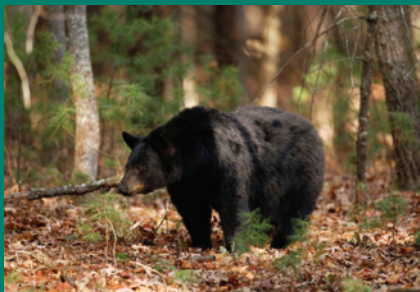


Making Connections

Building a healthy future for Shenandoah National Park
and its gateway communities



National Parks Conservation Association®
Protecting Our National Parks for Future Generations®

Making Connections

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Project Team

Research and Analysis

Writing and Publication Design

Michele L. Archie

Howard D Terry

The Harbinger Consulting Group

www.harbingerconsult.com

GIS Map Design

Dan Servian

DireWolf Graphics

www.direwolf.org

Reviewers

Shannon Andrea, Catharine Gilliam, Joy Oakes, Erin St. John (National Parks Conservation Association); Martha Bogle, Julena Campbell, Jeb Wofford (Shenandoah National Park); Marshall Jones (National Zoological Park/Friends of the National Zoo Conservation and Research Center); Chris Miller (Piedmont Environmental Council); Cliff Miller (Mount Vernon Farm).

Cover Photos

Clockwise from top: View of Shenandoah National Park from Mount Vernon Farm near Sperryville, Rappahannock County (Gregory Dicum); Downtown Luray (Town of Luray); Hiker overlooking Shenandoah fall colors (istockphoto.com/ntn); Black bear in Shenandoah National Park (istockphoto.com/Paul Tossier); Sperryville (Gregory Dicum).

Interior Portraits

Lianne Crookshanks and Tony Williams photos courtesy of the subjects. All other photos of individuals quoted provided by Gregory Dicum.



National Parks Conservation Association®

Protecting Our National Parks for Future Generations®

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Since 1919, the nonpartisan National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. NPCA, its members, and partners work together to protect the park system and preserve our nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage for generations to come.

Making Connections

This *Making Connections* report surveys important aspects of the interdependence between Shenandoah National Park and its neighbors, and offers insight into Shenandoah's positive economic influence on surrounding communities. National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) intends *Making Connections* to be both a report and an invitation. Individuals, organizations, businesses, and the park all can benefit by getting more involved to value and connect more closely with what each contributes to the region.

We hope that when you read this report, you will want to get more involved. Here are some connections you can make:

- **Participate in community planning.** Protect park and community values by speaking up early and constructively in public planning processes.
- **Engage in your community's economic development process.** Focus on the unique landscape and attractions such as native fish and wildlife, history, and heritage to recruit new businesses and strengthen existing ones.
- **Celebrate the 75th anniversary of the dedication of Shenandoah National Park in 2011.** Get involved in planning for this exciting celebration, and watch www.nps.gov/shen for related announcements.
- **Keep up with the work of the Blue Ridge Committee for Shenandoah National Park Relations.** The committee provides for communication between the park and adjacent counties. There is a representative from each county bordering the park. Keep informed about park plans and identify opportunities to work together at www.blueridgecommittee.org.
- **Work through Virginia's Regional Planning Districts.** Four districts border the park (listed on the inside back cover) and offer information and expertise for the region. Connecting through these districts could help park neighbors explore ways to work together to maximize the benefits of park proximity.
- **Get involved in creating a "geotourism" initiative.** The National Geographic Society's Center for Sustainable Destinations at www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable promotes this concept as a way to foster stewardship-based tourism. A successful collaborative effort including Glacier National Park serves as a potential model for communities around Shenandoah. See www.crownofthecontinent.net.
- **Help schools take advantage of Shenandoah National Park's curricula and interpretive programs.** Many teachers don't have the resources to take students on park field trips. Sponsor a school or a class to learn from and explore our national park. Learn more at www.nps.gov/shen/forteachers.
- **Choose clean air and water inside and outside the park.** The park's mountain streams are the source of many communities' drinking water and flow to the Chesapeake Bay. And cleaner air in Shenandoah will mean healthier air for our communities, farms, wineries—and children. Be involved with the Choose Clean Water coalition at www.choosecleanwater.org, and join Virginians for Healthy Air at www.npca.org/vahealthyair.
- **Take your family and friends to visit the park.** Enjoy and explore its many surprises. For schedules of programs and events, regularly check the park's web site at www.nps.gov/shen.
- **Join National Parks Conservation Association** at www.npca.org.

For more information, or to get involved in our efforts, please contact:

National Parks Conservation Association
Virginia Field Office
7 East Washington Street
Lexington, Virginia 24450
Tel: 540.463.3800 Email: virginia@npca.org
www.npca.org

A park and its gateway are really a single destination, with similar history, scenery, and climate.

— Jonathan Tourelot
National Geographic Traveler



The rural character of the surrounding countryside is part of Shenandoah National Park's appeal.
Photo: istockphoto.com/titoslack

“If you visit a national park,” writes Jonathan Tourtellot in a National Geographic ranking of 55 park areas, “you’ll often spend plenty of time just outside the park, too—eating, sleeping, parking, shopping, sightseeing—in the town or region that geographers call the gateway. A park and its gateway are really a single destination, with similar history, scenery, and climate. The way park and gateway interact can make all the difference in the quality of your trip and in the sustainability of the destination.” (Tourtellot 2005)

Perhaps no park better illustrates this connection than Shenandoah National Park. Long and slender, Shenandoah is designed for people to look *out* of. Its central feature is Skyline Drive, a 105-mile roadway with 75 overlooks. The visual character of the surrounding communities and countryside are key to park visitors’ experience.

Shenandoah National Park and its neighboring communities share a landscape. The surrounding communities and countryside are as essential to the park and the “park experience” as the park is to the character of this region.

Connections: Local Economies, Landscapes, and the Park

Drawing on economic data compiled by state and federal agencies, interviews with local residents and leaders, and a variety of research reports and assessments, this report outlines three findings:

Finding 1: Shenandoah National Park provides benefits for surrounding communities.

Shenandoah is an ecological core for the surrounding landscape and a source of economic benefit for nearby communities. The park provides clean water, fish and wildlife habitat, and a backbone of undeveloped land for the surrounding region. Tourism, recreation, and Park Service spending bring economic benefits.

Finding 2: Much of Shenandoah National Park’s appeal comes from the surrounding communities and landscape.

The surrounding landscape, farms, and small towns are a crucial part of Shenandoah’s visual appeal, and they help attract visitors to the park. Fish and wildlife that inhabit the park also depend upon areas beyond park boundaries. What happens outside the park affects the experience of park visitors and area residents.

Finding 3: Attractive places and quality of life are at a premium in today’s economy.

The attractiveness of the region’s communities and their surroundings is an economic advantage. Global economic trends drive this dynamic, as do growth of “transportable,” non-labor sources of income such as dividends and retirement payments, and improvements in communication technology that make it easier for people to live and work where they want.

