The Common Landscape: A Case for Using Participatory Strategies to Improve Management of the Blue Ridge Parkway Viewshed

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Abstract

The most popular site in the National Park System, the Blue Ridge Parkway—long-promoted as a key to the region’s economic and environmental well-being—generates billions of dollars in tourism-related activity in western North Carolina and Virginia. However, an exploration of the conservation and economic history of western North Carolina before and after the Parkway’s construction reveals a complex and often controversial relationship between the Parkway and the surrounding region. In this paper, I investigate whether the National Parks Service’s management of the Parkway is fulfilling both its own mandates and its promise to adjacent communities outside the park’s borders. This exploration reveals that regional land-use trends are putting at risk the key resource which sustains the Parkway and related tourism activity: the scenic viewshed.

In North Carolina, the persistence of these threats necessitates an assessment of Parkway-related policies which guide efforts to grow the regional economy and protect the Blue Ridge Mountains’ natural and cultural heritage. I find that existing plans and initiatives lack the scale and scope needed to address viewed threats. Because of the region’s checkerboard land-management and overlapping public-private lands, increasingly, private and non-profit conservation tools might represent the best available means for improving viewshed preservation. Implementing these strategies at a landscape scale requires convincing regional landowners and environmental organizations to work with government agencies with a frequency and in a way that promotes compromise and communication regarding best practices for maintaining the balance between land-use priorities. Ultimately, I suggest that planners consider the Parkway viewshed as a landscape-scale, common-pool resource and emphasize rural stakeholder participation in a comprehensive viewshed preservation initiative.
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Table of Contents

List of Figures........................................................................................................................................vi

Introduction...............................................................................................................................................1

The Landscape as a Common-Pool Resource
Organization of the Paper

Chapter One: “The Scenic”: Pretext or Panacea...............................................................................13

Pre-Parkway History
A Parkway Panacea
The Parkway and the People
Postwar Regional Economic Change
Rural Tourism and Local Economic Agency
Protected Areas and Grassroots Conservation

Chapter Two: The General Management Plan and Current Viewshed Threats.....45

Land-Use Threats
Ecological Threats
Tourism and Related Development
The General Management Plan

Chapter Three: Participation in a Parkway Landscape Commons.................................76

The Parkway Landscape
Identifying Stakeholders
The Viewshed as a Common-Pool Resource
Participation
Applicable Frameworks
Common Traits of Successful Participatory Projects

Chapter Four: Recommendations.....................................................................................108

Coordinating a New Viewshed Initiative
Coordinating Land Management
Land Trust Linkages
Conclusion

Appendices...........................................................................................................................................131

References...........................................................................................................................................136
List of Figures

Figure 1.1 (page 4): “Vicinity Map” of the Blue Ridge Parkway, from the Blue Ridge Parkway General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement (2013, p. 6)

Fig. 1.1 (p. 15): NC Highways ca. 1924, from the Encyclopedia of North Carolina (map by Mark Anderson Moore, https://www.ncpedia.org/highways-part-2-north-carolinas).

Figure 1.2 (page 21): “The Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina” by Mark Anderson Moore (University of North Carolina Press, 2003)

Fig. 1.3. (page 32): Blue Ridge Parkway Yearly Recreational Visitation (NPS, 2018)

Fig. 2.1 (page 47): Population Change in Western North Carolina Counties (by thousands of residents), 2010-2014, from the UNC Carolina Center for Demography

Figure 2.2 (page 48): This map predicts western North Carolina developmental sprawl by the year 2030 (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016, p.152).

Fig 2.3 (page 49): Changes in average farm size in western North Carolina between 2007 and 2012. Map from the Western North Carolina Vitality Index (2016, p. 256)

Fig. 2.4 (page 50): Projected changes in Western North Carolina’s population by age. From the Western North Carolina Vitality Index (2016)

Fig. 2.5 (page 51): Sprawl along the valley floor and up the ridgelines as seen from the Walnut Cove Overlook between Parkway mile posts 396 and 397, just north of Asheville.

Figure 2.6 (page 55): Current (2006) and Projected (2030) Land-Use in Western North Carolina Counties (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016, p. 149-150)

Figure 2.7 (page 57): Percent Forest Surrounding Forested Area in Western North Carolina, 2006 (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2013, p. 151)

Figure 2.8 (page 58): Land cover by type in Western North Carolina, 2006 (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2013, p. 146)

Fig 2.9 (page 64): Data from a 2008 study by the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, indicating preferred activities by regional tourists.

Figure 3.1 (Page 90): Cyclical effects of “naturbanization” in high amenity value landscapes faced with population increase, development, and changing land-use (Prados, 2009, p. 12)

Figure 3.2 (page 105): Common design principles of successful CPR management projects

Figure 4.1 (page 121) shows the CT4NC conservation projects along the Blue Ridge Parkway. The map is from the Conservation Trust for North Carolina website (“Blue Ridge Parkway Properties Protected by Conservation Trust for North Carolina”)
Introduction

Connecting Virginia’s Shenandoah National Park with Great Smoky Mountains National Park on the Tennessee/North Carolina border, the Blue Ridge Parkway (“BRP” or “Parkway”) is a 469-mile elongated park managed by the National Parks Service (NPS) (See Fig. I.1). In addition to connecting the two national parks, the Parkway provides recreational drivers with scenic views of the Virginia and North Carolina countryside, and encourages and facilitates outdoor recreation. The Parkway also provides opportunities and resources for the public to learn about the region’s natural and cultural heritage and preserves and protects the scenic landscape and the natural and cultural resources within. Conceived in the 1930s and constructed over the course of more than fifty years, the Parkway has become the most visited site in the national park system, and it endures as an integral part of the economies of western North Carolina and Virginia. More than fifteen million visitors traverse some stretch of the Blue Ridge Parkway every year, and those visitors inject more than $2 billion into the regional economy (Blue Ridge Parkway Virginia and North Carolina Final General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement, 1 2013). Moreover, the Parkway is a part of an interconnected—and often overlapping—patchwork of national, state, and privately-held protected areas (PAs), which conserve an ecologically and culturally valuable stretch of the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

In 2013, the NPS released the Blue Ridge Parkway General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement (General Management Plan or “GMP”), which, for the first time since the park’s founding, updated Parkway priorities, practices, and policy. The plan struck a positive and optimistic tone in describing the benefits to Blue Ridge communities in North Carolina and Virginia of the park’s popularity, regional economic contributions, and expanding

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1 Cited in-text from this point forward as “General Management Plan”
environmental initiatives. However, despite the overall economic effects of Parkway visitation and related activities, a number of concerning trends expose the needs to look more carefully at how the Parkway does and does not benefit the surrounding region. Data indicates that the benefits of Parkway-related economic growth have been overwhelmingly concentrated in a few thriving municipal centers. Resulting residential sprawl outward from these communities and in high amenity value sites along the Parkway—as well as the conversion and subdivision of private forests and farmland—have fragmented the ecological region, thus posing a direct threat to conservation and environmental goals. Furthermore, though residents and visitors alike indicate affinity and preference for the landscape’s mixed rural and natural scenic qualities, development and other recreational activities increasingly degrade the scenic vistas along the Parkway. In short, the popularity and economic impact of the Parkway highlighted by the GMP have become a threat to the very qualities that make the Parkway popular.

The GMP did mark an important step toward acknowledging the Parkway’s role in the broader landscape and modernizing the NPS’s approach toward mitigating internal, as well as external, threats to the Parkway’s primary goals. Nevertheless, I believe that the NPS’s hesitancy to more fully integrate Parkway planning and management with the realities of the surrounding landscape leaves the Parkway viewshed vulnerable to the effects of regional population shifts and land-use changes. Defined by Tandy (1967) as “the area in a spatial environment that is directly visible from a particular location” (Aben et al., 2017, p. 626), and Fisher (1996) as “the area visible from a location or locations in the landscape” (p. 1298), the “viewshed” adjacent to the Parkway is a central feature of, and a key resource for, the Blue Ridge Parkway and the surrounding cultural, economic, and ecological landscape. I believe that because the Parkway’s popularity is so intertwined with the rural identity, economic well-being, and environmental
outcomes of the surrounding landscape, the preservation of the scenic landscape through which the Parkway runs should be a shared initiative of the NPS, local landowners, and other regional economic, cultural, and environmental interests.

In this paper I propose a more cooperative management paradigm for the management and preservation of the Parkway viewshed so as to better reflect the shared priorities of the Blue Ridge Parkway and surrounding communities. Historically, by overemphasizing tourism and resource exploitation, regional planners and developers failed to develop a cohesive management strategy for the Blue Ridge landscape that gave enough consideration to the rural landowners and communities who have the greatest stake in viewshed preservation. These trends endured throughout the twentieth century, and still persist both in spite of and because of the Parkway’s increased popularity. As such, when it comes to the most valuable resource that the Parkway and Parkway-adjacent communities possesses—the scenic viewshed and the surrounding rural landscape—future policy must address the preservation of that resource in manner that better reflects the collective interests of diverse stakeholders. I believe that managing the viewshed as a shared regional resource can help to use the viewshed in a more sustainable way, better distribute the benefits of the viewshed related economic activity, and improve the regional balance between economic development, environmental conservation, and landscape preservation.

I propose two fundamental shifts in the way that the National Parks Service, along with state and local policy-makers, address the preservation of the Blue Ridge Parkway viewshed. First, given that the park and the viewshed are a central feature in a mixed ecological, cultural, and economic landscape, policy solutions must address environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and economic development on a more comprehensive, landscape scale. This would enable policy-makers to better balance these sometimes competing, sometimes symbiotic,
conservation, preservation, and development agendas. Second, given the collective regional interest in viewshed preservation, I propose that policymakers approach its management and preservation by understanding it as a common-pool resource. By approaching the viewshed as a common resource on this scale, policymakers can and should explore a wider range of tools and strategies that reflect a more inclusive, bottom-up, collective effort to manage and preserve the Parkway viewshed. I believe that a survey of historical trends and contemporary landscape characteristics identify a number of stakeholders who exhibit a propensity for protecting the landscape, and who share the NPS’s interest preserving the viewshed. In this paper, I explore ways to better include these stakeholders in future Parkway planning and policy.

Fig. I.1: “Vicinity Map” of the Blue Ridge Parkway, from the General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement (2013, p. 6)

The Landscape as a Common-Pool Resource

To address the threats to the Parkway viewshed and improve upon the strategy outlined in the General Management Plan, we must understand the Parkway to be a part of a dynamic
landscape where diverse interests have a stake in its preservation. In a more European tradition, landscapes are defined as more than a manicured space or the natural ecology of a place, but are also characterized by “species diversity, qualities related to the atmospheres and characters of places, pictorial qualities, and qualities related to history and narrativity” (Arler 2000, p. 300-301). Incorporating past and current cultural characteristics into a resource management context gives consideration and value to the cultural heritage—and in this case rural identity—as a part of the ecological and economic landscape (Buggey & Mitchell, 2002; Walter & Hamilton, 2014). What sets landscape preservation apart from conservation or even historical preservation—aside from the interaction between humans and nature—is that landscapes are defined by the evolution and mutual adaptation of the interaction between people and place. Forward-looking preservation plans must not only acknowledge the course of these changes, but also anticipate that they will continue to change (Diamant, Marts, & Mitchell, 2006). Integrated preservation of the diverse characteristics of overlapping landscapes can help planners to pursue mutually beneficial economic, environmental, and cultural outcomes.

Given that the primary threat to the Parkway’s viewshed manifests outside of the park boundaries, it is important to consider Parkway management in a way that focuses on the broader region. When faced with both the scale and scope of human and ecological systems and diversity, planners must manage resources—including the viewshed and all of the ecological and a cultural elements within—on a landscape scale. However, while NPS budgets have grown in recent decades, they have not necessarily kept pace with inflation, visitation rates, and increased costs of maintenance and growing park mandates (Rettie, 1995, p. 163-186). In the face of increasing demands and fewer resources, Parkway management must instead meet transboundary threats by better engaging viewshed stakeholders, interests and values.
Based on research into landscape-scale management, we know that conceptualizing the Parkway as a more integrated part of the surrounding physical, economic, ecological, and human landscapes necessitates a shift to strategies that dynamically involves local stakeholders and more diverse concepts of land values. Doing so would help better direct the benefits of Parkway-generated revenue and resource conservation to rural communities and landowners. Because management of complex landscapes requires elements of local inclusivity and shared responsibility for landscape preservation, the NPS must reconsider its predominantly inward-focused policy history. In turn, landscape residents must take on a greater responsibility of shared ownership over the viewshed’s future (Antrop, 2006, Agnoletti, 2006; Andersen, 2010).

Preserving the scenic human and environmental landscape serves the dual agenda of maintaining the Parkway’s popularity while protecting the rural identity and economic well-being of the surrounding landscape. Research into Parkway usage indicates that vistas and scenery are the primary attraction for Parkway visitors, and viewshed development is perceived by visitors as the primary threat to the Parkway’s future (Mathews et al., 2003). The NPS reinforces this:

> When asked about the special values that are most important to their parkway experience, visitors describe the beauty of the views from and along the roadway. The natural setting of mountains and valleys, the peacefulness of rural and pastoral landscapes, and the dramatic high-elevation vistas are frequently highlighted by visitors. (Blue Ridge Parkway General Management Plan, 2013, p. 207).

The scenic landscape is a primary factor in drawing visitors to the Parkway, and tourist dollars to proximate communities. Further changes to the region’s scenic character would imperil Parkway visitation rates and slow the flow of Parkway-related economic activity into local economies.

Since the economic contribution of the Parkway does, or at least should, benefit the broader region (as opposed to a select few individuals), and because there is thus regional
interest in protecting the natural and pastoral landscape which generates that contribution, then it follows that the viewshed is a common resource held by a broad, interwoven, regional commons. Ostrom (1990) defines a “common-pool resource” (CPR) as a resource that displays two characteristics: the use of the resource results in “subtractibility or rivalness”—meaning that use of the resource by one person decreases the resource availability and value for other users—and that the difficulty in excluding appropriators from accessing the resource potentially encourages free-riding (p. 7). The BRP viewshed displays both of these characteristics.

Because properties derive value from the rural and pastoral characteristics of the landscape, developing or converting existing properties to some other use detracts from the value of other nearby properties. Thus, the landscape displays rivalness. Land conversion and subdivision also hurts the regional economy by subtracting from the landscape’s amenity values and discouraging Parkway visitation. Moreover, private land ownership, property rights, and lack of land-use restriction encourages free-riding, leading to rapid, market-driven rural land-subdivision and development (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016). Land owners enjoy myriad environmental, property value, and individual economic benefits by simply contributing their taxes, rather than actively managing or protecting the landscape beyond their own property. Because the viewshed displays these fundamental properties of a common resource, it holds that the population which draws benefits from that resource is a collective common.

While historically “commons” have referred to localized, shared-resource situations, increasingly, researchers have begun to explore commons and CPR scenarios of broader scale, scope, and complexity (Dolšak & Ostrom, 2003b). For example, Healy (1994) applied the common-pool resource concept specifically to landscapes, in particular those subject to overuse by tourists. Newfont (2012) describes the Blue Ridge Mountains and regional forests as an
important common-pool environmental resource for regional residents. As a result, we must consider CPR approaches in the development and evaluation of strategies and institutions for managing complex, landscape-scale resources. In this paper, designating the BRP landscape as exhibiting characteristics of a dynamic commons, and the viewshed as a CPR, shapes how I assess viewshed management strategies and recommend future approaches beyond those proposed in the GMP. In particular, that assessment leads me to stakeholder participation as common theme in applicable, commons-based approaches to conservation and development on a landscape-scale.

Though the GMP outlines action plans for dozens of issues that the Parkway and surrounding landscape face, this paper focuses specifically on the confluence of development and conservation in viewshed preservation and management. I believe that approaching the Parkway viewshed as a common-pool resource opens up broader BRP management for commons-based approaches. I also believe that future Parkway and regional interests could benefit from a broad ethos of shared responsibility in managing all aspects of this landscape. Focusing specifically on the interrelated issues of the distribution of Parkway economic and scenic benefits, regional developmental sprawl, and threats to regional ecology and biodiversity, I will explore integrated development and conservation frameworks that can inform future management efforts to mitigate viewshed threats.

Given the historical and contemporary (and likely future) discrepancies regarding state economics, policy, and laws, at this stage I find it useful and necessary to approach analysis of the Parkway viewshed in North Carolina and Virginia separately. While the two states share the costs and benefits of the Parkway, they present unique conditions that have required the NPS to approach Parkway construction and management differently. This paper focuses specifically on
the southern half of the Parkway viewshed, located within North Carolina. Western North Carolina’s social, political, and economic history regarding tourism, protected areas, and the Parkway itself—as well as current economic, population, and environmental trends—necessitates narrowing the commons to the state border. Furthermore, more than 60% of total BRP travelers visit North Carolina sections, rendering the Parkway’s effect on the local economy greater in North Carolina than in Virginia (Thomas & Koontz, 2017). However, my hope is that effectively shifting the theory and praxes of current viewshed management in North Carolina’s Parkway segments will encourage similar approaches in Virginia.

Organization of the Paper

Knowledge of local history and social, political, and economic contextual characteristics is fundamental to understanding how to design strategies for common-resource management (Ostrom, 1990; Campbell & Vainio-Mattila, 2003, Blank, 2006; Luyet et al., 2012; DeCaro and Stokes, 2013; Berman, 2017). Additionally, in cultivating effective CPR management, Mohan and Stokke (2000) explain the importance of understanding how these characteristics develop and exist within broader regional and national contexts. The scale and scope of the resource—and the threats that is faces—should shape the ways with which participation is implemented (Ostrom, 1990). At a landscape-scale, effectively framing the problem faced is essential in “targeting” stakeholders for outreach and participation (Brody, 2003; Chen, Qian, & Zhang, 2015; Alexander, Andrachuk, & Armitage, 2016). Armed with that knowledge, we can develop a specific strategy for employing effective participation in viewshed management (Ostrom, 1990; Mohan and Stokke, 2000; Campbell & Vainio-Mattila, 2003, Luyet et al., 2012; DeCaro and Stokes, 2013; Berman, 2017). Whisnant’s (2006) account of the historical relationship between
local residents and the BRP revealed the need to look deeper into the consequences of regional perceptions of, and dependency on, the Parkway.

Chapter One thus begins with a survey of the historical context in which the Parkway was built. Knowledge of the Parkway’s history informs my evaluation of the GMP goals and priorities. Both to understand original Parkway priorities and to gain insights into the Parkway’s effects on its region, the goal of Chapter One is to understand the economic, environmental, and social conditions in which the Parkway evolved. In particular, the chapter focused on historical economic and conservation trends of western North Carolina. So as to provide historical context for the NPS’s Parkway agenda, the chapter highlights population changes, shifting economic foundations, the formation and management of federal PAs, local responses to the Parkway and other tourism initiatives, and the development of grassroots initiatives to protect local resources and promote local economic agency and cultural identity.

In Chapter Two, I reexamine some of those issues in the contemporary context in which the NPS wrote the General Management Plan. Despite a number of dramatic changes to the region’s economy and population, realities persist that have plagued western North Carolina since before the Parkway was conceived. Chapter Two discusses current Blue Ridge issues and data—derived largely from the 2016 report by the Western North Carolina Vitality Index—including the region’s dependence on tourism as an economic driver, urban-rural socioeconomic disparities, and population and land-use trends. The chapter also explores contributing factors to land-conversion and subdivision, the core ecological challenge faced by the NPS and policymakers concerned with viewshed preservation. Chapter Two concludes with an overview of the 2013 General Management Plan and explains how NPS planning decisions and current viewshed management policies fail to address some of these threats.
In hopes of improving viewshed policy coordination, in Chapter Three I outline an argument for applying landscape-scale and commons-based principles to viewshed management. Based on existing research into managing integrated human, environmental, and cultural landscapes, this chapter argues that conditions exist for an approach that incorporates Parkway management into the region beyond the park’s borders. This chapter also outlines the case for applying commons-based praxes to management of the viewshed landscape and the implications of doing so. I build upon concepts of shared resource benefits and responsibilities by defining the Parkway viewshed as a common-pool resource (CPR), and explore a number of key points of emphasis and design priorities that should inform any approach to sustainable and inclusive CPR use. CPR research identifies key principles for incorporating improved stakeholder participation and building resource management institution, and by applying these principles to the Parkway viewshed, it emerges that frameworks which integrate environmental conservation and cultural preservation into economic development projects are best suited for the Parkway landscape.

Chapter Four outlines my recommendations for how participatory CPR management should be applied to the preservation of the Parkway viewshed. I spotlight a number of existing programs and policies—in North Carolina and elsewhere—that have successfully integrated public and private interests, as well as conservation and development agendas, by devising ways to bring diverse interests into both policy planning and execution on a landscape scale.

By utilizing existing institutions as well as a new, more inclusive initiative, I believe that policy-makers can capitalize on existing inertia for mitigating the shortcomings of past and present Parkway management, and for addressing the threats to key natural and cultural resources in the Parkway landscape. In particular, this chapter presents land trusts as a key
institution for including local landowners into the policy-making process and for coordinating a multi-faceted viewshed management agenda. Final remarks then conclude the paper.

The 2013 GMP presented a rare opportunity to shift the thinking of Parkway interactions with regional partners. It also gave the NPS a chance to reconsider the way that Parkway management balances conservation, development, and other BRP priorities. It was a good start. While I do not advocate abandoning the PA model for protecting natural spaces, or dramatically increasing the lands managed by federal authorities, I do think that the Parkway viewshed is approaching the “tragedy of the commons” tipping-point that Garrett Hardin (1968) warned would befall common-pool resources without intervention. Outside of protected areas, the landscape is changing too much and too fast for the NPS to not pursue more proactive management strategies. I believe that reimagining the Parkway viewshed as a landscape-scale, common-pool resource invites the exploration of new frameworks for land use management and provides a unique chance to propose more inclusive participation in shaping the region’s economic and environmental future. After more than a hundred years of devotion to relatively singular models of development and conservation in western North Carolina, perhaps now is the time to start think more creatively by reconceptualizing the Blue Ridge Parkway landscape.
Chapter One—“The Scenic”: Pretext or Panacea?

“In pleading for a location of the Parkway which will serve this region, we are pleading for nothing less than the right to live.”

- Robert Lathan, editor of the *Asheville Citizen-Times*, 1934

Under the authority of the New Deal’s 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act, Congress provided funds for the construction of a scenic, park-to-park road connecting two of the Southeast’s recently designated national parks: Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP) on the Tennessee-North Carolina border, and Virginia’s Shenandoah National Park. In 1936, Congress officially granted the National Parks Service (NPS) the authority to manage the Blue Ridge Parkway and its construction with a set of clear mandates. The original legislation and subsequent updates state the purposes of the Blue Ridge Parkway as: connecting GSMNP and Shenandoah National Park with a scenic rural parkway, providing recreation and opportunities for the enjoyment and understanding of the region’s natural and cultural heritage, and conserving the surrounding scenery and preserving regional cultural and natural resources (General Management Plan, 2013, p. 9).

Accounts of the Parkway’s history have traditionally focused on its function as a magnanimous, federal, public-works project tasked with, in the NPS’s own words, “provid[ing] a boost to the travel and tourism industry and help[ing] the Appalachian region climb out of the depths of the Great Depression (General Management Plan, p. 4). However, revisionist social histories of the region, like Anne Whisnant’s 2006 *Super-Scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History*, expose a far more complex confluence of factors that led to a region-wide commitment to the Parkway project. Because the Parkway represents “many things to many

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1 The most common and popular history of the Parkway is Harley Jolly’s *the Blue Ridge Parkway* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press 1969), which Whisnant (2006) and I find to be the source for most of the modern romantic depictions of the Parkway’s origin story.
people” (GMP, p. 4), to evaluate the Parkway’s successes and failures in meeting their goals, and to identify stakeholders and evaluate other Parkway-related policy, we must more deeply understand the history between the Parkway and the regional population.

