



# Forest County Comprehensive Plan

A Community Development Policy Guide  
for Pennsylvania's Most Rural County



October 2013

# **Forest County Comprehensive Plan 2013**

**Prepared by the Forest County Conservation District and Planning Commission Board**

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**The Commission and Consultants wish to recognize and offer thanks for the special volunteer assistance of Joy Ruff, AICP  
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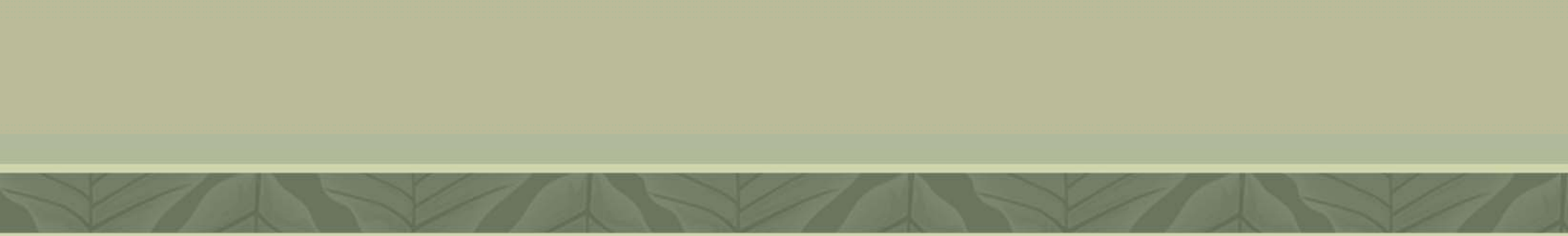
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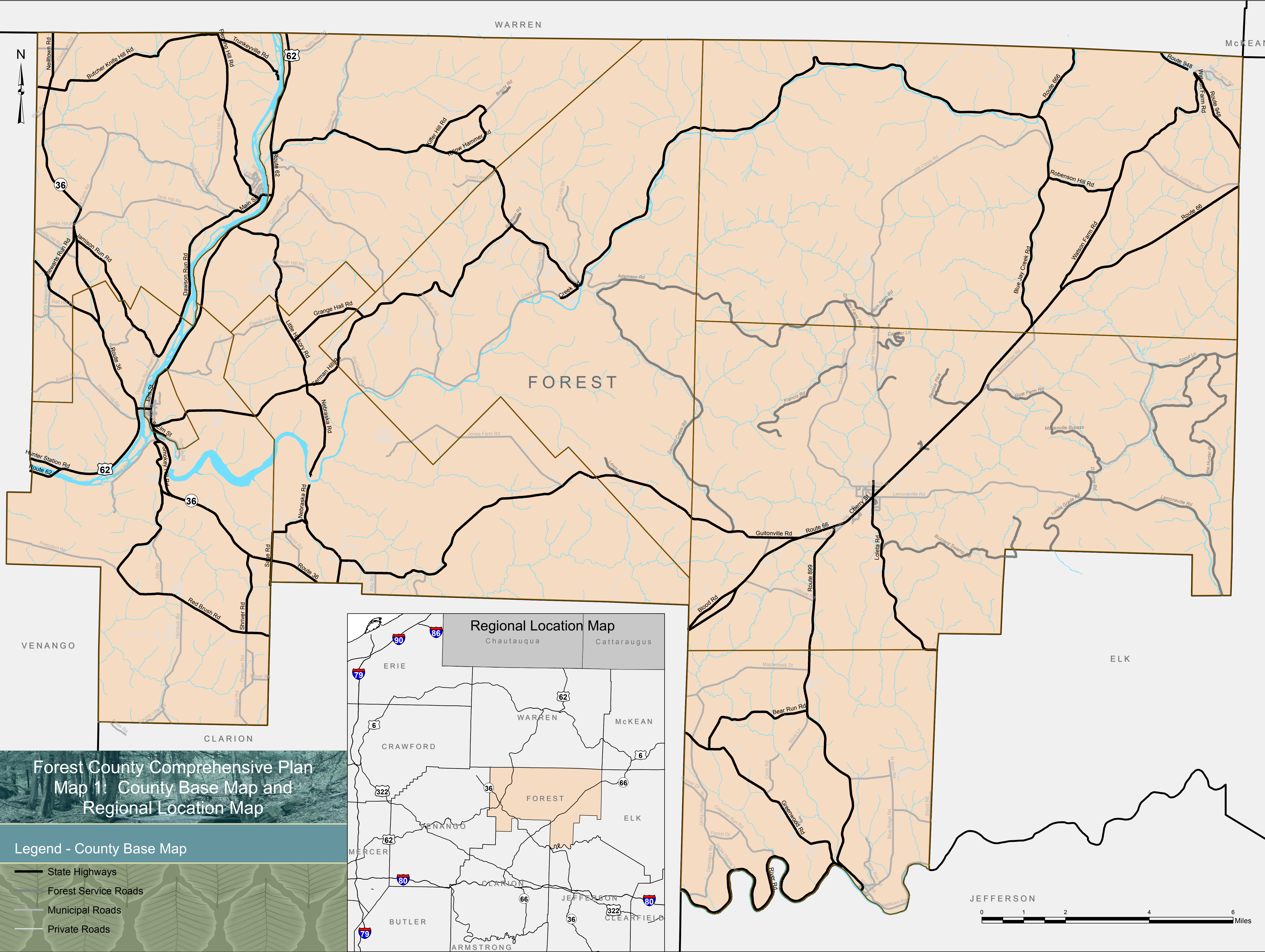
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Gallery of Maps: All maps for the Forest County Comprehensive Plan were prepared in ArcGIS Geographic information systems software, then saved into an Adobe portable document format (PDF) file. The maps were reduced to 8.5X11 size in order to fit into the bound comprehensive plan document. Electronic PDF files of these maps are available from the County Conservation District and Planning Commission Office and allow significant enlargement of any viewing area. Large format paper copies of these maps are also available for viewing at the aforementioned offices.





