

# OBSERVE

## Visitor Center Exhibits for the 21st Century

### SOUNDS CARRY

Often, you can hear more than you can see. When you're outside, listen. You might be amazed by the sounds of life all around you.



The cooing of doves in the woods.



The snort of a deer raises the alarm.



Up in the trees, squirrels chatter.



A hooting owl can make you hear its "who-cooks-for-you?" Who cooks for you, BT?



These milkweed pods will burst, scattering seeds. More native milkweed will grow.



The drumming of a red-bellied woodpecker.



The flute-like song of a wood thrush, carrying through the trees.



**pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION  
AND NATURAL RESOURCES



**106GROUP**  
Connecting People + Place + Time

# Visitor Center Exhibits for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Today's Agenda



# Who We Are



**Terri Kromel**

Chief, Outdoor Programming  
Services Division



**Amy Hill**

Information & Interpretive  
Projects Section Chief



**Anne Ketz**

CEO & Services Director



**Steve Boyd-Smith**

Interpretation & Exhibits Manager

# Why Do We Interpret?



# DCNR Visitor Centers/Exhibits Approach



SILICATE CHEMISTRY IS SECOND NATURE TO US GEOCHEMISTS, SO IT'S EASY TO FORGET THAT THE AVERAGE PERSON PROBABLY ONLY KNOWS THE FORMULAS FOR OLIVINE AND ONE OR TWO FELDSPARS.

AND QUARTZ, OF COURSE.  
OF COURSE.



EVEN WHEN THEY'RE TRYING TO COMPENSATE FOR IT, EXPERTS IN ANYTHING WILDLY OVERESTIMATE THE AVERAGE PERSON'S FAMILIARITY WITH THEIR FIELD.

# How do we get there?







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## Goals

The exhibit program at the new Ohiopyle State Park visitor center meets the needs of the park and its visitors by staying focused on its key goals, summarized as:

**More than the Falls:** Raise awareness of and excitement about the diversity represented in Ohiopyle State Park.

**Go There:** Encourage visitors to explore other, less-used areas of the park and the Laurel Highlands.

**Explore:** Give people the tools to get out and to more fully enjoy the region.

**Make a Difference:** Increase awareness of conservation issues and help visitors participate in conservation activities.

## Audiences

Ohiopyle State Park is visited by an estimated 1.5 million visitors per year. Of these, park staff estimate that about half will enter the visitor center. This high number is both an opportunity and a challenge for a 2,800 square foot exhibit space.



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## Interpretive Theme & Subthemes

The Youghiogheny River is a powerful force that continues to forge a unique landscape, sustain abundant flora and fauna, and influence human activity.

### Water, Rock, & Forest

The conflict between water and rock has created a breathtaking riverine landscape, which, combined with the surrounding verdant forests, encourages visitors to experience the diversity found throughout Ohiopyle State Park whether traveling on foot, by boat, or along the scenic byways.

### Nature Inspires Recreational Opportunities

The natural environment, both the river and landscape of Ohiopyle State Park, inspires the recreational opportunities available to visitors, including rafting, hiking, biking, camping, climbing, and sightseeing along the scenic byways.

### Making Connections, Balancing Options

Modern pressures influence conservation and stewardship decisions at Ohiopyle State Park just as they influence our individual choices. The intrinsic qualities—historical, scenic, cultural, and recreational—found at Ohiopyle State Park, along the Historic National Road, and in the surrounding Laurel Highlands region inspire visitors to become stewards of the park, region, and their own special places.

### Those Who Have Gone Before

The natural resources and landscape of southwestern Pennsylvania have influenced human activities and national, regional, and local historical and cultural events through time just as the Historic National Road has been instrumental to our nation's expansion.

## Foundations

in the Laurel Highlands, a cultural, natural, and historic region in southwestern Pennsylvania that includes the Laurel Highlands Scenic Byway.

Stewardship

(4)

Get Outside

(3)

Build Your  
Adventure  
(Recreation)

People  
+ Place  
(Culture)

(1)

What's  
Out There?  
(Nature)

(2)

