



The Southwestern Commission Planning and Economic Development Commission serves as the Lead Development District for the seven western counties in North Carolina, known as Region A.

In that role, the Southwestern Commission is tasked with working with regional stakeholders to develop a new Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for Region A every 5 years. The U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) supports the development and implementation of a comprehensive economic development strategy.

The CEDS document represents a coordinated regional strategy for economic development that creates a vision for where Region A will go over the next five years and the specific actions needed to achieve that vision. Input was gathered from a variety of regional stakeholders through public surveys and a steering committee made up of public, private, and non-profit representatives. The primary purpose of the project was to identify strategic goals and objectives that will move the region's economy forward. The CEDS can be used to support funding requests and as a guiding document for economic development.



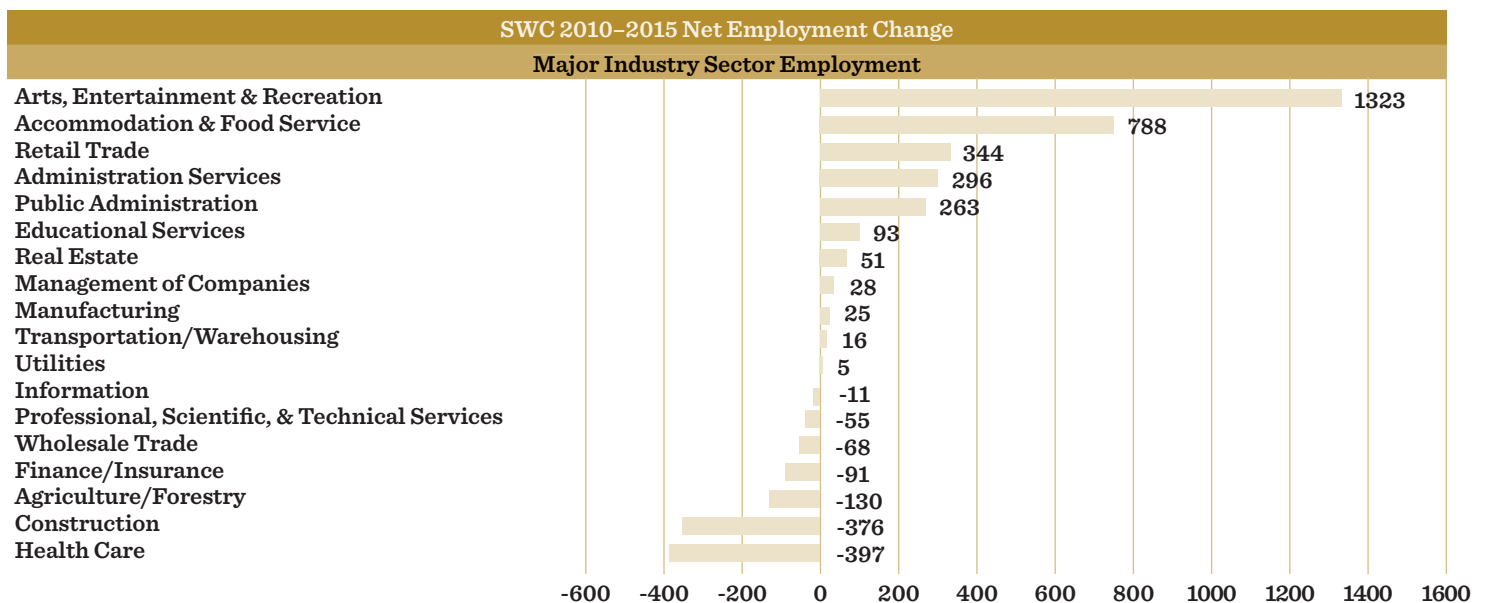
DEMOGRAPHICS

Age Breakdown			Ethnic Breakdown		Poverty Rate			Population and Growth Rate by County		
Age	Region A	(%)		(%)		All persons	Under 18	Median Household Income	County	Growth Rate (%)
0-19	43,041	21.3	White	90.7	Region A	19.5%	30.4%	\$37,019	Cherokee	1.3
20-29	23,756	11.8	American Indian	4.7	North Carolina	17.2%	24.1%	\$46,596	Clay	2.1
30-39	20,752	10.3	Black	2.1	United States	15.5%	21.7%	\$53,657	Graham	1.1
40-49	24,193	12.0	Asian	0.7					Haywood	0.9
50-59	29,449	14.6	Other/Two or more races	1.8					Jackson	2.2
60+	60,512	30.0							Macon	1.4
									Swain	0.8

