

Choices...

VISION PLAN 2008-2028

OCONEE COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA
TWENTY-YEAR VISION PLAN



2028
OCONEE
BY CHOICE
www.oconeebychoice.com

Oconee County

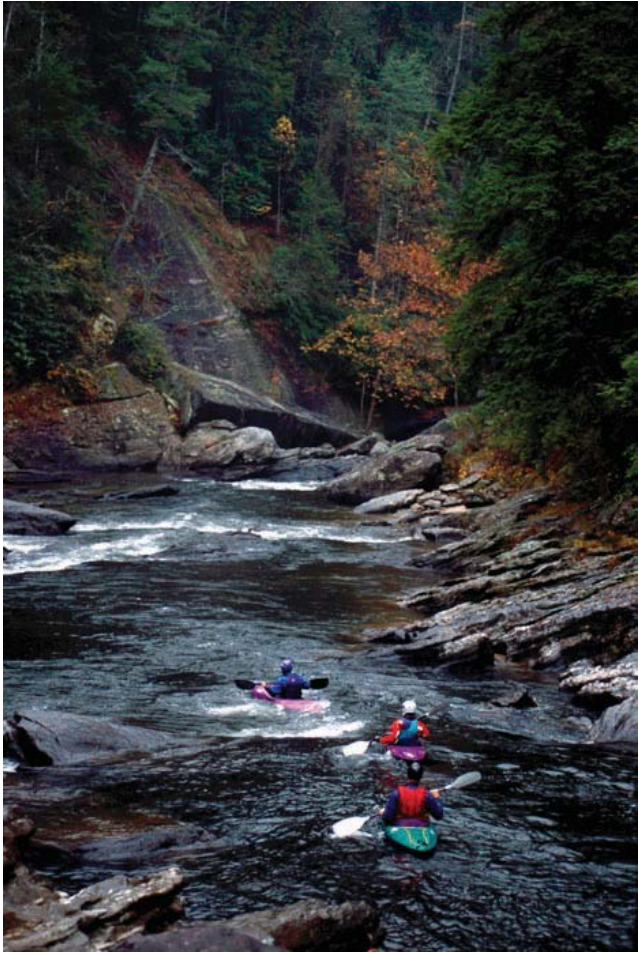
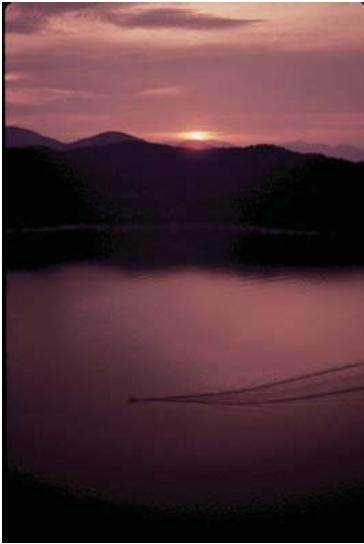


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Report and facilitation provided by:



Facilitators of Community Visioning
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TO THE CITIZENS OF OCONEE COUNTY

Your voices have been heard and your input has been put into action. After fifteen focus group sessions, many individual interviews from a cross section of the county and several town hall meetings, we are proud to present a twenty-year vision for Oconee County.

Going into this visioning process known as Oconee by Choice 2028, we knew that our County was blessed with beautiful mountains, lakes, rivers, and historical areas. We knew that our citizens are passionate about preserving our natural landscape. We hoped that our citizens would participate in the visioning process.

We are proud that thousands of ideas were provided by hundreds of citizens. We are proud that the people of Oconee County realize that change is inevitable and that we must plan in order to have what we want in the future. In this document, we will present a collection of recommendations that fall under six major areas. You will see that these ideas and visions, when implemented, will make Oconee County an even greater place to live and to do business.

Our request is that you read this Vision. If a certain category or item stimulates you, we hope you will contact the Oconee Alliance (864-718-1077) to learn more about joining us in implementing that portion of the Vision. Remember, it is a twenty-year Vision and we must work together, within the available resources, to make a great county even greater. With your involvement, we will truly experience Oconee by Choice - Your Choice for 2028.