Pre-Parkway History

Even before the Parkway’s construction, radical economic shifts had completely upended the rural economy of North Carolina’s Blue Ridge Mountains. In the final decades of the nineteenth century through the Great Depression, the arrival of industrial capitalism to the Blue Ridge Mountains triggered the conversion of much of the region from a rural, subsistence-agricultural system to a wage-dependent, resource-extractive, boom-and-bust industrial economy (Pierce, 2000). Famed forester Gifford Pinchot once called the forests and streams of the Blue Ridge Mountains “their common,” in reference to rural resident’s shared dependency on the land (Gregg, 2004, p. 423). But by 1980, Ronald Eller (1982) explains in his study of the of southern Appalachia’s industrialization, the synthesis between rural resident and the environment was interrupted by the industry’s arrival. Industry chipped away at the subsistence commons and shifted the course of the physical, economic, and cultural landscape of western North Carolina by introducing wage-labor and subjecting the region to broader market trends (Pierce, 2000).

In the late-nineteenth century, the growth of the commercial timber industry hastened these shifts. The resource and acreage demands of the timber industry altered land use, property ownership, and income dependence for mountain families. Cheap land, and rural landowners eager to capitalize on its value, allowed big timber enterprises to consolidate vast tracts of Appalachian forests—overrunning small-scale, local logging and agriculture (Eller, 1984; Brown, 2000). Property consolidation drove families onto smaller plots and the younger population away from family farms in search of wage-work. By the turn of the century, railways
had opened up access to North Carolina’s virgin forests, and timber quickly became the second largest industry in North Carolina, employing more than 10,000 workers stationed at camps scattered throughout the region (Eller, 1982, p. 104). Even as the timber boom died out early in the twentieth century, mining, tobacco, furniture, paper, leather, and rayon industries dominated local mountain economies or drew more mountain workers and families into nearby industrial centers in Tennessee and plants in North Carolina’s Piedmont (Pierce, 2000, 21-22).

Fig. 1.1 NC Highway map ca. 1924, from the *Encyclopedia of North Carolina* (map by Mark Anderson Moore, https://www.ncpedia.org/highways-part-2-north-carolinas)

Recognizing that resource intensive industries lacked sustainability, however, mountain residents across the socioeconomic spectrum hoped that new transportation infrastructure could help facilitate the shift to a sustainable tourist industry and usher in an era of broader prosperity and opportunity (Whisnant, 2006). Rural Blue Ridge residents supported early efforts to build tourism-focused transportation infrastructure, because they saw these efforts as tied to a greater promise of connectivity to regional markets and economic opportunity. However, early twentieth century railroad and road construction—as a part of the New South and Good Roads movements—instead disproportionately prioritized industrial enterprises and wealthier municipal centers like Asheville (Eller, 1982; Whisnant, 2006). By the middle of the 1920s, while much of
the state had undergone a highway and railroad construction boom, many rural communities in North Carolina’s Blue Ridge Mountains were still connected by the same footpaths or dirt and gravel roads that had existed for decades (see fig 1.1) (Turner, 2003; Ruscin & Morgan, 2016).

Regional conservationists and tourism boosters alike supported government intervention to curb industrial resource extraction and protect the region’s Southern Appalachian landscape, whose forests and mountains and rivers had been cut over, burned down, and washed out by extractive industries (Eller, 1982; Whisnant, 2006). In 1915, North Carolina established Mt. Mitchell State Park to protect the nation’s highest peak east of the Mississippi River. In the 1910s and 1920s, capitalizing on the growing popularity of national parks in the American West, a successful coalition of grassroots conservationists, local communities, and regional tourism boosters in southern Appalachia successfully acquired authorization for Mammoth Cave, Shenandoah, and Great Smokey Mountains National Parks.

Initially, federal parks advocates were united in the need to protect the region’s dwindling natural heritage and return the people’s agency over the “commons.” But by the 1930s, powerful decision makers in the region coopted the public commons narrative and shifted promotion toward federal lands’ ability to attract outside dollars to North Carolina’s once popular resort towns and cities. Despite harm to local landowners wrought by federal land acquisition’s displacement of rural residents—first by the Forest Service under the 1911 Weeks Act and later with the establishment of the region’s first national parks—local leaders and regional economic powers regarded federal PAs as essential to the long-term regional economic viability of the Blue Ridge Mountains (Shands, 1992; Schwarzkopf; Duncan & Burns, 2009; Bramwell, 2012).

With the onset of the Great Depression, in hopes of saving the region’s tourism industry, Blue Ridge regional planners became more eager for additional federal public works, protected
areas (PAs), and road and railroad construction. The desperation for new tourism investment was motivated less by rural poverty or protection of natural spaces, however, and instead by Asheville’s economic downturn. When 1920s industrial growth slowed, and tourism development boomed, many in and around Asheville invested in ambitious and over-leveraged hotel and resort projects and civic improvements. The Depression bankrupted Asheville—which incurred the greatest amount of debt per capita of any Depression-Era city in the nation—and many of the banks and other investors that had financed area tourism development. Once fiercely independent and somewhat isolated, because mountain residents had become increasingly dependent on disappearing jobs and opportunities outside their local communities, rural communities suffered disproportionately from regional economic decline (Eller, 1982; Starnes, 1999; Gregg, 2004; Whisnant, 2006). However, Despite Asheville-centric tourism’s role in instigating the economic downturn, state and regional officials advocated for new tourism enterprises as an economic panacea that would save the region from the Depression.

In the 1930s, organizers, particularly in Asheville, set to devising ways reinvigorate regional tourism by promoting the new national parks projects and related public works. When Shenandoah received federal approval for, and began construction on, the “Skyline Drive” in 1930, GSMNP advocates proposed a similar project. Hoping to capitalize on the national popularity of the national park system and on 1920s transportation and recreation trends, tourism boosters endeavored to connect the new parks to one another and to existing regional economic and tourism centers (Whisnant 2006, p. 32-33).

A Parkway Panacea

When proponents proposed a scenic highway joining Shenandoah and GSMNP through the Blue Ridge Mountains, they promoted the Parkway idea to both the federal government and
area residents as a means to generate employment opportunities and economic growth. While the priority was rescuing Asheville and nearby resort investments, North Carolina Parkway boosters—a unified front of politicians, businesses, civic organizations, and developers—sold the project to rural residents and local governments as the final step toward connecting urban and rural mountain communities, local farms and regional markets, and tourists’ dollars and the producers of local goods (Whisnant, 2006). Similar to earlier campaigns for national parks and forests, the Parkway—or “the Scenic,” as locals have traditionally called it—was promised as a means to further protect the land, connect the people, and alleviate rural poverty (Whisnant, 2006, Newfont, 2012).

As in the past, Asheville interests emerged as the primary voice in favor of a federally funded highway project. A cast of business and political voices similar to the one that, in prior decades, had lobbied for better state roads and federal protected areas near Asheville, joined with advocates in Tennessee and Virginia to promote the scenic highway and lobbied the Roosevelt administration to direct New Deal public works dollars toward the mountains. Boosters convinced Washington that while such a project would fulfill the New Deal’s agenda to celebrate America’s natural grandeur and cultural heritage, the Parkway would also improve infrastructure and access to transportation and utilities for rural residents. On November 19, 1933, President Roosevelt approved the Parkway’s construction, to be paid for with federal dollars, so long as the states could acquire the necessary right of way (Ise, 1961).

Even without economic research behind claims that the Parkway would beget tourism or that tourism would rejuvenate the economy, advocates adopted the nationwide ethos that jobs in any form would jumpstart a recovery and doubled-down on Asheville as the key to the region’s prosperity (Whisnant, 2006, 35-51). Over the next three years a battle over the Parkway exposed
the true business-oriented initiative behind the project. Parkway proponents in North Carolina gave little attention to what jobs would be generated, who would receive the benefits, and how those benefits would be distributed outside of municipal centers. Though the Depression-era tourism decline had actually opened the door for industrial rayon, textile, and paper ventures to gain small footholds in Asheville and surrounding communities—and would for decades employ more rural residents than tourism—the primary focus was connecting Asheville and proximate protected areas to form a tourism corridor with Asheville at its center (Whisnant, 2006).

Critics in both the state and federal governments decried the costs of the Parkway project as wasteful. Others, who had witnessed the displacement of tens of thousands of rural residents by the designation of regional federal lands and construction of Shenandoah’s Skyline Drive, warned of the human consequences of land-intensive federal projects (Pegram, 2006). Others argued that Blue Ridge communities would be better served by projects public works projects like those undertaken in Tennessee by the TVA, which modernized regional utilities and energy infrastructure. What little sociological and economic research did exist showed tourism offered especially little, if any, financial benefit to rural communities. In fact, studies indicated the possibility that greater socioeconomic disparity would emerge, and warned that efforts to draw tourists to rural communities could degrade local culture (Becker, 1998).

Still fully committed to tourism, however, leaders among Parkway advocates endorsed the Parkway as a solution to the plight of the rural poor and unemployed. Boosters knowingly used stereotypes of mountain people to sell the frontier appeal of a scenic parkway to investors. Parkway promotions stereotyped rural residents and native communities on the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indian’s Quallah Boundary—located adjacent to GSMNP and on the proposed parkway route—to emphasize the need for more economic development to benefit poor
mountain farmers. While in public, Parkway planners frequently supported increased access to markets for rural crafts and agricultural products, among themselves, they privately voiced little concern for rural communities and readily acknowledged that the Parkway would offer little benefit in the form rural improvement (Whisnant, 2006).

Ultimately, North Carolina politicians and boosters successfully marketed the state’s natural and cultural landscape and sold the promise of tourism to both their own constituents and federal officials (Becker, 1998). Over the recommendation of department’s own planning committee, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes chose a route for the BRP located entirely in Virginia and North Carolina. The decision was made in deference to the North Carolina route’s scenic superiority—boosted by the prevalence of scenic natural areas within Pisgah National Forest that were already in federal hands—but also the seemingly unified support among Blue Ridge residents. Regional media, led by the Asheville Citizen-Times, spun stories of cooperative advocacy and unanimous support across socioeconomic divides, despite warnings from critics and misgivings from local landowners who feared losing land to right of way (Whisnant, 2006).

Thus, political and economic deference to business interests, especially those based on tourism and in Asheville, dominated the context in which the Blue Ridge Parkway was built. Although proponents of the Parkway and other PAs often considered the natural landscape, rural peoples, and native communities, they made little effort to conceive of practical strategies and solutions that prioritized or gave equal voice to those whose valued the environment or protections for rural interests. While some exceptions did exist, namely in the management of national forests, policy-makers advanced large-scale development and conservation efforts even if they came at the detriment to local communities’ cultural identity, autonomy, or economic security. As a result, when construction and land acquisition began in 1935, Parkway proponents
and NPS officials operated under a set of false assumptions about the region’s cultural and economic identity. In turn, these assumptions shaped the interaction between the people, the environment, the economy, and the Parkway for the next seventy-five years.

The Parkway and the People

Fig. 1.2: “The Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina” by Mark Anderson Moore (University of North Carolina Press, 2003)

The popular narrative of the BRP as a universally well-received source of public-works jobs and regional economic stimulus unravels under closer scrutiny of the history between the Parkway and those whose lands and work were closest to the route. Between when construction began and finally ended in 1987, several well-documented disputes between planners and local developers expose tensions that left lasting impressions among residents along the Parkway. Because advocates marketed the Parkway as a boon to the region’s rural economy, disputes over the Parkway’s route, land-acquisition, and roadway access restrictions most often reflected the failed promise of Parkway’s benefits for those most directly affected by its construction.
Parkway construction required the acquisition of tens of thousands of acres of right-of-way, much of which was the property of private landowners. This inevitably created tension with local communities, as the planned Parkway route placed the interests of the project over that of owners of farms, resort properties, and even large estates. More than half of Parkway land was purchased by state governments (and then donated to the NPS) or outright by the federal government, and much of the rest of the land was donated by the U.S. Forest Service.² Private landowners donated the rest. As a result, thousands of landowners lost property and had property divided to make way for the Parkway or adjoining recreation areas.

Though planners eventually settled on a less intrusive ratio of 125 acres per square mile of road, in the early years of Parkway construction largely uninhibited land acquisition left a permanent imprint on both the physical and cultural landscape through which the Parkway runs (Whisnant, 2006, p. 120-121). In the early years of construction through North Carolina’s Parkway segments, parkway designers regularly expanded the initial 200-foot right-of-way agreement that was attached to the plan approved by the Roosevelt administration. Along some stretches, the state acquired dozens of land parcels to allow for the construction of fewer than ten miles of road.

Even though the Parkway was marketed as a step forward for regional connectivity to markets for both local producers and consumers, planners instead constructed the BRP as a limited use, limited-access road which restricted access points from other roads and forbade connective roads from private properties and businesses. Though state and local officials had assured landowners that increased commercial activity and connectivity would defray the effects of property loss, Parkway-use restrictions inconvenienced many farmers, and kept local interests

² More than 150 miles of the Parkway run through four different National Forests (Nantahala and Pisgah in North Carolina, and Jefferson and George Washington in Virginia).
from capitalizing on increased tourist traffic. Administrators expanded the Parkway’s footprint to protect the scenic landscape visible from the road, and also to prevent billboards, food and produce stands, and other service and retail enterprises—the very types of opportunities local residents had hoped the Parkway would support—from cluttering the roadsides.

For the most part, Parkway management forbade farmers, even those whose properties the Parkway bisected, from herding livestock across the road, crossing the road with equipment, or connecting segmented properties with access roads. Planners forbade non-NPS contracted businesses from operating on BRP land, gave out contracts for lodging and concessions operations to out of state companies who only operated on federal lands. Restrictions also, for the most part, forbade advertising along the road. To garner support from local communities, state officials promised to build parallel road to local communities as a means improve local infrastructure. Ultimately, however, what few roads were built mostly served to divert local commuter and commercial traffic off the Parkway and keep scenic tourism separate from local enterprise (Whisnant, 2006).

While North Carolina land acquisition resulted in a far more protected scenic road than in Virginia, the aggressiveness of the state’s land purchases and deference to the value of scenery to tourism made for far greater conflict and controversy between local communities, landowners, and Parkway interests. North Carolina eminent domain law allowed the state to take control of land simply by posting a notice and a map at the county courthouse. This allowed the state to rapidly transfer of lands into federal hands and immediately begin surveying and construction. While the system proved incredibly efficient for planners, it did little to build goodwill with affected landowners (Whisnant, 2006, p. 123). Landowners, many of whom could not afford lawyers or a lengthy appeal process, found it difficult to acquire just compensation for their land,
increasing tension between government agents and regional communities. In protest, during appeals and delays, some landowners clear-cut their timber, capitalizing on property value and degrading the landscape even before construction could begin. Others built and rebuilt access roads and broke down barricades built by park officials (Whisnant, 2006, p.123-124).

While some right-of-way disputes ended in compromise, in many negotiations state officials and federal Parkway managers did irreparable and lasting harm to relationships with local communities and individuals. The proposal for the southern end of the Parkway to run through the Quallah Boundary sparked intense debate between Eastern Band factions. Some supported the potential for economic growth and connectivity to nearby markets that the Parkway could bring, while others worried that it would be detrimental to tribal autonomy and cultural identity. All factions felt betrayed when the proposed route cut straight through the reservation’s most valuable and productive farmland. Though after years of debate and negotiation a compromised route was agreed upon, the episode brought indelible change to tribal governance, engendered a prevailing mistrust between the community and federal land managers, and permanently shifted the economy within the Quallah Boundary to one driven by tourism (Starnes, 2003; Starnes, 2005; Whisnant, 2006).

Owners of large estates and powerful business more often found success in opposing Parkway planners. Near Blowing Rock, Bertha Cone, the wife of wealthy textile magnate Moses Cone, succeeded in delaying construction through her land until her death in 1947, when the family property was willed to the state of North Carolina rather than the NPS. After a lengthy legal dispute, the wealthy and well-connected owners of the resort at Little Switzerland negotiated concessions regarding advertising on and access from the Parkway and forced the state to pay exorbitant prices for the company’s land. The resort’s owners led a public campaign
against the NPS and their allies in the state government, which successfully stigmatized the Parkway as an incursion into mountain communities by outside interests (Whisnant, 2006).

For more than a decade of the 1950s and 1960s, Hugh Morton, the owner of the land on and around Grandfather Mountain—one of the most picturesque sites along the Parkway’s route—battled against the state and the NPS for control over the site and its tourism potential. The 1987 construction of the Linn Cove Viaduct around Grandfather Mountain has been heralded as a technological wonder at the triumphant site of the Parkway’s completion. But before it could be built Morton successfully waged a crusade against the NPS in the name of private enterprise and local empowerment, successfully painting Parkway managers as federal government interlopers. Morton negotiated land-value concessions, a new route for the Parkway that circumvented his tourist site at the mountain, and various roadside connectivity and advertising exceptions (Whisnant, 2006).

In the following decades, Morton proudly embraced his role the local champion of the Blue Ridge commons. He was instrumental in both the passage of the 1984 Mountain Ridge Protection Act—which sought to limit ridgetop construction in the interests of scenic preservation—and in pioneering the purchase of conservation easements as a means to protect forest lands and scenic spaces. In Morton’s case, opposition to the Parkway helped to build regional consensus for a policy change that limited the ability of both individuals and businesses to exploit the region’s scenic resources. Whisnant (2006), cites Morton’s anti-NPS campaign as a primary source of persisting division between government agencies and local mountain residents and business interests.

While these examples represent successful local resistance to the Parkway by the wealthy and powerful, the vast majority of Parkway opposition was unsuccessfully undertaken by owners
of small parcels along the Parkway route. In the first decade of Parkway construction, through poor communication, parsimonious land acquisition, delayed compensation, and seemingly ever-changing plans requiring additional right-of-way, the NPS built up significant ill-will among workers and landowners in the Parkway landscape. It is difficult to quantify the scale of discontent from mountain landowners, but especially in North Carolina’s northernmost Parkway counties—rural Ashe and Alleghany—dozens of letter-writing campaigns, legal appeals, and even incidents of vandalism and sabotage persisted in response to Parkway policy. For example, in an effort to combat illegal timber cutting during land transfers, the NPS hired its first ranger. In an attempt to build local goodwill with local residents, they hired an Alleghany County man; in the face of increased vandalism and destruction of private forests, he proved unwilling or unable to change local sentiment and subversive behavior (Whisnant, 2006).

Within the first decade of construction, so as to prevent the further division the viewshed’s physical and cultural landscape, federal officials recognized the need to improve public relations along the Parkway. In the 1940s, in the face of frustration and mounting discord between the NPS and local landowners, NPS staff printed an information newsletter and circulated it to hundreds, and eventually thousands, of regional citizens, schools, civic organizations, and other community groups. Whisnant (2006) writes this outreach “represented an experiment both in providing information and in constructing a discourse that would justify the Parkway's existence to sometimes frustrated local people…they had realized that the success of their new creation depended greatly on the cooperation of local residents” (p. 151). Albeit often reactive rather than proactive, early NPS communication and outreach efforts emerged as a crucial part of the planning and management process, and the need for—and often lack of—participation by affected landowners and landscape residents in Parkway decision-making.
Unfortunately, for Parkway landscape residents, for much of the rest of the twentieth century Parkway policy was guided by funding struggles, national trends toward self-contained national park experiences, and an emphasis toward visitor experiences and comforts rather than regional economic development (Starnes, 1997, p. 175-176). While most of the necessary right of way had been procured by the onset of the war, World War II resulted in a halt in construction and enforcement of Parkway restrictions. During the war, limited NPS regulation and wartime transportation needs liberalized Parkway use for many residents who hoped the local benefits of the Parkway might finally be realized. But the war also led to the deterioration of what little early progress had been made in communication and compromise. When postwar national park infrastructure initiatives like Mission 66 rejuvenated Parkway construction and improvements to unfinished recreation areas, the NPS reestablished limited access policies and again awarded the Parkway’s few lodging and concessions contracts to large, out-of-state companies (Carr, 2007).

Instead of the promised economic panacea, in the first fifty years of the Parkway’s history, disputes over routes, land acquisition, concessions contracts, and transportation access defined the Parkway’s relationship with much of the surrounding landscape. Despite the completion of construction and the steady growth in the Parkway’s popularity among visitors, Parkway policies often instead resulted in mountain residents’ opposition to NPS management and skepticism of the Parkway’s ability to benefit communities beyond existing tourism centers. Likewise, periodic conflicts between managers of federal PAs and mountain communities, especially regarding conservation and the sustainable use of regional resources, threatened the commons ethos that had long-defined the relationship between the people and the land in the Blue Ridge Mountains (Newfont, 2012). When these trends continued into the second half of the twentieth century, mountain communities in North Carolina faced a new wave of exploitation by
outside investors, resources intensive industries, and government interests whose policies favored business interests over rural communities.

Postwar Regional Economic Change

Instead of continuing the movement toward tourism and recreation, after World War II much of western North Carolina’s economy shifted away from agriculture and toward manufacturing. As farming technology improved, and agriculture became less dependent on a large workforce, many small farms were consolidated into larger ones and the displaced workforce shifted into growing regional industries. The state industrialized rapidly, as textile manufacturing became the largest employer of rural North Carolinians from its height in the 1960s until a general downturn in industry and manufacturing in the 1990s (Coclanis & Kyriakoudes, 2007).

Between 1950 and 1970, while agricultural output slowed, North Carolina’s statewide industrial production outpaced the rest of the Southeast and emerged as one of the leaders in industrial growth as a part of the postwar growth in “Sunbelt” states (Niemi, 1975; Beck 2013). Most of the state’s midcentury growth and investment, dedicated to the “Big Three” industries—tobacco, furniture, and textiles—which would lead the state’s economy into the end of the twentieth century, eluded the western part of the state (Carlisle & Escobar, 2010). While these industries did build a growing labor class, jobs were disproportionately concentrated in central North Carolina’s cities. When cities in the central and Piedmont regions of the state diversified their economies and demands for better-skilled and educated workers grew, many furniture and textile enterprises moved their factories into Blue Ridge counties, seeking cheaper sources of labor. While this did help to grow the economies of Asheville, and even smaller towns like Hickory and Morganton, growth was limited to communities along existing transportation
corridors who possessed utilities and infrastructure that could support industrial enterprise. During the midst of industrialization and urbanization in the 1960s, North Carolina, while still the seventh most rural state, became the fifteenth most industrial—reflecting the state’s growing disparity between urban opportunity and rural stagnation (Cowdrey, 1996).

1970s and 1980s investment in labor, technology, education, and growth further focused on the state’s urban centers, despite some statewide initiatives to increase rural wages and training (Carlisle & Escobar, 2010). A 1979 report on the balance of the state’s economic growth, the North Carolina Division of Policy Development frequently cited insufficient infrastructure, lack social services, and limited related services and enterprises as reasons why manufacturing and high-wage jobs eluded rural mountain communities. Thus, while overall employment did increase in western counties, it was concentrated around a few manufacturing centers, and growth in counties along the northern and southern stretches of the Parkway lagged behind Asheville and much of the rest of the state. In the 1980s and 1990s, the state’s economic initiative again turned city-ward, but this time with a focus on education, technology, and finance, with rapid growth in the newly minted “Research Triangle” and the emergence of Charlotte as a national financial hub (Cowdrey, 1996; Carlisle & Escobar, 2010).

In the 1990s, a nationwide economic recession and a downturn in American manufacturing further motivated efforts by the state government to transition the North Carolina economy away from manufacturing and small-scale agriculture and to emphasize innovation, education, and attraction of new industries. While these initiatives did grow the state economy, they did little to reverse poverty and stagnant growth trends in North Carolina’s neediest, often most rural, communities (Johnson, 2003; Carlisle & Escobar, 2010). In some cases, statewide organizations like the Rural Center and other local business organizations, craft guilds, and
municipalities did make great strides in addressing poverty and investing in more diverse local economies. Still, despite statewide growth, overall trends indicated that decades of above-average poverty rates in mountain communities persisted through the end of the century, consistent with a statewide trend in which multigenerational poverty most afflicted rural counties—a result of declining agriculture and manufacturing, poor access to quality education and job training, stagnant wages, and low-investment in local development (Hall, 2003).

By the end of the 1990s, statewide unemployment was down to below 4%, and average yearly individual income was more than $26,000. While cost of living remained relatively low in rural mountain counties through the end of the century, many mountain counties faced unemployment rates above 5%, and average annual wages well below $20,000. In the economics report for the North Carolina Atlas’s Report for the New Century, Harrison Campbell Jr. cites a reliance on tourism and related seasonal work as a possible reason why annual wages and employment rates remained low for many mountain counties.