Source: NC Commerce, Access NC Source: NC Commerce, Access NC Source: NC Commerce, Access NC Source: United States Census, 2010-2014

SWC Industry Clusters Specialization & Change				
Cluster	2015 Employment	2010-2015 Employment Change	Degree of Specialization	Business Establishments
Expanding & Specialized				
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation & Visitor Industries	5,004	1,323	1.4	269
Plastics & Chemicals	1,367	524	1.4	31
Education (Public & Private)	6,196	93	1.6	111
Declining & Specialized				
Forest & Wood Products	2,723	(522)	2.6	106
Electrical Equip, Appliance, Component Mfg.	334	(15)	1.9	6
Health Services	8,491	(397)	1.1	165
Emerging & Unspecialized				
Business & Financial Services	3,584	29	0.5	606
Industrial Materials	1,684	520	0.7	43
Apparel & Textiles	320	123	0.6	33
Transportation Equip Mfg.	143	67	0.2	4
Computer & Electronic Product Mfg.	88	15	0.2	3
Primary Metal Mfg.	45	38	0.3	2
Declining & Unspecialized				
Information Technology & Telecom	1,930	(36)	0.6	171
Transportation & Logistics	628	(54)	0.3	78
Agribusiness & Food Processing	607	(19)	0.3	67
Printing & Publishing	418	(55)	0.4	65
Machinery Mfg.	271	(52)	0.5	9
Fabricated Metal Product Mfg.	171	(17)	0.3	10
Glass & Ceramics	29	(3)	0.2	9

Industries may be in more than one cluster. Source: SYNEVA Economics, EMSI, Center for Regional Development Purdue University



GOALS & OBJECTIVES

GOAL 1	Build on the Region's Competitive Advantages and Leverage the Market Place
Objective 1	<i>Establish the "MountainWest Partnership" as a recognized regional brand to support existing business and recruit new business to the region</i>
Strategy 1	Use the MountainWest Partnership to communicate and convey the economic story of Region A to businesses and entrepreneurs
Strategy 2	Further develop and promote the on-line portal to serve as a data and resource directory for entrepreneurs and businesses and a one-stop location for all economic development data, resources and events for the region
Strategy 3	Standardize local efforts into an integrated business retention and expansion (BRE) call program
Objective 2	<i>Support the Region's Clusters of Economic Development that offer Competitive Advantage</i>
Strategy 1	Leverage the region's history, cultural heritage and natural assets to extend the visitor's stay in Region A
Strategy 2	Promote and support agriculture as a viable economic practice
Strategy 3	Promote and support industry clusters of strength as identified in the Economic Analysis of the Southwestern Region
Objective 3	<i>Facilitate Success of Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses</i>
Strategy 1	Continue to operate and adequately capitalize the Southwestern Commission Revolving Loan Fund
Strategy 2	Facilitate sharing of information among resource providers to strengthen entrepreneurial ecosystem
Strategy 3	Expand the quantity and quality of networking opportunities throughout region in order to increase the interaction between and among entrepreneurs, service providers and others
Strategy 3	Create awareness among businesses owners, government officials and resource providers of the MountainWest Partnership website as a one-stop location where entrepreneurs and small businesses can access information about support services, technical assistance, financing, and up to date listings of educational and networking events
GOAL 2	Establish and Maintain a Robust Regional Infrastructure
Objective 1	<i>Create a comprehensive inventory of the region's infrastructure and infrastructure capacity in order to identify whether water, sewer, and natural gas, etc. can accommodate future growth</i>
Strategy 1	Identify and maintain an inventory of the region's infrastructure assets
Strategy 2	Establish a public-private coalition to advocate for increased state and federal infrastructure in the region
Strategy 3	Coordinate planning to ensure needed infrastructure investment
Objective 2	<i>Make low-cost, clean-burning natural gas accessible to communities throughout the region</i>
Strategy 1	Conduct feasibility study for providing natural gas to communities that currently lack service
Strategy 2	Facilitate collaboration between private natural gas providers and local and regional planners and economic developers
Strategy 3	Incentivize investment in the development of appropriate natural gas infrastructure and related facilities
Objective 3	<i>Expand reliable and affordable broadband service throughout the region</i>
Strategy 1	Establish public-private partnerships to expand broadband services in underserved and difficult to reach areas of the region
Strategy 2	Continue to support the deployment of high speed wireless access in the region's downtown areas
Strategy 3	Leverage the Region A Broadband Assessment to attract service providers to the region
Objective 4	<i>Develop multi-modal transportation plans that address existing and future year capacity deficiencies</i>
Strategy 1	Continue to strengthen the partnership with NCDOT Transportation Planning Branch and the Southwestern Rural Planning Organization
Strategy 2	Expand connectivity with a safe and reliable regional road network
Strategy 3	Develop alternatives to driving within existing communities
Strategy 4	Develop freight mobility plan designed to reinforce the importance of moving goods and people

