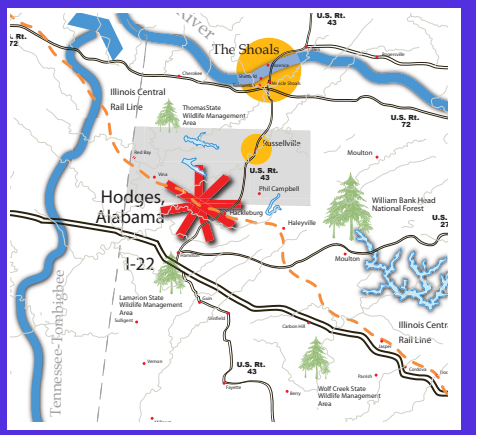
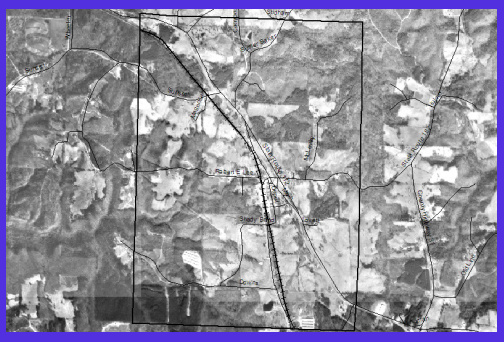
Town of Hodges Economic Development Study

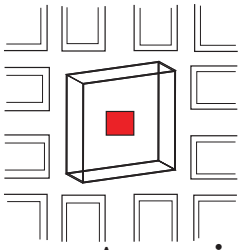
A guide to developing local assets in Hodges, Alabama.





HODGES ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STUDY

Prepared by Farmer & Associates
with assistance from
Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments



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NACOLG

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Hodges Economic Development Study
A. Introduction

The purpose of the Hodges Economic Development Study is to identify future growth and development strategies for Hodges, Alabama. Hodges citizens and community leaders wish to expand their economic opportunities in order to develop a stronger tax base, greater opportunity, and higher quality of life in the town. The municipality is committed to this purpose while preserving the rural quality of life that is abundant in Hodges.

This study focuses on economic development strategies that capitalize on existing assets within Hodges and Franklin County. In many ways these are not traditional economic development approaches. The abundant natural resources, rural setting and relative isolation of Hodges create an ideal environment for leveraging rural assets, which contrast with economic development strategies that focus on industrial development. Hodges' assets have been identified and analyzed for the most sustainable method to develop each into an economic generator for Hodges that contributes to the town's overall development goals.

The Hodges Economic Development Study provides the basic framework to assess existing assets and to prepare for future development. More detailed planning and design development efforts will be necessary to leverage the identified assets, but this document establishes the general framework for future economic development and community planning in Hodges, Alabama.

Community Description

Resting within the southernmost hills of the Tennessee Valley, Hodges overlooks an attractive landscape of agriculture and woodlands. The town of 261 residents ("U.S. Census Bureau") is composed of 3.1 square miles, with a small business district. The majority of the town's citizens are employed in manufacturing jobs located outside of Hodges. First incorporated in 1913, Hodges evolved around a Post Office (Steele 4) and the Illinois Gulf Central Rail Line. The district is currently in decline and in dire need of redevelopment.

Recreation and scenic sites abound in and around the Town of Hodges. Two miles to the north is the Bear Creek Reservoir composed of a "system of lakes and surrounding woodlands. The reservoir is used for camping, fishing, boating and swimming ("Bear Creek Reservoir")." Additionally, the beautiful Rock Bridge Canyon is just to the northwest of Hodges. The Dismals National Natural Landmark is to the east and is the only location in which a particular species of insect- the dismalite- can be found. Throughout the area, opportunities for unique outdoor recreation and education experiences are virtually unmatched, and it is these opportunities on which the Economic Development Study will seek to build.

Location and Geography

The Town of Hodges is located in northwest Alabama in the southern portion of Franklin County (N34º 19.633', W87º 55.574). Franklin County is bounded on the north by Colbert County, on the east by Lawrence County, on the south by Winston and Marion Counties, and on the west by the State of Mississippi. Hodges is located 16 miles from Hamilton, 45 miles from Florence and 100 miles from Birmingham.

Historically, Hodges' economic success has been based on links to the region's railroads and highways. Hodges is located at the intersection of Alabama State Route 187 and Alabama State Route 172. These two-lane roads connect the town to regional thoroughfares - Alabama 24 north and U.S. 43 south of Hodges. The town sits approximately 7.5 miles northwest from U.S. Highway 43, which is a regional arterial running north-south and linking urban centers in Alabama and Tennessee. Hodges was initially founded along the railroad, and the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad passed through the town of Hodges from its construction in 1907 (Steele 3) until it was decommissioned.

Geographically, Hodges' location is vital to its past and present economic activity. The town is located along the Tennessee Valley Divide (TVD), which is "… the eastern and southern boundary of the drainage basin of the Tennessee River and its tributaries" ("Tennessee Valley Divide"). The ridge that forms the divide provided the Illinois Central Railroad the ability to manage and engineer the rail line and allowed its economical operation. The TVD also provides much of the natural context for the town and Franklin County, creating conditions and biodiversity not found elsewhere in the United States.

Purpose and Goals of the Study

The purpose of the Economic Development Study is to prepare a growth plan for the future and to provide the Hodges community with a chance to foster job creation and increase the revenues for the municipality.

The Hodges Economic Development Study has identified the need to improve local employment and municipal infrastructure. The goals established by the leadership of Hodges and its citizens are:

- Redevelop downtown
- New residential development
- Job creation through local assets
- Capitalize on regional water resources
- Develop municipal properties

The Hodges Economic Development Study provides the Town of Hodges with a comprehensive review of existing conditions and potential assets for leveraging into increased economic development for the town. The plan is crafted around an analysis of existing conditions of the town and establishes future economic development goals. The growth opportunities in the

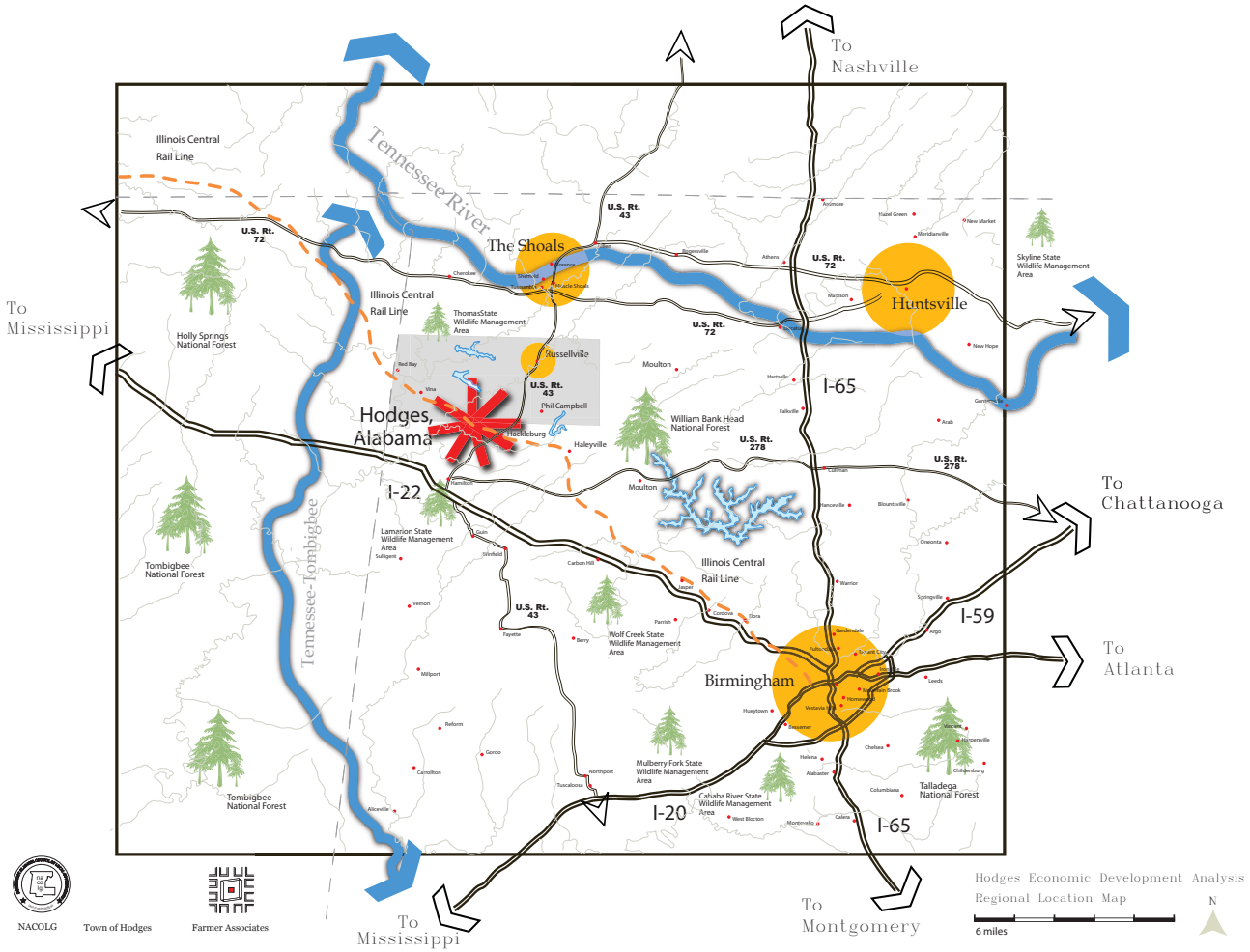
plan are based on the principles of asset based economic development.

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) defines Asset-Based Economic Development as "a strategy that builds on existing resources—natural, cultural and structural—to create valued products and services that can be sustained for local benefit ("ARC")." The basic principles of asset-based development consist of "mobilizing individual and community talents, skills and assets", which must be community driven ("ABCD")." The present undertaking embraces these principles by virtue of exploring existing resources and capacities to create opportunities for expanded economic activities without damaging the assets or character that make the Town of Hodges and Franklin County unique.

Community Involvement and Relationship to the Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan

Community mobilization was essential to identifying the economic development goals for the Town of Hodges. In preparing the Economic Development Study a series of public involvement meetings were conducted in order to solicit the ideas, feedback, and interest from the public. As the plan progressed, ideas regarding growth and development opportunities became increasingly concrete and directed toward the concept of recreational tourism as an important opportunity for Hodges. Planning for developing the Town's resources to maximize opportunities for recreational tourism eventually led to the Hodges' Equestrian Trails Plan, which is a supplemental strategic plan intended to carry out the goals established by the Economic Development Study.

Moving forward with implementation, the community of Hodges must be persistent in pursuing their goals and in so doing implement the strategies contained in the Equestrian Trails Plan. Without ongoing support and implementation from local citizens, the goals of the Economic Development Study will be unachievable. Therefore, continued community involvement and support are requisite for the general goals of this plan and the specific strategy contained in the Equestrian Trails Plan to be implemented.



B. Challenges & Opportunities

The economic opportunities for the Town of Hodges outweigh the identified challenges. Economic development in Hodges will be based on leveraging assets and opportunities as a means to overcome challenges. In assessing local economic development challenges with the community, there was one repeating issue- the rural isolation of the town and its surrounding region. Although a significant challenge for traditional economic development techniques, the town's rural isolation provided a significant opportunity for developing recreational attractions. In repeated community discussions, it became evident that the community's geographic isolation created a rural character and charm that allow unique economic development opportunities.

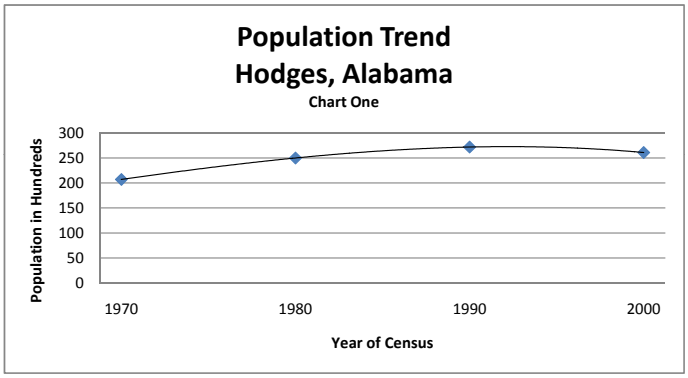
Throughout the planning process, there were three on site forums held in the Town of Hodges. The first meeting discussed the existing conditions of the town and surrounding region. The community reviewed the existing conditions analysis reacted to information about these conditions. The second meeting reviewed the previous meetings discussion and identified challenges and opportunities in the community. The second on site forum identified the greatest overall economic development challenge as rural isolation, related to geographic constraints on transportation that arise from topography and environmental conditions. The third meeting discussed design based solutions to the identified economic development challenges- solidifying the development of the Equestrian Trails Plan.

