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PICKENS COUNTY

SOUTH CAROLINA

PLANNING COMMISSION



SPECIAL CALLED MEETING AGENDA

Pickens County Administration Building
Auditorium
222 McDaniel Avenue
Pickens, South Carolina

April 18, 2022
6:00 pm

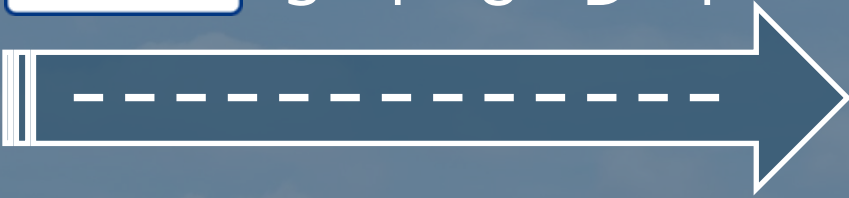
- I. **Welcome and Call to Order**
Moment of Silence
Pledge of Allegiance
- II. **Introduction of Members**
- III. **Public Comments**
Members of the public are invited to address the Planning Commission on any relevant topic not listed on this agenda.
- IV. **Public Hearings**
 1. Public Hearing and Comment Period on the SC HWY 11 Corridor Study
- V. **New Business**
 1. Consideration of a Resolution Recommending Adoption of the SC HWY 11 Corridor Study by the Pickens County Council.
- VI. **Commissioners and Staff Discussion**
- VII. **Adjourn**

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Corridor STUDY



FINAL REPORT



APRIL 11, 2022

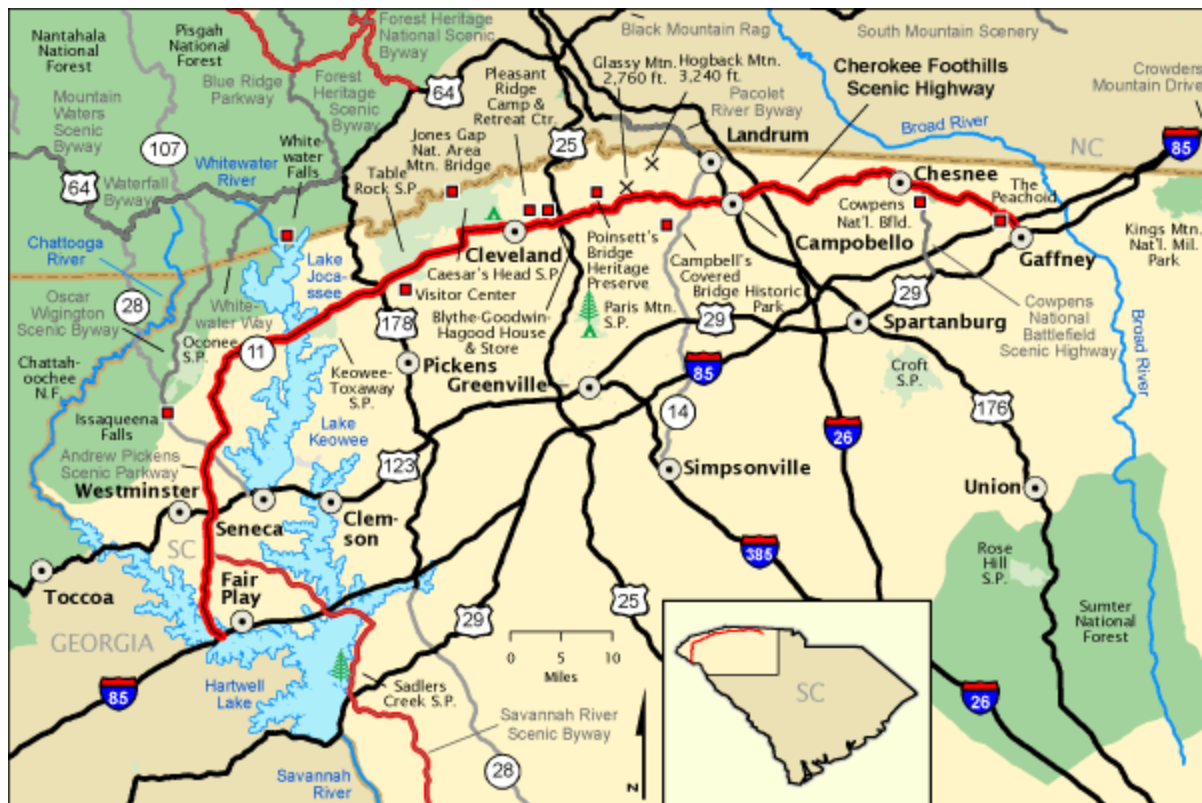


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1 BACKGROUND

The Cherokee Foothills National Scenic Byway is the longest and best-known scenic byway in South Carolina, stretching 118 miles through 5 upstate counties. It is named Cherokee Foothills because it runs through the foothills found at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the ancestral home of the Cherokee Indians. Starting in Cherokee County, it runs along Highway 11 all the way through Spartanburg, Greenville, Pickens and Oconee Counties to the West. The Blue Ridge Mountains become clearly visible to the west of the Town of Chesnee in Spartanburg County and remain dominantly present until you have driven past the Town of West Union in Oconee County. This is a scenic alternative to Interstate 85. Numerous outdoor and recreational activities are available along the byway to include hiking, biking, horseback riding and numerous lake activities.



2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Although the 1996 designation of Highway 11 as the Cherokee Foothills National Scenic Byway established a foundation for present day work, most efforts have been abandoned. Federally mandated requirements of the South Carolina Department of Transportation only encompass regulation of billboards and junkyards along National Scenic Byways.



The very nature of a National Scenic Byway requires the roadway to be of regional or national significance and also to sustain high standards of scenic quality, cultural integrity and authentic visitor experience. Growth along the byways is inevitable, but only through thoughtful planning and careful execution can the natural aesthetics of Highway 11 be protected.

Pickens County has arguably the most beautiful and pristine portion of Highway 11 in South Carolina (**See Map 1**). The tangible and intangible resources within the Pickens County portion of the corridor include scenic, historic, cultural, recreational, natural, and archaeological intrinsic qualities. In an effort to preserve these qualities, Pickens County began a study of the corridor in October 2021 to review existing conditions, gauge public opinion on the corridor's future, and develop recommendations to address current and future needs.

3 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Highway 11 Corridor Study has garnered substantial attention from concerned citizens along and surrounding the Highway 11 corridor in Pickens County. Three community meetings, two focus group meetings, and one-on-one stakeholder meetings were held during the planning process. A Visual Preference Survey was designed and published at the beginning of



the planning process to gauge citizen opinions of various types of development and design standards. Brief descriptions of the community meeting, focus groups, stakeholder meetings, and survey are provided in this section. Section 4 summarizes the major themes expressed in the public comments from all sources.

3.1 Community Meetings

A series of Community Meetings were held to receive feedback from the public about the future of the Highway 11 corridor.

The first meeting was held on October 19, 2021, from 5:00 – 7:00 PM. The second meeting was held on March 10, 2022, from 5:00 – 7:00 PM. The third meeting was held on March 31, 2022, from 6:30 – 8:00 PM. All meetings were held at the Holly Springs



Center in Pickens County. The public was provided the opportunity to listen to a presentation describing the purpose of the study and the study area boundary and were encouraged to ask questions and provide comments. Project team members were available to talk with participants during the entire meeting. All attendees were also given an opportunity to take the Visual Preference Survey and to submit comments on a corridor-wide map. A total of approximately 200 participants attended the meetings. A summary of the comments received is included below:

- Are there any upcoming projects that are triggering this process?
- We have no rules on Hwy 11. We could see anything come here and not be able to do anything about it.
- We do not want any big developments on Hwy 11
- A moratorium on development should be put in place while we work on getting zoning for this area
- Need rules to address storm water issues
- Development could lead to water quality issues
- What are the watershed signs about?
- What happens after this meeting?
- Question about who has moved to the area because there were no people here? About half the room raised their hands
- Need to protect the watershed
- What is the width of the right-of-way?
- Like the fishing spots off of Hwy 11. Need to keep them clean and parking is a problem.
- Moved here because of the natural beauty and peace and quiet. Need this to be maintained moving forward.
- Need zoning – rules and regulations to protect the area
- How did they put a Dollar store in Pumpkintown?

