

Jackson County

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy



Jackson County Economic Development Advisory Committee

2012

Acknowledgements



We would like to thank the Jackson County Board of County Commissioners for choosing us to do this work. It has been a pleasure to work with the elected officials, staff and business community to develop the Comprehensive Economic Development Plan for Jackson County.

Jackson County Commissioners

Walter J. Debnam, Chairman
Douglas L. Cody
Joe Cowan
Charles Elders
Mark Jones

Jackson County Staff

Chuck Wooten, County Manager
Gerald Green, County Planner
Pat Parris, Clerk to the Board
Jan Fitzgerald, Executive Assistant

Other Volunteer Participants

Ryan Sherby, Interim Executive Director, Southwestern Commission
Sam Riddle, WCU Intern, MPA Program
Paige Roberson, Sylva Town Manager
Julie Spiro, Jackson County Chamber of Commerce
Stephanie Edwards, Cashiers Area Chamber of Commerce
Robin Ashmore, President of the Greater Cashiers Area Merchants Association

Cover Photo: Courtesy of Nick Breedlove

TABLE OF CONTENTS BY SECTION

Section	Page Number
Acknowledgements	2
Jackson County Economic Development Advisory Committee	3
Mission – Vision – Values	4
County Profile	6
SWOT Analysis	16
Clusters of Opportunity	20
A New Vision for Jackson County	28
The Work Plan to Carry Out the Vision	30
Existing EDC Structure and Revolving Loan Fund	39
New EDC Structure Options	41
County Assets Available for Light Manufacturing	45
Performance Measures	47
Appendices	49

Jackson County Economic Development Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee was organized in 2012 by the Jackson County Board of County Commissioners to develop the Jackson County Economic Development Strategy.

Members

Chair: Dr. Don Tomas
Fred Alexander
Wendy Cagle
Doug Cody
David Gates
Bill Gibson
Ben Graining
Don Hensley
Jeremy Hyatt
Chris Matheson
Will McKee
Jeff Murphy
Scott Stanberry

President, Southwestern Community College
Duke Energy
Western Carolina University
Jackson County Board of County Commissioners
Appalachian Funeral Services
Southwestern Commission
B.H. Graining Landscapes
Western Builders
Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians
Sylva Town Board Member
High Hampton Inn
Jackson Paper Company
Stanberry Insurance

Ex-Officio Members

Chuck Wooten
Gerald Green

Jackson County Manager
Jackson County Planning Director

MISSION - VISION - VALUES



COUNTY PROFILE

County Profile

Jackson County is located approximately one hour from the urban area of Asheville and two and a half hours from the city of Atlanta. The area is easily accessed via Interstates 40 and 26 via US 74/23.

The county has four incorporated towns: Dillsboro, Forest Hills, Sylva (the county seat) and Webster. The population in the 2010 census was 40,271 and predicted to reach 53,347 by 2030. The county encompasses 494 square miles and boasts an abundance of natural beauty. Its topography includes 185 named summits, approximately 250 named rivers and creeks and the elevation ranges from 2,000 feet above sea level in Whittier's broad Tuckasegee River valley to more than 6,000 feet on mountaintops in the Plott Balsam and Great Balsam ranges. **The combined population of Sylva, Webster and Cullowhee is approximately 25,000.**

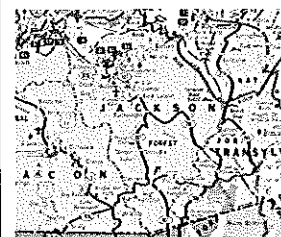
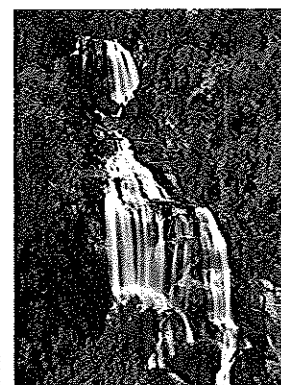
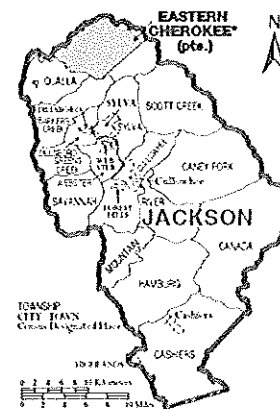
The tallest peak, Richland Balsam, rises to 6,410 feet and is the highest mountain in the Great Balsam range ranking it among the twenty tallest summits in the Appalachian range. The Blue Ridge Parkway reaches an elevation of 6,053 feet, the parkway's highest point, as it passes over Richland Balsam's southwestern slope. The county is home to Whiteside Mountain, the highest vertical cliffs in Eastern America and Panthertown Valley near Cashiers, which has been described as the "Yosemite of the East" and is home to granite domes, waterfalls, valley floors, and rare high altitude bogs. The headwaters for Greenland and Panthertown Creeks and the East Fork of the Tuckasegee River are in Panthertown Valley.

The county boasts over 30 waterfalls including **Whitewater Falls** that is touted as the tallest waterfalls east of the Mississippi at 411 feet. The Tuckasegee River flows through the county and major roads follow the river: N.C. Highway 107 parallels it between the communities of East LaPorte and Tuckaseegee and follows its West Fork to Glenville; N.C. Highway 281 travels alongside the river's East Fork; and U.S. 74/441, like the railroad tracks that preceded it, mostly follows the Tuckasegee's path from Dillsboro to the Jackson/Swain county line. To the north, the Oconaluftee River forms part of the Jackson/Swain county line; to the south, the Whitewater and Chattooga Rivers separate Jackson from Transylvania and Macon counties. **Lake Glenville is the highest lake east of the Mississippi River.**

Jackson County includes a significant amount of U.S. National Forest land, including the 40,000-acre Roy Taylor Forest, which is southwest of and adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway and includes both the Tuckasegee Gorge and Panthertown Valley. The Valley is home to Big Green Mountain that is a favorite for rock climbers in the Southeast. The Taylor Forest is part of the larger Nantahala National Forest and is home to some of the nation's healthiest and fastest growing hardwoods. The county contains **64 Significant Natural Heritage Areas** identified by the NC Natural Heritage Program.

The Blue Ridge Parkway, America's most visited unit of the National Park System, winds along the border of Jackson and Haywood counties. A portion of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indian Reservation – known as the Qualla Boundary - lies within Jackson County and borders the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Complementing the county's tourism industry are the picturesque downtowns of Sylva, historic Dillsboro and resort community of Cashiers, all with great restaurants and unique shops. The county is recognized as a regional center for higher education and health care.



County Profile Continued

Jackson County Towns and Communities

Sylva, the county seat, is located in the center of the county and is the commercial service and governmental hub. The picturesque small town exhibits the strong sense of community that abounds in Jackson County. The new Library Complex, located in the Historic Jackson County Courthouse atop Courthouse Hill, is a gathering place for many community functions.

Dillsboro is a popular tourist attraction due to the many arts and crafts shops located in the town center. The town's old-fashioned charm and gracious hospitality has made it popular with a growing number of artisans and craftspeople that now make it their home. The historic Jarrett House Inn and Restaurant, established in 1844, is another popular attraction for locals and visitors.

Forest Hills Village is located near Cullowhee and the campus of Western Carolina University. There are approximately 400 residents. Recently, several community members and WCU have proposed that the village of Forest Hills become the town/city of Cullowhee, incorporating the present Forest Hills boundaries and areas near Old Cullowhee Road and NC Highway 107.

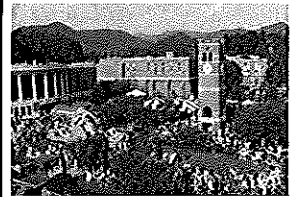
Cullowhee (unincorporated) is home to Western Carolina University and has the largest and youngest population base in the county. WCU, founded in 1889, has grown in size to become a major cultural, scientific, and educational force in the region and the state.

Webster, located on the Tuckasegee River, was the first county seat of Jackson County when it was established in 1869. It was formerly the location of a large Cherokee town known to the Cherokee as Unadanti'yi, "where they conjured." According to tradition and the story in *"Myths of the Cherokee and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees"* by James Mooney, "a war party of Shawano, coming from the direction of Pigeon River, halted here to make medicine against the Cherokee, but while thus engaged were surprised by the latter, who came up from behind and killed several, including the conjurer." Today Webster is primarily a residential community.

Cashiers (unincorporated) is located in the southern end of Jackson County and is the highest plateau in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Its unique geography boasts hundreds of waterfalls, quiet lakes, stone mountains and rhododendron forests with elevations of 3500 to 4000 ft. The quiet village offers world-class accommodations, great restaurants, golfing, activities and shopping. It is also home to the well-known **High Hampton Inn & Country Club** that offers golf, tennis, hiking, fly-fishing and a European spa on a 1,400-acre playground. The Cashiers area also boasts several private club communities such as the **Wade Hampton Golf Club**, which is continuously ranked among the top 20 in the United States and often referred to as "Tom Fazio's Masterpiece."

Lake Glenville (unincorporated) is located near Cashiers in the Hamburg Township and is a beautiful, popular lakeside vacation community.

A portion of the **Qualla Boundary**, homeland of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians, is also located in Jackson County, including Harrah's Cherokee Casino.

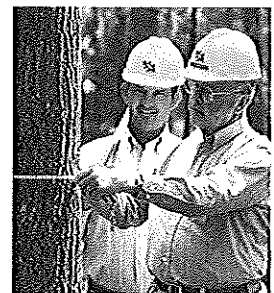
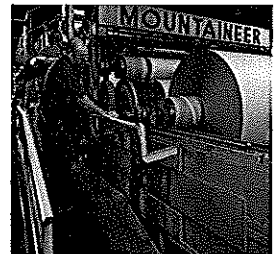
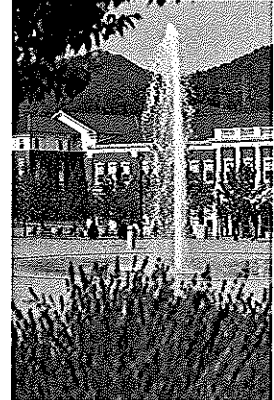


