



**Department of Conservation and Recreation**  
Division of Planning and Recreation Resources  
600 E Main Street, 24<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Richmond, Virginia 23219



DRAFT

# Master Plan

2024 UPDATE



## Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park

10 WEST FIRST STREET NORTH, BIG STONE GAP, VIRGINIA 24219



# **SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA MUSEUM HISTORICAL STATE PARK MASTER PLAN**

## **2024 UPDATE**

## **ADOPTION PAGE**

The plan was reviewed by the Board of Conservation and Recreation on October 3, 2024.

■ ■

Danielle Heisler, Chair, Board of Conservation and Recreation

Date

On November 22, 2024 the plan was adopted by DCR Director, Matthew Wells.

## **Adopted**

Matthew Wells, Director, Department of Conservation and Recreation

Date



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**“The purpose of the Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park is to collect, preserve, share, and interpret the history and culture of the Commonwealth’s far southwestern coal-producing counties, sustain connections with surrounding local communities, and promote a sense of regional identity.”**

because of its important collection of thousands of artifacts which tell the story of the southwest Virginia region. The SWVA Museum is housed in a mansion originally built by Rufus Ayers. The house was constructed over a seven-year period; construction was started in 1888 and completed in 1895. C. Bascom Slemp purchased the house several decades later in 1929. C. Bascom Slemp and his sister, Janie Slemp Newman, shared a deep love of Southwest Virginia, its people, history, and rich culture, and collected artifacts depicting life in the area. This collection was originally displayed in the Janie Slemp Newman Museum.

Before C. Bascom’s death in 1943, he established the Slemp Foundation. It was his wish to create a museum depicting Southwest Virginia’s history and culture. Since its inception the Slemp Foundation has been, and continues to be, a major supporter and funder of the special projects at SWVA Museum.

The site was listed on the Virginia Landmark Register and the National Register of Historic Places in 2002 and plays an important role on several local heritage trails including *The Crooked Road: Virginia Heritage Music Trail*<sup>1</sup> and *Virginia’s Coal Heritage Trail*<sup>2</sup>. From a natural resource perspective, it is located close to the Big Cherry Reservoir, the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests, and is a featured site on the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources Birding and Wildlife Trail. Another potential trail exists on an abandoned railroad corridor between the Towns of Big Stone Gap and Appalachia. Mountain Empire Community College may also offer joint educational opportunities. The SWVA Museum Regional Connectivity Map is an attachment to the full Master Plan document.

## MANDATES FOR PLANNING

Prior to 2009, the SWVA Museum did not have a formal Master Plan due to its unique nature. Over the years, various plans for the Museum have directed management and operations of the museum buildings, grounds, collections, and exhibits. An executive summary update was developed in 2011.

This Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park (SWVA Museum) Master Plan is the most recent update of the plan as described in section 10.1-200.1 of the Code of Virginia. This Master Plan is intended to set forth a clear vision for the future of the park (based on phased development), while fulfilling the narrative text requirements of Chapter IV of the Virginia Construction and Professional Services Manual (CPSM) and section 10.1-200.1 of the Code of Virginia. It outlines the desired future condition for SWVA Museum when it is fully developed.

<sup>1</sup> The Crooked Road was designated as Virginia’s Heritage Music Trail by the Virginia Assembly in 2004. This 333-mile-long driving trail connects 10 major venues and over 50 affiliate venues that preserve and promote traditional Appalachian old-time and bluegrass music. <https://thecrookedroadva.com>

<sup>2</sup> The Virginia Coal Heritage Trail seeks to preserve and protect the Appalachian coalfields way of life and its link to the unique landscape of Southwest Virginia, through the development of a 325-mile trail that highlights coal mining history, structures, and culture. [www.virginiacoaltrail.net](http://www.virginiacoaltrail.net)

## INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF THE PARK

SWVA Museum is located in the Town of Big Stone Gap in Wise County. This park is unique in the Virginia State Park System

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN

The Department of Conservation and Recreation's planners and Virginia State Park staff conducted this Master Plan update in accordance with section 10.1-200.1 of the Code of Virginia. Public input was solicited at the beginning and at the end of the process to ensure that plan recommendations were understood, accepted and supported by the community. This plan outlines the desired future condition of the park over a 30-year planning horizon. As required by the Code of Virginia, it must be revisited every 10 years to ensure that the development objectives outlined in the plan continue to meet the recreational and environmental protection needs of the citizens of the Commonwealth.

As a part of the 2024 Master Plan process, the 2009 and 2011 park Master Plans were reviewed. Following discussions of changing conditions and new land acquisitions in the park, it was determined that enough significant events and changes had occurred to warrant a public meeting prior to the final revision of this Master Plan. The desired future condition of the park has shifted since the writing of the 2009 Plan. The phased development plan and costs have been revised to reflect projects that have been completed since 2009, as well as newly proposed projects. A public comment meeting was held at SWVA Museum on February 20, 2024, where the public expressed support for the proposed Master Plan update. The park staffing and operations costs have also been updated to reflect current conditions. The adopted park purpose statement is stated below:

"The purpose of the Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park is to collect, preserve, share, and interpret the history and culture of the Commonwealth's far southwestern coal-producing counties, sustain connections with surrounding local communities, and promote a sense of regional identity."

The following table depicts park attendance during the period from 2019 to 2023. The numbers are divided between day use visitors and overnight visitors at the Cottage. (Note that these years fall within the time of the impact of the COVID pandemic.)

Table 1 Summary of Park Visitation Numbers

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
<b>Cottage</b>	392	280	360	361	345
<b>Day Use</b>	36,078	11,305	5677	27,813	35,835
<b>Total</b>	<b>36,470</b>	<b>11,585</b>	<b>6037</b>	<b>28,174</b>	<b>36,180</b>

In 2022, the SWVA Museum had 28,174 visitors; 361 were overnight guests while 27,813 were day use visitors. Master plan recommendations, once implemented, should improve the visitor experience, and increase visitation. The anticipated increase in visitation will have a positive impact on tourism and spending in the region, thereby also having a positive impact on the region's economic vitality.

A more detailed projection of park visitation and the effect it may have on the economy is provided in the SWVA Museum Business Plan which is included by reference in this document.

## THE PARK

The park occupies approximately 2.5 acres in Big Stone Gap, VA. The main feature of the park property is the mansion, which is located on West First Street North. Situated in the center of the property, the 11,756 square-foot mansion contains exhibits telling the story of the exploration and development of Southwest Virginia. Since its dedication by the state on May 30, 1948, the museum has been a part of the state park system. Visitors can tour the museum building to discover more about the history and culture of far Southwest Virginia, from Native Americans to pioneers of the Wilderness Road and coalminers of the coal boom in the 1880s. Several exhibits feature touch screens and interactive technology. Overall, the park offers a diverse range of year-round educational programming and festivals including a quilt show, music festival, rotating exhibits, festival of trees during the winter months, and Adventures in History tours. In addition to education, the site and its staff offer various other services. A multi-purpose room in the basement is available for community use. It accommodates between 30-70 people, depending on the use of tables and chairs. A gift shop is located on the first floor and offers souvenirs and merchandise for purchase and the facility is available for weddings.

The site also has several other structures that support the mission of the park. The Carriage House is in the west corner of the property, The 2,392 square-foot building is presently used to store the park's collections that are not on display. Three storage buildings are located behind the museum building on the southwest portion of the property. They hold tools and equipment necessary for upkeep of the grounds and buildings. Two of the buildings are 96 square feet in size, and the third is 144 square feet. The Park Manager's Residence is located diagonally across from the Museum at 9 West First Street North.

The Park Administrative Offices are located across the street from the Museum to the northwest, as is the three-bedroom Poplar Hill Cottage, which is available for rent. The office building is 4,128 square feet and the public rental cottage is 1,282 square feet. The 418 square-foot maintenance building is also located on the southern corner of this property.

Park improvements since the writing of the 2009 Master Plan include accessible lifts to the basement and first floor of the museum building, and the acquisition of additional parcels such as the Railcar Lot, which formerly was owned by the Town of Big Stone Gap (see associated Master Plan map).

## PROPOSED BUILDOUT

This 2024 Master Plan update represents both new facilities needed at the park, and improvements to existing facilities. New facilities at this park should be designed and built with consideration to the original historical design and layout of facilities and be reflective of the overall character of the Poplar Hill neighborhood. Buildout should also be conducted in keeping with the prescriptive management areas as defined by the park's Natural Resource Management Plan and the guidelines of the park's Visitor Experience Plan. To the greatest extent possible, Virginia State Parks also strives to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. (See Figure 3 Basic Park Resources Map on page 20 and Master Plan Map on page 70) .

All future phases of park construction will be developed in an environmentally sensitive manner. Building and site design will implement green energy standards using energy-efficient and sustainable materials and process to the greatest extent possible. These facilities will be carefully sited to minimize impacts to the views within the park and of the park from adjacent lands. Development activities will comply with the requirements set forth by the Virginia Stormwater Management Handbook published by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.

Acquisition of additional park land should be considered to enhance the park, particularly to provide a location  
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for a new Collections Storage Building as described in this plan, or buffer it from inappropriate development. Future land acquisitions will only be negotiated with willing property owners. Designating the site's historic neighborhood as a town historic district should also be explored. Placing conservation easements on adjacent property to preserve the historic landscapes, as well as the natural and scenic resources near the park, should be encouraged. In working cooperatively with neighboring landowners, the site will be enhanced and protected over time.

The proposed developments for SWVA Museum are presented in a development plan with three phases. Completion of all the projects in this list will represent total build-out (completion of the Master Plan) and covers a 30-year timeframe. (All costs are in 2023 dollars)

## **PHASE I**

- Construct 1,600 sf maintenance facility on the Leach Lot
- Improve accessibility at the Park including:
  - 2 ADA parking spaces,
  - Architectural Feasibility Study on museum accessibility, and
  - Construct accessible Comfort Station
- Improve exterior lighting throughout the park

**The total estimated cost for Phase I development is \$2,141,875.**

## **PHASE II**

- Construct a Collections Storage Building
- Exhibit Refresh
- Convert Carriage House to classrooms, a children's hands-on space, and collections workspace
- New administrative offices with meeting space

**The total estimated cost for Phase II development is \$15,880,819.**

## **PHASE III**

- Poplar Hill Cottage Renovations
- Exhibit Refresh
- Ball Lot Renovations

**The total estimated cost for Phase III development is \$3,186,995.**

**The total cost to bring the Southwest Virginia Museum State Park to its desired future condition is \$21,209,688.**

## STAFFING AND OPERATIONS<sup>1</sup>

### Existing (FY 2024)

• Staffing: 5 FTE salary and benefits	\$375,667
• Wage totals	\$78,925
• <u>OTPS:</u>	<u>\$139,699</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$594,291</b>

### Immediate Needs Via Staffing Matrix

• Staffing: 4 FTE salary and benefits	\$383,748
• Wage totals	\$67,500
• <u>OTPS:</u>	<u>\$0</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$451,248</b>

### Needs with Phase 1 Buildout

• Staffing: 1 FTE salary and benefits	\$83,537
• Wage totals	\$22,500
• <u>OTPS:</u>	<u>\$17,272</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$123,309</b>

### Needs with Phase 2 Buildout

• Staffing: 4 FTE salary and benefits	\$346,502
• Wage totals	\$45,000
• <u>OTPS:</u>	<u>\$150,441</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$541,943</b>

### Needs with Phase 3 Buildout

None

### Full Buildout

• Staffing: 4 FTE salary and benefits	\$1,189,502
• Wage totals	\$213,925
• <u>OTPS:</u>	<u>\$307,412</u>
<b>Full Buildout Total</b>	<b>\$1,710,791</b>

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<sup>1</sup> Amounts are in FY24 dollars and all costs such as salary, wage, and Other than Personnel Services (OTPS) are based on FY24 budget projections. OTPS includes non staffing expenses such as (but not limited to) equipment, supplies utilities, and resource management.

### LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BCR	Board of Conservation and Recreation
CPSM	Virginia Construction and Professional Services Manual
DCR	Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation
FY	Fiscal Year
MPC	Master Plan Committee
MPT	Master Plan Team
PRR	Division of Planning Recreation and Resources
sf	Square Feet (measurement of area)
SWVA Museum	Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park
V&SW	Virginia & Southern Railway
VOP	Virginia Outdoors Plan

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# INTRODUCTION

## PURPOSE OF THE MASTER PLAN

Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park was identified for a review and update as part of its 10-year review cycle. This revision was necessary to address changes to the existing conditions and reflects the current context of the park in the local community, region and within the Virginia State Parks system. The plan includes revisions to the phased development based on current and projected needs over the next 30 years. This report reflects both the developed park purpose statement, and the future direction of the park in accordance with Article XI Conservation of the Constitution of Virginia.

*In accordance with §10.1-200.1 of the Code of Virginia the Department of Conservation and Recreation shall undertake a Master Planning process (i) for all existing state parks, (ii) following the acquisition of land for a new state park, and (iii) prior to undertaking substantial improvements to state parks that are not already documented in a park's existing Master Plan.*

The Code also dictates that Master Plans be reviewed and updated by the DCR and BCR no less frequently than once every 10 years. The purpose of a park's Master Plan is to guide the development, utilization and management of a park and its natural, cultural, and historic resources, and shall be adhered to closely.

## MASTER PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The state park Master Planning process is outlined in the Code of Virginia. The Code states that a Master Plan be developed in two stages. Stage one addresses the development of a characterization map indicating, at a minimum, boundaries, inholdings, adjacent property holdings, and other features such as slopes, water resources, soil conditions and types, natural resources, and cultural and historic resources. It also includes a characterization of the potential types of uses for different portions of the parks and a narrative description of the natural, physical, cultural, and historic attributes of the park. The stage one plan shall include the specific purposes for the park and goals and objectives to support those purposes.

Stage two of the Master Plan development process utilizes the findings from the first stage and addresses the potential size, types and locations of facilities and the associated infrastructure including roads and utilities, as applicable. It also includes a proposed plan for phased development of the potential facilities and infrastructure. Proposed development of any type shall be in keeping with the character of existing improvements, if appropriate, and the natural, cultural, and historic heritage and attributes of the park.

Development costs and the operational, maintenance, staffing and financial needs necessary for each of the various phases of park development, as well as projections are also made for the park's resource management needs and related costs as part of Stage two of this process. Additionally, a map indicating boundaries, adjacent property holdings, and other features such as cultural and historic resources, is prepared during this stage. A park purpose statement, as well as goals and objectives for the park, are likewise developed.

DCR's process for addressing the requirements of the Code of Virginia for State Park Master Planning was reevaluated during a period from February to September of 2022. This effort culminated in a report, Evaluation and Refinement of the Master Planning Process for Virginia State Parks, developed in a collaborative effort with DCR personnel from the Division of Planning and Recreation Resources, Virginia State Parks, and other divisions and offices that have historically and are projected to continue to be involved in the process. A key deliverable of

this report was the development of a defined Master Planning process (summarized in Figure 1) that places an emphasis on preplanning, public engagement, and integration of a park's unique resources and desired visitor experience.

## **MASTER PLAN TIMELINE AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

The timeline for the development of a Master Plan is driven by the scope of the project, which varies depending on whether the process is for a new park, a 10-year update, revision following the acquisition of land or prior to undertaking substantial improvements not documented in the plan, or for non-substantial amendments. It is also influenced by the public engagement involved and final reviews by the DCR Director's Office, BCR, and General Assembly.

The 2023 Master Plan process for SWVA Museum was initiated as part of the 10-year update for the plan and took about two years. Initial work was completed as part of the first Master Plan document which was developed in 2009 and updated in 2011. The scope of, and anticipated timeline for, this update was developed based on these historical documents, as well as the DCR's current Master Planning process standards, in conjunction with the scheduling needs for both internal and external stakeholders.

Recognizing the importance of community involvement and public input in DCR's development of a park Master Plan, the 2023 process included two hybrid public meetings held on April 4, 2023, and February 20, 2024, respectively. The meetings were well-attended with over 50 participants and provided an opportunity for members of the public to speak directly with the Master Planning Team and DCR leadership, learn more about the planning process, request specific considerations for the future of the park, and provide feedback and help focus the vision for the Master Plan.

Public engagement was ongoing throughout the Master Plan's development. In addition to the hybrid meetings, a public input survey and public comment period were open for 30 days following each meeting. Initial feedback focused on maintaining and improving upon the park's high level of cultural resource management, the park's community context, and specific needs including lighting, parking, and accessibility. This feedback was incorporated into the draft plan which was also made available for public comment. The public input process was complemented by internal workshops.

The internal and public engagement process culminated in the development of a 10-year update for the SWVA Museum Master Plan that was presented to the Board of Conservation and Recreation (BCR) in a final public forum on October 3, 2024. The Board unanimously recommended approval of the plan before it was shared with the General Assembly for a 30-day review. On November 22, 2024 the plan was adopted by DCR Director, Matthew Wells.