- Also need to look at the feeder roads coming into Hwy 11
- Design standards so new development is compatible with the area
- Steve Lorch with Table Rock Tea Company is a good example of the development we want
- Zoning is critical. Junkyards are a problem
- Follow the Blue Ridge parkway model – limited access. Agribusiness is a good idea, buffer along the road, maybe a frontage road instead of a bunch of driveways coming onto the road. New development to be modeled after existing. Preserve and protect existing businesses.
- Holly Spring Center is an asset
- Can road be restricted to only two travel lanes?
- An increase in 18-wheeler traffic is tearing up the road and increasing noise
- Restrict road to local delivery trucks, no 18-wheelers
- Concerned about the extension of 153 into Pickens County
- Need more state trooper patrols
- Excessive speeding on road
- Bike riders – bike lane needs to be better maintained
- 178 intersection – speeding issues
- Intersection near Aunt Sue's could be improved
- Need zoning. Property cleanup, blight issues, 178/8/288
- How can we keep it this way without a lot of rules and regulations?
- Commercial – need design standards
- Moratorium on development
- Need local representation on Planning Commission
- Are there any local examples of good planning? Too much urban sprawl and wasting land
- Would like to see lighting restrictions (Dark Sky issues)
- Need to look at safety, environmental and historic concerns
- Stake holder groups for further discussion
- No large-scale multi-family development in the area
- Different sections of the road have different character profiles
- Dense development is bad – leads to water runoff/quality issues
- Minimum lot size for lots in subdivisions
- Small scale commercial or none at all (no chains)
- Small restaurants
- Maintain green spaces

- Agritourism
- How is Pickens County marketing the area?
- Place a moratorium on development until process is complete
- Problems with illegal dumping in area
- 4 T's – Trees (no clearcutting), traffic circles, trails and Town of Table Rock
- Lots of other issues – speeding, truck traffic, intersection improvements
- Want to tell me what I can do with my property but leave theirs alone
- Would zoning allow current uses to be grandfathered?
- If rules are put in place, property owners should be forced to come into compliance after property transfers to a new owner
- No manufacturing or RV parks
- Small-scale commercial only – less than 8,000 square feet
- Low impact development – zoning, design guidelines or conservation easements to preserve the environment
- Limit growth – residential growth leads to increased business activity
- Encourage people to keep their properties cleaned up
- Manage clearcutting of properties
- Zoning, low impact developments are appropriate combinations for future regulations

3.2 Focus Groups

As a key component of the corridor's public involvement, a series of two focus groups were conducted with individuals in the community about a variety of planning related topics. The focus groups gathered technical and professional input from those that have specific knowledge on issues along and adjacent to the corridor.

The Business Leaders Focus Group met at the Holly Springs Center on October 26th from 10:00 AM – 11:30 AM. That same afternoon, the Conservation and Public Lands Focus Group met from 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM. Participants were asked a series of questions to generate a group discussion on topics such as land conservation, future development, and infrastructure. A total of 15 participants attended the meeting. A summary of the comments received is included below:

Business Leaders Focus Group

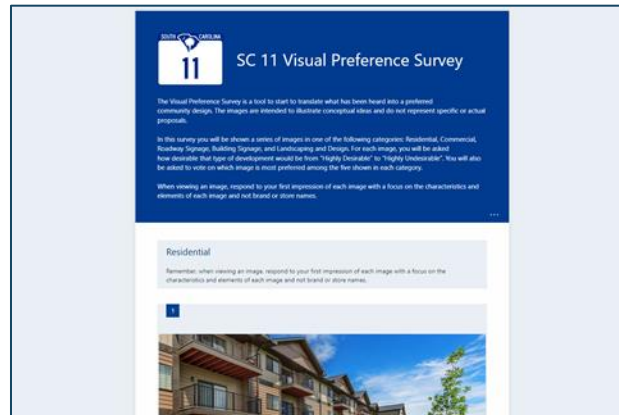
- Metal buildings, bright lights, flashing lights take away from essence of corridor.
- Campers look for dark skies; SC 11 a prime area (nationally) for star gazers.
- Design restrictions are fine.
- Maintain quiet ambiance.
- Small and quaint mountain country development (boutique hotels and B&Bs, agritourism, outdoors outfitters).
- Could use small business assistance for businesses along the corridor. Businesses could use assistance with grant identification and grant writing.
- Tourism map for SC 11 with local business listings.
- Market the corridor like the Blue Ridge Parkway.
- Limit semi-trucks on SC 11.
- Internet speeds along the corridor do not support existing business needs, upgrades necessary.
- Scenic overlooks and other scenic areas need to be cleaned up more frequently (litter).
- Keep dollar store type development on side roads, not on SC 11.
- Bike safety is a problem.
- Could partner with conservation groups to buy and preserve land.

Conservation and Public Lands Focus Group

- SC Department of Natural Resources has limited staff and cannot take on more land for conservation. Conservation easements are a good tool for preservation.
- New development should integrate into the existing character of the corridor. Conservation design, buffering along SC 11, riparian buffers, open space requirements, buffering waterways.
- Protect the scenic beauty along SC 11.
- Cheap buildings, clear cutting, removing scenic elements chip away at the unique value of SC 11.
- More public access to natural areas.
- The natural beauty from Greenville County to Oconee County should be protected.
- Cherokee Foothills Realty, Table Rock Tea Plantation, Table Rock Inn are examples of businesses that integrate well within the natural landscape.
- DNR's main concern is loss of wildlife habitat.
- Push development onto locations off of SC 11.
- Lots of turnover of properties along SC 11 in the past 2 years - new people moving in.

3.3 Visual Preference Survey

Incorporating a survey during the planning process is beneficial in that it allows citizens that are unable to attend in-person meetings to have a medium to provide their input on the project. For the Highway 11 corridor, a visual preference survey was designed and published at the beginning of the planning process.

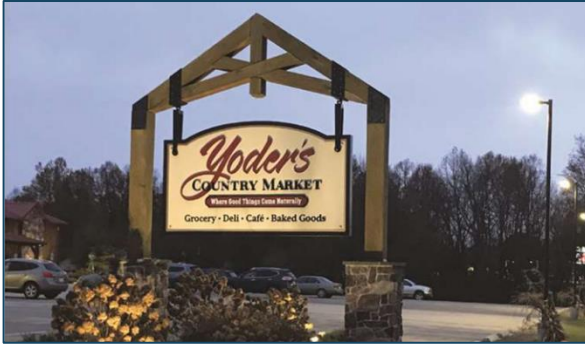


The survey shows a series of images in one of the following categories: Residential, Commercial, Roadway Signage, Building Signage, and Landscaping and Design. For each image, the survey taker is asked how desirable that type of development would be from “Highly Desirable” to “Highly Undesirable”. The survey taker is asked to vote on which image is most preferred among the five shown in each category.