The Economic Development Study provides an inventory and analysis of key opportunities, including environmental resources and existing infrastructure. Meanwhile, the Hodges Equestrian Trails Plan is a companion document that sets forth a sustainable strategy for leveraging the identified assets. In forming both plans, the need to protect local assets being leveraged was consistently identified. The strategies presented for development attempt to be sustainable in relation to the Town of Hodges. Sustainability is defined here by the capacity of the town to phase in developments over time without destroying the unique opportunities that exist today. Local community context is essential to defining challenges, opportunities, and sustainability.

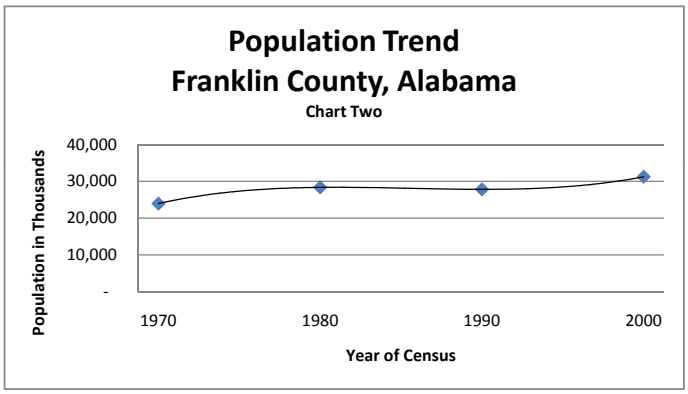
Demographic and Socioeconomic Profile

With a population of 261, Hodges is a small town with less than one percent of Franklin County's population and a limited resource base. Hodges contains .84% of the population of Franklin County (pop. 31,223). Although maintaining a small total population, Hodges enjoyed a high growth rate from 1970 until 1990, with an average growth of 15% over the twenty year period. From the 1970 census to the 2000 census, Hodges' population increased by 54 persons for a total increase of 20% for the thirty year period. From 1990 until 2000, however, the town decreased marginally in population, losing 11 persons (or 4% of its population). Given the small population base, these moderately high changes have produced modest numeric increases in population relative to other areas, but the effect on the community has been far greater. Table one provides a summary of municipal and county population during the past thirty years.

Throughout Franklin County, the 1970s and 1980s saw high growth rates for most communities. This growth trend changed in the 1990s, reflecting cyclical and structural economic changes in manufacturing and the national economy. By 2000, the county saw an increase in growth as did the municipalities of Russellville and Vina. However, a sharp decline was evident in the 2000 census in Phil Campbell, while Red Bay and Hodges experienced moderate declines. In Phil Campbell there was a -17.1% population loss with marginal declines in Red Bay of -2.2%. Hodges lost 4% of its population from 1990 to 2000.



The population gains during the 1990 to 2000 decade reversed a trend for Franklin County. The previous decade's stagnation had led to out-migration. But, partly as a result of the 1990 opening of Golden Poultry, the county-wide population steadily increased (House 7). Overall the net population gains were positive for Hodges and Franklin County.



Ethnic and racial populations changed from the 1990 to 2000 in Franklin County. In order to supply the diversifying industries of the county, diversification and immigration occurred. Specific increases were seen in Russellville and Franklin County with respect to Hispanic population. The 1990 census indicated a .5% percent Hispanic population for Russellville and .4% Hispanic population for the county. By 2000, Russellville and Franklin County populations were a 12.6% and 6% Hispanic respectively. Hodges, however, has not experienced these changes to the extent that other areas of the county have. Table Two, includes information on racial and ethnic composition.

The median age for Franklin County residents in the 2000 Census was thirty-seven years, while the median age for Hodges was thirty-nine. In comparison with Alabama's median age of 36, the Franklin County area was similar to regional trends, except that Red Bay residents' median age was slightly older (41). Meanwhile, 19% of the population was over the age of sixty-five, supporting concerns voiced by workforce development entities involving the aging workforce in Franklin County and the State of Alabama.

In all likelihood, the demographic makeup of Franklin County will continue to evolve. This change will require that additional resources be devoted to meeting specific demographic trends. Although the Town of Hodges did not experience a vast demographic change in the 2000 Census, an aging population raises concerns about the availability of the future work force, the type and character of jobs to be created, and the services to be offered to meet the demands of the population. This concern extends far beyond the town and into the State of Alabama and our nation; however, forward thinking decisions and strategies implemented at a local scale can mitigate damaging trends and create additional economic opportunities.

Income

Compared to other municipalities in Franklin County, Hodges possessed the highest per capita income at $25,239.00 per person according to the 2000 Census ("Per Capita Income"). Franklin County had a $14,814.00 per capita income with Phil Campbell being second to Hodges at $16,053.00 per capita ("U.S. Census Bureau"). The wealthy per capita income for Hodges might be attributed to multiple factors including an increase in retirees, a higher graduation rate for high school students, a willingness to commute farther and "shop around" for better job, or simply be the result of misrepresented income among a small population.

Commuting Patterns

The mean travel time to work, which averaged 32 minutes, is an indication of the isolation and limited employment opportunities in the Town of Hodges. County wide, comparable travel times were found only in Vina, which averaged 35 minutes. Franklin County as a whole had a mean travel time of 24 minutes, which was just below the state average of 25 minutes. In comparison to the state and county commute times, Hodges is 28% above the state average. The overall loss of economic resources, due to lost time, increased energy prices and vehicle maintenance is a concern to local residents. In order to reduce the need for travel, a strategy would be needed for generating economic development and additional employment opportunities.

Employment

The Town of Hodges contains approximately eight commercial businesses within the police jurisdiction. There are no manufacturing businesses located in Hodges. Based on the 2000 Census, there were a total of 128 persons in the labor pool of Hodges, with twenty-two of those being unemployed (17.1%). Of the employed persons ninety-two commuted to work with an average commute of thirty-two minutes. In light of Hodges' size and the importance of the regional economy to the town, it is best to evaluate existing economic conditions on a county scale in order to present the opportunities and constraints available for local growth.

Regional Economy

Franklin County contains the municipalities of Hodges, Phil Campbell, Red Bay, Russellville and Vina. Within Franklin County, there are a total of 13,872 civilian laborers with 1,145 of those unemployed ("ADIR"). The Franklin County preliminary unemployment rate as of July 2008 was 8.3% ("ADIR"). This was in comparison to the State of Alabama preliminary rate of 4.9% for August 2008 ("ADIR").

From 1980 to 1990, Franklin County and the surrounding region experienced manufacturing plant closings. These closings occurred within Franklin County and throughout northwest Alabama. The Alabama Employment Service reported 460 job losses during the period from industries within Franklin County (House 5). Additional job losses from outside the county also greatly impacted Franklin County due to the rate of employment outside of the county. Unemployment in Franklin County for the 1980 to 1990 period averaged 13%.

Franklin County again cycled through periods of heavy unemployment from 1990 through 2000. This trend continued until 2004 when a decline in unemployment became evident. Through the 1990-2000 period, unemployment ranged from a high of 10.6% unemployment in 1990 to a low of 5.9% unemployment in 2000 ("ADIR"). The mean unemployment rate for this period was 7.1% ("ADIR").

Today, Franklin County possesses a Civilian Labor Force of 13,872 down 3,159 persons from the high in 1998 of 17,031. Table Three presents this data in greater detail in comparison to the State of Alabama Civilian Labor Force employment and unemployment. Heavy fluctuations and high unemployment rates from the 1970's and an 18% unemployment rate in the mid 1980's had been reduced to an annual 4.1% percent in 2007 (House 7, "ADIR"). As of 2008 the July unadjusted unemployment rate for Franklin County is 8% percent ("ADIR"). This and the state's unadjusted unemployment rate of 5.1% reflected the current economic crisis in the housing sector and rising energy costs throughout the nation.

Lack of employment opportunities, isolation leading to long commute times, coupled with high and rising fuel costs create significant challenges for Hodges. Increased local economic opportunity leading to greater job creation, income in flow, and opportunities to work at or near home are all visible and appropriate responses.

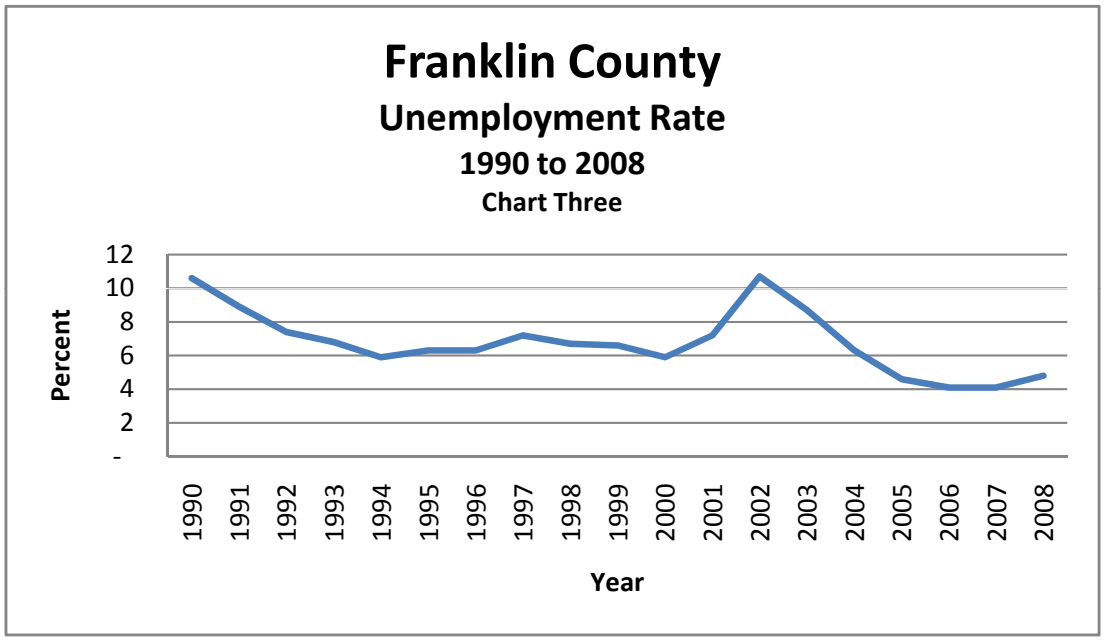
Table Two

Census 2000 Demographic Profile for Franklin County, Alabama

Demographic Profile	Hodges	Phil Campbell	Red Bay	Russellville	Vina	Franklin County	Alabama
Population	261	1,091	3,374	8,971	400	31,223	4,447,100
Percentage Population of County	.84%	3%	11%	29%	1.3%	55% unincorporated	N/A
Per Capita Income	$ 25,239.00	$ 16,053.00	$ 14,653.00	$ 14,871.00	$ 10,662.00	$ 14,814.00	$ 18,189.00
Age							
Median Age	39	38	41	37	34	37	36
Persons 18 Years & Over	201	828	2,641	6,798	273	23,578	3,323,678
Percent of Population	77%	76%	78%	76%	68%	76%	75%
65 Years and Over	45	190	638	1,602	54	4,637	579,798
Percent of Population	17%	17%	19%	18%	13%	15%	13%
Male	129	529	1,535	4239	199	15,329	2,146,504
Percent	49%	49%	46%	47%	50%	49%	48%
Female	132	562	1,839	4732	201	15,894	2,300,596
Percent	51%	51%	54%	53%	51%	51%	52%
Race							
Total	261	1,091	3,374	8,971	400	31,223	4,447,100
White	261	1,080	3,268	7,115	393	28,001	3,162,808
Percent of Population	100%	99%	97%	79%	97%	90%	71%
African American	0	0	49	1,009	2	1,314	1,155,930
Percent of Population	0%	0%	1.5%	11.2%	1%	4.00%	26.00%
Hispanic	0	9	27	1,134	7	2,316	75,830
Percent of Population	0%	1%	1%	12.6%	2.00%	6.00%	2.00%
Households							
Toal Households	98	458	1,429	3,556	155	12,259	1,737,080
Median Household Income	$33,750.00	$24,598.00	$27,596.00	$25,333.00	$18,584.00	$27,177.00	$34,135.00
Average House Hold Size	2.6	2.4	2.3	2.4	2.6	2.5	2.5
Housing Units	125	555	1588	3,809	179	13,749	1,963,711
Median Home Value	$39,800.00	$50,000.00	$61,100.00	$68,500.00	$39,800.00	$62,800.00	$85,100.00
Renter Occupied Units	14	135	436	1,231	45	2,961	469,129
Percentage of Renter Occupied Units	14%	30%	31%	35%	29%	24%	27%
Education							
Population 25 Years & Over	182	754	2,409	5,977	222	20,860	2,887,400
Highschool Graduate	73	207	644	1,791	46	6,363	877,216
Percent Highschool Graduates	40%	28%	27%	30%	20%	30%	30%
Bachelor's Degree	0	35	109	435	9	1237	351,772
Graduate or Professional Degree	1	41	98	298	5	784	197,836
Commutting To Work							
Workers 16 Years & Over	192	419	1,420	3,304	115	12,839	1,900,089
Drove Alone	92	338	1,186	2,591	96	10,148	1,576,882
Carpooled	11	63	197	562	19	2,105	234,020
Mean Travel Time in minutes	32	25	19	21	35	24	25

