



Washington County is rich with natural and historic resources that represent a strong community identity. These scenic features not only contribute to the environmental health and quality of life for Washington County residents, they are tourism assets.

The natural environment often dictates how we use land. Development potential for land is dependent on many physical characteristics. Soil conditions, slopes, flood frequency and wetlands all affect where development can safely and feasibly occur. These and other environmentally sensitive features, such as surface water, ground water and air quality, should be given consideration in the planning process.

The history of Washington County is important, and awareness and preservation of historical assets is an important activity to continue in the future. Our historic and cultural resources attract visitors to our area, provide us a touchstone to our past and contribute to the sense of place that makes Washington County a special place to live.

Since natural and cultural resources may be affected by future growth and development, it is important to consider these assets when planning the future of Washington County.

Natural Resources

Physical Geography

The majority of Washington County land (95%) lies in the Valley and Ridge physiographic province of Virginia. The Whitetop Mountain area (approximately 5%) in the extreme southeastern corner of the county lies in the Blue Ridge physiographic province. The county consists of a broad valley which extend in a northeast to southwest direction. The valley is bordered by the dominant ridges of Clinch Mountain on the northwest and Iron Mountain on the southeast. Elevations range from 1,330 feet near Mendota to 5,524 feet at the summit of Whitetop Mountain, the second highest peak in Virginia. Slopes in excess of 20% are included on the Constraints to Development Map on the following page. Steep slopes often preclude land development due to their erosive tendencies and high development costs.

Washington County is underlain by sedimentary rocks consisting of limestone, shale, and sandstone. Limestone is the dominant rock underlying the valley and sandstone and shale form the ridges. Rocks in the Whitetop Mountain area (Blue Ridge physiographic province) are predominately metamorphosed rocks of igneous origin, including rhyolite, greenstone, granite and some inclusions of quartzite and quartz pebble conglomerates.¹

Washington County is identified as a Virginia county containing karst topography. Karst topography is characterized by a landscape developed in limestone, dolomite, marble, or other soluble rocks and characterized by subsurface drainage systems, sinking or losing streams, sinkholes, springs, and caves. Karst landscapes supply water and provide habitat for animal and plant species.²

Soils

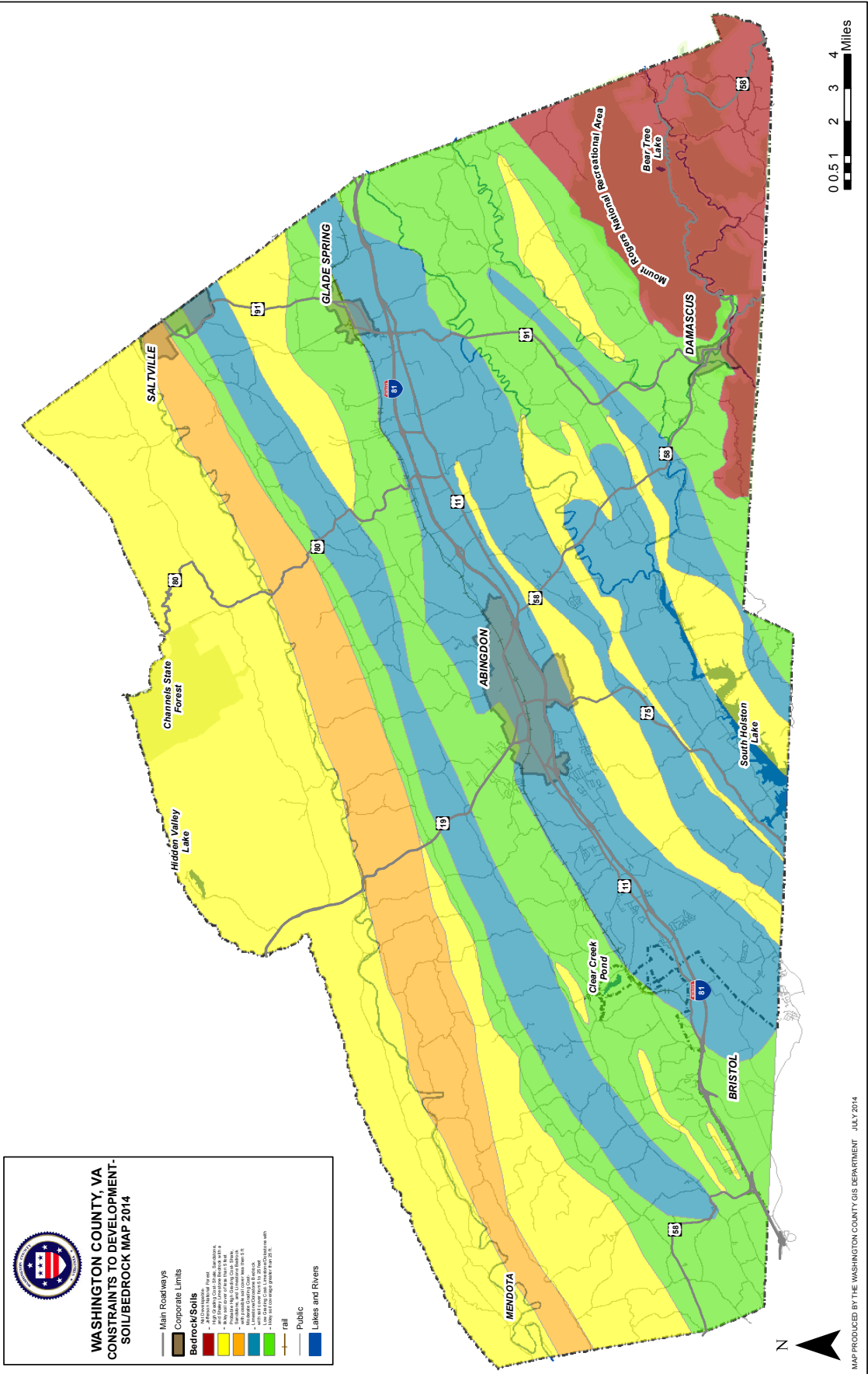
Detailed soil maps and descriptions are contained within the "Soil Survey of Washington County Area and City of Bristol, Virginia," report completed in 1992. The report provides a description of soil properties and qualities, their location and a discussion of their suitability, limitations, and use and management considerations. Washington County was included in the "Soil Survey of Washington County Area and the City of Bristol, Virginia," a publication of the National Cooperative Soil Survey. This project was a joint effort of the United States Department of Agriculture and other Federal and State agencies, including the Agricultural Experiment Stations and local agencies. Full copies of the report and soil maps may be obtained through the Holston River Soil and Water Conservation District.

Soil information contained within the soil survey is essential to the comprehensive plan to inform land use decisions and identify special practices needed to ensure proper performance. Differences in soil properties can occur within short distances and can determine usability of the land. Some soils are seasonally wet and subject to flooding, others are poorly suited to use for septic tank absorption fields. The protection of agricultural soils is critically important as the county works to promote the economic impact and tradition of farming in the community.

The Constraints to Development Map shows soils and bedrock and illustrates the suitability of soils and bedrock for development. Areas that are predominately shale, sandstone and shaley limestone with a likely soil cover of less than five feet present high grading costs. The same soil types with possible soil cover of less than five feet have probable high grading costs. Limestone and dolostone bedrock with a likely soil cover from five to 25 feet have moderate grading costs, and lower grading costs are associated with limestone and dolostone bedrock with a likely soil cover greater than 25 feet.

¹ Soil Survey of Washington County Area and City of Bristol, Virginia

² "Introduction to Virginia's Karst", VA Department of Conservation, http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage/documents/IntroVAKarst.pdf (accessed February 25, 2014).



