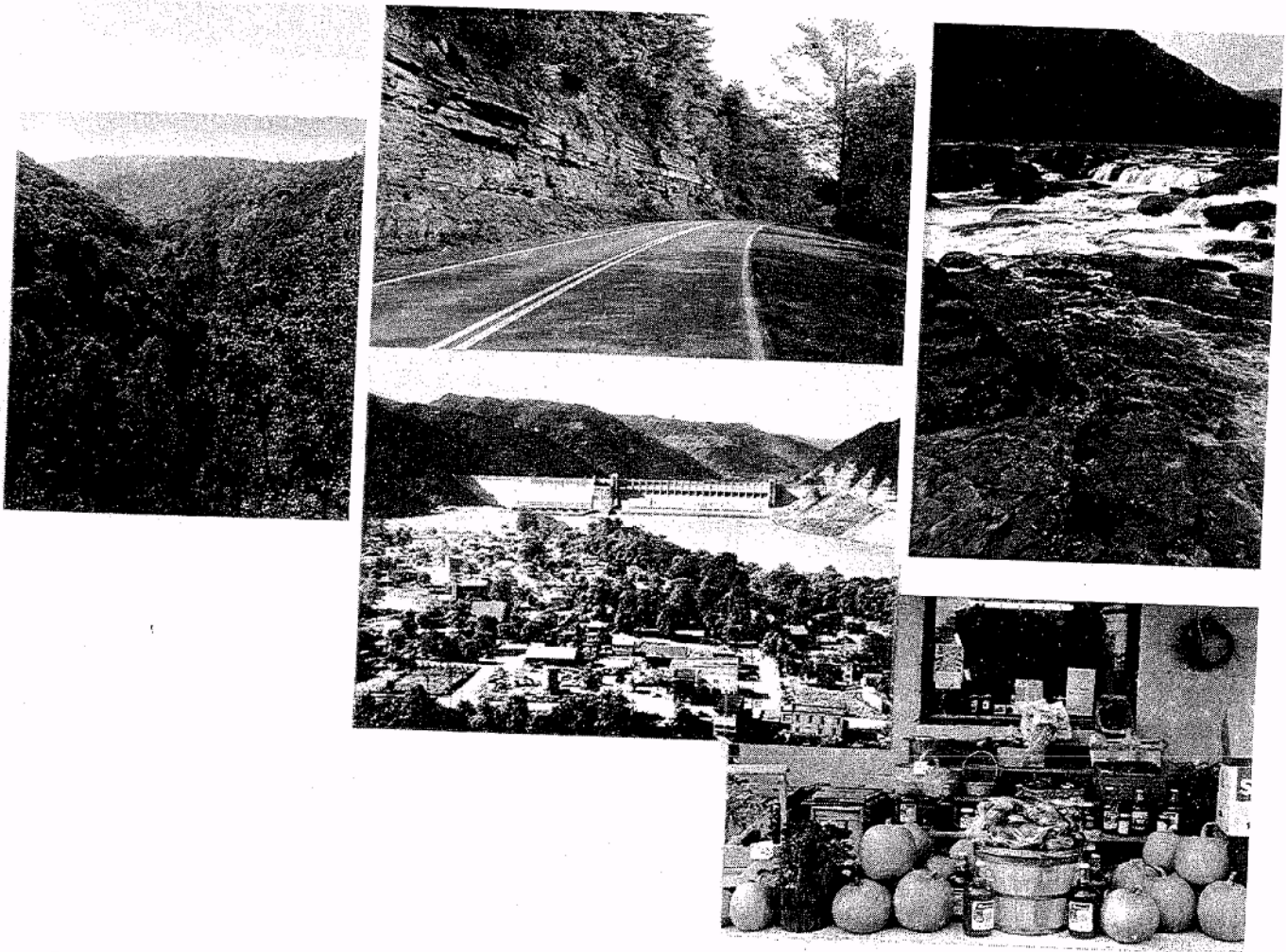




Draft Environmental Impact Statement

New River Parkway, I-64 to Hinton

Raleigh and Summers Counties, West Virginia

U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration
West Virginia Department of Transportation, Division of Highways

In Cooperation with:
New River Parkway Authority
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service
West Virginia Division of Culture and History
West Virginia Division of Environmental Protection
West Virginia Division of Natural Resources



FHWA-WV-EIS-95-01 -D
Federal Project No. DE-0062 (804) E
State Project No. X241-125-0.00 02

FHWA- WV-EIS-95-01 -D
Federal Project No. DE-0062 (804) E
State Project No. X241-125-0.00 02

NEW RIVER PARKWAY
I-64 INTERCHANGE TO HINTON

RALEIGH AND SUMMERS COUNTIES, WEST VIRGINIA

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT Submitted

Pursuant to: 42 U.S.C. 4332 (2) (c), 49 U.S.C. 303, Executive Order 11990

U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration
and West Virginia Department of
Transportation, Division of Highways

Cooperating Agencies and Reviewers:

New River Parkway Authority
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service
West Virginia Division of Culture and History
West Virginia Division of Environmental Protection
West Virginia Division of Natural Resources

2/23/98
Date of Approval

2/23/98
Date of Approval

Samuel N. Beverage
for WVDOT, Division of Highways
David A. Leighow
for Federal Highway Administration

The following persons may be contacted for additional information concerning this document:

Mr. David A. Leighow
Environmental Coordinator
Federal Highway Administration
Geary Plaza, Suite 200
700 Washington Street, East
Charleston, WV 25301
304-347-5268

Mr. Ben Hark
West Virginia Department of Transportation
Division of Highways, State Capitol Complex
Building 5, Room A 416
Charleston, WV 25305-0430
304-558-2885

The proposed project involves the design, construction and management of a scenic parkway along the New River between I-64 and Hinton, West Virginia. The New River Parkway, I-64 to Hinton, includes facilities integral to the recreation needs of residents and visitors in the southern portion of the New River Gorge National River. A description and analysis of the affected scenic parkway (visual, recreational and cultural resources) and the biophysical and socioeconomic environment follows, with special consideration of potential impacts and possible mitigations.

Comments on this Draft Environmental Impact Statement are due by MAY 28 1998 and should be sent to Mr. Randolph T. Epperly, Jr., Director, Roadway Design Division, Division of Highways, State Capitol Complex, Building 5, Room A416, Charleston, WV 25305-0430.

3.0 AFFECTED SCENIC PARKWAY ENVIRONMENT AND CONSEQUENCES

This section combines the description of the affected scenic parkway environment with the discussion of the potential consequences of the proposed project in relation to visual, recreational and cultural resources. The purpose of this format is twofold. First, it serves to eliminate the repetition of information that is common when these sections are separate. Second, a description of the existing conditions of each parameter immediately followed with a discussion of the associated corridor involvements, provides a more comprehensive understanding of the environmental consequences of the proposed action. The general format for each parameter studied includes a brief, introductory description of the physical parameters, followed by an explanation of the methodology used to analyze that parameter. After methodology follows a description of the affected environments and a list of potential direct impacts, and potential secondary and cumulative impacts to the parameter. Each parameter analysis is concluded with a list of potential mitigation measures which are proposed to avoid or minimize impacts that will result from implementation of the proposed project.

The New River gorge and its surrounding environment has been recognized as an outstanding asset to West Virginia and the nation as a whole. Thousands of visitors come to the gorge every year to experience the outstanding qualities of the area. One goal of the proposed parkway is to provide a pleasant leisurely driving experience along the New River that will link rich and diverse historical, cultural and natural resources and enhance the experience of New River gorge visitors (NRPA 1991).

Experiencing the New River gorge includes viewing the landscape and its unique features, participating in recreational activities and learning about the area's cultural history. All of these experiences are made possible by the combined natural and cultural heritage of the gorge. This DEIS highlights the relationship between natural and cultural features, and the importance of the traveler's experience along the parkway.

Given that a goal of the project is to enhance traveler's experience while preserving the natural heritage of the area, we have chosen to categorize visual, recreational and cultural features as the primary resources contributing to the proposed scenic parkway.

An inventory and analysis of potential impacts on visual, recreational and cultural resources are included in this section to fully acknowledge their combined importance to residents and visitors of this portion of the New River gorge.

3.1 VISUAL RESOURCES

Visual resources are defined by human values and for this reason every analysis of visual resources will have a degree of subjectivity. In an effort to be as objective as possible, this analysis has focused on the measurable contrast between the existing visual character of the project study area and the visible changes that will result from each project alternative.

The visual character of a landscape is a description of the predominant features that define the visual quality of the landscape (FHWA 1993). In the project study area the dominant visual features include the New River, the relatively steep mountain slopes and sandstone cliffs that define the narrow river valley, dense woodlands, pastoral farms, and the City of Hinton. These are predominantly natural features, consequently this analysis considers the overall visual character of the project study area to be naturalistic. This is not to suggest that the area is a pristine natural environment, only that the project study area landscape has an overriding natural appearance.

Within the project study area there are other features, i.e., built structures, which are less consistent with the project study area's naturalistic visual character. These features include two roads and a railroad corridor that run parallel with the New River, several small communities and scattered residences, two power lines that cut across the river and bridges at both ends of the project study area. These features, however, are largely masked by the combination of topography and dense vegetation. With the exception of the City of Hinton and the bridges, this analysis does not consider these features to diminish the naturalistic visual character of the project study area.

While all landscapes can be described by a visual character, not all landscapes have high scenic value. The project study area is considered, however, to have high scenic value due to the area's natural visual character. Recognition that the project study area's naturalistic appearance has high scenic value is supported by the inclusion of the project study area within the National Park Service (NPS) New River Gorge National River (NRGMR). The natural and scenic values of the NRGMR are clearly described in NPS documentation regarding the character of the National River as represented in this statement from the NRGMR Land Protection Plan (USDOI 1984, 11):

"The National River's significance is based largely on the generally undeveloped condition of the land within the boundary. The topography and the area's isolation have resulted in large portions of the gorge retaining an abundance of natural resources and high-quality scenic values. Activities or land uses which might involve increased development, new vehicle access to previously isolated areas, or actual harvesting of resources have a significant potential for adversely affecting the National River's natural and scenic values."

Since the project study area's natural visual character is the basis of the area's high scenic quality this analysis maintains that any visible change that strongly contrasts with the naturalistic appearance of the New River environs, will impact the scenic quality of the project study area. It is also recognized that in order to maintain the project study area's scenic quality while simultaneously providing for a scenic touring road, the area's naturalistic appearance must be maintained in the gorge and along the parkway as much as possible.

The Visual Resources Section evaluates the impact of the project on the area's visual character and the subsequent impacts to the area's scenic quality. The section is divided into two subsections and assesses the scenic quality from two perspectives. The first subsection identifies all permanent project modifications and evaluates the impacts these will have on the area's scenic quality from the perspective of viewers looking toward the proposed alternatives. The second subsection identifies the positive visual opportunities and scenic quality each alternative offers the parkway traveler and assesses the impact of permanent construction modifications on the visual experience of the parkway traveler. Both of these evaluations assess impacts by measuring the contrast between construction modifications and the project study area's naturalistic visual character.

3.1.1 Impacts to Project Study Area Scenic Quality

During project construction the area's scenic beauty will be disrupted by visible hillside modifications, construction equipment, stockpiles, storage areas and construction access roads, especially when these occur in areas that are highly visible or are important resource areas. Much of this initial disturbance will lessen once construction is complete and excavation and fill modifications begin to revegetate.

There will, however, be long-term disturbances to the area's scenic beauty where construction requires permanent modifications to the landscape. Visible permanent modifications will increase the appearance of human habitation and, as a result, contrast with the area's naturalistic scenic quality. Examples of such necessary modifications include steep excavation and fill alterations, retaining walls and bridge crossings. If these modifications are large enough they could be visible from valued viewing places throughout the project study area.

In order to assess the impact of project alternatives on the area's scenic quality, the following section identifies valued viewing places and evaluates the visibility of permanent construction modifications from each viewing place.

3.1.1.1 Methodology

In order to evaluate impacts to the project study area scenic quality, a three-stage methodology was developed. First, it was necessary to identify valued viewing places in the project study area. Once viewing places were identified, a method of ranking the importance of each viewing place was developed. The evaluation of impacts was then based on viewing places of high importance. This conservative approach was used to ensure that the most extreme impacts were identified and measured.

In the second stage, the permanent construction modifications visible from each viewing place were identified. This identification was based on the height of the modifications and their locations within the viewsheds of highly important viewing places.

Finally, visual simulations from three east and west side Sandstone Falls viewing places were created. Given the scenic and recreational importance of this NPS facility, and given the extensive modifications required for Alternative 3 near this facility, it was decided that visual simulations would be useful for fully understanding the potential impacts to Sandstone Falls scenery.

The following discussion gives a detailed description of each stage of this methodology. This section of the visual analysis is limited in that it only analyzes existing views and not potential views that may result from construction of project alternatives.

Stage One: Criteria for Designating Viewing Places of High Importance

In order to be considered a viewing place, a site had to be either within a residential area or within a state or NPS facility. Sites in each of these areas were identified and the viewsheds were delineated from field observations and topographic maps. Generally, the number of viewing places do not vary with alternatives.

Not all locations and views identified are of equal importance, therefore, it was necessary to determine the relative value of each view. Their relative importance was determined through a scoring system. Views were scored according to:

- 1) Attention (Score: 1-2; 1=average or below average; 2=above average)

Refers to the level of attention given to the view and is related to what the viewers are doing when they are * looking. Vistas seen while driving, for example, probably do not receive as much attention as vistas seen while stationary, such as from an overlook or a backyard.

- 2) Volume (Score: 1-2; 1=fewer viewers; 2=more viewers)

Refers to how much exposure the view gets. Views estimated to be seen by more people score higher.

3) Significance (Score: 1-3; 1=significant; 2=more significant; 3=most significant)

Refers to the content of the view. Because research suggests that scenes with less human influence are preferred (Carls 1974; Kaplan et al. 1975; Hodgson and Thayer 1980), if the view is of a natural scene or contains a visual feature such as cliffs, rapids, an historic farm, etc., then it rates higher. Since all the views studied have an important feature in them, all views receive a score of at least 1.

4) Scenic Expanse (Score: 1-3; 1=average; 2=above average; 3=high)

Refers to the amount of the landscape visible in the scene, not the content of the scene. Generally, more panoramic, "multi-ridged" scenes with longer viewing distances are preferred over limited, "single-ridged" scenes with shorter viewing distances (USDOI 1988).

Totaling the scores for each factor resulted in an overall importance score for each view. Based on professional judgement, highly important views were identified as those which scored eight to 10 points. Viewing places and the scores given to their views are shown in Table 3.1.A.

Stage Two: Method of Assessing Alternative Impacts

Permanent modifications include structures like bridges and retaining walls, as well as steep excavation and fill slopes which cannot be revegetated. Hillside excavation and fill banks with slopes equal to or less than 2:1 were considered temporary because they can be revegetated. The impact of the Build Alternatives upon the project study area's scenic quality was evaluated based on the visibility and the location of these permanent modifications within highly important viewsheds.

The visibility of these modifications is based on their heights and vegetation coverage. The heights were estimated using 1:600 cross sections [at 152-meter (500-foot) intervals along the alternative alignments] as shown on preliminary engineering drawings. Heights were calculated and placed into one of three ranges: 1.5 to 5.8 meters (5 to 19 feet), 6.1 to 10.7 meters (20 to 35 feet), and 11.0 meters (36 feet) and up.

Generally, hillside excavations, fills and retaining walls 1.5 to 5.8 meters (5 to 19 feet) in height are not expected to impact the visual quality of the gorge. Such heights will, in most cases, be covered or screened by vegetation or will diminish in size with viewing distance, therefore, construction modifications in this height category were not considered negative impacts for this analysis.

Excavations, fills and retaining walls ranging from 6.1 to 10.7 meters (20 to 35 feet) in height are expected to have moderately negative visual impact on views within the gorge but only when they occur in open, unforested areas. Forests in the gorge are estimated to have heights of approximately 9.1 to 18.3 meters (30 to 60 feet). Forested areas would effectively screen 6.1- to 10.7-meter (20- to 35-foot) modifications.

TABLE 3.1.A IMPORTANT VIEWING PLACES AND VIEW RATINGS IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA

VIEWING PLACE	ATTENTION SCORE: 1-2	VOLUME SCORE: 1-2	SIGNIFICANCE SCORE: 1-3	SCENE SCORE: 1-3	TOTAL SCORE
NPS Facilities					
Sandstone Falls put-in	2	2	2	1	7
Sandstone Falls boardwalk - VS-3	2	2	3	3	10
Sandstone Falls boardwalk - VS-4	2	2	3	2	9
Sandstone Falls overlook (Rt 26) - VS-5	2	2	3	3	10
Sandstone Falls overlook (WV 20) - VS-2	2	2	3	3	10
Sandstone Falls take-out	2	2	2	1	7
Brooks Falls put-in	2	2	1	1	6
Brooks Falls facility - VS-7	2	2	3	1	8
Brooks Falls take-out	2	2	1	1	6
Akers put-in - VS-10	2	2	3	2	9
Residential Clusters					
Sandstone	2	1	2	1	6
Brooks	2	1	2	1	6
Fox Edition	2	1	2	1	6
Richmond Bottom (north)	2	1	1	1	5
Richmond Bottom (south)	2	1	1	1	5
Hinton - VS-8	2	2	2	2	8
Hinton Historic District - VS-9	2	2	3	3	10
Brooklin - VS-11	2	2	3	2	9
State Facilities					
Laurel Creek put-in (DNR)	1	1	3	2	7
Camp Brookside put-in (DNR)	1	1	2	1	6
Brooks Island overlook (DOH) - VS-6	2	2	3	3	10
View from I-64 Bridge - VS-1	1	2	2	3	8
Highly important viewing places are shaded in lighter gray tone.					