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000 Demographic Profiles

Table Three					
Annual Unadjusted Civilan Labor Force Franklin County, Alabama					
Year	Civilian Labor Force	Employment	Unemployment	Franklin County Unemployment Rate%	State of Alabama Unemployment Rate %
2008	13,872	13,204	668 (July 1,145)	4.8 (July 8.3%)	4.2(July 5.1%)
2007	13,859	13,290	569	4.1	3.5
2006	13,868	13,304	564	4.1	3.5
2005	13,578	12,957	621	4.6	3.9
2004	13,239	12,410	829	6.3	5.1
2003	13,411	12,247	1,164	8.7	5.4
2002	13,714	12,249	1,465	10.7	5.6
2001	14,081	13,072	1,009	7.2	4.8
2000	14,791	13,924	867	5.9	4.1
1999	16,958	15,832	1,126	6.6	4.3
1998	17,031	15,897	1,134	6.7	3.9
1997	16,745	15,483	2262	7.2	4.4
1996	16,458	15,417	1041	6.3	4.5
1995	15,889	14,887	1002	6.3	5.2
1994	15,456	14,546	910	5.9	5.4
1993	15,122	14,098	1024	6.8	6.6
1992	14,760	13,670	1090	7.4	6.9
1991	14,137	12,882	1255	8.9	6.9
1990	13,563	12,128	1435	10.6	6.3
Source: Alabama Department of Industrial Relations 2008					



Employers

Today, Franklin County has nine employers with employment greater than one hundred people. Diversification of the county's economy has occurred with chicken processing, pet foods and recreational vehicles. Historically, Franklin County has supported six mobile home manufacturers at any given time in recent decades. Today only two mobile home manufacturers exist within the county. The mobile home industry is very cyclical and fluctuates with interest rates and consumer demand. During the 1980's, thousands of jobs were lost regionally and many were lost in Franklin County due to layoffs in the mobile home and related industries. In the future, Franklin County should continue to expand its economic base in order to diversify the local economy and move toward higher wage and higher skill job opportunities.

Employment Sectors

The majority of employment for Franklin County is contained in the manufacturing sector with 4,465 jobs. The second largest sector is health care and social assistance at 1,191 jobs. However, these two industry sectors were not the fastest growing or the highest wage earners within the county. The fastest growing industry sector in Franklin County was management of companies at 14.7%, and the second fastest growing sector was information at 3.4%. The highest wage earning sector was utilities at $974.00 average weekly wage. The 2006 average weekly wage in Franklin County was $495.00 and $770.00 in the State of Alabama.

Small Business

Although major employers within a county are a tremendous asset to the community, it is the smaller firms that account for the majority of employers. The Town of Hodges contains eight small businesses with its municipal and police jurisdiction. These businesses consist of E & J Gas Station, Harold's Gas Station, Pine Valley Farms, CB&S Bank, Rainbow Wholesale, Kathy Kutts, Waylon Provost Construction, and Northwest Alabama Supply. The table below identifies the business and its location.

The future development of small business within the Town of Hodges will be based on leveraging existing assets. These assets range from abundant natural resources and recreational opportunities to social capital, raw experience, and education. Building opportunities around these existing assets will allow for the planning, development and promotion of local strengths into future employment opportunities.

Population Projections

The main purpose of providing population and economic projections is to establish benchmarks against which future development and infrastructure decisions may be made. This is usually in regards to type, mix, character and quantity of future development opportunities and infrastructure improvements. Population growth will influence future demand for residential, retail and industrial property in the Town of Hodges. Population forecasting is at best an educated guess. For this reason, population forecasts should be used only in the context of establishing a generalized analytical framework. This framework should allocate future land use and infrastructure improvements to be made by the town.

The future number of persons who choose to live in Hodges will be influenced by market forces and the growth strategies of Hodges and Franklin County. Thus, Hodges' population growth must be viewed in a local and regional context. While it is clear that a significant amount of growth will occur within Franklin County it is difficult to predict precisely the pace at which this future development will occur or how Hodges development decisions will precisely affect the distribution of population. In order to estimate future growth, the straight-line method of population projection has been applied for Franklin County and its municipalities.

Straight-Line Method

The straight-line method uses a locality's past annual population growth rates to make educated guesses concerning future growth and is sufficient to provide a rough estimate of growth potential. As is reflected in Table Six below, the population projections place Hodges in a 20% growth rate. Using the straight-line method, it is estimated that the Town of Hodges will have 279 residents by the year 2010 and 297 by the year 2020.

Table Six
Hodges and Franklin County Population Projections
2000 to 2030

Municipality	Average Anuual Change in Persons	Population 2000 Estimate	Population Projection 2010	Percent Increase From 2000	Population Projection 2020	Percent Increase From 2000	Population Projection 2030	Percent Increase From 2000
Hodges	1.8	261	279	7%	297	14%	315	21%
Phil Campbell	-4.6	1,091	1,045	-4%	999	-8%	953	-12%
Red Bay	30	3,374	3,674	9%	3,974	18%	4,274	27%
Russellville	39	8,971	9,361	4%	9,751	8%	10,141	12%
Vina	1.1	400	411	3%	422	6%	433	9%
Franklin County	243	31,223	33,653	8%	36,083	16%	38,513	24%

Source: Morgan & Farmer Linear Projection 2008

Summary of Population Projections

The population projection used above is based on historical growth trends within the region. The straight-line method does not consider the political boundaries or physiographic features or the economic or political contingencies that could limit or enhance future development in the town. Clearly, these factors will need to be considered along with the previous population projections in the process of making sound future economic development plans.

However, these figures may be used in the forecasting of future land demands, community facility demands and infrastructure support requirements. Based upon the results obtained using the straight-line method it is projected that the Town of Hodges will have a population of 315 by the year 2030. This would represent an increase of 20% and fifty-four residents during the upcoming 20 year planning period.

Geographic Constraints and Opportunities

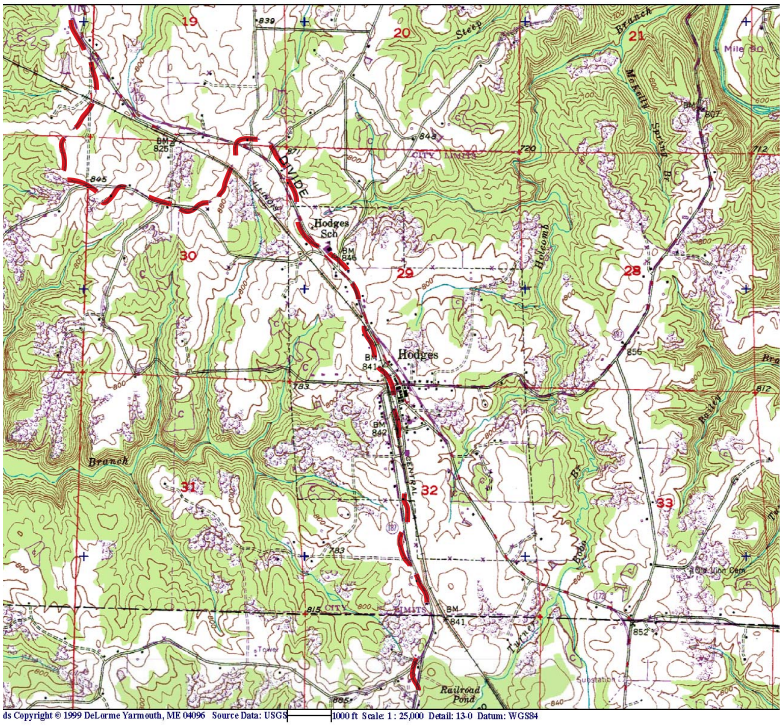
To appreciate the impact of Hodges physical location on its cultural and economic underpinnings, we must understand the geography of the surrounding region. Geomorphology is the study "of landforms and the processes that shape them ("Geomorphology")." The understanding of processes and composition of the regional landforms is fundamental to understanding and evaluating the natural and cultural resources of Hodges.

Physiographic Regions

Physiographic regions are broadly descriptive subdivisions of the earth based on terrain texture, rock type, and geologic structure. Physiographic regions are combined descriptions based on geology (rock types) and topography (elevation and slope). There are eight physiographic divisions in the United States as classified by the United States Geological Survey ("USGS") and Fenneman (1946). They are the Laurentian Upland, Atlantic Plain, Appalachian Highlands, Interior Highlands, Rock Mountain System, Imtermontane Plateaus, Pacific Mountain System, and the Interior Plains. The State of Alabama contains three of the eight physiographic divisions. All three physiographic regions come together along the Tennessee Valley Divide in the near vicinity of Hodges in Franklin County. From a physiographic perspective, this is an extremely rare phenomenon. The geology, soils, topography, water resources, minerals, vegetation, and natural features prevalent in the region are influenced by this phenomenon and create a landscape and biological environment that is exceedingly diverse. Such diversity is the foundation of the recreational opportunities found in Hodges.

Topography

The number and composition of physiographic regions in Franklin County give it a varied and diverse topography. The topography of Franklin County moves from a flattened low land in the northeastern corner to undulating ridge and gorge formations in the majority of the county. The flattened lands composing the area in and around the City of Russellville provide opportunities for intensive agricultural and industrial activities. The landscape surrounding the Town of Hodges consists of ridge and gorge formations similar to that of other parts of Franklin County. Steep hills and deep cut stream channels are characteristic of the landscape surrounding Hodges. Hodges, like all municipalities in Franklin County, was founded on higher ground than the surrounding landscape. The Town of Hodges sets along the Tennessee Valley Divide (TVD) which also follows the contours created by the physiographic regions in northwest Alabama. This collision of major landforms is manifested through changes in soil composition, flora and fauna within the region.



To the north of Hodges and the TVD the streams and water runoff flow into the Tennessee River. To the south, the drainage patterns collect into the Tombigbee and Sipsey rivers through tributaries leading up to or through the southern edge of the divide. Elevations in Franklin County range from 623' to 1,040' across the county (Clements 142). Municipalities in the county are located at an altitude of 865' at Hodges, 1033' at Phil Campbell, 650' at Red Bay, 765' at Russellville, and 682' at Vina.

The topographical conditions in Franklin County and Hodges have produced unique economic and developmental challenges. These challenges can be seen in the transportation and existing infrastructure within Hodges and the county. The challenges of transportation may never be fully resolved in the Hodges community in a manner sufficient for the demands of traditional industrial development. The topographic conditions do create opportunities for other forms of economic development in the fact of rural character and the number of recreational opportunities available. Leveraging these assets will require non-traditional methods of economic and community development, which maximize the economic capacity associated with the surrounding landscape.

Climate & Water Resources

Distribution of water within Alabama and our world is constantly changing. As water is recycled in the hydrologic cycle it is continuously moving through plants and other systems into the atmosphere ("Water Cycle"). This atmospheric vapor returns to the earth's surface as precipitation. This precipitation is often absorbed into our soils making moisture available to flora and fauna. When rain falls faster than the earth can absorb it then the water goes into our local and regional drainage systems via

intermittent streams, branches, and rivers. Although there is adequate supply of water in Alabama, it is impossible to have the water in the quality, quantity, and location where and when it is needed to support human demands without intervention.

Alabama has a humid subtropical climate, having mild winters and hot summers with precipitation during most of the year ((U.S.A.C.E. 57). The Town of Hodges and its surrounding region has an average minimum temperature of 45 degrees Fahrenheit and an average maximum temperature of 75 degrees Fahrenheit ("Climate"). The average monthly precipitation for the area in 2007 was 5 inches with the most rainfall occurring December through May ("Climate"). The first frost has a ninety percent chance of occurring by November first and the last frost has a ninety percent chance of occurring before May first. A chart showing monthly precipitation, maximum and minimum temperature, and degrees days in the area is shown below.