Hydrology

Hydrology is the study of the waters of the earth on and below the surface of the planet. It involves the study of various properties of water and its relationship with the living and nonliving environment. (Department of Environmental Sciences, University of Virginia.¹ Water is vital natural resources in Washington County as we rely on them for drinking water and scenic/recreation resources.

Surface Water

Washington County is home to all three tributaries of the Holston River; the North, Middle and South Forks. These forks serve to drain the Washington County area and all forks flow in a southwesterly direction, parallel to the main valley. The Middle and South Fork meet in Washington County, southeast of Abingdon. The three forks meet their confluence near Kingsport, Tennessee. The North Fork begins in Bland County, the Middle Fork in Wythe County and the South Fork in Smyth County. From their confluence near Kingsport, the river flows 136 miles until meeting with the French Broad River east of Knoxville. This point is considered to be the start of the Tennessee River.

South Holston Reservoir, located on the South Fork of the Holston River, is an important resource in Washington County. The reservoir is formed by the South Holston Dam which impounds the South Holston Lake of approximately 7,550 acres. Construction on the dam was begun in 1942 and completed in 1950. The reservoir was created for several purposes; power production, aquatic ecology, flood control, and augmentation of water flow during dry periods.

Several major streams are present in Washington County and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality released the 2012 Water Quality Assessment Integrated Report in January 2014. The report determined whether Virginia waters meet water quality standards and established a schedule to restore waters that are impaired. The list of impaired waters in Washington County may be found on the Department of Environment Quality website.

Watershed

A watershed is simply the area of land that drains into a particular body of water. Bodies of water used to define a watershed may be a creek, pond or river. Virginia has defined 14 major watersheds and the entirety of Washington County lies within one of these, the Holston River Watershed. The three forks of the Holston River, North Middle and South, serve as drainage for the county. Watershed consideration is critical to maintain and improve water quality and ensure that future generations have adequate water supplies.

Wetlands

The term "wetland" means an area that is that are inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support – and that under normal circumstances do support – a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands include swamps, marshes, bogs and similar areas."² The physical, chemical, and biological properties of the Commonwealth's wetlands work in concert to perform "wetland functions."³ Wetland functions may include storage of water, ground water recharge, sediment trapping, transformation of nutrients, and wildlife habitat. Wetlands are some of the most productive habitats on earth, providing nursery grounds for fish and other wildlife.

Washington County derives benefits from our wetlands including flood reduction, water purification, and wildlife habitat. When wetlands store water along a larger body of water, they often serve to absorb the impact of periodic flood waters. The process of storing water also slows water to trap sediment and pollutants caused by over land or upstream water flow. As wildlife habitat, wetlands provide hunting and fishing opportunities.

Floodplain Management

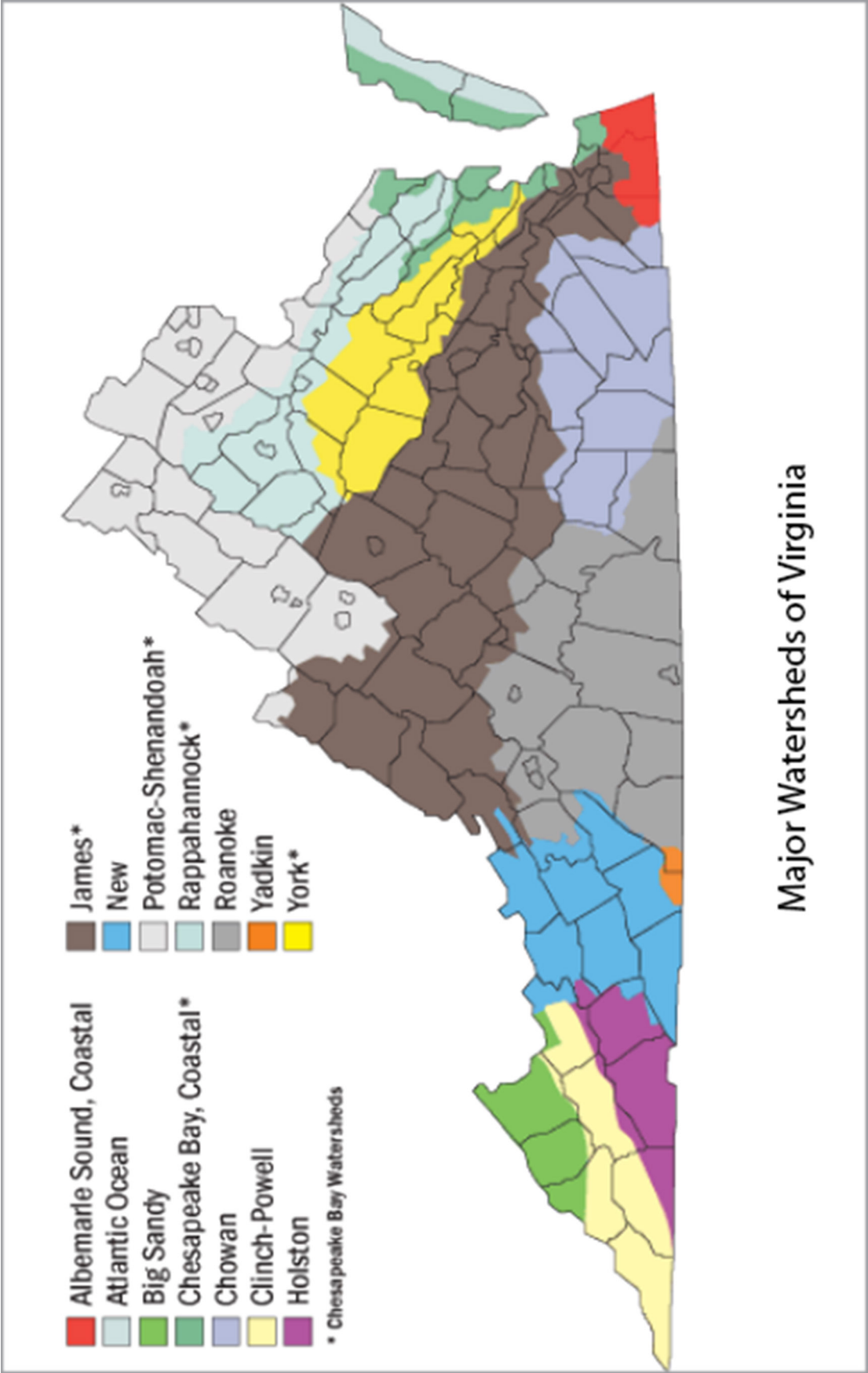
A floodplain is any land area susceptible to being inundated by water from any source. These areas are defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and managing them appropriately is important for several reasons including: protecting life, health and property, minimizing rescue and relief efforts, minimizing business interruptions, minimizing public expenditures for costly flood projects or damage to public facilities, and to prevent increases in regional floods.

Washington County participates in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) administered by FEMA. In order to maintain eligibility of county property owners to purchase flood insurance, the county Zoning Ordinance contains provisions for the regulation of construction and other activities in designated flood hazard areas of Washington County. These designated flood hazard areas are established by FEMA's Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) for Washington County which have been incorporated into the official County Zoning Map available through the county's netGIS database. The specific county Zoning Ordinance regulations governing flood hazard areas are found in Chapter 66 of the County of Washington, Virginia (2002), Flood Hazard (FH) District Regulations.

