

ROCKFISH VALLEY AREA PLAN



Area Analysis & Asset-Based Strategies



March 29, 2017

*Please see page 40
for acknowledgments.*

ROCKFISH VALLEY AREA PLAN

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1. RVAP PROJECT INTRO

Nelson County's Rockfish Valley: A Special Place

The Rockfish Valley is widely recognized as a special place – a highlight of Nelson County and all of Virginia. The area's many special qualities, places, and features provide:

- an authentic rural character and a high quality of life that are cherished by local residents;
- a special sense of place that is enjoyed by many visitors during all four seasons; and
- a beautiful and bountiful Blue Ridge landscape that supports agritourism and nature-based tourism.

The Rockfish Valley's many natural assets and rural Blue Ridge character have proved to be a solid foundation for building a **strong place-based economy**, now comprised of:

- vineyards & farm wineries;
- breweries & distilleries;
- four-season resort tourism with ski & golf;
- performing arts, festivals, & events; and
- outdoor recreation at multiple National Park units.

This beautiful patch of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains has truly become a **major tourism destination**. Members of this area's unique business community have thoughtfully capitalized on the Rockfish Valley's local assets and sense of place, and have produced a veritable cornucopia of award-winning local products and experiential attractions.

With the ongoing success of the local economy, the area is hosting an expanding number of visitors; experiencing a higher demand on local rural roads; and attracting continued commercial development activity and interest.

The RVAP attempts to answer the following questions:

These recent trends and issues create an **important and increasingly urgent need to ensure that the Rockfish Valley is well-planned**. The Rockfish Valley is so deeply special to area residents – and is achieving such success and renown as a special tourism experience – that the area cannot be subjected to unplanned growth.

Over time, it is inevitable that changes will occur in the Rockfish Valley area – and that is not automatically good or bad. But now is a prudent time to **proactively make plans to manage the changes that this community can see coming, and attempt to maximize the degree to which those changes are positive**.

Accordingly, this Rockfish Valley Area Plan (RVAP) is a local public planning effort to analyze the area's characteristics and recent trends; and to identify appropriate long-range goals and short-term strategies for the area regarding a wide variety of public issues.

More specifically, the RVAP is an attempt to determine how the area's future land use patterns and economic development activities can be complimentary to, and harmonious with, the existing land uses and the invaluable qualities of the one and only Rockfish Valley. This RVAP effort is **equally important for area residents, local businesses, and members of the visiting public** – because everyone would benefit from the stewardship of the Rockfish Valley's special sense of place and the wise use of the area's abundant community assets.

(PLACE)

What makes the Rockfish Valley so special?

(CHANGE)

What are the area's most recent growth and development trends? How have these growth patterns changed the Rockfish Valley?

(LOCATION OF GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT)

What areas are most suitable for future growth?
What are the most important areas for rural preservation?

(AMOUNT OF GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT)

How much future growth is appropriate with respect to...roadway capacity? ...community character? ...quality of life? ...sense of place?
Is more always better? Is there enough?
Is there too much? What is the right amount?

(VISION)

What should the Rockfish Valley be like in...
5 years? ...10 years?

(ACTION)

What specific strategies could help achieve better balance and harmony between growth and preservation?

What is the Rockfish Valley Area Plan (RVAP)?

The Rockfish Valley Area Plan (RVAP) is a public community planning effort conducted by Nelson County and the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission. The RVAP was a two-phase process:

Phase I: area analysis + public engagement

(January 2016 – August 2016)

Phase II: recommendations + strategies

(September 2016 – January 2017)

The RVAP is an effort to understand how ongoing changes and future development in the Rockfish Valley can occur in ways that are most harmonious with, and complimentary to, the area's special sense of place, high quality of life, premier scenic beauty, and rich natural heritage.

Therefore, this project attempts to **provide a community planning framework that facilitates the optimal balance** between the area's economic development potential, and the careful preservation of the area's special sense of place and rural Blue Ridge character. **Achieving such balance between commercial activity and traditional rural heritage is a real necessity** – and a community priority – in order to sustain the highest possible quality of life for everyone, while also supporting the strongest, most sustainably successful local economy possible. To those ends, the RVAP intends to:

- Produce an up-to-date evaluation of a wide variety of community assets and topics, including:
 - [agriculture] ... [economy] ... [community]
 - [natural resources] ... [transportation]
- Understand recent land use patterns and development trends within context;

The study area includes the entire Rockfish River watershed above US29. This area contains much of the North District and Central District, from Afton to Nellysford to Beech Grove to Wintergreen, and also the area from the Martin's Store substation (VA151/VA6) over to Woods Mill (VA6/US29).

RVAP Study Area: Upper Rockfish River Watershed



- Identify the local community's current concerns, desires, values, and priorities through a public engagement process;
- Develop short-term and long-term goals for meeting the needs of the Rockfish Valley's families, businesses, and visitors; and
- Identify a framework for balancing growth and preservation that will attempt to:
 - Maintain authentic rural character
 - Preserve unique sense of place
 - Protect Blue Ridge Mountain scenery
 - Sustain working farms, working forests, and other productive ag lands
 - Support local economic vitality
 - Provide specific recommendations for possible updates and modifications to County policies.

Why conduct an Area Plan?

Responsibility:

- to minimize unplanned growth and prevent undesirable change
- to protect rural residential areas
- to identify future land use patterns that are most desirable and most appropriate
- to maximize quality of life for residents

Opportunity:

- to ensure continued economic vitality
- to maximize Nelson Co. tourism “brand”
- to help attract the desired types of growth
- to help guide development towards the most appropriate areas

Priority:

- the area’s ongoing commercial growth, as well as anticipated future development pressures, create an urgent need for a proactive response

The RVAP attempts to serve many purposes:

Purpose: Nelson County Mission Statement

- “It is the mission of the Board of Supervisors to maintain Nelson County as a beautiful, safe, healthy, and prosperous rural county;
- ...where citizens are involved in all aspects of their governance; and
- ...*where the community is well planned to assure respect for and dedication to its traditions and resources, while continuing to improve its economic viability.*”

Purpose: Economic Development

- Develop strategic recommendations that:
 - complement and strengthen the area’s existing businesses and industries; *and*
 - help to attract new commercial activity from compatible target industries
- Establish a practical framework to guide commercial development towards the most appropriate locations throughout the area

Purpose: Comprehensive Plan

- Identify any elements of the existing 2002 Comp Plan to be updated, expanded, replaced, or otherwise revised
- Produce up-to-date, forward thinking recommendations that can be considered for adoption into the existing 2002 Comp Plan

Purpose: Code of Virginia

- §15.2-2280: “protect and promote the public health, safety, and welfare”
- §15.2-2283: “facilitate the creation of a convenient, attractive, and harmonious community”
- §15.2-2284: The Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map must reasonably consider the: “existing use and character; ...trends of growth or change; ...conservation of natural resources; ...[and] the encouragement of the most appropriate use of the land.”

Purpose: Community Development

- Develop strategic recommendations to protect the area’s rural character, natural beauty, and special sense of place
- Develop strategic recommendations to protect rural residential areas from unplanned commercial development(s) and from other unharmonious land use changes

Purpose: Zoning Policy

- Identify strengths and weaknesses of how the current Zoning Ordinance tools and regulations affect this area
- Identify practical opportunities to review the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map for appropriate amendments

Purpose: Public Participation

- Ensure that public participation by a broad representation of stakeholders is a genuine part of the process, which will result in recommendations that reflect the values of the area’s residents and businesses
- Develop an accurate understanding of the community’s current interests and concerns
- Identify community concerns and desires regarding the future of the Rockfish Valley

What projects are in the RVAP work plan?

Phase I: Public Engagement

(page 5)

- Project Webpage
- Community Survey
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Agricultural Working Group
- “Community Open House” Public Meeting
- “Community Listening Session” Public Meeting
- Presentation to Planning Commission (July 27, 2016)
- Presentation to Board of Supervisors (August 9, 2016)

Rockfish Valley Area Plan: Community Survey

This survey is being conducted by Nelson County and the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission as part of the Rockfish Valley Area Plan (RVAP). This survey will help identify local priorities, concerns, ideas, and values. Responses from the public will help guide the RVAP planning process and will shape the content of the final report. Your responses are voluntary and will remain anonymous. Thank you for participating!

The survey is also available online at the following link:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/rvap>

Please submit your responses by July 1st 2016 - drop-off locations are listed at end of survey.

1. How long have you lived in Nelson County? (check one)

0-3 years
 4-6 years
 7-10 years
 10+ years
 Not a resident

2. What is your zip code? (fill in)

□ □ □ □ □

3. Do you own property in Nelson County? (check one)

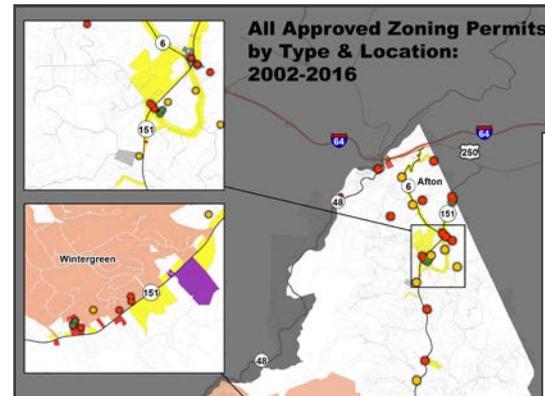
Yes
 No




Phase I: Area Analysis

(page 7)

- Summary of Previous Plans & Existing Studies
- Topical Analysis & Community Asset Inventory: (Natural Resources, Community, Economy, Agriculture, and Transportation)
- Zoning & Land Use Analysis
- Analysis of Zoning Permit Approvals: 2002-2016
- Business Clusters Tax Revenue Assessment
- Zoning Ordinance Review
- SWOT Analysis: (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)



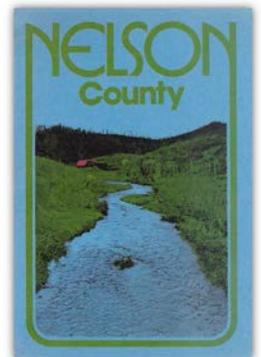
Phase II: Area Planning

(page 29)

- Vision Statement: a forward-looking, aspirational statement which draws from existing County plans and policies and which is shaped by community feedback received during Phase I of this project.
- Toolkit of Recommended Strategies: specific ideas for how to best respond to area issues and area opportunities; this includes identification of available programs, resources, and tools to begin implementing priority recommendations, and includes identification of recommended modifications to County codes, ordinances, and plans.
- Asset-Based Development Plan: place-based ideas about how (and where) to better utilize community assets; about where to encourage future growth and development; and about where to prioritize rural preservation

ROCKFISH VALLEY AREA PLAN

Summary of Existing Plans



Original Nelson County Comprehensive Plan (cover) - 1971

Plans – page 1
 Station Plans – page 4
 Structure Plans – page 6
 Economic Development & Tourism Plans – page 8
 Plans: Environment, History, and Recreation – page 11

2. PHASE I: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Project Webpage

The RVAP project webpage contains project information and updates, public meeting information, and reports, maps, and other files available for download. The webpage also included a link to the community survey during the survey process.

<http://www.nelsoncounty-va.gov/departments/planning-zoning/rockfish-valley-area-plan/>

Agricultural Working Group

The RVAP project team convened and facilitated an “Ag Work Group” (AWG) to receive advisory input on the Area Plan process and content. The AWG met four times during 2016 (February 11, April 25, August 1, and November 21). The AWG members included:

Elected and Appointed Officials:

Mr. Tommy Harvey, County Supervisor (North District)
Mrs. Connie Brennan, County Supervisor (Central District)
Mrs. Philippa Proulx, Planning Commissioner (North District)

Additional Members of the Public:

Mr. Michael LaChance, Agricultural Agent, Unit Coordinator,
Virginia Cooperative Extension
Mr. William A. Wright, Nelson County Ag-Forestal District
Advisory Committee Chair
Mrs. Joyce Burton, Greenfield Ag-Forestal District rep
Mrs. Elizabeth Smith, Afton Mountain Vineyards
Mr. George Hodson, Veritas Vineyard and Winery

Public Meetings

The RVAP project team conducted two large public meetings:

At the **June 28th Community Open House** public meeting, approximately 125 members of the public were in attendance. This large turnout allowed the project team to raise public awareness of, and interest in, the project; and it generated a relatively large amount of public participation and feedback for the project team to incorporate into the project.

The Community Open House included a formal “project introduction” slideshow presentation, comprised of a project overview and a look at initial area analysis maps, data, and (interim) results of public survey. The meeting also included informal question-and-answer sessions with project team members, organized into five topics: Agriculture; Natural Resources; Economy; Community; and Transportation.

The meeting also included other opportunities for public participation, such as a comment cards box and a mapping activity which allowed attendees to place location-specific comments onto a large map of the study area.

At the **November 1st Community Listening Session** public meeting, approximately 30 members of the public were in attendance. The project team provided a formal presentation of the (draft) final results from the RVAP’s “Area Analysis” phase. A substantial portion of the meeting was dedicated to a formal question-and-answer session between the audience and three members of the project team; this interactive time allowed attendees to pose their questions to the project team, and to present recommendations for how the RVAP project should proceed.

Community Survey

The RVAP project team conducted a Community Survey in both paper format and also online using Survey Monkey. The survey contained 28 questions designed to begin identifying the community’s preferences, values, concerns, and “level of agreement” with certain statements about the study area.

The survey was initially conducted from May through June; and in order to meaningfully respond to comments that the survey was not reaching a diverse audience, the original survey deadline was extended two weeks (to July 15th) to reach a bigger, wider audience. This two-week extension included the hand delivery of paper surveys to 16 churches or other religious institutions located in the study area; as well as the hand delivery and posting of survey flyers at post offices, the public library, community centers, and gas stations and service centers within the study area.

In total, **431 survey responses were submitted**, and 234 of those surveys included the (optional) submission of written responses. 95% of respondents identified themselves as Nelson County property owners. Summary information about the Community Survey is available on the following page, with additional detailed materials in the Appendix.

Note: A complete summary of the Community Survey responses is contained in the Appendix.

3. PHASE I: AREA ANALYSIS

Summary of Previous Plans & Existing Studies

A review of relevant existing plans and studies enable the area's ongoing issues to be better understood in a broader historical context – and helped to avoid duplication of prior efforts. While many existing plans have a regional or even statewide focus, several are specific to Nelson County. Six previous plans focused specifically on the Rockfish Valley.

General Plans:

- original Nelson County Comprehensive Plan (1971)
- current Nelson County Comprehensive Plan (2002)
- Nellysford Community Plan (2007 – *not adopted*)

Transportation Plans:

- VDOT Route 151 Corridor Study (2013)
- VDOT Route 151 Corridor Study (2001)
- TJPD Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

Infrastructure Plans:

- Rockfish Valley Corridor Water and Sewer Study (2002)
- Region 2000 Water Supply Plan (2011)
- Nelson County Broadband Project Plan

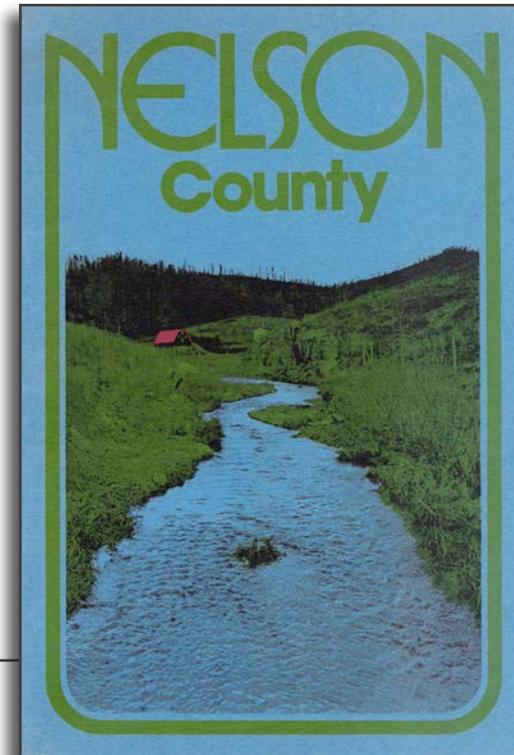
Economic Development and Tourism Plans:

- Nelson County Economic Development Authority Plan
- Virginia DRIVE Tourism Plan (2014–2015)
- Virginia State Tourism Plan (2013)
- Nelson County Sales Gap Analysis (2005)

Other Plans – Recreation, History, and Environment:

- Virginia Outdoors Plan (2013)
- South Rockfish Rural Historic District (2015–2016)
- Virginia Main Street Program (Nellysford: “Affiliate”)

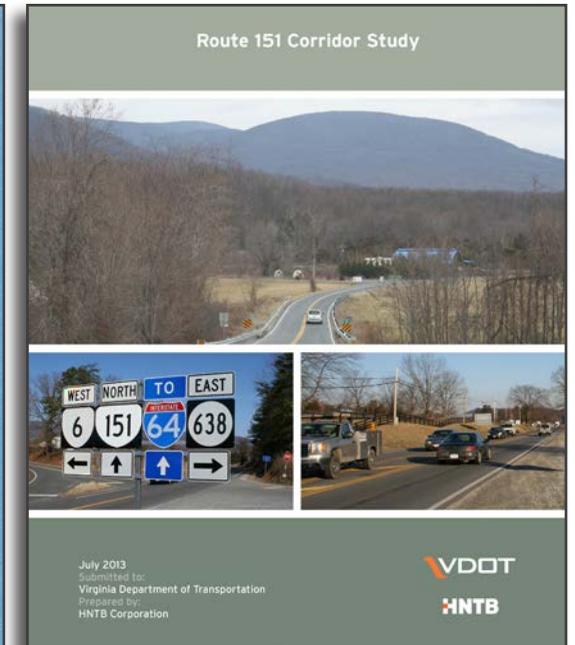
Note: A complete summary of all previous plans and existing studies that were reviewed during the RVAP project is contained in the Appendix.

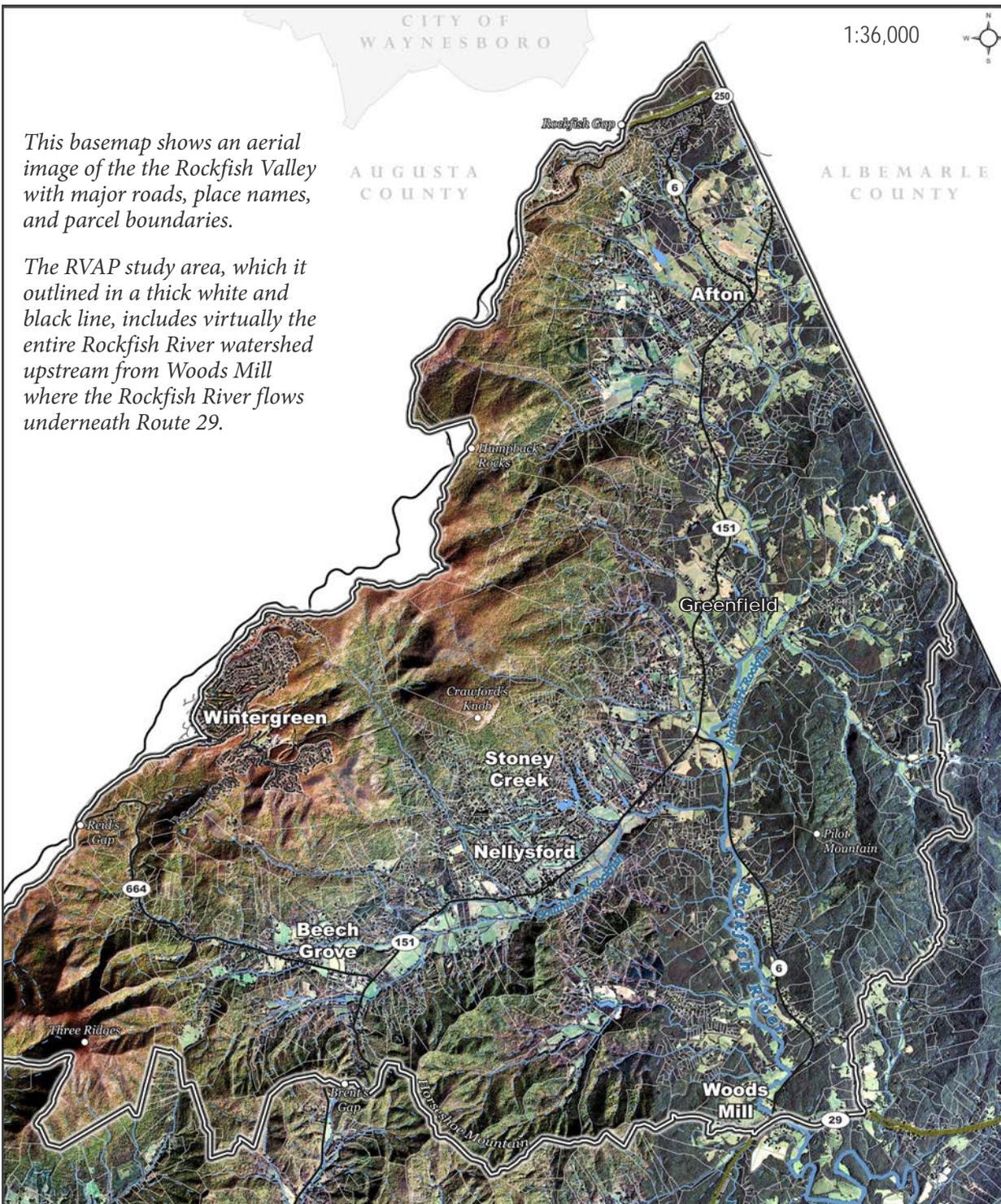


Nelson County (Original) Comprehensive Plan – 1971



- Nelson County Green Infrastructure Plan (2010)
- VA DEQ Rockfish River TMDL Study (2011–2012)
- Groundwater Pollution Potential Map (1993)
- Rockfish River Watershed Study (1990's)





RVAP Study Area: Quick Facts

- **Size** = 103 square miles
- **Population** = 7,749
- **Population Density** = 32 persons/square mile
- **Median Age** = 51 years
- **Median Household Income** = \$57,203
- **Unemployment Rate** = 3.4%

Major Roads

- ▣ Interstate 64; Route 250; Route 151; Route 6; and Route 664
- ▣ With the exception of Interstate 64, all of these highways are designated Virginia Scenic Byways

Major Industries

- ▣ Services; Agriculture; and Tourism
- ▣ Tourism includes Wintergreen Resort; farm wineries, breweries, cideries, and distilleries; and outdoor recreation

Unique Characteristics

- ▣ The prominent, scenic terrain of the Blue Ridge Mountains;
- ▣ Proximity to some of the most popular and iconic public lands in the USA, such as the Blue Ridge Parkway, Skyline Drive/Shenandoah NP, Appalachian Trail, and George Washington NF; and
- ▣ The unique agritourism attractions include a craft beverages cluster (including craft beer, wine, hard cider, spirits, coffee, and kombucha)

Surrounding Influences

- ▣ Commuting and employment patterns with nearby Charlottesville, Lynchburg, and Staunton/Waynesboro areas
- ▣ Atlantic Coast Pipeline, which is under review by FERC (identified as a *major community concern* by survey respondents)

Area Analysis: Natural Resources

Overview

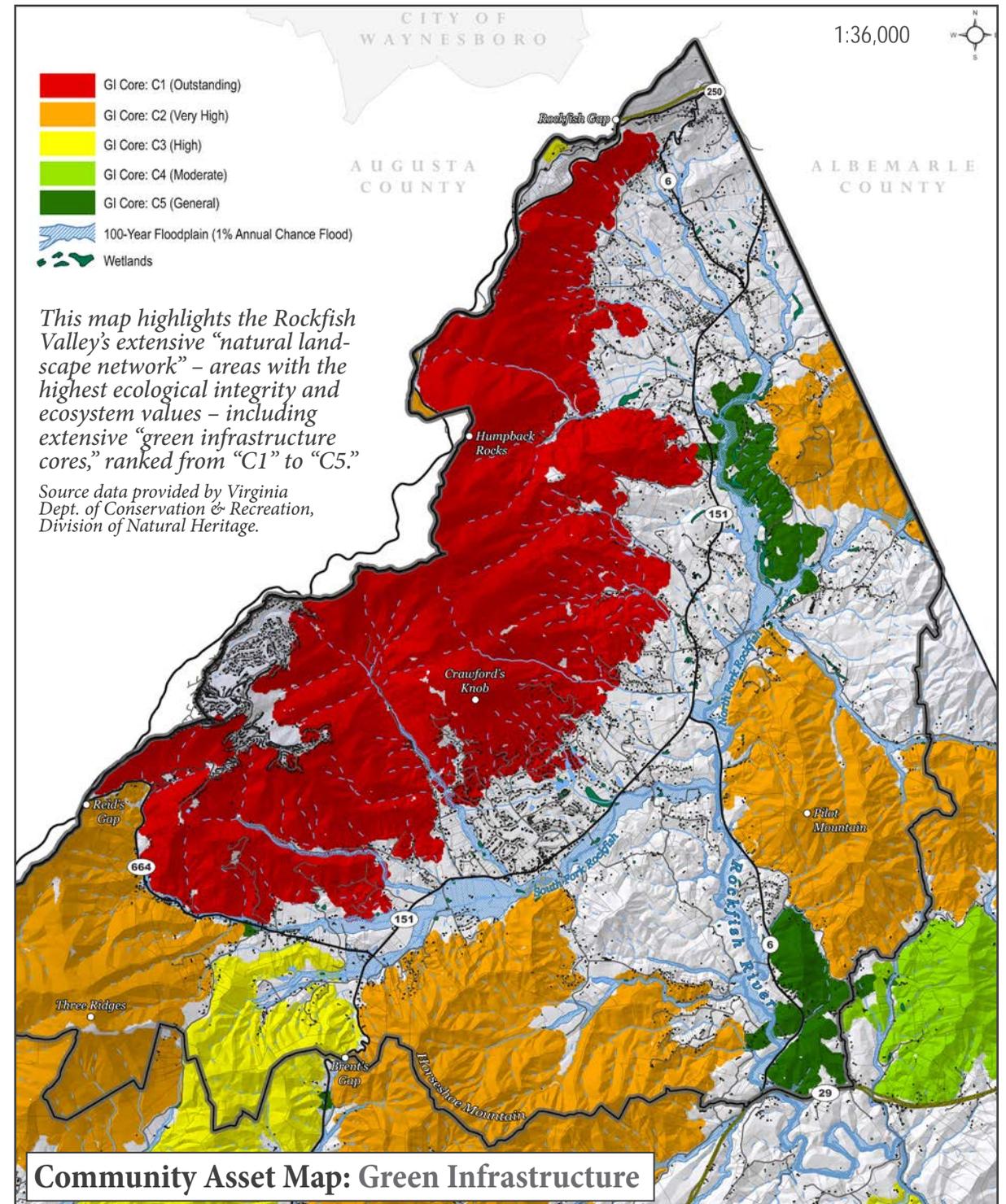
The natural environment is a defining characteristic of the Rockfish Valley. The study area contains some of the highest-quality natural landscapes in Virginia, and is defined by its stunning scenic vistas, babbling brooks, misty mountain forests, and wild places. It is these natural features that draw many residents and tourists to the Rockfish Valley. People value access to public lands such as the Blue Ridge Parkway, Appalachian Trail, and George Washington National Forest; and locals value the area's rural landscapes, working farms, and forests which maintain access to hunting and fishing opportunities. The study area does not contain much 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.

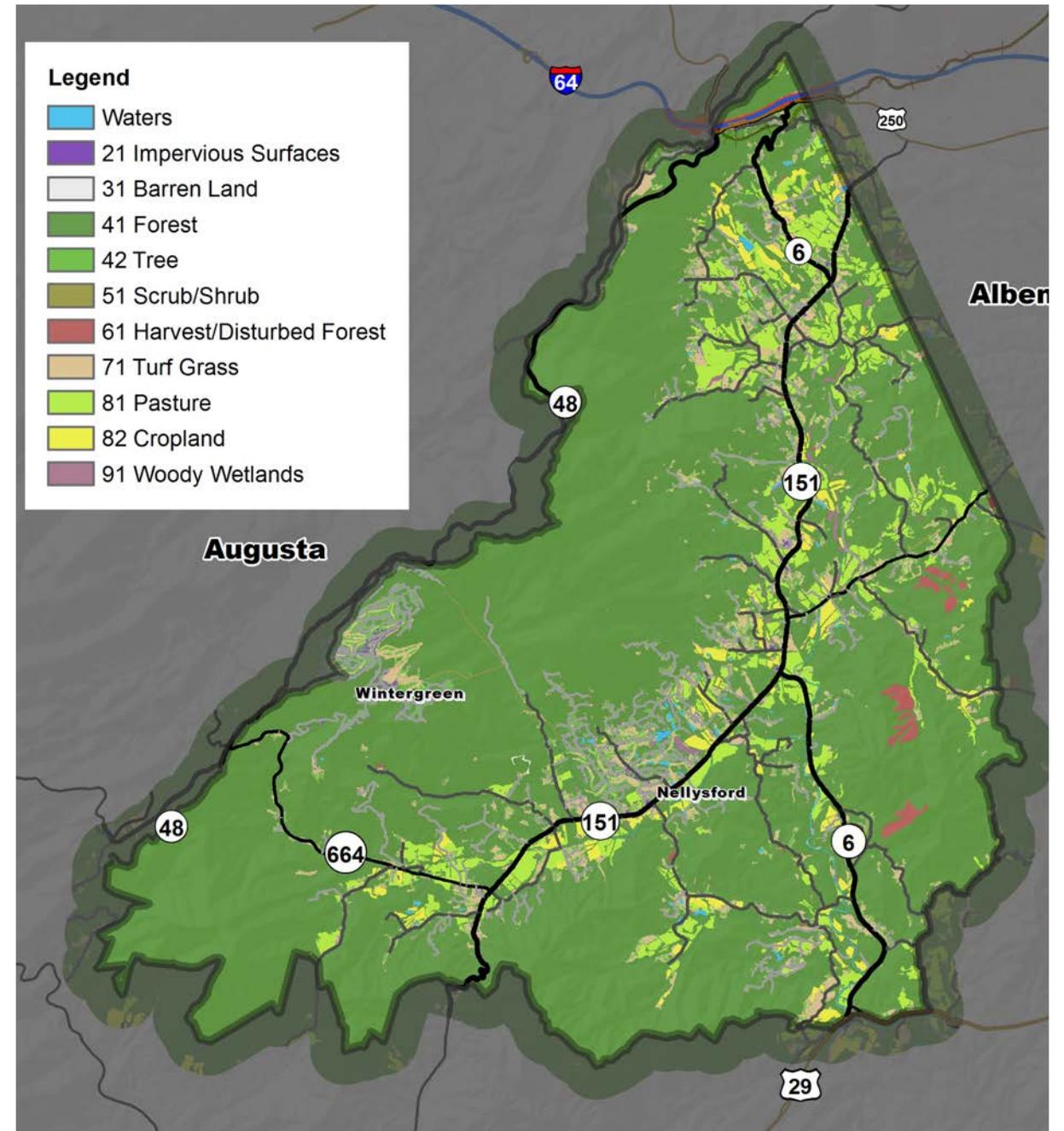
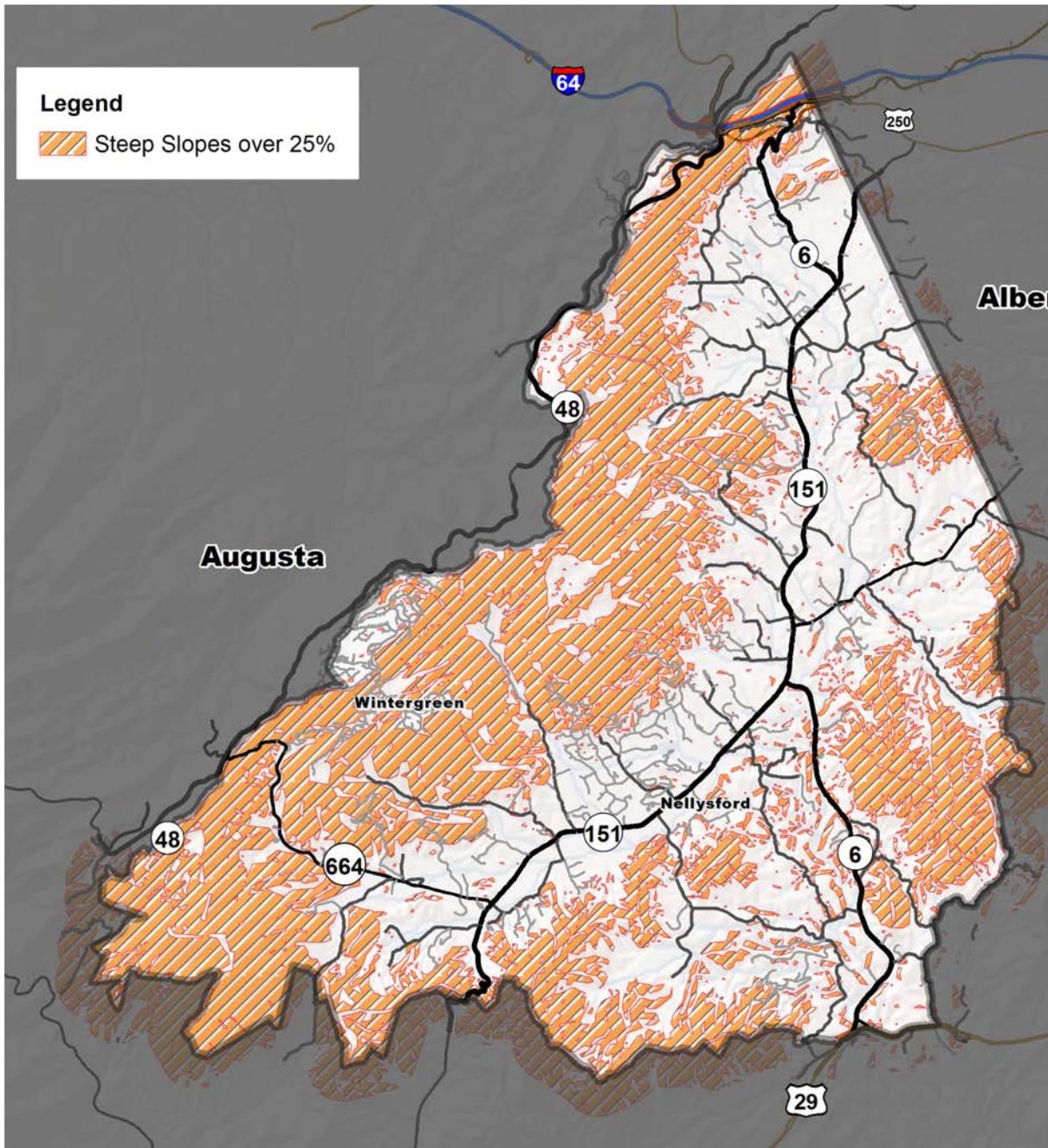
Facts & Figures

- 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

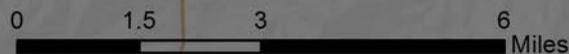
It is critically important to recognize the interconnectivity of the Rockfish Valley's environmental resources and continued local economic vitality. The Green Infrastructure Plan (2010) evaluated environmental assets and noted the value of conserving local natural resources while also sustaining existing agricultural and timber industries. The Virginia Outdoors Plan (2013) highlighted the area's many outdoor recreation activities such as hiking, rock climbing, hunting, fishing, bird watching, winter snow sports, and cycling.





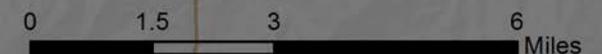
Steep Slopes Map:

All Terrain With a 25% Grade (or Greater)



Land Cover Map:

Land Use Classifications – All Surface Areas



Area Analysis: Community

Overview

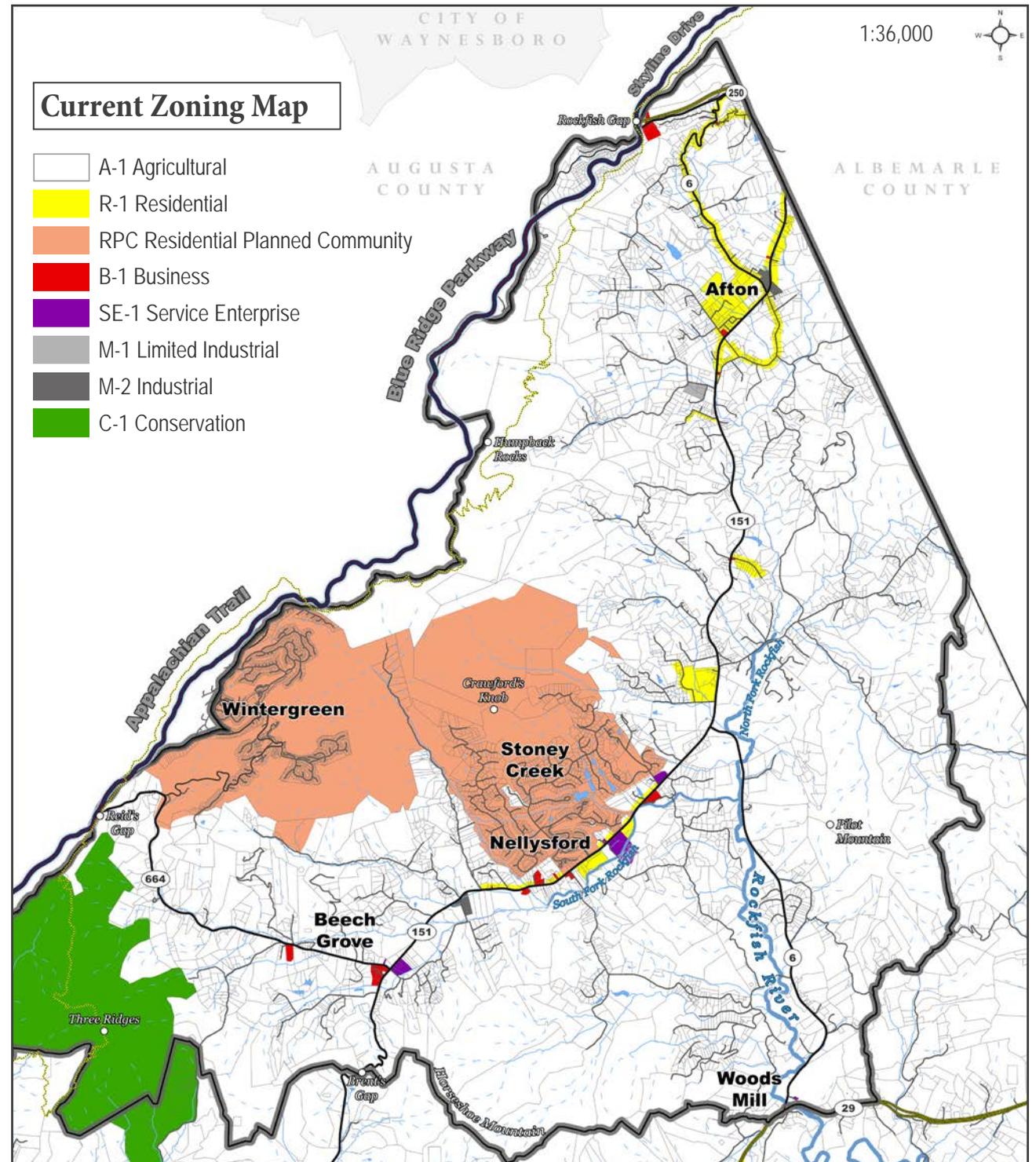
Previous plans and studies have included the Rockfish Valley area, but few plans focused specifically on the Rockfish Valley. Earlier countywide “Comprehensive Plans,” including the original 1971 plan and the most recent 2002 plan, have recognized the area’s unique attributes but have provided only a limited framework for the area’s current development and future growth. Other plans and studies include: VDOT Route 151 Corridor Study (2013); the Nelson County Green Infrastructure Plan (2010); the Rockfish Valley Corridor Water & Sewer Study (2002); the Region 2000 Water Supply Plan (2011); the TJPDC Regional Bike & Ped. Plan; Nelson County’s Broadband Project, EDA Plan, and DRIVE Tourism Plan; and the VA Tourism Plan (2013) and VA Outdoors Plan (2013).

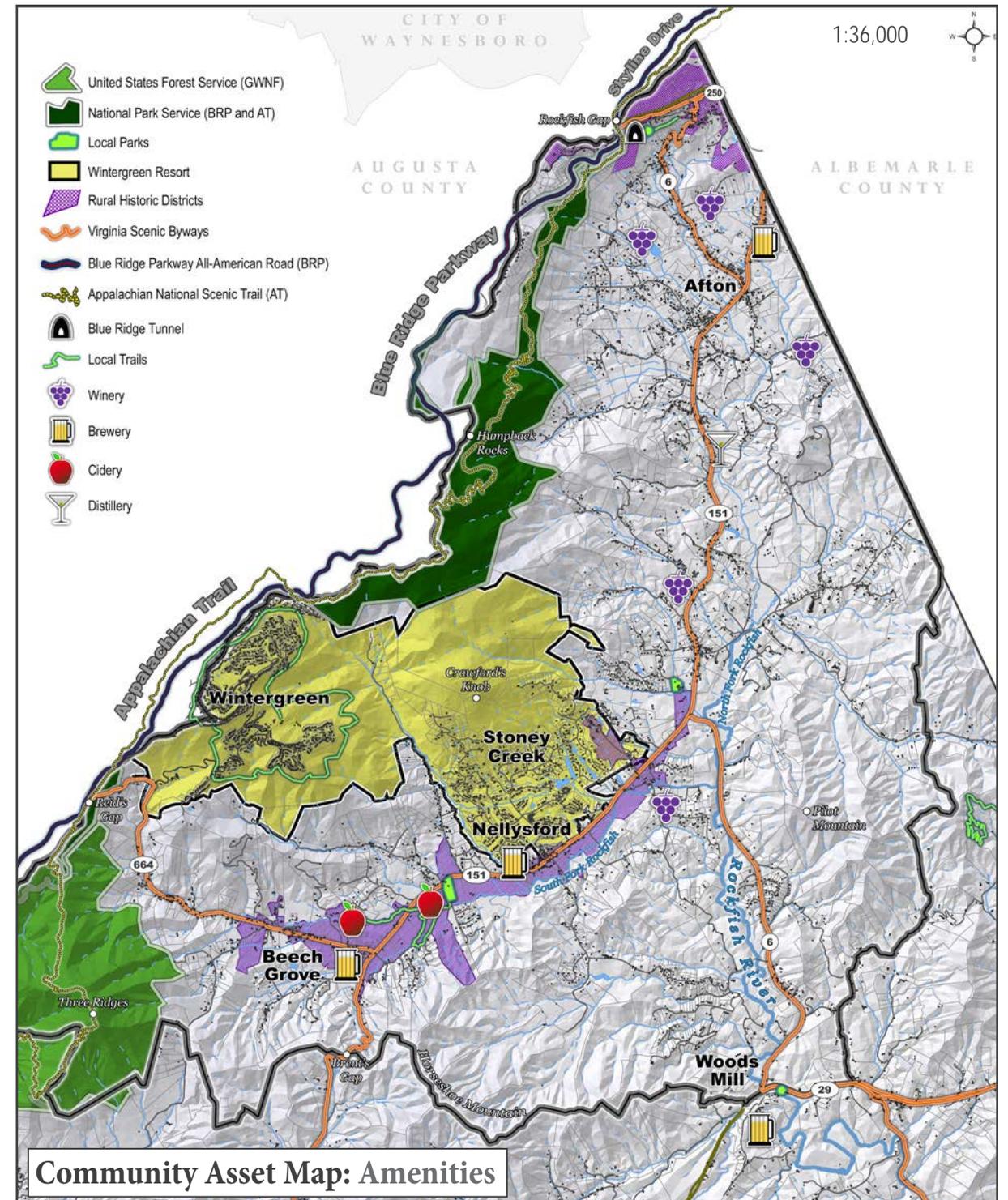
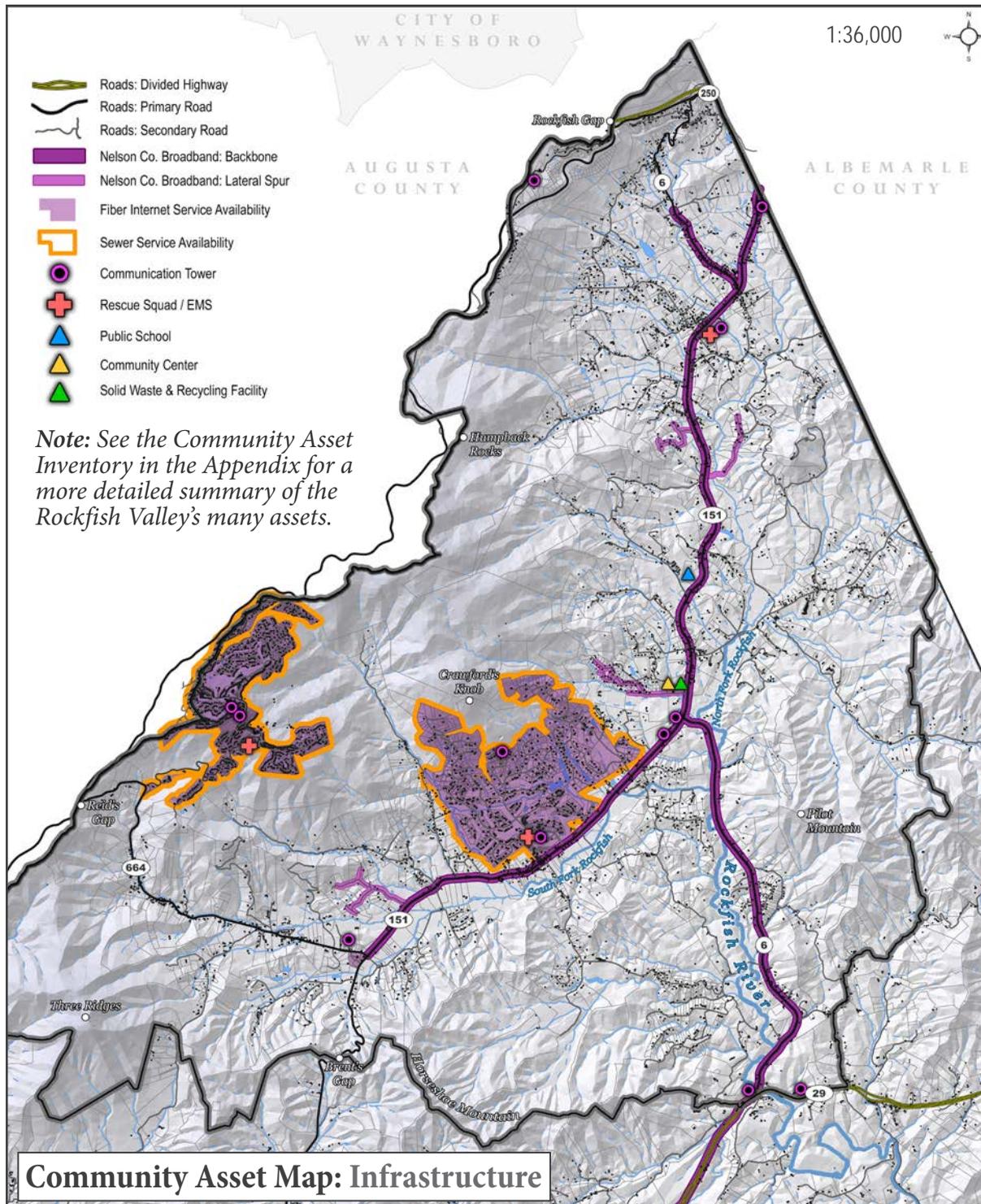
Facts & Figures

- Current Zoning Map: adopted in 1977 (with individual amendments)
- Current Comprehensive Plan: adopted in 2002
- Properties on the National Register of Historic Places: 5
- Rural Historic Districts: 2
- Designated Scenic Byways: 5

Next Steps

Planning policies and land use regulations are the two main tools that are available to local governments for shaping a community’s current and future conditions. Planning and zoning are the overriding factors that have the ability to impact all the other topic areas addressed in the RVAP. Specifically, updates to the Comprehensive Plan and/or modifications to the Zoning Ordinance are the most appropriate and effective ways to successfully address issues of growth and preservation in the study area.





Area Analysis: Economy

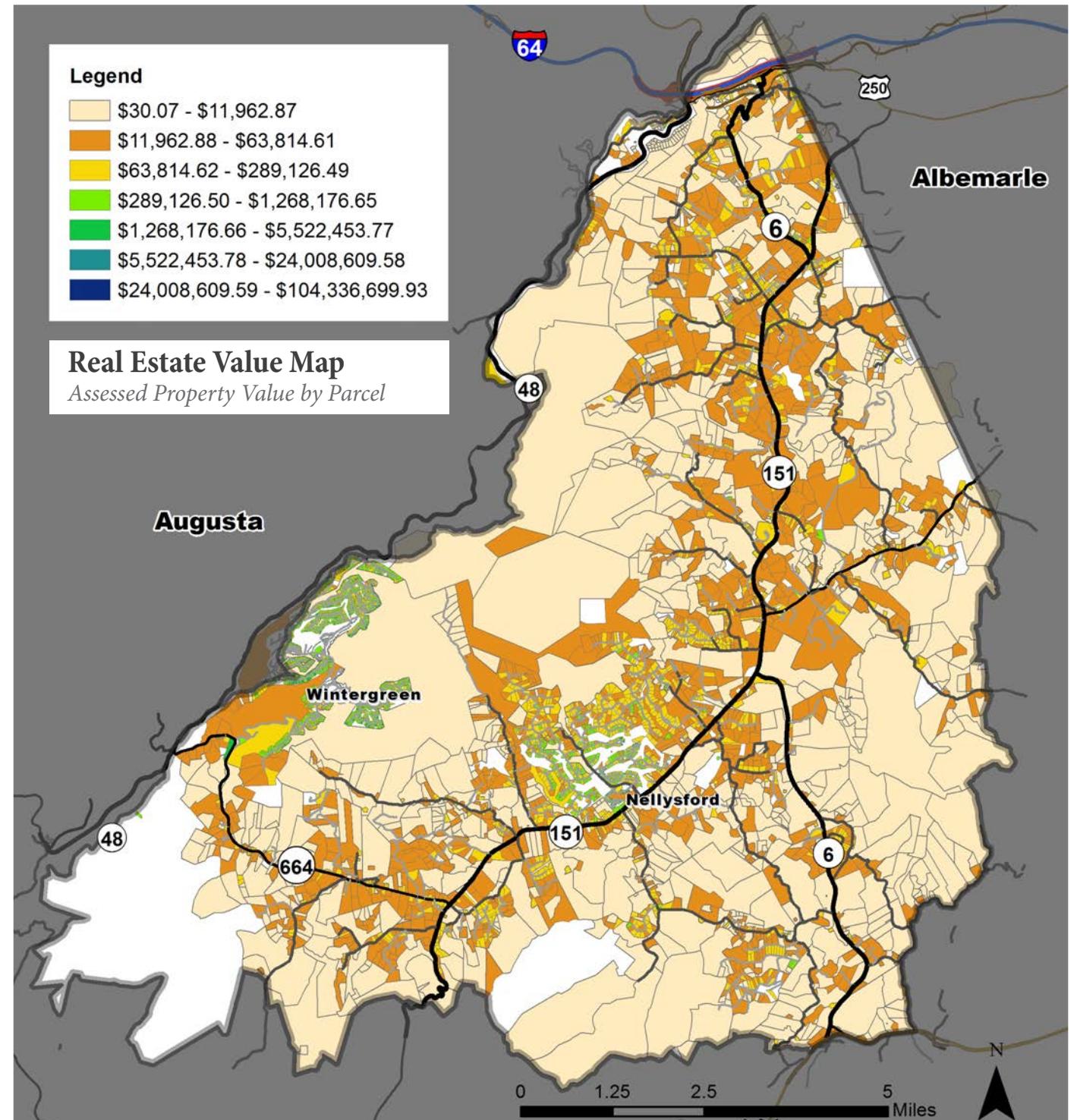
Overview

The economy of the Rockfish Valley is interconnected with its natural beauty and rural identity. The stunning scenic vistas, authentic ag heritage, and outdoor recreation destinations attract a significant number of tourists and vacation home owners. Of the area's 1,593 jobs, the largest proportion (40%) are in the accommodation and food service industry. The largest entities are Wintergreen Resort and the area's agribusiness sector, which includes numerous award-winning breweries, cideries, wineries, and distilleries. The vast majority of businesses have located on the Route 151 corridor, with concentrations in Nellysford, Afton, and Beech Grove, and also at Wintergreen Resort. The area has a daily out-commuting pattern for employment, with area residents' destinations including Albemarle County (18%), Charlottesville (12%), Augusta (4%) and Waynesboro (3%).

Facts & Figures

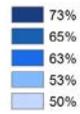
- Median Household Income in RVAP Study Area: \$57,203
- Median Household Income in Nelson County: \$48,888
- Population in Study Area: 7,749 people (32 persons/square mile)
- Unemployment Rate: 3.4%

This map highlights the distribution of real estate values in the Rockfish Valley expressed in total dollars per acre. This value includes both the underlying land value and the value of any improvements, such as dwellings and other structures. Note: data was not available for all parcels; and the data does not necessarily represent a taxable value of real estate (due primarily to land use valuation). Data was sourced from Nelson County assessor records from 2016.



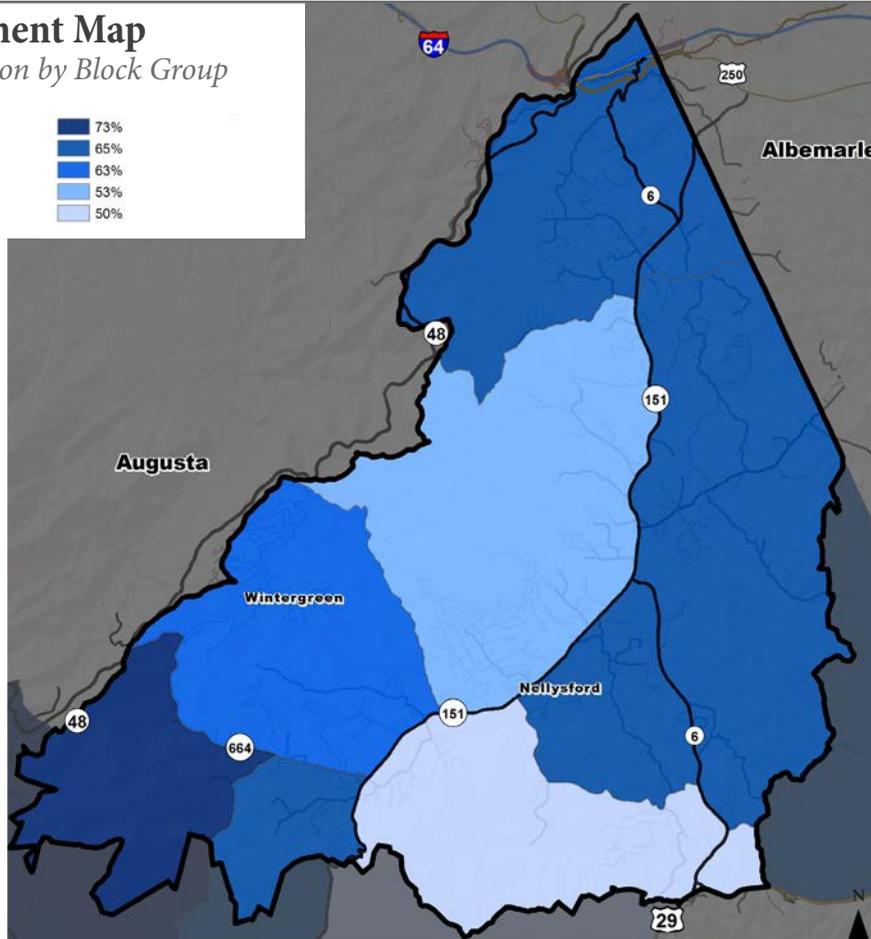
Level of Employment Map

Labor Force Participation by Block Group



This map shows the population (age 16+) that is participating in the labor force.

This map identifies which block groups have: relatively high un-employment rates; concentrations of people who may have dropped out of the labor force due to disability or long-term unemployment; and concentrations of people not participating because they are full-time students or retired. The statewide average participation rate is 66.4%.



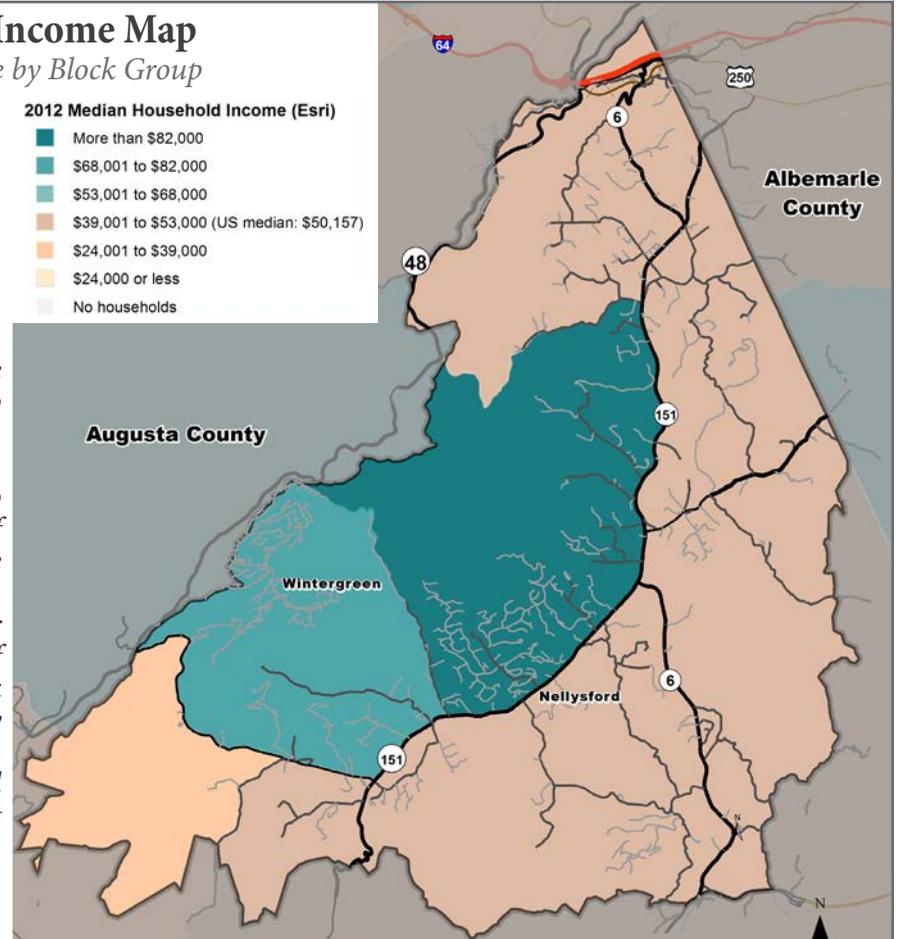
Annual Household Income Map

Median Household Income by Block Group

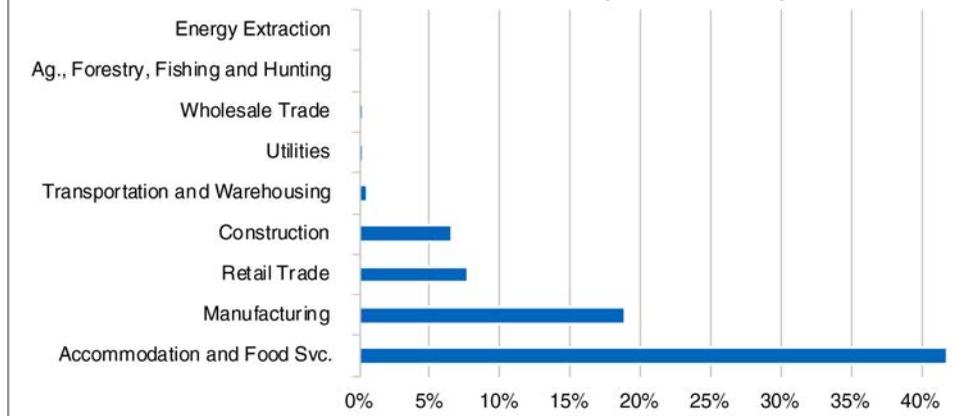


This map shows median annual household income levels of each block group within the study area.

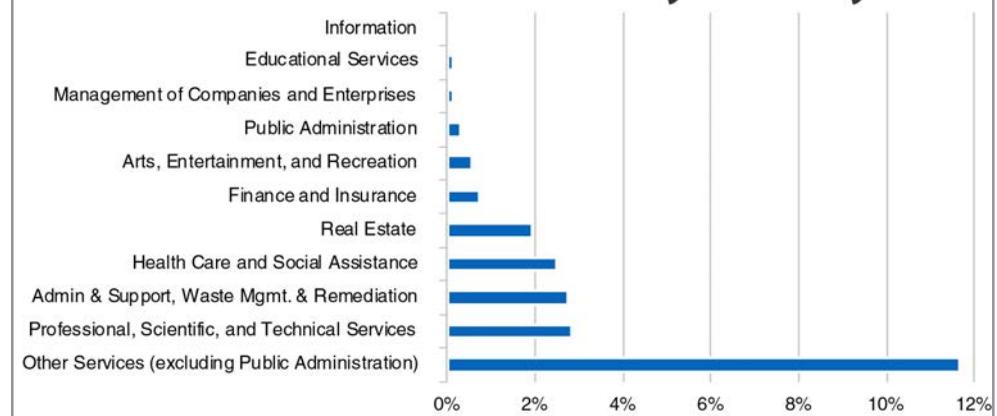
Specifically, this map shows that the majority of the block groups within the study area have a median household income at or below the U.S. median of \$50,157. The two block groups containing Stoney Creek and Wintergreen have median annual household incomes that are higher than the U.S. median of \$50,157.



Blue-Collar Jobs by Industry



White-Collar Jobs by Industry



Area Analysis: Agriculture

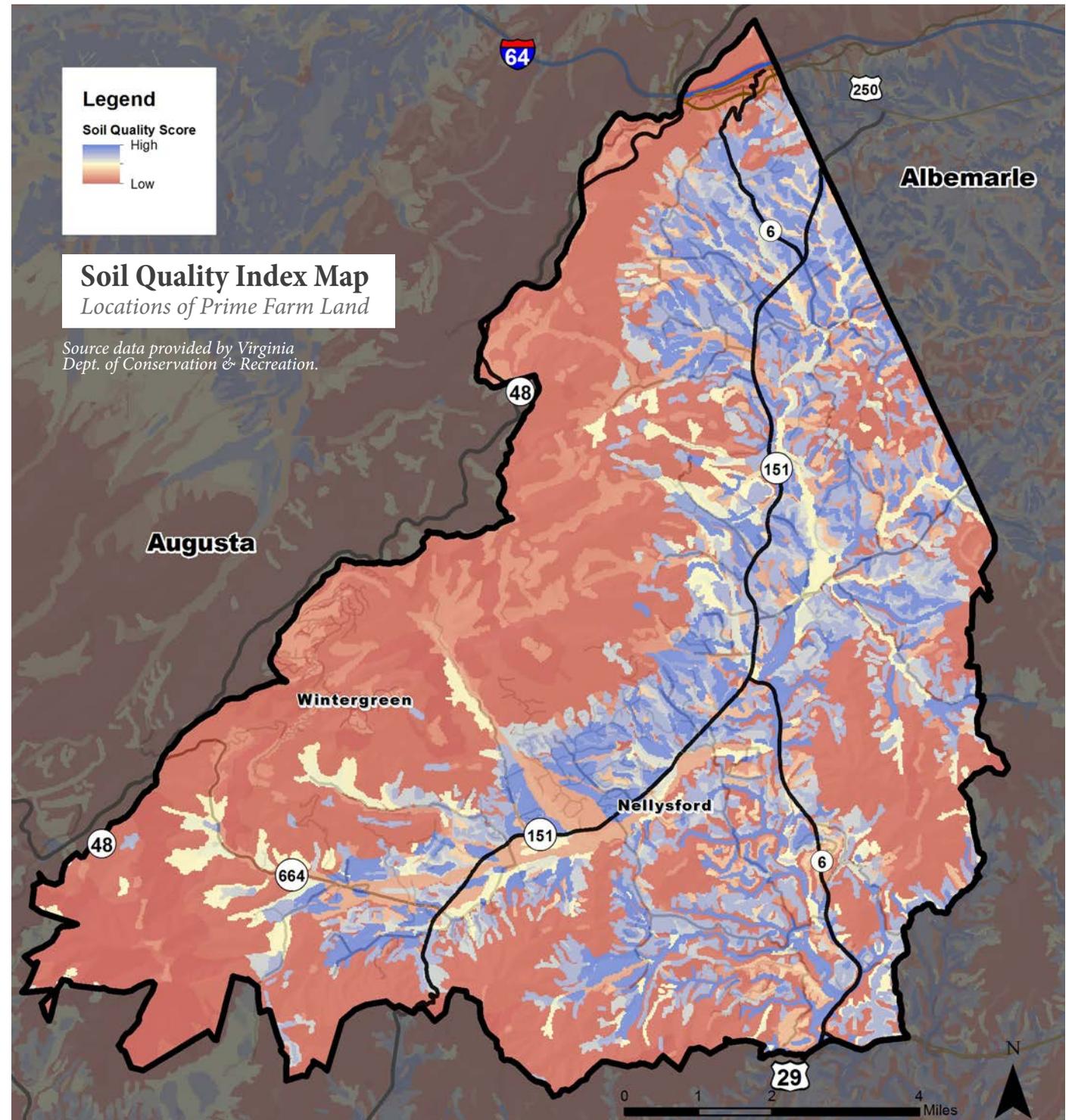
Overview

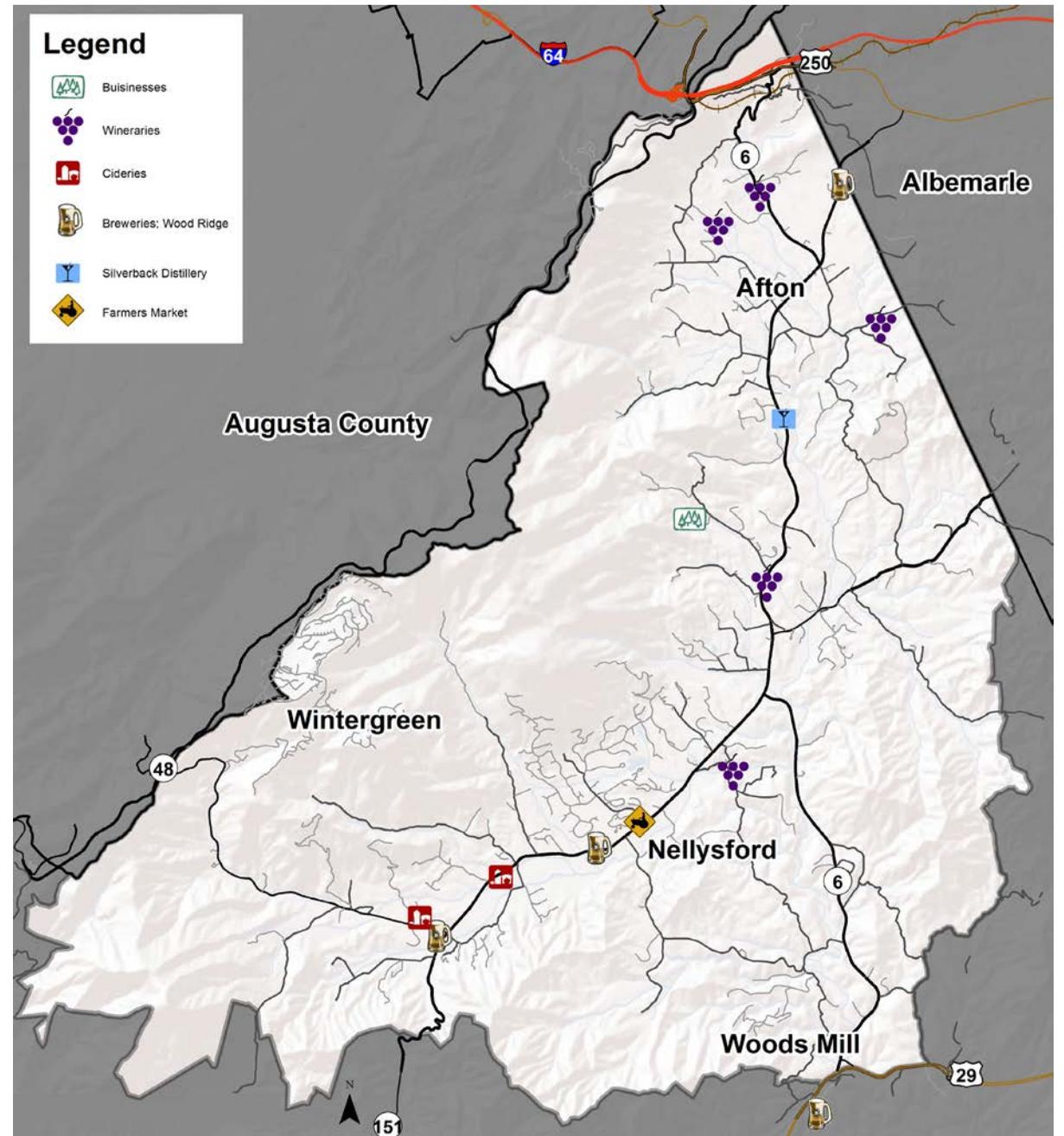
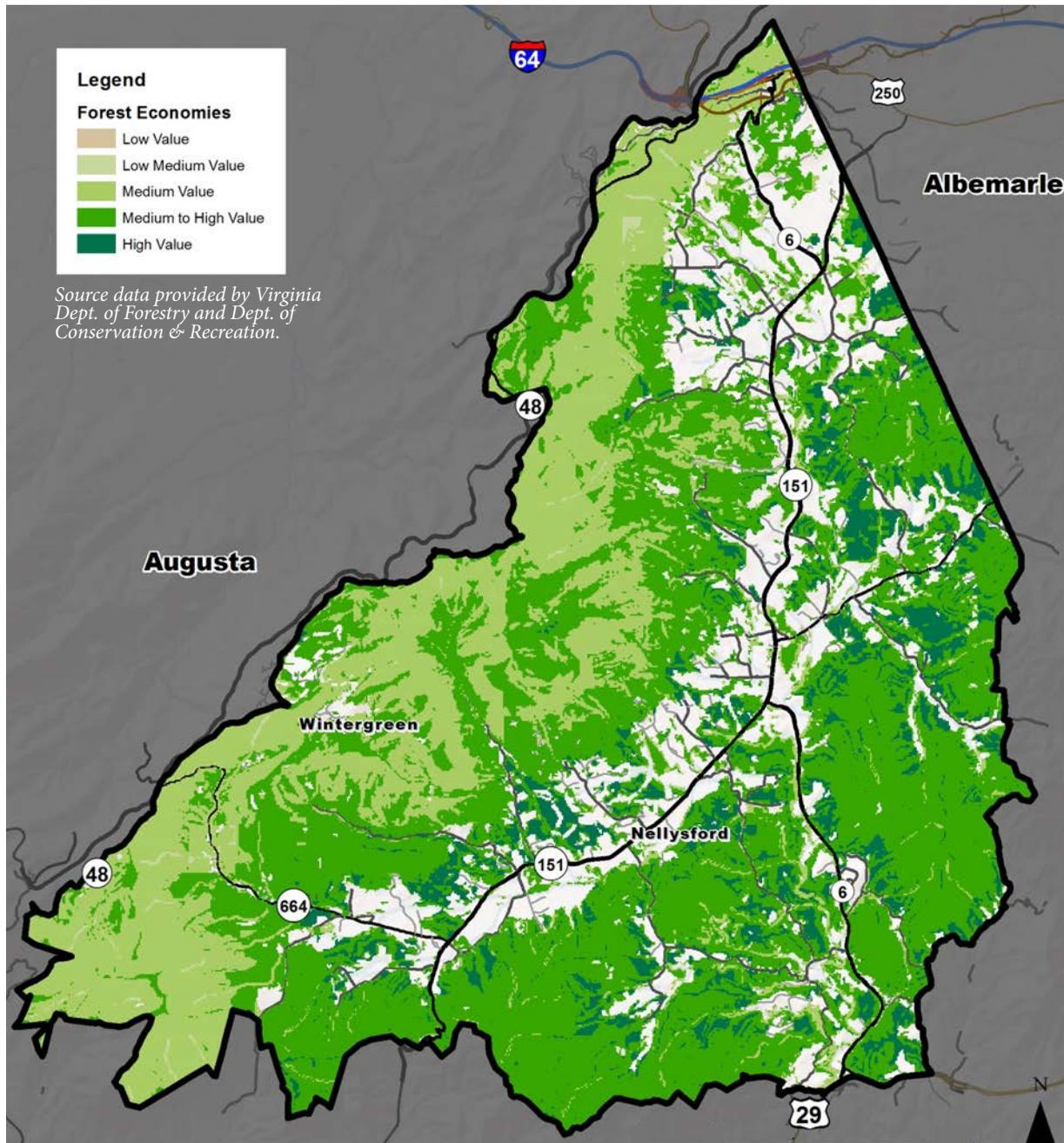
The Rockfish Valley supports a thriving agribusiness and agritourism economy, including numerous award-winning craft breweries, cideries, wineries, and distilleries. The area is also home to more traditional ag activities including orchards, raising cattle, the production of forage, crops, nurseries, and timber harvesting. The area's agricultural heritage and landscapes help to define the authentic rural character that is such an important part of the community identity. Working farms and forests also benefit the area by protecting open spaces and natural habitats, and providing recreation opportunities for hunting, fishing, and hiking. Most agricultural activities in the area are concentrated in the valley floors, where the flattest and most fertile agricultural land can be found. Further up slope, ag lands transition from fields and pastures to orchards and vineyards which tend to benefit from cooler temperatures, rocky soils, and desirable solar aspect.

Facts & Figures

- Amount of RVAP study area land in agriculture: 8,243 acres (13%)
- Total value of agricultural products sold: \$15.81M (Countywide)
- Total value of livestock: \$5.43M (Countywide)
- Cattle: \$4.79M (Countywide)
- Total value of crops: \$10.38M (Countywide)
- Fruits, tree nuts and berries: \$463,900 (Countywide)
- Timber Harvest Value: \$2.85M (Countywide)–29th in VA (VDOF 2012)

The Soil Quality Index combines several factors relating to soil quality for agricultural uses. These include prime agricultural soils, the threat of flooding, soil type, and terrain. The index scores range from 100 (optimal) to 0 (unsuitable for agriculture). This map demonstrates that high-quality soils are primarily concentrated along streams and river bottoms.





Forest Economics Map

Economic Value of Forests

This map classifies the economic value of forest lands, organized into five values based on a combination of environmental and access factors. The dataset can help guide land management and planning decisions by highlighting forests that have the highest timber values.

Agritourism Map

This map identifies the area's many agritourism locations, which include wineries, breweries, cideries, distilleries, a farmers' market, and a specialty retail nursery.

Area Analysis: Transportation

Overview

The transportation network in the Rockfish Valley consists of rural two-lane arterial highways and rural routes; all 224 road miles are maintained by VDOT. The major corridors are Route 151 (which runs north-south) and Route 6 (which runs east-west). Route 664 (Beech Grove Road) is also an important route connecting the Rockfish Valley to Wintergreen Resort and the Blue Ridge Parkway, and it provides access to Augusta County through Reids Gap. All three routes are official VA Scenic Byways; and Route 151 is a designated bicycling route. The Route 151 corridor is also the location of much of the area's recent commercial development as well as an increasing number of special events. Route 6 has experienced less growth, but has the most heavy vehicle traffic in the study area (9% of all vehicles on the route are "heavy" such as trucks, busses, or tractor trailers).

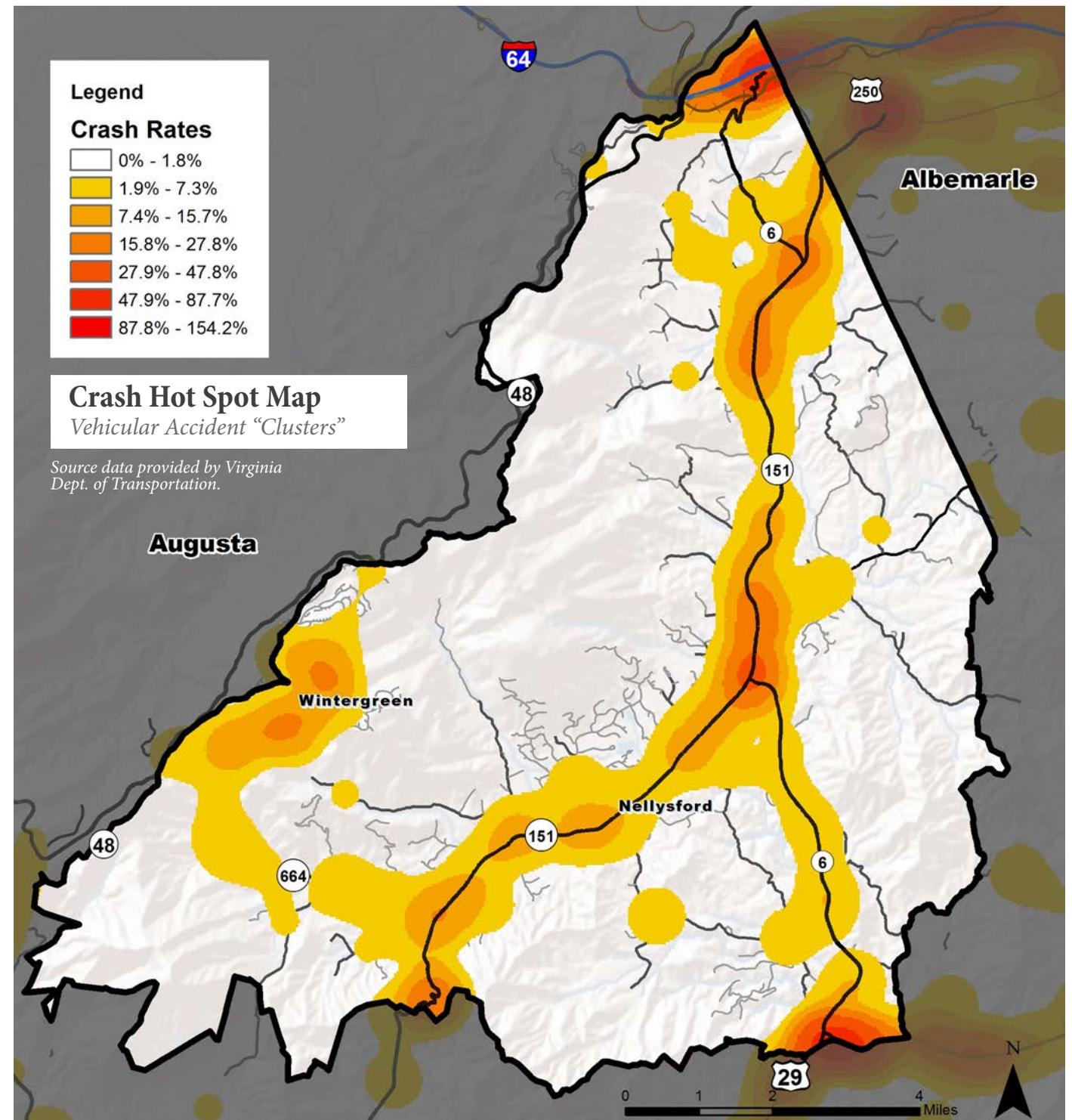
Facts & Figures

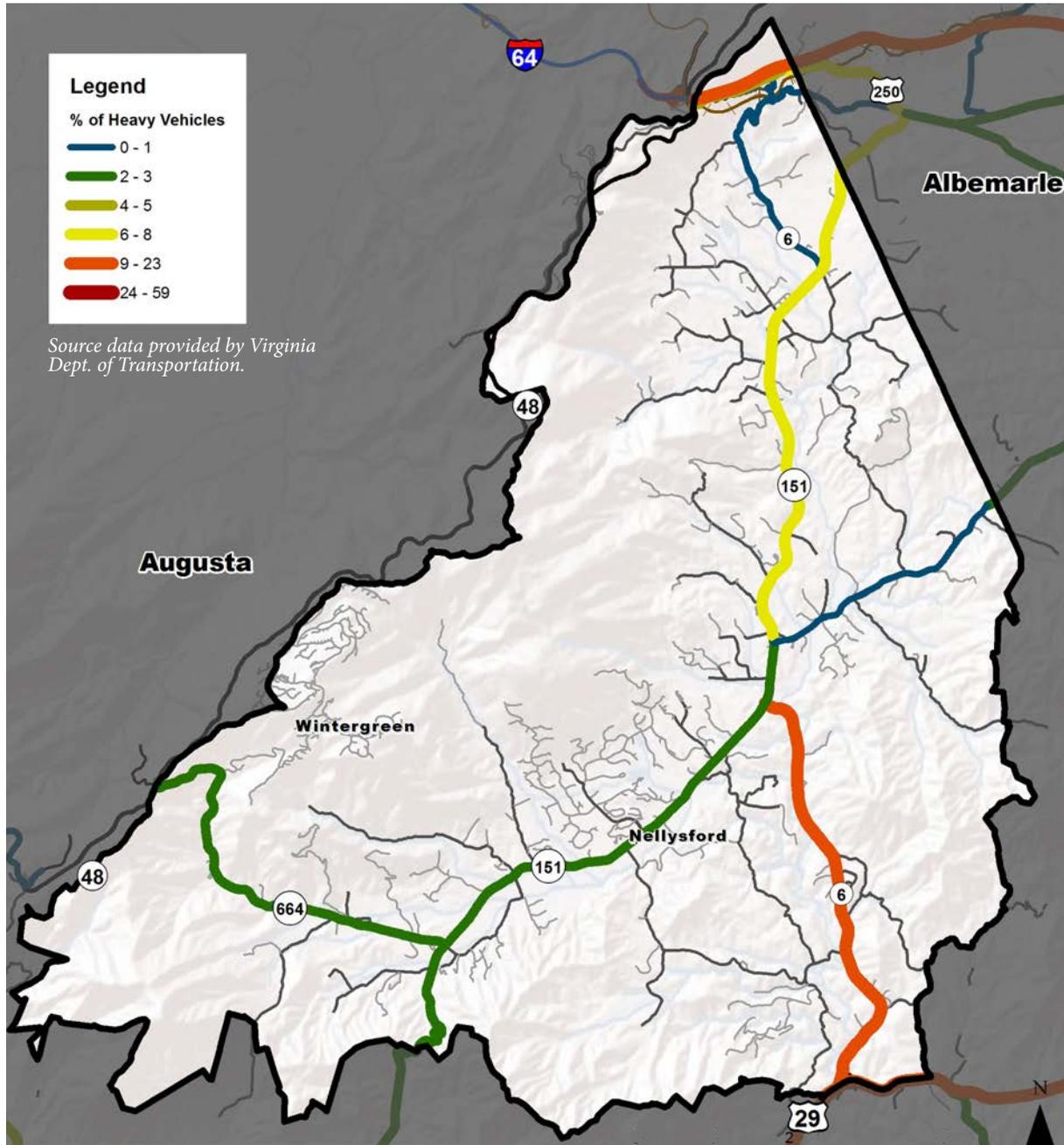
(VDOT Data: 2012-2014)

- Total number of crashes (between 2012-2014): 302
- Most congested routes: Route 151 and I-64
- Total number of crashes involving alcohol (between 2012-2014): 26
- Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT): 8,161

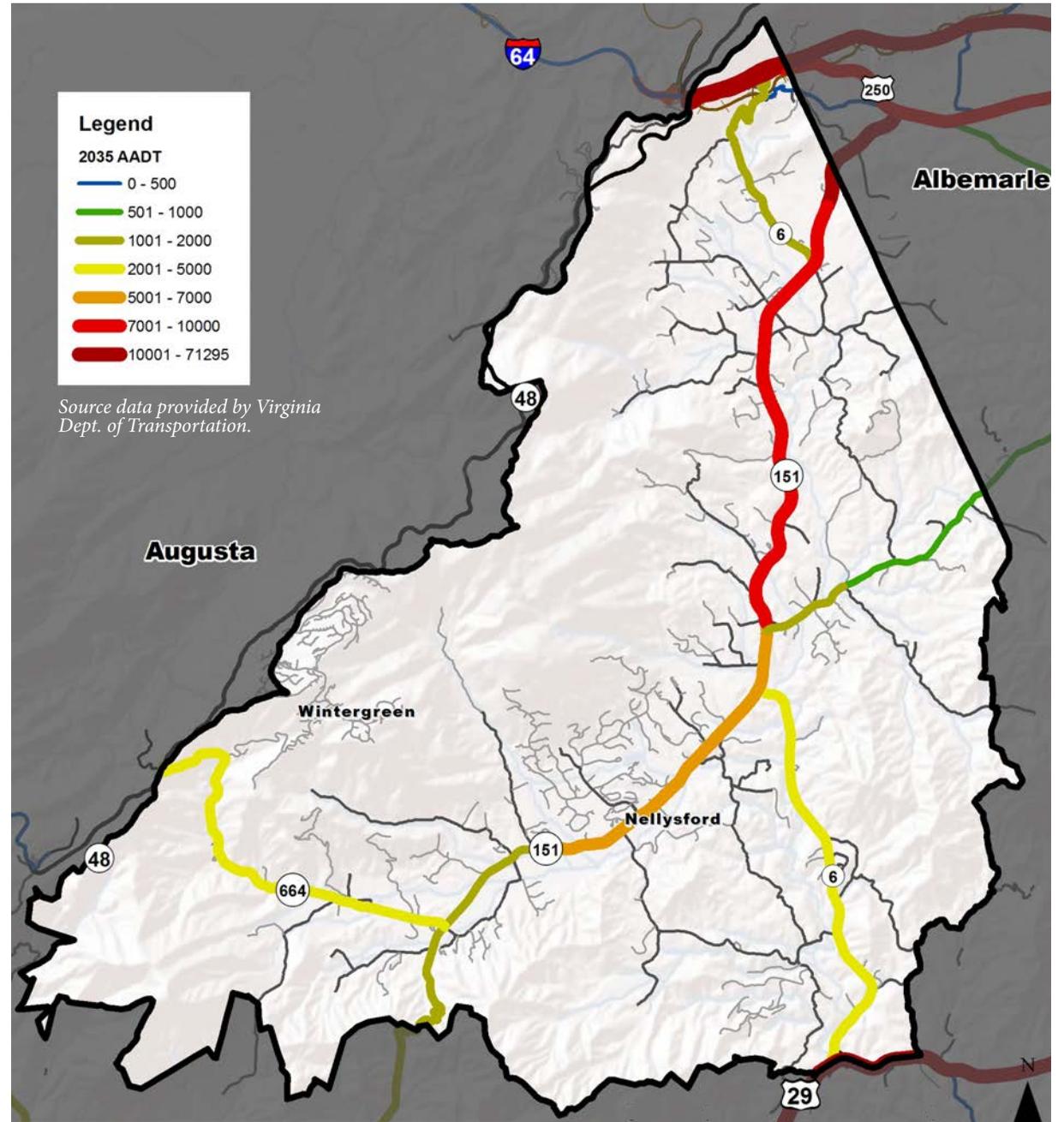
Current Recommendations

Several studies have evaluated the transportation network in the Rockfish Valley and identified ways to improve safety and reduce congestion. Some recommendations have been incorporated into the Regional Long Range Transportation Plan (RLRP-2035). Most recently, the VDOT Route 151 Corridor Study (2013) identified strategies for improving problematic intersections all along Route 151; two such projects within the corridor were recently awarded construction funds through VDOT's Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP).





Percent Truck Traffic Map
% of Heavy Vehicles Among All Vehicle Types



2035 Estimate Map: Average Annual Daily Traffic
VDOT Forecast for Daily Vehicle Traffic - 2035

Area Analysis: Zoning & Land Use Patterns

How are Zoning and Land Use Different?

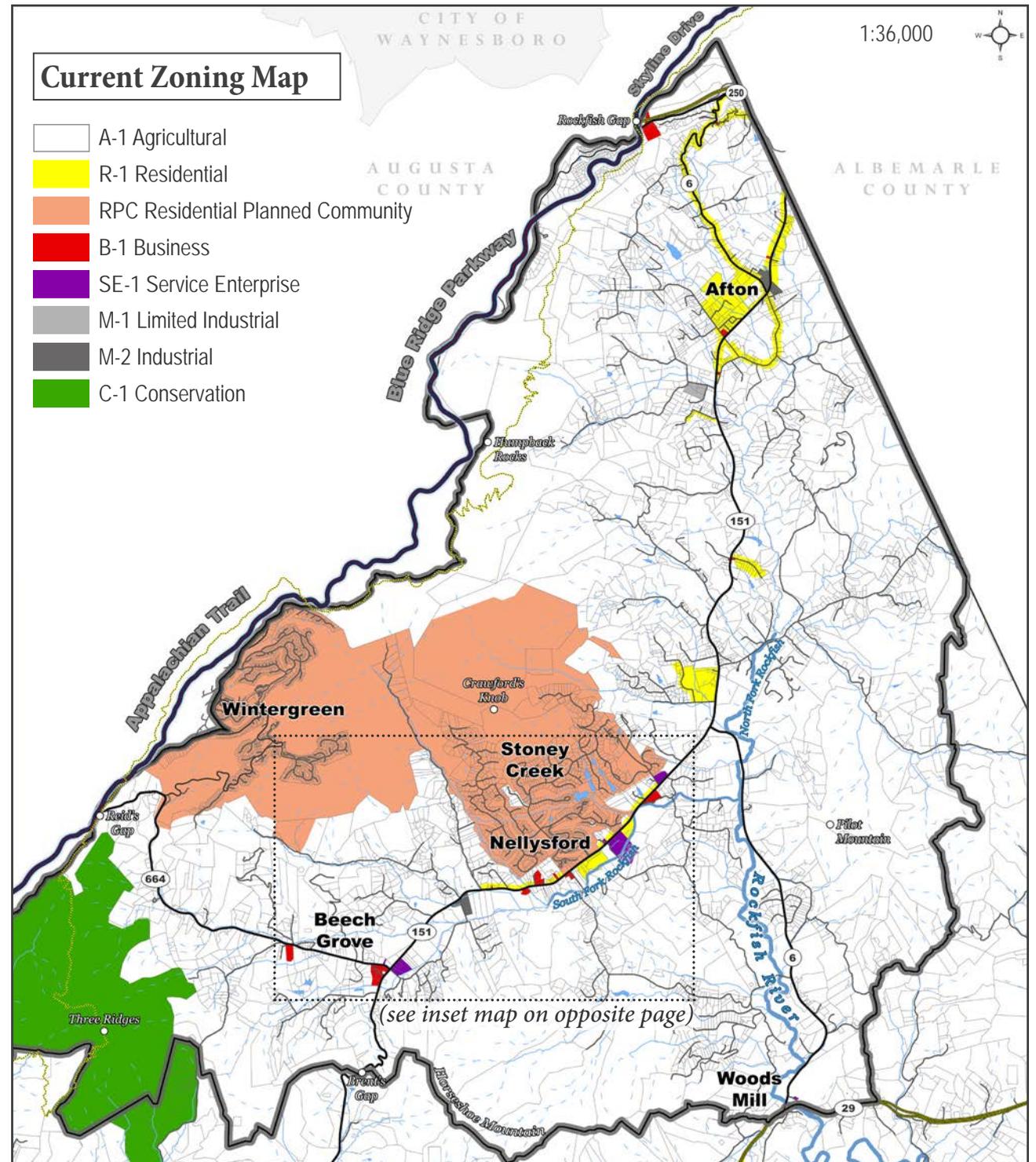
- **Zoning** is the system of legally-binding local regulations which designate specific “districts,” where some land uses are permissible and other land uses are not permissible; and
- **Land Use** refers to the actual uses and structures that are found on a property, regardless of the zoning designation.

Zoning Map Analysis (Overview):

- Current zoning designations are highly variable throughout the Rockfish Valley, and do not appear to be reflective of any comprehensive or coherent zoning ‘patterns’ or districts.
- There are numerous examples of isolated commercial or industrial properties within rural residential areas.
- There are other examples where unharmonious or even incompatible zoning districts are located adjacent or very close to one another (for example: M-2 Industrial District and R-1 Residential District).
- There is no discernible “district” or area that is properly zoned for commercial (or mixed-use) activity or for a traditional village development;
- There is a notably small amount of property zoned for residential uses and structures (R-1 Residential District or R-2 Residential District).

Zoning Map Analysis (By District):

(see opposite page)



Residential (R-1)

- The RV contains relatively few locations zoned R-1, even though residential properties are located in many areas.
- R-1 Districts are located in Afton, Avon, and Greenfield.
- Nellysford also contains parcels zoned R-1, located in the immediate vicinity of A-1, B-1, SE-1, and RPC-MU zoning.
- Almost all R-1 zoning is linear “roadside” zoning; many R-1 parcels are “split-zoned” (R-1 in front / A-1 in rear).

Residential Planned Community (RPC)

- The RV contains the only RPC District in Nelson County.
- The RPC consists of Wintergreen Resort and Stoney Creek.
- RPC zoning allows various uses and structures, subject to the approved “Master Plan” designations for different “sectors” located throughout the RPC District.
 - For example: the RPC–Multiple Use Sector in Nellysford is effectively a B-1 Business District.

Business (B-1) and Service Enterprise (SE-1)

- B-1 (Business) zoning and SE-1 (Service Enterprise) zoning is found at various locations throughout the RV – mostly along Routes 151, 6, or 664.
- The current zoning map does not contain any locations in the RV that are suitable for supporting a true business “district” or a traditional mixed-use commercial village.

Industrial (M-2) and Limited Industrial (M-1)

- The RV contains a small amount of M-1 and M-2 zoning in Afton (along Critzers Shop Rd. and Mill Ln.) and in Nellysford (Rockfish Valley Hwy. in the Spruce Creek area).
- Some M-1 and M-2 locations seem random relative to adjacent zoning designations and land uses. This is partially because some properties were originally zoned M-2 due to the existence of industrial uses at that time – some of which have been discontinued.

100-year Floodplain (FP)

The Floodplain District exists along many streams, creeks, and river bottoms throughout the Rockfish Valley. It exists as a “zoning overlay district,” which creates additional regulatory restrictions in addition to the underlying zoning regulations. The Floodplain District locations are established by the boundaries of the 100-year floodplain, as defined by FEMA.

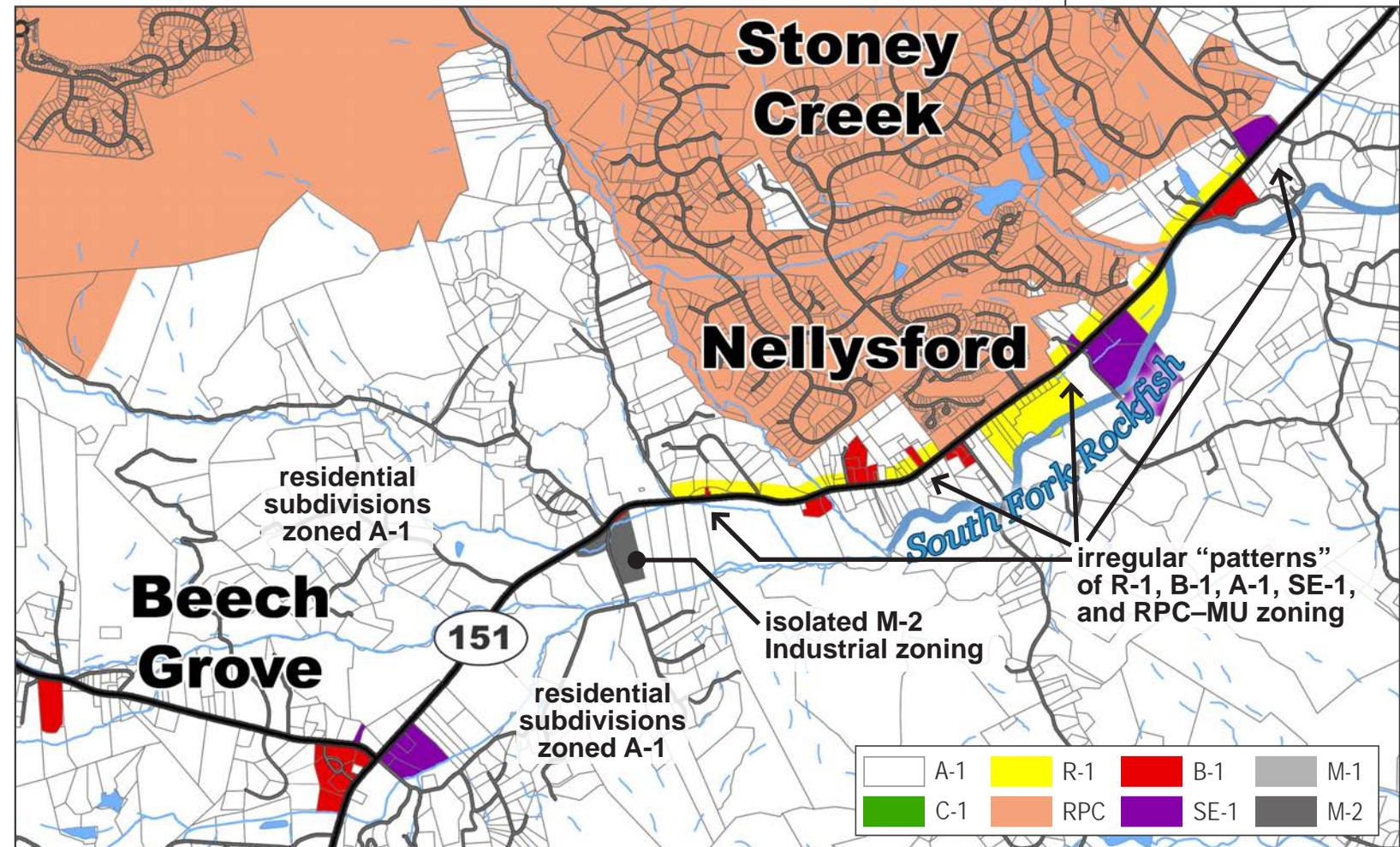
Conservation (C-1)

- The only C-1 zoning in the RV are in the Three Ridges Wilderness Area of the George Washington National Forest.

Agricultural (A-1)

- The A-1 District covers a large majority of the RV.
- The A-1 District is effectively a “rural mixed use” district:
 - large amount of A-1 properties are used for residential dwellings, including numerous residential subdivisions;
 - relatively small percentage is farming or other ag; and
 - large number and wide variety of permissible land uses, either by right or special use.

Current Zoning Map:
Nellysford

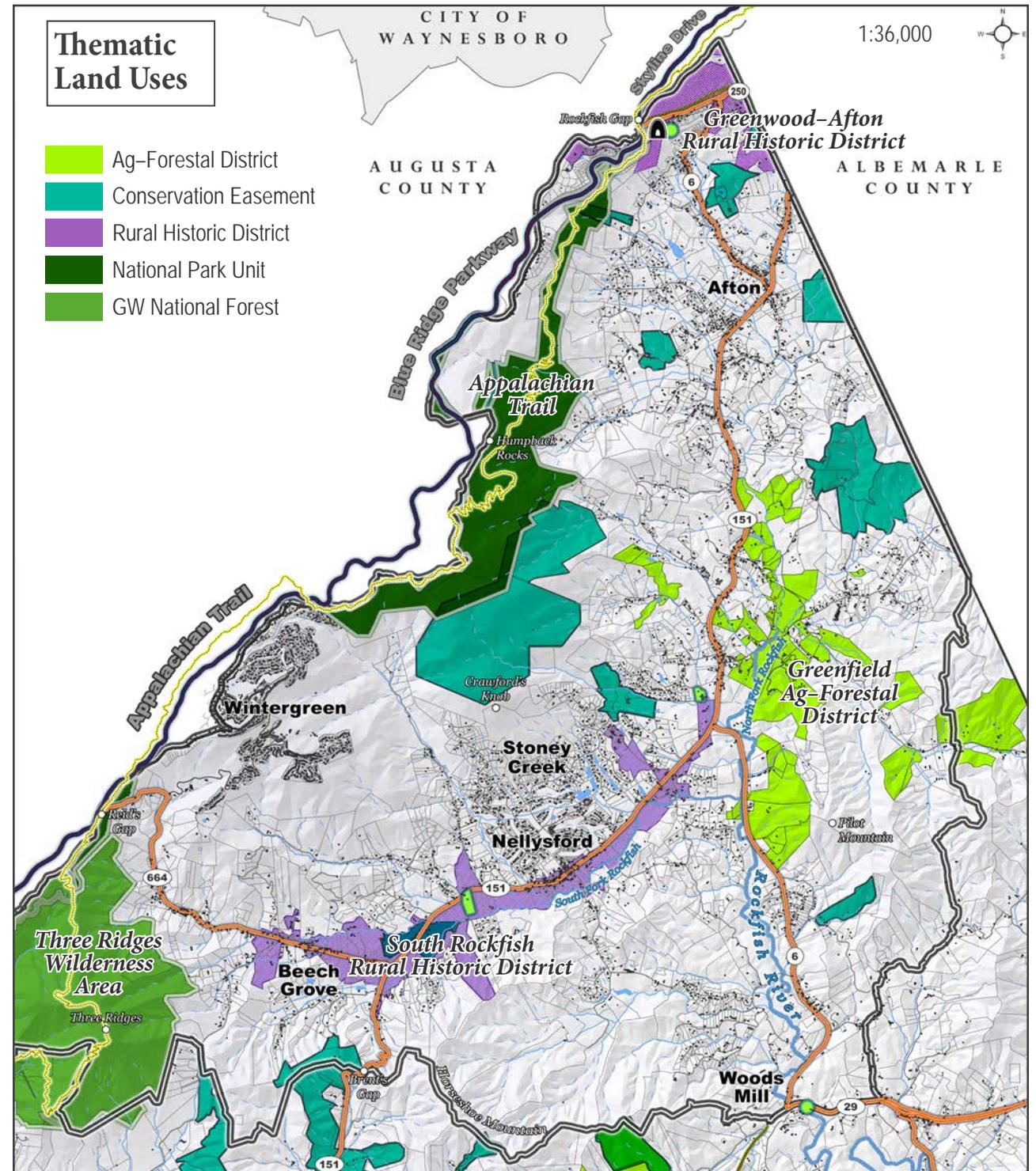


Area Analysis: Zoning & Land Use Patterns

Land Use Analysis

- A substantial amount of non-commercially zoned land is being used for commercial uses and/or structures.
- The commercial uses of non-commercially zoned land are scattered across various locations throughout the study area, especially in the Agricultural (A-1) District. (see page 22 – opposite)
- A substantial amount of land zoned Agricultural (A-1) is being used for non-agricultural uses or structures, such as residential or commercial uses.
- A substantial amount of dwellings and residential land use is occurring in land zoned Agricultural (A-1), not Residential (R-1) or (R-2).

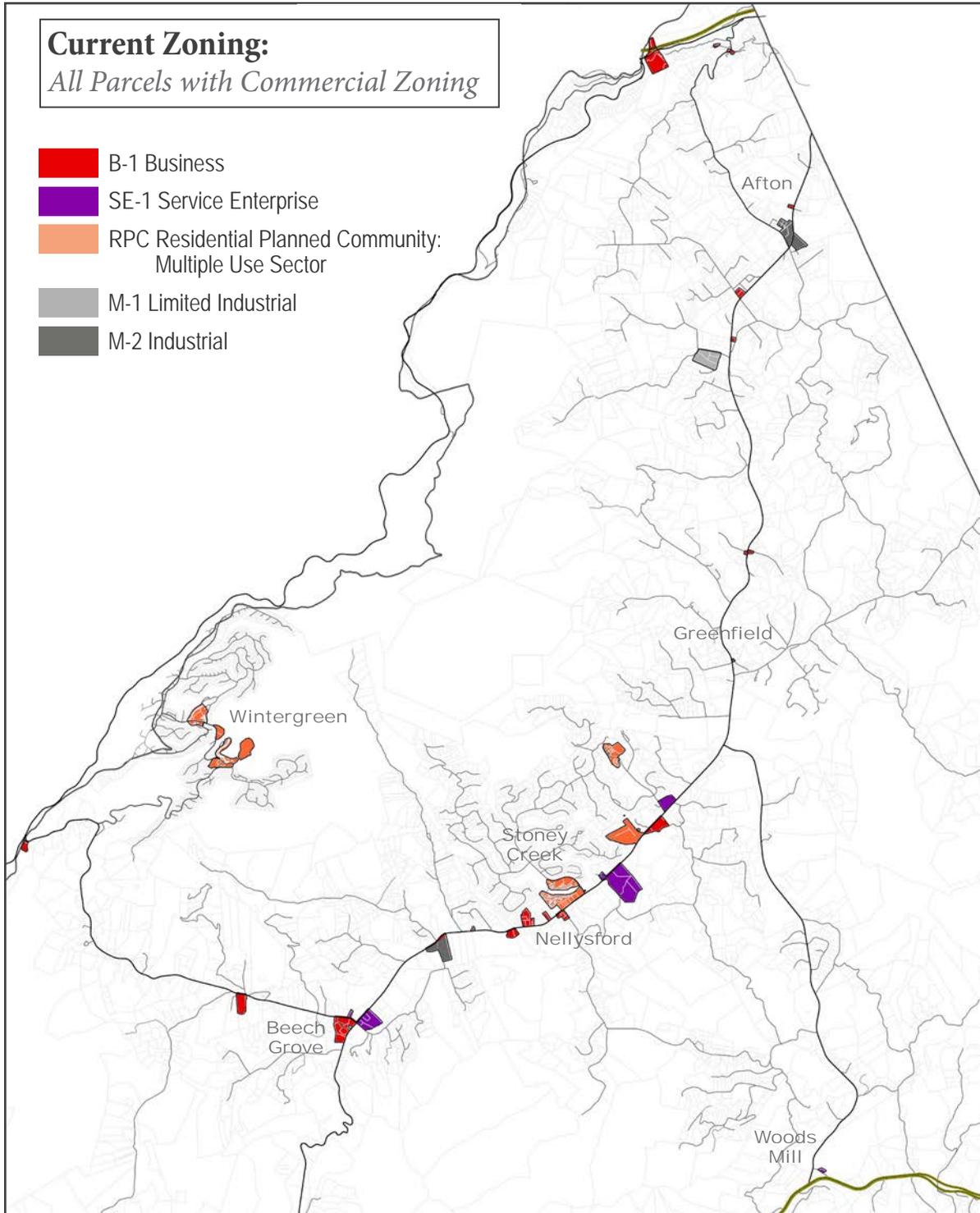
Crawford's Knob (which is under conservation easement) and hayfields in September.



Current Zoning:

All Parcels with Commercial Zoning

-  B-1 Business
-  SE-1 Service Enterprise
-  RPC Residential Planned Community: Multiple Use Sector
-  M-1 Limited Industrial
-  M-2 Industrial



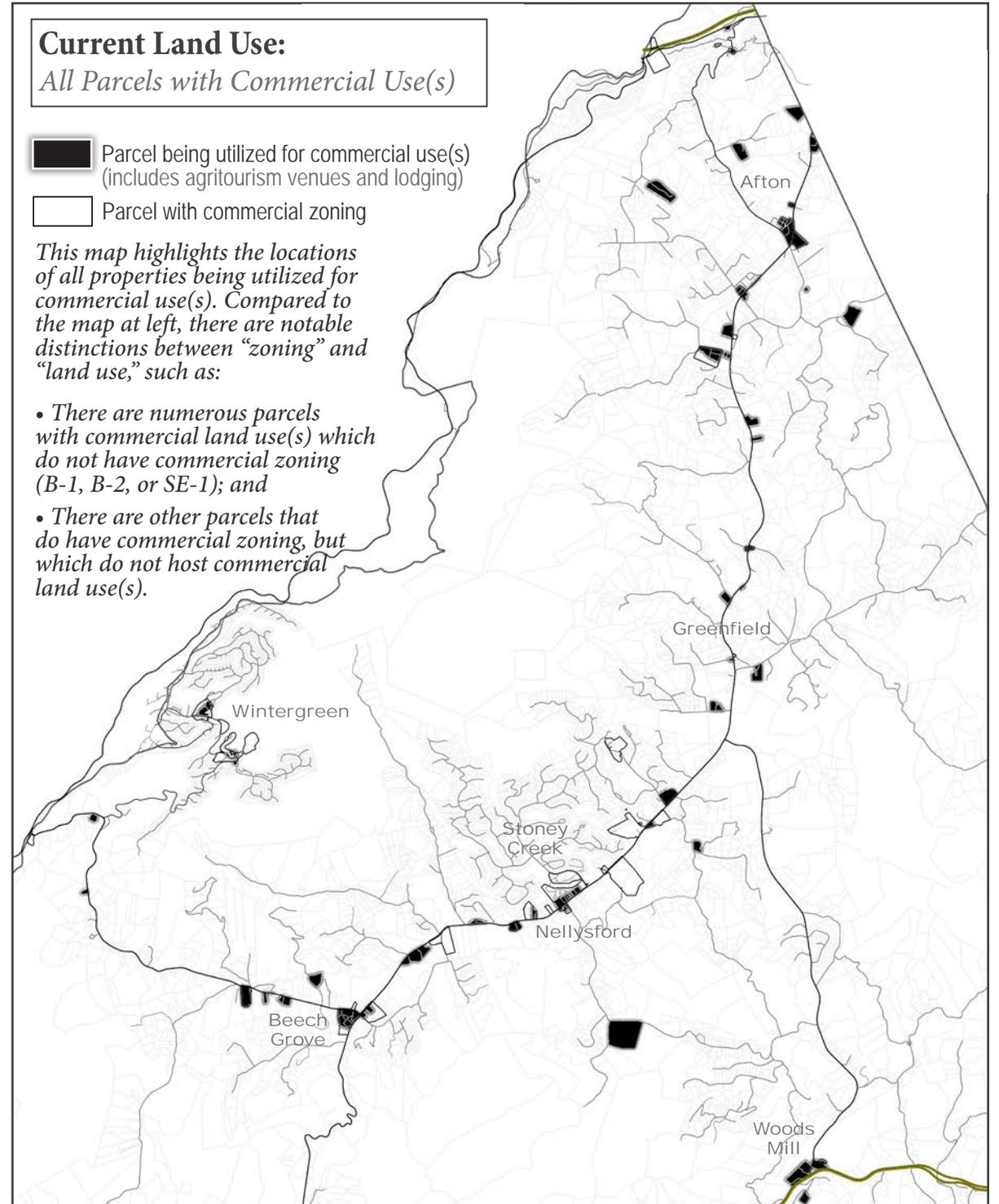
Current Land Use:

All Parcels with Commercial Use(s)

-  Parcel being utilized for commercial use(s) (includes agritourism venues and lodging)
-  Parcel with commercial zoning

This map highlights the locations of all properties being utilized for commercial use(s). Compared to the map at left, there are notable distinctions between “zoning” and “land use,” such as:

- There are numerous parcels with commercial land use(s) which do not have commercial zoning (B-1, B-2, or SE-1); and
- There are other parcels that do have commercial zoning, but which do not host commercial land use(s).

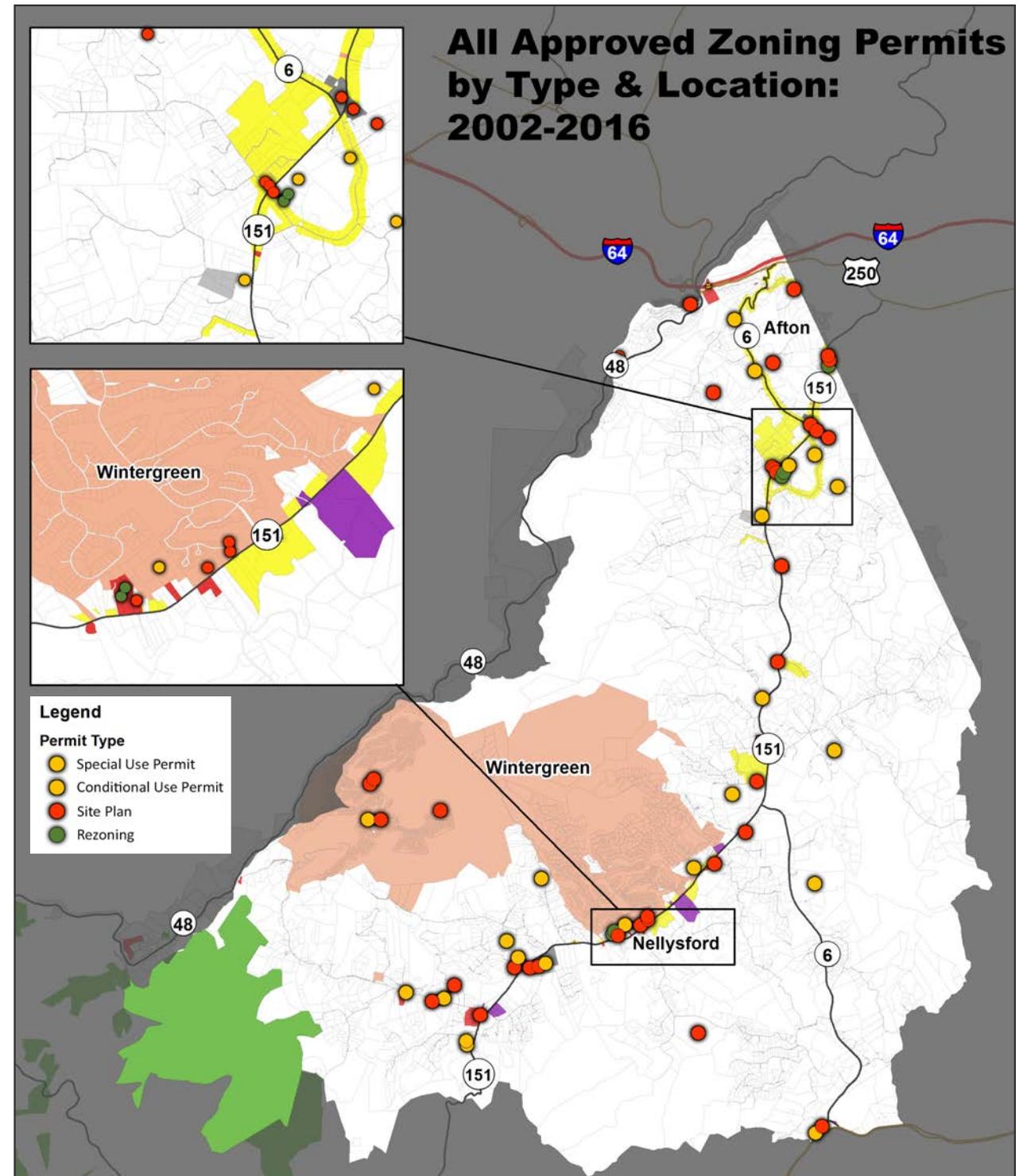
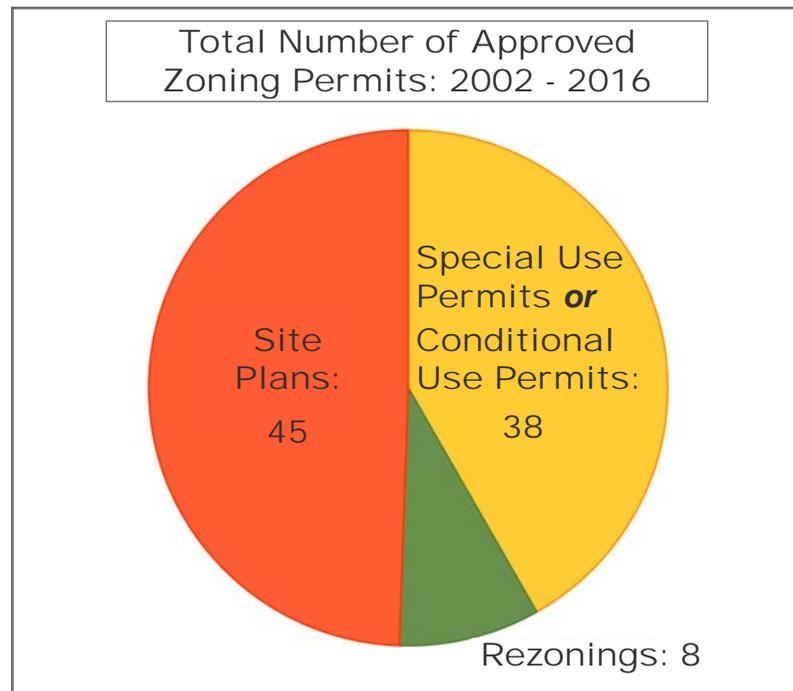


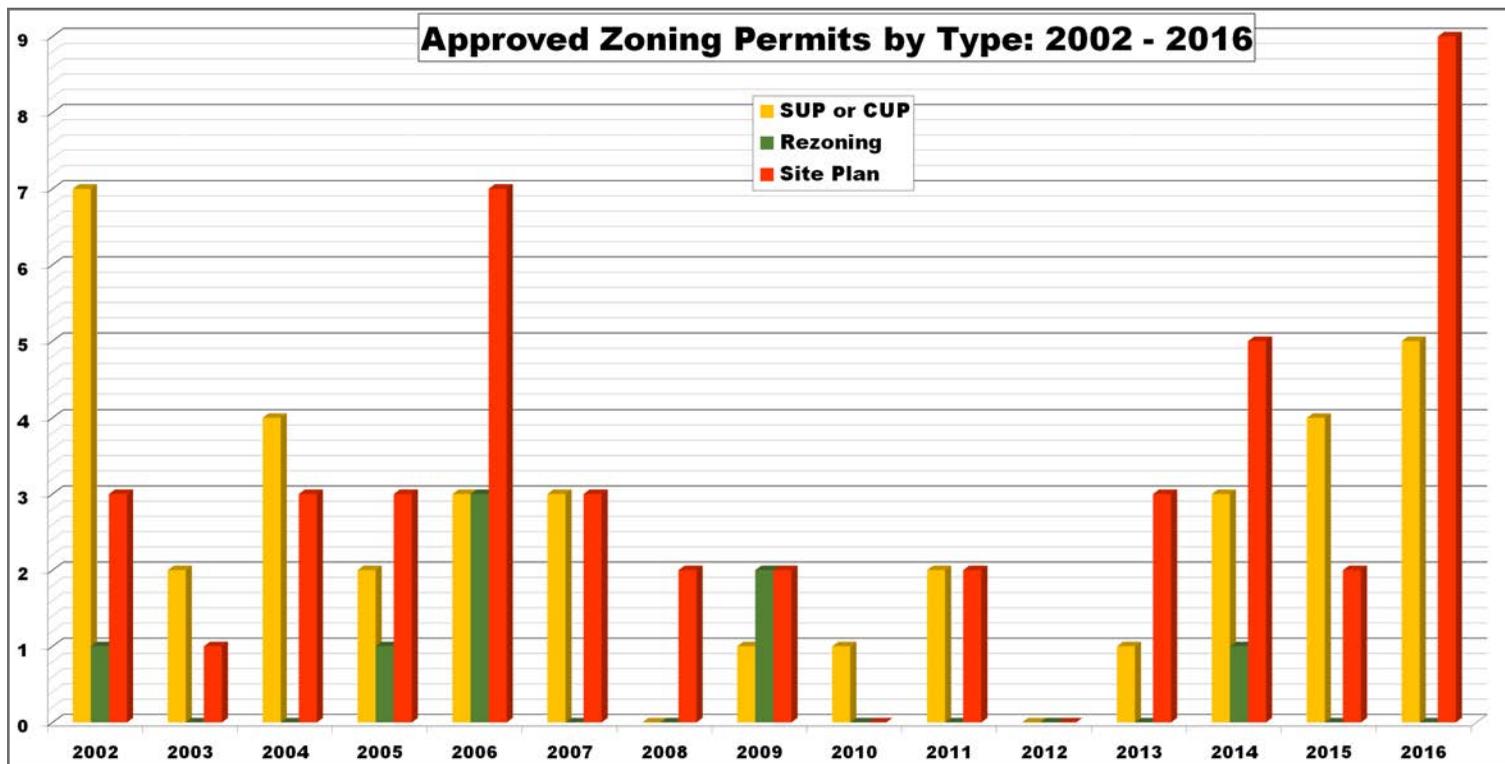
Area Analysis: Development Trends & Zoning Permit History

Analysis of Approved Zoning Permits, 2002–2016

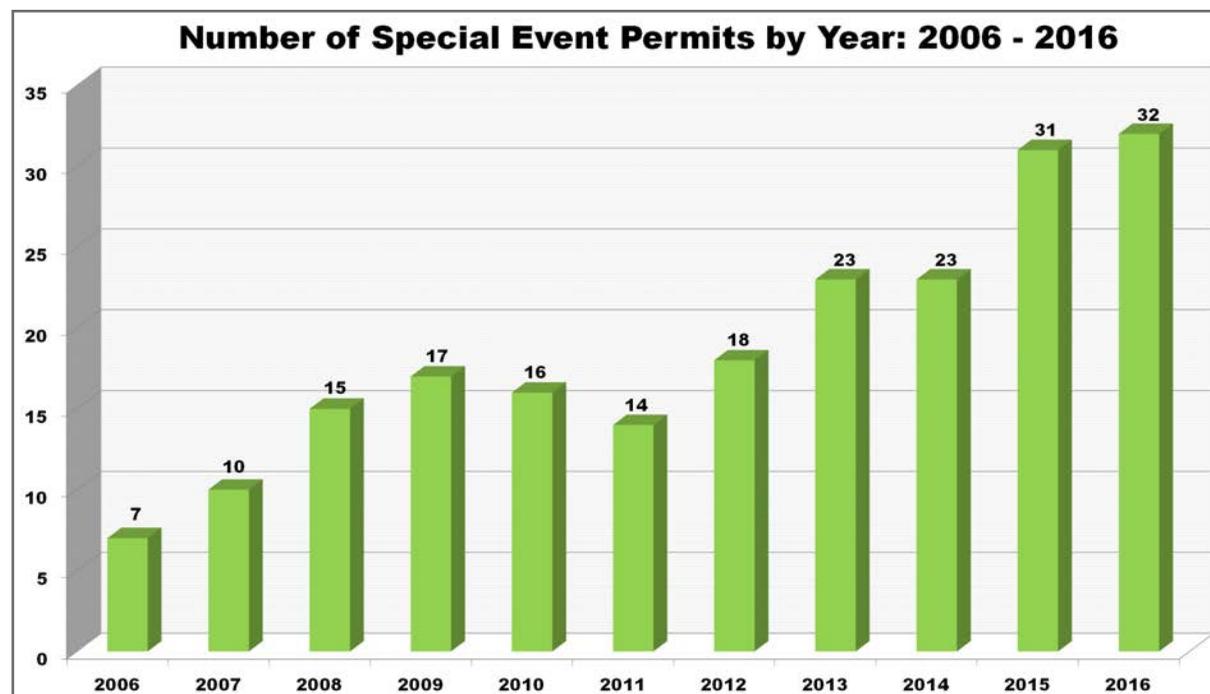
This analysis identified and mapped all zoning permits that were approved for properties in the Rockfish Valley between 2002 and 2016.

Specifically, this included all approved rezonings, special use permits, and site plans (as well as conditional use permits, until they were discontinued in 2010). This 15-year time frame was selected in order to better understand how much growth and development has occurred (and where) since the most recent version of the Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2002.





- 2006 contained a spike in approved rezoning applications: three such approvals (totaling 8 parcels) were granted in the Rockfish Valley that year; a total of 5 other rezonings were approved in the other 14 years.
- The 5-year period between 2008 and 2012 generally reflects the lack of economic development that occurred nationwide during the recession. During those five years, only 12 total zoning approvals were granted. In comparison, 13 total zoning approvals were granted in 2006 alone; 9 were granted in 2014 alone; and 14 were granted in 2016 alone.
- In general, zoning permit approvals in the Rockfish Valley have been characterized by a steady decrease in rezonings and a steady increase in special use permits (SUP). The increase in approved SUP is particularly notable in 2015 and 2016; and based on zoning permit applications that are currently under review, it is possible that this trend may continue into 2017.



Approved Special Events Permits

This graph (left) shows the annual number of approved Special Events Permits (SEP) for all of Nelson County. This is a Countywide total – these figures are not specific to just the Rockfish Valley. But the growing number of SEP Countywide is also reflective of the trend within the Rockfish Valley.

- Between 2010 (16 SEP) and 2013 (23 SEP), there was a 44% increase in approved Special Events Permits Countywide.
- Between 2013 and 2016 (32 SEP), there was another 39% increase in approved Special Events Permits Countywide.

In January 2017, the Nelson County Board of Supervisors enacted new Zoning Ordinance amendments for “Temporary Events, Festival Grounds, and Out-of-Door Accessory Uses” which provide new provisions and regulations for certain events, and which exempt other types of events and activities.

Area Analysis: Business Cluster Analysis & Tax Revenue Assessment



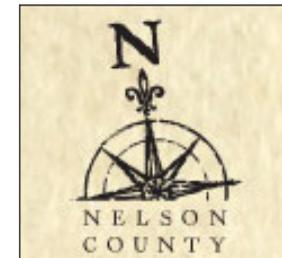
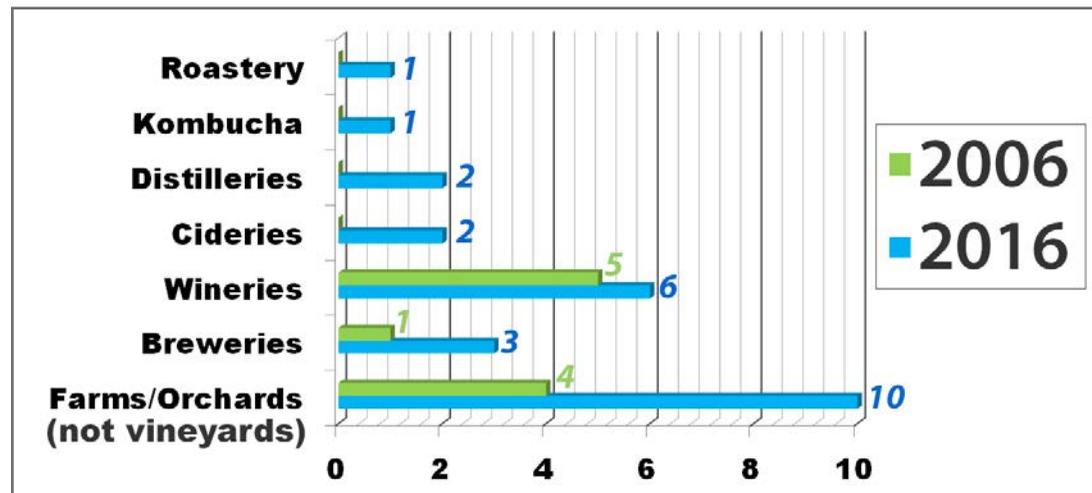
Business Development Timeline, 2002–2016

Major developments (or expansions) in the past fifteen years include Blue Mountain Brewery, Devils Backbone Brewing Co. Basecamp & Meadows, Wild Wolf Brewing Co., Bold Rock Hard Cider, Blue Toad Hard Cider, Veritas Vineyards & Winery, Afton Mountain Vineyards, Cardinal Point Winery, Silverback Distillery, Rockfish Valley Inn, Zenith Quest, and Afton Medical Center.

Major developments that have been permitted, but which currently remain unbuilt, include the Spruce Creek Resort & Market (in Nellysford) and the Monarch Inn (in Greenfield).

Additionally, the Rockfish Valley Community Center (RVCC) has evolved over this time period to include numerous small commercial enterprises; recreational, cultural, and educational activities and programs; and community amenities such as a skate park, basketball courts, and a baseball diamond. In recent years, RVCC has developed into a dynamic, vibrant hub for many members of the public.

Number of Ag & Agritourism Enterprises, 2006 & 2016



Number of Business Licenses in the Rockfish Valley, 2006 & 2016

2006:
75

2016: 360
(285 additional licenses = 380% increase)

Tax Revenue Assessment & Comparisons

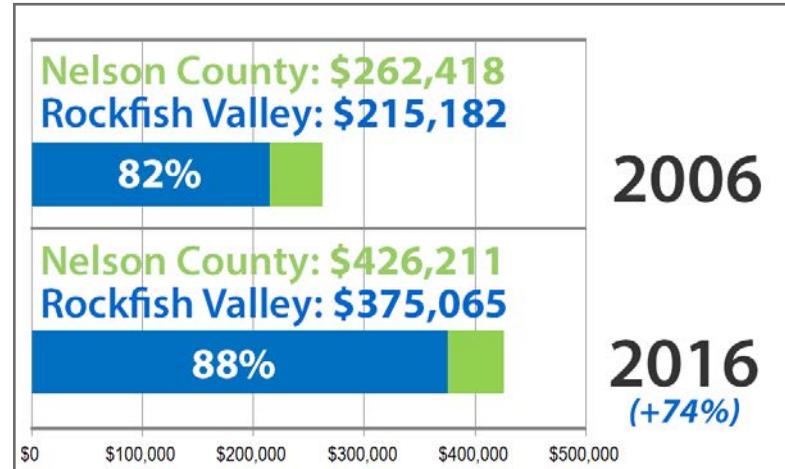
Comparisons of annual tax revenues from tourism-related industries from 2006 and 2016 illustrate the following:

The Rockfish Valley is the economic engine of Nelson County.



Lodging Tax Revenue Comparisons:

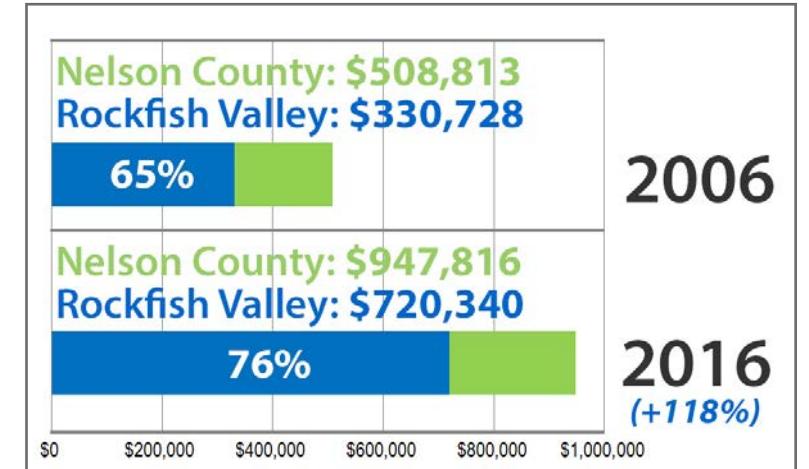
(Rockfish Valley & Nelson County)
and
(2006 & 2016)



- The number of lodging establishments in the Rockfish Valley increased from 19 in 2006 to 44 in 2016. (This number more than doubled over that decade – a 132% increase.)
- The 2016 Lodging Tax revenue from the Rockfish Valley was approximately \$160,000 more than in 2006. (This was a 74% increase.)
- The Rockfish Valley's contribution to Nelson County's total Lodging Tax revenue increased from 82% of Countywide revenue in 2006 to 88% in 2016.

Meals Tax Revenue Comparisons:

(Rockfish Valley & Nelson County)
and
(2006 & 2016)



- The number of restaurants in the Rockfish Valley increased from 16 in 2006 to 27 in 2016. (This was a 69% increase.)
- The 2016 Meals Tax revenue from the Rockfish Valley was approximately \$390,000 more than in 2006. (This number more than doubled over that decade – a 118% increase.)
- The Rockfish Valley's contribution to Nelson County's total Meals Tax revenue increased from 65% of Countywide revenue in 2006 to 76% in 2016.

Area Analysis: S.W.O.T. Analysis

Overview:

S.W.O.T. stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. This SWOT Analysis highlights a wide variety of issues and topics that were identified during the RVAP community engagement process (community survey, open house meetings, and stakeholder interviews).

Note: See the S.W.O.T. Analysis in the Appendix for more detailed explanations, and for a list of recommended action items organized into short-term, medium-term, and long-term steps.

STRENGTHS:

Strengths are the existing features, amenities, and characteristics that contribute to a community's success. Strengths include intangible attributes as well as physical assets.

Successful communities reinforce, protect, and build on all of their strengths.

Environmental Resources

Charming Rural Character

Beautiful Scenic Vistas

Agritourism & Authentic Local Ag Heritage

Community Pride & Involvement

Relatively High Median Household Income

Economic Engine of Nelson County

WEAKNESSES:

Weaknesses are existing features, conditions, or problems that hinder a community from realizing its goals. All communities have weaknesses in their own ways.

Successful communities consider ways to identify, understand, address, and overcome these obstacles.

Inadequate Growth Management

Traffic Volume & Road Safety

Lack of Transportation Options

Limited Access to Adjacent Natural Landscapes

Non-Diversified Economic Base

No Traditional Mixed-Use Rural Village

No Attractive Gateways into Rockfish Valley

OPPORTUNITIES:

Unlike strengths and weaknesses, opportunities are more forward-looking. These are future prospects that could help a community realize its goals.

Successful communities consider ways to strategically take advantage of their opportunities.

Broadband/Fiber Services

Local Business Expansion & “Buy Local”

Agritourism & Agribusiness

Increased Access to Public Trails & Parks

THREATS:

Like opportunities, threats are more forward-looking – and often involve larger forces or trends. These future challenges could hinder the community from maximizing its potential and realizing its goals.

Successful communities should consider ways to avoid or mitigate threats – or even transform them into potential strengths.

Atlantic Coast Pipeline

Diminished Scenic Resources

Unplanned Growth & Land Development

Aging Population

The Rockfish Valley’s agritourism industry and Blue Ridge Mountains scenery are two of the area’s best strengths.



Increased access to nearby trails and public lands is a promising opportunity to diversify and reinforce the tourism industry, and to boost quality of life.



4. PHASE II: AREA PLANNING

Vision Statement for the Rockfish Valley:

The Rockfish Valley is a special place in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains.

The Rockfish Valley area is defined by a powerful sense of place; a high quality of life; a unique local economy; and a deep sense of community pride.

This community is successfully cultivating a healthy rural economy sustained by agriculture and tourism, while also proactively protecting rural character and community assets.

Powerful Sense of Place:

The Rockfish Valley's **powerful sense of place** is defined by rich natural heritage and historic cultural heritage, including:

- the Blue Ridge Mountains, forests, and woodland wildlife;
- all four seasons of natural beauty;
- authentic agricultural heritage and rural historic landscapes;
- evolving agritourism land uses and activities.

The area's sense of place and community assets are well protected – and successfully promoted – for the mutual benefit of residents, local businesses, and visitors alike.

High Quality of Life:

The Rockfish Valley's **high quality of life** is defined by:

- abundant natural beauty, authentic rural character, and scenic byways and backroads;
- proximity to public lands, trails, and other amenities;
- access to a high-quality community center, schools, and other community assets;
- access to a safe, efficient transportation network; and
- a strong sense of community and local civic pride.

The area's many assets, strong sense of community, and special sense of place support and sustain a strong connection between area residents and the place they proudly call 'home.'

Unique Local Economy:

The Rockfish Valley's **unique local economy** is sustained through a blend of agriculture, tourism, and other place-based industries such as agritourism, special events, outdoor recreation and trails, and resort attractions.

Local economic vitality is sustained by a strong commitment to buying local, and a growing culture of collaboration and partnership among local businesses.

The area enjoys a sustained, harmonious balance between place-based economic vitality and the preservation of the incredible community assets.

Area Planning: Strategic Recommendations by Topic



Community



Goal C-1: Develop and implement common-sense growth management policies that balance development and rural preservation.

Objective A: Identify appropriate future development areas as well as rural preservation areas.

- i. Evaluate suitability of locations in Afton, Rockfish Gap, Nellysford, and Beech Grove for designation as future development areas.
- ii. Identify sections of the highway corridors and other parts of the Rockfish Valley that are high-priority areas for the preservation of rural character or protection of scenic resources.

Obj. B: Conduct a focused effort to update County policies, plans, and ordinances to create a stronger framework for balancing development and rural preservation.

- i. Review and update the Comprehensive Plan, with particular emphasis on updating the Future Land Use Plan and Map.
- ii. Review zoning map in areas designated as future development areas and designated rural preservation areas, and identify appropriate modifications for further evaluation.

Goal C-2: Increase access to public space(s) within the Rockfish Valley.

Obj. A: Connect with local stakeholders and explore shared interest(s) and ideas relating to a potential place-making project.

- i. Conduct a vision-casting workshop in collaboration with community stakeholders, to evaluate public interest and feasibility of establishing a new “central gathering place” in the Nellysford area.
- ii. Convene committed stakeholders to more formally establish of a collaborative partnership, for the purpose of successfully advancing a public “place-making” project.

Goal C-3: Increase access to natural landscapes and outdoor recreation amenities.

Obj. A: Complete the Blue Ridge Tunnel rehabilitation and rails-with-trails project.

Obj. B: Utilize the Old Howardsville Turnpike as a recreational facility (hiking trail) connecting the Rockfish Valley to the crest of the Blue Ridge.

- i. Explore all opportunities to partner with local, state, and federal agencies and non-profit groups.

Obj. C: Establish a greenway or multi-use path between Wintergreen Resort, Stoney Creek, Nellysford, and Beech Grove.

- i. Explore all opportunities to partner with local community stakeholders; local, state, and federal agencies; and non-profit groups to establish a new recreational amenity.
- ii. Maximize the value of any such new amenity by successfully connecting with existing trails and other community assets.

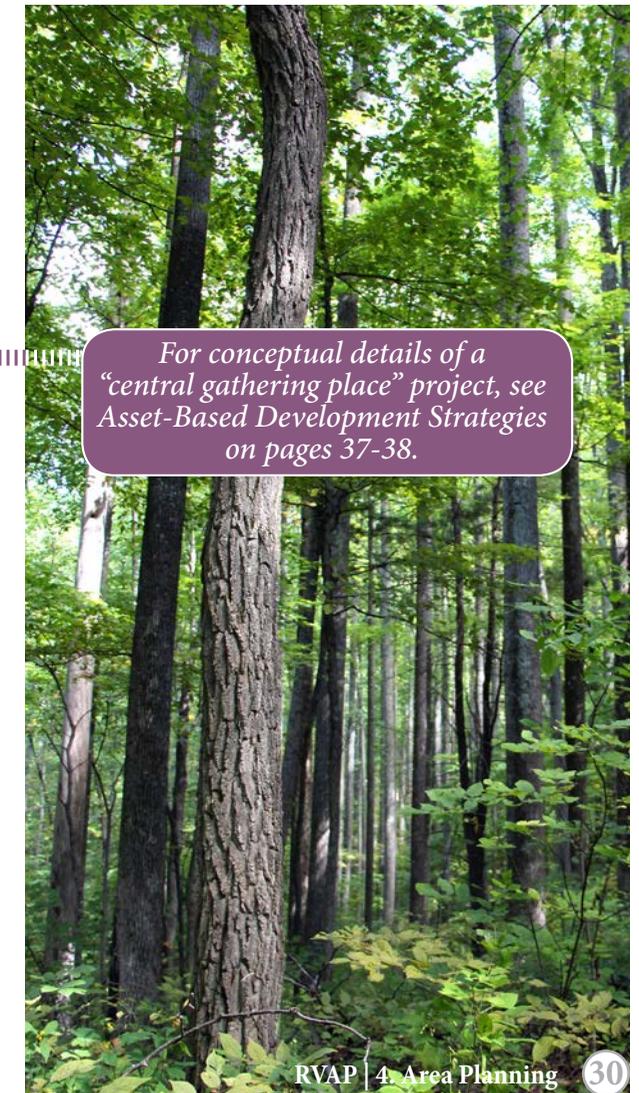
Goal C-4: Prepare for the specific needs of an aging population.

Obj. A: Address the changing needs of the community by specifically providing community services that are consistent with Nelson County’s demographic trends of an aging population.

Goal C-5: Protect and promote local history and culture.

Obj. A: Protect local historical resources and promote local cultural heritage.

- i. Support and promote the South Rockfish Rural Historic District.
- ii. Incorporate historical interpretative signage into any place-making project in the Nellysford area and at scenic overlooks.



For conceptual details of a “central gathering place” project, see Asset-Based Development Strategies on pages 37-38.

Area Planning: Strategic Recommendations by Topic



Economy



Goal E-1: Recognize (and capitalize on) connections between local economic vitality and rural character.

Objective A: Continue to utilize the area's rural character, natural scenery, and attractive sense of place as the foundation for sustained economic vitality.

Obj. B: Preserve and protect the area's rural character as a critically important element of the local economy.

Goal E-2: Protect community identity and rural character from undesired change.

Objective A: Prevent land development and commercial or industrial growth from diminishing the area's special sense of place, by ensuring that development is compatible with existing landscapes and land uses, and also compatible with future land use plans.

- i. Update the "Future Land Use Plan" in the Comprehensive Plan.
- ii. Identify appropriate future development areas as well as rural preservation areas.
- iii. Encourage and facilitate the location of new development, redevelopment, and business expansion within designated future development areas.

Goal E-3: Capitalize on the Rockfish Valley's proximity to National Parks and other recreational amenities.

Obj. A: Position and promote the area as a gateway into the Blue Ridge Parkway, Shenandoah National Park & Skyline Drive, the Appalachian Trail, and the George Washington National Forest.

- i. Continue to coordinate with NPS, USFS, VDOT, VA DCR, and local partners to maximize the recreational and economic potential of the Blue Ridge Tunnel and Rockfish Gap area.
- ii. Explore opportunities to better capitalize on U.S. Bicycle Route 76, including potential connection(s) with the Blue Ridge Tunnel or other amenities and attractions in the Rockfish Gap area.

Goal E-4: Support and promote economic development opportunities in agriculture and agritourism.

Obj. A: Promote family farms and direct-to-consumer sales.

Obj. B: Promote agritourism as a way to sustain the profitability of farms and to preserve a rural landscape and lifestyle.

Obj. C: Offer partnership and collaborative leadership towards locating and developing

a permanent, indoor/outdoor farmers market facility – ideally as a key component within a walkable place of commerce, recreation, leisure, and public amenities.

i. Bring together major stakeholders and all interested community members; and help facilitate a coordinated "place-making" effort. This would most logically be focused on the Nellysford area.

Goal E-5: Support growth in the outdoor recreation industry.

Obj. A: Attract and locate outfitters, tour guides, or similar businesses that provide outdoor rec services and activities in the Rockfish Valley (and throughout Nelson County).



Obj. B: Promote the Rockfish Valley's many community assets to help attract outdoor rec industry jobs (including production and light manufacturing of gear and equipment, product assembly, product repair, etc.).

Goal E-6: Support strong coordination and information-sharing among the business community.

Obj. A: Create annual fact sheet(s) on new business creation and economic growth within the study area.

Obj. B: Enhance open channels of communication between business owners and County government.

Obj. C: Review/streamline requirements for new business registration.

Goal E-7: Emulate "best practices" and apply "lessons learned" from comparable rural VA communities.

Obj. A: Research comparable rural Virginia communities, and identify relevant "lessons learned" and local "best practices."

- i. Compare Virginia best practices to Nelson County plans and policies.
- ii. Identify "low-hanging fruit" types of opportunities in the Rockfish Valley to adopt best practices (with local modifications).

Area Planning: Strategic Recommendations by Topic



Transportation



Goal T-1: Continue to implement priority recommendations in VDOT's 2013 Route 151 Study.

Objective A: Collect more accurate roadway data for Rte. 151 and Rte. 6 traffic.

- i. Coordinate with VDOT to conduct traffic counts that better capture seasonal and weekend conditions, to compliment the existing traffic data which only represents mid-week traffic patterns.
- ii. Evaluate split between personal vehicles and commercial truck traffic.

Obj. B: Continue to request transportation funding through VDOT's SMART SCALE competitive funding program.

- i. Consider the cost-effective strategy of committing County funds as a one-time "local match" for SMART SCALE projects. That would significantly strengthen the SMART SCALE application scoring, and significantly improve project(s) feasibility.



Goal T-2: Improve road safety.

Obj. A: Coordinate with VDOT and other stakeholders to reconsider reduced speed limits along the Rte. 151 tourism corridor.

- i. Evaluate the possibility of reducing the speed limit from 55 MPH to 45 MPH between Rte. 250 and Brent's Gap.

Obj. B: Conduct speed study to identify appropriate speed limits in Nellysford.

- i. Evaluate the possibility of reducing speed limit from 45 to 35 MPH through Nellysford.

Obj. C: Coordinate with public safety officials to improve safety and reduce risks.

- i. Assess possibility of enhanced highway patrol enforcement (with specific focus on speeding as well as impaired driving).
- ii. Utilize available resources or programs to increase public awareness and information about safe driving.

Goal T-3: Improve public signage throughout the Rockfish Valley and at important "gateway" locations.

Obj. A: Coordinate with VDOT to evaluate and improve existing signage.

- i. Identify location(s) of outdated signs; remove or replace such signs.

- ii. Identify opportunities to consolidate or otherwise simplify existing public signage.
- iii. Identify any situations requiring maintenance or repair.

Obj. B: Implement a new community signage project, with improved wayfinding and tourism information using attractive and consistent new signs.

- i. Design and install welcome signage at "gateway" locations to create a sense of arrival and to strengthen the area's tourism brand. This would also alert drivers of their entry into a high-activity tourism zone with challenging road conditions (hills/curves).
- ii. Design and install milepost signage to help tourists navigate the roadways and find their destinations more safely.

Goal T-4: Support Park-n-Ride lots.

Obj. A: Improve and formalize existing Park-n-Ride lots at appropriate locations.

- i. Evaluate existing informal lots, including locations at the intersection of Route 6 and Route 151; the intersection of Route 6 and US-29; and along Route 664.
- ii. Identify needed improvements at each location, including possible surface treatment, lighting, trash and recycling features, or other improvements.

Obj. B: Evaluate the demand and the value of establishing new Park-n-Ride locations.
i. Partner with VDOT, TJPDC, and Ride-Share to identify potential locations and to pursue available resources and assistance.

Goal T-5: Improve transportation alternatives and options for all users.

Obj. A: Continue to support regional transit service (i.e. JAUNT), including fixed routes and on-demand service, to address needs of an aging population and the mobility-impaired.

Obj. B: Encourage addition of sidewalks, bike lanes, or similar "multi-use path" in Nellysford, especially during new development and redevelopment activities.

- i. Incorporate "best practices" that maximize safety, including design details and also signage to alert drivers about increased presence of pedestrians, bicyclists, etc.

Obj. C: Plan for a more complete and better-connected transportation network.

- i. Evaluate opportunity(s) to implement parallel service roads, including bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, in appropriate locations that have higher concentrations of commercial activity and traffic congestion.

Area Planning: Strategic Recommendations by Topic



Natural Resources



Goal NR-1: Ensure the sustainable use and protection of water resources quantity and quality.

Objective A: Protect groundwater resources from depletion and pollution.

- i. Partner with regional and state agencies and universities to evaluate the Rockfish Valley's groundwater resources, including analysis of the local carrying capacity for residential, agricultural, recreational, and industrial uses.
- ii. Incorporate the Groundwater Pollution Prevention Map as a tool in long-range planning and current development review activities.

Obj. B: Protect surface water resources and surrounding riparian corridors, floodplains, and wetlands.

- i. Update and improve floodplain management program and policies.
- ii. Explore potential value of participating in (voluntary) "Community Rating System" program with NFIP and FEMA.
- ii. Include Wetlands as an available Layer on the County's online GIS.

Goal NR-2: Protect the quality, integrity, and connectivity of the natural landscape network.

Obj. A: Support the protection of the area's "natural landscape network" and "green infrastructure cores."

- i. Consider adoption of updates to Comp Plan and amendments to Zoning Ordinance, as recommended in the *Nelson County Policy Guide* and *Nelson County Stewardship Guide* (Green Infrastructure Center, 2011).
- ii. Incorporate green infrastructure resource mapping and analysis into the County's Site Plan review process.
- iii. Create *performance incentives* in the Site Plan review process for project details that incorporate Low Impact Development practices, conservation of high-quality green infrastructure resources, and protection of steep slopes.



Goal NR-3: Recognize (and take advantage of) the connections between scenic resources, viewshed protection, tourism, and rural economic vitality.

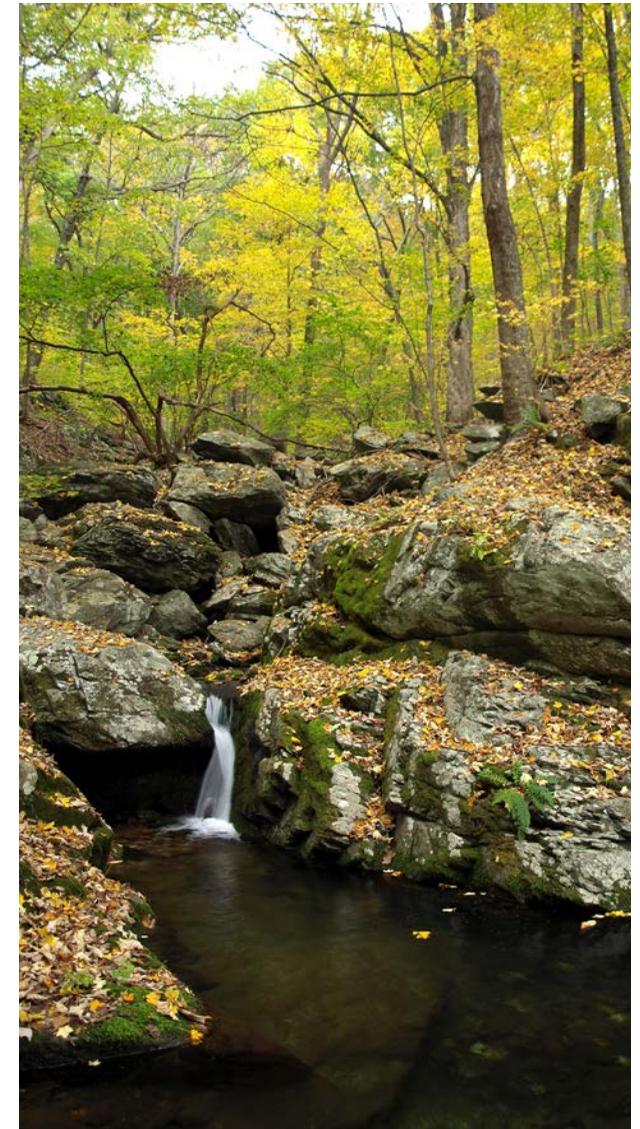
Obj. A: Identify and protect priority scenic viewsheds along Scenic Byways.

Obj. B: Ensure that new commercial and industrial development is planned, designed, and constructed with appropriate context-sensitive details.

- i. Adopt new Site Plan Checklist standards applicable to new development projects within a "RV Corridor" area, in order to:
 - Create a clear, consistent set of *required minimum standards* for details such as screening, landscaping, setbacks, signage, and exterior lighting; and
 - Create *performance incentives* in the Site Plan review process for project details that exceed minimum "RV Corridor" requirements.

*Three Ridges Wilderness Area,
George Washington National Forest*

Humpback Rocks, Blue Ridge Parkway



Area Planning: Strategic Recommendations by Topic



Agriculture



Goal A-1: Increase and strengthen the agricultural economy within the Rockfish Valley, as measured by number of ag operations, volume of ag products, or value of ag products.

Objective A: Ensure that County plans and policies support the protection and productive use of lands that are most suitable for farming.

- i. Update the Comprehensive Plan to identify “prime” agricultural soils, and other soils most suitable for ag operations.
- ii. Ensure that the Zoning Map and Zoning Ordinance adequately support and protect agricultural landscapes and family farms in the Agricultural A-1 zoning district.
- iii. Consider adoption of specific recommendations identified by the Green Infrastructure Center’s 2011 “Nelson County Policy Guide” and “Nelson County Stewardship Guide.”

Obj. B: Expand the following agricultural sectors within the Rockfish Valley: tree fruit/orchards; grapes/vineyards; and barley (or other grains for malting or distilling).

- i. Increase all three target sectors by 10% or more within 5 years, as measured by production volume, sales volume, or total value of products.
- ii. Increase one or more target sectors by 50% or more within 5 years, as measured by production volume, sales volume, or total value of products.
- iii. Increase amount of land in tree fruit/orchards production and in grapes/vineyards production at existing farm wineries.

Goal A-2: Identify and support key resources, activities, and partnerships that will strengthen and increase the success of existing farms and ag operations.

Obj. A: Improve local opportunities for direct-to-consumer agricultural sales.

- i. Promote and support the development of a permanent year-round community farmers market location in the Rockfish Valley.

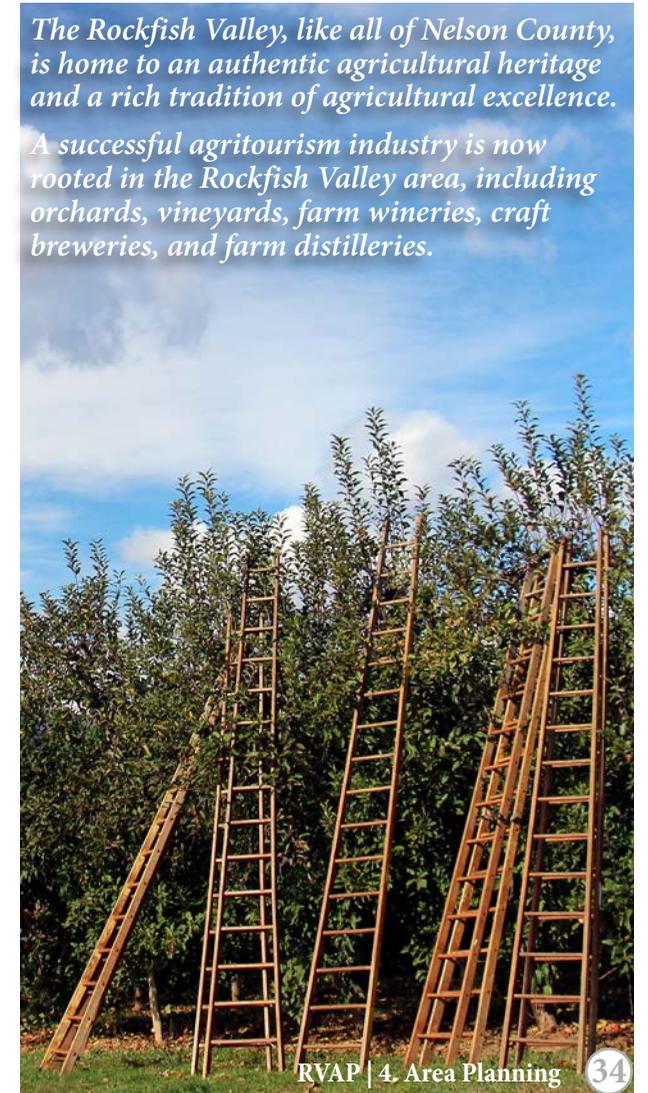
Obj. B: Increase awareness among property owners and ag operators about relevant resources, programs, and info.

- i. Assemble and provide educational resources on voluntary land use practices, such as conservation easements and Agricultural & Forestal District programs.

- ii. Assemble and provide educational resources on farming best practices.
- iii. Assemble and provide contact info for agencies and organizations that provide property owners and ag operators cost-sharing opportunities or technical assistance.
- iv. Conduct an annual event for local ag producers and agritourism operators to discuss best practices; promote Nelson agriculture; and foster collaboration among local producers. This annual event would incorporate FFA and 4-H participants; and would be conducted in partnership with all relevant farm-related organizations such as Virginia Cooperative Extension, VDACS, Virginia Tech, Farm Bureau, TJSWCD, NRCS, Virginia Cattlemen’s Association, Virginia Wineries Association, Virginia Craft Brewers Guild, and others.



The Rockfish Valley, like all of Nelson County, is home to an authentic agricultural heritage and a rich tradition of agricultural excellence. A successful agritourism industry is now rooted in the Rockfish Valley area, including orchards, vineyards, farm wineries, craft breweries, and farm distilleries.



Area Planning: Growth Management Strategies

Recommendations for Balancing Development & Rural Preservation

South Rockfish:

A. Nellysford

- currently contains a mixture of commercial activities
- Comp Plan supports continued growth in this area
- very good highway entrance suitability:
 - above-average sight distance
 - relatively flat topography

(Note): This recommendation is a direct continuation of current policies in the Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Plan. However, these policies from 2002 should be reviewed and updated with new advisory language and an updated vision for this area.

B. Beech Grove

- currently contains a growing mixture of agritourism venues and commercial activities
- ‘gateway’ location: Rockfish Valley & Wintergreen
- great highway entrance suitability:
 - very good sight distance
 - virtually flat topography

North Rockfish:

C. Rockfish Gap

- exceptional location: strategically located adjacent to numerous amenities and assets at the intersection of local roads, state highways, and I-64
- opportunity for visionary ‘gateway’ development

D. Afton (Avon)

- a ‘node’ with a mix of retail, offices, storage, and shipping activities; generally a high-activity area
- generally above-average highway entrance suitability

E. Afton (Rockfish Orchard)

- a ‘node’ with agritourism and restaurant commerce
- good highway entrance suitability:
 - above-average sight distance
 - relatively flat topography

F. Greenfield (Chapel Hollow)

- a ‘node’ with ag and agritourism commerce, small-scale retail, and Rockfish River Elementary School
- good highway entrance suitability:
 - above-average sight distance
 - recent intersection improvements

Woods Mill:

E. Rockfish River (VA-6 & US-29)

- ‘gateway’ location: US-29 corridor <> Rockfish Valley tourism and Wintergreen Resort
- potentially great location to target for longer-term future growth, such as:
 - small-scale mixed use development; and/or
 - higher-density residential development, inclusive of workforce housing
- location has both pros and cons:
 - floodplain would need to be avoided
 - transportation infrastructure (intersections) would require improvements
- note: VDOT recently completed a major repair/upgrade of US-29 bridge over the Rockfish River

Future Development Areas: Optional Locations

South Rockfish:

- A** Nellysford
- B** Beech Grove

North Rockfish:

- C** Rockfish Gap
- D** Afton (Avon)
- E** Afton (Rockfish Orchard)
- F** Greenfield (Chapel Hollow)

Woods Mill:

- G** Rockfish River
at junction of
VA-6 & US-29

Limited Growth Option:

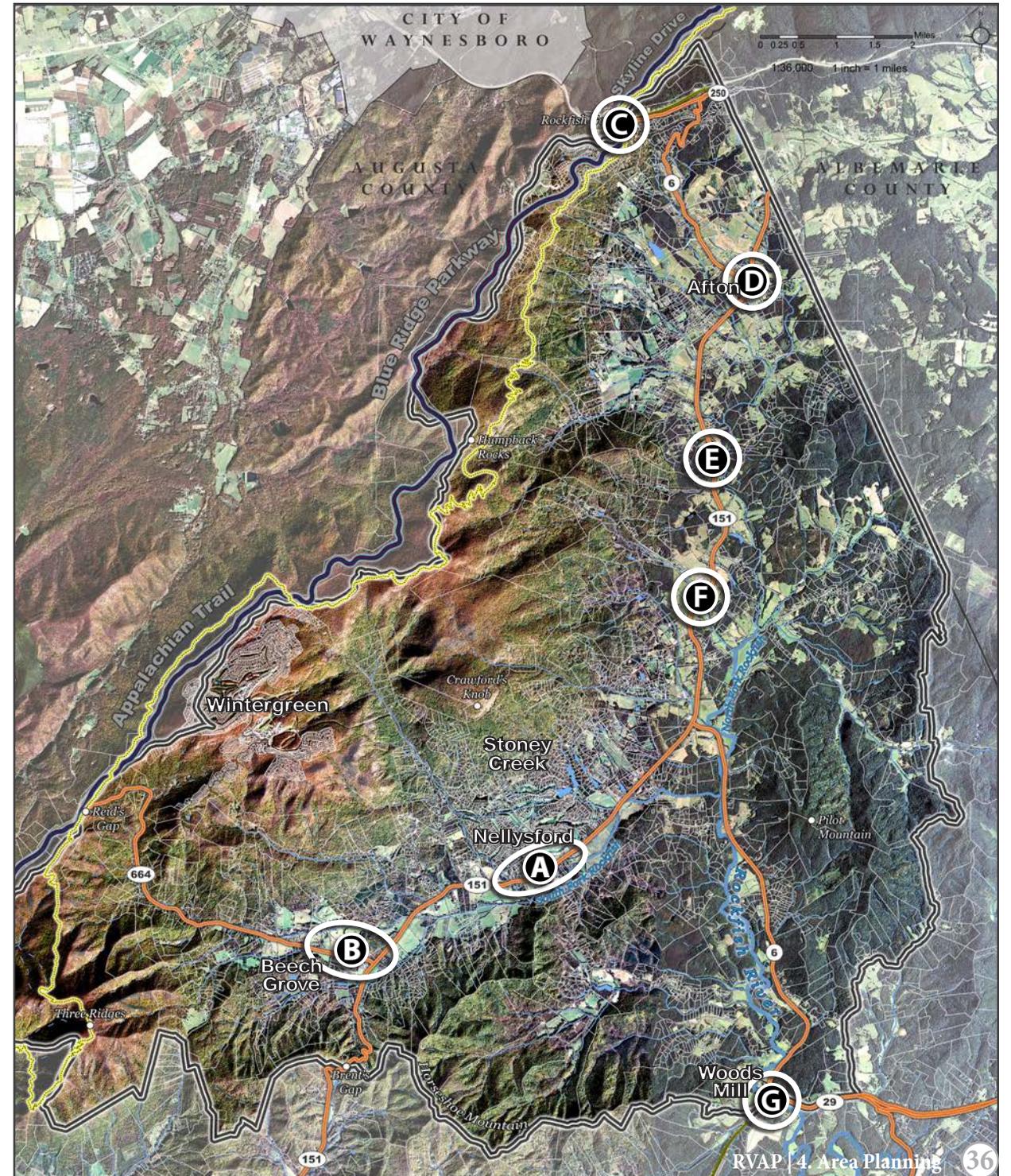
- A: Nellysford *and*
- C: Rockfish Gap *and*
- G: Woods Mill

Moderate Growth Option:

- A: Nellysford *and*
- B: Beech Grove *and*
- C: Rockfish Gap *and*
- G: Woods Mill

Accelerated Growth Option:

- A: Nellysford *and*
- B: Beech Grove *and*
- C: Rockfish Gap *and*
- D: Afton (Avon) *and*
- E: Afton (Rockfish Orchard) *and*
- F: Greenfield (Chapel Hollow) *and*
- G: Woods Mill



Area Planning: Asset-Based Development Strategies

Place-Based Opportunities for Economic Vitality & Quality of Life

Community assets are all the things that give a place its identity – the local things which, altogether, create a community's sense of place. A community's assets are the local things which contribute to community pride and which cultivate a love for 'home.'

Community assets are the special places, features, and qualities which create value by:

- enriching the local quality of life and providing a distinct sense of place; and
- providing creative opportunities for a strong place-based economy.

All successful communities maximize their local assets by:

- proactively identifying, mapping, and analyzing assets;
- prioritizing community assets as essential elements of overall community success;
- protecting assets from undesirable change; and by
- positioning community assets to produce the maximum amount of value and benefit without harming the assets.

An **asset-based development strategy** is a framework for positive community change that can balance 'growth and change' with 'rural preservation.' Asset-based development strategies are designed around the contents of a community's asset inventory; such strategies are inherently place-based.

An **asset-based development strategy** can provide one balanced framework for integrating two separate (and sometimes conflicting) community priorities:

- sustained economic vitality; and
- protection of rural character and sense of place.

A Blue Ridge Tunnel

- Complete the restoration and reuse of this incredible (but underutilized) community asset, to provide an amazing rails-with-trails recreational amenity.
- Incorporate signage to highlight and interpret the historic tunnel as well as the surrounding Blue Ridge landscape.
- Support recreational connectivity with City of Waynesboro.



B Old Howardsville Turnpike

- Collaborate with local stakeholders and interested community members to utilize this historic right-of-way for a new hiking trail connecting the valley (Chapel Hollow) and the crest of the Blue Ridge (Humpback Mountain).
- Explore potential partnerships and resources at local, regional, state, and national levels.

C **D** Greenway & Multi-Use Trail

- Create a safe, user-friendly recreational connection between Wintergreen, Stoney Creek, Nellysford, and Beech Grove.
- New bicycle and pedestrian connections would stimulate and support local businesses and tourism industry, and would be a valuable recreational amenity for residents and visitors.
- Connections could be made to existing trail systems, as well as other public community assets, throughout the South Rockfish Valley.
- Incorporate signage that highlights and interprets the Rockfish Valley's historical cultural heritage and abundant natural heritage.
- Promote the values and benefits of such non-vehicular infrastructure projects, and cultivate partnerships with local commercial stakeholders such as Wintergreen, Nelson 151 agritourism producers and venue owners, and Chamber of Commerce members.

Conceptual Strategies for Maximizing Community Assets



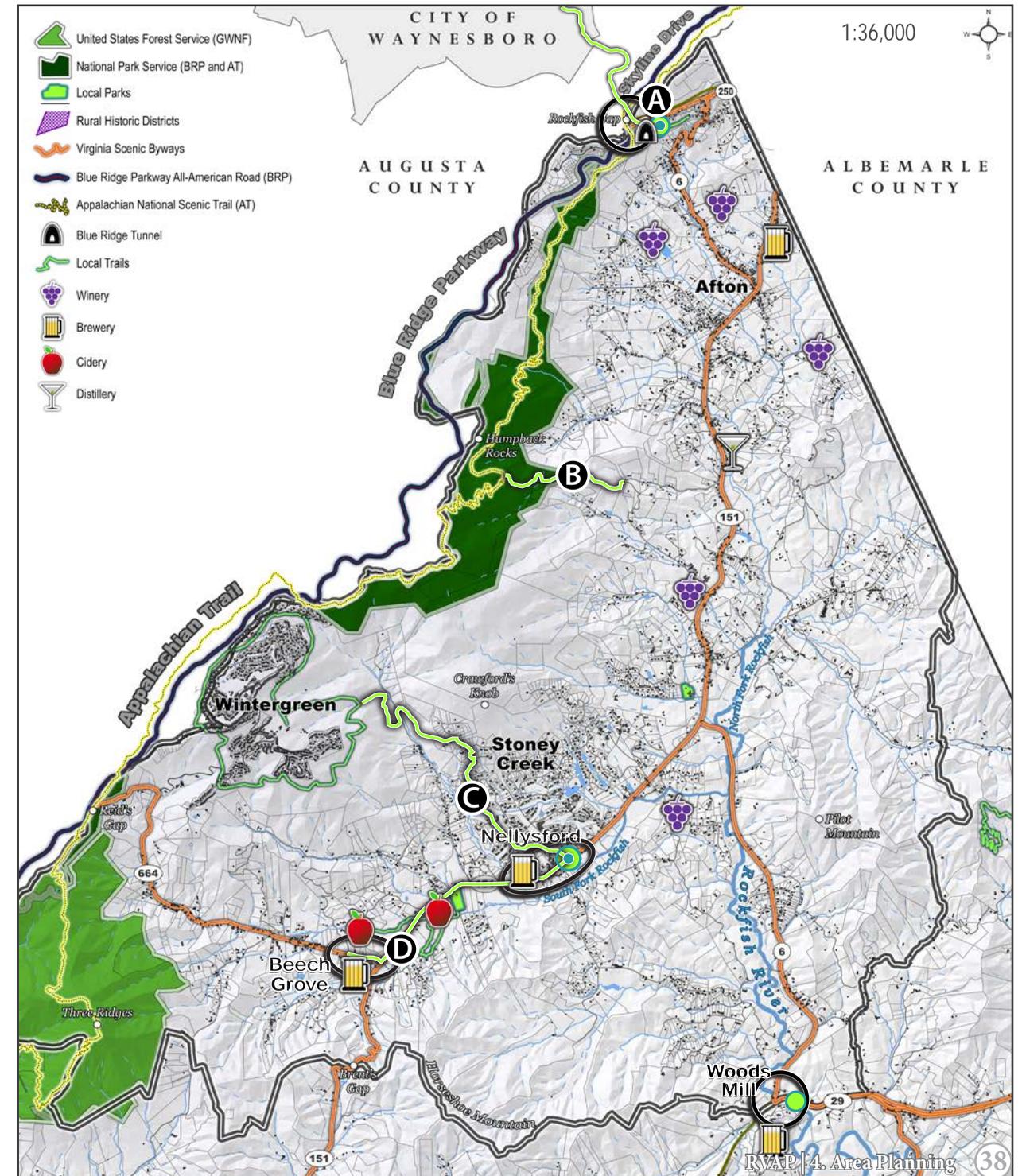
Nellysford Place-Making Project & Partnership

- Assemble local stakeholders, generate a vision, and establish a collaborative partnership to site, plan, design, and build a new “central gathering place:” an attractive, multi-purpose destination for the general public. This new place could be...
 - An all-ages-friendly, publicly accessible park that doubles as the “anchor” of a traditional small rural village with a mixture of commercial uses, structures, and activities;
 - A free, family-friendly attraction that provides quality of life benefits and builds a stronger sense of community through neighborly contact in shared public spaces.



Rockfish Gap Place-Making Project

- This area enjoys a most strategic location between many places, amenities, attractions, and activities. Rockfish Gap represents a major opportunity for a transformative “gateway” project – one that could support significant new economic development goals, and also accommodate beneficial community development goals.
- This is an important opportunity to collaborate with area property owners and create alignment among a wide variety of stakeholders. The area represents a valuable opportunity to redevelop a diminished and underutilized area (in a very special location) into a dynamic, attractive, high-profile gateway – one that contains public amenities as well as private services for tourists, travelers, and transient lodgers.



Area Plan Summary: Priority Action Items and “Next Steps”

Comprehensive Plan Review & Update

Refer the 2002 Comp Plan to the Planning Commission for their review and recommendations, with particular focus on the existing language dealing with “Development Models” and the “Future Land Use Plan” and “Future Land Use Map.”

Community Engagement

Conduct a BOS public hearing on the RVAP for the purpose of conducting a “listening session” to hear directly from local property owners, local business owners, and other community stakeholders. Such a hearing would help the County make well-informed decisions about possible next steps.

Community Partnership

Initiate and convene a “place-making task force” to begin exploring (in detail) the concepts of new amenities in the Nellysford area, including a new publicly-accessible “central gathering place” and/or a new recreational “multi-use path” or similar trail.

Action Items

The following is a summary of action items, along with details on proposed timelines, deliverables and stakeholders.

| Action | Description | Deliverable | Timeline |
|----------------------------------|--|-----------------|------------|
| Comprehensive Plan | Update the Plan to establish a holistic and up-to-date growth management strategy. | Plan Update | Short-term |
| Aging Population | Develop strategies for embracing the County’s aging population. | Plan Update | Short-term |
| Asset-Based Development Strategy | Develop an asset-based development strategy to maximize and synchronize economic development priorities and community development goals. | Plan Update | Short-term |
| Parks and Recreation | Conduct an assessment of opportunities for parks and recreation facilities in the Rockfish Valley. | Plan Update | Short-term |
| Code Audit | Evaluate effectiveness of ordinances at preserving rural character and scenic vistas. | Report Document | Short-term |
| Traffic Counts | Coordinate with VDOT to conduct additional traffic counts on weekends and peak season. | Data | Short-term |

County Officials Work Session

Schedule a BOS work session – or a joint meeting with the PC – to get into a more detailed review of Area Plan recommendations involving issues pertinent to the Rockfish Valley, such as growth management, tourism planning, and asset-based development strategies.

The S.W.O.T. Analysis completed in Phase I of the Area Plan process contains this chart of “short-term action items.” Also included are mid-term and long-term action items.

Please see the RVAP Appendix for more information.

Acknowledgments:

Nelson County Board of Supervisors:

Mr. Tommy Harvey (Chair), North District
Mrs. Connie Brennan, Central District
Mr. Tommy Bruguere (Vice-Chair), West District
Mr. Larry Saunders, South District
Mr. Allen Hale, East District

Nelson County Planning Commission:

Mrs. Philippa Proulx (Chair), North District
Mrs. Linda C. Russell, Central District
Mr. Michael Harman, West District
Mrs. Mary Kathryn Allen, South District
Mr. Robert C. Goad III, East District

Nelson County Staff:

Mr. Stephen A. Carter, County Administrator, Clerk to BOS
Mrs. Candy McGarry, Deputy Clerk to BOS
Ms. Maureen A. Kelley, Econ. Dev. & Tourism Director
Mrs. Jean Payne, Commissioner of the Revenue (*former*)
Mrs. Pam Campbell, Commissioner of the Revenue
Mr. Tim Padalino, AICP, Planning & Zoning Director
Mrs. Stormy Hopkins, Planning & Zoning Secretary (*former*)
Mrs. Emily Hjulstrom, Planning & Zoning Secretary

Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission:

Mr. Chip Boyles
Mr. Will Cockrell, AICP
Mr. Wood Hudson
Mr. Nick Morrison

Virginia Dept. of Agriculture & Consumer Services:

“Governor’s Agriculture & Forestry Industries Development (AFID) Fund”

Governor Terry McAuliffe
Mr. Todd E. Haymore, Secretary of Ag & Forestry (*former*)
Mr. Basil I. Gooden, Ph.D, Secretary of Ag & Forestry
Mrs. Sandra J. Adams, VDACS Commissioner
Mr. Stephen Versen, AFID Fund Coordinator
Ms. Chauntele D. Taylor, AFID Compliance Coordinator

RVAP “Agricultural Working Group” Members:

Elected and Appointed Officials:

Mr. Tommy Harvey, BOS (North District)
Mrs. Connie Brennan, BOS (Central District)
Mrs. Philippa Proulx, PC (North District)

Additional Members of the Public:

Mr. Michael LaChance, Agent, Unit Coordinator (*former*),
Virginia Cooperative Extension
Mr. William A. Wright, Nelson County Ag-Forestal District
Advisory Committee Chair
Mrs. Joyce Burton, Greenfield Ag-Forestal District
Mrs. Elizabeth Smith, Afton Mountain Vineyards
Mr. George Hodson, Veritas Vineyard and Winery

Rockfish Valley Community Center:

Mr. Stu Mills, Executive Director
Ms. Sara Taylor, Operations Manager

Nelson County Community Members

*Thank you for your interest, efforts, and continued engagement with the issues and recommendations identified in this plan.
Thank you for making Nelson County’s Rockfish Valley so special – and for continuing to endeavor for an even better tomorrow.*

ROCKFISH VALLEY AREA PLAN



Agriculture



Natural Resources



Community



Economy



Transportation

Additional information, including appendix items, large-format maps, and other RVAP materials, can be found at:

<http://www.nelsoncounty-va.gov/departments/planning-zoning/rockfish-valley-area-plan/>

Blue Ridge Mountains (Afton)



Historic Dodd Cabin (Beech Grove)



Pauls Creek (Nellysford)