CO-CHAIRPERSONS

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STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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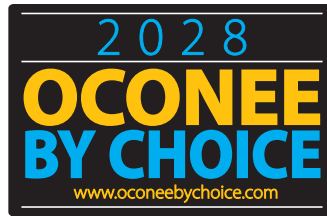
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Oconee County, South Carolina’s 2008-2028 Vision Plan “Oconee By Choice” will serve as a means for improving Oconee County over the next twenty years. “Oconee By Choice” is not a document that simply states what is logical and necessary for the county’s future but a plan established by the dynamic and passionate citizens of a remarkable county grounded in tradition. While some refer to the vision plan as a road map to the future, it is more like a GPS system that will actively guide citizens, elected officials, and civic leaders through their travels to 2028. Oconee’s citizens understand that change will happen; however, they want a voice in what that change will be. They prefer choice to chance. With everyone working together, the trip, although arduous, will be smooth.

This plan was developed by citizens throughout the county under the guidance of a citizen-based steering committee. A special note of thanks is extended to the Vision Plan Donors and the Steering Committee members for their participation in the process. Carpe Diem Community Solutions from Florida served as the consultant for this visioning process.

Through a nine-step process, this vision plan stands ready to support community-building in six goal areas in Oconee County. The six goal areas are:

1. A Planned Choice: The Choice of a Planned Oconee
2. An Educated Choice: The Choice of Education
3. A Working Choice: The Choice of Rewarding Employment
4. A Destination Choice: The Choice for a Destination
5. A Safe and Healthy Choice: The Choice for Security, Health, and Contentment
6. A Natural Choice: The Choice That’s Natural

The goal areas were developed from the Vision Input Process (VIP), step number four, which consisted of eleven individual interviews, fifteen focus group sessions, five town hall meetings, mail-in input forms, and online-based input. The goals and their corresponding objectives are presented in priority order based on the number of times the topic was mentioned. The public input process began in August 2007 with the leadership launch and ended in January 2008 with the final town hall meeting.

Citizens of Oconee County gathered in different venues to discuss the future of their county. Each gathering consisted of people with expertise and passion in specific areas expressing their opinions and deliberating on what they felt would make Oconee a better place to live and work. Oconee County’s active visioning plan for the next twenty years and beyond is a result of providing citizens with a voice and a stake in their future. The creation of the vision plan is this community’s deliberate and conscious decision to control the direction and character of the way Oconee changes and adjusts over the next twenty years.

All citizens were invited to participate in the vision process. While the early large forums captured community spirit and the clustering of consensus interests, the views expressed in smaller focus groups and through online submissions provided the flavor of individual voices among those citizens who have an intimate stake in, and passion for, their fields and county life. This in turn provided areas that could be probed more deeply during subsequent town hall meetings.

The fact that area professionals were willing to meet for two hours in focus groups is evidence of their commitment to make “Oconee By Choice” a success. The focus group sessions followed the same format as the town hall meetings with one exception: after discussing “what needs to be done,” the attendees broke out into smaller groups to discuss the first and second prioritized items regarding “how to facilitate the completion of the most prioritized items.” The steering committee established the following focus group topics:

- Agriculture
- Arts & Culture
- Economic Development
- Education
- Environment
- Faith
- Government
- Health Care
- High School Students
- Public Safety
- Recreation/ Tourism
- Senior Adults
- Sense of Place
- Social Services
- Young Professionals

The town hall meetings brought together citizens from all parts of the county to give their input into what will keep the future of the county bright and prosperous. Citizens availed themselves of the town hall meeting experience to express their hopes, dreams, and vision for the next twenty years. The format of the town hall meetings consisted of discussions about what should be done to make Oconee County a better place to live. After listing all aspects brought forward, each participant was given five sticker dots to prioritize all responses.

After determining the two most highly prioritized items, the discussion moved toward how those two items could be accomplished, including listing stakeholders, existing resources, and obstacles.

At the conclusion of each interaction with Oconee County citizens, they were asked if there was anything left unsaid. Everyone, including those not in attendance, still had a chance to contribute to this dynamic process by using the citizen input forms distributed throughout the county, or they were able to go to the vision plan website at www.oconeebychoice.com to have their voices heard.

Thousands of comments were received from area citizens. Based on these comments, 96 objectives were created within six goal areas.

Not one group or individual received more weight or influence in the vision plan, but each provided insight and, in some cases, novel approaches to ways to keep Oconee County a thriving county over the next twenty years.

