

SECTION 3

COMMUNITY PROFILE

This section of the Plan provides a general overview of the Smoky Mountain Region. It consists of the following four subsections:

- ◆ 3.1 Geography and the Environment
- ◆ 3.2 Population and Demographics
- ◆ 3.3 Housing, Infrastructure, and Land Use
- ◆ 3.4 Employment and Industry

3.1 GEOGRAPHY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The Smoky Mountain Region is located in the southern portion of the Western North Carolina Blue Ridge Mountains. For the purposes of this plan, the Smoky Mountain Region includes Cherokee, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, and Swain Counties, the incorporated jurisdictions within these five counties, and Tribal lands of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. An orientation map is provided as **Figure 3.1**.

The Smoky Mountain Region is best known as being home of the most-visited national park in the United States, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Each year, over 9 million people visit the park to see the diverse wildlife and waterfalls, hike, bike, fish, picnic, and camp. The Smoky Mountains are among the tallest in the Appalachian chain with elevations that range from 875 to 6,643 feet. In the park, there are 16 peaks reaching over 5,000 feet.

The Smoky Mountain Region is also a popular tourist destination for other activities such as golfing, tubing, horseback riding, and skiing. The Qualla Boundary, home of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, also attracts many vacationers who come to enjoy Cherokee cultural festivals and outdoor activities, visit the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, or take a tour of the Oconaluftee Indian Village.

The total land area of each of the participating counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians is presented in **Table 3.1**.

TABLE 3.1: TOTAL LAND AREAS OF PARTICIPATING COUNTIES AND TRIBE

County	Total Land Area
Cherokee County	455 square miles
Graham County	292 square miles
Haywood County	554 square miles
Jackson County	491 square miles
Swain County	528 square miles
Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	213 square miles*

*The Reservation is comprised of land located in Swain, Jackson, Cherokee, and Graham Counties.

Source: US Census Bureau

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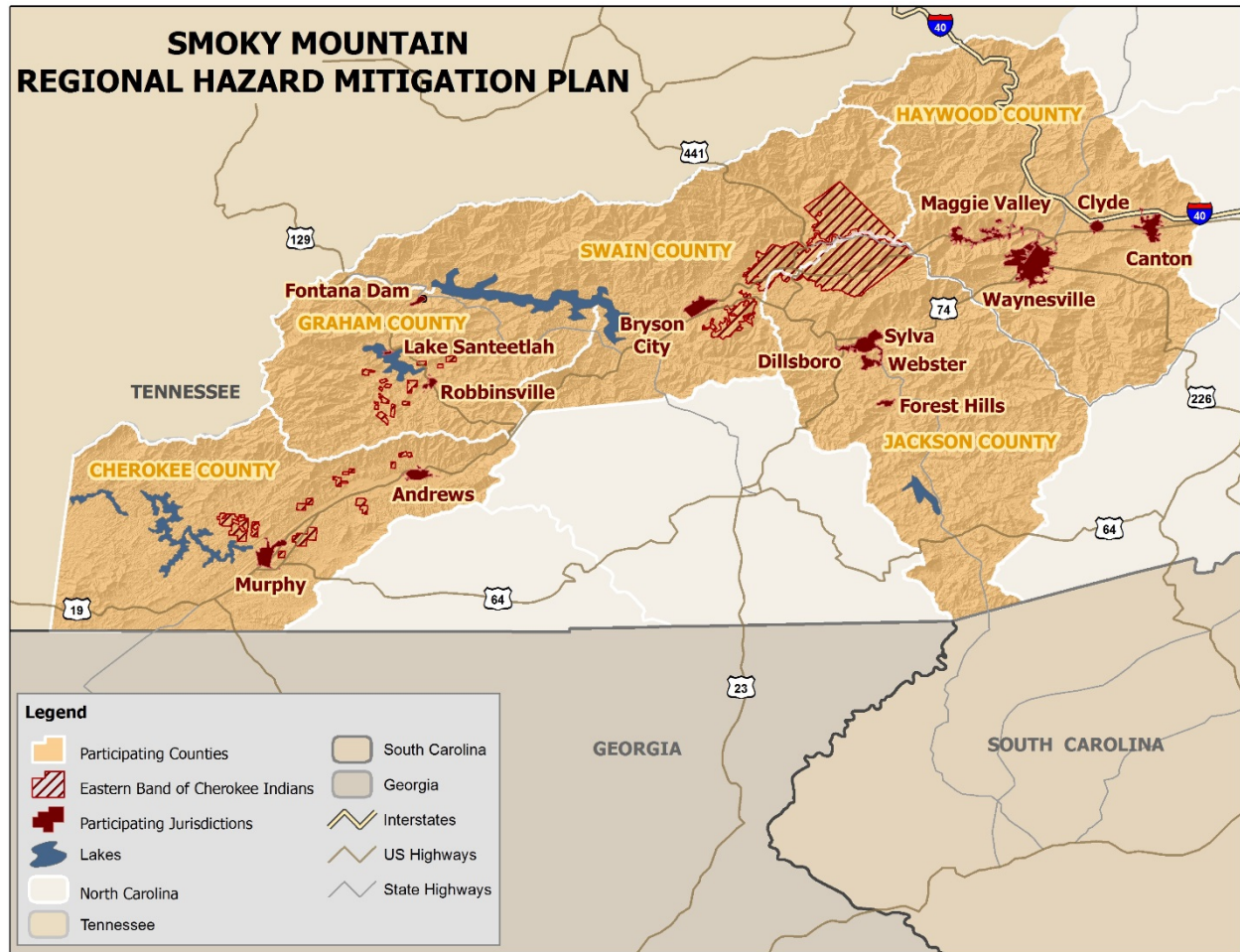
The Smoky Mountain Region enjoys a moderate climate that is characterized by mild winters and hot, humid summers; however, variation in elevation and topography can drastically affect local weather. In general, the spring months are marked by unpredictable weather and changes can occur rapidly with sunny skies yielding to snow in a just a few hours. From March through May, temperatures in the lower elevations have an average high of 61°F and an average low of 42°F. Typically, the weather is milder by mid-April and warm in May.

