

Jobs, Forests, & Rivers: Accomplishing Climate Change Resiliency in Rural NC through Model Forest Policy Tools

Edwards, Jenny

Dan River Basin Association

The Dan River Basin Association (DRBA) used the tools and process offered by the Climate Change University (CSU) of the Model Forest Policy Program to develop a living climate change adaptation plan for a rural North Carolina County (“Rockingham County: Jobs, Forests, and Rivers”) in 2013. We built a core team of local planners, municipal leaders, paddlers, hunters and community college students to engage in the process. DRBA can share experiences of: (1) building a local constituency to accomplish the plan; (2) identifying what is most important to local residents; and (3) finding funding to support the process. While the goal of CSU is to empower rural, under served communities to become leaders in climate resilience using a cost effective distance-learning program, DRBA’s purposes for the plan were more narrowly focused on the perils to natural resources posed by extreme weather events and ecological degradation. At the heart of our planning process was (and still is) a desire to effectively prepare the people, businesses and natural resources of Rockingham County to adapt to extreme weather events. By making the plan a conservative “no regrets” approach, we found much more support for it. Rather than broadcasting climate change resiliency - which may meet political resistance or citizen apathy - we instead advanced the cause that our county’s forests and rivers are vital to economic development, wildlife habitat, drinking water, and electricity production. We are focused on protecting the most vulnerable among us, the elderly, materially poor and poor of health, from extreme heat during the summers; and ensuring that Rockingham County has resources that will place it in the best possible position to attract new business and to foster the entrepreneurial spirit from within. As a result, we have found that climate change resiliency is becoming a bedrock principle in nearly all of our work.