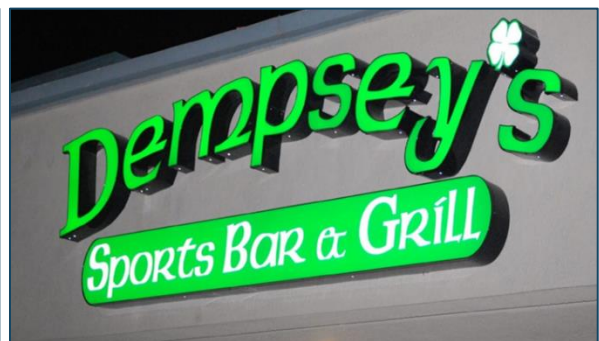
Results from the survey can assist in the creation of design guidelines for new residential and commercial development. As of April 2022, a total of 278 responses have been compiled. A sample of results from the survey are included below:

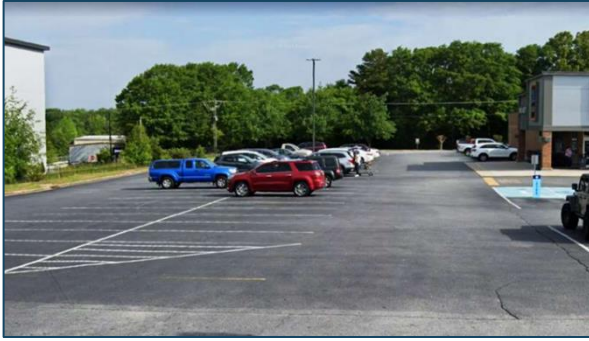
Aesthetics and Design Most Desirable





Aesthetics and Design Least Desirable





Summary of Most Desirable Architectural Elements and Site Design

- **Primary Building Materials:** Natural stone, wood, brick
- **Colors:** Earth tones
- **Roof Design:** Pitched roof systems
- **Exterior Lighting:** Dark sky-compatible, cutoff fixtures, site-contained
- **Landscaping:** Dense buffering along Highway 11, heavily landscaped parking lots
- **Commercial Site Design:** Access management, minimal curb cuts, buffered from roadway
- **Residential Site Design:** Conservation subdivision design, open spaces, tree preservation
- **Signage:** Monument-style, natural stone and wood, no backlit signage, externally illuminated (down lit)

The last question of the survey asked respondents to identify what they believe is the most important element of characteristics when considering future development along the corridor. The following word cloud summarizes the responses. Words or phrases in large and bold text represent the most common responses.



3.4 Project Website

A website specific to the Highway 11 Corridor Study was hosted by Pickens County at: https://www.co.pickens.sc.us/departments/planning/scenic_highway_11_corridor_study/index.php. The website provided an overview of the project along with up-to-date detailed information about the progress of the plan, a link to the Visual Preference Survey, and announcements about upcoming public input opportunities.

3.5 One-on-One Stakeholder Meetings

The project team conducted one-on-one stakeholder meetings on December 9, 2021. Stakeholders invited to attend these meetings included residents along Highway 11, Upcountry SC, Duke Energy, Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative, Anthony Property Group, and South Street Partners (The Cliffs).

The project team went through a series of questions with each stakeholder in an effort to generate a dialog about existing and future issues and opportunities along the corridor. Input from the stakeholders mirrored the input from the community meeting and the focus groups.

4 COMMON THEMES

Several themes emerged during the public outreach portion of the project. These themes were identified through stakeholder interviews, questionnaires, and public meetings. Though not formalized, these themes have guided the recommendations of the study and will inform future discussions.

The primary concern of respondents was that the local character and context of the Highway 11 corridor could be destroyed by future development with no strategies or regulation for guiding development along the corridor. The highway was also seen as a regional resource with environmentally sensitive areas and areas of historic or cultural significance that are valuable assets to residents and visitors. The vast majority of participants throughout the process expressed a desire for new development to be limited in some fashion and for enhanced regulations to ensure the character of the corridor is maintained.

Protection of the corridor's character and the viewshed along the highway were the two primary goals that emerged from our input sessions. There was less consensus on uses that were appropriate for the corridor and what type of regulation should be used to control growth. Three main themes grew out of the discussions and below are the following summaries show the areas of consensus and the issues with less agreement on the appropriate path forward.

4.1 Maintain Character of Highway 11

Protecting the character of the corridor was a consistent theme identified throughout the public input process. Creating a clear definition of the corridor's character was more challenging. One aspect of the corridor that there was overwhelming agreement was that the views from the highway, such as that of Table Rock or the many other scenic views and vistas, create a unique driving experience along Highway 11 and are very important to preserving the corridor.

Another aspect of the character discussions revolved around what type of development uses should be allowed along Highway 11. Respondents approved of low density, single-family type residential development along the corridor similar to what exists today. Generally, respondents were not as favorable of subdivision development as they were with single home development on existing parcels. The main concern was the visual impact on the corridor's character if subdivision development close to the highway was not buffered from view. However, there was some support for allowing subdivisions if siting concerns were addressed so that they were not seen from the immediate roadway. The general consensus was that all residential development in any form should have some guidelines for limiting the impact on the visual characteristics of the corridor and surrounding environmental features when property was developed.

Commercial and industrial uses were also topics in the meetings held. Almost all feedback received did not support any type of industrial development along the corridor. Agreement about commercial uses was not as clear. Many respondents expressed appreciation for existing businesses and attractions such as Table Rock State Park and Aunt Sue's and were identified as part of the character people identify with. However, there were many different opinions of whether there should be additional commercial development along the corridor and what form that should take. A significant number of responses supported limited or no commercial development along the corridor. However, others felt that some would be necessary and others thought that it would be positive for the residents of the corridor.

One common part of these discussions was the need for a consistent feel and look for development along the corridor regardless of use. The use of natural materials, limited signage and lighting, and maintaining vegetative buffers along the corridor were widely supported ideas to keep development consistent with the current character. Residents also agreed that the value Highway 11 brings to the County was from the unique attractions and iconic views present along the corridor.

4.2 Minimum Standards for New Development

Although not unanimous, the majority of feedback was that it is important for the County to establish measures to preserve the character of the corridor. Suggestions for protective measures ranged from prohibiting development along the highway and zoning the entire corridor, to establishing land conservation funds to purchase properties and many other measures in between. Ensuring exclusion of incompatible uses and structures such as industrial and large-scale commercial activities, preserving the scenic resources present, and creating a cohesive aesthetic were generally identified as the objective for improved land use control measures.

Overall support for enacting development standards to provide the framework for preserving the corridor was positive. However, there was no widespread agreement on which measures would be best to achieve the objective. As meetings progressed, the discussion of which regulatory tools best suited the situation found limited agreement. Disparity between what types of businesses should locate often related to the look and feel of the business as opposed to the actual business itself. Many suggested that existing businesses were fine, but they didn't want new business that were franchises or looked more modern. This suggested that the base issue was the aesthetic feel of the business as opposed to the function of the establishment. This form over function discussion played out in many conversations.

Support for different measures correlated with two primary issues. One was an individual's own definition of the character of the corridor and what is appropriate as mentioned above. The other was a correlation with an individual's opinion of land use controls and how much autonomy they were willing to give up on their own property for residents within the proposed overlay.

This situation was best illustrated in one meeting where a proposed expansion of an existing business was being discussed. Several people were opposed to the proposed project and suggested there should be regulations to prevent expansion. However, when it was suggested that measures could be taken that would limit development of their property they were opposed to them. Divergent ideas over what is the appropriate character and what is an acceptable level of regulation limits the ability to conclusively identify one measure that satisfies everyone.

The challenge for the County moving forward will be to find a level of standards that best achieves the objectives of preserving the corridor and gaining broad support at the same time. Ultimately, no one single measure is likely to achieve the ultimate goal of protecting the corridor and a layering of tools will be needed. Feedback throughout the meetings recognized that, in addition to any development standards, additional measures such as fee

simple purchase of important properties or better enforcement of existing laws would also help achieve objectives. Building on the support for enhanced development controls from the community will help further the efforts to protect the future of Highway 11.