Jackson County Top Employers

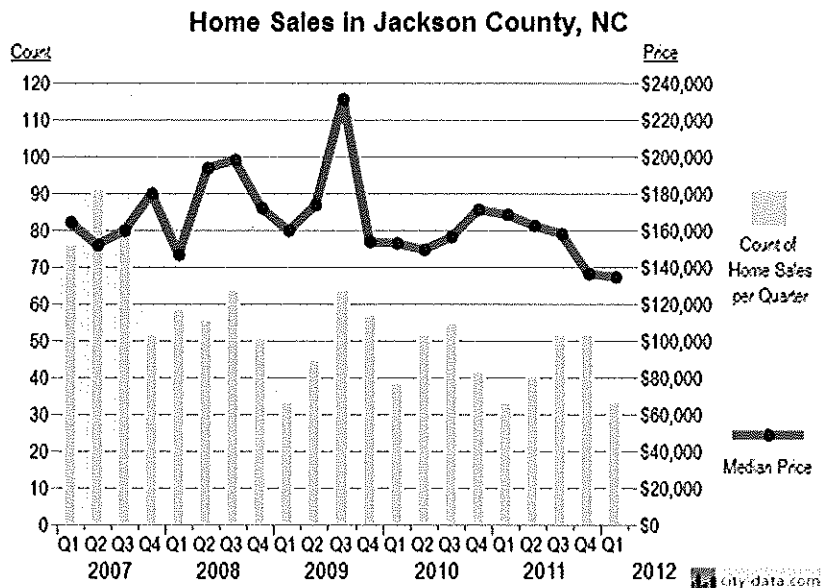
Company Name Employment

Industry Description

Western Carolina University	Education & Health Services	1,000+
CJ Harris Community Hospital	Education & Health Services	500-999
Jackson County Public Schools	Education & Health Services	500-999
County of Jackson	Public Administration	250-499
Southwestern Community College	Education & Health Services	250-499
Wal-Mart Associates Inc.	Trade, Transportation & Utilities	250-499
Aramark Food & Support Services	Leisure & Hospitality	250-499
NC DOT	Public Administration	250-499
Ingles Markets, Inc.	Trade, Transportation & Utilities	100-249
High Hampton Inn & Country Club	Leisure & Hospitality	100-249
Mountain Trace Nursing & Rehab	Education & Health Services	100-249
Mountaintop Golf & Lake Club	Leisure & Hospitality	100-249
Meridian Behavioral Health Services	Professional & Business Services	100-249
Lowes Home Centers, Inc.	Trade, Transportation & Utilities	100-249
Skyland Care Center	Education & Health Services	100-249
Jackson Paper Manufacturing Company	Manufacturing	100-249
Smokey Mountain Center for MH DD SA	Education & Health Services	100-249
Wayne Moss	Natural Resources & Mining	100-249
Southwestern Child	Education & Health Services	50-99
Pathways for the Future	Other Services	50-99
Camp Merrie-Woode	Leisure & Hospitality	50-99
Zaxby's	Leisure & Hospitality	50-99
Trillium Links & Village LLC	Leisure & Hospitality	50-99
T&S Hardwood, Inc.	Manufacturing	50-99
McDonalds Restaurants of NC	Leisure & Hospitality	50-99

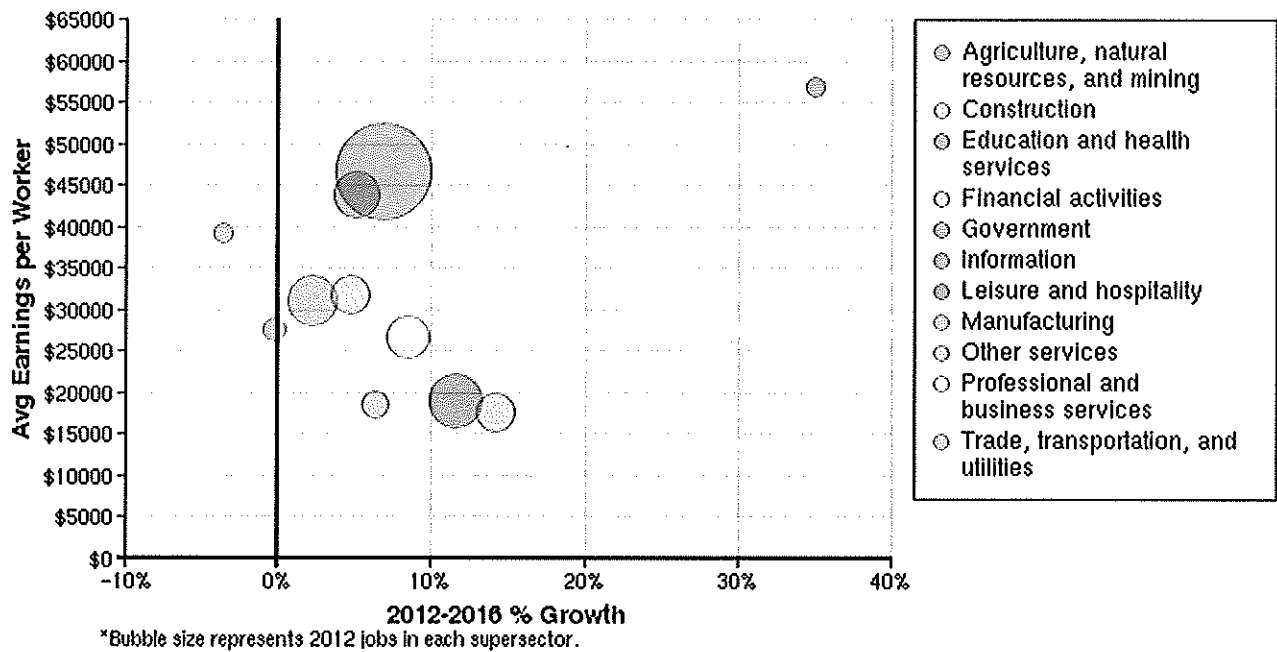


The county's housing/construction industry has suffered since the fourth quarter of 2009. However, there is an upward trend in new construction permits in the first and second quarters of 2012.



Business & Industry

Jackson County - 2012-2016 Size and Growth

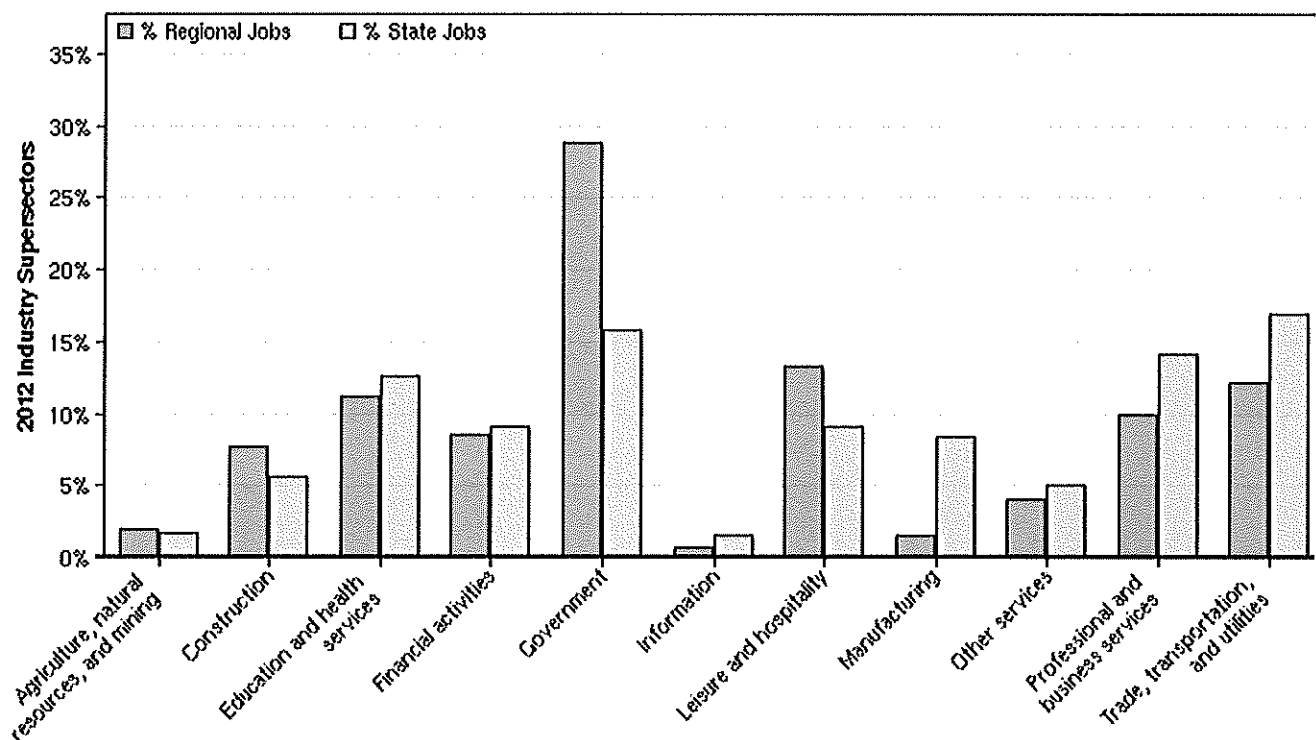


Description	2012 Jobs	2016 Jobs	Growth	% Growth	2011 EPW
Agriculture, natural resources, and mining	427	426	-1	0%	\$27,638
Construction	1,627	1,703	76	5%	\$31,833
Education and health services	2,363	2,482	119	5%	\$43,852
Financial activities	1,800	2,056	256	14%	\$17,708
Government	6,062	6,475	413	7%	\$46,545
Information	134	181	47	35%	\$56,769
Leisure and hospitality	2,791	3,115	324	12%	\$18,994
Manufacturing	335	323	-12	-4%	\$39,310
Other services	849	903	54	6%	\$18,646
Professional and business services	2,092	2,270	178	9%	\$26,783
Trade, transportation, and utilities	2,577	2,634	57	2%	\$31,086
Total	21,058	22,567	1,509	7%	\$33,645

Source: EMSI Complete Employment - 2011.4

Business & Industry

Jackson - Industrial Makeup 2012



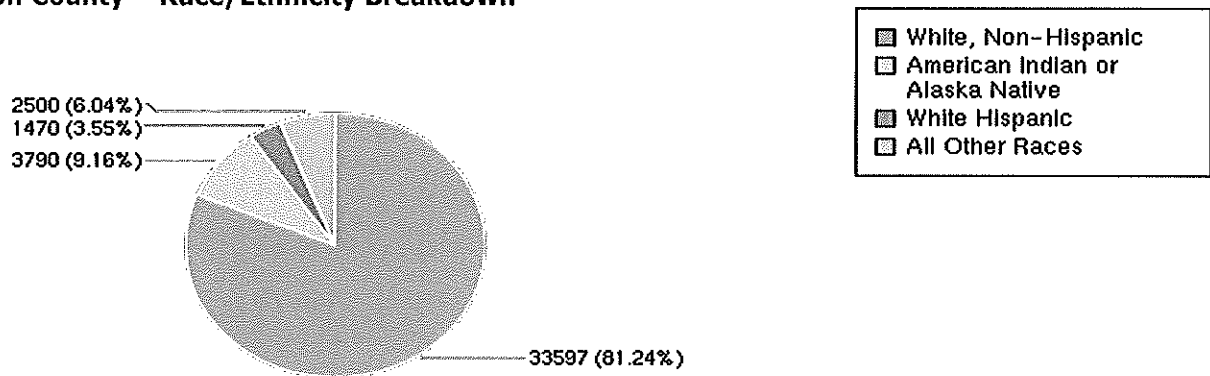
Description	2012 Regional Jobs	% Regional Jobs	2012 State Jobs	% State Jobs
Agriculture, natural resources, and mining	427	2.0%	91,699	1.7%
Construction	1,627	7.7%	292,660	5.6%
Education and health services	2,363	11.2%	664,456	12.6%
Financial activities	1,800	8.5%	480,358	9.1%
Government	6,062	28.8%	834,860	15.8%
Information	134	0.6%	82,197	1.6%
Leisure and hospitality	2,791	13.3%	479,540	9.1%
Manufacturing	335	1.6%	442,758	8.4%
Other services	849	4.0%	262,798	5.0%
Professional and business services	2,092	9.9%	747,551	14.2%
Trade, transportation, and utilities	2,577	12.2%	891,130	16.9%

Source: EMSI Complete Employment - 2011.4

Demographics

Jackson County was the fastest growing county in the seven-county region in the last decade with a 2010 population of 40,271 - an increase of 21.5% over the 2000 population statistics.

