

MASTER TRAILS PLAN

Oconee County, Georgia

Adopted June 27th, 2023

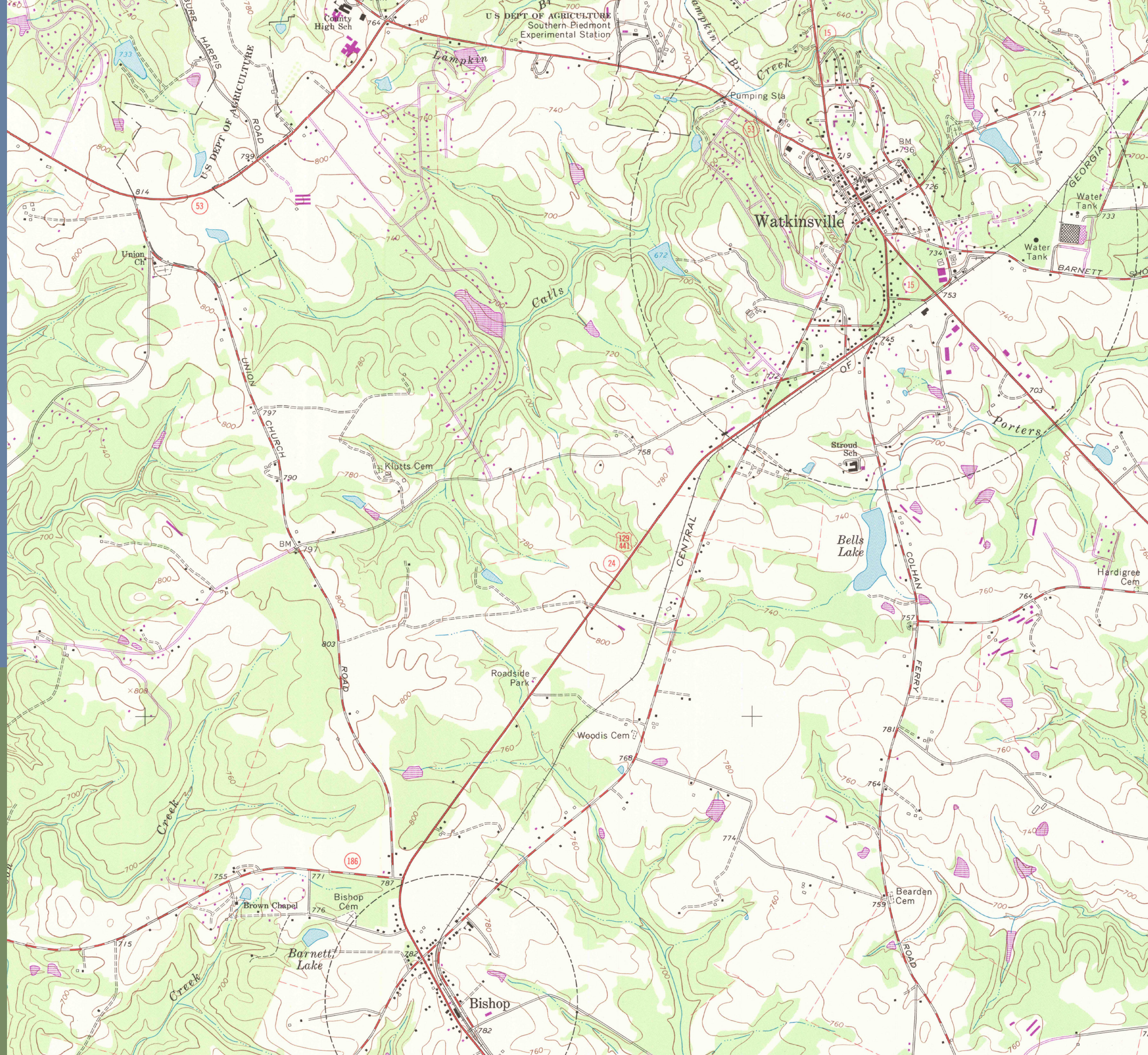


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Purpose and Planning Process	1
Goals	2
Facility Cost Estimate Overview	2
Prioritization Model	3

Maps and Tables

Facilities Master Map	4
Facilities Master Table	5
Priority 1 Facilities Map	6
Priority 1 Facilities Table	7
Priority 2 (Rails to Trails) Facilities Map	8
Priority 2 (Rails to Trails) Facilities Table	9
Priority 2 (Water Trails) Facilities Map	10
Priority 3 (Water Trails) Facilities Tables	11

Appendix

References	12
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PREPARED BY THE NORTHEAST GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION



INTRODUCTION

This plan provides a blueprint for local decision-makers and advocates for investing in transportation choices and infrastructure. Funding for this planning effort is derived from a contract between the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission, who prepared the plan and facilitated the process, and the Georgia Department of Transportation.

