EXPLORING POLYCENTRICISM IN RURAL COMMUNITINES

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

A DEKALB COUNTY REGIONAL TRAIL NETWORK

A PROJECT OF THE RURAL PLANNING ORGANIZATION

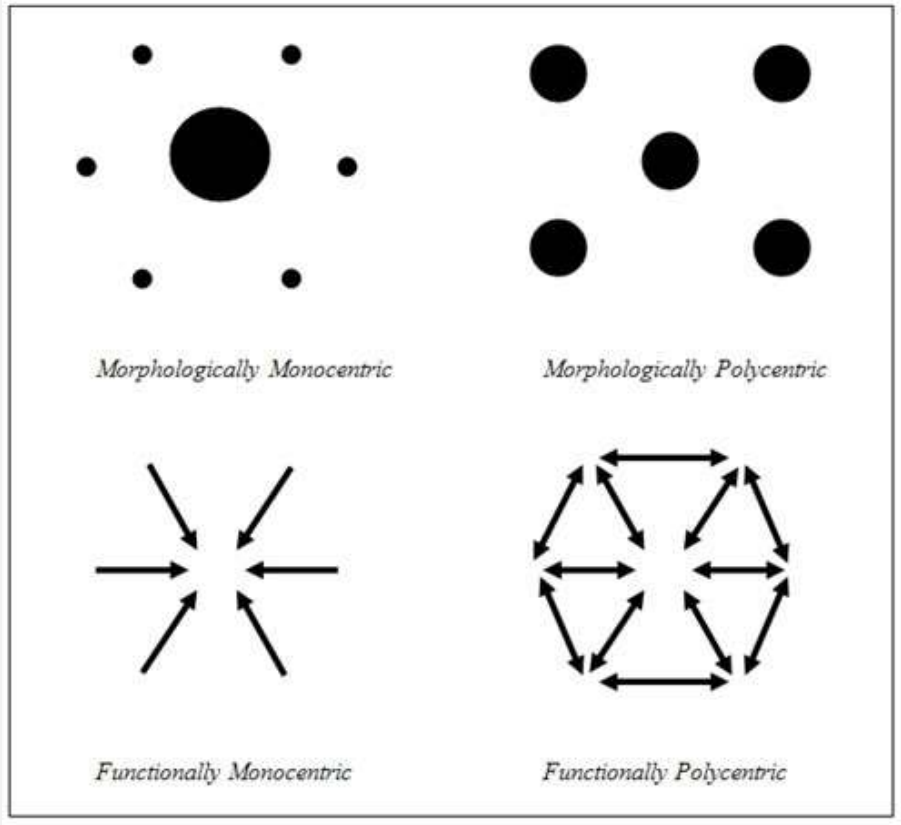
Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments

Overview of Talk

1. Polycentricism in Rural Areas
2. Regional Planning Agencies
    1. What does TARCOG do?
    2. How can we facilitate Rural Polycentricism?
3. Creating the Regional Plan
4. Unique Funding Sources

POLYCENTRIC COMMUNITIES

A Polycentric Metropolitan Area is an urban area that is organized around multiple cities (or nodes).



RURAL POLYCENTRICISM

CALL FOR PLANS: POLYCENTRICISM

– *Share your story or experience that illustrates how our communities **develop their identity** via the **interplay of varied and oft conflicting nodes**, sub-areas, and initiatives.*

RURAL POLYCENTRIC COMMUNITIES

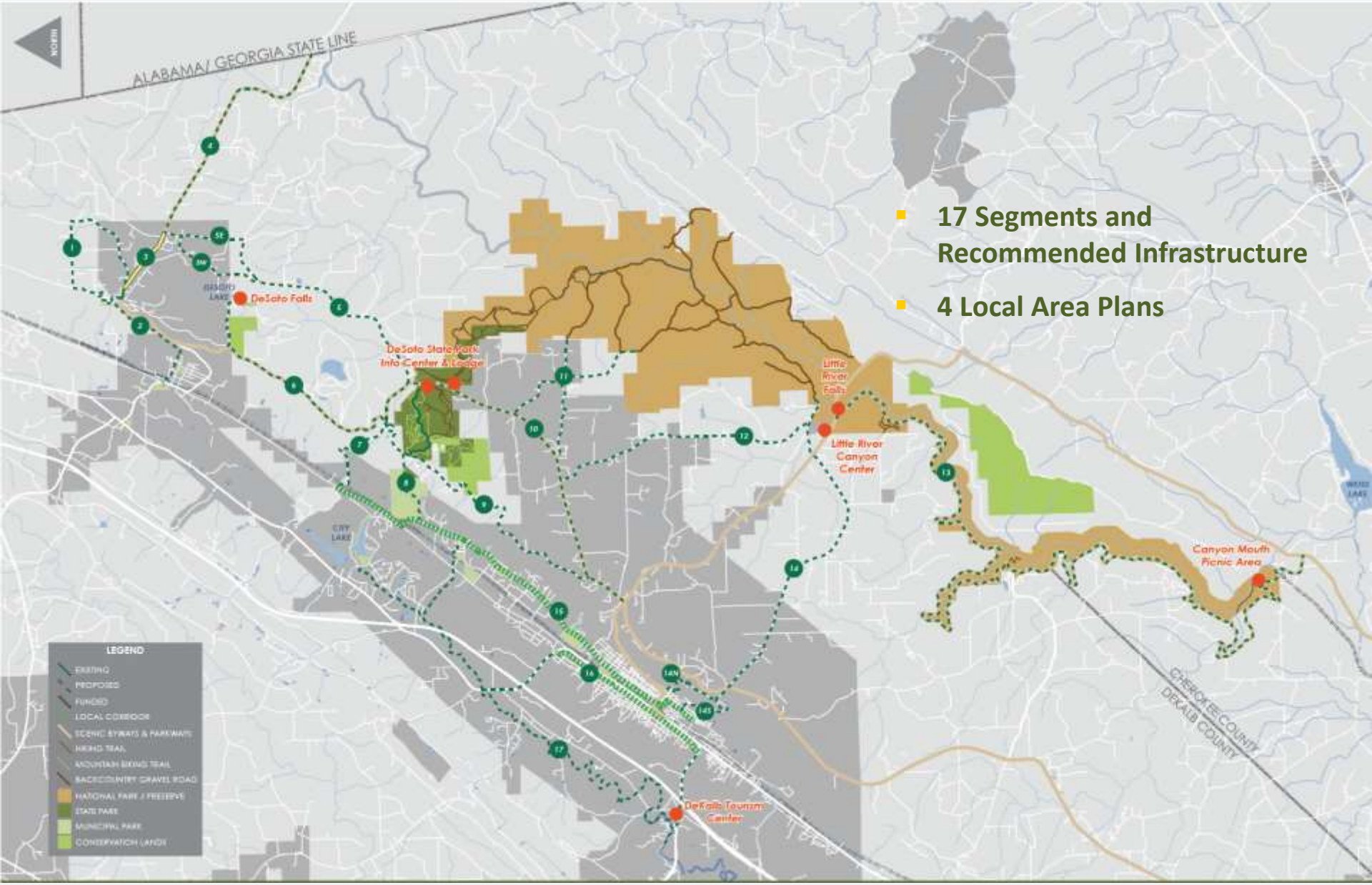
PLACE: DeKalb County, AL
SCALE: 17.17 miles (altitude)