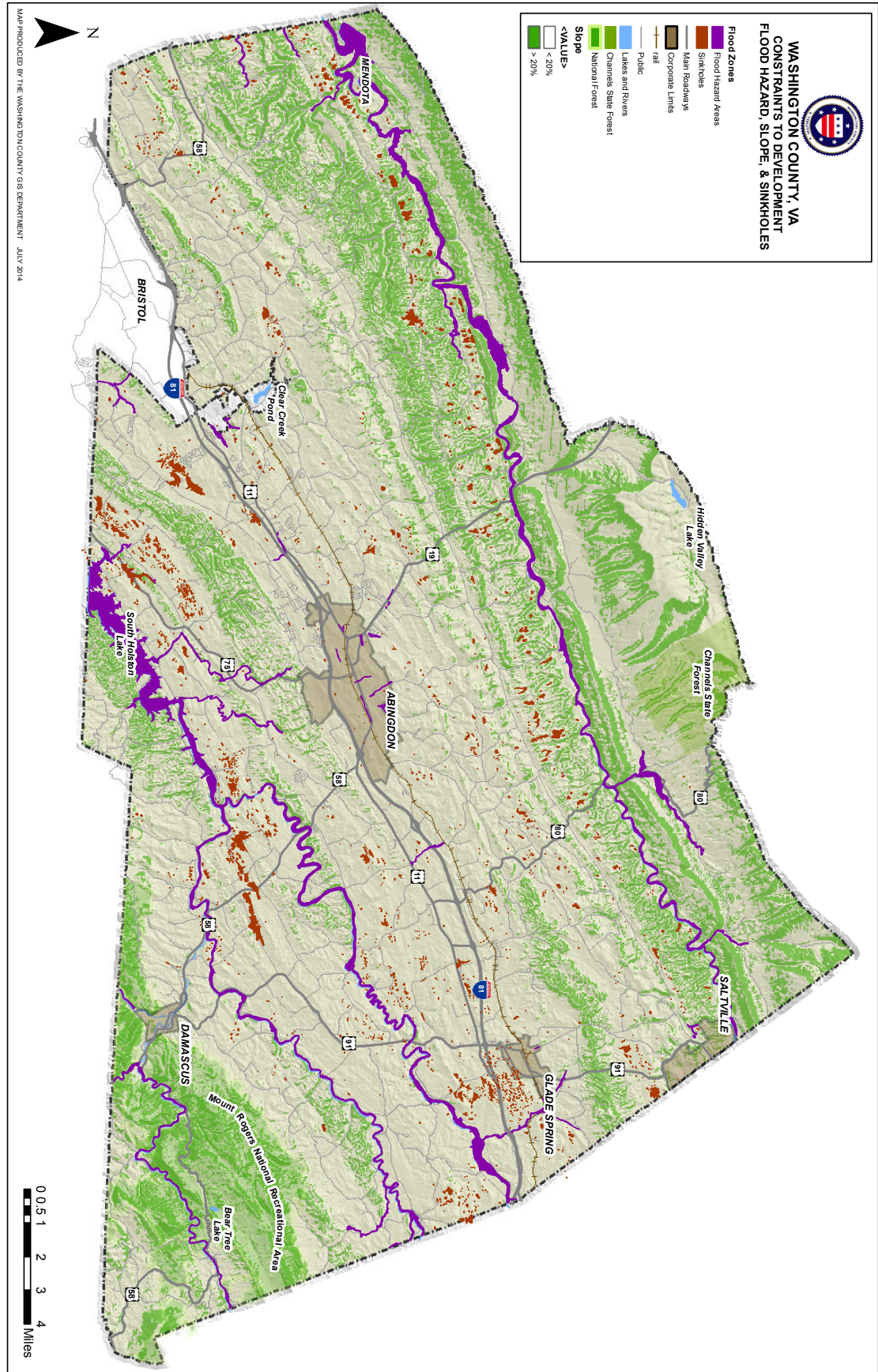
¹ <http://www.evsc.virginia.edu/research/hydrology/> (accessed February 24, 2014)

² U.S. Army Corp of Engineers definition.

³ Virginia DEQ - Wetlands, <http://www.deq.virginia.gov/Programs/Water/WetlandsStreams/Wetlands.aspx> (accessed March 2014)



Major Watersheds of Virginia



Air Quality

Air quality essential to our quality of life factor for residents of Washington County but this is not a subject that has been studied comprehensively in the county. Air quality can be affected by sources such as internal combustion engines, industries, and livestock. Poor air quality can cause an impact on the community including; negative health impacts, especially among the very young and very old, and damage to natural resources. It is important to consider poor air quality because it can make an area less attractive to live or visit which can impact both quality of life for residents, tourism and recruitment of businesses to an affected area.

The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Air Division, is responsible for carrying out the mandates of the Virginia Air Pollution Control Law, as well as meeting Virginia's federal obligations under the Clean Air Act. The Air Division's programs protect and enhance public health and the environment by controlling present and future sources of air pollution. The division ensures the safety and quality of the air in Virginia by monitoring and analyzing air quality data, regulating sources of air pollution, and working with local, state and federal agencies to plan and implement strategies to protect Virginia's air quality.¹

Washington County is in the Southwest Monitor Network. The pollutants monitored in this network include O₃ (Ozone), PM₁₀ (Course Dust Particles), PM_{2.5} (Fine Particles), and Lead. The O₃ monitor is located in Rural Retreat, VA. The PM₁₀ monitor is located at Gladeville Elementary School in Galax, VA and the PM_{2.5} monitor is located at Highland View Elementary School in Bristol, Virginia. Lead is monitored at a station in Buchanan County. Two additional O₃ stations are located in Blountville, Tennessee, and Kingsport, Tennessee. Since air quality is a regional concern, the county may work with other localities to stay informed on air quality issues and work with to obtain a regional air quality study.

Wildlife/Ecoregion

Virginia's landscape also is commonly categorized by seven ecoregions. According to the U.S. EPA, "Ecoregions reflect areas of general similarity in ecosystems and in the type, quality, and quantity of environmental resources, they are designed to serve as a spatial framework for the research, assessment, management, and monitoring of ecosystems and ecosystem components" (Woods et al. 2003)². Virginia is divided into seven ecoregion and each ecoregion contains a distinct collection of natural communities and species. The biodiversity of flora, fauna, and ecosystems that characterize an ecoregion tend to be distinct from that of other ecoregions.

Washington County is located in the Ridge and Valley ecoregion. This northeast-southwest trending, relatively low-lying, but diverse ecoregion is sandwiched between higher, more rugged mountainous regions with greater forest cover. The region is characterized by roughly parallel ridges and valleys which have a variety of widths, heights, and geologic materials. These geologic materials including limestone, dolomite, shale, siltstone, sandstone, chert, mudstone, and marble. Springs and caves are relatively numerous. Present-day forests cover about 50% of the region. The ecoregion has a diversity of aquatic habitats and species of fish.

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries produced "Virginia's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy" in 2005. The document was produced to assess Virginia's wildlife resources, develop partnerships, to identify key species and habitats in need of conservation and to prioritize action and research. The document shows that Washington County is an area rich in species with the potential and/or confirmed habitat for "Tier One" species in Virginia. Tier One is a classification utilized in the report to identify species of greatest conservation need.

1 VA Performs website, <http://vaperforms.virginia.gov/indicators/naturalResources/airQuality.php>

2 Virginia Department of Environmental Quality website, <http://www.deq.virginia.gov/Programs/Water/WetlandsStreams/Wetlands.aspx>

Forests, Trails and Open Space

Washington County is rich in natural resources that also serve as recreation and tourism amenities for both citizens and visitors to the county. These resources are important community resources that should be promoted, protected and expanded to enhance the quality of life in the county as well as economic well-being. New opportunities to add to the list of resources should be a priority in the future.

