

Ruth and Paul Henning Conservation Area

Fifteen-Year Area Management Plan FY 2018-2032



Lisa B. Allen

Forestry Division Chief

9-25-17

Date

Ruth and Paul Henning Conservation Area Management Plan Approval Page

PLANNING TEAM

Ashley Schnake, Urban Wildlife Biologist

Quenten Fronterhouse, Conservation Agent

John Miller, Interpretive Center Manager

Dave Woods, Fisheries Management Biologist

Andy Humble, Private Land Conservationist

Greg Cassell, Resource Forester

Rhonda Rimer, Natural History Biologist

SOUTHWEST REGION


RCT Chair


Signature

8/30/17
Date

FORESTRY DIVISION

Forest Management Chief


Signature

9/25/17
Date

OVERVIEW

- **Official Area Name:** Ruth and Paul Henning Conservation Area, #8208
- **Year of Initial Acquisition:** 1981
- **Acreage:** 1,534 acres
- **County:** Taney, Stone
- **Division with Administrative Responsibility:** Forestry
- **Division with Maintenance Responsibility:** Forestry
- **Statement of Purpose:**

A. Strategic Direction

Ruth and Paul Henning Conservation Area (CA) is managed for glade, woodland, and forested natural communities and the species they support. These habitats are managed for deer and turkey as well as collared lizard, roadrunner, and native warm-season grasses and forbs.

B. Desired Future Condition

The desired future condition of the Ruth and Paul Henning CA is a healthy glade, woodland, and forest landscape that supports upland game and other associated wildlife and plant species and provides hiking, nature viewing, and photographic opportunities for the public.

C. Federal Aid Statement

N/A

GENERAL INFORMATION AND CONDITIONS

I. Special Considerations

A. **Priority Areas:** Bull Shoals Glade Important Bird Area

B. **Natural Areas:** The White River Balds Natural Area is located within the conservation area. It is 362 acres in size and consists mostly of glade and woodland habitat. The dolomite glades here are very diverse and support over 200 native plant species including Ozark glade endemics like yellow coneflower, Trelease's larkspur and cobe beardtongue.

II. Important Natural Features and Resources

A. **Species of Conservation Concern:** Species of conservation concern are known from this area. Area managers should consult the Natural Heritage Database annually and review all management activities with the natural history biologist.

B. **Caves:** None

C. **Springs:** Yes, records kept with Missouri Department of Conservation (the Department) natural history biologist.

D. Other: Occurs in the Ozark Highlands Section, White River Hills Subsection, White River Dolomite Glade/Oak Woodland Rugged Hills Landtype Associations. Historically, glade and mixed oak and pine oak woodlands dominated this landscape.

III. Existing Infrastructure

- Two parking areas, one gravel and one paved with a maintained rock wall barrier (Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA] accessible)
- Four interpretive kiosks
- Two observation decks; one covered deck overlooking parking area off Highway 76 parking lot and one uncovered deck along Glade Trail.
- One 40-foot observation/lookout tower off Dewey Bald trail
- Two privies near Highway 76 paved parking area (ADA accessible)
- Homesteaders Trail, 3.4-mile hiking trail
- Glade Exploration Trail, 1.1-mile hiking trail
- Shane's Shortcut, 0.3-mile hiking trail
- Dewey Bald Trail, 0.4-mile hiking trail
- Streamside Trail, 0.4-mile hiking trail

IV. Area Restrictions or Limitations

- A. Deed Restrictions or Ownership Considerations:** A deed restriction exists on 200 acres donated by the Herschend Family, in the northwest corner of the area, stating that no hunting or commercial development is allowed.
- B. Federal Interest:** Federal funds may be used in the management of this land. Fish and wildlife agencies may not allow recreational activities and related facilities that would interfere with the purpose for which the State is managing the land. Other uses may be acceptable and must be assessed in each specific situation.
- C. Easements:** Southern Missouri Gas Company gas pipeline easement, Roark Water and Sewer sewer line easement, KAMO transmission line right of way easement, Empire Electric transmission line right of way easement
- D. Cultural Resources:** Yes, records kept with Department environmental compliance specialist. Managers should follow best management practices for cultural resources found in the Department Resource Policy Manual.
- E. Endangered Species:** None observed.
- F. Boundary Issues:** Establishing accurate and identifiable boundary markers is a priority for this property.

MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

V. Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) A forest inventory of the area was completed in 1995. Site quality for tree growth is low on the south- and southwest-facing slopes, where glades and woodlands are present. Higher site quality is present in forested stands on the ridgetops and on north-facing slopes.
- 2) Maintain forest health and prevent possible introductions and/or spread of invasive insects and disease.
- 3) Encroaching eastern red cedars threaten the high quality glade natural communities and associated rare species at the conservation area. Application of prescribed fire is needed to keep these communities healthy and diverse. However, use of fire within the Branson metro area presents challenges.
- 4) Controlling invasive species on the area, such as sericea lespedeza, Johnson grass, and eastern red cedar is also a challenge.

Management Objective 1: Maintain forest cover for wildlife and recreation.

Strategy 1: Protect forest from wildfire, insects, and disease. (Forestry)

Management Objective 2: Monitor forest and glades for insect and disease outbreaks as well as invasive plant species.

Strategy 1: Forestry staff will monitor forested stands and glade areas for insects and diseases as well as for invasive species on an on-going basis, as regular area maintenance and boundary work are performed. (Forestry)

Strategy 2: Conduct forest management activities to manage any insect and disease issues, as needed. (Forestry)

Management Objective 3: Maintain high quality glade and woodland natural communities.

Strategy 1: Apply prescribed fire on a three- to five-year rotation. (Forestry, Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Remove cedar by hand if unable to control through prescribed burning. (Forestry)

VI. Aquatic Resource Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Ruth and Paul Henning CA contains approximately 0.6 miles of Roark Creek stream frontage.
- 2) The area also contains first- and second-order ephemeral streams that flow from the southern uplands of the property north to Roark Creek.

Management Objective 1: Maintain, enhance, or expand the riparian corridors of Roark Creek to a minimum of 100 feet and the first- and second-order streams to a minimum of 50 feet on both stream sides, where appropriate.

Strategy 1: Allow natural regeneration to vegetate the riparian corridors, or plant trees and shrubs within the corridors, where regeneration is not likely to succeed. (Fisheries, Forestry, Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Monitor areas of stream bank erosion and address them using Department stream stabilization guidelines (2009), where appropriate. (Fisheries, Forestry)

Management Objective 2: Implement appropriate watershed best management practices on all Department managed areas.

Strategy 1: Implement stream best management practices on all streams according to the Department's *Watershed and Stream Management Guidelines for Lands and Waters Managed by the Missouri Department of Conservation* (2009). (Fisheries, Forestry)

Strategy 2: Conduct glade/woodland restoration and associated forest management activities on the area in accordance with the Department's *Missouri Watershed Protection Practice Recommended Practices for Missouri Forests: 2014 Management Guidelines for Maintaining Forested Watersheds to Protect Streams* (2014). (Fisheries, Forestry, Wildlife)

Strategy 3: Manage roads and trails according to appropriate best management practices to minimize runoff and sedimentation into stream resources. (Fisheries, Forestry)

VII. Public Use Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Ruth and Paul Henning CA has a scenic overlook located at the Highway 76 parking lot that receives heavy use during the Branson tourist season (April-October).
- 2) The area contains 5.6 miles of hiking trails.

- 3) The area receives moderate public use in the form of hiking, photography, and birding activities. Hunting, trapping, bike riding, horseback riding, and all-terrain vehicle use are prohibited on the area.

Management Objective 1: Maintain public access at the two parking areas.

Strategy 1: Perform regular parking lot maintenance, as needed, including black topping, painting parking space lines, grading, replacing gravel and parking lot posts, and maintaining signs. (Forestry, Design and Development)

Management Objective 2: Provide self-guided hiking opportunities.

Strategy 1: Maintain the existing trail system along with trailhead signs and signage. (Forestry, Outreach and Education)

Strategy 2: Maintain the self-guided brochure and corresponding trail stop markers for the Homesteaders Trail. (Forestry, Outreach and Education)

Strategy 3: Maintain two wooden overlook decks and one observation tower for public use along the trails. (Forestry, Outreach and Education)

Management Objective 3: Provide information about the natural history of Ruth and Paul Henning CA.

Strategy 1: Maintain four kiosks located in the Highway 76 parking lot. (Forestry, Outreach and Education)

Management Objective 4: Maintain an area that is inviting for public use.

Strategy 1: Continue to have the gates at the Highway 76 entrance locked by a private security company from sunset to sunrise. (Forestry)

Strategy 2: Increase uniformed patrols during peak activity periods to ensure compliance with area regulations and to prevent misuse of the area. (Protection)

VIII. Administrative Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Boundary issues could arise as private lands adjacent to Ruth and Paul Henning CA develop. Current boundary issues exist on the north and west sides of the area.

Management Objective 1: Maintain area boundaries.

Strategy 1: Maintain boundaries annually by replacing boundary signs and demarcating boundary lines with blue paint. (Forestry)

Strategy 2: If, or when, disputes arise over boundary lines, work with neighbors to resolve any disputes. Seek to maintain good working relationships with neighbors. (Forestry)

Lands Proposed for Acquisition:

When available, adjacent land may be considered for acquisition from willing sellers. Tracts that improve area access, provide public use opportunities, contain unique natural communities and/or species of conservation concern, or meet other Department priorities, as identified in the annual Department land acquisition priorities, may be considered.

MANAGEMENT TIMETABLE

Strategies are considered ongoing unless listed in the following table.

| | FY18 | FY19 | FY20 | FY21 | FY22 | FY23 | FY24 | FY25 | FY26 | FY27 | FY28 | FY29 | FY30 | FY31 | FY32 |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Terrestrial Resource Management | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Objective 3</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Strategy 1 | | | | X | | | | | X | | | | | X | |

APPENDICES

Area Background:

Ruth and Paul Henning Conservation Area is in the White River Hills of western Taney County on the west side of Branson. Much of this 1,534-acre area consists of steep hills covered with typical upland oak/hickory forest. The forest is interspersed with a series of scenic glades (open desert-like areas) that make up the White River Balds Natural Area. The area also includes a small section of bottomland forest along a 0.5 mile stretch of Roark Creek, a relatively undisturbed Ozark headwaters stream. The glades or "balds," as local people refer to them, played an important role in the history and folklore of the region. Because post-Civil War vigilante groups often met on the balds, they became known as "baldknobbers."

Several features of the area were also immortalized in Harold Bell Wright's book, *Shepherd of the Hills*, including Dewey Bald, Boulder Bald, a portion of the trail of indeterminate age, Sammy Lane's Lookout, The Signal Tree, and Little Pete's Cave.

Most of the area was donated or purchased from Ruth and Paul Henning. Paul is best known as the creator of the Beverly Hillbillies, Green Acres, and Petticoat Junction television series. It was their wish to keep this beautiful landscape for all to enjoy.

An additional 200 acres was donated from the Herschend Family (Silver Dollar City Corporation) in 1981 and will remain closed to hunting and trapping because of deed restrictions.

Current Land and Water Types:

| Land/Water Type | Acres | Miles | % of Area |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-------|------------|
| Woodland /Upland Forest | 1,172 | | 76 |
| Glades | 362 | | 24 |
| Total | 1,534 | | 100 |
| Stream Frontage – Roark Creek | | 0.6 | |

Public Input Summary:

The draft Ruth and Paul Henning Conservation Area Management Plan was available for a public comment period Feb. 1–28, 2017. The Missouri Department of Conservation received comments from nine respondents (Appendix A). The Ruth and Paul Henning Conservation Area Planning Team carefully reviewed and considered these ideas as they finalized this document. A brief summary of public input themes, including how they were incorporated or why they were not, can be found below. Rather than respond to each individual comment, comments are grouped into general themes and are addressed collectively.

Department responses to themes and issues identified through the Ruth and Paul Henning Conservation Areas Management Plan public comment period.

Suggests adding more benches along area trails.

As budget allows, additional benches may be constructed and placed along the trail system as feasible.

Suggests allowing horseback riding on area trails.

Ruth and Paul Henning CA has some of the highest quality glade habitats in the Midwest. The White River Balds Natural Area is located within the Ruth and Paul Henning CA. Glades are a sensitive natural community with soils that are not appropriate for equestrian use.

Suggests allowing bicycles on area trails.

Ruth and Paul Henning CA has some of the highest quality glade habitats in the Midwest. The White River Balds Natural Area is located within the conservation area. Glades are a sensitive natural community with soils that are not appropriate for bicycle use.

Suggests opening Ruth and Paul Henning CA to all-terrain vehicle use.

Ruth and Paul Henning CA has some of the highest quality glade habitats in the Midwest. The White River Balds Natural Area is located within the conservation area. Glades are a sensitive natural community with soils that are not appropriate for all-terrain vehicle use.

Suggests restocking interpretive pamphlets or adding a permanent sign stating the significance of each trail marker.

Interpretive pamphlets are stocked once a week by Department staff. The Henning Homesteaders trail brochure states the significance of each homestead site and is available at the trail head on Roark Creek. Area brochures with trail maps are available at the main parking lot on Highway 76.

Appreciates Ruth and Paul Henning CA and new bridge over the creek. Suggests adding more walking bridges over creeks.

Bridges are located over all major creeks that are located on the designated trails on the conservation area.

Suggests improving trails by grading or paving them.

Ruth and Paul Henning CA has some of the highest quality glade habitats in the Midwest. The White River Balds Natural Area is located within the conservation area. Glades are a sensitive natural community with soils that are not appropriate for graded or paved trails. Currently, there is a paved trail from the Highway 76 parking lot to the top of Dewey Bald (Designated “Dewey

Bald Trail” in the area brochure). This trail goes to the fire tower viewing platform and does not go through sensitive glade habitat.

Suggests adding more hiking trails and a visitor’s center.

Ruth and Paul Henning CA currently has over 5 miles of hiking trails. These trails were constructed in areas that would limit degrading the glade habitats that exist on the area. A visitor center is located at nearby Shepherd of the Hills Fish Hatchery.

Appreciates the efforts made by the Department to conserve natural spaces.

We appreciate the opportunity to help Missouri citizens conserve, use, and enjoy Missouri’s fish, forest, and wildlife resources.

References:

Missouri Department of Conservation. (2009). *Watershed and stream management guidelines for lands and waters managed by the Missouri Department of Conservation*. Jefferson City, MO: Missouri Department of Conservation.

Missouri Department of Conservation. (2014). *Missouri watershed protection practice recommended practices for Missouri forests: 2014 management guidelines for maintaining forested watersheds to protect streams*. Jefferson City, MO: Conservation Commission of the State of Missouri.

Maps:

Figure 1: Area Map

Figure 2: Vicinity Map

Figure 3: Land Cover Map

Figure 4: Features and Facilities Map

Additional Appendices:

