



SEVEN SPRINGS

CREATING OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMIES

STRATEGIC PLAN

2024-2029

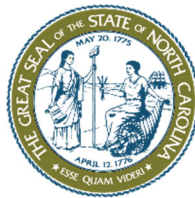


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NC DEPARTMENT
of COMMERCE
RURAL ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT



The REDD announced the technical assistance program offering Outdoor Recreation Economy Strategic Planning and Asset Development services in late 2022. Communities from across the state applied to engage with strategic planning services and 34 local governments were accepted to participate. Main Street & Rural Planning (MS&RP) staff, who is responsible for facilitating strategic economic development planning and implementation services, worked with local government staff to communicate the goals of the program, identify local opportunities, and assemble a planning work group.

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Seven Springs Town Council

Executive Summary

Through CORE, the Town of Seven Springs collaborated with the N.C. Department of Commerce, Rural Economic Development Division staff members and local stakeholders through a strategic planning process to identify and develop outdoor recreation assets that present economic growth opportunities. Strategy development focused on leveraging outdoor recreation assets to increase tourism, encourage small business development, enhance quality of life for residents, plan for outdoor recreation asset and infrastructure development, and position communities to grow and attract outdoor gear manufacturing industries. The planning process was tailored to meet the specific needs, goals, and opportunities that local stakeholders identified.

The plan proposes strategies, goals, objectives, and actions that communities can take to increase economic vitality by leveraging outdoor recreation. For the purposes of this strategic planning program outdoor recreation is defined as all recreational activities undertaken for leisure that occur outdoors, with an emphasis on those activities that involve some level of intentional physical exertion and occur in nature-based environments. Furthermore, other community assets and economic institutions that benefit from or complement the outdoor recreation economy are addressed in the plan.

Background

There is a long tradition of outdoor recreation in North Carolina. From the mountains to the coast and everywhere in between there are incredible landscapes and unique places to pursue a wide variety of outdoor recreation activities. Participation in these activities generates a large economic impact. In recent years statistics show that participation in outdoor recreation is increasing, particularly in the wake of COVID-19. Continued growth in participation leads to the opportunity for the increased economic impact of outdoor recreation, particularly in rural locations where many of the state's outdoor recreation assets are located. Also, there is great potential to expose and engage people that have historically not participated in outdoor recreation activities at the same rate as others. It is important for all individuals to have the opportunity and access to enjoy recreational pursuits, and to have an opportunity to benefit economically from outdoor recreation. These factors, combined with other on-going outdoor recreation initiatives across the state, make it an ideal time to think critically about how this sector can continue to be leveraged to benefit local economies.

Economic Impact

Outdoor recreation activity and associated expenditures generate a large economic impact. This is a broad economic sector that comprises a diverse range of industries including

manufacturing, retail, arts, entertainment, and recreation, as well as many supporting activities such as construction, travel and tourism, accommodation and food service, and many more.

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis' Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, nationwide, in 2022, the outdoor recreation economy represented \$563.7 billion in current-dollar gross domestic product (GDP), or 2.2 percent of the United States' total GDP. The outdoor recreation sector of the economy is growing at a faster rate than the overall economy. "Inflation-adjusted ("real") GDP for the outdoor recreation economy increased 4.8 percent in 2022, compared with a 1.9 percent increase for the overall U.S. economy, reflecting a deceleration from the increase in outdoor recreation of 22.7 percent in 2021. Real gross output for the outdoor recreation economy increased 7.5 percent, while outdoor recreation compensation increased 9.1 percent, and employment increased 7.4 percent (national table 9)." Employment in the outdoor recreation industry increased in all 50 states during 2022.

At the state level, outdoor recreation contributed \$14.5 billion in total value-added economic impact to North Carolina's GDP. North Carolina ranked as the 11th highest state in "Value-Added Outdoor Recreation in Total outdoor recreation activities" in 2022. This included employment for over 146,000 individuals that resulted in over \$6.8 billion in total compensation. Employment in key industries within the outdoor recreation sector includes over 7,600 in manufacturing, 51,000 in retail, 27,000 in accommodation and food service, and over 29,000 in arts, entertainment, and recreation.¹

Outdoor Recreation Participation

According to the 2022 Outdoor Industry Association 'Outdoor Participation Trends Report', "outdoor participation continues to grow at record levels. More than half (54%) of Americans ages 6 and over participated in at least one outdoor activity in 2021, and the outdoor recreation participant base grew 2.2% in 2021 to 164.2M participants. This growing number of outdoor participants, however, did not fundamentally alter long-term declines in high frequency or 'core' outdoor participation."²

Studies show that approximately 56% of North Carolinians participate in some form of outdoor recreation each year.³ This includes more than 22.8 million visitors to North Carolina state parks

¹ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2022. <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation>

² Outdoor Industry Association. 2022 Outdoor Participation Trends Report. <https://outdoorindustry.org/resource/2022-outdoor-participation-trends-report/>

³ The Citizen-Times. North Carolina outdoor recreation is a \$28 billion industry, poised for further growth. October 11th, 2019. <https://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/2019/10/11/outdoor-economy-conference-asheville-highlights-28-billion-industry/3923846002/>

in 2021 — three million more than any other year on record. Many parks, national forests, and other public recreation areas report increased visitation as well. These numbers represent a solid base of individuals participating in outdoor recreation and contributing to associated economic activity. But there is still room to engage more individuals and continue to increase participation in outdoor recreation, particularly among populations that have not historically participated in outdoor recreation at levels comparable to others. Also, people increasingly want outdoor recreation opportunities that are convenient to where they live so they can participate on a regular basis without the need to travel long distances.^{4 5}

Setting

The Town of Seven Springs (population 55)⁶ is located in southeast Wayne County along the banks of the Neuse River. Seven Springs is approximately 16 miles from Goldsboro, 17 miles from Kinston, 14 miles from Mt. Olive, and is conveniently accessible to the broader region from NC 70.

The town is also located in close proximity to the Cliffs of the Neuse State Park, which is approximately four miles away via the highway, but only two and a half miles along the river. The park is perched on top of towering bluffs along the Neuse River, and is a forested ecosystem complete with hardwoods, pines, and riparian bottomlands. Activities available in the park include hiking, biking, paddling, swimming, picnicking and more. The park maintains many high-quality amenities to enhance the enjoyment of visitors including a visitor's center and exhibits, boat rentals, tent and RV camping sites, picnic shelters, bathhouses, and a swimming beach.

The section of the Neuse River connecting the park and town is also a part of the Mountains-to-Sea Paddle Trail. The state park and the Mountains-to-Sea Trail (MST), in addition to forthcoming local park improvements which include development of additional RV sites and a new community park and pavilion, provide great outdoor recreation amenities in Seven Springs and place the town in a position to benefit economically from outdoor recreation participation. At least one existing business in town, Neuse River Trading, directly benefits and is engaged in the outdoor recreation economy. Other local businesses, such as restaurants, likely receive indirect benefits from customers patronizing their establishments.

⁴ Headwaters Economics. Recreation Counties Attracting New Residents and Higher Incomes. <https://headwaterseconomics.org/economic-development/trends-performance/recreation-counties-attract/>

⁵ Outdoor Foundation. 2022 Outdoor Participation Trends Report. <https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2022-Outdoor-Participation-Trends-Report.pdf>

⁶ US Census Bureau. 2020 Census. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/decade/2020/2020-census-main.html>

Existing Plan Review

In an effort to complement and build upon subsequent community planning efforts, staff assembled and reviewed other relevant plans and documents. This review provides valuable insight and helps avoid duplication or contradictions of past planning proposals. The following documents were reviewed and considered during the CORE planning process.