4.3 Establishing Corridor Boundaries and Viewsheds Beyond

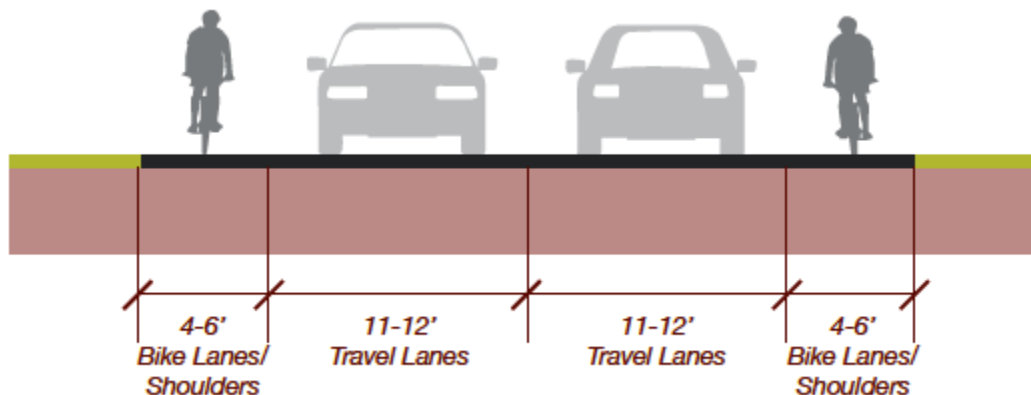
Defining the corridor for any regulatory framework to apply to was also a noted theme. A defined area for protection would allow a clear framework of measures that help protect the scenic corridor from encroachment of incompatible land uses, mitigate activities within the corridor that detract from its scenic quality, and make development more compatible with the environment and in harmony with the surroundings.

Beyond that, some noted that there was additional need to examine how to protect existing viewsheds along the corridor that are outside any defined corridor. From natural features such as Table Rock or Lake Keowee to the wooded streams and panoramic perspectives of the escarpment, the views provide an intrinsic value that attracts visitors to the area. Many of these views include land that is miles away from the Highway 11 corridor and not within the immediate confines of lands adjacent to the highway. The need to address protection of viewsheds that lie outside the immediate Corridor was noted by many who have noticed development activity detract from them over the years.

Concerns over residential development and clear cutting in distant vistas was raised as a significant threat to views. This issue was separate from the concerns of development directly adjacent to the corridor. Minimizing development on steep slopes and ridgelines within the viewshed were ideas mentioned during discussions. A long-term goal of identifying key characteristics of the viewshed will help target areas where protective strategies will be most effective and impactful at one of the key characteristics that makes the corridor so special.

4.4 Improve Traffic and Safety

Numerous comments were received during community meetings regarding traffic along the corridor. Residents and business owners cited concerns about excessive speeds, high amounts of truck traffic, and general safety along Highway 11.



The South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) classifies Highway 11 as a state-maintained minor arterial roadway. In rural areas, minor arterials will provide a mix of interstate and intercounty travel service. When compared to the principal arterial system, the minor arterials provide lower travel speeds, accommodate shorter trips and distances and lower traffic volumes, but provide more access to property.

The speed limit along most of the corridor is 55 MPH and right-of-way is generally 160 feet wide. Lower speed limits are located in areas with less right-of-way and heavily utilized intersections. Enforcement is the primary mechanism available to monitor and deter speeding. Traffic calming elements can be incorporated into roadway design in certain cases; however, most arterial roadways are designed to move vehicle traffic freely and efficiently from one destination to another.

SCDOT maintains 5 traffic count locations along Highway 11. In 2020, the average daily traffic count along the corridor was 2,000, with the highest traffic count (2,300 ADT) occurring near the Pumpkintown Mountain Opry at the SC 8 / SC 11 junction. Trucks accounted for 10 – 15% of traffic along the corridor in 2019 and 2020, with the highest truck volumes occurring in the vicinity of the US 178 / SC 11 intersection and the SC 8 / SC 11 intersection.

Historical data show average traffic counts along the corridor have not significantly increased since 1996. Truck traffic growth is unknown due to a lack of available historical data to compare. Anecdotal evidence points to a recent increase in truck traffic along the corridor, especially since the Interstate 85 improvement project in Cherokee County broke ground in 2018.

In terms of safety, the project team examined crash data from 2016 – 2020 along the entirety of the corridor (**See Map 2**). During the 5-year reporting period, there were 123 crashes along Highway 11: resulting in 6 fatalities and 62 serious injuries. The intersection of SC 11 and New Hope Road / South Saluda Road had the highest number of crashes during the reporting period with a total of 12, resulting in 1 fatality and 5 serious injuries. During the public involvement process, several residents identified the SC 11 and New Hope Road / South Saluda Road intersection as dangerous, and the crash data confirm the general consensus. The crash data also found the intersection of SC 11 and West Gate Road to be a safety concern, with 6 accidents, 3 fatalities and 7 serious injuries during the 5-year reporting period.

5 SUMMARY OF PLANNING TOOLS

5.1 Design Guidelines

Local enforceable design guidelines and design review can limit the impact of development on scenic vistas and viewsheds. Clear design guidelines and a local design review process gives communities a chance to decide how development will affect their neighborhoods and countryside on a case-by-case basis, within the parameters of predetermined community preferences. Design guidelines are typically enforced through an overlay district mechanism.

Currently, Pickens County has design guidelines in place for the Eighteen Mile Road Corridor. These guidelines apply to property within 700 feet on both sides of Highway 18 and control non-residential development design. Elements addressed in the regulations include signage, building façade materials, driveway access, dumpster screening, parking lot landscaping, and street tree planting along SC 18.

Most design guidelines will address a number of architectural design elements, including building materials, signage, awnings, articulation, windows, and roof design. Design guidelines can go a step further and control site design elements such as landscaping, lighting, driveways, parking, and public art.

Since design guidelines are already a feature in the Pickens County Unified Development Standards Ordinance, the addition of guidelines for the Highway 11 corridor would not require creating a new administrative process.

5.2 Zoning

Zoning and land use ordinances can be implemented for agricultural and scenic protection. Zoning laws that limit the height of buildings based on their proximity to a design viewshed are an effective way of preserving scenic vistas. Other types of legislative protection include

overlay zoning and the creation of view corridors. Overlay zoning places added restrictions on zoned areas and is often used to control density, grading, ridgeline development, and vegetation. View corridors are planned openings in the built environment that allow views of scenic vistas and viewsheds.

The zoned areas of Pickens County are limited to the municipalities of Easley, Pickens, Liberty and Central. Zoning has the benefit of dictating the specific use of a piece of property, allowing the jurisdiction to choose which uses are allowed and where they are allowed. On its own, zoning does not address the architectural design of a development. A zoning overlay district is a tool that can be added to a zoning regulation to address aesthetic design in a specific area. Other zoning tools include cluster developments, planned and flexible developments, performance zoning, floating zones, conditional uses, and priority investment zones.

In South Carolina, zoning regulations must conform to the Local Government Comprehensive Planning Enabling Act of 1994. In order for a jurisdiction to enact zoning controls, they must have an adopted Comprehensive Plan with a Land Use Element. The county recently completed its Comprehensive Plan, titled *OnePickens County*. The document includes a Land Use Element, thus providing the county the authority to enact zoning.

Unlike design guidelines, zoning in Pickens County would require the creation of a new administrative and enforcement process. This process ensures the zoning powers of the local jurisdiction are exercised in accordance with state law. While these procedures could be written into the framework of the existing Unified Development Standards Ordinance, special attention will be needed to ensure the administrative functions and processes are clear and delineated from any existing land development processes.

5.3 Conservation Subdivisions

A conservation subdivision is a residential subdivision that devotes at least half of its potentially buildable land area to undivided, permanently protected open space. In contrast, conventional subdivisions devote all, or nearly all, buildable land area to individual lots and streets.

In rural areas, conservation subdivisions offer several advantages to communities over conventional subdivisions. They supply more habitat for wildlife, filter and retain more stormwater runoff, require less new infrastructure, and better maintain a rural sense of place. When developers link open space areas to the open spaces of adjacent subdivisions, conservation subdivisions can contribute to a network of environmental corridors within or between communities. Conservation subdivisions do not, however, stop urban expansion or reduce automobile dependency.

The Pickens County Unified Development Standards Ordinance has provisions for Open Space Subdivisions, which are like conservation subdivisions in that a portion of the buildable area is set aside as open space and the remainder is developed at a higher density than traditional subdivisions.

Conservation subdivision design goes beyond open space and density and requires a jurisdiction to identify which environmental and cultural resources or features they want to protect from new development and incentivizes developers to protect it. In order to implement conservation subdivision design, incentives, protected features, and administrative procedures would be created and codified within the Unified Development Standards Ordinance.

5.4 Low Impact Development

Low-impact development (LID) is the general term for a wide array of site planning principles and engineered treatment practices used to manage both water runoff volume and water quality. LID is an ecologically friendly approach to site development and stormwater management. It encourages sustainability by minimizing development impacts to the land, water, and air. LID's goal is to use multiple on-site techniques to avoid generating runoff and increase the landscape's ability to detain rainwater and capture pollutants. Rather than rely on one single device for control, such as a detention pond, it relies on the cumulative benefits of many small-scale prevention and treatment techniques.

LID can be applied to any type of development. Applying LID to new development involves using a five-step systematic approach to reducing and controlling runoff, which is time and labor intensive. Some of its principles and practices may conflict with existing stormwater management approaches, subdivision regulations, and building codes. Development of a LID program requires significant effort to address these conflicts and to provide new design guidance.

Implementation of an LID program in Pickens County would require revisions to the Unified Development Standards Ordinance and a comprehensive design review process which may necessitate additional staff.

5.5 Tax Abatements and Exemptions

The county can work with businesses and developers to provide tax incentives for preservation, buffering, and/or building trails adjacent to SC 11.

Tax abatements reduce the total amount of tax owed, generally for a fixed period of time, such as five or 10 years. When used as an incentive to stimulate a particular type of

development, owners typically receive a discount on their tax bill for the duration of the abatement. The discount may be all or part of a particular taxing jurisdiction's share of total property tax revenue.

Tax exemptions adjust the value of the property subject to taxation; the resulting assessed value is then used to calculate the total amount of tax owed. For example, local jurisdictions wishing to stimulate a particular type of development on vacant lots can exempt the value of any improvements on the lot (such as a new building) for a defined period of time when calculating property tax liability.

In South Carolina, tax abatements are commonly used to incentivize economic development projects that feature significant job creation. These types of large-scale projects are counter to the overwhelming consensus derived from this plan's public involvement process.

5.6 Conservation Easements

The most traditional tool for conserving private land, a "conservation easement" (also known as a conservation restriction) is a legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. It allows landowners to continue to own and use their land, and they can also sell it or pass it on to heirs. Several non-profit land trust organizations are involved in acquiring and negotiating the terms of conservation easements in the Upstate.

Local governments can make the decision to proactively protect significant natural, historic and/or cultural resources by offering incentives to landowners for conveyance of conservation easements or fee simple title. Greenville County and Oconee County have established Conservation Banks / Trusts that oversee funding for disbursement as grant to eligible landowners. Pickens County could elect to enact a similar process through a Council-appointed board.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The purpose of these recommendations for the SC 11 corridor is to prevent, to the greatest extent practical, the degradation of the existing visual character of Highway 11. Unregulated development has the potential to add a visual element of urban character to an existing rural or open space area.

The corridor recommendations are based on the information gathered from the planning process through community meetings; discussions with residents, business owners, and land conservation specialists; survey results; a technical analysis of existing conditions along the corridor; and a thorough examination of planning tools available to Pickens County. Achieving the outcomes

desired by the community will require the use of multiple tools that should be evaluated from time to time to ensure that they continue to be effective.

6.1 Highway 11 Corridor Design Guidelines

The project team recommends creating design guidelines for new development along Highway 11. Design guidelines should focus on architectural and site design elements of new development. Results from the Highway 11 Corridor Visual Preference Survey will aide Pickens County in developing guidelines by presenting the contextual challenges and clarifying the preferred development aesthetic. Corridor Design Guidelines are enforced through an Overlay District, which will create a geographic boundary in which new development will be required to adhere to the guidelines. Pickens County's recent moratorium on development applies to development within 660 feet of the centerline of Highway 11 (**See Map 3**), which can serve as the geographical limits of the Overlay District.

Architectural design guidelines should address the following elements at a minimum: building materials, colors, roof design, windows, entrances, special architectural features, and signage.

Site design guidelines should address the following elements at a minimum: parking, landscaping, exterior lighting, screening and buffering, and driveway/access locations.

During the public involvement process, the regulation of use was mentioned as a means of mitigating the impacts of development. The project team reviewed existing conditions along the corridor and performed a detailed slope analysis to understand how these conditions could impact where future development locates and how intensive any future development could be.

One key concern of public comment was development setbacks from Highway 11 and how they would impact the perceived character of the corridor. The right-of-way for Highway 11 ranges from 130 feet to 180 feet, and averages 160 feet. Each lane of roadway is 12 feet wide with shoulders/bike lanes provide an additional 4 feet of width. On average, right-of-way extends at least 60 feet beyond the edge of pavement which provides a significant buffer/separation from the corridor that cannot be developed. Additional buffering and

landscaping along the property line frontage, combined with the 60-foot Highway 11 right-of-way buffer, will greatly reduce visual impacts along the corridor.

Another key concern from public comment was that intensive types of development such as heavy commercial and industrial may locate along the corridor without additional regulations. The project team reviewed topographic data along the corridor (**See Map 4**) and



A development along Highway 11 with 60-foot right-of-way buffer from edge of pavement. Trees and shrubs provide added buffering from the roadway.

performed a spatial analysis of slopes within 1,000 feet from Highway 11 (**See Map 5**). Industry standard defines moderate slopes between 15 and 25 percent and steep/severe slopes greater than 25 percent. Single-family residential is suitable for most slopes, while commercial and industrial are not suitable in areas with slopes greater than 15 percent.

Of the 309 parcels with frontage on Highway 11, 109 of them contain at least a portion of land with greater than 15 percent slope. Parcels east of Table Rock State Park have the least amount of topographic variation and thus have the least number of natural constraints to future development; however, those parcels with less than 15 percent slope account for a total of 716 acres with an average of 4 acres



An example of steep slopes along Highway 11.

per lot. A focus on architectural and site design through design guidelines can ensure that new development in these areas will complement the natural landscape and the aesthetic desire of the community.

6.2 Unified Development Standards Ordinance Amendments

Amendments to the Pickens County Unified Development Standards Ordinance are recommended to address development in areas with moderate and steep slopes.

Allowing development on sloped land results in significant cut-and-fill and degrades natural drainage features, native wildlife habitats, and soil stability. Current requirements in the Unified Development Standards Ordinance should be enhanced with specific limits on the types of development allowable under sloped conditions. A soil survey of the corridor from USDA should be reviewed to categorize soil types and determine slope thresholds.

Once completed, a Corridor Overlay District containing the Highway 11 Design Guidelines should be added to the Unified Development Standards Ordinance in Appendix A, Section A03.

6.3 Viewshed Study of the Corridor

Existing viewsheds are iconic and create many of the fond memories associated with Highway 11. From natural features such as Table Rock or Lake Jocassee, to agricultural fields and orchards, the views are a big reason why people drive Highway 11.

The project team recommends the county commission a study of the viewsheds along the corridor to ensure that greenbelts, views of lakes and mountains, and views of agricultural land are retained amid future development pressure. Recommendations from a viewshed

study will likely require further amendments to the Unified Development Standards Ordinance and/or specifically the Highway 11 Corridor Overlay Design Guidelines.

6.4 Consider Developing a Conservation Strategy

Nearly 2,500 acres along Highway 11 are protected through conservation. An additional 16,000 acres are county and state park lands (**See Map 6**). Most of the conservation efforts along Highway 11 have focused on the western portion of the corridor. Several counties in South Carolina have become proactive in their efforts to conserve historical, natural, and cultural resources through Conservation Banks/Trusts as detailed in Section 5.4.1.



Looking westward at Highway 11 from Grant Meadow Overlook.

Based on the large amount of public comment focused on conserving land and natural resources along Highway 11, the project team recommends that Pickens County consider developing a conservation strategy. A strategy does not necessarily need to involve the creation of a Conservation Trust. A good first step could be opening a dialog with the South Carolina Conservation Bank to determine what grants or programs the county may be eligible for.

7 FINAL THOUGHTS

The Highway 11 Corridor Study generated a significant amount of public input, with more than 300 attendees contributing to in-person Community Meetings and nearly 300 survey responses. The overwhelming participation during the planning process is a testament to the importance of this corridor to Highway 11 residents, Pickens County residents, and residents throughout the Upstate.

Pickens County leaders have chosen to take a proactive approach to protect the natural, historical, and cultural resources that Highway 11 boasts. One goal of this study was to provide as much information to county leaders as possible to aid in their deliberations. This document has summarized the available qualitative and quantitative data, public comment, and planning tools available to allow for a variety of regulatory strategies.

The project team's hope is that this Highway 11 Corridor Study has sufficiently conveyed the importance that residents and business owners place on Highway 11, and their desire to see this beautiful place protected and maintained for future generations.

APPENDIX A - MAPS

Map 1	Corridor Extents
Map 2	2016-2020 Crash Data
Map 3	Development Moratorium Boundary
Map 4	Topography
Map 5	Slope Analysis
Map 6	Parcels with >15% Slopes
Map 7	Sloped Parcels and Protected Lands



SC HIGHWAY 11 CORRIDOR

Map 1. Corridor Extents

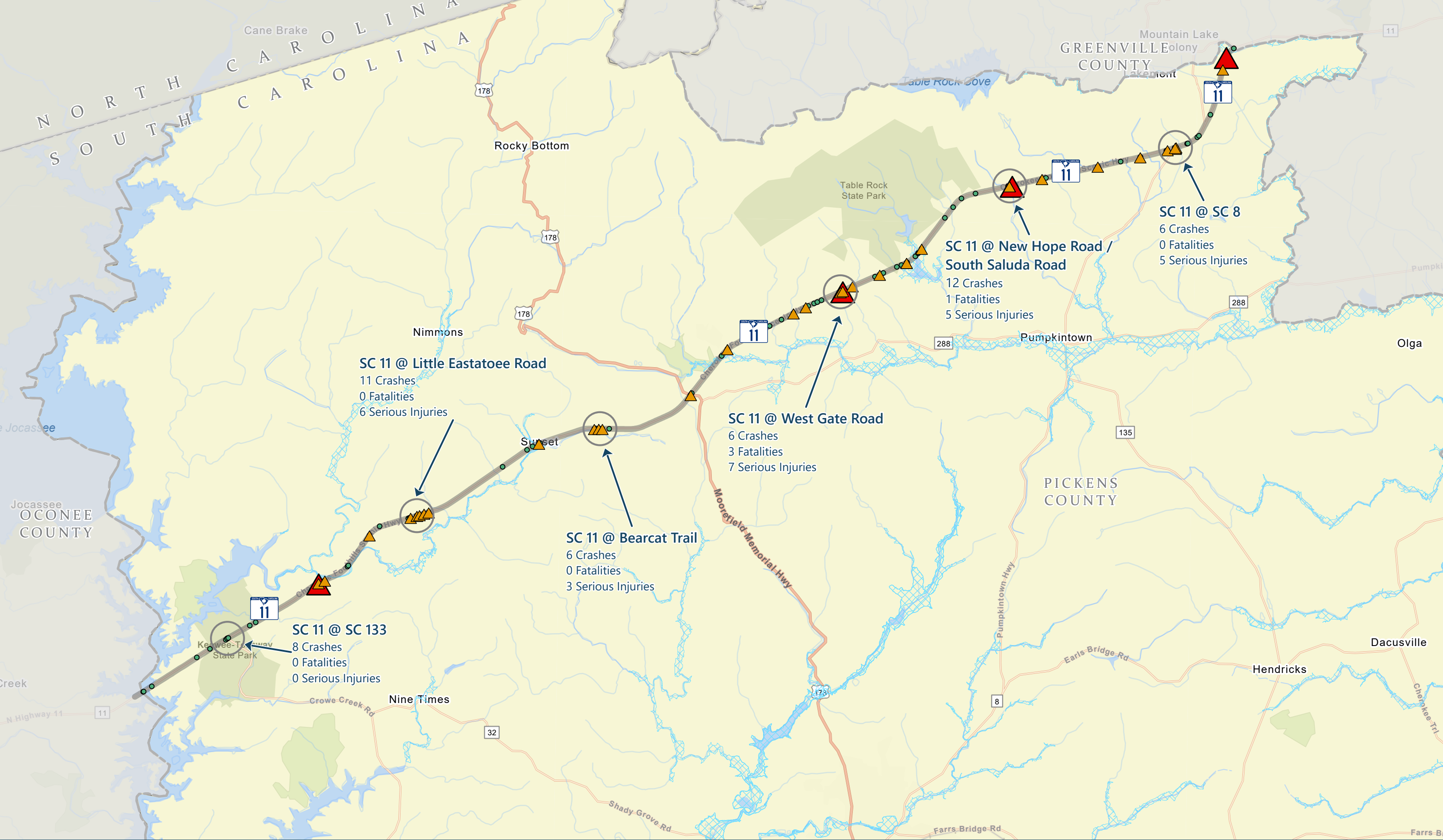
Legend

 SC Highway 11

 Hydrography

 Floodplain

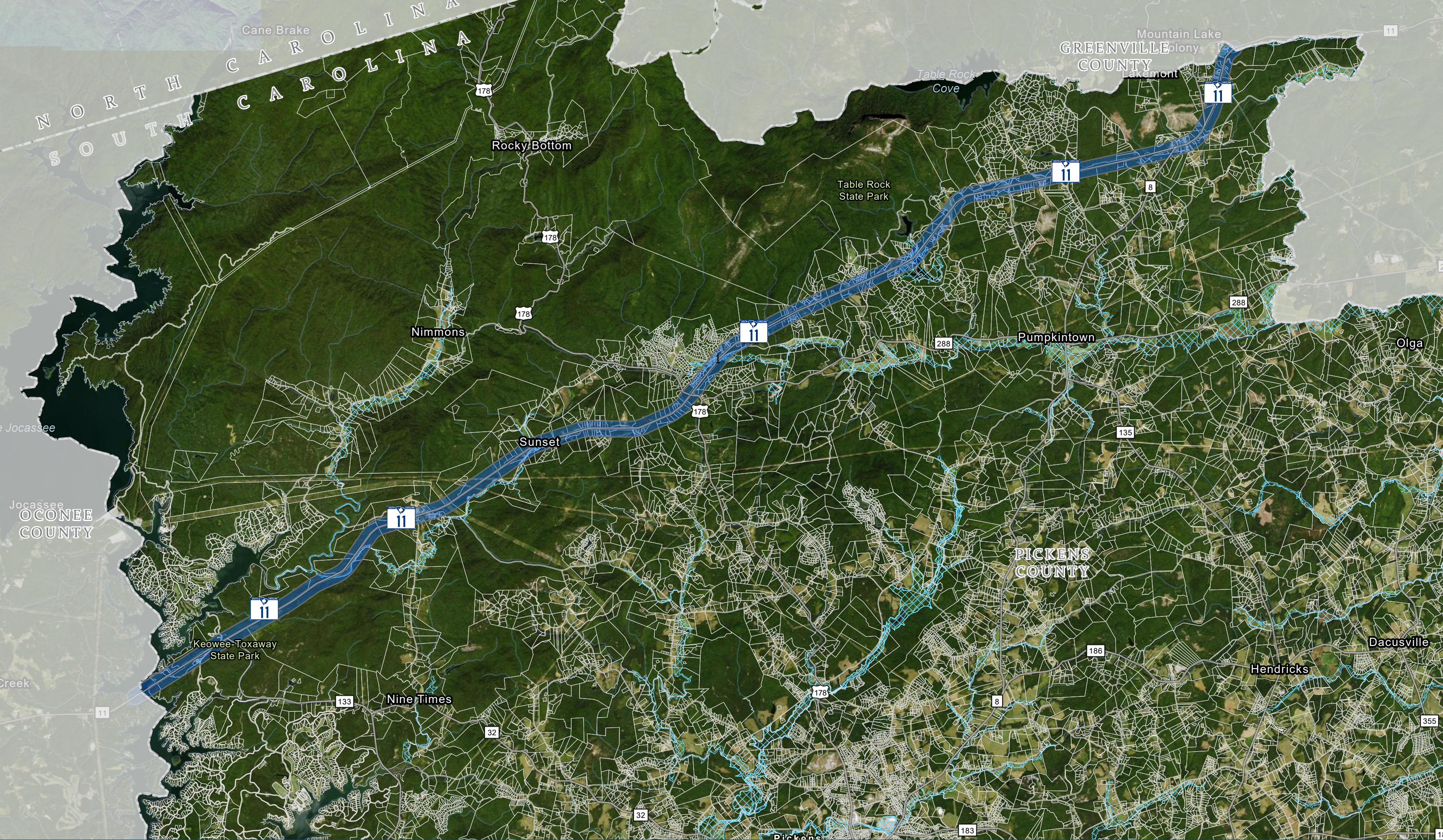




SC HIGHWAY 11 CORRIDOR

Map 2. 2016-2020 Crash Data





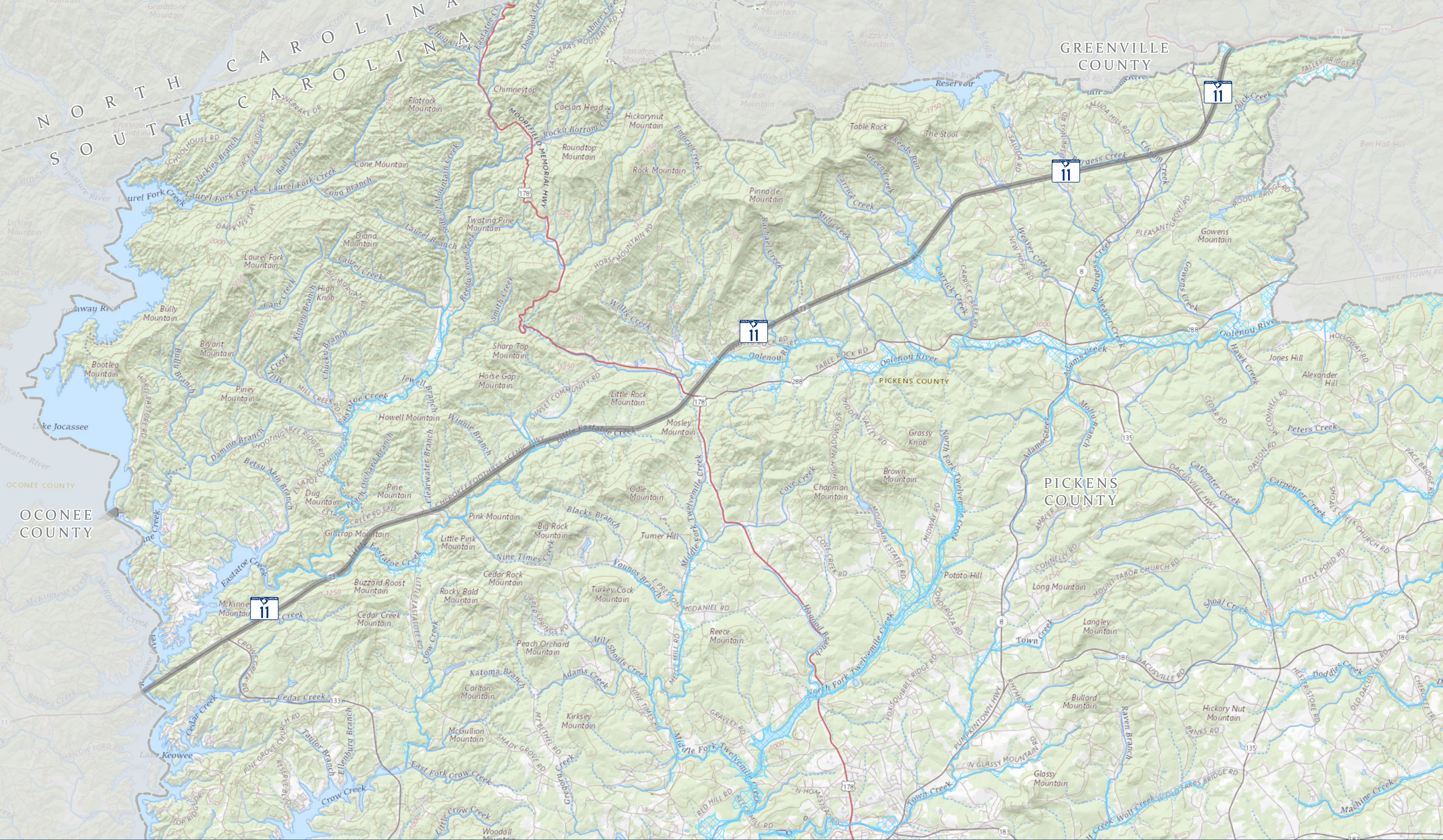
SC HIGHWAY 11 CORRIDOR

Map 3. Moratorium Boundary

Legend

- Hydrography
- Parcels
