



# HABERSHAM COUNTY **Growth Management and Conservation Strategies**

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Georgia Institute of Technology, School of City and  
Regional Planning

CP 6055 Studio

Lauren Beduhn, Madison Davis, Nathan Davis, Mira  
Kaufman, Sierra Scott

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## Acknowledgements

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### Studio Advisor

Aaron Fortner

### Studio Student

Lauren Beduhn  
Madison Davis  
Nathan Davis  
Mira Kaufman  
Roxanne Raven  
Sierra Scott

### Georgia Conservancy

Nick Johnson  
Luben Raytchev  
Katherine Moore

### Community Stakeholders

Alicia Vaughn, *Habersham County Manager*  
Mike Beecham, *Habersham County Planning & Development Director*  
Keith Dickerson, *Clarksville City Manager*  
Angelia Kiker, *Clarksville City Councilwoman & Business Owner*  
Dee Anderson, *Cornelia City Manager* Chris Kafsky, *Local Land Manager*  
Lew Oliver, *Lew Oliver Inc.*  
Rope Roberts, *Economic Development Manager, Georgia Power*  
Duncan Hughes, *Soque River Watershed Association*  
Steven Patrick, *UGA Cooperative Extension*  
Gilbert Barrett, *Habersham County Farmer & Former Farm Bureau Board Member*



*Studio Team & Georgia Conservancy Staff*



## Vision Statement

Our plan aims to promote the following goals within Habersham County:

Environmental  
conservation of rural areas

Management of suburban  
growth

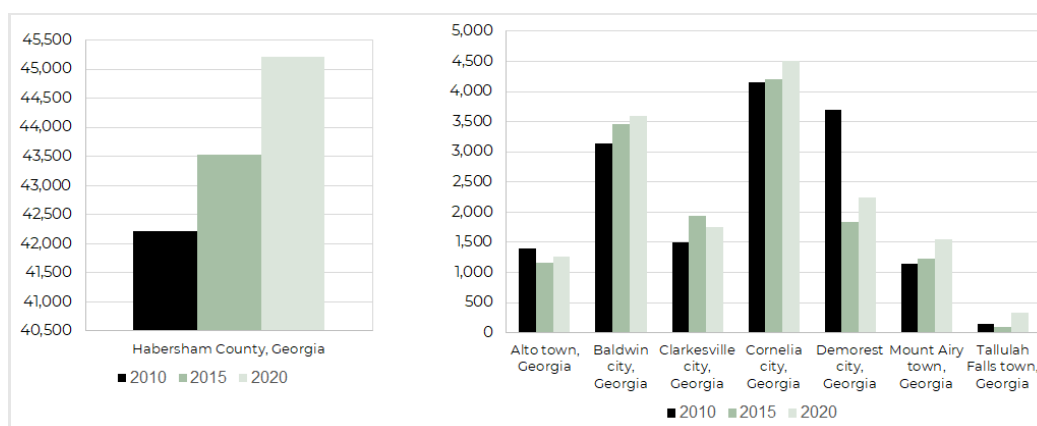
Mobility and connectivity



## Study Area Overview

Habersham County is located in North Georgia at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. The county has a population of 46,031 people. Although Habersham has historically been a rural county, there are signs of development interests moving into the county's southern region, and the county has experienced rapid population growth. This growth has both environmental and economic impacts. Between 1974 and 2016, the county lost 14,441 acres (8.1%) (Map Appendix - Fig. 4 & Fig. 5). Important industries that support the population in Habersham include agriculture, manufacturing, and education.

## Population



Population Charts

According to the Census Bureau's American Community Study (ACS Data) for 2010, 2015, and 2020, the population of the county grew by 7 percent between 2010 and 2020. The largest cities, Baldwin and Cornelia, fueled the growth during this time span. However, some of the smaller towns, such as Mount Airy and Tallulah Falls, grew as well.

## Demographics

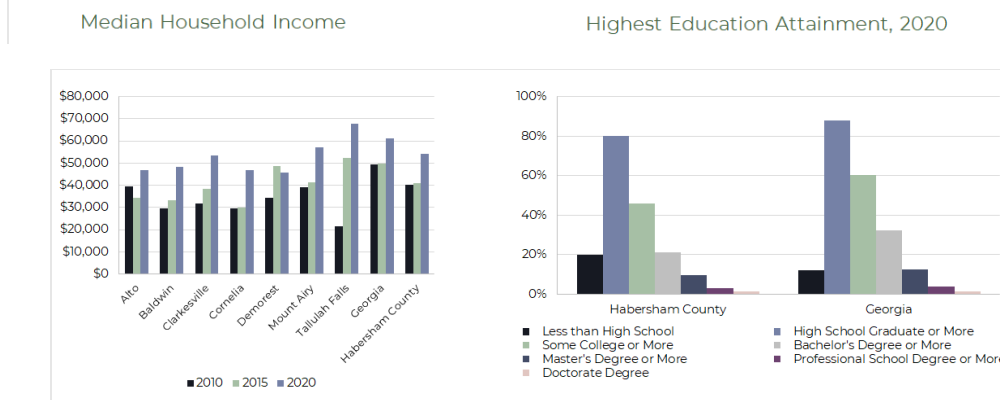
According to the ACS race and ethnicity data for 2010, 2015, and 2020, Habersham residents are 85% White, and the county has a growing Hispanic or Latino population, which increased from 12 to 16 percent between 2010 and 2020. All other demographic groups have maintained a relatively stable proportion of the population between 2010 and 2020.

	2010	2015	2020
White Alone	87%	88%	85%
Black or African American Alone	4%	4%	3%
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	0%	0%	0%
Asian Alone	2%	2%	2%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	0%	0%	1%
Some Other Race Alone	5%	4%	5%
Two or More Races	1%	1%	4%
Hispanic or Latino	12%	14%	16%

Demographic Data



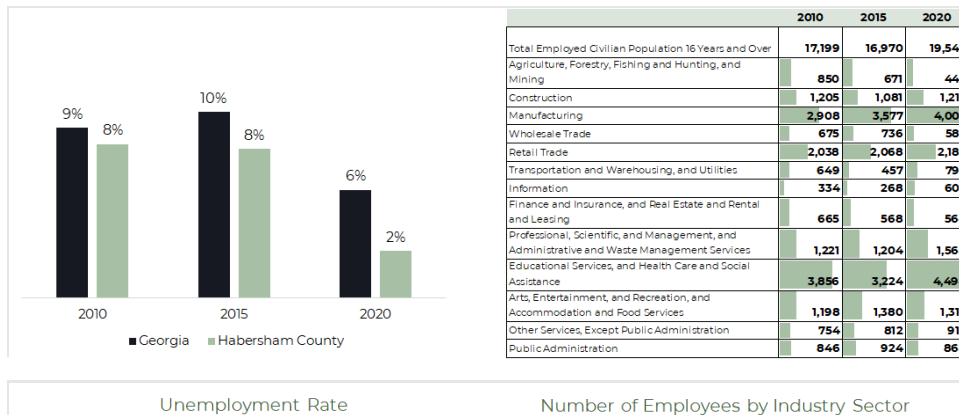
## Income and Education



### MHI and Education Data

The median household income increased between 2010 and 2020 for all cities in the county, although on average Median Household Income (MHI) is lower in Habersham than in the entire state of Georgia. Tallulah Falls is the smallest city but has the highest MHI. The level of education in Habersham is below average in comparison to the state of Georgia. For example, about 20% of the county has less than high school education, whereas the state of Georgia is 12%.

## Employment

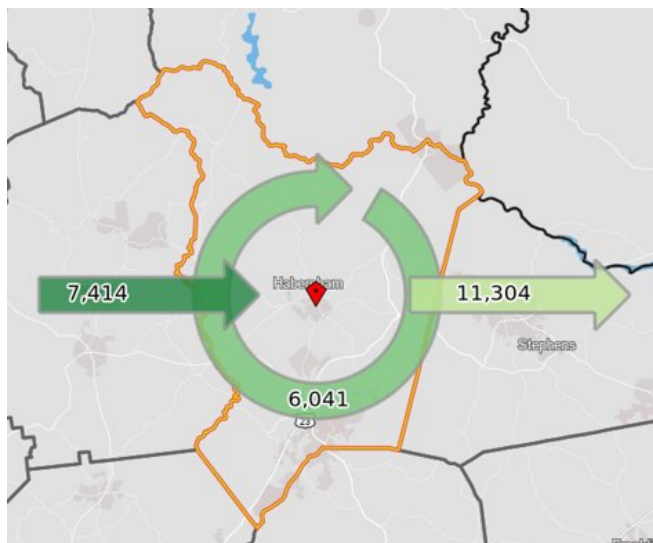


The county had a consistently lower unemployment rate than the state of Georgia between 2010 and 2020. Habersham had a notably low unemployment rate of 2% in 2020.

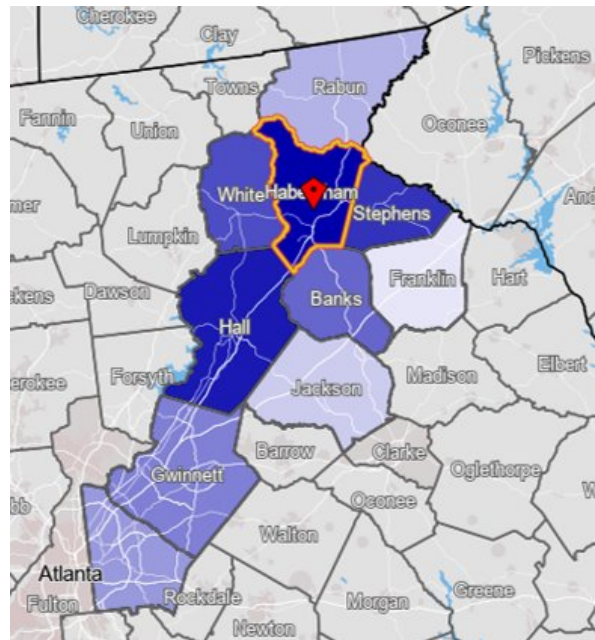
By number of employees, manufacturing and education are the largest industries in Habersham. The education sector is likely led by North Georgia Technical College and Piedmont University.

## Commuting Patterns

The team performed a worker inflow/outflow analysis via the U.S. Census Bureau's *On the Map* tool to investigate commuting patterns in Habersham County. This tool evaluates primary jobs, an individual's highest paying job. Worker inflow refers to the number of workers that live outside Habersham County and commute into the County for work. Worker outflow refers to the number of Habersham County residents that commute out of the County for work. The below figures display the inflow/outflow analysis for the County in 2018. Due to data availability, this analysis only represents pre-pandemic conditions. In 2018, Habersham County had a net negative worker flow of 3,890 workers, 11,304 workers commuted out of the county and 7,414 commuted into the county. Additionally, 6041 people live and work in Habersham County. This would safely classify Habersham County as a bedroom community, primarily for Hall County.



Habersham	6,041
Hall	1,047
Stephens	835
White	735
Banks	718
Gwinnett	283
DeKalb	273
Rabun	267
Jackson	256
Franklin	233
Other	2,767





## Previous Plans and Studies

### Downtown Clarkesville Master Plan (2015)

The Downtown Clarkesville Master Plan, published in 2015, establishes a strategic vision, plan, and work program for the city's downtown area. The report authors, the Downtown Georgia Renaissance Partnership (DGRP), conducted focus groups, one-on-one interviews, a town hall meeting, community-wide surveys, and a visual preference assessment to gather local perspectives regarding downtown Clarkesville. The final section of the plan translates this community input into a work program, design solutions, and short- and long-term implementation steps.

Through the community engagement process, DGRP found that residents hoped to improve walkability, re-route trucks out of the downtown, increase residential housing downtown, and provide lodging (e.g., locally owned, boutique hotels), among other suggestions. To address these concerns, the report offers options such as potential redesigning of the town square and maps showing where sidewalks could be added to increase walkability. DGRP also highlights areas for possible infill and offers design standards to retain a historic ambiance downtown. The report concludes with implementation goals for the City of Clarkesville. Long-term goals include rebuilding fire damaged structures, streetscape improvements, main square redesign, downtown lodging, and event spaces, and increased downtown housing.

### Habersham County Joint Comprehensive Plan (2018)

The Habersham County Joint Comprehensive Plan was formed in 2018 to address the local planning requirements and community development of the county as well as the municipalities of Clarkesville, Alto, Baldwin, Cornelia, Demorest, and Mt. Airy. The plan was formed by a Joint Stakeholder Advisory Committee made up of local elected officials and planning technicians. The plan sets an overall vision for the county, but also dictates the individual visions for each of the municipalities. In combination with a multitude of character area studies, the plan's visions represent the desire for the citizens of the county and towns to create and preserve a strong sense of community, one that protects the beautiful rural landscape they enjoy, while fostering collective belonging and a small-town way of life.

The character area definitions and corresponding maps in the Joint Comprehensive Plan are used as starting points for this study. Our recommendations update the map in this document and corresponding character area descriptions significantly to meet the goals of preservation and managing suburban growth.

## **The TDR Handbook: Designing and Implementing Transfer of Development Rights Programs (2012)**

Transfer of Development Rights, or TDR's, are a somewhat new planning tool that utilizes free market mechanisms to implement and finance the voluntary redistribution of development rights. Proponents of TDRs use this concept to protect certain places from development by allowing landowners to voluntarily sell their right to development, which can then be bought by property owners in other areas. These are commonly referred to as "sending areas" and "receiving areas". This leads to increasing the density of those areas that can sustain more concentrated development while protecting areas appropriate for conservation. This handbook, published in 2012, goes into detail about how to set up these programs in a wide variety of land use circumstances and provides case studies for locations where these methods have been used successfully within the United States. The most common goal of TDR programs is to preserve the environment and preserve farmland, both of which have been identified as priorities for this project in Habersham County. Specific takeaways for the project are highlighted in "Chapter 15: Farmland and Environmental Preservation Case Studies" and "Chapter 17: Rural Character Preservation Case Studies."

## **Clarkesville Greenways Masterplan (2004)**

This document provides background into the first phase (Phase I) of the Clarkesville Greenway Master Plan. The project was a joint initiative between Soque River Watershed Association, Clarkesville Greenways, and the City of Clarkesville. This phase includes a one-mile trail, a half-mile loop trail, a constructed wetland and stormwater retrofitting project, streambank restoration project, a bridge that connects the greenway to Mary Street Park, and a downtown connector trail on East Water Street. Phase I was the first greenway constructed in Habersham County. Future phases of this project include the following: Greenway expansion, organic community & native plant garden, and volunteer workdays among other components.

## **Clarkesville Green Infrastructure Implementation Strategy (EPA) (2014)**

Clarkesville approached the EPA about developing the Green Infrastructure plan in 2014. The city is not subject to state or federal requirements to address stormwater pollution but addresses stormwater quality and quantity issues through post-construction stormwater requirements and use of green infrastructure. The implementation strategy is broken into three major components: goals and objectives, comprehensive prioritization of parcels for further evaluation, and site-specific design. Ultimately, the EPA recommended a wide range of green infrastructure interventions, including rainwater harvesting, a green alley, bioretention, permeable pavement, a green roof, stormwater wetlands, and stormwater detention. Clarkesville has previously partnered with Habersham County, the Soque River Watershed Association (SRWA), and North Georgia Technical College on the design of a



pocket wetland area, grass swale, and two bioswales for the Habersham County Judicial Center. Additionally, the city played a role in encouraging the retrofit of a bioretention cell on private property near downtown. City staff at the time of the EPA plan's writing had a familiarity with green infrastructure from recent projects, particularly a greenway network and preserved open spaces and parks. The city adopted a Greenway Master Plan to connect parks with the central business district and eventually create a loop around the city.

In terms of existing strengths, Clarkesville's zoning code already encourages conservation design in new developments and the use of native vegetation in developed landscaping. Specifically, four areas of the city's ordinances – preservation corridor overlay district (Article XXII); subdivision requirements related to open space (§ 2816); conservation subdivision design option (§ 2806I); and tree preservation ordinance – seek to protect open areas, preserve natural features, and provide community green space (Article XXIX). The EPA also assessed the community using Tetra Tech's Green Infrastructure Opportunity Checklist Tool to identify new opportunities to modify the city's zoning ordinance to encourage further green infrastructure implementation including parking and street dimension changes; redevelopment incentives; setback reduction; phased disturbance of existing vegetated areas to reduce topsoil erosion; wetland protections through minimized hydrologic alteration requirements for development; increased stream buffer widths; and the adoption of additional stormwater performance standards for new development.

EPA provided additional recommendations for identifying and leveraging diverse funding sources based on site-specific considerations and Clarkesville's expressed interests. The overall strategy for Clarkesville was summarized as a 6-step process: 1) investigating property owner interest, cost and general feasibility of site-specific opportunities and select a sub-set to pursue more detailed conceptual designs; 2) consideration of key opportunities for code improvement in future zoning code revisions, 3) continuing to pursue WaterFirst Community Designation, 4) investigating feasibility and public interest in a stormwater utility for use in funding projects and grant cost share, 5) collaborate with affordable housing and economic development programs to find opportunities for green infrastructure and leveraging with ARC Grants, USEDA Economic Development Assistance Programs, and the CDBG program, and 6) pursuing site-specific funding for Appendix C Exhibits 1-11 as appropriate based on further planning and evaluation. EPA's site-specific design recommendations for 11 prioritized parcels as well as the methodology used for the prioritization process are strengths of the plan.

### **Coosa-North Georgia Regional Water Plan**

The Coosa-North Georgia Regional Water Planning Council (the Council) prepared a Regional Water Plan in 2017. The Coosa-North Georgia Region includes Habersham County and 17 other counties. The Council's report focuses on water conservation, water supply, wastewater, and water quality. The plan evaluates the CNG Region's current and future water and wastewater needs and highlights management practices that can be implemented through collaboration between local, regional, and state entities. Using 2050 population projections, the plan indicates that Habersham County has adequate water supply resources and infrastructure for the next three decades; however, Habersham County's wastewater infrastructure will exceed capacity by 2050. Habersham County also contains 42 miles of stream not meeting water quality standards and listed as a 303(d) impaired waterbody.

