

Natural Resources and Open Space

NATURAL RESOURCES

Two major rivers run through the Hwy. 321 study area and affect not only the quality of the surface water but have important cultural and historic ties to the community. The headwaters of the Henry Fork and Jacob Fork Rivers rise in the South Mountains and drain east into the Hwy. 321 corridor area. The Henry Fork and Jacob Fork join near the US Highway 321 interchange at NC Highway 10 and flow south as the South Fork of the Catawba River. Considerable land bordering these rivers is floodplain, limiting its development but providing natural habitat for fish, birds, small mammals as well as trees and flowering plants. The floodplain also offers good opportunities for passive recreational activities, such as hiking, canoeing and picnicking. *See Map 11: Natural Resources.*



Jacob Fork River

Natural Resources and Open Space

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To protect water quality, the State of North Carolina enacted the Water Supply Watershed Protection Program in 1989. The program requires all local governments with land use planning jurisdiction in designated watersheds to administer a Water Supply Watershed Protection Ordinance to protect surface drinking water. The Jacob Fork is the source for Newton’s water supply and, as a result, a small portion of the study area surrounding the Newton water intake falls within the WS-III Watershed. Another small portion of the SAP boundary along the South Fork is located within the WS-IV Watershed, which drains south into Lincoln County.

Development within the WS-III Critical Area surrounding the Newton water intake is limited to one house per acre for single-family development. Multi-family and non-residential development, where permitted, is allowed to cover 12% of the lot area with impervious material such as asphalt, gravel and buildings. The WS-III Protected Area allows one



Multi-family development.

house per half acre for single-family development. Multi-family and non-residential development is limited to 24% lot coverage or 70% impervious surface if a “5%/70% Bonus” permit is approved by the Catawba County Board of Adjustment.

The WS-IV Protected Area in the southern portion of the Hwy. 321 corridor area requires 15,000 square-foot lots when curb and gutter is not used, and public water or sewer service are provided. When no public utilities (water and sewer) or curb and gutter are installed, lots cannot be smaller than one-half acre. Multi-family and non-residential uses, where permitted, are limited to 24% impervious coverage of the lot with curb and gutter and 36% without curb and gutter. Within the Protected Area, planned developments may use the high-density option of 70% impervious coverage with stormwater controls.



OPEN SPACE

The Catawba Lands Conservancy has been an active participant in preserving open space along the South Fork Catawba River. The organization now owns or partially owns over 3,000 acres in Catawba, Lincoln and Gaston Counties. Currently, the Catawba Lands Conservancy has two projects in the Hwy. 321 corridor area. A 66-acre tract, part of the historic Oakwood Farm, was donated to the organization in 2003. At least one other landowner of the former Oakwood Farm has placed his land in a conservation easement and is the process of restoring the historic buildings on the property. Eventually, the farm may be opened to the public as a historical and educational resource. Further south, the Catawba Lands Conservancy owns 310 acres, a portion of which was known informally as the Viles Farm, which received a Clean Water Management Trust Fund grant to preserve water quality along the South Fork.



Rural countryside

Besides protected watersheds and undeveloped land along the area’s creeks, another significant natural feature is the rural, undeveloped land that still remains in the southern portion of the corridor. Considerable acreage simply remains as undeveloped woodland and open fields. In order to help preserve these agricultural and forest lands, the County developed a Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) program in 2008. The program allows landowners to voluntarily enter their property

into an agricultural district which recognizes the property as farmland and commits the landowner to retain the property as active agricultural land. In exchange, signs are located on the farmland which identifies the property as an agricultural district and notice is provided through the County’s land records system (GIS) which identifies the approved districts and land in proximity to the districts. Within the study area there are 15 tracts of land in agricultural districts, comprising 716 acres. Of the total acreage, 57 acres are in the enhanced district program which commits the landowner to a 10-year irrevocable conservation agreement. An additional 3,272 acres in the corridor could qualify for the agricultural district program since they are in the County’s present use tax value program (one of the qualifications for the VAD program).



