

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Obed Wild and Scenic River  
Wartburg, Tennessee



# Obed Wild and Scenic River

## Final Climbing Management Plan

July 2002

U.S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
Obed Wild and Scenic River  
Wartburg, Tennessee

# 1.0 Background

## 1.1 Project Location

Obed Wild and Scenic River (Obed WSR) is located on the Cumberland Plateau in Morgan and Cumberland Counties, Tennessee (Figure 1). The Obed WSR consists of sections of four streams: Daddy's Creek, Clear Creek, Emory River and the Obed River. Forty-five river miles flow through some of the most rugged and undeveloped terrain in east Tennessee. The existing climbing area is located near the confluence of Clear Creek and the Obed River (see Figure 1).

## 1.2 Description of the Action

The National Park Service (NPS) will protect the natural and cultural environment of the Obed WSR while providing climbing opportunities to park visitors.

## 1.3 Need for the Plan

Rock climbing has exploded in popularity in the United States over the last 15 years. Climbing at Obed WSR has followed this pattern (see Section 1.4 History of Rock Climbing at Obed WSR), which has had consequences for the climbing experience and the environment. Despite large numbers of climbers at Obed WSR, climbing has remained largely unmanaged and climbers are essentially self-regulated. Adverse impacts to the environment have occurred as a result of climbing, and questions have arisen about whether any sensitive, threatened, or endangered plant or animal communities have been harmed. This plan has therefore been prepared to:

- Meet the NPS mandate to manage recreational use;
- Protect the natural and cultural environment;
- Provide rock climbing opportunities; and
- Protect the experiences of other park visitors.

## 1.4 History of Rock Climbing at Obed WSR

Rock climbing at the Obed WSR began in the mid-1970s, around the time that Congress amended the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to include the Obed River system (1976). At that time, a group of climbers from the Knoxville, Tennessee area began exploring the Obed, bouldering and using traditional means<sup>1</sup> to climb the more obvious routes. In the 1980s, however, while many other areas of the country were seeing substantial growth of climbing activity due to an increase in popularity of the sport, the Obed lay in obscurity, with little or no climbing activity. Then, in the early 1990s, another group of Knoxville climbers began exploring the Obed River system. They found climbing route potential near the confluence of Clear Creek and the Obed River and began establishing traditional and sport routes. As the popularity of sport climbing exploded in the U.S. in the 1990s, more and more sport routes were established at Obed WSR. The park became known for quality routes and climbers flocked to the area. These climbs were popular because of the quality of the rock, the safety of the routes, and the overhanging nature of the cliff faces.

---

<sup>1</sup> Definitions of the various types of climbing practiced at Obed WSR are located in Section 4.0 Glossary of Climbing Terms.

Between 1993 and 1996, Obed WSR saw a 20% annual increase in its number of climbers. This increase tapered off and from 1996 to 2000 there was a 10% annual increase in the number of climbers using the area. Over the past several years there has been no significant increase in climbing taking place at the Obed (Turan, 2001). Today, most of the climbers coming to the Obed use the area to sport climb and only a handful of climbers are practicing traditional climbing. Articles on climbing at Obed WSR have appeared in a number of national magazines including *Rock and Ice* (3 articles), *Climbing* (3 articles), and *Boulderdash* (several short articles).

In the early years of Obed climbing only a small number of people participated in “bouldering” (see Section 4.0 Glossary of Climbing Terms). About five years ago bouldering began to increase in popularity nationwide and bouldering at Obed followed suit. Lilly Boulders has become a popular area and provides a wealth of high quality bouldering routes or “problems”<sup>2</sup> for all skill levels.

Currently there are approximately 300 sport routes and 40 traditional routes within the boundaries of Obed WSR. Many of these routes occur on land that is owned by The Nature Conservancy, a not-for-profit conservation organization. Visitors to the park established all climbing routes at Obed WSR; the NPS has no officially designated routes for rock climbing. It is estimated that Obed WSR has 2,600 climber use-days per year (this estimate is for calendar year 2001).

Even though climbing has been an established recreational activity at Obed WSR for twenty-five years, the NPS has done little to manage climbing in the park. In August 2000, the NPS placed a moratorium on establishing new fixed anchors at Obed WSR until park managers could gain an understanding of the impacts of climbing on natural and cultural resources and prepare a plan to manage future climbing activities.

### **1.5 Law, Regulation, and Policy**

This Climbing Management Plan (CMP) has been prepared in accordance with federal law, regulation, and policy; it complies with NPS policy for implementation planning, as described in *Director's Order #2, Park Planning*. The CMP has been through a full environmental assessment review as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (see the *Obed Wild and Scenic River Final Climbing Management Plan and Environmental Assessment*). The NPS's Southeast Regional Director has signed a finding of no significant impact on this plan.

Laws, regulations, and policies that govern the management of Obed Wild and Scenic River contain few specific references to climbing. Pertinent citations follow:

- National Park Service Organic Act of 1916

This act declares that the National Park Service is established to:

*...conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.*

---

<sup>2</sup> A particular sequence of bouldering moves is called a boulder “problem”.