### **State Wildlife Action Plan (2015)**

Georgia's State Wildlife Action Plan contains statewide procedures to conserve populations of native wildlife species and natural habitats. The Plan lists 25 problem categories which stress wildlife systems and natural ecology. The list includes several categories which apply to potential changes to Habersham County: altered water quality, commercial/industrial development, conversion to agriculture, development of roads and infrastructure, and residential development. The Plan also identifies areas of Habersham County as containing existing conservation lands and high priority watersheds for preserving wildlife. Habersham is located mainly in the Piedmont ecoregion but borders the Blue Ridge ecoregion and has small land areas in that region. The Plan explains that the increase in sprawled residential and commercial development along major highways and on the outskirts of metropolitan areas is affecting the wildlife diversity in the Blue Ridge ecoregion. Similarly, the primary challenge for habitats and species in the Piedmont ecoregion is the rapid pace of residential and commercial development. The Plan suggests conservation goals such as minimizing "impacts from residential and commercial development on high priority species and habitats by providing input on environmental assessments and sharing information from DNR biodiversity databases" and maintaining "known viable populations of all high priority species and functional examples of all high priority habitats through land protection, incentive-based habitat management programs on private lands, and habitat restoration and management on public lands" (Georgia State Wildlife Action Plan 2015, pg. 114).

## **An Assessment of Water and Sewer Services in Habersham County, Georgia (2015)**

In 2015 the Habersham County Archway Partnership partnered with Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government (the Institute) to complete an assessment of water and sewer providers in Habersham County. The Institute reviewed water sources, water and sewer infrastructure, intergovernmental agreements, water systems' finances, water-related regulations, and governance structures of the water and sewer systems used by Alto, Baldwin, Clarkesville, Cornelia, Demorest, Mount Airy, and Tallulah Falls. Water and sewer infrastructure is important to communities of Habersham County because it is a limiting factor to community development. Furthermore, inadequate infrastructure can impact public health and impair natural resources.

A majority of Habersham County rests in the Upper Chattahoochee Watershed, part of the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River System (ACF). The ACF supplies water to the majority of Metro Atlanta as well as a large portion of central and South Georgia's agricultural operations. Therefore, the health of Habersham's watershed impacts numerous communities downstream. Under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act, eleven stream reaches totaling 99 miles of stream within this watershed are considered impaired, primarily due to fecal coliform concentration. Impaired water bodies have negative consequences for public health and economic development. It can also increase the cost of water treatment and longevity of water sources.

As of 2013, there are seven permitted drinking water systems in the county, including Alto, Baldwin, Clarkesville, Cornelia, Demorest, Mount Airy, and Tallulah Falls. Alto and Tallulah Falls rely upon groundwater sources. Baldwin, Clarkesville, and Cornelia draw from surface water sources. Demorest purchases surface water. The County's water infrastructure and customers are incorporated under Demorest's system. In 2014, only three systems (Alto, Baldwin, and Cornelia) generated positive revenue. GIS data of drinking water infrastructure, such as water lines, is limited. The assessment indicates that "a formal collaborative structure that allowed the individual water systems to cooperatively develop GIS information could provide immense value to these systems" (2015, pg. 25). There are various drinking water interconnections and intergovernmental agreements between systems. However, many of these agreements are not adequately documented, active, or formalized. The assessment's water demand projections revealed that there is small demand and supply gap for the year 2050. Water conservation and efficiency practices are the most cost-effective route to address this gap.

Four cities operate sewer systems in the County, including Baldwin, Cornelia, Clarkesville, and Demorest. The data documenting the extent of these systems is limited. Better documentation of these systems is important to identify and prevent conflicts between systems. The capacity of these systems may need to be expanded in the future, especially if more industrial users located in the County.



The assessment revealed four primary goals of local water providers: 1) promoting economic development, 2) preparing for growth, 3) drought resilience, and 4) efficient operations. Given these goals and all other findings from the assessment, the Institute recommends the following action items:

- Identify water capacity planning goals and strategies
- Plan for emergency supplies
- Formalize all interconnection agreements
- Update the service delivery strategies
- Map water and sewer infrastructure
- Coordinate representation and participation in regional planning
- Coordinate efforts to improve water quality
- Promote economic development by increasing transparency regarding water infrastructure

### **Soque River Watershed Protection Plan (2008)**

To advance sustainable management of water resources in Habersham County, local and state agencies created the Soque River Watershed Partnership. The partnership received Clean Water Act Section 319(h) funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, administered through the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, to conduct a comprehensive watershed assessment of the Soque River Watershed. The Soque River Watershed rests primarily in Habersham County, and the watershed's health affects residents of the county as well communities downstream of the Soque River's confluences with the Chattahoochee River. The Soque River Watershed is the primary water source for Clarkesville and Cornelia. It is also an important driver of the local economy, specifically agriculture and tourism. Due to growing concerns about water quality, the Soque River Watershed Partnership collected bacteria and sediment pollution data between 2004 and 2008. The data demonstrated that bacteria and sediment are a threat to the watershed's health. 60.5% of the watershed is considered impaired with E. Coli under USEPA guidelines, and the watershed yields approximately 23,586 tons of sediment per year. The assessment suggests that cattle crossings and failing residential drain fields are a large contributor to high E. Coli concentrations. The partnership aims to address this by encouraging farmers to install fencing to prevent cattle crossing and encourage the growth of vegetation buffers. Furthermore, the assessment points to drainage fields that need repair. In order to reduce sediment production, the assessment proposes the following best management practices: 1) cattle exclusion, 2) Streambank protection, 3) Critical area planting, 4) filter strips, 5) grass swales, 6) infiltration devices, 7) settling basins, 8) infiltration basins, and 9) porous pavement. In addition to recommended best management practices, the assessment proposes an education program and implementation schedule.

**Georgia Now & Forever StoryMap (2021)**

The Georgia Conservancy and the Georgia Institute of Technology have established a collaborative effort known as Georgia Now & Forever to study Georgia's historical land cover and how it has changed over the past 50 years. The partnership has produced a visual [StoryMap](#) which highlights how low-density development has devastated forests, wetlands, and agricultural land and, in turn, how it has affected wildlife, water systems, and food production. From 1974 to 2016, Habersham County lost 14,441 acres (8.1%) of its forest cover. The StoryMap discusses options for the inevitable growth throughout Georgia and how it can be shaped to have minimal impact on the natural environment. Rather than promoting traditional development, Habersham County can minimize the impact of growth on its environmental assets by pursuing opportunities like infill and redevelopment, form-based codes, and increased urban density.

## Community Input

### Stakeholder Interviews

Our studio team conducted several interviews with important stakeholders throughout the process to augment background data with a contextual understanding of local concerns. These stakeholders included Habersham County officials, and city officials from Clarkesville and Baldwin, as well as local environmental advocates, business owners, and farmers. County officials shared information regarding the county's capacity for development, including water and sewer infrastructure concerns and limited resources to respond to emerging challenges. While there is a recognition that growth is coming to Habersham County, the stakeholders expressed that there is a strong desire to conserve the natural and rural character of the county. The interviewees emphasized the need for audience-appropriate education targeted at county residents to build support for planning and conservation initiatives. Funding was the primary challenge for large infrastructure projects needed to expand the limited extent of water and sewer connections. This set of stakeholders also shared their desire to expand recreational opportunities for county residents and their ideas for potential sites for development projects.

We also spoke with representatives from the Cities of Clarkesville and Cornelia. As the county seat, Clarkesville is the center for the political and advocacy activity for the county. These stakeholders were passionate about the economic development of Clarkesville, and they especially wanted to find ways to engage the storefronts downtown and creatively redevelop the old courthouse building. Clarkesville's uniqueness was emphasized, as well as the desire to manage their growth in a way that preserves and uplifts their uniqueness. Cornelia is similarly on the front lines of development pressure from metro Atlanta. Representatives of Cornelia expressed excitement about the potential to take advantage of the coming development. These stakeholders were also interested in developing an environmental conservation strategy, but they shared the context that the municipalities don't often engage in strategizing together. The city officials were passionate about the potential of growing the economies of Clarkesville, Cornelia, and the county at large.

Finally, our studio team spoke with local activists and residents who had become involved with the studio to protect environmental interests and promote urban design best practices. The stakeholders came from environmental stewardship, architecture, and business backgrounds. These stakeholders provided the team with crucial firsthand experience of ongoing development and conservation-related efforts throughout Habersham County and its municipalities. The northern parts of the county were mentioned as priority areas for a dedicated conservation strategy because of the high number of private farms, growing trout fishing industry, and the vitally important Soque River headwaters. This group of stakeholders want to see responsible industrial growth in non-sensitive areas. They also discussed efforts to design a revitalized downtown Clarkesville and existing barriers to shopfront activation in its downtown. A few local stakeholders provided a tour of the county's rural and urban areas for our studio team.

## Stakeholder Presentations Feedback

After reviewing the plans previously mentioned and conducting numerous stakeholder interviews, our studio group synthesized three principal areas to focus our efforts on: suburban growth, conservation, and mobility. Our team developed high-level recommendations within each of these categories. On September 30, 2022, we presented our initial findings along with the recommendations for each of our focus areas to the key stakeholders we interviewed and other stakeholders invited by individuals in our original outreach. The full presentation can be found in the appendix of this document, and a brief summary of our focus areas, their associated goals, and recommendations are shown below.

### Focus Area 1: Suburban Growth

Goal: Proactively address suburban growth across the county by identifying specific corridors and areas for smart growth in order to discourage unmanaged residential and commercial development, particularly in priority conservation areas.

Recommendations:

- #1: Rethink the placement and size of the character areas “suburban transition”, “mixed residential”, and “traditional neighborhood”
- #2: Design conservation subdivisions
- #3: Consider forms of subdivision controls

### Focus Area 2: Conservation

Goal: Highlight locations with natural amenities and rural characteristics to preserve and provide strategies for managing those resources and the wider Soque River Watershed.

Recommendations:

- #1: Design and implement green infrastructure facilities to manage stormwater
- #2: Consistently enforce stream buffers around particular land uses
- #3 Reinforce existing tourism sites and protect trout fishing

### Focus Area 3: Mobility

Goal: Recommend facility improvements that will connect city residents to one another by activating new or underutilized sites for community activities.

Recommendations:

- #1: Develop/update trail system plans for each city
- #2: Improve existing pedestrian facilities



#3: Explore downtown revitalization programs in specific cities

#4: Pilot larger mobility solution ideas in specific corridors

The stakeholders at the presentation found our preliminary findings to be in alignment with Habersham County's needs and priorities. After reviewing our recommendations, the meeting participants felt each recommendation was viable and worth exploring further. With this stakeholder support, our group moved forward by exploring the initial recommendations in more depth and adding detailed implementation steps to each.

The studio team presented again to stakeholders on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. In this presentation, the team detailed our final recommendations for each of the three categories: suburban growth, conservation, and mobility. Recommendations were designed with implementation in mind and were tied closely to each of the character areas. The expanded list of recommendations received similar support, especially within the context of parallel planning efforts set to begin in the coming year.



Studio Team & Georgia Conservancy Staff

## Plan Recommendations

Based on the feedback received from participants and continued research, our studio team refined and finalized our recommendations framed around the following goals.

### Suburban Growth (S)

- S1: Implement the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program at the County level.
- S2: Rethink the placement, size, and makeup of the county's character areas.
- S3: Create a capital improvement element (CIE) to collect impact fees.

### Conservation (C)

- C1: Create and implement a watershed conservation strategy.
- C2: Create and implement a land conservation strategy.

### Mobility (M)

- M1: Develop a countywide trail system.
- M2: Increase the capacity and frequency of Habersham County Transit.
- M3: Ensure a basic level of service for non-motorists
- M4: Focus transportation investments in existing urbanized areas.
- M5: Reform County and municipal zoning ordinances to foster multimodal transportation.

The following sections describe each goal in detail and provide implementation steps for county officials to pursue. Additional information regarding potential implementation partners, funding sources, and case studies can be found in an appendix at the end of these sections.

## Suburban Growth

### Objective

Proactively address suburban growth across the county by identifying specific corridors and areas for growth to discourage unmanaged residential and commercial development

### Goals

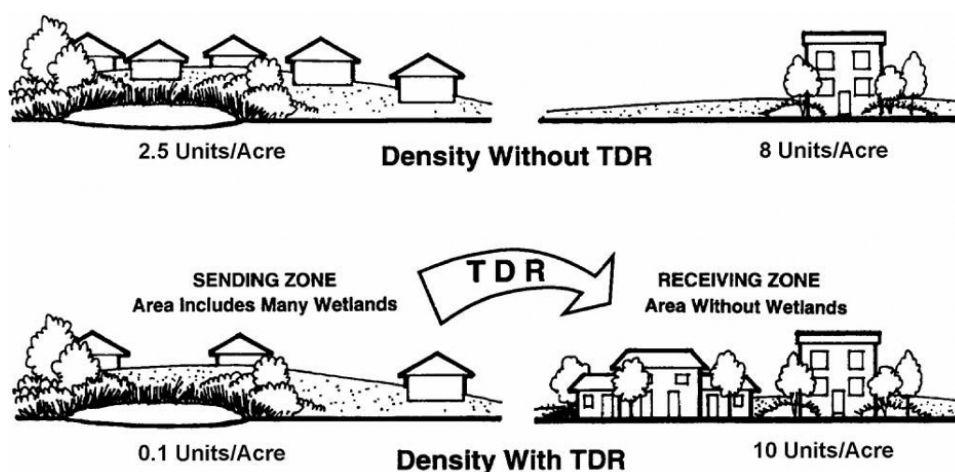
S1: Implement the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program at the County level.

S2: Rethink the placement, size, and makeup of the county's character areas.

S3: Create a Capital Improvement Element (CIE) to collect impact fees.

### S1: Implement the Transfer of Development Rights program at the county level.

The Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program is a growth management tool that allows property owners in low density areas to conserve their land, while receiving fair compensation in exchange for the property's development rights. The development rights are then available to be purchased by property owners in medium or high-density areas, to increase the density of a given development beyond what existing zoning allows for. The TDR program operates using “sending” and “receiving” zones in which tracts zoned for low-density uses are sending zones, and medium / high density areas designated by local governments serve as receiving zones. This tool establishes the permanent protection of agricultural lands and natural landscapes through conservation easements or restrictive covenants and encourages intentional growth by redirecting development to more densely populated corridors. We propose that Habersham County establishes a TDR program to protect rural areas around the Soque Watershed while incentivizing growth in designated corridors.



*Graphic Demonstration of TDRs from Madison-Morgan Conservancy*



## S2: Rethink the placement, size, and makeup of the county's character areas.

The County regulates land through the designation of Land Use Districts. The current designations fall into four categories:

1. Agriculture Protection
2. Low Intensity
3. Moderate Intensity
4. High Intensity

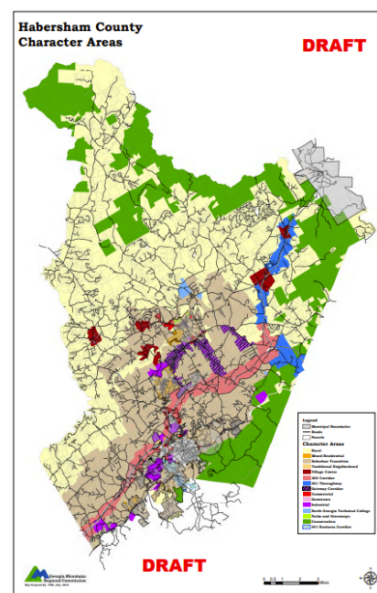
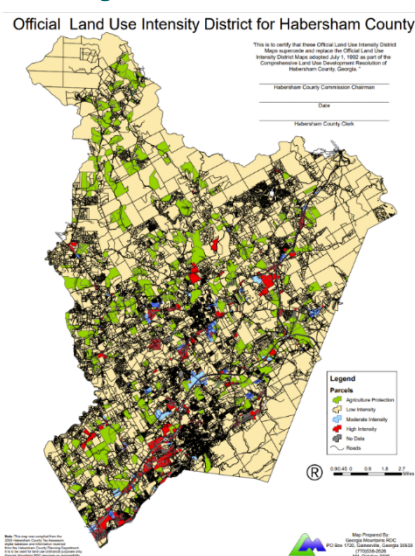
These broad designations are represented by the map to the right. They are further divided into 10 more distinct districts.

The 2018 Habersham County Joint Comprehensive Plan proposed 15 character areas. This map improves upon the current Land Use District designations by adding areas specifically intended for conservation; however, these additions were minimal and mostly consisted of federally protected lands. Furthermore, the 2018 plan also expanded residential, suburban development into heavy agriculture areas in the western portion of the county, which could potentially exacerbate environmental stresses resulting from population growth.