Farm in Voluntary Agricultural District

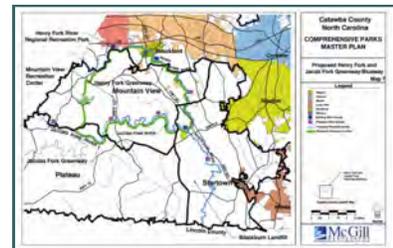
RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The City of Newton has completed the initial phase of developing Jacob Fork Park and Canoe Launch. The recreational facility is a 100-acre park located along NC Highway 10, just west of US Highway 321, at the point where the Jacob Fork and the Henry Fork Rivers join to form the South Fork of the Catawba. The Park currently includes two softball fields, bleachers, dugouts, a concession building, restrooms, and paved parking lots. Future plans include lighting the softball fields, developing two soccer fields, constructing a picnic shelter with restrooms, a playground area, and walking and bicycle trails. The park will enable people to enjoy the Jacob Fork River for active and passive recreation.



City of Newton's Jacob Fork Park

Catawba County’s Comprehensive Parks Master Plan recommends formalizing the Henry Fork and Jacobs Fork blueway systems through the establishment of canoe access points along the rivers. Within the study area, the Henry Fork blueway is proposed to have an access point at Sandy Ford Road and the Jacob Fork River blueway would use the canoe access point at the City of Newton’s Jacob Fork Park. An additional upstream access point for the Henry Fork blueway is at the City of Hickory’s Henry Fork River Regional Park. Proposed access points are planned for the Jacob Fork blueway at Old Shelby Road, Hwy. 127 and Finger Bridge Road. The South Fork blueway, which will be approximately 8.6 miles within the study area, is proposed to have access points at the Rocky Ford Road and



Henry Fork and Jacob Fork Greenway Plan



Canoe Access at Riverbend Park



Farmland Viewshed



Catawba River Greenway—
Morganton, NC

Blackburn Bridge Road bridge crossings. In addition to providing access points and parking for the blueway system, the sites will allow an opportunity for individuals to access the rivers' proposed greenway network (See the Transportation - Pedestrian and Bicycle System section).

In addition to the passive recreational opportunities offered by the floodplain along the rivers and active opportunities available at Jacobs Fork Park, other unique recreational opportunities exist within proximity of the Study Area. For example, the Optimist Club is very active in the community and offers youth basketball, baseball and football at Startown Elementary School.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

NATURAL RESOURCES AND OPEN SPACE

- NP-1 Preserve ample open space for future generations.
- NP-2 Encourage conservation easements or greenways along the Henry and Jacob Fork Rivers and the South Fork of the Catawba River.
- NP- 3 Assist farmers/property owners desiring to maintain the agricultural or open space use of their property

RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

- NP-4 Provide adequate recreational opportunities, both active and passive, for all segments of the population.
- NP-5 Encourage innovative ideas to create new recreational opportunities.
- NP-6 Utilize rivers for environmentally sound recreational activities

PLAN GOALS

NATURAL RESOURCES AND OPEN SPACE

- NG-1 Contact farmers in the study area who qualify for

the Voluntary Agricultural District program to educate and encourage them to participate.

NG-2 Evaluate new opportunities for farmers to participate in the EcoComplex facility which can provide a market for their products; thereby, allowing them to remain active in farming. This may include creating incubator plots at the EcoComplex which would allow new and/or young farmers to become established in agribusiness.

NG-3 Collaborate with the Catawba Lands Conservancy on additional land preservation opportunities along the South Fork Catawba River. This will help implement the blueway and greenway components of the County's Parks Master Plan and Carolina Thread Trail Master Plan while preserving open space and wildlife corridors.



Sunflowers grown at EcoComplex

RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

NG-4 Pursue grants to develop the blueway access points listed in the County's Comprehensive Parks Master Plan.

NG-5 Conduct outreach to Lincoln County and the other downstream jurisdictions that link to the U.S. National Whitewater Center in order to discuss establishing a connected blueway system that will benefit the region.



Kayaks at U.S. National Whitewater Center