

THE GATEWAY TO TOMORROW PLAN

GRAHAM COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA
SEPTEMBER 2015



TABLE OF CONTENTS

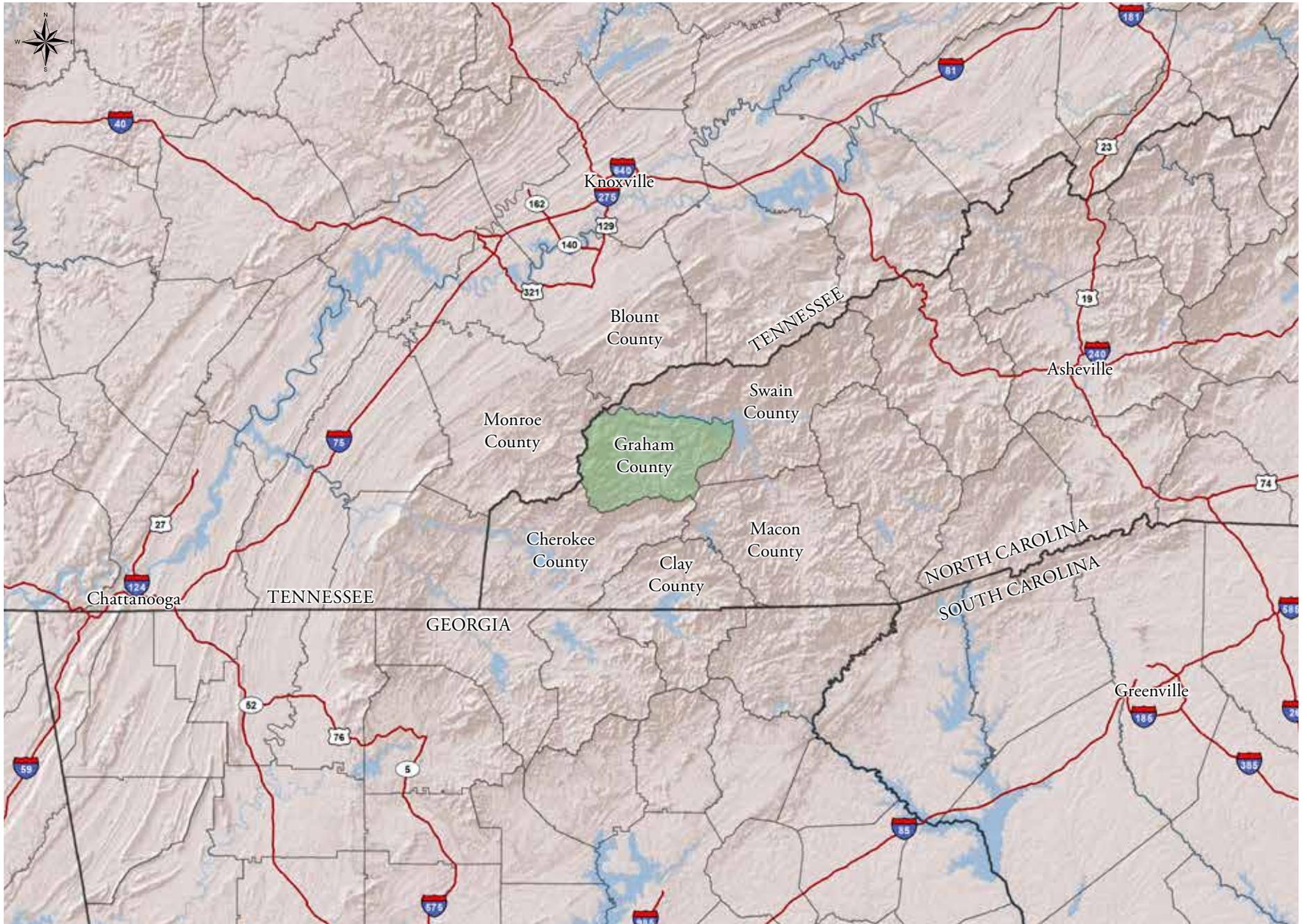
PART I: ANALYSIS	5
Land Stewardship11
Nature, Health, & Culture15
Demographics24
Transportation35
PART II: COMMUNITY INPUT	41
PART III: RECOMMENDATIONS	45
Land Stewardship & Community Facilities47
Nature, Health, & Culture65
Economic Development70
Transportation73
PART IV: IMPLEMENTATION	77
APPENDIX: CORRIDOR K	83

Throughout the plan, only those images that require credit are credited. Images from the planning team are not credited.



PART I: ANALYSIS

REGIONAL CONTEXT



INTRODUCTION

This plan is an effort on the part of the people of Graham County and a planning team to put forth a vision for the future of the county. The plan was drafted as part of Opt-In, the Opportunity Initiative of Southwestern North Carolina, so the plan recommendations are also coordinated with that larger regional vision and explore specific means to implement its goals.

As shown in the map on the previous page, Graham County is located in the mountains of western North Carolina. Robbinsville, the county seat, is 45 miles south of Knoxville, 85 miles northwest of Greenville, and 74 miles southwest of Asheville.

COUNTY HISTORY

The rugged mountains of Graham County date to tectonic activity some 480 million years ago, although their present topography was not created until the past 66 million years.

As the Ice Age ended approximately 11,000 years ago, the present ecosystem began to take hold and signs of the first human settlers appear. By the 1500s, the Cherokee people were practicing agriculture and had settled in small villages across what is now Graham County. A smallpox epidemic in 1738 significantly reduced the Cherokee population.

In 1838, the U.S. government forced the removal of the Cherokee people along the Trail of Tears, which required the construction of Graham County's first real road across Tatham Gap. Small numbers of white settlers entered the area after this, although Graham County was not formally constituted until 1872. It is named for a former governor and U.S.

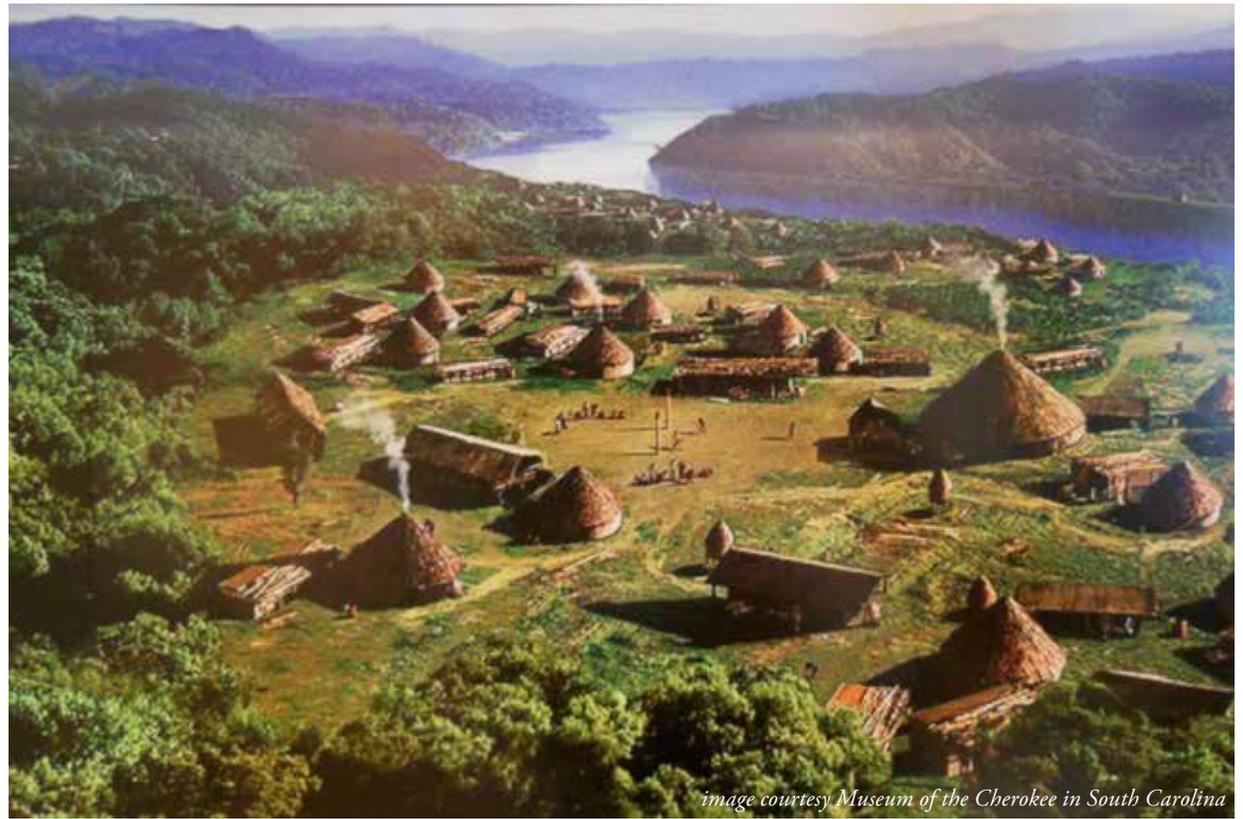


image courtesy Museum of the Cherokee in South Carolina

Small Cherokee villages dotted the landscape of what is now Graham County for thousands of years

senator named William A. Graham, who was born in Lincoln County.

Robbinsville (originally called Cheoah Valley) was the site of the first store in Graham County in the early 1840s. A post office opened in 1843.

The community of Yellow Creek was one of the earliest Graham County settlements. A log cabin meeting house was built there in the 1850s or 60s.

The community of Stecoah was settled around 1832. The famous school was constructed in 1926 and rebuilt after a fire in 1930.

The first few decades of the twentieth century saw the construction of three major dams in Graham County and a significant influx of temporary workers. These dams were due to the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA), which needed an enormous source of electricity for its aluminum production factory in Tennessee. The dams were the Cheoah Dam (which began construction in 1916), Santeetlah Dam (began in 1925), and Fontana Dam (began in 1942). The historic town of Fontana Dam dates from this era.

During this era, Graham County's wooden courthouse (the last in the state) was surrounded by stores in a rustic environment. Ox-drawn wagons or groups of Cherokee would travel to town to shop, alongside lumberjacks and farmers.

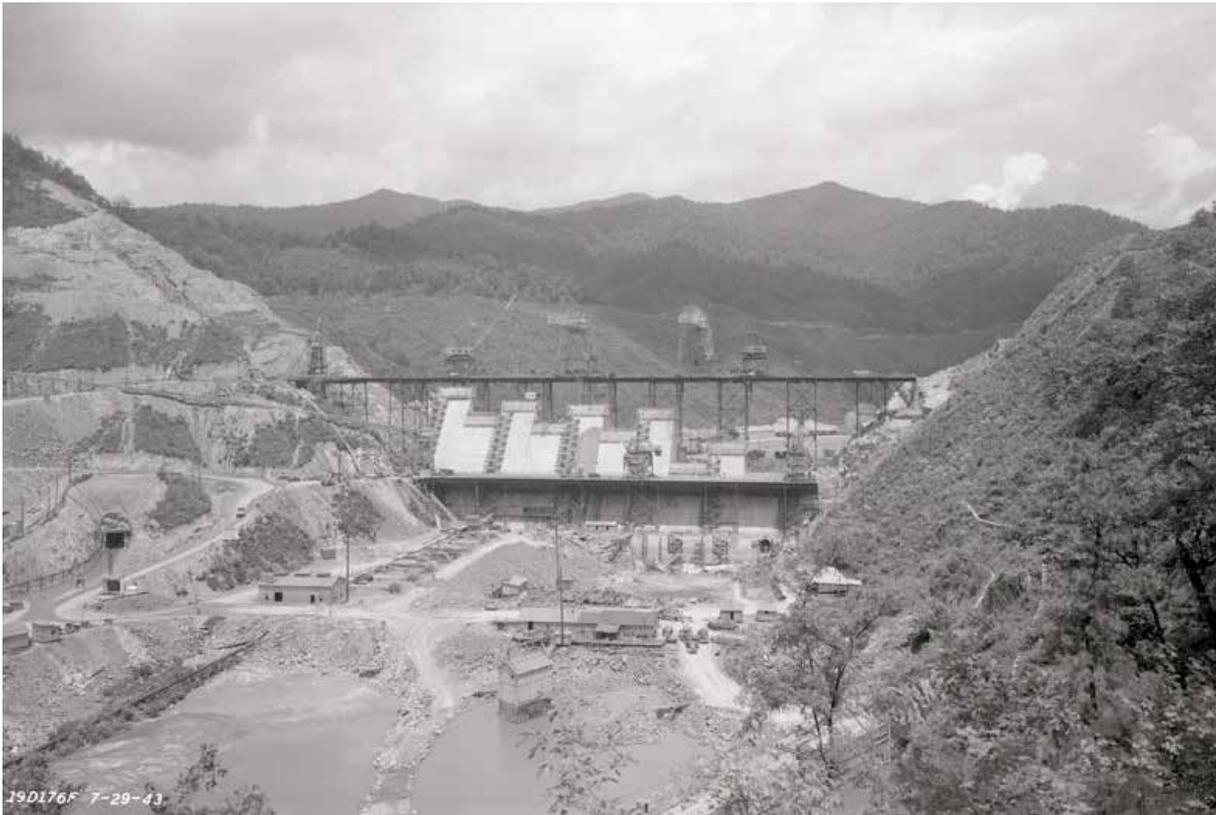
The logging industry has also been a significant part of Graham County's history. Logs were floated down streams in the 1800s and traveled by railroad in the 1900s. The first sawmill was located near the Little Snowbird Bridge.

The first railroad reached Graham County in 1906. The first automobile entered the county in 1931 by crossing Deal's Gap, the current location of U.S. Highway 129. The opening of the road to Tennessee allowed travel to Knoxville and other towns. With this road, the local tourist economy began.

The reservoirs further strengthened the tourist economy, along with the creation of Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest in 1926, the Great Smoky

Mountains National Park in 1934, and the Appalachian Trail in the 1930s.

sources: Wikipedia, Cherokee Chamber of Commerce, grahamchamber.com, Mountain Area Information Network, grahamcounty.net



Fontana Dam, completed in 1944, is the largest construction project in Graham County's history (approx. \$936 million in today's dollars)

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS PLANS

The following plans were reviewed in order to ensure that the recommendations of previous community planning efforts are preserved. A number of regional plans, listed below, are also relevant. They are not summarized here because of their broader perspective, but an effort has been made to align their recommendations with those in this plan.

- ♦ Opt-In: The Opportunity Initiative of Southwestern North Carolina
- ♦ Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Southwestern North Carolina
- ♦ Growing Local: Expanding the Western North Carolina Food and Farm Economy
- ♦ Region A Toolbox: Mountain Landscapes Initiative

GRAHAM REVITALIZATION ECONOMIC ACTION TEAM (GREAT) STRATEGIC PLAN

The GREAT organization is a 501(c)(3) community leadership group that is charged with addressing the civic, economic, social, and physical challenges facing Graham County. The 2013 Strategic Plan outlines the objectives and actions to achieve ongoing revitalization, including a chapter dedicated to economic development, business, and industry. Specifically, the strategic plan calls for the leadership in Graham to more actively support business recruitment, work with the Economic Development Commission to provide more business support and networking, grow creative entrepreneurial opportunities, and build an up-to-date infrastructure that will make Graham more competitive for investment.

Other sections detail strategies for planning for and growing tourism and cultural opportunities for

economic development, as well as pursuing downtown and community revitalization to improve resident's quality of life. The strategic planning process resulted in the creation of seven committees that mirrored the seven economic drivers identified in the plan. Each committee has an individual work plan that collectively work to achieve the vision of a Graham County where "traditional Appalachian culture lives, people flourish, and businesses thrive."

REIMAGINING ROBBINSVILLE

Funded by the Golden LEAF Foundation, this plan looks at the lack of investment in Robbinsville and recommends a number of measures: promoting

tourism, developing greenways/parks, revitalizing downtown, improving the appearance/design of the bypass, promoting local economic development, and initiating community dialogue on sensitive issues.

The plan includes a community profile with information on history, demographics, housing, infrastructure, employment, tourism, and natural/recreational/cultural resources. Tourism based on natural assets is key to local identity and economy, but unfortunately the town of Robbinsville does not attract large numbers of tourists.

A robust public involvement plan allowed residents, business owners, and other stakeholders to contribute



The Reimagining Robbinsville plan recommended a number of improvements

significantly to the formation of the plan. The plan puts forth a significant number of recommendations, some of which are listed as follows:

- ◆ Wayfinding signage
- ◆ Connection from Junaluska Museum and Memorial to downtown
- ◆ Branding campaign
- ◆ Redesigned visitor's center
- ◆ Greenway system
- ◆ Revitalized downtown: purchase key properties, retain public facilities, and creatively reuse buildings
- ◆ Main street streetscape
- ◆ Land use ordinance for downtown
- ◆ Downtown farmers market
- ◆ Median and sidewalk improvements on bypass
- ◆ Ford Street housing development
- ◆ Local economic development

While the plan addresses mostly physical improvements, it does address key economic development issues and projects. Key recommendations include expanding Robbinsville's tourism product by recruiting and developing more local attractions, businesses, and activities to support tourism as an economic driver. Similarly, the plan calls for a more active approach to downtown revitalization including the acquisition and redevelopment of vacant and underutilized properties, as well as creating an incentive program to assist the private sector in improving and developing their properties. The plan also calls for an effort to grow jobs from within by creating an environment where local entrepreneurs can invest and thrive.

The document also provides limited demographic and economic data, while recognizing that Robbinsville's and Graham County's key limitation to economic development is a lack of dedicated staff or planning to pursue it effectively. Of note is the declining population over the last decade, high unemployment rates for Graham County, declining household incomes with increasing vacancy and poverty rates. A key opportunity for Robbinsville and Graham is capitalizing on the regional tourism destinations such as the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Qualla Boundary and Cherokee culture, Tail of the Dragon, Nantahala National Forest, Appalachian Trail, among others. In addition, growing cultural arts such as local artisans and craftsmen as both a tourism and economic development opportunity was noted. The plan concludes with a comprehensive implementation matrix with projects, time frames, lead agencies, and potential funding streams.

NANTAHALA NATIONAL FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

This plan is currently undergoing revision. The multi-year revision process is expected to wrap up in 2016 and will cover a 15-year period. In many ways the Forest Plan serves as a Comprehensive Plan for the National Forest and drives management decisions at a local level. The USFS has made considerable effort to involve the public and local communities in the plan and is an important planning document.

COMMUNITY HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLAN

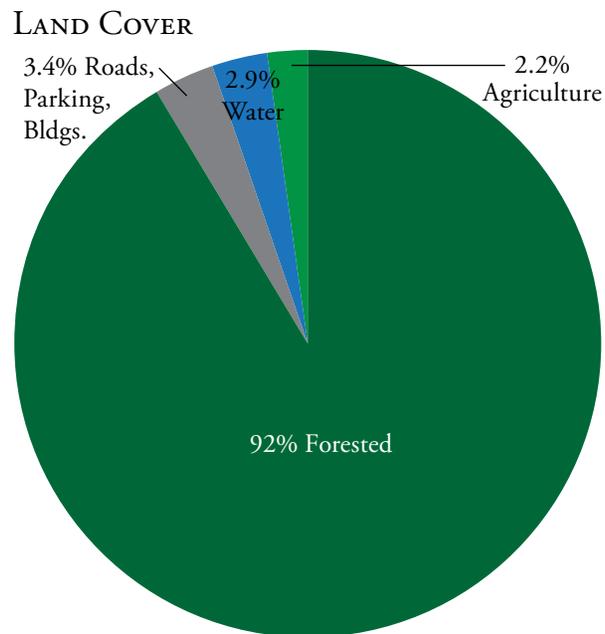
This plan summarizes current health conditions, includes success stories, identifies partners, assesses health impacts, and presents community objectives. Priorities include obesity, diabetes, healthcare access, substance abuse, and tobacco free parks and

recreation. The plan identifies a number of strategies to address these priorities.

LAND STEWARDSHIP

The nature and patterns of land uses within Graham County affect its sense of place, economic health, and road network. As shown in the pie chart below, the vast majority of both public and private land within the county is forested. This land is interspersed by small amounts of farmland and impervious surface (roads, driveways, parking lots, and buildings). Most development is concentrated in Robbinsville.

The unique character that the forest lands bring to Graham County can not be underestimated, for their aesthetic, historic, and economic value. Much of this forested land is publicly owned, as shown in the pie chart and map on page 13. This land cannot be developed.



Source: National Land Cover Database, 2006

Few regulations exist with regard to development and land use, and no part of the county or its incorporated towns has formal zoning. Building and housing codes control some aspects of building construction, and a number of state regulations affect development, but there are no existing regulations controlling use, parking, land subdivision, or site design.

While the vast majority of the county is and will remain undeveloped, the portions that are commercially developed have generally followed a suburban model. This model is focused on parking and vehicular access without concerns for landscaping,

architecture, or respecting the rural context. For this reason, portions of Robbinsville feel like commercial strips in towns across America and do not show much local character.

Residential land development patterns follow, for the most part, a rural model, in which a mix of historic homes, newer homes, and mobile homes sit on large lots. The second home market is significant in Graham County; approximately 26% of residences are seasonally used, according to the 2010 U.S. Census. The Town of Lake Santeetlah contains the largest collection of seasonal homes, many of which are on small lots.



image courtesy Arvind Govindaraj

Graham County's mountainous landscape consists mostly of publicly owned land

According to the 2011 American Community Survey, less than 4% of housing units in Graham County are in apartment or other multifamily buildings, and approximately 27% of housing units are mobile homes. See page 29 below for a more significant discussion of housing.

The large amount of publicly owned land within Graham County, combined with the significant amount of land with 40% or greater slopes as shown on page 18, mean that there is little land available for development. There is also a lack of large flat parcels that would be suited for larger commercial or industrial uses.

Land cover data indicates that only 2.2% of the area of Graham County is dedicated to agriculture. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture,

1,100 acres of hay were harvested within the county in 2012. That same year, 1,000 head of cattle were present in the county.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Graham County has a variety of recreational facilities. These consist of a swimming pool, tennis courts, basketball courts, a fitness center, playgrounds, baseball field, softball field, volleyball court, football field, soccer field, swimming beach, and several picnic areas. These facilities are owned by the county, towns, schools, or private entities, but are open to the public.

There is one sheriff station on the Rodney Orr Bypass in Robbinsville that serves the entire county. There are four fire stations within the county, all

of them staffed by volunteers. They are located in Robbinsville, Snowbird, Meadow Branch, and Pine Ridge (Santeetlah). In addition, the community of Stecoah has a fire station that also serves the Town of Fontana.

There are no hospitals or major health facilities in Graham County. The Graham County Health Department has a new facility in downtown Robbinsville that offers a variety of services for physical, mental, and dental health to adults and children. There is also a private clinic called the Tallulah Health Center and a clinic at Snowbird owned by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. There is also a private dentist in Robbinsville.

The three public schools in Graham County are all located in Robbinsville. The elementary school (642 students) is located downtown, while the middle school (193 students) and high school (341 students) are located just east of downtown (all enrollment numbers provided by NC School Report Cards, 2011-2012). Tri-County Community College also has a small facility in Robbinsville.

INFRASTRUCTURE

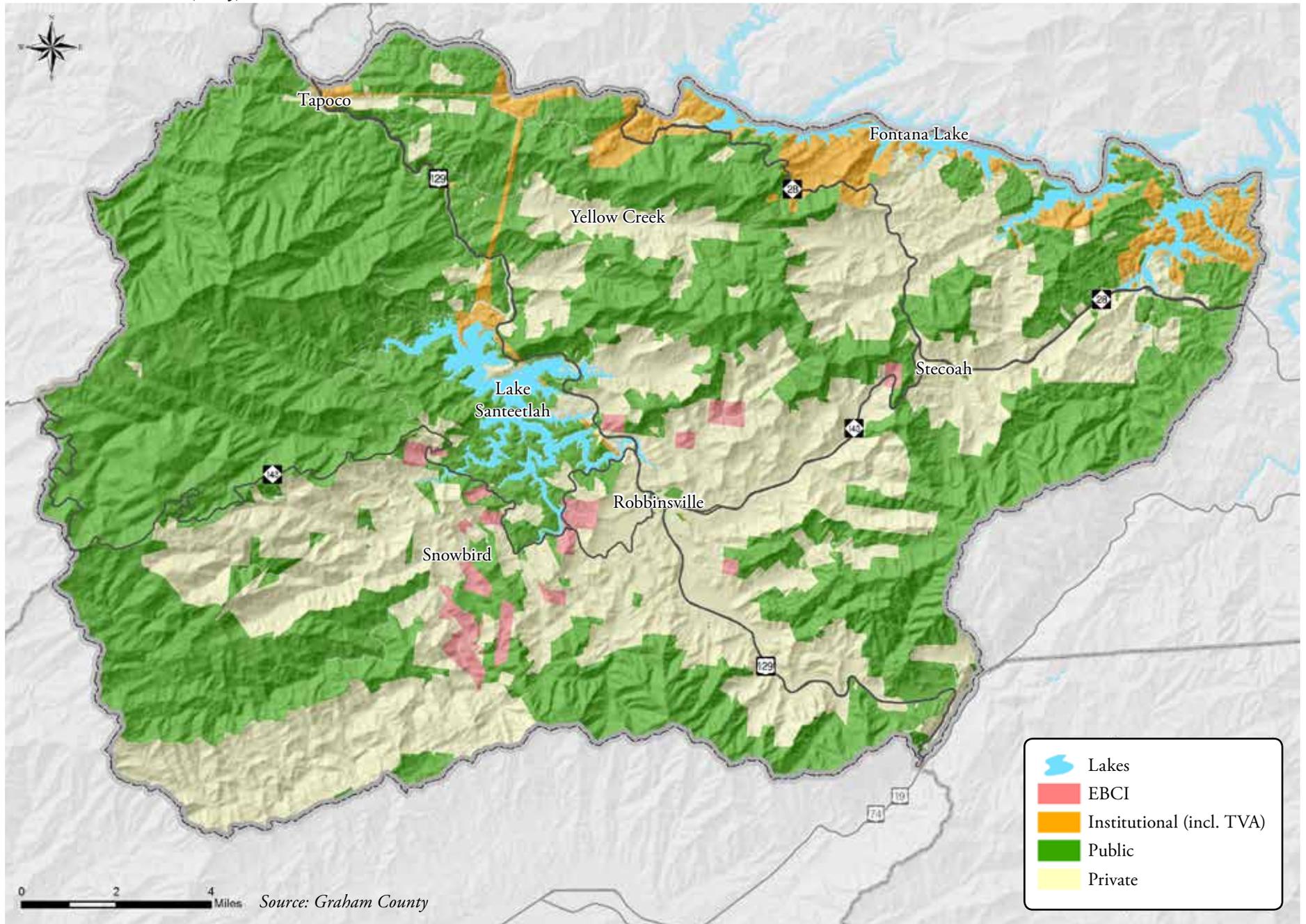
As shown in the map on page 14, water and sewer infrastructure is very limited in Graham County and exists only near Robbinsville. This effectively limits the extent and type of development.

