



SOUTHWESTERN COMMISSION  
**COMPREHENSIVE  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
STRATEGY (CEDs)**



Southwestern NC Economic Development District  
125 Bonnie Ln, Sylva, NC 28779 | 828.586.1962

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# SUMMARY BACKGROUND

## WHY A REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY?

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy is a locally based, regionally driven planning effort to capitalize on the assets of the region to inform and strategically guide investment in a way that has the most positive impact on the citizens of the region. The benefits to this approach include having more of a voice as a region than as an individual community, the ability to achieve economies of scale needed to provide important services, the opportunity to build stronger partnerships across county lines and sectors through an intentional process of engagement, and the ability to coordinate strategically to achieve synergies and to avoid duplication of services.

Identifying the assets of the region as opposed to by individual counties provides a more efficient way to communicate these assets with partners at the state and federal levels. The population in North Carolina is 10.4 million people and over 20% of those live in Wake and Mecklenburg County; therefore, it is increasingly difficult for smaller, rural counties to have a voice in Raleigh or Washington D.C. But a region of 200,000 that speaks with one voice can have a greater impact and can convey a more consistent message to partners about the needs of the region.

Another reason for a regional plan is that some issues and opportunities are not bound by county lines. Twenty-two percent of workers in the region work in a county other than the one in which they reside, so if a company employing over 200 people moves in or out of a county this can have a significant impact on the citizens of the neighboring county. While individual counties may not have the capacity to conduct a rapid response effort to address the needs of laid off workers, the region is able to build that capacity and deploy it where it is needed. Working as a region enables rural communities to build capacity that it may not otherwise have by providing some greater economies of scale. It is these economies of scale that have historically led to regional consortiums to address childcare, mental health, and workforce and more recently to address the shortage of housing in the region.

A third reason to engage in a regional planning effort is the opportunity to engage with a variety of stakeholders from different backgrounds. The CEDS process brings together professionals from both the private and public sector and from different communities. It helps those in manufacturing gain a better understanding of the challenges faced in the education system or for those in government to gain a better understanding of the tremendous impact non-profit organizations can have in the region. It helps partners to get out of their silos and to have a more holistic vision of the issues faced by the region.

The fourth reason is the opportunity to better coordinate the region's resources. The CEDS can help to provide guidance for different partners who work in the region. Many funders want to know that projects are consistent with the goals and activities of the regional CEDS, the CEDS can serve to filter out projects that are duplicative or are not consistent with the goals of the region.

The CEDS process is critical for communicating with state and federal partners, creating the economies of scale needed to provide critical resources, engaging a variety of partners, and strategically coordinating partners.



[Regional planning meeting >](#)  
Photos courtesy of Kirsten Chang, Institute of Emerging Issues

## 2017–2021 CEDS REVIEW

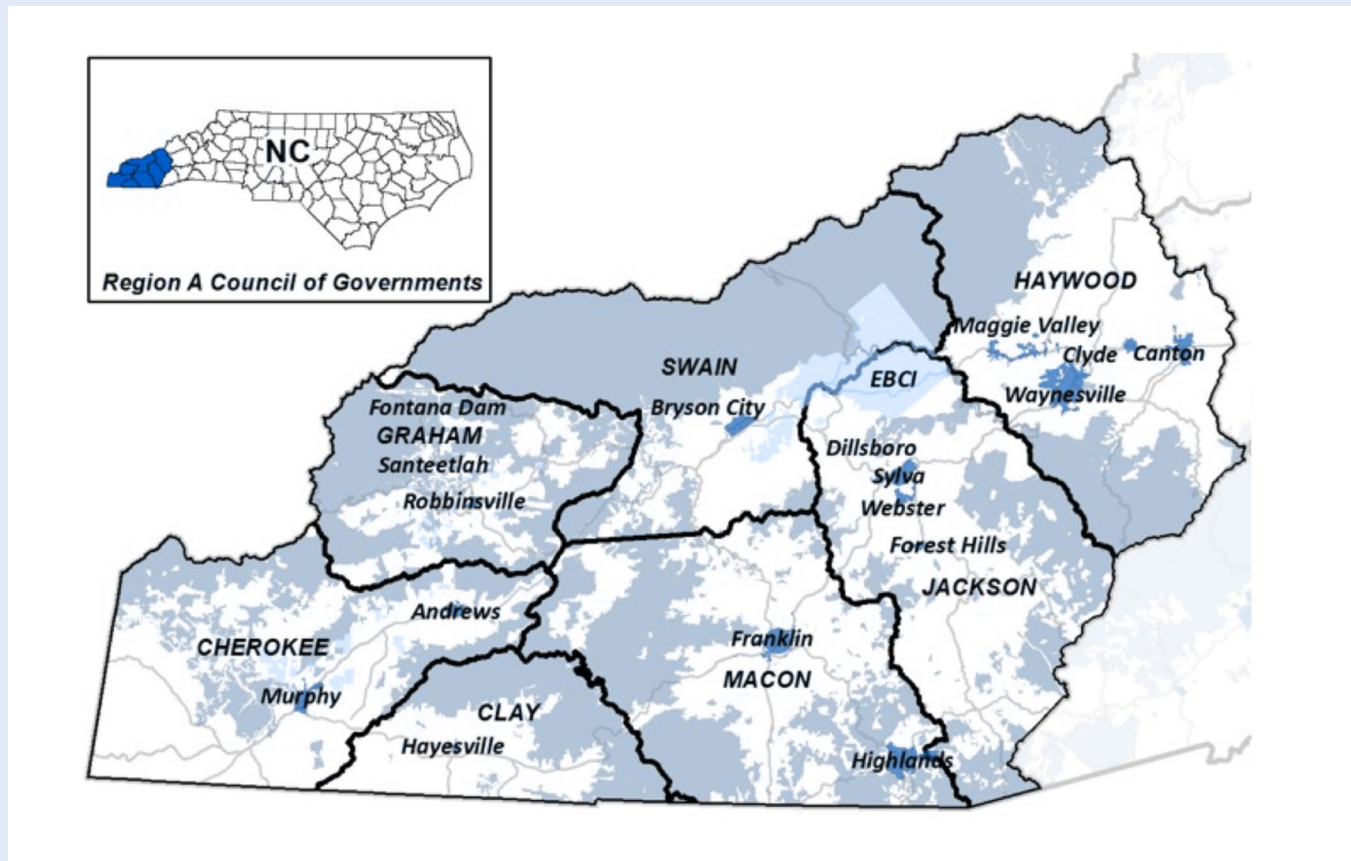
In 2017, the Southwestern Commission completed the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the region. The plan was divided into four key goal areas and below is a recap of some of the progress made by the Southwestern Commission and partners towards the goals during the last 5 years.

<b>01</b>   BUILD ON THE REGION'S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES AND LEVERAGE THE MARKET PLACE	The Southwestern Commission asset mapped the region's food resources and produced a series of four videos highlighting those assets
	The region underwent the CREATE Bridges planning process to support retail, accommodation, tourism and entertainment businesses
	A Business Retention and Expansion study was conducted to explore ways to better support small businesses in the region
	The Southwestern Commission Revolving Loan Fund was expanded by \$1.8 million
<b>02</b>   ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN A ROBUST REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE	Received over \$7M for broadband expansion to expand service to more than 3,500 homes
	A demand aggregation study of broadband access and an inventory of vertical assets was conducted for the region
	Through a collaborative design process involving multiple stake holder groups, design for Corridor K in Graham County was completed, and construction is expected to begin in October of 2022
<b>03</b>   CREATE REVITALIZED, HEALTHY, AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES	The Southwestern Commission worked with its member governments to create the Southwestern NC HOME Consortium to bring HUD HOME funds to the region
	Thirteen towns across the region created or updated land use plans
	The Southwestern Commission was awarded an ARC grant to assist Graham County with a feasibility study for a vacant downtown building
	Housing Studies were conducted for all seven counties identifying need by market segment
	The Southwestern Commission helped the Town of Sylva access funding to complete Wayfinding Signage
	Four projects in region were awarded funding through Opportunity Appalachia to cover pre-development costs on transformational re-development projects
<b>04</b>   DEVELOP TALENTED AND INNOVATIVE PEOPLE	The Southwestern Commission worked with partners to secure funding to address childcare workforce issues in the region
	The Southwestern Commission partnered on an ARC funded project to assist those in recovery with rejoining the workforce
	The North Carolina Rural Center held its Homegrown Leaders Leadership program at Western Carolina University

**STRATEGY  
COMMITTEE**

Josh Carpenter	Regional Industry Manager, NC Economic Development Partnership
David Francis	Economic Developer, Haywood County
Tommy Jenkins	Director, Macon County Economic Development Commission
Scott Sutton	Dean of Workforce Innovation/Economic Development, Southwestern Community College
Paul Worley	Cherokee County Economic Development, Tri-County Community College
Matt Saenger	Sales Manager Enterprise Services, Balsamwest
David Garrett	Workforce Development Director, Southwestern Commission
Lisa Leatherman	District Manager, Duke Energy
Rich Price	Executive Director of Economic Development and Regional Partnerships, Western Carolina University
Sarajane Melton	Area Agency on Aging Director, Southwestern Commission
Russ Seagle	Executive Director, The Sequoyah Fund
Tiffany Henry	Director, Jackson County Economic Development Commission
Sandra Dennison	Director, Small Business and Technology Development Center at Western Carolina University
Rose Bauguess	Rural Planning Organization (RPO) Coordinator, Southwestern Commission
Aaron Patton	Director of Customized Training, Tri-County Community College
Russ Harris	Executive Director, Southwestern Commission
Bernadette Peters	Business Owner/ Director of Main Street Sylva Association
Ann Bass	Appalachian Regional Commission
Deborah Porto	Haywood County Broadband Committee
Becca Scott	Director of Community and Economic Development, Southwestern Commission
Caroline Lafrienier	Southwestern NC HOME Consortium, Southwestern Commission
Laura Lauffer	Project Director, Empowering Mountain Food Systems
Ashley Swanger	Small Business Center Director, Haywood County
Angie Knight	School Superintendent, Graham County Schools
Christine Laucher	Southwestern Regional Manager, Mountain BizWorks
Daniel Allison	Graham County Travel and Tourism
Doug Burchfield	Dean of Workforce and Industry, Haywood Community College
Elaine Eisenbraun	Executive Director, Nikwasi Initiative
Emma Beasley	Student, Graham County Schools
Nathanael Shope	Student, Graham County Schools
Marne Harris	Small Business Center Director, Southwestern Community College
Jackie Gottlieb	Executive Director, Hinton Rural Life Center
Linda Lamp	Business Services Representative, Southwestern Commission

