



PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Purpose of Evaluation

Please use the following space to explain briefly why you are seeking an evaluation of this property.

This PIF was produced by DHR staff to support the use of ESHPF Hurricanes Florence and Michael funding by the Town of Halifax to stabilize the Kings Bridge Piers, which would be considered contributing to the historic district. This historic district was recommended potentially eligible during a compliance survey in 2008 and has the support of the Town of Halifax. If determined eligible, a full NRHP Nomination would also be funded through the ESHPF grant.

Are you interested in applying for State and/or Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits? Yes _____ No X

Are you interested in receiving more information about DHR’s easement program? Yes _____ No X

1. General Information

District name(s): Banister River Navigation Improvements Historic District

Main Streets and/or Routes: Along the Banister River from the falls at Meadville to the confluence with the Dan River just east of South Boston

City or Town: Halifax, Meadville

Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located: Halifax County

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: Approximately 1000 acres

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban _____ Suburban _____ Town X Village X Hamlet X Rural X

Briefly describe the district’s overall setting, including any notable landscape features:

The Banister River is an approximately 65 mile long tributary of the larger Dan River. The 23 mile long navigable section that the district encompasses meanders in a general northwesterly direction through rural, central Halifax County from its confluence with the Dan River about 6 miles east of South Boston, past the Town of Halifax, to the falls at Meadville.

3. Architectural/Physical Description

Architectural Style(s): N/A, the resources consist of engineering features.

If any individual properties within the district were designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: None known

If any builders or developers are known, please list here: Roanoke River Navigation Company

Date(s) of construction (can be approximate): 1787, Circa. 1791 and Circa 1831

Are there any known threats to this district? Erosion, storm damage

Narrative Description:

In the space below, briefly describe the general characteristics of the entire historic district, such as building patterns, types, features, and the general architectural quality of the proposed district. Include prominent materials and noteworthy building details within the district, as well as typical updates, additions, remodelings, or other alterations that characterize the district..

The Bannister River Navigation Improvements Historic District is a linear district confined to the areas within or immediately adjacent to the 23 mile long segment of the Banister River between its confluence with the Dan River about 6 miles east of South Boston to the falls at Meadville. Noted architectural and engineering features of the river include multiple late eighteenth-to-early-nineteenth century stone wing dams, along with mill sluices, bridges, the Halifax-Bannister Dam (041-0156), the Meadville Canal (44HA0279), and the Kings Bridge Piers. With further research and investigation, additional resources and features may be identified.

- **Wing Dams:** The wing dams are the most prominent and significant resources found in the district. These “V”-shaped dams were built of stones at intervals along the waterway to insure river navigability. The dams speed up the water that runs over them, thereby creating a channel for bateaus to traverse and a reduction in sediment accumulation, which decreases the amount of dredging that would be required. Noted canal expert William E. Trout III noted that the wing dams in the Banister River, south of the Halifax-Banister Dam, are some of the best preserved in Virginia. Noted examples within the district include Cows Ford Bridge Wing Dams (44HA0252), Kings Bridge Wing Dams (44HA0251), and Wing Dams Under Route 360 Bridge (041-5311-0001).
- **Dams:** The Halifax-Bannister Dam (041-0156) was built as a mainstream impoundment in 1921 and the Banister Lake which was created serves as a drinking water reservoir for the Town of Halifax. It was built at the former site of Winbish’s Dam and bateau lock (Upper Reach n.d.).
- **Canals:** Canals were important for transporting goods into towns. The only previously recorded canal is the now buried Meadville Canal (44HA0279). Meadville an important commercial center in the region and a primary bateau port when it was founded around 1800 (Department of Conservation and Recreation [DCR] 2012). Evidence of other canals are likely present in the district as well.
- **Bridges:** Both vehicular and railroad bridges cross the river though the district. The oldest remnants of this are the stone piers of the Kings Bridge, originally constructed in 1787, which is located in the Town of Halifax (Jacobe 2007). Other bridges include two Norfolk and Southern Railroad trestles, one in the Town of Halifax and the other near Wolf Trap, the ca. 1962 Bridge 6097 Wolf Trap Road (041-5005), and the ca. 1959 Bridge 6152 (041-0055-0012). Other abutments and bridge ruins are also located in the district (DCR 2012)

- Other resources: Other remnants of commerce and navigation are also located in the district including mill ruins, navigational sluices and hauling walls, though none have been recorded at this time (DCR 2012, Jacobe 2007).