While the vision plan itself gives a blueprint of what will help Oconee County continue to grow and prosper, it is equally important to understand the voice and concerns of the people who participated in the dialogue. On a few occasions, meetings became slightly contentious, but this showed the passion citizens have when asked to plan the future of their county. In the end, all conversations were positive and successful



“WHILE SOME REFER TO THE VISION PLAN AS A ROAD MAP TO THE FUTURE, IT IS MORE LIKE A GPS SYSTEM THAT WILL ACTIVELY GUIDE CITIZENS, ELECTED OFFICIALS, AND CIVIC LEADERS THROUGH THEIR TRAVELS TO 2028.”

as citizens continued to deliberate in the hallways and parking lots after the meetings.

The mountain vistas and lakes are a staple in Oconee County, and citizens are willing to take every measure possible to preserve the beauty they cherish. At the beginning of every session, people spoke glowingly about the splendor of the area. One citizen said, “This is why we live here and others move here.” Another responded, “I visited here a few times and finally decided to move my business and family here.” They are concerned that growth could ruin their treasure. Citizens want to ensure their community remains “a place where nature is respected not exploited.” They cited communities in Florida, Georgia, and other parts of South Carolina as examples of planning gone wrong.

The prioritized objectives information will be given to the Implementation Leadership Team to use in developing Vision Partnerships and Vision Alliances, and in supporting the implementation of the Oconee County Vision Plan.

Accomplishing all of these objectives at once is extremely unlikely and would result in dilution of energy and resources. Instead, the plan is designed to present a prioritized list of objectives that can be achieved over the course of the next twenty years as the county grows. Some objective items will be harder to achieve because they evolved from citizens who were willing to think imaginatively and expansively, but then this would not be much of a vision plan if all its objectives were easily within reach, so those more imaginative goals are included here, as well.

The fundamental principle of the visioning process is that all citizens have an opportunity to voice their opinions on the direction of the future of Oconee County. This principle was boldly achieved. The pages that follow provide a vision statement and objectives for each goal area as well as benchmarks for the goals areas. The objectives are presented in order, beginning with the most mentioned and ending with those that were least mentioned. Therefore, the objectives in each goal area are in priority order.

While this crucial phase of visioning has been completed, the difficult work of putting action and energy to words and ideas is the next critical step. The momentum of visioning must now be transferred to the implementation phase.

VISION PLAN SPONSORS

Oconee Alliance
Oconee County
Oconee Medical Center
City of Seneca
S.C. Budget and Control Board
Blue Ridge Electric Co-operative
Duke Energy
Fort Hill Natural Gas
Trehel Corporation
Community First Bank
Anderson Area Association of Realtors
First Citizens Bank
Seneca National Bank

IN-KIND CONTRIBUTORS

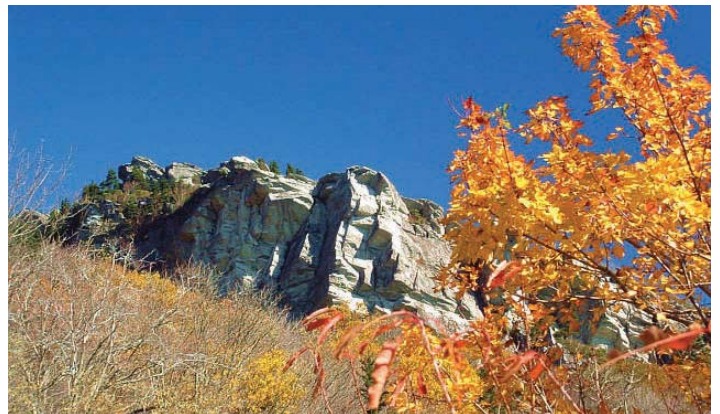
School District of Oconee County
Eagle Media/Daily Journal
Print It!
WGOG
WSNW





Oconee chooses

smart growth and increased economic vitality with a plan that protects what is precious—a way of life, the bountiful resources of nature, and towns and a countryside full of inviting warmth. Oconee plans for a larger vision, one that stays true to the best of Oconee, one that responds to the character and economic desires of the county.



A PLANNED CHOICE _____
THE CHOICE OF A PLANNED OCONEE

BY 2028 OCONEE COUNTY WILL...

P1 Develop and communicate a plan through public and private sectors to establish through ordinances, zoning, and managed growth an appropriate balance between individual property rights and a community's choice to achieve an ordered and harmonious sense of itself.

