

4.2.5.3.3 Mitigation Techniques

No techniques are proposed for the Laurel Branch Picnic Area.

For the Partial-Build Alternative to Bushnell, two new backcountry campsites could be created, one along Welch Ridge Trail and one along Cold Spring Gap Trail, to mitigate the loss of campsites. A new trail would be built to provide access from the Forney Creek embayment to Forney Creek and Bear Creek trails (for fishing) with a Primitive Park Road.

In addition to the techniques proposed for the Partial-Build Alternative to Bushnell, a new trail would be necessary to connect Eagle Creek Trail to Hazel Creek Trail to provide east-west continuity of the Park's trail system for the baseline Northern Shore Corridor.

4.2.5.3.4 Enhancement Measures

Enhancement measures, noted in Section 2.5, have been incorporated into the development of the study alternatives. Additional enhancement measures could include improvement to campsites and trails (e.g., needed maintenance) within the study area or other areas of the Park.

4.2.5.4 Impairment Evaluation

Impairment to the visitor use and experience of GSMNP and the AT would not occur under the No-Action Alternative, Monetary Settlement Alternative, Laurel Branch Picnic Area, and the Partial-Build Alternative to Bushnell. The Northern Shore Corridor is not likely to impair the visitor use and experience of GSMNP or the AT based on the information obtained to date. Due to the magnitude of this alternative, it is likely that additional NEPA documentation would be required to address site specific impacts not currently known and to determine detailed mitigation measures as they relate to final design. The impairment determination related to visitor use and experience would be re-evaluated in such documentation.

4.2.6 Environmental Justice and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

4.2.6.1 Regulations

In 1994, President Clinton signed EO 12898, which directs each federal agency to address, as appropriate, “disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations.” The CEQ, which is charged with ensuring that all federal agencies comply with NEPA and EO 12898, developed guidance for identifying and addressing environmental justice issues.

Clarification of the term “baseline” for this project:

The Partial-Build Alternative to Bushnell and the Northern Shore Corridor include a baseline route, as well as options to that route. Baseline routes and options are detailed in Section 2.5 and shown on Figure 2-8. Baseline routes have been compared to existing conditions. Impact analyses for the options are shown as a difference from the associated baseline route.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 makes it illegal to show discrimination in the conduct of all federal activities. Specifically, Title VI states that, “No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”

4.2.6.2 Area Demographics

Although the study area is predominantly a homogeneous population of Caucasians, census data show a higher percentage of American Indian or Alaska Natives inhabiting the study area census geographies when compared with the North Carolina percentage. Few other racial or ethnic minorities are represented. United States Census data show Graham and Swain counties have substantially lower median household incomes compared with the state, although incomes in the area have increased relative to statewide incomes in recent years. The composition of the study area is further described in Socioeconomic and Community Features, Section 3.2.1; the Regional Economic Impacts Technical Report (Appendix F); and the Environmental Justice Section of the ECR, Section 3.2.2. Relevant historical information, which was analyzed to consider cumulative environmental justice issues, is detailed in Indirect and Cumulative Impacts, Section 4.1.2, and in the Environmental Justice Section of the ECR, Section 3.2.2.

4.2.6.3 Summary of Impacts to Minorities and Low-income Populations

Due to the location of the proposed project in GSMNP, no direct impacts to minorities or low-income populations are expected.

Indirect impacts, such as economic and community impacts, would not result in disproportionately high or adverse impacts to minorities or low-income populations.

The entire study area population is expected to benefit from economic impacts resulting from the alternatives. Economic impacts, such as creation of jobs and increased personal income, could be beneficial to low-income populations. The area’s American Indian population would benefit from any synergistic effects of the action alternatives (all alternatives except for No-Action) on the Cherokee Casino through increased tourism.

Residents of Bryson City may be more affected by traffic, construction, and land use impacts than residents in other portions of the study area due to proximity to the eastern project terminus. However, these impacts would not be expected to result in disproportionately high or adverse effects on minorities or low-income populations.

None of the alternatives would result in disproportionately high or adverse impacts to minorities or low-income populations, thus there would be no cumulative disproportionate or adverse impacts resulting from the proposed alternatives.

Clarification of the term “baseline” for this project:

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