As most of the district has not been formally surveyed, the estimated number of resources that may contribute to the Banister River Navigation Improvements Historic District is unknown. As of 2019, eight resources have been previously recorded, though not all will be considered contributing due to their age. Most resources remain in good condition, though erosion and large storms may threaten them over time.

Discuss the district's general setting and/or streetscapes, including current property uses (and historic uses if different), such as industrial, residential, commercial, religious, etc. For rural historic districts, please include a description of land uses.

As with most eighteenth and early-nineteenth century inland water transportation systems throughout the state, the advent of rail transportation ended the use of the river for the bateau. The Banister River is currently used primarily for recreation and it is a designated Virginia Scenic River as well as a part of the Southern Virginia Wild Blueway (DCR 2012). The river has been able to maintain its rural character, according to a report by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation completed in 2012:

“The Banister river corridor contains few signs of human development. Several houses and cabins may be seen along the route, but they are few and far between. A wildlife viewing platform with picnic tables is located at Molliver Vineyards, which offers a pleasant rest spot for paddlers. Several other areas have sitting areas and hammocks along the river's edge, but no buildings are present. The greatest concentration of buildings are a number of houses along the shore of Banister Lake. Other human interventions include bridges and utility line crossings (DCR 2012).”

4. District's History and Significance

In the space below, briefly describe the history of the district, such as when it was established, how it developed over time, and significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property. Please list all sources of information used to research the history of the property. (It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or family genealogies to this form.) Normally, only information contained on this form is forwarded to the State Review Board.

If the district is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

Historic Context

Before European contact, Native Americans constructed fish dams along the Banister River. As settlers moved into the area they continued the use of the river through additional fish dams as well as the construction of bateau sluices, mills, and dams, some of which have ruins still visible on the river today (Upper Reach n.d.). By the late eighteenth-century the river had so many of these elements that a petition to the state legislature was filed in 1791 stating that the Bannister River was so “choked up with stone stops and mill dams” and that it needed to be cleared to allow for the passage of fish and boats (Upper Reach n.d.). A later 1798 petition to the General Assembly requested the creation of the town of Meadville, which would become the primary port in Halifax County, and noted that passage to Meadeville from the Dan River was now navigable by bateau (Jacobe 2007).

Large, state-wide river improvement projects began in the first part of the nineteenth century. In 1815 the Roanoke Navigation Company was chartered jointly by North Carolina and Virginia:

“The company was responsible for constructing and maintaining a three-part system of canals and dams that facilitated river traffic and commerce. The first section consisted of the lower tidewater of the Roanoke, which stretched over 100 miles, and was to be cleared for large craft such as steamboats and barges. Second the falls above Weldon where the Roanoke dropped 100 feet in only a few miles required a nine mile bateau canal with locks. Finally the upper Roanoke, Staunton, Dan and their tributaries encompassing more than 300 miles were to be made navigable for bateau by clearing and sluicing” (Jacobe 2007).

The primary rivers and tributaries were improved first by the Roanoke Navigation Company, so it was not until 1831 that they began work along the Bannister River, when the already existing navigational systems were improved and extended. In 1835, over 6000 hogsheads of tobacco and 10,000 barrels of flour were transported and \$7,000 in tolls were collected along the routes improved by the Roanoke Navigation Company in Southside Virginia. This sheer amount of good means there were likely hundreds of bateaus traveling along these waterways, including many up and down the Bannister River (Jacobe 2007).

Most bateau pilots were enslaved or free Black men who transported goods along the rivers. Not much research has been done on their contributions to these transportation networks in Southside Virginia, and further investigation is needed to fully understand their important involvement in both the building of and transporting along, these navigational improvements.

