

VOLUME 1 | OPT-IN: THE REGIONAL VISION

CREATED FROM IDEAS AND INSIGHTS CONTRIBUTED BY THE REGION'S RESIDENTS



November 2014

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

Volume 1 of the Opt-In regional vision report sets forth the community vision, with specific policies and actions to bring it to fruition. It is a compilation of feasible steps to inspire the region and to generate voluntary and cooperative action.

Volume 2, its companion, organizes under one cover the three reports that were instrumental in creating the regional vision: The **Baseline Vision** (July 2013), the **Draft Regional Vision Framework** (September 2013), and the **Draft Regional Vision – What the Community Wants** (December 2013). Those reports build the case for the vision and document its main components: the region's background, derived from technical analysis, and the policy framework and the vision's goals, derived from public comments.

The two volumes should be reviewed together. Extensive references have been provided throughout **Volume 1** to facilitate linking the two.

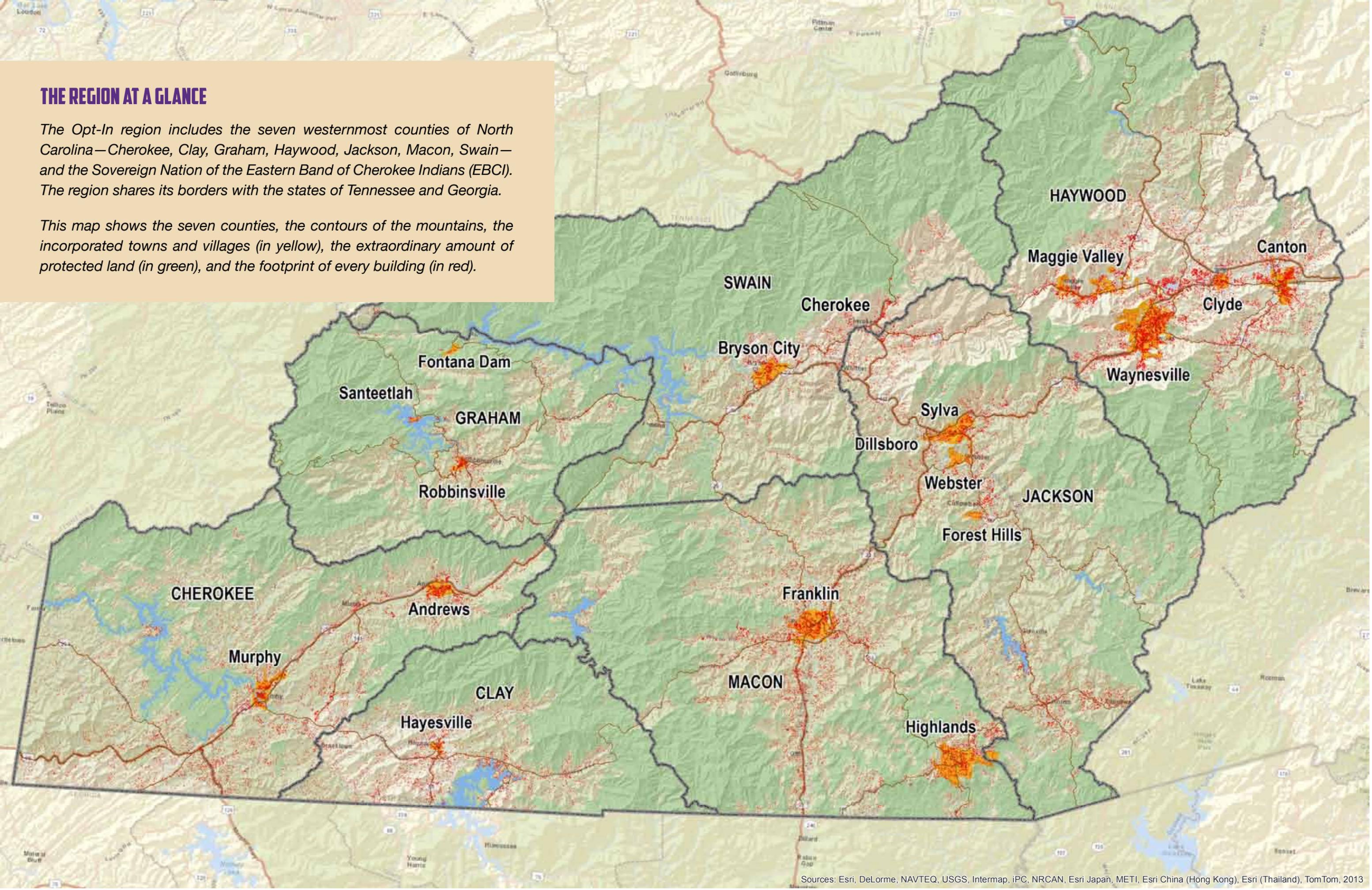
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THE REGION AT A GLANCE

The Opt-In region includes the seven westernmost counties of North Carolina—Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Swain—and the Sovereign Nation of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI). The region shares its borders with the states of Tennessee and Georgia.

This map shows the seven counties, the contours of the mountains, the incorporated towns and villages (in yellow), the extraordinary amount of protected land (in green), and the footprint of every building (in red).



STRUCTURE OF VOLUME 1

Volume 1 is divided into seven chapters.

1. Introduction, provides information on the background and management of the Opt-In process.

2. Process, explains process and products instrumental in creating the vision.

3. Vision, describes the overall vision and introduces and goals and major themes.

4. Scenario Planning, describes the methodology and results of evaluating the region's suitability for growth and investments. It also summarizes the public's preferences

5. Policies and Actions, outlines policies and actions to implement the vision.

6. Implementation Matrix, prioritizes actions and identifies leading agencies for their implementation.

7. Appendix, includes various maps and supporting documents.

1. INTRODUCTION

OPT-IN, THE OPPORTUNITY INITIATIVE OF SOUTHWESTERN NORTH CAROLINA, WAS A 15-MONTH EFFORT TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AND INFORM THE RANGE OF CHOICES FACING LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, BUSINESSES, AND FAMILIES IN THE SEVEN WESTERNMOST COUNTIES OF NORTH CAROLINA AND IN THE EASTERN BAND OF CHEROKEE INDIANS. THE OPT-IN REGIONAL VISION IS A ROAD MAP, CREATED BY REGION'S RESIDENTS, ON HOW TO MAKE THOSE CHOICES A REALITY.

BACKGROUND

The Opt-In Regional Vision was not a legislative undertaking. None of the policies and actions contained in this report will bind the counties or municipalities to any legislative or governmental mandate. Rather, they identify broad regional agreement on goals for economic development, transportation planning, and environmental stewardship, and suggest ways for regional leaders to realize that vision voluntarily and cooperatively.

The context for the Opt-In Regional Vision was established by recommendations in an April 2011 report from the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution.

The **Mediation Report** was prepared at the request of the Federal Highway Administration, North Carolina Division (FHWA), and the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT). The report suggested paths to resolve the “controversy over the design, location, benefits, and environmental impacts” of a proposed highway route through the North Carolina mountain region to complete the Corridor K segment of the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS). (The full **Mediation Report** is available online at optinswnc.org.)

Following the report's recommendations, the Southwestern Commission, the Council of Governments organization

representing the seven westernmost counties in North Carolina, issued a Request for Proposals for a regional vision that “identifies the region's goals and needs and also explores how to integrate regional economic development and environmental protection goals and addresses how transportation options can support those goals.” The Atlanta-based TSW team was selected for the project.

MANAGEMENT

The Southwestern Commission managed the Opt-In Regional Vision on behalf of the region's counties and municipalities. A Leadership Council of elected officials, business professionals, and nonprofit leaders from the region acted as a steering committee. Funding came from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), and the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and was administered through the Southwestern Commission.

Over the course of the 15-month duration of the Opt-In Regional Vision process, the TSW team conducted



Volume 2: Background, includes the three reports that were instrumental in creating the regional vision: **The Baseline Vision**, **the Draft Regional Vision Framework**, and **the Draft Regional Vision – What the Community Wants**.

hundreds of one-on-one and group interviews, 16 community workshops, a regional survey with a randomly selected sample, and the Regional Summit. These efforts involved more than a thousand people. It is safe to say that never before in the history of this region have so many citizens and leaders engaged in such an intense and prolonged conversation with one goal: to develop an agreed-upon and feasible vision. The results of that conversation are summarized in this report.

Concurrently with the regional vision, the TSW team completed comprehensive plans for Cherokee and Graham counties and a comprehensive transportation plan for Graham County

THE OPT-IN REGION: THE PLACE AND THE CULTURE

There are few places in America where landscape has shaped a people and culture more profoundly than the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. Southern Highland settlement patterns, farming practices, personal individualism and independence, religious fervor, distinctive music and speech, and local customs all emerged interwoven and rooted in a landscape of rugged mountains, deep valleys, isolated coves and abundant waters.

The seven Opt-In counties are located within the Southern Appalachian Mountains, which are among the oldest mountains on earth. The geology and climate contributes to the region's extraordinary diversity of flora and ecological integrity. The area is mostly rural and forested. Nearly 47% of the region's 3,099 square miles is public land. The Qualla Boundary, comprising 2.7% of the region's land, is a "land trust" supervised by the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs and governed by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

Geography, with its mountainous terrain, has defined the physical and scenic character of the region's roads and towns. It has created the pattern of small independent towns and villages nestled into fertile valleys. It has

affected the cost of development and road building. A great deal of the land (over 40%) has slopes which are in excess of 40%. Even though development on such slopes is technically possible, it is prohibitively costly.

It is not only the natural amenities that make this region special. It is also its culture. This includes Cherokee and Appalachian customs and traditions, arts, crafts, music, and agriculture. It includes festivals, performances, events, and heritage sites that keep the culture alive and provide insights on how the region has evolved over time.

To protect those natural, scenic, and cultural amenities while improving the region's economy has been the single most consistent priority expressed by region's leaders and residents.



Top, scenic views of farms and mountains are a major component of the region's appeal. Bottom, downtown Franklin, Macon County.

PROCESS HIGHLIGHTS AND TIMELINE

This timeline highlights critical steps and outcomes of the Opt-In public engagement process.

- ★ Project Kick-off (March 2013)
- ★ Baseline Vision (June 2013)
- ★ Stakeholder Interviews (June to September 2013)
- ★ Draft Regional Vision Framework (September 2013)
- ★ Community Workshops, Round One (September 23 to October 10, 2013)
- ★ Draft Regional Vision (October 2013)
- ★ Scenario Planning (November 2013 to February 2014)
- ★ Community Workshops, Round Two (February 2 to March 11, 2014)
- ★ Regional Summit (May 8, 2014)
- ★ Opt-In Regional Vision Report (June 2014)

2. PROCESS

THE OPT-IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS INVOLVED MORE THAN 1,000 OF THE REGION'S RESIDENTS IN HUNDREDS OF MEETINGS, FROM ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS TO THE SUMMIT, ARGUABLY THE LARGEST-EVER GATHERING OF ITS KIND IN THE SEVEN-COUNTY REGION. THIS PROCESS WAS DESIGNED TO ENSURE THAT THE VISION REFLECTED WHAT RESIDENTS WANTED. IT WAS ALSO DESIGNED TO ENSURE THAT FACTUAL INFORMATION ABOUT CONDITIONS IN THE REGION WOULD BE AVAILABLE TO INFORM RESIDENTS' DECISIONS.

OVERVIEW

BASELINE VISION

The first step in the Opt-In process was to gather information about the region. The results were compiled in the **Baseline Vision**, a document that provides an at-a-glance snapshot of the seven-county region. It documents existing conditions and trends in the region's physical characteristics, economy, and demographics, and it reveals the extent to which economic development, transportation, land preservation, and growth are interrelated. The **Baseline Vision** is available in **Volume 2**, starting on page 1.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Concurrently, the Opt-In team conducted more than 300 one-on-one and small-group interviews throughout the region. Individuals and organizations interviewed included, among others: elected and appointed officials, business leaders, concerned citizens, economic development directors, developers, health practitioners and officials, community organizations, not-for-profit organizations, and advocacy groups. The interviews identified with remarkable consistency the economic, environmental, transportation, land use, and quality-of-life issues for the vision to focus on.

DRAFT REGIONAL VISION FRAMEWORK

The **Draft Regional Vision Framework** integrated the **Baseline Vision's** findings and the results of the interviews. It was used to identify topics and summarize the information that was then presented in the first round of Community Workshops. The **Draft Regional Vision Framework** is available in **Volume 2**, starting on page 123.

THE SIX OPT-IN PILLARS

The six pillars of the Opt-In Vision were introduced in the **Draft Regional Vision Framework**. They reflect and organize the comments collected through the stakeholder interviews. They are:

- ★ The Way We Get Things Done... About the leadership and strategies required to carry the vision forward;
- ★ The Economy We Need... About tourism, economic development, and job creation;
- ★ The Place We're Given... About the region's exceptional natural and cultural resources;
- ★ The Places We Make... About the built environment;
- ★ The Ways We Get Around... About the full range of transportation modes that connect people and commerce both within and beyond the region; and
- ★ The Quality of Life We Expect... About access to educational opportunities, facilities and programs that support healthy living, and venues and programs that promote regional arts and culture.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS, ROUND ONE

From September 23 to October 10, 2013, the Opt-In team conducted the first round of eight Community Workshops in each of the seven counties and in the Qualla Boundary. The purpose of the workshops was to expand the regional conversation and to evaluate whether the findings from the stakeholder interviews resonated with the community at large. Participants were asked to review those findings and, through facilitated small-group activities, to comment.

MAJOR THEMES AND GOALS

The more than 1,000 comments generated in the first round of Community Workshops were catalogued and posted on the Opt-In website. They were then sorted according to the six vision pillars, and sorted again into major themes. The major themes were used to develop goals. Major themes and goals were introduced for the first time in the Draft Regional Vision: What The Community Wants published and posted in October 2013. The public prioritized the goals in the second round of Community Workshops held in February and March 2014. The **Draft Regional Vision: What The Community Wants** is available in **Volume 2**, starting on page 137.

SCENARIO PLANNING

The scenario planning phase of Opt-In took place from the end of the first round of Community Workshops (October 2013) to the start of the second round (February 2014). The vision goals and themes were used to create plausible “what if?” scenarios for the future, and see how each scenario impacted each of the six pillars. The scenarios and the scenario planning methodology are explained in detail in **Chapter 4: Scenario Planning**, which starts on page 7.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS, ROUND TWO

The purpose of the second round of Community Workshops was to share the findings of the scenario planning phase and to provide an open forum for discussion and comment. An 11-question survey was administered at the end of each workshop.

In Graham and Cherokee Counties the Community Workshops were part of two weeklong planning workshops held as part of the comprehensive plans for the two counties and the comprehensive transportation plan for Graham County. The workshops presented an opportunity to gain additional feedback on the scenarios and the specific elements of the vision in the two counties.

THE REGIONAL SUMMIT

The Regional Summit was held on May 8, 2014, at the Harrah’s Cherokee Casino Resort Hotel in Cherokee. The Summit was the last public event of the Opt-In Regional Vision. The program was organized into three segments: A Vision for the Economy of the Future, A Vision for Connectivity Through Transportation, and A Vision for the Natural and Cultural Environment. The segments were introduced by Regional Leadership Council members, who gave a brief overview of vision policies related to their topic. The presentations were followed by questions that participants answered using electronic keypads. The results were displayed on a large screen, immediately after each question. The results are summarized in **Chapter 4. Scenario Planning**, starting on page 18.

DOCUMENTATION

Documentation for all the steps and reports mentioned in this section and throughout the report can be found online at www.optinswnc.org.

REFERENCES

A key aspect of the Opt-In process was the integration of technical information with the ideas gathered through the public engagement process described in the next chapter.

Three documents provided the necessary data: the **Baseline Vision**, the **Summary of Previous Plans**, and the **Summary of Trends**—available on line at www.optinswnc.org. The **Baseline Vision** summarized existing conditions in the region. They included:

- ★ The region’s physical characteristics and land

development trends through Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping, see **Volume 2**, page 7;

- ★ The road and transportation system: history, conditions, and trends, see **Volume 2**, page 23;
- ★ An assessment of the benefits of natural and cultural resources, see **Volume 2**, page 36;
- ★ The identification and cataloguing of signature and legacy landscapes, see **Volume 2**, page 40;
- ★ A review of general economic trends comparing the region with the state of North Carolina, see **Volume 2**, page 53;
- ★ Specific economic trends to identify key drivers of economic performance, see **Volume 2**, page 60;
- ★ Demographic trends and forecasts, see **Volume 2**, page 73; and
- ★ The review of more than 50 plans and studies to identify similarities and differences in land use and transportation goals, policies, and priorities throughout the seven counties, see **Volume 2**, page 83.

All plans and studies are also available at www.optinswnc.org.

Participants in the opening session of the weeklong workshop in Andrews, Cherokee County.



CHAPTER STRUCTURE

This chapter is divided into three sections.

It Is Twenty Years from Now... provides a snapshot of a future in which the policies and actions of the Opt-In vision have been realized. It describes how the region has changed from the vantage point of the year 2035.

Major Themes captures the most distinctive and essential elements of the vision.

Goals lists the ten Opt-In goals created from the ideas and comments generated by the public.

3. VISION

THE VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF SOUTHWESTERN NORTH CAROLINA WAS CREATED FROM IDEAS AND INSIGHTS CONTRIBUTED BY HUNDREDS OF PARTICIPANTS. THEIR SHEER NUMBER, DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS, AND ORIGINS IN ALL PARTS OF THE REGION GIVE CONFIDENCE THAT THE REGIONAL VISION IS AN ACCURATE SAMPLE OF THE WISHES, DREAMS, AND ASPIRATIONS OF RESIDENTS.

When implemented, the vision will substantially change the region. The following section, titled ***It Is Twenty Years From Now...***, is written in the present tense, from the vantage point of the year 2035. It visualizes how the region's natural environment, economy, transportation, and quality of life have changed by turning the vision into reality.

IT IS TWENTY YEARS FROM NOW ...

The region is growing and prospering. The change envisioned by the region's residents in 2014 has improved many things. It has affected the quality of the natural environment, the economy, the way residents get around, and the appearance of our towns and villages.

The region is a beautiful place. The awesome beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina and the irresistible scenic views they create remain what makes this region special. They are even better now, as private property owners have chosen to add major landscapes and notable features and places to the already vast portfolio of protected lands. The beauty of the land has played a major role in the region's economic turnaround.

Tourists come year-round to enjoy the mountains, forests, lakes, and scenic vistas. They bike, kayak, and trout fish in the region's pristine rivers. "Grown Locally" is an attribute found on food and product labels in stores, restaurants, and thriving farmers' markets. Some businesses have located here because they are directly involved in recreation and the outdoors. Others have found that proximity to the outdoors and to vibrant towns has made the area attractive to young, talented employees.

Marketed as one, the region competes globally. A razor-sharp focus on regional cooperation has created a business climate that has attracted entrepreneurs, start-ups, knowledge businesses, and "green" manufacturing, while reestablishing local agriculture. Education has played an important role. A partnership of local businesses and educational institutions has worked together to give residents the skills needed for current and future jobs and has given employers the qualified workforce they require.

There are now more regional transportation choices. The road network is safe and efficient. It minimizes impacts on cultural and scenic resources, and supports the needs of town economies. There are roads in place that

connect the region to the larger surrounding areas and roads that provide access to and from the region for industries and tourists. There are more alternatives to moving around within the region's towns. Many people continue to drive cars, but in many towns, sidewalks, and biking and pedestrian paths have made it easy to get around without a car. Local and regional transit routes have also become more available and frequent.

Villages and towns in this diverse region are leading the way to plan for population and job growth and to create prosperous and vital town centers. They have provided the right blend of fair regulations and incentives to attract housing and commercial developers to existing downtowns and areas well served by infrastructure. This has resulted in vibrant, bustling main streets where businesses thrive, and a variety of housing choices coexist, attracting young and older residents alike. The focus on existing population centers has contained sprawling development and has left intact the rural and independent lifestyles that many in the region prefer.

The region has found its stride. It is different and special. Even as substantial changes have occurred, it has kept its strong individualism and independence, its distinctive towns, its traditional arts and crafts, its music and speech, and its local customs. It has established itself as the authentic and quieter side of the Smokies, steeped in the mountains' culture yet efficient, prosperous, welcoming, connected, and mobile.

MAJOR THEMES

The major themes, listed below, further define the vision and constitute the framework for the recommendations in **Chapter 5: Policies and Actions**, which starts on page 23. They are the region's call to action.

The Opt-In vision...

...Establishes the notion that the region is one, a fundamental economic and geographic unit that competes globally and provides residents with economic opportunities and improved quality of life.

...Demands a unified and coordinated economic development strategy to develop and diversify business, create jobs, support agriculture and local food supply, educate the workforce of the future, attract and retain young people, and establish and market a strong regional identity.

...Calls for protecting and enhancing the value of the region's natural and cultural assets and making them central to businesses' decision to locate here.

...Advocates for creating vibrant, lived-in downtowns to manage and control the inevitable growth, maintain the small-town and rural character of the region, balance regulations with the protection of individual liberty, extend the reach of broadband services, and expand and improve water and sewer services.

...Champions connectivity within and outside the region and within existing communities, maintaining and improving existing roads, and exploring alternatives to the private automobile.

...Campaigns for a fair and equitable quality of life, with a focus on health and wellness, education, and a rich cultural life.

These major themes should guide local units of government, private sector leaders, and citizens to think and act regionally.

GOALS

The depth and breadth of the vision raises the question, How can this vision become a reality? Or, more specifically, How will it affect how children grow, businesses prosper, and residents create fulfilling, happy, and comfortable lives for themselves? The ten goals, listed below, provide the broadest picture of what the region should accomplish over the next 20-plus years.

THE WAYS WE GET THINGS DONE

Leadership—A region that thinks and acts as one.

THE PLACE WE'RE GIVEN

Natural Resources—The region preserves and protects its natural resources and encourages land stewardship and outdoor-oriented businesses while maintaining and enhancing the quality of life residents and visitors currently enjoy.

THE ECONOMY WE NEED

Economic Development—The region prospers with a diversified economy that supports traditional industries, tourism, small businesses, farming, entrepreneurship, and the wise use of its natural resources.

Jobs—The region offers choices of well-paying jobs that match the population's skills and are attractive to young people.

Identity and Marketing—A comprehensive branding and marketing campaign highlights the region's assets, attracts new and diverse businesses, and connects visitors to local amenities.

Infrastructure—An extensive high-speed broadband network, the availability of energy, water, and sewer, and

the expanded use of local airports make the region a magnet for investment.

THE PLACES WE MAKE

Quality Places—A region of beautiful, clean, vibrant, and walkable downtowns maintains its small-town and rural character and manages future growth through clear and fair plans and regulations.

THE WAYS WE GET AROUND

Transportation—A balanced, efficient, and realistic transportation system provides better connectivity within and outside the region, offers mobility alternatives, and creates economic growth opportunities.

THE QUALITY OF LIFE WE EXPECT

Arts and Culture—A region where art, cultural programs, and strong institutions play a key economic role, motivate artists to move into the region, and keep visitors longer.

Social Issues—Strong, well-coordinated local and regional systems are in place to improve healthcare, education, the availability of affordable housing, and services for the region's aging population.



The goals as prioritized in the second round of Community Workshops.

HOW WERE THE GOALS CREATED?

Goals express a desired outcome described in simple terms. They are broad statements of what the region has the potential to accomplish. They tell how the region can change.

The ten Opt-In goals were created from comments the public made in the first round of Community Workshops. Comments were divided according to the vision's pillars and then further sorted into major themes—recurring ideas that indicate values, recommendations, and preferences. Once major themes were identified they were used to develop goals for each pillar.

The full list of comments can be found in **Volume 2, Draft Regional Vision: What the Community Wants**, starting on page 137. In addition to the verbatim comments, that report lists the major themes, the first draft of provisional goals, a set of principles, and additional comments suggested by participants.

Using electronic keypads, summit attendees express their preferences and see results instantaneously.



CHAPTER STRUCTURE

This chapter is divided into five sections.

A. Process and Methodology explains the scenario planning process.

B. Regional Investment Guide shows preferred investment areas throughout the region.

C. How Much Land Is There for Investments and Growth? quantifies land available for investments and growth in each town.

D. Demonstration Projects shows how future growth can occur.

E. Preferences provides a snapshot of the public's preferences.

Additional maps and documents related to this chapter are found in **Chapter 7: Appendix**.

4. SCENARIO PLANNING

THE PURPOSE OF SCENARIO PLANNING IS TO DETERMINE WHERE AND HOW TO ACCOMMODATE FUTURE GROWTH, BASED ON TECHNICAL ANALYSIS AND COMMUNITY PREFERENCES. IT IS ALSO TO PUT INTO SHARP FOCUS THE TRADE-OFFS AND CHOICES FACING LOCAL JURISDICTIONS AS THEY STRIVE TO ACHIEVE THE LAND USE, ENVIRONMENTAL, TRANSPORTATION, AND QUALITY OF LIFE GOALS OF THE VISION.

A. PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

SCENARIO PLANNING

Scenarios are sets of assumptions that tell a story about the future and help imagine change. The Opt-In vision scenarios describe what the region would be like if the ideas and goals expressed by the regional community were implemented. Scenario planning was originally used by businesses to identify plausible future economic conditions to better manage risk. Scenario planning has been compared to test-driving several models of a car before choosing one.

Following the first round of Community Workshops, the Opt-In team began the process of developing three alternative scenarios.

Scenario A – Staying the Course assumed that the region continues the trends of the past 20 years into the future.

Scenario B – Targeted Management and Investment asked: What would happen if the region implements the

goals of the vision with moderate amounts of growth management, investments, and incentives?

Scenario C – Robust Management and Investment asked: What would happen if the region implements the goals of the vision with robust amounts of growth management, investments, and incentives?

Each scenario tells a different story based on its impacts on each of the following five categories: land use, employment, demographics, transportation, and infrastructure. A more detailed description of each scenario is on page 8.

