



Clarion River Recreation Assessment

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Acknowledgements

The following agencies and governments have been partners in this process. We would like to recognize the County Commissioners for their support of this project. This report would not have been possible without their commitment.

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)

Allegheny National Forest (ANF)

Elk County

- County Commissioners
- Johnsonburg Borough
- Jones Township
- Millstone Township
- Ridgway Borough
- Ridgway Township
- Spring Creek Township

Forest County

- County Commissioners
- Barnett Township

Jefferson County

- County Commissioners
- Barnett Township
- Heath Township

Clarion County

- County Commissioners
- Alliance for Wetlands and Wildlife
- Clarion County Conservation District

Northwest Pennsylvania Great Outdoors Visitor's Bureau

Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC)

Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC)

Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED)

Introduction

In the autumn of 2006, the County Commissioners from Elk, Forest, Jefferson and Clarion Counties, in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and the Allegheny National Forest (ANF), began a recreational assessment of the Clarion River corridor. After hearing some concerns about the corridor and seeing its unique beauty first hand, DCNR Secretary Michael DiBerardinis offered the assistance of Fermata, Inc, a consultant working with DCNR on the Pennsylvania Wilds initiative, to support the partnership effort. This effort is not a broad planning study like some that have been conducted in the past, but rather a more rapid evaluation of the current recreational opportunities and challenges facing the Clarion River corridor.

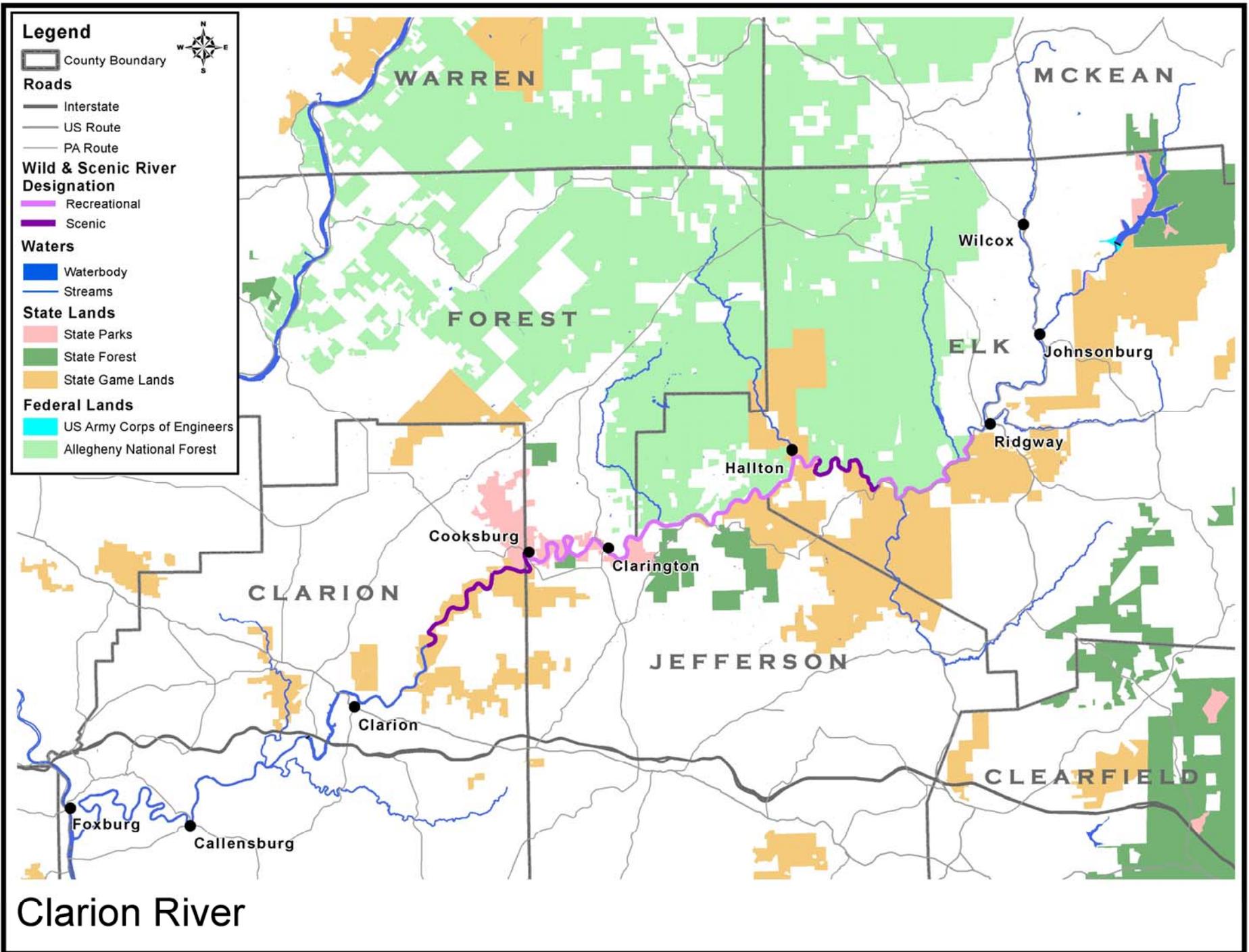
The goal of the assessment is a report that:

- ❖ Identifies issues of concern facing communities along Clarion River corridor.
- ❖ Identifies key recreational opportunities that would benefit residents and visitors and support economic opportunities in the counties.
- ❖ Develops action steps to be implemented by partners that solve problems and enhance recreation and economic opportunities.