GOAL 3	Create Revitalized, Healthy, and Resilient Communities
Objective 1	<i>Encourage investment in downtown corridors and communities in order to make them more attractive to tourists and residents</i>
Strategy 1	Increase the revitalization and historic preservation efforts in the downtown areas of communities in the region
Strategy 2	Increase investments in the maintenance and development of trails and greenways, pedestrian infrastructure, and public gathering spaces to promote healthy living and attract visitors
Strategy 3	Encourage and support communities in reviewing and updating their existing codes and regulations which impact development issues
Objective 2	<i>Increase housing opportunities for all who wish to live in the region</i>
Strategy 1	Complete a housing analysis and assessment to better understand the region's housing market and current and future housing needs
Strategy 2	Develop strategies and incentives to encourage housing development which meets the region's identified housing needs
Strategy 3	Maintain existing housing stock by reinvesting in existing communities
Strategy 4	Raise awareness of and encourage Aging in Place Initiatives
Objective 3	<i>Provide the facilities necessary to support entrepreneurs in targeted industries</i>
Strategy 1	Determine the feasibility of establishing co-working spaces in the region's downtowns or other appropriate areas
Strategy 2	Determine the feasibility of establishing additional incubator space in the region
Strategy 3	Determine the feasibility of creating at least one makerspace in the region
GOAL 4	Develop Talented and Innovative People
Objective 1	<i>Improve Development, Retention, Attraction of Skilled Workforce to support the region's key driver industries (e.g., information technology, light manufacturing)</i>
Strategy 1	Establish consortia among smaller companies with similar workforce training needs to enable them to access customized training
Strategy 2	Continue workforce initiatives to align training and education with target industries
Strategy 3	Facilitate collaboration between different agencies in workforce development (Southwestern Commission Workforce Development, Community Colleges, Mental Health providers)
Objective 2	<i>Increase quality, affordable childcare across the region</i>
Strategy 1	Work with the MountainWest Partnership to increase awareness of childcare as an economic development issue
Strategy 2	Conduct analysis to identify gaps in provision of quality, affordable childcare
Strategy 3	Collaborate with partners to provide technical assistance to childcare providers
Objective 3	<i>Expand community capacity in Region A by continuing to foster, encourage and support the region's leaders</i>
Strategy 1	Grow the impact and reach of the Millennial Campus at Western Carolina University as an initiative for university faculty and students, businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies to work together in applied research, projects, and programming that benefits the region
Strategy 2	Continue to work toward the formation of a Regional Rural Leadership Institute that prepares future leaders for the region
Strategy 3	Encourage nonprofits and civic organizations in the region to include youth and young adult representatives on their board of directors



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