In the summer, afternoon showers and thunderstorms are common and average temperatures increase with afternoon highs reaching the 90s in July and August. At higher elevations, weather is much more pleasant during the summer.

September through mid-November is typified by clear skies and cooler weather that alternates between warm days and cool nights. Daytime highs are usually in the 70s and 80s during September but fall to the 50s and 60s by early November. The first frost often occurs in late September and the lows are near freezing by November. During these autumn months, there are only occasional rain showers making it the driest period of the year.

Winter in the Smoky Mountain Region is generally moderate but extremes do occur, especially at higher elevations. About half of the days from mid-November through February have high temperatures of 50°F or more and can even reach the 70s. Winter lows are usually at or below freezing but temperatures can drop to -20°F at high elevations. Snow is most common during January and February. At low elevations, snows of one inch or more occur one to five times per year; however, in the higher mountains, snow falls more frequently and up to two feet can fall at one time.

FIGURE 3.1: SMOKY MOUNTAIN REGION ORIENTATION MAP



3.2 POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Haywood County is the largest participating county by area and it also has the largest population. Between 2010 and 2015, the majority of participating jurisdictions experienced slight population growth, however Cherokee and Graham Counties, as well as four towns did see a decline. Population counts from the US Census Bureau for 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2015 for each of the participating counties, jurisdictions, and Tribe (where available) are presented in **Table 3.2**.

TABLE 3.2: POPULATION COUNTS FOR PARTICIPATING JURISDICTIONS AND TRIBE

Jurisdiction	1990 Census Population	2000 Census Population	2010 Census Population	2015 ACS Population	% Change 2010-2015
CHEROKEE COUNTY	20,170	24,298	27,444	27,092	-1.3%
Town of Andrews	2,551	1,602	1,781	2,050	15.1%
Town of Murphy	1,575	1,568	1,627	2,095	28.8%
GRAHAM COUNTY	7,196	7,993	8,861	8,700	-1.8%
Town of Fontana Dam	--	--	--	--	--
Town of Lake Santeetlah	47	67	45	36	-20.0%
Town of Robbinsville	709	747	620	575	-17.0%
HAYWOOD COUNTY	46,942	54,033	59,036	59,170	0.2%
Town of Canton	3,790	4,029	4,227	4,156	-1.7%
Town of Clyde	1,041	1,324	1,223	1,311	7.2%
Town of Maggie Valley	185	607	1,150	1,533	33.3%
Town of Waynesville	6,758	9,232	9,869	9,748	-1.2%
JACKSON COUNTY	26,846	33,121	40,271	40,812	1.3%
Town of Dillsboro	95	205	232	295	27.2%
Village of Forest Hills	--	330	365	405	11.0%
Town of Sylva	1,809	2,435	2,588	2,597	0.3%
Town of Webster	410	486	363	409	12.7%
SWAIN COUNTY	11,268	12,968	13,981	14,163	1.3%
Town of Bryson City	1,145	1,411	1,424	1,748	22.8%
EASTERN BAND OF CHEROKEE INDIANS	5,968	8,092	9,018	9,796	8.6%

Source: US Census Bureau

Based on the 2015 Census, the median age of residents of the participating counties ranges from 36 to 48 years and the median age of the Tribe was 32 years. The racial characteristics of the participating counties are presented in **Table 3.3**. Generally, whites make up the majority of the population in the region accounting for over 80 percent of the population in Cherokee, Graham, Haywood, and Jackson Counties. Swain County, with smaller populations of white people, had the largest proportion of American Indians. This can be attributed to the fact that the main portion of the Eastern Cherokee Reservation lies in eastern Swain County and northern Jackson County.

