Discussion of Selected Indicators in the Blue Ridge Parkway Socioeconomic Atlas and Their Potential Impact on Land Use

The purpose of the Blue Ridge Parkway Socioeconomic Atlas is to gather socioeconomic data that can be used as a tool by park mangers, planners, community leaders, and others in their efforts to manage and protect the natural and cultural resources along the Blue Ridge Parkway. In particular, the atlas is designed to help decision makers understand the conditions and trends outside the park boundaries that could have an impact on park management.

There are six categories of socioeconomic indicators considered in the Atlas; they are general population, economy and commerce, social and cultural characteristics, recreation and tourism, administration and government, and land use. Within these categories, there are 17 core indictors that are common to all the atlases and an additional 15 that are chosen by park staff to address park specific issues. The data sources for all indicators are listed in Appendix 1 of the Blue Ridge Parkway atlas.

Selected indicators from the Blue Ridge Parkway atlas that could directly or indirectly impact land use along the parkway were summarized for each county along the parkway in both Virginia and North Carolina. The categories of indicators include population, industry and employment, and recreation, within each category there are several indicators. The indicators discussed here are listed in the order they appear in the state summaries.

Urban Population
The percentage of the total population in the county living in an urban area in 2000.

As defined by the U.S. Census 2000, an *urban area* includes all territory, population, and housing units in an urbanized area. An *urbanized area* is defined as an area with a population concentration of at least 50,000 inhabitants and generally consists of a central city and the surrounding closely settled contiguous areas with a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile. Nine of the counties along the parkway have no urban areas within the county although these same counties have all experienced an increase in population. The smallest average increase per decade was 5.3% and the largest was 19.4% per decade between 1970 and 2000.

Description of the County
These indicators describe how land is managed and used within the county.

- **Percentage of land in the county under federal management**
  The highest percentage of land under federal management along the parkway is in Swain County with 71% and the lowest is in Surry County with 0.3%. In addition to the National Park Service, federal agencies that manage land along the parkway include the Forest Service and the Tennessee Valley Authority.

- **Number of acres of designated farmland (1997)**
  Change in the number of acres of designated farmland (1987-1997)
  The number of acres of farmland and changes in the total number of acres provide a sense of both the changes in the local economy and land use. Farmland often decreases as a result of environmental changes such as soil depletion, increased competition from growers elsewhere, loss of labor or conversion to other (frequently urban) uses. Twenty one counties along the parkway have experienced a decrease in farmland between 1987 and 1997; Henderson County has lost the greatest percentage of farmland at 24.9%.

  Alternatively, the percentage of farmland in the county can increase as a result of increased demand for agricultural products or because changes in technology, business practices, or government programs that make farming more profitable. Eight counties along the parkway have increased the acres designated as farmland. Avery County has increased farmland by 29.8%. It is interesting to note that the number of building permits issued annually between 1990 and 2000 also increased in all but one of these eight counties.

Degree of Urbanization

Urbanization is a measure of the development of land into towns and cities. The Economic Research Service (ERS) of the United States Department of Agriculture has developed a classification system to describe the range of local economies in nonmetropolitan counties across the United States. A nonmetropolitan county will not have a city with a population larger than 49,999 people as determined by the United States census. The classification system consists of nine mutually-exclusive codes, the higher the number the more rural the county.

METROPOLITAN COUNTIES

1   Counties in large metropolitan areas of 1 million or more residents
2   Counties in small metropolitan areas of less than 1 million residents

NONMETROPOLITAN COUNTIES

3   Adjacent to a large metro area and contains all or part of its own city of 10,000 or more residents
4   Adjacent to a large metro area and does not contain any part of a city of 10,000 or more residents
5   Adjacent to a small metro area and contains all or part of its own city of 10,000 or more residents
6   Adjacent to a small metro area and area and does not contain any part of a city of 10,000 or more residents
7   Not adjacent to a metro area and contains all or part of its own city of 10,000 or more residents
8   Not adjacent to a metro area and contains all or part of its own town of 2,500 to 9,999 residents

9	Not adjacent to a metro area and totally rural, does not contain any part of a town of 2,500 or more residents

NOTES: Metropolitan status is that announced by the Office of Management and Budget in June 1993. Adjacency was determined by physical boundary adjacency and a finding that at least 2 percent of the employed labor force in the nonmetropolitan county commuted to metropolitan central counties. When a nonmetropolitan county was adjacent to more than one size of metropolitan area, it was classified as adjacent to the size of metropolitan area to which the largest share of its workers commuted.