As with most eighteenth and early-nineteenth century inland water transportation systems throughout the state, the advent of rail transportation ended the use of the river for the bateau. By the mid-nineteenth century, the railroad allowed farmers and manufacturers to transport many more goods at a faster rate. In 1921 the Banister-Halifax dam was built to create a reservoir, which cuts off navigability just north of the

Town of Halifax. Partially due to the dam, larger boats are not able to gain access to the southern section of the Banister River, and it has remained fairly rural and allowed for the preservation of historic navigational improvements such as the wing dams.

Statement of Significance

The Banister River Navigation Improvement Historic District is recommended eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A at the local level for its significance to broad patterns of trade and transportation in antebellum Southside Virginia as well as Criterion C for engineering as a functioning example of nineteenth century river navigation. This district is also likely to yield information important to history and pre-history, particularly as other features of Banister River navigation are identified and investigated, therefore the district is recommended eligible under Criterion D.

The period of significance spans from 1787 when the King's Bridge was built to 1921 when the Halifax-Banister Dam was constructed, effectively cutting off navigability.

References:

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)
2012 "Banister Scenic River Report, Halifax County, Virginia." Department of Conservation and Recreation Division of Planning and Recreation Resources. Electronic document, <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/document/srreportban.pdf>. Accessed August 2020.

Jacobe, Stephanie A.T.
2007 "Banister River Wing Dam Assessment: Route 360 Banister River Replacement Project, Halifax County". The Louis Berger Group, Inc. On file at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

Upper Reach.
n.d. "Banister River Blueway, King's Bridge, Halifax, Virginia, Roanoke River Basin". The Upper Reach Roanoke River Basin Association. Electronic document, http://www.upperreach.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=47&Itemid=192. Accessed August 2020.

5. Property Ownership (Check as many categories as apply):

Private: X Public\Local X Public\State _____ Public\Federal _____

6. Applicant/Sponsor (Individual and/or organization sponsoring preparation of the PIF, with contact information. For more than one sponsor, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)

name/title: Caitlin Sylvester, ESHPF Grant Program Coordinator
organization: Department of Historic Resources
street & number: Kensington Avenue
city or town: Richmond state: Virginia zip code: _____
e-mail: caitlin.sylvester@dhr.virginia.gov telephone: _____

Applicant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

• • Signature required for processing all applications. • •

In the event of organization sponsorship, you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: _____

Daytime Telephone: _____

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than applicant/sponsor listed above)

name/title: _____
organization: _____
street & number: _____
city or town: _____ state: _____ zip code: _____
e-mail: _____ telephone: _____

7. Notification

In some circumstances, it may be necessary for DHR to confer with or notify local officials of proposed listings of properties within their jurisdiction. In the following space, please provide the contact information for the local County Administrator, City Manager, and/or Town Manager.