According to the National Broadband Map, only 65.3% of Graham County's population had Internet download speeds of greater than 3 Mbps and upload speeds of greater than 0.768 Mbps as of December 31, 2012. Only three counties in the state score lower on this indicator.

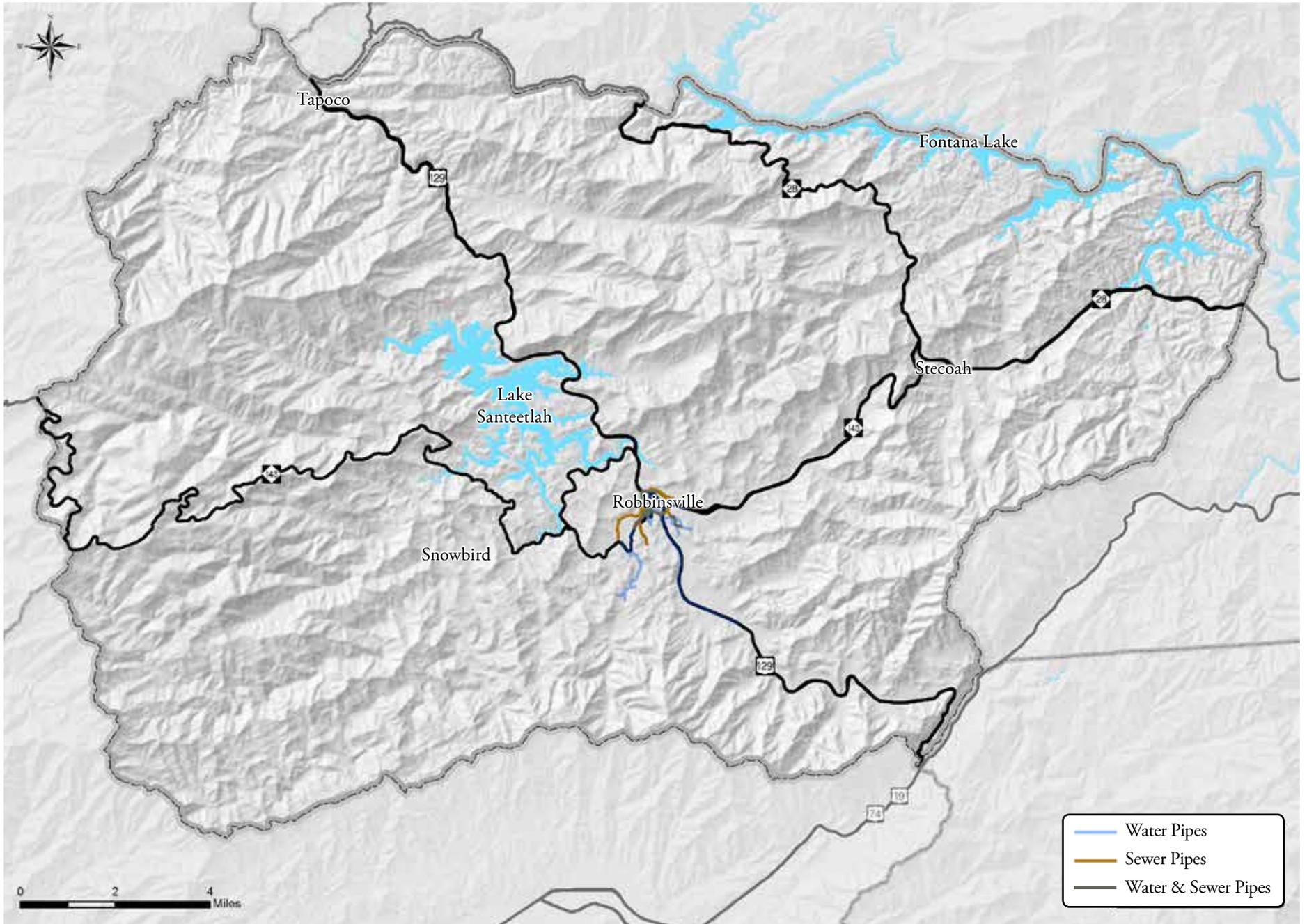


There are currently no regulations that control land use, building design, site design, or parking

LAND OWNERSHIP (2013)



EXISTING WATER/SEWER INFRASTRUCTURE



NATURE, HEALTH, & CULTURE

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Graham County is bordered by the Great Smoky Mountains to the north, the Snowbird Mountains to the southwest, the Unicoi Mountains to the west, and the Nantahala Mountains to the southeast. The Cheoah Mountains lie in the center of the county, which is home to many significant resources including water resources, flora and fauna, National Forest lands, scenic viewsheds, and cultural resources.

WATER RESOURCES

The Cheoah River watershed is contained within Graham County and is part of the larger Little Tennessee River Basin. This basin is important for its biodiversity and many partners are working to maintain its quality because it is an important source of drinking water and recreation for Graham County and many communities downstream.

All surface waters are classified by the state to designate their level of importance as drinking water supply and healthy fish and aquatic communities. This classification may impose buffers and other development restrictions. Individual waters can have multiple classifications. The following two classifications are significant in Graham County:

- ♦ High Quality Waters are designated because of physical or chemical characteristics. State law controls development near such streams, but nearly all of them are on public land in Graham County.
- ♦ Division of Water Quality Trout Waters and Designated Public Mountain Trout Waters: These two separate designations indicate waters that are critical to the survival of trout, are



Waterways are important not only for drinking water, but for wildlife habitat, scenic beauty, and tourism

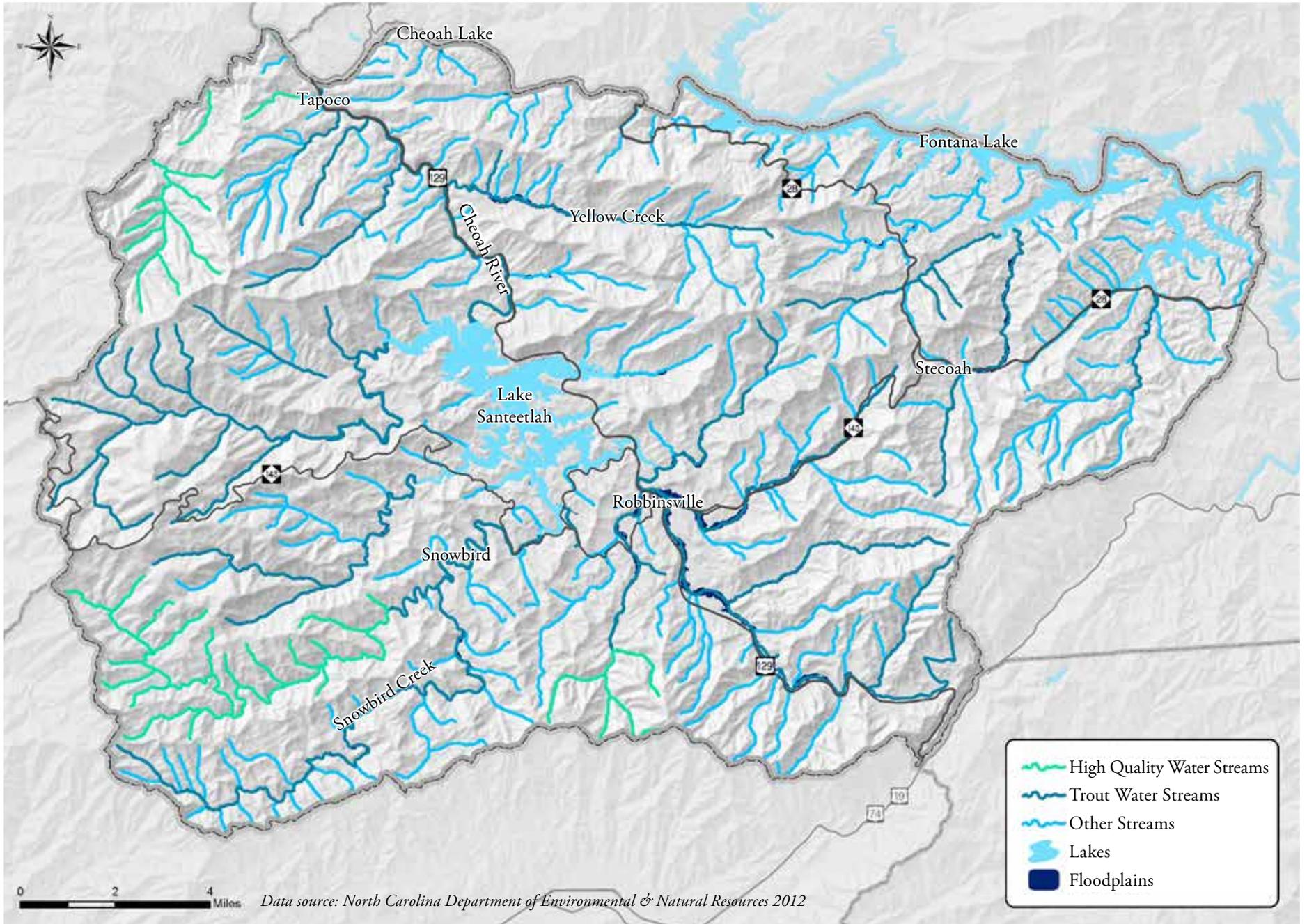
heavily regulated, and have additional restrictions on development, including buffer zones.

Other water resources include:

- ♦ Floodplains are a critically important natural resource that have many benefits to human and natural communities. For example, they allow for replenishment of agricultural soils and help maintain the natural process of waterways that, over time, meander across the floodplain. The floodplain designation indicates areas where regular flooding occurs and that are not suitable for development.

- ♦ Wetlands are essential to maintain clean drinking water, provide habitat for wildlife, and contain and slow flooding. Wetlands work to filter and absorb surface water into the ground like a sponge. Wetlands are heavily regulated under federal and state laws.

WATER RESOURCES



FLORA & FAUNA

There are no federally designated areas of critical habitat for endangered species within Graham County. Invasive species are an issue in the county and many partners are actively working to control them. The Southern Appalachian Cooperative Weed Partnership includes Federal, State, private, and non-profit partners and has targeted management areas on public land along the Cheoah River and Stecoah Gap because they are threatened by invasive plant species.

MANAGED OPEN SPACE

Approximately 64% of the land in Graham County is part of the Nantahala National Forest. There is also a significant amount of conserved lands or easements. The North Carolina Department of Transportation owns several hundred acres of land in Tulula Bog for mitigation purposes for completed road projects that had environmental impacts. The North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources holds easements on private lands along waterways where restoration or mitigation work has occurred. The Land Trust for the Little Tennessee is a significant conservation partner in the county and works with land owners to create voluntary easements. In 2013, easements on private lands in the county amounted to nearly 1,000 acres.

The map on page 19 shows “conserving working forest lands” as identified by the North Carolina Department of Environment & Natural Resources. These lands have high values for connectivity with other forestlands, water quality protection in existing high-quality waters, habitat for wildlife, and strong markets for hardwood and softwood products. They also take into consideration development risk.

SCENIC RESOURCES

Graham County residents and visitors acknowledge the significant value of scenic resources. Those landscapes with the highest scenic or cultural value are listed below. These landscapes are visually intact, iconic, and figure prominently in visitors’ and locals’ identification of what defines the local sense of place.

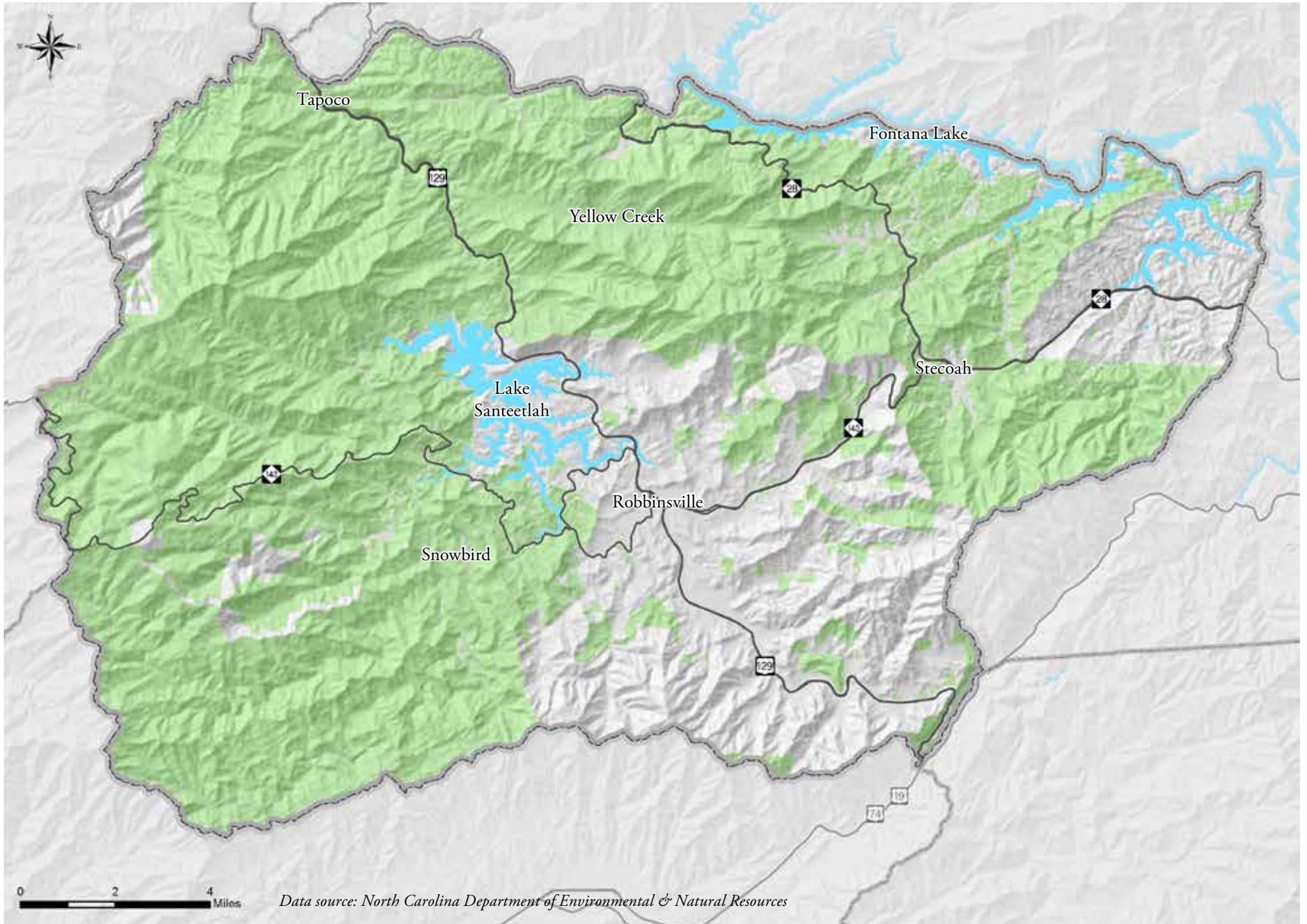
- ◆ Cheoah, Snowbird, and Unicoi Mountains
- ◆ Cheoah River, Little Snowbird Creek
- ◆ Appalachian Trail
- ◆ Fontana Lake, Lake Santeetlah
- ◆ Cherohala Skyway

- ◆ Great Smoky Mountain National Park
- ◆ Kilmer-Slickrock / Santeetlah Creek Basin
- ◆ Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest
- ◆ “The Tail of the Dragon” (Route 143)



Tulula Bog, an environmentally sensitive area in southeastern Graham County

CONSERVING WORKING FOREST LANDS



ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Graham County has a significant amount of land with slope percentages higher than 40%. These slopes can add to development costs and increase the risk for potential slope failures. Once development occurs on slopes over 40%, risks for landslides, mass erosion, and degradation to stream quality increase greatly (source: Appalachian Landslides Consultants). Landslides in Western North Carolina are prevalent and occur naturally, but can be triggered by development activities. Soil type, slope, and amount of rainfall all play a factor.

The Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness area is federally designated as a Class I Air Quality Area, a status given to public land areas with low air quality and visual impairment. The 2007 Regional Haze State Implementation Plan, monitored by the North Carolina Department of Environment & Natural Resources Division of Air Quality, sets goals and actions for the improvement of air quality.

CULTURAL & HERITAGE RESOURCES

The National Historic Register of Historic Places is a designated list of historic structures, sites, and districts that are noteworthy for their historic value. Archaeological sites, cemeteries, and burial sites are also regulated under the National Historic Act.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has designated several scenic byways in Graham County for areas that have scenic and cultural significance. The designated routes include: Cherohala Skyway (a National Scenic Byway), Indian Lakes Scenic Byway, and Nantahala Byway. These routes connect many important cultural sites, provide interpretive information along the routes, and are promoted as tourist destinations.

The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area works to protect, preserve, and promote the natural and cultural heritage of Western North Carolina. It has become an influential and effective partner for counties and businesses as related to tourism, economic development, and can be a valuable resource in planning efforts.



image courtesy NCDOT

A 2,500 foot debris flow on Cherohala Skyway in 2013

HERITAGE

The Little Tennessee River valley, including its immediate surroundings, comprises one of the richest archaeological areas in the southeastern United States, since it was home to numerous prehistoric settlements. Wild South and the Eastern Band of Cherokee have partnered to develop extensive mapping of villages and trails of the Cherokee based on historic maps, records, and oral histories. See page 22 for mapping derived from this research. Lands in Graham County have incredible significance to the Cherokee people. Some of the highest density of historic settlements occurred in Graham County (source: State Historic Preservation Archaeologist Linda Hall). As a result, a high concentration of artifacts remain in the county.

Important sites are detailed in the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area management plan in partnership with the Cherokee Tribal Historic Preservation Office and the Cherokee Heritage Trails Guidebook. Sites discussed include villages, mounds, museums, and geological sites of cultural importance.

William Bartram, one of the nation's first naturalists, recorded details of Graham County in 1776. His experience describes a landscape that was relatively untouched by European settlers and full of natural splendors.

Hydro-electric projects have a prominent place in Graham County history and have created historic structures and communities like the Tapoco Lodge Historic District and Fontana Village. The Cheoah, Santeetlah, and Fontana dams have cultural significance and are on the National Historic Register. The Tapoco Lodge Historic District near Robbinsville showcases a hydro-electric company-owned building

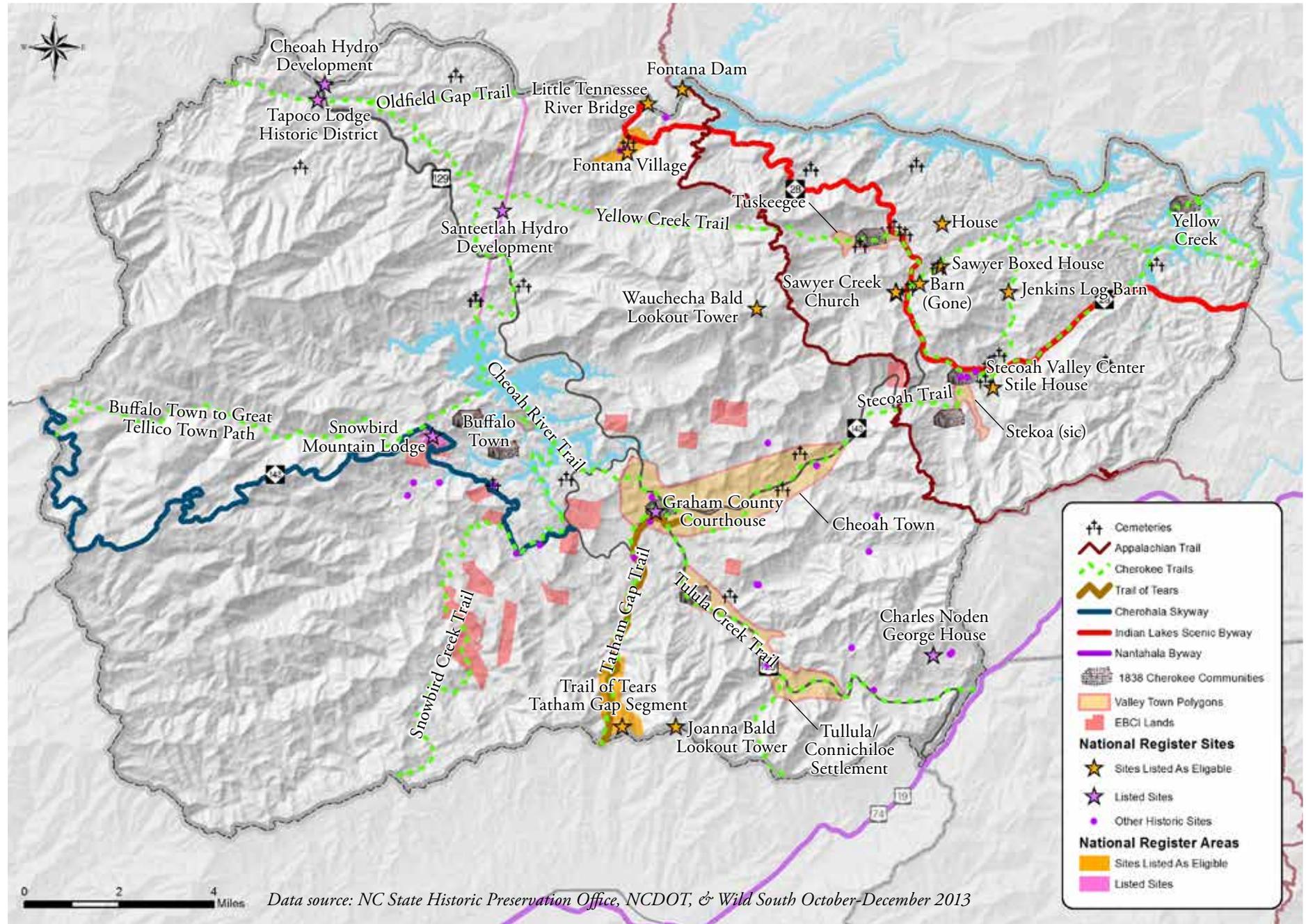


image courtesy grahamcountytravel

The historic Stewart Cabin is one of many historic resources in Graham County

that has been converted into a lodge. There are a number of historic lodges such as the Snowbird Lodge that was built in the 1940s.

CULTURAL & HERITAGE RESOURCES



COMMUNITY HEALTH

According to the Western North Carolina Healthy Impact Survey, significantly more Graham County residents identify themselves as in excellent or very good health compared to the region and the state. Overall, the most significant health concerns are:

- ◆ Growing elderly population. In Graham County, 19.7% of the population is over age 65, compared to 12.9% statewide.
- ◆ Diabetes and obesity. The prevalence of diagnosed diabetes among adults in Graham County rose from 8.8% in 2005 to 10.1% in 2009, an increase of 14.8%. The percentage of the population that is overweight and obese is significantly higher in all age groups when compared to the state and region.
- ◆ Health care access. When asked “Considering cost, quality, number of options and availability, there is good health care in my county,” over half of the respondents answered either “Disagree or Strongly Disagree.”
- ◆ Cancer and heart disease. Heart disease was the leading cause of death in the recent survey. Rates were roughly 15% higher than state and region-wide averages. Cancer rates in Graham County are generally on par with the region and state, but women have seen a 54% increase in cancer diagnosis over the past 5 years.

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

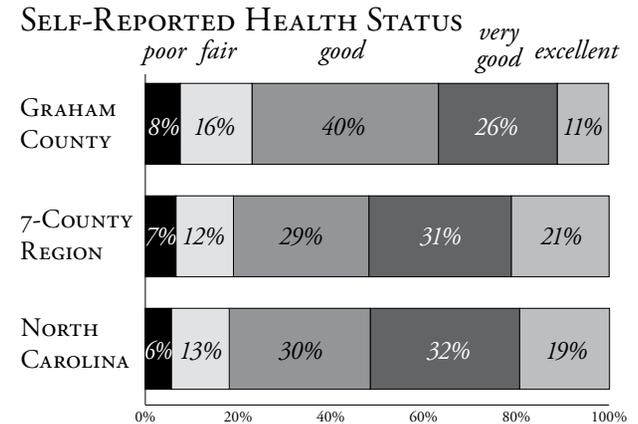
Social determinants of health are, as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “the circumstances in which people are born, grow up, live, work, and age, as well as the systems put in place to deal with illness. These circumstances are in turn shaped by a wider set of forces: economics, social

policies, and politics.” Local social determinants of health include:

- ◆ Wages. Median family income is significantly below the state average (see page 27).
- ◆ Poverty. The 2006-2010 poverty rate for Graham County was 31.1%, compared to 19.5% in the region as a whole. Childhood poverty increased in the region during this period by 5.2%.
- ◆ Tobacco use. Graham County residents are nearly three times more likely to use smokeless tobacco than the average American. Over 27% of expectant mothers reported smoking during prenatal period, compared to 11% within the state.
- ◆ Limited physical activity. Nearly twice as many Graham County residents reported limited physical activity due to physical, mental, or emotional problems, compared to the national average.
- ◆ Dental screenings. Local kindergartners have twice as many missing, filled, or decayed teeth as the average North Carolina kindergartner.