URBAN POLYCENTRIC COMMUNITIES

PLACE: Huntsville, AL

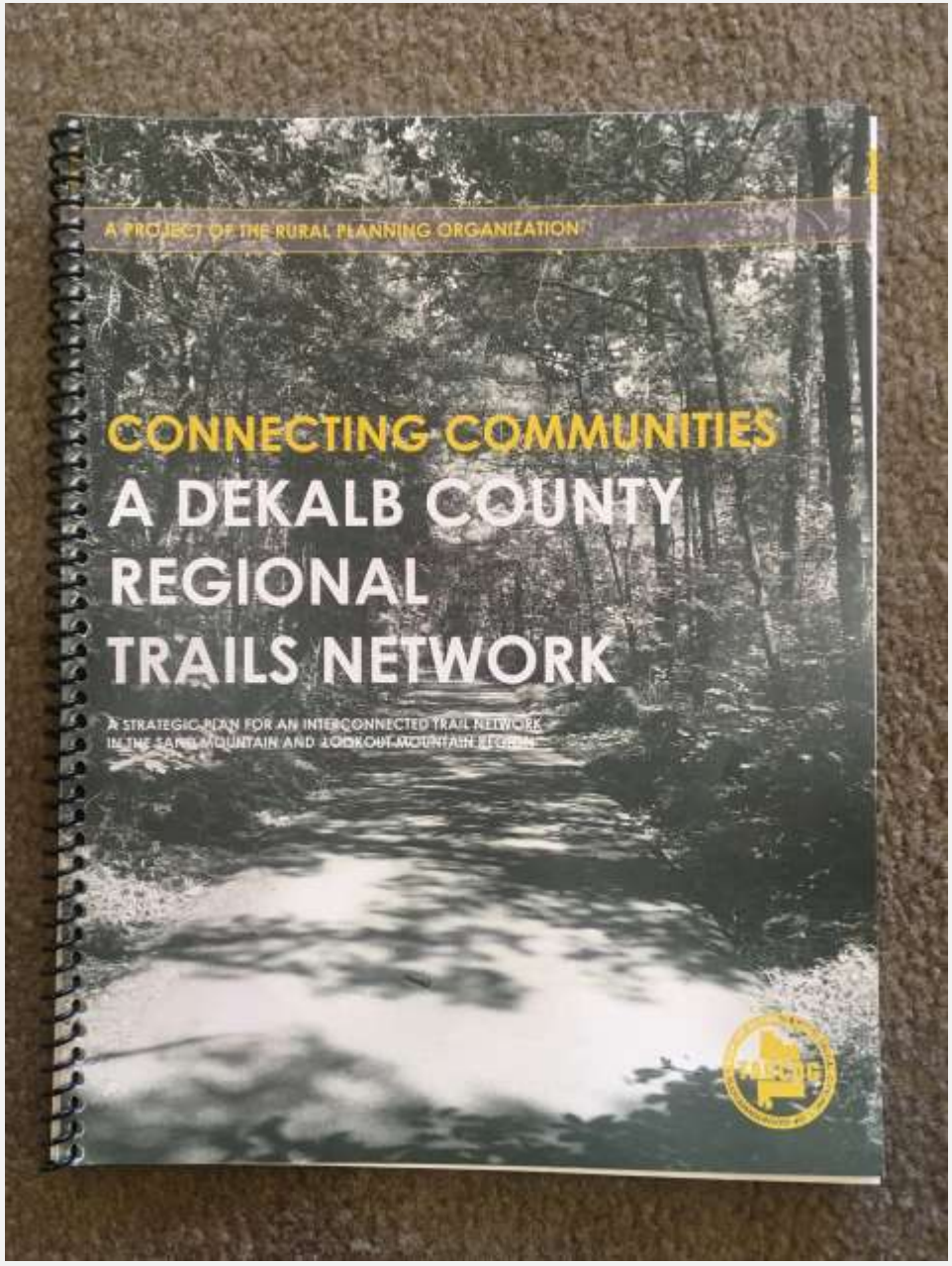
SCALE: 17.17 miles (altitude)

A RURAL MULTI-NODAL NETWORK



- 17 Segments and Recommended Infrastructure
- 4 Local Area Plans

CONNECTING COMMUNTITIES: A DeKalb County Regional Trails Network



What is TARCOG?