Appendix A. Graves Mountain Conservation Area Management Plan Public Comments

Figure 1: Area Map

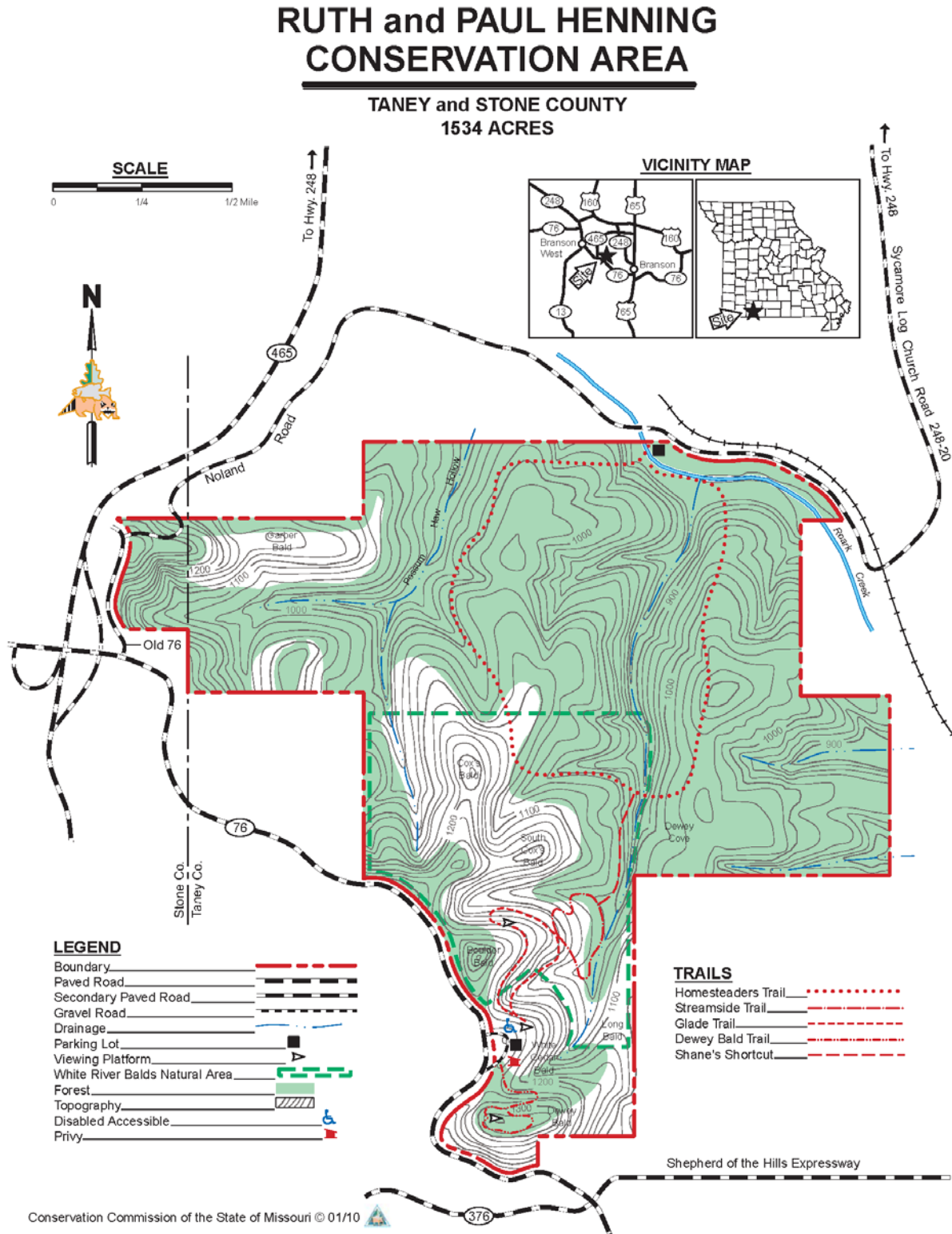


Figure 2: Vicinity Map

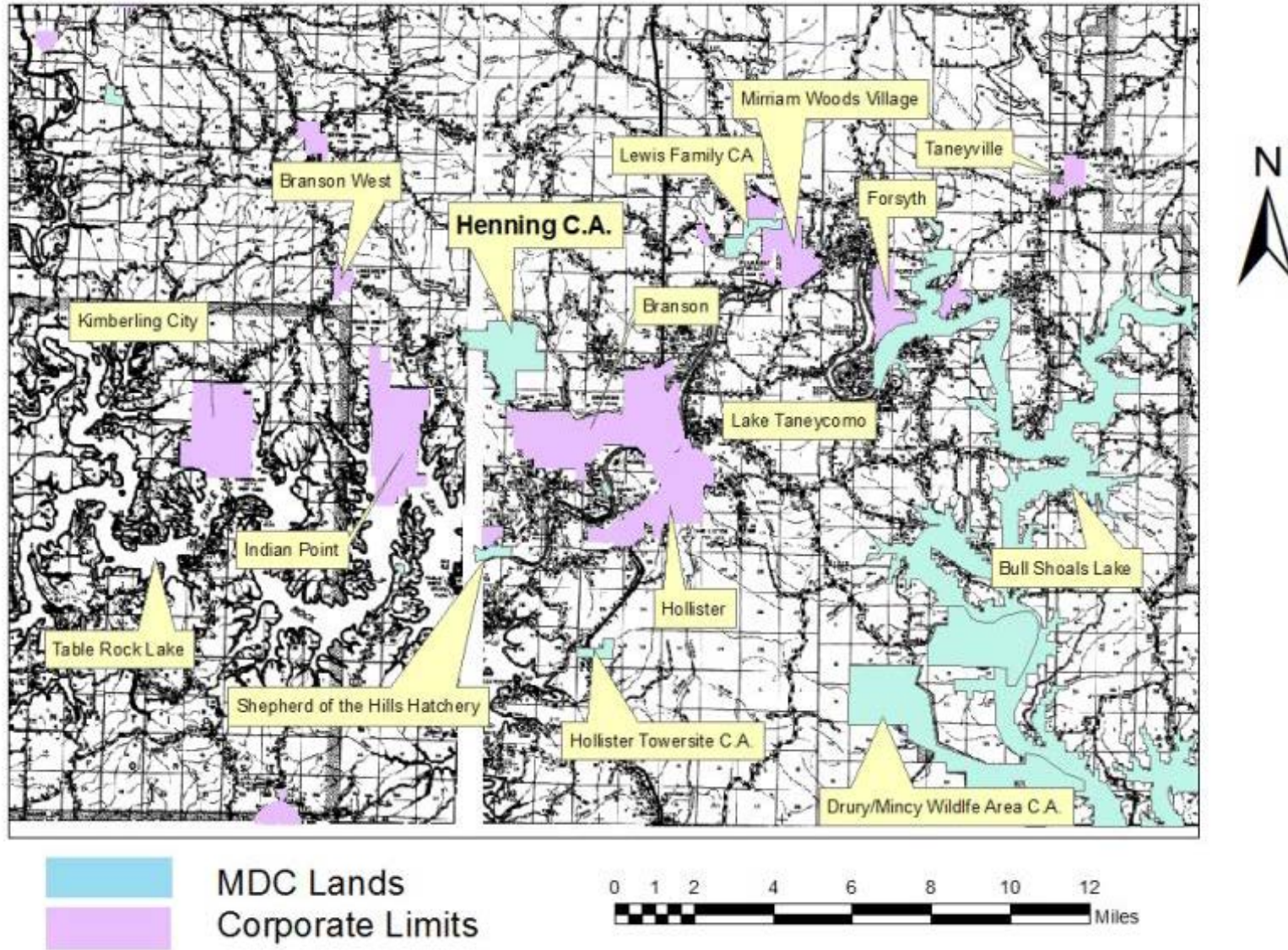


Figure 3: Land Cover Map

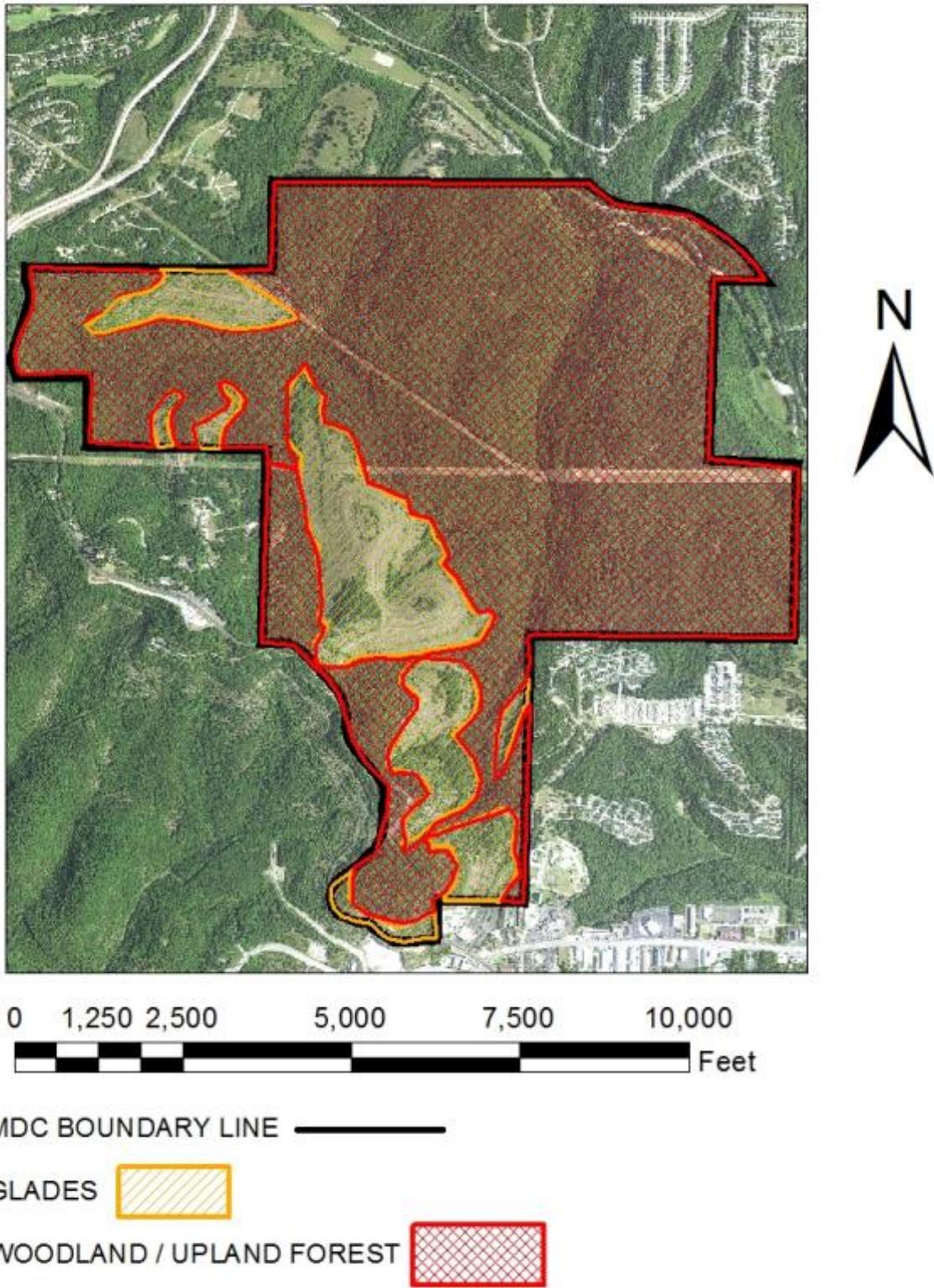
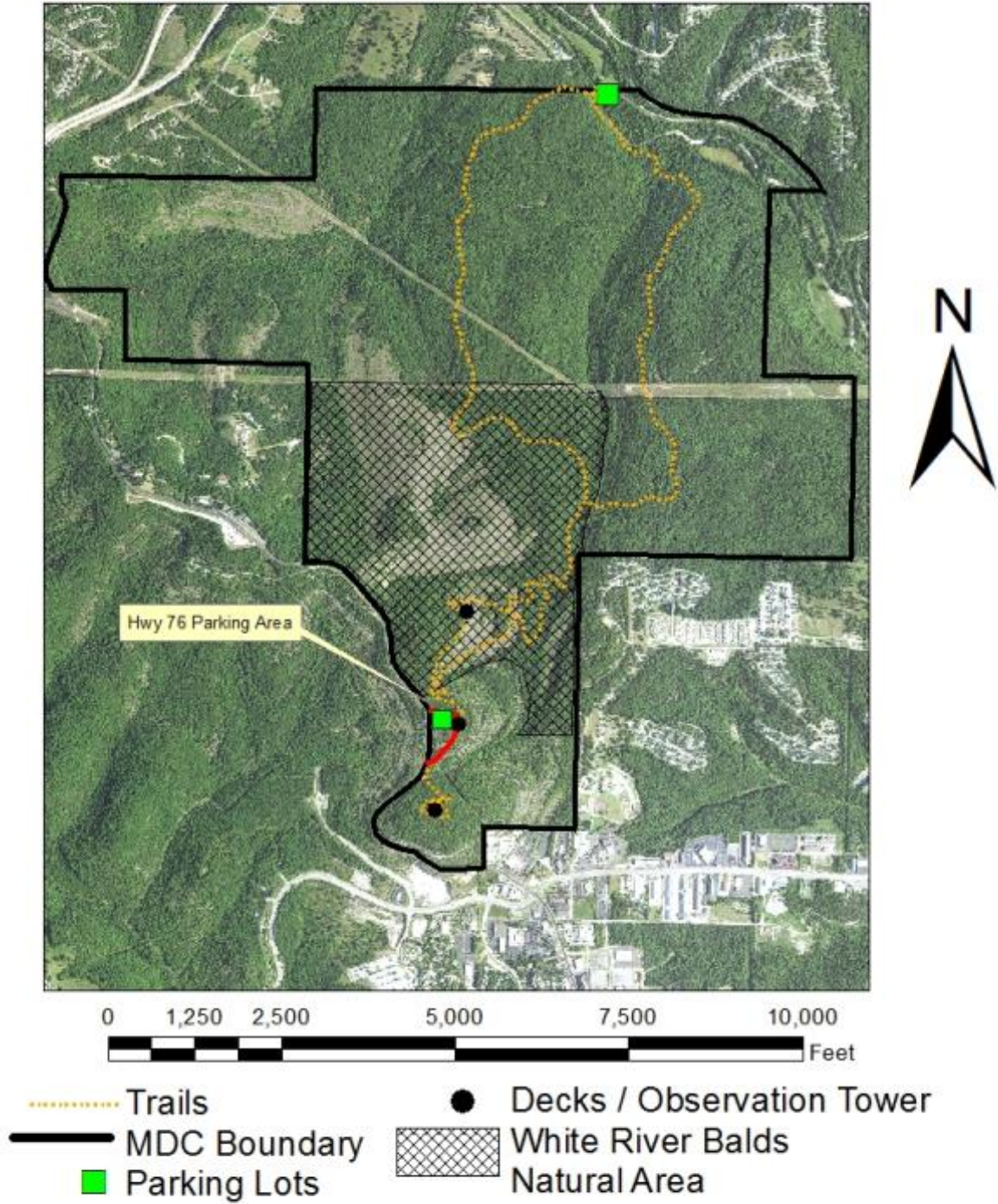


Figure 4: Features and Facilities Map



Appendix A. Ruth and Paul Henning Conservation Area Management Plan Public Comments

Received during public comment period (Feb. 1-28, 2017):

| |
|--|
| <p>This is great, as a lifelong Missouri resident I've always appreciated the care and planning that goes in to making our natural spaces last forever. Thank you for continuing your efforts on behalf of mine and future generations. Cheers.</p> |
| <p>I grew up in the area and would like to see Paul Henning used for Horseback riding. I would like to see either Henning forest or the new Ozark Mountain State Park used for ATV use. We have a changing demographic that is younger and need more use type areas close to town. Also I would love to see the tower area open after dark. It has one of the most awesome views of the Branson Lights. You could do it with guided night hikes if you don't want to keep it open all the time at night. This area has a lot of history from the Beverly Hillbilly's to the town of garber to Sammy Lane. It would be great to host narrative weiner and marshmellow roasts with stories of the most interesting history of the area.</p> |
| <p>I would love to have a few more benches along the trails in this area.</p> |
| <p>This Conservation Area is PERFECT in every way, I enjoy it immensely and don't want to see significant changes. The new bridge over the creek however, was needed.</p> |
| <p>My family and I enjoy hiking the trails. The backside of the area has a trail with sites along the trial marked by posts with numbers on top of the post. The posts marked former homesteads, old schools, old post office, etc. Years ago there were information boxes with pamphlets saying what each numbered site is. The numbered posts are in good shape, but there have not been pamphlets in the information boxes for years. It would be nice if these were either stocked on a regular basis, or there was permanent sign/legend as to what each site marker represented. The last time I was able to get a pamphlet with the guide was over 10 years ago. I think it was a boy scout project at one time, if I am not mistaken.</p> |
| <p>A bridge (rustic arch type walking bridge) across the creek when you first come to it and a trail on the other side winding along the creek with another bridge back to the original trail later would be a great addition. Benches turned to look at the creek (there is a bench now that looks away from the creek. Why?) would enhance the experience of hikers, birders, and photographers. Basicly I do not feel we are utilizing many of the natural resources of the area. Better signage on the trail for areas of interest would also be helpful such as the areas refered to in the book "Shepherd of the Hills". We have enjoyed hiking the trails and plan to continue utilizing the area. Branson area needs more hiking trails.</p> |
| <p>Please add an equestrian trail head and equestrian trails throughout this CA. This parcel is sizable enough to support equestrian trails and additional hiking trails. Thank you.</p> |
| <p>I would like to see this area improved by adding grading and payment to make the trails less muddy and more accessible for running, walking and overall safety. It's a great trail and I love it,</p> |

but it needs some maintenance. I also think that we should work with the school district to allow this trail once it has improvements to be used for the Cross Country meets. Currently the one they use is not long enough to attract the High School meets and give a better area to run and safe too. I believe the Ruth Henning Area could serve the community well in these two ways.

(Hardcopy Comment Received 2/28/2017): Please highly consider adding more hiking trails, a visitors center (because of the impact on the millions that visit to Branson), and most importantly please add biking trails which could be used by the Branson visitors. We own the adjacent property and this could be a great addition to the area.