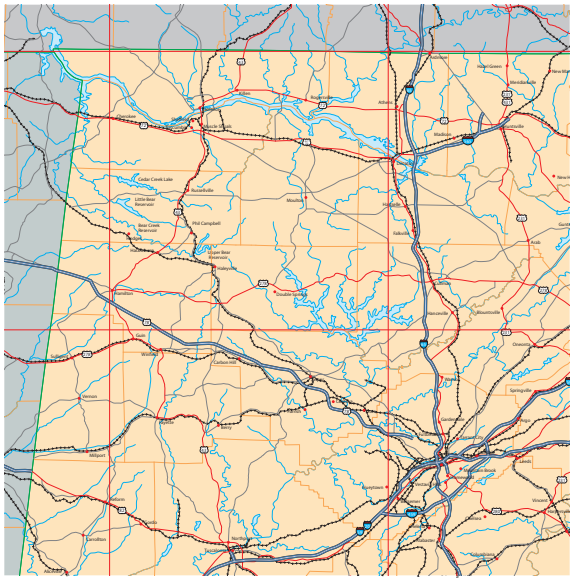
Average Weather Data

Statistic	Units	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	Average
Minimum Temperature	ºF	26.1	28.5	35.7	42.2	52.2	61.1	66.1	64.4	57.8	44.1	35.4	28.9	45.23
Maximum Temperature	ºF	51.8	57.5	66.8	75.3	82.2	88.7	92	91.9	86.5	76.3	64.9	55.1	74.08
Heating Degree Days		808	616	433	208	65	2	0	0	19	201	449	714	292.92
Cooling Degree Days		0	0	7	21	136	298	436	409	234	52	4	0	133.08
Monthly Precipitation	Inches	5.78	5.12	6.4	5.47	6.01	4.68	4.74	3.41	4.5	3.39	5.32	5.85	5.06

Source: *Climate-Charts.Com*

Surface Water Resources

Alabama is divided into thirteen river basins named after the rivers that drain them. The river basins affecting Hodges and Franklin County are The Tennessee River Basin and the Sipsey-Warrior River Basin ("Alabama River Basins"). These two basins meet at the Tennessee Valley Divide on which the Town of Hodges resides. The Tennessee River Basin collects its flow into the Tennessee River, which runs from east Alabama westward through Alabama before heading north back into Tennessee. The Tennessee River connects with the Ohio River and drains areas from Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, Virginia, Mississippi and Alabama. The Sipsey-Warrior River Basin drains to the Mobile River and includes portions of Franklin County and southeastern Alabama. All thirteen Alabama Rivers eventually flow into the Gulf of Mexico.



Within Franklin County, the Bear Creek Lakes consist of four major reservoirs and multiple tributaries feeding each major lake. The four lakes compose over 8,000 acres of surface area ("Bear Creek Reservoir"). The smallest of the four lakes is the Bear Creek Reservoir followed in size by Little Bear Creek Reservoir. The second largest in the system is the Upper Bear Reservoir and the largest lake is the Cedar Creek Reservoir at 4,200 acres. These lakes provide an abundance of recreational opportunities as well as water resources for Franklin County and the surrounding region.

Each of these reservoirs is within a few miles of Hodges, and they have a direct ecological and economical impact on the town. Hodges contains multiple drainage systems made of branches and intermittent streams, which connect to larger drainage systems and provide important recreation and environmental benefits to downstream residents. In addition, the Bear Creek Lakes provide a tremendous recreational tourism resource for Franklin County and Hodges.

Groundwater Resources

Groundwater occurs when runoff from precipitation seeps into soils. The general quality of groundwater is determined by mineral content. The more mineral content the water has the harder the water.

Groundwater is one of the most valuable resources a community and region may possess. The geologic formations of Alabama provide the state with great resources for quality and quantity of groundwater. Water quality varies widely according to the physical and chemical composition of an aquifer and its geologic composition. In certain situations in Alabama, excessive hardness and high iron content occurs in limestone formations.

The natural systems and aquifers of Franklin County provide residents of Hodges and Franklin County with municipal water. Residents of Hodges receive municipal water from two wells and a spring which are supplemented by a 200,000 gallon water tank. These wells and springs draft water from the Bangor and Pottsville Aquifers. Excessive hardness of the water is a common problem in the Bangor Aquifer with pollution potentials evident. These problems are related to the Bangor composition of limestone and the availability of water to move in channels rather than pore spaces. Movement in subsurface channels allows for a rapid recharge rate of the aquifer but decreases the amount of filtration of surface contaminants before entering the aquifer.

In comparison, the Pottsville Aquifer is composed of sandstone with smaller beds of compact conglomerates (U.S.A.C.E. 71). This compaction allows for a slower filtration of the surface recharge, which produces lower contamination rates. However, slower filtration can cause water shortages and reductions in well performance when the aquifer is heavily used. The water quality in the Pottsville Aquifer is good and is usually soft to moderate in composition.

Wetland Formations

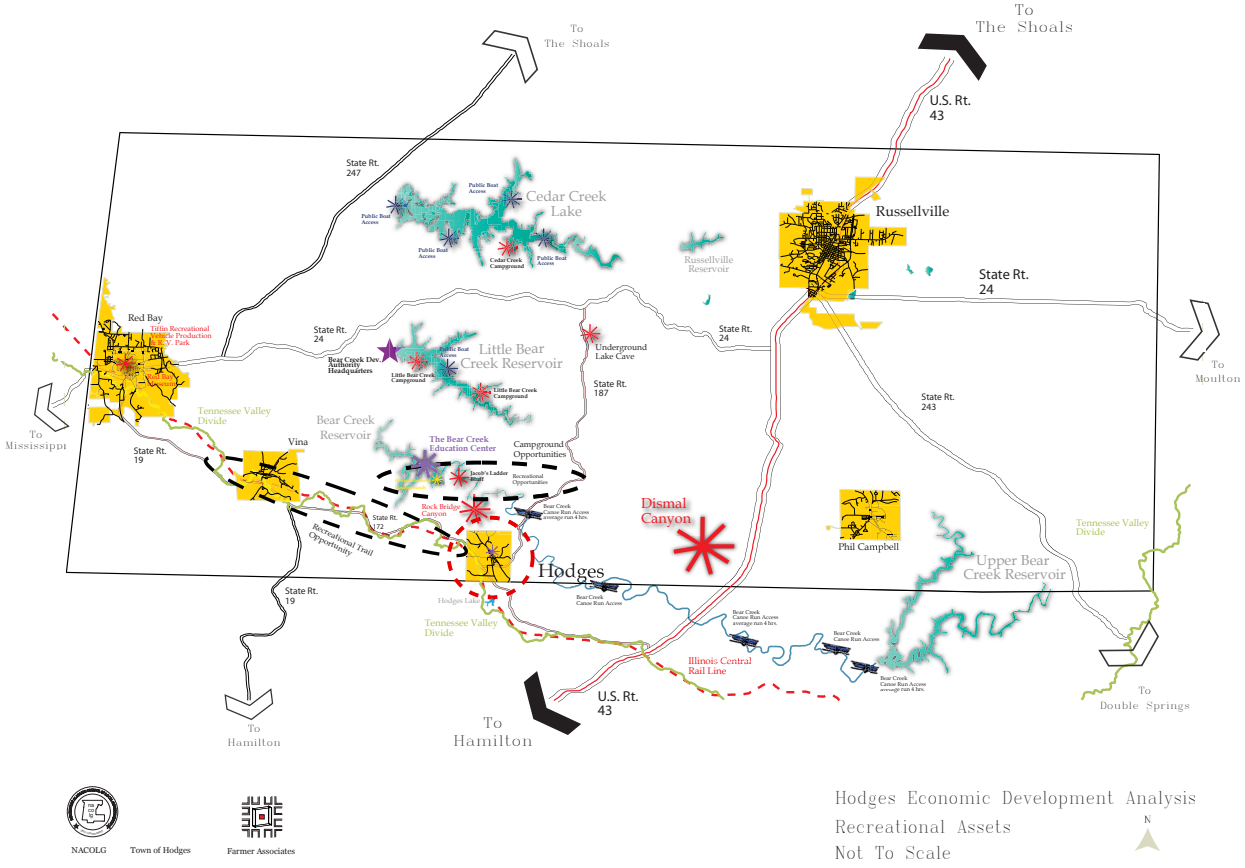
Wetland formations are as diverse and variable as they are numerous. Even though one half of the nation's wetlands have disappeared, there are multiple methods of preservation and restoration going on today (Dahl). For land to be considered a wetland, it must contain three elements. First, the land must be saturated at least a portion of the year creating a hydrophobic soil condition that is absent of free oxygen. Second, there must be hydric soils. These soils are produced when the soil composition is submerged and has little oxygen content. Finally, there should be wetland plants or hydrophytes present in the low oxygen environment. The Army Corps of Engineers specifically defines a wetland as "those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions." (Corps of Engineers A14)." Wetlands play a key role in purifying surface water, storm water storage, ground water recharge, and biodiversity of local and regional ecologies. The decline in our state and national wetlands has affected water quality, infrastructure development and management and our wildlife habitats.

Within the vicinity of the Town of Hodges are several freshwater ponds. There is no recorded evidence of other wetland types based on information provided by the National Wetlands Inventory. There are multiple freshwater emergent wetlands and freshwater forested wetlands within Franklin County and within a mile of the municipal boundary of Hodges at Bear Creek. Additional freshwater emergent and forested wetlands occur in numerous locations throughout Franklin County ("Inventory"). The map shown below indicates the location of wetlands around the Town of Hodges.

Sensitive Landscapes

Due to the location of Hodges along an unusual physiographic fall line, there are sensitive landscapes within the region. Sensitive landscapes are defined for this discussion as unusual in biodiversity or fragile ecological systems. Within a few miles of Hodges are two unique natural areas worthy of discussion.

The Dismals Canyon is a National Natural Landmark located east of Hodges. The canyon is one of the best examples of a mixed mesophytic forest in the State of Alabama. The 85 acre site has been preserved for its serenity and natural beauty. The Dismals contain large sandstone boulders, caves, waterfalls, and dismalites. "Dismalites are the larvae stage in the life of an insect called the fungus gnat. This gnat emits a bright blue-green light to attract food, in the form of other flying insects ("Dismalites")." At night, the insects glow along the canyon wall emitting a beautiful blue light. The Dismals Creek flows through a mile long

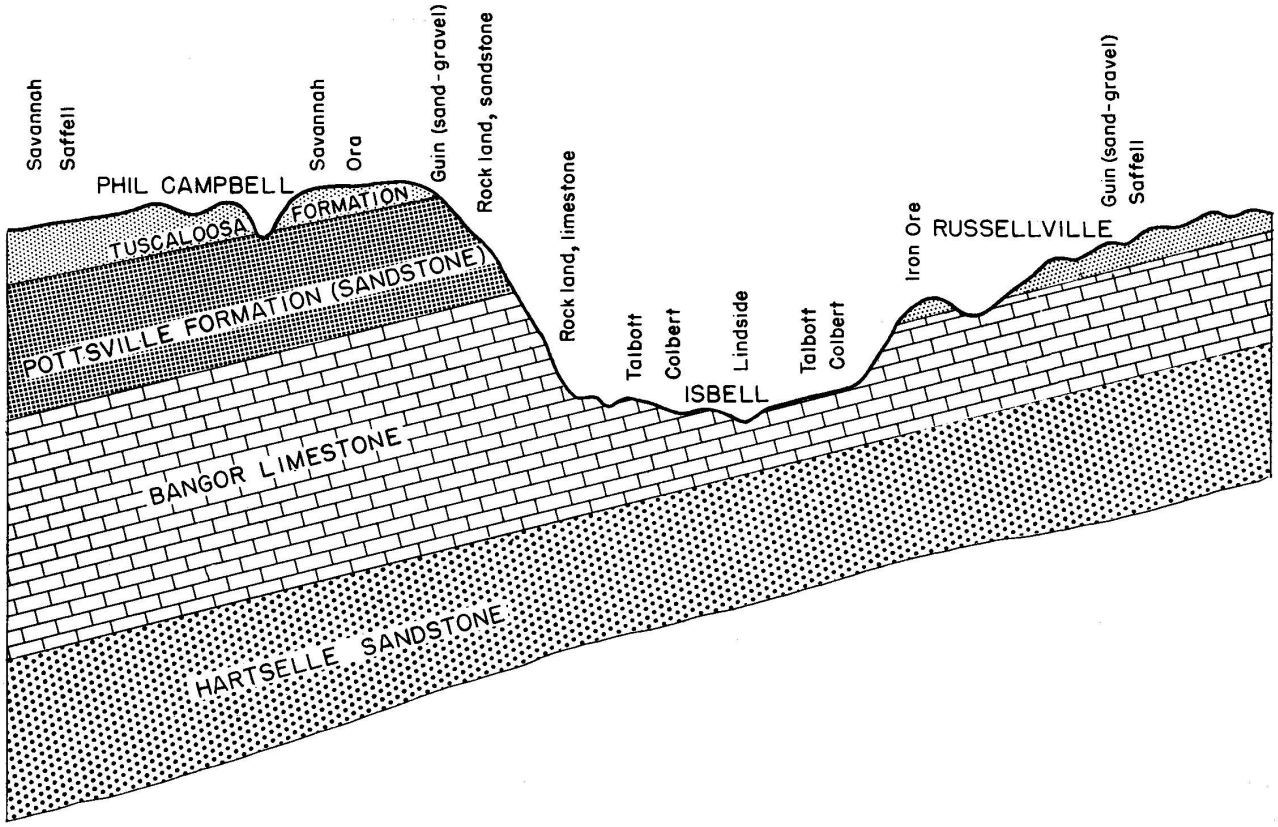


gorge within a one hundred feet deep canyon. The Dismals contain a bio-community that might be seen in the Appalachian Plateau even though it is isolated completely from the Appalachian Province. Due to its unique nature, the Dismal Canyon has been recognized by National Geographic Traveler as well as the Discovery Channel special "When Dinosaurs Roamed."