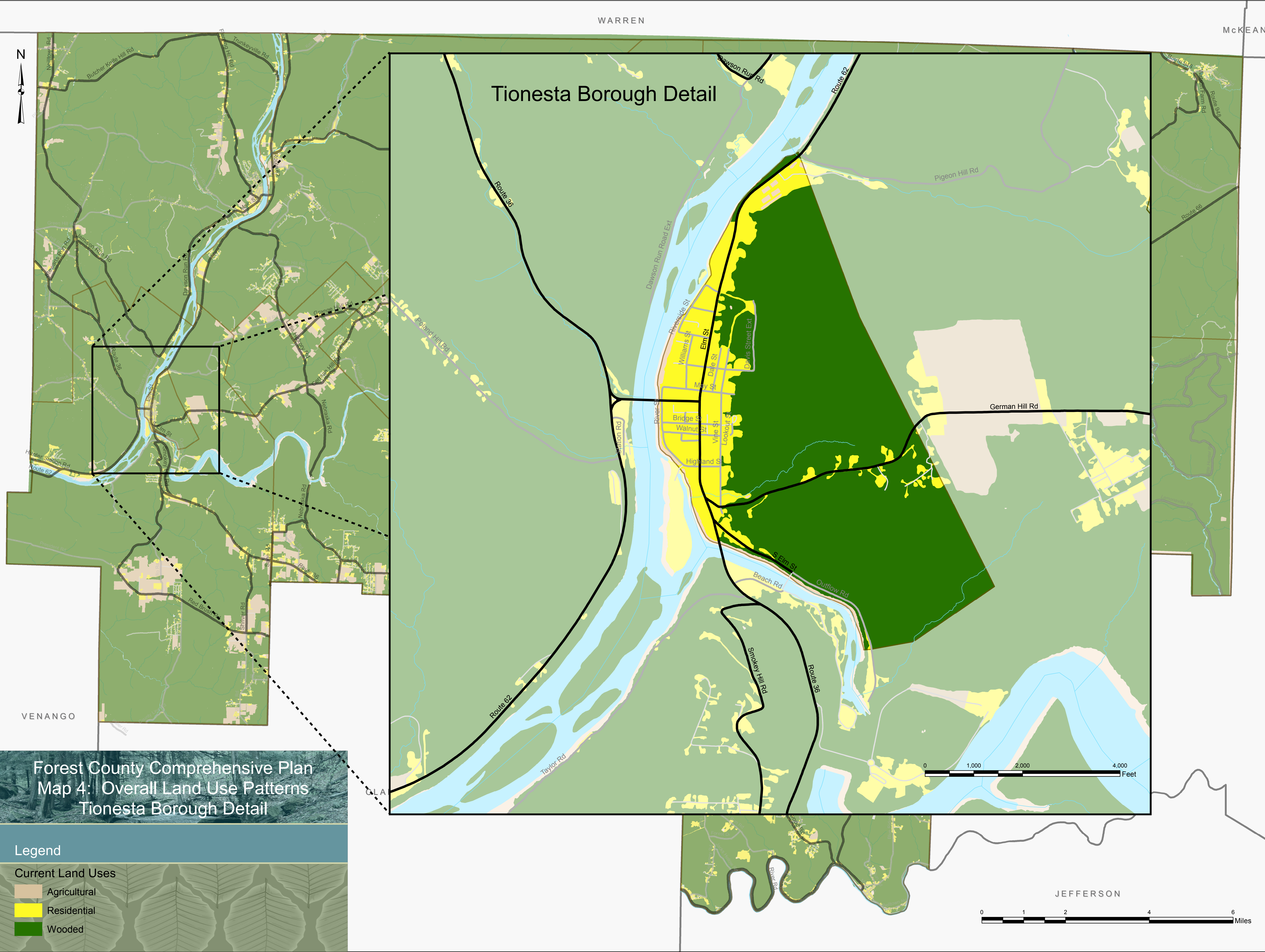




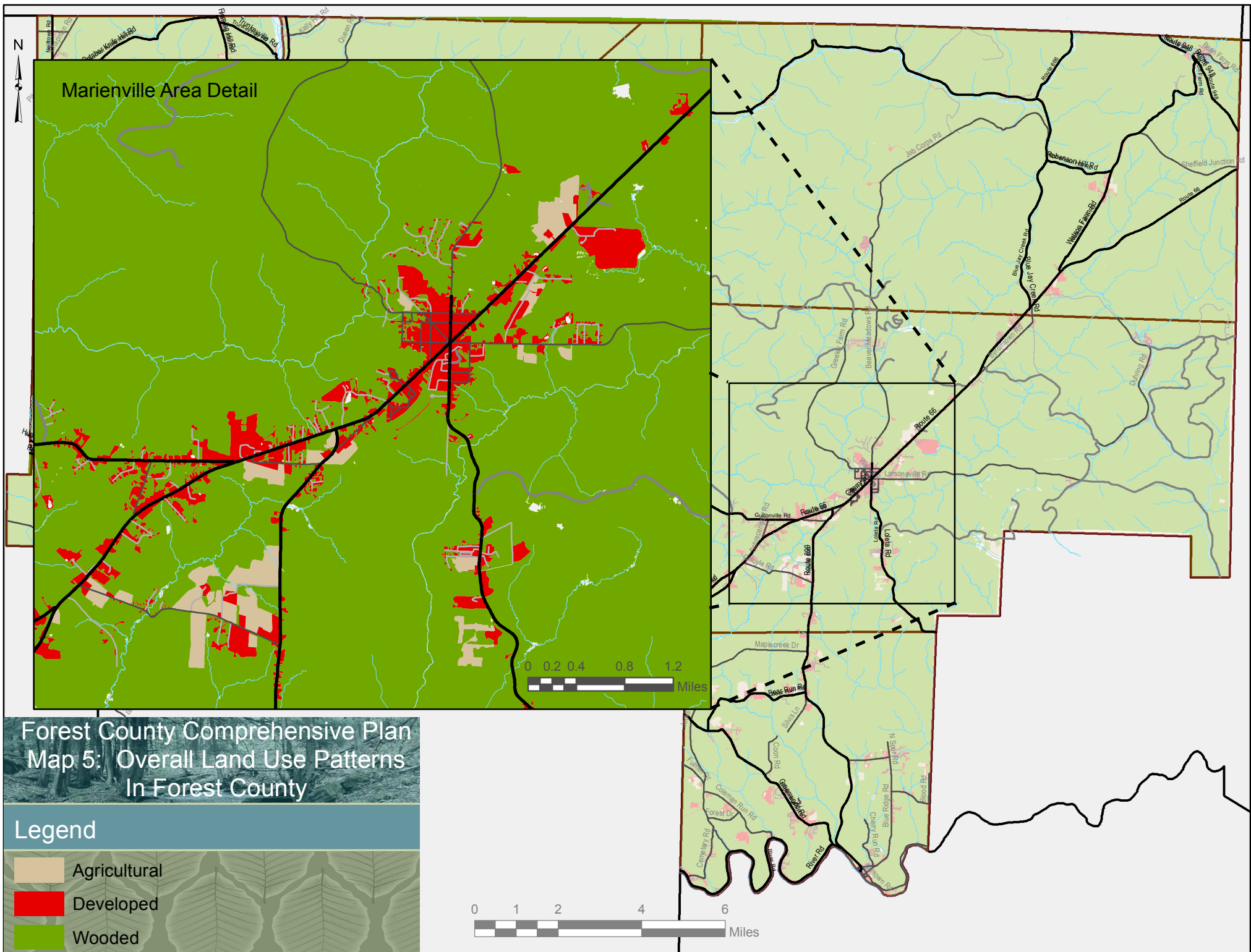








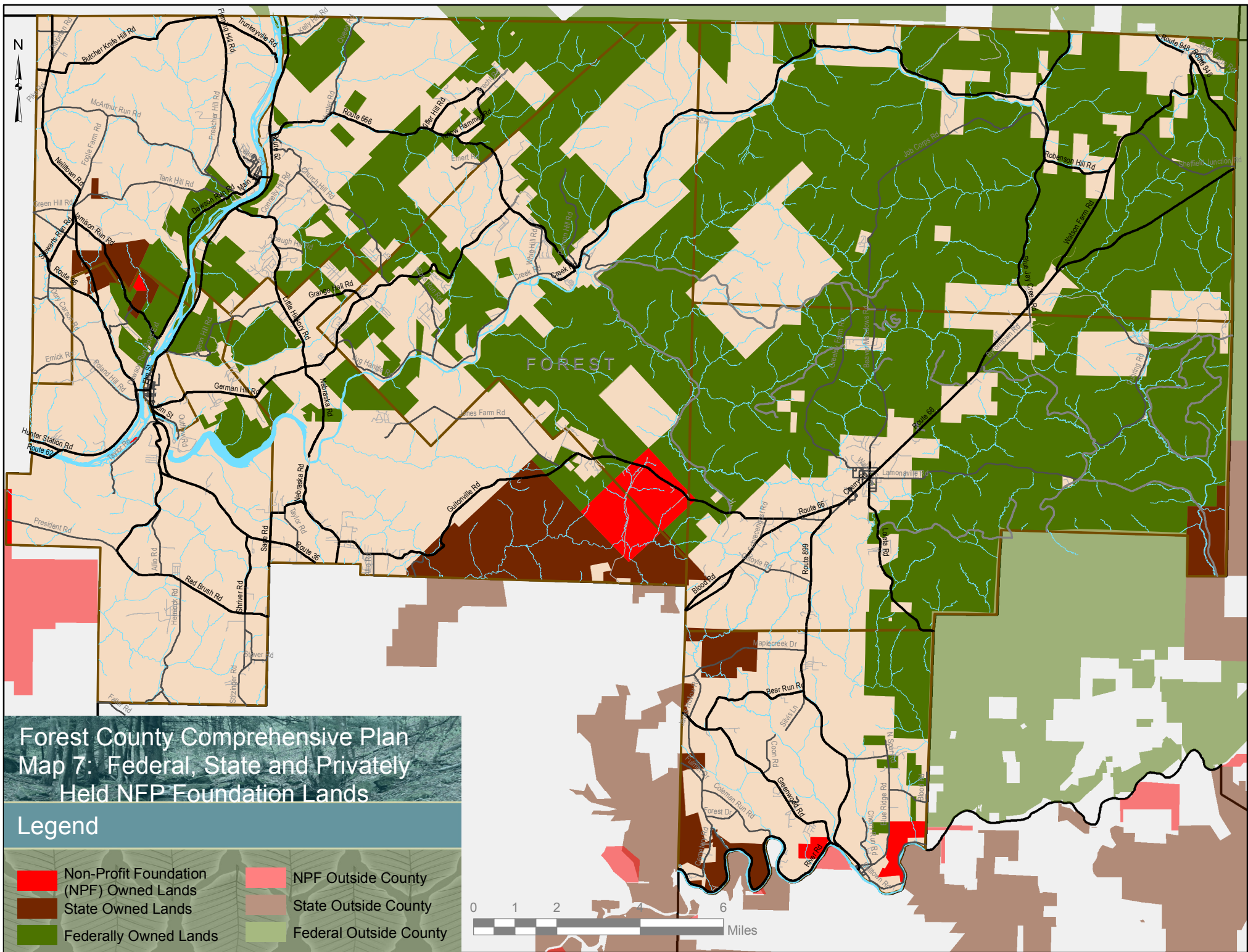




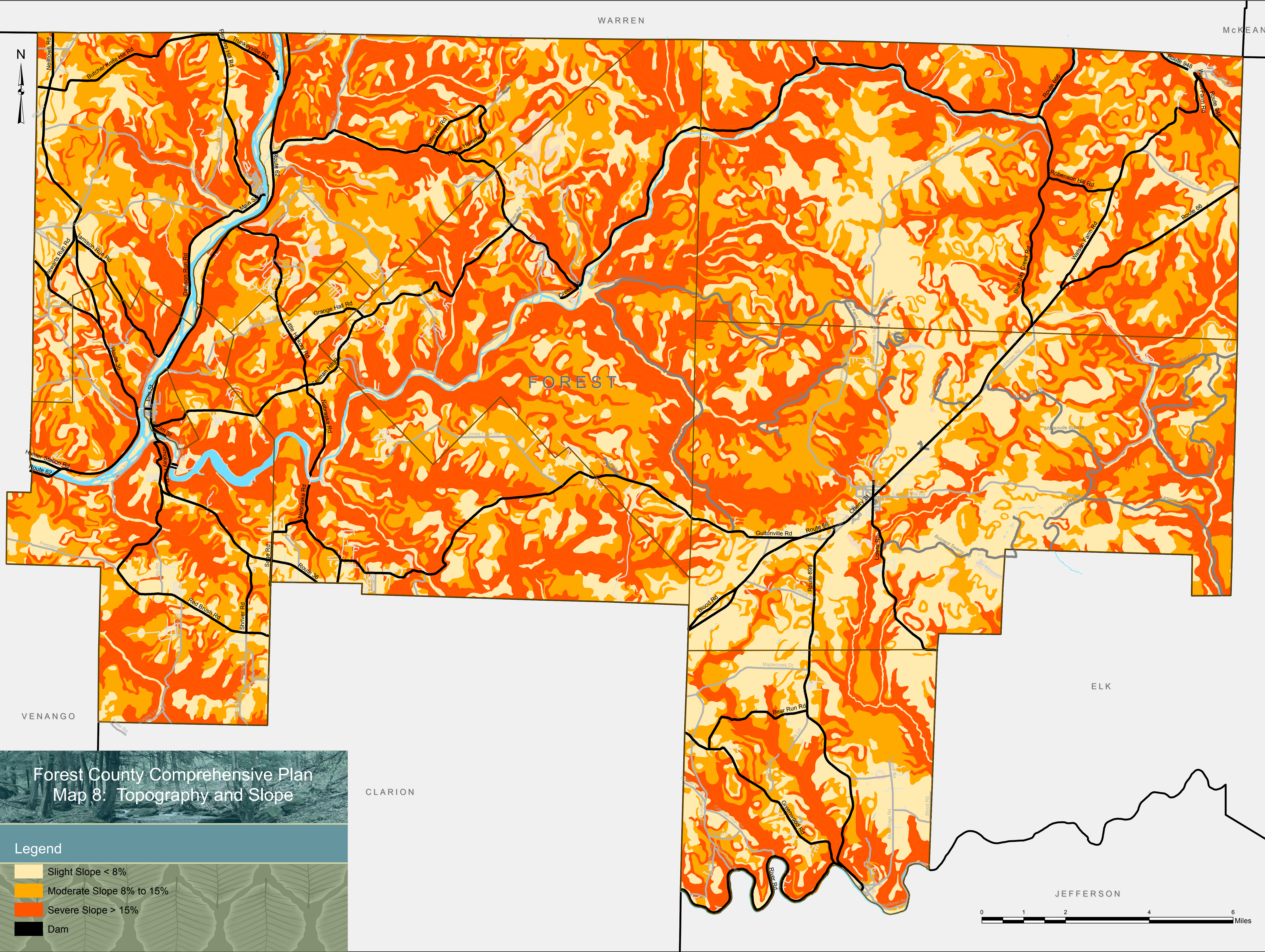




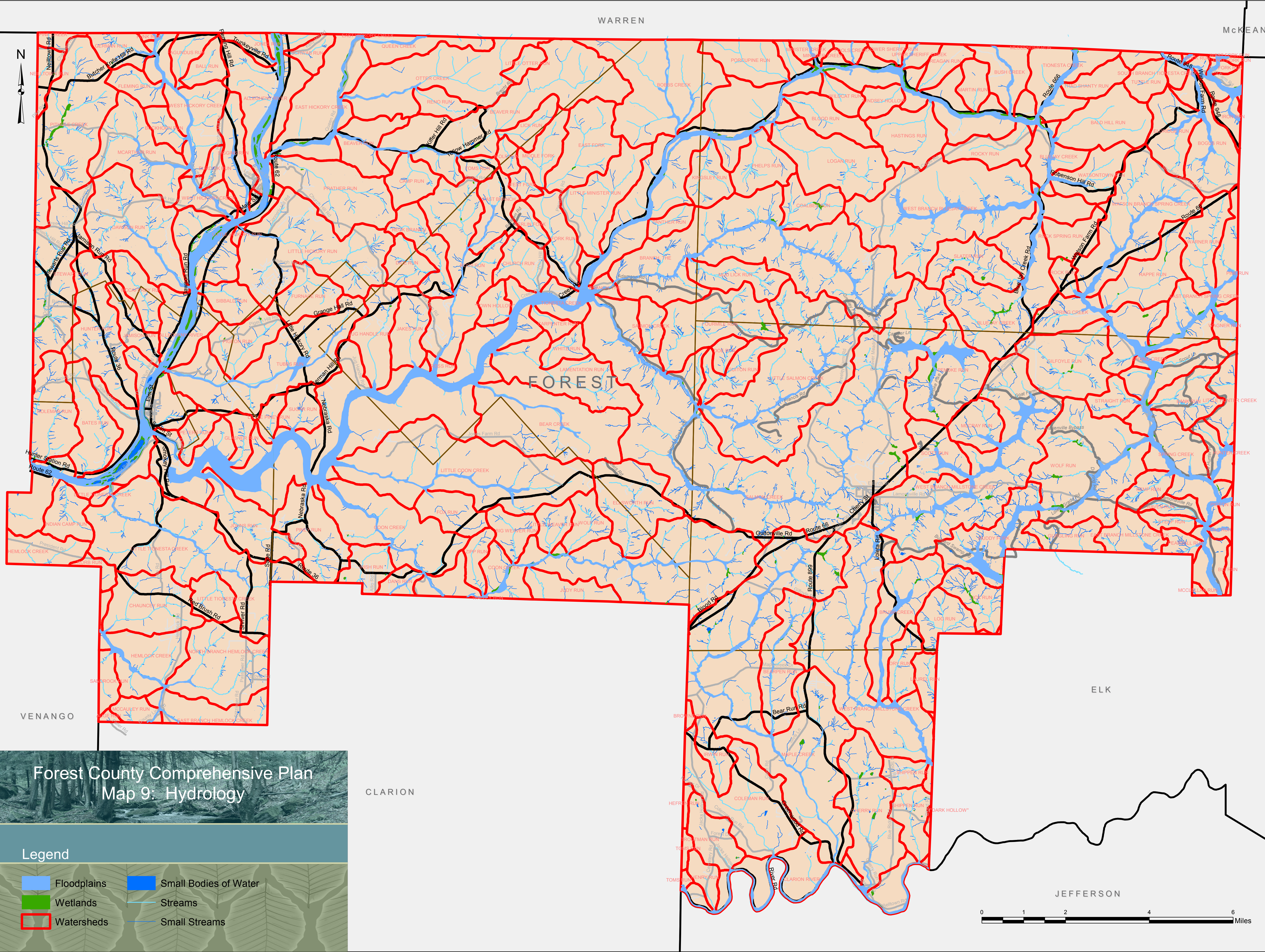




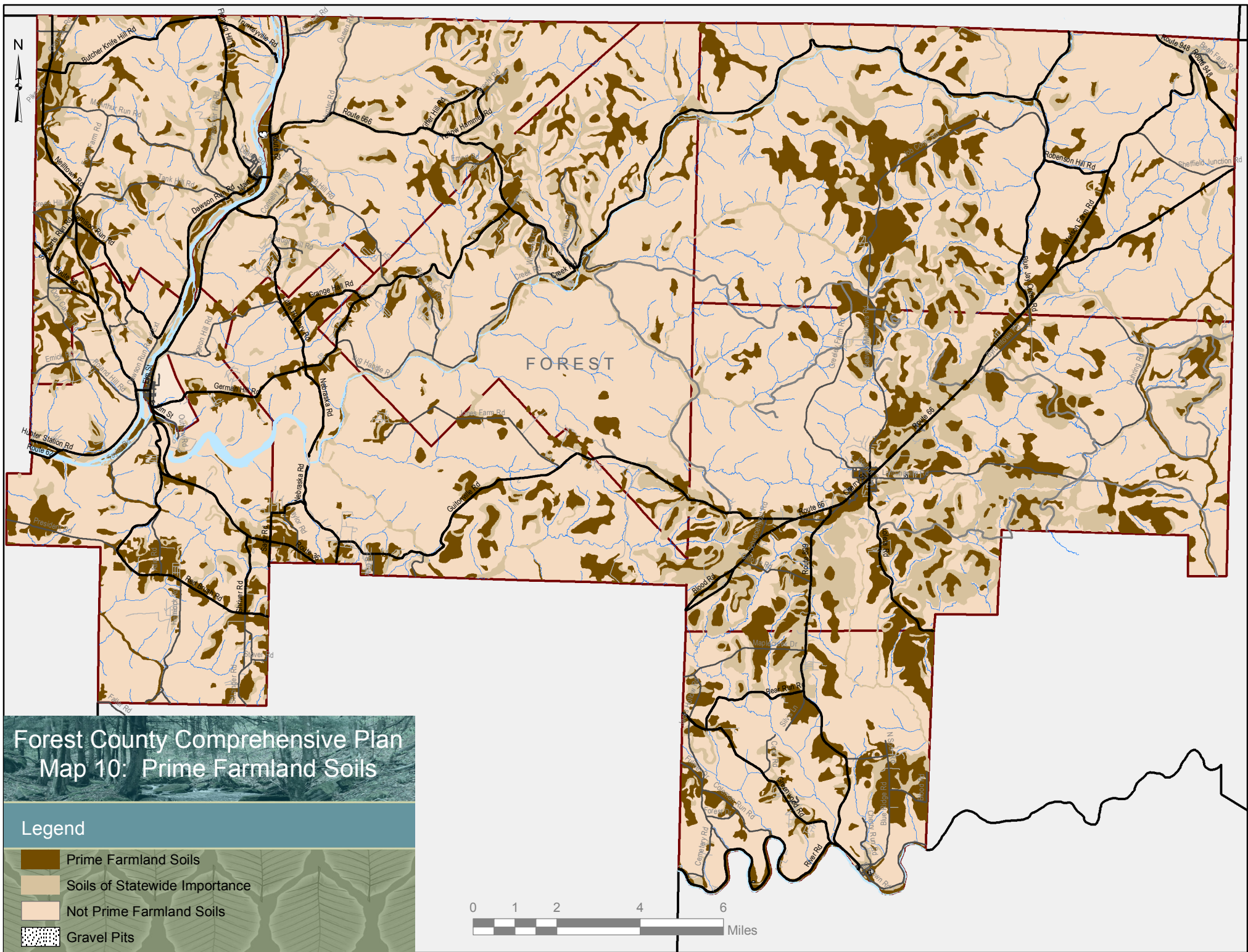


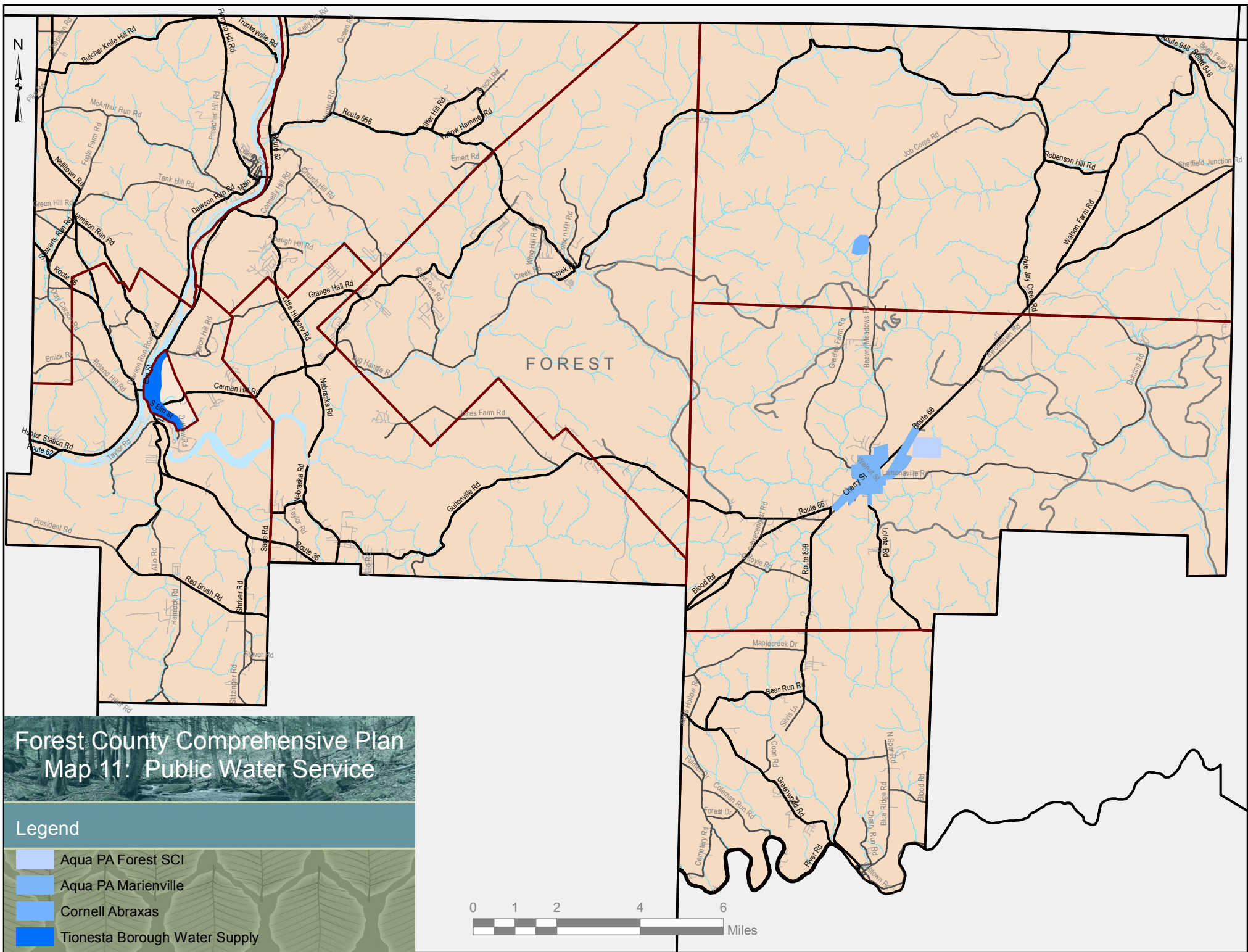




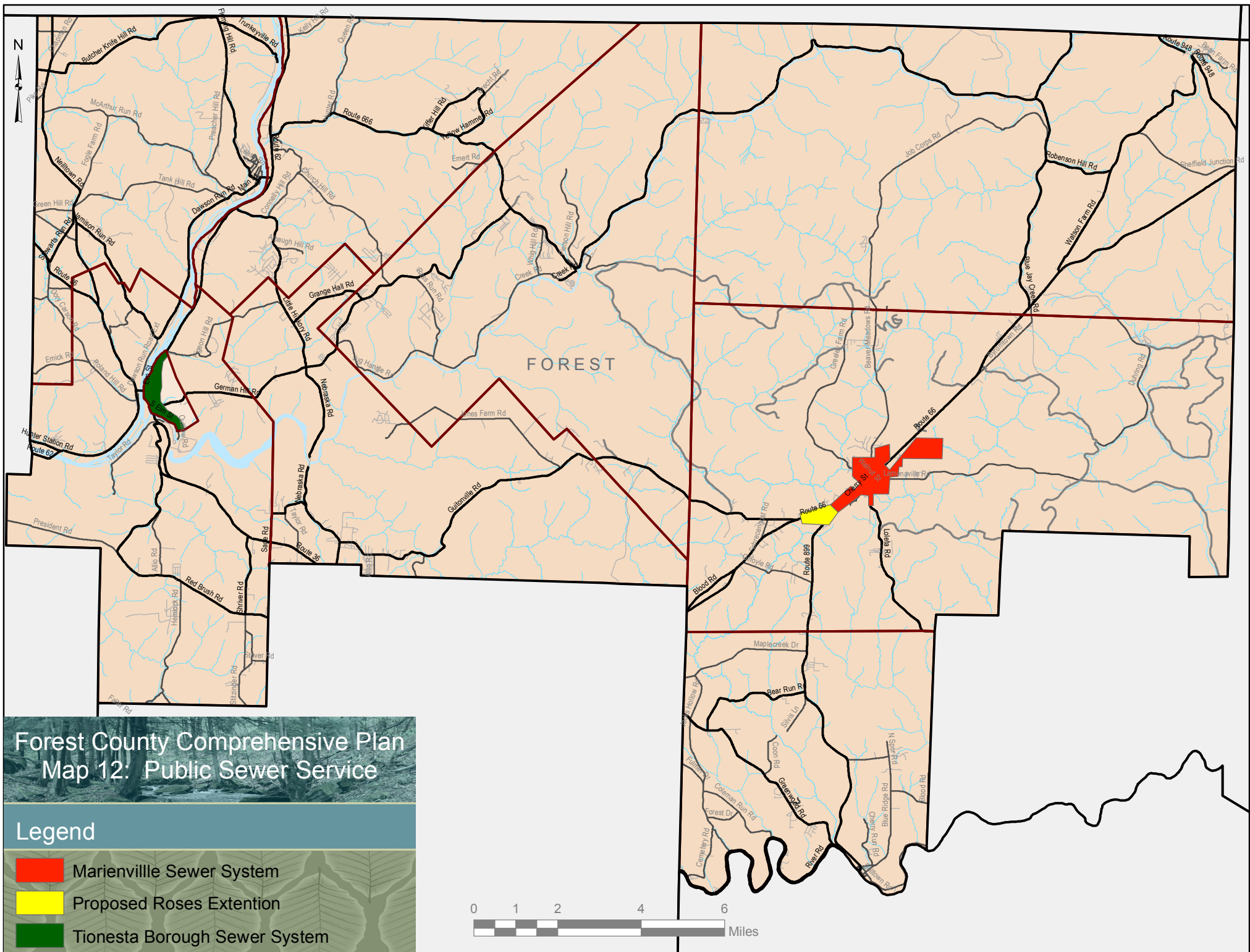






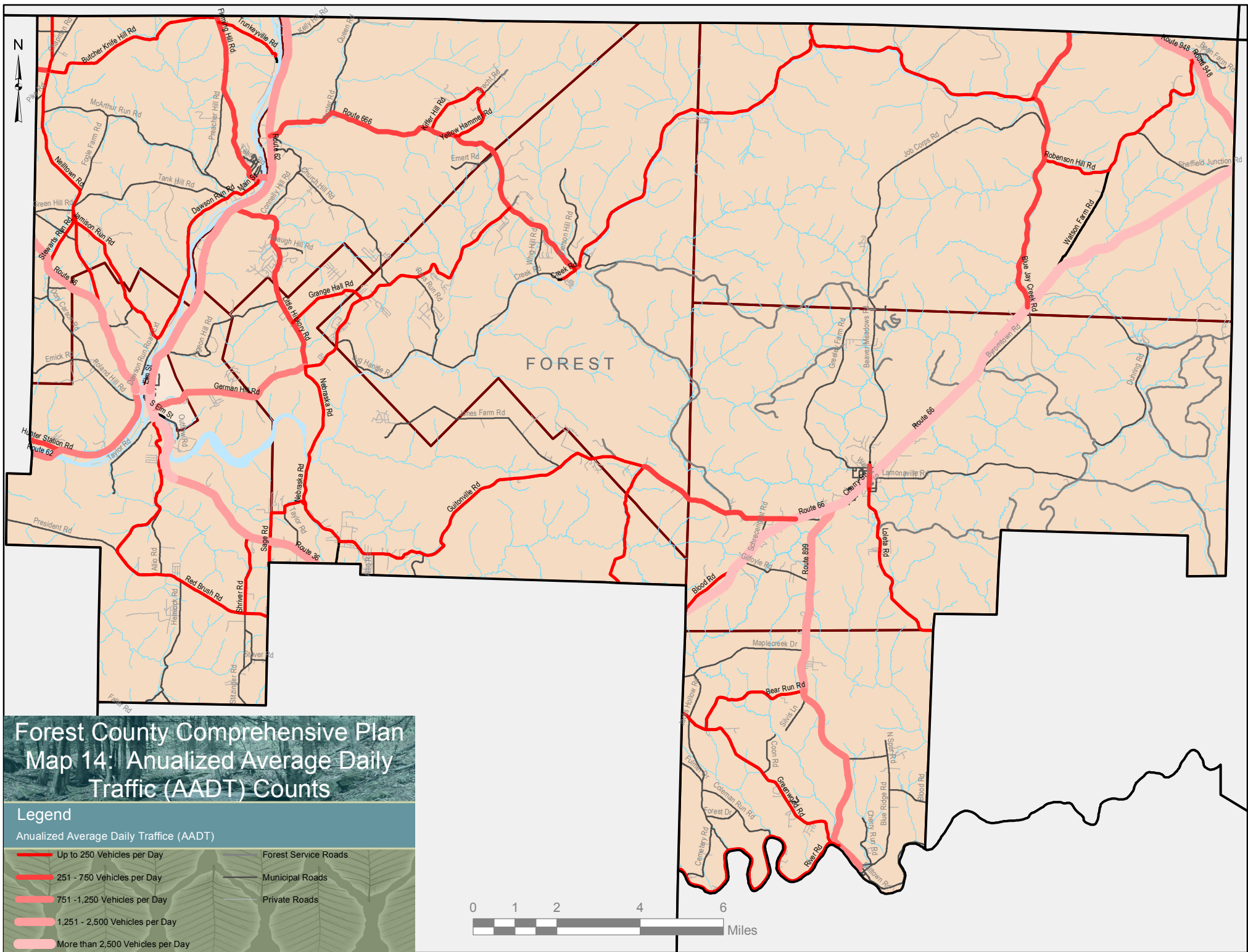












# Forest County Comprehensive Plan

## Map 14: Annualized Average Daily Traffic (AADT) Counts

**Legend**

Annualized Average Daily Traffic (AADT)

- Up to 250 Vehicles per Day
- 251 - 750 Vehicles per Day
- 751 - 1,250 Vehicles per Day
- 1,251 - 2,500 Vehicles per Day
- More than 2,500 Vehicles per Day

Forest Service Roads

Municipal Roads

Private Roads





# Introduction

## Chapter I

### Forest County Comprehensive Plan

## Forward

Douglas E. Carlson, Executive Director  
Forest County Conservation Dis-  
trict & Planning Department.

In June of 1975, Forest County adopted a Comprehensive Land Plan. In 1998, a revised plan was adopted by Forest County. The Plan is intended to guide decision makers into a workable, realistic future through a report of the past, a definition of the present, and a vision of the future. Planning is always a look at what is, at what is needed, at what is wanted, and at what is possible. As much as a group of citizens desire a predictable future, the reality is always a function of pressures from within the group and from outside the group, issues that are difficult to control or predict. Forest County is no different, yet in some profound ways, Forest County is unique.

According to the latest American Forest Inventory, For-



est County is 99% forested. Over half the County is owned and managed by State and Federal Agencies. A plethora of other rules and regulations via State and Federal authorities are exercised upon the other half of the County, the tax paying private land owners. Yet in the face of all

those forces vying to rule over the citizens of Forest County, the average citizen still enjoys and thrives in an environment of freedom, autonomy and self reliance. Land planning is desired and mandated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, yet the results of what ac-

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## Forward, continued

tually happens are more a function of economic climate than of well laid land use planning. The real result of land use planning is the process, a process that allows citizens to reacquaint themselves with the land and how they use it.

Over the past three decades Forest County has slipped into a decline that seems unstoppable. The traditional industries, timber, oil and gas, remain but are tightly controlled by outside laws, rules and regulations. A new industry, the State Correctional Facility in Marienville, provides employment and has spurred a slight economic upswing locally, if not countywide. Government remains the biggest employer, with the Forest Area School District and the County Government employment. As noted in the last Comprehensive Plan, retirement implants (and returns) has increased dramatically. People move to Forest County to retire. Senior citizen issues have become the highest concern as the population demographics shift toward old-

er people. Forest County is a great place to retire and so the population numbers have actually risen since the last Plan.

County decision makers, leaders both political and appointed, have a concern about the future sustainability of County government, Municipal Government and the School District. Government land purchases which decrease the tax base of the County, have slowed through policies implemented since the last Plan. However, pressure remains from the Allegheny National Forest to buy more land. Tourism has changed, where once hunters and fishermen dominated a fair share of the economy, now visitors to the woods, sightseers, and water recreationists thrive. Tourism infrastructure services have not kept pace and have actually declined over the past decade. The prime asset of any place, its people, has changed, where once native born residents dominated, now retirement populations seek a rightful place in the local society. The

future of Forest County is not a very clear picture for all citizens, other than a continued decline and hurting economy and more difficult time of making a living.

The bright spot is that Forest County is a place where nature still rules. Forests grow, rain and snow falls, rivers flow and wildlife lives. That picture means many things to different people, but it also means one thing to most of the residents, that being that Forest County is a wonderful place to live and die. As with the lifelong citizen, those who move here breathe fresh free air and end up with a similar perspective as do those who have lived their lives here. For residents, Forest County remains a place of independence and freedom. What the future holds remains an undiscovered country but Forest County is a great place to seek it.

## What is a County Comprehensive Plan, continued

A County Comprehensive Plan is a legal term defined by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC). The MPC is the state code that governs all local government actions for future planning. The specific definition of a County Comprehensive Plan is *“a land use and growth management plan prepared by the county planning commission and adopted by the county commissioners which establishes broad goals and criteria for municipalities to use in preparation of their comprehensive plan and land use regulation”*.

Each county in Pennsylvania is required to prepare such a plan and adopt it by an official county resolution. It must be updated at least every ten years. Forest County last updated its comprehensive plan in 1998, and began searching for funding for an update in 2008.

In addition to establishing the broad goals and criteria mentioned in the definition, a county comprehensive plan must also contain minimal content to be



**The County Planning Agency is charged with preparing the comprehensive plan document through research and analysis.**

regarded as complete. The planning commission for the county is charged with undertaking careful surveys and studies of trends in such areas as housing, economics, general locations of different types of land use, the extent of community facilities and road systems and various natural resources. The purpose of these studies is to ensure that there is a fac-

tual basis for any policies and recommendations. The plan itself must be a collection of maps, texts and charts that are internally consistent and include plans for those aspects of the county pertinent to future growth and development.

## What is a County Comprehensive Plan, continued

These plans were part of the 1998 County Comprehensive plan document and include:

- A statement of goals and objectives related to the location, character and timing of future development.
- A plan for land use.
- A plan for housing that would meet the needs of persons expected to reside in the County in the future.
- A plan for community facilities and public utilities.
- A plan for the “movement of people and goods”.
- A statement of interrelationships between various plan elements and the relationship of the comprehensive plan to those of neighboring municipalities.

In 2001, the MPC was updated to include new requirements for County comprehensive plans that were not in effect in 1998. These include:

- A Plan for the protection of natural and historic resources to the extent not pre-empted by state or Federal environmental laws. Local plans may not exceed the Clean Streams Law, two Surface Mining Conservation and Reclamation Acts, The Bituminous Mine Subsidence and Land Conservation Act, the Oil and Gas Act, the Nutrient Management Act, and two acts Protecting Agricultural Land Uses and Agricultural Security Areas.
- An identification of minerals that might be extracted in the municipality as they relate to other land uses.
- A plan for agricultural preservation, which could be integrated into other plans for natural and historic resources.
- Water supply implications of future growth and development.
- A recognition that both commercial agriculture and mineral excavation activities can have an effect upon water supplies and that these effects are regulated by state and Federal agencies.
- Identification of a plan for historic preservation, which can be integrated into a plan for the protection of natural and historic resources.
- Identification of Development of Regional Impact and Significance, which are defined as development that because of its size or character, can affect more than one municipality.

These requirements formed the legal basis upon which the 2012 Forest County Comprehensive Plan was developed.



## The Official Use and Status of a Comprehensive Plan

Within the parameters of required content, there is no requirement as to how any municipality should address any particular issue. The MPC gives municipalities great freedom to set their own priorities and create plans that meet local needs.

Upon adoption, the county comprehensive plan has an official policy status, but it is not an ordinance. The comprehensive plan alone has no direct effect or limitation upon any private development or private use of land. It's official status is related to the actions of the County and other levels of government.

The county comprehensive plan is the yardstick by which government actions policies that relate to development are measured to ensure that they are consistent with an overall goal. The MPC defines consistency as, *an agreement or correspondence between matters being compared which denotes a reasonable rational, similar, connection or relationship.* The MPC



**The comprehensive plan has some jurisdiction over other local government actions, such as school districts**

further requires that all township or borough comprehensive plans be generally consistent with the county comprehensive plan. Zoning ordinances, subdivision and land development ordinances, or official map ordinances must also be generally consistent.

The actions of boroughs, town-

ship, or school districts that related to development must also be reviewed by the Forest County Planning Commission to also ensure they are consistent with the County Comprehensive Plan. Examples of such actions that must be reviewed include the expansion or sale of public real estate, new sewage treatment plans or



## The Official Use and Status of a Comprehensive Plan, continued

street closures. This local planning requirement establishes a process to ensure that the actions of other government bodies do not undermine the carefully formulated policies of the comprehensive plan. The MPC

requirements are consistent with other joint planning requirements, such as those within the National Environmental Policy Act. Based upon this need, the County Planning Commission will use the official

use statement below as a guide for when the comment process must be used by any government entity or activity within the County.

### Official Use Statement

Pursuant to requirements of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, the Forest County Planning Commission will use this comprehensive plan as a document to advise the County Commissioners on decisions relative to:

Any creation of a zoning ordinance and zoning map, as well as future amendments to zoning, amendment to the County subdivision and land development ordinance, or the creation and amendment of any official map.

The adoption or amendment of any borough or township comprehensive plan

The location, opening,, vacating,, widening,, narrowing, or enlargement of any street or watercourse in the County.

The location, opening, vacating, or extension of any public ground (land owned by a government body)

The location, erection, demolition, removal or sale of any public structure in the County.

The construction, extension, or abandonment of a water or sewer lines or a sewage treatment plant.

The Planning Commission will also use this plan as required by Section 305 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code to review any school district actions relative to the location, demolition, sale, or lease of any school district structure or land.

Finally, state agencies utilize this plan when making decisions about issuing state permits deciding if applications for state grants or low interest loans are consistent with the vision of the plan. The County Planning Commission may make comments on the consistency of funding applications.

The recommendations of the Planning Commission will be supplied to the applicable public body within 45 days as required. It remains the responsibility of other public bodies to submit plans for applicable actions in sufficient time for review.



## Brief Introduction to Forest County

Forest County prides itself as being one of “Pennsylvania’s best kept secrets”, and the encyclopedic website Wikipedia noted that the County is “famous as a rural retreat area”. Until the 2010 Census the County consistently had the smallest population in the entire Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This only changed because of the opening of the State Correctional Institute at Marienville, Pennsylvania, known officially as SCI Forest. This state prison was opened in 2004 and built to house 2,200 male inmates. As of the Census of 2010 there were 2,456 inmates. This single event made Forest County the fastest growing county in Pennsylvania between 2000 and 2010. County population changed in that time from 4,946 persons to 7,716 persons.