Oconee County is home to more than 41,449 people at a density of approximately 225 people per square mile. The county is projected to undergo an annual growth rate of 1.90% from 2021–2026, which is higher than the annual growth rates projected for the Region (1.31%) and the State of Georgia (1.05%) for the same period (ESRI BAO).

At present, the County has limited pedestrian and bicycle facilities. Sidewalks are primarily located in new developments, typically subdivisions. There are sidewalks along either side of the Oconee Connector and Epps Bridge Parkway. Also, sidewalks are present on the south side of the Hog Mountain Road from Oconee High School to Butler’s Crossing (the intersection of Hog Mountain Road and Mars Hill Road/Experiment Station Road). There is only one bike lane in the County on the Oconee Connector from University Parkway through the City of Watkinsville. All existing trails in the County are in the local parks. Oconee Veterans Park has about 1-mile of walking trails and Heritage Park has almost 8-miles of bicycle trails, 3.6-miles of equestrian trails, and less than a mile of multi-use trail.

Beyond these areas, there are few facilities supporting bicycle, pedestrian, or any non-motorized transportation, therefore, connections to destinations within the county are limited. This plan identifies corridors that will provide the greatest benefit to county residents and seeks to create a blueprint for future opportunities.

PURPOSE AND PLANNING PROCESS

The availability of alternative transportation options provides many benefits to the overall health of a community. Having access to a diversity of active mobility options has been shown to reduce air pollution, lower obesity levels, stimulate economic productivity, lower transportation costs per household, and generate job creation (Speck, 2012). Specifically, multi-use trail construction in the region has been estimated to generate a total economic impact of \$1.33 for every dollar spent (GDOT, 2021). These are benefits that Oconee County would like to see in its community moving forward.

This document serves as a guide to facilitate local decision-making and investment toward non-automobile transportation and outdoor recreation. The planning process that informed this document was designed to include on- and off-road facilities for walking, jogging, and/or bicycling. As a result, Oconee County will have one comprehensive framework to reference when considering these closely related facilities and will be better equipped to strategically connect the community.

The contents of this document were guided by Oconee County’s Recreation Advisory Committee, elected officials, and County staff. NEGRRC staff worked closely with these elected officials, staff, and advocates to obtain the most current data available, seek direction on project priorities, and develop goals and objectives. Opportunities for public input were also advertised by Oconee County to elicit feedback on the final draft of the proposed alignments before local adoption.

GOALS

Implementation of this plan will be accomplished using several tools, including, but not limited to, public investment, private investment, local zoning ordinances, public-private partnerships (PPP), and non-profit advocacy. The location and type of facility are designated and prioritized in this plan; however, site-specific designs are not provided due to the variety of options available per facility type. This allows Oconee County to adapt to contextual situations when implementing each project. Cost estimates provided in this plan are general and would require a site-specific determination of cost per project, which should be considered when budgeting for projects.

The goals listed below should be referenced by Oconee County and private developers when making design decisions. The goals of Oconee County are multi-faceted, and each facility should accomplish some, if not all, of them.

- ◇ Trails will be safe and comfortable to use for all age groups.
- ◇ County staff and elected officials will strive to improve civic pride and public health.
- ◇ Where practical, all trails will be ADA-accessible.
- ◇ Miscellaneous components of a trail route (such as benches, signage, safety refuge areas, and mid-block crossings) may be incorporated where applicable.
- ◇ All off-street facilities will be integrated in an environmentally sensitive manor.

FACILITY COST ESTIMATE OVERVIEW

NOTE: Cost estimates do not include property acquisition, permitting and inspection, project management or administration, special site remediation, or the cost of ongoing maintenance.



Paved Trail At-Grade ≈ \$170/LF

- * Includes medium grading, soil erosion and sediment control, site clearing, concrete pavement, signage, and landscaping
- * Cost estimates are based on a trail width of 12'

Paved Trail Example: Firefly Trail, Winterville, Ga



Minor Trailhead ≈ \$165,000/site

- * Includes site preparation, drainage improvements, concrete paving, kiosks, signage, electric utilities, and landscaping.

Minor Trailhead Example: Arabia Mountain, Stonecrest, Ga



Boat & Kayak Launch Site ≈ \$400,000/site

- * Based on the Athens-Clarke County 2020 SPLOST project and adjusted for inflation
- * Includes the cost of construction, design fees, project management, stormwater enhancement, and stream restoration

Kayaka & Boat Lauch Example: Morgan Falls, Sandy Springs, Ga

PRIORITIZATION MODEL

The planning process identified routes that would provide connective benefits to the community. These routes are along retrofittable corridors that can support the proposed facilities. This is critical to the implementation of the network and ensure walking and biking become a viable and safe modes of transportation in the County. The process also identified ideal locations for water access points. The specific form of each proposed route will be determined during the design phases of individual corridors and water access sites.