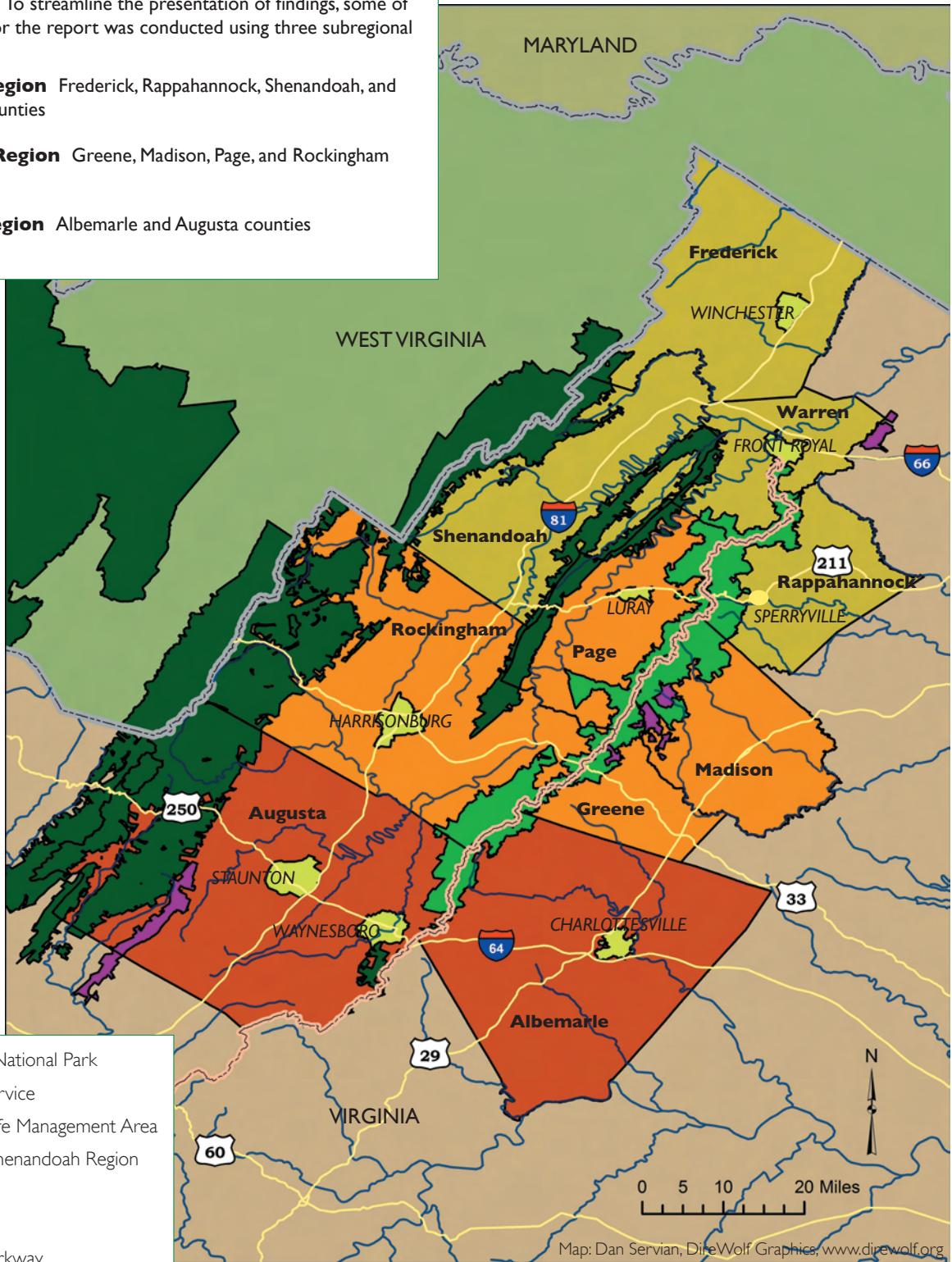
Making Connections for a Bright Future

Making Connections concludes that the value of Shenandoah National Park to local communities goes well beyond its appeal for visitors. The closing section identifies opportunities for cooperation to create more economic success for area residents while protecting the park and the landscapes that make this region so attractive.

Figure 1: Shenandoah National Park and Its Gateway Region

Shenandoah National Park's gateway region, as identified in this *Making Connections* report, consists of 10 counties in the Piedmont and Shenandoah Valley. To streamline the presentation of findings, some of the data analysis for the report was conducted using three subregional areas:

- North Region** Frederick, Rappahannock, Shenandoah, and Warren counties
- Central Region** Greene, Madison, Page, and Rockingham counties
- South Region** Albemarle and Augusta counties



Legend

- Shenandoah National Park
- U.S. Forest Service
- Virginia Wildlife Management Area
- Counties in Shenandoah Region
- Cities
- Major roads
- Blue Ridge Parkway
- Rivers and streams

Map: Dan Servian, DireWolf Graphics, www.direwolf.org

Finding I — Key Points

- Shenandoah contributes to wildlife viewing, hunting, and fishing revenues in the region.
- The park provides the kinds of outdoor recreation that Virginians value.
- Shenandoah is a long-standing attraction for visitors to the region, and creates local economic benefits.
- Travel-related economic activity is growing and important in local communities.



John Shaffer, Luray
Marketing Director, Luray
Caverns

“Many don’t realize the additional benefits our communities will receive from the park in the future. As recreational opportunities and scenic landscapes become more scarce in the East, the park will become an even more important treasure.”

Shenandoah National Park provides benefits for surrounding communities.

Many of Shenandoah National Park’s most popular hikes follow cool mountain streams and lead to beautiful waterfalls. More than 800 freshwater springs bubble to the surface in the park, combining in their downhill course to form the headwaters of 70 watersheds that flow into three major drainages: the Shenandoah, James, and Rappahannock rivers. Waters originating in the park feed aquifers that supply water for surrounding communities. Water is perhaps an apt illustration of many of the benefits Shenandoah provides to surrounding communities. It is a daily reality, and easy to take for granted.

Wildlife Viewing, Hunting, Fishing Bring Economic Activity

The cold, clear streams that originate in the park spawn a fishery that extends beyond park boundaries. A centuries-old draw for visitors, trout fishing continues to lure anglers to the region, giving nearby communities a share of more than \$800 million that anglers spend in Virginia each year, and the state’s 14,700 fishing-related jobs. (U.S. Department of the Interior, *et al*)

Each year, more than two million wildlife watchers in Virginia infuse \$960 million into the state’s economy. A good share of this spending happens in the counties surrounding Shenandoah National Park, where wildlife viewing is a popular activity.

Although not allowed inside the national park, hunting also benefits the area economy. Several hundred black bears inhabit the park at any given time, and bears move freely between the park and surrounding lands. During the 2008 hunting season, two of every five black bears were taken in the ten-county Shenandoah region. (Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries) If a proportionate amount of the \$17 million that bear hunters spend in Virginia each year goes to these counties, bear hunting may funnel \$6.5 million into the local economy in spending on food, lodging, equipment and transportation. (Wright)

Outdoor Recreation is a Draw for Residents and Visitors

Outdoor recreation is popular, though demand sometimes outstrips access in this fast-growing state. In a 2006 survey, residents ranked “trails for hiking and walking”



Taking in the view from Shenandoah. Hiking is a popular park activity, and among Virginians’ favorite forms of outdoor recreation. Photo: istockphoto.com/SKLA

Virginians’ Favorite Outdoor Recreation Activities

(Top five activities ranked by percent of households participating)

1. Walking for pleasure 72%
2. Visiting historic sites 56%
3. Driving for pleasure 55%
4. Swimming 44%
5. Visiting nat. areas, parks 44%

(Virginia DCR—Department of Conservation and Recreation)

and “access to natural areas” as the second and third most needed recreation opportunities in the state. (Virginia DCR)

Virginians place high value on the state’s protected areas, stating the two most important reasons to protect natural areas are “conserving natural resources” and “providing people places to explore and enjoy nature and their cultural heritage.”