- National Park Service Management Policies 2001

Section 8.2. of the Management Policies states, in part:

*To provide for enjoyment of the parks, the National Park Service will encourage visitor activities that:*

- *Are appropriate to the purpose for which the park was established;*
- *Are inspirational, educational, or healthful, and otherwise appropriate to the park environment;*
- *Will foster an understanding of, and appreciation for, park resources and values, or will promote enjoyment through a direct association with, interaction with, or relation to park resources; and*
- *Can be sustained without causing unacceptable impacts to park resources or values.*

*Unless mandated by statute, the Service will not allow visitors to conduct activities that:*

- *Would impair park resources or values;*
- *Create an unsafe or unhealthful environment for other visitors or employees;*
- *Are contrary to the purposes for which the park was established*

*Management controls must be imposed on all park uses to ensure that park resources and values are preserved and protected for the future.*

Section 8.2.2 proceeds:

*Examples of recreational activities that may be encouraged or allowed include, but are not limited to...mountain and rock climbing... However, not all of these activities will be appropriate or allowable in all parks; that determination must be made on the basis of park-specific planning.*

*Restrictions placed on recreational uses that have been found to be appropriate will be limited to the minimum necessary to protect park resources and values, and promote visitor safety and enjoyment.*

- Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, Public Law 90-542 (enabling legislation for Obed Wild and Scenic River)

*It is hereby declared to be the policy of the United States that certain selected rivers of the Nation which, with their immediate environments, possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values, shall be preserved in free-flowing condition, and that they and their immediate environments shall be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.*

- General Management Plan (GMP) for Obed Wild and Scenic River

The selected alternative in the GMP includes the following list of recreational values and opportunities at Obed: "fishing, hunting, boating, climbing, hiking, swimming, picnicking, and camping." Other than that statement, the selected alternative is silent about climbing.

- Scenic Easement Deed Held by the United States of America for Tracts 101-23 and 103-01, Owned by The Nature Conservancy (deed registered in the courthouse of Morgan County, Tennessee)

The United States of America (NPS) holds a scenic easement on land owned by The Nature Conservancy that is within the boundaries of the Obed Wild and Scenic River (see Figure 2). Terms of this easement include, but are not limited to the following:

- *The character of the landscape shall remain generally unchanged and no excavation or changes of the topography shall be made.*
- *...the National Park Service shall have the right to erect and maintain signs and survey monuments deemed appropriate for the management of the Obed Wild and Scenic River...*
- *The National Park Service, its employees and assigns, shall have the right of access to the River and to enter upon and to cross the land described hereinabove, for the management of Obed Wild and Scenic River...*
- *The public shall have a right of access on, and use of the river and flood plain for recreational purposes, and across the land described hereinabove in event of emergency.*
- *No activity shall be conducted or continued that could adversely affect a listed threatened or endangered plant or animal species.*
- *No disturbance of rock shelters shall be permitted.*

Other laws, regulations, and/or policies relevant to this plan are:

- Director's Order #12: Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision Making
- Council on Environmental Quality Regulations, 40 C.F.R. 1500-1508
- Endangered Species act of 1973

## **1.6 Goal and Statement of Philosophy for this Plan**

Based on the relevant legislation, policies, and planning documents, the following goal and statement of philosophy have been developed for the climbing management plan:

*Philosophy* - Rock climbing at Obed WSR is a recreational opportunity that must be managed in accordance with the NPS's fundamental purpose of protecting the environment and providing for the enjoyment of its visitors.

*Goal* – The NPS will protect the natural and cultural environment of Obed WSR, provide climbing opportunities, and protect the experiences of other visitors.

This plan serves as the blueprint to accomplish this goal.

## **1.7 Objectives**

The following are the objectives of the climbing management plan and will help meet the goal stated above:

1. Protect natural resources, especially sensitive, threatened, or endangered plants, animals, and ecological communities;
2. Provide for a diversity of recreational experiences, including climbing;
3. Engage the climbing community in cooperative stewardship of natural resources and the climbing experience;
4. Build a foundation of data (status of natural resources, climbing routes and use patterns, and visitor effects on resource values) as a basis for future decision making;
5. Provide a framework for a climber education program;
6. Provide a clear decision-making framework and action timetable;
7. Initiate a continuing planning process that responds to new data and changes over time; and
8. Assure regular monitoring of use and resources.

## 2.0 Management Actions

### 2.1 Selected Alternative

The following actions represent the selected alternative. This alternative, which is described in the *Final Climbing Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* as the agency preferred alternative, will be implemented by the NPS.

#### 2.1.1 Research to Support the Plan

There is a recognized lack of information regarding rock climbing at Obed WSR. Specifically, little is known about rock climbing use levels or the plant and animal communities that are affected by climbing activities. The NPS knows generally where climbing and bouldering occur, and climbers have inventoried routes for the purpose of preparing guidebooks, but the NPS has never sponsored a detailed study of climbing routes, use levels, or impacts.

##### *Inventory and Mapping of Climbing and Bouldering Routes*

The most detailed information on climbing routes at Obed WSR is located in a climbing guidebook by Watford (1999). While informative, it is not known if this text is complete or represents the entirety of both sport and traditional climbing routes in the park. The NPS must have a complete inventory of all climbing and bouldering routes to effectively manage climbing and protect the natural environment. Therefore, this plan proposes an inventory and mapping of climbing routes and bouldering rocks. The study will be funded by the Access Fund, a non-profit organization working to maintain access to climbing areas and protect the climbing environment.

##### *Inventory of Sensitive Habitats and Rare Species*

In order to support this plan, NPS will conduct a resource inventory of all species, especially rare, threatened, and endangered species and important ecological communities along the cliffline<sup>3</sup> and at the bouldering area. A detailed inventory will allow the park to develop appropriate management prescriptions for the climbing areas. The inventory will dovetail with the vertebrate and vascular plant inventories funded by the NPS Inventory & Monitoring program, which will begin during fiscal year 2002. Because some clifflines are being used by climbers, a concentrated inventory, focusing on rare and sensitive resources, is necessary to adequately assess potential threats in the impacted area. A concentrated inventory is also practical in this case, because of the limited geographic area that is involved. The inventory will cover the roughly 2.2 miles of climbed cliffline, including the two sites proposed for organized rappelling and the bouldering area, on NPS and Nature Conservancy-owned land.<sup>4</sup> The NPS has requested and been approved to receive funding for this project, which should start during fiscal year 2002.

---

<sup>3</sup> "Cliffline" is defined here as the face of the cliff, plus the non-vertical surfaces at the top and bottom of the cliff that could be impacted by climbers and climbing.

<sup>4</sup> The NPS holds a scenic easement on The Nature Conservancy parcel that provides for joint management of the land and visitor use that occurs on this tract (see Section 1.5).

### *Rock Climbing Use Levels*

The NPS will conduct research to determine the types, amount, frequency, and seasonality of rock climbing that occurs at Obed WSR, and socio-demographic information on rock climbers using the park. This information will assist in understanding the relationship of climbing to resource impacts, and will help guide future management prescriptions. The Access Fund will provide some or all of the funding necessary to complete this study.

#### 2.1.2 Moratorium on New Fixed Anchors

In August 2000, the Unit Manager of Obed WSR issued a moratorium on new bolts and other fixed anchors in the park. The intent was to prevent any new impacts that would result from additional bolted sport routes until a climbing management plan could be developed and the issue further evaluated. Due to the lack of information about climbing use levels and sensitive resources, the NPS will extend the moratorium on new fixed anchors for the Obed WSR until results from the above prescribed studies are received. At that time, the NPS, in close coordination with the climbing working group described in Section 3.0 of this plan, will evaluate research results and potential ecological effects of the use of the climbing areas. The NPS will then be able to make a determination about the efficacy and appropriateness of new routes and fixed anchors. Based on the study results, the moratorium will be 1) implemented as a permanent management prescription for the park, or 2) lifted for some or all of the climbing areas within the park (see Section 2.1.3 Climbing Zone).

#### 2.1.3 Climbing Zone

The definition of sport climbing provided by the Access Fund includes the following: "...sport climbing has allowed climbers to push their ability to very high standards... Previewing and practicing a climb is common, and the emphasis is on the technical difficulty of a climb" (see the glossary in Section 4.0 of this plan for a complete definition of sport climbing). Sport climbs are "protected exclusively with fixed protection, usually bolts" (Access Fund, 2001). With its emphasis on physical ability and technical difficulty, and the permanent nature of the requisite protection, sport climbing is less of a nature- and park-dependent activity than traditional or other types of climbing. Therefore, it is appropriate to place limits on the geographic scope of sport climbing at Obed WSR by defining a zone within which sport climbing may occur and outside of which the activity is not allowed.

Sport climbing will be allowed on established routes within existing climbing areas (hereafter known as the "climbing zone" [see Figure 2]). The climbing zone includes "Lilly Bluff", "Obed River", "North and South Clear Creek", and the "Y-12 Wall"; as defined and delineated on the attached map (Figure 2). Sport climbing outside this zone will be prohibited.

#### *Replacement of Existing Fixed Anchors*

Climbers will be responsible for replacing existing bolts and other fixed anchors after consultation with the NPS. Prior to lifting the moratorium on new fixed anchors (see Section 2.1.2), the NPS will review each proposed location for anchor replacement. After the moratorium is lifted, climbers will still consult with the NPS, but the consultation will simply be a means for the NPS to provide education and information on ecologically sensitive placement and camouflaging of the anchors. No NEPA review or compliance documentation will be necessary for replacement of existing fixed anchors, before or after the moratorium is lifted, because this activity will not cause measurable impacts to the environment.



## *Evaluation of Sport Climbing Routes*

After the research that is prescribed in Section 2.1.1 of this plan is completed, the NPS will reconvene the climbing working group to review the results. The NPS will then decide, in general, whether new sport climbing routes are warranted and appropriate within the climbing zone. The following criteria will guide and direct the decision on whether to allow new sport climbing routes (Figure 3 provides a summary of these criteria in flow chart format):

1. Are sensitive, threatened, or endangered plant or animal communities present within the climbing zone?
2. If present, are climbing activities likely having an adverse impact on these communities? <sup>5</sup>
  - ✓ If the answer to either question is “no”, then further sport routes will be allowed by permit within the climbing zone.
  - ✓ If the answer to both questions is yes, the NPS and the working group will determine if the impacted resource(s) can be avoided through climber education or temporary or permanent closures of selected climbing routes. If permanent closure is the selected option, appropriate restoration efforts will be conducted. In addition, new routes could be allowed by permit within the climbing zone in areas where the species of concern do not exist or are not being impacted.
  - ✓ If the answer to the first question is yes and the second question is unclear or indeterminate, the NPS will conduct further research to determine if climbing activities are having an adverse effect on the species or communities of concern. The moratorium on new fixed anchors will remain in effect until a determination is made.

The moratorium on new fixed anchors will be effectively rescinded for those areas where new sport routes are deemed appropriate. This will only include areas within the climbing zone described in Section 2.1.3 above and depicted on Figure 2. Climbers will then adhere to the following guidelines:

- *New Routes by Permit* – Bolts, fixed anchors, and new sport routes will be allowed by NPS permit. Climbers will notify the NPS of desired locations for new routes. The NPS will conduct a field check to look for sensitive natural or cultural resources in the immediate vicinity of the proposed route.<sup>6</sup> The decision to grant a permit for a new sport route will be based on whether sensitive natural or cultural features exist in the area, the quality of the climbing experience, and the density of the routes in the area. The NPS will organize a committee consisting of local climbers and other interested citizens<sup>7</sup> who will provide input on the quality of the proposed climbing route(s). The NPS will coordinate with The Nature Conservancy for all new route proposals on or affecting Nature Conservancy-owned land.
- *Power Drills* – The Obed climbing working group feels that placing a bolt with a power drill has less overall auditory impact to park visitors and wildlife than placement by a hammer. Although power drilling is louder than hand drilling, the noise is shorter lived. Therefore,

<sup>5</sup> If adverse impacts are found to be occurring to federally listed threatened or endangered species, the NPS will consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

<sup>6</sup> Since this climbing management plan has undergone a complete environmental assessment process, proposals for new sport routes will not require further NEPA analysis and documentation, unless sensitive resources are found in the vicinity.

<sup>7</sup> This type of committee is sometimes called a “Fixed Anchor Advisory Committee.”

power drills will be allowed to establish new routes, but will be part of the NPS permit, which will establish limits on the amount and timing of their use.

