its proximity to Kensington Mansion, the terminus of a potential rail trail from Cabin Branch, the Palmetto Trail, and the Wateree and Congaree River paddle takeouts, a revitalized Eastover could effectively link heritage tourism with nature tourism in Lower Richland.

## South Carolina National Heritage Corridor (SCNHC)



*Map of the SCNHC showing its 4 regions and geographic proximity to Lower Richland.*

Congress designated the SCNHC in 1996. According to the National Park Service; the SCNHC was created for the Southeastern states to receive a NHA designation and the SCNHC is one of the largest Heritage Areas. The SCNHC extends 240 miles across South Carolina, stretching from the mountains of Oconee County, along the Savannah River, to the port city of Charleston. Bounded at one end by the historical port of Charleston and at the other by the mountains of the Blue Ridge, the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor, also known as the “Corridor,” encompasses the history of the settlement and evolution of the State. Within its boundaries, the Corridor also holds the places where rural and agricultural-based lifestyles developed and that remain as unique and powerful today as they were centuries ago.

### CONNECT HERITAGE TO NATURE

In 2017, Congaree National Park welcomed over 160,000 visitors, a 15% increase over the previous year, and the most recorded in the park’s history. Yet very few of these visitors left Lower Richland with any awareness of the area’s cultural heritage. For tourism of any kind to succeed in Lower Richland in the long term, heritage assets must be linked with natural resource assets to create a shared identity for the area. Not only will this serve as a more authentic representation of Lower Richland but it will be more interesting to visitors. Some may come for one reason and stay for another. Others will be enticed to visit because Lower Richland offers a unique fusion of nature and heritage experiences. There are numerous program opportunities that can help to marry these interests beginning with a brand identity and marketing campaign that gives equal credence to both types of tourism. Other programs include improved interpretive education coursework for both nature and heritage guides that effectively links Lower Richland’s to the landscape of the region.

### WATEREE RIVER HERITAGE PRESERVE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

Waterree River Heritage Preserve WMA is managed by SC DNR to preserve and enhance natural and cultural resources of the area. A major part of that management consists of restoring and enhancing of wetlands and streams on the property. SC DNR is also addressing the cultural resources aspects of the property through an in-depth archaeological study that will be used to provide educational material and programs for visitors. New heritage trails with interpretive signage and wayfinding could help to make the findings of the study more accessible to visitors. Although certain activities and practices are restricted on this heritage preserve because of a conservation easement and the Heritage Trust Law, Richland County and SC DNR should continue to work with the private owner of the Goodwill Plantation to conduct public tours of this important site, and if possible, develop a schedule of regular events that would allow visitors to plan in advance.

*“Libraries aren’t amenities; we’re necessities. And we will continue to move our communities forward, making sure our residents are prepared for the future. We will be places where the community can come together and discuss issues that are important to them. We are ensuring people have spaces to learn, create and share. And we need to break down barriers, provide access to information and connect local residents directly to the experts.”*

*Melanie Huggins, Executive Director  
Richland Library*

#### LIBRARY SYSTEM COLLABORATION

The Richland Library system has set an impressive standard for public service and is guided by a mission which closely aligns with the goals of the Lower Richland Tourism Plan. After a successful bond measure in 2013, the Richland Library has developed construction plans for six new or renovated libraries in the county and has spent the last year gathering community input on their plans. The Library has a history of positive programming in Lower Richland with heritage programming at the Eastover branch location and an ambitious culinary program at Lower Richland High School. Yet, Lower Richland remains underserved by the Library and the Hopkins area has been identified as an ideal location for expanded programming. There is a significant shared interest in the Library’s plans and the vision for the Lower Richland Heritage Center, and this plan proposes a substantial collaboration to realize the vision.

#### BRANDING + WAYFINDING

The development of a custom branded identity is a relatively low-cost but high return investment in the development of heritage tourism economy for Lower Richland. The branding as simplified representation of Lower Richland’s shared identity will help significantly to unify the many distinct heritage sites of the area and aid in guiding visitors who will be looking for consistent and recognizable identification. The branding would typically include a logo graphic, color and typography standards, and potentially a phrase or motto that could be used to distill and easily communicate the essence of Lower Richland to new visitors.

These branding elements then become the foundation for wayfinding signage that can be placed at strategic locations throughout Lower Richland to help guide visitors and steer them to the various heritage sites (see the *Wayfinding* section of the *Tourism Framework* for an expanded description and example of the signage). Additionally, the South Carolina Parks, Recreation & Tourism department offers



*Richland Library has a history of integrating heritage resources into its programming including these panels at the Eastover Branch.*

grant funding and assistance for emerging tourism areas to implement more standard tourism wayfinding signage through its *Tourism-Oriented Directional Signage* (TODS) program.

### INTERPRETIVE OPPORTUNITIES

There is a wealth of knowledge and interest in sharing stories among Lower Richland’s resident population, but there exist few resources for residents to communicate and share this interpretive local knowledge to area visitors. Interpretation is a keystone for successful tourism as it provides a way for visitors to learn about places that may not speak for themselves and it allows local residents a means of educating visitors about these places. Successful interpretation will also help to inspire appreciation for places among visitors which may lead them to return or at least share stories with other potential visitors, which in turn leads to more tourism. In many cases, if visitors struggle to find information about the key places that make an area special, they will likely not enjoy their experience, or at a minimum may depart the area with an insufficient understanding of the place and little of value to share with other potential visitors.

There are several ways that interpretation can help establish and enhance tourism in Lower Richland. A key first step is to develop an interpretive strategy for the region that aligns with the recommendations of this plan. The interpretive strategy would help to better define the specific narratives and tours that can connect multiple heritage sites in Lower Richland and help to prioritize investment in the area’s heritage resources.

Interpretive training will be important for the local guides to offer these tours. To encourage and facilitate more local residents to earn guide credentials, Richland County can offer guide certification training offered by the National Association for Interpretation. Another resource is Benedict College which at one time offered a tourism studies program that could be potentially be reinstated as a continuing education course.

Following the interpretive strategy and establishment of a training program, various interpretive products, such as maps and booklets, signage, websites, and smart-phone apps, can be developed to help travelers connect with the experiences available in Lower Richland. These products can also be implemented in phases as funding is available.

### Tourist-Oriented Directional Signage (TODS)



The *Agriculture and Tourist Oriented Directional Signage* Programs, commonly referred to as TODS, allows tourism- and agritourism-oriented facilities to have directional signage placed in the highway right-of-way in rural areas.

The Department of Agriculture and SCPRT are responsible for promoting the programs and screening businesses to make sure they qualify to participate in the programs. Because the backbone of the program revolves around highway signage, SCDOT will oversee the program and maintain all program regulations. The regulations were developed cooperatively by the three agencies and are in compliance with the Federal Highway Administration’s Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices. (program text from the *South Carolina Parks, Recreation and Tourism* website)

There are also many traditional interpretive enhancement programs that can be utilized or leveraged not only to tell Lower Richland's stories but to conserve its historic resources as well. Lower Richland is already home to numerous sites listed on the National register of Historic Places but many of these are not well known or identified. This information should be a key component of any interpretive products developed for Lower Richland. There also remain many historic sites in Lower Richland that are not identified by historical markers, and it is recommend that Richland County and Lower Richland stakeholders work with the South Carolina Historic Preservation Office and its historic marker program to have these sites designated. Finally, there are also existing grant programs available to help with the restoration of sites so they are more equipped to receive tourists.

#### TARGETED PRESERVATION

A qualified consultant should work with Richland County to develop the comprehensive interpretive strategy for Lower Richland identified in the previous recommendations. This strategy will include a general framework for interpretation that will aid in guided tours and interpretive products, as well as identifying a strategy for prioritizing historic preservation sites. Key sites that can best inform visitors about the themes of Lower Richland's heritage should be prioritized for preservation and restoration. In advance of a commissioned interpretive strategy, Richland County Conservation Commission can begin to pursue a strategy of prioritizing sites based on the following themes to ensure that an inclusive and diverse narrative of Lower Richland is presented to visitors:

- Native American settlements
- Dwellings of the Antebellum period, including dwellings of enslaved people and plantations
- African American homesteading during the period of Reconstruction



*Preservation and adaptive reuse of the historic Wateree Store could help tell the story of mercantile culture in Lower Richland while providing goods and services for the resident and visitor communities.*

- Evolution of agricultural practices tied to the land
- The continuity of religious faith to Lower Richland residents
- Mercantile culture
- The impact of the railroad on Lower Richland communities

#### RESTORE AND REOPEN KENSINGTON MANSION

The preservation of Kensington Manor as a public heritage site needs to be of the utmost priority. Not only is this Lower Richland's most significant historic building, it is one of very few sites along the eastern edge of Lower Richland and is capable of drawing a large number of visitors. Owned by International Paper and currently under restoration, plans for public access, tours, event rentals, etc. have not been made known. The slave cabin on the property is in great need of restoration and interpretation and must be made available to tell the complete story of Kensington. Richland County should be the leader in advocating for public access to both structures.

#### COMMUNITY COMMONS / FESTIVAL GROUNDS

In conjunction with the proposed Lower Richland heritage center, the heritage hub should include a more flexible *Community Commons* area that can provide dedicated



park space for festivals, performances, outdoor movie screenings, and other community gatherings. One of Lower Richland's strongest heritage assets is its calendar of festivals which could attract more visitors from across the state and beyond if provided with a dedicated space.

In advance of the heritage center, the *Community Commons* could also provide a space for an open air visitor center and serve as an effective initial phase of the heritage center project as additional funding becomes available.

#### ORAL HISTORIES

The heritage of Lower Richland resides in both the built environment of the area as well as the collective memory of area residents past and present. An effective interpretation of Lower Richland's heritage will integrate stories of local residents into the tourism experience. There is of course a generational component to these stories, and while many stories have been passed from one generation to the next, many of the most illustrative stories are at risk of being lost if not documented soon. To this end, it is recommended that Richland County conduct an immediate effort to document, organize, and make accessible the *Oral Histories* of Lower Richland residents and others familiar with the area. Efforts should also be made to gather and make accessible any and all past oral history work conducted in Lower Richland. This project could be done in conjunction with Richland Library and/or a local audio/visual consultant.