name/title: Carl Espy, Town Manager

locality: Town of Halifax

street & number: 70 South Main Street

city or town: Halifax state: Virginia zip code: 24558

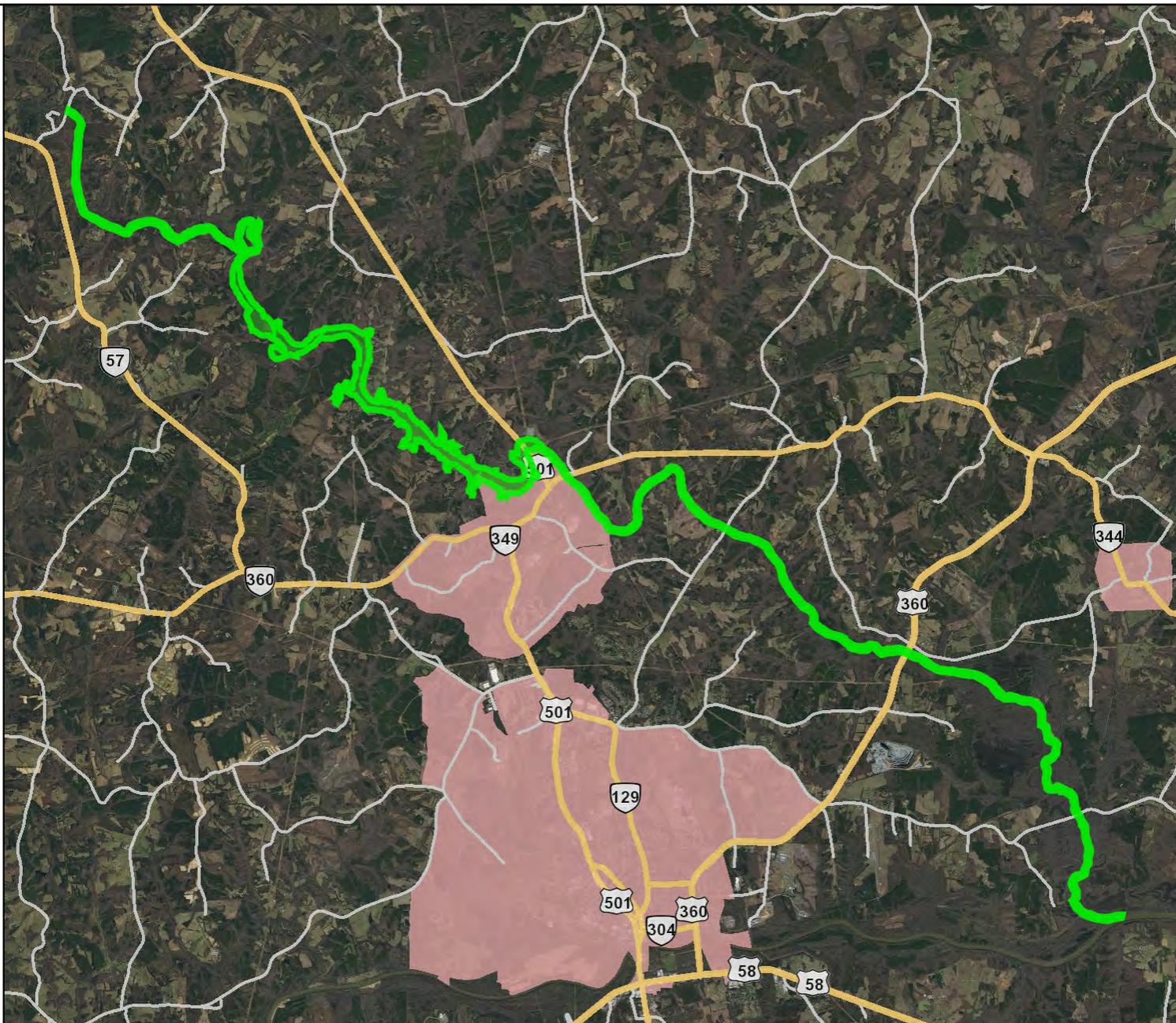
telephone: 434-476-2343



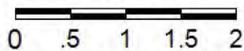
Legend

Roads (200,000)

-  Interstate
-  Primary Highway
-  Secondary
-  County Boundaries
-  Jurisdictional Boundary
-  Towns



Miles



1:144,448 / 1"=2 Miles

Title:

Date: 9/1/2020

DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR's Richmond office.

Notice if AE sites: Locations of archaeological sites may be sensitive the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and Code of Virginia §2.2-3705.7 (10). Release of precise locations may threaten archaeological sites and historic resources.