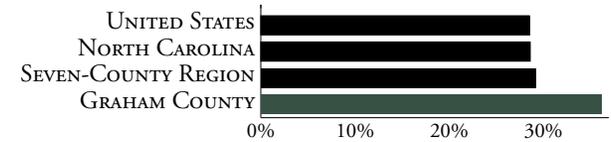
The map on the following page shows a geographic analysis of poor health indicators by census tract, based on data from the NC State Center for Health Statistics. This map is based on:

- ◆ Total population and population density.
- ◆ Social determinants of health (the percent of residents who):
 - Are African-American or Hispanic
 - Are below the poverty level
 - Have completed high school
 - Are spending more than 30% of income on rental housing
 - Are on food stamps



Source: WNC Healthy Impact Survey

PERCENT OF OBESE ADULTS

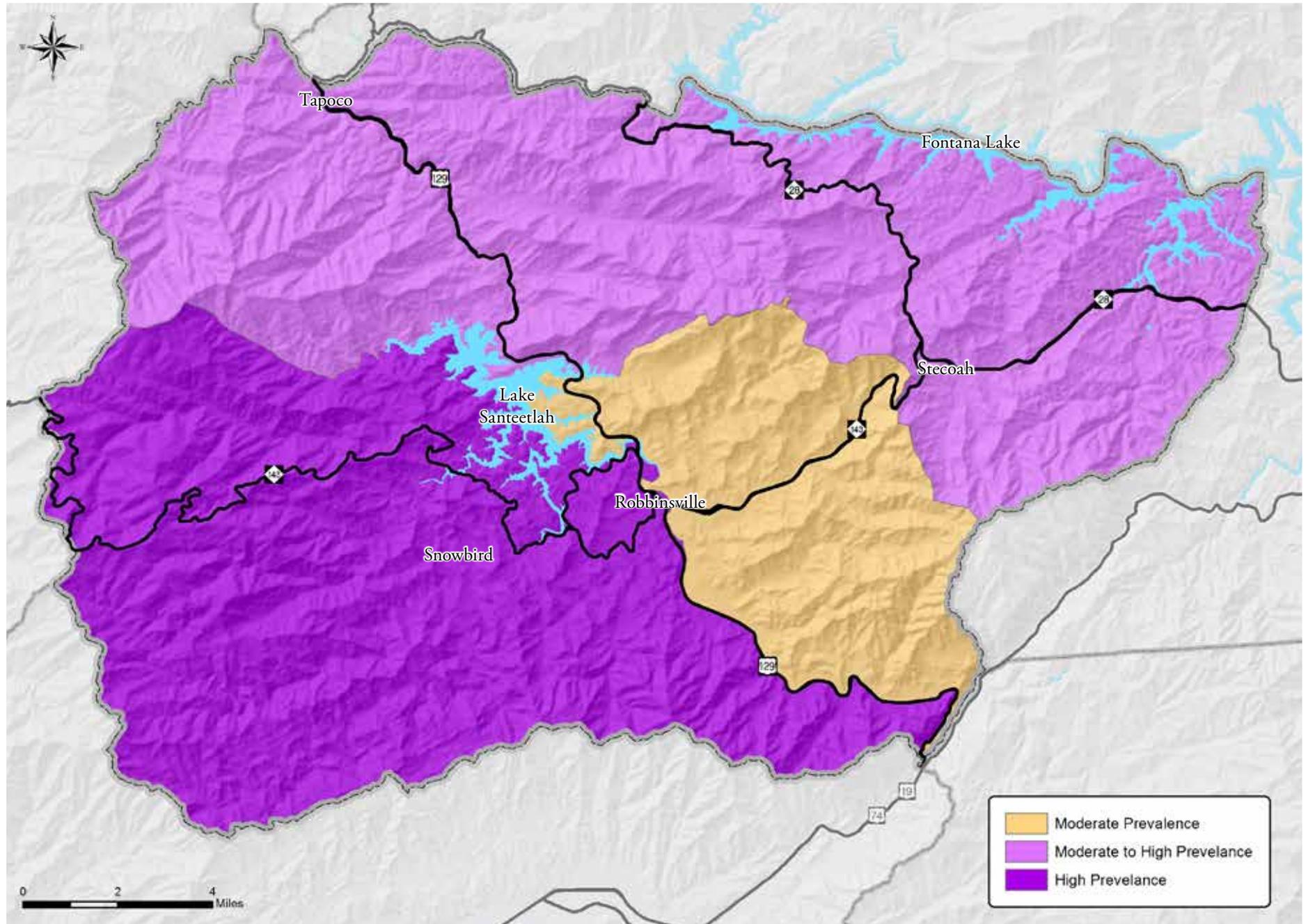


Percent of adults with body mass index of 30 or greater
Source: WNC Healthy Impact Survey

- ◆ Community risk factors: number of health care workers and population with low access to grocery stores.
- ◆ Health risk behavior and outcomes: heart disease mortality rate; stroke mortality rate; and lung/bronchus/trachea cancer rate.

The map shows that, based on these determinants, the census tract containing Robbinsville and the Snowbird community has the highest level of need for interventions and health-related considerations.

PREVALENCE OF DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS OF POOR HEALTH



DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographic information on the following pages provides an important socioeconomic background for planning. Graham County's demographics form an important context for economic development, infrastructure, and future planning.

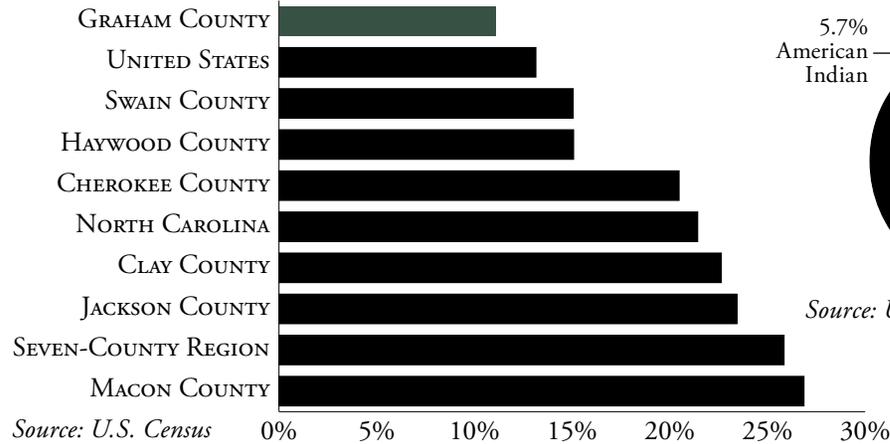
The data in this section do not include part-time residents or second home owners. Demographic and other information on this population is not collected as a part of the Census and it not easily available. A detailed survey of part-time residents was not a part of this effort, but the market segmentation report does address this population.

POPULATION

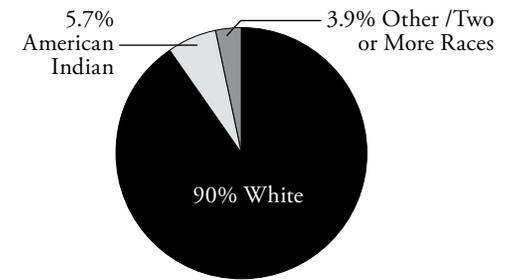
According to the U.S. Census, Graham County's population in 2010 was 8,861. It has the third smallest population of any county in the state and an average of 20.8 acres of land per resident (or 8.5 acres per resident if only non-public land is counted). Like the seven-county area (which includes those seven counties shown in the charts at right), Graham County enjoyed healthy growth between 1990 and 2000, and again between 2000 and 2010.

Graham County's median age is 44.6, which is approximately 7 years older than the state average. An older population is common in rural areas, but contributing factors in Graham likely include the loss of young people and the presence of retirees. Ethnically, Graham County is over 90% white. American Indians represent 5.7% of the population, a figure higher than the average for the region.

TOTAL POPULATION GROWTH 1900-2000

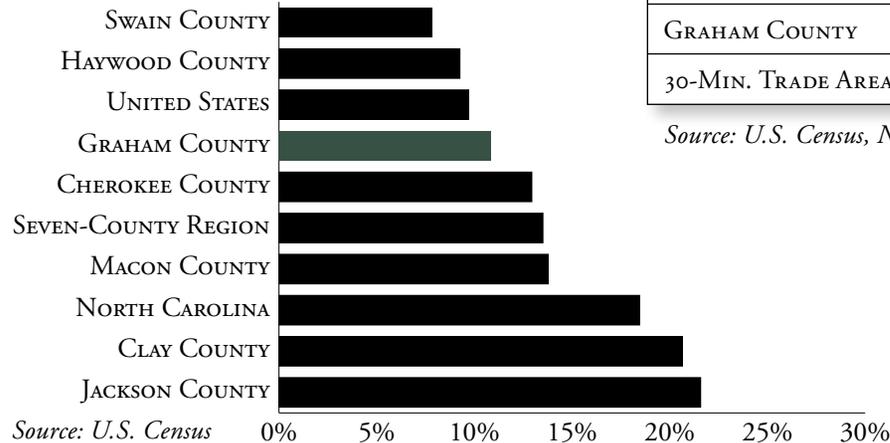


GRAHAM COUNTY ETHNICITY



Source: U.S. Census 2011 ACS Survey

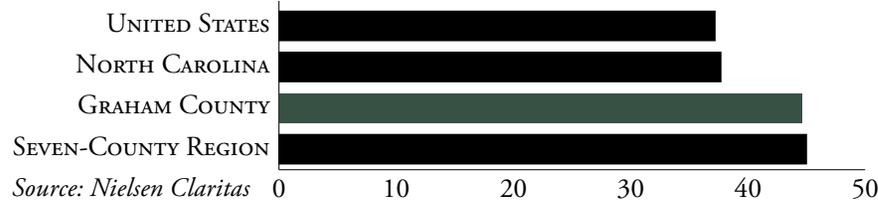
TOTAL POPULATION GROWTH 2000-2010



POPULATION	1990	2000	2010
GRAHAM COUNTY	7,196	7,993	8,861
30-MIN. TRADE AREA	n/a	11,242	12,065

Source: U.S. Census, Nielsen Claritas

MEDIAN AGE (2013)



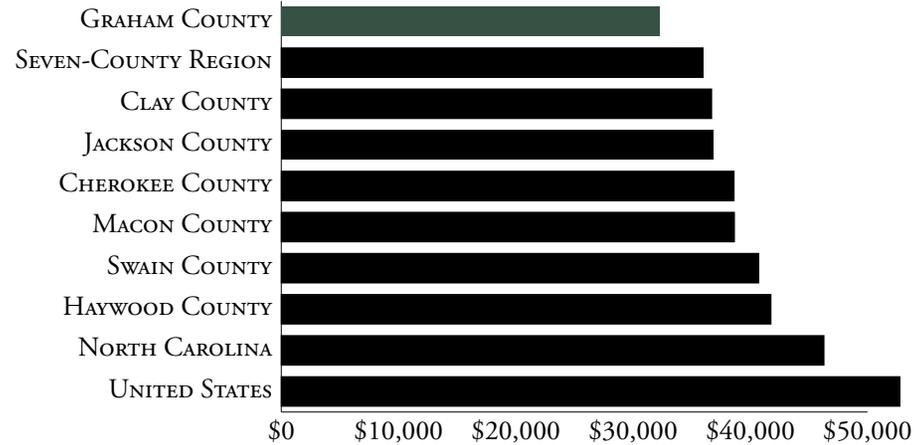
INCOME & EDUCATION

On average, Graham County residents have lower incomes than the rest of the region and state. The table below shows estimated annual entry-level, median, and experienced wages in the county based on its mix of occupations, compared to the statewide average. Employees with experience earn substantially more, but still less than the statewide average. Interestingly, entry-level wages in Graham County are higher than the statewide average.

The annual median household income in 2011 was \$32,255 in Graham County, \$35,974 in North Carolina, and \$46,291 nationwide. These numbers are compared in the chart at right. In 2010, 24% of Graham County households were below the poverty level according to the U.S. Census, the highest rate in the seven-county region.

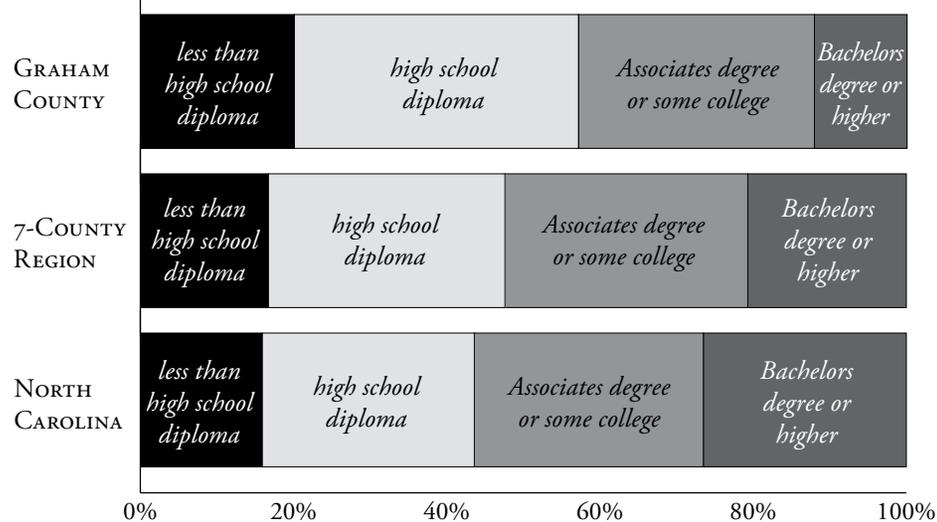
Graham County has the highest five-year cohort graduation rate of any county in the state (source: State Board of Education). Nevertheless, Graham County residents' educational attainment lags behind that in the region and the state. Among residents age 25 and older, 20% do not have a high school diploma, compared to 17% in the region and 16% statewide. Only 12% have completed a four-year college degree or more, compared with 21% in the region and 27% statewide.

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (2011)



Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey 2011, Nielsen Claritas

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT (AGE 25+)



Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey 2011

WAGE & INCOME BASED ON JOB SECTOR MIX	Est. Hourly Wage			Est. Annual Wage		
	Entry	Median	Experienced	Entry	Median	Experienced
GRAHAM (AVERAGE ALL OCCUPATIONS)	\$9.73	\$12.51	\$18.41	\$20,233	\$26,022	\$38,287
NORTH CAROLINA (AVERAGE ALL OCCUPATIONS)	\$9.08	\$15.31	\$25.57	\$18,880	\$31,850	\$53,180

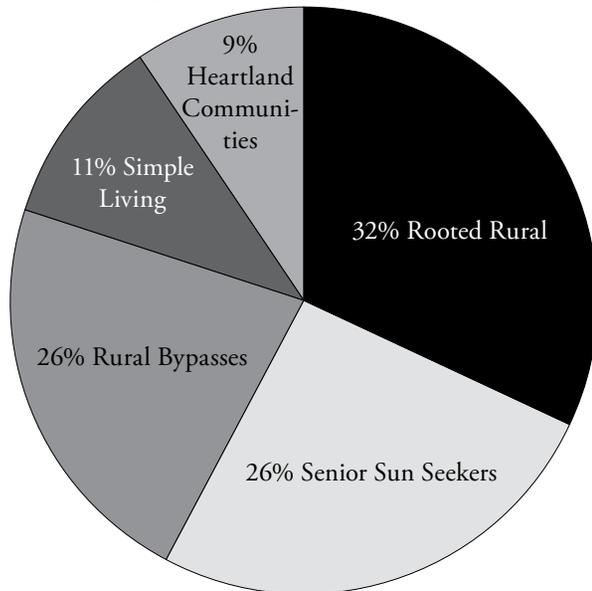
Source: North Carolina Division of Employment Security

MARKET SEGMENTATION

This section groups Graham County residents based on their age, gender, income, education, occupation, and ethnicity. This provides a more qualitative look at the quantitative data shown above. This information can help local businesses concentrate on the market segments that exist in their trade areas. By recognizing different segments and analyzing their needs and requirements, a business can more effectively focus its marketing or building its inventory.

For this analysis, all data comes from ESRI Lifestyle Tapestry Segmentation, which divides the population into sixty-five different categories based on their socioeconomic characteristics. Graham County households fall into the following five market segments, which are general categories—actual local households may vary from these descriptions.

GRAHAM COUNTY TAPESTRY SEGMENTS



Source: ESRI Tapestry

ROOTED RURAL

Rooted Rural households are predominantly married couples in rural areas, with a median age of 44. They are empty nesters and retirees with no children living at home. Rooted Rural households have a median household income of \$37,032. A third are receiving Social Security benefits. Employed Rooted Rural residents tend to work in agriculture, service, and manufacturing sectors. They own their own homes, which are predominantly single-family detached, with about one quarter being mobile homes. Rooted rural communities also have a higher proportion of seasonal housing. These residents enjoy home improvement projects and gardening, live a rural lifestyle, and own a truck. They generally eat at home, shopping frequently at the local grocer. They sometimes eat out at family restaurants such as Ryan's Steakhouse. They like to hunt and fish, listen to country music, and enjoy car races.

SENIOR SUN SEEKERS

Senior Sun Seekers are one of the older segments with a median age of 52. They are nearly 90 percent white and made up of mostly married couples without children at home. Nearing or at retirement, their median household income is \$35,560. Many Senior Sun Seekers have relocated to warmer climates, or are "snowbirds" who come back to the community during the winter months. They have a large proportion of seasonal housing in their neighborhoods. Sun Seekers enjoy traveling by car, and often stay at reasonably priced lodging such as Days Inn. They eat at family restaurants and shop at home improvement stores. They are members of local veterans' clubs and fraternal orders, and do charity work. Most Senior Sun Seekers seek the services of financial planners. They own satellite TV service, watching game shows,

sitcoms and golf tournaments on CMT, TNT and Turner Classic Movies. They fish and hunt, and list to country music.

RURAL BYPASSES

Rural Bypasses households are married and single-households with a median age of just under 40. They have lower levels of income with a median of \$27,231. Many Rural Bypasses are on Social Security or other public assistance. They are 58% white and 36% black. Most have high school degrees but with less college education. They work in blue-collar jobs such as agriculture, manufacturing, construction, and mining. 30% of Rural Bypass homes are manufactured, and home ownership is at 73%. They typically drive trucks and SUV's and enjoy activities such as watching NASCAR, fishing and hunting. They shop at discount stores such as Family Dollar and Wal Mart, and often order from catalogs.

SIMPLE LIVING

Simple Living households are younger compared to the rest of Graham County's population, with a median age of 39.7. Half of households are singles, and just under one-third are married with families. Their household income averages \$27,284 and many receive Social Security and public assistance. They are blue-collar, working in health care, retail, manufacturing, and accommodations/food service. Many residents do not own a vehicle, and 45% of households own one car for the whole family. They spend conservatively on a limited budget, shopping at discount stores with the occasional dinner and a movie.

HEARTLAND COMMUNITIES

Heartland Communities households are typically older, with nearly half being aged 55 or older. Many are retirees. Their median household income is \$34,088, and they work in a wide range of jobs from management to unskilled labor jobs. They invest time and money in their homes and communities, many of which live in the community where they grew up. They own large lots, have riding lawn mowers, and shop at Lowe's and Ace Hardware. They buy their groceries at Wal Mart, and eat at Cracker Barrel. They have a country lifestyle, enjoying fishing and hunting, country music and NASCAR. Many are involved with their churches and local politics.

STANLEY FURNITURE

Oak Valley Hardwood, a Tides and Times Company, which processes lumber to be sold domestically and internationally, is locating an operation to saw and dry lumber in Graham County. The process is to saw and dry lumber to be sold as a raw material to companies using wood to produce products domestically and internationally. Oak Valley Hardwoods is requesting funding to help with the installation of a wood fired boiler that will consume green dust for energy to heat their kiln operation at the new facility in Graham County. The green dust will be a byproduct from the other sawing operations. Oak Valley will also do many other improvements to the building in Graham County to allow for quicker processing of lumber through this new location. Oak Valley will be an important part of the future of economic development in Graham County for years to come.

Graham County is expecting the economic impact from Oak Valley Hardwoods locating in Graham County to create a total of 114 jobs over a five year period and have an immediate impact of 25 jobs to the county. The total capital investment is to be \$9,175,000 in the five year period and an immediate investment of \$1,175,000. The project will have a huge impact on the unemployment rate in Graham County, considering the recent closing of the County's largest employer, Stanley Furniture. The payroll impact to the county over the 5 year period at the average wage promised by the company will be from \$728,000 (first year) to \$3,319,680 (in the fifth year).

As listed above, the five year outlook for this project is for 114 jobs created, \$9,175,000 in total capital investment locally, and an average yearly payroll year five of \$3,319,680. The future after that will

hopefully continue to see marginal growth rates of the same scale as the first five years, considering the available natural resource in the area which is required in the projects daily operation. Graham County has 27.23 square miles of private owned timber lands and the surrounding Western North Carolina counties in total with Graham have 147.88 square miles of private timber land that could potentially be harvested. The USFS also has land in this area that could potentially be harvested for timber which would increase this available resource and the company's potential for expansion of the operation in the future.

With the creation of the 114 jobs Graham County could potentially see a decrease in the unemployment rate. With the capital investment of \$9,175,000 over the five year project history there is potential for the County's ad valorem property taxes to be between \$42,000 and \$50,000 annually. With the company's contacts outside Western North Carolina and in the international arena, there is a potential for additional business growth in Graham County through this network that is not available with other local businesses.

The Stanley Building which is the new location for Oak Valley Hardwoods is an incredible building with high ceilings (20 to 24 feet) and approximately 588,000 square feet under roof. The building was most recently used in the manufacturing of youth furniture and at one time was a carpet plant. The building was built in 1958 and has been added on to several times with the newest addition added in 1998. The building is located on approximately 56 acres at 68 Snowbird Road.

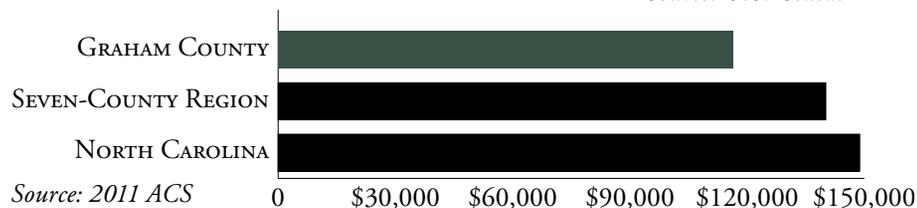
HOUSING

Single-family home construction in Graham County over the past two decades mirrors national trends (source: U.S. Census building permit data) to some extent. Growth was sustained through the 1990s and began more substantial increases during the early 2000s, but Graham County's boom during the 2000s was short lived. Rapid growth began in 2003 and peaked in 2005, followed by a rapid decline due to the national housing crisis. There was a slight increase in new home permits between 2011 and 2012, but this is not enough data to suggest the trend has changed. These trends are shown on the chart on the following page. This continued downward trend could be the result of a decline of the second home market in Western North Carolina.

The trend shown in the chart at right suggests that Graham County is likely to see little residential growth. However, if new development is created, or if the community is able to position itself as a second home/retiree market, then there is the potential to reverse declining trends. Other issues that can affect housing growth include transportation access, health care, education, and availability of jobs.

Occupied home values in Graham County in 2011 were some of the lowest in the region. The median occupied housing unit value in 2013 was \$116,450 in Graham County, \$140,143 in the region, and \$148,826 statewide.

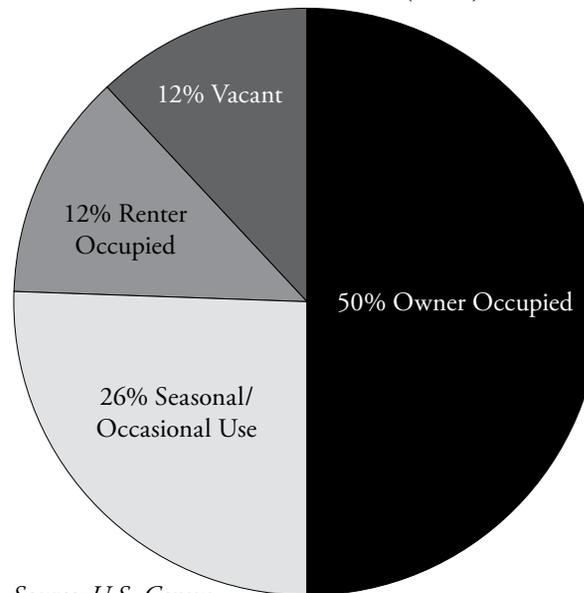
MEDIAN OCCUPIED HOUSING UNIT VALUE



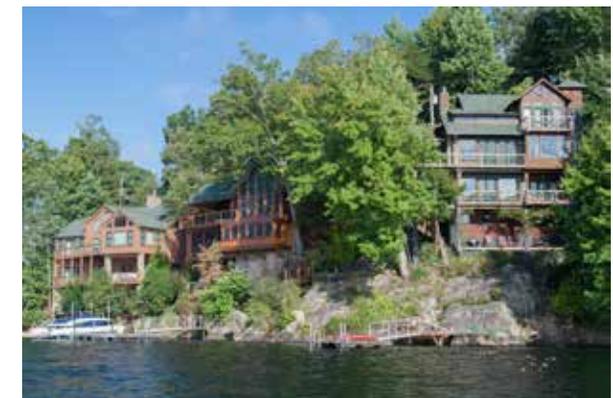
The vast majority of Graham County homes (74%) are less than \$100,000 in appraised value. However, it should be noted that "seasonal and occasional use homes" are counted as vacant and therefore not included in these figures, so actual home values are likely higher.

Only half of Graham County homes are owner occupied. This number is a bit misleading because an additional 26% are listed as "seasonal and occasional use." This is higher than the regional average of 23% and state average of 4.5% (source: U.S. Census). If we were to assume these homes are owner occupied, then home ownership is more along the lines of 76%, which is more typical for rural communities.

HOUSING UNIT OCCUPANCY (2010)



GRAHAM COUNTY SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL BUILDING PERMITS



The number of residential building permits has declined significantly since 2005

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

This section presents an analysis of the current economic environment within Graham County. This includes anecdotal information garnered from ongoing stakeholder input, as well as quantitative data for Graham County pulled from a number of sources.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT

As a part of this planning effort, numerous stakeholder interviews were conducted with Graham County leadership, local businesses, and area residents. Key stakeholder comments related to economic development are summarized below:

- ♦ A significant portion of Graham County land is protected by the U.S. Forest Service and other agencies. In order for Graham to grow, land management issues need to be addressed.
- ♦ The Golden Leaf Foundation and the North Carolina Rural Center have been invaluable partners to Graham County. They have been instrumental in helping build infrastructure and retain businesses. Golden Leaf also helps fund the Economic Development Commission. These partnerships are vital to future growth and development. The uncertainty of the state's new rural economic development program is a concern.
- ♦ While Graham is a part of Region A, its location in the corner of the state makes Tennessee and Georgia more relevant as a market for jobs, industry, and transportation.
- ♦ Transportation is a huge issue in Graham County. Concerns include the lack of backhauling (because trucks must travel one way empty), accessibility to jobs (particularly during winter weather), and the challenges of trucks on rural roads.