In spite of apparent rapid growth the County remains Pennsylvania’s most rural County. Cameron and Sullivan Counties now have a smaller population, but Forest County has the fewest residents living



**The image most residents and visitors have of Forest County is of endless forests and incredible natural beauty.**

in Boroughs or other small urban areas. It remains distinctive in remaining the only county in Pennsylvania without an icon of urbanity. The County has no traffic signal light. Forest County remains true to its name, a

county of forest lands, broken only by the occasional house, farm field, or small village. Further pertinent facts about the County are contained in subsequent chapters.





## The Comprehensive Planning Process

Creating a comprehensive plan involves both a document and a process. There were important differences between the 1998 planning process and the one used to create the 2012 plan. The 1998 Comprehensive Plan utilized citizens' surveys as a tool for plan formulation, but did not include any type of public town hall meeting or vision-building process. There was a public meeting and a public hearing as required by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code-(MPC), but these occurred after the plan was formulated. The 2012 plan reversed this by seeking citizen input and local leader priorities before the plan was formulated. This process is discussed more fully in the following page.

Also, this update integrated more capacity building for community leaders into the planning process. The Appalachian Regional Commission supplied funding for the update in the hope that it would assist in building the local economy. To further that objective, the Northwest Regional Commission as-



**As a part of the planning process, Forest County leaders and consultant team members received a grant to travel to the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia for training on building local economies.**

sisted in obtaining additional grant funding for training of local leaders. This formal training session was targeted to rural communities dealing with common issues of public lands who were interested in tourism based economic development.

The training allowed local leaders to further refine goals and project lists to revitalize the County's economy. This is discussed in greater detail in the economic development plan chapter.





## Citizens and Local Leaders Set the Agenda

Before a single page of the comprehensive plan was written, the consultant team went to local leaders and citizens to define the priorities for this project. To ascertain citizen priorities and compare them to local leader perceptions, three identical town hall meetings were held. Each of these meeting asked participants some simple questions:

What was the Counties Greatest Strength?  
What was the greatest weakness in the County?  
Based upon the above answers, what was the best or worst future that you might realistically imagine?  
Results were tabulated and then voted on through nominal group techniques. The top priorities for each of the three

meetings are shown on the sidebar to the right. Participants also answered a brief exit survey, prior to leaving, the results of which are shown below. The meeting showed great commonality between local leaders and citizens in this rural county. Pertinent results of these meetings are integrated into the subsequent plan chapters.

How concerned are you about the following issue?	Not Concerned	Somewhat Concerned	Very Concerned
Crime	30.00%	35.00%	35.00%
Management of Federal and State Public Lands	5.00%	50.00%	45.00%
Lack of Job and Business Opportunities	0.00%	40.00%	60.00%
Access to Shopping and Restaurants	47.62%	33.33%	19.05%
Access to Medical Services	10.53%	68.42%	21.05%
Localized Flooding	94.44%	5.56%	0.00%
Loss of Hunting and Fishing Opportunities	26.32%	31.58%	42.11%
Deteriorating Homes	21.05%	42.11%	36.84%
Lack of Retirement Housing	40.00%	45.00%	15.00%
Cost of Real Estate Taxes	29.41%	17.65%	52.94%
Drinking Water or Sewer Systems	20.00%	30.00%	50.00%
Things for young people to do	11.76%	58.82%	29.41%
ATV's and Trespassing	27.78%	38.89%	33.33%
Loss of local farms and farmers	26.32%	42.11%	31.58%

### Local Leader Priorities

1. Economically viable downtown in Tionesta
2. Have major manufacturers supporting smaller businesses
3. Natural Beauty
4. Lack of Capital (Both Money and human)
5. No People (ANF effect)

### Marienville Priorities

1. Allegheny National Forest (Strength and Weakness)
2. Marcellus Shale (Strength and Weakness)
3. Local School District (strength)
4. More Business in Town: desire for retail bustling again with better support for startups and tech training
5. No Support For Local Retail (weakness)

### Tionesta Priorities

1. More Jobs/Better Cell Phone Service (tie)
2. Freedom/Need Senior Center in Tionesta (tie)
3. No High Speed Internet/ Lack of Retail and Restaurants (Tie)





## A Long Heritage of Planning

In spite of its small size, limited budgets and rural nature, Forest County has a long history of active community planning. A number of previous planning efforts were utilized in formulating the 2012 plan, including:

1. Forest County Tornado Disaster Economic Recovery Plan. (1987). Adams, Graney and Associates
2. Quality of Life Survey: Allegheny Plateau Region. (1993). Penn State University
  - a. Citizen's attitudes toward local economic development
3. Forest County Comprehensive Plan. (1998). Graney, Grossman, Ray and Associates.
4. Assessing life in the Allegheny Forest Region. (2001). Grace A. Wang, Penn State University
  - a. Attitudinal survey of resident's feelings about the Allegheny National Forest
5. Economic Development Strategy Tionesta Area. (2005). Shepstone
6. The New Economy and the Forest: Rural Development in the Post-Industrial Spaces of the Rural Alleghenies. (2003), Deborah Che, Western Michigan University
7. Pennsylvania Wilds Planning Study and Design Guide (2007)
8. Clarion River Recreation Assessment. (2007). Fermata
9. Market Analysis and Site Feasibility Study for Downtown Tionesta. (2008). L R Kimball Engineering
10. Economic Development Strategy Route 66 Corridor of Marienville, Forest County Pennsylvania
11. Forest County Tourism Assessment and Report. (2009). Meritage Consulting
12. Northwest Pennsylvania Comprehensive Development Strategy. (2009). Environmental Planning & Design
13. Forest County Greenways Plan. (2010-not adopted). Pashek Associates
14. Conservation Landscape Initiatives. (2010). DCNR
15. Clarion River Greenway Plan. (Draft). Unknown



# Community Development Goals and Objectives

## Chapter 2

### Forest County Comprehensive Plan

#### From Broad Concepts to Policy and Action

Article III of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) states that a comprehensive plan must include a statement of the future development objectives of the municipality, with mandatory inclusion of a statement as to the “location, character, and timing” of future developments. This section of the Forest County Comprehensive Plan will establish these goals and objectives as they relate to character. Goals for the location and timing of future development are expressed in the land use policy plan and accompanying text in the land use chapter.



Goals and objectives are broad criteria from which policies are created. They also will form the basis for future action. Many goals and objectives from the 1998 Forest County Comprehensive Plan remain relevant today. Rather than re-invent these 1998 goals they were up-

dated as necessary and incorporated into the 2012 plan document. A new section has also been added that uses photographs of the type of development that fits well into this rural county. These are meant as establishing an ideal for either pub-

lic or private development, and are based on precedents from the [Pa. Wilds Design Manual](#). A full copy of this manual is recommended for inspiring any developer in the County and is available from the County Planning and Conservation District Office.

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## Land Use Goals and Objectives

Future development of land in Forest County should conform to local citizen-based consensus and the inclusive future-oriented vision set forth in the Land Use Plan.

Future development in Forest County should be concentrated around existing and planned development centers, thereby maximizing utilization of existing infrastructure services and utilities, while eventually providing every township with a place to grow private sector development.

Development of the growth areas should be directed to occur in a systematic and well-designed pattern, the goal of which is to enhance the entire living environment and maintaining appropriate usage in relation to existing rural lifestyles.

A variety of living and working environments should be provided within the County.

Diversification of living and working environments better allows for adjustments to change.

The natural resources of Forest County should be identified and critical areas signified for conservation; exceptional areas should be considered for protection, where warranted, by means of a local citizen consensus.

Prime agricultural areas should be preserved for agricultural use and encroachment by other land use activities should be discouraged.

Encourage the development of new commercial facilities in existing areas of development concentration.

Large industrial uses should be located on large tracts of land with convenient access to primary highways.

Efforts should be made to utilize suitable vacant land for private agricultural uses, private forest uses, or more intensive private development uses, particularly in respect to involvement by Forest County citizens and residents.

Efforts must be made to provide additional employment and self-employment opportunities for all residents of Forest County.

Forest County should continue to seek out and adopt the necessary development controls and guidelines in order to insure that future development will occur in such a manner as to be an asset to the County.

Efforts should be made to enter into Agreement of the US. Forest Service [Allegheny National Forest (ANF)] and other governmental agencies owning lands in the County, to establish a more cooperative planning and management relationship relating to those lands owned and managed by such agencies.

Forest County should continue to seek ways to control and mitigate the effects which occur through the conversion of private lands to public.

Forest County should continue to explore, and adopt, appropriate policy measures which would result in a "No Net Loss of Private Property" standard within the County.





## Transportation Goals and Objectives

A safe, convenient, and an efficient transportation network should continue to be developed in order to facilitate the flow of people and goods throughout the County and to external destinations.

Highway access into Forest County should be improved. Roadways and bridges utilized as truck routes and primary and secondary highways should be improved to facilitate the flow of traffic, especially during periods of high seasonal use.

Access between the eastern and western ends of the County, primarily Marienville and Tionesta, is limited as a result of geography, but, nonetheless, methods and systems designed to improve this access should continue to be explored.

Improvement of private and semi-private roads should be encouraged (where feasible and cost-effective) to township, County, and State standards in order to reduce the dangers and inconvenience of improperly constructed or maintained roads.

Enhancement and improvement of existing public transportation systems should be provided for the residents of Forest County, particularly as the County population continues to age.

Forest County should cooperate with the Allegheny National Forest in the further development of specialized vehicular and pedestrian routes throughout the County. Enhancement of these routes is necessary to service the tourism industry as well as the needs of local business and residents.



**The Route 62 bridge at Hunters Station, scheduled to be replaced within five years.**



## Housing Goals and Objectives

Develop among the residents of Forest County a sense of community self-interest and encourage the provision of housing units to meet the needs of all segments of the responsibility for providing decent housing to meet the needs of all County residents.

Continue to assess conditions, establish standards, and enforce regulations designed to improve the quality of new housing and new residential development, while, at all times, avoiding unnecessary barriers to affordable housing.

Establish minimum standard guidelines and provide a framework for enforcement of regulations designed to improve the quality of residential conversion from seasonal to residential, while, at all times, avoiding unnecessary barriers to affordable housing.

Provide improved sewer and water service to residential concentrations in the County. Explore and promote innovative solutions to geological and geographical limitations in regards to improvement of sewer and water service to citizens in the County.



Continue to seek improvement of the health, safety, and general welfare in residential environments by removing blighting influences such as illegal dumping, abandoned vehicles, ramshackle and dilapidated structures, and abandoned oil and gas equipment.

Efforts must be undertaken to work toward a reformed tax system which will encourage, rather than discourage, housing improvements and routine maintenance practices.

Continue to investigate data resources and establish a mechanism for the improvement of the quality of demographic, economic, and housing data in Forest County.





## Conservation Goals and Objectives

All natural resources within Forest County must be identified and evaluated and the long-term impacts of any development considered prior to any development activity.

Efforts must be made to protect public and private water sources from contamination, particularly since these water resources serve as the primary water source for the citizens of Forest County as well as for many seasonal residents.

The streams and rivers of Forest County must continue to be protected from contamination and pollution. Maintenance and conservation of existing stream and riverine ecosystems will guide human development activities and management decisions in, and around, these systems.

All new road construction improvements should direct drainage away from adjacent farm properties, private landowners, and unique ecosystems, when possible, in order to avoid crop damage, property damage, and long-lasting ecosystem alteration.

Education programs should continue to be initiated and undertaken to instruct all forest landowners concerning “Best Management Practices” and “Sustainable Forestry” methods within Forest County.

Environmental education programs should continue to be undertaken to acquaint all County residents, especially the young, with the value of appropriate conservation of natural resources.

Promote tourist and recreation development without adversely affecting the scenic and natural resources of the County and without disrupting the rural lifestyle of the citizens of Forest County.

Development within, and adjacent to, public recreational resources must continue to be vigorously assessed and appropriately controlled to prevent adverse effects upon natural resources.

Regional recreational facilities should be complemented and protected whenever possible.

The Allegheny National Forest should be encouraged to provide adequate and well maintained facilities to meet the needs of the County and to vigorously enhance its tourist attractiveness. Use of National Forest land should be appropriate, and where needed, regulated to protect its value as a total community resource.

Greater effort should be made to enter into cooperative management arrangements to offer local opinion and input regarding usage of National Forest lands within Forest County and to explore, in frank and realistic ways, the impacts endured and absorbed by Forest County citizens.



## Community Facilities and Utilities Goals and Objectives

Adequate clean and healthy water resources need to be made available to all residents of Forest County. Potential and real sources of pollution must be identified and subsequently reduced to prevent contamination of ground water supplies.

The expansion of water services into areas not serviced by public sewers should be avoided.

Existing public (open) water supplies need to be protected from contamination.

Public sewer facilities should be provided to development concentrations in the County, as long as fiscally feasible without placing undue strain upon permanent residents, who often have limited incomes.

Adequate capacity must be provided in public systems to allow utility expansion which will foster growth in existing residential concentrations.

Existing sewer facilities should continue to be improved and expanded to meet present and future needs of Forest County.

Individual sewage disposal systems must be adequately installed to protect the water resources of the County and prevent possible health hazards.

Alternatives to conventional sewage disposal systems should be explored and identified so as to provide private land owners safe sewage disposal options and to allow development on lands currently deemed unsuitable for sewage by Commonwealth regulation.

Education concerning surface and ground water quality and protection should be encouraged throughout Forest County, in order to preserve adequate water supplies for the future.

Existing County facilities should be maintained and improved, as necessary, to meet future population demands.

State and regional services and facilities should be utilized to reinforce necessary services within the County.

The public school system should be maintained and improved to provide the best possible education for all students. Whenever possible, use of school facilities should be made available to all County residents and integrated into the whole community.

Adult education programs, especially those designed to increase economic self sufficiency, should be explored and provided to residents of Forest County.

Elderly care facilities within the County should continue to be provided, needs identified, and services appropriately expanded.

Local recreation needs should be identified and provided through cooperative efforts between the public and local government.





## Examples of Optimum Development



Use of Native Lumber is both affordable and fits the character of the County.



Commercial development in centers in the County preserves access for both vehicles and pedestrians



Small scale agriculture and horse keeping defines the edge of villages.



Small, well designed, signs fit well into rural areas, while still serving to identify local businesses.



# Land Use Plan

## Chapter 3

### Forest County Comprehensive Plan

#### County Land Use Planning Requirements

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code has always required that a comprehensive plan include a land use plan element. However, the Code also gives the municipality considerable freedom to plan for land use as it sees fit. The MPC states that the land use plan “*may include provisions for the amount, intensity, character and timing of land use proposed for residence, industry, business, agriculture, major traffic and transit facilities, utilities, community facilities, public grounds, parks and recreation, preservation of prime agricultural lands, flood plains and other areas of special hazards and other similar uses.*” This “may” language indicates permissiveness, rather than a mandate, as found in language for the plan for conservation requirements. The exception is that County Plans must also identify Land Uses as they relate to mineral utilization. The County plan must also note all Development of Regional Im-

pact and Significance (current and proposed). Mineral Excavation issues are dealt with more fully in the Plan for Conservation Chapter, but some specific policies are identified in this chapter.

Development of Regional Impact and Significance are defined by the MPC as *any land development that, because of its character, magnitude, or location will have substantial effect upon the health, safety, or welfare of citizens in more than one municipality*. This does not mean that Development of Regional Impact and Significance is inherently negative, just that it is large enough to have large impacts. For Planning Purposes, the County Plan identifies two such developments. The first is the Allegheny National Forest (ANF), that effects virtually every municipality. The ANF has impacts upon such divergent issues as every sector of the County from tourism to manufacturing, and

effects traffic patterns, conservation and municipal and school district tax base.

The second development of regional impact and significance is the State Correctional Institute/SCI Forest. While located wholly in Jenks Townships, SCI Forest employs about 100 County residents and was the single most important contributor to demographic growth and change in the County from 2000 to 2010.

The potential for future Development of Regional Impact and Significance is difficult to discern in a County with limited land development. As of this writing, the most realistic possibility is expansion of gas drilling in the County; which could create the need for large support services or secondary facilities that could impact more than one municipality.

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## Basic Growth Trends

With Publication of the 2010 Census, Forest County found itself to be the fastest growing county in Pennsylvania. As shown in the table to the right, The County's population grew by an outstanding 56 percent in ten years. This was unusual as the County had previous seen patterns of population loss, as detailed in the 1998 Comprehensive Plan. This changed between 2000 and 2010. A partial reason for this trend was the opening of the State Correctional Facility in 2004. According to the Census of 2010, 2500 County residents are living in institutionalized group quarters, most of whom are resident of SCI Forest in Jenks Township.

This anomaly can be seen in the huge growth seen by Jenks Township,. However, it does not account for the more modest growth experienced by every other Township in the County. When population by age is examined, it is apparent that many people chose to relocate to the County upon retirement. The only community that lost population was Tionesta Borough.

Geographic Area	Census: April 1, 2010 Number	Census: April 1, 2000	Change: 2000 to 2010 Number	Change: 2000 to 2010 Percent
<b>Forest County</b>	<b>7,716</b>	<b>4,946</b>	<b>2,770</b>	<b>56.0%</b>
Barnett township	361	349	12	3.4%
Green township	522	397	125	31.5%
Harmony township	666	511	155	30.3%
Hickory township	558	525	33	6.3%
Howe township	405	417	-12	-2.9%
Jenks township	3,629	1,261	2,368	187.8%
Kingsley township	363	261	102	39.1%
Tionesta borough	483	615	-132	-21.5%
Tionesta township	729	610	119	19.5%

***With Publication of the 2010 Census, Forest County found itself to be the fastest growing county in Pennsylvania***

While any demographic growth is beneficial, it is a concern that in migration may not be a long term means to sustain the population of this small County. As an emerging retirement destination, Forest County made the City-Data.com "top 101" list of all the Counties in the nation.

#45 of the top 101 counties with the lowest number of births per 1000 residents.

#98 of the top 101 counties with the highest number of deaths per 1000 residents.

Detailed analysis of demographic trends indicate that young people continue to leave the County upon reaching adulthood. This can have a negative effect upon attracting employers, due to shrinking labor force, as well as negative effects upon school district enrollment that are discussed more fully in Chapter 7.

## Demographic Challenge and Tionesta Borough

While there has been modest county growth (apart from the anomalous prison growth) there remain a number of demographic challenges. It is entirely possible that the Borough of Tionesta may present a bleaker alternative scenario for the County's long term future. For the Past 50 years, Tionesta Borough has lost population. In the last decade it suffered a 21.5 percent drop. As the Borough's population shifts from families with children to older adults, the School district is seeing decline and area income also decreases. Over 30% of Tionesta Borough residents have an annual income of less than \$15,000.

2010 Census data confirms that much of the recent growth has been come from a combination of retirees and prison inmates. There is thus justifiable concerns among local leaders about the County's long term fiscal sustainability. The prisoners do not contribute directly to the local economy, and pay no local taxes. The Prison may very well cost the County more than it benefits it, as it has caused a marked increase in local criminal court activity (adjudicating crimes that occur within the prison). Retirees pay property taxes, but generally have low or no earned income, so their benefit to the School District and municipality is much less than working age families.

## Development History of the County

Development in Forest County is a kind of oxymoron. It is a place with no town of a thousand people. It is a place without a permanent red light. It is a place that is somewhat stuck in time. In speaking of development in the county, it is assumed that the development is human driven, a function of human beings living in this place. Development, being a result of human activity, in Forest County truly began with the Paleolithic hunters, who undoubtedly entered the region following their prey animals, such as the mammoth, bison and other Paleolithic animals. While the continental glacier loomed just north of the County, these hunters traveled through the, then, tundra region that existed approximately 18,000 to 15,000 thousand years ago.

As Native American culture arose in North America, the County would have provided excellent habitat for game and eventually for agricultural activity. The presence of two major rivers, the Allegheny and the Clarion, and the presence of a

major creek, Tionesta Creek provided not only habitat but transportation corridors through the region. As Native American culture flourished, their cultures progressed toward more agricultural activity which was done primarily on the river and creek valley floors. Villages sprang up in the Hickory area, along the Tionesta Creek and at the Tionesta Creek confluence with the Allegheny.

As the European invasion progressed from the East Coast of North America, Native American populations were displaced and many tribes either died or fled as refugees. Along the Allegheny River, refugee towns also came into existence among the Seneca Nation. These towns and peoples were what the earliest European pioneers found when they moved west from the east Coast. A spur to interest in the region was the award of lands in the wilderness to pay Revolutionary veterans for service during the War of Independence from Britain. John Range, one such veteran, was awarded the land that is now

the County seat, in Tionesta. Another early pioneer to the area was Poland Hunter, who settled on the island at the mouth of the Tionesta Creek, in the Allegheny River. A dispute arose as to who owned the Island, Hunter or Range. The law suit that followed was decided on the fact whether the island was really an island, a fact that was settled in Court with the testimony of Seneca Chief Cornplanter, who testified that he had canoed around the island as a young man.

Interest continued in this frontier region and Europeans began to establish farms along the waterways. Traders founded trading posts and a few early entrepreneurs saw the potential in the timber found in the area. Early timber men like Teddy Collins, came, bought land, and began cutting timber. Lumber camps, saw mills, and raft yards sprouted across the county. Towns were established along the Tionesta Creek in the interior of the county at Nebraska, Newtown, Balltown, Foxburg (Lynch) and Brookston. Tiones-

***Development in Forest County is a kind of oxymoron. It is a place with no town of a thousand people. It is a place without a permanent red light.***





## Development History of the County, continued

ta and Hickory were the first towns along the Allegheny River. On the Clarion River, Cooksburg, and Clarington were founded. Near the center of the county, the town of Marien (Marienville) was founded by Cyrus Blood, who is also the founder of Forest County. Other small towns, like Kelletville and Mayburg arose later to service the timber industry and to service related products derived from wood.

The building of railroads during the 1860's and the later lumber railroads created development at whistle stops and sidings. These railroads brought goods from the East and shipped goods both east and west out of the county. Rail became a more dependable mode of transportation than the waterways. Indian paths became roadways and then became paved highways as road building technology progressed. Of course, the success of the roadways contributed to the demise of the railroads eventually. Today, highways are the only major mode of transportation in



**Chief Cornplanter, the Iroquois chief for whom the Cornplanter State Forest is named. (image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)**

Forest County.

Agriculture, lumber and to a smaller extent oil and gas were the primary economic foundations of Forest County. Later industries like the glass plant at Marienville and the baby bottle factory in Tionesta sustained the already estab-

lished towns. Tionesta had a mill and a factory that produced fireplace mantles.

So development naturally began along the waterways in the County, with the exception of Marienville which is situated on the ridge running from the northeast to the southwest.



## Development History of the County, continued

Small communities like Golinza and Guitonville were also established on the plateau away from the waterways, both beginning out of agriculture and timber activities.

By 1919, F. F. Whittekin produced a map of Forest County. On that map he records that there are 112 miles of railroads, and 295 miles of roads. The population in 1919 was reported to be 7,954 persons. There were 2 tanneries, 3 chemical works, 5 grist mills, 2 sand factories, and 5 sawmills in 1919 according to Whittekin. There were 9 county bridges, 1 toll bridge, 1 county home, and 94 schools. Today, only 2 major sawmills and a few small mills operate. There are 2 schools, but the tanneries, chemical works, grist mills, etc. are all lost in history. The railroads are gone as well.

The European founding and settling of the county was from primarily English and German peoples, with small enclaves of Italian and other nationalities also. The Native



**This Civilian Conservation Camp, built in Jenks Township in the Great Depression, also housed German Prisoners of War during World War Two.**

American imprint still exists also with several local families tracing their roots back to Seneca ancestors.

The World Wars brought in new blood to Forest County both in residents and in economy. Local farms prospered producing draft animals for the military, the forests produced both lumber and chemi-

cals derived from wood for the war effort as well. Forest County also hosted a German prisoner of war camp during the Second World War, at the site of the Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Duhring, Jenks Township.

After the Second World War, another phenomena in development occurred. Forest





## Development History of the County, continued

County had long been a destination for hunting and fishing sports but after the war, veterans who found work in the cities looked for places to get away to vacation. After the war, another circumstance also came about, that being that a lot of boys who had went to war, either didn't come back to the family farm or moved to the cities for higher paying employment. The result was that a lot of older family farms were sold to land speculators and developers. What these entrepreneurs did with these farms was to sell small lots to the city folks looking for a vacation residence. Even before WWII, a few fishing camp developments had sprung up along the Allegheny River, drawing non-residents who spent summers on the river. After the war, the number of camp developments dramatically increased.

