

General Description of the Area

The Smoky Mountain Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Area encompasses both the Smoky Mountains of East Tennessee, as well as parts of the French Broad, Nolichucky, Little Tennessee, and Holston River basins. The counties included in this RC&D area are as follows: Blount, Cocke, Hamblen, Jefferson, Knox, and Sevier. The area includes approximately 1,629,440 acres (2546 square miles) including parts of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Cherokee national Forest. The area is bordered by the mountains of North Carolina along the southeast, by Greene County (TN) on the northeast, by the Holston River to the north, and by Anderson, Roane, and Loudon Counties to the west. The area has a very diverse land use and geology. This is a rugged, rural landscape that is dominated by the Appalachian Mountains. The severely dissected ridges and narrow valleys that formed the western frontier of early America continue to influence transportation, commerce, agriculture, and land use.

The population of the six county region is approximately 712,171 according to an estimated figure obtained by the US Census Bureau in 2002. Farming enterprises include beef cattle, tobacco, dairy, poultry, and specialty crops. The vast majority of farmers are part-time within this region. Most jobs are in a variety of service trades (16.7%) and manufacturing facilities (21.3%). The average per capita income for the area in 1999 was \$17,970, with the median household income calculated to be \$33,460 per year. Unemployment across the area was calculated at a rate of 5.7 %.

The Smoky Mountain RC&D Area received its charter in June 1997, as well as successfully obtained its 501(c)3 tax status with the Internal Revenue Service. At this point, the Council consisted of only five counties (Blount, Cocke, Hamblen, Jefferson, and Sevier). The Council's borders were expanded to include Knox County in late 2004.

In addition, the Smoky Mountain RC&D has received grants from the USDA Forest Service, Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Tennessee Valley Authority, US Fish & Wildlife Service, Tennessee Arts Commission, and the USDA – Rural Development. The funds generated from these grantors will be used to initiate and complete projects that will help to meet the goals and objectives listed in this plan.

Social and Economic Conditions

This section will describe the social and economic characteristics of the Smoky Mountain RC&D Area. We will discuss the population, income data, employment patterns, education levels, and housing conditions in the region.

Population

The Smoky Mountain RC&D Area is predominantly white (91.1%) with roughly equal male to female ratio. The largest segment of the population is in the 35 to 44 year age bracket. The median age for those residing in this area is 37.5 years. Table 1 on the following page details the region's population by gender, race, and age.

Income and Poverty Level

Currently, the median household income in the RC&D area is \$33,460. This is approximately 10% below the state average. Approximately 86,000 people in the RC&D area are living below the poverty level. This number has increased dramatically over the information published a mere decade ago. The average per capita income of the region is \$17,970, as compared to the state averages of \$19,393. See Table 2 for an in-depth analysis of each county's income and poverty level data.

TABLE 1
Smoky Mountain RC&D Area Population
By Gender, Race, and Age - 2000

	POPULATION	2000	% POPULATION
GENDER			
Male		337,472	48.6
Female		357,540	51.4
RACE			
White		633,421	91.1
African-American		40,552	5.8
Hispanic		11,048	1.6
Asian		6,595	0.9
Other		3,396	0.5
AGE			
Under 5 years		42,262	6.1
5-9 years		44,295	6.4
10-14 years		44,234	6.4
15-19 years		47,498	6.8
20-24 years		50,545	7.3
25-34 years		98,083	14.1
35-44 years		109,922	15.8
45-54 years		98,965	14.2
55-59 years		38,086	5.5
60-64 years		30,801	4.4
65-74 years		49,630	7.1
75-84 years		30,680	4.4
85 and older		10,011	1.4
MEDIAN AGE		37.5	

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

TABLE 2
Income and Poverty Data for Tennessee Counties

COUNTY	MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME	PER CAPITA INCOME	PERSONS BELOW POVERTY	% POP BELOW POVERTY
Blount	37,862	19,416	10,084	9.7
Cocke	25,553	13,881	7,452	22.5
Hamblen	32,350	17,743	8,236	14.4
Jefferson	32,824	16,841	5,695	13.4
Knox	37,454	21,875	46,572	12.6
Sevier	34,719	18,064	7,517	10.7
Average	33,461	17,970	14,259	13.9
Tennessee	36,360	19,393		
TN %	10%	11%		

