



US Army Corps
Of Engineers
Wilmington District

PUBLIC NOTICE

Issue Date: January 15, 2013
Comment Deadline: February 14, 2013
Corps Action ID #: SAW-2012-00882
TIP Project No. R-2915

The Wilmington District, Corps of Engineers (Corps) has received an application from the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) regarding a potential future requirement for Department of the Army (DA) authorization to discharge dredged or fill material into waters of the United States associated with the proposed improvements and widening of US 221 to a multi-lane facility from US 421 near Deep Gap, Watauga County, North Carolina to NC 88/US 221 Business in Jefferson, Ashe County, North Carolina.

Specific alignment alternatives and location information are described below and shown on the attached plans. This Public Notice and all attached plans are also available on the Wilmington District Web Site at:

<http://www.saw.usace.army.mil/Missions/RegulatoryPermitProgram.aspx>

Applicant: North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT)
Project Development and Environmental Analysis Branch
Attn: Dr. Gregory J. Thorpe, Manager
1548 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699

Authority

The Corps will evaluate this application to compare alternatives that have been carried forward for detailed study pursuant to applicable procedures of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1344).

In order to more fully integrate Section 404 permit requirements with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, and to give careful consideration to our required public interest review and 404(b)(1) compliance determination, the Corps is soliciting public comment on the merits of this proposal and on the alternatives evaluated in the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Environmental Assessment (EA) of 18 October 2012. At the close of this comment period, the District Commander will evaluate and consider the comments received as well as the expected adverse and beneficial effects of the proposed road construction to select the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative (LEDPA). The District Commander is not authorizing construction of the proposed project at this time. A final DA permit may be issued only

after our review process is complete, impacts to the aquatic environment have been minimized to the maximum extent practicable and a compensatory mitigation plan for unavoidable impacts has been approved.

Location

The proposed project area stretches along existing US 221 from the intersection with US 421 near Deep Gap, Watauga County, North Carolina to NC 88/US 221 Business in Jefferson, Ashe County, North Carolina. The total distance for this project is 16.1 miles. Water resources within the project area are part of the New River Basin (Hydrologic Unit 05050001). Named streams within the project area include Gap Creek, Little Gap Creek, South Fork New River, Old Field Creek, Beaver Creek, Naked Creek, and Little Buffalo Creek. The approximate midpoint of the project is located at Latitude 36.3201 N, Longitude -81.5156 W.

Existing Site Conditions

The study area is located in the Mountain physiographic province of North Carolina with topography characterized as gently sloping in the stream valleys along the existing US 221, with steeper areas along the ridge tops. Elevations range from approximately 2,800 to 3,440 feet above mean sea level. Existing land use in the project area is primarily farming, with scattered residential neighborhoods (some large) and several businesses. The land use near the Towns of West Jefferson and Jefferson is more urban than the remainder of the project. The existing roadway generally consists of a two lane, 20- to 24- foot-wide roadway with usable shoulders that range in width from 5 to 12 feet. In some locations, the shoulders are partially paved, with pavement that varies from 2 to 4 feet in width.

The project area is located within the New River Basin (Hydrologic Unit 05050001). Named streams within the study area include Gap Creek, Little Gap Creek, South Fork New River, Old Field Creek, Beaver Creek, Naked Creek, and Little Buffalo Creek. A total of 193 jurisdictional streams were identified within the study area as well as approximately 145 jurisdictional wetlands adjacent to these streams.

Applicant's Stated Purpose

The purpose of the project is to upgrade the existing roadway to a multi-lane facility to increase capacity, alleviate congestion, improve traffic operations, and reduce the rate of traffic crashes.

Project Description

The NCDOT proposes to widen existing US 221 from the intersection with US 421 near Deep Gap, Watauga County, North Carolina to NC 88/US 221 Business in Jefferson, Ashe County, North Carolina. The total distance for this project is 16.1 miles. The proposed improvements include three typical sections that were evaluated; a 4-lane facility with a 23-foot wide raised grassed median with curb and gutter and 8-foot shoulders, a 4-lane facility with a 36-foot wide depressed grassed median and 8-foot shoulders, and a 4-lane facility with a variable 17.5-foot wide raised grassed median and 8-foot shoulders. In addition, a new interchange with US 421 at Deep Gap is proposed.

Detailed Study Alternatives

The range of alternatives that have been considered include the No-Build Alternative, a Public Transportation Alternative, a Transportation Systems Management (TSM) Alternative, and Improvements to the Existing Facility. Improving the Existing Facility includes an assessment of 1) Widening to the East; 2) Widening to the West; 3) Symmetrical Widening; and 4) Best-Fit Widening. After a preliminary evaluation, it was determined that the Best-Fit Widening alternative should be carried forward for detailed study due to its ability to meet the stated Purpose and Need, and reflect less environmental impact.

Cultural Resources

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the lead federal agency for cultural resources coordination on this project, has determined that two (2) registered properties, or properties listed as being eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) are located within the project area. These properties are identified as the Baldwin Bethany Cemetery and the Barnett Idol House. An evaluation with the State Historic Preservation Office found that the Best-Fit Widening alternative would have no effect on these properties because there will be no construction within the historic boundary and no changes to elements that make them eligible. Surveys conducted by the applicant indicate that there would be no effect on any archaeological resources eligible for the NRHP.

Endangered Species

There are 11 federally protected species of plants and animals that have ranges extending into Watauga and Ashe Counties: bog turtle (*Clemmys muhlenbergii*), Carolina northern flying squirrel (*Glaucomys sabrinus coloratus*), Virginia big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii virginianus*), spruce-fir moss spider (*Microhexura montivaga*), Blue Ridge goldenrod (*Solidago spithamea*), Heller's blazing star (*Liatris helleri*), Roan mountain bluet (*Hedyotis purpurea* var. *montana*), spreading avens (*Geum radiatum*), swamp pink (*Helonias bullata*), Virginia spiraea (*Spiraea virginiana*), and rock gnome lichen (*Gymnoderma lineare*). The FHWA, the lead federal agency for coordination of endangered species issues on this project pursuant to the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA), has determined that the proposed project may have an effect on one federally listed endangered or threatened species or its formally designated critical habitat. Virginia spiraea has been documented within one mile of the project area with suitable habitat found along the streams in the study area. However, field surveys of the suitable habitat have identified no individual plants. As a result, the FHWA has concluded that the proposed project may affect but is not likely to adversely affect this species. The proposed project is expected to have no effect on the remaining species listed above.

Evaluation

The decision whether to issue a permit will be based on an evaluation of the probable impacts, including cumulative impacts, of the proposed activity on the public interest. That decision will reflect the national concern for both protection and utilization of important resources. The benefit which reasonably may be expected to accrue from the proposal must be balanced against its reasonably foreseeable detriments. All factors which may be relevant to the proposal will be considered including the cumulative effects thereof; among those are conservation, economics, aesthetics, general environmental concerns, wetlands, historic properties, fish and wildlife values, flood hazards, flood plain values (in accordance with Executive Order 11988), land use, navigation, shoreline erosion and accretion, recreation, water supply and conservation, water quality, energy needs, safety, food and fiber production, mineral needs, considerations of property ownership, and, in general, the needs and welfare of the people. For activities involving the discharge of dredged or fill materials in waters of the United States, the evaluation of the impact of the activity on the public interest will include application of the Environmental Protection Agency's 404(b)(1) guidelines.