Rock Bridge Canyon is located just to the north of Hodges in Franklin County. Rock Bridge Canyon contains massive waterfalls and a natural bridge of one hundred feet high. The canyon has been closed for several years and remains in private ownership. Opportunities for leveraging this asset should be pursued in reestablishing a collective amount of natural experiences within the region.

Geology

"Geologic formations exposed in Franklin County range in age from the Mississippian and Pennsylvanian System consolidated rocks to the Late Cretaceous unconsolidated gravel (Peace 7)." The three geologic systems within Franklin County contain multiple formations that compose each overall geologic system. The Mississippian System is composed of the Hartselle



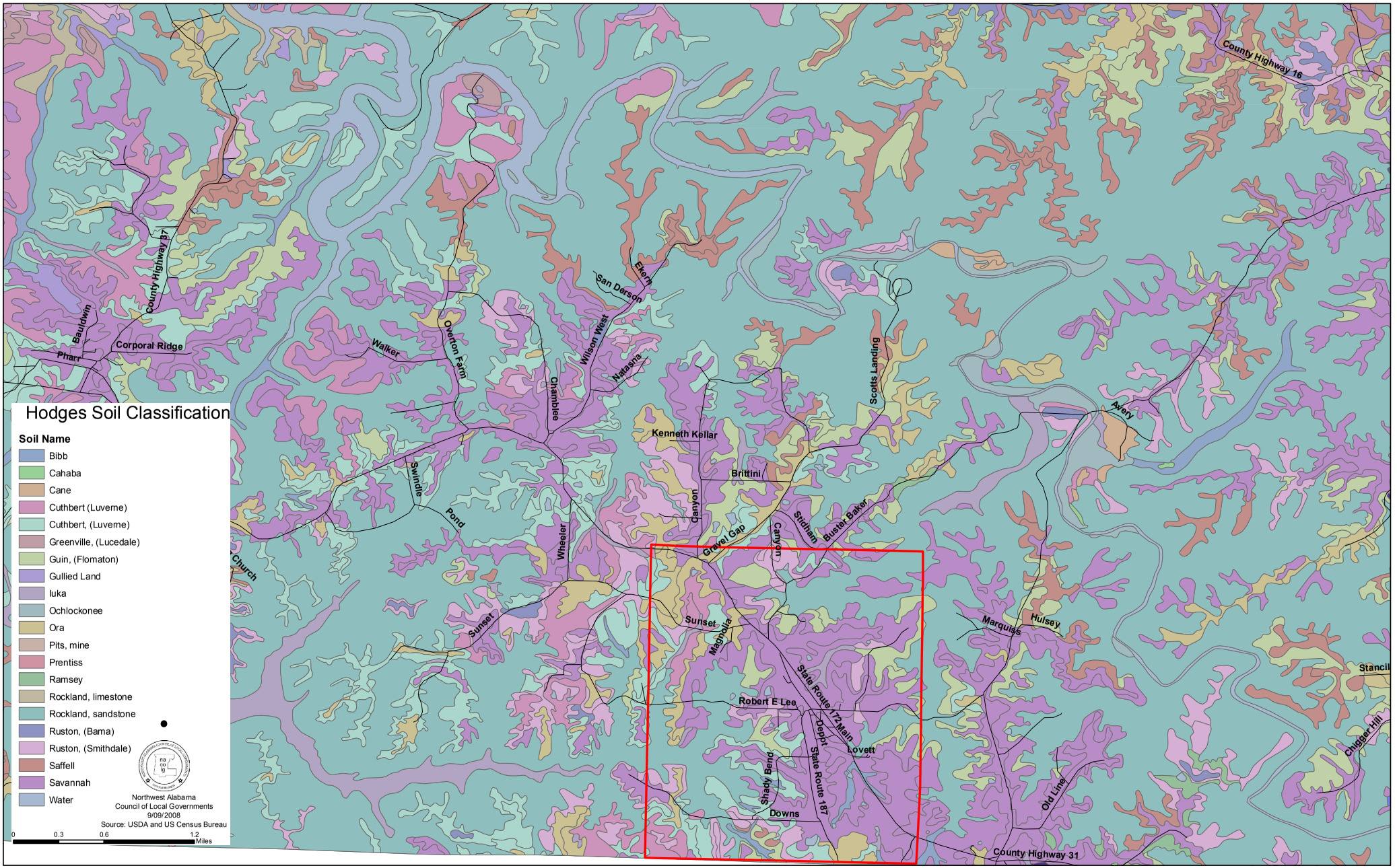
Sandstone Formation, the Bangor Limestone Formation, and the Pennington Formation. The Pennsylvanian System is composed of the Pottsville Formation in Franklin County. The Cretaceous System in Franklin County is made up of the Tuscaloosa Group and underlies about one half of Franklin County. The area surrounding the Town of Hodges is composed of the Cretaceous System and is made up of the Tuscaloosa Group.

The Tuscaloosa Group consists of fifty feet of sand, clay and gravel in an irregular format. "The gravel consists of predominantly rounded pebbles of chert and some limestone (Peace 14). The Tuscaloosa Group contains brown iron ore, which was once a principal industry in Franklin County. Water supplies from this group are plentiful but do contain high iron contents in Franklin County.

There are multiple soil types stemming from the Tuscaloosa Group that impact Hodges and its surrounding region. However, the two major soil associations within the Hodges area are the Savanna-Ruston-Saffell Association and the Guin-Cuthbert-Ruston Association. Below is a typical geologic cross section of Franklin County showing the underlying geologic formation and its soil composition.

Soils

Soil scientists have identified seven soil associations within Franklin County with two general soil associations occurring in the Hodges area. The two soil associations occurring in the area of Hodges are the Savanna-Ruston-Saffell Association and the Guin-Cuthbert-Ruston Association. Each association comes with general limitations and development opportunities. The Savanna-Ruston Saffell Association is moderately well drained on slopes of zero to ten percent within undulating and rolling ridge tops (USDA 3). This association is often dissected by intermittent streams and composes seventeen percent of Franklin County. According to the Franklin County Soil Survey, these soil types are some of the most intensively farmed in the county. The Guin-Cuthbert-Ruston Association is excessively drained to moderately well drained with a gravelly and sandy composition (USDA 3).


Hodges Soil Classification
Soil Name
Bibb
Cahaba
Cane
Cuthbert (Luverne)
Cuthbert, (Luverne)
Greenville, (Lucedale)
Guin, (Flomaton)
Gullied Land
Iuka
Ochlockonee
Ora
Pits, mine
Prentiss
Ramsey
Rockland, limestone
Rockland, sandstone
Ruston, (Bama)
Ruston, (Smithdale)
Saffell
Savannah
Water
Northwest Alabama
Council of Local Governments
9/09/2008
Source: USDA and US Census Bureau
0 0.3 0.6 1.2
Miles
County Highway 16
County Highway 87
Bauldwin
Pharr
Corporal Ridge
Walker
Overton Farm
Chamblee
Wilson West
Natasha
San Derson
Ekern
Scotts Landing
Avery
Kenneth Kellar
Brittini
Swindle
Pond
Church
Wheeler
Canyon
Gravel Gap
Stidham
Buster Baker
Sunset
Magnolia
Marquiss
Hulsey
Robert E Lee
State Route 172 Main
Depot
Lovett
Shady Bend
State Route 187
Downs
Old Line
Chigger Hill
County Highway 31

The slope runs from ten to forty percent and is a highly dissected formation (USDA 3). This soil association contains steep ridge tops and narrow gorges. A majority of this soil association is forested and contains gravel pits as well as abandoned iron ore mines. The United States Department of Agriculture recommends that this association remain woodland since it may be subject to very severe erosion (USDA 4).

Within the two soil associations of the Hodges area are multiple soil series. Fifteen soil series types are located within the municipal limits. Soil reports for specific properties should be reviewed prior to finalizing specific future development plans. Capability groupings and soil compositions for each soil series is shown in Map 3:3. Soil associations may be further evaluated in the Franklin County Soil Survey published by the United States Department of Agriculture.

Mineral Resources

Franklin County contains major mineral deposits of coal, sandstone rock (crushed into sand) gravel and iron ore. The first mining of iron ore in Alabama was in 1818 in Franklin County (USDA 77). The first blast furnace in Alabama for refining the ore into making steel was setup by Joseph Heslip on Cedar Creek (USDA 77). The mining consisted of extracting brown iron ore or limonite. The iron ore is a rock that can economically have the metallic iron extracted from it. A blast furnace is used in the extraction of the metallic iron. The iron at the Franklin County site was used to make local hand tools and dining utensils. The furnace was later abandoned in 1832 due to transportation issues in getting the iron ore to market. There is a historic marker placed on the highway four miles south of Russellville describing the First Alabama Iron Ore Furnace. Mining for iron ore is no longer a major activity within Franklin County (USDA 77). However, iron ore mines are scattered throughout the county with thousands of acres still in need of reclamation (NACOLG 11).

Coal has been mined in Franklin County for many years with intense mining efforts occurring during the 1980's (NACOLG 11). Coal was once a major mineral produced in the southwest part of the county.

Sandstone and limestone mineral deposits are scattered throughout Franklin County. The Town of Hodges has deposits of sandstone nearby (U.S.A.C.E 35). The mineral can be removed and then crushed into sand. The County continues to be a major supplier of sand to the North Alabama area (NACOLG 11). The immediate vicinity within the downtown area of Hodges holds Sand and Gravel deposits. Further out into the surrounding area are general deposits of sand. The sand and gravel deposits are spread throughout the western side of Franklin County with the majority of sand deposits located in the southeastern section of the county (U.S.A.C.E. 35).

Vegetation & Fauna

Vegetation and fauna are additional environmental features that are based on physiographic conditions, primarily those affecting the formation of soils, which in turn affect plant and animal life. The Cumberland Plateau Section (a subsection of the Appalachian Highlands physiographic region) in Franklin County generally contains oak-hickory-pine forest and southern mixed forest. "The predominant vegetation form consists of needle-leaved, evergreen trees with cold-deciduous, broad-leaved forest ("Forest Service")." Specific species include loblolly pine, sweet gum, water oak, red maple, southern red oak, and white oak.

Fauna of the Cumberland Plateau Section includes "white-tailed deer, black bear, bobcat, gray fox, raccoon, cottontail rabbit, gray squirrel, fox squirrel, eastern chipmunk, white-footed mouse, pine vole, short-tailed shrew, and cotton mouse ("Forest Service")." The turkey, bobwhite, and mourning dove are game birds in various parts of this Section. Songbirds include the red-eyed vireo, cardinal, tufted titmouse, wood thrush, summer tanager, blue-gray gnat catcher, hooded warbler, and Carolina wren. The reptiles include the box turtle, common garter snake, and timber rattlesnake.

The East Gulf Coastal Plain Section (a sub-section of the Atlantic Plains physiographic region) contains oak-hickory-pine forest, black belt, and oak-hickory forest. The predominate vegetation in the physiographic section is evergreen, needle-leaved forest with cold-deciduous, broad-leaved trees. "The principal forest cover type consists of loblolly and shortleaf pine with hardwoods, including sweet gum, flowering dogwood, elm, red cedar, southern red oak, and hickories ("Forest Service")." Hardwoods are often the dominant vegetative type based on soil moisture and previous land development.

Fauna of the East Gulf Coastal Plain Section are similar to the Cumberland Plateau Section described previously.

According to the Franklin County Water Service Authority Final Environmental Assessment, the forest types within the Hodges area are at a transitional point. This is due to the physiographic changes occurring with the two physiographic divisions of the Appalachian Highlands and the Atlantic Plain, which meet along the fall line. This transitional line is where the central hardwood forest and the coniferous forest of the southeast overlap and intertwine. Tree species of the area include chestnut oak, loblolly pine, sweet bay magnolia and in the past, the American Chestnut (TVA 16).