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

Employment

The majority of the jobs within the area are in the manufacturing, retail, and services fields. The only exception to this statement is in regard to Sevier County, where over 20% of its employees work in the fields of Entertainment, Recreation, and Accommodations due to the large amounts of tourist traffic that passes through the county in a given period. Many of these positions have little potential for advancement. Of even greater concern in the Smoky Mountain RC&D area is the region's rate of unemployment. Even though this rate (5.7%) is not staggering in comparison to the national rate (5.5%), this still signifies that nearly 20,000 individuals within the region are still without jobs. Table 3 gives the state's labor statistics, as of November 2004.

COUNTY	CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE	EMPLOYMENT	UNEMPLOYMENT	UNEMPLOYMENT RATE
Blount	58,410	55,980	2,430	4.2
Cocke	15,530	14,270	1,260	8.1
Hamblen	29,340	27,710	1,630	5.6
Jefferson	23,260	21,840	1,420	6.1
Knox	213,250	204,910	8,340	3.9
Sevier	44,110	41,390	2,720	6.2
Regional Totals - Median UE Rate	383,900	366,100	17,800	5.7
Tennessee	2,907,800	2,751,800	156,000	5.4
United States	147,401,000	139,252,000	8,149,000	5.5

Source: TN Department of Employment Security

Education

The educational levels attained in this area are outlined in Table 4. Of special importance is the fact that 15% of the population over the age of 25 has less than a ninth grade education. Thirty percent of this population has a high school education, which means that one in three has withdrawn from high school prior to graduating. Studies show that a major reason for dropping out of high school is the perceived lack of relevance between classroom studies and real life needs. It is obvious to see that this misconception is a definite obstacle that must be surpassed with school age students living in the area. It should be noted that the statistical figures listed in Table 4 have been cut nearly in half when compared to the same data collected in 1990. Even though great strides are being made in the right direction, the problem is far from being solved.

Natural Resources

The following subsections will describe the natural resources of the area with special emphasis and discussion of those areas that directly impact the problems identified by residents in the region. Land use, topography and geology, archaeological resources, cultural resources, and biological resources will be discussed.

TABLE 4 Educational Level of Persons 25 Years and Older Residing in the SMRC&D Area 1990 - 2000				
	1990		2000	
	RC&D Area	% Population	RC&D Area	% Population
Less than 9th grade	57,267	15%	39,770	9%
9th - 12th grade - No diploma	59,879	16%	61,978	13%
High School Graduate / GED	113,344	29%	143,864	31%
Some College - No Degree	65,156	17%	93,231	20%
Associates Degree	17,142	4%	23,853	5%
Bachelor's Degree	46,576	12%	65,576	14%
Graduate / Professional Degree	24,915	6%	37,904	8%
TOTAL	384,279		466,176	

Source: U.S. Census 2000

Land Use

The 1,629,440 acres of the Smoky Mountain RC&D area show a very diverse land use pattern. The area is composed of 7% cropland, 20% pastureland, 33% woodland, 18% urban and built-up lands, 17% federal land, and 4% water (NRI Database Information, 1997). Due to the fact that this information was last updated in 1997, we feel confident that changes have been made in the cropland, pastureland, and urban / built-up land categories. These assumptions are based on land use trends exhibited within the area over the past several years.

