

WEOGUFKA STATE FOREST
RECREATIONAL SITE USE PLAN

IMPORTANCE (CONTINUED):

The CCC-constructed cabins and observation tower represent an excellent example of rustic architecture, or “Parkitecture,” featuring the use of native stone and longleaf pine. To garner further notoriety this property could be nominated for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Flagg Mountain represents a significant physical feature on the Alabama landscape. The mountain summit rises to 1,152 feet above mean sea level. It is within the Appalachian Highlands Physiographic Region and is the southernmost peak of such prominence before the landform changes dramatically to the Coastal Plain. Flagg Mountain lies within a section of the Appalachian Highlands known as the Northern Piedmont Uplands. These lands have steep, well-defined slopes and shallow soils with exposed igneous and sedimentary rocks. The lands that rise to the northeast from Flagg Mountain once provided tribal boundaries, food, and shelter for the early settlers, and wood that fueled the industrial development of our nation.

Today, Flagg Mountain and the Appalachian chain that extends to the Georgia line are largely protected by federal, state, and non-profit land stewards. These lands are healing from their rugged past and represent a range of recovering forest ecosystems. The Flagg Mountain ecosystem supports one the most significant old-growth montane longleaf pine forests in the entire range of longleaf.

Additionally, Flagg Mountain is the southern beginning of the Pinhoti Trail and a gateway to exploring Alabama’s Appalachians. Flagg Mountain offers visitors a place to position themselves geographically, chronologically, and emotionally as they begin to explore and understand an important part of Alabama. Whether they make the full trek connecting to the Appalachian Trail and into Canada, or just spend a few hours exploring the nearby ridges and canyons, Flagg Mountain introduces Alabama’s mountain culture and its future as a hallmark for sustainability.

PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY:
OPPORTUNITIES & CONSTRAINTS

Making responsible decisions for Weogufka State Forest requires a thoughtful planning process. The topography, historical significance, and ecological prominence – as well as the neighboring property owners with shared access routes that include limited narrow roads and weight restricted bridges - require planning that is both well-researched and collaborative.

Local citizens and non-profit organizations are passionate about Flagg Mountain. Numerous groups have collaborated to reclaim the Weogufka State Forest as a public recreation resource. These groups are invested in its maintenance and day-to-day operations. In 2016, the Coosa County Chamber of Commerce reached out to the University of Alabama Center for Economic Development for assistance in developing a county-wide strategic plan. Within that planning effort, Flagg Mountain and the Pinhoti were identified as assets under the goal to “enhance public access to Coosa County tourism.” In August 2018, the East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission was asked to convene stakeholders in the development of a strategic plan for Flagg Mountain (Weogufka

State Forest). Through this effort, a vision and mission were crafted, and a list of priority projects was identified. The Weogufka State Forest Flagg Mountain Strategic Plan was released in 2019. Priority projects from the Weogufka State Forest, Flagg Mountain Strategic Plan included water supply to the cabin site, plans for a new bathhouse and maintenance building, and tower restoration.

Flagg Mountain was studied as a site with potential for enhancement during the development of a Built Environment Master Plan for the Alabama Pinhoti Trail. The Pinhoti Master Plan provided a case study of the Flagg Mountain area as one of the trail assets that could support increased visitor use and become a stimulus for local economic development. As all these planning efforts began to converge, professional landscape design and architectural consultants were engaged.