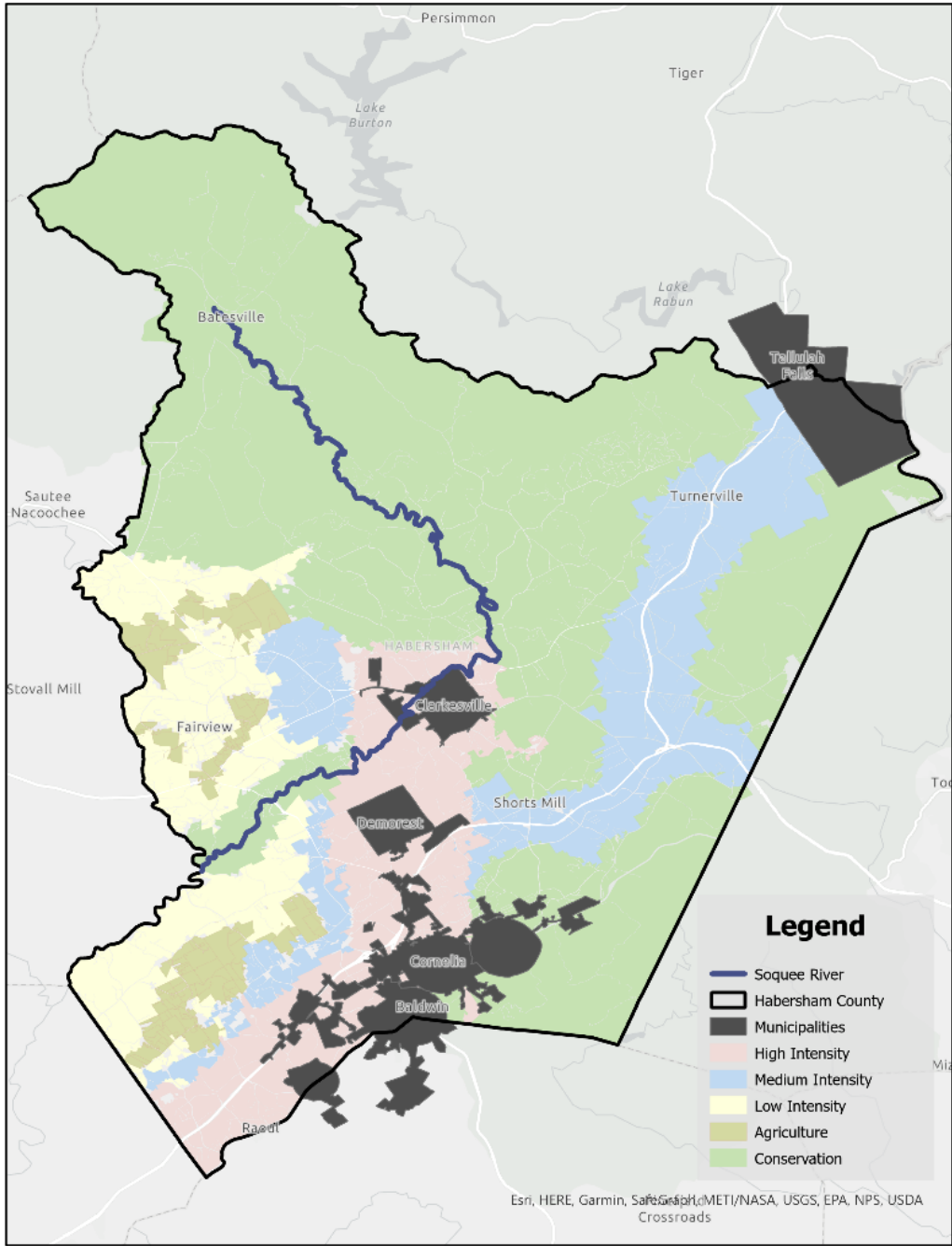
### Recommendations

**S2.1.** We propose the following adaptations of the land use designations and character areas map for the county to explore with the community during the next Comprehensive Planning Process.

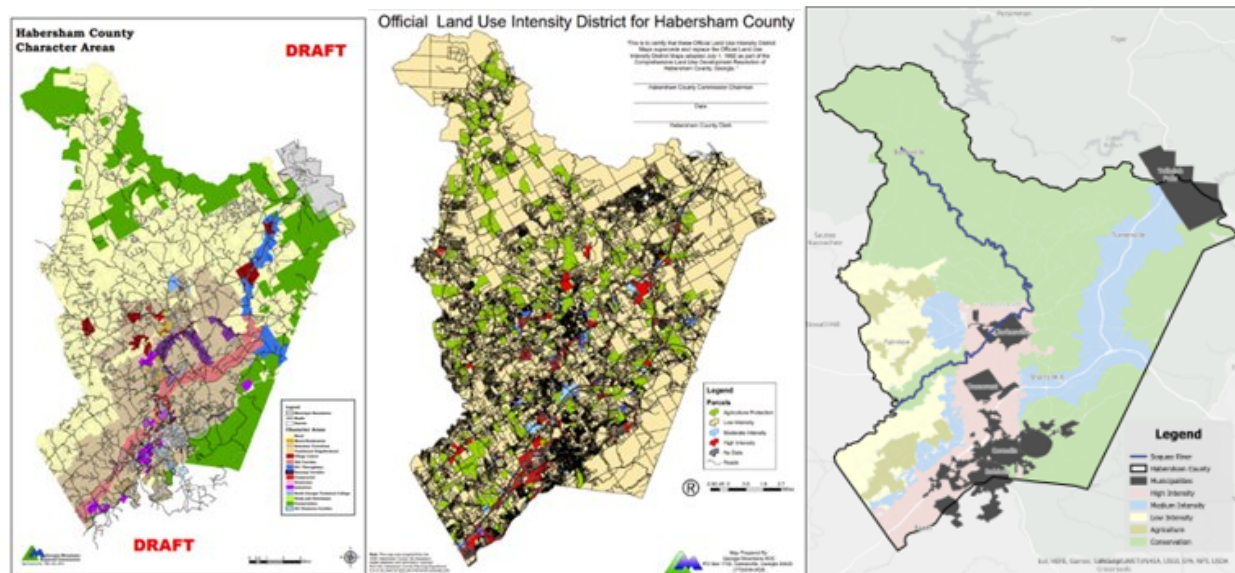
**S2.2.** If these character areas align with the needs of Habersham residents and County priorities for future growth management, the next implementation step would be to update the County's Code of Ordinances to ensure the land use district coverages align with the changes listed in the character area descriptions below.







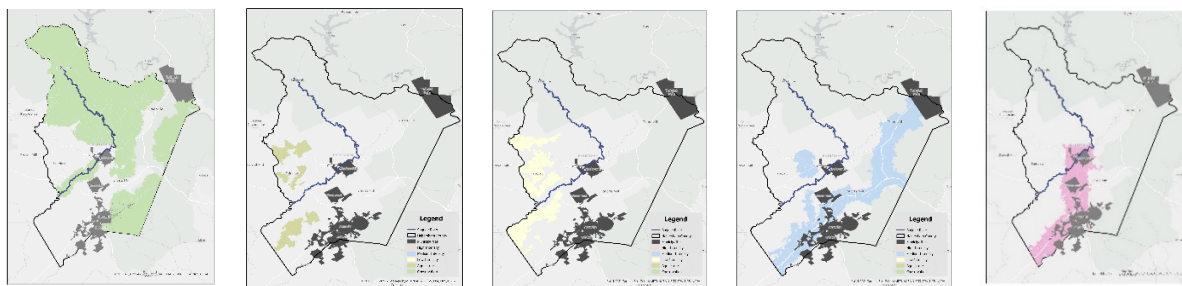
Proposed Updated Character Area Map for Habersham County



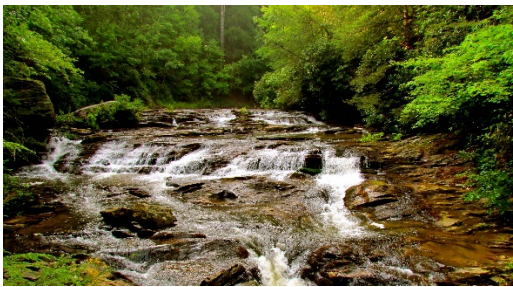
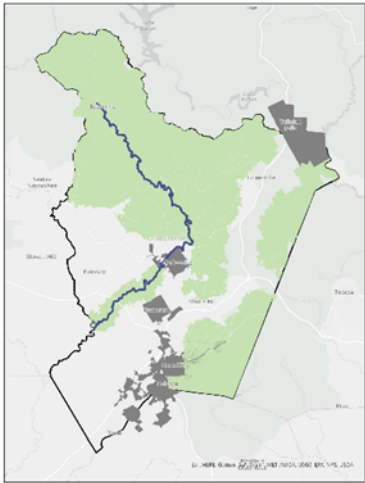
The purpose of our recommended character area map is to channel growth into certain areas and slow growth in others. Character areas are a visioning tool local governments can use to envision how specific sections of the County may look over the long-term, and do not necessarily reflect the characteristics of existing development in those areas.

A comparison of the maps shows an increase in conservation lands and a more efficient development pattern along existing thoroughfares between municipalities. It is important to note that existing land uses will not be made illegal if their new character area is incompatible with their current use. Emphasizing this fact with County Commissioners and County residents could potentially help increase buy-in with these two key stakeholder groups.

A further break down of the proposed character areas and their key characteristics are on the following pages.



**Conservation:**



**Recommendations / Characteristics of the Conservation Character Area:**

This area expands conservation efforts past the land already conserved by the US National Forest.

This area serves as a TDR Credit Sending Zone.

It should contain no commercial or industrial development, and very restricted residential development.

Strong regulations for the subdivision of lots.

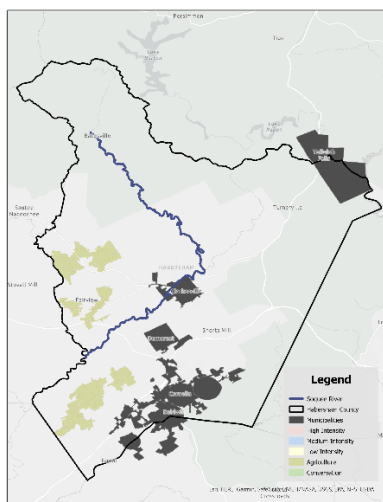
Large minimum lot sizes (10 acres) – paired with very low impervious surfaces percentages.

The idea of the regulations should allow those with farms and residences already in the conservation zone to do what they need, but to be very intentional about limiting what else can be built here (within legal boundaries).

Mandatory stormwater management on site.

Includes agricultural uses through a Special Land Use Permit, though current farms would be grandfathered in.

Includes riparian buffers around streams using conservation easements as a method of protection.

***Agricultural:*****Recommendations / Characteristics of the Agricultural Character Area:**

This area primarily encompasses existing Agricultural Land.

This area serves as a TDR Credit Sending Zone.

No commercial or industrial development, industrial related to agrobusiness, or seasonally commercial activities (pumpkin patches, Christmas tree farms, etc.).

Strong regulations for the subdivision of lots.

Low density and low intensity development with large minimum lot sizes (5 acres) – paired with very low impervious surfaces percentages.

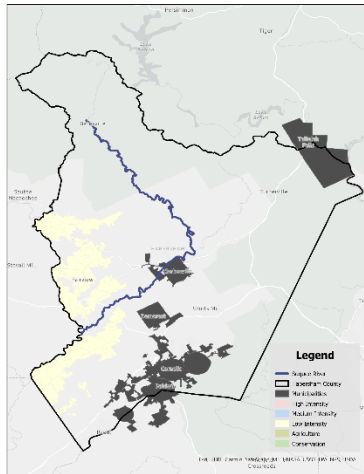
Restricted residential development, primarily in support of ongoing agricultural practices.

Incentives for farming operations that explore or implement regenerative agriculture practices (like allowances to the impervious surface percentage).

Guidance and incentives for managing storm water on site and constructing stream bank fencing – does not need to be permanent.



**Low Intensity:**



**Recommendations / Characteristics of the Low Intensity Character Area:**

Light, low impact residential development. No commercial or industrial development, other than temporary seasonal commercial uses related to agritourism.

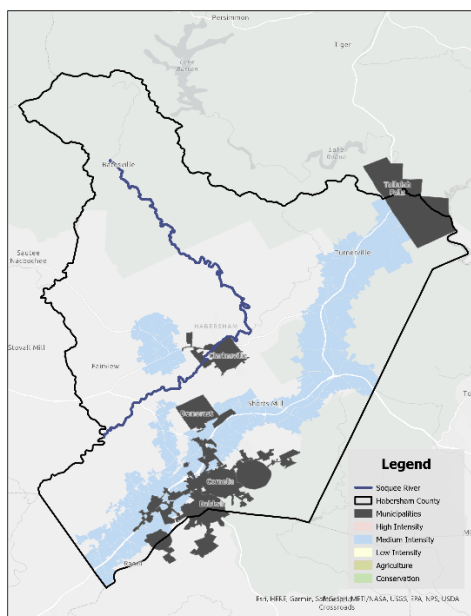
This area serves as a TDR Credit Sending Zone.

Low density and low intensity development with large minimum lot sizes (2.5 acres) – paired with very low impervious surfaces percentages.

Incentivize conservation subdivisions by permitting smaller lot sizes in conservation subdivisions.

Development uses wells & septic tanks and should be outside the water and sewer service zones.

Guidance and incentives for managing storm water on site and putting up stream barriers – don't need to be permanent.

**Medium Intensity:****Recommendations / Characteristics of the Medium Intensity Character Area:**

This area is primarily used for corridors and as a transition between low intensity development patterns and higher intensity development patterns.

This area serves as a TDR Credit Receiving Zone.

This area has smaller lot minimums:  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre. Begin instituting maximum lot sizes.

Begin accepting industrial and commercial land use patterns in addition to residential and agricultural. Industrial uses through SPLU permits can give the county control over intentionally siting these facilities.

Incentivize cottage style or craftsman style developments via design ordinances that preserve the “Mayberry” small-town feel.

Incentivize conservation subdivisions but allow for normal subdivisions.

Needs to be within a certain distance of water and sewer so these services can be reasonably extended and paid for through impact fees if not in service zones already.

Use high design standards and viewshed overlays in corridors to create visually appealing development, standardization and minimize “corporate branding” skylines along major thoroughfares. Viewshed overlays can preserve views of natural resources from these developments.

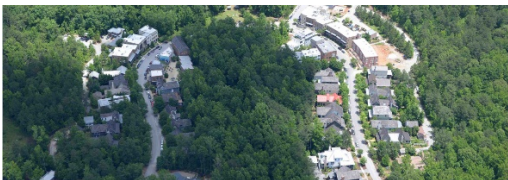
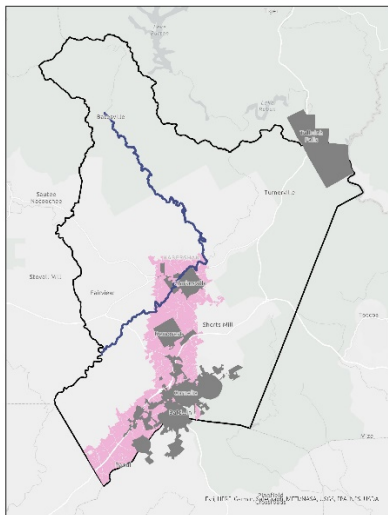
Sidewalk requirements should be in the zoning code, especially around schools

	Work with GDOT/Developers to provide commercial access via block patterns or alleyway access points off major roadways.
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A designed site plan using the principles of the Medium Density Character Area.

**High Intensity:**



*Chattahoochee Hills – Serenbe High Intensity Area*

**Recommendations / Characteristics of the High Intensity Character Area:**

This connects already developed areas in the cities to create a corridor-like regional growth pattern through the center of the county. By concentrating development here in this manner, the county can take advantage of more efficient economic development and natural transportation flows while reducing impact on the natural resources of the county.

Industrial and commercial uses accepted here. Industrial uses through SPLU permits can give the county control over intentionally siting these facilities.

This area serves as a TDR Credit Receiving Zone.

$\frac{1}{4}$  acre minimum lot size,  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre maximum lot size. These can have large impervious surface percentages.

Design standards to locate parking away from street-engagement areas, i.e., behind or on the sides of buildings. More recommendations around parking can be found in M5.

Incentivize multifamily choices such as townhomes, duplexes, or triplexes. Design guidelines can make these look like single family residential homes. This can maintain the feel the county is looking for, while giving young families and seniors right-sized, affordable choices to be able to stay in their home community.

Incentives for mixed-use developments.

Combined with a Tree Ordinance (CX), these areas can still feel natural.



	Sidewalk requirements in the zoning, especially around schools and commercial shopping centers.
--	---

Character Area Summary Chart:

	Lot Sizes	Permitted Land Uses	TDR Zone Type	Things to Require	Things to Incentivize
Conservation	10+ acres	Conservation, Ag & Residential with SPLU	Sending	Small permeable surfaces percentages, onsite stormwater management	No development
Agriculture	5+ acres	Conservation, Ag, & Residential, Commercial with Temporary Permit	Sending	Small permeable surfaces percentages, onsite stormwater management	Regenerative agricultural practices
Low Intensity	2.5+ acres	Conservation, Ag, & Residential, Commercial with Temporary Permit	Sending	Small permeable surfaces percentages, onsite stormwater management	Conservation Subdivisions
Medium Intensity	.5-1 acre	Conservation, Ag, & Residential, Commercial, Industrial with SPLU	Receiving	High design standards, less corporate branding, sidewalks	Best practices for stormwater management
High Intensity	.25-.75 acre	Conservation, Ag, & Residential, Commercial, Industrial with SPLU	Receiving	High design standards such as brick or natural stone, less corporate branding, sidewalks	Best practices for stormwater management

**S3: Create a Capital Improvement Element (CIE) to collect impact fees.**

The Georgia Development Impact Fee Act (DIFA) is a program that allows municipal or county governments to require a one-time development fee to fund adequate public

infrastructure. Used properly, impact fees can be an equitable tool to leverage new developments with the proportionate share of increased public facility demand associated with a given development. Stakeholder input and previous plans highlighted several needs that are currently underfunded or not funded. County infrastructure priorities that will be exacerbated by new development include maintenance of existing transportation infrastructure; development of sidewalks, trails, and greenways; and an expansion of the water and sewer system capacity.

To begin collecting impact fees, a government entity must include a Capital Improvements Element (CIE) in their comprehensive plan. The enabling CIE must include an inventory of current county assets in each category, predicted future needs, a schedule of improvements, and context-specific projects. Additionally, governments must update their entire Short Term Work Programs (STWP) annuals, and the CIE annually by creating an Annual Financial Report on impact fees, and a new fifth year schedule of improvements, and any changes or revisions to CIE projects including alterations in project costs, proposed changes in funding sources, construction schedules, or project scope. The seven eligible funding categories are:

- Water supply, production, treatment, and distribution facilities
- Wastewater collection, treatment, and disposal facilities
- Roads, streets, bridges, including rights-of-way, traffic signals, landscaping, and any components of state or federal highways.
- Stormwater collection, retention, detention, treatment, and disposal facilities, flood control facilities, and bank and shore protection and enhancement improvements.
- Parks, open space, and recreation areas and related facilities
- Public Safety, including police, fire, emergency medical and rescue facilities
- Libraries and related facilities

In order to support the development of central corridors in Habersham County, we recommend that the county adopts a CIE in the next Comprehensive Plan.

## Conservation

### Objective

Protect, preserve, manage, or restore natural resources from exploitation, destruction, or neglect within Habersham County.

### Goals

C1: Create and implement a watershed conservation strategy.

C2: Create and implement a land conservation strategy.