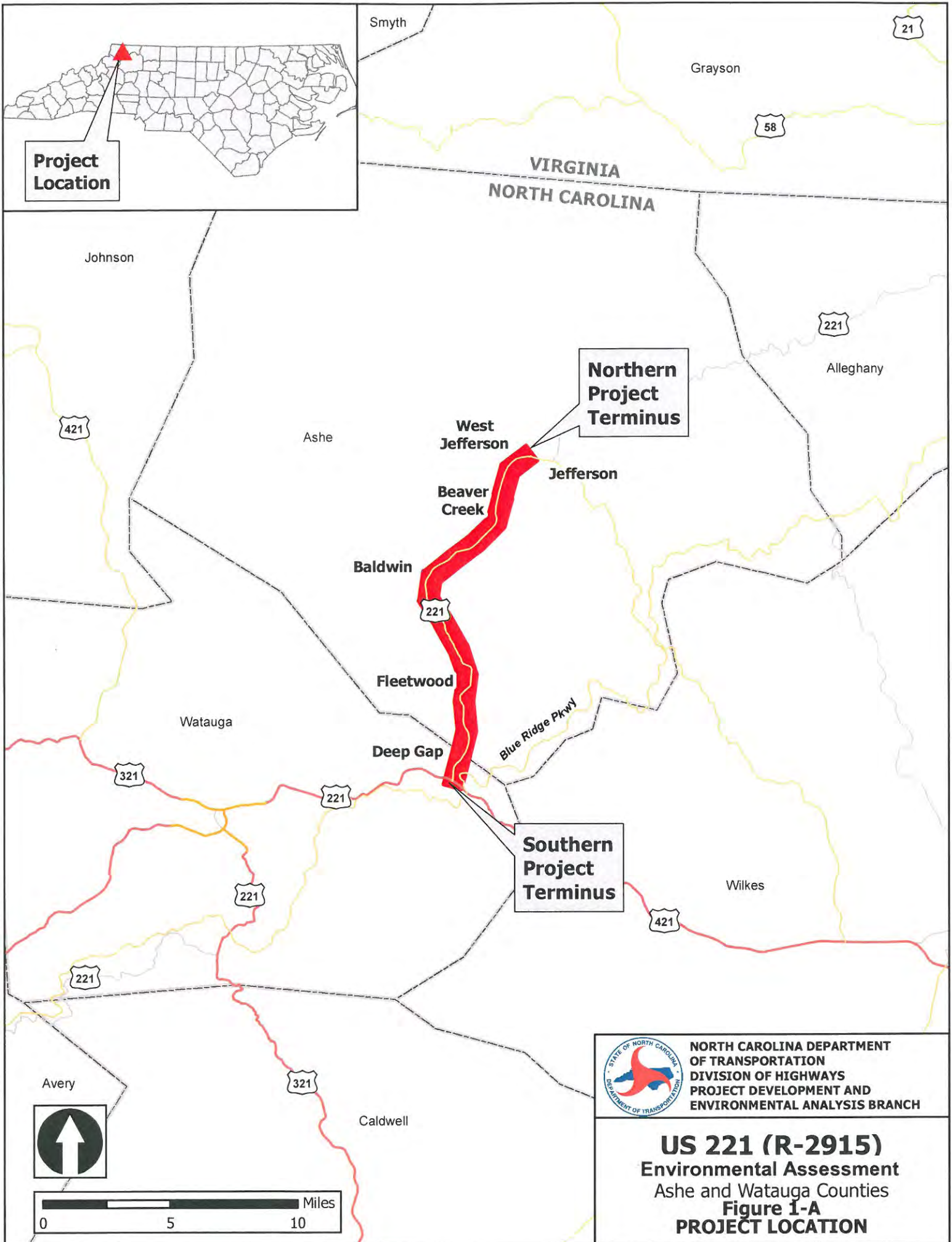
Compensatory Mitigation

The purpose of compensatory mitigation is to replace the lost functions from a project's impacts to Waters of the United States, including wetlands. Appropriate and practicable compensatory mitigation will be required for unavoidable impacts from this proposal. The applicant will make every effort to provide on-site mitigation where possible. Any mitigation requirements not provided on-site will be met off-site through utilization of the North Carolina Ecosystem Enhancement Program.

Commenting Information

The Corps of Engineers is soliciting comments from the public; Federal, State and local agencies and officials, including any consolidate State Viewpoint or written position of the Governor; Indian Tribes and other interested parties in order to consider and evaluate the impacts of this proposed activity. Any comments received will be considered by the Corps of Engineers to select the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative (LEDPA) for this proposal. To make this decision, comments are used to assess impacts on endangered species, historic properties, water quality, general environmental effects and the other public interest factors listed above. Comments are used in the preparation of a Corps of Engineers Environmental Assessment (EA) and/or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Comments are also used to determine the need for a public hearing and to determine the overall public interest of the proposed activity.

Written comments pertinent to the proposed work, as outlined above, will be received by the Corps of Engineers, Wilmington District, until 5pm, February 14, 2013. Comments should be submitted to Mr. Monte Matthews, US Army Corps of Engineers, Raleigh Regulatory Field Office, 3331 Heritage Trade Drive, Suite 105, Wake Forest, NC 27587, telephone 919-554-4884 x30.



Project Location

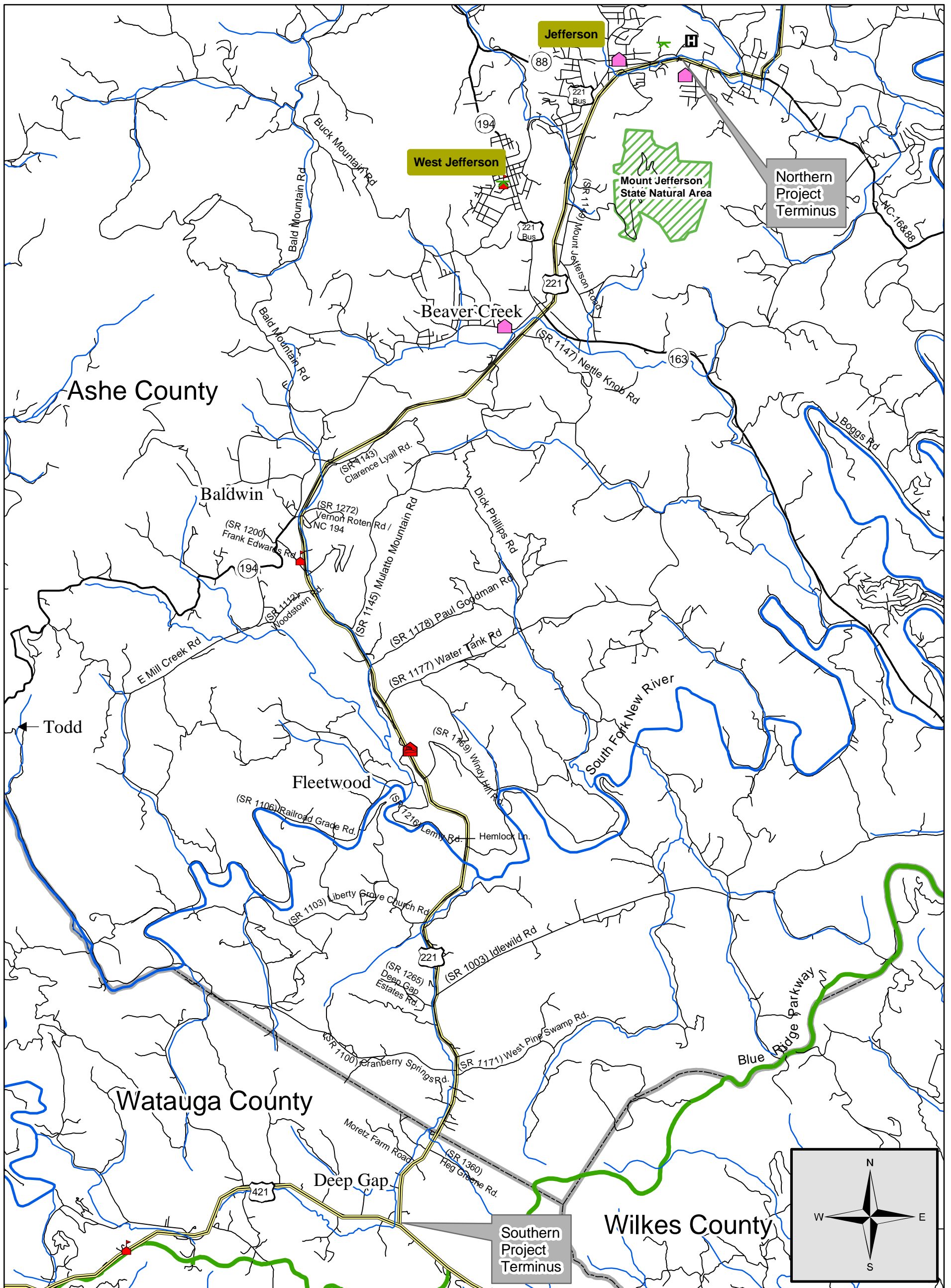
Northern Project Terminus

Southern Project Terminus






NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
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PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS BRANCH

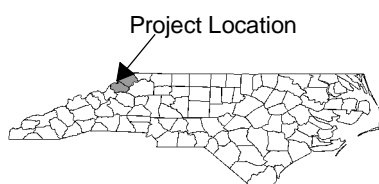
US 221 (R-2915)
Environmental Assessment
 Ashe and Watauga Counties
Figure 1-A
PROJECT LOCATION





Legend

-  Ashe County Courthouse - NRHP
-  Fleetwood Volunteer Fire & Rescue, Inc.
-  Public Schools
-  Parks



North Carolina Department of Transportation
 Environmental Study
 US 221 - NCDOT Project # R-2915
 Ashe and Watauga Counties, NC

