

Project

Summary

Several months ago, Bays Mountain Park was approached about purchasing a 38.68-acre property in the eastern section of Hawkins County, located at the far western end of Bays Mountain Park. This property, previously owned by the Gibbs family, represents a critical addition to the park's efforts to preserve the Laurel Run Watershed. Attachment 1 provides a map of the proposed property location.

For over 20 years, the park sought to acquire the Gibbs property, and the family has now expressed interest in selling it to the City of Kingsport. This acquisition would complete the park's efforts to fully protect the Laurel Run Watershed, which flows through Bays Mountain Park, Laurel Run Park, and ultimately into the Holston River.

The property features significant natural assets, including sections of Laurel Run Creek and a wide waterfall larger than the well-known Laurel Run Falls along the Laurel Run Trail. If acquired, this would add a fifth waterfall to Bays Mountain Park and expand opportunities for guided waterfall hikes, a popular spring activity.

Access challenges in the park's western portion make this acquisition strategically important. Currently, park staff must rely on permission from private landowners for vehicle access to upper trails such as Laurel Run Trail and Kiner Hollow. The Gibbs property would provide direct vehicle access from Bays Mountain Road, enabling quicker response times for rescues and more efficient perimeter monitoring.

Future plans for the property include the development of new trails and backcountry camping areas, which would complement the park's existing 40 miles of trails and enhance recreational offerings.

Bays Mountain Park is designated a Class I Natural Area under the Tennessee Natural Areas Preservation Act of 1971 and is managed by the City of Kingsport with support from the Tennessee Natural Areas Program. The park's mission is to preserve its natural and cultural resources while offering high-quality educational and recreational opportunities. Daily maintenance and operation of the property will be funded through the park's yearly budget.

Project Evaluation Criteria

1. Core Criteria

The mission of Bays Mountain Park aligns closely with the Tennessee Heritage Conservation Trust Fund's (THCTF) purpose of permanently conserving and preserving land. This project would protect the Laurel Run Watershed, a critical natural resource with scenic, scientific, and recreational value.

Without intervention, the property is at risk of habitat destruction, refuse dumping, commercialization, and off-road vehicle use. The acquisition would ensure the preservation of the waterfall, creek, and surrounding habitats while expanding recreational opportunities.

The Gibbs property would enhance tourism and recreation, which are vital to the economies of Hawkins and Sullivan Counties. The property's proximity to Laurel Run Park and Bays Mountain Park creates a natural synergy for promoting outdoor activities such as hiking, biking, fishing, and educational programming.

Education is a cornerstone of the park's mission. Over 10,000 students from surrounding states participate annually in the park's educational programs. The Gibbs property could host new programs, including scientific research, TN Naturalist programs, and Bio Blitz events, fostering stewardship of natural resources.

2. Importance

The Gibbs property represents the final piece needed to preserve the entire Laurel Run Watershed, a tributary of the Holston River. Ownership would enable scientific research, habitat management, and educational opportunities in partnership with institutions such as East Tennessee State University and Lincoln Memorial University.

The property's biodiversity includes potential habitats for threatened or endangered species, such as Mountain Canby's and American ginseng. If acquired, the park plans to conduct comprehensive surveys to identify and protect sensitive habitats.

3. Threatened

The property is at risk due to the passing of its original owner. The next-of-kin has reached out to the park, offering a unique opportunity to secure the land. If acquired, the property would be permanently protected by the City of Kingsport.