- SC 11 Moratorium Buffer (660')
- Floodplain



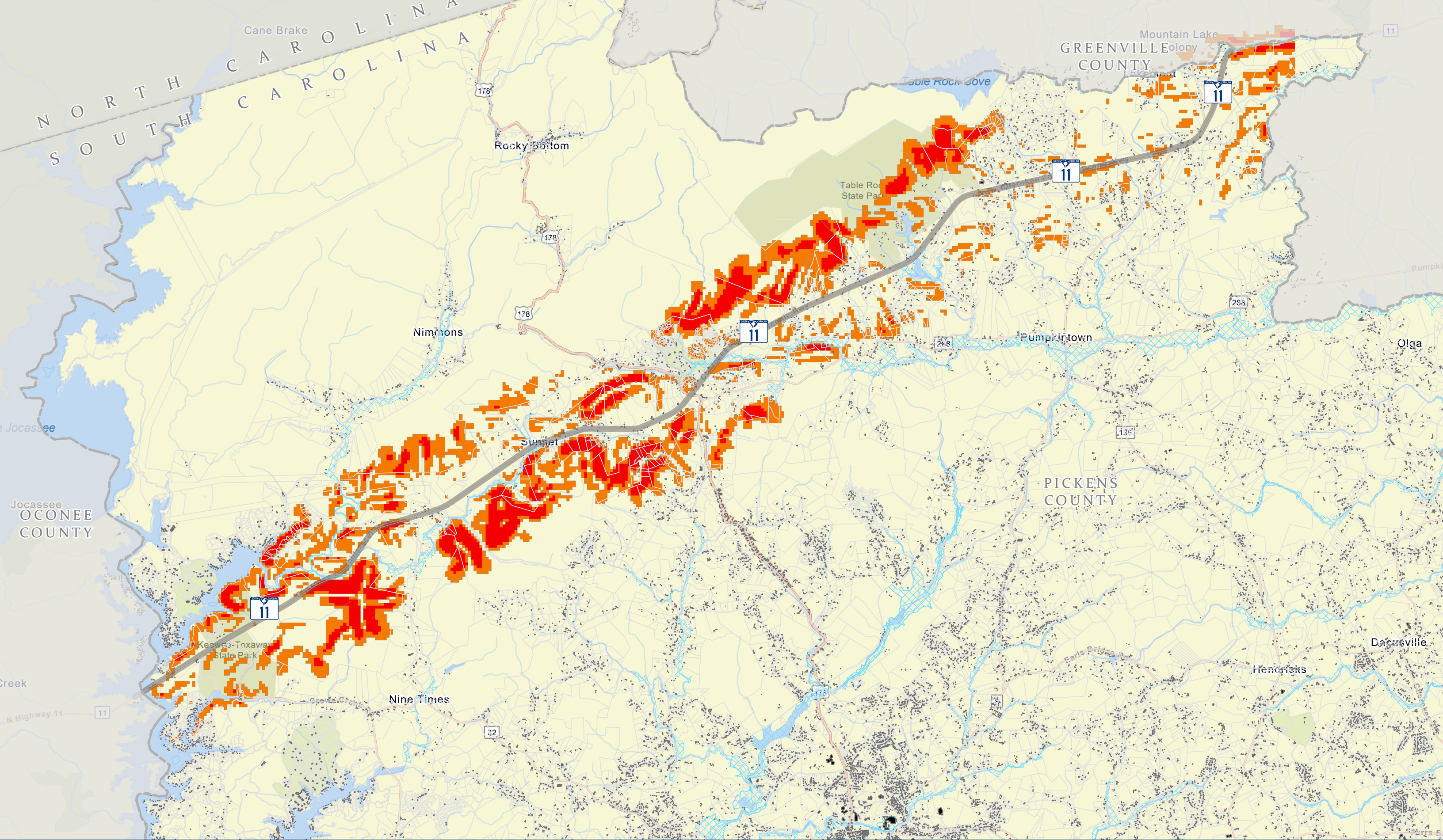


SC HIGHWAY 11 CORRIDOR

Map 4. Topography

- Legend
- SC Highway 11
 - Hydrography
 - Floodplain





SC HIGHWAY 11 CORRIDOR

Map 5. Slope Analysis

Legend

	SC Highway 11		Parcels		15% - 25% Slope		> 25% Slope
	Hydrography		Floodplain		Buildings		



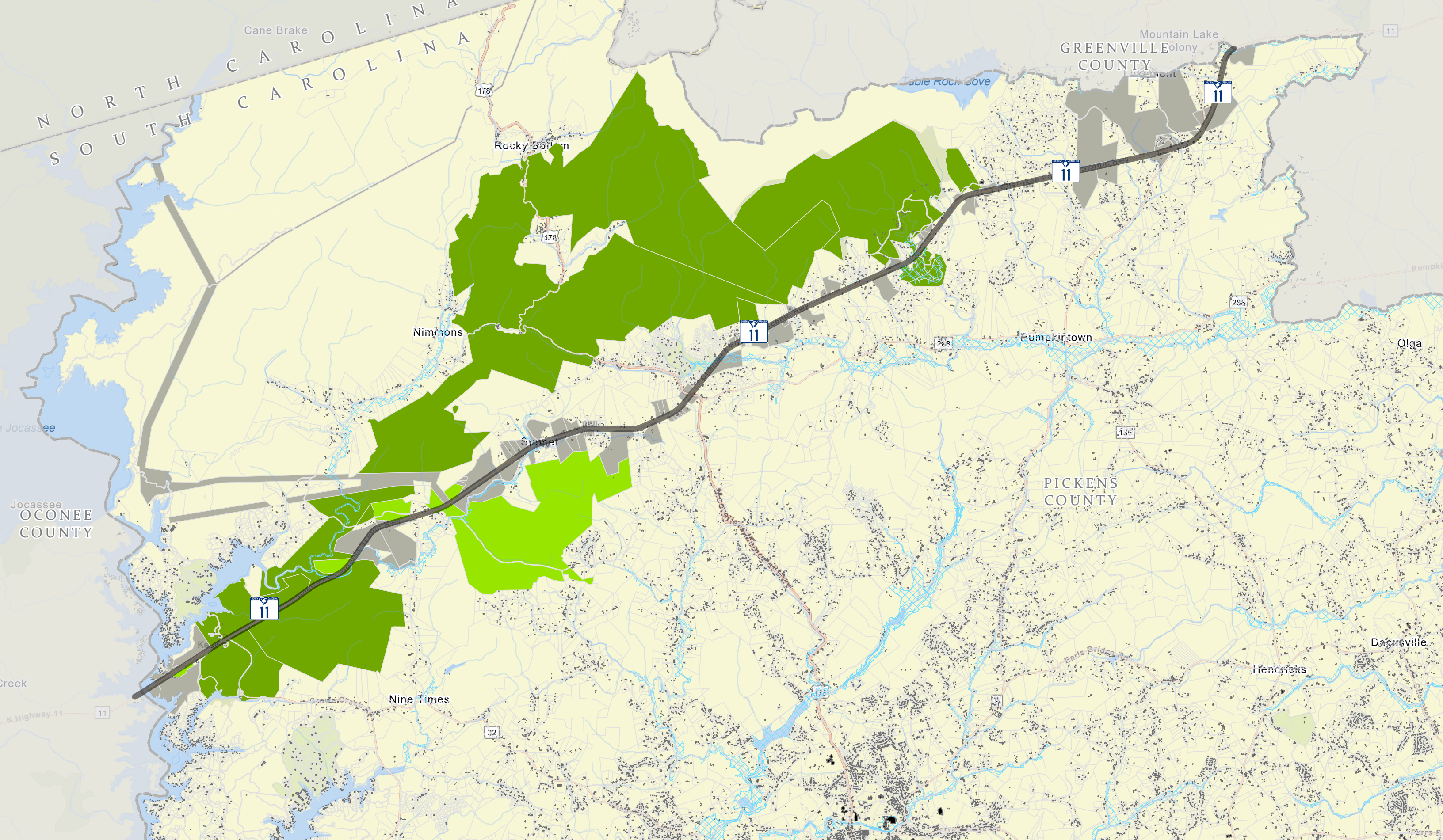


SC HIGHWAY 11 CORRIDOR

Map 6. Parcels with >15% Slopes

- Legend
- SC Highway 11
 - Hydrography
 - Floodplain
 - Buildings
 - Parcels with >15% Slope





Legend

- SC Highway 11
- Hydrography
- Parcels
- Private Conservation Lands
- State Land
- State Land Floodplain
- Parcels with >15% Slope
- Buildings



SC HIGHWAY 11 CORRIDOR

Map 7. Sloped Parcels and Protected Lands



DRAFT

A RESOLUTION OF THE
PICKENS COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
RECOMMENDING ADOPTION OF THE
SC HIGHWAY 11 SCENIC BYWAY CORRIDOR STUDY
AND DRAFT FINDINGS AND PLAN
BY THE PICKENS COUNTY COUNCIL

WHEREAS, the SC Highway 11 Scenic Byway, also known as the Cherokee Foothills Scenic Highway, SC 11, and Scenic 11, is a 118-mile corridor spanning five counties in the Upstate of South Carolina and this highway provides a scenic route along the Blue Ridge Escarpment; including the most photographed natural feature in South Carolina, Table Rock; and

WHEREAS, Pickens County Council found that there is considerable interest in both preservation and protection of Pickens County portion of the SC Highway 11 Scenic Byway; and

WHEREAS, Pickens County Council further found that there are no specific standards for development or land use along the SC Highway 11 Scenic Byway that would both serve to preserve and protect the scenic corridor; and

