Draft Environmental Assessment

Channel Realignment at the Coahulla Creek Prater's Mill Dam Site

Whitfield County

Dalton, Georgia

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Prepared By:

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) is being prepared to evaluate the effects associated with the proposed action and complies with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Department of the Interior (43 CFR §46; 516 DM 8) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (550 FW 3) regulations and policies. The National Environmental Policy Act requires examination of the effects of proposed actions on the natural and human environment.

2. PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action is the restoration and realignment of an approximate 550-foot section of the Coahulla Creek channel in the vicinity of the Prater's Mill Dam in Dalton, Whitfield County, Georgia. The restoration action will include channel realignment and instream channel and stream bank restoration. The Prater's Mill Dam and Prater's Mill Historic Building will be preserved and structurally reinforced to reduce the future risk of failure, and flow will be maintained at the historic Prater's Mill House Building wheelhouse. Recreational access will be enhanced with the addition of two small river access points.

A proposed action may evolve during the NEPA process as the agency refines its proposal and gathers feedback from the public, tribes, and other agencies. Therefore, the final proposed action may be different from the original. The proposed action will be finalized at the conclusion of the public comment period for the Draft EA and will be formally documented in the Final EA.

3. BACKGROUND

The Prater's Mill Dam Site is located on Coahulla Creek in Dalton, Whitfield County, Georgia. Coahulla Creek is a tributary to the Conasauga River. Coahulla Creek originates in Cleveland, Tennessee, and runs approximately 60 miles until it meets the Conasauga River just southeast of Dalton, Georgia (Appendix A).

The Prater's Mill Dam Site is adjacent to several protected historic resources (*i.e.*, listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)), including the Prater's Mill Historic Building and the approximate 25-acre Prater's Mill Historic Site. Although not listed on the NRHP, there is a small low head dam adjacent to the Prater's Mill Historic Building. The Prater's Mill Dam was originally constructed in the 1850s (approximate). The dam is approximately 11.5 feet high and 130 feet long and is thought to be comprised of wood cribbing overlain by cobble and concrete. The dam is partially breached and in poor structural condition. The dam structure has contributed to severe scouring and erosion on the river's western edge, where the river channel has migrated around the dam's north-western edge, creating an unstable river reach. These conditions make the dam highly susceptible to a "sunny-day" breach, an unexpected collapse event that could have severe negative impacts on the surrounding environment, including negative impacts to the Prater's Mill Historic Building.

The proposed project will serve to remedy the severe scouring and erosion caused by the dam through channel realignment and instream channel and stream bank stabilization. The Prater's Mill Dam foundation will be preserved and stabilized during this restoration process. This effort will mitigate the risk of catastrophic dam failure, preserve the integrity of the Prater's Mill

Historic Site, as well as provide for aquatic organism passage and increased aquatic habitat suitability in Coahulla Creek at the Prater's Mill Dam Site.

4. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE ACTION

The purpose of the proposed action is the restoration of an approximate 550-foot section of the Coahulla River in the vicinity of the Prater's Mill Dam in Dalton, Whitfield County, Georgia. The restoration will include channel realignment and instream channel and stream bank restoration. The Prater Mill Dam and Historic Mill Building will be preserved and structurally reinforced to reduce the risk of future failure. Recreational access will be enhanced with the addition of two small river access points.

The Prater's Mill Dam blocks upstream access to 154 miles of the Coahulla Creek and its tributaries, which negatively impacts the local aquatic community. Coahulla Creek is home to at least 22 native aquatic fish and mussel species, including two Federally endangered mussels, two Federally threatened mussels, and one Federally threatened fish. Aquatic organism passage is critical for these species, who use different sections of the aquatic habitat of Coahulla Creek throughout their life cycles.

The Prater's Mill Dam is partially breached and in poor structural condition. The dam structure has contributed to severe scouring and erosion on the river's western edge and the river channel has migrated around the dam's north-western edge. These conditions make the dam highly susceptible to a "sunny-day" breach, an unexpected collapse event that could have severe negative impacts on the surrounding environs, including negative impacts to the Prater's Mill Historic Building. The current configuration of the migrated flow pathway additionally contributes to scour along the downstream edge of Prater's Mill Historic Building and puts the structure at risk of collapse. The scouring and erosion caused by the dam also negatively impacts critical aquatic organism habitat by decreasing water quality, increasing fine sediment deposition, and generally degrading the condition of aquatic habitat required by sensitive species.

The purpose of this project is to improve water quality within the watershed, stabilize severe streambank erosion, reduce and mitigate risks of damage to adjacent National Register of Historic Places structures, reduce the dam's contribution to local flooding, improve sediment transport, and enhance aquatic organism passage. This restoration project will also mitigate against a catastrophic dam failure ("sunny-day breach"), which would have negative ecological and historic resource implications as well as the potential to damage the downstream bridge infrastructure at Georgia Highway 2.

5. PUBLIC OUTREACH

This Draft EA will be available for public review and comment for 20 calendar days (July 10. 2025 – July 29, 2025) on the Whitfield County website at: www.whitfieldcountyga.com.

Comments submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will be considered a matter of public record and will be releasable under the Freedom of Information Act (110 Stat. 3048; 5 U.S.C. 552); the Service is not required to coordinate with the specific entity that proposes comments. Comments become public property once they are submitted to the Service. All comments will be appropriately addressed and included in the final version of the EA. Please

send written comments to: Cathy Marion, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, at cathy_marion@fws.gov.

6. ALTERNATIVES

Two alternatives were evaluated for this project. These include No Action and Channel Restoration. The No Action alternative includes no proposed change to the channel or eroding streambanks. The Channel Restoration alternative includes channel realignment and bank stabilization along the western edge of the Prater's Mill Dam, instream and stream bank restoration through slope contouring, plantings, the anchoring of tree stumps, and addition of native rock as needed.