INDICATORS

The performance of each scenario was measured according to 12 indicators and utilized suitability modeling. The indicators suggest that scenarios B and C will have the most dramatic impact on realizing the vision goals of creating vital town centers while protecting the environment, attracting young talent, reducing the amount of time residents will spend commuting, and enabling more people to be served by infrastructure. For

an overview of how each scenario performs according to the 12 indicators, see: **Chapter 7: Appendix**, page 60.



Participants in the second round of Community Workshops in Macon County.

SCENARIO PLANNING ALTERNATIVES

The three alternative scenarios described at left are based on the totality of comments made by participants to the first round of Community Workshops. Following the Community Workshops, the more than 1,000 comments were catalogued and sorted by the six Pillars. They were then sorted again within each Pillar, according to major themes.

The totality of comments, organized by pillars, is available for review in **Volume 2, Draft Regional Vision – What the Community Wants**, starting on page 137. In the report the comments are reported word for word.

SCENARIO A—STAYING THE COURSE	SCENARIO B—TARGETED MANAGEMENT AND INVESTMENT	SCENARIO C—ROBUST MANAGEMENT AND INVESTMENT
The region continues to develop following the spread-out growth trends established in the past two decades.	The region counters the trends of the past two decades by implementing a moderate set of incentives, investments, and regulations to achieve the vision's goals.	The region counters the trends of the past two decades by implementing a more robust set of incentives, investments, and regulations to achieve the vision's goals.
LAND USE		
The majority of future population locates away from existing population nodes. Housing choices are limited.	A percentage of future population and jobs locates near existing population nodes. More housing choices become available.	The majority of future population and jobs chooses to locate within existing population nodes. A greater supply of housing choices becomes available, including apartments, live-work units, and reused buildings. Single-family and rural homes remain available.
ECONOMY		
Jobs in manufacturing decline; jobs in service rise.	The coordinated regional implementation of marketing and economic development strategies begins to diversify the economy and expand job choices.	The coordinated regional implementation of marketing and economic development strategies continues to diversify the economy and expand job choices. More jobs are linked to smaller, entrepreneurial firms.
DEMOGRAPHICS		
Population continues to age. Lower-paying jobs fail to retain and attract younger people.	Demographics begin to change. Job choices attract a younger, more educated workforce with the skills to match employer needs.	Demographics continue to change as an increased job diversity attracts and retains young workers to the region.
TRANSPORTATION		
Investments focus on improving the existing network. Residents rely almost exclusively on cars to get to work, shop, and recreation. No emphasis on freight rail.	Investments focus on implementing connections to the greater region. Residents continue to rely for the most part on cars to get to work, shop, and recreation. The region reestablishes freight rail connections to the greater region.	Investments are shared between network building within population nodes and connectivity among population nodes. Mobility options such as public transportation and active transportation (walking and biking) become available. The region places greater emphasis on extending freight rail service internally.
INFRASTRUCTURE		
The spread-out nature of development makes it challenging and costly to extend water and sewer and broadband infrastructure.	Better opportunities exist to extend water and sewer and expand broadband service as a percentage of development, and redevelopment occurs in areas closer to where infrastructure exists.	More compact development patterns further expand opportunities for delivering water, sewer, and broadband services.



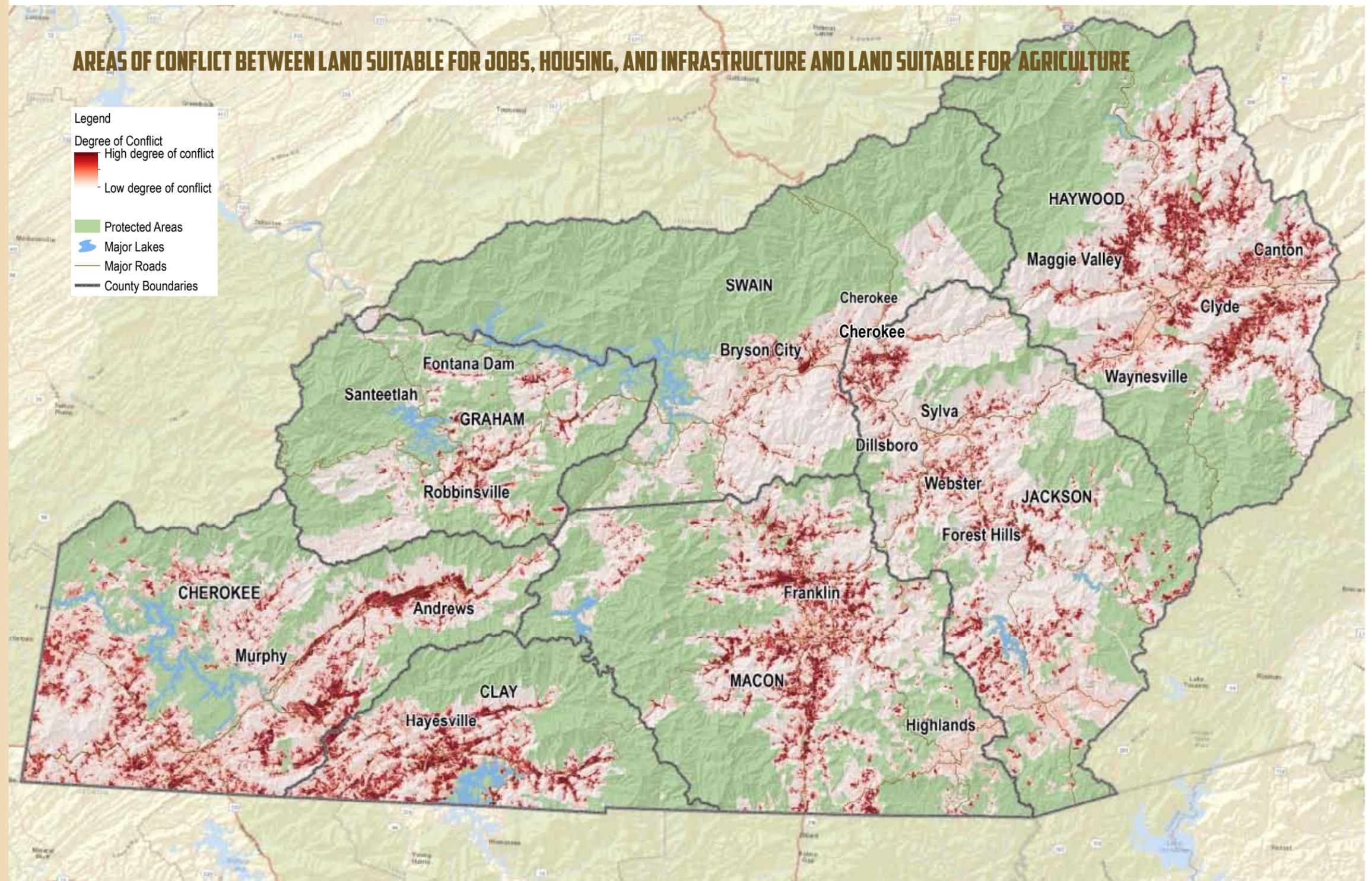
This is a facsimile of the handout given to participants to the second round of Community Workshops. It describes the three alternative scenarios.

SUITABILITY MODELING

Suitability modeling is a process that determines which land is most suitable for a given use or investment. In the Opt-In region, suitability was determined by looking at three categories: conservation, agriculture, and jobs, housing, and infrastructure.

Once suitability was determined for each category, maps were overlapped to identify conflicts. The areas with the least conflict were designated as most suitable for investment and growth. For example, the map to the right shows the degrees of overlap between the jobs, housing, and infrastructure and the agriculture categories. As expected, much of the overlap between those two is in the region's valleys, where there is relatively flat and open land that is suitable for both uses.

A total of six maps were developed to conduct the suitability analysis. The information gathered was used to create the *Regional Investment Guide* map, shown on page 11. The entire set of suitability and conflict maps is available in *Chapter 7: Appendix*, starting on page 48.



B. REGIONAL INVESTMENT GUIDE

Suitability analysis, combined with the vision's goals, the performance of each scenario, and public comments, was used to create the Regional Investment Guide map shown and described in the following pages.

A typical outcome of scenario planning is a preferred scenario, a map that dictates with great precision where future investment should occur. The suitability analysis revealed that in the Opt-In region there are no compelling geographic or demographic conditions to justify a single preferred scenario. Only a small percentage of the “developable” land in the region has in fact been developed, and jobs and population growth forecasts are moderate.

The Regional Investment Guide map is, therefore, this region's preferred scenario: a tool driven by choice. A tool to be used, on a voluntary basis, by local jurisdictions when and where they decide it is in their best interest to follow the guidance of this vision.

MAP OVERVIEW

Inspired by the vision's goals, the Investment Guide map foreshadows a region where growth (physical, economic, and infrastructure) occurs in a rational way within vibrant towns and along transportation corridors that complement the region's special landscapes.

The map does not mandate what jurisdictions 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.

The map describes five general types of investment areas that exist in the region and links them to the goals, policies, and actions of the regional vision. The five types are described below, with references to the vision's relevant goals and policies.

FIVE TYPES OF INVESTMENT AREAS

The areas in green on the map, ***Protected Areas***, include state and federally managed land and land with permanent easements. Opt-In recommends the continued preservation and enhancement of these areas. (See ***Chapter 5: A Vision for Land and Culture***, page 29.)

The areas in dark green, ***Land Stewardship Areas***, include land that is privately owned and/or that presents challenges to investment. This includes floodplains, wetlands, and slopes steeper than 40 percent. This land currently supports some agriculture and forestry uses. Some of it has notable environmental characteristics. Opt-In recommends ways to facilitate and increase the protection of those lands. (See ***Chapter 5: A Vision for Land and Culture***, Action C1a, page 30.)

The areas in light gray, ***Limited Investment Areas***, include land that has limited potential to sustain new investment because it is not adjacent to major roads, and has limited or no infrastructure capacity in terms of water, sewer, and other utilities. It contains woodlands, farms, and scattered second and rural homes. Opt-In de-emphasizes public investments in this land but does not preclude private ones. (See ***Chapter 5: A Vision for Place and Investments***, Policy D 1, page 32.)

The areas in pink, ***Secondary Investment Areas***, include land adjacent to and approximately within a quarter-mile of major roads. The proximity to major roads makes them likely prospects for new investment. In recent years these corridors have absorbed a great deal of the region's suburban growth, including strip malls, shops, restaurants, hotels, businesses, small manufacturers, crafts outlets, and tourist attractions. They also include traditional, unincorporated places and crossroads communities—the rural communities cherished by residents and tourists alike. Opt-In recommends that future investments in these areas be managed to reflect land suitability and to reinforce the rural and scenic character of the roads. It also recommends that investments and incentives be offered to channel future growth toward the small traditional

communities found along the corridors, if and when they choose to grow. (See ***Chapter 5: A Vision for Place and Investments***, page 32.)

The areas in red, ***Primary Investment Areas***, include: all the land contained within town boundaries; all land within quarter-mile of town boundaries; and all land within quarter-mile of all major roads within one mile of town boundaries. These criteria have been applied to all towns within the region, with an understanding that each town or city can choose to modify them based on local conditions and priorities. A variety of factors, including demographics, life-style preferences, and the vision's goals, make these areas the most likely target for future growth in the region. For the most part, these areas already have water and sewer services, and are served by broadband. Extension of those services when necessary is facilitated by proximity. Opt-In recommends a mixture of regulations, investments, and incentives that favor growth of businesses and retail, redevelopment, infill development, reuse of existing buildings, and provision of housing choices within the Primary Investment Areas, as always, based on the priorities and discretion of local jurisdictions. To begin with, each jurisdiction will have to determine the specific boundaries of its Primary Investment Areas. (See ***Chapter 5: A Vision for Place and Investments***, page 32.)

A high resolution view of the Regional Investment Guide map is available at optinswnc.nemac.org/gis/regionalinvestmentguide/

NOT A LAND USE MAP

The Regional Investment Guide map is NOT A LAND USE MAP and does not take precedence over local land use planning authority. The Investment Guide is intended as a tool to be used on a voluntary basis by local communities. It provides a recommendation for regional land, transportation, economic, cultural, quality of life, and infrastructure investments that will ultimately be implemented by county and municipal decision-makers based on their local priorities and goals.

In addition to this region-wide map, a series of maps at the county scale are available in ***Chapter 7: Appendix***, starting on page 53. The county maps provide more specificity and actually show which areas within towns are best suited for investments and growth.

All maps are posted as high-definition versions at optinswnc.nemac.org/gis/regionalinvestmentguide/.

C. HOW MUCH LAND IS THERE FOR INVESTMENT AND GROWTH?

The chart to the right shows, in square miles, how much land exists in the Primary Investment Area of each town. The information is divided into three categories:

- A. Total Land**—The number of square miles of land within each town’s Primary Investment Area.
- B. Investment Land**—How much of that total land is suitable for investment (calculated by subtracting Protected Areas and Land Stewardship Areas from Primary Investment Areas).
- C. Optimal Investment Land**—How much of the developable land has optimal conditions for investment and growth, based on the suitability analysis.

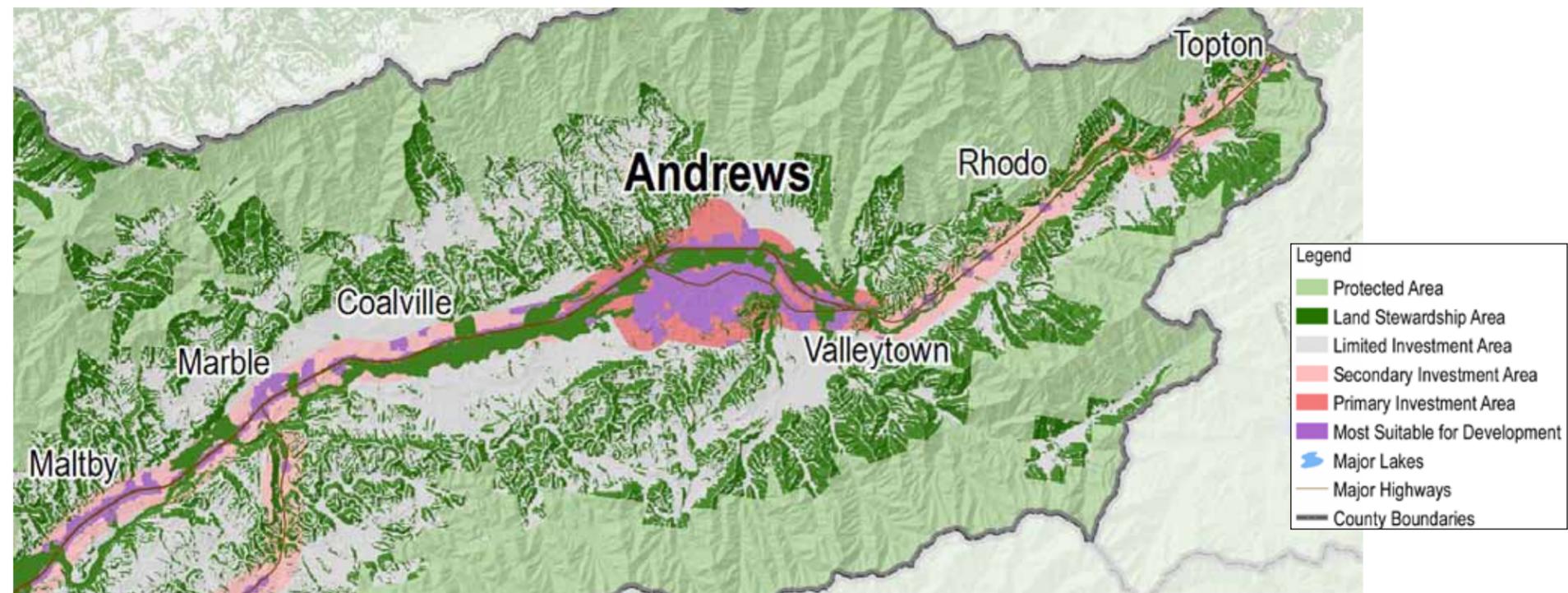
There is a significant amount of land for investment and growth in each town and in the region as a whole. Specifically, the Primary Investment Areas for the whole region contain 76.8 square miles of land suitable for investment, 25.6 square miles of which are optimal to accommodate investment.

How large is the amount of investment land in the region? It is 60% larger than the total city area of Asheville, which encompasses 45 square miles and has a population of 83,000. It is more than enough to satisfy the vision’s goals and to accommodate population and jobs growth to the year 2035.

Towns	A. Total Land	B. Investment Land	C. Optimal Investment Land
Andrews	4.4	3.2	1.8
Bryson City	6.4	4.4	1.7
Canton	9.7	8.0	3.8
Clyde	3.8	3.3	1.2
Dillsboro	2.4	1.7	0.6
Fontana Dam	2.9	0.2	0.04
Forest Hills	2.7	1.6	0.4
Franklin	11.3	9.8	4.0
Hayesville	3.2	2.7	0.7
Highlands	12.5	7.8	1.0
Maggie Valley	11.8	6.6	1.2
Murphy	6.9	4.7	1.6
Robbinsville	4.5	2.9	0.9
Santeetlah	2.1	0.2	0.02
Sylva	6.6	4.8	2.1
Waynesville	17.4	12.5	5.0
Webster	3.5	2.5	0.4



Top, the many farmers’ markets in the region establish the link between towns and the productive farmland surrounding them. Below, a detail of the Primary Investment Area for the town of Andrews, in Cherokee County. It shows, in purple, the most suitable land for development and investments (1.78 square miles). The boundaries of the Primary Investment Area, in red, have been applied following the criteria described on page 10. They should be carefully reviewed by towns and counties to ensure they meet their specific priorities. Detailed maps for each county are available in Chapter 7: Appendix, on page 53.



D. DEMONSTRATION AREAS

During the Graham and Cherokee County weeklong workshops, held as part of the comprehensive plans for the two counties, the Opt-In team developed area plans for specific sites in those counties. Three of these area plans are shown here as a way to communicate potential development choices. All three are located in Primary or Secondary Investment Areas.

The three demonstration areas are:

The **Marble Crossroads**, in Cherokee County, shows a condition very common in the region: a community once thriving, now diminished by generic highway-type development. The concept shows how this type of community can recover sense of place and grow gracefully with careful planning.

The **Rodney Orr Bypass**, in Graham County, shows the transformation, over time, of a strictly functional road into an attractive boulevard. The before-and-after images, on page 15, illustrate the visual impact of the change. Change itself is incremental and the product of guidelines, investments by the public sector in infrastructure, and investments by the private sector.

The **Casino Village Concept**, also in Cherokee County, shows the great potential that can be triggered by a catalytic development. It also shows the efficiency and quality of a compact and well-designed mixed-use development.

MARBLE CROSSROADS

The Marble community, originally built around the former train station with an economy rooted in quarrying and agriculture, saw its vitality diminished by construction of the four-lane Highway 74, which siphoned traffic and commerce away from its center. The community's compact pattern of streets and uses is still largely intact, however, as in many similar rural communities where the highway "passed them by."

The workshop sketch plan illustrates some possible ways to build on that pattern to reinforce Marble's identity and character as a distinct place. Included is an example of how residential infill development, in scale with the relatively small existing lots nearby, could enhance the community's fabric. These recommendations suggest how new development around the highway crossroads, if done thoughtfully, can add to a sense of place in the way it is oriented to and perceived by passing motorists as part of a rural village. Reactivating the rail line between Murphy and Andrews was an idea that received a lot of support at the workshop. If the Marble station was restored as a stop on this line, it could create significant long-term opportunities for the community in the areas of tourism, industry, and transit.

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



Plan view of the proposed improvements.

RODNEY ORR BYPASS

Much of the focus of the Graham County weeklong workshop was on how to enhance the appeal of the town of Robbinsville as the county's primary activity center and gateway to its other attractions. When the Rodney Orr bypass was built, it channeled traffic away from the town's original pedestrian-oriented Main Street shopping district in favor of an automobile-oriented strip development with less charm and walkability. Because this strip is now home to most of the town's viable businesses, it functions as the de facto main street.

The proposed improvements suggest ways this strip can be transformed, incrementally, to create a more pleasing setting for both residents and visitors. By consolidating multiple curb cuts into a more coherent system of access streets, the frontage along both sides of the road can be devoted to continuous sidewalks and street trees. As new buildings are built, they can be pulled up closer to the street, with parking in the rear (see the transformation sequence, *above next page*). The centerpiece of this transformation would be the creation of a "new downtown"—including a town square, framed by a new civic building, with sidewalk-oriented shops and a cinema around its perimeter.

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



A rendering of the revitalized town of Robbinsville as the county's activity center.



Above, before-and-after renderings of a walkable and vital Rodney Orr Bypass, in Robbinsville. Below, plan view of the proposed boulevard.



CASINO VILLAGE CONCEPT

The EBCI's new casino will be located one-half mile off of Highway 74, and will not be visible from the highway. All traffic to the casino, however, will pass through the 50 acres of privately owned land at the casino entrance drive, via the bridge currently under construction. This highly visible site, which is expected to be a prime location for new restaurants and hotels, presents a unique opportunity in the region to organize these uses in a walkable, mixed-use "village" format, rather than as a collection of automobile-oriented "pad" sites. The sketch plan, developed during the Cherokee County workshop, proposes an initial phase of development consisting of tourist-oriented retail shops and restaurants, a hotel, and apartments framing a roundabout at the village's main crossroads.

Later phases of development might include an outlet mall and additional housing on the southern portion of the site, as well as hillside housing on higher portions of the site overlooking the village.

The proposed village site is within a quarter mile (5-minute) walk from a possible rail station site across Highway 74. If excursion rail service is reactivated along the corridor between Murphy and Andrews, this station, possibly in conjunction with a shuttle bus, could provide an entertaining way for area residents, casino patrons, and other visitors to access the village and the casino.

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



Above, renderings of the proposed concept for the Casino Village concept. *Left, the plan view.*

Next page, images from the Graham County and the Cherokee County weeklong workshops. *From top left: Participants in the opening session of the weeklong workshop; A drawing by an elementary school student; Participants in the Open House (part of the weeklong workshop) reviewing economic development and tourism alternatives; High school students participating in a focus group (also part of the weeklong workshop).*



E. PREFERENCES

The Opt-In vision is the result of qualitative feedback from the region’s residents. Comments and preferences were collected through interviews and workshops and considered, in their totality, to generate the vision’s goals and policies. Three surveys, however, were fielded to quantify the region’s responses to those goals and policies. This section describes the surveys and their results. It is divided into two parts. The first part describes the surveys; the second summarizes the results.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS SURVEY AND COMMENTARY

During the second round of Community Workshops, public comments were recorded using a survey and written open-ended comment cards. The survey asked questions that focused on possible trade-offs between various elements of the vision. The comment cards probed likes and dislikes related to the scenarios and their performance. With respect to the scenarios, both the survey and the written comments show moderate to strong support for scenarios B and C and little support for scenario A. The text box Scenario Preferences, *at right*, gives a snapshot of the region’s dialogue on the scenarios. The full results of the survey can be found in **Chapter 7: Appendix**, pages 61 and 62.

SUMMIT ELECTRONIC KEYPAD SURVEY

During the Regional Summit, participants addressed 27 questions probing the strength of their support for the vision’s elements as well as exploring trade-offs and preferences. Questions addressed regional readiness, economic development, transportation, land use, natural resources, quality of life, and implementation. The survey was fielded live during the Regional Summit, using electronic keypads, and the results were shown on a large screen immediately after each question. The keypads provided a highly interactive method to engage the Summit’s participants and to continue the regional conversation started by the Opt-In process.

The full report of the audience responses is available at www.optinswnc.org.

SURVEY OF REGISTERED VOTERS

The primary goal of the survey of registered voters was to determine whether the findings of the vision are supported by the results of a more systematic sample. A secondary goal was to determine whether there were any obvious divisions in opinion between various groups of respondents.

The survey sample was drawn from a list of registered voters, which ensured that all respondents were above the age of 18 and residents of the region. Potential respondents were sent a copy of the survey questionnaire, and soon thereafter received a follow-up postcard reminding them to respond. The response rate was a respectable 11% a total of 454 respondents. According to most available indicators (including county of origin, gender, and age), those who responded resemble the target population (see table and caption, *below*). The full results can be found at www.optinswnc.org. The next section, **What Did We Learn?**, draws from all three surveys in creating a picture of the region’s preferences.

COUNTY OF ORIGIN	SAMPLE	POPULATION 18+
Cherokee	12%	14%
Clay	6%	6%
Graham	3%	4%
Haywood	32%	30%
Jackson	24%	21%
Macon	17%	17%
Swain	6%	7%

The table above lists the data on respondents’ county of origin (sample) compared to the target (population 18+). The latter only adds up to 99% due to rounding. The age of respondents ranged from 23 to 96 with an average age of 64. Although 64 is older than the average for the region, it is comparable to registered voters’ age (60).

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

SURVEY OF REGISTERED VOTERS

Results of the survey of registered voters show that, when not faced with trade-offs, registered voters in the Opt-In region tend to see all of the vision’s issues as important. On the one hand, respondents express the most support for improving the quality of education, providing access to medical care, and preserving and protecting the region’s natural resources. On the other hand, they placed establishing a brand identity, exploring and promoting alternative means of transportation, and providing quick and easy access to all parts of the region near the bottom of the list.

Results also show that, in every case, respondents displayed the most support for trade-offs that required regional collaboration and management and the least support for those that required more taxpayer investment, with regulations falling in the middle. Additional questions show that the least popular trade-offs include policies that would make it harder for people to get around by walking, bicycling, or taking public transportation, and policies that would hurt the environment. Likewise, there is little support for strategies that would prioritize public investment within towns, but not promote them in the more rural regions of the county. The three tables on page 19 show the results of the survey of registered voters.

A key, and somewhat surprising, outcome of the random survey is the priority given to quality of life issues. Specifically, improving the quality of education, getting access to quality medical care in all parts of the region, attracting and retaining young people to the region, and providing housing choices in price and type, rank, respectively, first, second, fourth, and fifth among important issues facing the region. This outcome is surprising considering the fact that quality of life issues were among the least mentioned in the interviews and in the two rounds of Community Workshops. **The strong importance given to those issues places them at the top of the vision’s implementation priorities.** (Continued on page 20.)