### *Desired Future Conditions for the Climbing Zone*

Within the climbing zone, rock climbing opportunities are available. Climbers and their equipment are often noticeable by the visiting public. Climbing is a dominant form of recreation, and some resource impacts could occur as a result of climbing, climbers, and climbing equipment. Sensitive, threatened, or endangered plants, animals, and ecological communities are protected. The zone is managed to prevent significant impacts to natural and cultural resources and provide a quality climbing experience.

### *Carrying Capacity for the Climbing Zone*

Carrying capacity is defined as the number of climbers that the climbing zone will accommodate given the desired natural resource conditions and visitor experiences (the desired conditions are outlined in the above "Desired Future Conditions" statement). Implementing the management actions described here in Section 2.0 will keep the natural resource carrying capacity of the area from being exceeded. The social carrying capacity of the climbing zone, however, could be exceeded at some future point if demand for climbing opportunities in the Southeast increases substantially. Should this occur, this climbing management plan will be amended through a *Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP)* process to prescribe management actions that will balance the demand for climbing opportunities with available resources.

#### 2.1.4 Traditional Climbing

In traditional climbing, the focus is more on nature and the outdoor world than with sport climbing, and protection used in traditional climbing usually does not damage the rock (see the glossary for a complete definition). Impacts associated with traditional climbing are typically less than those of sport climbing (this is a generalization, however; each area must be assessed on a case-by-case basis). It is therefore appropriate to view traditional climbing like hiking, paddling, and other park-dependent activities at Obed WSR.

Traditional climbing will be allowed throughout the entire Obed WSR (provided that the routes do not require fixed anchors), but will be monitored and subject to route-specific closures if the activity results in resource damage (similar to what would occur with other recreational activities that are causing unacceptable impacts). Any traditional routes within the climbing zone that require fixed anchors will be subject to the same conditions that apply to sport routes. These conditions are discussed in Section 2.1.3 Climbing Zone.

#### 2.1.5 Rappelling

Rappelling is the method by which a climber descends a rope, usually by using a mechanical friction device (see Section 4.0 Glossary for more information). At Obed WSR, rappelling is usually practiced by the following users or for the following reasons: 1) search and rescue training by groups such as local police and the NPS; 2) climbers wishing to access the bottom of the cliff; 3) groups practicing climbing and rappelling techniques (i.e., climbing clubs, Boy Scouts), 4) climbers establishing new sport routes, and 5) as a purely recreational activity.

At Obed WSR, as in much of the Eastern United States, fragile vegetation communities grow on the edge of the cliff. People wishing to rappel often have to use trees for safety anchors, and

staging at the top of the cliff can impact sensitive vegetation and erode thin soils. Therefore, under this alternative, organized rappelling will be restricted to two designated areas that are depicted on Figure 2. It is understood that within these rappelling areas, visitors may have to use trees as rappel anchors. The NPS will develop a list of required procedures to be followed to protect trees that may be used as anchors and other resources that could be impacted by this activity. Proposals for fixed rappel anchors at the two designated sites will be treated like all other proposals for fixed anchors per the process outlined in Section 2.1.3 Climbing Zone above. Rappelling outside the designated rappel sites – that which would be necessary to develop new sport routes -- will be considered in the permitting process for new routes (see Section 2.1.3).

### 2.1.6 Other Areas and Activities

Areas outside the climbing zone (see Figure 2) will remain free of bolts and other fixed anchors. In addition to traditional climbing (see Section 2.1.4 above), bouldering and rock scrambling will be permitted throughout the entire Obed WSR (except in those areas that have been closed to protect natural and cultural environments – see Section 2.1.12 Closures).

### 2.1.7 Prohibited Activities

The following activities will be prohibited:

- Climbing or bouldering on, under or within 100 feet of a bridge, a named feature (i.e., the Arch and Lilly Bluff Overlook), or a designated, developed overlook;
- Climbing or bouldering on, under or within 100 feet of a known archeological resource;
- Chipping or gluing;
- “Gardening” or the intentional removal of vegetation to “clean” a route;
- Using trees as climbing anchors (however, using trees as rappelling anchors is acceptable in some cases; see Section 2.1.5 Rappelling);
- Using trees for climbing; and,
- Leaving fixed ropes for extended periods for the purpose of ascending and descending (rappelling) rock walls.

### 2.1.8 Climbing Hardware and Chalk

Climbing hardware (slings, carabiners, quick draws, etc.) left on the walls will not be permitted unless absolutely necessary for safety reasons. The NPS encourages all bolts and other fixed anchors, slings, quick draws, and any other piece of equipment that will be left on the wall for an extended period to be of a color that blends with the rock in the area.

The NPS will work with climbers and climbing groups to coordinate chalk clean-ups for high-visibility climbing walls and bouldering areas. The NPS encourages climbers to use the minimum amount of chalk necessary to climb safely.

### 2.1.9 Lilly Boulders

Bouldering will be permitted at the Lilly Boulders (see Figure 2), as in the rest of Obed WSR. Due to the scenic nature of the Lilly Boulders area, no fixed anchors will be allowed there. Fires and camping will be prohibited at Lilly Boulders. There is private land in the immediate vicinity; climbers are encouraged to respect private land, private property rights, and NPS boundaries.

Access to and parking at Lilly Boulders is an issue. For more information on this topic, please see Section 2.1.11 Trails, Parking, and Access.

#### 2.1.10 Route “Top-Outs”

Most of the climbing and bouldering routes at Obed WSR do not “top-out” (i.e., the routes stop below the cliff or boulder rim, which provides a degree of protection for the rim ecosystem). The NPS encourages climbers to continue this environmentally sensitive practice. Should routes in the future top-out, the NPS may prohibit the practice to protect the cliffline ecosystem.

#### 2.1.11 Trails, Parking, and Access

Many trails that access climbing areas at Obed WSR are social trails that have been developed without input or design from the NPS. The NPS will maintain, upgrade, and in some cases re-route these trails to make them safe and environmentally sensitive. The NPS will eliminate duplicate, braided, or unnecessary trails.