- ♦ Other infrastructure needs include rural broadband service for both residents and businesses, as well as natural gas.
- ♦ Workforce development is a challenge due to isolation and low population. Tri-County Community College partners with local employers, but there is a challenge with matching the training opportunities with the jobs that will be needed.
- ♦ Quality of life improvements are needed to recruit additional workforce and new employers. Those elements important to economic development include a vibrant downtown, quality public schools, and cultural opportunities.

- ♦ Tourism is a significant sector in Graham County, and vital in terms of workforce, retail, and small business. Many tourism jobs don't have benefits, are lower wage, highly seasonal, and include a more transient population. There is a need for more effective marketing of tourism.
- ♦ Graham's position can be the "trailhead" for the region. Graham has great potential with outdoor recreation, fishing tournaments, and even motorcycle enthusiasts, but needs improved visitor services and amenities.
- ♦ There is a perceived need for medical services. This is key for job creation as well as quality of life.



Stanley Furniture was the largest employer in Graham County

image courtesy Bert VanderVeen

EMPLOYMENT

Stanley Furniture is the largest employer in Graham County with approximately 350 employees. In Robbinsville, Stanley produces the Young America brand of children's furniture. Graham County Schools and Graham County government make up the second largest employer in the county.

Tourism is also one of Graham's predominant employment sectors. This primarily includes accommodations associated with tourism and resorts, including Fontana Village, Snowbird Mountain Lodge, Iron Horse Lodge, Blue Waters Mountain Lodge, and Tapoco Lodge, among others. It also includes restaurants and other visitor services. This industry is very seasonal, with businesses carrying limited employees during the winter months. According to stakeholder interviews, the tourist season runs approximately May through October, but the season for part-time residents may vary.

The Manufacturing sector makes up the largest portion of Graham's employment at 20%. This is followed by Construction at 15%, and Educational services at 12%.

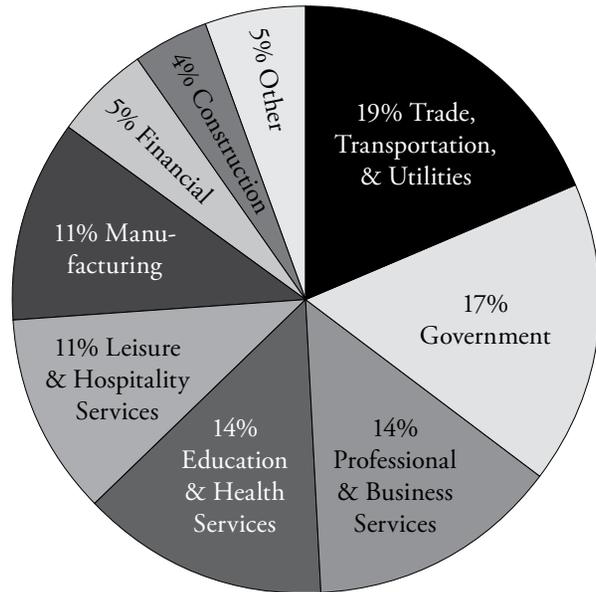
According to non-seasonally adjusted August 2013 data from the North Carolina Division of Employment Security, the unemployment rate in Graham County was 12.3%, compared to the statewide average of 8.3%.

LARGEST GRAHAM COUNTY EMPLOYERS (4TH QUARTER 2012)

Rank	Company	Industry	Employment Range
1	Graham County Schools	Education & Health Services	250-499
3	Graham County	Public Administration	100-249
4	Principle Long Term Care Inc.	Education & Health Services	50-99
5	Graham County Land Company LLC	Construction	50-99
6	Ingles Markets Inc.	Trade, Transportation & Utilities	50-99
7	Sawyers Home Care	Education & Health Services	50-99
8	Crisp And Crisp Inc.	Construction	50-99
9	Fontana Village Inc.	Leisure & Hospitality	Below 50
10	Southeastern Construction	Construction	Below 50
11	Stanley Furniture Co Inc.	Manufacturing	Below 50
13	McDonalds	Leisure & Hospitality	Below 50
13	Phillips & Jordan Inc.	Construction	Below 50
14	Walgreens Trade	Trade, Transportation & Utilities	Below 50
15	Jacco LLC	Professional & Business Services	Below 50
16	Wes Ben Co Inc.	Construction	Below 50
17	Robbinsville Custom Moulding Inc.	Construction	Below 50
21	Wendys Old Fashioned Hamburgers	Leisure & Hospitality	Below 50
21	Boco LLC Leisure & Hospitality	Leisure & Hospitality	Below 50
21	A 4 Home Center Inc.	Trade, Transportation & Utilities	Below 50
21	Ace Clearing & Construction Inc.	Construction	Below 50
23	Farley Insurance Services Inc.	Financial Activities	Below 50
23	N C Dept Of Transportation	Public Administration	Below 50
24	Lovin Equipment & Sales Inc. Trade	Trade, Transportation & Utilities	Below 50
25	Town Of Robbinsville	Public Administration	Below 50

Source: NC Commerce, Labor and Economic Analysis Division

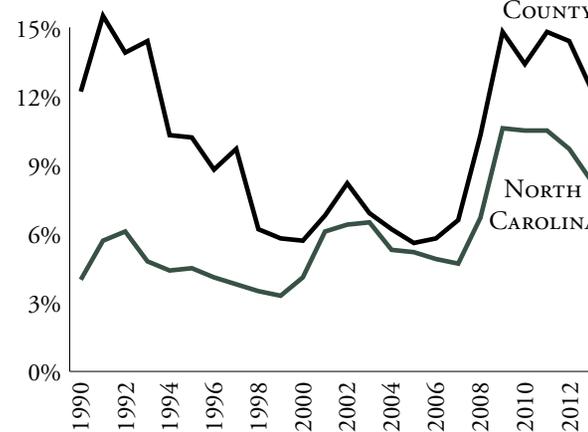
GRAHAM COUNTY EMPLOYMENT BY SECTOR



Source: U.S. Census On The Map

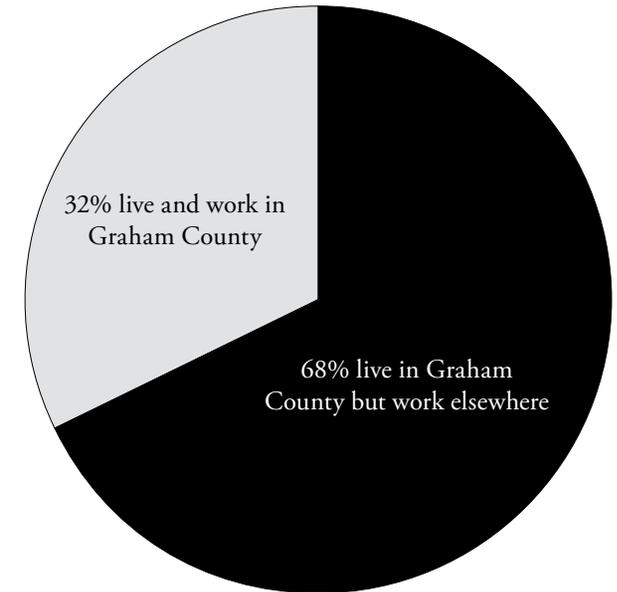
Approximately 68% of Graham County's labor force works in adjacent counties. Similarly, just 45% of jobs in Graham County are filled by residents. This translates to a net outflow of approximately 775 jobs, according to 2011 numbers from the U.S. Census.

UNEMPLOYMENT TRENDS

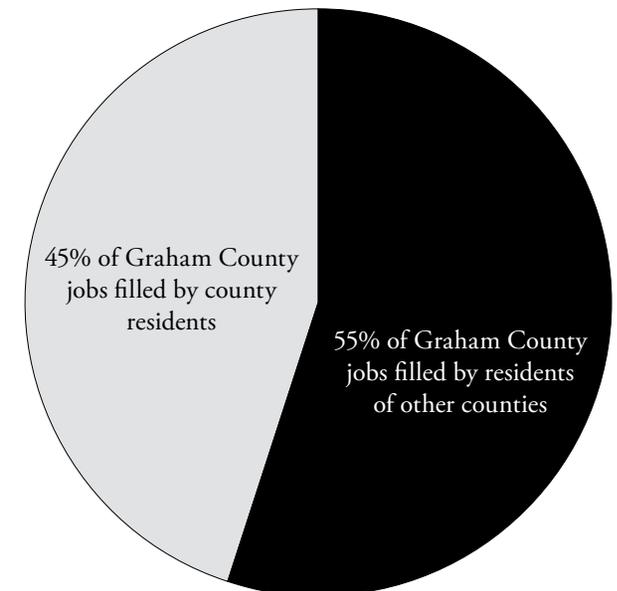


Source: North Carolina Division of Employment Security

WHERE GRAHAM'S RESIDENTS WORK

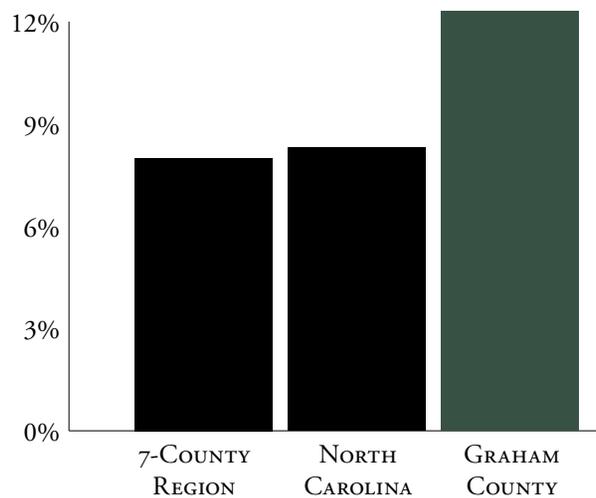


WHERE GRAHAM'S WORKERS LIVE



Source: On the Map (U.S. Census Bureau)

UNEMPLOYMENT (AUGUST 2013)



Source: North Carolina Division of Employment Security
Numbers are not seasonally adjusted

EXISTING RETAIL INVENTORY

Graham has limited retail offerings, amounting to an \$88 million market overall in 2012 (see table on the following page). Robbinsville accounts for the majority of the county's retail market. Over half of retail sales are in two categories (gas stations and motor vehicle/parts dealers).

Most retail businesses are located in Robbinsville along Highway 129 and Highway 143. Key retail businesses include Ingles Market, A-4 Home Center, Dollar General, Family Dollar, Kerr Drug, and various gas stations. Restaurants include chains as well as independent restaurants.

RETAIL LEAKAGE

Retail leakage compares sales within an area to residents' buying power within the same area. If consumers who live in an area are purchasing more goods than local stores are selling, dollars are "leaking" to outside markets. This leakage translates directly to retail demand. Conversely, if stores are selling more than residents have the capacity to buy, they are attracting outside consumers.

As shown in the table on the following page, Graham County stores sold \$88 million in 2011, while Graham County residents spent \$122.4 million. Therefore, Graham County as a whole leaked approximately \$34.4 million in retail sales to adjacent areas. The vast majority of leakage is in grocery stores (of which Graham only has one) and general merchandising. Of the \$15 million leaking in general merchandising, the majority is likely leaking to the Walmart in Murphy.

Consumer expenditures shown are based on the collective buying power of full-time county residents. Part time residents are not accounted for

under consumer expenditures, so it is likely that the demand figures are actually higher.

Other areas showing demand potential include clothing and clothing accessories, building materials and supply, restaurants, and health/personal care. By comparing Graham County's needs to the offering in the larger trade area, opportunities for new retail businesses can be determined.

RETAIL PULL FACTOR

One method to determine an area's retail competitiveness is by calculating a retail "pull factor." This

supply-side calculation provides a broader perspective on the relative strength of a community's retail base. Here, pull factor is determined by dividing Graham County's per capita retail sales by North Carolina's per capita sales. The figures on the following page are based on the most recent sales data available.

A pull factor figure greater than one suggests the area is pulling in sales beyond the customer base that lives within the area. A factor less than one means that a community is losing sales to outside areas.



There is a limited amount of retail in Graham County, resulting in retail dollars "leaking" to other areas

GRAHAM COUNTY RETAIL OPPORTUNITY GAP

	Consumer Expenditures	Retail Sales	Demand
MOTOR VEHICLE & PARTS DEALERS	\$16,429,188	\$19,804,910	(\$3,375,722)
FURNITURE & HOME FURNISHINGS STORES	\$2,402,212	\$551,587	\$1,850,625
ELECTRONICS & APPLIANCE STORES	\$2,231,321	\$157,235	\$2,074,086
BUILDING MATERIAL, GARDEN EQUIP. STORES	\$11,878,521	\$3,843,478	\$8,035,043
FOOD & BEVERAGE STORES	\$17,658,865	\$2,980,044	\$14,678,821
HEALTH & PERSONAL CARE STORES	\$8,975,528	\$2,138,920	\$6,836,608
GASOLINE STATIONS	\$13,278,197	\$27,794,972	(\$14,516,775)
CLOTHING & CLOTHING ACCESSORIES STORES	\$4,957,306	\$0	\$4,957,306
SPORTING GOODS, HOBBY, BOOKS, MUSIC	\$2,129,318	\$473,434	\$1,655,884
GENERAL MERCHANDISE STORES	\$16,525,176	\$1,120,173	\$15,405,003
MISCELLANEOUS STORE RETAILERS	\$3,895,414	\$9,819,242	(\$5,923,828)
NON-STORE RETAILERS	\$9,725,926	\$14,142,631	(\$4,416,705)
FOOD SERVICE & DRINKING PLACES	\$12,389,444	\$5,196,022	\$7,193,422
TOTAL RETAIL SALES	\$122,476,416	\$88,022,648	\$34,453,768

Source: Nielsen Claritas

At 0.65, Graham County is losing sales (compared to North Carolina per capita sales) to nearby counties. In other words, Graham County has just 65% of the expected retail sales. When we look at the region, we see that the pull factor is 1.32. Like the retail leakage study, the retail pull factor suggests demand for additional business in Graham County.

RETAIL CAPTURE SCENARIO

While there is fair amount of retail leakage, Graham County cannot reasonably expect to recapture 100% of the sales leaking outside its borders. As much as we shop for items that we need everyday, shopping itself is an activity. People will continue to travel to other places to get certain goods or services; they will also continue to shop online and in catalogs. Therefore, we must look at a potential capture

scenario that illustrates the potential for additional retail should some of the lost revenues be captured in the categories where retail leakage exists.

Through strategic recruitment, economic development, and marketing, a community can reasonably expect to recapture a portion of sales that are leaking. In Graham County's case, the table on the following page illustrates the potential if it could capture between 10% (one in every ten dollars) and 20% (one in every five dollars) of the demand that exists in the county. This is a conservative analysis and the potential could be higher. The table also shows supportable retail space by square footage for individual retail categories. Key opportunities include:

- ♦ General merchandise. Potential exists for between 11,500 and 23,000 square feet. A typical dollar store is between 10,000 and 15,000 square feet.
- ♦ Building material and garden equipment. Potential exists for up to 12,900 square feet.
- ♦ Clothing. Up to 4,600 square feet.
- ♦ Drug stores. Up to 5,500 square feet.
- ♦ Grocery stores. Up to 6,800 square feet. This is not nearly enough demand for a new grocery store. However, this could suggest the potential for a small specialty grocery, perhaps for Lake Santeetlah or Fontana Village residents.

RETAIL SALES PULL FACTORS

	Total Retail Sales	2010 Population	Per Capita Retail Sales	Pull Factor
NORTH CAROLINA	\$146,426,317,149	9,535,483	\$15,355.94	n/a
SEVEN-COUNTY REGION	\$3,647,127,875	194,102	\$20,212.01	1.32
GRAHAM COUNTY	\$88,022,648	8,861	\$9,933.71	0.65

Sources: Nielsen Claritas, U.S. Census

GRAHAM COUNTY RETAIL CAPTURE SCENARIO

	Annual Demand	10% Capture	20% Capture	Sales per Sq. Ft.	10% Capture (Sq. Ft.)	20% Capture (Sq. Ft.)
FURNITURE STORES	\$953,437	\$95,344	\$190,687	\$141.8	672	1,344
HOME FURNISHING STORES	\$897,188	\$89,719	\$179,438	\$167.8	535	1,070
HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCES STORES	\$300,606	\$30,061	\$60,121	\$245.4	122	245
RADIO, TELEVISION, ELECTRONICS STORES	\$1,193,749	\$119,375	\$238,750	\$207.2	576	1,152
COMPUTER & SOFTWARE STORES	\$532,056	\$53,206	\$106,411	\$207.2	257	514
CAMERA & PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT STORES	\$47,675	\$4,768	\$9,535	\$542.6	9	18
BUILDING MATERIAL & SUPPLY DEALERS	\$9,167,477	\$916,748	\$1,833,495	\$142.4	6,439	12,877
HARDWARE STORES	\$1,084,891	\$108,489	\$216,978	\$121.1	896	1,792
GROCERY STORES	\$12,647,160	\$1,264,716	\$2,529,432	\$371.8	3,402	6,803
HEALTH & PERSONAL CARE STORES	\$6,836,608	\$683,661	\$1,367,322	\$247.3	2,765	5,529
CLOTHING & CLOTHING ACCESSORIES STORES	\$3,801,019	\$380,102	\$760,204	\$164.6	2,309	4,618
WOMEN'S ACCESSORY & SPECIALTY	\$833,207	\$83,321	\$166,641	\$164.6	506	1,012
SHOE STORES	\$666,460	\$66,646	\$133,292	\$158.8	420	839
JEWELRY STORES	\$442,896	\$44,290	\$88,579	\$263.9	168	336
LUGGAGE & LEATHER GOODS STORES	\$46,931	\$4,693	\$9,386	\$198.8	24	47
SPORTING GOODS STORES	\$882,864	\$88,286	\$176,573	\$153.5	575	1,151
HOBBY, TOYS & GAMES STORES	\$522,187	\$52,219	\$104,437	\$146.3	357	714
SEW/NEEDLEWORK/PIECE GOODS STORES	\$189,192	\$18,919	\$37,838	\$74.9	253	505
BOOK STORES	\$286,954	\$28,695	\$57,391	\$161.2	178	356
GENERAL MERCHANDISE STORES	\$15,405,003	\$1,540,500	\$3,081,001	\$133.9	11,505	23,010
FLORISTS	(\$538,910)	n/a	n/a	\$149.8	n/a	n/a
GIFT, NOVELTY, & SOUVENIR STORES	(\$1,174,193)	n/a	n/a	\$168.6	n/a	n/a
FOOD SERVICE & DRINKING PLACES	\$7,193,422	\$719,342	\$1,438,684	\$201.6	3,568	7,135
DRINKING PLACES: ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES	\$647,208	\$64,721	\$129,442	\$88.1	735	1,470
TOTAL		\$6,457,819	\$12,915,638		36,269	72,538

Sources: Nielsen Claritas, Arnett Muldrow & Associates, Urban Land Institute (Dollars and Cents of Shopping Centers)

TRANSPORTATION

The following pages draw on information gathered as a part of the Graham County Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP), which is being written concurrently with this plan. This section leverages the CTP effort and documents existing transportation networks, conditions, and deficiencies

Transportation is an important topic that affects all residents and businesses in Graham County. Quality of life is dependent on a functioning transportation system, since the condition of the transportation network directly impacts travel time, emergency response time, access to markets and job opportunities, and recreation.

Mountain ranges surrounding Graham County geographically isolate it from the rest of North Carolina and neighboring states. The small number of suitable gaps in the ranges surrounding the county makes traveling in and out difficult and limits potential transportation improvements.

Steep grades associated with the mountainous terrain impact the roadway network in numerous ways. Heavy trucks and passenger cars slow down when climbing grades. Snow and ice combined with steep grades can make roads impassable during winter. Landslides are a threat that can block roads, or the roadway itself can slide off the mountain. Finally, compared to roads on flat terrain, mountain roadways have more and tighter curves that slow traffic and present safety concerns.

The Graham County transportation network is currently operating well from a capacity perspective. Countywide, only two roadway segments are near capacity and none are over capacity. However, safety is currently a problem. There are several high

crash intersections and road segments. In contrast, bridges are generally in good condition, with only six deficient bridges identified. Two of the six deficient bridges are currently being replaced.

EXISTING NETWORKS

The primary transportation network in Graham County is the road network. In addition to the roadway network, Graham County also provides transit service. As a primarily rural county, bicycle and pedestrian accommodations are limited. There is currently no active rail in Graham County.

ROADWAYS

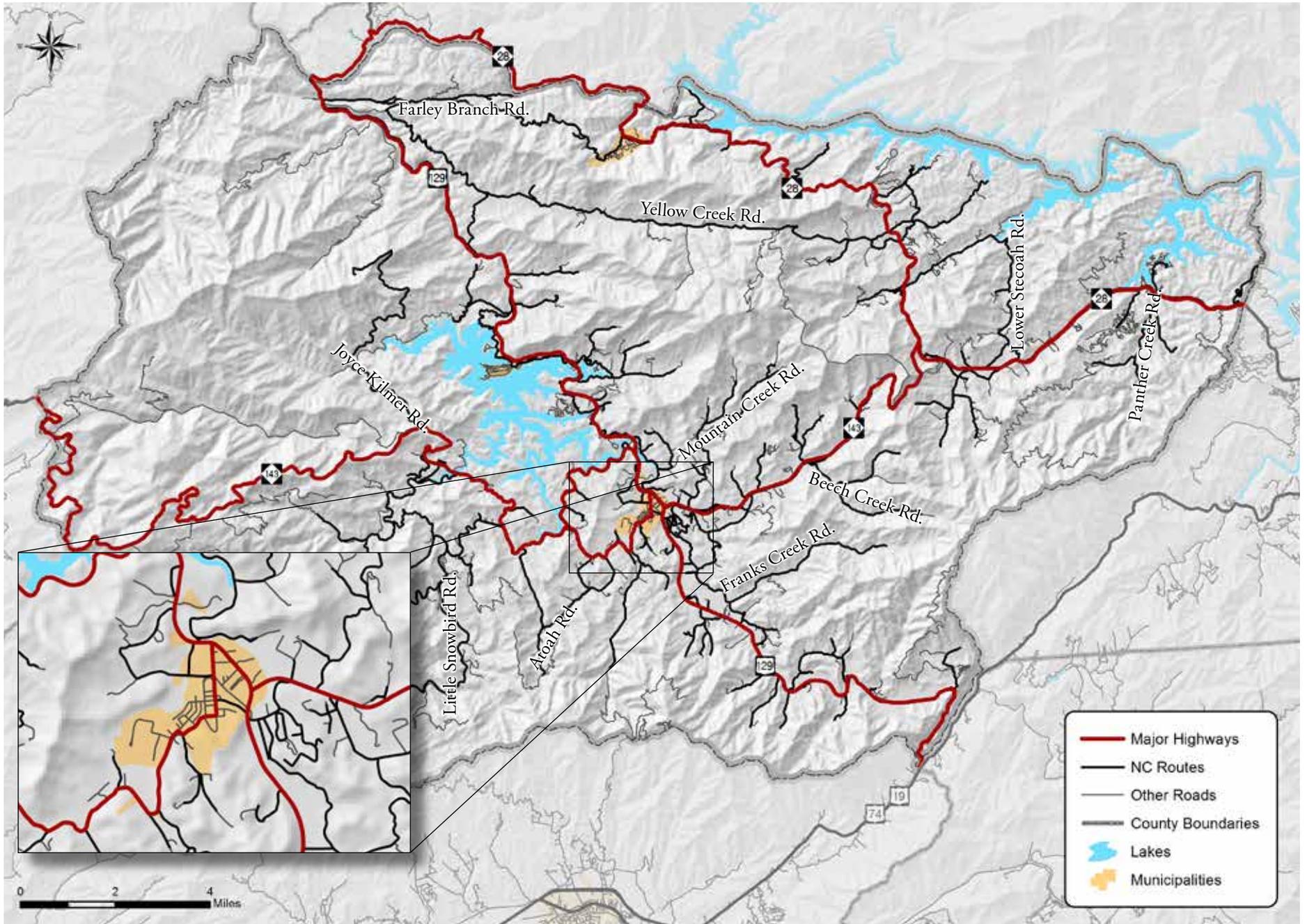
The major transportation corridors in Graham County are as follows. Of these roads, only a portion of NC 28 from the Swain County line to the proposed new location roadway for Corridor K is designated as a state Strategic Highway Corridor.

- ♦ U.S. Highway 129 (Tapoco Road/Rodney Orr Bypass/Tallulah Road)
- ♦ N.C. Highway 143 (Cherohala Skyway/Massey Branch Road/Sweetwater Road)
- ♦ N.C. Highway 28 (Fontana Road)



Graham County's road network is characterized by low volume facilities

EXISTING ROADWAY NETWORK



PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Public and human service transit service is provided by Graham County Transit. In addition to serving destinations within Graham County, routes to Andrews, Cherokee, and Marble are scheduled daily. Service is also provided to Asheville, Bryson City, Hayesville, Murphy, and Sylva. Transit is on-demand only and requests must be made at least 24 hours in advance for local service and 48 hours ahead of time for out of county service.

BICYCLE

Graham County does not currently have any dedicated bicycle facilities, such as bike lanes, wide shoulders, or paved multi-use trails. Additionally, the typical two lane rural roads throughout the county can make traveling by bicycle challenging.

PEDESTRIAN

Outside of the incorporated areas of Graham County, sidewalks do not exist. Downtown Robbinsville is the location of the majority of the sidewalks in Graham County. Graham County roadways not located in incorporated communities are generally two lane rural roads with designs that do not provide specific accommodations for pedestrians.

RAILROAD

There is currently no active rail service in Graham County. Additionally, substantial sections of the abandoned rail line that originated southwest of Robbinsville and roughly paralleled US 29 (Tallulah Road) to the Norfolk Southern mainline near Topton have been removed and the right-of-way deeded back to the original landowners.

AIR

Graham County does not own or operate an airport. Western Carolina Regional Airport, located approximately 22 miles south of Robbinsville by road, serves Graham County. As of 2008 (the most recent year for which statistics are available), the airport averaged 56 operations per day and 73 aircraft were based at the airport. Access to the airport is complicated by the lack of a direct route. Currently, the shortest route is to take US 129 southeast to Topton and then turn onto US 129/74 to continue southwest to the airport.

