



II. Natural Environment

Location

The Town of Bluefield, Virginia is located in the north central sector of Southwest Virginia in the northeastern portion of Tazewell County. Bluefield, Virginia has the distinction of having a “sister” city, Bluefield, West Virginia. U.S. Highway 19 provides north-south access, while U.S. Highway 460 provides east-west access. Approximately thirty minutes south of Bluefield, Interstate 77 intersects with Interstate 81, a major transportation route linking the northeast and southeast United States. Thirty miles to the north, Interstate 77 connects with Interstate 64 linking the Port of Hampton Roads, Virginia to the east with the Central United States.

Region

Bluefield is located in the Cumberland Plateau Planning District. The District is composed of four counties, located in the western part of Virginia, bordering West Virginia and Kentucky. These counties consist of Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell, and Tazewell Counties, encompassing an area of approximately 1,830 square miles with a combined population of approximately 113,181 in 2010. The population density of the District is approximately 61.85 persons per square mile. The rural nature of the region is evidenced by the fact that Bluefield is the second largest community within the Cumberland Plateau Planning District.



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Physical Geography

Major topographic features such as elevation, topography, and soil conditions, as well as climatic conditions, such as annual rainfall, seasonal temperatures, humidity, and prevailing winds must be fully considered to determine their potential effect. Soils, for instance, are frequently of such consistency that water cannot percolate through them, thus creating poor drainage conditions. As a result from this condition, temporary flooding occurs because the soils are unable to absorb the moisture during times of heavy precipitation. Under these conditions, the use of septic tanks is very limited and would generally be a health hazard. Growth is limited in those areas that are not served by Municipal Waste Water Treatment facilities. The development in areas where steep slopes prevail can rapidly escalate construction cost and can also directly affect environmental conditions. Soil properties exert strong influence on the manner in which land will be used. The suitability and limitation of soils can determine the feasibility of projects such as: sewage disposal facilities, urban drainage systems, foundations for buildings and structures, transportation facilities, etc. Historically, the study of soils has been primarily directed toward agriculture and forestry with little attention given to the ways in which soil properties might influence urban uses of land. However, with the growing intensity of urban development, soils play a more vital role in determining day to day decisions governing urban development.





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Elevation

Located in the north central section of Southwest Virginia, Bluefield has an average elevation of approximately 2,385 feet. Bluefield is almost totally surrounded by mountains that reach upward of 4,000 feet. The Town of Bluefield has the distinction of having the highest elevation for any town in the state of Virginia. Hence the slogan, “Virginia’s Tallest Town”.

Climate

The climate of Bluefield is continental. In the winter, moderate to cold temperatures occur with occasional severe cold waves moving through the area. In the summer, the weather is comfortable at lower altitudes and moderate temperatures prevail in higher elevations. The range of mean daily temperature is from a minimum of 24 degrees Fahrenheit to a maximum of 40 degrees Fahrenheit in January to a minimum of 56 degrees Fahrenheit to a maximum of 82 degrees Fahrenheit in July. Yearly precipitation is approximately 44 inches with an average estimated annual snowfall of 35 inches. The last killing frost is in mid-May with the first killing frost normally in the second week of October.





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Geology

The following map was compiled from several sources by several different entities and is by no means meant to represent anything more than a cursory knowledge of the rock types and locations within the Town's boundaries. There have been seven types of rock layers identified that can be grouped into three major type categories.

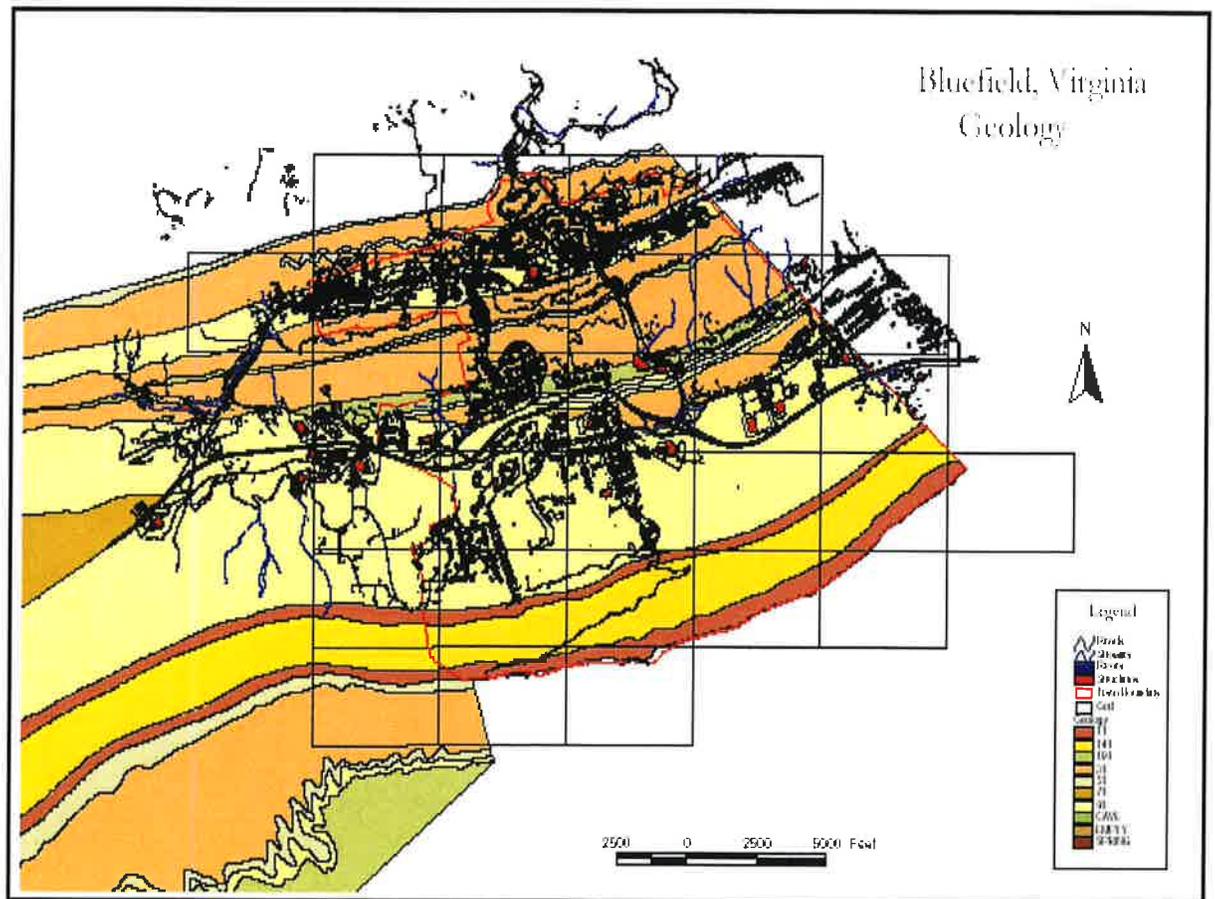
1. Carbonate rocks that are typically found in the valley floors. These carbonate rocks form better agricultural soils as well as providing the best groundwater infiltration. This type of rock is often very porous allowing for rapid water movement from the surface to underground aquifers and caves.
2. Fine grained clastic rocks that are usually found in the foothills and mountain slopes and form thin low fertility soils and are relatively non-porous yielding limited groundwater supplies. These fine grained clastic formations are represented by: a shale, sandy shale and siltstone complex that are formed of mud and silt.
3. Sandstone and Sandstone/Shale layers are usually found on steep slopes while the ridge crests are the more durable sandstone beds. These form thin loose stony soils that are susceptible to erosion.



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Soil Types

- Highly soluble carbonates with well developed karsts (91).
- Carbonates that are less soluble with less developed karst example (71).
- Shale, Sandy shale and Siltstone (141).
- Red Shale that forms weak unstable slopes (11).
- Black or Carbonaceous Shale that forms weak unstable slopes and produces iron and Sulphur that is present in wells (191).
- Interlayered sandstone and shale (31).
- Sandstone (51).





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Water Resources

The Town of Bluefield lies just six miles east of the Eastern Continental Divide. Due to this fact, and the steeply sloping terrain, in general there are only small streams to provide water. The few lakes located in the area are small and man-made. Because of the karst topography, the area is blessed with many springs.

Historically, ground water has proven to be a good source of water for individual and small community supplies. There are some who believe that a large aquifer is present below Bluefield, but there has been no definitive research to prove or disprove this theory.

The Bluestone River is the largest source of groundwater in the community. It also serves as the Town's source for drinking water. Wrights Valley Creek, Beaver Pond Creek and Whitley Branch are the other primary streams that pass through the Town.

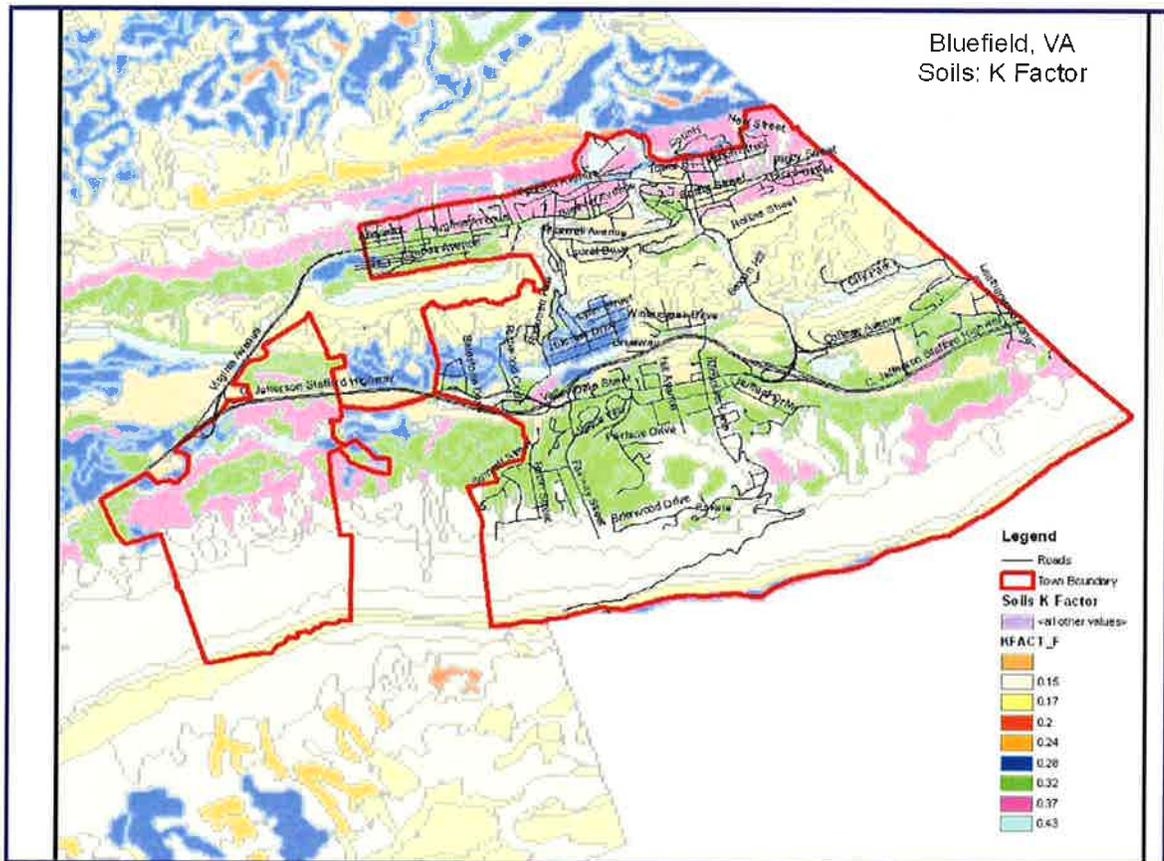
Soils

The K factor or soil erodibility factor represents both the susceptibility of soil to erosion and the rate of runoff, as measured under the standard plot condition. Soils high in clay have low K values, typically in the range of 0.05 to 0.15, because they are resistant to detachment. Coarse textured soils, such as sandy soils, have low K values, typically around 0.05 to 0.20 because of low runoff, even though these soils are easily detached. Medium textured soils, such as silty loams, have moderate K factors, usually in the range of 0.25 to 0.40 because they are moderately susceptible to both detachment and runoff.



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Soils having high silt content are the most erodible of the soil types. They are easily detached and tend to crust over producing high runoff rates. K values for these types of soils are typically greater than 0.40. Additionally soils are broken into categories based on their composition and further categorized by the slope on which they are found. This gives two ways to map soils, one is by K factor a more quantitative method, the other is by soil classification, which is a more qualitative method. Included is a map of the K factors for the town. The local NRCS office can provide full access to any information pertaining to soil classifications.





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Non-Renewable Natural Resources

The area has been known for years as a major producer of coal. In recent years, the coal reserves have begun to be depleted, and the mechanization of the industry has combined to force many to find new employment.

Pounding Mill Quarry provides stone and gravel from their local operation. This stone is used for construction, concrete, asphalt and also for the production of Limestone dust which is used in coal mining to reduce the risk of explosions.

Renewable Resources

The primary renewable resource in the area is timber. Both hardwoods and softwoods are timbered in the area. Hardwood reserves exist inside the Town limits, but the harvesting of these will lead to increased stormwater runoff problems. Studies will first need to be conducted on each individual piece of land in order to determine whether or not this practice would adversely affect any adjacent land owners, increase run-off, or stormwater problems that are already occurring throughout town.



III. Historical Perspective & Culture

History

The Town dates back to the early 1860's when a small post office, bearing the name 'Pin Hook' was built. Although not a town at the time, this post office was the beginning of what is now Bluefield, Virginia.

This area became significantly important upon construction of the Norfolk and Western Railway. It was during this period shortly before 1883 that the post office was renamed 'Harman' to honor a confederate war hero Colonel E. H. Harman.

In 1884, Thomas Graham arrived from Philadelphia to survey for the N&W Railway. He purchased a tract of land and laid out the streets of an embryo town. The post office was renamed 'Graham'. It was also in the year 1884 that the fledgling town of 'Graham' elected its first mayor, one John T. Linkous.

In 1924, a general election was held to change the name to Bluefield due to its close proximity to Bluefield, West Virginia. Five hundred-eighteen (518) votes were cast and it was decided by only sixty-four votes to change the name.

The name Bluefield, Virginia became official July 12, 1924. It was a memorable event celebrated by a day-long spectrum of activities. An actual wedding ceremony between Ms. Emma Smith and Mr. L. Wingo Yost, occurred to symbolize the "marriage" of the two towns.



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The ceremony was attended by over 15,000 people including the governors of both Virginia and West Virginia. It received national news coverage and congratulatory messages were sent by then President Coolidge to the mayors of both Bluefields.

The name Bluefield is derived from a species of chicory that has a dark blue flower, and from the bluegrass that grows in abundance in this area.

For many years, Bluefield, Virginia was a bedroom community for Bluefield WV, which served as the commercial and economic center of the region. During the last 20+ years, Bluefield, WV has declined in population and prominence. In the last 10 years Bluefield, Virginia has seen an increase in commercial activity and establishment of numerous new businesses. The more favorable business and tax climate has made Bluefield, Virginia the commercial center for the region.

General History

As with many smaller communities, Bluefield has less cultural amenities than more urbanized areas. While lacking in the diversity of programs, the area does offer a great variety of recreation and entertainment alternatives.