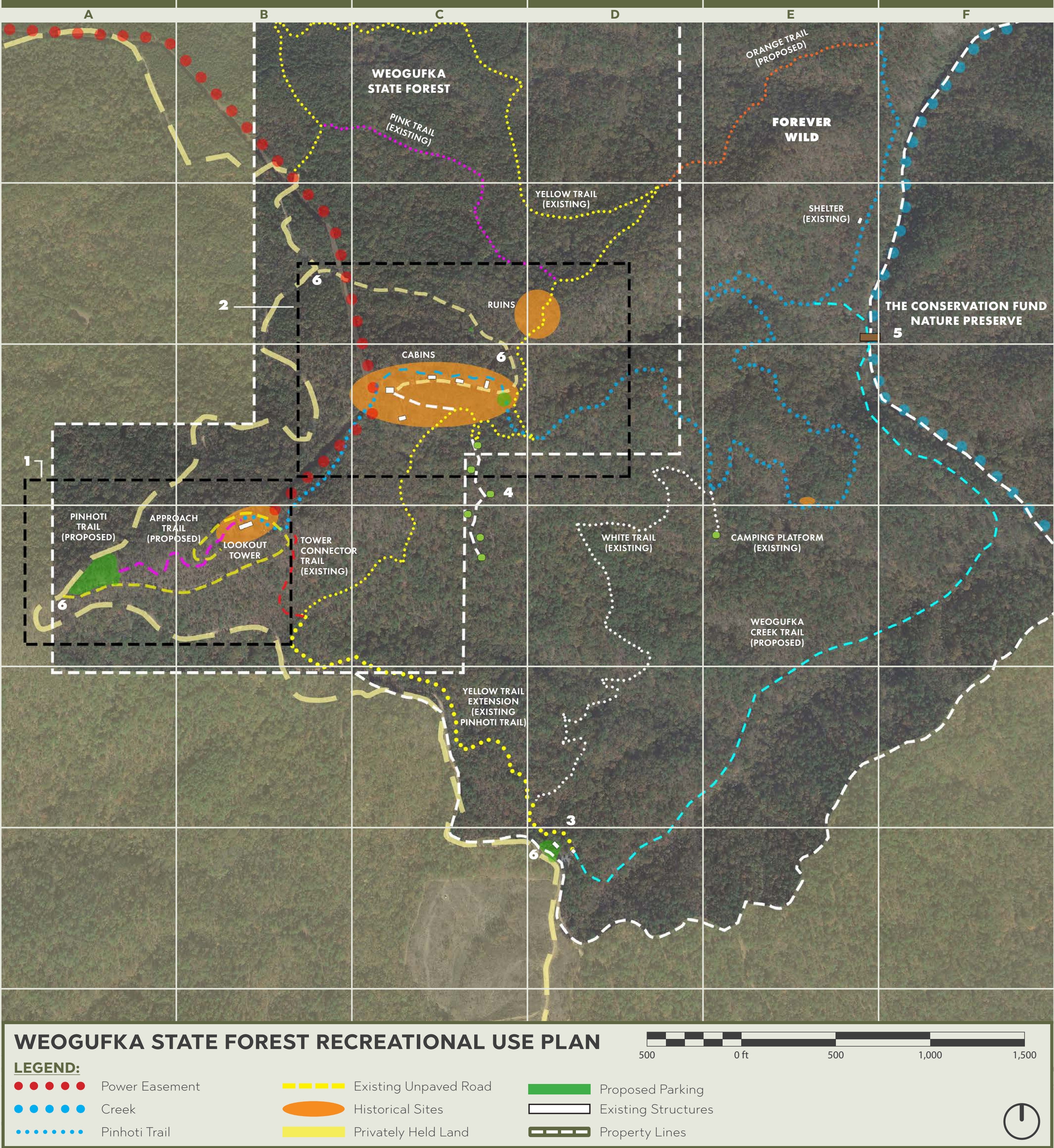
From the Pinhoti Master Plan came the inclusion of a trailhead combined with a visitor access point for the tower. Key to the design of each of these projects was the incorporation of the afore mentioned cultural resource assessment and coordination with the Alabama Historical Commission. This coordination ensured the project design to be complementary to the visual as well as the physical components of the Historic District.

Next began the development of this site plan. The planning team began by building the spatial inventory of the built environment, including mapping all the trails on Weogufka State Forest and the nearby lands. The team broadened outreach to potential stakeholders to verify current efforts and identify additional opportunities to enhance the user experience. Data was collected from an online survey to narrow potential amenities and appropriateness for the site. Updates on current projects and potential improvements were presented in December 2019 at a public stakeholder workshop in Weogufka. In the spring of 2020 several review meetings with the AFC occurred to validate the recommendations and ensure that the plan was progressing with the support of the deciding officials within AFC.

This Recreational Site-Use Plan has been developed based on the above listed planning efforts. As each step in the planning process evolved the following constraints and opportunities were identified. These items reflect the stakeholders’ and land stewards’ values derived from this planning process. They should serve as reference points during project implementation and as launching platforms for future collaboration.

- ♦ **Historic and Cultural Integrity:** The report, A Cultural Resources Assessment for the Proposed Weogufka State Park Improvements in Coosa County, Alabama, released in July 2019, will continue to be a document for evaluating all future improvements at Flagg Mountain relative to protecting the historic and cultural integrity of the Weogufka State Forest Historic District. This report, with adherence to its recommendations, and consultation with the Alabama Historical Commission achieves a fundamental benchmark when pursuing federal funding for future restoration or enhancement projects. Beyond the written document and requirements for consultation, it should be recognized that the area has a “lore” associated with Native American use.