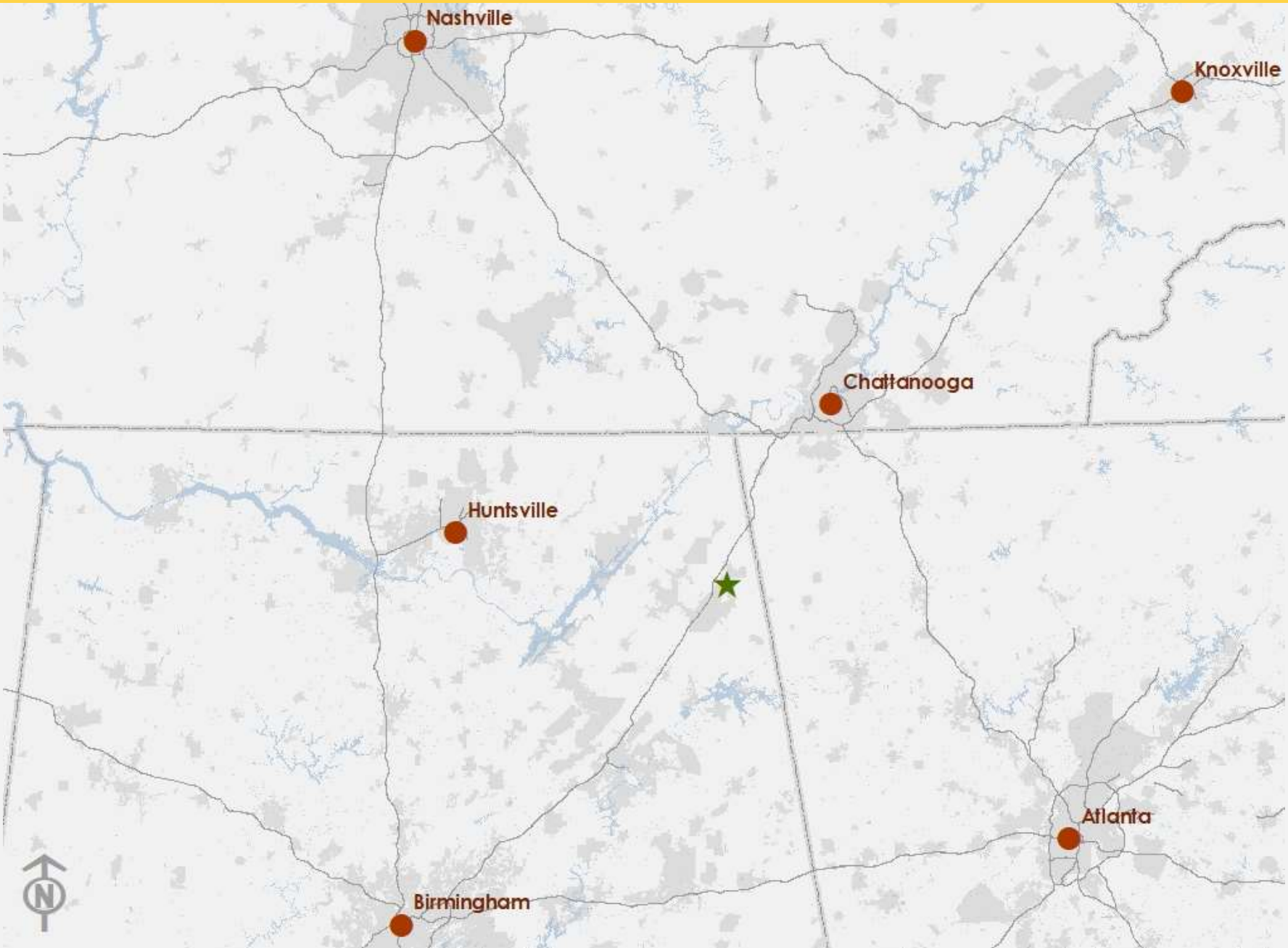
TARCOG ED&P

- Economic Development
  - CEDS and other Strategic Plans
  - Grant Writing: EDA, ARC, CDBG-ED
  - Site Selection Support
- Community & Regional Planning
  - Comprehensive & Downtown Plans
  - Transportation & Environmental Planning
  - Hazard Mitigation Plans
  - Rural Planning Organization (RPO)
  - Zoning Regulations and Maps
  - GIS/Mapping Support
  - Grant Writing: CDBG, TAP, RTP, LWCF, ARC, Law Enforcement, RC&D, etc.

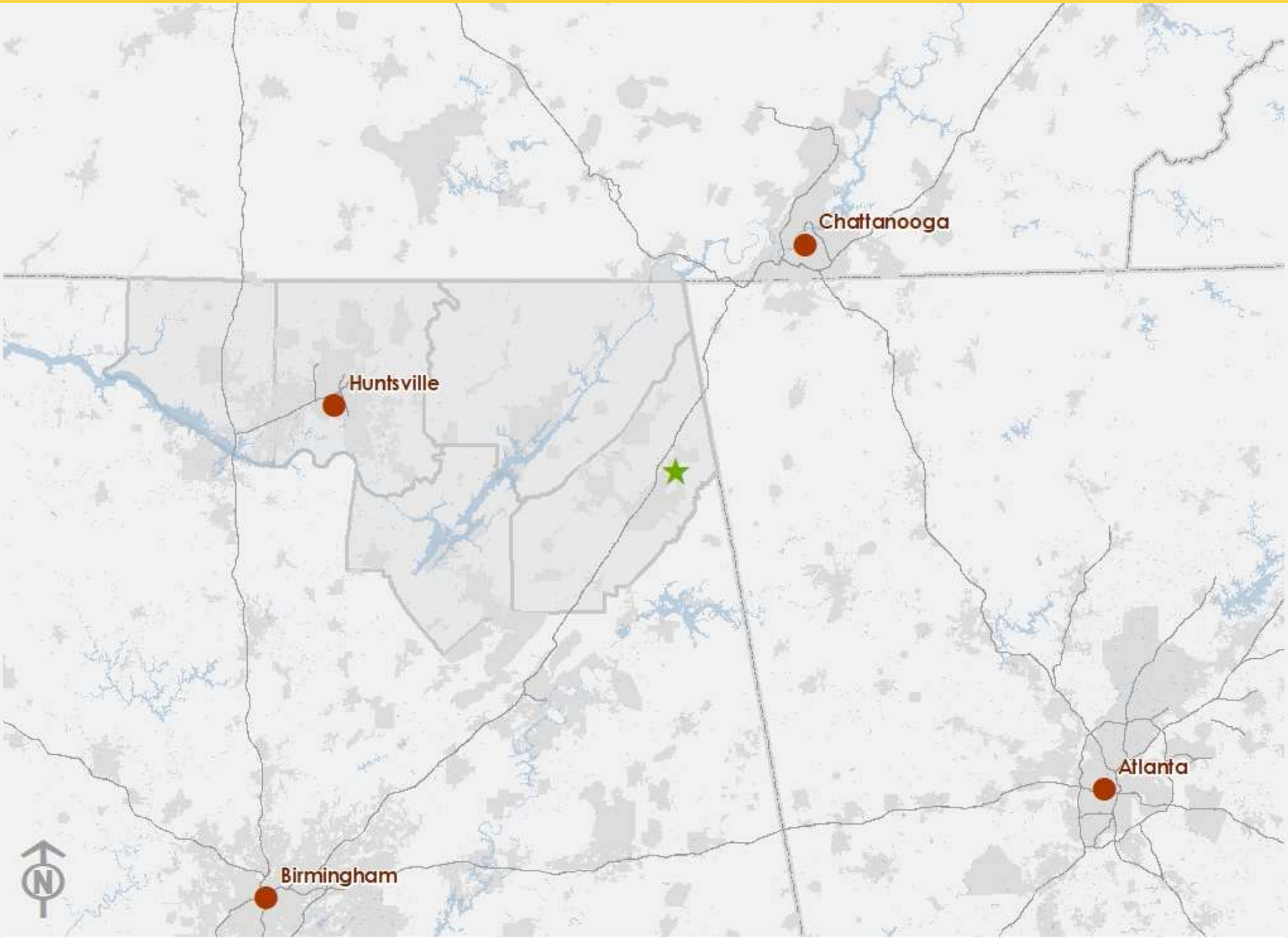
RPO - OVERVIEW

- Work Program
- Safety Program
- Long-Range Transportation Needs Study
  - Document long-range transportation needs of the region as identified by the elected and appointed officials in the area to help ALDOT develop STIP and various statewide plans.
  - This study is strictly advisory.
- Special Studies
  - Special transportation studies, such as pedestrian network, multiuse trails study, regional transportation feasibility projects, etc. based on the regional and local needs.

