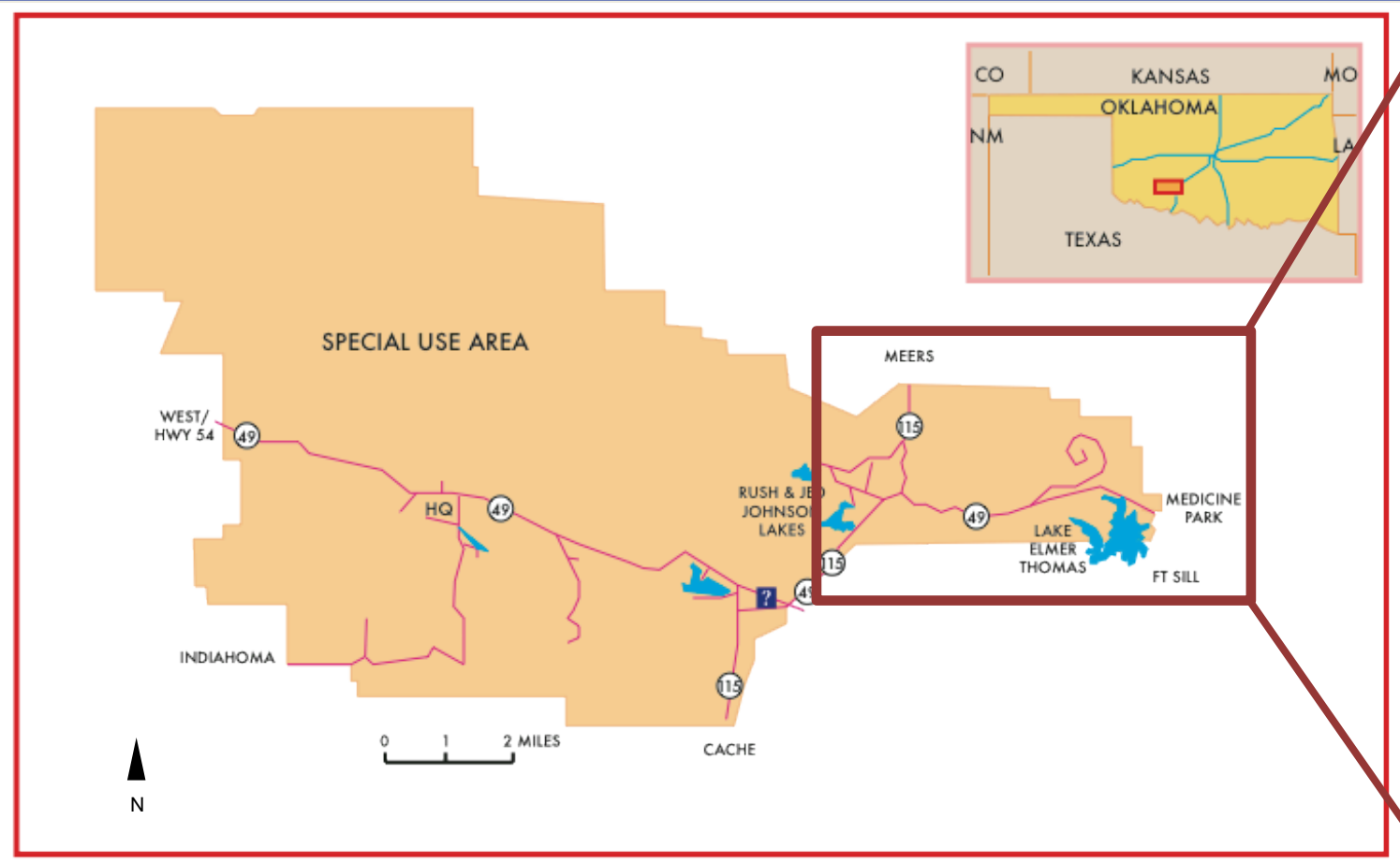


# Enhancing Bicycling, Walking, and Accessibility at Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge



Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge (WMWR) encompasses nearly 60,000 acres and conserves the largest remnant of undisturbed mixed-grass prairie in the world. Established in 1901, WMWR became a testing ground to preserve the American bison and later to conserve the Texas Longhorn – culturally significant in western U.S. settlement. Today, the Refuge is home to 50 mammal, 240 bird, 64 reptile and amphibian, 36 fish, and 806 plant species, including one endangered bird species.

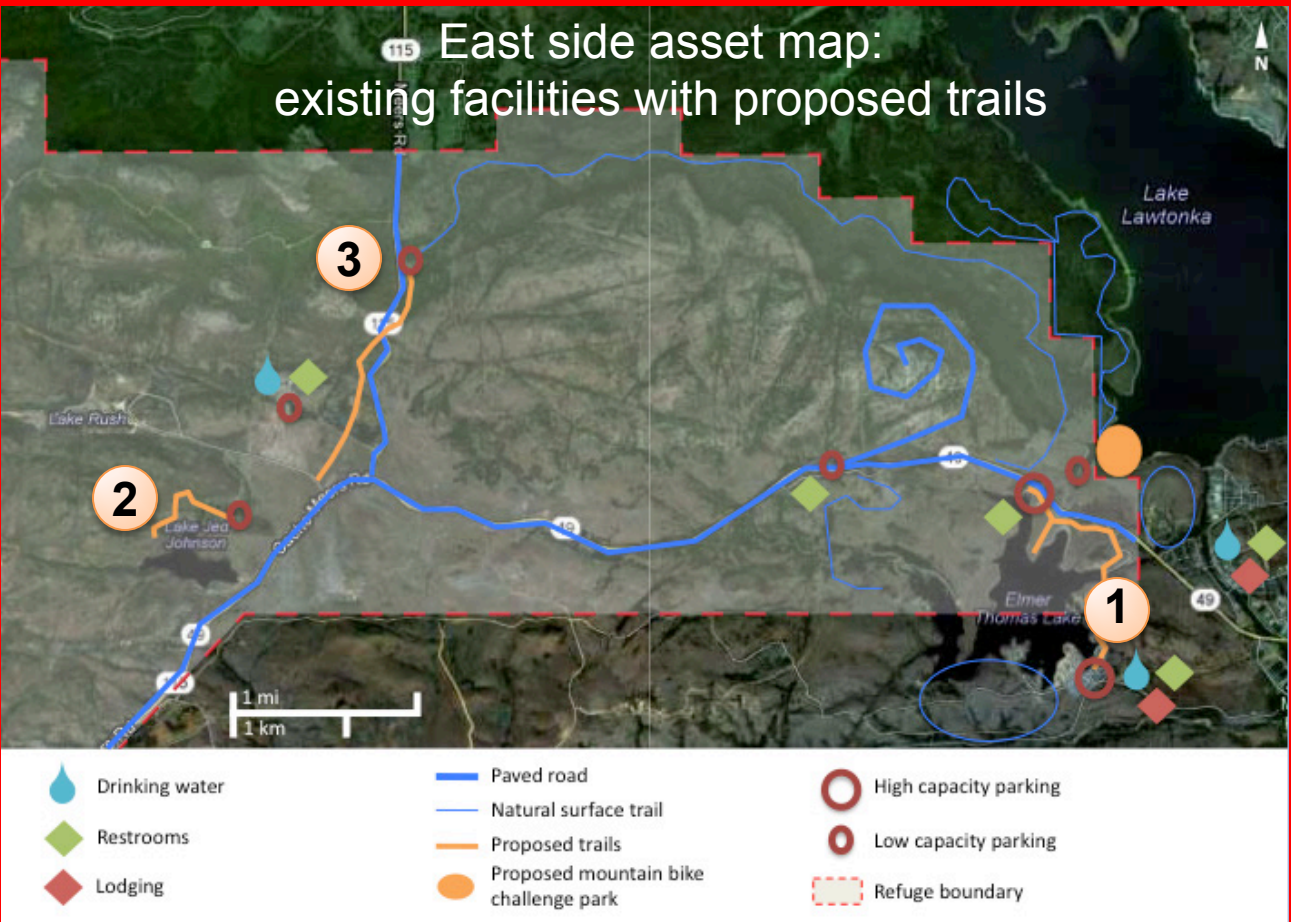


**Visitation**  
Approximately 1.7 million annual visitors engage in wildlife-dependent recreation and enjoy the scenic views. Ninety percent of these visitors arrive in private automobiles.

- Project Problems**
- Speeding
  - Animal-vehicle collisions
  - Parking congestion
  - Habitat degradation
  - Pollution
  - Limited pullouts for wildlife viewing
  - Blind curves
  - High road maintenance costs
  - Large carbon footprint

- No regional transportation coordination
- Auto-dependent development patterns
- Poor statewide health (sedentary lifestyles, obesity)
- Disconnected public, especially youth
- Few accessible facilities
- Overuse of wilderness area
- Littering

The Refuge began work in 2009 to address some of the above problems and to provide visitors with more options to experience the abundant natural and cultural resources through non-motorized means. Three high-priority trail projects are now being advanced to a NEPA-ready state through the Transportation Scholar’s efforts.

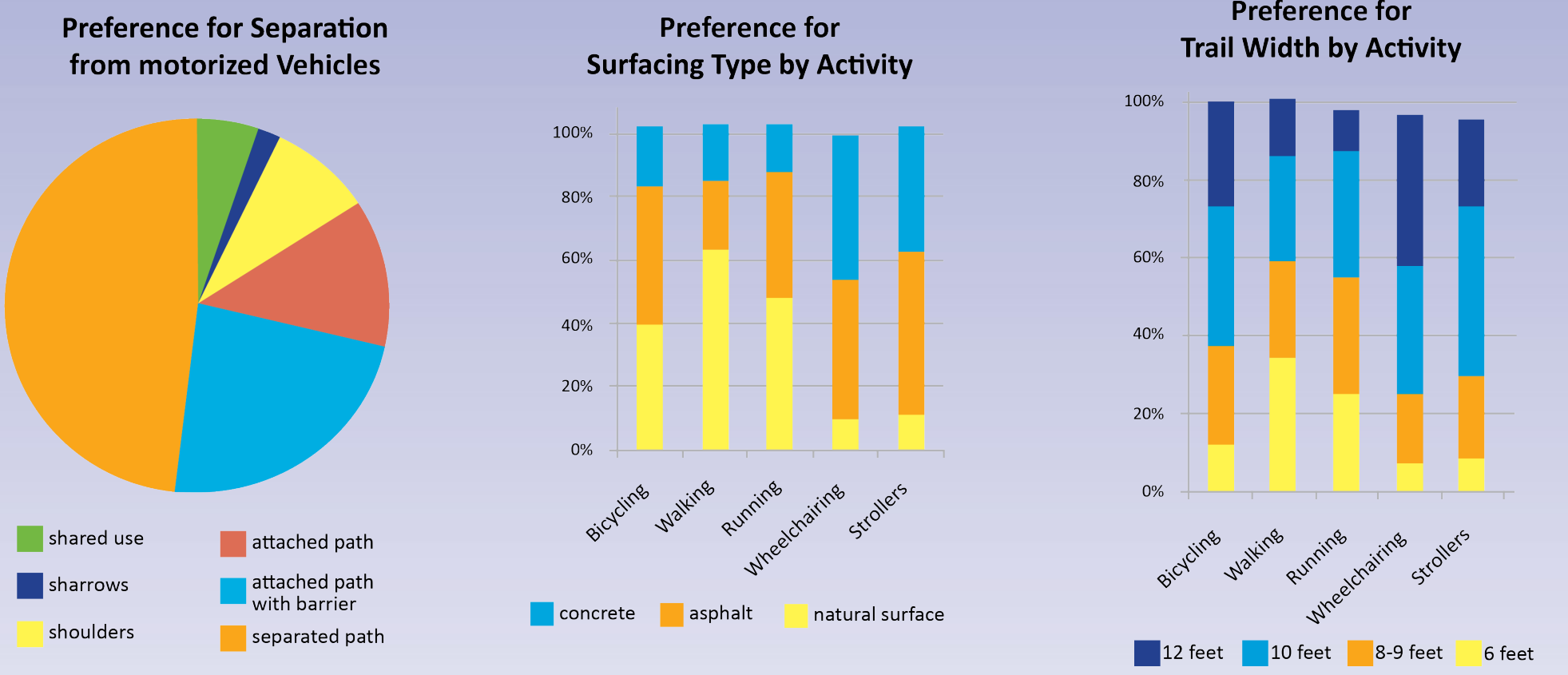


- Target Audiences**
- Families with children
  - Youth
  - People using wheelchairs or other mobility aids
  - Active seniors/retirees
  - Casual recreationalists

- Project Goals**
- Increase and improve non-motorized travel options
  - Redirect visitors to biking and walking opportunities
  - Increase quantity and quality of accessible trail experiences
  - Encourage visitors to connect with nature through active modes
  - Encourage biking and walking among target audiences

### Community Outreach

Several outreach meetings provided opportunity for the public, community leaders, teachers, and youth to engage the trails planning process. Over 215 people shared their preferences for safe and enjoyable trail facilities on the Refuge..



### Project Partners

- Fort Sill Army Base and the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Division
- Medicine Park Museum of Natural Science
- City of Lawton Parks and Recreation Department
- Fit Kids of Southwest Oklahoma
- Lawton Public Schools
- Medicine Park
- Friends of the Wichitas

