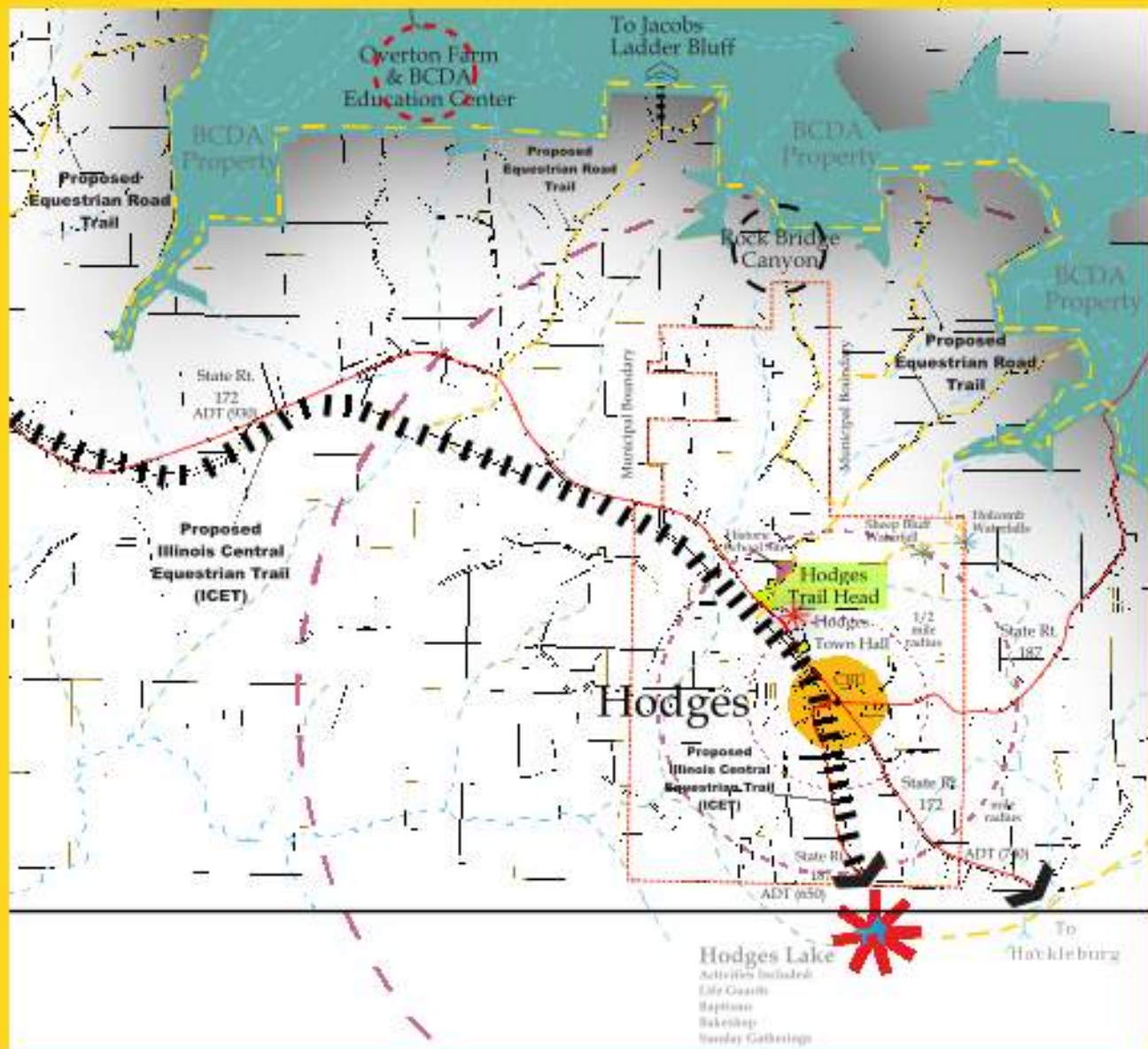


Town of Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan

A strategic plan for economic development in Hodges, Alabama.



HODGES EQUESTRIAN TRAILS PLAN

Prepared by Farmer & Associates
with assistance from
Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments



Farmer Associates



NACOLG

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Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan

A. Introduction

A Vision for the Town of Hodges

Hodges, Alabama is a hidden treasure tucked away in a rustic, beautifully rural, but still very accessible, part of Franklin County. Such places can be found across the nation and throughout northwest Alabama- a little off the beaten path, but within a short drive of most places- where opportunities for relaxation and recreation amaze visitors year round. Whether hiking and fishing at the Bear Creek Lakes, visiting the local environmental center, hiking and riding the winding trails, or simply relaxing beneath the stars, Hodges offers something for everyone. The Town operates a recreational trailhead, which serves as a gateway to the host of recreational opportunities available nearby. Initiated as a campground for visitors to the equestrian trail system, the park and trailhead have become a focal point for a thriving recreational tourism industry in Franklin County. Each year, hundreds of families visit Hodges for these and other activities, and although the town may not be the most heavily trafficked locale, its hidden treasures are widely enjoyed and help to breathe life and opportunity into a town that once struggled to distinguish itself from the crowd, retain youth, and make its way financially.

This is the Town of Hodges' **vision** for the future: *To become a destination and gateway to the recreation opportunities available in Franklin County.*

Today, Hodges is a struggling small town in a rural county with few businesses, a declining population base, and a community infrastructure in jeopardy of decline. Tomorrow, Hodges will be the center of a thriving recreational industry made possible by the rural assets of Hodges and Franklin County. By assessing the strengths and weaknesses inherent in Hodges' location, the town has developed a guide to economic growth and development through a long-term strategy that builds upon the town's location and rural character. The purpose of this plan is to describe the town, its challenges, and the town's response, which is to promote the growth of recreational tourism in Franklin County by developing an equestrian trailhead and trail network connecting Hodges to Franklin County and a growing recreational tourism industry.

Community Description

Resting within the southernmost hills of the Tennessee Valley, Hodges overlooks an attractive landscape of agriculture and woodlands. The town of 261 residents ("U.S. Census Bureau") is composed of 3.1 square miles, with a small business district. The majority of the town's citizens are employed in manufacturing jobs located outside of Hodges. First incorporated in 1913, Hodges evolved around a Post Office and the Illinois Gulf Central Rail Line. The district is currently in decline and in dire need of redevelopment.

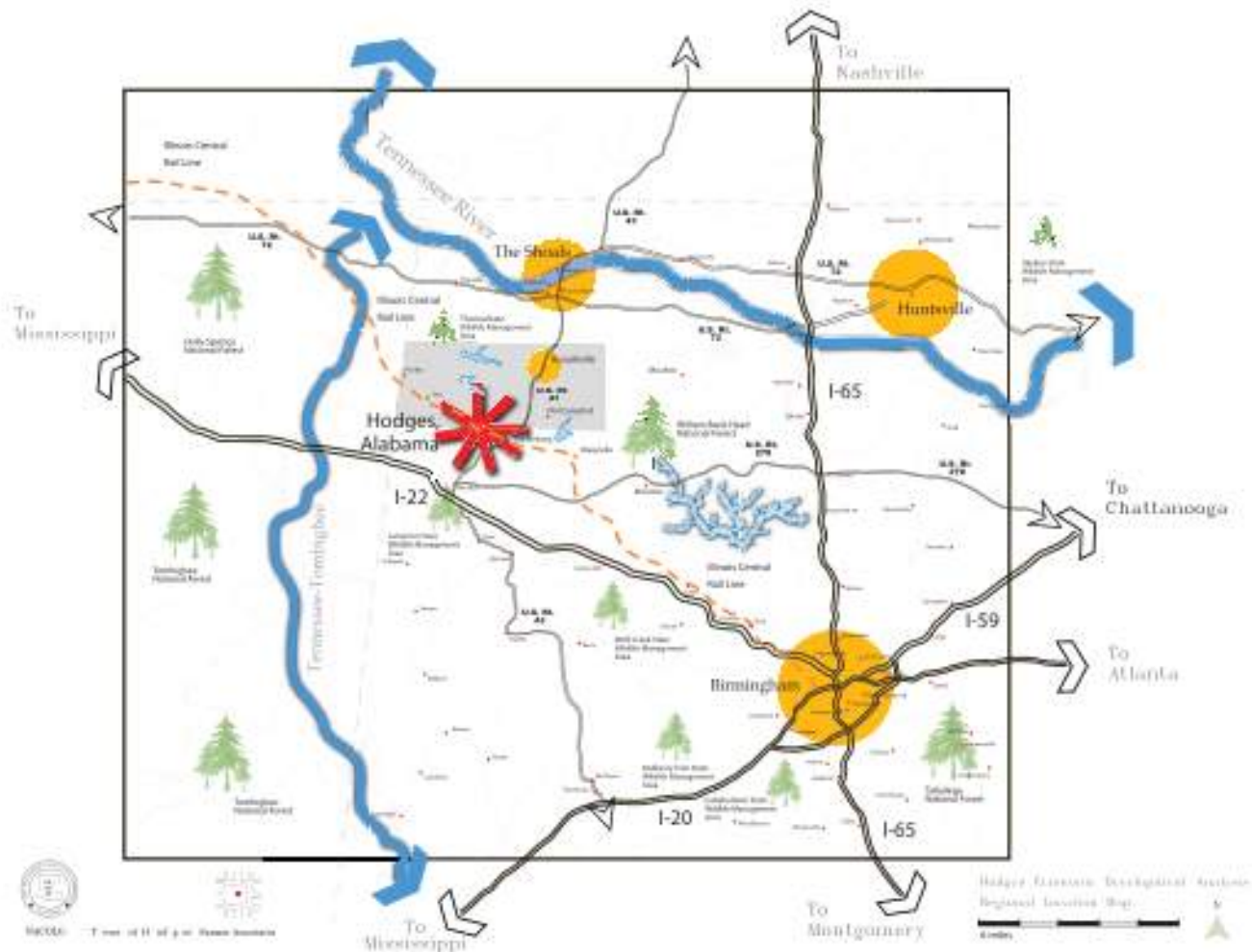
Recreation and scenic sites abound in and around the Town of Hodges. Two miles to the north is the Bear Creek Reservoir and of a "system of lakes and surrounding woodlands... used for camping, fishing, boating and swimming ("Bear Creek Reservoir)." Additionally, the beautiful Rock Bridge Canyon is just to the northwest of Hodges. The Dismals National Natural Landmark is to the east and is the only location in which a particular species of insect- the dismalite- can be found. Throughout the area, opportunities for unique outdoor recreation and education experiences are virtually unmatched, and it is these opportunities on which the Economic town's development strategy will seek to build.