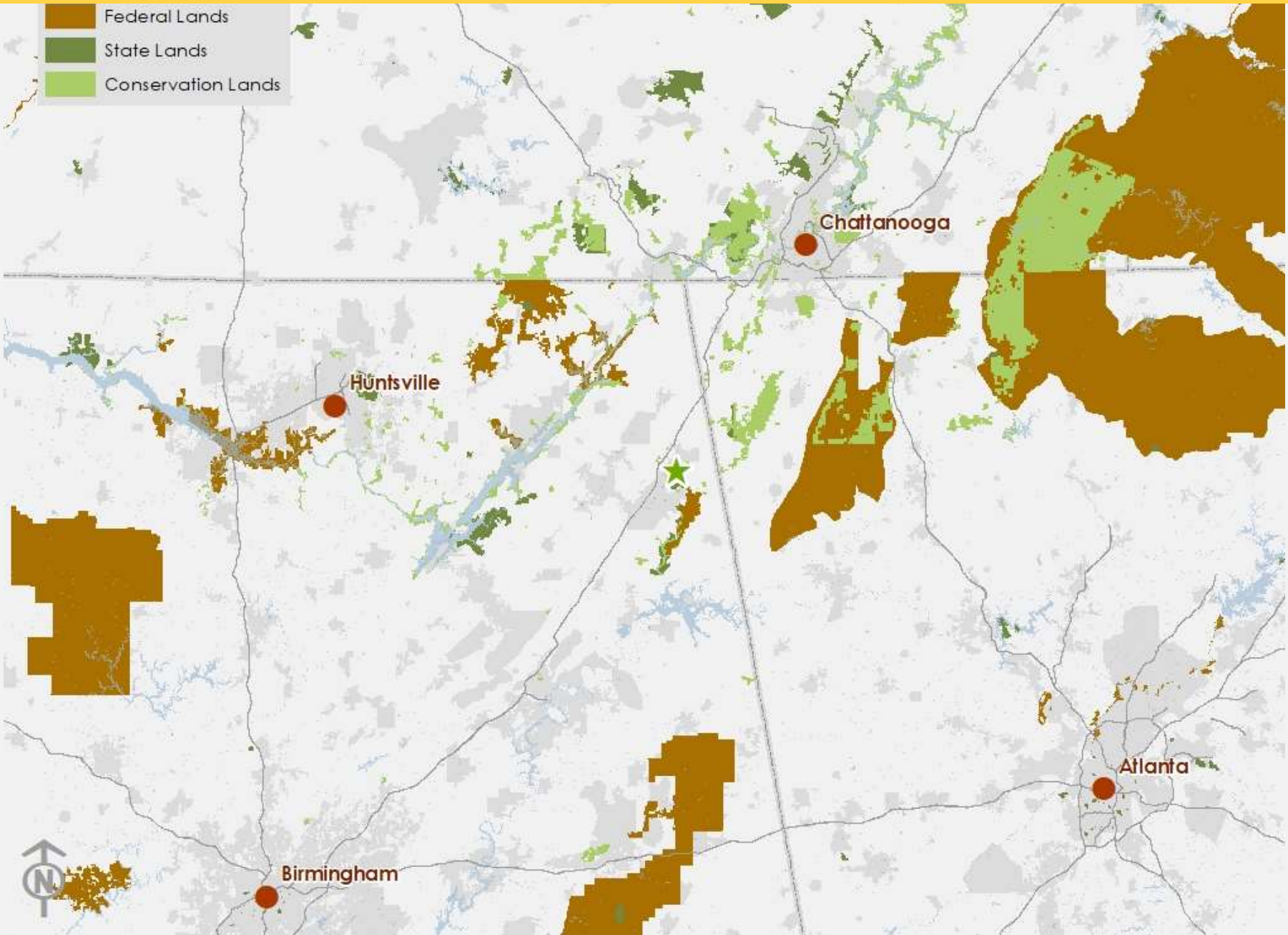
CONTEXT


Nashville
Knoxville
Chattanooga
Huntsville
Atlanta
Birmingham
N

CONTEXT



CONTEXT


Federal Lands
State Lands
Conservation Lands
Chattanooga
Huntsville
Atlanta
Birmingham
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BEGINNING

Photo Credit: Anne Welch

Photo Credit: DeSoto State Park

TOURISM SNAPSHOT: DEKALB COUNTY

Total Tourist Expenditures	$85,786,441
Total Tourism Earnings	$27,239,473
Annual State Lodging Taxes Collected	$438,400
Total Economic Impact from 2010-2014	$14,253,696
Total Tourism Jobs (Direct & Indirect)	1,073

The State of Alabama Tourism Department 2017 Annual Report shows that DeKalb County tourist expenditures in the last 10 years have more than doubled, despite most of this time period falling in the recession era.

Tourism is the largest non agricultural business in DeKalb County.

BEGINNING

Develop *complete* and *connected* multiuse trail system that would:

- Improve safety for bicyclists and pedestrians of all ages and abilities.
- Support state, regional, and local economic development. –

  Chief Ladiga and Coldwater Mountain Bike Trails
- Increase travel options for all transportation system users and protect the natural environment.

Based on Goals identified in ALDOT Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan updated in 2017.

STAKEHOLDERS

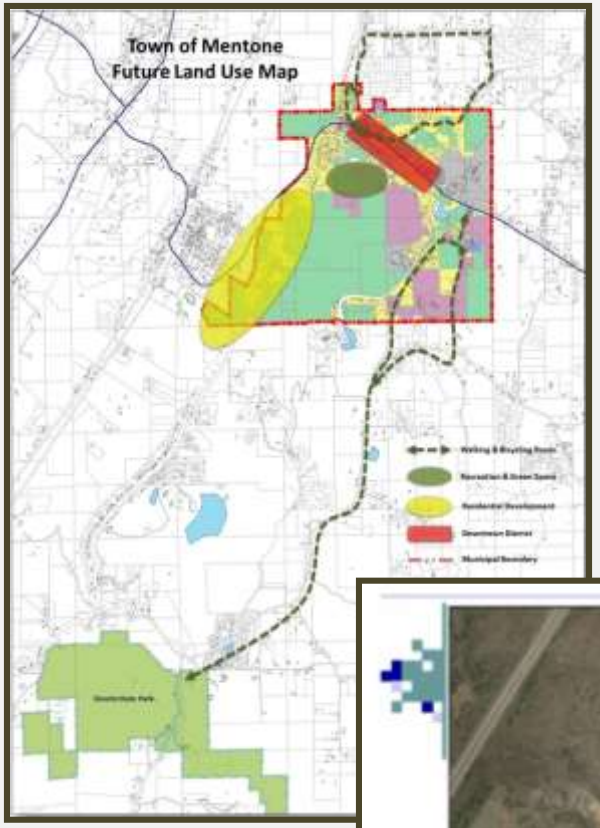
- National Park Service – *Little River Canyon National Preserve*
- DeSoto State Park
- Jacksonville State University – *Little River Canyon Center*
- *DeKalb County Tourism*
- DeKalb County EDA
- DeKalb County Commission
- City of Fort Payne
- Town of Mentone
- Town of Valley Head
- Fort Payne Chamber of Commerce
- Mentone Arts and Cultural Center
- *Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments*

