

# 7. Findings on National Heritage Area Feasibility and Suitability

## 7.1 Findings about the Study Area

A heritage area suitability and feasibility study, according to the National Park Service, should include analysis and documentation that:

1. An area has an assemblage of natural, historic, or cultural resources that together represent distinct aspects of American heritage worthy of recognition, conservation, interpretation, and continuing use, and are best managed as such an assemblage through partnerships among public and private entities, and by combining diverse and sometimes noncontiguous resources and active communities:

*Chapter 3 provides a synopsis of key resources, and Chapter 4 reviews the history of the area and the inter-relationships of these resources.*

Many resources in the area offer potential for recognition. The superb natural resources of unique granite and granite-gneiss outcrops found at Arabia Mountain and the surrounding geological sites, including Panola Mountain, are home to fragile ecosystems which include federally threatened and endangered plant species that will benefit from the National Heritage Area designation. Panola Mountain has also already been designated a National Natural Landmark and is a rare example of a pristine, granite outcrop that has never been quarried.

The South River is a major natural resource that is dotted with cultural and historic sites including the oldest continually occupied property in the study area, the Lyon family home. The corridor links together other important resources of the area including Panola Mountain State Conservation Park, South Rockdale Community Park, and Miners Creek Preserve. This river corridor can be directly linked by trails and greenways to the Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve.

The region's historic granite quarry system illustrates the longstanding importance of granite to the area and the nation. Much of the history and character of Lithonia and the surrounding area reflects the area's quarrying success. Historic structures, landmarks, and quarry sites tell the story of quarrying, the influx of international craftsmen tell the story of a period of the area's development, and together identify the area's unique locus within the Piedmont. These stories of the cultural and physical granite resources need to be identified and communicated to the public.

2. Reflects traditions, customs, beliefs, and folk-life that are a valuable part of the national story:

*Chapter 4 reviews the history of the area and its development, and Chapter 5 proposes initial interpretive themes.*

Some of the historical and cultural resources predate European settlement. The area's pre-historic origins are evident in archeological sites such as those at Miners Creek Preserve and at Soapstone Ridge. Native American history is also present in the form of place names and routes that are today's roads and railroads through the county, and in the marking of counties. For example, part of the DeKalb County line follows the Hightower Trail. African American culture has also played a significant role in the development of the area, particularly the growth and evolution of Lithonia. These cultural stories need to be identified and expressed in the subsequent detailed Management Plan so that future generations can understand how this area and its culture have related to its unusual geology and landscape.

3. Provides outstanding opportunities to conserve natural, cultural, historic, and /or scenic features:

*Chapter 2 highlights the local commitments to conservation that are already in progress. Chapter 6 indicates the general approach to the heritage area plan.*

The Alliance has initiated measures to conserve and protect many of the unique natural, historic, and scenic features of the area. Arabia Mountain and the surrounding open lands offer opportunities to conserve quickly disappearing open space into a contiguous natural system that can link to the South River Corridor, and the multi-county Greenway Trail system being implemented by the PATH Foundation. The historical, archeological and cultural preservation opportunities along this network include resources from different periods of history such as archeological sites, historic structures and properties, the only farm left in DeKalb County, and other features such as the numerous structures of Lithonia granite that are clustered throughout the area, particularly in the center of Lithonia.

4. Provides outstanding recreational and educational opportunities:

*Chapters 3, 4, and 5 provide information related to existing opportunities and resources and how they might be used in the Heritage Area.*

The proposed National Heritage Area is located within 20 minutes of downtown Atlanta and offers outstanding recreational and educational opportunities for the residents of the area. Arabia Mountain, in the core resource area, and Stone Mountain, nearby, are already recognized as key natural and recreational destinations by Atlanta residents and out-of-state visitors. Panola Mountain State Conservation Park and Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve both offer nature learning centers as well as interpretive tours. Arabia Mountain's abandoned quarrying sites and ruins offer untapped educational potential.

Efforts are underway to link the recreational and educational resources of the area through a system of multi-use trails. Such initiatives will need to be incorporated into the heritage effort along with other initiatives to realize the recreational and educational activities.

Other facilities in the study area, such as the Fernbank Museum of Natural History, the Fernbank Science Center, and the DeKalb Historical Society can be partners in interpretive and educational programs. The historic Lithonia Woman's Club building, which has been offered to the Alliance, is a potential visitor contact and historic information center, located in the heart of Lithonia.