After more than a half-century of limited growth, western North Carolina finally saw its primary urban center modernize and develop in late 1990s and early 2000s, when Asheville began to realize its potential as a business and tourism destination. A new wave of resort development; recreation opportunities; local food, music, and cultural events and festivals; and a thriving craft scene have emerged to define Asheville as a mecca for mountain visitors, outdoor enthusiasts, and lovers of its bohemian lifestyle. A major factor in the city’s (as well as Buncombe County’s) ability to invest in tourism-related development and city rejuvenation, however, was the existence of an increasingly diverse economy with a healthy manufacturing foundation. Finally free of the crippling debts accrued during the Great Depression, Asheville experienced rapid growth, development of the downtown area, and the inevitable sprawl into
lower-elevation communities around the city (Chase, 2007). Much of that investment, however, came from sources outside of local communities, who capitalized on stagnant growth, cheap land, and high amenity values to exploit regional natural and scenic resources.

While North Carolina’s statewide economy boomed for much of the second half of the twentieth century, much of that growth exacerbated existing rural-urban wealth disparities. In no place was that more pronounced than in the rural mountain counties. In Avery County, for example, local residents famously spent much of the 1980s and 1990s fighting development atop two of its most scenic peaks: the construction of the Sugar Top Resort at Little Sugar Mountain, and mining operations that sought to strip Belview Mountain (Starnes, 2005; Leutze, 2012). Promised decades before that a thriving Asheville and a booming tourist industry would modernize rural communities and facilitate the growth of local enterprises, rural towns and counties along the Parkway instead experienced the hardships associated with persistent stagnation, resource exploitation, and development benefits that leaked out of mountain communities.

*Rural Tourism and Local Economic Agency*

Whisnant (2006) concludes that between the direct loss of land and the literal and figurative interruption of their local life, the Parkway represented a clear cultural and financial net loss for many mountain residents. Because many communities along the Parkway lacked intrinsic natural or cultural tourist appeal that could compete with marquee scenic locations like PAs and Asheville, most rural areas relied on Parkway-generated tourist traffic to funnel visitors into manufactured tourist enterprises. This furthered the disparity between the “haves” and “have-nots” along the Parkway. Whisnant (2006) writes:
Beyond topography, however, the social and cultural geography (and related economies) of the Parkway's subregions shaped the road by determining the conflicts that emerged in building it. All of these factors affected how and to what degree the ever-shifting Parkway ideal could be implemented in specific places. Most importantly, these intraregional differences make clear that the Parkway came not into a region of generic mountains and undifferentiated “mountain people” but into a chain of subregions of widely differing character (p. 112).

Reflecting realities of decades of regional tourism focused on federal parks and regional hubs like Asheville, for most of the second half of the twentieth century the BRP did especially little to facilitate sustainable and stable development for poorer, rural communities (Whisnant, 2003).

Fig 1.3. Blue Ridge Parkway Yearly Recreational Visitation. Data collected and organized by the National Parks Service (2018)

While BRP visitation rates did trend upwards in the Parkway’s first fifty years (see Fig 1.3), increased Parkway tourism did not always manifest in widespread economic growth. Many mountain communities initially benefitted from the jobs and modernization promised by federal public works investment and the reinvestment of new tourist revenues into regional infrastructure improvements. However, as New Deal Era projects like Fontana Dam, the Parkway, and other national parks infrastructure waned, many public works jobs proved temporary. Furthermore, because access restrictions limited direct access between rural producers and regional markets, outside of transportation hubs and communities at the gateways of popular parks the economic
opportunity provided by public works like the Parkway was limited to small-scale, seasonal ventures (Hopcroft, 2002). Whisnant (2006) argues that for much of the century tourism did little even for Asheville’s economy: “From the 1930s collapse until at least the early 1970s, when tourist-oriented development began to accelerate again, tourism did not dominate Asheville’s economy as it once had, providing no more than about 6 percent of employment” (p. 102).

Postwar economic growth and increases in recreational and vacation spending did bring initial success to some resorts and tourism-based enterprises in towns like Maggie Valley, Little Switzerland, and Cherokee. In these communities, tourism came to dominate employment and opportunity for local residents (Brown, 2000). However, in these towns and others like them the emphasis on seasonal tourism resulted in little long-term growth, as resorts failed to support the development of related goods and services. Instead, much of the tourism investment in BRP counties, especially that by local entrepreneurs, was limited to low-cost hotel and amusement projects that depended on seasonal visitation and labor. Because of the low wages associated with seasonal labor and service industries, as well as the volatility of tourism tastes and trends, for many years in western North Carolina’s wide rural swaths between thriving populations centers, small-town tourism and tourism-related development in simultaneously created jobs and poverty (Starnes, 2005).

Even when public and private investment came to the mountains, it often ignored mountain citizens’ well-being and instead focused on infrastructure and industries that catered to urban centers, industries, and outside investors. This urban-rural development divide maintained or even exacerbated the region’s economic disparity. As early as the 1950s agencies like the interstate Appalachian Regional Commission issued warnings about tourism and stagnant rural growth, national, regional, and state initiatives continued to take a trickle-down view of the
benefits of industrial and infrastructure projects. This did little to address the lack of social services, sporadic local connectivity, receding agricultural output, and low-wages for laborers and those employed in the tourism and service sectors. In the postwar years, most successful tourism projects, rather than increasing local opportunities, were undertaken by out-of-state companies. As a result, in mountain counties there was a dramatic increase in non-locally owned land—much of it held by developers, speculators, and second-home owners (Whisnant, 1980).

While theme parks like Cherokee’s Santa Land, local “historical” attractions like frontier living histories or “Unto These Hills” performed by members of the Eastern Band, or kitschy tourist towns like Little Switzerland and Chimney Rock endured through the end of the century they survived as relics of a midcentury tourist era that failed to adequately distribute their limited economic and social benefits (Starnes, 2003). In the legacy of regional tourism advocates from the beginning of the twentieth century, these tourist “traps” and local enterprises hocked cartoonish representations of native and mountain culture, and served to perpetuate existing wage stagnation, economic growth, and rural stigmas (Tooman, 1994; Starnes, 2005; Taylor, 2001). Local businesses often made little effort to embrace authentic regional culture and heritage, and the benefits of the limited growth mostly flowed out local communities or into the pockets of a few local residents.

By the time a 1974 study by the North Carolina Public Interest Research Group exposed the overstated benefits and detrimental effects of North Carolina’s tourism industry on mountain counties, residents, and environmental landscape, many of the region’s tourism projects had already begun to fail (Whisnant, 1980). Twenty years later, in his doctoral thesis, Tooman (1994) found that most of these trends persisted, especially in the most rural and tourism-dependent counties. Despite the inertia of conservation organizations and local interventions in
environmental issues, David Whisnant (1980), in citing the long-term failures of top-down efforts to “improve” southern Appalachia, observed a lack of support for the few community-based, grassroots efforts to empower local residents to set the agenda for investment in rural economic growth and opportunity.

Central to those failed efforts was tourism’s inability to generate growth, and the perpetuation of false, stereotypical representations of mountain and hopelessness. Citing the failed agenda of the Congress for Appalachian Development in the 1960s, Whisnant blamed the concurrent reticence toward decentralization and federal and state spending for the failure of external investment to materialize. As a result, no economic foundation upon which to push local initiatives existed. In 1980, after nearly a century of paternalistic efforts to help (in his words “colonize”) rural Appalachian communities, social historians like Taylor (2001) and Whisnant advocated for a reset to the developmental approach to southern Appalachia—a shift that has only slowly materialized.

The findings of North Carolina Public Interest Research Group’s 1974 study revealed the enduring and disproportionate power of external interests and regional developers in driving the twentieth century economy of western North Carolina counties. Especially in rural counties where investment and employment opportunities tended to be lower, a lack of economic self-determination increased dependence on broader economic trends and development in regional population centers. In its first fifty years, the Blue Ridge Parkway failed to help facilitate the spreading of the region’s limited wealth. In the year before the Parkway was completed, for example, tourism generated $305,568,000 of income in Asheville’s Buncombe County. Data shows other high concentrations of revenues in counties in close proximity to Asheville and GSMNP—like Henderson, Haywood—or Watauga, the home to highway-accessible tourist
towns like Boone and Blowing Rock. In that same year, many of the rural counties along the Parkway failed to generate even $10 million in yearly tourism-related income (Starnes, 2005, p.147). Starnes (2005) explains that in the twentieth century, the same inequality which plagued tourism development when the Parkway was conceived, persisted:

Just as in the 1880s, tourism growth followed improved access...By the 1980s, improved access by interstates and rural highways made it possible for visitors to spend the days in GSMNP, on the Cherokee Indian Reservation, or at any other mountain attraction but spend the night in Asheville. This drew much-needed revenue away from rural counties and reinforced Asheville’s economic prominence. (p. 146)

In the rare instances that postwar rural tourism development in western North Carolina counties did benefit local communities, success was not attributed to the existence of the Parkway or actions by government planners. Instead, successful local tourism development grew out of efforts by community institutions to promote growth and cooperation among local communities. Civic groups including local business, educational institutions, and chambers of commerce helped to promote effective business practices, education and entrepreneurship throughout the state’s westernmost counties. A major component of the work done by these midcentury organizations was building popular support for enterprises that used local and regional capital, land, labor, and investment. Organizations like Western North Carolina Associated Communities (WNCAC) and the Southern Highland Craft Guild not only provided entrepreneurial training and funding, but also worked to facilitate the distribution of tourism activity toward rural projects and helped bring local products to larger regional markets (Starnes, 2005). Still, even though in the second half of the twentieth century tourism did produce higher rates of local development and entrepreneurship, overall the limits of and dependency on these enterprises instead inhibited overall economic growth (Tooman, 1994).
In addition to efforts to stimulate employment and increase scenic tourism, the federal government made the promotion and protection of the region’s cultural heritage a key pillar of the Parkway’s mission. However, managers of the Parkway and other federal lands in North Carolina often struggled to balance tourism, resource extraction mandates, and conservation. In years after World War II, statewide conservation did become more of a priority, and both the state government and national conservation organizations made great strides in combating pollution and promoting the protection of threatened natural spaces. At the same time, state and federal policy-makers’ deference to industrial enterprises and resource extraction engendered a mistrust of federal lands (Hall, 1998).

While national environmental organizations emerged as key advocates for protection of North Carolina’s environment beyond protected areas, slow economic growth in mountain communities provoked skepticism of external conservation interests who advocated for government regulations and limits to the use of resources which many local residents regarded as their common property and birthright. As a result, Blue Ridge residents developed a culture of local activism that proved particularly effective in uniting the public against those who might exploit mountain land, people, and resources, and sought to dictate property owners’ own resource use. In the second half of the twentieth century, though they often worked in concert with large conservation organizations, policy-makers, and even federal land managers, local activist groups emerged as a lynchpin for the success of regional environmental interests and represented a key evolutionary development in Blue Ridge conservation (Newfont, 2012).

In the postwar decades, the growth of a nationwide environmental movement and the passage of laws like the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Air Act of 1970, and
the 1972 Clean Water Act raised America’s environmental awareness and shifted the conservation narrative in North Carolina (Cowdrey, 1996). This national environmental impulse, combined with increased public interest in outdoor recreation and more readily available federal funds, led to the establishment of a spate of new state parks in the western part of the North Carolina (Friends of State Parks, 2006). To further emphasize the state’s dedication to conservation, in 1975 the North Carolina Constitution was amended to include an “Environmental Bill of Rights.” In the 1970s and 1980s, a number of state laws established protections for places of scenic and cultural value and funded them through public bond initiatives and the creation of long-term funds like the North Carolina Natural Heritage Trust Fund, the Park and Recreation Trust Fund, and the Clean Water Management Trust Fund. These state trusts ensured that protection of valued spaces would not be borne solely by local communities (Heath & Hess, 2007; Friends of State Parks, 2006). Furthermore, because they reinforced residents’ inclination to conserve their own natural and cultural heritage in the Blue Ridge Mountains, few residents opposed these initiatives.

In these early stages of North Carolina’s postwar environmental movement, external transplants and conservation groups played an outsized role in activism and organization. In the 1970s and 1980s national environmental groups joined efforts to promote conservation in North Carolina. Groups like the Nature Conservancy and the Sierra Club opened statewide and local chapters in North Carolina and helped to fund and spearhead efforts to conserve forests, protect wetlands, raise awareness about endangered species, and pressure state legislators to consider the environmental ramifications of state policies. In particular, the Nature Conservancy, the Sierra Club, and the Wilderness Society successfully promoted the expansion of protected areas and even private land conservation as a means to ensure that threatened natural spaces in North
Carolina would be protected in perpetuity (Lynch, 2002; Newfont, 2012). But inconsistent agendas and priorities challenged regional coordination efforts and the efficacy of Blue Ridge environmentalism. External interests historically placed greater value on preserving scenic amenity values or furthering national economic initiatives through PAs, unlike the local resource conservation and sustainable-use practices favored by local landowners (Newfont, 2012).

These decades also marked renewed tension between state and local conservation and development interests. Notwithstanding the state and federal governments’ broader efforts to preserving natural and cultural spaces, in North Carolina, policy-makers focused less on sustainability and environmental protection, and instead focused resource-management policy on conserving resources for extraction and use—often by out of state interests and some of the mountains’ largest industrial polluters. As a result, in postwar western North Carolina, the environmental externalities from waste disposal, commercial agricultural and logging, industrial enterprises, coal-fed power utilities, and other threats to mountain forests, rivers, and farmlands, remained insufficiently checked (Cowdrey, 1996; Heath & Hess, 2007, p. 39-42).

Federal PA policy from the 1930s onward also ushered in a period of controversy and mistrust between local mountain residents and the federal government. On one hand, as the state parks movement grew, many mountain residents supported PAs as a mean to halt corporate land-grabbing and promote tourism development. In other cases, public opinion of public lands deteriorated in the face of state and federal policy limiting local access and promoting large-scale resource extraction in protected areas. Disputes first emerged over Depression-Era relief projects like the building of dams and transportation infrastructure in and around GSMNP and the BRP. Even when such enterprises increased employment and economic growth in mountain communities, resentment over the displacement of residents to make room for federally managed
lands divided local landowners and state and federal agencies over land rights, federalism, and access to regional markets (Pierce, 2003). Some local communities waged these battles against federal agencies throughout the century (Jacobson, 2003; Whisnant, 2006).

Because of lingering mistrust of federal agencies and wariness of outside conservation groups, Blue Ridge communities that desperately needed economic development—but also cared passionately for guarding against exploitation of their natural heritage—were often drawn into conflict over resource management (Newfont, 2012). Local activism often proved to be the most effective means for promoting sustainable use of common resources. Shifting attitudes toward federal land protection came to a head with the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act, which aimed to increased use restrictions in existing federal lands, including Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests in North Carolina’s Blue Ridge Mountains. In the 1960s and 1970s, in public debates over wilderness areas some residents who objected to new wilderness designations worried that the local employment and economic opportunities provided by forest resource extraction would be compromised. Equally passionate local voices advocated for more federally managed forests and wilderness designations, because wilderness areas might stimulate visitation and certain types of recreation. Still others argued greater federal oversight would at least protect the forest commons from the intrusion of private interests (Newfont, 2012).

When compromise was ultimately achieved, it happened not in government offices, but largely because local citizens exercised their right to participate, comment, and advocate in public meetings and letter-writing campaigns during public comment periods (Newfont, 2012). The coalition that ultimately came out in favor of wilderness areas represented diversely motivated outdoor enthusiasts, farmers, rural legislatures, and especially hunters and fishers, who came together under a mutual interest in conservation and sustainable resource use and access for
local residents (Hall, 1988). These debates presaged local communities’ willingness to sacrifice some the economic potential of mountain forests in the name of conservation and local empowerment that still characterizes Parkway communities. Compromise reinforced a general support for the continued establishment and expansion of state and federal PAs, so long as policy dictating the management of public lands maintained local access to resources even within PA borders. Furthermore, both resistance to and acceptance of greater protections over North Carolina’s mountain forests exposed a powerful regional impetus to reject the disproportionate influence of outside exploitation of the what Kathryn Newfont (2012) has labelled the “Blue Ridge Commons.”

In 1979, a study by the Appalachian Alliance—a group of citizens, researchers, activists, and organizations concerned by regional economic and environmental trends—formed a research group called the Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force (Newfont, 2012). Results, released in 1981, showed that in the 80 surveyed southern Appalachian counties, absentee landowners—in particular large oil, coal, timber, and steel companies—owned over half the land. Furthermore, their study exposed a clear link between the prevalence of corporate enterprises and regional poverty. The study cited western North Carolina as one of the regions likely to feel greater effects in the future (Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force, 1983). Subsequent local studies showed that by 1981, largely a result of a boom in second homes and resorts built on converted farmlands in the most rural counties, external property owners owned 82% of land in western North Carolina counties (Starnes, 2005, p. 143-144).

These studies illustrated the power of knowledge in shaping public opinion and promoting agency for local communities. Residents’ awareness of the findings triggered local activism which immediately organized successful opposition to oil and gas leases in national
forests, armed with comprehensive evidence disproving arguments that new resource exploration would beget regional economic prosperity (Newfont, 2012). The immediate aftermath showed the importance of coordinated and well-funded research, and the value of organizations in disseminating information to local residents and communities. In this case, members of the Appalachian Alliance emerged as important local coordinators and organizers. In addition to bringing together scholars, activists, government agencies, and local residents, the study showed the potential for mountain communities to cooperate in self-determined management of regional resources (Scott, 2008).

In the 1980s, when national pro-business and privatization trends pushed the Forest Service toward a greater emphasis on resource extraction on federal lands, local activists—some of whom had been a part of the Appalachian Alliance—formed the Western North Carolina Alliance (WNCA). Over the next decade, WNCA coordinated efforts to oppose plans for clearcutting in Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests and state and federal government oil and gas leases on PA lands (Newfont, 1999; Hall, 1988). Local leaders, amateur activists, and community coalitions provided the primary energy and organization for the WNCA. Their public campaign—joined by local press, national conservation groups—represented the power of local energy in protecting both public lands and precious mountain natural resources (Newfont, 2012).

In 1984, the Forest Service released a fifty-year plan for Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests, which included plans to aggressively harvest wide swaths of timber. In response, an aggressive WNCA launched a “Cut the Clearcutting” campaign, culminating in 1989 when local citizens were afforded a largely symbolic opportunity to provide public input and feedback on the draft plan. The WNCA collected and presented the Forest Service with a petition of more than 15,000 anti-clearcutting signatures, symbolically unfurled over four Asheville blocks. As a
result, in the 1994 amendment to its own controversial 1984 plan, the Forest Service was required to deemphasize clearcutting in favor of more sustainable resource extraction and put a greater emphasis on sustainable outdoor recreation as a primary economic objective (United States Forest Service, 1994). Perhaps most importantly, the “Forest Goals” section of the document closed with the following point of emphasis:

Keep the public involved in open and honest dialogue; involve interested and affected people in the full process of making decisions about common resources. Ensure that everyone has access to information and knows what is going on. Facilitate discussion among interests and, enlist them in joint problem-solving (p. 14).

Largely a result of pressure from local activists, this marked a significant evolution in the Forest Service’s attention to long term local and regional environmental and economic concerns.

Quoted by Newfont (1999), WNCA organizer Mary Kelly stated, “It wasn't some outside agenda that came in and created the Alliance. It really was the brainchild of the people of the region. It was created by and for the people of western North Carolina for the purposes that they saw fit” (p. 60). Public awareness of and grassroots responses to the exploitation of mountain resources helped facilitate the passage of state policies like the 1973 Mountain Area Management Act and the 1983 Mountain Ridge Protection Act, which sought to regulate some of the most intrusive trends resulting from tourism and industrial development. Despite the toothlessness of these policies and regulations, and the lack of local zoning in mountain counties, local residents and grassroots organizations proved effective as the primary line of defense against the resource degradation and intrusive land use (Starnes, 2005).

In postwar western North Carolina, individual landowners and local communities have shown a willingness to sacrifice financial gain, build alliances with external environmentalists and organizers, and use political and economic power—even against traditional allies among
representatives in government and developers—to protect their local communities and resources (Hall, 1988). For much of the twentieth century, Parkway management and policy was slow to react to local changes because, for the most part, the park had never depended on local communities. Instead, throughout the twentieth century, the NPS shaped Parkway policy in reaction to larger conflicts and trends—ranging from budgeting, visitation, and the national economy, to nationwide public opinion and scientific research—that manifested across the broader national parks system (Lowry, 1994; Rettie, 1995; Runte, 1997; Machlis & Field, 2000). Too often, however, they failed to respond to local realities and the values of rural communities along the Parkway. Decades of evidence shows that the NPS and Forest Service can successfully gain support for public lands and build public cooperation in their management by better integrating local communities into both economic and environmental mandates and efforts (Field, 2000). Broad regional support for state PAs, national parks, and natural forests shown in this chapter indicate that criticism of public lands generally focuses on policies, practices, and park personnel, rather than the parks themselves (Rettie, 1995, p. 213).

In response to policies that failed to adequately protect mountain communities, residents of western North Carolina regularly turned to grassroots organization and self-advocacy to guarantee the protection of their commons rather than rely solely on PAs and federal agencies. Even in the face of slow economic growth, unequal distribution of wealth, threats to public health, and exploitation of shared natural and cultural resources, North Carolina’s Blue Ridge residents have and will organize to preserve their cultural and natural heritage. Current Parkway officials and other policy-makers must work to harness this energy in a way that protects the viewshed and provides for long-term, sustainable development of previously underserved Parkway adjacent communities.
Chapter Two—The General Management Plan and Current Viewshed Threats

“More than a road, the parkway was planned as the physical core of an inter-regional plan for the entire Appalachian Range. As mountain farms and cutover forests were abandoned by impoverished inhabitants, the Blue Ridge Parkway was the means of planning and enabling coordinated outdoor recreational land uses as the basis of new regional economies.” – Ethan Carr, Wilderness by Design (1998)

Supporters of protected areas and related tourism development in western North Carolina continue to hope that tourism can be an economic solution improves regional land and resource management, coordinates regional conservation and development initiatives, and provides a sustainable source of economic development for both urban and rural mountain communities. As in the past, current Blue Ridge Parkway supporters and management assert that the Parkway is a unifying, conservation-minded entity that spans the checkerboard of PAs and private lands across the landscape. By boosting tourism and related businesses in gateway and adjacent communities, the Parkway supporters hope that it can integrate the region’s conservation and development future. Despite the region’s legacy of vibrant and effective grassroots conservation and preservation initiatives, the presence and expansion of protected areas remains the predominate means of protecting the natural and cultural heritage of North Carolina’s Blue Ridge Mountains. In counties along the Parkway, where agricultural output has slowed and local economies provide few alternative development and employment opportunities, planners also continue to depend on scenic tourism as an economic foundation. As such, the Parkway is still widely regarded as a panacea.

Even though the same economic hardships that befell previous generations continue to plague rural mountain communities—especially those furthest from popular parks, urban centers, or bustling vacation and college towns (Carlisle & Escobar, 2010; Anderson, 2003), planners and policy-makers have not dramatically altered or adapted Parkway and tourism-related policy. The
Parkway’s popularity and visitation have reached all-time highs, peaking at more that 21 million visitors in 2001, and last year—after a post-Great Recession decline—rebounding to back above 16 million (National Park Service, 2018). Nonetheless, the benefits of that popularity have not found their way into Parkway-adjacent communities in ways that both sustain rural economies and protect against threats to the Parkway viewshed. From recent data and research into current economic, environmental, and social conditions in the Parkway landscape, especially from the 2016 Western North Carolina Vitality Index, it is clear that those interested in preserving the viewshed must intervene more systematically.\(^1\) With the 2013 General Management Plan, the NPS attempted to reconcile its traditional policies with efforts to address current and future challenges. An assessment of the GMP framework for combating these threats and planning for the Parkway’s future indicates that planners must do even more to effectively unite efforts to better ensure the future of the Parkway landscape beyond.