6.1 Alternative A – No Action Alternative

Under the No Action alternative, channel realignment at the Prater's Mill Dam Site on the Coahulla Creek would not be completed, and the river and surrounding environs would remain at current conditions. The river would continue to migrate around the north-western edge of the dam, causing severe scouring and erosion. The Prater's Mill Dam would be at continued and increased risk for "sunny-day" breach, the Prater's Mill Historic Building would be at continued and increased risk of damage and collapse, and the surrounding historic structures, downstream bridge, and streambanks would be at risk for further degradation and collapse. Aquatic organism passage would not be sufficiently achieved and the quality of aquatic habitat at the site would continue to degrade.

6.2. Alternative B – Channel Restoration

The proposed action is the restoration of an approximate 550-foot section of Coahulla Creek in the vicinity of the Prater's Mill Dam in Dalton, Whitfield County, Georgia. The restoration action will include channel realignment and instream channel and streambank restoration. The Prater's Mill Dam will be preserved and structurally reinforced to reduce the future risk of failure, and flow will be maintained at the historic Prater's Mill House wheelhouse. Recreational access will be enhanced with the addition of two small river access points.

Land-disturbing activities will include the construction of a small staging area and access pathway on the western edge of Coahulla Creek and the creation of an approximate 60-foot-wide natural flow pathway of channel realignment (Appendix B). An additional staging and access area will be located in the existing gravel drive/parking area of the eastern bank. The access pathways will be constructed in compliance with Georgia Erosion and Sediment Control Standards. A limited number of trees may be removed on the western pathway, but the pathway will be limited in width to just enough space for construction equipment. The access pathways will be demolished and replaced after instream construction activities are complete. The channel realignment will involve the excavation of a new, approximate 60-foot-wide natural flow channel at the appropriate grade, to reestablish the native channel pathway and re-establish natural riffle areas. The "new" channel would be located along north-western side of the dam, approximately where the creek has currently migrated. The new channel is designed to intersect with the Georgia Highway 2 bridge in a perpendicular fashion, bringing the channel into

modern-day compliance with Georgia Department of Transportation bridge design criteria. Locally sourced "native" rock will be added instream as needed to maintain natural channel slope characteristics (*i.e.*, creation of constructed riffle/grade control). A small number of trees may need to be removed along the channel alignment pathway. Banks will be regraded, sloped (3:1), and terraced along the realignment reach to reintroduce floodplain connectivity. Stream banks would be stabilized with widely used bioengineering practices that employ "native" rock, vegetation, and geotextiles. The banks would be replanted with native trees, shrubs, and herbaceous seed mix to stabilize newly exposed sediment and to inhibit the establishment of nonnative invasive plant species. The use of all "native" locally sourced river rock will enhance the aesthetic outcome of the restoration, creating an "old-fashioned" appearance rather than the "recent construction" aesthetic provided by traditional imported riprap. The stabilization and contouring of banks along the realigned reach will assist with reducing flooding stress on the eastern side of Coahulla Creek (*i.e.*, adjacent to the historic structures) and would provide overland access for the storage of floods water and the dissipation of overbank velocities. It is expected that the proposed work can be accomplished with one medium to large-class excavator for a duration of no more than one month, depending on weather conditions.

The existing Prater's Mill Dam would not be compromised by the action. Onsite fill will be used both upstream and downstream of the dam to stabilize the structure, reducing the risk of "sunny-day" breach. The channel realignment would reduce scour on both the dam and the Prater's Mill Historic Building, particularly during high flow events. The Prater's Mill Historic Building and surrounding banks would also be reinforced, as needed, using geotextiles, plantings, and "native rock". This will make the historic resources on site more resilient to the impacts of failure during natural flooding events.

Flow will be maintained at the Prater's Mill Historic Building Wheelhouse using a buried 36-inch HDPE pipe to maintain entrance and egress flow. The pipe will be situated at a 1% grade to maintain downstream flow.

Two small river access points (*i.e.*, steps) will be added, located upstream and downstream of the dam. These access points would be built into existing "native" rock streambank protection areas.

6.3 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated

An alternative that was considered but eliminated was the full removal of the Prater's Mill Dam. This alternative was feasible, however, this action would disturb the historic value of the Prater's Mill Dam and the adjacent Prater's Mill Historic Building. In addition, removing the dam and aligning the river directly adjacent to the millhouse would create a situation where the river would cause undue sheer (erosive) stress on the Prater's Mill Historic Building foundation and would position the river so that it would not meet the downstream Georgia Highway 2 bridge in a perpendicular configuration. Therefore, this alternative was considered, but eliminated from detailed analysis in this EA.

7. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This section is organized by affected resource categories and for each affected resource discusses both (1) the existing environmental and socioeconomic baseline in the action area for each resource, and (2) the effects and impacts of the proposed action and any alternatives on each

resource. The effects and impacts of the proposed action considered here are changes to the human environment, whether adverse or beneficial, that are reasonably foreseeable and have a reasonably close causal relationship to the proposed action or alternatives. This EA includes the written analyses of the environmental consequences on a resource only when the impacts on that resource could be more than negligible and therefore considered an "affected resource." Any resources that will not be more than negligibly impacted by the action have been dismissed from further analyses.

7.1 Physical Environment

7.1.1 Land Use

Affected Environment

The Prater's Mill Dam Site is located on Coahulla Creek in Dalton, Whitfield County, Georgia. Coahulla Creek is situated in Georgia's Environmental Protection Agency level III Ridge and Valley ecoregion, which is typified by long north-northeasterly trending sandstone ridges separated by shale or limestone fertile valleys that are conducive to farming. The ridge areas are mostly forested with oak-hickory and oak-pine species, whereas the river edges are home to large hardwoods.

The Coahulla Creek watershed drains approximately 113,000 acres of mostly rural lands in Tennessee and Georgia. In the Georgia portion of the watershed, land use is predominantly agricultural and low-density residential development scattered throughout and concentrated in the lower portion of the watershed near Dalton, Georgia.