Plenty of residents take advantage of that opportunity to explore—80 percent of households visit a natural area, preserve, or refuge each year. About a third of Shenandoah’s visitors are Virginia residents. Nine of ten residents who backpack in Virginia do so on protected public lands. (Virginia DCR)

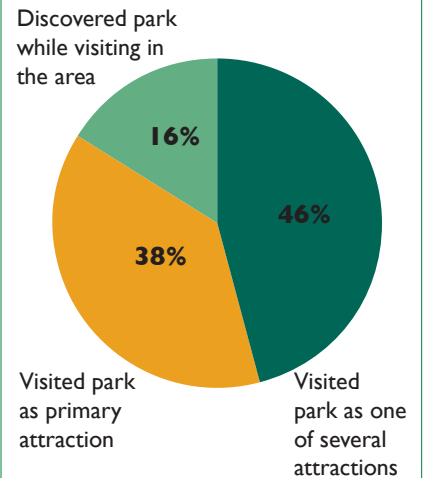
Shenandoah National Park Generates Economic Value for Neighboring Communities and Businesses

Visitors find Shenandoah National Park in a variety of ways. For some, it is their primary destination. Others enjoy the park as one of a number of attractions on their vacations. Still others discover the park by happenstance, often directed there by people in the surrounding communities.

No matter how they find Shenandoah, visitors spend money in and around the park, primarily on travel-related services such as lodging, meals, and fuel. Because almost two-thirds of Shenandoah’s visitors go on to explore other attractions in Virginia, they generate additional economic activity in the region.

“We have a very loyal local crowd,” notes CeCe Castle, owner of Brookside Restaurant, between Luray and the park entrance at Thornton Gap. “But we couldn’t survive without travelers. We do 65 percent of our business from May to October, and depending on when the leaves peak, October is right up there with July and August as one of our best months. From Maine to Georgia, in the mountains, the high season is always going to follow the fall colors.”

Figure 2: Shenandoah National Park as Primary Visitor Destination



Shenandoah National Park draws around a million visitors a year. Many park visitors also enjoy other attractions in the area. A significant portion of park visitors discover Shenandoah while visiting the area. The attractiveness of surrounding communities is important to the park, as well. (Source: Littlejohn)

Figure 3 Economic Impacts of Shenandoah National Park Visitor Spending and National Park Service Jobs, 2006

Shenandoah visitor spending and National Park Service payroll for employees create local economic benefits. Estimates of these impacts include both direct effects (e.g., businesses selling goods and services directly to park visitors) and secondary effects (e.g., household spending of income, and sales to related businesses in the local region).

2006 Impact of Visitor Spending		2006 Impact of Park Employment	
Recreation visits	1,076,150	Park Service jobs**	218
Spending by non-local visitors*	\$41,073,000	Salary plus payroll benefits	\$11,656,000
Local Impact of Visitor Spending		Local Impact of Park Payroll Spending	
Jobs**	819	Jobs**	317
Personal income***	\$14,260,000	Personal income***	\$14,634,000
Value added****	\$22,050,000	Value added****	\$16,619,000

*Visitor spending is estimated using spending averages from park visitor surveys and local area economic multipliers.

**Includes full-time and part-time jobs. Seasonal positions adjusted to an annual basis. Park Service jobs do not include employees of park concessions.

***Covers wages and salaries, including income of sole proprietors and payroll benefits.

**** “Value added” is the sum of personal income, profits and rents of private firms, and indirect business taxes accruing to regional/local government. This does not account for Park Service purchases from local businesses.

(Source: Stynes)



Shenandoah National Park’s ranger-led interpretive programs give visitors the opportunity to explore and learn about the park’s natural and historical features. Photo: John F. Mitchell, NPS

The local economic impact of visitor spending in Shenandoah’s gateway communities is added to by Park Service payroll and by purchases from local businesses. As these dollars are spent and re-spent locally, the impact of these expenditures and payroll on the local economy is multiplied. (See Figure 3, p. 5.)

In 2009, Shenandoah National Park began spending \$30 million in stimulus funds authorized by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act—primarily for infrastructure and roads projects—bringing an extra measure of economic activity to local communities. And, despite the economic downturn, Shenandoah’s year-to-date visitation numbers in September 2009 were up ten percent over the previous year.

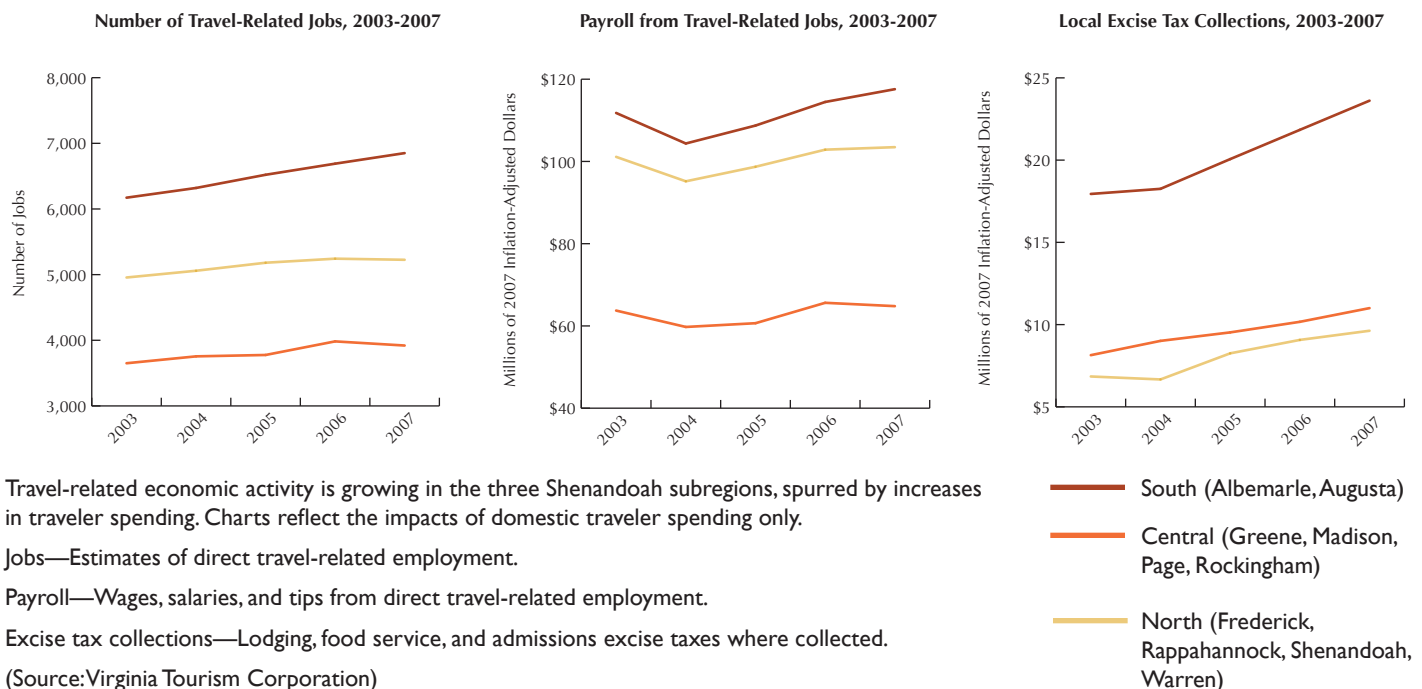
Travelers’ Contributions to Local Economies are Growing

Between 2003 and 2007, tourist expenditures grew in each of the three sub-regions surrounding Shenandoah National Park. At 20 percent, growth in the North region was on par with the growth of travelers’ expenditures in Virginia as a whole. During the same time period, traveler spending grew by 23 percent in the Central region, and 32 percent in the South region. (Virginia Tourism Corporation)

As tourist expenditures grew, they supported a modest expansion in the number of travel-related jobs and modest payroll growth. Local and state tax collections have risen simultaneously. Receipts from excise taxes, which are administered by counties and independent municipalities, have been growing at a rate that has kept pace with, or outstripped, the growth in travelers’ spending. (See Figure 4.)