TRAFFIC COUNTS

The following recent trends in traffic levels on major highways in Graham County have been observed from 2002 to 2012 using average annual daily traffic data obtained from the North Carolina Department of Transportation. Overall, Graham County has not experienced a large increase in traffic between 2002 and 2012.

- ◆ US 129 (Tapoco Road/Rodney Orr Bypass/Tallulah Road): Traffic volumes along US 129 increased between 2002 and 2012 with the exception of three count locations. North of SR 1247 (Meadow Branch Road), north of SR 1156 (Knight Road), and north of NC 143 (Sweetwater Road).
- ◆ NC 143 (Cherohala Skyway/Massey Branch Road/Sweetwater Road): Traffic levels along NC 143 and NC 143 Business have generally declined between 2002 and 2012. Additionally, the 2012 traffic count was below the 10 year average at almost all count locations on NC 143. The only locations where 2012 counts were above average on NC 143 were east of US 129 and on NC 143 Business East of SR 1133 (Claude Rogers Road).

- ◆ NC 28 (Fontana Road): The increase and decline in traffic levels along NC 28 between 2002 and 2012 was mixed. Traffic increased at more count locations than it fell. Locations where traffic decreased include: east of SR 1246, north of SR 1246, and north of SR 1267 (Yellow Branch Road).

In addition to the major highways mentioned above, the change in traffic counts from 2002 through 2012 on various facilities in Graham County is illustrated on the following page.

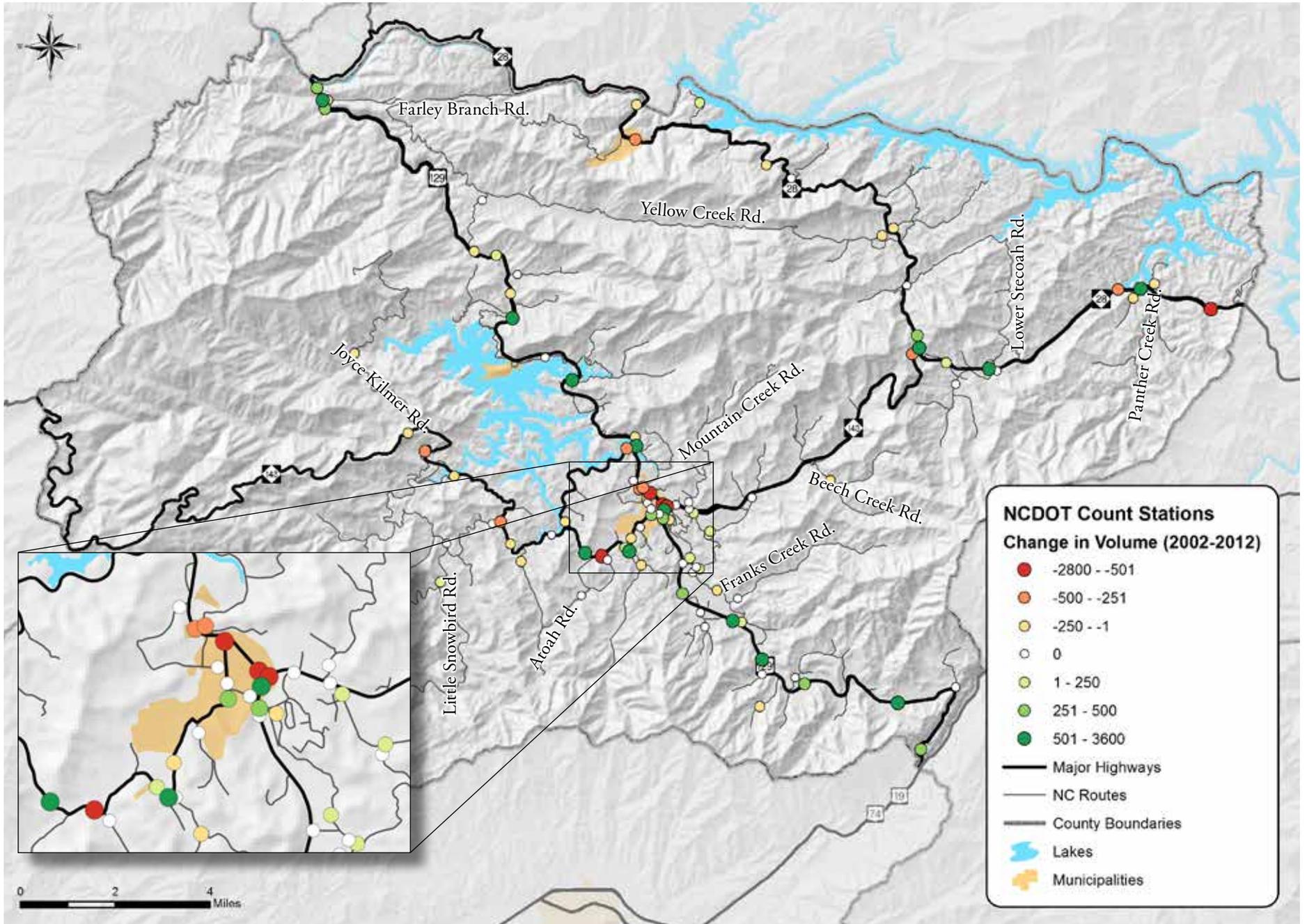
ROAD CAPACITY AND LEVEL OF SERVICE

When the volume of traffic on a road exceeds that road's capacity, a capacity deficiency is said to exist. Roads are considered near capacity when traffic volume is at least 80% of capacity. The maps on the following pages show existing and future capacity deficiencies. The traffic volumes shown for 2040 are projections taken from the Graham County Comprehensive Transportation Plan. They assume that only road improvements programmed for construction in the 2014-2020 State Transportation Improvement Plan will be in place by that time.

The current amount of traffic on a road divided by the capacity of that road, yields the level of service, which is measured on a letter grade system where A represents free flow with no delays and F represents significant delays and congestion with traffic often at a standstill. Level of service D indicates the point at which drivers begin to experience delay.

Currently, no roadway segments in Graham County are over capacity. However, two segments are near capacity, and both are located on US 129. The first segment that is currently near capacity is US 129 (Tallulah Road) from Woodland Heights to 5 Point Road. The second segment that is near capacity is US

CHANGE IN TRAFFIC VOLUMES (2002-2012)



129 (Rodney Orr Bypass) from Ford Street to NC 143 (Sweetwater Road).

While capacity data indicate that in theory there will not be significant delays on Graham County roads, the presence of steep grades and truck traffic without passing lanes will increase travel times in many locations, including for emergency vehicles.

SAFETY

NCDOT provided the data used in the following crash and bridge deficiency assessments. Traffic crashes are often used as an indicator for locating roadway problems. Crash patterns obtained from an analysis of crash data can lead to the identification of improvements that will reduce the number of crashes.

The Traffic Safety Unit of NCDOT's Transportation Mobility and Safety Division identifies high frequency crashes at intersections and along roadway sections during a five year period. The high frequency crash locations examined during the development of the Graham County CTP occurred between January 1, 2006 and December 31, 2010. During this period, a total of twenty-one intersections and twenty-five roadway sections were identified as having a high frequency of crashes as illustrated in the map on the following page.

BRIDGE DEFICIENCY

Bridges are a vital element of a highway system and present the greatest opportunity of all potential highway failures for disruption of community welfare and loss of life.

NCDOT's Structures Management Unit inspects all bridges in North Carolina at least once every two years. Bridges having the highest priority are

replaced as federal and state funds become available. Six deficient bridges were identified on roads evaluated as part of the comprehensive transportation plan. Of these, two are currently under being replaced. Refer to the comprehensive transportation plan for a list of deficient bridges as well as more detailed bridge deficiency information.



PART II: COMMUNITY INPUT

OVERVIEW

In any planning process, open and effective community engagement is fundamental to ensuring that the plan's goals and vision reflect the community's ideals, and that the implementation plan is not only feasible, but that there is adequate buy-in from the community to press forward with implementation after the plan document is complete and adopted. To promote active stakeholder participation throughout the planning process, the consultant team used several methods, including public meetings, a weeklong workshop, steering committee meetings, and print and electronic outreach.

The outreach process for this plan benefited by being concurrent with the outreach process for Opt-In (The Opportunity Initiative of Southwestern North Carolina) and the Graham County Comprehensive Transportation Plan. All public meetings allowed feedback on all plans, and all efforts have been coordinated to ensure that the plans are consistent with each other and reflect the input given by the community.

INTERVIEWS AND SMALL GROUP MEETINGS

Given the large and rural nature of the region, the Opt-In process began as a series of individual interviews and small group meetings to learn about the priorities of those in Graham County and the region before the first public meeting. About three dozen such meetings occurred with Graham County stakeholders, not including other meetings with a regional focus, but that also addressed Graham County (for instance, with the U.S. Forest Service).

FIRST COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

The first public meeting for the Gateway to Tomorrow planning process was the first Opt-In Community

Workshop, which was held on September 24, 2013 from 5:30 to 8:15 p.m. and attended by approximately 45 people. This initial meeting focused on introducing the public to the planning process and allowing them to respond to issues identified during interviews and small group meetings. The meeting also included an overview of some basic facts describing the region.

WEEKLONG COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

From Monday February 3 to Friday February 7, 2014, a weeklong community workshop was held. Approximately 90 individuals signed in during the week. There were ten focus group sessions

conducted during the week to get input on specific topics such as transportation, tourism, and health. There was also a public meeting the first evening to address regional issues as part of Opt-In. An Open House late Wednesday afternoon allowed members of the public to view the draft county level ideas that had been explored, and a draft workshop results presentation on Friday afternoon concluded the week with an overview of the many ideas brainstormed, suggested, and developed during the week.

One of the focus groups consisted of local youth, who contributed a number of important ideas to the conversation during the week. Among these



Participants at the first workshop discuss key issues in the region and Graham County

were the importance of maintaining the close-knit community and natural beauty of Graham County, while also attracting better jobs, more restaurants & shops, and more things to do. The revitalization of downtown Robbinsville was of particular interest.

DRAFT PLAN OPEN HOUSE

Based on input received at the first two workshops, an Open House was held on April 22, 2014 from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. At this meeting, the entire draft recommendations section of this plan was on display on posters around the room. Sticky notes were provided for participants to leave comments. Hundreds

of comments were received from the approximately 65 people who attended.

FINAL PLAN PRESENTATION

On September 15, 2015 the final Gateway to Tomorrow plan was presented to the Graham County Commissioners for adoption.

STEERING COMMITTEE

A committee of local stakeholders was assembled to help guide the process, review draft plans, and give input. This 18-member committee included representatives of Graham County, all three towns within

the county, and other important local interests. This committee also oversaw the Comprehensive Transportation Plan process and met nearly monthly during the process.

OUTREACH TOOLS

In an effort to reach as many Graham County stakeholders as possible, a number of communication tools were used. The Opt-In website served as the key source for information about the Gateway to Tomorrow Plan. The site showed the date and location of every public meeting, documented all comments received at every meeting, made drafts public for download as they were available, and provided contact info for public comments. Regular posts, keyworded by topic, updated visitors to the website about the latest news regarding the public process and the plan. Regular email announcements regarding the Gateway to Tomorrow plan and public meetings were advertised via the Opt-In email list, which included more than 1,200 contacts across the region.

In addition to the website, flyers were posted at public locations around the county and sent to the steering committee for distribution prior to each public meeting. The Graham Star carried advertisements for all public meetings, but also published a number of stories with more detailed information about the planning process and helped increase participation.



The Open House as part of the February Weeklong Community Workshop allowed locals to prioritize ideas for the future

A scenic view of a mountain range with vibrant autumn foliage in the foreground and a blue sky with scattered white clouds in the background. The foreground shows a dense forest of trees with leaves in shades of orange, yellow, and red. In the distance, several layers of mountain ridges are visible, creating a sense of depth. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds, and the overall atmosphere is bright and clear.

PART III: RECOMMENDATIONS

OVERVIEW

The following recommendations are based on public input received at the week-long Community Workshop, in personal interviews, from the Planning Committee, and by other means, coupled with sound planning principles. The recommendations represent an ambitious plan for Graham County and are intended to serve as a comprehensive, long-term guide for public and private investment.

Recommendations in this plan are divided into policies and projects. Projects are specific tasks with a defined cost and time frame. The numbers before each project refer to cost and time frame details in Part IV: Implementation (forthcoming in May).

Policies are general guidelines that provide direction to the implementation of the plan. They often support recommended projects and should serve as the basis for future actions on the part of decision makers.

LAND STEWARDSHIP & COMMUNITY FACILITIES POLICIES

Preserve rural character and rural residential areas. *The rural landscape is one of the county's most valuable assets and should be preserved.*

Encourage growth in the areas shown on the Investment Guide Map. *The plan on the following page should serve as a general guide for where development, infrastructure, and other significant investment and activity should occur.*

Support the implementation of the Reimagining Robbinsville plan. *This important plan was adopted by the Town of Robbinsville and presents an important vision for the future of downtown that was developed*

with public input. The plan should continue to be implemented.

Support the redevelopment of downtown Robbinsville and the bypass as shown in the conceptual plan on pages 55-59. *This long term, visionary plan includes public improvements and private housing & shopping as detailed in the conceptual plan.*

Support the revitalization of the area around the Stecoah Center as shown in the conceptual plan. *As a key tourist hub and residential node, the health of Stecoah is key to the health of the county.*

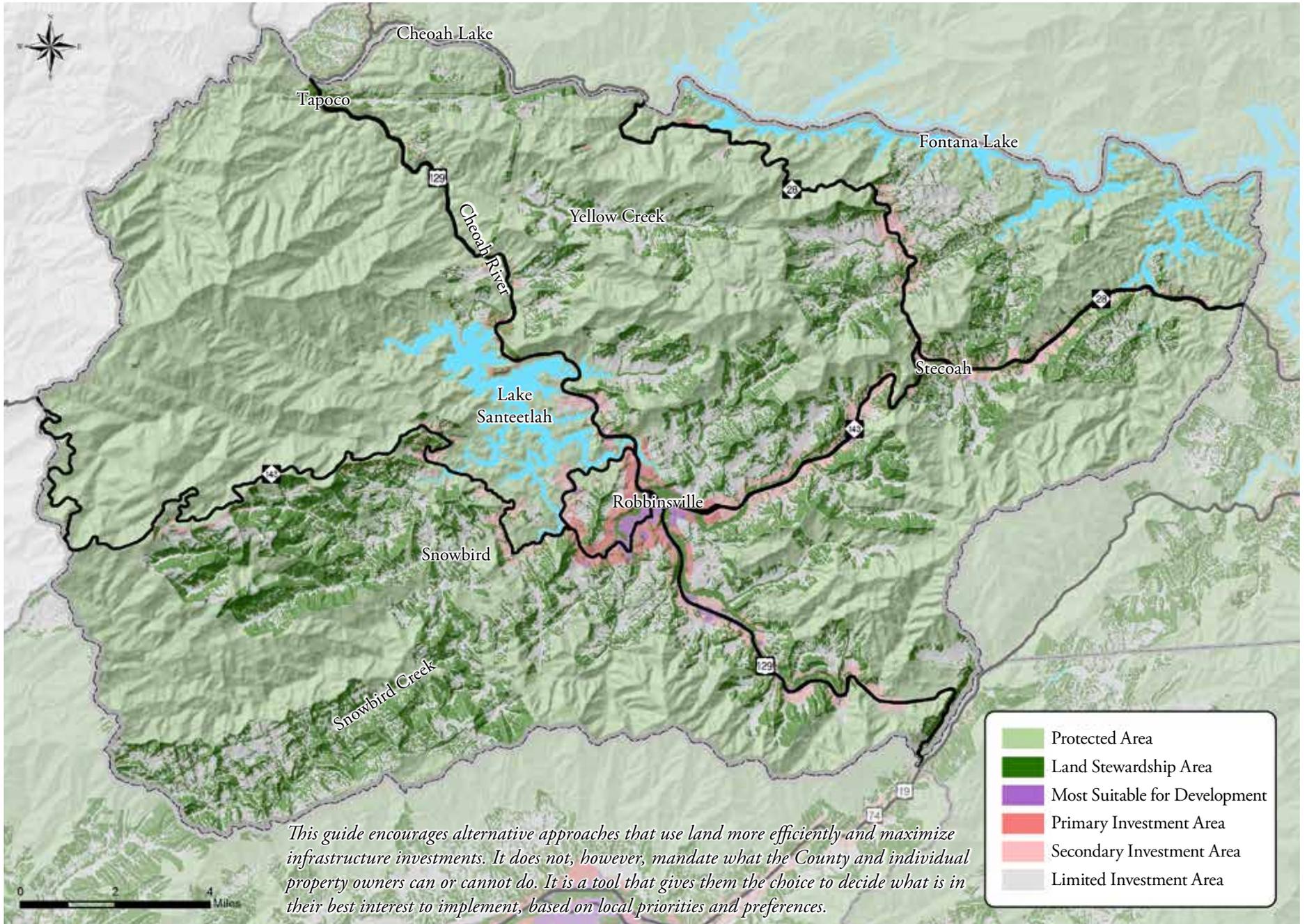
Encourage subdivisions and other clustered development types that preserve open space. *Developers should be made aware of and encouraged to use these tools in order to preserve the open space and rural character that is so important.*

Encourage developers to provide a variety of affordable home types. *See page 53 for details.*

Promote awareness of the challenges of developing on steep slopes and discuss with emergency services how to provide reasonable emergency access to such locations. *While steep slope development regulations are not desired at this point, awareness should be promoted to ensure that residents are not put in danger.*



The preservation of rural character is a key goal of this plan



This guide encourages alternative approaches that use land more efficiently and maximize infrastructure investments. It does not, however, mandate what the County and individual property owners can or cannot do. It is a tool that gives them the choice to decide what is in their best interest to implement, based on local priorities and preferences.

INVESTMENT GUIDE

The Investment Guide on the preceding page comes from the Opt-In Regional Vision and is the combination of the regional land suitability analysis and public comments on the three regional planning scenarios. The Guide encourages alternative approaches that use land more efficiently and maximize infrastructure investments. It does not, however, mandate what the County and individual property owners can or cannot do. It is a tool that gives them the choice to decide what is in their best interest to implement, based on local priorities and preferences.

Protected Area. This category shows land that is not developable and not appropriate for major infrastructure investment, such as state and federally managed land and land with permanent easements. These areas should continue to be preserved and enhanced.

Land Stewardship Area. This category shows land that is privately owned but that presents challenges to development or other significant investment. It includes floodplains, wetlands, and slopes steeper than 40%.

Most Suitable for Development. These areas have the fewest conflicts between prime agricultural land, areas suitable for growth, and protected natural resources. These should be the preferred development and investment areas for the county.

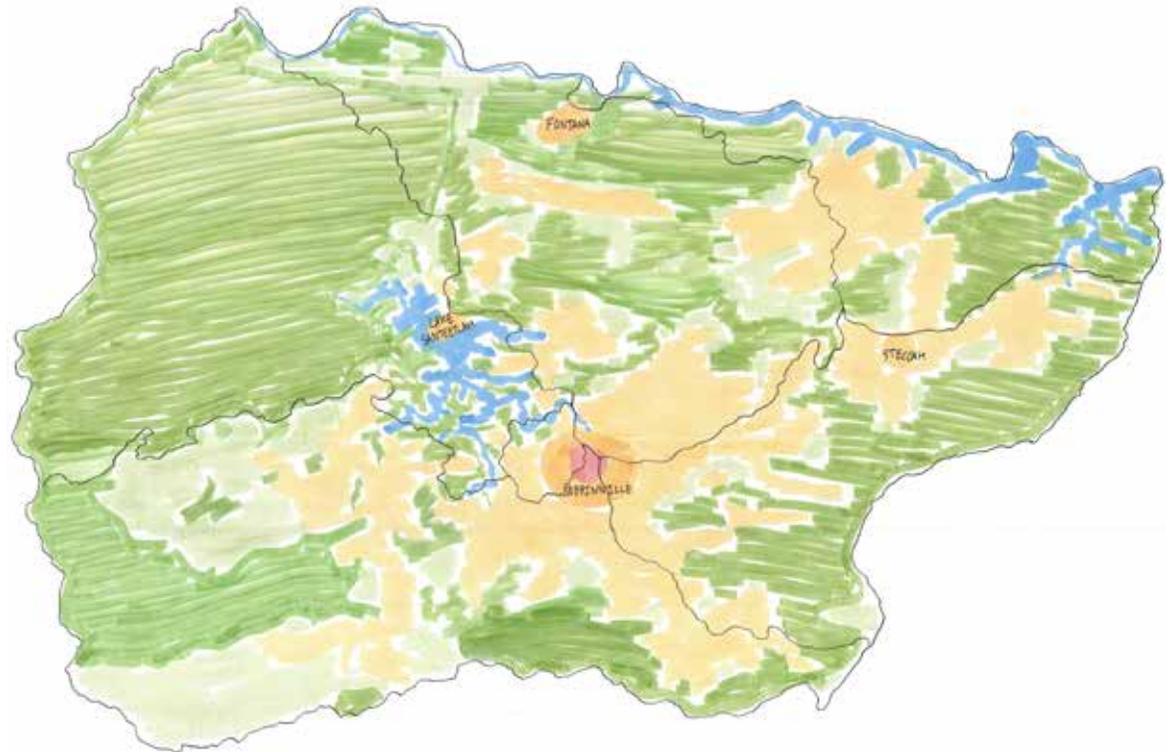
Primary Investment Area. This category shows land in and near existing town limits. A variety of factors including demographics, lifestyle preferences, and the plan's goals make these areas the

most likely locations for future growth. Most of these areas already have water, sewer, and high speed Internet. Infrastructure and private development within this area will be the least costly.

Secondary Investment Area. Land within ¼ mile of major roads is shown in this category. The location of these areas makes them likely prospects for new development and logical places for new infrastructure investment, but these should be implemented in a way that preserves rural character and makes the most efficient use of limited

public resources, encouraging growth and investment in existing communities where possible.

Limited Investment Area. This category shows land with limited potential for new development or other significant investment because it is not near major roads or existing infrastructure. It contains woodlands, farms, and scattered homes. Significant public investment in these areas would be inefficient and is not recommended, but private development should not be precluded.



This potential growth nodes map from the week-long workshop was the predecessor of the Investment Guide

Seek opportunities for sustainable harvesting of timber on public and institutional lands. Forest lands are one of the most valuable renewable resources; new opportunities should be explored for sustainable logging.

Preserve existing farmland and support existing farms and their products. Agriculture is an important part of local heritage and a key opportunity for economic growth and agritourism. Farms should be preserved where possible, and opportunities to sell farm products to locals and tourists should be expanded.

Encourage annexation consistent with the investment areas shown on the Investment Guide Map.

The map on page 50 should serve as a general guide for where annexations should occur, particularly because annexations affect future infrastructure extensions.

Preserve historic buildings and encourage their rehabilitation where feasible. Historic structures in Robbinsville and throughout the county are important reminders of the past and have scenic and economic value.

Consider imposing fees on sewer expansion to incentivize growth in desired areas. Such fees could encourage growth in areas already served by infrastructure and make more efficient use of public utilities.



Supporting farms and their products can help strengthen the local economy (image courtesy GardenBlog2)

LAND STEWARDSHIP & COMMUNITY FACILITIES PROJECTS

1. Work with communities to draft small area plans, with a focus on Snowbird, Stecoah, and Robbinsville. Support the existing plan for Fontana Village. These plans should be developed with community input and form the basis for growth and investment.

2. Create a Capital Improvement Plan to more efficiently plan and manage infrastructure improvements. Many counties use this type of plan to solicit community input and better manage public spending. The plan should address sewer, water, streets, public buildings, parks, and other public facilities.

3. Explore the extension of sewer lines from Robbinsville to the Town of Lake Santeetlah. This extension could serve the needs of the Town of Lake Santeetlah and lessen the environmental impact of existing septic tanks. Care should be taken to limit access along the line to avoid sprawling development and a loss of rural character.

4. Upgrade the Town of Fontana Dam water system. The water system is aging and in need of replacement and upgrades.

5. Adopt design guidelines for central Robbinsville to encourage development in keeping with the town's historic character. These guidelines could help ensure that building materials, facade design, site design, and more are appropriate.

6. Keep civic buildings and uses in the core of Robbinsville. Conduct a study of how to keep county administrative offices in downtown. Civic buildings can anchor a downtown and provide people that patronize restaurants and shops. All efforts should be made to keep these buildings in downtown.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING OPTIONS

Community members emphasized the need for more housing in Graham County that would be affordable for young families, the elderly, and others with limited resources. Nearly all the existing housing stock is limited to conventional single-family homes or mobile homes. These housing types will continue to be important, but are not ideal or affordable for everyone.

The images on this page show a number of potential options for new types of housing that were on

display at the week-long Community Workshop. The images below represent those that workshop participants selected as most appropriate for Graham County. They range from conventional homes arranged around a common greenspace, to apartments, duplexes, and townhouses. It is important to make sure that developers provide a variety of housing types in sizes in the county going forward in order to ensure that all residents have a variety of options.