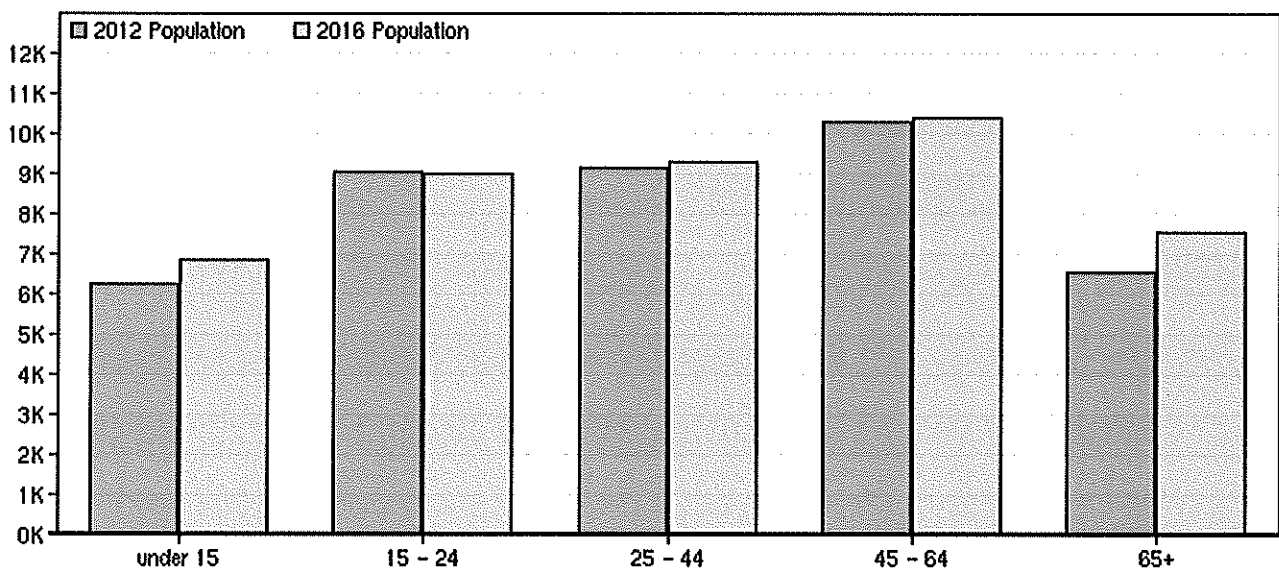
Jackson County - Race/Ethnicity Breakdown



Ethnicity	2012 Population	% of Region
White, Non-Hispanic	33,597	81.24%
White Hispanic	1,470	3.55%
Non-White Hispanic	364	0.88%
Black or African American	826	2.00%
American Indian or Alaska Native	3,790	9.16%
Asian	375	0.91%
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	14	0.03%
Two or more races	921	2.23%

Source: EMSI Complete Employment - 2011.4

Jackson County - 2012 - 2016 Age Size and Growth



Infrastructure and Utilities

Duke Energy operates 10 hydroelectric plants in six counties in the mountainous region of Southwestern North Carolina, known as the "Nantahala Area." Five of those plants are in Jackson County: Bear Creek, Cedar Cliff, Tennessee Creek, Thorpe and Tuckasegee. They serve approximately 65,000 residential and business customers with a transmission and distribution system that provides reliable power across the region.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has issued all six hydroelectric licenses for the Nantahala area. The licenses "kick start" processes for a variety of public recreation and aquatic habitat enhancements for the region. They are implementing the terms of these licenses, while awaiting FERC decisions on some outstanding issues.

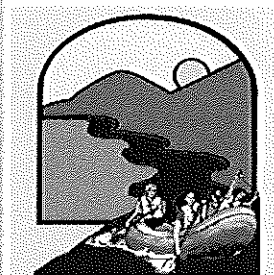
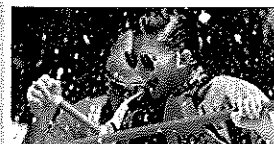
Between 2000 and 2003, Duke team members invested more than 9,000 hours visiting sites, guiding study needs, reviewing reports and collaborating to address environmental concerns and public recreation needs. The Nantahala and Tuckasegee settlement agreements remain key to successfully relicensing the hydro stations. The two legally binding agreements, signed in 2003, are the work of stakeholder teams representing 30 organizations, including Duke Energy. Through these licenses there are planned "enhancements" to both the Nantahala and the Tuckasegee Rivers. They are as follows:

Enhancements Coming to the Nantahala River

1. Add five kayak/canoe access areas with parking along the river and a handicap-accessible fishing access area.
2. Make land near Nantahala Powerhouse available to the U.S. Forest Service to improve public access for whitewater recreation.
3. On eight days during the recreation season, release flows from Nantahala Dam into the old streambed to provide high-skill boating opportunities.
4. Increase continuous minimum flows from the Nantahala Project to enhance stream habitat in the highly popular stretch of delayed harvest trout water in the Nantahala River Bypassed Reach.
5. Add continuous minimum flows from Whiteoak Dam to enhance aquatic habitat in Whiteoak Creek and downstream into the Nantahala River Bypassed Reach.

Enhancements Coming to the Tuckasegee River

1. Add nine river access areas, including a portage around Cullowhee Dam.
2. Provide 150 acres of land upstream of Wolf Creek Dam to the U.S. Forest Service to enhance public recreation and restore native brook trout.
3. During certain months, schedule generation releases to provide flows to increase paddling opportunities and enhance use and access for one of the most popular catch-and-release stretches in the Southeast.
4. On seven days each year, release water from Lake Glenville into the old streambed to provide high-skill boating opportunities. Create a parking area, trail and downstream take-out area to improve access.

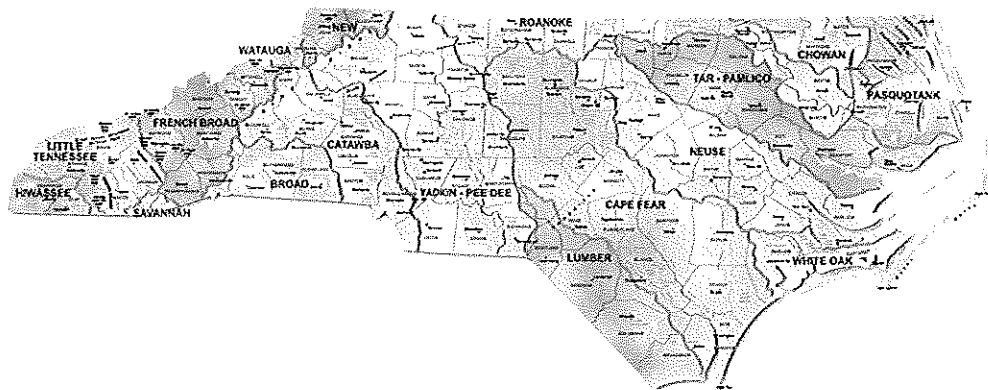


Infrastructure and Utilities Continued

Jackson County's clean and bountiful water resources come from the Little Tennessee and Savannah River Basins.

River Basins in North Carolina

(click on a basin for more information)



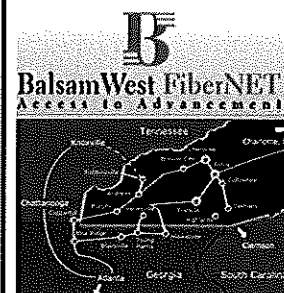
Tuckaseegee Water & Sewer Authority was created in 1992 when the County of Jackson and the Towns of Dillsboro, Sylva and Webster consolidated their water and wastewater utilities. The Tuckaseegee Water and Sewer Authority is dedicated to the delivery of water and wastewater services to the Citizens of Jackson County in the most efficient manner possible while protecting water quality and preparing for the future.



PSNC Energy, a SCANA Company, serves the county with Natural Gas. Headquartered in Gastonia, NC, PSNC Energy is a regulated public utility engaged primarily in purchasing, transporting, distributing and selling natural gas to approximately 489,000 customers throughout a 28-county service area in 96 cities and communities, including the Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill areas in the north central part of the state; the Concord, Statesville, Gastonia, and Forest City areas in the Piedmont; and the Asheville, Hendersonville, Brevard, and **Sylva areas** in the western part of North Carolina.



BalsamWest FiberNet, a fiber-optic based broadband company, is the leading provider of broadband services in the region via SONET & Ethernet service and the leading provider of Collocation and Interconnection Services. Headquartered in Sylva, the company was founded by both Phil Drake of Drake Enterprises and Principal Chief Michell Hicks of The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in 2003.



BalsamWest has deployed approximately 300 miles of underground fiber that serves 10 counties in NC, GA & TN. The primary backbone is made up of Cisco 15454 operating at OC-192 the blazing speed of 10 gigabits and Balsam's local loops operate at OC-48 or OC-12, 2.5 gigabits and 622 Mbs respectively.

The region around Jackson County has the most robust broadband network in a rural area in the world

Infrastructure and Utilities Continued

Highways

The highway system in Jackson County provides easy access to all points in the Southeast. Jackson County is located approximately one hour from the urban area of Asheville and approximately three hours from the city of Atlanta. The area is easily accessed via Interstates 40 and 26 via US 74/23. Several highways in Jackson County are part of the NC Strategic Highway Corridors Initiative: US74/US 23, NC 107, US 441 and US 64.



Transportation planning in Jackson County is conducted by the Rural Transportation Organization (RPO) and is managed by the Southwestern Commission (Region A).

Public Transportation

Jackson County Transit is a fully coordinated, public transportation system and operates as a branch of Jackson County Government.

Jackson County Transit provides transportation for human service agencies, the elderly, people with disabilities, and the general public of Jackson County. It offers deviated fixed routes, paratransit service, and a demand response service between 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, except holidays. This is a deviated fixed service that includes 11 fixed bus stops along the route. Limited service is available to Asheville, Waynesville, Franklin and Bryson City.

Scenic Byways

Jackson County is home to **four NC Scenic Byways: Waterfalls, Nantahala, Whitewater Way and Forest Heritage**. The N.C. Department of Transportation designates scenic byways to give visitors and residents a chance to experience a bit of North Carolina history, geography and culture while raising awareness for the protection and preservation of these treasures. The routes are carefully selected to embody the diverse beauty and culture of the area. The Blue Ridge Parkway, a federally designated **National Scenic Byway**, known as "**America's Favorite Highway**," also traverses through the county.