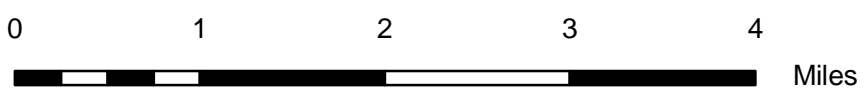
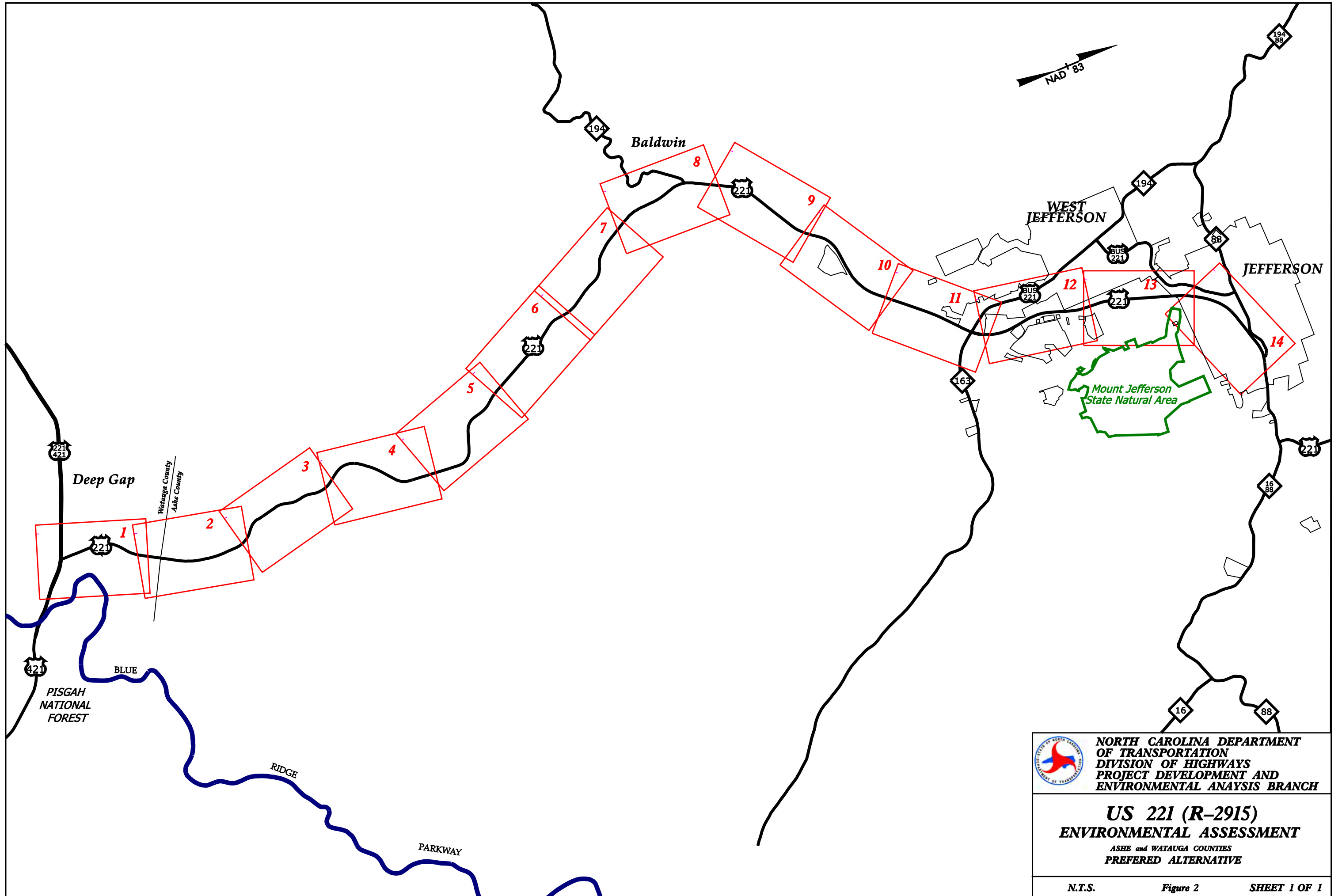











Figure 1-B: Study Area

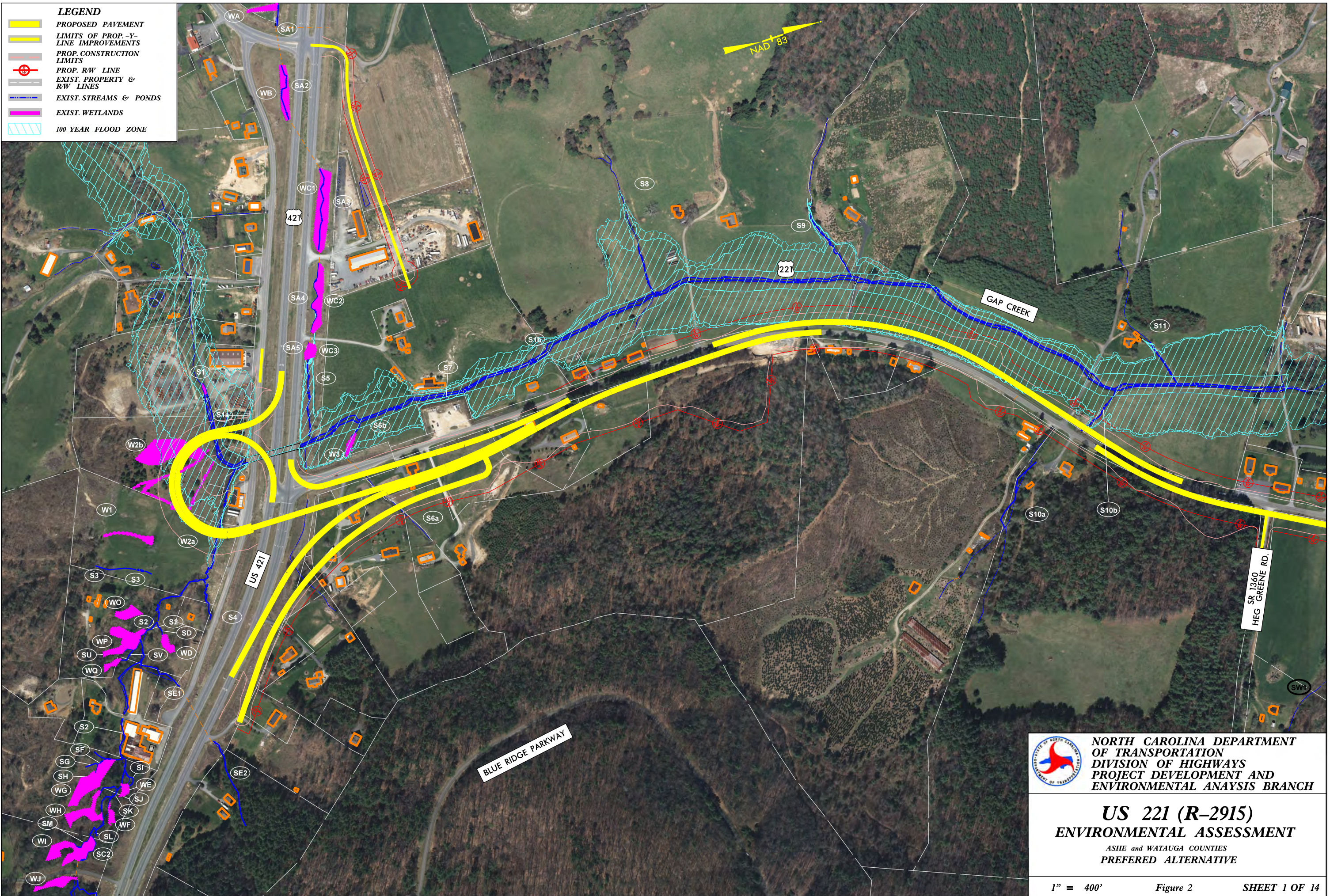




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ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS BRANCH**

**US 221 (R-2915)
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**
 ASHE and WATAUGA COUNTIES
PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

LEGEND










-  PROPOSED PAVEMENT
-  LIMITS OF PROP. -Y- LINE IMPROVEMENTS
-  PROP. CONSTRUCTION LIMITS
-  PROP. RW LINE
-  EXIST. PROPERTY & RW LINES
-  EXIST. STREAMS & PONDS
-  EXIST. WETLANDS
-  100 YEAR FLOOD ZONE

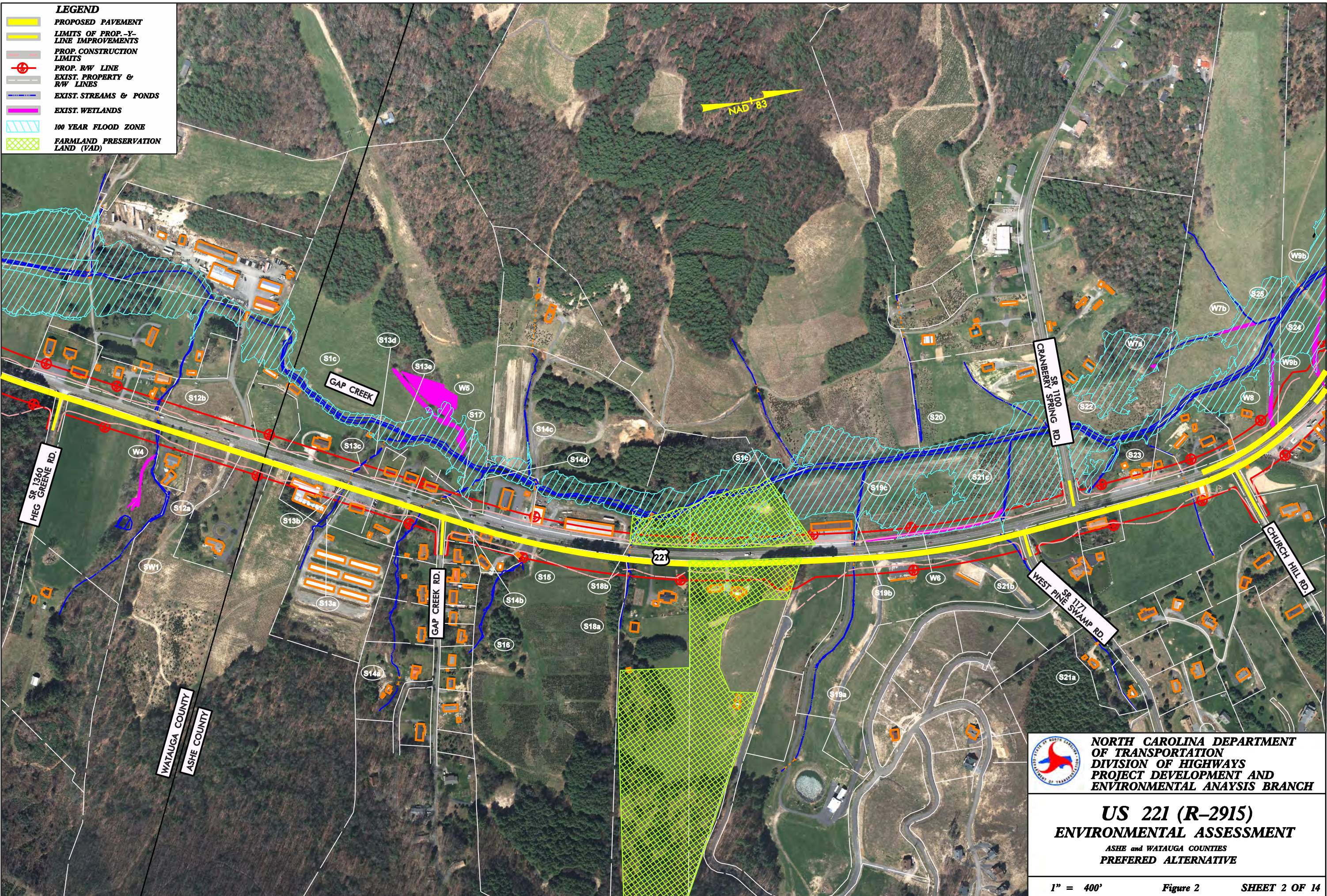




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

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-  FARMLAND PRESERVATION LAND (VAD)