The land use immediately surrounding the Prater's Mill Site is a combination of forested, open field, and low-level development (*e.g.,* Prater's Mill Historic Site). Surrounding properties are zoned for general agriculture and are at low to no risk for future development.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative A: No Action

The No Action alternative would have no major impacts on land use, however local streambank erosional issues that are currently present would continue as the current channel reestablishes itself around the dam, resulting in a small, but permanent loss of riparian land on the western bank of the project area. The general land use of the area would remain consistent with current conditions.

Alternative B: **Channel Restoration**

The Channel Restoration would alter the local current land use to a very minor extent. The current channel would be realigned and stabilized, which would reduce further scouring, bank degradation, and "land loss" along the northwestern edge of the site. The construction footprint would be limited to instream and riparian areas that are already impacted by the stream migrating around the dam's northeastern edge. The general land use of the area would remain consistent with current conditions.

7.1.2 Water Resources

Affected Environment

Coahulla Creek is a tributary to the Conasauga River which originates in Cleveland, Tennessee and runs approximately 60 miles until it meets the Conasauga River just southeast of Dalton, Georgia.

The Prater's Mill Dam is contributing to local water quality decline. The dam structure has contributed to severe scouring and erosion on the river's western edge because the river channel has migrated around the dam's north-western edge. The scouring and erosion caused by this bank failure and channel migration negatively impacts critical aquatic organism habitat by decreasing water quality and increasing fine sediment deposition, resulting in the general degradation of aquatic habitat required by sensitive species.

In general, water quality in the proximity of the site does not meet its use criteria (*i.e.*, fishing) at the section of stream proximate to the site and listed as impaired on the 2024 Georgia Integrated 303(d)/305(b) List (GAEPD 2024). The cause of impairment is fish tissue, mercury.

Other generalized factors contributing to declines in water quality that are of concern in the watershed include channel erosion and excess fine sediments; herbicide, pesticide, and nutrient contaminants entering the stream via overland flow and other pathways from agrarian lands; and loss of protective riparian buffers.

A portion of land around the Prater's Mill Site is mapped as at risk for annual flooding. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) categorizes the site as a special flood hazard area with a 1% chance of flooding, also known as a 100-year flood (FEMA 2024).

Environmental Consequences

Alternative A: No Action

Water quality would continue to deteriorate under the No Action alternative. The river would continue to collapse banks on the dam's north-western edge and continue its migration around the dam. Local water quality would continue to decline due to an increase in fine sediments scoured from the banks. This local water quality degradation would contribute to the larger-scale degradation of water quality in Coahulla Creek.

Flood elevations may remain consistent with the existing conditions under the No Action alternative. Local flooding at the site would continue to put the dam at risk of "sunny-day breach" failure and would continue to endanger the structural integrity of the Prater's Mill Historic Building. Local flooding may also put the Georgia State Route 2 bridge just downstream of the site at risk of damage.

Alternative B: Channel Restoration

The Channel Restoration alternative would permanently relocate the channel to the north-western side of the dam and stabilize the stream and banks in a manner that would minimize future scouring and bank deterioration. Channel realignment would alleviate hydrologic stress on the Prater's Mill Dam and the Prater's Mill Historic Building; these structures would be further strengthened through the placement of fill and rock to protect the structures from breach and scouring. The channel alignment would place the existing channel at a location where the

channel would meet the Georgia State Route 2 bridge in a perpendicular configuration, reducing stress and potential damage to the bridge.

Declines in local water quality would be remedied by instream and bank stabilization activities. Fine sediment inputs would be greatly reduced, and aquatic habitat would be improved.

Flood elevations would remain consistent with existing conditions under the Channel Restoration alternative, however, the integrity of adjacent historic structures would be better protected against flood events. Stream banks would be stabilized with widely used bioengineering practices that employ "native" rock, vegetation, and geotextiles. One constructed riffle will be located near the center of the realigned channel reach; it is likely that 2 additional riffles, would naturally form along the realigned channel section. The banks would be replanted with native trees, shrubs, and herbaceous seed mix to stabilize newly exposed sediment and to inhibit the establishment of nonnative invasive plant species. The restored areas would provide riparian habitat, storage of flood water, and dissipation of overbank velocities.

7.1.3 Air Quality

Affected Environment

The Clean Air Act requires the United States Environmental Protection Agency to set National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for pollutants considered to be harmful to the environment and to public health. The project site (*i.e.*, Whitfield County) is currently designated as "in attainment" for ozone, carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter, and sulfur dioxide (EPA 2024).

Environmental Consequences

Alternative A: No Action

Under the No Action alternative, no construction would occur; therefore, there would be no change in air quality.

Alternative B: Channel Restoration

The Channel Restoration alternative will require heavy construction equipment, labor, and materials over the anticipated construction period. Construction activities will require the use of equipment such as excavators, loaders, generators, and other heavy equipment. Transportation of labor and materials may require delivery trucks, dump trucks, and pickup trucks. The operation of equipment will generate low levels of nitrogen oxides and negligible amounts of volatile organic compounds for a period of no more than one month. Since the construction time is short and only a few pieces of heavy equipment will be used, the actions would be below conformity de minimis levels set by the EPA. Any impacts to air quality would be short-term, with no long-term increases in air pollutants resulting from project activities.

7.1.4 Noise

Affected Environment

The existing noise environment at the proposed site is characterized by natural ambient noise sources such as sounds from wildlife, wind, and water movement. The proposed project is adjacent to Georgia Highway 2 and the Georgia Highway 2 bridge over Coahulla Creek. The primary source of anthropogenic noise at the project area is traffic noise generated by automobile and truck operations on adjacent low-volume roads. Traffic sounds generated are composed of tire, engine, and exhaust noise. Georgia Highway 2 passed 6,680 vehicles per day in 2023, 8% of which were classified as light and large trucks (GDOT 2024).