P2 Manage growth by developing a comprehensive future land use map to promote thoughtful zoning for industrial, agricultural, commercial, community, and residential housing development and to establish setbacks, height restrictions, and zoning so as to promote smart business expansion and protection of natural and cultural resources.

P3 Preserve and protect lakes, mountains, and natural beauty; preserve natural environment with ordered growth, specifically providing buffers around lakes and natural areas.

P4 Encourage smart growth, conservation measures, green cities planned with pedestrian-friendly spaces, and open green areas and a balanced village-style development with a certain percentage for development and a generous percentage for green space.

P5 Revitalize downtowns through incentive programs that combine historic preservation with economic rejuvenation, and government operations to develop attractive city centers, complete with pro-

grams for the promotion as destinations for shopping, outings, and tourism.

P6 Plan growth for environmentally sound infrastructure—roads and utilities—by collaborating among cities and the county, residential and commercial areas, in creating a master infrastructure plan that is prioritized and phased in; and provide infrastructure to areas where growth is desirable, with the I-85 corridor as a priority.

P7 Reduce the number of billboards and establish a countywide signage ordinance.

P8 Promote locally owned businesses and stores to locate in the downtown areas.

P9 Safeguard a healthy water supply by building environmentally sound infrastructure, by providing ample buffers around water sources, by restricting water diversion to outside areas, and by managing sewage and stormwater runoff.

P10 Manage roadsides for neatness and address property with pronounced litter and clutter by enforcing existing ordinances.

P11 Create wildlife sanctuaries and enhance natural and cultural areas as a part of managed growth.

P12 Inform of existing, and create additional, incentives for land owners to preserve and create natural areas.

P13 Employ reasonable impact fees for planned growth.

P14 Manage sprawl along Highway 123 and retain the small town feel.

P15 Encourage compact, aesthetically pleasing, bike and pedestrian-friendly communities.

P16 Provide a modern, functional public transportation system countywide—the CAT bus system and perhaps alternatives—to reduce traffic congestion and to provide affordable transport for all citizens, but especially for our work force.

P17 Link transportation upgrades and expansion with plans for industrial growth, tourism, agriculture, and cultural arts/recreation while keeping the environment green, unpolluted, and clean.

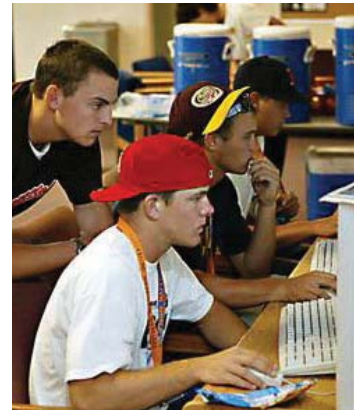
P18 Build a road system and establish traffic patterns for the future, with four-lane connectors to I-85, an improved highway system around Seneca and Clemson, traffic directed away from Highway 11, and integration with the state's road plan.

P19 Promote physical activity and plan for alternative transportation by building bike-friendly areas and sidewalks that connect natural areas with industrial and residential areas.

P20 Inform citizens of the purposes and effects of zoning and land use planning.

Oconee is proud

of its schools, its students, and the excellence that they achieve. Oconee chooses learning for all, beyond traditional learning, extending and renewing resources beyond the usual concepts of time and place. While continuing to promote personal responsibility in school children, Oconee also proclaims that it is every citizen's right and responsibility to learn.



AN EDUCATED CHOICE _____
THE CHOICE OF EDUCATION

BY 2028 OCONEE COUNTY WILL...

E1 Make a superior education system available for all Oconee residents through the development of educational programs that assess long-term job needs and address new employment needs in partnership with Oconee County School District, area colleges, and universities so all residents can become productive citizens.

E2 Promote parent and retiree volunteerism in schools and parent engagement in education.

E3 Cut the drop-out rate by half.

E4 Create curriculum and educational modes that utilize instructional best practices to ensure relevant and engaging educational opportunities for all learners, especially at-risk learners.

E5 Further develop college preparedness and honors programs, such as Advanced Placement, Dual Enrollment, International Baccalaureate, and foreign language instruction.



E6 Use education facilities wisely and economically to extend the education options of youth and to achieve lifelong educational needs, such as after-school tutoring, English and literacy education, parenting skills, and computer training.