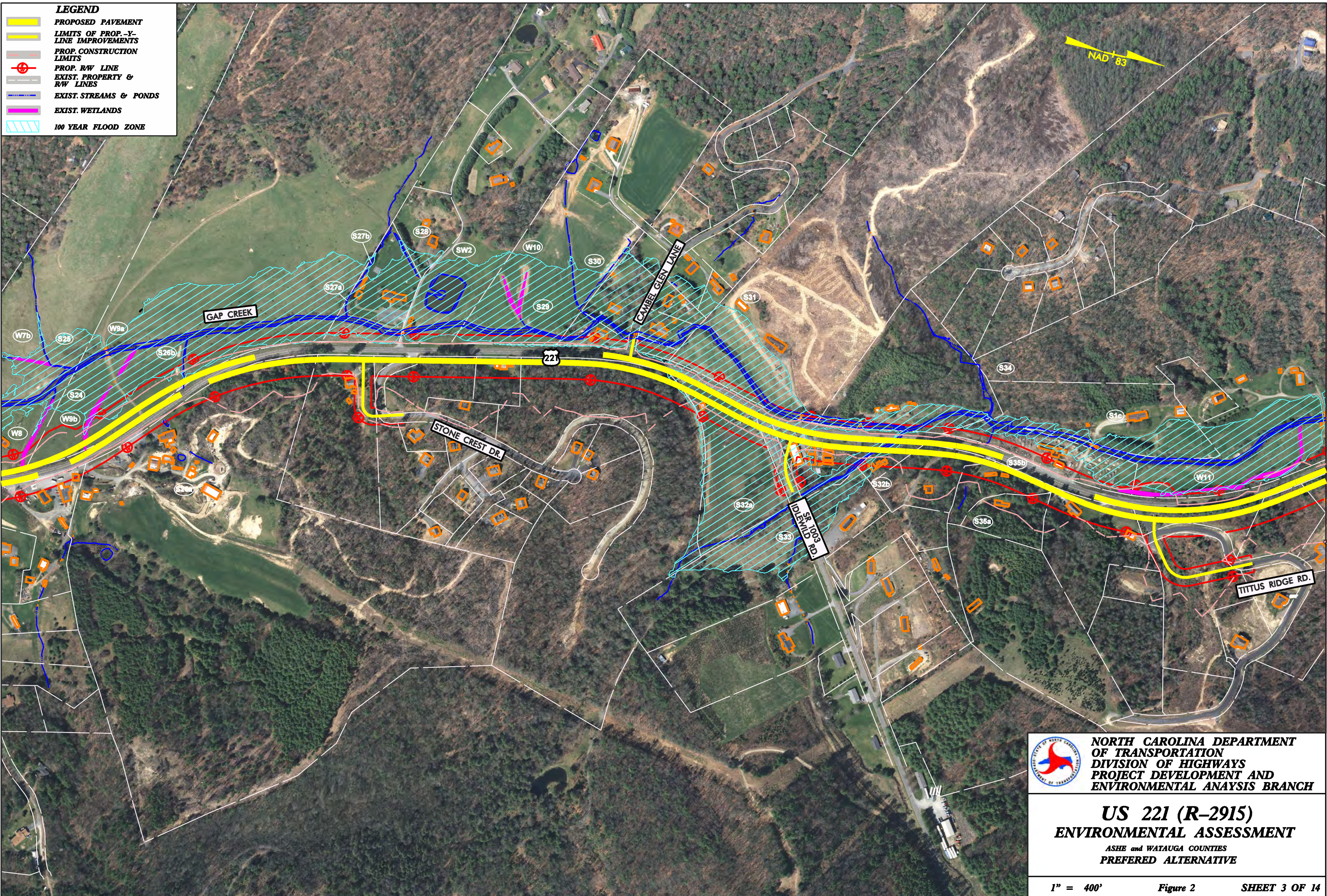




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

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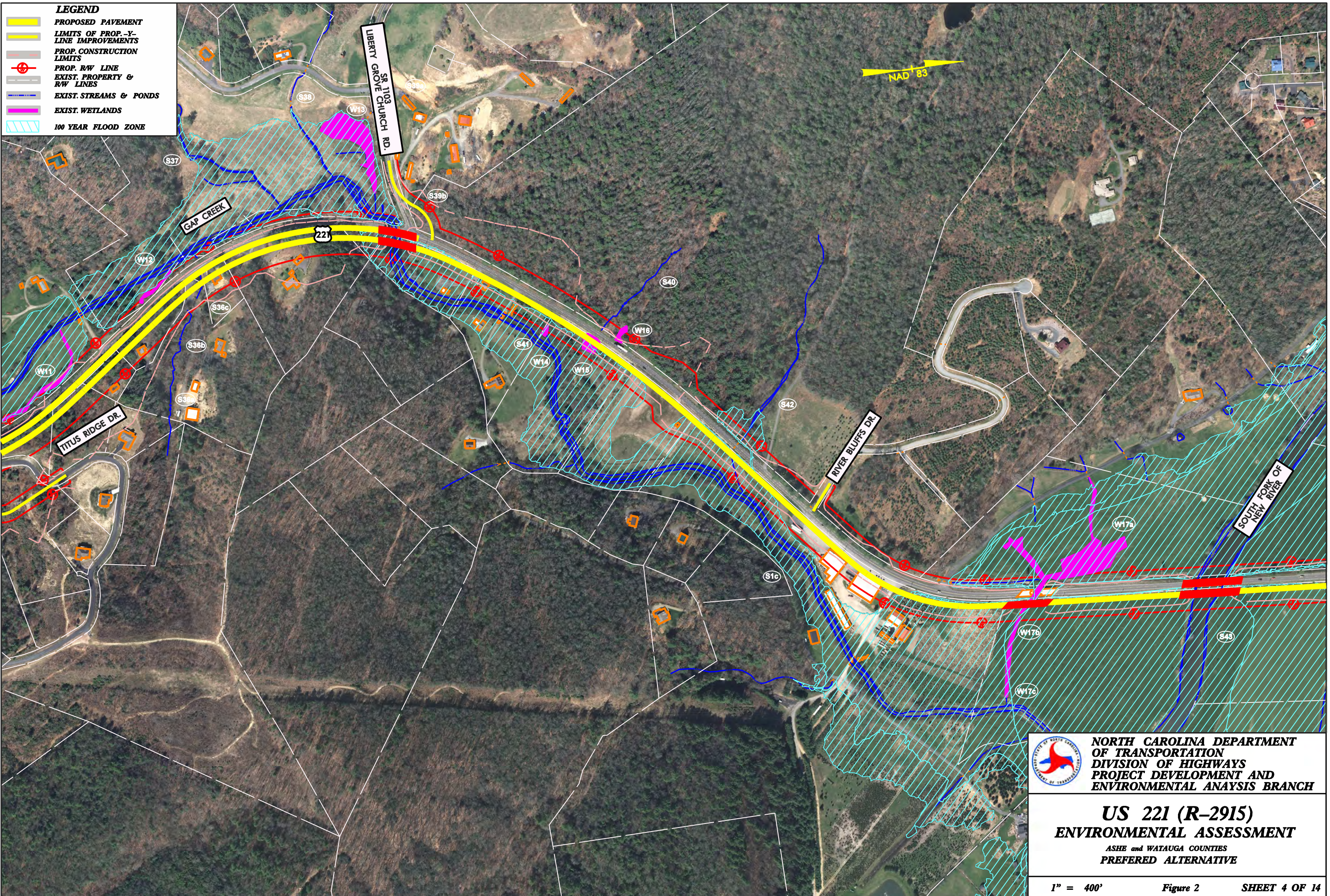