#### RAIL TRAILS

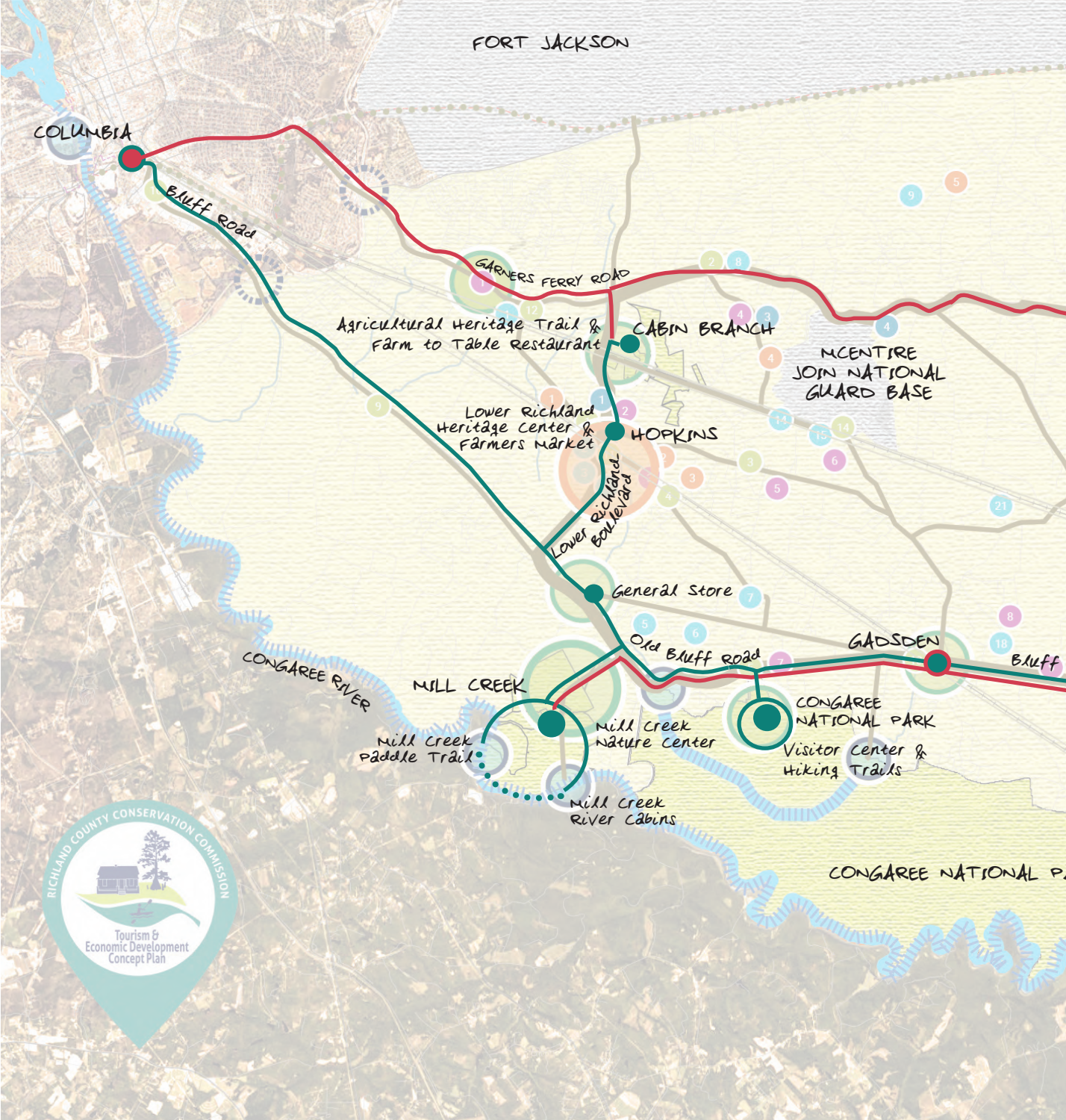
The impact of the railroad on the development Lower Richland is unmistakable. Not only were all of the current population centers of Lower Richland founded along one of two freight lines, these lines continue to operate and structure life in the area. There are examples of heritage tourism already happening in conjunction with the railroads, notably the annual Kingville Festival which

celebrates the memory of a once prosperous railroad town of which almost nothing remains, as well as numerous historic markers along the lines. Yet there may exist opportunities to better leverage the railroad right-of-way itself to spur heritage tourism.

*Rail Trails* are a concept in recreation, tourism, and active transportation, in which rail corridors are adapted to serve as hike and bike trails. Hundreds of communities all over the United States have successfully found ways to adapt their railroad right-of-ways to better serve their residents as amenities. While the majority of these trails have been created from decommissioned rail lines, such as the well-known Swamp Rabbit Trail in Greenville, SC, there are an increasing number of trails along active rail lines, often referred to as *Rails with Trails* in which the trail is physically separated from the actual train line but utilizes a portion of the same right-of-way.

In Lower Richland, both the southern rail line operated by CSX, and the northern rail line operated by Norfolk Southern, may have potential to support *Rails with Trails*. Along the Norfolk Southern line in particular, key segments pass through Eastover and Cabin Branch and could make for meaningful trail projects even as short isolated segments. It is recommended that Richland County staff oversee some preliminary due diligence work to learn which segments of the rail lines include right-of-way in excess of 50'. Following this study, the county should work with the Washington D.C. based non-profit organization Rails to Trails Conservancy to conduct a basic feasibility study of the potential for *Rails with Trails* in Lower Richland. Given the critical need for improved bikeways in Lower Richland but the difficulty in adapting them to the area's narrow roadways, even limited sections of *Rails with Trails* could have a huge impact on connectivity.

# Nature & Heritage Itineraries



RECOMMENDATIONS



## Two-Day Itinerary

1. From Columbia, head to Mill Creek Nature Center via Bluff Road.
2. Get oriented, visit the environmental education exhibits, and pick up picnic lunch from a park concessionaire.
3. At the riverfront, go fishing, bird watch, or rent kayaks for the Mill Creek Paddle Trail, and enjoy lunch on the river.
4. By early afternoon, head to Hopkins, stopping at the Harriet Barber House, and then browse the exhibition at the Lower Richland Heritage Center.
5. Finish the day with a short stroll along the Cabin Branch Agricultural Heritage Trail before dinner at the Cabin Branch Farm to Table restaurant.
6. Head back to Mill Creek and stay the night at a River Cabin or camp site.
7. After breakfast, rent mountain bikes and ride the Mill Creek trail loop.
8. Grab a picnic lunch at the new general store near the intersection of Bluff Road and Old Bluff road, and continue to Congaree National Park.
9. Get oriented at the Harry Hampton Visitor Center and enjoy any of several hiking trails.
10. Take an afternoon driving tour of heritage sites including a stop at Kensington Mansion.
11. Stop for dinner in Eastover or Gadsden. Return to Mill Creek for the night, check in at a local Bed & Breakfast, or return to Columbia.

## Third Day Options

1. Drive to Eastover and rent bikes to explore the Palmetto Trail along McCord's Ferry Road and across the Wateree River via the Wateree Passage.
2. Stop at the Wateree Store for lunch or snacks, and browse for Lower Richland local goods.
3. Drive to Wateree River Heritage Preserve WMA to explore Cooks Mountain and the heritage trails, mountain biking, fishing, or check out Wateree Range for skeet shooting.
4. Return to Columbia via Garner's Ferry Road, stopping at any of the local family farms near Cabin Branch.



A photograph of a white, single-story house with a large, multi-paned window on the left side. The house has a grey roof and a small porch area. A paved driveway leads from the foreground towards the house. The background is filled with tall, dark green trees under a cloudy sky. A green semi-transparent box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing text.

# Small Business Development

A truly sustainable tourism economy is not just environmentally beneficial - it also creates economic opportunity and financial sustainability for local communities and families.

In order to grow tourism businesses that are led and sustained by Lower Richland residents and families, offering resources, policies, and programs for small business development will be essential. The recommendations in this section are designed to create “ladders of opportunity” so that residents at every level of expertise can participate in the process and find the type of small business that works for them and their family. They include recommendations on the key growth sectors for small businesses, as well as opportunities for financing, education and capacity building, and zoning refinements to support business growth.

# KEY INCUBATOR PROGRAMS



RECOMMENDATIONS

The Small Business Incubator will serve as the cornerstone of local business development in Lower Richland. The Incubator can be co-located with the Heritage Center and new Richland Library branch at the Hopkins Heritage hub, and will be a core component of the county and its local partners' work to ensure that Lower Richland residents benefit from the burgeoning tourism economy in the area.

### **Education and Technical Assistance**

The incubator will be the central “hub” for educational resources and technical assistance for Lower Richland residents who are working to start and grow new businesses. Educational resources will be available to residents at every stage of the process - from those who are just starting to think about a new business and wondering what the opportunities are, to those who have a small business and are looking for financing to take the next step in their growth, to those who already have an established business and are working to grow their market, revenue, and profit. Initial programming will focus on the three key sectors identified by Lower Richland residents: lodging and accommodations, restaurants and food service, and agriculture and food production. However, programs and partnerships at the incubator can easily be expanded to serve new areas of economic opportunity and growth. Partners including Clemson University, USC, the Ice House business development program, USDA, and others will be critical. Richland Library or other staff support will be crucial to facilitate and organize meetings and to maintain ongoing programming.

### **Networking**

The incubator will help Lower Richland business owners grow their networks, secure financing, expand their market share with new customers, and build a qualified employee base. The incubator can be a space for convening and networking for multiple groups, including:

- Investors looking for new businesses to support - including private investors as well as bank, credit union, and micro-lender staff
- Convention and Visitor's Bureau informational events on marketing and attracting a visitor-based clientele
- Restaurants and grocers who may be interested in purchasing local agricultural products
- Small businesses looking for potential employees - who can host a job fair or recruitment event

### **Designing Programs and Attracting Resources**

Incubators work best when they are spaces that can support many different types of programming, and can provide concrete support for business development - including competitions or micro-loan pools to get new businesses started; “accelerator” programs that provide intense guidance, mentorship, and often funding to help businesses grow; and even pop-up retail, restaurant, or other spaces that can provide essential equipment and visibility for growing businesses in order to get them ready for the next step of running their own venue. In order to support these programs, the business incubator will need knowledgeable staff who have experience in development and grantwriting work, or close partnerships with county or other agencies who can provide support for program design and resource development.

One initial program we recommend that the Small Business Incubator undertake is the development and operation of a commercial kitchen space that will offer resources for aspiring caterers, restaurateurs, and specialty food producers to cook at larger scales and process products in ways that are consistent with food safety regulations. Commercial kitchens are a proven mechanism for helping aspiring small-business owners get “off their kitchen table” and into a space that allows them to scale up operations and gain needed experience that enables them to receive financing for further expansion. However, competent and consistent supervision of commercial kitchen spaces is required in order for them to offer a significant benefit to the community, which will require the incubator to work with partner organizations and funders to find sustainable funding for operations.

## Develop High Opportunity Business Sectors



*Mr. Bunkys is one of the few examples of a successful retail operation in Lower Richland and currently fulfills many retail needs including basic conveniences, grocery, restaurant, and fuel.*

Currently, there are few businesses available for tourists and visitors to patronize in Lower Richland, and community members also see a dearth of available services and retail options to meet their daily needs. Growing businesses in Lower Richland is therefore an opportunity to serve visitors coming to enjoy the natural and heritage assets of the area; to fuel additional demand for community-serving businesses like grocery stores and restaurants; and to enable local residents to build wealth through business ownership and local employment. Residents engaged in the planning process expressed a need to focus on targeted, high-opportunity business sectors for small business development, including lodging and accommodation businesses; restaurant and food service businesses; and agricultural and food production businesses.

### GOALS

- 1. Lodging and Accommodations:** From creating a small RV park, to ensuring that zoning permits small bed-and-breakfast or lodging opportunities, to the possibility of a larger “boutique” hotel, Lower Richland should offer an array of lodging and accommodation options for visitors and tourists that are locally-owned and build local wealth.
- 2. Restaurants and Food Service:** Restaurants and food service opportunities in Lower Richland develop to serve both residents and visitors to the area, and take advantage of local expertise and local agricultural products.
- 3. Agriculture and Food Production:** The agricultural heritage of Lower Richland becomes an economic generator through opportunities for specialty and organic farming; value-added production of food products using local ingredients; and resource-pooling strategies such as cooperative ownership of land and cooperative sales.
- 4. Community-Serving Businesses:** Grocery stores and neighborhood-serving retail businesses can serve both residents and tourists. Using the tourism market to expand the economic potential of key development sites can help attract businesses like grocery and dry goods stores that rely on traffic and visitor counts to determine where to locate.





### *Precedent*

## **Gateway to Big Bend National Park**

At first glance, Marathon, Texas, may not appear to have much in common with any of the towns in Lower Richland. However, what they share is a proximity to a heavily visited national park, small town character, an intact cultural heritage, and no other economic development beyond small-scale tourism.

As the self-proclaimed 'Gateway to Big Bend National Park', Marathon has successfully leveraged its location to serve as a much needed hub for visitors continuing to the park.