This plan segregates proposed trail routes into priority categories. Priorities were determined based on several factors including the overall potential use and benefit each route provides. As the routes were developed, the trails were categorized into two tiers for implementation purposes. Tier one is the highest priority, regarding implementation, while tier two is the lowest. Tier two is also classified by trail type, as water trails and launch sites will have different implementation requirements than traditional trails. There is no prioritization between trail types. The priority levels are in place to assist the County with planning and development but should not prevent the County from pursuing and implementing trails in lower priorities. Should the right opportunity for partnership, funding, and implementation arise, the County will pursue developed regardless of priority. The method of implementation and maintenance varies such that the County should, instead of prioritizing, employ public and private resources when and where the opportunities arise regardless of location.

In total, there are 46.56 miles of proposed trails; 17.88 of water trails and 28.68 of traditional multi-use trail.

PRIORITY ONE TRAIL ROUTES (T1)

Priority routes include 12' on-street paved multi-use trails that connect the most populated areas of Oconee County with facilities such as public schools and parks. Priority one proposed trail connections include:

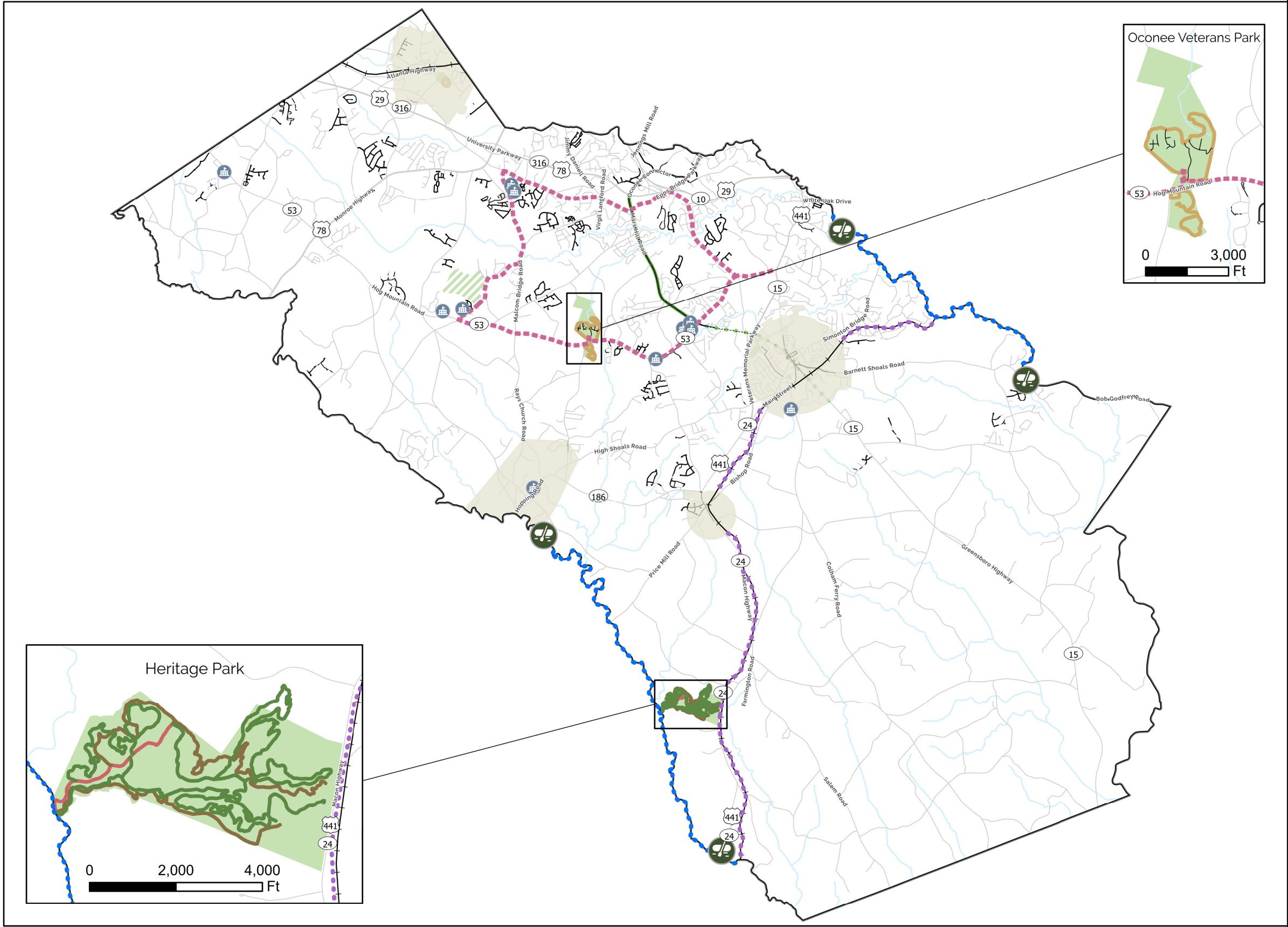
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|-----------------------|---|
| ◊ Hog Mountain Road | ◊ Oconee County Primary, Elementary & High School |
| ◊ Rocky Branch Road | ◊ North Oconee County Elementary & High School |
| ◊ Malcom Bridge Road | ◊ Malcom Bridge Elementary & Middle School |
| ◊ Mars Hill Road | ◊ Oconee Veterans Park and Herman C. Michael |
| ◊ Daniels Bridge Road | ◊ Proposed Park (former LAS water treatment site) |