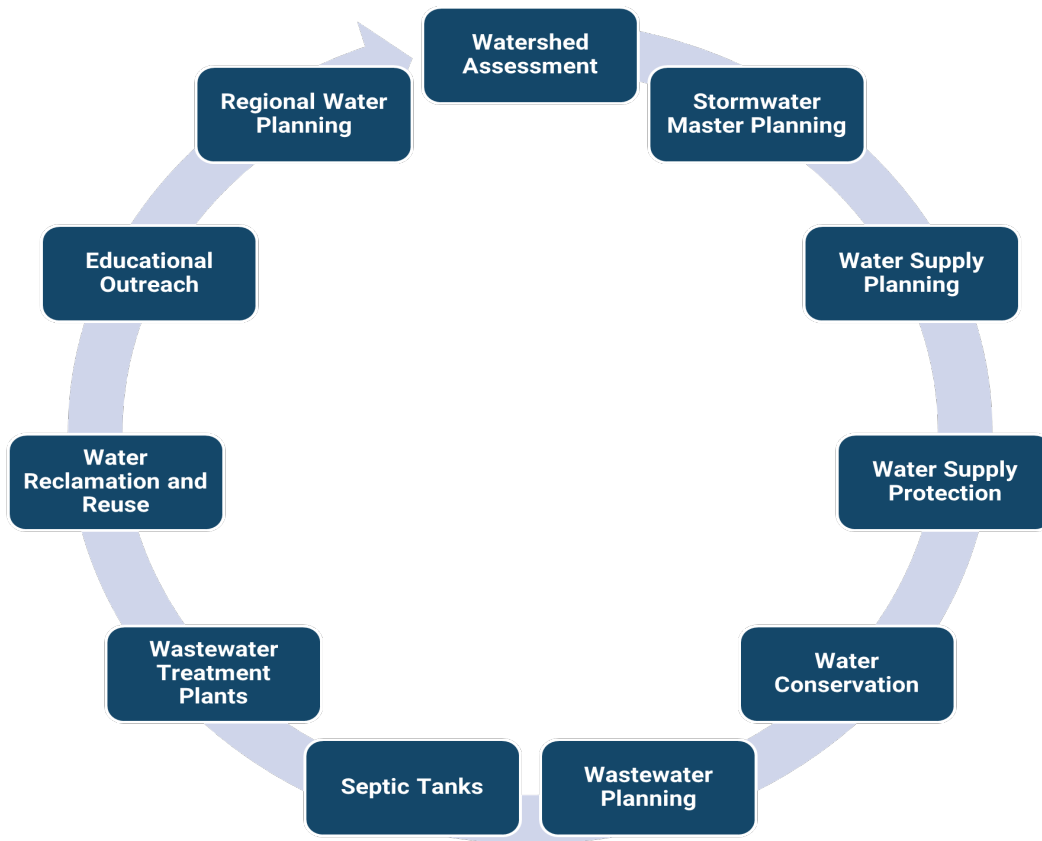
#### **C1: Create and implement a watershed conservation strategy.**

Habersham County's local watershed is a beautiful natural amenity that provides economic opportunity and promotes a high quality of life. The project team recommends that Habersham County implements various strategies to improve the sustainability of the County's water resources and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of water resource public administration.

#### **Recommendations:**

##### **C1.1 Watershed Conservation: County-wide water resource management practices**

Increase the resiliency of the County's water resources by implementing best practices for water resource management. This includes increasing the level of coordination between municipalities and integrating stormwater, wastewater, and drinking water planning. By implementing water resource management best practices, the County could pursue a WaterFirst Community designation. WaterFirst is a program administered by the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA). WaterFirst communities engage in the practices listed in the figure below. Communities that receive this designation can receive a 1% interest rate reduction on GEFA loans, annual eligibility for water-related project applications for the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG), and priority status for Georgia Environmental Protection Division's (EPD) 319(h) grant program. Cornelia and Hall County received a WaterFirst designation in 2010 and 2019, respectively. The County could utilize Cornelia and Hall County's experience to implement best practices and navigate the WaterFirst application process.



*WaterFirst Community Practices from GEFA*

### C1.2 Watershed Conservation: Increase Green Infrastructure

Green infrastructure is loosely defined as a vegetated structure or open land engineered to promote groundwater infiltration and reduce stormwater velocity (EPA, 2008). Green infrastructure can reduce the risk of flood hazards, improve water quality, and provide visual aesthetics. Specific green infrastructure interventions can range greatly in size, as demonstrated in the figure below. Habersham County and its constituents have implemented green infrastructure projects previously. In 2012, the Habersham County Commission in partnership with the Soque Watershed River Association constructed three green infrastructure features at the county courthouse, as demonstrated in the figure below. Additionally, in 2015, EPA prepared a Green Infrastructure Implementation Strategy for the City of Clarkesville. Habersham County can promote watershed conservation by increasing efforts to implement green infrastructure projects through a county-wide implementation strategy, economic incentives, zoning modifications, and public outreach.



## GROWTH MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION



*Example Green Infrastructure Interventions*

*Source: EPA Region IV,*

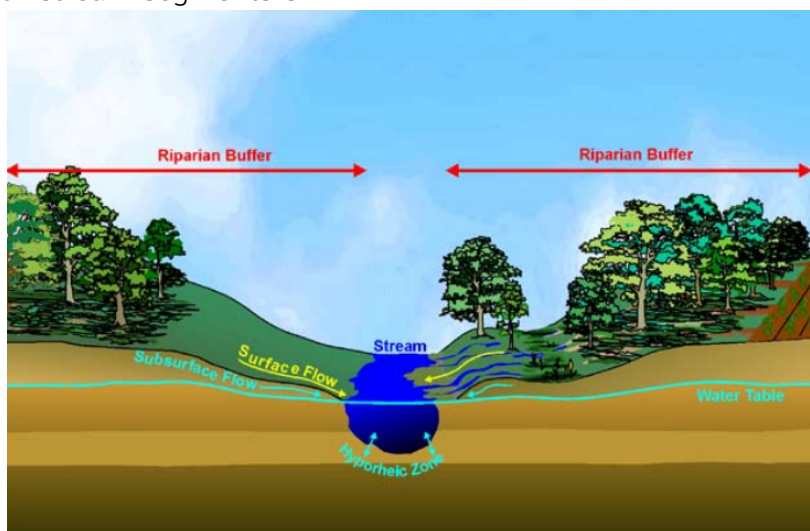


*Habersham County Courthouse, Curbless Bioswale*

### C1.3 Watershed Conservation: Utilize Riparian Buffers

Stakeholder interviews and research from the County's previous plans and studies demonstrated that the regional watershed, especially the Soque River (Map Appendix - Fig. 1), is a treasured local resource, providing water supply, recreational activities, and economic value. As noted in the 2008 Soque River Watershed Protection Plan, river sedimentation and fecal coliform threaten the local watershed's health (Soque River Watershed Partnership). In this plan, four stream segments on

the Soque River and Hazel Creek are listed as "Impaired Waters" by the State of Georgia and USEPA. Sedimentation and fecal coliform are non-point pollution sources caused by increasing development and land disturbance, failing residential drain fields, and cattle crossings. As stated in the 2016 Manual for Erosion and Sediment Control in



Example Riparian Buffer

Georgia, a strip of undisturbed or restored vegetation surrounding water bodies, a buffer zone, is a crucial practice to reduce sediment load, decrease stream velocity, encourage groundwater recharge, and encourage water filtration (Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission). The image to the right displays a diagram of a buffer zone developed by the United States Environmental Protection Agency. The team recommends this practice to protect the County's water assets and would like to highlight the work of the UGA Cooperative Extension and SRWA to promote this practice.

### Watershed Conservation Funding Sources

Funding Source	Learn More
<b>CWA Section 319 (h) Nonpoint Source Implementation Grant</b>	<a href="https://epd.georgia.gov/outreach/grants/georgia-319h-nonpoint-source-grant">https://epd.georgia.gov/outreach/grants/georgia-319h-nonpoint-source-grant</a>
<b>Georgia Power Foundation Grants, Waters for Georgia Grant</b>	<a href="https://www.georgiapower.com/community/apply-grant/environmental-water-grant.html">https://www.georgiapower.com/community/apply-grant/environmental-water-grant.html</a>
<b>USEPA Clean Water State Revolving Fund</b>	<a href="https://gefa.georgia.gov/water-resources/water-and-sewer-financing/clean-water-state-revolving-fund">https://gefa.georgia.gov/water-resources/water-and-sewer-financing/clean-water-state-revolving-fund</a>
<b>National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Five Star and Urban Water Restoration Program</b>	<a href="https://www.nfwf.org/programs/five-star-and-urban-waters-restoration-grant-program">https://www.nfwf.org/programs/five-star-and-urban-waters-restoration-grant-program</a>
<b>USDOT Transportation Alternatives Program</b>	<a href="https://www.dot.ga.gov/GDOT/Pages/TAP.aspx">https://www.dot.ga.gov/GDOT/Pages/TAP.aspx</a>

**USDA Rural Assistance Program – Water and Waste Disposal Direct Loans and Grants**

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/water-environmental-programs/water-waste-disposal-loan-grant-program>

**USDA Environmental Quality Incentives Program**

<https://gaswcc.georgia.gov/agricultural-conservation-programs/usda-nrcs-programs/environmental-quality-incentives-program-eqip>

## C2: Land Conservation

Stakeholders indicated a strong desire for land conservation recommendations during the preliminary presentation and throughout the process. Habersham County's native forest is a treasured natural amenity that provides recreational, economic, and ecological value for residents and wildlife; yet, the County has lost nearly 15,000 acres in the last 50 years to development and degradation. Additionally, stakeholders highlighted the importance of the agricultural community and open farmland to the character and economic vitality of the county. Stakeholder input also reflected residents' interest in preserving Habersham's rural character and open spaces. Development in different areas of the county pose unique threats to the existing agricultural, park, and conservation spaces. To protect these valuable resources, we recommend that Habersham County pursue the following actions:

### Recommendations

#### C2.1: Adopt a forest management strategy.

Habersham County should take a more active role in managing national forest areas with the US Forest Service (USFS) as a part of a countywide forest management strategy. Habersham County contains a large portion of the Chattahoochee-Oconee Forest that is maintained by the US Forest Service. While federal jurisdiction and law does not require USFS to adopt local government regulations, it does require the agency to coordinate with local government planning efforts. The county can leverage this relation to conduct planning exercises that increase the county's utilization of its natural amenities and create more opportunities for residents. For example, Code of Ordinances § 68-507 acknowledges that most of the unique flora and fauna in Habersham County is on federal land. However, conducting a unique flora and fauna asset mapping exercise with property owners who are adjacent to the national forest areas may reveal areas in critical need of protection. The county could then encourage property owners to enroll in different conservation opportunities such as the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Candidate Conservation Agreement.

A joint planning exercise between the county and USFS to map out sensitive areas and create management strategies would reduce the burden on county capacity to respond to different planning challenges. USFS also publishes resources related to invasive plant and animal species management, forest management and additional conservation methods. The county could work with USFS to create educational and recreational opportunities to disseminate their resources and information to county residents. Conversely, the county could create its own database of resources as a part of a campaign to educate residents and property owners of forest management best practices and other important topics.





**C2.2: Encourage productive, sustainable use of farmland.**

Habersham County has a number of farms and other agricultural lands that are valuable to the local community. However, stakeholders expressed concern that the farming community lack the needed support and resources. To address this need, the county could explore a cost sharing program that allows property owners to implement best practice solutions on their farms without extreme out-of-pocket costs. For example, North Carolina's Agriculture Cost Share Program (ACSP) reimburses landowners for as much as 75% of the average cost of labor and materials to implement best management practices that reduce nonpoint pollution on their properties. Habersham County could also support local property owners and residents to develop community gardens to strengthen Habersham's character as a rural and agricultural community.

Habersham County could create additional opportunities for economic development while simultaneously conserving their existing farmland by enabling temporary, seasonal commercial use of farms. Agritourism allows property owners to charge for admission to view or visit an operating farm for recreational or educational purposes. Existing ordinances do not prohibit agritourism uses; however, it is not encouraged or common throughout Habersham County. Seasonal commercial uses on farms in agriculture and low intensity character areas would allow for agritourism and productivity on family farms while also strengthening Habersham's character and economy. Specifically, seasonal commercial uses such as pumpkin patches or farmers markets may provide a unique economic opportunity for property owners to profit from their farmland and promote the conservation of farmland. A supportive agritourism ordinance could also permit tours of historic local farms. To support the development of a local agritourism industry, the county could assess its historic farms and map those assets.



*Source: Soque River Watershed Association*



**C2.3: Modify Habersham County ordinance to support conservation strategies.**

Habersham County could benefit from slight modifications to its existing county ordinances to support a more robust conservation strategy. Currently, Habersham County does not have a countywide tree ordinance, risking the loss of existing native forest. The county should explore different examples of successful tree ordinances across Georgia and find which models work best for the rural context since tree ordinances commonly apply to urban trees or public spaces. The county will want to devise regulations that do not overly restrict private land use. As an example, the ordinance could require that private landowners with large tracts of forest or developers submit and maintain a tree plan that details the existing trees and site conditions, proposed site changes (if applicable), and conservation strategies for existing trees. The City of Clarkesville has a tree ordinance that could be used as the basis for a countywide regulation.

Additionally, Habersham County's current conservation subdivision ordinance designates existing native forest and agricultural land as a secondary conservation use, which deprioritizes forest preservation and agricultural land uses such as community gardens as a part of a holistic conservation strategy. By changing farms and existing native forests to a primary conservation use, developers and residents may more easily convert existing forest areas into conservation subdivisions if appropriate. The county could also consider requiring developers provide parkland or open space in any large new developments or pay an impact fee.

**C2.4: Promote economic incentives for farmland and forest conservation.**

Habersham Co. could benefit from promoting different forms of economic incentives to property owners with large tracts of forested land. For example, conservation use property can qualify for Conservation Use Value Assessment (CUVA) that allows for the property to be assessed at 40 percent of fair market value so long as at least 50 percent of the land is used for agricultural purposes. The covenant is maintained for ten years, and property owners can incur a penalty for breaking its land maintenance requirements. Habersham's Tax Assessor currently manages CUVA for the county so continuing promotion of this incentive could bolster the county's overall conservation strategy. The county could also promote the Georgia Conservation Tax Credit Program. GCTCP allows landowners to donate land to the local government or a land trust in order to apply a credit against their state income taxes up to 25 percent of their land donation's fair market value. The land donation is permanent, and the tax credits will expire on December 31, 2026. However, GCTCP does not require that donated land allow for public assess. CUVA and GCTCP are both strong economic incentives for private landowners to support conservation efforts in the county. Habersham Co. should explore partnerships with Georgia Conservancy, local land trusts, and other organizations that can support these and other economic-based conservation strategies.

## Mobility

### Objective

Recommend facility improvements that will connect city residents to one another by activating new or underutilized sites for community activities.

### Goals

M1: Develop a countywide trail system.

M2: Increase the capacity and frequency of Habersham County transit.

M3: Ensure a basic level of service for non-motorists.

M4: Focus transportation investments in existing urbanized areas.

M5: Reform County and municipal zoning ordinances to foster multimodal transportation.

#### M1: Develop a countywide trail system.

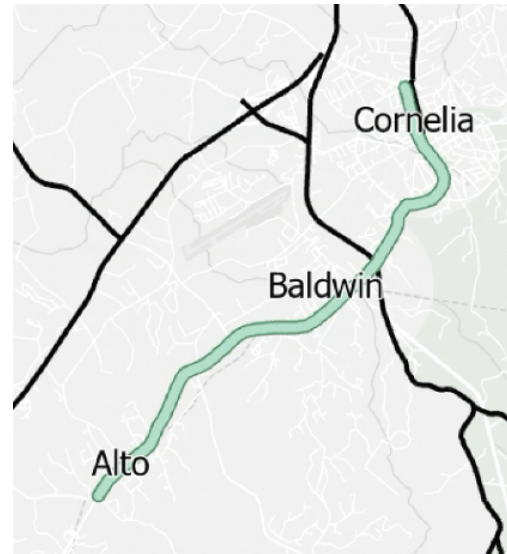
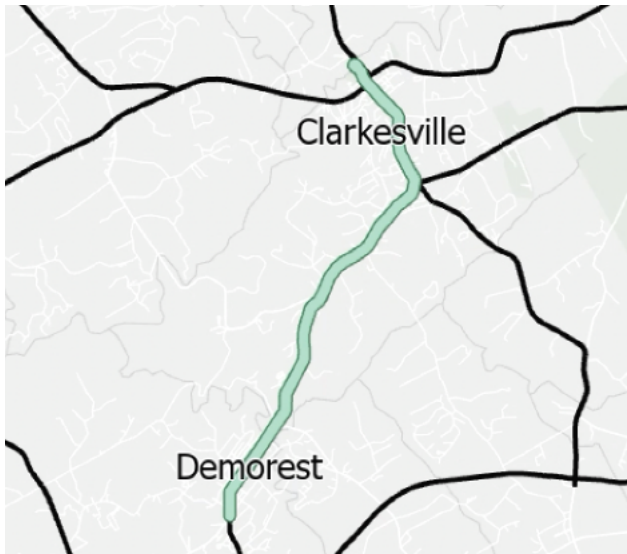
Stakeholder input revealed a desire for a countywide multi-use trail system; however, there is the lack of funding due to repeated failed TSPLOST referendum votes including the one on November 8th, 2022. Moreover, there are documented concerns about potential trespassing on private land. With limited funding and political will, there are more feasible solutions to providing intercity multimodal transportation. Such an approach can include using existing public right-of-way (ROW) to provide additional amenities such as a multi-use trail connecting municipalities within Habersham County.

### Recommendations

**M1.1:** Establish a pilot intercity multi-use transportation corridor.

Two potential routes for a multi-use trail include the:

- Corridor along US Historic 441 between the City of Clarkesville and the City of Demorest
- Corridor along Willingham Ave / Gainesville Hwy between Cornelia and Alto



Within this ROW, there is immense opportunity to provide additional amenities such as enhanced bike and pedestrian infrastructure. For example, this can include a grade-separated multi-use path along with benches, rest stops, bike repair stations, and trash receptacles. This path should be defined by minimal curb cuts to reduce interference with motorists. Along these corridors are opportunities to employ green infrastructure such as bioswales, permeable pavement, and street trees. Not only are these practices good for stormwater management, but they also add an aesthetic value to the space for the enjoyment of trail users.

The picture below offers an example of what a multi-use trail along these two corridors could look like.



