

*This excerpt is from the 38-page publication **Economic Overview 2002 Bath and Highland County** produced by the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission.*

I. HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY

History

In 1847, 416 square miles of spectacular mountain terrain were formed into Highland County out of portions of Bath and Pendleton Counties. The county received its name from its prevailing high altitude: it has one of the highest mean elevations of any county east of the Mississippi River.

The county has a rich historical tradition. During the Civil War the Battle of McDowell, a significant battle in Stonewall Jackson's 1862 Valley Campaign, was waged in Highland County. The Town of Monterey was established in 1848. Originally named Highland, the town was renamed in honor of the Mexican town where General Zachary Taylor defeated the Mexican Army during the Spanish-American War.

Highland County was built around the richness of its natural resources. Wool remains one of Highland's major agricultural commodities. In 1990 the county ranked third in the state in the number of sheep. The county is typically one of the largest wool-producing counties in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Geography

Both Bath and Highland lie within the Allegheny Mountains and are part of the Ridge and Valley Physiographic Province. High, narrow mountain ridges that run northeast to southwest characterize the counties and that form relatively narrow river valleys. Most of the level areas are found on the terraces adjacent to streams and rivers. Elevations range from 4,546 feet above sea level in Highland County, to 1,140 feet above sea level in Bath County where the Cowpasture River flows into Allegheny County.

According to the U. S. Forest Service's *Forest Statistics 1992*, approximately 73.8 percent of Highland's 266,112 acres is forested. Forest resources support a strong local wood-products industry and are important in protecting watersheds, wildlife habitats and outdoor recreation. The dominant forest type is mixed hardwoods, specifically oaks, hickories and maples. Most of the forested areas are tracts large enough to be classified as potentially available for commercial use. Several major sawmills have been or are currently in operation.

The large proportion of each county that is held as national forest or state natural area indicates the high quality of natural resources in Bath and Highland Counties. In Highland alone, approximately 28 percent (71,455 acres) is held by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries or the George Washington–Jefferson National Forest. While the majority (64 percent) of Highland's forested land is privately owned, 36 percent is classified as public land.

Climate

Bath and Highland share a continental-type climate, which is modified considerably by the elevation. The winters are moderately cold and the summers are relatively cool. The nearby mountains produce various steering, blocking and modifying effects on storms and air masses. In winter a general airflow from the northwest may cause persistent cloudiness and, in many cases, snow flurries in both Bath and Highland Counties. Prevailing winds in Bath County are from the southwest with an average velocity of 10 miles per hour.

The normal annual temperature for Bath and Highland is 50.9 degrees and 47.6 degrees Fahrenheit, respectively. Precipitation is well distributed throughout the year with maximum amounts falling in July and the minimum amounts falling in January. Precipitation in the summer is mainly in the form of showers and thunderstorms. In the winter, precipitation usually occurs as snow. Bath and Highland receive an average of approximately 41.5 inches of precipitation each year.

VI. LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Structure and Organization

Virginia counties are unincorporated administrative subdivisions of the state created by law and governed by an elected board of supervisors. The Highland County Board of Supervisors consists of three members elected at-large for four-year terms. Virginia towns are political subdivisions governmentally independent of county or counties surrounding them. Monterey is an independent town governed by a six-member council and mayor who are elected for two-year terms. A clerk-treasurer oversees the daily operation of the town.

Local Services

In Highland County, water and sewer services are provided to the residents of Monterey. The Town of Monterey also provides solid waste collection, streetlights, sidewalks and maintenance of fire hydrants. The community of McDowell is served with water only. Highland County adopted a comprehensive plan in 1999 and regularly updates its zoning and subdivision ordinances. Monterey adopted the same Comprehensive Plan and zoning ordinances used by the county. Building and zoning officials act to monitor and guide new development within each of the localities, with technical assistance from the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission.

VII. TAXES AND FINANCES

Local Taxes

In Virginia, towns and counties are separate taxing entities. Businesses and residents of a town are subject to both town and county tax levies (with the exception of the utilities tax). Both Bath and Highland Counties levy taxes on real estate and tangible personal property. Bath also levies taxes on merchant's capital, while Highland assesses a utilities tax. The major local taxes paid by manufacturers in Highland County are real estate, machinery and tools taxes. In addition, Highland County collects a sales and use tax of 1 percent in conjunction with the state levy of 3.5 percent.

VIII. EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

Public Schools

The Highland County public school system consists of one elementary school and one high school. The 1999-00 year-end student population was 353. The Highland County public school system has a vocational-technical training division and offers adult vocational training.

IX. LIVING CONDITIONS

Cultural and Recreational

The Highland County Recreation Commission offers an organized softball program for residents of the county. In addition, public schools, churches and various social and civic organizations provide recreational opportunities. The Needle's Eye is a nine-hole golf course open to the public in Highland County. There are many historical sites within Highland County that have national as well as local significance, including the McDowell Civil War Battlefield.

The annual spring Maple Festival attracts more than 70,000 people to Highland County. During the festival, the maple sugar camps are open to the public to demonstrate the production of maple syrup. The festival offers dances, craft shows and music. The Highland County Arts Council was formed in 1989 to bring musical, dramatic and other art programs to the county.

Medical Care

Highland County is served by one private practice physician, who lives in the county, as well as many other doctors and dentists, including specialists, who are available in nearby Hot Springs, Staunton and Harrisonburg. The recently completed Highland Medical Center is the local facility for outpatient health care services. Currently, one physician, a family nurse practitioner, a registered nurse and a certified medical assistant staff the Center.

Fire Protection

Fire protection for Highland County is provided by three volunteer fire departments. These include the Highland County Volunteer Fire Department (responsible for Monterey and Blue Grass), the McDowell Volunteer Fire Department (covering McDowell, Doe Hill and Headwaters), and the Bolar Volunteer Fire Department (responsible for the southern part of the county).

Libraries

Highland County Public Library, an independent institution located in Monterey, has approximately 14,000 total volumes, including books and periodicals and audio-visual materials and subscribes to 39 periodicals. Free Internet access is available on 5 computer terminals. Circulation in 200-01 was close to 24,000 volumes.

Media

The Recorder, a local newspaper published weekly in Monterey, covers events occurring in Bath and Highland Counties. A broader converge of Virginia and the nation can be provided by home delivery of *The Richmond Times-Dispatch*, *The Daily News Leader* (Staunton), *The Daily News-Record* (Harrisonburg), the Covington *Virginian Review*, and the *Roanoke Times*.

For a complete copy of the report, contact the Highland County Chamber of Commerce.