The Coahulla Creek has currently carved a path on the western side of dam, therefore there is no noise derived from water flowing over the dam under most flow conditions. Water does flow over the dam during very high flow events. Water falling over the structure creates sound that varies depending on the volume of water flow over the dam structure.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative A: No Action

Under the No Action alternative, no short-term or long-term noise impacts would occur.

Alternative B: Channel Restoration

The ambient noise sources from wildlife, wind, and local traffic would not be impacted by the Channel Restoration alternative. The ambient noise of water flow over the dam at high flows would be replaced by the sound of water moving over and through boulders and rocks in the section of stream that is realigned.

Temporary impacts caused by construction noise may be experienced by adjacent homeowners during construction activities. Construction activities will require the use of heavy construction equipment including, but not limited to, one medium or large-class excavator, loaders, and generators. A very small increase in road traffic may also be anticipated during construction activities. Construction time is temporary in nature and would be no longer than one month. Under normal circumstances, noise will only be generated Monday through Friday during normal working hours. No long-term adverse noise impacts would be associated with construction activities.

7.2 Biological Environment

7.2.1 Aquatic Fauna and Habitat

Affected Environment

The portion of Coahulla Creek within the project area is designated by Georgia Department of Resources as a year-round trout stream. Trout species stocked in Coahulla Creek can include brown trout (*Salmo trutta*), rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), and brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*). Current state regulations require the maintenance of a 50-foot vegetated buffer on trout streams. The por*r*tion of Coahulla Creek just downstream of the Prater's Dam Site is

routinely visited by anglers, who likely catch varius sunfish (Lepomis *spp*.) and basses (Micropterus *spp*.). At least 22 species of fish and mussels are endemic to the area.

The aquatic habitat in the vicinity of the proposed channel restoration site is degraded due to the presence of the Prater's Mill Dam. The Prater's Mill Dam has impounded this reach of the Coahulla Creek for approximately 175 years. The dam has interrupted the natural sediment and fluvial regime of Coahulla Creek by accumulating sediment behind the dam and artificially disrupting natural flow patterns by slowing down and holding back water behind the dam. This fluvial condition is not ideal for many of the native aquatic fauna (i.e., fluvial specialists) and flora of the area. In addition, the dam has acted as an impediment to aquatic organism movement, effectively isolating upstream and downstream populations from movement throughout the aquatic system. Many of the native aquatic fauna found in Coahulla Creek make small migratory movements throughout the year to complete their life cycles. Impediments to movement also reduces metapopulation viability, which can be particularly detrimental for imperiled species. If there is a local event that causes a decline in the abundance of a species in one area of the stream network, it is important to have proper aquatic connectivity so that the affected area can be repopulated by fishes or mussels from other areas of the stream network.

The reach of Coahulla Creek near Prater's Mill Dam has migrated around the Prater's Mill Dam, creating a "new" unstable channel that is highly eroded. This channel is contributing excessive fine sediments to the local aquatic system and is acting as an impediment to aquatic organism movement under most hydrologic conditions.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative A: No Action

Under the No Action alternative, impacts to aquatic fauna and habitat would continue to increase because of unmitigated bank collapse and scouring at the site. Aquatic habitat would continue to deteriorate and this would have a negative impact on local fish and mussel populations due to increased sedimentation and general habitat alteration. In addition, resident fishes who are reliant on migrations throughout the Coahulla Creek system to complete their life cycles would continue to be impacted by the Prater's Mill Dam and by the impediment posed by the current unmitigated channel migration at the northeastern edge of the dam; both areas pose impediments to aquatic organism movement.

Alternative B: Channel Restoration

Under the Channel Restoration alternative, negative impacts to aquatic fauna and habitat would be abated. The current stream channel would be properly aligned on the northwestern side of the Prater's Mill Dam; banks would be contoured and stabilized; and instream habitat features would be reestablished. The impediment to aquatic organism movement would be eliminated, and aquatic fauna would be able to freely traverse both upstream and downstream of the Prater's Mill Dam through a reach comprised of appropriate habitat and flow conditions.

7.2.2 Species and Habitats of Concern

Affected Environment

Federally listed species that may occur in ***the vicinity of*** the project area include the endangered gray bat (*Myotis grisescens*), the proposed endangered tricolored bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*), an experimental population of whooping crane (*Grus americana*), the threatened trispot darter (*Etheostoma trisella*), the threatened Alabama moccasinshell (*Medionidus acutissimus*), the endangered southern clubshell (*Pleurobema decisum*), the endangered southern pigtoe (*Pleurobema georgianum*), the endangered triangular kidneyshell (*Ptyobranchus greenii*), the proposed threatened monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), the threatened large-flowered skullcap (*Scutellaria montana*), and the endangered Tennesee yellow-eyed grass (*Xyris tennesseensis*). The project area is also located within the defined critical habitat for trispot darter.

Other non-federally listed aquatic species protected by the State of Georgia known to occur in the Coahulla Creek watershed include the burrhead shiner (*Notropis asperifrons*), coldwater darter (*Etheostoma ditrema*), freckled darter (*Percina lenticula*), and Alabama map turtle (*Graptemys pulchra*).

Environmental Consequences

Alternative A: No Action

Under the No Action alternative, no impacts would occur to State or Federally threatened or endangered species. However, all of the State and Federally listed aquatic species found in Coahulla Creek are sensitive to fine sediments and the degradation of aquatic habitat will continue to be detrimental to these species that may be found in the area, and habitat and water quality will continue to be unsuitable for these species.

Alternative B: Channel Restoration

There are no documented occurrences of federal listed flora or fauna in the vicinity of the Prater's Mill Dam site. However, the site is located within the geographic range of the endangered gray bat and the proposed endangered tricolored bat. Because tree removal will be minimal and incidental tree damage would be of only small-diameter trees, no impacts to the gray bat or tricolored bat are anticipated. Conversely, bats will benefit from the restoration of the forested riparian area that will result from the Channel Restoration alternative.

All of the listed aquatic species would likely benefit from aquatic habitat and water quality improvement efforts associated with the Chanel Restoration alternative. Channel Restoration will fully restore aquatic connectivity for fish and mussel movement throughout Coahulla Creek, which will benefit these listed species over time.

7.3 Cultural and Historic Resources

Affected Environment

Cherokee Indians originally inhabited the land that now comprises Whitfield County, Georgia. In 1798, the United States signed a treaty with the Cherokee, granting them rights to land in northwest Georgia, including what is now Whitfield County. In 1828, the State of Georgia claimed authority over the area, in violation of the previous treaty, and pressured the U.S. Government into removing the Cherokee from the land (*i.e.*, Trail of Tears). Dalton is the gateway to the 150-mile Chieftain's Trail, which traces the path of Cherokee Indian sites located throughout northwest Georgia. The final council meeting of Georgia's native Cherokee was held in Whitfield County, and it marked the starting point of the Trail of Tears. The Cherokee were well known to use aquatic resources for subsistence and travel and likely had a presence in the area.

The Prater's Mill Site is directly adjacent to the Prater's Mill Historic Site. The Prater's Mill Historic Building dates to approximately 1859 and was operated by Benjamin Franklin Prater. The mill was originally operated as a water-powered flour mill; the operation of the site was later expanded to include a cotton gin, sawmill, wool carder, syrup mill, general store, blacksmith shop, and hostel shed for overnight campers. The mill remained in the Prater family and was operated by family millers until 1954 when it was sold to the Church of God of the Union Assembly. The church installed a gasoline-powered engine and operated the mill for various purposes until selling the property in 1963. The site is currently owned by Whitfield County. The mill complex is currently used for country fairs and other recreational activities, as operated by the Prater's Mill Foundation. An annual country fair is held at the site each year; the fair hosts a demonstration of corn milling at its annual event. This event requires the operation of the existing waterwheel at the Prater's Mill Dam Historic Building.

The Prater's Mill Historic Site was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. The Site is comprised of the Prater's Mill Historic Building (GA Resource ID 63004) and the approximate 25-acre Prater's Mill Historic Site (GA Resource ID 63006, cited collectively in the National Register of Historic Places under Reference ID 78001010***)***.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative A: No Action

Under the No Action alternative, there would be no change to the current status of cultural and historic resources. However, the Prater's Mill Dam and the Prater's Mill Historic Building would continue to be at increased risk of failure and degradation. The Prater's Mill Dam is currently breached and at risk of "sunny-day" breach, which describes the possibility of an unexpected and sudden failure. The Praters Mill Historic Building currently experiences scour along the southern portion, putting it at risk of failure and collapse. Coahulla Creek would continue to migrate haphazardly around the dam, collapsing banks and further undermining the dam and historic building structure. The existing Prater's Mill Historic Building foundation would continue to be

at risk of damage due to scouring during high flow events, and would likely also be damaged in the case of a 'sunny-day" dam breach.

Alternative B: Channel Restoration

The Channel Restoration alternative will stabilize flow along the north-western edge of the dam in the location where the river has currently migrated. Because river flow is a contributing feature of the historic site, this alternative would have an adverse effect on the historic resource. Adverse effects will be addressed in concurrence with the Georgia State Historic Preservation Office and documented in a separate report.

The channel realignment would reduce scour on both the dam and the Prater's Mill Historic Building, protecting the historic features from future degradation and collapse. Flow will be maintained at the Prater's Mill Historic Building Wheelhouse using a buried 36-inch HDPE pipe to maintain entrance and egress flow. The pipe will be situated at a 1% grade to maintain downstream flow. This flow will maintain the ability for the annual county fair to power the millhouse and demonstrate corn milling operations.

7.4 Recreation

Affected Environment

Recreational opportunities in the vicinity of the project area include fishing, canoeing/kayaking, hiking, and attending events at the Prater's Mill Historic Site.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative A: No Action

Under the No Action alternative, there will be no change in fishing, canoe/kayaking, or hiking opportunities from the current condition. In its current condition, the dam does not hold back water because the majority of the stream channel has migrated around the dam's northeastern edge. However, if the dam were to fail, it would change the recreational experience of visitors to the Prater's Mill Historic Site. The visual integrity and historic nature of the site would be fundamentally altered and the operation of the Prater Mill Historic Building waterwheel would no longer be available.

Alternative B: Channel Restoration

Under the Channel Restoration alternative there will be a long-term benefit to fishing and canoe/kayaking opportunities. Fishing opportunities will be increased due to increased access to the river and canoe/kayaking opportunities will be greatly enhanced by providing boaters safe passage around the Prater's Mill Dam. Two small river access points (*i.e.*, steps) will be added, located upstream and downstream of the dam. These access points would be built into existing "native" rock streambank protection areas.

The visual integrity of the site will be maintained at a level at or above the current condition. The majority of flow will bypass the Prater's Mill Dam, as occurs with current conditions, but the channel will appear more "natural" and "tidy" to visitors, due to aesthetic and ecological

improvements of the stream channel structure. In addition, the Prater's Mill Dam will remain intact and be edified against the risk of a "sunny-day" breach, ensuring that visitors to the site will be able to experience the historic and cultural resources of the site for years to come.

7.5 Human Health and Safety

Affected Environment

The Prater's Mill Dam is a low head dam, a structure type that is known to present a drowning hazard. The hydraulic condition created at the downstream toe of low head dams can create "boils", a condition where water from below the surface moves back towards the dam in a circular motion, entrapping anything that enters the boil. These boils present a danger to swimmers, anglers, and boaters in particular, because boils are not clearly visible at the surface, yet can trap users and lead to injuries and mortality.

The Prater's Mill Dam is partially breached and in poor condition and at risk of unexpected failure, *i.e.*, "sunny-day" breach. As such, the dam itself poses a risk to individual users of the area. If the dam were to unexpectedly fail, individuals in the vicinity are at risk of injury or mortality. The failure of the Prater's Mill Dam also poses a risk to the structural integrity of the downstream Georgia Highway 2 bridge.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative A: No Action

Under the No Action alternative, no improvements to human health and safety will be realized.

Alternative B: Channel Restoration

Under the Channel Restoration alternative, the potential drowning hazard caused by boils that form at the base of the Prater's Mill Dam will be eliminated. In addition, the risk of a "sunny-day" breach will be greatly reduced and the general safety of individuals and infrastructure in the vicinity will be increased.

7.6 Socioeconomic Resources

Affected Environment

The Coahulla Creek flows through Whitfield County in Georgia and the proposed project area is located entirely within Dalton, Georgia. As such, the Dalton geographic area provides an appropriate context for analysis of the socioeconomic conditions in the vicinity of the proposed action.

Table 1 summarizes the demographic and economic characteristics of the proposed project area and project setting (U.S. Census Bureau 2020).

Table 1. Demographic and Economic Characteristics

Category	Dalton
Total Population	74,026
Persons under 19	25.7%
Persons over 65	13.8%
Race	
White	29%
Not Hispanic or Latino	24%
Hispanic or Latino	24%
Some other race	12%
Two or more races	7%
Black or African American	2%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1%
Asian	1%
Income	
Median household income	$59,161
Persons below poverty level	15.7%
Employment	
Unemployment rate	39.9%
Housing	
Housing units	27,295
Occupied housing units	92.8%

Environmental Consequences

Alternative A: No Action

The No Action alternative would have no impact to the general socioeconomic resources of the area.

Alternative B: Channel Restoration

The Channel Restoration alternative would have short-term socioeconomic (economic) benefits to the area through the use of work crews to conduct construction. There are no anticipated short- or long-term beneficial or negative socioeconomic impacts.

8. SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

The purpose of this EA is to briefly provide sufficient evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

Alternative A: No Action

As described above, the No Action alternative would result in no change to the current condition of the Prater's Mill Site. The "unstable" creek would continue to migrate around the Prater's Mill Dam and the banks would continue to erode along the migrated pathway. Water quality and aquatic habitat would continue to decline and aquatic organism passage would not be sufficiently achieved. The Prater's Mill Dam would be at risk for "sunny-day" breach, and the surrounding historic structures, downstream Georgia Highway 2 bridge, and streambanks would be at risk for further degradation. The dam would pose a risk to human health and safety.

Alternative B: Channel Restoration

As described above, Channel Restoration alternative would restore an approximate 550-foot section of the Coahulla River in the vicinity of the Prater's Mill Dam. The restoration would include channel realignment and instream channel and stream bank restoration. The Prater's Mill Dam will be preserved and structurally reinforced to reduce the risk of future failure. The Prater's Mill Historic Building will be protected from current scouring. Recreational access will be enhanced with the addition of two small river access points.

The Channel Restoration alternative would improve water quality within the watershed, stabilize severe streambank erosion, reduce and mitigate risks of damage to adjacent National Register of Historic Places structures, reduce the dam's contribution to local flooding, improve sediment transport, enhance aquatic organism passage, and enhance local recreation. This restoration project would also mitigate against a catastrophic dam failure ("sunny-day breach"), which would have negative impacts to ecological and historic resources, potentially damage the downstream bridge infrastructure at Georgia Highway 2, and put human health and safety at risk.

10. LIST OF PREPARERS

Cathy Marion, Deputy Field Supervisor, Georgia Ecological Services

11. LITERATURE CITED

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APPENDIX A. Project location.

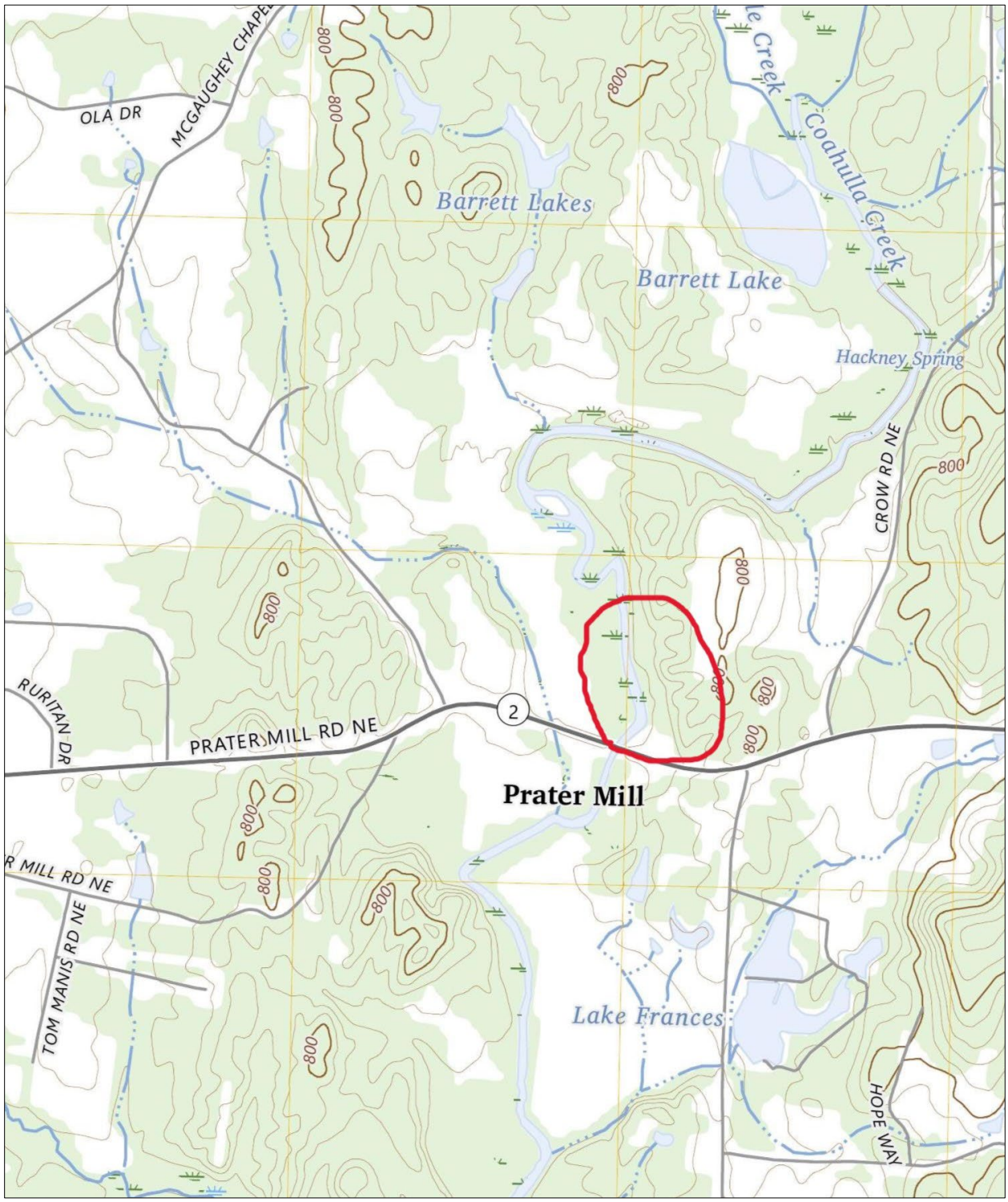


Figure 1. General location of the Prater's Mill Site.

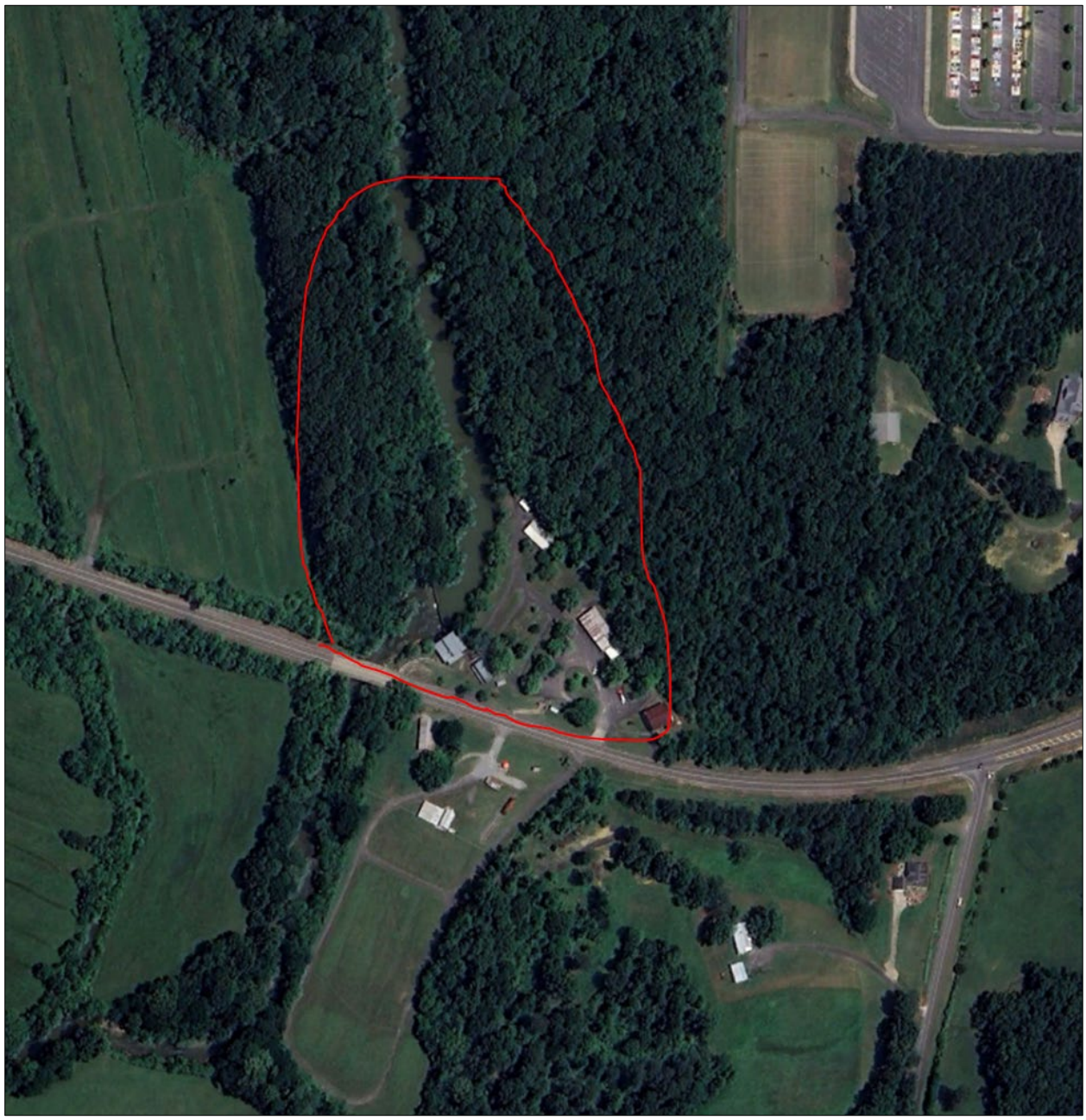


Figure 2. General aerial view of the Prater's Mill Stie.

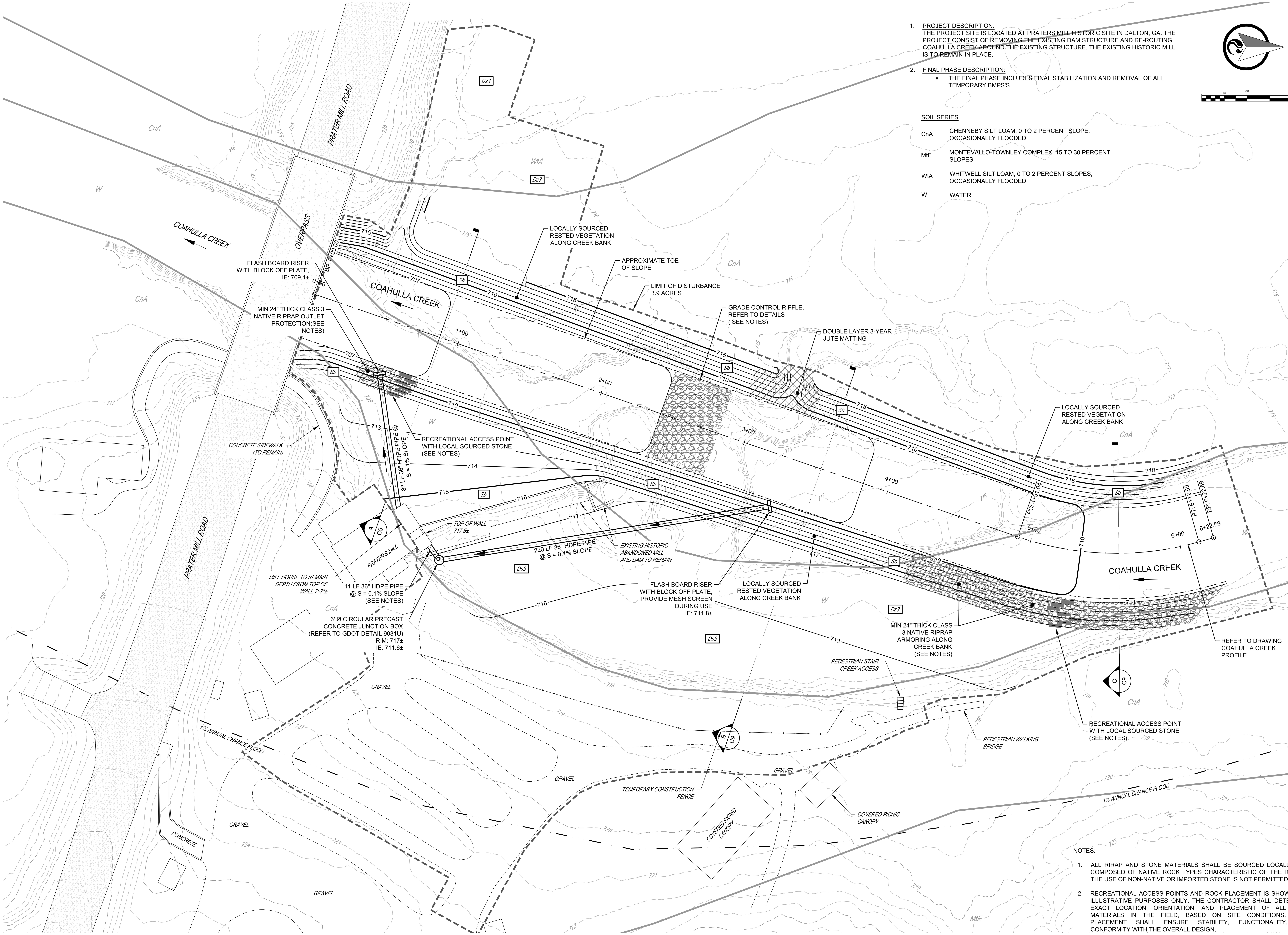
APPENDIX B. Design Plan.

1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION:
THE PROJECT SITE IS LOCATED AT PRATERS MILL HISTORIC SITE IN DALTON, GA. THE PROJECT CONSIST OF REMOVING THE EXISTING DAM STRUCTURE AND RE-ROUTING COAHULLA CREEK AROUND THE EXISTING STRUCTURE. THE EXISTING HISTORIC MILL IS TO REMAIN IN PLACE.

2. FINAL PHASE DESCRIPTION:
   - THE FINAL PHASE INCLUDES FINAL STABILIZATION AND REMOVAL OF ALL TEMPORARY BMPS'S

SOIL SERIES

CnA	CHENNEBY SILT LOAM, 0 TO 2 PERCENT SLOPE, OCCASIONALLY FLOODED
MIE	MONTEVALLO-TOWNLEY COMPLEX, 15 TO 30 PERCENT SLOPES
WtA	WHITWELL SILT LOAM, 0 TO 2 PERCENT SLOPES, OCCASIONALLY FLOODED
W	WATER



NOTES:

1. ALL RIPRAP AND STONE MATERIALS SHALL BE SOURCED LOCALLY AND COMPOSED OF NATIVE ROCK TYPES CHARACTERISTIC OF THE REGION. THE USE OF NON-NATIVE OR IMPORTED STONE IS NOT PERMITTED.
2. RECREATIONAL ACCESS POINTS AND ROCK PLACEMENT IS SHOWN FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY. THE CONTRACTOR SHALL DETERMINE EXACT LOCATION, ORIENTATION, AND PLACEMENT OF ALL ROCK MATERIALS IN THE FIELD, BASED ON SITE CONDITIONS. FINAL PLACEMENT SHALL ENSURE STABILITY, FUNCTIONALITY, AND CONFORMITY WITH THE OVERALL DESIGN.

REVISIONS

NO.	DESCRIPTIONS	DATE	BY	APP'D

DESIGN	DRAWN	CHECKED	APPROVED
ZWR	ZWR	SAH	PRS

LIMESTONE VALLEY RC&D
PRATER'S MILL STREAMBANK STABILIZATION

ESPC FINAL PHASE

CTI ENGINEERS
1122 RIVERFRONT PARKWAY
CHATTANOOGA, TN 37402
423-267-7613

GEORGIA REGISTERED PROFESSIONAL ENGINEER NO. 030578 PHILIP R. SCHOFIELD

GSWCC 934

JOB NO.	G24021
ISSUE DATE	05/16/2025
DRAWING NO.	C7