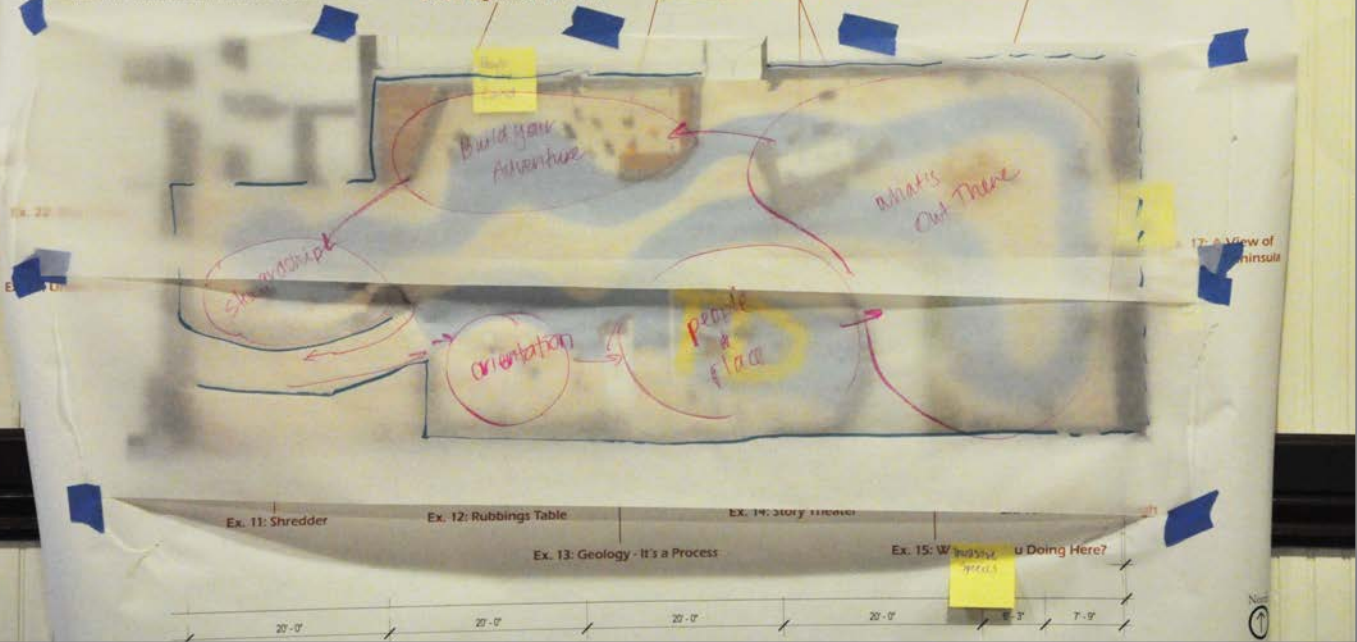
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Orientation

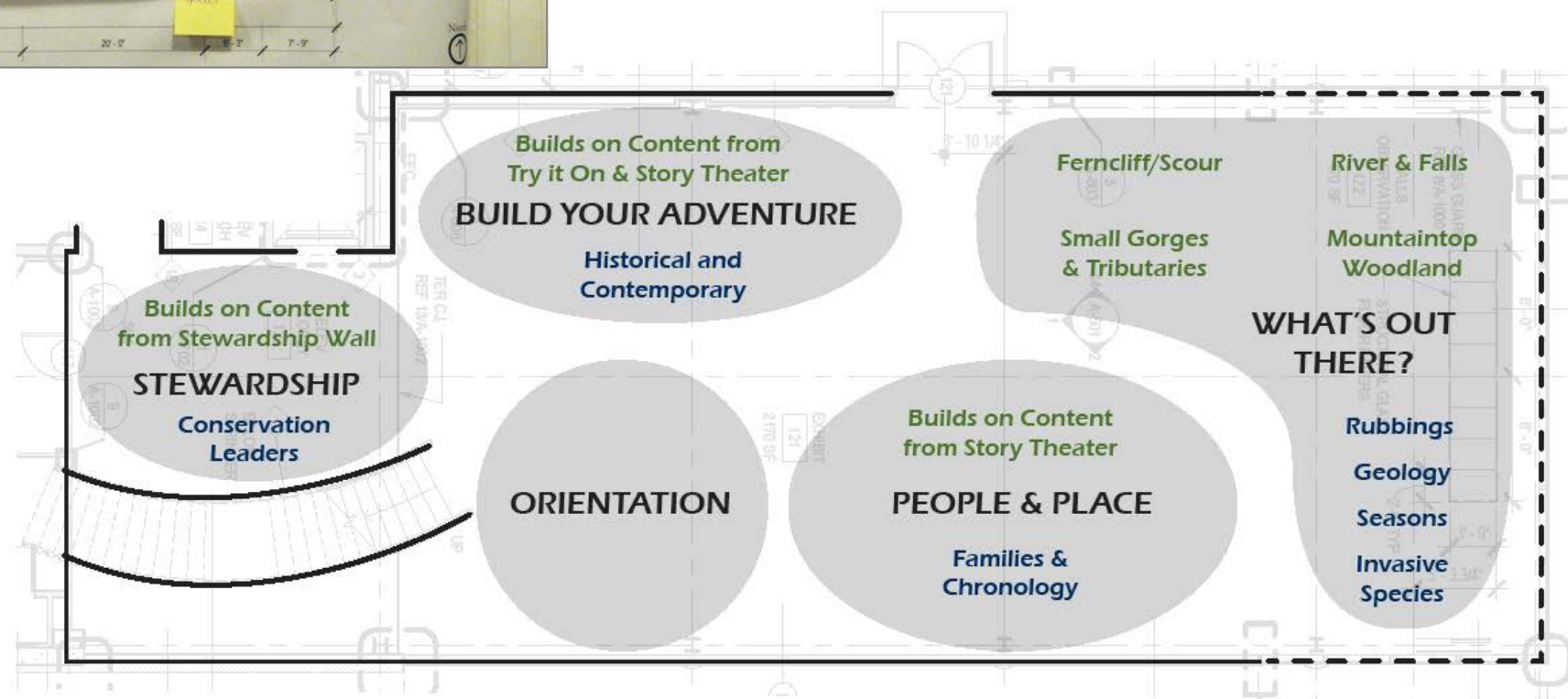
Concept

### Exhibit Plan: Lower Floor

The exhibits plan shows where each exhibit will be in the new visitor center.