Excavations, fills and retaining walls 11.0 meters (36 feet) and higher are estimated to have a high visual impact on the gorge due to their high degree of visibility and contrast with the surrounding naturalistic scenery. These impacts will be reduced slightly if they occur in forested areas; however, these modifications will not be completely concealed by forests and will be visible at various sites throughout the project study area.

A bridge crossing over the New River is another permanent and visible modification which will impact scenic quality, especially from the perspective of a person recreating on the river. These bridges will contrast with the natural appearance of the river and the wooded mountain slopes experienced by a person on the river. Impacts can be lessened, however, with the use of bridge materials, forms and processes which blend with the naturalistic character of the project study area.

Stage Three: Visual Simulation

In the Sandstone Falls area, the simultaneous occurrence of high visual quality, numerous viewers, multiple viewpoints and extensive changes due to Alternative 3 suggested the need for visual simulation of the proposed changes. Visual simulations are photo-like images of future scenes used to represent visual changes in the landscape, which allow more concrete and qualitative evaluation of potential impacts.

Scenes from two viewpoints at Sandstone Falls were selected for simulation because Alternative 3 lies within the viewsheds of these viewpoints and this alternative will be visible from the viewpoints. The first viewpoint (Vp1) is from the NPS Sandstone Falls overlook off of Route 26. This overlook provides an excellent panoramic view of Sandstone Falls, the New River and the surrounding wooded mountain slopes. The second viewpoint (Vp2) is from the river's side viewing platform on the east end of the boardwalk. The viewing platform provides the best close-up view of Sandstone Falls and the New River, and it is directly across the river from Chestnut Mountain. The Sandstone Falls Overlook off of WV 20 is also an important scenic viewpoint. However, because Alternative 3 cuts into the steep slope below the WV 20 overlook this alternative is not visible from the overlook and no simulation is therefore necessary. A plan and section have been drawn to depict the horizontal and vertical relationship between the two viewpoints (Vp1 and Vp2) and the alignments of the Build Alternatives in the vicinity of Sandstone Falls.

The method of visual simulation is a two-step process consisting of modeling and imaging. First, the landform and road structures were three-dimensionally modeled with CAD software. From this model, viewpoint perspectives were generated and displayed as wire-frame and color-rendered images. In the second step, the generated perspectives were superimposed on images of the actual perspectives using image processing software, creating the photorealistic image of the proposed project.

The landform model used elevation data from USGS topography [at 12-meter (40-foot) contours] and preliminary engineering topography at 1.5 meter (five-foot) contours. Modeling of the roadbed and bridge structures was based on preliminary alignment, profile and cross-section design. Site images were scanned from 35 mm photographs, taken with a normal lens (50 mm) as panoramas to capture the typical scale and field of view. The resulting simulations are representative of the proposed form of the project; however, simulations may vary slightly from actual construction due to data limitations, model generalization and design changes.

3.1.1.2 Affected Environment

Highly Important Viewing Places

Highly important viewing places and their viewsheds are areas of high scenic value and are the affected environments when considering the impact of alternatives upon the views within the gorge. Eleven viewing places located at NPS facilities, state facilities and residential clusters have been identified. The six viewing places at NPS facilities include four at Sandstone Falls, one at the Akers site and one at Brooks Falls. The state facility viewing places are the Brooks Island Overlook on WV 20 and the I-64 Bridge crossing the New River. The highly important viewing places located in residential clusters include two in Hinton and one in Brooklin.

Figures 3.1 .a, 3.1 .b and 3.1 .c show the locations and the viewsheds of these eleven viewing places.

Visible Permanent Modifications

As stated in the introduction, there are existing features in the project study area that contrast with the area's visual character. However, because these features are not considered to diminish the overall character they are not discussed in this analysis. This analysis is focused on the recognized scenic quality of the area and the changes to this quality that will occur with the Build Alternatives.

Figures 3.1.a, 3.1.b and 3.1.c map *all* of the permanent modifications that will result from the Build Alternatives. The modifications which are *shaded* on the map are those that are visible from highly important viewing places. There are a total of 18 visible modifications as shown in Table 3.1.B.

As Figures 3.1.a, 3.1.b and 3.1.c indicate, some visible modifications are located within highly important viewsheds and some are not. Table 3.1.C lists the length of visible modifications located within each highly important viewshed. Those visible modifications which are not in highly important viewsheds are not considered negative impacts to highly important views. However, they are important to note because they will impact views from the New River.



**TABLE 3.1.B LENGTH OF ALL MODIFICATIONS VISIBLE ALONG EACH BUILD ALTERNATIVE IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA
(Continued)**

Modification Number	Alt. 2A	Alt. 2B	Alt. 2C	Alt. 3	Alt. 4A	Alt. 4B	Alt. 4C
West Side Modifications							
W-1	n/a	n/a	91 m (300 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a	91 m (300 ft)
W-11	213 m (700 ft)	213 m (700 ft)	213 m (700 ft)	213 m (700 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
W-19	198 m (650 ft)	198 m (650 ft)	198 m (650 ft)	198 m (650 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
¹ Option 4D will require no modifications in areas E-31, E-32 and E-33 and will require 487 meters (1,600 feet) less modifications compared to Alternative 4. Note: n/a denotes modification does not affect this project alternative.							

TABLE 3.1.C LENGTH OF MODIFICATIONS ALONG EACH BUILD ALTERNATIVE VISIBLE FROM HIGHLY IMPORTANT VIEWING PLACES IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA

Viewing Place	Alt. 2A	Alt. 2B	Alt. 2C	Alt. 3	Alt. 4A	Alt. 4B	Alt. 4C
I-64 Bridge (VS-1)	290 m (950 ft)	0	0	290 m (950 ft)	290 m (950 ft)	0	0
Sandstone Falls Overlook (east) (VS-2)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sandstone Falls Boardwalk (VS-3)	0	0	0	1,189 m (3,900 ft)	0	0	0
Sandstone Falls Boardwalk (VS-4)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sandstone Falls Overlook (west) (VS-5)	0	0	0	1,341 m (4,400 ft)	0	0	0
Brooks Island Overlook (VS-6)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Brooks Island Facility (VS-7)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hinton (VS-8)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hinton Historic District (VS-9)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Akers put-in (VS-10)	0	0	0	0	487 m ¹ (1,600 ft)	487 m ¹ (1,600 ft)	487 m ¹ (1,600 ft)
Brooklin (VS-11)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of viewing places impacted	1	1	0	3	2 ¹	1 ¹	1 ¹
Bridges visible from viewing places	1 Richmond Farm Bridge	1 Richmond Island Bridge	0	1 Brooks Island Bridge	2 Richmond Farm & Brooks Island Bridges	2 Richmond Island & Brooks Island Bridges	1 Brooks Island Bridge

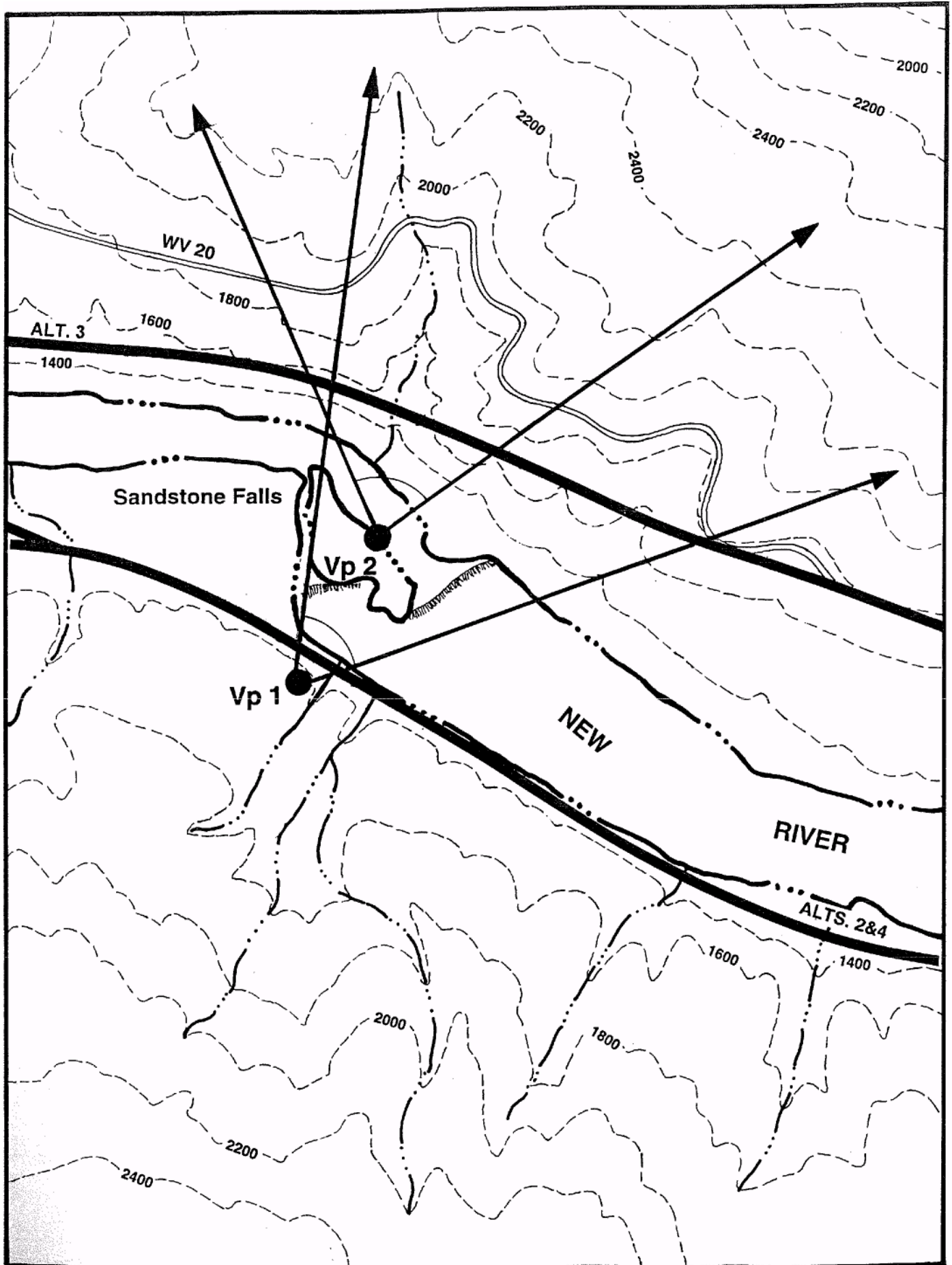
¹ Option 4D will have 487 m (1,600 ft) less modifications visible from highly important viewing places and will impact one less viewing place in the project study area compared to Alternative 4.

3.1.1.3 Potential Direct Impacts

Table 3.1.D summarizes the impacts of each Build Alternative on the scenic quality of the project study area. The inclusion of truck climbing/passing lanes into the roadway design of Alternative 3 may be necessary. Initial analysis indicates, however, that in addition to the current visual impacts of Alternative 3, truck climbing/passing lanes will result in minor visual impacts. The No-Build Alternative is not included in Table 3.1.D as this alternative will have no additional impact on the project study area scenic quality.

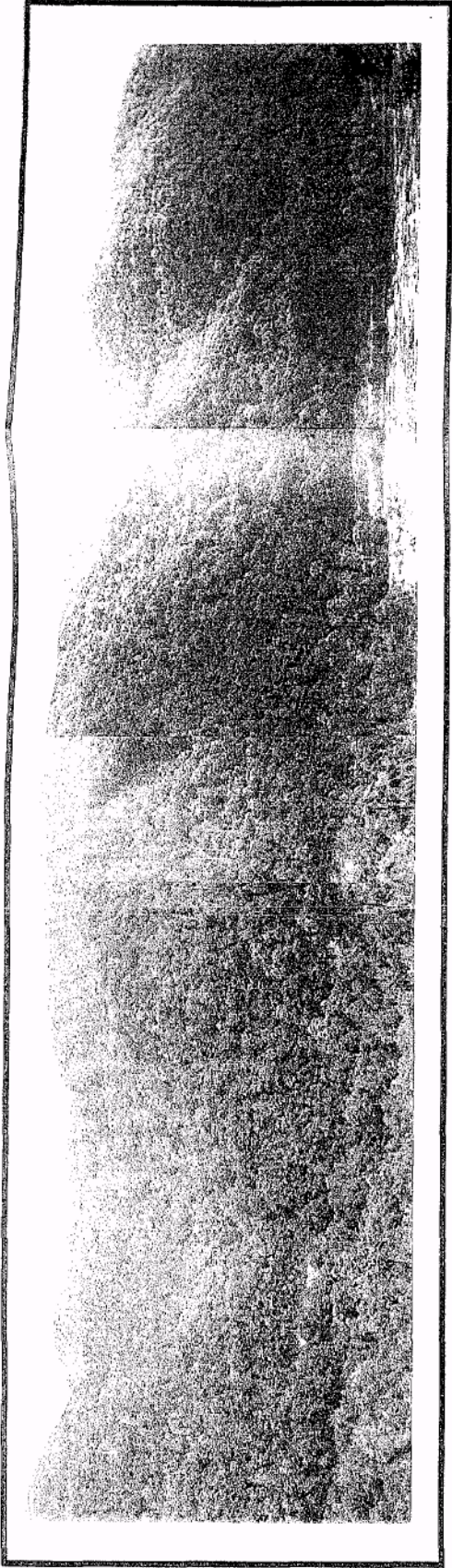
TABLE 3.1.D DIRECT IMPACTS ON SCENIC QUALITY BY BUILD ALTERNATIVES IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA							
	Alt. 2A	Alt. 2B	Alt. 2C	Alt. 3	Alt. 4A	Alt. 4B	Alt. 4C
Total Length of Visible Modifications	701 m (2,300 ft)	411 m (1,350 ft)	502 m (1,650 ft)	2,773 m (9,100 ft)	778 m ¹ (2,550 ft)	487 m ¹ (1,600 ft)	578 m ¹ (1,900 ft)
Percent of Road Length that has Visible Modifications	4%	2%	3%	17%	5%	3%	3%
Number of Highly Important Views Impacted¹	1	1	0	3	2 ¹	1 ¹	1 ¹
Total Length of Modifications Visible from Highly Important Viewing Places¹	290 m (950 ft)	0	0	2,820 m (9,250 ft)	778 m ¹ (2,550 ft)	487 m ¹ (1,600 ft)	487 m ¹ (1,600 ft)
Number of Bridge Crossings Over the New River	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
Bridge Crossings Visible from Highly Important Viewing Places	1	1	0	1	2	2	1
¹ Option 4D will require 487 meters (1,600 feet) less visible modifications and will impact one less highly important view compared to Alternative 4.							

Alternative 3 has the greatest number of visible modifications and impacts on valuable viewing places. Alternatives 4A, 4B and 4C have fewer visible modifications than Alternative 3, however, they impact one to two valued viewing places and require two bridge crossings over the New River. Option 4D would reduce the visual modifications of Alternative 4 by 487 meters (1,600 feet) and would impact one less highly important view.