Threatened and Endangered Species

Alabama has 107 threatened or endangered plant and animal species. Franklin County contains six of these endangered species, one threatened species and one candidate species. A list of the endangered, threatened, or candidate species in Franklin County is shown below. For additional information on Federally Endangered Species in Alabama, please see the outdooralabama.

com website. The 2003 Franklin County Water Service Authority Final Environmental Assessment identifies eleven terrestrial animal species that are protected by the USFWS or the State of Alabama. Seven of the eleven species are protected by the USFWS and four are considered rare by the Alabama Natural Heritage Program (ALNHP). As future development proposals are finalized, there should be further evaluation of endangered and threatened species within the study area.

Franklin County Federally Endangered & Threatened Species
E – Gray bat Myotis grisescens
E - Indiana bat Myotis sodalis (P)
E - Cumberlandian combshell mussel Epioblasma brevidens
T - Lyrate bladder-pod Lesquerella lyrata
E - Leafy prairie clover Dalea foliosa
E - Tennessee yellow-eyed grass Xyris tennesseensis
C - Slabside pearlymussel Lexingtonia dolabelloides
T- Bald Eagle Haliaeetus leucocephalus
P- Osprey Pandion haliaetus
E – Red-cockaded Woodpecker Picoides borealis
Source: Outdoor Alabama & Final Environmental Assessment, Franklin County Water Authority.

Natural Features

Five major natural features have been identified within Franklin County and the Hodges area. These are the 1. Dismal Canyon (previously called the Dismal Wonder Gardens), 2. Jacob's Ladder Bluff, 3. Evans Cove, 4. Rock Bridge Canyon, and the 5. Underground Lake Cave. Each of these sites is unique due to the landscape, natural formations, and wildlife found there. However, the sites vary in the degree of leveraging that has taken place for promoting recreational tourism.

The Dismals Canyon is located eight miles to the east of Hodges near Highway 43. The Canyon is in private ownership and is marketed as a private pristine landscape for relaxation. Cabins and a country store are on site with hiking, camping and nature study being the predominate use.

Jacob's Ladder Bluff is located 2.5 miles to the north of Hodges at the Bear Creek Reservoir. It is an unusual limestone formation on the edge of Bear Creek Lake (NACOLG 3).

Evans Cave contains two scenic pools and is located fifteen miles northeast of Hodges (U.S.A.C.E. 8). The cave has been reported in previous environmental and ecological inventories. The cave is in private ownership and is not formally leveraged for tourism and recreation.

Rock Bridge Canyon is located two miles to the north of downtown Hodges. The canyon is in private ownership and has been closed for several years. Visitors can find unusual sandstone bluffs, waterfalls and a natural bridge at the site. The natural rock bridge is 100 feet high, 82 feet long, and 19 feet thick. Visitors are able to walk across to get a beautiful look at the canyon below. There are four waterfalls within the canyon and multiple natural springs. The canyon contains over forty species of ferns and trees. The canyon once held a Mountain Laurel festival the second week in May. Rock Bridge Canyon is currently under utilized as a local and regional asset for tourism within the county and region.

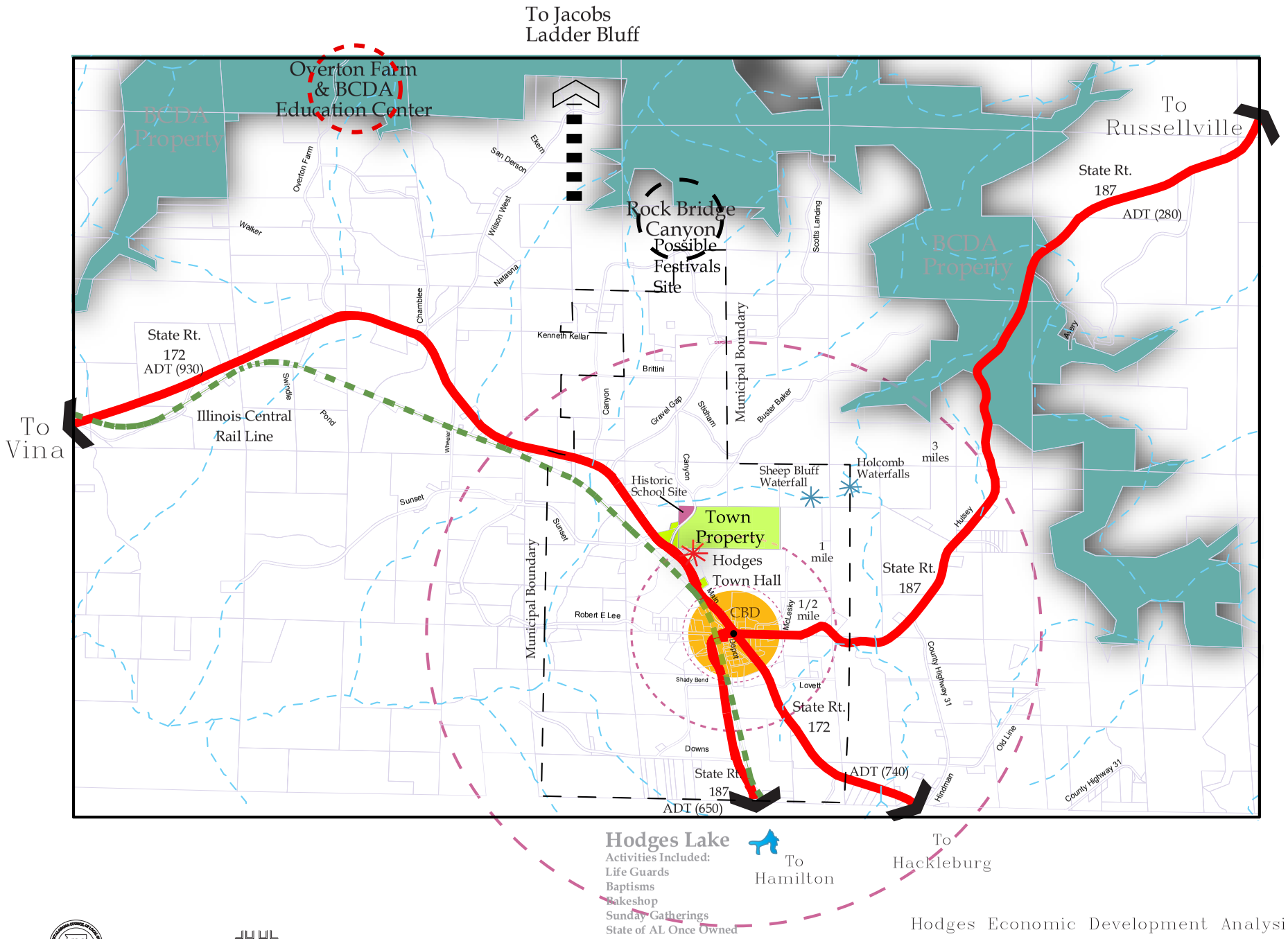
Underground Lake Cave is located one mile south of Belgreen and is just South of State Highway 24 and East of Alabama 187. The underground lake is a large body of water in an underground cave. The cave is undisturbed at the present time and like all the previous sites discussed it has potential for ecotourism within Franklin County.

Geographic Summary

The geographic and ecological diversity in Franklin County and the Town of Hodges has been viewed as a stumbling block for traditional opportunities in economic development, which focus on leveraging the local environmental assets into traditional industrial manufacturing. However, the same bountiful assets that have kept the town of Hodges and much of Franklin County physically and economically isolated are in demand for their aesthetic qualities. These qualities can and should be leveraged in a sustainable manner that benefits the citizens of Hodges and Franklin County. Sustainability should include environmental protection of the asset and should incorporate environmental education alongside recreational tourism to promote the area for increased economic opportunity.

Cultural Resources

Within Franklin County and north Alabama, human occupation has occurred from the Paleo-Indian to the Historic period (TVA 29). Prehistoric archaeological chronology is broken into five broad time periods for the north Alabama region. They are the Paleo-Indian, Archaic, Gulf Formational, Woodland, and Mississippian (TVA 29). "Prehistoric land use and settlement patterns vary during each period, but short-and long-term habitation sites are generally located on floodplains, and alluvial terraces along rivers and tributaries (TVA 29)." Early American sites can be found on alluvial terraces, ridge lines and bluffs of the area. These sites are typical throughout this area. Native Americans from this region came into contact with early Europeans through trade routes involving furs and European goods in the seventeenth century (TVA 29).



NACOLG Town of Hodges Farmer Associates

A significant number of archeological sites have been identified within Franklin County. The number of documented sites in Franklin County is greater than 151 throughout the county (U.S.A.C.E. 183). Exact locations and individual descriptions of known archaeological sites have been omitted to avoid the possibility of harm to the sites. It should be understood that the number of sites identified reflects the number of studies completed and does not necessarily reflect the potential for new discoveries.

Today, Franklin County remains primarily rural, although its agrarian roots are long passed. Overton Farm serves as the regional example of early life for settlers in northwest Alabama. The Overton Farm is located four miles north of Hodges and contains an eighty acre site with one building and four structures. The farm carries architectural significance with a cultural classification of American rural from the listing on The National Register of Historic Places ("NRH"). The period of significance of the Overton Farm was from 1800 to 1899 and was constructed by Abner Overton.

The Bear Creek Development Authority operates the Bear Creek Recreation and Education Facility on Bear Creek Reservoir in Hodges, Alabama ("Education Center"). The facility provides outdoor environmental education for groups of all ages. The facility offers meals and accommodations for day and overnight groups. Training focuses on team building centered around programs involving bird watching, archery, canoeing, high ropes, hiking, rappelling, pioneering, history, and spelunking ("Education Center").

In October, the Town of Hodges holds the annual Spirit of Hodges Festival. The Spirit of Hodges festival celebrates the American spirit and patriotism of the citizens of Hodges during World War II. The "Spirit of Hodges" was the name of a W.W.II P-51 airplane named after the town for its role in selling war bonds. The bond auction was held in January of 1943 and the proceeds were $43,000.00. This was a large sum for the people of Hodges and its surrounding neighbors. The war plane was built by North American Aviation Company and was deployed in the South Pacific Combat Zone (Steele 22). Its whereabouts are currently unknown (Steele 22).

C. Existing Land Use and Transportation

Economic opportunities exist in a framework that is in part established by a place's existing land use and transportation patterns. The context of existing development is vital to understanding these opportunities. Streets and road networks provide connections for the movement of people and goods from place to place. At the same time, existing land uses describe the locations where current residential, commercial, industrial, recreational – and other – land use demands are met. Understanding this context and the ways in which residents and leaders may choose to build from existing patterns and shape future conditions is vitally important to economic growth prospects.

Arterials, Collectors, and Local Streets

A connected road system is essential for reasonable accessibility and traffic movement. The system should move goods and services with little interference to residents engaged in activities associated with adjacent activities, such as commercial and residential centers. A street classification system is useful for describing the options and limitations for growth associated with the available transportation network. The street classification system used here defines streets primarily in terms of the length of an average trip and the amount of access to adjacent property from a given street.

The hierarchy for street classification is defined as principal arterials, minor arterials, collector streets, and local streets. Principal arterials provide long distance connectivity between urban centers. Minor arterials connect principal arterials within an urban area and carry a majority of vehicular traffic. Collector streets connect and collect traffic from local streets to minor arterials. Collector streets are usually municipal streets having mixed land uses along them. Local streets carry short distance traffic to collector streets. They may be found in residential neighborhoods and have numerous driveways and curb cuts allowing access to adjacent properties.

Hodges is located on two regional arterials on which the average trip is long and there is low access to property. As growth occurs, new construction may be required to avoid congestion and provide more access to developed lands.

Improvements to the arterial highway networks linking Franklin County to other markets are pertinent to Hodges' future. Franklin County is currently not located on an interstate highway and has only limited access to a four lane major arterials. However, future development of U.S. 43 and the West Alabama Freeway will directly connect Franklin County to the interstate system. The West Alabama Freeway is in the early stages of development with the multiple corridors for construction still being considered. The State Highway Department is conducting a Tier One study to isolate environmentally fragile landscapes that should be avoided. Once the Tier One study is complete the corridors for the freeway will be evaluated through a thorough environmental impact statement (EIS). This connection will provide Hodges and Franklin County the access to improve the quality of life and economic opportunities as never before. This opportunity will require extensive planning efforts and infrastructure improvements in order to protect environmental assets and leverage local resources.

Franklin County is currently served by U.S. Highway 43, which is a four lane divided highway from north of Florence, Alabama to Phil Campbell. To the north, U.S. Highway 43 connects Franklin County to the Shoals Area and the east west corridor of U.S. Highway 72. To the south, U.S. Highway 43 connects Franklin County to the City of Hamilton and future Interstate 22. U.S. 43 is two lanes for much of its length to I-22.