In this context, two of the most significant indicators of local economic activity in a nonmetropolitan county are the size of any urban areas within a county and whether the county is adjacent to a metropolitan area. The category that appears most frequently is 6. The 10 counties in this category are nonmetropolitan counties that are adjacent to a small metropolitan area but that do not have a city of 10,000 or more people within the county. The next most frequent category is 2. The 7 counties in this category are small metropolitan areas of less than one million people. There are 6 counties that are classified as 9, not adjacent to a metro area and totally rural.

Table 1 describes all counties based on the nine categories of local economic activity developed by ERS and selected characteristics in the United States, the South Atlantic Census Division, Virginia, and North Carolina. The population column is the population within all counties in a particular category. For example, the total population of the 7 counties defined as large metropolitan areas in North Carolina is 1,360,691.

Table 1: Selected characteristics of Urban Influence

		Total Population	Average Population Per County	Per Capita Income	Earnings Per Job	Total Number of Counties
	United States	**282,124,631**	**90,715**	**29,469**	**36,316**	**3,110**
1	Large metro	140,828,199	463,251	33,890	42,518	304
2	Small metro	85,074,775	164,874	27,182	32,116	516
3	Adj.large metro with city 10,000+	4,049,574	65,316	23,184	27,729	62
4	Adj.large metro w/o city 10,000+	2,876,659	23,579	22,224	23,962	122
5	Adj.small metro with city 10,000+	10,737,458	58,356	23,016	27,393	184
6	Adj.small metro w/o city 10,000+	13,846,517	22,297	20,827	23,861	621
7	Not adj. with city 10,000+	10,745,682	46,318	22,940	26,369	232
8	Not adj. with city 2,500-9,999+	10,367,043	18,781	21,021	24,056	552
9	Not adj. without city > 2,500	3,598,724	6,961	19,759	21,402	517
	South Atlantic Census Division	**51,964,279**	**92,793**	**28,345**	**34,118**	**560**
1	Large metro	22,613,000	297,539	31,867	38,934	76
2	Small metro	18,713,427	147,350	27,963	31,644	127
3	Adj.large metro with city 10,000+	738,159	82,018	25,847	28,946	9
4	Adj.large metro w/o city 10,000+	846,438	24,895	22,716	26,318	34
5	Adj.small metro with city 10,000+	1,566,477	65,270	22,250	27,408	24
6	Adj.small metro w/o city 10,000+	3,858,008	27,957	20,569	25,252	138
7	Not adj. with city 10,000+	1,329,591	57,808	23,743	27,561	23
8	Not adj. with city 2,500-9,999+	1,600,037	23,530	19,705	24,617	68
9	Not adj. without city > 2,500	699,142	11,461	19,179	22,944	61
	North Carolina	**8,077,367**	**80,774**	**26,882**	**32,022**	**100**
1	Large metro	1,360,691	194,384	31,514	38,286	7
2	Small metro	4,098,695	146,382	28,217	32,731	28
3	Adj.large metro with city 10,000+	285,201	71,300	23,960	27,990	4
4	Adj.large metro w/o city 10,000+	58,327	19,442	20,831	26,155	3
5	Adj.small metro with city 10,000+	498,507	71,215	21,512	26,493	7
6	Adj.small metro w/o city 10,000+	1,111,391	44,456	22,427	25,751	25
7	Not adj. with city 10,000+	205,284	51,321	23,662	28,329	4
8	Not adj. with city 2,500-9,999+	285,241	31,693	22,179	24,934	9
9	Not adj. without city > 2,500	174,030	13,387	21,399	23,463	13
	Virginia	**7,104,016**	**67,657**	**31,120**	**36,481**	**105**
1	Large metro	3,740,003	155,833	36,251	41,598	24
2	Small metro	1,812,499	82,386	29,007	33,313	22
3	Adj.large metro with city 10,000+	83,220	83,220	27,170	29,753	1
4	Adj.large metro w/o city 10,000+	202,022	16,835	23,151	23,204	12
5	Adj.small metro with city 10,000+	281,916	93,972	21,772	27,246	3
6	Adj.small metro w/o city 10,000+	404,328	20,216	20,250	23,999	20
7	Not adj. with city 10,000+	108,170	108,170	22,082	27,453	1
8	Not adj. with city 2,500-9,999+	295,757	32,862	19,410	24,146	9
9	Not adj. without city > 2,500	176,101	13,546	20,044	23,939	13