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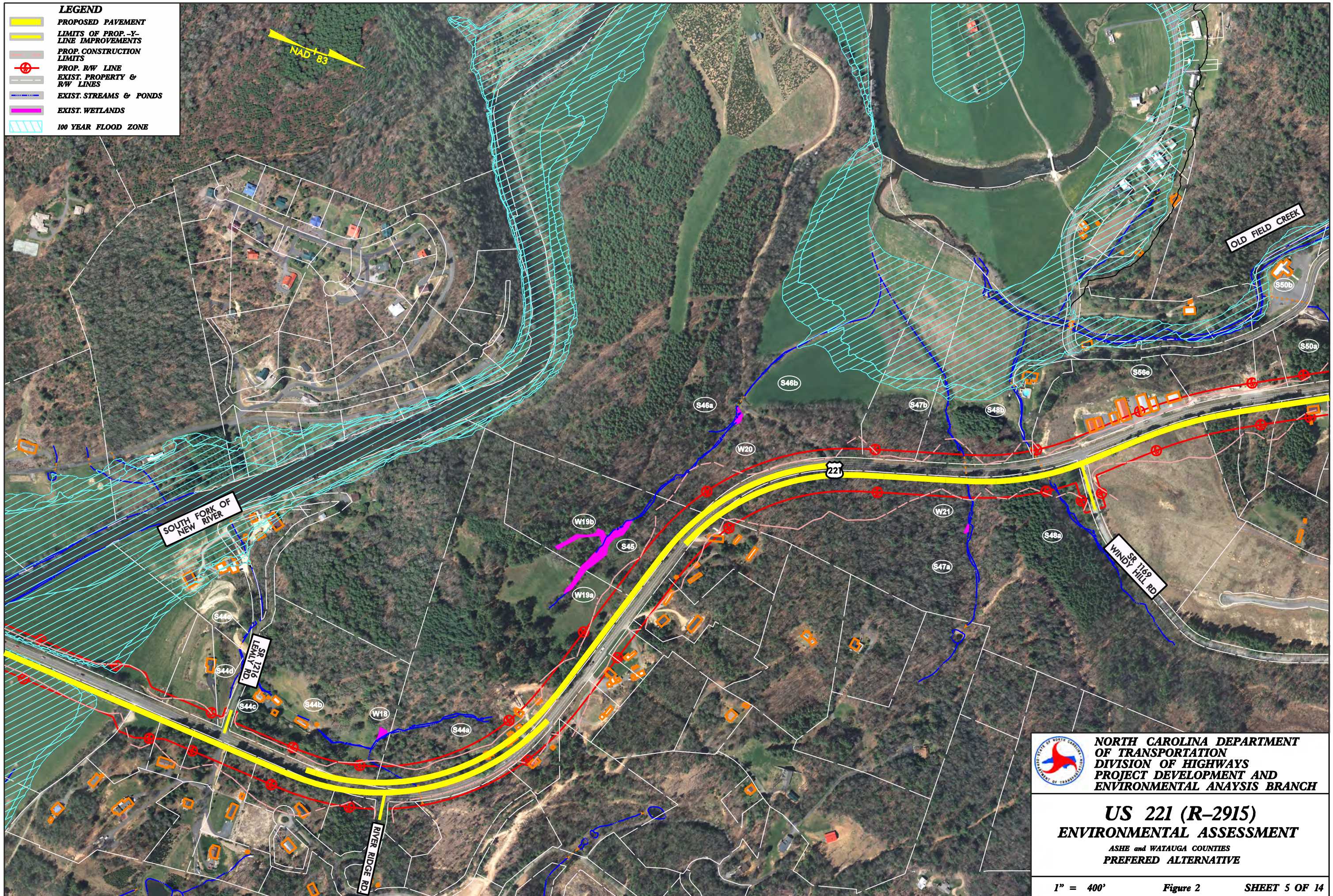
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



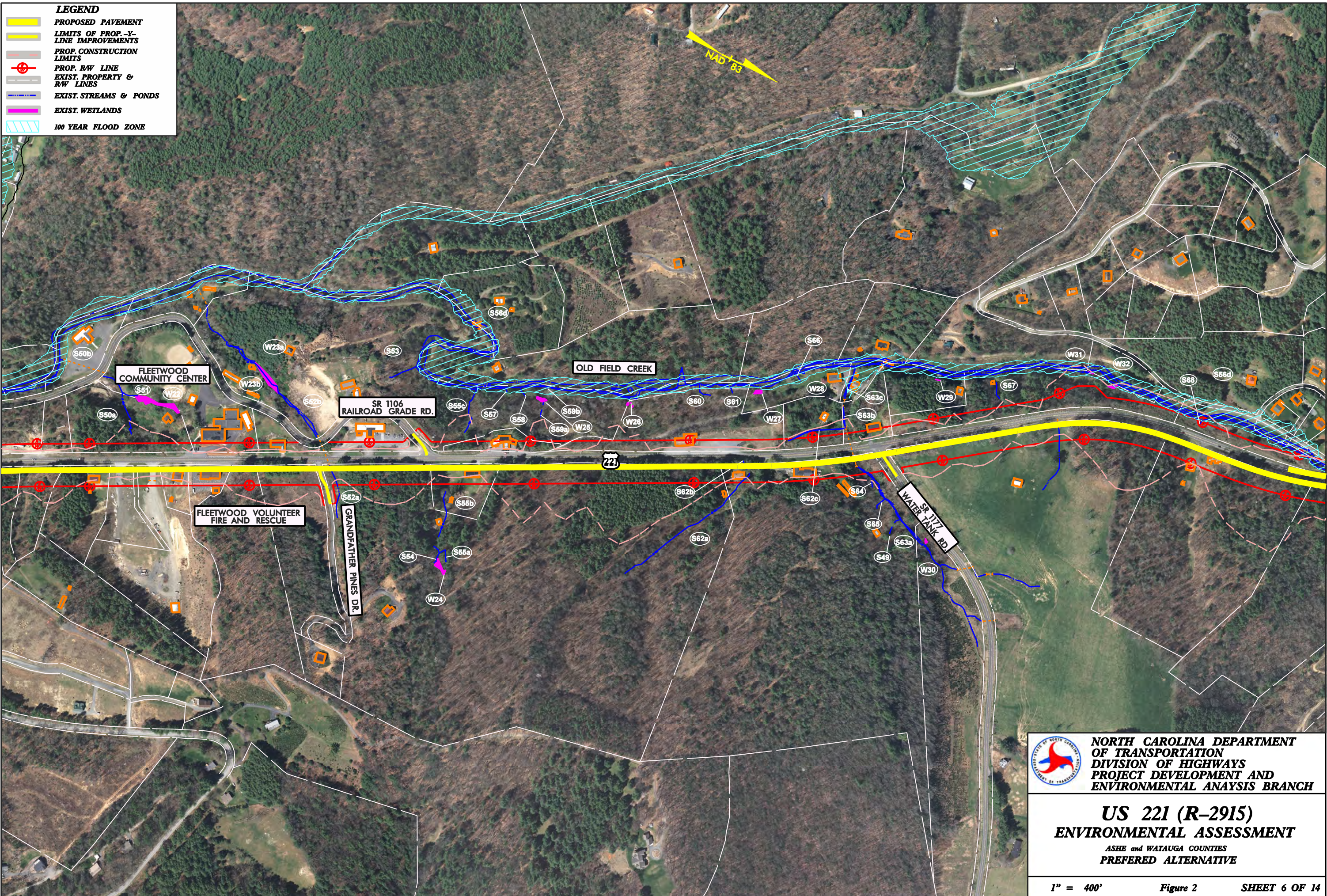

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1" = 400' Figure 2 SHEET 5 OF 14

