

# Canton Paper Mill Site: Reuse Concepts

Preliminary discussion brief • Canton, North Carolina • October 2026

**Purpose.** Summarize early ideas for productive reuse of the former paper mill property, especially a regional multi-sport campus and a Pigeon River fishing and conservation club. This is a concept brief—not a feasibility study, engineering opinion, property survey, or investment recommendation.

## 1. Overall opportunity

The former mill site could be evaluated for a mix of recreation, sports, conservation, and adaptive reuse. A combined concept may be more resilient than relying on a single attraction: outdoor sports fields, reuse of suitable existing buildings, visitor amenities, river access, trails, and habitat restoration could serve different users and potentially be developed in phases.

The property has been described in public redevelopment discussions as roughly 185 acres, but total acreage must not be confused with usable or available acreage. Ownership, municipal purchases, easements, floodplain constraints, environmental conditions, and infrastructure needs must be confirmed from current records.

## 2. Regional multi-sport campus

### Possible components

- **Outdoor fields:** a conceptual starting point of 6–8 full-size soccer fields, some configured for football and field hockey, plus a showcase field with bleachers and lighting. Field sharing and scheduling would reduce duplication.
- **Indoor sports and training:** indoor turf for soccer and football training, and potentially courts for basketball or volleyball; strength training, sports medicine, camps, and clinics.
- **Tournament support:** restrooms, changing facilities, concessions, team gathering space, bus drop-off, parking, and event operations.
- **Public recreation:** trails, picnic areas, and riverfront open space where compatible with flood safety and ecological plans.
- **Adaptive reuse:** assess existing warehouses or other structures for feasible conversion before assuming all facilities need new construction.

### Preliminary land planning

| Component                                      | Conceptual allowance |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 6–8 fields and circulation                     | 18–28 acres          |
| Parking, access and bus areas                  | 5–10 acres           |
| Indoor facility and visitor amenities          | 3–6 acres            |
| Additional recreation, landscape and expansion | 8–16 acres           |
| Indicative total                               | 34–60 acres          |

These are rough conceptual allowances only. Actual needs depend on site geometry, field dimensions and buffers, parking standards, shared uses, grading, stormwater, flood design, and environmental restrictions. Do not assume that 34–60 contiguous usable acres exist.

## 3. Pigeon River trout fishing and conservation club

A river-oriented concept could combine guided fishing, fly-casting and fly-tying instruction, youth programs, conservation work, and a modest clubhouse or adaptive reuse of an existing building. A public-facing fishing and conservation center may be more flexible initially than a private club that promises exclusive trout fishing.

**Critical caveat:** the river's suitability for trout in the specific stretch beside the mill has not been established. The mill's industrial history and former discharge make site-specific water-quality, sediment, habitat, and contaminant assessment essential. Water quality at an upstream monitoring station cannot prove conditions at the proposed site.

A qualified fisheries biologist and relevant state agencies should assess summer water temperatures, dissolved oxygen, pH, conductivity, relevant contaminants, fish species and abundance, flows, sediment, habitat, and whether restoration could support a sustainable trout fishery. If trout are not viable, other fishing, environmental education, river restoration, trails, and recreation may still have value.

Private ownership of riverfront land does not automatically provide exclusive fishing rights in the river. Property boundaries, access rights, navigability, and North Carolina law require review before offering exclusive membership access.

## 4. Flooding, environmental conditions and site planning

- **Flood risk:** the Pigeon River corridor and Hurricane Helene impacts make flood mapping, hydrology, evacuation access, and resilient design central to any plan. Confirm current FEMA maps and local floodplain requirements.
- **Environmental due diligence:** industrial-site history may require Phase I and Phase II environmental site assessments, remediation planning, and review of North Carolina Brownfields options.
- **Zone uses by risk:** consider placing valuable permanent buildings and critical equipment on suitable higher ground; consider flood-compatible open space only where engineering and environmental review support it.
- **Artificial turf is not a shortcut:** flood velocities, infill, drainage, contamination, cleanup, and post-flood recovery need expert evaluation.
- **Property and infrastructure:** confirm current ownership, parcel boundaries, easements, utility capacity, demolition needs, access, and the exact acreage that is available for the proposed uses.

## 5. Topgolf or golf-entertainment option

A full-size Topgolf-style venue could be a separate component if demand and site conditions support it. Topgolf is not generally offered as a conventional franchise; potential approaches may involve a corporate development, real-estate, or build-to-suit arrangement. Earlier planning ranges discussed were approximately 9–15 acres and a broad \$30 million–\$60 million-plus development allowance, but these are not a Topgolf quote, confirmed current cost estimate, or guarantee of company interest. Land, site remediation, flood protection, financing, and local construction conditions can materially change costs.

## 6. Potential operating model and revenue

- Field rentals to clubs, schools, adult leagues, and tournament organizers.
- Tournament weekends, camps, clinics, and sports-performance services.
- Indoor training memberships or leases to specialist operators.
- Concessions, sponsorships, event rentals, and visitor partnerships with hotels and restaurants.
- Guided fishing, lessons, memberships where legally and ecologically appropriate, fly shop services, and conservation education.
- Public-private partnership options where public recreation, flood resilience, brownfield reuse, or conservation goals align with funding programs.

Revenue is not guaranteed. A demand study should quantify the number of teams, event weekends, field-hours, seasonality, travel catchment, competing facilities, hotel capacity, and willingness to pay before a financial forecast is prepared.

## 7. Recommended first steps

1. Meet with Town of Canton, Haywood County, and the current property owner/developer to understand their plan, parcel availability, and public goals.

2. Obtain current parcel maps, title/ownership information, existing building plans, utility information, flood maps, and available environmental reports.
3. Commission a high-level site constraints map identifying developable ground, floodways/floodplains, contamination areas, access, and candidate adaptive-reuse buildings.
4. Interview regional soccer, football, field hockey, school, college, youth sports, and adult league organizations to document demand and tournament needs.
5. Ask a fisheries biologist and state wildlife/water-quality contacts to evaluate the exact river reach before promoting trout fishing.
6. Prepare a phased concept plan and order-of-magnitude cost estimate only after the constraints and demand work are complete.

## 8. Useful starting points

- [Town of Canton Planning Department](https://www.cantonnc.com/planning/) — <https://www.cantonnc.com/planning/>
- [Two Banks Development / Spirtas Worldwide](https://www.spirtasworldwide.com/tbd) — <https://www.spirtasworldwide.com/tbd>
- [NC Wildlife Resources Commission — trout fishing](https://www.ncwildlife.gov/fishing/trout-fishing-north-carolina) — <https://www.ncwildlife.gov/fishing/trout-fishing-north-carolina>
- [NC Wildlife Resources Commission](https://www.ncwildlife.gov/) — <https://www.ncwildlife.gov/>
- [FEMA Flood Map Service Center](https://msc.fema.gov/portal/home) — <https://msc.fema.gov/portal/home>

## Important note on figures and statements

All land allocations and cost ranges in this brief are preliminary planning concepts. Publicly reported property acreage, transactions, and project status should be independently verified against current official records. This document does not establish the site's availability, suitability for development, trout-fishing viability, or financial feasibility.