# REGIONAL PROFILE



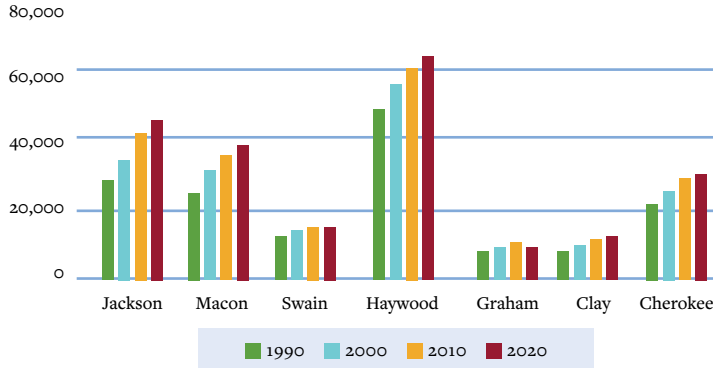
## GEOGRAPHY

The Southwestern Commission is a Local Development District comprised of seven counties (Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, and Swain) in the westernmost portion of North Carolina, also known as Region A. The region is mostly rural and forested, with a total land area of 3,098 square miles. More than 70% of the region is public land, which is substantial, compared to other areas in the eastern US. This public land includes two National Parks (The Great Smokies and the Blue Ridge Parkway), two National Forests (Nantahala and Pisgah), four TVA lakes (Appalachia, Chatuge, Fontana, and Hiwassee) and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

The Blue Ridge Mountain Range on the east and the Unaka Mountains on the west form the north-south boundaries of the Southern Highlands with various ranges, including Balsam, Snowbird, Nantahala, and Cowee ranges forming the cross bars. Between these transverse ranges are valleys of varying length and width, each with its own river system. The more mature valleys have broad floors and gently rolling to hilly slopes. The gently sloping river plains have supported most of the district's population in the past, and they can be expected to do so in the future. Although all but the most severe of topographic limitations can be overcome, the expense of overcoming them can be prohibitive. The problems of development on slopes in excess of 30% limit any major construction. Approximately 66% of the district's land (both public and private) have slopes over 30%.

Region A is located within the geographic center of an immensely growing region. New York, Chicago, Tampa, New Orleans, the Mississippi River, the Great Lakes, and the Gulf of Mexico are all within 500 miles. The Economic Development District (EDD) is also within a day's drive of 75% of the nation's population.

### REGION A POPULATION TRENDS, 1990-2020



### REGION A ETHNICITY BREAKDOWN 2019-2020

White	91%
American Indian	5%
Black	1%
Asian	1%
Other/Two or more races	2%

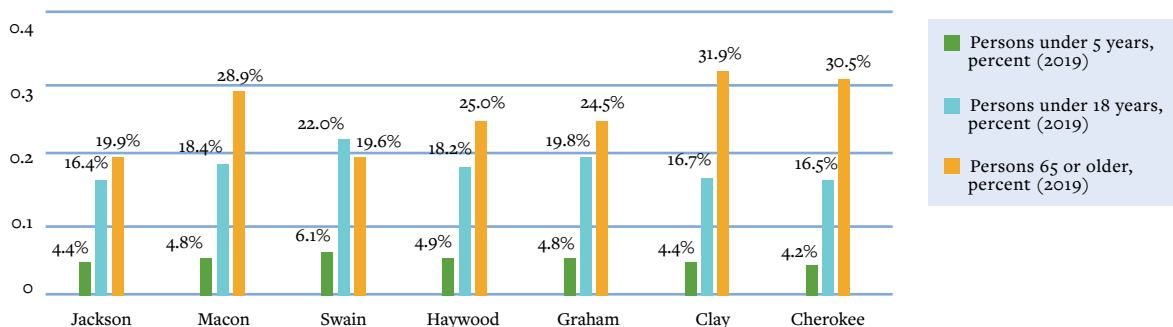
## POPULATION

In 2010, approximately 194,100 people resided within the Southwestern Commission region which includes the seven western most counties in North Carolina, the 17 municipalities there within and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. The region has experienced 5.4% growth in population over the last 10 years and now has a population of 204,312. Macon County experienced the highest rate of growth during the last decade at a rate of 9.37% and Graham County experienced the only decline in the region by a rate of -9.35%. The significance of this is that it’s the first time that any county in the region has seen a decline in its population in the last 30 years.

Seventy-seven percent of the region is rural, compared with 41% of the state population. The region’s density is 63 persons per square mile of land. Large parts of the region are made up of restricted public land, so the adjusted population density for the region is approximately 215 people per square mile.

The most significant demographic trend in the region is the “graying” of the region. Only 18% of the region is under the age of 18 (compared with 21% in 2017) and 1 in 4 is over the age of 65. This trend has an impact on every aspect of life in the region. This demographic shift will have an impact on demand for housing, transportation and mobility, and basic service delivery. It has also had an impact on the workforce of the region. The COVID-19 pandemic saw many people at or near retirement age retiring earlier than planned either due to the loss of a job or unwillingness to risk adverse health effects of the pandemic. As of July 2022, the unemployment rate for the region was 3.5% (3,213 unemployed) while there are 3,973 job openings, leading to an overall lack of available workers. Businesses across the region have struggled to find workers and some restaurants have closed due to the inability to find workers or have had to scale back workers due to the shortage.

### REGION A AGE BREAKDOWN





## INCOME AND POVERTY

The all-persons poverty rate across Region A is higher than both the state average and the national average. Additionally, the median household income is also significantly lower than both the state and national averages. The table below shows the median household income and poverty rate in all seven western counties and Region A for both the current period and for 2017 when this report was last published. According to these statistics, over 15% of Region A residents live in poverty. Trends from 2017 to 2020 show that Median Household Income for the region increased by \$2,460 with all but Clay County showing increases and five out of seven counties showing decreases in the poverty rate.

COUNTY	MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (2017)	MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (2020)	PERSONS IN POVERTY (2017)	PERSONS IN POVERTY (2020)
Jackson	\$46,113	\$46,820	15.40	16.60%
Macon	\$42,456	\$45,703	16.14	12.90%
Swain	\$41,407	\$45,554	15.60	13.90%
Haywood	\$47,872	\$51,548	7.78	13.60%
Graham	\$37,748	\$42,207	17.80	16.60%
Clay	\$43,684	\$42,160	17.80	16.40%
Cherokee	\$38,283	\$40,793	17.00	15.10%
Region Average	\$42,509	\$44,969	15.36	15.01%
North Carolina	\$49,547	\$56,642	14.70	12.90%
United States	\$61,136	\$64,994	13.40	11.40%

