

# THE NATCHEZ TRACE

A POTENTIAL NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL



A SUMMARY OF  
FEDERAL - STATE FIELD TASK FORCE  
STUDY FINDINGS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF OUTDOOR RECREATION  
SOUTHEAST REGION, ATLANTA, GEORGIA

THIS BROCHURE WAS PREPARED PURSUANT TO PUBLIC LAW 90-543, THE NATIONAL TRAIL SYSTEM ACT. PUBLICATION OF THE FINDINGS HEREIN SHOULD NOT BE CONSTRUED AS REPRESENTING EITHER THE APPROVAL OR DISAPPROVAL OF THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR. THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT IS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION AND ALTERNATIVES FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION BY THE BUREAU OF OUTDOOR RECREATION, THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR, OTHER FEDERAL AND STATE AGENCIES, AND THE PUBLIC.

Cover: The scene of the Natchez Trace was reproduced from an original sketch, courtesy of Jack Knox, Nashville, Tennessee.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                           | <u>Page</u> |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Why the Need for a Trails Study . . . . . | 1           |
| Conduct of the Study. . . . .             | 2           |
| Summary and Recommendations . . . . .     | 2           |
| The Study Corridor . . . . .              | 2           |
| Physical Characteristics . . . . .        | 2           |
| Cultural Characteristics . . . . .        | 7           |
| Flora and Fauna. . . . .                  | 7           |
| Landownership. . . . .                    | 10          |
| Land Use . . . . .                        | 10          |
| Recreation Needs . . . . .                | 10          |
| Project Alternatives. . . . .             | 20          |
| Corridor Protection. . . . .              | 20          |
| Alternative I. . . . .                    | 20          |
| Alternative II . . . . .                  | 20          |
| Alternative III. . . . .                  | 22          |
| Alternative IV . . . . .                  | 22          |
| Alternative V. . . . .                    | 22          |
| Administrative Alternatives . . . . .     | 23          |
| Possible Impacts. . . . .                 | 24          |
| Public Input. . . . .                     | 24          |

## MAPS

|                                             |       |
|---------------------------------------------|-------|
| Map One--Location . . . . .                 | 4     |
| Map Two--Trails Study Corridor. . . . .     | 5     |
| Map Three--Physiographic Features . . . . . | 6     |
| Map Four--Indian Territories. . . . .       | 8     |
| Map Five--Significant Features. . . . .     | 13-14 |
| Map Six--Existing Land Use. . . . .         | 17-18 |

## Why the Need for a Trails Study?

In recognition of the growing demand countrywide for increased outdoor recreation opportunities, the Congress of the United States in 1968 passed Public Law 90-543, the National Trails System Act. The purpose of the Act was threefold: (1) to institute a national system of scenic and recreation trails which would provide many of the recreation opportunities in greatest demand and a means of protection for the areas through which these trails pass; (2) to designate the Appalachian Trail and the Pacific Crest Trail as the initial components of the system; and (3) provide the guidelines by which additional components may be added to the system. Nationwide surveys conducted in 1960 and again in 1972 showed that an overwhelming majority of Americans preferred simple recreation activities such as walking for pleasure, picnicking, sightseeing, driving for pleasure, and swimming. Recreation trails offer a low cost and energy conserving means of satisfying some of America's top recreation needs.

The U.S. Department of the Interior was charged by Public Law 90-543 with the responsibility for studying the Natchez Trace area, one of 14 potential scenic trails in the country having possible national significance. That responsibility has been delegated to the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. Scenic trails are defined in the Act, in part, as:

"extended trails so located as to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of nationally significant scenic, historic, natural or cultural qualities of the areas through which such trails may pass."

To qualify for designation as a national scenic trail, a trail should meet the following criteria:

1. Provide maximum outdoor recreation potential.
2. Posses significant scenic, historic, natural or cultural qualities and contain a minimum of activities that could detract from the scenic value (i.e., highways, power transmission lines, industrial developments, etc.).
3. Allow for adequate public access by way of connecting or side trails.
4. Be primarily land based.
5. Be several hundred miles or more in length.
6. Be continuous for the entire length.



## Conduct of the Study

To obtain a more comprehensive approach toward determining the potential for a trail or system of trails within the area of the Old Natchez Trace, a joint Federal-State study task force was organized in April 1974. Members of the task force include representatives from the three States of Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee along with representatives of the U.S. Forest Service, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the National Park Service, and the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation.

This study delineates a "trail corridor"; considers various types of recreational trails such as hiking, bicycling, and horseback riding; identifies areas nearby as scenic, historic, or natural; analyses landownerships; presents potential land use trends; estimates needed land acquisition, maintenance, and development costs; considers trails administration; and examines the possible overall impact of trails should they be implemented.

The study task force, after examining the potential for a national trail in the Natchez Trace area, (see map one) will submit its findings in a report to the President and to Congress. Congress will then decide whether the proposed Natchez Trace Trail will be authorized for construction and inclusion into the national system of trails.

## Summary and Recommendations

### The Study Corridor

A general study corridor was established approximately 80 miles wide and 450 miles long through the States of Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi. A more specific study corridor was defined as a 1/2-mile area on either side of the centerline of the present Natchez Trace Parkway but includes the Old Trace where it deviates from the Parkway plus 1/2 mile beyond (see map two). This basic 1-mile-wide specific study corridor was utilized for detailed planning purposes. High impact factors outside the specific study area were considered in determining needs originating elsewhere such as State and Federal parks and forests, urban areas, and others.

