



EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

NMIX 4510 CAPSTONE SPRING 2020

TEAM TALLASSEE PARK

TR 3:30-4:45

The Oconee River Land Trust (ORLT) is a non-profit institution with its roots right here in Athens, Georgia. ORLT is dedicated to developing and maintaining strong relationships with public and private landowners in and around the state of Georgia in order to “conserve natural forests and working lands along rivers, streams, and wetlands” (<http://oconeeriverlandtrust.org/>). In working with landowners and securing conservation easements throughout the state, the institution seeks to “protect water quality, preserve wildlife habitats, and enhance the quality of [people’s] lives” (<http://oconeeriverlandtrust.org/>). Alongside its conservation efforts, ORLT wants to help communities around conservation easements connect to the land and become comfortable in nature. Notably, the Oconee River Land Trust has secured 140 conservation easements and protected approximately 36,000 acres of land since its inception in 1993.

In 2012, the Athens-Clarke County government purchased land off of Tallasee Rd from a private landowner with SPLOST funding. Following this purchase, the local government entered into a conservation easement with the Oconee River Land Trust in order to protect the land from “inappropriate development” that would jeopardize natural habitats or water quality in and around the land (<http://oconeeriverlandtrust.org/>). ORLT then submitted a proposal to the Athens-Clarke County government in turn to renovate the untouched Tallasee land into a public park, and soon received SPLOST 2020 funding in order to do so. Goals of the Tallasee Park Project include: “creat[ing] opportunities for local neighborhoods, schools, and all residents to experience physical and psychological benefits of recreation in nature” as well as “provid[ing] a neighborhood resource for local schools (and those throughout the county) to experience and learn about the natural environment” (<https://www.athensclarkecounty.com/DocumentCenter/View/56911/18---79---Tallasee-Forest-Park->).

In order to help the Oconee River Land Trust achieve its goals of generating interest in recreational experiences in nature as well as providing a resource to learn about the environment for the school and community around the Tallasee Park, our team will create an iOS application, an Android application, and a webpage that the

community can use as a resource to engage with and learn about the Tallassee Park environment and what it has to offer for recreation and education. Since the park is currently under renovation and will be opened to the mass public next year at the earliest, our webpage and mobile applications will require group-specific log-ins from parties granted permission by the Athens-Clarke County government to access the land (e.g., Burney-Harris-Lyons Middle School staff and students) as well as the app's administrators within the ORLT. After our first meeting with our contact Laura Hall at The Oconee River Land Trust, we brainstormed the following features: interactive map of the park with suggested points of interest in the form of GPS points and corresponding pictures, as well as a feature for visitors to submit their own points of interest (e.g., rare plant or animal sightings). At this moment in time, the applications will also include games meant to engage and educate visitors about the park's environment with a user experience accessible to people of all ages (e.g., middle school students and their guides).

After our team's first meeting with our client, our contact Laura Hall provided valuable information that has guided our initial approach to developing and designing our iOS, Android, and web applications. Hall expressed a preference for the uncluttered aesthetics of the applications of museums, including the High Museum in Atlanta. When pitched the idea of an interactive map for the Tallassee Park including points of interests, Hall reacted enthusiastically. Following Hall's expressed preferences discussed during the initial client meeting, the team conducted research on existing applications from the websites and mobile applications of recreation.gov, the High Museum, and the Museum of Modern Art. Concerning the applications of the mentioned organizations and institutions, our team liked the uncluttered and clean designs, interactive maps, the ability to save favorite places, manage account information, make appointments/reservations through the app, and review personalized recommendations from previous visitors, among other traits that could be explored as we develop our applications in collaboration with ORLT.

The recreation.gov mobile application allows its users to search for points of interest (e.g., campgrounds) in the area around them by using their current location, save their favorite places they visit, as well as manage their personal/account information. Concerning an interactive map, this mobile application allows users to view photos along an interactive map of campgrounds and campsites. Users are also able to review personalized recommendations based on their location from previous visitors, which is a feature our team could potentially incorporate once the Tallassee Park is opened to the public. The mobile application also includes a search feature that allows users to search "criteria and filters based on what's important (e.g., price, amenities, and more)" (<https://www.recreation.gov/mobile-app>). Including a search feature in our mobile and web applications could enable users to search for specific points of interest throughout our interactive map or locations within the park, which will help them navigate and curate their own trips.

Similar to the recreation.gov mobile application, the ArtClix app from the High Museum "encourages visitors to interact with select works in the collections and with

each other” (<https://www.high.org/artclix/>). Indirect interaction is a foundational part of each of the aforementioned applications, and an element that could potentially be incorporated in our applications for the Tallassee Park Project. Users being able to select points of interest within Tallassee Park and comment on them, and other users being able to see these comments would be useful in our applications. Within ArtClix, users can “unlock surprising details about works of art”, which our team might be able to achieve concerning details about plant or animal life in the park. Users are also able to share their own photos on social media from the app and contribute their thoughts to an ArtClix community. Providing in-application social media access is key for any application in this day and age, and is a feature that has a place within the Tallassee Park applications in order for users to be able to share their own photos and thoughts about the parks with potential users/visitors. Moreover, creating a community specific to the Tallassee Park, or even to publicly accessible Oconee River Land Trust conservation easements might be valuable in terms of making users feel connected to one another and apart of something greater, not isolated in nature.

Another application that our team found in our research was the Museum of Modern Art’s audio app that allows users to hear about the art they will see during their visit to the MoMA. Users are able to “get new perspectives on modern masterworks as curators, artists, and others talk about [the pieces]” (<https://www.moma.org/visit/momaaudio>). Our team believes that we incorporate an audio feature into our mobile applications, allowing users to gain new perspectives on being in nature – specifically in the Tallassee Park – with audio entries from local experts concerning conservation easements, indigenous settlements in Georgia, etc. A notable fact about the MoMA audio app is its “detailed descriptions of key works [that] enhance[s] the experience for...blind and partially sighted visitors” (<https://www.moma.org/visit/momaaudio>). Everyone has the right to enjoy nature to its fullest extent, including blind and partially sighted individuals, as referenced by the MoMA. Including an audio component within the Tallassee Park app will increase its accessibility, which is a trait our team finds valuable and necessary.

In terms of places our team believes we can improve the aforementioned applications of recreation.gov, the High Museum, and the Museum of Modern Art, we believe carefully selecting the features detailed above and combining them in one app with a specific purpose to one plot of land is improvement in and of itself. Our team believes we would be improving upon these apps, in a manner of speaking, because we are taking inspiration from their best, most functional traits and deploying them in service of educating the public about the Tallassee Park. Using the cited features to educate users on an incredibly specific topic is an improvement and a way of using these features to their fullest in service of a niche topic as compared to, for example, all of the publicly accessible recreation campgrounds in the continental United States (i.e., recreation.gov mobile application).