5. The resources important to the identified theme or themes of the area retain a degree of integrity capable of supporting interpretation:

*Chapters 3 and 4 highlight the key resources and their qualities.*

Natural, historical, and cultural themes will be an integral part of the area's interpretation. The themes developed in **Chapter 5** will take advantage of the full scope of the area's historic and cultural resources, including historic buildings, sites, and landmarks. However, rapid urbanization poses a threat to some of these resources, such as remains of former mills, the last remaining farm, and scattered archeological sites associated with early settlement. It is important that these sites be preserved and interpreted for future generations.

The high quality of the natural and scenic resources as well as their proximity to a growing regional population will ensure educational and recreational opportunities. Arabia Mountain provides an ideal setting to learn about the quarrying industry, the cultural history of its significance to the Native Americans, and the ecology of its vernal pools and unique plant life.

6. Residents, business interests, non-profit organizations, and governments within the proposed area are involved in the planning, have developed a conceptual financial plan that outlines the roles for all participants including the federal government, and have demonstrated support for designation of the area:

*Chapter 2 presents information on the activities of public and private parties to this area and their contributions to innovative use and development of its resources.*

Over the past few years, the Alliance has undertaken tremendous efforts in bringing together various public and private stakeholders together around the idea of the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area. This effort should be pursued and led by the Alliance during the various stages of the planning process. The residents as well as local industries are enthusiastic about the initiative that has been taken to tell the stories and promote the significance of the region.

The City of Lithonia government is particularly involved and committed to this effort. This community is closely linked to the development of the region and includes key resources that can support interpretive, educational, and economic opportunities.

DeKalb, Henry, and Rockdale Counties are strongly supportive of this designation and have committed to supportive improvements and ongoing financial commitments.

The State of Georgia, through its Department of Natural Resources, manages Panola Mountain State Conservation Park and has indicated its support for a cooperative public-private effort.

Finally, the Alliance has secured significant private and non-profit funding support for its activities, representing a broad spectrum of regional interests (see **Appendix 5**).

7. The proposed management entity and units of government supporting the designation are willing to commit to working in partnership to develop the heritage area:

*Chapter 2 indicates the strong cooperative and existing partnership commitments.*

The Alliance has involved all levels of government in its planning, including the National Park Service, national environmental groups such as The Nature Conservancy, The Conservation Fund, the Trust for Public Land, regional advocacy groups such as the PATH Foundation, and state, county and local representatives. The activities and projects of the Alliance indicate a willingness to work in partnership with public entities and with other non-profit and private sector stakeholders. Ultimate roles and responsibilities will need to be defined during the Management Plan for the Heritage Area.

8. The proposal is consistent with continued economic activity in the area:

Current economic development in the area is clustered along I-20 and includes the Stonecrest Mall and the New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, which are well underway. Population growth in the area surrounding Arabia Mountain is larger than in other districts of the region and as residential development continues to increase, the scarcity of land will drive up the value of property. On the other hand, small historic urban centers such as Lithonia need support in order to preserve resources and to remain economically viable. Existing developments will support the need for improved recreation, open space access, and services in the area. The National Heritage Area will improve the quality of life of the region, while offering support for activities and services linked to heritage tourism and infrastructure. Additionally, the improvement and enhancement of the Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve into a facility with wider regional appeal is an important part of the DeKalb County Comprehensive Plan as well as the DeKalb County Parks and Recreation Plan.

9. A conceptual boundary map is supported by the public:

*Appendix 2 highlights the public involvement process that was carried out during the feasibility study. Chapter 2 indicates local commitments that have been carried out with widespread public support. Chapter 6 includes the conceptual boundary map.*

The core resource area defined by the conceptual boundary has been presented to the public during the feasibility study process. This area would be the center of heritage preservation and interpretation efforts. However, the feasibility study does recognize that the Management Plan should incorporate review and recommendations regarding potential designation of a larger "impact" area, in order to enable development of area-wide programmatic initiatives that could take advantage of key local institutions and could link to other related resources.