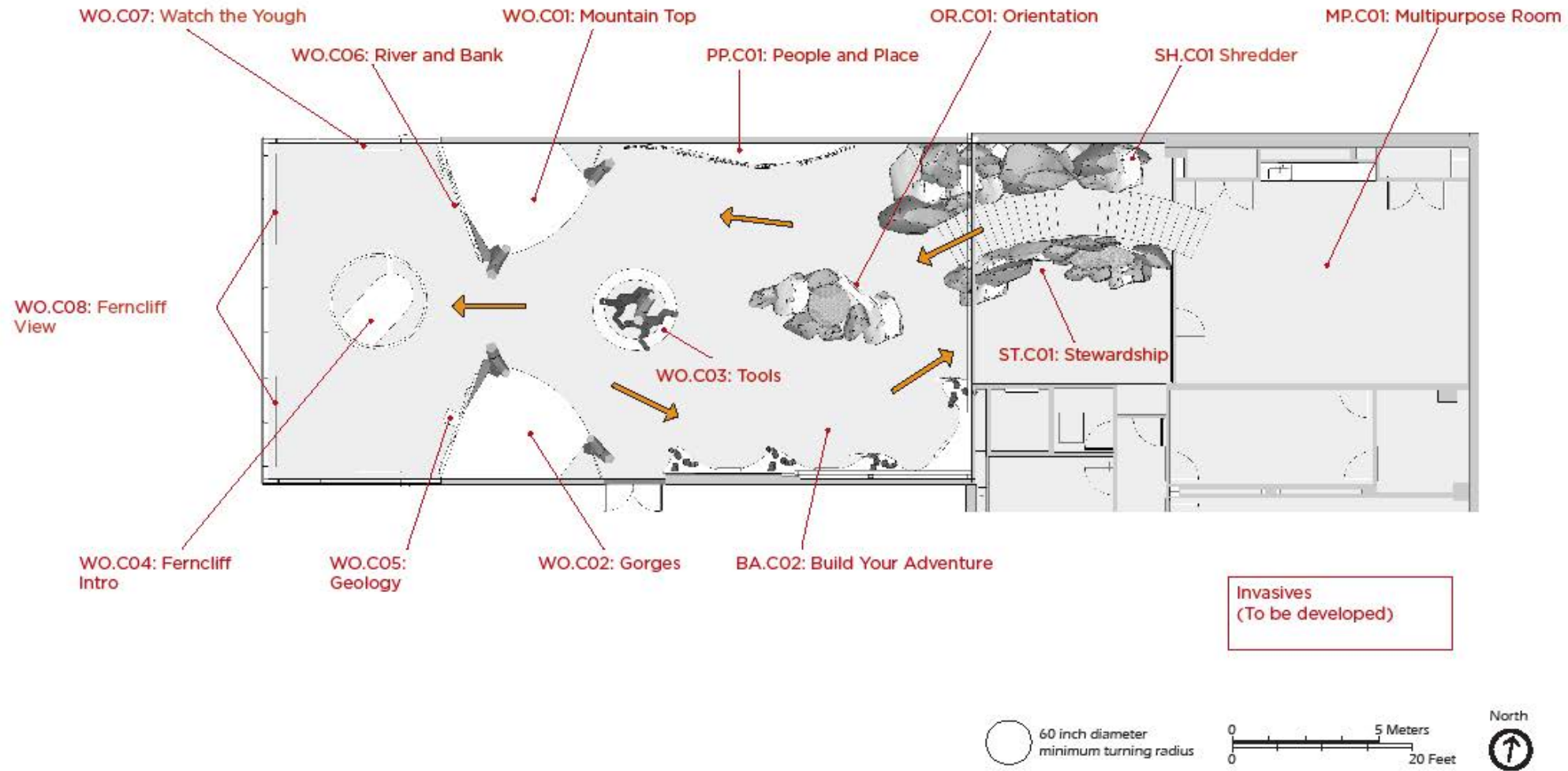


Concept



# EXHIBIT PLANS

## Lower Level

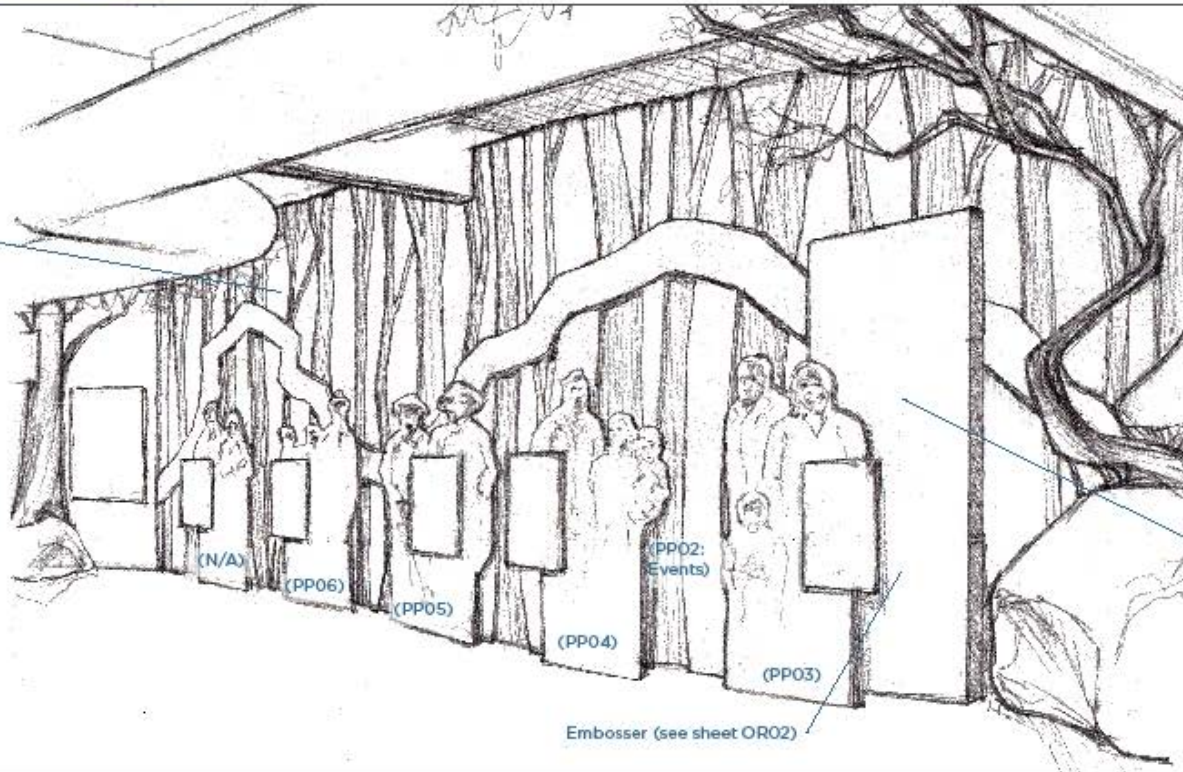


## Schematic Design

## PP01 - People & Place Background

### Thumbnail

PP01 is the background wall that unifies the other parts. It includes the monolith introducing everything.



**Monolith panel example text:**  
This rugged, resource-rich Laurel Highlands landscape has continually influenced human lives and movement through the region along the Youghiogheny River and National Road.

### Exhibit Purpose (Approved)

To show that the interactions between people and this rugged, resource-rich Laurel Highlands landscape have continually influenced human lives and movement through the region and along the Youghiogheny River and National Road.

### Message (People & Place in total)

This rugged, resource-rich Laurel Highlands landscape has continually influenced human lives and movement through the region and along the Youghiogheny River and National Road.