Access from the east and west into Franklin County is limited. Alabama Highway 24 connects Franklin County to I-65 near Decatur, Alabama. When complete Highway 24 will be a four lane highway and is part of the Appalachian Regional Corridor System designated Corridor V. The future completion of Highway 24 will have an economic impact on Franklin County bringing additional industrial activity. The four lane construction of Highway 24 within Franklin County is expected to be complete in five to seven years. Current work includes the letting of construction contracts for grade and drainage work in two phases. The second phase is to begin in November of 2009.

The completion of additional lanes along Alabama Highway 157 between Moulton and I-65 has increased regional access within northwest Alabama. The project has affected connectivity between Franklin County and its industries and other regions.

The Franklin County road network links the State and Federal transportation system to municipalities and communities in the county. The county network binds the federal and state system to the areas of Franklin County. The Franklin County Commission is responsible for the road system within the county. Priorities are divided into two categories of road improvements and bridge improvements. The county engineer prepares a prioritized list of road and bridge improvements. Improvements are based on the number and location of road improvements and directly correlate to population distribution in the county.

The Town of Hodges is connected to its immediate region by Alabama Highway 187 and Alabama Highway 172. The regional arterial Highway 187 runs from Alabama Highway 24 south through downtown Hodges to its intersection at Alabama Highway 43, which functions as a major arterial, just north of Hamilton. The 2007 average daily traffic count for this arterial was 280 cars just to the north of Hodges and 650 cars just to the south of Hodges. Highway 172 also acts as a minor arterial and connects Hodges to the Town of Hackleburg to the east and the Town of Vina to the West. Highway 172 is the best connection for Hodges to Highway 43 and all points south. The 2007 average daily traffic count for Highway 172 to the west of Hodges was 930 cars and to the east of Hodges was 740.

Hodges' municipal road system is formed along a backbone made up of Highway 187 and Highway 172. The town's transportation network has grown around this nexus. The road network is small enough to have only local street classifications with the two Alabama Highways serving as minor arterials. All traffic through the arterial network is funneled into downtown Hodges. Existing streets appear adequate for current loads. According to the Franklin County Highway Department, there are no

current or proposed projects within the municipal or police jurisdiction of Hodges.

Sidewalks are prominent within the business district but are greatly needed to link recreational areas to downtown. Residential areas within Hodges do not have sidewalks. The Mayor and Council are considering sidewalk improvements within the near future with ALDOT Transportation Enhancement Funds. Any new development within Hodges will need additional streets and sidewalks and should be considered as part of a development plan. There are roughly 10 miles of paved streets in the Town of Hodges with the maintenance being conducted by the Franklin County Highway Department on a reimbursable basis (Source: Franklin County Highway Department).

The planning, development and safe operation of a transportation system is essential to the proper functioning of a community. The appropriate location and quality of municipal and county roads will have an impact on the quality of life residents of Hodges will have in the future. Transportation links within and outside the county will have great impact on future economic growth in Hodges. As future development occurs in Hodges and Franklin County, there should be care taken to enforce minimum road standards. Minimum standards for development will alleviate cost to tax payers. In addition, undesirable intersections and poor access management should be alleviated through future land use planning along major thoroughfares.

Rail Lines

Franklin County is served by two rail lines. They are the Norfolk Southern Railway running from points south through Haleyville, Alabama, and on to Russellville in Franklin County. The rail line proceeds north from Russellville to the Shoals area and beyond. The second line is a short line running from Red Bay, Alabama to Corinth, Mississippi. This line is called the Redmont Railway and is leased from the Mississippi-Alabama Railroad Authority ("Redmont Railway"). Franklin County and Hodges were once served by a third line from the Illinois Central Railroad. This line ran from Chicago, Illinois to Miami, Florida, and carried the passenger train called the City of Miami (Steele). The City of Miami operated until 1960 when it became unprofitable to operate the passenger train. Norfolk Southern bought the Illinois Central Railroad and abandoned the line soon after (Steele). Today, the rail bed is overgrown with vines and waiting to be brought back to life as a regional transportation corridor.

Russellville Municipal Airport

The municipal airport in Russellville is fifteen minutes from downtown Hodges. The airport operates a jet capable runway seventy-five feet wide and 5,500 feet long. The airport has single wheel weight limitations of 30,000 pounds. Fuel, hangars, and tie down equipment are available. The airport is managed by Blue Diamond Aviation and has aircraft rental and pilots available upon request. The municipal airport operates on average about fifty-five aircraft daily, with twenty-one aircraft based on the airfield ("Airport").

Land Use

The Hodges' land use section shows the distribution and location of existing land use patterns within Hodges. The existing land use patterns within the municipal boundary are predominantly agricultural and forested with the second most prevalent use being large lot single family residential. The town has two recreational parks. West Park is open green space and focuses on passive recreational activities. The second park is the Hodges Town Park and is an active recreational park with two sets of swings, a slide, pavilion, basketball court, and restroom facilities.

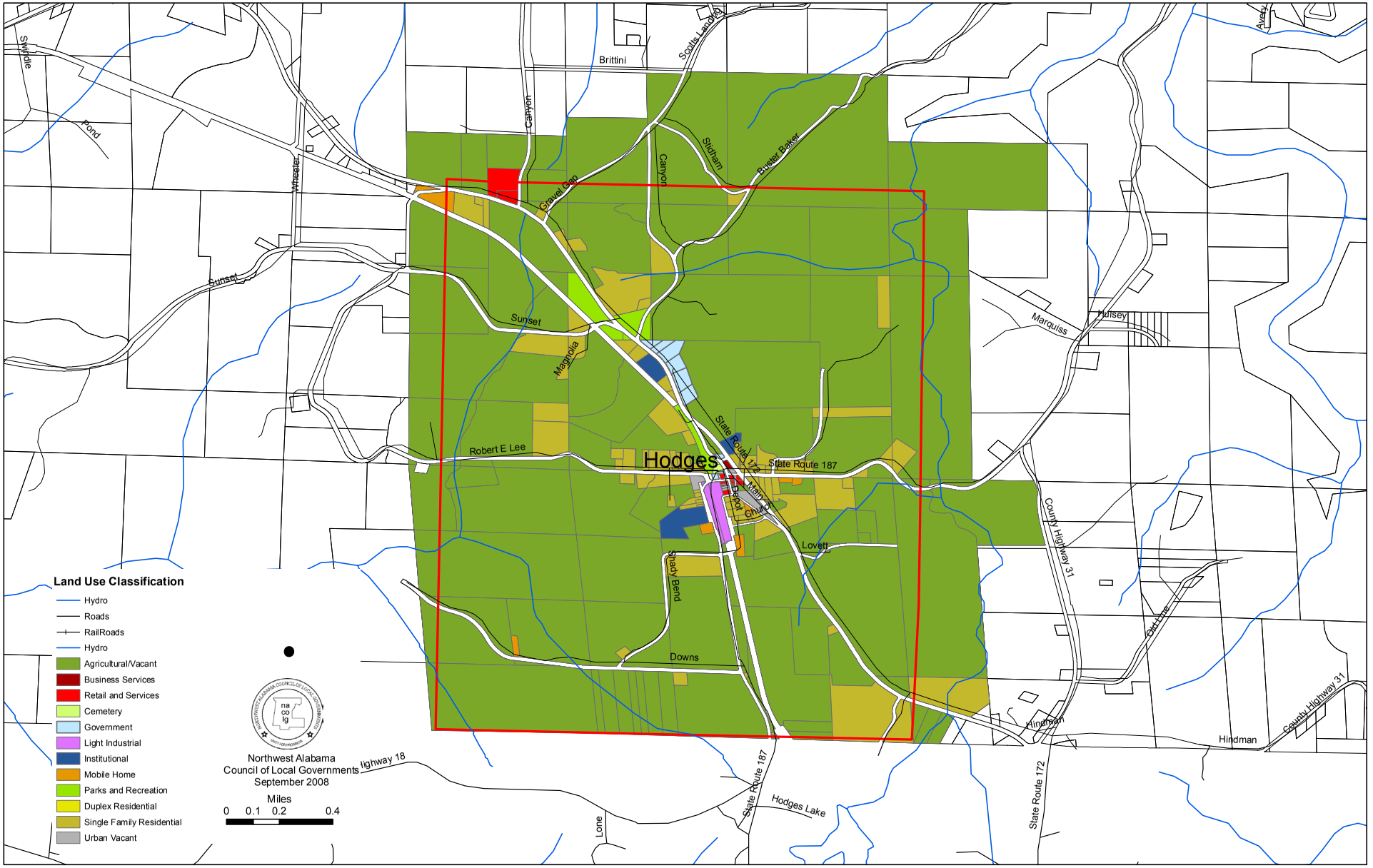
The town contains twelve parcels categorized as retail and business service land uses, with the majority of this land use being focused in the business district at the intersection of Highway 187 and Highway 172.

The residential land uses are mixed between single family, duplex residential, and mobile home uses. The single family residential is focused along Highway 172. There is one parcel that is currently developed as duplex residential within the town. This use is within walking distance of downtown Hodges, but there is a connectivity issue from the duplex land use to downtown due to an absence of sidewalks. The mobile home land use is located on seven parcels within the municipal limits. This land use provides adequate housing for its residents in a rural and wooded setting.

Government and institutional land uses are scattered throughout the business district and along the arterial corridors. In general, these land uses have the potential to be a central focus and unifying element of the Hodges community. It is recommended that as additional institutional and municipal buildings are considered that they be focused within the Hodges central business district (CBD).

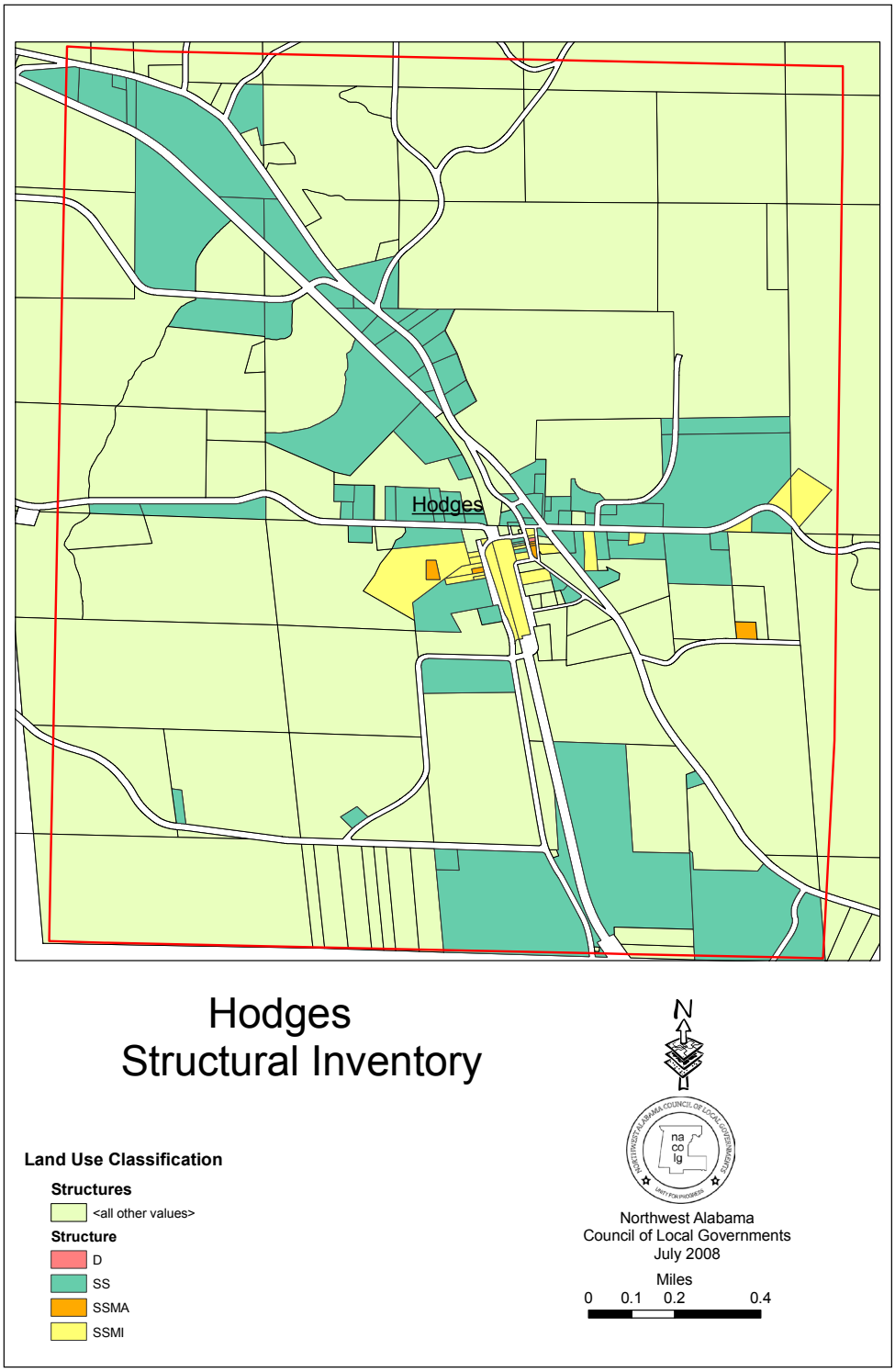
Due, in part to the unique nature of the Highway 172 and 187 intersections, there are oddly shaped and small parcels within the downtown. It is recommended that these parcels be creatively approached in a way that redevelops them from the current vacant status into contributing parcels. This redevelopment should follow proposals that are developed in this plan and finalized in future redevelopment strategies.