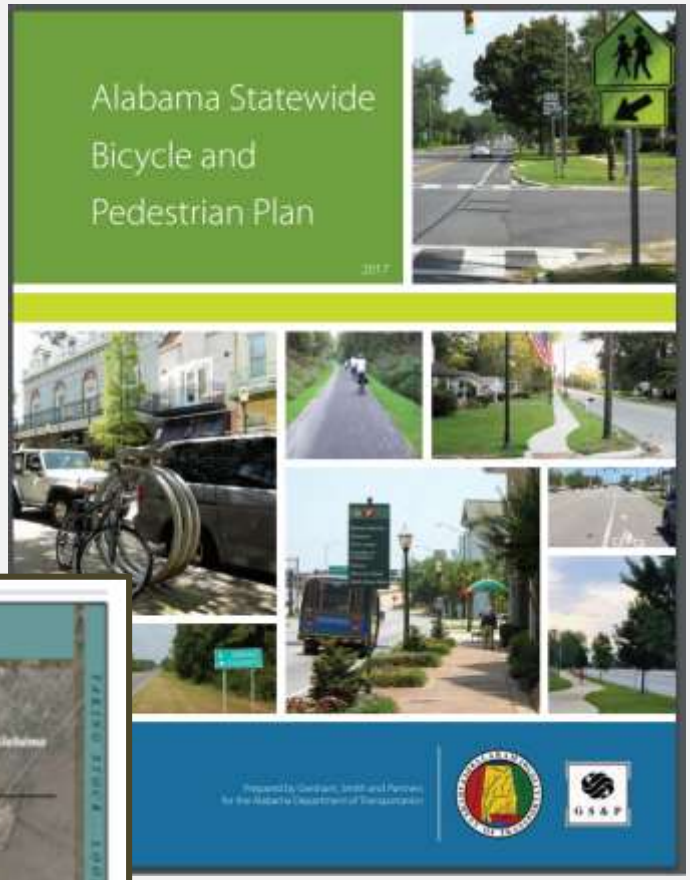
PROCESS

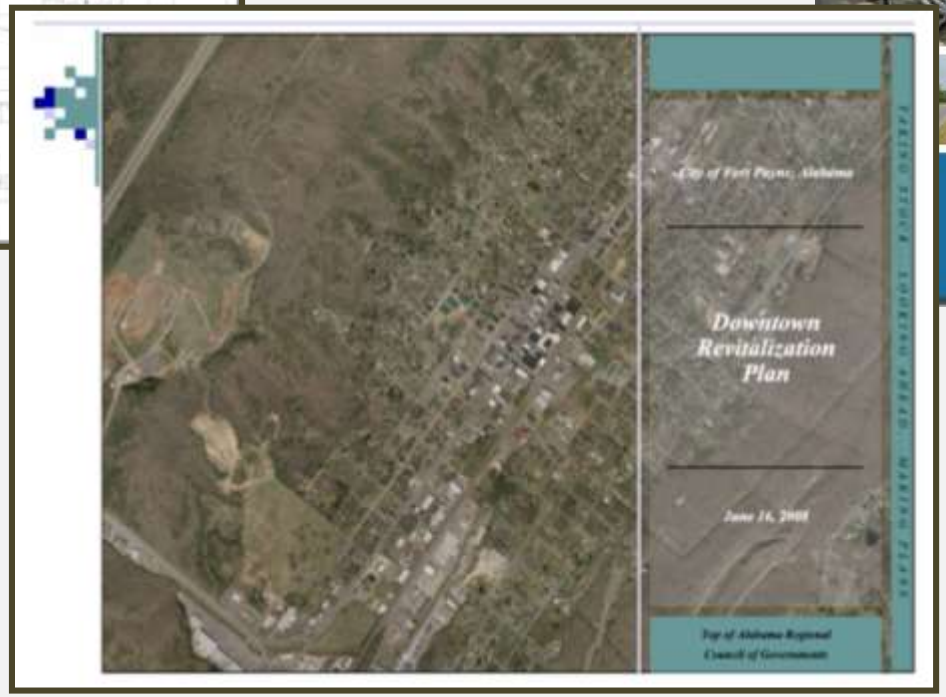
- **Needs Assessment**
  - Vision & Objectives
  - Plans & Frameworks
  - Network Analysis – Destinations, Current trails and Connections Identifications
  - Case Studies of Southern Trails
- **Proposed Network**
  - Regional Network
  - Local Networks
- **Design Guides**
  - Roadway and Trail Design Guides
  - Way finding
- **Potential Funding Sources**