Designated state and national forests in Washington County are managed and operated by state and federal control and comprise hundreds of acres of land for public use for recreation. In addition to designated forests and trails, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation extends voluntary legal agreements to landowners in the form of conservation easements. The conservation easement is a tool to preserve land for agriculture or forestry uses or to protect against development or to preserve open space. This land may be preserved through government ownership or voluntary private easements. The 2013 Virginia Outdoors Plan reports 37,888.29 acres of land in the county are conserved through ownership and 4,971.6 through easements for a total of 42,859.89 acres. Land trusts and conservation programs operating in the county include, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Virginia Outdoors Foundation, Virginia Department of Forestry, The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Land and The Conservation Fund. Washington County has a Purchase of Development Rights ordinance in place but as of 2014, only one landowner has gone through this process.

Washington County utilizes land use taxation as a tool to preserve farm and forested land. The Land Use Program is adopted by ordinance and offers people a discount on their real estate taxes if they have land used for agriculture or open space purposes. A minimum of 5 acres without a dwelling is required in order to qualify for the program. If a home is located on the property, there is a minimum of six acres to qualify for the program. Once property is enrolled in the Land Use Program, it is no longer taxed at the fair market value. There are three main categories in the program: tillable property, pasture land, and woodland. These values override the fair market assessments for taxable purposes.



Forests and Open Space

Jefferson National Forest

The George Washington National Forest in west central Virginia and the Jefferson National Forest in southwest Virginia were administratively combined in 1995 to form the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. The two national forests contain nearly 1.8 million acres; one of the largest blocks of public land in the eastern United States. The forests include 1,664,110 acres in Virginia, 123,629 acres in West Virginia, and 961 acres in Kentucky. The forest headquarters is the Forest Supervisor's Office in Roanoke, Virginia. The forests include the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area and seven Ranger Districts.¹

The forests are primarily Appalachian hardwood and mixed pine-hardwood forest types located within the Blue Ridge, Central Ridge and Valley, Allegheny, and Cumberland Plateau provinces. Forests are managed for multiple uses and provide many products and benefits. Developed recreation opportunities are offered at over 200 sites on the forests (including campgrounds, picnic areas and boat launches), along with nearly 2,200 miles of trails, and 1,700 miles of open roads. Elevations range from 5,729 feet at Mount Rogers to 515 feet along the South Fork of the Shenandoah River.

Mount Rogers National Recreation Area

The Mount Rogers National Recreation Area (NRA) manages approximately 200,000 acres of National Forest land near Mount Rogers. The area features four Congressionally designated wilderness areas; the Virginia Creeper Trail; the Mount Rogers Scenic Byway which traverses over 50 miles offering views of the National Recreation Area and open rural countryside; the 5000 acre Crest Zone featuring elevations over 4,000 feet, large rock formations, and a mixture of mountain balds and spruce-fir forests; a herd of wild, free-ranging ponies; and the highest elevated road in the state of Virginia leading to the summit of Whitetop Mountain. The Mount Rogers NRA was officially established and designated a National Recreational Area by the Secretary of Agriculture in 1966.

Many activities are available in the area including camping, picnicking, sight-seeing, bird watching, trout fishing, hunting, hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and swimming. The U.S. Forest Service has 3 rental cabins and 11 campgrounds in the Mount Rogers NRA, four of which are set up for horseback riders. There are over 500 miles of trails in the area, including 60 miles of the Appalachian Trail, 18 miles of the Virginia Creeper Trail, and 67 miles of the Virginia Highland Horse Trail. Over one million visitors come to Mount Rogers every year.²

Hidden Valley Wildlife Management Area

Hidden Valley Wildlife Management Area is located in Washington County and is bordered by Russell County along the area's northwest boundary. This 6,400-acre property is mostly forested mountain land with the exception of a number of small openings, developed and maintained to enhance wildlife habitat. Two thousand feet at its lowest elevation, the area's highest elevation exceeds 4,000 feet, indicating the rugged steepness of the area. Logged in the early 1900s when much of the area was virgin forest, the predominate forest is now mature, mixed hardwood. Hidden Valley Lake is situated at the head of the valley, from which flows Brumley Creek.³

1 USDA Forest Service website. <http://www.fs.usda.gov/gwj> (accessed February 2014)

2 USDA Forest Service website. <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/gwj/specialplaces/?cid=stelprdb5302337> (accessed February 2014)

3 Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wmas/detail.asp?pid=27> (accessed February 2014)

Clinch Mountain Wildlife Recreation Area

A small area of the Clinch Mountain Wildlife Recreation Area is located within Washington County's border. The area is dominated by mountains rising steeply from narrow valley floors. Due to a difference in elevation, a unique forest developed. Tree species from both southern and northern forests are found. Elevations range from 1600 feet to 4700 feet atop Beartown Mountain. There is considerable water on the area; a 330-acre man-made lake, one major stream and several tributaries. The land that forms Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area was virgin forest until the late 1800s. Evidence of the narrow gauge railroad used while logging can still be seen, and some of the old rail bed is now part of the management area's present road system.¹

Channels State Forest

The Virginia Department of Forestry purchased what is now the Channels State Forest from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in early 2008. The purchase was made possible through funding from the Virginia Land Conservation Fund. TNC had purchased the property a few years earlier for the purpose of protecting and conserving this unique and valuable resource. Within the boundary of the 4,836-acre property is a 721-acre parcel that has been dedicated in perpetuity as the Channels Natural Area Preserve under the provisions of the Natural Area Preserve Act of 1989. The preserve is to be managed by the Department of Forestry in partnership with the Department of Conservation and Recreation.²

Trails

Appalachian National Scenic Trail

The Appalachian National Scenic Trail is a continuous, marked footpath extending approximately 2,180 miles from Katahdin, Maine to Springer Mountain in Georgia, along the crest of the Appalachian mountain range. In 1968, Congress established a national system of trails and designated the Appalachian Trail and the Pacific Crest Trail (in the west) as the initial components. Virginia has the longest section of the Appalachian Trail, with about 536 miles. Approximately 1.2 miles of the trail lies within the corporate limits of the town. Usage has increased tremendously since the 1966 Act of Congress designating the area around Damascus as a National Recreation Area. Surveys show that the greatest increase is among weekend and week-long hikers utilizing not only the Appalachian Trail, but also the many loop trails to which it connects.³

Virginia Creeper Trail

The Virginia Creeper Trail is a multi-use (footpath, bicycle, horse) trail that connects Abingdon with the Virginia-North Carolina border 1.1 miles east of Whitetop Station, Virginia. Its total length is 33.4 miles. From the Town of Damascus, Abingdon is 15.5 miles northwest and the Virginia-North Carolina line is 17.9 miles southeast. Approximately three miles of the Virginia Creeper Trail lies within the corporate limits of the town. The Town of Damascus owns the former railroad right-of-way from its corporate limits west to Drowning Ford. The town jointly owns the right-of-way (with the Town of Abingdon) from Drowning Ford west to Abingdon. Since its designation by Congress in 1985 as a National Recreation Trail, there has been a tremendous increase in its use. This has had a positive impact on tourism in Damascus and has led to substantial growth in town businesses, such as bike shuttle services.⁴

Iron Mountain Trail

The Iron Mountain Trail is one of many recreational trails in the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area and Jefferson National Forest. A trailhead is located at the end of Fourth Street in the Mock Hollow section of the town where the trail travels down Damascus Drive to join the Virginia Creeper and the Appalachian Trail within the corporate limits, continuing to Orchard Hill Road, where it reenters the woods and proceeds south into Tennessee.⁵