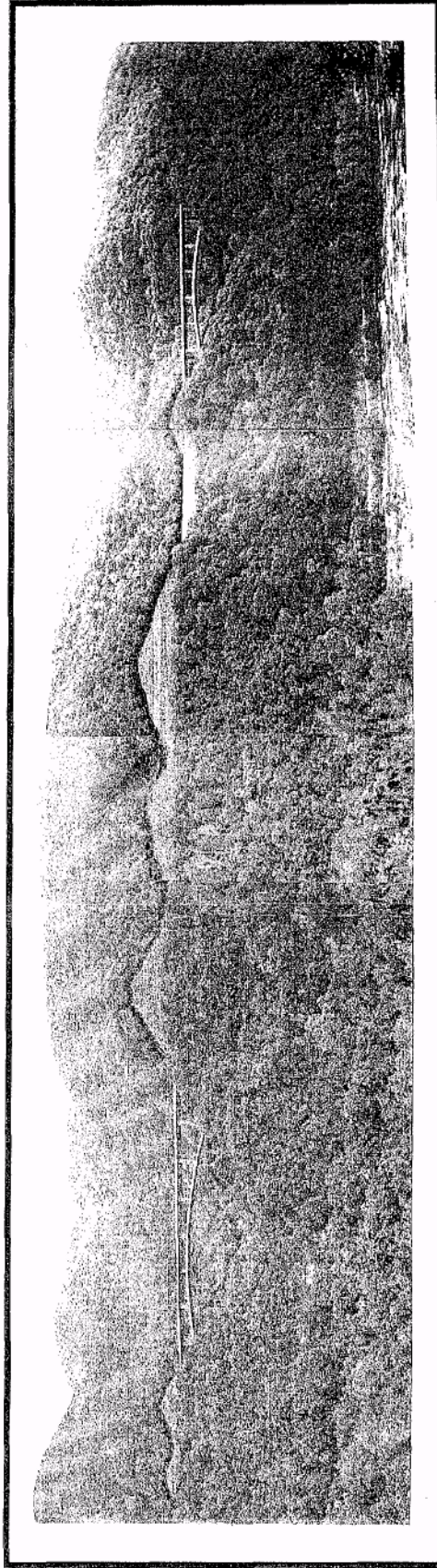


Viewsheds Related to Viewpoints 1 & 2

VISUAL SIMULATIONS



VIEWPOINT 1 - EXISTING

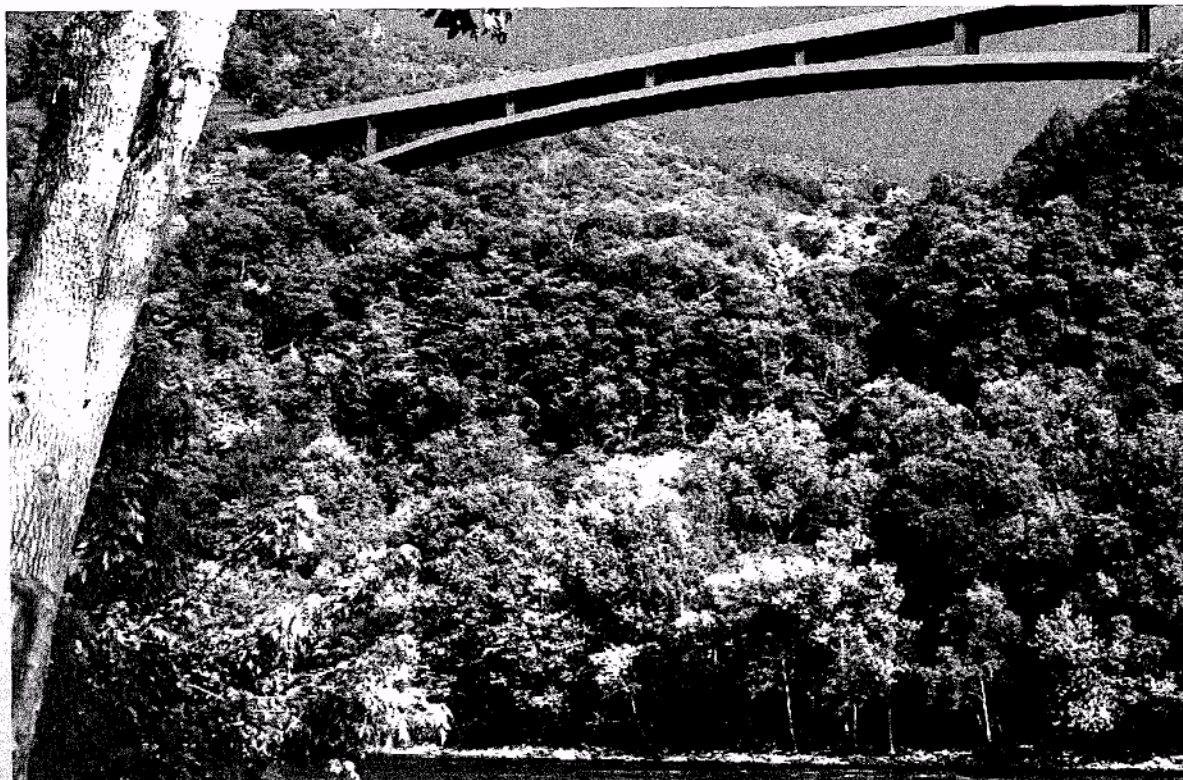


VIEWPOINT 1 - PROPOSED
ALTERNATIVE 3

VISUAL SIMULATIONS
I-64 to Hinton
New River Parkway
West Virginia
Sheet 2 Fig. 3.1.f



VIEWPOINT 2 - EXISTING



VIEWPOINT 2 - PROPOSED

VISUAL SIMULATIONS

Alternatives 2A, 2B and 2C have few visible modifications, little or no impact on valued viewing places and require only one bridge crossing.

Views from the New River must also be considered when assessing the potential impacts of the alternatives. The naturalistic appearance of the project study area is even more valuable for a visitor traveling along the river than for a visitor traveling along the parkway because a parkway traveler would expect to see roadway-related infrastructure; however, a river traveler would not expect to see such infrastructure. A visitor traveling on the river also has the potential to experience more visible modifications, not just those visible from highly important viewing areas.

The permanent visible impacts of Alternative 3 will all be visible from the river. Alternatives 4A, 4B and 4C have fewer excavation modifications that will be visible from the river, but they do have two bridge crossings. Alternatives 2A, 2B and 2C have few visible excavations and only one bridge crossing. The No-Build Alternative has no new impacts on views from the river.

3.1.1.4 Potential Secondary and Cumulative Impacts

Construction of any of the Build Alternatives is expected to increase development pressure in the project study area. Structures associated with increased development may be visible from scenic viewing places. Any additional sign of human habitation will lessen the project study area's naturalistic appearance and the result will be the further degradation of the project study area's overall scenic quality.

The New River Parkway Land Management System (LMS) that will accompany the Build Alternatives will provide some protection of visual quality by guiding building design in the parkway corridor. Currently, only the City of Hinton has ordinances to guide development and protect scenic quality on private lands in the project study area; this situation will remain should the No-Build Alternative be chosen as the preferred alternative.

3.1.1.5 Potential Mitigations

The visual impact of extensive hillside modifications along any Build Alternative will be lessened with the use of retaining walls where possible. If excavations are necessary, the impact will be minimized by making the modifications resemble the textures of existing cliff faces. Additionally, vegetative growth on the cliff faces will be encouraged to help cover and/or add interest to new excavations.

Visual impacts of retaining walls will be minimized by using wall designs which blend appropriately with the context of the natural environment.

Stockpiles and storage areas for machinery and materials will be located in places that are not highly visible. Stockpiles and storage areas will be restored to pre-project conditions after construction.

The feasibility of innovative and aesthetic bridge designs will be explored in order to lessen the impact of bridges over the New River. Regardless of the bridge design chosen, naturalistic materials, forms and processes will be used to better blend the bridge with its surroundings.

For more information on mitigation, see Appendix D: Mitigation Strategies and Techniques.

3.1.2 Visual Experience of the Project Alternatives

Given the area's existing scenic beauty, each of the project alternatives has valuable scenic qualities. These qualities differ depending upon the topography and land cover through which the alternatives pass. For instance, road alignments on the west side run along lower foothills and bottomlands close to the river. These alignments offer intimate views of the river, farms and historic buildings. Road alignments on the east side cross Chestnut Mountain high above the New River and offer both near views of mountain forests and panoramic views of the New River. These are examples of visual opportunities which could enhance the experience of a parkway traveler. The experience of the traveler could be diminished by too many modifications to the area's naturalistic scenic quality.

For this analysis, the overall visual experience provided by each alternative is evaluated based on the alternative's access to positive visual opportunities and the impact of visible construction modifications. Two types of positive visual opportunities were identified: visual features and vistas. Visual features have been defined as aesthetic, cultural and natural resources which can be experienced intimately while traveling on a project alternative. An example would be the opportunity to experience the area's rural character as an alternative travels through or along a local farm. This experience is possible due to the traveler's close physical proximity to the visual feature.

Vistas were defined as opportunities along a project alternative which offer panoramic views. Vistas may look out over one or more visual features, but in contrast to an intimate experience, the vista allows the traveler to view these features in their larger scenic, cultural and natural context.

In order to assess which Build Alternative has the highest scenic quality, the sequence of positive visual opportunities along each alternative was inventoried. It was assumed that an alternative with a great number and variety of positive visual opportunities would be of high scenic quality.

For the Build Alternatives, this scenic quality could be altered by the presence of permanent visible construction modifications along the alignment corridor. Construction of each Build Alternative would result in modifications to the physical landscape which would negatively impact the scenic quality of the alternatives. Impacts to scenic quality would, therefore, affect the overall visual experience of the parkway traveler.

3.1.2.1 Methodology

Visually important features were identified by the NPS, the NRPA and landscape architects at Virginia Tech. Water features and farms were included as valued visual features based on a study conducted on the Blue Ridge Parkway which determined visitors preferred views of water resources and pastoral landscapes above all others (USDOI1988). Features were delineated to include the land physically occupied by the feature.

Area vistas were identified by landscape architects at Virginia Tech. These vistas include overlooks and recreation sites which currently exist or are proposed to be added along each Build Alternative (for more information on the proposed sites, see Section 3.2 Recreational Resources). Each vista was identified in the field and mapped. For this analysis, the view from the vista is not important, rather it is the opportunity for views which each vista represents that is considered important. Therefore, when project alternatives were analyzed, their relative scenic quality was based on the total number of features and vistas accessed.

Negative impacts on the driving experience were estimated according to the total length of excavations, fills and retaining wall modifications visible along each alternative. Only hillside modifications and retaining walls above the road will be visible from the perspective of a parkway traveler. Bridge structures, smaller fills and retaining walls below the road are not considered in this evaluation. Also, from the perspective of a parkway traveler, all construction modifications above the road will be visible regardless of their heights so, in this section, modification height was not a consideration. The length of each modification was measured from 1:4,800 scale maps.

The visual experience of each Build Alternative was given an overall ranking of high, medium or low relative to the other alternatives. The rankings were determined by evaluating the negative impact of visible modifications on the scenic quality of each alternative.

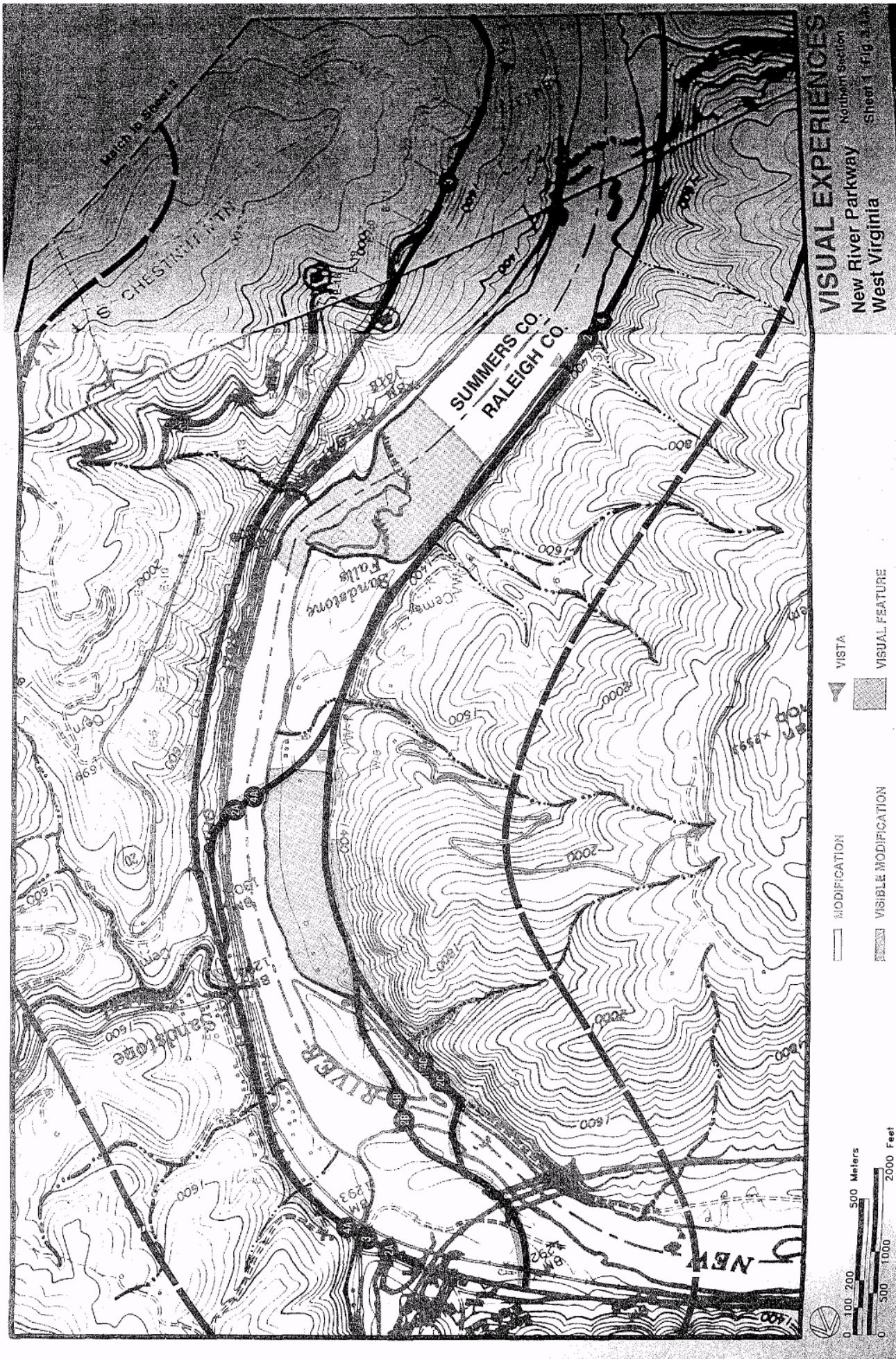
3.1.2.2 Affected Environment

Positive Visual Opportunities

Six visual features and 14 vistas have been located in the project study area. The locations of each feature and vista are delineated on Figures 3.1 .h, 3.1 .i and 3.1 j.

Table 3.1.E identifies all vistas and features which will be accessed by each project alternative with a check mark (✓).

TABLE 3.1.E VISUAL FEATURES AND VISTAS ACCESSED BY PROJECT ALTERNATIVES IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA								
	No-Build	Alt. 2A	Alt. 2B	Alt. 2C	Alt. 3	Alt. 4A	Alt. 4B	Alt. 4C
Features								
Tug Rapids	✓	✓ ¹	✓ ¹	✓ ¹		✓	✓	✓
Brooks Falls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Sandstone Falls	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Hinton Historic District	✓					✓	✓	✓
Terreo Farm	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Richmond Farm	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Vistas								
VE-1 Proposed Laurel Creek Site		✓			✓	✓		
VE-2 Proposed Sandstone Falls Overlook					✓			
VE-3 Sandstone Falls Overlook (east)	✓							
VE-4 Proposed River North Overlook					✓			
VE-5 Brooks Island Overlook	✓				✓			
VE-6 Tug Creek Pull-Out	✓					✓	✓	✓
VE-7 Proposed Hinton Gateway Site						✓ ²	✓ ²	✓ ²
VW-1 Proposed Richmond Farm Overlook			✓	✓			✓	✓
VW-2 Sandstone Falls Overlook (west)		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
VW-3 Sandstone Falls Pull-Out		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
VW-4 Proposed Long Bottom Site		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
VW-5 Brooks Falls Recreation Site		✓	✓	✓	✓			
VW-6 Akers Recreation Site		✓	✓	✓	✓			
VW-7 Proposed Brooklin Site		✓	✓	✓	✓			
¹ Option 2D/3A will access one more visual feature in the project study area compared to Alternatives 2 and 3.								
² Option 4D will access one more vista in the project study area compared to Alternative 4.								



Visible Construction Modifications

Table 3.1.F lists the permanent modifications which will be visible to the parkway traveler. Figures 3.1.h, 3.1.i and 3.1.j show these visible modifications shaded in lighter gray tone.