TABLE 3.3: DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPATING COUNTIES AND TRIBE

Jurisdiction	White Persons, Percent (2015)	Black Persons, Percent (2015)	American Indian or Alaska Native, Percent (2015)	Other Race, Percent (2015)	Persons of Hispanic Origin, Percent (2015)*
Cherokee County	93.6%	1.6%	1.8%	2.8%	2.8%
Graham County	88.6%	0.5%	7.6%	3.3%	1.5%
Haywood County	96.0%	0.9%	0.3%	2.8%	3.6%
Jackson County	83.3%	3.1%	8.8%	4.8%	5.3%
Swain County	64.6%	1.5%	26.9%	7.0%	2.4%
Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	16.6%	0.9%	74.0 %	8.5%	5.7%

*Hispanics may be of any race, so also are included in applicable race categories

Source: US Census Bureau

3.3 HOUSING, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND LAND USE

3.3.1 Housing

According to the 2010 US Census, there were 97,098 housing units in the Smoky Mountain Region, the majority of which are single family homes or mobile homes. Housing information for the five participating counties and Tribe is presented in **Table 3.4**. As shown in the table, Haywood County has a lower percentage of seasonal housing units compared to the other counties.

TABLE 3.4: HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS

Jurisdiction	Housing Units (2000)	Housing Units (2010)	Housing Units (2015)	Seasonal Units, Percent (2010)	Median Home Value (2011-2015)
Cherokee County	13,499	17,515	17,667	20.9%	\$142,600
Graham County	5,084	5,930	5,930	25.7%	\$120,700
Haywood County	28,640	34,954	35,086	16.2%	\$161,300
Jackson County	19,291	25,948	26,322	26.4%	\$171,900
Swain County	7,105	8,723	8,769	22.3%	\$126,700
Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	3,194	4,028	4,310	9.2%	\$110,900

Source: US Census Bureau

3.3.2 Infrastructure

Transportation

There are several major highways that cross the Smoky Mountain Region. The Great Smoky Mountains Expressway is a four-lane divided highway that traverses west to east starting at Bryson City in Swain County, through Jackson County, to Clyde in Haywood County. The Waterfall Byway, part of US Route 64, also connects west to east starting in Cherokee County and continuing on through Jackson County. This scenic byway is known for its more than 200 waterfalls that surround the route. US Route 74 is another east-west highway that runs across the state, but it travels roughly southwest to northeast in the region

connecting the towns of Murphy, Andrews, Bryson City, Cherokee, Sylva, and Waynesville and linking all 5 counties in the Smoky Mountain Region. US Route 74 has alternating names, but it is considered the commercial backbone and main truck route of Western North Carolina. This highway briefly runs concurrent with and intersects US Route 441, a north-south highway that runs from the Georgia border, into Jackson County, and through Swain County to the Tennessee border.

The Asheville Regional/Hendersonville Airport is the largest airport in the mountains serving the Smoky Mountain Region and all of Western North Carolina. The airport currently offers non-stop commercial flights on four airlines to six major cities. The major airport located nearest to the region is the Charlotte Douglas International Airport, which offers non-stop commercial flights on nine airlines to numerous destinations across the eastern US and Midwest as well as to several international destinations. This airport is approximately 175 miles from Bryson City, which is roughly located in the center of the region. Other major nearby airports include the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport in Georgia and the Nashville Metropolitan Airport in Tennessee.

Utilities

Electrical power in the Smoky Mountain Region is provided by one public utility, Progress Energy, and several electricity cooperatives. The electricity cooperatives servicing the region include Haywood Electric Membership Corporation in Haywood County and Tri-State Electric Membership Corporation and Blue Ridge Mountain Electric Membership Corporation in Cherokee County.