PRIORITY TWO RAIL TO TRAIL ROUTES (T2)

The T2 route includes a 12' off-street paved multi-use trail following an abandoned railroad through Oconee County (referred to as the Athens Line). The line would connect the county to the Cities of Watkinsville and Bishop along with the bordering counties of Athens-Clarke and Morgan.

PRIORITY TWO WATER TRAIL ROUTES & LAUNCH SITES (W1 & LS1)

Water trails are designated sections of the Middle Oconee and Apalachee Rivers for recreational activities such as kayaking, canoeing, or tubing. It also includes proposed launch sites along the two rivers.



Master Facilities Map

- County Parks
- Proposed Park
- City Limits
- County
- Public Schools
- Proposed Launch Sites
- Roads
- Rail Lines
- Rivers & Streams
- Sidewalks
 - Existing
 - Under Construction
- Bike Lanes
 - Existing
 - Planned
- Existing Trails
 - Bicycle
 - Walking
 - Multi Use
 - Equestrian
- Proposed Trails
 - Priority 1
 - Priority 2 (Rails-to-Trails)
 - Priority 2 (Water Trail)



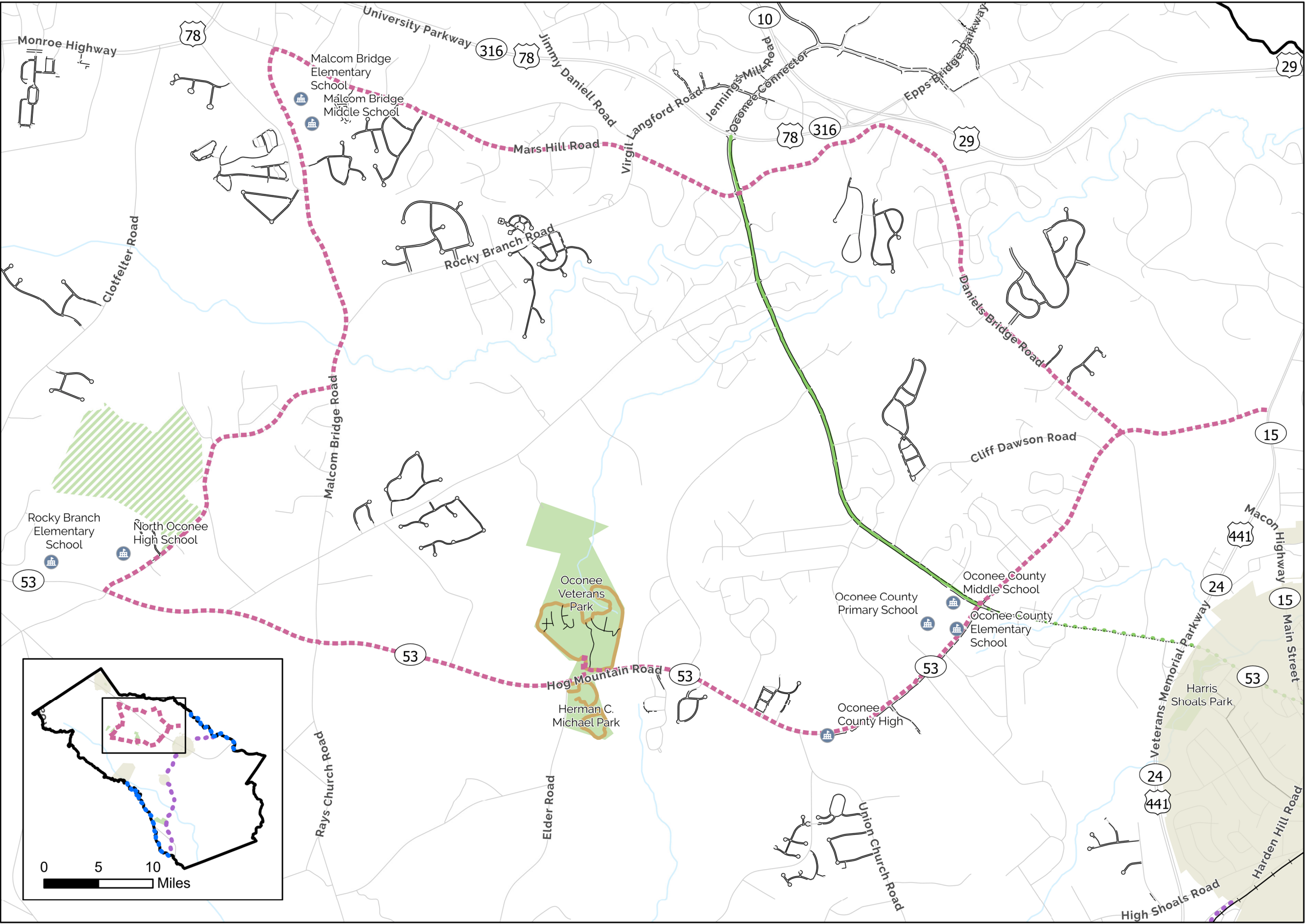
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FACILITIES MASTER TABLE

