

CHAPTER FOUR THE RURAL AREAS

INTRODUCTION

The Rural Landscape

Albemarle County occupies 726 square miles in the Virginia Piedmont and Blue Ridge Mountains. The designated Rural Areas, about 690 square miles, make up approximately 95 percent of the County, and surround the designated Development Areas and the City of Charlottesville. They border Greene and Orange counties to the north, Louisa and Fluvanna counties to the east, Buckingham County to the south, and Nelson, Augusta, and Rockingham counties to the west.

~~Agricultural and forestal resources have been identified as the most critical County resources and the desired primary land use in the Rural Area. Such uses Agriculture, forestry, and conservation play an important and long-standing role in the environment, heritage, and economy of the County. Loss of these resources to development is irreversible and irreplaceable. These uses depend on natural resources that are irreversibly lost when rural land is converted to residential and commercial uses. Stewardship of these resources also Protecting rural land uses provides an opportunity to conserve and efficiently use other resources such as: (1) water resources (with use of property conservation techniques); (2) natural, scenic, and historic resources (with through the maintenance of pasture land, farmland, and forested areas, and other natural areas); and, (3) fiscal resources (by limiting development and lessening the need to provide public services to wide areas of the County). In the interest of this growth management strategy, residential development is considered a secondary use in the Rural Areas.~~

The County's topography varies from Piedmont hills in the east and south to the Blue Ridge and its foothills in the west. Altitudes range from 235 feet, where the Rivanna River crosses the County's eastern border, to 3,389 feet on Big Flat Mountain in Shenandoah National Park. There are large areas of steep slopes primarily in the central and western part of the County. The majority of the Rural Areas is in the watershed of the James River, mostly draining through the Rivanna and Hardware rivers. The two largest Rivanna River tributaries in the County are the North Fork and South Fork Rivanna rivers. The South Fork is dammed to form the area's largest drinking water reservoir.

The land cover of the Rural Areas is a complex mosaic. It has been estimated that, as of the early 1990s, nearly 47 percent of the Rural Areas was in deciduous forest, 18 percent was in mixed forest, and 8 percent was in conifer forest. Open areas, including pasture, row crops, barren areas, mowed areas and yards, occupied about 24 percent of the Rural