To fund multi-use trails to connect the counties, there are numerous federal funding sources which are identified on pages 50 and 51. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) provide significant funding for bike and pedestrian infrastructure. The US Historic 441 corridor is owned and maintained by the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) and therefore presents opportunities and challenges for creating a multi-use trail. GDOT has its Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program which funds non-auto transportation projects and receives applications for grant funding on an annual basis. There are numerous state and federal funding sources. However, pursuing the use of a GDOT corridor imposes significant restrictions on the corridor improvements that can be made and the timeline for improvements. Willingham Ave / Gainesville Hwy is not a GDOT corridor; however, it is still eligible for all the same grants.

#### **M1.2: Develop or update trail system plans for each city.**

In the same vein as the intercity multi-use transportation corridor, an intercity bike and pedestrian network will be critical in enabling non-motorists to move safely and freely from their origin to destination(s). Developing a comprehensive network will provide additional mobility for pedestrians and light individual transportation (LIT) users as well as additional recreational opportunities. Currently, the City of Clarkesville has in place a Greenways Master Plan that provides recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Additionally, the City of Cornelia has been investing in its Rails to Trails program over the past several years, providing additional recreational opportunities for its residents and visitors. Aside from the cities of Clarkesville and Cornelia, there are no municipal greenway and/or trail master plans in place. Winding out of Stephens County and along GA 17 and US 441 is a US bicycle route; however, there is no additional infrastructure. Rather, it is a simple designation. Therefore, planning for and developing comprehensive municipal greenways and trails will lay the groundwork for a countywide system.

In developing these master plans, the county and the seven municipalities should provide opportunities for both nature trails geared towards recreation and urban trails geared towards multimodal transportation. While nature trails can be used for transportation and urban trails for recreation, the form of each tends to dictate its function, and there should be provision for both. These trails present opportunities to implement green infrastructure such as bioswales and street trees, and site amenities should be regularly provided such as bicycle repair stations, benches, and trash cans.

Specific to urban trails, there should be few to no curb cuts to minimize conflict points between motorists and non-motorists. Additionally, there should be provision for a separation of cyclists and pedestrians. Where possible, the paths should be constructed wide enough separate from the roadway with clear division between cyclist and pedestrian pathways. In places where the right-of-way does not exist to provide for separate paths, cyclists should be directed onto the roadway. While all roadways should be safe for cyclists, there should be additional safety provisions for cyclists where urban trails interact with the

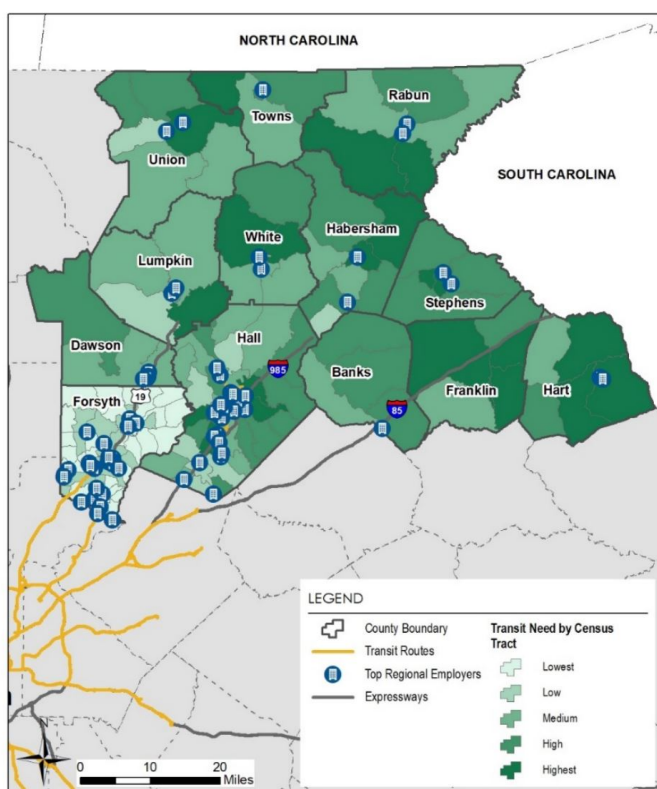


roadway. In all municipal plans, there should be some level of continuity in provision for amenities and design standards.

In addition to the funding sources detailed on pages 44-45, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) administers the Recreational Trails Program (RTP). The RTP is an annual, competitive federal grant program from the Federal Highway Administration, intended to support recreational trails and trail-related facilities.

## M2: Increase the capacity and frequency of Habersham County Transit.

To improve mobility and serve constituent's transit needs, Habersham County should increase the capacity of the county bus service. The county can strengthen their existing on-demand buses and supplement service with commuter bus access. GDOT's 2020 Transit Need Assessment document includes a map outlining transit need in the Georgia Mountains Region by census tract (see image below). The majority of Habersham County is rated at "high" or "highest" need.



Transit Propensity per Capita by Census Tract in Georgia Mountains Region  
(Summer 2019)

## Recommendations

### M2.1: Partner with state and federal transportation agencies.

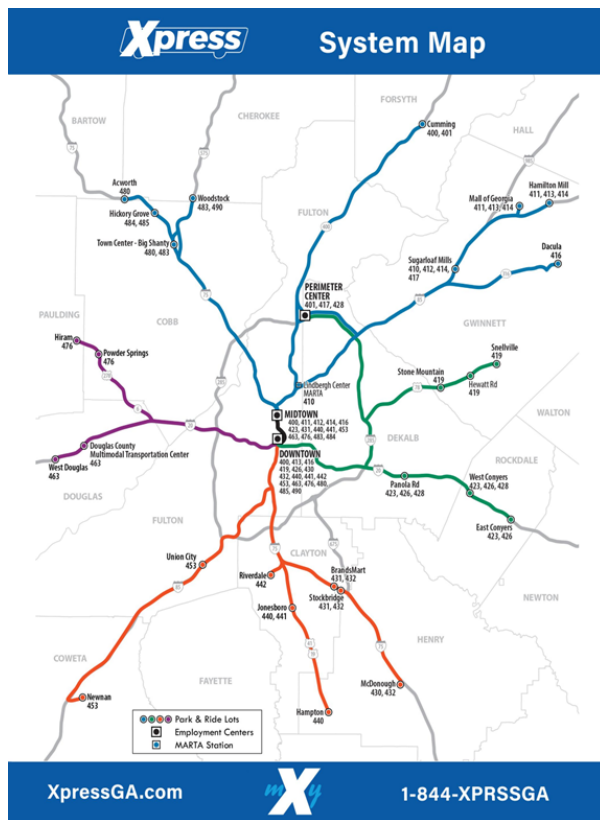
In 2020, GDOT recommended "a new commuter transit service. . . to serve Hall County commuters to Gwinnett" which would extend the current Xpress system (GDOT Transit Needs Assessment, 2020, pg. 4-22). As Hall and Gwinnett County collaborate to secure a bus route, Habersham can work to connect to the Hall offshoot of the system in years to come.

Bus service connecting Gainesville and Hall County all the way to Tallulah Falls would open opportunities for Habersham residents to traverse the county in new ways, while encouraging development along key

corridors that can support it. Service should connect the urban cores of the seven municipalities as well as the high intensity carriage areas throughout the county. In choosing transit stops for the commuter bus service, the County should identify regional business districts, downtowns, healthcare centers, tourism destinations, and other large employment centers.



In terms of implementation, the County should explore the benefits of a commuter bus service. Commuter bus services are not subject to the same federal regulations that local bus service is subject to particularly surrounding paratransit. Therefore, the County should partner with state and federal transportation agencies to identify funding sources, transit needs of residents and visitors, and regulations that would impact commuter bus service. Commuter bus services can connect the county's outlying areas (conservation, agricultural, and low-density areas) to regional business districts, downtowns, and healthcare centers. The Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority (ATL) operates Xpress commuter bus service (see routes as of 2022 below). Given the rise of non-traditional working patterns and the high volume of tourism in Habersham County, the County should, to the extent possible, consider running reliable, safe, predictable, and convenient transit service all seven days of the week.



## M2.2: Expanded On-Demand Transit.

Alongside improved commuter accessibility, Habersham can continue to provide on-demand transit, expand their fleet, and offer a mobile app. Valdosta, Georgia provides an example of an on-demand transit program with low-cost fares and a user-friendly app which can be used to order a ride.

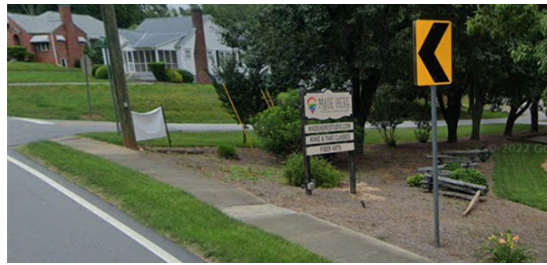
Learn more about the Valdosta program here: [Case Study in Valdosta, Georgia](#)

**M3: Ensure a basic level of service for non-motorists.**

To support safe pedestrian transportation, the zoning code and design standards in Habersham County and its municipalities should ensure the provision of ample crosswalks, sidewalks, and ADA-compliant streetscapes, particularly in the downtown areas of the county and near schools. The county can map walking routes to school and develop a specific strategy to improve the pedestrian experience on those routes. Further, travel speeds of county roads should reflect safety goals for non-motorists.

**Recommendations**

**M3.1:** Place emphasis on pedestrian improvements near universities and colleges and areas which will become receiving areas for development.



Source: Google Maps

Potential improvements include crosswalks, ADA-compliant ramps, and sidewalks, furnishing zones, and planter strips. The furnishing strips and safe crosswalks shown above already exist in Habersham County and features like those shown above could be added to the County's sidewalk network.

**M3.2:** Develop a Safe Routes to School Strategy and expand plans for improving student's ability to safely access schools via the county's sidewalk network.

**M3.3:** Reduce travel speeds of vehicles. Lower road speeds support a safe environment for non-motorist travelers and are associated with less risk of pedestrian injury.

**M4: Focus transportation investments in existing urbanized areas.**

Transportation investments influence development patterns, and smart growth development patterns have lower long-term infrastructure costs. The recent failed TSPLOST referendum in November 2022 coupled with rising construction costs places financial strain on the county and other transportation partners. Therefore, it is critical for the county and municipalities to minimize additional transportation expenditures. Promoting smart growth development patterns that utilize existing infrastructure to the extent possible will maximize the net revenue for the county and municipalities.

Moreover, investing in quality transportation systems can help improve traffic flow, reduce traffic deaths and fatalities, and enable the urbanized areas to become much more pleasant places. These investments can include bike and pedestrian infrastructure, adaptive traffic signal control (ATSC), and road redesigns / diets.

***Bike and Pedestrian Infrastructure***

Bike and pedestrian infrastructure are critical to ensuring accessibility and mobility for all. Bicycle infrastructure can include painted / protect bike lanes, bike paths, and bike racks. Pedestrian infrastructure can include a minimum 5' sidewalk, frequent crosswalks, pedestrian islands, and comfortable sidewalk connections to storefronts. Recommendation M3 discusses this topic in greater detail.

***Adaptive Signal Control Technology (ASCT)***

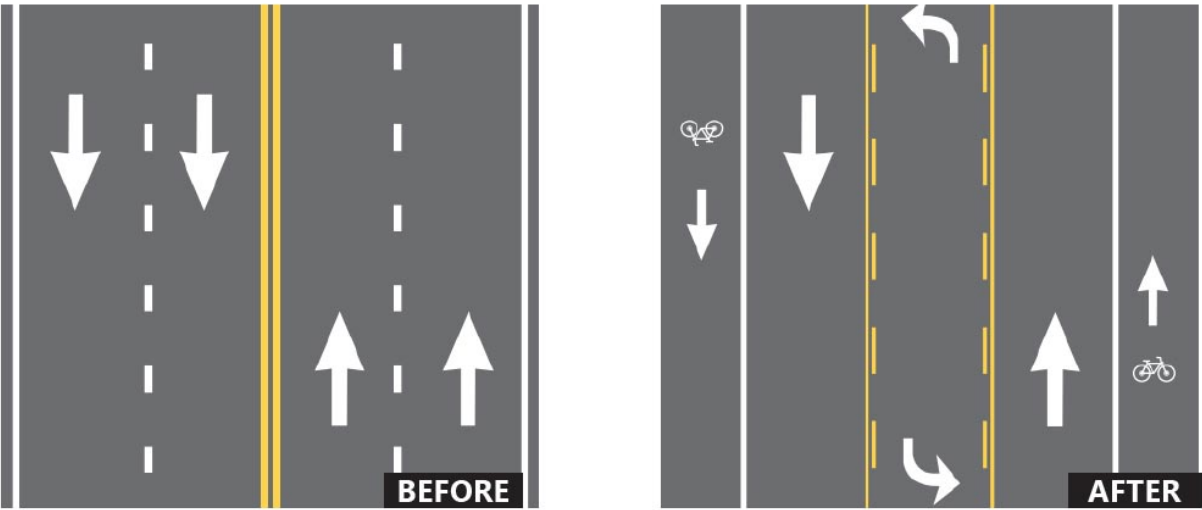
Inefficient traffic signal timing contributes to congestion and increased travel times. In turn, this can contribute to air pollution and increased costs to businesses and commuters. Commuters lose productive time to commuting and incur additional fuel costs, and businesses incur similar costs.

Rather than widening roads that reduce accessibility and mobility for non-motorists, ASCT presents an opportunity to maximize capacity of existing systems. These systems receive and process data from sensors, adjusting traffic lights accordingly to improve the flow of traffic. For example, sensors can adjust lights if there is significant back-up in one direction to eliminate the congestion. The signal timing is continuously updated according to the data received. With limited ROW and limited opportunity for expansion in urban cores, ASCT is a great solution to employ throughout the county and the municipalities. This technology can expand capacity without creating environments hostile to bicyclists and pedestrians.

***Road Redesigns / Diets***

Road redesigns and diets are a common solution to address points and corridors of high conflict between motorists, cyclists, and/or pedestrians. In urban cores and areas where ROW has been established and opportunities for expansion are limited, redesigning the existing ROW provides opportunity to expand capacity, improve circulation, and enhance bike and pedestrian infrastructure. Generally, best practice is to minimize travel and parking lanes to the extent possible and to maximize space for bicyclists and pedestrians. One common road diet is to convert a four-lane road into a two-lane road with a center turn lane and bike lanes on either side.

Transportation investments should balance mobility and accessibility with ensuring that public spaces continue to be welcoming to non-motorists. These three approaches to investing in transportation for urbanized areas can maximize capacity and circulation while improving accessibility and mobility for non-motorists. Partnering with GDOT and the municipalities can provide funding sources to implement these measures, and grant funding outlined on pages 51 and 52 assist in funding bike and pedestrian improvements. For county roads, incorporating road redesigns and diets into a maintenance schedule can provide for a fiscally sustainable budget.



Visual Examples of Road Diets

*Source: Federal Highway Administration*

## **M5: Reform County and municipal zoning ordinances to foster multimodal transportation.**

### **Recommendations**

#### **M5.1: Loosen off street parking, loading, and access requirements.**

The County's ordinances (Article IV) require significant off-street parking without allowing for shared leases to account for more than 50% of a land use's parking requirements. Additionally, there are onerous requirements for on-site loading and access space. Consistent with the recommendations to divert development from conservation, agriculture, and low-intensity character areas towards medium- and high-intensity character areas, loosening Article IV will allow for flexibility in developers meeting needs where appropriate. It will also allow for holistic parking solutions. A local model is the Town of Alto's off-street parking, loading, and access requirements which can be found in Article VI of its code of ordinances. While the ordinance must be adopted in a holistic approach, sections 604 through 613 are the core differences between the current county ordinance and the needed changes. While Alto's ordinance is more optimal, there are still opportunities to improve. In shaping the parking minimums, it is important to consider that developers frequently provide more parking than the minimum. Therefore, the requirements should be written to be a bare minimum designed for typical day-to-day demand rather than the most extreme demand events, i.e., holiday shopping events. In addition to reforming the County's ordinances, all six other municipalities should adopt off-street parking, loading, and access requirements like the Town of Alto. Such ordinances will be essential in reducing car dependency and improving mobility and accessibility for non-motorists.

#### **M5.2: Encourage the provision of on-street parking and alleyway access in commercial, mixed-use, and multi-family residential areas.**

The images below highlight parking lots in Clarkesville and Cornelia with red blocks, demonstrating the amount of space dedicated to parking in the County's municipalities. On-street parking and alleyway access are key characteristics of town centers, and there are accompanying benefits to these urban design approaches. Benefits include a more efficient allocation of parking supply, safer traffic speeds, and pedestrian-oriented development. As a result, there will be more accessibility and mobility for non-motorists as well as fewer impervious surfaces. The county should adopt ordinances to encourage the provision of on-street parking and alleyway access to buildings, especially in the medium- and high-intensity character areas. Due to the overlap between these character areas and the municipalities, all seven municipalities should also adopt ordinances that encourage these development patterns in commercial, mixed-use, and multi-family residential areas. These provisions should be the standard in new developments, and where possible, existing developments should be retrofitted to provide for these amenities. Principal arterial roads



are the only roads on which on-street parking should not exist, or if there is not the available ROW in existing developments.



*Aerial Maps Highlighting Off-Street Parking Facilities in Downtown Clarkesville (left) and Downtown Cornelia (right)*

### Pedestrian and Bicycle Funding Opportunities: U.S. Department of Transportation Transit, Safety, and Highway Funds

September 9, 2022

This table indicates potential eligibility for pedestrian and bicycle activities and projects under U.S. Department of Transportation surface transportation funding programs. Activities and projects need to meet program eligibility requirements. See notes and basic program requirements below, with links to program information. Project sponsors should integrate the safety, accessibility, equity, and convenience of walking and bicycling into surface transportation projects.