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



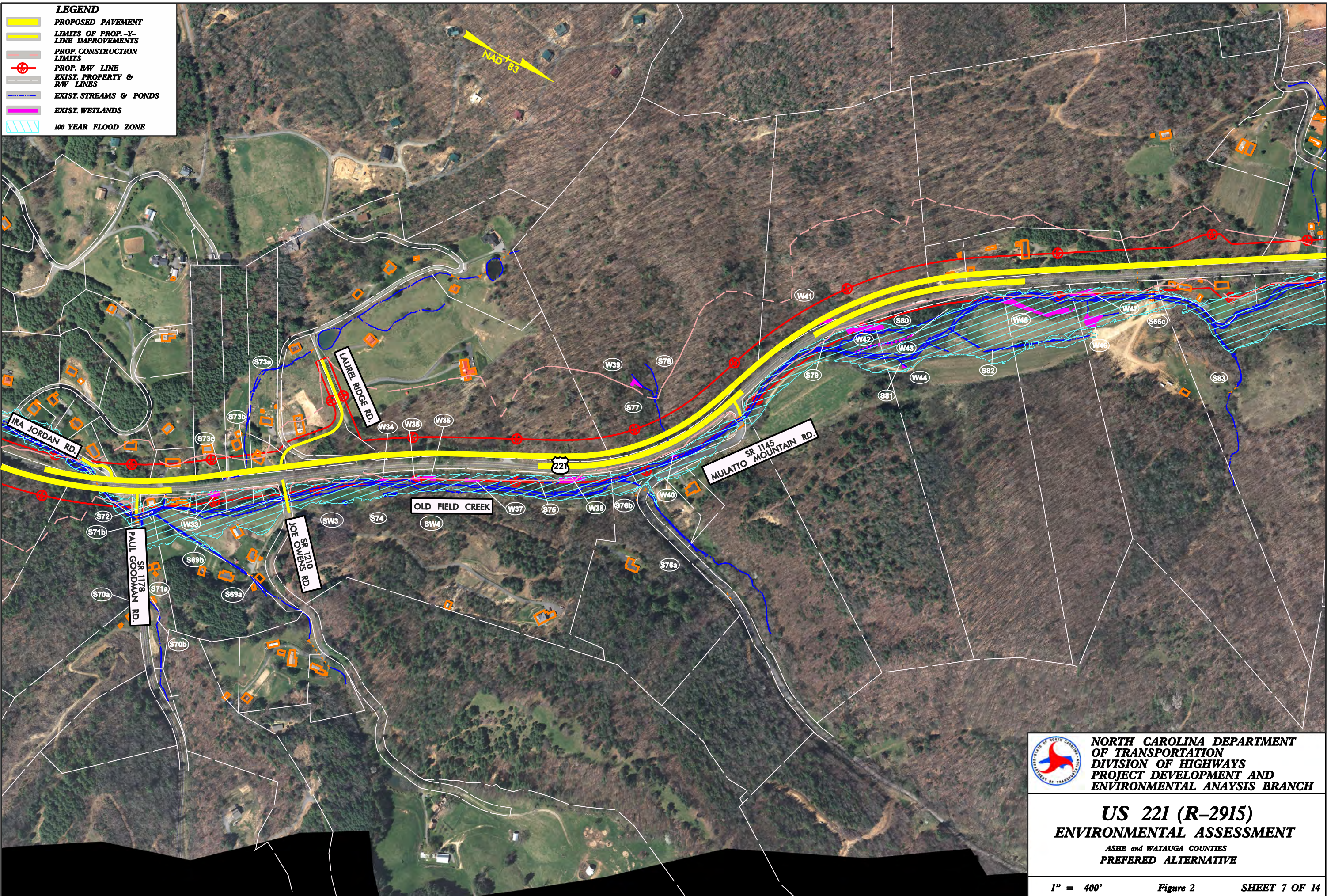
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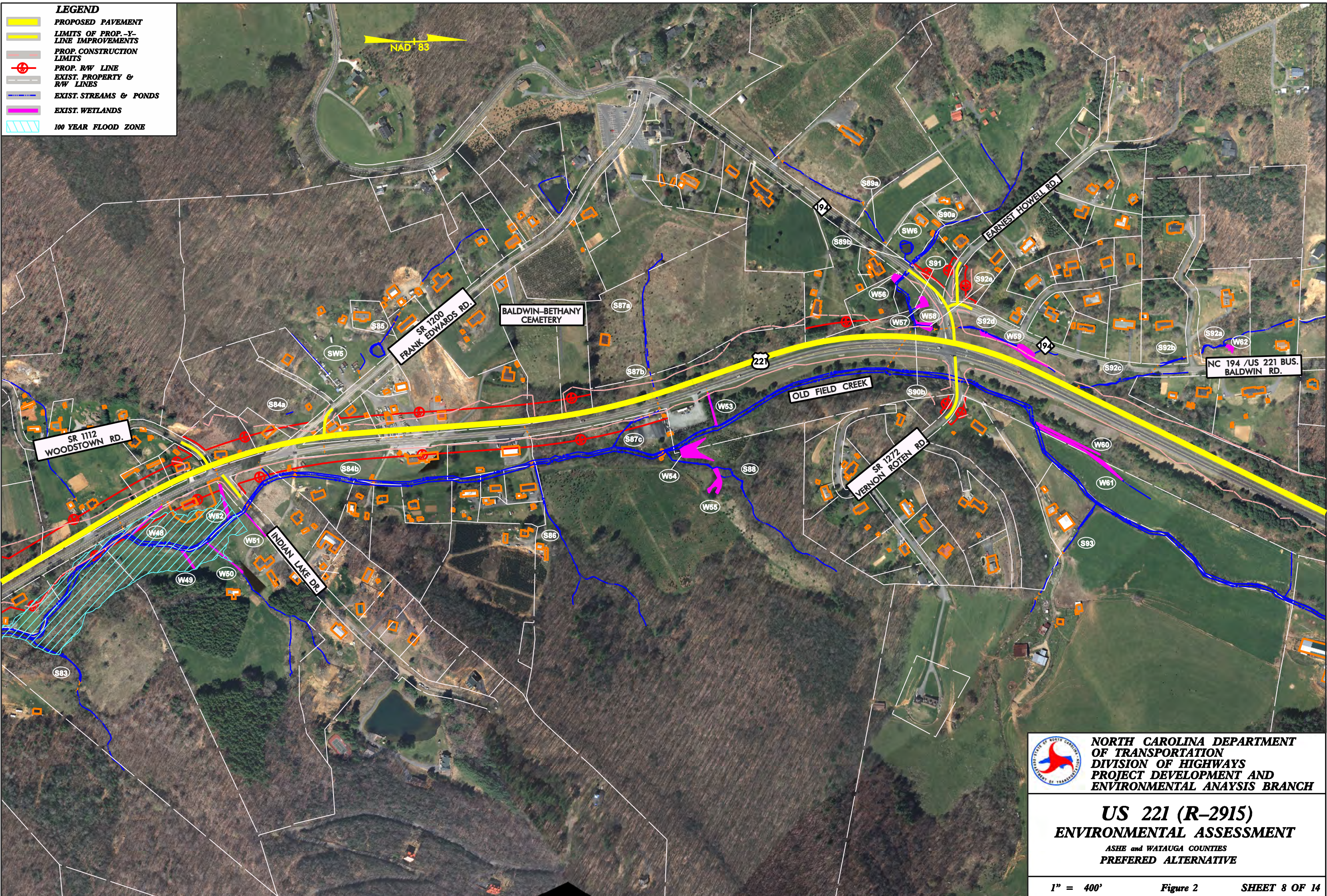
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



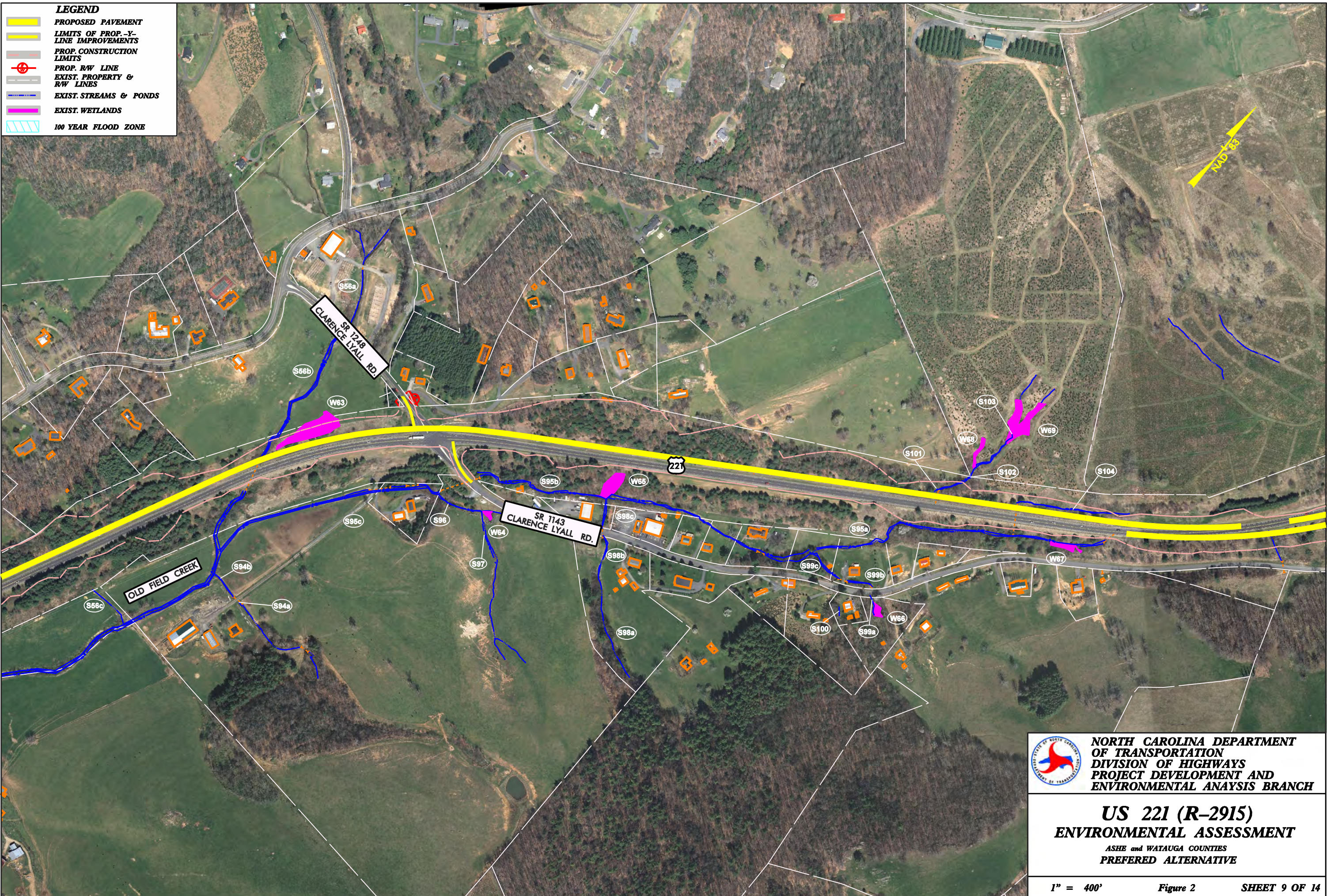
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