## PARK BACKGROUND

### Location and General Description

Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park is situated in the town of Big Stone Gap in Wise County, Virginia. Big Stone Gap is at the junction of U.S. Route 23 and U.S. Route 58 Alternate, and is regionally accessible, from Ohio, Kentucky, West Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, in addition to Virginia. The Park consists of a series of seven (7) permanent structures, two (2) storage buildings, and two (2) parking lots as well as a parcel that houses the museum's largest artifact, a historic railcar. At the core of the park is the 11,215 square foot mansion located on West First Street which is positioned in the center of the property. These facilities and artifacts are nestled amongst the town's existing homes, businesses, industry, and supporting infrastructure. (Fig 2 – Boundary and Vicinity Map)

### Property and Park History

The history of the SWVA Museum Historical Park begins with C. Bascom Slemp, a multiterm Congressman who later became the private secretary to President Calvin Coolidge, and his sister, Janie Slemp Newman. Originally, the siblings had a museum in a building behind the family home on the corner of Second Street and Cherokee Avenue in historic Big Stone Gap, Virginia. The building that houses the Southwest Virginia Museum today, then known as the Ayers House, was purchased by Slemp in 1929. From reviewing his actions and writings during this time, it is evident that Slemp's goal was for the building to become a public historic site. After Janie Slemp Newman's death in 1935, the museum became known as the "Janie Slemp Memorial Museum". Before his own death in 1943, Slemp established the Slemp Foundation and designated in his Last Will to perpetuate the future relationship between the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Slemp Foundation.

For a more detailed description of the history of the park's collection, see the sub-section on Cultural and Historic Resources in the Existing Conditions section.

### Park Acquisition

In 1946, the state purchased the building for \$25,000, and the Collection was bequeathed to the Commonwealth. The SWVA Museum was officially dedicated on May 30, 1948, and is managed by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's Division of State Parks. Originally, the SWVA Museum site was operated as a satellite of Hungry Mother State Park, and in 1988 it became a stand-alone state park with a Park Manager.

On October 13, 2023, the Department of Conservation and Recreation added an additional parcel to the SWVA Museum property with the acquisition of a .79 acre lot of grassy land that overlooks downtown Big Stone Gap, and the Powell river, and is the home of the parks largest artifact, the "101 Railcar", a late 1800's era wooden Pullman train car that is known as one of the oldest and best railcar examples of its construction type in the country.

The acquisition of this parcel was the result of the combined efforts of Park staff, the Friends groups, and the Town. DCR acquired the land by donation from the Friends of the Southwest Virginia Museum State Park. The Friends group had previously acquired it, by donation, from the Town of Big Stone Gap.

## Prior Park Planning Efforts

The Master Plan for SWVA Museum was previously adopted following an update to the Executive Summary in 2011, which itself was an update to an original Master Plan document that was adopted in 2009 by the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Prior to 2009, the SWVA Museum did not have a formal Master Plan, and over the years various plans for the Museum have directed management and operations of the museum buildings, grounds, collections, and exhibits.

This 2023 update to the Master Plan builds upon the 2011 SWVA Museum document to create a framework for the development and operation of the SWVA Museum, and in the process defines the park's purpose, goals, and objectives for the construction, expansion, and operation of the park over the next 30-years, while also taking into consideration the cultural, physical, and natural resources, and desired visitor experiences.

In addition to the park Master Plan, SWVA Museum is also guided by a Business Plan prepared by DCR and published in January of 2020. Portions of this plan including the economic impact section were produced in partnership with and as part of a Memorandum of Understanding between Virginia Tech and the Department of



Figure 1 Master Plan Cycle

Conservation and Recreation. The Business Plan provides both a Market and Financial Analysis of the park in addition to other key information and is intended to be updated on a 5-year cycle. The Business Plan is included in this Master Plan by reference.

## Planning Context

The buildings and parcels that comprise the park are surrounded by residential, commercial, and industrial development and the associated infrastructure that comprise the Town of Big Stone Gap, Virginia. Under the Code of Virginia, Chapter 15.2, land use in the town is guided by a Comprehensive Plan which provides a framework for its short and long-range growth and development.

The most recent plan, the 2020 Comprehensive Plan for Big Stone Gap, prepared in September 2004, highlights several other types of land use, including vacant, and public and semi-public land. Within this context, the SWVA Museum is of the latter two of these uses. While it is anticipated that some changes may have occurred since the Comprehensive Plan was developed, these uses comprised approximately 380 acres or 25% of all developed land within the town's boundaries.

Wise County, in which the Town of Big Stone Gap and the State Park are situated, provides additional context as to the nature of planning and zoning opportunities and constraints that influence the Town and countywide development impacting the park. The Comprehensive Plan for Wise County published in May of 2018, characterizes the Town of Big Stone as a primary development area, where resources and services are maximized, and it is mostly developed. Infill development and redevelopment should efficiently use, maintain, and expand existing infrastructure.

At a regional planning level, the Park is in the Region 1 LENOWISCO Planning District. As one of 24 state-wide Districts, the LENOWISCO Planning Commission serves the Counties of Lee, Scott, Wise and the City of Norton, and is guided by a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The Planning Commission is involved in local infrastructure planning and development, with an emphasis on community and economic development, and transportation and public utility infrastructure. The CEDS was last updated in 2022.

Goals outlined in the Town, County, and Planning District support those of the park including:

- Supporting tourism
- Protecting the character of region
- Promoting the development and protection of parks, trails, and outdoor recreational areas

## Market Analysis

A key component of the planning process is a market opportunity analysis that identifies the most important aspects of the service market relevant to DCR's priorities for this park. A market analysis for SWVA Museum Historic State Park was conducted in 2019-2020 as part of a Business Plan prepared by the Business Management Working Group of Virginia State Parks. That plan is included as part of this Master Plan by reference. Figures quoted from that study are from 2018.

## Service Market Delineation

As shown in figure 19 the local service market was divided into two areas defined by the travel time to the park. The primary area was within a 60-minute drive and the secondary area was within a 60–180-minute drive.

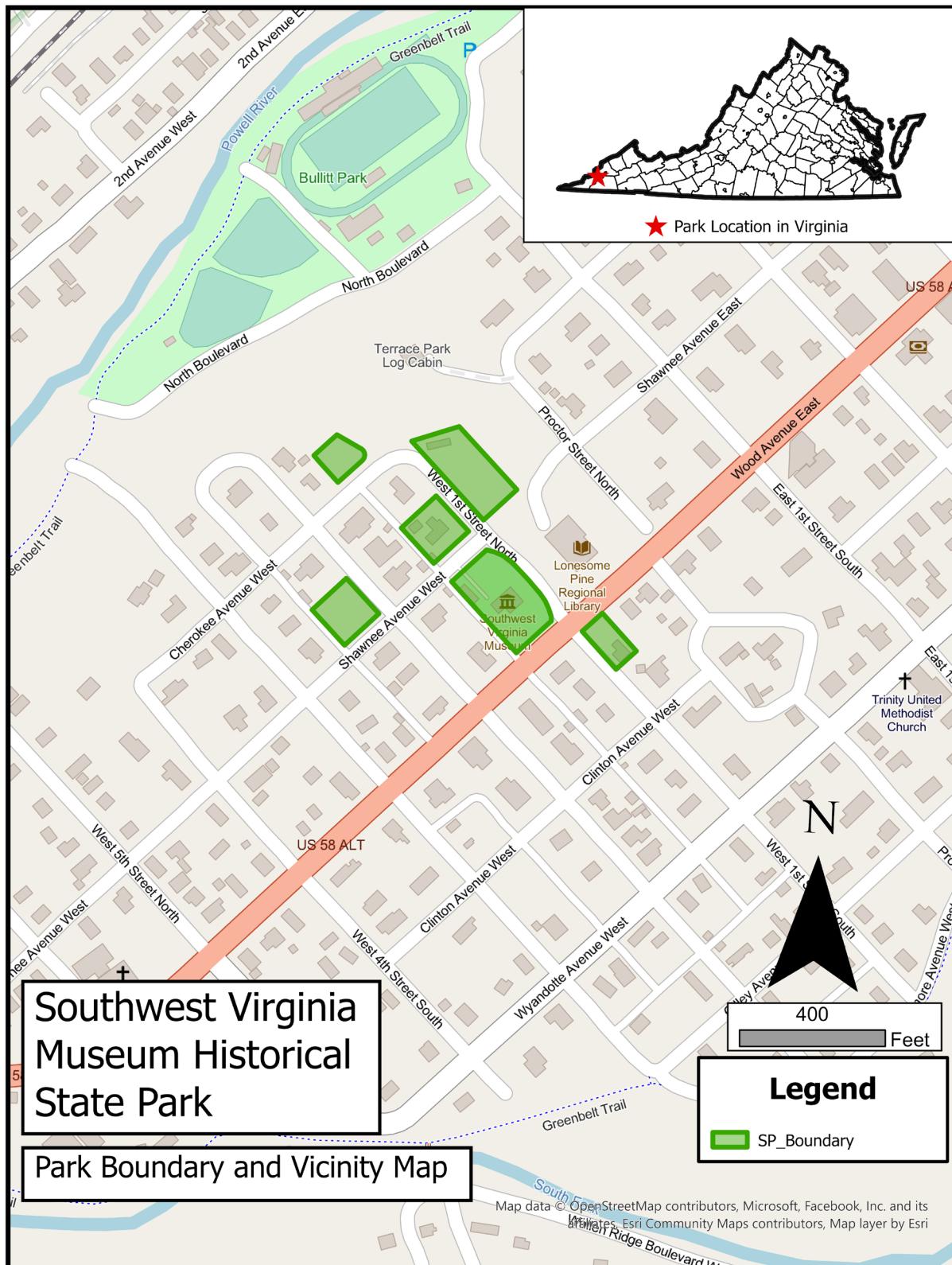


Figure 2 - Park Boundary and Vicinity Map



Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation

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## SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA MUSEUM HISTORICAL STATE PARK MASTER PLAN 2024 UPDATE

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Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

### VIRGINIA OUTDOORS PLAN (VOP)

The Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP) is required for Virginia to participate in the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund program. In addition, it provides guidance for the protection of lands through the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation.

The survey for the VOP provides statistically accurate information about the recreational needs and wants of Virginians throughout the state. The VOP is the state's comprehensive plan for land conservation, outdoor recreation, and open-space planning. This information helps all levels of government and the private sector meet needs pertaining to those matters. The plan's development was led by Virginia Commonwealth's School of Government and Public Affairs.

As of this writing, the complete 2024 VOP has not been finalized. A survey was conducted to support the development of the VOP. Figures from the survey were used to inform some of the data supporting recreational activity and needs in the LENOWISCO planning district that includes Wise County, Big Stone Gap and the SWVA Museum. That breakdown can be found in Table 2 on page 57.



Figure 3 - Basic Resources Map



# GOALS AND PLANNING CONTEXT

The following sections of this master plan are used to meet the “Stage One” requirements of the Code of Virginia previously referenced.

## GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The basis for the park’s master plan is the SWVA Museum’s purpose, goals, objectives, and desired visitor experience, which provide planning guidance for the park. These incorporate the recommendations of needs assessments, and other management plans, and guidance documents. The respective mission statements for DCR, Virginia State Parks, the Code of Virginia, and the Constitution of Virginia provide a legal and legislative basis for all park long-term development.

Goals are organized by the central themes of protecting, conserving, and enhancing the park’s resources, providing a welcoming and safe experience for all to learn, a range of day-use opportunities and facilities, and programming for education and interpretation. Implementing these involves working across sectors, building partnerships, and administering and managing the park in a manner which fosters the public’s trust. The plan’s goals and objectives provide specific and measurable actions directed towards their achievement over the course of the Master Plan’s projected 30-year phased development.

### SWVA Museum State Park Purpose Statement

*“The purpose of the Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park is to collect, preserve, share, and interpret the history and culture of the Commonwealth’s far southwestern coal-producing counties, sustain connections with surrounding local communities, and promote a sense of regional identity.”*

### Department of Conservation and Recreation Mission Statement

*“Conserve, protect, enhance, and advocate wise use of the Commonwealth’s unique natural, historical, recreational, scenic, and cultural resources.”*

### Virginia State Parks Mission Statement

*“To conserve the natural, scenic, historic, and cultural resources of the Commonwealth and provide recreational and education opportunities consistent with the good stewardship of these lands, waters, and facilities that leave them unimpaired for future generations.”*

### Constitution of Virginia, Article XI, Section 1

*“To the end that the people have clean air, pure water, and the use and enjoyment for recreation of adequate public lands, waters, and other natural resources, it shall be the policy of the Commonwealth to conserve, develop, and utilize its natural resources, its public lands, and historic sites and buildings. Further, it shall be the Commonwealth’s policy to protect its atmosphere, lands, and waters from pollution, impairment, or destruction, for the benefit, enjoyment, and general welfare of the people of the Commonwealth.”*

## SWVA Museum State Park Goals and Objectives

### **Goal 1.0: Protect, conserve, and enhance the cultural, historic, and natural resources of the park.**

- Objective 1.1 – Develop and manage the park, its resources, and facilities in a culturally and environmentally sensitive manner.
- Objective 1.2 – Preserve, protect, promote, and interpret the cultural, historical, and natural resources on-site and in the region through direct action, partnerships, and programming.
- Objective 1.3 – Manage and protect the Museum Collection utilizing professional archival standards.
- Objective 1.4 – Implement the park’s Natural Resources Management Plan, which focuses on treating invasive species.
- Objective 1.5 – Develop and manage the park to promote a sense of regional identity.
- Objective 1.6 - Showcase the present and historic melting pot of Big Stone Gap by relaying the diverse stories of local European settlers, African Americans, indigenous, Melungeon and other communities through exhibits and programming.

### **Goal 2.0: Create a welcoming and safe experience for all to learn, see the region through new eyes, and gain a better understanding of the cultural continuity of Southwest Virginia.**

- Objective 2.1 – Develop and operate the park in a manner that respects and embraces the culture of the Commonwealth’s far southwestern coal-producing counties, the Town of Big Stone Gap, and its visitors.
- Objective 2.2 – Develop and implement a Visitor Experience Plan to guide programming and events at the park and in the local community.
- Objective 2.3 – Provide a range of high-quality experiential opportunities for users, regardless of income, background, and ability.
- Objective 2.4 – Serve as a hub of access and information for regional resources and provide visitors with clear orientation and wayfinding.
- Objective 2.5 – Anticipate the needs of an ever-changing community and structure programs and facilities accordingly.
- Objective 2.6 – Create experiences that inspire repeat visitation, volunteerism, or future employment opportunities.

### **Goal 3.0: Provide a range of day-use opportunities and facilities for visitors to the park.**

- Objective 3.1 – Design and manage recreational activities to minimize impacts on cultural, historic, and natural resources to preserve the experience for future visitors.
- Objective 3.2 – Provide a spectrum of high-quality opportunities and supporting infrastructure for park users that encourages repeat visitation.

**Goal 4.0: Provide facilities and programs for cultural, historical, and environmental education and interpretation.**

- Objective 4.1 – Provide a variety of inclusive educational formats for all learning capabilities and levels.
- Objective 4.2 – Teach cultural and environmental awareness and stewardship.
- Objective 4.3 – Educate Park visitors and the broader community about the value of the cultural, historical, and environmental resources within the region and how to act to sustain and conserve these resources.
- Objective 4.4 – Provide site-appropriate education and interpretation.
- Objective 4.5 – Develop partnerships with local organizations to promote educational opportunities.
- Objective 4.6 – Engage diverse groups with programming and cultural interpretation on site.

**Goal 5.0: Collaborate across sectors to provide mutually beneficial efforts to enhance the SWVA Museum and the surrounding region.**

- Objective 5.1 – Partner to manage, connect, and conserve cultural and ecological resources in the park and the region.
- Objective 5.2 – Develop partnerships to further the shared goals and objectives of the Regional Planning Commission, local government units, and organizations.
- Objective 5.3 – Participate in local, regional, and state planning efforts related to recreational opportunities and access as well as other shared interests.
- Objective 5.4 – Collaborate with local and regional tourism on park-oriented efforts.

**Goal 6.0: Administer and manage the park professionally and transparently, which fosters the public's trust.**

- Objective 6.1 – Ensure the park has adequate staffing and operations to support safe and meaningful visitor experiences and to protect and conserve resources.
- Objective 6.2 – Acquire additional land from willing sellers that will meet the needs and objectives of the park as opportunities arise.
- Objective 6.3 – Regularly update and implement the park's Business Plan.
- Objective 6.4 – Assure proper care and maintenance of park facilities and infrastructure.
- Objective 6.5 – Upgrade and provide communications and informational access to enhance the visitor's experience throughout the park.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### Surrounding Land Use

The primary land use surrounding the SWVA Museum parcels is characterized as residential. To the north and northeast is a large parcel of Town-owned property classified as parkland. To the immediate northeast of the museum is the Big Stone Gap Town Library. (Figure 2 – Park Boundary and Vicinity)

### Park Boundaries

SWVA Museum includes 2.92 acres of land spread across several non-contiguous parcels in a town setting. Park boundaries are not contiguous and not all include physical barriers to help delineate the individual lots. The SWVA Museum site is bounded by West 1st Street North, Wood Avenue West, an unnamed gravel alley, and Shawnee Avenue West. The Museum building is partially bounded by stone walls, and other parts of the park property have barriers consisting of various forms of fencing. Specific legal boundaries for park parcels are recorded and maintained by the Town of Big Stone Gap, Wise County, and DCR's Real Property Office. A map characterizing the boundaries, inholdings, and adjacent property holdings is depicted in Figure 3 – Basic Resources Map.