Location and Geography

The Town of Hodges is located in northwest Alabama in the southern portion of Franklin County (N34° 19.633'; W87° 55.574'). Franklin County is bounded on the north by Colbert County, on the east by Lawrence County, on the south by Winston and Marion Counties, and on the west by the State of Mississippi. Hodges is located 16 miles from Hamilton, 45 miles from Florence and 100 miles from Birmingham.

Historically, Hodges' economic success has been based on links to the region's railroads and highways. Hodges is located at the intersection of Alabama State Route 187 and Alabama State Route 172. These two-lane roads connect the town to regional thoroughfares - Alabama 24 north and U.S. 43 south of Hodges. The town sits approximately 7.5 miles northwest from U.S. Highway 43 which is a regional arterial running north-south and linking urban centers in Alabama and Tennessee.. Hodges was initially founded along the railroad, and the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad passed through the town of Hodges from its construction in 1907 (Steele 3) until it was decommissioned.

Geographically, Hodges' location is vital to its past and present economic activity. The town is located along the Tennessee Valley Divide (TVD), which is "... the eastern and southern boundary of the drainage basin of the Tennessee River and its tributaries" ("Tennessee Valley Divide"). The ridge that forms the divide provided the Illinois Central Railroad the ability to manage and engineer the rail line and allowed its economical operation. The TVD also provides much of the natural context for the town and Franklin County, creating conditions and biodiversity not found elsewhere in the United States.



Purpose and Goals of the Study

The Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan is intended to promote the economic development agenda of the Town of Hodges by studying the feasibility, economic impact, and design requirements of equestrian trails linking Hodges to various recreational sites in Franklin County. The study is a preliminary feasibility analysis that evaluates the design and demand criteria for equestrian trails in the context of Hodges' environmental, geographic, and cultural assets. The Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan is an extension of the principles of asset based economic development, which relies on leveraging local assets to create economic opportunity. The plan is intended to evaluate the design requirements of an equestrian trails system, the potential economic impact of an equestrian trails system in Hodges, and provide a review of the phasing and opportunities for developing such a system.

The Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan proposes three components focused on equestrian riders: the Hodges Trail Head and Campground (HTH&C), the Illinois Central Equestrian Trail (ICET) and the spur trails connecting the recreational assets to the trail head. The proposed use for the Hodges trail system focuses on equestrian riders, but successfully blending trail uses with other non-motorized recreation can maximize opportunities for users. Including multiple users conserves natural resources and allows for greatest economic impact. However, designing for multiple users requires a larger trail corridor width, additional design, and accessibility for the entire length of a trail. Compared with designing for only equestrian use, multiple-use trails require additional treads (or travel paths) and additional cost. The proposed Illinois Central Equestrian Trail (ICET) will focus on equestrian riders while allowing pedestrian use. This focus eliminates any conflicts from motorists along the trail and allows for a tailored corridor design.

Community Involvement and Relationship to the Hodges Economic Development Study

The Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan addresses connectivity and leveraging of local recreational assets surrounding the Town of Hodges. The local recreational assets were identified through site analysis, public participation, and asset development meetings associated with the development of the Hodges Economic Development Study. Key recreational assets that could be leveraged for future economic development were identified, along with the goals and objectives of economic development in Hodges. Downtown revitalization, increased commercial and financial capacity, and the optimal utilization of public property are among the goals identified in the Hodges Economic Development Study and advanced by the Hodges Recreational Trails Plan. Across the United States, trails and greenways are stimulating tourism and recreation-related spending. Trails and greenway systems have become the central focus of tourist activities in many communities and the impetus for kick-starting stagnating economies.

Feasibility

The feasibility of the Equestrian Trails Plan is established by an evaluation of the design requirements of the trails system, the availability of suitable sites for trails in the vicinity of Hodges, the cost of the proposed improvements, and the benefits of the equestrian trails system in terms of revenue generation and improvements to local quality of life. The Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan presents information on each of these factors in an attempt to determine the overall feasibility of developing a trails system as an economic generator for Hodges. Design considerations indicate that the Town of Hodges and rural Franklin County possesses the environmental, geographic, and cultural assets necessary for the implementation of equestrian trails. Sizeable opportunities are available for property to be used for trails development. The climate and beauty of the area are conducive to riding. Potential trail riders indicate a willingness to travel to Hodges to use a trails system. Factors of cost and benefit, however, are more difficult to pinpoint. Surveys indicate a willingness on the part of trail riders to visit Hodges and an average daily expenditure of \$125 per person per day, which is a sizeable investment in the local economy. Cost factors are much more elusive values. Only the roughest measures can be used to estimate property acquisition costs (including leases and easements), legal transaction fees, and construction costs. The final conclusion of the plan, therefore, is that further, ongoing evaluation is required, along with a phased, common-sense approach to implementing the trails program that, early on, enhances the local community's recreational opportunity and eventually builds into a regional attraction. The plan, therefore, calls for phased development of the trails system to support the overall sustainability and feasibility of the project, to prevent overinvestment early-on, and to ensure adequate benefits versus costs of trails development.

Trail Design

The trails development plan for Hodges calls for single-use trails that are context sensitive in design. The focus of the trail system is to link equestrian riders with local recreational sites. Equestrians include the youth, elders, leisure riders, organized groups, novices, ranchers, and persons with disabilities. The Hodges Equestrian Trail System has multiple benefits for the community and region. These benefits include the conservation of natural resources, alternatives to motor vehicle travel, access to unusual or remote sites, physical health, community interaction and increased economic activity. The aforementioned benefits of a well planned trail system will work towards implementing the citizen envisioned goals. The Hodges Trail is to become the central focus of tourist activities within Hodges. The trail will serve as the anchor for additional activities and festivals hosted by the town.

Resources for the planning of the Illinois Central Equestrian Trail and Hodges Trail Head Park & Campground include the following: Rails to Trails Conservancy (RTC) at <http://www.railtrails.org>, National Trails Training Partnership (NTTP) at <http://www.americantrails.org/resources/railtrails>, and Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (PBIC) at <http://www.bicclinginfo.org/rt>.

The Hodges Trail System Master Plan shows the connectivity of local assets to downtown. The plan presents a bird's eye view of the trail system. In addition, the master plan lays out the Illinois Central Equestrian Trail (ICET) and the Hodges Trail Head & Campgrounds (HTH&C).

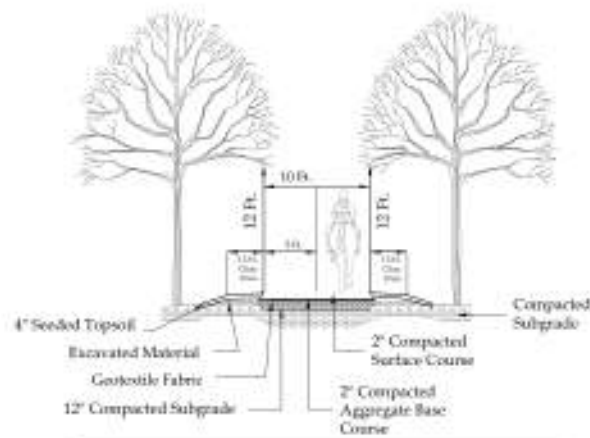
B. Hodges Equestrian Trails Master Plan

The components of the Hodges Equestrian Trails Master Plan are the Hodges Trail Head & Campground (HTH&C), the Illinois Central Equestrian Trail (ICET), and the Recreational Asset Trails. Each component of the system is designed to meet design guidelines for equestrian trails while providing enough trails to meet user demand. Rider demand is estimated at 15 trail miles per day, based on average trail rides of ten to twenty-five miles per day. Approximately 40 miles of trails are proposed in the initial Master Plan, and the potential for additional trails development exists. Additional trails will likely become feasible as the Master Plan is successfully implemented.

The Hodges Equestrian Trail System will provide a unique economic stimulus to the Town of Hodges and Franklin County. The feasibility of the trail system centers on the rural recreational and agricultural heritage of Hodges. The trail capitalizes on existing assets such as the abandoned railroad, 80 acre trail head, and managed recreational lands within the Bear Creek Development Authority. Through capitalization of local assets Hodges will establish a unique venue that creates a cultural experience unlike any other. This experience is founded in equestrian access to downtown Hodges and the potential for local festivals and events. Where else in the southeast can riders have access to over forty miles of trail and ride into town for supper!

Hodges Equestrian Trail Design Guidelines

Equestrian trail design involves a specific terminology describing the location, layout and width of the trail. The transportation corridor is the "alignment of a trail, which may include other modes of transportation . . . that has separate trails for stock, bicycles, and motor vehicles (Hancock 52)." The trail corridor contains the trail tread, overhead space, sub-grade, and native vegetation along the immediate edges of the trail. The trail tread is the alignment and travel surface of the trail and contains the tread material that is travelled upon. The section drawing below illustrates the typical trail section for a shared use equestrian trail. The Master Plan is laid out based on inferences about topography and environmental features drawn from best available data. A complete resource inventory and adequate surveys will be required prior to finalizing construction specifications.



