Mapping Methodology and Data Sources

The maps for the *MountainElements* project were created with data layers from the US Census, the State Center for Health Statistics, NCDOT, and NC OneMap, with background layers from the US Forest Service and GIS software. The rating system is based on the US Census data at the census tract level, including diverse topics such as percentage of high school graduates, average age of residents, and racial make-up of the region. All of these factors were plugged in to a statewide model that identified areas as having a higher or lower "modeled level of need."

For this specific eight-county area, we took this same data and framed it in a regional context to understand how census tracts compared to others in the region. This allows us to see smaller differences that may not have been picked up using the statewide scale. The darker purple colors indicate those Census tracts where the data indicates a Higher Prevalence of Poor Health Conditions when compared to other tracts within the *MountainElements* study area. The lighter colors indicate areas with a Lower Prevalence of Poor Health Conditions when compared to other tracts in the region. We then screened the counties to "remove" public lands (e.g. national forest, state parks) from the data layers to get a better perspective on where the pockets of poor health conditions may reside since these are the areas in which people live and the likely places where counties and towns will approve new land uses and make other investments.

It is important to keep in mind that these are still just "indicators" as no statistically-valid survey data exists below the countywide level. Therefore, we are reliant upon the input from the health directors, health educators or planners to provide input as to whether these locations make sense from the standpoint of what the existing data is telling us.