**REGION A**

**POPULATION**  
206,105

**MEDIAN AGE**  
47.3

**% WITHOUT INTERNET ACCESS** 25.5%

**AVERAGE MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME\***  
\$44,969  
\*Numbers current as of June 2022

**AVERAGE PROPERTY TAX RATE\***  
.47%

**MEDIAN HOME VALUE**  
\$170,571

**TOP 5 SECTORS**

1. Leisure & Hospitality
2. Retail Trade
3. Health Care
4. Educational Services
5. Government and Public Administration

**EDUCATION STATISTICS**

**% HIGH SCHOOL OR HIGHER**  
86.81%

**% BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER**  
23.27%

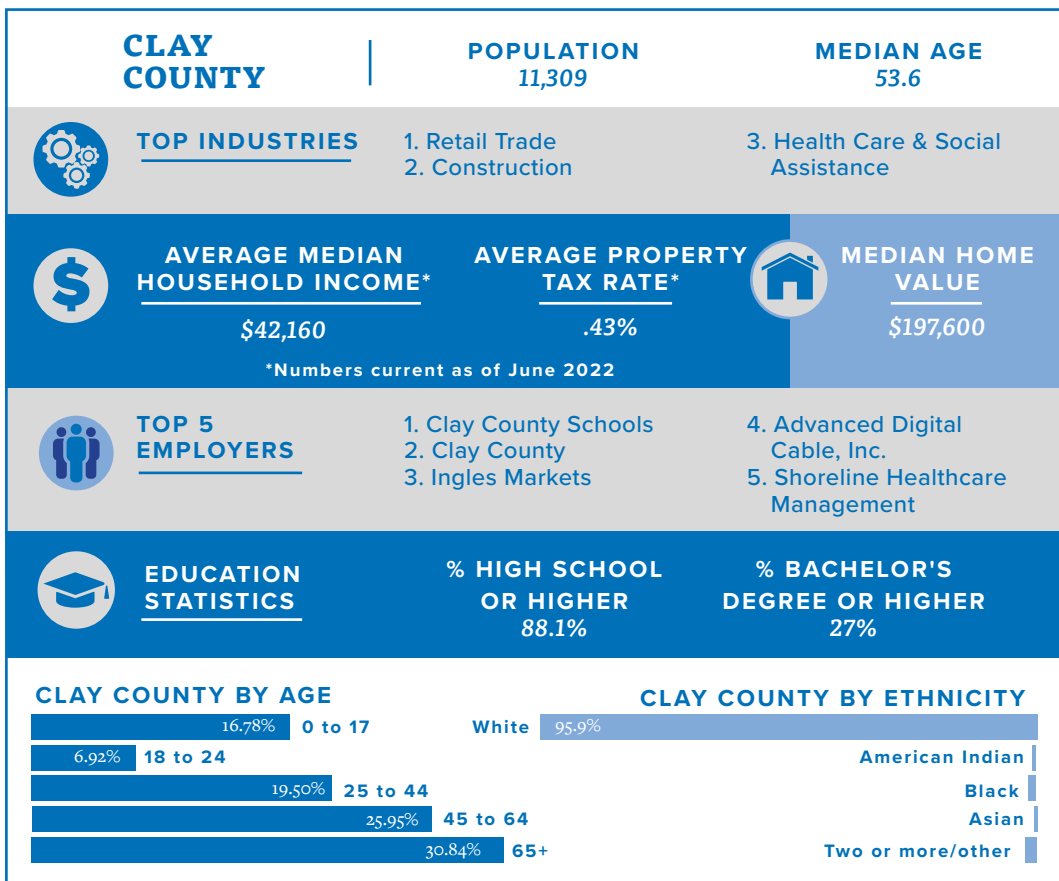
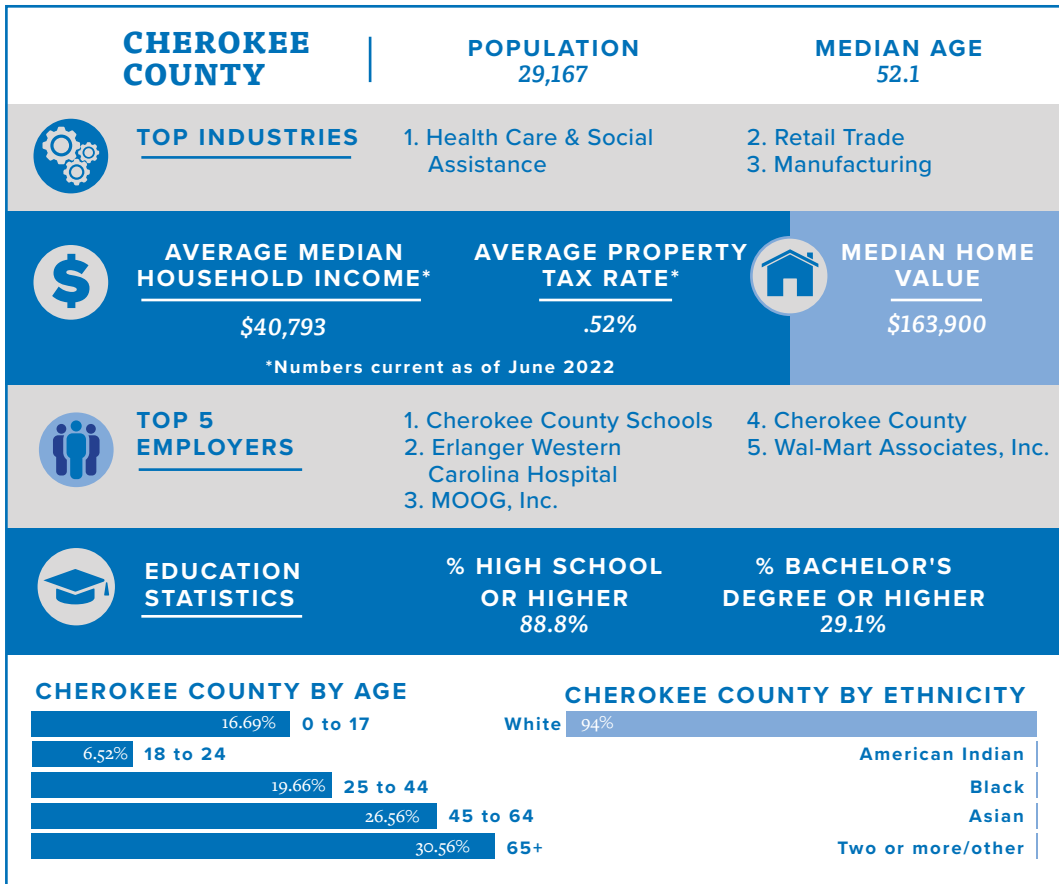
**REGION BY AGE**

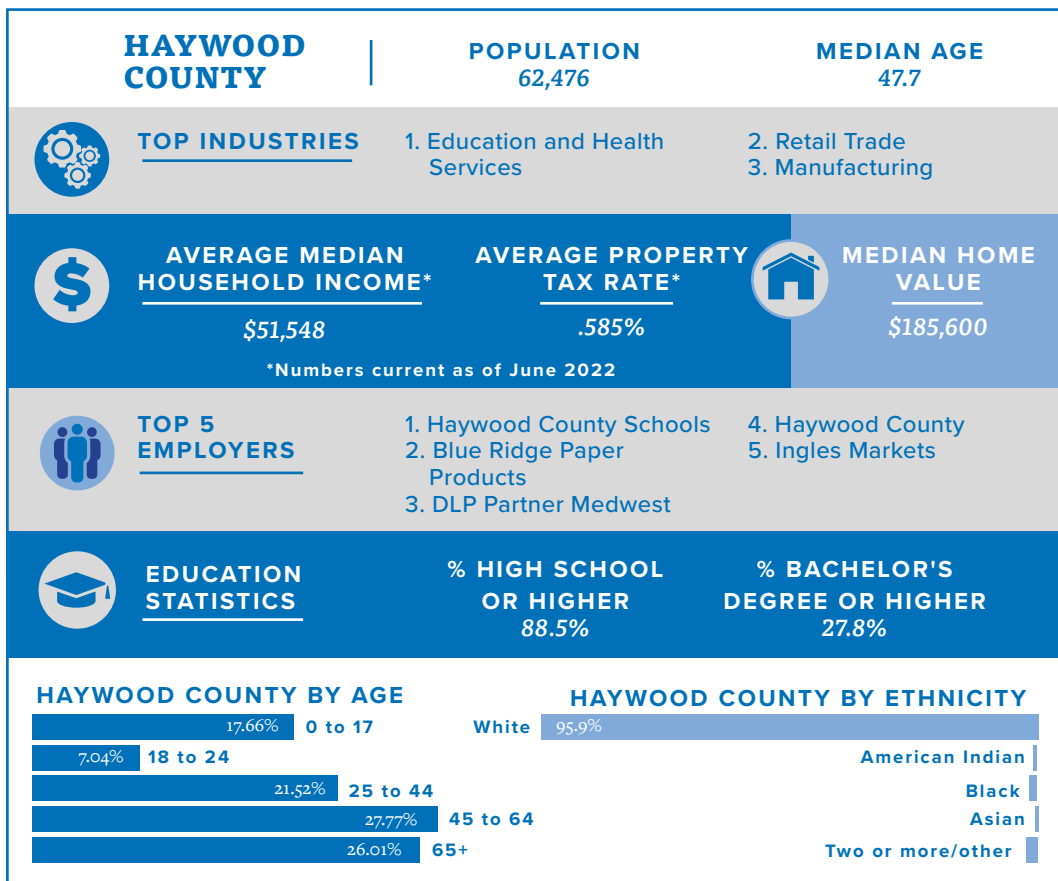
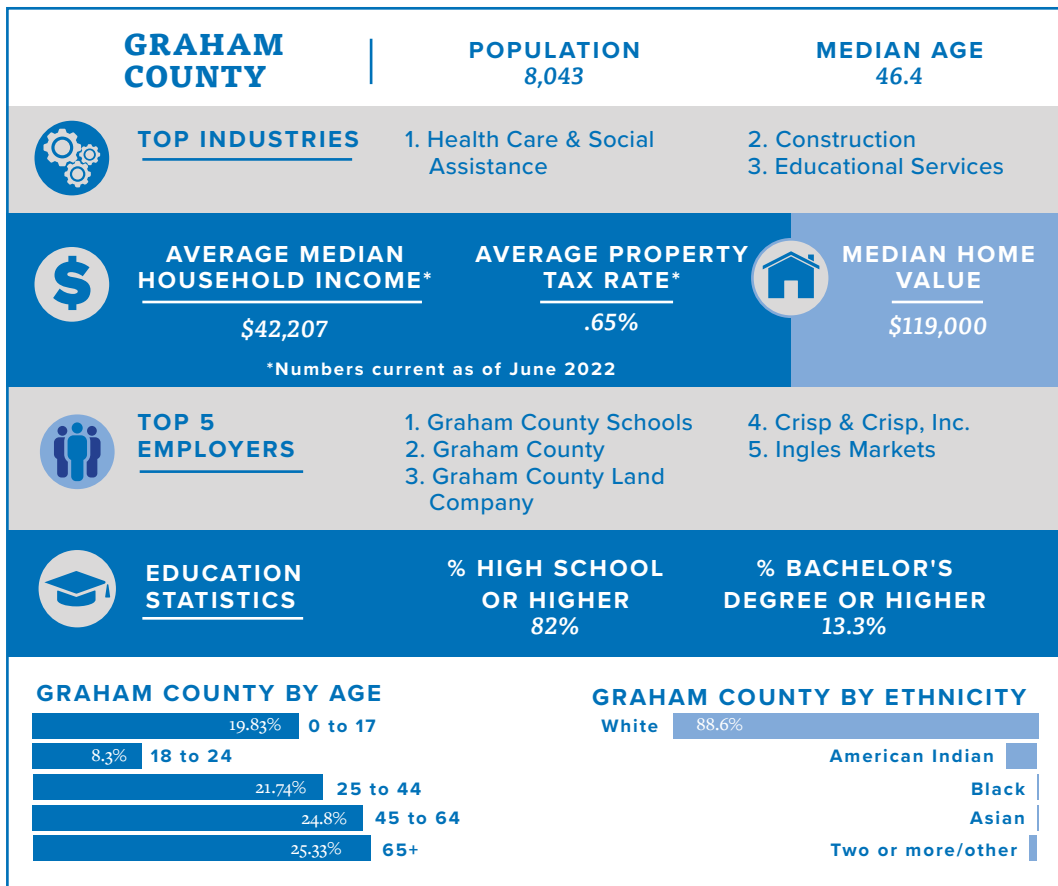
	17.79%	0 to 17
	9.65%	18 to 24
	21.27%	25 to 44
	25.44%	45 to 64
	25.84%	65+

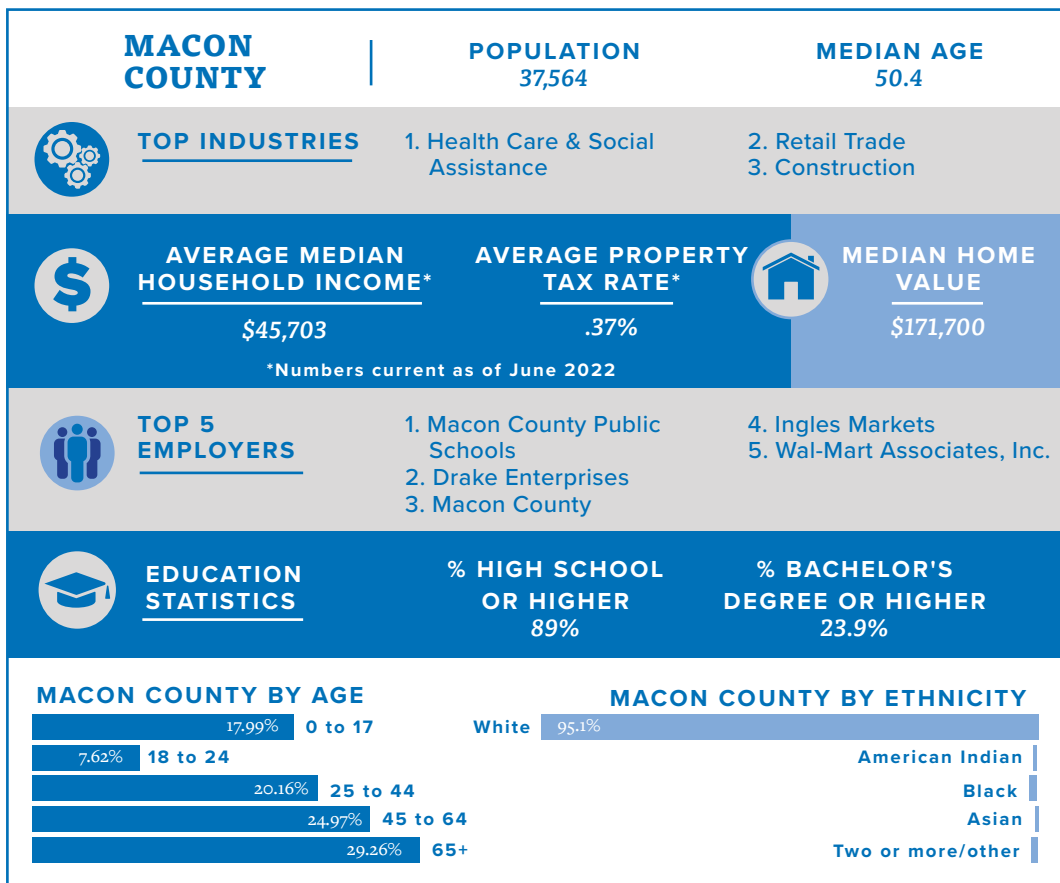
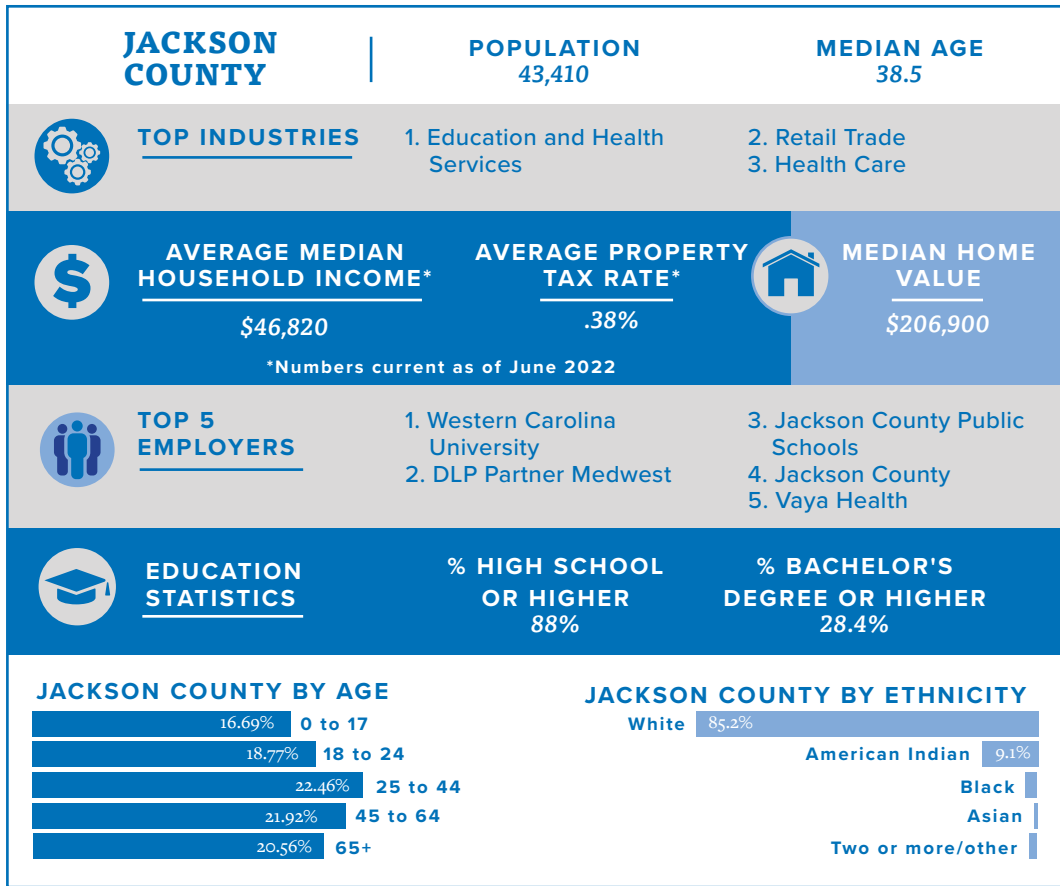
**REGION BY ETHNICITY**

	90.65%	White
		American Indian
		Black
		Asian
		Two or more/other

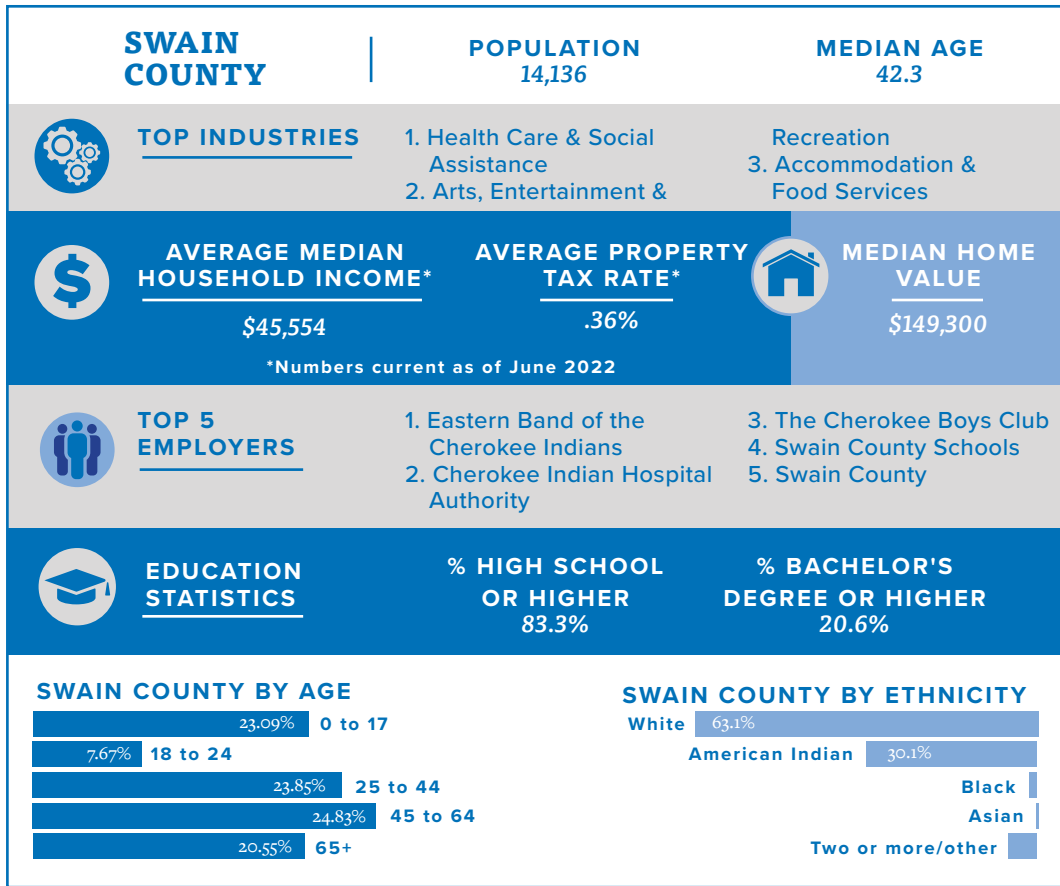












Group of students



Regional planning meeting



< Regional planning meeting  
Photo courtesy of Kirsten Chang, Institute of Emerging Issues

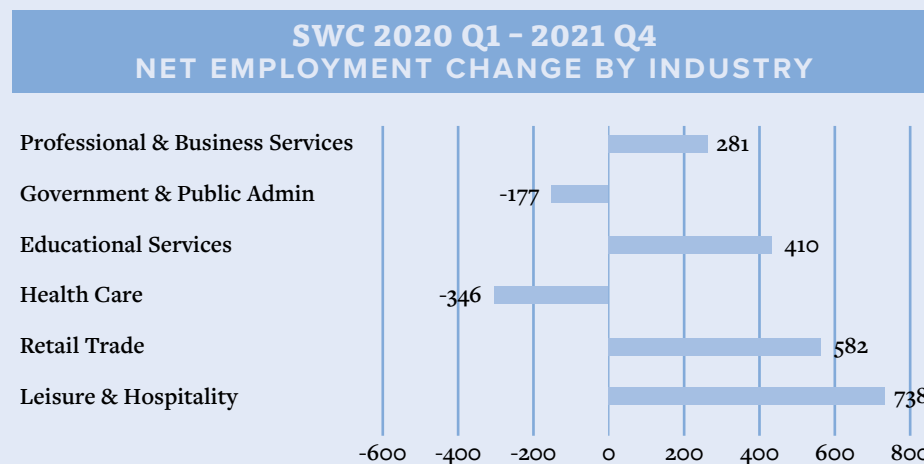
# ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

## INDUSTRY CHANGES

In 2021, the Southwestern Commission contracted with Syneva Economics to conduct an Economic Analysis of Region A.