- ♦ **Adjacent Landowners:** The Weogufka State Forest is surrounded by extensive privately owned commercial forest land, dedicated Forever Wild land, and the Conservation Fund’s Nature Preserve, each with specific management objectives. Vehicular access to Flagg Mountain is limited by narrow, weight-limited bridges. The southern entry can be impeded by high water. These constraints mandate a high level of coordination among the parties to ensure safe access for visitors and potential commercial interests. Limitations may need to be placed on the capacity and number of visitors allowed. Road surfacing should a consideration and an ongoing operational objective.
- ♦ **Terrain:** The topography is steep and rocky. On-site vehicular navigation is limited due to narrow, steep unpaved roads. Vehicle size and number of vehicles at a given time will be a long-term management consideration. Road surfacing is also a consideration.
- ♦ **Visitor Inclusiveness:** The Weogufka State Forest hosts a variety of visitors from nearby Coosa County residents to long-distance hikers. These visitors represent a wide range of abilities and interests. The proposed improvements will increase visitor use, likely bringing to the mountain even more diversity. Thoughtfulness will be needed to ensure all visitors are welcomed and their experience is enhanced.
- ♦ **Future Pinhoti Designations:** The Pinhoti Trail in its entirety has the potential to be designated as a National Recreation Trail and even as a National Scenic Trail. Currently only a small portion of the Trail within the Cheaha State Park and the Talladega National Forest is designated as a National Recreation Trail. These designations within the Weogufka State Forest will require AFC concurrence and participation in collaborative governance with other Pinhoti land stewards. These designations will require federal review, including review of existing trail design and management.
- ♦ **Off-site Opportunities:** Through the survey and stakeholder meeting process, a few amenities were noted that have the potential to add value to the site and economic development opportunities for neighboring communities. Through promotion of Flagg Mountain as a destination, communities can build on increased visitorship by expanding hospitality offerings. These include restaurants, remote event parking, hotel / bed and breakfast accommodations, and recreational vehicle accommodations. Coordination with county and state highway officials should be considered to allow the Pinhoti Trail where it is within road rights-of-way to be more intentional. This would increase hiker safety and promote foot traffic into local businesses.
- ♦ **Natural Resources:** Managing and conserving the natural resources to promote visual quality and retain the elements of the native ecosystem. An inventory of existing vegetation, water resources, soils and geology should be conducted, and a prescription developed for their future management.