In December 2006, Fermata's Recreation Planner reviewed previous Clarion River studies and reports, and evaluated the condition of recreation facilities and access roads along the river. The DCNR, ANF and Fermata met with township and county officials in December 2006 to gather initial issues and opportunities. This was followed by three public input workshops in February 2007 to record stakeholder issues and concerns. Initial findings and recommendations were developed and were presented to local officials in March 2007. The findings and recommendations were revised based on their feedback then shared publicly at two evening meetings at the end of March 2007.



When a river is designated as a National Wild and Scenic River, the managing agency is required to complete a management plan. The Allegheny National Forest will soon be initiating the process for developing the Clarion Wild and Scenic River Management Plan. The management plan's purpose is to provide for the protection of the river values. The knowledge gained in this report and other planning reports that preceded it, will guide and inform the management plan.



Findings

The Clarion River is an Exceptional Outdoor Recreation Resource

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 identified the Clarion River as a study river setting in motion an interest in the river that ultimately brought about its rebirth. River recreation use steadily climbed after passage of the Act. Interest in cleaning up the river grew. In 1996, a section of the Clarion River was designated a National Wild and Scenic River – an affirmation of all the work that went into the restoration of the Clarion River.

The 1996 Clarion River Eligibility Study determined that the Clarion River contains outstandingly remarkable recreational and scenic values of regional significance. The river valley is mostly forested with few residences and industry outside of Clarion, Ridgway and Johnsonburg. The river experience has been described as intimate because of the narrow meandering valley. The river provides paddling opportunities for novices and in recent years has become known as a trophy brown trout fishery. Two state parks, a national forest, a state forest and four state game lands border the Clarion and provide an opportunity unparalleled in Pennsylvania.

Any stream is a sensitive natural resource and recreation use can severely impact the quality of the resource if it is not managed. Strategies to manage recreation use and develop suitable facilities are critical to protect the river and support its continued restoration.

The enhancement of recreation opportunities can also spur economic growth in the communities along the river. The lodging, restaurants, shopping, and cultural assets in local communities support river recreationists and add a diversity of opportunities that strengthens the attraction of this area. Growth in community services and opportunities increases the attraction, fortifies communities and makes them more attractive to commerce.



Recreational Visitation can be Better Managed

For many years, the management of recreation use on the river has been insufficient and inconsistent. This has resulted in resource impacts to soil and water quality from camping on unsuited sites, disgruntled residents, and a visitor experience that does not come close to its potential. As stewards of this precious resource, recreation must be managed to ensure the river's continued restoration and health.

How do we know that active management can make a difference? In 2005, after receiving complaints from Millstone Township about the unregulated camping along Millstone Creek and the Clarion River, the Allegheny National Forest analyzed the situation and started a project in 2006 to designate campsites, close campsites in unsuited areas, and make contact with campers to inform and educate them on their responsibilities. At the end of the camping season, ANF personnel reported less trash, fewer incidents of noise and alcohol, and improved road safety. An active presence and an attention to management issues had a tremendous impact in just one season.



Active management can reduce or eliminate many of the problems that were brought forward at the public input workshops. Information and signing can guide and distribute visitation which can reduce crowding and depreciative behaviors, and lead visitors to facilities that meet their needs. Detailed information can build realistic expectations by informing visitors of their risks and responsibilities before they arrive. Improved access and camping areas will protect the environment and the visitor's safety by providing facilities that can accommodate the intended use. Regular patrols and contacts with visitors can educate and inform visitors on how their actions can sustain or harm this environment. Detailed maps and signing can guide visitors to help during emergencies. Interpretive signing can educate visitors on the remarkable story of the river's recovery.

Active management improves opportunities for visitors and residents alike, and can maintain and improve the integrity of the natural resources. Tourism, if thoughtfully managed, need not impair the quality of life.

Interagency and Intergovernmental Cooperation is Needed

The solution to improving management of the Clarion River visitation does not lie with one person. Each issue is a complex situation that involves multiple parties. The coordination and cooperation between all these parties will be necessary to take this project forward.

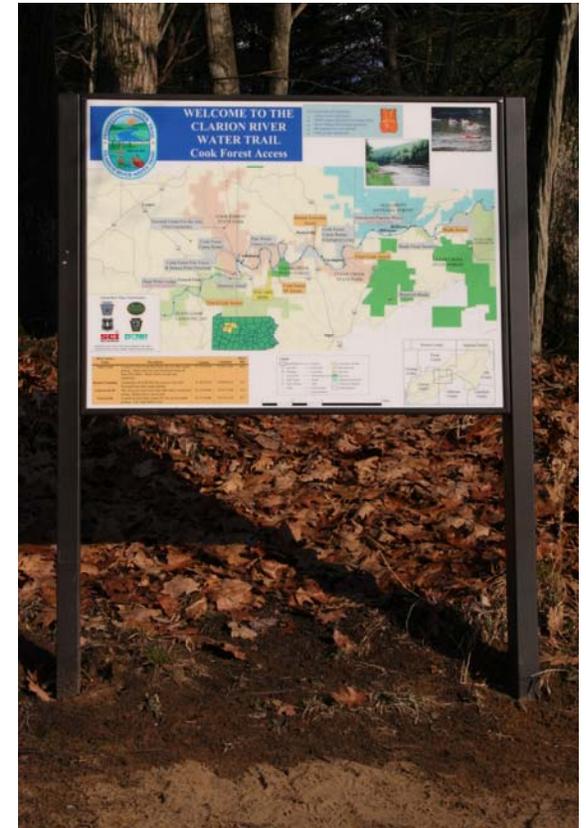
This is not just an issue for public land managers but for all the jurisdictions along the river corridor. We've seen that a management strategy of increased enforcement presence in just one area may move problems to another jurisdiction. Rightfully so, residents have a keen interest in protecting their quality of life and unplanned growth and development from tourism can have negative impacts on the character of rural communities. Local governments need to be involved and actively coordinate their efforts in order to protect the unique character of this region and to maximize tourism benefits while minimizing potential burdens.