### Physical Characteristics

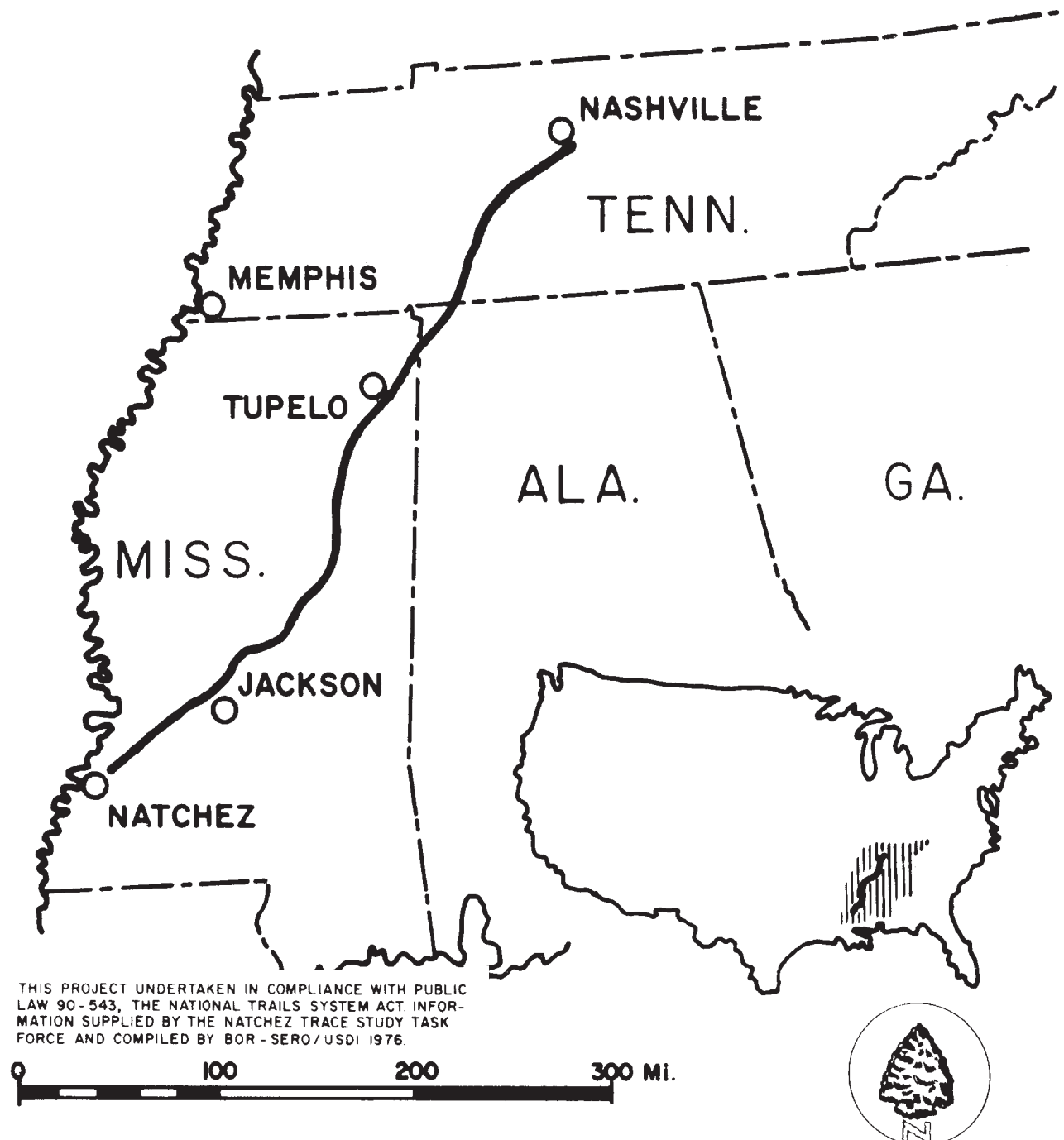
The Natchez Trace study corridor traverses two general physiographic provinces--the Interior Low Plateaus and the East Gulf Coastal Plain (see map three). The overall topography ranges from about 1,000 feet above sea level near Nashville, Tennessee, to only 250 feet above sea level at Natchez, Mississippi. Much of the specific study corridor is rural in nature, thus, the prospective trails user could easily visualize the Trace as it