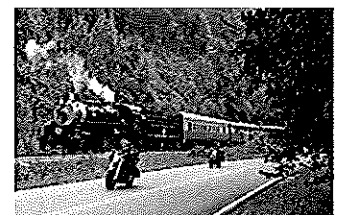
Airports

Jackson County Airport (FAA LID: 24A) is a small airfield situated on a ridge about three miles (5 km) southeast of the town of Sylva. It is also less than 1 mile west of the unincorporated town of Cullowhee that is home to Western Carolina University. The airport is owned and operated by the county. It sits at an elevation of 2,856 feet (870 meters) and covers an area of 147 acres. The airport's traffic consists mostly of light single and twin-engine private aircraft. The county recently made approximately \$600,000 in improvements including resurfacing and widening of the runway, restriping the runway and all other areas around the airport, improved parking for airplanes and improved runway lighting.

Asheville Regional Airport is approximately 1.5 hours North of Sylva. The Atlanta Airport is approximately three hours south of Sylva.

Railroads

Norfolk Southern Railway operates a portion of what is known as the Murphy Branch through Jackson County, providing a rail connection with the rest of the country. In Sylva, Norfolk Southern connects with the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad. Interchange between the two lines is handled near Jackson Paper Company. Great Smoky Mountains Railroad operates the rest of the Murphy Branch from Dillsboro to Andrews.



Norfolk Southern and The Great Smoky Mountains Railroad both provide freight service. However, the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad additionally is among top five scenic tourist railroads and provides visitors a unique experience as it travels through the southwest mountains of North Carolina.

SWOT ANALYSIS

SWOT Analysis for Jackson County

STRENGTHS

- Excellent education institutions: Western Carolina University, Southwestern Community College and a great public school system
- An existing cluster of medical facilities in the county
- Vast federal, state and private lands in the county for outdoor recreation
- Biodiversity of the natural resources and the proximity to the Highlands Biological Station operated by WCU
- Proximity to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway, **the two most visited national park units in the nation**, and the Nantahala National Forest, offers an opportunity to leverage outdoor recreation into a "comparative and competitive advantage" for the county through activities such as fishing, hiking, water sports and other outdoor activities.
- Location of the county in the Southeast as a part of the **Blue Ridge Escarpment** with a mild climate, relatively low cost of real estate and tax values, make it extremely attractive to retirees
- Availability of a skilled workforce that is mechanically inclined and well-educated exists in the county, and due to the quality of life many "under-employed" workers are in the county because they choose to live here
- **WCU's Kimmel School** with its Departments of Construction Management and Engineering and Technology along with the **Center for Rapid Product Realization**
- **Redundant fiber optic loop in the county** through BalsamWest FiberNet, LLC provides open and direct access to an advanced telecommunications infrastructure
- Highly-skilled, talented and connected second home residents and retirees
- Uptick in new construction has started bringing the county back to 2010 levels
- Proximity of Jackson County to the **Qualla Boundary** and the new opportunity of Las Vegas style table gaming at Cherokee Harrah's Casino, located in Jackson County.
- County-wide alcohol sales now legalized
- County has the second-lowest tax rate in the state (2011)
- Unique county **Revolving Loan Program** to foster business development

WEAKNESSES

- Challenges that all healthcare providers face in a rural area in America
- Serious lack of affordable housing
- Inadequate number of lodging rooms in the county for growth in the industry
- Lack of collaboration between WCU and the tourism industry
- A splintered and fragmented tourism marketing model, with two TTA's
- Limited utilization of educational facilities for summer activities at WCU or SCC
- Sluggish real estate sales and new construction starts, due to recession
- Lack of marketing in general for Jackson County (economic development) and what marketing is in place is very fragmented, *i.e. consider referring to the county population instead of just a single town to show market potential of over 40,000 residents in the marketing materials*
- No central place for small business or entrepreneurs to find resources they need (lack of support for Southwestern SBTDC)
- A continued lack of confidence in retail shoppers that exists nationally
- A lack of retail shopping beyond the big-box discount stores
- Continued struggles with the Town of Dillsboro's economy

OPPORTUNITIES

- There is an opportunity to leverage the already existing cluster of medical facilities in the county and WCU's College of Health and Human Sciences that offers the opportunity for training and clinical experiences for local physicians and other health professionals, the Millennium Campus and their planned multitenant medical office building into a pathway of becoming a "**regional healthcare hub.**" The inclusion of Southwestern Community College's over 20 Health & Science Curriculum Programs into the mix offers the opportunity to provide the allied healthcare workforce needed for the hub.
- The biodiversity of the natural resource, the available public lands, and the location of the Highlands Biological Station - a Center of the University of North Carolina System - offer another potential spoke in the regional healthcare hub through expansion into the **natural products industry.** The Richard C. Bruce Biodiversity Laboratory, in the Biological Station, complete with Molecular Lab offers space for work in molecular ecology, DNA/RNA extraction, quantification, PCR, visualization and cloning.
- The opportunity to leverage the county's easily accessed location, climate and vast outdoor recreation venues is paramount. The proximity to the Great Smokies National Park and the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians homeland along with access to four National Scenic Rivers and the Nantahala National Forest provides a real competitive advantage for the county. Further development and marketing outdoor recreation through waterways, greenways, trails and private golf clubs can prove to be a real boost to the already existing "**tourism industry cluster,**" as well as the second home industry and the "lone eagle" entrepreneur. Developing a brand message and creating collaboration between the northern and southern ends of the county will strengthen this industry and help it grow.
- Formalizing the **partnership with the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad and Swain County** to build "turn tables" for the railroad's steam operations in Dillsboro and in Bryson City. Not only does this create new tourism product, but also creates six new, year-round, jobs in Jackson County at the railroad maintenance facility maintenance that will be restoring and maintaining the original steam engine, brings trip origination back to Dillsboro and expands that tourism product back into Jackson County. This expansion project will help with revitalization efforts for the Town of Dillsboro.
- The location of the County in the Southeast, its mild climate, access to such amenities as the Performing Arts Center and the Ramsey Center at WCU and the relative low cost of real estate and tax values provides yet another *competitive advantage* that could further the development of the "**second-home or retirement cluster.**" The fact that many second home owners visit an area, fall in love with it and then want to live there creates the opportunity to co-market two existing clusters. In addition, the already existing second-home residents could possibly contribute to this opportunity through something similar to a **Retiree Advisory Group.** Another tactic that could be fruitful is establishing a "*How to Purchase Your Retirement Property Symposium*" at WCU to market the county in conjunction with the American Association of Retirement Communities.
- The opportunity exists to build a "**technology-based industry cluster**" through a partnership with WCU through its Engineering and Technology Department, Center for Rapid Product Realization, the Millennium Campus. Also, Southwestern Community College, offering numerous technology degree and certificate programs, including the Cisco Networking Certificate, should be approached as a collaborative partner in the initiative. Success of this effort would require a stronger working relationship between the county, Southwestern Community College and WCU with a shared vision.
- In addition, the **redundant fiber optic loop traversing the county** and the location of the corporate headquarters of BalsamWest FiberNet, LLC in Sylva provides a real opportunity for collaboration to recruit small companies in the future. **The county has an opportunity to strengthen its technology infrastructure by working collaboratively with BalsamWest to extend broadband to "the last mile," with the Metrostat assets it has acquired.**

OPPORTUNITIES continued...

- The fact that the County can offer low cost and reliable power through Duke Energy, excess capacity for water and sewer in some areas of the county, and access to natural gas in Sylva, Cullowhee and Webster, is another plus for the potential of economic growth. **A stronger working relationship with TWSA for improved water and sewer connections would further improve these assets.**
- The county should explore the opportunity of **learning more about the students at WCU and SCC and their needs while living in the county.** The opportunity for creating and implementing a survey tool that would identify their purchasing habits, preferences for entertainment, food, shopping, their career goals and where they want to live, work and play could prove beneficial and help stop the "brain drain" that takes place once these young professionals complete graduation. This work could also help determine what types of establishments need to be added to the retail mix.
- Looking at how to expand the entrepreneurial opportunities beyond a degree program at WCU could prove beneficial in growing new companies in the county. The development of a **Certified Entrepreneurial Community Program** would help to create an "entrepreneurial friendly" atmosphere, particularly if Southwestern Community College would be willing to lead the effort and create a place where young entrepreneurs could meet, socialize and collaborate. The development of a mobile app and/or brochure targeted to entrepreneurs could be developed to make the process easier for start-up companies. This initiative could be a partnership with both chambers of commerce in the county for distribution via the web and in their respective Visitor Centers.
- The county could step up its economic development efforts by **identifying potential sites for new economic development**, including analyzing the **Tuckaseegee Mills building** for redevelopment. In addition, **collaboration with the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians on the old industrial park on Hwy 74 (known as the Whittier Site)** could provide a new economic development opportunity since the tract has excellent rail, highway, broadband and sewer access.
- An opportunity exists to further develop the **Elder Hostel Program at WCU** through a collaborative effort with SCC to offer a focused program on starting a new career or business in the area. **The uptick in the national trend for retirees starting a new career or small business could be leveraged for the county.**

THREATS

- Brain drain in the county
- Not solving the last mile issue with the broadband service
- Federal tax revamp for wealthy home owners
- Putting all the "eggs in one basket" for economic development: *i.e. tourism*
- Lack of diversity in the economy – loss of manufacturing, lagging entrepreneurship
- Lack of online presence and appropriate marketing for economic development for the county
- A disjointed economic development model that remains inactive in the marketplace
- Lack of cooperation with strategic partners in the region
- Not acting on the identified opportunities in this plan

CLUSTERS OF OPPORTUNITY

Clusters of Opportunity

There are currently five clusters of industry in Jackson County that provide a competitive advantage: Education, Gaming, Healthcare, Tourism and Retirement Communities

Education Cluster

Western Carolina University is a major player in the county and the region's economy ranking as the top employer. A member of the University of North Carolina system, WCU's enrollment tops 9,000 students from 38 states and 32 countries.

Its academic programs span more than 120 specialties – including **the nation's highest-rated entrepreneurship and project management programs**, a national **award-winning teacher education program**, a **criminal justice program used as a model for NC's accreditation program** and the **nation's first accredited four-year Baccalaureate Emergency Medical Care program**. WCU is one of only fourteen institutions in the nation offering this Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degree in Emergency Medical Care.