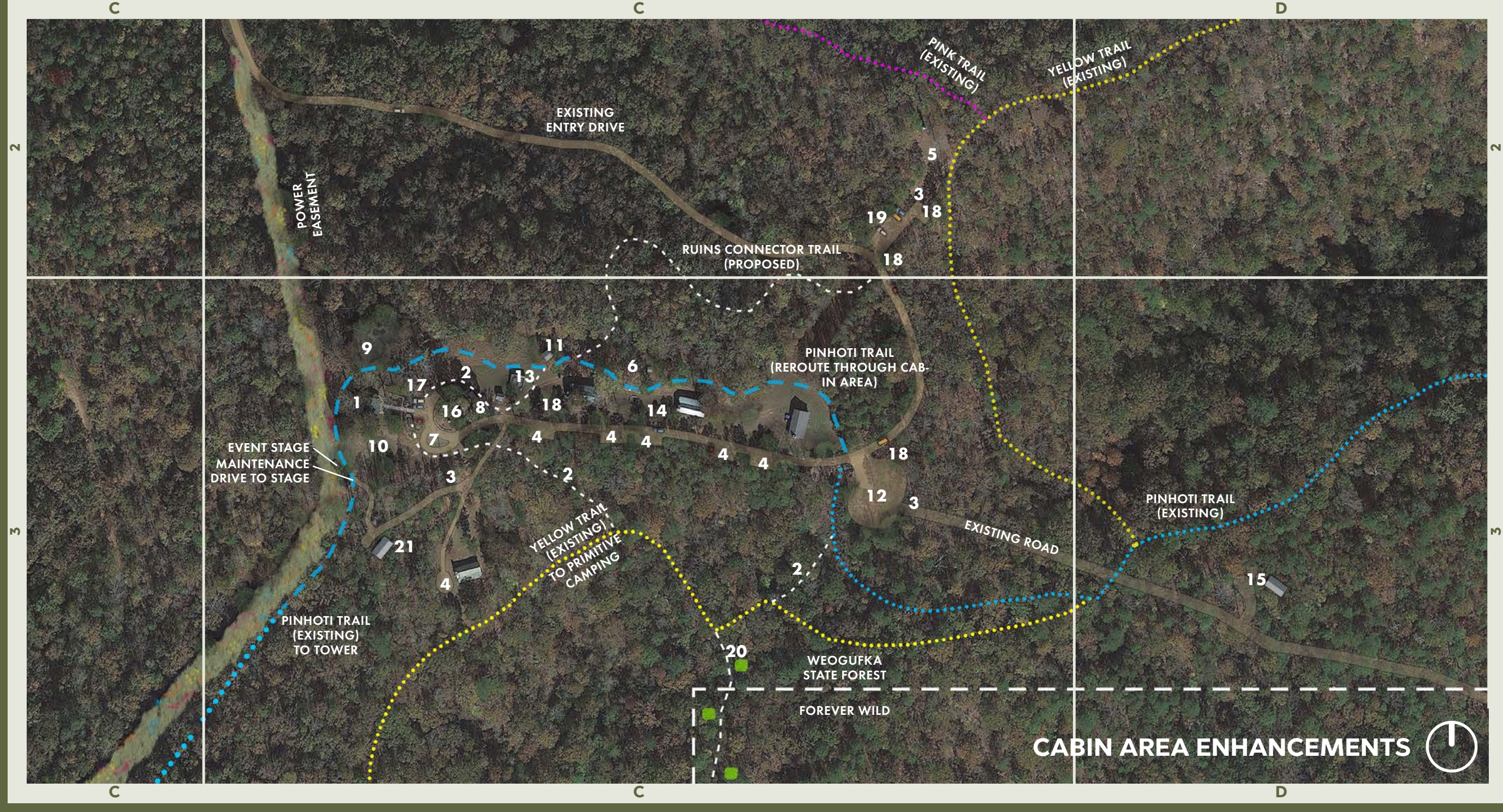
- PROPOSED OVERALL RECREATIONAL SITE USE IMPROVEMENTS:**
- The proposed recreation site use plan identifies opportunities for improvements and enhancements to the site, as well as operational recommendations to enhance user experience and protect the unique assets of Weogufka State Forest as well as the larger Flagg Mountain ecosystem.
- 1) TOWER ENHANCEMENTS:**
(See Enlargement)
 - 2) CABIN AREA ENHANCEMENTS:**
(See Enlargement)
 - 3) WEOGUFKA CREEK CONNECTION:**
With the realignment of the Pinhoti Trail detailed in the Tower Enhancement plan, the existing pavilion can be repurposed as the Weogufka Creek Trailhead. A new connector trail from the pavilion to Weogufka Creek connects visitors to the creek through a previously underutilized section of Forever Wild property. This trail terminates into the Pinhoti Trail.
 - 4) PRIMITIVE CAMPSITES:**
The site can offer the opportunity for expanding camping by developing campsites stepped in along a ridge just south of the Cabin Area. A connection to the cabin area amenities can be made via a connector trail.
 - 5) CONNECTION TO CONSERVATION FUND LAND:**
Construction of a proposed pedestrian bridge over Weogufka Creek would open opportunities to a future trail system and other amenities on adjacent Conservation Fund land.
 - 6) VEHICULAR WAYFINDING SIGNAGE:**
Identification signage should be located at access roads to the mountain from main highways as well as throughout the site for vehicular orientation to designated parking areas.
 - » **PEDESTRIAN WAYFINDING SIGNAGE:**
Install pedestrian (hiker) wayfinding signage at key trail termini and intersections. (See Enlargement)
 - » **PINHOTI REALIGNMENT:**
The Pinhoti Trail connects through the Cabin area, but currently bypasses the Tower. The proposed realignment routes it through the Tower and Cabin sites. Alternate routes have also been included to bypass those areas should a user prefer. (See Enlargement)
 - » **CULTURAL RESOURCES:**
(See Enlargement)
 - » **POWER EASEMENTS:**
To enhance the views, power lines can be put below ground as they run through Flagg Mountain property. An open meadow easement can be maintained to provide access for maintenance.
- REFERENCES:**
- ♦ Flagg Mountain Strategic Plan, East Alabama Regional Planning Commission, February 2019
 - ♦ Pinhoti Built Environment Master Plan, Alabama Trails Foundation, June 2019
 - ♦ Cultural Resources Assessment: Weogufka State Park, University of Alabama; office of Archaeological Research, July 2019

