

COMMUNITY PROFILE

This section of the Plan provides a general overview of Catawba County and its incorporated municipal jurisdictions. It consists of the following five subsections:

- Geography and the Environment
- Population and Demographics
- Housing, Infrastructure and Land Use
- Employment and Industry
- Disaster Declarations

Geography and the Environment

Catawba County, NC was formed in 1842 from the northern portion of Lincoln County and is located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina. Catawba County is bordered by Alexander County to the north, Burke and Caldwell Counties to the west, Lincoln County to the south, and Iredell County to the east. The county's location affords relatively easy access to the major metropolitan area of Charlotte, while maintaining a small town feel. There are eight (8) incorporated municipal jurisdictions in Catawba County, as shown in **Figure 3.1**.

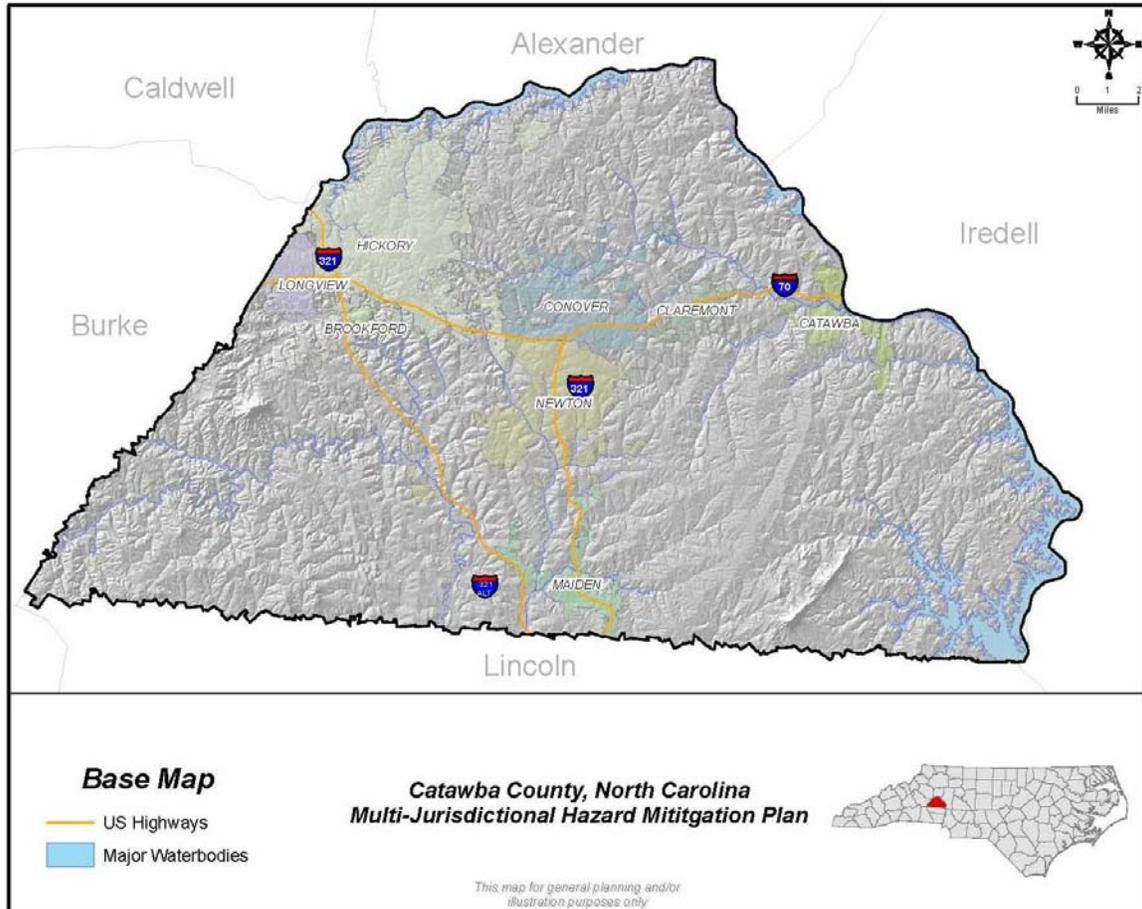
Catawba County has a total area of 405 square miles, of which approximately 14 square miles is water area. It is located in the physiographic region referred to as the Upper Piedmont Plateau, more commonly known as the "foothills." The elevation of the County averages 995 feet with a range from a high of 1,780 feet at Bakers Mountain in the west-central portion of the County to a low of 705 feet where the Catawba River leaves the County. The County's landscape could be described as "rolling" with fairly broad ridges and some short steep slopes. Geologically, Catawba County lies within the Inner Piedmont Belt comprising mostly of metamorphic and intrusive rocks. About 45.5 percent of the county's acreage is wooded, of which 98% is privately owned.

Catawba County lies entirely within the Catawba River basin. The Catawba River, which serves as the natural border for most of the eastern and northern portions of the county, begins in the Blue Ridge Mountains and flows 225 miles into Lake Wateree in South Carolina. The river is an extraordinary eco-system that provides habitat for 50 fish species, 160 bird species and 120 tree species. The river also serves as a source of electric power, provides recreational opportunities for residents and tourists and is one of the major economic foundations of the region. Three large lakes are also located in Catawba County: Lake Hickory covers roughly 6.4 square miles; Lake Lookout Shoals covers 2 square miles; and Lake Norman, the largest manmade lake in the state, covers more than 50 square miles extending many miles into neighboring Iredell, Lincoln and Mecklenburg counties.

Catawba County has a moderate climate, due in part to its proximity to the mountains. The average annual temperature is 68.8 degrees Fahrenheit, and a mean daily high temperature ranges from 48 degrees in January to 87 degrees in July. The county's normal annual precipitation is approximately 49 inches per year, and annual snowfall is approximately 9 inches each year.

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Figure 3.1
Map of Catawba County

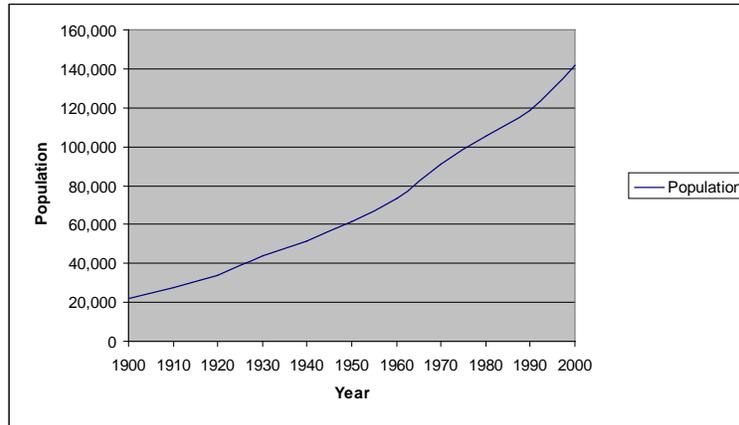


Population and Demographics

The total estimated population of Catawba County is 157,079 persons (2008 Estimate, U.S. Census Bureau), making it the 15th most populated county in the state. Since 2000, there has been a 10.2 percent increase in population for the county indicating that population growth has slowed but remains steady for the area (there was a 19.7 percent increase in population for the county between 1990 and 2000). **Figure 3.2** illustrates the long-term population growth of Catawba County from 1900 to 2000.

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Figure 3.2
Population Growth of Catawba County, 1900 – 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Among the eight municipalities in Catawba County, the city of Hickory is the largest with a total land area of approximately 28 square miles and a 2007 estimated population of 40,985 persons (26 percent of the total county population). **Table 3.1** shows the population for each of the incorporated municipalities and the unincorporated area of Catawba County according to the 2007 estimates made available through the U.S. Census Bureau. The Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) includes the counties of Catawba, Alexander, Burke and Caldwell and is the seventh largest MSA in the state with a 2008 population estimate of over 363,000 residents.

Table 3.1
Municipal Populations for Catawba County, 2007

Jurisdiction	Population
Unincorporated Areas	83,424
Brookford	426
Catawba	797
Claremont	1,134
Conover	7,239
Hickory	40,985
Long View	4,918
Maiden	3,439
Newton	13,284
TOTAL	155,646

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 Population Estimates

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The steady population growth of Catawba County closely parallels the statewide average, a trend that is projected to continue over the next several decades. **Table 3.2** lists the projected population counts for Catawba County at ten-year intervals between 2000 and 2030.

Table 3.2
Projected Population Growth for Catawba County, 2000 – 2030

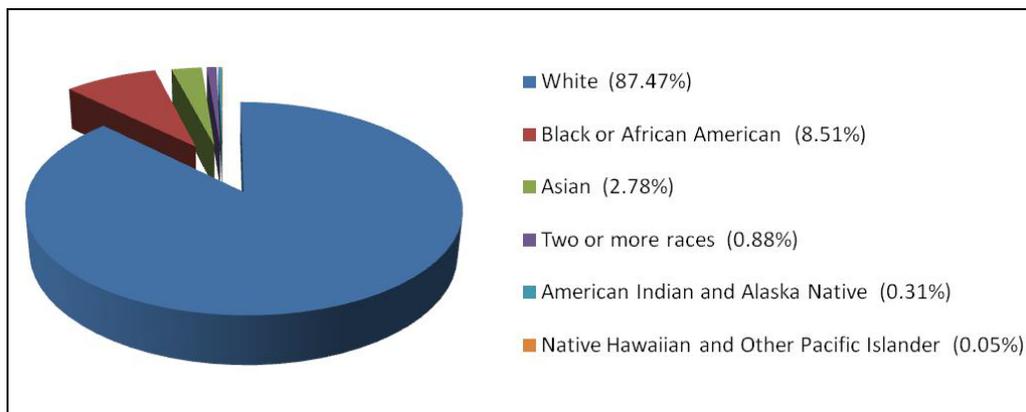
2000	2010	2020	2030
141,686	158,429	175,175	192,270

Source: North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management, 2007

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2007 population estimates, the median age for Catawba County residents is 37.9 years, slightly older than the statewide average of 36.6 years. Only 13 percent of the county's population is made up of persons that are 65 years old and over. Approximately 72% of occupied housing units are owner-occupied. Of all persons more than 25 years of age, approximately 78 percent are high school graduates and 23 percent have a Bachelor's degree or higher.

White persons make up approximately 87 percent of the Catawba County population, followed by Black or African Americans making up nearly 9 percent. **Figure 3.3** displays the most recent demographic data on race distribution (percentages) for Catawba County.

Figure 3.3
Race Percentages in Catawba County, 2007



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 Population Estimates

Race is a self-identification data item in which respondents choose the race or races with which they most closely identify. In the federal statistical system, ethnic origin is considered to be a separate concept from race. Therefore, people of Hispanic or Latino origin may be of any race. For the 2000 census, Hispanics were asked to indicate their origin in the question on Hispanic origin, not in the question on race. 2007 population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau indicate that Hispanics make up 8.7 percent of the Catawba County population.

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Housing, Infrastructure and Land Use

There were an estimated 66,921 housing units in Catawba County in 2007, with a median value of \$123,100 for owner-occupied units. The homeownership rate in Catawba County is nearly 73 percent, slightly higher than the statewide average of 69 percent. The average household size for the county is 2.57 persons, and approximately 15 percent of all housing units are located in multi-unit structures.

Catawba County's development patterns range from rural unincorporated areas to concentrated urban areas in its municipalities. The largest population centers are in the Hickory urban area, including Hickory proper, the town of Long View, the town of Brookford and adjacent unincorporated areas. Not surprising, the corporate limits of both Long View and Hickory represent the highest population density in the County (both near 1,300 persons per square mile). Recent development trends have also exacerbated a burgeoning urban area around Lake Norman with limited urban infrastructure, such as sewer service, and finding the means to provide such services to this area is an ongoing challenge for planners and other County leaders. Sewer lines are currently being installed to serve a portion of the Sherrills Ford community with an expansion being planned to service the new Highway 150/16 interchange.

Transportation networks are vital to Catawba County, especially due to its relative proximity to the metropolitan areas of Greensboro and Charlotte. The county is fortunate to have very few unpaved roads, and is home to a major rail line and it offers its citizens the option of using public transportation. Interstate 40 traverses directly through Catawba County and serves as a vital east-west transportation corridor for North Carolina travelers. US Highway 321 provides a direct route to Charlotte and its international airport, located approximately 50 miles to south of Catawba County. Vehicle commuters in the southern portion of Catawba County can now make the trip to Charlotte in approximately 45 minutes – a contributing factor for the county's rapid residential growth surrounding the Lake Norman area. Similarly, with the completion of Highway 16 in southeast Catawba County in late 2010, citizens in this area will have a direct route into downtown Charlotte. These and other recent highway improvements have served to expand housing and economic development in Catawba County and are expected to continue bringing commercial and industrial growth for years to come.

The eight municipal jurisdictions make up roughly 17 percent of Catawba County's total area. This percentage is expected to increase over time as outlying unincorporated areas become annexed by growing municipalities that seek to expand the provision of municipal services into their extra-territorial jurisdictions and beyond. Perhaps the most positive asset that Catawba County has is its eight municipalities and the services that they provide. Each of the cities and towns were incorporated between the mid-1800s and the early 1900s and therefore are all experienced in providing services and accommodating new growth.

Hickory, the County's largest municipality, is a regional employment and entertainment center that is home to a wide range of large employers (e.g., Coming Cable Systems, Shuford Mills, Hickory Springs) and entertainment venues (e.g., Valley Hills Mall, the Catawba Valley Arts and Science Center, L.P. Frans Stadium - home to the Hickory Crawdads minor league baseball team). Hickory is also home to a respected liberal arts institution, Lenoir-Rhyne University.

The town of **Long View** has significant employment opportunities but also serves as a bedroom community to Hickory, especially for persons seeking lower cost housing that might not be available elsewhere in the County. Long View, like Hickory, is nearly "built-out," with little vacant

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land available for new development. However, recent annexation efforts have provided the town with access to I-40 and future growth opportunities that would have otherwise not been possible.

The town of **Brookford**, despite being in the heavily developed Hickory area has the lowest population density in the County. Brookford was originally established as a mill town, and has experienced very little changes over the past several decades. However, the recent completion of the US 321 and NC 127 highways will likely have some impact on the town.

The **Newton/Conover** area represents the second highest concentration of people and the second (Newton) and third (Conover) highest density in the County. Newton, established in 1855, is the County seat and the second largest city. As with most county seats, Newton is home to a number of public sector employers but also has a significant (and growing) industrial base. Conover is a burgeoning industrial and business center, including within its boundaries the 700-acre Conover West Industrial Park.

The **Maiden** and **Claremont/Catawba** areas are the county's third and fourth largest population centers, respectively. Within Maiden's town limits there are four small industrial parks and a number of significant employment centers. Based upon location alone, Maiden is poised to experience perhaps the earliest growth effects of the recently completed US 321 Highway. In addition, Apple Computer, Inc. will invest \$1 billion within the next 9 years in its first east coast infrastructure hub (including a 500,000 square foot data center) to be located just outside Maiden near US 321 Business. Claremont, like Conover, is fortunate to have experienced rapid industrial growth in recent years. The city is home to Alcatel and the corporate offices for CommScope, representing two of the three major high tech industries located in the county. A 700-acre international business park is also located in Claremont. The town of Catawba is the second smallest municipality and the second least densely populated place. Due to its proximity to Claremont and Interstate 40, the town has the potential for both residential and non-residential growth over the coming years.

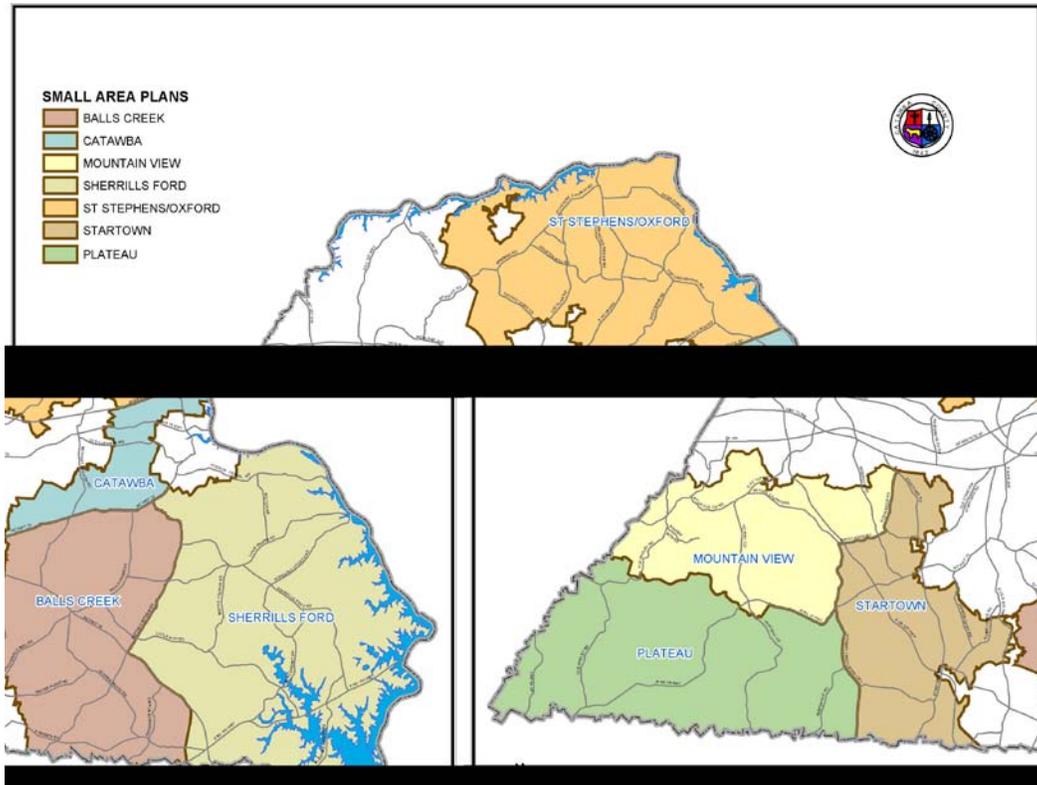
While Catawba County is certainly becoming more developed and more urban in nature, it still consists of a large amount of rural and farm lands. As described in its 1999 *Strategic Growth Plan*, Catawba County can claim more than 20,000 acres of cropland and more than 115,000 acres of timberland (early 1990's estimates). These two non-urban uses represent approximately 210 square miles; roughly half of the county. Furthermore, nearly half of the county's population is now located within incorporated areas. These numbers all seem to paint a picture of a changing County; one with a generous amount of rural, undisturbed land and at the same time one with a number of emerging centers of human activity. The County's Comprehensive Plan, "VisionQuest 2010," describes the County's Land Use and Development Goal as follows: "To provide for an efficient, equitable, and compatible distribution of land uses within Catawba County and to establish innovative, efficient and equitable planning tools and appropriate planning processes to properly guide the growth of the County."

One notable outgrowth of the Catawba County's Strategic Growth Plan is the recently completed grassroots development of "Small Area Plans" for seven designated unincorporated areas, shown in **Figure 3.4**. Through the development of these small area plans, appointed citizen committees worked with Catawba County to explore general development patterns and trends and evaluate public service/facility deficiencies needing attention. The committees also assessed their area's current quality of life and sustainability on issues such as traffic congestion, residential development patterns, water quality, library service levels, utility capacities and school facilities. Upon reviewing these issues, committees then recommended measures for improvement and prepared conceptual sketch plans to be used in consideration for future zoning changes and

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subdivision standards. With adoption of the small areas plans, the County revised its land development regulations into a Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) which implemented many of the goals and recommendations of the small area plans. The UDO was adopted in February 2007 and includes urbanizing standards for development.

**Figure 3.4
Catawba County's Small Area Plans**



An ongoing popular design in subdivision development throughout Catawba County is the cluster subdivision. This allows allow the same lot density as a traditional development, however a cluster development allows smaller lot sizes and requires a certain portion of the parcel to remain undeveloped as permanent open space. By not developing certain lands, overall community and environmental benefits are being realized, including hazard mitigation. Hazardous lands preserved as open space may include floodplain areas and steep slopes where erosion is a risk. The open space can then be used for activities such as walkways, parks, and other non-intrusive amenities that allow lands to be maintained in their natural state.

Employment and Industry

In 2007, the median household income for Catawba County was \$43,618. The per capita personal income in 2007 was reported to be \$22,114, and Catawba County has an estimated 11.1 percent of persons below poverty which is below the statewide average of 14.3 percent. In February 2007, the North Carolina Employment Security Commission reported that Catawba

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County had an employed labor force of 76,913 and an unemployment rate of 15 percent, higher than the statewide average of 11.3 percent.

Catawba County sustains a diversified economy, with most employment still being concentrated in the manufacturing sector (34 percent). Internationally known as a furniture manufacturing center, Catawba County is often referred to as the “Furniture Capital of the World”. Its traditional industries of furniture, hosiery and textiles have been joined by industries of the technological age such as the manufacturing and development of fiber optics and telecommunications cable. Alcatel, NA, the world's largest manufacturer of telecommunications cable products and the second-largest telephone equipment company, is headquartered in Hickory along with Siecor Corporation, the world's largest independent manufacturer of fiber optics cables. However, the layoffs of the last three years have been a challenge to traditional industries that have in the past benefited from Catawba County's economy being based on manufacturing. Comprehensive efforts are being directed at identifying and recruiting new sectors in manufacturing such as biomedical, pharmaceutical, technology and building products, and identifying and recruiting non-manufacturing sectors such as retirement and retail development. One of the County's recent successful economic development efforts includes the new data center to be constructed just outside of Maiden in the West Star Mission Critical Data Park, which is projected to create more than 3,000 jobs in the regional economy. The once tight labor force has transitioned into a pool of skilled workers loyal to the area and its industries.

Retail trade accounts for roughly 13 percent of Catawba County's workforce. Catawba County has historically been a competitive market for new commercial and retail development. In recent years, the area has seen an explosion of commercial development along the Highway 70 corridor which will help continue to expand the level of retail sales generated in the county. From 1992 to 2010, retail sales in Catawba County were forecast to increase by 35% (from \$1.2 million to \$1.6 million)¹. In 1980 voters approved mixed drink sales in Conover and Hickory, which also helped spur hotel, motel, restaurant, and entertainment growth. More recently, the Town of Catawba and Mountain Creek township (Lake Norman area) approved mixed drink sales which is expected to have similar positive effect on new development.

Health care and social assistance follows closely behind retail trade, with approximately 10 percent of total employment in Catawba County. The county serves as a major medical area with two major hospitals (one County-owned), a large medical community, and a number of nursing and rest homes.

Table 3.3 provides an overview of employment in Catawba County by sector.

¹ Catawba County Strategic Growth Plan, 1999.

**Table 3.3
Employment and Wages by Sector in Catawba County, First Quarter 2008**

Employment Sector	Average Employment	% Total	Average Weekly Wage
Manufacturing	27,045	34.1%	\$719
Retail Trade	10,307	13.0%	\$772
Health Care and Social Assistance	8,050	10.2%	\$685
Accommodation and Food Services	6,305	8.0%	\$234
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	4,106	5.2%	\$1,198
Transportation and Warehousing	3,964	5.0%	\$1,597
Wholesale Trade	3,421	4.3%	\$868
Public Administration	3,115	3.9%	\$2,597
Construction	2,902	3.7%	\$642
Management of Companies and Enterprises	2,162	2.7%	\$2,049
Other Services (except Public Administration)	1,720	2.2%	\$446
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	1,655	2.1%	\$769
Finance and Insurance	1,470	1.9%	\$968
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	844	1.1%	\$357
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	629	0.8%	\$501
Educational Services	606	0.8%	\$557
Information	605	0.8%	\$720
Utilities	338	0.4%	\$1,704
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	0	0.0%	\$0
Mining ²	0	0.0%	\$0

Source: NC Department of Commerce

Catawba County, the Chamber of Commerce and the municipalities work together in bringing new industry to the area. Activities include the establishment of the Industrial Development Commission (which in 1993 was merged with the Hickory Office of Business Development and renamed the Economic Development Corporation), expansion of water and sewer lines, road and highway improvements, enhancements to public education, and much more. Another milestone was the completion of Interstate 40 in the mid 1970's, making Catawba County more accessible and expanding economic opportunities throughout the area.

Although private Industry accounts for nearly 90 percent of employment in Catawba County, the largest employer is Catawba County Schools (there are 40 public schools in the County with approximately 24,000 students). **Table 3.4** shows the top 25 employers in Catawba County as ranked by the North Carolina Employment Security Commission in the first quarter of 2008.

² According to local municipal staff, the Hickory rock quarry and Maiden quarry were both still in operation during this period and employed a small number of individuals.

**Table 3.4
Catawba County Top 25 Employers in Catawba County**

Rank	Employer Name	Industry	Employment Range
1	Catawba County Schools	Education & Health Services	1,000+
2	CommScope, Inc.	Manufacturing	1,000+
3	Catawba Memorial Hospital	Education & Health Services	1,000+
4	Frye Regional Medical Center	Education & Health Services	1,000+
5	Corning Cable Systems LLC	Manufacturing	1,000+
6	County of Catawba	Public Administration	1,000+
7	Hickory Springs Mfg. Co.	Manufacturing	1,000+
8	Wal-Mart Associates Inc.	Trade, Transportation & Utilities	1,000+
9	Century Furniture LLC	Manufacturing	1,000+
10	HDM Furniture Industries Inc.	Manufacturing	500-999
11	Catawba Valley Community College	Education & Health Services	500-999
12	Hickory City Schools	Education & Health Services	500-999
13	Pierre Foods Inc.	Manufacturing	500-999
14	Sherrill Furniture Company (A Corp)	Manufacturing	500-999
15	Newton-Conover City Schools	Education & Health Services	500-999
16	City of Hickory	Public Administration	500-999
17	Catawba Rental Co. Inc.	Trade, Transportation & Utilities	500-999
18	Mccreary Modern Inc.	Manufacturing	500-999
19	Ethan Allen Operations Inc.	Manufacturing	500-999
20	Getrag Corporation (A Corp)	Manufacturing	500-999
21	Shurtape Technologies Inc.	Manufacturing	500-999
23	Draka Comteq	Manufacturing	500-999
23	Institution Food House Inc.	Trade, Transportation & Utilities	500-999
24	Vanguard Furniture Co. Inc.	Manufacturing	250-499
25	Bassett Furniture Industries of NC	Manufacturing	250-499

Source: North Carolina Employment Security Commission

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Disaster Declarations

Since 1965³, Catawba County has experienced a total of six (6) presidential disaster declarations, shown in **Table 3.5**. The county has also experienced additional emergencies and disasters that were not severe enough to require federal disaster relief through a presidential declaration.

Table 3.5
Presidential Disaster Declarations for Catawba County, 1965 – 2008

Event	Declaration Date	Declaration Number
Severe Storms & Flooding	11/14/1977	DR-542
Tornadoes	05/10/1989	DR-827
Hurricane Hugo	09/28/1989	DR-844
Blizzard of '96	02/02/1996	DR-1087
Winter Storm	02/23/1996	DR-1103
Severe Ice Storm	12/13/2002	DR-1448

Source: Federal Emergency Management Agency

³ Prior to January 1, 1965, presidential disaster declarations did not have county designations.