One camp lot developer, Ernest Matson, concentrated on the German Hill area, creating the Fawn Acres and Irinza Heights developments. A card advertisement that he used to give to prospective



**The Hunting and Fishing camp became the predominant form of development in the County in the mid Twentieth Century. This camp was listed for sale at the time of the comprehensive plan update. (photo courtesy of [www.realtor.com](http://www.realtor.com))**

buyers highlights the draw to Forest County. The advertisement card has a map of western Forest County on one side, the other side reads:

*FOREST COUNTY  
CABIN SITES – Hunters – Nature Lovers – Fishermen: Looking for a site to build that little cabin you've always dreamed*

*of? The card continues: Excellent hunting and fishing. Good roads. Good water and electricity available. Priced at \$150.00, average size 50X150. Terms to suit the purchaser. All lots marked, staked and surveyed and sold with a Clear Warranty Deed. The consequence of this type of land de-*



## Development History of the County, continued

velopment was a concentration of lots and buildings unlike any other in Forest County. Sewage regulations were very relaxed, water came from springs, and the roads in the developments were privately owned and maintained. Changes in sewage regulations have made many of the un-built lots non-usable. The concentrations of people around the springs have made the spring water unsafe. The private ownership of the roads has created problems with those lots that people developed and now have retired on since winter snow removal and spring road repair costs are the responsibility of the land owners, not the townships.

With an estimated 40 such lot developments in Forest County, there are approximately 10,000 camps or non-resident structures, a number double that of resident homes in the county. A more recent phenomena of retirement to these camps is creating demographic shifts to older and older populations, as well as shifts in

political attitudes. The decline in factories and businesses (jobs) in the county has driven the younger population out of the county.

Overall land development measured by buildings has decreased, and has even moved in the opposite direction. Land development meas-



**In recent years, the County has seen a return of natural gas extraction. With horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing, the well pad area increases significantly over conventional vertical wells.**

ured by land use, has increased with the development of the oil and natural gas speculation. Roads and drilling pads have jumped over the past ten years, with much of that activity happening on the land owned by the Allegheny National Forest. These activities strain the municipal government road programs but





## Development History of the County, continued

bring needed business to local business owners.

The limits to land development today are similar to yesteryear with some differences. Slope still limits building; narrow valleys also decrease the likelihood of large land development. New sewage regulations and soil conditions widespread in the county also limit the likelihood of large scale land developments. New factories are not very likely. The biggest limiting factor in Forest County to future land development is the land ownership patterns. The majority of land in Forest County is either owned by government, with the Federal Government being the largest, or owned by timber companies. Little private, developable land exists, and that land has seen costs soar with the recent Marcellus gas speculation.

Land development in the past may have been dictated by transportation considerations, rivers, railroads, and highways. Today, the same

resources are in Forest County, but usage of those resources has changed. Widespread clear-cutting of forests is not done. Modern forestry techniques have developed more sustainable methods of tree harvests. Environmental regulations safeguard environmental quality, and in Forest County, that measure of the environment is that it is environmentally cleaner now than it has been in 100 years. New rules and regulations dictate how land development may occur. A countywide subdivision ordinance does not allow lots below an acre in size, so the heyday of unregulated recreational land development has come to an end. New sewage regulations also insure land development that does not pollute water supplies, surface or subsurface. New construction codes preclude the buying of a recreational lot and moving an old school bus on it to be used as a camp.

Land development in Forest County has slowed with the exception of the oil and gas

development activity. Forest County hillsides along the rivers and Tionesta Creek have returned to similar conditions as existed when the land was only inhabited by Native Americans. Tourists flock to the county to visit, view and move on through. Some will stop to recreate on our waterways, maybe hunt deer, or fish, but they only want to visit. Owning a piece of paradise, Forest County paradise, is not as attractive anymore because lifestyles have changed in America. A few say that they would love to live in Forest County but can't because they can not find work. One wonders if they ever think how the residents feel about the same thing. Life is great in Forest County, life is tough in Forest County. Forest County is unique, wonderful and the road less traveled.

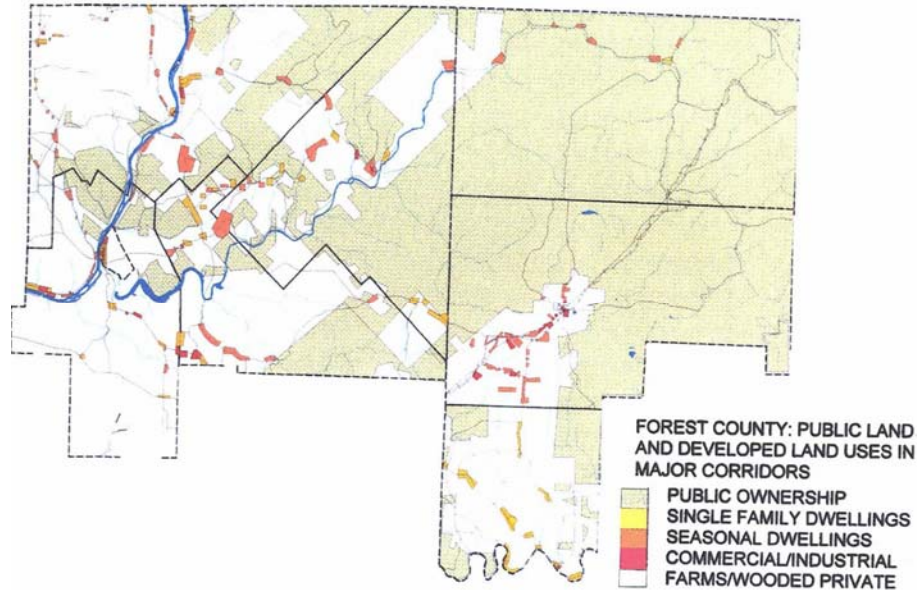
***Life is great in Forest County, life is tough in Forest County.***



## Existing Land Use Patterns

Planners track land use trends over time in order to see where growth and development is occurring within a community. They also typically divide land uses into categories to track what kinds of development are occurring (typical categories include residential, retail/commercial industrial and public uses) and how these patterns may change. The purpose of this is to fulfill the growth management objectives of a comprehensive plan in Pennsylvania. The typical planner's approach is nearly useless in Forest County. Land use trends in the past 31 years in Forest County have exhibited remarkable stability. This is not to say that there have been no changes, but typical urban planning approaches are just not useful to track the way land use patterns in Forest County change.

Map 3 in the map gallery divides all land in Forest County into three overall patterns of "developed" "Cleared/agricultural" and "wooded". The "developed" category includes all types of developed land use,



**This existing land use map from 1998, bears a striking similarity current patterns of development as depicted don Map 3. The 1998 map also is nearly identical to another completed in 1980.**

such as year round residential, seasonal residential, commercial or industrial. Once the slight difference in categorization is understood, the map looks strikingly similar to a similar one prepared during the 1998 comprehensive plan update process. Only about 1 percent of the County's land area is used for developed land uses. The only major changes

that can be seen at this scale are the SCI Marienville property on Route 66 north of Marienville, and some small growth of commercial development south of Marienville.

Many land use changes are more subtle and can only be seen by talking to residents or examining economic trends. A number of small businesses





## Existing Land Use Patterns, continued

have closed, or commercial buildings disappeared since 1998. A block of commercial structures in downtown Tionesta burned and the site has not been redeveloped. A commercial restaurant building on Route 62 south of Tionesta closed and the structure was converted to residential. Three new small businesses have opened in the West Hickory area.

Another often imperceptible change has been major alterations to the County's large stock of seasonal housing. One trend has been the continued conversions of single family dwellings into year round occupancy. The other trend has been the abandonment of some of the older and more primitive hunting and fishing camps.

The largest perceptible single change in developed land use patterns since 1998 has been the development of about 204 acres at the SCI Forest Prison site. This ties into a key trend in Forest County, where changes in ownership are often more



**This block in downtown Tionesta was formerly a block of commercial buildings that included a general mercantile/appliance store, restaurant, and gift shop. It has not yet been redeveloped.**

important than changes in use. With the adoption of the 1998 comprehensive plan, the County became aware that increases in public owned non taxable property were becoming a strain on the tax base of this small rural community. The most well known example of this trend is the Allegheny National Forest which alone owns

more than half of all property in the County. Since adoption of the 1998 comprehensive plan however, there have been no increases of holdings by the United States Forest Service. Still, the SCI forest project made publicly owned land the fastest growing land use category in the County from 1998 to 2001.



## Land Use Policy Plan

Map 6 in the gallery of maps represents the official land use policy plan for Forest County. This section of the plan documents supports and explains the map. The map is based upon definitions for planning that fulfill the growth management definition of a county comprehensive plan. This is the portion of the comprehensive plan that may identify growth areas, rural resource areas, and future growth areas as defined by the Pa Municipalities Planning Code. The Code encourages county level planning based upon the defined concepts of designated growth areas, future growth areas, and rural resource areas. These are defined by the MPC as follows:

**“Designated growth area,”** a region within a county or counties described in a municipal or multimunicipal plan that preferably includes and surrounds a city, borough or village, and within which residential and mixed use development is permitted or planned for at densities of one unit to the acre or more, commercial, industrial and institutional uses are per-

mitted or planned for and public infrastructure services are provided or planned.

**“Future growth area,”** an area of a municipal or multimunicipal plan out side of and adjacent to a designated growth area where residential, commercial industrial and institutional uses and development are permitted or planned at varying densities and public infrastructure services may or may not be provided, but future development at greater densities is planned to accompany the orderly extension an provision of public infrastructure services.

**“Rural resource area,”** an area described in a municipal or multimunicipal plan within which rural resource uses including, but not limited to, agriculture, timbering, mining, quarrying and other extractive industries, forest and game lands and recreation and tourism are encouraged and enhanced, development that is compatible with or supportive of such uses in permitted, and public infrastructure services are not provided except in villages.

The task of the County is to use these defined concepts to guide growth where it desires it to occur, and to offer policies for the character and location of future growth.

The County has identified four clusters of **Designated Growth Areas**. These represent areas for natural expansion of historic growth patterns in the County. They are located in the areas of Tionesta, West/East Hickory, Marienville, and southern Barnett Township. County policy for these areas is to encourage all forms of private development, whether residential, commercial, or industrial, provided that lands use conflicts can be minimized in conformity to the community development goals and objectives continued in Chapter 2. Public and non-taxable uses in the areas should be limited to government offices or community based facilities such as schools, parks and churches. Under no circumstances should any of these areas be used for any form of state or federal public conservation of recrea-





## Land Use Policy Plan

tion lands, with the possible exceptions of narrow trails or greenway connections that would connect private economic development to open space. The County might support privatization of such state or federal conservation lands in these areas in exchange for acquisition of land by state or federal agencies elsewhere if the growth area tracts involved have potential to increase private sector development. This will be studied on a case by case basis.

**Future Growth Areas** are a new category which was not found in the 1998 Comprehensive Plan. The County has decided to include the future growth area designation as a means to give every township in Forest County an area to plan for private sector growth and development. Public policy for these areas is nearly identical to that of Designated Growth Areas. The County will support and encourage compatible private sector growth and development, but it is expected that the timing of development in these areas may not

occur until the next comprehensive planning cycle. However, preservation of private land in these areas is essential to preserve the ability of each municipality in the County to grow some form of tax base.

**Rural Resource Areas** on the land use policy map are divided into two categories: Private Rural Resource areas and Public Rural Resource areas. Public policy in each area is similar in that no major growth and development is anticipated in these areas, and significant infrastructure expansions to encourage development area not anticipated. Ideal land uses should be centered upon farming, forestry and regulated mineral extraction. The main public policy differentiation is that the conversion of private rural resource areas into public rural resource areas is not consistent with this Comprehensive Plan. Expansion of public grounds must be reviewed by the County Planning Commission in order to be consistent with the MPC. The Planning Commission will review all pro-

posed expansions against the land use policy plan map.

The preservation of Private Rural Resource areas is essential for tax base preservation of the County and its constituent municipalities. These areas also provide a place for intense uses such as mineral extraction to occur without creating land use conflicts with dense residential or commercial development. Residential development can fit onto these areas at low densities (one dwelling unit per acre or lower). Scattered small business can also be a part of healthy private rural resource areas.

Traditional uses in Public Rural Resource areas should be preserved as well. These areas should remain accessible to the citizens who pay taxes to maintain them. Forestry and responsible mineral excavation represent other traditional uses on these lands.



## Land Use Policy Plan Implementation

The first use of the land use policy plan is to serve as a measure of the consistency of actions by the County, its Municipalities, and other governments bodies. For example, the plan may be used to compare recommendations of a Township Act 537 Sewage Facilities Update. It might be used to comment upon a grant proposal by a non profit to a state agency in order to purchase land for public grounds. During the course of this update, local planners began to examine means to strengthen the policy plan through implementation.

Zoning is one common means of implementing a land use plan. At present only one Forest County municipality, the Borough of Tionesta, has adopted a zoning ordinance. There is a good reason for this. Many models of zoning are based upon suburban or urban models that do not fit the reality of land use in rural areas. Urban and suburban zoning often rigidly separate uses into industrial, commercial and various densities of residential use. This approach does not fit a

rural homestead where there might be a single family dwelling (R-1 residential zoning) apartment for grandma (R-2 residential zoning), a beef steer fattening in the back yard (agriculture zone) and a wood-working shop where dad earns his living (industrial zoning). This type of mixed land use pattern is common in rural areas and represents the means for rural families to thrive.

Forest County has been a pioneer in Pennsylvania at adapting urban planning tools to a rural setting. The 1998 Comprehensive Plan was lauded for its innovative use of an urban growth boundary concept to preserve private land for development. The County will make a serious exploration of whether it might adapt the concept of zoning in a way that would preserve local freedom to earn a living upon private property while still implementing the land use policy plan. Mixed use zones can be created to allow a variety of residential and economic activities. Public zones can be created to create a formal process to control expan-

sion of public land uses and preserve key sites for taxable development. There is no statutory exemption from local zoning for many state and federal agencies, who are often subject to local zoning and land development regulations. Counties in Pennsylvania have unique zoning powers. A county is the only type of municipality that can zone only a part of its jurisdiction. However, if a Township wished to adopt stricter zoning, its adoption would result in an automatic repeal of the any County ordinance.

The County may also explore other implementation activities in the future. The County subdivision and land development ordinance may be updated to reflect new approaches to land development. Official mapping might be used to preserve sites for future public grounds or streets if necessary. Whatever these activities might be, they will be based upon the land use concept plan.





## Summary of Actions and Policies

The Land Use Policy Plan Map (map number 6 in the gallery of maps) represents the key policy statement of the Forest County Comprehensive Plan. Based upon this map, the County will encourage land use and development consistent with the concepts of Designated Growth Areas, Future Growth Areas, and Private and Public Rural Resource Areas.

The County will use the land use policy plan as a guide for commenting on a host of activities which are within the purview of its review responsibilities. These reviews will be made in conformity with the Official Use Statement in Chapter 1.

To further implement the land use policy plan, the County will explore development of an innovative zoning ordinance that can achieve goals without creating hurdles to beneficial development and traditional mixed use land use by County residents.

Over time, the County may also explore other approaches to implement the land use plan, including but not limited to official mapping, updates to the subdivision and land development ordinance, or impact fee ordinances.



# Plan for Conservation

## Chapter 4

### Forest County Comprehensive Plan

## Protecting Natural and Historic Resources

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) was amended in 2001 to require that all comprehensive plans contain "A plan for the protection of natural and historic resources to the extent not preempted by federal or state law." The MPC specifies that the natural and historic resources meriting include:

- Wetlands and aquifer recharge zones
- Woodlands
- Steep slopes
- Prime agricultural land
- Floodplains
- Unique natural areas

and historic sites

For Counties, the requirement also includes a specific requirement to plan for agricultural preservation and Identification of a plan for historic preservation. Finally, the MPC specifies that local planning may not exceed the requirements of nine Commonwealth environmental laws, as listed below.

As may be noted below, many of these laws affect mineral extraction and commercial agriculture. The MPC also requires that the

County Comprehensive plan also contain statements noting that lawful activities such as extraction of minerals impact water supply sources and that such activities are governed by statutes regulating mineral extraction that specify replacement and restoration of water supplies and that commercial agriculture production also may impact water supply sources.

This represents the framework for local resource conservation planning.

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### Environmental Laws that Pre-empt Local Planning Powers under the MPC

- Act of June 22, 1937 (P.L.1987, No.394), known as "The Clean Streams Law".
- Act of May 31, 1945 (P.L.1198, No.418), known as the "Surface Mining Conservation and Reclamation Act".
- Act of April 27, 1966 (1st SP.SESSION, P.L.31, No.1), known as "The Bituminous Mine Subsidence and Land Conservation Act".
- Act of September 24, 1968 (P.L.1040, No.318), known as the "Coal Refuse Disposal Control Act".
- Act of December 19, 1984 (P.L.1140, No.223), known as the "Oil and Gas Act".
- Act of December 19, 1984 (P.L.1093, No.219), known as the "Noncoal Surface Mining Conservation and Reclamation Act".
- Act of June 30, 1981 (P.L.128, No.43), known as the "Agricultural Area Security Law".
- Act of June 10, 1982 (P.L.454, No.133), entitled "An Act Protecting Agricultural Operations from Nuisance Suits and Ordinances Under Certain Circumstances".
- Act of May 20, 1993 (P.L.12, No.6), known as the "Nutrient Management Act,"



## General Summary of Resources

Many of Forest County's natural resources are also impediments to development. Many areas of the County have significant steep slopes. Many deep stream channels run through these slopes and create floodplains. Slope and hydrologic patterns are shown on Maps 8 and 9. Development is further constrained by soil types that do not facilitate safe on-lot septic systems. These natural impediments to development are one of the reasons the County has remained rural and undeveloped. These rural resources are also scenic and over time significant parts of the County have been purchased for state, Federal or nonprofit conservation uses (see map 7).

Since the adoption of the 1998 Comprehensive Plan, a natural heritage inventory was undertaken by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. This document was completed in 2007. It notes both geographic areas of special conservation concern and species of concern. This detailed document is available for persons desiring a more comprehensive examination of natural resources. It should be noted that many of the most sensitive areas and resources are largely located on public lands.

The County also has a rich human heritage. Several Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission markers note the large number of Native Ameri-

can towns established along the Allegheny River in the 18th Century. The County also has several properties listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register was created as part of the Historic Preservation Act of 1966, and is administered in Pennsylvania by the Pa. Historic and Museum Commission. It is regarded as the gold standard of historic significance. Listed Properties include the historic cabins at Cook Forest, the Courthouse, the Cook Mansion and the West Hickory Bridge. Known eligible but unlisted properties are illustrated below. The list does not include several eligible highway bridges.

Municipality	Resource Name
Tionesta Borough	Tionesta Historic District
Tionesta Township	Damtenders Dwellings and Tionesta Dam
Tionesta Township	Timber Crib Dam
Jenks Township	Pebble Dell CCC Camp
Jenks Township	Allegheny National Forest Marienville Compound



## Management of Public Lands: Public Ownership Does Not Ensure Conservation

According to the American Forest Inventory, 99% of Forest County is forested and 50% is public lands. What happens on public land can affect the private lands profoundly. Certainly, the assumption that government ownership of land preserves land can be disputed. At best, considering the following examples should illustrate that government ownership and management is no better and can be worse than private land management.

Prime farm land in the Allegheny River Valley is now owned by the Federal Government and part of the Allegheny National Forest, managed by the United States Forest Service. What was once land that was used agriculturally is now growing into scrub brush, and fast becoming dominated by invasive species such as multi-flora rose or Japanese Knotweed. The Allegheny River, a Wild and Scenic River, is managed through a management Plan administered by the U.S. Forest Service. Along the river reach in Forest County, Purple

Loosestrife, an invasive species is spreading quickly. A recent proposal by the Forest County Conservation District to map invasive species along the river was denied with the Forest Service commenting that they had no money to address the invasive species along the river. This typifies the kind of Federal management that residents of Forest County have come to expect, do little or nothing except studies of environmental impact of proposed activities on the Forest.

Some glaring examples of the ineffectiveness of land management by Federal policy may illustrate the legitimacy of criticism. By way of some defense, the Forest Service operates under a multi-layered set of laws, Acts of Congress, and internal policy that too often seem to contradict. Lack of funding also limits the ANF's ability to manage these lands.

With the Wild and Scenic Allegheny River being managed by the U.S. Forest Service, failures regarding invasive

species illustrate the fallacy that government owned or government management is better than on private lands. In the Allegheny River there are several endangered species of freshwater mussels. Being filter feeders, freshwater mussels depend on water that carries a biotic load but is limited in the amount of sediment load carried in the water. The biggest enemy and killer of these mussels is sediment, it can physically cover the mussels or can smother the mussel. Excessive erosion is the primary source of sedimentation in the river. Among the important sources of this excessive sedimentation is river bank destabilization and failure. Yet in the management scheme of the U. S. Forest Service of the Allegheny, there has been a huge decrease in the issuance of permits for stream-bank stabilization. Why? Something called a Section Seven review, part of the Wild & Scenic River Act, dictates that nothing can be done on a designated river that hardens the bank or changes the velocity of a free flowing river. The

***The Forest Service operates under a multi-layered set of laws, Acts of Congress, and internal policy that too often seem to contradict. Lack of funding also limits the ANF's ability to manage these lands.***





## Management of Public Lands, continued

most common bank stabilization technique is the use of rip-rap, large rocks set into the bank which produce a stabile profile. The Forest Service has determined that rip-rap violates the Wild & Scenic River Act and so it can not be used. Private citizen's that have bank failure occurring on their private property end up in conflict with Federal managers when they propose to use cost effective rip-rap to stabilize their land. In short, the Federal managers have opted to use the Wild and Scenic River Act to affect private property activities and by doing so they actually violate the Endangered Species Act because of the cumulative affect on the freshwater mussels. If this were the only case of Federal mismanagement, it could be understood and corrected. That is not the case.

The Timber Rattlesnake is protected in Pennsylvania, as a candidate species for endangered or threatened species listing by the Pennsylvania Fish Commission. In Western PA, reptile researchers have identi-

fied most rattlesnake dens as aging, typified by large individuals and low birth rates. The primary reason for this is that the female timber rattler requires basking sites for most of the summer prior to birth of the baby snakes. Basking sites are places of rocky boulder fields or ledges exposed to sunlight. On the Allegheny National Forest, the forest is maturing, with older trees providing a connected canopy which shades the ground and consequently the basking sites traditionally used by the Timber Rattler. The Allegheny Forest Plan designates overall land management strategies by units, but the recently completed Plan does not fully address the issue of Timber Rattlesnake decline. The National Environmental Protection Act requires public disclosure and comment for proposed management activities. In the case of the Timber Rattler, this would mean providing information to the public about den and basking areas, where management activities would occur. Some citizens could and would use this information to seek out

those areas and to harm the snake. It causes a kind of 'catch 22' situation. The result is that little forest clearing on the south and southwest sides of the traditional basking sites has been proposed or implemented. This is another case where Federal land managers fulfill one law, that of National Environmental Protection Act and yet inadvertently do an injustice to a species that is in decline.

In the case of land management practices on private land, some land owners are very responsible and others completely irresponsible. The difference between private land owner and public landowner management practices is public scrutiny and public comment. The public always has an opinion, but that opinion may be more the result of emotional response rather than scientific data and study. A private landowner can seek out information and expertise in the management of private forested lands and then proceed doing what they think is best. A public land



## Management of Public Lands, continued

manager has many masters overseeing their activity, and some of those overseers are inconsistent with scientific fact. Public land management is complicated, private land management may not be.

Historic preservation is a land management strategy that recognizes the importance of the past. On public lands in Forest County there exist both prehistoric and historic sites. Assuming that government management will respect and preserve the sites may not be wise however. In the Allegheny River Valley, there are ancient American Indian villages as well as historic buildings from the age of European settlement. The Masteller farm, along West Hickory Creek was purchased by the U.S. Forest Service during the 1980's. The farm was known for the amount of horses raised there. The original farm house, a unique fire hose drying building and two ceramic brick silos were still standing when the Forest Service came into possession. Under Federal ownership, the

two silos were destroyed and buried on site. The pit where the rubble was disposed of was an Indian village, with artifacts showing up on the surface during the burial process. Today the house and the unique octagonal fire hose building have fallen down.

