

1.6.3 Airports

No airports are in the study area. The nearest airport, Macon County Airport, which has one landing strip, is off NC 28 south of the study area. The nearest major airport, McGhee Tyson Airport in Knoxville, Tennessee, is roughly 50 miles (80.5 km) northwest of the study area.

1.6.4 Bicycles and Pedestrians

There are no North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT)-designated bicycle routes within the study area. However, due to the scenery and recreational characteristics of the study area in proximity to the AT, the Mountains to Sea Trail, and the Blue Ridge Parkway, cyclists, hikers, and pedestrians are a common sight along some of the roadways within the study area, especially during the summer months. More information concerning biking and hiking trails within GSMNP and the Nantahala National Forest is included in Section 3.2.5 of this document. Within Bryson City, sidewalks and roadways serve pedestrian and bicycle traffic. Outside the city limits, all roadways are either two-lane rural highways with minimal shoulders or four-lane freeways, which are not bicycle or pedestrian friendly. No dedicated bicycle lanes are within the study area.

1.7 Study Issues

Environmental impact topics were identified by the study team and finalized through input from the public. The impact topics that were identified, and analyzed in Chapter 4, include: community, economic, land use, visitor use and experience, environmental justice, cultural resources, public health and safety, geology, floodplains, air quality, soundscapes, wetlands (jurisdictional and special aquatic habitats), streams and lakes, water quality, aquatic ecology, vegetation communities, terrestrial wildlife, black bears, migratory birds, invasive exotics, federally protected species, and visual resources. Other topics with discussions of effects in Chapter 4 include utilities, hazardous materials, energy, indirect and cumulative effects, private in-holdings, and sustainability and long-term management.

Topics that were dismissed from further analysis in this EIS were farmlands, relocation, Section 4(f), and Section 6(f).

Farmlands are protected under the Farmland Protection Policy Act of 1981 (7 CFR Part 658) (“the Act”), which establishes criteria for identifying and considering the effects of Federal programs on the conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses. The project study area does not meet the Act’s definition of farmland. Therefore, the provisions of the Act do not apply to this project.

None of the detailed study alternatives would directly result in relocation impacts. All partial-build and build alternatives are located within GSMNP. Furthermore, offsite disposal of pyritic rock would not require relocation of any residences or businesses. Potential property acquisitions due to actions undertaken with the Monetary Settlement would depend on local use of funds.

Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966, as amended, stipulates that the FHWA will not approve any program or project which requires the use of publicly owned park land, recreation area, wildlife or waterfowl refuge, or land of a significant historic site unless there is no feasible and prudent alternative and all possible planning to minimize harm resulting from such use is included. However, this provision

does not apply to any project for a park road or parkway under Section 204 Federal Lands Highways Program, of Title 23, USC. The partial-build and build alternatives would be constructed as park roads under the Federal Lands Highways Program. Therefore, Section 4(f) does not apply.

Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 (LWCF) protects grant-assisted areas from conversions. It requires replacement of any land improved with LWCF monies that is converted to non-recreational purposes. No portions of GSMNP in the study area were funded with LWCF monies. Therefore, there is no use of Section 6(f) resources.

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