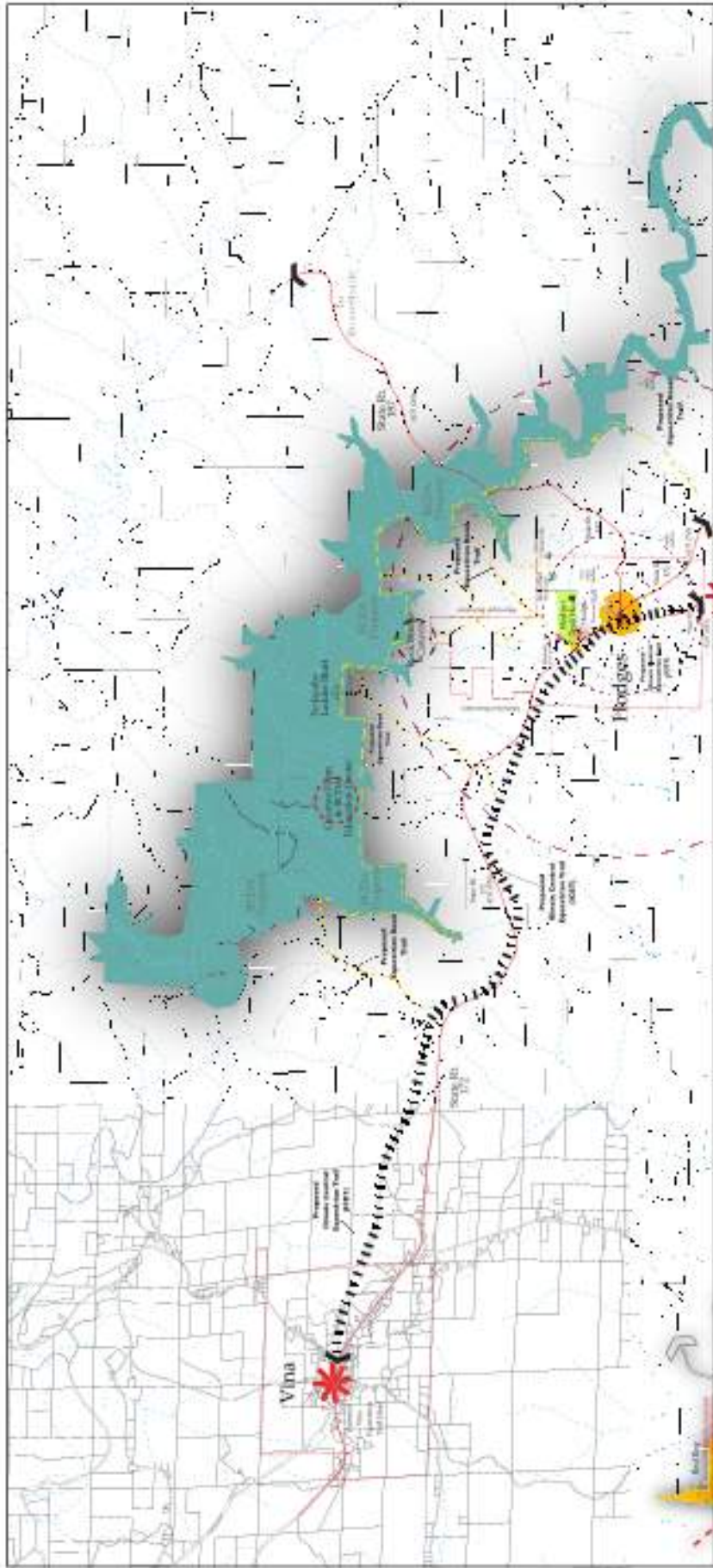
Typical Equestrian Trail Section
Not For Construction
Redrawn From Equestrian Design Guidebook . . .

Hodges Trail Head & Campground

In the Equestrian Trails Master plan, the Hodges Trail Head & Campground (HTH&C) acts as the anchor point for trail activity and festivities taking place within downtown Hodges. The trail head is located in the western corner of the HTH&C site, which is just north of downtown Hodges. It provides access and circulation to and from local recreational assets and downtown. The trail head contains parking for pedestrians and equestrians as well as picnic tables, toilets and a site host unit and will serve day riders as well as those staying within the adjacent campground.

Adjacent to the Hodges trail head are the campgrounds and internal equestrian trails. The campgrounds contain twenty-six campsites, divided between fifteen pull through sites and eleven back-in parking pads. The dimension of each space is 78' long and 28' in width, exclusive of turning radius for back-in and pull-through spaces. Camping sites should be installed as ridership and trail length creates additional demand. Additional campsites may be required in addition to those shown. The trail contained within the HTH&C serve as links from the trail head to the greater equestrian trail system.

The Hodges Trail Head and Campground incorporates guidelines for design and construction that are specific to equestrian needs. These requirements range from the distance of water from campsites to the layout of group camps in relation

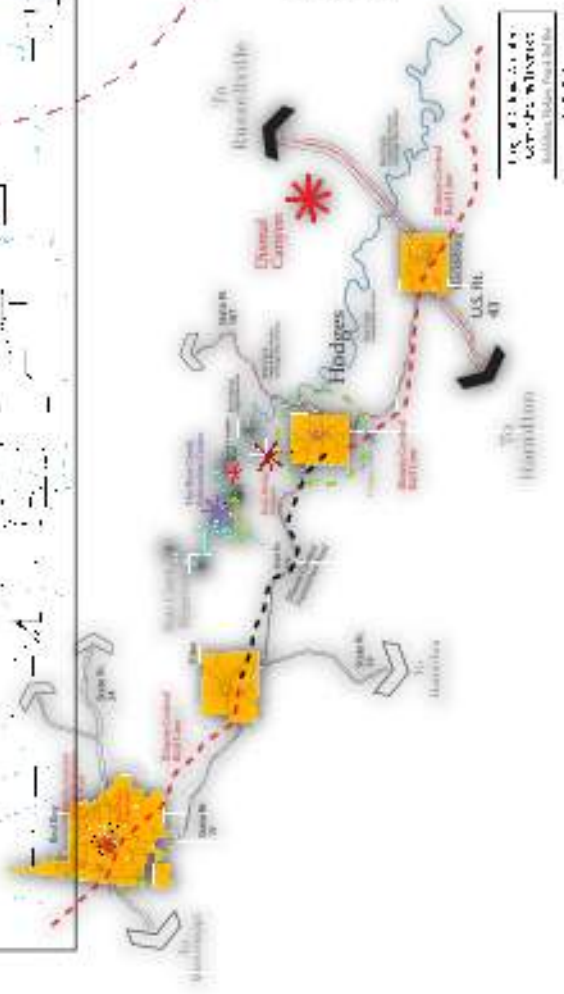


Hodges Economic Development Analysis
 Equestrian Trail Feasibility Study
 Hodges Equestrian Trail System
 January 20, 2009



MAJOR: Town of Hodges in Farmer Association

- edge to Vina ICET: 11.5 miles
- ICDA Property Trails: 14.5 miles
- recreational Asset Trails: 14.5 miles
- Total Trail Mile-in-System: 40.5 miles



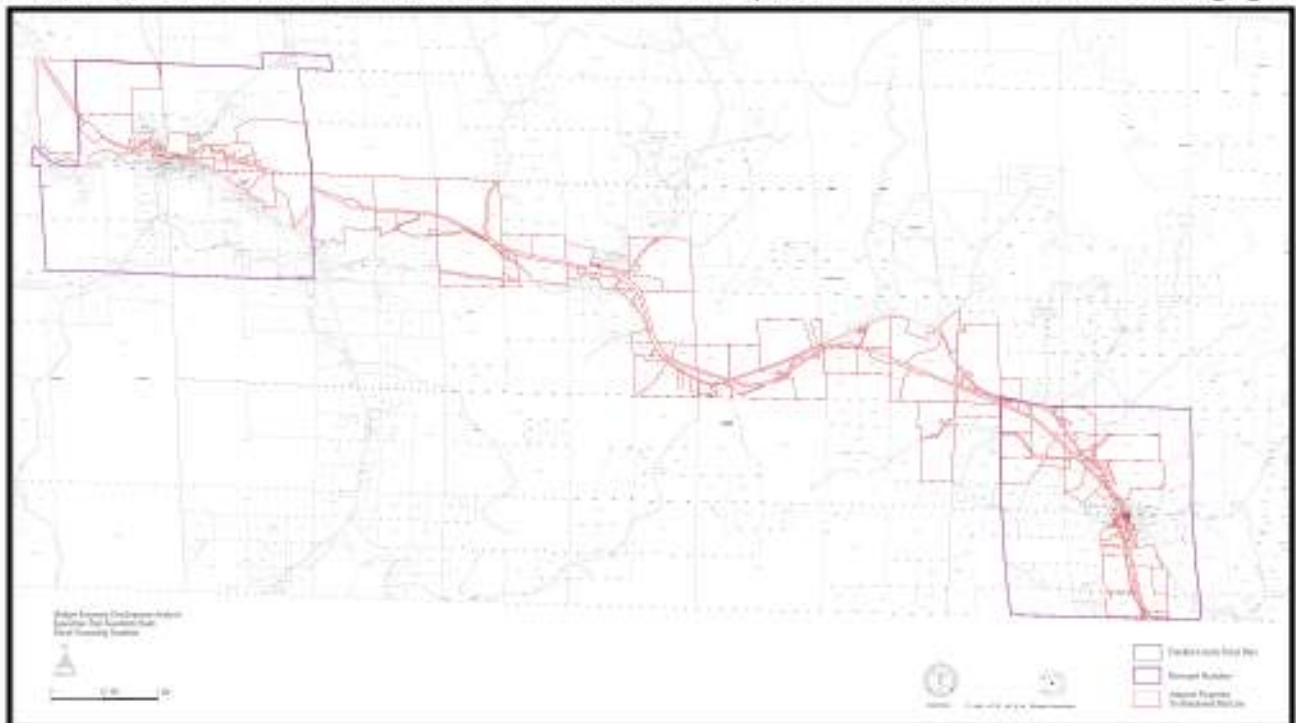
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
 National Hydrography Dataset
 06/15/2006

to single camp units. Amenities for equestrian oriented campgrounds consist of trail access, toilets, corrals, water, showers, mounting ramp, loading ramp, manure disposal, wash rack, mounting block, and hitch rails (Hancock 112). Recreational sites often have standard utilities which include storm drainage, waste disposal and electrical power. In determining the level of utilities and amenities involved at the Hodges Trail Head and Campground (HTH&C), an evaluation of the sites proximity to existing utilities should be completed. This evaluation should be compared against the current budget and the overall desired development of the campground. Amenities for the HTH&C have been included in the campground master plan and may be phased in over time.