Excise taxes—levied by some localities on lodging, food service, and admissions to attractions—augment local government general funds, helping communities keep up with infrastructure and other costs. Lodging excise tax receipts in excess of two percent contribute to marketing and tourism business development.

Figure 4: Travelers’ Contributions to Local Economies, 2003-2007



Much of Shenandoah National Park’s appeal comes from the surrounding communities and landscape.

In Shenandoah National Park, history is never far away. A good share of the park’s 500 miles of hiking trails pass through old farmsteads and ruins. President Herbert Hoover’s retreat, Rapidan Camp, is among the park’s most popular attractions. Former resorts—like Skyland—and the rustic handiwork of 1930s Civilian Conservation Corps workers house many park concessions and visitor facilities.

In the early 1930s, park booster William Carson declared in a radio address, “Scenery is going to be Virginia’s next big cash crop.” As the chair of Virginia’s Commission on Conservation and Development, Carson orchestrated the design and construction of Skyline Drive to take full advantage of the surrounding scenic beauty. From some of the drive’s east-facing overlooks, visitors could see across a landscape of small towns and farms some 70 miles to the Washington Monument.

Development Could Threaten Shenandoah’s Views

Shenandoah was designed to appeal to East Coasters as driving vacations boomed in popularity during the early decades of the 20th century. For most park visitors, taking in the view from Skyline Drive is still the focal point of their trip. In a 2001 survey, the following reasons for visiting Shenandoah garnered the most “extremely important” and “very important” ratings:

- Viewing the scenic drive and overlooks (87%);
- Enjoying solitude and natural quiet (75%);
- Viewing wildlife and plants (72%); and
- Experiencing wilderness (71%). (Littlejohn)

For generations, the view from Skyline Drive’s overlooks and many of the park’s trails has been forests, mountain vistas, and open farmland dotted with small towns. But that is changing as development expands the footprint of the region’s towns and cities, and, in some places, takes over open agricultural land.

Development of land in Virginia has been concentrated in recent decades, driven by rapid population growth. More than a quarter of the land area developed since the settling of Jamestown—for houses, commercial establishments, industrial facilities and the like—was developed between 1990 and 2006. If population growth trends continue, the state projects that the 40 years following 2006 will see the development of more land than in the previous 400 years combined. (Virginia DCR 2006)

These projections do not bode well for the areas surrounding Shenandoah National Park. For more than 30 years, population growth in the northern and central parts of the park’s region has outpaced even rapidly growing Virginia. In the southern part of

Finding 2 — Key Points

- Shenandoah National Park depends upon the surrounding landscape and communities for its visual appeal.
- Habitat for park fish and wildlife extends beyond park boundaries to nearby public and private lands.
- Poorly planned development may isolate park habitat, make views less attractive, and diminish the appeal of the park’s neighboring communities.
- The character, culture, and vitality of surrounding communities help maintain quality of life for local residents and attract visitors to the region and park.



Photo: istockphoto.com/sborisov



Photos: NPS

Air Pollution Shrouds the View from the Top

Downwind from major industrial and urban areas, Shenandoah National Park's air quality is often poor. Effects include:

- Hazy skies that obscure views;
- Acid deposition, which harms native fish;
- Ozone pollution that damages sensitive plants and may slow forest growth.

Despite improvements spurred by the federal Clean Air Act, visibility and sensitive streams remain degraded. Ground-level ozone pollution is among the worst of any national park. And climate change threatens to exacerbate these problems.

the region, population has grown more slowly than Virginia's, but still faster than the national average. (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis)

Chris Miller, president of the Piedmont Environmental Council, says trends in private land conservation in the region are encouraging. "Landowners have protected hundreds of thousands of acres visible from Shenandoah National Park," notes Miller. "Many of the conservation easements specifically reference maintaining views from the park as a primary purpose. I estimate that the region is between 20 and 30 percent of the way to protecting private lands that are important viewshed and buffer areas for the park."

Across the ten-county region, more than 188,000 acres are held in conservation easements, which protect land from development while maintaining compatible uses such as farming. (Virginia DCR Land Conservation Data Explorer)

Park Wildlife Need Habitat Inside and Outside the Park

The 72 percent of visitor survey respondents who valued the opportunity to view wildlife and plants during their Shenandoah visits (Littlejohn) likely left the park satisfied. Since the park's establishment, the forest has retaken a landscape once cleared for farming, timber harvest, grazing, and other uses. As the forest recovered, native plants and wildlife came back.

Virginia white-tailed deer, once all but wiped out in the region, are again abundant in the park. In 1937, an estimated two black bears made their home in the park. Today, the park's black bear population ranges up to several hundred. Introductions of wild turkey on adjacent private lands helped return a healthy population of these birds in the park, where they join some 30 year-round resident bird species, and about 170 species found in the park seasonally. (National Park Service)

The park is now one of the largest intact tracts of eastern deciduous forests in the northern Blue Ridge Mountains. Because it straddles the northern and southern Appalachians, and varies some 3,500 feet in elevation, it is also home to a remarkably diverse array of plant communities and animal species.

The Virginia Natural Landscape Assessment, a project of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, identifies Shenandoah and some adjacent lands as areas of outstanding habitat integrity, linked to other high-quality habitat to the south and west in the George Washington National Forest. These linkages are critical for species such as black bears and bobcats—as is maintaining habitat on private lands surrounding the park. These animals rely on a range of natural areas to allow them to adapt to changing conditions and food availability.

Many of Virginia's growing population of 16,000 bears live in and around Shenandoah National Park. Seven of the eleven counties with the highest concentrations of bears are in the region covered by this report. (Sajecki) According to park wildlife experts, as Shenandoah's forests matured to produce



Native eastern brook trout. Bears and bobcats are not the only animals that depend on habitats in and outside the park. Brook trout, American eels, and other aquatic species range up and down streams that flow through park and private lands. Photo: iStockPhoto.com/invs572517

plenty of food for bears, land use outside the park also encouraged healthy bear populations: “The mosaic of agricultural lands, woodlots and tree-lined streams created nearly ideal conditions for the bear population to expand and disperse.” (National Park Service)

Aquatic species, such as brook trout and American eels, also rely on linkages between the park and private land. Eels must travel upstream through private lands to reach park streams, where they develop into adults. The health and resilience of the park’s brook trout populations depends on high-quality downstream habitat, which allows connectivity with trout populations at lower elevations. (Wofford) Maintaining habitat connections may help native fish be more resilient to climate change.

