



# Red River Gorge

DESTINATION RESORT MASTER PLAN

September 2020

# Red River Gorge

Destination Resort Master Plan



Consultant Team:





## **Destination Resort Master Plan**

**T**he Red River Gorge's awe-inspiring geologic features, bio-diversity, and expansive recreational opportunities make it an ideal location for Kentucky's first destination resort. Several recent studies highlighted the opportunity for a 4.5+ star resort in the Red River Gorge area of Eastern Kentucky. This level of accommodation offers an impeccable level of service, implied sense of luxury, and great food and beverage options. The identified market opportunity calls for a 180 key resort with 10,000 square feet of meeting space, creating a year-round destination with over 300 employees and providing over \$50 million in overall economic impact.

# A Destination Resort for the Modern Adventurer

The preferred site's inspiring natural features, viewsheds, and ruggedness make it an ideal setting for a resort catering to the modern adventurer who enjoys a little bit of luxury. With nearly 900 acres, over 20 arches, cliffs, and a few rock shelters and caves, the site is begging to be explored. There also happens to be a meadow nestled deep in the property with breathtaking views and solitude. The meadow is a gently rolling space that allows all of the resort development to be sited at least 200 feet from the base of the cliff lines and for nearly 800 acres to be designated as a nature preserve with only trail access.

## The recommended program and guest experiences includes:

- 170-room luxury lodge with a target 4.5 star rating;
- 10 resort cottages;
- Signature lobby and arrival experience for check in;
- Destination spa;
- Conference facility with up to 10,000 SF;
- 3-meal restaurant;
- Retail with up to 5,000 SF;
- Fitness center;
- Specialty restaurant and bar (could be a stand-alone destination);
- Distillery and or micro-brewery (could be combined with the specialty restaurant);
- Signature indoor/outdoor pool amenity;
- Wedding venue;

- Outdoor event space;
- Hiking trails providing access to the site's geologic features, Slade, and Natural Bridge;
- Mountain biking trails; and
- "Founders Lane" vacation home lots for sale (up to 12 one acre or larger lots).

Other resort amenities not included in the current program that could help meet guest expectations at this location could include a permaculture garden and orchard to support a farm-to-table food and beverage approach, "glamping" (luxury camping), equestrian center, and a remote event center for large weddings and events.



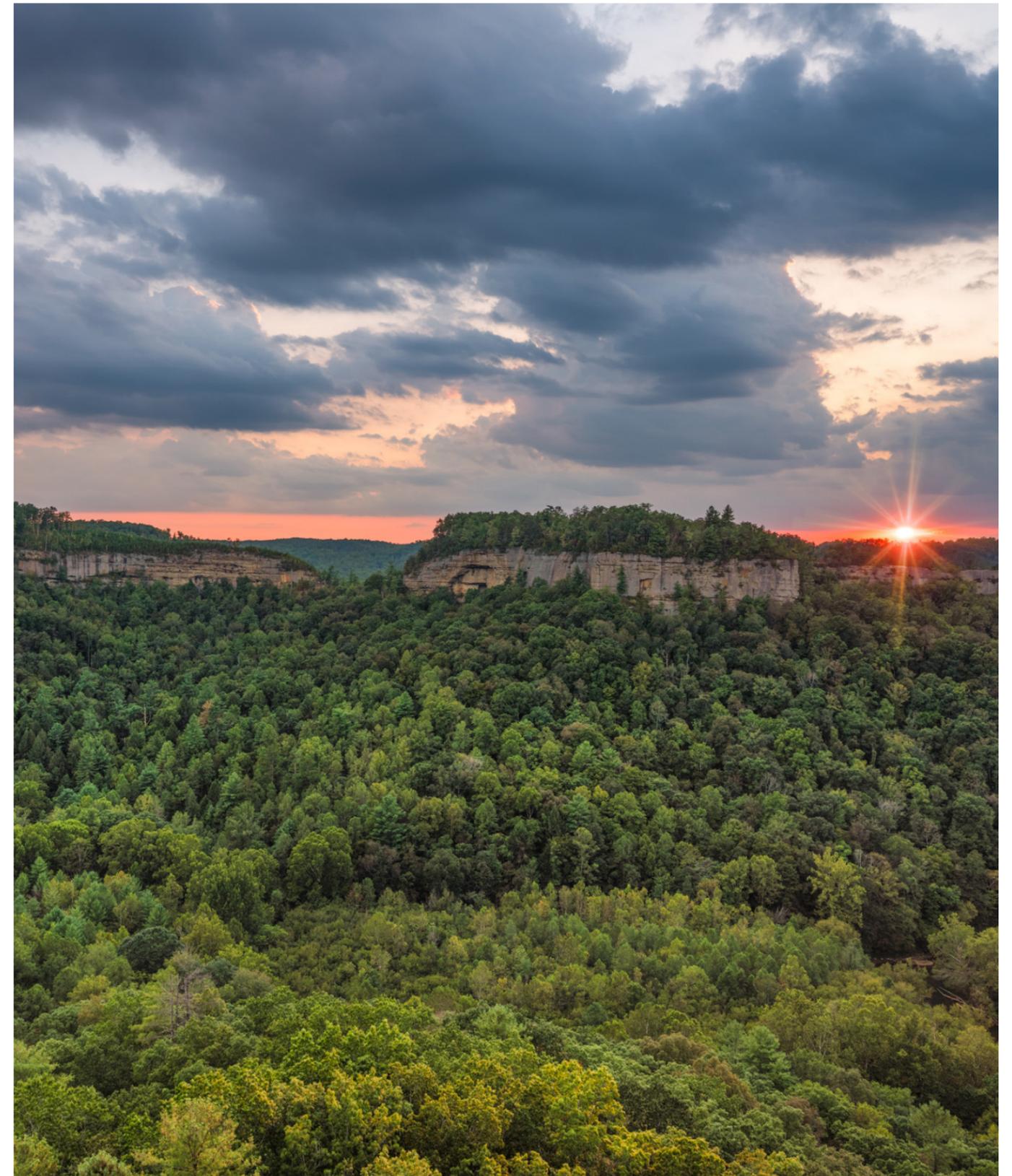
Existing ridge line outcropping



Existing natural stream bed



Existing meadow



Red River Gorge

## Natural Features and Sustainability

The preferred resort site's natural features and proximity to the Red River Gorge require an unbreakable commitment to sustainability. The signature idea behind the proposed masterplan is to create an authentic Red River Gorge resort that is eco-friendly and sets a new standard for an environmentally and economically sustainable approach to hospitality offerings in the region. The following features add immense value to the overall guest experience:

- 890-acre heavily wooded site with proximity and access to Slade;
- Over 20 natural arches and windows; plus, extensive natural cliffs, rock faces, caves, and out-croppings that recall the Red River Gorge;
- Cleared rolling meadow deep within the site is a natural location for the lodge;
- Cliffs following the ridge line and partially surrounding the meadow provide a natural buffer to neighboring properties;
- Historical rock carvings and family cemetery;
- Over 10 miles of existing trails with potential connectivity to Slade and Natural Bridge;
- Beautiful internal views from the meadow to surrounding cliffs and arches;
- Multiple stream beds including Timothy Branch that runs from the meadow area to the Middle Fork of the Red River and Mountain Parkway.