Location of amenities within single party camps and group camps can be critical. The location of toilets and water sources should be on the exterior of the campground. This placement prevents informal paths leading to the center of the campground and encourages users to follow the existing transportation network. Amenities and design guidelines for equestrian campgrounds are show in the schematic design for the Hodges Trail Head & Campground. Accompanying notes describe the amenity.

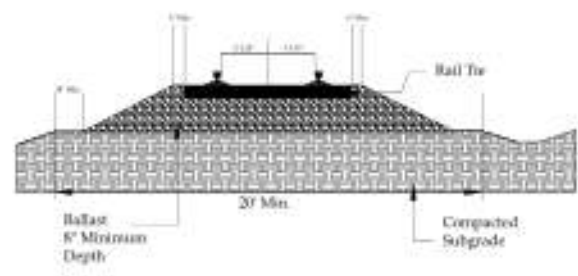
Illinois Central Equestrian Trail (ICET)

The Illinois Central Equestrian Trail (ICET) resides within the abandoned rail corridor of the Illinois Central Railroad. The initial proposal for the ICET is from Hodges to Vina for a total length of 11.5 miles. The total length of Illinois Central railroad bed in Franklin County is 24 miles. The trail will take advantage of existing grades and the constructed sub-base. However, there should be a tree plan developed for the ICET trail to provide shade to riders. In addition, water sources and signs should be identified during the design development phase of the ICET trail. The ICET trail has several equestrian and vehicular conflict points with State Route 172 as it meanders northwest to Vina. The Illinois Central Equestrian Trail (ICET) will follow the existing right-of-way



rail bed dimensions. The standard dimensions of a right-of-way vary within any rail line. This is best illustrated in the rail section from Hodges, Alabama, to Vina, Alabama.

The typical right-of-way is 100' and the rail bed is typically 20' of compacted sub-grade and 5' of bed containing the metal rails. The five foot dimension meets the necessary requirement for the one way trail tread shown below. However, input from regional equestrian riders indicates that two riders may ride abreast within an abandoned rail line. Additional passing lanes may be created if required along the ICET trail if necessary. Rail beds are engineered and compacted in a similar manner as equestrian trails. Rails and rail ties that have not been removed should be removed and the existing rail bed examined. Existing rail beds use ballast size stone and may need an additional surface tread applied to the bed. Standard horse tread materials are ¾"



Typical Rail Bed

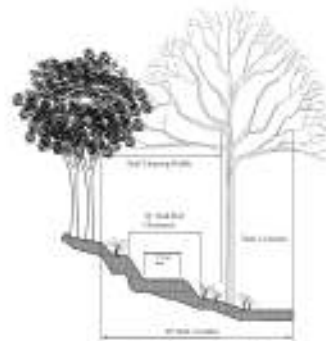
Not To Scale
Redrawn From
Rail Road Design and Rehabilitation

stone with fines and then compacted. Examination of the existing Illinois Central Rail Line may indicate the need for only brush removal. However, an existing conditions field survey should be completed for the entire proposed trail. Any adjacent structures and natural features within 100' of each side of the trail system should be documented. Road crossings and potential transportation conflicts should also be noted. Appropriate waiting areas for road crossings should be designed and constructed. Finally, there should be an attempt to maintain a 100' sight distance forward and backward along the ICET trail and along any spur trails that link local assets.

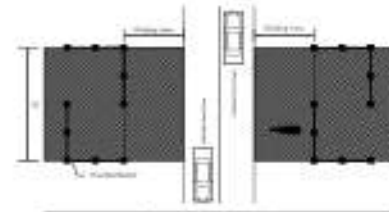
Recreational Asset Trails

The Recreational Asset Trails link the ICET trail to the BCDA proposed trail system. The asset trails trace existing and under utilized county roads as well as traversing private property. The recreational asset trails take advantage of public rights-of-way on Franklin county roads as well as potential opportunities within the BCDA property. The total length of proposed trails within the BCDA property is 14.5 miles. The public and private trails linking the BCDA property to the ICET trail are 14.5 miles. The proposed recreational asset trails are schematic and will require property easements and land acquisition.

The proposed trails linking the local assets to downtown Hodges will need further refinement based on field investigations and a completed field survey. These trails should be designed with 20' feet of right-of-way for a two-way trail and 15' of right-of-way for a trail requiring 5' of tread. It should be noted that horses require 18" of trod area which is represented in the drawing below.



Single Direction Trail
 Adapted from: The
 Recreation Series
 Equine Design Guidelines



Equine Trail Crossing
 Adapted from: The
 Recreation Series
 Equine Design Guidelines



Equine Tread Area
 Adapted from:
 Equine Design Guidelines

Way Finding and Signage

Way finding and public information signs require sound planning in relation to the proposed equestrian trail system and trail head campground. Planning is essential for cost, safety, and consistency in location and type of signs. Sign planning and placement should consider user needs, safety, and protection of local and regional assets being connected by the trail.

The way finding program must take into account identification signs, interpretive signs and signs at visitor information stations as well as regulatory and warning signs. These signs should be unique to each trail system while following the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). Standard recreation symbols should be used for the equestrian trail system and at the Hodges Trail Head Park.

Recreational Trail and campground signs include regulatory signs, trail destination signs, and interpretive signs. Regulatory signs inform trail users and automobile drivers of traffic laws and conflict points. Stop signs, one way signs and speed limit signs are an example of regulatory signs. Regulatory signs should inform all users of roads and trails and the controls for environmental protection. Environmental controls may range from forage management practices for animals as well as user safety and fines for enforcement. Regulatory signs may also be used to direct user parking and parking types when required for multiple use type trails. Warning signs are especially important for automobile traffic along trail routes. Within the trail corridor, warning signs should indicate conflict points for trail users, which include road crossings and other shared roadways. All warning signs should be placed at least fifteen feet from the associated danger located along the equestrian trail.

Trail destination signs provide necessary information to trail users and vehicle drivers about a trail. Trail destination signs inform trail users about trail direction, water, shelter, resting areas, and potential conflicts. These signs give specific directions, identify trails, identify junctions, reassure trail name and may indicate exact location within the trail system. Other examples of destination signs include kiosks or visitor stations that provide overall information about the trail system, facilities, regulations and etiquette. In addition, a helpful bulletin board allows for posting of new policies and communications between trail users. Equestrian trail information stations should not have roofs that are dangerous to riders. Hitching posts should always be placed nearby. Destination signs should be provided frequently and throughout the trail and campground areas.



Standard Recreational Symbols

Trail Destination Signs

Interpretive signs convey a message about the surrounding environment that usually educates the user in some manner. This education often shares cultural, environmental, or user point of interest. Often exhibit structures are built and view stations constructed to provide optimum views and information. Installation of a horse hitch should be placed nearby to encourage riders to dismount near built structures. The interpretive sign type will be extremely important along the Hodges trail system. This is in part to the recreational assets that bind the trail together.

The establishment of a way finding and sign program is not contained within this document and should be further refined in the design development phase for the overall trail system. This should consist of identification of sign specifics along the trail map and types of materials to compose the signs.

Food and Water

Anatomically horses require food and water daily. When out on the trail, horses need access to water at least every ten miles and five miles during hot weather. Thoughtful design of a trail can provide water every five to ten miles. In hot weather, horses consume at least one gallon of water per 100 pounds of weight. Many horses may need two to four times this amount. Riders should be notified of the distance between water resources.

A horse can consume 1.5 to 3.5 percent of its body weight. A 1000 pound horse must eat between 15 to 35 pounds of hay, grass, and grain per day. Riders should be made aware of weed free feeds if required within the campgrounds. The use of weed free feeds protects the local ecological system from receiving seeds from other ecosystems.

Trail Development Class

The National Forest Service has identified five trail classes that outline physical characteristics to be applied to a trail (Hancock 32). Class one is extremely primitive and has many obstacles along the trail route. In addition, there are minimal constructed features and no constructed bridges. At the other end of the development scale, class five has a hardened asphalt tread and has frequent structures with no obstacles and is not present in wilderness areas. The third or middle classification fits the region and proposed use for the Illinois Central Equestrian Trail and its adjacent trails linking assets. The class three trails accommodate one lane travel with occasional allowances constructed for passing. Typically, native materials are used for any construction and obstacles are infrequent. Trail bridges are built as needed and structures may be common and substantial. Directional signs are at all junctions and destination signs are typically present.

C. Equestrian Trails Feasibility Analysis

The feasibility of a proposed trails construction project is based on several factors. These factors include the overall goals of the project, the type of trail to be installed and its design requirements, the availability and suitability of property that meets the trail's design requirements, and the economic benefits and costs of trails development. The overall goals of the Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan are those detailed in the Hodges Economic Development Study, and include downtown revitalization, increased revenues, and optimal use of public lands. The following sections review the design characteristics, site suitability, and economic impact of equestrian trails.

Why [Equestrian] Trails?

Two simple answers: Money and acceptance. The goal of the development program in Hodges is to create additional economic opportunity by promoting recreational tourism, and multiple studies indicate that trails, greenways, and open space programs create community value, both in terms of increased expenditures on the part of visitors and in stabilizing land values. As for equestrian trails, after considering various options for trail types (motorized, pedestrian, bicycle, etc.), residents and local officials determined that equestrian trails were likely to generate more revenue and be more widely accepted. Equestrian trails were determined to offer greater tourism benefits (i.e. thought to be more of an attraction than, say, pedestrian trails) with lower perceived nuisances than other trail types.

Trail Design Standards

The design and layout of an equestrian trail should follow design guidelines. Trail guidelines should be able to meet the needs of most users and be flexible enough to adapt to different terrain types. General guidelines for trails development include provisions for land area requirements, slope and soil requirements, use of trails, and signage requirements. The overall feasibility of the proposal will be based on how well existing field conditions in the area designated for trails development meet these guidelines, with areas most closely meeting the design guidelines being easier and less expensive to develop.