*Land-Use Threats*

While the pace of population growth in western North Carolina has been slower than the rest of the state, recent and emerging population trends should serve as warning signs to Parkway landscape managers. Despite region-wide population loss from 2010-2014 (see fig. 2.1), North Carolina's Blue Ridge counties are expected to see 5%-20% growth from 2010-2020, and models have the western North Carolina population increasing by over 20% by 2030 (see Appendix C) (Tippett, 2015). To this point, most of that growth along the Parkway has occurred in urban centers like Asheville and Hendersonville, college towns like Boone and Cullowhee, upscale vacation communities like Black Mountain and Blowing Rock, and PA gateway communities

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\(^1\) The Western North Carolina Vitality Index is a comprehensive report on economic, environmental, population, and infrastructure trends in the state’s twenty-seven western counties, compiled by the Mountain Resources Commission (see Appendices A and B for contextual parameters and orientation).
like Brevard. In poorer, rural communities, population stagnation is expected to continue (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016). Shifting land-use resulting from both population growth and decline have resulted in a number of economic, social, and environmental realities that will increasingly challenge prevailing economic and conservation policies.

**Fig. 2.1 Population Change in Western North Carolina Counties (by thousands of residents), 2010-2014, from the UNC Carolina Center for Demography**

![Population Change Map](image)

(for county labels see Appendix A)

Where regional economic development and population growth have been concentrated in and around a few municipal centers, exurban sprawl—outward from population centers—has pushed commercial, industrial, and especially residential development into viewshed areas that were once dominated by the pastoral, mixed forest-agricultural landscape that draws visitors to the region (see fig. 2.2). In recent decades, where population increases have been most pronounced, development in Southern Appalachia has far outpaced national averages, increasing the demand for home construction. Frequently, agricultural or forest land that once constrained and isolated outward growth from existing population centers is being land converted for development and subdivision (Wright & Czerniak, 2000; Cho, Kim, Roberts, & Jung, 2009).
Sipes and Sipes (2013) found that “since 1948, 75 percent of farmlands along the parkway have been converted to other land uses.” Much of this land has been converted to residential subdivisions, resorts, and vacation home construction (p. 166). While the three mountain counties with the most farms—Surry, Ashe, and Buncombe—are all Parkway-adjacent, between 2007-2012, three other Parkway counties, Haywood, Mitchell, and Wilkes, lost more than twenty percent of their total farms. In 2012, three Parkway-adjacent counties—Jackson, Swain, and Watauga—reported net farm income losses, which portends future farm loss and consolidation (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016, p. 251-259).
Fig 2.3 shows changes in average farm size in western North Carolina between 2007 and 2012. Map from the Western North Carolina Vitality Index (2016, p. 256)

The rate of farm consolidation in the region is striking (see fig 2.3), and to many small farmers, prices for agricultural commodities and their land’s value to developers or commercial agricultural enterprises ultimately makes it impractical to keep farms intact. Between 2007 and 2012, western counties lost five percent of small family farms, and when the data from the 2017 Agricultural Census is released, most prognosticators expect that downward trend to continue. (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016). The aging regional population (see fig. 2.4) also
increases the likelihood that farm properties owned by baby-boomers be sold, putting further financial pressure on small farms and making them primary targets for residential subdivisions (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016).

Fig. 2.4 shows projected changes in Western North Carolina’s population by age. From the Western North Carolina Vitality Index (2016)

Land conversion not only harms the regional agricultural sector but has also led to increased crowding on valley floors, along regional waterways, and adjacent to existing transportation corridors (see Fig. 2.2) (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016). While much of the sprawl along the Parkway has been exurban, in some more rural communities, high amenity values and cheap land have encouraged rural resort and vacation home development. Much of this construction occurs at elevations and in locations that once provided some of the region’s most natural scenic views and unfragmented natural spaces located on private lands (Nash, 1999). This type of home construction has tended toward ridge-sides and isolated mountain-top locations, but recently has become increasingly clustered because of public land constraints and prioritization of high-amenity value sites (see fig 2.5). This clustering unfortunately had increased the conspicuousness and viewshed obstruction by this type of

Fig. 2.5 Sprawl along the valley floor and up the ridgelines as seen from the Walnut Cove Overlook between mile posts 396 and 397, just north of Asheville. Notice the golf club on the outskirts of the town of Arden, along the French Broad River, and the homes on the ridgetop in the foreground (shown in more detail on the bottom right), and on the hillsides back to the horizon. Photos taken by author on 02/24/2018.

The attraction to many of these priority sites is their proximity to visual and recreational opportunities afforded by the BRP and other PAs. As a result, PAs are increasingly threatened by the scenic amenity values that they protect. This PA-adjacent development phenomenon, called “naturbanization”—a term coined by researchers studying land conversion, resort development,
and population growth adjacent to European national parks—makes it difficult for PAs to maintain so-called “buffer zones” between their borders and adjacent development and communities (Prados, 2009). This is particularly problematic for the BRP, which depends on the preservation of scenic amenity values to attract visitors.

The increased human footprint on PAs’ periphery also challenges their carrying capacities and makes it more difficult to meet ecosystem protection and resource management goals. Acknowledging the attraction of pastoral landscapes, recreational opportunities, and other natural spaces, Napton et al. (2010) explain that “many homeowners prefer sites that are at or near the border with public land, particularly the Blue Ridge Parkway, because of the views and public land management, which is likely to favor amenities and other noneconomic factors” (p. 41). Citing the U.S. Forest Service, the Western North Carolina Vitality Index (2016) predicts that residential development and density will continue to increase in spaces with high amenity values, especially adjacent to national forests and national park lands (p. 151).

A number of other effects on local human and natural communities also arise from this type of vertical sprawl, or “movement up the mountain.” First, vacation homes tend to be particularly large and obtrusive, which interrupts scenic views drive down amenity values. Moreover, the cost of delivery of utility and other municipal services often creates a net deficit for local governments, despite the additional property tax revenues. Resulting home and property value increases also often price local residents out of their local housing markets (Nash, 1999; Cho, Kim, Roberts, & Jung, 2009). This can worsen cultural divide between well-off home builders and local residents and can dramatically change the culture of small communities. Current problems like cultural dilution and economic leakage—which can result from absentee landownership—invoke the same concerns and calls to action which pervaded the region when
the Appalachian Alliance released the results of their 1981 study on absentee land ownership and external economic influence (Nash, 1999).

“The 170 green miles of parkway from Roanoke to Blowing Rock, most of them privately owned, could be lined with strip malls in another thirty years,” laments Steven Nash (1999) in his predictive assessment of the Blue Ridge Mountains’ future (p. 91). The existence of Pisgah National Forest and some state parks adjacent to and traversed by the BRP ensures that much of the land and many of the views around the Parkway will be preserved. In between PAs, however, unchecked growth and development imperil private lands. The popularity of Asheville and other upscale communities have resulted in more rapid exurban sprawl in recent years than in any period since the Great Depression. In 1976, regional human development in the western counties of North Carolina used up only .06 acres per person, equaling less than 1% of the total land. In 2006, 6.3% of the land was developed (see fig 2.6), and the pace has not slowed (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016, p. 149). This type of sprawl occurs most often at the sacrifice of farms, forests, prairies, and wetlands (General Management Plan, 2013, p. 180; Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016). At this pace, it is only a matter of time before the landscape one sees from much the BRP is more human and urban than natural and rural.

Without immediate and comprehensive intervention, the BRP viewshed will continue to contend with both exurban sprawl, and amenity-driven naturbanization. The effects of sprawl are not limited to human outcomes, however. Sprawl also contributes existing environmental stressors that plague the region. If development along the Parkway continues to intensify, it will further challenge both PA’s and grassroots environmentalists’ ability to combat habitat fragmentation, and loss of regional biodiversity.
The conditions outlined here dramatically affect Parkway managers’ and viewshed communities’ ability and willingness to preserve the viewshed’s natural, scenic, and cultural characteristics. While the NPS has rededicated the Parkway to its mission to incorporate history and cultural heritage into the park experience, how it plans to assure that the rural identity of the surrounding cultural and natural landscape is preserved will be imperative to maintaining public interest. Thus far, local and regional policy-makers have proven incapable of—or even disinterested in—halting sprawl. Many communities have done little to manage residential and commercial growth because of the allure of increased economic development, lack of rural zoning restrictions, and counties’ and developers’ ability to exploit loopholes in laws like North Carolina’s 1983 Ridge Protection Act (Heath, 1984; Fordney, 1994; Igelman, 2014). While more than 200 miles of the Parkway cuts through, or is adjacent to, national forests or other PAs, outside of public lands there is no consistent management for the millions more acres in the viewshed that remain in private hands (see Appendix D) (General Management Plan, 2013). In a context with so much inconsistent and overlapping sovereignty, it can be difficult to find ways to cohesively manage land-use trends and respond to economic and environmental stressors.

Ecological Threats

Historically, based around both protected areas and grassroots efforts, this region has been defined by a robust conservation initiative that seeks to conserve the uniqueness of its natural beauty, protect biodiversity, and combat a number of trends in pollution and wildlife habitat loss. State laws and initiatives, in concert with federal agencies and regional organizations, have recently made significant progress in improving the health of air, water, and other natural resources systems harmed by increased automobile traffic, regional coal-fired
power plants, logging, and other industrial enterprises (Nash, 1999; Henderson, 2016; North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, 2016).

**Fig 2.6: Current (2006) and Projected (2030) Land-Use in Western North Carolina Counties** (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016, p. 149-150)

Baldwin (2010) finds that in engaging in environmental and ecological conservation at a scale of the Parkway and surrounding systems, “it is critical to identify the keystone threats, those threats that are so strongly interacting that if they were removed, other threats would be considerably weakened” (p. 27). Especially as strides have been made toward improving scenic
qualities via air-quality control, the keystone environmental threat to the BRP viewshed actually stems more directly from exurban sprawl and naturbanization. The General Management Plan (2013) makes clear that “the parkway is also considered a keystone area in which to track environmental changes related to water and air quality that could affect the entire region” (p. 10), and it lists fragmentation of habitats from park-related infrastructure among the primary environmental concerns (p. 24). Combined with the GMP’s need to address the scenic encroachment of viewshed sprawl, fragmentation emerges as a primary issue in both the BRP’s environmental and land-use management mandates.

The harms of fragmentation and habitat loss on biodiversity and ecosystems are well-documented (e.g. Quammen, 1996; Myers et al., 2000; Wilson, 2016). The breaking up of habitats and migration corridors by infrastructure, deforestation, or subdivision of intact lands can restrict and change wildlife movements and interactions. This leads to decreased biodiversity in isolated fragments, overabundance of edge and other species that would otherwise not thrive, and increased extinction rates. The effects of habitat fragmentation can be more extreme where—like in the Blue Ridge Mountains—isolation due to topographic variance, waterway interruption, or multiuse forests and agricultural landscapes is more pronounced (Lindenmayer & Fischer, 2006; Plantinga et al., 2007; Baldwin, 2010; Losos, MacArthur, & Ricklefs, 2010; Kettle & Koh, 2014). This scenario has been realized in much of the Parkway viewshed.

The worst deforestation and fragmentation of habitats in the region happens on private lands. At the turn of the twenty-first century, 98% of federal land in the Blue Ridge Mountains was forested. While private conservation and PAs have limited some forest conversion within and adjacent to national forests and other public lands, in 2000 only 72% of nonfederal lands remained forested (Napton et al, 2010, p. 41). Without land-use restrictions, transportation
infrastructure and rural residential development are leading causes of habitat fragmentation and represent a major threat to biodiversity along the Parkway (see figs. 2.7 & 2.8).

![Fig 2.7 Percent Forest Surrounding Forested Area in Western North Carolina, 2006 (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016, p. 151)](image)

The interaction between private forest and agricultural land-use is imperative to understanding the effects of ecosystem-scale decisions regarding biodiversity in human landscapes. Especially in a place rich in biodiversity like the Blue Ridge Mountains, maintaining habitat integrity is not just essential for fauna with wide migratory ranges, but also for preserving niche habitats for smaller indicator species and a wide range of other species unique to the region (Surasinghe & Baldwin, 2014). Private forests are not only beneficial to habitat connectivity, but also are in some ways, as or even more effective than PAs in supporting wildlife diversity (McCune, Natto, & MacDougall, 2017).

Beyond PA borders, preserving mixed-use rural settings can help to mitigate instances of fragmentation, so long as further conversion and subdivision is limited. Even though deforestation has occurred through much of the region, remaining intact farmlands and mixed-
farm-and-forest properties can diversify habitats and result in some species flourishing, especially if habitat-aware and more ecosystem-sensitive agricultural practices limit the intensiveness of land-use (Hicks & Pearson, 2003). By contrast, residential development and property fragmentation, at both high and low-densities, does consistent harm to species proliferation (Turner et al., 2003).

**Fig 2.8 Land cover by type in Western North Carolina, 2006 (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016, p. 146)**

In the Parkway region, without comprehensive intervention, the likely continuation of both low-density residential development and exurban sprawl will lead to further habitat destruction, isolation of habitat “islands,” and wildlife extinctions. Despite regional reforestation trends over the course of the twentieth century—a result of regional shifts away from logging and agriculture—in places along the Parkway where building density has increased, forest removal and the conversion of agricultural land, fragmentation has worsened significantly (Napton et al., 2010, p. 41-42). More recently, on parcels at higher elevations, where much of the recent, post-agricultural reforestation has occurred, increased demand for residential and resort
development is interrupting habitats in new and more vulnerable sites (Turner et al, 2003). Under the current conservation model, there simply are not enough public lands and PAs to combat population and development shifts and preserve habitat and ecosystem integrity (Goetz, Jantz, & Jantz, 2009).

What is worrisome is that despite the regional growth in the size and number of PAs, failure to coordinate with private landowners renders PAs unable to combat fragmentation outside of their borders. With a park as long-and narrow as the BRP, there are simply more areas relevant to regional conservation outside of its boundaries. In a region noted for its biodiversity, lack of proactivity and coordination among conservation efforts across the Southern Appalachian bioregion will limit the efficacy of large-scale conservation efforts in the face of environmental threats and increased development infrastructure (Tonn et al., 2005). Thus, while core habitat and resource protections provided by PAs have long-been an essential component of biodiversity conservation in the Parkway region, broadening policy-making to include unprotected private lands is necessary in order for managers of protected areas, like the Parkway, to accomplish conservation goals (Goetz, Jantz, & Jantz, 2009, p. 1421).

Increasingly, private and non-profit conservation tools have emerged that might represent the best available means for improving protected habitat connectivity, despite the viewshed’s checkerboard land-management and overlapping public-private lands (see Appendix D) (Cooke, 2018). To do so requires convincing regional communities, local landowners, and environmental organizations to work with PAs and developers at a scale and with a frequency that can affect the necessary changes, and in a way that promotes compromise and communication regarding best practices for maintaining the balance between land-use priorities (Surasinghe & Baldwin, 2014). In rural areas worldwide, it has been shown coordination in buffer-zones and cooperation from
local communities are integral to successful, PA-centric conservation efforts (Wells & Brandon 1993). Given the rural nature of much of the region surrounding the Parkway and western North Carolina’s other PAs—and the amount of space along the Parkway that is not protected by PAs—there is a clear need to extend PA conservation beyond park borders (see Appendix D).

Tourism and Related Development

Even though combatting fragmentation is primarily an ecological concern, the need to limit fragmentation is consistent with efforts to preserve the rural cultural landscape and viewshed along the Parkway. McEvoy (2004) finds that especially when it comes to small farms and private forest properties, preventing fragmentation is in the interests of commercial enterprises and individual land owners. Limiting fragmentation of the human landscape can safeguard the long-term sustainability, profitability, and ecology of private forests and farmland, and can retard land acquisition by developers. Policy-makers can thus protect the long-term ecological and economic health of rural communities by supporting small businesses, seeking ways to work with private landowners to keep properties and small agricultural enterprises economically viable, and promoting the scenic and cultural qualities of communities threatened by land conversion. For communities along the Parkway, tourism remains a vehicle for the pursuit of this balance.

A number of factors have emerged along the Blue Ridge Parkway which underscore the importance of preserving the character and integrity of the viewshed. For landowners and those with economic interests in preserving rural spaces along the Parkway, the challenge becomes either to derive value from rural and scenic qualities, or to create new financial incentives or value that induce landowners to maintain the current integrity and rural functions (agriculture, private forest) of their properties. Tourism helps accomplish the former solution, so long as
tourists visit rural areas and patronize local enterprises. Tourism can help property owners—especially farmers—to supplement agricultural production with postproductive value, aided by sustainable, tourism-related growth like agritourism and outdoor recreation. Current landowners and visitors value the region’s rural aesthetic, ecological, and human characteristics, which means that, so long as properties remain affordable enough to stay in the hands of current landowners, the total productive output of the land alone need not determine its value (Mather, 2001; Bergstrom, 2005). To this point, however, in many Parkway-adjacent communities, tourism alone has not driven satisfactory rural growth.

Recent trends in BRP visitation are an important reminder of the Parkway’s economic potential. In the General Management Plan (2013), the NPS emphasizes the breadth and scope of Parkway’s impact on the tourism economy in communities all along the park:

“The Blue Ridge Parkway, by virtue of its 469-mile length, provides a travel and tourism facility that unites a 29-county region in Virginia and North Carolina. The opportunity for some 20 million visitors each year to sample its scenic and recreational resources has established the parkway as a primary tourism magnet for the region” (p. 11).

In 2017, 98.7% of BRP visitors were “non-local,” and they spent more than $1 billion on the Parkway or in adjacent communities (Thomas, Koontz, & Cornachione, 2018). Parkway-related economic activity was responsible for generating more than 15,000 area jobs and nearly a half a billion dollars of labor income. In total, last year, the Parkway added $750 million in value to various sectors of the regional economy—especially food, lodging, and recreation. These numbers represent totals at or near five-year highs (Thomas, Koontz, & Cornachione, 2018). In past years, it has been estimated that economic activity related to the Parkway contributes more than $2 billion into the North Carolina economy every year (General Management Plan, 2013, p. 11; National Parks Service, 2018). Civic leaders and organizations regularly cite the benefits of
BRP-related economic activity as vital component of local tax revenue, support for local businesses, and contributions to outdoor recreation (Brandon, 2014; Brandon & Worth, 2017).

However, a lack of comprehensive research into the distribution of those benefits makes it difficult to assess the relative impact of Parkway tourism across counties and various communities. Upon closer inspection, though, prevailing economic trends reveal that while the overall economic value of the Parkway is very real, many of the problems that plagued the distribution of tourism-related benefits in the previous century may persist. While overall tourism is increasing region-wide and in Parkway counties, the largest tourism economy in the region remains that of Asheville’s Buncombe County. For example, in 2017 tourism generated more than $1.1 billion in expenditures in Buncombe County—hundreds of millions more than in the next highest Parkway counties: Buncombe-adjacent Henderson County ($295 million) and Watauga County ($253 million). In smaller, more rural Parkway counties, like Allegany and Mitchell, 2017 tourism spending failed to surpass even $25 million. Buncombe and Henderson also dramatically outpaced other Parkway counties in the rate of tourism expenditure increase, growing by 6.58% and 7.13%, respectively, while remaining Parkway counties grew by an average of only 3.49% (Visit North Carolina, 2018). Despite its disproportionate share of tourism spending, however, as recently as 2009 Buncombe County tourism made up a smaller part of the total economy (7.8%) than in more tourism-dependent counties like Swain, Avery, and Watauga, where tourism makes up more than 12% (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016, p. 237).

Even after making per capita adjustments to tourism data, related trends indicate that in rural, tourism-dependent Parkway counties, scenic tourism is not sufficiently improving communities. As was true in the twentieth century, in counties where tourism creates the largest percentage of county employment and where tourism spending is highest per capita,
infrastructure and connectivity is less reliable, poverty rates tend to be higher, median household incomes trend lower, fewer and lower-quality social services are available, and public health suffers (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016, p. 201-202). Given the limited manufacturing and decreasing agricultural sectors for many of these counties, as well as the demographic changes established earlier in this paper, current tourism enterprises are likely not generating enough sustainable economic growth to curb troubling land-use trends.

Tourism activity also tends to concentrate in and around certain access points, which are not evenly distributed throughout the region or along the Parkway. More visitors travel the North Carolina section of the Parkway that includes Asheville and Pisgah National Forest than any other, with the most widely used access points concentrated near interchanges with highways and close to urban centers like Asheville and Boone (National Park Service, 2018). Disparate regional visitation rates and consumer spending indicates that tourism—as it is currently employed—is an insufficient foundation in mostly rural counties where few other consistent, year-round economic opportunities exist (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016).

Even in gateway communities, tourism based around PAs can fail to generate enough economic activity to grow local economies. The town of Cherokee, on the Quallah Boundary, is located at the confluence of GSMNP and the southern end of the Parkway. Despite decades of promise that GSMNP and Parkway would generate growth and opportunity, scenic and outdoor recreation has failed to generate more than local, seasonal enterprises which are often based around superficial representations of Cherokee culture. Since the late-twentieth century, tourism tastes, interests, and demographics along the Parkway have changed. In recent years tourist to the Parkway region have been found to be older, wealthier, and better educated that the average North Carolina tourist, and are more interested in outdoor recreation and large festivals that
better characterize activities associated with parks and larger municipal centers (see fig. 2.9) (Stoddard, Evans, & Davé, 2008).

**Fig 2.9** shows data from a 2008 study by the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, indicating preferred activities by regional tourists.

![Graph showing preferred activities by regional tourists](image)

As a result, in places like Little Switzerland and Cherokee, many of the traditional, seasonal attractions have shuttered. Ironically, given Cherokee’s location, economic salvation for the city and the reservation has not been found in PA tourism, but instead in the construction of the Harrah’s Cherokee Casino Resort only a few miles from the entrance to GSMNP and the southern entrance to the Parkway. Here, like in Asheville and other cultural centers, PA tourism may supplement or even compliment other regional enterprise, but diversification beyond scenic recreation is necessary to build a thriving tourism-based economy (Whisnant, 2006; Lewis, 2017). Thus, while the GMP and other NPS publications rightfully herald the Parkway’s regional economic contribution, other contextual factors indicate that tourism alone has not led to sufficiently widespread economic growth.

Still, regional development organizations continue to commit to the Parkway and tourism as a focal point of future development strategies. For example, in their 2012 *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy*, the NC High Country Council of Governments—a coalition of
seven counties along North Carolina’s northern sections—listed Parkway visitors as the primary focus of future tourism initiatives and projects. A broad survey of reports by regional chambers of commerce confirms Blue Ridge counties’ dedication to projects and development focused on capitalizing on the Parkway’s popularity. Because tourism to rural areas is expected to become an even larger part of the North Carolina economy in the coming years, tourism-dependent rural counties along the Parkway will have to find ways to both increase visitation rates and diversify their economies without exacerbating already low employment and without shutting out investors, entrepreneurs, and the benefits of state tourism promotions (Starnes, 2003; Visit North Carolina & U.S. Travel Association, 2016).

NPS planners can and should capitalize on existing local and regional efforts to integrate tourism, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation through economic initiatives. Such projects do exist along the Parkway and have proven capable of supporting sustainable development of a number of tourism-related industries. These efforts, if successfully funded, scaled up, and distributed along the Parkway, provide a model for how scenic tourism can serve as a starting point for sustainable, viewshed-friendly, rural economic growth. For example, the Altapass Foundation has developed the Orchard at Altapass into a popular destination near rural Mitchell County’s remote town of Spruce Pine. The Orchard maintains a system of walking and hiking trails, sells homegrown and local crafts and produce in its shop and restaurant, hosts a summer music festival and concert series, and has worked with local conservation groups to protect orchard and Parkway adjacent land.

Regional organizations like the NC Rural Center (NC Rural Center website, www.ncruralcenter.org) and Mountain BizWorks (Mountain BizWorks website, www.mountainbizworks.org) have successfully brought rural businesses together with markets
and investors by providing financial support, guidance, and networking for small-scale agriculture and craft/heritage enterprises. Their programs focus on promoting sustainable and local production and consumption and helping to support the connection between local producers and regional markets. Groups like the Western North Carolina Alliance—who once coordinated the campaign to combat clear-cutting in by the Forest Service—continues to coordinate sustainable development and conservation initiatives at the county and community level (Western North Carolina Alliance website, www.wnca.org). The Southwestern Commission operates in counties and communities in the southwest corner of North Carolina, investing in local development and generating economic growth through financial and logistical support for local projects and businesses (Southwest Commission website, http://regiona.org/).