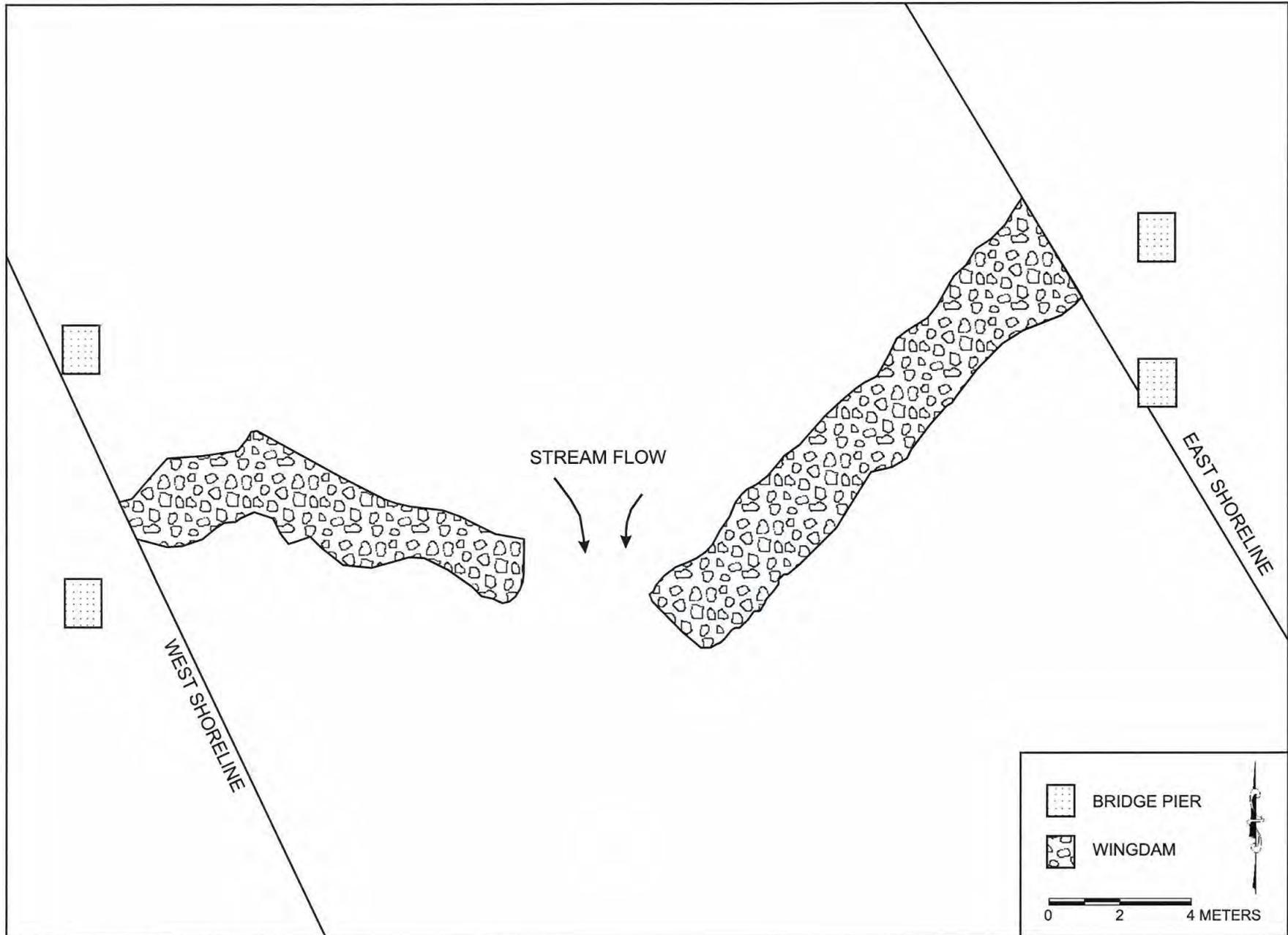
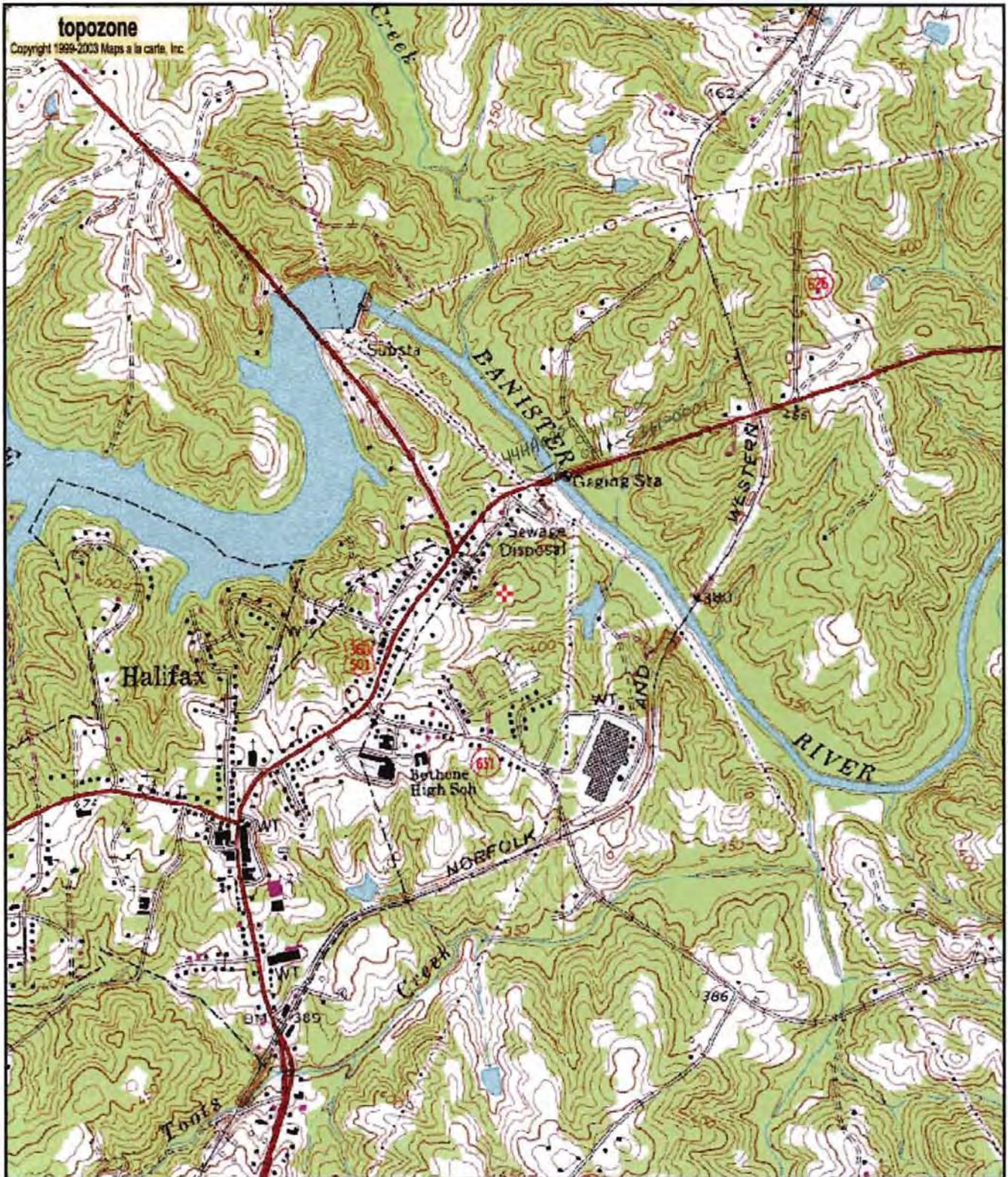


FIGURE 3: Plan View of Wingdam



0 0.3 0.6 0.9 1.2 1.5 km
 0 0.2 0.4 0.6 0.8 1 mi
 UTM 17 685757E 4071485N (NAD27)
Banister Town, USGS Halifax (VA) Quadrangle
 Projection is UTM Zone 17 NAD83 Datum

M*
 G
 M=-8.861
 G=1.247

041-5311-0001 Wing Dams under Route 360 Bridge Halifax, VA
 Part of Banister River Navigation Improvements Historic District (041-5311)
<http://www.topozone.com/print.asp?lat=36.77279&lon=-78.91864&size=l&u=4&layer=D...> 1/10/2008