Protecting the Landscape Protects the Region’s Future

How and where development occurs affects the scenic appeal of the region, wildlife habitat, quality of life for local residents, and the viability of agriculture.

“Private land conservation,” observes Piedmont Environmental Council’s Chris Miller, “can help sustain all of these values. The communities adjacent to the park are working hard to designate and protect scenic byways, recognizing that the journey to and from the park is as important to visitors as the destination itself. Nearly 90,000 acres of conservation easements in the Piedmont region are directly adjacent to designated scenic byways.”

Keeping farmland farmed has not been easy in some of the area’s counties. Mirroring a statewide trend, every county in the region saw average farm size shrink between 1992 and 2007. The number of farms grew in every county, while the number of acres farmed increased in only three counties. (See Figure 5.)

According to an American Farmland Trust analysis, nearly every county in the Shenandoah region contains a sizeable area of prime and unique farmlands. Pressure for development is particularly strong in Augusta, Frederick, Rappahannock, and Shenandoah counties. (American Farmland Trust)



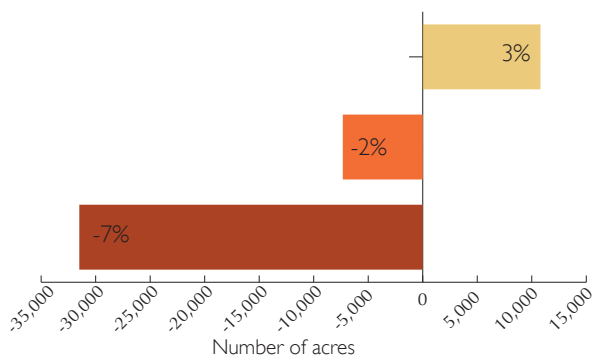
Marshall Jones,
Front Royal

Smithsonian National
Zoological Park Conservation
and Research Center

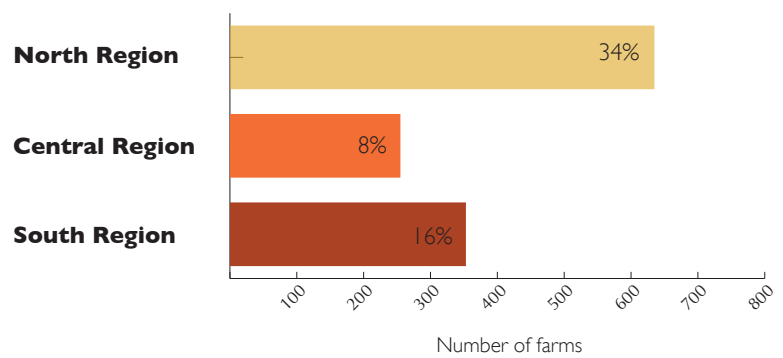
“If you look at how national parks are done in some other countries, villages and private land are included. I think that is sort of an unspoken idea that a lot of people have here. We’re an extension of the park. When you stand on Skyline Drive, you see the beautiful farms and rolling country. That’s what we want to see here—rural views and rustic towns.”

Figure 5 Trends in Farms and Farmland

Change in Farmland Acreage, 1992-2007



Change in Number of Farms, 1992-2007



In most of the region’s counties, farmland acreage declined or held steady between 1992 and 2007. The only counties to post gains in farm acreage were Warren (22%), Shenandoah (13%), and Madison (2%). Rappahannock (-18%), Greene (-16%), and Albemarle (-16%) experienced the biggest proportionate losses. Every county saw gains in the number of farms. Warren County (87%) topped the list, followed by Rappahannock (33%) and Madison (28%). (Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture)



Julena Campbell, Luray
Ranger, Shenandoah National
Park

“The story of the human history of the area is essential to this park. We drew on many oral histories from local residents to create the park history exhibit at Byrd Visitor Center.

“Now, families come up to the visitor center and you’ll hear parents say, ‘This is your great-grandmother,’ or, ‘This is the cabin your great-grandfather grew up in.’ Seventy years after the park was created, people can come up and explore their personal connections to the land—go to the cemetery where their great aunt is buried, or find the cornerstone of great-grandfather’s house, or the tree he might have planted when he was a little kid.”

Local Character and Culture Support Quality of Life and Attract Visitors to the Region and Park

Nationwide, 86 percent of fruits and vegetables, and 63 percent of dairy products are produced in urban-influenced areas, which puts important food production squarely in the path of development. (American Farmland Trust)

That, says Andrew Haley, who owns Blueridge Artisans gallery in Sperryville, is where the local food movement comes in. “Agriculture is a tough go here. It’s hard to fight cheap corn from California and virtually free strawberries. I think the conventional wisdom is that you just can’t do it, but we’re seeing amazing counter-examples—organic farmers who are going gangbusters taking their produce to local farmers markets around here and in D.C. People care a lot less about what it costs than about knowing it was locally produced without a lot of poisons.”

Eric Bendfeldt, community viability specialist with the Virginia Cooperative Extension, says that developing regional markets is a springboard for farmers to transform low-profit commodity agriculture businesses. “Differentiating products—for example, raising hormone-free, local beef, or organic seasonal vegetables—helps farmers increase the value of their products, keep more of that value for themselves, and diversify into other crops.”

This local agriculture transformation is helping invigorate communities, says Bendfeldt, noting that the “concept of developing local food systems within a regional foodshed is all about maintaining quality of life.” Affirming the links between farming and local culture, the 2008 inaugural “Harvest” in Berryville welcomed visitors to celebrate local food, farming, and history. The festival was spearheaded by, and proceeds supported, nonprofit groups dedicated to land, cultural, and historic preservation.

Elsewhere in the region, *Flavor* magazine and *Edible Blue Ridge* serve up stories about local food, wine, culture, and sustainability. Online networks have sprung up to guide residents to fresh, regional offerings in both the Shenandoah Valley and Piedmont. Over the past two years, the Piedmont Environmental Council, in partnership with many state and local organizations, has distributed “Buy Fresh Buy Local” guides to over 250,000 households in the communities adjacent to the park.



In 2005, local producers created the Shenandoah Valley Produce Auction. This centralized market has opened doors for more farmers to go into vegetable production. “Diversification,” notes Virginia Cooperative Extension’s Eric Bendfeldt, “helps make farms less susceptible to economic pressures.” Photo: Virginia Cooperative Extension

Finding 3

Attractive places and quality of life are at a premium in today's economy.

Howard Thompson of Evergreen Outfitters tells a familiar story when he recounts how he and his wife, Andy, moved to Luray from Alexandria. “When we were living in northern Virginia, we’d come out here most weekends, backpacking and camping. We bought our house in Luray in 1998 and weekendened it until 2003 when we sold everything in Alexandria and moved out. We were going to get rid of one place, and it was far easier for us to part ways with northern Virginia, the traffic, and the city.”

Interviews with business owners and other residents suggest that the same recreation opportunities, natural beauty, and small-town pace of life that attract weekenders and visitors, draw some of those visitors to move permanently to the area. And they are a large part of the area’s appeal to long-time residents.

Newcomers Contribute to Local Economies

Between 2000 and 2008, each of Shenandoah’s three subregions attracted new residents faster than the rest of the counties in Virginia as a whole. (See Figure 6.) With the sole exception of Charlottesville, more people moved into each of the counties and independent municipalities in the region than moved away during that time period.