Western North Carolina is also the home to a thriving craft industry, generating $206 million in revenue for the region in 2007. Nearly half of regional craftspeople work part-time or use their craft work to supplement another income (often agricultural) and depend on attracting tourist interest in the authenticity of the local experience and identity to market their wares (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016). Organizations like the Southern Highland Craft Guild and Homegrown Handmade, have helped to support and promote local crafters and link craftspeople to tourism markets (Southern Highland Craft Guild, 2017; Anderson, 2003; Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016).

Other programs have developed initiatives designed specifically to support the region’s small farms. According to the Western North Carolina Vitality Index (2016):

Western North Carolina is leading the state in farmland protection initiatives, such as Voluntary Agricultural Districts and Farmland Protection Plans. Buncombe County alone has appropriated more money for conservation easements than any county in the state. This has allowed several thousand acres of farmland to remain in farming, remain in the tax base, and be protected from development (p. 258).
As both the number and size of Blue Ridge farms has decreased, programs like the Western North Carolina branch of the statewide Farm Link organization has provided similar educational and financial services for small and medium-sized mountain farms (WNC Farmlink website, https://wncfarmlink.org/). The Carolina Farm Trust facilitates private land conservation, helps small farms invest in capital, and provides services linking small farmers in the Carolinas to government and other national initiatives aimed at preserving family farms and encouraging sustainable farming practices. While they do not currently manage any projects along the Parkway, they certainly could in the future (Carolina Farm Trust website, https://carolinafarmtrust.org/).

But inconsistent access and application of these efforts, and the difficulty in linking them to a more dynamic and integrated rural economic initiatives, has limited their overall impact. Because tourism still tends to be concentrated outside these communities, and because urban centers tend to attract larger enterprises, local artisans and farmers can get crowded out by larger, better-moneyed enterprises. Furthermore, in funding such a wide range of projects, these organizations’ dependence on private donations, membership fees, and grants from government and other exogenous organizations can limit their ability to affect enough of the region. These initiatives lack a coordinating institution to bring organizations together with other stakeholders like the NPS and other federal agencies, state and local governments, individual landowners, and business organizations like area chambers of commerce.

After more than a century of efforts to promote tourism in Southern Appalachian/Blue Ridge communities, it alone has not proven to dramatically improve the economic prospects or living standards in many Parkway counties. Without accompanying economic development in other industries and/or commercial enterprises, the shortcomings of Parkway tourism as a golden
goose for rural economies are unlikely to diminish (Tooman, 1995). For the Parkway to realize its potential and promise as an economic boon to the entire region, NPS policy must facilitate more widespread and sustainable development beyond scenic tourism, and work to facilitate Parkway traffic and recreation toward other economic initiatives—while still promoting the preservation of scenic rural land. Tourism might still provide the conduit for such development. But without devising ways to cooperatively promote and distribute the benefits of tourism initiatives and tourism-related enterprises, it risks exacerbating existing viewsched degradation and regional socioeconomic disparities.

The General Management Plan

With the 2013 release of the General Management Plan for the Blue Ridge Parkway—the first comprehensive management plan in the Parkway’s history—the NPS outlined its agenda for reaffirming and upholding core Parkway priorities that had driven Parkway policy since its inception (p. 9). The GMP also represented Parkway management’s first comprehensive synopsis of its own past, present, and future challenges, giving park planners an opportunity to reconsider approaches to Parkway mandates.

As a part of that effort, the NPS considered three alternative frameworks to overall Parkway management. By focusing within the park boundaries and prioritizing the scenic driving experience for visitors, the first (“Alternative A”) would have maintained the status quo established by the Parkway’s founding laws and documents. “Alternative C” proposed incorporating the Parkway more comprehensively into the surrounding region by better linking the Parkway—including its infrastructure, recreational opportunities, natural and cultural heritage sites, economic initiatives, and conservation-practices—to adjacent communities and regional initiatives. “Alternative B,” which was ultimately selected as the basis for the final
General Management Plan, prioritized enhancing interactive Parkway experiences, providing more recreation opportunities for Parkway visitors, and updating Parkway management to better reflect evolving visitation and Parkway usage trends. Alternative B shared much of Alternative C’s language regarding outreach and partnerships with external conservation and heritage preservation efforts, but limited the integration of parkway recreational spaces and economic resources with those of surrounding communities. In presenting these alternative approaches, the NPS acknowledged a number of realities that will profoundly affect the Parkway and surrounding region over the course of the twenty-plus years for which the GMP will be applied.

First, the overall GMP initiative reinforced the Parkway’s stewardship regarding the region’s natural and cultural heritage. In addition to asserting its ongoing dedication the scenic driving experience, the GMP redefined conservation and preservation as a central to the Parkway purpose. While the Parkway has both literally and figuratively connected regional environmental conservation efforts, the GMP’s full title, “Final General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement,” and the initiatives it proposes, reflect an import acceptance of the Parkway’s effects on, and responsibility to, the broader natural landscape.

Second, the NPS recognized that the Blue Ridge Parkway was far more integrated into the surrounding landscape than ever before. The GMP acknowledged that “the parkway is now situated in a much broader resource and visitor context that extends both physically and philosophically far beyond its boundaries” (p. 8). The proposed alternatives explored whether Parkway management should pursue more proactive integration into the economy and resource management of the surrounding region, thus acknowledging the multifaceted symbiosis of the Parkway and its surroundings.
Third, in a major shift from the management status quo of the previous seventy-five years, the GMP placed a greater emphasis on the need to develop responses to persistent threats to the Parkway’s multifunctional mandate. In particular, in response to regional land-use trends, the NPS listed increasing urban and suburban sprawl among those threats. According to the NPS, the scenic Parkway experience “is being threatened by the subdivision of hundreds of privately-owned acres of scenic farms and mountainsides for residential development” (General Management Plan, p. 21). To address increased sprawl resulting from regional development, the GMP determines that the NPS should continue and complete its baseline survey of the scenic viewshed, and also:

Actively collaborate with adjacent landowners, county officials, and developers on a site-specific project basis to conserve priority scenery. In addition, the parkway would work with its partners to provide leadership for regional efforts among adjacent landowners; local, state, and federal officials; and developers to establish long-term strategies for conserving views from the parkway. (General Management Plan, 2013, p. 44)

By highlighting the need to work cooperatively and develop partnerships, the NPS both accepted the need to collaborate in order to meet its own goals and recognized the connection between the Parkway and regional land-use trends.

Together these GMP foci elucidated the threats to the identity and viability of the Parkway landscape that result from increased human activity. By adopting plans to address threats by enhancing relationships between the Parkway and surrounding communities, increasing recreational opportunities for visitors, and improving protection of natural and cultural resources, the NPS acknowledged that challenges to the Parkway’s future at least partially result from the Parkway’s popularity and regional economic impact. Likewise, they recognized that increased population and development activity in the Parkway viewshed—a reality to which
Parkway-generated tourism and Parkway-protected visual landscapes contribute—threaten the scenic quality which the Parkway promises visitors.

Because the Parkway is effectively a threat to its own viewshed, the GMP represented a necessary evolution from previous Parkway management by which the park was conceptualized as largely separate from the surrounding region. The NPS’s chosen action plan thus emphasized coordination and cooperation with external partners in working to meet goals specifically for scenic conservation and land protection. Additionally, sections on natural and cultural resource management underscored that efforts should be regional and should promote connectivity across the Parkway, rather than focus solely within Parkway boundaries and in the immediate periphery. The GMP also acknowledged the limitations of the Parkway’s resources, and the practical difficulties of direct intervention into regional development and resource conservation. To accomplish these goals, the NPS needs to explore ways to influence regional planning and management by cultivating active and cooperative partnerships.

Regional economic, ecological, and land-use trends data suggest that NPS initiatives outlined in the GMP might not go far enough. Regarding Parkway-adjacent agricultural properties, the NPS indicates satisfaction in current lease and easement arrangements with property-owners. Currently, the NPS manages 446 leases, which limit land-use and aesthetic changes to scenic qualities on approximately 3500 acres of Parkway adjacent and viewshed property (General Management Plan, 2013, p. 29). The GMP states the NPS’s preference to maintain those current arrangements, and only add to Parkway property, via donation and fee-simple purchases by willing sellers, on an ad hoc basis (p. 39). However, factors like rural poverty, declining agricultural outputs from traditional sources, and developers’ increased interests in Parkway-adjacent properties means that that either the NPS will have to exert greater
control over adjacent lands—risking further alienating landscape communities—or will have to more actively promote and facilitate strategies and opportunities that increase the economic viability and affordability of key properties. This can only be accomplished by working more dynamically with area landowners and more directly supporting viewshed-friendly development in Parkway communities.

The GMP also acknowledges the Parkway’s vital function in conserving habitats and maintaining migration corridors for a wide range of species (General Management Plan, 2013, p. 252-253). However, focusing efforts internally, without pursuing intervention on a scale that spans the park’s borders, limits the Parkway’s ability to meet its environmental goals. Despite the emerging threat of fragmentation well beyond the park’s borders—and given an emerging body of research that shows that PAs with fixed boundaries are limited in their ability to conserve vital elements of and contributing factors to biodiversity and ecological health—the GMP fails to outline a comprehensive enough regional conservation initiative.

Criticizing this type of boundary rigidity regarding national parks, Dilsaver and Wycoff (2005) explain that in failing to work more cooperatively with local interests, PAs impede their own conservation agendas—which naturally extend beyond park boundaries—and alienate local communities. Goetz et al. (2009) explain that “because ecological processes and species movements often span parks and protected area boundaries, it is necessary to evaluate current reserve networks in relation to surrounding unprotected habitat” (p. 1421). For the NPS, the failure to pursue the BRP’s environmental mandate beyond the park borders limits its efficacy in protecting the region’s ecological systems and its ability address the primary ecological threat to the viewshed.
If the NPS is going to meet these viewshed threats head on, it is going to have to do so by more proactively addressing issues that occur primarily outside of the park’s boundaries. While basic concepts behind the choice of GMP “Alternative B” support such an endeavor, I find that a greater challenge exists than can be solved by building ad hoc partnerships to address economic and environmental—and thus scenic—issues. Instead, rather than acknowledging the need to reach out beyond the park boundaries when an issue, need, or threat arises, the Parkway needs to be understood not as an entity within a separate Blue Ridge region, but proactively as a part of broader economic, cultural, and ecological systems.

It is precisely because of the failure of this “proximate but separate” mantra of interaction between the Parkway and the viewshed that shifting individual and regional economic priorities, as well as broader population changes, have failed to generate symbiosis. Instead, the NPS should pursue a management strategy that goes beyond the proposals favored by the GMP. The scale and scope of the challenges presented by a tourism-based economy, fragmentation and habitat loss, and sprawl and land-conversion—and the likelihood that the Parkway’s future viability and popularity depend on combating these deeply-rooted regional trends—necessitate that the NPS and other Parkway partners more comprehensively embrace the Parkway viewshed as a valuable, shared resource to be managed as party of an integrated landscape.

Parkway planners must reimagine the park in the context of the surrounding landscape, and tailor management strategies to better distribute and balance the benefits of the Parkway’s existence. To this point, throughout the region, local groups have taken the lead in promoting local community development, environmental protection, social justice, and civic engagement. In the face of land-use trends that have disproportionately benefitted out-of-state landowners, these initiatives emphasize region-wide economic and conservation initiatives that benefit local
residents (Scott, 2008). Rather than bringing these organizations together in a unified effort to mitigate these concerns on a more comprehensive scale, however, inward-looking park policy and overreliance on scenic tourism indicate that the NPS can do more to bring together the full-range of interests who have a stake in the viewshed’s preservation (Rettie, 1995; Starnes, 2003, p. 152-153, Smith, 2012).

There is regional precedent for the creation of a top-down institution for the purpose of organizing a regional-scale, bottom-up initiative. In the similar contexts, the Forest Service has previously integrated land management priorities to better align with local ecological, economic, and cultural priorities (Yarnell, 1998). Planners of the nearby Appalachian Trail have used federal protections of its elongated greenway space to create a multi-faceted, mixed-use rural landscape that promotes local economic enterprises while still prioritizing the conservation of natural spaces. In both instances, planners used scenic values and outdoor recreation associated with PAs to enhance rural conservation initiatives and promote sustainable development on a broad scale. In doing so, they helped to protect the scenic, rural quality of their surrounding communities in the face of increased population and development (Yahner et al., 1995).

Since its 2003 designation by Congress, the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area (BRNHA) has acted as a “steward of the living traditions of our region, protecting and promoting the unique music, crafts, outdoors, foodways and Cherokee culture unique to Western North Carolina.” Its stated mission is to “make investments in rural communities for the benefit of present and future generations” (Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, 2008). The BRNHA, whose mandate covers the same twenty-five counties studied for the Western North Carolina Vitality Index (see Appendix A), operates with a modest budget, but helps to facilitate grant writing and distribution to local development and preservation projects.
By conceiving of the entire region an interrelated economic and cultural entity, the BRNHA has proved that combining and coordinating existing initiatives can actually empower local, rural individuals and communities without sacrificing cultural and economic identity. The BRP and the BRNHA already share a facility at the Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Center in Asheville and share the goal of promoting tourism centered on appreciating the Blue Ridge Mountains’ natural and cultural heritage. Further combining the efforts by these two organizations—or a new institution tasked with facilitating the organization of a viewshed management project—could prove a powerful and unifying initiator of a viewshed-wide protection program and could provide the means for rural stakeholders to preserve economic and resource agency.

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The divide between Parkway and partners does not have to be permanent. The GMP lists more than six pages of organizations, governments, and individual interests who received, for review, an official copy of the GMP upon its release. Throughout the document, dozens of “partner” organizations are listed as resources for helping the NPS to meet various aspects of its agenda. Now a part of the landscape for nearly a century, as geographically unifying element, the Parkway should evolve into a coordinator of region-wide efforts coordinate tourism, local sustainable enterprises, and conservation efforts. While the Parkway has endured budget shortfalls and lacks the capacity to preserve the viewshed on its own, a viewshed organizing initiative would benefit from the gravitas and potential financial resources of a federal government entity.
Chapter Three—Participation in a Parkway Landscape Commons

“Conservation, without a keen realization of its vital conflicts, fails to rate as authentic human drama. It falls to the level of a mere utopian dream.”—Aldo Leopold (1937)

While the General Management Plan takes important steps toward planning for better future coordination with surrounding communities and stakeholders, I believe that the NPS fails to plan for the necessary growth of the Parkway’s role within the surrounding region. Because of persistent economic trends and viewshed threats—whose root causes extend back well-into the twentieth century—and because mountain communities have proven to be effective and essential partners in protecting the region’s resources, applying two fundamental shifts to how the NPS and other policy-makers regard the Parkway viewshed can better assure its future protection.

First, the National Parks Service, communities along the Parkway, and managers of other adjacent state and federal lands must accept that the Parkway is a part of a broader landscape and manage it as such. The NPS has integrated awareness of its place in a broader landscape into the Parkway mission. According to the GMP (2013):

The Blue Ridge Parkway incorporates innovative and enduring design, engineering, and construction techniques that harmonize with the southern Appalachian landscape. The Blue Ridge Parkway is a linear park unit threaded by a road in which visitor driving and enjoyment of scenery is the primary objective. The Blue Ridge Parkway is a human manipulated environment that continues to shape parkway management practices (p. 11).

Because the Blue Ridge Parkway is a part of an ecological, cultural, and economic region, it must be managed in coordination with those landscape. Research indicates that landscape-scale planning and management enables policy-makers to better employ resources and strategies in an integrated manner that reflects the interconnectedness, magnitude, and complexity of economic, cultural, and natural systems.
Second, both the NPS and surrounding communities should accept that the Parkway viewshed is a shared resource, for which the responsibility of management falls on both the NPS and the broader Blue Ridge commons. By accepting that the viewshed is a common-pool resource (CPR), held collectively by the entire landscape, we can also acknowledge that the traditional, top-down PA-model of conservation and development is too exclusive. Instead, CPR management planning and strategies must include and incorporate cooperative efforts by a broader spectrum of stakeholders and interests.

The challenges then become identifying those stakeholders and determining how to best incorporate them into future viewshed preservation efforts. Past and present viewshed threats indicate that rural communities and property owners—especially those with private forests and agricultural land—must be granted more agency and should more dynamically participate in providing for the viewshed’s future. By prioritizing participation as a means to engage and include previously underrepresented Parkway stakeholders, future viewshed management plans can incorporate participatory strategies and lessons learned from both conservation and development projects from across the globe.

The Parkway Landscape

Researchers of biodiversity, ecology, and resource systems increasingly understand that these systems are neither static nor separate. As a result, models for conservation have shifted toward understanding systems on a landscape, or “ecoregional” scale. Landscape-scale conservation planning, however, is difficult to define because “landscape” is not a precisely quantifiable space. In general, environmental landscapes, or “ecoregions,” refer to a connected geographic space with shared biodiversity and unifying and related ecological processes that might consider human boundaries but are not limited by them (Trombulak & Baldwin, 2010).
Glennon and Didier (2010) define “landscape,” in an environmental context, as “an area sufficient in size, composition, and configuration to support at least one ecologically functional population of all conservation features for the long term” (p. 374). Omernik (2004) defines ecoregions as “areas of similarity regarding patterns in the mosaic of biotic, abiotic, aquatic, and terrestrial ecosystem components, with humans being considered part of the biota” (p. S32).

Southern Appalachia is one such ecooregion, and the Parkway landscape reminds us that the resources that it contains spans political, cultural, infrastructure, and certainly PA boundaries (Brody & Pelton, 1998; Goetz, Jantz, & Jantz, 2009; Trombulak & Baldwin 2010). To affect and conserve the ecology of the Parkway landscape in a manner consistent with the NPS’s own environmental mandate, and so that conservation does not end at park borders, they must plan at a scale that considers habitat size, wildlife movement and migration, regional environmental history, interruptions to connectivity, and shifting resource use trends (Wells, 2010; Nislow, Marks, & Lutz, 2010; Ray, 2010).

In understanding the viewshed through the lens of landscape scale conservation, preventing fragmentation through the preservation of private forests, agricultural lands, and other properties becomes even more important (Surasinghe & Baldwin, 2014). Transboundary conservation efforts suffer from a range of problems beyond the scope and complexity of ecological systems, ranging from competing economic interests, overlapping bureaucratic structures, and the need to build local cooperation. As such, it is difficult to gather and share information, even with modern technology improving mapping, data collection, and electronic communication and databases (Woolmer, 2010). Implementing landscape-scale conservation requires cooperation between public lands, private landowners, and other area interests. However, because private landowners and rural communities bring a different set of values and
understandings to conservation, strategies need to incorporate human factors and regional coordination into landscape-scale initiatives (Omernik, 2004, Jodice & Suryan, 2010).

By describing viewshed degradation as a principal threat to the Parkway’s existence and ability to meet its core mandates, the NPS highlights the importance of developing new community relationships to better coordinate viewshed management in the more the 500,000 acres of private land visible from the Parkway. With their development of the 2008 Scenery Conservation System Guidebook and the use of the Visual Resource Inventory (see Appendix C), Parkway management understands the importance of the surrounding landscape, and the need to proactively address viewshed threats (General Management Plan, 2013, p. 182-183). However, the NPS has limited their use of these tools by focusing primarily on the Parkway and the viewshed as a singular, scenic entity.

Parkway policy has traditionally avoided meddling in viewshed affairs, and instead, for decades has focused on the viewshed as a primarily visual entity to be enjoyed by visitors. This scenic priority is why Parkway is managed as a limited-access, recreational—rather than commercial—road. Even when the GMP does invoke the term “landscape” in reference to ecological and cultural aspects of the Parkway, it does so almost always in reference to scenic values. For example, when describing the threat of residential development to viewshed quality, the GMP explains, “[t]he parkway was designed as a park without visual boundaries, in response to the congressional intent to provide a scenic and recreational driving experience from which visitors could view the landscapes of the central and southern Appalachian Mountains” (p. 38).

In reference to cultural landscapes—again with a focus on the visual—another GMP section explains that plans will “rehabilitate and/or restore cultural landscape resources to the extent feasible. This could entail restoring important historic viewsheds through manual
thinning, rehabilitating agricultural fields and orchards, removing noncontributing and incompatible structures, and incorporating new additions using compatible design” (p. 96). Similarly, the “Brief Description of the Park” section hints at a broader ecological focus when explaining that the park “protects significant mountain landscapes far beyond the shoulders of the road itself” (p. 4), before, again, reiterating the need to protect natural spaces for the purpose of preserving visual experiences. Assigning such preeminence to scenic landscape value limits consideration of other interpretations regarding how other stakeholders derive value from the landscape. If viewed through only the lens of scenic quality the viewshed can only be sustained in one manner at the sacrifice of other landscape components. Planning with a singular interpretation of “landscape” will lead to the erroneous assumption that by protecting one element, entire landscapes are protected.

While the GMP planning initiatives show an awareness of multiple systems that operate outside its borders, it falls short of recognizing the dynamism of the surrounding landscape. By separating different landscape systems, the NPS limits its ability to manage the viewshed in a way that reflects what Antrop (2005) considers a necessity in modern, rural landscapes:

Vanishing traditional rural landscapes can be sustained with different objectives, such as preserving ecological functioning and diversity, continuing or reintroducing traditional practices that proved to be sustainable, maintaining and enhancing the quality of life for the local population to prevent land abandonment. In areas of increasingly intensive land use and concentration of people and activities, new landscapes must be designed to fit the multifunctional use of space in a more sustainable manner (p. 195).

The lands that make up the BRP viewshed are as much a landscape of human interaction with the land as they are an unspoiled natural setting. For much of its existence, however, Parkway policy has been more narrowly focused, and deemphasized rural landowners’ interests and values, despite their social and emotional interest in preserving more than just the landscape’s scenery.
Imperative, then, to preserve the Parkway as a part of an integrated landscape, policy-makers must relinquish the singular visual conception of the landscape.

We should not, however, condemn or simply ignore the obvious value of scenic beauty to the Parkway or those within the landscape. Amenity values are also shapers of culture, identity, and human interactions with their natural spaces (Tahvanainen, Tyrväinen, Ihalainen, Vuorela, Kolehmainen, 2001; Mather, 2001; Cho et al, 2009). The scenic landscape is a fundamental part of the Parkway’s existence and the primary way with which visitors interact with the park. However, an overemphasis on the scenic views as an entity to be managed from within the park, rather than as a part of a larger mixed scenic-pastoral landscape, has inhibited more effective management of the Parkway viewshed. We must, then, determine how that visual landscape derives and provides value to stakeholders, and who those stakeholders are. Only then, can policy-makers develop strategies that preserve the viewshed in a way that integrates cultural, economic, and ecological systems.

Because the viewshed holds great economic, natural, and even cultural value, those values need not be regarded as separate. Instead, we can use social reactions to and perceptions of a landscape’s scenic beauty as a means to determine and affect land-use values and priorities. We can then use that knowledge to build consensus—or spotlight disparities—among otherwise competing interests in shaping viewshed preservation policy (Ribe, 2002). Agnoletti (2006) believes that conservation of dynamic landscapes should recognize the intersection between natural spaces and the people and entities who interact with them. He emphasizes that “a more modern concept considers cultural landscapes to be the expression of historical integration between social, economic and environmental factors, influencing all aspects of development” (p. xi). Page (2015) explains, “armed with an understanding of a landscape’s significance, existing
conditions, and historic character, we can play a critical role as problem solvers within a larger context of resource management” (p. 69). Accepting the interrelation of landscapes thus improves the likelihood that we can preserve them.

Ray (2010) finds that cultural and economic landscapes overlap with scenic and environmental landscapes, necessitating a far more dynamic understanding of the region in determining how to proceed in order to preserve an intact viewshed. This holds, then, that the same economic and ecological threats that endanger to rural, agricultural properties in the Parkway landscape also jeopardize the Blue Ridge’s cultural landscape (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016). There is growing consensus that in rural Appalachia and elsewhere, to undertake landscape-scale management planners need to move away from top-down models—in which PAs and other central authorities dictate regulatory, conservation, and development priorities and practices—and instead shift towards management frameworks that are more inclusive (Reid & Taylor, 2002; Squires, 2000; Brick et al., 2000; Pretty & Smith 2004; Dilsaver & Wycoff 2005; Jansujwicz & Calhoun, 2010).

