REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION

HENDERSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

MEETING DATE: **October 21, 2009**

SUBJECT: **Linking Land and Communities**

ATTACHMENTS: **Yes**

SUMMARY OF REQUEST:

Jim Stokoe, with Land of Sky, will make a presentation to the Board of Commissioners on "Linking Land and Communities in the Land-of-Sky Region".

BOARD ACTION REQUESTED:

No action is requested. The presentation is for information purposes.

   Suggested Motion:

   No motion suggested.

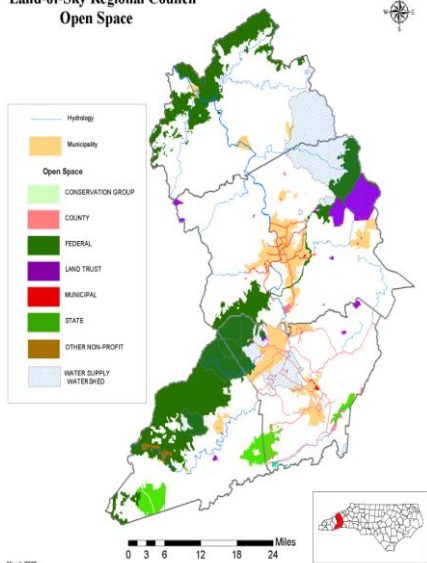# Linking Lands and Communities in the Land-of-Sky Region

Creating a framework for conservation and development that respects community values and natural systems

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The Regional Conservation and Development Network is
an interconnected network of lands valuable for their ecological systems and services including farmlands, forests, water resources, wildlife habitat, recreation areas – and areas most suited for future growth and development.

PROJECT INFORMATION

Land-of-Sky Regional Council Open Space

Hydrology
Municipality
Open Space
CONSERVATION GROUP
COUNTY
FEDERAL
LAND TRUST
MUNICIPAL
STATE
OTHER NON-PROFIT
WATER SUPPLY WATERSHED

Miles
0 3 6   12   18   24

March 2005

In response to unprecedented development in Western North Carolina, Land-of-Sky Regional Council is working with local and regional interests to design a regional framework for conservation and development that will strategically guide future growth for Madison, Buncombe, Henderson, and Transylvania counties while respecting the integrity of the region's ecosystems.

The Linking Lands and Communities project is creating a forum for practitioners, citizens, local governments and organizations to build a common understanding of the region's ecological systems and services and build relationships across sectors and jurisdictional boundaries. By using a collaborative approach, this effort will help to link urban and rural communities and protect the area's rich natural and cultural heritage.

The Conservation and Development Network Will…

- *Identify our area's green infrastructure* - valuable ecological systems, farms and forests, recreation lands

- *Identify areas most suited for future growth and development*.

- *Illustrate the importance of interconnectivity in our conservation efforts and development patterns* in order to maintain ecological values and functions necessary for healthy sustainable communities.

- *Serve as a resource for decision-makers and developers* to balance economic and environmental needs of our communities.

Why a Regional Network?

- **Healthy ecosystems produce services** for our communities, like clean drinking water, carbon storage, flood storage, local food supplies, and other goods and services

- **Natural systems don't pay attention to jurisdictional boundaries** – they must be protected, managed, and restored at the larger landscape level. This can only be accomplished by communities throughout the region working together.

- **By incorporating the needs and benefits of healthy natural systems into existing planning processes** at the municipal and county levels, **our communities are better prepared** to make land use decisions that sustain human communities and natural systems for the long term.

Elements of our Green Infrastructure

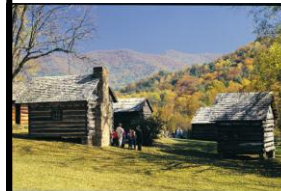**Water Resources**

Agricultural Lands

Recreation Lands

Wildlife Habitat

Conserved Lands

Cultural Resources

Project Partners

Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP)

Appalachian Trail Conservancy

Asheville Convention and Visitors Bureau

The Biltmore Estate

Blue Ridge Forever

Blue Ridge National Heritage Area

Buncombe County

Buncombe County Greenways and Trails Commission

Buncombe County Soil & Water Conservation District

Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy

City of Asheville

City of Hendersonville

NC Farm Bureau

Friends of DuPont State Forest

Henderson County

Madison County

Mars Hill College

Mountain Council for Accountable Development

Natural Resources Conservation Service

NC Cooperative Extension Service – County Offices

NC Department of Agriculture

NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources

NC Division of Community Assistance

NC Division of Forest Resources

NCSU Mountain Horticultural Crops Research & Extension Center

NC Wildlife Federation

NC Wildlife Resources Commission

Open Space Institute

RENCI @ UNC Asheville

RiverLink

Self Help Credit Union/Self Help Ventures Fund

Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition

Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy

Southern Environmental Law Center

Sustainable Big Ivy

Sustainability Strategies, LLC

Transylvania County

U.S.D.A. Forest Service Southern Research Station

UNC Asheville

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Warren Wilson College

What is our Green Infrastructure?

Green Infrastructure is our community's life support system - an interconnected network of land and water that is managed for its natural resource values and for associated benefits for people.

A green infrastructure network connects ecosystems and landscapes, including:

- ❑ Conserved natural areas, such as wetlands, woodlands, waterways, and wildlife habitat
- ❑ Working lands, including farms and private forests
- ❑ Publicly managed lands, including national and state parks, nature preserves, wildlife corridors, and wilderness areas
- ❑ Recreation areas, including hiking and biking trails, parks, and blueways
- ❑ Cultural sites and resources, including historical sites, community gathering places, and interpretive trails

E*cological assessments* are being conducted as a part of the Linking Lands and Communities project to determine

- ► *Where is our region's green infrastructure?*
- ► *What condition is it in?*

Project Schedule & Upcoming Events

Water Resources, Agricultural Lands, and Wildlife Habitat Assessments completed – September 2009

Public Open Houses for Review and Comment:

- October 26, 29, 30 in Asheville
- November 4, 5 in Marshall
- November 9, 10 in Brevard
- November 19, 20 in Flat Rock

Green Infrastructure Network Design Workshop –January 2010

Public Sessions: Future Scenarios Charrette – March 2010

Network Implementation Workshop – May 2010

Complete Regional Conservation and Development Network & Plan - June 2010

Linking Lands and Communities in the Land-of-Sky Region

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Community Open House Events

In the fall of 2009, Land-of-Sky Regional Council and partners from across the region will hold a series of open house events to introduce the Linking Lands and Communities project, share the maps of natural systems that have been developed, and solicit input about community values related to natural areas in the region.

Project Overview

Land-of-Sky Regional Council (LOSRC) is working with individuals, local governments, and organizations across our four-county region to develop a regional network that identifies the location and condition of our natural systems and provides a strategy for maintaining connectivity of these resources. The project is organized into five distinct steps.

1. **Develop broad-based partnerships and recruit community leaders** to participate in the following four steps of the project

2. **Gather data, conduct ecological assessments and develop maps** for key elements of our region's natural systems (which make up our green infrastructure network), including water resources, agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, recreation and conservation lands, and cultural resources.

3. **Develop a science-based green infrastructure network for the region** based on the assessments and data collected above.

4. **Create a Regional Conservation and Development Network** that helps communities to understand the role of future development and natural disturbance factors (i.e., climate change, invasive species) as it relates to the region's green infrastructure network.

5. **Identify implementation strategies** for the Regional Conservation and Development Network and engage partners in these activities.
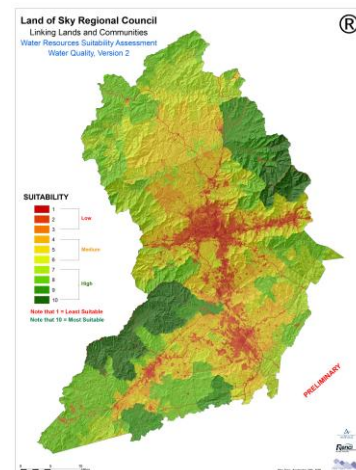
Why an Open House?

Through the efforts of more than 45 partners around the region, the first two steps of the project are nearly completed. We are now ready to finalize our ecological assessments and maps by bringing them to local leaders and the public for an extensive round of review and comment. We also hope to encourage community members and leaders to take active roles in the subsequent phases of the project.
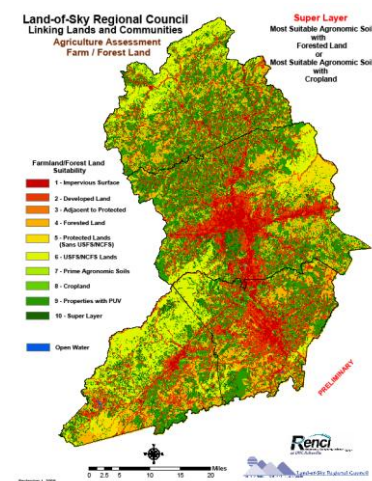
What will I Learn if I Attend?

The Open House events will provide an opportunity for practitioners, government officials and community members to learn about the Linking Lands and Communities Project and the ways that communities benefit from maintaining a network of healthy natural systems in the region. Participants will also gain an understanding of the kinds of products and tools that will be available once the project is complete and how they can use them. Finally, people will have an opportunity to meet other community members and share their values and concerns related to our region's natural systems.
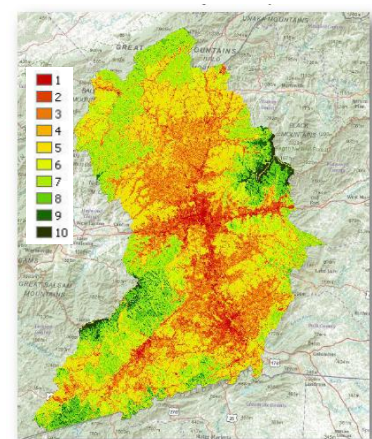
Maps of Natural Systems in the Region

Water Resources

Agricultural Lands

Wildlife Habitat

What do I need to know about the Open House Events?

At each open house location, there will be four primary components:

- 20-minute introductory presentation that describes the Linking Lands and Communities project, the ranked assessments and informational maps, and the importance of working at a regional scale. This short presentation will provide a context for the remainder of the open house and participants are highly encouraged to attend.

- Display area where the maps that describe the location and condition of the region's water resource lands, agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, recreation lands, conserved lands and cultural resources will be displayed. Maps of input data layers will also be available. Maps will be available at each station explicitly for mark-up and comment by participants.

- Computer stations that invite participants to look at the maps and data in more detail and explore their applications.

- Feedback area where participants will be asked to complete survey forms and provide more detailed comments on the maps and on the project in general.

Schedule of Open House Events

October 26, 29, 30 at Land of Sky Regional Council Offices in Asheville

Monday, October 26, 6– 9 pm - *Presentations at 6:30 and 7:30 pm*

Thursday, October 29, 2– 4 pm & 6 – 9 pm - *Presentations at 2:30, 3:30, 6:30 and 7:30 pm*

Friday, October 30, 10 am – 1 pm - *Presentations at 10:30 am, 11:30 am, and 12:15 pm*

November 4, 5 at Marshall High Studios in Marshall

Wednesday, November 4, 4 – 8 pm – *Presentations at 4:30, 5:30, and 7:00 pm*

Thursday, November 5, 10 am – 1 pm – *Presentations at 10:30 am, 11:30 am, and 12:15 pm*

November 9, 10 at the Transylvania County Library in Brevard

Tuesday, November 9, 4 – 8 pm – *Presentations at 4:30, 5:30, and 7:00 pm*

Thursday, November 10, 10 am – 1 pm – *Presentations at 10:30 am, 11:30 am, and 12:15 pm*

November 19, 20 at Blue Ridge Community College Campus in Flat Rock

Thursday, November 19, 4 – 8 pm - *Presentations at 4:30, 5:30, and 7:00 pm*

Friday, November 20, 10 am – 1 pm - *Presentations at 10:30 am, 11:30 am, and 12:15 pm*

Note: Additional presentations will be added in if necessary.

For maps and directions to open house locations, please go to the project website: www.linkinglands.org