A good trail will meet the needs of most of its users. In order to design a trail that meets the needs of most users, it is necessary to define the trail type and evaluate the characteristics of the "typical" user. The trail design can then meet the needs of the "typical" user. Although this approach will not accommodate each and every user, it will allow for the development of a trail that does not overly burden the majority of users. Fortunately, ample design materials have already been developed for equestrian trails. The Hodges Equestrian Plan utilizes the standards found in the book *Equestrian Design Guidebook for Trails, Trailheads, and Campgrounds*. These standards are compared with existing conditions in Hodges to determine site suitability. The most important design considerations for determining overall feasibility include site suitability and the availability of property for development. A suitable site will meet environmental criteria for development, will possess suitable slopes and soils, and will be available for use or acquisition for use as a recreational trail.

Land area requirements for achieving a successful equestrian trail vary across the nation. In a dense urban environment, a successful trail may not be of great length but be highly utilized by multiple use types. In rural areas a trail may be of substantial length and constructed to serve a specific user group. Trail length may vary from five miles to twenty-five miles with riders averaging two hours for a five mile trek. Loop and spur trails allow for greater trail length achieved on small tracts of property. Equestrian trails have specific slope requirements for horses and their riders. When designing and constructing the trail head the maximum preferred slope is no greater than 5%. Anything greater requires treatment of the slope to prevent erosion of the trail. To further prevent erosion, environmental damage, and expensive construction, the trail has been designed with existing soils in mind. Paths and drives within a campground should not exceed the maximum grade of 4%.



Loop and Spur Trails

Reprinted From
Equestrian Design Guidebook...

Site Suitability & Availability

Site suitability and availability was evaluated for the three trail components of the Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan- the Hodges Trail Head and Campground (HTH&C), the Illinois Central Equestrian Trail (ICET) and the spur trails connecting the recreational assets to the trail head.

An eighty-acre site just north of downtown Hodges has been chosen for the Hodges Trail Head and Campground. The Town of Hodges currently owns the property, which is primarily woodland and touches State Route. 172 on the southwest corner. The site was originally proposed for any future industrial manufacturing in Hodges, but on reconsideration of the assets of the town, it was determined that the site was more suitable as a trailhead and recreational center. The Hodges Trail Head and Campground will comprise forty to fifty acres. The additional thirty acres will contain loop and spur trails.

Spur trails connecting Hodges to various recreational tourism assets in Franklin County will be required and can be placed along existing county road right-of-ways where possible. Signage and crossing safety will be paramount concerns on these roads, however, the spur trails can take advantage of existing low density roads- many of which are unpaved (an advantage for horse riders)- that pass through wildlife management, forestry, and other natural areas on the way to such features as Rock Bridge Canyon and the Bear Creek Environmental reservation.

Finally, the Illinois Central Equestrian Trail (ICET) will follow the abandoned rail line of the Illinois Central Railroad. This trail follows a long tradition of Rails-to-Trails projects. A Rails-to-Trails is a trail development that acts as both a trail and a linear park. Rails-to-Trails date back into the 1930s and are found in all fifty states. In the early 1900s, the United States had over three hundred thousand miles of rail line (Sendich 635). Today, there are now 1,200 rails to trails open covering over 12,600 miles ("American Trails").

Geographic Constraints & Opportunities

Topography, slope, soil types, water resources, environmental impact, points of interest and existing trails provide constraints and opportunities to trail development. These constraints and opportunities determine the layout and design guidelines for the trail system. The complete Hodges trail system consists of the Illinois Central Equestrian Trail, The Hodges Recreational Asset Trails and the Hodges Trail Head & Campground.

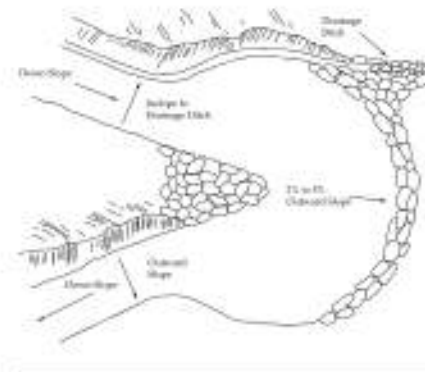
Topography and Slope

Topographical conditions for equestrian trails determine the ascent and descent experience for trail users. When climbing steep terrain the trail grade must be controlled by a series of switchbacks within the trail. Topographical change can affect construction and maintenance costs and the overall budget for the trail system. Finally, topography determines drainage controls to be used along the trail. Drainage or surface water flowing through the corridor must collect and drain properly. The off site water flow determines the intensity of storm water and the amount of drainage flowing into, within, and out of the trail corridor. Properly assessing the drainage patterns by field survey for each of the three trail components is necessary for the design development phase. "Controlling surface water is one of the most important aspects of trail design and development (Flink 16)." Topography will have the greatest impact on the design development phase of the Hodges Trail Head & Campground.

An understanding existing slopes within the proposed trail components will be needed for cost effective trail system construction. At the current phase of schematic design, the existing slopes for construction are unclear. The required slope or grade for equestrian trails is 1% to 10% preferred with 10% being a maximum sustained grade for long

distances. A 5% slope is ideal. At shorter distances, a 20% slope may be achieved along a trail route. It is important to note that horses and their riders are able to tackle difficult terrain when required. All trails involving trail conditions beyond a 10% grade should be identified with signage. Placement of signs marking grade changes should occur at the beginning of the trail or at the beginning of a spur trail, which leaves the main trail section.

A separate slope requirement must be met for the Hodges Trail Head and Campground. Choosing a trailhead and campground site that meets design standards reduces costly cut and fill requirements during construction. A reduction in construction cost will occur by selecting a site within the eighty acre tract that has the least changes in slope. The most desirable slope for the campground and trail head is between 1% and 4%. A gentle slope of this nature allows for "construction of roads, parking areas, structures, camp units, and picnic units without extensive earthwork (Hancock 109)." Currently the overall understanding of the proposed site for the trail head is limited to soil series analysis. A full field survey of the site will save time in construction cost and enable the phasing of the project overtime. Finally, the unnecessary and costly relocation of past improvements may be prevented by the field survey.



Equestrian Trail Switch Back

Typical Trail To Scale
Redrawn From
Trail Design for Small Properties

Soil Conditions

Soil types vary within the areas proposed for development and each component of the trails system has been evaluated separately in order to describe the slope, erosion, cultivation suitability, and engineering properties for the soil series. Soil capability units are generally discussed in this document and should be further evaluated during design development. However, the soil series does provide solid direction for where to place the trail head and campground. In addition, potential problems with trails that link recreational assets have been identified. It is assumed for this assessment that the existing Illinois Central Rail Line will not be modified extensively. With that understanding, the soil series underpinning the rail corridor has been documented and no further analysis has been made.

The Hodges Trail Head and Campground (HTH&C) site contains four soil types within the eighty acres owned by the Town of Hodges and proposed for development. The eastern side of the site contains the Rockland Sandstone Series. Rockland sandstone is actually not a series but a land type that is predominantly covered by outcrops of bedrock and by loose stones and boulders. Thirty to ninety percent of the surface is covered with stone fragments and contains slopes of 15 to 35 percent. This land type is very common in Franklin County and practically all of this acreage type is forested and should remain so. "The major forest trees are red, white, and post oaks, black locust, red maple, black cherry, poplar, hickory and loblolly, shortleaf, and Virginia pines (USDA 57)." This type of soil has very severe limitations that make it unsuitable for cultivation. The suggested use is woodland and wildlife only. The engineering properties are not suitable for a road sub-grade, not suitable for a source of topsoil, sand or gravel and not suitable for disposal of waste from septic tanks. It will not serve well as the bed of ponds or reservoirs. This soil series/land type is best left as woodland and would be suitable for a recreational trail that is designed appropriately. This soil series is not suitable for a trail head or campground.