Trail at Beaver Dam Creek

The Trail at Beaver Dam Creek is the newest addition to Damascus' pedestrian and bicycle network. This rail-trail conversion will utilize what remains of the old Virginia-Carolina Railway and the Beaverdam Railroad railbed and corridor that ran from Damascus to Shady Valley, Tennessee; a link that was shut down in 1926. This trail has received funding through the Federal Highway Administration's T-21 program for trails, bicycles, and pedestrian facilities. The Trail at Beaver Dam Creek will be a multi-use, partially paved recreational trail with handicap accessible trail and fishing pier access. The trail will link to the Virginia Creeper Trail at Beaver Dam Creek where it heads south and

1 Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wmas/detail.asp?pid=21> (accessed February 2014)

2 Virginia Department of Forestry. <http://www.dof.virginia.gov/stateforest/list/channels.htm>. (accessed February 2014)

3 Town of Damascus Comprehensive Plan

4 Town of Damascus Comprehensive Plan

5 Town of Damascus Comprehensive Plan

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

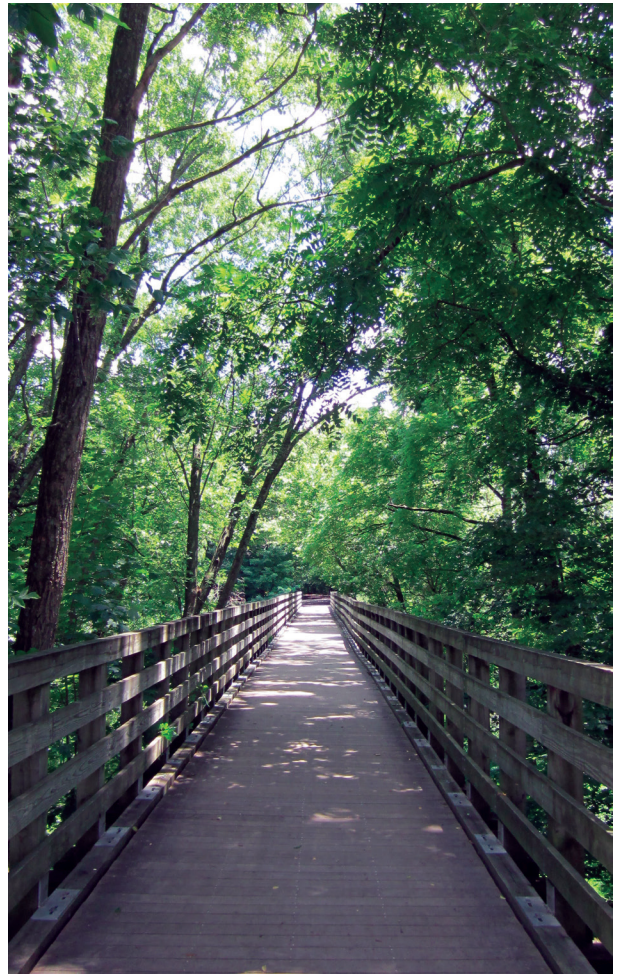
circles the old Smethport Extract Company (Bayer Chemical Corporation) site. The trail will then follow Route 716 to the Jefferson National Forest in Phase I, approximately 1 mile. Phases II and III of this project (if supported) will follow Route 716 into the Cherokee National Forest, Backbone Rock, and Shady Valley, Tennessee (TN Route 133), potentially converting nearly 15 miles of abandoned rail bed.⁶

Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail

The Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail commemorates the campaign leading to the Battle of Kings Mountain by following the historic route of the Patriot Militia Men of the Revolutionary War from Abingdon to the Battle of Kings Mountain, South Carolina. Currently, the National Park Service has placed signs along major roads, such as Hwy 11-E and Hwy 19-E depicting the Commemorative Motor Route of the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail. One sign exists on State Route 75 in Washington County. Route 75 is part of the Commemorative Motor Route. 11 miles of pedestrian trail are located in Virginia, three miles are within The Town of Abingdon, and eight are within Washington County. The Town of Abingdon has constructed a portion of the trail within the town limits and has developed the Abingdon Muster Grounds to serve as a trailhead and interpretive center.⁷

Virginia Salt Trail

The Virginia Salt Trail is a multi-use trail that connects the towns of Glade Spring, Virginia and Saltville, Virginia. The trail is approximately 8 miles long and runs along an old Norfolk and Western railroad bed between the two towns. The rail line was built in 1856 to haul salt out of Saltville and trains ran on the line until the 1980s.⁸



⁶ Town of Damascus Comprehensive Plan
⁷ National Park Service Website. http://www.nps.gov/hfc/pdf/ip/OVVI_LRIP.pdf (accessed March 2014)
⁸ Salt Trail Info, <http://vasalttrail.com/> (accessed March 2014)

Trail Opportunities

Several opportunities exist to add to Washington County's trail network. Potential new segments include:

Extension of the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail

Of the eleven miles of trail in Virginia, three miles have been constructed in Abingdon. An additional eight miles of trail could be extended south from Abingdon to the Tennessee state line to link to the work completed in Sullivan County, Tennessee. Ultimately, the trail could provide an interpretive and recreational link between Abingdon and Kings Mountain, South Carolina. The trail would cover 300 miles and traverse four states. The trail could provide a recreation facility for county residents as well as tourism and economic opportunities. There are only 30 National Scenic and Historic Trails in the United States. Examples of other trails include the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, Natchez Trace National Scenic Trail and Trail of Tears National Historic Trail.

Laurel Mountain Trail

Located in the Taylor District, an opportunity exists to connect the Virginia Creeper Trail to a network of trails created by the Johnson County Trails Association in Johnson County, Tennessee. The trail is approximately two miles in length and presents some engineering concerns that require additional study. It also could weave into the Mt. Rogers National Recreation Area. The connection could build and enhance tourism, recreation, and economic opportunities in the Damascus area.

Beaches to Bluegrass Trail

This statewide trail will stretch west to east from the Cumberland Plateau to the Chesapeake Bay. Comprised of many trails existing or underway, this network will connect the mountains to the sea and may stimulate tourism by linking a wide variety of resources and provide opportunity for new business. The Beaches to Bluegrass Trail system follows along multi-use, non-motorized, and motorized and includes several regional and local trails. In Washington County, the Creeper Trail, Mendota Trail, and would comprise the Beaches to Bluegrass Trail although a new section of trail is needed along the rail line or Wyndale Road to connect the two.¹

Mendota Trail

The Mendota Trail will connect the City of Bristol to the Mendota community along abandoned railroad corridor. The City of Bristol maintains ownership over a large portion

of the trail. A citizens group has formed to study the issue.

Trail Link between Emory, Glade Spring and Meadowview

Many community meeting participants suggested a trail link between Emory, Glade Spring and Meadowview. This would require study as there is no alignment currently proposed.