*Typical Scene Along the Natchez Trace Parkway*

# LOCATION MAP

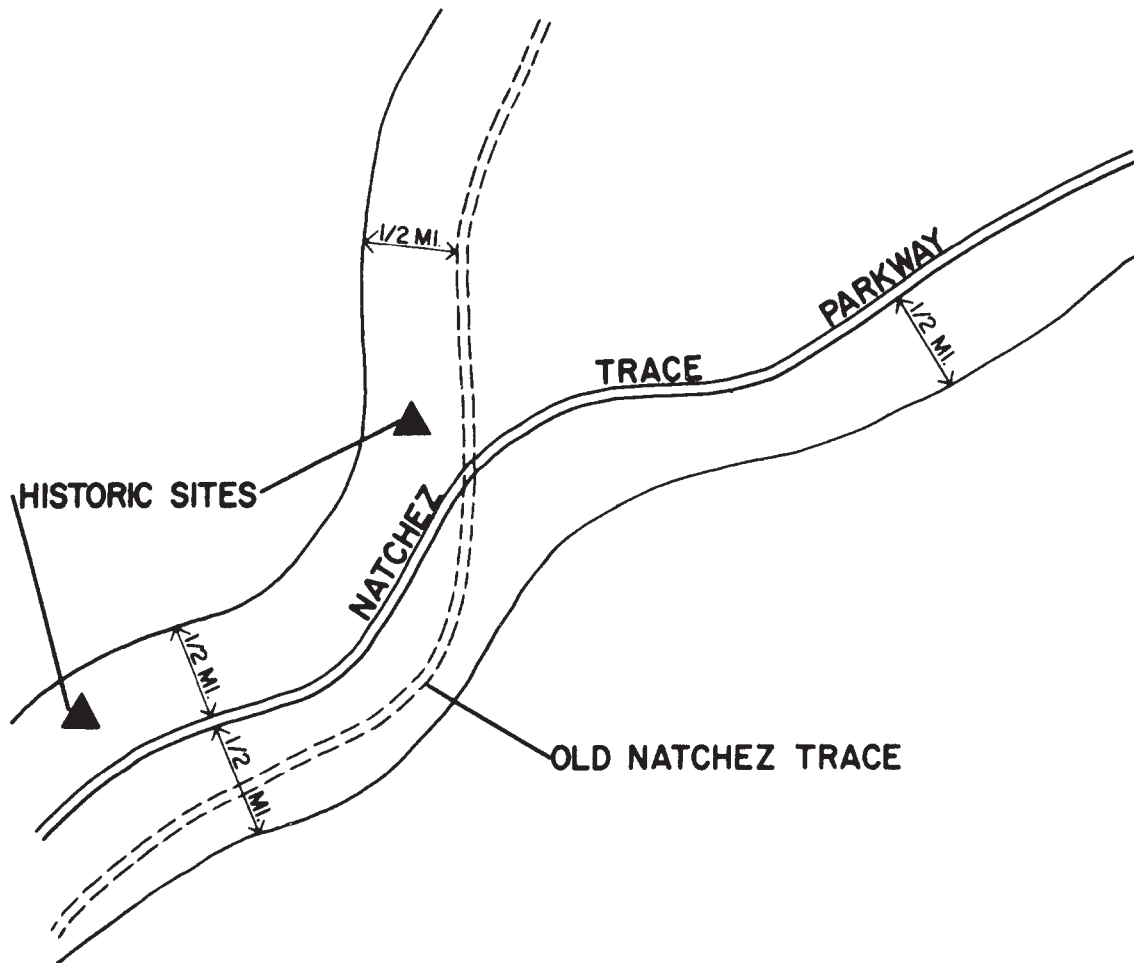
map one



## NATCHEZ TRACE TRAILS STUDY

# TYPICAL SECTION OF SPECIFIC STUDY CORRIDOR

map two

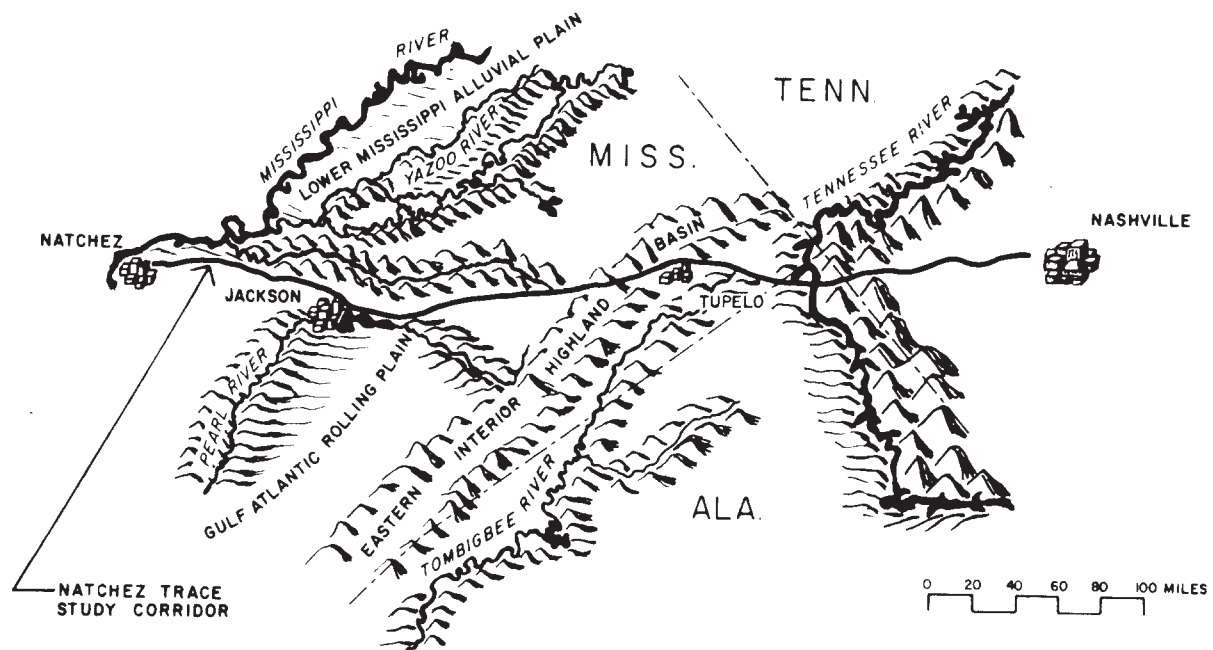


THIS PROJECT UNDERTAKEN IN COMPLIANCE WITH PUBLIC  
LAW 90-543, THE NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM ACT INFOR-  
MATION SUPPLIED BY THE NATCHEZ TRACE STUDY TASK  
FORCE AND COMPILED BY BOR - SERO/USDI 1976.

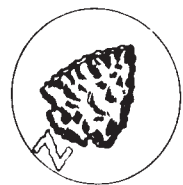
## NATCHEZ TRACE TRAILS STUDY

# PHYSIOGRAPHIC FEATURES

map three



THIS PROJECT UNDERTAKEN IN COMPLIANCE WITH PUBLIC LAW 90-543, THE NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM ACT. INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY THE NACHEZ TRACE STUDY TASK FORCE AND COMPILED BY BOR - SERO/USDI 1976.



## NACHEZ TRACE TRAILS STUDY



must have appeared during its major period of use. The general landscape is especially beautiful in spring and fall when greatest use of the Natchez Trace Trails System is anticipated.

### Cultural Characteristics

The cultural characteristics of the study area involve (1) the history of Old Natchez Trace and (2) an understanding of the socioeconomic characteristics of the people.