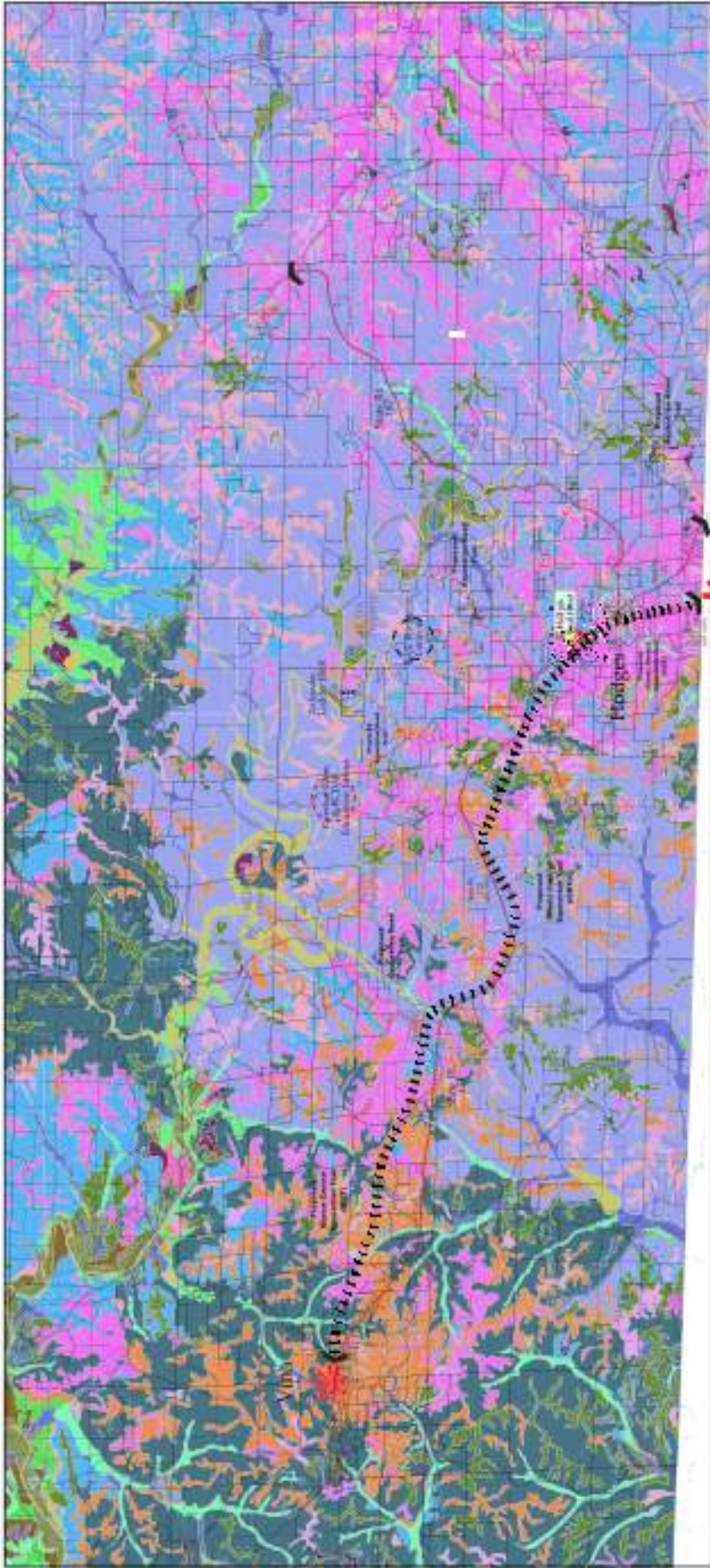


The Guin soil series are strongly sloping and very steep. The soils are gravelly and have excessive drainage. This soil series is the most extensive in Franklin county. "The native vegetation consists chiefly of oak, hickory, poplar, gum, ash, dogwood, maple and pine (USDA 53)." A majority of this acreage in Franklin County is in forests. The mapping units for this soil series range from ten to forty percent slopes and are not suitable for cultivation. The soil series is low in fertility and organic matter, with low moisture capacity. It is recommended that this soil series remain forested with little cultivation. This soil series has a moderate to severe chance of erosion. Gullying of the soil type is likely if disturbed. It is suggested that the area be kept in vegetation, preferably trees. The engineering properties are suitable for road sub-grade and road infill but do not provide good topsoil due to a high content of gravel. This soil series provides a good source of gravel with a very rapid absorption. Due to the rapid absorption, this soil series can be used for septic systems, but it is not recommended that Guin series be developed due to erosion. The Guin series is suitable for a recreational trail. However, the Guin series is not suitable for a trailhead or campground.

The Ruston soil series are deep and well drained and is found in the Coastal Plain area. The vegetation is mostly "post, white, and scarlet oaks, hickory, dogwood, and pine (USDA 57)." Much of the acreage of this soil series has been cleared within Franklin County. There are multiple mapping units for the Ruston series with the slopes ranging from two to fifteen percent. The series is generally well suited to cultivation but can be susceptible to erosion. This soil series is deeply well drained and has little or no erosion to severe erosion if not maintained. The Ruston series is suitable for cultivation but should implement practices that reduce erosion. Fertility for crops ranges high natural fertility to low organic matter requiring needed rotation and fertilization of crops. The engineering properties are suitable for road sub-grade and road infill, and provide good top soil. The Ruston series does not provide good quantities of sand or gravel but is suitable for disposal of waste from septic tanks (providing rapid absorption) (USDA 44).

The final soil series contained on the eighty acre site is the Savannah series. The Savannah is the most predominate series within the eighty acres and will support trail head and campground activities. Savannah soils are nearly level and moderately well drained. The slopes range from zero to ten percent. The vegetation consists of oak, hickory, dogwood and gum with some pine (USDA 59). A majority of the Savannah series has been cleared in Franklin County. The soils are moderately deep that occupy stream terraces, foot slopes and uplands. Surface runoff can cause a moderate to severe erosion and should be managed accordingly. The natural fertility is low and is low in organic matter. "Lack of available moisture is a hazard to crops during dry periods (USDA 13)." The engineering properties are poor for road sub-grade, fair for road infill, and good for topsoil. The Savannah series does not provide good sand or gravel and has a slow absorption rate for disposal of waste from septic systems. This series makes a good embankment for ponds and has moderate infiltration for water holding capacity. The Savannah series needs vegetation along waterways and has a fragipan at 18 to 30 inches (USDA 45). In summary, the Savannah series is the most appropriate to contain the trail head and campground and is best suited in relation to adjacent transportation routes. The Hodges Trail Head and Campground schematic layout takes advantage of the soil series engineering properties. This is done in order to minimize cost environmentally and fiscally.

The Illinois Central Rail Line passes through seven different soils series and two land use types. As previously discussed, it is not expected that the existing rail corridor will be greatly disturbed. Therefore, the soil evaluation for the ICET consisted of a review of the existing soil series within the rail corridor. The soil series are: Savannah, Guin, Ruston, Cuthbert (Luvre) Bibb,



Hodges Economic Development Analysis
Equestrian Trail Feasibility Study
Trail System Soil Types



Soil Name

Ab e rivile	Colb e n	Gairn, (flam ston)	L ink e s, (Nauvoo)	Rock lens, sand sto	Tupe lo
Ab e rivile, (Town)	Colb e n, (Tupe lo)	Gullie d, L, and	M e n n, (W e h	Region, Blam Ruston, (5m	Ud orth e mls
Bib b	Cuth b e n, (L, ue m	H ollywood	Cch lock one e	Saf e ll	W ash r
Case	Cuth b e n, (L, ue m	H ollywood, (Barrie ld)	Orn	Saravach	
Caprina, (L e ad val	De catur	H uttington, (5m ory Pond	Ph is, m, ing	Sch ck e m	
	Dove Iron, (K e tone)	Luk e	Ph e rtile	Talb ott, (8e m lap)	
	Dumling, (K e tone)	L ind sid e, (Ch e mbe b	Ram as y	Thid e n, (Oba)	
	Gre e nville, (L, uce	L ink e r	Rock lens, (lim e		



NOV0010 Farmar Associates

Cuthbert, and Greenville (Lucedale). The two land use types are Rockland-sandstone and Gullied Land.

The trails linking the recreational assets also contain many different soil series. These soils like those contained in the ICET trail will be able to support equestrians if the trails are constructed properly. A majority of the asset trails follow existing county roads. However, an exception lies within the outer loop along the edge of the Bear Creek Development Authority (BCDA) property. It should be noted that this property is owned by the BCDA and is managed in conjunction with the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). There are sensitive landscapes along the proposed asset trails within the BCDA property. Further investigation should be completed during design development for the proposed trails within the BCDA property and all identified spur trails linking local recreational assets. Proper trail construction with switch backs, turn pikes, and boardwalks will resolve a majority of environmental conflicts. Within the BCDA the trail easement should be a minimum of 50' with a preferred 100' wide easement. This width will allow for greater flexibility in trail design when encountering sensitive wildlife habitat. In addition, environmentally sensitive landscapes provide opportunities to educate trail users on local and regional ecology.

Water Resources

Water resources along equestrian trails provide interest to trail users and a source of needed water to horses. A careful balance of the local ecosystem and the trail users must be maintained. Interactions with water along the proposed trail system occur at a minimum of seventeen times. The crossing of intermittent streams are defined here as an interactions. Each crossing will be subject to site-specific requirements. Water crossings along the trail system will vary in intensity. Formal construction of bridges should be avoided, based on the preferences of equestrian riders for fording slow moving water and the unfamiliarity of stock with bridges. If the water is less than three feet deep, a site should be selected with stable sand or a gravel base. If a proper ford is not available, then a soil covered culvert is the most preferred. Bridges should be constructed only if the water is over three feet or a proper crossing cannot be determined.

The environmental impact of the Hodges equestrian trail system has yet to be fully evaluated. A complete environmental impact statement (EIS) should be done for each of the three components prior to each component's development. The greatest environmental impact may occur along the southern boundary of the Bear Creek Development Authority (BCDA) property. The HTH&C component consists of eighty acres that will have a relatively low impact and contains suitable soils for development. Finally, the ICET is developed within the existing Illinois Central Railroad corridor and will have minimal impact on the existing ecosystem. Where moderate environmental impact may exist, there should be measures taken in trail construction to reduce such impact. Examples include the use of geotechnical fabrics to eliminate sub-base migration back into the sub-grade of the trail tread.

Trail Routing and Points of Interest

Points of interest along a trail should act as anchor points for trail layout. Trails should go past significant landforms, forest types, land use types, scenic vistas, ponds and lakes. The trail should avoid obstacles such as archeological sites, areas of boulders, significant species habitat, gorges, steep slopes, cliffs, wetlands, and historic or cultural sites. These obstacles can be expensive to navigate and cross.

Existing recreational trails and logging paths should be followed where available. Use of existing trails and roads must be evaluated for use by equestrian riders. Conflicts between equestrians and current uses should be identified and mitigated. Where use of rural roads or crossing of existing highways are unavoidable then appropriate measures should be taken. These measures consist of crossing gates and signs placed to notify vehicles and riders of potential conflicts.

Regulatory agencies governing the three components of the Hodges Trail System include The Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM), Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Army Corps of Engineers (Nashville), Illinois Central Railroad, Franklin County Commission, Alabama Department of Public Health, Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT), Bear Creek Development Authority (BCDA), Franklin County Road Department, Town of Hodges, and the Town of Vina. Each of these entities will play a key role in the success and development of the Hodges Equestrian Trail System. Discussion and contact with each of these entities must begin prior to initiating trail system development.

Equestrian Trail Demand & Economic Benefits

Economic benefits are generated by trail users, who buy local equipment, supplies and services, eat in local restaurants, stay in motels and campgrounds and purchase local crafts. In turn the trail demand is created by local, regional, and interstate riders, who come to use the trail system. "The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that Alabama has 1.8 million households in 2005 (Whiting 7)." Out of these households 4.9 percent owned, rented or leased horses in the State of Alabama (Whiting 7). This estimate indicates that eighty-nine thousand households have horses in Alabama.

It is difficult to accurately count the total potential riders for the Hodges Trail System and it is even more difficult to predict the economic impact once the trail is completed. This prediction must take into account the unique nature of the Hodges Trail System to downtown Hodges and the woodland setting in which most of the trail is placed. Initial investigations did not provide accurate information for determining the economic impact for a single use trail system located in a rural community. Taking these factors into account, the Hodges Equestrian Trail survey was prepared. A potential trail user list came from local and regional equestrian clubs that have a stake in the system. This survey was then used to collect information to assess the potential economic impact to the Hodges Equestrian Trail System.