TABLE 3.1.F LENGTH OF MODIFICATIONS VISIBLE TO THE PARKWAY TRAVELER ALONG EACH BUILD ALTERNATIVE IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA							
Modification Number	Alt. 2A	Alt. 2B	Alt. 2C	Alt. 3	Alt. 4A	Alt. 4B	Alt. 4C
East Side Modifications							
E-1	229 m (750 ft)	n/a	n/a	229 m (750 ft)	229 m (750 ft)	n/a	n/a
E-2	290 m (950 ft)	n/a	n/a	290 m (950 ft)	290 m (950 ft)	n/a	n/a
E-3	46 m (150 ft)	n/a	n/a	46 m (150 ft)	46 m (150 ft)	n/a	n/a
E-4	61 m (200 ft)	n/a	n/a	61 m (200 ft)	61 m (200 ft)	n/a	n/a
E-5	n/a	n/a	n/a	122 m (400 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
E-7	n/a	n/a	n/a	61 m (200 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
E-10	n/a	n/a	n/a	61 m (200 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
E-12	n/a	n/a	n/a	320 m (1,050 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
E-14	n/a	n/a	n/a	259 m (850 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
E-16	n/a	n/a	n/a	46 m (150 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
E-19	n/a	n/a	n/a	122 m (400 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
E-21	n/a	n/a	n/a	91 m (300 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
E-22	n/a	n/a	n/a	61 m (200 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
E-24	n/a	n/a	n/a	61 m (200 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a

TABLE 3.1.F LENGTH OF MODIFICATIONS VISIBLE TO THE PARKWAY TRAVELER ALONG EACH BUILD ALTERNATIVE IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA (Continued)							
Modification Number	Alt. 2A	Alt. 2B	Alt. 2C	Alt. 3	Alt. 4A	Alt. 4B	Alt. 4C
East Side Modifications (Continued)							
E-28	n/a	n/a	n/a	61 m (200 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
E-29	n/a	n/a	n/a	198 m (650 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
E-30	n/a	n/a	n/a	198 m (650 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
E-32	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	61 m ¹ (200 ft)	61 m ¹ (200 ft)	61 m (200 ft)
E-33	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	30 m ¹ (100 ft)	30 m ¹ (100 ft)	30 m ¹ (100 ft)
West Side Modifications							
W-1	n/a	n/a	91 m (300 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a	91 m (300 ft)
W-2	n/a	n/a	427 m (1,400 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a	427 m (1,400 ft)
W-3	n/a	n/a	91 m (300 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a	91 m (300 ft)
W-4	n/a	335 m (1,100 ft)	335 m (1,100 ft)	n/a	n/a	335 m (1,100 ft)	335 m (1,100 ft)
W-5	n/a	91 m (300 ft)	91 m (300 ft)	n/a	n/a	91 m (300 ft)	91 m (300 ft)
W-7	396 m (1,300 ft)	396 m (1,300 ft)	396 m (1,300 ft)	n/a	396 m (1,300 ft)	396 m (1,300 ft)	396 m (1,300 ft)
W-8	61 m (200 ft)	61 m (200 ft)	61 m (200 ft)	n/a	61 m (200 ft)	61 m (200 ft)	61 m (200 ft)
W-9	91 m (300 ft)	91 m (300 ft)	91 m (300 ft)	n/a	91 m (300 ft)	91 m (300 ft)	91 m (300 ft)
W-10	91 m (300 ft)	91 m (300 ft)	91 m (300 ft)	n/a	91 m (300 ft)	91 m (300 ft)	91 m (300 ft)
W-11	213 m (700 ft)	213 m (700 ft)	213 m (700 ft)	213 m (700 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
W-12	61 m (200 ft)	61 m (200 ft)	61 m (200 ft)	61 m (200 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
¹ Option 4D will have 91 m (300 ft) less modifications visible to the parkway traveler compared to Alternative 4.							

TABLE 3.1.F LENGTH OF MODIFICATIONS VISIBLE TO THE PARKWAY TRAVELER ALONG EACH BUILD ALTERNATIVE IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA (Continued)							
Modification Number	Alt. 2A	Alt. 2B	Alt. 2C	Alt. 3	Alt. 4A	Alt. 4B	Alt. 4C
West Side Modifications (Continued)							
W-13	61 m (200 ft)	61 m (200 ft)	61 m (200 ft)	61 m (200 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
W-15	122 m (400 ft)	122 m (400 ft)	122 m (400 ft)	122 m (400 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
W-16	183 m ¹ (600 ft)	183 m ¹ (600 ft)	183 m ¹ (600 ft)	183 m ¹ (600 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
W-17	91 m (300 ft)	91 m (300 ft)	91 m (300 ft)	91 m (300 ft)	n/a	n/a	n/a
¹ Option 2D/3A will have 30 m (100 ft) more modifications visible to the parkway traveler compared to Alternatives 2 and 3. Modifications visible to the parkway traveler are shaded in lighter gray tone.							

3.1.2.3 Potential Direct Impacts

Table 3.1.G summarizes the relative visual experience of each Build Alternative based on access to positive visual opportunities and the impact of visible permanent construction modifications.

As previously mentioned, the location of the alternatives within the NRGNR implies that all of the alternatives will provide a scenic touring experience. Therefore, the focus of this section is to identify which of the alternatives provide the best visual experiences relative to one another. No project alternatives are considered to provide a low quality visual experience.

As shown in Table 3.1 .G, all of the Build Alternatives access a large number of positive visual opportunities. Alternative 2 accesses 11 visual opportunities, Alternative 4 accesses ten visual opportunities and Alternative 3 accesses eight visual opportunities. The No-Build Alternative, although not shown in Table 3.1.G, will access five visual opportunities.

The second part of Table 3.1.G indicates the length of visible construction modifications along each Build Alternative. These modifications impact the visual experience of the parkway traveler. There are relatively few visible modifications as a result of Alternatives 2 and 4. There are a greater number of modifications that result from Alternative 3. There are no additional modifications that alter the visual experience of the No-Build Alternative.

TABLE 3.1.G OVERALL VISUAL EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY EACH BUILD ALTERNATIVE IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA

	Alt. 2A	Alt. 2B	Alt. 2C	Alt. 3	Alt. 4A	Alt. 4B	Alt. 4C
Features Accessed	4 ¹	4 ¹	4 ¹	1 ¹	5	5	5
Vistas Accessed	7	7	7	7	5	5	5
Total Number of Visual Opportunities Accessed	11	11	11	8	10 ²	10 ²	10 ²
Modifications Visible to the Parkway Traveler	2,026 m ³ (6,650 ft)	1,826 m ³ (6,000 ft)	2,435 m ³ (8,000 ft)	3,657 m ³ (12,000 ft)	1,356 m ⁴ (4,450 ft)	1,156 m ⁴ (3,800 ft)	1,765 m ⁴ (5,800 ft)
Percent of Parkway Length with Visible Modifications	12%	11%	15%	23%	8%	7%	10%
¹ Option 2D/3A will access one more visual feature compared to Alternatives 2 and 3.							
² Option 4D will access one more vista compared to Alternative 4.							
³ Option 2D/3A will have 30 m (100 ft) more modifications visible to the parkway traveler compared to Alternatives 2 and 3.							
⁴ Option 4D will have 91 m (300 ft) less modifications visible to the parkway traveler compared to Alternative 4.							

Visual impacts for proposed parkway recreation facilities are not accounted for in detail in visual impact assessment because detailed construction plans for these sites have not been developed. However, visual impact assessment of conceptual site plans for proposed parkway recreation facilities indicates that the cuts and fills associated with these sites are not expected to impact the visual quality of the New River gorge or negatively impact the visual experience of the parkway traveler.

3.1.2.4 Potential Secondary and Cumulative Impacts

All of the project alternatives, including the No-Build Alternative, will experience future development pressure which will alter the visual quality of the chosen alternative. This development pressure is expected to occur at a faster pace with the Build Alternatives, however, the Build Alternatives will be accompanied by the LMS which will influence the appearance and potentially the density of development in the parkway corridor. The No-Build Alternative will not benefit from the LMS guidance.

The LMS will not directly control the amount of development which could occur or where it will occur along the parkway corridor; Area farmland will be especially susceptible to development

pressures. The development of farmland in the project study area will result in a loss of positive visual features and the alteration of valued panoramic views. Should this occur, the visual experience of the parkway traveler will be diminished.

3.1.2.5 Potential Mitigations

To the greatest extent possible, existing vegetation will be preserved to protect the natural character of the parkway corridor and to screen construction impacts.

Hillside modifications will be quickly revegetated after construction using plant species appropriate to the existing natural environment. Planting patterns and the use of trees, shrubs and groundcovers will also be naturalized. Plant species indigenous to the project study area and region will be used in revegetating and screening disturbed areas where feasible.

Where it is not possible to revegetate an excavation or fill, or where retaining walls occur, views to these modifications will be screened or diminished (if deemed necessary) by planting vegetation in front of the impacted area. The appearance of retaining walls will be adjusted to fit with the natural setting by using natural materials (i.e., stone) to face the walls.

Consideration will be given to placing utility lines along the parkway corridor underground to preserve visual quality.

For more information on mitigation, see Appendix D: Mitigation Strategies and Techniques.

3.1.3 **Summary**

In conclusion, Alternative 3 results in the most visible, permanent modifications and is visible from the most highly important viewsheds. For these reasons, Alternative 3 is considered to have the greatest contrast with the area's natural character. Alternative 3 does provide a scenic driving experience, however, the extent of permanent modifications associated with this project alternative also modifies the experience.

Alternative 4 also has modifications (particularly two bridge crossings of the New River) which contrast with the area's visual character; however, Alternatives 4 provides a scenic driving experience with few modifications.

Alternative 2 contrasts slightly with the natural character and provides a high quality scenic experience for the parkway traveler. The No-Build Alternative is considered a scenic traveling experience although it would not benefit from the LMS or the additional vistas that will be constructed with the Build Alternatives.

3.2 RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

Southern West Virginia's natural beauty and cultural history make it a popular destination for tourists. The recreational opportunities offer a welcome respite for both local residents and visitors. According to a recent survey (See Appendix F: Summary Of Southeast West Virginia Heritage Visitor Survey), most visitors to southeast West Virginia come from out-of-state for family vacations, outdoor recreation, to visit family or friends, sightseeing or scenic drives (Southeast West Virginia Heritage 1992). This survey, which canvassed the counties of Raleigh, Fayette, Nicholas, Summers, Mercer, Greenbrier and Monroe in July and October of 1992 showed that about 20 percent of the visitors camped during their stay and, of all the possible activities, sightseeing was the one that the greatest number of visitors participated in. Visitors said the activities of most importance to them when they travel were outdoor recreation, followed by sightseeing, scenic drives, historic sites and shopping (Southeast West Virginia Heritage 1992).

The West Virginia Development Office, in discussing outdoor recreation opportunities in the state (see Appendix A: Summary Of West Virginia's 1993-1997 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan), has identified tourism as one of the state's target industries in its strategic plan for economic development (West Virginia Development Office 1993). Although many areas in southeast West Virginia attract visitors, the outstanding scenic beauty, varied outdoor recreational opportunities and unique natural and cultural history of the New River gorge make it especially appealing. The West Virginia Development Office (1993) noted that local governments need to consider tourism potential in their long-range planning as the tourism industry generates over \$2.5 billion in total sales while supporting 50,000 jobs in the state.

The NRGNR is a primary outdoor recreation attraction in southeast West Virginia and is managed by the NPS. According to the NPS, the popularity of the NRGNR has increased about four-fold over the last nine years from 231,295 visitors in 1984 to 1,007,998 visitors in 1993 (USDOI 1994). In 1996, 1,237,637 recreational visits were made to the NRGNR representing an additional 23 percent increase in visitation during the three-year period between 1993 and 1996 (USDOI 1997). The NRGNR offers outdoor recreation opportunities in Whitewater rafting, hiking, biking, horseback riding, nature study, guided nature walks, camping and rock climbing, along with more passive activities such as sightseeing and scenic automobile touring. By linking Interstate 64 (I-64) and Interstate 77 (I-77), the New River Parkway could ultimately improve visitor access to recreational opportunities in the NRGNR and likely increase the number of recreational users in the project study area.

An increase in visitation and tourism activities in the project study area could be a source of conflict among recreation users, as current river users who enjoy existing recreation opportunities in the area could be resistant to sharing recreational resources with additional users associated with the parkway. Recreation users in the project study area generally fall into two categories:

the traditional user who often camps along the river for long periods of time participating in hunting and fishing activities, and a newer type of user who often comes from an urban environment seeking a natural experience over a shorter time period. Improved access and increased visitation associated with the parkway could result in competition for recreational experiences between these two types of users. However, traditional river users who wish to gain better access to recreational resources could experience increased and improved access to the river and other recreational amenities as a result of construction of proposed parkway recreation facilities.

As portions of the project study area are currently open to hunting and fishing, another concern involves the potential conflict between hunters and fishermen, and parkway users interested in sightseeing and other passive recreation activities. Hunting (white-tail deer, upland birds, small game and waterfowl) and fishing (crappie, walleye, sunfish, carp and several species of bass and catfish) are popular traditional recreation activities in the project study area which historically have provided important economic benefits to local communities. In terms of hunting regulations in the project study area, it is illegal to hunt from or across a public road, and it is illegal to shoot a firearm within 122 meters (400 feet) of any schoolhouse or church, within 152 meters (500 feet) of any dwelling, or on or near a park or other place where persons are gathered for pleasure (WVDNR 1996).

While hunting is prohibited near specified public use areas, dwellings and roadways, hunting does occur on the hillsides above the river and along hiking trails. Waterfowl hunting occurs along the banks of the river, in some areas also used for fishing and boat access, and from the open water of the river. Hunting is permitted seasonally, generally from October to February and April to May in compliance with applicable state, county and federal game regulations. However, hunting for specific wildlife species is often confined to shorter time periods during the aforementioned months. Due to the complexity of hunting seasons relative to the large variety of game species, more specific information should be obtained from West Virginia hunting and trapping regulations (WVDNR 1998).

Fishing is permitted throughout the year but occurs most heavily in the project study area from March to October on both designated and undesignated sites along the river road [Raleigh County Route 26 (Route 26)]. Fishermen often pull off the roadway to fish wherever there is an opening to do so and frequently camp at undesignated sites along the river.

Sightseeing is heaviest in June, July, August and October, and is expected to increase when the parkway is constructed. If the additional impact of parkway users necessitates a limitation of traditional uses, some resistance may be expected from traditional users. However, while hunting and fishing have been the primary recreational pursuits next to sightseeing, all three types of recreation activities can potentially coexist in harmony in the project study area through careful attention to the placement and design of recreation and river-use areas. Because hunting

seasons and primary sightseeing, river rafting and tourist seasons occur during different times of the year, they are likely to present few conflicts with each other. As a majority of hunting activities occur at a distance from existing roadways, no additional limitations which will restrict traditional hunting and fishing pursuits, beyond existing state and federal laws, are anticipated. However, some proposed public recreation facilities to be located along parkway alternatives may be designated as public gathering places following construction of such facilities in conjunction with selection of a preferred parkway alternative. Hunting opportunities in the vicinity of these areas will be managed consistent with existing state and federal laws.

In discussing the current level of recreation use in the project study area, uncontrolled access along the New River continues to contribute to the decline of riverside aesthetics and water quality. Uncontrolled access in certain sensitive areas along the riverbank has resulted in the destruction of vegetation and wildlife habitat, and increased occurrences of erosion and siltation that facilitate degradation of water quality. Local and out-of-town river users continue to access the river in steep slope areas, wearing down streambank vegetative cover which aids in the filtering and buffering of adjacent site runoff. Continued uncontrolled access in the project study area could result in the future decline of river water quality and the degradation of aquatic ecosystems. Additional public access points created in the past 10 years have, to some degree, lessened uncontrolled access pressure in the project study area.

This section discusses: (1) existing NPS and DOH recreation facilities in the project study area and (2) proposed recreation facilities along parkway alternatives which are recommended based upon recreation goals outlined in the Purpose and Need statement and findings of the Technical Report entitled *A Use Potential Study of Recreation Opportunities and Design Features for the Proposed New River Parkway Northern Section, I-64 to Hinton* (VPI&SU 1998). In recognizing increased visitation to the NRGNR, this section recommends upgrades of existing recreation facilities along with the provision of new recreation facilities to meet growing visitor demand for diverse recreation opportunities along the proposed New River Parkway in this portion of the NRGNR.

3.2.1 Existing Recreation Facilities

The project study area encompasses approximately 16 kilometers (10 miles) of the southern section of the NRGNR between Hinton and the I-64 bridge. Many recreation opportunities already exist in this area. According to the Hinton Subdistrict Ranger, the most popular recreation activities are sightseeing, hunting and fishing (D. Bartlett, NFS, personal communication, October 1993). In addition, Whitewater rafting, canoeing, kayaking, guided nature walks, camping, hiking and nature study are available within this southern section of the NRGNR. The NPS owns approximately 25 percent of the land in the project study area (D. Wilson, NPS, personal communication, September 1993). Most recreation activity occurs within

the NRGNR boundaries, however, camping, fishing and hunting take place on private property as well. In addition to these types of recreation, the City of Hinton includes a National Historical District and offers visitors the opportunity to engage in the growing recreational pursuit of heritage tourism.

3.2.1.1 Methodology

An inventory of the existing recreation facilities along both sides of New River was conducted through site visits and discussions with NPS personnel, the city manager of Hinton, local residents and local business owners. In addition, some data were obtained from NPS studies and related project proposals. Existing recreation facilities are shown in Figure 3.2.a and are listed in Table 3.2. A.

