

# Natural Resources



## Overview

The natural environment is a defining characteristic of the Rockfish Valley. The study area is defined by its stunning vistas, babbling brooks, misty mountain forests, and wild places. It is these natural features that have drawn many residents and tourists to the Rockfish Valley. These environmental resources also provide recreational opportunities on public and private lands. People are drawn to the area because of the access and proximity to the Blue Ridge Parkway, Appalachian Trail, and George Washington National Forest; and locals value the area's rural landscapes, working farms, and woodlots which maintain access to hunting and fishing opportunities. The study area is largely free of large-scale residential and commercial development such as what is found throughout neighboring counties. Most development in the study area fronts along the Routes 151, 6, and 664 corridors.

## Facts and Figures

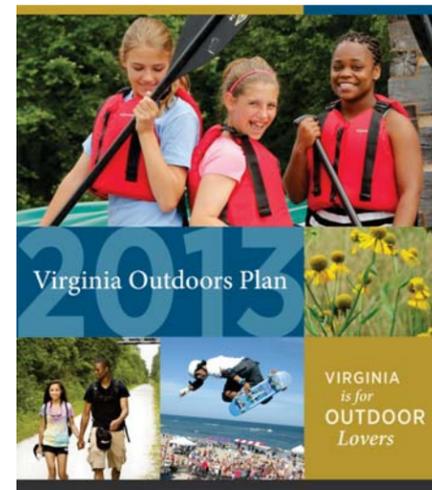
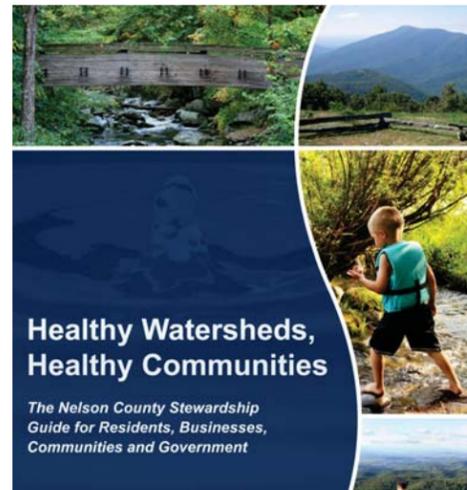
- Total conservation lands in study area: 37.5 square miles
- Total length of streams in study area: 171 miles
- Total area of wetlands in study area: 414 acres
- Total forest cover in study area: 86 square miles (83%)



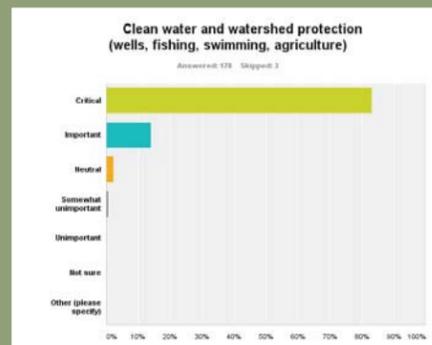
## Current Recommendations

Several previous studies have focused on the Rockfish Valley's natural resources and environmental features. These include the Green Infrastructure Plan (2010), which evaluated environmental assets countywide, and which illustrated the value of conserving local natural resources while also sustaining existing local agricultural and timber industries. The Rockfish Valley was also featured in the statewide Virginia Outdoors Plan (2013), which highlighted the area's many outdoor recreation activities such as hiking, rock climbing, hunting, fishing, bird watching, winter snow sports, and cycling. The area's green infrastructure network and continued economic vitality are fundamentally interconnected.

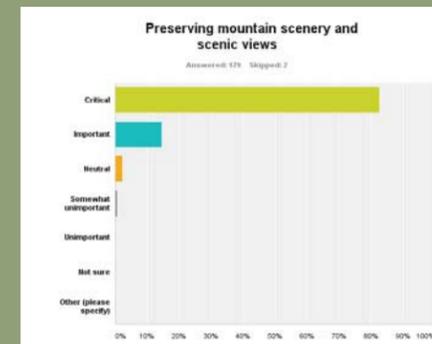
## Previous Plans & Existing Studies



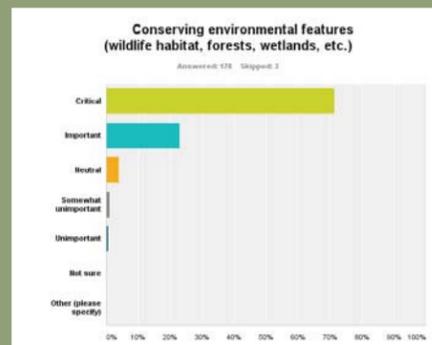
## Public Survey Results: What is the community saying about the Environment? Do you agree with the results of the survey?



95% said clean water and watershed protection are important; over 80% said they are critically important.

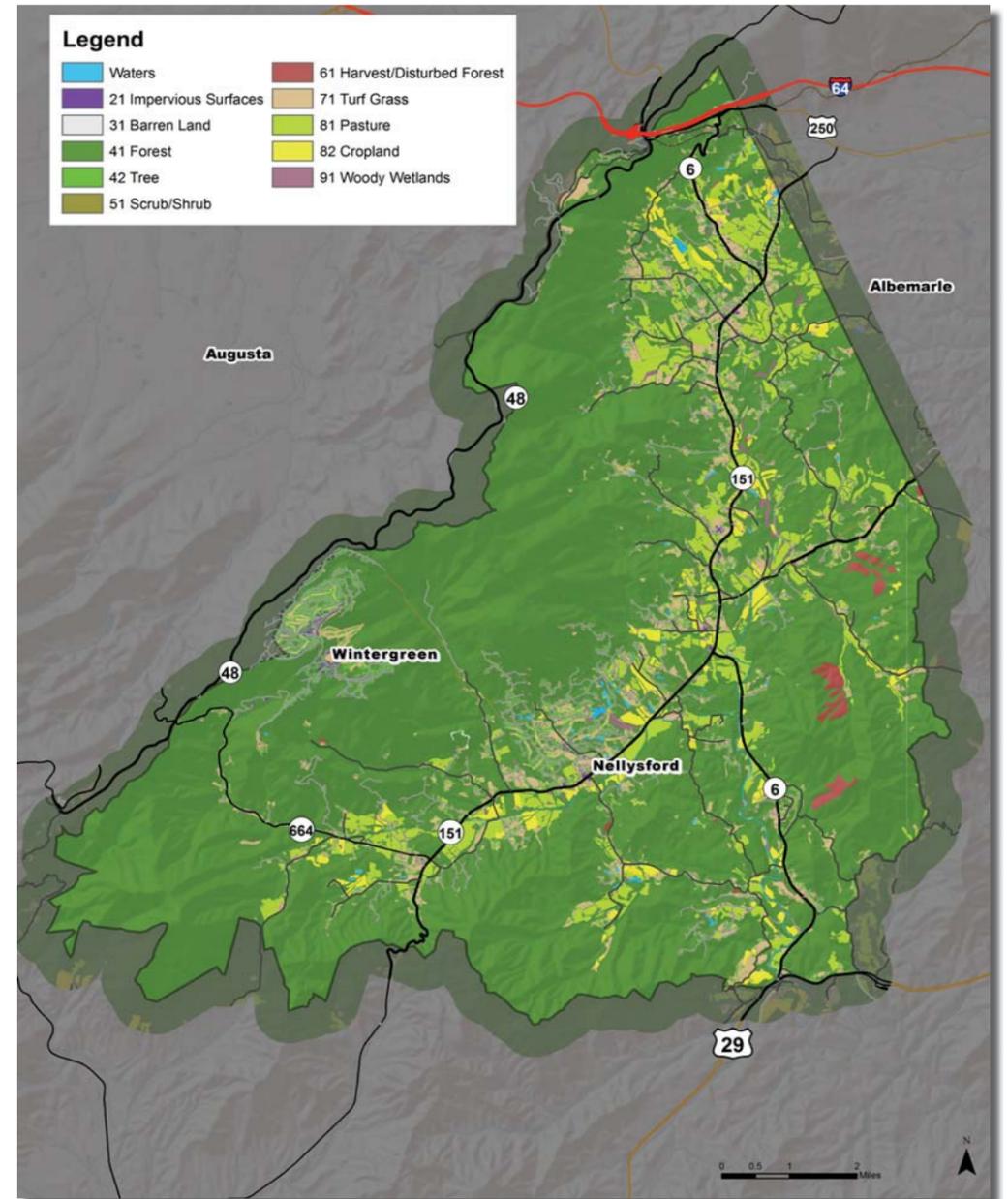


95% said scenic preservation is important; over 80% said it is critically important.



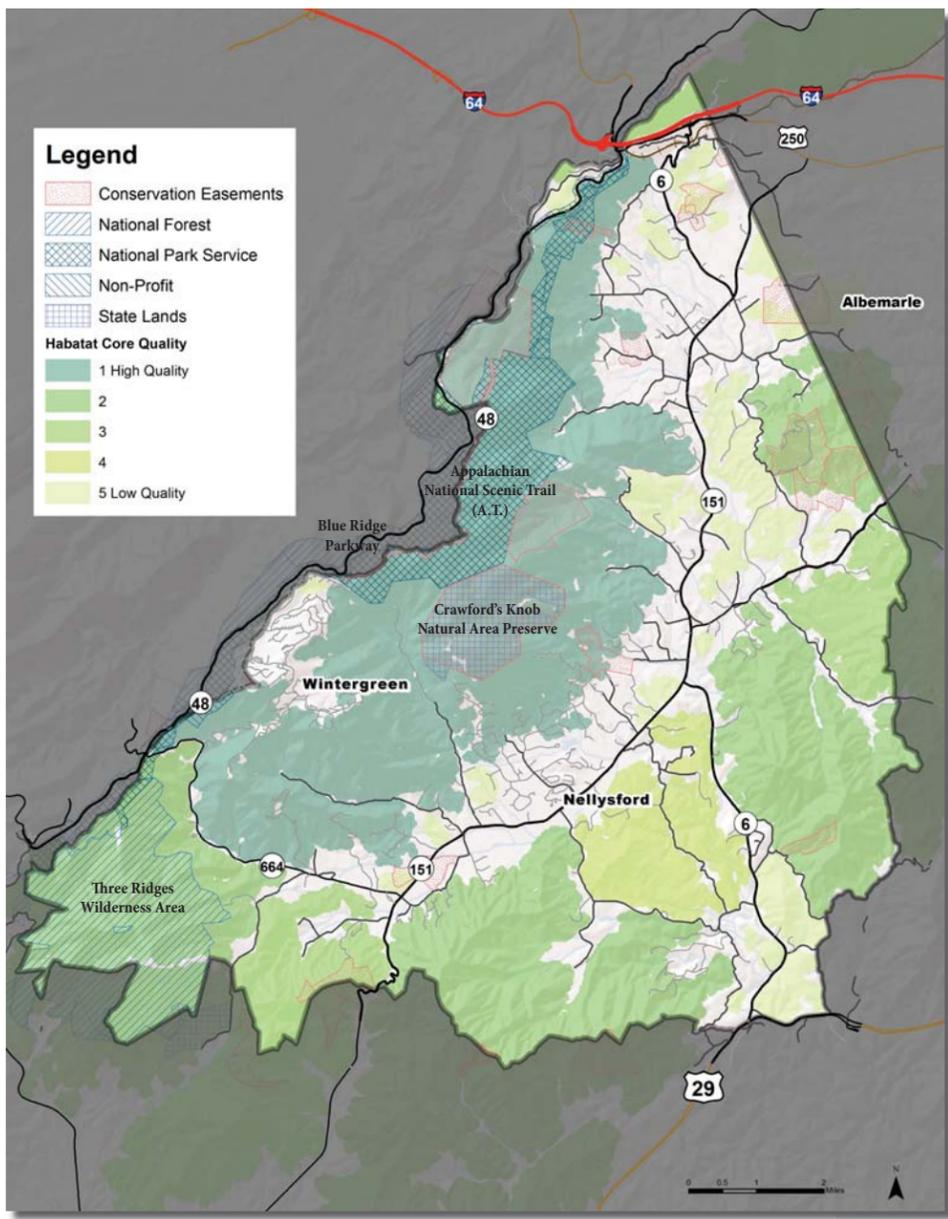
Over 90% said conserving local environmental features is important; over 70% said it is critically important.

## Land Cover Map



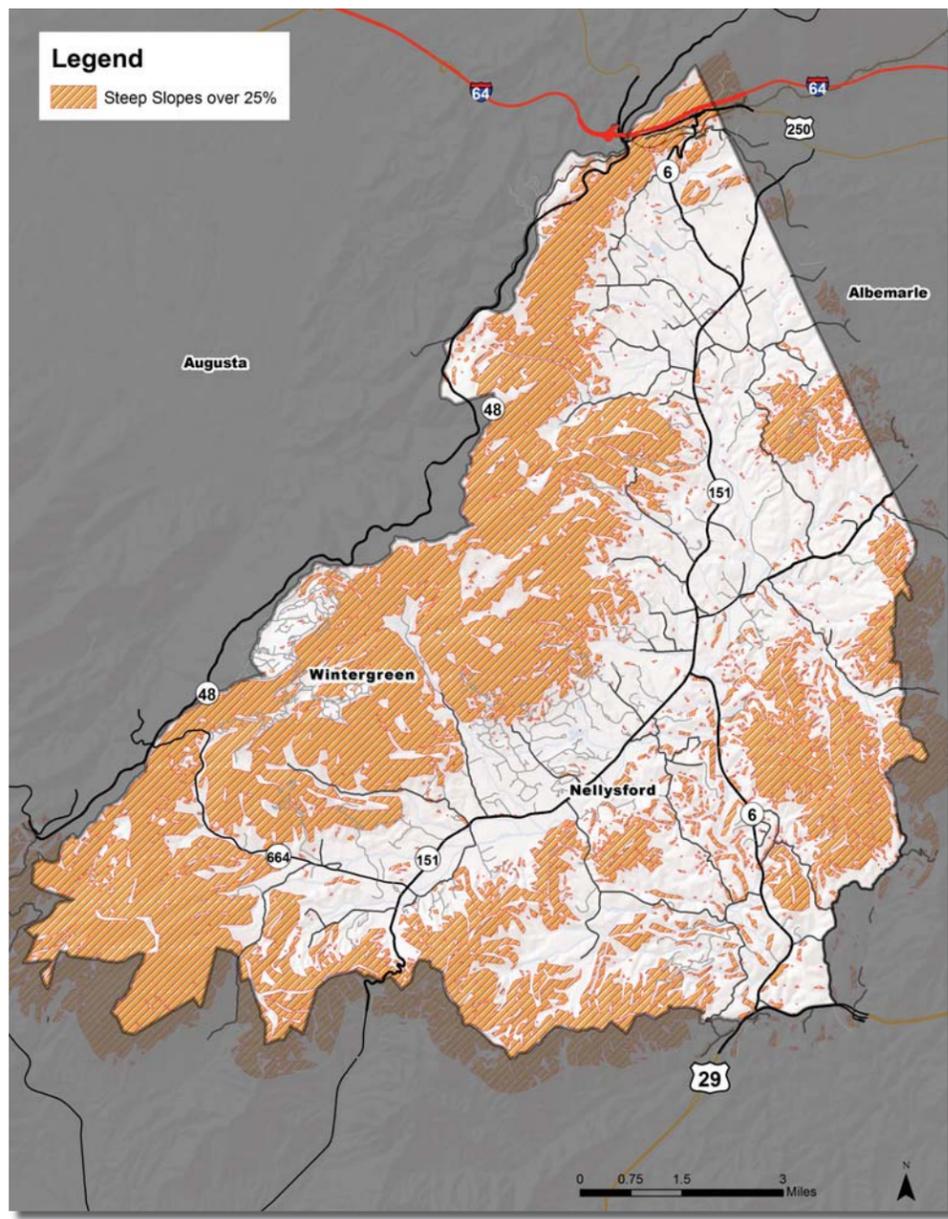


## Conservation Land & Habitat Cores



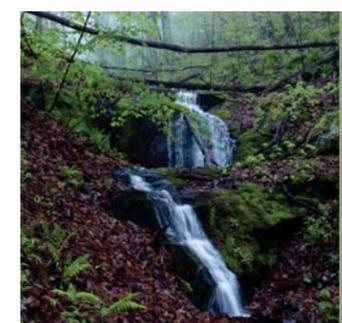
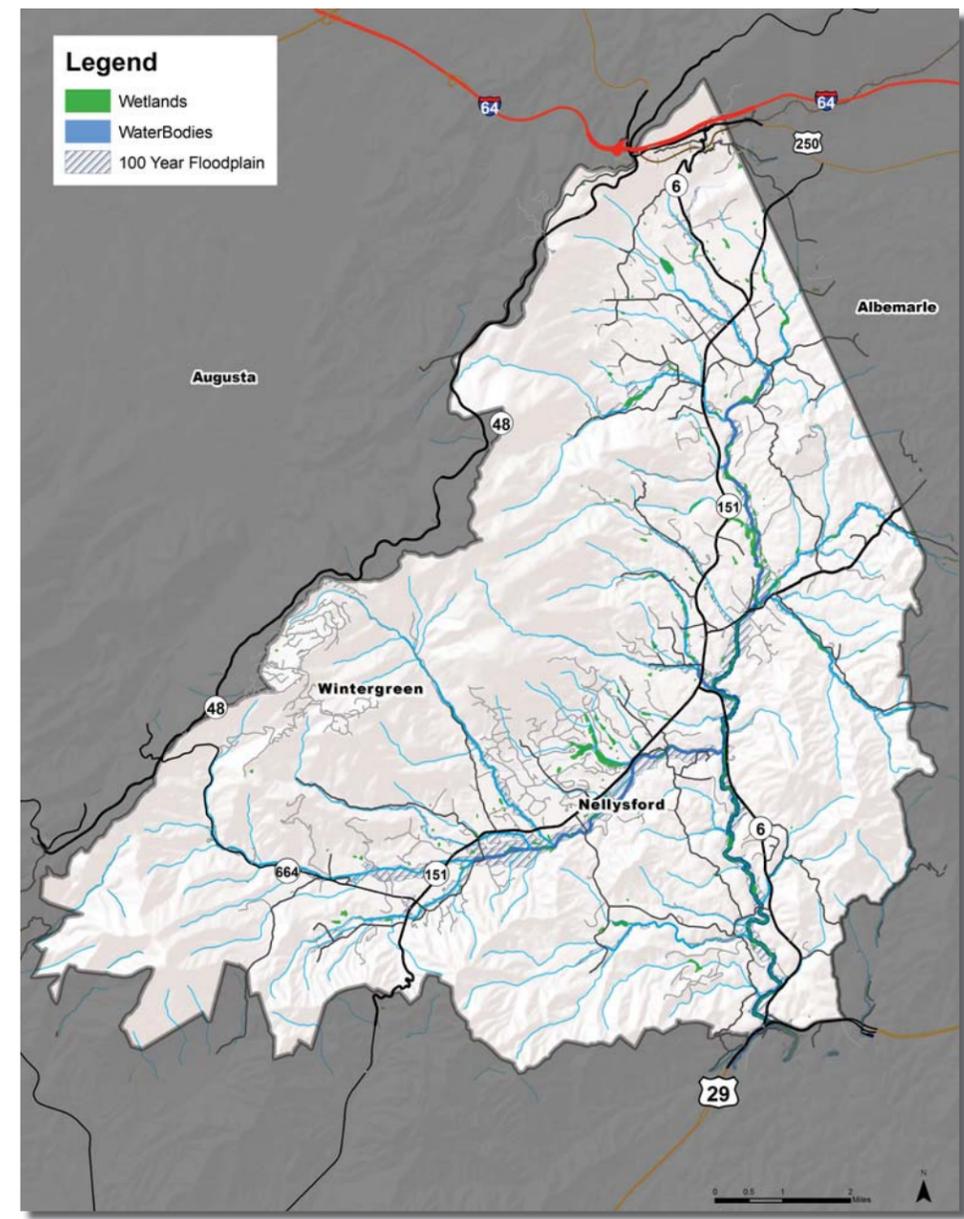
This map identifies the quality of natural landscape cores, as well as land in conservation easement or in public ownership (State, Federal, and nonprofit). These protected landscapes provide critical wildlife habitat and ecosystem services. They also provide recreation opportunities and act as a draw for tourists. Recreation activities like hiking, wildlife viewing, hunting and fishing, photography, and scenic touring have proven to create positive economic impacts.

## Steep Slopes



Steep slopes are defined as land areas with slopes greater than 25% in grade. These slopes tend to be found at higher elevations in the study area. Land with steep slopes is more difficult to access and develop; and when developed, there are increased chances for erosion. Steep slope areas also represent some of the most important natural views and vistas in the study area, creating another reason to avoid development of steep slopes.

## Streams and Wetlands



Streams, rivers, wetlands, and floodplains are vital components of the green infrastructure network. They provide residents with important ecosystem services such as aquifer recharge, water quality protection, a reliable source of safe drinking water, flood mitigation, and riparian habitat. They also create recreation opportunities for fishing and boating. Given the mountainous terrain of the study area, most wetlands and floodplains are in lower elevation river bottoms.