Water and sewer service is provided by many of the towns in the Smoky Mountain Region, but generally municipal water systems are extremely limited in the mountains and private or shared wells and septic systems are considered the norm. Cherokee and Jackson Counties; the Towns of Andrews, Murphy, Lake Santeetlah, Robbinsville, Canton, Clyde, Maggie Valley, Waynesville, Dillsboro, Sylva, and Webster; and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians provide water and sewer service to their residents.

Community Facilities

There are a number of public buildings and community facilities located throughout the Smoky Mountain Region. According to the data collected for the vulnerability assessment (Section 6.4.1), there are 59 fire stations, 16 police stations, and 47 public schools located within the study area. Seven medical facilities are located in the Smoky Mountain Region including several hospitals, health centers, and rural clinics.

In addition to Smoky Mountain National Park, the Smoky Mountain Region contains numerous local, state, and national parks and recreation areas. These include the Nantahala National Forest, Pisgah National Forest, Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest, Cherohala Skyway, and Blue Ridge Parkway. These facilities offer recreational opportunities to area residents and millions of visitors each year.

3.3.3 Land Use

Many areas of the Smoky Mountain Region are undeveloped or sparsely developed due to the mountainous terrain and the conservation of land in state and national parks and forests. As shown in **Figure 3.1** above, there are several small incorporated municipalities located throughout the study area, and these areas are where the region's population is generally concentrated. The incorporated areas are also where many businesses, commercial uses, and institutional uses are located. Land uses in the balance of the study area generally consist of rural residential development, agricultural uses, recreational areas, and forestland.

Local land use (and associated regulations, or lack thereof) is further discussed in *Section 7: Capability Assessment*.

3.4 EMPLOYMENT AND INDUSTRY

The early modern economy in the Smoky Mountain Region was built around extractive industries; such as mining, logging, and agriculture; manufacturing; and textiles. Like many other mountain towns in North Carolina, the jurisdictions in the Smoky Mountain Region have focused recent economic development efforts on cultural and natural heritage tourism. Second home development is also being considered as another way to boost the economy and promote revitalization.

According to the North Carolina Department of Commerce, Labor and Economic Analysis Division, Demand Driven Data Delivery System, in 2015, Cherokee County had an average annual employment of 7,877 workers. In 2015, Education and Health Services employed 2,221 persons (28.2 percent) of the County's workforce followed by Trade, Transportation and Utilities occupations (1,501, 19%); Leisure and Hospitality (947; 12%); Manufacturing occupations (878; 11.1%), and Construction occupations (385; 4.9%). In 2015, the median annual wage in Cherokee County was \$28,424 compared to \$32,510 for the state of North Carolina.

In 2015, Graham County had an average annual employment of 1,951 workers. In 2015, according to the North Carolina Employment Security Commission, the Education and Health Services industry employed the most people, with 21.8 percent of the workforce, followed by Construction (21.4%); Leisure and Hospitality (14.7%); Trade, Transportation, and Utilities (14.2%); and Public Administration (12.4%). In 2015, the annual median wage in Graham County was \$24,182, compared to \$32,510 for the state of North Carolina.

According to the North Carolina Employment Security Commission, Haywood County had an average annual employment of 16,737 workers in 2015. In 2015, the Education and Health Services industry was the largest employment sector with 25.5 percent of the County's workforce. The other leading industries were Trade, Transportation, and Utilities (20.5%); Leisure and Hospitality (14.9%); Manufacturing (14.1%); and Public Administration (6.6%). In 2015, the annual median wage in Haywood County was \$29,120 compared to \$32,510 for the state of North Carolina.

The North Carolina Employment Security Commission reported an annual average employment of 12,915 workers in Jackson County for 2015. In 2015, the top employment industry was Education and Health Services, making up 34.4 percent of total employment. Other major industries were Leisure and Hospitality (20.0%); Trade, Transportation, and Utilities (16.0%); and Public Administration (10.1%). In 2015, the County's annual median income was \$31,826 compared to \$32,510 for the state of North Carolina.

Swain County had a 2015 average annual employment of 9,591 workers. In 2015, according to the North Carolina Employment Security Commission, the Leisure and Hospitality industry employed 44.3 percent of the workforce followed by Public Administration (21.6%); Education and Health Services (12.3%); and Trade, Transportation, and Utilities (8.6%). In 2015, the annual median income for the County was \$25,921, compared to \$32,510 for the state of North Carolina.

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Data from the US Census 2011-2015 American Community Survey indicates the Eastern Band of Cherokee has a population 16 years and over of approximately 7,191. Of that population, 3,805 people (approximately 53%) were considered to be in the labor force. Of those in the labor force, approximately 5.2% were unemployed. Of those employed, 2,026 were employed in private business and 1,310 were employed as government workers.