## Lodging + Accommodations

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Take advantage of the “sharing economy” by creating a training program at the Small Business Incubator and encouraging local residents to try renting rooms in their home, or other properties they own, to visitors on a short-term basis.
2. Based on proven demand for sharing economy rentals, develop a targeted loan program to help residents build accessory dwelling units (mother-in-law units) to be rented through Airbnb or other online listing venues.
3. Develop small RV parks and lodging options at the Mill Creek tract to help further prove the market for lodging in Lower Richland. The successful RV park arrangement at the Harriet Barber House during Congaree Swampfest and the continued growth of the National African American RVers Association (NAARVA) has demonstrated an ongoing need.
4. Ensure residents are aware of the lodging businesses currently permitted in Lower Richland within the zoning ordinance, and perform an economic impact assessment related to zoning alterations that would allow larger bed-and-breakfast uses and/or expand the Rural Commercial category to allow for additional areas of potential hotel development.
5. Provide educational programs and financing resources that support local residents to build businesses in this market sector (see “Financing” and “Education and Capacity Building”).



*Bed & Breakfasts are already permitted within the existing RU zoning designation but many Lower Richland residents are not aware of this.*



*An RV campground has been long needed in Lower Richland and could be accommodated at the Mill Creek tract.*



*Upland Cabins are one of the potential lodging options that would be ideal at the Mill Creek tract.*

## SHARING ECONOMY

*Take advantage of the “sharing economy” by creating a training program at the Small Business Incubator and encouraging local residents to try renting rooms in their home, or other properties they own, to visitors on a short-term basis.*

The “sharing economy” is a word often used for online booking sites, like Airbnb, VRBO, or HomeAway, that enable local residents to advertise and rent rooms in their homes or whole properties to a national and international group of tourists and visitors. These sites allow property owners to list their room or property as often as they would like to (all the time, during peak seasons, or just one weekend a year during a major festival). Hosts and guests are able to review one another, so property owners can determine whether a potential guest is going to be respectful of their home or property. A short class on listing property on “sharing economy” websites, including a primer on the different websites available and guest and host responsibilities, could be helpful to show Lower Richland residents the potential of their properties to generate additional income from tourism visitors. Residents can then decide whether they would like to try listing their property.

## ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS

*Based on proven demand for sharing economy rentals, develop a targeted loan program to help residents build accessory dwelling units (mother-in-law units) to be rented through Airbnb or other online listing venues.*

Many people on sharing economy websites keep renting rooms in their home for a long time. However, many visitors want to rent independent apartment suites, cabins, or homes, with their own kitchens and bathrooms — and they will pay a premium for these types of units. Residents of Lower Richland who have tried renting rooms and see an opportunity for additional visitors may want to add small “accessory units” or “mother-in-law units”

on their property in order to increase the number of visitors they can attract, but these renovations can be expensive. Developing a loan program with a local bank or credit union can help residents access loan officers who understand the local tourism environment and the opportunities for Lower Richland residents to invest in lodging for visitors.

## MILL CREEK LODGING

*Develop small RV parks and lodging options at Mill Creek to help prove the market for lodging in Lower Richland.*

Often, banks can be reluctant to lend to any development that is the first of its kind in a particular area, and the lack of current lodging options in Lower Richland means that community members who want to create RV parks or small lodges will need to work through this barrier. One way to remove this barrier is for the county to help take the first step toward proving that visitors can and will stay in Lower Richland if they are given the opportunity. This plan therefore recommends that a small RV park and a set of lodging options on the Congaree River be integrated into the county-owned Mill Creek site. In order to ensure that these lodging options provide benefit to the community, the county should examine local employment opportunities, and potentially operate some of the lodging facilities as “concession” models in which a local business could lease and operate the county-owned site.



*The small bed & breakfast at Wavering Place Plantation in Lower Richland is a scale that other property owners could emulate.*

#### CLARIFY AND ADAPT ZONING

*Ensure residents are aware of the lodging businesses currently permitted in Lower Richland within the zoning ordinance, and perform an economic impact assessment related to zoning alterations that would allow larger bed-and-breakfast uses and/or expand the Rural Commercial category to allow for additional areas of potential hotel development.*

Currently, the Rural zoning category allows bed-and-breakfast development for properties with less than 9 rooms within the Rural zoning district, while larger hotel and motel uses are permitted under the Rural Commercial category. This plan recommends that the Richland County Planning department ensure residents are aware of current opportunities to develop small bed-and-breakfast uses, and perform an economic impact assessment of opportunities to either expand the number of rooms allowed in bed and breakfast uses, or expand hotel/motel development through use of the proposed RTCS zoning designation along major corridors (Lower Richland Blvd, Bluff Rd, and Old Bluff Rd) and within the Gadsden Commercial District which forms the gateway to the Congaree National Park.

#### FINANCING, EDUCATION, AND CAPACITY

*Provide educational programs and financing resources that support local residents to build businesses in this market sector (see “Financing” and “Education and Capacity Building”).*

The “Financing” and “Education and Capacity Building” components of this section will focus on educational and financing resource development that can support lodging businesses and other small businesses in Lower Richland.

#### GROWING A BUSINESS

See the following page for a chart that discusses a “sample path” for growing a business in the lodging and accommodations sectors, and shows how the resources described in this plan can assist businesses in each stage of growth:

- Taking the First Steps
- Growing a Small Business
- Scaling Up for Success

LODGING & ACCOMMODATIONS	Taking the First Steps	Growing a Small Business	Scaling Up for Success
<p><b>A Sample Path: Growing a lodging &amp; accommodations business</b></p>	<p>Residents rent a room in their house on Airbnb during peak tourist seasons (e.g. firefly season) to gain extra income</p>	<p>Residents develop a “mother in law” unit or “accessory dwelling unit” on personal property and rent it via Airbnb, VRBO, or other online venue full-time</p>	<p>Residents attract investment to develop and operate a bed &amp; breakfast or a lodge for visitors.</p>
<p><b>RESOURCES FOR LODGING &amp; ACCOMMODATIONS BUSINESSES</b></p>			
<p><b>Spaces &amp; Places</b></p>	<p><b>Business Incubator:</b> Co-located with a new Richland Library branch and the Heritage Center, this is a space to convene partners who can provide educational resources to help Lower Richland residents grow successful businesses</p>	<p><b>Business Incubator</b></p>	<p><b>Business Incubator</b></p>
<p><b>Education</b></p>	<p><b>Ice House Program at the Business Incubator:</b> Create a basic business plan to envision what a successful business could look like</p>	<p><b>Business Incubator Classes:</b> Partnerships with USC’s college of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management and their Tourism Incubator, as well as Benedict College’s Recreation and Leisure Services department, can help bring relevant content to the Business Incubator in Lower Richland.</p>	<p><b>Business Incubator Classes and Networking Events:</b> The business incubator may offer additional classes as well as networking events with local investors, banks, and credit unions.</p>
<p><b>Financing</b></p>	<p><b>No financing required!</b> The “first steps” are designed to be low-cost, low-investment, and low-risk ventures that let people try out different types of businesses and see what is right for them.</p>	<p><b>Local Bank or Credit Union:</b> Programs at the business incubator assist residents to apply for a bank loan from a local bank or credit union to develop small, rentable units on their properties, or a micro-loan to renovate their existing properties. <b>County Small Business Development:</b> Dedicated staff for small business development at the county level may assist to develop a targeted loan product for LR residents with a local bank.</p>	<p>The success of small lodging options on county sites and in residents’ backyards has shown investors and banks the opportunity that exists in Lower Richland - programs at the business incubator and at USC can help residents work with these investors and banks to grow new lodging options that enhance and display local character.</p>
<p><b>Partners</b></p>	<p>The IceHouse Program; Richland Library system</p>	<p>USC; Benedict College; USDA; County Economic Development staffer devoted to small businesses; Richland Library system</p>	<p>Local banks and credit unions; investors</p>

## Food Service & Production

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop a commercial kitchen that can be operated as part of the Small Business Incubator concept.
2. Create restaurant or catering facilities at publicly-owned properties, including at the proposed Heritage Center and Nature Center, that can be operated on a “concession” model by a local business.
3. Focus on food trucks as a potential intermediate step for small businesses that have outgrown the commercial kitchen and concession model.
4. Adapt zoning to facilitate restaurant development around the Gadsden and Garner’s Ferry hubs and along Old Bluff Road and Lower Richland Boulevard.
5. Provide educational programs and financing resources that support local residents to build businesses in this market sector (see “Financing” and “Education and Capacity Building”).



*Whippoorwill Cafe & Bakery is a relatively new locally owned restaurant on Garner’s Ferry Road.*



*The Certified SC program provides free marketing for value-added products produced in commercial kitchens.*

### COMMERCIAL KITCHEN

*Develop a commercial kitchen that can be operated as part of the Small Business Incubator concept.*

Commercial kitchens are important assets that help residents scale up their catering businesses, restaurant concepts, and specialty food product ideas, while following important food safety rules and learning to use standard commercial equipment rather than home-kitchen equipment. The key to a successful commercial kitchen incubator program is to ensure that it is operated and maintained on an ongoing basis by staff with the ability to train new users on regulations, equipment usage, and cleanup. This commercial kitchen should therefore be located near the Small Business Incubator and operated as a component of the incubator program.

### RESTAURANT OR CATERING FACILITY

*Create restaurant or catering facilities at publicly-owned properties, including at the proposed Heritage Center and Nature Center, that can be operated on a “concession” model by a local business.*

New catering and food service facilities at the Mill Creek and Hopkins Heritage Center sites can build opportunities for new businesses to operate a restaurant without having to make a large capital investment in kitchen equipment. These “concession” operations will generally charge the restaurant operator a standard fee to use and operate the space, and the small business operator will receive their sales income and use it to grow their business further. Because these facilities will be associated with major tourism hubs, they offer opportunities to attract visitors while also creating new dining options for local residents. The concession model creates opportunities for start-up restaurants to experiment; for “pop-up” restaurants to generate excitement and bring new visitors to the area; and for tourism hubs to attract visitors who are looking to stay out for the day with their families, rather than return to Columbia to find lunch or dinner.

### FOOD TRUCKS

*Focus on food trucks as a potential intermediate step for small businesses that have outgrown the commercial kitchen and concession model.*

Investing in and starting up a food truck business can require between \$25,000 and \$100,000, depending on whether the food truck is new or used and the types of kitchen equipment required. While this is a significant amount, it is still far less than the amount needed to fully renovate or build a new restaurant space. Food trucks have several other advantages for young businesses and aspiring restaurateurs: they allow the operator to market and build a customer base in multiple locations around Lower Richland and the region before establishing a brick-and-mortar business; and they create opportunities to take advantage of local events like festivals and farmer’s markets that attract additional visitors. Richland County can help to encourage or incentivize these types of business by dedicating specific locations to be *Food Truck Parks* where patrons can expect to encounter the food trucks on a regular basis.



*In recent years, food trucks have become one of the most accessible means for new entrepreneurs to develop small scale food service operations.*



*The general store is a retail typology that can serve the needs of both local residents and tourists alike.*

#### CLARIFY & ADAPT ZONING

*Adapt zoning to facilitate restaurant and targeted types of retail development around the Gadsden and Garner’s Ferry hubs and along Old Bluff Road and Lower Richland Boulevard*

The Rural zoning category allows very few types of retail uses, which has limited the opportunity to develop tourist-serving businesses in Lower Richland. Residents of Lower Richland recognize the need to take a balanced approach to development that preserves the area’s rural character, while still allowing some retail services to develop in order to benefit tourism and the local community. Along major corridors, allowing small restaurant uses with limited parking can be a strategy for facilitating locally-owned business growth while limiting interest from large franchises and chains that have minimum parking requirements when they perform site selection. Within commercial hubs (e.g. Gadsden) and at major intersections, the county planning department should work with local residents to study opportunities to expand the Rural Commercial district in order to grow retail uses that are in demand from visitors and residents.

#### FINANCING, EDUCATION, AND CAPACITY

*Provide educational programs and financing resources that support local residents to build businesses in this market sector (see “Financing” and “Education and Capacity Building”).*

The “Financing” and “Education and Capacity Building” components of this section will focus on educational and financing resource development that can support food service businesses and other small businesses in Lower Richland.