The **University's 2020 Vision – Focusing our Future** – outlines its vision for involvement in the local community and the region as follows: *(abbreviated version of initiatives that involve economic and community development)*

Goal 3.2 Position the University as a key leader in regional economic and community development efforts

Initiative 3.2.1: Facilitate an annual conference for regional government, nonprofit, community, education and business leaders to focus attention and action on regional strategies for economic and community development

Initiative 3.2.2: Develop the West Campus as a national model for building public-private partnerships that support community and economic development

Initiative 3.2.4: Work with external partners to facilitate economic and community development in Cullowhee and Jackson County

Initiative 3.2.5: Seek out and implement internal synergies around outreach efforts and potential partnerships that are focused on economic and community development

Initiative 3.2.6: Facilitate collaborative research and development efforts between WCU and external partners

Jackson County has a tremendous opportunity for collaboration with WCU through its College of Health & Human Sciences, the Millennial Campus and the Center for Rapid Product Realization

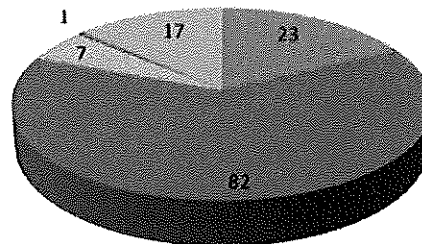
Education Cluster Continued

Southwestern Community College offers degree, diploma and certificate programs in three main academic divisions: Arts & Sciences, Career Technologies and Health Sciences, providing synergy across all three clusters. In addition, a majority of the regional employers have given the college outstanding rankings on preparing the workforce and in collaboration efforts with their companies in the **College's Vision 2017 Planning Process**. See the charts below for further detail.

Southwestern Community College Survey Results from Regional Employers

How collaborative is SCC
with your organization?

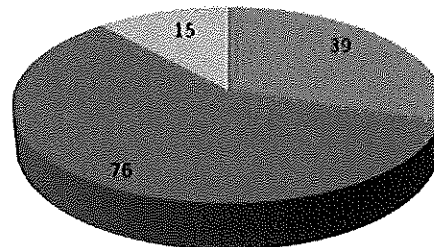
Somewhat	23
Very	82
Not at all	7
Don't know	1
No response	17



■ Somewhat
■ Very
■ Not at all
■ Don't know
■ No response

How well prepared are SCC
graduates?

Prepared	39
Very Prepared	76
No Response	15



■ Prepared
■ Very Prepared
■ No Response

Gaming Cluster

According to the study done by Kenan-Flagler Business School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in June of 2011, the Harrah's Cherokee Casino that includes 120,000 square feet of gaming space, retail shops, restaurants, three hotel towers, a 15,000 square foot conference center and a 3,000 seat event center, has had a clear positive impact on the economy of Western North Carolina. Without the casino, the region and the state would not have attracted equivalent revenue. The casino and hotel is located in Jackson County. **The Casino currently employs nearly 900 Jackson County Residents.**

(The Kenan-Flagler Business School economic analysis provides us with the information in the following paragraphs.)

As a regional export industry, casino revenues are cycled through the regional economy in the form of employee compensation, local supplier purchases, and transfers of several types. Each generates a demand for additional goods and services as households purchase consumer goods and the Tribe and the Cherokee Preservation Foundation make investments in the region. Casino capital investment also supports the regional economy.

Approximately 3.6 million people visit the casino each year and visitor-generated revenue totaled \$386 million in 2010 after temporarily peaking at \$449 million in 2007. Over two-thirds of gaming revenues come from out-of-state visitors. **In 2009, the economic impact on Jackson and Swain counties was estimated to be approximately \$300 million. Capital investments added another estimated \$82 million.** A large portion of the gaming revenue, the tourist spending accompanying it, and the follow-on economic impacts would likely be lost to the state in the absence of the Casino. In order to generate these revenues, the Casino hires employees and contracts with vendors. In 2009 alone the Casino was directly responsible for five percent of employment (1674 employees—80 percent of whom were not enrolled members of the EBCI) and approximately eight percent of all wages and salary disbursements (\$74.8 million) in Jackson and Swain counties.

In addition, an estimated \$52.4 million wage and salary income was fed into the local economy. Household spending generated an additional \$8.3 million in economic output for a **total employee compensation impact of \$60.7 million in Jackson and Swain counties.** Casino-purchased goods and services from local vendors in Jackson and Swain counties totaled \$4.4 million - \$3.8 million in direct and \$557,000 in indirect economic impact. Casino operational spending - the combined effect of employment and local business impacts - produced an estimated \$65.1 million impact on the economies of Jackson and Swain counties.

In order to maximize long-term revenues, the casino undertook a large capital investment program in 2009. One fourth of operating revenues were dedicated to new capital investments in land and improvements, equipment, and construction. A total of \$76.9 million was paid to local construction contractors and sub-contractors that translated into an \$82.5 million impact on the local economy during the construction period of 2010-2011. A large portion of the expansion is now complete, but economic impact into 2012 has not yet been calculated. – Article end

The Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians was able to secure a compact to establish live table gaming in Cherokee in the 2012 short session of the NC General Assembly. The addition of live gaming in the \$650 million-dollar expansion of the casino has added an additional 400+ jobs and will provide another boost to the regional economy in 2012-2013 and beyond.

Jackson County should explore all avenues of economic opportunity related to this cluster of development such as: supply chain, retail, etc.

The gaming cluster offers another opportunity for Jackson County to analyze supply-chain business opportunities - particularly along the 441 Corridor connecting the Qualla Boundary to the rest of the county

Healthcare Cluster

Jackson County has two hospital facilities and four nursing facilities. The degree and certificate programs previously identified in this document at Western Carolina University and Southwestern Community College provide a strong foundation for the healthcare cluster, particularly in the allied health industry.

Healthcare will most likely be one of the most productive job creation engines in 2012.

Skilled workers are in demand because patient demand is so high and while the American population ages and grows less healthy, millions of healthcare workers who care for us are edging toward retirement.

*Source: 2012
Healthcare Jobs Outlook
- John Rossheim, Senior
Contributing Writer at
mobster.com.*

The current healthcare facilities in the county include:

Med-West Harris is an 86-bed, fully accredited, not-for-profit acute care hospital that has been providing care to Jackson County since 1929. MedWest is affiliated with Carolinas HealthCare, the largest healthcare system in the Carolinas.

Highlands-Cashiers Hospital is an 84-bed community hospital, providing diagnostic, surgical and acute patient care to the public through on-site professional services, or as a referrer to regional providers.

Skyland Care Center has serves the Sylva, NC area as a nursing home / health care facility / Alzheimer care clinic. They provide 24-hour health care for adults. Their amenities include: 94 Nursing Home Beds, 24-hour nursing coverage and skilled and intermediate care. They provide physical, occupational and speech therapies and a restorative nursing program.

Mountain Trace Nursing Center is a facility that offers a full range of nursing and medical services.

Morning Star Adult Care Home in Sylva is an assisted living facility with 55 beds and offers 24-hour medial care, entertainment, recreational activities and occupational and speech therapies.

The Hermitage, an assisted living facility, offers a Memory Care Wing for those with Alzheimer's or other types of dementia along with a private spa.

The combination of the educational opportunities and the healthcare facilities in Jackson County creates a "competitive edge" in the healthcare industry.

It should be noted that Jackson County should strive to foster collaboration between the healthcare professionals and the facilities located in the County in order to grow the industry and create jobs for the trained professionals coming out of its educational institutions.

Retirement Cluster

This cluster is closely related to the tourism cluster because most retirees visit the area as a tourist, experience the natural beauty and mild climate available here and then seek to purchase or build another home in the county. The educational offerings also play into the growth of this cluster. Western Carolina University's **Performing Arts Center, Elderhostel Program** and variety of summer events add to the lure of the beautiful and peaceful environment. The unspoiled character of the small communities attracts a resident that values a "sense of place" and warm mountain culture.

The southern end of Jackson County is home to several high-end retirement communities such as High Hampton Inn and Country Club, Wade Hampton Golf Club, Balsam Mountain Preserve, Chinquapin and Champion Hills.

It should be noted that Jackson County was classified as a "**recreation**" county by the Economic Research Service (ERS), based on 2000 data and **ranked among the top fifteen rural areas to retire to by Bob Powell in his Retirement Blog at the Wall Street Journal in 2009.**

The uniqueness of Jackson County's landscape and location in the Southeast is a definite competitive advantage and therefore should be seriously taken into consideration as the county moves forward in planning for future economic growth. **Should these competitive advantages be taken for granted and "spoiled" it would greatly affect the economic vitality of the county overall.**

The retirement/second home communities in the County also help to reduce the County burden by building civic infrastructure and providing private funds (non-tax revenue) for public services such as fire protection, rescue and ambulance services, while using minimal amounts of such services as public water and sewer, security and public schools.

It should also be noted that Jackson County should work across the healthcare cluster and the education cluster to continue to offer the quality of life necessary for this cluster to be retained or grow in the future.

The townships that include these communities provide 60% of the property tax base for the county.

The supply chain for these second home residents provides yet another competitive advantage for further economic development in the county.

Tourism Cluster

According to the NC Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development's research division, domestic tourism in Jackson County generated an economic impact of **\$66.79 million in 2011**. This was a 6.72 % change from 2010. The county ranked **49 in travel impact among North Carolina's 100 Counties**. More than 570 jobs in Jackson County were directly attributable to travel and tourism and travel generated a **\$10.68 million payroll** in 2011 providing **\$8.42 million in state and local taxes representing \$209.11 in tax savings to each county resident**. *Note: These figures do not include the activity on the Qualla Boundary.*

The county's abundant natural beauty, mild climate, biodiversity and vast outdoor recreation resources have created a cluster in the tourism and resort industry. **Five of the top twenty-five employers in the county are in the Leisure and Hospitality Industry**. This industry is the second largest provider of jobs (2,791 in April, 2012) in the seven-county region. Jackson County currently has 115 properties paying occupancy tax from leisure travelers. The properties include the full range of B&B's, cabin and cottage rentals to major resorts.

The county's proximity to the Great Smokies National Park, the Cherokee Indian Reservation, the Nantahala National Forest, the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Tuckasegee River provides a competitive advantage in the Travel and Leisure industry. Outdoor recreation, in particular, is an area that Jackson County should leverage to its advantage.

Jackson County boasts the nation's first **Fly-Fishing Trail** established in 2009; it has been very successful and the subject of a number of articles in outdoor publications. The trail offers everything from wide rivers to medium-sized creeks to small streams. It has been a hit with experts and beginners alike, drawing anglers and media attention from across the nation. The delayed harvest section of the "Tuck" (Tuckasegee River) provides open spaces and well-stocked "catch and release" waters that can be fished year-round. The "Tuck" is often referred to as "Western North Carolina's best trout stream for fly anglers." **FishingWorks.com** also identifies 33 accessible lakes in the county for fishing.

The location of Jackson County as a part of the Blue Ridge Escarpment that stretches from southeast of Asheville, westward to the Chattooga watershed in Georgia, with a mild climate, relative low cost of real estate and tax values (second lowest tax rate in NC) **creates a competitive advantage** for economic development that is related to the travel and leisure industry as well as the retirement community industry. This cluster is "low hanging fruit" for increased economic activity particularly in outdoor recreation.