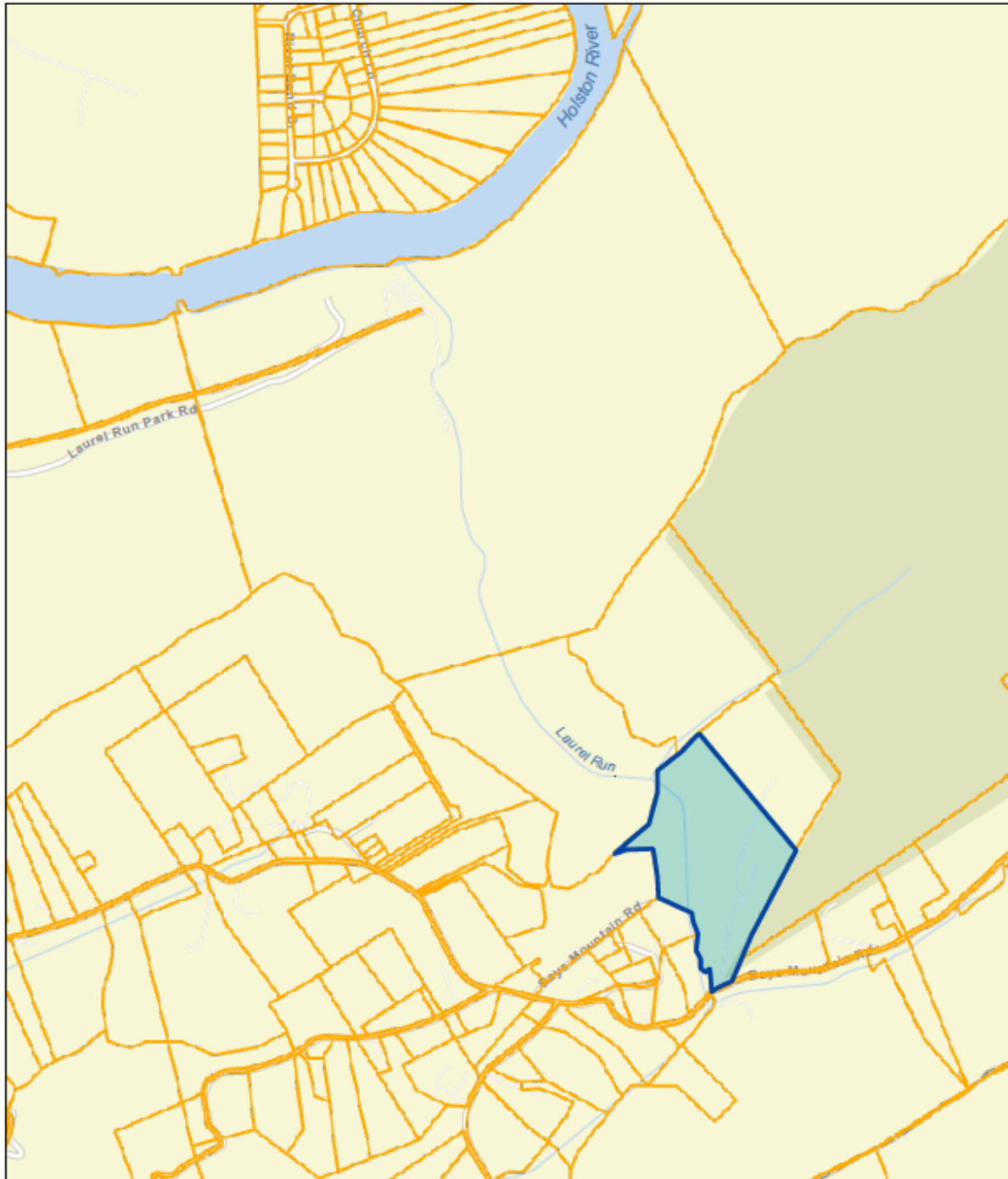
4. Strategic

Bays Mountain Park currently spans 3,750 acres across Hawkins and Sullivan Counties, making it the largest city-owned park in Tennessee. The Gibbs property shares two borders with the park and would fill a critical gap, enhancing park connectivity and providing strategic access points.

Additionally, the acquisition would position the park to negotiate with neighboring landowners about conservation easements or future acquisitions, further expanding the park's protected footprint.

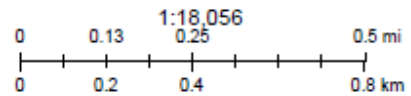
Preserving this property would protect vital ridges and valleys, combat urban sprawl, and safeguard wildlife habitats, ensuring long-term conservation for future generations.

Hawkins County - Parcel: 057 072.00



Date: December 4, 2024

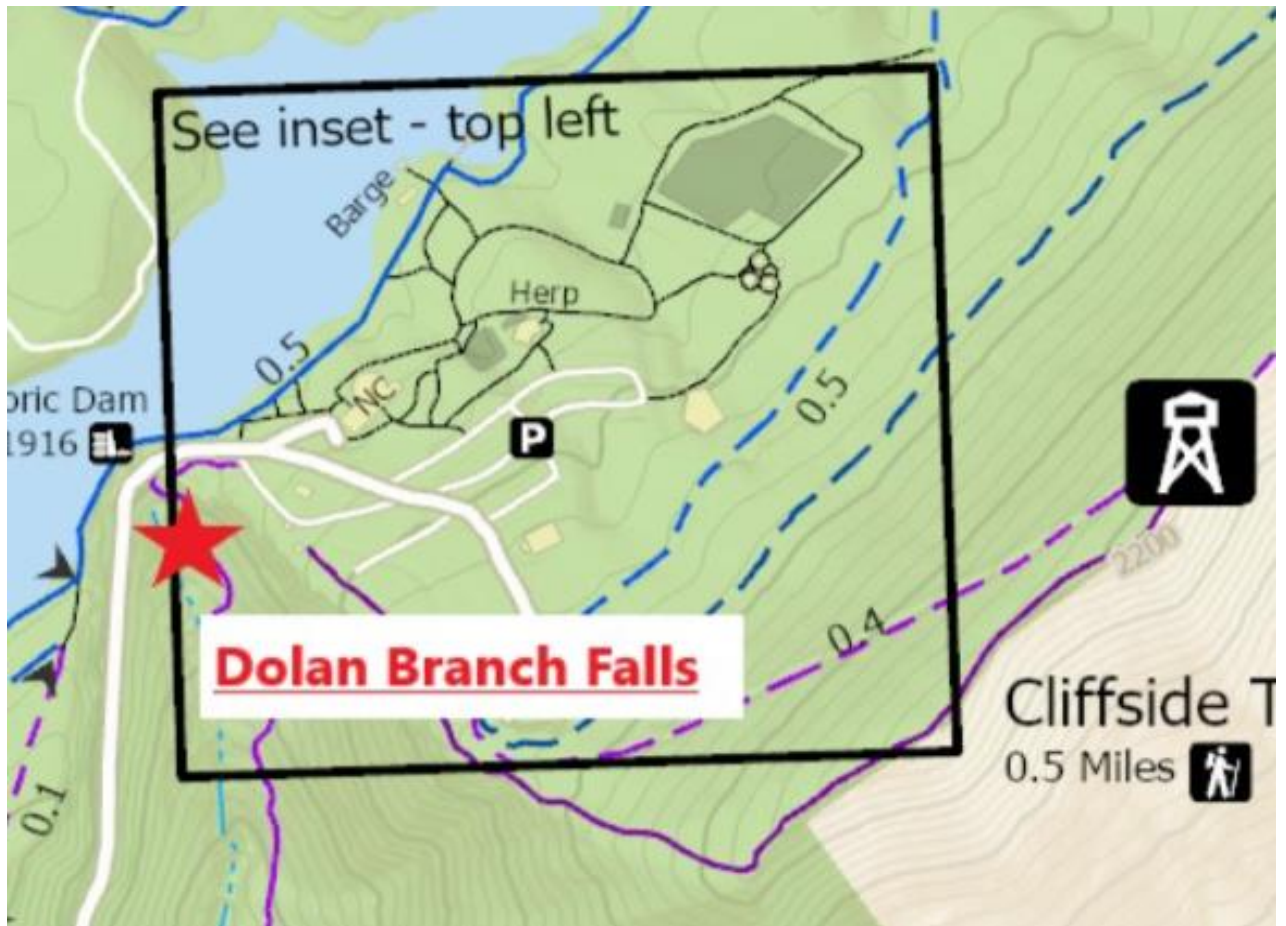
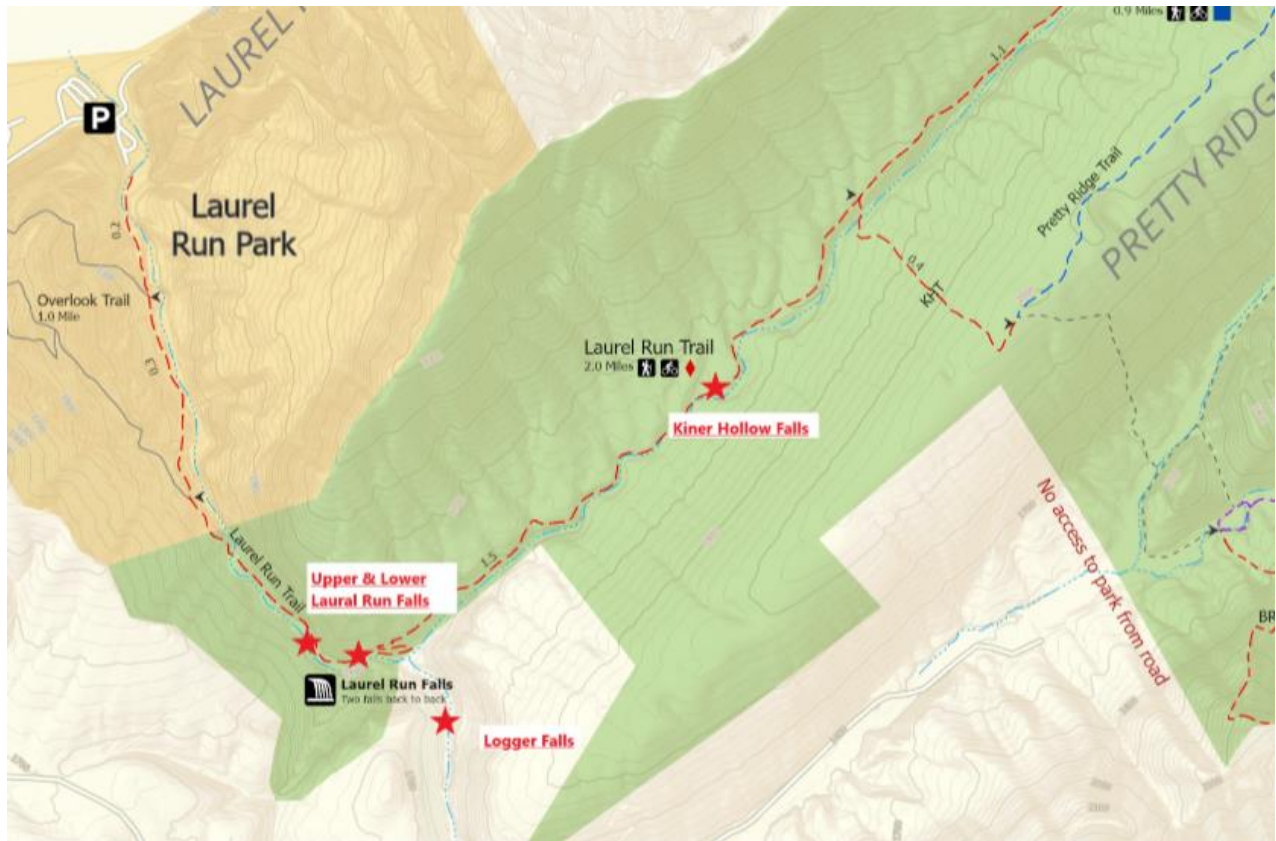
County: Hawkins
Owner: GIBBS ELBERT A & GLENDA D
Address: BAYS MOUNTAIN RD 263
Parcel Number: 057 072.00
Deeded Acreage: 38.68
Calculated Acreage: 0
Date of TDOT Imagery: 2019
Date of Vexcel Imagery: 2023



State of Tennessee, Comptroller of the Treasury, Division of Property Assessments (DPA). Esri Community Maps Contributors, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METYNASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, US Census Bureau, USDA, USFWS

The property lines are compiled from information maintained by your local county Assessor's office but are not conclusive evidence of property ownership in any court of law.

Bays Mountain Waterfalls



Logger's Falls