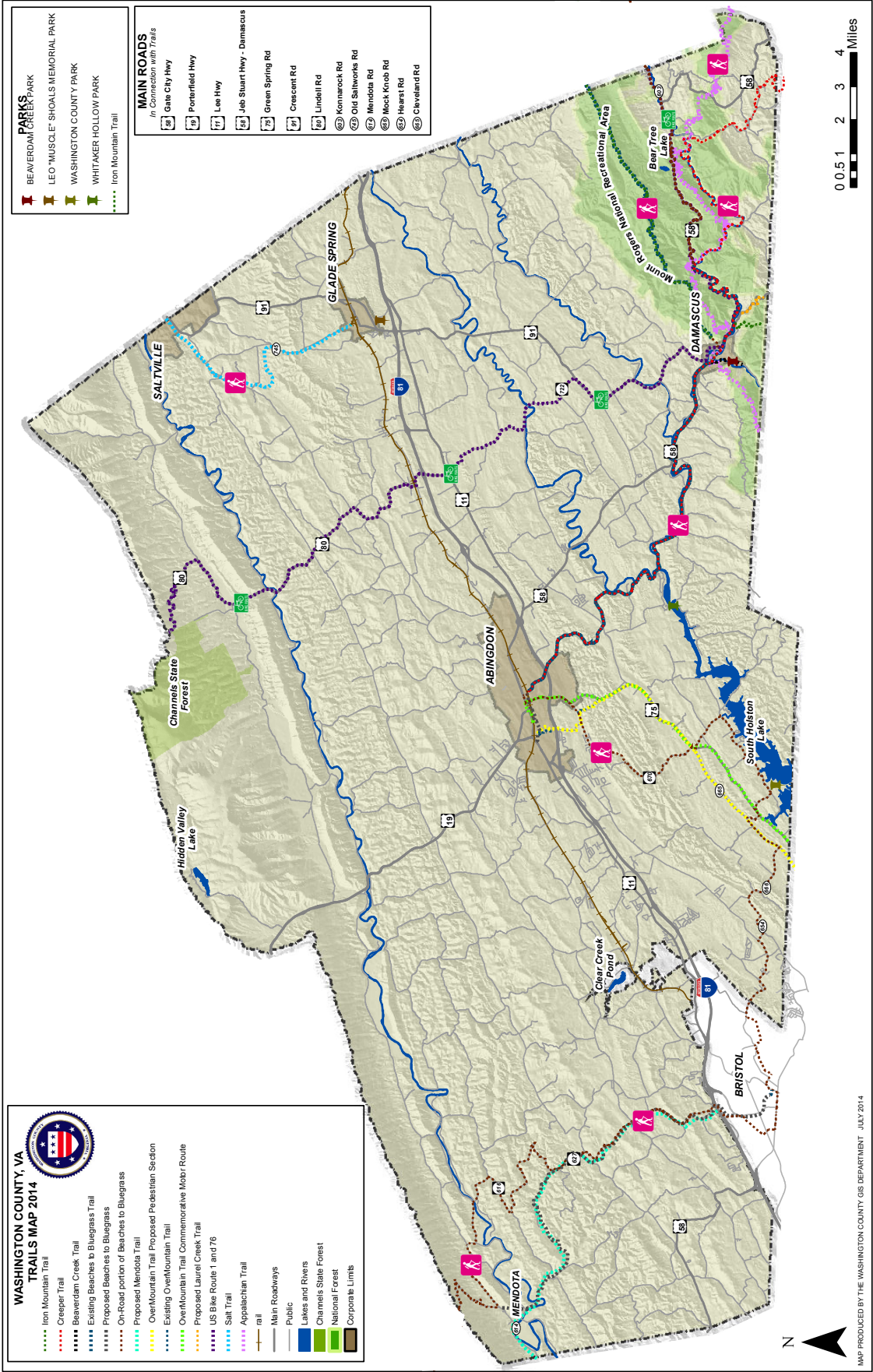
Extension of Virginia Salt Trail

The Salt Trail currently extends eight miles from Saltville to Glade Spring, north of the Town Square. The extension into the Town could build and enhance recreation in the northeastern section of the county and provide additional tourism or economic opportunity in the Glade Spring.

1

Beaches to Bluegrass Trail - Department of Conservation and..., http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational_planning/trailb2b.shtml (accessed February 2014).

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES



Cultural Resources

A Brief History of Washington County¹

Washington County was formed in 1776 from part of Fincastle County. It was the first area of the country named for General George Washington, before he was elected President in 1789. Washington County was formed from a long succession of splits from other counties. The parent county would consist of all territory originally encompassed in Augusta County, formed by the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1738; Botetourt County in 1770; Fincastle County in 1772; and Washington County established on December 7, 1776. Surrounding counties were created through the subdivision of the Washington County of 1776: Russell County in 1786, Lee County in 1793, Tazewell County in 1800, Scott County in 1814, Smyth County in 1832, Wise County in 1836, Buchanan County in 1858, Dickenson County in 1880.

Wild animals and Native Americans first inhabited Washington County and traveled the Great Valley of Virginia along an ancient trail known as Warrior's Path. The Warrior's Path would eventually become the Great Valley Road along which colonists traveled as they moved into the Great Valley. Highway 11 and Interstate 81 follow this same route today. Washington County was not inhabited by Native Americans though Cherokee and Shawnee had land that bordered the area, they maintained the Great Valley as a hunting ground for all tribes. Long Hunters, 18th-century explorers and hunters who made expeditions into the American frontier, such as John Findlay (Finley), James Patton, Stephen Holston, William Clinch, Charles Campbell, and Abrose Powell and Dr. Thomas Walker were early explorers of the county.

The first permanent settlers, which were of Scotch and Irish descent, began arriving in the area in the 1750s but returned to more populated areas due to the French and Indian War (1754-1763). In 1760, Colonel William Byrd and a regiment of men constructed Island Road from what is now Abingdon to the "Long Island of the Holston" in present day Kingsport, Tennessee. Island Road was a continuation of the Great Wagon Road which extended from Pennsylvania through the upper Tennessee Valley. Daniel Boone arrived in the area by 1775 and marked a trail into Kentucky known as the "Wilderness Road." This trail passed through Abingdon and for 20 years was the principal highway traveled by settlers in route to the West. A second wave of settlers arrived around the time in which Washington County was founded, in 1776. The new settlers traveled along the Great Wagon Road. Coming primarily from Northern Ireland (Ulster-Scots) and Germany, they heard of available land in the Great Valley and thousands came here to establish their homes.

Abingdon (first known as Wolf Hills and later as Black's Fort) was established as the county seat of Washington County. The community of Black's Fort was the first county seat of Washington County in 1776. Black's Fort was incorporated as the Town of Abingdon in 1778. In the summer of 1776, a war party of Cherokees entered Washington County, causing the settlers to seek refuge in Black's Fort, near the future town of Abingdon. Though the fort was not attacked, there were skirmishes between colonists and Cherokees.

In the fall of 1780, four hundred men from Washington County were mustered to travel under the command of Colonel William Campbell to overcome the British troops under the command of Patrick Ferguson. North Carolina and Tennessee militia from various counties joined with the Virginians to pursue the British and engage them at King's Mountain, South Carolina. The "Overmountain Men" were ordered to yell like Indians during this attack. The confusion that resulted from the yelling and exceptional marksmanship as well as other tactics helped cause the death of Ferguson and the defeat of his troops October 7, 1780. The defeat effectively halted the British Army in its westward campaign in the South.

The Notch

In 1665, an order was given to establish the new state line between Virginia and North Carolina, at the 36° 30' parallel. This line was to extend across the country.

In 1749, when Peter Jefferson, father of Thomas Jefferson, surveyed from about where Patrick County is today, he kept moving further north away from the assigned parallel till he discontinued his survey east of Damascus. In 1800, the northeast tip of the new state of Tennessee joined Virginia and North Carolina on Pond Mountain. Tennessee continues on that northern parallel in Washington County, until it jogs south but not to 36°30'. Three stories are told about the reason for the Notch: (1) the surveyor was inebriated (2) iron deposits in the Iron Mountains interfered with readings of the compass and (3) the strong will of Tennesseans prevailed.