### Physiographic Region

The SWVA Museum is located within the Town of Big Stone Gap, a historic town situated in the valley (or gap) between Powell Mountain and Little Stone Mountain and is part of the Appalachian Plateau region of Virginia.

### Topography

Located within a developed town, the Park itself is relatively flat, with an approximate elevation of 1,569 feet above sea level atop Poplar Hill.

### Watersheds

A *watershed* is traditionally defined as an area that collects water with a single convergence point. A *hydrological unit*, on the other hand, may have multiple convergence points throughout its area. In short, hydrological units (HUs) can be a little more specific than watershed boundaries. Today there are two recognized ways of labelling watersheds in Virginia:

- A 12-digit HUC12 code as part of the National Watershed Boundary Dataset developed by a team of federal agencies in the early 2000s. For SWVA Museum, the entirety of the site falls within HUC12 code 060102060104.
- A 4-digit VAHU6 code as part of the Virginia National Watershed Boundary Dataset developed for use in the Commonwealth by DCR. The first two digits refer to the major stream name (i.e., TP = Tennessee-Powell River) and the last two numbers reference a sequential numbering system designed to indicate drainage from the headwaters to the mouth of the waterway. At SWVA Museum, the entirety of the site falls within VAHU6 code TP04.

## Flood zones

Flood zones are used to help visualize the frequency and intensity of flooding events in an area. To that end, DCR's Division of Dam Safety and Floodplain Management has outlined areas of high, moderate, low, and other flood risk throughout the Commonwealth. Each flood zone is given a special categorization in accordance with its relative risk. All A and V zones (including A, AO, AH, AE, A99, AR, AR/AE, AR/AO, AR/A, V, and VE) are considered to be Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA), meaning that the area that will be inundated by a flood event has a 1 % chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year (i.e., the 100-year floodplain). A Shaded Zone X is considered to have a moderate flood risk with a 0.2 % chance of flooding in any given year (i.e., the 500-year floodplain), while an Unshaded Zone X is a low flood risk area. Zone D represents an area that has an undetermined flood risk. These classifications are particularly important in the light of the Virginia Flood Risk Management Standards. At SWVA Museum, the entire property is currently classified within an Unshaded Zone X Classification, meaning that there is a minimal flood hazard on the property. (Figure 4 – Flood zones)

## Wetlands

There are no known wetlands at SWVA Museum.

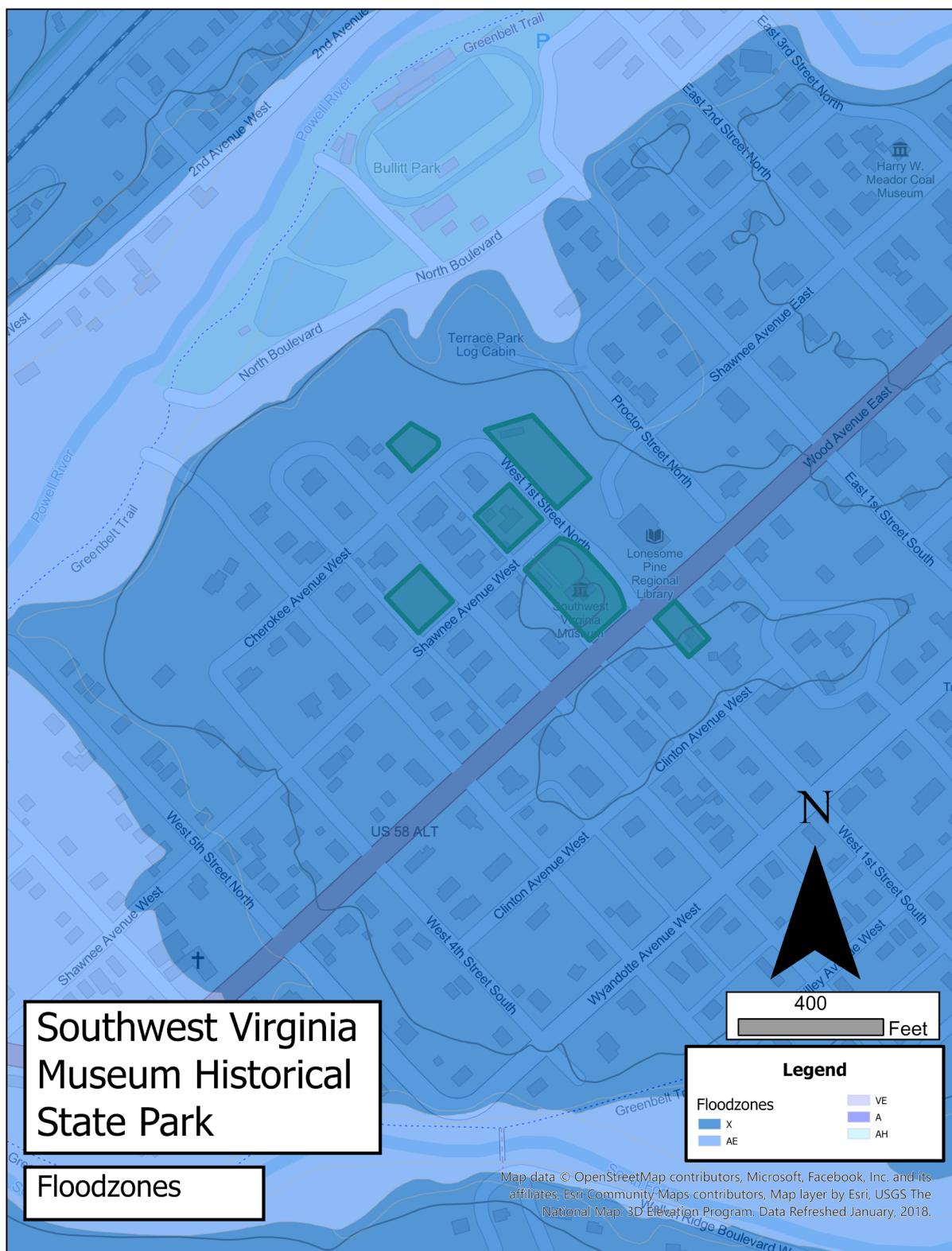


Figure 4 - Floodzones

## SOIL CONDITIONS AND TYPES

Due to the urban nature of the park, the only soil type as found on the Web Soil Survey is defined as 100% Udorthents – Urban Land Complex, 0 – 80 percent slopes. This map unit is a disturbed urban soil with significant development of residences, streets, and other urban components.

## NATURAL RESOURCES

The SWVA Museum has a landscape that differs significantly from many of the other parks in the Virginia State Parks system, which are typically resource based and less than 15-25% developed. The park's setting features very little natural habitat and the native plant species in the park are primarily part of its landscaping and historic gardens. As a result of these conditions, the Natural Resource inventory at the park is limited to existing vegetation that is part of the landscaping. The plants identified in the table are the plants known to be on the grounds, most of which are on the block containing the Museum itself and the Victorian Gardens.

## VEGETATION

Table 1 Native and non-native species found on the property

Common Name	Botanical Name	Classification	Invasive
<b>Trees</b>			
red maple	<i>Acer rubra</i>	Native	No
sugar maple	<i>Acer saccharum</i>	Native	No
flowering dogwood	<i>Cornus florida</i>	Native	No
Kousa dogwood	<i>Cornus kousa</i>	Non-Native	No
white ash	<i>Fraxinus americana</i>	Native	No
black walnut	<i>Juglans nigra</i>	Native	No
crape myrtle	<i>Lagerstroemia indica</i>	Non-Native	No
tulip poplar	<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>	Native	No
southern magnolia	<i>Magnolia grandiflora</i>	Non-Native	No
star magnolia	<i>Magnolia stellata</i>	Non-Native	No
Alberta spruce	<i>Picea glauca</i>	Non-Native	No
blue spruce	<i>Picea pungens</i>	Non-Native	No
white oak	<i>Quercus alba</i>	Native	No

Shrubs			
Common Name	Botanical Name	Classification	Invasive
Japanese barberry	<i>Berberis thunbergii</i>	Non-Native	Yes
boxwood	<i>Buxus sempervirens</i>	Non-Native	No
Chesapeake Bay holly	<i>Ilex crenata</i> 'Chesapeake'	Non-Native	Reported invasive in Rock Creek National Park (D.C.)
bush honeysuckle	<i>Diervilla sessilifolia</i>	Native	No
forsythia	<i>Forsythia spp.</i>	Non-Native	No
Chinese holly	<i>Ilex cornuta</i>	Non-Native	Listed as invasive in Albemarle and Fairfax Counties
American holly	<i>Ilex opaca</i>	Native	No
winterberry	<i>Ilex verticillata</i>	Native	No
privet	<i>Ligustrum spp.</i>	Non-Native	Yes
catawba rhododendron	<i>Rhododendron catawbiense</i>	Native	No
multiflora rose	<i>Rosa multiflora</i>	Non-Native	Yes
Pacific yew, western yew	<i>Taxus brevifolia</i>	Non-Native	No
Grasses, Forbes, Herbaceous			
European lily of the valley	<i>Convallaria majalis</i>	Introduced	C. majalis is listed as invasive in several VA counties
fescue	<i>Festuca spp.</i>	Non-Native	No
English ivy	<i>Hedera helix</i>	Non-Native	Yes <sup>1</sup>
liriope, lilyturf, monkeygrass	<i>Liriope muscari</i>	Non-Native	Listed as invasive in several VA counties and cities
bee balm	<i>Monarda spp.</i>	Native	No
wisteria	<i>Wisteria spp.</i>	Non-Native	Yes
yucca	<i>Yucca aloifolia</i>	Native (only VA listing is in Virginia Beach) <sup>6</sup>	No

## Potential Suitable Habitat

The DCR Division of Natural Heritage utilizes species habitat modeling to create predicted suitable habitat (PSH) areas for rare plants and animals. A known species occurrence would be an Element Occurrence (EO); this tool, however, allows for a filtered approach when determining a potential area for a rare species. Currently it is worth noting that the entirety of SWVA Museum and much of the Town of Big Stone Gap is considered potential suitable habitat for the Little Brown Bat (*Myotis lucifugus*), Northern Long-eared Bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*), and Tricolored Bat (*Pipistrellus subflavus*). While the Park may not have active resource management geared towards these bats, it would be a good future topic for interpretive programming.

## Element Occurrences

The DCR Division of Natural Heritage has developed and manages an inventory of rare, threatened, and endangered plant and animal species as well as exemplary natural communities. Collectively these species and communities are referred to as EO species where they occur on the landscape. The exact locations of these EO species are protected information that cannot be shared with the public. However, while planning it is important to keep in mind the following EO species and their locations, especially during discussions of future development on site. Today at SWVA Museum there are no known EO species. However, nearby waters contain the following sensitive species that might be discussed through interpretive programming at the park:

- **Spiny Riversnail** (*Io fluvialis*) – This snail species is ranked as G1G2S2, which means that it is critically imperiled globally at very high risk of extinction and is imperiled at the state level due to restricted range, few populations or occurrences, steep declines, severe threats, or other factors.
- **Tennessee Heelsplitter** (*Lasmigona holstonia*) – This freshwater mussel species is ranked as G3/S1, which means that it is vulnerable at the global level but is critically imperiled at the state level at very high risk of extirpation due to a very restricted range, very few populations or occurrences, very steep declines, severe threats, or other factors.

## Park Resource Management Issues

### *Emerald Ash Borer*

The primary natural resource issue at SWVA Museum is Emerald Ash Borer (*Agrilus planipennis* Fairmaire). Native to northeast Asia, Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) was first discovered in the United States in the summer of 2002 in the Great Lakes region. It likely came to North America from Asia via international trade, utilizing wood packing materials, crates, or pallets as a vector to the west. Since arrival in North America, EAB has spread rapidly through most of the Canadian Provinces and the lower 48 United States, including the Commonwealth of Virginia.

EAB has decimated native ash tree populations (*Fraxinus* spp.) across the species' range, including those around the Museum grounds at the park. This half-inch long, metallic green, wood-boring beetle is particularly damaging as larvae when it feeds on the inner bark of hosts, impacting the ability of the ash trees to transport critical nutrients and water needed for survival. Adult insects then leave a diagnostic D-shaped hole in the tree bark when they exit the tree in the spring. These D-shaped holes are readily evident in the white ash (*Fraxinus americana*) that currently are still alive on the Museum grounds.

To preserve and protect the two remaining white ash trees on the grounds of the SWVA Museum, resource management staff have been actively treating the specimens with insecticides. Through 2018, the trees received basal bark treatments annually and in 2019 a switch was made to insecticides designed for injection in the spring every other year after full leaf-out. This adjustment in the product and method has been significantly more effective while also reducing the number of required treatments, which is promising for the long-term survival of these stately trees. Park staff will continue to treat the ash for as long as it is practical and safe to do so. If, in the future, the treatments stop working the tree will need to be removed. At that time a suitable replacement should be made.

#### *Native Species Considerations*

This historical state park has striven to balance the historic accuracy and interpretive value of the Victorian Garden and other plantings within the park with a desire to promote more native plants and associated wildlife. Through time, Virginia State Parks has made decisions to phase out certain non-native species where practical. For instance, *Nandina* spp. was recently removed and replaced with native *Rhododendron* spp. around the Carriage House. Native herbaceous species were also recently utilized for plantings around the Collection's train car as well as on the Museum grounds. Over time, Virginia State Parks will continue to acknowledge the historic use of non-natives on the grounds of the park while incorporating natives as opportunities allow.

## Cultural and Historic Resources

Telling the story of the site, town and region is the central part of the purpose, goals, and objectives of the SWVA Museum. To accomplish these objectives, Virginia State Parks manages the park as a historic site focusing on the Museum building itself, and maintaining the tens of thousands of invaluable, irreplaceable artifacts in its collection. These two important aspects of the park are inextricably linked, and their description and historical context is provided herein as part of this Master Plan.

Development of a Cultural Resources Management Plan addressing these resources should be prioritized to provide additional detail, and allow greater flexibility in updating the information, as it may need to be done in a time horizon outside of an update to this Master Plan.

The extent of the collection and its upkeep requires staff with specialized skills. As such, the site does not maintain a public archive (e.g., like a library), nor is it a research institution. Additionally, because the site is a state agency, its operations differ considerably from most non-profit museums in that staffing, safety and other requirements peculiar to state agencies apply. However, in this master plan and the staffing plan the goal is to achieve staffing comparable to similar museums.

#### *Organization and Historical Context of the SWVA Museum Collection*

The SWVA Museum's Collection consists of approximately 4,600 photographs, 3,800 documents, 2,000 books, and more than 50,000 additional artifacts and material specimens comprised of wood, stone, leather, metal, glass, textiles, paintings, historical weaponry, and musical instruments, to name a few. Human-produced antiquities in the Collection span at least 6,000 years, and natural history specimens can reach back millions of years. With such a vast array of objects, the Collection is diverse and incrementally expanding.

Virginia State Parks manages the park as a historic site focusing on the Museum. The primary purpose of the Collection is interpretation. Several projects have been undertaken over the past 75 years to develop the state

park better and manage the Collection using increasingly professional museum standards.

The Museum categorizes its Collection into subgroups to organize and provide historical context. They include the following:

- The Slemp (core) Collection
- The True Years
- The Modern Collection - Professional Parameters Era
- Virginia State Parks Collection

#### *The Slemp (core) Collection*

A detailed understanding of the link between the SWVA Museum's core collection and its historical context explains how and why the Museum's Collection came to be.

The Collection's story starts with C. Bascom Slemp, a multiterm Congressman who later became the private secretary to President Calvin Coolidge. A native of Turkey Cove in Southwest Virginia, Congressman Slemp and his sister, Janie Slemp Newman, had a love of their Southwest Virginia heritage, its people, history, and culture. Thus, the pair of siblings routinely collected artifacts depicting life in the area. Initially, the Slemp siblings had a museum in a building behind the family home on the corner of Second Street and Cherokee Avenue in historic Big Stone Gap, Virginia. After Janie Slemp Newman died in 1935, the Museum became known as the "Janie Slemp Memorial Museum." The future relationship between the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Slemp Foundation was permanently designated in C. Bascom Slemp's will.

The original Collection was a mixture of items collected and or purchased by C. Bascom and Janie, representing both the region and items of national and international interest. While both siblings wanted to preserve the rich heritage of Southwest Virginia, they also wanted area school children to experience history from around the world, which explains why items such as the Disraeli China, French paintings, and Asian antiquities are in the core Collection. Of note, Newman kept diaries of the history of items collected but never described the actual items, creating quite a challenge for future managers of the Collection. Thus, while the histories still exist as part of the Collection, it has often been challenging to accurately match them with specific artifacts.

Additionally, Congressman Slemp supported the first Works Progress Administration (WPA) Museum in Virginia. The Museum was on the second floor of one of the original downtown Big Stone Gap School buildings. It brought many WPA artists in contact with Congressman Slemp and would shape the outcome of the core of the Museum's Collection. Slemp would heavily involve the WPA artists in creating the Slemp Collection. For example, he hired Paul Walker to photograph and make scale models of historic homes in Southwest Virginia. In time, Walker would make 11 scale models in the Collection today. Other examples of WPA artists' work in the Collection include portraits of Southwest Virginia elected officials.

Throughout his life, Congressman Slemp worked to establish a recognized museum based upon the "Janie Slemp Newman" collection of artifacts dedicated to Southwest Virginia. Initially, he dreamed of having a national park in the High Knob area with a museum at the summit. He even convinced the Secretary of Interior to visit him in Big Stone Gap to review his Collection. After visiting, the Secretary thanked Slemp for his gracious hospitality and noted that "the collection was not of national significance, but certainly of state significance," thereby planting the seed of Slemp establishing a state-operated historical site.

The building that houses the Museum today, then known as the Ayers House, was purchased by C. Bascom Slemp in 1929. From reviewing Slemp's actions and writings during this time, it is evident that his goal was for the building to become a public historic site. He had his architect cousin, Edmund S. Campbell, review the structure and recommend upgrades to give it a more "public building" appearance. For instance, the double porches had become unstable in the Queen Anne-style home and would be costly to fix, so Slemp removed them. The Ayers House began its transformation into a museum structure. The building partially housed a few of Slemp's extended family and his growing Collection during this time. The building was entered into the National Register of Historic Places in November 2002. The carriage house is listed as a contributing resource.

Before Congressman Slemp died in 1943, he established the Slemp Foundation. It was his wish that the Commonwealth of Virginia acquire the Ayers House for purposes of a museum and that the Janie Slemp Newman Collection also be given to the state for use in the Museum. In 1946, the state purchased the building for \$25,000, which had also been the original construction cost of the building in the late 1800s. The Collection was bequeathed to the Commonwealth. The SWVA Museum was officially dedicated on May 30, 1948, and is managed today by Virginia State Parks. From that point onward, the state's ownership and management of the site has been crucial in how the Collection developed over time.

#### *The True Years 1946-1974*

Initially, the SWVA Museum site operated as a satellite of Hungry Mother State Park. James E. True was hired as the Museum's first Curator in 1946 and would continue until his retirement in 1974. True had been one of the WPA artists associated with Big Stone Gap and was well acquainted with the Slemp Collection. Once in position, True added his creations to the Collection, including a series of dioramas depicting scenes across Southwest Virginia. He had intimate knowledge of the Collection and knew Congressman Slemp directly. Visitors remember him for giving his tours and histories of the artifacts, with many recalling him revealing the secret compartments of the Sea Captain's Desk on his tours. He also attempted to number and label the artifacts, but the labels were temporary and did not last. The True family lived in the Carriage House during his time as curator; this building would later become the Collections storage building as it is today. True was genuinely passionate about the site and its artifacts and holds the legacy as the first curator. As True did not write down his knowledge, much was lost to time.

#### *Modern Collection-Professional Parameters, Philosophy, and Policies Take Shape*

The physical infrastructure at SWVA Museum had not been upgraded since the work of Congressman Slemp in the 1940s and the Commonwealth's upgrades just before opening in 1948. Upgrades to the buildings were made to protect and care for the collection. Those upgrades included the following:

- **1981:** The Carriage House was declared unstable and slated to be demolished. The community stopped this process, but the building continued to deteriorate.
- **1990-1993:** The Museum was closed for repair and remodeling. Major functions within the Museum that affect collection management were addressed, including the addition of central heat and air, fire suppression, and alarm systems. Other projects included wiring upgrades, patches and painting of walls, and cleaning of woodwork. At this time, the exhibits were also completely redone.
- **1991:** The Museum had a Conservation and Artifact Cleaning Survey conducted by Sanders Museum Services. The conservators identified many artifacts for removal from display due to deterioration, needing cleaning, conservation, and other work.

- **1991:** A new roof was installed on the Carriage House.
- **1994:** The Carriage House was restored and began its use as Collection storage.
- **1994:** The Museum's foundation underwent repairs to prevent the basement from becoming wet when it rained, affecting humidity in the building.

In addition to these upgrades, in 1997 an Architectural Assessment survey as part of the Conservation Assessment Program (CAP) was initiated with the following goals:

- Provide recommendations and priorities for conservation action, both immediate and long-range;
- Facilitate the development of long-range institutional plans for the care and preservation of the collections; and
- Serve as a fund-raising tool for future conservation projects.

Recommendations from this survey that impacted the care of the Museum's Collection included:

- Installation of interior storm UV windows on existing building windows;
- Upgrades to the HVAC system, including humidity regulation;
- Upgrades to interior exhibit lighting to protect building interior and artifacts;
- Improvements to the building envelope, such as roofing, windows, and doors, to provide for a better artifact environment.

Over the decades, of the items on the project list, only the lighting plan has not been completed (aside from changing to LED bulbs.)

Early in the 21st century, focus intensely began on inventory, record keeping, and care of the Collection. This effort aimed to establish professional and structured procedures for handling the Collection in the future of State Park operations. The Museum also undertook several projects simultaneously, several continuing through the present time. A few of these projects include:

- Creating a standardized Certificate of Gift with legal wording;
- Creating a standardized Accession Record;
- Establishing Collections Management policies and procedures;
- Matching existing donation and loan documents with the artifacts where possible to identify;
- Matching existing artifacts with Janie Slemp Newman's histories to identify items in the original Collection;
- Matching True records with any existing artifacts and donation/loan records;
- Matching assorted Chief Ranger records with any existing artifacts and donation/loan records;
- Setting up donation files based upon Chenal's *The Revised Nomenclature for Museum Cataloging*;
- Setting up an artifact inventory system includes applying accession numbers where documentable or with new donations. If documentation of accession numbers was not possible, the establishment and implementation of numbering criteria occurred using the following structure:
  - Documents - "DOC" numbers;
  - Photographs - "P" numbers;

- Artifacts - "T" numbers
  - Books - "B" numbers;
  - Virginia State Parks collection - "SP" numbers
- Using Microsoft Excel to maintain records in spreadsheets initially;
  - In the early 2000s, Past Perfect, a standardized software program for small museums, was implemented to manage records;
  - Carriage House set up for artifact storage, with original photographs stored there and copies stored in the second-floor wing collections office in case of fire;
  - Establishment of a system matching an artifact's location and its inventory location; offsite storage obtained for natural history collections and other artifacts not stored on-site;
  - Establish reference files consisting of materials acquired for exhibit research by the park staff, volunteers, and student interns; These files are for staff use, like any other files held in an office of the Museum. The Museum is not staffed for and does not maintain a public archive;
  - Photographs began to be digitized, and some made available to view by computer and on-display screens throughout the Museum;
  - Collections offices moved from the wing of the Museum into the current office complex;
  - Inventory, inventory, and more inventory!

#### *State Parks Collection*

The Museum began the Virginia State Parks (VSP) Collection in 2006. The idea for this Collection was born from the realization that the State Parks system was not preserving its history. Since then, the Collection has been added to in two ways: 1) by items from the Agency itself, and 2) by donations from private memorabilia of active and retired employees. Housed in a secure, climate-controlled room at the SWVA Museum, more than 20,000 artifacts are in the VSP collection.

## Cultural Resources Inventory

The Museum's collection contains tens of thousands of treasured, exceptional objects. Among these, are a few that stand out amongst the rest; objects with deeper meaning to share and more complex stories to tell. Presented here is a small sample of these artifacts.

**Devonian Brachiopods, Ca. 400 Million Years BCE** During the Paleozoic Era (541-252 million years ago), as it occurred in Virginia, the Devonian period included an episode of mountain building (the Alleghanian Orogeny), which pushed up the Appalachian Mountains. Subsequent erosion of these mountains resulted in large amounts of sediment deposition into the shallow continental seas. These sediments eventually formed the shales and sandstones rich in fossils in Virginia's Valley and Ridge Province, encompassing much of Southwest Virginia. Among the fossilized remains are brachiopods, marine filter-feeding animals with two shells hinged at the back's center. Were it not for the mountain building of the Devonian period, as represented by these fossilized crustaceans, our country's story, that of Virginia, and indeed Southwest Virginia, would most likely be very



Figure 5 Typical Devonian Brachiopods

different. The chronicles of the human experience associated with the exploration, settlement, and inhabitation of the Appalachian Mountains of Southwest Virginia would not be geologically nor geographically relatable today.

### ***Sea Captain's Desk, Ca. 1880***



Figure 6 - Sea Captain's Desk

thought-provoking items they may never have otherwise gotten to experience.

A brass-bound camphorwood "Sea Captain's" desk with mechanical opening action. The relevance of this desk, as it relates to Southwest Virginia, does not necessarily lie in its origin but in how it has been shared and experienced over the years. James True, the first Curator of the Museum, would often use this object to capture the imagination of scores of park visitors over his 28-year career. He would delight in demonstrating the mechanical workings of the desk, which included cleverly designed secret compartments. Visitors could imagine the variety of valuable objects hidden inside by past owners. This object also exemplifies the original intentions of museum organizers who wanted to educate and expose the people of Southwest Virginia to obscure,

### ***Alpha Slemp Habern Quilt, Ca. Mid-1800's***

Quilts, as we know them in America, were originally a strictly utilitarian article, born of the necessity of providing warm bed covers and as hangings for doors and windows not sealed well enough to keep out the cold. Because the earliest American quilts, made by English and Dutch settlers, were considered utilitarian and connected to the early colonists' everyday life, little design information exists. Only in later years, when fabrics were being manufactured in America, making them more affordable, and freeing quilt makers from the work of producing their own yarns and fabrics, did the more artistic type of quilting become more widespread.

Alpha Slemp Habern (1836-1893), the creator of this quilt, was born in Turkey Cove, Lee County, Virginia. She was the sister of Colonel Campbell Slemp, father of C. Bascom and Janie Slemp, the original contributing benefactors of the Museum. An outstanding example of local craftsmanship, handed down through generations, the quilt was donated to the Museum in 2001.



Figure 7 Alpha Slemp-Habern Quilt

### ***Daniel's Accordion, Ca. 1895***

This Fidel Socin Accordion came to America on the French immigrant liner La Savoie at the turn of the 20th century. Its owner, Romano Danelon, later recalled playing it for the enjoyment of other passengers until the crossing got too rough for dancing on the ship's deck. After clearing Ellis Island immigration in 1901, Danelon began the classic immigrant's adventure – traveling the United States hoping to strike it rich and return home, as



*Figure 8 - Daniel's Accordion*

he had promised his mother, in five years. That return trip never happened. Instead, Romano Danelon became Rome Daniel and was soon an integral part of his new home in Big Stone Gap, Virginia. His vocation was bricklayer and stonemason, and his lasting contributions can still be seen in town, from the Presbyterian Church to the old Wise Printing Shop. Daniel's love of playing the accordion remained constant throughout his long life, as the broken strap and worn surfaces on his beloved accordion attest.

His granddaughter, Sheryl Moore, who still resides in Big Stone Gap, has fond memories of him playing the instrument and singing in his native tongue for friends and family. In the 1980s, Daniel's daughter donated his accordion to the Museum.

#### ***Interstate 101 Rail Car, Ca. 1870***

Built in the South Carolina Railroad shops in 1870, the Southern Railway acquired this all-wood constructed office rail car in 1899, becoming Southern office car No. 117. It was swapped for a newer car to the Virginia & Southwestern Railway (V&SW) in Bristol, Virginia, in 1916. Interstate Railroad president Harry L. Miller inquired if the V&SW would sell the car and struck a deal. On March 21, 1916, the car left its refitting shop in Knoxville, Tennessee, headed for the Interstate Railroad's headquarters in Andover, Virginia.

In 1924, Interstate acquired a newer, steel-constructed office car, becoming number No. 100, and downgraded the old wooden car to number 101. The newer steel car was sold during the Great Depression in 1936, while the old No. 101 would hang on for the few times the company needed an office car and would continue to be known as No. 101 for the rest of its life.

A coal executive bought car No. 101 in 1959, and moved it into the woods above Dorchester, Virginia, for use as a hunting lodge. In 1988, a new owner decided the car was in the way of a planned expansion of surface mining. After nearly 30 years at Dorchester, they offered to donate the car to any organization willing to take possession and move it immediately, at no expense to the current owner. A group of local leaders in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, banded together quickly and raised the necessary money to finance the move to Big Stone Gap, where it would be restored and used as a regional tourist information center. There, it served its new intended purpose for the next 29 years until the town opened a new tourist information center in the central business district in 2017.

After much planning, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation acquired the car through a donation to be a permanent exhibit at the SWVA Museum in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, where it resides today. Aside from the car's long local railroading history, with its direct connections to Rufus Ayers, the original owner of the structure that houses the Museum, and to other prominent citizens of Southwest Virginia, including former Virginia Governor and Big Stone Gap



*Figure 9 - Interstate 101 Rail Car*

native, Linwood Holton, the Smithsonian-quality wooden rail car fits nicely into the Museum's mission and scope of Collection. It is one of the oldest and best examples of a rail car of its construction type in the country.

## Physical Resources

See Figure 3 for a map of the existing infrastructure at the park.

### *Existing Built Infrastructure*

#### **Museum**

**Location:** Located in Southeastern Corner of Park Property

**Square Footage:** 11,756 sqft

**Primary Materials:** The Museum's exterior walls are primarily made up of limestone and sandstone that was locally quarried and chiseled. Intricately designed Red Oak lines much of the interior of the Museum building.

**Approximate Completion of Construction:** 1895



*Figure 10 - The Museum*

Foundation to help fulfill his wish of creating a museum to depict Southwest Virginia's history and culture. Through C. Bascom Slemp's will and The Slemp Foundation, the site was acquired by the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1946. It was opened under the Virginia State Park system in 1948 as the SWVA Museum. Today visitors can tour the Museum building to explore three floors of exhibits that showcase the history and culture of far Southwest Virginia, from Native Americans to pioneers of the Wilderness Road and coalminers of the coal boom in the 1880s. Several exhibits feature touch screens and interactive technology. A multi-purpose room in the basement accommodates between 30-70 people, depending on the use of tables and chairs, for community use. A gift shop is located on the first floor and offers souvenirs and merchandise for purchase and the facility is available for weddings. The original limestone wall still surrounds the property, measuring at 442 linear feet, 4.5 feet high and 1.5 feet thick.

## Carriage House

**Location:** Big Stone Gap, Virginia – Located West of the Museum Building

**Square Footage:** 2,392 sqft

**Primary Materials:** Painted brick exterior

**Approximate Completion of Construction:** Exact date unknown; likely around 1895

The Carriage House is presently used to store the SWVA Museum's park collections while they are not on display.

## Storage Buildings (Not Pictured)

The Museum is housed in the mansion originally built by Rufus Ayers. The house was constructed over a seven-year period; construction was started in 1888 and completed in 1895. Several decades later in 1929, the house was purchased by C. Bascom Slemp. C. Bascom and his sister, Janie Slemp Newman, had a love of Southwest Virginia, its people, history, and rich culture. They collected artifacts depicting life in the area that were originally displayed in the Janie Slemp Newman Museum.

Before C. Bascom's death in 1943, he established the Slemp



*Figure 11 Carriage House*

**Location:** Big Stone Gap, Virginia – Located Behind the Museum (i.e., Southwest Side)

**Square Footage:** Two Storage Buildings are 96 sqft in size each; the other is 144 sqft.

**Primary Materials:** Both structures are wood framed with wood siding.

**Approximate Completion of Construction:** -1995

The Storage Buildings are primarily utilized to hold tools and equipment necessary for upkeep of the SWVA Museum grounds and buildings.

### Park Manager's Residence

**Location:** Big Stone Gap, Virginia – Located in the Eastern section of the park, diagonally across from the Museum at 9 West First Street North.

**Square Footage:** 2,196 sqft

**Primary Materials:** The residence is a wood framed structure with aluminum siding and a block foundation.



Figure 12 - Park Manager's Residence

**Approximate Completion of Construction:** 1950

The house serves as a residence for the SWVA Museum's Park Manager; a 160 sqft storage shed is also located on the property.

### Park Administrative Offices



Figure 13 - Administrative Offices

on the back, southwest side.

**Location:** Located in the Northwestern Portion of Park Property, across the street from the Museum.

**Square Footage:** 4,128 sqft

**Primary Materials:** The building is a wood framed structure with the exterior a combination of brick, vinyl siding and aluminum siding.

**Approximate Completion of Construction:** 1940

The Park Administrative Offices are in a former residential home located near the Museum and across from the field often used for special events by the Park. This two-story building includes spaces for 5 individual offices, a kitchen, restrooms and a small meeting room

## Poplar Hill Cottage

**Location:** Located in the Northwestern Portion of Park Property, across the street from the Museum.

**Square Footage:** 1,282 sqft

**Primary Materials:** The Cottage is a wood framed structure with the exterior a combination of brick, vinyl siding and aluminum siding.

**Approximate Completion of Construction:**

1985

The Poplar Hill Cottage is a quaint cottage available for overnight rental by Park Visitors.

The two-story Cottage features three bedrooms, two full bathrooms, a kitchen and living room with a fold-out couch; collectively, it accommodates up to 8 guests.



Figure 14 - Poplar Hill Cottage

## Maintenance Building



Figure 15 - Maintenance Building

**Location:** Located in the Northwestern Portion of Park Property, across the street from the Museum.

**Square Footage:** 418 sqft

**Primary Materials:** The building is a wood framed structure with the exterior a combination of brick, vinyl siding and aluminum siding.

**Approximate Completion of Construction:** 1940

This structure is currently being utilized to store tables, chairs, tents, and other miscellaneous items.

## Storage Building

**Location:** Located in the Northwestern Portion of Park Property, designated and described by Wise County as Lots Four (4), Five (5) and Six (6) in Block Fifty (50) (commonly referred to at the park as the Leach lot).

**Square Footage:** 96 sqft

**Primary Materials:** This building is wood framed with wood siding.

**Approximate Completion of Construction:** 1995

The maintenance building is currently utilized for storage of tools and other maintenance supplies.



Figure 16 - Storage Building

#### *Supporting Infrastructure*

### **Ball Lot**

**Location:** Located in the Southwestern Portion of Park Property, designated and described by Wise County as Lots Five (5), Six (6), Seven (7) and Eight (8) in Block Sixty-Two (62) (commonly referred to at the park as the Ball lot).

**Square Footage:** 16,896 sqft

**Primary Materials:** N/A

**Approximate Completion of Construction:** N/A

The Ball Lot is empty and utilized for parking during special events.



Figure 17 - Ball Lot

### **Leach Lot**

**Location:** Located in the Northwestern Portion of Park Property, designated and described by Wise County as Lots Four (4), Five (5) and Six (6) in Block Fifty (50) (commonly referred to at the park as the Leach lot).

**Square Footage:** 9,876 sqft

**Primary Materials:** N/A

**Approximate Completion of Construction:** N/A



Figure 18 Leach Lot

One storage shed is currently situated on the lot and the property is also utilized for parking during special events.

#### *Deferred Maintenance Issues*

Like many of Virginia's State Parks, the Southwest Museum Historical State Park has many deferred maintenance projects in need of funding. At the Museum and associated Carriage House, key maintenance needs include exterior paint and repairs, sidewalk repairs, lighting upgrades, and improvements to existing parking. Elsewhere in the park, several existing facilities need reroofing, door, and window replacement, and/or upgrades to electric, plumbing and HVAC systems. In total, these projects are estimated to cost a minimum of \$935,000.

#### *ADA Issues Relating to Physical Resources*

Currently there are no accessible restroom facilities in the museum building. This is a factor that limits visitation. A new accessible facility could be constructed at the rear of the Museum at ground level making it available to persons of all abilities. This could be accomplished by moving 5 HVAC units a few feet so make space for the new facility.

It is important to note that this should not be the standard state parks comfort station design. This facility will be located in a National Historic area and as such should reflect the general aesthetics and atmosphere of the Museum, the Carriage House, etc.

## VISITOR EXPERIENCE

### Introduction

As part of the Master Plan process, Virginia State Parks hosted a visitor experience workshop to better define the desired experience that the park should provide to its diverse guests. The primary purpose of the visitor experience workshop was to define the following factors to provide a solid foundation for future interpretive efforts at the park:

- Park purpose
- Central theme and subthemes
- Significant resources
- Audience types
- Visitor objectives
- Experience areas
- Essential experiences
- Opportunities for improving the visitor experience

Creating the visitor experience first requires identification of the various audience types using the park. Once those audiences are identified, their specific wants, needs and expectations can be evaluated, and suitable experiences, programming, themes, and messages can be planned.

### Park Purpose

The purpose of the Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park is to collect, preserve, share, and interpret the history and culture of the Commonwealth's far southwestern coal-producing counties, sustain connections with surrounding local communities, and promote a sense of regional identity.

### Central Theme and Subthemes

**Central Theme:** Endlessly intertwined – rivers, mountains, and human hands have carved a landscape of hope, home, and diverse culture that continues to reach far beyond Southwest Virginia.

#### Subthemes:

- *Human Hands and Hearts:* From the skilled hands of the artisan crafter to the ever-moving hands of banjo-picking and fiddling musicians, Southwest Virginia continues to be defined by the skilled people who called this area home and used their own hands to shape it into the culturally rich region we know today.
- *A Landscape that Provides:* Bountiful forests and rivers, lush greenery, and valuable minerals have all welcomed the people who settled here throughout the ages. The landscape of Southwest Virginia remains a timeless force that has shaped the area even as human hands and other natural forces continue to shape it in return.

- *Culture and History of SWVA:* Southwest Virginia's history is rich with diverse families, customs, communal achievements, and the ever-present backdrop of coal mining. The hardships and accomplishments of its people have a far-reaching influence beyond the boundaries of the ancient mountains that define the community.
- *The Museum:* Established as a late-century family home, this building today celebrates history within its walls and beyond. The craftsmanship and stylings provide a snapshot into an era past. The conversion of this home offers the opportunity to visitors and locals alike to appreciate the history of their region while continuing to engage with a thriving community today. At its core, the Museum is brought to life by its Collection, from a thimble to a train car, that showcases the natural and cultural histories of the region from ancient times through the Woodland and Colonial periods and on to today.

### *Significant Resources*

While every state park is filled with a variety of cultural, historic, natural, and scenic resources, a park's significant resources capture the essence of its existence. These significant resources define why the state park exists as part of the Virginia State Parks system and typically cannot be experienced elsewhere. The significant resources of SWVA Museum are thus defined as follows:

- *The Museum Itself:* This resource includes the historic stone walls that surround the Museum, as well as all structures "inside the walls," such as the Carriage House and Museum itself. This resource also includes the Victorian Gardens that give character to the site, especially the two large White Ash (*Fraxinus americana*) trees as a key focal point of the garden setting. This area all tells one story, with a unique atmosphere and energy for visitors to enjoy as they step back in time.
- *The Collection:* The Collection itself is the heart of the Museum, significant not only to the state park itself, but also to the Commonwealth. The Collection guides, feeds and interprets the story of the Museum itself and those resources that are "inside the walls." It is continually utilized to pull in fresh and new material for Museum exhibits as well as traveling exhibits at local libraries, schools, or partnerships with universities for research, internships, etc.
- *The Railcar Lot:* Both the Railcar as an artifact and the Railcar Lot as a portion of the park are collectively a significant resource for the state park. This Lot is the only place in the park where visitors can enjoy a view of Big Stone Gap. The Lot also has become an integral part of Park operations. If the Collection is the heart of the Museum, the Lot is the lifeblood that often brings vibrancy to the park as it is used for interpretive events, festivals such as Gathering in the Gap, weddings, etc.

### Visitor Objectives

SWVA Museum offers visitors a quality, authentic experience. Each visitor can learn something, see the region through new eyes, and gain a better understanding of the cultural continuity of Southwest Virginia, even through generations of change. Ultimately, the state park inspires its guests to become consistent future park users, volunteers, staff, and advocates. Each audience type is unique. All are welcome, and recognition that each will have individual wants, needs, and expectations for their visit is necessary.

## Audience Types

To provide the best visitor experience possible, an understanding of the audiences of SWVA Museum is critical. Visitors to SWVA Museum fall into multiple categories and can be grouped as follows to help shape future programs and park offerings.

### Story-based Users

These users typically come to the park for a particular themed reason. However, those themes vary widely from history to music and more, so the overall user group was divided again into two subgroups:

#### **1. Experiential Education Users:**

These users typically come for the love of learning, want to be educated, and leave after being immersed in the park experience. The top experiential education users of the park include the following:

- History lovers, including but not limited to lovers of the history-themed bus tours offered at the park
  - Genealogy lovers
  - Those who love “brown signs” (i.e., historical markers, park signs, museum signs, public property signs)
  - Architecture lovers
  - Museum tour lovers
- a. Wants:** When this group of users visit the park, they typically desire information on a specific topic (e.g., history, genealogy, architecture).
- They may appreciate access to Museum exhibits, artifacts, and documents, or others may show interest in the management of the collection. They typically want staff to guide or show them the way.
- b. Needs:** This user group needs exhibits to feed them with pertinent information,
- This group needs a quiet space to think and reflect and the guidance of staff and physical amenities such as restrooms. They need immersion in the museum and through immersive programming such as bus tours.
- c. Expectations:** Experiential education users expect accurate information at the Museum.
- They expect their mind to be engaged and interest provoked, their joy of learning fed and to leave knowing more than when they arrived. They also expect what they might find at any Virginia State Park, that being professional staff, clean and cared for facilities, parking and accessibility.

#### **2. Experiential Entertainment Users:**

These users typically visit the park to be entertained for a specific reason or due to a particular challenge but also leave with an immersive experience:

- Music lovers (e.g., Crooked Road)
- Virginia State Parks Trail Quest competitors

- Festival and exhibition goers (i.e., Quilt Show, Festival of Trees, Gathering in the Gap)
- a. **Wants:** This user group often comes to the park with a specific purpose.
  - They generally have a relatively narrow focus, and their eyes are on the prize, whether in the form of a music event, a festival, or just checking a box on their Virginia State Parks Trail Quest.
- b. **Needs:** Since many of these users come to the Museum for an event, their needs are often physical amenity-based.
  - They need ample parking spaces, bathrooms, staff interaction, seating, and specialized equipment.
- c. **Expectations:** These visitors expect the park and the event to be accessible, welcoming, and especially enjoyable.
  - Events are often a social opportunity for these users to engage with staff, neighbors, and other community members. It is crucial that events at the park represent the diverse culture and landscape. Staff must ensure these offerings stay relevant and change with the audience where feasible and appropriate.

## Curriculum-based Users:

These users typically arrive at the park with a desire to fulfill some education requirement or interest.

- Higher education users
  - Boy and Girl Scouts
  - Homeschoolers
  - School-aged children (i.e., Pre-K through 12th grade)
- a. **Wants:** These users often come to the park to fulfill the expectations of a particular program or curriculum, such as the Virginia *Standards of Learning* (SOLs), a collegiate major, a class focus, or for badges and/or patches.
- b. **Needs:** Curriculum-based users must have clear expectations of what the park can offer them to fulfill their needs, such as the types of programs provided and the ability to accommodate student group size based on the building, staff, and/or volunteer availability. The park must provide programs and topics for specific age groups or knowledge levels.
- c. **Expectations:** These users expect to receive quality education from professional park staff, well-organized classes, programs, or tours.

## Facility-based Users

These users typically visit the SWVA Museum because it provides the facilities that they need for a desired end, they include:

- Overnight guests that use Poplar Hill Cottage as a base from which to explore Big Stone Gap or the Southwest Virginia coal country region.
- Guests that primarily come to the park for special use events and/or conferences, e.g., weddings,

engagements, and bridal showers

- Passive park users, usually from the local area, come primarily for picnics and dog walking.
  - a. **Wants:** These users often come to the park to create memories.
    - They want the park for its atmosphere, beauty, and backdrop of historic architecture and grounds. The park is primarily a means to an end, such as a wedding, and their primary desire is a safe, clean space of acceptable size and setting.
  - b. **Needs:** Facility-based users need the physical space they utilize to be safe and clean.
    - They often need staff support for their events, especially staff administrative support that can help them understand the parameters and limitations of the rental as well as necessary preparations in the lead-up to the day of the event.
  - c. **Expectations:** These guests expect to have a great time.
    - They expect to go home with photographs, but more importantly, joyful, happy memories that will last a lifetime.

## Tourists

These visitors often are walk-ins who happen to drive, bike, or walk by the Museum site, and their interest is piqued. Sometimes, these guests stay to tour the Museum and its grounds, whereas, at other times, they are just interested in restroom facilities, the location of the local Walmart, or suggestions on the best places to eat in town.

- a. **Wants:** Tourists often want to know what the building is, where the bathroom is, or where is the gift shop.
  - Usually, the key want of tourists is to be oriented to where they are within the facility, the Town of Big Stone Gap, and the Southwest Virginia region.
- b. **Needs:** Tourists need materials,
  - They want brochures, and interpretive-based customer service that fulfills their curiosity.
- c. **Expectations:** This user group often drops into the Museum, expecting to learn about the Museum and the region itself.
  - They may want to know about other local tourist attractions, the location of a particular store, and suggestions on good local restaurants.

## Experience Areas

The experience areas of a state park are often distinct portions of the park, each with its characteristics, resources, and landscapes, as well as corresponding stories and interpretive value. Many state parks have individual experience areas such as day use, overnight camping, equestrian, and lake use. Due to its unique role as a Museum and community center, the SWVA Museum experience areas are more akin to a series of concentric circles that start “inside the walls” and move outward.

**Core Experience Area:** The core experience area encompasses the area of the state park located inside the stone walls. This would include the stone walls themselves, the Museum building, the Carriage House (including the Collection), and the Victorian Gardens.

**Secondary Experience Area:** The Rail Car Lot and other state park properties outside the stone wall but within the Poplar Hill neighborhood are a secondary experience area. The Rail Car Lot is the only location where you can view Big Stone Gap (the geological formation) from the park property and look at the history of the landscape, the town, and the park. It is a place for open recreation, public events such as Gathering in the Gap, weddings, and other events.

The Poplar Hill Cottage is a unique area embedded within this secondary experience area; though only a small percentage of guests rent this overnight facility, it provides its own unique immersive experience for guests to enjoy.

**Tertiary Experience Area:** Continuing outward from the state park, the Town of Big Stone Gap is also an extended experience area of the park, even though it is outside of park grounds and jurisdiction. For instance, Big Stone Gap's Green Belts are used for annual First Day hikes and interpretive programs at the town's farmers markets, Bullitt Park, and RV Park.

**Quaternary Experience Area:** A fourth and final experience area of the park is the local region comprised mainly of Dickenson, Lee, Scott, and Wise Counties. The park routinely offers traveling regional exhibits at libraries and schools, interpretive events, and history-centered bus tours in these areas.

## Essential Experiences

Essential experiences are those immersive opportunities offered by the park that visitors should enjoy in order to fully take in the park's resources, story, and all that it has to offer. Essential experiences may make different impressions upon individuals based upon their backgrounds and interests but provide a critical foundation from which interpretive events and other offerings can be based as rangers guide them to and through the park's offerings. Essential experiences at SWVA Museum consist of:

- First impressions with woodwork and craftsmanship on the floor, the ceiling, and the stairway, particularly when guests enter the Museum's front doors for the very first time.
- The oldest, continuously run Museum in Virginia west of Roanoke.
- Immersion in the Museum's Collection and the history and culture of Southwest Virginia.
- Exhibition experiences such as the annual Quilt Show and Festival of Trees.
- Bus tours to immerse in the regional landscape and story.
- Music events such as Gathering in the Gap that shower visitors of all ages with rich culture.
- Spatial orientation, setting, geography, geology and general viewshed of the Big Stone Gap.

## Opportunities for Improvement in Visitor Experience

Even with its many wonderful offerings, the Museum is growing, changing, and adapting within an ever-changing world. Moving forward, Virginia State Parks sees several opportunities for potential improvement in the visitor experience at SWVA Museum:

- There are many untapped opportunities for telling the whole story of Southwest Virginia, including but not limited to African American, indigenous, and Melungeon stories. Big Stone Gap is and has long been a historic melting pot within the greater region of Southwest Virginia, and opportunities abound to expand upon these diverse stories through future exhibits and events.
- The Museum still has some significant accessibility issues that should be improved.
- The Museum's bathrooms need significant improvement. The current bathrooms are currently in the basement, inaccessible to individuals with mobility issues.
- The current Museum exhibits are dated, and some have a color combination that is hard to read.
- Parking and lighting for safety and access are an important need.
- There currently are not enough indoor spaces for programming at the park.

The park greatly needs a modern Collections facility to house its artifacts; the creation of such a facility would open the Carriage House for other potential uses. Ultimately, a new piece of property is needed to provide space for a new Collections facility and the Carriage House could be renovated for other uses.

## MARKET ASSESSMENT AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

### Introduction

A key component of the planning process is a market and economic impact analysis. These tools identify the most important aspects of the service market, and economic impacts relevant to DCR's priorities for the development and operations of the SWVA Museum.

Both a market analysis and economic impact assessment were conducted as part of the Business Plan that was completed in 2020, with the latter being completed in conjunction with Virginia Tech's Pamplin College of Business through an memorandum of understanding with DCR and using economic models built and calculated using IMPLAN software.

It is recommended that this plan be updated regularly to reflect the changing market and economic conditions that impact the state park, and this data be incorporated into the Parks Master Plan when it is updated. Additional information may be provided in the Master Plan to supplement these materials or where a Business Plan is absent, to provide high-level guidance on these topics. A park's Master Plan is not intended to take the place of its Business Plan.

### Community Context

Big Stone Gap is the 61st largest city in Virginia and is in Wise County, which borders Lee, Scott, Russell, and Dickenson Counties in Virginia and the state of Kentucky to the west. The park is situated with easy access from U.S. Route 23. According to the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), approximately 5,200 cars travel this road each day.

### Visitation and Usage

The majority of both day and overnight visitors at SWVA Museum are from Virginia (89.06%). The top 10 other states from which visitors come are Virginia, North Carolina, Maryland, New York, West Virginia, Georgia, Florida, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Texas.

Of 382 visitors surveyed by the Virginia Tourism Southwest Virginia Region Travel Profile, 13% visited for museums and 12% visited for state parks.

### Demographic Considerations

SWVA Museum lies wholly within Wise County and within the incorporated town limits of the Town of Big Stone Gap, Virginia. The town's population estimate as of July 1, 2022, is 5,153, which is a 1.9% decrease from the population recorded in the April 1, 2020, U.S. Census. Wise County had a population of 35,421 with a similar decrease over the same period. A detailed assessment of specific demographic features is outlined in the market assessment section of this report, as well as the park's Business Plan. External documents including the Comprehensive Plans for Wise County and the Town of Big Stone Gap also highlight these features in greater detail.

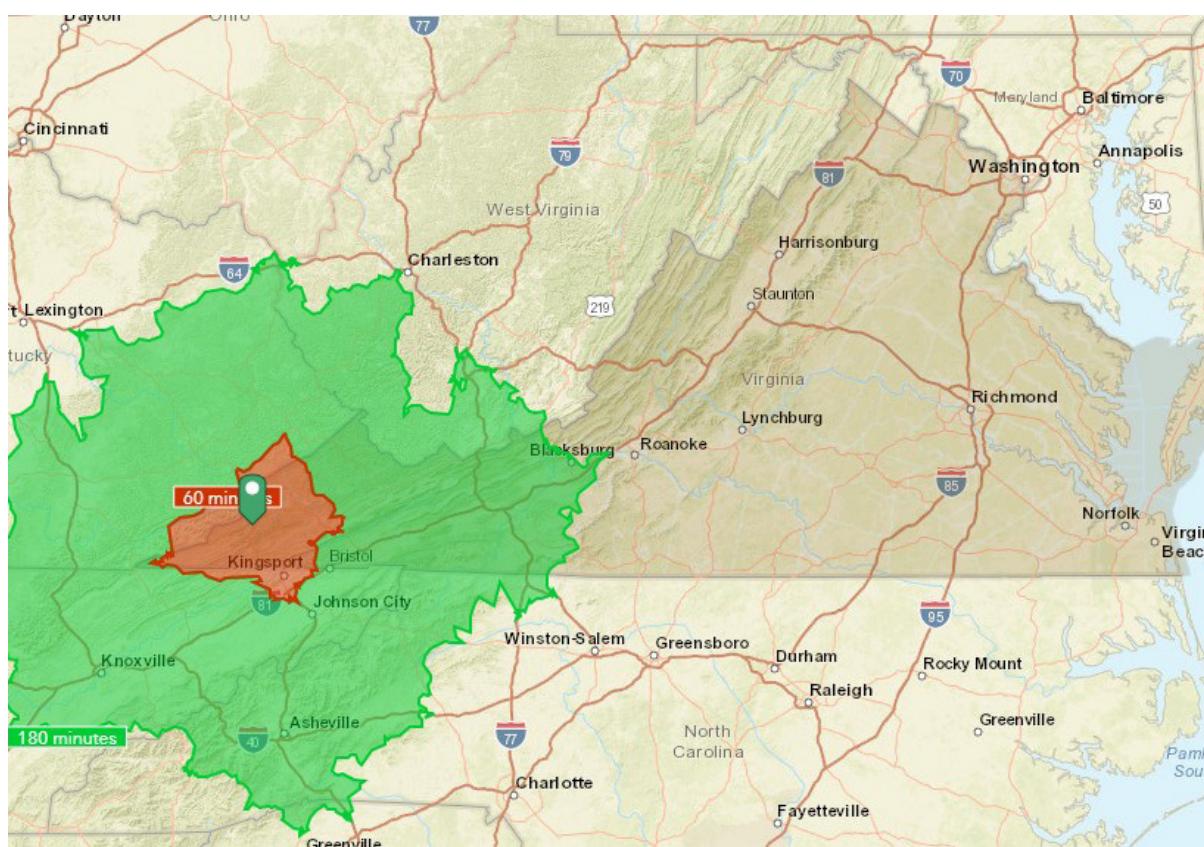


Figure 19 - Primary and Secondary Service Areas

## Defining the Park Service Area

The Business Plan broadly defines the park service area as customers from across the United States and around the world. It also provides some reference to the Town of Big Stone Gap, and surrounding area by way of the Virginia Tourism Southwest Virginia Region Travel Profile. For this Master Plan, the service areas were defined using the ESRI Community Analyst tool, with primary and secondary service areas identified as a 1- and 3-hour drive.(see Figure 19)

These parameters reflect the unique nature of SWVA Museum amongst Virginia's state parks with the primary attraction being the museum, a strong relationship with the local community and the services the park provides to Big Stone Gap, and the immediate region around the park, and the limited overnight accommodations which is not typical of parks in the state system, which are primarily resource-based, and provide these opportunities.

These delineations are the primary regions from which visitors to SWVA Museum will most likely originate, based on the amenities and visitor experiences available at the park. In the development of this Master Plan, it was evident that, like the Business Plan analysis, the Community Analyst Tool service area analysis has limitations. This is primarily as the Museum, and the artifacts that make up its various Collections hold not only local and regional significance, but also provide opportunities for visitors travelling from significant distances to seek a specific experience or who are interested in a specific subject matter. Additionally, with its location off a major regional and national transportation throughfare, the Museum attracts visitors from well beyond these service areas.

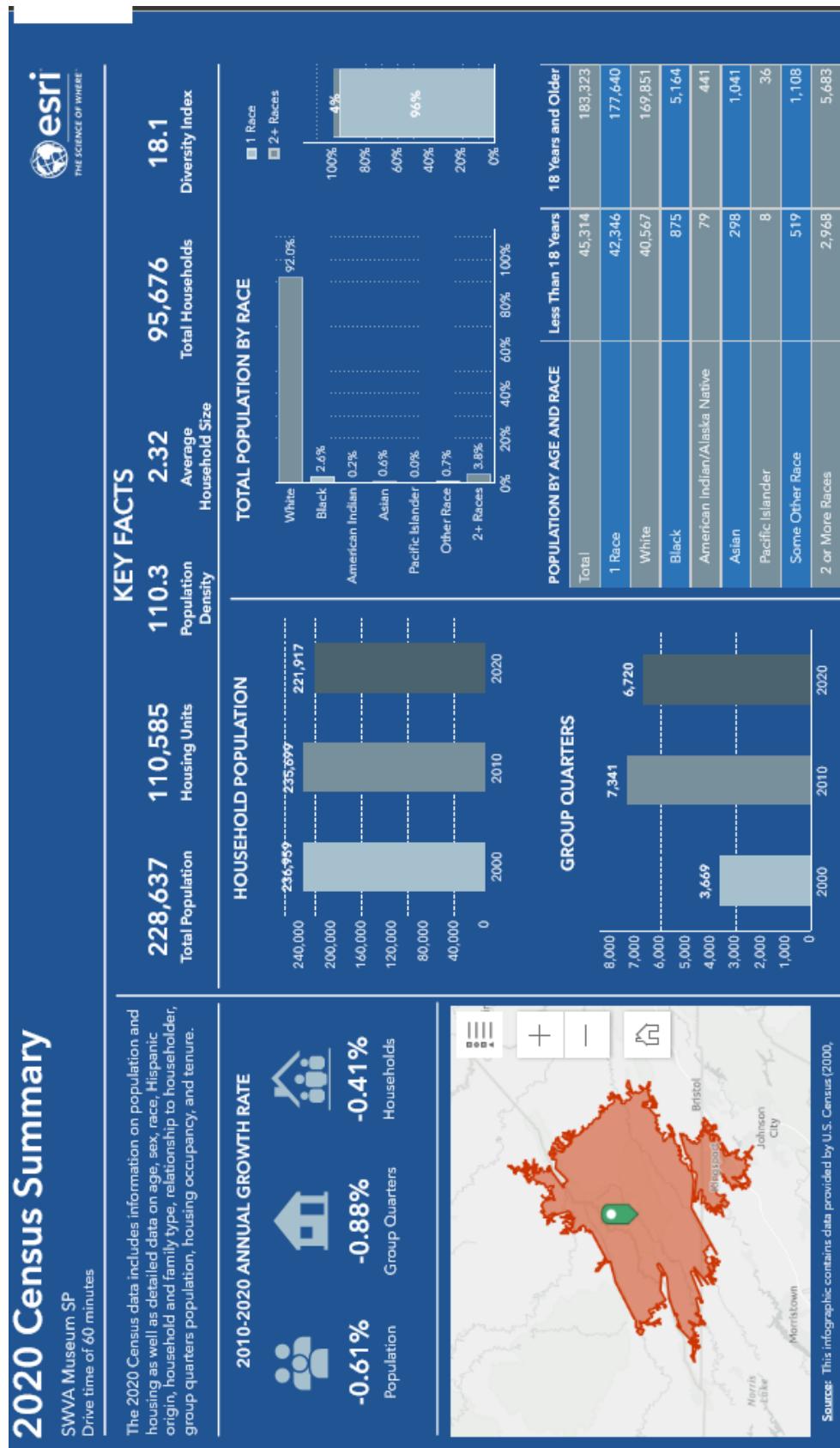
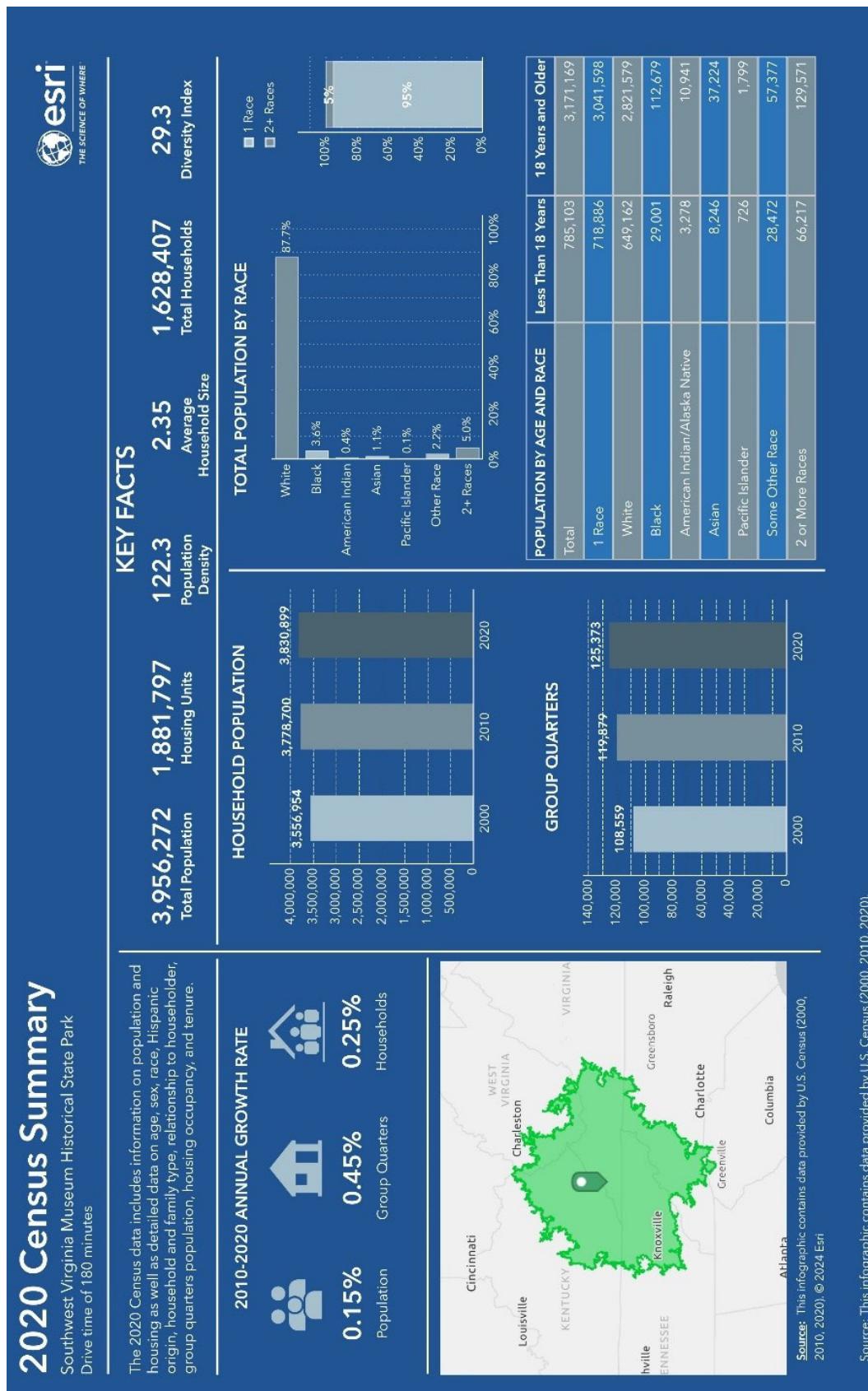


Figure 20 - Primary Service Area Demographic Profile



*Figure 21- Secondary Service Area Demographic Profile*

Source: This infographic contains data provided by US Census (2000 2010 2020)

The primary service area includes southwest Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee, and the secondary service area extends to include these states as well as West Virginia, North Carolina, and a small area in South Carolina. Within the primary service area there are 256,629 residents and in the secondary, 2,802,786. Major nearby cities include Charleston, West Virginia (3 hours), Asheville, North Carolina (2 hours), Knoxville, Tennessee (2.5 hours), and Blacksburg, Virginia (3 hours).

## Demographics of Park Service Area

A demographic analysis describes the population within the primary and secondary service areas that were evaluated in the development of this Master Plan update. This assessment is reflective of the region's total population and its key characteristics such as age segments, race, ethnicity, income levels, and gender. Data available through ESRI's Community Analyst Tool are summarized in Figures 20 and 21. The Business Plan also provides additional context.

## Market Trends

Market trends were evaluated based on the Business Plan as well as through the Virginia Outdoor Survey conducted as part of the 2024 update to the Virginia Outdoors Plan. Additional context may also be drawn from ESRI's Community Analyst tool. It is recommended that future Business Plans for SWVA Museum incorporate a detailed Market Analysis to help DCR better understand market trends and other associated data to help better inform the museum's operations.

General trends in outdoor recreation according to the Business Plan include:

- A greater awareness of the value of leisure, and overall increased demand for leisure activities.
- An expectation of recreation facilities that are more comfort-oriented.
- Preference for individual or informal activities is increasing. People are looking for authentic "experiences."
- Participation by older adults in active recreation and sports has increased.
- The average age of outdoor recreation participants is increasing.
- The number of minority participants is increasing, most notably from Hispanic communities.

## Market Analysis and Conclusions

From these findings the following recommendations are reflected in the operational models developed for SWVA Museum:

- The design of the amenities and services should have a broad appeal for a wide range of visitors both local and from outside the primary and secondary service areas.
- Operations should be focused on presenting the Museum and the Collection to many types of visitors.
- Core business of the park will likely be from users within the primary and secondary service areas interested in the historical presentations and special events.
- Special events, festival, and rentals (such as weddings) are advised to provide supplemental income streams.

# PLAN DEVELOPMENT

This section of the report meets the Stage Two requirements of the Code of Virginia. These requirements include size, types, and locations of facilities and associated infrastructure, including roads and utilities. The Master Plan needs to include a proposed plan for phased development of potential facilities and infrastructure as well as development cost and operational, maintenance, and staffing needs.

The above requirements for SWVA Museum were evaluated through:

- A Business Plan analysis;
- Working meetings with:
  - DCR Planning and Recreation Resources (PRR) staff,
  - Virginia State Parks staff, and,
  - Public comment - during the Master Planning process, including two advertised public meetings and subsequent surveys to obtain input from the general public.

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

### Introduction

A needs assessment workshop for SWVA Museum was conducted to identify those resources that are needed to satisfy and provide the desired visitor experience. In addition, the needs assessment provides guidance for infrastructure, operations, and staffing at the park that will support that experience. The assessment was conducted through public input, analysis of the existing conditions, user groups, and input from park staff.

### Public Input

#### *Public Information and Public Comment Meetings*

Two public meetings were held at SWVA Museum. The first was a public information meeting designed to introduce the public to the Master Plan process, discuss critical resources at the park, and answer questions about the process. This meeting also gave attendees the opportunity to voice their ideas about what should be included in the Master Plan. The second public meeting was a public comment meeting. That meeting presented the proposed Master Plan of the park and received in-person and virtual public comment on the plan. A period of 30 days followed the meeting during which members of the public were able to comment on the plan.

#### *SWVA Museum Survey*

A survey was distributed at the public information meeting and made available online. A total of 19 responses were received.

- 14 surveys were submitted online, and the remainder (5) were turned in on the night of the public comment meeting.
- 14 of the respondents had previously visited the museum.
- Frequency of visitation was evenly divided among the respondents from only once to once a month or

more often.

- Of those that had never visited the park, the only response was a lack of knowledge about the Museum.
- 18 respondents reported that the primary motivation for visiting the park was events, followed by the exhibits.
- 13 of the respondents said that they would return to the park, with none saying they would not, and one saying maybe.
- When asked what the primary motivation would be for returning to the park, 10 respondents said for events, 4 for programs, and 2 for rotating exhibits
- For those unlikely to return to the park, 2 respondents reported that they could be persuaded to return by special events and the Festival of Trees.
- 6 respondents reported that their favorite part of the Museum experience was the exhibits, 5 said events, 4 said friendly staff and volunteers, 4 said history/culture/art/architecture/woodwork.
- 5 respondents reported that their least favorite part of the Museum experience was the maintenance, followed by parking, lighting and uneven sidewalks.
- When responding to how the Museum's programs could be improved, 3 respondents answered by offering diverse topics and /subject matter, as well as rotation of exhibits. Other answers included more special events, and more funding and staffing.
- For those who had attended special events at the Museum, 8 respondents reported having attended the Festival of Trees, 4 at the Quilt Show, and 3 at Gathering at the Gap. Several reported having attended "all of them," with music events, Tea, Art Show, and Coffee House also mentioned.
- Respondents equally mentioned parking, lighting, attention to detail, space, and more music as ways to improve the special events.

#### *[Virginia Outdoors Plan \(VOP\) Survey Results](#)*

The VOP meets the federal requirement to develop a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) every five years. The plan is required in order for the state to receive federal funding for certain types of outdoor recreation. The SCORP is required to include public input that conveys the public's preferences and opinions on outdoor recreation. In Virginia, it provides feedback from Virginians on ways outdoor recreation can be improved, which activities and kinds of recreation are most enjoyed, and some of the more subtle ways these perspectives may differ depending on where people live.

The survey for the VOP provides statistically accurate information about the recreational needs and wants of Virginians throughout the state. The plan's development was led by Virginia Commonwealth's School of Government and Public Affairs.

The VOP Survey Survey results below (Table 2 VOP Survey Results 2021-2022) are specific to the region that SWVA Museum is in and reflect the statistically weighted answers to what activities respondents have participated in during the past 12 months. Over 3500 responses were received. Only those activities with more than 10% response are listed.

Table 2 VOP Survey Results 2021-2022

Activity	Percent Response
Walking for pleasure	54.9
Driving for pleasure	38.8
Visiting parks (local, state, national)	36.2
Viewing the water	33.5
Fresh water fishing	31.4
Swimming/outdoor pool	30.4
Visiting natural areas	29.1
Sunbathing/relaxing on a beach	28.5
Outdoor festivals	26
Visiting working farms, etc.	25.3
Swimming beach, lake, river	23.9
Canoeing/kayaking	23.8
Visiting historic areas	23.6
Music festivals	22.9
Viewing scenery	22.8
Pools	22.2
Gardening	21.6
Picnicking away from home	21.4
Visiting playgrounds	19.9
Visiting gardens/arboretums	17.6
Hiking/backpacking day trip	17.6
Nature-based tours/trails	16.9
Tubing on water	14.8
Shooting range	14.8
Culinary tours/trails*	13.8
Hunting	13.3
Jogging/running	13.3
18-hole golf	13.1
Basketball	12.5
Snow sledding/tubing	12.4
Paddling on scenic rivers	12.3
Miniature golf	11.4
Paved or gravel bicycle trail	11.4
Sporting events/tournaments	11
Ice skating, outdoor	10.7

Tent camping	10.7
Visiting private farms/forests	10.7
Bird watching away from home	10.2

#### Past Visitation Numbers

Attendance tracking in parks is always difficult, especially at SWVA Museum where the park has no single entry and exit point. The Museum has employed the following methods to provide a consistent mechanism for tracking visitors. The results of these efforts over the last five years are shown in Table 3.

1. Museum entry: as payment is required to tour the Museum, this is an easy number to track.
2. Programs and events: staff keep attendance lists for all the programs and events that they host.
3. Day Use: numbers include visitors who did not come to tour the Museum or for a specific event or program and yet may still use the park for activities such as picnicking in the garden or Railcar Lot or taking photos by the railcar.

Table 3 Park Visitation Numbers

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Cottage</b>	392	280	360	361	345
<b>Day Use</b>	36,078	11,305	5677	27,813	35,835
<b>Total</b>	<b>36,470</b>	<b>11,585</b>	<b>6037</b>	<b>28,174</b>	<b>36,180</b>

#### PHASED DEVELOPMENT

Within the state park system, park needs vary significantly and depend on a variety of factors including the purpose of the park, the users, desired visitor experiences, existing conditions, and proposed and existing infrastructure in both the park and the surrounding community.

DCR utilized several methods to assess the needs of SWVA Museum. These included:

- Soliciting feedback during a public information meeting held April 4, 2023, where the public gave feedback through a survey that was made available in written and electronic form,
- Conducting an internal needs assessment workshop with staff to collect their feedback,
- Conducting interviews with local stakeholders and conducting a Level-of-Service analysis with the aid of ESRI's Community Analyst tool.

Based on the outcome of these assessments, the following needs including the potential size, types and locations of facilities and associated infrastructure including roads and utilities were developed.

#### DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT GUIDANCE

Due to Southwest Virginia's unique setting and purpose amongst Virginia's state parks, all proposed facilities and associated infrastructure, including landscaping, should be developed with materials and in a style that keeps with

the aesthetic of the neighborhood and character of the Museum.

## **FUTURE ACQUISITION CONSIDERATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT**

As additional properties in the vicinity of the Museum become available, DCR should evaluate their potential for acquisition into the SWVA Museum, to further the purpose of and meet the future needs of the park. This is especially important when it comes to finding a location for the future Collections Storage Facility proposed as part of this Master Plan. While critical to the park today, this facility has been planned for Phase 2 due to the preliminary land acquisition needs that must come first.

## **PROPOSED 30-YEAR DEVELOPMENT BY PHASES – VISITOR EXPERIENCE NEEDS**

### **PHASE 1** (See map on page 70)

#### **Construct a Maintenance Facility**

Currently the SWVA Museum lacks a designated maintenance facility, and the current sheds that the park utilizes are not adequate for routine needs. As such, the following is recommended:

- Maintenance Facility to be built on the Park's Leach Lot.
- The surrounding shop yard fence should be solid / non-transparent and constructed of a material and design that complements the historic character of the district. Two gates on either side of the facility should be planned to provide ease of entrance and exit.
- Two bays to support equipment. Bay entrances should face the northwest, away from Cherokee Avenue West.
- Landscaping with trees, shrubs, and flowers as appropriate.
- Office space for at least two maintenance staff members, storage space, a restroom, and small laundry facility with one washer and dryer to support the park.
- One shed for storage of fuel and paint and an attached pole shed.
- Appropriate parking, security system, and utility connections.

#### **Improve Accessibility at Park**

There are no ADA accessible restrooms at the park and parking spaces need to be improved. Accessibility to the upper floors of the Museum is lacking. As such, the following is recommended:

- Two ADA spaces for the Museum located outside the stone wall and adjacent to the gate that leads from Shawnee Avenue into the Museum lot. Includes grading, site preparation, materials, striping and signage, and a sidewalk to the Museum area, as well as removal of the existing parking space, and addition of landscaping to the area. Consider the use of stamped concrete that looks like stone.
- Conduct an Architectural Feasibility Study to determine potential avenues to expand ADA access at the Park.
- Relocate five HVAC units and construct a no less than 14' x 24' accessible comfort station on the southwest side of the Museum to serve as a restroom facility.

- The Comfort station will include one restroom with one sink and two toilet stalls, one of which will be accessible, and one restroom with one sink, one urinal and one stall being accessible.
- Mechanical room between the two restrooms and an accessible drinking fountain on the outside of the building. Includes connection to utilities and sidewalk modifications.

## Improve Exterior Lighting throughout the Park

Several public comments indicated that the current lighting at the park is not adequate. This is especially true during special events that run into the evening hours. Safety is a concern here for walking on the park sidewalks from the event location to parking areas. As such, the area around the Museum block as well as the Administrative Building, Railcar Lot, and Maintenance facility should receive lighting upgrades, including underground wiring, low-level lighting fixtures, pole mount lighting, repairs to existing sidewalk and additional sidewalk.

- All lighting should be designed to fit with the character of the historic Museum and Park. Due to the historic theme of the park and surrounding neighborhood, typical bollards and pole lights would not be appropriate selections for this park.
- Work with electrical company to expand dusk to dawn streetlights where appropriate.
- Add post-top lights to fences at the Railcar and Ball lots, 40 and 38 respectively.
- On the sidewalks along 1st Street and Wood Avenue, add recessed lighting into the sidewalks (every 10 feet for the distance of 354', equating to about 36 lights)
- Improve landscaping lighting around the museum and expand to the park administrative building. This would include approximately 55 lights at the museum and 53 at the administrative building (approximate locations indicated with red dots on map at the end of the document).
- Add lighting to the stairways around the museum grounds to include (stairways are highlighted in orange on map at the end of the document):
  - Handrail lights for single rail, 7 steps
  - Handrail lights for double rail, 7 step.
  - Handrail lights for double rail, 8 steps
  - Step lights for 10 steps.

## PHASE 2

### Exhibit Refresh

Before the current Master Planning cycle began in late 2022, staff of the Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park were already beginning to work with internal and external partners to discuss the replacement of the Museum's exhibits. In 2024, the park continued early planning stages of this work as an exhibit prospectus was developed, proposals were solicited from private design firms, and a design firm was selected. Currently the design work is expected to officially begin in September 2024. Through engaging and relevant use of indoor exhibits and displays, the new exhibit design shall efficiently utilize all three floors and the basement of the historic stone structure in which the Museum is housed to interpret the history and culture of the Commonwealth's far southwestern coal-producing counties in a manner that is consistent with the park's

mission as outlined in this Master Plan. Since the current exhibit design work began before the development of this Master Plan, its associated costs have not been included in the Phase 1 capital development needs. However, as exhibits optimally would be refreshed at least once every several decades, an estimate of \$2 Million has been included in Phase 3 for a future design and exhibit update.

## Collections Storage Facility

A modern Collections Storage Facility (ideally 10,000 sqft), designed and built to standards appropriate for the storage of artifacts, is sorely needed (current collections storage is 2,392 sf). If a separate property could be obtained and acquired, this facility would become a higher priority on the Phase 1 list of immediate needs. Currently there is no property identified, however. Some discussions have revolved around utilizing the lot on which the Park Manager's residence is currently located. However, in that situation, another nearby residence would need to be purchased by the commonwealth.

- Per the previous Master Plan, the Collections Storage Facility should be two stories and include a sprinkler/fire alarm system, security system, elevator, covered unloading area, isolated climate control systems for cleaning/storage/office space, cleaning area ventilation system, generator, collection storage units, connection to existing utilities, and fencing.
- The internal storage system could possibly be modeled after other Museum archives with rolling tracks (e.g., Virginia DHR Headquarters) to maximize storage space usability.
- This project should also include parking adjacent to the Collections Storage Facility. Previously these were two items in the Master Plan; moving forward, these items should be considered together.
- If new construction, the facility and fencing need to be in keeping with the aesthetics of the neighborhood, depending on the location.
- There is the potential for purchasing a suitable facility if one readily becomes available in Big Stone Gap.

## Convert Carriage House to Classrooms and Collections Workspace:

Once the Collection Storage Facility is in place and items are moved over, the existing Carriage House should be remodeled into a multi-use facility:

- A portion of the remodeled Carriage House should be planned for classrooms as well as a programming/visitor experience area that caters to children of all abilities.
- A portion of the remodeled downstairs should be planned as a Collections work area (i.e., for archival and restoration efforts.) It has been suggested that perhaps there could be a glass pane in front of the collections work area that would allow visitors to see archival efforts in action, similar to what some Museums utilize (e.g., Mariner's Museum, Virginia DHR Headquarters).
- Renovate existing bathroom and add an additional, ADA-compliant bathroom with changing areas (for infants and up), as well as a lactation space.

## New Administrative Offices with Meeting Space:

- Administrative Offices, either a new build or repurposed building, are needed in order to provide proper

office space for staff, proper storage, a meeting space, a kitchen, and multiple restrooms, including an accessible restroom if the facility is more than one level. Proper parking, a security system, etc., would be needed.

- The design of the new Administrative Offices should be in keeping with the aesthetics of the neighborhood.
- If a new build, the facility would include six offices, a collections office and workspace, a storage room, and two staff restroom facilities. The conference/event space portion of the building would include a meeting room, storage room, kitchen, and public restrooms (men's and women's.) The women's restroom would have one sink and two toilet stalls, one being an accessible stall. The men's restroom would have one sink, one urinal and one accessible stall.

If the Administrative Offices are to be replaced, this may also impact the Poplar Hill Cottage. Considerations should be made to make sure that the Administrative Offices complement the Cottage, and that future Cottage guests still have a private area, such as a courtyard, to themselves.

## PHASE 3

### Poplar Hill Cottage Renovations

Includes exterior remodeling of the existing 1,282 sf cottage as well as an interior kitchen remodeling.

### Ball Lot Renovations:

Permeable pavers installed to improve parking for daily operations and events. Lot is 95' x 130' in size and will provide parking for up to 40 vehicles.

## STAFFING AND OPERATIONS

Current staffing for SWVA Museum Historical State Park includes five full-time employees (FTEs): a Park Manager, Assistant Park Manager (Historic Preservation Specialist), Office Manager, Chief Ranger – Visitor Experience, and Park Ranger – Maintenance.

Compared to many professional museums, SWVA Museum Historical State Park is understaffed. While the current staff provide exceptional service to the system and its visitors, they need additional assistance in positions ranging from administrative to maintenance to collections management to interpretation and visitor experience. In fact, an internal 2019 study of field operations for Virginia State Parks identified that the total recommended FTEs for the park at the time was 9 FTE positions, and that there was a deficit of 4 FTE positions. Five years later, at the onset of this master plan's development, there had been no additional FTE positions added to the park. Therefore, even before additional capital development occurs, there is a need to immediately fill 4 FTE positions.

The four immediate staffing needs at the park include an Assistant Park Manager to assist with administration as well as manage special events, which play a key role at not only the park but the greater Big Stone Gap community; an Education Specialist to assist with the heavy programming load at the park and in the community; and, a Park Ranger (Historic Maintenance) to handle the regular maintenance of historic buildings on the property. Additionally, a Chief Ranger (Collections Manager) is needed to assist with the daily management and care of the collection, which includes a multitude of responsibilities such as environmental monitoring, integrated pest management, maintaining current artifact inventories, accessioning new acquisitions, assisting with loans,

exhibitions, specialized knowledge in regulatory compliance (e.g. Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)), and more.

In addition to identified immediate needs, SWVA Museum Historical State Park will need additional positions as the park is developed. For example, the need for an additional Park Ranger – Historic Maintenance has been identified in conjunction with the Master Plan Phase 1. This position would require more specialized skills necessary to properly care for structures and landscapes currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register. This designation is an honor and indicates that the properties have been diligently researched, evaluated, and determined to be worthy of preservation. Additionally, as a state owned property on the Virginia Landmarks Register, the park is legally obligated to work with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources to ensure the historic integrity of these buildings are retained. While multiple Park Ranger – Historic Maintenance positions could be utilized at the park today, the construction of a new Maintenance Facility and associated offices would provide the needed space for such a position.

Phase 2 features capital development needs that will greatly change the day-to-day management of the park. The new Collections Storage Facility and modern storage system, as well as the Collections workspace in the renovated Carriage House, will allow the park to operate according to the standards of a traditional curated professional museums. At minimum, another Park Ranger (Collections Specialist) will be required to assist with the Collection. The renovated Carriage House will also include classrooms with immersive, hand-on experiences for children, allowing the park to expand upon its current Visitor Experience programming at the park. Currently there are very few spaces at the park to host traditional classroom-type experiences, and these classrooms will open many new possibilities; an additional Education Specialist will be hired to aid in this effort. Both development pieces will also bring on additional volunteers, in addition to the extensive volunteer base, and necessitate volunteer duties being transferred from the current wage staff level to a FTE Volunteer Coordinator position. Likewise, to assist with the growing staff, operations, educational opportunities, and special events, an Office Assistant will be brought on to help with administrative management at the park.

No additional positions are currently planned for Phase 3.

## Proposed 30-Year Development by Phases – Staffing Needs

### Existing Staffing (FY 2024)

- One full time employee (FTE) Park Manager
- One FTE Assistant Park Manager (Historic Preservation Specialist)
- One FTE Office Manager
- One FTE Chief Ranger – Visitor Experience
- One FTE Park Ranger (Maintenance)

### Immediate Needs

- One FTE Assistant Park Manager (Administration/Special Events)
- One FTE Chief Ranger (Working Title of “Collections Manager”)

- One FTE Education Specialist (Focused on External Programs, Tours, Schools, etc.)
- One FTE Park Ranger (Maintenance – Historic Trades)
- Three Wage Staff (Maintenance, Office Assistant and Housekeeping duties, respectively)

## Phase 1

- One FTE Park Ranger (Historic Trades Maintenance)
- One Wage Staff (Maintenance)

## Phase 2

- One FTE Office Assistant
- One FTE Education Specialist (Focused on In-House Park Programs)
- One FTE Park Ranger (Working Title of “Collections Specialist”)
- One FTE Volunteer Coordinator
- Two Wage Staff (Curatorial and Events, respectively)

## Phase 3

None for Phase 3

## CONSTRUCTION COSTS PER PHASE

Table 4 Planning Bureau Cost Analysis

**PLANNING BUREAU COST ANALYSIS - estimated sizes and costs**
**South West Virginia Museum State Park**
**Master Plan - Phase 1** Prepared by: JGH

1/8/2024 - DRAFT

Description		Unit	Unit Cost	Total
<b>Phase 1</b>				
Maintenance Facility - 2 bays, restroom, storage, office for two members and laundry	1600	SF	\$ 400	\$640,000
All buildings in maintenance area to be designed to match the character of the neighborhood				
Storage building for paint and fuel - 10'x10'	100	SF	\$ 500	\$50,000
Pole Shed - 12' x 12'	144	SF	\$ 500	\$72,000
Fencing -brick or wood fence with two gates designed to match the character of the neighborhood	300	LF	\$ 200	\$60,000
Landscaping	1	LS	\$ 25,000	\$25,000
Paving	355	SY	\$ 150	\$53,250
Water (property has access to public utilities - water, elec., & sewer))	100	LF	\$ 50	\$5,000
Electric	100	LF	\$ 50	\$5,000
Sewer	1	LS	\$ 25,000	\$25,000
Accessible Parking Spaces (3 spaces) - stamped concrete	120	SY	\$ 300	\$36,000
New landscaping	1	LS	\$ 10,000	\$10,000
Remove existing parking space and landscape	1	LS	\$ 5,000	\$5,000
Construct accessible comfort station - southwest side of the Museum - designed to reflect the aesthetics of the existing musum and tentatively sized to 14' x 24'	350	SF	\$ 700	\$245,000
Water (property has access to public utilities - water, elec., & sewer)	50	LF	\$ 50	\$2,500
Electric	50	LF	\$ 50	\$2,500
Sewer	1	LS	\$ 25,000	\$25,000
Relocate and Replace (5) existing exterior mechanical(condensing) units	5	EA	\$ 10,000	\$50,000
Exterior Lighting throughout the Park				\$0
Post lights at Railcar and Ball parking lots (40 lights at Railcar 38 lights at Ball lot)	78	EA	\$ 750	\$58,500
Sidewalk lighting recessed in concrete - for 350' linear feet (on public sidewalk)	36	EA	\$ 1,000	\$36,000
Landscape lighting - 55 lights at Museum and 53 at Admin. Building	108	EA.	\$ 750	\$81,000
Stairway lighting at 4 existing locations	75	LF	\$ 100	\$7,500
Accessibility Feasibility Study of the existing Museum building - with cost estimate	1	LS	\$ 50,000	\$50,000
Description		Unit	Unit Cost	Total

<b>PHASE 1 CONSTRUCTION SUBTOTAL</b>				<b>\$1,544,250</b>
A/E Fee (17% see note 1) includes stormwater mgmt. & E&S control measures				\$262,523
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>				<b>\$1,806,773</b>
Contingency (10% see note 2)				\$154,425
Other Project Costs (10% see note 3)				\$180,677
<b>TOTAL</b>				
				<b>\$2,141,875</b>
		<b>Phase I Total</b>		<b>\$2,141,875</b>

## SOUTH WEST VIRGINIA MUSEUM STATE PARK MASTER PLAN - PHASE 2

Description	Unit	Unit Cost	Total
<b>Phase 2</b>			
New Collections Storage Facility (building site unknown currently)- 2 story building with an elevator and exterior fencing.	SF	\$ 600	\$6,000,000
Collection Storage System - like Rolling Archive Shelves/ Southwest Solutions Group	LS	\$ 250,000	\$250,000
Exhibits Refresh	LS	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000
Parking- 10 parking spaces	SY	\$ 125	\$80,000
Water (the cost is based on water being at the site)	LF	\$ 50	\$10,000
Electric (the cost is based on electric being at the site)	LF	\$ 50	\$10,000
Sewer (the cost is based on a drainfield septic system)	LS	\$ 100,000	\$100,000
Renovate Carriage House to Classrooms and Collections Workspace including accessible toilet rooms	SF	\$ 400	\$956,800
Elevator	LS	\$ 100,000	\$100,000
Parking - 2 spaces	SY	\$ 125	\$16,000
New Administrative Office with Meeting Space	SF	\$ 350	\$2,450,000
Water	LF	\$ 50	\$5,000
Electric	LF	\$ 50	\$5,000
Sewer	LS	\$ 25,000	\$25,000
<b>PHASE 2 CONSTRUCTION SUBTOTAL</b>			<b>\$10,007,800</b>
A/E Fee (17% see note 1) includes stormwater mgmt. & E&S control measures			\$1,701,326
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>			<b>\$11,709,126</b>
Contingency (10% see note 2)			\$1,000,780
Other Project Costs (10% see note 3)			\$1,170,913
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$13,880,819</b>
	<b>Phase 2 Total</b>		<b>\$15,880,819</b>



Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation

## SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA MUSEUM HISTORICAL STATE PARK MASTER PLAN 2024 UPDATE

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

### SOUTH WEST VIRGINIA MUSEUM STATE PARK MASTER PLAN - PHASE 3

Description	Unit	Unit Cost	Total
<b>Phase 3</b>			
Exhibits Refresh	LS	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000
Renovate the Poplar Hill Cottage	SF	\$ 400	\$512,800
Ball Parking Lot - install permeable pavers - 95' x 130'	SY	\$ 250	\$343,000
<b>PHASE 3 CONSTRUCTION SUBTOTAL</b>			<b>\$855,800</b>
A/E Fee (17% see note 1) includes stormwater mgmt. & E&S control measures			\$145,486
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>			<b>\$1,001,286</b>
Contingency (10% see note 2)			\$85,580
Other Project Costs (10% see note 3)			\$100,129
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$1,186,995</b>
<b>Total Master Plan Costs</b>			<b>\$3,186,995</b>
			<b>\$21,209,688</b>

#### Notes:

1 - A/E Fee - 17% includes site visits, code reviews, agency reviews, plan reviews, bidding, construction administration, project close out.

2 - Contingency - 10% due to minimal project scope and unknown site conditions.

3 - Other Project Costs - 10% includes project mgmt/inspection, equipment and furnishings, exhibits, site survey, abatement, geotech, materials testing, document printing / bid ads, utility connection fees - all as per the Construction & Professional Services Manual

## SWVA MUSEUM STAFFING BUILDOUT

The Virginia State Park Staffing Buildout Matrix identifies the staffing complement of a park based on size and resources, number and type of facilities, as well as types of programming and activities. The staffing complement will be re-evaluated with the addition of new facilities All costs such as salary, wage, and "Other than Personnel Services" (OTPS) are based on FY24 budget projections

Table 5 Staffing Buildout

POSITION (FY24)	CURRENT POSITION	IMMEDIATE NEEDS VIA STAFFING MATRIX	NEEDS WITH PHASE 1 BUILD OUT	NEEDS WITH PHASE 2 BUILD OUT	NEEDS WITH PHASE 3 BUILD OUT	NUMBER AT FULL BUILD OUT
Park Manager	X					1
Assistant Park Manager (Historic Preservation Specialist)	X					1
Assistant Park Manager (Administration/Special Events)		X				1
Office Manager	X					1
Office Assistant				X		1
Chief Ranger (Collections Manager)		X				1
Chief Ranger – Visitor Experience	X					1
Education Specialist		X		X		2
Park Ranger (Historic Maintenance)	X	X	X			3
Park Ranger (Collections Specialist)				X		1
Volunteer Coordinator				X		1
	<b>FTE SALARY WITH BENEFITS TOTAL</b>					<b>FTE SALARY WITH BENEFITS TOTAL</b>
	\$375,667	\$383,748	\$83,537	\$346,502	\$0	\$1,189,454
	<b>WAGE TOTAL</b>					<b>WAGE TOTAL</b>
	\$78,925	\$67,500	\$22,500	\$45,000	\$0	\$213,925
	<b>OTPS TOTAL</b>					<b>OTPS TOTAL</b>
	\$139,699	\$0	\$17,272	\$150,441	\$0	\$307,412
	<b>TOTAL BUDGET (FY24 DOLLARS)</b>					<b>TOTAL BUDGET (FY24 dollars)</b>
	\$594,291	\$451,248	\$123,309	\$541,943	\$0	\$1,710,791

## CONCLUSION

The Master Plan for the SWVA Museum makes recommendations for park improvements in a phased development scenario over the next 30 years. The plan also makes recommendations for staffing to accompany those improvements.

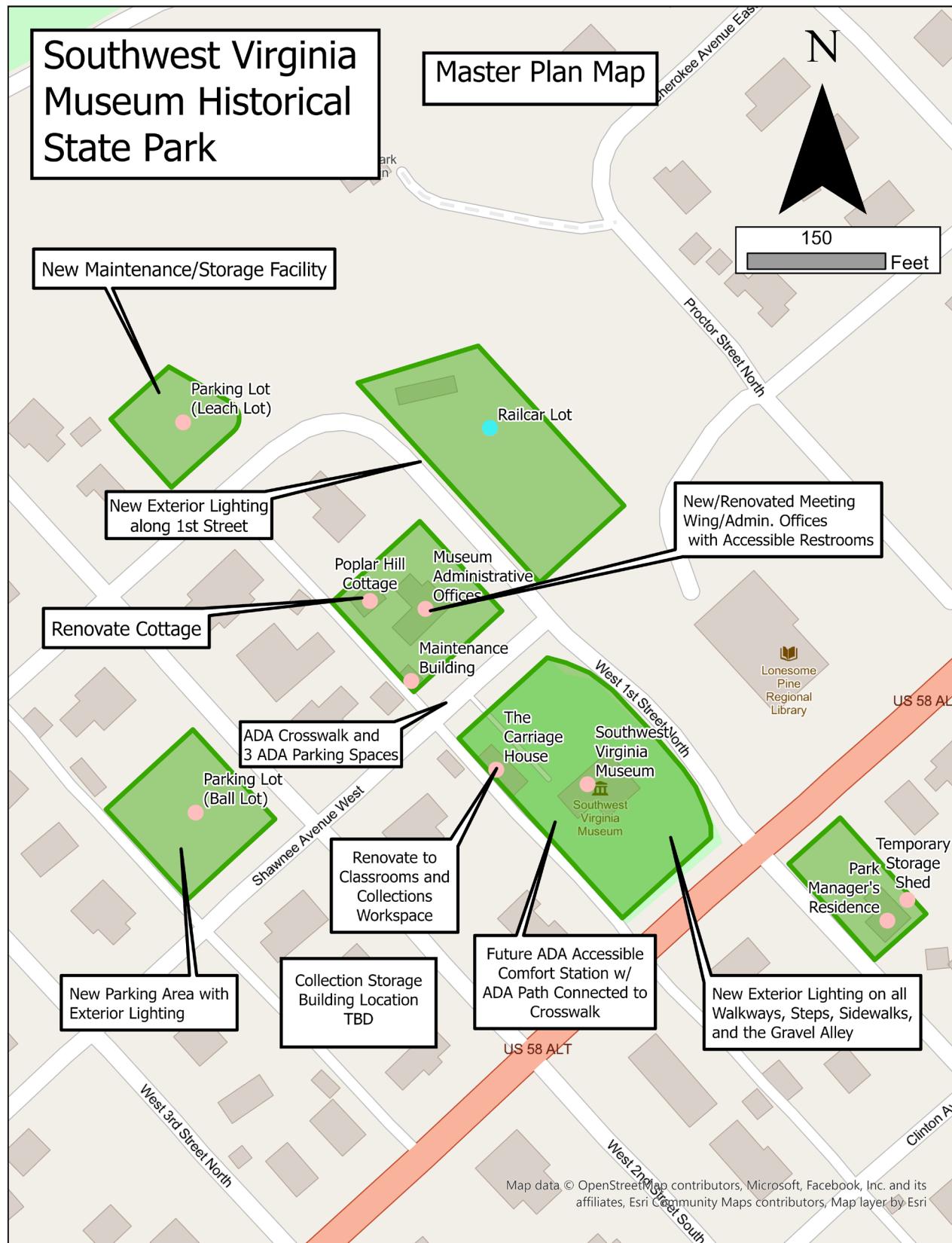
The recommendations are based on analysis and evaluation of the existing resources, wants, needs, and expectations of defined visitor groups, the desired visitor experience, demographic information, and analysis of the various park users.

## PHASED DEVELOPMENT

The Master Plan provides a blueprint for improvements at the park over the next 30 years in three phases.

All proposed facilities and associated infrastructure should be developed with materials and in a style that keeps with the aesthetic of the neighborhood and character of the Museum.

- The first phase includes the much-needed construction of a maintenance facility. It also includes improvements to accessibility at the park and improved exterior lighting. Estimated cost is \$2,141,875.
- The second phase includes the construction of a collection storage facility that would be design specifically for that purpose, with the proper climate control, security, and fire protection. This phase also includes an exhibit refresh, conversion of the carriage house to classrooms and collections workspace, new administrative offices, and meeting space. Estimated cost is \$15,880,819.
- The third phase would see the renovation of the Poplar Hill Cottage, further exhibit refresh and additional parking in the Ball Lot using permeable paving and supplying parking for up to 40 vehicles. Estimated cost is \$3,186,995.
- The total buildout cost estimate is \$21,209,688.
- The total staffing cost (in FY 2024 dollars) for the full buildout is \$1,710,791.



## APPENDICES

### SUMMARY OF COMPLEMENTARY PLANS

The full Master Plan for any park within the state park system is a composite of separate plans that come together to assure the best management and stewardship of the land and its resources, while providing an exemplary experience for all visitors and staff. These plans include the Resource Management Plan, the Visitor Experience Plan, and the Park Business Plan. Following are summaries of these plans for the SWVA Museum.

### BUSINESS PLAN

The Division of State Parks completed a Business Plan for SWVA Museum which was published in January of 2020 and is included in this Master Plan by reference. Portions of this plan including the economic impact section were produced in partnership with and as part of a memorandum of understanding between Virginia Tech and the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

The purpose of this business plan was to develop realistic expectations for enterprise operations and service development at SWVA Museum. It is recommended that the business plan be reevaluated and updated on a five-year rotational basis.

### SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS FROM BUSINESS PLAN INCLUDING MARKET/ECONOMIC INFO

The Business Plan identifies and projects the economic benefits of the park to the surrounding town and region. The total 5-year projected economic impacts of the SWVA Museum are summarized in the document as the following<sup>1</sup>:

Economic Activity:	\$25.5M
5-year spending by Park Visitors:	Virginia residents: \$9.7M Out-of-state residents: \$8.7M
Park Visitors' 4 largest spending Categories:	Hotels: \$4.0M Restaurants: \$3.8M Groceries: \$2.5M Gas: \$2.5M
Jobs (Average per year):	Total: 59.7 Direct: 45.0 Indirect: 5.6 Induced: 9.1
Labor Income:	Total: \$10.8M Direct: \$6.9M Indirect: \$1.8M Induced: \$2.1M
State and Local Tax Revenues Generated:	\$1.8M
Value-Added Effect:	\$16.2M
Economic Impact:	\$20.1M

<sup>1</sup> Southwest Virginia Museum Histsorical State Park Business Plan, January2020.

## VISITOR EXPERIENCE PLAN

A long-term goal for Virginia State Parks is to develop Visitor Experience Plans for each park that address the unique needs, wants, and expectations to help inform the goals and objectives of a state parks overall Master Plan. Before the development of this Master Plan, the SWVA Museum did not have a formal Visitor Experience Plan.

Through efforts undertaken as part of the development of this Master Plan, DCR staff completed an assessment of visitor experience needs. This assessment was accomplished through public outreach as part of the public information meeting, subsequent user surveys, stakeholder interviews, and internally as part of efforts that culminated in a visitor experience workshop. The workshop was held in June of 2022 with key members of the Master Planning Team and state park staff members.

The primary purpose of this workshop was to define the following to provide a solid foundation for future interpretive efforts at the park:

- Park purpose
- Central theme and subthemes
- Significant resources
- Audience types
- Visitor objectives
- Experience areas
- Essential experiences
- Opportunities for improving the visitor experience



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SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA MUSEUM HISTORICAL STATE PARK MASTER PLAN 2024 UPDATE

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Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation