



2026 Economic Development Conference Stories of Resilience and Hope

July 2026



Speakers



Zeb Smathers
Mayor of Canton



David Francis
Director of Haywood
Advancement Foundation



Russ Harris
Executive Director
of the Southwestern
Commission

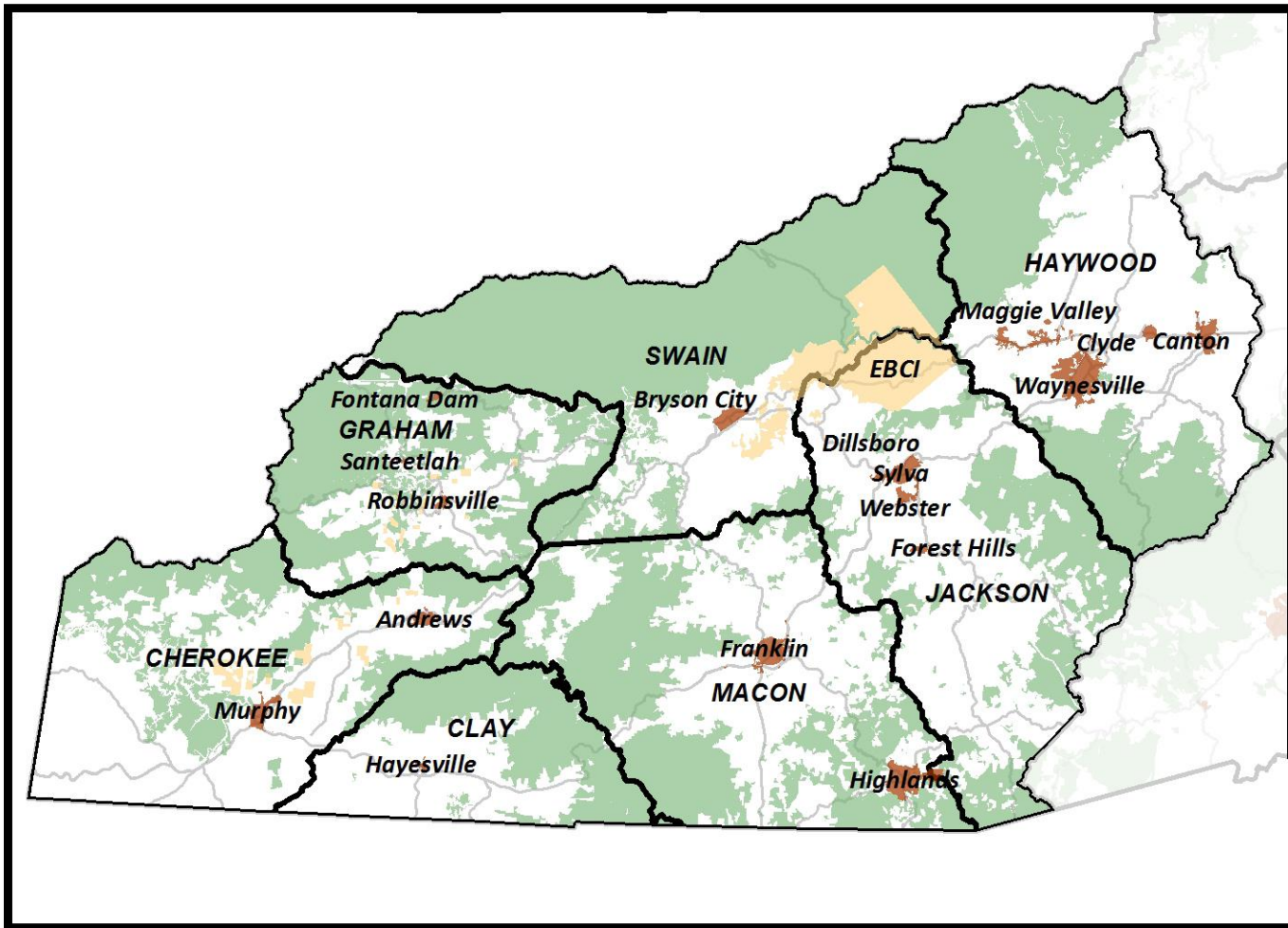


Mill Town





NC Region A





Mill Town



Smoky Mountain News



Eakin Howard, Asheville Citizen-Times

“Growing up, I went to a library built by Champion (Evergreen). I swam in a pool [YMCA] built by Champion (Evergreen),” he said. “That's gone. That culture and history has gone.”