Needs Assessment

Needs Assessment

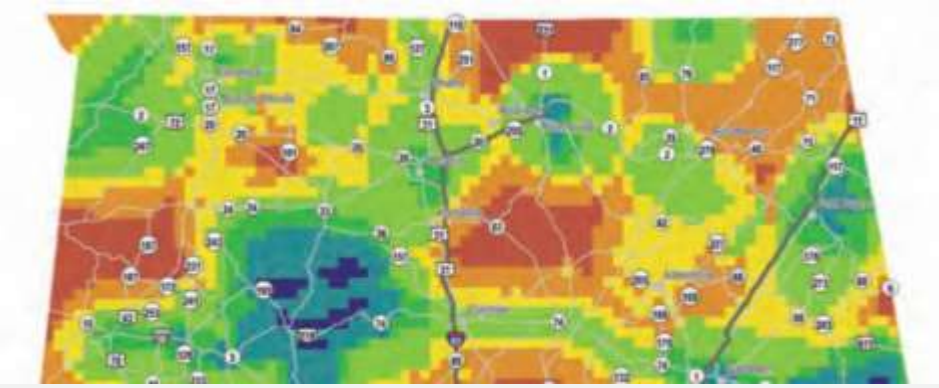






Needs Assessment

Suitability Analysis

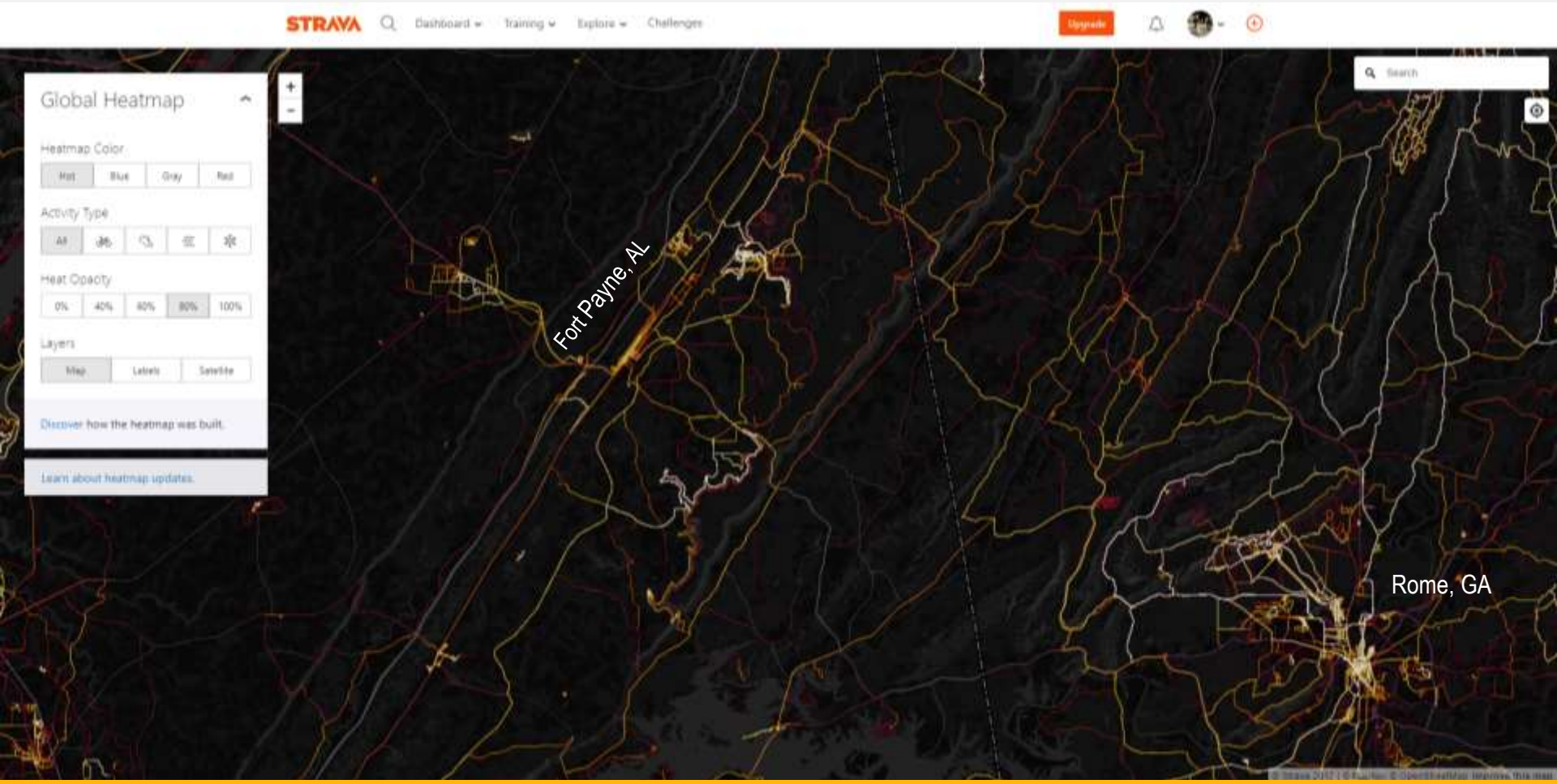


Demand Analysis

State Bicycle Corridors

Alabama Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, 2017 (ALDOT)

Needs Assessment



As you can see in the above map, many of the routes identified in the proposed DeKalb County Regional Trails Network are already heavily utilized by recreational bicyclists.

Strava Heat Map

Needs Assessment

Photo Credit: https://www.visitgreenvillesc.com/listing/ghs-swamp-rabbit-trail/6190/

TOTAL ECONOMIC IMPACT BETWEEN 2010 –2014

$14,253,696

SWAMP RABBIT TRAIL, SC

Needs Assessment

Photo Credit: https://www.accessatlanta.com/events/outdoors--recreation/ways-run-bike-skate-the-silver-comet-trail/lNc2eVH4Tz7FUHDSlfiHyI/

Silver Comet Trail generates about $100 million in total expenditures throughout the Region each year, supporting about 750 jobs.