To protect the site's natural features and surrounding environment, the masterplan includes a set of sustainability standards to guide future design and construction. Additionally, to meet the modern adventurer's expectations for an eco-friendly resort experience, the eventual developer should implement a similar set of sustainability standards to guide resort operations.

1. Achieve Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold certification or higher;
2. Adhere to U.S. Fish and Wildlife development standards requiring a 200-foot setback from the base of cliffs and a 100-foot setback from the top edge;
3. Follow International Dark-Sky Association lighting guidelines;
4. Implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) for stormwater management;
5. Refrain from blasting rock during construction; and
6. Designate at least 80% of the site as a nature preserve with only trail access.

## Resort Framework

Building on the sustainability standards and respecting the site's natural features, the resort planning framework begins with three key elements that will drive the first phase of development:

1. Utilize the Timothy Branch "draw" for the resort

entry, allowing for a perfect entry experience from Highway 15 across the Mountain Parkway up to the meadow. This approach is the least impactful route for the primary entry.

2. Place the lodge and resort core amenities in the meadow, limiting site clearing and drainage issues while allowing for great views to on-site features.
3. Leave the remainder of the site untouched except for hiking and mountain biking trails that provide access to the site's signature geologic features.

## Resort Entry Experience

The masterplan recommends two separate entries to the resort. Both entry roads will arrive at the upper meadow resort core area. Having the second entry improves emergency access and removes maintenance and delivery vehicles from the visitor's entry experience. The two proposed entry drives become part of the woodland and drainage systems, bridging drainage as needed and where possible using old logging roads as the travel route to the lodge. While the dimensions of these roadways will be improved, the goal is to provide as natural and unobtrusive corridor as possible.

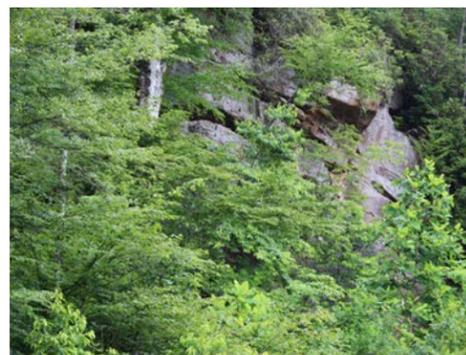
1. **Timothy Branch** – The Timothy Branch entry will be the primary visitor entry. The road will bridge over the Mountain Parkway providing access out of the floodplain and presenting the opportunity for an

architectural gateway feature for the Red River Gorge, Slade, and Eastern Kentucky. There is opportunity to create a "gate-house" entry point when entering the site at the bottom of Timothy Branch. Building a road along Timothy Branch allows for a needed stream restoration and a less aggressive roadway slope than Helton Cemetery Road to the north. Once guests enter the upper meadow, the lodge and core resort area will come into view and on a clear, crisp fall day, much of the natural ridge line behind the resort can also be viewed and serve as the backdrop to the lodge, framing the environment.

2. **Helton Cemetery Road** – This existing county road is located on the north edge of the site and will provide for a secondary access point for maintenance and deliveries. This entry can serve as the initial construction access, and will also provide access from the north serving the resort back of house (BOH), and the proposed cottage and residential sites at the northern portion of development. Roadway and drive connections to resort residential products and future development opportunities have access off the northern access road keeping the Timothy Branch arrival experience with undeveloped and natural viewsheds throughout its length.