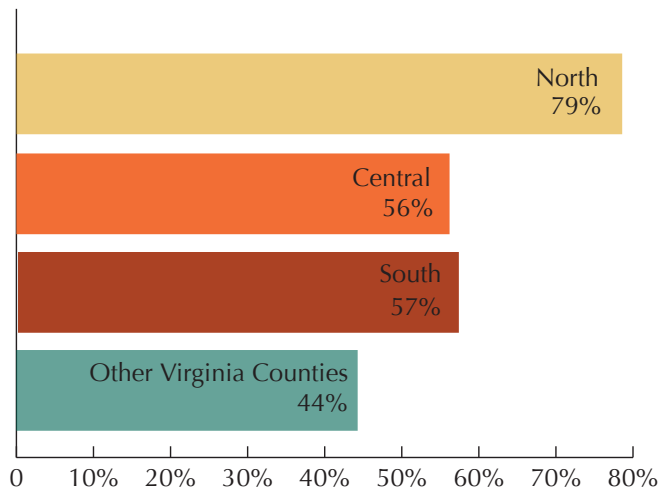
A decline in the percentage of seasonal homes in most counties in the region may offer evidence that more people are, like the Thompsons, opting for permanent rather than seasonal residences. Only three counties in the region saw significant increases in the proportion of seasonal homes between 1990 and 2000: Albemarle, Page, and Rappahannock. (See Figure 7.)

Finding 3 — Key Points

- New residents and small businesses contribute to growth and vitality in local economies.
- The Shenandoah region is attracting new residents faster than the rest of the state.
- Economic changes have placed a premium on community attractiveness—including natural beauty, high-quality public lands, outdoor recreation, and small, friendly communities. These changes are expected to continue.

Figure 6 Population Growth through Migration

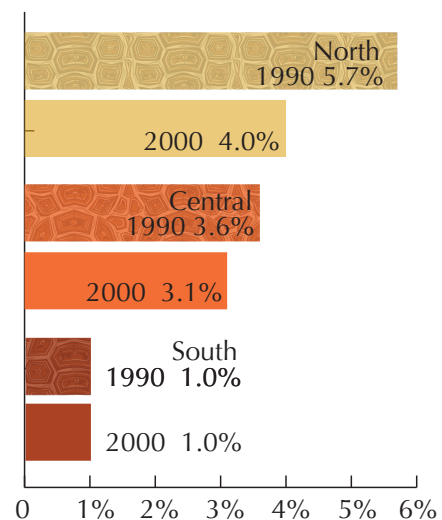
Percent Population Growth Due to Net Migration, 2000-2008



Net migration refers to the difference between the number of people moving into the area, and the number of people moving away. Strong net migration rates can be an indicator of the attractiveness of an area or the strength of its economy. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau)

Figure 7 Trends in Seasonal Homes as a Proportion of all Homes

Seasonal Homes as a Percentage of All Homes, 1990 & 2000



A declining share of seasonal homes may indicate an influx of permanent residents. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau)



Lianne Crookshanks
Waynesboro

Director of Tourism

“It’s stunning to see the sun come up over the Blue Ridge Mountains. I wake up to that every morning. That’s why I came here, and why I’m raising my kids here.”

Some of those newcomers are starting small businesses, and, as in other parts of the country, small businesses carry the bulk of the load in employment growth in the Shenandoah region. Across the region, 86 percent of firms have fewer than 20 employees. Between 1995 and 2005, firms with 10-19 employees showed the fastest growth in the North and South subregions. In the Central subregion, firms with 20-49 employees grew the most quickly as a share of all firms. (U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns)

Economic Changes Place a Premium on Quality of Life

Over the past 30 years, the structure of local economies throughout the region has changed in similar ways, with personal income growth concentrated in non-labor income and the services and professional sectors. Government and manufacturing have also been growing in some areas. (See Figure 8.)

National and global shifts toward a more services-oriented economy continue to filter through this region. Improvements in communication technology and changes in workplace management have made it easier for people to live and work where they want.

At the same time, “transportable,” non-labor sources of income, especially dividends, interest, rent, and age-related payments such as retirement, have become more important. (See Figure 8, p. 13.) Some of the growth in non-labor income is driven by an expanding share of retirement-age residents, and the advance of baby boomers toward retirement.

These shifts place a premium on a community’s quality of life—its attractiveness and ability to draw and retain residents. Research from around the country and interviews conducted for this report suggest that natural beauty, public lands, outdoor recreation, and small, friendly communities top the list of what long-time residents and newcomers alike appreciate.

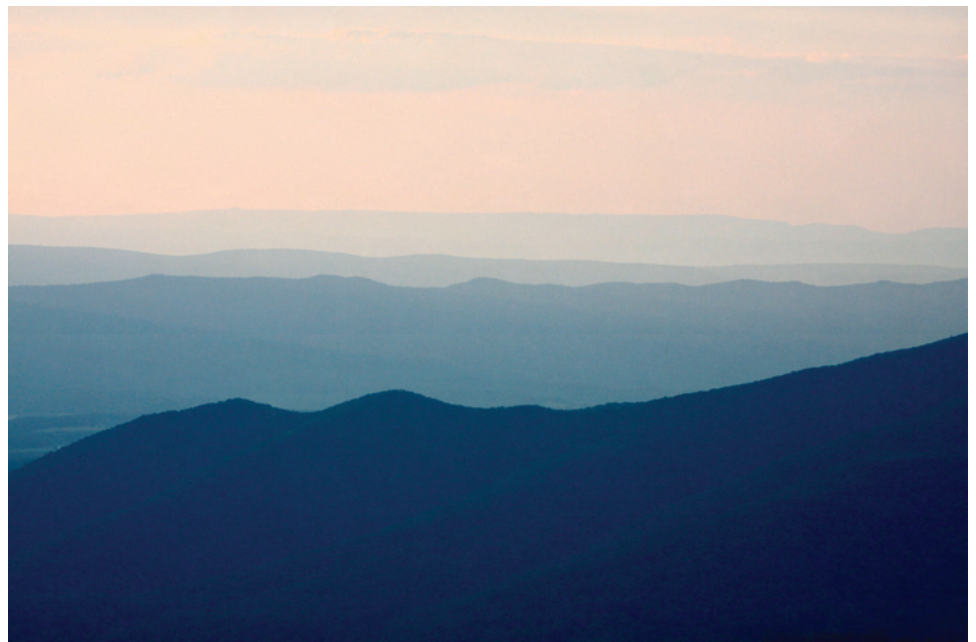
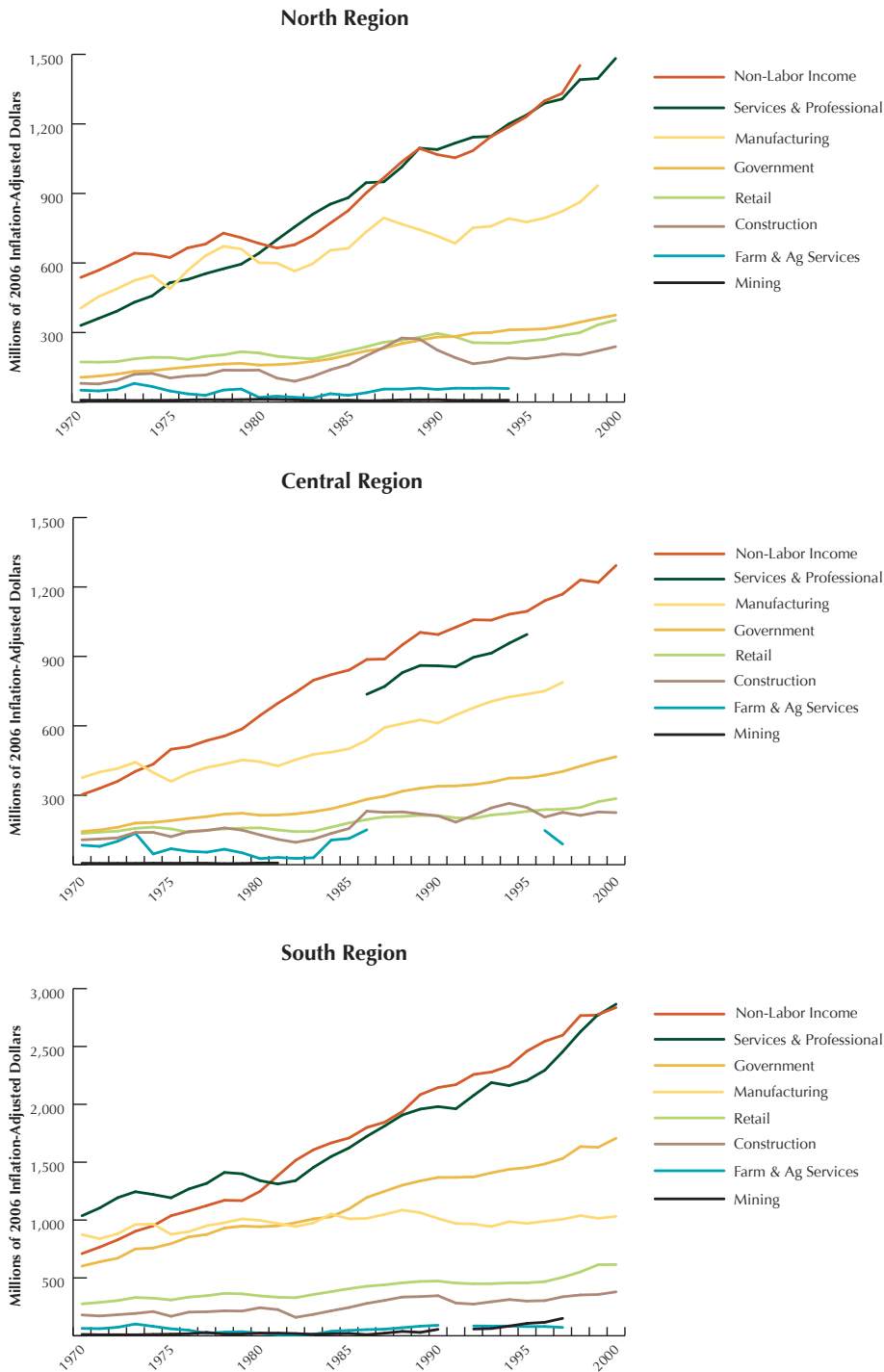