Eastern Carolina Council Community Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

Seven Springs is located within the Eastern Carolina Council Economic Development District (EDD). The vision statement for the Eastern Carolina Council region states that “tourism and recreation flourish through utilization of key natural and historic attractions and the success of small businesses” indicating that this is a key to future economic prosperity in the region. One of the priority areas identified in the CEDS is to “create healthy and connected communities and improve quality of life,” and acknowledges that the availability of recreational amenities is critical in maintaining quality of life, enhancing livability, and “attracting and retaining the needed talent pool” to sustain economic competitiveness and vitality. They expect that this strategy will help the region “attract and retain younger talent by promoting the region’s livability and access to exceptional nature and outdoor recreation opportunities.” They also suggest the region should “prioritize strategies that support the growth of tourism and value-added natural resource industries (including ecotourism, marine-related activities, sustainable farming, and local food and beverage production) to enhance economic opportunities in rural areas.” Seven Springs’ CORE plan seeks to advance the priorities of the Eastern Carolina Council CEDS.⁷

2018 Seven Springs Recovery Plan

In response to the widespread damage caused by Hurricane Matthew in 2016, the Town of Seven Springs engaged in disaster recovery planning efforts. The result was a plan to help the town forge a path forward in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew and become more resilient to potential future natural disasters. Among the goals identified in the Recovery Plan, several directly align with the objectives of the CORE plan’s focus including:

- Goal 4: Environment – “Take action to protect the area’s natural and cultural resources that contributes to the water quality of the Neuse River, mitigates the impacts of future disasters, and fosters ecotourism.”
- Goal 5: Open Space – “Recognize the recreation/open space potential of the town’s natural areas and of land acquired through multiple grant programs.”

⁷2023-27 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. Eastern Carolina Council. <https://eccog.org/economic-development-planning/>

- Goal 6: Land Use – “Apply land use measures that mitigate the impacts of flooding, preserve natural and cultural resources, foster safe growth, build an ecotourism economy, and provide housing opportunities for current and future residents.”
- Goal 8: Economic Development – “Develop an ecotourism economy that builds on the town’s history and the beauty of its natural surroundings.”

The CORE plan seeks to build upon this planning effort and provide concrete actions that town leaders and partners can take to advance these goals.⁸

Cliffs of the Neuse State Park General Management Plan

All state parks are governed by a general management plan. Cliffs of the Neuse State Park’s management plan includes a project list that outlines the park’s planned improvements over the coming years. This management plan outlines the State Parks plans for allowable uses, maintenance, and future improvements.⁹ Cliffs of the Neuse State Park is a major recreational draw to the Seven Springs area attracting 241,375 visitors in FY 2021-2022.¹⁰ Increased engagement with park leadership and targeted efforts to leverage the proximity of the town to the park will substantially impact the town’s effort to improve community and economic development.



Planning Process

Under the REDD, MS&RP Center staff facilitates the CORE strategic planning process with participation from the local government and an established local work group. This work group is comprised of individuals who have a vested interest in leveraging outdoor recreation to enhance economic development. The planning process employs established planning methods including presenting economic and associated data, asset mapping, economic driver identification, SWOT analysis, local work group discussions, and more. The planning process was tailored to meet the specific needs, goals, and opportunities that local stakeholders identified.

⁸ 2018 Seven Springs Recovery Plan. Hurricane Matthew Disaster Recovery and Resiliency Initiative, Coastal Resilience Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel-Hill.

⁹ North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Division of Parks and Recreation. Cliffs of the Neuse State Park General Management Plan. May 2017.

¹⁰ North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. FY 2021-2022 Visitation Data.

Situational Analysis

The MS&RP staff began the planning process by having conversations with town leaders to convey the intent of the CORE program and receive feedback on the overarching aspirations and expectations of what the town hopes to achieve through this strategic planning process. A site tour was hosted so that MS&RP staff could have a better understanding of local recreational and economic assets. A questionnaire was developed to obtain feedback from the local planning committee prior to the formal work group meetings. The intent of this questionnaire was to obtain more detailed information on local assets, potential opportunities, and a better understanding of local priorities. As indicated above, a review of existing planning documents was also performed.

Local Work Group Establishment and Involvement

The local work group was assembled by the local government's lead contact and included individuals with a vested stake in the Seven Springs community. These individuals included elected officials, friends of the state park, Cliffs of the Neuse State Park staff, and other community members. These individuals provided local knowledge, input via questionnaires and topical discussion, and helped to shape the vision, strategies, goals, and actions outlined in this plan. As with any plan, these work group members will be essential participants in following through after the planning process to begin addressing goals and objectives outlined in this plan and are critical to attaining the potential economic impact of these strategies.

Asset Mapping

During the planning process various asset mapping exercises were conducted. Based on findings from the work group questionnaire, SWOT analysis, and discussion of economic and recreational assets during meetings a map displaying all related assets in Seven Springs was created.

Economic Positioning Statement Development

Based on the findings and discussions throughout the planning process, the local planning committee drafted an economic positioning statement for the Town of Seven Springs' CORE plan. This statement should guide their vision for future economic progress in the outdoor recreation space over the next five years. There was an effort to maintain consistency and complement previous strategic planning visions including the 2018 Seven Springs Recovery Plan. Once the economic visioning statement was outlined the work group determined the economic development strategies that will be implemented in order to achieve this desired vision. Based on findings and opportunities identified throughout the planning process the group developed strategies, goals, objectives, and action steps that, collectively, will help the town become more economically vibrant. From this the working team can identify action teams

or committees who will then develop specific tasks that it takes to accomplish the action/project.

Plan Review and Adoption

The draft Seven Springs CORE plan was presented to the local planning committee on March 28, 2024 and taken before the Town of Seven Springs Town Council on April 16, 2024. Following review, the Town of Seven Springs Council adopted the plan on April 16, 2024.



The Neuse River as seen from the scenic overlook at Cliffs of the Neuse State Park.

Economic Positioning Statement

Seven Springs is connected to the Neuse River and Cliffs of the Neuse State Park along the NC Mountains-to-Sea Trail and is an outdoor recreation destination for people from both near and far who are attracted to their variety of amenities and small-town hospitality.

Seven Springs Outdoor Recreation Strategic Plan 2023 – 2028

Vision: Seven Springs is connected to the Neuse River and Cliffs of the Neuse State Park along the NC Mountains to Sea Trail and is an outdoor recreation destination for people from both near and far who are attracted to their variety of amenities and small-town hospitality.