TABLE 3.2.A EXISTING RECREATION FACILITIES IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA (See Figure 3.2.a)			
Map I.D.	Site	Affiliation	Recreational Use
A	Sandstone Falls (west)	NPS	fishing/boat access, camping, portage
B	Sandstone Falls (west)	NPS	fishing access, camping, day use/trails
C	Sandstone Falls (west)	NPS	overlook (foot access only)
D	Sandstone Falls (east)	NPS	overlook
E	Sandstone Falls (west)	NPS	upper portage
F	Brooks Island (east)	DOH	overlook
G	Brooks Falls (west)	NPS	lower portage
H	Camp Brookside (east)	NPS	ranger station, boat access
I	Brooks Falls (west)	NPS	day use/fishing access, trails
J	Brooks Falls (west)	NPS	upper portage
K	Tug Creek Beach (west)	NPS	fishing access
L	Akers Site (west)	NPS	fishing/boat access

3.2.1.2 Affected Environment *Existing****National Park Service (NPS) Facilities***

Within the project study area, the NPS maintains six facilities which together have 23 picnic tables, eight grills, 15 fire rings, eight campsites, two trails, 11 to 13 portable toilets, 375 meters (1,230 feet) of boardwalk, 63 trash cans and three river overlooks as shown in Table 3.2. B (C. Thompson, NPS, personal communication, November 1993). The NPS also either maintains or recognizes eight river access points and six additional undesigned campsites (D. Bartlett, p.c.). Most of the existing facilities are located on the west side of the river. In addition to the existing designated facilities, many recreation activities occur in undeveloped areas along the river. While it is difficult to quantify these uses, the Hinton Subdistrict Ranger (D. Bartlett, p.c.) estimates recreation activities in order of user frequency are: (1) sightseeing, (2) fishing, (3) hunting, (4) camping, (5) picnicking, (6) boating (includes raft, kayak and canoe users), and to a much lower extent, (7) biking and hiking.

TABLE 3.2.B EXISTING FACILITIES MAINTAINED BY THE NPS WITHIN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA										
Facility	Parking	River Access ¹	Camping	Picnic	Fishing	Hiking	Scenic View	Restrooms	Handicap Access	River Location
Sandstone Falls ² (A, B, C, E)	18-23	upstream: c,k downstream: c,k,r,tr	8 sites	10 tables	very heavy	yes	yes	yes 8 porta	yes	west
Brooks Falls ³ (G, I, J)	8-10	upstream: c,k,r downstream: c,k,r,tr	4 undesig	9 tables	heavy	yes	yes	yes 2 porta	yes	west
Akers Site (L)	?	c,k,r,tr	none	1 table	light	no	yes	yes 1 porta	?	west
Tug Creek Beach (K)	?	c,k,r,tr	2 undesig	none	moderate	no	no	no	no	west
Sandstone Falls, WV 20 overlook (D)	8	none	none	3 tables	none	no	yes	no	?	east
Camp Brookside (H)	?	c,k,r,tr	none	none	light	no	no	no	no	east
¹ River access to canoes (c), kayaks (k), rafts (r) and/or boat trailers (tr). ² Includes Sandstone Falls overlook, day-use and camping areas, and portage points upstream and downstream of Sandstone Falls. ³ Includes Big Branch trail and portage points upstream and downstream of Brooks Falls.										

Fishing, boating, waterfowl hunting and much of the camping, picnicking, biking and hiking occurs in or along the New River. Portage facilities upstream and downstream of Brooks Falls and Sandstone Falls on the west side of the river account for four of the NPS maintained river access points. Remaining access points on the west side are found at the Akers Site (former ranger station) across the river from Hinton and near Tug Creek Beach. Numerous other unofficial access points are found along the river's edge since fishermen and hunters commonly

park along the shoulders of Route 26 to gain river access to fishing pools and prime hunting areas. Hunting, other than waterfowl hunting, mostly occurs on the hillsides above the river on private and NPS land as seasonally allowed by state and federal laws. Hunters may use NPS trails to gain access to use areas but must comply with state and federal laws governing hunting in public use areas.

Hiking occurs on undeveloped trails throughout the NRGNR. Heavy use by fishermen and hunters has resulted in many undesignated trails that honeycomb the popular areas. However, the NPS maintains two official trails in the project study area: the first is a highly used trail and boardwalk at Sandstone Falls; the second is Big Branch trail, a 2.9-kilometer (1.8-mile) hiking trail near Brooks Falls that climbs 134 meters (440 feet) up the west slope of the gorge. It is the intent of the project to alleviate some of the unsafe parking that currently takes place along the shoulder where people access hiking trails and walk to the New River.

Sandstone Falls (Map I.D. "A", "B", "C" and "E")

Sandstone Falls, accessible from Route 26 on the west side of the river, is the most extensively developed NPS recreation facility in the project study area and had 78,351 visitors during 1993 (60,883 visitors during the months of June, July and August), making it the third most visited site in the entire NRGNR from Hinton downriver to Fayetteville (USDOI 1994). Sandstone Falls features a boardwalk that spans a rare flatrock plant community enroute to the overlook of the falls on the New River. There are day-use areas and camping at eight unimproved sites. A portage site upstream of the falls is suitable for canoes and kayaks, and a second portage site downstream from the falls can accommodate boat trailers. Parking is limited to 10 to 15 cars in the main parking lot (two handicap spots), with additional parking for eight cars in the camping area. Other facilities include: eight portable rest rooms (one handicap accessible), 10 picnic tables and grills, and trash receptacles. The 305-kilometer (1,000-foot) boardwalk is handicap accessible and allows visitors the opportunity to observe the rare flatrock plant community with no or minimal disturbance by foot traffic. The boardwalk crosses two islands enroute to the viewing platform that terminates the boardwalk at Sandstone Falls. The area is heavily used by fisherman angling for bass and catfish. During the summer, fishermen are present day and night (D. Bartlett, p.c.). The NPS also maintains an overlook above Sandstone Falls which can be accessed by a privately-owned road from Route 26. A steep trail leads up wooden split rail steps to an overlook with a visitor register. Because there is no additional parking or facilities for the overlook, visitors park at the Sandstone Falls parking lot.

Sandstone Falls, WV 20 Overlook (Map I.D. "D")

The overlook on the east side of the river along WV 20 is a popular viewing area of Sandstone Falls. Parking is limited to approximately eight parking spots. Three picnic tables are located about 46 meters (150 feet) off the road. One portable restroom is located along the trail to the

overlook. The overlook is approximately 183 meters (600 feet) above the river or about 0.32 kilometers (0.2 miles) from the falls.

Brooks Falls (Map I.D. "G", "I" and "J")

The primary visitor experience at Brooks Falls is viewing the falls and river close at hand. Brooks Falls offers a developed viewing area adjacent to eight to ten gravel parking spots (one handicap stall) accessible from Route 26 on the west side of the New River. The viewing area is handicap accessible. Downstream of the falls, a portage site is accessible to boat trailers and is used by commercial rafting companies to take out rafts after running through the Class 3-4 rapid at Brooks Falls. There are four unofficial camping sites with no facilities. Portage upstream of the falls is available for canoes, but not boat trailers. The day-use area has eight to ten picnic tables and grills, two portable toilets and a bulletin board. The trailhead for Big Branch trail is located across from Brooks Falls above Route 26 and is accessible from the parking area at Brooks Falls. The trail follows old logging roads up a 2.9-kilometer (1.8-mile) loop and climbs 134 meters (440 feet) up the Big Branch Creek, crossing it several times with stepping stones and one footbridge, and returning along old logging roads.

Camp Brookside (Map I.D. "H")

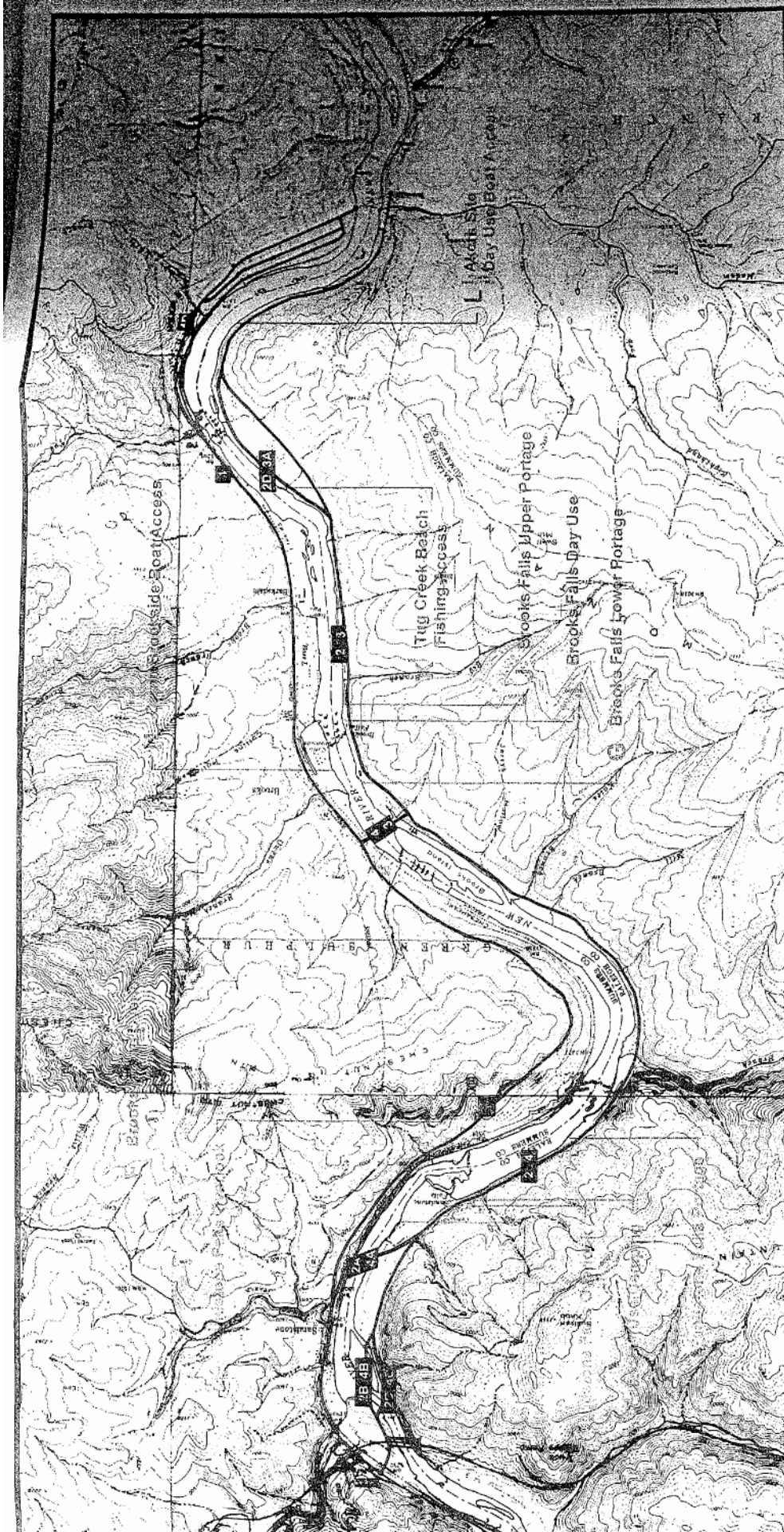
Camp Brookside is a former Union Carbide property recently acquired by the NPS and has a boat access area maintained by the NPS. The NPS currently operates a ranger station at this location. Camp Brookside has 12 structures on the property including a number of cottages and gathering halls. The camp is located on an island surrounded by wetlands and a rare flat rock community. Existing access problems limit public use of this property at this time.

Tug Creek Beach (Map I.D. "K")

Tug Creek Beach is not heavily advertised. There is no official camping or sanitation facilities, but camping is allowed and sometimes two to three campers are there on weekends. The fishing is moderate at this location.

Akers Site (Map I.D. "L")

The former NPS ranger station at the Akers site on Route 26 has heavy use as a public access site and boat launch. The facilities are limited to one picnic table and a portable toilet. Fishing is light at this location.



EXISTING RECREATION SITES

New River Parkway
West Virginia

Northern
Section
Fig. 3.2.a

Hinton NPS Visitor Center (no Map I.D.)

The Hinton Visitor Center is located outside the project study area on the West Virginia 20/3 (WV 20/3) Bypass and is open year round on weekends and during the week from Memorial Day to Labor Day (W. Snyder, NPS, personal communication, January 1994). It offers visitor information about the NRGNR and had 5,800 visitors in 1993.

*Existing West Virginia Department of Transportation, Division of Highways (DOH) Facility**Brooks Island, WV 20 Overlook (Map I.D. "F")*

The DOH maintains one overlook on WV 20 above Brooks Island which offers a scenic view of the Brooks Island area. Brooks Island overlook is also located on WV 20 and is essentially a wide spot in the road that is located about 610 meters (2,000 feet) north of Brooks Island and overlooks the island with Brooks Falls in the distance. Parking is limited to two to three parking spots.

Private Facilities

Several fishing camps are located on private property along the banks of the New River. Landowners rent space for visitors to park trailers while they stay to hunt or fish. Spaces are rented monthly or yearly, often by friends or family of the landowner. Since they are not strictly open to the public and are rented for long-term use, these sites may arguably be called residential. The NPS (D. Bartlett, p.c.) estimates there are 210 trailers along the river between Hinton and I-64. The largest and most prominent of these facilities is Bass Lake Campground located on WV 20 adjacent to the new Summers County High School.

Commercial rafting is a popular activity which utilizes both private and NPS river access facilities. Interest in commercial rafting opportunities is high according to 1993 NPS findings which documented 81,985 commercial river users in the entire NRGNR.

Private areas for hiking, all-terrain vehicle use and horseback riding are also available on private property but are not typically available to the general public.

3.2.1.3 Potential Direct Impacts

Potential direct impacts to existing recreation facilities are analyzed with regard to: (1) direct physical access to existing facilities by parkway alternatives and (2) parkway road construction impacts to existing facilities.

The No-Build Alternative will continue to afford direct, physical access to all of the 12 existing IMPS and DOH recreation facilities listed in Table 3.2.A and shown in Figure 3.2.a. while each of the Build Alternatives will afford direct, physical access to only a portion of the 12 existing NPS and DOH recreation facilities. For Build Alternatives in the project study area, Table 3.2.C indicates that Alternative 2 will access the highest number of existing recreation facilities (nine) while Alternatives 3 and 4 will access a lower number of existing recreation facilities (six and five, respectively). All of these existing recreation facilities accessed by Alternatives 2 and 4 are NPS-managed recreation facilities. Only Alternative 3 will access the existing DOH recreation facility at the WV 20 overlook above Brooks Island.

TABLE 3.2.C DIRECT ACCESS TO EXISTING RECREATION FACILITIES BY BUILD ALTERNATIVES IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA (See Figure 3.2.a)							
Map I.D. (Affiliation)	Alt. 2A	Alt. 2B	Alt. 2C	Alt. 3	Alt. 4A	Alt. 4B	Alt. 4C
A (NPS)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
B (NPS)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
C (NPS)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
D (NPS)	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
E (NPS)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
F (DOH)	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
G (NPS)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
H (NPS)	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
I (NPS)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
J (NPS)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
K (NPS)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
L (NPS)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
TOTALS (12 Facilities)	9 NPS 0 DOH	9 NPS 0 DOH	9 NPS 0 DOH	5 NPS 1 DOH	5 NPS 0 DOH	5 NPS 0 DOH	5 NPS 0 DOH

Table 3.2.D summarizes access to major existing NPS and DOH facilities in the project study area. Alternatives 2 and 4 afford direct access to Sandstone Falls on the west side, the most extensively developed and intensively used NPS facility in the project study area. Alternatives 2 and 3 afford direct access to the NPS portage, fishing access and viewing platform at Brooks

Falls on the west side. The existing NPS overlook facility located above Sandstone Falls on the east side of the river along WV 20 will not be accessed by Build Alternatives as these alternatives will utilize a new route along the lower slopes of Chestnut Mountain. The existing DOH overlook above Brooks Island on the east side of the river along WV 20 will only be accessed by Alternative 3. The DOH Brooks Island overlook may need to be closed and renovated during project construction of Alternative 3 as this overlook is located in the path of the expanded roadway alignment along WV 20.

TABLE 3.2.D DIRECT ACCESS TO MAJOR EXISTING RECREATION FACILITIES BY BUILD ALTERNATIVES IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA (See Figure 3.2.a)			
Major Existing Recreation Facilities	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4
Sandstone Falls (NPS, west) (A, B,C,E)	Yes	No	Yes
Brooks Falls (NPS, west) (G,I,J)	Yes	Yes	No
Sandstone Falls Overlook (NPS, east) (D)	No	No	No
Brooks Island Overlook (DOH, east) (F)	No	Yes	No

As previously noted, the No-Build Alternative will afford continued access to all existing recreation facilities since these facilities can currently be accessed by existing roads. However, access to these facilities will occur through an irregular network of substandard rural roads and secondary highways which could prohibit recreational vehicle movement or make such movement unsafe in some areas, especially in narrow sections along Route 26 on the west side of the river.

The existing NPS visitor center south of Hinton will be accessible by all Build Alternatives and the No-Build Alternative since this visitor center lies outside the project study area, past the terminus of the proposed parkway project along existing WV 20/3. A summary of recreation access to existing and proposed facilities in the project study area is included in Section 3.2.2.3.

During construction, access to the river and associated existing recreation facilities will be limited and controlled in those areas defined as construction sites. Existing recreation facilities and their environs, such as areas of indigenous vegetation along trails and the river's edge, could experience resource degradation during parkway road construction but such direct impacts are expected to be minimal and will be mitigated as appropriate.

Access to the parking area and facilities at Sandstone Falls will be provided by the project alternatives which pass by the Sandstone Falls NPS recreation area (Alternatives 2 and 4).

Construction of the roadway associated with these alternatives could impact the upper camping access road and possibly narrow the available camping area.

Access to the parking area and facilities at Brooks Falls will be provided by the project alternatives which pass by the Brooks Falls NPS recreation area (Alternatives 2 and 3). An existing trailhead located on the western side of Route 26 near the entrance to the recreation area will be relocated during parkway construction.

Convenience in accessing existing recreation facilities will be reduced during construction, however, no existing recreation facilities will be lost as a result of project construction. Some informal recreation areas, such as fishing and hunting access spots along existing roads, will be lost as a result of project construction. At the same time, the proposed parkway will alleviate some of the unsafe parking along the existing shoulders of WV 20 and/or Route 26 depending upon which Build Alternative is selected.

3.2.1.4 Potential Secondary and Cumulative Impacts

Overall recreational opportunities for local and regional residents, and travelers to southeast West Virginia will be enhanced through improved access to existing recreation facilities in the project study area. Improved access to recreational opportunities accompanied by increased visitation in the project study area will provide secondary economic benefits to tourist-related industries in the project study area.

Potential negative secondary impacts include the reduction in quality of recreational experiences resulting from increased pressures on recreational resources accruing from increased visitation along the river. There may also be some loss of spontaneous recreational use in certain areas along the river. Higher levels of recreational resource degradation and littering could occur as a result of increased visitation in the project study area, and as a result of general recreational development in the NRGNR and surrounding area. Higher levels of visitor use could tax the existing recreation facilities in the project study area and lead to overcrowding, particularly at Sandstone Falls. Overcrowding at Sandstone Falls and at other recreation facilities on the west side of the river would be of particular concern with Alternatives 2 and 4 as a result of the estimated 713% increase in traffic. Increased visitation in the project study area may lead to increased pressures for commercial development of recreation-related enterprises adjacent to the river and to general commercial encroachment in the project study area.

Combined with increased visitation in the NRGNR and state recreation areas, the increases in parkway-related visitation could have cumulative impacts on sensitive natural and cultural resources in the project study area. Potential future projects, such as the New River Parkway Extension and establishment of the New River Wild and Scenic River from Glen Lyn, Virginia

to Bluestone Lake, would increase visitation in the project study area and impact resources unless residential and commercial development is properly planned and managed.

Positive secondary impacts could include increased control of access along the preferred alternative for those areas where curb and gutter are used and within the new parkway right-of-way. Spontaneous recreational use in certain areas along the New River could be reduced along with associated resource damage (i.e., trash, old campsite remnants, erosion, vegetative trampling, etc.) where uncontrolled access occurs and is eliminated through implementation of the preferred alternative. Uncontrolled access areas and informal pulloffs scattered along existing roads (especially Route 26) will be mostly eliminated if a parkway is constructed, and visitors and residents will be directed to new, controlled river access points associated with proposed overlooks, thus reducing impacts to existing, informal pulloff areas.

3.2.1.5 Potential Mitigations

Disturbance of existing recreation facilities will be mitigated through avoidance and alignment alteration, as necessary, and through the provision of adequate access and parking during parkway road construction. Potential impacts to existing recreation facilities at Sandstone Falls and Brooks Falls will be coordinated with NPS representatives so that appropriate contingency plans are drafted to avoid or minimize recreation facility disturbance. Any impacts to these recreation facilities will be mitigated consistent with NPS management guidelines for the NRGNR.

Loss of informal recreational opportunities in the project study area, such as fishing and hunting access spots along existing roads, through construction of the preferred parkway alternative could be mitigated through the development of new and expanded recreational opportunities at overlooks and day-use areas, and through the provision of improved, controlled access to the river. Replacement of informal recreation areas will be coordinated with the development of new and expanded recreation opportunities in conjunction with the appropriate state and federal agencies. The effective implementation and enforcement of the New River Parkway LMS, which would accompany a Build Alternative, could help encourage appropriate development of new recreation areas within the parkway corridor, and could offer the possibility for increased protection of sensitive recreation resources in the parkway corridor in the absence of local resource management ordinances in Raleigh and Summers counties.

Negative cumulative impacts related to overcrowding at specific recreation facilities (such as Sandstone Falls) could be lessened by creating additional recreation sites, developing a visitors center in a location proximate to where most visitors would enter the parkway, encouraging visitors to explore Hinton and other recreation facilities in the area, and strictly controlling the number of users at popular recreation facilities. Negative cumulative impacts related to possible increased visitation pressures in the project study area from potential/proposed future

development projects should be addressed through expansion of planning functions in communities within the project study area. As visitation and development pressures increase, localities in the project study area may find it advantageous to develop comprehensive plans and associated ordinances that proactively respond to potential recreation pressures on natural resources.

For more information on mitigation, see Appendix D: Mitigation Strategies and Techniques.

3.2.2 Proposed Recreation Facilities

Demand for scenic touring and outdoor recreation opportunities in this part of West Virginia continues to outpace the supply of quality recreational experiences currently available in the NRGNR. A 1988 survey conducted by Ryan-Repass Associates, Inc. found that sightseeing was the number one outdoor recreation activity participated in by nonresident tourists visiting the state of West Virginia (West Virginia Development Office 1993). A more recent point-of-entry survey of nonresident visitors to West Virginia reinforced this demand for scenic touring, concluding that sightseeing and visiting parks were the activities of most interest to nonresidents engaging in outdoor recreation activities (see Appendix A: Summary Of West Virginia's 1993-1997 SCORP). Construction of a low-speed parkway could help meet this demand for scenic touring by providing an opportunity for visitor access to the unique recreational and scenic resources within the NRGNR. See Appendix B: Summary Of New River Parkway Extension Transportation Needs Study for a discussion of visitor level of interest and participation in various activities along the Blue Ridge Parkway in Virginia.

Consistent with the NPS comprehensive management strategy for the development and management of the NRGNR, the purpose and need statement for the project stresses the importance of controlled access to recreation sites in conjunction with the protection and maintenance of the area's broad diversity of natural and cultural resources. While some recreation resources have already been developed within the project study area, other potential recreation sites exist in an undeveloped state. Some of these undeveloped sites reflect the misuse and abuse of sensitive natural and cultural resources resulting from uncontrolled access and/or ineffective management or enforcement. Other undeveloped sites remain relatively untouched but have the potential to become important recreation sites. Proposed recreation facilities are identified in order to evaluate the appropriateness of different parkway alignments in terms of river access, recreational opportunities and resource protection.

Recreation facilities will likely be needed to mitigate impacts of the roadway, for example, to redistribute increased fishing or day-use recreation pressures along the New River in the project study area. Mitigation for the loss of informal pulloff areas along existing roads may justify the creation of new overlooks, boat and river access points and/or trailheads along the parkway.

Recreation facilities will be included in project construction, and may be funded under sections 302 and 204 of the Federal Lands Highway Program. Such funds could be used to create recreation facilities built as part of the parkway project. Title 23 funds may possibly be used to construct proposed recreation facilities built as mitigation for impacts of the roadway, such as the loss of informal river access by visitors and local residents or the increase in recreation activity along the river.

3.2.2.1 Methodology

Proposed recreation sites were identified using a three-stage process. First, potential recreation sites on the east and west sides of the New River were identified by a team of landscape architects, local citizens familiar with the area and representatives of state and federal agencies. Each site was assessed based upon its capacity to physically accommodate visitors. Those sites that would not accommodate visitors were eliminated from consideration. The remaining sites were visited, photodocumented and assessed. The second stage of proposed recreation site identification utilized an interagency approach to review the findings of the first two stages. Representatives of state and federal agencies went into the field to look at potential sites along both sides of the New River in the project study area. In the third stage of analysis, information from stage one and two were combined and reanalyzed based upon the overriding goal to balance concerns for resource preservation with visitor enjoyment consistent with NPS management goals for the NRGNR (see Technical Report entitled *A Use Potential Study of Recreation Opportunities and Design Features for the Proposed New River Parkway Northern Section, I-64 to Hinton* (VPI&SU 1998).

The third stage of analysis consisted of (1) an inventory or summary of regional recreation demands, needs and opportunities, and (2) the application of recreation site rating criteria to potential recreation sites. Summaries of regional recreation demands and needs, existing regional recreation facilities, the NRGNR 1982 General Management Plan (USDOI1982) and the Blue Ridge Parkway Participation Survey (FHWA and WVDOT 1993) are presented in Table 3.2.E along with a synthesis of these summaries which yield an overview of parkway recreation demands and needs. Based upon the synthesis of these summaries, Table 3.2.E indicates that proposed recreation facilities in the project study area fall into one of six categories or types of recreation which represent a variety of recreation activities that may be available at proposed parkway recreation sites, as follows:

- Views (i.e., sightseeing)
- River Access (swimming, fishing/hunting access, and canoe/kayak/raft access)
- Picnic/Passive Recreation (picnicking, and passive, family-oriented recreation)
- Boat Launch (formalized boat launch for motorized boats with trailers)
- Hiking/Trails (hiking/walking trails)
- Unique Interpretation (visual, cultural and/or historical interpretation of unique sites)

The findings of the surveys presented in Table 3.2.E are consistent with NPS recreation management goals for the NRGNR (USDOI1982) and highlight the desire for recreation activities which provide opportunities for sightseeing, interpretation of natural, cultural and scenic resources, and participation in a variety of active and passive recreation pursuits. These findings, in conjunction with NPS recreation management goals, serve as a framework for guiding the development of proposed recreation facilities along the New River Parkway.

TABLE 3.2.E SUMMARY OF RECREATION DEMANDS, NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES				
1 Summary of Regional Recreation Demands and Needs¹	2 Summary of Existing Regional Recreation Facilities²	3 Summary of NRGMR General Management Plan³	4 Summary of Blue Ridge Parkway Recreation Survey⁴	5 SYNTHESIS: New River Parkway Recreation Demands and Needs⁵
Jogging/Walking/Hiking Sightseeing Fishing Swimming (pools) Hunting Boating/Canoeing/Rafting	Camping Hunting Swimming Fishing Picnicking Hiking	Sightseeing Picnicking Hiking Horseback riding Fishing Hunting Camping Lodging Interpretation	Sightseeing Picnicking Hiking Interpretation	Views (i.e., Sightseeing) River Access Picnic/Passive Recreation Boat Launch Hiking/Trails Unique Interpretation

¹Information is a synthesis of three surveys (West Virginia Development Office1993): (1) US 1992 Residents;

(2) WV 1988 Residents/Nonresidents/Region I Residents; and (3) 1992 Nonresident "True Tourists".

² Information is summarized from reference materials pertaining to recreation facilities at West Virginia State Parks and State Forests, Virginia State Parks, West Virginia State Wildlife Management Areas, US Forest Service Recreation Areas and Wildlife Management Areas, and National Park Service facilities within 60 air miles or two to three hours drive of the NRP study area.

³ Information is summarized from New River Gorge National River (NRGMR) 1982 General Management Plan pertaining to proposed river- and land-based recreation development within the NRGMR (USDOI 1982).

⁴ Information is summarized from Blue Ridge Parkway Participation Survey conducted by the Center for Public and Urban Research, Georgia State University (1986) as presented by GAI Consultants in *Transportation Needs Study New River Parkway Extension* (FHWA and WVDOT 1993).

⁵ Information is synthesized from information presented in columns 1,2, 3 and 4. The six categories or types of recreation presented in column 5 represent a variety of recreation activities that may be available at proposed New River Parkway recreation sites.

Camping opportunities are not included in the categories or types of recreation planned for the New River Parkway shown in Table 3.2.E for several reasons. As the New River Parkway, I-64 to Hinton, is located within the boundaries of the NRGMR, recreation facilities proposed along

the parkway should be consistent with NRGNR recreation development plans. A review of camping facilities currently available within the NRGNR shows that only primitive camping is provided at five locations within the park including facilities at Sandstone Falls within the project study area. However, camping facilities are abundant at State Parks, State Forests, State Wildlife Areas and US Forest Service Recreation Areas with over 1,800 campsites within 97 air kilometers (60 air miles) or two to three hours drive of the project study area. There are also numerous camping opportunities at private campgrounds and resort parks in the vicinity of the project study area. Therefore, at this time, due to the primitive nature and limited opportunities for camping within the NRGNR, and the many opportunities for camping at state, federal and private facilities within 97 air kilometers (60 air miles) or two to three hours drive of the New River Parkway, camping is not proposed along the parkway at this time.

In applying recreation site rating criteria to potential recreation sites, 36 potential parkway recreation facilities were analyzed using a rating system that included five major rating criteria:

- adequate space for developing the proposed facility and associated parking
- land ownership - federal, state or private ownership of land where facility is proposed
- site sensitivities - impacts to or conflicts with nearby natural and/or cultural features
- potential linkage to other recreation sites along the parkway
- recreation types potentially available at each site

Parkway themes that could be experienced during a parkway visit were established to help evaluate the diversity of recreation experience potentially provided by a recreation site. Parkway themes support the Purpose and Need statement developed for the New River Parkway to "provide visitor access to the New River and its natural, cultural and scenic resources", and "improve the accessibility of outdoor recreational experiences along the parkway" especially the provision of river access points for historical recreation purposes and day-use activities. The four major parkway themes are directly related to the NPS General Management Plan for the NRGNR (USDOI 1982) and were developed from the New River Parkway Concept Plan (NRPA 1991), and involve the experience, interpretation and enjoyment of:

Scenic Features
Natural and Ecological Features

Historical and Cultural Features
River Access

Once the rating criteria were applied to the 36 potential recreation sites, 15 sites emerged as "priority sites" considered to be the most appropriate locations for recreation sites and that would create an appropriate range of recreation experiences and activities for both visitors and local users of the parkway. The 15 sites shown in Figure 3.2.b and listed in Table 3.2.F do not represent all possible parkway recreation sites in the project study area; rather, they indicate 15 sites well suited for the development of recreation facilities and then selected for more detailed study through the development of conceptual site plans. Additional parkway recreation sites will be explored during final design of the preferred alternative.

TABLE 3.2.F PROPOSED RECREATION FACILITIES IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA (See Figure 3.2.b)

Map I.D.	Site	Parking	Views	River Access	Picnic/ Pass. Rec.	Boat Launch	Hiking/ Trails	Unique Interp.
1	I-64 Boat Access	6+ spaces	no	no	no	yes	no	no
2	Laurel Creek Overlook	6+ spaces	yes	no	no	no	no	yes
3	Richmond Farm Overlook	6+ spaces	yes	no	no	no	no	yes
4	Sandstone Falls Overlook	2-3 spaces	yes	no	no	no	no	yes
5	River North Trailhead	4-5 spaces	yes	no	no	no	yes	no
6	Fall Branch Trailhead	6+ spaces	no	no	yes	no	yes	yes
7	Long Bottom Overlook	4-5 spaces	yes	no	no	no	no	no
8	Mermaid Beach Boat Access	6+ spaces	no	no	yes	yes	no	no
9	DOH Replacement Overlook	4-5 spaces	yes	no	no	no	no	yes
10	Cochran Farm Multiple Use	6+ spaces	no	yes	yes	no	yes	no
11	Brooks Falls Boat Access	6+ spaces	no	no	yes	yes	no	no
12	Camp Brookside Multiple Use	6+ spaces	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
13	Izaak Walton River Access	6+ spaces	no	yes	yes	no	no	no
14	Richmond Bottom Multiple Use	6+ spaces	no	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
15	Brooklin Overlook	4-5 spaces	yes	no	no	no	no	yes

The 15 proposed recreation facilities described in this DEIS are located adjacent to one or more of the proposed parkway alternatives. Because much of the river's edge on both the east and west sides of the New River in the project study area is in private ownership, proposed recreation facility construction on private property beyond the proposed parkway right-of-way will require the use of an easement or the direct acquisition of land from willing sellers if public facilities are to be constructed. No acquisition of private land for the purpose of recreation facility construction will take place without the cooperation of willing private property owners.

For a more detailed discussion of the methodology used to identify proposed recreation sites, see the Technical Report entitled *A Use Potential Study of Recreation Opportunities and Design Features for the Proposed New River Parkway Northern Section, I-64 to Hinton* (VPI&SU 1998).

3.2.2.2 Affected Environments

Fifteen proposed recreation facilities were identified on the east and west sides of the New River in the project study area (see Table 3.2.F and Figures 3.2.c to 3.2.r).

I-64 Boat Access (Map I.D. 1 and Figure 3.2.c)

The proposed I-64 Boat Access is located directly below the I-64 bridge in a portion of the 100-year flood area along the east side of the New River and is accessed by Alternatives 2B, 2C, 4B and 4C. Recreation facility construction would take place within the existing WVDOT construction right-of-way for I-64 and the proposed WVDOT parkway construction right-of-way. Use of this site as a boat ramp is strongly supported by the WVDNR. Palustrine wetland fringes the shoreline in the vicinity of the proposed boat access. The boat access is sited in rather close proximity to the roadway and is currently depicted having an entry road running parallel to the parkway.

Proposed site features include a hardened boat launch ramp, parking for six or more vehicles, and parking for six or more boat trailers and their tow vehicles. Anticipated recreational uses associated with this site are fishing, waterfowl hunting (consistent with applicable state, local and federal game regulations) and boating.

Laurel Creek Overlook (Map I.D. 2 and Figure 3.2.d)

The proposed Laurel Creek Overlook is located on the east side of the New River immediately south of the WV 20 bridge over Laurel Creek along the west (river) side of the highway, and is accessed by Alternatives 2A, 3 and 4A. The proposed overlook would be situated on a bluff above the CSX rail line and the confluence of Laurel Creek and the New River. The property is well above the flood area and is currently privately owned. It is expected that recreation facility

construction would take place either partially or entirely within the proposed WVDOT parkway construction right-of-way.

Richmond Island and Richmond Farm lie across the river offering opportunities for unique interpretation of these resources. Proposed site features include a large overlook area with parking for six or more vehicles and an interpretive area. Anticipated recreational uses associated with this site are viewing/sightseeing, and interpretation of unique natural and historic resources.

Richmond Farm Overlook (Map I.D. 3 and Figure 3.2.e)

The proposed Richmond Farm Overlook is located on the west side of the New River on Route 27/2 (north of where Route 26 turns up onto Irish Mountain) and is accessed by Alternatives 2B, 2C, 4B and 4C. The proposed overlook would be located on the western edge of the agricultural land along current Route 27/2. Land use in the vicinity of the overlook is primarily agricultural fields including Richmond Farm, a working farm established well over 200 years ago by one of the earliest settlers of the region. Richmond Farm, located to the north of the proposed overlook site, is comprised of a homestead, small log barn, tenant house, granary, chicken house and other outbuildings, along with an agricultural landscape which includes corn fields, grazing meadows and an orchard near the dwelling. The Richmond Farm property is currently privately owned. It is expected that recreation facility construction would take place within the proposed WVDOT parkway construction right-of-way.

The proximity of the proposed overlook immediately adjacent to Richmond Farm offers opportunities for unique interpretation of this important historic resource. Proposed site features include a large overlook area with parking for six or more vehicles and an interpretive area. Anticipated recreational uses associated with this site are viewing/sightseeing, and interpretation of unique historic and associated natural resources.

Sandstone Falls Overlook (Map I.D. 4 and Figure 3.2.f)

The proposed Sandstone Falls Overlook is located on the east side of the New River below and to the north of the existing NPS Sandstone Falls Overlook along WV 20, and is accessed by Alternative 3. Construction of the proposed overlook would take place adjacent to the proposed WVDOT parkway construction right-of-way on property currently owned by the NPS. The overlook would provide visual access from the east side of the river to Sandstone Falls, the most prominent visual feature in the project study area, and includes views of the 20- to 25-foot falls, adjacent islands, rock outcrops, backwater areas, pools, riffles, rapids and wetlands associated with Sandstone Falls. The Sandstone Falls Overlook would provide an unparalleled opportunity to interpret the natural, ecological and historical resources of this important site within the project study area.

construction would take place either partially or entirely within the proposed WVDOT parkway construction right-of-way.

Richmond Island and Richmond Farm lie across the river offering opportunities for unique interpretation of these resources. Proposed site features include a large overlook area with parking for six or more vehicles and an interpretive area. Anticipated recreational uses associated with this site are viewing/sightseeing, and interpretation of unique natural and historic resources.

Richmond Farm Overlook (Map I.D. 3 and Figure 3.2.e)

The proposed Richmond Farm Overlook is located on the west side of the New River on Route 27/2 (north of where Route 26 turns up onto Irish Mountain) and is accessed by Alternatives 2B, 2C, 4B and 4C. The proposed overlook would be located on the western edge of the agricultural land along current Route 27/2. Land use in the vicinity of the overlook is primarily agricultural fields including Richmond Farm, a working farm established well over 200 years ago by one of the earliest settlers of the region. Richmond Farm, located to the north of the proposed overlook site, is comprised of a homestead, small log barn, tenant house, granary, chicken house and other outbuildings, along with an agricultural landscape which includes corn fields, grazing meadows and an orchard near the dwelling. The Richmond Farm property is currently privately owned. It is expected that recreation facility construction would take place within the proposed WVDOT parkway construction right-of-way.

The proximity of the proposed overlook immediately adjacent to Richmond Farm offers opportunities for unique interpretation of this important historic resource. Proposed site features include a large overlook area with parking for six or more vehicles and an interpretive area. Anticipated recreational uses associated with this site are viewing/sightseeing, and interpretation of unique historic and associated natural resources.

Sandstone Falls Overlook (Map I.D. 4 and Figure 3.2.f)

The proposed Sandstone Falls Overlook is located on the east side of the New River below and to the north of the existing NPS Sandstone Falls Overlook along WV 20, and is accessed by Alternative 3. Construction of the proposed overlook would take place adjacent to the proposed WVDOT parkway construction right-of-way on property currently owned by the NPS. The overlook would provide visual access from the east side of the river to Sandstone Falls, the most prominent visual feature in the project study area, and includes views of the 20- to 25-foot falls, adjacent islands, rock outcrops, backwater areas, pools, riffles, rapids and wetlands associated with Sandstone Falls. The Sandstone Falls Overlook would provide an unparalleled opportunity to interpret the natural, ecological and historical resources of this important site within the project study area.

Figure 3.2.c CONCEPTUAL SITE PLANS FOR PROPOSED RECREATION FACILITIES IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA

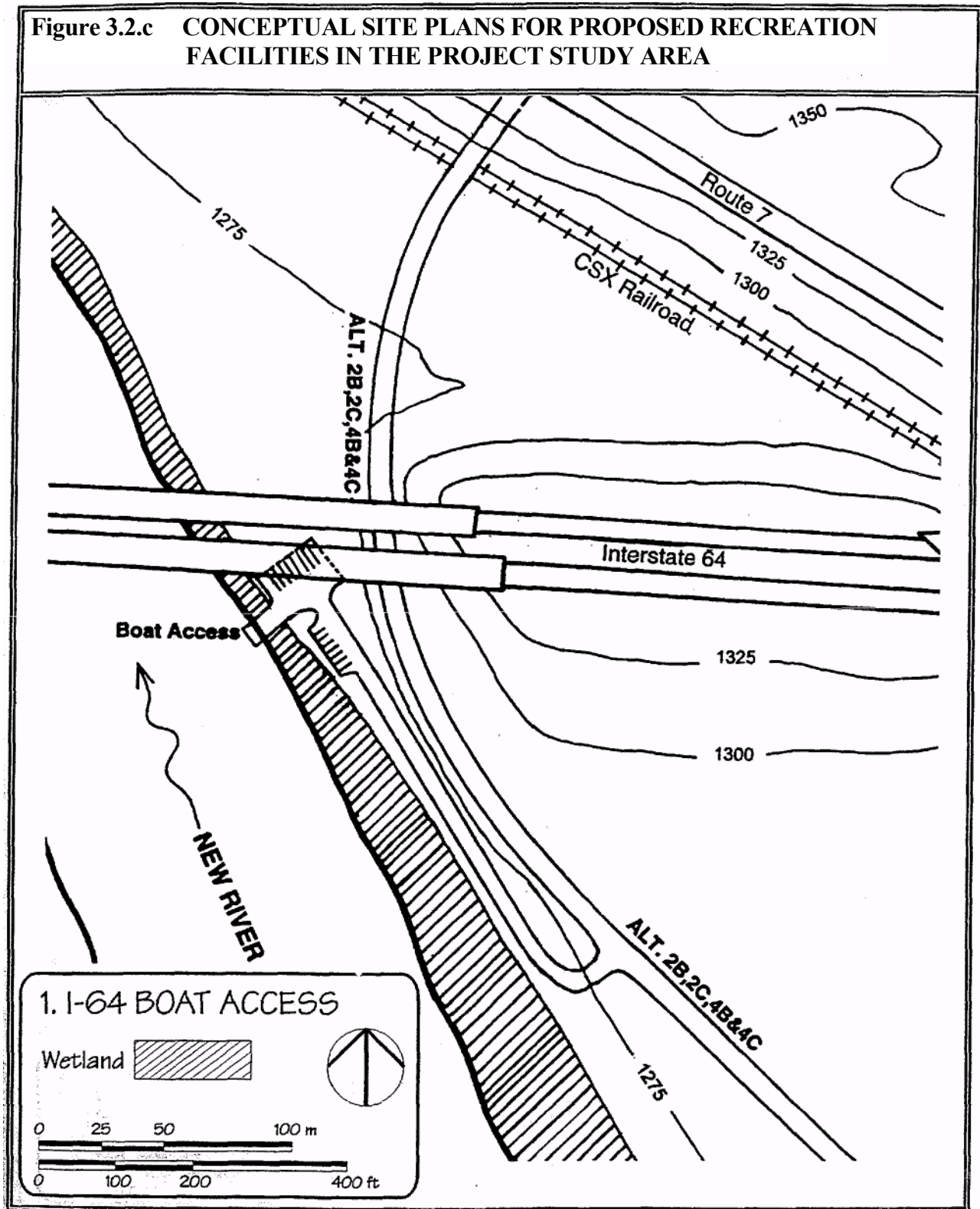


Figure 3.2.d CONCEPTUAL SITE PLANS FOR PROPOSED RECREATION FACILITIES IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA

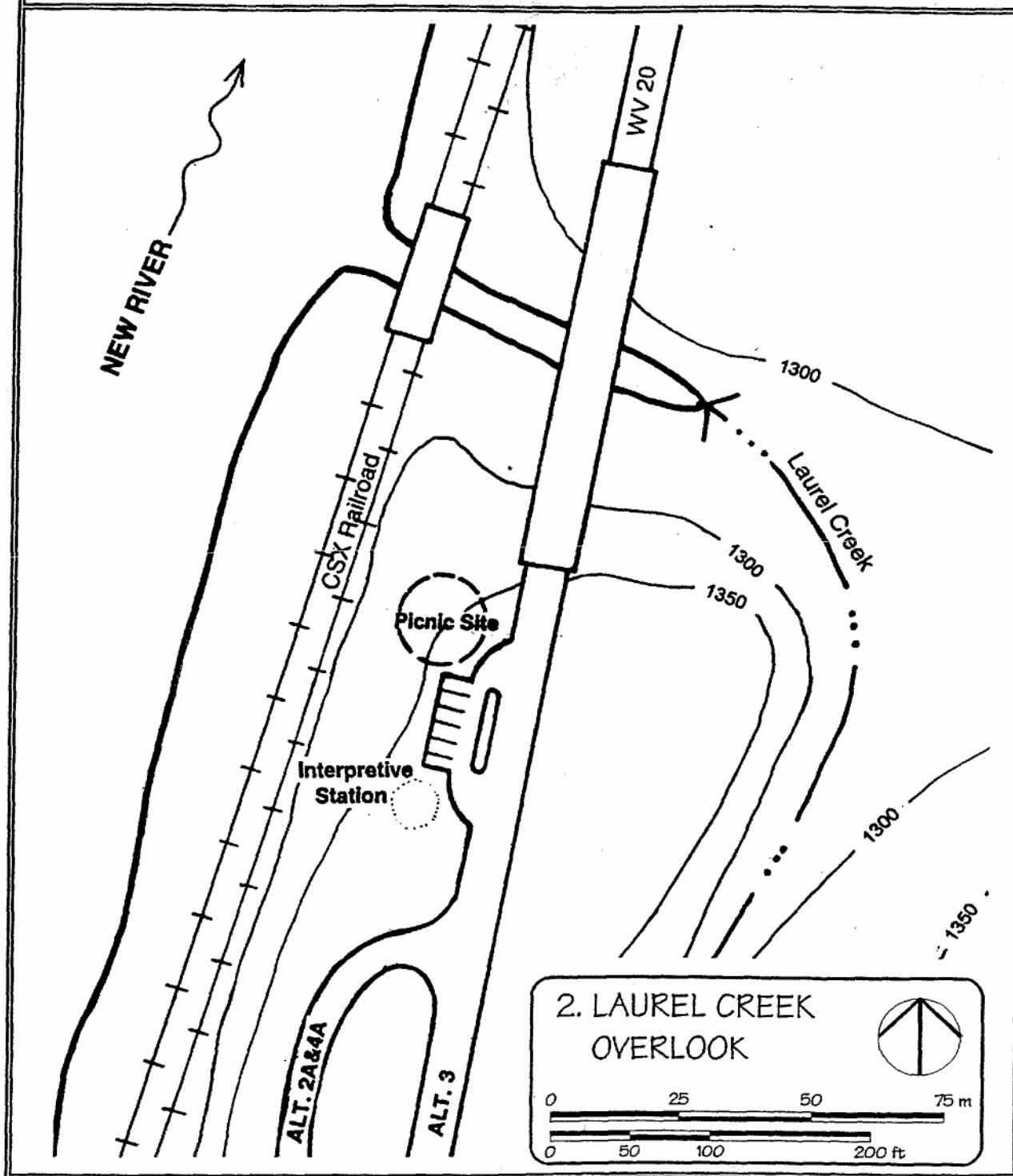


Figure 3.2.e CONCEPTUAL SITE PLANS FOR PROPOSED RECREATION FACILITIES IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA

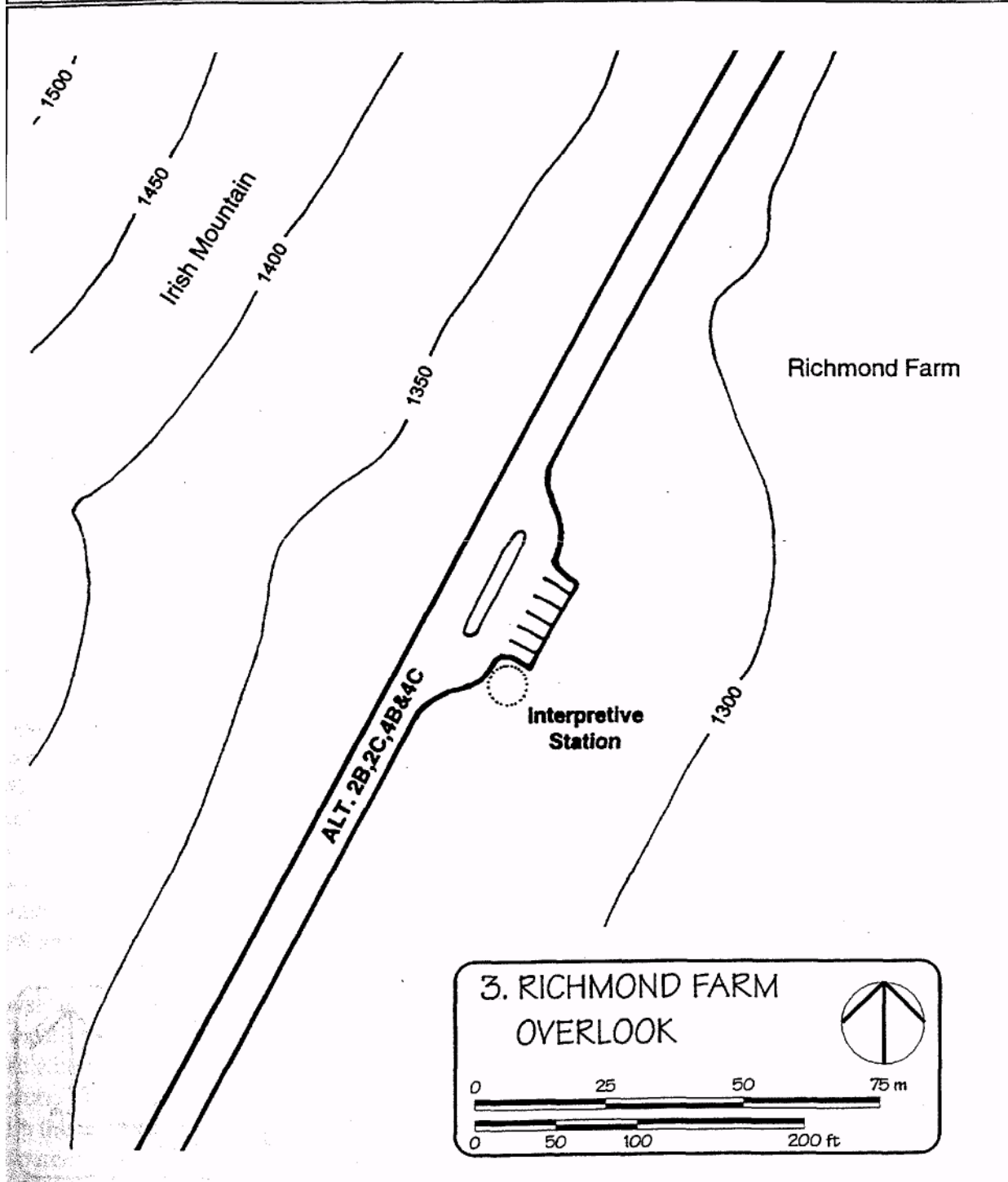
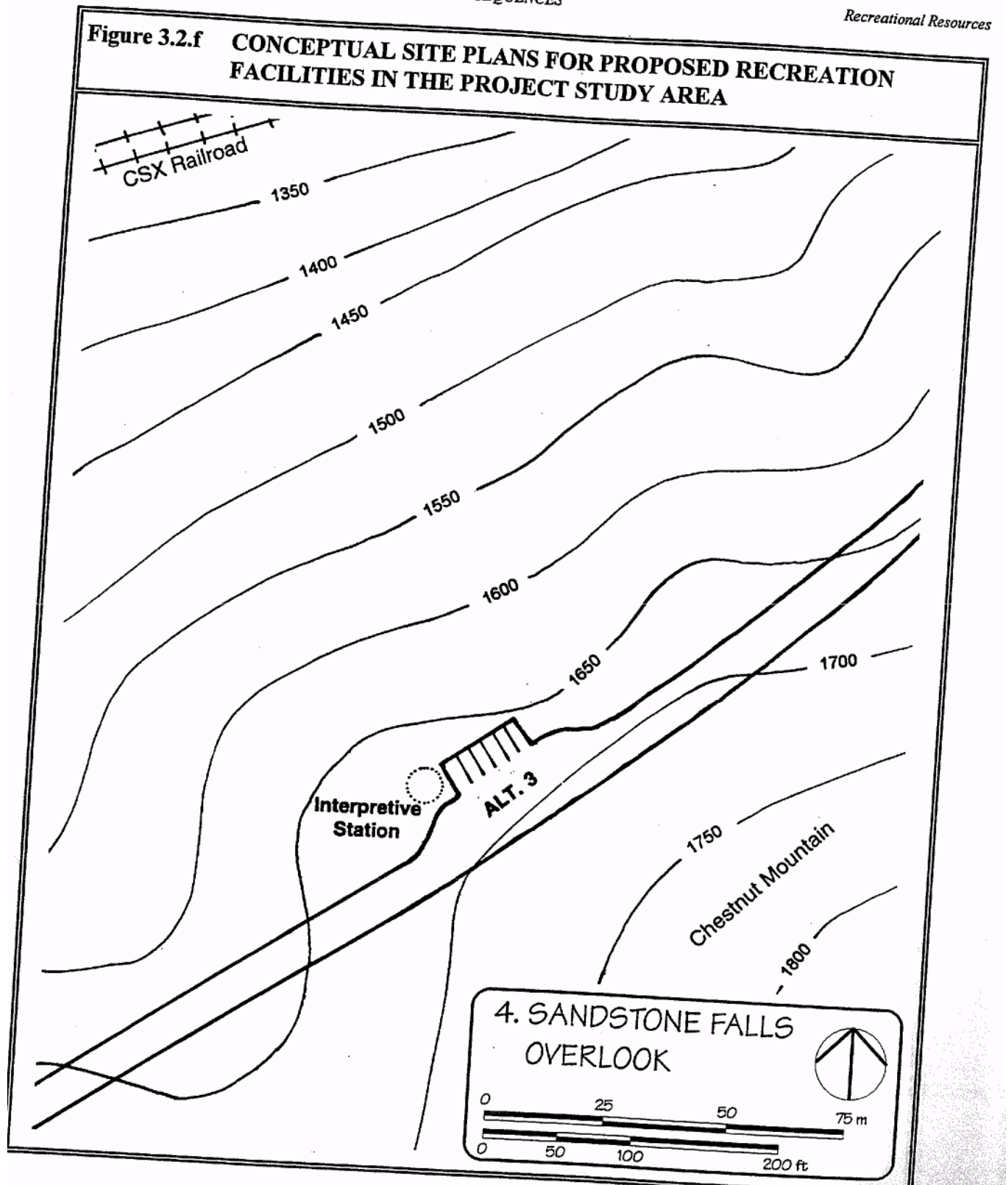


Figure 3.2.f CONCEPTUAL SITE PLANS FOR PROPOSED RECREATION FACILITIES IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA



Proposed site features include a small overlook area with parking for two to three vehicles and an interpretive area. Anticipated recreational uses associated with this site are viewing/sightseeing and interpretation of unique natural resources. It is important to note that the view of Sandstone Falls from this proposed overlook will be considerably different than the view from the existing NPS overlook. This is due to the significant drop in elevation of proposed Alternative 3 which places the viewer much closer to the river.

River North Trailhead (Map I.D. 5 and Figure 3.2.g)

The proposed River North Trailhead is located on the east side of the New River along WV 20 north of the DOH overlook and is accessed by Alternative 3. The proposed trailhead would be situated on a wide fill area along WV 20 on NPS-owned property and would offer a prime opportunity for a foot trail through the lower forested slopes of Chestnut Mountain. This NPS-owned parcel contains an existing network of logging roads which the proposed foot trail would follow with only minor improvements required.

From the proposed parkway area, there would be no visual or physical access to the river, however, the lower sections of trail would provide visual access to the river. Proposed site features include a trailhead access area with parking for four to five vehicles and hiking trail with interpretive information pertaining to the region's forest and logging history. Anticipated recreational uses associated with this site are viewing/sightseeing and hiking.

Fall Branch Trailhead (Map I.D. 6 and Figure 3.2.h)

The proposed Fall Branch Trailhead is located on the west side of the New River along Route 26 north of the existing bridge over Fall Branch and is accessed by Alternatives 2 and 4. The proposed trailhead would be located on property which is currently privately owned and accompanied by a NPS scenic easement. The site includes exposed rock outcrops and disturbed cliffs which are remnants of a former quarry and which frame the entryway to the Mary I. Draper Trail. The historic trail follows Fall Branch through a steep-sided, small valley with rock outcrops and patches of hemlock before gradually making its way up Irish Mountain and beyond. This is the only historic, long distance trail in the project study area. The trail is currently maintained by a volunteer group. Cooperative management between the private trail group, the NPS and the NRPA may be possible at this recreation site.

Physical and visual access to the river is not available at this site, although it is available nearby at existing NPS facilities at Sandstone Falls. Proposed site features include a trailhead access area with parking for six or more vehicles, picnic facilities, a hiking trail connecting to the historic Mary I. Draper Trail and an interpretive area. Anticipated recreational uses associated With this site are picnicking/passive recreation, hiking and interpretation of unique historic resources.

Long Bottom Overlook (Map I.D. 7 and Figure 3.2.i)

The proposed Long Bottom Overlook is located on the west side of the New River along Route 26 south of the proposed Fall Branch Trailhead and is accessed by Alternatives 2 and 4. The proposed overlook is located on a narrow strip of bottomland just above the 100-year flood area along the edge of the New River on property which is currently privately owned. It is expected that recreation facility construction would take place within the proposed WVDOT parkway construction right-of-way.

An overlook positioned at this bend in the river would offer an outstanding view in both directions with the river in the foreground and mountains in the background. The view downriver includes the small islands and shoals north of the confluence of Fall Branch. Upriver, Mermaid Beach and Brooks Island are visible. Both directions combine for a panorama of the river and its surroundings that is unrivaled on the west side.

Proposed site features include an overlook with parking for four to five vehicles and a small foot trail providing fishing access to the river. Anticipated recreational use associated with this site is viewing/sightseeing.

Mermaid Beach Boat Access (Map I.D. 8 and Figure 3.2.J)

The proposed Mermaid Beach Boat Access is located on the west side of the New River along Route 26 and is accessed by Alternatives 2 and 4. The proposed boat access area is currently privately owned. The property is well suited for a boat access point with a gentle slope down towards the river's edge and ample room for maneuvering a boat trailer and tow vehicle. A portion of the site is located within the 100-year flood area and includes a wetland fringe along the river bank.

A hardened boat launch ramp in this location would provide public access to the rather large pool of the river bounded by the shoals near Fall Branch (north) and the shoals around Brooks Island (south). Currently, there is no public access to this pool of the river from the west side. The WVDNR has been supportive of providing boat access to this pool of the river in response to growing fishing pressures along the river. This site would provide local residents, as well as nonresident visitors, additional opportunities to enjoy popular traditional recreation activities such as fishing, waterfowl hunting and boating. The primary role of the site is to serve the middle portion of the New River in the project study area through the provision of a hardened boat launch ramp on the west side of the river.

Proposed site features include a hardened boat launch ramp, parking for six or more vehicles, parking for six or more boat trailers and their tow vehicles, and picnic facilities. Anticipated

Figure 3.2.g CONCEPTUAL SITE PLANS FOR PROPOSED RECREATION FACILITIES IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA

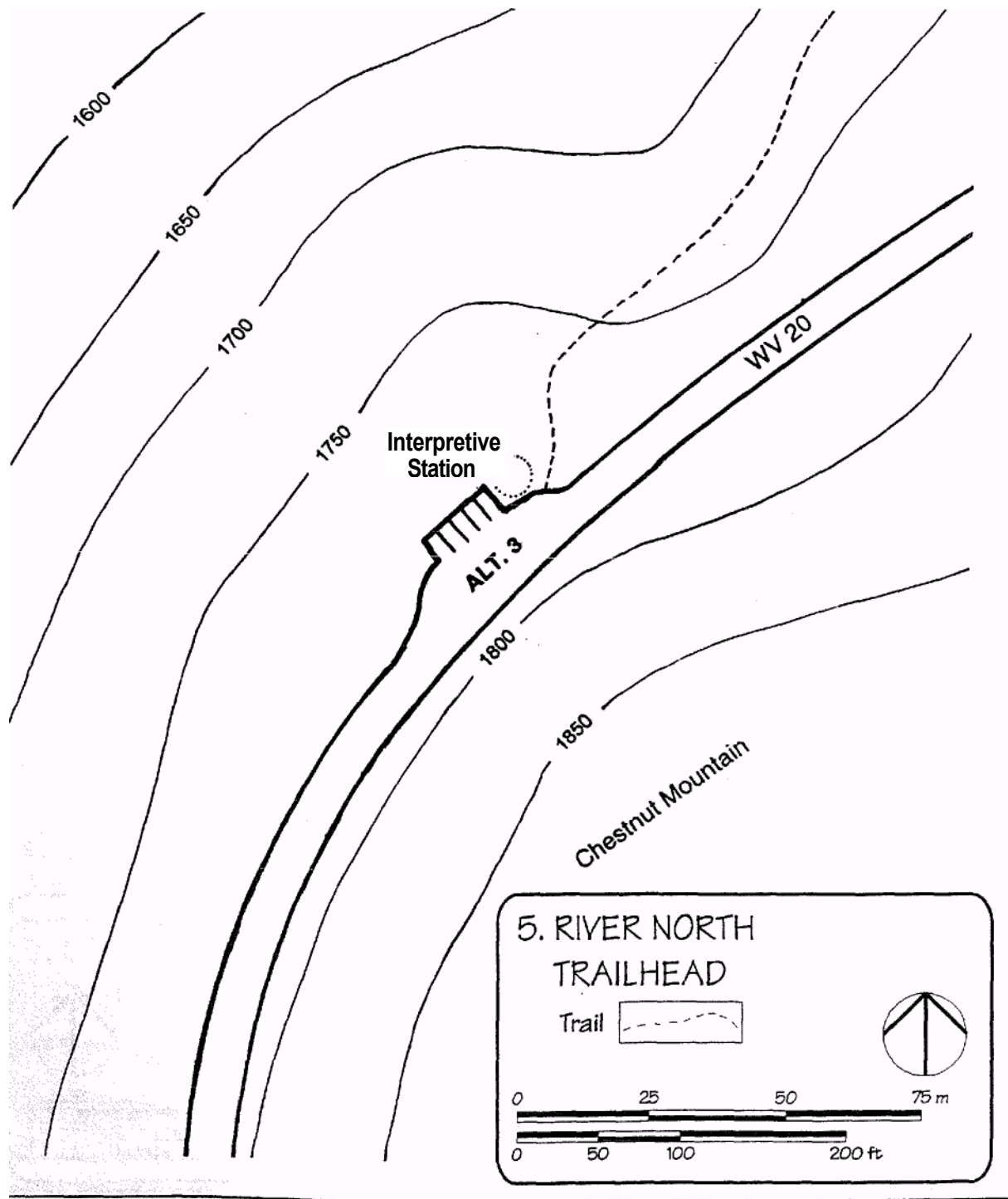


Figure 3.2.h CONCEPTUAL SITE PLANS FOR PROPOSED RECREATION FACILITIES IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA

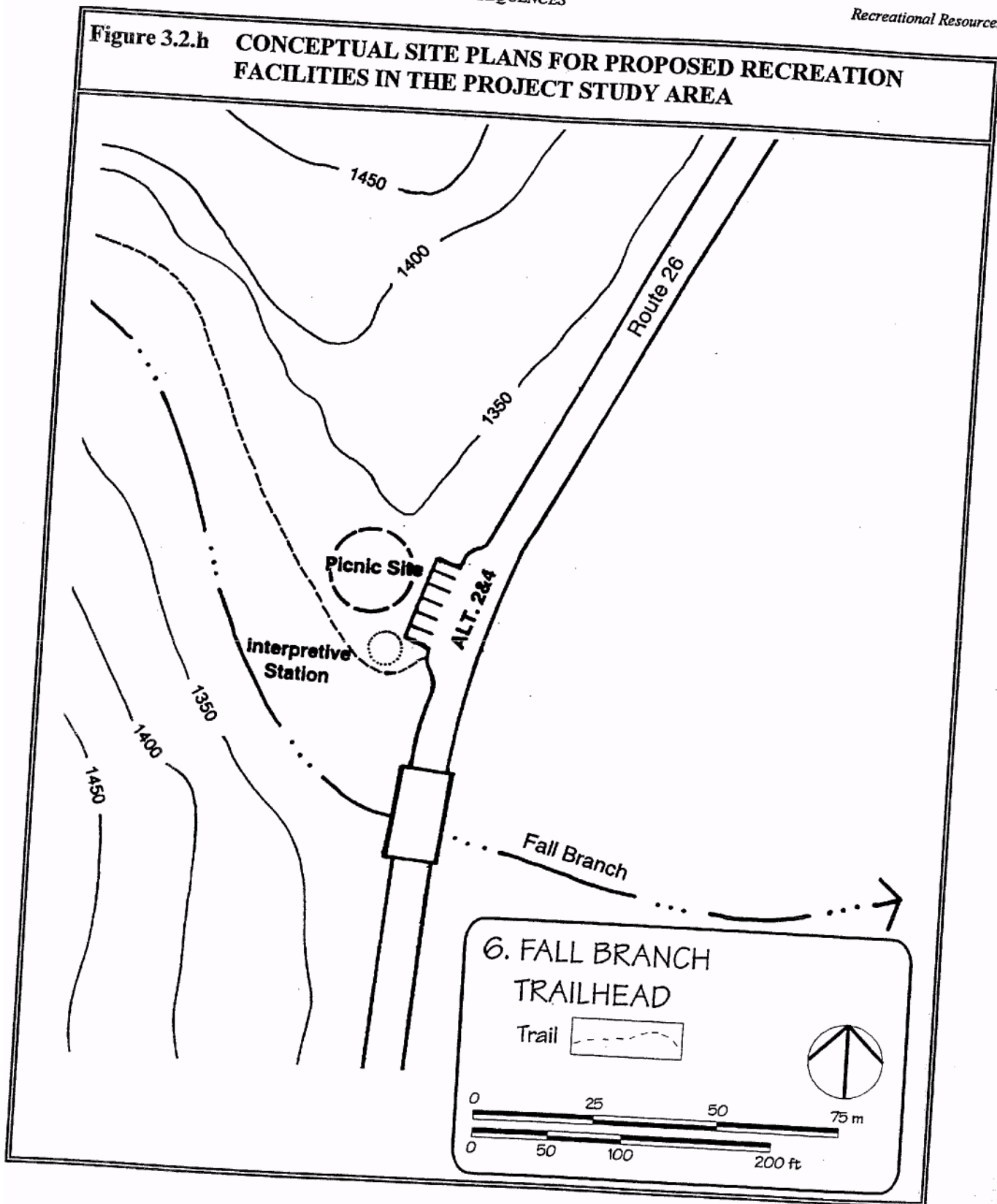


Figure 3.2.i CONCEPTUAL SITE PLANS FOR PROPOSED RECREATION FACILITIES IN THE PROJECT STUDY AREA