### Content: Points to Make

None for the wall; People and Place as a whole:

#### Topics:

- People involved with shipping goods and services through.
- People who traveled through on their way west.
- People who settled here.
- People who came here for recreation/enjoyment.

#### Events

### Graphics/Objects/Tactiles

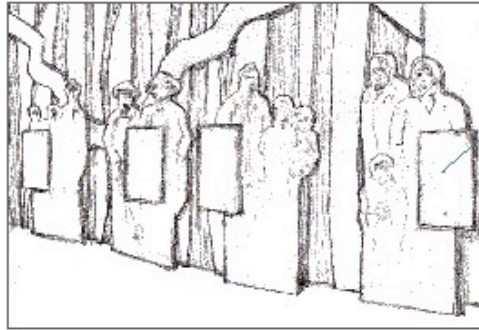
- (None.)

### Notes/Questions

- (None.)

## Schematic Design

Thumbnail



Sample panel with draft text for this topic.

**WAGONS & GOODS**

Title

A growing nation needed to move goods back and forth over the mountains. Wagoners like Westley Strother used the National Road to drive large Conestoga wagons of goods and supplies between the established East and the growing West.

About the subject



Background image

The wagon, a covertop and the six horses needed to pull it.

One traveler on the National Road recorded 133 large wagons passing by on a single day in 1840. He estimated about that many wagons with teams of five or fewer horses also.

Interesting fact.