Cottages clustered around common greenspace



Townhouses



Duplex designed to look like single-family house



Quadplex on one level, accessible for seniors



Apartments



Apartments

7. Pursue funding sources to help historic property owners keep their buildings in a state of good repair. *A number of historic buildings are in need of facade renovations, painting, roof work, and other improvements to stabilize and preserve these important resources.*

8. Repair the stone wall in downtown Robbinsville. *The stone wall on Main Street should be repaired to avoid collapse.*

9. Create the Young America Outdoor Recreational Park. *This important park has already been planned for, but should be constructed to expand recreational opportunities and improve health.*

10. Explore the creation of a public fairgrounds where shown on page 65. *These fairgrounds could serve as an entry feature into Robbinsville and provide space for festivals and other large public events.*

11. Construct an addition to the existing sheriff's office to create a new Town Hall. *This addition, shown on page 56, would provide much needed space for Town Hall and allow these civic offices to stay in downtown.*

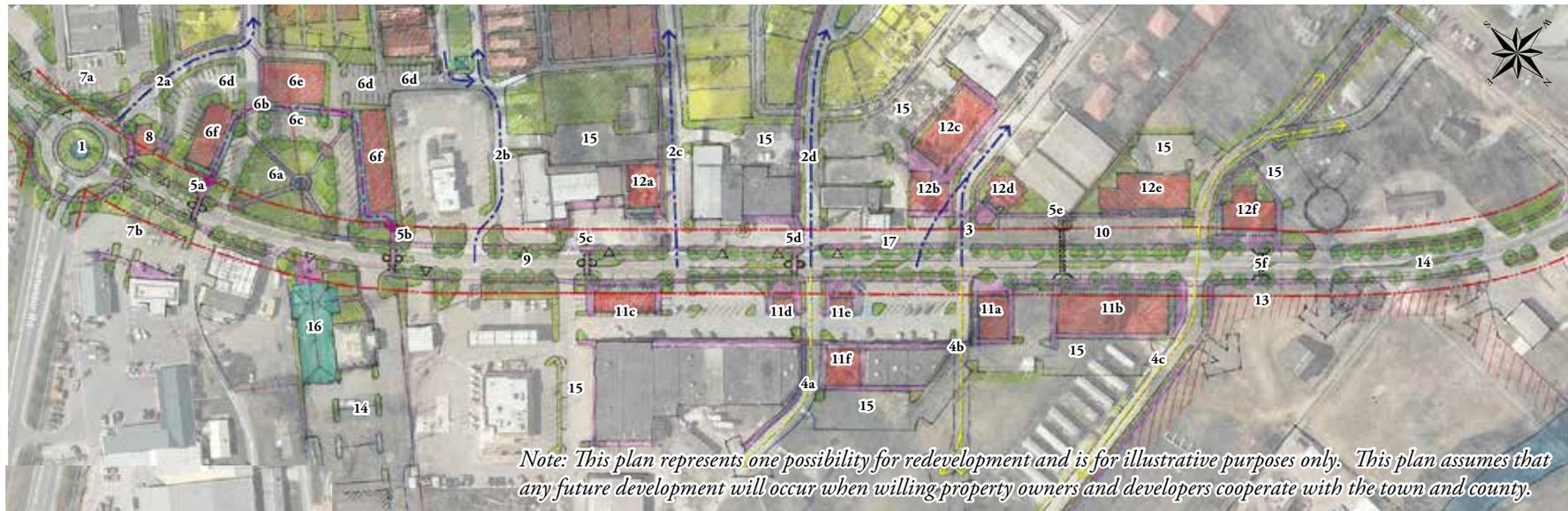
12. Construct a Town Square as shown on page 56. *This public space could serve as a focal point for Robbinsville, being surrounded by public and private buildings.*



Infrastructure expansions should be well planned to ensure they do not encourage sprawl (image courtesy Diversify Nevada)

DOWNTOWN ROBBINSVILLE CONCEPTUAL PLAN: ARTIST RENDERING





The plan shown above and detailed below would transform the Rodney Orr Bypass into “Rodney Orr Boulevard” and be a catalyst for revitalization in Robbinsville.

- 1. Intersection and streetscape improvements at Hwy. 143 and U.S. 129 to provide a transformational arrival feature.
- 2a.-d. New lateral streets connecting Rodney Orr to Ford Street would create multiple auto and pedestrian routes and reduce congestion.
- 3. Laura Street realigned with street 4b. to provide development opportunities at the two corners.
- 4a.-c. Formalized streets on east side of Rodney Orr and optional locations for bridge crossing to high school. Option 4c. is the preferred

alignment since (1) it is the northernmost and least congested location, (2) it could provide a direct connection from the high school to Main Street and the elementary school, and (3) street and infrastructure improvements could open up adjacent land for development.

- 5a.-c. Existing pedestrian crossing locations, all of which could be enhanced with median extensions as shown without impeding turning movements.
- 5d.-f. Additional potential pedestrian crossing locations with median refuge islands.
- 6a. Proposed Town Square with central fountain or sculpture on axis with proposed Town Hall, framed by tourist-oriented retail and restaurants.

6b. Continuous wide sidewalk with shed porch roof. High-visibility ends of buildings provide excellent opportunities for outdoor dining.

6c. Angled parking provides 26 spaces.
6d. Rear parking provides an additional 44 spaces.

6e.-f. Building e (6,000 sq. ft.) could be a two-screen cinema with a traditional marquee. Buildings f. (total 10,000 sq. ft.) provide 40 foot-deep tenant space. With a total footprint of 16,000 sq. ft. and 71 parking spaces, a portion of these buildings could have second floor offices.

7a. These 16 parking spaces replace the 15 displaced for street 2a.

(continued on following page)

RODNEY ORR BYPASS CONCEPTUAL PLAN

7b. These 36 parking spaces are reorganized to be more attractive and efficient. They replace the 30 existing space. A curb cut is also eliminated.

8. This “signature” building (potentially an ice-cream stand) should have a distinctive architectural character.

9. Triangles shown throughout the plan indicate curb cuts that should be eliminated in favor of shared driveways to decrease accidents and provide a more continuous, safer, and more attractive sidewalk. No businesses are negatively impacted. Reorganized parking could also provide space for outdoor dining or retail displays.

10. This undeveloped block provides an opportunity for a continuous frontage road with parking to support pedestrian-oriented retail.

11a.-b. Proposed buildings face the sidewalk, with parallel parking in front but most parking to the side and rear. Building 11a frames the end of the existing parking lot to the south.

11c.-e. These small buildings replace a few existing parking spaces and dramatically improve the appearance of the existing strip center. They face the sidewalk to visually reduce the width of the road and create a “village” feel, while providing 4,000 sq. ft. of highly desirable retail space.

11f. This infill building provides an additional 2,700 sq. ft. of retail space. A distinctive design could enhance the character of the existing strip center. It could also have second floor offices to enhance the center’s appearance.

12a.-f. These commercial infill buildings, all with good frontage and visibility, would help to complete the corridor (total 39,000 sq. ft.).

13. This undeveloped site, with 430 feet of frontage, could be assembled for a large footprint anchor use.

14. Widening this section of road to a full three lanes would allow for a landscaped median.

15. In these locations, parking can be shifted to or augmented in the rear of buildings to improve the character and walkability of the boulevard.

16. The proposed two-story Town Hall could provide an 18,000 sq. ft. addition to the existing sheriff’s office, with ample room in the rear for parking and future facilities. This stately civic building, fronting on the new Town Square, could provide a dramatic shift in resident and visitor perceptions of the town.

17. Streetscape improvements should include widening sidewalks, adding a planting strip between the curb and the sidewalk, and planting street trees. These improvements could occur incrementally but should be coordinated with planting, private development, and utility plans.



The Rodney Orr Bypass today



The proposed Boulevard showing streetscape improvements



Future new development further enhances the street

DOWNTOWN ROBBINSVILLE CONCEPTUAL PLAN

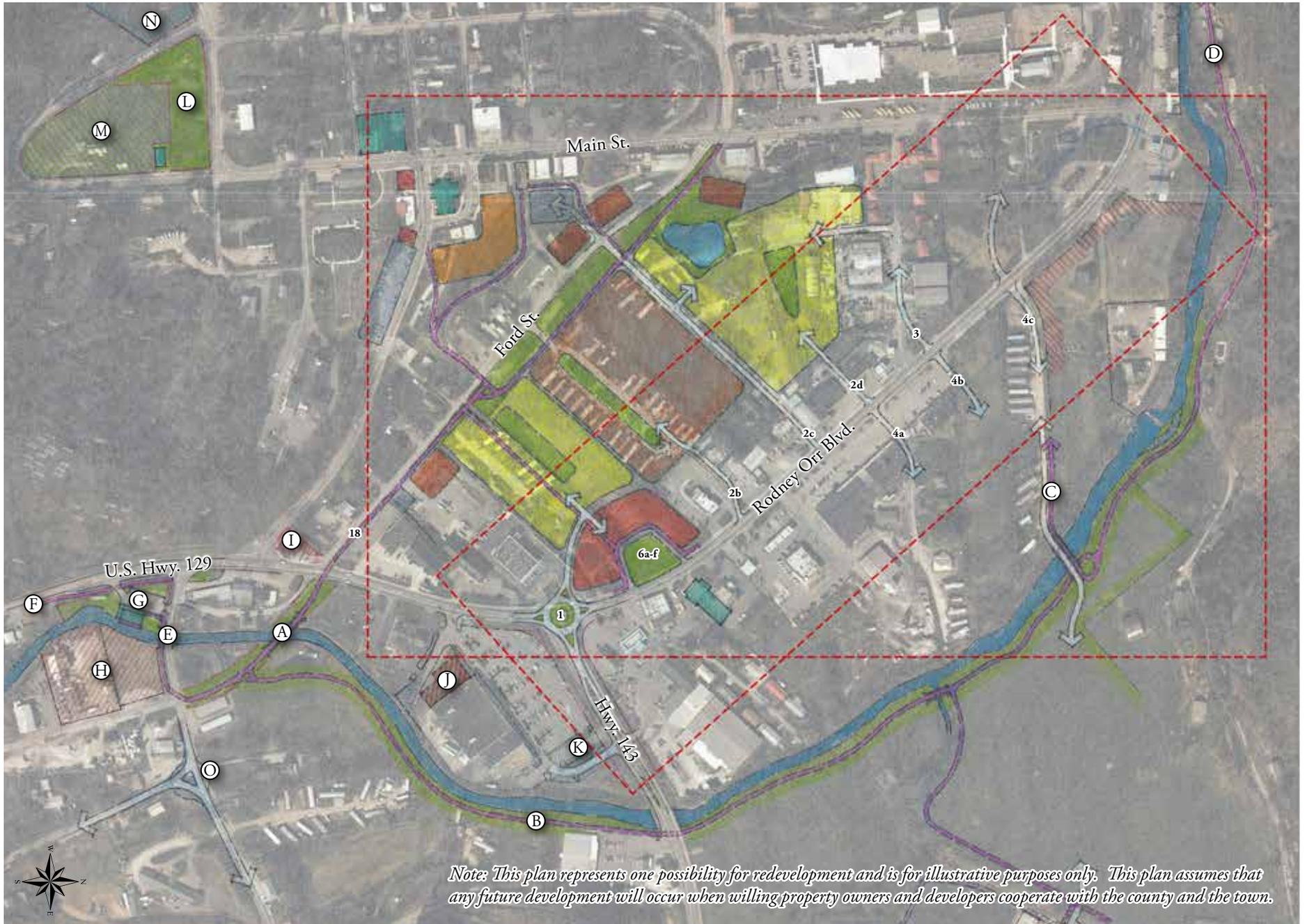


Note: This plan represents one possibility for redevelopment and is for illustrative purposes only. This plan assumes that any future development will occur when willing property owners and developers cooperate with the town and county.

The plan on the previous page shows one potential long-term vision for the revitalization of central Robbinsville. This ambitious combination of public and private improvements would increase the tax base; provide new housing, shopping, and dining options; add public gathering spaces; and create a regional destination for locals and visitors.

- A) This proposed multi-use trail follows the historic railroad bed, per the Robbinsville Connectivity Plan.
- B) This section of trail should be built along the street, since existing parking precludes use of the rail bed. The adjacent parking lot could be narrowed to 60 feet deep to accommodate the trail, but still allow adequate circulation.
- C) Potential trail connection(s) from Ford Street to Rodney Orr, one of which should connect to the proposed Town Square.
- D) Potential trail connection(s) from Ford Street to the historic downtown. One of these routes connects to the “fire tower” location envisioned in the Reimagining Robbinsville plan.
- E) The “courtyard” terrace envisioned in the Reimagining Robbinsville plan may be an appropriate long-term setting for a visitors center, once downtown is reestablished as a destination. An alternate near-term location visitors center location is shown on page 60.
- F) The green space between Ford Street and the railroad bed should be graded where possible to create a bioswale to help decrease flooding. A proposed pond would collect rain water and release overflow through a pipe under the bypass to the creek.
- G) Proposed cottages along a loop street face a common greenspace and have alleys for parking so that front porches face onto the sidewalk. The proposed sewer layout for this area would need to be amended to allow this plan. The common greenspace serves as the central neighborhood amenity. A shade structure serves as an amenity for the park as well as the multi-use trail.
- H) Potential location for a public tennis or basketball court.
- I) Proposed homes preserve the existing lot and utility layout. Existing mobile homes could be incrementally replaced by Katrina cottages. Parking is accessed by alleys so that front porches face neighborhood streets and parks. The central park includes a gazebo to screen views of the adjacent restaurant parking lot.
- J) Each of these proposed greenspaces is defined by a picket fence with a gate for each home to create a shared front yard for clusters of Katrina cottages.
- K) This neighborhood includes larger residential lots and a central park.
- L) Potential community garden.
- M) Proposed townhomes would face Ford Street and have rear parking. The southernmost townhome location would screen views of the equipment yard from the street.
- N) This proposed apartment building and parking deck would provide additional parking for the Courthouse and local businesses, increase downtown housing options, and help to connect downtown with the bypass. The parking deck would border the Courthouse square and transition between the grade of the square and the slope below. It would provide 200 parking spaces and be less expensive than a typical deck because of the lack of ramps. The lower level(s) could be entered from a parking lot along Ford Street, the middle level from East Main Street, and the upper level from the square. Three to four stories of apartments (potentially appealing to seniors given nearby health facilities) would line the parking deck and have views of the town.
- O) The commercial viability and aesthetic appeal of downtown could be enhanced significantly by formalizing this existing gravel parking lot.
- P) The Courthouse and municipal buildings do not adequately serve their civic functions. While the relocation of these facilities has been discussed, this plan recommends that they be kept downtown. New space could be provided in the proposed Town Hall shown on page 56.
- Q) This long-vacant historic store could be renovated to house county or town offices.
- R) These key infill sites should be occupied by new buildings and businesses that contribute to downtown’s vitality and appeal.

GREATER ROBBINSVILLE CONCEPTUAL PLAN



GREATER ROBBINSVILLE CONCEPTUAL PLAN

The plan on the previous page shows a number of ideas for Robbinsville outside the immediate downtown area. These improvements and connections would help revitalize and improve first impressions of the town.

- A) Proposed multi-use trail crossing of creek, using existing railroad bridge supports.
- B) Multi-use trail along creek, per Robbinsville Connectivity Plan.
- C) Trail across creek to Main Street per Connectivity Plan. There are also two other possible locations.
- D) Trail to Lake Santeetlah (see pages 70-71).
- E) Trail to Visitors Center added to existing Five Points Road bridge over creek.
- F) Potential trail extension along U.S. 129.
- G) Proposed Visitors/Outfitters Center (see page 66).
- H) Vacated properties across creek from Visitors Center—key future use consideration.
- I) Highly visible property at entrance to town—key future use consideration.
- J) Potential expansion of existing grocery store (about 11,000 sq. ft.) based on acquiring property corner for access.
- K) Potential additional parking (36 spaces) resulting from shifting entry drive to align with drive across Sweetwater Road.
- L) Minimum land acquisition required for amphitheater park proposed in Reimagining Robbinsville plan.
- M) Additional land acquisition desirable to complete park.
- N) Improvements to Junaluska memorial & museum.
- O) Portion of proposed truck bypass route (see Graham County Comprehensive Transportation Plan for details).

STECOAH VILLAGE CONCEPTUAL PLAN



Note: This plan represents one possibility for redevelopment and is for illustrative purposes only. This plan assumes that any future development will occur when willing property owners and developers cooperate with the county.

STECOAH VILLAGE CONCEPTUAL PLAN

The plan on the previous page shows one potential vision for the future of Stecoah that would help create year-round activity while preserving history. The plan incorporates ideas explored at the Community Workshop. Implementation would require the cooperation of the Stecoah Valley Center as well as a private developer.

A) Cottages. These proposed cottages could be leased seasonally, purchased, or rented full time. They would add a residential component to the village and help frame an improved public greenspace. They might be attractive to aging residents who no longer want to maintain a large home and yard.

B) Lodge or Hostel. This new building could serve visitors to events, Appalachian Trail hikers, and other tourists and visitors, allowing them to experience the Stecoah Valley Center and extend their stay in Graham County.

C) Gathering Space. The historic gymnasium could be renovated for use as an indoor gathering space that could host events, dinners, conferences, and other meetings.

D) Outfitters Store. The historic corner store could be a great location for a small outfitters store to serve Appalachian Trail hikers and other visitors.



BYPASS CROSSROADS CONCEPTUAL PLAN

The truck bypass proposed in the Graham County Comprehensive Transportation Plan would create a prominent new “crossroads” where this new truck bypass crosses U.S. 129 just south of Robbinsville. The handsome existing bank building would occupy the southwestern corner of this new intersection, with the historic stone building on the southeastern corner. The north-eastern corner is currently vacant, but should be considered a focal development site deserving quality architecture, with buildings close to the road and parking behind.

The northwestern corner is now occupied by a distinctive home which should be retained for residential or future commercial use. The adjoining land, shown as future “anchor” development, offers one of the best opportunities near Robbinsville for a large-footprint use such as a hotel or entertainment. With roughly nine acres of developable area, it is large enough to accommodate a cluster of such uses. The proposed extension of the truck bypass to Snowbird Road would offer a second access point to this key site.

This plan recommends that the supermarket not be relocated to this location, due to negative impacts on downtown Robbinsville.



SOUTH U.S. 129 CONCEPTUAL PLAN

The bottom land surrounding the former Phillips & Jordan equipment yard is prime farmland. This setting, if its agricultural character were restored, could constitute a “signature” landscape for the county and an important gateway feature for Robbinsville. Because of its prominent location and proximity to town, it could be an ideal venue for large events like car club meets, a farmers market, or other activities to boost tourism. The land surrounding these fairgrounds could be positioned as a farm coop to promote a local diversified agriculture program.

The properties adjoining the P&J offices, if marketed as part of a “Fairgrounds Business Park,” could provide attractive sites for future businesses. Access to this business park and to an expanded complex of sports fields could be enhanced by extending the existing P&J Road west to U.S. 129. It might be desirable for this Fairgrounds complex to include an RV park, especially if it aspires to host equestrian events.

- A) Existing Phillips & Jordan offices
- B) Future office park sites
- C) Extend P&J Road with bridge to U.S. 129
- D) Dedicated recreation complex parking
- E) Existing ballfields
- F) Expanded ballfields & creekside trail complex
- G) Existing barn converted to event pavilion
- H) Fairgrounds activity areas
- I) Agricultural use
- J) Potential trail connection to Robbinsville



Note: This plan represents one possibility for redevelopment and is for illustrative purposes only. This plan assumes that any future development will occur when willing property owners and developers cooperate with the county.



Massey Branch is a typical rural crossroads that could have a small commercial presence to meet the demand identified in the market study, as well as provide additional housing. The ideas and principles shown here are applicable at crossroads throughout the county, although the location of the proposed restaurant on tribal lands would allow it to serve alcohol.

- A) Proposed dock to allow boaters to visit lodge and lodge guests to directly access the lake
- B) Proposed lodge
- C) Potential multi-use trail
- D) Proposed rental cabins
- E) Proposed general store, farmers market stand, and restaurant with outdoor dining
- F) Proposed intersection improvements
- G) Proposed infill housing

NATURE, HEALTH, & CULTURE POLICIES

Capitalize on the county's natural and scenic resources as its biggest economic driver. Brand the county for nature-based tourism and recruit businesses that provide adventure recreation opportunities (fly-fishing, zip lines, outfitters, etc). Develop a tourism plan that has this as the key focus as well as incorporating heritage, agricultural, and ecotourism.

Provide recreation opportunities within a short drive or walking distance of every community. Recreation amenities, greenways, connected sidewalks, and connected schools should be accessible to everyone.

Improve water quality through improved infrastructure and partnerships. Improve the Robbinsville area water supply by fixing failing septic systems, extending sewer to failing areas, and target key livestock and property owners to aid in fencing cattle from the stream. Work with local watershed groups to meet these goals and maintain water quality in the lakes.

Use the most up-to-date environmental best practices as future transportation facilities are developed. Work with NCDOT, governmental agencies, and non-profit partners to identify solutions to conserve water quality, habitat, and cultural resources. Some of these solutions could include arched culverts designed for fish passage, wildlife crossings (underpasses or overpasses), and collaborative planning at a county level.

Encourage site planning that respects the natural topography and avoids mass grading where feasible. A sensitive and contextual approach to land development can help lessen environmental impacts and preserve the natural features that make this area unique.

Incorporate Cherokee and Graham heritage into future public works projects. Local heritage education and pride can fold into new public works, such as

greenways, road improvements, recreation facilities, a visitor center, byway overlooks, or a town square. This can be done through interpretive and road signage, county tourism branding, artifacts on loan, public art projects, and gateway areas.

Provide better healthcare access and expand the types of services available (particularly specialty healthcare).

NATURE, HEALTH, & CULTURE PROJECTS

13. Pursue the creation of a new visitors center where shown on page 60 and in cooperation with willing property owners. This visitors center could serve as a

gateway to the town as well as an anchor for potential tubing along the creek.

14. Improve the connection between Robbinsville and Lake Santeetlah with a greenway, dredging of the lake for a boat landing, and tubing. This could be a valuable connection for tourism, recreation, and awareness of natural beauty. See pages 70-71.

15. Conduct a regular analysis of hot spots of poor health to track how conditions are changing over time. These hot spots (the Robbinsville and Snowbird areas, specifically) should be subject to regular analysis by the County Health Department and other partners.



Additional recreation opportunities and trails will improve access to nature and improve local health

RELOCATED VISITORS CENTER

The Graham County Travel and Tourism Authority has considered multiple options for a new visitors center. The recommended best near-term location is at the southeast corner of the Five Points Road/U.S. 129 intersection (see page 58).

This creekside site is the only place on the southern approach to Robbinsville that offers an unobstructed view to the creek from the highway. The property is for sale, and is across the creek from vacant land that could be developed for a variety of complimentary uses (hotel, outdoor event venue, recreational uses such as mini-golf, etc.). The sketch below illustrates one proposed

concept for this site that would create a signature feature for the county and a gateway to the Town of Robbinsville.

The facility could function as both a Visitors Center and an Outfitters Center, potentially publicly owned but leased to a private operator. Both functions could be staffed by the operator or a public entity. This could be a “one stop shop” for visitors interested in motor tourism, fishing, boating, hiking, camping, kayaking, and biking, with the gear for these activities prominently displayed on the front porch of the building. Because it caters to diverse groups, many of whom are active

in the off-season, year-round operation could be viable.

This facility could also serve as the trailhead and put-in point for the Tulula Creek floatway and greenway, which would extend two miles downstream to a take-out point at Lake Santeetlah (see page 70). If this concept proves viable, it could be an exciting activity to showcase at the town’s entrance. Re-contouring the creek bank could open up creek views, with a rear patio for café dining overlooking the creek.



16. Educate the public and contractors about existing erosion and sediment control regulations to improve water quality. Existing regulations were considered adequate by the community, but should be better enforced to ensure water quality improves.

17. Collaborate with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and the Snowbird Community to identify areas for preservation and interpretation, including the Junaluska Museum. Several sacred sites, Cherokee mounds, and larger cultural resource rich areas (including village areas and burial sites) should be considered in future planning and development. Jointly, EBCI,

the county, and communities can help preserve these resources and reveal their stories in a respectful way.

18. Identify and promote community hubs for healthy activities and facilities, such as community gardens, greenway trails, and upgrades to walking, bicycling, and recreational connections. The school recreation complex should be enhanced as the central hub for promoting healthy living. Opportunities should be identified elsewhere in the county for community gardens, greenway trails, and upgrades to other walking, bicycling, and recreational connections.

19. Connect U.S. Forest Service trails with communities and identify multimodal and recreational needs along major transportation routes. Identify multimodal and recreational needs along major transportation routes, and work with NCDOT to identify potential solutions.

20. Create a bioswale and pond along Ford Street as shown in the conceptual plan to help reduce flooding. This feature would also improve the aesthetics in this low lying area.

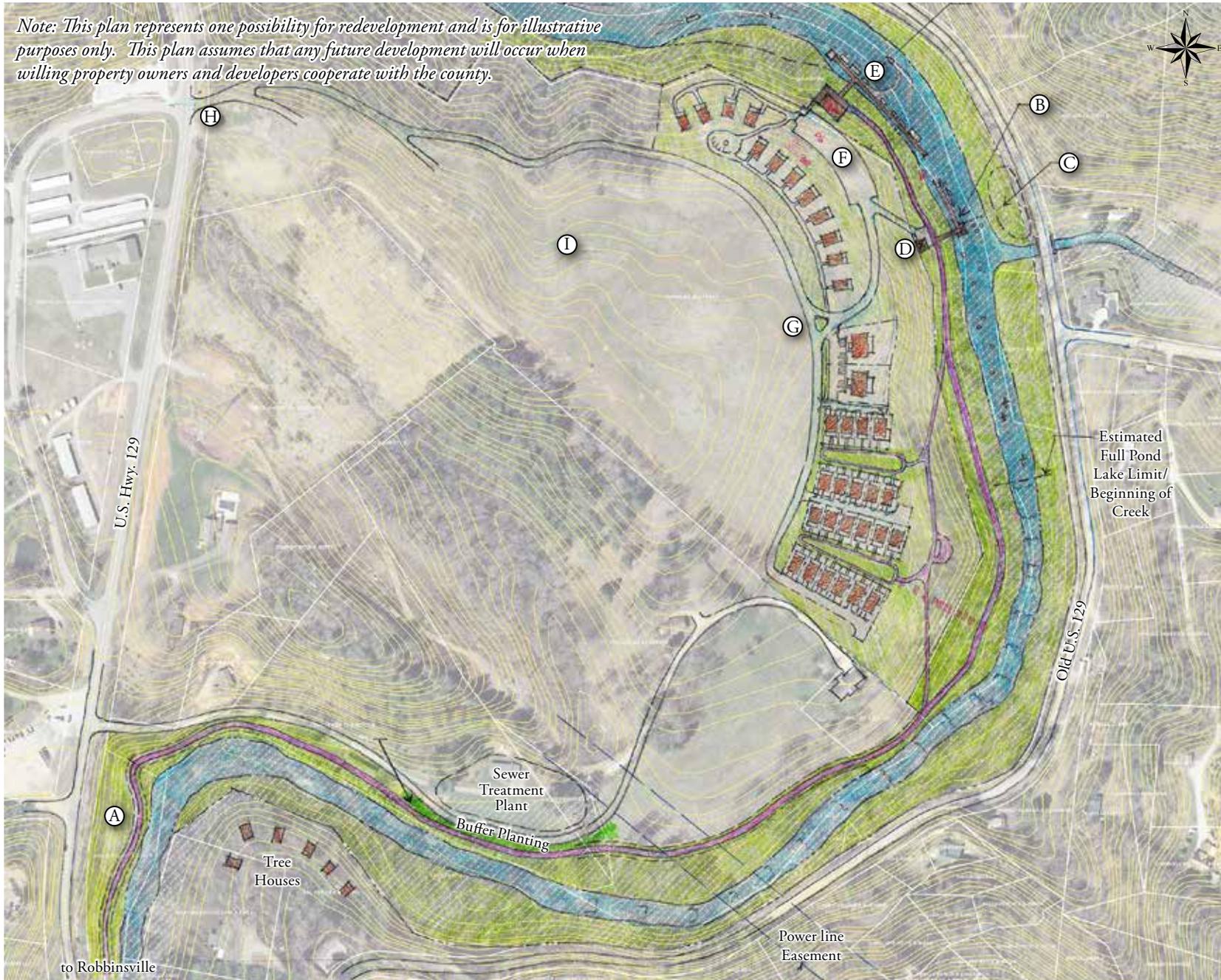
21. Work with NCDOT to open Tulula Bog for controlled public access and explore opportunities for recreation and education. Tulula Bog is one of the state's most important natural heritage sites, a popular birding spot, one of the largest wetlands in Western North Carolina, and has been restored and put under permanent conservation as part of mitigation by NCDOT.