Rural countrysides have aesthetic and social value because they are places where humans and nature achieve cohesion. Existing limitations of both privatization and government management in balancing viewshed exploitation, resource conservation, and components of rural heritage, suggest tailoring management regimes to specific, scenic, resource scenarios (Pallarès-Branch, 2009). Since both the economic and amenity value gained from the scenic landscape might be lost if the natural landscape is destroyed, natural and social capital need be considered in planning for future land-use and the evolution of the landscape (Antrop, 2006). Achieving a decentralized approach to landscape-scale management requires targeting cooperative outreach to local residents, tourism enterprises, and conservation initiatives, which can help to bring
together stakeholders that might otherwise compete for resource use (Prados, 2009; Lourenço, Quental, & Barros, 2009). Collaboration was at the heart of the scenic parkway ideal the led to the Parkway’s construction, and perhaps more so now than in the 1930s, the NPS need to act as a more unifying influence throughout the landscape.

However, especially in rural and natural areas close to population centers, it is difficult to balance top-down and bottom-up planning in overlapping and threatened cultural landscapes. Angelstam (2006) suggests that small and large-scale enterprises should work cooperatively to prevent fragmentation, and sustainable land management must incorporate diverse stakeholders representing multiple regional identities and interests. Until recently NPS policy has not considered, or has exploited and misrepresented, the value of the viewshed’s rural identity (see Chapter One). Instead, Agnoletti (2006) suggests that those identities and qualities should utilized to incorporate regional history and culture into multidisciplinary viewshed preservation efforts. Baldwin (2010) explains that landscape-scale planning requires both engaging and empowering stakeholders beyond the typical decision-makers and facilitating active cooperation by those stakeholders.

Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000) recommend that because of the need to extend resource management outside park boundaries, federal mangers should decentralize decision making, identify key stakeholders, and embrace community interests and collaboration. Firth (2005) also believes that outreach to, and partnerships with, local landowners and stakeholders is likely the only way to preserve the scenic, natural, and cultural heritage of the Parkway viewshed. In short, if previous land-management shortcomings are to be addressed and related systems are to be approached at a landscape-scale, efforts to manage the landscape need to become more inclusive of those who to this point have been excluded (Blank, 2006).
Identifying Stakeholders

Research into the preservation of cultural landscapes holds that individual and community “conceptions of place” can be powerful factors in defining how both residents and visitors envision future land-use, react to development trends, and prioritize viewshed sustainability (Stedman, 2005). To responsibly combat sprawl and simultaneously promote conservation and rural ideals requires an approach that matches the scope and scale of the problem. Because the scenic and natural amenity values are intertwined with the economic value of the rural viewshed, any plan managing the viewshed in an equitable way must consider its social value economic value to stakeholders (Antrop, 2006). Otherwise, planners risk losing important human capital and public sentiment in both conservation and development efforts (Métaillé, 2006). Key to that change is identifying stakeholders who can and will affect local change and capitalizing on those residents’ and visitors’ willingness to protect the existing viewshed for reasons beyond economic motivations.

If the viewshed is to be preserved as a defining characteristic of regional rural identity, as a valuable and sustainable economic resource, and as a means to conserve regional biodiversity, it needs to be protected by rural stakeholders who both derive value from, and bear the management costs of, its scenic value. If NPS planners and local interests are to benefit from landscape scale management, they must come together in collaborative understanding of what the viewshed means to each stakeholder in the context of shifting economic, cultural, and environmental realities (Squires, 2000). If the rural landscape has aesthetic value to landowners and tourists, then the potential hazards of sprawl and development on the lands around the parkway become inextricably tied to the vitality of the Parkway itself. Because both visitors and landowners in the viewshed value its natural and cultural heritage and have indicated a
willingness to bear some of the human and financial costs of its protection, preservation-minded policy should engage these stakeholders on economic, environmental, and cultural terms.

For tourists, the characteristics that they value are similarly clear. In a 2003 survey completed for the Blue Ridge Parkway Association, researchers concluded that North Carolina parkway tourists spent an average of over $600 per trip on goods and services along the Parkway. Visitors overwhelmingly cited scenic views and access to vistas as their primary purpose for visiting and the greatest source of enjoyment. They also indicated that they would be far less likely to visit, or would dramatically reduce spending, if the landscape was altered or roadside scenic quality and overlook vistas were degraded or reduced (Mathews et al., 2003).

However, with the increased trend toward outdoor recreation in PAs and forested spaces in the region, while scenic tourists prefer a mixed landscape of natural features and small clearings, recreational visitors place greater value on more natural spaces (Tahvanainen et al., 2001). Increasing awareness of, access to, especially the personal and economic benefits of a broad range of priority recreational experiences, sites of great scenic value, and other experiential opportunities (i.e. cultural and heritage sites, access to regional crafts and goods, concessions and lodging, and other economic opportunities) can have a profound effect on visitor preferences and the popularity of different locations (Kil, Holland, & Stein, 2015). This means that even disparate visitor preferences and values can be incorporated in a wide range of existing BRP management priorities without undermining viewshed management.

Nationwide, visitors to natural parks and forests have also indicated a preference for managed, pastoral views that mix open and forested spaces (Clay & Daniel, 2000). They prefer vistas that are unobstructed, feature forests framing either water features or pastoral land, and multiple ridge/mountain views with layered depth to the horizon (Hammitt, Patterson, & Noe,
These values are consistent with decades of NPS efforts to manipulate and frame the landscape as bucolic and pastoral, rather than natural or wild. They are also consistent with the characteristics of the landscape that rural residents want to protect.

Landowners display similar social and emotional attachment to, and affinity for, rural land, and complex understandings of the value of scenic viewsheds. Surveys show that Appalachian property owners have a growing environmental consciousness and rank preservation of amenity values, outdoor recreation, and biodiversity more highly than making a profit from their land (Bolgiano, 1998, p. 260). Regional landowners have also expressed a direct interest in learning more about how to better sustain landscape resources, and leaders of viewshed preservation efforts must figure out how to facilitate that learning (Hull, Kendra, & Robertson, 2001). Hull, Kendra, & Robertson (2001) found that in Southern Appalachia, residents’ attitudes about natural spaces, resource sustainability, and identity indicate that diverse residents assign great value to forest health, and the cultural, economic, and community benefits attributed to natural spaces. Given the opportunity to assess natural spaces and to speak openly about the contributions to individual and community, respondents focused on mutual identity and benefits over those of the individual. Although this deep association to place can engender group thinking and resistance to change, local residents’ attachment to place and the resources within it can also result in a powerful impetus to protect landscapes and the resources within—even at the cost of financial gain or other opportunity (Cheng, Kruger, & Daniels, 2003; Agnoletti, 2006).

These same trends play out in rural landscape across the country. For example, in analyzing the results of a survey of lakeside residents in Wisconsin, Stedman (2005) generalizes important trends of human interaction with natural space in vacation destinations, finding that dynamic landscape affinity figures strongly into preserving rural amenity values:
Harder to justify through conventional science are impacts of changing land use practices on less tangible aspects of human quality of life: satisfaction and attachment to place; valued social relationships; aesthetic value; and participation in favorite activities. Because they are harder to measure, these aspects have often been neglected as discursive strategies for opposing changing land use practices (Stedman 2005, 120).

Further research done by Blank (2006) and Brain, Hostetler, and Irani (2014) shows that rural landowners—even when under financial pressure—express and attachment to place and pride in local landscapes which increases their valuation of their own land and its rural qualities. This can encourage them to practice environmental stewardship and take part in conservation initiatives.

Both landowners’ and visitors’ attitudes toward the local communities and affinity for the region’s scenic and natural qualities indicate a willingness to preserve the viewshed even if it means incurring greater individual cost or limiting some economic opportunity. Viewshed preservation policy should capitalize on visitors’ and local landowners’ energy and willingness to participate more dynamically in efforts to protect the natural landscape and use their dollars to support local rural cultural and economic enterprises. Doing so requires developing an understanding between policy-makers and local stakeholders that prioritizes the current economically viability of existing properties, and also guarantees the long-term protection of existing amenity values.

The Viewshed as a Common-Pool Resource

I believe that in the case of the Parkway landscape, engaging stakeholders and moving away from a top-down model requires abandoning the perception that the viewshed exists within a patchwork of ownership. If the Parkway’s future is to be more fully integrated into the broader fate of the landscape, then the primary resource from which the Parkway and the landscape derive value—the scenic viewshed—needs to be held in common by viewshed stakeholders. By
conceiving of the viewshed as a common-pool resource, we recognize that appropriators value and depend on the viewshed, and that all have an interest in its long-term preservation. Because the viewshed is a common-pool resource, the responsibility for the provision and protection of that resource falls on not just the Parkway, but on all stakeholders within the landscape.

By approaching the Parkway viewshed as a common-pool resource we create a different management paradigm for which new strategies can be identified and evaluated. This requires accepting the viewshed’s subtractibility/rivalness and the fact that property rights, financial incentives, and non-exclusiveness can encourage the type of free-riding that has led to regional land-use changes. Only then can we identify applicable CPR frameworks for addressing those problems and derive strategies from those frameworks for viewshed management. Because (a) at a landscape-scale, so many stakeholders’ property and civic rights grant them access to and interest in the viewshed, and (b) the resource itself is limited, regarding the landscape as a commons further enhances the landscape approach to viewshed management by making possible the application of commons-based resource governance (Ostrom, 1990).

Healy (1994) recognizes this common-landscape dilemma across rural scenarios like that in the Parkway viewshed, where scenic and economic value are linked: “The agricultural landscape provides a significant draw for tourists, yet there is little incentive to the agriculturist to continue to provide the landscape service unless agricultural profitability alone would justify it” (p. 600). Healy’s explanation continues:

In short, tourism landscapes and other background tourism elements are frequently subject to characteristic problems of common pool resources—a tendency toward overuse and a lack of incentive for individuals to invest in maintaining or improving them. This characteristic seems to be responsible for the oft-noted decline in the quantity and quality of such resources in many parts of the world. In addition to providing a diagnosis for this decline, identifying certain tourism resources as common pool resources suggests some strategies for overcoming the problem through use of various property rights regimes. (1994, p. 600)
Similarly, Manning (2007) explores carrying-capacity in conservation-minded public lands and determines that they should also be addressed as common-pool. The implication of Healy’s and Manning’s work is that a broad spectrum of visual and other amenity resources of landscapes which are subject to tourism can, and perhaps should, be managed as CPRs.

While the viewshed and other landscapes may seem a far cry from Hardin’s (1968) famous commons example of the shared grazing pasture, more modern interpretations of the commons accept that commonly-held resources can occur on larger scales and in much more diverse contexts than once thought. In their collection of essays on modern CPRs, *The Commons in the New Millennium* (2003), Dolšak, Ostrom, and others argue that in an increasingly complicated and integrated world, resources which are held as common property are more complex than traditionally local CPRs, but still require the same collective management as a local pasture. Globally, others have explored PA resources and spaces as CPRs in overlapping social and environmental contexts, suggesting that this approach is of fundamental importance for balancing tourism, conservation, and land-use agendas. Multiple studies of PAs (e.g., Burns, Arnberger, & von Ruschkowski, 2010; Duzgunes & Demirel, 2016; Cupul-Magaña & Rodríguez-Troncoso, 2017) find that applying CPR principles to park management can help to frame dilemmas regarding visitation rates and spatial and ecological carrying capacities—especially in combatting declining visual qualities in the face of public access and subtractibility.

Regarding the Parkway viewshed, because it is dominated both by public lands and private property rights regimes, the effects of this scenic resource decline is felt by a broad range of stakeholders across the landscape. This leads to the cyclical problem, described above by Healy, in which the effects are exacerbated by the very nature of the landscape and the resource-use (spelled out in greater detail in fig. 3.1). If considered a CPR at the scale and complexity of
the viewshed—and the unique dilemma faced by scenic, rural landscapes, it suggests that common-property regimes, or elements of common-property regimes, be adopted in coordination with either public or private management of the viewshed (Healy, 1994). Newfont (2012) proposes that this dilemma has occurred in the Blue Ridge Mountains for generations. Because of the broad emotional, social, and material value of Blue Ridge Mountain forests to residents and other stakeholders in western North Carolina, she argues that use of the region’s forests should be regulated with CPR principles in mind. I believe that also accurately defines the integrated, natural, human, and scenic landscape in the Parkway viewshed.

**Fig 3.1 shows cyclical effects that befall high amenity value landscapes in the face of population increase, development, and changing land-use (Prados, 2009, p. 12)**

![Diagram showing cyclical effects of population increase, development, and changing land-use]

We have thus seen that including and engaging with local stakeholders and communities is imperative for a dynamic landscape approach to viewshed management (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000; Squires, 2000; Firth, 2005; Angelstam, 2006; Baldwin, 2010). We also know that cooperative and sustainable management of CPRs—especially in complex, socio-ecological systems—requires elements of self-governance and stakeholder involvement and input (Ostrom, 1990, Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003; Ostrom 2009). We must then explore how future viewshed preservation initiatives can better incorporate those stakeholders and encourage them to work collectively. Based on a growing body of research into such scenarios, I suggest that
future plans for development and conservation within the viewshed prioritize a concept called “participation” as the in facilitating stakeholder involvement in a viewshed-wide preservation.

Participation

In the second half of the twentieth century, participation emerged as a popular tool for projects hoping to improve upon traditional top-down models for the provision of rights, goods, services, and investments in a post-colonial world. Non-profit corporations and IGOs filled the role of colonial governments and delivered aid where it was needed most, because political and economic centers often lacked the ability or willingness to provide services to link rural communities increasingly left behind by a globalizing economy (Cornwall, 2000). In 1968, Hardin famously warned that either centralization or privatization were necessary to combat the “tragedy of the commons.” Accordingly, in developing contexts where private property regimes either did not exist or did not equitably combat poverty, the predominant method of aid delivery and resource management followed of top-down, centralized models.

In the 1980s and 1990s, however, a number of challenges to Hardin’s binary emerged and undermined the prevailing wisdom that collective action could not effectively manage resource delivery and serve as means of organizing civic engagement. “Arstein’s ladder” (1969) provided a linkage between citizen participation and civic power, and others like Sen (1995) further explored collective decision making as a means of improving group outcomes. These changes influenced research into collective action as a means of improving development and resource management outcomes. Ostrom’s (1990) work in CPR management strategies, employed in isolated contexts around the world, indicated that, so long as stakeholders actively participated in the design and execution of strategies, common property regimes could, in fact, effectively manage sustainable resource use and delivery. In the 1990s, in search of a way to combat
inefficiencies in aid and poverty-reduction projects, the World Bank, other NGOs, and national
governments invested millions into improving stakeholder participation (Mansuri & Rao, 2004).

What exactly is stakeholder participation? Most simply, defined by Cohen and Uphoff (1980), it refers to “the involvement of a significant number of persons in situations or actions which enhance their well-being, e.g. their income, security or self-esteem” (p. 214). The
fundamental idea posits that though economic theories assume that resource users default to their
own self-interests in exploiting available resources, in communities (commons) where users are
mutually dependent on that resource’s availability and sustainability, collective management
strategies will often emerge that prevent Hardin’s “tragedy.” While Ostrom’s work in the 1990s
focused on understanding existing CPR scenarios, others have applied her and Chambers’ (1983)
research into participation-based, bottom-up development as a strategy for more equitably
managing the costs and benefits of threatened common resources (Mansuri & Rao, 2004).

In participatory frameworks the application of stakeholder participation can take many
forms. In fact, in developing the GMP the NPS already applied participatory methods. Required
by the National Environmental Policy Act, NPS held public comment and feedback periods to
allow interested parties to review the GMP, raise concerns, and suggest changes to the document
before its final release (General Management Plan, 2013, p. 509-530). Allowing this type of
participation at beginning and end of planning phases can be an effective way to reach an array
of stakeholders, gain insights into local values, and capitalize on stakeholder knowledge. If
participants accept that their feedback has been heard and valued, they are more likely to accept
plans or positively react to ultimate management decisions (Beierle & Cayford, 2002).

But the more complex the CPR, and the more dedicated to stakeholder involvement a
common property regime is, the more multifaceted and active participation must be. Put simply,
complex CPR management requires more—and better—participation. With the GMP, the NPS has not yet outlined a set of plans for how to incorporate more dynamic participation beyond public feedback and building ad hoc partnerships. Thus, we need to take a closer look at how and why participation can be better used in viewshed preservation (General Management Plan, 2013). Specific participation strategies are as diverse as the scenarios and contexts to which they are applied. Common forms of participation include discussion and deliberative based methods like public meetings and comments, focus groups, citizen advisory committees, and citizen juries (Chess & Purcell, 1999; Konisky & Beierle, 2001). Other, more active participatory strategies involve participants in research, the long-term evaluation of resource management systems, and in institutions that regulate, monitor, and even punish resource users (Ostrom, 1990; Hage, Leroy, & Petersen, 2009; Luyet et al., 2012). Participation can also happen less directly, through actions like voting or taking part in local governance (Blair, 2000).

While the definition of participation is non-specific, and because each CPR scenario is unique, how stakeholders participate does not fit into a strict set of rules or definitions. There is, however, general acceptance among those who study and apply participatory strategies that participatory tools fall into a few different engagement categories. Cohen and Uphoff (1980) listed four entry points for participation in development projects: decision-making, implementation, benefits, and evaluation (p. 219). More recently, in updating Arnstein’s “ladder of citizen participation” (1969)—which has long provided planners with a checklist of types of participatory engagement—Tippett, Handley, and Ravetz (2007) list five participation types:

- inform—information provision and communication;
- design—active engagement in developing options and plans;
- consult—consultation to elicit response to options and plans;
- deliver—community devolved implementation and management of plans;
- monitor—review of effectiveness, learning cycle to incorporate learning from implementation (p. 19).
These participation types have been applied across a wide spectrum of contexts and types of CPRs, and also—consistent with the stages and types of participation listed above—a multiplicity of entry points in CPR projects.

This provides a valuable body of research for managers of a complex CPR like the viewshed. For example, Stewart et al. (2009) found that in projects designed to address public health concerns in Mississippi Delta region, information-sharing and public discussion at the outset of planning helped to improve consensus about what problems community projects should address. In rural Mexico, Valencia-Sandoval, Flanders, and Kozak (2009) showed that generating and using stakeholder participation for in discussion, research, and feedback regarding site evaluation helped to build landscape-wide consensus for agenda-setting and options for addressing both environmental and socioeconomic land-use concerns.

Elsewhere, the International Fund for Agricultural Development empowered local stakeholder to participate in project implementation and monitoring, which has improved water resource management in local CPRs across the developing world (Office of Evaluation and Studies, 2001). The World Bank has found that after cooperative planning and knowledge-sharing, participation at other stages of development has helped to improve relationships between local communities, central government, and non-profit entities in various rural contexts (Mansuri and Rao, 2013). Because of the complexity of the Parkway viewshed landscape, regional social and economic heterogeneity, and overlapping—and oppositional—economic and environmental issues, it is important that contextual, scale, and strategy multiplicity has proven that improving viewshed management via participation is plausible in diverse scenarios.

Participation should not, however, be treated as cure-all for effective CPR management, and future Parkway planners must understand that participation is neither a panacea for
improving stakeholder satisfaction, nor a guarantee that resource management will improve (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980). A number of legitimate concerns exist about the motivations for, and the efficacy of, participation in achieving goals for decentralization. For one, assuming that participation will effectively offset central management costs can lead to underfunded or unprofitable participatory projects. Also, projects that are too focused on one aspect of a CPR (e.g. its profitability, its ecological significance, or its amenity values) can create alienate some stakeholders and emphasize the participation of some stakeholders over others (Campbell & Vainio-Mattila, 2003). Others caution against participation being used as a proxy for central power, for redistributing the financial or human burden of management onto stakeholder, or for the forced implementation of an exogenous agenda (Mansuri & Rao, 2004).

Another common problem in participatory projects is they can assume homogeneity among stakeholders or community members. Especially because participation is a means of decentralizing power from an exogenous authority, project designers and agenda setters with limited knowledge of local contexts might exacerbate existing socioeconomic disparities or may have unrealistic expectations of participation for marginalized and culturally isolated members of stakeholder groups (Cleaver, 1999; Mompati & Prinsen, 2000). Cornwall (2000), effectively summarizes the need to understand project context, and the perils of not doing so:

While ‘invited participation’ has opened up spaces for popular engagement in the development process, the challenge ahead lies in recognising that poverty and exclusion cannot be tackled simply by enlisting participants in projects, programmes or processes. Nor do the answers lie in an uncritical celebration of ‘people’s organisations’ as the new intermediaries. Rather greater attention needs to be paid both to enabling people to make and shape their own spaces for engagement and to processes to enhance the accountability of local and global institutions that affect people’s lives. With this, participation comes to mean more than taking up invitations extended by others. (Cornwall, 2000, p. 13)
Perhaps most importantly, it is imperative to accept that participation is not a goal, nor it is not a specific process. Participation is a tool for building more effective and inclusive strategies for creating CPR management and rights regimes.

Participation should be used as a starting point. If the outcome, rather than dedication to participation, drives strategy then projects are likely to generate dissatisfaction from a sizeable proportion of stakeholder (Uphoff 1992; Brody 2003). Even if a project evolves out of general consensus, as with viewshed preservation, the design for managing the resource cannot be predetermined. Those strategies should emerge from the participation, regardless of anticipated outcomes. Uphoff (1992) explains that potential for failure can actually strengthen a process. If participation is the focus, then important learning and fortification of institutions can happen if stakeholders bear the responsibility for common property. Given the rapid state of viewshed deterioration and nearly a century of shortcomings in distributing viewshed benefits, process—rather than a fear of failure—should be the primary concern.

Despite the risks, in the context of Parkway viewshed management, it is critical to consider and incorporate participation into future management for three key reasons. First, and perhaps most obvious, is that the General Management Plan already includes participatory elements. In addition to outlining the need to develop partnerships and coordinate planning throughout the GMP, the NPS has already used participatory strategies for addressing concerns and soliciting stakeholder feedback. In the “Consultation and Coordination” chapter of the GMP, the NPS outlines a number of ways—both required by law and as a matter of good practice—that public participation was incorporated into the GMP’s formulation: “The public had three primary avenues for participation during the development of the plan: participation in public meetings, responses to newsletters, and comments submitted by way of the NPS planning website and
regular mail” (2013, p. 493). Of particular value to the viewshed, the GMP explains that this process exposed widespread concern for the incursion of sprawl and fragmentation into natural and scenic spaces—a primary reason why the NPSs elevated viewshed preservation among the future Parkway concerns.

Second, the scope of the Parkway’s mandate and the effects of increasingly strained national park budgets, requires including relevant stakeholders and partners to undertake a more integrated approach to landscape management. Because of budgetary restrictions, the Parkway and other regional PAs are already dependent on supplementary funding and manpower provided by local non-profit organizations and “friends” groups (Kays, 2018). Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000) suggest that federal resource management agencies, like the NPS and administrators of individual parks, should seek out means for collaboration with stakeholders and involve both employees and local stakeholders in participatory exercises to helping manage resources beyond park boundaries. Again, decentralization, comes with risks, ranging from inefficiency, to difficulty in consensus-building, and exacerbating existing social inequalities or divisions. Participation can mitigate these potential shortcomings (Phillips, Carvalho, & Doyle, 2012), and because at landscape scale resource management requires involvement and coordination of local stakeholders, participatory strategies have great value as a planning tool (Yaffee, 1996).

Finally, because of the diversity of values in the viewshed landscape, we must work towards mutually agreeable outcomes that address threats to the viewshed from conservation, preservation, and development perspectives. With those priorities in mind, Parkway managers and other regional interests must include previously underrepresented stakeholders who also wish to preserve the landscape. Without dynamic outreach, proactive efforts to intervene in resource uses that limit aspects of economic growth might not naturally, or universally, be well-
received by low-income or resource-dependent communities. In situations in which competing interests might potentially prevent consensus, it is important for stakeholders to come together and learn from one another so as to build empathy and trust (Daniels & Walker, 2001).

Applicable Frameworks

Most commonly, projects and studies regarding stakeholder participation focus on development. The most common model in participatory development research addresses local distribution of a resource in exchange for labor or some other form of involvement in resource management (Pretty & Smith, 2004). In his landmark study of irrigation systems management in Sri Lanka, Uphoff (1990) introduced stakeholder participation as a foundational principle of collective CPR management. Stakeholder participation, Uphoff contended, was essential to stakeholder empowerment. He hypothesized that by emphasizing empowerment and agency—even in imperfect, or slowly developing, management plans—over time, projects would ultimately lead to more sustainable and equitable CPR management. The need to institute a management strategy that is more equitable across geographic and class disparities is essential to halting the sprawl and fragmentation that plague the viewshed.