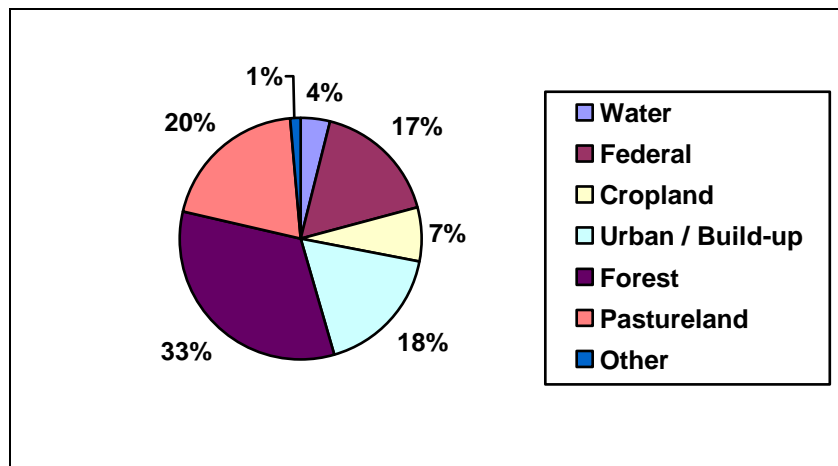


Figure 1: Land Use Pattern Exhibited Throughout The Smoky Mountain RC&D Area
Source: *Natural Resources Conservation Service*

Urban: The acreage of urban and built-up land is increasing and is permanently converting cropland and pastureland to concrete. This growth is mostly occurring around population centers and around the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Small towns are basically unequipped for the rapid commercial and residential development taking place in their once-peaceful backyards. There is little or no land use planning to guide sustainable growth within this area. Much of this development is taking place in areas adjacent to streams. A variety of problems are starting to arise due to this new development: increased sedimentation of streams, failing septic systems, increased flooding, as well as a loss of habitat for species living in these bodies of water. Citizens across the area are concerned about the degradation of the resources, as well as the effect that these problems could potentially have on one's quality of life – if things aren't done to help improve the current situation.

Agriculture: The majority of the farming operations are located in the southern Appalachian Ridge and the Valley Land Resource Area. Farm operations within the area are diversified and include a wide variety of enterprises. The majority of farming operations are part-time enterprises; however, there are still a number of full-time farmers in the region. Several trends in farming within the area include a reduction in farms growing tobacco, while those growing vegetable crops are increasing dramatically. Cropping enterprises include corn, tobacco, wheat, truck crops, vineyards, and orchards. Animal agriculture enterprises include dairy cattle, beef cattle, swine, and poultry. Several farmers within the area are beginning to show an interest in aquaculture farms, wishing to raise trout and catfish.

Forest Resources: The fertile hills and valleys of East Tennessee have long been known for their hardwood and softwood timber. There are approximately 552,000 acres of woodland within the six county area. The National Forest and Park are located in Blount, Cocke, and Sevier Counties.

Topography and Geology

The Smoky Mountain RC&D area encompasses two major land resource areas – the Southern Appalachian Ridgeland Valley and the Blue Ridge (or Unaka) Mountains.

The first major land resource area is the Ridge and Valley region, also called the “Great Valley of East Tennessee,” outlined by the Unaka or Appalachian Mountain Range to the east and the Cumberland Plateau and Mountains to the west. It has a wide variety of topography, geologic formation, and soils. In many places, the terrain is a succession of tall, wooded parallel ridges and narrow, cleared intervening valleys. In other areas, it smooths out into broad expanses of rolling to hilly pasture and cropland. Rivers and creeks winding down the valley generally follow the strike of the rock formations, but they occasionally cut through the tall ridges to form deep gaps.

The East Tennessee Ridge and Valley Region is one of the most highly developed Karst areas in the United States. According to the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, these areas have numerous hazards that impact the environment, such as cavern collapse, flooding, and groundwater pollution.

The second major land resource area is the Appalachian Blue Ridge, featuring rugged terrain, heavily forested slopes, and rushing streams with waterfalls. Within these high mountains are lower hills and numerous valleys and coves. The valley bottoms range in elevation from about 1,000 feet in the south to 1,500 feet in the north. The highest peak in Tennessee is Clingman's Dome in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, with an elevation of 6,642 feet.