**JACKSON COUNTY 2011
TOURISM ECONOMIC IMPACT**

Year	Revenues (millions)	%Change
2011	\$66.79	6.72
2010	\$62.58	2.76
2009	\$60.90	-11.85
2008	\$69.09	-4.85
2007	\$72.61	6.45
2006	\$68.21	10.53
2005	\$61.71	10.75
2004	\$55.72	4.13
2003	\$53.51	-0.24
2002	\$53.64	7.00
2001	\$50.13	-0.69
2000	\$50.48	4.19

2011 TOURISM STATISTICS – SOUTHWEST COMMISSION REGION

County	Expenditures (Millions)	Percent of Change	Payroll (Millions)	Employment (Thousands)	State Taxes (Millions)	Local Taxes (Millions)
Cherokee	33.92	7.2	5.00	0.29	1.67	2.05
Clay	11.65	3.8	1.24	0.06	0.50	1.29
Graham	23.73	4.0	4.01	0.25	1.16	1.57
Haywood	120.40	3.5	22.76	1.28	6.40	4.95
Jackson	66.79	6.7	10.68	0.57	3.15	5.27
Macon	126.15	3.3	21.40	1.10	5.96	10.28
Swain	280.50	9.4	76.90	3.28	17.17	6.06
Region Totals	663.14	37.90	141.97	6.83	36.01	31.47
State Totals	18,421.06	8.3	4,192.47	188.42	959.61	560.93

Tourism Cluster Continued

According to the latest study conducted by The Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) in 2012, the outdoor recreation industry is on the rise nationally and is considered a robust job creator across the nation as the US economy evolves. More than 140 million Americans make outdoor recreation a priority in their daily lives – and they prove it with their wallets. Each year, **Americans spend \$646 billion on outdoor recreation.**

Jackson County enjoys a natural geography that lends itself to numerous outdoor recreation opportunities. Western North Carolina is known already as an outstanding outdoor recreation venue in such sports as whitewater tubing, rafting, canoeing, and kayaking along with hiking, rock climbing, boating, fishing, skiing, etc. In fact, the **International Canoe Federation** chose the mountains of North Carolina (the Nantahala River) as the venue for the **2013 International Freestyle Kayaking Championships** at its meeting in Budapest in 2011.

Jackson County has the opportunity to partner with some of the best private companies in the industry to expand their offerings in the county and help entrepreneurs create new companies in the supply chain of this sector of the economy.

A new initiative is taking shape in the outdoor recreation sector led by **Duke Energy**, the **Southwestern Commission** and **Smoky Mountain Host of NC** (a seven-county tourism industry association) to create a "Blueways Trail" through the seven-county region. This trail will incorporate the rivers in the region that dump into Fontana Lake (Tuckaseegee, Nantahala, Little Tennessee and the Oconaluftee) and offer some of the best venues for flora and fauna, fishing, hiking, canoeing, whitewater rafting and bird watching.

The first leg of the trail will be a section of the Tuckaseegee River in Jackson County. The initial plans incorporate developing historical, geographical, botanical, etc. information on this stretch of the river and making that easily available to the user/visitor through digital media outlets (smart phones) and interpretative signage. This initiative could "kick start" an opportunity for the county to focus more on marketing to the overall outdoor enthusiast and build a stronger foundation for tourism industry growth.

State of the Outdoor Industry

At the core of the outdoor recreation economy is the outdoor consumer, whose diverse interests fuel a robust and innovative industry. Today's outdoor lovers aren't confined to traditional demographics or activity segments. They seek meaningful outdoor experiences in their backyards and in the backcountry. They are all genders, ages, shapes, sizes, ethnicities and income levels. They live throughout America, and they view outdoor recreation as an essential part of their daily lives. They fill their garages with bicycles, dirt bikes, backpacks, boats, skis, and tents, hunting rifles and fishing gear. This is redefining the outdoor industry, an evolution that is evident in the growth of sales and jobs since 2006.

In short, outdoor recreation is a growing and diverse economic super sector that is a vital cornerstone of successful communities that cannot be ignored. Most importantly, outdoor recreation is no longer a "nice to have," it is now a "must have" as leaders across the country recognize the undeniable economic, social and health benefits of outdoor recreation.

Taken from the Outdoor Industry Economy Report 2012



A NEW VISION
JACKSON TOMORROW

Facilitation of a New Vision for Jackson County

The Jackson County Economic Development Advisory Committee, in conjunction with Ridgetop Associates, developed a business assessment survey for input on the needs of the business community and distributed nearly 700 copies via email to business owners and others in the county. The databases used for the survey were the membership of both the Cashiers Area Chamber of Commerce and the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce. The Advisory Committee held meetings in both Cashiers and Sylva, targeting the business community, to present the survey findings, including the DRAFT Vision Statement developed by the Committee, for review and comment. A total of eighty-one (81) persons attended the Cashiers input session of which 71 represented some type of business interest. A total of 21 persons attended the Sylva input session, with 17 representing business interests. Both meetings were promoted in the local news media and via email alerts to the membership of the respective chambers of commerce. The survey and its analyses are included in the appendices. The survey analyses' components were used as one form of input into the plan strategy development.

The Board of County Commissioners appointed an **Occupancy Tax Steering Committee**, Chaired by Commissioner Mark Jones. The committee, consisting of members of both the current Travel & Tourism Development Authorities (Cashiers TTA, Jackson County TTA), elected officials and other tourism industry representatives, was formed to determine a new structure to comply with recent N.C. General Assembly enabling legislation allowing the county to increase the current occupancy tax of 3% by an additional 1%. Formed in March 2012, the committee completed its work and presented its recommendations to the Board of Commissioners in September of 2012. Commissioners adopted a resolution in October setting forth the parameters for both increasing the occupancy tax and forming a single Jackson County Tourism Development Authority. In accordance with state law, the new TDA must be in place by January 2013. A copy of NC GA HB 96 is included in the Appendices of this document.

The creation of a single **Tourism Development Authority (TDA)** and the additional 1% increase in the occupancy tax will bring a consolidated and unified structure to marketing Jackson County's tourism assets rather than the fragmented approach that has been in place since the original legislation in 1987 that created two regional Travel & Tourism Authorities (TTAs) representing the northern and southern ends of the county. The proceeds realized from the 1% increase in the tax are estimated to bring \$150,000 annually in additional funds to market travel and tourism opportunities in the county – a total of approximately \$600,000 each year.

Through its resolution, the Board of Commissioners has identified that any employees of the Jackson County Tourism Development Authority will be county employees and subject to county personnel policies. Under state law, the TDA will have authority working with the Board of Commissioners to determine how the Occupancy Taxes will be allocated to market the county.

The Advisory Committee met with representatives of BalsamWest FiberNet to discuss the need for making high-speed broadband readily available to county residents and businesses. In addition the Committee met with the Tuckaseegee Water and Sewer Authority to discuss water and sewer infrastructure and access issues across the county.

During this process the **Board of County Commissioners also held an historic "joint meeting" with the Tribal Council of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians to discuss mutual economic development interests.** The two governing bodies agreed to meet on a regular basis in the future.

A NEW VISION

Jackson County is a place that enjoys a thriving and diverse economy. The elected officials partner with their public and private leaders to serve as a catalyst for innovation in all sectors of the economy while strongly supporting the existing business community. The government policies and educational opportunities foster sustainable growth and provide a quality of life that makes Jackson County communities places where people, young and old, want to live, work and play.

THE WORKPLAN

FOUR CORE AREAS OF FOCUS

- **Build on the county's competitive advantage and leverage the marketplace**
- **Establish and maintain a robust countywide infrastructure**
- **Create revitalized and vibrant communities**
- **Foster healthy and innovative people**

RECOMMENDED STEPS TO CARRY OUT THE PLAN

CORE VALUE ONE: Build on the county's competitive advantage and leverage the marketplace

Objective 1: Identify the county's clusters of economic development that offer competitive advantages

Status: Completed

Recommended Objective 2: Engage in a "branding process" for tourism and new business development

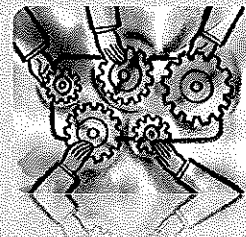
Recommended Objective 3: Develop a Jackson County Development and Marketing Plan that includes all the economic clusters

Recommended Objective 4: Identify "adaptive capabilities" in the existing workforce that can lead to innovation in another industry

Example: Many workers in the furniture industry have migrated into the high-end craft industry in NC

Recommended Objective 5: Maintain a healthy business environment for existing business and industry

Opportunity: Establish an on-going Existing Industry & Business Retention Program



It is easier to navigate downstream than row upstream, so we should build on our strengths and work with the market, not against it.

CORE VALUE ONE: Build on the county's competitive advantage and leverage the marketplace

Objectives	Lead Agency	Partners	Strategy	Estimated Costs	Potential Barriers	Status & Timeframe	Performance Measures
1. Identify clusters of economic development	Jackson County	Ridgetop Associates	Analysis completed by Ridgetop Associates	N/A	N/A	Completed on 10/2012	N/A
2. Engage in a "branding process" for tourism and economic development	Jackson County	ED Entity and TDA	Put ED Entity in place and hire agency to lead the branding process	Around \$10,000 should be adequate	Getting TDA in place and hire agency	Should be done as soon as possible to meet marketing deadlines for 2013	Increase in visitation and revenues, jobs created, etc.
3. Complete Marketing Plan	Jackson County	ED entity/TDA	Should be developed by county ED entity	Should be an effort of the agency of record and ED entity staff – part of contract for agency	Getting TDA in place and hire agency of record	Should be able to be completed by March, 2013 if not earlier	Jobs created, companies started or retained and increased tourism revenue
4. Identify specific skill sets in the existing workforce	Jackson County ED entity and Regional Workforce Board	ED entity Region A	Should be an initiative of the new ED entity	Cost Unknown at this time	Staffing and funding	Should be done as soon as possible	A "profile" developed of the existing workforce and used in marketing
5. Maintain a healthy business environment for existing business and industry by developing an Existing Industry and Business Program that fosters regular engagement with the business community	County ED entity	ED entity, Chambers of Commerce and Business Associations in the County	Should be an initiative of the new ED entity	Unknown at this time and subject to county budget	Getting ED entity formed and identify staffing	Should be part of an initial launch of the Program of Work for the ED entity in 2013	Increased business activity, new business start up and growth in existing industries and increased collaboration with other regional partners

CORE VALUE TWO: Establish and maintain a robust countywide infrastructure

Objective 1: Identify the county's infrastructure assets (transportation, workforce, water/sewer, broadband, housing education, healthcare, access to capital and energy)

Status: Complete

Objective 2: Develop transportation plans that addresses existing and future capacity deficiencies

Status: Complete – RPO Plan

Recommended Objective 3: Identify whether water, sewer and natural gas infrastructure can accommodate future growth in the county

Status: Partially complete - Need additional mapping work on current service areas and underserved areas in some utilities such as natural gas, etc.

