

## Northern Mountains Region



**Regions D & E:** *Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, McDowell, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes, Yancey*

- Total land area: 4,611 square miles
- Agriculture: 7006 farms, \$723 million receipts
- 11 rural and one urban counties
- Tourism and agriculture-based economy

### Projected Population Growth in North Mountain Counties

2000	2010	2020	2030
576,756	605,302	719,682	786,550

**Natural Resources:** A great diversity of mountain elevations fills this region, interspersed with broad basins and deep gorges. Spruce-fir forests blanket the highest peaks, and pine woodlands cover sharp ridges of the Blue Ridge escarpment. The low to middle elevations support oak forests (which once contained abundant American chestnuts) and cove forests. The rich cove forests, in moist areas of small valleys, contain impressive, towering trees and exceptional plant diversity. Mountain bogs dot the plateau around the New River and elsewhere, and the region contains an outstanding group of rocky summits, including the spectacular cliffs and exceptional ecological diversity of Grandfather Mountain.

**Specific Growth and Conservation Concerns:** Several counties are establishing agricultural districts to maintain working farms. Buffers and greenways being developed along the Catawba River and its tributaries will provide water quality protection as well as attract tourism to boost the local economy. In the highlands, tourism plays a major role, resulting in many vacation homes placing the demands on local resources.

### Regional Conservation Planning

**High Country Council of Governments** has developed a GIS data set of protected open space and priority protection areas in the region. This information is based on meetings with local governments and conservation organizations/agencies operating in Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey counties. In addition to mapping, the COG has completed a written description of regional conservation activities and an analysis and synthesis of the various projects and priorities.

<http://www.regiond.org/>

**Western Piedmont Council of Governments** has initiated a contract to conduct a one-year study that would identify potential recreational and open space in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba counties. This study would also determine the impact of open space on the economy and quality of life in the four-county region, and provide the basis to develop future projects. Maps of the Upper Catawba River Trail and current Recreational Inventory are available at [www.wpcog.dst.nc.us](http://www.wpcog.dst.nc.us).