¹ Information for this section was taken from the Washington County and Washington County Historical Society websites. <http://www.washcova.com/residents/about-washington-county>, <http://hswcv.org/history.html>

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Following the Revolutionary War, wilderness was turned into farmland and villages, new roads were built, and schools and colleges were established. By 1803, salt was being extracted in Saltville from underground deposits, some of which are within the present boundaries of Washington County. Emory and Henry was founded in 1836. Waterpower, harnessed by the combination of springs and elevation provided in the area, made for milling grains and for sawing lumber from the abundant stands of trees. The railroad arrived in 1856 creating new towns and improving travel in the area. Communities along the main route from Washington Springs to Goodson (now Bristol) included Glade Spring, Emory, Meadowview, Abingdon, Fractionsville, Wyndale and Wallace.

One rail line went from Glade Spring to Saltville by way of Litz, Keywood and Clinchburg; another rail line extended from Bristol to Mendota; another headed southeast from Abingdon to West Jefferson, North Carolina through of Watauga, Barron (now Alvarado), Delmar, Drowning Ford Station, Hellena, Damascus, Laureldale, Taylors Valley, Creek Junction, Cant Work and Green Cove.

Washington County sided with Virginia and the Confederacy during the Civil War (1861-1864). Though the county experienced no battles, a company of Federal troops passing through town in December 1864, burned buildings used by the Confederacy. Washington County, like much of the South, suffered following the Civil War. Eventually the economy was boosted by the development of the lumber industry, agriculture, coal mining industry in neighboring counties, and tourists coming to the country to escape the heat of summer. (Washington County Historical Society website)

During the 19th and 20th century, tobacco and farming were primary activities in Washington County. Manufacturing became a heavy economic activity in Washington County resulting from the construction of Interstate 81. A 52 mile stretch of Interstate was completed from Bristol to five miles east of Marion by November 1963. Interstate 81 had major impact by improving access to the county and stimulating economic growth. In recent years the county has gained recognition as a tourism destination due to its historic towns and buildings, cultural attractions such as the Barter Theatre, Martha Washington Inn, the Virginia Highlands Festival, the William King Museum, and recreational opportunities provided by the Virginia Creeper Trail and state parks.



Emory and Henry College, founded in 1836, was listed on the National Register in 1989.

Washington County Communities of Historical Importance

Abingdon

In the County Seat, history can be found within the record books of the Washington County Courthouse, in the cemeteries dating before the Revolution, in the homes throughout the historic district, and dedicated markers. One historic house constructed in 1832 was the home of Brigadier General Francis Preston. After General Preston's death the Holston Conference of the Methodist Church acquired the property. On March 15, 1860 classes began in Martha Washington College for women, the first such recognition of Martha Custis, the wife of George Washington. The Civil War interrupted classes while a hospital temporarily occupied the College. After the Civil War, classes resumed and continued until 1931.

Damascus

Recipients of Revolutionary Land Grants were some of the earliest settlers in the southeastern part of Washington County. Even though Daniel Boone was born in Pennsylvania and moved with his father's family to the Yadkin River in North Carolina, he played an important part in future migrations by other Mocksville, North Carolina residents. These residents, who followed the Daniel Boone Trail to Kentucky and beyond, were so pleased by the conditions in the valley carved out by the Beaver Dam Creek and the Laurel Creek that they stayed in what would later be named Damascus.

Emory

The village of Emory developed around the perimeter of Emory & Henry College for men, founded in 1836. Named for Bishop John Emory of the Methodist Church and Patrick Henry, the famed Virginia patriot and political leader, the college was planned by the Rev. Mr. Creed Fulton and Tobias Smyth, whose log cabin was moved from its original location to the campus, where it can be seen today. In 1861, all the students withdrew to join the army; and the main building became a hospital. In 1922, women were admitted to the college, which continues to be co-educational.

Glade Spring

Incorporated in 1875, Glade Spring is centered by a thriving town square. Glade Spring's railroad depot was initially called "Passawatamii," an Indian word meaning "here is the trail." Glade Spring may owe its name to a single spring at the head of the Old Glade Spring Presbyterian Church. The town square has seen significant investment in recent years and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2013.¹



Glade Spring, VA

Konnarock

The community known as Konnarock lies in the far southeast corner of Washington County. Logging of the virgin timber in the valley and up the sides of White Top Mountain by the Hassinger Lumber Company from 1906 to Christmas Eve, 1928 provided a boom economy in the form of new homes, company buildings and sawmills, and a railroad spur to an existing line. After all the large timber was gone, the town reverted to being a remote village of people who love

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Southwest Virginia Crossroads, Joe Tennis, page 74.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

to live at the north base of White Top Mountain.

Meadowview

"Meadow View" prospered as a railroad town in the early 1900s and was incorporated in 1914, but its government only lasted a few years. Meadowview's town square has been revitalized and is home to a restaurant, shops and a health clinic and community center.

Mendota

The community in the northwest corner of Washington County took the name given the area by native people, because the name means "bend in the river." For the five eastern tribes who fished the river and hunted the woods, Mendota was an excellent place to meet. High on the cliffs, there are overlooks for viewing the river in both directions. When settlers moved in they found that the soil in this valley was rich for farming.



Meadowview, VA

Saltville

Part of a sea was captured in the valley near the northeast corner where Washington County borders Smyth County. This salty lake attracted birds and animals, then hunters of various tribes, then a surveyor Charles Campbell who was granted 330 acres including the remaining lake and swamp by King George II in 1748. Settlers and soldiers traveled to "The Lick" to purchase salt, the product of crystallization during boiling of the salty water. When spring rains and melting snows raised the level of the North Fork of the Holston River, flat bottom boats were used to carry salt to Chattanooga and beyond. From 1893 chemical factories provided jobs, while sadly polluting the rivers. Discovery of Woolly Mammoth remains has led to further paleontological digs and the Museum of the Middle Appalachians.

National Register of Historic Places

The county possesses historic resources from different significant periods. These nonrenewable resources yield unique information about our past. Although many have been discovered, there are undiscovered cultural resources throughout the county. In addition to those listed on the National Register of Historic Places, historic homes, commercial buildings, mills, railroad resources, churches and cemeteries are scattered throughout the county.

Thirteen sites located in Washington County are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources.

Washington County National Register listings include:

- Abingdon Bank
- Abingdon Historic District
- Baker-St. John House
- Brook Hall
- Crabtree-Blackwell Farm
- Edmondson Hall
- Emory and Henry College
- The Grove
- Mont Calm
- Moonlite Theatre
- Dr. William H. Pitts House
- Walnut Grove
- White's Mill
- Glade Spring Commercial District



Moonlite Theatre, photo from National Register Nomination Application

To be considered eligible, a property must meet certain criteria. The property must be associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; associated with the lives of significant persons in or past; embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or yield information important in history or prehistory.

Listings in the National Register can serve benefits to both the owner of the property and community. Listings can help build community pride in history and serve as tourism assets to help spur economic vitality. The related documentation that goes along with the nomination process can serve as educational tools to help the community understand why historic properties are important. Listed properties are also identified early in the planning process for federally funded and permitted projects as well as some state involved projects. Finally, listings to the National Register make applicable property eligible for grant funding or tax incentives. A listing on the National Register does not place restrictions on the property owner, nor does it preserve property in the future as a conservation easement would do. National Register status does not restrict the rights of private property owners in the use, development, or sale of their property, nor will it lead automatically to the creation of a regulated historic district.