	Pedestrian and Bicycle Funding Opportunities: U.S. Department of Transportation Transit, Safety, and Highway Funds																												
	Key: \$ = Activity may be eligible. Restrictions may apply, see program notes and guidance. ~\$ = Eligible, but not competitive unless part of a larger project.																												
	OST Programs							Federal Transit				NHTSA		Federal Highway Administration															
Activity or Project Type	RAISE	INFRA	RCP	SS4A	Thrive	RRIF	TIFFA	FTA	ATI	TOD	AoPP	402	405	BFP BIP BRR	CRP	CMAQ	HSIP	RHCP	NHPP	PRO TECT	STBG	TA	RTP	SRTS	PLAN	NSBP	FLTP	TTP	TTPSF
Access enhancements to public transportation (benches, bus pads)	\$	\$	\$	\$		~\$	~\$	\$	\$		~\$				\$	\$			\$	\$	\$	\$				\$	\$	\$	
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)/504 Self Evaluation / Transition Plan				\$	TA					\$	\$				\$						\$	\$	\$		\$		\$	\$	
Barrier removal for ADA compliance	\$	\$	\$	\$		~\$	~\$	\$	\$	~\$	~\$			\$	\$				\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		\$	\$	\$	
Bicycle plans			~\$	\$				\$		\$	\$				\$					\$	\$	\$		\$	\$		\$	\$	\$
Bicycle helmets (project or training related)												\$									\$	\$	\$	\$	\$			\$	
Bicycle helmets (safety promotion)																					\$	\$	\$	\$	\$			\$	
Bicycle lanes on road	~\$	~\$	\$	\$		~\$	~\$	\$	\$		~\$				\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		\$			\$	\$	\$
Bicycle parking (see <a href="#">Bicycle Parking Solutions</a> )	~\$	~\$	\$	\$		~\$	\$	\$	\$		~\$				\$	\$			\$		\$	\$	\$	\$		\$	\$	\$	
Bike racks on transit	~\$		\$	~\$			~\$	\$	\$		~\$				\$	\$					\$	\$					\$	\$	
Bicycle repair station (air pump, simple tools)	~\$		\$	~\$		~\$	~\$	\$	\$						\$						\$	\$					\$	\$	
Bicycle share (capital and equipment; not operations)	~\$	~\$	\$	~\$		~\$	~\$	\$	\$						\$	\$			\$		\$	\$					\$	\$	
Bicycle storage or service centers (example: at transit hubs)	~\$		\$	~\$		~\$	\$	\$	\$						\$	\$					\$	\$					\$	\$	
Bridges / overcrossings for pedestrians and/or bicyclists	\$	\$	\$	\$		~\$	~\$	\$	\$					\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$			\$	\$	\$
Bus shelters and benches	\$	\$	\$	~\$		~\$	~\$	\$	\$						\$	\$			\$	\$	\$	\$				\$	\$	\$	
Coordinator positions (State or local) (limits on CMAQ and STBG)				\$							\$					\$					\$	\$	\$	\$	\$			\$	
Community Capacity Building (develop organizational skills/processes)				\$	TA					\$	\$														\$			\$	
Crosswalks for pedestrians, pedestrian refuge islands (new or retrofit)	\$	\$	\$	\$		~\$	~\$	\$	\$						\$	~\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		\$	\$	\$	\$
Curb ramps	\$	\$	\$	\$		~\$	~\$	\$	\$					\$	\$	~\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		\$	\$	\$	\$
Counting equipment		\$	\$	\$			~\$	\$	\$								\$		\$		\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		\$	\$	\$
Data collection and monitoring for pedestrians and/or bicyclists	\$	\$	\$	\$			~\$	\$	\$	\$	\$				\$				\$		\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		\$	\$	\$
Emergency and evacuation routes for pedestrians and/or bicyclists	\$	\$	\$	~\$			\$	\$	\$	~\$	~\$				\$				\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$			\$	\$	
Historic preservation (pedestrian and bicycle and transit facilities)	~\$		~\$	~\$		~\$	~\$	\$	\$		~\$				\$						\$	\$				\$	\$	\$	
Landscaping, streetscaping (pedestrian/bicycle route; transit access); related amenities (benches, water fountains); usually part of larger project	~\$	~\$	~\$	~\$		~\$	~\$	\$	\$	~\$	~\$				\$				~\$	\$	\$	\$					\$	\$	
Lighting (pedestrian and bicyclist scale associated with pedestrian/bicyclist project)	\$	\$	\$	\$		~\$	~\$	\$	\$		~\$				\$	~\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		\$	\$	\$	\$
Maps (for pedestrians and/or bicyclists)				\$				\$	\$	\$	~\$				\$	\$					\$	\$		\$	\$	\$		\$	
Micromobility projects (including scooter share)	\$		\$	~\$		~\$	~\$				~\$				\$	\$					\$	\$					\$	\$	
Paved shoulders for pedestrian and/or bicyclist use	\$	~\$	\$	\$		~\$	~\$							\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		\$		\$	\$	\$	\$
Pedestrian plans	\$	~\$	~\$	\$				\$		\$	\$				\$					\$	\$	\$		\$	\$		\$	\$	\$
Rail at-grade crossings	\$	\$	\$	~\$		\$	\$	\$	\$						\$		\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$			\$	\$	\$
Recreational trails	\$		\$	~\$			~\$													\$	\$	\$	\$	\$			\$	\$	\$
Resilience Improvements for pedestrians and bicyclists	\$	\$	\$	~\$		~\$	~\$			\$	~\$			~\$	~\$	~\$			\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		\$	\$	\$	
Road Diets (pedestrian and bicycle portions)	\$	\$	\$	\$		~\$	\$								\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$			\$	\$	\$

	Pedestrian and Bicycle Funding Opportunities: U.S. Department of Transportation Transit, Safety, and Highway Funds																														
	Key: \$ = Activity may be eligible. Restrictions may apply, see program notes and guidance. ~\$ = Eligible, but not competitive unless part of a larger project.																														
	OST Programs							Federal Transit					NHTSA		Federal Highway Administration																
Activity or Project Type	RAISE	INFRA	RCP	SS4A	Thrive	RRIF	TIFFA	FTA	ATI	TOD	AoPP	402	405	BFP BIP BRR	CRP	CMAQ	HSIP	RHCP	NHPP	PRO TECT	STBG	TA	RTP	SRTS	PLAN	NSBP	FL/TP	TIP	TIPSE		
Road Safety Assessment for pedestrians and bicyclists				\$	\$	TA		~\$				~\$						\$	\$			\$	\$			\$		\$	\$	\$	
Safety education and awareness activities and programs to inform pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists on ped/bike traffic safety laws					\$							~\$	\$	\$				\$				\$SRTS	\$SRTS		\$	\$			\$		
Safety education positions					\$							~\$	\$									\$SRTS	\$SRTS		\$				\$		
Safety enforcement (including police patrols)					\$								\$	\$				\$				\$SRTS	\$SRTS		\$				\$		
Safety program technical assessment (for peds/bicyclists)				\$	~\$	TA						~\$	\$					\$				\$SRTS	\$SRTS		\$	\$		\$	\$		
Separated bicycle lanes	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		~\$	~\$	\$	\$		~\$			\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		\$		\$	\$	\$	\$	
Shared use paths / transportation trails	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		~\$	~\$	\$	\$		~\$				\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	
Sidewalks (new or retrofit)	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		~\$	~\$	\$	\$	~\$	~\$			\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	
Signs, signals, signal improvements (incl accessible pedestrian signals) see note	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		~\$	~\$	\$	\$	~\$	~\$				\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		\$		\$	\$	\$	\$	
Signing for pedestrian or bicycle routes	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		~\$	~\$	\$	\$		~\$				\$	\$	\$		\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		\$		\$	\$	\$	
Spot improvement programs (for pedestrian and bicycle facilities)	\$	\$			\$		~\$	~\$	\$			~\$				\$		\$	\$			\$	\$	\$	\$			\$	\$	\$	
Stormwater impacts related to pedestrian and bicycle project impacts	\$	\$	\$	\$	~\$		~\$	~\$	\$	\$								\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$			\$	\$	\$	
Traffic calming	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		~\$	~\$	\$							\$		\$		\$	\$	\$	\$		\$			\$	\$	\$	
Trail bridges	\$	\$	\$	\$	~\$		~\$	\$								\$	~\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$			\$	\$	\$	
Trail construction and maintenance equipment					~\$		~\$	~\$								\$							\$	\$	\$			~\$	~\$	~\$	
Trail/highway crossings and intersections	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		~\$	~\$							\$	\$	~\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		\$	\$	\$
Trailside/trailhead facilities (restrooms, water, not general park amenities)	~\$						~\$	~\$								~\$						\$	\$	\$			\$	\$	\$		
Training					\$	TA						~\$	\$				\$	\$				\$	\$	\$	\$	\$			\$		
Training for law enforcement on ped/bicyclist safety laws					~\$								\$	\$			~\$	\$				\$SRTS	\$SRTS		\$				\$		
Tunnels / underpasses for pedestrians and/or bicyclists	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$		\$	\$	\$	\$						\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$			\$	\$	\$	
Vulnerable Road User Safety Assessment				\$	\$	TA												\$				\$	\$		\$	\$			\$	\$	

**Abbreviations**

ADA/504: Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 / Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

[RAISE](#): Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity[INFRA](#): Infrastructure for Rebuilding America Discretionary Grant Program[RCP](#): Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program[SS4A](#): Safe Streets and Roads for All[Thrive](#): Thriving Communities Initiative (TA: Technical Assistance)[RRIF](#): Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (loans)[TIFFA](#): Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (loans)[FTA](#): Federal Transit Administration Capital Funds[ATI](#): Associated Transit Improvement (1% set-aside of FTA)[TOD](#): Transit-Oriented Development[AoPP](#): Areas of Persistent Poverty Program[NHTSA 402](#): National Highway Traffic Safety Administration State and Community Highway Safety Grant Program[NHTSA 405](#): National Highway Traffic Safety Administration National Priority Safety Programs (Nonmotorized safety)[BFP](#): Bridge Formula Program; [BIP](#): Bridge Investment Program; [BRR](#): Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation Program[CRP](#): Carbon Reduction Program[CMAQ](#): Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program[HSIP](#): Highway Safety Improvement Program[RHCP](#): Railway-Highway Crossings (Section 130) Program[NHPP](#): National Highway Performance Program[PROTECT](#): Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost Saving Transportation[STBG](#): Surface Transportation Block Grant Program[TA](#): Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (formerly Transportation Alternatives Program, Transportation Enhancements)[RTP](#): Recreational Trails Program[SRTS](#): Safe Routes to School Program (and related activities)[PLAN](#): Statewide Planning and Research (SPR) or Metropolitan Planning funds[NSBP](#): National Scenic Byways Program[FL/TP](#): Federal Lands and Tribal Transportation Programs: [Federal Lands Access Program](#), [Federal Lands Transportation Program](#), [Tribal Transportation Program](#), [Federal Lands Planning Program](#) and related programs for Federal and Tribal lands such as the [Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Projects](#) program.[TTP](#): Tribal Transportation Program[TTPSF](#): Tribal Transportation Program Safety FundSource: [https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle\\_pedestrian/funding/funding\\_opportunities.pdf?u=092922](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/funding/funding_opportunities.pdf?u=092922)



## IMPLEMENTATION TABLES

The following tables serve as a guide for implementing the recommendations in the previous sections. They are divided by each of our major focus areas, and provide information on how to implement the recommendations, the likely timeframe it will take to implement them, possible partnerships and funding sources, examples, and applicable character areas.

### Suburban Growth

Goals	Recommendation Number	Implementation Strategy	Timeframe	Possible Partners	Possible Funding Sources	Case Study or Important Source	Applicable Character Areas
TDRs	S1.1	Establish the TDR option and administrative provisions within the municipal zoning ordinance. We recommend using a TDR Bank, and/or the Buyer-Seller Public Support option.	Short-term	Georgia Conservancy, Municipalities, County Commissioners, Georgia Mountain Regional Commission	n/a	<a href="#">Pennsylvania</a> ( all-encompassing resource); <a href="#">Beaufort County, SC</a> ; <a href="#">City of Chattahoochee Hills</a> ; and the <a href="#">City of Milton</a>	All
		Establish the sending area. The sending area is usually a defined geographic area but can also be based on specific	Short-term	n/a	n/a	See “character area” section of plan	Agriculture, Conservation, and Low-Intensity Character Areas

		locational criteria.					
		Determine the number of TDRs allocated to each landowner within the sending area. This is usually based on a simple mathematical formula such as one TDR for every five acres. Most municipalities also establish a threshold for minimum parcel size eligible for the TDR program.	Medium-term	County Commissioners, Municipalities, Georgia Mountain Regional Commission	n/a	<a href="#">Pennsylvania, Various cities &amp; counties</a>	All
		Establish the procedure for severing TDRs. Usually, this procedure is written as part of the zoning ordinance provisions and	Medium-term	Georgia Conservancy, Habersham County, Municipalities, County Commissioners	n/a	<a href="#">Pennsylvania, Various cities &amp; counties</a>	All



		requires a deed of transferable development rights.					
		Establish the procedure for permanent protection of the land from which the TDRs were severed.	Medium-term	Georgia Conservancy, Municipalities	State funds	<a href="#">Pennsylvania, Various cities &amp; counties</a>	All
		Establish the receiving area. This should be an area (or areas) planned to accommodate growth, preferably where public utilities like water and sewer exist or are planned.	Short-term	n/a	n/a	See "character area" section of plan	Medium and High Intensity Character Areas
		Establish the plan-submittal requirements for developments in the TDR receiving area.	Short-term	County Commissioners, Georgia Mountains Regional Commission	n/a	See prior case studies	All
Rethink the placement, size, and	S2.1.	Conduct public engagement activates	Short-term	County Commissioners, Georgia	n/a	n/a	All

makeup of the county's areas		through comp plan process using a new character area map		Mountains Regional Commission			
	S2.2.	Pass an ordinance through the County Commission to update the land use districts according to the new character area map.	Long-term	County Commissioners	n/a	n/a	All
Impact Fees/DIFA	S.3	Place enabling CIE in comprehensive plan.	Medium/Long-term	County Commissioners, Georgia Mountain Regional Commission, Municipalities	DIFA	<a href="#">DCA, Georgia: Forsyth County, City of Gainesville, Dawson County</a>	All
		Update CIE and Short-Term Work Program (STWP) annually.	Long-term	""			

### Conservation

Goals	Recommendation Number	Implementation Strategy	Timeframe	Possible Partners	Possible Funding Sources	Case Study	Applicable Character Areas
Watershed Conservation	C1.1 County-wide integrated water resource management	Set a water management vision during the 2023 joint comprehensive plan process. Utilize the WaterFirst Checklist to inform water resource management best practice.	Short-term	Municipalities, Soque River Watershed Association, Coosa-North Georgia Water Planning Region, water utilities	*	City of Cornelia (received WaterFirst designation in 2010)	All
		Utilize the comprehensive plan process to identify a county-wide partnership strategy involving municipalities, water utilities, Soque River Watershed Association, and Coosa-North Georgia Water Planning Region.	Medium-term	See first implementation step.	*	None.	All

		Agree on partnership roles and responsibilities. For example, the County could have a staff member lead a joint task force that meets quarterly. The cities and water utilities could nominate members to join the task force.	Medium-term	See first implementation step.	*	None.	All
		Establish policies and procedures to operate across agency boundaries. Develop mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and report on results. For example, the County could release a yearly report, archived on city, county, and water utility websites.	Long-term	See first implementation step.	*	None.	All
	C1.2 Green Infrastructure	Prepare a stormwater assessment identifying areas prone to flooding.	Medium-term	Municipalities, Soque River Watershed Association, Coosa-North	*	Clarkesville Green Infrastructure Implementation Strategy	All

		Conduct a site identification and prioritization analysis, similar to the <i>Clarkesville Green Infrastructure Implementation Strategy</i> completed by EPA on behalf of Clarkesville in 2015.		Georgia Water Planning Region			
		<p>After identifying areas that could be best served by green infrastructure, consider the following tools to promote project adaption:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stormwater fee and discount</li> <li>• Impervious surface maximums</li> <li>• Pilot projects</li> <li>• Education and marketing</li> </ul>	Long-term	Municipalities, Soque River Watershed Association, Coosa-North Georgia Water Planning Region, drinking water and wastewater utilities, local business	*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stormwater fee and discount – See City of Cornelia Code of Ordinances and City of Cornelia Stormwater Utility <i>Stormwater User Fee Credit Technical Manual</i></li> <li>• Impervious surface maximums – Philadelphia Code § 14-1603.2</li> </ul>	Relevant character areas depend on results of previous analysis.