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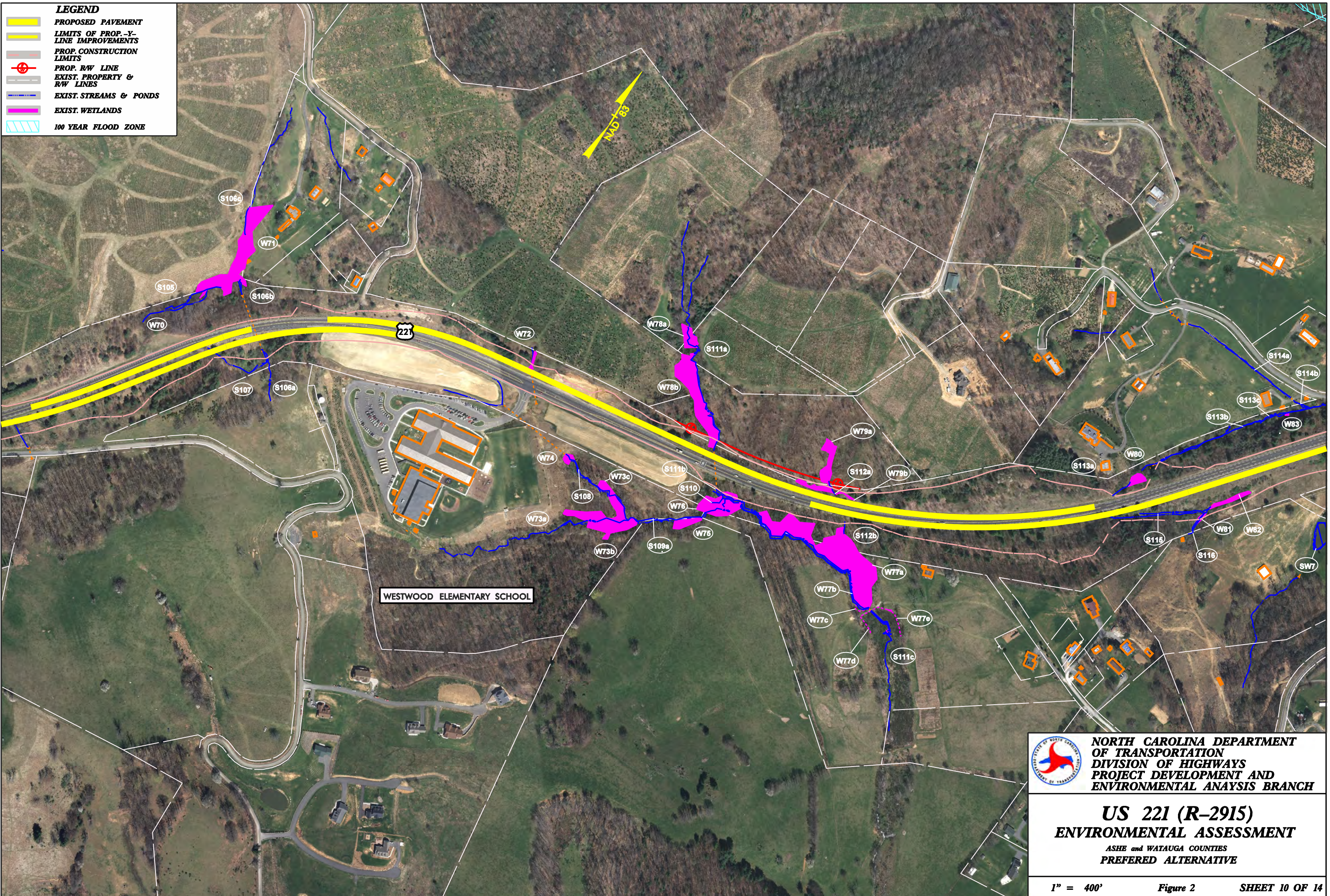




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

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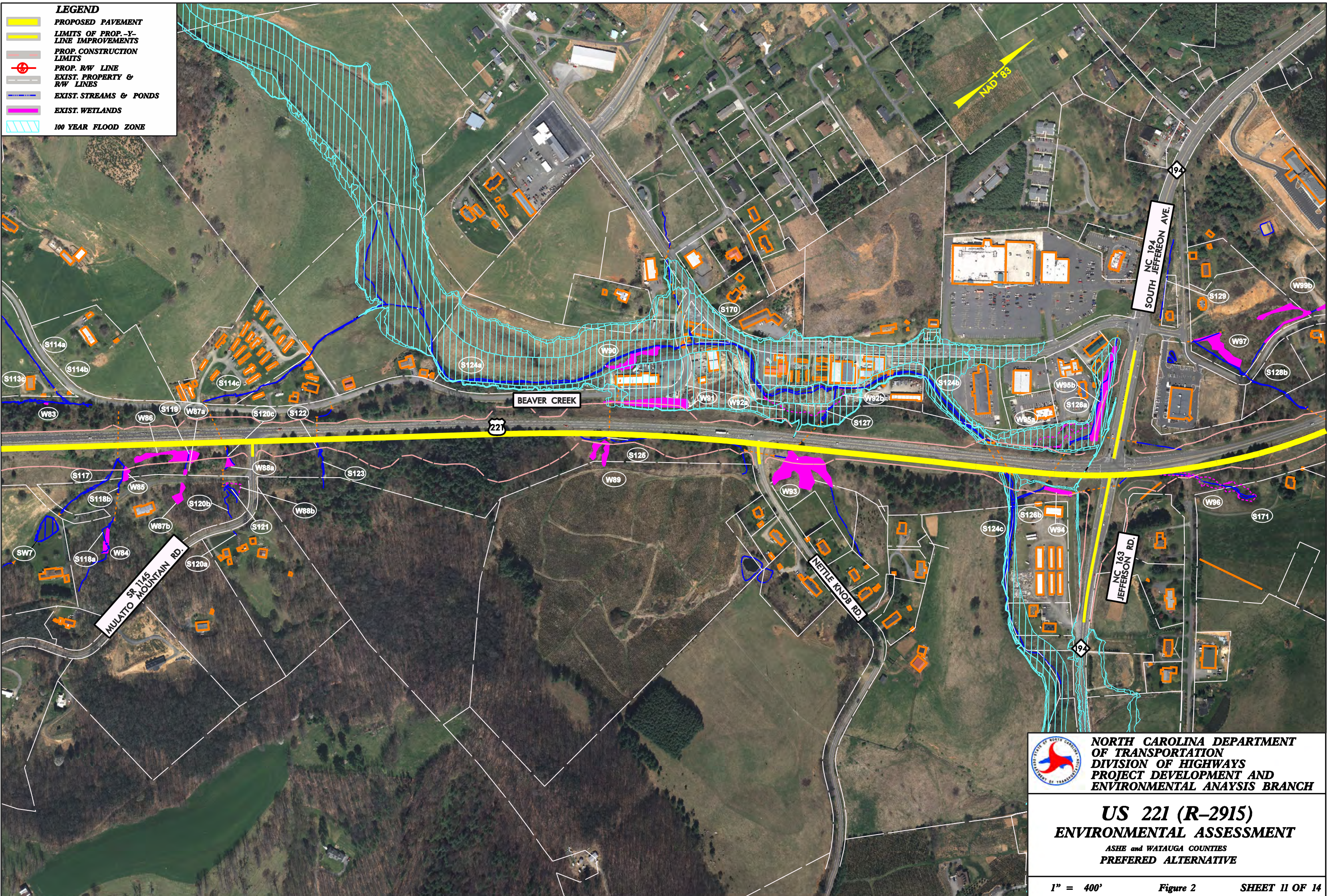




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

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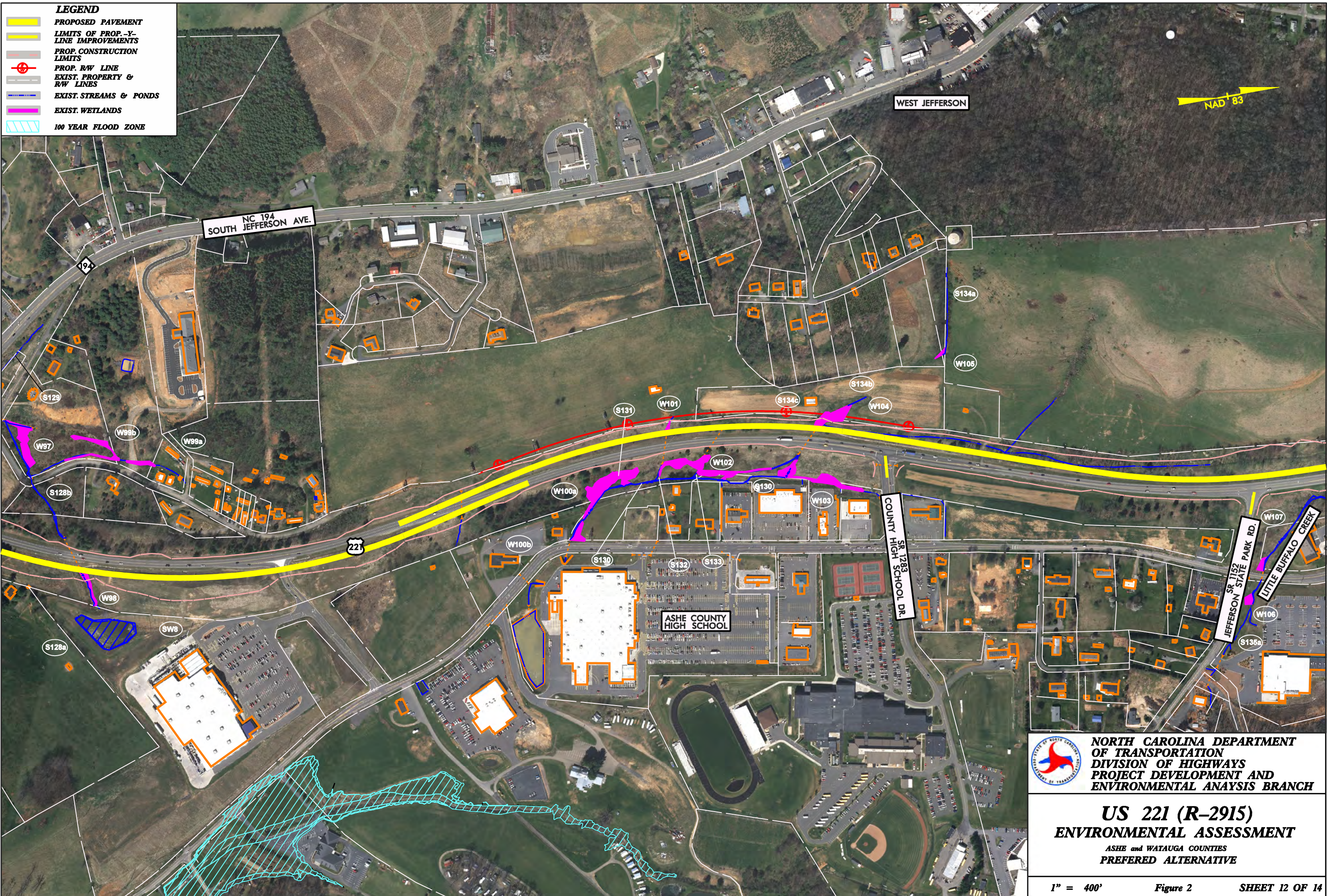