Priority Name	Description	Distance (FT)	Distance (Miles)
Priority 1 Trails	Off-street path improving connectivity of populated areas to schools and local parks.	80,262.38	15.20
Priority 2 "Rails to Trails"	Off-street 12' wide paved trail following the Athens Line railroad.	60,169.21	11.40
Priority 2 Water Trails	Launch sites and designated segments of the Middle Oconee, Oconee, and Apalachee Rivers for recreational use such as kayaking, canoeing, or tubing.	94,387.03	17.88
Total:		234,818.63	44.47



Priority 1 Trails

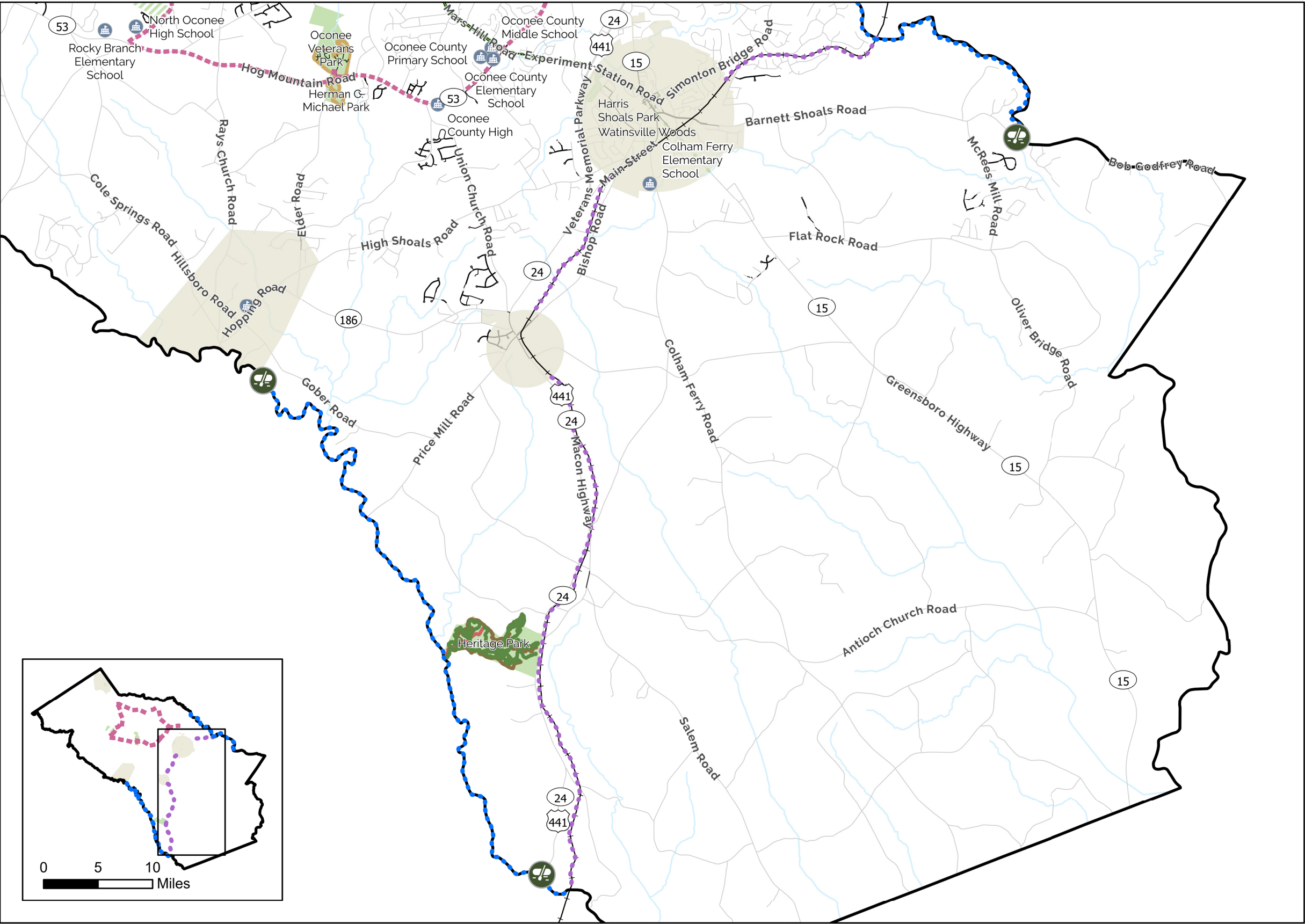
- County Parks
- Proposed Park
- City Limits
- County
- Public Schools
- Roads
- Rivers & Streams
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 - Existing
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 - Bicycle
 - Walking
 - Multi Use
 - Equestrian
- Proposed Trails
 - Priority 1
 - Priority 2 (Rails-to-Trails)
 - Priority 2 (Water Trail)
 - Rail Lines

