



## GIC News Release

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### **New County Stewardship Guide Provides Steps for Conserving Nelson County's Natural Assets**

Nelson County, Va., is blessed with some of Virginia's most highly-valued natural assets. To help preserve these natural resources, Nelson County and the Green Infrastructure Center (GIC) undertook a year-long assessment of the county's natural resources. Today, they are pleased to release the final community stewardship guide Healthy Watersheds, Healthy Communities, which provides maps and tips for residents, businesses, and local government to manage and conserve the county's abundant natural assets, as well as preserve healthy watersheds.

Nelson County has more large intact areas of forest than most counties in the Virginia Piedmont, covering 80 percent of the county. More than 249,000 acres of those forests are ranked by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation as "outstanding to very high quality" for wildlife and water quality protection.

According to GIC Director Karen Firehock, "These forests contribute \$3 million dollars to the local economy, so it isn't just wildlife that benefits. They are also helping the community by cleaning the air and facilitating the recharge of our drinking water aquifers, while filtering stormwater runoff before it reaches our creeks and rivers."

The new stewardship guide Healthy Watersheds, Healthy Communities shows how the forests and rivers of Nelson County promote the county's active nature-based recreation and tourism. The breweries, wineries, walking, hiking and biking trails, and boating areas depend on the beautiful scenery that Nelson County's intact forests provide. Fishermen also rely on intact, forested watersheds to help keep rivers clean and support abundant fish populations.

Not only is clean water important for people and wildlife, it also supports local brewers, who rely on Nelson County having clean and abundant water for their craft beers. Visitors to the local "Brew Ridge Trail" and the new "Artisan Trail" appreciate the county's beautiful landscape settings that keep them coming back again and again. To ensure that these resources remain healthy and abundant, the guide provides tips for community members to become involved in such activities as livestock fencing and improving the habitat in their own

backyards. The study is available to the public for free download at <http://www.gicinc.org/projectsnelson.htm>  
There are also additional copies at the Nelson County Visitor's Center below the library in Lovingston, Va. on Route 29.

The study was funded by the U.S. Forest Service, the Virginia Department of Forestry, the Chesapeake Bay Program and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Healthy Watersheds Initiative. Work was completed by graduate students at the University of Virginia, staff at Skeo Solutions, and the Green Infrastructure Center. All data and maps completed as part of the study are being donated to the County's planning department for use in future land use planning.

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*Founded in 2006, the Green Infrastructure Center Inc. (GIC) <[www.gicinc.org](http://www.gicinc.org)> is a nonprofit organization located in Charlottesville, Virginia that assists communities in developing strategies for protecting and conserving their ecological and cultural assets. The Green Infrastructure Center team is made up of staff from the GIC and Skeo Solutions, which provides mapping analysis. The center has completed ten mapping projects in Virginia. The center is supported entirely through grants and donations. This project has been provided to Nelson County on a pro-bono basis, meaning that all services have been donated to the county.*