Cultural Resources

The rugged mountains and isolated hollows influenced the people and culture that developed here. This isolation meant that only resourceful, independent, hard-working people could make it. This level of isolation influenced the language, music, and ways of life that are unique to Appalachia. Many residents have a deep resentment of governmental entities, which is well founded in certain instances. In others, this sense of mistrust has added to the locals' reluctance to fully cooperate with their neighboring towns and most certainly with governmental agencies.

Archaeological Resources

East Tennessee is rich in both historic and prehistoric archaeological resources. Humans have utilized many sites of significance more than once. Several sites within the Smoky Mountain RC&D area date back to the Paleo-Indian era of approximately 9000 BC to 8000 BC. Other sites date to the Archaic period of 8000 BC to 500 BC. The Tennessee Historical Preservation office has documented numerous sites within the six-county area. Other sites within the area include historic Cherokee components from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries – and buildings from the Anglo settlement of the region.

Biological Resources

The Smoky Mountain RC&D area is rich with biological resources. This is due in part to the age of the mountains and valleys that form the area. The Smoky Mountains form one of the most diverse plant communities on earth, in fact, the number of different species are rivaled only by the tropical rain forests. Tennessee has 101 species federally listed as endangered or threatened according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It is important that we respect and protect the plants and animals, as well as the ecosystems on which they depend, from disappearing from the face of the earth. Identified threats include habitat destruction, poor construction practices, and poor land use practices.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Smoky Mountain RC&D Council and its programs is to empower residents to improve their quality of life through economic and community development while sustaining the natural resources of the area.

Vision Statement

The vision of RC&D is to enhance environmental awareness within the Smoky Mountain Area by restoring stream health to critical waterways, educating citizens to promote economic development while preserving cultural heritage, and supporting landowners in the management of natural resources.

Needs and Opportunities

In order to identify the needs and opportunities for the Area, the Smoky Mountain RC&D Council disseminated a survey to individuals, organizations, cities, counties, partners and community leaders. Feedback from the completed and returned surveys indicates that the following concerns are the highest priorities within the Area.

1. **Land Conservation** – Surveys indicated a significant need to control erosion and protect farm land through controlling development and providing education on how to preserve our land.
2. **Water Management**- Survey responses revealed a need for increased stream bank restoration and better water quality (water protection, Safe drinking water, septic tank permits, agriculture runoff control and proper drainage). Respondents also believe that removing streams from the 303d list should be a priority. .
3. **Community Development**- Survey respondents indicated a need to provide increased employment by continuing to educate the public about starting up small businesses, and by encouraging more efforts to bring in local industrial parks, recruit new businesses, focus on sustainable economic development, promote local businesses, increase heritage tourism, develop more recreation areas along river fronts, and work with Chambers of Commerce toward more green technology.
4. **Land Management**- The survey showed that smart development, proper farm land management, rotational grazing, better forestland management, and increased participation in land protection programs are all Area priorities.

Element: Land Conservation

Goal 1: Increase erosion control by working with 6 landowners through the Conservation District by 2012.

Objective 1. Help promote the erosion control benefits of participating in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to multiple landowners throughout the Area by 2012.

Strategy 1. Work closely with local Soil Conservation Districts and NRCS field offices in the Area to identify critical erosion problems by 2010.

Strategy 2. Encourage landowners to attend workshops and field days to be educated on how to reduce erosion.

Objective 2. Provide information and education to landowners interested in participating in erosion control programs by 2010.

Strategy 1. Provide cost –share to at least 2 landowners that do not qualify for other funding by 2010.

Strategy 2. Help identify landowners in need of assistance to become better stewards of their land.

Goal 2: Reduce Forestland erosion by working with the local Division of Forestry Department by 2012.

Objective 1. Decrease erosion on at least 2 forestlands by providing information and education materials by 2012.

Strategy: Coordinate with the Forestry Division to identify and promote at least 2 conservation opportunities to help prevent erosion by 2011.

Objective 2. Utilize at least 2 Best Management Practices (BMP) in order to reduce erosion on forestland by 2012.

Strategy: Encourage participating landowners to plant ground cover on eroding forestland by 2012.

Element: Water Management

Goal 1: Partner with 2 local watershed organizations to expand upon the importance of clean water by 2012.

Objective 1. Advise communities and coordinate assistance for 2 water line projects and facilities within the Area by 2011.

Strategy: Coordinate with Utilities Districts in 3 counties to help identify communities in need of improved water quality and quantity by 2011.

Objective 2. Encourage 4 landowners to use Best Management Practices (BMP) for agriculture runoff by before 2012.

Strategy: Partner with 3 local Watershed groups in resolving non-point pollution runoff by 2012.

Objective 3. Coordinate with Utilities Districts partners to promote the importance of proper working septic systems throughout the Area by 2012.

Strategy: Utilize local health departments in identifying and resolving failing septic systems by 2011 in 2 Counties.

Goal 2: Assist in removing 2 streams within the Area from the 303d list by 2012 while conserving natural resources.

Objective 1. Work with NRCS to promote water quality throughout the Area using existing Farm Bill programs by 2011.

Strategy: Promote Best Management Practices (BMP) relating to improving water quality to 3 landowners by 2012.

Objective 2. Protect shoreline in danger of erosion due to changing water levels at 2 locations by 2012 using Water Quality teams.

Strategy: Identify shoreline within the Area that is in danger of erosion due to changing water levels by 2011.

Element: Community Development

Goal 1: Expand 8 sustainable local businesses throughout the area by 2012 by conducting 3 workshops.

Objective 1. Continue to work with 3 Chambers of Commerce within the area to promote the benefits of starting new businesses by 2011.

Strategy 1. Build partner relationships with at least 2 local planning commissioners to best promote and utilize available community resources by 2010.

Strategy 2. Conduct at least 3 community development workshops in the Area targeting new and potential business owners.

Objective 2. Encourage at least 2 local businesses developer to focus on building energy efficient industrial parks by 2012.

Strategy: Promote and publicize through newsletters and news releases the savings and benefits that renewable energy can provide to a community by 2011.

Objective 3. Encourage at least ten small businesses to attend workshops provided by Rural Development, Small Business Administration, and other diverse agencies by 2011.

Strategy: Identify and work with at least 10 individuals, 2 local agencies, and four Area non-profit groups that can benefit from participating in Area wide workshops by 2012.

Goal 2: Improve local tourism revenue within the 6 counties by 2012.

Objective 1. Build partnerships with at least 6 local tourism boards or Chambers of Commerce to promote tourism while sustaining natural resources by 2012.

Strategy: Identify at least 6 partner organizations willing to publicize and promote the Area as a tourism destination through news articles and public speaking opportunities by 2010.

Objective 2. Coordinate media opportunities and events with at least 2 tourism partners to promote the Area's recreational, historical, and cultural destinations to visitors by 2011.

Strategy: Identify 2 existing tourism projects/partners to serve as a model to emphasize the Area's tourism opportunities by 2011.

Element: Land Management

Goal 1: Increase the use of rotational grazing programs on 4 farms by 2012.

Objective 1. Promote and encourage Council members to attend at least 1 field day held by Agriculture driven organizations by 2011.

Strategy: Continue to provide support by encouraging at least 15 volunteers to attend each field day by 2011.

Objective 2. Assist with coordinating at least 2 grazing workshops within the Area by 2012.

Strategy: Work with the Area's 6 local Soil Conservation Districts to identify forage producers that are experiencing success with grazing programs by 2011.

Objective 3. Promote 2 energy conservation crops to be used to produce energy within the Area by 2012.

Strategy: Coordinate at least 2 local workshop to seek information and education on growing crops to produce energy by 2012.

Goal 2: Work with 3 landowners in the Farm Protection programs by 2012.

Objective 1. Use educational materials in partnership with Soil Conservation Districts and NRCS to educate at least 2 landowners on how to enroll their farm into a Conservation Easement program by 2011.

Strategy: Identify and disseminate specific conservation easement printed materials produced by partner agencies to at least 4 landowners by 2010.

Objective 2. Work with at least 2 forestland owners to improve their management of forestland and ridge tops by 2012.

Strategy: Encourage the establishment of partnerships between Area landowners and the Tennessee Division of Forestry and/or the US Forest Service to increase forestland management by 2012.

Current and Potential Partnerships with USDA and Others.

The Smoky Mountain RC&D has a unique partnership with various organizations. Two of our most significant partnerships are with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the U. S. Forest Service. These partners provided financial support to the RC&D in order to become organized.

We also have identified additional partners, including Rural Development (RD), local Chambers of Commerce throughout the Area, the Tennessee Division of Forestry, the US Forest Service, and Area Soil Conservation Districts.

In recent years, Smoky Mountain RC&D has developed a strong partnership with the Tennessee RC&D Council, as well as the Southeast Association of RC&Ds, and the National Association of RC&Ds.

We have participated in workshops and field days with Service Agency (FSA), Rural Development (RD), and The University of Tennessee. We work with several local Soil Conservation Districts, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, the Tennessee Division of Forestry, U.S. Fish and Wildlife to educate Area landowners about conservation and agricultural opportunities.

Other partners include the Department of Veterans Affairs, the African American Task Force Coalition, The Tennessee Picnic, Tennessee Valley Authority, several Area Utility Districts, Pellissippi State Community College, Walter State Community College, Community Economic Development of East Tennessee, Little River Watershed, Water Quality Forum, French Broad Watershed, the East Tennessee Quality Growth Forum, Jefferson Federal Bank, and city and county governments within the area. We are now in the process of developing a partnership with Earth Fare store and the Little Pigeon River West Prong watershed.

Linkages to the NRCS Strategic Plan.

High Quality, Productive Soils.

Soil Quality-Area Plan

Goals 1 and 2 address soil quality under the Land Conservation Element as it relates to erosion control.

Clean and Abundant Water

Water Quality- Area Plan

Goals 1 and 2 address water quality under the Water Management Element by using Best Management Practices for agriculture runoff. They also promote water quality through existing programs offered in the current Farm Bill.

Healthy Plant and Animal Communities

Rotational Grazing- Area Plan

Goal 1 addresses working with local Conservation District in identifying forage producers that are being successful in the grazing program under Land Management Element.

Goal 2 addresses work with forestland owners in directing them of managing their forestland and ridge top under Land Management Element.

Adequate Energy Supply

Energy Conservation- Area Plan

Goal 1 addresses promotes energy conservation crops to produce energy under Land Management Element.

Working Farm and Ranch Lands

Information and Education- Area Plan

Goal 1 identifies landowners and provides them farm educational materials while encouraging them to attend farm field days to support their farm and ranch under Land Conservation and Land Management Elements.

Signature Page

The Smoky Mountain RC&D Council agrees that the RC&D Program will be conducted in compliance with the nondiscrimination provisions as contained in Title VI and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as amended; the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 (Public Law 100-259) and other nondiscrimination statutes; namely, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 and in accordance with the regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture (&CFR-15, Subparts A & B) which provide that no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, national origin, age, gender, religion, marital status or handicap / disability be excluded from participation in, or be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial (or technical) assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture or any agency thereof.

The Smoky Mountain RC&D Council agrees that the signing of this document constitutes agreement to comply with federal laws concerning restrictions on lobbying, a drug-free workplace, and responsibilities for nonprocurement, suspension, disbarment, and state review.

The Smoky Mountain RC&D Council hereby adopts this RC&D Area Plan and agrees to effectively use the assistance provided by the United States Department of Agriculture to realize its goals and objectives outline herein.

Smoky Mountain RC&D Council – Tennessee

By: _____ Date: _____
(Chairperson)

Attest: _____
(Council Secretary)

This action authorized at an official meeting of the Smoky Mountain RC&D Council and Executive Committee on _____.
(Date)

U.S. Department of Agriculture – Natural Resources Conservation Service

Approved by: _____ Date: _____
(State Conservationist)