

Southern Mountains Region



Regions A & B: *Buncombe, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, Swain, Transylvania*

- Total land area: 4,901 square miles
- Agriculture: 3,792 farms, \$394 million receipts
- 10 rural and one urban counties
- Tourism-based economy

Projected Population Growth in Southern Mountain Counties

2000	2010	2020	2030
566,200	597,232	676,201	750,848

Natural Resources: This region includes the most extensive high mountains of the Southern Appalachians. The greatest amount of rain in eastern North America allows plants more typical of the tropics to thrive in unique small habitats. Scattered bog wetlands provide homes for many rare species, including the bog turtle. The region is a global center of salamander diversity. The oak forests covering most of the uplands once included the American chestnut until this tree was decimated by blight. Spruce-fir forests blanket the highest peaks and ridges. Rich cove forests, in moist areas of small valleys, contain impressive, towering trees and exceptional plant diversity.

Specific Growth and Conservation Concerns: The natural beauty of pristine forests and agricultural land, which draws millions of tourists each year to this region, is threatened by residential and commercial sprawl. Development on steep slopes, ridge tops and floodplains has resulted in flooding and destructive landslides. When they can no longer supply adequate water to keep up with the growth of the community, watersheds are “retired” and then may be subject to controlled foresting.

Regional Conservation Planning

The Southwestern North Carolina Planning and Economic Development Commission works with the local land trust to identify properties to be conserved in Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon and Swain counties. County/town properties, U.S. Forest Service land, gamelands, parks and greenways have been targeted. Plan development ideas and strategies include creation of an open space plan that supports Region A and surrounding counties. <http://www.regiona.org>

The Land-of-Sky Regional Council worked with Buncombe, Henderson, Madison and Transylvania to create an inventory of open space. A conceptual design for a regional open space plan that addresses local conservation needs and opportunities includes federal, state and local government open space opportunities as well as lands managed by land trusts, other conservation organizations and private entities. The council’s larger “green infrastructure” collaboration with the USDA Forest Service and the National Association of Regional Councils includes landcare, mountain ridge protection, non-native invasive species, agricultural land preservation, forest gateway communities and sustainable forest management. http://www.landofsky.org/other/o_gis.html