Photo: Gregory Dicum

Figure 8: Income by Source or Industry Sector, 1970-2000

Personal income growth has been led by non-labor income (payments such as dividends, interest, rent, and government payments such as Medicare or Social Security) in all three regions, closely followed by the services and professional sector. Manufacturing is of growing importance in the North and Central regions, while government is gaining strength in the South. (Source: Economic Profile System compilation of data from U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis Regional Economic Information System 2006)



Note: Missing portions of lines in the graphs in these graphs indicate gaps in data, often due to restrictions on disclosure of company-sensitive information or difficulties aggregating data across multi-county regions.



Tony Williams
Stanardsville

Greene County Director of Economic Development

“Proximity to Shenandoah National Park is one of Greene County’s greatest selling points, as businesses stress quality of life as much as the cost of doing business. Who wouldn’t want to work and live near such beauty?”

“The community here understands its great natural resource and has created a comprehensive plan to preserve it. Designated areas for commercial and retail growth will maintain the open spaces that give this county much of its appeal, and sustain both economic growth and the county’s natural beauty.”



Lee Wolverton
Waynesboro
Editor, *News Virginian*

“I see the park as an economic opportunity for the town. There is plenty of room for more integration with the park and for attracting more park visitors who are passing through.

“Precisely how that would coalesce into a vision, and what it would look like, I’m not sure. But I think both the park and the city could show more leadership in figuring out an answer.

“How to turn the area to the east of the city into a gateway? Maybe a center that focuses on the park—some displays and exhibits, something to give people a reason to stop and check it out.”

In 2005, when National Geographic assembled a panel of experts to rate 55 national park destinations and their gateway communities on a broad-based stewardship index, Shenandoah ended up on the “rock bottom” list. Its score of 48 out of a possible 100 ranked it above only two other park areas.

Among the challenges and opportunities panelists identified: Protecting Shenandoah’s famous vistas; getting a handle on traffic; coordinating and improving marketing and tourist services; encouraging day visitors to spend time in nearby communities; and addressing environmental challenges such as air quality.

Business and community leaders interviewed for this report agree there are plenty of opportunities to work together more closely, for mutual benefit. The following recommendations offer a starting place for leveraging local resources for a more prosperous and attractive future.

■ Create more collaborative relationships between the park and local communities, and among communities.

Cliff Miller, owner of Mount Vernon Farm, which encompasses more than 800 hundred acres surrounding Sperryville, says he thinks the town and the park are “good neighbors, but we’re not coordinating nearly as much as we ought to.” How could the region move forward in a more coordinated way? Some examples:

- Create joint visitor centers in neighboring communities, focusing on the park and opportunities and services outside the park. Give local businesses print materials and updates so they can offer better information about the park.
- Take the park’s top-notch interpretation and educational staff and resources on the road, offering programming in surrounding communities.
- Use successful programs as models to help promote local businesses. In 2009, for example, park staff offered educational programs about hiking with children. Evergreen Outfitters loaned demonstration gear for the classes.
- Develop a regional brand identity to provide a unified public face for a region that includes Shenandoah National Park. In the same way as “Handmade in America” drew attention to traditional crafts in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee, or the “Crooked Road” draws visitors to southwestern Virginia, a regional identity could help Shenandoah and its neighbors.



Civil War cannon at New Market battlefield. The Shenandoah region is full of rich resources that could be better connected through coordinated marketing, signage, and tour packages and itineraries. Photo: iStockPhoto.com/Visionofmaine

- Identify resources that are unique to the area, and connect and focus on these. “Geotourism” is a possible organizing concept, encouraging citizens and visitors to get involved in building a sense of regional identity and stewardship around what is unique to the area.

■ Maintain and enhance the character of the park and surrounding communities and landscapes.

Maintaining the region’s attractive qualities while providing for economic growth is a priority that communities and the park can share. For example:

- Revisit guidelines for, and the operation of, park concessions and services to ensure roots in local culture, history, and nature; and services and goods that appeal to today’s visitor and connect to surrounding communities.
- Be smart about growth and development on private land. Each county must work out an approach that fits its circumstances. Conserving open spaces and farmland adds to the region’s appeal, contributes to the viability of agriculture, protects fish and wildlife, sustains the visual character of the park, and increases land values overall.

Many jurisdictions have land conservation programs, comprehensive plans, and zoning ordinances that could be tweaked to include protecting views from park trails and scenic overlooks as an element. Conservation programs for private land should consider potential impacts on park viewsheds, wildlife habitat, and other elements critical to the health of the park.

