

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. The top half of the image shows a steep, densely forested hillside with trees in various shades of green, yellow, and orange, suggesting autumn. Below the hillside, a valley opens up, featuring a large, flat green field, several smaller fields, and a cluster of farm buildings including a white house and a barn. A dirt road winds through the valley. The bottom half of the image is dominated by a dense forest of trees with vibrant autumn foliage in shades of yellow, orange, and red.

MID-ATLANTIC HIGHLANDS ACTION PROGRAM

TRANSFORMING THE LEGACY

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Cover photograph: Rock Creek, WV by Lyntha Scott Eiler.

The Mid-Atlantic Highlands region extends from New York in the north to the North Carolina/Tennessee border in the south, and from the Blue Ridge Mountains in the east to the Ohio River in the west.



Mid-Atlantic Highlands

T R A N S F O R M I N G T H E L E G A C Y

Action Program

prepared by
Canaan Valley Institute

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the Joint Explanatory Statement of the Committee of the Conference, accompanying Public Law 107-73, making Fiscal Year 2002 Appropriations for the Department of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies (including the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)), Congress expressed an expectation that the Administrator of the EPA will carry out the goals of the Mid-Atlantic Highlands Program. It calls for EPA to enter into agreements with state and federal agencies, as well as nongovernmental organizations like Canaan Valley Institute (CVI) to assist the Agency in carrying out those goals. CVI has prepared this report for Congress and EPA for two reasons:

1. to document the need for a Highlands Action Program and
2. to recommend an approach to implement a Highlands Action Program.

Created to foster local decision making in support of sustainable Highlands communities, the Institute is committed to empowering stakeholders and increasing

their ability to improve their quality of life.

The Mid-Atlantic Highlands is a complex and evolving region, where the environment is an important part of the community, quality of life, and economy. The region hosts some of the most diverse and globally important ecological resources on Earth. Its forests are the most diverse in North America and contain the largest interior temperate hardwood forests in the world. Highlands streams also contain as many types of fish, mussel and crayfish species as any temperate streams in the world. In a 2000 report by the Nature Conservancy, the Highlands region was identified as one of its top six priorities because of the high diversity in total species richness of plants and animals, and the presence of unique species not found in other parts of the United States.

The Highlands region has a remarkable history forged by past environmental and economic decisions. These decisions left a legacy of problems – remnants of past exploitation that fueled an economy outside the region. Over the past ten years, a wealth of scientific information has been generated about the Highlands by scientific institutions. This information is being used to

help solve some of the region's environmental problems and support the need for a Highlands Action Program.

Some of the major environmental problems identified through research and CVI-stakeholder interactions are habitat loss; stream sedimentation; forest fragmentation; acid rain; acid mine drainage; flooding; and invasive, non-native species. These are just some of the stressors that result from human activities such as urban infringement, timber, agriculture and mining practices, and stream alterations. In addition there are also economic concerns in the Highlands. In some counties in the Highlands, up to 50% of the children are living in poverty. Parts of the region also struggle with high unemployment rates, low labor force participation rates, and some of the lowest per capita incomes in the nation (Table 1).

With problems, however, come opportunities. There are opportunities to take advantage of the skills and resources within the region that cannot be duplicated anywhere else – its people, history and cultural heritage, institutions, climate, scenic beauty, open space, biological diversity, and globally significant forests.

Table 1. Environmental and socioeconomic indicators suggest that all is not well in the Highlands.

Indicator	Environmental Condition (% Fair/Poor)	Socioeconomic Condition (% Counties Below National Average)
Forest Fragmentation	47	
Bird Index	57	
Fish Index	67	
Insect Index	75	
High School Graduation Rates		86
Unemployment Rates		83
Per Capita Income		88

Some key opportunities include the following:

1. the creation of a natural resource restoration industry;
2. amenity-based development;
3. value-added natural resources products; and
4. the foundation of a solid base for environmental stewardship and sustainable development through partnerships.

Those who live here and those who visit realize that the Highlands region must be cared for through partnerships and with methods that intertwine the economic concerns and values of local communities with environmental stewardship. The Canaan Valley Institute has demonstrated that this model for the Highlands works. Now, the model needs to be expanded through a Highlands Action Program to sustain this special place and nurture the emerging approach to environmental

stewardship. This will require broad political and citizen support.

Sound environmental stewardship can be achieved through a Highlands Action Program that

1. takes action on the problems identified in this report;
2. uses environmental indicators, good science, and partnerships to identify the causes of these problems;
3. develops solutions and management actions to resolve these problems;
4. develops a management governance for the Program that includes local communities, states, non-governmental organizations, research institutions, and the private sector in partnerships; and
5. periodically assesses its status, emerging issues and trends, and reports to

Congress and local stakeholders on its findings.

An approach for implementing a Highlands Action Program to achieve the objectives cited above is recommended in this report.

This report describes how a Highlands Action Program can, indeed, help transform a legacy of scarred landscapes and underserved people into a promising future of sound environmental and socioeconomic stewardship. The Program relies upon Highlands stakeholders to work together to resolve Highlands issues.

Mid-Atlantic Highlands
TRANSFORMING THE LEGACY
Action Program

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