

# CHAPTER FIVE: OTHER PLANNING INITIATIVES IN THE BRNHA



## INTRODUCTION

The mission and activities of the BRNHA clearly touch a wide variety of resources, both those pertaining to the five heritage themes as well as other socio-economic resources. Numerous other organizations - including many of the BRNHA's current partners - are also engaged in activities that may affect these resources in some way. These diverse initiatives may be broadly characterized as:

- Initiatives targeting the management of heritage resources, especially those focusing on interpretation and preservation;
- Initiatives intended to promote tourism, including heritage tourism;
- Initiatives focusing on broader economic development goals; and
- Initiatives involving environmental and infrastructure planning, which relate to overall quality of life issues and can be important in mitigating the potential adverse environmental impacts of other activities.

These initiatives are too numerous for all to be discussed in detail. This chapter provides a summary of known planning efforts in the region. Appendix 2 provides a comprehensive list of other plans and studies, including the organization responsible for the planning initiative and pertinent dates.

The information should prove useful as the BRNHA identifies heritage resource needs and opportunities in the region and considers potential partners and projects that could be developed to satisfy those needs and opportunities. Local implementation partners may request BRNHA involvement on projects that they are initiating, in which case a local plan will inform the BRNHA of the details it might need before making a decision. The presence or absence of government

plans and studies or citizen driven initiatives can also be an indicator of a community's vision and its organizational, political, and financial capacity to successfully engage with the BRNHA on heritage-related activities. When presented with proposals, the BRNHA may elect to reference this chapter and Appendix 2 before committing human and financial resources. Because the Heritage Area designation is fundamentally associated with the NPS, it is important that BRNHA activities also be consistent with the management direction of the NPS units in the region. Consideration of these other initiatives can help reduce potential duplication of effort among organizations and maximize both the effectiveness and efficiency of partnerships and projects.

Already this information has proven beneficial in the environmental assessment (EA) process. It has been found that in some localities, there is a notable absence or lack of planning which may impede the ability of certain communities to manage well expected increases in population and development stimulated in part by heritage based tourism. The BRNHA may wish to invest some resources in the coming years on helping communities improve their capacity to plan for these changes. In other communities, plans do exist which may govern how some projects undertaken through BRNHA involvement will be executed.

## MANAGEMENT OF HERITAGE RESOURCES AND RELATED CULTURAL RESOURCES

A wide variety of governmental and nongovernmental organizations are involved in efforts to manage the natural and cultural resources of the region. Many of these predate the establishment of the BRNHA itself.

## Natural Resources

The federal agencies responsible for the extensive public lands in the region (including the US Forest Service and the National Park Service) are actively engaged in resource management and have long operated under management plans that guide their activities. Federal agencies that do not manage land in the region (such as the US Fish and Wildlife Service) also play a key role in natural resource issues. Additionally, many state agencies are engaged in resource management at a number of scales. For example: the NC Division of Parks and Recreation is directly responsible for the State Parks System; the NC Wildlife Resources Commission manages state fish and wildlife resources and has developed a Wildlife Action Plan; the NC Division of Water Quality has developed water quality plans for each river basin in the BRNHA; numerous local watershed plans have been developed in the region by the NC Ecosystem Enhancement Program.

Other ongoing efforts include programs such as the following:

- State agencies are working to preserve land through the Million Acre Initiative and One NC Naturally.
- Private land trusts are active in the protection of land and priority natural areas. Land trusts in the BRNHA include: Conservation Trust for NC; Blue Ridge Rural Land Trust; Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy; Piedmont Land Conservancy; Foothills Conservancy of NC; High Country Conservancy; Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust; Land Trust for the Little Tennessee; National Committee for the New River; Pacolet Area Conservancy; and the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy. These land trusts have formed a partnership called Blue Ridge Forever to collaborate on certain conservation priorities in Western North Carolina.
- Many other regional and national organizations are engaged in a variety of resource protection activities. Some of these include: WildSouth (formerly the

Southern Appalachian Biodiversity Project); the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition; Trout Unlimited; the Trust for Public Land; the Nature Conservancy; and the Conservation Fund.