Originally a system of animal and Indian paths threading 600 miles through the wilderness, the Old Trace, or trail, later became a vital frontier route for explorers and settlers beginning with the French in the early 1700's through about 1830, then under the control of the fledgling United States (see map four). Colorful tales of the people who used the Trace abound as do physical remains of the past. Many events of national significance are associated with the Trace--some humorous and some tragic. Andrew Jackson's troops twice marched over the Trace, once in 1812 and again in 1815. Meriwether Lewis of Lewis and Clark fame met his death on the Trace, as did countless others.

Trail studies associated with the Trace were envisioned as early as the 1930's in conjunction with the development of the Natchez Trace Parkway. The Natchez Trace Parkway, a modern memorial highway, is now administered by the National Park Service.

The South has experienced far reaching social and economic changes since the end of World War II. These have come about primarily due to technological innovations, widespread advances in education, and increases and mobility of the population. Especially important, in terms of the Natchez Trace study area, has been the shift in population away from rural to urban places due to the lessening demand for unskilled farm labor and the growing demand for higher paying skilled jobs in the cities. Mechanization and new farm practices have also allowed the consolidation of farms into larger holdings worked by few farm laborers.

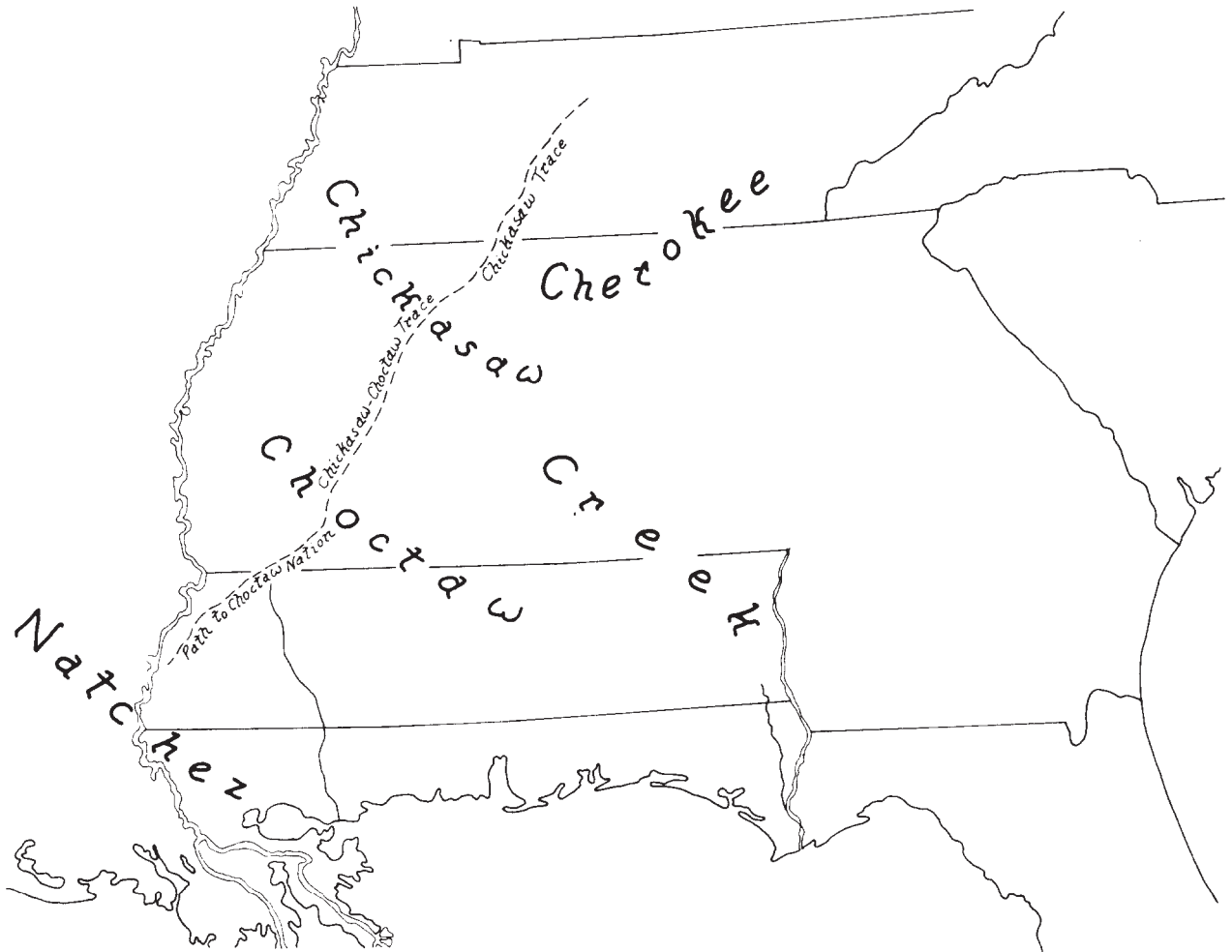
### Flora and Fauna

The Natchez Trace study corridor traverses five major forest groups: loblolly-slash pine, loblolly-shortleaf pine, mixed oak and pine, mixed oak and hickory, and a combination of oak, gum and cypress. In addition to these major stands of trees, there is an abundance of smaller plantlife which together would offer the trail user a beautiful vista.

There is also a great variety of fish and wildlife throughout the study corridor. Examples of fish include bass, perch, bream, and

# INDIAN TERRITORIES

map four



THIS PROJECT UNDERTAKEN IN COMPLIANCE WITH PUBLIC  
LAW 90-543, THE NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM ACT INFOR-  
MATION SUPPLIED BY THE NATCHEZ TRACE STUDY TASK  
FORCE AND COMPILED BY BOR-SERO/USDI 1976.



## NATCHEZ TRACE TRAILS STUDY



*In Places, the Trod of Thousands of Weary  
Travelers Cut Deep Into the Landscape*



catfish. Some of the more popular game animals include deer, rabbits, and squirrels, as well as the nocturnal species like the fox, opossum, and raccoon.