SCENARIO PREFERENCES

The open-ended comments summarized below provide a snapshot of the range of sentiments in the region relative to the scenarios. Some comments strongly support the robust management, incentives, and investments proposed by scenario C, while others reject any kind of planning, since it is viewed as interfering with private property rights.

Taken together, the comments show a desire for positive change in the region and support for the future foreshadowed by scenarios B and C. That support, however, is moderated by the trade-offs needed to achieve change. The variety of statements of support and moderation are strongly echoed by the results of the survey of registered voters and by the Summit’s electronic keypad survey.

Below are brief summaries and a sampling of comments on the economy, land use, infrastructure, and transportation.

★ There is strong support for an economy that creates jobs and attracts small businesses and entrepreneurs to the region. *“B and C support economic development and job creation through recruitment of sustainable small employers using skilled labor.”* *“Scenario A is stagnant and does not show much promise.”* *“Increase incentives and infrastructure to encourage businesses and manufacturing to the area.”* When surveyed, participants overwhelmingly supported focusing on tourism and small businesses versus larger employers and even light industry.

- ★ There is strong support for the creation of attractive town centers as a tool to attract and keep young people in the region. There is also strong support for providing housing choices. The open-ended comments show support for creating more compact, lively downtowns that allow safe walking and biking. There are qualifications about how much growth is “right” for the region and questions about “the impacts of concentrated population.” “Revitalize downtowns but keep the small town feel.” “Scenario B: Attract young people without overcrowding.” There are also fears that regulation will bring an end to personal freedom and that forces outside the region are controlling the outcomes of the process. “Liberty, freedom, collaboration at the local level based on locally elected officials, held to account by their constituents.”
- ★ There is unqualified support for improved broadband service. “High-speed broadband—not feasible in all rural areas, good incentive to bring population to city centers.”
- ★ Interestingly, there were very few comments dealing with transportation. There is support, however, for expanding mobility options in the region. “Bike paths for the younger, transit for the older.” “As people age, they need more mobility options[...].” There is also support voiced for expanding passenger and freight rail service tempered by concerns about costs.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE FOLLOWING ISSUES THAT FACE THE OPT-IN REGION?

Improve the quality of education	89%
Provide access to quality medical care in all parts of the region	89%
Preserve and protect the region's natural resources	86%
Attract and retain young people to the region	79%
Manage the region's future growth	74%
Housing choices (in price and type) in the region	73%
Expand broadband and high-speed internet access in the region	71%
Diversify the region's economy	68%
Celebrate our region's culture and heritage	67%
Explore and promote improvements to existing highways in the region	66%
Promote development with the smallest environmental impact	65%
Create vibrant, lived-in downtowns in the region	59%
Provide incentives for businesses that focus on outdoor recreation	56%
Establish a strong brand identity to market the region	55%
Explore and promote alternative means of transportation	55%
Provide quick and easy access to all parts of the region	49%

The numbers in this table represent the percentage of respondents who answered in the top two categories of importance: very important and somewhat important. Statistical models show that there were minor differences in the preferences based on number of years lived in the region, county of origin, political ideology, age, or education.

OTHER PERTINENT QUESTIONS

Economic development strategy that would prioritize public investment within established towns in the region, but not promote growth in some of the more rural locations outside established towns	16%
Economic development strategy that would be likely to create good-paying jobs but would hurt the environment	14%
A transportation strategy for the region that would make it easier for people to get around in cars, and trucks, but harder to get around by walking, bicycling, or taking public transportation	8%

The numbers in this table represent the percentage of respondents who answered a 5, 6, or 7 on a 7-point scale for each question, with 7 indicating strong support and 1 indicating no support. Each question suggests a trade-off between two aspects of the vision.

HOW STRONGLY WOULD YOU SUPPORT THE FOLLOWING POLICIES THAT WOULD ADVANCE SOME GOALS AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHERS?

THE PLACE WE'RE GIVEN

Advance the goal of protecting and enhancing the region's unique natural and cultural assets but require more regional collaboration and management	40%
Advance the goal of protecting and enhancing the region's unique natural and cultural assets but require more local regulations	30%
Advance the goal of protecting and enhancing the region's unique natural and cultural assets but require more local investment—including taxpayer investment	20%

THE ECONOMY WE NEED

Advance the goal of a healthier regional economy but require more regional collaboration and management	37%
Advance the goal of a healthier regional economy but require more local regulation	21%
Advance the goal of a healthier regional economy but require more local investment—including taxpayer investment	17%

THE WAYS WE GET AROUND

Support regional transportation policies that advance the goal of better connecting the places where people work with the places where people live but require more regional collaboration and management	30%
Support regional transportation policies that advance the goal of better connecting the places where people work with the places where people live but require more local regulations	20%
Support regional transportation policies that advance the goal of better connecting the places where people work with the places where people live but require more local investment—including taxpayer investment	17%

The numbers in this table are the percentage of respondents who answered a 5, 6, or 7 on a 7-point scale for each question, with 7 indicating strong support and 1 indicating no support. Here, the results are organized by pillar. For each pillar, the same issue, one that had received broad support by vision participants, is measured against three possible trade-offs. The results clearly indicate that the support for each issue drops once these trade-offs are considered. Here, too, there were insignificant differences in the preferences based on percentage of life in the region, county of origin, political ideology, age, or education.

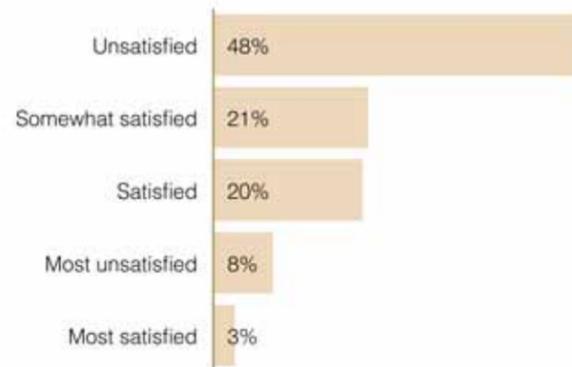
In conclusion, the region's residents tend to think a host of issues are important, but support them less when confronted with trade-offs that may be inherent in these policy decisions. This suggests that building awareness and continuing the regional dialogue started by Opt-In should be a key part of implementation.

Although respondents felt differently on issues, there do not seem to be any large-scale divisions, suggesting that the region may be more united than many often claim.

SUMMIT ELECTRONIC KEYPAD SURVEY

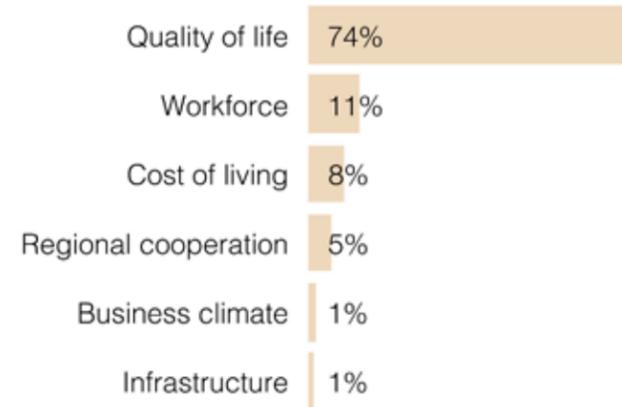
This section highlights results of the major questions answered at the Regional Summit and, when appropriate, compares them with results of the Community Workshops survey and the random survey. Charts in the text provide details of specific answers.

Summit participants want the region to act as one and share opportunities and resources, but are unsatisfied with the current level of governmental cooperation. When asked about the importance for the region to work cooperatively, an overwhelming majority of participants (86%) responded that the topic was very important or somewhat important. When asked about the "level of cooperation among the region's governments," 48% responded that they were unsatisfied with it.



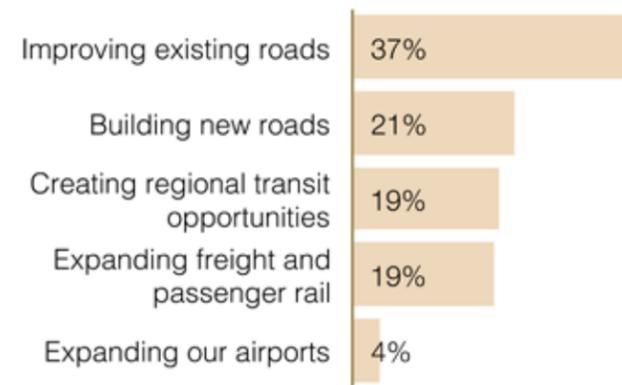
A separate question reveals very strong support, 81%, for cooperative agreements among counties, to share opportunities and resources.

To diversify the economy, participants prefer a better integration of tourism with economic development (27%) over branding and marketing the region (23%) and coordinating economic development activities (21%). They also consider, by a large margin (74%), "quality of life" as the decisive argument to convince businesses to move to the region.

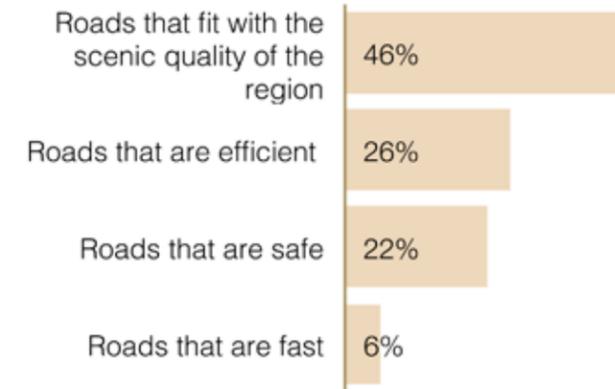


The findings resonate with the Community Workshops survey, where, in two separate questions, participants strongly preferred to focus economic development on tourism and small businesses (76%), and to brand the region and market it together (67%). "Diversify the region's economy" was ranked eighth in the priority list of important issues in the random survey.

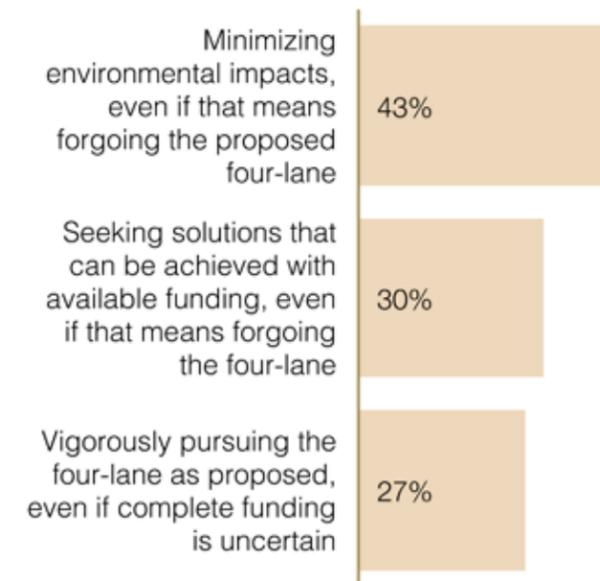
Participants prefer improving existing roads as a way to achieve connectivity within and outside the region.



When asked about the design of future roads, they strongly prefer roads "that fit with the scenic quality of the region."



On completing Corridor K, participants prefer to "minimize environmental impacts."

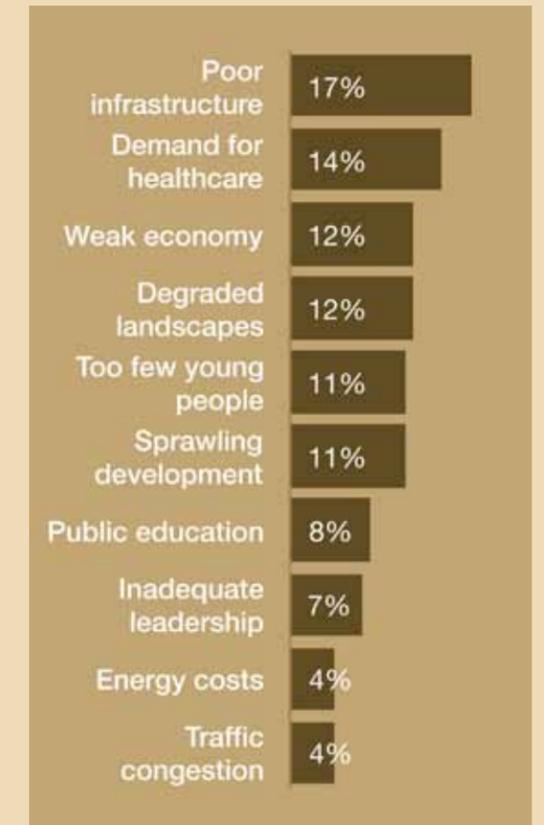


The preference for improving existing roads is consistent with responses from the Community Workshops survey where participants selected "existing highway improvement" (35%) over "high-speed highway connecting towns within the region and beyond" (18%). "Provide quick and easy access to all parts of the region" ranked last among important issues in the random survey.

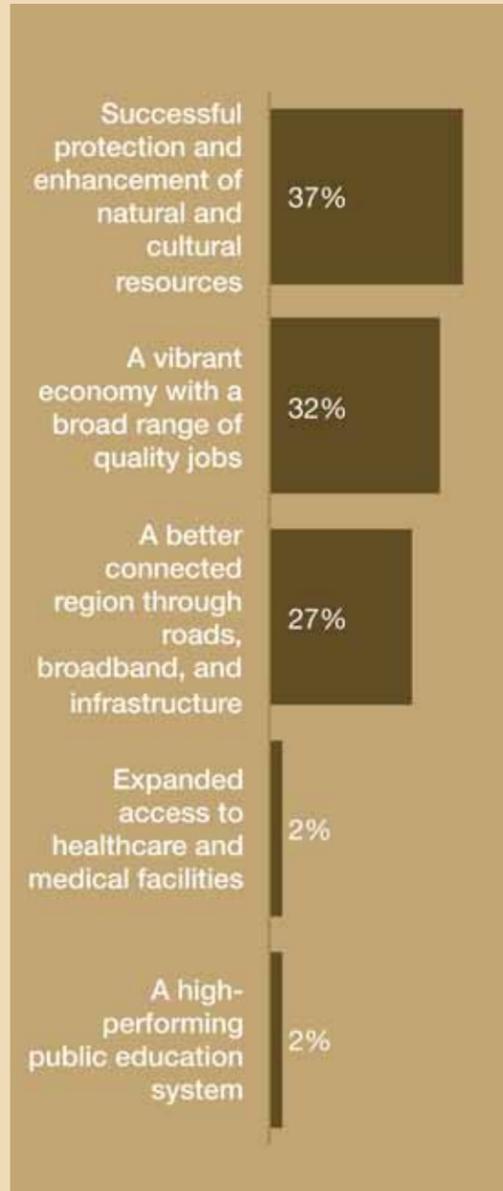
CONCERNS AND EXPECTATIONS

The summit survey raised two questions designed to probe the region's concerns and expectations about implementing the vision.

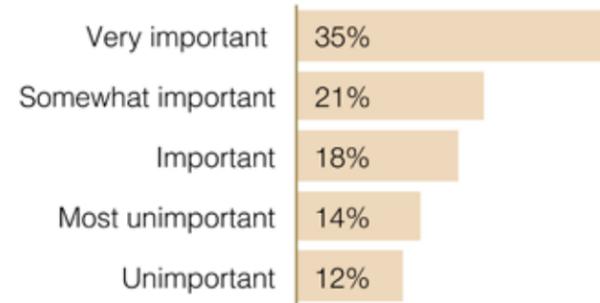
PICTURE OUR REGION 20 YEARS FROM NOW. WHAT IS THE #1 ISSUE OR CHALLENGE IT WILL BE FACING THEN?



PICTURE OUR REGION 20 YEARS FROM NOW. WHAT IS THE #1 ACCOMPLISHMENT WE WILL BE CELEBRATING?

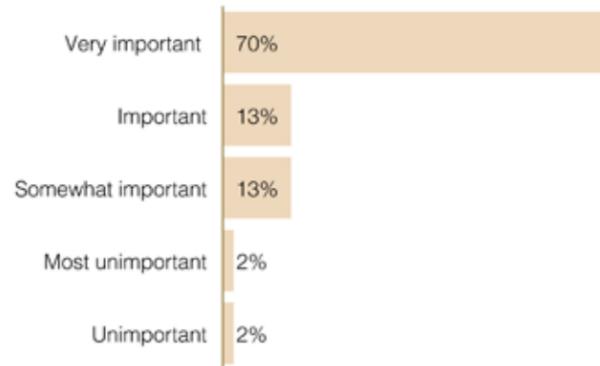


Summit participants (74%) consider alternatives to driving to be important to very important.



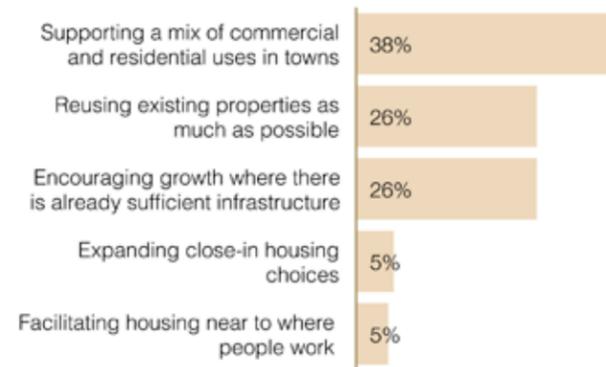
It should be noted that in the Community Workshops survey a similar percentage of residents, 37%, prioritized “expanded opportunities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit.” It should be further noted that in the random survey a policy “that makes it easier for people to get around in cars and trucks but harder to get around by walking, bicycling, or taking public transportation” received only 8% of support, the lowest recorded.

They strongly believe it is important to create “vibrant and prosperous town centers.”

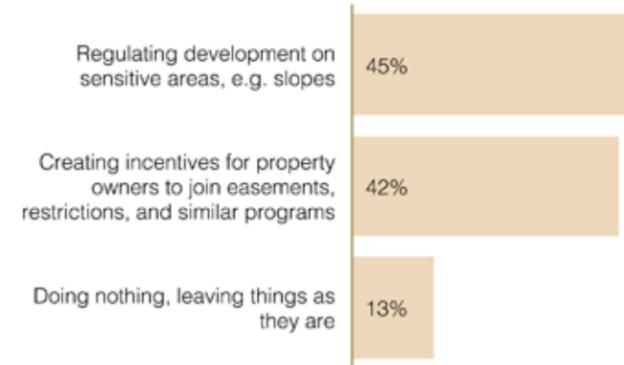


Community Workshops participants also considered creating “interesting towns that attract and keep young people” very important (72%), and somewhat important (25%). However, when investments and incentives are introduced, random survey respondents show less support (16%) for economic development strategies that “would prioritize public investment within established towns in the region, but not promote growth in some of the more rural locations outside established towns,” suggesting a preference for more balanced investment policies.

They support implementing a mix of commercial and residential uses, reusing existing properties, and encouraging growth where there is already sufficient infrastructure.



And want to protect and enhance natural and cultural resources with a mixture of regulation and incentives.



The issue of regulating development is a controversial one, as noted in the text box on page 19. It was also mentioned during the first and second round of Community Workshops as an issue of individual property rights infringement, with concerns that forces outside the region, including the federal government, have too large a say in local decision-making. The question was posed in the Community Workshops survey and participants strongly supported “to manage and regulate future growth” (69%), versus “to prioritize property owners’ rights” (31%). “Manage the region’s future growth” polled strongly in the random survey, ranking fifth in the list of important issues facing the region.



Above and next page, images from the Regional Summit.



Keywords
Diversity, Inclusion & Equity
Workforce Development

CHAPTER STRUCTURE

This chapter is divided into six sections:

- ★ The Ways We Get Things Done: A Vision for Leadership and Implementation
- ★ The Economy We Need: A Vision for Prosperity
- ★ The Place We're Given: A Vision for Land and Culture
- ★ The Places We Make: A Vision for Place and Investments
- ★ The Ways We Get Around: A Vision for Connectivity
- ★ The Quality of Life We Expect: A Vision for Community

Each section includes the following parts: Issues, Solutions, Goals, and specific Policies and Actions. The recommended policies and actions support each goal and are based on three sources: input from the regional community, facts about the region from the Baseline Vision, and examples and success stories from communities, both local and national.

5. POLICIES AND ACTIONS

THIS CHAPTER INTRODUCES POLICIES AND ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE VISION'S GOALS. IMPLEMENTING THEM WILL REQUIRE AN UNPRECEDENTED COLLABORATION AND COOPERATION AMONG INSTITUTIONS, GOVERNMENTS, AND BUSINESSES. IT WILL REQUIRE CHAMPIONS AND STEWARDS. IT WILL REQUIRE STEADY COMMUNITY PRESSURE. IT WILL REQUIRE A CONCERTED EFFORT TO BUILD PUBLIC AWARENESS ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF WHAT IS PROPOSED. TOGETHER THESE POLICIES AND ACTIONS ARE A CALL TO ACTION AND A ROAD MAP ON HOW TO TURN THE REGIONAL VISION INTO REALITY.

THE WAYS WE GET THINGS DONE: A VISION FOR LEADERSHIP AND IMPLEMENTATION

ISSUES

The task of implementing the Opt-In vision is a challenge that will require all the talent and resources that the region can mobilize.

Issues are complex, and the vision is all-encompassing. Resources, levels of motivation, and expectations are uneven throughout the seven counties. The region's governments dramatically vary in power and size, ranging from small municipalities to a sovereign nation, the EBCI. This complexity is compounded by the absence of a large metropolitan area in the region and the financial assets, political clout, and resources typically associated with such areas.

The Opt-In vision is not a proposal that can be adopted with a simple yes or no vote. In fact, there is not a single unit of government, let alone a specific agency, with the authority to make all of the changes that need to be made.

SOLUTIONS

Implementation will require an unprecedented level of voluntary cooperation among governments, businesses, and institutions. It will also require widespread acceptance of the notion that acting regionally will produce tangible benefits larger than any individual jurisdiction alone can achieve.

The Southwestern Commission, as a voluntary association of governments, is the one entity that can bring together the diverse parties—public, private, and civic—to address the vision's complexity. Equally important, the

commission is already involved in several of the policies and actions recommended by the vision.

REFERENCES AND PREFERENCES

Participants in the more than 300 stakeholder interviews and in the first round of Community Workshops made repeated reference to cooperation and collaboration as keys to implement the vision. Comments from the interviews about leadership were summarized in *Volume 2, Draft Regional Vision Framework, The Ways We Get Things Done*, page 136. Comments from the Community Workshops can be found in their entirety in *Volume 2, Draft Regional Vision – What the Community Wants, Section 3*, page 201.

The Summit also asked questions about implementation. When asked about the importance for the region to work cooperatively, an overwhelming majority of participants (86%) responded that the topic was very important or somewhat important. A plurality (48%) expressed disappointment with current “level of cooperation among the region's governments.” They also, very strongly (81%), supported “cooperative agreements among counties to share opportunities and resources.” And, they were very willing (67%) and somewhat willing (24%) “to get involved in implementing the vision,” by “promoting” it (40%), “staying informed” (30%), and “donating time” (27%). Finally, they supported (62%) using county resources to support implementation.

GOAL

Leadership—A region that thinks and acts as one.

A. POLICIES AND ACTIONS FOR LEADERSHIP

A1 Form an Implementation Committee.

The Southwestern Commission (SWC) should take on the primary responsibility of coordinating implementation of Opt-In. To do so it should convene and staff an Implementation Committee. The committee should include representatives of local governments, as well as private and civic sector leaders with a strong interest in regionalism. Its purpose is to lead implementation, provide regional perspective, and assist the SWC in prioritizing steps, engaging non-governmental partners, seeking non-governmental funding, educating the region on the benefits of thinking and “planning regionally,” and continuing the regional dialogue initiated by Opt-In. The SWC staff will oversee the day-to-day needs of implementing the vision. The Implementation Committee and the SWC should:

- ★ Organize presentations throughout the region to elected and appointed officials, business leaders, and special interest groups. These presentations should focus on organizations that have local or regional credibility and should be tailored to highlight elements of the vision likely to resonate with the selected group.
- ★ Engage young people in this regional dialogue about the future. This should include high school and college students as well as young professional organizations.
- ★ Engage in a sustained awareness campaign that uses conventional printed and electronic media, as well as electronic tools such as blogs, e-mail blasts, and social media, to give the region periodic progress updates.
- ★ Schedule periodic reports to the community highlighting progress and checking back on the vision.

A2 Acknowledge and reward exemplary regional leadership.

Local communities should organize an annual “State of the Vision” event that celebrates progress and recognizes exemplary regional leadership from government bodies, civic organizations, and the private sector.

A3 Establish a Regional Rural Leadership Institute.

As the challenges and opportunities in the seven-county region become more complex, there will be an increasing need to develop regional leaders. The SWC, working with the region’s community colleges and Western Carolina University, should initiate a leadership program designed to better prepare government, business, and nonprofit leaders to work together and cooperate. The program should build upon the experience of Coulter Regional Leadership Program, focus on regional issues, teach the benefits of thinking regionally, and prepare participants to address regional issues. The program should continue on an annual or semiannual basis.

A4 Identify best practice procedures for the implementation of multi-jurisdictional agreements.

The SWC should research and document multi-jurisdictional agreements in the region, state, and nation. It should showcase these examples to regional leaders on an ongoing basis and should evaluate the applicability of those practices to the seven-county region.

HOW HAVE OTHER REGIONS IMPLEMENTED THEIR VISIONS?

It turns out, in all kind of ways.

For the past 20 years a multitude of regions have created regional visions and plans and have faced the question of how to implement them in the absence of a direct form of regional governance. Two common trends emerge in the way those regions approached implementation.

Some have placed implementation in the hands of newly formed independent organizations expressly created for that purpose. Typically this has been done in the absence of organizations with the regional reputation, focus, and mission needed to implement the vision. Envision Montgomery, in the five-county Montgomery region, and Envision Utah, in the Salt Lake area, are two successful examples of this approach.

Others have relied on existing organizations with a track record as regional conveners. “Connect,” the regional vision process for the 14-county region surrounding Charlotte, relied on the Centralina and Catawba Councils of Governments to get things done. They applied for and received a \$4.9 million HUD Sustainable Communities Grant and \$3 million in local in-kind public and private matching resources. See more at www.connectourfuture.org/whatisconnect.