Rock character on site



Ridge line rock outcropping



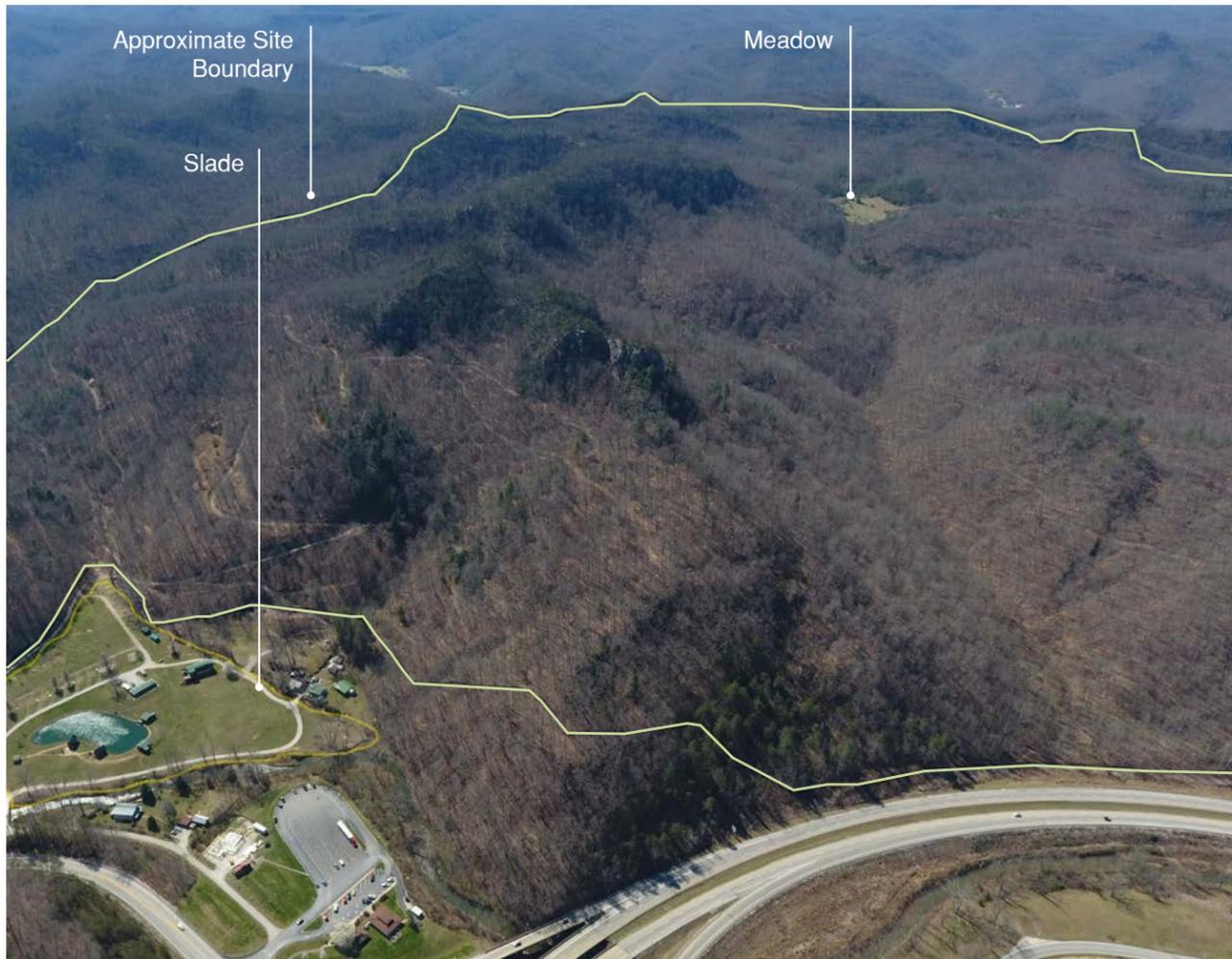
Rock outcropping & cave



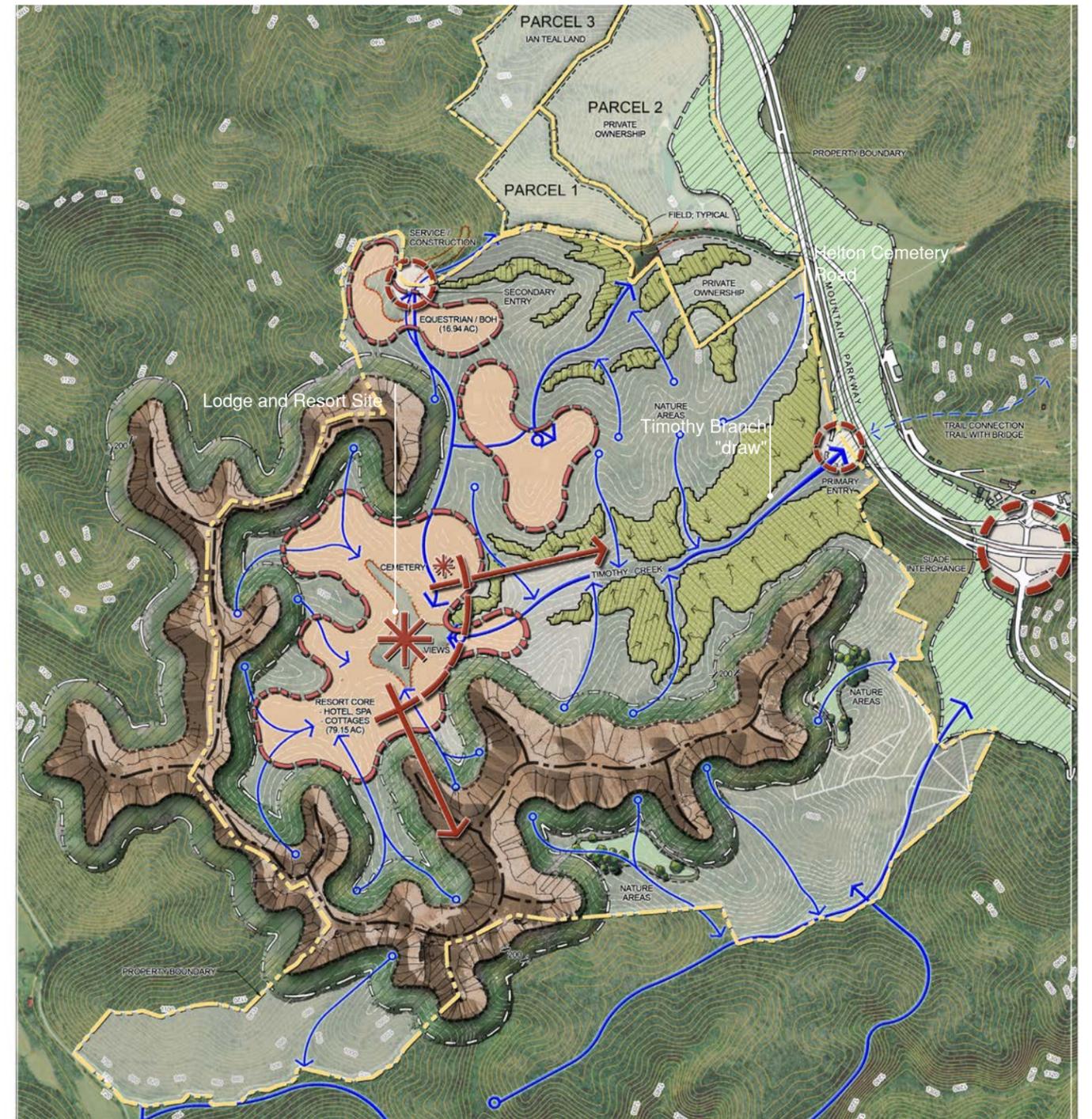
Gateway Bridge Imagery



Resort Gateway and Access Location



Slade and Preferred Resort Site  
Photo credit: © Ian Teal



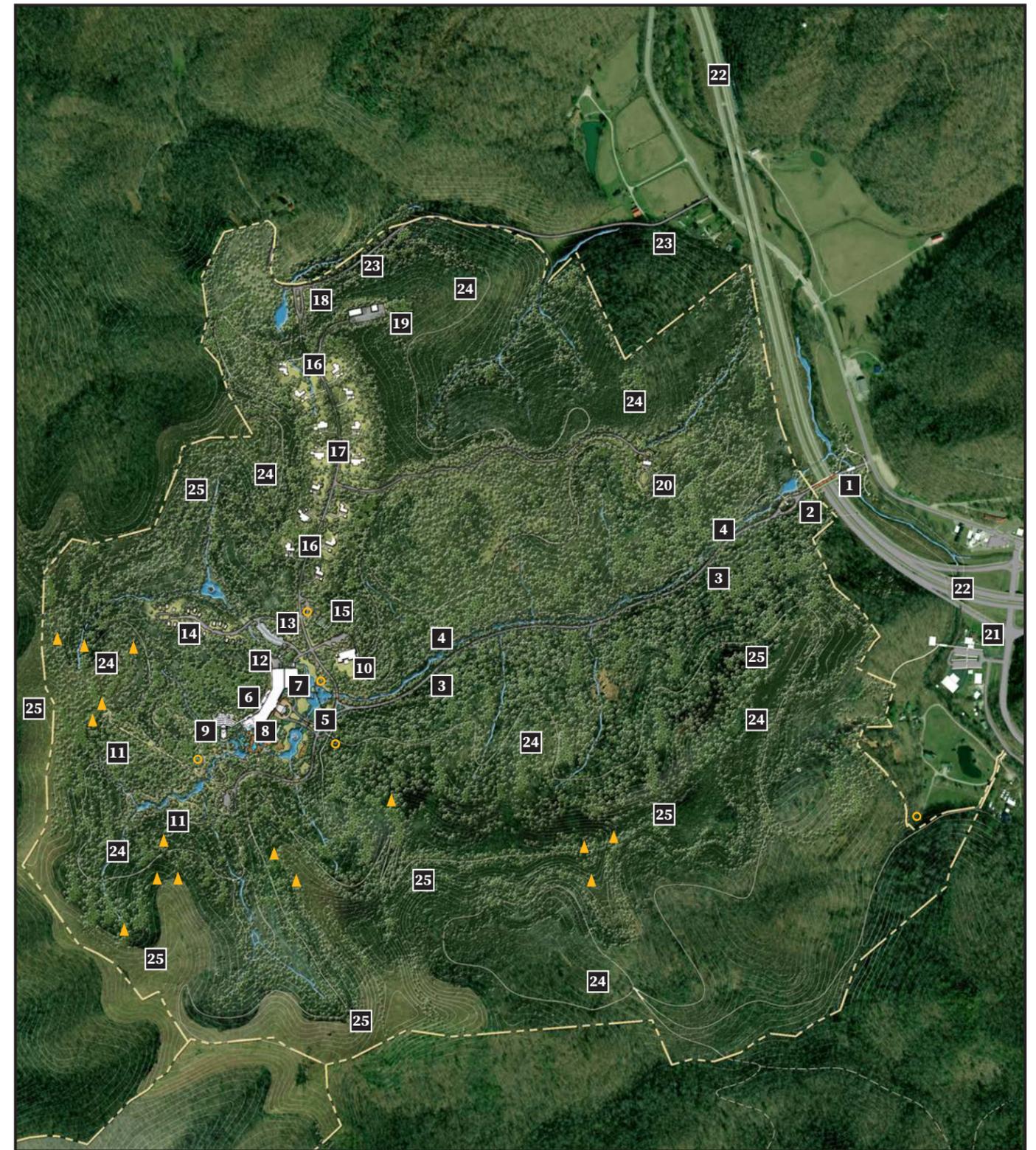
Existing Site Features  
Photo credits: © Ian Teal

# Overall Resort Master Plan

The Red River Gorge destination resort will be a model of sustainability, demonstrating best practices in environmental planning and design while being a catalyst for the region's efforts to advance economic development through tourism. The resort's natural features and proximity to the Gorge will attract the modern adventurer looking for affordable luxury in a wilderness setting.

## Master Plan Legend

- 1** Gateway bridge over Mountain Parkway with landscaped trail
  - 2** Resort main entry area with gatehouse
  - 3** Resort main entry road follows Timothy Branch
  - 4** Existing Timothy Branch to be protected
  - 5** Lodge arrival area with landscape, meadow and streams
  - 6** Lodge with 170 rooms in 5 levels (parking underneath)
  - 7** Conference center & meeting Rooms (with Green Roof / Terraces)
  - 8** Indoor / Outdoor pool amenity area (terraced pools with water slides)
  - 9** Event lawn for weddings & tents with 300 seat grassed amphitheater
  - 10** Signature restaurant & distillery (2 levels)
  - 11** Resort "Glamping" & Adventure Hub (rock climbing, zip line, observation tower, hiking trails)
  - 12** Service / BOH area
  - 13** Overflow lodge parking with solar shade structures
  - 14** Resort cottages & clubhouse (clubhouse & 10 units in phase one)
  - 15** Existing historical family cemetery to be protected
  - 16** "Founders Lane" residential lots (1 acre lots with max of 6,500 SF clearings)
  - 17** Secondary resort entry road (follows existing jeep trail)
  - 18** Secondary resort entrance & gatehouse
  - 19** Resort maintenance area
  - 20** Secluded observation point and event venue
  - 21** Slade interchange area with new Adventure Out-Post Hub
  - 22** Existing Mountain Parkway corridor
  - 23** Existing road (County Road)
  - 24** Existing forested areas to remain as conservation area with improved trails
  - 25** Existing ridge lines with rock cliffs to be protected (200' buffers each side)
- ▲ Natural arch locations
  - Existing trail head locations