10. The management entity proposed to plan and implement the project is described:

*The background of the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance is described in Chapter 2.*

The Alliance is spearheading the effort for designation of the National Heritage Area and would serve the role of a management entity from designation through the development of a Management Plan. The process of developing a Management Plan will need to explore the relative roles of the Alliance and other entities in long-term management. Whatever structure is chosen, it will need to have legal ability to accept, disburse, and account for federal funds and other funding. The Alliance has met with the State Department of Natural Resources to ensure their cooperation in this process.

## 7.2 National Importance of the Area and its Resources

This study has documented that the area, with its rich and unusual granite strata, has geological resources and forms that are evident in the landscape and have powerfully influenced cultural activities and settlement patterns.

The imprint of natural granite, granite-gneiss and the granite industry define a powerful landscape where cultural environments and working places are interwoven with natural settings that are either protected or have not yet succumbed to regional development pressures. Early settlements named Lithonia (Greek for “place of rock”), Rock Chapel, and Klondike, the community that has been evaluated by the Georgia State Office of Historic Preservation and qualifies for nomination as a National Historic District, carry forward these associations.

Many of the families that were intimately involved with the development of this area have passed on local traditions and folklore and are still prominent in the community today. Lithonia, known mainly for its granite, continues to be an active center of quarrying activity. The quality of Lithonia granite has been recognized in many important buildings around the nation, including military academies at West Point and Annapolis, as well as, reportedly, on the Lincoln Memorial. Lithonia granite has also recently been selected for use in the construction of the proposed Martin Luther King Memorial on the Mall in Washington, D.C. The “Seminary”, a local historic building within Lithonia, also of Lithonia granite, has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The principal granite monadnocks of the region – Panola Mountain, Arabia Mountain, and Stone Mountain – offer strong natural forms that portray different stages of development and use of the granite resources. Panola Mountain is pro-

TECTED, state-owned, was never quarried, and is designated as a National Natural Landmark. Arabia Mountain includes unspoiled areas, but also has substantial portions that were quarried and reveal evidence of man's presence, although the setting is now under county ownership. Although Stone Mountain is not proposed within the core area, it is a nearby resource that has potential for linkage to the proposed National Heritage Area and could increase the visibility of these resources to the region. The base of Stone Mountain was heavily quarried and has been a major visitor destination since 1825, now attracting 4 million visitors per year to a range of privately managed fee-based and recreational destinations.

The region is rich with archeological remains associated with geological resources. Nearby Soapstone Ridge, with its multiple soapstone quarry sites, provides evidence of human use and settlement during the Late Archaic period (3,000 – 1,000 B.C.E.) and, by the end of that period, became one of the most important places of trade and human development in North America. The area has been nominated as a National Register site, is a designated local Historic District, and has been suggested for future consideration as a National Historic Landmark. Miners Creek Preserve, a related site within the core area at a bend of the South River, has been studied by archeologists and has yielded significant evidence of pre-historic human activities over a span of 5,000 years. The site is now an undeveloped county park, which could potential play a role in the interpretation of the Heritage Area and its themes.

At least three plant species classified by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as threatened (T) or endangered (E) are associated with the granite and monadnock habitat found in the area, including Little Amphianthus (**T**, *Amphianthus pusillus*), Black-spored quillwort (**E**, *Isoetes melanospora*). Many other species, including *Diamorpha* (*Diamorpha smallii*) are associated with rock outcrops and vernal pools of the Piedmont and are concentrated on the three primary monadnocks of Stone, Panola, and Arabia Mountains. This unique plant life along with habitat-associated animal species, such as the tiny shrimp of vernal pools, are vulnerable and limited to this ecosystem. Care and protection is necessary to preserve these habitats.

## 7.3 Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this proposal to create the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area complies with the stated criteria for designation of the National Park Service, is strongly supported by local, state, and national legislators, has widespread public support, and should be submitted for National Heritage Area designation by the U.S. Congress at the earliest possible date.