In either case, implementation of specific elements of the vision were delegated to *ad hoc* committees and task forces, to spread ownership of implementation.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THEIR EXPERIENCE?

The early months of implementation are the most important. The momentum created by the Opt-In process and by the Regional Summit must be harnessed and sustained. To do so, implementation must start quickly and the implementation structure (chain of command) must be clear to everyone involved.

The SWC and the Implementation Committee must introduce the vision to the region. Even though events such as the Regional Summit have generated media coverage, the region needs to hear from the entity charged with implementing it. This will be the start of a new dialogue, one informed by the vision and designed to facilitate its implementation.

A common drawback of vision implementation is the reluctance on the part of the leading organization to publicize progress. To do so must be a top priority of the SWC and the Implementation Committee. Opt-In is part of an effort to create a whole new narrative and to tell a new story about the region. A sustained awareness and information campaign will ensure that the Opt-In story is owned, but more important, told by, everyone who lives and works in the region.

These activities need to be orchestrated to keep the flame of the vision alive, to intercept new issues and opportunities as they emerge, and to create accountability in the process of implementing the vision.



THE ECONOMY WE NEED: A VISION FOR PROSPERITY

ISSUES

There is strong consensus that the region needs to diversify its economy. Little information, however, is available about which businesses are appropriate and can thrive in the region given current economic and workforce strengths and weaknesses, infrastructure conditions, and natural and cultural resources.

Jobs scarcity continues, and the lack of well-paying jobs compels better-skilled workers to leave, resulting in what some have called “a lost generation” of workers. Transportation costs are high and commutes are long, discouraging potential workers from low-paying jobs. Businesses have trouble locating skilled workers, and when they do, they find it difficult to keep them in the region.

There is limited marketing to help the region move forward and recover from the 2008 economic downturn and address future opportunities. The issue is compounded by structural changes occurring in state and regional economic development organizations, such as Advantage West and the North Carolina Department of Commerce. These changes foreshadow greater regional competition for businesses and resources. At the moment, counties and municipalities are on their own competing for resources and for businesses.

SOLUTIONS

The vision strongly encourages the seven-county region to coordinate economic development activities, act as one, and speak with one voice. The region is a large and sparsely populated area and it does not have the pull and resources of a central urbanized city. Coordinating economic development activities will maximize the

Top, small scale agriculture is an important component of the region’s economy. Bottom, manufacturing is in decline, a trend shaped by forces outside the region.

region’s ability to leverage its wealth of natural and cultural resources, recruit new business and talent, and capitalize on the growing importance of tourism to the state and global economy.

The 2012 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) report, an effort coordinated by the Southwestern Commission, has begun to address the issue of identifying appropriate businesses for the region with its **Regional Industry Cluster Targets** study. The report also includes lists of policies and projects from all counties and municipalities in the region. These lists need to be aligned with the regional vision and the findings of the clusters study.

KEY TRENDS AND REFERENCES

The **Baseline Vision** provides a comprehensive summary of socio-economic and demographic conditions and trends in the region. (See **Volume 2**, starting on page 51.) The **Draft Regional Vision Framework** provides summaries of conditions and trends, which are listed below. (See **Volume 2**, starting on page 130.)

The seven-county regional economy is growing slower than the rest of the state... Consequently, it accounts for a decreasing share of the state’s overall economy. This trend is consistent with more general urban-rural trends across the country.

The decline in manufacturing is a general trend... This trend is being shaped by forces outside the region, and therefore will be difficult to reverse by actions within the region.

The education and health services sector is important to the region... With the region’s aging population and the presence of Western Carolina University, this sector should continue to be an economic anchor.

The rise in leisure and hospitality services is natural... These services are common in rural areas that possess attractive natural and cultural resources. They

provide an alternative path for economic development in the wake of declining manufacturing activity.

Data on the economic impacts of natural and cultural resources are limited... No county or regional level natural and cultural resource economic data was available when the Baseline Vision was prepared.

Population growth has been strong for a rural area... Though lagging the state, the population has grown faster than the national rate. However, population growth is projected to slow substantially in the next five years, with Cherokee and Graham counties expected to have negative growth. Towns that are projected to experience substantial declines in population include Robbinsville, Hayesville and Andrews.

B. POLICIES AND ACTIONS FOR PROSPERITY

B1 Coordinate economic development activities.

Currently, economic development activities in the region are the prerogative of county economic development directors. AdvantageWest is the designated regional economic development entity for the 23 westernmost counties in the state. Local communities should collaborate with a variety of economic development stakeholders, including chambers of commerce and state agencies, to promote the region as an ideal location for economic growth, support existing businesses, and advocate for policies that are advantageous to businesses and workers.

B1a Establish an independent regional economic development and marketing entity.

The SWC is currently incubating an economic development and marketing group called the Mountain West Alliance (MWA). The group includes the region's economic development directors, the EBCI, and representatives of Western Carolina University's Millennial Initiative. The SWC should take the next step and formalize the group as an independent economic development and marketing entity for the Opt-In region. The MWA should:

- ★ Identify shared regional priorities and projects.
- ★ Work with the region's Main Street, Small Town Main Street, and HandMade in America communities to look for opportunities to build informational networks and shared marketing efforts.
- ★ Gather data on the economic impact of tourism in the region.
- ★ Align regional strategies with state and federal funding criteria, and communicate that alignment to state and federal agencies and officials.

B1b Commission a strategic five-year economic development plan.

The plan should build upon the 2012 CEDS report and complete the process of identifying economic sectors most likely to stimulate business investment and jobs in the region based on comprehensive and up-to-date market research. It should also identify established targets from each county, implementation resources, and benefits for each county.

B1c Brand and market the region's assets.

The creation of a regional identity will help Southwest North Carolina market itself on a national and global scale. This action is discussed in the next section, *The Place We're Given: A Vision of Land and Culture*.

B2 Diversify and expand the economy.

The MWA should work with the region's economic development directors and identified regional partners to begin implementing the recommendations of the strategic economic development plan. It should also focus on efforts to improve the business climate in the region. To this end it should:

- ★ Develop a legislative agenda to create a favorable business climate that can sustain the region's vision and support the development of the industry sectors identified by the plan.
- ★ Mobilize a coalition of the region's chambers of commerce, business leaders, and other economic development entities to pursue the legislative agenda.

INDUSTRIAL PARKS

LandsEast Industrial Park is located in Pitt and Martin Counties in North Carolina. The counties have officially entered into an inter-local agreement concerning LandsEast Industrial Park. The document, signed by the chairmen of the Martin and Pitt County Commissioners, details the terms of revenue and cost sharing between the two counties for the joint park. The agreement specifies that the two counties will evenly share incremental ad valorem tax revenues created by improvements or businesses located within the park. The counties will also equally share expenses for the industrial park. The collaboration to develop a joint industrial park officially began in 2005 as both counties aimed to stimulate jobs and investment in underserved areas. An advisory committee consisting of eight members, four from Pitt and four from Martin County, guides the development of the park. LandsEast spans almost 800 acres and was approved as a North Carolina Certified Site in late 2008 by the North Carolina Department of Commerce.

Pellissippi Place, located in Blount County Tennessee, is a community with a business focus on technology research and development and commercialization. It is a collaborative effort of four local governments seeking to further R&D innovations in the Oak Ridge Technology Corridor/Innovation Valley (www.pellissippiplace.com).

ADDITIONAL FUNDING RESOURCES

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) has announced the creation of **Appalachian Community Capital (ACC)**, a new central bank for development lenders that will increase the availability of capital to small businesses in the 13-state Appalachian Region.

LOCALLY OWNED BUSINESSES

The federal JOBS Act makes it possible for businesses to raise up to \$1 million in equity annually from local investors. Individuals can invest \$2,000–\$10,000 annually (depending on their earnings and net worth) in a local business. Investment must take place through a government-accredited portal. The regulatory and organizational landscape for community-based equity investments in locally owned businesses is new, but it seems likely that it will be essential for a local organization or agency such as the SWC to play a central role in vetting entrepreneurs and pairing them with investors. For more information:

- ★ Economic Gardening: www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/
- ★ National Crowdfunding Association: www.nlcfa.org
- ★ The JOBS Act: What Startups and Small Businesses Need to Know, www.forbes.com/sites/work-in-progress/2012/09/21/the-jobs-act-what-startups-and-small-businesses-need-to-know-infographic/

BRANDING AND MARKETING REGIONS

Various regions throughout the country have pursued branding and marketing strategies. Below are few examples.

Lane County, Oregon, is devoted to developing the tourism market throughout the rural areas of the county. The tool to do so is the Rural Tourism Marketing Program (RTMP). The RTMP allocates funds to rural communities for tourism-related projects. The funds that are allocated for the Rural Tourism Marketing Program are from room taxes collected in rural areas of the county and are used to encourage more tourism.

Milwaukee 7, launched in September 2005, was formed to create a regional, cooperative economic development platform for the seven counties of southeastern Wisconsin: Its mission is to attract, retain, and grow diverse businesses and talent. For more information: www.mke7.com.

Tacoma, the Wired City – Tacoma Power, a division of the city's municipally owned Tacoma Public Utilities, took a calculated risk in 1997 that has benefited the residents, businesses, and development of the city of Tacoma and Pierce County ever since. In keeping with its dedication to its customers, Tacoma Power made a \$100 million investment in installing 700 miles of fiber-optic cable within every right-of-way in Tacoma. Tacoma was recognized as the most wired city in the country, a powerful identity that was featured in national newspapers.

- ★ Align the region's communities to maintain a voice in the continued development of North Carolina's new Rural Economic Development Division.

B3 Be ready for new industry.

The SWC should work with the seven counties, the EBCI, and the WCU Millennial Initiative to identify optimal locations for the creation of regional-scale strategically located industrial sites and to ensure availability of water, sewer, high-speed Internet, natural gas and other energy sources, and appropriate road infrastructure to those locations.

B4 Facilitate the success of entrepreneurial and small businesses.

In a rural area like the Opt-In region, small businesses and entrepreneurs are likely to be a key component of the region's economic development strategy. Growing entrepreneurship, however, will require strategies that are profoundly different from those needed to recruit larger, more established businesses. It will take a combination of efforts at the regional, local, and grassroots levels.

B4a Create an investment capital fund for emerging entrepreneurs.

The SWC should lead this initiative to increase access to capital for businesses at different stages of development. The commission is already involved in the management of the Revolving Loan Fund funded by the Economic Development Administration and by the Appalachian Regional Commission with a \$1.3 million balance and in the development of an Angel Fund with a target of \$2 to \$3 million. The commission should:

- ★ Identify private investors, philanthropic organizations, pension funds, and foundations that have the potential to contribute to a local investment pool.
- ★ Call on these potential investment sources to make the case that a portion of their holdings should be invested in Southwestern North Carolina.

B4b Streamline regulations and develop incentives.

At a more local level, local jurisdictions should consult with their local attorney and access legal advice from the UNC School of Government to evaluate incentives and regulatory steps currently allowed by state law to facilitate the creation of new jobs. At the regional level, jurisdictions should work with state elected officials to broaden the types and availability of economic development incentives similar to those available in other states. For example, many communities offer property and business equipment tax credits for businesses that locate downtown. Collierville, Tennessee, adopted an ordinance more than 20 years ago that assesses an impact fee on new commercial development that takes place outside the downtown district. Revenue from the impact fees is used for downtown development and management activities. Through zoning overlays that create special development zones, some communities also offer job credits and other benefits. For example, Winchester, Virginia, has created a downtown technology overlay zone, providing an attractive package of incentives for small technology companies that locate downtown and thereby attracting more than 50 new businesses.

B4c Network and inform entrepreneurs.

Networking and information sharing are critical. The region should create an internal entrepreneurial network to provide existing and future entrepreneurs with a knowledge base of information learned through successful businesses. It should also establish an entrepreneurial library to provide potential entrepreneurs with accurate and up-to-date market research.

B4d Support business incubators.

The SWC, working with local jurisdictions, should support the creation of business incubators. These incubators may be able to offer amenities such as seed capital, business seminars, mentoring relationships, and meeting space to help welcome and nourish entrepreneurial development in the region. If loca-

tion-neutral businesses are most likely to be the ones attracted by the region's amenities, a more flexible approach to small-business support may be considered.

B5 Train the workforce of the future.

The SWC, through the Southwestern Workforce Development Board, should convene a workforce development consortium of postsecondary education and training institutions to develop and deliver the specific technology skills and talent needed in the emerging workplaces, now and into the future. The process should start at lower grades, as recommend in policy **F3, Start Early; Educate the Future Workforce**, page 40.

B6 Promote and support agriculture as a viable economic practice.

The nation is undergoing a revolution in agricultural practices and Southwestern North Carolina is a recognized leader in the production of artisanal food products, drinks, and organic farming practices. The vision, however, strongly supports expanding the role of agriculture in the future.

A number of steps are listed to accomplish that vision; some are regulatory, others focus on awareness building and marketing. They include:

- ★ Raising awareness of the economic and health benefits of agriculture.
- ★ Encouraging local jurisdictions to review and update policies and codes to allow for agricultural activities wherever appropriate.
- ★ Uniformly permitting low-impact agricultural activities within viable agricultural areas.
- ★ Developing a coordinated marketing effort and expanding farmers' markets in partnership with the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP).
- ★ Promoting agritourism as a legitimate economic development activity.
- ★ Encouraging closer coordination between small-scale, farm-to-table farming and the region's larger scale commercial farming.

BEYOND THE SEVEN-COUNTY REGION (ECONOMY)

DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

The Opt-In region lies within a two-hour drive of six major metropolitan markets. Each of these areas competes with the region for economic investment, but also provides a captive population for both workforce and tourism. The Opt-In region has long been a destination for second-home ownership driven by these metro areas and beyond, and will continue to be a receiving area for retirees, empty-nester homeowners, and visitors. As shown at right, each of these urban markets has experienced rapid growth in population and income, with three exceeding the fast growth of the Opt-In region.

The seven-county region's proximity to each metro market varies by county. For example, Cherokee and Graham enjoy a second-home base supported by the Atlanta market, while Haywood has more part-time residents from Charlotte, Raleigh, Ohio, and Florida. Similarly, the most western counties are able to draw workforce from eastern Tennessee and north Georgia, while the eastern counties can pull from Asheville and upstate South Carolina.

Local economic developers should collectively work with regional partners to train and tap workforce that has the skillset needed by employers in the larger region.

TOURISM

The Opt-In region's biggest opportunity with respect to the larger region is with tourism. The Opt-In area is quite large, and the competitive aspects vary by individual community and county. Neighboring regions have the following assets that compete with assets in the Opt-In region:

- ★ Asheville, NC, Greenville, SC, Knoxville and Chattanooga, TN—urban downtown, arts and culture.
- ★ Hendersonville and Brevard, NC—destination downtown.
- ★ Pisgah National Forest, Chattahoochee National

REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC AND INCOME COMPARISON

	2010 Population	2000–2010 Growth	2014 Median Household Income	2014 Median Occupied Housing Unit Value
Atlanta Metro Area	5,286,728	24%	\$52,533	\$171,573
Knoxville Metro Area	837,571	12%	\$44,405	\$149,096
Greenville Metro Area	824,112	14%	\$44,677	\$144,257
Chattanooga Metro Area	528,143	11%	\$41,704	\$146,045
Asheville Metro Area	424,858	15%	\$43,318	\$186,523
Spartanburg, Metro Area	313,268	10%	\$40,173	\$121,423
SWNC 7 Counties	194,102	13%	\$35,974	\$140,143

This table compares statistical information for the six Metro Areas and markets, which are located within a two-hour drive from the Opt-In region.

Forest, Lake Jocassee, Lake Keowee, Lake Hartwell, and Lake Lanier—outdoor recreation and natural resources.

- ★ Southwest Virginia—Regional outdoor recreation, cultural resources, viticulture, retiree and second homes.

The Opt-In region's biggest competitive advantage likely lies in outdoor recreation and the outdoor experience. The 19 counties of southwest Virginia have similar outdoor offerings, although not likely to the degree of the Opt-In area, particularly with the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and the Nantahala Gorge and its recreation activities.

While southwest Virginia has effectively claimed and marketed its music heritage and artisan roots, it is in its infancy promoting outdoor recreation. The Opt-In region needs to compete in the same arenas.

The seven counties in the Opt-In region are already successful in attracting visitors and investment away from competitor regions. According to the North Carolina Division of Tourism, the top five markets are Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, and Tennessee. Similarly, the top five advertising markets for overnight visitors include:

- ★ Charlotte
- ★ Greenville-Spartanburg
- ★ Atlanta
- ★ Greensboro-High Point-Winston Salem
- ★ Raleigh-Durham

It is important that the Opt-In region collectively recognizes its regional impact and, in particular, market itself and its tourism and economic opportunities to these regional competitors.

TOURISM AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Opt-In interviews and surveys have underlined the need to do a far better job of leveraging the region's appeal to tourists to broaden and diversify its economic base. Western Carolina University's Steve Morse argues that "Tourism IS economic development." And there's a strong consensus that tourism development agencies and economic development commissions should be talking to one another regularly and collaborating on research and marketing that can bolster the region's success in at least two ways: by extending tourists' experiences and visitor days, and by identifying individuals and small businesses already attracted by the region's amenities who might have the education and skills sought by existing businesses or who might be candidates for moving businesses or establishing new ones in the region.



THE PLACE WE'RE GIVEN: A VISION FOR LAND AND CULTURE

ISSUES

Outdoor recreation and tourism, tied as they are to beautiful mountain terrain and healthy forests and waters, have long been an economic mainstay of the region and will remain so. The region's forests are declining, however, compromised by logging and clear-cutting, livestock grazing, invasive species, erosion, and insect or parasitic infestation. Spread out development has also claimed many acres of nature and interrupted areas of continuous forest. State and federal agencies lack funding to improve or better manage public forest lands, and local property owners often lack the information and incentives to improve the condition of their woodlands. Regional competition for recreation and tourism revenues is fierce, with eastern Tennessee, north Georgia, and other areas of western North Carolina, all of which offer competing products.

SOLUTIONS

A key element of the regional vision is the public's desire to balance protection of the region's natural and scenic resources with improvements to the region's economy. Small-scale industries that don't damage or over-burden lands and resources, managed logging, small-scale sustainable farming that provides food products for locals and nearby big-city residents while generating income for local landowners, and businesses tied to recreation and natural and cultural resources, among others, are likely to play a key role in establishing that balance. Developing a strong identity can differentiate the region from its competitors. Engaging the private sector can offset the decline in public spending.

Above left, the region's waters are a major natural resource. Below left, trout fishing is an increasingly popular activity with visitors.

KEY TRENDS AND REFERENCES

Information about natural and cultural resources in the region is available in the *Regional Character* section of *Volume 2, Baseline Vision*, page 7. This section includes maps and information on: federal and state managed land, slopes, and floodplains and wetlands. It also includes information on the economic benefits of the region's natural and cultural resources and provides an inventory on the region's signature and legacy landscapes. (See *Volume 2*, page 36 and page 40, respectively.) Key trends include:

The region has an abundance of natural resources...

It is home to remarkable geological and water features, significant amounts of forestland, important water resources, and prominent natural heritage areas.

These resources have been the cradle of the area's unique culture...

The region's settlement patterns, farming practices, personal individualism and independence, religious fervor, distinctive music and speech, and local customs all emerged interwoven and rooted in a landscape of rugged mountains, deep valleys, isolated coves and abundant waters.

They represent the wealth of this region...

They attract visitors and part-time residents with an extensive array of outdoor and cultural activities. They have a profound impact on residents' quality of life and help make tourism a key component of the region's economy. Tourism revenues are on the rise in all seven counties with 2011 values ranging from \$11.65 million in Clay County to \$280.50 million in Swain County. (Source: North Carolina Department of Commerce.)

Even though all counties share those assets, the economic impacts vary...

Data shows that in 2011 tourism generated \$643 million in revenues for the region. It also shows that Cherokee, Clay, and Graham counties generated little more than 10% of those revenues (\$69.3 million), despite their abundance of recreational resources. (Source: North Carolina Department of Commerce.)

GOALS

Natural Resources—The region preserves and protects its natural resources and encourages land stewardship and outdoor-oriented businesses while maintaining and enhancing the quality of life that residents and visitors currently enjoy.

Identity and Marketing—A comprehensive branding and marketing campaign highlights the region’s assets, attracts new and diverse businesses, and connects visitors to local amenities.

C. POLICIES AND ACTIONS FOR LAND AND CULTURE

C1 Form and coordinate the activities of an ad-hoc Environmental Leadership Forum.

The SWC should form an Environmental Leadership Forum that includes the EBCI, county representatives, large property owners, local watershed organizations, and other nonprofits. The Leadership Forum will assist in implementing the environmental aspects of the vision and expand the regional dialogue on environmental issues.

C1a Protect the region’s scenic beauty and unique ecosystem.

The Environmental Leadership Forum should focus on acquiring rights or permanent easements on scenic, environmentally sensitive, and prime agricultural lands. It should consider and prioritize the following steps:

- ★ Promote the benefits of programs such as conservation easements, deed restrictions, “less than fee simple” transactions, and life estates.
- ★ Support the expansion of greenways and trails, especially longer-distance greenways like the Appalachian National Scenic Trail that serve as ecological corridors.
- ★ Work with property owners to evaluate the implementation of Payment for Ecology Services (PES) strategies. PES are transactions between the “buyer” of ecological services and the “seller,” a property owner. Transactions are typically

orchestrated by one of three methods: as public payments directly to service providers; through the purchase/sale of services coordinated by brokers and eco-project developers on behalf of buyers and sellers; and through independent private agreements.

- ★ Advocate for the creation of new tools to improve land stewardship, like Transfer of Development Rights. TDR may require special legislation, as it is not currently permitted in North Carolina.
- ★ Develop programs with local school districts to educate youth on the value of natural resources to the region.

C1b Increase dialogue on local and regional environmental issues.

The Environmental Leadership Forum should be the go-to entity to address local and regional issues and act as an interagency convener. A start-up sample of issues that call for public discussion include:

- ★ Increasing opportunities for sustainable community harvesting of timber and other resources on publicly owned lands.
- ★ Expanding efforts to protect and increase local availability of culturally important native and medicinal plants used by Cherokee and mountain artisans.

Signature landscapes, top, are major large-scale landscape areas that define the identity or “signature” of a region. They possess a combination of exceptional natural and scenic qualities and remain largely unaltered by human activity. They possess high visual quality and figure prominently in locals’ (and visitors’) sense of place, framing and influencing human history and activity throughout the larger landscape.

Legacy Landscapes, bottom, are notable features and places where: past and present human activity and development have sustained or strengthened the landscape’s intrinsic (natural, scenic, recreational, historical, or cultural) qualities; human activity and development have established a positive example or legacy for resource management, land use and conservation, recreation, historic preservation, local economic development, etc.; human intervention and development have come about through a collective effort and in the interest of “the greater good;” and local values and heritage are represented.

For more information see Volume 2, page 40.





Judaculla Rock is an ancient petroglyph located in Jackson County's Caney Fork community. The rock is part of a 15-acre site that once was a prehistoric Native American settlement, soapstone quarry, and sacred place. The Judaculla Rock Preservation Project (JRPP) is a successful collaborative project focused on preserving an ancient, carved soapstone boulder and on interpreting Cherokee history. The petroglyphs, of unknown origin and meaning, are dated to 1,500 BCE. The JRPP is an effort between Jackson County, the Cherokee Preservation Foundation, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI), the U.S. Forest Service, Western Carolina University, the North Carolina Rock Art Survey, and other agencies. Judaculla Rock is one of North Carolina's most visited cultural sites, in a region that is home to countless Native American Indian settlements and trails on some of the most rural and undeveloped land in the Appalachians. Nearly 11,000 visitors per year travel to the rock.

C2 Make clean air and clean water a priority.

The SWC should lead an effort to inventory environmental data and conditions across the seven-county area and identify management and protective actions. This effort could be coordinated with the Linking Land and Communities Effort by the Land of Sky Regional Council. For more information on that program, see www.landofsky.org/linkinglands.html.

C3 Celebrate the region's Appalachian and Native American heritage.

The SWC should build a partnership with the EBCI, the Cherokee Preservation Foundation, and other heritage organizations to focus on heritage interpretation, heritage tourism opportunities, and marketing strategies. Steps to be considered are:

- ★ Developing a wayfinding system to the region's cultural and historic sites.
- ★ Developing "treasure" maps and "treasure discovery programs" that direct visitors to sites and cultural resources.
- ★ Developing school programs that educate students about cultural resources and expand educational field trips.
- ★ Increasing access to Cherokee language resources.

C4 Brand and market the region's assets.

The Mountain West Alliance should coordinate the branding and marketing of the region. This requires that they identify the components of the regional brand that match the product and experience the region's consumers want and shape a strategy to market them. The policy and related actions have been deliberately placed in the context of this section to stress the fact that branding and marketing the region should rigorously integrate the attraction of new business with the promotion of the region's natural assets.

C4a Identify critical regional assets.

There is agreement that the region lacks a recognizable identity and that that is hampering its marketing. A key to marketing the region is to identify those

critical natural and recreational assets that resonate among potential site selectors, business investors, tourists, and retirees and integrate them into a marketing strategy.

C4b Finalize and fund a multiyear marketing campaign.

The marketing campaign should be carefully coordinated with similar efforts occurring at county and town levels. It should focus on those sectors deemed to be primary in the region, including tourism, education, technology, agriculture, and light manufacturing.

C4c Integrate resort and hospitality services in the campaign.

Resort and hospitality services are a growing segment of the region's economy. Biking, kayaking, and trout fishing are emerging as priority businesses. The effort should be coordinated with marketing generated by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and with the activities of the Smoky Mountain Host.

C4d Measure the economic impact of natural and cultural resources on the region's economy.

The SWC should work with state agencies, Western Carolina University, and regional tourism operators to design and commission a study that measures the economic impact of the region's natural and cultural resources, in order to demonstrate their value to the region.

THE PLACES WE MAKE: A VISION FOR PLACE AND INVESTMENTS

ISSUES

In the past two decades the region's towns have experienced the typical suburban expansion found in the rest of the country. Growth has primarily occurred away from the traditional downtowns and municipal cores in a random and spread-out fashion. An estimated 30,000 seasonal homes have been scattered throughout farms, forests, and slopes (Source: NEMAC). Businesses left downtowns and moved to suburban locations. As a result of these development patterns, the vitality of the region's downtowns declined and the amount of driving needed to accomplish even the most basic chores increased. Infrastructure became more costly and difficult to justify. Finally, unregulated growth has created bland and generic places the likes of which can be found anywhere in the country's suburbs and seldom reflect the region's character.

SOLUTIONS

Balancing growth and development with the preservation of natural resources is perhaps the most dominant theme of the vision. The region has always treasured its rural and mountain character, and there is widespread (but not uniform) recognition that to keep that character, growth outside municipalities has to decrease while core communities need to be strengthened and revitalized. Public input has shown that there is a desire for developing moderate to robust regulations to accommodate future growth and maintain the region's character. It has also shown that the debate between those who advocate for fair regulations and those who oppose them on private property rights grounds is not settled. Much public awareness needs to be built to explain the benefits of more efficient growth.

Decisions to regulate remain, of course, the responsibility of local jurisdictions. The *Regional Investment Guide* map, described in detail in *Chapter 4*, page 10, provides the data and a level playing field for making those decisions in a regional context.

KEY TRENDS AND REFERENCES

Information about the character of the region's man-made places is available in *Volume 2, Baseline Vision, Regional Character* section, page 7. This section includes maps and information on the region's towns, the lands of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, impervious surfaces, and regional land use. It also includes information on land development trends, on page 17, and an analysis of policy similarities and differences among more than 50 plans and studies, on page 45. The latter maps municipalities that have zoning, regional greenways and trails, recreational trails, and regional bicycle routes. Key trends include:

The seven-county region does not have a dominant large city... It is made up of a variety of small to mid-size towns and villages located in the region's gently sloping valleys.

All municipalities within the region have some form of zoning... With the exception of Bryson City, Fontana Dam, and Robbinsville.

No county within the region has zoning... Some counties have subdivision ordinances, watershed protection laws, noxious use restrictions, and other regulations that serve some of the functions of zoning ordinances.

Land consumption has been substantial...In the 30 years between 1976 and 2006 the number of acres converted from natural/rural land to developed land in the region increased over 500%, from 11,188 acres in 1976 to 68,505 in 2006. Conversion took place at a rate of over five acres per day. (Source: Mapping Historical Development Patterns and Forecasting Urban Growth in Western North Carolina 1976-2030," Center for Applied GIScience, UNC Charlotte, in 2010.)

Land availability is constrained... When the land characteristics of Southwestern North Carolina are taken into consideration, nearly 70% of the region's total lands present various degrees of development challenges. This condition is the foundation of the region's strong environmental stewardship goals. Land available for development

remains, however, plentiful. (Source: NEMAC, *Volume 2, Baseline Vision*, page 16.)

GOALS

Quality Places—A region of beautiful, clean, vibrant, and walkable downtowns maintains its small-town and rural character and manages future growth through clear and fair plans and regulations.

Infrastructure—An extensive high-speed broadband network, the availability of energy, water, and sewer, and the expanded use of local airports make the region a magnet for investment.

D. POLICIES AND ACTIONS FOR PLACE AND INVESTMENTS

D1 Direct growth toward existing communities.

A central theme of the Opt-In vision is to direct new growth in the region's towns and population centers, where development already exists. Locating new housing and employment as well as retail, services, and public institutions in towns and villages will strengthen the local economy, make the region attractive to young talent and to older residents alike, and make it easier to get around without a car.

D1a Encourage counties and local jurisdictions to align local land use policies and plans with the vision's goals.

The Regional Investment Guide (RIG) described in the previous chapter provides an orderly tool to align local land use policies with the vision's goal of directing new development to existing towns and villages. The RIG identifies Primary Investment Areas centered on each of the region's jurisdictions. Those areas are intended to be the focus of public investments and incentives because they have fewer conflicts between prime agricultural land, areas suitable for development, and protected natural resources. It will be entirely up to the local jurisdictions to decide when it is in their best interest to activate those Primary Investment Areas.

REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

A number of factors may contribute to the lack of broad land use policies and regulations within the region. The vast amounts of public land already have limits on land use and other protections that would traditionally be enforced by other means. For this reason, many of the most valuable landscapes within the region are already preserved by land use controls that come from the federal level.

Where public lands do not exist, the terrain is such that it limits development in many areas, either because steep slopes make most types of development infeasible or because the lack of large flat parcels makes development at a significant scale difficult. These natural factors do not prohibit development outright, but effectively limit its location and scope.

Finally, as is reported in a number of previous plans, many citizens within the region are uncomfortable with excessive regulation of individual land use and do not view land use maps or zoning ordinances as compatible with their values. Many residents of areas with high growth pressures, however, recognize that some level of regulation is necessary.



D1b Develop incentives that direct businesses and residents toward areas already served by infrastructure.

Local jurisdictions should consider a variety of incentives to direct growth toward their Primary Investment Areas. Incentives from local units of government can include fee waivers or streamlined review processes. They can also include the creation of tax-increment financing (TIF) and similar economic tools. Incentives to promote residential development can include low- or no-interest loans, rent-to-own programs for apartments/condominiums, and loan and down payment forgiveness opportunities. A package of possible incentives is described in the text box on the next page.

D1c Educate public, private, and civic leaders, developers, and lending institutions on the economic and social benefits of more efficient and compact town centers.

Efforts to direct growth to existing population centers should go hand in hand with efforts to raise public awareness of the social, economic, and environmental benefits of doing so. The Implementation Committee can play a key role in sustaining the dialogue initiated by the Opt-In process with regard to the character of place the region wants and land use and regulations. The committee could conduct regional public forums on the purpose and benefits of land use regulations, design guidelines, and investments and incentives.

Images of the region's towns: left, Sylva, below, Highlands, and Franklin.



D2 Create vibrant, lived-in, and prosperous town centers.

Vibrant lived-in centers are a prerequisite for a positive business climate for the individual towns and the region as a whole. Offering quality-of-life amenities in existing communities would also reinforce the strong advantage that the natural and recreational assets already give to the region.

D2a Encourage local jurisdictions to review their current codes and regulations.

Current codes and land regulations should facilitate, not hinder, the redevelopment of existing town centers. Local jurisdictions with land use authority should identify where zoning regulations may be unnecessarily rigid, and where amendments can be made to encourage more intensive, mixed-use development through more flexible regulations. At the request of individual jurisdictions, the SWC should assist in the review process with additional assistance from the North Carolina Department of Commerce Rural Development Division's Community Planning program.

D2b Support policy and regulations for mixed use, live-work proximity.

Local jurisdictions should consider eliminating zoning provisions that keep uses completely separate and should favor mixed-use and live-work conditions. Mixed-use provisions allow a wide range of residential and commercial development to co-locate within a building or within a designated area. The presence of residents and workers all day and through the evening creates both vibrancy and security. Affordable and market-rate housing built closer to where people work and shop is possibly the most powerful solution to alleviate traffic and save money on infrastructure investments. Towns should inventory existing ordinances and eliminate barriers to mixed use.

D2c Support infill, redevelopment, and adaptive reuse of vacant and underutilized properties.

Towns should provide incentives for infill development and the redevelopment of vacant and underutilized properties, to eliminate conditions that detract from the visual appearance and economic health of the community.

D2d Adopt design guidelines for attractive sidewalks, street lighting, trees, traffic calming, and other street landscaping measures.

Existing roads should be made more pedestrian friendly through the addition of sidewalks, bicycle lanes, crosswalks, good lighting, and other amenities. Traffic calming, tree planting, and landscaping initiatives can also create a safer and more pleasant experience for pedestrians and bicyclists. On-street parking, reduced building setbacks, and sidewalk shops can also improve the pedestrian experience.

More information on creating streets that are pedestrian-friendly is available from the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center at www.pedbikeinfo.org and from the Alliance for Biking and Walking at www.bikewalkalliance.org/.

D2e Create a program to recognize communities with successful design efforts.

The Implementation Committee should undertake a program of public design workshops, awards programs, and other initiatives that highlight regional successes in community design. Emphasis should be placed on a variety of community design issues, including new construction, rehabilitation, and adaptive reuse projects.

D3 Expand broadband service.

High-speed internet access is an important component of infrastructure in the region. The seven counties are already served by broadband infrastructure provided by a variety of private operators (BalsamWest Fibernet, MCNC, ERC). What they lack is “last mile” connectivity—the final leg of the networks, the part that actually reaches the customer. The key reason for last mile weakness in the region is the spread-out, low-density nature of development. Datasets of broadband infrastructure and availability are not publicly available, but websites such as the National Broadband map (broadbandmap.gov) provide basic facts.

D3a Work with private service providers to partner in the expansion of services in underserved and difficult-to-reach areas.

The SWC should continue to work with private service providers to: 1) frame the economic case for expansion; 2) Inventory underserved and difficult-to-reach areas; and 3) Identify ways for the public sector and private operators to work together in expanding the network. Declining state and federal funding and a shortage of local financial resources are key obstacles that need to be addressed.

D4 Prioritize the maintenance and extension of water and sewer.

Communities should work with utility providers to prioritize improvements to and extension of current infrastructure consistent with the Opt-In growth and development

objectives. Strategic targeted infrastructure maintenance and extension is essential for attracting a strong local business base, maintaining a good quality of life for residents, and reducing development pressure on farmland and forests.

D4a Consider regional solid waste disposal facilities.

The SWC should work with municipalities to identify sites and opportunities for the creation of regional solid waste facilities and explore the possibility of combustion of solid waste for energy recovery. For more information, see epa.gov/waste/nonhaz/municipal/wte/.

A PACKAGE OF INCENTIVES

Incentives designed to facilitate in-town development are varied. What follows is a brief glossary of those mentioned in the text.

Reduced down-payment requirements within a target district. Banks could offer reduced down-payment requirements for development in a designated area or street. If necessary, jurisdictions could provide funding to make up the difference.

Favorable loan repayment terms and/or loan forgiveness opportunities. The banks could offer loans that accrue little to no interest for a defined number of years, or that can be forgiven after a certain length of time. Again, funding from jurisdictions may be necessary to realize this incentive.

Federal and state historic rehabilitation tax credits, as they are available. The federal government offers a federal income tax credit equal to 20 percent of qualified rehabilitation expenses for redevelopment of historic commercial buildings. (Resource: Guide to Tax-Advantaged Rehabilitation, published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, provides a solid overview of historic rehabilitation tax credits.)



THE WAYS WE GET AROUND: A VISION FOR CONNECTIVITY

ISSUES

In the Opt-In region the mountainous terrain defines the character, location, and cost of roads. Few alternative routes are available, and the cost of building new roads is high. The region's transportation system is very vulnerable to disruption due to landslides.

Commuting within and outside the region is extensive, as many live in one county and work in another. Data from the US Census Bureau OnTheMap Application shows that only 30% of the region's population live and work in the same county. These commuting patterns reveal how dependent the economy of the region is on reliable transportation options. Conflicts exist between commuters, shoppers, tourists, and trucks, which all share the same roads at different speeds. These conflicts peak during the summer months. Private vehicles account for most travel done. The population is getting older and less mobile, but transportation alternatives are limited. The completion of the Corridor K segment of the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS) is a controversial issue.

SOLUTIONS

A strong consensus emerges from the vision that connectivity both within the region's population centers and beyond to important markets (Asheville to the east, Chattanooga to the west, and Atlanta to the south) is critical. What is clear is that portions of the region have better connectivity and access than other areas. Therefore, a one size fits all approach to improving connectivity may not work. Citizen preference as how to best achieve desired regional connectivity was probed using a community workshop survey, an electronic keypad survey at the Regional Summit (neither of which are scientific surveys),

Left, above, the mountainous terrain has attracted international motorcycle and sport-car enthusiasts. Below, while current rail service is limited, the vision calls for increased freight rail service and expanded tourism-based passenger rail, pictured.

and a scientific random-sample survey of registered voters across the region. A variety of approaches were suggested, and the results from these surveys, which are aggregated for the full region, are discussed elsewhere in the vision.

Fortunately, all counties in the area now have fairly current, or soon to be updated, Comprehensive Transportation Plans (CTP) to address the individual areas' priorities for connectivity. In the particular case of Graham County, and to an extent Cherokee County, adequate connectivity may not be achieved through existing road improvements alone. Through the Comprehensive Transportation Plan process, Graham County developed the following vision for its transportation system: To develop a balanced, long-term, and realistic transportation plan that provides better multi-modal access to and through the county, improved access for emergency services, and economic growth opportunities while protecting the area's natural, cultural, aesthetic, and recreational resources. To that end, Graham County's new Comprehensive Transportation Plan recommends a variety of transportation improvements, including new facilities. For more information refer to the Graham County's CTP at: www.optinswnc.org.

Equally strong is a consensus on increasing walking, biking, and public transportation choices within existing towns. This is seen not only as a quality-of-life issue but also as a way to increase the towns' vitality and their ability to attract younger talent to the region, thus linking transportation with land use and economic priorities. This linking of transportation and land use preferences is a recurring theme of the vision.

During the Opt-In process, the issue of completing the Corridor K project was often raised by community members, especially in the western part of the region, the one most directly affected by its outcome. The result was a renewed sense of urgency to focus the region's efforts on completing the route in some fashion.

KEY TRENDS AND REFERENCES

Information about transportation is available in *Volume 2, Baseline Vision, Regional Character* section, page 23. This section includes maps that show changes to primary and secondary roads for the period 1976 to 2006, the status of the Appalachia Development Highway System as of 2005, scenic byways, and major roads. It also includes information on historic daily traffic volumes for the period 1999 to 2011. Key trends include:

The region network of regional and secondary roadways has grown by approximately 230 miles, over the last 30 years... The region has seen a growth of primary routes from 735 miles in 1976 to 832 miles in 2006—a net increase of almost 100 additional roadway miles in 30 years. Likewise, the secondary road system has grown from 2,436 miles to 2,567 miles.

Regional primary and secondary roadways have also been improved... Primary roads have been widened to multilane and higher speed facilities or passing lanes have been added to lower travel times. Lanes have been widened and shoulders have been added to secondary roads to enhance safety.

The region is relatively isolated... Which makes travel for residents and visitors alike dependent on a sparse network of routes. Travel between population centers is often characterized by narrow two-lane roads in mountainous conditions, with little to no opportunity for passing and no redundancy in network and route choice. These conditions make travel in the region unpredictable, as an accident or snowstorm that shuts down one route can basically strand travelers where they are. An example is the two-lane NC 107 between Cullowhee and Cashiers. The road carries a mix of resident, visitor, commercial, and university-related traffic on an alignment with very few opportunities for passing due to the terrain and road geometry. If an incident occurs, travelers don't have a viable alternative and can find themselves unable to reach their destination.

Within towns and villages there has been a push to create more of a “main street”... The recognition of the importance of walking and bicycling as modes of transport within population centers is reflected in the character of the roadways (sidewalks and street furnishings) and the presence of greenways and trails to connect parks, schools, and neighborhoods. This focus on walking and bicycling as modes of transport within population centers is reflected in the seven Comprehensive Transportation Plans that have been completed or drafted as well as in other regional studies regarding trails and bike facilities.

Traffic volumes in the region have stabilized or in some cases dropped... While there has been a growth in roadway network, overall traffic volumes have shown growth in the time period up to the early-mid 2000's, then have stabilized or in some cases dropped. This trend is consistent with national trends of traffic volumes, demonstrating that people are actually driving less, mostly due to the costs associated with operating a motor vehicle and economic conditions. (See chart at right.)

GOAL

Mobility—A balanced, efficient, and realistic transportation system provides better connectivity within and outside the region, offers mobility alternatives, and creates economic growth opportunities.

E. POLICIES AND ACTIONS FOR CONNECTIVITY

E1 Expand connectivity with a safe and reliable regional road network.

E1a Appoint a Corridor K Task Force.

The SWC should appoint a Corridor K Task Force to advocate for the completion of North Carolina's segments of Corridor K. Its job will be to engage state and federal agencies to ensure timely implementation, secure funding, and fast-track environmental review and facility design. The Corridor K Task Force should include local governments, advocacy groups, and civic leaders.

HISTORIC DAILY TRAFFIC DATA TRENDS

Year	US 19/74	NC 28	US 64	NC 107	US 129	NC 294	US 441
1999	3,900	700	6,800	860	2,100	1,300	10,000
2000	4,500	700	7,000	1,000	2,000	1,300	10,000
2001	3,100	650	6,900	870	2,100	1,500	10,000
2002	4,600	780	7,200	1,100	2,200	1,900	11,000
2003	4,100	790	7,400	1,000	2,000	1,300	11,000
2004	4,100	850	6,600	1,100	2,400	1,100	12,000
2005	3,600	810	7,900	1,000	2,000	1,100	12,000
2006	3,100	780	8,000	1,000	2,100	1,200	10,000
2007	3,700	820	7,500	940	2,700	1,300	9,900
2008	3,500	770	6,800	730	2,200	1,100	8,800
2009	3,700	670	7,000	690	2,400	1,200	8,800
2010	3,500	960	6,900	700	2,500	1,100	9,900
2011	3,800	550	5,800	730	2,100	1,000	7,700

The chart shows historic annual average daily traffic volumes (AADT) on key regional primary routes, showing traffic volume trends in the region. (Source, Alta Planning+Design, Fuss & O'Neill, Inc., NC DOT.)

E1b Continue improvements to primary and secondary roads.

The SWC and the Rural Planning Organization (RPO) should continue the process of prioritizing improvements to primary and secondary roads in the region following the guidelines of Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS), which are reviewed on page 38. They should:

- ★ Emphasize connectivity within the region.
- ★ Prioritize design elements that balance safety, context sensitivity, and efficiency.
- ★ Maintain the scenic quality of the region's roads.
- ★ Promote the adoption of Scenic Byway roadway designation where applicable and appropriate.
- ★ Assist in securing NCDOT support for tourism-related maintenance and improvements to such roads.

THE CORRIDOR K STORY

Corridor K is part of the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS), which was established by Congress in 1965 to reduce isolation and generate economic development throughout Appalachia by building a network of modern highways. Approximately 85% of the network has been built, but a few difficult and controversial corridors, including Corridor K, remain incomplete. Corridor K connects U.S. Highway 23 in Dillsboro, North Carolina with Interstate 75 in Cleveland, Tennessee. Only two segments of the corridor have yet to be improved. The section in Tennessee is currently being studied, in part to lessen potential impacts in the Ocoee Gorge.

The incomplete North Carolina section of Corridor K consists of approximately 20 miles between Andrews and Almond and is intended to improve access to Graham County and Robbinsville. As previously conceived by NCDOT, most of the A-9 project would be built on new right-of-way as a four-lane highway with a median. The proposed route would cross two mountain ridges, numerous streams, National Forest lands, and areas of cultural significance.

NCDOT completed a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) 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.



E2 Develop alternatives to driving within existing communities.

County, city, town, and village governments should take the lead in implementing this policy, which is consistent with the central theme of the Opt-In vision to direct new growth in the region's towns and population centers, where development already exists. When development moves in the direction of existing population centers, conditions improve for walking, biking, and public transportation alternatives, giving residents and visitors true choices about how they move around their communities. Further, doing so reduces energy and resource consumption and helps protect air and water quality. The policy provides mobility to the region's aging population. Importantly, this also saves people money.

E2a Plan for the creation of complete streets.

Jurisdictions should incorporate the recent NCDOT Complete Streets Design Guidelines in their transportation plans, if they have not yet done so. Complete Streets is an approach to street design that requires streets to be planned, designed, operated, and maintained to enable convenient, comfortable, and safe travel and access by those walking, bicycling, driving automobiles, riding public transportation, or delivering goods.

E2b Prioritize pedestrian and bikeway projects for funding through the Rural Planning Organization.

Trails and greenways are an emerging and important piece of the transportation network. Ongoing implementation should be a priority to position the region as a leader in recreation and wellness. This strategy should also be coordinated with efforts to improve access to the region's parks. Funding is, however, limited. At 2.2%, the State of North Carolina is 19th among the 50 states for the percentage of federal transportation dollars applied to bicycling and walking. (Source: Bicycling and Walking in the United States, 2014 Benchmarking Report, Alliance for Biking and Walking.) For more information, see www.bikewalkalliance.org/.

E2c Expand transit options and service frequency.

The RPO should initiate a dialogue with transit operators and the EBCI to expand public transportation options in the region. Regional transit has not been fully explored, possibly due to the lack of population density and low ridership potential. There are, however, examples of low-density regions where transit operators have agreed to operate regionally. One of the best known is the Northwest Oregon Transit Alliance, with agencies in four neighboring counties. The alliance created the North by Northwest Connector—a bus route that connects towns in rural Oregon and crosses county borders but doesn't require a transfer. The funding for the service is shared among agencies, and riders can purchase passes for the connector through any of the transit agencies. For more information about the Northwest Oregon Transit Alliance, see www.nworegontransit.org/.

E3 Expand regional connectivity.

The SWC should take steps to expand connectivity outside the seven-county region. It should focus on a variety of fronts:

- ★ Complete the ongoing Freight Study and implement its recommendations.
- ★ Work with NCDOT and rail operators to increase freight rail service in the region and expand tourism-based passenger rail.
- ★ Identify intermodal truck, air, and rail transfer opportunities.
- ★ Plan for the future of the region's airports.
- ★ Coordinate with Tennessee, South Carolina, and Georgia to identify regional issues and opportunities.

BEYOND THE SEVEN COUNTIES (TRANSPORTATION)

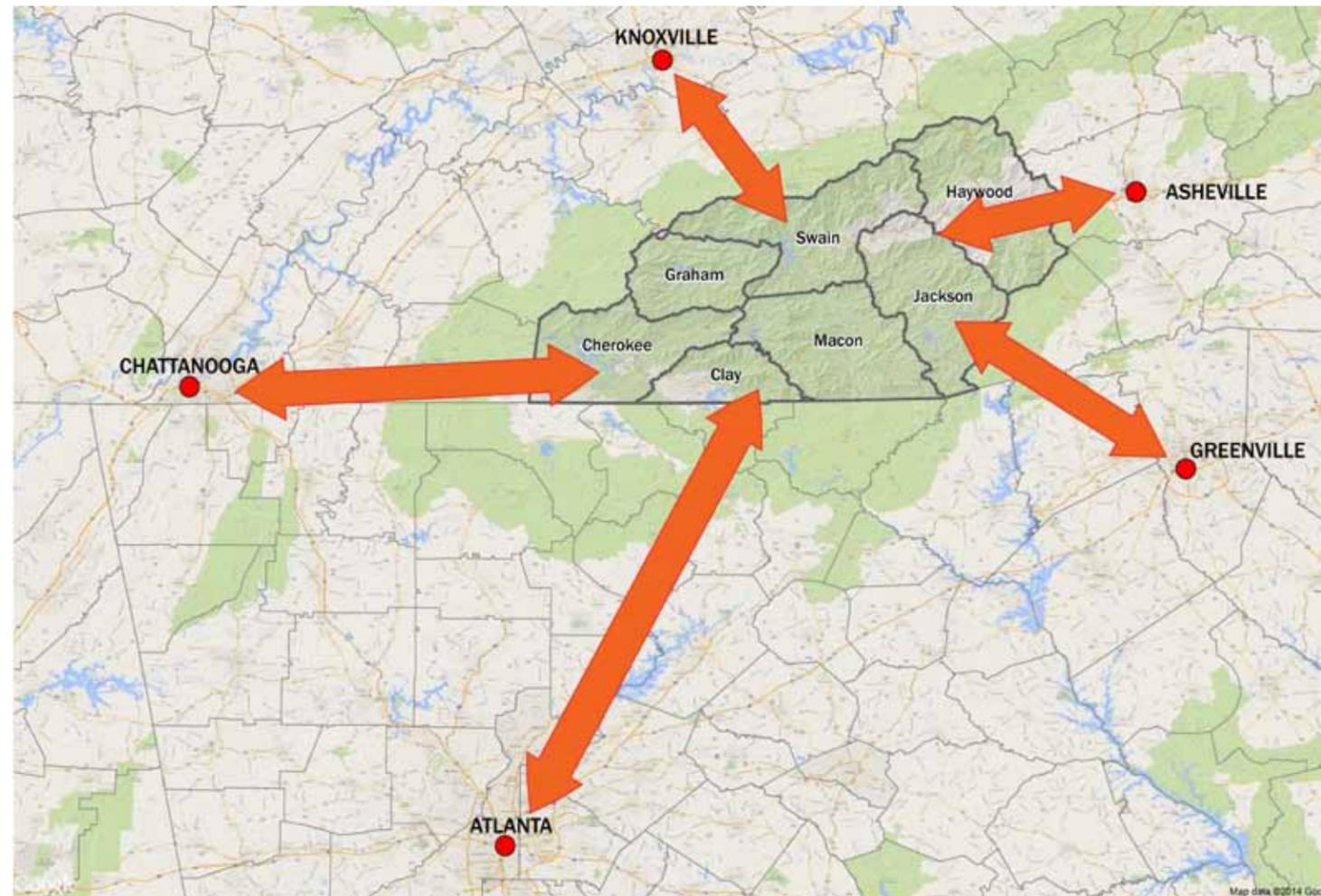
ENHANCE CONNECTIVITY TO THE LARGER REGION

The Opt-In region is tied to a broader geographic area that spans multiple counties and states, and relies on relationships with larger economic engines such as Atlanta and Chattanooga. A critical part of this reliance is the availability of safe, efficient, and reliable transportation corridors to bring people and goods to and from the region. During the Opt-In process, the team heard repeatedly how aware the region is of its reliance on a broader region—most notably Chattanooga and Atlanta, in addition to Asheville and Greenville.

Several desires were brought forward by the communities of the region during the Opt-In process:

- ★ A desire to enhance road connectivity to the broader region, especially to Atlanta, Chattanooga, and Knoxville, for personal travel as well as commerce, including the completion of Corridor K in some form consistent with the ADHS requirements.
- ★ A desire to enhance existing rail service for excursion tourism within the region, and to study the feasibility of reconnecting the region in the long term to Atlanta by filling the gap between Murphy and Mineral Springs, Georgia, for freight and eventually passenger service.
- ★ A desire to enhance the travel options available to residents and businesses in the region to reduce travel times to destinations such as Atlanta, Chattanooga, Asheville, Knoxville, and Greenville.
- ★ A desire to create redundant network and modal opportunities along specific routes, in order to offer alternatives should inclement weather or other issues make one connection impassable.