Another site in the river valley nearby was the King farm. Prior to federal ownership, the original farm house and barns still stood. As a condition of purchase, the Forest Service told the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (the land owners) to remove the buildings. The largest barn built in Forest County was among the buildings. Visiting prior to destruction, visitors to the barn saw three feet tall mounds of bat guano on the floor. The bat habitat in the surround swamps was exceptional, as was the barn. It all was destroyed without thought to historical significance or ecological importance. Just these two examples illustrate that governmental ownership guarantees nothing, certainly not preservation or stew-

ardship. Under private ownership the same results could have occurred, however, the expectations on what we have been told in regards to government management should have produced far different results. These few examples are the tip of the iceberg and provide one more legitimate reason why public ownership of more land in Forest County is poor land use policy. **(Note: An addendum has been added to the Comprehensive Plan to further discuss the importance of the Allegheny National Forest. This addendum follows Page 87.**





## Plan For Historic Preservation

The County government in Forest County has long prioritized the preservation of historic resources within the County. Considering the small size of the population and commensurate County budget, significant resources have been put towards the preservation of buildings and objects. Examples of this include use of Community Development Block Grant funding to restore the County historical society building, and efforts to renovate the murals accidentally discovered in the Courthouse.

The plan supports continued historic preservation efforts as a means to increase community pride and tourism. The focus of future efforts should be uniquely local.

Some of the most treasured local historic resources are not eligible for the National Register due to physical changes. Conversely, some eligible properties are significant because of relatively obscure engineering history associations. It is recommended that the County estab-



**The Forest County Historical Society office and museum was the beneficiary of funding from Forest County towards the preservation of their building.**

lish its own local database of historic resources. This type of community history project can be undertaken with a relatively small budget and can add to both local pride and the experience of tourists.

Finally, the County strongly supports efforts of state and

Federal bodies to maintain and restore historic structures on their lands. Publicly owned historic structures should not be allowed to crumble.



## Agricultural Preservation Plan

The US Census of Agriculture tracks trends in farmland within the County every five years. The 1998 Comprehensive Plan noted a loss of 9,000 acres of farmland from 1964 to 1992. The number of farms in the same period declined from 99 to 36. Unlike other Pennsylvania Counties, most of this farmland was not lost to development of residential subdivisions or shopping malls. Many farms were simply abandoned, and trees began to take over the untilled fields. Map 10 notes concentrations of prime farmland soils, and many of these are within public lands or private forest lands.

This trend of farm decline has actually been reversed in Forest County by a revival of small scale agriculture. By 1997 the number of farms had further declined to just 34. Reversal began with the 2002 Census of Agriculture. In that year, the County noted presence of 59 farms, the most it has seen since before 1969. The most recent Census of Agriculture notes the presence of 84 farms. This is a surprising trend. In



**Soybean fields on Route 62, just south of East Hickory.**

fact, it might make agriculture the fastest growing industry in the County.

The 1998 Comprehensive plan noted that Red Brush Valley in Tionesta Township was one of the last significant agricultural areas left in the County. Forest County's agrarian revival

seems to be benefiting from a rise in small part time farming activities throughout the County. It should be noted that the USDA Census of Agriculture no longer tracks purely subsistence farms, though these are at least partly commercial operations. The tables on the next page show how many of these new farms have been estab-

***Agriculture may be Forest County's fastest growing industry.***





## Agricultural Preservation Plan, continued

lished and how small in size and income these farms are. Statistics indicate these small farms provide owners with only

**Size of Farms: Forest County 2007**

<b>1 to 9 Acres</b>	6
<b>10 to 49 Acres</b>	18
<b>60 to 179 Acres</b>	44
<b>180 to 499 Acres</b>	12
<b>500+ Acres</b>	2

supplementary income, but this

**Annual Farm Income, Forest County 2007**

<b>Less than \$2,500</b>	48
<b>\$2500-\$4999</b>	12
<b>\$5,000-\$9,999</b>	8
<b>\$10,000-\$24,999</b>	9
<b>\$25,000+</b>	1

is a growth industry in the County. The Source for both of these tables

is the 2007 USDA Census of Agriculture.

Further statistics indicate that these small farms derive their income from small poultry flocks, beef cattle, goats and

berries. There is also reason to believe that this rising number of farms is actually an undercount. Many small farmers do not return the Census and other small farmers are not mailed a form. It is interesting that the Census lists no farmland in orchards, and no farms producing maple syrup. This is probably not correct.

With Agriculture on the rise, the remaining private farmland must be protected from acquisition as public open space lands. There is simply no reason for more farmland to be converted to forest land.

The Census of Agriculture does not track farm trends at the Township or any sub-county level, so it is difficult to know where these farms are, except from land use mapping. Townships are typically the front line in farmland protection in Pennsylvania. The principle means to protect farms at the Township level is through Agriculture Security Areas (ASA). An ASA is a covenant between farmland owners and the Town-

ship. It offers the farmland owner additional protection from nuisance suits by urban oriented neighbors and protection from future township ordinances that would limit normal farming practices. It also offers a higher level of protection from eminent domain by State Agencies. At present, only Tionesta Township has emplaced an Agriculture Security Area. Each Township should be encouraged to examine this tool.

The County can also help and foster this emerging industry. While incomes from farming seem low, when compared to lower household incomes, and the likely value of subsistence produced on farms (vegetables, meat, eggs, and firewood), agriculture is an important economic endeavor to nearly 100 local families. An agricultural economic development strategy might be a means to see what might be done to support the growth of local farms and farmers. This strategy could look at building a local food economy, regulatory barriers, farmers markets, and development of farm support infrastruc-



## Mineral Excavation and Conservation

While there are numerous legal and practical definitions of minerals, the Pa Municipalities Planning Code defines minerals to include any “aggregate or mass of mineral matter, whether or not coherent”. In giving examples, this legal definition explicitly includes both natural gas and oil. For this reason, planning for mineral excavation in the County will include natural gas.

Forest County has been involved in mineral excavation activities since the Civil War era oil boom. Today the County produces natural gas, and non coal minerals, such as stone, sand and gravel.

The County continues to be a leader in conventional shallow well gas extraction. IN 2009/2010, the PA Department of Environmental Protection issued 776 permits for conventional gas wells in the County. The County also has had four deep or unconventional wells drilled within its limits. These wells are primarily exploratory and are being

drilled into deep reserves of Shale Gas. As of this writing, (December 2011) many analysts in Pennsylvania are touting a new boom from unconventional natural gas resources located in the Marcellus and Utica Shale layers.

Forest County lies at the edge of the Marcellus Shale but within the heart of the Utica Shale formation. From preliminary reports exploratory wells in the area, it is likely that there will be increased interest in drilling in Forest County. This can be a tremendous benefit to landowners. Other economic benefits can be more transient, as the Marcellus drilling boom in northeastern Pennsylvania actually overwhelmed many small towns. This diluted some of the local economic benefits (See the work of Penn State Agricultural Economist Tim Kelsey) .

If unconventional wells in Forest County prove to be profitable, infrastructure development to process and move the gas will follow. While this

has its own economic benefits, natural gas processing and compressor stations and similar support uses can create land use conflicts.

One unique aspect of mineral excavation in Forest County is that many tracts of public land have had the mineral rights severed. This means that subsurface owners have rights to enter and extract minerals, and this split estate has been controversial among certain portions of the environmental community. Practically, it means that public agency surface right owners have less ability to manage the impacts of mineral excavation than the County. The County's zoning powers traditionally included the ability to regulate mineral extraction to the extent it does not replicate or exceed state law. The extent of this authority rests in courts at present (see Act 13 sidebar). The County will explore this issue further, particular with regards to minimizing land use conflicts .

### Act 13 of 2012 and the Regulation of Oil and Gas Development

**After the first draft of this plan was completed, Act 13 of 2012 became law. The Act was a response to the growth of unconventional natural gas development in Pennsylvania. The law contains three main parts: reform of statewide setbacks and environmental regulations for oil and gas development, imposition of an impact fee for unconventional wells, and new limits on the ability of local zoning to control certain aspects of oil and gas operations. The local limits were formally challenged by seven municipalities and the Pa. Commonwealth Court made a decision that portions of the Act as applied to municipalities were unconstitutional. The decision was appealed to the Pa. Supreme Court.**

**If the limits of Act 13 are upheld by the PA Supreme Court, there are only a few options for local regulations. If the Act is deemed unconstitutional, a greater diversity of local approaches will remain possible. The outcome is important to Forest County as the case touches upon the limits of any government authority with regards to property.**





## Community Based Land Conservation

The 1998 Comprehensive Plan recommended that the County explore development of a local land trust. This was recommended because management decisions for public lands are often politicized and out of local control. The 1998 plan made the case as follows: *In a worse-case scenario, sound stewardship of private forest lands can also not be assured. It may, thus, be reasonable for Forest County to begin investigation of the formation of a locally based land trust to identify and purchase timberlands as a form of municipal investment. Timberlands managed in a sustainable fashion represent a good long-term investment. No organization can benefit more from long-term investment than municipalities and public agencies, which can be assumed to exist in perpetuity. In the absence of available public timber reserves, and the absence of sound private stewardship, community-based forestry represents a reasonable hope of assuring a continuous local supply of timber. At present, funds exist for*

*the purchase of public lands via the Keystone Initiative. A local land trust should be eligible to apply for, and receive, such funds for acquisition. In the long run, this will also diffuse a second controversy, as outside land trusts have purchased lands in Forest County which were not necessarily in the community's best economic or ecological interest.*

This action was never pursued, primarily due to costs. The idea remains relevant today, as this plan has shown that state or Federal ownership alone is no guarantor of sound natural resources conservation. Keystone funding is no longer available but there are other funding sources. The County could use its official mapping powers to reserve potential public grounds until purchase can be funded.





## **Summary of Key Issues and Policies**

Become an advocate for scientifically based public land management.

Reconsider the concept of forming a locally controlled land trust.

Create a Forest County based register of historic places.

Undertake a County Agricultural Economic Development Plan.

Encourage more use of Agricultural Security Areas for both small farms and private forest lands.

Examine the extent of regulatory concepts to manage the secondary effects of natural gas development and other mineral extraction as permissible under Pennsylvania law.





# Economic Development Plan

## Chapter 5

### Forest County Comprehensive Plan

## Creating Wealth for County Residents

There is no requirement in the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code to plan specifically for economic development. However, Forest County has always prioritized building the local economy as a part of its planning program. The 1998 comprehensive plan asked this question?

*"Why doesn't Forest County look like 1975 as the Land Use Plan desired it to look?" The answer seems to be that economic development patterns did not follow land use planning. It is also important to note that Forest County has done significant planning for economic development, and has seen little tangible benefit. Forest County began the trend of tourism development, which has grown slowly, but steadily. Unfortunately, tourism development, to this point in time, has not brought the widespread prosperity desired by Forest County residents. It has created several entrepreneurial opportunities, but no*

*widespread employment base. Other communities faced with these problems have undertaken a pattern of economic development activities referred to commonly as "smokestack chasing." In this model, communities, public utilities, and various agencies of local government undertake to attract industrial businesses to locate within their jurisdiction. This form of development is highly competitive, involves expensive marketing, and most important, the provision of public subsidies (such as tax incentives) for new jobs created. This text from 1998 still echoes true today. A recent article called by Marjorie Kelly entitled "Creating Rural Wealth" noted that Trying to "attract" jobs to rural communities has never worked for most places. Development is a do it yourself job — and the process begins with a plan for building wealth. (The article in full can be found at <http://www.dailyyonder.com/creating-rural-wealth/2011/10/23/3571>)*

County leaders have recognized that they have a difficult time competing with larger, richer, more accessible counties in offering subsidized business park sites. This should not mean that there is no place for economic development. This plan recommends a revisit of policies from the 1998 plan, which center on building the local economy from within. This type of approach can emphasize every sector including

Agriculture  
Tourism  
Retail  
Forest Products  
Mineral Excavation  
Manufacturing

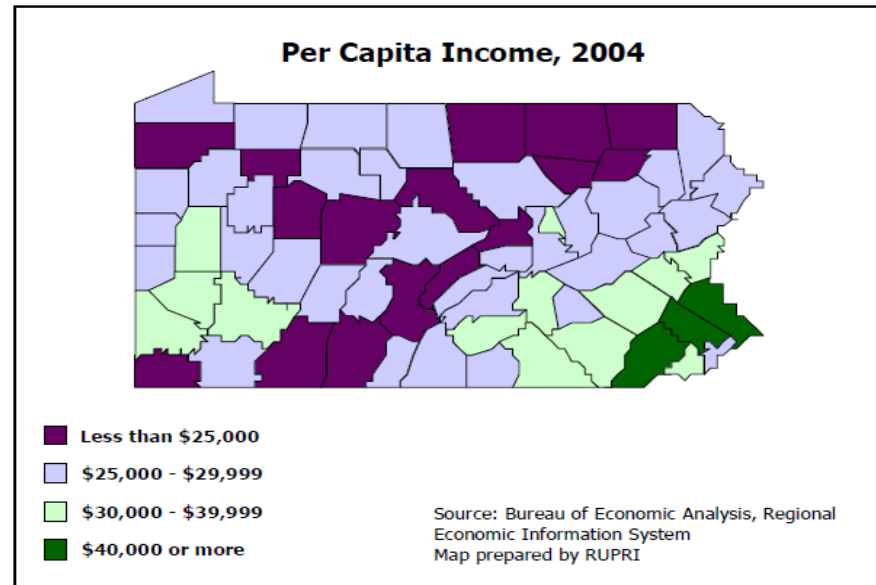
Certainly outside assistance is still critical; especially for infrastructure and major capital improvements. This chapter concludes with some specific projects where outside financial help will be essential to realize economic goals.

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## Household Economics

Measurement of economic health begins at the household level. Data is available from the Census of 2010 and the allied American Community Survey to measure household economics. County residents have lower incomes than the statewide norm, are more likely to be unemployed, and more likely to be living in poverty than the average Pennsylvanian. The Estimated median annual household income in 2009 for the County was \$34,055. This compares to the statewide median of \$49,520. The income gap between the average Forest Countian and the average Pennsylvanian is \$15,465. This is somewhat mitigated by the County's lower cost of living. The December 2009 cost of living index in Forest County: 87.2 (less than average, U.S. average is 100). However, median household income would need to be \$38,414 to close the gap. The percent of residents below poverty line estimated for 2009 is 16.4 % and compares to a statewide rate of 11.0 percent. This trend is long term, as shown by the 2004 per capita data in the map above and data from the



1998 Comprehensive Plan. Part of the income gap is due to occupational patterns.  
Five most common female occupations:

Waiters and waitresses (7%)  
Cooks and food preparation workers (6%)  
Material recording, scheduling, dispatching, and distributing workers (5%)  
Secretaries and administrative assistants (5%)  
Nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides (5%)

Five Most Common Male Occupations:

Driver/sales workers and truck drivers (8%)

Laborers and material movers, hand (7%)

Metal workers and plastic workers (6%)

Other production occupations including supervisors (6%)

Electrical equipment mechanics and other installation, maintenance, and repair occupations including supervisors (6%)



## Government Effect Upon Local Economics

A partial explanation for lower household incomes in the County is the age of residents. As noted in the land use plan chapter, Forest County residents are more likely to be over the age of 65 and thus more likely to be retired. Because of this, a major source of local income is not wage and salary, but transfer of payments by the Federal government to residents. County residents of working age are more likely to work for Federal, State or Local Government than Pennsylvanians as a whole. When retirees and government workers are combined, the result is that USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) typology rates Forest as one of only five PA counties where government is the dominant factor in the economy. There are also only two counties in Pennsylvania (Forest and Venango) where transfer of payments exceed 30 percent of total personal income (combined income for all persons)

### Class of Worker

Class of worker	Forest County	Co. Percent	PA Percent	US Percent
Private Wage and Salary Workers	1254	70.3%	82.3%	78.6%
Government Workers	369	20.7%	11.7%	14.6%
Self Employed	155	8.7%	5.8%	6.6%

Note: Table does not include certain classes of family and domestic workers.

### Sources of Household Income

Households	Forest County	Co. Percent	PA Percent	US Percent
With wage income	1285	64.6%	77.0	80.1
With Social Security Income	996	50.1%	31.2	27.1
With Cash Public Assistance	58	2.9	3.1	2.4
With SNAP or Food Stamps in last 12 month of survey date	206	10.4	8.2	8.5

Data Source for both tables : American Community Survey 2005-2009



## Summary of Business Trends

The United States Census Bureau tracks the number of business establishments, their employees and payroll for every County in the nation each year. In 1998, the year the last comprehensive plan was adopted, Forest County had 147 business establishments, 1,020 employees and an annual payroll of \$19.4 million dollars. By 2009, There were only 111 establishments, though employees were up slightly to 1,180. Payroll increased to \$32.7 million dollars. Average wages were thus about \$19,022 per employee in 1998, and 27,711 in 2009. If the 1998 wage were adjusted for inflation it would be 24,917.79, so workers did stay ahead of inflation. As this counts establishments and their employees, it must be noted that all employees of County business are not County residents. The economic impact of a nonresident worker can be minimal or substantial, dependent upon a wide variety of circumstances. Many industries saw greater consolidation, and there were losses in key sectors such as construction. The largest employment sec-



**There has been slight long term growth in the accommodation and food sector in the County.**

tors are now various health care and social assistance businesses.

Retail Trends are somewhat less encouraging. In 1998 the County had 35 retail stores large enough to have a payroll. By 2009, this had dropped to 17. . There was a rise in accommodation and food business from 22 to 24 establishments over the

eleven year period.

Retail sales are measured on five year increments, and they illustrate that many County residents and tourists are shopping outside the County. Per capita retail sales in 2002 were \$3,619 for Forest County. This is barely a third of the statewide per capita of \$10,603



## Re-localizing economic development

During the town hall meetings, several attendees spoke about the importance of residents patronizing local business. Business in the County are currently looking at forming a business alliance. If this happens, it must be supported by a focused buy local campaign that effects all sectors of the economy. County residents should be encouraged to ask:

Who is your farmer?  
Who is your merchant?  
Who is your bank?

It should be a matter of pride that County residents buy local. Pragmatically, it can also keep taxes lower as local business help subsidize the school district through their property taxes. By re-localizing these sectors of the economy County residents can grow their own jobs.

Further re-localizing can be based upon the County's unique base of natural resources. Wood products manufacturing need not be at a large capital intensive scale. Imag-



**Local small business remain the heart of the County economy. Who is your merchant?**

ine the effect of 10 small wood products businesses that each employed 5 people on the entire local economy? Possibilities for product lines are endless. There is even a burgeoning industry in the US making traditional hardwood or pine coffins! The main obstacle is a

deficit in local skills and training, and micro level capital. These are the areas where future efforts could be directed. The County could begin by offering real estate tax abatement though LERTA to micro level businesses who build within the County.

## Local Economy Versus Community Character

In re-localizing economic development, County leaders face tremendous challenges. One challenge is capital; is there local capital available, or it is possible to attract outside capital? In declining poorer areas local capital is normally not available in sufficient quantity, but it has a significant advantage in that local capital has a vested interest in the “look” of economic development and a desire to hire locally. Outside capital has more resources, but less concern about community character or local hiring. This difficult dichotomy can be seen through the eyes of Tionesta downtown merchants. One complaint raised by local business owners in Tionesta is lack of traffic, specifically people walking into stores to spend money. Higher vehicular and foot traffic is seen as the answer to more sales among downtown merchants. The outside capital solution might be some national chain store or a locally owned business, which could facilitate traffic to the local downtown. A so-called “anchor” store would be easily recognized by consumers, provide goods, service or food of a known quality and provide welcome tax revenue. Local consumers would like the convenience and out-of-towners would see a familiar business. The down side of such a solution for Tionesta would be the impact on existing merchants, and the limited likelihood that such a chain store would even be interested in locating in the town. Another source of capital to develop the downtown is from government funds. Again, decisions as to what kind of facilities and businesses are being targeted needs to consider impacts to the character of the town as well as the impacts upon existing businesses. After ten years with empty lots, a sense of desperation might cause decision makers to jump at some ‘good thing’ without considering all the ramifications involved. Caution needs to be applied prior to development of any business sector in The County’s towns.



## Tourism Development Plan

Tourism and Forest County  
Reviewing past studies and the current tourism initiatives, it becomes apparent that Forest County has its own story to tell - one that has yet to be fully explored – just like the County itself. From the outset, the development of Forest County was driven by what by all accounts was the annexation of a portion of Jefferson County by joint resolution of the Pennsylvania Legislature in 1848. In 1866 the county expanded west and the Borough of Tionesta became the county seat and many residents still perpetuate sentiments such as the “*two sides of Forest County*”. Forest County is among the least populated counties in Pennsylvania and is known (and loved) for its expansive natural landscapes. Located in northwestern Pennsylvania, the County by its very name exemplifies the wilderness concept behind tourism marketing initiatives such as the Pennsylvania Wilds, the Lumber Heritage Region, the Oil Heritage Region, and the Wild and Scenic Rivers program.



**Forest County is part of the multi-County Pa wilds tourism area.**

Tourism can be big business and significant amounts of money across rural communities have been invested to improve public infrastructure and build private partnerships. The Pennsylvania Wilds (PA Wilds)

offers a case study of government creating the atmosphere for business growth with over \$126 Million in state spending from 2002 to 2009 within 12 Counties. Forest County received \$1 Million for ATV and





## Tourism Development Plan

snowmobile trails in the Allegheny National Forest as well as trail improvements in Cornplanter State Forest.

However, tourism as any other industry must be carefully managed in order to grow the local supply chain and benefit host communities. Forest County has documented the fiscal challenges presented by the predominance of public lands and its corresponding limitation to generate tax revenues. Recently, Forest County, through the NW Planning Commission, completed a Greenways study. The document includes a Forward authored by Forest County government that serves as a mission statement for striking a balance between public and private interests.

To understand the opportunities associated with tourism, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) in April 2011 sent eight people to represent Forest County at an economic development workshop sponsored by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The workshop “Balancing Nature and Com-



**An important change in tourism has been the growth of off-road vehicle (ORV) enthusiasts. For some business, ORV users have replaced hunters and fishermen as important sources of tourist dollars.**

merce in Communities that Neighbor Public Lands” brought in renowned experts to speak to sustainable economic development centered upon community character and strategic planning for nature-based tourism. The Forest County team consisted of eight individuals

representing County and Municipal Government, tourism, and K-12 Education. The majority of the team members were County residents with one individual from the State Park system and a second representing the planning consultant retained to prepare the Forest



## Tourism Development Plan

County Comprehensive Plan update.

During the course of the three-day workshop, the participants were challenged to view their community through the eyes of a stranger. Many of the group heard Ted Eubanks of Fermata Inc. speak for the first time of “nature tourism product development” and how Forest County is rich with opportunity. Ed McMahon with the Urban Land Institute focused on ways that communities can strategically direct development to drive economic revitalization. Even after the formal lessons, the Forest County team was busy cataloguing the challenges and opportunities available to them. The Team envisioned Forest County valued for natural escapes and a small-town character, which would be used to direct economic development and target marketing. The group quickly realized that the story of Forest County is not well known nor are people aware of the diversity of activities available. This coupled by a lack of infrastructure both physical and technological

were identified as challenges to economic growth based upon tourism.

Forest County has limited service and retail establishments to accommodate visitors (i.e. hotels, restaurants, shops) and struggles to capture the through traffic generated by visitors to the ANF, rivers, and state parks. Without creating the type of environment that makes people want to stop, shop, and stay, Forest County will not benefit from tourism in any measurable fashion. Two strategic locations have been identified consistently in previous planning studies as having opportunity for expanded business and industry development – Tionesta and Marienville (Jenks Township). Both locations also complement recommendations made in planning studies for greenways, tourism, trail development, and transportation improvements.

Action: Establish land use policies &/or regulations that will support private capital investments and retain productive land for tax

generation purposes.

Action: Direct state funding to leverage dollars for public infrastructure improvements – i.e. signing/wayfinding, parking, storm water. Priority locations include those identified on the project list

Action: Plan regionally, implement locally

Participate in the NW Commission programs for transportation planning.

Direct enhancement dollars &/or expand maintenance programming to support streetscape enhancements to the Borough of Tionesta and Village of Marienville

Participate in the PA Wilds Planning Team. Use this forum to understand regional issues and have a voice to DCNR.

Partner with Warren, Venango, and Elk counties on regional tourism initiatives Gather data on local tourism market to understand changing demograph-





## Tourism Development Plan

ic of visitors and seasonal residents

Action: Establish a destination plan for Forest County marketed around the variety of activities and its rich heritage, which includes:

The Civilian Conservation Corps Camp

Off road motor vehicles at private facilities and the ANF

Family-oriented activities at the State and Federal destinations

Implement streetscape projects for Tionesta and Marienville. This will help create two centers for tourist oriented retail, food services and accommodations.

Action: Target the development of small wood products manufacturing as a potential for tourist development and local employments.

