The New River Valley Green Infrastructure Partnership

In the fall of 2006, the New River Valley Planning District Commission (NRVPDC) kicked off a regional initiative to promote planning that would maintain the quality of life and rural heritage experienced by current day residents in the Valley. Recognizing that growth is coming, the NRVPDC and its partners are promoting the use of Green Infrastructure planning concepts within our communities. Green Infrastructure (GI) is defined as an interconnected network of land and water that contributes to the health, economic well being and quality of life for communities and people. These interconnected networks include water resources, agricultural lands, outdoor recreation and trail networks, cultural resources, natural areas, parks and conservation lands.

Green Infrastructure can be viewed in much of the same was as gray infrastructure, which includes roadways, bridges, sewers and power lines. Both systems attempt to establish a framework for the proper growth and development within a community and more importantly, both need equal consideration and value within the planning process. Abigail Convery of the NRVPDC explains, “Most often, gray infrastructure planning does not take into context the services the existing green infrastructure is already providing, while historically, conservation planning does not take into account the existing or future gray infrastructure plans and the effects those plans on what realistically can be implemented. We are working to promote more context sensitive planning by working to raise an awareness of the value of the Green infrastructure components within the landscape.”

The name “Green Infrastructure” builds on the idea that natural areas within the landscape can perform a variety of valuable services to communities and therefore it functions as infrastructure for those communities. That “green” provides services that are directly tied to a community’s quality of life and maintains the natural landscape characteristics that are associated with the heritage of an area. Green Infrastructure provides several “ecological services” such as maintaining and protecting a clean drinking water supply, mitigating droughts and floods, removing air pollutants and protecting habitats for plants, fisheries and wildlife. Several studies have now shown that by maintaining elements of Green Infrastructure within a landscape or community, it can also act as a source of economic growth for a region by providing trails and sites for ecological tourism, sustaining working lands for forestry and agriculture, and by increasing property value through conserved or restored open space. The benefits of Green Infrastructure also include enhancing the overall value of a community by providing recreational opportunities such as a network of walking/biking trails and parks, creating community green spaces used for gathering and relaxing, and by improving the overall aesthetics of a community through planting trees and restoring river banks.

Creating a GI network throughout the region will take several initial steps before an implementation phase can be reached. The NRVPDC hopes to first bring together various community stakeholders to learn more about the GI process, and to collect a shared vision and set of goals for each community. Community Meetings will be held on the following dates:

1. Floyd County – August 7, 5:30-8:00pm – Country Store
2. *City of Radford* – August 23, 5:00-8:00pm - Parks and Recreation Building
3. *Giles County* – August 28, 5:00-8:00pm – Castle Rock Recreation Area
4. *Pulaski County* – August 30, 5:00-8:00pm – Rockwood Manor (North of NRCC)

After this initial phase, other planning stages would follow that include conducting an inventory of the area’s natural and cultural resources, identifying which resources provide public service (clean air and water, food and energy, etc.), and linking key landscape features and designating optimal areas for the possibility of new growth. For any further information concerning GI, please contact Abigail Convery with the NRVPDC, at 540-639-9313.