### **The Next Steps**

Following such designation, a detailed Management Plan should be prepared, as has been required for other such designated areas. Key topics that should be studied in further detail in this Management Plan would include, but not be limited to:

- **Confirm and/or adjust the final boundary of the Heritage Area**, including consideration of an expanded area for programmatic coordination that might facilitate involvement of key area institutions such as the Fernbank Museum of Natural History and local Historical Societies in interpretive and educational efforts in and beyond the proposed core resource area. Additionally, a larger impact area might include important resources that could be linked to the core resource area, including sites in the Soapstone Ridge and the Stone Mountain vicinities.
- **Recommend the most effective management responsibilities for the proposed National Heritage Area**, taking account of the potential for expanded cooperative efforts in resource protection among county governments, state government, and the non-profit sector. The Alliance will continue to serve as the overall management entity during the management plan process. A particular area that would be fruitful to explore is the possibility of expanded coordination between DeKalb County, now responsible for the Davidson-Arabia Nature Preserve and Rockdale County, and state government, now responsible for Panola Mountain State Conservation Park. Cooperative agreement among these entities, in coordination with the increased recognition to be brought by National Heritage Area designation, could accomplish expanded interpretation of the larger area, while limiting duplicative efforts.
- **Recommend a coordinated program of interpretation** that communicates the story of this area, takes advantage of key extant resources, and proposes specific interpretive improvements and associated responsibilities. A part of this effort should be additional ethnographic research into the African American and immigrant communities of the study area and the association of these groups with the quarrying industry and their impact on the economic development of the region.
- **Develop a program to preserve and effectively use key resources** and settings throughout the core resource area, in coordination with other state and local entities. Special focus will be appropriate in Lithonia, to be coordinated with state and county assistance programs for urban and community development.



# Appendix 1

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## Appendix 2

# Public Involvement Process

This study has incorporated a comprehensive involvement process that solicited information, comment and input from the public as well as from a wide regional constituency for an Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area. The process and progress has been discussed by the Alliance throughout, and their guidance has been continuous.

The Alliance meets on a monthly basis, and has been involved throughout this study process. The feasibility study process under the sponsorship of the Alliance has required the comment, approval, and input of the various Alliance members and the public through a series of meetings, summarized below:

- **June 2000** – Meeting with the National Park Service to review the scope and process of the feasibility study
- **June 2000** – Meeting with DeKalb County departments, Historical Society, Parks and Recreation, Planning, and Commissioners, as well as other county-wide organizations including the Chamber of Commerce, and the Convention and Visitors Bureau
- **June 2000** – Meeting with the officials of the City of Lithonia, including the Mayor and Economic Development Director
- **September 2000** – Presentation to the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance on the draft concepts and input session
- **October 2000** – Public meeting, advertised in the local press and widely attended to receive input for the Heritage Area draft alternative concepts for the proposed National Heritage Area
- **November 2000 – January 2001** – Revised draft reviews by key Alliance members, including counties, NPS, Historic Society, nature constituencies, and public representatives
- **February 2001** – Presentation of final document to the Alliance for submittal

In addition to the formal presentations, the Alliance has met with many groups during this study including:

- Presentation to affected neighborhood groups and major local church leaders
- Presentations to county commissioners, and chairpersons of DeKalb, Henry, and Rockdale Counties
- Presentations to selected property owners in DeKalb and Rockdale Counties
- Presentations to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, South River Watershed Alliance members, Historical Society Board, DeKalb Chamber of Commerce, DeKalb Convention and Visitors Bureau, Lithonia City Council, and citizens.



## Appendix 3

# Conceptual Alternatives

This section presents the three potential concepts that were developed during the feasibility study for developing and preserving the heritage resources of the proposed Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area. These concepts were presented to the public and discussion of the principles underlying these concepts assisted the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance to develop a consensus on appropriate directions for the Heritage Area plan and its conceptual boundary and scope. To highlight the choices among the different potential scopes and boundaries, the alternatives provided different frameworks for the implementation of the heritage area, its interpretation, resources, preservation, conservation, and programs. The conceptual foundations for each alternative are described in the remainder of this section, and a diagram for each concept is shown in **Figures 7, 8, and 9** at the end of this section.

## **Concept 1: Concentrated Core Resources**

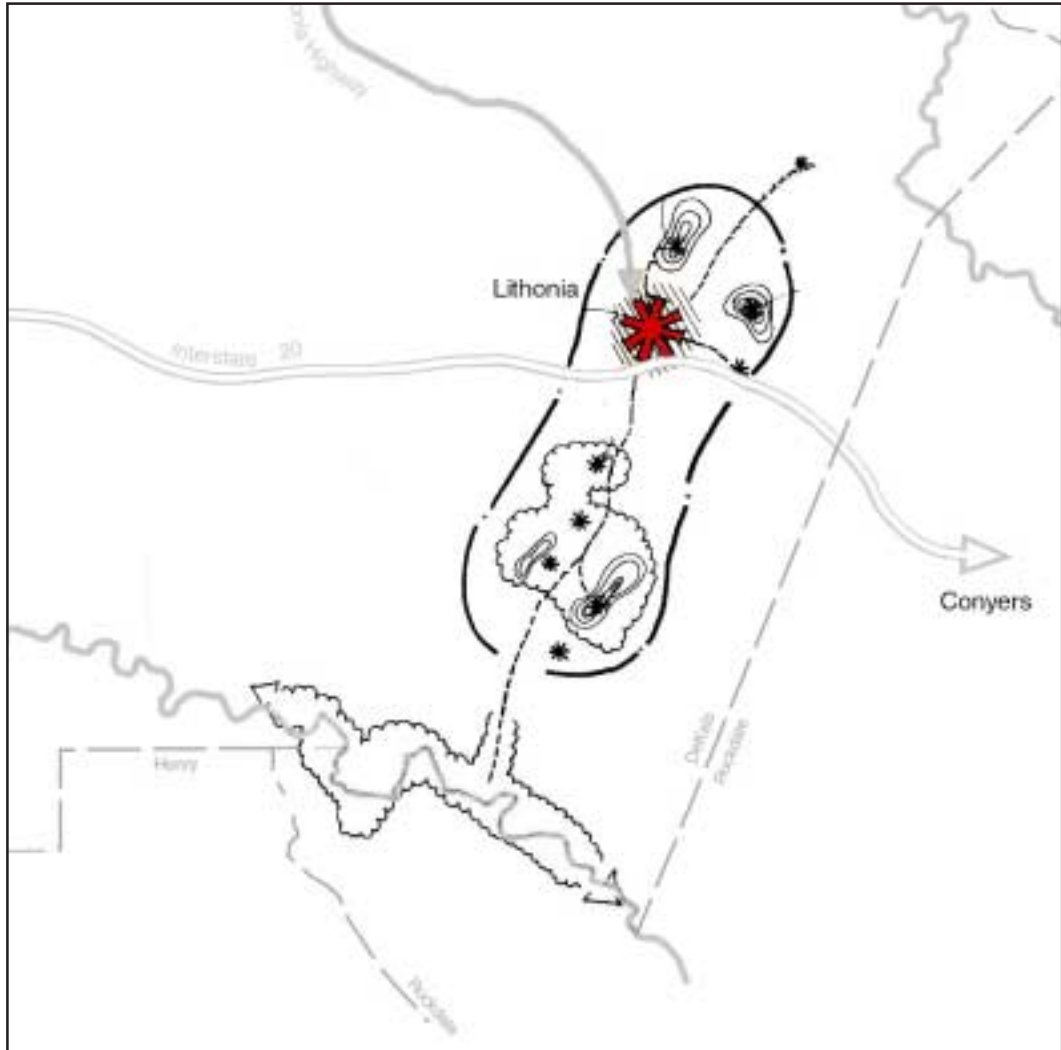
Under this approach, the heritage area would be limited to southern DeKalb County and would be defined by a tight boundary centered on Lithonia and its quarry system encompassing closely-related quarries such as Big Ledge and Pine Mountain, and Arabia Mountain to the south.

The story and thematic focus will emphasize Lithonia granite during the heyday of its quarry industry from the period after the Civil War to World War II.

The approach would treat highly accessible Lithonia as a gateway to the Heritage Area and provide linkages to specific sites and related resources to the north and south.

The main visitor orientation and services and interpretive facility might be housed in downtown Lithonia, potentially including a granite museum, including exhibits and programs describing the industry, tools, entrepreneurs, and workers of the granite industries. Self-guided tours starting from the granite museum could link the museum to other historic downtown resources and the related quarries surrounding the town, including Pine Mountain, Big Ledge, and Arabia Mountain. Links along byways and the former rail corridors would encourage visitors to explore the area. Arabia Mountain would remain a recreational resource, and an important venue for interpreting the landscape that existed before the granite era, as well as the enduring and tranquil quality of the monadnock settings throughout the area.