Six industries emerged as the primary industry sectors in the region. These were *Health Care, Government and Public Administration, Retail Trade, Educational Services, Professional and Business Services, and Leisure and Hospitality*. In March of 2020, Region A, like the rest of the nation, was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. From pre-pandemic through June of that year, the region experienced 8.5% job loss and in Leisure and Hospitality (the region's largest and fastest growing sector) 18.6% of jobs were lost. However, of the Top 6 sectors in the region, only two of them failed to regain the lost jobs over the next 24 months. During the time span from Quarter 1 of 2020 (prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic) to Quarter 4 of 2021, two industries saw net decreases in overall employment. These industries were *Government and Public Administration* (loss of 177 jobs) and *Health Care* (loss of 346 jobs).

Other industries saw increases in net employment. Significantly, the *Leisure and Hospitality* industry saw an increase of 738 jobs between the 2020 Q1 and 2021 Q4. Another significant gain was in the *Retail Trade* industry, which saw a net increase of 582.



These changes are encouraging, as those industries with the greatest increases in net employment were those that had some of the greatest losses in the early days of the pandemic. In fact, according to the report done by Syneva Economics in 2020, the Leisure and Hospitality industry accounted for the largest share of estimated job losses in Region A. It is noteworthy then, that this industry demonstrates the greatest growth in the region and the time of this report.

In 2022, Lilly Consulting and Shining Rock Ventures looked at more long-term trends in the regional economy related to occupation. It is also notable that food service, construction management, drivers/sales staff, and computer support were the major opportunity gains over the 2010-2020 period, with construction labor, gambling dealers and home health workers close behind.

## INDUSTRY OCCUPATIONS — TOP 2010-2020 'GAINS'

DESCRIPTION	EMPLOYED IN INDUSTRY GROUP (2010)	EMPLOYED IN INDUSTRY GROUP (2020)	CHANGE (2010-2020)	% CHANGE (2010-2020)	% OF TOTAL JOBS IN INDUSTRY GROUP (2020)	MEDIAN HOURLY EARNINGS	TYPICAL ENTRY LEVEL EDUCATION	TYPICAL ON-THE-JOB TRAINING
Cooks, Fast Food	134	648	+514	384%	1.0%	\$10.32	No formal educational credential	Short-term on-the-job training
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	632	1,074	+442	70%	1.7%	\$11.01	High school diploma or equivalent	Short-term on-the-job training
Construction Laborers	315	613	+298	95%	1.0%	\$15.26	No formal educational credential	Short-term on-the-job training
Cashiers	2,261	2,514	+253	11%	4.0%	\$10.50	No formal educational credential	Short-term on-the-job training
Stockers and Order Fillers	725	952	+227	31%	1.5%	\$12.57	High school diploma or equivalent	Short-term on-the-job training

Perhaps equally telling, the major losses in terms of occupation opportunities in the 2010-2020 period were in machining and heavy industry (likely a result of increased investment in 'co-botting' and similar technologies) executive support services (similarly, likely a result of technology-enhanced moves away from a reliance on human staff support), and mental health and substance abuse workers.

## INDUSTRY OCCUPATIONS — TOP 2010-2020 'LOSSES'

DESCRIPTION	EMPLOYED IN INDUSTRY GROUP (2010)	EMPLOYED IN INDUSTRY GROUP (2020)	CHANGE (2010-2020)	% CHANGE (2010-2020)	% OF TOTAL JOBS IN INDUSTRY GROUP (2020)	MEDIAN HOURLY EARNINGS	TYPICAL ENTRY LEVEL EDUCATION	TYPICAL ON-THE-JOB TRAINING
Executive Secretaries and Executive Administrative Assistants	405	101	-304	-75%	0.2%	\$23.55	High school diploma or equivalent	None
Miscellaneous Assemblers and Fabricators	455	258	-197	-43%	0.4%	\$14.81	High school diploma or equivalent	Moderate-term on-the-job training
Nursing Assistants	1,002	859	-143	-14%	1.4%	\$13.30	Postsecondary nondegree award	None
Food Preparation Workers	670	527	-143	-21%	0.8%	\$10.84	No formal educational credential	Short-term on-the-job training
Waiters and Waitresses	1,521	1,388	-133	-9%	2.2%	\$9.60	No formal educational credential	Short-term on-the-job training

In addition to identifying key industries and businesses, regional workforce flows remain essential to understanding where the working population of Region A counties are going, especially regarding occupation and education. The following data snapshots and highlights demonstrate a significant internal workforce flow among the member counties of Region A, and a significant and ongoing 'export' of workforce into the Asheville-Buncombe opportunity corridor – particularly in higher-wage employment and younger and likely more highly skilled employees.



## WHERE THE WORKING POPULATION WORKS

COUNTRY	LIVE / WORK IN SAME COUNTY	INFLOW INTO COUNTY	OUTFLOW OUT OF COUNTY	INFLOW / OUTFLOW (NET)
Cherokee	3,429	2,496	3,877	-1,391
Clay	520	810	2,078	-1,268
Graham	877	667	1,322	-655
Haywood	8,363	5,861	11,709	-5,848
Jackson	3,704	5,229	5,897	-668
Macon	5,380	3,386	5,357	-1,971
Swain	1,145	1,931	2,193	-262
TOTAL	23,418	20,380	32,433	-12,053

For each individual county in Region A, summary workforce flows are as shown. While each county has inflow and outflow within the region, the Net Inflow / Outflow demonstrates clearly that all the Region A counties are in the ‘workflow negative’ category or ‘losing’ the full local economic impact potential of people that live in the region and decide to work elsewhere.

Analyzing commuting patterns of the region’s workforce, about 56,000 people live in the 7-county region and about 44,000 people work in the 7-county region. This means that roughly 12,000 people are commuting to work outside of Region A on a daily or near-daily basis (note that these patterns are not fully updated to reflect the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on workflow patterns but are the latest available benchmark).

Tektone Sound Signal ribbon cutting



Farmers Market

# EDUCATION

## REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Educational attainment within the region is consistent across all seven counties. The percentage of those with at least a high school diploma ranges from 82% (in Graham County) to 89% (in Macon County) with the regional average being 86.81%. The percentage of those with at least a bachelor's degree ranges from 13% (in Graham County) to 28.4% (in Jackson County) with the regional average of 23.27%.

### K-12

North Carolina has a centrally controlled public education system, with the state bearing most of the operational costs of schools. Local boards are charged with providing capital facilities, most maintenance and utilities, and operating supplements to enhance local education.

The region's public schools all have high completion rates, and most schools in the region are performing at what the State of North Carolina considers to be a "C" or above in their "report card" rating system. The percentage of students meeting grade expectations on end of year assessments range from 35% (in Graham County) to 56% (in Haywood County) with the regional average being 46.19%. The percentage of students meeting, and exceeding grade expectations ranges from 18.6% (in Graham County) to 37.7% (in Haywood County) with the regional average being 18.53%.

## HIGHER EDUCATION

There are approximately 15,000 students enrolled in institutions of higher education throughout the region. Approximately 32% of these students are enrolled in one of the region's three community colleges: Haywood Community College, Southwestern Community College and Tri-County Community College. These colleges offer associate, vocational and continuing education programs and they regularly collaborate with the local Workforce Development Board to match students with employment opportunities in the region.

The other 68% of students attend Western Carolina University, a constituent institution of the University of North Carolina system. This university offers undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degree programs. It is integrally connected to the region as an educational and economic resource and brings a multitude of cultural and enrichment opportunities to the region through theater, music, and other events which are often open to the public.

### EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

COUNTY	HIGH SCHOOL OR HIGHER	BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER
Jackson	88.00%	28.40%
Macon	89.00%	23.90%
Swain	83.30%	20.60%
Cherokee	88.80%	21.90%
Graham	82.00%	13.30%
Clay	88.10%	27.00%
Haywood	88.50%	27.80%
Region Average	86.81%	23.27%

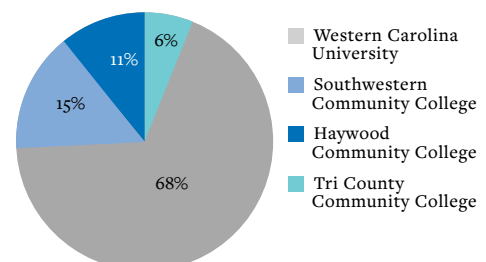
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020

### MEETING GRADE EXPECTATIONS

COUNTY	% MEETING GRADE EXPECTATIONS
Jackson	41.5
Macon	49.5
Swain	44.9
Cherokee	46.3
Graham	35
Clay	49.8
Haywood	56.3
Region Average	46.19

Source: NC Department of Public Instruction, 2020-2021

### HIGHER EDUCATION IN REGION A BY NUMBER OF STUDENTS, 2020-2021



# ANALYSIS OF COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS & OPPORTUNITIES

## SWOT ANALYSIS









SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis is a method to assess the region’s advantages, challenges, and future opportunities. Strengths are the factors that give the region a competitive edge. Weaknesses are the factors that hinder economic development of the area and that need to be overcome. Opportunities are conditions that make future economic development plausible. Threats are unfavorable conditions that may lead to the economic decline of the region. The SWOT analysis reflects the ideas and beliefs of multiple stakeholders, including public administrators, elected officials, educators, business owners, and citizens about what is important in Region A.