#### GROWING A BUSINESS

See the following page for a chart that discusses a “sample path” for growing a business in the restaurant and food service sectors, and shows how the resources described in this plan can assist businesses in each stage of growth:

- Taking the First Steps
- Growing a Small Business
- Scaling Up for Success



RESTAURANTS & FOOD SERVICE	Taking the First Steps	Growing a Small Business	Scaling Up for Success
<p><b>A Sample Path: Growing a restaurant or food production business</b></p>	<p>Use the commercial kitchen located at the business incubator to start a catering business, or to start learning about food safety rules related to processing and selling foods like local sausages or peanut oils.</p>	<p>With the help of a micro-loan, start a food truck business that can sell at multiple local events and venues; or, operate a local food concession at Mill Creek or the Heritage Center.</p>	<p>Attract funding from investors and loans from local banks to help rehabilitate an Eastover commercial building as a restaurant, or construct a new restaurant in Gadsden, the “Gateway to Congaree.”</p>
<p><b>RESOURCES FOR RESTAURANT &amp; FOOD SERVICE BUSINESSES</b></p>			
<p><b>Spaces &amp; Places</b></p>	<p><b>Business Incubator:</b> Co-located with a new Richland Library branch and the Heritage Center, this is a space to convene partners who can provide educational resources to help Lower Richland residents grow successful businesses.</p> <p><b>Commercial Kitchen:</b> A commercial kitchen in Lower Richland will provide classes, programming, and facilities to help residents grow catering and restaurant businesses.</p>	<p><b>Concessions:</b> Facilities like the Heritage Center and Mill Creek Nature Center are good locations for built-in cafes with kitchens to serve the tourist population. These facilities can be run as “concessions” in which a local business can operate the location without having to immediately invest in a full kitchen buildout. Criteria for selecting concession operator could include local ownership or local employment.</p> <p><b>Food Trucks:</b> A food truck is a more accessible and inexpensive way to launch a new restaurant business and try out different concepts without the pressure to invest in a full physical location with seating. The mobility of a food truck also makes it possible to try out different locations and see what works before committing to a building.</p>	<p><b>New and Renovated Buildings:</b> The Eastover commercial corridor is a potential source for historic buildings that could be renovated to house a new restaurant or retail store, while the Gadsden Business District offers opportunities to develop new restaurants and stores that serve Congaree National Park and Mill Creek visitors.</p>
<p><b>Education</b></p>	<p><b>Ice House Program at the Business Incubator:</b> Create a basic business plan to envision what a successful business could look like.</p> <p><b>Commercial Kitchen:</b> Learn about requirements for food safety and ideas for operating a successful restaurant or food service business at the commercial kitchen.</p>	<p><b>Business Incubator Classes:</b> A marketing course at the business incubator can help local restaurateurs, caterers, and food production businesses understand how to use social media and press coverage to promote these businesses.</p>	<p><b>Detailed Business Plan Courses:</b> Create a full-fledged business plan that moves toward full-time rather than part-time agricultural work with help from the Midlands Food Alliance, the USC Tourism Incubator program, or the local Small Business Development Centers at Benedict College, Midlands Technical College, or USC.</p>
<p><b>Financing</b></p>	<p><b>No financing required!</b> The “first steps” are designed to be low-cost, low-investment, and low-risk ventures that let people try out different types of businesses and see what is right for them.</p>	<p><b>Micro-Loan:</b> Consider a micro-loan for a food truck, or other equipment or resources needed to grow the business</p>	<p><b>Local Bank or Credit Union:</b> Using a business plan, approach a local bank to purchase equipment and land to continue expanding the business</p>

## Agriculture & Food Production

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop a farm-to-table branding campaign for Lower Richland agricultural products and work with the CVB, Columbia restaurants, and others to promote local produce.
2. Develop a farmers' market venue at the Heritage hub in Hopkins that is co-located with the Heritage Center, Small Business Incubator, Richland Library, and commercial kitchen.
3. Create educational and training programs that support specialty farming techniques and products including heirloom products, organic farming.
4. Use the commercial kitchen to support processing and packaging of agricultural products, as well as “value added agriculture” which involves the production of more finished products from agricultural resources.
5. Work with local residents and stakeholders to build support and participation for a “farmers’ co-op” in Lower Richland and examine whether the co-op should focus on supply of key items, marketing and distribution of products, or both.
6. Work with local farmers and Clemson Extension to design and site “refrigeration hubs” for cooling produce after it is harvested, extending its shelf life.
7. Provide educational programs and financing resources that support local residents to build businesses in this market sector (see “Financing” and “Education and Capacity Building”).



*Vendor at Colleton Farmers' Market  
Credit: Colleton County*



*Value-added products at a farmers' market  
Credit: Highlands Current.*



*Refrigeration trailer using A/C system with CoolBot technology. Credit: EverGood Farm*

### FARM-TO-TABLE BRANDING

*Develop a farm-to-table branding campaign for Lower Richland agricultural products and work with the CVB, Columbia restaurants, and others to promote local produce.*

Lower Richland is an incredibly rich agricultural environment and has a built-in local urban market in Columbia; however, small-scale specialty agricultural production has often been replaced with large-scale agricultural operations, leaving the area without clear recognition as an area with agricultural opportunity and high-quality local produce. Recruiting key stakeholders including local growers, local restaurants, partners like Clemson Extension, and others to work on a unified branding campaign for Lower Richland produce should benefit existing farms and open up the opportunity for new growers to build the brand; the branding work should also help promote the Farmers' Market and other local venues for agricultural sales.

### TRAINING

*Create educational and training programs that support specialty farming techniques and products including heirloom products and organic farming.*

One of the main issues expressed by Lower Richland residents is that farming is an extremely difficult way to make a living - and that large, commercial farming has taken the place of the small farming that many residents feel is achievable. It is important for these small growers to develop specialty markets and to think about how to grow products that are more valuable on a ton-by-ton basis, and less widely available, than the typical large farm. Some important opportunities include the farming of heirloom products, such as the Carolina Gold rice being grown by Anson Mills, and organic farming, which requires specialized knowledge and practices but brings in higher prices for the final product. Making educational opportunities available related to these farming techniques and products, and supporting small growers who may not be able to farm full-time, will expand the base of local residents who have the knowledge and desire to recreate the agricultural strength of Lower Richland.

### FARMERS MARKET

*Develop a farmers' market venue at the Heritage hub in Hopkins that is co-located with the Heritage Center, Small Business Incubator, Richland Library, and commercial kitchen.*

One of the elements proposed for the Hopkins Heritage Hub is a farmers' market venue that includes a basic structure, sheltered from the elements, where farmers and even small growers and gardeners can establish a regularly-scheduled market for local produce and value-added products. Farmers' markets are great opportunities for the food community in Lower Richland to come together and to attract visitors from Columbia and out of town; food trucks, local heritage events and festivals, and other visitor-attractive opportunities can be scheduled together with the farmers' market to create a strong hub of activity.

### COMMERCIAL KITCHEN

*Use the commercial kitchen to support processing and packaging of agricultural products, as well as "value added agriculture" which involves the production of more finished products from agricultural resources.*

Providing resources for farmers to appropriately wash and package agricultural products for distribution, and to work on creating "value-added" products by processing their crops, are both proven strategies for enhancing growers' opportunity to market their products to a wider audience. An example of value-added agriculture is creating boiled peanuts, peanut oil, or peanut butter from a peanut crop; these products can increase the value of crops and can bring in more revenue for the farmer or grower. However, food-safety regulations apply to processed foods, and appropriately processing and packaging produce and value-added products is critical in order to develop a larger market for local growers' goods. The commercial kitchen can provide facilities for processing small growers' products and teaching appropriate food safety and produce preservation techniques, with help from local experts.

## FARMERS CO-OP

*Work with local residents and stakeholders to build support and participation for a “farmers’ co-op” in Lower Richland and examine whether the co-op should focus on supply of key items, marketing and distribution of products, or both.*

Agricultural cooperatives, or “farmers’ co-ops,” have been used nationwide to help small producers pool their resources, grow their businesses, and compete successfully with larger farm suppliers. The common thread among co-ops is cooperation, but farmers cooperate in a number of different ways depending on their needs and wants. The USDA provides special funding for setting up local farmers’ co-ops.

- Supply co-ops help farmers purchase the products and services they need collaboratively; costs are lowered for everyone by purchasing goods like seeds or fuel in bulk, and members can pool resources to purchase expensive goods like machinery and equipment where appropriate. The concept of a “farm hub” that would loan equipment to its members, and that could solicit donations or reduced prices on machinery, would fit neatly into this area.
- The Distribution co-ops work to ensure that farmers can package, distribute, and market their *products collaboratively in order to increase the amount and diversity of products they can provide. A distribution co-op could also take responsibility for promoting the Lower Richland agricultural brand.*

Local growers and residents should be engaged in determining whether one or both types of co-ops would be most helpful for Lower Richland residents in entering the agricultural field, and should be involved throughout the process of establishing a co-op.

## REFRIGERATION HUBS

*Work with local farmers and Clemson Extension to design and site “refrigeration hubs” for cooling produce after it is harvested, extending its shelf life.*

Cooling produce directly after it is harvested is a very important step in extending the shelf life of the produce and enabling sales to grocery stores and grocery distributors. Without immediate cooling, produce tends to spoil before it can be sold to consumers. Inexpensive “refrigeration hubs” can be created using insulated shipping containers, a regular consumer-grade air conditioner, and a system called the “CoolBot” that transforms the air conditioner into a refrigeration system. As production scales up and more farmers enter the business, siting these refrigeration hubs in strategic locations or offering grants or micro-loans for farmers to purchase these systems can help build the potential for wider distribution of Lower Richland produce throughout the region.

## EDUCATION, FINANCING, AND CAPACITY BUILDING

*Provide educational programs and financing resources that support local residents to build businesses in this market sector (see “Financing” and “Education and Capacity Building”).*

The “Financing” and “Education and Capacity Building” components of this section will focus on educational and financing resource development that can support agricultural businesses and other small businesses in Lower Richland.

## GROWING A BUSINESS

See the following page for a chart that discusses a “sample path” for growing a business in the agriculture and food production sectors, and shows how the resources described in this plan can assist businesses in each stage of growth:

- Taking the First Steps
- Growing a Small Business
- Scaling Up for Success

AGRICULTURE & FOOD PRODUCTION	Taking the First Steps	Growing a Small Business	Scaling Up for Success
<p><b>A Sample Path: Growing an agricultural business</b></p>	<p>Start a garden on personal property and sell some items at the Farmers' Market in Hopkins on weekends.</p>	<p>Work with local restaurants to determine the market for heritage products and organic products; focus on growing in-demand items and selling both to restaurants and at farmers' markets</p>	<p>Work to purchase or lease additional tracts of land, potentially through a local farm co-op that also owns and loans equipment to farmers. Use local refrigeration centers to keep produce fresh after harvest so that it can be marketed to grocers and restaurants in the wider region.</p>
<p><b>RESOURCES FOR AGRICULTURE &amp; FOOD PRODUCTION BUSINESSES</b></p>			
<p><b>Spaces &amp; Places</b></p>	<p><b>Business Incubator:</b> Co-located with a new Richland Library branch and the Heritage Center, this is a space to convene partners who can provide educational resources to help Lower Richland residents grow successful businesses  <b>Commercial Kitchen:</b> A commercial kitchen in Lower Richland will provide classes, programming, and facilities to help residents learn to process agricultural products into value-added products using appropriate food safety requirements.</p>	<p><b>Farm Co-Op and Equipment Hub:</b> Local representatives are working to form a farm co-op that could help bring more acres of land into farming, and create an equipment "hub" or lending facility to help more residents gain access to expensive farm equipment as they start new agriculture enterprises.</p>	<p><b>Farm Co-Op and Equipment Hub:</b> Continue to utilize the equipment hub while growing personal investment.  <b>Refrigeration Hubs:</b> Shipping containers can be formed into inexpensive "refrigeration hubs" distributed in areas with concentrations of farmland in order to provide immediate cooling for harvested crops, which is necessary for providing quality, fresh produce on a large scale</p>
<p><b>Education</b></p>	<p><b>Ice House Program at the Business Incubator:</b> Create a basic business plan to envision what a successful business could look like.  <b>Business Incubator Classes:</b> Take classes on local agriculture and growing techniques led by local growers, Clemson Extension, and the Midlands Food Alliance.  <b>Commercial Kitchen Classes:</b> Learn about USDA food safety regulations required for selling processed goods.</p>	<p><b>Business Incubator Classes:</b> Additional classes through Clemson Extension and the Midlands Food Alliance on producing specialty or value-added products - for example, organic farming techniques and local food processing requirements.</p>	<p><b>Business Incubator Business Plan Course:</b> Create a full-fledged business plan that moves toward full-time rather than part-time agricultural work with help from Clemson Extension and the Midlands Food Alliance.</p>
<p><b>Financing</b></p>	<p><b>No financing required!</b> The "first steps" are designed to be low-cost, low-investment, and low-risk ventures that let people try out different types of businesses and see what is right for them.</p>	<p><b>Micro-Loan:</b> Consider a micro-loan for some equipment or resources needed to grow the business that may not be available through an equipment hub.</p>	<p><b>Farm Co-op:</b> Join for access to equipment and land  <b>Local Bank or Credit Union:</b> Using a business plan, approach a local bank to purchase equipment and land to continue expanding the business.</p>
<p><b>Partners</b></p>	<p>The IceHouse Program; Clemson University Extension; USDA; South Carolina Dept. of Agriculture</p>	<p>Clemson University Extension; USDA; South Carolina Dept. of Agriculture; Farm Co-Op Organization; micro-lenders</p>	<p>Clemson University Extension; USDA; South Carolina Dept. of Agriculture; Farm Co-Op Organization; local banks</p>

## Financing



*Developing relationships between business owners and local banks through networking events can help grow investment in Lower Richland. Credit: Greenville REC and SC Works Greenville.*

Lower Richland residents see a strong need to ensure that residents are able to access capital and investment to build and grow their businesses. This plan approaches the challenge by building “ladders of opportunity” that involve an initial stage that requires little or no investment; targeted resources to help businesses take their first growth steps; and networking and education of banks and local investors to help bring new resources as Lower Richland businesses scale up into sustainable long-term growth.

### GOALS

1. Ensure that residents have the opportunity to take low-risk, low-cost initial steps into each of the key business sectors in order to create a vision for successful growth and make the case for investment.
2. Focus on “bridging” resources from government agencies, micro-lenders, and targeted bank or credit union loan pools that can help businesses take initial growth steps in each of the three key sectors.
3. Develop investor and bank relationships with local business owners to help them make the case for increased investment and growth.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish a dedicated position at the county within the Economic Development Office for small business development.
2. Design programs that extend county economic development assistance to rural small businesses.
3. Provide guidance on funding and financing sources for Lower Richland business owners through the Economic Development Office and Small Business Incubator.



*Small Business Development Centers can offer assistance to local business owners looking to grow their business. Credit: Maryland GovPics, Flickr*

**DEDICATED STAFF**

*Establish a dedicated position at the county within the Economic Development Office for small business development.*

Currently, the county has an Office of Small Business Opportunity that largely focuses on small businesses that do business with the county directly, and an Economic Development Office that has traditionally been dedicated to the attraction of large manufacturing businesses. There is a need for a staff position within the Economic Development Office that can function as a “quarterback” and public-sector liaison for attracting funding for the recommendations in this plan, facilitating partnerships to open and operate the Small Business Incubator, and liaising with small businesses in Lower Richland and elsewhere in the county to ensure that the local environment is conducive to business development.

**RURAL ASSISTANCE**

*Design programs that extend county economic development assistance to rural small businesses.*

Richland County currently offers resources including a five-year Property Tax Abatement program (for manufacturers investing at least \$50,000 or more in land, building, or equipment); and a Special Source Revenue Credit program to help offset a project’s infrastructure and/or machinery and equipment costs, which credits a certain percentage or amount of the company’s tax bill over a number of years. These programs could be applicable to development of rural small businesses along commercial corridors and within hubs; Richland County should work to analyze the economic impact of modifying program criteria to apply to rural small businesses in targeted areas, and design programs that create a measurable impact on the finances of start-up small businesses in these areas.

## FUNDING & FINANCING GUIDANCE

Provide guidance on funding and financing sources for Lower Richland business owners through the Economic Development Office and the Small Business Incubator.

Growth often seems daunting for small business owners, whether it entails moving from self-employment to hiring their first employee, or from renting a room in their own house to purchasing another property they can rent to visitors full-time. Resources such as micro-loans, which require little to no collateral and fewer technical requirements, have been created to help businesses bridge this gap. After receiving and successfully utilizing a micro-loan, businesses may be ready to make larger equipment purchases or to develop or redevelop a new building to house their lodging, retail, or agricultural production work; banks, credit unions, and community development financial institutions specializing in small business loans are often best positioned to assist business owners to navigate the requirements of these loan opportunities. The resource list below covers key information about grant and loan programs that are available to support the growth goals of small businesses.

Name	Funding Agency	Grant / Loan	Description
<b>Grants</b>			
Value-Added Producer Grant	U.S. Department of Agriculture	Grant	Grants for independent farmers/producers, cooperatives, or groups of farmers to provide planning and working capital to create a “value-added” product from produce (e.g. peanut butter from peanuts).
<b>Microloans</b>			
Business Builder Loan	SC Community Works	Loan	Microloans of up to \$15,000; require 2 years of personal tax returns and a business plan
MicroBusiness Loan	SC Community Works	Loan	Microloans of up to \$50,000; require 2 years of personal tax returns, a business plan, and an equity contribution from the business owner
Microloan Program	Carolina Small Business Development Fund	Loan	Microloans up to \$50,000; require 1 year of personal and business tax returns, profit and loss statement for the calendar year, resumes, and cash flow projections
<b>Financial Institutions Specializing in Small Business</b>			
Community Business Loan Program	SC Community Loan Fund	Loan	Loans of \$10,000 - \$1,000,000, focused on “community businesses serving and employing low to moderate income individuals located in under-served South Carolina communities.” Require financial statements, cash flow projections, collateral in the form of equipment or real estate.
Benedict Minority Revolving Loan Fund	Benedict-Allen Community Development Corporation	Loan	Loans for small and minority-owned businesses, administered by banks. Applicants receive assistance from the Benedict-Allen Community Development Corporation during the application process.
Small Business Loans	Carolina Small Business Development Fund	Loan	Loans of up to \$250,000; require 2 years of personal and business tax returns, profit and loss statement for the calendar year, resumes, and cash flow projections.





Committed to the future of rural communities.

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## Education and Capacity Building



*Business courses focused on core skills and local tourism sectors can help businesses grow and develop in Lower Richland. Credit: Bart Everson, Flickr.*

Lower Richland residents are hungry for information on how to start sustainable small businesses that can benefit from visitation and tourism, and are looking for a venue in Lower Richland that can provide them with education, capacity building, and connection to regional partners. The Small Business Incubator, and its associated commercial kitchen, are envisioned as a place to concentrate educational and capacity building resources for small businesses.

### GOALS

1. Offer residents of Lower Richland a standard set of introductory business classes that outline the fundamentals of starting, operating, and sustaining a small business, in order to stimulate small business growth and remove barriers.
2. Ensure that Lower Richland residents have access to knowledge and connections with local institutions, organizations, and businesses that bring expertise in lodging and hospitality, recreation, restaurants and food service, and agriculture and food production.
3. Act as a venue for convening, collaboration, and development of the Lower Richland “brand” as a tourism destination and a thriving local economy.



Entrepreneurship courses build local business. Credit: Maryland GovPics, Flickr.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Use the Ice House Entrepreneurship Program as an ongoing opportunity for all Lower Richland residents who are interested in starting a business.
2. Provide foundational courses in accounting, sales and marketing, and attracting banks and investors for growth.
3. Provide specialized informational sessions and short courses in each of the three core sectors for tourism business development: lodging and accommodations; restaurants and food service; and agriculture and food production.
4. Convene Lower Richland business owners to advocate for their needs and develop strategic collaborations around marketing and branding the Lower Richland area.
5. Target funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Economic Development Administration, and philanthropic sources, and leverage staffing resources from partner organizations like the Richland Library.



## The Ice House Entrepreneurship Program

Use the Ice House Entrepreneurship Program as an ongoing opportunity for all Lower Richland residents who are interested in starting a business.

The *Ice House Entrepreneurship Program* is an evidence-based program that Clemson Extension associate Stanley Green has successfully used in Columbia to help low- and moderate-income residents conceive and start businesses of their own. The program focuses on instilling the key elements of an entrepreneurial mindset, including identification of opportunities; translating ideas into action; pursuing knowledge; creating wealth; building a brand; and developing a network and community of supporters. According to Green, the Ice House program responds to the fact that “92% of startups are self-financed, and 22.5% of startups with employees, and 39.5% of startups without employees start with less than \$5,000 in capital” and creates an environment in which business owners do not require large amounts of pre-existing wealth or connections to succeed. Participants develop, test, and iterate a Business Model and develop a single-page business plan as outcomes of the program. The Ice House Entrepreneurship Program provides an ideal opportunity to get community members ready to take advantage of future possibilities while they take their first low-cost steps toward starting a business.

### FOUNDATIONAL COURSES

*Provide foundational courses in accounting, sales and marketing, and attracting banks and investors for growth.*

Foundational courses in accounting, sales, and marketing will be important resources for Lower Richland residents as they start and grow small businesses. These courses should be applicable to all three core sectors of the Lower Richland tourism economy, meaning they should attract a broad base of resident interest. In addition, a short course on how businesses grow and what banks and investors look for when lending to a business should help entrepreneurs in all three sectors learn how to access funding and resources.

### SHORT COURSES

*Provide specialized informational sessions and short courses in each of the three core sectors for tourism business development: lodging and accommodations; restaurants and food service; and agriculture and food production.*

Developing local partners, including universities, restaurant owners and associations, agricultural organizations, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, and others, will be a critical way for the incubator to provide more advanced capacity building and technical assistance to local businesses. Courses of interest to Lower Richland business owners could include:

- Lodging and Accommodations: The Basics of the Sharing Economy; Growing a Hospitality Business (Potential Partners: USC College of Hospitality, Retail, and Sport Management; Columbia Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau)
- Restaurants and Food Service: Food Safety Rules and Regulations (Potential Partners: USDA, SCDHEC)
- Agriculture and Food Production: Food Safety Rules and Regulations; How to Grow Organic; Farming Local Heirloom Products; Value-Added Production (Potential Partners: Clemson Extension; Midlands Food Alliance)

### LOWER RICHLAND BUSINESS ALLIANCE

*Convene Lower Richland business owners to advocate for their needs and develop strategic collaborations around marketing and branding the Lower Richland area.*

The Small Business Incubator should be a space where Lower Richland business owners can come together to make policy and program recommendations (possibly through a Lower Richland Business Alliance or similar organization), and form smaller working groups such as a Farmers' Co-op Working Group that can work on specific issues that are of interest to the Lower Richland business community.

### FUNDING AND STAFFING RESOURCES

*Target funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Economic Development Administration, philanthropy, and corporate sources, and leverage staffing resources from partner organizations like the Richland Library.*

Small business incubators often require layered sources of funding to provide all the services that are useful to local populations. The USDA offers funding sources such as the Rural Economic Development Program, the Rural Business Opportunity Program, and the Small Socially Disadvantaged Producer Program, all of which are dedicated to funding organizations that provide business incubation and technical assistance to small businesses and agricultural producers. The U.S. Economic Development Administration also offers an Economic Development Assistance / Public Works Program which funds the construction and operation of business incubator facilities; and business incubators also often receive funding from philanthropic and corporate sources. In order to maintain sustainable staffing, the Incubator should also look to leverage resources from public agencies that may be co-located on the same site, such as the Richland Library potential new branch location. The Library has experience in attracting funding and providing a wide array of social services, technological facilities like computer labs, and other programs similar to the Small Business Incubator programming and would be a strong potential partner at the Incubator facility.



