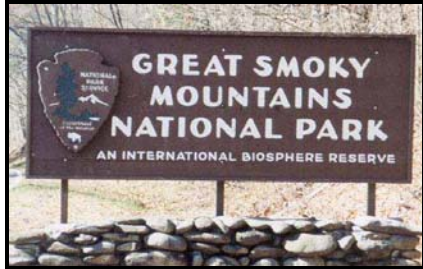


the road because they contend that construction and use of the road would harm both terrestrial and aquatic species. Some support a cash settlement in lieu of the road to boost Swain County's economy.

## 1.5 Project Setting



Park entrance sign

The project study area, shown in Figure 1-1, is in western North Carolina and includes a portion of GSMNP in Swain County and a portion of the AT in Swain and Graham counties. Both the GSMNP and the AT are individual units of the national park system within the NPS. The study area extends from just west of Fontana Village to the eastern municipal limits of Bryson City, covering an area of roughly 120,000 acres (48,562 ha). Fontana Lake divides the study area into halves to include land south and north of the lake. The southern limits of the study area are parallel to and just south of NC 28 and US 19/US 74, while the northern limits follow an arc that includes the majority of land transferred in the 1943 Agreement.

To provide the full range of study alternatives and thorough analyses that are required by NEPA, the EIS study area covers a large expanse of land. Specifically, the inclusion of land south of Fontana Lake is necessary to evaluate the existing roadway network, the area's transportation needs, and potential access options across Fontana Lake. The inclusion of rural communities such as Lauada, Almond, Stecoah, and Bryson City, to name just a few, provides insight on the local population's economy, demographics, and social values.

## 1.6 System Linkage

### 1.6.1 Road Networks

The existing road network services the areas surrounding Fontana Lake and connects Bryson City and various secondary roads to regions outside the study area. The primary east-west roadways in the study area include US 19, US 74, and NC 28. US 19 is a two-lane facility that goes through downtown Bryson City before merging with US 74 southwest of town. The merged US 19/US 74 is a four-lane, divided facility with a grass median, which then transitions to a five-lane, undivided section west of the Little Tennessee River. In the study area, NC 28 extends from US 19/US 74 in Swain County to Lake Cheoah in Graham County.

### 1.6.2 Railroads

The Great Smoky Mountains Railroad (GSMR) services the Bryson City region, connecting Dillsboro, Bryson City, and Nantahala. The 53-mile (85-km) line was owned by Norfolk Southern Railroad until 1988, when it was purchased by the state of North Carolina and leased to the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad, Inc. It is now primarily used for passenger travel as a tourist attraction for the area. No other passenger or freight service is available in the study area.