						Environmental Controls for the Wissahickon Watershed as featured in EPA's Green Infrastructure Municipal Handbook	
	C1.3 Riparian Buffers	Conduct an initial watershed assessment. Map streams with designated uses and required buffer. Complete a survey of buffer enforcement, identifying areas where buffers need to be enforced or restored. Prioritize areas for enforcement based on local water quality and stream bank stability conditions.	Medium-term	Municipalities, Soque River Watershed Association, Coosa-North Georgia Water Planning Region	*	None.	All

		Apply the following tools to enforce and restore buffers: Sustainable agricultural practices - Expand upon current programs in the County to increase sustainable agricultural practices. Transfer of development rights (TDRs) - The County can identify riparian lands it would like to preserve as “sending areas”. The riparian lands can be protected with a conservation easement or similar legal tool.	Long-term	Municipalities, Soque River Watershed Association, Coosa-North Georgia Water Planning Region, Extension Office, agricultural producers, The University of Georgia Carl Vinson Institute of Government	*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainable agricultural practices – Georgia Soil &amp; Water Conservation Commission Manual for Best Management Practices for Georgia Agriculture: Conservation Practices to Protect Surface Water Quality</li> <li>TDRs - Lee County, Florida designates wetlands as a sending area through a TDR program (Frazer et al., 2006).</li> </ul>	Relevant character areas depend on results of previous analysis.
Adopt forest management strategy	C2.1-1	Conduct unique flora and fauna asset mapping	Medium-term	United States Forest Service	n/a	N/A	Conservation
	C2.1-2	Create or distribute existing forest management	Long-term	United States Forest Service, Georgia Tree Council, Georgia	United States Forest	<a href="#">Forest Stewardship Program</a>	Conservation

## GROWTH MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION

		educational materials		Forestry Commission	Service Grants		
	C2.1-3	Develop invasive plant species management strategy	Medium-term	United States Forest Service, Georgia Forestry Commission	NRCS	<a href="#">Invasive Plant Control Program</a>	Countywide
	C2.1-4	Develop joint management strategies for national forest areas	Medium-term	United States Forest Service	N/A	<a href="#">Agreement For Shared Stewardship of California's Forest And Rangelands</a>	Conservation
	C2.1-5	Expand educational opportunities for county residents in/near national forest areas	Long-term	United States Forest Service, Georgia Tree Council, UGA Cooperative Extension	United States Forest Service Grants	<a href="#">National Environmental Education Foundation</a>	Conservation
	C2.1-6	Expand recreational opportunities for county residents in/near national forest areas	Long-term	United States Forest Service, Georgia Grown	United States Forest Service Grants	<a href="#">National Environmental Education Foundation</a>	Conservation
Encourage productive, sustainable use of farmland	C2.2-1	Develop cost sharing program for property owners to implement best management practices	Short-term	Georgia Water and Soil Conservation, Soque River Watershed Association	Natural Resources and Conservation Financial Assistance	<a href="#">Agricultural Cost Share Program</a>	Countywide
	C2.2-2	Encourage local community gardens	Short-term	Municipalities, Soque River	Urban Agriculture	<a href="#">Clarkesville Greenway</a>	Countywide

## GROWTH MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION

				Watershed Association	Resilienc e Program, other grant funding	<a href="#">Community Garden</a>	
	C2.2-3	Promote temporary, seasonal commercial uses on productive farms	Short-term	Municipalities	N/A	<a href="#">Green Hills Farm</a>	Countywide
Modify Habersham County ordinance to support conservation strategy	C2.3-1	Adopt tree ordinance	Short-term	Municipalities	N/A	<a href="#">Clarkesville Tree Ordinance</a>	Countywide
	C2.3-2	Modify conservation subdivision ordinance to allow agricultural lands as a primary conservation use	Short-term	Municipalities	N/A	N/A	Countywide
	C2.3-3	Modify conservation subdivision ordinance to allow existing native forests as a primary conservation use	Short-term	Municipalities	N/A	N/A	Countywide
	C2.3-4	Require parkland or open spaces in-lieu of a fee for new developments	Short-term	Municipalities	N/A	<a href="#">Atlanta Impact Fee Schedule</a>	High Intensity, Medium Intensity
Promote economic incentives	C2.4-1	Promote Conservation Use Value Assessment	Short-term	Municipalities	N/A	N/A	Conservation, Agriculture, Low Intensity

## GROWTH MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION

for farmland and forest conservation	C2.4-2	Promote economic incentives for reforestation	Long-term	Georgia Conservancy, Georgia Forestry Commission	One Tree Forward Reforestation Program; Community Forestry Assistance Program	N/A	Conservation
	C2.4-3	Promote Georgia Conservation Tax Credit Program	Medium-term	Georgia Conservancy	N/A	N/A	Conservation, Agriculture, Low Intensity



## Mobility

Goal	Recommendation Number	Implementation Strategy	Time – Frame	Possible Partners	Possible Funding Sources	Case Study and Links	Applicable Character Areas
Develop a countywide trail system.	M1.1	Develop and design a multi-use trail corridor through public input and engagement of partners.	Short-term	County Commission, GDOT, Municipalities	n/a	<a href="#">Small Town and Rural Design – Side Path</a>	Medium and high intensity
		Solicit construction bids based on the preliminary design.	Short-term	Construction company(ies)	n/a		
		Apply for available state and federal grants (i.e., Recreational Trails Program), and secure all necessary funding (e.g., bonds).	Medium-term	GDOT, GDNR, County Commission, Municipalities	Recreational Trails Program		
		Develop and execute a construction schedule in partnership with the contractor.	Long-term	County Commission, GDOT, Municipalities	n/a		
	M1.2	Solicit bids for the preparation of greenways and trails plans for the county and municipalities.	Short-term	County Commission, Municipalities, GDOT	n/a	<a href="#">Tifton Area Greenway Best</a>	Medium and high intensity

## GROWTH MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION

		Apply for available state and federal grants to fund the planning efforts and to fund such improvements.	Medium-term	County Commission, Municipalities, GDOT, GDNR	n/a	<a href="#">Practices Report</a>	
		Execute the planning processes including a thorough public input process.	Medium-term	County Staff, Municipal Staff, Consultant	n/a		
		Develop and execute an implementation schedule to guide municipal / county budgeting.	Long-term	County Commission, Municipalities, GDOT	Recreational Trails Program		
Increase the capacity of the county bus service.	M2.1	Collaborate with Xpress commuter bus service, Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority, and the GMRC to determine the feasibility of extending service from Gwinnett County to Hall and Habersham County.  Use GDOT's Transit Needs Assessment to show evidence of commuter support needed in Habersham.	Long-term	Xpress Bus Service, GMRC, Hall County, Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority	Formula Grants for Rural Areas (Section 5311)	<a href="#">Xpress Bus Service Current Routes &gt;</a>  <a href="#">GDOT Transit Needs Assessment &gt;</a>	All
	M2.2	Work with the county grant writer to identify and apply for pertinent federal funding opportunities for increasing the size of	Medium-term	Georgia Institute of Technology, University of Georgia, Piedmont	Formula Grants for Rural Areas (Section 5311);	<a href="#">Case Study in Valdosta, Georgia &gt;</a>	All

		Habersham's on-demand bus fleet.  Partner with a high education institution to develop a mobile app for on-demand bus transit.		University, other institutions of higher education	Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities (Section 5310)		
Ensure a basic level of service for non-motorists.	M3.1	Amend the county zoning code to require sidewalks and safe crossings in desired areas.	Short-term	County Planning Department, Planning Commissioners, Board of Commissioners	n/a	<a href="#">Case Studies for FHWA Pedestrian and Bicycle Focus States and Cities</a> >	Areas near schools and universities, Medium Intensity, High Intensity
		Partner with GMRC to investigate the potential of installing crosswalks, ADA-compliant ramps, furnishing zones, and planter strips in desired areas.	Medium-term	County Planning Department, GMRC			
	M3.2	Identify local schools to become partners with the Georgia Safe Routes to Schools Resource Center and sign up for the program. Partners receive free	Medium-term	County Planning Department, City Managers,	Georgia Safe Routes to School	<a href="#">Georgia SRTS Funding</a>	Medium Intensity, High Intensity

		technical assistance and educational materials.		County Grant Writer	Program Grants	<a href="#">Guidelines</a> ≥	
		Working with the County Planning Department to identify staff or an outside group to develop a SRTS Plan (which is required to be eligible for funds under the Georgia Safe Routes to School Program).	Medium-term			<a href="#">Marquette County, Michigan Case Study</a> ≥	
		Upgrade speed-related signage in school zones.	Short-term			<a href="#">DeWitt, Michigan case study</a> ≥	
						<a href="#">GA SRTS Partnership Levels</a> >	
	M3.3	Reduce the speed limit on local roads that are not part of the GDOT system.	Short-term	GMRC (transit planners), GDOT, Planning Department,	n/a	<a href="#">Traffic Calming Techniques in Rural Communities</a> ≥	All
		Request that GDOT conduct speed-limit reviews on state and federal roads within the county by contacting the District 1, Area 4 office.	Short-term	Planning Commissioners, Board of Commissioners			
		Upgrade speed-related signage in areas with pedestrian traffic.	Short-term				

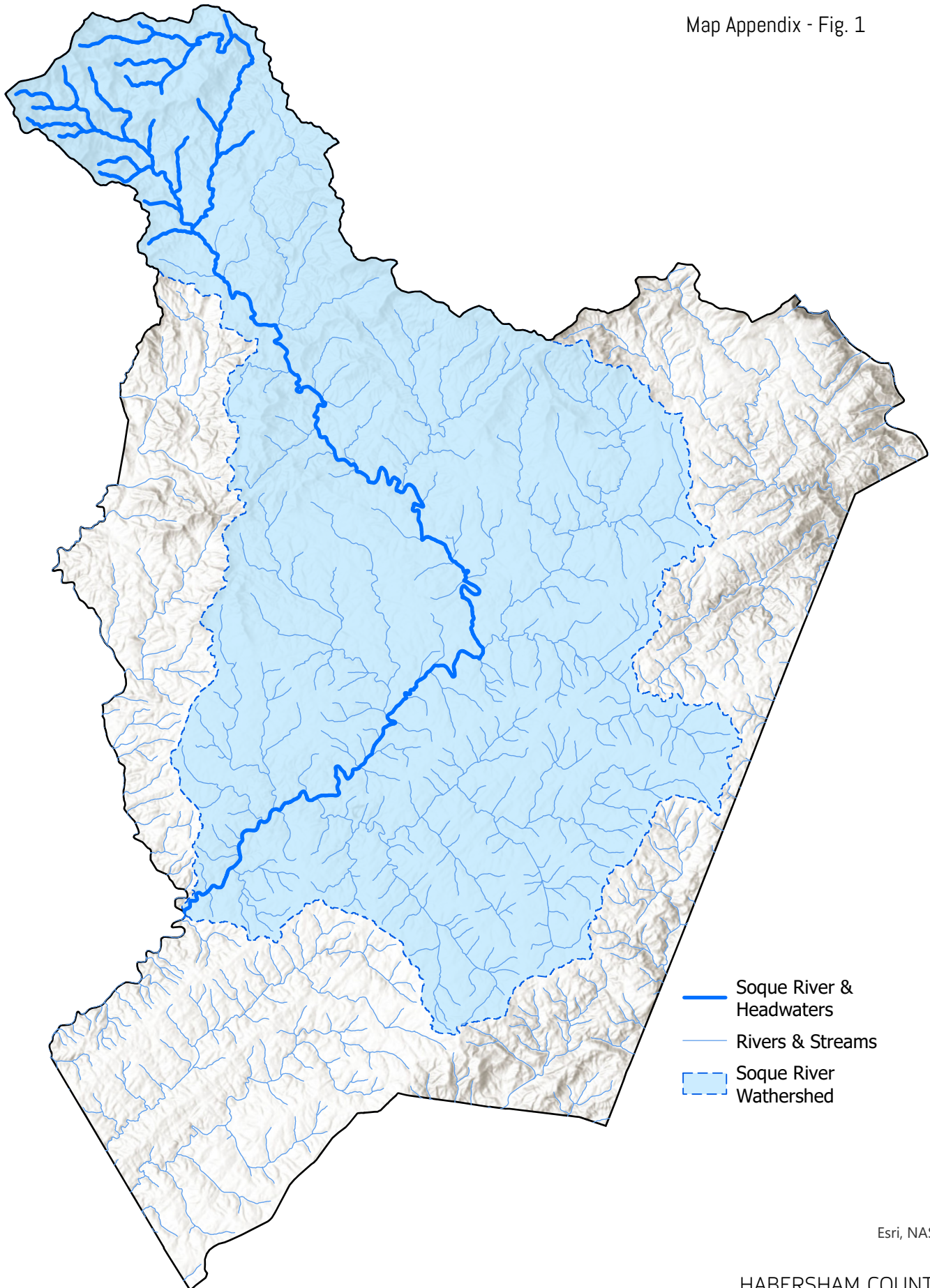
		Explore options for traffic calming through road design by adding colored pavement, physical lane narrowing, signing, and landscaping to promote slower speeds. See Table 10 in <a href="#">Traffic Calming Techniques in Rural Communities</a> .	Long-term				
Focus transportation investments in existing urbanized areas.	M4.1	Engage with GDOT to detail and adopt a transportation investment strategy for the county that targets improvements in existing urbanized areas.	Short-term	GDOT, County Planning Department, Municipalities		<a href="#">Complete Streets Guidance</a>  <a href="#">ASCT Case Studies</a>	Medium Intensity, High Intensity
		Conduct thorough public input processes to gauge public opinion on transportation improvements.	Short-term	County Planning Department			
		Identify projects throughout the county and create a detailed infrastructure construction and maintenance schedule.	Medium-term	County Planning Department, County Commission, GDOT			
		Apply for available state and federal grants to fund the transportation improvements.	Medium-term	County Planning Department, GDOT			
		Implement and construct transportation improvements	Long-term	County Planning Department,			



		according to the adopted schedule.		GDOT, Municipalities			
Reform county and municipal zoning ordinances to foster multimodal transportation.	M5.1	Engage with local developers and businesses to identify parking excesses.	Short-term	County Planning Department, Developers, Municipalities	n/a	Town of Alto Code of Ordinances	All character areas
		Draft and adopt a county ordinance for to provide opportunities for reductions in off-street parking, loading, and access requirements.	Short-term	County Planning Department, County Commission			
		Provide municipalities with a model ordinance to reduce minimum parking, loading, and access requirements.	Short-term	County Planning Department, Municipalities			
	M5.2	Conduct thorough public input processes to gauge public opinion of on-street parking design.	Short-term	County Planning Department	n/a	Historic downtown districts in Cornelia and Clarkesville  <a href="#"><u>WEDC – Issues and Solutions for Parking on Main Street</u></a>	All character areas
		Identify preferred design standards for on-street parking and set the standard for the county.	Short-term	County Planning Department, County Commission			
		Draft and adopt an ordinance for new commercial, mixed-use, and multi-family developments, requiring on-street parking and	Short-term	County Planning Department, County Commission			

		alleyway access where appropriate.					
		Draft and adopt an ordinance to allow on-street parking to be counted towards parking requirements.	Short-term	County Planning Department, County Commission			
		Provide municipalities with model ordinances.	Short-term	County Planning Department, Municipalities			
		Identify existing ROW where on-street parking can be added and add it to the respective capital improvements schedule.	Medium-term	County Planning Department, County Commission			