## Cultural and Historical Resources

The North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office assists private citizens, private institutions, and government agencies in the identification, protection and enhancement of properties significant in North Carolina history and archaeology. Preservation North Carolina, a private, non-profit statewide organization, works to protect and promote buildings, sites, and landscapes important to the diverse heritage of North Carolina. The NC Arts Council promotes the appreciation and preservation of traditional craft, music and other arts by providing technical assistance and grants to non profit organizations and artists across the state.

Numerous organizations exist at the local and regional levels, including local Arts Councils, Heritage Councils, Historic Preservation Commissions and other private preservation societies and advocacy groups. These groups produce a variety of plans and surveys and most are active in every county in the region.

## Cherokee Heritage

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) is engaged in many activities to preserve important elements of tribal heritage and to interpret that heritage to the general public. Key organizations include the Tribal Historic Preservation Office and the Cherokee Preservation Foundation. The Cherokee Preservation Foundation works to improve the quality of life of the EBCI through a variety of avenues, including providing funding for the preservation, research, restoration, and/or development of the history, tradition, culture, language, arts, crafts, heritage and overall well-being of the Cherokee people.

## Agriculture

Initiatives in the area of farm land preservation and the promotion of agriculture include diverse governmental programs and private efforts. The purpose of the NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund of the NCDACS (<http://www.ncadfp.org/>) is to support the farming, forestry, and horticulture communities by: assisting with the purchase of agricultural conservation easements; funding public and private enterprise programs that will promote profitable and sustainable family farms; and funding conservation agreements targeted at the active production of food, fiber and other agricultural products. The North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation is a statewide nonprofit organization that actively promotes farm and rural issues through a variety of programmatic initiatives. Farm land preservation is a priority for many local land trusts, and support for mountain farming activities is also provided by regional organizations such as the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) and Carolina Farm Stewardship Association. ASAP has recently published a 325 page report on the potential for saving farms through local food production (<http://asapconnections.org/special/research/index.html>). Among the other relevant organizations are the NC Agricultural Tourism and Crop Diversification Program (NC State University Cooperative Extension Service) and national organizations such as the American Farmland Trust and the Conservation Fund.

## PROMOTION OF TOURISM AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

While one component of the BRNHA's mission is to promote heritage tourism in the region, it is important to recognize that there are many other local, regional and statewide organizations seeking to promote heritage tourism and tourism in general in Western North Carolina. Many of these efforts began well before the establishment of the BRNHA. Efforts focusing on other aspects of economic development such as industrial recruitment are common as well.

## State-Wide Programs

The Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development (DTFSD) of the NC Department of Commerce actively assists the state's tourism industry in promoting its services and attracting visitors. Services provided include helping to devise effective marketing strategies, providing research, community development programs and providing visitor facilities. The DTFSD operates a consumer website (VisitNC.com) where visitors planning a vacation to North Carolina can get travel information. The NC Mountains are actively promoted as a tourist destination.

The DTFSD also includes a Heritage Tourism Program. The Heritage Tourism and Community Development Program guides sustainable tourism development by cooperating with strategic partners to protect, preserve and promote the state's natural, historic and cultural resources (<http://www.nccommerce.com/tourism/heritage>). The five Heritage Tourism Development Officers working in the region and partnered with the BRNHA are a part of this program.

The NC Department of Commerce Division of Community Assistance (DCA) works to assist local communities in attaining economic prosperity by providing a number of resources, among them:

- Community Development Grants to improve infrastructure and meet other needs;
- Community planning programs; and
- Workforce development programs.

NC Rural Economic Development Center (<http://www.ncruralcenter.org>) is a state-wide nonprofit organization with the mission of assisting North Carolina's rural communities in planning, promoting and implementing sound economic strategies. All BRNHA counties other than Buncombe are considered to be rural. The Rural Center develops policy initiatives to promote economic development, provides grants and loans for local capacity building and engages in a variety of related activities.

## Regional Activities

AdvantageWest Economic Development Group (<http://www.advantagewest.com>), chartered in 1994, is Western North Carolina's regional economic development commission. AdvantageWest is a non-profit public-private partnership whose primary focus is marketing the North Carolina mountains to corporations seeking to relocate or expand within the region as well as improving the quality of life in the region through activities such as filmmaking, entrepreneurship and tourism.

HandMade in America has been working since the 1990s to implement environmentally sustainable economic solutions that emphasize the craft industry, enhance hand crafting opportunities in the marketplace, and develop entrepreneurial strategies for the region's crafts artisans.