STRATEGIES

Connected to the Neuse River and Cliffs of the Neuse State Park along the NC Mountains to Sea Trail	A destination with a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and small-town hospitality.
<p>Goal 1: Enhance the recreational opportunities for visitors and residents along the Neuse River</p> <p>Objective 1.1: Increase usage of the Seven Springs NC Wildlife boat ramp Actions/Projects:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance amenities at the Seven Springs NC Wildlife boat ramp Promote the Seven Springs NC Wildlife boat ramp on the town website, social media, outdoor recreation forums such as fishing and paddling, and at Cliffs of the Neuse State Park <p>Objective 1.2: Connect Seven Springs to Cliffs of the Neuse State Park with a multi-use trail Actions/Projects:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for a for multi-use trail from Cliffs of the Neuse State Park to downtown Seven Springs <p>Objective 1.3: Leverage the existing MTS Trail paddle route Actions/Projects:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Learn more about the MST and opportunities available to promote the trail and Seven Springs Promote Seven Springs as a destination along the MST <p>Objective 1.4: Promote “beginner-level” paddle and float trips along the Neuse River from Cliffs of Neuse State Park to the Seven Springs WRC Boating Access Area Actions/Project:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop information and promote this paddle and float route as a beginner level and family-friendly activity 	<p>Goal 2: Create a robust outdoor recreation infrastructure and develop a range of lodging options while promoting the town’s unique natural and cultural assets</p> <p>Objective 2.1: Enhance variety of outdoor recreation amenities Action/Projects:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Support and advocate for improvements within Cliffs of the Neuse State Park by engaging with the park on future General Management Plans, which guide state park operations and identify future improvement projects Identify and construct low-cost recreation amenities and/or projects that are low cost or have potential for funding Identify current and potential FEMA properties with a focus on contiguous tracts. Research permissible uses to add to the outdoor recreation economy <p>Objective 2.2: Increase overnight stays by developing lodging options Actions/Projects:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Promote existing campground and campsites in Seven Springs to increase overnight stays at existing locations Research alternative overnight lodging options (unique stays, short term rentals, etc.) <p>Objective 2.3: Enhance cultural assets that promote hospitality and sense of place Actions/Projects:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate outdoor recreation into community events (i.e. youth fishing, canoe races, etc.) Promote local history and culture Add 3 mural/art installations that celebrate local culture and hospitality Design open space attraction on the corner town lot to use as a gathering space

- 2. Collaborate with Neuse River Trading to increase participants engaging in these paddle and float activities and increase economic impact of river users
- 3. Encourage opportunities that compel river users to spend more time in Seven Springs “after the experience”. This could include patronizing businesses, cultural activities, and more

for residents and visitors

Objective 2.4: Increase or improve local business services associated with or benefitting from outdoor recreation activities on the Neuse River and at the Cliffs of the Neuse State Park

Actions/Projects:

- 1. Identify landowners and/or residents who would like to be part of the outdoor recreation industry in Seven Springs to enhance or create additional outdoor recreation offerings and opportunities
- 2. Evaluate goods and services offerings of current businesses and the days/hours of operation. Encourage businesses to accommodate individuals participating in outdoor recreation in order to increase economic activity.
- 3. Evaluate potential for new business opportunities, particularly those catering to outdoor recreation and hospitality

Objective 2.5 Promote Seven Springs and its outdoor recreation opportunities and amenities

Actions/Projects:

- 1. Maintain active and dedicated work group that meets regularly to follow through to begin addressing goals and objectives outlined in this plan
- 2. Enhance online presence (website and social media) to market outdoor recreation in Seven Springs including amenities, events, and campground information/booking
- 3. Partner with recreation groups (paddle, hiking, biking, camping, fishing) groups to promote activities and amenities
- 4. Partner with organizations (TDA, ED, Arts Council) and keep them aware of activities and opportunities
- 5. Maintain and increase collaboration between the town and the Cliffs of Neuse State Park
- 6. Continue and increase engagement with Eastern Carolina Council of Governments to utilize their grant writing, technical assistance, planning, programming, and other opportunities provided

Implementation Schedule: Actions and Projects with Delineated Tasks

Strategy: Connected to the Neuse River and Cliffs of the Neuse State Park along the NC Mountains to Sea Trail				
Goal 1: Enhance the recreational opportunities for visitors and residents along the Neuse River				
Objective 1.1: Increase usage of the Seven Springs NC Wildlife boat ramp				
Action 1. Enhance amenities at the Seven Springs NC Wildlife boat ramp				
Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Research other NC Wildlife boat ramps on rivers and their layout/amenities; create visioning board of these amenities		In-House	0	NC Wildlife Website
2. Meet with NC Wildlife to find out what options and amenities could potentially be available at the Seven Springs wildlife ramp		In-House	0	NC Wildlife
3. Make a list to include but not limited to restroom facilities, shower facilities (indoor or outdoor), kayak launch, accessible fishing dock, improved ramp, covered picnic shelter, and upgraded signage	Town of Seven Springs	In-House	0	Seven Springs residents/community members

Strategy: Connected to the Neuse River and Cliffs of the Neuse State Park along the NC Mountains to Sea Trail				
Goal 1: Enhance the recreational opportunities for visitors and residents along the Neuse River				
Objective 1.1: Increase usage of the Seven Springs NC Wildlife boat ramp				
Action 2. Promote the Seven Springs NC Wildlife boat ramp on the town website, social media, outdoor recreation forums such as fishing and paddling, and at Cliffs the Neuse State Park				
Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Research and list websites that contain information on the boat ramp to see if the information/link would be valuable to be shared		In-House	0	NC Wildlife, MST, Carolina Outdoors Guide

2. Add boat ramp information and quality photos to the town website	Town Of Seven Springs	In-House	0	
3. Quarterly, post information about the boat ramp with quality photos on social media	Town of Seven Springs	In-House	0	Wayne County Tourism Development Authority
4. Research outdoor recreation forums such as fishing and paddling and see what information is available on the boat ramp. Send the forum any updated useful information. Link these to the town website as resources		In-House	0	

Strategy: Connected to the Neuse River and Cliffs of the Neuse State Park along the NC Mountains to Sea Trail

Goal 1: Enhance the recreational opportunities for visitors and residents along the Neuse River

Objective 1.2: Connect Seven Springs to Cliffs of the Neuse State Park with a multi-use trail

Action 1. Advocate for a for multi-use trail from Cliffs of the Neuse State Park to downtown Seven Springs

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Contact and stay in touch with Friends of MST to see plans for a multi-use land route between Seven Springs and Cliffs of the Neuse State Park		In-House	0	Friends of Mountains to Sea Trail
2. Stay in contact with Cliffs of the Neuse State Park to remain aware of MST multi-use land route to and from the state park		In-House	0	Cliffs of the Neuse State Park
3. Meet with current work group members to assess potential multi-use trail routes.		In-House	0	Cliffs of the Neuse State Park; Eastern Carolina Council of Governments

Strategy: Connected to the Neuse River and Cliffs of the Neuse State Park along the NC Mountains to Sea Trail

Goal 1: Enhance the recreational opportunities for visitors and residents along the Neuse River

Objective 1.3: Leverage the existing MTS Trail paddle route

Action 1. Learn more about the MST and opportunities available to promote the trail and Seven Springs

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Contact MST to see what opportunities are available for promoting Seven Springs along the route		In-House	0	Friends of MST
2. Evaluate opportunities for trail participants to stop in Seven Springs		In-House	0	
3. Evaluate and enhance opportunities for participants to stop in Seven Springs		In-House	0	Local business owners; Town of Seven Springs

Strategy: Connected to the Neuse River and Cliffs of the Neuse State Park along the NC Mountains to Sea Trail

Goal 1: Enhance the recreational opportunities for visitors and residents along the Neuse River

Objective 1.3: Leverage the existing MTS Trail paddle route

Action 2. Promote Seven Springs as a destination along the MST

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Publicize opportunities in Seven Springs at the river, state park, Seven Springs website and social media, and online opportunities		In-House	0	Wayne County Tourism Development Authority; Friends of MST
2. Provide information about Seven Springs with MST as it is available		In-House	0	Wayne County Tourism Development Authority; Friends of MST