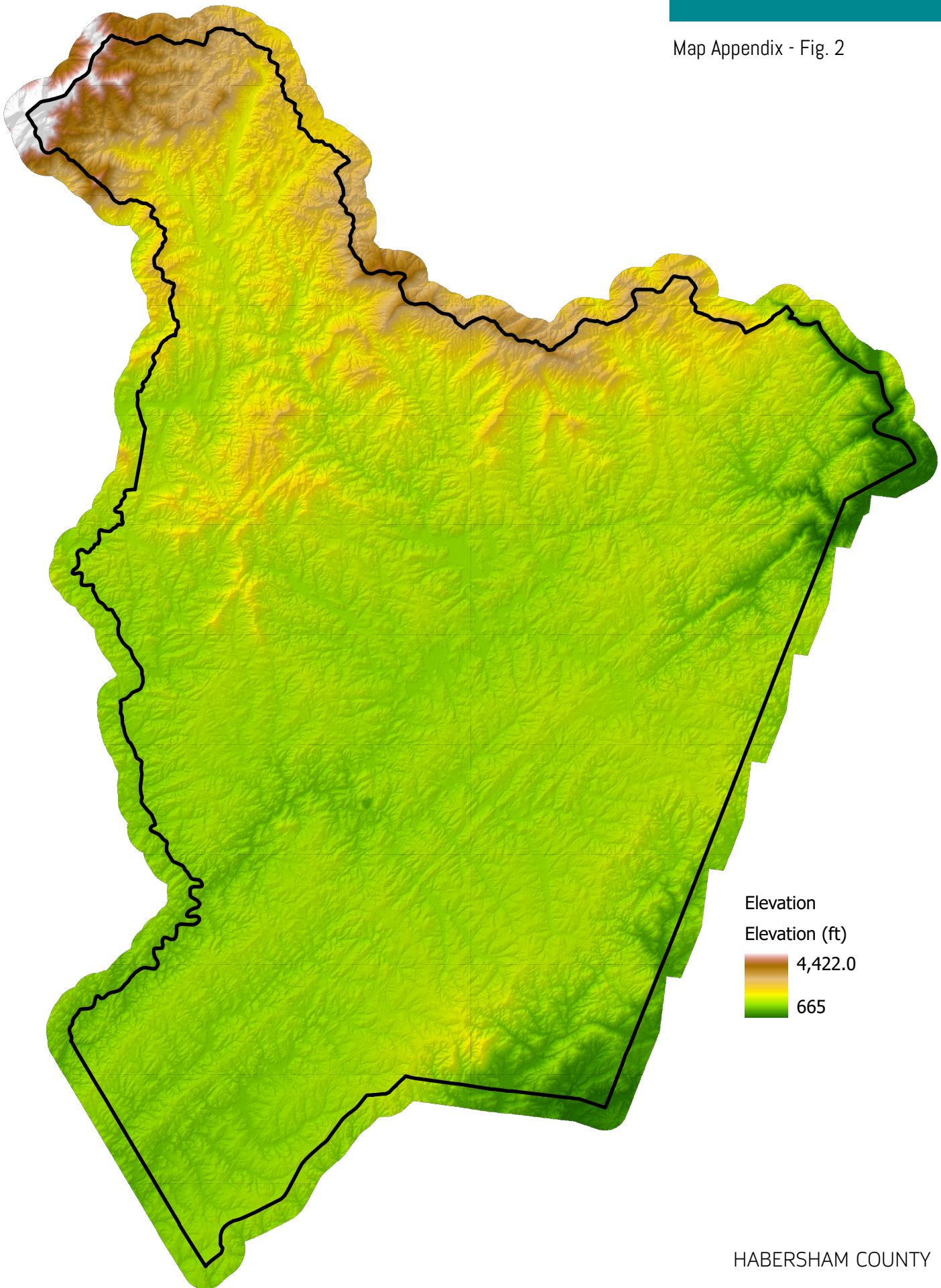
Map Appendix - Fig. 1





## ELEVATION, FEET

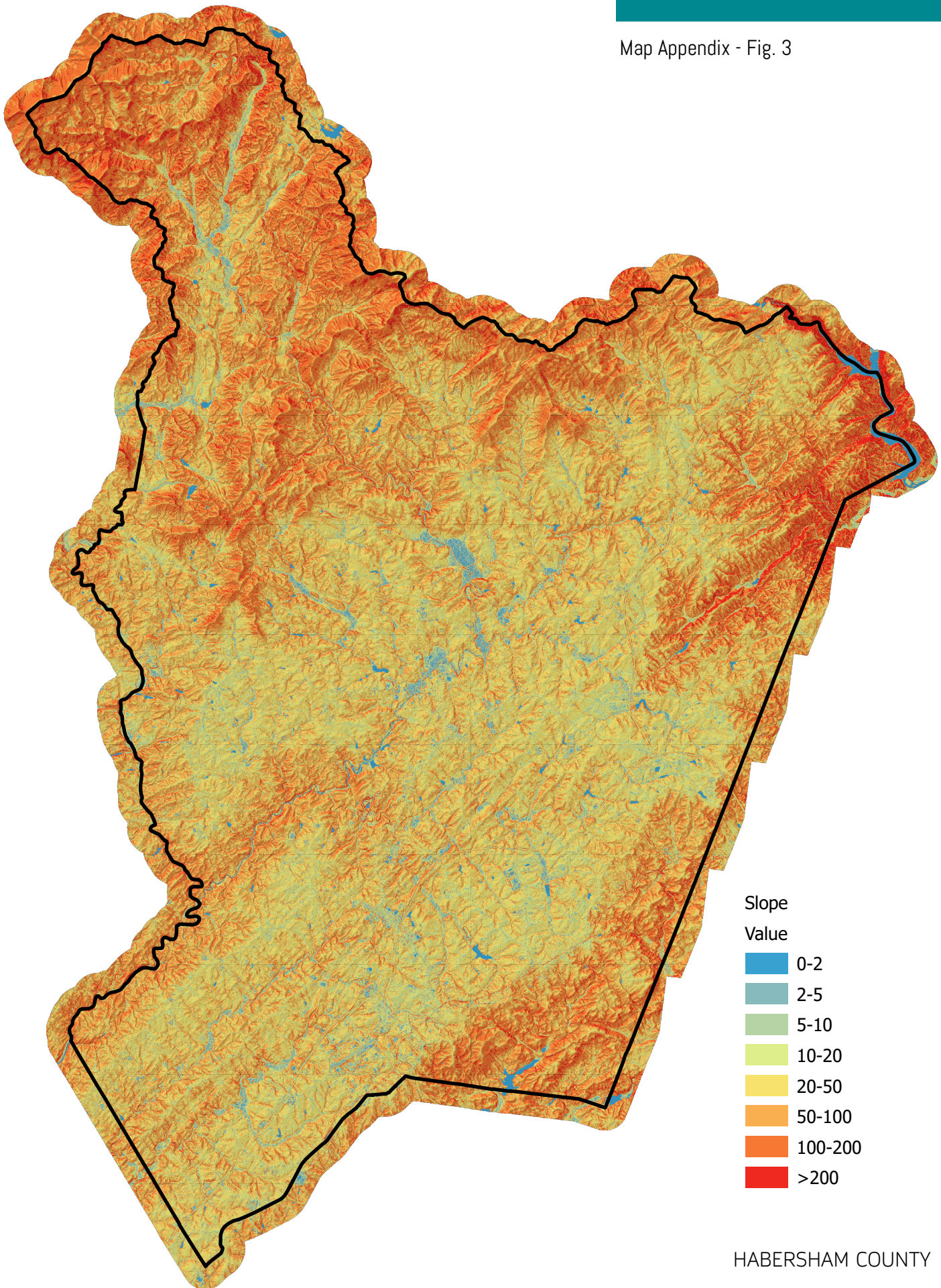
Map Appendix - Fig. 2





## SLOPE, PERCENT RISE

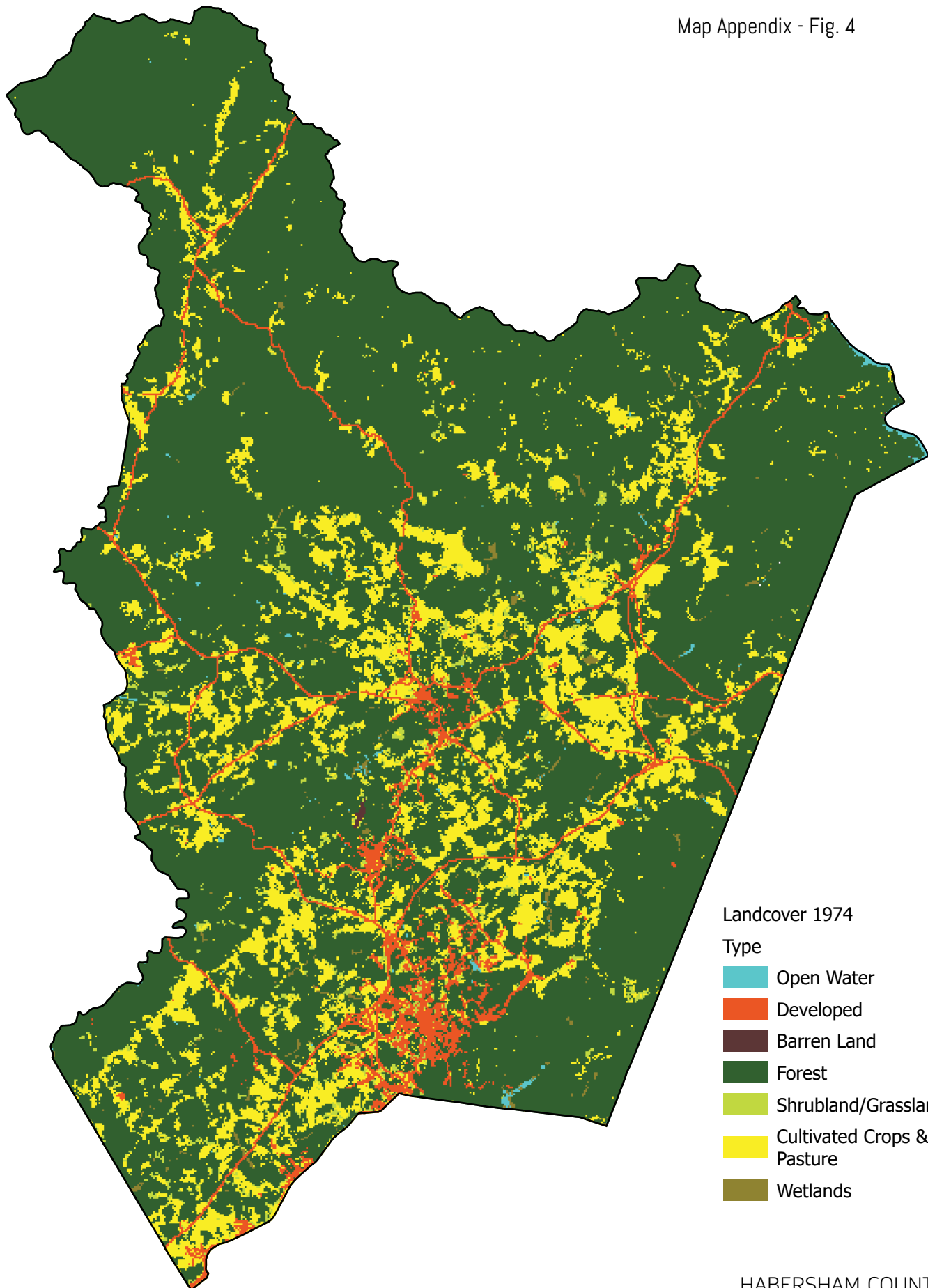
Map Appendix - Fig. 3





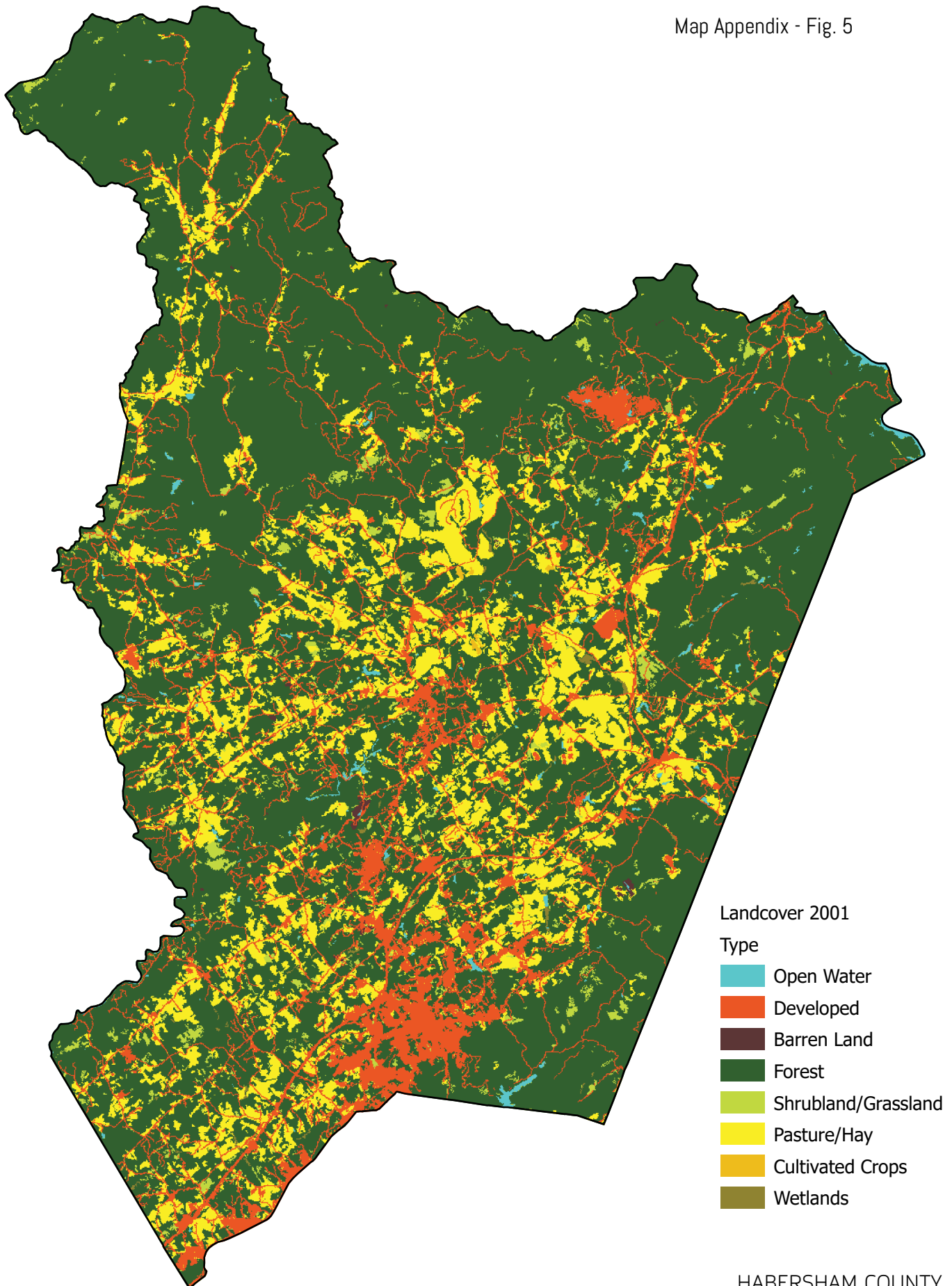
## LANDCOVER (1974)

Map Appendix - Fig. 4



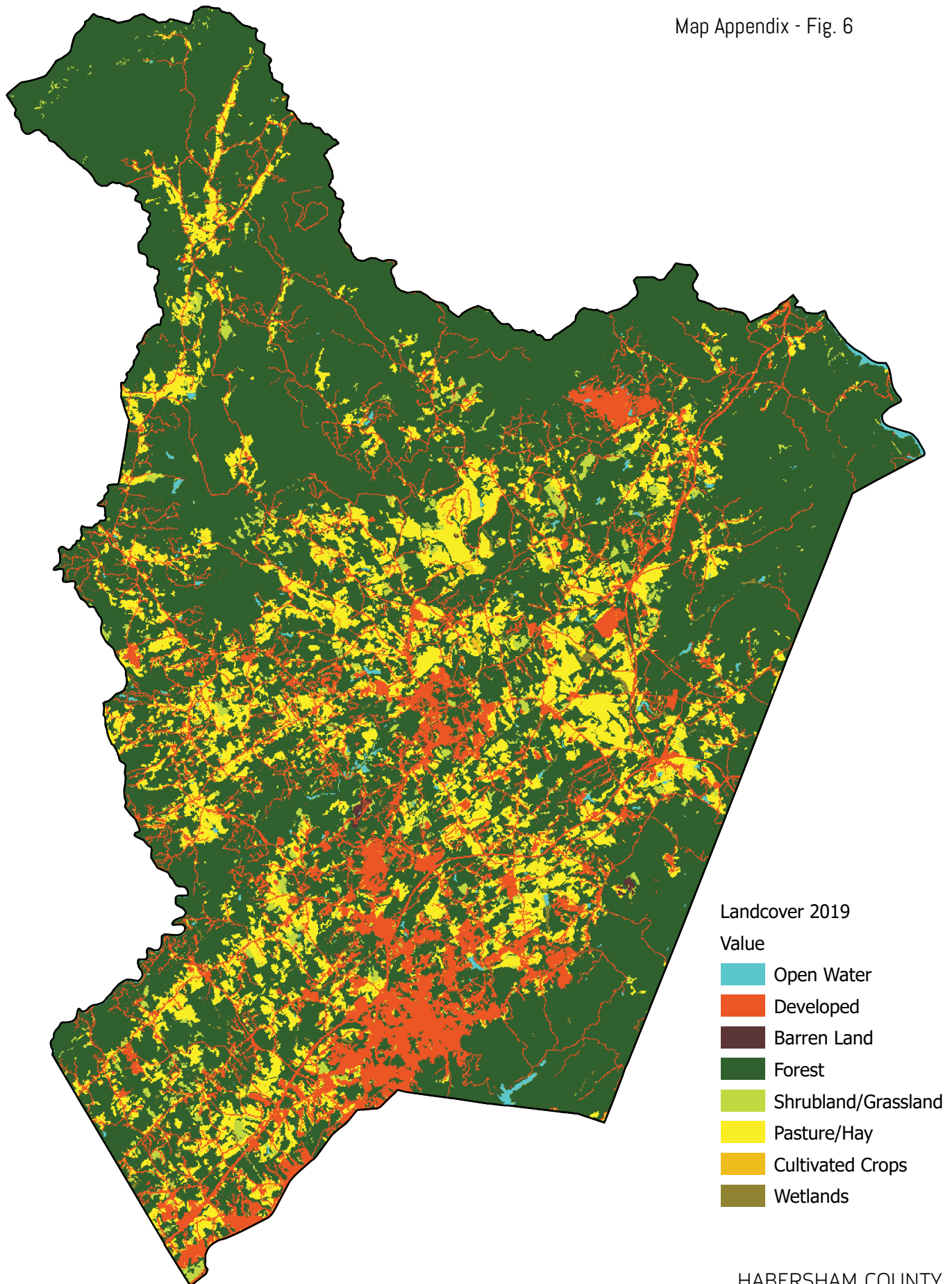
## LANDCOVER (2001)

Map Appendix - Fig. 5



## LANDCOVER (2019)

Map Appendix - Fig. 6

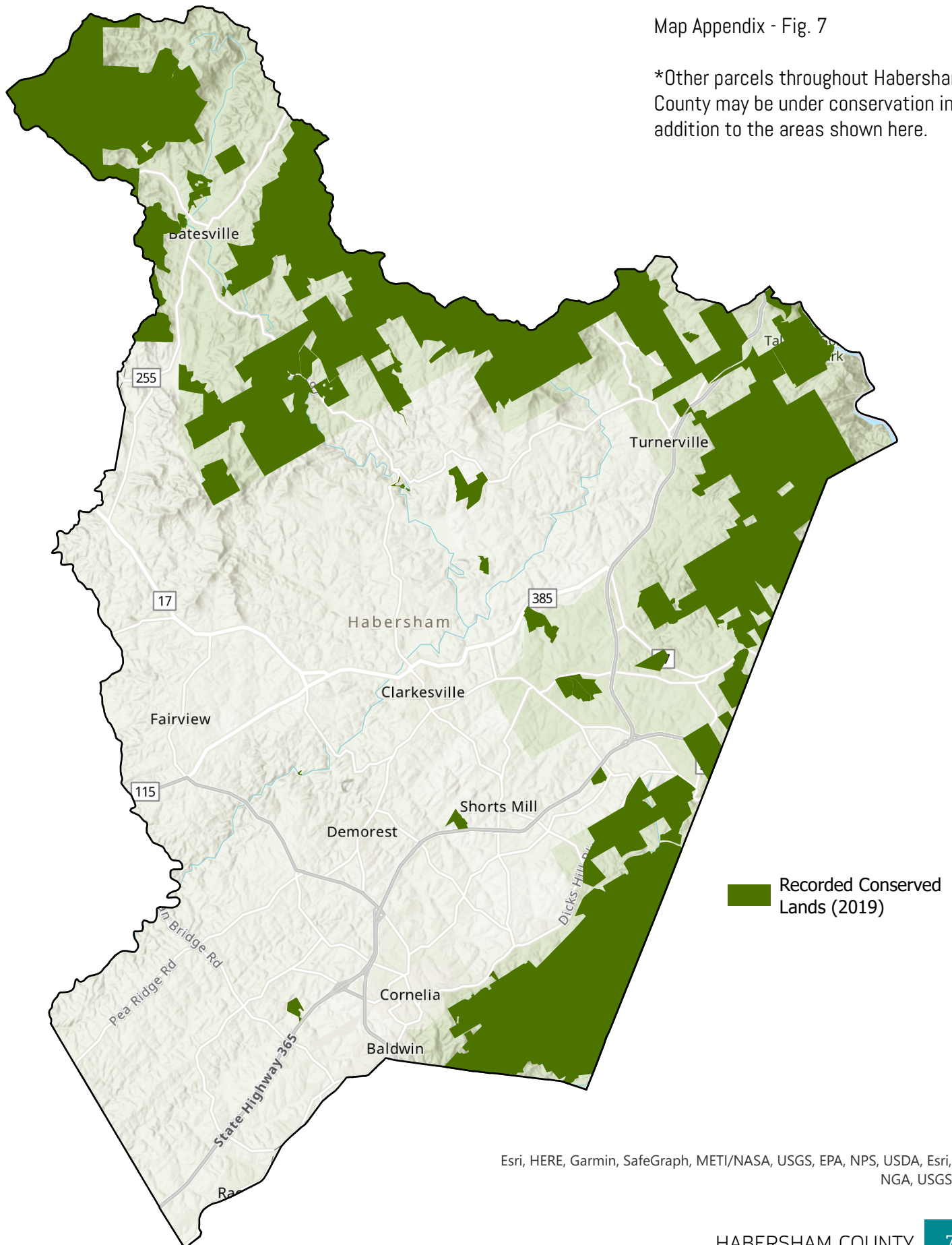




## CONSERVED LANDS\*

Map Appendix - Fig. 7

\*Other parcels throughout Habersham County may be under conservation in addition to the areas shown here.



Esri, HERE, Garmin, SafeGraph, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USDA, Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, FEMA