## Economic Development Priority Projects

While many small economic development activities can be self funded, major infrastructure to support community and business needs will require outside assistance. As part of the Comprehensive plan process. The conclusion of this plan chapter contains 17 priority projects. Each was selected by local leaders based upon local need and its positive impact upon the local economy if completed.



## Priority Projects

Project Number	Name	Importance	Probable Cost
1	Communication Tower Replacement/Upgrade: Phase 1. (Marienville, Jenks Township)	Infrastructure to support public safety and economic development	\$150,000
2	Communication Tower Replacement/Upgrade: Phase 2. (Marienville, Jenks Township)	Infrastructure to support public safety and economic development	\$170,000
3	Marienville Train Station Revitalization Project (Phase 1: Deed Research, Legal Feasibility)	Economic Development: Tourism and Retail	\$10,000
4	Forest County Fiscal Analysis and Survey (wage survey, industry strengths & growth areas, fiscal impacts of tourism)	Economic Development: Tourism and Retail	\$50,000
5	Pre-feasibility study of Canoe Launch Tionesta Creek (Howe Township)	Economic Development: Tourism and Retail	\$15,000
5	Improve Clarion River Access Point in Barnett Township (SR 899)	Economic Development: Tourism and Retail	TBD
6	Pre-feasibility study of CCC Camp (Jenks Township)	Economic Development: Tourism	\$20,000
7	Sewer Extension for Marienville/Jenks Township (Phases 1-3)	Infrastructure to support public health and economic development	Consultant cost
	Phase 1- 1.5 miles along US 66 from Birch St/66		
	Phase 2 – 0.7 miles		
	Phase 3 – 1.1 miles Us 66 & 0.7 miles on SR 899		
8	Marienville KOEZ – Site improvements Phase 1: Design and Bid Documents (parking lot on 16.2 acre site)	Economic Development: Industry	\$15,000





## Priority Projects, continued

9	Marienville KOEZ – Phase 2: Construction of site improvements (parking lot on 16.2 acre site)	Economic Development: Industry	TBD
10	Marienville Train Station Revitalization Project (Phase 2: Feasibility/Reuse Study)	Economic Development: Tourism and Retail	\$50,000
11	Marienville Train Station Revitalization Project (Phase 3: Acquisition/Renovation)	Economic Development: Tourism and Retail	TBD
12	SR 62, 948, 666, River Road PA Byway Corridor Study	Economic Development: Tourism and Retail	\$30,000 - \$50,000
13	Tionesta/FCIDC Site Development 1.3 acres	Economic Development: Tourism and Retail	\$900,000
14	Tionesta School Redevelopment Project Phase 1: Reuse Feasibility Study	Economic Development: Tourism and Retail	\$50,000
15	Tionesta School Redevelopment Project Phase 2: Site Development	Economic Development: Tourism and Retail	\$700,000
16	Sewer Project Harmony Township, Hickory Township	Economic Development: Tourism and Retail	Consultant cost
17	Waterline Replacement Project (Tionesta)	Infrastructure to support public safety and economic development	Consultant cost



# Plan for Housing

## Chapter 6

### Forest County Comprehensive Plan

## Residential development as Economic Development

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Codes specifies that a housing plan must be “A plan to meet the housing needs of present residents and of those individuals and families anticipated to reside in the municipality”.

The county’s 1998 comprehensive plan listed three major issues facing the county – the need for elderly housing alternatives, fair housing and concerns with seasonal housing.

The 1998 plan found no regulatory barriers to fair housing. As there have been no changes to local regulations, it is safe to assume this is still the case. Also, from 2004 through 2010, there were no fair housing complaints registered with the Pennsylvania Human Rights Commission for Forest County, so fair housing does not appear to be a pertinent issue today.

As a result, meeting the housing needs of elderly residents



**Forest County offers many people their dream house; the proverbial “cabin in the woods”. This can be a key to community revitalization.**

and seasonal-related housing issues remain as the two consistent areas of concern, and are the main subjects of this policy plan. Beyond that is the simple concept that Forest County’s rural housing stock offers people of all ages a chance for a very old vari-

ation of the American dream, a cabin in the woods. In this manner, housing policies can be a means to attract new residents and contribute to economic revitalization

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## Key Housing Trends

The most important housing trend is that the County's population is aging. In the 2010 census, there were 1,418 people aged 65 and older, comprising 18.4 percent of the population. This compares to 15.6 percent statewide. In addition, Forest's median age is 45 years, compared to 38 years in Pennsylvania as a whole. This trend is due to two factors, the first is the effect of long term out migration by young people. Married homeowners in the County are more likely to age in place, while the young leave to seek economic opportunity elsewhere. The second reason is due to in-migration. As mentioned in previous chapters, Forest County has become a retirement home destination.

Residents are aware of these trends and recognize the need to act. Exit surveys of residents who attended this plan's public input sessions indicate that 45 percent of respondents were "somewhat concerned" by a lack of elderly housing.



**Elderly Housing in Tionesta Borough [www.coniferliving.com](http://www.coniferliving.com)**

Second, despite a older population that is not growing naturally, the number of housing units has actually grown in the last 20 years. In 1990, there were 8,445 dwelling units, 8,701 in 2000 and 8,760 in 2010, an average gain of 6 dwellings per year from 2000 to 2010.

Third, the conversion of seasonal units (hunting camps) to year-round use has continued. In 2000, 6,560 units, or 75.4 percent, were seasonal. By 2010, that number had declined to 5,962 or 68 percent of the total. (By way of perspective, the percentage of homes that are classified as seasonal



## Key Housing Trends , continued

statewide is 3 percent.) Additionally, the 2010 census showed there were 2,511 occupied dwelling units – a 71.3 percent vacancy rate. This is a drop from the 2000 census, where the vacancy rate was 77 percent.

The conversion pressure highlights some issues related to the fourth major trend – a growing awareness among the population regarding the quality of the housing. Some residents at town hall meetings have ex-

pressed concerns about low quality housing. According to exit surveys submitted during public input, 42 percent were “somewhat concerned,” about dilapidated housing and 37 percent were “very concerned.”

Some local government officials echo that, contending that building code enforcement is lacking and property maintenance codes are needed.

In addition, the historic development of hunting camps took place on postage-stamp lots

that don’t meet today’s needs for on-lot sewage disposal, which can lead to environmental concerns such as polluted wells.

### Key Housing Changes

#### Summary

**Rental ratios have grown, but these remain below statewide norms. In 2000, 82.7 percent of occupied dwelling units in the county were owner-occupied; by 2010, that ratio dropped to 81 percent. Statewide, 71.3 percent of occupied dwelling units were owner-occupied in 2000; that number was 70 percent in 2010.**

**Gross rental costs are rising but also are comparatively low; the median cost was \$337 per month in 2000, and \$445 per month in 2010. The statewide median in 2010 was \$763.**

**Home values are rising. In 2000, the median Forest County home value was \$57,300 and in 2010, it rose to \$79,700. The statewide median value in 2010 was \$165,500.**

**The number of total households in 2010 was 2,511.  
The number of families in 2010 was 1,488.**

***Source: 2000 and 2010 Census data, 2010 ACS Estimates***



## Housing Policy Plan

The first goal of this housing plan is to meet the changing housing needs of older residents.

The traditional route in elderly housing is nursing homes or personal care homes. In this regard, the county's offerings are somewhat lacking. There is a 100-bed nursing home in Marienville, but Tionesta doesn't have one of its own. For this reason, this plan recommends support of additional housing for persons over the age of 55.

Though the typical nursing home setting is still a popular and necessary mode of care for seniors today, in-home care is becoming more prevalent as residents prefer to stay at home and independent as long as possible. It is also less expensive and is being promoted by insurance companies and Medicare as an alternative to institutional-based care.

In-home care includes services such as delivered meals, assistance with bathing, eating, shopping, transportation and other necessities, and respite care, which provides relief for



**There has been some growth in housing along riverfront properties. The Land Use Plan encourages this trend where such development would not impact floodplains. Even modest growth in new year-round housing will have a very positive effect upon local tax base.**

family and friends who provide care. All of these services are offered in the county through the senior service centers and vendors, and it should be further encouraged and assisted as possible.

In addition, Community Development Block Grant funding assistance should be explored

as an avenue for low- to moderate-income seniors to make accessibility modifications such as ramps to their residences to help them to remain as independent as possible.

The second goal of this housing plan is to deal with the issues surrounding seasonal





## Housing Policy Plan, continued

housing. Some officials suggest the housing is unsafe, unsanitary or otherwise unlivable, and it often serves to depress housing values.

For new housing, the issue should be muted. Since the last comprehensive plan, the state instituted a statewide building code and gave local municipalities the option to not administer the building code locally. According to a Center for Rural Pennsylvania October 2010 study, 93 percent of all Pennsylvania municipalities – and 91 percent of rural municipalities – opted to take responsibility for UCC enforcement and administration. Of Forest County's eight municipalities, only Harmony Township opted out of enforcement, and many of the communities came together under the Council of Governments to administer the code.

To promote consistent and effective enforcement, the county may consider offering assistance via serving as a mediator with the state Department of Labor and Industry and Department of Community and Economic Development on interpretation and implementation

of building code-related regulations.

For property maintenance-related issues of existing housing, there are several potential remedies.

First, a caveat. There is a resistance in Forest County to government regulation of one's own property: It's no one else's business how one chooses to live in his own home. However, there is still a community interest in maintaining properties from a value and public safety standpoint.

To balance the need to preserve and protect lives and property with the reality that some forms of enforcement will not be accepted, municipalities can try a general property maintenance or nuisance codes dealing strictly with exterior issues, which could be tailored to a particular community's desires.

Or, communities could regulate rental housing, taking the position that once a property is opened up for rental to the general public, there is a community interest that certain basic standards of habitability are held to since the tenants don't

control the quality of the structures themselves.

The county should assist municipalities wishing to address housing quality concerns by assembling sample property-maintenance, housing or rental inspection ordinances for rural communities.

Another issue with seasonal housing has nothing to do with the quality, but the small lot sizes of historic development. Both to keep costs down, and simply because the use of seasonal camps never required much land, the lots were kept small.

But with conversion of the lots to full-time housing, and with the additional amenities and expanded use of some camps, larger lots are necessary. The county should encourage the enlargement of lots in these older developments. The county has made it administratively easier for subdivisions that expand lot size or erase lot lines. Further means to encourage lot consolidation will be pursued.



## Summary of Key Policies and Actions

- Recognizing that the population is aging, and Forest County is becoming a increasingly popular retirement home destination, the County will support continued efforts to broaden housing choice for older residents. The County will support efforts to construct elderly housing in identified growth and future growth areas. Such housing should provide a full range of continuing care options so that older citizens may remain within the community as their housing and daily care needs change.
- As funding is available, the County supports efforts to develop assistance for elderly residents who wish to remain in their homes but may need assistance with transportation and other needs.
- The County supports continued development of new low density, single family dwellings in both private rural resource areas and identified growth and future growth areas. In particular, private lands along river fronts areas that are not impacted by slope or floodplain would provide a setting that would add value to residential investment. River front housing can be accommodated in a manner that is environmentally sensitive to the County's rural resources.
- Whether on a river front or in an upland area, new housing should be constructed on larger lots to ensure that adequate on-lot water and sewage disposal can be provided. The County will examine land development policies encourage lower density than the historic pattern of substandard lots, consistent with rural resource area densities contained within the Pa. Municipalities Planning Code of no more than one dwelling unit per acre.
- The County will continue to pursue means to further encourage the consolidation of substandard lots that area too small to meet on-lot sewage disposal regulations
- The County will examine the effect of statewide building code regulations upon townships and its possible role as a mediator .
- The County supports efforts by constituent municipalities to establish basic housing property maintenance, rental ordinances and nuisance ordinances. The County Planning Commission will search for and collect ordinances that are appropriate for small rural townships.



# Plan for Community Facilities

## Chapter 7

### Forest County Comprehensive Plan

## Community Facilities Attract Citizens and Investment

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code states that the County Comprehensive plan must contain *A plan for community facilities and utilities, which may include public and private education, recreation, municipal buildings, fire and police stations, libraries, hospitals, water supply and distribution, sewerage and waste treatment, solid waste management, storm drainage, and flood plain management, utility corridors and associated facilities, and other similar facilities or uses.* Since the first County Comprehensive Plan in 1975, the County and its municipalities have worked hard to establish and maintain as many community facilities and services as possible with a small rural population. The 1998 plan noted that *community facilities represent another area where Forest County has made some real progress since the 1975 Comprehensive Plan. Through the Community Development*

*Block Grant Program, and other funds, Forest County has reinvested in itself. Examples have included emergency services, bridges, and water and sewer. Perhaps the greatest shortcoming of this program has been that many in the County do not know of its successes. For example, it would be informative for the entire community to know of the leveraging of outside funds which made the Jenks Township sewer system a reality. A second success which needs to be publicized is the ability of volunteers within the community to get things done. For example, the Marienville area maintains a swimming pool, park system, and library, largely as a volunteer effort. Tionesta does the same with its beach and library. Communities larger than all of Forest County have been unable to develop public swimming areas.*

This investment, whether by local government or volunteers, is cru-

cial. In a free society, people vote with their feet and choose to live and work in a community that meets their needs and desires. Often, the services that communities offer – such as public water and sewer or police and fire protection, play a large role in those decisions. Consequently, communities must regularly assess the levels and costs of the services they provide so that they are commensurate with their goals for what type of place they want to be.

Though Forest County has a very small population, it continues to improve and maintain a highly competitive share of community facilities and services. This chapter will discuss the history, status, needs and recommendations for improvements in major segments of community facilities program in order to attract residents. In spite of many successes, there remain significant challenges.

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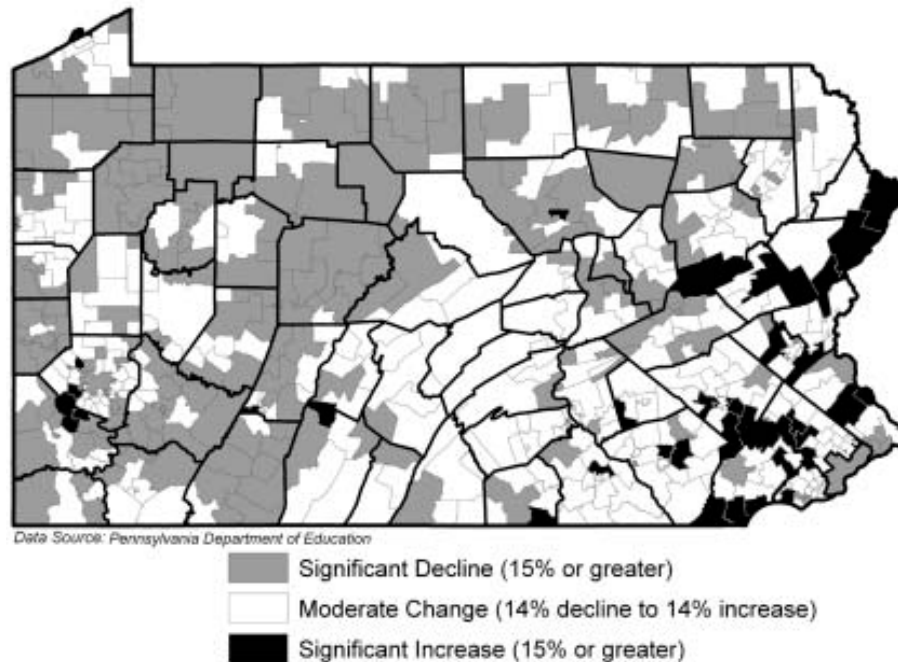


## School District Enrollment Declines

Among the most significant issues facing the County's maintenance of community facilities is the School District, which is facing enrollment declines. The Forest Area School District epitomizes the struggles facing rural public schools across the state. Its duty to educate all children in the county and the pressure to do so at the lowest cost leads to an ever-evolving struggle to balance the competing mandates.

The district is divided into East Forest and West Forest, with K-12 schools in Marienville and Tionesta.

The fundamental challenge to the school district is declining enrollment (See Table in sidebar). The 2006-2007 school year saw an enrollment of 644. For the 2011-2012 school year, there were 535 students. The state Department of Education projects that enrollment will continue to steadily decline through the next decade, and by the 2020-2021 school year, the enrollment will be 444. East Forest has been relatively more stable than West Forest.



This map of statewide enrollment trends: 2002-2012, show that Forest County is not alone (Map Source: Pa. Department of Education)

A more moderate drop is reflected in statewide trends. This generally represents the aging of the state's population; however, declining enrollment is more pronounced in the state's rural counties, as shown above.

A growing trend is posing another drag on the district: The rise of cyber/charter schools

and homeschooling. Districts are required to provide payment for students in their areas who attend the cyber/charter schools. In 2009-2010, the cost was nearly \$310,000 for 26 students who attended cyber/charter schools that year. The cost is characterized as "devastating" by school officials, especially as the state

**Forest County School District Historic and Projected Enrollment**

Year	Enrollment
2006-2007	644
2007-2008	604
2008-2009	569
2009-2010	540
2010-2011	527
2011-2012	509
2012-2013	495
2013-2014	490
2014-2015	482
2015-2016	473
2016-2017	481
2017-2018	465
2018-2019	463
2019-2020	454
2020-2021	444



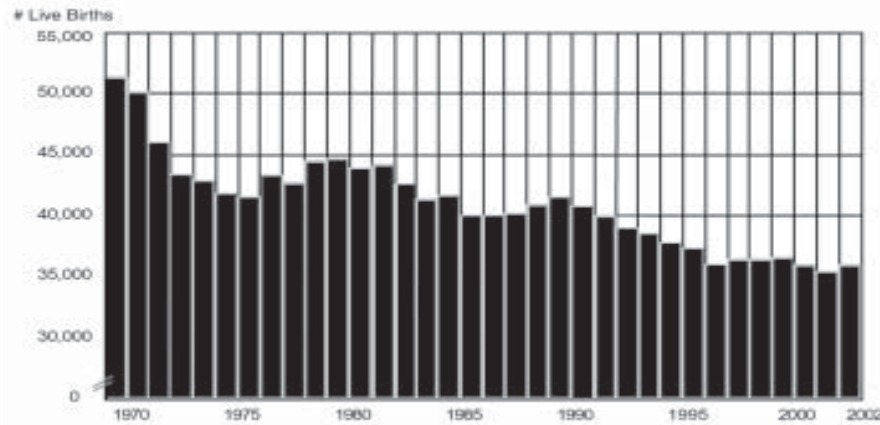
## School District Enrollment Decline, Continued

recently eliminated reimbursement to public school districts for the expense. (The board has raised its property tax millage rate consistently for many years and only expects that to continue.)

In an effort to head off loss of students, the district started its own cyber school in the 2010-11 school year. In its first year, the school had about a half-dozen students enroll and one finish the year. In the 2011-12 year, no students enrolled. However, the students who left the cyber program didn't go to other cyber/charter schools; they either returned to traditional school or moved from the area.

In addition, the district is working with state legislators to ensure all types of schools must meet the same standards.

Going forward, the enrollment decline will translate into reduced state funding, even as the district has fixed costs that will only rise. The state provides 42 percent of the District's budget, so the uncertainty over the future of state fund-



Live Births in Rural Pennsylvania Counties, 1970-2002 show that declining birthrates and lack of in-migration are the source of school district declines in the region. (Chart Source: Center For Rural Pennsylvania)

ing is another major challenge – as it is for districts across the state.

For the 2011-2012 school year, the state budget cuts to school districts greatly impacted the district, netting a \$250,000 reduction, and indications are that future funding levels – apart from funding reductions based on declining enrollment numbers – will stay flat or decrease further.

The district was able to avoid furloughs of faculty and staff and elimination of educational programs primarily by cutting hours of part-time aides and reducing busing costs through combination or alteration of routes. Discussion of cutting the staff of 94 is difficult; Forest is already at a bare-bones staffing level. In fact, there is only one teacher per grade level at each school, so any teacher cuts would result in a combination of grade levels or the elimi-

**Going forward, the enrollment decline will translate into reduced state funding, even as the district has fixed costs that will only rise.**



## School District Enrollment Decline, Continued

nation of programs such as arts or athletics.

A significant handicap is the presence of the Allegheny National Forest (ANF), which occupies much of the district's taxing area. As the ANF is tax-exempt and the district relies heavily on property tax receipts, the ANF has a tremendous impact on the district's finances. Since 1908, the federal government has provided funding to counties and school districts hosting national forests to make up in part for the lost tax.

However, the future of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act (the federal program that currently provides the funding) is uncertain and federal payments may revert to a previous formula that provided counties and districts 25% of timber sales proceeds from the national forest. However, those payments will not compare as the timbering activity has diminished along with the value of the timber that is harvested. One natural cost-cutting suggestion in a district with de-

creasing enrollment is merger; why would a district with only 535 students need two schools? Indeed, the consolidation of East and West Forest schools has been discussed on and off for many years.

However, two major factors argue against that point. First, the district is geographically one of Pennsylvania's largest, with the two schools nearly 30 miles apart. Closing one school would only increase the time students are spent on buses, with some trips already more than an hour long.

Second, both the Marienville and Tionesta areas value their local schools and the identity they symbolize, and so oppose talk of school merger. Some Marienville residents indicated in the public input process that the closure of East Forest would be part of a "worst future" for the area.

There's been no serious discussion of merger by district officials recently, according to interviews with school officials.

The decline in enrollment doesn't translate into a poor academic record. The county's

schools fared well in several benchmarks maintained by the state Department of Education. Each of the schools reached their adequate yearly progress in 2010 and 2011 as established by the state and for 2009-2010, the preliminary four-year cohort graduation rate for Forest was 98 percent, compared to 78.73 percent statewide.

Also, the district has newly-updated facilities: East Forest School, built in 1949, was renovated in 2002. The West Forest facility was built in 1982 and updated in 2006.

A healthy and successful district is critical to the health of the county has a whole. The district is not only important in terms of educating the county's children, but it's also one of the largest employers and purchasers in the county.

The district may be forced to lobby the federal government to restore Secure Rural Schools funding and to work with the county and local industry officials to increase timber harvesting, which is another objec-

Forest is already at a bare-bones staffing level. In fact, there is only one teacher per grade level at each school, so any teacher cuts would result in a combination of grade levels or the elimination of programs such as arts or athletics.





## School District Enrollment Decline, Continued

tive of this plan. This would both provide additional local jobs and tax revenue.

The district may be able to exploit its cyber school as an engine for cost-savings. In a district as rural as Forest, it may prove to be an excellent way to reduce busing costs while also capturing those students who may feel traditional public school doesn't meet their needs. This initiative would be somewhat contingent on im-

proving the county's internet connection infrastructure, which is another goal of this plan.

Without significant changes to land use and economic development patterns, the district must continue to be creative in exploring new funding sources (the district succeeded in securing \$269,306 in grants in 2010) and continued cost-cutting. This may include consideration of a combination of grade levels, merger of schools or elimination

of extracurricular programs to find a level of sustainability. But any such changes should not be so drastic as to make the schools – and thus the county – less attractive to potential residents, resulting in a further decline in population and continuation of a downward spiral.

### What is the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act?

In 1908, the federal government created a program to share 25 percent of National Forest timber sales revenues generated with the counties and school districts where the timber came from to compensate for large amounts of tax-exempt federal land occupied by the National Forests. For 80 years, those payments provided counties with funding for services such as education and infrastructure. However, by the 1990s timber harvests declined, and as a result the payments dropped. This led Congress to pass the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act. Under the act, the federal government provided so-called “transition payments” over six years while efforts were made to increase timber production. It was extended in 2008 and expired September 30, 2011. There were 662 counties that received funding under the act in 2011.

*Sources: U.S. House natural resources committee and Secure Rural Schools web site.*

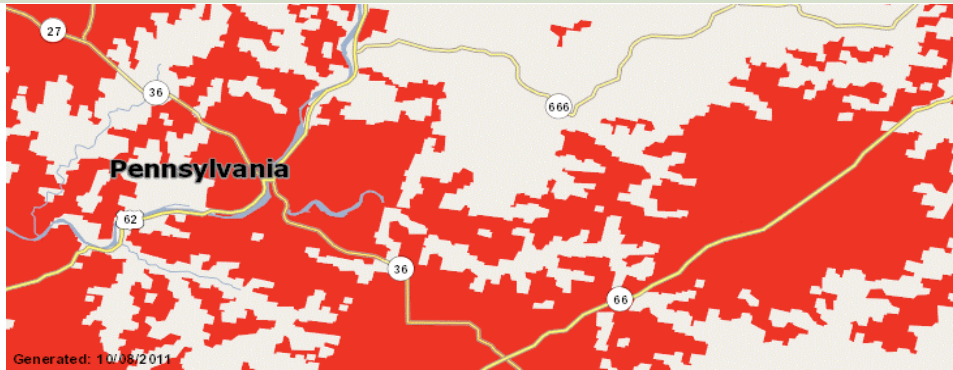


## The County Lacks Digital and Telecommunications infrastructure

Despite efforts at both the state and federal levels, many rural areas of the county are underserved when it comes to broadband Internet and mobile telephone service. During the town-hall meetings, many residents expressed frustration at the lack of service, and the cost of service when it was available, considering each serious weaknesses.