Equestrian riders were surveyed by phone and asked a series of sixteen questions. In addition, regional equestrian

campgrounds were contacted by phone. Riders and trail system owners estimated that they ride for three to four days at a time with a daily economic expenditure of \$125.00 dollars per day. Expenditures incurred include fuel, tack, horse feed, snacks, lodging, trail fees, camping fees, clothing and souvenirs. Distances traveled ranged from two to eight hours in order to reach a trail destination. Frequency of trail rides was two to three times per year. If a rider participates in a four-day ride twice per year then the economic impact to the trail system is \$1,000.00 at \$125.00 per day, assuming an overall economic impact of \$500.00 per trail ride or event. A majority of riders surveyed (within and outside the State of Alabama) indicate travel to Hodges for a trail ride would be within reason.

Feasibility Conclusions

The preceding analysis indicates a number of suitable locations for the developments proposed in the Equestrian Trails Plan. With respect to site suitability, the arrangement, slope and soils of Hodges and Franklin County are acceptable for the development of trails. With respect to the availability of property for trails development, the existing Hodges' town property is available and suitable for development as a recreational trailhead. Development of additional spur trails along existing right-of-way for county roads will require acceptance of the plan by county officials, appropriate design and installation of crossing safety features and signage, and improvements to shoulders in some areas along the trail; however, low population density and connectivity with other key assets is high along these routes, and they are appropriately surfaced along much of the trail route. Accessing BCDA property will require agreement among members of the BCDA board of directors and will require an additional impact assessment in order to more thoroughly gauge the environmental impact of the trails system. However, with appropriate trail design, including routing and management, the environmental impact will be minimized, which indicates a generally good overall feasibility for accessing BCDA property. Likewise, the Illinois Central Rail line provides a highly suitable location for the proposed development. Acquisition of the Illinois Central Rail line will require significant investment of time and resources, but the overall feasibility is good. Altogether, the suitability and availability of property in and around Hodges, Alabama presents a sound environment for pursuing a development strategy focusing on recreational, and in particular equestrian, trails.

Financial feasibility is a more difficult task to establish. Judging from the preceding analysis, potential impact from activity associated with an equestrian trails system is estimated to be \$125 per day or approximately \$500 per event. The frequency of visits to the trails system and the projected cost of development are elusive. The most difficult portion of development costs to estimate is property acquisition, due to uncertain land prices and legal costs. An assumed development cost of approximately \$3.5 million dollars is used in the following calculations; but this figure represents a "cash only" project. As discussed more thoroughly in the upcoming section on implementation, effective mobilization and volunteer support for the project may significantly reduce costs.

Assuming full development and a modest weekly visitation of 5 day-riders ($5 \times \$125 = \625) and 5 overnight visits ($5 \times \$250 = \1250), the overall impact of the trail would be \$1875 per week, exclusive of multiplier effects. According to some estimates, multiplier effects from the horse industry in Alabama are as high as 1.9 (Guthrie 36), bringing the total impact up to \$5437.50 per week ($\$1875 \times 1.9 = \$3562.50 + \1875). Under such a scenario, where a high-end estimate of cost is \$3.5 million, total economic activity equivalent to the initial investment would be generated in just over 12 years. Naturally, any public funds invested in the project would be returned at a lower rate, and the benefits would not likely accrue uniformly; however, the overall level of economic activity associated with even a small projected visitation rate appears to support the overall viability of the project. Expressed in other terms, tourism industries produce approximately 1 job per \$80,872 in expenditures according to one recent study of Alabama's tourism (Economic Impact 1). Over one year, then, this modest rate of visitation would sustain an additional 3 to 4 jobs.

This "cash only" development scenario presents a conservative view of the returns from a trail system, however, given the likelihood of volunteer community involvement in the funding and implementation of the project, and the likelihood of program revenues resulting from the operations and management of the trails. Additionally, secondary social benefits and private investment metrics are not calculated, but are understood to be important benefits of the proposed developments. Finding ways to reduce costs and increase ridership through effective mobilization and coordination of constituents and riders will increase the benefits to cost ratio significantly.

D. Implementing the Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan

Typically, a development will go through several stages on the way from a general idea or concept to a concrete development. Initial planning leads to defined goals and objectives (The Hodges Economic Development Study) and a schematic design that shows how all of the conceptual elements fit together (included in The Equestrian Trails Master Plan, Part B., above). In subsequent stages, detailed construction drawings are made, bids are taken- if necessary, and construction begins. Finally, the finished improvement is opened for business.

So, which of these events comes next for the Hodges Equestrian Trails System? Obviously there are some key milestones and activities that have to take place before construction begins on the Hodges trails system- property must be secured, money and effort must be arranged for construction. And throughout the project's implementation, appropriate phasing of developments must occur to create steady, growing demand, build a good reputation, and a quality recreational product. This section of the plan describes the options for these next steps and some of the tools available for reaching benchmarks in the development of the Hodges Equestrian Trails System.

Benchmarks & Phasing of Development

Developing the trails network outlined in the Equestrian Trails Plan will not be an easy task, but it is far from impossible as long as the overall proposal is broken down into smaller steps. The most important considerations are taking one step at a time, not being dragged down by the enormity of the project, and remembering that each step forward builds toward the 'big picture' and will help achieve overall project goals- in this case, economic development. Plotting out exactly which steps should occur next is no easy task, however. Therefore, the phases of development are listed below as benchmarks that are roughly prioritized. These benchmarks are not rigid steps to take in order; many will proceed at the same time or out of order, which is fine. By the same token, the range of options for developing any element included in the trails plan precludes a comprehensive, step-by-step narrative for implementation, but some steps will undoubtedly be necessary before others are possible. Taken all together, these rough benchmarks present the outline of a simple action plan for implementing the Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan.

The "First Fifteen"

If a days' ride is on average 10 to 25 miles, then the first fifteen miles of trail are perhaps the most important. Although not long enough to accommodate a longer distance ride (usually 25+ miles) without covering the same trail portion more than once, fifteen miles is a functional unit for phasing trail improvements. With 15 miles of trails in place, Hodges can sustain visitors looking for a day ride. Within each length of trail, appropriate design will include provisions for trail layout, crossings, signage, and rest areas for riders- complete with watering stations. The location of the first few miles of trails will depend heavily on the availability of property. County roads connect to the trail head and are a good place to start. After all, these roads are already being ridden! With the support of the County and appropriate signage, several spur trails could be developed to provide a safer route for residents and visitors both. Additional development should follow a rule of thumb regarding fifteen miles as a functional measure of a days' ride, with facilities developed according to the demand for services present with each additional length of trail.

Hodges Trail Head (Phase I)

Once enough trails are in place to begin to draw visitors to Hodges, there will be a need for parking arrangements at the proposed trail head. In the earliest phase, the area will need a gravel surface sufficient in size for parking a few trailers at a time. Subsequently, a paved parking area for passenger vehicles will be needed, but at the earliest stages of development an elaborate parking area will probably not be necessary.

One of the most important improvements at this time will be the installation of water facilities at the trailhead. Again, elaborate improvements are probably not necessary at this time, but having water on site and available to visitors will be important from the start. Having restroom facilities available as early as possible will help to solidify the trail head as a point of departure.

Trail Management Plan

A trail management plan will be needed to spell out the rules governing the use of the trail, the responsibilities of riders, and the responsibility of various partners for the maintenance and operation of the trail. The management plan will consist of documentation of adopted policies, formal agreements between responsible parties, and other arrangements deemed necessary to the operations and maintenance of the trails network. It should be kept as an up-to-date record of all of the necessary arrangements for the recreational trails network and should be updated as necessary to reflect changes in the extent of trails or responsibilities of parties.

The Hodges Trail System will require multi-jurisdictional trail and maintenance considerations due to the number of entities involved in its development- BCDA, acquired property, county roads, and land owned by the Town of Hodges. When drafting the operations and maintenance schedule and budget, ways to leverage and expand existing capacity should be closely considered. Maintenance activities should follow the finalized development of each of the trail system components. Some of the maintenance activities are: repair of eroding or damaged trails, replace damaged or missing signs, repaint worn pavement markings, trimming of shrubs on trails and trail head, mowing of trails and trail head, removal of trash, cleaning of ditches and

drainage areas, cleaning and repair of rest rooms, inspection of structures, removal of fallen trees, spraying for weed control, cleaning and replacing lights, and removal of graffiti along trail and at the trail head. Each of these maintenance items should be categorized for priority. Safety of trail users should take priority over all other maintenance objectives. After the maintenance activities are identified then the last step is to complete a maintenance schedule that requires systematic completion of maintenance.

The maintenance plan should also include budgetary components for each element of Hodges Equestrian Trail System. The maintenance plan should evaluate existing costs from other trails within the southeast based on a cost per mile for the trails and a general cost for campground amenities. A review of the sample budget structure and bookkeeping methods will assist in an accurate trail operations and maintenance schedule.

Local Trail Riders' Association

The establishment of a local trail riders' association will be an important benchmark for the development of the trails network. The Association can be a vital resource for the development, construction, and advocacy of the areas' trails system. The association should be separate from any non-profit organization established to own the trails. It can consist of any members or other membership organizations interested in helping with the financial or physical labors associated with trails construction and maintenance. A trail riders' association will also be a valuable source of ridership for the new trails system. After all, with time and commitment invested in creating and operating the trails, such a group is likely to be very interested in its use!

Acquisition of the Illinois Central Rail Line

The acquisition of the Illinois Central rail line, in whole or in part, will be a major step in the development of the recreational trails network. As shown on the Master Plan, the rail line forms the central column from which spur trails are routed to connect to features in and around Hodges. Although acquisition in whole is preferred, partial acquisition from Hodges to Vina will supply sufficient property for initial development. The abandoned rail in Franklin County appears to belong to the Norfolk Southern Railroad with the exception of the corridor through Vina, which appears to end on the east side of Vina and pick back up on the other side of town.

In acquiring property for the development of the trails network, there are four methods commonly used. The first is to receive the abandoned rail line as a conveyance directly from the railroad. The second is to purchase the rail line directly from the railroad. The third is to rail bank the land as the railroad abandons the property. This is done in accordance with Section 8(d) of the National Trails System Act, which permits acquiring the line without regard to underlying easements or leases. "Rail banking essentially intercepts the abandonment intent, preserves the corridor for trail use, and gives the railroad company the right to return in the future and force a sale of the corridor back to the railroad (Sendich 635)." This option does leave the opportunity for a forced sale of the rail to become active again. The fourth option consists of acquiring the abandoned rail line and reassembling the properties from the adjacent property owners. This option can be time consuming and expensive but does not apply in cases where the property is held by a single owner. No matter what method is utilized, a significant title search and legal opinion will be necessary to complete the property transaction required for the acquisition.