E7 Expand career and technical education options.

E8 Maintain and improve comparative student achievement through test scores and academic performance.

E9 Strengthen pre-K programs, early education access, contracts for services, parenting education, and childcare training.

E10 Create and promote a regional environmental/conservation education cluster.

E11 Provide opportunities for understanding cultural diversity among all students, faculty, and staff in the Oconee County School District.



Oconee chooses

productive labor as a foundation of economic vitality, emphasizing the quality of life in economic decisions and balancing the preservation of a wonderful place to live with the growth of high quality jobs. Oconee continues to define itself by making choices that pleasantly provide labor for all and present all citizens with Oconee's best.



A WORKING CHOICE _____
THE CHOICE OF REWARDING EMPLOYMENT

BY 2028 OCONEE COUNTY WILL...

W1 Cultivate more high paying, low environmental impact jobs in areas such as manufacturing, automotive, biomedical, high tech, clean industry, tourism, professional arts, and health care. Establish business incubators and encourage retirees to support business development and growth.

W2 Invest more now to attract jobs of the future; provide incentives for businesses to relocate to our county.

W3 Encourage availability of communication technology.

W4 Build job growth on tourism and retirement destination trends.

W5 Make the I-85 corridor more desirable to industry and commerce.

W6 Market the lakes, waterfalls, mountains, along with fishing and outdoor recreation for tourism, emphasizing old town, arts and crafts, local artists, history, museums, and eco-tourism.

W7 Provide opportunities for young people to stay here by encouraging industry recruitment, tourism, and manufacturing jobs, especially in automotive, high tech, healthcare, heritage tourism, and eco-tourism.



W8 Redevelop existing industrial buildings and vacated structures.

W9 Provide incentives for downtown business revival, renovation, and relocation.

W10 Encourage or create a single countywide chamber of commerce.

W11 Establish a convention and visitors bureau.

W12 Encourage the development of a convention center and encourage development of accommodation facilities and restaurants.

W13 Promote local agriculture, market its economic value and impact, and expand farmers' market opportunities.

W14 Expand Oconee County Commerce Center on Highway 11.

W15 Promote the development of a small business health insurance pool.

W16 Establish agricultural processing facilities.

People choose Oconee

as a place where they can visit or live.

Oconee embraces lifelong residents and warmly welcomes newcomers and tourists. All partake in Oconee's bountiful nature, experiencing the rejuvenating power of its lakes and mountains, and its vistas. Oconee is a beautiful stage for art, culture, history, recreation, and entertainment.



A DESTINATION CHOICE _____
THE CHOICE FOR A DESTINATION

BY 2028 OCONEE COUNTY WILL...

D1 Enhance venues that host artist, cultural, and entertainment events.

D2 Continue partnering with a variety of arts/cultural/recreational organizations to provide mutually beneficial activities and events.

D3 Involve a diverse group of young professionals, families, art organizations, governmental bodies, and media in formulating and promoting cultural events.

D4 Create a performing arts/visual arts/cultural center as a magnet for community activity and as an attraction for tourism.

D5 Learn how successful communities manage amateur and professional artistic, cultural, and entertainment activities, and model programs accordingly.

D6 Expand recreational sites and activities, including YMCA, swimming pools, playgrounds, basketball courts, tennis courts, and outdoor sports facilities. Seek support from the public schools to make recreational facilities accessible to all Oconee citizens.

D7 Enhance recreational activities for people of all ages, including camping, walking, hiking, fishing, riding, biking, boating, kayaking, and canoeing.



D8 Improve after-school art and recreation activities.

D9 Create a community arts forum, bulletin board, and calendar of events to advertise offerings.

D10 Give a voice to young people in the creation and design of recreation, entertainment, and art facilities and programs.

D11 Provide handicap accessibility when renovating or building parks and play areas.

D12 Provide more public access to the area's recreational lakes.

D13 Build an outdoor stage venue for entertainment and art, and encourage as a hub for retail stores, restaurants, and coffee shops.

D14 Create a consolidated website to promote group and organizational efforts.

D15 Preserve and protect existing state land, and acquire more through conservation programs.



Oconee chooses

to be a safe, healthy, and clean county. Oconee takes care of those who need care, and it provides resources for its citizen to care for themselves. Important are ample housing, the ability to move freely around the county through well-ordered transport and a well-kept road system, and the opportunities to pursue a healthy lifestyle.