A great variety of birds are also found in the area such as the mockingbird, bluejay, cardinal, and oriole. Game birds include the quail, wild turkey, duck, and others.

Although all wildlife can be potentially dangerous, especially if cornered, none would normally pose any unusual dangers to the trail user.

### Landownership

Landownership in the general study corridor is predominantly private, consisting of mostly small parcels of land. The largest single ownership of land is by the U.S. Forest Service. Three large forests are found in the general study corridor: the Homochitto, Bienville, and Tombigbee. In addition, the three States of Alabama, Tennessee, and Mississippi own and/or manage several large wildlife management areas, reservoirs, and State parks (see map five).

There are no privately owned major recreation facilities within the study corridor. Major Federal facilities include the Natchez Trace Parkway, three national forests, two major Civil War battlefields, a reservoir and numerous smaller parks and historic sites. There are 10 major State parks and nine State game management areas in the study corridor in addition to several important State historic sites and areas administered by special authorities.

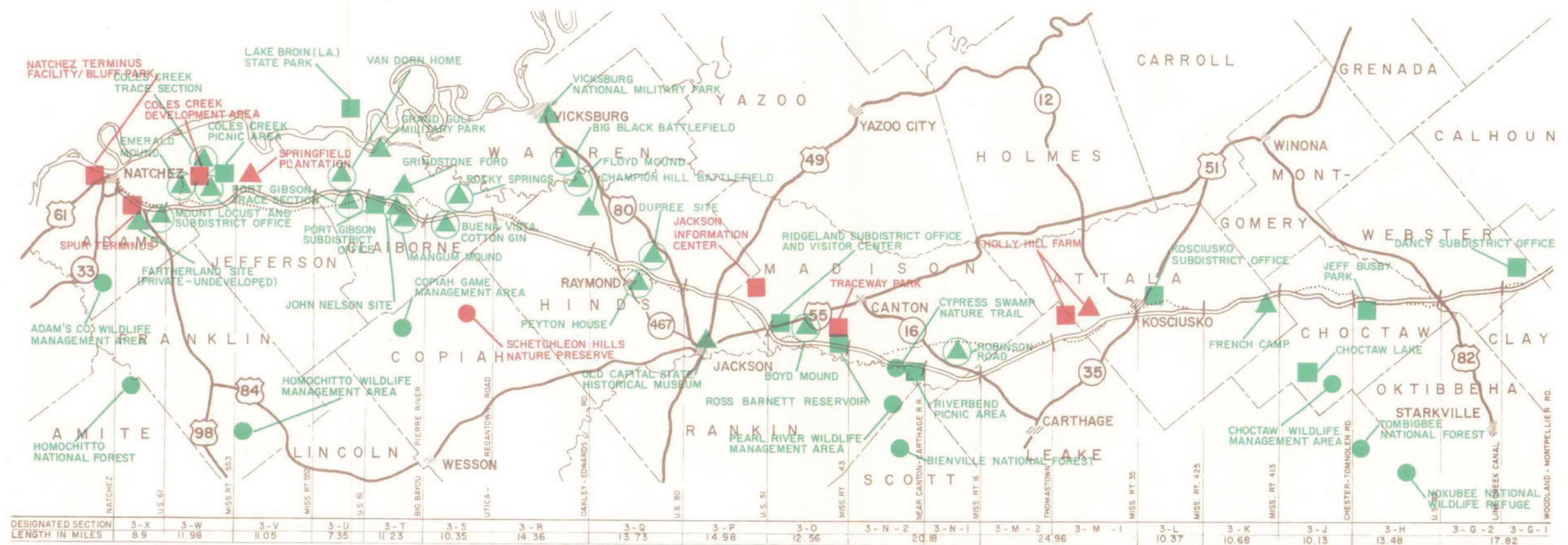
### Land Use

A majority of the land use in the general study corridor is agricultural, forest, or unused (see map six). Even though agriculture has declined in the postwar years, much of the Trace corridor retains its agricultural appearance. In terms of relative size, residential lands are second, followed by commercial and industrial land use. Even though urban areas account for less overall land use, they are nevertheless greatest in terms of monetary value.

Care must be taken to insure that the continued expansion of existing land use and those planned for the future do not become incompatible with the proposed Natchez Trace Trails System.

### Recreation Needs

Five types of trails needs in the general study corridor were determined to the year 2000. By combining these activities, three types of trails needs were developed: hiking, bicycling, and horseback riding. By the year 2000, hiking needs will have increased





