

Project Plan

Echoes of the Tennessee Rail Foundation

Version 3.3

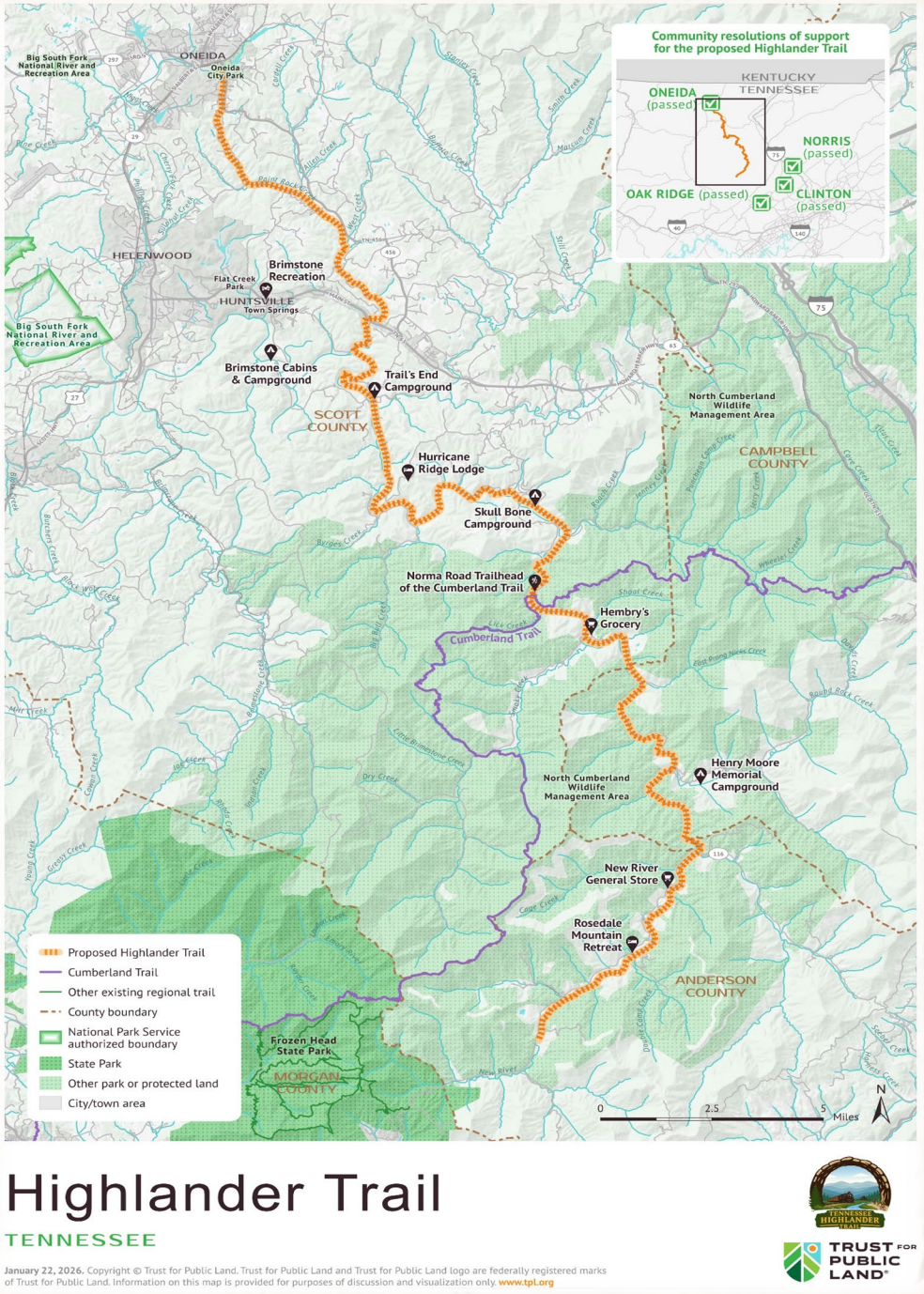
May 1, 2026

What?

The Tennessee Highlander Trail

A Rail-to-Trail project along 42 miles of the old Tennessee Railroad Corridor from Oneida through Norma to New River and into Frozen Head State Park.





Highlander Trail

TENNESSEE

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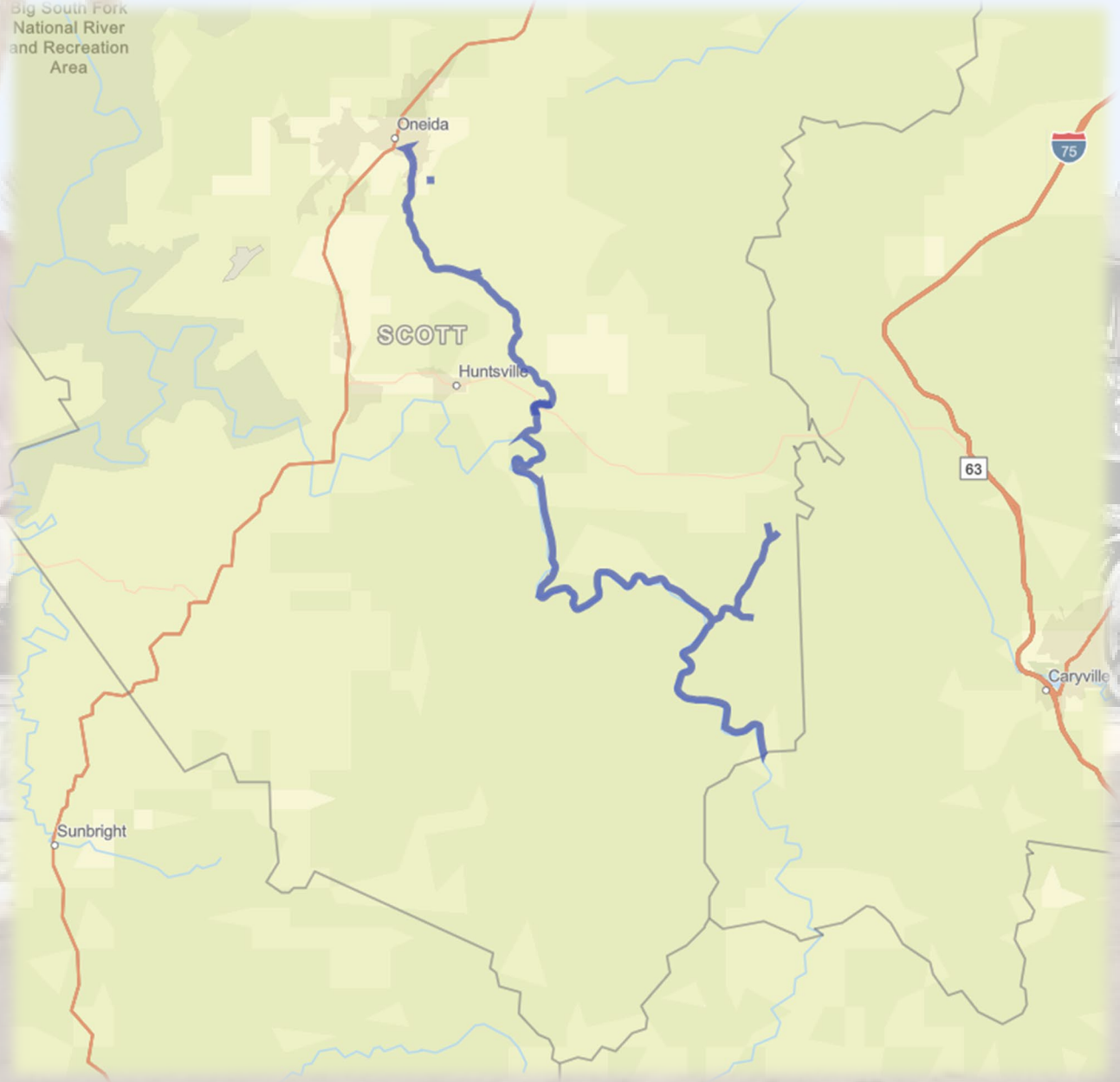


Where?

Scott County, TN

- 27.0 of 42 miles are in Scott County
- Scott County is a “distressed” county
- The Trail passes through several communities that would benefit from new economic opportunity:
  - Town of Oneida
  - Town of Huntsville
  - Winona
  - Norma
  - Smokey Junction
- Synergistic outdoor tourism draws:
  - Big South Fork National Rec Area
  - Brimstone OHV park
  - TWRA – N. Cumberland & Royal Blue OHV
  - Cumberland Trail (hiking) crosses

Where?

Campbell County, TN

- 6.7 of 42 miles
- Campbell County is an “at-risk” county
- The Trail passes through a very rural and undeveloped portion of Campbell County
  - 80% of Trail passes thru State-owned land
  - Several private land-owners have expressed interest in entrepreneurial economic activities (campground, e-bike rental, etc.)
  - Is a beautiful and unpopulated portion of the Trail – true wilderness





Where?

Anderson County, TN

- 7.3 of 42 miles
- Anderson County is one of the economically strongest in TN; but the Rosedale / New River community is geographically isolated and distressed
  - 1940's – 50's, population of 3,000
  - Today's population is 149
- Synergistic Outdoor Tourism Attractions
  - US Hwy 116 is a road-bicyclist destination called the "Devil's Triangle"; parallels Trail
  - Windrock OHV park
- A few businesses are already present and will immediately benefit from a new demographic of outdoor tourist

Why?

- **Because this is a once-only opportunity.** Corridors like this cannot be recreated. Preservation must happen now!
- **Because public access matters.** The trail creates safe, quality-of-life & health enhancing access to outdoor space for walking, hiking, & cycling without requiring expensive new infrastructure.
- **Because history deserves continuity, not abandonment.** This Corridor tells the story of the region's industrial and cultural past. Adaptive reuse honors that history while giving it new relevance.
- **Because economic benefit follows.** Rail-trails consistently drive tourism, small business growth, property value stabilization, and community investment—*without heavy public burden*.

Why?

The Trail represents a shift from exporting finite resources to importing visitors; circulating dollars locally in a sustainable & growing economic cycle.







Coal & Timber

- Finite resource base
- Boom–bust cycles
- Capital-intensive, externally owned
- Wealth largely exported
- Negative environmental legacy

Outdoor Tourism & Heritage Activation

- Renewable asset base
- Small-business driven, locally owned
- Distributed local spending & revenue generation
- Multi-day visitor potential
- Attracts retirees, families, remote workers

Why?

Rail trails generate reliable, repeat economic activity

- The Virginia Creeper generates 250,000 visitors per year![1]
- Brushy Mountain State Penitentiary attracts 100,000 visitor per year![2]
- Many rural counties and areas are focusing on outdoor tourism to drive economic growth.[2]
- Rail-to-Trail Conservancy's Trail Town research notes that long- distance trails (>= 12 miles) more likely attract *overnight* visitors & such visitors spend about **six times more than day-trip visitors** in trail communities.[3]
- Conservatively, The Tennessee Highlander Trail can generate 10,000 visitors per year:

  10,000 annual visitors = $2.06MM in direct local spending each year!

  Fiscal Impact w/ Annual visitors: 10,000
  Average daily spending per visitor: $206[4]
  Total annual direct spending: **$2.06MM**
  Estimated Annual Tax Revenue Generated
  Sales Tax (9.25%): ≈ $190,500
  Hotel Occupancy Tax (9%)
  (Assume 30% of spending is lodging-related) ≈ $55,500
  Total annual public revenue ≈ **$246,000 per year**

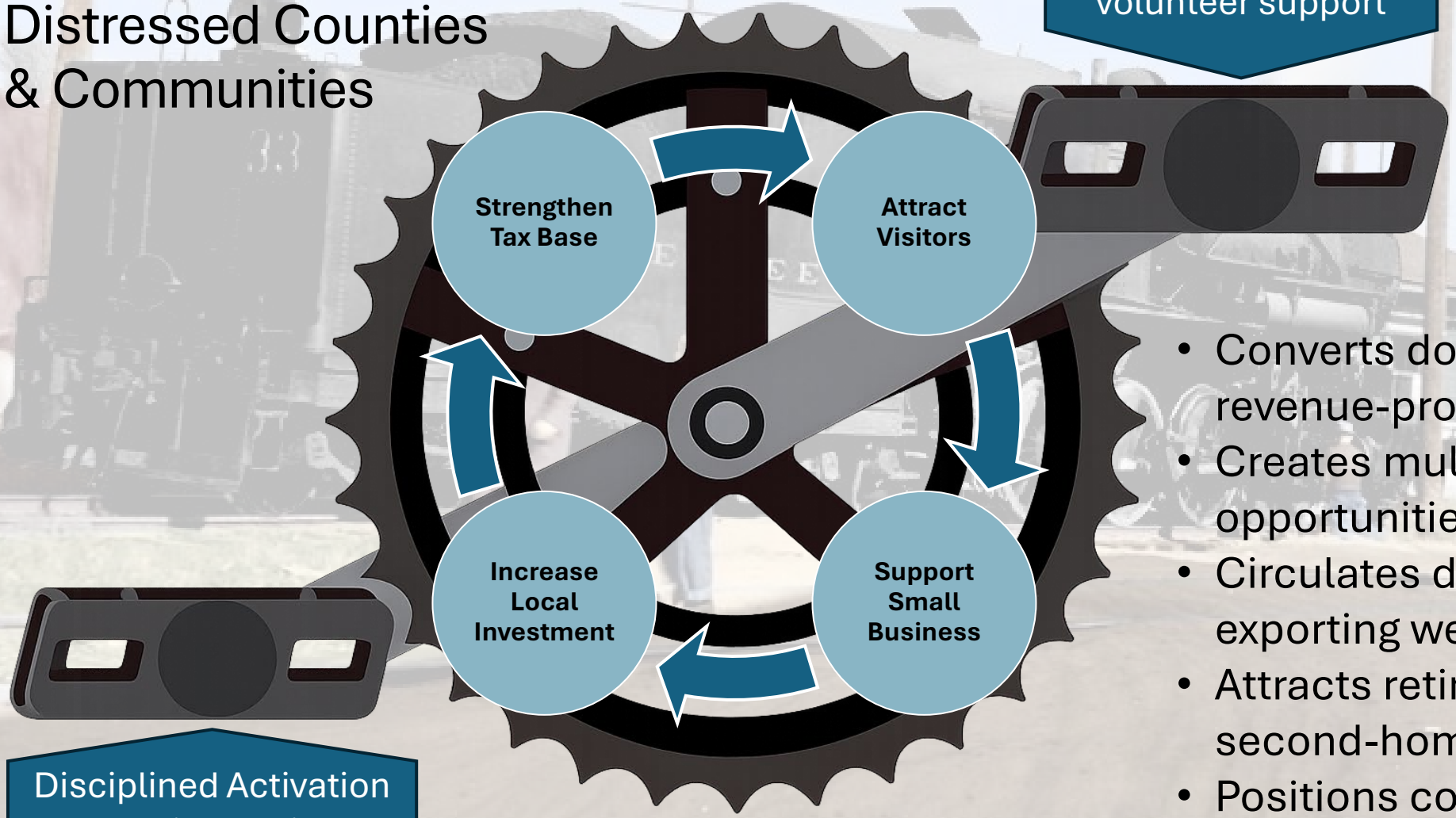


1 US Forest Service website, 12-19-25 2 Morgan County News, "Distressed to success: Real examples of economic growth in rural Tennessee", 5-25-25
3 www.railstotrails.org/trail-building-toolbox/trail-towns/ 4 "2024 Economic Impact of Travel on Tennessee", TN Dept. of Tourism Development

Why?

this Matters for Our Distressed Counties & Communities

Private donations, grant money, philanthropic capital, volunteer support



- Converts dormant Corridor into revenue-producing asset
- Creates multiple small-business opportunities (lodging, food, outfitting)
- Circulates dollars locally instead of exporting wealth
- Attracts retirees, remote workers, and second-home investment
- Positions counties competitively for ARC and state development grants

Disciplined Activation of the Trail; Continuous Improvement

Why?

Use outside capital to strengthen local communities; not strain local budgets

The Echoes' Commitment:

- Acquisition, construction, and maintenance / operations funded through private donations, philanthropic capital, and state & federal grants and appropriations

Economic Diversification without reliance on local operating budgets

- Attracts private and philanthropic capital into our communities
- Positions communities for state & federal rural development grants
- Supports small business growth (lodging, food, outfitting, services)
- Expands sales and lodging tax base without raising rates

Local Political Support Still Matters

- Counties & municipalities may be asked for resolutions of support
- Coordination on road crossings, signage, EMS access, trespass
- Partnership on adjacent economic initiatives



The Tennessee Highlander Trail is a NET GAIN not a net drain for our local economies.

Why?

A rail-trail is not just recreation; it is long-term, community-based healthcare

1. Increases Everyday Physical Activity
Safe, free, and accessible low-impact space for walking, biking, and mobility across all ages.

2. Reduces Chronic Disease Risk
Supports prevention and management of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension — conditions disproportionately impacting rural counties.

3. Improves Mental & Social Well-Being
Outdoor access reduces stress and isolation while strengthening community connection.

4. Supports Intergenerational Health
Encourages family activity and lifelong healthy habits.

5. Built-In Preventive Health Asset for the Communities



Why?

The Trail will reinvest in the Communities along the Corridor – not extract

Direct Community Grants

Playgrounds • Youth recreation • ADA amenities • Beautification

Support for Public Safety

Volunteer fire equipment • EMS coordination • First-responder access

Local Partnership Investment

School programs • Community events • Matching grant leverage





Our Commitment

The *Tennessee Highlander Trail* will reinvest in the Communities along the Corridor creating visible, tangible benefit beyond the Trail itself.



Who?

The **Echoes of TN Rail Foundation (Echoes)**

- is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with officers and advisors from all along the old Tennessee Railroad Corridor and the larger region.
- is seeking to acquire, construct, and manage The Tennessee Highlander Trail for public use via primarily private funding.
- is focused on preserving, developing, and managing the Corridor for long-term public access and community economic benefit.

Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning (TCWP)

- is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that secured the original NITU in 2020 to preserve the corridor for future railbanking and trail conversion.
- Leading public outreach and coalition-building with local governments, communities, and partners.
- Supporting fundraising and resource development from a range of public and private sources for all phases of trail implementation.

Who?

Trust for Public Land (TPL)

- is a national 501(c)(3) conservation organization with offices throughout the US.
- is the current NITU holder and party to final railbanking agreement with RJ Corman.
- holds an option to purchase the corridor and is conducting due diligence toward acquisition.
- will transfer ownership to a long-term steward committed to permanent public access and benefit.

RJ Corman Railroad Group, LLC (RJC)

- Current owners of Corridor.
- RJC is a privately owned railroad services and short line operating company headquartered in Nicholasville, Kentucky.
- RJC has owned the line since 2010; and petitioned for abandonment in 2020.

National Salvage & Service Corp (NSSC)

- Company contracted by RJ Corman to remove rails and ties from the rail bed
- NSSC has been a strong ally in the effort to secure the Corridor as a long-term public access asset.

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RJ Corman Railroad Group

How?

The Echoes Plan – Leadership, Ownership, & Stewardship in Phases



Phase 0 – Interim Stewardship & Corridor Protection

Goal: Protect and stabilize the corridor *before ownership*, preventing loss, degradation, or liability; demonstrate positive, proactive leadership with landowners, partner organizations, and governmental entities along the Corridor and in the region.

Phase 1 – Corridor Acquisition

Goal: Secure legal ownership and long-term control for public use.

Phase 2 – Design & Construction

Goal: Build a safe, accessible, and durable public trail.

Phase 3 – Operations & Long-Term Maintenance

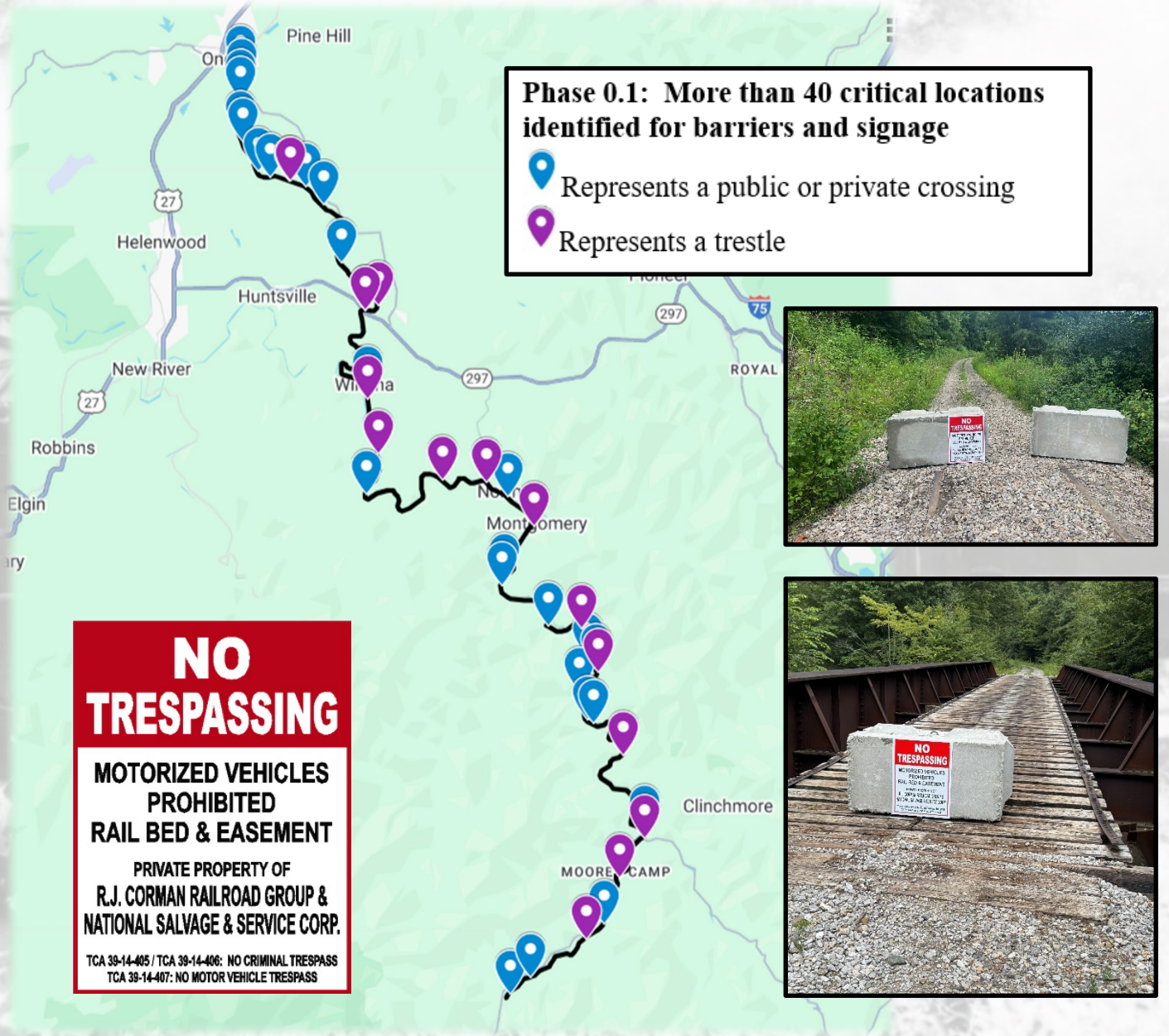
Goal: Ensure lasting public benefit and sustainability.

Phase 0 Status

Phase 0.1 – Barrier and Sign the Corridor

Secure the corridor against trespass, damage, and misuse

- Main complaint of landowners is motorized trespass
- 100% private donation money & labor
- August ’25: MM0 – MM13.0
- Nov ’25: MM13.0 – MM28.1
- Feb ’26: MM36.7 – MM41.2
- Soon: MM28.4 – MM29.2
- Deferred: MM29.2(S) – MM34.8



Phase 0 Status

Phase 0.2 – Establish “showcase” sections for supervised access

Section 1: 1.1-miles (MM0 – MM1.1)

Section 2: 5.5-miles (MM15.6 – MM22.1)

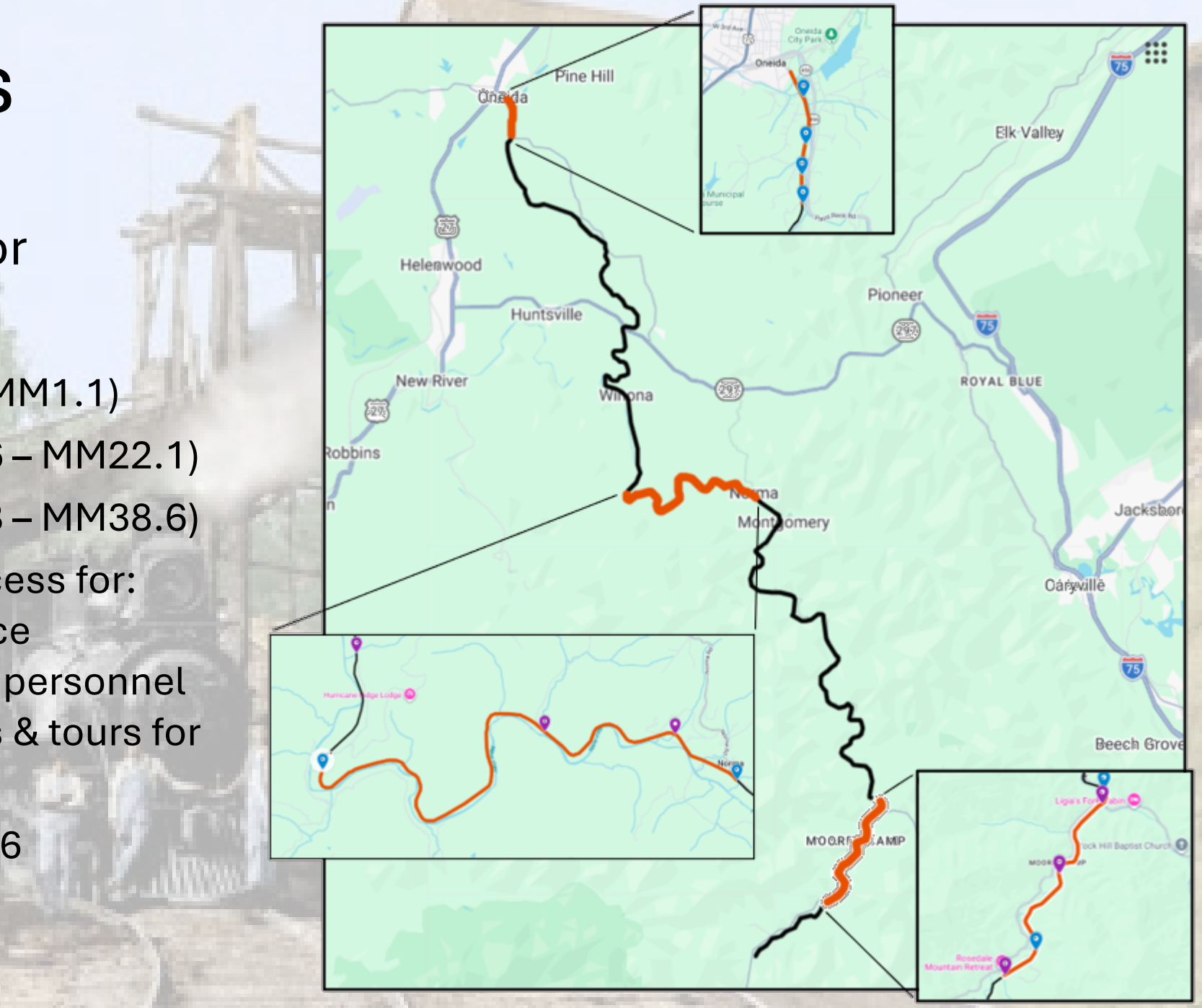
Section 3: 3.8-miles (MM34.8 – MM38.6)

Demonstrate responsible access for:

- Construction & Maintenance
- First responders & security personnel
- Select & supervised groups & tours for walking, hiking, and biking

Completion date: Summer ’26

Concluding Phase 0



Phase 1 Status

The TPL is positioning the Corridor for long-term stability & public benefit via due diligence and initial acquisition.

- The TPL has executed an option with RJC to acquire the Corridor
  - December 7, 2026 option date – close within 45-days (January 2027)
- The TPL is currently working on title work, appraisal, & other due diligence
  - Appraisal resulted in a valuation of approx. $3,000,000
  - Title work completed and shows that vast majority of Corridor was purchased “fee simple” or equiv. 1880 – 1920
  - Railbanking agreement with STB affected April 27, 2026
  - Phase I environmental in progress
  - Boundary survey in progress

Phase 1 Status

Insurance

Assumption of responsibility for liability and insurance coverage is a requirement of interim trail use, thereby protecting the railroad while preserving the corridor under federal railbanking law.

- The Echoes is prepared to insure the property (commercial general liability)
- Grow insurance coverage as the Rail-Trail is opened and grows (see Phases 2 & 3)
- The Echoes is prepared to indemnify RJC & NSSC & TPL
- The Echoes will also carry D&O insurance

Funding

- The Echoes is seeking to raise money from State, Federal, and Private / Philanthropic sources for acquisition and design & construction



It’s a big lift! Please help

Phase 2 Status Echoes will operate under a disciplined, phased approach:



- **Vision** (Year 1)
  - Complete and make available for public use the Showcase Sections
  - Demonstrate feasibility, establish public confidence, and validate standards
- **Realize** (Years 2 – 5)
  - The Showcase Sections are expanded and eventually connected such that the entire 42-miles is open
  - Build-out of Trailheads
  - Constantly learn and adapt
- **Transform** (Years 5+)
  - Continuous improvement
  - Transform this resource into a regional (and national) destination
  - Improvement & investment aimed specifically at the Communities along the Corridor
  - Improvements of Trailhead amenities; historical & cultural markers; etc.
  - Possible expansion opportunities

Phase 3 Status

Operations & Maintenance

The Echoes budgets $3,000 per mile per year – maintenance consumables (fuel, blade sharpening, chemicals, etc.); equipment upkeep; and capital maintenance (washouts, rockslides, vandalism, reasonable trestle maintenance, etc.)

- Figure based on interviews with other peer Trail Managers
- Figure includes Trailhead operations such as gravel & port-a-potties

The Echoes currently has the following pledges for ongoing operations & maintenance:

Miles	Commitment Source	Commitment Duration
4.00	Corporate	3 years
1.00	Local Small Business	3 years
1.00	Individual	3 years
6.00		

Phase 3 Status

Operational Evolution & Continuous Improvement

The Echoes is looking into the future as the Trail and its Stewardship grows:

- **Safety and Incident Management** is distinct from insurance and entails safety-conscious operations of the Trail.
- **Usage Monitoring and Data** will be collected and evaluated to inform maintenance priorities, safety decisions, and future improvements.
- **Community Stewardship and Partnership**. A central objective of The Echoes is to work collaboratively with the communities along the Trail to support life-enhancing amenities that promote health, recreation, and community engagement.
- **Environmental Stewardship & Compliance.** The Echoes plans to operate in an environmentally responsible fashion.
- **Financial Sustainability Framework** transcends budgeting to a structure of multiple funding sources so that the continued operation of the Trail is not dependent on a single source.
- **Long-Term Governance & Transition Planning**. The Echoes is committed to being the long-term steward of the Tennessee Highlander Trail; however, our approach considers a transition to a public entity for permanent control should that option be available and desirable to fulfill our Mission.

The Echoes Mission:

- **Preserve** the integrity and celebrate the history of the 42-mile Corridor that has contributed so significantly to the communities along its length for over a century
- **Develop, manage, and maintain** the Corridor for public access & recreation for non-motorized uses
- **Promote** economic opportunities and activities along the Corridor and the larger region
- **Protect and enhance** the riparian and natural habitats along the Corridor.





A call to action …

The *Tennessee Highlander Trail* needs your support.

Questions and comments?

TENNESSEE HIGHLANDER TRAIL