NEXT STEPS:

- Alabama Forestry Commission official adoption of the Recreational Site Use Plan by incorporation into their planning and operational procedures.
 - Inclusion of the Recreational Site Use Plan as a standard part of the coordination among all parties as funds are pursued and secured to implement improvements.
 - Establishment of a review and approval process to maintain the integrity of the cultural resources.
 - Operations** - Development of an operations plan to support volunteer and caretaker agreements for day-to-day activities.
 - Maintenance** - Development of a maintenance plan that includes a focus on maintaining views, controlling invasive species, and preventing erosion.
 - Signage** - Development of a sign plan to achieve cohesiveness in both wayfinding and interpretative signage character.
- » **Wayfinding Character & Approach:**
Development of a signage hierarchy to be used throughout the Flagg Mountain trail system and vehicular access for wayfinding and information. Signage can be developed to complement the Pinhoti trail signage guidelines as both will be used on-site. Signage should consist of trail blaze palette, trail identification markers, and information kiosks.
- » **Interpretive Character & Approach:**
A detailed approach should be crafted to tell the story of Flagg Mountain and its natural and cultural history. With so many existing structures, it is vital that the interpretive methods do not compete with the setting. Also important is telling the story specific to Flagg Mountain, not one that is duplicated elsewhere. Interpretive elements should be accessible and engaging.

CABIN AREA ENHANCEMENTS:

- RANGER CABIN:**
An existing cabin can be repurposed to serve as administration office, meeting room and camp store. Future improvements could include restoring bathroom facility within the cabin.
 - CABIN AREA CONNECTOR TRAILS:**
The creation of new trails connecting the Ranger Cabin to Woodland Parking, Ruins Area, and Primitive Campsites will help remove pedestrian traffic from the roadway. These trails provide an opportunity for visitors to safely experience the site without the need to drive.
 - CONTROLLED ACCESS:**
Installation of controlled access gates at strategic locations will provide improved security of the site and protection of resources.
 - DISPERSED PARKING:**
Minimal crushed-stone parking can be incorporated along access drive to Ranger Cabin and Ruins Area. These spaces can provide low-impact parking in close proximity to Cabins.
 - RUINS AREA:**
Rebuilding of cabins at ruins area and expanding the primitive camping will provide opportunity for group camping.
 - OUTHOUSE:**
Existing outhouse to remain.
 - CABIN ACCESS ROAD:**
Reroute turn-around to connect fire pit area to stage and cabin area.
 - GATHERING AREA:**
Install small stage area near fire pit and create open lawn area for stage viewing.
 - WOODLAND PLAYGROUND:**
Expanding family activities can be offered by the construction of a natural woodland playground adjacent to Ranger Cabin.
 - AMPHITHEATER:**
Utilizing the open hillsides adjacent to the Ranger Cabin and the construction of an event stage downhill will create an amphitheater for approximately 200 people. This initially could be a natural-slope lawn seating area initially with future improvements to include construction of stone seating to complement the character of the CCC structures.
 - BATHHOUSE:**
New Bathhouse, expected completion 2021.
 - WOODLAND PARKING:**
Utilizing an existing cleared area to create a natural parking area that can accommodate approximately 25-35 vehicles.
 - PICNIC AREA:**
Utilize the existing water tower foundation area to create a seating area for picnic tables. The foundation can be used in the future to replicate the historic water tower. The existing well house in this area could be removed once utilities are relocated to New Bathhouse.
 - CABIN RESTORATION:**
Cabins should be restored as funding becomes available. The restorations should be as comprehensive as possible and is should be pursued under direction of historical preservation authorities. Implementation of a native vegetated buffer between cabins and road will provide a separation for enhanced user experience.
 - HOST CABIN:**
Future construction of a new cabin for an on-site caretaker would be in an area near concentrated amenities, but with privacy and accessibility for an on-site caretaker. Location shown is approximate.
 - FIRE PIT**
 - ACCESSIBLE PARKING & DROP-OFF:**
5-8 parking spaces.
 - DIRECTIONAL SIGNAGE**
 - RUINS PARKING:**
Six parking spaces
 - CONNECTOR TRAIL TO PRIMITIVE CAMPSITES**
 - MAINTENANCE BUILDING:**
New Maintenance Building, expected completion 2021
- » **SITE MAINTENANCE:**
By minimizing mown area around the cabins, a native grass and wildflower meadow can be established to prevent erosion and provide a transition to forested areas. The open lawn area can be utilized for reserved group tent camping or tent camping for special events..



