

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# Corridor Management Plan for the

# Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Murray and Whitfield Counties are contiguous, share many common characteristics and were created from former Cherokee County land. The Georgia Land Lottery of 1832 officially designated the area as Murray County. In the mid 1830s, the state of Georgia purchased right-of-way to construct the Western and Atlantic Railroad that would connect Atlanta to the north. The town of Cross Plains, a small settlement located on the selected route would eventually become the city of Dalton, the Whitfield County Seat. After numerous delays, the railroad to Chattanooga was completed in 1850. The railroad connection made settlement in the area more attractive and the population near it began to increase. In 1851, land was carved from Murray County that included the railroad and named Whitfield County.

Both Whitfield and Murray county governments had separately determined that implementing appropriate Land Use Management practices was of the utmost importance in order to protect the rural beauty of these two counties. As part of the Comprehensive Planning process, both had also listed the creation of a Georgia Scenic Byway as a future goal. At a Scenic Byway workshop jointly conducted by the Georgia Department of Transportation and the Region 1 Advisory Council, representatives from these two counties discovered this mutual goal and decided to investigate the possibility of a joint route.

## II. VISION

A Byway Steering Committee comprised of representatives from both Whitfield and Murray Counties and potential sponsoring agencies was formed to identify a potential route. The next step was to have the identified route preliminarily approved by the Georgia Department of Transportation's Scenic Byway Coordinator. An application was submitted and approved by the Georgia Department of Transportation's Board of Directors for the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway. The Byway Steering Committee created the following vision for the byway: **“The vision for the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway is to enhance, preserve, and raise the recognition of the mountain and rural beauty through local leadership that generates pride among the community.”** They then helped form the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan Committee. This committee was made up of owners of property located along the byway who began meeting in October 2002.

## III. GOALS & OBJECTIVES

At a meeting held on January 31, 2003 the Corridor Management Committee created the following Goals & Objectives for the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway:

- Goal 1:** To maintain the safe use of the byway for all traffic.
  - ✓ develop additional rest stops and pull off areas
- Goal 2:** To encourage public-private partnerships that will expand and enhance the landscape of the byway.

- ✓ reintroduce additional native plant materials
- ✓ utilize professional and community organizations to develop joint projects
- Goal 3:** To preserve cultural and natural resources along the byway.
  - ✓ ensure that economic and recreational development not detract from the scenic qualities of the byway.
  - ✓ determine the links that join various people and cultures along the byway
  - ✓ To designate a committee/group to monitor and maintain the rural character of the route
- Goal 4:** To inventory byway resources such as: scenic vistas, historic sites, cultural heritage and environmental assets.
  - ✓ Identify all existing resources
- Goal 5:** To encourage interactive activities along the byway.
  - ✓ add to the byways diversity by increasing transportation usage patterns such as bicycle, equestrian, and pedestrian trails
- Goal 6:** To increase awareness and visitation to public sites.
  - ✓ provide good byway interpretation and marketing techniques to local and out of town visitors
  - ✓ manage tourism growth in a manner that lessens the impact to the daily routines and traditional cultures of the byway
- Goal 7:** To utilize the byway as a vehicle to increase tourism in Whitfield and Murray Counties.
  - ✓ develop measurable economic development data

Copies of all minutes generated by the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway Corridor Management Committee are included in Appendix B.

#### **IV. SCENIC BYWAY INTRINSIC QUALITIES INVENTORY**

The purpose of a scenic byway is to preserve the natural beauty along the designated route. A written description of the route is as follows:

**Section 1** – Hwy. 52 west from scenic overlook on Fort Mountain (across from Dalton Antique store) to Holly Creek Cool Springs Road

**Section 2** – Holly Creek Cool Springs Road to Old CCC Camp Road

**Section 3** – Spur right on Old CCC Camp Road to picnic area in National Forest

**Section 4** – Old CCC Camp Road to Crandall – Ellijay Road

**Section 5** – Crandall – Ellijay Road to Summerour Road

**Section 6** – Summerour Road to Highway 2

**Section 7** – Highway 2 to Prater’s Mill

**Section 8** – Prater’s Mill, Hwy. 2 to Crow Road to McGaughey Chapel Road

**Section 9** – McGaughey Chapel Rd. to Cohutta-Beaverdale Rd. to Hopewell Road

**Section 10** – Hopewell Road to Old Dalton-Cleveland Rd. to Stancil Road

**Section 11** – Stancil Road to Wilson Caldwell Road to Red Clay Road

**Section 12** – Red Clay Road to Cohutta Fish Hatchery

A byway can be designated under one or more of the six “intrinsic qualities” defined by the Federal Highway Administration. The National Scenic Byways Program defines intrinsic qualities as “features that are considered representative, unique, irreplaceable or distinctly characteristic of an area.” The six intrinsic qualities are: Scenic Quality, Natural Quality, Historic Quality, Cultural Quality, Archeological Quality and Recreational Quality. The Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway contains rolling pastoral land and breathtaking mountain views and possesses all six intrinsic qualities. The route will take the visitor from the cultural picturesque heritage of Prater’s Mill with an agricultural landscape to a mountain vista skyline of the Cohutta Mountains, into the Chattahoochee National Forest and up the winding road to Fort Mountain State Park. Portions of Georgia Highway 411 and 52 that are along the byway are also part of the Southern Highroads Trail. These same Georgia highways are also included in the east-west corridor known as the Appalachian Foothill Parkway. The many resources located along the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway that fit into each intrinsic quality category are:

### **Scenic Qualities**



In the distant horizon along the Whitfield County portion of the route visitors can observe the Ridge and Valley Province of the Appalachian Highlands, with elevations of 1,000 - 1,600 feet, and along the Murray County portion the Chattahoochee National Forest with elevations ranging from 1,200 - 2,800 feet.

Traveling along GA Hwy 52 atop Fort Mountain one experiences spectacular panoramic views of the mountains in the Cohutta Wilderness area. The Holly Creek area spur offers picturesque views of farmland with mountains in the background. The spur contains scenic river and creek crossings that meander into the Chattahoochee National Forest.



The Conasauga River is the main water body located along the route. It flows north to northwesterly into Tennessee before turning south and flowing back into the flat valley of the Coosa Valley Basin headwaters, forming the boundary between Whitfield and Murray Counties. Coahulla Creek and Holly Creek, tributaries of the Conasauga River, also flow along the route.



### **Natural Qualities**

Visitors will have the opportunity to experience untouched forest areas undisturbed by man, unique geologic formations on Fort Mountain, several tributaries such as the Conasauga River, Cohutta Creek, abundant natural vegetation, and opportunities for viewing wildlife. The Conasauga River is famous for its biodiversity with over 90 types of fish habitats and 42 kinds of mussel species.



Native species that may be seen along the route are: deer, black bears, bobcat, fox, woodchuck, coyote, rabbits, squirrels, deer, opossum, beaver, muskrat, raccoon, and bat. There are also various species of birds present in both counties such as: quail, waterfowl, doves, hawks, crows and owls. The route will provide travelers with a visual experience of life as it was in early Appalachia with the extensive practice of agriculture.



The Cohutta Fishery Center, one of the proposed trailheads, contains a museum with 10 tanks displaying the aquatic habitat located in the surrounding water bodies. Another feature along the route is the Southeastern Aquatic Research Institute Laboratory (SARI) owned by the Tennessee Aquarium. These biologists study 12 species of animals that are considered threatened or endangered from the Conasauga River. This team of biologists work to reproduce these species in a controlled facility that enables the scientists to reintroduce them safely back into their natural river environment.

According to the Murray County, Chatsworth and Eton Joint Comprehensive Plan, Murray County holds approximately 50,297 acres of the 741,000 acre Chattahoochee National Forest. The Cohutta Wilderness Area is a federal wilderness area located in the Chattahoochee National Forest, which are located along the route. The national forest boundary extends along the byway from Cisco on Highway 411 to Highway 52. This wilderness area contains approximately 35,268 acres located in several counties

such as Murray, Fannin and Gilmer. The area contains over 90 hiking trails and the elevations range from 850 ft. to 4,200 feet.

Currently in natural areas along the byway there are several preservation and conservation efforts underway. The Conasauga River Alliance (CRA), consists of citizens, government agencies and conservation groups that regularly conduct water quality improvement programs in the Conasauga Watershed. A specific example is the Conasauga Watershed Adopt-a-Stream program. Through this program the public is educated on non-point source pollution by assisting citizens in collecting water quality data. Whitfield County also has an Adopt-a-Stream public education program that utilizes water quality data collection and the formation of various partnerships.



The US Forest Service and the Nature Conservancy are partnering with the Conasauga River Alliance by providing technical and financial support. The Keep Dalton/Whitfield Beautiful agency assists The National Conservancy with river-clean-ups and performs visual surveys for litter removal. The University of Georgia, Institute of Ecology is collecting data on the health of aquatic species in the Conasauga Watershed.

Greenspace plans have been adopted in both Whitfield and Murray Counties to preserve natural resources, including rivers and creeks, and passive recreation. According to the Whitfield County greenspace plan the following are protection efforts that pertain to the scenic byway:

- 1) Approximately 11,700 acres (6.3% of the County's total land area) of the Armuchee District of the Chattahoochee National Forest lie within the County and are considered permanently protected open space.
- 2) Approximately 13,133 acres (7.1% of Whitfield County's total land mass) of flood plains along the Conasauga River, and Mill, Coahulla, Swamp, Little Swamp, Drowning Bear and other Creeks;
- 3) Approximately 3,431 acres (1.8% of Whitfield County's total land mass) of land in the Prater's Mill, Hurricane Valley, Redwine Cove, and Red Clay areas, and land associated with the Blue Hole near Varnell.

## Ten-Year Strategy to Achieve Whitfield County's Goal

The joint Comprehensive Plan contains all of the Greenspace Plan provisions. Whitfield County has begun the process to amend their zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations in order to incorporate greenspace preservation standards. Zoning Ordinances will also be amended to allow for the clustering of development uses in exchange for the preservation of greenspace in areas designated in Whitfield County's Greenspace Plan. Whitfield County has established the State's Part V Minimum Environmental Protection Standards and will incorporate these into zoning ordinances applying to groundwater recharge areas, water supply watersheds, wetlands, protected rivers and steep slopes. They will also study the feasibility of implementing Transfer Development Rights provisions as authorized by Georgia Code Section 36-66A-1.

Other tools that Whitfield County will use to achieve their goal are:

Fee simple acquisition: Fee simple acquisition will be reserved for areas of greatest sensitivity and where provision of public access is of concern.

Conservation easements: It is anticipated that conservation easements will be used for the majority of the remaining land designated as greenspace, especially for land, which owners want to retain to pass to their descendants in an undeveloped state.

In Murray County there will be approximately 4,423 acres of land intended to be set aside for greenspace. There is no land known to be under permanent protection, except for that included in the Chattahoochee National Forest (51,630 acres) and Fort Mountain State Park (3,520 acres). Much of the County's land is still rural and included flood plains, forested and agricultural areas. It is the intent of elected officials and community leaders to conserve as much of the County's rural character as possible, while accommodating future development through carefully planned growth and preservation.

Currently in Murray County, The Trust for Public Land is working with property owners and government officials to purchase any land surrounding Chief Van House that will serve the appropriate historic context. They propose to keep in permanent greenspace an additional 2% of their land beyond the 54,880 acres already permanently protected.

- 1) Proposed to preserve approximately 15% of the 100-year floodplain.
- 2) Will permanently protect 3,760 acres of the 100-year floodplain, 44 acres of archaeological and historic sites, 442 acres of historic and prime farmland, and 177 acres of parkland both proposed and existing.

Tools that Murray County will use to permanently protect greenspace. The primary tools will include conservation easements, fee simple purchase, deed restrictions and conservation subdivision design. Temporary protection measures include zoning, archaeological and historic overlays and Part V Minimum Environmental Protection Standards.

## Historic Qualities

There are several historic resources located in each county and along the route. Prater's Mill, one of the trailheads of the route in Whitfield County, is a major historic structure in the North Georgia Mountains. Benjamin Franklin Prater built the mill in 1855, which includes hundreds of acres of farmland that were used to produce corn, oats, wool, wheat, and cotton. The mill was used to process wheat into flour and animal feed. Mr. Prater expanded his operation by building a cotton gin, syrup mill, general store, saw mill and blacksmith's shop. During the Civil War the mill served as a campsite to Confederate and Union soldiers. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Prater's Mill is one of the few mills still working in Georgia. The State of Georgia has expressed an interest in acquiring Prater's Mill as one of their state historic sites.



Another historic resource that is in close proximity to the byway is the railroad tunnel in Tunnel Hill. Tunnel Hill is approximately 9 miles from Prater's Mill, just off Hwys. 201 and 41. Construction began in 1848, it opened in 1850 and it is the oldest railroad tunnel south of the Mason-Dixon Line. It's historical significance lies in two areas:

1. The tunnel opened the door for east-west trade to Chattanooga and the Tennessee River. The nearby Clisby Austin house was also used as a mountain retreat for visitors from South Georgia and South Alabama. The natural spring on the property provided a cool place for folks to relieve themselves of the effects of the heat and humidity.
2. The railroad was a major source of transportation during the Civil War, especially to transport supplies. It was also on the route of the Great Locomotive Train Chase. General Sherman also headquartered briefly at the Clisby Austin house while planning the Atlanta Campaign after the Battle of Chickamauga.





Currently, the tunnel is under restoration, and has been completed enough for visitors to walk through. Presently under construction is a visitor's center/museum. Eighty acres of land that include the Clisby Austin house were deeded to Whitfield County in 2003.

Also located along the route is the historic Waterhouse-Colvard House, presently called the Oakwood Plantation that was built in 1857 for Euclid Waterhouse of Cleveland, TN, a wealthy copper-mine owner and banker. Other historic sites in the Murray County area are the Civilian Conservation Corps Tower and mysterious rock wall on Fort Mountain.



JOSEPH VANN, Cherokee

Historic sites in close proximity to the route are the Moravian Mission and springs in Spring Place and the Chief Vann House. The Historic Township of Spring Place is currently applying for National Register district status. Chief Joseph Vann who brought in Moravian missionaries to educate the Cherokee children started the Moravian Mission in Spring Place. Another famous historic site is The Chief Vann House; the brick mansion built by Chief Joseph Vann in 1804, and called the "Showplace of the Cherokee Nation." It stands along the Chieftain's Trail that commemorates the "Trail of Tears".

Another Murray County historic site is the Wright Hotel in downtown Chatsworth, which was built in 1908 with all materials coming from the local area. Mr. Wright even rented the Chatsworth brick plant for one year to make the soft rose bricks used to build the hotel. All the heart pine lumber was cut from his personal farm and aged for a year. The hotel was used as a spa for visitors coming in the summer to drink the mineral waters, enjoy the cool mountain breezes and indulge in home cooking.





Among the famous visitors to the hotel were Hoke Smith, Governor of Georgia, and Gordon Lee of Gordon Lee Mansion fame in Chickamauga. Near the byway in Murray County is the Murray County Courthouse built in 1912, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. One of only three domed courthouses in the state of Georgia, it can be seen from overlooks on Fort Mountain and from Hwy. 52 traveling down Fort Mountain on the east west drives of the byway.

Red Clay State Park is adjacent to the Cohutta Fishery Center trailhead at the Tennessee/Georgia State line. This historic site is the last council grounds of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation. The park contains a museum where visitors can view artifacts and an educational film. Also dispersed throughout the park area are replicas of Cherokee structures, a natural spring, walking trails and the Eternal Flame commemorating the continuing life of the Cherokee Indians.

There are several historic single-family dwellings along the route. The following are historically significant structures, located along the scenic byway route, that are cataloged in the Whitfield and Murray County Historic Resources Survey from 1996:

#### Whitfield County

- Prater's Mill – Located on Georgia Hwy. 2 the mill was constructed in 1854. It was originally used as a mill-processing facility. Currently it is being used for outdoor recreation, campground, and picnic area.
- Beaverdale Baptist Church – Located at the Intersection of GA Hwy 2 and Beaverdale Rd. it was constructed in 1914 as a bungalow style building with a front gable. (on route to the Cohutta Fishery Center segment)
- McGaughey's Chapel United Methodist – Located on McGaughey Chapel Road constructed in 1909 this gable church has a bell tower.

#### Murray County

- Single family dwelling house - Single dwelling house built in 1840 two story with I-house design with brick chimney, verandah porch and rectangular frame. Located at the on the west side of 411, first house north of Fairy Valley Road.
- Amazing Grace Baptist Church/Old Summerour Methodist Church – Built in late 1800's the church is a front gable church with front portico, with Roman or Tuscan columns on the porch. Located in Crandall on Summerour Church Road.
- Old Cohutta Spring – The spring currently serves as a natural feature. The spring flows from under the roots of a large tree into a man-made stone and concrete basin on the south side of the pond. The pond is stagnant, full of algae

and is shallow. Located on the East side of GA Hwy 225, .15 miles North of GA Hwy 2.

- Old 10<sup>th</sup> Militia District JP Courthouse – Built in 1910-1919 the small rectangular building was originally used as the militia district courthouse and is currently vacant. Located at the NW corner of GA Hwy 225, GA Hwy 2, and Halls Chapel Road.
- Euclid Waterhouse House, Waterhouse-Colvard House, Oakwood – Built in 1857 the house is a two-story I-frame house with Greek revival style that contains a front porch. Single family dwelling that was once used as a bed & breakfast.
- Colvard's Store – Built in 1920-1929 this one room rectangular general store is located at the SE corner of GA Hwy 225, GA Hwy 2, and Hall's Chapel Road.
- Single dwelling – Built in 1880-1889 the one-room building with three bay façade and the additions of shed and deck. Located at the North Side of GA Hwy 2, .75 miles East of Beaverdale Road.
- Dr. Thomas Leach House – Built in 1840-1849 the two story single-family dwelling is a rectangular building with 1 -house building type, verandah, three bay facades with chimney in the central hallway. Square pillars support porch roof. Located at the North side of GA Hwy 2, .3 miles East of Beaverdale Road.

### **Cultural Qualities**



The economics of any region have a significant impact on the culture of that region. The sweeping farmland seen along the route shows that agriculture continues to be a key component of this region's economy. Fields containing horses, cattle and other livestock can be seen along with bales of hay and the barns used to store that hay.

Rows of grapes, corn and other crops are an important visual example of rural life in this region. Vast acres of Georgia pine are contiguous to the route reminding travelers of Georgia's lumber industry. Poultry production is significant to this economy and many chicken houses are dotted along the byway.



In the early 1900's Catherine Evans Whitener made a bedspread using the lost Colonial art of hand tufting. She sold this bedspread from her front porch for two two dollars and fifty cents. A significant cottage industry sprang up from that initial sale and eventually encompassed the entire area. With the advent of changing technology the chenille bedspread industry evolved into the current multi-billion dollar carpet industry, making Dalton the "Carpet Capital of the

World". As the industry evolved so did the land use in the region. Many of the chicken houses previously mentioned began to be converted into mini carpet plants as property and business owners changed with the economic times and a higher return for their investment.

### **Archaeological Qualities**

The only significant quality along the byway Fort Mountain State approximately 250,000 park to hike up to this and read the legends Unfortunately little is history of the wall,



archaeological is the Stone Wall in Park. Every year visitors come to the old stonewall known about the however scholars

believe that the 850ft. long wall may have been a ceremonial area of the pre-historic Woodland Indians. Another theory is that the Indians constructed the wall as a fortification against hostile tribes. The wall winds across the crest of Fort Mountain, some 2,800 ft. in elevation, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

### **Recreational Qualities**

Along the byway there are several festivals that occur each year celebrating the abundant cultural traditions of the area. Prater's Mill is famous for its country festivals, which are held in May and October attracting approximately 50,000 visitors each year. These festivals provide visitors with the ultimate Appalachian Heritage experience.



In Murray County there are several festivals that occur throughout the year. Each year beginning in the spring, Murray County gears up for a summer full of events. The Southeastern Off Road Bike Association has their Mountain Bike Festival on Fort Mountain. Other activities through the summer include Wildflower Hikes at Fort Mountain and the Appalachian Wagon Train. The Wagon Train is a weeklong celebration held every year since 1959 exposing thousands of visitors each year to the way of frontier life. Other events include Vann House Days, National Racking Horse Association's World Championship Jamboree, Candlelight Christmas Tours at the Vann House during Christmas, and a local favorite for many years – the North Georgia Mountain Christmas Parade.

Various diverse recreation opportunities are abundant along the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway. The Cohutta Mountains in the Chattahoochee National Forest provide visitors opportunities for hiking, biking, picnicking, swimming, tubing, canoeing and fishing. The Holly Creek spur provides a direct route to the National Forest with picnic areas, hiking trails and fishing opportunities in the Creek. Fort Mountain State Park, which towers above the City of Chatsworth, provides various recreational opportunities such as hiking, camping, biking, fishing, cottage rental, miniature golf and horseback riding. The Cohutta Springs Adventist Center & Wildlife Refuge, Adjacent to the Chattahoochee National Forest, is located off Hwy 411 with a 55-acre lake, 12 cabins and 84 lakefront rooms in the lodge. Activities offered to visitors are tennis, camping, horseback riding, hiking, swimming, boating, skiing, miniature golf and an animal refuge. Along the segment that leads to Cohutta Fishery Center trailhead is the Farmer's Lake spring-fed cement swimming pond that attracts thousands of people each summer. On the route across from the fishery center is a picnic area. Fishing is also available in the various ponds at the fishery center.



## V. PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

As part of the Byway Application process local, state and/or federal government agencies were notified of Murray and Whitfield Counties interest in creating a Georgia Scenic Byway. Community organizations that had been or might be involved with the byway designation also had to be identified and notified as part of the application process. They were:

<b>Government/Organization</b>	<b>How Informed</b>	<b>Contact Name &amp; Telephone #</b>
Whitfield County	In Person	Bradley Arnold, County Administrator 706-275-7500
Murray County	In person, phone	Dick Barnes, Grants & Zoning Administrator, 706-517-5554 Tyson Haynes, Commissioner 706-695-2413
William G. Hasty, SR. GDOT Board Member	Phone/letter	William G. Hasty, SR. (770) 479-8528
City of Cohutta	Letter	Don Henderson, Mayor (706) 694-3412
North Georgia RDC	In person	Larry Vanden Bosch, Director of Community & Economic Development Services, 706-272-2300
North Georgia RDC	In person	Michelle Patterson, Associate Planner, 706-272-2300
U.S. Forest Service	Phone	Larry Thomas 706-695-6736

USDA-Natural Resources Service	Phone	Cindy Askew & Karen Bradley 706-638-2207
Dalton Convention and Visitors Bureau	In person	Janet Cochran 706-281-1289
Chatsworth-Murray County Chamber of Commerce	In person	Dinah Rowe 706-695-6060
Dalton-Whitfield Chamber of Commerce	In person	George Woodward 706-278-7373
Prater's Mill Foundation	In person	Judy Alderman 706-694-6544
Cohutta Fishery Center	phone	Ron Schennick 706-694-8830
Fort Mountain State Park	e-mail	Danny Tatum 706-695-2621
Whitfield-Murray Historical Society	phone	Marcelle White 706-278-0217
Keep Dalton-Whitfield Beautiful	In Person	Kimberly Jaco 706-226-6211
Conasauga River Alliance/The Nature Conservancy	In Person	Rick Guffey 706-695-3950
Limestone Valley RC&D	Phone	Doug Cabe 706-625-7044

There were two public hearings held in Whitfield County and one public hearing in Murray County to provide opportunities for citizen input. All public meetings were advertised in the legal section of the Daily Citizen News along with mentions in various news articles. A draft copy of the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan was made available on the Whitfield County website two weeks prior to the second public hearing while another draft copy was made available to Murray County citizens through their library.



All property owners contiguous to the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway were identified through the Whitfield and Murray County Assessors Offices. Two weeks prior to each public meeting the flyers listed in this section were mailed to all property owners via both county administration offices. Written comments from the first public meetings held in each county are also listed in this particular section of the Corridor Management Plan. At the second public meeting those present prioritized action steps by placing colored dots on digital photographs depicting the needed action step, and also discussed potential permanent byway organizational models.



## Proposed Cohutta - Chattahoochee Scenic Byway



“It’s your road, it’s pretty, and we’d like to see it stay that way.”

### Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway

#### What is the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway?

The purpose of a scenic byway is to preserve the natural beauty along the designated route. In March 2002, the Dalton Convention & Visitors Bureau and Murray County Chamber made application to the Georgia Dept. of Transportation to designate a scenic byway route in Whitfield and Murray Counties. The proposed Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway will extend from Fort Mountain State Park in Murray County to the Cohutta Fishery in Whitfield County, with a spur to Prater’s Mill. The route was approved by the GA DOT, but for it to become officially designated a Corridor Management Plan must be developed. The purpose of the Corridor Management Plan is to develop a strategy to protect and preserve the scenic qualities of the route for future generations.

#### Benefits of the Byway Designation

The **vision** for the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway **is to enhance, preserve and raise the recognition of the mountain and rural beauty through local leadership that generates pride among the community.** Scenic byways have a positive effect on a community because they provide protection for natural scenic beauty believed to be threatened. They also receive identification on state, and possibly federal, highway maps leading to more tourism opportunities for an area.

#### Georgia Scenic Byways

The Georgia Department of Transportation has already designated five scenic byways in the state: Monticello Crossroads Scenic Byway, Ridge and Valley Scenic Byway, Russell-Brasstown Scenic Byway, Altamaha Historic Scenic Byway and South Fulton Scenic Byway.

#### Public Meetings

Since you live along the route, we need your help to protect your byway. For example, we need your input in addressing problem areas (abandoned houses or junkyards) through buffering (the planting of trees, bushes or flowers). A public meeting will be held in **Murray County at 6:00 PM on February 25<sup>th</sup> at the Murray County Senior Center.** A second public meeting will be held in **Whitfield County on March 4<sup>th</sup>, at 6:00 PM at Cohutta First Baptist Church.**

**Please attend these meetings to give your input into the Corridor Management Plan.**

**For more information contact Janet Cochran at 281-1289 or Jessica Nix at 695-6060.**

# Proposed Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway



**“It’s your road, it’s pretty, and we’d like to see it stay that way.”**

## Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway

### Second Public Meeting

We have incorporated your comments from the first public meeting into the Corridor Management Plan and we need your help again. For example, we need your input in addressing specific problem areas (abandoned houses or junkyards) through buffering (the planting of trees, bushes or flowers). A second public meeting regarding this plan will be held in **Whitfield County at 6:00 PM on May 13<sup>th</sup> at the Dalton Regional Library.**

### Public Meeting Purpose

A task timeline must be created as part of the Corridor Management Plan and we need your assistance to choose the top five task priorities. A draft of the Corridor Management Plan will be available online as of May 1, 2003 at [www.whitfieldcountygga.com](http://www.whitfieldcountygga.com) and several copies will also be available at the public meeting. **Remember, this is a Plan and not an Ordinance** and therefore, is a fluid document that can be altered based on the input received. The purpose is to develop a strategy to protect and preserve the scenic qualities of the route for future generations.

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**PLEASE ATTEND THIS IMPORTANT MEETING**

**For additional information contact Janet Cochran at 281-1289**

# SCENIC BYWAY PUBLIC COMMENTS

## Murray County – February 25, 2003

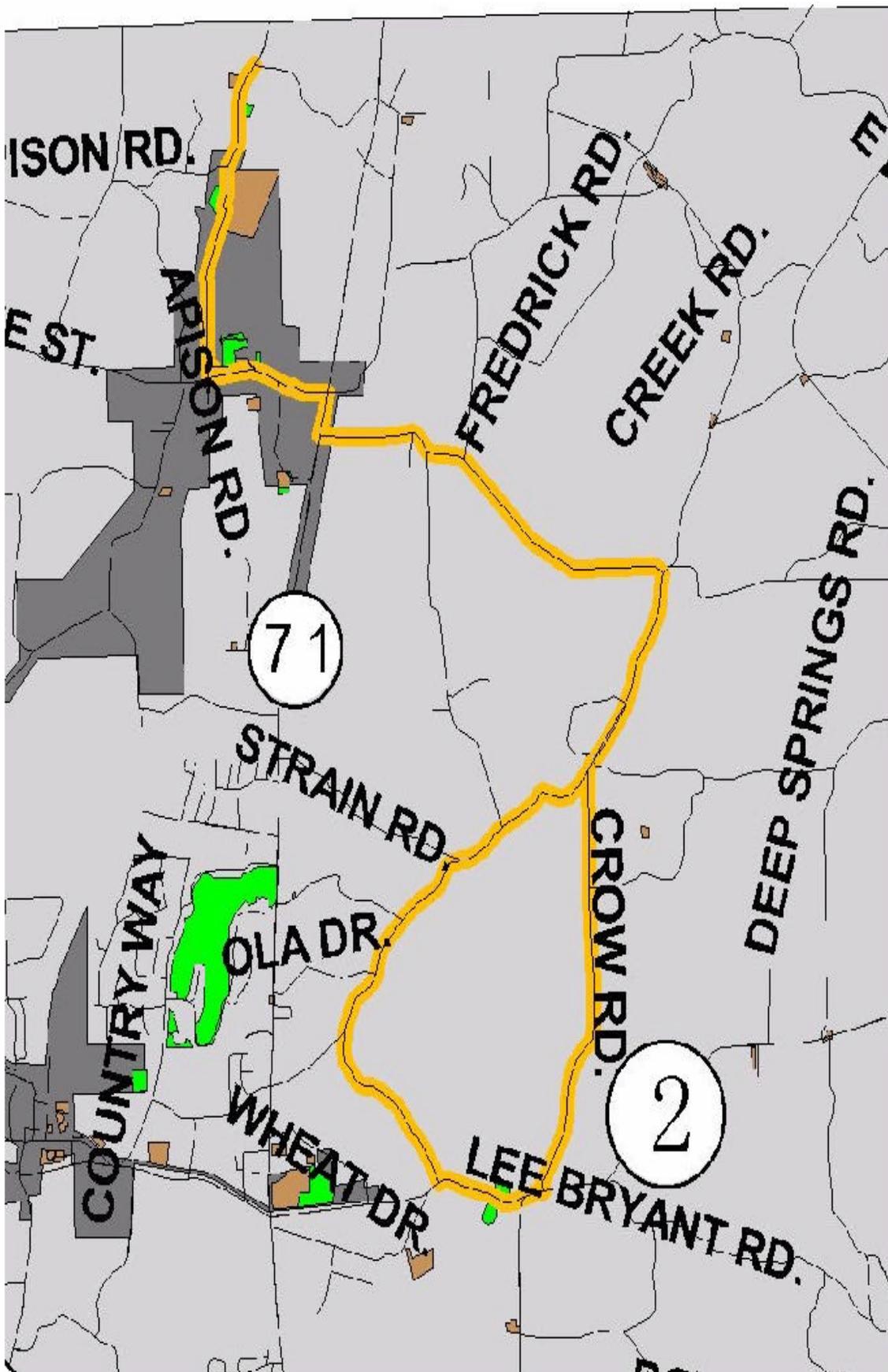
- Hope that DOT district maintenance plan will move Byway up in priority
  - ✓ That should be the case. Just call your regional DOT contact to remind them of impending designation
- Citizens would like to see a bicycle lane along Route 2 and the Byway
  - ✓ When DOT is working on their highways and a local government makes a request, they will add a bike lane while doing their other planned work. So, a bicycle lane in conjunction with the Byway is very feasible.
- Concern was expressed about the unprotected railroad crossing at Summerhour Church Road
  - ✓ Commission Hayes is already aware of and working on this unprotected railroad crossing at Summerhour Church Road and will utilize the Scenic Byway as additional leverage to see that it becomes a protected crossing.
- Hope that Scenic Byway status will assist with various litter issues along the Byway
  - ✓ State prisoners will be able to be utilized on State highways. Local law enforcement currently uses probationers and locally incarcerated individuals for various government tasks. This would be a good time to endorse a Keep Murray Beautiful Program and their Adopt A Highway project.
- As long as they don't have to move fences or it won't change the easements already a part of their property – o.k. with it
  - ✓ A Scenic Byway does not alter any local laws regarding land use.
- Look at existing billboard and see what the rental status is as it is in pretty poor shape
  - ✓ Commissioner Tyson Haynes said that he would investigate who owned that billboard and discuss it's condition and use with that owner
- Will local governments assist them with some buffering they feel needs to take place and additional sprucing up and landscaping they would like to do?
  - ✓ The local governments plan to apply for national Scenic Byway funds to assist with the cost of various types of planting.
- Any estimates on the increased amount of traffic?
  - ✓ Based on the traffic counts of current Scenic Byways, an increase is slow, but steady and that particular type of traveler is a leisure traveler with time and money to spend

# Scenic Byway Public Comments Continued

## Whitfield County – March 4, 2003

- Will the County assist with the conditions of some of the roads that are already in need of repair along the Byway?
  - ✓ County roads are assessed by the Public Works Department on a yearly basis. The roads are rated based on the condition and then funds are requested from the Department of Transportation.
- Can a bike lane be added along the Byway along Highway 2?
  - ✓ County Administrator, Bradley Arnold explained that the City of Dalton and Whitfield were currently in the middle of a Transportation Study. There was a meeting the next morning and a bicycle route recommended by those present would be submitted as part of the Transportation Plan.  
(See map on next page)
- Any estimates on the increased amount of traffic?

Other Scenic Byways have experienced a 1% - 2% increase in traffic. It was explained that the type of traveler that uses a Scenic Byway route has the time and money to spend in your County and would have an economic impact.
- Will Byway status assist with the litter pick up along the route?
  - ✓ The Sheriff's Department will be asked to scrutinize the cleanliness of the route as part of their regular routes through the County. If they notice a particular increase in litter they will be asked to report this and to request local prisoners for clean up purposes.
- Can Byway status help us with DOT as far as state maintenance issues?
  - ✓ Georgia DOT also has a rating system they use to schedule road maintenance. Scenic Byway would most probably get more attention from DOT than non-scenic byway roads.
- Can the County assist with some of the landscaping and buffering issues that need to be done along the Byway?
  - ✓ Both Whitfield and Murray Counties plan to request federal funds to assist with the creation of the three trailheads, buffering and landscaping along the Scenic Byway. The national grant requests are usually due in the month of June.
- Will Byway status add the existing easement along the route?
  - ✓ Scenic Byways do not alter local Zoning or Land Use Ordinance currently in place.
- Would like groups to look at Adopt A Highway and other beautification programs
  - ✓ That is a good suggestion as there is a Keep Dalton/Whitfield Beautiful Program in the city/county and it should be encouraged.



**PROPOSED BICYCLE LANE**

## VI. ACTION ITEMS

The final public meeting for the Whitfield County portion of the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway was held at the Northwest Georgia Regional Library located in Dalton. Pictures identified at the Corridor Management Plan Committee meetings from the Scenic Byway Digital Inventory were posted on the walls of the meeting room for attendees to place a color dot designating the issues they felt must be addressed first.

The following photographs are listed in the order of prioritized Action Items:

### Priority #1

**Photo 13 – View of old country store with broken sign off Red Clay Road**



Broken sign and post need to be taken down, utility poles no longer in use need to be removed and basketball goal needs to be relocated from the view of the road

### Priority #2

**Photo 48 – View of abandoned house off Hopewell Road**



Buffering along side of roadway along with compliance of zoning ordinance against establishment of abandoned houses

### Priority #3

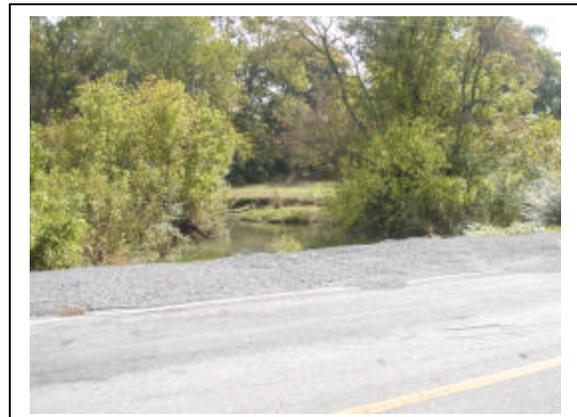
**Photo 96 – Prater's Mill Crosswalk**



Can crosswalk be expanded, speed limit be lowered or some kind of traffic calming introduced?

### Priority #4

**Photo 33 – View of Mill Creek off Wilson-Caldwell Road**



Identified as a potential pull-off location however DOT says due to poor underpinning that is not appropriate. An attractive rail and additional beautification would make it an asset to the byway.

**Priority #5 - Tied**

View of trash from utility work off the intersection Of Wilson-Caldwell Road & Highway 71



Trash needs to be cleaned up by utility crew and Adopt-A-Scenic Byway program needs to be implemented

**Priority #5 – Tied**

Storage trailers on Hwy. 2 at Baldrige Lumber



Request that the company relocate storage trailers to the rear of the property. Additional buffering along side Of road might be helpful.

**Priority #6**

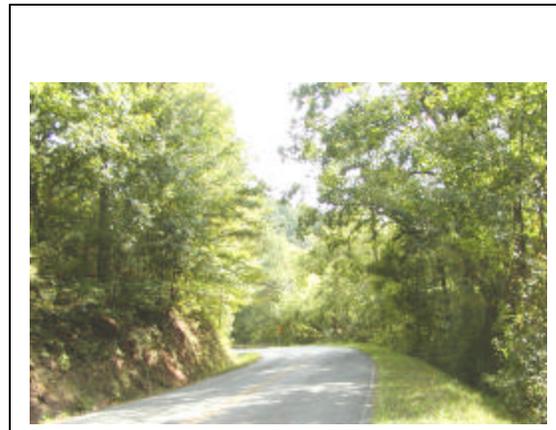
Clear cutting off Wilson-Caldwell/Hopewell Roads



Buffering

**Priority #7**

Wilson-Caldwell Road



Install guardrail or sharp curve sign

Priority Number	Action Item	Estimated Completion
#1	Broken signs, post & old utility pole to be taken down	October 2003
#2	Address abandoned house on Hopewell Road	December 2003
#3	Address crosswalk, speed limit & the introduction of traffic calming at Prater's Mill	June 2004
#4	Underpin & expand potential pull-off on Wilson-Caldwell Road	June 2004
#5	Trash pick up	Part of regular maintenance process
#6	Request that trailers be moved to rear of lumber property	December 2003
#7	Buffering	June 2004
#8	Install sharp curve sign	November 2004

#9	Introduction to Historic Trailhead signage for Prater's Mill	Temporary September 2003 Permanent June 2004
#10	Master Planting Design Plan	November 2003
#11	Apply for National Scenic Byway funds to construct trailheads	September 2003
#12	Determine phased implementation of Master Planting Plan	December 2003
#13	Determine Byway aesthetic traffic barriers (guardrails, retaining walls, etc.)	December 2003
#14	Implement proposed bicycle lane loop	December 2004
#15	Install aesthetic barrier hardware	Cost will determine date
#16	DOT wildflower planting	June 2003 December 2003
#17	Buffer lumberyard w/crosshatch fence	December 2004

## MURRAY COUNTY PRIORITIZED ACTION STEPS

Priority	Action Item	Estimated Completion
#1	Address unprotected railroad crossing at Summerour Church Road	June 2004
#2	Tear down burned out house	December 2004
#3	Clean up/fix up vandalized house on 411	December 2004
#4	Have the 1 remaining billboard removed	December 2004
#5	Add Scenic Byway Overlay to Zoning Ordinance	June 2004
#6	Apply for National Scenic Byway grant funds to construct trailheads	September 2003
#7	Install green Introduction to byway sign on Gilmer County side of trailhead	December 2003
#8	Enhance Chattahoochee National Forest sign with additional landscaping	March 2004
#9	Choose aesthetic traffic barrier hardware	December 2003
#10	Phase implementation of Master Planting Plan	December 2003
#11	DOT wildflower planting	June 2003 December 2003
#12	Expose an additional view shed on Fort Mountain at identified pull-off area	February 2004
#13	Introduce identified property owners to new setback requirement regarding junk cars	July 2004
#14	Install aesthetic barrier hardware	Cost will determine

Preceding all other action items is the official appointment of the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway Advisory Board to two-year terms. The make-up of the Advisory Board will consist of one member appointed by each of the two sponsoring agencies, one member appointed by each participating local government, and one property owner that lives on the route from each county currently serving on the Cohutta- Chattahoochee Corridor Management Plan Committee. As Whitfield County has a Quality Growth staff position, that individual will serve as staff, assisted by a transportation planner from the NGRDC to ensure that all Action Items are implemented in the expressed time frame. A public meeting will be held each year in both counties, similar to the public hearings previously held for scenic byway implementation input. All property owners located along the byway will be invited by mail. At these public meetings all property owners in attendance will have the opportunity to participate in a yearly goal setting session and the prioritization of all Action Items identified.

## VII. MARKETING

The marketing plan determined for the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway would incorporate all six Intrinsic Qualities. It is our belief that by making the Byway an educational experience, the actual utilization and interest in the Byway will be increased. The Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway will actually have three trailheads. Even though this Byway has examples of all six Intrinsic Qualities, the educational focus of each trailhead will be on two of those qualities that each trailhead represents. These promotional pieces will be separate from the inclusive Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway brochure that will be developed.

The Cohutta Fishery Center Trailhead will have a kiosk with materials that explain the Natural and Recreational Intrinsic Qualities. A list of the examples of those qualities along the entire route will be part of the informational material. The trailhead at Prater's Mill will interpret the Historic and Cultural Intrinsic Qualities also utilizing a kiosk and the appropriate materials. Fort Mountain State Park's trailhead will emphasize the Archeological and Scenic Intrinsic Qualities. This trailhead and kiosk, past the park entrance would capture additional visitors entering from adjacent Gilmer County. Each trailhead is a site of interest individually and will bring its own audience to capitalize upon. Every kiosk will contain promotion collateral materials for all points of interest along and close to the Byway route.

Awareness and recognition will help increase tourism traffic to all the cities and smaller communities located within both Whitfield and Murray Counties. The cultural/heritage tourist will visit longer and spend more money. The nature-based tourist will seek out natural settings, scenic beauty and undisturbed natural resources. According to a study commissioned by the Regional Advisory Council of DCA/GDITT on behalf of the Historic High Country Travel Association, history/heritage and outdoor recreation are the number one and two reasons respectively that visitors come to Northwest Georgia. All of the Visitor Centers in the Historic High Country Travel Association display the area attractions of the other communities located in that region. Also, the Association will ensure that the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway promotional pieces are on display at all state welcome centers.

Fort Mountain State Park, situated at one end of the Cohutta-Chattahoochee scenic route, attracts 250,000 visitors each year. The Prater's Mill historic site, bringing in 50,000 visitors per year, is situated at the other end. The scenic byway is the catalyst for exchanging visitation between these two established tourism destinations. With the commitments from Whitfield and Murray Counties and supporting organizations, the byway will be guarded against any future inappropriate development that will detract from those intrinsic qualities currently found along the route.

Preliminary plans are to have the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway brochures developed and printed before the end of 2003 calendar year.

## VIII. CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS and REGULATIONS

The Zoning Ordinances for both Whitfield and Murray Counties will be utilized to implement and maintain the Corridor Management Plan. Whitfield County's Zoning Ordinance is more comprehensive and has recently been updated. Murray County recently implemented a Land Management Ordinance during the 2003 - year.

Ordinance Issues - The appropriate local governments are already investigating identified yards that contain significant trash and junk, property hosting dilapidated structures, abandoned vehicles and other related issues. Both counties have enforcement officers to streamline the Scenic Byway property compliance process. In Whitfield County, the Department of Zoning and the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan Committee have already identified those properties that will need to make improvements. The Department of Zoning has documented the offenses with digital photographs and letters have been sent to those property owners in violation. Most of those property owners have already brought their property into compliance. Murray County's Ordinance is very basic and will not address all issues. However, for the issues that can be addressed, the Zoning Department was included in the property assessment process. Now that their Land Management Plan is in place, violating property owners are being notified. Other specific requirements, to match those already in place in Whitfield, will be adopted by Murray County for the scenic byway route in the future.

- Maintenance - Both counties have access to local and state prisoners coordinated by and through their Public Works departments that will clean along the byway. If at any time, there is additional trash and garbage or particularly bad areas are noted, Public Works will be asked to provide additional clean up. Public Works will also look for issues other than cleanliness. If a violation is noted that would be addressed by the Zoning Ordinance they will notify the Department of Zoning's Enforcement Officer.

State Highways 2 and 52, and U.S. Highway 411 are under the jurisdiction of the Georgia Department of Transportation for their operation and maintenance. Other byway sections are under control of the local governments and GDOT assumes no financial or other legal responsibilities by designation of these roadways as a Scenic Byway.

- Buffering - The areas of the byway that would benefit from buffering, such as the screening of unsightly properties, have been noted by the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan Committee. Specific sites and the specific planting materials (including size and exact location) for those sites will be a future component of the Corridor Management Plan and will be chosen based on the Georgia Department of Transportation's Landscaping Requirements. The local governments will be responsible for the planting and maintenance of those plantings on county right of ways.

- ❑ Set-backs - There are several properties along the Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway that could be enhanced by an additional set-back requirement. Potential new development areas and the land leased by lumber companies for clear-cutting are two examples. Whitfield County will consider each permit request separately for the property located along the byway to determine if an additional setback should be required. Murray County will be encouraged to do the same.
- ❑ Easements - In some cases, this management-planning component may be the proper tool used to achieve an end result acceptable to both the local government and a private property owner. Easements will be utilized wherever appropriate and feasible.
- ❑ Segmentation – GDOT’s Program Requirements specify that “the CMP shall provide for segmentation (the exclusion of corridor sections with industrial or commercial use that include little or none of the intrinsic qualities for which scenic byway designation is desired)”. However the Cohutta – Chattahoochee Scenic Byway is rich in the six intrinsic qualities, and not segmentation of the byway appears to be appropriate.
- ❑ Signage – Both governments acknowledge the federal requirements regarding existing outdoor advertising, as defined in United States Code Title 23, Section 131 (s), and the prohibition of new billboards along those routes designated as Federal Primary, National Highway System, and Interstate. We also acknowledge that designation of this route will subject it to local enforcement of these regulations. Currently, there is only one billboard on the byway and it is in Murray County. As the Land Use Map has limited areas in Whitfield County zoned for commercial this should not be a large issue. In Murray County, it will be one of the future standards adopted by them for the byway.

There is a small amount of commercial signage that will be addressed by either the current zoning ordinance in Whitfield or the future byway standards in Murray. The Corridor Management Plan Committee has already identified that signage. The future Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway Advisory Board will serve as a forum for promoting fair, consistent sign regulations along the entire byway. Both communities will work with the Georgia DOT to identify the most appropriate scenic byway signage placement for the route. They would also request that byway signs be placed on Interstate 75 at Exit 341, Highway 201 N and directed to GA Highway 2 and the byway.

- ❑ Infrastructure - The three trailheads are located on or contiguous to property that already houses restroom facilities and at least one picnic table. The Georgia Department of Community Affairs awarded a Local Development Fund grant to Whitfield and Murray Counties for the creation of Trailhead Master Plans for each trailhead site. The final draft of those plans has been presented to both local governments and the Three Trailheads Master Plan Report will be simultaneously submitted to the Georgia DOT with the Corridor Management Plan. Both Public

Works/Road Departments rate the current condition of all roads in both counties each year. The paving of the local roads on the scenic byway will be maintained as a part of that continuous process and is the responsibility of the local government and not the Georgia Department of Transportation.

- Future Byway Enhancement - Wildflower plantings, roadside pull offs, additional plantings and other enhancements have been and will continue to be identified as part of the public-input process. Members of the local committee and the regional Georgia DOT Engineer and Maintenance personnel have jointly surveyed the route as we intend to keep them fully informed of all future scenic byway enhancement activities. A Master Planting Plan is currently in process and will be submitted to GDOT at a later date.

## **IX. CONCLUSION**

Both the local governments and citizens of Murray and Whitfield Counties are pleased to have a project that they can jointly develop and promote. Land-use management has become a major regional focus, as northwest Georgia is the fastest growing area of the state outside of metro-Atlanta. Protecting the valuable resources that provide these two counties with the quality of life they enjoy is paramount. After the Georgia DOT approves the Corridor Management Plan, the newly appointed Cohutta-Chattahoochee Scenic Byway Advisory Committee and designated staff will carry the plan forward with yearly input and assistance from byway property owners and the community at large. In addition, Whitfield and Murray Counties foresee a future expansion of this byway into other adjoining counties and the creation of additional partnerships to the benefit of all.