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PRIORITY 1 FACILITIES TABLE

Project Number	Project Name	Description	Distance (Feet)	Distance (Miles)	Cost Estimates
1	Hog Mountain Road East	Along the north side of Hog Mountain Road, from the Butler's Crossing (intersection of Hog Mountain Road and Mars Hill Road/ Experiment Station Road) to the intersection of Hog Mountain Road and Macon Highway (US 129).	10,996.60	2.08	\$1,869,422.00
2	Park Connector	Along the west side of Rocky Branch and the north side of Hog Mountain Road, from the Proposed Park location (former LAS water treatment site) to the intersection of Hog Mountain Road and Rocky Branch Road and then Oconee County High School.	17,902.30	3.39	\$3,043,391.80
3	Malcom Bridge Road	Along the east side of Malcom Bridge Road, from the intersection of Rocky Branch Road and Malcom Bridge Road to the intersection of Malcom Bridge Road to Mars Hill Road.	10,390.09	1.97	\$1,766,314.61
4	Rocky Branch Road	Along the northside of Rocky Branch Road, from the Proposed Park locations (former LAS water treatment site) to the intersection of Rocky Branch Road and Malcom Bridge Road.	6,869.13	1.30	\$1,167,751.83
5	Mars Hill Road	Along the south side of Mars Hill Road, from the intersection of Malcom Bridge Road and Mars Hill Road to the intersection of Mars Hill Road and Daniells Bridge Road.	14,575.90	2.76	\$2,477,903.56
6	Daniells Bridge Road	Along the north side of Daniells Bridge Road, from the intersection of Mars Hill Road and Daniells Bridge Road to the intersection of Daniells Bridge Road and Hog Mountain Road.	16,622.77	3.15	\$2,825,871.48
7	Hog Mountain Road West	Along the north side of Hog Mountain Road. From Oconee County High School to Bulter's Crossing (intersection of Hog Mountain Road and Mars Hill Rd/Experiment Station Road.	5,991.17	1.13	\$1,018,498.06
8	Oconee Veterans Park & Oconee County High School	Along the north side of Hog Mountain Road. From Oconee Veterans Park to Oconee County High School.	7,911.02	1.50	\$1,344,873.40
Total:			80,262.38	15.2	\$13,644,604.75



Priority 2 Trails
(Rails-to-Trails)

- County Parks
- Proposed Park
- City Limits
- County
- Public Schools
- Proposed Launch Sites
- Roads
- Rail Lines
- Rivers & Streams
- Sidewalks
 - Existing
 - Under Construction
- Bike Lanes
 - Existing
 - Planned
- Existing Trails
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- Proposed Trails
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 - Priority 2 (Water Trail)