Recommended Objective 4: Develop plans for the expansion of high-speed broadband, particularly the last mile that can accommodate the business community

Status: Partially complete - Need a definitive plan to work with BalsamWest FiberNet to deliver the last mile

Recommended Objective 5: Develop a County Plan for affordable housing to accommodate the workforce

Opportunity: Work closer with WCU and private developers in the County

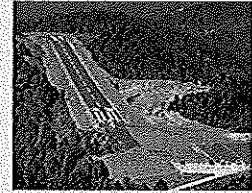
Recommended Objective 6: Establish a "One Stop Permitting Process" to support new and expanding business, construction of home and businesses and sanitation inspections; therefore reducing the regulatory burden on the customer

Opportunity: Create a streamlined and efficient permitting process for business activity using technology and other marketing tools to better communicate with the business community

Recommended Objective 7: Develop a plan for either rehabilitating or selling the Tuckasegee Mills and Whittier Properties to increase business activity on these commercial sites

Opportunity: (1) To work with SCC to develop an entrepreneurial incubator facility to spur home grown jobs

Opportunity: (2) Actively engage with the Sequoyah Fund and/or EBCI to sell or jointly partner on the rehabilitation of the Whittier Property as a light manufacturing regional industrial/business park.



To be successful, Jackson County needs to make sure investments in capital assets will support our communities, now and in the future

CORE VALUE TWO: Establish and maintain a robust countywide infrastructure

Objective	Lead Agency	Partners	Strategy	Est. Costs	Potential Barriers	Status & Timeframe	Performance Measures
1. Identify the county's infrastructure assets	Jackson County	Ridgetop Associates	Prepared in Jackson County CEDS	N/A	N/A	Complete	N/A
2. Develop transportation plans that addresses existing and future capacity deficiencies	Regional RPO/DOT	Region A	Update the 2009 Jackson County Plan	N/A	N/A	Update expected 2012-2013	%of projects funded in the plan
3. Identify whether water, sewer and natural gas infrastructure can accommodate future growth in the county	Jackson County	Ridgetop Associates, TWSA, Region A, Towns, PSNC	Prepare maps and work with vendors to analyze the status	Cost not known at this time, Staff time	Available staff time and funding	1 Year	Plans completed and funded identified
4. Develop plans for the expansion of high-speed broadband, particularly the last mile	Jackson County Planning ED entity	BWFN Metrostat	Work with Balsam West to outline a plan for last mile service to the businesses	TBD	Funding Staff time	1 Year	Plan complete, partners secured and last mile under construction
5. Develop a County Plan for affordable housing to accommodate the workforce	Jackson County Planning	Region A, WCU, private real estate developers	Complete the plan and establish private sector partners	TBD	Funding Staff Time	1 Year	Plan complete and partners secured with housing under construction
6. Establish a "One Stop Permitting Process" to support new and expanding business, construction of home and businesses and sanitation inspections	Jackson County	Jackson County Building Inspection & Planning Dept. and Health Dept.	Establish the location for the office, provide technology and market to the consumer	TBD	Funding Technology Marketing Local support	50% Complete 1 Year	Office established and a streamlined process in place for quick and efficient permitting for business activity
7. Plan for addressing Tuckaseegee Mills, Whitter Properties and land sites to create jobs	ED entity Planning office	Seq. Fund EBCI WCU, Millenium Campus Land owners	Rehabilitate or sell the properties; getting them back in use; work with WCU	TBD	Funding, Lack of interest in moving forward, Whittier floodplain	1 Year	Both properties either sold or rehabilitated and jobs created, collaboration with WCU

CORE VALUE THREE: Create revitalized and vibrant communities

Recommended Objective 1: Promote common sense and healthy development patterns

Status: Partially complete - Need GIS maps that depict the developed and undeveloped land in the county and determine where development should be encouraged

Recommended Objective 2: Ensure that all sectors are included in the planning for future development

Opportunity: Develop a "**Policy for Inclusive Input and Shared Vision**" to be used in the decision-making process by local, elected officials. This could include surveys, town meetings, advisory groups, etc.

Recommended Objective 3: Provide multi-modal transportation modes when and where possible

Opportunity: Encourage incorporated communities and towns to develop a plan for "**complete streets**" and partner with them when and where possible. Encourage bike paths, greenways, etc.

Recommended Objective 4: Protect and restore historically significant buildings throughout the county

Opportunity: Develop a **Restoration & Revitalization Plan for Historical Buildings**, government buildings, etc. in the county in conjunction with incorporated towns and communities when necessary

Status: In progress: Blue Ridge National Heritage Area designation at Judaculla Rock in progress, buildings identified and some work already done, etc.

Recommended Objective 5: Foster community vitality and a diverse and healthy business community

Status: Needs development – Examples discussed by the Committee below:

1. **Sylva** is currently participating in the Main Street Program that is being administered through the City Manager's office. Much has been accomplished in Sylva through the program. However, several businesses, particularly restaurants, have left the downtown district. Some restaurants in existence have bad reviews on the Internet, i.e. Trip Advisor. Jackson County ED entity should encourage Online Marketing Workshops for small businesses, particularly restaurants since they are usually one of the sectors that provide a core space for community engagement for both the residents and the visitors to the region and help establish a "brand" for the area. These workshops should be conducted when and where it is logical for the small business community to participate.
2. **Dillsboro** was assisted in 2010-12 by the WCU faculty and students in an effort to evaluate its current situation through surveys of visitors and WCU students and staff. The Study was completed in February 2012; however, we could not find any evidence that the survey information has been used to develop a strategic plan for revitalization. This work needs to be completed in order to revitalize the town.
3. **Cashiers** economy is primarily based on the second-home communities and tourism. Only 15% of the Jackson County full-time residents live in the southern end of the county where the village of Cashiers is located. However, this end of the County provides approximately 60% of the county tax base making it a significant area that needs to be sustained for its quality of place. This vibrant community wishes to ensure its "sense of place" that makes them attractive to the high-end summer resident and visitors as well. There are concerns about the traffic light, increased traffic flow and the lack of a central water system in the community. The construction of a "round-about" traffic circle at the light and plans for its construction are now part of the Regional Transportation Plan. The water and wastewater issues and broadband access need to be addressed moving forward in the implementation of this plan.
4. **Cullowhee** community is an area of the County that desperately needs to be revitalized due to the blight of old dilapidated and empty buildings that create an "eye sore" adjacent to the campus of WCU. There have been some planning efforts toward solving these problems. However, a definite action plan should be put in place moving forward. The county and the Village of Forest Hills should take the lead.



Just as a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, great counties make sure that all of their cities and towns, suburbs and rural areas are positioned to succeed.

CORE VALUE THREE: Create revitalized and vibrant communities

Objective	Lead Agency	Partners	Strategy	Est. Costs	Potential Barriers	Status & Timeframe	Performance Measures
1. Promote common sense development patterns	Jackson County Planning Dept. and GIS	Towns Region A Chambers	Prepare GIS Maps depicting land use and establish a Planning Advisory Board to review	TBD	Lack of a shared vision among local partners and Towns	1 year	Programs developed and partnerships forged
2. Ensure that all sectors are included in the planning for future development	JC Planning & Transit Depts. NC DOT	Towns Chambers Bus. Assoc. Region A JC Transit	Planning Board develop a Policy for Inclusive Input and Shared Vision	N/A	Lack of a shared vision among local partners	1 Year	Policy developed and implemented
3. Provide multi-modal transportation modes when and where possible	Jackson County Planning and Trans. Depart.	Towns Region A RPO NC DOT	Use any plans already in progress for biking, walking, etc. and develop others as needed	TBD	Funding Lack of cooperation	TBD	Increased multi-modal transportation
4. Protect and restore historically significant buildings throughout the county	Jackson County	JC Planning Department Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, NC Dept. Cultural Resources, WCU	Develop a Restoration and Revitalization Plan and special places for historical buildings or special places	TBD	Lack of funding sources, lack of interest	In progress at this time, a lot of work already done on buildings, 1 year	Plan established and funding plan/sources identified
5. Foster community vitality and a diverse and healthy business community	Jackson County ED entity Planning Dept.	Towns Chambers Region A SCC WCU	Create a venue for business owners to meet and hold workshops for business development (Internet marketing)	TBD	Funding, lack of interest from the partners, staff time	1 Year	Increased business activity, new business creation, vibrant and busy downtown areas with a decrease in empty office/building spaces

CORE VALUE FOUR: Develop healthy and innovative people

Recommended Objective 1: Foster development, recruitment and retention of skilled workforce

Status: Partially complete. There already exists a strong regional professional workforce development board.

Opportunity: Jackson County should work with this group of professionals to develop a formal Workforce Recruitment and Retention Plan.

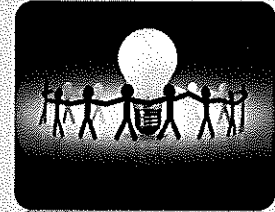
Recommended Objective 2: Identify and analyze all educational resources and conduct a gap analysis if needed

Status: Complete. It was determined that a gap analysis was not necessary in Jackson County

Recommended Objective 3: Foster an entrepreneurial spirit in the county by helping to establish The Jackson County Entrepreneurial Network.

Status: Partially complete, the county has committed to participation in the regional **Certified Entrepreneurial Community Program**.

Opportunity: The opportunity exists for a collaborative effort with Southwestern Community College leadership to be engaged as the designated organizations to lead this effort.



In an increasingly competitive and uncertain world, training, developing and educating our citizens will be critically important

CORE VALUE FOUR: Develop healthy and innovative people

Objective	Lead Agency	Partners	Strategy	Est. Costs	Potential Barriers	Status & Timeframe	Performance Measures
1. Foster development & recruitment and retention of skilled workforce	Jackson County ED entity	Region A Regional Workforce Board	Develop a close working relationship between the new ED entity, the business community and the Regional Workforce Board	TBD	Communication or lack of a shared vision	6 months	Partners identified and a good working relationship forged that should include quarterly meetings to share info
2. Identify and analyze all educational resources and conduct a gap analysis if needed	Jackson County	Ridgetop Associates and Advisory Board	Analysis completed	N/A	N/A	Analysis completed	N/A
3. Foster an entrepreneurial spirit in the county by helping to establish a Jackson County Entrepreneurial Network	Jackson County	SCC WCU Businesses Chamber AW	Complete the Certified Entrepreneurial Community Program	TBD	Funding Lack of focus from the partners	1 year to 18 months	Certification Complete

EXISTING EDC STRUCTURE AND REVOLVING LOAN FUND

History of Existing Economic Development Commission Structure

In the late 1980s a **Jackson County Committee of 100** was formed which was the precursor to the formation of the current **Economic Development Commission of Jackson County** as set forth in the North Carolina General Statutes 158:8-15. "The EDC fell dormant in 2005 amid controversy and allegations of financial mismanagement. It was reactivated with amended By-Laws on April 10, 2007, but fell apart shortly thereafter "amidst bureaucratic turf wars." "The Director resigned, the Board quit meeting, members resigned one by one and replacements from the County and participating Towns were not forthcoming (*Smoky Mountain News, March 7, 2012*)."

However, funds for economic development in the amount of \$425,000, are being held in the custody of the County which includes a \$335,000 direct transfer from the 2005 failed EDC plus money from each of the four towns that were contributing members:

Jackson County - \$382,065 (89.79%)
Dillsboro - \$2,851 (.67%)
Forest Hills - \$4,042 (.95%)
Sylva - \$29,743 (6.99%)
Webster - \$6,808 (1.6%)

In addition to the Commission Jackson County created the **Jackson Development Corporation** and a **Revolving Loan Fund** based on a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) from the Industrial Development Fund administered by the NC Department of Commerce and funds from a local bank. That revolving loan fund still exists today for economic development purposes.