SILVER COMET TRAIL, GA

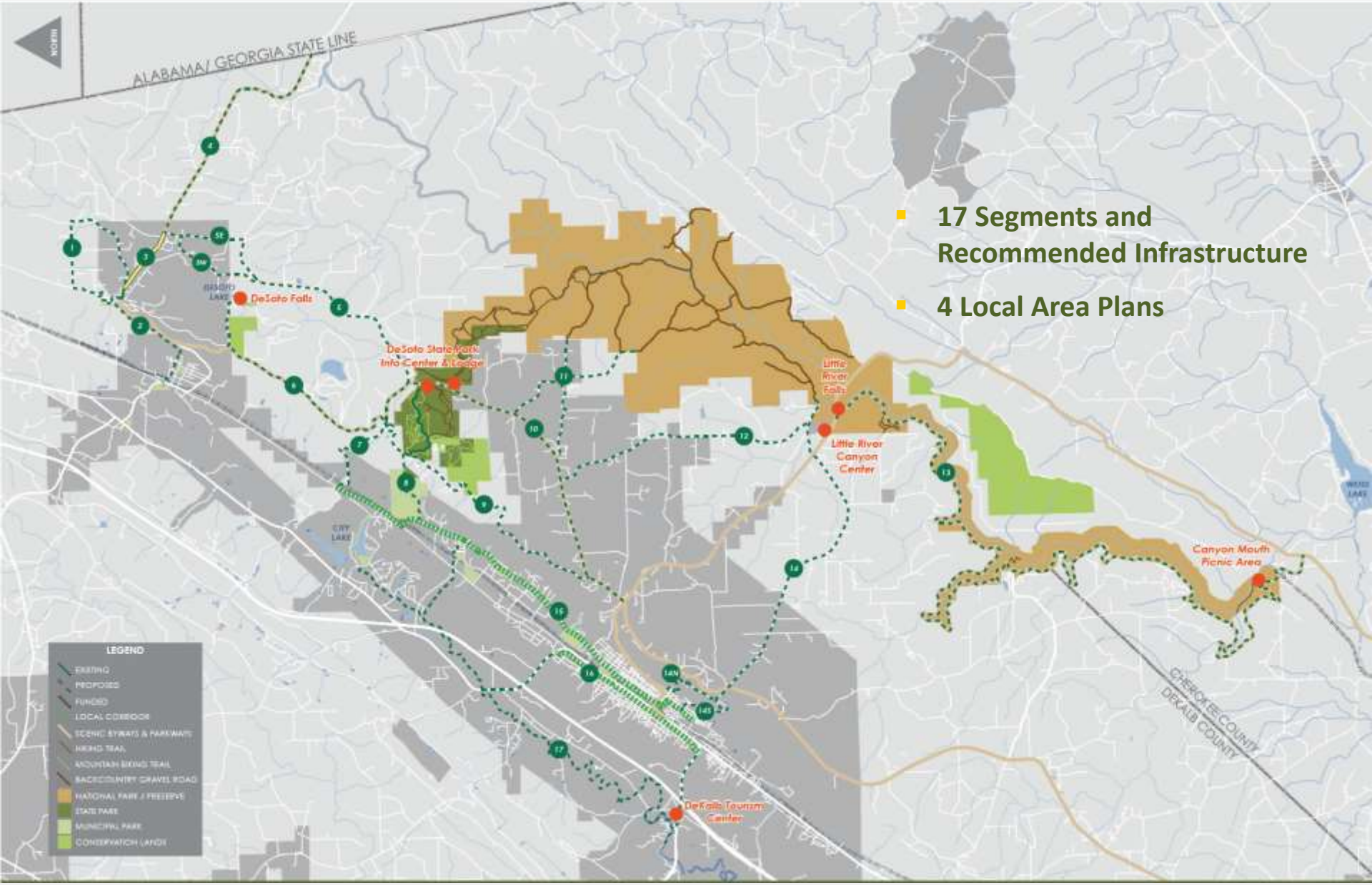
VISION

"Provide a safe, connected network of on – and off – road bicycle/pedestrian trails (and associated infrastructure) for the Lookout Mountain Area of DeKalb County, Alabama."

Mentone • Valley Head • Fort Payne • DeSoto State Park

Little River Canyon National Preserve

PROPOSED NETWORK



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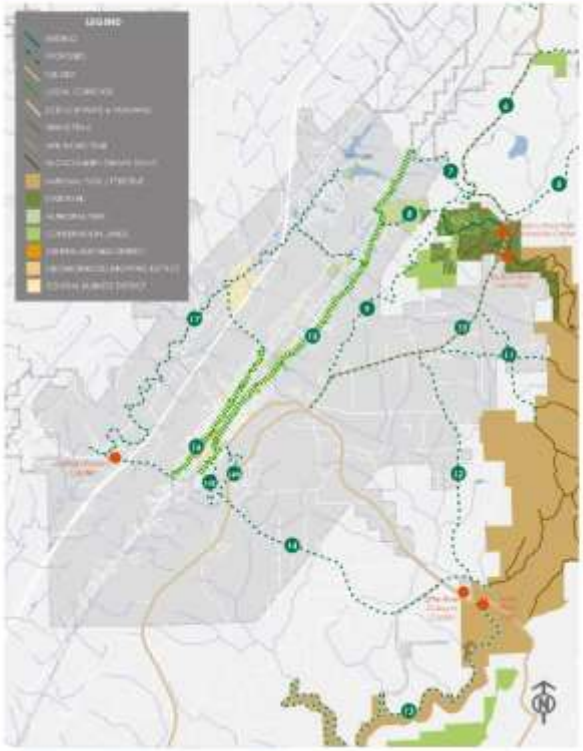
LOCAL NETWORKS

PROPOSED LOCAL NETWORK - City of Fort Payne



EXISTING AND PLANNED PROJECTS

- Big Wills Greenway
- Fort Payne Sportsplex and Trails
- Downtown Sidewalk Improvements

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strive to make ADA accessibility improvements to sidewalks within the City of Fort Payne.
- Inventory and connect places of interest in and surrounding downtown such as schools, civic facilities, parks, arts and entertainment venues, and other places of interests.
- Prioritize and create connections between the DeKalb County Regional Network and the City's local bicycle and pedestrian network.
- Install bicycle racks; repair stations; water fountains; as well as maps and wayfinding signage at local parks, schools, and civic centers.
- Encourage local businesses to install bicycle racks.
- Strengthen municipal policies and ordinances (example—leash laws) to encourage trail development.

PROPOSED LOCAL NETWORK - Town of Mentone

EXISTING AND PLANNED PROJECTS

- TAP FY18 application to build Phase 1 of the Town's two phase plan to extend a sidepath from Town Hall / Edward Mason Park east along Hwy 117 to Moon Lake Library and School has been granted funding.
- The Town of Mentone, the Alabama Historical Commission, and ALDOT have a Memorandum of Understanding to utilize the old bridge over the Little River as a pedestrian and bicycle bridge.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Work with the Town of Valley Head to construct the Caperton Trail.
- Install Bike Route signage along the Northern Mentone Loop and the Sothern DeSoto Connection.
- Install bicycle racks; repair stations; water fountains; as well as maps and wayfinding signage at local parks, schools, and civic centers.
- Encourage local businesses to install bicycle racks.

DESIGN GUIDE

ROADWAY DESIGN GUIDE - Dealing with Topography

CLIMBING BICYCLE LANE

Climbing lanes provide protection for bicyclists on uphills by separating slower bicyclists from vehicular traffic with a bike lane; the downhill side of the road is marked with a sharrow (shared lane marking), as bicyclists are able to more easily keep up with the flow of traffic while descending.

This type of infrastructure should be used for roadways with steep and hilly roadways and where existing right-of-way only supports the addition of only one bike lane.

A climbing lane in hilly downtown of Asheville, North Carolina

BICYCLE STAIRWAY RUNNEL

A bicycle stairway is a pedestrian stairway that has one or two channels along the side or center to facilitate the walking of a bicycle or stroller up or down the stairway. This type of infrastructure can provide vital connections for bicyclists in areas where topography and steepness limits the construction of trails.

A stairwell build to accommodate both bicycles and strollers on the campus of NTNU in Trondheim, Norway

Creatively designed stairwells can allow for utilization by both bicycles and pedestrians.