The NPS discourages parking, crossing, camping, climbing, or bouldering on private land. Use of private land for these or any other activity must be with the express permission of the landowner. Climbers are encouraged to respect private land, private property rights, and NPS boundaries.

Parking and access for the climbing and bouldering areas is depicted on Figure 2:

- *Lilly Boulders* - climbers will access Lilly Boulders by parking at the Lilly Bluff parking area and using the designated NPS trail that goes to the boulder field. The small parking area at Lilly Boulders has been closed due to impacts on private land.
- *Lilly Bluff* - climbers will access this area by leaving vehicles at the Lilly Bridge parking area and using the designated NPS trail that goes to the cliff.<sup>8</sup> Alternatively, climbers could leave vehicles at the Lilly Bluff parking area and use the trail from the overlook to access the climbing areas below the bluff.
- *Obed River and Y-12 Wall* – Climbers will access these areas by leaving vehicles at the Lilly Bluff parking area and using the Point Trail.
- *North and South Clear Creek* – All known climbing routes at North and South Clear Creek are located entirely on land owned by The Nature Conservancy. Since The Nature Conservancy property is located within the boundary of Obed WSR, this land is managed cooperatively by The Nature Conservancy and the NPS. In addition, parking at Clear Creek is currently provided by a private landowner, and it is within his rights to eliminate this use at any time. NPS encourages the Access Fund and other climber groups to consider securing an easement across this land to provide parking and access rights in perpetuity. Climbers are encouraged to respect private property rights. At this time, the NPS has no plans to purchase land that would provide official parking for the Clear Creek climbing areas.

---

<sup>8</sup> The NPS is seeking funding to expand the Lilly Bridge parking area.

#### 2.1.12 Closures

The NPS discourages multiple social trails and heavily impacted zones at the base of climbs and will employ signs, barriers, revegetation, and possible specific route closure as a means to prevent these impacts. The NPS reserves the right to close any area, rock feature, or climbing route to protect wildlife, natural or cultural resources, and visitor experiences. Permanent closures will result in site restoration by the NPS. NPS authority for closures is granted at 36 C.F.R. 1.5. Under the scenic easement, the NPS has the right to “impose and enforce certain restrictions” on the land owned by The Nature Conservancy (see Section 1.6 Law, Regulation, and Policy). The Nature Conservancy also has the right as landowners to restrict or eliminate certain activities on its properties.

#### 2.1.13 Cliff Nesting Raptors

No new sport or traditional climbing routes will be established in the vicinity of cliff nesting raptors. Existing routes that could harm these birds will be closed during nesting season.

#### 2.1.14 Safety

Using the park is not a risk-free experience, and climbing is an inherently dangerous activity. The NPS and The Nature Conservancy cannot guarantee the safety of climbers or other park visitors. The NPS and The Nature Conservancy will not maintain any climbing routes or associated climbing hardware and software, nor will they provide supervision to climbers or climbing instruction. The NPS and The Nature Conservancy will not assume responsibility for the condition of climbing terrain, routes, or the acts or omissions of climbers. The NPS and The Nature Conservancy explicitly disclaim all responsibility for the safety of equipment, bolts, or other anchor systems in the park. While the courts have ruled that public land managers have no “duty to rescue” climbers or other visitors who are lost, injured, or killed through engagement in their activity (see *Johnson v. United States*, Department of Interior, 949 F.2d 332, 335, 10<sup>th</sup> Circuit 1991 and *Kiehn v. United States*, 984 F.2d 1100, 1108, 10<sup>th</sup> Circuit 1993), the NPS will attempt to respond to all search and rescue incidents and take appropriate action given limited staff and resources.

#### 2.1.15 Climber Education Program

The NPS will promote responsible, ethical, and environmentally sensitive climbing and espouse the National Outdoor Leadership School’s “Leave No Trace” program for climbing. The NPS will work with climber groups such as the Access Fund to educate the park’s climbing community. The Access Fund will provide funding for educational materials such as signs, maps, and brochures that promote safe and ethical climbing.

#### 2.1.16 Pets

In accordance with the NPS regulations at 36 C.F.R. 2.15, pets must be kept on a leash of less than six feet in length at all times. Pets may not be left unattended.

#### 2.1.17 Litter

The NPS regulations at 36 C.F.R. 2.14 state that trash must be disposed of in a refuse receptacle (i.e., trash can or dumpster). This includes athletic tape, food wrappers and another

types of refuse sometimes found at climbing areas. The NPS will encourage climbers to continue the practice of holding regular “clean-up” days at the climbing areas.

#### 2.1.18 Human Waste Disposal

The NPS regulations at 36 C.F.R. 2.14 guide human waste disposal. In developed areas, the disposal of human body waste except at designated locations is prohibited. In non-developed areas, the disposal of human body waste within 100 feet of a water source, high water mark of a body of water, at a campsite, or within sight of a trail is prohibited. The NPS recommends burying human waste at least 6-8 inches and carrying out all toilet paper.

#### 2.1.19 Guide Services

Commercial guide services may only be conducted under an incidental business permit issued by the NPS (see 36 C.F.R. 5.3).

## **3.0 Coordination and Preparation of the Plan**

### **3.1 Preparers**

- Ron Cornelius, Geographic Information Systems Specialist, Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area
- Kristin Stoehr, Unit Manager, Obed Wild and Scenic River
- Christopher J. Stubbs, Community Planner, Obed Wild and Scenic River

### **3.2 Climbing Working Group**

The NPS convened a climbing working group to provide information on climbing, climbing impacts, and other recreational uses of Obed WSR. This group met on 21 February 2001 to discuss alternative strategies for managing climbing. Group members and their affiliations are listed below:

- Frank Harvey, representing local climbers and the Access Fund
- Kim Campbell, National Parks and Conservation Association
- David Luinstra, Tennessee Scenic Rivers Association
- Chris Bullington, The Nature Conservancy
- Jimmy Groton, Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning
- Liane B. Russell, Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning
- Jill Miller, Access Fund
- Ralph Harvey, Tennessee Paddle

The NPS will continue to consult with the climbing working group about research results, permitting for new routes, and the formulation of a Fixed Anchor Advisory Committee.

### **3.3 Consultation and Coordination**

National Park Service, Obed Wild and Scenic River

- Arthur McDade, Park Ranger
- Rob Turan, Park Ranger

National Park Service, Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area

- Reed Detring, Superintendent
- Tom Blount, Chief of Resource Management
- Tom Des Jean, Cultural Resource Specialist
- Frank Graham, Chief Ranger

National Park Service, Southeast Regional Office

- Jami Hammond, Regional Environmental Coordinator
- John Fischer, Park Planner

The Nature Conservancy of Tennessee

- Chris Bullington, Director of Conservation Planning

The Access Fund

- Sam Davidson, Executive Director

## 4.0 Glossary of Climbing Terms

Most of the text of the following glossary is taken directly from *Climbing Management: A Guide to Climbing Issues and the Production of a Climbing Management Plan* (Access Fund, 2001).

**Anchor:** Any piece of protection used to secure climbers to a cliff face for belaying or rappelling. Most are removable. "Fixed anchors" are left in place for all climbers to use.

**Belay or belaying:** The method by which one climber secures the rope to safeguard the other climber in the event of a fall. Typically one climber (the belayer) remains on the ground and belays the other climber (the leader) while he or she ascends the rock and places protection. Once the leader reaches the top, or an intermediate ledge, that person then belays the other climber up. The rope, which serves as a safety line while climbing, is usually fed through a device controlled by the belayer. These friction-creating "belay devices" attach to climbers' harnesses and allow small climbers, even children, to stop the falls of much larger climbers.

**Bolt:** Bolts are small devices (usually 3/8" diameter by about 3" length) used to protect climbers where there are no cracks for other types of protection. They are placed by drilling a hole, using either a hand-turned or battery-powered drill, and then driving in the device, which is designed to hold through mechanical expansion, forced compression, or (rarely) an epoxy adhesive. The placement of bolts allows climbers to attempt extremely difficult and previously unprotected rock faces, and to place fixed anchors for descent via rappel. The term "fixed" means they are permanently placed in the rock, although deterioration will occur over time, depending on the bolt specification and local weathering processes.

**Bouldering:** Bouldering is the term given to climbing that concentrates on short, sequential moves on rock usually no more than 15 feet off the ground. Typically, falls are very short (a few feet) and inconsequential. Each climbable sequence of moves is called a "boulder problem." Boulder problems vary in difficulty, and are usually given difficulty grades. Climbers typically will try difficult moves many times before succeeding on a given boulder problem. Some climbers use bouldering as practice for bigger climbs, while others pursue it as a sport in its own right. Since it takes place near the ground, bouldering can be a very social form of climbing, and requires relatively little equipment other than rock shoes. Use of a bouldering "crash pad" is common. These are placed below climbs to soften falls.

**Carabiners:** These are snap-links, generally of aluminum alloy, used to connect a climber's rope to intermediate protection and anchors.

**Chains:** Short lengths of metal chain are sometimes used instead of slings at a rappel or belay station. Chains are left in place at anchor bolts and are used for climbers to descend from the top of a route.

**Chalk:** This is the common name for magnesium carbonate powder, which climbers carry in a pouch (chalk bag) at the waist. It dries the hands and is used in rock climbing in the same way it is used in gymnastics, to improve grip.

**Climb (or "Route"):** As a noun, this is any independent line of ascent on a rock face. A climb may follow a crack system or other natural features, or it may strike out across a "blank" face. A climb is considered to be created when it is first ascended, and is usually given a name by the



first ascensionist. The climb is typically recorded and described in a guidebook so that other climbers can identify and climb the route.

**Climbing shoes:** Snug-fitting shoes with high-friction rubber soles and carefully designed edges that allow climbers to stand on tiny footholds.

**Fixed anchors:** see **Anchors** and **Bolt**

**Gear:** Equipment used for protection (see **Anchors** and **Hardware**).

**Harness:** Nylon straps and sewn fittings, buckled around the waist and thighs, providing a safe, comfortable way to tie into the rope for climbing, rappelling, and belaying.

**Hardware:** Climbing equipment placed in cracks or on faces to protect climbers from falling, including wired nuts, camming devices, hexes (hexcentric-shaped metal wedges), pitons and bolts.

**Multi-pitch:** A climb of two or more roped pitches (see **Pitch**) in length.

**Natural gear:** Removable, non-hammered protection equipment. In addition to sharing the broad definition of **Gear**, natural gear placement can also include slings around trees, horns of rock, or rock chockstones in cracks.

**Pitch:** The distance a lead climber ascends before he or she stops to belay the second climber's ascent. The distance of a pitch is limited by the length of rope and the location of ledges and belay stations. Typically a 50- or 60-meter rope length constitutes one pitch. Some climbs are single-pitch, others have many pitches.

**Piton:** These are small metal spikes, generally two to four inches long, that are placed by hammering them into existing cracks in the rock. Once the only form of climbing safety protection, pitons have been supplanted by easily removable protection such as nuts. Today, pitons are used only when no other form of protection is available, and are typically left in place for other climbers to use.

**Protection:** Any form of anchor used between belays to protect a climber. It can be removable or fixed.

**Quick Draw:** Two carabiners connected to one another by a sling. Often used in sport climbing to connect the climbing rope to the bolt.

**Rappel:** The method by which a climber descends a rope, usually by using a mechanical friction device. The descent is made on either a doubled rope, or two ropes tied together, looped through a fixed anchor. After the rappel is finished, the rope is retrieved by pulling on one end.

**Rating:** A numerical value assigned to indicate the difficulty of the climbing on a particular route. The rating is typically estimated by the first ascensionists, then revised by subsequent parties if necessary. The most commonly used rating index for free climbing ranges from 5.0 to a current maximum of 5.14. (The "5" is a constant in most of the difficulty ratings used in rock climbing, and indicates that the type of climbing is technical free climbing rather than easier scrambling - class 3 or class 4 climbing.) Virtually any able-bodied person can climb 5.0 with little practice,

but only extremely fit climbers can climb 5.12 or above. Aid climbs are typically rated A1 through A5.

**Route:** see **Climb**.

**Scramble:** the activity of a person who is not a trained climber, and is not using climbing equipment for protection on a cliff.

**Slings:** Knotted or sewn loops of nylon webbing that have many climbing uses. Slings are occasionally left behind when a climber descends from the top of a route by rappelling. At high-use sites, metal chains may be used instead of slings because they are easier to use once in place, last longer, and are less conspicuous.

**Sport climbing:** Climbs that are protected exclusively with fixed protection, usually bolts, are called sport climbs. Sport climbs are typically short – generally a single rope-length (50 to 60 meters) or less. They rarely continue to summits, but end at fixed anchors where the sustained difficulty of the climb diminishes, the character of the rock changes, or simply at the half-rope point to allow the climber to descend by being lowered. Sport climbing is relatively easy to learn, and requires less equipment than traditional climbing. Due to the fixed bolted protection and limited height, it provides an apparently safer climbing environment than that found in a traditional climbing venue. These qualities have made sport climbing very popular. Another important and attractive factor is that sport climbing has also allowed climbers to push their ability to very high standards with little fear from repeated falls. Previewing and practicing a climb is common, and the emphasis is on the technical difficulty of a climb.

**Top rope:** Technique of practice climbing where the rope is anchored above the climber.

**Traditional climbing:** Traditional climbing (sometimes also referred to as free climbing), is how the sport of rock climbing has been practiced since its inception, and has strong historic associations. It is the foundation for the development of the different types of climbing activity that we see today. The term applies to a style of climbing where protection is placed by the ascending climber and removed by the seconding partner. Value is placed on unpracticed ascents. Traditional climbers progress up the rock face using natural hand-and footholds, with the rope and technical climbing equipment used only for safety in case of a fall. Typically, traditional climbs are protected by climbing equipment that is removable and does not damage the rock surface. Traditional climbing can be practiced on small cliffs or in remote mountaineering or alpine locations. It generally involves multi-pitch climbs with the summits as common objectives, and is still what most climbers do most of the time.<sup>9</sup> Many traditional climbs may have an occasional fixed piton or bolt, and they often have fixed anchors for rappels or belays. On a traditional route, however, climbers are always prepared to arrange most of their own protection, which distinguishes this type of climbing from sport climbing.

---

<sup>9</sup> Some climbers have questioned the statement that traditional climbing is “still what most climbers do most of the time,” but the NPS does not propose to change this definition because it comes directly from the Access Fund. The NPS does recognize that most climbing at Obed WSR is sport climbing, not traditional climbing.

## 5.0 Literature Cited

- Access Fund. 2001. *Climbing Management: A Guide to Climbing Issues and the Production of a Climbing Management Plan*. Compiled by Kathryn Pyke. Edited by Jeff Achey. 96 pp.
- Turan, Robert. 2001. Personal communication with Robert Turan, Obed WSR park ranger, on 12 December 2001.
- U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. 1995. *Obed Wild and Scenic River: General Management Plan, Development Concept Plan, Environmental Impact Statement*. 161 pp.
- Watford, Chris. 1999. *The Dixie Cragger's Atlas: A Climbing Guide to Tennessee, Alabama and Georgia*. Market Place Press, Roswell, Georgia. 461 pp.

## 6.0 Figures

Figure 1. Obed Wild and Scenic River Vicinity

Figure 2. Climbing Management Plan (Selected Alternative)

Figure 3. Decision Tree for Evaluation of Sport Routes within Climbing Zone

Signature

Recommended:

Kristin A. Stoehr  
Kristin A. Stoehr, Unit Manager

July 17, 2002  
Date

Approved:

Reed E. Detring  
Reed E. Detring, Superintendent

7/18/02  
Date

# Figure 1. OBED WILD AND SCENIC RIVER VICINITY

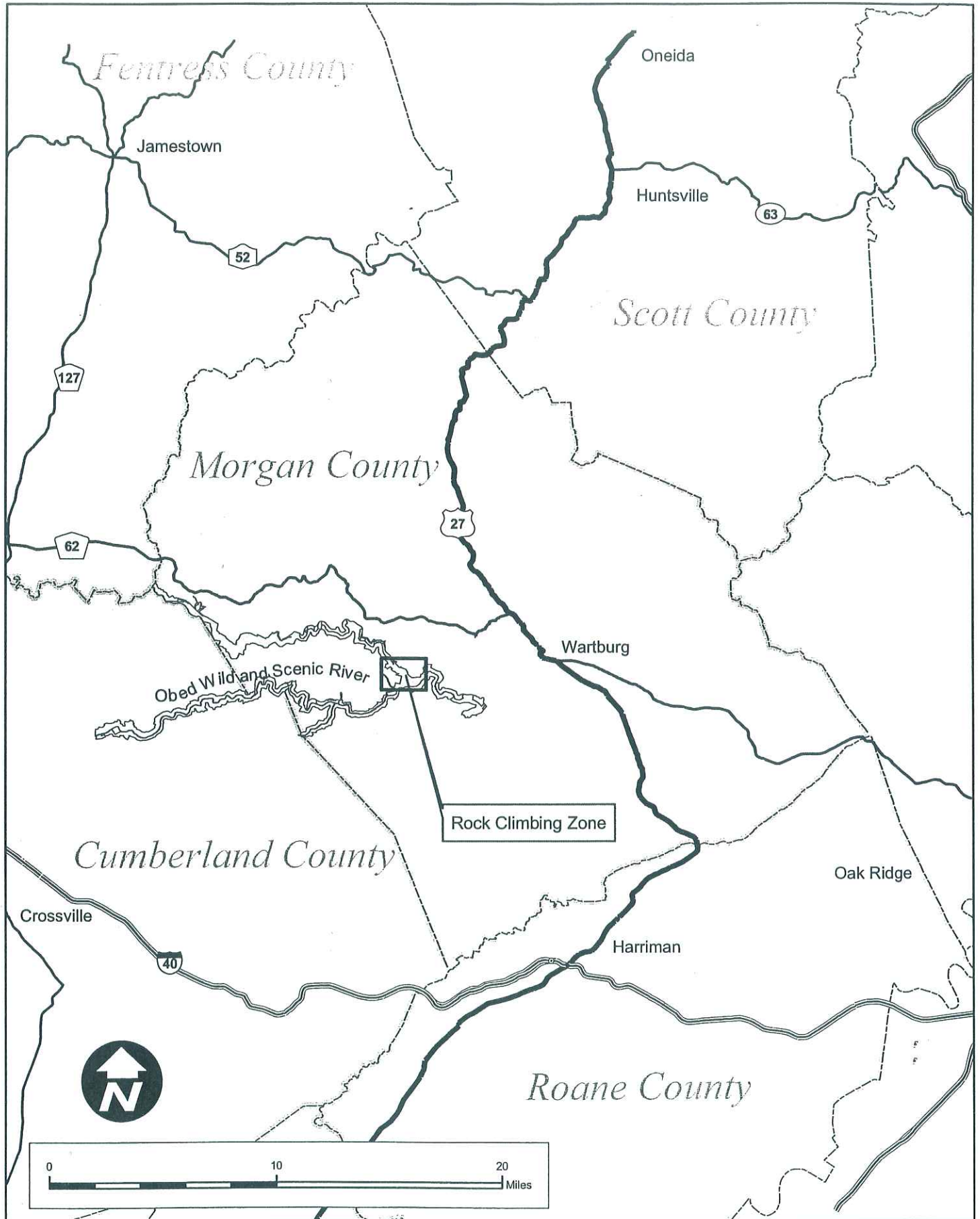




Figure 2. AGENCY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE (ALTERNATIVE A)  
Obed Wild and Scenic River

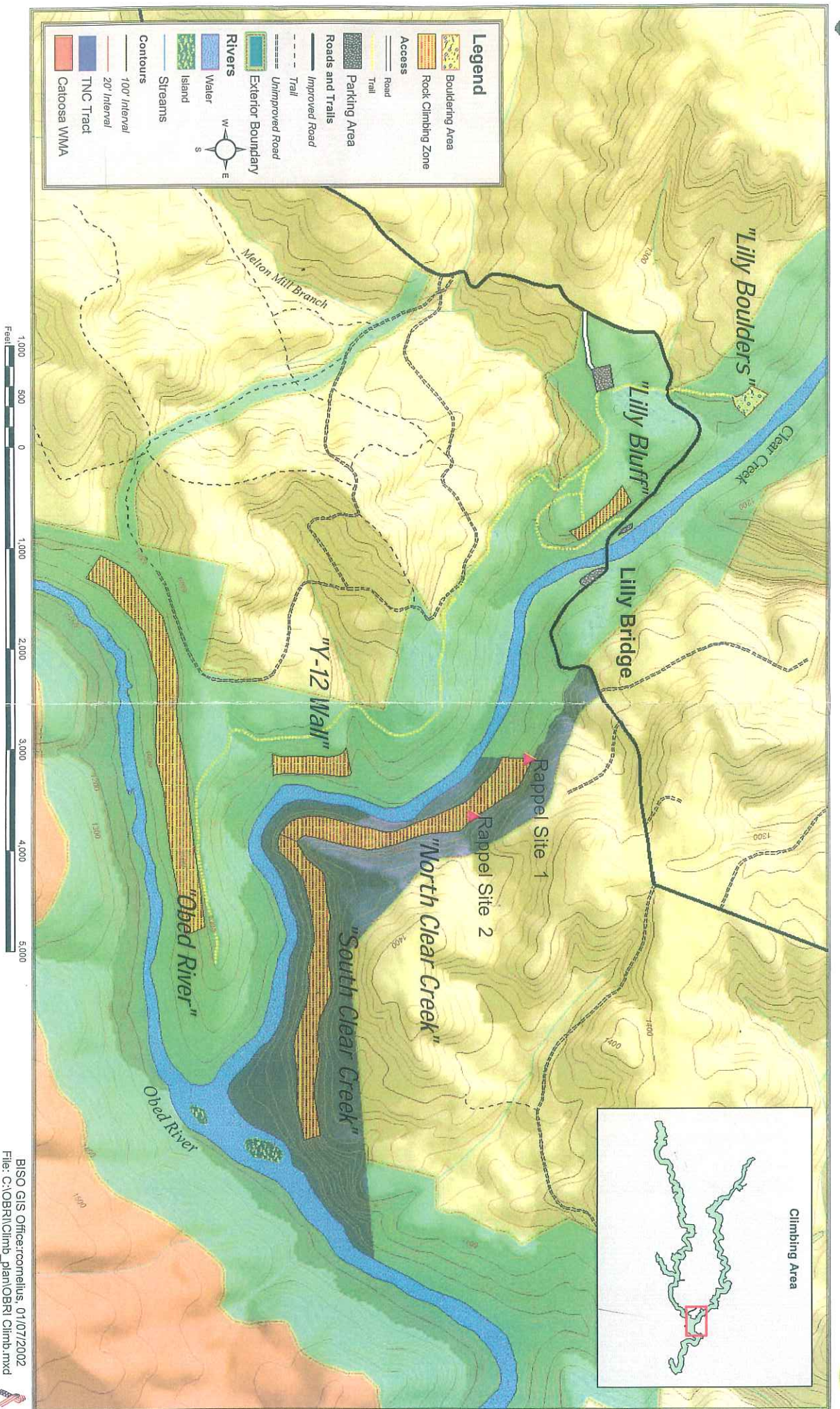


Figure 3. Decision Tree for Evaluation of Sport Routes within Climbing Zone