DEVELOPMENT AREAS

PROPOSED

EXISTING

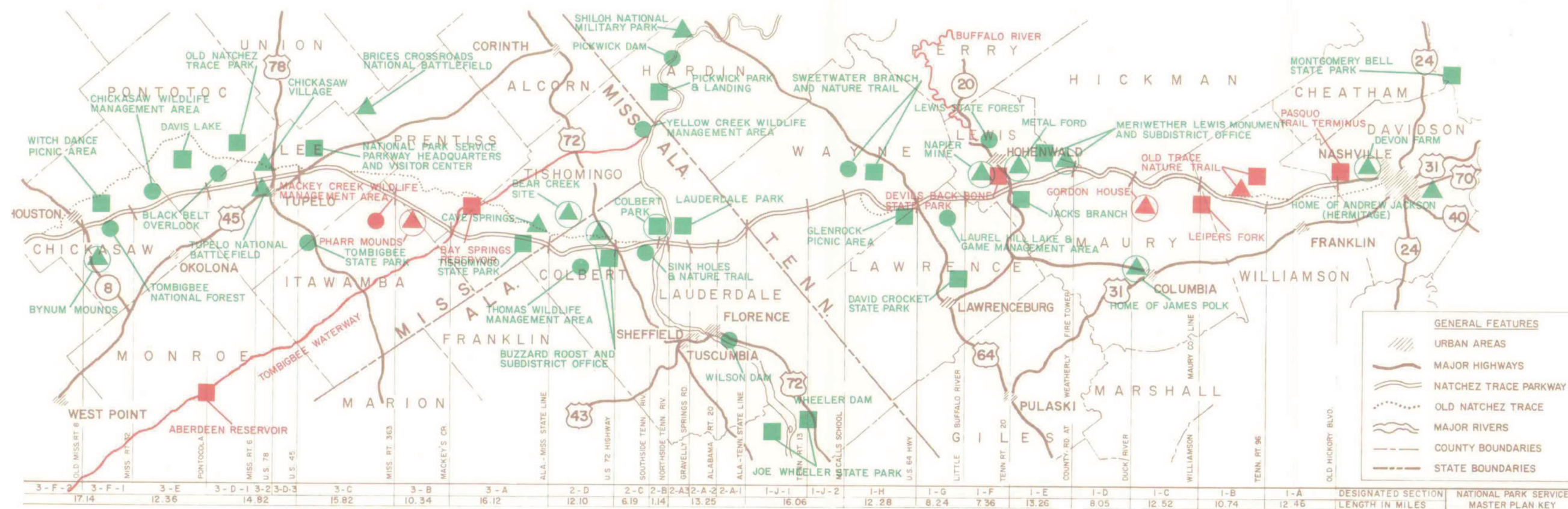
RECREATION AREA

HISTORIC SITE, ON NATIONAL REGISTER WHEN CIRCLED

SCENIC - NATURAL AREA

# SIGNIFICANT FEATURES

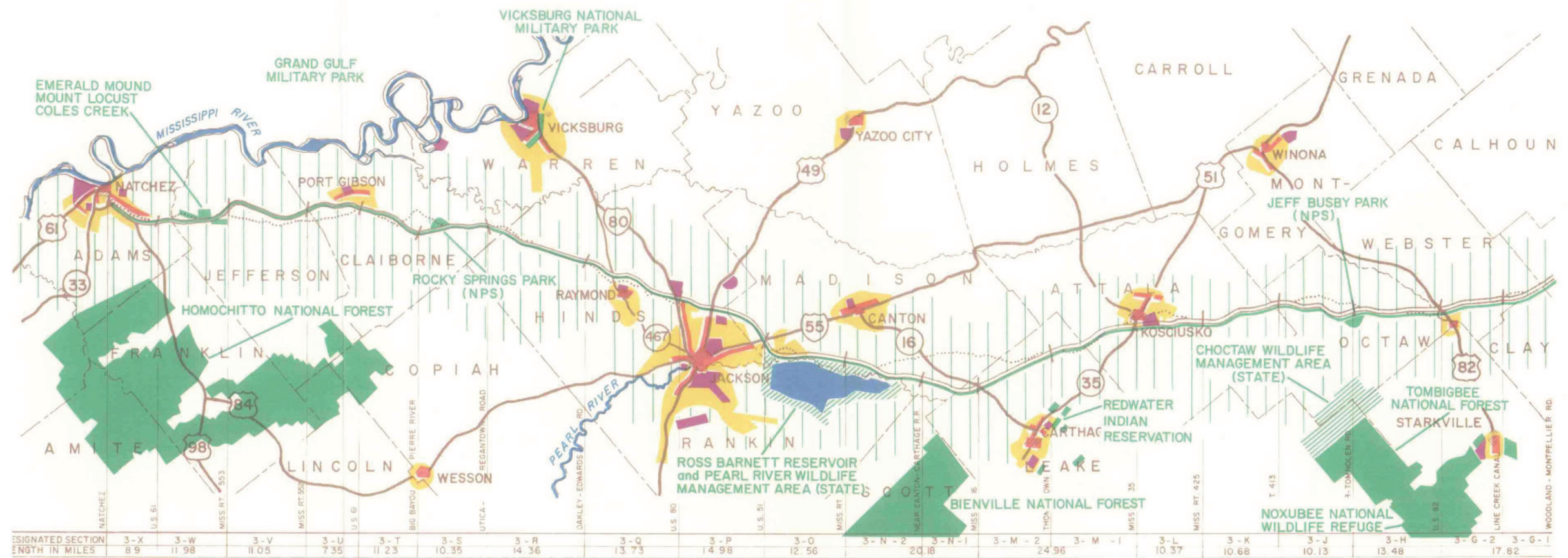
map five



THIS PROJECT UNDERTAKEN IN COMPLIANCE WITH PUBLIC LAW 90-543, THE NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM ACT. BASE MAP COMPILED FROM NATIONAL PARK SERVICE DATA BY BORRERO/USDI. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY THE NATCHEZ TRACE STUDY TASK FORCE 1974.