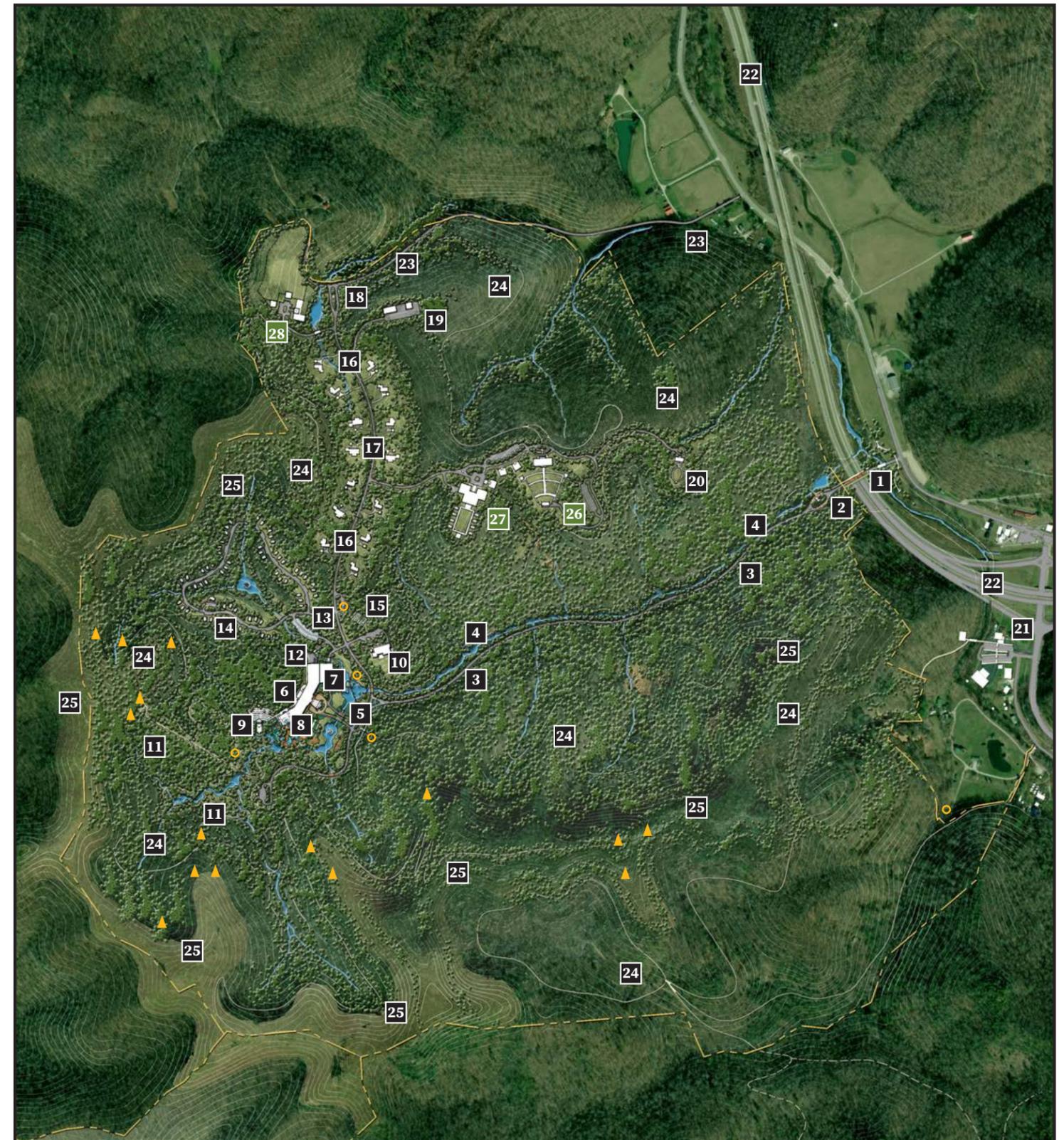
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 Scale: 1" = 1000'-0"

# Overall Resort Master Plan - Future Expansion

Later phases of development will add amenities including an amphitheater, retreat center and equestrian center.

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- 24** Existing forested areas to remain as conservation area with improved trails
- 25** Existing ridge lines with rock cliffs to be protected (200' buffers each side)
- 26** Potential future amphitheater venue for music festivals (1,500 seats)
- 27** Potential future retreat center
- 28** Potential future equestrian center at existing meadow area
- ▲** Natural arch locations
- Existing trail head locations



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Scale: 1" = 1000'-0"

# Resort Core Master Plan

The resort core includes the lodge, conference center, pools, event lawn and several other amenities. The lodge is nestled into the hillside and offers dramatic vistas of the ridge line and the Twin Bees rock formations.

## Resort Core Master Plan Legend

- 1** Entry road from Timothy Branch
- 2** Lodge main entry drive
- 3** Lodge drop-off area and entrance
- 4** Lodge with 170 rooms, spa, & conference center
- 5** Rooftop terrace & garden over conference center
- 6** Indoor pool area (opens to outside)
- 7** Outdoor pool amenity area with falls, slides, pool bar/grill, and cabanas
- 8** Outdoor amphitheater area (+/- 300 people)
- 9** Event lawn & wedding venue
- 10** Permaculture area (outdoor vegetable gardens)
- 11** Orchard areas
- 12** Meadow areas with wild flowers
- 13** Enhanced stream areas and ponds (stocked with fish)
- 14** To below grade parking
- 15** Path to resort cottages (10 units)
- 16** Back of House area
- 17** Outdoor courtyards with seating areas and fire pits
- 18** Conservation areas with hiking trails



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Scale: 1" = 100'-0"

# Modern Adventurer's Resort Core Experience

Placing the resort core in the upper meadow of the site preserves the rugged and topographic rich natural features of the site by building off and below them. The meadow is a gently rolling portion of the site that will help to reduce cut and fill site modifications that might otherwise be required. Building and amenity footprints are sited into the open spaces of the site, and outdoor spaces and activities develop toward the wood lines that frame the meadow. This approach allows nature into the outdoor resort activity areas and appears as the backdrop of the lodge interior spaces when near and distant views to the outdoors are met with clear story glass and indoor/outdoor activities.

In addition, at the meadow location, buildings are further removed from the cliff lines and arches. The amount of tree removal and natural topography modification required is limited, and there is space for stormwater Best Management Practices. In siting the main lodge in the meadow, views to the arches and cliff lines are preserved by developing below the cliffs and not on top of them. The plan proposes developing in a more limited and concentrated footprint on the site, which includes recommending parking below the lodge, as the geology allows, further preserving green space.

Siting the lodge and its core surroundings in the upper meadow presents a seamless sense of nature for the modern adventurer guest and other resort visitors. The resort design will usher in nature and blur the lines between site and building. This will be a modern-day architectural interpretation of our best-known historical lodges with clean lines of stone, wood, and glass. High volume ceilings and spacious public areas will greet visitors. Native vegetation and natural landscaping that continues the meadow and wooded edges with streams cutting through the meadow will create the “front door” sense of arrival to the resort. The core resort site is to convey a relaxed style of indoor and outdoor engagement that is warm and welcoming in the winter months, active and fun in the summer months, and reflective of the changing seasons in the spring and fall.