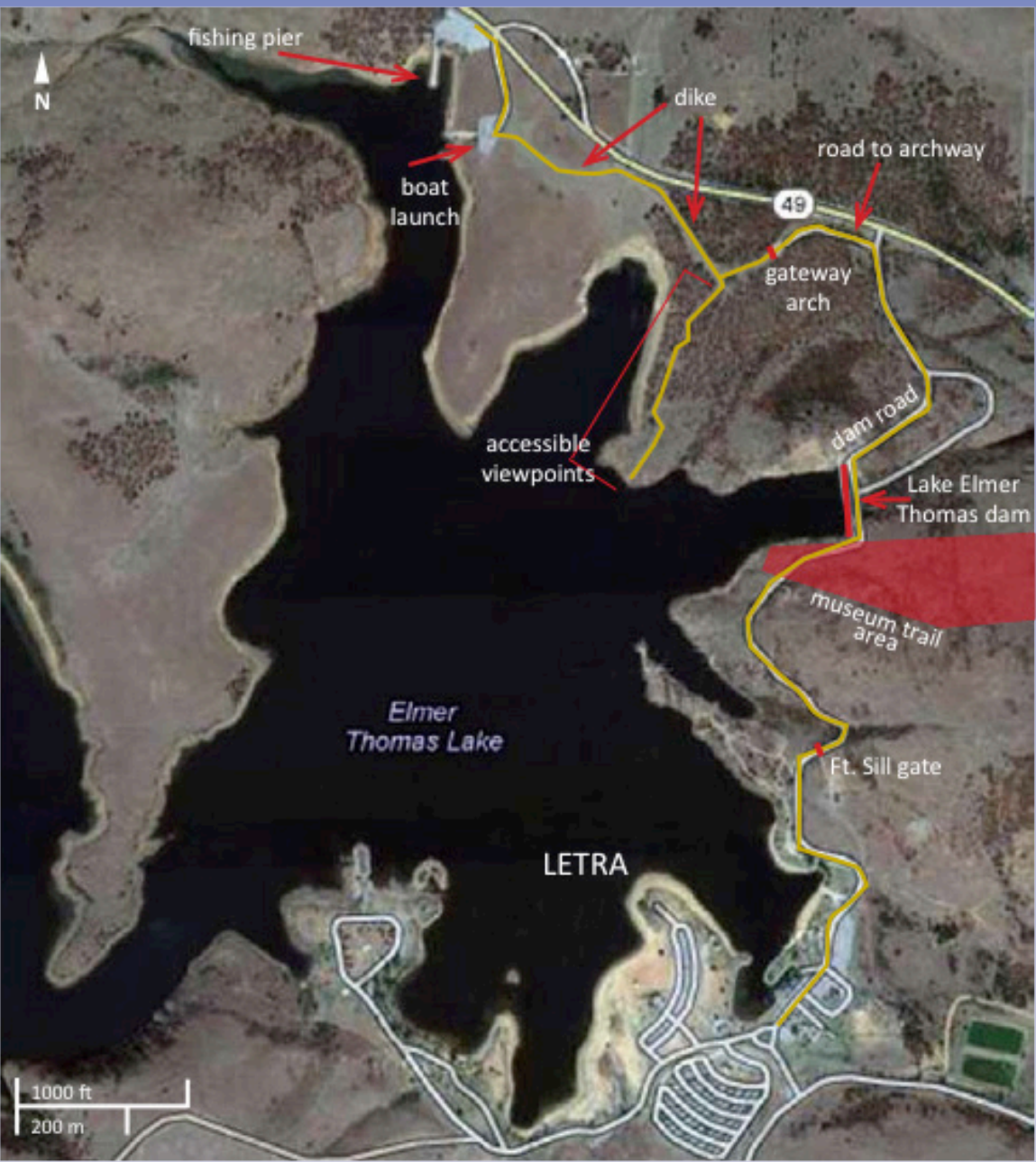


## Heidi Beierle Public Lands Transportation Scholar Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge

Project partners include landowners with property adjacent to the Refuge and organizations that support the Refuge with volunteers, awareness and promotion, environmental education, and access to target visitor markets.

### 1 LETRA connection trail

The 2-mile long Lake Elmer Thomas Recreation Area (LETRA) connection trail joins Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge with its neighbors – Fort Sill and Medicine Park. Fort Sill borders the Refuge to the south. Medicine Park borders the Refuge to the east. Under construction in the community is Medicine Park Museum of Natural Science, which abuts the Refuge boundary fence on the east side.



The trail would restore passage through the historic gateway arch by opening it to foot, wheelchair, and bicycle travel. Two planned spur trails would provide accessible opportunities for visitors to linger in areas with lake views and to observe the Refuge’s diverse flora and fauna.

The LETRA connection trail’s purpose is to provide non-motorized travel options for visitors to access the Refuge, Fort Sill, and Medicine Park.



### 2 Jed Johnson Tower trail

With the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)-constructed observation tower as the trail focus, the .5-mile Jed Johnson Tower trail provides many opportunities for visitors to experience the Refuge’s unique natural and cultural resources. An endangered song bird, the black-capped vireo, nests in the shrubby trees around the trail.

The Jed Johnson Tower trail’s purpose is to provide accessible, non-motorized travel options for families with children, groups, and individual visitors.

## What is the Transportation Scholars Program?

The Public Lands and National Park Foundations’ Transportation Scholars programs provide parks and public lands with transportation professionals for six to 12 months who assist in transportation planning and implementation to help parks and public lands reduce traffic, congestion and pollution while improving visitor experiences. These programs are designed to place individuals with substantial knowledge and expertise in transportation planning and related areas. *See footer for a list of sponsors.*

To accommodate planned use, a reroute of the trail just north of the Tower must occur to meet accessible grades. The parking area could require modifications to facilitate turning tour buses and other group transportation vehicles.



### 3 Meers Road trail

In a more conceptual planning phase than the LETRA connection or Jed Johnson Tower trails, this 2-mile segment of OK Highway 115 winds through rocky terrain, crosses a creek and provides access to a trailhead for the the Mt. Scott bike trail.

The Meers Road trail’s purpose is to accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians in this travel corridor. Additionally, the trail will provide opportunities for visitors on foot and on bike to access a variety of east-side Refuge destinations and the community of Meers to the north.

This narrow, shoulderless road follows historic routes through the mountains that served regional transportation needs and that provided access to mining sites. The Wichita Mountains National Scenic Byway includes this segment of Highway 115 in addition to the other lengths of OK 49 and OK 115 on the Refuge.