- Focus on community and economic development that enhances residents’ quality of life. Support entrepreneurship and small business, and enhance communication infrastructure. Prioritize education and health care.
- Push for full funding for Shenandoah National Park. Each year, the 392 parks in the U.S. National Park System receive less funding than they need to protect natural and cultural resources and provide visitor services. While some progress has been made in the past two years—and stimulus funding provided an additional boost in 2009—steady increases are needed to protect and restore Shenandoah and other national treasures.

In Shenandoah, an annual budget shortfall of about \$5.5 million leaves important management and maintenance functions undone, and creates a backlog of deferred projects. Cutbacks mean fewer rangers and interpretive programs; lack of visitor centers at key locations; campground closures; decreased maintenance of Skyline Drive and overlooks; and decreased ability to deal with oncoming challenges such as climate change.

- Visitors prize Shenandoah’s natural aspects, and think of the park as more than just the landscape surrounding Skyline Drive. These values should guide park management decisions, as well as inform the tourism marketing efforts of surrounding communities. A 2001 survey of park visitors asked about the most important attributes to consider in planning for the preservation of Shenandoah for future generations. The top responses were clean air, forests, clean water, wildlife, natural quiet, and wilderness/backcountry. (Littlejohn).
- Support local farmers, artists, craftspersons and business owners who are working to maintain and revive local culture and community character.



Howard Thompson Luray

Owner, Evergreen Outfitters

“Our business wouldn’t make it without locals and it wouldn’t make it without tourists.

“I think that people are realizing that tourism is a driving factor for the economy as it stands at this moment here in the county. The kind of industry that once used to drive the economy probably isn’t feasible here anymore.

“Being as close as we are to the metro DC/northern Virginia area, we get lots and lots of people coming out visiting the park, the river, the town. There’s been a lot of good progress made right here in the town of Luray, revitalizing the downtown business district, and the greenway, the walking trail that goes through town.

“I think we are very fortunate to have the park here. For business, obviously, it’s a good source of people coming in. And I just think I’m very lucky to have such an awesome playground right in my backyard.”



Martha Bogle, Luray
Superintendent, Shenandoah
National Park

“One of the challenges the park shares with adjacent landowners is invasive plants. We all have the same problems with weeds. We don’t want them sharing theirs with us, and we don’t want to share ours with them.

“The crew here in the park has years of experience dealing with invasive plants. I was talking with an organic farmer the other day, whose land abuts the park. I encouraged him to pick up the phone and call our exotic plant management team for advice about a particular challenge he is having.

“We’re neighbors, and if we can help each other out, everyone will be better off.”

■ Work together toward common goals.

From his vantage point at Blueridge Artisans in Sperryville, Andrew Hayley has observed a pattern that disturbs him. He calls it the “park, what park?” phenomenon. Hayley says that, whether it’s locals who take the park for granted or 30-somethings from D.C. for whom the brown Park Service signs along their driving route ring no bells, Shenandoah’s invisibility is a detriment to both the park and neighboring communities.

A 2000 National Park Service survey found that lack of advertised information about parks may detract from park visitation. When asked what the Park Service could do to encourage visitation, 41 percent responded that more advertising is necessary. At 12 percent, the next most common responses were lower fees, more parking, and free transportation. (National Park Service Social Science Program)

Increasing Shenandoah’s visibility is an example of a common goal that could unite the park and neighboring towns. Here are a few others:

- A park visitor survey revealed that 48 percent rated existing traveler information as poor or very poor. (Littlejohn) As a step in the right direction, Shenandoah National Park could participate in 511 Virginia, the regional traveler information system sponsored by the Virginia Department of Transportation (www.511virginia.org).

Another study found that travelers especially wanted information about driving Skyline Drive, seasonal attractions, and recreational opportunities in and outside the park. (U.S. Department of Transportation)

- About 300 non-native plant species have been documented in the park. Some are invasive problem species that pose a similar threat to native species and natural areas in the park and to farms and natural areas outside the park.
- The same air-borne pollutants that plague the park diminish air quality in surrounding communities. Shenandoah’s notoriously hazy skies are caused by high concentrations of airborne sulfate particles, and ozone concentrations damage plants, and decrease forest productivity. Because air quality in Shenandoah is protected by federal clean air law, communities around the park can leverage the park’s protected air quality status to improve air quality in the broader region. The Virginians for Healthy Air network of small businesses provides an organized forum for such advocacy (www.npca.org/vahealthyair).

Collaborating for Mutual Benefit

Anticipation of the 75th anniversary of Shenandoah National Park’s dedication already has spurred extraordinary collaboration among people and organizations in the area. As this 2011 anniversary comes and goes, and America prepares for the 2016 celebration of the first 100 years of its National Park System, Shenandoah National Park and its neighbors have the opportunity to continue down this path of increasing cooperation—protecting the park, the landscapes, and the character that make this region so attractive, and cultivating greater economic success.

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Further Information

Technical appendices containing analysis of economic performance in the North, Central, and South sub-regions are available at http://www.npca.org/mid_atlantic/who_we_are/regional-publications.html.

Download detailed economic profiles of the counties in this region from the Headwaters Economics website at <http://www.headwaterseconomics.org/eps/>.

Resources

Regional Commissions

Virginia's regional commissions promote coordination among local governments, provide data and analysis on a regional level, and develop strategic plans in concert with local governments, businesses, citizen organizations, and others. Regional commissions may be a resource for coordinated action.

Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission, Staunton

www.cspdc.org

Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission, Front Royal

www.lfpdc7.state.va.us

Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission, Culpeper

www.rrregion.org

Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission, Charlottesville

www.tjpd.org

Land Trusts

Land trusts provide information and resources to landowners to encourage conservation. They also arrange for conservation easements to financially benefit landowners and protect farmland, forests, scenic open space, and wildlife habitat.

Land Trust of Virginia

www.landtrustva.org

Piedmont Environmental Council

www.pecva.org

Potomac Conservancy

www.potomac.org

The Nature Conservancy

www.nature.org/virginia

Valley Conservation Council

www.valleyconservation.org

Virginia Outdoors Foundation

www.virginiaoutdoorsfoundation.org

In 2006, National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) commissioned a survey of the U.S. National Park System and its contributions to the American economy. The findings were striking: Every tax dollar spent on America's national parks generates at least four dollars in quantifiable value to the public. Plus, America's 392 national parks support some \$13 billion in local economic activity and more than 250,000 private-sector jobs, fueling economic growth in nearby communities. Taking its cue from this larger analysis, NPCA commissioned an examination of the economic relationship between Shenandoah National Park and ten neighboring counties.

This report draws on data compiled by state and federal agencies, interviews with local residents and leaders, and an analysis of economic change and performance. It outlines three findings:

- Shenandoah provides a range of benefits for surrounding communities;
- The park depends upon the surrounding communities and landscape for much of its appeal; and
- Today's economy puts a premium on attractive places and quality of life.

Making Connections concludes by identifying opportunities for leveraging local resources and proximity to the park to create a more prosperous and attractive future.



National Parks Conservation Association®
Protecting Our National Parks for Future Generations®

National Headquarters

1300 19th Street, NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20036
800-NAT-PARK (628-7275)
202.223.6722
www.npca.org

Mid-Atlantic Regional Office

1300 19th Street, NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20036
202.454.3386

Virginia Field Office

7 E. Washington Street, 3rd Floor
Lexington, VA 24450
540.463.3800