By acting on these desires as articulated in the recommendations and priority actions section of this regional vision, the area can achieve the mobility and support needed to realize its future economic vision.



This map shows the region's proximity to, and desired connectivity with, Tennessee, Georgia, South Carolina, and the rest of North Carolina.

CONTEXT SENSITIVE SOLUTIONS

Many state and local transportation agencies, including the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), are making strides to incorporate a Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) approach to highway planning and design. A CSS approach goes beyond addressing a road's efficiency, safety, and structural design. It encourages a road to fit its setting. CSS stipulates that the highway fit its setting while preserving or improving natural, cultural, and scenic resources, and addressing or enhancing local economies, multimodal travel, and sound land use practices. Additionally, a CSS approach considers the context of the road (physical setting, who will use the road, adjacent buildings, etc.) rather than just engineering concerns. This approach ensures that facilities are built in harmony with both the natural and built environments in which they occur, and that they help enable the overall regional vision.



High school students, in the weeklong Graham County workshop, imagining the future.

THE QUALITY OF LIFE WE EXPECT: A VISION FOR COMMUNITY

ISSUES

Housing choices are limited. The region's spread-out development patterns and the absence of a major urbanized center have limited the type of homes available almost exclusively to single-family and manufactured homes. Comments from the community revealed that availability of townhomes, condos, apartments, and downtown living is very limited, affecting first-time homebuyers and renters as well as older residents. They also revealed that availability of affordable housing is inadequate and that workers find it difficult to find accommodation reasonably close to where jobs are.

Education attainment in the seven-county region lags well behind the rest of the state, due in part to the flight of young people. This needs to be addressed at the appropriate levels; however, as is often the case, there is a disconnect between what young people learn in school and what the job market requires.

Arts and culture, an important component of the region's quality of life and economy, struggle with lack of resources.

Reliable access to quality healthcare is a challenge across all demographic groups. It is particularly acute in Graham County, where healthcare is jeopardized by limited facilities and greater distances to increasingly regionalized specialty care services. The region's residents' median age is 45, which is nearly 8 years above that of the state. As residents grow older, they will place further stress on the availability of health services. Physical wellness is also an issue. The westernmost counties of Cherokee, Swain, and Graham rank respectively 83, 78, and 76 out of the 100 counties in the state in terms of adult and child obesity and diabetes rates, according to the National Institute for Children's Health Quality.

SOLUTIONS

There is a strong desire to address these issues and to improve quality of life in an equitable way throughout the region. These are, of course, challenging issues that counties, local governments, and boards of education have worked hard to address. Lack of resources, market imperatives, and, in some cases, the geography of the region have been obstacles. The Opt-In vision in its totality already recommends solutions that will address and change those conditions. Improvements in transportation connectivity will make the region's health facilities easier to reach. Policies to direct growth to existing communities will increase housing choices and support active living. Understanding which industries are better suited to the region will enable better coordination of school curricula and workforce needs. Marketing the region will also market the arts and crafts sector and extend tourists' stay.

A regional perspective lends a new sense of urgency to address the quality-of-life issues listed below. They are not only important in themselves but also key to enabling the region to be competitive, attract and retain qualified workers and young families, and prosper.

KEY TRENDS AND REFERENCES

Information about quality of life issues is available in **Volume 2, Baseline Vision, Regional Trends** section, page 51. This section includes information on: employment and unemployment, income levels, poverty rates, demographic trends, age and age distribution, race, education, and housing. Key trends include:

The seven-county region has relatively low incomes, which is consistent with broader trends for rural areas... The problem of low incomes is mitigated by lower housing costs, but exacerbated by the shift in employment from manufacturing to tourism.

Regional unemployment has been consistently higher than state and national levels... The one exception is after the 2001 recession when regional unemployment dipped below state and national levels. See **Volume 2, Baseline Vision**, page 53.

Population growth has been strong for a rural area...

Though lagging the state, the population has grown faster than the national rate. However, population growth is projected to slow substantially in the next five years, with Cherokee and Graham counties expected to have negative growth.

Education attainment in the seven-county region lags well behind the rest of the state...

Standardized test scores indicate that low attainment is not due to low performance of students and schools; rather, it is due to the common problem of little opportunity leading people to either forsake education or not to stay in the area after completing a degree.

The region is overwhelmingly racially homogenous with about 88% being white...

Swain County is an outlier with about a third of the population being minority and a quarter being American Indian.

The region's residents are older and aging...

The median age is 45 years old, which is nearly 8 years older than the state of North Carolina. This follows a broader trend in rural areas, which is exacerbated by the region's relatively high retiree and second home population.

Access to medical facilities is limited in some parts of the region...

Rural areas (particularly in Graham and Swain Counties) have fewer facilities and remain more isolated from nearby facilities, due to distance, topography, and road infrastructure.

GOALS

Social Issues—Strong, well-coordinated local and regional systems are in place to improve healthcare, education, the availability of affordable housing, and services to the region's aging population.

Arts and Culture—A region where art, cultural programs, and strong institutions play a key economic role, motivate artists to move into the region, and keep visitors longer.

F. POLICIES AND ACTIONS FOR COMMUNITY

F1 Promote health and wellness.

The SWC should form an ad hoc regional coalition of health and educational institutions to address wellness and healthy lifestyles across all age groups. Over a period of 12 months, the coalition should:

- ★ Identify valuable initiatives and programs already in place.
- ★ Identify successful programs from other communities that the region could learn from and adopt.
- ★ Develop a health education curriculum for grades K–12 that teaches exercise, nutrition, and other basic health information.
- ★ Promote access to healthy food and expand farmers' markets.

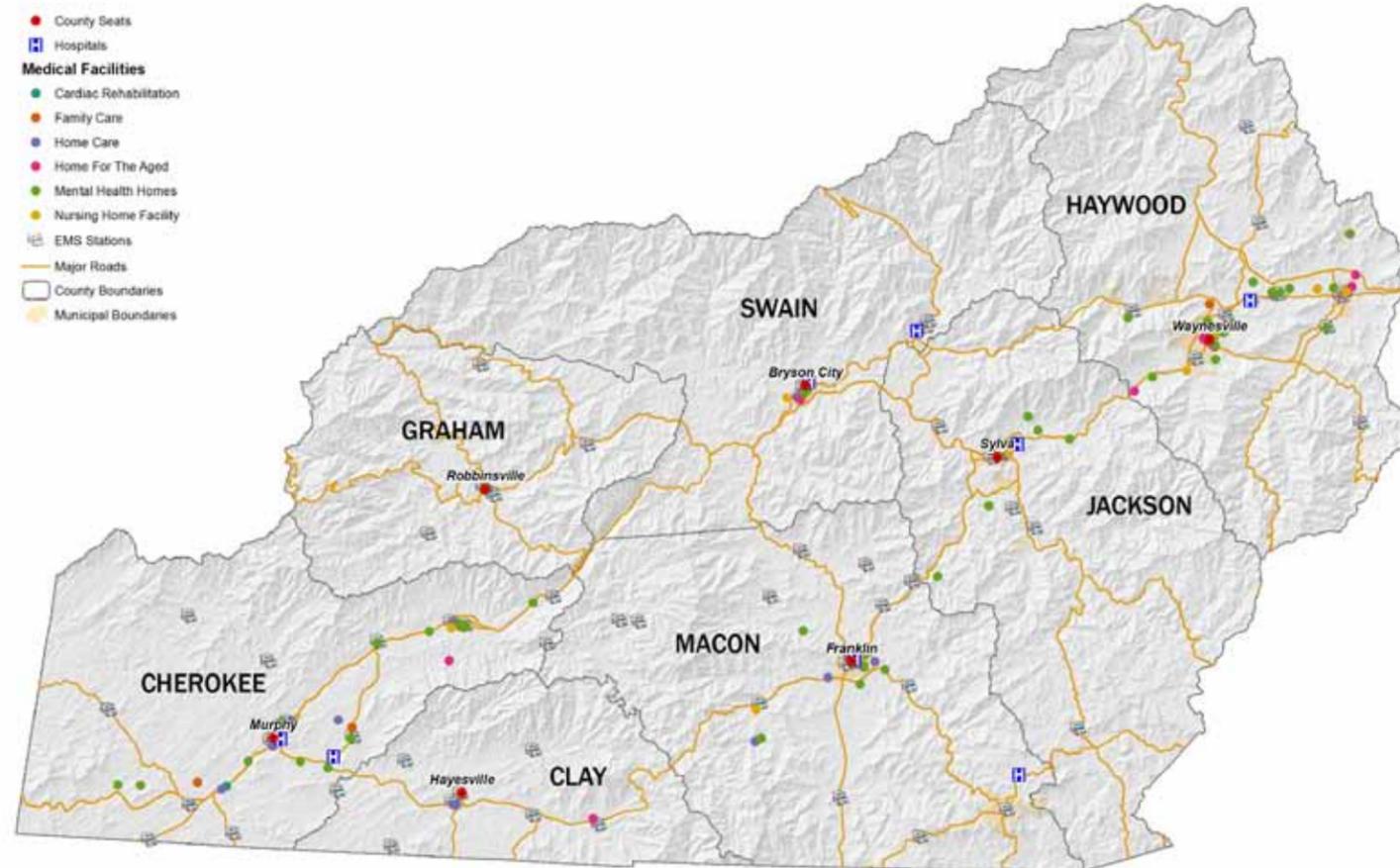
F2 Achieve a better distribution of healthcare facilities throughout the region.

The SWC should work with the region's hospitals to identify and address service gaps. See map below.

F3 Start early; educate the future workforce.

The SWC, through the Southwestern Workforce Development Board, should focus the workforce development consortium (created with policy **B5, Train the Workforce of the Future**) on early education steps. It should also work with school districts and local community colleges to develop high school curricula that create a seamless transition to the local workforce.

HOSPITALS AND MEDICAL FACILITIES



This map shows all existing hospitals, emergency medical services facilities, and other medical facilities within the region.

THE CHATTANOOGA NEIGHBORHOOD ENTERPRISE

Chattanooga Neighborhood Enterprise (CNE) is a nonprofit housing organization with a mission to “build and sustain livable neighborhoods.” CNE orchestrates a variety of programs and services, including residential and small-business loans, financial counseling, and the development of affordable housing. The organization deliberately targets neighborhoods in historically underserved parts of Chattanooga that are in need of revitalization. For more information, see www.cneinc.org.

CNE was founded in 1986 as a result of a citywide visioning effort known as Vision 2000. At the outset, a significant portion of its funding came from several local banks that collaborated in order to be responsive to the Community Reinvestment Act. Today, many other partners offer funding and other support for CNE's initiatives, including city and county governments, foundations, national and local nonprofits, the Tennessee Housing Development Authority, and private donors.

CNE has been a great success for Chattanooga. Since 1986 it has assisted in more than 3,400 home purchases and provided home improvement assistance through loans and technical assistance to more than 2,800 homeowners. It has built 1,500 housing units, and counseled 1,100 households through a foreclosure prevention program that boasts a 92% success rate. Over the past 25 years, CNE has contributed \$500 million in direct economic impact in Chattanooga.

In 1994 CNE was chartered as the first affiliate member of NeighborWorks America, a national network of more than 235 community-based nonprofit organizations. NeighborWorks provides grants, programmatic support, training, and technical assistance to the members of its network.

In 1998 CNE organized the Chattanooga Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), which is chartered by the U.S. Treasury Department. CDFIs are specialized financial institutions working in niche markets that are often underserved by traditional banks (e.g., mortgage financing for low-income and first-time home buyers, flexible underwriting and risk capital for community facilities, technical assistance and commercial loans for small start-up businesses).

F4 Meet the region's housing needs.

The SWC should convene a Housing Task Force that includes representatives of business, housing developers, homebuilders, local housing and social service agencies, not-for-profits, and housing advocates. This is a key policy to attract young families to the region. The task force should:

- ★ Look at demographics and jobs trends.
- ★ Review current housing efforts and funding across the region.
- ★ Develop methods to incentivize more housing development, remove barriers to development, and encourage reuse of vacant and tax-delinquent properties—particularly those that are near employment centers—for affordable housing.

F4a Conduct a residential market analysis.

The task force should commission a residential market analysis to determine the region's for-rent and for-sale existing and anticipated housing needs across income levels. It should also identify the range of housing products needed to satisfy that market and how to best make those products available.

F4b Establish a regional affordable housing home ownership program.

The task force should review national models, many structured after the Chattanooga Neighborhood Enterprise or similar affordable housing programs. (See text box, at left.)

F5 Support and expand the region's arts and crafts.

The SWC should form an ad-hoc Arts and Crafts Working Group to focus on this important component of the region's heritage and economy. This is a field that includes visual and performing arts, crafts, cultural heritage, music and instrument making, and artisanal productions—e.g., craft beer, wine, and cheese. The working group should focus on how to best support the arts and build awareness of the value the arts bring to the region.

F5a Support and promote the arts and crafts.

The working group should:

- ★ Coordinate promotional activities with HandMade In America and the Southern Highlands Craft Guild, both based in Asheville.
- ★ Support existing cultural facilities and expand their regional reach.
- ★ Include regional arts and crafts as a key part of the regional brand.

F5b Build awareness about the arts and crafts.

The working group should:

- ★ Educate leaders and residents about the value of creative industries.
- ★ Work with K–12 schools to expand after-school cultural activities and apprenticeship and internship programs.
- ★ Create an online directory of the region's artists, cultural venues, and programs.

F5c Attract artists to the region.

The working group should:

- ★ Explore the desirability and feasibility of creating a strategically located regional cultural district modeled after the Great Smoky Arts and Crafts Village near Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Paducah, Kentucky, launched its Paducah Artist Relocation Program (www.paducahalliance.org/) in 2000, to attract artists to a neighborhood adjacent to its downtown. In addition to national marketing to attract artists, the program provides 100% financing to artists interested in rehabilitating an existing building or building a new one, free building lots, grants to cover architectural fees, and other benefits. Since the program was launched, more than 70 artists from throughout the country have moved to Paducah.
- ★ Provide tax incentives to artists and cultural institutions to move to the region.

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CHAPTER STRUCTURE

The vision's key policies and actions have been organized along an implementation timeline according to the following time frames.

A. Now, includes the policies and actions that need to start in the next six months.

B. 18 Months, includes initiatives that immediately follow those implemented in the Now time frame.

C. Two to Five Years, includes longer-range projects.

6. IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

THE POLICIES AND ACTIONS LISTED IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER SPELL OUT, IN A COMPREHENSIVE FASHION, WHAT THE REGION WANTS. THE IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX PRIORITIZES THEM. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OPT-IN VISION NEEDS TO START IN EARNEST TO MAINTAIN THE MOMENTUM THAT THE PROCESS CREATED AND TO LEAD TO EARLY SUCCESSES THAT CAN INSPIRE ADDITIONAL ACTION.

BACKGROUND

There are three items to consider in preparation for implementation:

- ★ The vision has a horizon of 20-plus years. Over such a long stretch of time, many of the conditions that affect implementation today may change, so a policy or action that appears fanciful in today's political and economic climate (and therefore easy to dismiss) might become very feasible as a result of changed political and economic conditions.
- ★ The process of implementing the vision in and of itself can begin to change how we perceive things and act on them. The success of one initiative can lead to more. The revitalization of one downtown can become the example others follow. Thus it is important to look for projects that, by their success, can be the source of inspiration and further action.
- ★ Many of the policies and actions recommended are at different stages of being addressed in the region by the Southwestern Commission and by others. This fact indicates that those items are important and that they register as desirable with the community.

The Implementation Matrix presents the information in

chart format. In addition to the column that lists prioritized policies and actions, the matrix includes a column that makes reference to the affected vision pillar, a column that lists the lead agencies for the effort, and a column that identifies specific new entities to assist with implementing the vision.

Each policy or action is listed with the same reference letters and numbers used in **Chapter 5: Policies and Actions**. The capital letters refer to the vision considered:

- A for A Vision for Leadership and Implementation
- B for A Vision for Prosperity
- C for A Vision for Land and Culture
- D for A Vision for Place and Investments
- E for A Vision for Connectivity
- F for A Vision for Community.

The Southwestern Commission will take the leadership role in coordinating the vision's implementation. In doing so, it will bring together public and private entities that already exist and are active in the region. In addition, the vision calls for the formation of eight new entities to lead the implementation of specific aspects of the vision. None

of these new entities is proposed as permanent. They are ad hoc committees, task forces, institutes, and discussion forums that will sunset after their mission is completed.

NOW

POLICIES AND ACTIONS	PILLAR	LEAD	NEW ENTITY TO ASSIST WITH IMPLEMENTATION
A1 Form an Implementation Committee. The Southwestern Commission should take on the primary responsibility of coordinating implementation of Opt-In. To do so it should convene and staff an Implementation Committee.	The Ways We Get Things Done	Southwestern Commission (SWC)	Implementation Committee to oversee implementation.
E1a Appoint a Corridor K Task Force. The SWC should appoint a Corridor K Task Force to advocate for the completion of North Carolina's segments of Corridor K.	The Ways We Get Around	SWC	Corridor K Task Force to facilitate agreement.
B1a Establish an independent regional economic development and marketing entity. The SWC is currently incubating an economic development and marketing group called the Mountain West Alliance (MWA). The SWC should take the next step and formalize the group as an independent economic development and marketing entity for the region.	The Economy We Need	SWC, MWA, Western Carolina University (WCU)	Formalize Mountain West Alliance to foster economic development and marketing.
A3 Establish a Regional Rural Leadership Institute. The SWC, working with the region's community colleges and Western Carolina University, should initiate the leadership program.	The Way We Get Things Done	WCU, Community Colleges	Rural Leadership Institute to foster regional thinking and leadership.
B4 Facilitate the success of entrepreneurial and small businesses. B4a Create an investment capital fund for emerging entrepreneurs. The SWC should lead this initiative to increase access to capital for businesses at different stages of development.	The Economy We Need	SWC, MWA	
B5 Train the workforce of the future. The SWC, through the Southwestern Workforce Development Board, should convene a workforce development consortium of postsecondary education and training institutions to develop and deliver the specific technology skills and talent needed in the emerging workplaces. Consider the WCU Annual Conference to initiate the program this fall.	The Economy We Need	Southwestern Workforce Development Board (SWDB), WCU, SWC	

18 MONTHS

POLICIES AND ACTIONS	PILLAR	LEAD	NEW ENTITY TO ASSIST WITH IMPLEMENTATION
B1a Commission a strategic five-year economic development plan. The plan should build upon the 2012 CEDS report produced by the SWC and complete the process of identifying economic sectors most likely to stimulate business investment and jobs in the region.	The Economy We Need	SWC, MWA, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI), Smoky Mountain Host (SMH)	
B1c and E 4 Brand and market the region's assets. The creation of a regional identity will help the region market itself on a national and global scale.	The Economy We Need The Place We're Given	MWA, EBCI, SMH,	
B3 Be ready for new industry. The SWC should work with the seven counties and the WCU Millennial Initiative to identify optimal locations for the creation of regional-scale industrial sites; inventory existing regional capacity; identify optimal locations for the creation of regional-scale industrial sites; ensure availability of water, sewer, high-speed Internet, natural gas and energy, and adequate transportation to those locations.	The Economy We Need	SWC, MWA, WCU Millennial Initiative	
C1 Form and coordinate the activities of an ad hoc Environmental Leadership Forum. The SWC should form an Environmental Leadership Forum to include the EBCI, county representatives, large-property owners, local watershed organizations, and other nonprofits.	The Place We're Given	SWC, Environmental Leadership Forum, Land Trust for the Little Tennessee	Environmental Leadership Forum to assist in implementing the environmental aspects of the vision.
C3 Celebrate the region's Appalachian and Native American heritage. The SWC should build a partnership with EBCI, the Cherokee Preservation Foundation, and other heritage organizations to focus on heritage interpretation, heritage tourism opportunities, and marketing strategies.	The Place We're Given	SWC, EBCI, Cherokee Preservation Foundation	
F2 Achieve a better distribution of health care facilities throughout the region. The SWC should work with the region's hospitals to identify and address service gaps.	The Quality Of Life We Expect	SWC, Hospitals	
E3 Expand regional connectivity. The SWC and the RPO should take steps to expand connectivity outside the seven-county region. Work with NCDOT and rail operators to increase freight rail service in the region and to expand tourism-based passenger rail.	The Ways We Get Around	SWC, Rural Planning Organization (RPO), NCDOT, Rail Operators	
F4 Meet the region's housing needs. The SWC should convene a Housing Task Force that includes representatives of business, housing developers, home builders, local housing and social service agencies, not-for-profits, and housing advocates. Conduct a residential market analysis to determine the region's for-rent and for-sale existing and anticipated housing needs, and the range of housing products needed to satisfy that market.	The Quality Of Life We Expect	Housing Task Force, SWC, Division of Community Planning (DCP)	Housing Task Force to increase the availability of diverse and affordable housing products in the region.
D3a Work with private service providers to partner in the expansion of broadband services. Focus on underserved and difficult-to-reach areas.	The Places We Make	SWC, Jurisdictions, Broadband Providers	
F1. Promote health and wellness. The SWC should form an ad hoc coalition of health and educational institutions to address wellness and healthy lifestyles across all age groups.	The Quality Of Life We Expect	SWC, County Health Directors, Health Advocates	Ad hoc coalition of health and educational institutions to address wellness issues
F3 Start early; educate the future workforce. The SWC, through the Southwestern Workforce Development Board, should focus the workforce development consortium (created with policy B5, Train the Workforce of the Future) on early education steps and work with school districts and local community colleges to develop a high school curriculum that expedites a seamless transition to the local workforce. Coordinate with the Western Region Education Service Alliance (WRESA)	The Economy We Need The Quality Of Life We Expect	Southwestern Workforce Development Board (SWDB), School Districts, WCU, SWC, WRESA	

TWO TO FIVE YEARS

POLICIES AND ACTIONS	PILLAR	LEAD	NEW ENTITY TO ASSIST WITH IMPLEMENTATION
B2 Diversify and expand the economy. The MWA should begin the process of implementing the recommendations of the strategic economic development plan, working with the region’s economic development directors and identified regional partners.	The Economy We Need	MWA, Economic Development Directors	
D2 Create vibrant, lived-in, and prosperous town centers. SWC should convene county managers and mayors to discuss how to best align local policies and plans with the vision’s goals. Assist local jurisdictions, if requested, to review their current codes and land development regulations to remove obstacles and introduce amendments that further the creation of vibrant, walkable communities.	The Places We Make	Local Jurisdictions, ARC Division of Community Planning (DCP), SWC	
D1b Develop incentives that direct businesses and residents toward areas already served by infrastructure. Local jurisdictions should consider a variety of incentives to direct growth toward their primary investment areas.	The Places We Make	Local Jurisdictions	
B6 Promote and support agriculture as a viable economic practice. Raise awareness of the economic and health benefits of agriculture. Encourage local jurisdictions to review and update policies and codes to allow for agricultural practices wherever appropriate. Uniformly permit low-impact agricultural activities within viable agricultural areas. Develop a coordinated marketing effort and expanding farmers market in partnership with the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP).	The Economy We Need	Local Jurisdictions, EBCI, NCDA, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP).	
E1c Continue improvements to primary and secondary roads. The SWC and the RPO should continue the process of prioritizing improvements to primary and secondary roads in the region following the guidelines of Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS).	The Ways We Get Around	SWC, RPO, NCDOT	
D4 Prioritize the maintenance and extension of water and sewer. Communities should work with utility providers to prioritize improvements and extension to current infrastructure consistent with the Opt-In growth and development objectives. Consider regional solid waste disposal facilities.	The Places We Make	Local Jurisdictions, Utility Providers	
F5 Support and expand the region’s arts and crafts. The SWC should form an ad hoc Arts and Crafts Working Group to focus on this important component of the region’s heritage and economy.	The Quality Of Life We Expect	Arts and Crafts Working Group, Hand Made in America, South ern Highland Craft Guild	Ad hoc Arts and Crafts Working Group to expand their cultural and economic presence in the region.
C2 Make clean air and clean water a priority. The SWC should lead an effort to inventory environmental data and conditions across the seven-county area and to identify management and protective actions needed.	The Place We’re Given	WCU, The Canary Coalition, Duke Energy	
E2 Develop mobility alternatives within existing communities. Jurisdictions should take the lead in implementing this policy, which is consistent with the central theme of the Opt-In vision to direct new growth in the region’s towns and populated centers. They should prioritize pedestrian and bikeway projects and seek funding through the RPO. The SWC should provide assistance to develop guidelines for the creation of complete streets.	The Ways We Get Around	RPO, Local Jurisdictions, DCA	
E2c Expand transit options and service frequency. The RPO should initiate a dialogue with transit operators to expand public transportation options in the region and to encourage service to eliminate the current gaps in service across county lines.	The Ways We Get Around	RPO, Transit Operators, EBCI	

7. APPENDIX

The appendix includes:

A. Suitability Modeling

1. Land Suitable for Jobs, Housing, and Infrastructure Map
2. Land Most Suitable for Agriculture Map
3. Conservation Suitability Map
4. Areas of Conflict between Land Suitable for Jobs, Housing, and Infrastructure and Land Suitable for Agriculture
5. Areas of Conflict between Land Suitable for Jobs, Housing, and Infrastructure and Land Suitable for Conservation

B. Regional Investment Guide by County

1. Regional Investment Guide: Cherokee County
2. Regional Investment Guide: Clay County
3. Regional Investment Guide: Graham County
4. Regional Investment Guide: Haywood County
5. Regional Investment Guide: Jackson County
6. Regional Investment Guide: Macon County
7. Regional Investment Guide: Swain County

C. Performance Indicators

D. Community Workshops Survey Results

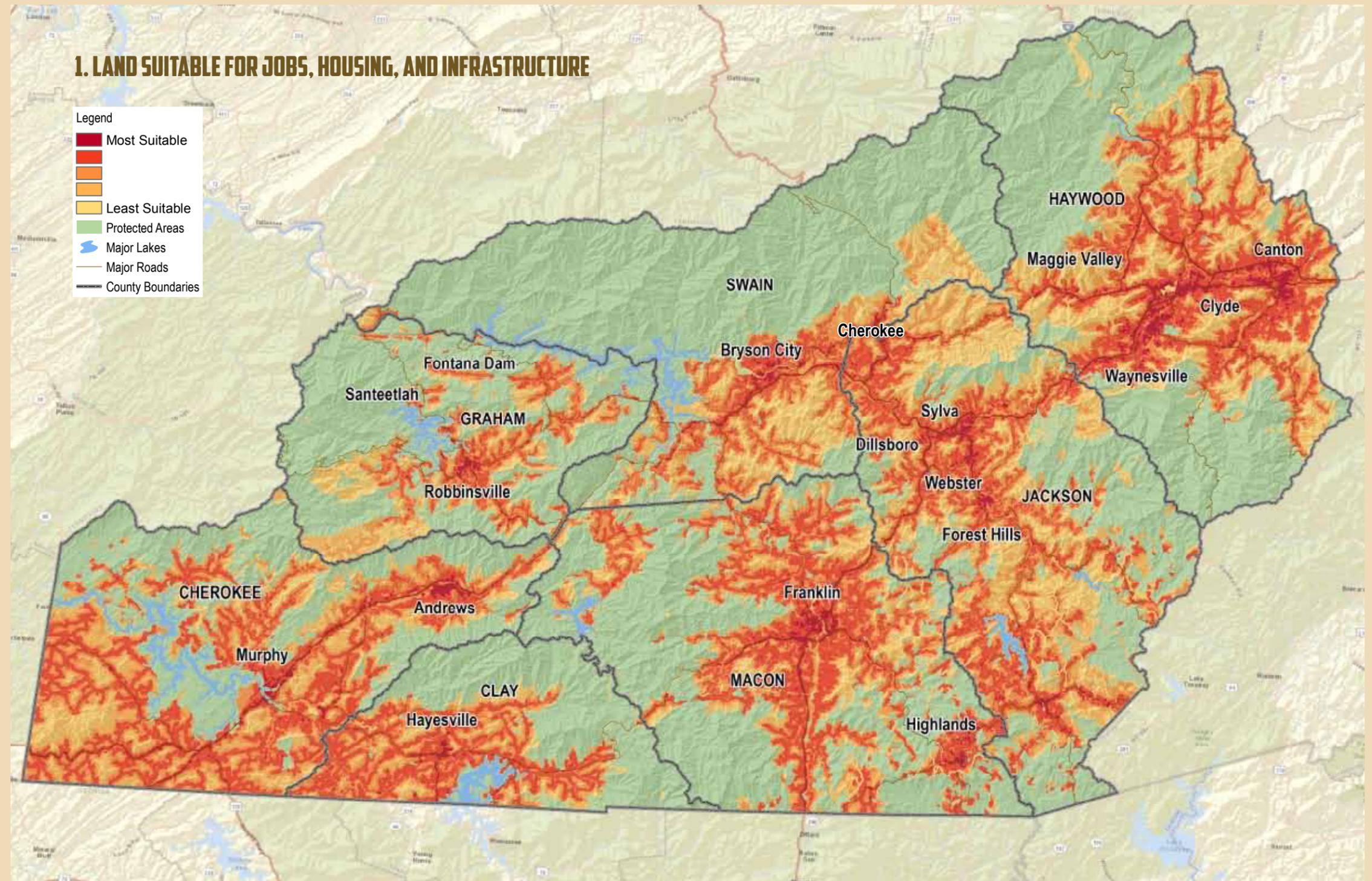
A. SUITABILITY MODELING

OVERVIEW

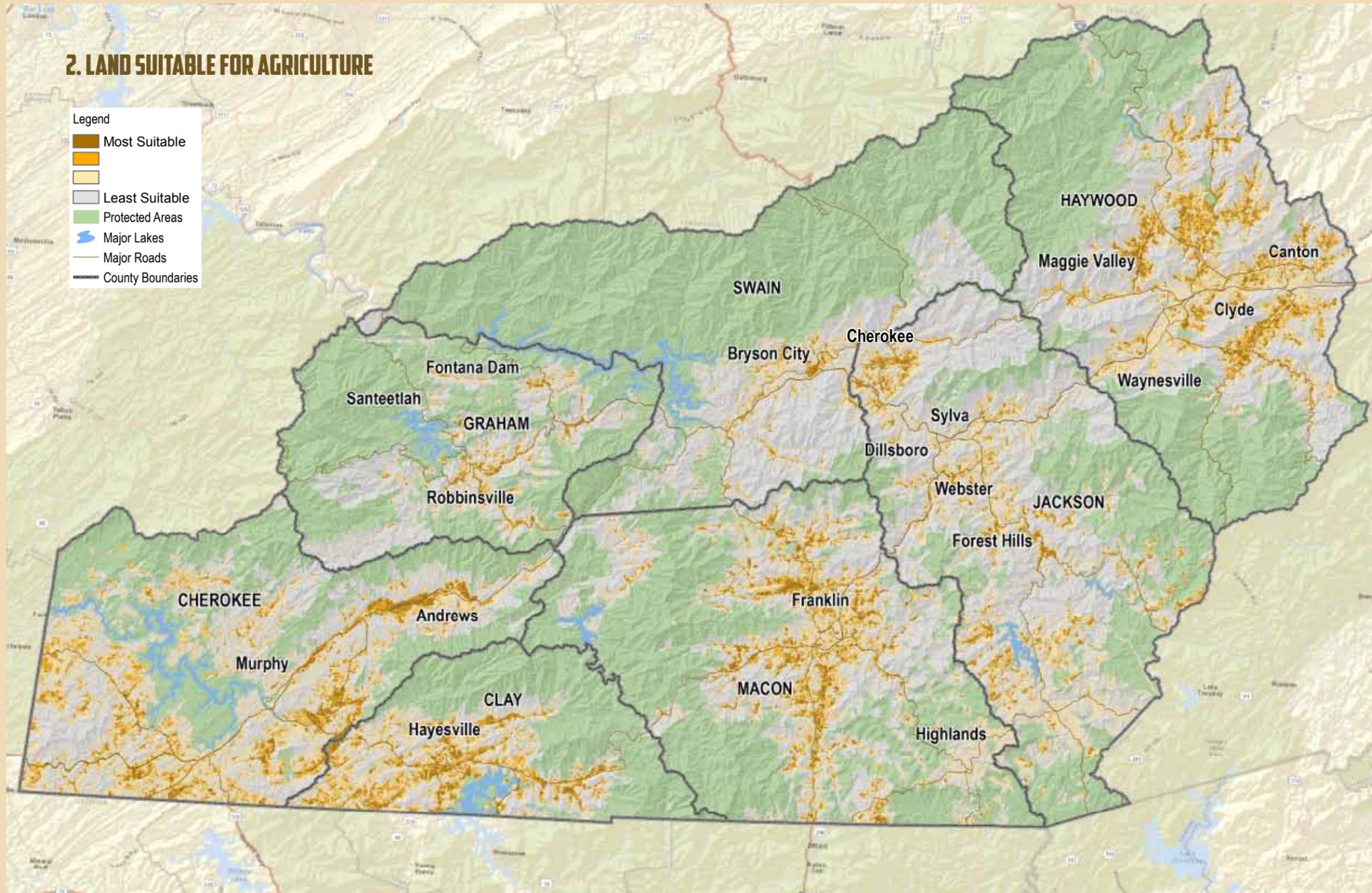
Suitability modeling is a process that determines the fitness of an area of land, ranking from high to low in suitability for a specified use. It can be helpful in answering the question, What is the best location? as it helps one understand limitations and potentials for different land uses and shows areas where future land use conflicts are likely to occur. The four suitability maps displayed here show the results of this modeling.

LAND SUITABLE FOR JOBS, HOUSING, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The jobs, housing, and infrastructure suitability model is based on land already developed (as shown in the 2006 national land-cover dataset), roads, floodplains, and slope. This information was added together to form the model base. The map at right shows land that is suitable for additional jobs, housing, and infrastructure. Shown in red is the most suitable land. Shown in yellow is the least suitable land.



2. LAND SUITABLE FOR AGRICULTURE

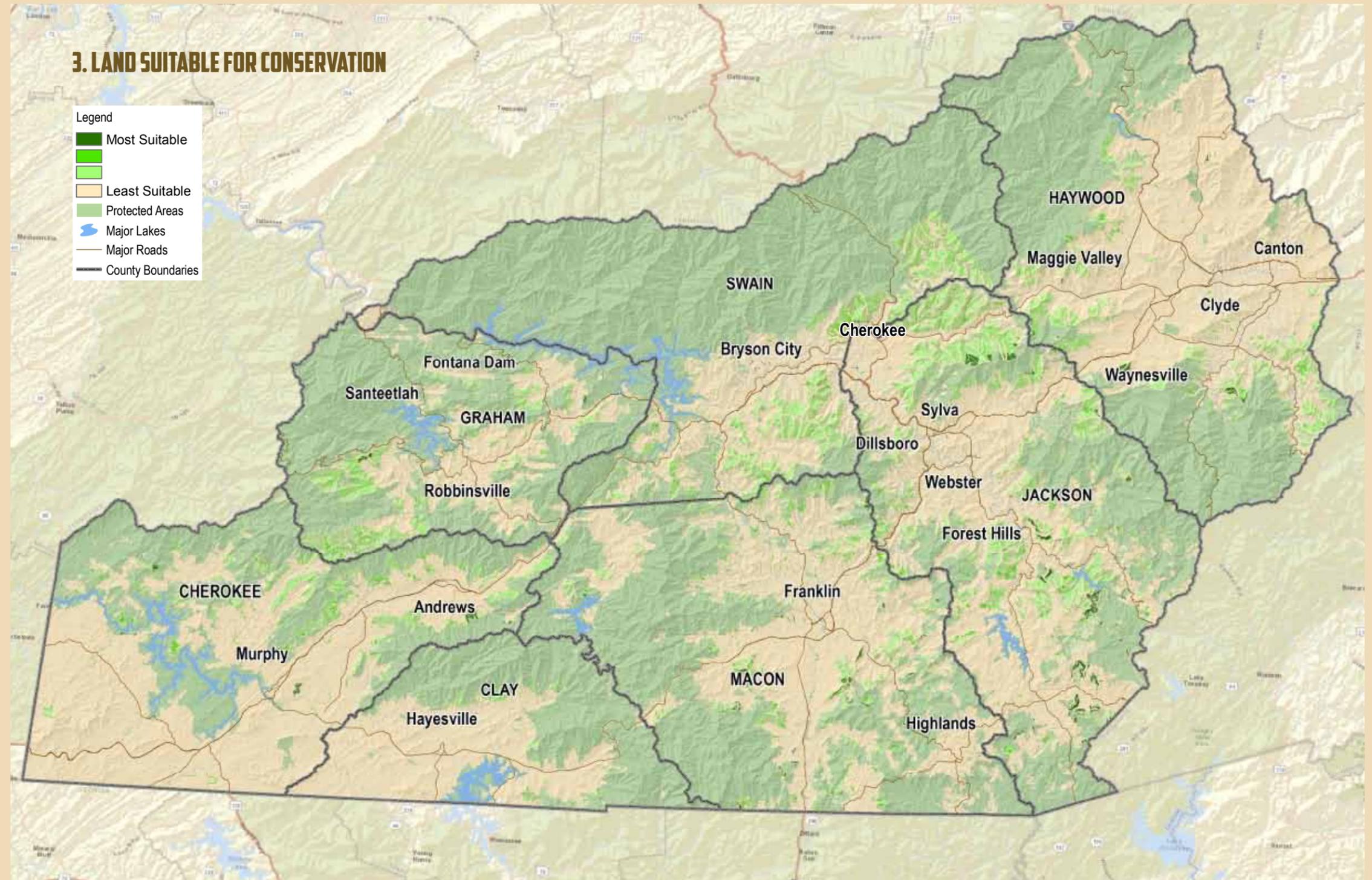


LAND SUITABLE FOR AGRICULTURE

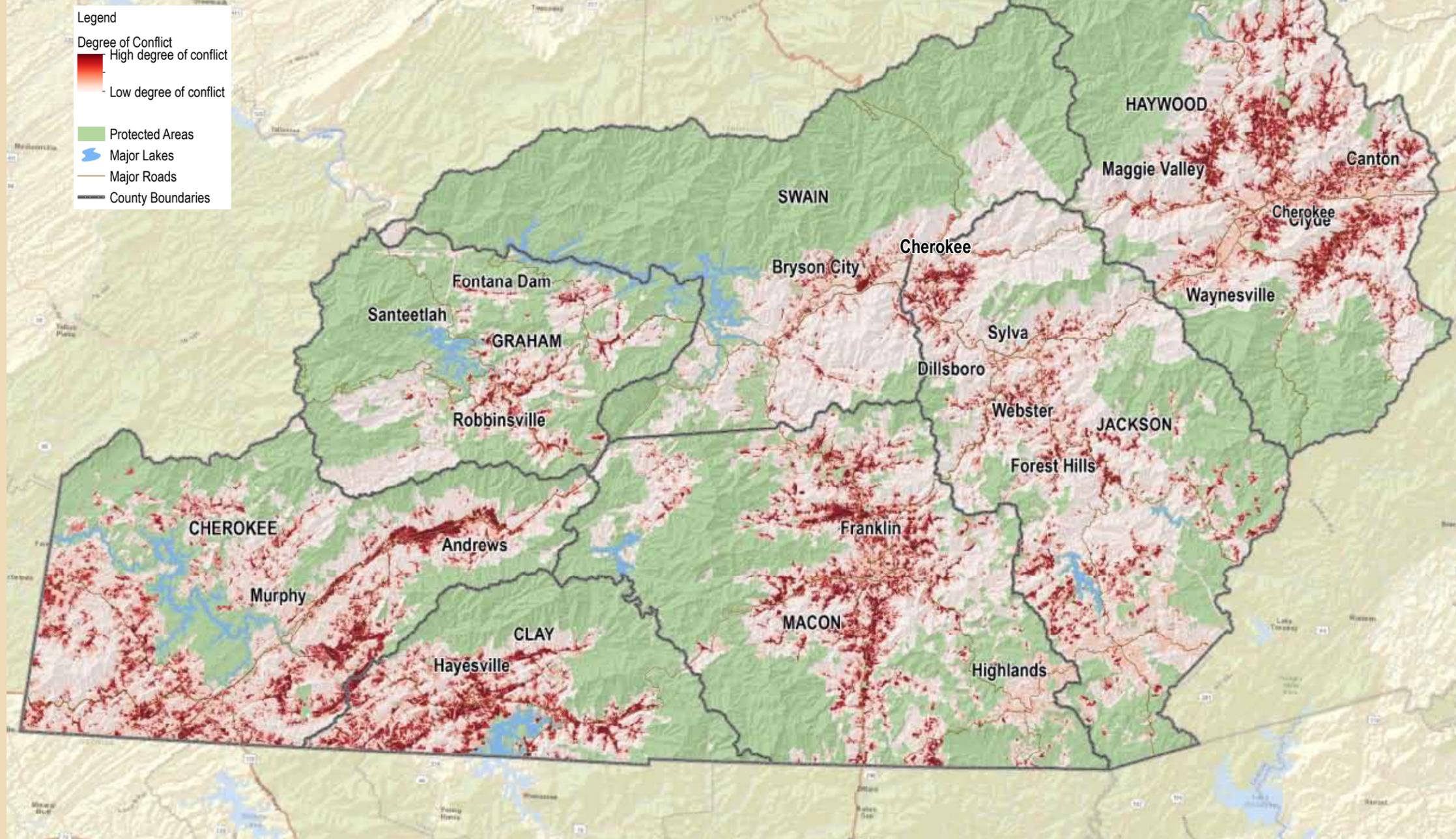
The agriculture suitability model relies on the agriculture land shown in the 2006 national land-cover dataset, lands that have a slope of less than 20 percent, and parcels that are listed as having an agriculture use. This information was added together to form the model base. The map at left shows land suitable for agriculture. Shown in brown is the most suitable land. Shown in yellow is the least suitable.

LAND SUITABLE FOR CONSERVATION

The conservation suitability model relies on classes 7–10 from the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program’s biodiversity and wildlife habitat assessment model, all lands managed for conservation, streams, wetlands, and federal critical habitat. This information is grouped and shown into four categories ranging from high to low suitability for conservation. The low suitability areas, shown in yellow, are largely private lands that have some suitability for conservation. The high suitability areas, shown in dark green, are already protected.



4. AREAS OF CONFLICT BETWEEN LAND SUITABLE FOR JOBS, HOUSING, AND INFRASTRUCTURE AND LAND SUITABLE FOR AGRICULTURE

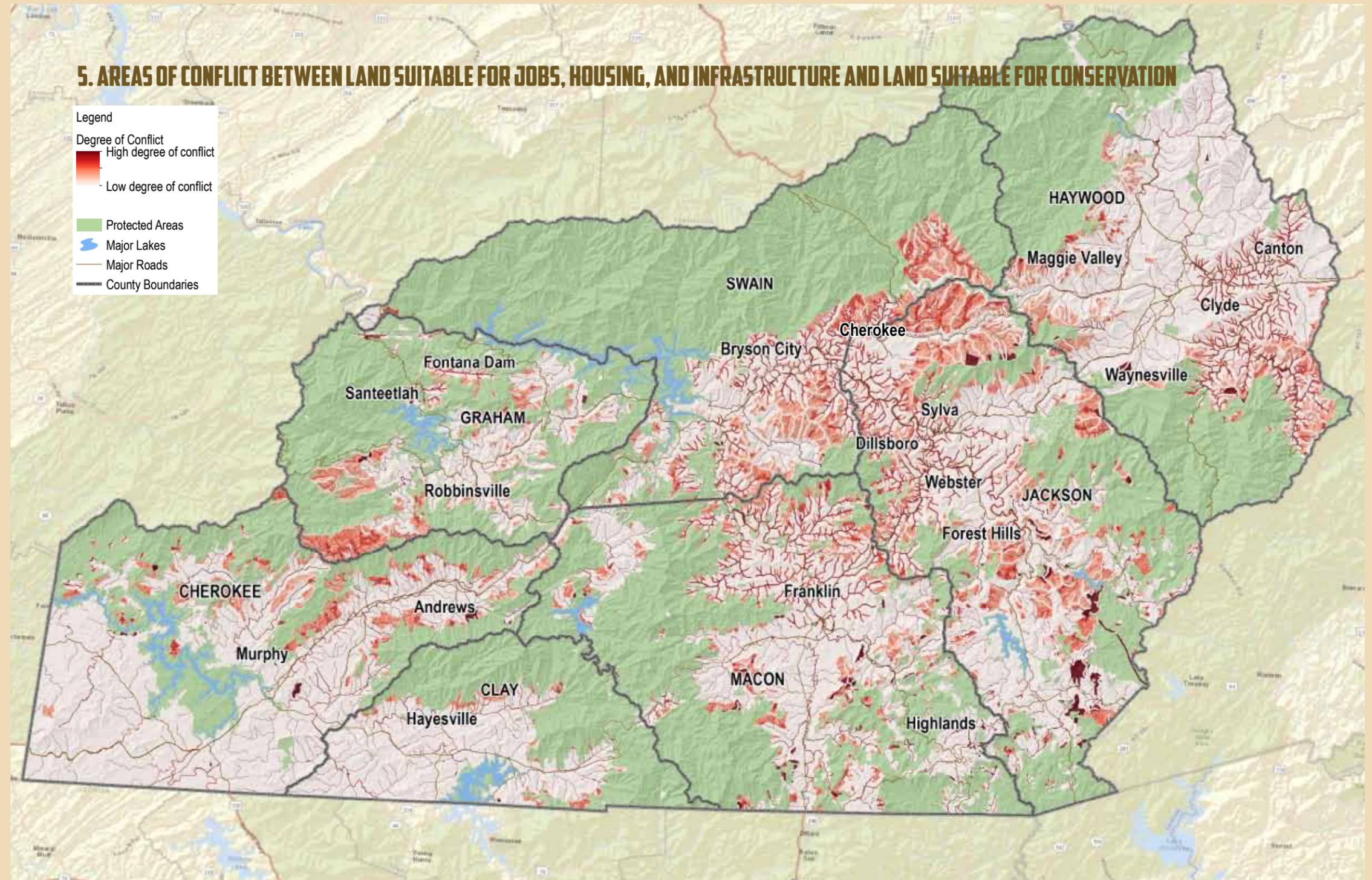


CONFLICT MAPS

The two following maps identify potential conflicts between 1) jobs, housing, and infrastructure and agricultural areas and 2) jobs, housing, and infrastructure and conservation areas. When conflict exists, local jurisdictions need to prioritize the use of the land based on community priorities. Both maps show that limited land in the Opt-In region is in true conflict. The map at left shows that most conflict between land suitable for jobs, housing, and infrastructure and land suitable for agriculture can be found in the region's relatively flat land that surrounds existing towns.

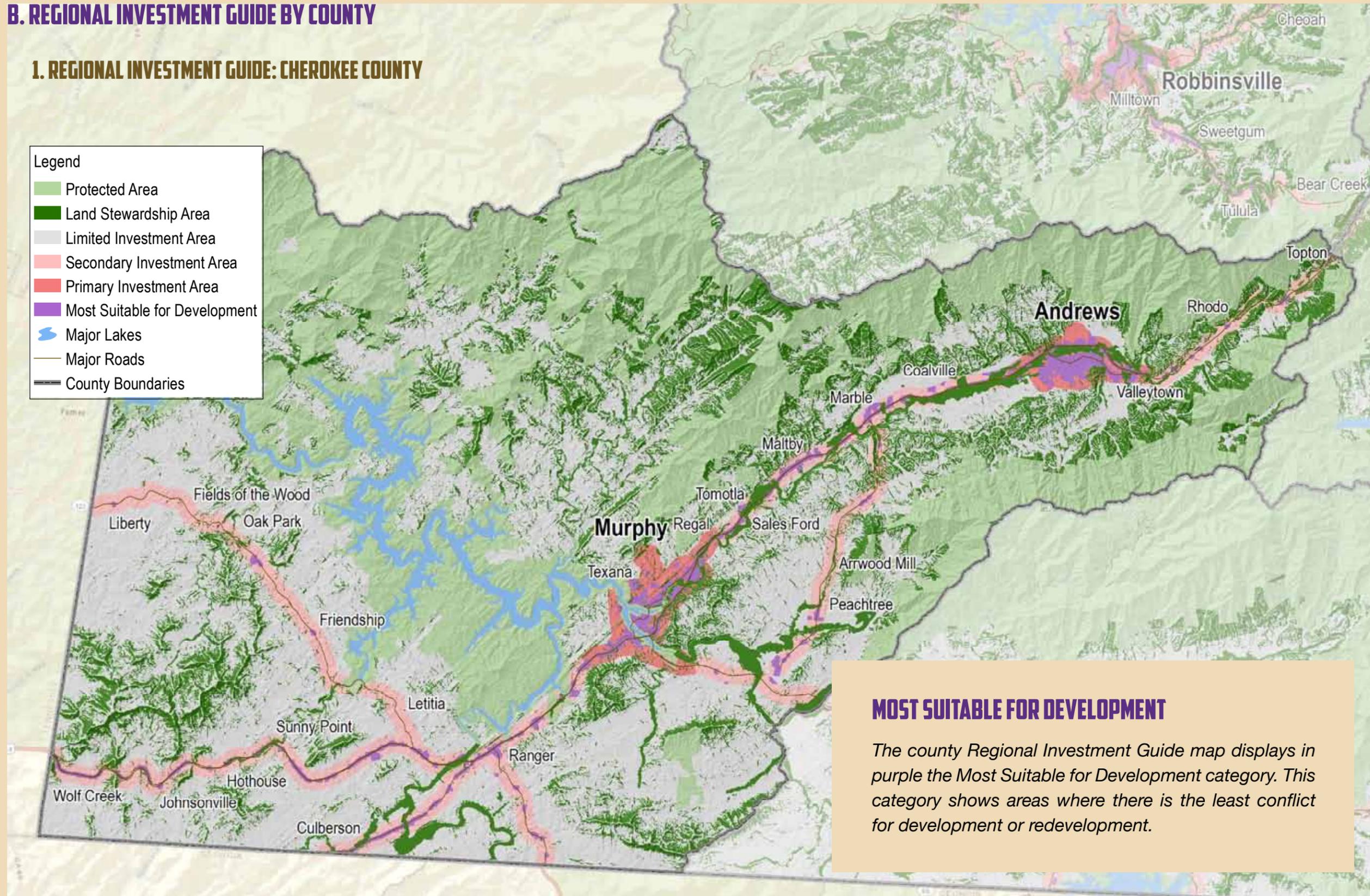
CONFLICT MAPS (CONTINUED)

The map to the right shows that there is very limited conflict between the jobs, housing, and infrastructure areas and conservation areas. This is due to the fact that most areas well suited for conservation are more isolated and occur along streams, steep slopes, and in wetland areas, none of which are very suitable for investments or development. Pockets of conflict areas are spread equally among the seven counties, with a slightly greater concentration in the vicinity of Forest Hills, Franklin, Bryson City, and Cherokee.



B. REGIONAL INVESTMENT GUIDE BY COUNTY

1. REGIONAL INVESTMENT GUIDE: CHEROKEE COUNTY

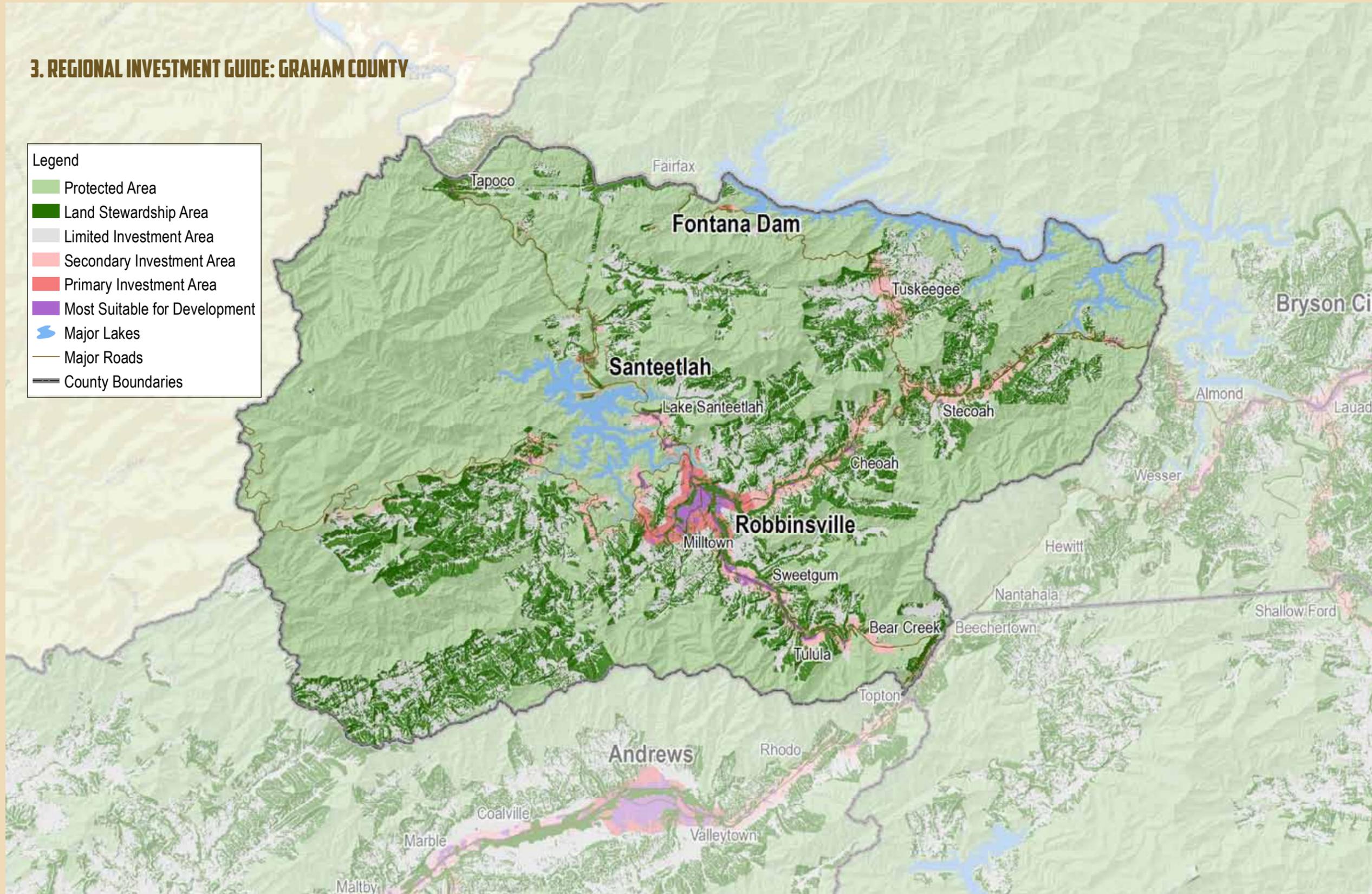


This and the following maps are shown at the same scale and oriented with the North at the top. A high resolution view of the maps is available at optinswnc.nemac.org/gis/regionalinvestmentguide/

3. REGIONAL INVESTMENT GUIDE: GRAHAM COUNTY

Legend

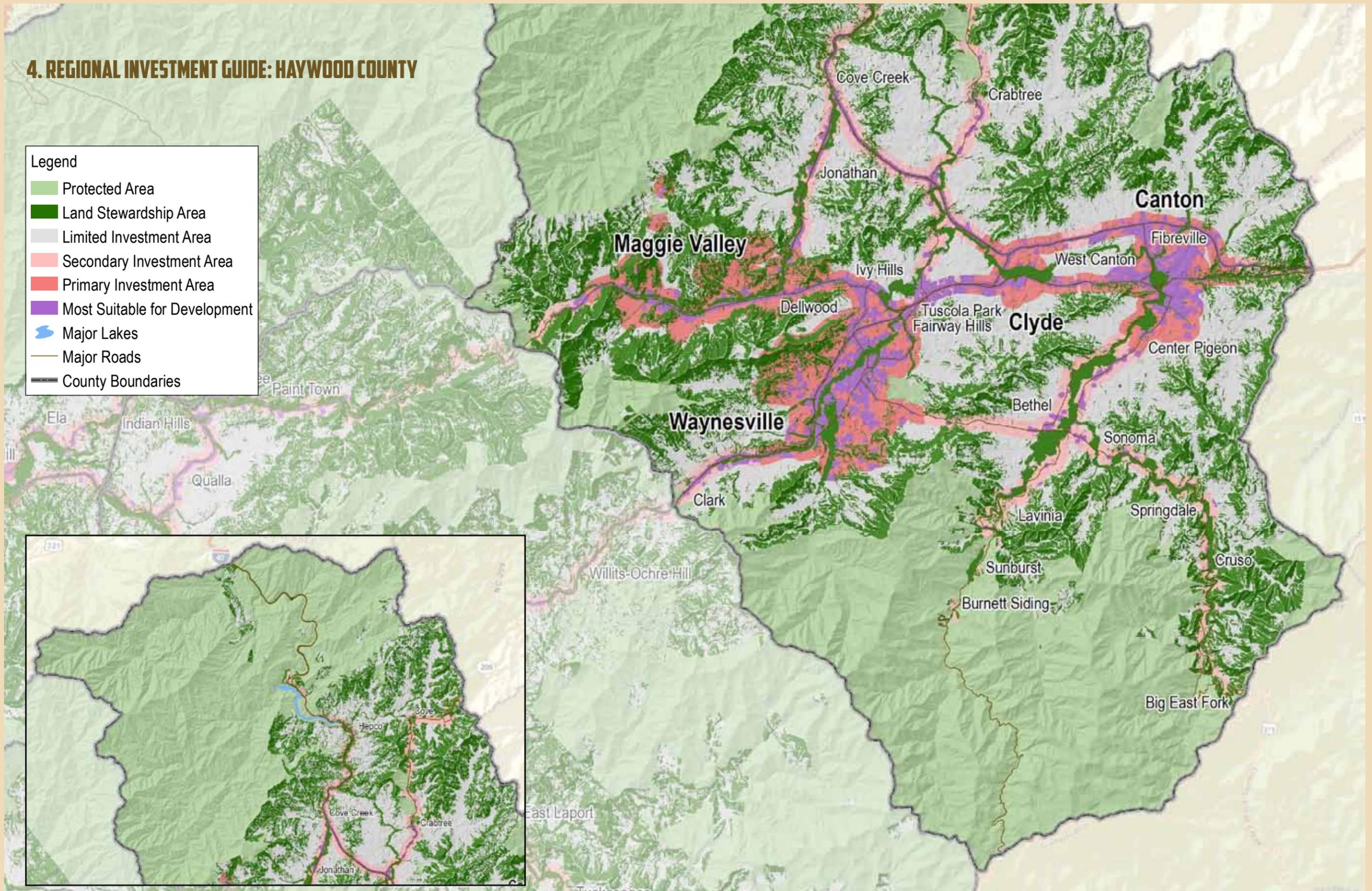
- Protected Area
- Land Stewardship Area
- Limited Investment Area
- Secondary Investment Area
- Primary Investment Area
- Most Suitable for Development
- Major Lakes
- Major Roads
- County Boundaries



4. REGIONAL INVESTMENT GUIDE: HAYWOOD COUNTY

Legend

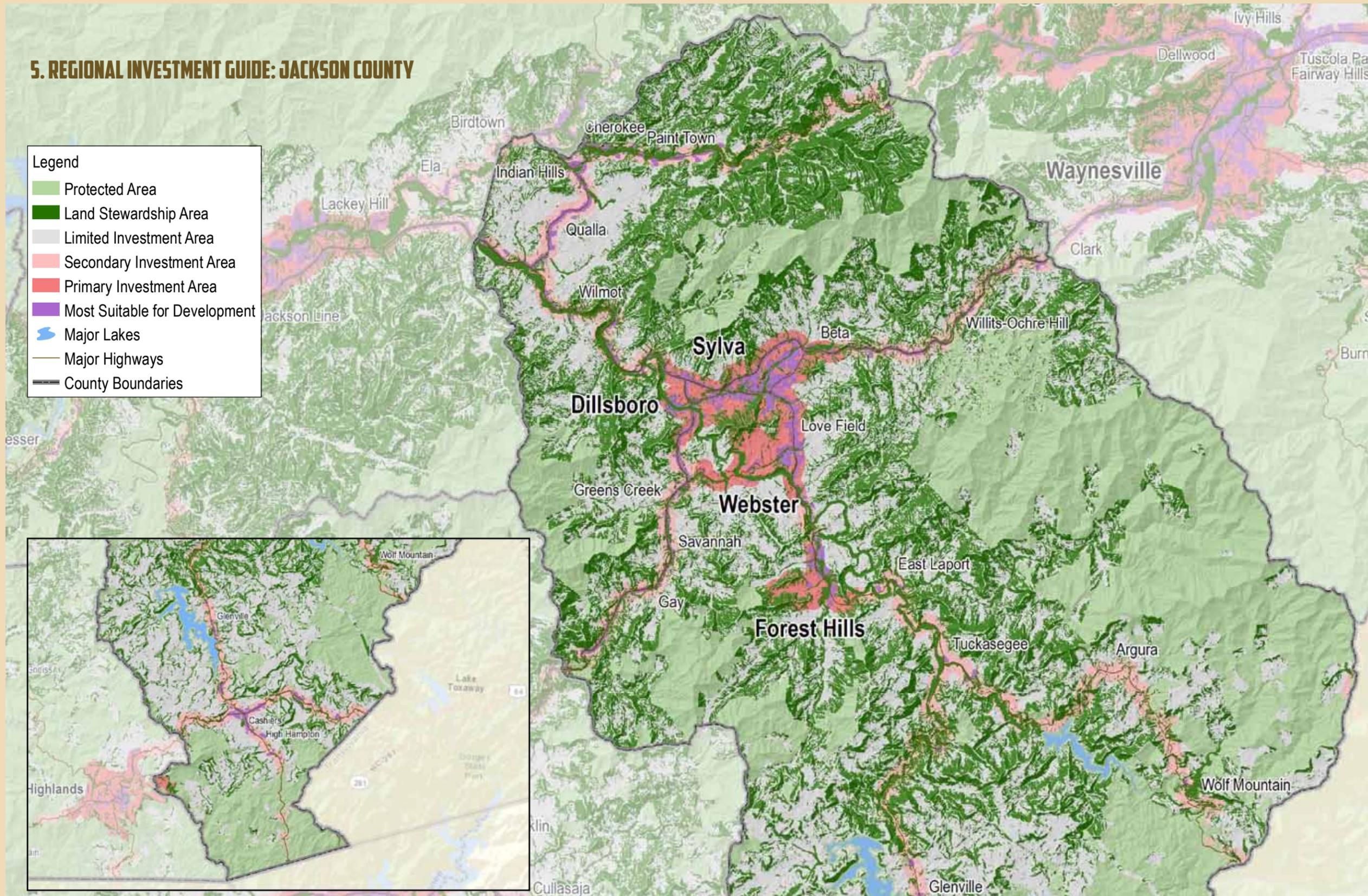
- Protected Area
- Land Stewardship Area
- Limited Investment Area
- Secondary Investment Area
- Primary Investment Area
- Most Suitable for Development
- Major Lakes
- Major Roads
- County Boundaries

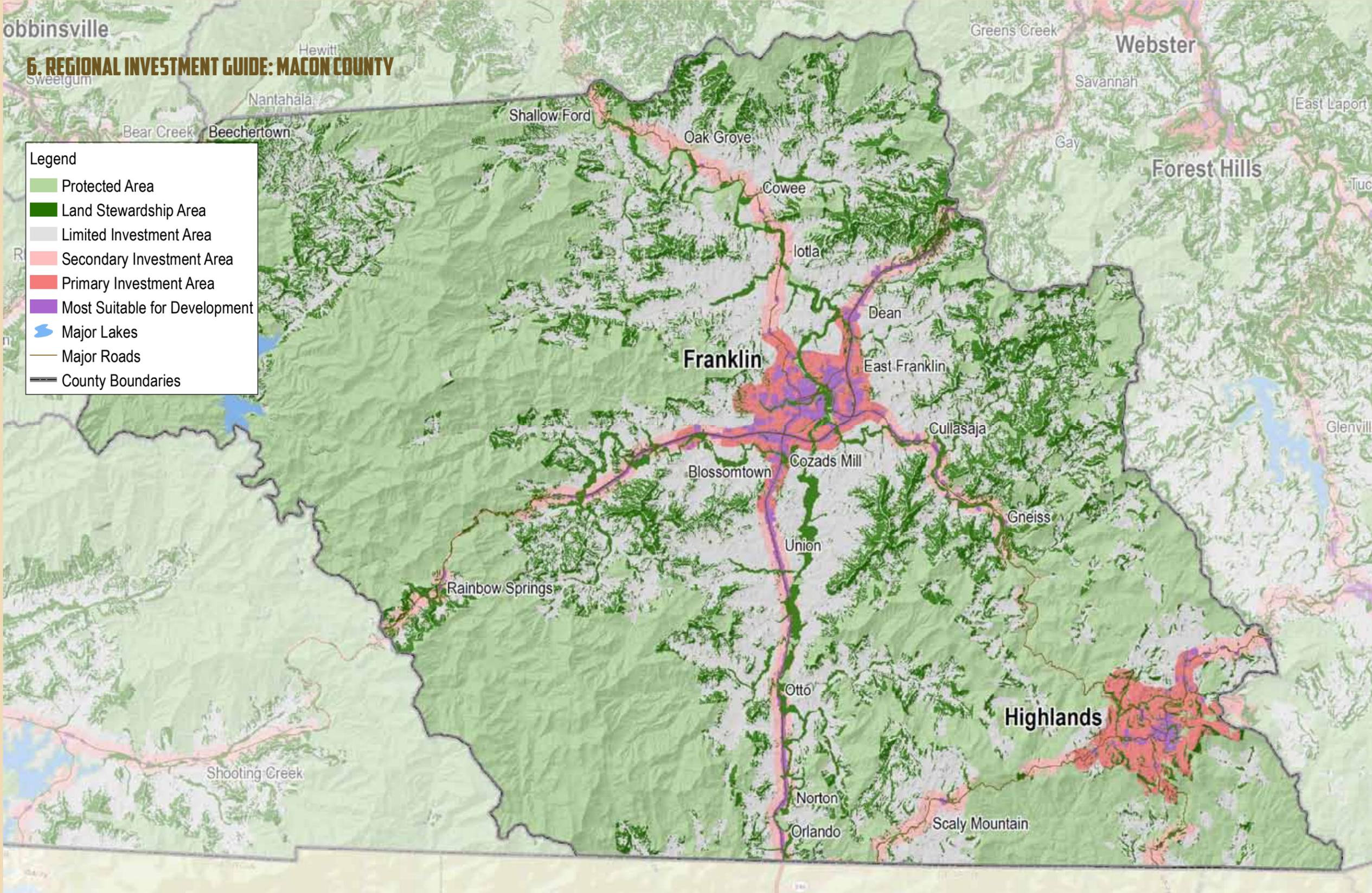


5. REGIONAL INVESTMENT GUIDE: JACKSON COUNTY

Legend

- Protected Area
- Land Stewardship Area
- Limited Investment Area
- Secondary Investment Area
- Primary Investment Area
- Most Suitable for Development
- Major Lakes
- Major Highways
- County Boundaries

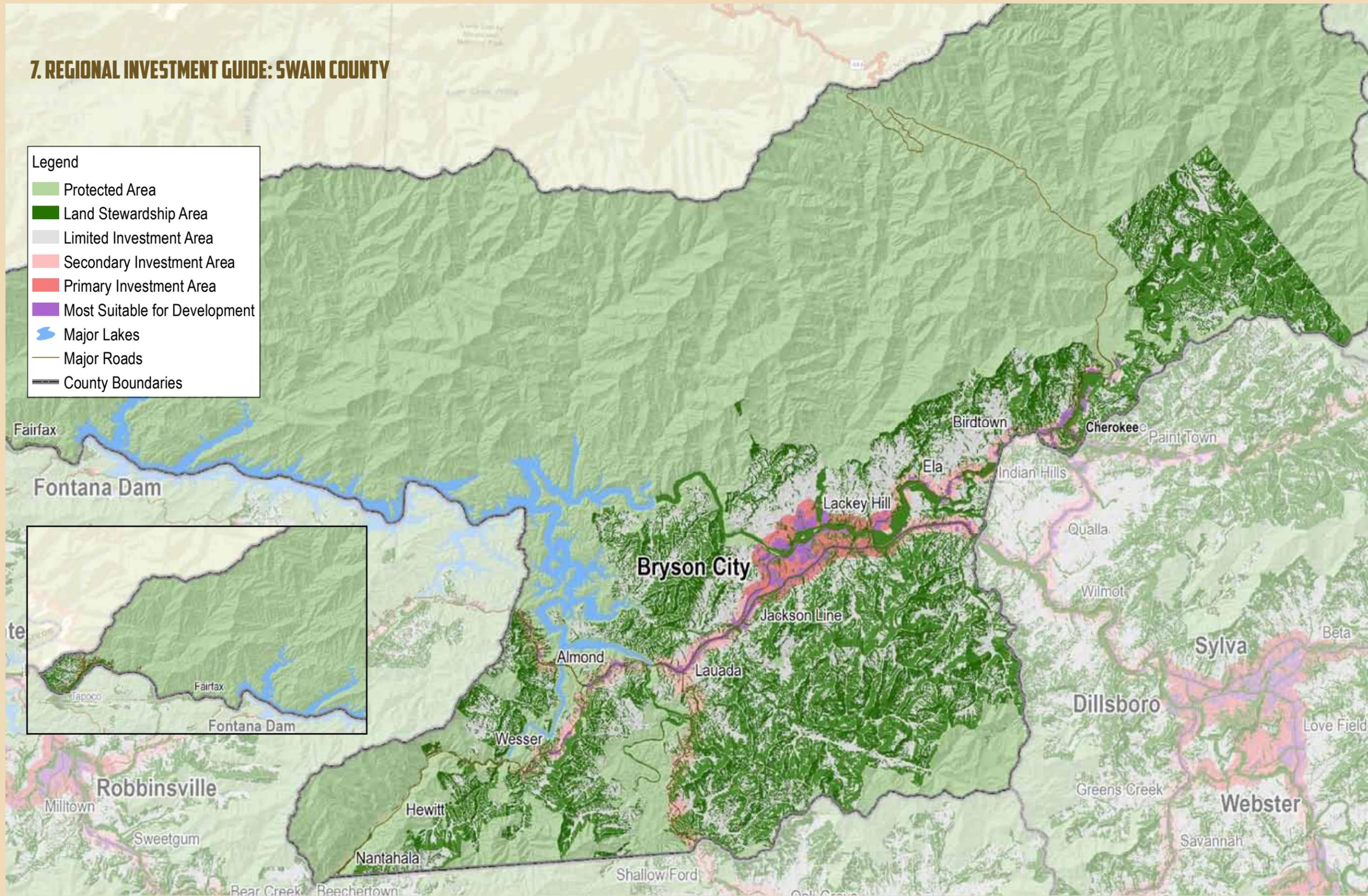




7. REGIONAL INVESTMENT GUIDE: SWAIN COUNTY

Legend

- Protected Area
- Land Stewardship Area
- Limited Investment Area
- Secondary Investment Area
- Primary Investment Area
- Most Suitable for Development
- Major Lakes
- Major Roads
- County Boundaries



C. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

	SCENARIO A: STAYING THE COURSE	SCENARIO B: TARGETED MANAGEMENT AND INVESTMENT	SCENARIO C: ROBUST MANAGEMENT AND INVESTMENT
PILLAR: THE PLACE WE'RE GIVEN			
Forest land converted for new residential and commercial development	25 square miles of forested land converted	18 square miles of forest land converted	10 square miles of forest land converted
Amount of development on steep slopes; impact on views	Some impact on steep slopes and views	Less impact on steep slopes and views as some residents choose to live closer to existing towns	Little impact on steep slopes and views as a majority of new residents choose to live closer to existing towns
Water quality and wildlife habitat	Some decrease in water quality; habitat becomes more fragmented	Less decrease in water quality; habitat is not as fragmented	Little decrease in water quality; little habitat becomes fragmented
PILLAR: THE ECONOMY WE NEED			
Attracting and retaining young people	Population continues to age; young people continue to leave the region	Some young people are attracted to stay in or move to the region by the availability of skilled jobs for which they qualify	A significant number of young people are attracted to stay in or move to the region by the availability of skilled jobs for which they qualify
Farmland converted for new residential and commercial development	9 square miles of farmland converted	6 square miles of farmland converted	4 square miles of farmland converted
PILLAR: THE PLACES WE MAKE			
Total land area used for new residential and commercial development	40 new square miles of land used	28 new square miles of land used	17 new square miles of land used
Vibrant and walkable downtowns	Downtowns continue slow revitalization	Downtowns become more vibrant and walkable	Significant revitalization of downtowns
PILLAR: THE WAYS WE GET AROUND			
Annual gasoline cost for typical individual commuter	\$1,980 per year	\$1,630 per year	\$1,280 per year
Amount of driving required outside your town or community	Increase in having to drive outside your local community for goods and services	Slight decrease in having to drive outside your community as more goods and services are available nearby	Significant decrease in having to drive outside your community as more goods and services are available nearby
Amount of freight traffic (roads and rail)	No increase in freight traffic	Slight increase in freight traffic	Moderate increase in freight traffic
PILLAR: THE QUALITY OF LIFE WE EXPECT			
Access to high-speed Internet service	Continued limited accessibility to high-speed Internet	More people have access to high speed Internet	Significantly more people have access to high-speed Internet
New residents within one mile of towns and population centers	3,000 new residents live near towns and closer to goods and services, but most live farther away	16,000 new residents live near towns and closer to goods and services, but some still live farther away	24,000 new residents live near towns and closer to goods and services, and few live farther away

This summary of the performance indicators was used by participants to comment on their preferences and comments.

D. COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS SURVEY RESULTS BY COUNTY AND REGION

	GRAHAM	MACON	SWAIN	CLAY	CHEROKEE	HAYWOOD	JACKSON	REGION
A. Which is preferable to you:								
1. To brand the region and market it together	60%	86%	91%	53%	51%	96%	67%	67%
2. Or to continue to compete for tourism and business at county and town levels	40%	14%	9%	47%	49%	4%	33%	33%
B. When attracting and locating new businesses, which is preferable to you:								
1. To develop shared regional business parks	42%	48%	70%	22%	29%	58%	33%	41%
2. Or to develop local ones	58%	52%	30%	78%	71%	42%	67%	59%
C. Which is preferable to you:								
1. Focusing on tourism and small businesses	85%	77%	50%	89%	80%	55%	83%	76%
2. Or attracting large employers such as light industry	15%	23%	50%	11%	20%	45%	17%	24%
D. How important is it to create interesting towns that attract and keep young people?								
1. Very Important	80%	63%	100%	58%	64%	83%	83%	72%
2. Somewhat Important	20%	30%	0%	42%	30%	17%	17%	25%
3. Not Important	0%	7%	0%	0%	6%	0%	0%	3%
E. How important is it to you and your family to have housing choices in the region?								
1. Very Important	74%	59%	64%	65%	52%	79%	33%	63%
2. Somewhat Important	24%	31%	27%	25%	31%	13%	50%	27%
3. Not Important	2%	10%	9%	10%	17%	8%	17%	10%
F. Which is preferable to you:								
1. To manage and regulate future growth	71%	82%	60%	47%	56%	100%	67%	69%
2. Or to prioritize property owners' rights	29%	18%	40%	53%	44%	0%	33%	31%

This chart, continued on the next page, shows the results of the 203 surveys fielded at the second round of Community Workshops. It provides results by county and for the region as a whole.

D. COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS' SURVEY RESULTS (CONTINUED)

	GRAHAM	MACON	SWAIN	CLAY	CHEROKEE	HAYWOOD	JACKSON	REGION
G. With limited transportation funding, which of the following is more important to you:								
1. High-speed highways connecting towns within the region and beyond	38%	4%	36%	11%	2%	34%	0%	18%
2. Existing highway improvements	38%	26%	18%	61%	49%	4%	17%	35%
3. Expanded opportunities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit	24%	63%	46%	28%	24%	54%	50%	36%
4. Rail connections to move freight and passengers	0%	7%	0%	0%	25%	8%	33%	11%
H. Rank these four destinations in terms of their priority for the region to connect with? (Use 1 for the highest and 4 for the lowest priority)								
1. Asheville, NC	#1	#1	#2	#1	#2	#1	#1	#1
2. Atlanta, GA	#2	#1	#1	#2	#3	#3	#2	#2
3. Chattanooga, TN	#3	#4	#3	#3	#1	#4	#4	#3
4. Greenville/Spartanburg, SC	#4	#3	#4	#4	#4	#2	#3	#4
I. Given the limited funds for water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure, which is more important to you:								
1. To extend water and sewer for development beyond town limits	54%	47%	64%	56%	40%	58%	17%	49%
2. Or to support in-town development	46%	53%	36%	44%	60%	42%	83%	51%
J. To Implement the regional vision, which is more important to you:								
1. To create and support an independent implementation entity to carry forth the regional vision	43%	81%	82%	26%	25%	77%	33%	48%
2. Or to keep all implementation responsibilities at county and town levels	57%	19%	27%	74%	75%	23%	67%	52%
K. If we create an independent entity to implement the vision, should it be:								
1. An alliance of governments	33%	48%	18%	31%	36%	64%	75%	39%
2. A private-sector organization	31%	16%	46%	31%	33%	0%	0%	26%
3. A nonprofit institution	36%	36%	36%	38%	31%	36%	25%	35%

Note: The responses to Question H in Macon County yielded a tie between Asheville and Atlanta as the highest ranked regional destinations to connect with.