The current Commission consists of nine voting members. Seven of whom are local government appointments; two by Jackson County, two by the Town of Sylva and one each from the Town of Webster, Dillsboro and the Village of Forest Hills. Two members are at-large members appointed by the EDC.

The funding under Article 7 of the By-Laws calls for each participating government to apply a *per capita* fee of at least one dollar (\$1.00) based upon the most recent census figures.

The existing EDC organization, having been riddled with controversy, creates a "handicap" to moving forward with any new vision for Jackson County. Therefore, the current Jackson County Board of County Commissioners sought to establish a new vehicle for its economic development purposes.

It is recommended that the Economic Development Commission be dissolved through the prescribed process of dissolution: **Article 9 of the By-Laws states that** "after a period of seven years, each governmental unit must reaffirm its support of the EDC by a simple majority vote of their respective governing board." So dissolution could be as simple as the member governments casting a vote to no longer affirm their support of the current EDC. At dissolution the fund balance for each town would be returned, making them whole, and Jackson County would take their remaining share of the funds and invest them in the new economic development entity.

The still existing Revolving Loan Fund, remaining in the county's control, offers the county a "leg up" on surrounding counties in the economic development arena and can be useful in collaboration with private industry and other funding sources for new business development. **In 2012 the fund was used to help retain jobs at an existing industry, Jackson Paper Company,** in a collaborative effort between The Sequoyah Fund and Jackson County. In addition, the fund made it possible to re-open the local radio station in Sylva in 2012. **Then idea of using some of these funds to rehabilitate the Tuckaseegee Mills property, in collaboration with WCU and the Certified Entrepreneurial Program, is worthy of further consideration.**

NEW ED STRUCTURE OPTIONS

New ED Structure Options

Option One

This option creates an **Office of Business and Industry**. This model will also require an **Advisory Committee for Business and Industry** appointed by and reporting to the County Commissioners.

The scope of work for this office should include programs (but not be limited to) such as those listed below:

Business and industry retention

Entrepreneurial services and networking

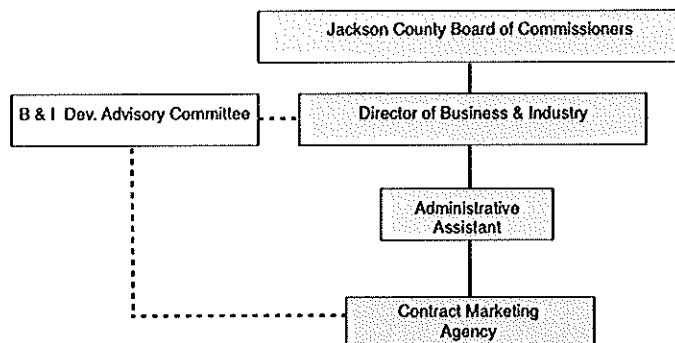
Business community networking

Business and industry recruitment marketing

Marketing the county as an excellent place to build a business or industry

This office should develop a new Comprehensive Marketing Plan that focuses on a digital and social media platform through the Internet, a website for business and industry development that markets the county for all new businesses, but focuses on the Clusters of Opportunity that have been identified in this report. This site could create a business brand and a location in the mind of the business owner or entrepreneur. An example might be **"The Tuckasegee Valley Corridor"** or some version thereof.

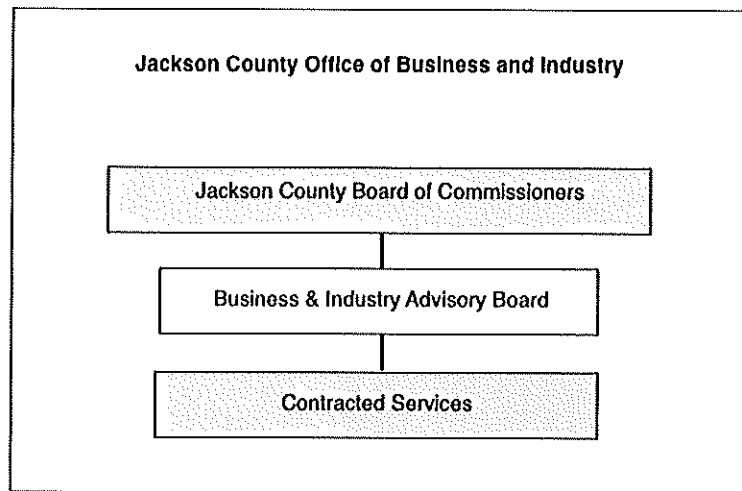
Jackson County Business and Industry Department



Option Two

Another option would be to create an Office of Business and Industry and contract out the management of the Office of Business and Industry. This model would also require a Business and Industry Advisory Board appointed by and reporting to the **Jackson County Board of County Commissioners**. Many small counties in North Carolina use this method for meeting their economic development growth needs. This option should include **the same Scope of Work as Option One** for business and industry development.

In this option, the county reduces overhead and employees by using a "contracted agent" instead of full-time employees and supporting offices expenses. This model has been successful in rural counties across the country.



Option Three

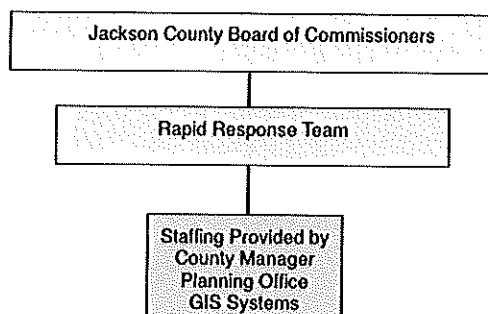
A member of the EDC Advisory Committee suggested that *in lieu* of a formalized staffing structure for economic development, the County might create a "**Rapid Response Team**" (**RRT**) established and appointed by the Board of County Commissioners. In such case, the RRT's primary function would be to respond to business and industry leads and prospect visits to the county. The RRT would receive staff support and assistance from a combination of county departments: Planning, Geographic Information Services, County Manager, etc. A department and staff person would need to be assigned as the lead in support of the RRT to ensure that it is appropriately executed

For an RRT to be effective, a significant amount of work would need to be completed:

- Development of a strategic marketing plan
 - Marketing materials based on factors derived from the local economy assessment
 - Use of a branding strategy developed by a marketing agency with experience in ED
 - Emphasis on digital, on-line and social media
 - Use of collateral print in an appropriate manner and within the context of the branding strategy
 - Process for updating the strategic marketing plan
- Training
 - Assign a county department head to lead the RRT training effort
 - Develop training materials; i.e., a training manual for the RRT
 - Training manual to focus on the following:
 - Strategic planning for local economic development as outlined in the CEDs
 - Explanation of the core areas associated with the CEDs strategy
- Assurance of RRT member active engagement and participation
 - Develop organizational procedures for operation
 - Structure of RRT should consist of elected officials, county employees, business owners spanning all sectors
 - Size should be no more than ten members

An underlying assumption of this option is that the county will provide staffing and support for the RRT within its existing organizational structure, thereby avoiding an additional staffing structure.

Jackson County Economic Development Rapid Response Team (ED RRT)



Existing County Assets Available
for Light Manufacturing or
Incubator Space

Existing Manufacturing Assets

Whittier Property

The 34-acre tract known as the "Whittier Property" and owned by Jackson County is located near US Highway 74 and has an existing brick facility with 78,000 square feet of manufacturing space and 4,000 square feet of office space. It is structurally sound making rehabilitation economically feasible. The site is also the location of the joint wastewater treatment facility for Jackson County and the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians (EBCI). There is rail access on site as well as the BalsamWest FiberNet broadband fiber that runs adjacent to the rail siding on the property served by the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad.

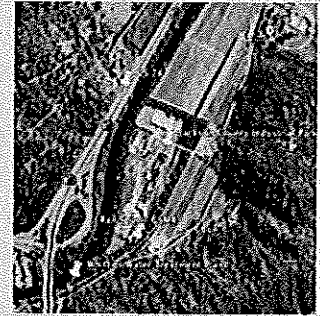
A limitation to the property is that water is only supplied by a well on site with a water tower and natural gas is nearby, but not on site. Additionally, the site is located in the floodplain and will require remediation and/or a letter of map adjustment approved by the state. This site is already zoned for business and manufacturing and has easy access to truck transportation via the four-lane highway - US 74.

The opportunity to forge a partnership with the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians (EBCI) to either work collaboratively to rehabilitate the facility and site or sell the site to the EBCI should be further explored. Discussions with EBCI through the Sequoyah Fund have been ongoing since 2009.

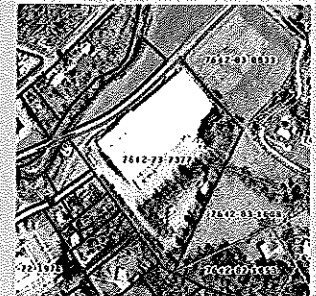
Tuckaseegee Mills Property

This commercial property is 7.43 acres located in the city limits of Sylva, is zoned I1- Industrial and owned by Jackson County. The building, built in 1970, has 101,260 square feet of manufacturing space with 14 ft. walls and a concrete slab foundation.

Water and sewer are in place and it is heated with forced air heat: oil, wood and coal fired. Currently there are issues with the HVAC and electrical. A renovation plan will be necessary to make this facility attractive to any new occupant. However, because of its location in the downtown area, **it could be suited more as a complement to the Certified Entrepreneurial Community Initiative as a business incubator. This option should be explored with WCU and Southwestern Community College's Small Business Technology Development Centers.**



**Whittier Property
Site adjacent to US
Highway 74**



**Tuckaseegee Mills
Property at 657
Scotts Creek Rd.
Sylva**

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Recommendation

The county should develop appropriate methodologies to measure effectiveness in all areas of economic development that include but not limited to the following:

- New jobs created
- Retention of existing businesses and current jobs
- New companies created
- Increased market share for visitation to the county
- Increased overnight stays in the county
- Increased sales tax in the county
- Increased payroll in the county
- Effectiveness of the new Brand Strategy

In addition the County should "benchmark" their progress within the region and in the state.

APPENDICES

TABLE OF APPENDICES

1. Southwestern Planning Commission Data Sets and Jackson County Transportation Plan
2. Lodging Rooms & Cottages in Jackson County – WCU SBTDC
3. Jackson County Surveys and Analysis
4. HB 96, Resolution Confirming the Creation of the Jackson County Tourism Development Authority and a Room Tax Collection Report (2007-2012)
5. Kenan-Flagler Study: "Assessing the Economic and Non-economic Impacts of Harrah's Cherokee Casino, North Carolina"
6. OIA Study "The Outdoor Recreation Economy" (2012)
7. NC Department of Commerce Tourism Statistics (2011) and Western Announcements Report from the Business and Industry Division (1/1/2010 to 9/4/2012)
8. Journal Communications, Inc.: "The Case for Place"
9. WCU Survey for the Town of Dillsboro
10. Economic Development Commission of Jackson County Bylaws
11. Jackson County Revolving Loan Fund