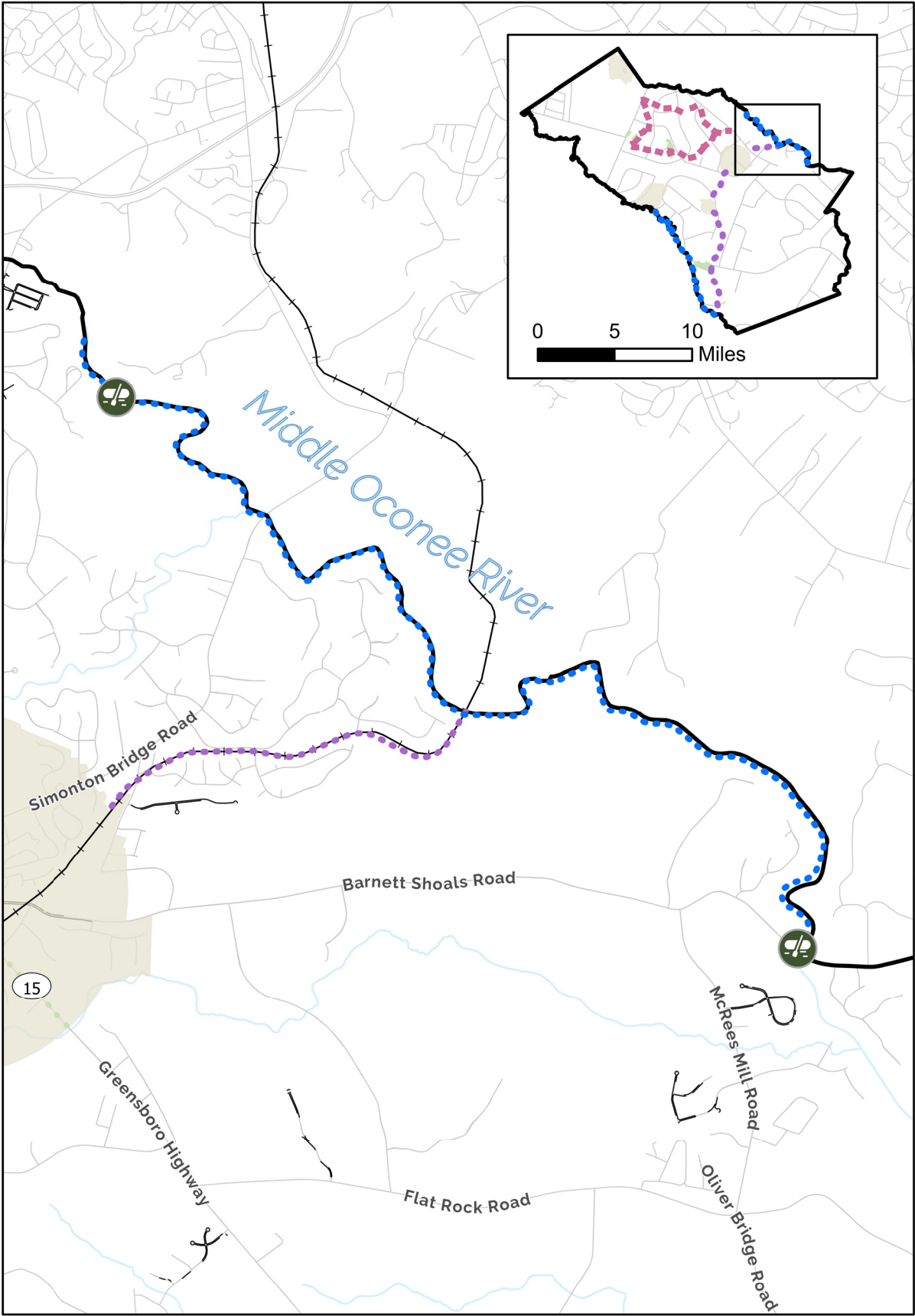
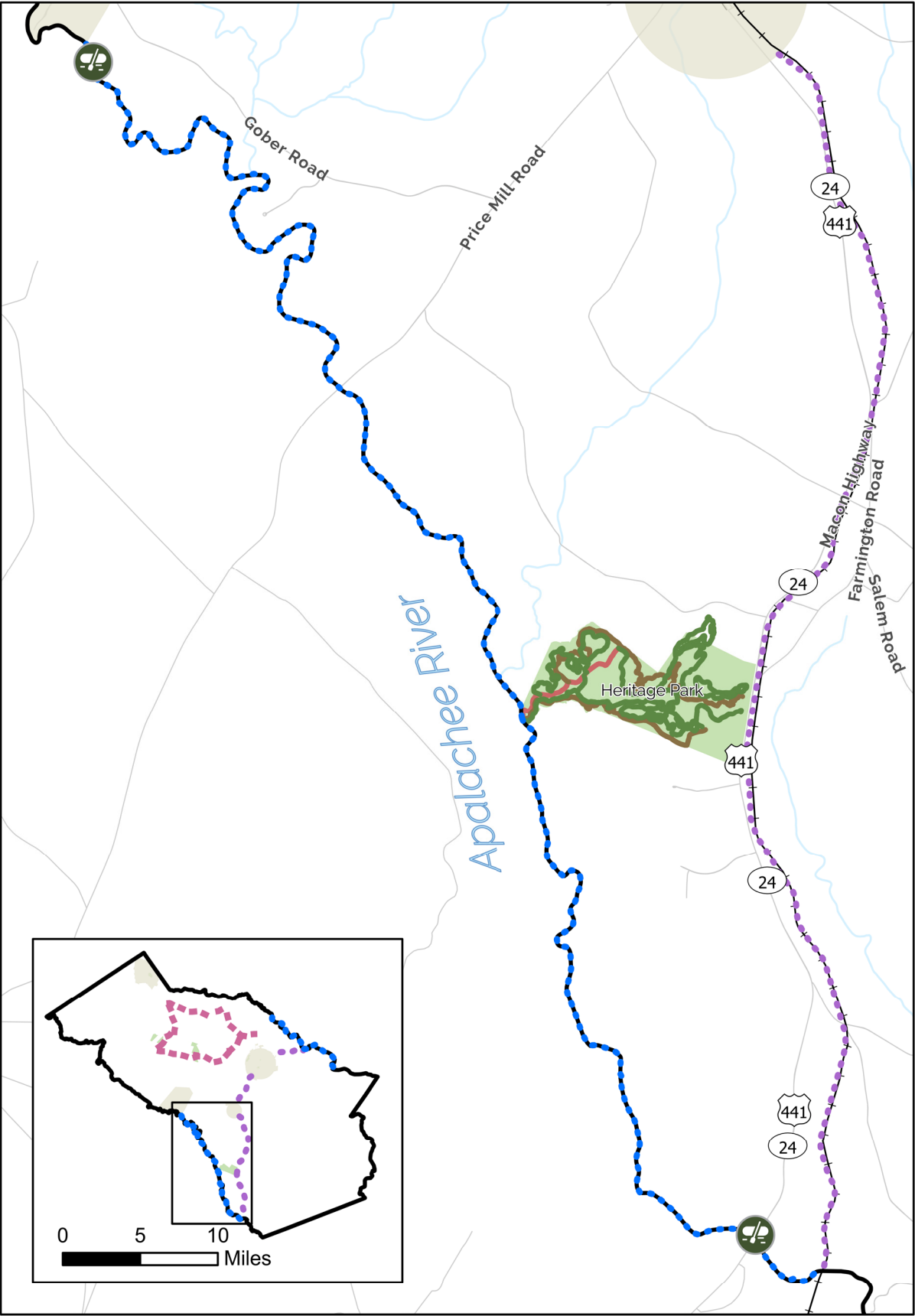
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PRIORITY 2 (RAILS TO TRAILS) FACILITIES TABLE

