



GEORGIA'S RURAL CENTER

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Dawson County Trail Master Plan Project

CENTER FOR RURAL PROSPERITY AND INNOVATION

SUMMARY

The Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation, also known as Georgia's Rural Center, agreed to assist the Dawson County Development Authority with funds to support a countywide multi-use trail system based on a tourism and economic development angle to attract additional visitors and businesses that can virtually work from any location such as entrepreneurial and tech companies. The quality of life value a trail system brings to a community is attractive to developers and a benefit to residents.

This plan identifies approximately 19.6 miles of trails in southern Dawson County, connecting schools, parks, Lake Lanier, Dawson Forest, neighborhoods, employment areas, and the Highway 400 retail and service destinations. Future expansion of the trail system should include connections to Russell Creek Reservoir, Downtown Dawsonville, Amicalola Falls State Park, and other greenspaces and protected areas. The well connected trail will address transportation infrastructure, economic growth investment, and many other community needs.

In early 2020, the Development Authority of Dawson County initiated a study for the development of a comprehensive economic development plan. The plan identified five specific vision/goals for the county, which included:

- Build a Resilient Community
- Focus Development Efforts
- Generate Opportunity for Business
- Support Community Residents
- Protect and Conserve Natural and Cultural Resources

According to the Dawson County Development Authority, there is support for planned growth by the Dawson County Chamber of Commerce, City of Dawsonville, and Dawson County. A plan for a trail system to provide connectivity is just one factor, and Georgia's Rural Center agreed to assist on the project. Dawson County competes with neighboring counties that have great connectivity to shopping, parks, and other recreational opportunities within the county which adds a quality of life component attractive to young professionals, especially those who work from home.

A key factor in assessing this project is that a significant percentage of the county's land area is public forest land, which does not generate property tax revenues. Therefore, Dawson County must ensure preservation, access, and value-added strategies to generate visitors and indirect income from these assets. Envisioning a future with a more diverse economic base, Dawson County looks to incorporate its nontaxable natural assets into a development plan that will ultimately lessen tax burdens placed on residents and farmers.

The reliance on the retail sector for both property tax income to the county and for employment of citizens is not sustainable for this area. Tourism and retail are the biggest portions of the county's economic portfolio. Expanding economic development efforts to reach small tech companies with higher wages is an effort to infuse diversity into Dawson County's economy.

The following outlines the route/segment name and total distance.

- Dawson Forest (6.4 miles)
- Etowah River (6.6 miles)
- GA 400 (2.2 miles)
- Thompson Creek (1.5 miles)
- Highway 53 (2.9 miles)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Contact the Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation (Georgia's Rural Center) at info@ruralga.org or 229.391.4847. For more information on this specific project, please contact Janet Cochran, janet.cochran@abac.edu.

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