The Virginia Department of Historic Resources administers the Virginia Landmarks Register, also established in 1966. The Landmarks Register is the state's official list of properties important to Virginia history. The same criteria are used to evaluate resources for inclusion in the state register as are used for the National Register.

The Abingdon Historic District is currently the only area in the county protected under a local historic preservation ordinance by the Town of Abingdon. At present, the Washington County Historical Society and individual, private citizens carry out historic preservation activities.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Significant field surveys have been conducted in Washington County by Vivian Coletti for the Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks. The results of this collection would be very beneficial for the county to obtain and map.

Scenic Resources

Washington County's scenic beauty includes mountains, rolling hills, water features, forests, farm land, and historic architecture. Scenic resources contribute to the county's desirability as a place to live; it enhances tourism opportunity, and represents our rural character.

The Virginia Outdoors Plan 2013 identifies several Washington County sites as scenic resources, including Whitetop Mountain, the Appalachian Trail, Mount Rogers and the Virginia Creeper Trail. As discussed in the Transportation Chapter, Route 75, from Abingdon to the Tennessee state line, and Route 58, between Abingdon and Volney, is potential Virginia byways segments.

In addition to scenic byways, potential exists for river segments in Washington County to be designated as state scenic rivers. Whitetop Laurel Creek from Green Cove Creek junction is Grayson County to Damascus has been evaluated and deemed to qualify for Virginia scenic river designation. Other river segments are potential scenic rivers and should be evaluated to determine suitability for designation:

- The North Fork of the Holston River from the confluence with Big Brumley Creek to the Tennessee state line in Scott County.
- The Middle Fork Holston River from Seven Mile Ford to South Holston Lake.
- South Fork of the Holston River from Sugar Grove to South Holston Lake.
- Big Brumley Creek from Hidden Valley Lake to its confluence with the North Fork of the Holston River.



North Fork of the Holston River, Mendota, VA
Photo courtesy of River Cliff Cottage.

If designated as a scenic river, certain parameters apply:

- Designation encourages protection and preservation of the river.
- Designation declares the protection of a river's scenic values to be a beneficial purpose of water resource policy.
- Designation allows for a local administering committee that can be appointed by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).
- Designation requires the Board of Conservation and Recreation, whose members are appointed by the Governor, to advise the Director of DCR on the federal, state or local plans that impact the designated river segment and give local citizens a voice in river-related issues.
- After designation, the General Assembly must approve construction of any dam that would result in an impediment to the natural flow of the river.
- For properties along designated scenic rivers, a special tax assessment may be given to reduce the tax liability, as valued by the State Land Evaluation Advisory Council, if adopted by the locality.

- The federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) recognizes Virginia's designated Scenic River System. This acknowledgement of the program ensures that the qualities of the designated river are considered during licensing or relicensing of federal projects on that river.
- Designation allows for lands along designated corridor to receive grant funds.

A designation process is required, initiated by Washington County, before any river segment would be considered as a scenic river.

Natural and Cultural Resource Objectives and Strategies

Guiding Vision Statements

RECREATION: **Washington County is a premier leisure and adventure destination.**

Washington County is the center of recreational diversity in Southwest Virginia. Many hiking and biking trails crisscross our beautiful county, including the Appalachian Trail, Virginia Creeper Trail, Transcontinental Bike Trail, and Daniel Boone Memorial Trail. The County offers many outdoor activities including camping, hiking, hunting, and fishing in the Jefferson National Forest, Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area, and nearby Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. Our high mountain streams and South Holston Lake offer excellent canoeing, kayaking, pleasure boating, and trout and bass fishing. The county is also the home of the Virginian Golf Course, a world-class golfing and gated residential community, along with many attractive public and private golf courses. Close proximity to the Bristol Motor Speedway offers the best of NASCAR - the ultimate venue in motor sports racing. Our regional sports complex accommodates all levels of field sport competition. Visitors to Washington County enjoy a variety of options for accommodations and dining ranging from charming bed and breakfast inns to internationally recognized four-star hotels.

ARTS, CULTURE & HISTORY: **Washington County is the champion of cultural heritage preservation and awareness.**

Washington County has a rich history of preserving and supporting its art, culture, and historical sites. The historic Barter Theatre, the state theater of Virginia, along with the William King Regional Arts Center and the Abingdon Arts Depot and many fairs and festivals attract visitors from all 50 states and many foreign countries. The Crooked Road, Virginia's Heritage Music Trail, runs through Washington County and Bristol, Virginia. Round the Mountain is a Southwest Virginia organization that promotes local crafts, which are featured in the Southwest Virginia Regional Artisan Center. Unique historic sites, colonial era architecture and a wealth of genealogical information attract many visitors to Washington County. Art galleries, cultural events, and historic sites are visited by groups representing many ages and points of origin, including public school students, senior citizens, and tour groups.

Objectives and Strategies

OBJECTIVE: **Identify, conserve, and protect natural resources and open spaces such as rivers, streams, creeks, forested and wooded areas, wetlands, floodplains, air and soil resources.**

STRATEGIES

1. Develop educational materials to encourage protection of ground and surface water resources and for the best management of storm water runoff.
2. Implement storm-water management program and continue erosion and sediment control program.
3. Partner with towns and/or other agencies and explore grant funding for a watershed study.
4. Include places on county property or parks for observing and learning about natural environments, such as geology, hydrology, landforms, wildlife, etc.
5. Collaborate with other agencies who provide technical assistance on natural resources such as the Holston River Soil & Water Conservation District, Washington County Cooperative Extension Office, Washington County Health Department and similar organizations to study information contained within the soil study.
6. Partner with regional localities and other agencies to explore grant funding or Department of Environmental Quality assistance with an air quality study.

OBJECTIVE: **Encourage voluntary easements, tax programs and scenic programs to promote natural and cultural resources in Washington County.**

STRATEGIES

1. Encourage use of voluntary conservation easements for lands that have agricultural, forestal, and scenic values.
2. Encourage purchase of development right programs by applying for grant monies to fund such programs.
3. Continue the Land Use Program as a tool to help conserve agricultural and forested land as well as land for open space.
4. Study the merits of designation in the Commonwealth's Scenic Rivers and Scenic Roads program.

OBJECTIVE: **Encourage new construction and development that utilizes best management practices and minimizes impact on natural resources.**

STRATEGIES

1. Encourage low impact and efficient development and construction techniques.
2. Encourage open space amenities in new subdivision design and study implementation of a density bonus program to reward developers for including open space in their design.
3. In conjunction with updates to the Zoning Ordinance, consider requiring stream buffers from the edge of wetlands and streams in new construction projects.

OBJECTIVE: **Explore opportunities for new trails and recreation amenities in Washington County.**

STRATEGIES

1. Partner with other localities, agencies, and organizations to study the feasibility of trail opportunities.
2. Expand and promote recreation uses in Washington County, such as; trails, public and private recreation facilities, and outdoor tourism uses.

OBJECTIVE: **Promote historically significant sites and structures and scenic views for the cultural, educational, and economic benefits they provide to county residents and visitors.**

STRATEGIES

1. Work with Washington County Historical Society and other history groups to promote and preserve historic resources in the county.
2. Develop and engage in heritage education programs that foster community pride and stewardship of the county's historic resources.
3. Develop and maintain a database of historic resources in Washington County.
4. Use GIS mapping to map location of all resources in the County and provide this information as a layer on the county's online GIS map.
5. Develop a driving tour of historic places in Washington County.
6. Assist homeowners and landowners with interest in nominating their properties to the National Register of Historic Places.
7. Promote voluntary measures for protection of historic and scenic resources.
8. Identify scenic views in Washington County and provide education as to their aesthetic, cultural, and economic value.