Interagency and intergovernmental cooperation can also improve management decisions because of the varied expertise from the participants. Cooperative efforts increase grant opportunities and have greater political influence. Solutions reached through coordination and collaboration will be more time and cost effective.

Recommendations

Summary of Recommendations

1. Better Manage Primitive Camping
 - a. Establish “Pack-In, Pack-home” garbage policy
 - b. Improve existing sites
 - c. Create new sites
2. Improve Signing and Access
 - a. Signing: directional, site identification, on-site, interpretive
 - b. Access Sites: better signing, and improvements to parking and launches
3. Improve Enforcement and Public Contacts
 - a. Put more emphasis on educating and informing
 - b. Develop law enforcement cooperative agreement
 - c. Simplify communication of rules and regulations
 - d. Develop an emergency response plan
 - e. Add a DCNR Ranger to Clear Creek State Forest
4. Better Visitor Information and Services
 - a. Develop a comprehensive visitor guide
 - b. Develop relationships between agency personnel and businesses
 - c. Communicate realistic expectations in publications
 - d. Expand river cleanup efforts
 - e. Update PFBC Water Trail Map
5. Support Community Revitalization
 - a. Ridgway riverfront redevelopment
 - b. Domtar paper mill tours and visitor center in Johnsonburg
 - c. Study rail-trail feasibility on East and West Branches
6. Intergovernmental Cooperation
 - a. Explore options for intergovernmental agreements to support implementation
 - b. Consider Circuit Rider position and/or Vista Program volunteer



Better Manage Primitive Camping

The assessment recommends creating more opportunities for and better managing primitive camping. Currently, camping along the river is only allowed between Ridgway and Cooksburg where most of the shoreline is public land. On the rest of the river, the land is privately owned or public land that is not open to overnight use. Managing hundreds of individual campsites is time consuming. All of the land managers along the river are constantly challenged to find more efficient ways to manage their land in order to stretch diminishing budgets. If campsites were grouped into small camping areas, strategically distributed along the river, managers could focus their efforts in fewer places. Attendees to public input workshops raised concerns about human waste at the campsites. Under the current camping configuration, it is not practical to install restrooms at each campsite, but with small camping areas, addressing human waste becomes more feasible. There is less need to post where camping is not allowed, if camping can only occur in designated areas. This reduces the environmental impact of camping to sites where impacts can be managed through design and regular maintenance.

The issue of trash left behind by river users was raised at several meetings. Installing garbage cans or dumpsters along the river will likely accumulate more household garbage than trash from river users. Even when receptacles are removed, people will often still leave their garbage because they know someone will pick it up. The ANF policy on packing home your trash has been successful and we recommend adopting this policy outside of developed picnic areas and campgrounds. This policy needs to be clearly stated in all publications, websites and at sites along the river. In order to encourage better compliance, labeled garbage bags could be distributed at offices and canoe liveries, and during patrols. The bags could include some informational or interpretive messages. One option would be to charge a nominal fee for the bags that would then permit the bag to be deposited in dumpsters at supervised sites (i.e. business or park).

Between Ridgway and Clarion there are several opportunities to designate, improve, or expand small camping areas. Locations are shown via river mile point, where zero is the mouth of the Clarion River at the Allegheny River. The towns of Ridgway and Cooksburg are shown for reference.

Site	Status	Land Owner	River Milepoint
Ridgway			93
Portland Mills area	new	SGL 44	81
Irwin Run Canoe Launch	existing	ANF	75.5
SGL 54 at end of Metts Road	new	SGL 54	70.5
Upstream of Millstone Confluence	existing	ANF	63.5
Clear Creek SP Campground	existing	DCNR	60
Downstream of Clarington, south shore	new	DCNR	54
Cooksburg			50
SGL 283 (site undetermined)	new	SGL 283	40-47.5

Between Ridgway and Irwin Run, the ANF owns almost the entire stretch along the north shore. With the exception of the Arroyo Road, this area has no roads and dispersed camping is allowed. Part of this section has a Wild and Scenic River designation of

“scenic”, which means that the shores are largely primitive and undeveloped with minimal road access. An inventory has not been undertaken to assess the quantity and condition of the existing dispersed campsites in this area. There is limited opportunity in this stretch to build small camping areas to concentrate camping use because of the lack of road access. The ANF has an interest in keeping this section undeveloped; however, they should consider evaluating existing campsites and designating suitable sites as a means to manage impacts.

Three sites on Game Lands have been identified as potential locations for camping areas. The first site is on Game Lands 44 near Portland Mills, the second site is on Game Lands 54 at the end of Metts Road, and the third site is on Game Lands 283 but a specific site has not been identified yet. The Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) has indicated an interest in land transfers rather than managing camping themselves. This report recommends that DCNR work with the PGC to explore such options. To reduce maintenance and patrol needs, the sites should be located on gated roads to limit use to canoe-in or hike-in campers only. Metts Road is an open road, but its primitive condition and remote location will limit the amount of car campers. The camping areas should be developed with designated sites, vault restrooms, river access path, signing and information.

Phase 2 of the ANF's ongoing Clarion River Dispersed Recreation Project dovetails nicely with the recommendations presented here. Phase 2 will evaluate the need for hardened parking at designated campsites and day use areas along the River Road in Millstone and Spring Creek Townships. Opportunities for additional campsites, restrooms and streambank restoration will be evaluated in the third phase of the Clarion River Dispersed Recreation Project. The analysis and project implementation will occur in partnership with Millstone and Spring Creek Townships.

Clear Creek State Park offers the only developed riverside campground along the Clarion River. The site is designed to handle a high density of recreation use, unlike most of the rest of the river. However, more can be done to upgrade this existing developed campground. The assessment recommends adding a developed boat launch within the campground to provide more direct access for canoe-in campers and replacing the existing vault restrooms in the campground and cabin area which are in poor condition, with modern vault restrooms. All of the campsites should provide hardened parking spurs to reduce soil compaction, damage to tree roots and loss of ground cover. Promoting Clear Creek State Park to concentrate recreation use where it can be more effectively managed is a good strategy that will help to take the pressure off more sensitive and more difficult to manage primitive campsites.



Downstream of Clarrington on the south shore, we also recommend that DCNR develop a small canoe-in camping area on either Cook Forest State Park or Clear Creek State Forest land. The location would not have public road access but would have access for park employees for construction and maintenance activities. The proximity of the camping area to houses should be considered to reduce impacts to area residents. Within the camping area, specific campsites should be designated in locations set back from the river bank to protect the bank from soil and vegetation loss. People are attracted to the Clarion because of its natural beauty so work should be undertaken to minimize the clearing of vegetation, keeping the new camping area in the background and subtle. An accessible vault restroom should also be provided. An improved pathway from the river to the camping area should be developed. A prominent sign along the river will identify the site and a bulletin board in the camping area will provide necessary information. As with other similar sites built on state park or state forest property, we recommend that DCNR continue a policy to require permits for this kind of camping. This will help regulate use and can ensure a campsite to paddlers at the end of the day.

Improve Signing and Access

The need for improved signing and access points was heard at nearly all the meetings with local officials and stakeholders. Therefore the report recommends that the municipalities along the corridor work together with DCNR, ANF, PGC and PA Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) to develop a comprehensive sign and access plan based on the recommendations below. Working together will ensure consistent, high quality results, and will open additional grant opportunities with priority ranking from DCNR, DCED and PFBC. In river stretches adjacent to national forest property, the ANF could coordinate work with municipalities, and could provide technical and design assistance which can be used as funding match in grant applications. Technical guidance and grant funding are also available from the PFBC.

Signing

Signing is a necessary and cost-effective component in enhancing the recreational experiences of visitors. Signing facilitates and nurtures visitation to the region. The remarkable story of conservation and restoration of the Clarion River will likely be untold if not explained through interpretive signing. As part of a coordinated signing strategy, the following types of signing are recommended:

Directional Signs help visitors find attractions. We recommend partnering with PennDOT and local tourism promotion agencies to erect signing that directs visitors to businesses (outfitters, lodging, retail, restaurants, etc.) in the region. These signs should provide consistent and predictable travel information, and should diminish the need for billboards and sign pollution at intersections. Directional signs also move visitors to recreation sites from the state highways. A directional sign plan necessitates thinking about how visitors may access the site. Important questions to consider are where to properly intercept travelers with signing and where signing is important to keep travelers on the proper route. For signing projects along state highways, PennDOT must be involved and can offer expertise to ensure a successful signing system.

Site Approach Signs give drivers notice that a recreation site is ahead. These signs also serve an important traffic control function - to prepare drivers for the slowing, breaking and turning maneuvers necessary for safe entry to the site. They can also reduce traffic impacts because some drivers may overshoot their destination and need to double-back (increasing the amount of traffic along a given stretch of road).

Site Identification Signs should mark the entrance of recreation sites. Such signs should clearly name the site and indicate the appropriate recreational uses through the use of universal recreation symbols.

On-site Signs include signs to direct visitors to various activities or facilities within a specific recreation site. Recreation symbols are preferable to word messages whenever their meaning is clearly understood.

One element of on-site signing is signs oriented to recreationists on the river. At all access and camping sites along the river, a prominent sign that includes the site name and the river mile should be installed on the bank facing upstream. The sign should be



mounted at least five feet above normal high water level. Because these signs are located close to the river, they are likely to be damaged during high water events and should be checked often to ensure they have not been damaged or swept downstream.

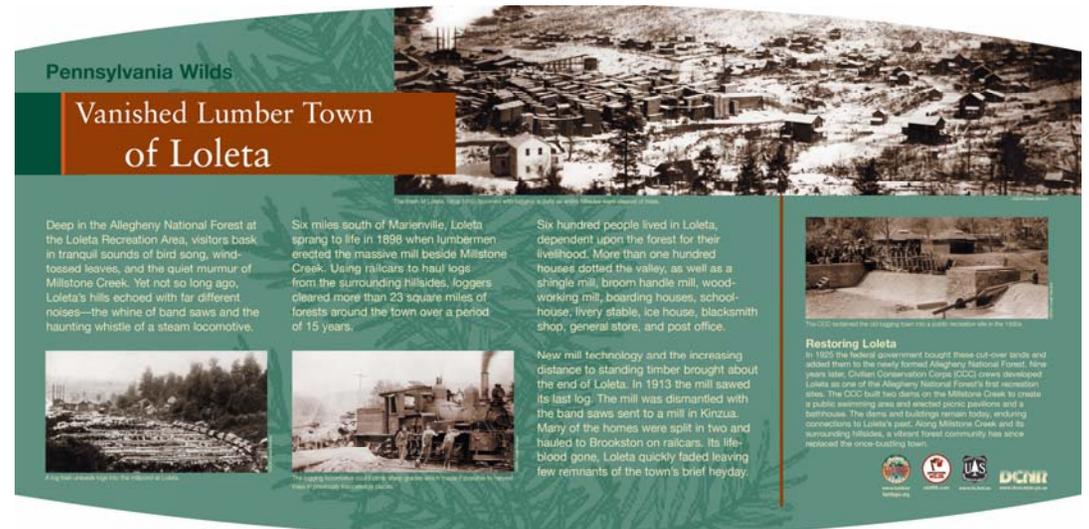
Visitor information boards should provide essential detailed information to minimize the need for signs elsewhere at the recreation site. The information boards provide important information to orient visitors to the area. The following information should be displayed: registration requirements (if appropriate), environmental messages (Leave No Trace), user etiquette, program or event schedules, regulations, and safety and emergency information (nearest telephone, closest hospital, emergency numbers, and manager contact information).

This report recommends minimizing the use of “fine print” regulation signs. The fine print regulation signs should be posted at visitor information boards but should not be posted throughout the site. Signs that address common regulatory problems should be developed. Research has shown that messages with a positive tone are more effective than “do not” messages. People also tend

to comply with messages when they understand the rationale behind the regulations and consequences of non-compliance. For regulations that are commonly disregarded, we recommend developing a sign that can be posted where the problem occurs and using graphics to support a friendly tone. Many people will not read all the information at the information board, so some specific reinforcement is required at strategic points. For example: “Protect the Clarion River by parking only on gravel or paved surfaces”; “Please take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints”; and “Leave It As You Find It – Picking flowers, collecting rocks or taking arrowheads means that others won’t have a chance to enjoy them.”

Interpretive Signs infuse meaning and help foster understanding. To truly transform visitors into stewards, interpreting the river's stories will be necessary. Interpretation adds another dimension to a visitor's experience and moves the experience into the realm of memorable. In addition, interpreting cultural and environmental amenities enhances community character while making the area more attractive to new residents and employers.

This report recommends that an interpretive plan for the Clarion River be undertaken to define the important stories to tell, identify the best sites to tell those stories, and to pick appropriate media to tell the stories. The Lumber Heritage Interpretive Plan identified the Clarion River as one of the priority itineraries for implementation in the Lumber Heritage Region. The history of the river is one of the great stories of restoration in Pennsylvania. Visible reminders of the area's logging history can be brought alive through interpretation. Connecting the interpretive sites into an itinerary, like the Elk Scenic Drive, can direct visitors through area communities, to important interpretive and recreational sites, and hopefully extend a visitor's stay in the region.



Access Sites

There are few natural resources that have the power of attraction like water does. Unfortunately, streamside and wetland areas are also some of the most sensitive resources in Pennsylvania. When recreation is highly dispersed, use has little effect on riparian and wetlands resources. Concentrated use is another matter. In the streamside environment, any concentration of use calls for providing improved facilities to sustain the recreation use. Concentrating use where it can be managed and monitored is an effective tool to protect natural resources. The kind of facility will be based on the type and intensity of use, and the management objectives (i.e. wilderness areas are less developed than park environments).

Access sites are riverside sites located along an open road that provide parking and facilities to enhance river recreation. This report recommends improvements to many of the existing access sites (see table on pages 13-14). A few of the sites should be relocated to more suitable locations. Representatives from the DCNR, ANF, PGC, and PFBC should be involved in the development of the site-specific recommendations for each access site. Although some sites like Clear Creek State Park are in good condition, it will be important for signing to be consistent at all sites, so some new signs will likely be needed at Clear Creek.

Access sites need to be developed with hardened parking. The spring is the most popular time for paddling due to the higher water levels, but soils can be very wet at this time and susceptible to damage. The size of the parking lot is often constrained by the size of the site. For instance, the Irwin Run Access is often overflowing with vehicles, but is located in an historic site where expansion is not feasible. The patterns of recreation use should be evaluated to determine the capacity of a parking lot. Access sites on the south



shore of the river are used less than the north shore, so parking areas can be smaller. Where possible, the lot should be configured to allow access by vehicles pulling trailers so that outfitters can easily pull through the site to pick-up and drop-off paddlers. These sites are often crowded during paddling season and designing sites for good traffic flow will ensure the safety of the users.

The pathway down to the river's edge for launching needs to be hardened to control erosion into the river. This is especially critical where the river banks are high because cuts through the bank will funnel water and hasten erosion. The ideal launch site has a bank that gradually slopes to the waters edge, like the access at Heath. Providing a launch with a gradient of less than eight percent will ensure the launch is accessible to a broad population and will considerably reduce the potential for erosion. A variety of suitable launches exist along the river. The launches at Portland Mills

and Arroyo utilize a concrete pad. This system is typically used at motorized boat launches and is an acceptable method for non-motorized launches. The launch at Irwin Run was built up with gravel and topped with a recycled tire mat (commonly used as door mats). The recycled tire mat holds the gravel in place and provides a soft surface to land a canoe or kayak on. At Clear Creek State Park, a set of graveled steps leads down the bank to the river's edge.

The Wilcox Access has not been developed and is not suited to paddling use because the launch is located on a tributary with low flow and gravel bars. A more suitable site could be developed at the Wilcox community park. There is ample room for parking and the river bank is gradually sloping. This is a more logical location in the Wilcox area since the site is already developed for recreation use.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers access just downstream from the East Branch Dam is minimally developed and is located on a poor condition road that is only suited to high clearance vehicles. The access path to the river is narrowed by trees and is nothing more than a fishermen's path. This river location is a good place to launch, but will need a better road, larger parking, improved launch and signing to make this site safe and attractive to river users.