Note: The South Atlantic Census Division includes the States of Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, aryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia.
Note: the Bureau of Economic Analysis treats most Virginia independent cities as part of their surrounding counties.
Sources: Calculated by USDA-Economic Research Service using population data from the U.S. Census Bureau and income and earnings from the Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Change in Building Permits
Average annual percent change in the number of building permits issued between 1990 and 2000. An increase in the number of permits issued generally indicates growth in the community. Interestingly, there are a number of counties along the parkway with a growing population but a decrease in the number of building permits issued.

General Population
These indicators measure how many people live a particular area, how the population has changed over time, or is projected to change in the future. Population growth can have a significant impact on land use as well as local government revenues and the services particularly when the growth is occurring as quickly as it is in the counties along the parkway. The general population indicators in the Atlas and summarized by county are:

- **Total Population:** The total number of people in the county based on the 2000 census.

- **Recent Population Change:** The percent change in the total number of people living in the county between 1990 and 2000.

- **Historical Population Change:** The percent change in the total number of people living in the county between 1970 and 2000.

- **Population Density Change:** The percent change in the county of the average number of people per square mile between 1980 and 2000.

- **Projected Population Change:** The projected percent change in the total number of people living in the county between 1998 and 2020.

- **Projected Population Density:** The projected average number of people in the county per square mile in 2020.

Industry and Employment
Economic activity is categorized in one of four categories: agricultural and natural resources, construction and manufacturing, sales and service, and government. Individual employees are classified by the industry in which they work rather than by their actual job. For example, an accountant who works for a mining company would be classified as an employee in the agriculture and natural resources sector even though accounting would normally be classified as a service position.

The leading sector for employment and earnings is the sales and service sector. Growth and change within the employment sectors varied both in terms of the relative rate of growth and the overall pace of growth in each county. It was interesting to note that in many counties even as the total projected employment in the agriculture and natural resources sector is projected to decrease, the total earnings in this sector are projected to increase.

Recreation
The recreation and tourism industry is composed of two categories: arts and entertainment and recreation and is part of the sales and service sector of the local economy. There are four indicators in this category, they are:

- **Recreation and Tourism Establishments:** This indicator measures the size of the recreation and tourism industry as a percentage of the overall sales and service sector of the economy and is a relative measure of the county's economic reliance on recreation and tourism. Along the parkway, the percentage of total establishments in arts, entertainment, recreation, and accommodation ranges from 0.5% in Grayson County to 4.7% in Swain County.

- **Recreation and Tourism Revenue:** Is expressed as a percentage of total sales and service receipts and could be a direct measure of the current economic importance of recreation and tourism in the county. This indicator does not, however, include the economic benefits of visitor dollars that are re-spent in the community or deposited in a local bank. As a result this indicator may under represent the economic benefit of recreation and tourism in the county. Seven counties reported no income from recreation and tourism along the parkway. Swain County has the highest revenue in this category at 34.2%.

- **Recreation and Tourism Employment:** Measures the percentage of county workers employed in the recreation and tourism industry. Swain County has the highest percentage of total employment related to recreation and tourism at 34.0% while Ashe County has the lowest at 0.2%.

- **Seasonal Housing:** Is also known as recreational or occasional housing because it is occupied only during certain times of the year and is generally located in resort areas. A park with a high number of seasonal housing units located near its boundaries can be considered a destination park. These parks attract people who can travel considerable distances and can spend a few days in or near the park. The percentage of total housing that is seasonal housing ranges from 1.1% in Surry County to 39.9% in Avery County. All the cities reported separately in Virginia have seasonal housing below 1%.