Judaculla Rock is an excellent example of cultural tourism and could be a model for Graham County

ROBBINSVILLE TO LAKE SANTEETLAH GREENWAY CONCEPTUAL PLAN

Note: This plan represents one possibility for redevelopment and is for illustrative purposes only. This plan assumes that any future development will occur when willing property owners and developers cooperate with the county.



ROBBINSVILLE TO LAKE SANTEETLAH GREENWAY CONCEPTUAL PLAN

This plan on the previous page illustrates the potential for a greenway link connecting Robbinsville to Lake Santeetlah. Such a link would not only provide a “waterfront” for the town—it would also make it possible for Lake Santeetlah boaters, who have few destination options for food or supplies, to tie up and walk into town for lunch.

A creekside multi-use trail would connect to the trail system described in the Robbinsville Connectivity Plan and the Reimagining Robbinsville plan. From the proposed park at the intersection of U.S. 129 and Knight Street, the trail would extend just over a mile to terminate at the proposed lakefront boat landing. This landing location is currently not navigable because of extreme silting from decades of upstream development. Dredging and restoration would dramatically improve water quality and the appeal of this part of the lake, and would provide for a boat landing within walking distance of town.

A recreational “floatway” could extend along the creek from the proposed Visitors/Outfitters Center (see page 70) to the boat landing point, a total of two miles. This segment of the creek, which flows through the heart of Robbinsville, could be a significant attraction for visitors and residents, offering a safe and leisurely activity for families. This highly visible activity could broaden Robbinsville’s capture of the recreation tourism market.

Creek clean-up and enhancements would be needed to support the concept. This effort would include removal of logs and other impediments (notably one sewer pipe crossing and the weir at the water plant). It might also be necessary to look at augmenting water flow in this section of the creek. One possibility might be to construct an upstream reservoir, which would fill overnight and release water during the day.

- A) Multi-use trail along creek to town
- B) Kayak rental and tube take-out point, with kayak mooring and swimming dock
- C) Potential alternate tube take-out location
- D) Operations kiosk and loading ramp
- E) Boat landing with transient slips, power boat rentals, snack bar, and fuel sales
- F) Shared parking (50 spaces)
- G) Creekside resort rental cottages
- H) Entry drive
- I) Future development site



Clearing of logs and other impediments would be necessary to implement the floatway



Tubing could capture more of the tourism market (image courtesy visitcherokeenc)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

Pursue economic development that capitalizes on current opportunities, growing the various segments of the visitor market such as scenic driving, heritage tourism, and outdoor recreation.

Develop, promote, and support heritage-based entrepreneurs and festivals. *Creating and expanding these festivals can increase year-round tourism and promote local heritage.*

Support the development of Stecoah and Fontana as unique economic centers and tourism drivers, with a focus on heritage craft and recreation.

Promote local businesses, including outdoor recreation, retail, creative businesses, artisans, etc. *These small businesses will continue to be an important part of the local economy.*

Focus on cultivating a healthy environment for existing businesses. *Encouraging business owners and making sure they are aware of and have access to existing resources will help strengthen local businesses and help keep them profitable.*

Recruit a diversity of new jobs and investment, focusing on high-tech, higher paying employment. *Increasing the diversity of the job base and recruiting more high-wage jobs will make the local economy more robust and stable.*

Target key industries like data call centers and intelligence. *These are key examples of higher wage jobs that could be a good match for the community.*

Improve key infrastructure to support economic development including enhanced transportation, broadband, natural gas, and rail.

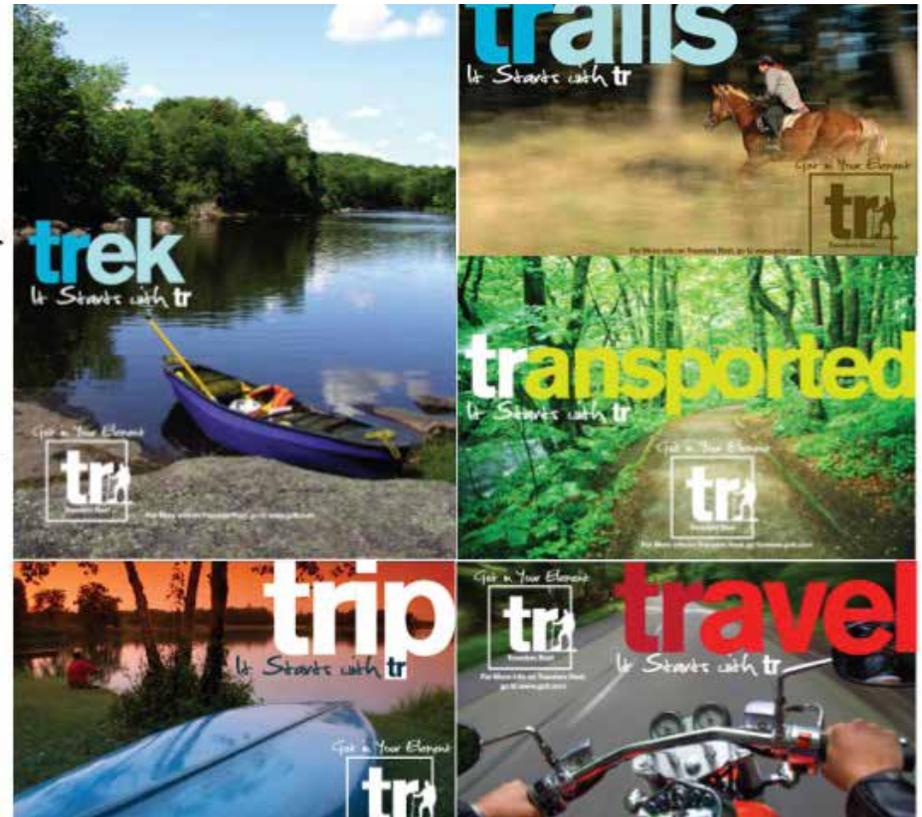
Focus on the revitalization of downtown Robbinsville in addition to efforts on the bypass. *The historic core of Robbinsville is important, but revitalization is also needed along the bypass, since it has become a new main street for the town.*

Market the county to promote economic and tourism development as well as residential growth. *Graham County will continue to be attractive to new residents for many reasons, but marketing should focus on tourists and industrial/business recruitment as well.*

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

22. Create a consistent brand identity for Graham County focusing on economic and tourism development, as well as residential recruitment. Create sub-identities for the county's key nodes. *This is one of the key recommendations of this plan and will be crucial for promoting the county.*

23. Recruit retail and commercial services based on demand identified in market analysis. *This strategy will allow a focus on recruiting those businesses for which there is the most demand.*



A consistent brand could significantly help market Graham County; shown here is an example from another community

24. Build a small business/entrepreneur support system. Build an internal system to connect existing small business resources to local businesses. Create a business startup guide with info on local requirements, area business training resources, etc.

25. Coordinate with the community college to align training with local needs, particularly woodworking machinery, early childhood education, diesel mechanics, health, and hospitality.

26. Take advantage of the high speed Internet point of presence and work to connect households and businesses with broadband service. This access will be key for providing residents access to information, education, and products from outside the county, as well as attracting businesses.

27. Work with the private sector to expand cellular telephone coverage. This will decrease isolation in the most rural parts of the county as well as provide better emergency response.

28. Target year round businesses that cater to the needs of local and second home markets as well as seasonal tourism. Seasonal diversity is crucial to economic growth and will provide more year-round jobs.

29. Educate residents on best practices regarding supplemental businesses. Home-based businesses are an important economic base. With educational resources, business owners can be more successful.

30. Work with the community college and local schools to add entrepreneurial education to the curriculum. These classes, potentially through the NC REAL program, could educate youth and other potential entrepreneurs about how to start and run a successful business.

31. Create and promote unique events in each community core. These events could attract more visitors, highlight the unique heritage and features of communities within Graham County, and create year-round activity.

32. Coordinate marketing efforts among local and regional destinations and agencies; participate in a regional branding process. There are currently a number of public and private entities that market Graham County's assets. A coordinated effort between these groups and adjacent counties could help attract more visitors and increase their stays.

33. Recruit new residents by targeting the key segments identified in the market analysis. There are many reasons to move to the county; marketing should focus on younger, green entrepreneurs, empty-nest second home owners, and others.

34. Build marketing collateral to promote Graham County, including a web presence for both economic and tourism development. Work with all appropriate partners to develop attractive print materials and a website with a unified brand.



Marketing, tourism development, and small business support will be key to a strong local economy

35. Create and implement a countywide wayfinding and signage plan. *Signs could serve as gateways to welcome visitors, help guide them to major destinations, and be based on a unified county brand.*

36. Market key development sites with web and print collateral promoting sites, market research for existing and prospective businesses, and a business recruitment marketing package.

37. Reestablish the Chamber of Commerce to work jointly with Graham County Travel and Tourism. *This entity should be reconstituted as a key advocate for local economic growth.*

38. Create an economic development support team with representatives from relevant local entities to meet quarterly to communicate and coordinate efforts.

39. Consider a flat business license fee to support business support and development efforts. Use the business license program to document and track existing businesses and an build internal network.

40. Create a countywide Tourism Development Plan for the County. *This plan should catalog existing assets and develop strategies to improve and market them.*

41. Educate the community regarding the economic benefits of allowing beer and wine sales in restaurants; consider a citizen-led campaign to allow a referendum within the Town of Robbinsville.

42. Provide incentives to keep the existing grocery store in the current location as a downtown anchor, while opportunities for a smaller grocer are explored elsewhere. *The closing of the existing store would have a tremendous negative impact on the vitality of downtown Robbinsville, create an eyesore, and be difficult to lease.*

TRANSPORTATION POLICIES

Support the recommendations of the Graham County Comprehensive Transportation Plan.

Support the implementation of the Robbinsville Pedestrian Connectivity Plan.

TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS

43. Complete Corridor K improvements from Stecoah to Robbinsville (known as Corridor K, A9-B,C) as described in the Graham County Comprehensive Transportation Plan.

44. Work with state and federal agencies to develop a strategy to address the need for study and completion of the section of Corridor K (A9-A) from Robbinsville to Cherokee County, without delaying progress on sections B,C.

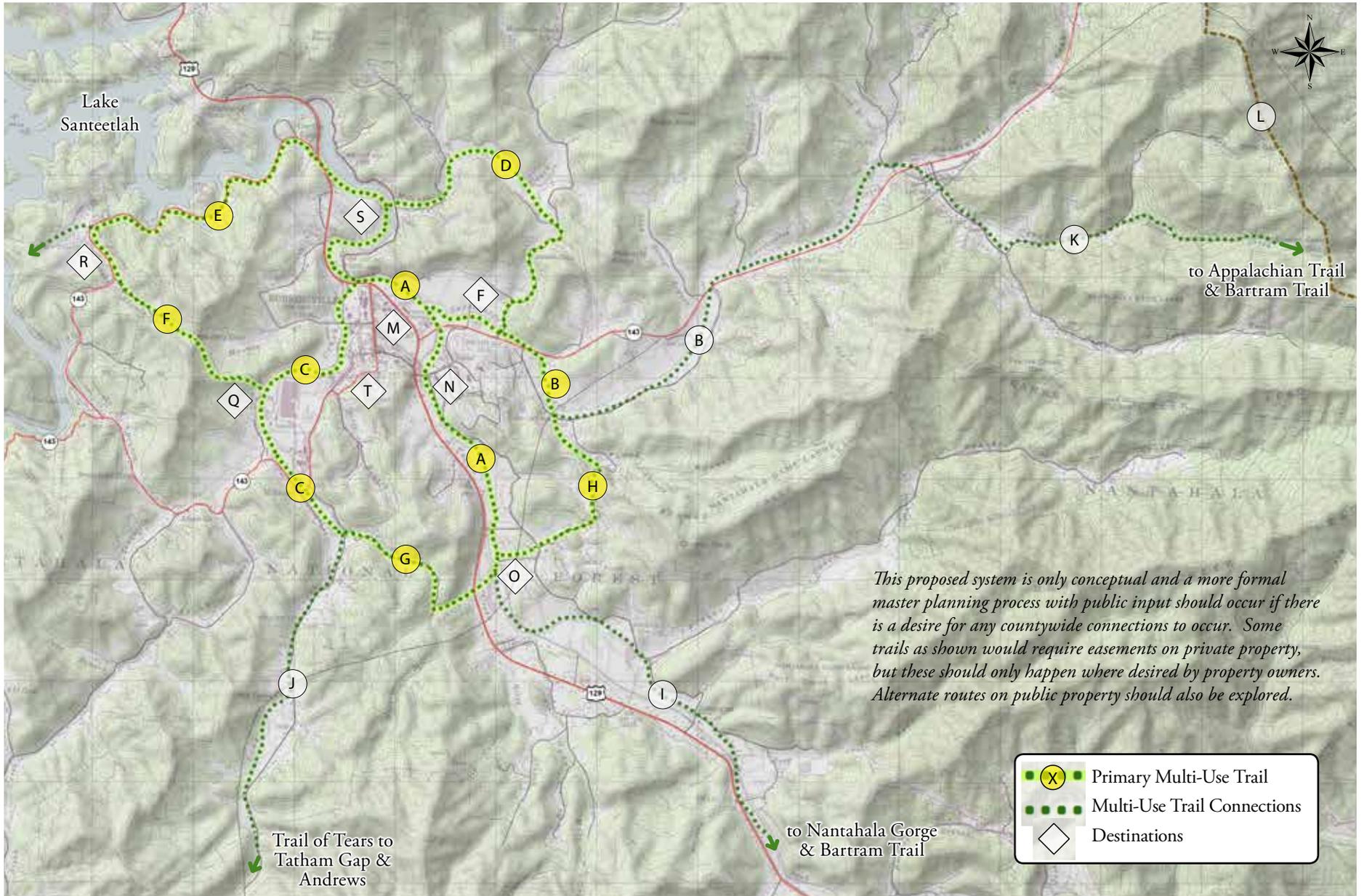
45. Construct new streets and realign existing streets as shown on the conceptual plan on pages 56-58. *This will create multiple auto and pedestrian route options and reduce congestion on the bypass.*

46. Consolidate curb cuts and extend the medians on the bypass to improve safety for turning vehicles and pedestrians. Add new crosswalks to make pedestrian crossings safer.

47. Construct multi-use trails where shown on the conceptual plan on pages 76-77.

48. Construct a parking deck in downtown Robbinsville.

PROPOSED ROBBINSVILLE GREENWAY SYSTEM



PROPOSED ROBBINSVILLE GREENWAY SYSTEM

Building on the Robbinsville Pedestrian Connectivity Plan, a wonderful network of multi-use greenway trails should be established through and around Robbinsville. The trails shown here would allow locals and visitors to experience the town as well as the scenic rural landscapes nearby by foot or bike. These trails could become a major attraction for visitors and families who are looking for hiking/biking experiences, but who must now drive some distance out of town to find hiking or biking trails.

As mentioned in the Connectivity Plan, trails can be built along creeks, abandoned railroads and logging roads, low-volume local roads, utility easements, and even on historic trails used by Native Americans and early settlers.

A true greenway system should follow creek and natural corridors that link recreational and open space areas, and where the greenway itself includes conservation components. A primary objective of this greenway system is to reveal and help maintain the clear-running creeks and the beautiful farmlands and woodlands at the town's doorstep. The system could also feature interpretive exhibits about historic places and events along and near various routes.

- A) Tallulah Creek Greenway, along creek or Old Tallulah Road. (Connectivity Plan recommends portion of this greenway.)
- B) Sweetwater Creek Greenway, along combination of Sweetwater Creek and Old Sweetwater Road.

- C) Long Creek Greenway, along combination of Long Creek and local access roads. (Connectivity Plan recommends this greenway.)
- D) Mountain Creek Greenway, along combination of Mountain Creek, Mountain Creek Road and local access roads.
- E) Snowbird Road Greenway, along Snowbird Bird.
- F) Mauney Gap trail connector between Long Creek and Snowbird Road Greenways.
- G) Poison Branch trail connector between Long Creek and Tallulah Creek Greenways.
- H) Long Branch Road trail connector between Sweetwater Creek and Tallulah Creek Greenways.
- I) Tallulah Creek Greenway trail extension along creek &/or Old Tallulah Road to Nantahala River Gorge.
- J) Long Creek Greenway trail extension along creek, local access roads, and Forest Service roads to Tatham Gap and Trail of Tears.
- K) Beech Creek trail connection (from Sweetwater Greenway) to Appalachian Trail and Bartram Trail.
- L) Appalachian Trail.
- M) Downtown area (refer to Connectivity Plan for proposed trails in this area).
- N) Potential Visitors Center (see page 68).
- O) Potential P&J recreation/fairgrounds/business park complex (see page 65).



Greenways could attract visitors and be a great amenity for locals to use (image courtesy NHTSA)

- P) Robbinsville High School and athletic fields.
- Q) Future All-American Park/Stanley Park.
- R) Potential Massey Branch lodge & housing development (see page) and greenway.
- S) Potential cabin development, lake access and rafting take-out (see pages 70-71).
- T) Junaluska Memorial.



PART IV: IMPLEMENTATION

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the Gateway to Tomorrow Plan should occur according to the Implementation Table on the following pages. This table lists recommended projects along with a general timeline, rough cost estimate, possible funding sources, and those parties responsible for implementation.

Timelines range from short-term, (within the next few years) to long term (10-20 years in the future). This extended schedule will require that ongoing attention and priority is given to the plan and its implementation. Continued citizen involvement and input such as that shown throughout the planning process will be essential to the long-term success of the plan.

The County should be responsible for coordinating and tracking implementation of the plan, but many partners and funding sources must also participate. The Southwestern Commission will be a key partner for implementation given their dedicated staff, planning knowledge, and experience with funding sources. Cooperation between Graham County and the towns of Robbinsville, Fontana, and Lake Santeetlah will also be key to ensure implementation.

Implementing the plan requires a long-term commitment. The plan cannot be achieved overnight, and if it is not consulted and reviewed regularly, it risks becoming obsolete. While the general nature of the plan is unlikely to change in the near future, it is important that the community recognize that it can and will change over time. The future addition or subtraction of policies or projects should not be viewed as a compromise of the plan, but rather its natural evolution in response to new conditions.

Many of the assumptions used to guide this process, including the economic climate, transportation costs, funding sources, and development trends, are never fixed. Graham County must be prepared to respond to changes in order to ensure a plan that continues to be relevant.



The plan should be revisited by the community as conditions change to ensure that it stays relevant

IMPLEMENTATION TABLE

ID	Description	Timeline	Est. Cost	Responsible Party	Funding Source(s)
Land Stewardship & Community Facilities					
1.	Small area plans for various communities	Mid Term	TBD	County, Towns, SWC, DCA	
2.	Capital Improvement Plan	Short Term	Admin. Time	County, Towns, SWC, UNC EFC	County, Towns
3.	Sewer extension to Town of Lake Santeetlah	Mid Term	\$2.5M	County, Town	ARC, CDBG, NC DOC RD, Golden LEAF, NC DENR
4.	Town of Fontana Dam water system upgrades	Short Term	\$3.5M	Town	ARC, CDBG, NC DOC RD
5.	Design guidelines for central Robbinsville	Short Term	\$20,000	Town, SWC, DCA	
6.	Study how to keep civic buildings in downtown Robbinsville	Short Term	Admin. Time	County, Town, DCA, HandMade in America, STMS	n/a
7.	Pursue funding sources for historic property owners	Short Term	Admin. Time	County, Town	NC DOC RD
8.	Stone wall repair in downtown Robbinsville	Short Term	\$10,000-\$20,000	Town	Private
9.	Create the Young America Outdoor Recreational Park	Short Term	\$750,000	County, Town	PARTF
10.	Create the Public Fairgrounds	Long Term	TBD	County	TBD
11.	Construct a new Robbinsville Town Hall	Mid Term	\$3M	Town	USDA RD
12.	Construct a new Town Square	Long Term	TBD	Private, Town	Private
13.	Construct a new Visitors Center	Short Term	\$1M	County, Town, Private	
Nature, Health & Culture					
14.	Robbinsville to Lake Santeetlah greenway	Mid Term	\$2.5M	County, Town, Private, SWRPO	PARTF
15.	Regular analysis of poor health hot spots	Ongoing	Admin. Time	County	n/a
16.	Education about existing erosion/sediment control ordinances	Ongoing	Admin. Time	County, NC DENR, non-profits	n/a
17.	Identify Cherokee areas for preservation and interpretation	Ongoing	TBD	EBCI, CPF	EBCI, CPF

ID	Description	Timeline	Est. Cost	Responsible Party	Funding Source(s)
18.	Identify and promote hubs for healthy activities/facilities	Mid Term	Admin. Time	County	n/a
19.	Identify recreational trail needs along corridors and to connect with USFS trails	Ongoing	TBD	County, SWC, NCDOT, USFS	
20.	Construct a bioswale along Ford Street	Mid Term	\$50,000	Town, Private	NC DENR
21.	Open Tulula Bog for controlled public access	Short Term	\$50,000	NCDOT	CFWNC
Economic Development					
22.	Create a consistent county brand, focusing on economic & tourism development	Short Term	\$15,000	County	County
23.	Recruit retail & commercial services	Ongoing	Admin. Time	County, Town	n/a
24.	Small business/entrepreneur support system	Mid Term	TBD	County, TCCC, SWC	TCCC
25.	Workforce training	Short Term	TBD	TCCC	TCCC
26.	Take advantage of high-speed Internet	Ongoing	Admin. Time	County, Private	n/a
27.	Expand cell phone coverage	Ongoing	TBD	Private	Private
28.	Target year-round businesses	Short Term	Admin. Time	County	n/a
29.	Educate residents regarding second businesses	Mid Term	Admin. Time	County	n/a
30.	Entrepreneurial education	Mid Term	Admin. Time	County	n/a
31.	Unique community events	Short Term	TBD	Various	Public & Private
32.	Coordinate marketing efforts	Short Term	Admin. Time	County, Towns, Smoky Mtn. Host	n/a
33.	Recruit new residents	Ongoing	Admin. Time	County	n/a
34.	Create marketing collateral	Short Term	\$10,000 - \$15,000	County, Chamber	County
35.	Wayfinding/signage plan	Mid Term	\$25,000	County, DCA, NC DOT	County
36.	Market key development sites	Mid Term	Admin. Time	County, Chamber	n/a
37.	Reestablish the Chamber of Commerce	Short Term	Admin. Time	Chamber	n/a
38.	Create an economic development support team	Mid Term	Admin. Time	Chamber, GREAT	n/a
39.	Consider a flat business license fee	Mid Term	Admin. Time	County	n/a
40.	Create a Tourism Development Plan	Mid Term	\$30,000 - \$40,000	County, SWC, GREAT, DCA	ARC
41.	Education about economic benefits of allowing beer/wine sales	Short Term	Admin. Time	Town	n/a
42.	Incentives to keep grocery store in center of town	Short Term	TBD	County, Town	County, Town

ID	Description	Timeline	Est. Cost	Responsible Party	Funding Source(s)
Transportation					
43.	Complete Corridor K improvements for sections B & C as described in Comprehensive Transportation Plan	Short Term	TBD	NCDOT, SWRPO	ADHS, NCDOT, FHWA
44.	Complete Corridor K improvements for section A as described in Comprehensive Transportation Plan	Long Term	TBD	NCDOT, SWRPO	ADHS, NCDOT, FHWA
45.	New or realigned streets in central Robbinsville	Long Term	\$6M	NCDOT, Town, SWRPO	Town
46.	Consolidate curb cuts and extend medians on bypass	Mid Term	\$1M	NCDOT, Town	NCDOT
47.	Construct multi-use trails as shown on plan	Mid Term	\$1M per mile	Town, SWRPO	PARTF
48.	Construct a parking deck in downtown Robbinsville	Long Term	\$3M	Private	Private

ADHS: Appalachian Development Highway System

ARC: Appalachian Regional Commission

CDBG: Community Development Block Grants

CFWNC: Community Foundation of Western North Carolina

CPF: Cherokee Preservation Foundation

DCA: North Carolina Department of Commerce Division of Community Assistance, now called Economic Advancement & Planning

EBCI: Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

FHWA: Federal Highway Administration

GREAT: Graham Revitalization Economic Action Team

NC DENR: North Carolina Department of Environment & Natural Resources

NC DOC RD: North Carolina Department of Commerce Rural Development

PARTF: North Carolina Parks & Recreation Trust Fund Grant

STMS: Small Town Main Street Program

SWC: Southwestern Commission

SWRPO: Southwestern Rural Planning Organization

UDSA RD: U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development

UNC EFC: University of North Carolina Environmental Finance Center

USFS: U.S. Forest Service



APPENDIX: CORRIDOR K

CORRIDOR K HISTORY

Corridor K is part of the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS), created by Congress in 1965 to establish a network of modern highways throughout Appalachia. Approximately 85% of the proposed highways have been built, with only a few difficult corridors like Corridor K that remain incomplete. Corridor K connects Cleveland, Tennessee and I-75 with Dillsboro, North Carolina and U.S. Hwy. 23.