*Foundational courses in general marketing and short courses in websites and social media should be a part of the education and capacity-building efforts.*





# IMPLEMENTATION

40 169  
**HOPKINS**  
This rural community grew up around the plantation of John Hopkins (1759-1775). Hopkins, a native of Virginia, settled here in 1764. A surveyor and planter, he was later a delegate to the First Provincial Congress of 1775. Between 1836 and 1842, when the South Carolina R.R. line from Kingville to Columbia was completed, a turntable was named "Hopkins Turnout" for the family.  
Installed in 1988

IMPLEMENTATION





# Implementation Matrix

Many of the recommendations in this report require funding, staff time, and a coordinated effort by numerous partners in order to achieve the ultimate goal. This section breaks down the resources required for achieving each recommendation and the funding sources that are available to move these recommendations forward.

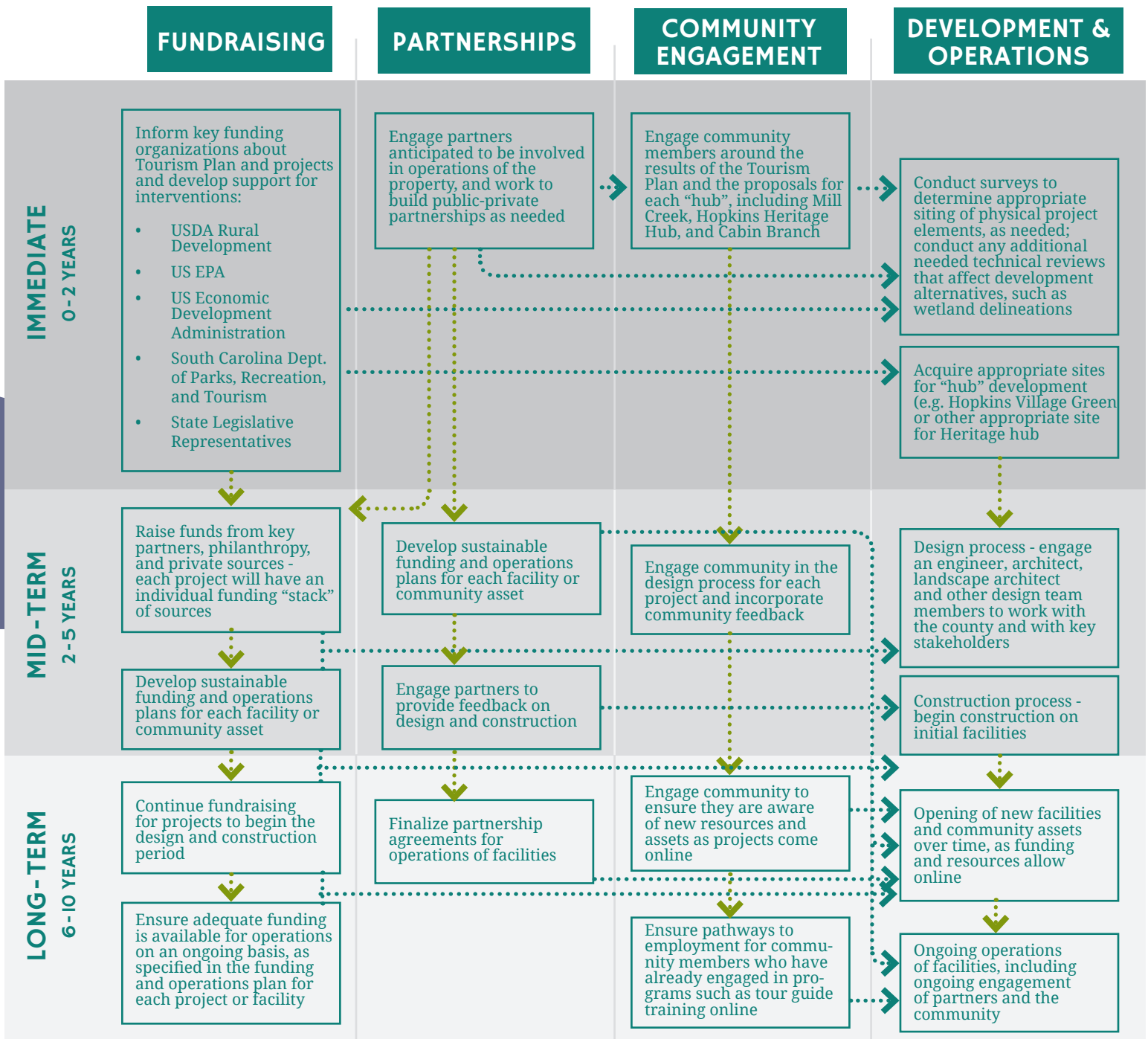
The phasing diagram on the following page gives an overview for Richland County and Lower Richland residents to show how to start work in the short term - on fundraising, business development assistance, surveys, and trail frameworks - that will lead to long-term change in Lower Richland's tourism economy, and will build economic opportunity and wealth for local residents.

The matrices within the rest of this section give detailed information on resources, partners, funding, and timing for each of the recommendations in the *Lower Richland Tourism Plan*.

# PROJECTS

This table shows the typical progress of implementing a development project recommended in this plan. This process will apply primarily to physical interventions proposed in the plan - including:

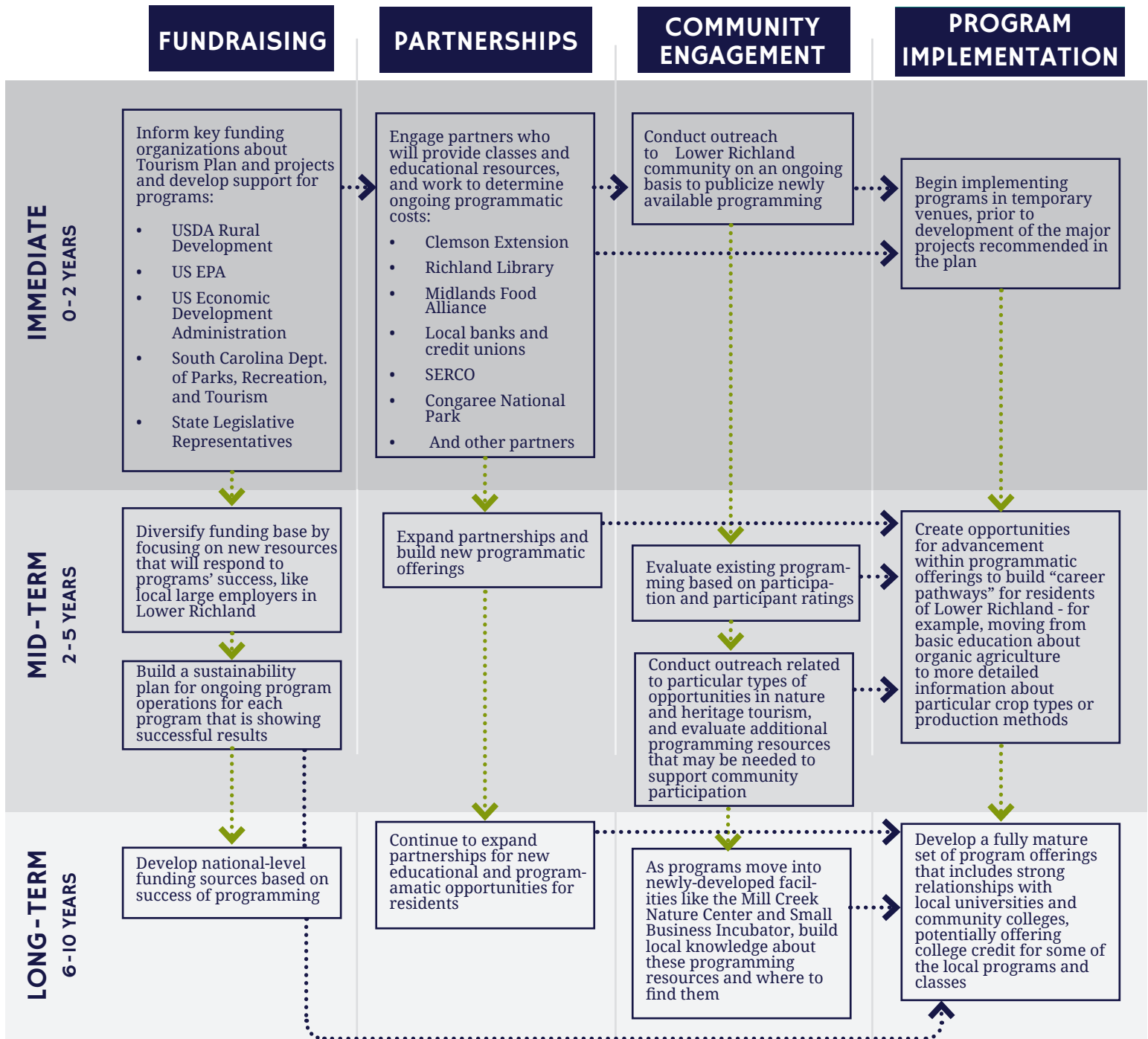
- The Mill Creek Nature Center and other physical tourism infrastructure proposed at the Mill Creek tract;
- The various projects proposed for the Hopkins Heritage Hub, including the Heritage Center, Small Business Incubator, Community Kitchen, Farmer's Market structure, and bandshell;
- The trails proposed for the Cabin Branch site and the regional trail and bikeway framework.



# PROGRAMS

This table shows the typical progress of implementing the programmatic and operational interventions proposed in the plan including:

- Small Business Incubator programming, coordinating partners for ongoing small business education and financing opportunities;
- Community Kitchen classes on food safety and supervision / booking of users of the kitchen;
- Tour / interpretive guide training opportunities;
- Nature Center programming and classes



Recommendation	Resources Required	Potential Partners	Timeline
<b>TOURISM FRAMEWORK</b>			
<b>Shared Identity</b>			
Determine which agency and staff within Richland County government is best situated to oversee the development and management of a Lower Richland branding effort	Time and funding available to engage community, create a logo, create a wayfinding plan, and oversee the development of a brand campaign	USDA Rural Development; SCPRT	2018
Form a committee of local resident stakeholders to oversee the development of the brand identity and to ensure that the brand development process is closely connected to the Lower Richland resident community	County and stakeholder time	Local stakeholders working in business, conservation, heritage, agriculture	2018
Work with a branding consultant to formalize the Shared Identity into an authentic brand for Lower Richland that can be used across various forms of media and utilized to promote every tourism destination in Lower Richland. Ensure that the branding consultant has experience working in similar tourism contexts	Funding for a branding consultant: \$30,000 - \$50,000	USDA Rural Development; SCPRT; SC National Heritage Corridor	2019
In conjunction with the development of the Lower Richland brand identity, work with a consultant to develop a dedicated website for Lower Richland tourism information.	Funding for a basic but attractive website: \$5,000 - \$10,000; Funding for an elaborate custom website: \$30,000+	USDA Rural Development; SCPRT	2019
<b>Mobility Improvements</b>			
Work with a consultant to conduct a feasibility study for all proposed Mobility Improvements in coordination with Richland County Planning and Public Works staff as well as the Richland County Conservation Commission.	Funding for consultant	Richland County Planning; Richland County Public Works	2019
Investigate the potential for an off-street trail aligned with the route of the planned sewer line.	Funding for off-street trail if feasible; penny tax funds may be utilized	N/A	2019
Investigate the available and underutilized right-of-way adjacent to both the CSX and Norfolk Southern rail lines to understand if more than the 50ft. of necessary right-of-way exists for a feasible rail trail along any portion of these lines. If sufficient right-of-way exists, work with the Rails to Trails Conservancy to determine next steps for planning the trail segments.	N/A	CSX; Norfolk Southern; Rails to Trails Conservancy; Palmetto Conservation Foundation	2018-2019
Ensure that future Capital Improvements Planning for Richland County considers the proposed mobility improvements as a part of its broader infrastructure recommendations.	N/A	Richland County Planning	2018
Coordinate with the Palmetto Conservation Foundation on ways to improve the conditions, access and connectivity along the Palmetto Trail through Lower Richland.	Potential need for resources for Palmetto Trail improvements or community maintenance partnerships	Palmetto Conservation Foundation	2018