A review of AT&T, Verizon and Sprint coverage maps shows that the areas around the population centers of the county at Marienville and Tionesta are served by both phone and data systems, though many residents may dispute the dependability of the service. There is broadband access at the public schools and the industrial complex north of Tionesta, but that was done only with public involvement.

According to a report by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, *Broadband Access in Pennsylvania: A Common Wealth or Digital Divide*, the negative impact of the lack of broadband Internet service on small businesses should not be understated. Many businesses de-



**Verizon voice/mobile broadband internet (darker color shows coverage area)**

pend on the Internet for information, purchasing, advertising and other essential tasks, and those with access only by dial-up are less competitive. That's because many programs are unavailable or too slow to run without broadband speeds.

This also holds true for highly-skilled residents such as technical consultants, graphic designers and the like who do much of their work electronically and by the nature of their business do not need to locate in a specific locale. It was noted in the public meetings that these types of workers may be especially desirable – and be especially attracted to – Forest County.

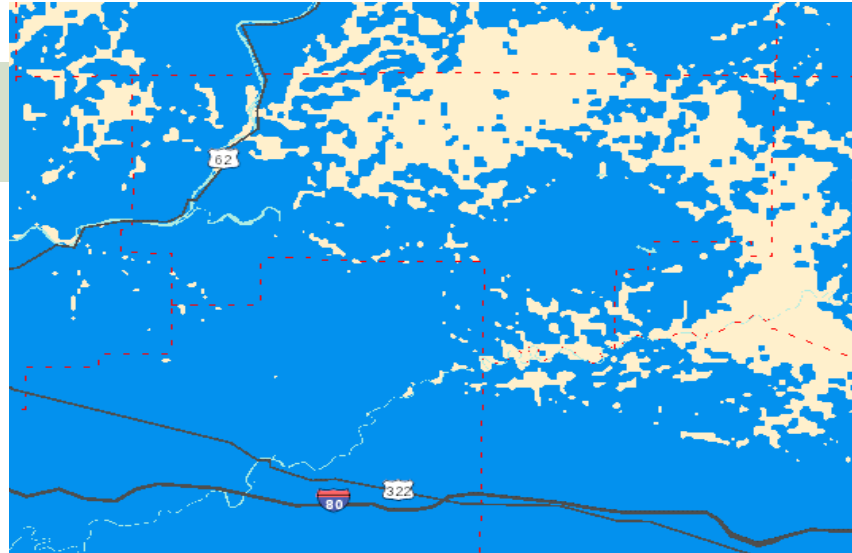
The main reason for lack of broadband is the same as with any infrastructure-based enterprise: The cost to run infrastructure from main lines to rural areas with low customer densities. Though the Commonwealth requires carriers to provide access once the density reaches a given threshold, most of the county does not meet that threshold and isn't likely to in the foreseeable future.

Map Number Two details locations of commercial telecommunications towers.

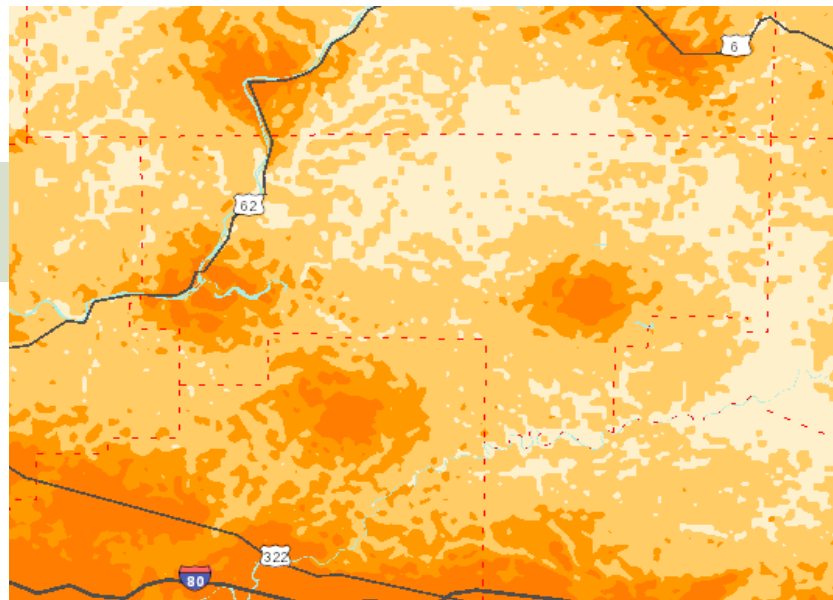


## The County Lacks Digital and Telecommunications infrastructure

ATT voice mobile (darker color shows coverage area)



ATT Broadband (darker shades shows better coverage areas)







## Water and Sewer Services Remain a Serious Challenge

Rural Forest County has worked hard to extend affordable public water and sewage treatment service to as many areas as possible. Maps 11 and 12 detail the extent of current and formally planned services areas.

At both the Marienville and Tionesta public input sessions, lack of extensive public water and sewer was cited as a potential roadblock for development. Though there hasn't been widespread development pressure, it's suspected the lack of infrastructure may have indeed hindered some growth.

The 1998 comprehensive plan listed as a priority extension of public water and sewer to identified revitalization areas and growth priority corridors in the Tionesta and Marienville areas. To some extent that has occurred, but not to the degree the plan had recommended.

In Marienville, both the water and sewer systems have been largely rebuilt, updated and expanded to accommodate the SCI-Forest prison, which came online in summer 2004, and related development.

Expecting more development to come along with the prison, the township opened the mostly new sewage plant in 2004. Though only minor construction has occurred, the township should be lauded for its proactive approach to updating the system, with new lines in the northern part of Marienville and two rebuilt pump stations. With other ongoing updates, most of the system is less than 20 years old and in good condition, and the region has a foundation for growth: In 2010, the system had a capacity of 583,000 gallons per day (gpd) but has historically had an average use of less than 400,000 gpd. The system serves 320 residential and 49 commercial customers plus the nearly 2,300 inmates at the prison. The system had two new connections in 2010.

The township also plans an extension southwest down Route 66 to Old Route 899, nearly to the village of Roses, to address an area with several failing on-lot septic systems. The \$1 million project has a tentative bid date of spring

2012 and will be paid for mostly with federal grants. It will add about 60 new equivalent dwelling units, including the new state police barracks.

The township's water system has been nearly as ambitious. The system was acquired in 2004 by Aqua PA-Jenks Township from the former Marienville Water Co. A privately-owned system, it serves a population of 3,585 in the Marienville area and has 400 service connections. It has a design capacity of 662,000 gpd but has an average production of only 330,000 gpd.

A new plant was built in 2002 and Aqua PA continues to replace older mains with larger diameters, and today it's essentially a new system.

Service was extended northeast along Route 66 to include the SCI Forest, a gas station, the ANF Ranger Station (an objective of the 1998 plan) and a few other properties. There are no immediate plans to extend water service farther.

In Tionesta, where public water and sewer have long been



## Water and Sewer Services Remain a Serious Challenge, continued

present in the majority of the borough (only the German Hill area of the borough is excluded), the focus has been maintaining and upgrading the existing systems.

The borough water system serves a population of 610, with 259 service connections. It is the oldest system in the county, with the treatment plant built before 1930 and the three wells constructed in the 1960s, 1980s and 2000. It has a design capacity of 430,000 gpd and an average daily use of 80,000 gpd.

The borough regularly replaces sections of main and in 2009 completely renovated the pump-house, bringing it up to current standards.

Just south of Tionesta at Tionesta Dam, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers operates a water supply system for roughly 140 connections for mostly transient, seasonal use.

The Tionesta Municipal Authority operates the borough's sewer system. The plant opened in 1983 and has a capacity of 250,000 gpd. There are 197 residential customers and 77 commercial taps. The

use is only around 90,000 gpd. There is no plan for expansion and customer growth for the next several years is expected to be light. The plant also services the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Tionesta Lake facility.

The only other community water system in the county is the West Hickory Water Company, which operates in Harmony Township. The system serves 450 people with 190 service connections. The system has a design capacity of 51,840 gpd but average production is only 20,000 gpd. There have been no expansions in recent history, nor are any expansions planned.

Harmony Township is also working on an update to its sewage management plan as directed to do by the state Department of Environmental Protection.

Barnett, Green and Kingsley townships are served in part by the Clarion County Sewage Association, while the remainder of the county is serviced by on-lot systems.

As can be seen above, each

of the community water and sewer systems are operating at levels far below their design capacities, and thus there is room to grow. Also as indicated above, though infrastructure improvement may not have directly resulted in extensive development, the lack of adequate facilities likely did inhibit development that may have occurred.

While it remains a formal policy goal to extend sewer to all potential private sector growth area, finances remain the main limitation. There are also areas of historic development where service would be beneficial but expensive. In many rural areas of Pennsylvania, older homes were built without sewer service (other than outdoor privies, of course), and indoor plumbing was installed later, only after running water was available. Often, the septic systems that were built were more of an afterthought, built poorly, neglected and now, decades later, are failing.



## Water and Sewer Services Remain a Serious Challenge, continued

In Forest County, old septic systems coupled with the conversion of cabins and other small dwellings, which were never meant to house people full-time, to permanent homes presents a double challenge. As environmental regulations continue to tighten and more residents make Forest their full-time home, the on-lot systems' failures will become evident and potential Department of Environmental Protection enforcement could follow.

However, the usual answer of extending traditional water and sewer may not be appropriate. This type of system, with its collection lines and central treatment plant, is expensive, and much of the older development in question may not correspond to identified growth areas.

Traditionally, centralized sewerage has been used in two ways. First, it was to deal with sewage issues that developed in densely populated areas, often installed in cities from the late 1800s to mid-1900s. Second, it has been used to spur

development in more suburban communities. Neither strategy is applicable to the neighborhoods with potentially failing on-lot septic systems.

One potential alternative to the traditional system could be Integrated Wastewater Management. The essence of this approach is that each community – or even each neighborhood or property – should be evaluated so as to determine the most cost-effective method for sewage treatment.

The report "Pennsylvania's Approach to Integrated Wastewater Management: A New Paradigm," showcases the Broad Top Township—Coaldale Borough Sewage Planning effort in Bedford County. The Broad Top plan dealt with hundreds of homes that had substantial on-lot septic system failure rates. It examined the restraints and came up with a plan that included cluster systems serving hundreds of homes in close proximity and joint on-lot sewer systems owned and maintained by

the Township in less densely-populated areas. By using cluster and shared on-lot systems, it will achieve significant cost savings over individual systems and over a traditional community system.

However, there are many hurdles to this type of solution. Instituting public sewerage is difficult on its face. , it's quicker and easier for DEP to review tried-and-true systems than to deal with alternative proposals that deal with site-specific issues, and funding assistance will often defer to off-the-shelf systems.

DEP's regulations for on-lot sewage systems allow consideration of alternative and experimental designs. Using the Broad Top example, Forest County could take a leadership role in proactively and responsibly dealing with the on-lot sewage issues, assisting local officials and residents who have neither the expertise nor, the resources to do so on their own.





## Emergency and Police Services

### EMS & Fire

County officials view the fire-fighting services as adequate for the region, with three volunteer fire departments based in the county, including West Hickory, Tionesta Borough and Jenks Township departments.

There are two health centers and two volunteer ambulance services, one each in Marienville and Tionesta, and a Pennsylvania State Health Center in Tionesta. Though citizens at both the Marienville and Tionesta public input sessions listed the local medical facilities as assets, Marienville expressed concern at the distance to full-service hospitals.

### Police and crime

Forest County is served primarily by the Pennsylvania State Police out of the recently-opened Marienville barracks. Other law enforcement entities include the State Bureau of Corrections, Bureau of Forestry, United State Forest Service, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, Pennsylvania Game Commission, Forest County Sheriff's Department,

and state liquor control authorities.

Public input has been mixed regarding police coverage. A couple of citizens at the Marienville session indicated having no local police was a weakness (somewhat ironic in that the state police barracks just recently moved to Marienville), while several at Tionesta felt that Forest is a safe place to live.

Forest County has a relatively low crime rate when compared with the state. For serious crimes such as murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault the state rate in 2010 was 2,538 reported crimes per 100,000 population. The clearance rate, that is the percentage of crimes solved, is 30.3. As might be expected, the rate of serious crimes reported in Forest County in 2010, 1,492 reported crimes per 100,000 population, is far below the state rate. The clearance rate was just above that of the state, at 30.5.

Rates for less-serious crimes such as stolen property, van-

dalism, weapons, drug abuse, driving under the influence, liquor law violations and disorderly conduct also show Forest is below the state levels. With 3,495 reported crimes per 100,000 population and an 87% clearance rate, Forest compares well with the state numbers of 4,797 reported crimes per 100,000 population and a 61% clearance rate.

Of course, due to the scarcity of law enforcement and largely self-sufficient nature of the population, the actual number of crimes is likely higher. From 2008 to 2010, the serious crimes ranged from 1,747 to 2,834 reported crimes, though the lower end appears to be more the norm. For the same three-year period, the less-serious crimes rate has varied between 3,021 and 3,495 reported crimes per 100,000.

There was some concern about the opening of SCI Forest creating additional crimes that would threaten area residents. There seems to be no evidence of this. However, there has been some indication

that crimes committed within the prison are creating a financial strain upon the local justice system. In a County with such a small tax base and low crime, this can become a serious expense.



## Recreation Facilities and Services

One Surprising result of the surveys undertaken by the consultants is the extent of municipal recreational opportunities available. These include Chipps Memorial Park in Marienville, David Manross Community Park in Harmony Township and Tionesta Community Park. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' dam-related facilities at Tionesta Lake also provide a range of outdoor activities for both residents and visitors.

Chipps Memorial Park is operated by the Marienville Area Civic Association. It includes a community building, volleyball court, swimming pool, a playground, baseball field and basketball court. There is a paved parking lot with about 30 parking spaces.

Tionesta Community Park is located near the confluence of the Allegheny River and Tionesta Creek south of town in Tionesta Township. A municipal park run by the Tionesta Recreation Board, it features horseshoe pits, mini-golf, playground equipment, a picnic pavilion, a volleyball court, a baseball field and seating areas.



David W. Manross Park in the West Hickory portion of Harmony Township .

as. The parking is informal, mainly in the grass and along the access road. There is also a swimming beach, but unfortunately, it's not open because of a lack of funds to pay lifeguards.

The Army Corps' Tionesta Lake was created by the damming of Tionesta Creek. The project was completed in 1940 and is a part of the flood control

infrastructure for the Allegheny and upper Ohio rivers.

In addition to flood control, the facility offers many recreational amenities, including boating, hiking, hunting, fishing, water skiing and picnicking. Camping facilities include rustic lakeside sites and RV pads with full hookups.

The National Recreation and Park Association recommends that there is one basketball



## Recreation Facilities and Services, continued

court, volleyball court and baseball field per 5,000 population, with a service radius of up to one-half mile. The NARA also recommends there be one trail system per region and one swimming pool per 20,000 people.

From a facility-per-capita perspective, Forest is well-served. Due to the dispersed nature of the population, most of the benefit goes to the population centers in Tionesta and Marienville. But according to generally accepted planning practices, this is entirely appropriate. This is because in more rural areas, recreation opportunities aren't needed as the larger parcel sizes afford space on private property.

Two service centers serve the needs of the area's senior citizens. There are centers in Hickory and Jenks townships.

Located in a Hickory Township-owned building, the Endeavor Senior Service Center offers social opportunities, health information and meals to the region's seniors. It's open three days a week and attendance ranges from 20 to 40 daily. Bingo is the most popular



**Marienville Area Civic Association Swimming Pool.**

activity, and it serves hundreds of meals each week. The center opened in 1974.

The Jenks Township senior center is at the MACA building, where it operates three days a week. There, seniors participate in informational and educational programs, play bingo, cards and other games. The center is in transition and working to increase its membership.

It has been relatively successful thus far, with attendance at about 17 per day.

One of the top needs of the Tionesta area expressed during the public input process was a senior center. However, the issue is more one of adequate space to house such a center. A study in the early 1990s showed the lack of a building in the Tionesta area that can host





## Summary of Key Policies and Actions

The greatest community facilities priorities are those infrastructure projects listed in the economic development plan chapter of this document.

School District trends may be one of the most serious threats facing the County. The County will assist the School District as much as possible with technical assistance towards maintaining fiscal stability.

The County supports all efforts to keep open those funding streams that attempt to account for the negative impacts of public lands.

The County will prioritize the continued expansion of broadband internet services and mobile phone service towards a goal of universal coverage.

Continue to prioritize expansion of sewer and water systems into growth areas depicted on the land use policy plan map.

Assist Townships with learning about community based alternative wastewater management systems that might be more affordable. Future Act 537 plans should include some analysis of the feasibility of this approach.

Assist in ensuring that recreation needs of aging residents are being met.



# Plan for Transportation

## Chapter 8

### Forest County Comprehensive Plan

## The Road Less Traveled

Forest County is the road less traveled. It is a destination in and of itself with roads criss-crossing steeply forested hills and curving along wide rivers offering breathtaking views into dark wooded glens and of bubbling streams cascading down mossy covered boulders. The remote character of the vast federal and state forests, parks, and game lands present in Forest County is what attracts adventure seekers to the diverse recreational opportunities. When traveling the twisting, two-lane roads, it is not uncommon to catch a glimpse of a Bald Eagle soaring over the Allegheny River or a black bear rambling through the woods.

What cannot be found in Forest County is a single traffic signal. In fact, US Route 62 is the only Major Through Traffic Route in Forest County (Penn DOT, 2011). The transportation network contributes to the secluded character of Forest County with

its limited east – west connectivity and distance from any major highway network or population center. Access to and within Forest County includes a few two-digit state routes (US Route 66, PA Route 36, and US 62), which travel north and south on either side of the County. Other three and four-digit state routes are present but primarily only State Route 666 and SR 2004 offer east-west routes.

While the road network might be limited it passes through beautiful scenery and connects to popular recreational destinations such as the Allegheny National Forest and Cook Forest State Park. Population Centers such as Tionesta Borough and West/East Hickory are located to the west along US Route 62 while the former County Seat of Marienville is situated along US Route 66 to the East. Commerce is present in the county situated along side these two roadways and the timber and oil and gas industries continue to maintain their historical presence.

Traffic generation and traffic volumes are inconsequential as might be expected with highest volumes found on the US Routes noted prior and State Route 36. One major traffic generator is the State Correctional Institution located near Marienville; however, despite this, traffic levels remain low although seasonal fluctuations occur in response to the tourism industry.

A few roads in Forest County are destinations themselves. State Route 666 is a popular roadway for motorcyclists seeking a fun winding road for a day trip. River Road (SR 2002) hugs the side of the Clarion River offering a relaxing ride for cars, motorcyclists or bicyclists. These along with SR 3004 present an opportunity for Forest County to promote “the road less traveled” through a local and or state byway program (Note: Maps 13 and 14 in the Gallery accompany this chapter, and are important to understand the text).

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## Corridor Assessment

For the purposes of the Forest County Comprehensive Plan, a corridor assessment was applied to study seven traffic routes within the County. The selection criteria included traffic volumes, population and commerce centers, recreational opportunities, physical deficiencies, public and private infrastructure, and public input. The corridor assessment applies a wide lens by which to understand the demands placed on area roadways including the land use context as well as physical considerations.

**US Route 62** is an important road to support commerce through the movement of people and goods. This road is Functionally Classified as a *Principal Arterial Highway* and is considered a *Major Through Traffic Route* is a two-lane arterial that enters Forest County from Venango County and travels north along the Allegheny River. The road provides access to the County seat, Tionesta, and access to US Route 6 in Warren County. This road is not under consideration as a



**US Route 62 from PennDOT Video Log imagery**

local byway although it does pass through portions of federally owned lands within the ANF.

Priority Concern: Hunter Station Bridge carrying US Route 62 over Allegheny River is listed on the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program for replacement (MPMS# 1343). The bridge was documented in 1992 as deteriorating but environmental investigations identified a species of rare and endangered mussels, which stopped the project. Dur-

ing stakeholder interviews with Penn DOT representatives, it was discovered that the obstacles to replace the bridge have not been resolved and it is anticipated that within the next 2-3 years, the structure will have a restricted weight limit. Posted structures will restrict the passage of tri-axle vehicles and other haulers traveling north and south between the City of Warren (Warren County) and Oil City in Venango County, which could present a negative impact on commerce and in-

### Corridor Assessment:

1. US Route 62
2. State Route 36
3. State Route 66
4. State Route 899
5. State Route 666
6. State Route 2002/  
River Road
7. State Route 3004
8. SR 1003





## Corridor Assessment, Continued

dustry.

**State Route 36** is functionally classified as a Minor Arterial located on the western side of Forest County entering from Clarion County and connecting into Venango County. This two-lane road offers access to Tionesta and crosses the Allegheny River sharing the same bridge structure as US 62. This road is not under consideration as a local byway. According to interviews with Penn DOT, there are no major concerns related to bridges along SR 36. The NW Commission's Long Range Transportation Plan (2011-2036) listed two improvements for SR 36: passing lane on Dam Hill and improvements for SR 26 and German Hill Intersection.

**State Route 66** is a Minor Arterial that enters Forest County from Clarion County and exits to Elk County. This two-lane road is a primary transportation corridor in the eastern portion of Forest County. Along State Route 66 is the village of Marienville in Jenks Township



US Route 36 from Penndot Video Log imagery

where the highest concentration of businesses and residents can be found in Forest County. According to Penn DOT, there are no identified transportation improvement projects on State Route 66. However, the beautification and enhancement of the Route 66 streetscape within Marienville has been identified as a potential project in previous studies and during the public input process.

State Route 66 is an important transportation corridor in that it

supports economic development goals for commerce and industry as well as tourism. From a tourism perspective, this road provides access to the proposed Knox Kane trail and the proposed Trail Town of Marienville. Additionally, along this corridor are several Off-Road trail access points and sites supporting camping, trail access, and horseback riding. Such uses will require amenities that accommodate larger vehicles pulling trailers and appropriate off-loading facilities.



## Corridor Assessment, Continued

The NW Commission's Long Range Transportation Plan listed SR 66 improvements within Marienville.

A three-digit Minor Arterial, **State Route 899** enters Forest County in Barnett Township and terminates at SR 66. This road serves as a gateway into Forest County and offers access to a Clarion River public access point where a canoe rental facility has been established as well as linking to State Route 2002/River Road. This location and capacity of this road is suitable to support economic development goals for private resource development and future growth.

**State Route 666** or "Triple Sixes" as it is locally known offers east-west access between US 62 and SR 1003. This two lane road offers spectacular views of undeveloped lands as it passes through federally owned lands while paralleling Tionesta Creek. The scenery shifts to reflect an agricultural characteristic as it crosses a plateau where family farms are situated



US Route 899 from Penndot Video Log imagery

on private land. Near Kellettsville, the North County Trail crosses SR 666 after which, at Town Line Road, Triple Sixes begins its descent as it nears the Allegheny River and its terminus with US 62.

At Kellettsville, Triple Sixes presents an opportunity to align transportation and tourism goals. The convergence of North Country Trail, Tionesta Creek, and *possible Kellettsville and Nebraska Trail* offers Forest County an additional resource to develop, if desired,

for tourism related economic development. Should this area be designated as a trail hub, a local byways designation could support future funding applications to private, state and federal entities.

Penn DOT bridge projects (MPMS# 74668 - SR 666 over Beaver Creek Run and MPMS# 1398 - SR 666 Beaver Creek Bridge) involve the replacement of a structure over Beaver Run and the rehab of the structure over Beaver Creek (new superstructure and widening).



## Corridor Assessment, Continued

**State Route 2002/River Road** **River Road** is functionally classified as a Rural Minor Collector offering east-west access from SR 899 to SR 36. This roadway exemplifies the wilderness nature of Forest County as it winds along the Clarion River through heavily wooded areas nestled with private and public camps and residences, which lends to its local designation as a Scenic Corridor. River Road offers access to Cook Forest State Park and the village of Cooksburg where private tourism development intermingles with state-owned recreational facilities.

Concern: Interviews with Penn DOT identified rehabilitation needs for SR 36 over Toms Run tributary. This structure is less than 65 feet in length and is scheduled to be let for bidding in 2012. Possible concerns include the impact on the commercial businesses in this area.

Concern: Interviews with DCNR personnel identified a need for improved pedestrian/bicycle facilities. Field views conducted on peak summer weekends (2011) documented potential

pedestrian/bicycle and vehicle conflicts.

Concern: The Cooksburg area of SR 36 & SR 2002 straddles political jurisdictions (Forest, Clarion and Jefferson Counties) as well as Penn DOT districts (District 1-0 and District 10-0). This could potentially contribute to a lack of coordination for future improvements. Development patterns straddle county and district lines and the many visitors drawn to the recreational and entertainment opportunities recognize only the obstacles to accessing the river and commercial sites.

**State Route 3004** from its intersection with SR 66 is Rural Major Collector until it changes to a Rural Minor Collector at the intersection with **SR 3005**.

From the east, SR 3004 begins at SR 66. From US 62, the road offers access to Little Hickory. Two significant features are located along this corridor – the Nebraska Bridge and the “Hemlock Curtain” or “Hemlock Wall”.

Spanning Tionesta Creek is the Nebraska Bridge (circa 1933), which is listed on the Penn

DOT 12 Year Plan. The bridge, which was closed to vehicular traffic is regularly submerged during the spring as the winter snows melt and floods Tionesta Creek. A public boat launch for Tionesta Lake is located near the bridge.

**SR 3004** traverses State Game Lands 24 and passes through what is locally known as the Hemlock Curtain or Wall. This expansive patch of large Hemlock trees creates a dense “curtain” of greenery and serves as a natural divide between east and west Forest County. Also located along SR 3004 are several state-owned public access areas for the game lands.

SR 1003 / Blue Jay Road Blue Jay Roads provides connection to SR 66 and the Triple Sixes. This road reflects higher traffic volumes since the construction of the State Correctional Institution. According to Penn DOT bridge maintenance records, Penn DOT project (MPMS # 1414), SR 1003 over Blue Jay Creek is slated for replacement in 2016.





## Non Highway Transportation

Forest County still had active rail lines when the 1998 comprehensive plan was prepared. The last active rail line in the County was the Knox and Kane Railroad, which ceased operations in 2006. This line ran through Marienville, and in 2011, The Pa Department of Conservation and Natural Resources funded a feasibility study to examine converting this line into a rail trail. The study examines a number of options for both motorized or non motorized trail users. One unique concept was to create a short line of rail for use by hobbyists who own restored antique railroad maintenance vehicles. As with many rail-trails, the study noted that “There is both support and opposition for a rail trail (motorized and/or non-motorized) among elected officials and local citizens”.

The County has one noncommercial airstrip, noted on Map 2. Another unique aspect of the County is the nature of the intricate non-vehicular transportation network on Allegheny



**Abandoned Knox and Kane Rail Line**

National Forest lands. Many of these attract unique user groups to the County ranging from horse campers to All Terrain vehicles and both road and

off road bicycles. Keeping large areas open to multi use is essential to maintain a broad tourist base for County businesses.



## Highway Planning and Maintenance Strategy

Planning and Maintenance Forest County is one of six counties included within PennDOT District 1. For the purposes of this Comprehensive Plan, PennDOT representatives were interviewed to ascertain regional and state level concerns regarding the transportation network in Forest County. Interviews were completed to determine priority deficiencies and opportunities for collaboration. Based upon these interviews coupled with data review and field assessments, the following maintenance and planning recommendations are offered:

Increase participation with PennDOT's Posted and Bonded Road Program

Coordinate with the Municipal Service Unit to piggy back on contracting

Liquid Fuels funding can be leveraged on the shared purchasing offered through PennDOT

Participate regularly with regional planning discussions

facilitated through Northwest Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission a Rural Planning Organization (RPO)

PennDOT relies upon the RPO to submit transportation improvement projects for funding consideration

KOEZ sites should be placed before the RPO for consideration to direct road and infrastructure improvement funding

The RPO group could serve as the forum to determine a regional approach to potential funding through any future Marcellus Shale impact fee.

The highest priority transportation issue facing Forest County, according to PennDOT representatives is the replacement of Hunter Station (US 62) Bridge over the Allegheny River. Route US 62, as noted previously, is the most heavily trafficked road in the County and serves Forest County as a primary route for

commerce. Placing weight restrictions on Hunter Station Bridge will effectively reduce the number of heavy trucks permitted on this road, which will have a negative impact on commerce for the County. Resolving this threat to economic development will require a coordinated partnership between the County, its economic development partners, business and industry leaders, Venango and Warren Counties, and the state due to the involvement of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Therefore the following strategy is recommended:

Form a Task Force to advocate for the replacement of Hunter Station Bridge. Membership should include, at a minimum: Venango and Warren Counties who, along with Forest have a vested interest to ensure the ability of haulers to use this road. Assistance should be also sought from the:

- NW Planning and Development Commission



## Highway Planning and Maintenance Strategy, continued

- PA Wilds Planning Team
- Business and Industry Leaders Legislators

Finally, consideration might be given to increasing the voice of the County through its many nonresident road users. The political voice of these visitors could be harnessed to make improvements that effect their ability to come visit as well as safety issues, such as bicycle lanes. This could be implemented by contacting user groups or on-site surveys of visitors.

The issue of an improved intra-county route connecting Marienville and Tionesta remains an issue from the 1998 Comprehensive Plan. This issue was raised again by County residents during the Town Hall meetings. This issue may need a separate task force.

Finally, the network of private camp roads remain a difficult issue for which there is no easy solution.



**Nonresidents could be sought to assist in advocacy for transportation improvements, especially where their self interest is at stake.**





## Summary of Policies and Actions

Create a larger base of allied organizations to advocate for needed transportation improvements.

Ensure that replacement of the Route 62 Hunter Station Bridge does not interrupt essential commerce that would negatively impact forest and neighboring counties.

Ensure that multi use recreation transportation options in the Allegheny National Forest remain available for visitors.

Consider forming a local task force for Marienville Tionesta road connections.



**The Allegheny National Forest multi use policy brings a tremendous variety of visitors who use non traditional transportation and contribute to the local economy.**

Private camp roads with indeterminate rights of way and small unimproved caraways remain a difficult issue. The County should support Townships in finding innovative affordable solutions and encourage adequate future roads through subdivision and land development policies.

# Interrelationships and Intergovernmental Plan

## Chapter 9

### Forest County Comprehensive Plan

## The Future of County and Municipal Government

This final chapter of the Forest County Comprehensive Plan fulfills two requirements of the MPC. The first is to ensure that local policies are internally consistent. For example, transportation policies should not create a negative effect upon another area of concern, such as conservation. The second is to ensure that County policies are consistent with those of neighboring counties, so that Forest County does not create a negative impact upon one of its neighbors.

During the course of research and meetings about these issues, the relationship between Forest County and its constituent municipalities became the subject of discussion. Because the County is small, its Townships and Boroughs are proportionally small. As local government responsibilities become more complex, it becomes more difficult for smaller units of government to meet their obligations. Some County residents



**Forest County has established a unique identity that can be seen in countless ways, such as the Tionesta Indian Festival pictured above. However, with a small population, tiny tax base and increasing responsibility upon County and local government, some question whether the County can survive as an independent entity into the 21st Century.**

have even come to question whether Forest County can survive as an independent self governing entity into the 21st Century. Recognizing the basic princi-

pal that smaller, more localized government is innately more democratic, the County is exploring ways to preserve itself and its communities.

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## County and Local Government Financial Trends

The entire County of Forest runs on an annual budget of about \$5.5-6.0 Million dollars. This is smaller than many suburban townships and is remarkable when such consideration as courts, and county jail costs are accounted for. The County also provides many free services to Townships, including administration of unfunded mandates such as stormwater management.

Most Townships in the County are maintaining a positive fiscal structure. Deficits are generally for debt structure or spending for public works. The singular reason for this positive balance

is federal and state subsidies. Ironically, the constituent municipalities have a more favorable income to spending ratio than the County in certain respects. This is more remarkable as the County has a long history of providing a number of required services to municipalities (The most recent example being the Stormwater ordinance)

The central challenge of the future will be maintaining favorable public service to tax ratios in an environment where local governments are required to do more.

In light of this challenge, it must be noted that the consultant examined three years of municipal financial reports for Townships. In each year there were obvious reporting discrepancies (See note in table below). It is unknown whether these errors were generated by DCED or the Townships. Financial reporting requirements have become more intricate, and this underscores the challenge to local Townships. As the mandated responsibilities of local government become more complex, Townships will have to increase their technical capacity or rely upon the County.

### Municipal Finance in Forest County 2009++

Municipality Name	Total Revenues	Intergovernmental Revenue (State and Federal, as a percentage of total revenue)	Expenditures	Excess or Deficit
BARNETT TWP	183150	50.79%	179575	3575
GREEN TWP	89450	47.46%	92126	-2676
HARMONY TWP	192470	36.41%	164167	28303
HICKORY TWP	177775	50.10%	140205	37570
HOWE TWP	756127	91.99%	713849	42278
KINGSLEY TWP	193030	75.81%	188841	4189
TIONESTA BORO	493575	11.41%	574155	-80580
TIONESTA TWP	136357	49.05%	180499	-44142
JENKS TWP++	2294191	1.15%	2524659	-23468

**++NOTE: 2009 Data for Jenks Township is erroneous. Other years' data appeared erroneous for Howe and other Townships.**  
**Data Source: Pa Department of Community and Economic Development**





## Continuum of Intergovernmental Cooperation

It is the opinion of the County Planning Commission that maintaining general government operations will become more difficult in the future for both the County and its Townships and single Borough. It is therefore establishing a continuum of options for sustainable local government. None of these are recommendations at this point. Rather, the County and its municipalities will begin to explore options. Ideally, higher levels of future growth and development will make this continuum less urgent.

### Low Level Activities

Exploration of Council of government services sponsored by the County. The County could help with centralized Township secretarial services, code offer services or sewage enforcement.

Multimunicipal planning and implementation agreements: the County and Constituent Municipalities would adopt the comprehensive plan as a multi-

municipal plan as well as a County Plan) This has several key advantages:

*More favorable Review of grant and state loan requests.*

*Protection from exclusionary zoning challenges, in that each municipality need not plan for all uses within its own boundary.*

*Power to share infrastructure investments and subsequent tax base across municipal lines.*

*Power to prepare specific plans that can avoid spot zoning challenges, result in better designed development, and accelerate development of key growth areas.*

These low level approaches are fairly common in other rural Pennsylvania Counties.

### Medium Level Activities

Direct provision of County Services: The County could form a County Sewer or Water Author-

ity. These could be financing authorities or actually operate water and sewer systems. The County could also form a redevelopment authority to assist in removal and redevelopment of blighted properties. In western Pennsylvania, Indiana County has formed a municipal services authority that operates sewer systems in small communities.

### Extreme Level

Municipal Home Rule Merger: creation of a single home rule that combines the county/ township/Borough entity. Under this approach, each township or Borough could have a voice on a county council. A single entity would handle all municipal functions. Cameron County recently gave serious consideration to a merger of all county and municipal services and functions.

County de-corporation: Forest County ceases to exist and is absorbed by one or more neighboring counties. This 'nuclear option' is not desired,



## Interrelationships Statements

In preparing this comprehensive plan update, the Forest County Conservation District and Planning Commission Board gave consideration to the adopted comprehensive plans of all neighboring counties. All were found to be generally consistent. Furthermore, there were a number of shared policy concerns which are included in this document in bold text.

Clarion County adopted its last comprehensive plan update in late 2004. The document relied upon the 1998 Forest County plan to ensure consistent inter-county policies. The Clarion County plan states:

*Key policies in border areas with Forest County include efforts at community revitalization in Barnett Township and agricultural revitalization of the Red Brush valley. These are consistent with the desire of Clarion County to revitalize communities in northern Clarion County, as well as have overall consistency with the Clarion County Land Use Plan. Forest County is also prioritizing growth in*

*the PA Route 36 and PA Route 66 corridors, but not to the extent that they will directly affect Clarion County. It must be mentioned however, that such development might have the indirect benefit of creating accessible job and business opportunities for northern Clarion County residents. Much of Forest County's land-use policy centers on the identified need to preserve private land and prevent the loss of tax base and beneficial development opportunities through excessive Commonwealth or federal public lands. The boundary included in the plan discourages the purchase of new public lands in the general areas of Tionesta, Green, and Barnett Townships. An overabundance of public land is not a countywide problem in Clarion. However, it is a problem in northern portions of the County. **Therefore, Clarion County endorses the growth-boundary concept in Forest County, as it will benefit northern County municipalities.***

Warren County adopted its County comprehensive plan in

2005. It shares many transportation goals with Forest County for improvements in the Route 62 corridor. Also, management of public lands and its fiscal effects was raised by citizens and local leaders. The Warren County Plan states:

*With the current market prices of hardwoods, Warren County communities should be realizing about \$5.6 million a year from timber sales—not \$1.7 million seen in 2003. Much of the reduction in timbering and the resulting income is due to lawsuits brought by environmental groups. Currently, the ANF is devising a new management plan. The people of Warren County have no desire to see the ANF ravaged. But, they should receive fair compensation for the land now locked in Federal ownership. **Warren County must join with McKean, Forest, and Elk Counties to participate in the future ANF plans to ensure the benefit to the many, so the ANF can be a true economic asset to Warren County.***



## Interrelationships Statements

The Warren County document also addressed cross border planning compatibility:

*The issue of compatibility is a relatively simple one for the Warren County Comprehensive Plan to address. Its entire east border, and two-thirds of the southern border of Warren County is comprised of land of the ANF, and that use extends into the abutting counties of Forest and McKean.*

**Venango County** adopted a Comprehensive Plan in 2004. The Forest County Planning Commission notes no discrepancy between Venango County policies and those of Forest County. In fact, the Venango County document identifies some mutual areas of potential cooperation. These include transportation planning in concert with the Northwest Commission, and such shared concerns as tourism and marketing and development of agricultural and forest products.

The shared border with Elk County is comprised entirely of Allegheny National Forest



**Cook Forest station in neighboring Clarion County. Northern Clarion County townships share many policy concerns with Forest County.**

Lands, so there are few potential use conflicts between plans. Elk County last updated its Comprehensive Plan in 1999. It includes a statement that Elk County will ensure consistent policy with neighboring municipalities.





# ALLEGHENY NATIONAL FOREST

## Addendum

### Forest County Comprehensive Plan

## An Addendum to Conservation Planning Issues

Issues relating to the Forest Service and the Allegheny National Forest were addressed within the text of the Comprehensive Plan. Those issues were considered in relation to what Forest County could actually affect rather than a comprehensive discussion of the Forest. In reflection, it became apparent that the ANF needed some additional consideration. This addendum is an attempt to provide a more inclusive view of the ANF and its' relationship to Forest County land use.

The Organic Administration Act of June 4, 1897 created the National Forest system. In that Act it was stated that no national forest was to be established except to improve and protect the forest within the boundaries, and for the purpose of securing favorable conditions of water flows, and to furnish a continuous supply of timber for the use and necessities of the citizens of the United States. It is safe to say that over the years the Forest Service has accom-



**The Allegheny River was the original statutory western boundary of the Allegheny National Forest.**

plished these laudable goals, having guided the Allegheny Brush Pile into what is now a revived and renewed forest.

On September 24, 1923 President Calvin Coolidge signed a proclamation which formed the Allegheny National Forest. The Proclamation boundary encompassed 739,277 acres which was

all private property at the time. Land purchases began shortly thereafter until today where the acreage totals approximately 122,545 acres of forest in Forest County alone. In Forest County the Proclamation Boundary originally was east of the Allegheny River but was later changed to allow the addi-

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## An Addendum to Conservation Planning Issues, continued

tion of acreage on the west side of the river. The Forest Service is also the administering agency for the Allegheny River Wild and Scenic River Management Plan.

In a partial recognition of the impact upon the local tax base, Congress had developed legislation that was meant to compensate local governmental agencies (County, Municipalities, and School District) for the loss of tax revenue since Federal Property is tax exempt. The first legislation Congress passed to provide compensation for loss of tax revenues was the Twenty-Five Percent Fund of May 23, 1908 (known locally as the Timber Receipt money) which provided that twenty-five percent of receipts generated on the Forest to return to the County for use on schools and roads. This Act, however, did not provide any revenue to return to county government in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, therefore the county tax revenue declined as property was purchased and added to the ANF with no compensation for that loss from the Federal Govern-

ment. With the ongoing land purchase policies of the Federal Government, two decades ago local leaders in Forest County became concerned about the conversion of private property to public property, due to the loss of tax revenues. Congress also passed the Payments In Lieu of Taxes Act on October 20, 1976 to provide compensation for loss of tax revenues. With a complex formula, the amount of PILT (Payment In Lieu of Tax) was a small fraction of the amount of tax revenue lost through the conversion of private property to public lands on the ANF. Congress, in 2000, enacted the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (P.L. 106-393). SRS (The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act Contract) provides assistance to rural counties and school districts affected by the decline in revenue from timber harvests on federal lands. Steep decline in timber sales during the 1980s and 1990's decreased the revenues that rural school districts received from these timber sales. In re-

sponse, Congress passed SRS in an attempt to stabilize the payments to counties (schools, municipalities, and counties) and to compensate for lost revenues. SRS not only returned revenue to schools (the School District) and roads (the Municipalities) but under Title Three of the Act, the County received funds but with strict criteria as to how those funds must be expended. The Act had a sunset which has been reauthorized several times, always with the threat from Congress that each reauthorization was going to be the last. Between the timber receipt money, PILT, and the SRS funds, compensation for loss of tax revenue has been deficient, tenuous and inadequate. Therefore in regard to sustainability of local government, the compensation schemes provided by Congress in Washington are lacking and at best insufficient. Local government reaction to this situation has been adoption of a policy of No Net Loss of private property, a concept oddly enough, important enough for the Forest Service to include in the Allegheny River Wild and



## An Addendum to Conservation Planning Issues, continued

### Scenic River Management Plan.

The impact of the Allegheny National Forest on Forest County itself has to be measured in two ways. Most of the negative impacts are addressed within the body of the Comprehensive Plan but the positive impacts were not addressed adequately. The negative impacts relate directly to the prime concern of sustainability for the local municipalities, the Forest Area School District and for County Government. One of the main issues the Comprehensive Plan addressed was that of sustainability and what the future may hold for all of Forest County. In several ways the future sustainability of Forest County is tied to the Allegheny National Forest.

The sustainability of local government in Forest County is tied to a healthy local economy. Traditionally and historically, that economy was linked to resource extraction, albeit, timber or mineral. The industrial economic component was very important for decades

however much of that was linked to resource extraction. The timber on the ANF has remained an important component in that economic picture, but with the advent of other Congressional action resulting from pressures from the environmental movement, the cost of forest management has escalated for the Forest Service. That increase of cost of forest management has strained the Forest Service budget dedicated to forest management. In a document titled "[Sustaining Pennsylvania's Hardwoods Industry : An Action Plan published by the Pennsylvania Hardwoods Development Council](#)", published in June 2010, an observation is made regarding a comparison between State owned lands and Federal lands, such as the ANF. It reads, "Although the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry has done an admirable job of maintaining a steady supply availability, the Bureau has been limited by budgetary realities and competing public values and uses for the land. The Pennsylvania Game Commis-

sion has historically not provided a level of timber availability that the industry deems adequate. A major consideration has been that the primary goal of the Commission is to sustain wildlife habitat. The Allegheny National Forest, on the other hand, has failed miserably to make sufficient volumes of timber available for commercial harvest. Over the past 25 years, the ANF has achieved only about 50% of its own approved and published harvest goal. Competing interests regarding various forest values and a significant amount of attendant litigation have severely damaged the ANF timber sale program."

Additionally; the oil, gas and mineral estate beneath the ANF remains in private hands. The Federal government only bought the surface rights for the ANF. A recent boom in the oil and gas industry has spread across the ANF causing concern from environmentalists as well as forest managers. While there is a cooperative relationship between the OGM (oil, gas & minerals) owners and the

***Over the past 25 years, the ANF has achieved only about 50% of its own approved and published timber harvest goal.***





## An Addendum to Conservation Planning Issues, continued

Forest Service continues to struggle with the negative impact on the forest created through the drilling processes, balanced against the rights of the OGM owners to lawfully access their OGM private property. So the future of timber resources and OGM resources are in some ways very tenuous and may not be considered sustainable.

The real strength of the ANF and the Forest Service is the forest itself as an attraction to many different stakeholders for considerable recreational activities, otherwise identified as tourists. The Allegheny River and the Clarion River, both with Wild and Scenic designations with Forest Service administration, attract canoeists, fisherpersons, hunters, birding enthusiasts, sightseers and others. The ANF is within a day's travel to a third of the population in the United States. Located in or near Forest County, the ANF has two wilderness designated areas, the Hickory Creek Wilderness and the Allegheny Islands Wilderness. Hunters and fisherper-

sons also utilize the ANF for a more natural outdoor experience while hunting and fishing. Many visitors use the ANF for camping, both in primitive and developed camping areas. The Forest Service strives to disperse these activities in order to decrease the impacts of concentrated use.

The ANF (four county area) has over 30 campgrounds with over 700 sites, some with full facilities, some primitive. Across the forest there are 7 canoe access points, and 1 marina. There are 11 picnic areas, 4 beaches and 3 Scenic Overlooks. Many miles of trails cross the forest, 201 for hiking, 53 for cross-country skiing, and 18 miles of interpretive trails. There are over 100 miles of All-terrain Vehicle (ATV) trails and 366 Snowmobile loop trails. The Forest Service also maintains 1270 miles of roads providing access to most of the areas in the forest. Recently completed in the Duhring area of Jenks Township, Forest County were a trailhead and trails for equestrian use. The area has been

used by horse riding enthusiasts for years, primarily centered at the privately owned CCC Camp at Duhring. The privately owned business offered several amenities to the equestrian tourist, but now with the ANF public equestrian facility a mile down the road, one can only wonder what the overall impact will be on the private owner. The economic impact may be positive; it may be negative, only time will tell the tale. Tourism is a major element in the Forest County economic picture but hard numbers of visitors are hard to arrive at. According to the National Visitor Use Monitoring project, a Federal project, a breakdown for fiscal year 2001 estimated that there were 1.41 million recreation use visits. For that same period there were 1.63 site visits on the forest averaging 1.1 site visit per visitor.

While difficult to estimate the actual economic impact resulting from tourism on the ANF, Forest County certainly benefits from this national attraction. Without tourism to the area, the County would look



## An Addendum to Conservation Planning Issues, continued

very different, particularly if the land ownership pattern were the same. As far as the overall mission of the Forest Service, since its' inception, Congressional action has added to the goals and objectives of National Forests. The National Environmental Policy Act profoundly changed the processes involving the task of forest management and escalated the costs and time it takes to put up blocks of timber for sale. The Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act amplified the policy of management of National Forests. The Act provided that the forests were to be established and administered for outdoor recreation, range, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes, but these purposes were not be in derogation of the original purposes set forth in the Organic Administration Act of 1897, which were simply watershed and timber resources. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 and the National Forest Management Act of 1976 both added layers of public participation in the processes governing planning

on the Forests, again a costly and time consuming endeavor. These are just a few of the overlapping legislative actions that complicate the activities of federal employees on National Forests.

Some of the examples provided in the body of the Comprehensive Plan occurred before newer legislation was enacted that changed how the Forest Service dealt with certain situations. Rattlesnakes are now considered and provided for in a different manner than a decade ago. Native American sites are protected to a much higher degree than when the Masteller Farm incident occurred. Invasive weeds have become more of a hot button but funds for on-going programs to eradicate and control these noxious weeds still are lacking considering the enormous problems of invasive species on the ANF. The assumption by the public that government owned land automatically means that the government will do a better job managing the land than private individuals can is not always true when

funding does not flow behind legislation. The Forest Service is doing a better job of balancing funding challenges with management needs, but it has a long way to go. The advantage private landowners have is that they have a vested interest in do a better job managing their lands and forests, but they don't always do it. Public land managers are given training and tools to do a better job of management; but when limited by public funding sources that change each year, sometimes they can't accomplish what they might wish. From the County perspective, tax loss from non-taxable public property is a reality that threatens the future sustainability of the County. While at the same time, the benefits of public lands in Forest County contribute substantially to the local and area economy, the loss of which would also threaten the future sustainability of Forest County. The real challenge facing both Forest County and the Allegheny National Forest is the same thing: future sustainability.