ROADWAY DESIGN GUIDE - Mixed Traffic Facilities

ADVISORY BIKE LANES or SHOULDER

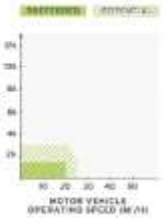
Advisory Bike Lanes or Shoulders create useable shoulders for pedestrians and bicyclists on roadways typically considered too narrow to accommodate bicycle infrastructure. The shoulders are marked with broken lines and optional pavement coloring (such as green or red). These roadways are bi-directional for both motorists and bicyclists. Motorists may only enter the marked shoulders when no bicyclists or pedestrians are present, and must use caution when overtaking these vulnerable users.

These are most appropriate on streets with low to moderate traffic volumes and speeds.

NOTE: Advisory shoulders are a new infrastructure type in the United States. In order to install advisory shoulders, an approved Request to Experiment is required, detailed in Section 1A.10 of the MUTCD. FHWA is also accepting requests for experimentation with a similar treatment, the "dashed bicycle lane".

BICYCLE BOULEVARD

Bicycle boulevards are low-stress shared roadways that give priority to bicyclists. They are typically located parallel to major roadways, on slow volume, low speed local streets. The ASSHTO Bike Guide describes bike boulevards as "streets that have been modified to accommodate through bicycle traffic and minimize motor traffic" (2012, p. 1-2). They are typically marked with large shared lane markings placed in the center of the travel lane. This minimizes wear on the markings from vehicular traffic and encourages bicyclists to ride a safe distance away from parked cars and the edge of the roadway.



DESIGN GUIDE

TRAIL DESIGN GUIDE - Unpaved Facilities

HIKING TRAILS

MOUNTAIN BIKING TRAILS

BACKCOUNTRY UNPAVED ROADS

WAYFINDING

NETWORK / ROUTE SIGNAGE

EDUCATIONAL SIGNAGE

WAYFINDING SIGNAGE

NEXT STEPS

- **Potential Funding Sources**
  - Local Collaborations
  - State and Federal Sources
- **Strategic Planning Process**
  - Continuous Process
  - Public Outreach and Education
  - Regular Update and Prioritization

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Prioritization of the trails at municipal level.
- Multiple projects in Mentone and Fort Payne are under design and/or construction.
- Increased community support for both Mentone and Valley Head for the historic Caperton Trail connecting them.
- Fort Payne purchased a critical park property for Athletic Center, which will provide a connection to the State Park.
- Fort Payne City Council has since started exploring ways to modify city ordinances that would encourage and support bicycle and pedestrian activities.

REGIONAL IMPACT

- It aligns with the CEDS regional goal of attracting and developing tourism activities to support economic development as tourism is one of the top industries in the County.
- This project is an excellent example of a collaboration between various levels of governments – local, state, and federal; various local organizations; and education institute.
- Changed the mindset:
  - Collaborating over competing;
  - Build upon community and regional assets of natural resources; and
  - Incorporate tourism development as a significant part of economic development puzzle.

CONTACT

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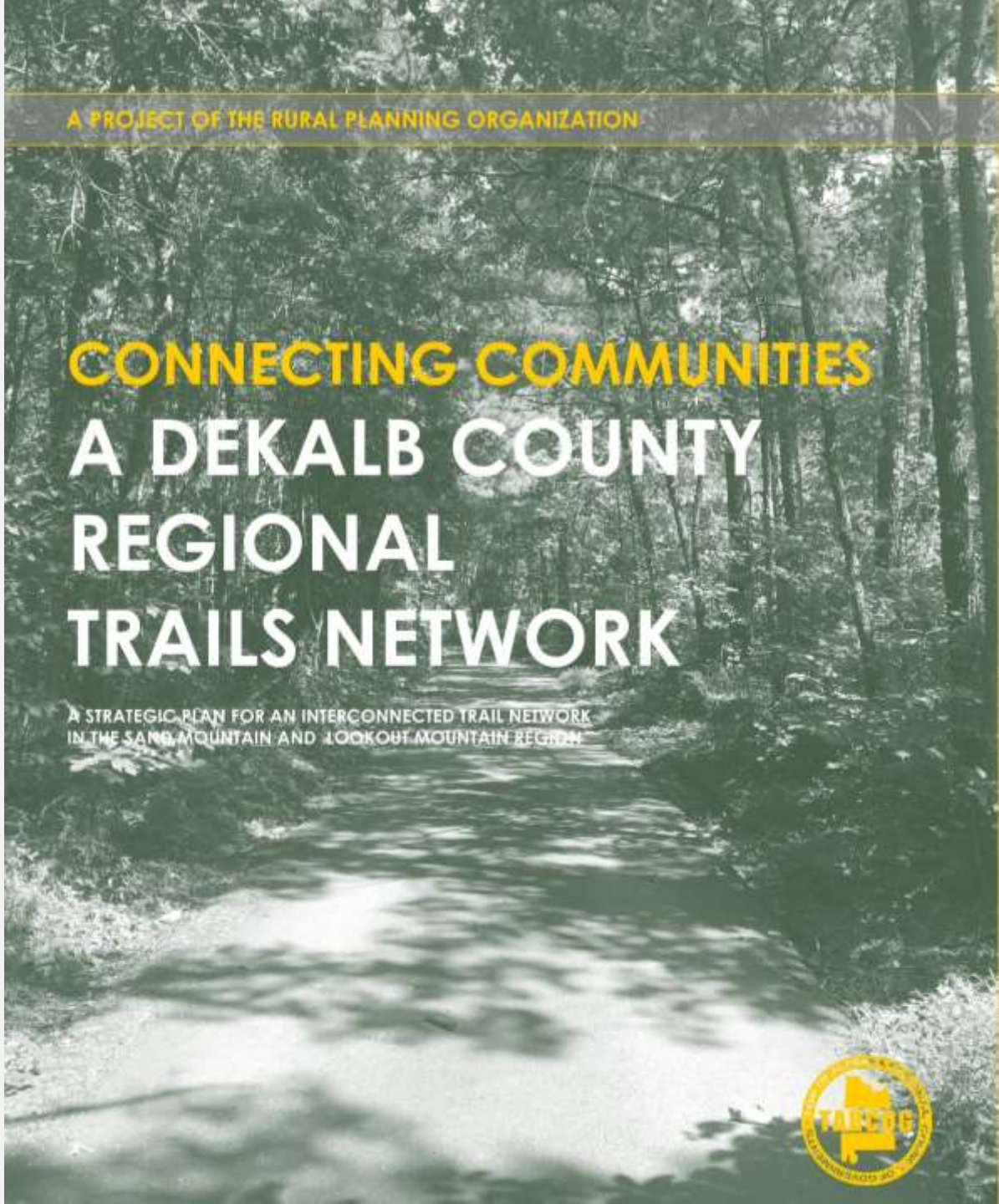
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