A complete list of land use types within the town is shown in the following map.


Land Use Classification
Hydro
Roads
RailRoads
Hydro
Agricultural/Vacant
Business Services
Retail and Services
Cemetery
Government
Light Industrial
Institutional
Mobile Home
Parks and Recreation
Duplex Residential
Single Family Residential
Urban Vacant
Northwest Alabama
Council of Local Governments
September 2008
Miles
0 0.1 0.2 0.4
Hodges
Brittini
Scotts Landing
Avery
Swindle
Pond
Wheeler
Canyon
Gravel Gap
Stidham
Buster Baker
Sunset
Marquiss
Hulsey
Magnolia
Robert E Lee
State Route 172
State Route 187
Depot
Church
Main St
Lovett
Shady Bend
Downs
County Highway 31
Owl Tree
Hinaman
Hindman
Highway 18
Hodges Lake
Lone

Structural Inventory

The purpose of this section is to evaluate the physical qualities of commercial structures and the availability of housing stock within the town. The amount and type of commercial and residential structures available in rural communities is a unique challenge for local governments. Within rural towns, commercial and residential structures can be affordable, but limited in supply. These limitations often cause concentration of structures to regional urban centers. This concentration affects a healthy rate of new construction while making it difficult to maintain existing buildings. In addition, rural communities may not have a centralized sanitary sewer system further hindering higher density development. This lack of density may limit the quality of a commercial district and the density of residential neighborhoods.



During the community analysis phase of this project, a windshield survey for the municipal limits of Hodges was undertaken. This survey evaluated groups of structures based on four structural classifications of dilapidated, substandard minor, substandard major and standard structure. The greatest percentages of structures within the town were of standard quality and contributed in value to the adjacent properties.

However, within the CBD, there were numerous properties that have suffered from local economic conditions and rural isolation. Only one commercial structure was evaluated to be dilapidated. Three commercial structures were viewed to be noncontributing to the overall business district. Finally, the majority of commercial structures were viewed substandard minor. This designation indicates minimal repairs are needed to improve overall quality to the commercial structure. A completed structural inventory for the municipal limits is shown below.

Affordable housing within Hodges is the most prominent housing issue in the community. Affordable housing is providing a variety of housing types at variable costs. These costs should allow all income levels to have safe and efficient housing. Achieving this goal requires a focused effort between community organizations, local governments, and state agencies. The cost of housing within the community is based on land cost, dwelling cost, site preparation cost, and interest rates for development capital. These four factors can be modified by local agencies and organizations to influence the quantity, quality and location of residential structures.

Current low income housing initiatives in Hodges are managed by the Hamilton Housing Authority. The authority provides eight units ranging from a one bedroom to three bedroom residences. Rent for these units ranges from $50.00 dollars per month to $249.00 dollars per month depending on the income. These units are located outside of the CBD and are single story structures sided with local stone.

The U.S. Census 2000 identified a total of 118 housing units within the municipal limits. Twenty of these housing units were vacant at that time with four of the 118 being for seasonal or recreational use. Out of the 98 occupied housing units there were a total of sixteen renter occupied units. The average household size for the owner units was 2.8 with the renter unit's average household size of 1.6 persons.

Existing structures for commercial and residential occupation within the town are in need of further evaluation. An assessment of the CBD in conjunction with a downtown development plan should provide needed square footage and business types for the district. Current commercial and residential development patterns are following local economic and development trends. These trends are expanding but at a slower pace than surrounding urban centers. As future economic strategies are put in place, the structural analysis for commercial and residential sectors should be further evaluated. This evaluation will capitalize on the economic expansion within the municipality and the region.

D. Community Facilities and Town Services

Community facilities include public buildings and properties that serve the citizens of Hodges. Hodges community facilities range from police and fire protection to water, education, waste disposal and recreational activities. Together, community facilities and town services are the collective infrastructure and operational capacity of a community.

Police & Fire Dept.

The Town of Hodges relies heavily on the Franklin County Sheriff's Department and the Alabama State Troopers to augment the two part-time police officers who serve the town. As Hodges continues to grow and develop, a full time officer will be needed when the population is between 1500 and 2000 persons. At this population figure or during peak times of high traffic activity and festival events, the town will need to consider full-time personnel. The town has two police cars, one manufactured in 2004 and one in 2007. The 2007 car is an undercover type and contains internal lights and no outside markings.

The Town of Hodges fire protection is provided by the Hodges Volunteer Fire Department located in downtown Hodges. The department has 12 volunteer firemen. The Insurance Service Office (ISO) rates all fire departments in order to assess their fire fighting capability. The rating is ranges from 1 to 10 with 10 being the worst. The rating is based on a number of interrelated factors such as water supply, location of hydrants, personnel and training, equipment and response times. Volunteer departments cannot achieve a rating better than six. The town's ISO rating is currently a nine. There are several factors which contribute to worse fire protection ratings in rural areas. Firefighters are volunteers, which increases the response time. Large service areas and sparse development patterns also contribute significantly to response times in the rural fire districts. Lack of permanent funding makes it difficult for rural departments to incur long term debt in order to purchase vehicles and equipment. Therefore, the departments often operate with outdated equipment and fire-fighting apparatus diminishing their fire fighting capabilities.

The Hodges Volunteer Fire Department has two paramedics on staff and serves over 1500 customers within the service area. Equipment grants in 2001 and a new truck in 2003 have increased the service capacity and capability of the department. The new fire truck is an International with a 1250 gallon waterloo pump with a 1000 gallon on board tank. The fire department also has a 1968 Ford with a 750 gallon per minute waterloo pump and an on board 500 gallon tank. The Hodges Volunteer Fire Department covers a five mile radius from the station in downtown Hodges. It is worth noting that the National Board of Underwriters recommends a maximum of a four mile radius for a fire fighting district. The Fire Chief identified the need for equipment in the short term and a second truck in the next three to five years.

One of the most serious detriments to rural fire protection is the lack of fire hydrants. Without fire hydrants, the departments must depend upon the water supply carried on the fire engines. While this is adequate for some calls, it is not sufficient to fight many of the routine fires the department will see. The Hodges Fire Chief indicated that fire hydrants are plentiful within the municipal limits with new upgrades underway and an additional 6" main line being installed at this time. The Chief indicated that water pressure within the municipal system could be improved by an additional water tank placed at a higher elevation and away from adjacent residential areas.

Public Water and Sewer Disposal

Public water supply is a network of storage, filtration systems, pumping facilities, and distribution pipes. In the Town of Hodges, the system is based on ground water. The town has two wells and a spring with additional connections to the Town of Hackleburg if needed. The Town of Hackleburg is connected to the Franklin County Water Authority, who has an intake at Bear Creek Reservoir. Issues for future development include upgrading the existing distribution lines and implementation of a fire protection program within the police jurisdiction of Hodges.

Waste water treatment systems can consist of individual on site systems or sewage pipes for collection, storm sewers, and sewage treatment facilities. Within the Town of Hodges, the sewer disposal system is based on individual septic systems. The limitation of individual on site systems is the inability to develop and plan for future density and pursue high impact economic development opportunities. The Town of Hodges should consider the need for municipal wastewater treatment closely given its desired population density.

Solid Waste

The Town of Hodges obtains solid waste collection through Franklin County. The County picks up door to door in the town of Hodges. Franklin County closed the Belgreen Landfill in 1994. The solid waste was then transferred to a privately owned regional landfill in Houston County, Mississippi. This closure was due to mandatory compliance of the Resource Conservation and Compliance Act. Compliance with this act changed how solid waste was to be handled in Alabama and the nation.

Franklin County opened a transfer station at the Belgreen Landfill in 1994. This station transfers an average of 1800 tons of solid waste per month. The waste is transferred from garbage collection trucks to transfer trucks and shipped to the Knox Landfill. Waste Connections charges the county $30.00 per ton to transfer and dispose of the material.

Public Education

The Town of Hodges is within the Vina School District, which is operated by the Franklin County School System. In addition to the Vina School District, students have the option to attend school in Belgreen, East Franklin Junior High School, Tharptown, Red Bay, Phil Campbell and Russellville. Each of the high schools in Franklin County includes grades Kindergarten through the 12th. The Franklin County School System receives 10 mills of local property tax. The municipal systems in Russellville

and Red Bay levy an occupational tax and receive additional funds in addition to the county funds. This system allows municipal school budgets to be subsidized through collections from non-city residents. In addition, the system encourages county residents to attend municipal schools where almost double the funds are provided in comparison to the county school system.

Higher education institutions in Franklin County and the region consist of Northwest Shoals Community College (NWSCC) and the University of North Alabama (UNA). Northwest Shoals is located in Phil Campbell and in Muscle Shoals and offers a variety of education opportunities for residents of the region. The state's first community college was opened in Phil Campbell as Northwest Community College and later became the Phil Campbell campus of Northwest Shoals Community College. The University of North Alabama is located forty minutes away in Florence and provides programs for obtaining bachelor, master's and doctoral degrees.

Government Structure

The Town of Hodges has a Mayor and Council form of government. The Mayor and five council members are elected at-large for four year terms. The mayor's position is part-time . A full time municipal clerk oversees day to day administrative functions.

Resource Goals & Objectives

Specific goals and objectives should be developed for future growth within the town. Goals and objectives should be realistic and should follow past trends in growth as well as adapting for future opportunities that frame the next generation of economic growth for the town. Goals may include realistic population growth and retention priorities, redevelopment of downtown Hodges, a refined well head protection program and economic development targets, such as increased sales tax collections.

A community's quality of life and ability to attract and retain economic growth will depend on the community services that are offered. Future citizens are often not attracted solely on transportation or rapid growth of the community. A majority of families will be attracted to Hodges for good jobs, quality education, pride in property ownership and enjoyment of recreational opportunities that abound in the area. The Town of Hodges and Franklin County should invest in long term promotional campaigns to attract tourists and thus residents to the town.

E. Summary and Conclusions

The Hodges Economic Development Study provides and inventory and analysis of existing conditions affecting economic development and growth conditions in Hodges and surrounding regions of Franklin County. The study presents an overview of the strengths and weaknesses for various development prospects and provides a straightforward set of development goals for the town. Along with these goals, a subsidiary set of development principles are evident in the preceding description of the town.

The **purpose** of the Hodges Economic Development Study is to *prepare a growth plan for the future and to provide the Hodges community with a chance to foster job creation and increase the revenues for the municipality.*

The **goals** established by the plan through extensive research and public involvement are the following:

- Redevelop downtown
- New residential development
- Job creation through local assets
- Capitalize on regional water resources
- Develop municipal properties
-

The **approach** embraced by the Town of Hodges is Asset Based Economic Development, whereby local assets and strengths are used as the foundation upon which capacity for future growth is built. The approach must be sustainable.

The **strategy** of the plan is to maximize recreational opportunities for economic development.

The **objectives** of the plan, which are the individual details and actions that will strengthen efforts are the following:

- Be aware of changing demographics and look for opportunities to improve services for changing population, including retirees and the elderly. These individuals will be a sizeable proportion of the local market in coming years.
- Be aware of natural resources and build on the uniqueness of Hodges with respect to the town's environmental strengths and rurality. These are features that are valuable and once removed cannot be rebuilt. Embrace the perceived weaknesses as strengths that make a high quality community.
- Improve connections between Hodges and the region's natural and cultural resources. Promote unique natural and cultural locations. Seek improvements that lessen isolation without affecting the benefits of seclusion: landscape, rural character, serenity, etc.
- Improve connections between existing assets and downtown Hodges. Downtown is the commercial heart of the town and is in grave danger. Once it is too far gone, it will be hard to revive.
- Support regional efforts to supply the things that Hodges cannot- rail, airports, major highways, mega-industrial sites, etc. These efforts will create opportunities for Hodges' residents without spoiling local strengths.
- Develop an action plan and follow through with it.

"Even if you're on the right track you'll get run over if you just sit there."

— Will Rogers

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