The 20-mile stretch of Corridor K between Andrews and Almond is intended to relocate a segment of U.S. Highway 74 out of the Nantahala Gorge and improve access to Graham County and Robbinsville. This segment is about 20 miles long. NCDOT previously proposed that much of these improvements consist of a four-lane highway with a median on new right-of-way. The proposed route crosses two mountain ridges, numerous streams, National Forest lands, and areas of cultural significance.

NCDOT completed a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FIES) in 1984 for the entire length of Corridor K that remained to be completed. In 1995, the FEIS was reevaluated for the section from Stecoah to Almond, which was subsequently constructed as a four-lane highway.

A Supplemental FEIS was begun in 1998 to reevaluate alternative alignments and environmental impacts for the segment from Robbinsville to Stecoah. A Draft Supplemental FEIS was approved in 2008, but approval of a Final Supplemental FEIS and a Record of Decision was delayed due to concerns by federal and state agencies and environmental groups over the potential benefits and environmental impacts of the project. Additionally, the dedicated funding stream to complete the ADHS has become uncertain.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Recommendation 44 of this plan is to “Complete Corridor K improvements from Stecoah to the county line (and beyond to Andrews) as described in the Graham County Comprehensive Transportation Plan.” The Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) document provides greater detail about Corridor K recommendations, but this appendix describes a number of details that were discussed and explored at the weeklong Community Workshop that were not able to be documented in the CTP. Many of these discussions occurred at the Transportation Focus Group meeting on February 4, 2014.

Participants in the Focus Group restated concerns about the proposed Corridor K improvements, including its estimated high cost, impacts to important natural and cultural resources, and bypassing of Robbinsville and Stecoah. Community members and NCDOT representatives agreed that it would be necessary to balance the goals of connectivity, access, and safety while preserving the landscapes and environment that are so important. To achieve this balance, participants explored several alternatives.

A number of challenges with the existing roads along the route designated as Corridor K were identified, as shown in the map on page 87. Two



Participants at the February 4, 2014 Transportation Focus Group discuss Corridor K

alternative routes were discussed during the Focus Group and are shown in the map on page 88. The Tatham Gap route shows the route previously proposed by NCDOT and would include more miles of new road and have more impact on natural and cultural resources, in particular the Trail of Tears. The Jutts Creek route was proposed as an alternative to lessen the potential construction costs as well as impacts to environmental and cultural resources. It was proposed as a way to show a willingness to consider other alternatives in road location and potential design. This came about after a discussion with representatives of an environmental group present at the meeting who expressed concerns over the Tatham Gap route. Near Stecoah, a number of concerns were identified with the previously proposed route, including a costly tunnel, impact to wetlands, bypassing of Stecoah, and impact to the Appalachian Trail. Improvements to the existing route were discussed as a less impactful alternative and could still meet the ADHS goal of 50 mph average travel speed between destinations. Some of the pros and cons of each route are shown in the table at right.

A travel time study completed in 2010 for NCDOT estimated an average speed of 50 mph and also estimated travel time savings. This report included a traffic simulation and travel time data gathered by driving the route and recording the travel times. One particular aspect of the study looked at completing Corridor K from the intersection of US 74 and NC 28 all the way to US 129 in Robbinsville. Comparing 2010 drive times to that after the proposed improvements, they estimated a travel time savings of 5.86 minutes by completing Sections B & C of Corridor K. Given existing grades and the high potential for slow moving traffic along the existing route from NC 28 to US 129, the actual drive data collected reflects a time savings of almost

six minutes versus two minutes by the computer mapping program.

A number of context-sensitive design considerations were reviewed during the workshop, examples of which are shown on page 89. Participants agreed that these considerations could be applied to any of the Corridor K options to lessen or avoid adverse environmental impacts, reduce costs, highlight cultural and scenic resources, and improve highway operation and safety.

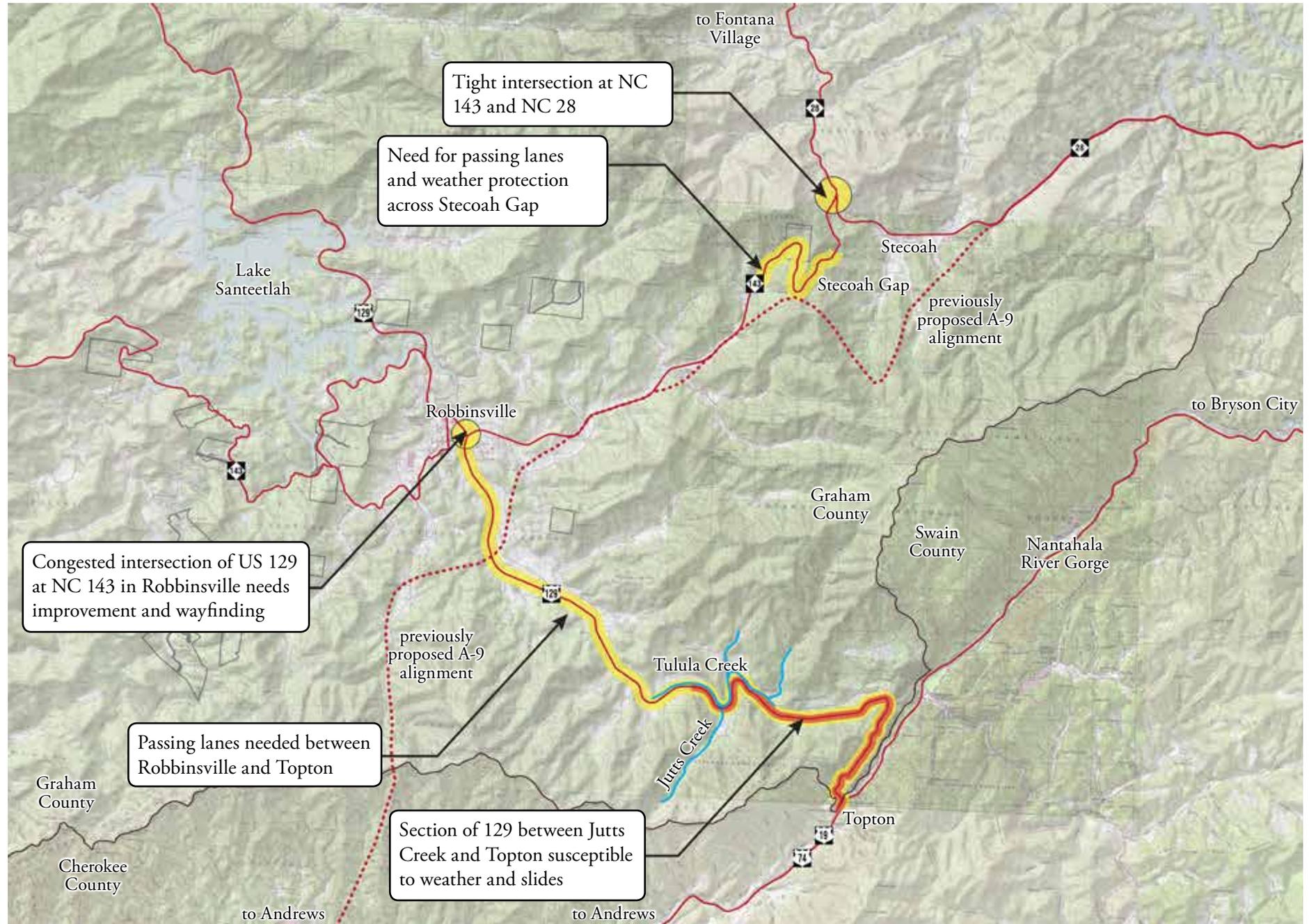
A set of Corridor K guiding principles, created based on public comments, emphasizes a balanced and context-sensitive approach. Needs for highway access, connectivity, safety, and multi-modal travel should be met by solutions that protect and respect natural and cultural resources, while also enhancing and showcasing the county's special qualities and assets. The guiding principles are as follows:

- ◆ Meet purpose and need, but avoid excessive or over-designed highways.
- ◆ Comply with design guidelines and criteria, but remain flexible.
- ◆ Provide adequate service and safety for motor vehicles while also supporting other highway users.
- ◆ Minimize adverse impacts to natural and cultural resources. Lay lightly on the land.
- ◆ Celebrate the setting, history and culture of place through amenities (like scenic turnouts). Maintain a high level of visual quality.

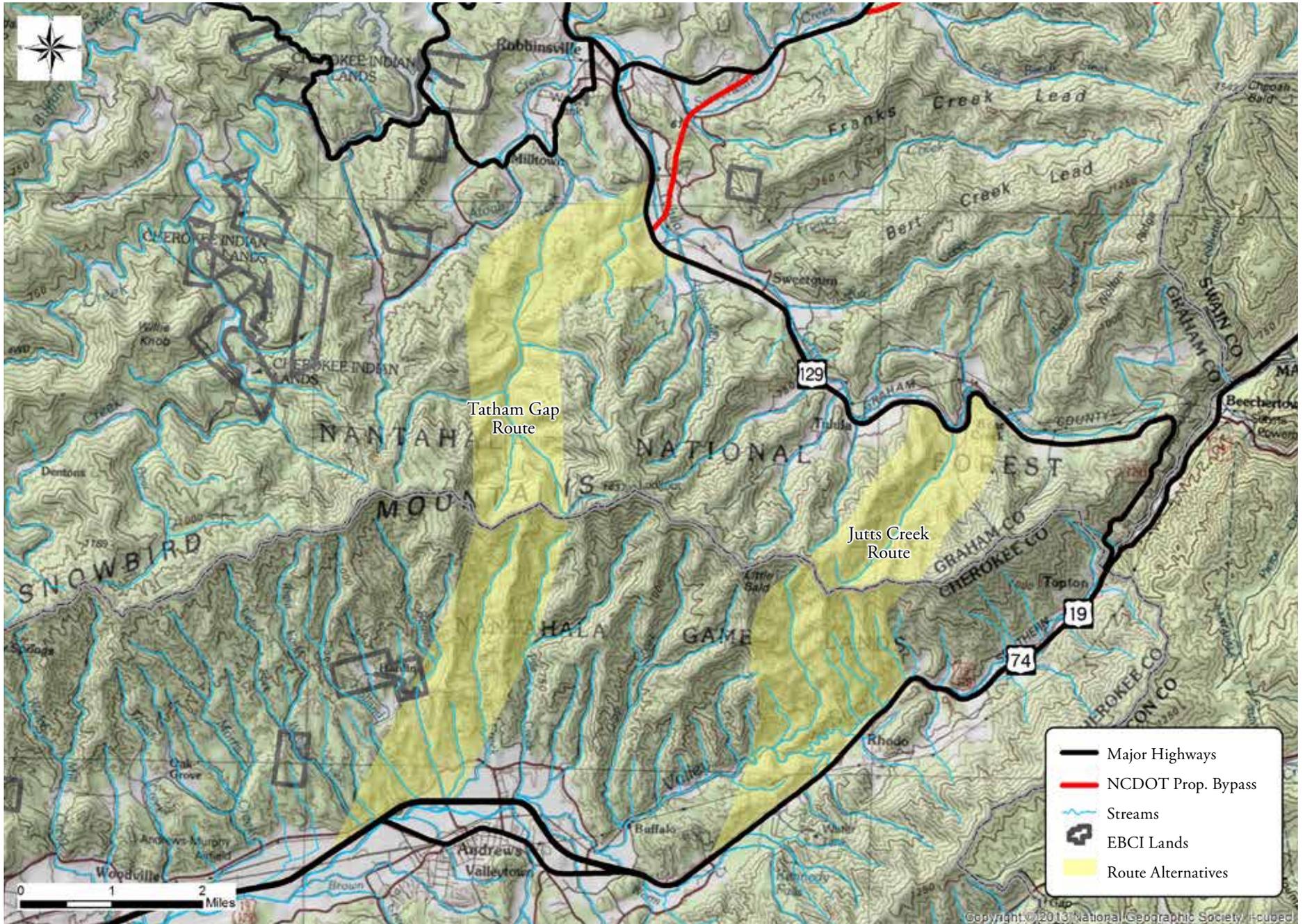
PROS & CONS OF ROBBINSVILLE TO ANDREWS ROUTES

Improve Existing Route
NO ADDITIONAL ROUTES (CON)
SUSCEPTIBLE TO WEATHER/LANDSLIDES (CON)
LOWEST COSTS/IMPACTS (PRO)
SHORTER TERM FOR IMPLEMENTATION (PRO)
Tatham Gap Route
CREATES ADDITIONAL ROUTES (PRO)
HIGHEST IMPROVEMENT IN TRAVEL TIME (PRO)
HIGHEST COSTS & IMPACTS (CON)
LONGEST TERM FOR IMPLEMENTATION (CON)
Jutts Creek Route
MODERATE ROUTE CHOICE IMPROVEMENTS (PRO/CON)
MODERATE TO HIGH IMPROVEMENT IN TRAVEL TIME (PRO/CON)
MODERATE COSTS & IMPACTS (PRO)
SHORTER TERM FOR IMPLEMENTATION (PRO)

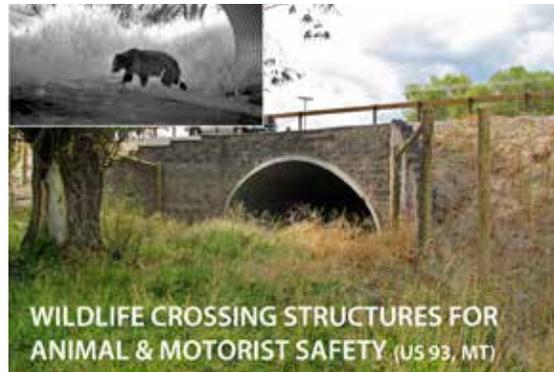
CHALLENGES WITH EXISTING HIGHWAY INFRASTRUCTURE

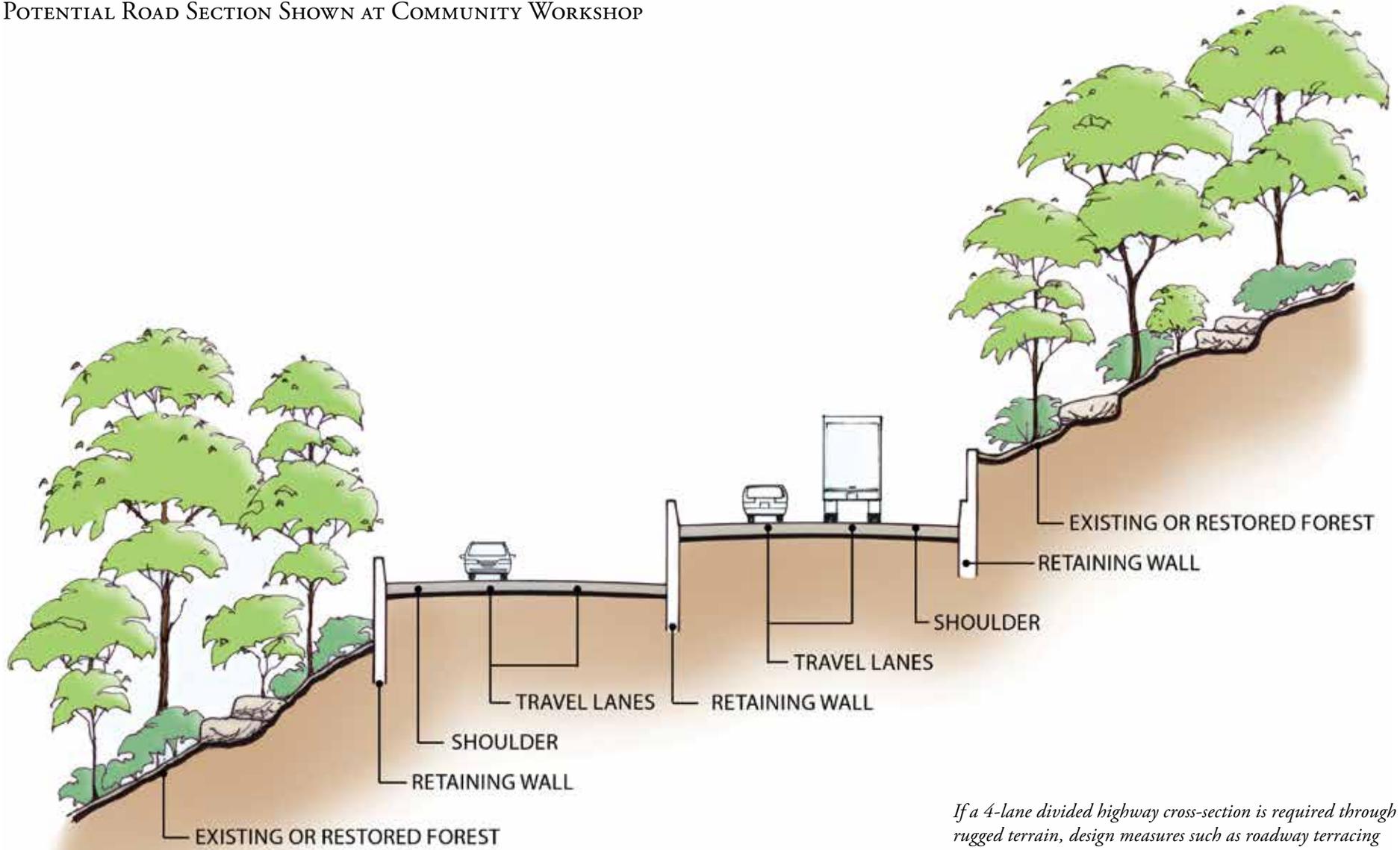


CORRIDOR K ROUTE ALTERNATIVES: ROBBINSVILLE TO ANDREWS



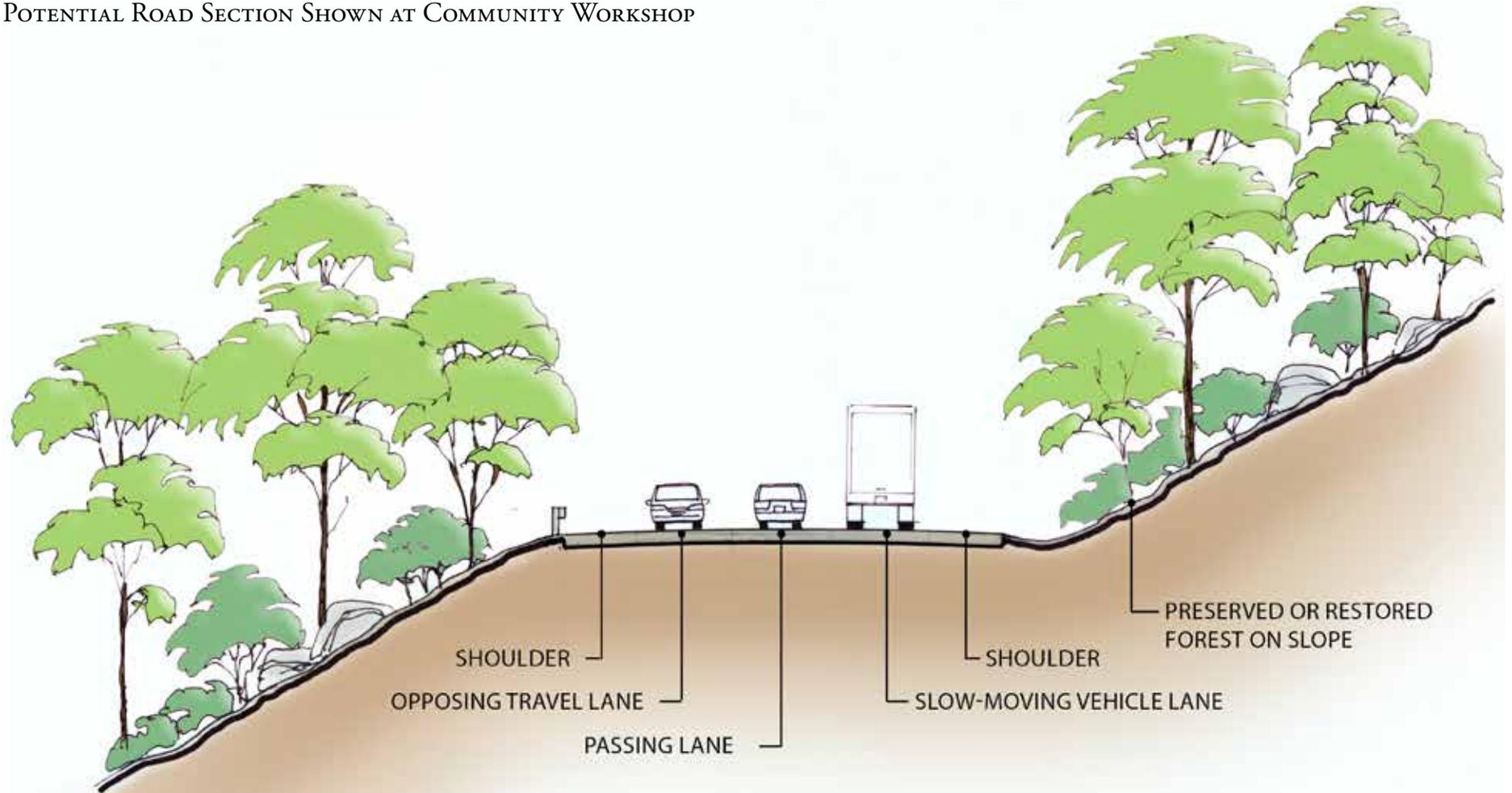
CONTEXT SENSITIVE DESIGN EXAMPLES SHOWN AT COMMUNITY WORKSHOP





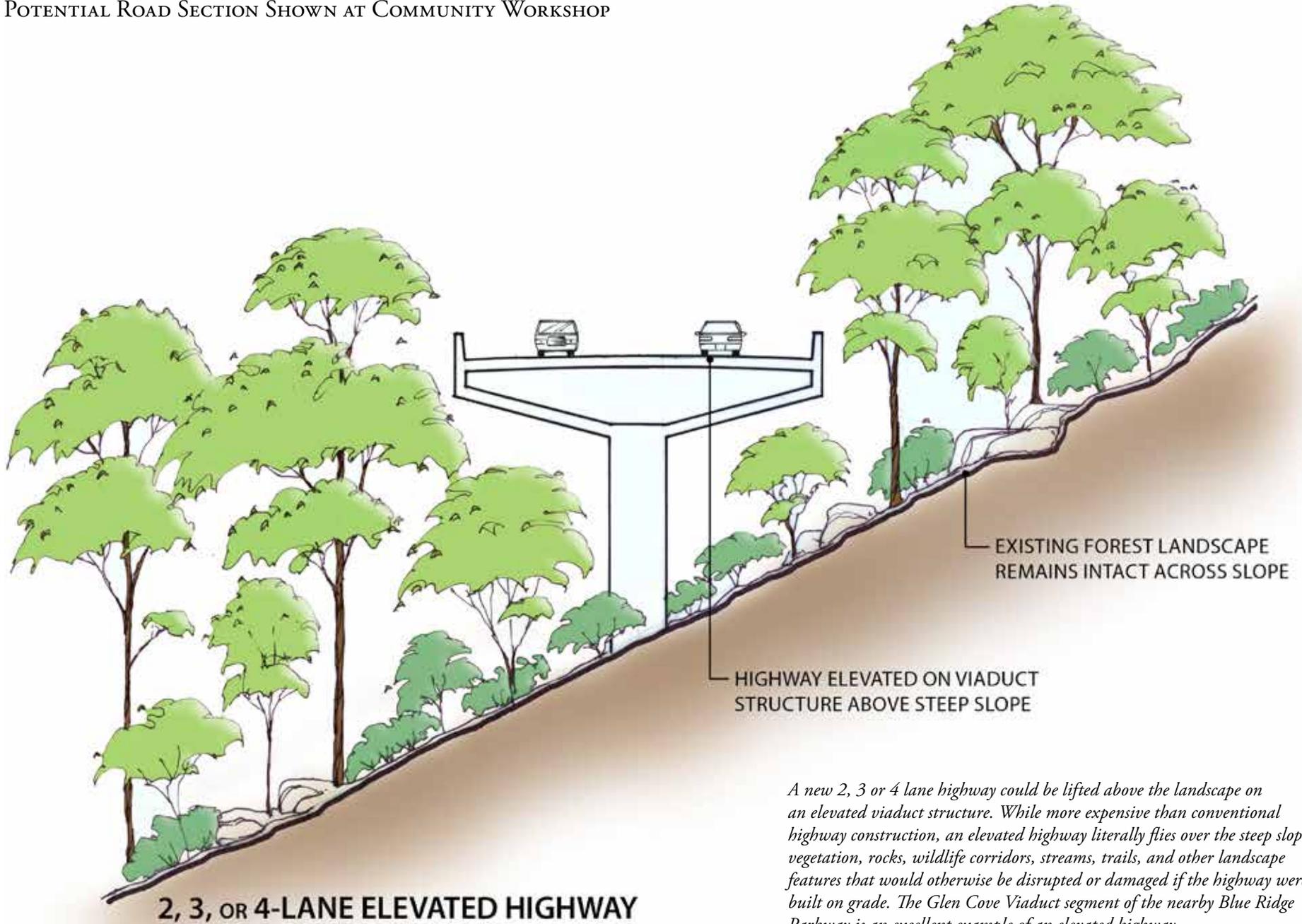
4-LANE HIGHWAY TERRACED INTO STEEP SLOPE

If a 4-lane divided highway cross-section is required through rugged terrain, design measures such as roadway terracing and bifurcation, retaining walls, and eliminating the conventional wide grassy median strip can reduce damage to adjacent forests, streams, cultural sites and other resources. The restoration and maintenance of native forest plants on highway cut and fill slopes can also play a significant role in lessening the adverse impacts of road cuts.



EXISTING HIGHWAY IMPROVED WITH PASSING LANES & SHOULDERS

Modest improvements to an existing 2-lane highway (such as US 129 and NC 143) could significantly improve connectivity, operation and safety without incurring the high costs and adverse environmental impacts of a new 4-lane median divided highway on a new alignment. Improvements such as passing lanes, widened shoulders, guardrail, wildlife crossing structures, access control, and slide stabilization can increase a 2-lane highway's performance.



A new 2, 3 or 4 lane highway could be lifted above the landscape on an elevated viaduct structure. While more expensive than conventional highway construction, an elevated highway literally flies over the steep slopes, vegetation, rocks, wildlife corridors, streams, trails, and other landscape features that would otherwise be disrupted or damaged if the highway were built on grade. The Glen Cove Viaduct segment of the nearby Blue Ridge Parkway is an excellent example of an elevated highway.