By placing most of the parking below the building, large paved areas are not part of the landscape. By locating a specialty restaurant and distillery at the edge of the meadow on an embankment opposite the lobby, the organization of the resort comes into focus. Driving over a bridged entry to the lodge arrival area that is finished in stone, wood, and natural materials borrowed from the surrounding context of the Gorge, grounds the



Resort Concept  
Rendering



Modern mountain architecture, Photo credit: Charles Cunniffe Architecture.



Quarry pool, Photo credit: Aqua Pool and Patio



Guest room, Photo credit: Ranch at Rock Creek



Great room, Photo credit: Julie Johnson-Holland, Interior design



Vegetable garden, Photo credit: The Ranch at Rock Creek

design in Eastern Kentucky. Valet service for all guests reduces the stress of arrival at check in. The landscape at the arrival area reflects the natural site and meadow and is not meant to be a formal sense of arrival but is a decision to be made: to check in or immediately engage with the resort site.

The lobby and great room area is a high volume living room for all guests with views north and south through the high glass walls at each side, flanked by large fire places, lobby and coffee bar areas, quiet reading areas, and more social areas. Views into nature permeate the space and guests accessing rooms in lodge corridors can view the lobby from above. The rear courtyards are accessed off the main lobby and guests are nestled into the rising tree line beyond and can enjoy seating groups around outdoor fire pits. The lodge is planned with five guest levels and features great views from all rooms, lobby bar, a three-meal restaurant, a destination spa, a fitness center, and accessible green-roofed terraces above the conference facility. Guests arriving just for the conference space can access meeting rooms directly from the arrival area.

**Resort core amenities located in the area in and around the lodge include:**

- Indoor/outdoor swimming hole style pool area with water slides built into the terraced site;
- Pool area bar and grill;
- Outdoor dining area off the three-meal restaurant;
- Seating areas and fire pits;
- Wedding and event lawn;
- Covered event space;
- P garden and orchard;
- Small wood docks/boardwalks for potential fishing and overlooks at the meadow lakes; and
- Connectivity to resort trails.

Amenities a bit more remote to the lodge could include a “glamping site, zip line, rock-climbing area, and a more remote and scenic wedding venue with great views to the surrounding cliff lines and arches.

The intentional designing of the pool to mimic a natural “swimming hole” is to honor the aesthetic of the resort and its location, moving amenity features back to a natural setting as much as possible with terraced levels built into the grade. This multilevel amenity provides the opportunity of each day’s use being a bit different from the day before depending on the level you sit, whether alongside a quiet



Photo credits, from top, left to right:  
 1. Adobe Stock imagery  
 2. Adobe Stock imagery  
 3. Vigilius Mountain Resort, <https://www.vigilius.it/en>  
 4. The Ranch at Rock Creek, <https://www.theranchatrockcreek.com>  
 5. The Ranch at Rock Creek, <https://www.theranchatrockcreek.com>  
 6. Adobe Stock imagery

pool or adjacent to the falling water or with a different view to nature. The multiple levels also provides flexibility of use for the pool so that if programmed, one area of the pool can be dedicated to a luncheon, cocktail party, or dinner and a different level of the pool can remain open for swimming activities. Plunge pools with water slides, spa, quiet deck areas, and sun and shade areas are all part of this amenity including fire pits and access to a pool bar and grill.

Pathways lead from the main pool area to the other amenities on the site such as the glamping and zip line area, hiking trails, trail connections that lead to Slade and Natural Bridge, and to the few resort cottages located just north of the lodge. Pathways for hikes, mindful walks in the woods, or biking trails lay across the meadow and woods while areas for practicing bouldering and rock climbing techniques are part of the resort outdoor activities.

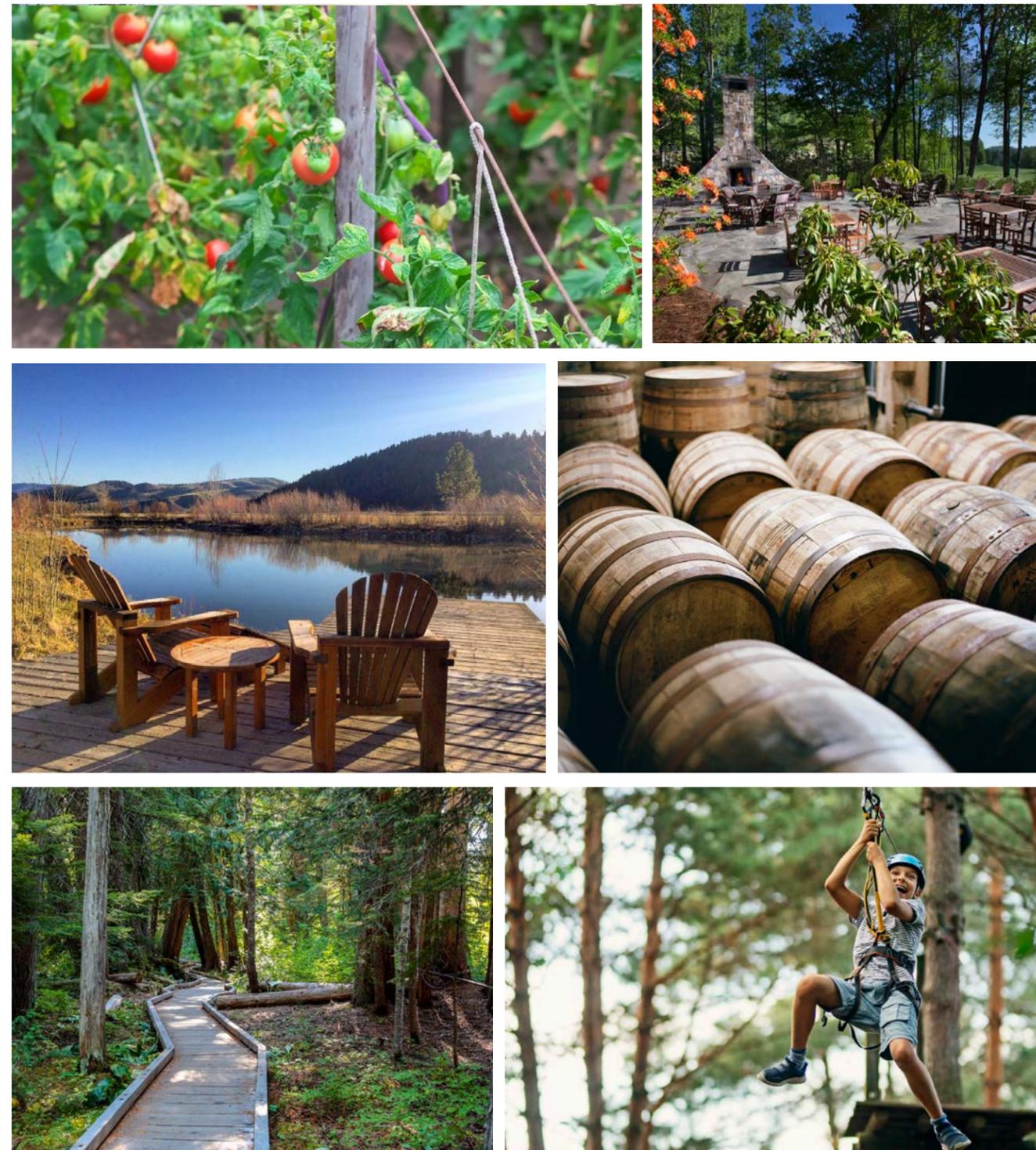
The resort cottages are part of the resort room count and program. These are planned as two-level luxury suites and are accessed by resort shuttle or golf carts and are within walking distance to the lodge. They will have an architectural character to match the main lodge with an emphasis of views to the outside with glass, stone, and wood construction and wide balconies for viewing and stone patios for outdoor seating. Clustered in groups of three,

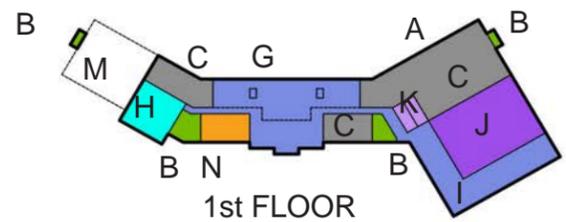
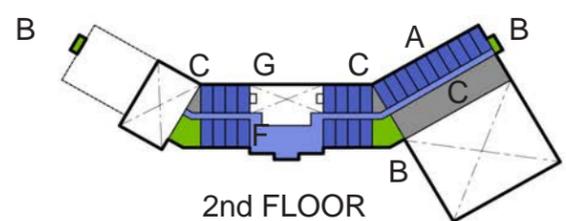
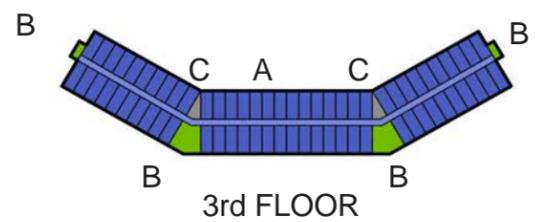
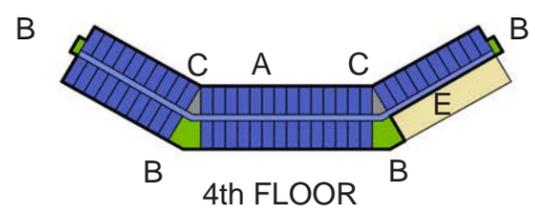
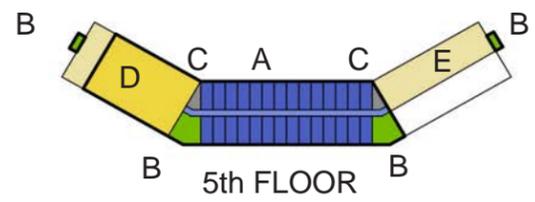
there will be opportunities for group events while remaining suitable for the individual traveler or families. These eco-friendly units will provide direct guest connection to the outdoors in a more private setting.

The last program element associated with the resort is the planned “Founders Lane” residential lots located on the secondary entry road north of the lodge. These large one-acre lots are envisioned as a way for guests to own a piece of the resort and have unique access to the resort amenities and food and beverage programs. The homes can also become part of the resort rental program and have guest services. Clearing the residential lot for custom home construction will be limited to 15% of the site or maximum of 6,500 square feet including driveway access and utilities. All homes will follow the project framework planning guidelines with the intent to have as little impact as possible to the site and surrounding natural areas.

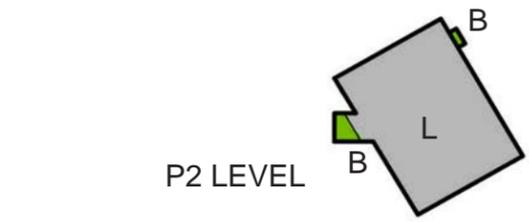
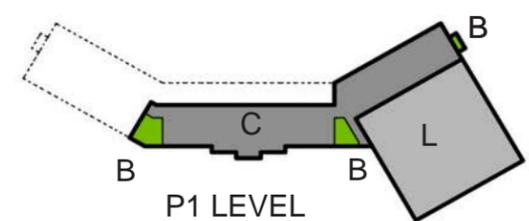
Much of the property is dedicated to maintaining the forest, streams, arches, cliffs and ridge lines, and the natural habitat. Of the site’s almost 900 acres, the planning framework requires less than 10% of the site to be dedicated to resort development, facilities, roadways, and resort amenities, leaving the balance of the site in its natural state for public outdoor adventure, enjoyment, preservation, and conservation.

Photo credits, from top, left to right:  
 1. Vegetable garden, Adobe Stock imagery  
 2. Old Edwards Club wedding venue, <https://www.oldedwardshospitality.com>  
 3. The Ranch at Rock Creek, <https://www.theranchatrockcreek.com>  
 4. Distillery, provided by Kentucky Tourism <https://www.kentuckytourism.com>  
 5. Forest trail, Adobe Stock Imagery  
 6. Adventure play, provided by Qreative Brand





- Legend**
- A Guest Rooms
  - B Vertical Circulation
  - C Housekeeping/ Boh /Mep / Kitchen
  - D Spa
  - E Terrace
  - F Lounge
  - G Lobby/Great Room,
  - H 3-Meal Restaurant
  - I Pre-Function
  - J Meeting Space
  - K Restrooms
  - L Parking
  - M Indoor Pool
  - N Retail

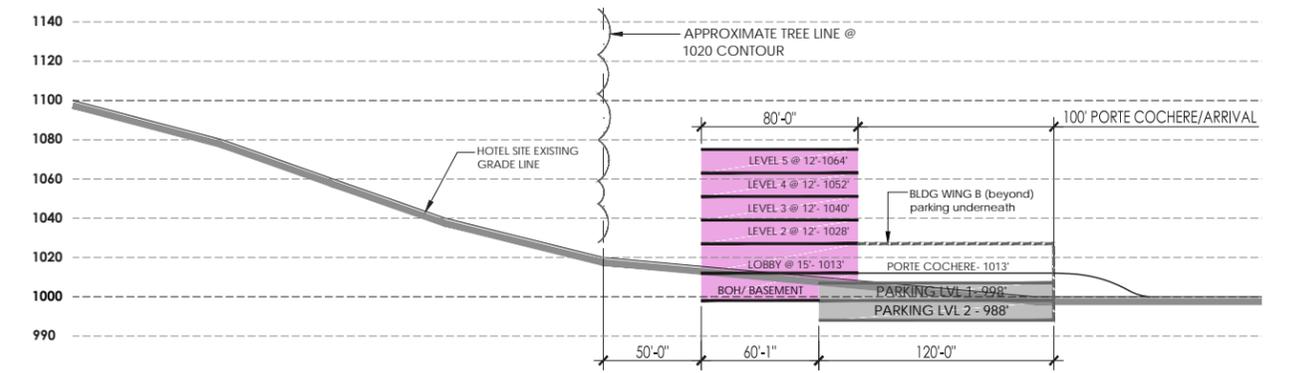


Diagrammatic site section of lodge built into grade

Diagrammatic site section of lodge built into grade



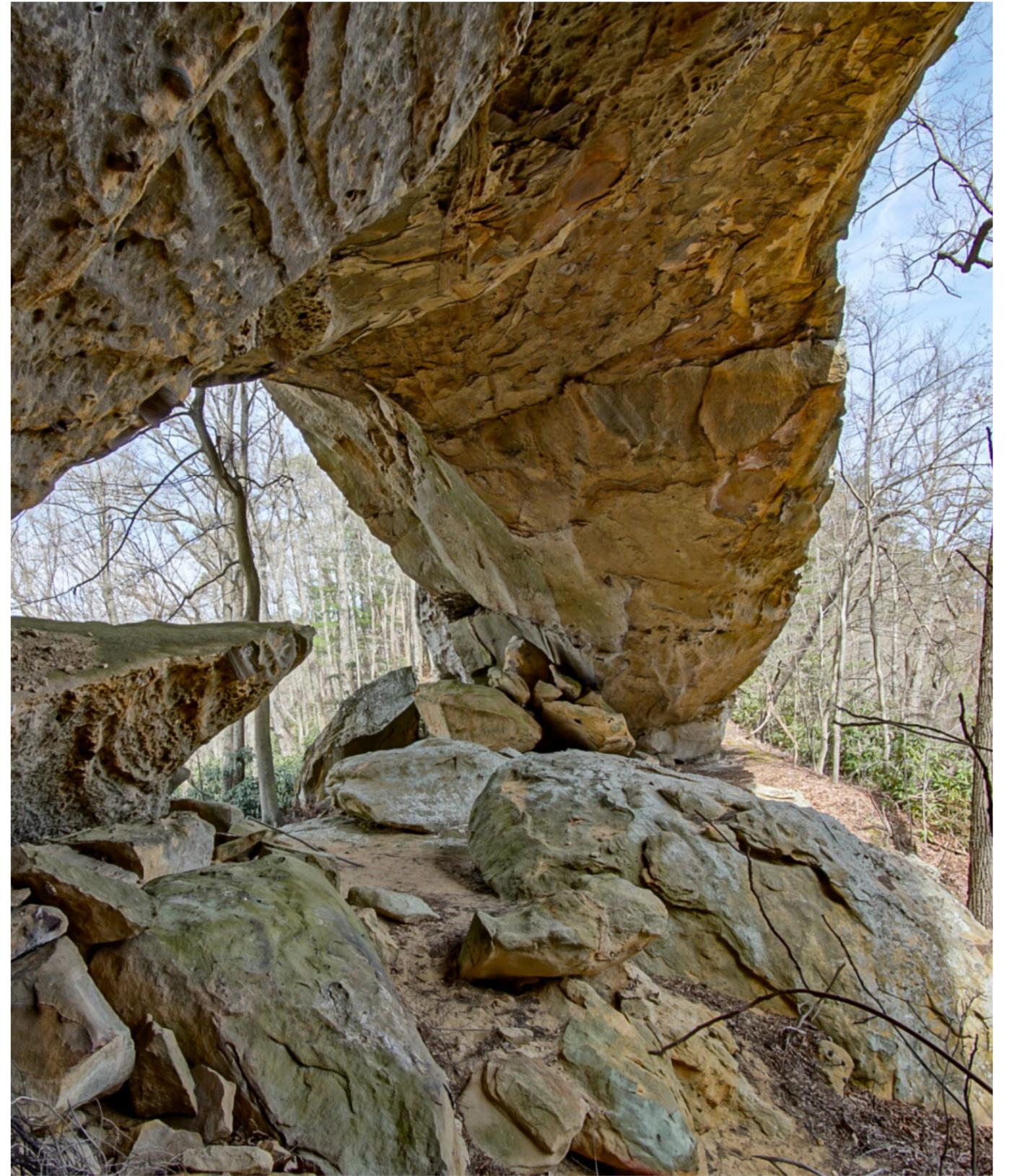
Example of contemporary architectural design, photo credit: Ward Young Architecture



# Modern Adventurer's Broader Resort Experience

Beyond the resort core, areas are left intact and as nature would have them, though that does not mean that minor site related guest's facilities or resort surprises are not along the way. A wedding garden and event lawn will be found in the near areas of the resort core while more wilderness and adventure uses are encouraged elsewhere. Glamping areas located in the woods a little further from the lodge along the pathway system where a back-to-nature wilderness experience might be organized are proposed. Hiking, mountain biking, and other active uses will be accommodated on the many trails that already exist and will be improved.

Opportunities to star gaze or do nighttime bat viewing hikes in the moonlight, or participate in a guided hiking tour to learn about local geology will be planned so guests can experience the site away from the resort core and develop a better understanding why so many people are attracted to the Red River Gorge and hopefully leave with a better sense of environmental awareness. The resort is envisioned to be a place for the modern adventurer and local resident to relax and engage body and mind, meet friends and family, and be back in nature. At the same time, the resort will be a launching site for adventurers to experience the Gorge and the activities and attractions that make it so special.



Site feature, Photo credit: Ian Teal