A potential concern about implementing participatory strategies in the viewshed is that simply including stakeholders does not ease the management of resources at a landscape-scale. In her analysis of water basin management California, however, Ostrom (1990) found that even in larger communities under established, centralized governments, collective action approaches to CPR scenarios reflect many of the same basic characteristics of successful management as rural projects. In fact, Ostrom found that the existence of stable regional governance can provide an important foundation for the collective management of complex resources.
Since the emergence of participation in the second half of the twentieth century, lessons and strategies gleaned from projects in the developing world have increasingly been applied in a wider spectrum of CPR contexts and scenarios beyond just development project (Reed, 2008). Participation has been used as a means for improving education, anthropological research, and even decentralizing civic governance. For example, Blair (2000) describes “Democratic Local Governance” as a means to improve civic engagement in contexts where local citizens traditionally do not participate in governance, or central authority—or lack thereof—might inhibit citizen empowerment.

In considering participatory frameworks for Parkway viewshed management, it is encouraging that participatory strategies have been used to address a wide array of CPR scenarios. But because there are integrated conservation and development threats to the viewshed, and the Parkway landscape stakeholders are not unified in their priorities, there is some risk in decentralizing in a non-cohesive manner. Fortunately, participatory projects have been shown to effectively address both conservation and development, and can be tailored to address the concerns of heterogenous communities.

The two most common applications of participation in CPR management continue to be in development and, increasingly, conservation. Often driven by investment from international NGOs and built upon participation’s ability to foment local responsibility for civic outcomes, community-based and community-driven development (CBD and CDD) projects have increased the agency of local communities by encouraging participation in designing and providing resources for their own developmental projects. In recent years, the World Bank alone has invested billions of dollars in community-based projects. The emphasis on community in these frameworks reflects more than just decentralization, but also an understanding that contexts are
not isolated, nor are they homogenous (Mansuri and Rao, 2004 & 2013). In the last two decades, participatory development studies and projects have shown that the same principles of empowerment and access can be applied to underserved communities in modern, developed economies like that of the United States (Prokopy & Castelloe, 1999; Kohl-Arenas, 2011). It is in this overlap at the local level—based on common dedication to community—that the application of participatory strategies to Parkway viewshed management becomes clearer.

This emphasis on community in participatory frameworks shares its roots with conservation efforts. Community-based conservation (CBC) projects evolved from criticism of PA models and narrowly focused, exogenous conservation projects supported by government agencies and conservation NGOs. Single-issue conservation projects tend to deemphasize local communities and the connectivity of ecological landscapes (Yaffee, 1996). CBC has been used as a means for coordinating conservation initiatives between PAs and local communities, independently managing conservation in PA buffer-zones, and even in scenarios that seek to decentralize conservation authority away from PAs and external conservation groups. In broad surveys of CBCs around the globe, both Yaffee (1996) and Reed (2008) found that the CBC approach, while often somewhat more restrictive—because it generally begins with the inflexible end-goal of protecting the resource, space, or ecological system in question—has regularly proven to result in improved decision-making and consensus-building in conservation programs (Brody, 2003). The importance of local community engagement and stakeholder participation to larger and more complex development and conservation projects indicates that CBD and CBC initiatives could be useful in exploring the introduction of participation to the Parkway viewshed.

The narrow, and often outcome-focused, nature of many community-based projects, however, has been fairly criticized for abandoning key participatory principles—a particular
concern for the inclusion of rural landowners and other stakeholders without traditional decision-making or agenda-setting power. In general, despite the goal of decentralized management, programs organized via government initiative or aid organizations are, by definition, top-down, and it can be difficult to shed that stigma or genuinely transfer agency to local stakeholders (Mansuri and Rao, 2004). Around the globe, where either local property rights do not exist or where individual property rights are not respected or prioritized, the benefits of conservation-based land use programs tended to favor the agendas of outsiders and elites over those of the rural poor who most depend on local resources.

The proportion of federal lands, the existence of absentee landowners, and a traditional emphasis on development investment from outside industries place the Parkway landscape at risk of these issues manifesting in an effort to include participation in future viewshed conservation. For community-based conservation to work and for local residents to willingly participate, incentives must be clear and attainable, and should be distributed in a way that prioritizes local participants (Lynch & Alcorn, 1994; Feldmann, 1994). Furthermore, conservation projects have often failed to stay true to participatory principles and decentralization because public land managers and have too often failed to address common resources beyond environmental concerns. This creates tension between resource dependent communities and conservationists. As such, regarding the viewshed and other multifaceted CPRs, there is a need to incorporate participatory development projects—which focus on stakeholder benefits—with the scale and science behind successful community conservation efforts (Campbell & Vainio-Mattila, 2003).

In response, CPR strategists have made more concerted efforts to integrate conservation and development projects, especially in contexts like the Parkway viewshed where environmental concerns and rural development needs are intertwined. A key characteristic of
such projects is that they give more attention to social and economic values when including stakeholder participants in planning and management. Integrated conservation-development projects (ICDPs) represent an important step forward in CPR management in integrated landscapes. In recent decades, ICDPs that pursue sustainable development hand-in-hand with biodiversity and resource conservation have been used in rural contexts. Drawing on local knowledge and stakeholder participation in institutional design and management has been fundamental to the success of such projects (Brooks, 2017).

Top-down initiatives have traditionally relied on separation from local communities in the creation of PAs, so as to shield them from inconsistent local policies, shifting economic contexts, funding shortages, and disparate priorities inside and outside PA boundaries. Evolving understanding of ecological systems and sustainable economies has exposed the need for cooperation and human capital from local communities to the long-term viability of PAs, and also to improvement in the condition of the communities on PA boundaries (Wells & Brandon, 1993). These realities have played out in western North Carolina, where the most successful initiatives to reshape PA policy have resulted in combined efforts by grassroots conservationists, PAs, and local community interests.

Integrated efforts like ICDPs reflect landscapes’ complexities and understand that humans and nature also interact in wider social contexts. As such, a wider array of stakeholders and experts with different values and areas of expertise work together to address a broader set of CPR-related concerns (Campbell & Vainio-Mattila, 2003). And while ICDPs do not represent a perfect solution to disparities across PA boundaries, ICDP planners recognize that where PAs persist, and rural communities depend on local resources to survive, employing the participation of resource-dependent stakeholders is essential to CPR sustainability (Brooks et al., 2006,
Brooks et al., 2012). Broader economic trends and deeply-rooted community identities have both shaped interactions between Parkway landscape residents and dictated the use of scenic resources since the Parkway was conceived. A new initiative incorporating ICDP strategies could help to navigate historical impediments to cooperation and take advantage of regional stakeholders’ deep affinity for and value of the rural landscape.

There is still not enough longitudinal research to understand the long-term efficacy of ICDPs (Brooks et al., 2006). But as Wells and Brandon (1993) so succinctly put it, “there seem to be no other choices” when it comes to managing complicated CPR scenarios (p. 162). ICDPs have been successful when well-tailored to contextual needs and characteristics, and when using useful evaluation frameworks, like that designed by Luyet, Schlaepfer, Parlange, & Buttler (2012). In particular more recent studies show increased ICDP potential in PA-adjacent communities like those along the Parkway. Previously, in and around national parks and other large PAs, intransigent conservation, sustainability, or development initiatives often led to failures to capitalize on the symbiosis of various landscape characteristic, thus alienating large subsets of landscape stakeholders—concerns that ICDPs have successfully mitigated (Di Matteo & Cavuta, 2016).

The confluence of rural poverty, amenity value-drive economic interest, and ecological conservation has created global inertia for projects promoting ecotourism and other sustainable development initiatives (Honey, 2008; Pallarès-Branch, 2009). Efforts to work more cooperatively have shown that landscape conservation and development projects can work symbiotically with PAs (Wells and Brandon, 1993, Lourenço, Quental, & Barros, 2009), especially if local stakeholders participate in planning and management. Because of this, ICDPs represent the best existing framework for combatting the threats to sustainable viewshed
development and resource management in the Parkway landscape. In reviewing a wide array of global ICDPs, especially those connecting protected areas with local communities, Wells and Brandon (1993) recommend three keys to successfully coordinating an integrated agenda within overlapping governance systems:

1- commitment from multiple-levels of government to political and legal backing for project institutions, capital for project development, and provision of necessary financial resources to supplement non-profit investment
2- communication of the importance of long-term goals and benefits to local, especially rural residents
3- effective institutions to help sustain local participation

If a Parkway viewshed ICDP can fulfill these requirements, then there is hope that a decentralized initiative can—by maximizing stakeholder commitment, agency, and benefits—better guarantee the viewshed’s future than the current management paradigm.

**Common Traits of Successful Participatory Projects**

While a dedication to stakeholder inclusion and participatory principles have been shown to improve public perception of efforts to decentralize CPR management, simply using “buzzwords” that invoke participation and stakeholder agency is ineffective. Paying lip-service to participation and stakeholder empowerment, rather than actually dedicating CPR management to those principles, can result in outcomes that devolve into factionalism and instead exacerbate the threats to resource sustainability (Cornwall & Brock, 2005). In that vein, this section identifies a number of lessons learned from surveys of participatory frameworks. Along with principles of successful ICDPs, these common characteristics of participatory design inform the recommendations proposed in the next chapter. In particular, the complex and overlapping nature of the economic, environmental, and human aspects of the viewshed require attention to common trends that apply across development, conservation, and integrated frameworks.
### Fig. 3.2: Common design principles of successful CPR management projects and strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design not outcomes</th>
<th>Successful participatory projects focus on design rather than outcomes, and employ a variety of participatory strategies at entry points throughout the planning, execution, and evaluation stages of any project. (Uphoff 1992; Chess &amp; Purcell, 1999; Brody 2003; Reed, 2008)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Context</td>
<td>Planners need to approach projects with adequate knowledge of the CPR context, (Mompati &amp; Prinsen, 2000; Botchway, 2001), so as to tailor frameworks and strategies to projects, and also so that projects can equitably distribute project benefits (Blair, 2000; Campbell and Vanio-Mattila, 2003) and ensure that an appropriately representative body of participants is included (Brody, 2003; Schenk, Hunziker, &amp; Kienast, 2007; Parkins &amp; Mitchell, 2005; Buanes et al., 2005).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Projects need to be adequately funded and provided necessary human and technological resources in the short and long-term (Dinar, Kemper, Blomquist, &amp; Kurukulasuriya, 2006; Mandarano, 2008; Seixas &amp; Davy, 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and Knowledge-Sharing</td>
<td>Developing strategies for effective communication is paramount. Communication is necessary for establishing project parameters, conflict resolution, sharing scientific and local knowledge, and for building trust and social capital among participants/stakeholders, and (Konisky &amp; Beierle, 2001; Campbell and Vanio-Mattila, 2003; Dolšak &amp; Ostrom, 2003; Agrawal &amp; Gupta, 2003; Parkins &amp; Mitchell, 2005; Hernandez &amp; Kempton, 2003; Pretty &amp; Smith, 2004; Reed, 2008; Mandarano, 2008; Glennon &amp; Didier, 2010; Horsbol &amp; Lassen, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Strategies and processes for holding planners/leadership, participants, and project efficacy accountable over the project duration are necessary for long term success. Accountability can be woven into projects directly, through strategies like monitoring of resource use, or as a part regular evaluation of the overall project (Ostrom, 1990; Blair, 2000; Brody, 2003; Yalegama, Chileshe, &amp; Ma, 2016).</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Whether focused on development, civic engagement, conservation, or integrated frameworks, the principles described in Fig 5.2 are regularly cited as essential for the creation of successful and long-term CPR management regimes. While the first three principles—emphasis on design not outcomes, designing projects in accordance with local contexts, and the need for consistent funding—are conceptual as a part of a broader design process, the others—communication and accountability—are traits that can be applied more practically in designing...
specific participatory strategies. Perhaps Ostrom’s most well-known contribution to CPR research, her eight “design principles” of stable local common pool resource governance provide a set of guidelines for any effort to effectively incorporate participation:

1- The resource(s) and stakeholders are clearly defined;
2- The appropriation and provision resources reflect local needs and conditions;
3- Collective management allows resource appropriators to participate in decision-making processes and necessary rule-changes;
4- Central government or other higher authorities recognize the self-determination and self-governance of local resource appropriators;
5- Resource use is monitored by those who either are, or accountable to, appropriators;
6- Graduated sanctions exist for those who violate collective resource use policies;
7- Affordable and accessible processes exist that provide for conflict resolution;
8- Especially for larger or more complex common-pool resources, resource governance is built through multiple layers of connected nested enterprises (Ostrom, 1990).

More recently, Ostrom and her colleagues included principles like prioritizing communication, knowledge-sharing, trust, reciprocity, and other elements that build social capital into CPR governance (Poteete, Janssen, & Ostrom, 2010). Combined with those of successful ICDPs and consensus about effective participation, these principles expose deficiencies in management of the viewshed commons and the surrounding landscape.

Fundamental for the delivery of those strategies, however, is that existence of well-functioning local institutions. As is made clear in Ostrom’s eight principle, institutions can provide essential horizontal and vertical linkages between interests, levels of governance, and integrated project priorities, especially in the management of complex CPRs (Ostrom, 1990; Murphree, 1994; Agrawal & Gibson, 1999; Dolšak & Ostrom, 2003; Berkes, 2004; Brown, 2002; Hage, Leroy, & Petersen, 2010; Pagdee, Kim, & Daugherty, 2006). In an effort as complex as implementing a new, ICDP-style CPR management system for Blue Ridge Parkway viewshed, well-functioning institutions will be imperative the bringing stakeholders together, structuring the planning process, and implementing long-term project strategies and agendas.
We should not approach participation as a panacea. Koontz (2005) reminds us that participation-based initiatives might have little effect on local or regional policy (Koontz, 2005), and project outcomes can be difficult to quantify and evaluate (Jansuwicz & Calhoun 2010; Koontz & Thomas, 2006). However, in the case of the BRP viewshed, the goal should not be just to change policy. Instead, the objective should be working within current policies to design better approaches for maintaining the balance between viewshed development and conservation. Policy changes may help to empower and improve the participatory process, but those changes are unlikely to occur without unified pressure from a broad array of regional stakeholders.

It can be difficult to assess whether cumulatively increasing stakeholder participation will make for more effective planning and design (Buanes et al. 2005). But because throughout the history of the Parkway viewshed, the interests of some stakeholders have been persistently subservient to others, improving participation in efforts to generate stakeholder collaboration matters (Campbell & Vainio-Mattila 2003; Parkins & Mitchell 2005). Contextual factors change, and in some cases resource-management outcomes improve or worsen regardless of planning or participation (Koontz, 2005). Still, improving collaboration and stakeholder participation has been shown to improve environmental outcomes, increase stakeholder satisfaction in resource-management, reduce the over-exploitation of resources, and increase the incorporation of social, political, and intellectual capital into CPR management mechanisms (Scott, 2015; Mandarano, 2008; Jansuwicz & Calhoun, 2010). For these reasons, and due to the importance of landscape-scale viewshed preservation to so many communities and institutions, better incorporating stakeholder participation offers the best opportunity to refocus the preservation of the viewshed before it is too late.
Chapter Four—Recommendations

“It makes no more sense to valorize the community as the best defender of conservation in all cases than it does to claim that national governments are always in the best position to protect nature. Discussion about which institutions are appropriate to govern biodiversity conservation must move beyond the false dichotomy of community versus central government” –Barrett, Brandon, Gibson, and Gjertsen (2011, p. 499)

If nothing else, this paper has outlined how fundamental principles of CPR management and participatory design have not been the priority of previous Parkway management strategies. The overwhelming consequence of those shortcomings have fallen upon rural communities who are most dependent on the scenic tourism that the Parkway generates. This indicates a clear need to develop ways to better include those communities in implementing a more participatory landscape management framework. The essential characteristics of successful participatory project design and the qualities of effective institutional design combined with the ICDP framework outlined the previous chapter, set the agenda for this paper’s recommendations. My recommendations thus seek to fulfill the following goals for future viewshed preservation:

1- Recommend a landscape-scale, integrated environmental conservation, economic development, and rural landscape preservation initiative that reflects the NPS agenda as well as the history and current realities that threaten the viewshed;

2- Ensure that stakeholder participation—especially by rural landowners—is a focal point of the development and implementation of that initiative;

3- Highlight existing institutions to provide structure to the project, link various elements of the project, and facilitate stakeholder participation.

Because participation is a context specific tool, and effective CPR projects focus on participatory design—not outcomes—it is not my place to recommend exactly how a new, participatory, landscape-scale, viewshed project should be structured. Such a project needs to emerge more organically from the energy of local stakeholders and the priorities of various viewshed interests. In these recommendations, then, I will attempt two tasks. First and foremost, I hope to illustrate that, with the right tools and interests involved, an effort to coordinate
conservation, preservation, and development on the scale of the viewshed is possible. Across the world, in developing and developed contexts, ICDPs have helped local communities and landscapes protect their rural identity while successfully managing CPRs. In that effort, I will provide examples of projects that have successfully undertaken similar efforts.

Second, I will promote the use of existing tools and the inclusion of existing institutions in coordinating key aspects of future viewshed management. At the end of the previous chapter, I emphasized that CPR project planners and researchers have been clear in emphasizing the importance of well-functioning management and linkage institutions in designing and implementing participatory plans. “Institution” can mean many things. It can, as described by Murphree (1994) be defined literally, as synonymous with an “organization.” One can also consider “institution” more figuratively, as in a set of norms and expectations that influence human practices and interactions (Barrett et al., 2001). In the context of CPR management, I choose to think of institutions as an amalgamation of both: a set of norms, expectations, processes, and organized human interactions which guide participation and communication, and provide linkages for resource governance.1

In these recommendations, my emphasis on institutions originates in the Parkway landscape’s need for two types of institutions. First, the shortcomings and lack of coordination between the NPS and local organizations to this point, and the lack of clear process for bringing viewshed interests together under the GMP, necessitate a new regional initiative designed for and dedicated specifically to protecting the viewshed. Whether a formal organization or a conceptual

1 The basis for this definition lies both in Ostrom's description of the functions of nested enterprises (Ostrom, 1990, p. 101-102) and Douglass North's definition of “institution,” quoted in Barrett, Brandon, Gibson, and Gjersten (2001): “the rules of the game in a society or, more formally...the humanly derived constraints that shape human interaction” (p. 497).
Coordinating a New Viewshed Initiative

The quotation from Barrett et al. which begins this chapter reflects an inescapable reality facing management of the Parkway viewshed. Because the Parkway landscape lies within a patchwork of public and private lands, those who hope to preserve it face the challenge of coordination across multiple layers of government and an economically, socially, and culturally heterogenous landscape. It is thus necessary that future management of the viewshed work within both a top-down and a bottom-up system. Public lands are unlikely to be eliminated, and individual agency over property and local sovereignty are indelibly woven into the fabric of
private property rights and the American system of governance. As Murphree (1994) argued, it would be unwise to “advocate for the devolution of rights as a panacea for all conservation concerns.” I would add, in agreement with Dongier et al. (2015), Yalegama et al. (2016), and others that it is impractical to expect any levels of government—and certainly not the NPS—to relinquish control of the viewshed to community developers. Furthermore, in accordance with the principles of ICDP design put forth by Wells and Brandon (1990), such a project needs to commitment of various levels of government in order to ensure the long-term viability of such a large initiative.

As I mentioned in Chapter Three, if the management of the viewshed is to move away from a model in which the Blue Ridge Parkway and the surrounding viewshed are managed separately, and instead toward a more integrated landscape model, then empowering and including local landowners is fundamentally important (Firth, 2005; Balwin, 2010; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000; Anderson, 2010). Thus, the solution for sustainably managing the Parkway viewshed lies somewhere between development and conservation, and somewhere between central governance and local agency. To achieve this, a new scheme or governing body, backed by federal and state government agencies, should be formed and tasked with the specific mandate to develop strategies for promoting sustainable use of the viewshed.

Elements of such an initiative already exist in separate pieces in projects nationwide. The National Parks Service operates the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, which provides training and assistance for historical preservation projects on both public lands and lands managed by private or non-profit organizations (Olmsted Center website). Programs like this reinforce the Parks Service’s increased attention to historical sites, visitor education, and preservation of regional heritage, and increase the likelihood that they would support a
coordinated initiative in the Parkway viewshed. Earlier, I highlighted the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, which is already positioned to coordinate the development of local tourist, craft, and other artisan projects across the Parkway landscape. Along with other non-profit organizations that support and promote local development, resource conservation, and local culture and are already in operation throughout western North Carolina, the BRNHA possesses the networks and scale to manage a rural development initiative in the viewshed and surrounding landscape.

Furthermore, between the NPS’s own Visual Resource Inventory, resources like the Conservation Planning Tool—operated by the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program (Western North Carolina Vitality Index, 2016, p. 82)—and increasingly available and capable GIS mapping tools at the region’s growing academic and research institutions, we have more resources dedicated to identifying at risk rural and natural spaces than ever before. What is lacking is a large-scale, well-funded, coordinating initiative to bring all of these elements together. Precedents for such a program, both in the United States and elsewhere, demonstrate that the potential for such a program in the viewshed exists. Valuable lessons gleaned from these projects should inform future viewshed management.

Statham (1994) describes a system by which a national government program, implemented by the British National Park Authority, developed a participatory program in the United Kingdom’s North York Moors National Park. In this program, farmers whose property was located within the park made ecological conservation and historical preservation upgrades to their properties in exchange for direct cash payment. The program emerged out of a participatory process that combined a planning period, feedback from a trial group and researchers, and then, upon implementation, active monitoring and evaluation by both managers and stakeholders.
While in operation, the program proved popular and successful, because it allowed farmers to maintain their property rights, gave them a new source of income for capital investment, and boosted regional property-maintenance labor opportunities (Statham, 1994).

A similar project would fit Parkway viewshed planners’ need for the better incorporation of local landowners into management, and could help to balance converging development, conservation and landscape preservation priorities. The North York Moors project benefitted from a government funding and organization—unlikely in the Parkway context given NPS budget shortfalls and the North Carolina state government’s inconsistent dedication to conservation initiatives. However, research indicates that if local and other non-profit, community-minded organizations can organize behind such an initiative, they can be successful in undertaking landscape preservation programs while still promoting local development.

In Madison, Wisconsin, a coalition of non-profit organizations acquired and developed—under its own set of zoning standards—a 31-acre protected site within city limits. The Troy Gardens project managed land donated by the city and was paid for by a group of community development and conservation organizations. Managers preserved much of the park’s open space and also built low-density, affordable housing to incorporate local development initiatives consistent with the local community identity (Campbell and Salus, 2003).

While clearly not at the scale that would be required of viewshed preservation, the Troy Gardens project indicates the potential for local, grassroots organizations to collaborate in a specific initiative for the protection of land threatened by development, and still promote the interests of a community underrepresented in typical development projects. Most importantly, in the eyes of Campbell and Salus (2003), this project proves that landscape conservation and community-based development enterprises can work in concert if local groups are able to
organize under a single, collaborative institution. When supported by local governments, say Campbell and Salus, “[t]he result is the creation of common property for the public good which…is yielding sustainable community-based development as well” (p. 179).

In the United States there are also analogous examples of landscape-scale conservation that combine the BRP region's interwoven government regimes, threats presented by developmental sprawl, and the value of a viewshed to the identity and economic well-being of a landscape. The effort to protect the Olana viewshed along the Hudson River in the Catskills region of New York State, offers striking similarities—albeit on a smaller scale—to the needs of a viewshed preservation project. This project presents useful insights as to how a Parkway viewshed protection project might organize, use conservation tools, and balance the interests of both central government and local communities.