WHEREAS, Pickens County finds that the preservation and protection of this corridor within Pickens County is difficult without proper planning and adoption of appropriate development standards; and

WHEREAS, the County, utilizing the services of the Appalachian Council of Governments, undertook a SC Highway 11 Scenic Corridor Study to help define and plan for proper standards for protection, preservation and development along this important corridor; and

WHEREAS, Pickens County undertook a public engagement process, including social media and website postings, general public meetings, focus group sessions, and stakeholder team discussions in order to receive valuable public input; and

WHEREAS, the efforts of the citizens, stakeholders, and county staff have resulted in an achievable plan and attainable recommendations to help guide the protection, preservation, and future development along this vital scenic corridor.

NOW, THEREFOR BE IT RESOLVED by the Pickens County Planning Commission that the SC 11 Scenic Byway Corridor Study and associated draft findings and plan is hereby recommended to the Pickens County Council for adoption.

PICKENS COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

BY: _____
Robert Ballentine, Chairman, District 1

BY: _____
Gary Stancell, Vice Chairman, District 3

BY: _____
Bobbie Langley, District 2

BY: _____
Philip Smith, District 4

BY: _____
Jon Humphrey, District 5

BY: _____
David Cox, District 6

BY: _____
Matthew Kutilek, At Large

THIS ____ DAY OF _____, 2022

ATTEST: _____
Christopher J. Brink, AICP
Planning Commission Secretary
Director, Department of Community Development