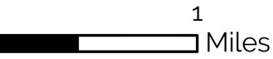

NOTE: Cost estimates per facility type are provided on page 2 and can be referenced when determining a preliminary cost estimate for Priority Two facilities.

Project Number	Project Name	Description	Distance (Feet)	Distance (Miles)
1	Upper Athens Line	From the north county boundary to Watkinsville's city limits.	11,744.28	2.22
2	Athens Line	From Watkinsville's city limits to Bishop's city limits.	10,805.50	2.05
3	Middle Athens Line	From Bishop's city limits to Heritage Park.	21,306.43	4.04
4	Lower Athens Line	From Heritage Park to south county boundary.	16,313.00	3.09
Total:			60,169.21	\$11.40

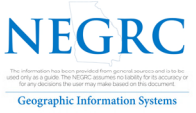


Priority 2 Trails
(Water Trails)

- Proposed Park
- County Parks
- City Limits
- County
- Proposed Launch Sites
- Roads
- Rail Lines
- Rivers & Streams
- Sidewalks
 - Existing
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- Bike Lanes
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PRIORITY 2 (WATER TRAILS) FACILITIES TABLES

NOTE: Cost estimates per facility type are provided on page 2 and can be referenced when determining a preliminary cost estimate for Priority Two facilities.

DESIGNATED WATER TRAIL SEGMENTS

Project Number	Project Name	Description	Distance (FT)	Distance (Miles)
1	Middle Oconee River	The water trail starts from the State Botanical Gardens of Georgia and ends at the Barnet Shoals Road bridge.	37,983.79	7.19
2	North Apalachee River	This segment of the water trail starts at North High Shoals' city limits and ends at Heritage Park.	33,696.20	6.38
3	South Apalachee River	This segment of the water trail starts at Heritage Park and ends at the railroad trestle.	22,707.05	4.30
Total:			94,387.03	17.88

BOAT & KAYAK LAUNCH SITES

Project Number	Project Name	Description
1	North High Shoals	Lauch site is about 200ft south of North High Shoal city limits
2	Heritage Park	Lauch Site located at on the western end of Heritage Park near the trail intersection.
3	Macon Highway	Lauch Site located right off Macon Highway, before the bridge.
4	Middle Oconee River water reclamation facility	Lauch site is located on the Middle Oconee River water reclamation facility in the designated recreational areas.
5	Barnett Shoals Road	Lauch site is located off of Barnett Shoals, before the bridge.

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