 <h3>STRENGTHS</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appalachian Resilience</li> <li>Collaboration/Partnerships</li> <li>National Parks</li> <li>Access to Higher Education</li> <li>Quality of Life</li> <li>Natural Resources</li> <li>Entrepreneurial Spirit</li> <li>Mountain Traditions</li> <li>Generational Conservation</li> <li>Artisan Presence</li> <li>Agriculture</li> <li>Homegrown Talent</li> </ul>	 <h3>WEAKNESSES</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of Broadband Access</li> <li>Lack of Cell Coverage</li> <li>Addiction Issues</li> <li>Access to Healthcare</li> <li>Lack of Child/Elder Care</li> <li>Lack of Affordable Housing</li> <li>Lack of Opportunity</li> <li>Under-Resourced Hospitals</li> <li>Lack of Public Transportation</li> <li>Lack of High-Paying Jobs</li> <li>Workforce Issues</li> </ul>
 <h3>OPPORTUNITIES</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital Inclusion</li> <li>Recruiting and Developing Workforce</li> <li>Tourism</li> <li>Retain Youth</li> <li>Higher Wages</li> <li>Increase Philanthropy</li> <li>Cooperative Health Insurance</li> <li>CTE Programs</li> <li>Balance Housing/ Jobs/Labor Between Counties</li> </ul>	 <h3>THREATS</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Land Access</li> <li>Pressure/Overuse of Natural Resources</li> <li>Climate Change</li> <li>Aging Infrastructure</li> <li>Addiction</li> <li>Income Inequality</li> <li>Digital Exclusion</li> <li>Housing Availability</li> </ul>

## ACTION PLAN

Based on the input gathered from stakeholders in the region, the 2022 CEDS Action Plan for Region A seeks to address the key issues facing the region. Key Focus areas for this plan are shown in the following graphic.

### KEY FOCUS AREAS

							
BROADBAND	HOUSING	WORKFORCE	INFRASTRUCTURE	CHILDCARE	HEALTHCARE	COLLABORATION	OUTDOOR RECREATION



## Goal 01

**“BUILD A STRONG REGIONAL ECONOMY THAT IS IN ALIGNMENT WITH THE CULTURE AND ASSETS OF THE REGION”** focuses on supporting the region’s businesses with a focus on Small to Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMES), which are businesses with the potential grow to over 10 employees and \$1M per year in revenue. These businesses make up over 82% of the region’s businesses. This plan focuses on outreach to those businesses as well as helping to build a more integrated entrepreneurial ecosystem while focusing on sectors of strength or those with high potential such as outdoor manufacturing, agriculture, tourism and retail.

## Goal 02

**“BUILD THE INFRASTRUCTURE REQUIRED TO ENSURE ROBUST GROWTH THAT IS AT A SCALE APPROPRIATE TO THE REGION”** focuses on the infrastructure investments required for communities to prosper going forward. Continuing to modernize the regions roadways while looking for opportunities to encourage other modes of transportation is a priority while looking towards future trends and technologies like electric vehicle charging stations. This goal also includes a focus on continuing to expand deployment of broadband infrastructure while also working at the individual level to give community members the tools they need to take better advantage of technological advances that can improve the quality of life in the region. This goal will also focus on infrastructure improvements in specific sectors like outdoor recreation that can help to drive tourism, improve quality of life in the region, and ultimately help in attracting workers to multiple sectors.

## Goal 03

**“DEVELOP TALENTED AND INNOVATIVE PEOPLE TO ADDRESS THE REGION’S WORKFORCE AND LEADERSHIP NEEDS”** focuses on the people who will help to make this plan a success and move the region forward. The region, like much of the country, is experiencing a tight labor market with a regional unemployment of only 3.5% and key sectors (such as healthcare) currently having over 600 open jobs in the region. This goal presents strategies for supporting the region’s leaders by supporting efforts to develop regionally based leadership programs as well as pursuing innovative strategies like job sharing to augment the capacity of local governments and organizations.

## Goal 04

**“BUILD COMMUNITIES THAT ARE ECONOMICALLY VIBRANT WITH OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL WHO WISH TO LIVE AND WORK IN THE REGION”** focuses on community development issues affecting the vibrancy of the region’s communities such as a lack of housing and the opioid crisis. This goal will also focus on ways to support the region’s downtown corridors which often serve as economic engines in rural counties.

## ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

As goals and objectives were developed, there was a focus on assessing the vulnerabilities of the region’s economy and pinpointing strategies that would address those vulnerabilities. The US Economic Development Administration defines economic resilience in terms of the ability to recover quickly from a shock, the ability to withstand a shock, and the ability to avoid the shock altogether. Activities that economic development professionals have at their disposal take two forms. Steady-state initiatives are long-term activities that seek to the make the region more resistant and able to withstand economic shocks. Economic diversification or ensuring redundancy in telecommunications networks would be an example of a steady-

state activity. Responsive activities refer to the ability to respond to economic development shocks. Establishing a process for regular communication, monitoring, and updating of business community needs and issues to be used after an incident is an example of a responsive activity.

This section takes a brief look at just a few examples of threats that the region faces both from natural disasters and from economic shifts. By looking at threats the region has faced over the last decade and the way that these events impacted the region, this update will seek to highlight ongoing activities that address regional economic resiliency and create goals and strategies to address regional weaknesses.

In March of 2020, Region A, like the rest of the nation, was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. From pre-pandemic through June of 2020, the region experienced 8.5% job loss and in Leisure and Hospitality, (the region's largest and fastest growing sector), 18.6% of jobs were lost. However, of the Top 6 sectors in the region, only two of them failed to regain the lost jobs over the next 24 months.

Impacts from COVID-19 hit the hardest in communities with the most economic distress. Graham County saw overall employment increase from Quarter 1 of 2020 to Quarter 1 of 2022 with most of that in hospitality and tourism while construction lost 13% of jobs and Healthcare lost 4%. So, while the region has regained the jobs lost at the beginning of the pandemic, most of those have been made up in the lower paying sectors with the higher paying jobs being slower to come back.

Also, like much of the country, the pandemic has exacerbated a workforce shortage. The seven western counties have been the fastest aging region in North Carolina for the last decade and when COVID-19 hit, many workers chose to retire as opposed to returning to jobs that were now unstable or where they felt unsafe. By May of 2020, the unemployment rate for the region had risen to 14.6%. As of June 2022, that number was down to 3.5%. With most of the workforce employed, there were many jobs left unfilled across the region. Haywood Regional Medical Center had 172 open positions, Western Carolina University had 161, Midwest had 80, and Harrahs Cherokee Casino had 110. Overall, the region had a shortage of 473 registered nurses.

Another outcome of the pandemic was to highlight the lack of affordable broadband access in the region. While many school systems across the country were able to immediately move to synchronous virtual instruction for students, many school systems in this region were communicating with students by having them drive by the school to pick up flash drives, return home to complete homework, and then turning the flash drives back in to be graded. A similar situation existed for working adults, as well, with many being unable to do their jobs remotely due to a lack of internet service.



This region of the state has also had its experiences with natural disasters. On August 17, 2021, Tropical Storm Fred struck Haywood County leaving six people dead and a cleanup bill of over \$4 million. In the Cruso community, 232 homes were damaged, 140 failed, and 164 were destroyed. The floods closed roads, destroyed bridges, and closed businesses. Some areas received 11.2 inches of rain in a short period of time impacting dozens of businesses, including farms, in the region. The impact on schools is expected to be over \$10 million and the Town of Canton lost many of its facilities including town hall, the police station, and the fire station.

The region has also experienced the economic shock of losing major employers. Graham County was home to Stanley Furniture for over 30 years and it formed the cornerstone of the local economy. In a county with a population of 8,800 and total workforce of 3,500, Stanley Furniture at its peak had 700 employees or 11% of the Graham County workforce. When Stanley Furniture closed in 2014, the plant employed 400, and as a result of the closing, unemployment for the county shot up to 10.6%, affecting not only those working at the plant but also those who provided services to those employees. The Stanley building was occupied partially for four years by Oak Valley Hardwoods, but employment peaked at 35 and it closed its doors after four years.

Conmet, manufacturer of commercial vehicle truck components, moved to Swain County in 1995. The 300,000 square foot facility was home to 270 employees when it announced that it was closing in 2017. Some employees were offered employment at the newly renovated plant in Canton 50 miles away. In 2020, Conmet laid off 100 workers at its Canton plant.

Strategies to make the region more resilient to these kinds of economic shocks include efforts to diversify the economy, expand broadband infrastructure, increase disaster preparedness and address the shortage of workforce across the region.



<b>GOAL 1</b>	<b>BUILD A STRONG REGIONAL ECONOMY THAT IS IN ALIGNMENT WITH THE CULTURE AND ASSETS OF THE REGION.</b>
<b>Objective 1</b>	Serve the needs of existing high-potential Small to Mid-sized Enterprises (SMEs) already in the region (Resilience-Steady State)
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Catalog and keep a profile of each high-growth potential business in the region
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Provide active, outbound outreach and support for target businesses and proactively inquire about their current and upcoming needs
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Seek to assist target businesses in addressing needs (growth capital, infrastructure, supply-chain partners, etc.)
<b>Strategy 4</b>	Work with counties and towns to develop economic development sites so that there is opportunity for businesses to expand or relocate to the region
<b>Performance Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of jobs created/retained</li> <li>• Percent increase to business sales revenue year over year</li> <li>• Number of “At Risk” Businesses retained and rescued</li> <li>• Amount of additional business investment leveraged</li> <li>• Number of new economic development sites developed</li> </ul>
<b>Lead Agency Partners</b>	Southwestern Commission, Mountain West Partnership, County Economic Developers, Small Business Centers, Small Business Technology Design Center
<b>Objective 2</b>	Build a stronger and more integrated entrepreneurial ecosystem (Resilience-Steady State and Responsive)
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Create a “Smart Business Concierge” for supporting the growth of an effective enterprise ecosystem
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Facilitate alignment and strategic alliances between small business resource providers in the region
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Creation of dynamic innovation hubs in major regional towns with co-working and event space to serve as a one-stop business support resource
<b>Performance Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of clients served through the “Smart Business Concierge”</li> <li>• Number of clients served through the One-Stop-Shop</li> <li>• Number of business resource provider meetings held.</li> <li>• Number of Innovation Hubs in the region</li> </ul>
<b>Lead Agency Partners</b>	Southwestern Commission, Small Business Centers, Small Business Technology Design Center, Community Development Finance Institutions, Mountain West Partnership
<b>Objective 3</b>	Leverage the assets of the region to encourage the growth of the region’s sectors of strength
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Develop marketing for the region that is appropriate to attracting target SMEs
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Leverage the region’s natural assets to attract outdoor manufacturing to the region
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Promote and support agriculture as a viable economic practice
<b>Strategy 4</b>	Leverage the region’s history, cultural heritage, and natural assets to extend the visitor’s stay in the region
<b>Strategy 5</b>	Promote and support the CREATE sectors which include accommodation, retail, entertainment, and tourism
<b>Performance Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of new SMEs attracted to the region</li> <li>• Number of outdoor gear manufacturers in the region</li> <li>• Number of jobs created in target sectors</li> <li>• Increase in county occupancy tax collected across the region</li> </ul>
<b>Lead Agency Partners</b>	Southwestern Commission, Growing Outdoors, Empowering Mountain Food Systems, WNC Food Works, North Carolina Department of Agriculture, Mountain West Partnership, Nikwasi Initiative, Western Carolina University



<b>GOAL 2</b>		<b>BUILD THE INFRASTRUCTURE REQUIRED TO ENSURE ROBUST GROWTH THAT IS AT A SCALE APPROPRIATE TO THE REGION</b>	
<b>Objective 1</b>	Develop multi-modal transportation plans that address existing and future year capacity deficiencies (Resilience-Steady State)		
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Continue to strengthen the partnership with NCDOT Transportation Planning Branch and the Southwestern Rural Planning Organization		
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Expand connectivity with a safe and reliable regional road network		
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Work with communities to expand the presence of Electric Vehicle (EV) charging stations along priority corridors		
<b>Performance Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of road improvement and modernization projects</li> <li>• Number of new EV chargers in the region</li> <li>• Number of Comprehensive Transportation Plans completed</li> </ul>		
<b>Lead Agency Partners</b>	Southwestern Commission, North Carolina Department of Transportation, Southwestern RPO, Local Governments		
<b>Objective 2</b>	Expand reliable and affordable broadband service and work to increase the rates of use and adoption (Resilience-Steady State and Responsive)		
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Partner with communities and Internet Service Providers to extend infrastructure into unserved and underserved communities		
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Create and implement Digital Inclusion Plans for every county in the region		
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Convene stakeholders and partners to continue to draw attention to the challenges and opportunities for broadband expansion and adoption in the region		
<b>Performance Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the percentage of people in the region with broadband speeds of 100/20 Mbps to 70%</li> <li>• Increase the percentage of people in the region who adopt broadband service to 75%</li> </ul>		
<b>Lead Agency Partners</b>	Southwestern Commission, NC Division of Broadband and Digital Equity, Internet Service Providers, County Broadband Committees, Dogwood Health Trust, Nantahala Health Foundation		
<b>Objective 3</b>	Build and maintain the necessary infrastructure to leverage the outdoor and cultural assets of the region		
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Support communities in building outdoor and cultural assets that can attract visitors and provide quality of life for residents		
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Create regional marketing efforts around specific opportunities such as outdoor recreation or cultural assets		
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Create a comprehensive inventory of outdoor recreation and cultural assets in the region		
<b>Performance Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miles of new trails in the region</li> <li>• Number of regional marketing campaigns to highlight the region's assets</li> <li>• Outdoor Recreation Plans created</li> </ul>		
<b>Lead Agency Partners</b>	Southwestern Commission, Growing Outdoors, NC Outdoor Industry Office, Nikwasi Initiative, Western Carolina University		



<b>GOAL 3</b>		<b>DEVELOP TALENTED AND INNOVATIVE PEOPLE TO ADDRESS THE REGION'S WORKFORCE AND LEADERSHIP NEEDS</b>	
<b>Objective 1</b>	Pursue strategies to expand the region's workforce in order to address the shortage of workers while also closing the skills gap (Resilience-Steady State)		
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Build a strong Recovery to Career ecosystem for those in active recovery from addiction		
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Work with partners in the region to increase the availability of childcare and eldercare so that caregivers have the option to return to work		
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Work with employers in the region to help them create workplaces that are more conducive to attracting and retaining non-traditional workforce such as older adult workers or those in recovery from addiction		
<b>Strategy 4</b>	Identify key sectors experiencing workforce shortages and work with education partners to help close gaps		
<b>Performance Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of clients accessing Recovery to Work Services</li> <li>• Number of participants in WNC Early Childcare Workforce Development</li> <li>• Number of trainings for employers for support of employing non-traditional employees</li> </ul>		
<b>Lead Agency Partners</b>	Vaya, NC Works, Southwestern Workforce Development Board, Southwestern Commission, Southwestern Child Development Commission, Region A Partnership for Children, Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging		
<b>Objective 2</b>	Expand community capacity in Region A by continuing to foster, encourage, and support the region's leaders		
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Work with partners in the region to develop a regional leadership institute that is unique and responsive to the region's needs		
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Look for opportunities to augment local capacity by hiring regional positions or job sharing by local governments to gain economies of scale		
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Encourage nonprofits and civic organizations in the region to include youth and young adult representatives on their board of directors.		
<b>Strategy 4</b>	Work with local governments to take advantage of current funding and capacity-building opportunities to sustain increased capacity in the future		
<b>Performance Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of participants in rural leadership institute</li> <li>• Number of participants under the age of 30 in rural leadership institute</li> <li>• Number of local governments sharing staff positions or contracting regionally to meet staffing needs</li> </ul>		
<b>Lead Agency Partners</b>	WCU, K-12 Schools, NC Rural Center, Nantahala Health Foundation, Dogwood Health Trust, Community Colleges, Southwestern Commission		
<b>Objective 3</b>	Provide opportunities for youth to stay and thrive in the region		
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Increase the number of adults over the age of 25 with some college degree or certificate		
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Work with partners in the region to develop more opportunities for K-12 students to gain exposure to potential careers		
<b>Performance Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of residents with a college degree to 30% by 2030</li> <li>• Create 5 certified apprenticeships in the region</li> </ul>		
<b>Lead Agency Partners</b>	Hights, Haywood Learning Center, K-12 school systems, Western Carolina University, Tri-County Community College, Haywood Community College, MyFutureNC, Apprenticeship NC, Career Technical Education (CTE) Directors, Southwestern Workforce Development Board		



<b>GOAL 4</b>		<b>BUILD COMMUNITIES THAT ARE ECONOMICALLY VIBRANT WITH OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL WHO WISH TO LIVE AND WORK IN THE REGION</b>	
<b>Objective 1</b>	Address the region's housing shortage (Resilience-Steady State)		
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Leverage the Southwestern NC HOME Consortium to bring additional funding into the region to address the housing shortage		
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Increase the capacity of organizations in the region focused on housing through convenings of resource providers		
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Inventory properties in the region that have the potential to be utilized for housing		
<b>Performance Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add 50 new units and repair 50 units in every county in the region</li> <li>• Number of events to convene resource providers</li> <li>• Number of convenings intended to help build local government capacity to address regional housing issues</li> </ul>		
<b>Lead Agency Partners</b>	Southwestern NC HOME Consortium, Mountain West Partnership, Dogwood Health Trust, Smokey Mountain Housing Partnership, Four Square Community Action, Mountain Projects, WNC Housing Partnership, Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging		
<b>Objective 2</b>	Assist communities with attracting investment in the region's downtown corridors		
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Facilitate opportunities to increase investment in the region's downtown corridors		
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Create a source of capital funding for smaller businesses having difficulty accessing capital		
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Assist communities with balancing the preservation of the region's quality of life with the growth of the region		
<b>Performance Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of vacant downtown buildings that are renovated and put into use</li> <li>• Number of communities assisted with land use issues</li> </ul>		
<b>Lead Agency Partners</b>	Southwestern Commission, Mountain West Partnership, Community Development Finance Institutions		





# IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

## GOAL 1 BUILD A STRONG REGIONAL ECONOMY THAT IS IN ALIGNMENT WITH THE CULTURE AND ASSETS OF THE REGION.

### *Objective 1 Serve the needs of existing high-potential Small to Mid-sized Enterprises (SMEs) already in the region.*

<i>Tactics</i>	<i>Lead Agency Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i> Short (1-3 Years) Medium (3-5 Years) Long (5+ Years)
Catalog and keep a profile of potential high-growth business in the region	Southwestern Commission, Mountain West Partnership, County Economic Developers, Small Business Centers, Small Business Technology Design Center	Short
Provide active, outbound outreach and support for target businesses and proactively inquire about their current and upcoming needs	Southwestern Commission, Mountain West Partnership, County Economic Developers, Small Business Centers, Small Business Technology Design Center	Short
Seek to assist target businesses in addressing needs (growth capital, infrastructure, supply-chain partners, etc.)	Southwestern Commission, Mountain West Partnership, County Economic Developers, Small Business Centers, Small Business Technology Design Center	Short
Work with counties and towns to develop economic development sites so that there is opportunity for businesses to expand or relocate to the region	Southwestern Commission, Mountain West Partnership, County Economic Developers, Small Business Centers, Small Business Technology Design Center	Medium

### *Objective 2 Build a stronger and more integrated entrepreneurial ecosystem.*

<i>Tactics</i>	<i>Lead Agency Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
Create a “Smart Business Concierge” for supporting the growth of an effective enterprise ecosystem	Southwestern Commission, Small Business Centers, Small Business Technology Design Center, Community Development Finance Institutions, Mountain West Partnership	Short
Facilitate alignment and strategic alliances between small business resource providers in the region	Southwestern Commission, Small Business Centers, Small Business Technology Design Center, Community Development Finance Institutions, Mountain West Partnership	Short
Creation of dynamic innovation hubs in major regional towns with co-working and event space to serve as a one-stop business support resource	Southwestern Commission, Small Business Centers, Small Business Technology Design Center, Community Development Finance Institutions, Mountain West Partnership	Medium

### *Objective 3 Leverage the assets of the region to encourage the growth of the region’s sectors of strength.*

<i>Tactics</i>	<i>Lead Agency Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
Develop marketing for the region that is appropriate to attracting target SMEs	Southwestern Commission, Growing Outdoors, Empowering Mountain Food Systems, WNC Food Works, North Carolina Department of Agriculture, Mountain West Partnership, Nikwasi Initiative, Western Carolina University	Short
Leverage the region’s natural assets to attract outdoor manufacturing to the region	Southwestern Commission, Growing Outdoors, Empowering Mountain Food Systems, WNC Food Works, North Carolina Department of Agriculture, Mountain West Partnership, Nikwasi Initiative, Western Carolina University	Medium
Promote and support agriculture as a viable economic practice	Southwestern Commission, Growing Outdoors, Empowering Mountain Food Systems, WNC Food Works, North Carolina Department of Agriculture, Mountain West Partnership, Nikwasi Initiative, Western Carolina University	Medium
Leverage the region’s history, cultural heritage, and natural assets to extend the visitor’s stay in the region	Southwestern Commission, Growing Outdoors, Empowering Mountain Food Systems, WNC Food Works, North Carolina Department of Agriculture, Mountain West Partnership, Nikwasi Initiative, Western Carolina University	Medium
Promote and support the CREATE sectors which include accommodation, retail, entertainment, and tourism	Southwestern Commission, Growing Outdoors, Empowering Mountain Food Systems, WNC Food Works, North Carolina Department of Agriculture, Mountain West Partnership, Western Carolina University	Short

<b>GOAL 2 BUILD THE INFRASTRUCTURE REQUIRED TO ENSURE ROBUST GROWTH THAT IS AT A SCALE APPROPRIATE TO THE REGION.</b>		
<i>Objective 1 Develop multi-modal transportation plans that address existing and future year capacity deficiencies</i>		
<i>Tactics</i>	<i>Lead Agency Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i> Short (1-3 Years) Medium (3-5 Years) Long (5+ Years)
Continue to strengthen the partnership with NCDOT Transportation Planning Branch and the Southwestern Rural Planning Organization	Southwestern Commission, North Carolina Department of Transportation, Southwestern RPO, Local Governments	Short
Expand connectivity with a safe and reliable regional road network	Southwestern Commission, North Carolina Department of Transportation, Southwestern RPO, Local Governments	Long
Work with communities to expand the presence of Electric Vehicle (EV) charging stations along priority corridors	Southwestern Commission, North Carolina Department of Transportation, Southwestern RPO, Local Governments	Medium
<i>Objective 2 Expand reliable and affordable broadband service and work to increase the rates of use and adoption.</i>		
<i>Tactics</i>	<i>Lead Agency Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
Partner with communities and Internet Service Providers to extend infrastructure into unserved and underserved communities	Southwestern Commission, NC Division of Broadband and Digital Equity, Internet Service Providers, County Broadband Committees, Dogwood Health Trust, Nantahala Health Foundation	Medium
Create and Implement Digital Inclusion Plans for every county in the region	Southwestern Commission, NC Division of Broadband and Digital Equity, Internet Service Providers, County Broadband Committees, Dogwood Health Trust, Nantahala Health Foundation	Short
Convene stakeholders and partners to continue to draw attention to the challenges and opportunities for broadband expansion and adoption in the region	Southwestern Commission, NC Division of Broadband and Digital Equity, Internet Service Providers, County Broadband Committees, Dogwood Health Trust, Nantahala Health Foundation	Short
<i>Objective 3 Build and maintain the necessary infrastructure to leverage the outdoor and cultural assets of the region.</i>		
<i>Tactics</i>	<i>Lead Agency Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
Support communities in building outdoor and cultural assets that can attract visitors and provide quality of life for residents	Southwestern Commission, MT. Biz Works-Growing Outdoors, NC Outdoor Industry Office, Nikwasi Initiative, Western Carolina University	Medium
Create regional marketing efforts around specific opportunities such as outdoor recreation and cultural assets	Southwestern Commission, MT. Biz Works-Growing Outdoors, NC Outdoor Industry Office, Nikwasi Initiative, Western Carolina University	Medium
Create a comprehensive inventory of outdoor recreation and cultural assets in the region	Southwestern Commission, MT. Biz Works-Growing Outdoors, NC Outdoor Industry Office, Nikwasi Initiative, Western Carolina University	Medium



<b>GOAL 3 DEVELOP TALENTED AND INNOVATIVE PEOPLE TO ADDRESS THE REGION'S WORKFORCE AND LEADERSHIP NEEDS</b>		
<b><i>Objective 1 Pursue strategies to expand the region's workforce in order to address the shortage of workers while also closing the skills gap.</i></b>		
<b><i>Tactics</i></b>	<b><i>Lead Agency Partners</i></b>	<b><i>Timeframe</i></b> Short (1-3 Years) Medium (3-5 Years) Long (5+ Years)
Build a strong Recovery to Career ecosystem for those in active recovery from addiction	Vaya, NC Works, Southwestern Workforce Development Board, Southwestern Commission	Medium
Work with partners in the region to increase the availability of childcare and eldercare so that caregivers have the option to return to work	Vaya, NC Works, Southwestern Workforce Development Board, Southwestern Commission	Long
Work with employers in the region to help them create workplaces that are more conducive to attracting non-traditional workforce such as older adult workers or those in recovery from addiction	Vaya, NC Works, Southwestern Workforce Development Board, Southwestern Commission, Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging	Medium
"Identify key sectors experiencing workforce shortages and work with education partners to help close gaps"	Vaya, NC Works, Southwestern Workforce Development Board, Southwestern Commission	Medium
<b><i>Objective 2 Expand community capacity in Region A by continuing to foster, encourage, and support the region's leaders.</i></b>		
<b><i>Tactics</i></b>	<b><i>Lead Agency Partners</i></b>	<b><i>Timeframe</i></b>
Work with partners in the region to develop a regional leadership institute that is specific to the region's needs	WCU, K-12 Schools, NC Rural Center, Nantahala Health Trust, Dogwood Health Foundation, Community Colleges, Southwestern Commission	Short
Look for opportunities to augment local capacity by hiring regional positions or job sharing by local governments to gain economies of scale	WCU, K-12 Schools, NC Rural Center, Nantahala Health Trust, Dogwood Health Foundation, Community Colleges, Southwestern Commission	Short
Encourage nonprofits and civic organizations in the region to include youth and young adult representatives on their board of directors	WCU, K-12 Schools, NC Rural Center, Nantahala Health Foundation, Dogwood Health Trust, Community Colleges, Southwestern Commission	Short
Work with local governments to take advantage of current funding and capacity building opportunities to sustain increased capacity in the future	WCU, K-12 Schools, NC Rural Center, Nantahala Health Foundation, Dogwood Health Trust, Community Colleges, Southwestern Commission	Short
<b><i>Objective 3 Provide opportunities for the region's youth to stay and thrive in Southwestern North Carolina.</i></b>		
<b><i>Tactics</i></b>	<b><i>Lead Agency Partners</i></b>	<b><i>Timeframe</i></b>
Increase the number of adults over the age of 25 with some college degree or certificate	Hights, Haywood Learning Center, K-12 school systems, Western Carolina University, Tri-County Community College, Haywood Community College, MyFutureNC, Apprenticeship NC, Career Technical Education (CTE) Directors, Southwestern Workforce Development Board	Long
Work with partners in the region to develop more opportunities for K-12 students to gain exposure to potential careers	Hights, Haywood Learning Center, K-12 school systems, Western Carolina University, Tri-County Community College, Haywood Community College, MyFutureNC, Apprenticeship NC, Career Technical Education (CTE) Directors, Southwestern Workforce Development Board	Medium



<b>GOAL 4 BUILD COMMUNITIES THAT ARE ECONOMICALLY VIBRANT WITH OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL WHO WISH TO LIVE AND WORK IN THE REGION</b>		
<b>Objective 1 Address the region's housing shortage.</b>		
<b>Tactics</b>	<b>Lead Agency Partners</b>	<b>Timeframe</b> Short (1-3 Years) Medium (3-5 Years) Long (5+ Years)
Leverage the Southwestern NC HOME Consortium to bring additional funding into the region to address the housing shortage	Southwestern NC HOME Consortium, Mountain West Partnership, Dogwood Health Trust, Smokey Mountain Housing Partnership, Four Square, Mountain Projects, WNC Housing Partnership, Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging	Medium
Increase the capacity of organizations in the region focused on housing through convenings of resource providers	Southwestern NC HOME Consortium, Mountain West Partnership, Dogwood Health Trust, Smokey Mountain Housing Partnership, Four Square, Mountain Projects, WNC Housing Partnership, Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging	Medium
Inventory properties in the region that have the potential to be utilized for housing	Southwestern NC HOME Consortium, Mountain West Partnership, Dogwood Health Trust, Smokey Mountain Housing Partnership, Four Square, Mountain Projects, WNC Housing Partnership, Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging	Short
<b>Objective 2 Assist communities with attracting investment in the region's downtown corridors.</b>		
<b>Tactics</b>	<b>Lead Agency Partners</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Facilitate opportunities to increase investment in the region's downtown corridors	Mountain West Partnership, Regional Community Development Finance Institutions, Southwestern Commission	Medium
Create a source of capital funding for smaller businesses that tend to locate in downtown corridors	Mountain West Partnership, Regional Community Development Finance Institutions, Southwestern Commission	Medium
Assist communities with balancing the preservation of the region's quality of life with the growth of the region	Mountain West Partnership, Regional Community Development Finance Institutions, Southwestern Commission	Long







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125 Bonnie Lane, Sylva, NC 28779  
828-586-1962 | [www.regiona.org](http://www.regiona.org)

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