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

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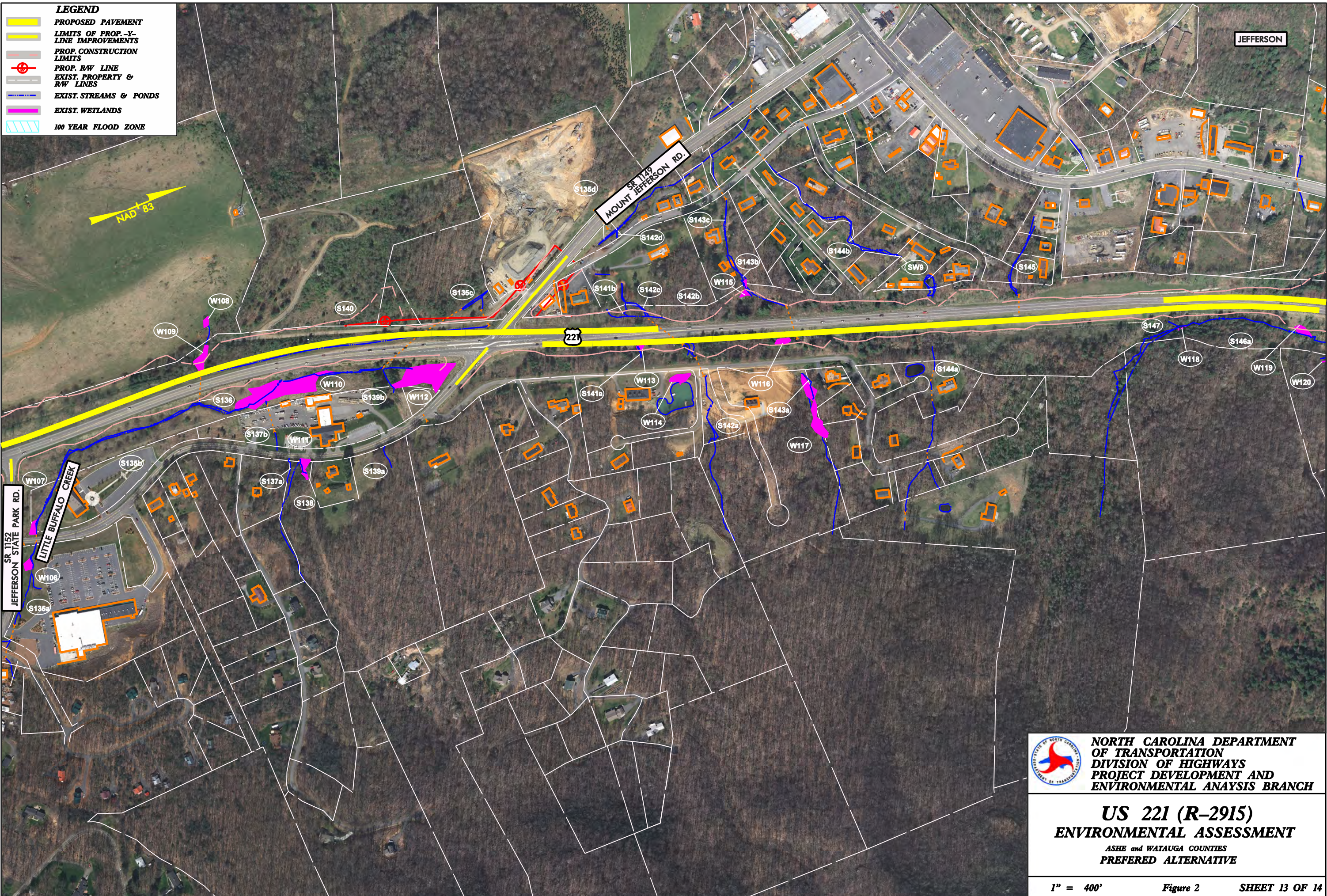


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JEFFERSON

SR 1149
MOUNT JEFFERSON RD.

221

SR 1152
JEFFERSON STATE PARK RD.









LITTLE BUFFALO CREEK

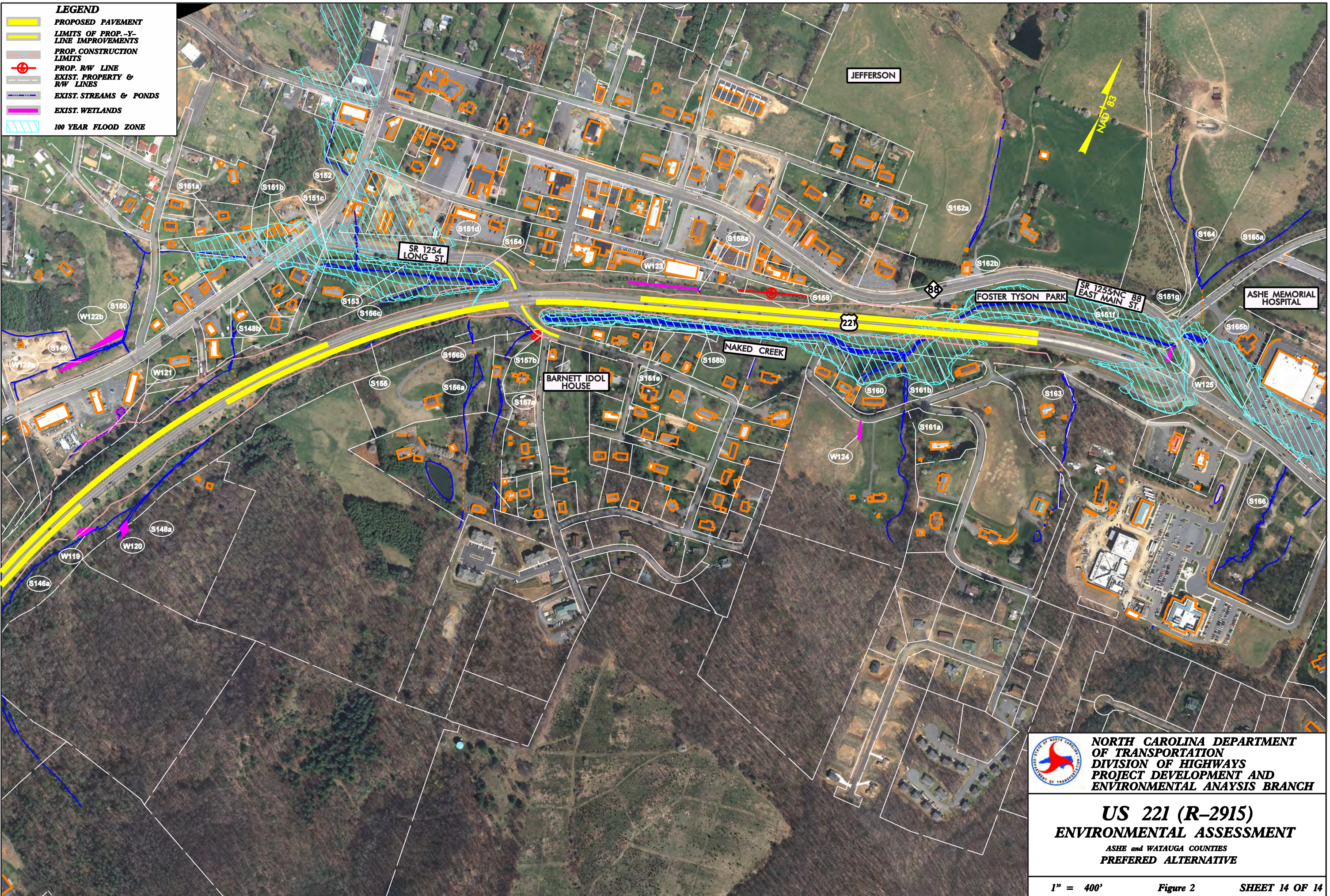



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