The EBCI Office of Planning and Development seeks to promote economic growth and business development in tribal areas. EBCI efforts include furtherance of tourism through the promotion of a variety of cultural sites and events, as well as promotion of other activities, such as gaming at the casino in Cherokee, which is a popular tourist destination in the region.

## Other Activities

A variety of economic development and promotional activities on the part of local governments, private companies and others are underway in the region. For example:

- Local Chambers of Commerce spend considerable resources on economic development issues, including the promotion of tourism;
- Virtually all counties in the region have a local Economic Development Commission;
- Economic development issues are an important component of the work of the six regional councils of government operating within the BRNHA;
- Institutions of higher education are involved in research and service activities to assist with development of the region's economy (e.g. the Small Business Center at Asheville- Buncombe Technical Community College; the Center for Applied Technology at Western Carolina University);
- Extensive advertising is undertaken by major private attractions in the region such as the Biltmore Estate, Grandfather Mountain, Tweetsie Railroad, and the Nantahala Outdoor Center, as well as by smaller destinations;
- Developers of subdivisions and homes in the region engage in extensive marketing throughout the country of their properties and the region itself.

The activities of the BRNHA operate within the broader context provided by these wide-ranging initiatives. The BRNHA can provide a coordinating presence to help focus and refine heritage preservation, interpretation and development in the region. However, the broader tourism promotion and economic development efforts summarized above far exceed BRNHA activities in scale and are unlikely to be readily influenced by BRNHA management.

## ENVIRONMENTAL AND INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING

Government agencies routinely perform many functions intended to establish a vision for the future, plan for changes in population and economic activity, develop and maintain infrastructure, and manage environmental impacts. While a comprehensive discussion of all of these efforts is beyond the scope of this chapter, some key activities include:

- State agency environmental regulations and initiatives, such as the water quality and erosion and sediment control programs;
- Federal natural resource management initiatives, such as those discussed earlier in this chapter;
- Local government environmental regulatory programs, such as stormwater management and erosion control programs;
- Local land use plans;
- Local recreational and open space plans;
- Water resource and wastewater planning efforts; and
- Transportation planning carried out the NCDOT and some local governments.

These initiatives can substantially affect the provision of public services in the region - including transportation, drinking water availability and waste disposal - as well as important quality of life concerns. These initiatives, and planning initiatives carried out by nongovernmental groups, can also be critical in preventing or mitigating the potential adverse environmental impacts of BRNHA actions and the related actions of other parties. Knowledge of the scope and nature of local planning activities within the BRNHA is therefore important to understanding the capacity of local governments to protect key resources as population growth and economic development occur, whether these take place as a result of BRNHA efforts or due to other tourism promotion and economic development efforts.

To provide a context for the environmental analysis to follow in Chapter 6, especially the analysis of cumulative impacts, Table 5-1 lists the extent of selected local planning initiatives by County. These initiatives were selected to provide an overview of planning activities relevant to three of the broad classes of environmental resources for which impacts are assessed in Chapter 6: cultural resources, natural resources and landscape/regional identity. Adverse impacts from tourism, population growth, development and related activities are more likely in those localities that lack the capacity to identify and protect key resources while guiding growth and development. While the existence of these plans is no guarantee that adverse impacts to resources will be avoided or mitigated, their presence does indicate that a locality at least has a structure in place to give attention to those resource issues. Furthermore, it may indicate that a financial capacity and political will exists in that locality to protect resources and guide growth and development in a manner that respects and attempts to avoid impacts. The following local planning initiatives are included.

### Capacity for Cultural Resource Management and Protection

- Preservation Commissions. The existence of municipal or county preservation commissions provides one indication of local concern for the protection of cultural and historic resources.
- Historical Societies. If a county is lacking an official preservation commission recognized by the state, a strong historical society can function, to some degree, in a manner that helps to raise awareness of cultural and historical sites and spur initiatives toward their protection.
- Architectural Surveys. Where municipal or countywide historic architectural surveys have been conducted it is more likely that the location of important historic and agricultural resources has been identified, a key step in the protection of those resources.
- Transportation Plans. Because state and federal funding is often associated with transportation improvements, local transportation planning usually acknowledges and



attempts to avoid causing adverse impacts to cultural and historic sites. While local transportation planning is listed under cultural resource management, it is also relevant to the management and protection of natural resources.