A SAFE AND HEALTHY CHOICE _____
**A CHOICE OF SECURITY, HEALTH AND
CONTENTMENT**

BY 2028 OCONEE COUNTY WILL...

S1 Prepare for the growing needs of senior adult healthcare, including the needs for in-home services, assisted and independent living facilities, and staged care.

S2 Establish communication as a core value of government, among all branches and among citizens countywide.

S3 Enforce litter laws and building codes uniformly throughout the county.

S4 Provide consistent high quality fire and police protection, hospital and emergency responder service across the county.

S5 Insist on quality, safe, and affordable healthcare for all.

S6 Increase housing that is targeted to Oconee median family incomes.

S7 Improve training for public safety officers, including training in technology, diversity, and disaster response.

S8 Ensure an efficient, centralized communication system for law enforcement and first responder personnel.

S9 Increase detention space and expand programs for repeat offenders.

S10 Provide support to the most needy in the community, including domestic violence and child

abuse victims, the ill, the frail, the indigent, distressed individuals, recovering substance abusers, and children and families generally.

S11 Encourage social services agencies and groups to form partnerships and create a one-stop center, with public transportation access, to improve the scope and effort of services to meet the needs of the whole person.

S12 Address homelessness by building a shelter, providing counseling, and improving case management services.

S13 Build a computer network for social service agencies, and align with the national model for strengthening families through early intervention and care.

S14 Coordinate food pantry efforts, especially those of the churches, by helping to establish a database for the needy; include clothing and utilities assistance in reporting.

S15 Provide more health outreach and medical satellite facilities throughout the county.

S16 Promote physical activity across the community.

S17 Support and expand programs that meet the needs of the handicapped; e.g. Tribble Center Gift and its Thrift Store.

S18 Buffer industrial and com-

mercial locales so that they do not diminish the health and safety of residential areas.

S19 Encourage citizens to participate in, or to lead, housing and growth management discussions.

S20 Look for opportunities to combine city and county services for value, effectiveness, and breadth of service.

S21 Promote mixed income housing rather than class- and income-based housing areas.

S22 Provide a women's and children's shelter while providing counseling and access to case management services.

S23 Reduce or discourage influences that lead to crime, including poverty, drug use, unemployment, apathy, and hopelessness; increase or promote influences that lead to productive lives, including health, employment, education, feelings of self-worth, and connectedness.

S24 Promote citizen confidence in and engagement in local government and civic affairs.

S25 Embrace diversity and acceptance of all citizens as part of the Oconee tradition and way of life.

S26 Encourage churches to continue to respond to community needs and crises.

Nature abounds here.

Oconee has chosen the richness of nature in the past, and it chooses nature for the future. Oconee is joined to nature and cannot be separated from it; thus nature is guarded jealously and protected passionately, safeguarding the lakes, mountains, streams, waterfalls, and forests for the present and for the future. In its towns and along its byways, Oconee treasures the pulse of nature, which is unhurried, unbothered, and unblemished. Oconee chooses nature's beauty and a small town feel as centerpieces of its life.



A NATURAL CHOICE _____
THE CHOICE THAT'S NATURAL

BY 2028 OCONEE COUNTY WILL...

N1 Protect that which attracts newcomers and visitors and which keeps lifelong residents: the beautiful natural environment.

N2 Preserve all lakes and rivers, such as Lake Keowee, Lake Jocassee, Lake Hartwell, and the Chatooga River.

N3 Retain and protect the small town and rural feel of the county.

N4 Create wildlife sanctuaries, and enhance incentives for land owners not to develop environmentally sensitive and environmentally valuable land.

N5 Preserve farms and rural countryside, and promote farming values.



N6 Protect natural green spaces and historical sites, e.g., Chatooga, Chauga, state and county parks, USFS forest lands, WMA lands, the fish hatchery, Spy Rock Road areas, Stumphouse Tunnel, Civilian Conservation Corps camps, and textile heritage sites; develop new green spaces and historical sites where needed.

N7 Preserve a healthy community with clean air and water.

N8 Fund an agriculture conservation bank and promote conservation easements.

N9 Encourage citizens, businesses, and governments to use resources responsibly, to reduce the use of fossil fuels, and to work toward environmentally friendly choices for agriculture, construction, and transportation.



Presented by



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