Strategy: Connected to the Neuse River and Cliffs of the Neuse State Park along the NC Mountains to Sea Trail

Goal 1: Enhance the recreational opportunities for visitors and residents along Neuse River

Objective 1.4: Promote “beginner-level” paddle and float trips along the Neuse River from Cliffs of the Neuse State Park to the Seven Springs WRC Boating Access Area

Action 1. Develop information and promote this paddle and float route as a beginner level and family-friendly activity

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Research opportunities that are available for paddling on the Neuse River from the Seven Spring Boat Ramp, including kayak, canoe, SUP, etc. rentals		In-House	0	Neuse River Trading
2. Determine routes that are “beginner level” from the boat ramp, and develop and disseminate information on these trips		In-House	0	Local individuals and organizations who are familiar with this section of river and have paddling experience; Main Street and Rural Planning Center (mapping assistance)
3. Develop and promote more accurate and available information about the “canoe/kayak/paddle launch...located two highway miles north of the visitor center” referenced in the COTN General Management Plan.		In-House	TBD	Cliffs of the Neuse State Park
4. Promote the trips on the town website and social media		In-House	0	
5. Promote the routes on online paddling/outdoor forums		In-House	0	
6. Better publicize and promote river access points upstream from Seven Springs		In-House	0	Cliffs of the Neuse State Park

Strategy: Connected to the Neuse River and Cliffs of the Neuse State Park along the NC Mountains to Sea Trail

Goal 1: Enhance the recreational opportunities for visitors and residents along Neuse River

Objective 1.4: Promote “beginner-level” paddle and float trips along the Neuse River from Cliffs of the Neuse State Park to the Seven Springs WRC Boating Access Area

Action 2. Collaborate with Neuse River Trading to increase participants engaging in these paddle and float activities and increase economic impact of river users

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Collaborate with Neuse River Trading to on ways to offer expanded kayak rentals (look at lockers in Hertford, NC)		In-House	0	Neuse River Trading; Wayne Community College Small Business Center
2. Support Neuse River Trading in their activities that boost activity along the river. Publicize the business and these activities on the town website and social media, and paddling forums		In-House	0	Neuse River Trading

Strategy: Connected to the Neuse River and Cliffs of the Neuse State Park along the NC Mountains to Sea Trail

Goal 1: Enhance the recreational opportunities for visitors and residents along Neuse River

Objective 1.4: Promote “beginner-level” paddle and float trips along the Neuse River from Cliffs of the Neuse State Park to the Seven Springs WRC Boating Access Area

Action 3. Encourage opportunities that compel river users to spend more time in Seven Springs “after the experience”. This could include patronizing businesses, cultural activities, and more

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Provide information at the riverfront and on town website about regarding local culture and history	Town of Seven Springs	In-House		

2. Provide information at the riverfront and on town website about businesses and hours of operation	Town of Seven Springs	In-House		
3. Provide information at the riverfront and on town website about other recreation opportunities in Seven Springs	Town of Seven Springs	In-House		

Strategy: A destination with a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and small-town hospitality

Goal 2: Create a robust outdoor recreation infrastructure and develop a range of lodging options while promoting the town's unique natural and cultural assets

Objective 2.1: Enhance variety of outdoor recreation amenities

Action 1. Support and advocate for improvements within Cliffs of the Neuse State Park by engaging with the park on future General Management Plans, which guide state park operations and identify future improvement projects

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Remain in contact, at least quarterly, with Park Rangers and Friends of Cliffs of the Neuse regarding improvements, potential land acquisitions, and changes at the park		In-House	0	Cliffs of the Neuse State Park; Friends of Cliffs of the Neuse State Park

Strategy: A destination with a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and small-town hospitality

Goal 2: Create a robust outdoor recreation infrastructure and develop a range of lodging options while promoting the town's unique natural and cultural assets

Objective 2.1: Enhance variety of outdoor recreation amenities

Action 2. Identify and construct low-cost recreation amenities and/or projects that are low cost or have potential for funding

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Garner input on desired recreation amenities from town residents and park visitors		In-House	0	

2. Install Bike Stations for repairs at park and advertise on bike forums and on town website and social media		In-House		
3. Create and provide information on native birds such as the endangered Woodpeckers, Eagle Cockeyed and Red Woodpeckers. Advertise the opportunities to view birds on birding sites, town social media and website, and have information available at the river and/or park	Local Bird Enthusiast	In-House		
4. Research opportunities such as disc golf that would be permissible to install on FEMA properties.		In-House	0	
5. Research recreation equipment grant opportunities		In-House	0	Eastern Carolina COG

Strategy: A destination with a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and small-town hospitality

Goal 2: Create a robust outdoor recreation infrastructure and develop a range of lodging options while promoting the town's unique natural and cultural assets

Objective 2.1: Enhance variety of outdoor recreation amenities

Action 3. Identify current and potential FEMA properties with a focus on contiguous tracts. Research permissible uses to add to the outdoor recreation economy

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Maintain a current map of all FEMA properties owned by town/county		In-House	0	NC Main Street & Rural Planning; Eastern Carolina COG
2. Identify properties that were not purchased by FEMA that are adjacent to FEMA properties and determine if they can be acquired		In-House	0	Cliffs of the Neuse State Park
3. Identify potential recreational and other activities that are allowable to be constructed on FEMA properties		In-House	0	FEMA

Strategy: A destination with a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and small-town hospitality

Goal 2: Create a robust outdoor recreation infrastructure and develop a range of lodging options while promoting the town’s unique natural and cultural assets

Objective 2.2: Increase overnight stays by developing lodging options

Action 1. Promote existing campground and campsites in Seven Springs to increase overnight stays at existing locations

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Promote RV and Primitive Campgrounds on town website and social media. Include good photos and descriptions.		In-House	0	
2. Identify the best way to secure campground reservations and payments		In-House	TBD	
3. Promote camping with Wayne TDA and Cliffs of the Neuse State Park (overflow and late arrivals)		In-House	0	Wayne County TDA; Cliffs of the Neuse State Park; Friends of Mountains to Sea Trail
4. Advertise campgrounds on websites and forums for camping, paddling, and fishing		In-House	0	

Strategy: A destination with a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and small-town hospitality

Goal 2: Create a robust outdoor recreation infrastructure and develop a range of lodging options while promoting the town’s unique natural and cultural assets

Objective 2.2: Increase overnight stays by developing lodging options

Action 2. Research alternative overnight lodging options (unique stays, short term rentals, etc.)

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Online research of alternative and unique lodging options such as treehouses, river platforms, covered wagons, etc.		In-House	0	
2. Visit other places that offer similar unique short-term lodging and camping opportunities to research best practices.		In-House	Travel expenses	

3. Determine regulations regarding similar activities on FEMA buy out property		In-House	0	FEMA; Eastern Carolina COG
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Strategy: A destination with a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and small-town hospitality

Goal 2: Create a robust outdoor recreation infrastructure and develop a range of lodging options while promoting the town's unique natural and cultural assets

Objective 2.3: Enhance cultural assets that promote hospitality

Action 1. Incorporate outdoor recreation into community events (i.e. youth fishing, canoe races, etc.)

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Determine ways participants at Old Timey Day, July 4 th , and the Christmas Parade can enjoy on or from the water		In-House	0	
2. Determine activities that can incorporate the use of the river in events and festivals		In-House	0	

Strategy: A destination with a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and small-town hospitality

Goal 2: Create a robust outdoor recreation infrastructure and develop a range of lodging options while promoting the town's unique natural and cultural assets

Objective 2.3: Enhance cultural assets that promote hospitality

Action 2. Promote local history and culture

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Incorporate the Spring House and local history in downtown for people to learn the history of the town		In-House	0	
2. Provide information on town website, by the river and at the park about local history and culture		In-House	0	

Strategy: A destination with a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and small-town hospitality

Goal 2: Create a robust outdoor recreation infrastructure and develop a range of lodging options while promoting the town’s unique natural and cultural assets

Objective 2.3: Enhance cultural assets that promote hospitality

Action 3. Add 3 mural/art installations that celebrate local culture and hospitality

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Develop guidelines for installing murals		In-House	0	NC Commerce Rural Planning, Wayne County Arts Council
2. Determine a location, theme, and artist for the first mural that celebrates the history of Seven Springs		In-House	0	
3. Research funding opportunities		In-House	0	Wayne County Arts Council; Eastern Carolina COG; Local business owners, organizations, and residents
4. Increase involvement and collaboration between Seven Springs and the Wayne County Arts Council		In-House	0	Wayne County Arts Council

Strategy: A destination with a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and small-town hospitality

Goal 2: Create a robust outdoor recreation infrastructure and develop a range of lodging options while promoting the town’s unique natural and cultural assets

Objective 2.3: Enhance cultural assets that promote hospitality

Action 4. Design open space attraction on the corner town lot to use as a gathering space for residents and visitors

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Increase amenities at the corner park that encourage people to visit and linger		In-House	TBD	
2. Host a “Trees at the Park” in December		In-House	0	

Strategy: A destination with a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and small-town hospitality

Goal 2: Create a robust outdoor recreation infrastructure and develop a range of lodging options while promoting the town’s unique natural and cultural assets

Objective 2.4: Increase or improve local business services associated with or benefitting from outdoor recreation activities on the Neuse River and at the Cliffs of the Neuse State Park

Action 1. Identify landowners and/or residents who would like to be part of the outdoor recreation industry in Seven Springs to enhance or create additional outdoor recreation offerings and opportunities

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Have discussions with work group and community members to discuss outdoor recreation opportunities		In-House	0	

Strategy: A destination with a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and small-town hospitality

Goal 2: Create a robust outdoor recreation infrastructure and develop a range of lodging options while promoting the town’s unique natural and cultural assets

Objective 2.4: Increase or improve local business services associated with or benefitting from outdoor recreation activities on the Neuse River and at the Cliffs of the Neuse State Park

Action 2. Evaluate current goods and services of current businesses and the days/hours of operation

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Promote hours of all Seven Springs restaurants along river so travelers are aware of dining options		In-House	0	
2. Keep a current list all businesses and hours		In-House	0	
3. Encourage businesses to remain open during peak traffic and special events.		In-House	0	
4. Promote all businesses		In-House	0	

Strategy: A destination with a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and small-town hospitality

Goal 2: Create a robust outdoor recreation infrastructure and develop a range of lodging options while promoting the town’s unique natural and cultural assets

Objective 2.4: Increase or improve local business services associated with or benefitting from outdoor recreation activities on the Neuse River and at the Cliffs of the Neuse State Park

Action 3. Evaluate potential for new business opportunities, particularly those catering to outdoor recreation and hospitality

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Continually identify outdoor recreation opportunities for current and new businesses		In-House	0	
2. Identify and encourage potential entrepreneurs that may invest in businesses within Seven Springs		In-House		Wayne Community College Small Business Center
3. Organize small business resource informational session with business resource professionals targeted toward existing and potential entrepreneurs.		In-House		Wayne Community College Small Business Center

Strategy: A destination with a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and small-town hospitality

Goal 2: Create a robust outdoor recreation infrastructure and develop a range of lodging options while promoting the town’s unique natural and cultural assets

Objective 2.5: Promote Seven Springs and its outdoor recreation opportunities and amenities

Action 1. Maintain active and dedicated work group that meets regularly to follow through to begin addressing goals and objectives outlined in this plan

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Stay in touch with the outdoor recreation workgroup and continue to add members		In-House	0	
2. Workgroup to meet annually to review and update plan		In-House	0	
3. Celebrate all accomplishments from the plan		In-House	0	

Strategy: A destination with a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and small-town hospitality

Goal 2: Create a robust outdoor recreation infrastructure and develop a range of lodging options while promoting the town’s unique natural and cultural assets

Objective 2.5: Promote Seven Springs and its outdoor recreation opportunities and amenities

Action 2. Enhance online presence (website and social media) to market outdoor recreation in Seven Springs including amenities, events, and campground information/booking

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Maintain a list of all outdoor recreation opportunities		In-House	0	
2. List all opportunities and detailed information about each recreational opportunity on the website		In-House	0	
3. At least once a month, promote opportunities on social media		In-House	0	Wayne County Tourism Development Authority

Strategy: A destination with a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and small-town hospitality

Goal 2: Create a robust outdoor recreation infrastructure and develop a range of lodging options while promoting the town’s unique natural and cultural assets

Objective 2.5: Promote Seven Springs and its outdoor recreation opportunities and amenities

Action 3. Partner with recreation groups (paddle, hiking, biking, camping, fishing) groups to promote activities and amenities

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Maintain a list of potential outdoor recreation groups that may have an interest in Seven Springs		In-House	0	
2. Send groups on the list information on Seven Springs and special events		In-House	0	

Strategy: A destination with a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and small-town hospitality

Goal 2: Create a robust outdoor recreation infrastructure and develop a range of lodging options while promoting the town’s unique natural and cultural assets

Objective 2.5: Promote Seven Springs and its outdoor recreation opportunities and amenities

Action 4. Partner with organizations (TDA, ED, Arts Council) and keep them aware of activities and opportunities

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Maintain a list of current and potential county and regional partners		In-House	0	
2. Send the partners list information on Seven Springs and special events		In-House	0	
3. Collaborate with partners to strategize about how to make special events/festivals hosted in Seven Springs attract a broader range of visitors		In-House	0	Wayne County Tourism Development Authority; VisitNC

Strategy: A destination with a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and small-town hospitality

Goal 2: Create a robust outdoor recreation infrastructure and develop a range of lodging options while promoting the town’s unique natural and cultural assets

Objective 2.5: Promote Seven Springs and its outdoor recreation opportunities and amenities

Action 5. Maintain and increase collaboration between the town and the Cliffs of the Neuse State Park

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Partner with Cliffs of the Neuse staff and Friends and collaborate on ways everyone can benefit		In-House	0	
2. Maintain representation from staff and Friends of Cliffs of the Neuse on the outdoor recreation work group		In-House	0	
3. Engage and collaborate on any future state park management plans to advocate for improvements which benefit Seven Springs		In-House	0	Cliffs of the Neuse State Park; Friends of Cliffs of the Neuse State Park

Strategy: A destination with a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and small-town hospitality

Goal 2: Create a robust outdoor recreation infrastructure and develop a range of lodging options while promoting the town’s unique natural and cultural assets

Objective 2.5: Promote Seven Springs and its outdoor recreation opportunities and amenities

Action 6. Continue and increase engagement with Eastern Carolina Council of Governments to utilize their grant writing, technical assistance, planning, programming, and other opportunities provided

Tasks	Responsibility (Name)	In-House or Outsource	Cost / Time	Partners / Assistance
1. Maintain representation from ECCOG on the outdoor recreation work group	Town of Seven Springs	In-House	0	Eastern Carolina Council of Governments
2. Work with ECCOG to determine ways they can support the community and outdoor recreation plan		In-House	0	
3. Consider joining ECCOG as a member		In-House	TBD	

Plan Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation

The Town of Seven Springs will be responsible for monitoring, evaluation, and reporting accomplishments on the objectives of this plan to the Rural Economic Development Division.

Plan Implementation

Maintaining a dedicated group to follow through after the planning process to begin addressing goals and objectives outlined in this plan is critical to attaining the potential economic impact of these strategies. This could be the same work group that helped develop this plan, or another similar group that is representative of the community and can advance the goals of this plan. The sustained presence of such a group builds ‘social capital’ within the group that improves their ability to work together and effectively address common goals. Furthermore, a dedicated group ensures continuity from planning stage through implementation, provides accountability to ensure that objectives are being met, and allows the community to react and respond quickly when an opportunity is presented. But this group should not be the sole entity responsible for implementing all the goals of the plan. Instead, the group should function as a convener and point of contact to connect to other individuals, organizations, and resources to help the broader community achieve these goals. Maintaining a regular meeting schedule will also help increase the effectiveness of the group, and the overall plan.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Regular monitoring and evaluation to review progress on the goals, objectives, and action steps in this plan, via regular review sessions with the Strategic Planning team and other community stakeholders, is critical to ensuring it remains a viable, living document. REDD staff will periodically communicate and provide assistance as needed to help advance the goals and document the outcomes of the plan.

Focus Areas

Strategy development focuses on leveraging outdoor recreation assets to increase tourism, encourage small business development, enhance quality of life for residents, plan for asset and infrastructure development, and/or position communities to grow and attract outdoor product manufacturing industries. Each subsection below provides supplemental information about a specific goal, objective, or action item identified in the plan’s strategy chart.

Seven Springs Boating Access Area

Objective 1.1 is to “increase usage of the Seven Springs NC Wildlife boat ramp.” During the planning process work group members indicated that there is an opportunity to work with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission to undergo physical infrastructure improvements at this boating access area. The Town of Seven Springs, who owns the boating access area property,



NC Wildlife Resources Commission's Seven Springs Boating Access Area.

and this work group should determine a specific list of improvements and amenities that the local community would like to see developed at this boating access site. This will be useful in discussions with the Wildlife Resources Commission so that the community has vetted input, and get the most possible benefit, when and if these improvements are made.

Based on the questionnaire results regarding popular outdoor recreational activities in Seven Springs, fishing and boating activities should be prioritized at this location. Also, an intentional effort to make this boating access area conducive to public gatherings and a vibrant public space should be considered. While the site is somewhat constrained due to the size of the parcel there should be an opportunity to make the site a vibrant hub for recreational activities that caters to a variety of users (ex. Those with and without boats; accessible fishing areas; picnics by the water; etc.). Planning committee members should consult best practices and examples of what other communities have done to improve usage of their boating access and fishing access and incorporate these in any future improvements in Seven Springs along the Neuse River.

Connecting Seven Springs to Cliffs of the Neuse State Park

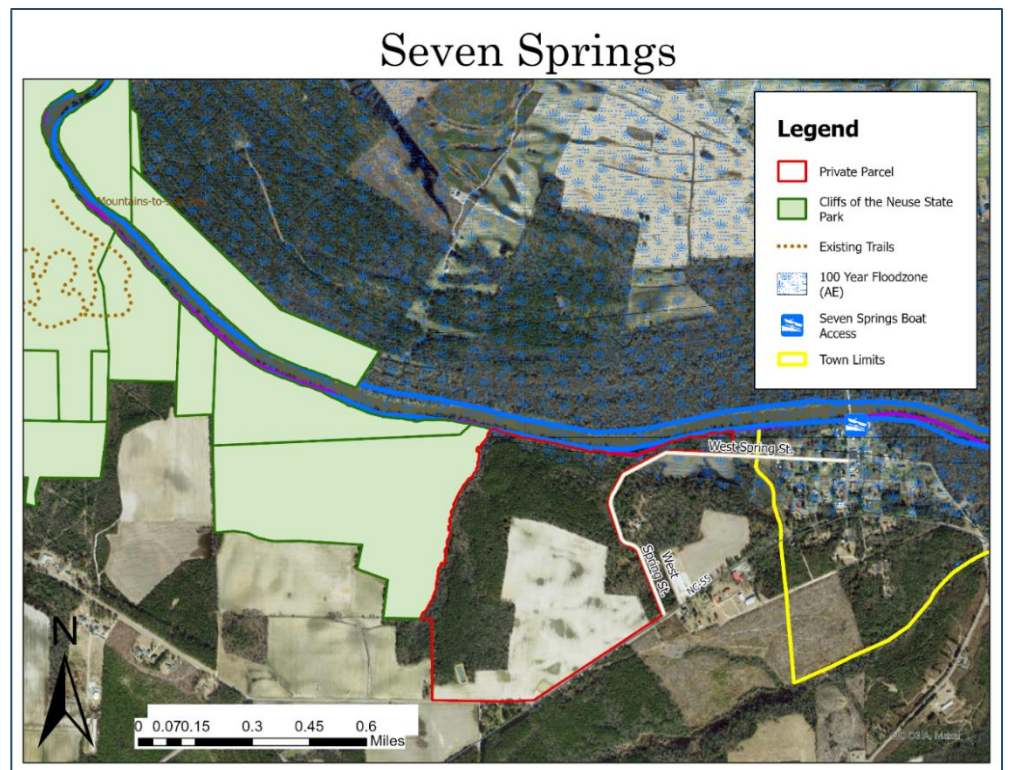
The Cliffs of the Neuse State Park draws hundreds of thousands of visitors annually, including 241,375 individuals in FY 2021-2022. This provides incredible potential for Seven Springs to capture increased economic impact from visitation. While this is a sizeable number the park experienced a substantial decrease in visitation from FY 2020-2021 to 2021-2022. More park amenities and nearby attractions could help bolster tourism and help these numbers trend in a positive direction.

Objective 1.2 is to “connect Seven Springs to Cliffs of the Neuse State Park with a multi-use trail.” This aligns with the overall strategy conveyed by this plan to leverage the close proximity

of Seven Springs to Cliffs of the Neuse State Park. This specific objective prompts local leaders to examine the possible options to connect the two entities via a land based multi-use trail. This could be accomplished via a variety of routes, but it is important to note the close proximity between current State Park property and trails (see map below), and the town center. “As the crow flies” it is approximately one mile between current land holdings of the State Park, and the intersection of Main Street and Spring Street in Seven Springs. This path “as the crow flies” does cross a single parcel of private property that is situated between the park and the town. This property appears to be predominantly forested and agricultural land, borders the river, and does contain areas that are within the 100-year flood zone. Maintaining communication between this property owner and the Town, local leadership, the State Park, and Friends of Cliffs of the Neuse would benefit the likelihood of advancing this objective regarding the potential to work out a scenario wherein a multi-use path could cross this property to connect the state park and the town. Theoretically, the path could connect to West Spring Street (a public road) and continue into the center of town.

Other options include traversing other private properties between state park land and public rights-of-way or having a multi-use path follow existing public rights-of-way from the park to the town. An alternative route such as this would likely be significantly longer, would not remain in a natural setting, pose more safety concerns/increase conflict between cyclist/pedestrians and vehicular traffic, and not connect as directly from the park to town.

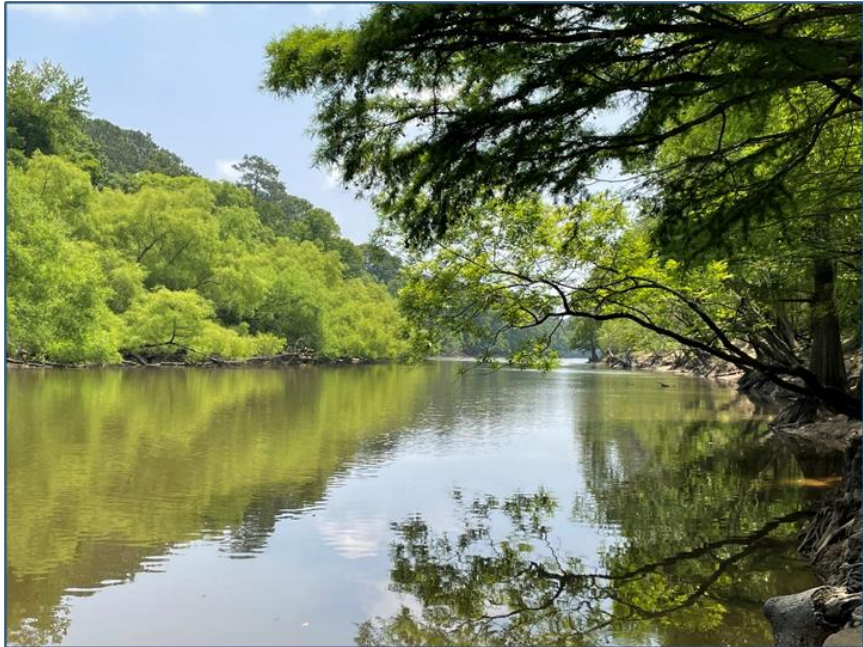
Any new trail development would need to go through the proper channels for approval, planning, design, and construction.



Map depicting proximity between Cliffs of the Neuse State Park property and downtown Seven Springs.

Mountains-to-Sea Trail (MST) Neuse River Paddle Route

This 163 mile “alternate” section of the MST follows the Neuse River from Smithfield to the Neusiok Trail in the Croatan National Forest near Havelock, passing through Seven Springs along the way. Seven Springs is listed as one of only five “trail communities” along this section and is an ideal destination for paddlers to stop along their journey.



The Neuse River at Cliffs of the Neuse State Park. This river section is part of the Mountains-to-Sea Neuse River Paddle Trail.

Efforts should be taken to continue to develop Seven Springs as a preferred destination for individuals undertaking the paddle trail, and to entice others to experience this section of the MST.

The Friends of the MST maintains a trail guide and provides other invaluable information to the public for those interested in exploring the MST. Seven Springs should ensure that the group is aware of future developments and amenities added in town that would cater to MST travelers so that the most up to date information is provided and travelers are aware of Seven Springs as a destination along the trail. Increased engagement between the town and the Friends of the MST could also be beneficial to help ensure future developments meet the needs of paddlers, the most up to date and accurate information is provided, and Seven Springs is promoted among the MST community.

Paddle and Float Trips Along the Neuse River

The overall plan goal to “enhance the recreational opportunities for visitors and residents along the Neuse River” is further specified by the objective to “promote “beginner-level” paddle and float trips along the Neuse River.” One way to encourage this is to develop detailed guides and other sources of information that explicitly outlines the paddle route and provides easily accessible information on what river goers can expect in terms of:

- Length of trip
- Difficulty of trip

- Where to put in and take out on the river
- What to expect regarding conditions, and how to prepare for this specific length of time on the water
- Other assets and resources available to make their experience on the Neuse River near Seven Springs an enjoyable trip that they will want to experience again

The Cliffs of the Neuse State Park General Management Plan indicates “a canoe/kayak/paddle launch is located two highway miles north of the visitor center. The launch is located adjacent to the intersection of River Road and Mince Hill Road just below Broadhurst Bridge.” But when you attempt online research to find the location of this river access point it is not apparent where this is located. There also does not appear to be signage and the access is not visible along the road. This access point is approximately eight and a half miles upriver from the Seven Springs WRC boat access area and is generally considered appropriate for only more experienced paddlers.

PADDLE TRAIL:

Neuse Paddle Trail is a 0.50-mile blue way along the park boundary.

A canoe/kayak/paddle launch is located two highway miles north of the visitor center. The launch is located adjacent to the intersection of River Road and Mince Hill Road just below Broadhurst Bridge.



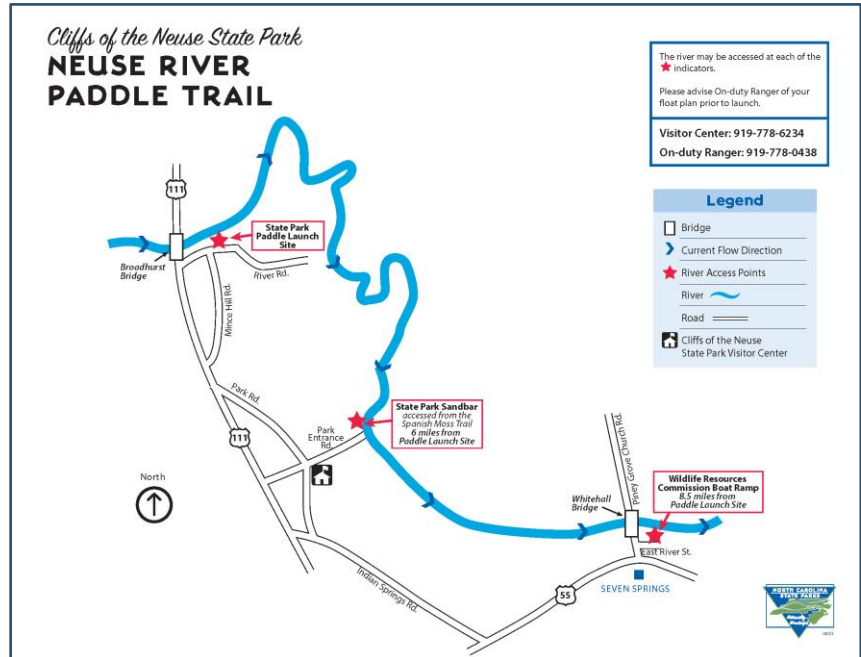
View from the Neuse Paddle Trail

The launch offers an opportunity to paddle an 8-mile section of the Neuse that leads through the park boundary and onto the Seven Springs public boat ramp managed by N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission which serves as a take-out.

Common sights along the river include: bald eagles, river otter, various waterfowl, and abundant fishing opportunities. On standard flow conditions, the trip typically takes about 3 hours. The Neuse Paddle Trail is a section of the Mountains-To-Sea paddle trail.

Cliffs of the Neuse State Park General Management Plan. 2017. Pg. 9.

In addition to the access point referenced above, the official Cliffs of the Neuse State Park “Neuse River Paddle Trail” map also indicates a river access point within the park boundaries via the “Spanish Moss Trail”. This access point is approximately two and a half miles upriver from the Seven Springs WRC boat access area.



Cliffs of the Neuse State Park, Neuse River Paddle Trail map.
<https://www.ncparks.gov/maps/cliffs-neuse-state-park-paddle-trail-map/open>

More consistent, accurate, and readily available information regarding access points and conditions to be expected on the river (length of trip, level of difficulty, and other conditions) will be helpful in making this outdoor recreation asset more approachable, user-friendly, and increase safety for river users. Establishing these access as “points of interest” on popular online search engine mapping platforms could be helpful. If these river access points are no longer feasible then alternative river access areas well suited to accommodate paddle activities beginning upriver from Seven Springs should be examined.

Lodging

Increasing overnight stays is one of the most effective ways to increase visitor spending. Overnight visitors typically spend significantly more than visitors on day trips. According to VisitNC, “overnight visitors spent \$814 while daytrip parties spent \$191 on average” during trips in North Carolina in 2022.¹¹ And increasingly, with the rise of short-term rentals and travelers’ propensity for camping, localities are no longer beholden to whether or not they have a traditional hotel in order to accommodate overnight visitors. According to the same report referenced above, approximately 7% of overnight visitors in NC used a “shared economy” accommodation (such as Airbnb), and approximately 5% of overnight visitors camped in either an RV or tent.

¹¹ 2022 North Carolina Visitor Profile. A publication of Visit North Carolina, A Unit of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina.
<https://partners.visitnc.com/contents/sdownload/73318/file/2022+North+Carolina+Visitor+Profile.pdf>

Many smaller communities have benefitted from local entrepreneurs using short-term rentals to bolster visitation. And other local governments and organizations have taken the initiative to develop these accommodations themselves in an effort to entice visitors to stay. Many of these accommodations are “unique” stays wherein the accommodation is distinctive to the area and guests cannot have a similar experience elsewhere. An example of this is the treehouse accommodations along the Roanoke River in Weldon, NC. With the current availability of camping in town parks in Seven Springs, and certain issues associated with camping at Cliffs of the Neuse State Park, an effort to examine look at the possibility to increase non-traditional lodging opportunities could be beneficial.

Small Business Development

Objective 2.4 seeks to “increase or improve local business services associated with or benefitting from outdoor recreation activities on the Neuse River and at the Cliffs of the Neuse State Park.” This objective is the most straightforward recommendation intended to leverage the outdoor recreation assets of Seven Springs for direct economic development. There are several opportunities for this within Seven Springs, both for existing businesses that cater directly to outdoor recreation participants (Neuse River Trading) or indirectly such as food and beverage, and lodging. Support should also be shown for aspiring entrepreneurs. One of the most important strategies in promoting and propelling this type of community economic development is understanding and utilizing the business assistance resources available, such as the Wayne Community College Small Business Center.



Neuse River Trading

Neuse River Trading is an existing business in downtown Seven Springs which caters to outdoor recreation participants. There could be significant potential for increased economic activity associated with outdoor recreational activities involving Neuse River Trading. There are business assistance resources available that could help this local

business assess current operations, examine market data and market gaps, improve

advertisement and more. Several businesses in other locations across NC that offer similar services could be researched for best practices that could potentially be applied.

Outdoor Recreation Product Manufacturing

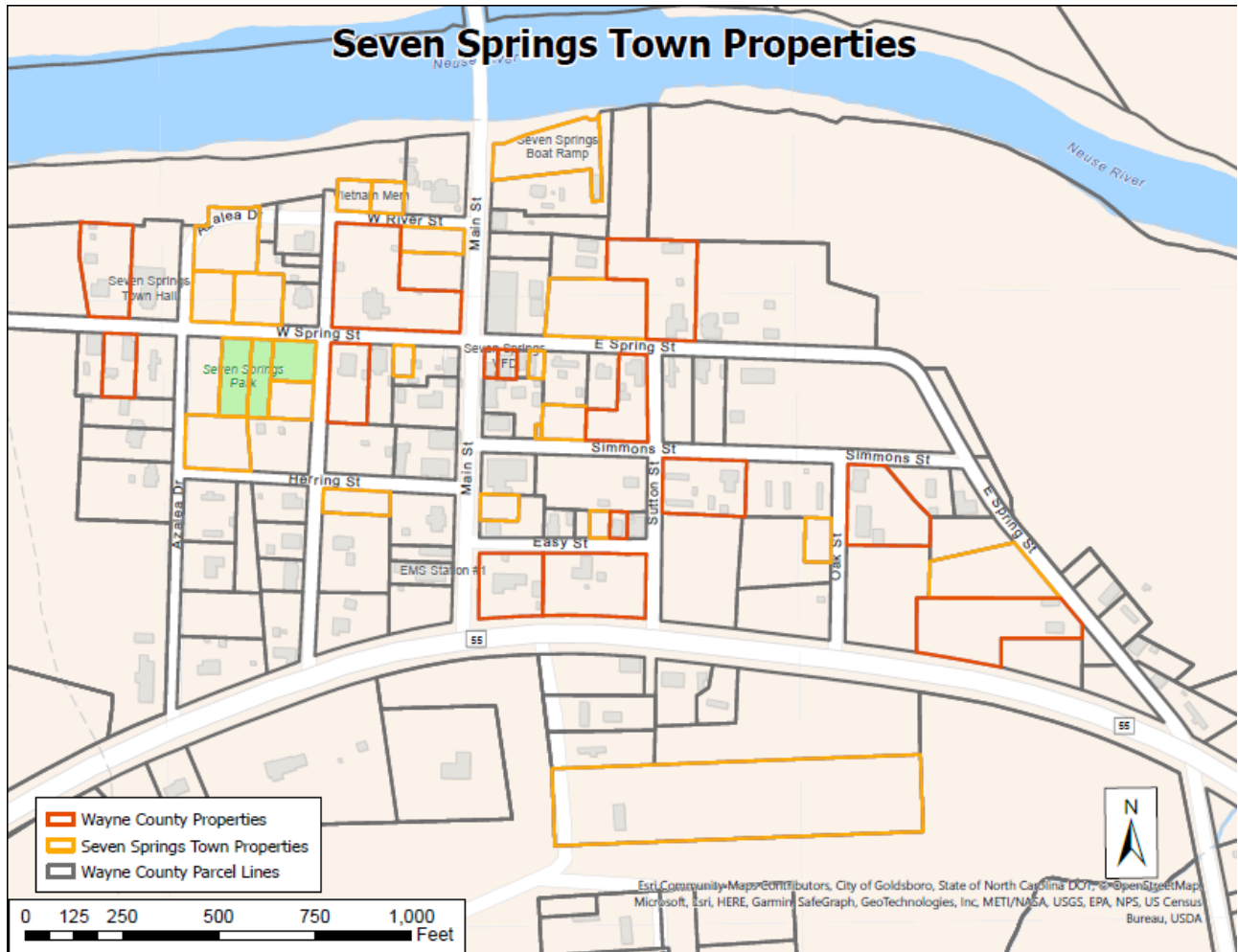
The Seven Springs CORE work group did not identify “encouraging potential for outdoor recreation-oriented product manufacturing” as a primary goal of this strategic planning process. But increasing understanding and education regarding the potential for outdoor recreation-oriented product manufacturing should be encouraged among all local leaders, particularly those seeking to advance economic development.

There is potential for increased manufacturing of outdoor recreation products, including supply chain materials, across the state of North Carolina. Attention should be paid both from a perspective of attracting an existing company to expand their operations in the community, or for a local startup business to emerge. Of the total \$14.5+ billion impact that outdoor recreation contributes to the state’s annual GDP, more than \$2.3 billion of that is contributed from manufacturing. This sector employs over 7,600 people.¹²

¹² U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2022. <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation>

Appendix

Maps



Seven Springs Town Properties



Seven Spring Assets