Recommendation	Resources Required	Potential Partners	Timeline
<b>Regulatory Strategy</b>			
Establish a Rural Tourism and Community Service (RTCS) land use category in the Richland County Land Development Code that creates opportunities for low- to medium-intensity land uses along major corridors and within hubs in Lower Richland.	Ongoing code update process	Richland County Planning	Immediate priority aligned with ongoing code review
Determine whether TROS zoning would permit active recreation uses and facilities such as the Mill Creek Nature Center and the canopy walk proposed for the Mill Creek site, and potentially clarify these uses within the code.	Ongoing code update process	Richland County Planning	Immediate priority aligned with ongoing code review
Work with Richland County Planning to apply appropriate zoning designations to the Mill Creek, Cabin Branch, and Hopkins sites in order to permit the proposed uses and character of development.	Update as plans for development are finalized	Richland County Planning	2018-2019
<b>NATURE TOURISM</b>			
<b>Nature Tourism Network</b>			
Create interpretive course for area guides and outfitters to better connect nature tourism to heritage tourism.	Local institutional partner(s) with experience and capacity to create the curriculum	Certified Interpretive Guide Program (CIG); NPS; USC	2019-2020
Develop a range of interpretive trails to connect Lower Richland nature and heritage sites.	Funding for trail construction and maintenance; penny tax funds may be used as a match for federal or grant funding	SCPRT State Trails Program; USDA Rural Development; SCDOT	2018-2019
Program Mill Creek site to complement opportunities at Congaree National Park.	Public-private partnerships directed by county plans for the site; funding for infrastructure provision provided by Richland County	USDA Rural Development; US Economic Development Administration; private partners and local small businesses	Begin surveys etc. in 2018-2019 to add precision to proposed site plan; move forward infrastructure for lodging and Nature Center sites coordinated with mitigation work in 2019; target opening of first lodging option and nature center by 2020
Create new put-in/take-out spots for paddlers at Mill Creek to enhance the existing Congaree Blue Trail.	Funding for a survey of proposed development area to determine ideal placement of put-in and take-out on site	USDA Rural Development; county funds	2019
Study new access points to the Wateree River to enhance the existing Blue Trail	Funding for survey of potential access points	County funds	2019-2020

Recommendation	Resources Required	Potential Partners	Timeline
Improve general conditions and access points along Palmetto Trail and link to adjacent features and other proposed interpretive trails.	Funding for improvements in trail conditions and wayfinding; potential community maintenance partnerships	SCPRT State Trails Program; USDA Rural Development; SCDOT	2018-2020
<b>Major Project: Mill Creek Nature Center</b>			
The Nature Center will provide: visitor orientation and wayfinding; group meeting facilities for visitor rental and environmental education; a cafe for visitor dining; space for an outfitting business to operate; and check-in facilities for campers.	Initial funding to be provided through federal, state, and private grants with potential local matching funds; ongoing operations should be funded through visitor fees	USDA Rural Development; US EPA; US Economic Development Administration; SCPRT; philanthropy; Visitor fees	Finish survey of site to determine ideal placement in 2018-2019; seek funding in 2018-2020; build infrastructure along with remainder of site infrastructure when possible according to mitigation schedule; target completion by 2021
<b>Cabin Branch Site</b>			
Development site framework to include new trails, trailheads, interpretive signage and connections to nearby heritage features; trail framework should include consideration of equestrian, mountain biking, and interpretive walking trails.	Site survey, consultant assistance, funding for trail construction from federal, state, local sources, and organizational partnerships and volunteers; Visitor fees for maintenance	USDA Rural Development; US EPA; US Economic Development Administration; SCPRT; philanthropy; Visitor fees	Commission survey, consult partners, and complete trail framework plan in 2018-2019; target trail development by 2020-2021
Locate a modest parking area near access to Lower Richland Blvd. and include an unstaffed trailhead/information kiosk.	Funding for kiosk and parking lot development	SCPRT	2020-2021 (in concert with trail development)
Identify site for signature farm-to-table restaurant.	County staff time to identify site; funding resources to install infrastructure	Local restaurateurs	2020-2021
Coordinate with organic farmers currently on site.	County staff time	Cabin Branch Organic Farms	2018
Work with adjacent landowners to develop access points and easements that complement existing trails on the Cabin Branch site, including access from major roads as well as access to natural features like Mistletoe Bay.	County staff time to engage adjacent landowners related to access and easements in accordance with the trail framework plan; funding and/or volunteer labor for trail construction	Local mountain biking advocacy groups	Consult adjacent landowners and negotiate easements in 2018-2019; target trail development by 2020-2021

Recommendation	Resources Required	Potential Partners	Timeline
<b>Heritage Tourism</b>			
Major Project: Lower Richland Heritage Center			
Consolidate support for Lower Richland to be included in the existing South Carolina National Heritage Corridor (SCNHC) and advocate for this legislation.	Work with Congressional staff and representatives to get legislation drafted and sponsored.	Congressional representatives of Lower Richland area	2019-2020
Leverage the existing heritage resources including the SERCO guide as a basis for more robust interpretive trail network	Coordinate heritage resources with other county trail planning; consultant may be desired to produce a framework plan once the Heritage Center hub is officially sited within Lower Richland	SERCO; local faith-based communities; community input	Trail framework to be developed further once the Heritage Center hub is officially sited; likely 2020-2021
Help existing Lower Richland nonprofits grow their capacity and be better positioned for future funding opportunities	Funding for nonprofit capacity building program	Together SC	2018 onward
Based on the Lower Richland brand, develop a wayfinding signage system with coordinated website and other outreach materials to better link the existing sites and advance their shared identity.	Wayfinding should be a coordinated element of the branding campaign; wayfinding material costs vary based on type of signage and quantity. Gateways on Garners' Ferry and Lower Richland, signage at hubs, and signage on major corridors should be prioritized	SCPRT Tourist-Oriented Directional Signage program (TODS), SCPRT Emerging Destination Marketing Grant program	Work coordinated with branding campaign in 2019-2020
Explore the potential to use a rail corridor as an interpretive trail to connect numerous sites of significance in Lower Richland and work with the Rails to Trails Conservancy to conduct a feasibility study on this effort.	N/A	CSX; Norfolk Southern; Rails to Trails Conservancy; Palmetto Conservation Foundation	2018-2020
Develop the Hopkins Village Green into a multi-faceted community commons oriented around a Lower Richland heritage center with an included Richland Library branch, a park that can serve as a festival grounds, a covered pavilion that can serve as a 'community porch', and a bandshell that can anchor a performance space <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The project would be an ideal county initiative or public/private partnership with the addition of an integrated retail component</li> </ul>	Significant funding and partnerships for infrastructure, construction, and ongoing operation of the Heritage Center and community commons elements. Richland Library will serve as a key partner in this effort	Richland Library; Richland County Planning Dept.; USDA Rural Development; Midlands Food Alliance; US EPA; US Economic Development Administration; SCPRT; philanthropy; Visitor fees	Begin working to acquire a site and develop a funding plan for the Heritage Center and Community Commons elements immediately; target ground-breaking for Heritage Center, farmers' market, pavilion, and bandshell in 2020
Support the City of Eastover's continuing efforts to rehabilitate its historic building on Main Street as a new City Hall	Explore partnerships with historic orgs. & state funding available	Palmetto Trust for Historic Preservation; SC Historic Preservation Office	2018 onward

Recommendation	Resources Required	Potential Partners	Timeline
Explore tax abatements and other incentives for adaptive reuse retail development within the historic structures along Eastover’s Main Street	Funding for adaptive reuse and historic preservation that can assist prospective building owners and business operators	Richland County Economic Development; South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office; Palmetto Trust for Historic Preservation	2018-2020
Utilize county funds to launch a Lower Richland oral history initiative immediately. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commission a local videographer to oversee the project</li> <li>• Make the oral histories fully accessible on the Lower Richland tourism website and the Richland Library system</li> </ul>	Funding for videographer time; staff time or organizational partnership to oversee the effort and publicize to Lower Richland residents	Richland Library; SERCO; other historic preservation organizations	2018-2019
Explore potential partnerships with Richland Library system to help develop the heritage center project and associated programs	County and Library staff time	Richland Library	2018 onward
Coordinate with the Palmetto Conservation Foundation on ways to better connect the Palmetto Trail to existing heritage sites in Lower Richland.	County staff time	Palmetto Conservation Foundation	Coordinate with other trail framework and mobility plans; 2018-2020
<b>SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT</b>			
<i>Major Project: Small Business Incubator</i>	Partnership with Richland Library or other group to coordinate operations and staff the Incubator; funding for ongoing operations & staffing	Partners to provide education & networking are critical: Clemson, USC, Benedict College, local SBDCs, financial institutions, CDFIs	Begin work in 2018 by providing courses elsewhere in Lower Richland; transfer to Heritage Center location when complete
<b>Lodging and Accommodations</b>			
Take advantage of the “sharing economy” by creating a training program at the Small Business Incubator and encouraging local residents to try renting rooms in their home, or other properties they own, to visitors on a short-term basis.	Partners and funding to provide training	Training partners such as local SBDCs or USC; funding partners such as USDA Rural Development, SCPRT	2018-2019 (begin in temporary space and then move to Small Business Incubator upon completion)
Based on proven demand for sharing economy rentals, develop a targeted loan program to help residents build accessory dwelling units (mother-in-law units) to be rented through Airbnb or other online listing venues.	Potential loan-loss reserve fund from county or philanthropy to assist in securing lower-interest loans	Local bank or credit union	2020-2021
Develop small RV parks and lodging options at Mill Creek to help prove the market for lodging in Lower Richland.	County funds to construct infrastructure; private investors to build out additional facilities; local operators and employees	Private investors	2020-2021



Recommendation	Resources Required	Potential Partners	Timeline
Ensure residents are aware of the lodging businesses currently permitted in Lower Richland within the zoning ordinance, and adapt zoning to allow additional lodging uses along major corridors.	Ongoing code rewrite process	Richland County Planning	Immediate coordination with code rewrite process
<b>Restaurants and Food Service</b>			
Develop a commercial kitchen that can be operated as part of the Small Business Incubator concept.	Funding for construction and ongoing operations; Consult with Colleton County and Colleton Commercial Kitchen about their experience and programs	USDA Rural Development; user fees; Clemson Extension; Midlands Food Alliance; Midlands Local Food Collaborative	2020-2021; work to construct in concert with the Heritage Center if possible, or begin slightly afterward
Create restaurant or catering facilities at publicly-owned properties, including at the proposed Heritage Center and Nature Center, that can be operated on a “concession” model by a local business.	Funding for construction of commercial kitchens within these facilities	Food entrepreneurs and caterers; USDA Rural Development; SCPRT	2020-2021; coordinate with development of Heritage and Nature Centers
Focus on food trucks as a potential intermediate step for small businesses that have outgrown the commercial kitchen and concession model.	Potential bank or credit union targeted loan program for food truck businesses; CDFIs or small business financing organizations	SC Community Works; Carolina Small Business Development Fund; Benedict-Allen Community Development Corporation	2019-2020 (begin considering programmatic and financing assistance beginning in 2019)
Adapt zoning to facilitate restaurant development around the Gadsden and Garner’s Ferry hubs and along Old Bluff Road and Lower Richland Boulevard.	Ongoing code rewrite process	Richland County Planning	Immediate coordination with code rewrite process
<b>Agriculture and Food Production</b>			
Develop a farm-to-table branding campaign for Lower Richland agricultural products and work with the CVB, Columbia restaurants, and others to promote local produce.	Coordinated effort with Lower Richland branding campaign	Richland County Convention and Visitors Bureau; local restaurateurs and food entrepreneurs; Midlands Food Alliance; Midlands Local Food Collaborative	2019
Develop a farmers’ market venue at the Heritage hub in Hopkins that is co-located with the Heritage Center, Small Business Incubator, Richland Library, and commercial kitchen.	Funding for simple covered structure to house farmers’ market	USDA Rural Development; SCPRT; Midlands Food Alliance	2019-2020
Create educational and training programs that support specialty farming techniques and products including heirloom products, organic farming.	Funding for training programs provided by local partners	Clemson Extension; Anson Mills; Richland SWCD; USDA NRCS; Midlands Local Food Collaborative; Carolina Farm Stewardship Assoc.	2019-2020