Mike Green, 4th Generation Employee



Disaster Strikes



Cory Vallencourt, Smoky Mountain News



Waynesville Mountaineer

"I'm apprehensive, 57 years old and starting over again," he said. "I'm keeping my head up. I still believe in this country, and I still believe that there's a place for people like me."

Justin Medford, 24-year employee



Disaster → Economic Development

Strong Partnerships:



Cory Vallencourt, Smoky Mountain News





Disaster → Economic Development

Early Success:



Caroline Parker, EDNC



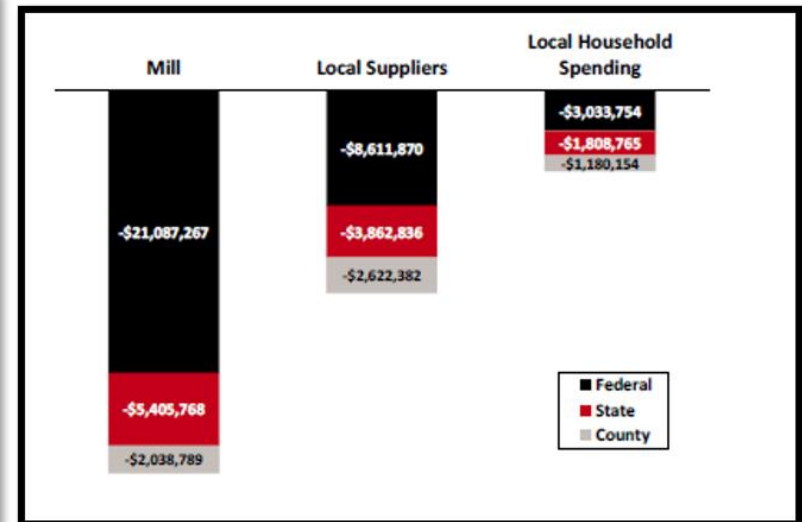
Disaster → Economic Development

Impacts Mitigated:

Lost Income & Income At-Risk in the Southwestern Region by County

Counties outside of Haywood account for 5% of impacted income.

County	Mill	Local Suppliers	Local Household Spending	Total	Percent of Total
Haywood	-\$87,234,032	-\$32,172,109	-\$14,782,927	-\$134,189,068	95.2%
Jackson		-\$2,832,293	-\$877,432	-\$3,709,725	2.6%
Cherokee		-\$1,099,457	-\$124,599	-\$1,224,056	0.9%
Swain		-\$1,012,058	-\$103,819	-\$1,115,877	0.8%
Macon		-\$554,008	-\$115,151	-\$669,158	0.5%
Graham		-\$64,976	-\$8,597	-\$73,573	0.1%
Clay		-\$32,389	-\$9,836	-\$42,225	0.03%
Total	-\$87,234,032	-\$37,767,290	-\$16,022,361	-\$141,023,683	100.0%



“The Mill’s Closure puts 2,020 jobs, \$141 million in income, and \$50 million in tax revenues at risk of being lost”
Tom Tveidt, Syneva Economics



Mill Town

Mill Site - Town of Canton, North Carolina





Role of the COGS

- ❖ Rapid Response
- ❖ Job Fairs
- ❖ National Dislocated Worker Grant
- ❖ Convening Funders
- ❖ Ongoing Grant Writing & Management





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Thank You



Our Past Informs Us



Business North Carolina



But Doesn't Limit Us