Efforts are currently underway to identify access sites between Ridgway and Johnsonburg. This stretch of river is known for its trophy trout fishing and does not have any improved access. The river is bordered entirely by private property and the potential for conflicts with residents due to trespass is undesirable. Access sites for fishing should be developed in a manner similar to boat access sites. The PFBC has technical assistance and funding program to assist with this kind of work. The DCNR and PFBC should develop a Memorandum of Agreement to support a partnership on this effort.

Many of the water trail access sites in Clarion County are undeveloped or are not suited to river access use. Most of the land in this area is privately owned so it will be necessary to work with landowners to develop suitable access points at regular intervals. The Alliance for Wetlands and Wildlife is an active conservation group in Clarion County that has been instrumental in restoring the

Clarion River and will lead this effort to identify, designate and improve access points around the Piney Reservoir and downstream of the Piney Dam. The operators of Piney Dam, Brookfield Power Piney & Deep Creek, own land around the lakeshore and immediately downstream of the dam, and should be involved in discussions about potential access sites. A few of the access points listed on the PFBC Water Trail Map (Deer Creek, Canoe Ripple and Alum Rock) are undeveloped sites on private property which are not suitable for promotion to the general public and should be removed from the water trail map. Deer Creek has recently been posted with no trespassing signs which brings into question whether landowners were involved in identifying these sites for public use. Access sites should meet a minimum standard in order to be added to the PFBC Water Trail Map. Access sites will be added to the water trail map when the Alliance for Wetlands and Wildlife develops the sites in this area.

The following table gives an overview of the current condition and needs at each of the access sites. A more detailed work description will need to be developed prior to implementation.

Site Name	Parking Condition	River Access Condition	Site Ahead Signing	Site ID Signing	Visitor Information	River Signing
Instanter	Gravel, good condition	Concrete, good condition	Yes	Yes	Yes	None (1)
East Branch Lake	Paved, large, good condition	Concrete, good condition	Yes	Yes	Yes	None (1)
USACE (below dam)	Primitive, potholed, limited (1)	Unimproved, erosion (1)	None (1)	None (1)	None (1)	None (1)
Glen Hazel	Gravel, limited, good condition	Gravel, good condition	None (1)	None (1)	None (1)	None (1)
Bendigo SP	Paved, large, good condition	Unimproved (1)	Yes	None (1)	Yes	None (1)
Wilcox (2)	Gravel, limited, good condition	Unimproved (1)	None (1)	None (1)	None (1)	None (1)
Johnsonburg	Gravel, good condition	Some erosion (1)	None (1)	None (1)	None (1)	None (1)
Love's Canoe	Gravel, good condition	Grassy, good condition	None (1)	Yes	Yes	None (1)
Portland Mills	Gravel, limited, good condition	Concrete, good condition	None (1)	Small (1)	None (1)	Small (1)
Arroyo	Gravel, good condition	Concrete, good condition	None (1)	None (1)	Regulations signs (1)	Small (1)
Irwin Run	Limited, good condition	Gravel, good condition	None (1)	None (1)	Water Trail sign (1)	Small (1)
Hallton	Grass, unimproved (1)	Unimproved, some erosion (1)	None (1)	None (1)	Regulations signs (1)	Small (1)
Heath	Gravel, large, good condition	Grassy, good condition	None (1)	None (1)	None (1)	None (1)

Site Name	Parking Condition	River Access Condition	Site Ahead Signing	Site ID Signing	Visitor Information	River Signing
Clear Creek SP	Gravel, large, good condition	Steps, good condition	Yes	Yes	Good	Yes
Barnett Township	Upper is potholed (1)	Gravel, good condition	None (1)	Yes	None (1)	None (1)
Cook Forest SP	Unimproved (1)	Loose soil (1)	None (1)	Small (1)	Good	None (1)
Gravel Lick	Grass (1)	Unimproved (1)	None (1)	Yes	None (1)	None (1)
Mill Creek	Gravel & grass, good condition, need to expand (1)	Concrete, river too shallow (1)	None (1)	Yes	Regulations & water trail signs	None (1)
SGL 74	Gravel, small, good condition	Concrete, good condition	None (1)	None (1)	Regulations signs (1)	None (1)
Toby	Gravel, small, good condition	Paved ramp, gravel bank, narrow	None (1)	None (1)	None (1)	None (1)
322 Bridge	Gravel, large, good condition	Unimproved	None (1)	None (1)	None (1)	None (1)
Deer Creek (2)	Sandy, small, primitive	Unimproved	None	None	None	None
Canoe Ripple (2)	None	None	None	None	None	None
Callensburg	Gravel, small, primitive	Unimproved	None (1)	None (1)	None (1)	None (1)
Alum Rock (2)	Primitive, small	Unimproved	None	None	None	None
Parkers Landing	Gravel, large, good condition	Unimproved (1)	None (1)	None (1)	None (1)	None (1)

(1) Site features that need improvement

(2) Sites that are unsuited that should be re-evaluated and/or relocated.

Improve Enforcement and Public Contact

The meetings with local officials demonstrated that in areas without enforcement presence, illegal activities had worsened in the corridor as enforcement and compliance improved in others. In the corridor from Ridgway to Cooksburg, citizens and local officials reported illegal camping, illegal ATV riding, and general nuisance activity where patrols were not in effect.

This report recommends forming partnerships between law enforcement entities to develop consistent approaches and plans for public contact and law enforcement. DCNR should consider adding a forest ranger position to the Clear Creek State Forest to increase official presence in and around the river.

The ANF's experience with regulating river use in 2006 gives us hope that additional patrols and regular public contact can make an impact on undesirable behaviors without having to take extraordinary measures. A soft approach to enforcement should be taken where personnel seek compliance first through education and information. To maximize the effectiveness and improve the visitor experience, law enforcement entities along the river (ANF, DCNR, PGC, PFBC, local law enforcement and state police) should develop a cooperative agreement for regular, consistent and comprehensive patrols and public contact.

Rules and regulations vary between the public lands along the river which can lead to visitor confusion and frustration. Land management agencies should develop and implement a plan to reduce or simplify conflicting regulations between agencies to enhance understanding and compliance. They should also take a close look at how publications can communicate regulations in a clear and simplified manner.

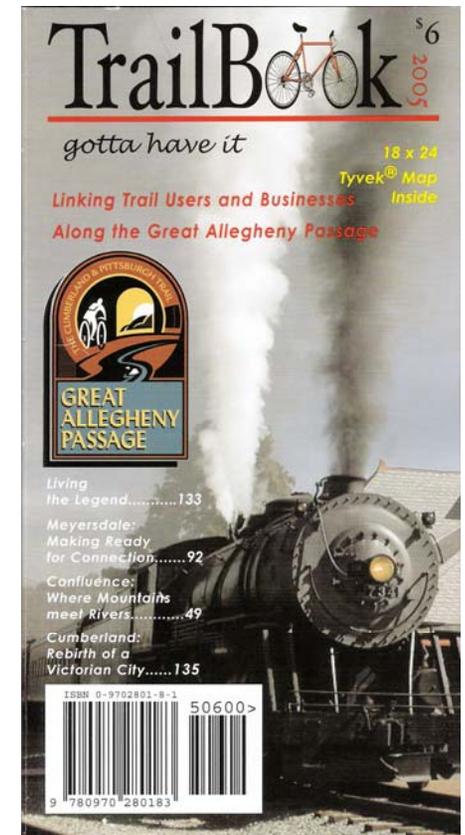
We also heard from the public that there needs to be a better system to report emergency needs along the river. Cell phone service is spotty and unreliable. Where telephone service land lines exist, pay telephones should be installed at access sites and communities along the river. The call boxes often seen along the turnpikes may be another option for reliable emergency communication. The law enforcement cooperative will be in a good position to develop plans for emergency response to the river.

Upstream of Ridgway and downstream of Clarion, the opportunity for cooperative law enforcement may be difficult because of the prevalence of private land. Bringing together all the enforcement personnel along the river to develop a plan of action for river issues will help ensure that no river segment is neglected.

Better Visitor Information and Services

Clear and detailed information is needed to facilitate and nurture the visitation to the Clarion River corridor. Surveys in the last two Pennsylvania State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans indicated that lack of information is a barrier to recreation. More importantly, the absence of information can be construed as a negative, leading to a sense of insecurity and unexpected danger. Information can reduce crowding by distributing visitation across the corridor and can direct visitors to private businesses.

We recommend working with the Northwest PA Great Outdoors Visitors Bureau to develop a guide that provides detailed information and maps about recreation sites and activities; a comprehensive listing of visitor services and businesses in and around the river; regional attractions; description of the river corridor by segment; information on when visitation is highest and lowest; outfitter and guide services to include the charge for rentals or other services; information on campsite reservations; stewardship messages; fishing license information; closest hospitals and state police barracks; and opportunity to purchase trail maps, guides and books about the area. The guide should be available in hardcopy form and online. The guide should be updated regularly (at least every two years). We see this guide as



being the source for comprehensive information – all visitors need to know in one handy publication. Pine Creek Outfitters in Ansonia, PA puts out a great guide on the Pine Creek Region every year. The Trailbook to the Great Allegheny Passage published by Fieldstone Press is another good example of a regional guide centered on an outdoor recreation attraction.

More interaction between land managers and area businesses will improve relationships and enhance recreational opportunities. The state parks and forests, and the ANF should partner more with businesses to distribute informational brochures, encourage delivery of new recreational offerings, and incorporate stewardship messages in their programs or services.



Develop and disseminate information to urge visitors to learn and understand the skills and risks associated with the recreation they pursue. The Clarion River is a natural environment and changing it to be safer for the inexperienced, diminishes the natural character and experience of the river. An assumption of risk statement should appear in all publications and at access sites that tells visitors that it is their responsibility to assume the normal risks associated with their recreational pursuit, inform themselves about potential hazards, and take appropriate actions to prevent injury or damage. Communicating realistic expectations sets the stage for a more satisfying recreational experience.

We recommend working with the canoe outfitters on the river to develop a brief orientation that should be given to paddlers before they launch. Many of the paddlers using the outfitters are inexperienced and would benefit from safety information (i.e., what to do in a lightning storm), knowing that some of the land is private and should not be entered, and approximate river travel times.

The DCNR, ANF and other partners should support an expanded river cleanup, which is currently conducted in the spring by Cook Riverside Cabins and Love's Canoes. This is an excellent opportunity to raise the awareness of the Clarion River and to encourage visitors to be good stewards.

Partners should work with Northwest PA Great Outdoors Visitors Bureau and private business owners to develop a promotion strategy for Clarion River that would disperse visitation across the corridor in order to limit impacts on local communities and natural resources, and enhance the visitor experience. Concerns about crowding were raised at many of the public workshops. The Clarion River is not a general tourist attraction and promotional efforts should target the recreational groups appropriate to the Clarion, such as canoers, kayakers, hikers, wildlife watchers, anglers and photographers. Broad promotional efforts could overwhelm the area and reduce the quality of the recreational experience. A variety of quality recreation opportunities exist in the area around the Clarion River, such as the Forest Cathedral Trail in Cook Forest State Park, and their promotion can help distribute use and provide a more robust visitor experience. Promotion can also inform visitors of the services and businesses in the area that can support and enhance the recreational experience, and fortify the local economy.

We recommend developing an expanded water trail guide to provide detailed information for avid paddlers. A larger map printed on waterproof paper could show campsite locations, historic sites, and area attractions and services. Potential visitors will value detailed

information about area communities, guide services, tours and programs, lodging and other services. The Susquehanna River Water Trail-West Branch is a good example of the level of detail that is desirable on maps. The Schuylkill River Water Trail Guide has been recognized by the American Canoe Association as one of the best water trail guides available. Deluxe guides, such as these, are typically for sale, which provides an opportunity to recover printing costs and make a small profit.

The PFBC Water Trail Map serves a more general visitor and is available at no cost. Some visitors will not have a need for a detailed map and will prefer the free version. We recommend that the local interagency/intergovernmental group that was active in the development of this report take responsibility for updating the water trail map with the PFBC. Some map inaccuracies were identified during this process that need to be communicated to the PFBC before their next map reprinting.

Support Community Revitalization

Connecting the area's communities to the river's recreational opportunities will stimulate economic growth and provide important services to visitors. The communities serve as the gateways to the Clarion River. Clustering development in the communities keeps the river corridor natural and undeveloped. Protecting the attraction is vital to the sustainability of this opportunity. Also, communities are in a better position to connect visitors to the heritage of the area with historic home tours, industry tours and historical society museums.

Ridgway Borough has been working on a riverfront redevelopment plan, and DCNR and DCED should continue to support this effort. The redevelopment plan should address the need for more parking in the area of the canoe launch and Clarion Little Toby Trailhead. These parking lots are too small even for normal use. Encouraging visitors to start their recreational activity in the community will limit the need to expand access sites along the natural sections of river, and will expose visitors to the stores and services in the community.

Johnsonburg's location at the confluence of the East and West Branches can be an important component in the Borough's downtown revitalization project. The river has long served industry in Johnsonburg but also has the potential to be a natural attraction. The Domtar Paper Mill also has potential to be an attraction. The Northwest PA Great Outdoors Visitors Bureau should work with the Domtar Paper Mill in Johnsonburg to develop a system of periodic tours highlighting papermaking at the plant, clean up of the river, restoration of the trout fishery, and the reclamation of land associated with the plant's operation. Tours provided on a scheduled basis at a regular interval (i.e., the first Saturday of every month) by reservation would control group size, regulate staff needs and provide more opportunity for visitors to attend a tour. A small visitor's center with interpretive exhibits would expand opportunities for learning about the mill's history. The PFBC is interested in partnering with Northwest PA Great Outdoors and Domtar to



develop interpretive and educational materials relating to fisheries. Funding assistance could be available through the Lumber Heritage Region.

Opportunities for converting rails to trails exist along the East and West Branches of the Clarion River. Johnsonburg and Wilcox should form a partnership to seek grant funding to study the feasibility for rail-trails in the area. Connecting the trails to other regional rail-trails would attract bicyclists from beyond the local area. There may be opportunities to connect to trails in McKean County being planned by the Tuna Valley and Kinzua Valley Trail Associations.

Explore Different Options for Intergovernmental Cooperation to Support Implementation

The success of this project will hinge on the ability of different agencies and governments along the river to work together. Through cooperative planning and management, local governments can combine their resources and expertise to provide the best possible recreational experience while protecting the quality of life in area communities.



The municipalities and counties along the river corridor should continue to meet periodically to address some of the common issues and opportunities they share along the river corridor. This would help provide a more solid framework for coordinated implementation of assessment recommendations. Other Pennsylvania towns may have good models that can assist the Clarion River communities in structuring their own partnership. One option is to formalize this partnership through an intergovernmental agreement. DCNR and the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) offer assistance in developing this kind of agreement, which would open the door to DCED Shared Municipal Services Funding, better decision-making and greater political influence. Less formal arrangements are also an option. Active partnerships have a better chance of securing grant funding.

To implement the recommendations, the services of a recreation professional will be needed to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. The DCNR and ANF personnel can offer their expertise, but community needs may be greater than what

they can provide. The partnership may want to examine the feasibility of establishing a Recreation Circuit Rider position to assist with the work outlined above including the management of grants and professional consultant services to support the implementation of assessment recommendations and to coordinate with other potential recreation efforts in the counties. This position would be eligible for DCNR grant funding matched by DCED and county contributions.

Next Steps

1. Meet with project partners to seek validation of the final report and the plans for implementation.
2. Schedule meetings with local municipalities to discuss intergovernmental cooperation models and pursue the preferred option.
3. Seek grant funding to implement recommendations.
4. Resource, land and water management agencies should meet to coordinate the implementation of recommendations. Letters of Intent or Memoranda of Agreement could be established to strengthen agency partnerships.
5. Work with the Northwest PA Great Outdoors on implementation of recommendations related to visitor services, information and tourism product development, and establish an agenda for activities to be pursued.
6. Seek guidance from DCED about community revitalization programs and resources that would support identified community revitalization projects in the river corridor.
7. Meet with the Lumber Heritage Region to discuss this report and potential collaboration on recommendations in the context of the Lumber Heritage Interpretative Plan.