Capacity for Natural Resource Management and Protection

- Land Use Plans. Land use planning can provide a framework for communities to identify resource concerns and develop appropriate management strategies. While land use planning is listed under natural resource management, it is also relevant to the management and protection of cultural resources and landscapes.
- Erosion Control Programs. While NCDENR operates a state wide erosion and sediment control (E&SC) program, some local governments have established programs to enforce the state regulations, and in some cases to apply stricter local requirements. Local Erosion & Sediment Control programs provide opportunities for enhanced resource protection and are an indication of local capacity to address water and land resource protection.
- Park/Open Space Plans. These plans allow communities to anticipate recreation and open space needs, increasing the likelihood that these needs can be met as growth occurs.
- Natural Heritage Inventory. County level natural area inventories provide important data on the distribution of rare plants, animals and natural communities, information critical to the protection of these resources.
- Watershed Plans. The NCEEP, local governments and local watershed organizations have developed plans for numerous small watersheds in the BRNHA. These plans provide a framework for resource management in the applicable areas.

- Watershed Groups. The existence of local watershed organizations is one indication of local concern for natural resource issues and of the capacity of local residents to organize for resource management and protection.

Capacity for Landscape Resource Management and Protection

- Voluntary Farm Protection Districts. The establishment of local Voluntary Agricultural Districts provides recognition, and some level of protection, to ongoing agricultural operations and is indicative of local interest in the protection of farming activities.
- Nationally Listed Farms. Listing of farms on the National Register of Historic Sites indicates local interest in the identification and preservation of historic agricultural areas.
- Farmland Preservation Efforts. Listing in Table 5-1 of concerted farmland preservation efforts indicates a local interest in the identification and preservation of important agricultural areas.

*\* Though listed under natural resources, land use plans are also relevant to local capacity to manage landscape and cultural resource impacts.*

*\*\* Y (Yes) indicates that the specified plan or action has been recently completed or is underway. N (No) indicates that this has not occurred.*

*For Nationally Listed Farms and Preservation Efforts, the number given indicates how many of these elements exist in each county.*

*\*\*\* A 'Y' is given those counties that have a completed, published historic architectural survey. Some counties with an 'N' rating have had some limited reconnaissance survey performed. Additionally, within those counties with an N rating, there may be urban areas within that county that have conducted a comprehensive or reconnaissance level survey.*

Table 5-1:  
Indicators of Local Planning Capacity for Resource Management and Protection \*\*

COUNTY	RESOURCE CATEGORY												
	CULTURAL				NATURAL						LANDSCAPE		
	Preservation Commission	Historical Societies	Historic Architect. Surveys***	Transp. Plans	Land Use Plans*	Sediment & Erosion Control	Park/Open Space Plans	Natural Heritage Inventory	Watershed Plans	Watershed Groups	Voluntary Farm Protect. District	Nationally Listed Farms	Preserve Farmland Effort
Alleghany	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	1	0
Ashe	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	2	1
Avery	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	0	0
Buncombe	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	1	2
Burke	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	1	0
Caldwell	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	0	1
Cherokee	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	0	0
Clay	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	0	0
Graham	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	0	0
Haywood	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	1	1
Henderson	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	1	1
Jackson	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	0	0
Macon	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	0	1
Madison	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	1	1
McDowell	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	1	0
Mitchell	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	0	0
Polk	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	2	0
Rutherford	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	2	2
Surry	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	2	1
Swain	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	0	0
Transylvania	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	0	0
Watauga	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	2	2
Wilkes	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	1	0
Yadkin	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	0	0
Yancey	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	0	0
Qualla	Y	Y	Y	Y	No Data	No Data	No Data	Y	No Data	Y	N	1	0

## LISTING OF PLANS AND INITIATIVES

The discussion above was not intended to be comprehensive, but rather to summarize major planning initiatives and to provide some representative examples. Appendix 2 provides a more detailed listing of many of the plans and initiatives relevant to the issues discussed above. The items in Appendix 2 are organized into the following categories: a) land use and development; b) infrastructure; c) historic and cultural resources; d) parks and recreation; e) environmental and natural heritage; and f) NCDOT transportation improvements. Some plans could fit into more than one category. For instance, the Blue Ridge Parkway's Management Plan is concerned with almost all of these issues. Where this occurs, the plan is listed under one issue judged by the technical consultant and IDT to be most pertinent.