Figure 7  
**Alternative Concept 1**  
**Concentrated Core Resources**



## Concept 2: Linear Granite Trail Corridor

Under this approach, the proposed National Heritage Area would be a north-south corridor across portions of DeKalb, Rockdale, and Henry Counties, starting at the Rock Chapel - Lithonia quarry district to the north, including Arabia Mountain at the center, and Panola Mountain State Conservation Park and the South River greenway corridor to the south. The concept would be to focus heritage program activities on these resources, including active quarries north of Lithonia, the Arabia Mountain area with its contrast between former quarry sites and natural settings, and the never-quarried setting of Panola Mountain.

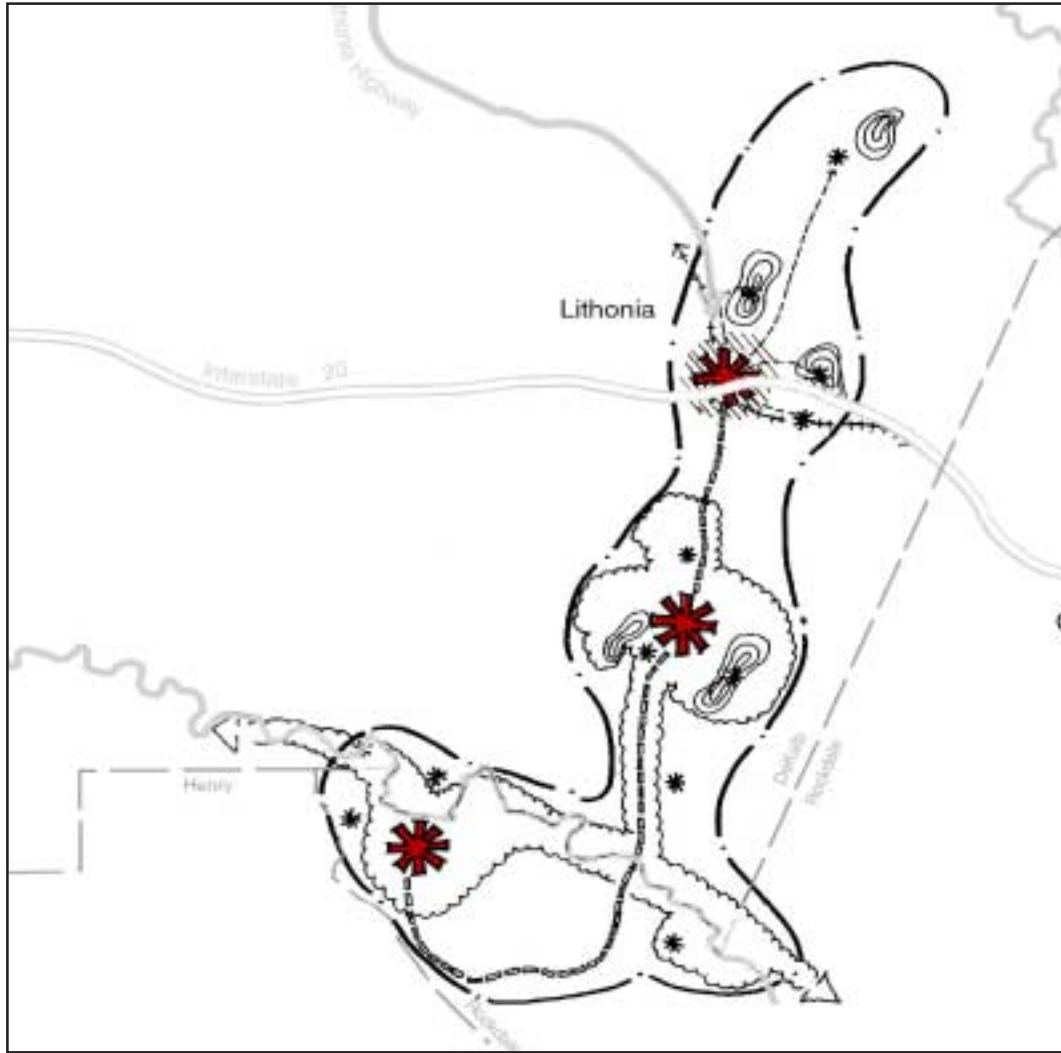
Within this corridor, the story and thematic focus would chronicle the early settlement of the area, the development of the quarry industry and trade and its decline, and the recovery of the landscape following quarry operations.

The approach would disperse visitors throughout the area to choose among a set of three attraction nodes composed of Rock Chapel-Lithonia, Arabia Mountain, and Panola Mountain and linked by a north-south trail and Klondike Road. Each node would focus on particular aspect of history and the geological and geographical environment:

- **Lithonia-Rock Chapel** could focus on the heyday of the granite industry including visitor orientation to the area and interpretation within downtown Lithonia. Self-guided and guided tours, demonstrations and educational programs could be offered at other related resources that could include downtown Lithonia and close by quarry sites such as Rock Chapel, Big Ledge and Pine Mountain.
- The area around **Arabia Mountain** could focus on early settlement and farmland, and environmental recovery and conservation issues. Visitor facilities, educational and interpretive facilities would be offered at the Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve and at the preserved and protected Vaughters farm. The farm could interpret the evolution of farming in DeKalb County from early settlement farming to cotton and the dairy industry. The nature center at Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve could continue its educational program on the ecology of the granite outcrop and could expand its scope to include educational and interpretive programs linked to natural resources preservation awareness and landscape recovery techniques. Other related resources would include the historic structures at Klondike community, and the potential DeKalb County environmental theme school cluster in conjunction with the Fernbank Museum of Natural History and the Fernbank Science Center.
- **Panola Mountain** area could focus on the geology, preserved natural environment and Native American settlement. Visitor services could include the existing Panola Mountain State Conservation Park Interpretive Center. Guided tours and nature trails to key ecological resources and nature programs could continue to be the key activities offered. Other resources and activities could include guided tours and educational programs linked to the recently discovered Native American sites in the vicinity of Panola Mountain State Conservation Park such as Miners Creek Preserve.

This option could potentially encompass a partnership management and operations arrangement, joining capabilities and resources of the State of Georgia at Panola Mountain State Conservation Park, DeKalb County at Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve, and Rockdale County at South Rockdale Community Park.

Figure 8  
**Alternative Concept 2 (preferred)**  
**Linear Granite Trail Corridor**



### Concept 3: Two-tier Heritage Area Concept

Under this approach, the core of the Heritage Area would be similar to that shown in Concept 2, but the overall boundary would be extended to encompass a broadly defined area that would include Soapstone Ridge, the South River Greenway Corridor, the Stone Mountain area, Conyers, and the central part of DeKalb County containing Fernbank Museum of Natural History and Decatur. The idea would be to focus most “bricks and mortar” types of assistance on the core area, where efforts to improve key settings might be similar to those described in Concept 2, while also enabling programmatic initiatives and interpretive outreach to more widely dispersed sites within the boundary and outside the core area.

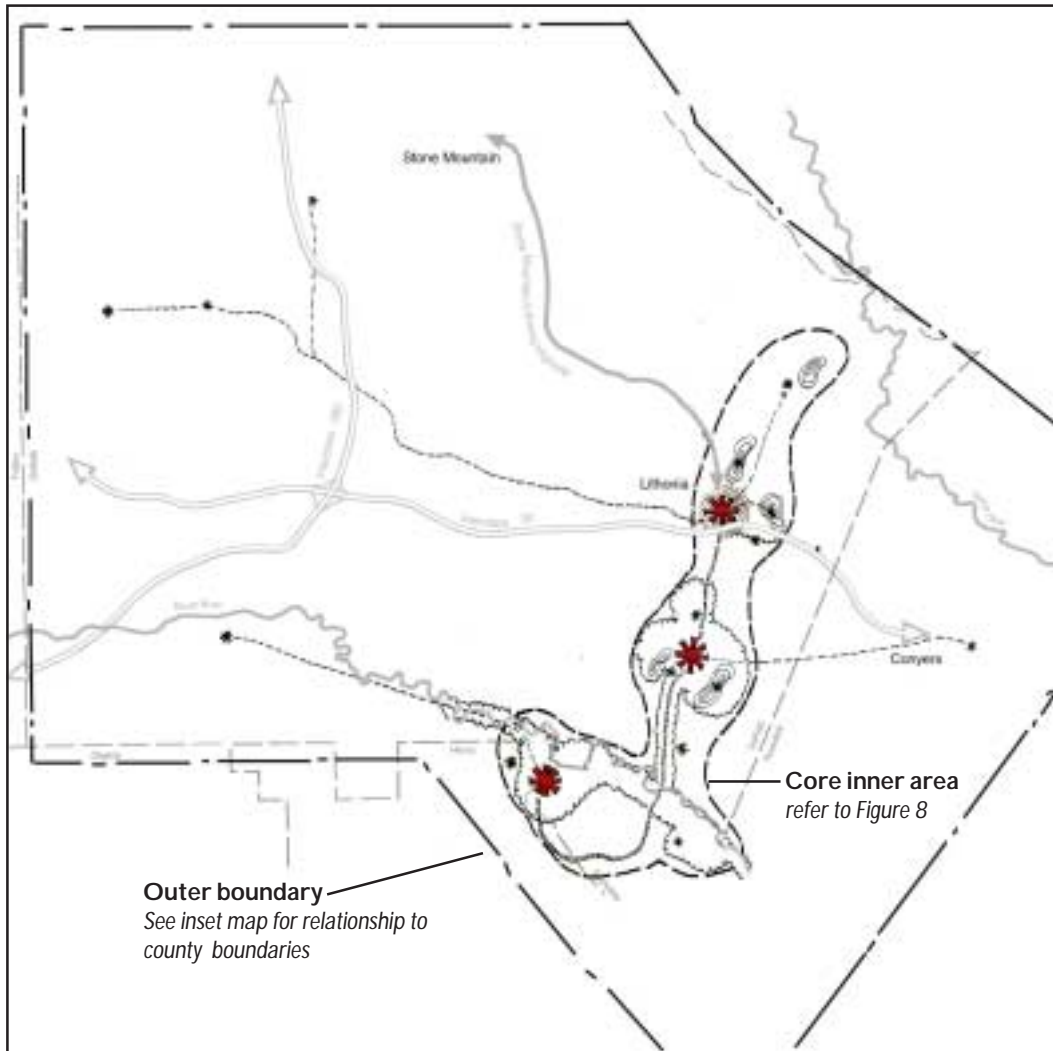
The story and thematic focus of this larger area might, in addition to themes mentioned in Concept 2 above, emphasize the geology and geography of the area, the evolution of the quarry industry and related trades from the pre-European era to the present, and remnants of a unique geological and natural environment and its need for conservation and preservation. Stories that might be appropriately interpreted within the core area might, thus, pertain not only to the core but also to the larger boundary, including:

- Interpretation of the activities of Native Americans, their quarries and settlement sites during the period from 3000 B.C.E. to 1500 B.C.E. and later Native American settlements in the area once agricultural techniques were developed. The evolution of the soapstone industry and related trade through several generations, including reference to resources at Soapstone Ridge, might deal with tools and goods, the abandonment of the area once pottery supplanted quarrying, and later influence of Cherokee and Creek nations who took over the territory and their relationships.
- The proposed greenway trail along South River could link these resources to other resources in the larger Heritage Area.
- Interpretation at the Fernbank Museum of Natural History and the Fernbank Science Center should be incorporated into this approach.
- The larger context of granite deposits throughout the area, not only within the core boundary area but also at Stone Mountain, could clarify the impact of the industry on the larger region.

Linkages within the core area as well as to peripheral resources at the extremities of the outer boundary could be developed. One or more gateways might be developed to carry special interpretation and to provide corridor-wide interpretive overview. Additionally, a Lithonia Museum could function as a discovery center for this concept to tell the story of the geology, industry, and communities of this cluster. Rail or other excursions could complement the experience and link Atlanta to Lithonia and Conyers. Other trails could be developed that would follow abandoned rail beds and other corridors that link the granite quarries to Lithonia. Trails and self-guided and guided tours might start at the proposed Granite Museum.

Additionally, a tour loop could link the clusters or corridors and their resources. As much as possible, the proposed tour loop should follow the most historic and scenic routes of the area. This tour loop might include Klondike and Rock Chapel roads, Panola Road, Browns Mill, Flat Shoals and Bouldercrest Roads, Panola to Stone Mountain Road, and Rockbridge and Stephenson Roads.

Figure 9  
**Two-tier Heritage Area Concept**



- Legend:**
-  Primary Resource/Attraction
  -  Secondary Resource/Attraction
  -  Recreation And/Or Open Space Corridor
  -  Key Linkage
  -  Heritage Area Boundary
  -  Settlements To Be Interpreted

