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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.

Council Goals and Objectives

Goal A: Expand sustainable economic development while conserving the area's natural resources.

Objective 01. Target planning commissions, local governments, and developers with technical assistance and expertise in land use planning.

Objective 02. Advance tourism enterprises that have a low impact on the environment.

Goal B: Promote new and innovative entrepreneurial opportunities to individuals within the RC&D Area.

Objective 01. Create sustainable growth that provides jobs that would increase the median household income of the area.

Objective 02. Plan and implement all phases of the Resource Conservation & Development Forum.

Objective 03. Research the potential of creating a warehouse-type facility that will promote organic farming, canning, marketing, as well as wholesale to the public.

Goal C: Educate individuals within the area on the importance of clean drinking water, as well as on the value of teaching water quality – in general terms.

Objective 01. Plant trees and install buffer strips to reclaim riparian filters, wildlife habitat, and control erosion along streams and rivers.

Objective 02. Encourage technology transfer and advocate use of alternative septic systems in areas of high bacterial pollution.

Objective 03. Advise communities and coordinate assistance in sewer line projects and waste water facilities.

Objective 04. Focus priority aid which will remove all health warnings from area rivers and lakes.

Goal D: Reach 25% of the RC&D Area population with educational programs by 2010 which will empower them with the knowledge and desire to improve their quality of life.

Objective 01. Conduct targeted environmental education programs in schools.

Objective 02. Conduct environmental education programs targeted to adults and the community at large.

Objective 03. Expand job training issues to meet the needs of the underserved.

Objective 04. Hold workshops and prepare technical materials for homeowners, contractors, and community leaders on the emerging issues of concern.

Objective 05. Partner with the Tennessee RC&D Council and Department of Human Services to promote and implement the First Wheels Program.

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 works 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.

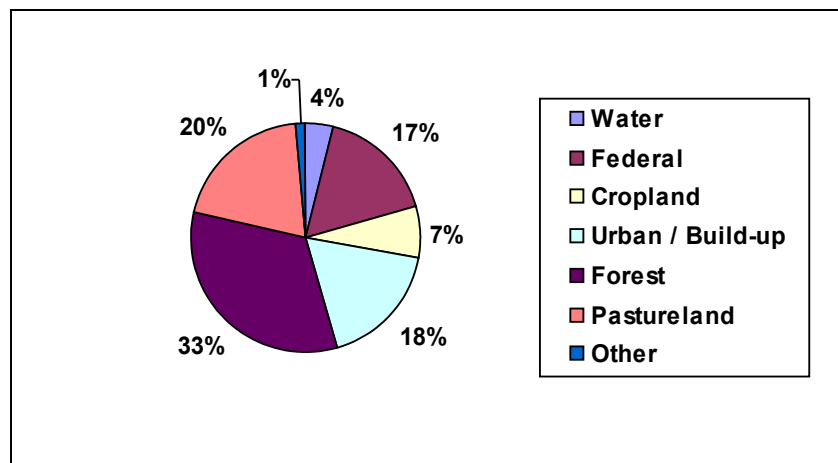


Figure 1: Land Use Pattern Exhibited Throughout
The Smoky Mountain RC&D Area
Source: *Natural Resources Conservation Service*

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 smoothes 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.

On-Going Projects

Resource Conservation & Development Forum

The Smoky Mountain RC&D annually conducts the Resource Conservation & Development Forum in order to educate people in East Tennessee about various concerns as it relates to the community in which they live. We hope to provide information and education components that an individual can be proud of and can use to build their level of knowledge in the respective areas in order to enhance the quality of life in their communities.

Express Loan Workshop

These workshops are conducted in conjunction with the Small Business Administration (SBA), from various locations, for small business people who want to start up, or already have, a small business established. The last workshop was held in December 2007, with 40 applicants, allowing small business owners to apply for loans of \$25,000 or less, with no credit check. Workshops such as these allow small business owners the opportunity to work with representatives of the SBA in all steps of the application process.

“Quilts in the Smokies”

The objective of this project, which continues to grow, has been the promotion of the artistic heritage and cultural richness of our region, supporting and promoting established and future artists (including students), cultural tourism, and growing partnerships among the Smoky Mountain RC&D, businesses, and other organizations in our service area. The project serves in multiple ways. First it serves all those who view the quilt squares with beauty, a sense of

history, and an opportunity to see parts of east Tennessee they might otherwise have missed visiting. Second, it brings dollars into the region as “quilt chasers” dine, shop, purchase gasoline, and stay at hotels /motels in the region.

Business Planning Workshop

The Smoky Mountain RC&D, in conjunction with the State of Tennessee Economic Development Department, hosts a state-wide business planning workshop at the Area Office conference room in Knoxville, TN. This workshop was put in place to assist attendees in assessing the current market situation and unique selling propositions, and discussing alternative ways to expand their business ideas, selecting target market(s) and evaluating the need for products or services while formulating appropriate deliverables and the distribution of products or services and ultimately transforming “thoughts” into written, implementable business plans.

Reclaiming the Eighth of August Celebration:

The Smoky Mountain RC&D partnered with the African-American Task Force of the Community Economic Development Networking group (CEDNET) to showcase and celebrate reclaiming August 8th as Emancipation Day. Over the last 140 years, people in African-American communities across Tennessee and Kentucky have celebrated the 8th of August as Emancipation Day. While the celebration has faded into memory in many communities, others continue to recognize and celebrate the special day (much like June 10th in other parts of the country). The Conference held by the RC&D brought together a rare combination of individuals from communities where celebrations have and have not occurred. These individuals wanted to uncover an important piece of African-American heritage, and to recognize those who have an academic interest in African-American history. These celebrations of cultural significance would certainly not be held in some local communities today if not for the efforts of the RC&D.

Water Quality Improvement Projects

The Smoky Mountain RC&D is partnering with a host of agencies in working with private landowners within the Holston River, French Broad River, and Nolichucky River Watersheds. The goal is to improve water quality for natural fauna by implementing best management practices (BMPs) in these areas. These practices will include riparian plantings, livestock exclusion fencing, alternative water systems, limited creek access and crossings, streambank stabilization, tree and other vegetative plantings, etc.

The Envirothon

The Envirothon program was designed with the mindset of assisting the young people of today as they grow into the leaders of tomorrow. The program is made possible by many federal, state, and local natural resource management partners. Government agencies, as well as business and industry members, work together to make this program available to 9th through 12th grade students throughout the country. Our primary funding partners for this program is the Tennessee Department of Agriculture’s Nonpoint Source Program.

Upcoming Project

Cocke County Natural Resource Center

The Cocke County Natural Resource Center is expected to cost approximately \$300,000. We will be partnering with Vision 21 and businesses throughout the area to fund this project. Plans, currently underway, consist of a classroom for study adjacent to the TN Division of Forestry Work Center which provides fire protection for state, federal and private lands. NRCS engineers are currently working on a design project for a water quality lab at the center. This project, when finished, will benefit several federal (NRCS, TVA and US Forestry Service) and state (TWRA and TDEC) organizations as well as surrounding communities who will study and train here.

Recently Completed Projects

Auto Recycler Plant

The Smoky Mountain RC&D has facilitated an auto recycler factory in Newport, Tennessee (Cocke County). The auto recycler was put in place to recycle vehicles that were an eye sore to the view shed of the community. This plant also serves to promote water quality by eliminating a number of vehicles being dumped into bodies of waters for disposal. When submitting a vehicle to the recycler plant, with a vehicle title, you will receive \$8.00 per one hundred pounds. This has created 7 jobs for local residents.

Tom Talley Project

The United States Fish & Wildlife Service provided a grant to the Smoky Mountain RC&D Council to install practices on a beef farm in Blount County. This project was completed in order to enhance beef production while promoting water quality and nutrient management. The farm lies at the foothills of the Chilhowee Mountains and has been in the Talley family for several generations. This farm is also one that is visited by neighboring farmers in order to educate them in the areas of water quality, rotational grazing and nutrient management.

Todd Bunch Project

The United States Fish & Wildlife Service provided a grant to the Smoky Mountain RC&D Council to install practices on a beef farm in Jefferson County. This project was completed in order to enhance beef production while promoting water quality and nutrient management. The best management practices that were used to enhance this farm were heavy use areas, alternative water system and fencing.

James McCammon Project

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture provided a grant to the Smoky Mountain RC&D Council to install practices on a beef farm in Sevier County. This project was completed in order to enhance beef production while promoting water quality and nutrient management. The best management practices that were used were stream bank restoration and alternative livestock watering system. This farm is located in the French Broad Watershed area.

Smiley Clapp

The United States Fish & Wildlife Service provided a grant to the Smoky Mountain RC&D Council to install practices on a beef farm in Knox County. This project was completed in order

to enhance wildlife features. The best management practices used on this farm were wetland restoration water control structure (shallow water impoundment). The farm is located in the Flat Creek/Holston River Watershed area.

Gary Free

The United States Fish & Wildlife Service provided a grant to the Smoky Mountain RC&D Council to install practices on a beef farm in Hamblen County. This project was completed in order to enhance beef production while promoting water quality and nutrient management. The best management practices used on this farm were stream crossing, fencing and critical area planting. The farm is located in the Bent Creek/Nolichucky Watershed area.