Hodges Trail Head (Phase II and Beyond)

The second phase of development for the Hodges Trail Head will likely involve surfacing passenger vehicle parking areas, expanding day riders' parking areas, landscaping and the installation of an informational kiosk. Internal trails will be desirable at this phase also, providing access to amenities throughout the trail head.

Bear Creek Development Authority Environmental Impact Study (EIS)

The Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan proposes equestrian trails to be routed along a 100' corridor adjacent to the outermost property line of the Bear Creek Development Authority (BCDA) property. Under arrangements with the Tennessee Valley Authority, any of this property will be required to undergo a thorough environmental assessment prior to development in order to determine sensitive ecology and culturally significant locations along the corridor. The proposed corridor crosses land managed under TVA's land management plan in one area, and adequate precautions will be required in order to resolve potential conflicts. The EIS is an important step toward resolving issues related to the development of the BCDA portion of trails.

Acquisition of Additional Development Rights

The Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan presents trails that are found on four main types of property: public land owned by the Town of Hodges, land within the Illinois Central rail corridor, Franklin County roads, land managed by the Bear Creek Development Authority, and private property. Previous discussions elaborate on all but private properties, which are involved only along spur trails insofar as possible. The majority of spur trails attempt to take advantage of existing right-of-way along county roads. Before a trail entity begins purchasing private property for the spur trails owners should be asked for donations because previous trails projects indicate that as many as 30% of owners will voluntarily offer up property or development rights. Solicitation of property should be done on an individual basis with publications on tax deductions and tax credit benefits. A Real Estate attorney and tax advisor should be consulted prior to making any acquisitions of property.

In addition to outright purchase, other methods of acquiring access to property for recreational trails consist of easements, revocable permits and licenses. These legal tools for property allow for use of property without obtaining full

ownership. A trail easement secures the right of public access and use and must be stated in the easement. A license allows access for a period of time with an option of both parties to renew at the end of that period. Railroads and other entities may prefer a license to a complete granting of property. A minimum of ten years should be required with a ninety-nine year license preferred. A revocable permit allows the property owner to withdraw rights of access if certain conditions are met. An example would be the rail corridor returning to rail use or the trail not being properly maintained. A revocable permit should be the last option for property acquisition of a recreational trail.

Hodges Campground (Phase I and Beyond)

With enough trails in place to support rides extending over multiple days, the recreational trails network can begin to support the development of campsites in accordance with the Master Plan. Again, phased development is recommended, with camp sites being offered in a number sufficient to support demand- and a little beyond. Maintaining quality of each campsite throughout the development of the campground will be vital to the success of the program. Amenities and spacing should be observed in order to meet the needs of users and ensure a high quality experience. The management plan should include- or be expanded to include- provisions for the new camp sites, including fee schedules, rules for use of campgrounds, and property maintenance.

Retail Establishments

The ultimate goal of the Hodges Economic Development Study and the Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan is very straightforward- to create a destination for trail riders to visit and thereby to create additional economic opportunity in Hodges. Local businesses will likely experience increased sales as a result of new visitors to Hodges. Equally importantly in the long run, however, will be the establishment of new retail offerings in Hodges- either from existing locations or new, specialty shops. The development of new specialties will be particularly important for efforts to revitalize downtown Hodges. Even if only open part time, a new feed or tack store could supply the needs of visitors. Meanwhile, specialty gifts and restaurants might be successful in a location with a steady supply of visitors. This long term strategy for retail development and will focus on incremental improvements in order to maximize opportunities for success. Throughout the implementation of the development strategy, ensuring a high degree of connectivity by street, trail, and sidewalk into downtown Hodges will help to facilitate new retail in the area. Additionally, festivals and trail activities should be concentrated in downtown Hodges to encourage visitation. A separate strategy for downtown revitalization should be considered to be implemented along with the Equestrian Trails Plan in order to focus revitalization efforts in a similar manner.

Assets for Implementation

The most significant assets for implementing the Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan are **strong leadership**, a network of **volunteer resources**, and a successful **financial strategy**. The improvements suggested in the Equestrian Trails Master Plan will not be constructed overnight; they will not be immediately recognizable as a significant trails system; they will not be immediately profitable; nor can they be funded through public financial opportunities alone. Long-term leadership and commitment will be essential to the project in order to slowly build a resource base in support of the project. Volunteers will be essential to the construction of much of the trails network and will be a major part of its ridership. And, due to the large scope and cost of developing the trails system, multiple financial resources will be required to coordinate together. In the end, the feasibility of the Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan will be as reliant upon establishing and expanding capacity as favorable physical conditions.

Leadership

Leadership can be a man or woman with a vision, or it can be a group of individuals with a goal in mind. In any case, leadership is found where individual(s) come together for a shared purpose and are dedicated to making things happen in the long run. In Hodges, local elected officials have taken a leadership role in electing to conduct an analysis of the town's goals and to create a strategy for achieving those goals. Going forward, the most effective leadership may be elected officials from Hodges, or a partnership of many elected officials, or a partnership between elected officials and private citizens, or from within a group of interested trail riders, or even from a single individual with the ability to effectively coordinate others. The essential qualities of leadership are a strong interest and desire to understand the project, its stakeholders' and constituents' concerns, and the ability to coordinate resources. In the end, leadership can come from many quadrants, but a strong leader or network of closely coordinated leaders will be needed to work with different public and private constituencies to make the Hodges Equestrian Trails System a reality.

Volunteerism

A network of volunteers willing to take on the Hodges Equestrian Trails as a project for their use and enjoyment will be vital to the implementation of this plan. Without this ready-made pool of labor, donations, and ridership, the trails system will have a difficult time becoming reality or sustaining itself. People committed to improving the trail- in large part so that they can enjoy it themselves- is the strongest capacity available to the plan. Making the appropriate connections to this constituency, empowering it to make important decisions about the trail, and involving it in the trails' construction and maintenance will all be important steps toward ensuring that the finished product is user-friendly, well-maintained, and that riders are aware of and support the trails. Often times, such groups can speed up the process of developing trails considerably, while creating a built-in

support and stewardship network for the trails system.

Financial Strategies

A multi-faceted and complex development proposal such as the Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan is likely to include numerous funding sources and opportunities. At the outset, it is vitally important to realize that public financing alone will not be sufficient to implement the trails plan. A mixture of resources, including foundations, private funds, donations, in-kind labor and material contributions, matching funds, grants, and development finance tools will be needed. Each tool comes with its own unique project requirements and "strings" attached. A successful financial strategy will navigate this sea of resources to effectively employ opportunities, minimize conflicts, and maximize results in terms of riders' use and enjoyment of the trails.

The following section briefly describes a number of financial resources and offers a discussion of the potential use of funds for functional elements of the overall trail, where appropriate.

Federal Highway Administration Programs: FHWA has two main programs that support the development of recreational trails and rails-to-trails programs. These are the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), administered through the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, and Transportation Enhancement (TE) program administered by ALDOT. Both programs require matching funds (20% has been typical under prior authorizations) and are subject to re-authorization in future federal transportation legislation.

Other Federal Programs: A number of other federal programs have been established that can assist with the development of recreational facilities, campgrounds, and economic development-related proposals. These include Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), the Urban and Community Forest Program (UCF), which currently being redesigned; and Public Works and Economic Development (PWED) administered by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration. Each program varies with respect to its eligibility, matching share requirements, restrictions on use of funds, and administering agency.

Brownfields and Wetlands Programs: In many cases railroads are subject to brownfields and wetlands programs as a result of their use and design. Through many years of industrial use, many abandoned lines are under-utilized due to suspected contamination (i.e. are brownfields sites). Often the routing of railroads passed through wetland areas with little or no mitigation, allowing the use of wetlands program funds for some projects.

State Resources: Alabama's Forever Wild Program, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, can provide funding for conservation related activities in the State of Alabama. The Bear Creek Development Authority (BCDA) is a state-chartered agency responsible for managing recreational holdings around the nearby Bear Creek Lakes. BCDA support for trails will be a vitally important part of the development of the overall trails network.

Local Public Financing Options: Public financing options include bonds, tax-increment financing, special sales and use taxes and tax districts, and other creative means for leveraging assets to implement the trails plan. Each of these measures in some way leverages future revenue gains for immediate capital for investment. The advice of legal counsel is required to ascertain the appropriate use of such funds in most cases.

Private Financing Options: Donations and fund raisers can be a significant source of contributions to the development of a recreational trails system. These sources typically can be leveraged with less overhead cost, strings attached, and administrative requirements than other sources (particularly grant sources). Often times, donations from individual supporters and private foundations can be quite substantial sources of development funds. Researching and corresponding with such foundations can be time-consuming, but often fruitful, endeavors. Finally, program revenues from user fees collected for use of trails and campground facilities can be applied to the development of improvements where they are in excess of operation and maintenance costs.

Conclusion

The Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan is a long-term growth and development strategy for Hodges and Franklin County that is deeply rooted in the assets and conditions that create a favorable environment to develop a recreational trails network and encourage recreational tourism opportunities. The inventory and analysis presented by this plan concludes that recreational trails will be economically and environmentally feasible in Hodges and surrounding areas of the county when they are 1) constructed in sustainable phases, 2) are appropriately sited and designed to accommodate local terrain, and 3) are installed in sufficient trail lengths to support a variety of equestrian activities. Additionally, the Equestrian Trails Plan concludes that the proposed development will provide viable opportunity for increasing economic activity in Hodges and opportunities for improving the condition of the traditional downtown. While significant, long-term investment and management is required for the proposed development to be a complete success, ample opportunities exist along the way for community action and engagement and volunteer support. The successful implementation of the Equestrian Trails Plan will create partnerships that view trails development as an incremental, step-at-a-time process and as series of opportunities to improve and build upon existing assets.

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