Recommendation	Resources Required	Potential Partners	Timeline
Use the commercial kitchen to support processing and packaging of agricultural products, as well as “value added agriculture” which involves the production of more finished products from agricultural resources.	Funding for ongoing commercial kitchen operations and training on safe food processing practices and food safety regulations	Clemson Extension; Midlands Food Alliance; Midlands Local Food Collaborative; commercial kitchen user fees	2020-2021 (after commercial kitchen is constructed)
Work with local residents and stakeholders to build support and participation for a “farmers’ co-op” in Lower Richland and examine whether the co-op should focus on supply of key items, marketing and distribution of products, or both.	Lead organization to organize farmers’ co-op	USDA Rural Development; Clemson Extension; Midlands Food Alliance; Midlands Local Food Collaborative	2018-2019
Work with local farmers and Clemson Extension to design and site “refrigeration hubs” for cooling produce after it is harvested, extending its shelf life.	Funding (approx. \$5,000 each plus transportation and placement fees) for refrigeration hubs	Clemson Extension; local farmers; Midlands Food Alliance; SC Dept. of Agriculture	2019-2020
<b>Financing</b>			
Establish a dedicated position at the county within the Economic Development Office for small business development.	County funding and staff time	Richland County Economic Development Office	2018-2019
Design programs that extend county economic development assistance to rural small businesses.	Potential tax abatements; partnerships to connect to incentives for historic rehabilitation or small business loans	Richland County Economic Development Office	2019 (begin offering information through existing agencies, move to Small Business Incubator upon completion)
Provide guidance on funding and financing sources for Lower Richland business owners through the Economic Development Office and Small Business Incubator.	Informational worksheets on potential funding sources	Richland County Economic Development Office; local Small Business Development Centers	2019 (begin offering information through existing agencies, move to Small Business Incubator upon completion)
<b>Education and Capacity Building</b>			
Use the Ice House Entrepreneurship Program as an ongoing opportunity for all Lower Richland residents who are interested in starting a business.	Funding for Ice House program	Clemson Extension and experienced Ice House partners (Stanley Green)	2019 onward
Provide foundational courses in accounting, sales and marketing, and attracting banks and investors for growth.	Funding and partners to provide courses; Small Business Incubator staff to administer	Clemson University, USC, Benedict College, local Small Business Development Centers; Richland Library or other organization funded to staff the Incubator	2019 (begin offering courses on an annual or biannual basis in temporary space, move to Small Business Incubator upon completion)

Recommendation	Resources Required	Potential Partners	Timeline
Provide specialized informational sessions and short courses in each of the three core sectors for tourism business development: lodging and accommodations; restaurants and food service; and agriculture and food production.	Funding and partners to provide courses	Clemson University and Clemson Extension, USC, Benedict College, local Small Business Development Centers; Richland Library or other organization as incubator staff	2019 (begin offering courses on an annual or biannual basis in temporary space, move to Small Business Incubator upon completion)
Convene Lower Richland business owners to advocate for their needs and develop strategic collaborations around marketing and branding the Lower Richland area.	Lead convening agency (Richland County Economic Development Office or Cm. Myers' office)	Lower Richland business owners	2018-2019
Target funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Economic Development Administration, and philanthropic sources, and leverage staffing resources from partner organizations like the Richland Library.	County staff time	USDA Rural Development; US EDA; SCPRT; South Carolina state funds; philanthropic partners	2018 onward

## Opinion of Probable Cost - Capital Projects

The cost estimates on the following pages are provided as a companion to the Implementation Matrix to assist with ongoing fundraising and site planning, based on the understanding that these projects will be implemented incrementally and funded separately or combined with other projects when practical. The estimates represent ranges of probable cost based on the understanding that more precise costing will require further design development on each of the projects. The actual cost of construction is based on numerous factors including complexity of the project and existing site constraints, market demand, material cost and labor costs, and can fluctuate dramatically from year to year, season to season, or even month to month. The budgets of many projects will ultimately be determined through the input of multiple stakeholders who will help to set expectations and standards. This being said, an implementable plan relies on a basic understanding of the scale of cost for recommended improvements to facilitate prioritization, incrementalization, and overall sound decision-making.

### **Disclaimer on the Opinion of Probable Cost**

*This opinion of probable construction cost is made on the basis of Asakura Robinson's experience and qualifications and represents Asakura Robinson's best judgment as an experienced and qualified professional generally familiar with the industry. However, since Asakura Robinson has no control over the cost of labor, materials, equipment, or services furnished by others, or over the Contractor's methods of determining prices, or over competitive bidding or market conditions, Asakura Robinson cannot and does not guarantee that proposals, bids, or actual construction cost will not vary from opinions of probable construction cost as prepared by Asakura Robinson.*

### **COST TYPES**

BLDG = Costs associated with building projects

SITE = Costs associated with site development

OVHD = Costs associated with operations

## HOPKINS GREEN - MAJOR HUB

TYPE	ITEM	APPROX. UNITS	COST RANGE	NOTES
BLDG	Heritage Center	10,000 sf	\$750k - \$1.5m	incl. exhibit spaces, office, classroom, lecture space, archive, cafe, and storage
BLDG	Community Porch	2000 sf	\$20k - \$40k	partially covered deck
BLDG	Commercial Kitchen	3000 sf	\$200k - \$300k	incl. equipment
BLDG	Farmers Market Pavilion	3000 sf	\$100k - \$200k	incl. covered pavilion only
BLDG	Incubator Space	6000 sf	\$200k - \$500k	incl. classrooms, offices, lecture space, lounge, and storage
BLDG	Bandshell	2500 sf	\$50k - \$100k	incl. stage structure only
BLDG	Restrooms	300 sf	\$100k - \$200k	Use county park standard
SITE	Festival/Performance Green Space	80,000 sf	\$100k - \$200k	incl. grading, planting
SITE	Trail Loop	6000 sf	\$25k - \$50k	6' wide concrete path
SITE	Streetscape & Parking Improvements	75,000 sf	\$750k - \$1m	incl. sidewalks, front-in parking, planting, and drainage
SITE	Wayfinding/Interpretive Signage (10)	N/A	\$25k - \$50k	incl. wayfinding and interpretive signage
OVHD	Heritage Center Operations	N/A	\$150k - \$300k	incl. 3 staff and other general operating costs per year
OVHD	Comm. Kitchen Operations	N/A	\$100k - \$200k	incl. 2 staff and other general operating costs per year
OVHD	Incubator Space Operations	N/A	\$150k - \$300k	incl. 3 staff and other general operating costs per year
		<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>\$2.47m - \$4.44m</b>	

## MILL CREEK - MAJOR HUB

BLDG	Mill Creek Nature Center	12,000 sf	\$1m - \$2m	incl. exhibit spaces, offices, classrooms, lecture space, library, storage
BLDG	Upland Cabins - 2 person (4)	300 sf	\$100k - \$150k	
BLDG	Upland Cabins - 4 person (4)	600 sf	\$150k - \$300k	
BLDG	Upland Cabins - 6 person (4)	800 sf	\$200k - \$400k	
BLDG	River Cabins - 2 person (3)	300 sf	\$150k - \$200k	
BLDG	River Cabins - 4 person (3)	600 sf	\$200k - \$300k	

## MILL CREEK - MAJOR HUB *cont'd*

TYPE	ITEM	APPROX. UNITS	COST RANGE	NOTES
BLDG	Camping Office	300 sf	\$25k - \$50k	services all lodging
BLDG	Concession Huts (4)	150 sf	\$100k - \$200k	intended for food service equipment rentals, and basic recreation supplies
BLDG	Boat Rental Facility	1000 sf	\$25k - \$50k	incl. shed and boat racks
BLDG	Maintenance Facility	10,000 sf	\$50k - \$200k	incl. industrial shed and storage yard
BLDG	Restroom (4)	300 sf	\$400k - \$800k	use county park standard
BLDG	Bath House (2)	600 sf	\$400k - \$800k	
SITE	Improved Existing Roadways - 2-way traffic	800,000 sf	\$8m - \$10m	20' wide, asphalt repaving with side swales where needed
SITE	Improved Existing Roadways - 1-way traffic	400,000 sf	\$4m - \$5m	10' wide, asphalt repaving with side swales where needed
SITE	New Roadways and dropoff areas	120,000 sf	\$1m - \$2m	20' wide, asphalt paving
SITE	Boardwalk Trails	48,000 sf	\$500k - \$1m	6' wide pressure-treated lumber, 18" ht avg
SITE	Paved Trails	12,000 sf	\$50k - \$75k	6' wide concrete or asphalt
SITE	Primitive Trails	200,000 sf	\$200k - \$400k	6' wide, compacted earth
SITE	Parking	50,000 sf	\$400k - \$600k	incl. parking for lodge, nature center, and upland camping
SITE	Visitor Kiosks/Trailheads (12)	N/A	\$50k - \$100k	
SITE	Entry Signage (1)	N/A	\$10k - \$20k	incl. lighting, planting
SITE	Wayfinding/Interpretive Signage (40)	N/A	\$100k - \$150k	
SITE	Camping Platforms (20)	100 sf	\$20k - \$30k	
SITE	RV Camping hookups (20)	N/A	\$50k - \$100k	incl. power and water
SITE	Boat Ramp and launch (2)	2,000 sf	\$100k - \$200k	
SITE	Fishing Pier	10,000 sf	\$100k - \$150k	
OVHD	Park Operations	N/A	\$1m - \$2m	incl. 10 fulltime staff, 20 part-time/seasonal staff and general operationg costs per year
		<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>\$16.58m - \$23.9m</b>	

CABIN BRANCH - MINOR HUB				
TYPE	ITEM	APPROX. UNITS	COST RANGE	NOTES
SITE	Roadway Access	110,000 sf	\$1m - \$1.5m	24' public r.o.w.
SITE	Loop Trail	100,000 sf	\$100k - \$200k	6' wide, compacted earth
SITE	Loop Trail foot bridges (3)	7500 sf	\$100k - \$200k	6' wide pressure-treated lumber
SITE	Agricultural Heritage Trail	30,000 sf	\$100k - \$200k	6'wide concrete or asphalt
SITE	Carolina Bay Trail	36,000 sf	\$400k - \$600k	6' wide pressure-treated lumber, 18" ht avg
SITE	Parking	6,000 sf	\$50k - \$100k	15 spaces
SITE	Visitor Kiosks/Trailheads (4)	N/A	\$20k - \$40k	
SITE	Wayfinding/Interpretive Signage (20)	N/A	\$50k - \$100k	
SITE	Entry Signage (2)	N/A	\$10k - \$20k	incl. lighting, planting
		<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>\$1.83m - \$2.96m</b>	

#### COST TYPES

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