## NATCHEZ TRACE TRAILS STUDY



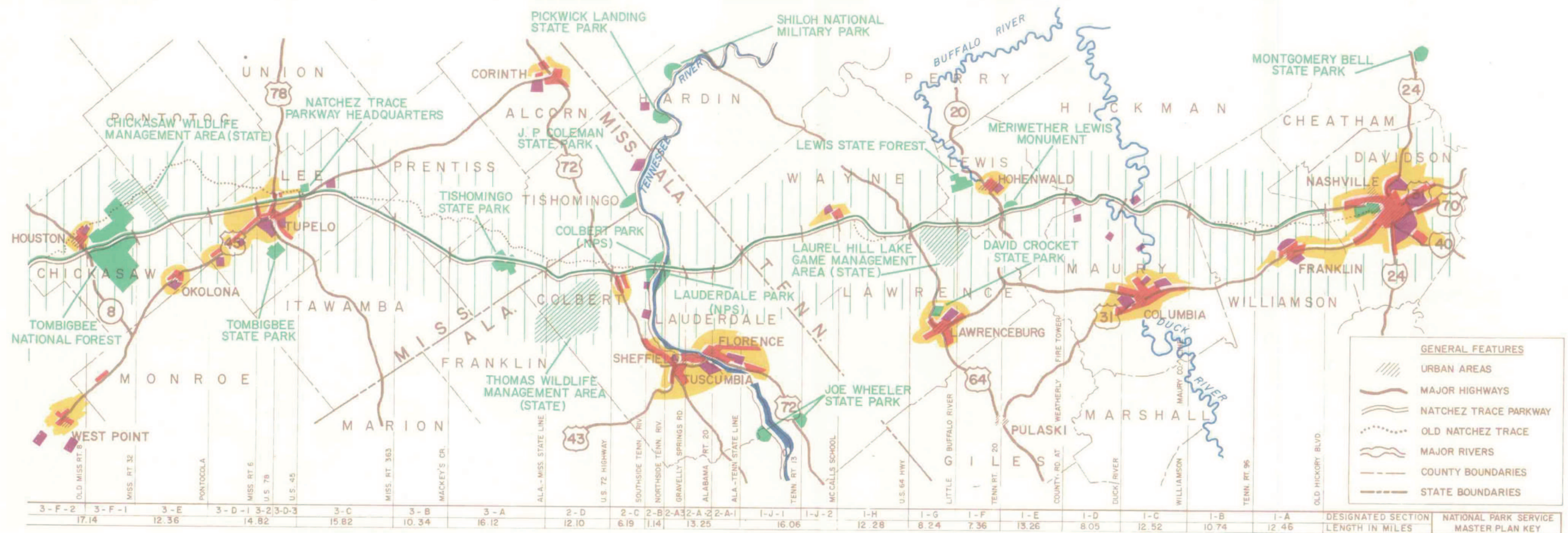




- RESIDENTIAL
- INDUSTRIAL
- COMMERCIAL
- PUBLIC/SEMI PUBLIC
- STUDY CORRIDOR (EMPHASIS)
- SIGNIFICANT WATER AREAS

# EXISTING LAND USE

map six



THIS PROJECT UNDERTAKEN IN COMPLIANCE WITH PUBLIC LAW 90-543, THE NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM ACT. BASE MAP COMPILED FROM NATIONAL PARK SERVICE DATA BY BOR-SERO/USDI. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY THE NATCHEZ TRACE STUDY TASK FORCE 1974.

## NATCHEZ TRACE TRAILS STUDY



to over 10,600,000 activity occasions; biking to over 26,400,000 occasions; and horseback riding to about 8,700,000 activity occasions. In terms of visitor days, hiking needs would amount to 4,200,000; biking to 4,400,000; and horseback riding to about 2,200,000 visitor days by the year 2000. Measured in miles needed, this means that approximately 892 miles of hiking trails will be needed, 1,050 miles of biking trails, and 1,043 miles of horseback riding trails.

### Project Alternatives

Based upon known data, a number of project alternatives were explored. This approach was felt to be best since it addresses the complete range of choices from the broadest conceptual plan to a simple, single purpose trail. Five primary alternatives were then developed and are discussed in this section (see table).

#### Corridor Protection

Protecting an adequate amount of land is, of course, essential to the success of any trails system. There are a number of ways of protecting trail lands. Among these, fee simple acquisition, easements, leases, and cooperative agreements appear to be the best possibilities. Fortunately, much land in the study area is already in public ownership through various Federal and State agencies and can be utilized for developing a good trails system. However, some funds will be needed either to assure accessibility of additional lands now privately owned and/or to develop trails facilities. Since accurate project costs can be determined only after the development of a final master plan by an overall administering agency, overall costs can only be estimated. Variations of actual costs can be caused by such unknown factors as opportunity purchases, land exchanges, donation, or problems that might arise.

#### Alternative I

This alternative calls for the development of a comprehensive multi-purpose trail system totaling 956 miles in phases over a period of 25 years. This trail system would include a 443-mile hard surface bicycling trail adjacent to the parkway and a 513-mile soft surface hiking trail, incorporating horseback riding in four segments. All of these trails would be built primarily within the publicly owned lands administered by the National Park Service, the Forest Service and the States. This combination trail system would satisfy 32 percent of the total identified trails needs in the general study corridor by the year 2000, or 40 percent of the hiking needs, 15 percent of horseback riding, and 42 percent of bicycling needs.

#### Alternative II

Alternative II is the development of a single-purpose hiking trail totaling 355 miles in length. This alternative could be divided into two priorities of development, 50 miles of first priority and

COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES\*  
NATCHEZ TRACE TRAILS SYSTEM

| Description of Action                                                                                                     | Trail Use and Mileage                                                    | Estimated Percent of Need<br>to be Satisfied by Year 2000 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>Alternative I</u>                                                                                                      |                                                                          |                                                           |
| Development of a comprehensive<br>multipurpose trail system using<br>public and private lands.                            | hiking, 355 miles<br>horseback riding, 158 miles<br>bicycling, 443 miles | 32                                                        |
| <u>Alternative II</u>                                                                                                     |                                                                          |                                                           |
| Development of a single-purpose hiking<br>trail using public and private lands.                                           | hiking, 355 miles                                                        | 12                                                        |
| <u>Alternative III</u>                                                                                                    |                                                                          |                                                           |
| Development of a relatively short<br>representative section for hiking only.<br>Primarily public lands would be utilized. | hiking, 100 miles                                                        | 3                                                         |
| <u>Alternative IV</u>                                                                                                     |                                                                          |                                                           |
| Development of a series of possibly (3)<br>trail segments for hiking only.<br>Primarily public lands would be utilized.   | hiking, 190 miles<br>(50 miles)<br>(72 miles)<br>(68 miles)              | 6                                                         |
| <u>Alternative V</u>                                                                                                      |                                                                          |                                                           |
| No action                                                                                                                 | -0-                                                                      | -0-                                                       |

\*These alternatives were the best among a dozen possible trails plans.

305 miles of second priority trails. An advantage of a single purpose hiking trail is that it could be quickly developed. However, hiking alone would not satisfy the greatest regional needs, i.e., horseback riding and bicycling, nor would this alternative provide the flexibility of choosing the best camping areas and nearby points of interest. This trail would satisfy approximately 12 percent of the total identified trails needs and 40 percent of the hiking needs by the year 2000.

### Alternative III

Under this alternative, a 100-mile "showcase section" of trail for hiking would be developed. The purpose of this alternative would be to capitalize upon the historical resources in this area, perhaps offering the trail user portions of the original Trace to hike upon. That area between Jackson and Natchez, Mississippi, is thought to have high potential because of the numerous scenic and historic features. However, only 3 percent of the total identified trails needs and 11 percent of the hiking needs would be satisfied by construction of this trail alternative. In addition, the development of such a short trail would not fully take advantage of the tremendous historical resources.

### Alternative IV

This alternative consists of a series of "trail segments" for hiking only within the specific trail corridor. Three sections were considered: (a) 50 miles between Nashville and Hohenwald, Tennessee; (b) 72 miles between Jackson and Rocky Springs, Mississippi; and (c) 68 miles between Tupelo, Mississippi, and the Tennessee River in Alabama. These three separate hiking trails would satisfy approximately 6 percent of the identified trail needs and 21 percent of the hiking needs in the general study corridor.

### Alternative V

This alternative is to take no action toward creating any type of trail or trails system within the Natchez Trace study corridor. Under this alternative, the provision of recreation trails would be left up to the individual States and localities along with preservation of cultural features associated with the Old Trace.

The obvious advantage of this alternative is the saving in capital expenditure and manpower which would be required if a trail system were instituted. A no action determination would of course require no acquisition or development. A disadvantage would be the absence of a system which could help satisfy known trails needs in the study corridor. It should be recognized that the absence of a program of sufficient size and authority to focus upon the Natchez Trace corridor, with all its social and cultural features, will eventually result in a gradual destruction of many irreplaceable national assets.



## Administrative Alternatives

There are basically only two alternatives for the administration of the Natchez Trace Trails System: total Federal administration or a combination of Federal-State-local administration. A major factor in the determination of a potential administering agency is the presence of the Natchez Trace Parkway, administered by the National Park Service.

### Alternative 1: Total Federal Administration

At the present time, the National Park Service is responsible for the completion and maintenance of the Natchez Trace Parkway. Inasmuch as this memorial roadway generally parallels the old historic Trace, it too was included in the study corridor. Certain historic and scenic foot trails are now presently maintained by the Park Service in conjunction with the Parkway. In view of the nearly complete parkway (85 percent as of April 1976) and lands acquired for this purpose, it is therefore logical that the Park Service might also administer whatever trails are constructed either within their present acquisitions or on other protected lands later.

Because of the National Park Service's unique position in this study, both as administrator of the Natchez Trace Parkway and as a member of the study task force, no other single Federal agency was as seriously considered by the task force to undertake the responsibility for administering any proposed Natchez Trace Trail.

### Alternative 2: Federal-State-Local Administration

Section 7(e) of the National Trails System Act states, in part, "where the lands included in a national scenic trail right-of-way are outside the exterior boundaries of federally administered areas, the Secretary charged with the administration of such trails shall encourage the States or local governments involved (1) to enter into written cooperative agreements with landowners, private organizations and individuals to provide the necessary trail right-of-way or (2) acquire such lands or interests therein to be utilized as segments of the national scenic trail . . . ." Therefore, since one of the considerations in providing for a Natchez Trace trails system was the acquisition or protection of additional lands outside of the present Natchez Trace Parkway right-of-way, States and localities clearly could be involved in the acquisition or protection and management of portions of the designated trails area.

Private assistance in the administration of those portions of the proposed trails system not acquired by Federal agencies is also a possibility. For example, portions of the proposed trails system could be legally protected and maintained by a private nonprofit club similar to the Appalachian Trail Clubs. These clubs have

assisted in obtaining various land-use controls along the Appalachian Trail working in conjunction with States and the National Park Service. Similar clubs could be formed to work with the proposed Natchez Trace Trails System.

### Possible Impacts

In assessing the overall impact of the proposed trails system, three basic categories were considered: social, economic, and environmental. If constructed, the Natchez Trace Trails System would provide a focal point for the preservation of nationally recognized historic values depicting a vital part of our American heritage. Both tangible and intangible benefits, or "amenities" will accrue to individuals and businesses in the study area. However, these benefits are not likely to be significant. Adverse impact upon nearby property owners or other trail users is expected to be minor. Impact upon the natural environment will basically result from two sources: (1) the initial construction phase, and (2) use of the trails and support facilities once constructed. However, with reasonable precautions, adverse impacts, both long and short term, can be held to a minimum.

Additional information regarding impact will be presented in the environmental impact statement in accord with Public Law 91-190, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

### Public Input

Since many people are perhaps unaware of the need for additional recreational opportunities, especially in this study area, and may be unfamiliar with Public Law 90-543, public meetings are planned to promote a better understanding of recreational needs and opportunities. Public comment on the proposed trail and on this study is welcome. Therefore, a key element in the study of the Natchez Trace area for recreation use is the comments, suggestions, and recommendations provided by individuals and private recreation/conservation groups. Your knowledge and your ideas are important components in the completion of a meaningful report by the Natchez Trace Study Task Force. In addition to the interested organizations in the three States, there are Natchez Trace Trails Associations in both Mississippi and Tennessee. These organizations, along with other concerned citizens, have long been interested in preserving the qualities associated with the Old Trace and adjacent scenic and historical areas.

Those persons who wish to comment may use the attached page or add additional sheets if more space is desired and mail them to: Regional Director, Southeast Region, Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, 148 Cain Street, Atlanta, Georgia 30303.

## COMMENTS

This page may be used to ask questions you may have on information provided on the preceding pages or to make additional comments to the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation on the Natchez Trace Trails Study.

Name:  
Address:  
Telephone Number: