

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

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

## The Regional Green Infrastructure Network is

an interconnected network of lands and waters valuable for their ecological systems and services and significant contribution to regional and local economies

## PROJECT INFORMATION

Our natural landscape provides us with the fundamental necessities that support our physical, psychological, social, and economic health. It supplies us with clean water; fertile lands for growing food, producing fibers and other forest products; lands for recreation; and habitat that supports the region's unique populations of plants and animals. Our livelihoods and our very sense of who we are depends upon the health of our forests, our rivers, the productivity of our farmlands, and access to open spaces.

As the human footprint continues to grow in our region, our natural communities become more and more fragmented, and begin to lose their resilience and ability to provide the goods and services that our communities rely upon. The Linking Lands and Communities Project emerged from a need for better tools to help the region plan for new growth while sustaining healthy ecosystems.

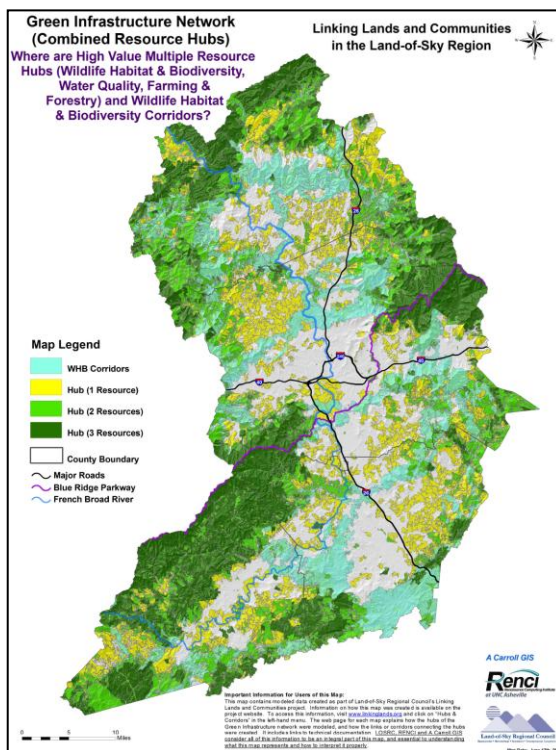
In response to this need, Land-of-Sky Regional Council, along with over 40 local and regional partners, from a variety of sectors worked together to gather information about the region's natural resources and identify opportunities to link these important natural systems via a *Regional Green Infrastructure Network*.

### Why a Regional Network?

- **Natural systems don't conform to jurisdictional boundaries** - they must be protected, managed, and restored at the larger landscape level. This can only be accomplished by communities and municipalities throughout the region working together.
- **Maintaining intact natural landscapes** sustains basic ecosystem functions. Fragmentation of these landscapes results in degradation of habitat, and the loss of key ecosystem services upon which our communities depend.
- **By incorporating the needs and benefits of healthy natural systems into existing land use planning efforts**, our communities are better prepared to make decisions that sustain human communities and natural systems for the long term.

### The Regional Network ...

- **Identifies our area's green infrastructure** - valuable hubs and corridors comprised of forests, farmlands, water resources, and other natural communities;
- **Brings together a diversity of local governments, non-profit organizations, and private businesses from around the region** to explore the values of our communities and consider conservation and development simultaneously when making land use decisions; and
- **Serves as a resource for decision-makers, local governments, landowners, land trusts, and developers** to balance the economic and environmental needs of our communities.



### Elements of our Region's Green Infrastructure



Water Resources



Farmlands



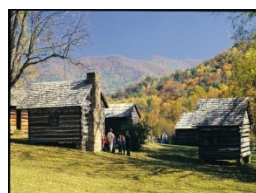
Recreation Lands



Wildlife Habitat



Forest 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  
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 – National Forests in NC  
U.S.D.A. Forest Service Southern Research Station  
UNC Asheville  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Warren Wilson College  
Western North Carolina Alliance  
WNC Green Building Council

## 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 ecological and economic values. 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, and wilderness areas;
- ❑ Recreation areas, including trails, parks, and blueways; and
- ❑ Cultural sites and resources, including historical sites, community gathering places, and interpretative trails.

## Resource Assessments for the Region

The first step in identifying our region's green infrastructure is to understand the location and condition of our region's land and water resources. The following *resource assessments* were conducted during the Linking Lands and Communities project:

- ▶ Water Quality
- ▶ Wildlife Habitat and Biodiversity
- ▶ Agriculture

## Regional Green Infrastructure Network

A network of hubs and corridors were identified using the highest priority lands identified in the resource assessments. The regional network prioritizes areas that ranked high on multiple resource assessments. This network represents the first-ever assessment that illustrates the interconnectedness of our natural systems in the Land-of-Sky Region.

## Implementation Toolkit

Using the big picture vision of the regional green infrastructure network as a guide, the implementation tool kit provides tools and resources for planning, conservation, restoration, and development that can be used to maintain and strengthen the health of the region's green infrastructure network and its resilience to threats, such as climate change.

## Project Timeline

- ▶ Resource Assessments Completed – *October 2009*
- ▶ Public Open Houses Held – *November 2009*
- ▶ Green Infrastructure Network Design – *January – April 2010*
- ▶ Complete Regional Green Infrastructure Network and Implementation Toolbox – *July 2010*

**For more information or to get involved, please contact:**

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