The Olana preservation project was undertaken by a coordinated effort between private landowners and regional conservancies, and eventually bolstered by the passage of both federal and state legislation. This joint effort used incentives for the purchasing of easements to protect private land; designed a long-term plan that maintained the historical legacy of the property and viewshed; accommodated and provided for the long-term viability of local farms, vineyards, and residences; and prioritized conservation of other key environmental and historical sites. The State of New York and the National Parks Service supported Scenic Hudson, Inc.—a land conservancy that coordinated the raising of funds and the acquisition and management of key easement properties—as the primary initiator of the project. Key to those efforts was communication and coordination between those entities, as well as input and cooperation from private landowners and businesses (McKee, 2000).
Initial coordination between local conservation and historical preservation organizations provided the foundation for the overall initiative, but ultimately, this project would not have been successful without private energy to preserve threatened properties. Likewise, conservation would not have been possible without landowners' willingness to sacrifice agency and property rights. Local farmers, especially, gave up some rights so long as the preservation of their land also ensured that that land could remain central to their—and future generations’—financial security. Carefully negotiated and designed easements allowed for the perpetual, but individually-tailored, conservation of these private properties (McKee, 2000).

Similar to the Olana preservation project, in the 1950s a successful public effort purchased conservation easements on private properties on a stretch of the Mississippi River along Wisconsin’s scenic Great River Road. The program was undertaken and funded by the state government, but implemented in cooperation with individual, conservation-minded landowners. Absent a mechanism to unify zoning in the Great River Road’s viewshed, the purchase of conservation easements emerged as a way to implement a consistent pattern of protection on private lands threatened by obtrusive development and conversion. The basic structure of the preservation project has since endured through periodic adjustments over the years (Ohm, 2000).

The National Parks Service also currently oversees the coordination of multiple private entities, conservation groups, and local governments in a number of landscape scale “parks,” which model the landscapes protections provided by British countryside parks. Ebey’s Landing, on Washington State’s Puget Sound, is an NPS national historic reserve that encompasses a number of federal, state, and local publics lands, as well as properties owned by private individuals and businesses. A board comprised of members of local government and other
organizations and interests within the reserve manage the landscape under the auspices of the National Parks System. Ebey’s Landing aims to preserve the historical nature of the thriving, historical port, while promoting local businesses and working with conservation organizations to protect the Sound’s coastline (“Learn about the Reserve,” Ebey’s Landing website).

The National Parks Service also coordinates and manages the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA), which encompasses a number of public parks as well as national and state natural and historical sites. The SMMNRA, located in the shadow of sprawling Los Angeles, protects an integrated landscape of public and university lands, all of which are tasked with protecting the mountains’ threatened Mediterranean ecosystem and Native American heritage sites from urban encroachment. Built gradually by adding to the initial park founded in 1978—which itself was established from state and local parklands that had existed since the nineteenth century—SMMNRA reflects the scale required to preserve the Parkway viewshed, and also indicates that it is possible to unify and manage a patchwork of protected areas in accordance with a singular preservation goal (Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area website, https://www.nps.gov/samo/index.htm).

Cumulatively, these examples expose a few key lessons in organizing successful integrated projects in efforts to protect CPR landscapes. First, inertia is a powerful factor. Whether from a grassroots effort or a government program, a new initiative or institution must be created with a clear set of landscape-scale goals. Without coordinated efforts and the energy that cooperation can create, it is unlikely that a landscape-scale project will be able to bring together the requisite stakeholders in the interest of a single project. Data and surveys discussed in this paper indicate deep stakeholder affinity for the natural and rural identity of the Parkway viewshed. This gives hope that there is a similar willingness to direct those energies toward an
integrated, landscape project. Western North Carolina’s history of grassroots activism and
initiative in response to economic and environmental threats, indicates that the organizational
potential for addressing sprawl and fragmentation exists. Given that decades of regional history
reveal a deep interest in addressing the types of threats faced by the Parkway viewshed, the onus
is on Parkway management to harness and coordinate that energy.

Second, funding matters. In some cases—as in the case of North York Moors National Park and the Great River Road—a clear source of public funding enables a project from the beginning. Otherwise, funds need to be raised as a part of the project, and other types of financial incentives must encourage both participation and sustainable development. Third, in projects not initiated by existing government programs, access to legal frameworks and policy tools, and the linkage institutions to wield them, are imperative for local efforts to be successful. In the cases of the Olana viewshed, Troy Gardens, and the Great River Road, projects were organized by similar institutions—trusts—and utilized easements to designate and protect valuable lands. My final recommendations highlight the need for economically viable private land conservation tools to supplement protections afforded to PAs. Finally, I identify conservation easements wielded by western North Carolina trusts as an ideal source of institutional linkage between viewshed project goals, and between local landowners and other stakeholders.

Coordinating Land Management

I am intrigued by the concept put forth by Murphree (1994), in which rather than
decentralizing or segregating authority, participatory management systems organize to delegate
proprietorship of a common resource. Again, it is unrealistic to expect that individual
landowners, local communities, the NPS, or other government entities will relinquish complete
authority over their respective properties. However, a new system whose framework distributes
protestorship of the commons, as Murphree explains, “provides a necessary tenurial component for an adequate institutional framework” (p. 405-406).

Murphree (1994) explains that proprietorship means “the sanctioned use rights, including the right to determine the mode and extent of management and use, rights of access and inclusion, and the right to benefit fully from use and management” (p. 405). In the viewshed, this could mean private landowners maintain their “bundle” of property rights, but with the authority to engage in a management system, on an individual level, in which those rights are negotiable and have value. Furthermore, this would allow willing landowners to participate in the collective management and protection of a key source their property’s value: its place within the viewshed.

Conceptually, emphasizing proprietorship represents a realistic means of bridging some of the hurdles of existing public-private disparities. Practically, implementing such a system specific to viewshed properties requires an institution for managing proprietary arrangements. In lieu of a singular, government-backed institution, cases where private properties necessitate coordinated initiatives to bring like-minded groups together with adequate resources and legal tools at their disposal have proven able to enforce proprietary-type arrangements within existing legal frameworks. In a complex CPR scenario like the Parkway viewshed, the use of conservation easements makes this possible.

An easement is a legal restriction placed on a property which limits at least some of a property-owner’s of land-use rights. Easements are backed by federal, and often state, law and guarantee restrictions for a designated time period—often in perpetuity (“Taxes” section of the Land Trust Alliance website, 2018). Put simply, if a property-owner places an easement on a property, or an easement on a property is purchased by an outside party, then the property owner agrees to abide by the land-use restrictions outlined by the easement, and consents to monitoring
of the property by a coordinating entity. In return, the property owner might receive tax incentives, as well as a guarantee that the property will never be subdivided or significantly altered. Easements can be particularly attractive for owners of farms or other large properties of significant environmental value, because they can provide owners with a means to maintain the integrity of their land in the face of financial pressure to sell, covert, or subdivide.

If the purchase of conservation easements in the viewshed could be coordinated at a scale that successfully interrupts land conversion and fragmentation, then it would accomplish a primary component of viewshed preservation. Furthermore, as a financial incentive, easements could help bring financial security to rural landowners and small, sustainable businesses like farms, recreation areas, historical sites, and craft enterprises. Easements also represent an opportunity for viewshed stakeholders to participate in its preservation, either by entering into an easement agreement; participating in an organization that purchases, promotes, and monitors easement properties; or by helping to maintain properties with easement protections. Rather than dramatically expanding public lands and PAs in hopes that land-use restrictions and financial incentives can stem the tide of exurban sprawl and naturbanization, I believe that private conservation tools like easements represent the best possible means for protecting individual rural properties. What the viewshed needs, in order to utilize easements as a part of a landscape-scale viewshed project, is an institution that can fund and coordinate easement purchasing, monitoring, and upkeep. I believe that in western North Carolina, such institutions already exist.

Land Trust Linkages

One of Ostrom’s famous eight design principles for CPR institutions is that in “more complex, enduring CPRs,”—so-called “nested enterprises”—work within larger governance systems and institutions and perform either narrower tasks or tasks on smaller scales (Ostrom,
Nested enterprises ensure that in complex local contexts, governance and resources can be adequately coordinated. They do so by linking together various interests, stakeholders, and organizations to facilitate certain aspects of management and to connect various elements and processes of the CPR system (Barrett et al., 2001; McKinney, 2001, DeCaro & Stokes, 2013). Hage, Leroy, and Petersen (2009) call them “boundary institutions” because they build bridges across impediments between stakeholders and other institutions that make up the management process. Most commonly, however, they are called “linkage institutions.” Regardless of the identifying term, it is essential to identify local institutions that can facilitate and coordinate vital elements of viewshed management for an ICDP framework to succeed. In this final section of the chapter, I identify existing and key local institutions that I believe can perform this vital function.

In the examples of successful land management and preservation scenarios listed earlier, a recurring theme was the need to provide landowners and local communities with the means to make their conservation and preservation impulses financially viable—the development component of an integrated project. In North York Moors and the Great River Road, the financial incentives were provided directly from an external budget. In Troy Gardens and the Olana viewshed, however, the development component was facilitated by local organizations—trusts—using a common land management tool—easements—to provide financial incentives to landowners and permanently protect the land from future development. For decades, now, similar efforts have been underway in the Parkway viewshed. I believe that any project coordinating management of the viewshed should include and empower local trusts as primary linkage institution for facilitating stakeholder participation, distributing economic benefits, and implementing viewshed monitoring strategies.
Both public and non-profit land trusts have operated in the United States for more than a century, and in recent years hundreds—even thousands—of non-profit community and land trusts have emerged as a means of encouraging private landowners to implement long term conservation of their properties (Campbell & Salus, 2003). Nationwide, a large percentage of trusts’ activities are dedicated to increasing the connectivity of ecosystems at a landscape-scale or extending the reach of PA-associated conservation efforts into buffer zones and adjacent communities (Milder & Clark, 2011). Either via fee-simple purchase, or by purchasing easements, land trusts protect properties from future development by implementing aesthetic or infrastructure restrictions on properties and guarding against future subdivision. In the Parkway's early years, the NPS purchased easements on Parkway-adjacent properties, which restricted certain uses of, alterations to, and activities on properties that might be seen from the Parkway. By the 1940s, however, the NPS abandoned this practice in favor of fee-simple purchases, which did not require complicated negotiation or monitoring (Whisnant, 2006, 116-117).

Fig 4.1 shows the CT4NC conservation projects along the Blue Ridge Parkway. The map is from the Conservation Trust for North Carolina website (“Blue Ridge Parkway Properties Protected by Conservation Trust for North Carolina”)
The North Carolina government has not always embraced trusts. The state never adopted the national Uniform Conservation Easement Act UCEA, and in 2013 the legislature let lapse a set of state tax benefits for properties managed by easements. Still, CT4NC and member groups have used federal conservation tax incentives to successfully work with individual landowners to provide individually tailored conservation options. Prior to CT4NC, most easements on private lands in the Parkway landscape were managed by the National Parks Service or state government, and land acquisitions were managed by national conservation organizations like the Nature Conservancy. General skepticism of national government and local wariness of conservation organizations drove the need for a more coordinated effort to bridge the conservation gap between public lands and private properties, while still in meeting individual economic goals (Roe, 2000).

Along the Parkway, regional land trusts and conservancies have already proven capable of providing local landowners with solutions for combatting economic and environmental threats. The Conservation Trust for North Carolina (CT4NC) has been central to this effort. Though its member organizations and projects are statewide, CT4NC lists among its objectives to “permanently protect spectacular properties along the Blue Ridge Parkway,” a mandate bestowed upon them by the state’s governor in 1996. Using conservation easements, managing donated lands, or via fee-simple purchases, CT4NC is responsible for the permanent conservation of more than 32,000 acres adjacent to the Parkway or within the Parkway viewshed (see fig. 4.1) (“Protect,” Conservation Trust for North Carolina website).

Among its priorities, in addition to facilitating protection of properties along the Parkway, CT4NC lists connecting individuals and local organizations to outdoor recreation and environmental education, and also assisting other trusts and conservation organizations by
providing mapping, research, legal, and financial assistance in more locally focused conservation efforts. More recently, CT4NC has tasked a new nested organization with specifically coordinating those efforts in western North Carolina into a small, but targeted initiative to protect North Carolina’s Blue Ridge Mountains. As the regional initiative of CT4NC, Blue Ridge Forever identifies itself as “a collective campaign led by local land trusts and national conservation organizations to engage the public and raise financial resources to safeguard land and water in the Southern Blue Ridge for present and future generations” (“About Us,” Blue Ridge Forever website). To achieving that mission with their partner organizations, they outline three fundamental goals:

- Implementing a collective vision to achieve protection on a region-wide landscape scale that respects natural ecosystems.
- Gaining from each other’s knowledge and experience – keeping the local connections of smaller land trusts yet gaining national attention to our collective efforts.
- Pooling our resources to protect shared priority areas, particularly watersheds, river corridors, farms and lands adjacent to already preserved areas. (“About Us,” Blue Ridge Forever website).

Together, CT4NC and Blue Ridge Forever seem to fulfill the basic goals of a participatory, viewshed management institution. They attempt landscape scale conservation. They seek out sustainable and economically viable means for preserving key viewshed properties. They connect local landowners, grassroots organizations, government agencies, and legal systems. Finally, through education programs and resource-pooling, they enable communication and knowledge-sharing between local residents, researchers, academic institutions, and trade groups.

The reason, however, that my recommendations look beyond simply empowering CT4NC, or even Blue Ridge Forever, to henceforth manage the viewshed is that, on their own, it would be difficult for even well-coordinated trusts to operate at the scale required for management of the entire landscape. While the Blue Ridge Forever mission is ambitious in its
goal to conserve at a landscape scale, the scale at which even networked trusts operate, and the limited tools and budgets available to them in North Carolina, renders it unlikely that they could coordinate the preservation the private lands necessary to protect the entire viewshed.

By protecting tens of thousands of acres of land CT4NC already makes a significant contribution to viewshed protection. However, on average only 2.2% of lands in North Carolina counties through which the BRP runs are protected by conservation easements. While well above the state average of 0.7% (United States Department of Agriculture, 2014), it is not a number large enough to tip the scales of conservation or combat widespread development trends. BRP-region trusts often manage hundreds or even thousands of acres of landholding easements, but individually it is not clear that that is enough to impede landscape-scale threats. Even trusts the size of CT4NC face uphill fights to scale up, diversify available tools, and generate widespread enough commitment from property owners. And for all those acres, Blue Ridge Forever currently has only one full-times staff member. CT4NC employs fewer than twenty. This leaves even large trusts in need of more partnerships and better coordination (Hocker, 2000; Alexander & Hess, 2012).

Furthermore, even when they work with landowners on an individual level and engage in transactions that seek a mutually agreeable financial and environmental outcome, land trusts are not universally popular. Merrill and Lapping (2007) found that trusts and easements often create an undue burden on local governments, who, without resources for education programs or qualified personnel, can find it difficult to incorporate new modes of land-use into governance. Nor do all landowners—even ones who convey personal attachment to rural landscapes and conservation values—react positively to relinquishing property rights (Stroman, Kreuter, and Gahn, 2017). Often, individual landowners who have otherwise expressed positive sentiments
towards conserving property through trusts, convey apprehension toward the perpetuity of
easements, the rigidity of trust agreements, intrusion by monitors, and the uncertainty of
proposed financial incentives (Ohm, 2000; Miller, Bastian, McLeod, Keske, & Hoag, 2011).
Though research indicates that perpetual easements are most effective at meeting conservation
goals (Duke & Lynch, 2007), agricultural landowners can be wary of easements that might
permanently limit their future land-use flexibility. Landowners can also get bogged down by
legal jargon and can have difficulty in relating to the concept of conservation easements and the
selling, donation, or forfeiture of certain of their land-use rights (Paterson et al., 2005).

Rather than acting as a policy focal point for viewshed management, land trusts and
easements are better suited as a tool to supplement broader conservation efforts. Based on their
size, resources, and management limitations, simply scaling up trusts might overburden these
non-profit organizations, or could force them sacrifice their local presence and familiarity.
However, given easements’ affordability, permanence, and low barrier of entry, trusts are also
better placed than government institutions to introduce conservation to rural landowners
(Campbell and Salus, 2003). A new initiative for viewshed management presents an opportunity
to highlight and empower an organization like CT4NC and a campaign like Blue Ridge Forever,
while keeping its focus and mandate local.

In a broader ICDP project, trusts can operate as linkage institutions in the Parkway
viewshed because in many ways they already perform necessary linkage tasks for conservation
on a landscape scale. Across the country, trusts and easements have been used in increasingly
creative ways as a part of much more dynamic land-conservation initiatives (Gustanski &
Squires, 2000). Their ability to provide local landowners with financially-sustainable and user-
friendly conservation options opens up a realm of possibilities for trusts to take on an even more
dynamic role in facilitating stakeholder participation in future Parkway viewshed preservation.

When focused on a specific region or a type of property, trusts have proven capable of
spanning divergent economic, environmental, and land-use concerns. Trusts are on site in local
communities and key properties, and provide a conduit for local knowledge and landowner
preferences to be shared as a part of broader efforts provide incentives. Because they share
information about scientific data, responsible land-use, and important legal processes, trusts can
empower and increase the agency of landowner demographics that might not be traditionally
associated with conservation organizations. For example, farm trusts throughout the country
have proven effective resources for threatened farms by purchasing easements, providing
financial and legal services, helping farmers to develop more sustainable practices, and
encouraging younger demographics to pursue agriculture (Gustanksi & Squires, 2000).

As a part of a landscape-scale viewshed preservation, ICDP project, a regional trust like
Blue Ridge Forever could become an even more effective conduit for participation in
conservation. With the clout of a region-wide viewshed initiative and support from the NPS and
local counties and communities, the North Carolina General Assembly could be pressured into
reinstating conservation tax incentives. A state trust fund for conservation easements would
allow Blue Ridge Forever to devote fewer resources toward fundraising, and instead develop
more dynamic outreach and public relations initiatives. Where mistrust of perpetual easements
and monitoring limit landowners’ willingness to work with trusts, with more resources and allies,
trusts could develop a cooperative monitoring system among local landowners.

Another way to increase popular support for trusts and easements in the Parkway
landscape would be to open either trust lands or conserved private properties to public access.
Given the increased regional popularity of outdoor recreation, easement-protected lands with hiking and running trails—especially as a means to connect existing but fragmented regional trail systems and greenways—could boost local tourism and recreational businesses to communities without direct access to popular PAs other than the Parkway. Trusts can also raise public awareness and support for private conservation if property-owners grant educational institutions and programs access to protected properties.

The cost of monitoring, upkeep, and increased human capital currently prevents smaller trusts from managing extensive public access lands, and property owners can be hesitant to invite increased, unregulated traffic onto their properties. Working in coordination with NPS and other federal and state land managers, local research institutions, and by building up their own staff, a campaign like Blue Ridge Forever could help to cooperatively manage a greater volume and broader spectrum of protected lands. The networking, resources, and public outreach shortcomings of the more than a dozen existing Blue Ridge trusts and conservancies operating in rural communities could be significantly alleviated were they a part of a more coordinated—and potentially profitable—regional effort.

Again, what is lacking when it comes to a landscape scale effort to promote private conservation and local development is the broader inertia and institutional backing to scale up the work that trusts do. The Conservation Trust for North Carolina is already listed as a Parkway “partner” (General Management Plan, 2013), and they have helped to facilitate the transfer of lands into Parkway management and have protected thousands of more acres within the viewshed. However, without a specific project that envisions the dynamic management of the viewshed on a landscape scale and integrates trusts’ conservation efforts with other elements of viewshed preservation, it is likely that trusts with continue to operate in the same patchwork,
reactive manner that other local organizations have throughout much of the Parkway’s history. I think that because the threat to the viewshed and the landscape is imminent, now is the time to coordinate an effort to change that outcome.

The existence of effective linkage institutions and examples of successful projects of similar scope is encouraging for the prospect of a successful viewshed ICDP. That visitors to and residents of Parkway-adjacent counties convey such deep attachment to the natural and rural heritage of the land gives me confidence that the necessary inertia exists if stakeholders can all be brought to the table. Overlapping government bureaucracies, the temptation of economic stimulus, competing regional and statewide agendas, and an ambitious but limited General Management Plan have prevented better coordination to this point. But the deep regional history of local efforts to overcome threats to the landscape and the Blue Ridge Mountains’ precious resources are important reminders that the people of the Blue Ridge Mountains have long-proven willing and able to protect their common landscape and keep it scenic.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is both to diagnose and prescribe a remedy to the problems that have befallen the Blue Ridge Parkway and its viewshed. The primary lesson from this paper should be that because the status quo has proven untenable, the entire ethos of the Blue Ridge Parkway needs to be revised. While 2013 marked an important turning point, I think that the philosophy behind the General Management Plan is too reactive. Breaking down the proximate-but-separate mentality between the Parkway and the landscape, and abandoning the scenic tourism myopia, leaves a much cleaner slate for envisioning how the Parkway viewshed might be managed in the future. In that vein, my concluding remarks encourage proactive and creative
thinking. A challenge viewshed preservation, begotten of a complex history and intertwined, landscape-scale systems and threats, necessitates thinking beyond traditional solutions.

Rather than dwell on previous shortcomings of Parkway policy, I choose to use those past realities and trends to instead look forward and think creatively about ways to better incorporate a participatory framework for future viewshed management. My ultimate focus turned to institutions because of how important CPR planners and researchers have deemed them to be, and because viewshed management on a landscape scale requires, above all else, better coordination of between viewshed stakeholders. But that focus should not distract from the vital point: something different needs to be done.

To stay true to the focus established in the second half of this paper, my final thoughts are less concrete and more focused on encouraging future viewshed managers to reconceptualize. This ethos is perhaps best described by Aslan et al. in their 2014 paper titled, “Cultivating Creativity in Conservation Science”: “Creativity is evident in past conservation successes, yet we generally do not make a conscious effort to foster this trait in our training, research, or practice” (p. 346). It was in this ethos that I looked to previous grassroots organization and moments of cooperative resource use between conservationists, PAs, and businesses, and wondered if that energy and initiative might be recaptured in another way. In their paper, Aslan et al. list four ways in which future planners should face conservation projects. Their suggestions embody the participation ethos and dynamic incorporation of priorities beyond conservation that I have proposed in this paper. They believe that the future of conservation lies in these creative thinking strategies:

- embrace risk
- surround oneself with unfamiliar people, concepts, and points of view
- meet people where they are
- value the cycle of learning, struggle, and reflection (2014, p. 346-347)
I think a new participatory framework for managing the viewshed as a CPR embodies these principles.

This whole proposition embodies risk. I am proposing that a large government agency relinquish some of its authority and abandon elements of its own recently produced management plan. I am asking local landowners to once again trust that what is good for the park, and good for businesses, can be good for them too. And I am hoping that millions of Parkway visitors will put the viewshed—the one thing that brings them back to the parkway year after year—in the hands of a new approach.

Competing interests need to come together in unfamiliar ways in which they rarely have in the Parkway’s history. Rather than existing on opposite sides of the urban/rural divide or on either side of the Parkway’s boundaries, I am hoping that stakeholders can come together and see one another on different terms.

Those interests, however, cannot come together on the terms of any one priority. Participation requires meeting people and organizations where they are, learning from others accepting some truths, and creating new strategies. People who care about the viewshed must literally and figuratively meet each other where they are.

And finally, anyone involved in an effort to approach the viewshed differently has to accept that after decades of outcomes-focused planning, a new focus on process will inevitable produce failures, slow progress, and monumental breakthroughs. The learning happens in cycles that began generations ago and must continue into the future.

No singular interest is to blame for the threats to the Parkway’s future. But I would argue that everyone will be to blame if we do not act now and try something nothing different. To avoid that, a little creative thinking can go a long way.
Appendix A

Approximate BRP route through North Carolina Counties (North Carolina Natural Heritage Program, GIS Data)

North Carolina Counties included in the Western North Carolina Vitality Index (Mountain Resources Commission, 2016, p. 7)

From “North Carolina” by Dave Imus (2010), The Essential Geography of the United States of America. Map included with author’s permission (see Appendix B for full map).
Appendix C

http://osbm2.osbm.state.nc.us/ncosbm/facts_and_figures/socioeconomic_data/population_estimates.shtm
Appendix D

The process for the use of the NPS VRI in data collection and planning application. From Sullivan & Meyer (2016), flow chart originally from public NPS materials on the VRI.
Appendix E

This map shows overlapping federal, state, and private land-management in western NC. Notice the “checkerboarding” along the Parkway corridor (North Carolina Gap Analysis Final Report, McKerrow, Williams, & Collazzo (2006, p. 63))
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