WEOGUFKA
STATE FOREST

RECREATIONAL SITE USE PLAN
AUGUST, 2020

ALABAMA FORESTRY COMMISSION
ALABAMA TRAILS FOUNDATION
ARCHITECTUREWORKS, LLP
MACKNALLY LAND DESIGNS

INTRODUCTION:

This Site Use Plan is presented by the Alabama Trails Foundation in support of the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) and their partners. The intent of this Plan is to inform decisions and provide a guide for future restoration and improvement on the 240 acres held in public trust by the AFC. These 240 acres, managed as the Weogufka State Forest, encompass the summit of Flagg Mountain. The larger Flagg Mountain complex, representing many public and private land stewards, is integral to this planning document. Any improvements or changes listed within this Plan for those properties are presented as opportunities or ideas for consideration. The over-arching goal of the planning process is for all partners to work cooperatively to enhance and promote the Flagg Mountain area as a destination and touchstone for nature-based recreation that respects the environmental, cultural, scenic, and economic values of the "mountain."

IMPORTANCE:

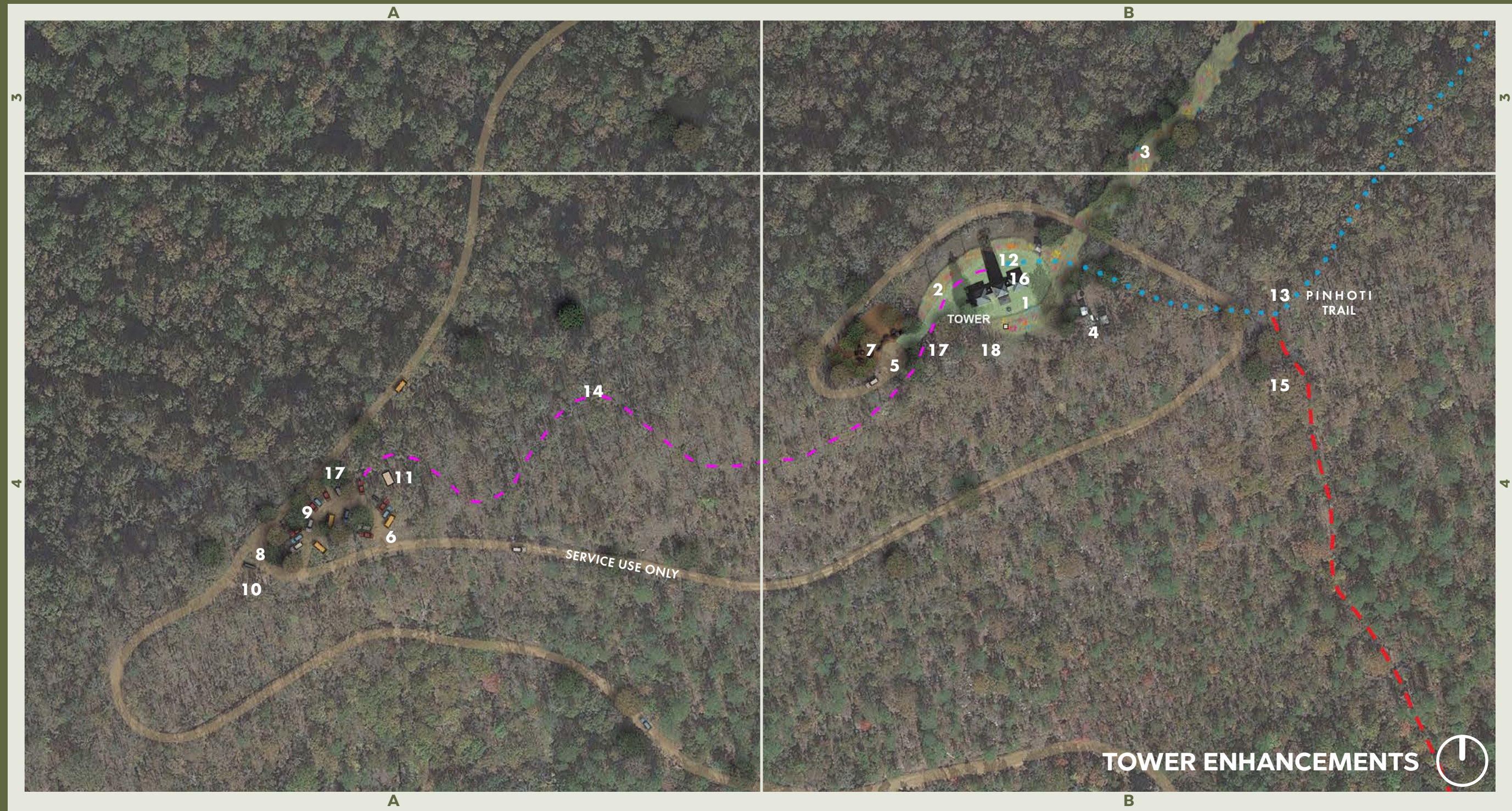
The Weogufka State Park was created in the early 1930's as part of the federal relief program in connection with the Great Depression. The name was later changed to the Weogufka State Forest as a result of administrative shifts in the state government. In 1989 the Coosa County Historical Society nominated the property for inclusion on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage. It is listed on this Register as a 240-acre historic district based on its local, state, and national significance as "part of the national Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) movement."