**WESTLEY STROTHER, WAGONER**

About the person

Westley Strother made a career driving wagons. One writer described him as "statured in size and shape. He was well liked by all the old wagoners, and by everyone who knew him. He was mild in manner, and honest in purpose."

**Exhibit Purpose (Approved)**

To show that the interactions between people and this rugged, resource-rich Laurel Highlands landscape have continually influenced human lives and movement through the region and along the Youghiogheny River and National Road.

**Message**

This region was a highway for carrying goods and people back and forth in a young and growing nation.

**Content: Points to Make**

- About the subject: (see message)
- About the person: Westley Strother, African American Wagoner on the National Road.
- Interesting fact: the road was busy.
- Time period: c. 1830.

**Graphics/Objects/Tactiles**

- Background image
- Custom illustration of people
- Object: Hat matching the engraving image. Or possibly a "hunting shirt" as described in Searight, page 144.

**Notes/Questions**

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## PP05-G01: SETTLERS TITLE

Points to be made: (Supporting the message)

- Identifying title

Thumbnail:

SETTLERS

Graphics:

- none

Objects:

- none

Design Development

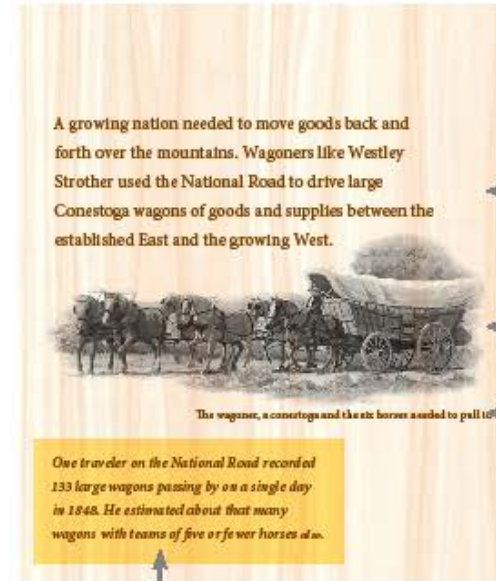
PP05-G01 to G02

## PP05-G02: SETTLERS ABOUT

Points to be made: (Supporting the message)

- This region's natural resources and landscape attracted people who settled here permanently.
- In 1911, the Western Maryland Railroad added rails through Ohiopyle to tap the area's vast resources of virgin timber and coal. With that came the human workforce to cut and saw the logs, load the awaiting gondolas, operate the train and maintain the miles of track.
- Cool Fact: The Davis Lumber Company operated a sawmill at Bruner Run and around it sprung a village with post office, a company store, and boarding houses for workers—many of whom were local residents.

Thumbnail:



Graphics:

- period image

Objects:

- none

← Overview text  
(about the subject)

← Image

← Image caption

↑ Cool fact/Quote

Reference image to come





Fabrication



Installation

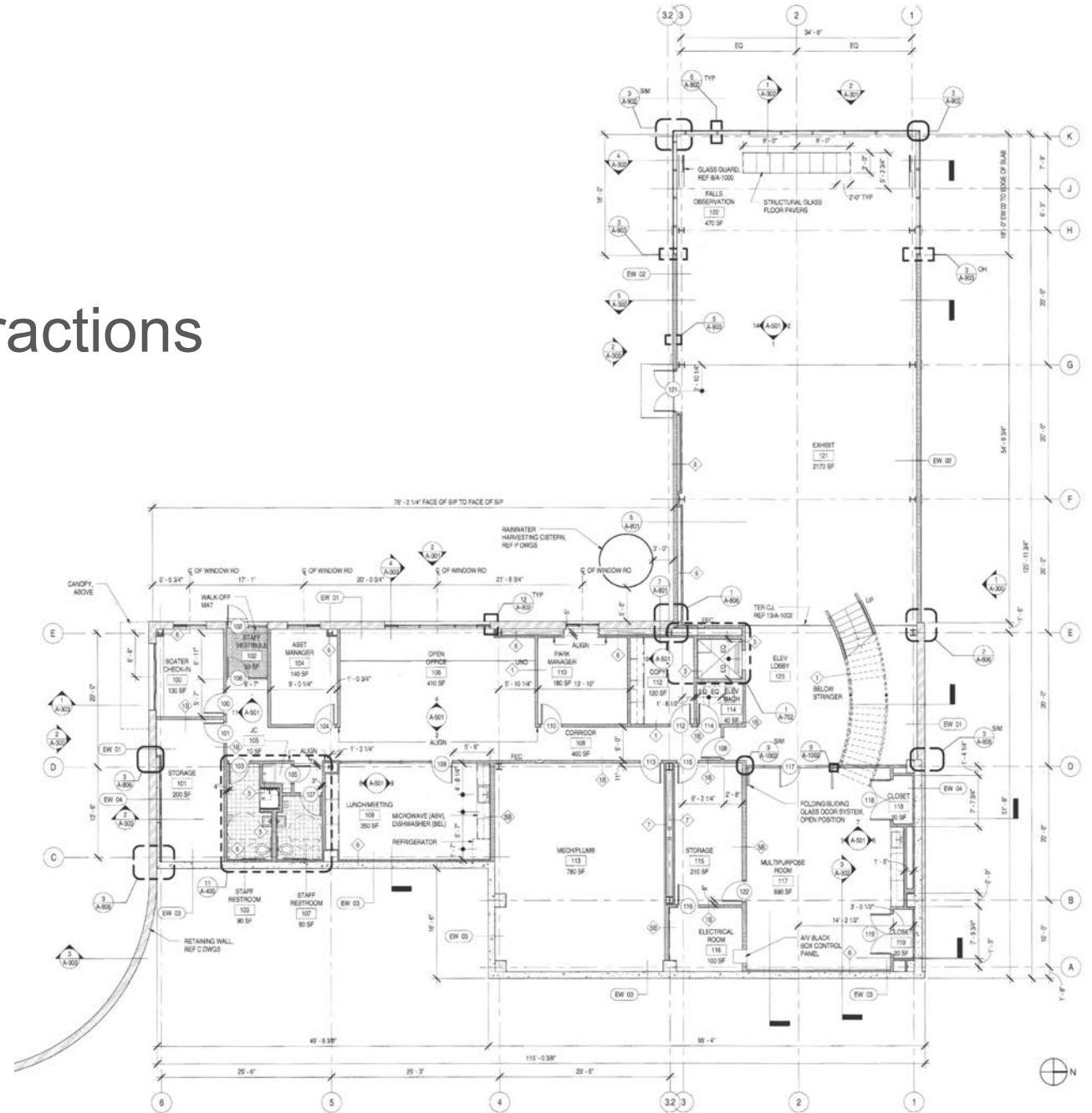
# Timeframe

- Design, Fabrication, and Installation:
  - Ohiopyle: 5 years
  - Kinzua Bridge: 3 years
  - Hickory Run: 4 years
- Reasons for delay:
  - pauses for fundraising/grants
  - building construction
  - regulatory
- *Minimum* 1.5 to 2 years for design and fab



# Costs

- Consider size in square feet
- Consider style of exhibits/interactions



# Renewing the Landscape

People always change the places where they live. We know guides our decisions about how we use the land. With a changing climate and an evolving relationship with nature, we are working to restore a healthy landscape.

1 For centuries indigenous people used fire to revive the land. Burning improved harvests of the plants and animals they relied on.

2 Loggers removed most of the area's trees. The debris fueled wildfires that threatened people's livelihood and safety. After the devastating Hinckley Fire, preventing fire became a priority.

Without the natural disturbance of fire, the landscape changed. Pine forest was replaced by savanna meadows gave way to hardwood forest thick with brush.

3 Windstorms in the early 2000s toppled thousands of trees. The park needed to reassess its management goals. Since the 1970s, park managers had used control, but rarely fire-dependent strategies.

4 Climate change here will continue to bring warmer winters, fewer days of snow cover and more intense rainstorms. The plants in this community are more resilient to these changes.



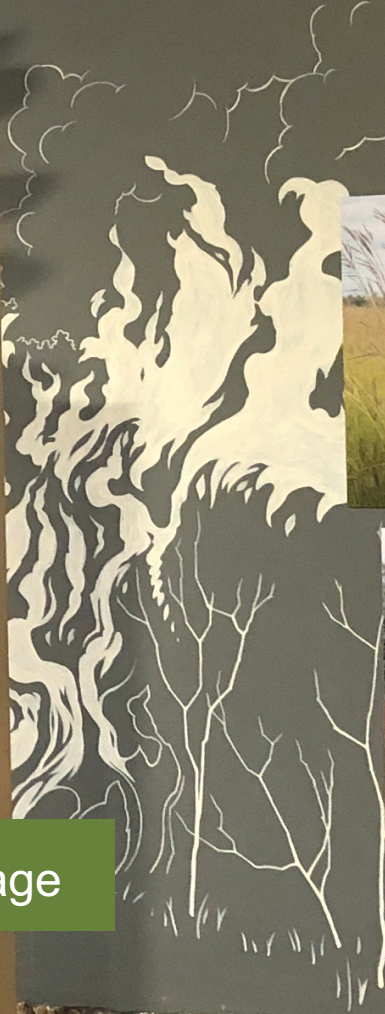
## Renewing Rare Communities

Peoples' understanding of fire has changed over time. Respectful use gave way to banning it out of fear. Today, we use fire as a tool to restore and maintain rare habitats.

Press the button to watch a of a prescribed burn (silent video).



Largely graphic with some unique moments: \$250/sq ft average



### Fire Required

Before this land was a park, fires swept through often enough to prevent forests from forming in certain areas. Some plants and seeds can survive fire and thrive in previously burned sites.

Burns are mostly open areas with grasses, low shrubs, small trees and scattered large trees. They are rare and imperiled globally. You can see jack pine burns along the Matthew Lewis Trail.

Savannas experience frequent fires and are defined by large open areas with minimal tree canopy. They are one of the largest and most threatened plant communities in the world. You can glide through an oak savanna on the bike trail to Lake Clayton.

Globally imperiled means the plant community is extremely rare or it may become extinct because of a natural or human factor.

Look for these fire-dependent plants in the park.

### Lessons Learned

Past land use decisions influence current habitats. Today we make land management choices by learning from the past and looking toward the future.

1930s workers suppressed fires here in the 1930s but today we view fire as a tool.

### Welcome Back

Rare ecosystems provide necessary habitats for species at risk. The red woodpecker had almost vanished from the park. By restoring the savanna, we've made a place for them here.

Largely graphic with some unique moments: \$250/sq ft average



Large Dioramas : \$500/sq ft average



# Get Outside

## BUILD YOUR ADVENTURE

Chicope State Park is famous for whitewater, but its 32-square miles of rugged landscape offer so much more. While you are here, make the entire Laurel Highlands your playground. Take a hike, ride a bike, climb a cliff, enjoy a scenic drive, fish or camp. Go ahead, stick around awhile.

- TRY
- EXPLORE
- ADVENTURE
- RELAX
- BREATHE

High Tech: \$500/sq ft average

# Costs: Don't forget ...

- Your staff's time.
- Maintenance, repairs, and eventual replacement.



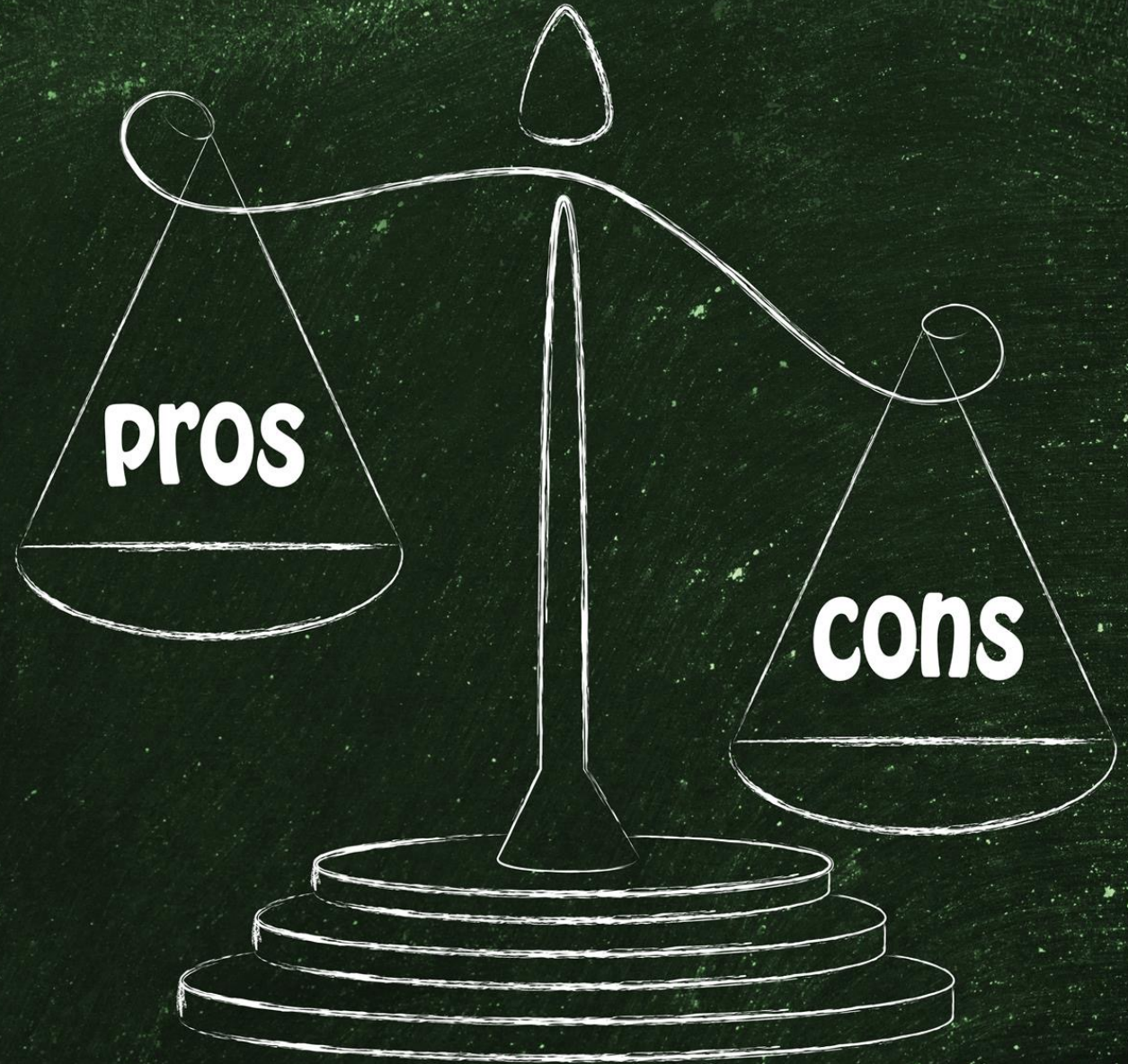


# Process: Contracting Models

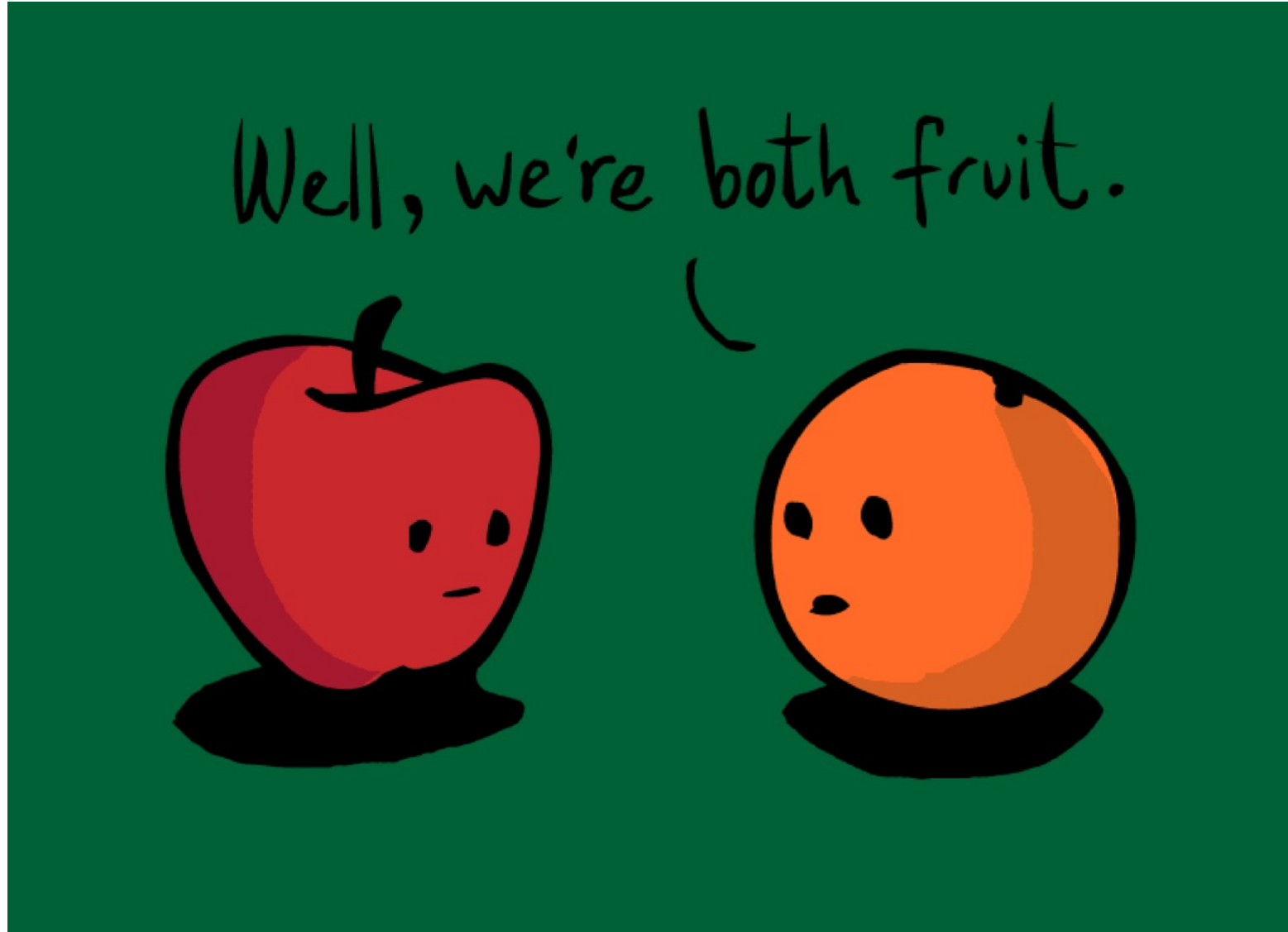
- Design/Bid/Build (AKA planning and design or design-only)
- Design/Build: all-in-one contracting process.
- Hybrid: a prime contractor forms a team specialized for your needs.

# Contracting Models

- Contractor considerations
- Agency considerations



# Process: Planning your Contract



# Process: Other Considerations

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“Our team is ecstatic, our funders are thrilled, and the final product is just incredible. Best part – the visitors are interacting well with [the exhibits] too and asking for information upstairs on how to get to the places in the park that are highlighted in the exhibits. The ultimate goal!”

# Questions?

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# Thank You!

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