In 2019 the University of Alabama Office of Archaeological Research was contracted by the AFC and funded by the University of Alabama, Center for Economic Development to perform a cultural resources assessment of a portion of this Historic District, specifically the area supporting the cabins, the tower, cabin ruins, and the cribbing by the creek. As a result of this work, the Historic District is now considered eligible for documentation as a nationally significant place of social history, politics/government, and economics in connection with the Great Depression and the creation of federal relief programs such as the CCC; and in the area of architecture.

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TOWER ENHANCEMENTS:

- SITE MAINTENANCE:**
Minimize mown area around tower to reduce maintenance.
- NATIVE GRASS & WILDFLOWER MEADOW:**
Establish a native grass and wildflower meadow on slopes to prevent erosion, maintain views and provide a transition to forested areas.
- VIEWS:**
Maintain views through cautious selective clearing practices of forested areas.
- LANDSCAPE BUFFER:**
Provide native evergreen buffer to screen communications utilities.
- VEHICULAR ACCESS:**
Reduce length and establish turnaround for limited access / service drive at tower site.
- CONTROLLED ACCESS:**
Provide controlled access gate at bottom of service drive.
- GATHERING AREA:**
Create fire pit gathering area with boulders and wooded campsite for reservation-only groups.
- ACCESS:**
Realign entry road to provide for improved vehicular access and sight lines.
- TRAILHEAD:**
Utilize gentle slopes at intersection of roads to create wooded trailhead parking. Construct the drive to allow for appropriate school bus drop-off, with remote parking to be coordinated. The parking lot will contain +/- 15 parking spaces. It will provide access to the Approach Trail, an accessible trail that leads to the Tower and the start of the Pinhoti Trail.
- TRAILHEAD MONUMENT SIGNAGE:**
Install Pinhoti Trail identification monument signage along road at intersection to service drive / parking.
- RESTROOMS:**
Construct restroom facility at Pinhoti Trailhead parking.
- TRAIL IDENTIFICATION & INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE:**
Establish Section 1 Pinhoti Trail Marker and Interpretive Signage at Tower.
- WAYFINDING (PINHOTI TRAIL):**
Install Section 1 kiosk at Pinhoti Trail
- APPROACH TRAIL:**
Create accessible approach trail to Tower from trailhead parking.
- CONNECTOR TRAIL:**
Create new connector trail to existing Yellow Trail / proposed Weogufka Creek Trailhead (existing pavilion)
- INTERPRETIVE EXHIBIT AT EXISTING MUSEUM:**
Create a central interpretive exhibit in the Tower Museum. The exhibit should consist of a well-rounded view of the history of the site that tells a complete story with the various viewpoints. This story can be integrated to flow through the site via strategic trails signage that leads visitors through the storied past of the site.
- DIRECTIONAL SIGNAGE**
- OUTHOUSE:**
Retain existing outhouse.



Document Prepared by: