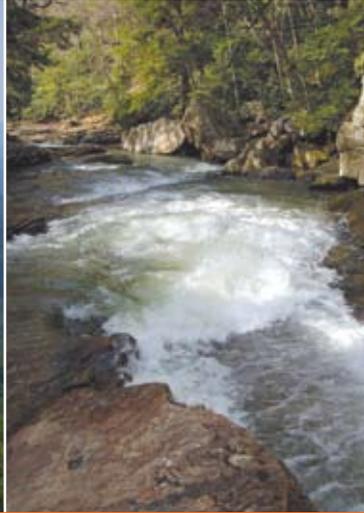


Pennsylvania Conservation Landscape Initiatives Report



CONSERVATION LANDSCAPE INITIATIVES

The places we call **home**.

June 2010

Beautiful Pennsylvania

IMAGINE A PLACE WHERE VIBRANT COMMUNITIES DRAW STRENGTH FROM THEIR NATURAL ASSETS TO SUSTAIN THEIR QUALITY OF LIFE. A PLACE WHERE CITIZENS CARE ABOUT PROTECTING THE SPECIAL QUALITIES OF A REGION – THEIR REGION. A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE AND PARTNERS BAND TOGETHER TO ENVISION A BETTER ECONOMIC FUTURE, TACKLE SHARED CHALLENGES AND CARE FOR THE NATURAL, SCENIC, AND RECREATIONAL RESOURCES THAT DEFINE THE PLACE THEY CALL HOME. THIS IS A CONSERVATION LANDSCAPE.



Pennsylvania is changing. Its landscapes are being transformed; communities face economic challenges; natural resources are under new threats. How we adapt and respond to these changes will determine our future prosperity and quality of life.

Over a century ago, Pennsylvanians faced similar resource and community challenges. Rampant resource extraction to fuel an industrializing nation put natural resources on the brink of disaster and communities floundering when industry left town.

Thankfully, conservation leaders envisioned a future Pennsylvania defined by its natural beauty and worked to re-establish its heritage by setting aside lands for public enjoyment.

Today, 60 percent of the landscape is forested. Wild and natural areas capture the beauty of the past; 117 state parks, 2.2 million acres of state forests, 1.4 million acres of state game lands and the 500,000-acre Allegheny National Forest serve as the foundation for outstanding recreation, scenic beauty, nature-based tourism and vibrant communities.



Pennsylvanians have a solid outdoor culture and a strong affinity for the mountains, streams and landscapes that surround their communities. This attachment to the land is born from the robust traditions of a natural resource-based economy like timber and farming and strong hunting, fishing and hiking traditions. Pennsylvania's beautiful and engaging scenery – from the rolling piedmont to the Appalachian Ridge and Valley to the deeply cut plateau of the Alleghenies – also has helped to imbue a deep sense of place and affinity for landscapes with the commonwealth's residents.

New Challenges Call for New Thinking



Just as they did in the past, our natural resources, landscapes and communities stand perilously close to permanent alteration. Pressure to use our forests to extract natural gas is growing. Rural regions and small towns still face declining industry, high unemployment and an exodus of young people who are leaving to look for work in more prosperous places.

Urban areas struggle with increasing development pressure at the cost of green spaces. Many lack comprehensive land use plans, which take a coordinated and thoughtful approach to managing growth. Local governments, strapped with their own budget concerns, lack the resources to work across political boundaries to address these pressing issues.

As the state's natural resource agency and primary conservation and recreation funding source for communities, the Department of

Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) saw the need to refocus its expertise in order to help address these new challenges. Instead of working exclusively within its park and forest boundaries or within a specific community, the agency broadened its approach to defined regions, or conservation landscapes.

DCNR believed that strategic investment around conservation, community revitalization and recreational projects within a landscape could profoundly affect local communities and help protect important natural assets. Simply put: working to save special regions of the state can save the lifestyles they offer to their citizens and benefits they offer to their visitors.

These Conservation Landscape Initiatives are driven by a partnership approach to getting work done at the regional level. By getting community leaders, other state agencies, local governments, philanthropies and nonprofits all engaged around a common goal – motivated by a sense of place – it was much easier to tackle effective

land use planning, investment, citizen involvement and revitalization.

Through these landscapes initiatives, DCNR is working closely with partners and communities on issues such as:

- Conserving land
- Protecting greenways
- Creating walking and biking trails
- Protecting habitats
- Reducing forest fragmentation
- Encouraging sustainable development

Work is well underway in seven Conservation Landscape Initiatives throughout the state: Pennsylvania Wilds, Lehigh Valley Greenways, Lower Susquehanna, Laurel Highlands, South Mountain, Schuylkill Highlands and Pocono Forests and Waters.

While each of the seven landscapes has unique qualities and sometimes dramatically different goals, they share these core principles: locally driven planning, natural resource conservation, community revitalization and civic engagement.



photo by Brad Harrison

The Recipe for Conservation Landscape Initiatives



Key ingredients that have helped define the conservation landscapes for the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources include:

- **Sense of Place.** These regions are based on a shared landscape and are not defined by political boundaries.
- **Readiness.** Communities are ready to participate in a region-wide effort often because of threats or opportunities such as changes in the economic base, declining population or urban sprawl.
- **Engagement.** DCNR convenes like-minded partners through a civic engagement process that brings people of the region together to identify common values and concerns.
- **Strategic Investments.** State agencies with regional and statewide partners provide high-level leadership, financial support and technical assistance.
- **DCNR interests and lands.** The presence of state parks, state forests or significant recreational investments in the region provides the foundation for the landscape as well as staff who can help guide the initiative.

The first two conservation landscapes established were dramatically different in size, scope and goals. The Pennsylvania Wilds, located in one of the most rural sections of Pennsylvania, is vast in geographic size, but contains only 4 percent of the state's population. It focuses on nature-based tourism, built on the strong presence of state and federal lands and recreational amenities. In contrast, the Lehigh Valley Greenways encompasses only two counties, but is located in one of the most urban settings of the state. Its goal is to protect critical open spaces and make urban and suburban connections via a vast network of trails and greenways.

Those two areas, which are profiled as part of this report, provide a snapshot of the diverse issues Pennsylvania citizens and officials face and how Conservation Landscape Initiatives are helping local areas develop a regional response that makes sense to them.

Evaluations of the Conservation Landscape Initiatives



The Conservation Landscape Initiative is a nontraditional strategy for government to target investment and engage with communities for the benefit of resource conservation and community revitalization. For this reason, DCNR commissioned two studies to assess the impact of the approach and to make recommendations for improving and sustaining the approach in the future.

“Pennsylvania Wilds has brought a common awareness of needs that then has made it possible to compile a coordinated strategy for working on these problems”

In 2009, OMG Center for Collaborative Learning, an independent, nonprofit research and consulting organization based in Philadelphia, documented and assessed the process of developing the Conservation Landscape Initiative. Since each conservation landscape was in a different stage of development, the evaluation focused attention on the two most mature: the Pennsylvania Wilds and the Lehigh Valley Greenways initiatives. The evaluators also reviewed the work of the other five Conservation Landscape Initiatives. In addition to OMG's evaluation, Econsult Corporation worked with Wharton GeoSpatial Initiative, both of Philadelphia, to assess the economic impact of the commonwealth's investment in the Pennsylvania Wilds.

These reports are available online at www.dcnr.state.pa.us/cli

Regional Approach Hallmark of Conservation Landscape Initiatives

A key approach of Conservation Landscape Initiatives is to look at an area from a regional, rather than local, viewpoint. By definition, Conservation Landscape Initiatives span town and county boundaries. In doing so, these initiatives are bringing regions together to collaborate in ways that they have never done before. The results are a more efficient use of time, money and other resources, and approaches that draw on a broad range of expertise.

In several Conservation Landscape Initiatives, intergovernmental partnerships have been forged for the first time.

For example, DCNR offered to fund a planning team in the Pennsylvania Wilds after hearing from Jerry Walls, a former Lycoming County Planning Director, who thought the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative needed more planning before a full-scale launch into communities.

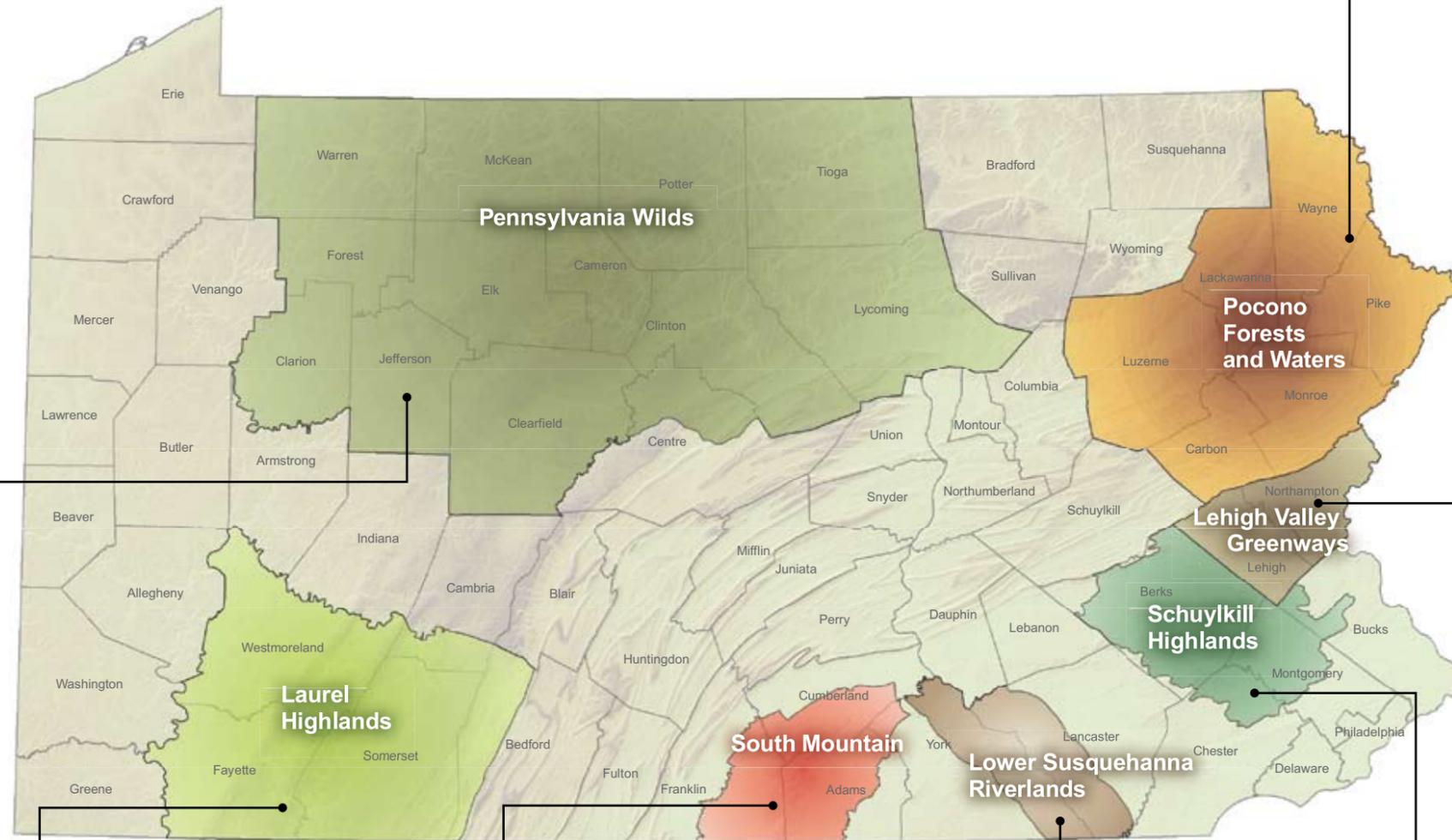
As a result, the region's 12 county governments signed a groundbreaking intergovernmental cooperative agreement stating that they would work together to address common planning issues and to ensure the community character of the region did not suffer as a result of increased tourism to the area.

Never in the state's history had such an agreement covered such a large geographic area—a quarter of the state. The agreement gave way to the Pennsylvania Wilds Planning Team and new funding sources.

Since its inception, the planning team has undertaken a region-wide planning study to strategically address key infrastructure planning issues. The group has tackled regional issues such as developing better signs to direct visitors to state parks and other areas, planning for increased bus traffic on secondary roads, encouraging cell phone coverage in an area notorious for spotty signals, and planning for increased needs for sewage treatment in rural villages.

“Pennsylvania Wilds has brought a common awareness of needs that then has made it possible to compile a coordinated strategy for working on these problems,” Walls said.

SEVEN CONSERVATION LANDSCAPE INITIATIVES



Pennsylvania Wilds is 12-county region that offers tremendous outdoor experiences, on the more than 2 million acres of public land, equivalent to that of Yellowstone! The region is home to the largest elk herd in the northeast and some of the darkest skies in the country. It is one of the most rural and sparsely populated regions of Pennsylvania, containing only 4.1 percent of the state's population. Accomplishments include \$126 million in park and forest infrastructure improvements; \$5 million in regional marketing; \$5 million in grants and loans for small business development; \$13 million in local park and regional partnership grants; a regional design guide to assist communities with community character preservation and enhancement, and an artisan initiative to help improve the visibility and profitability of artisans and arts-related businesses.



The Laurel Highlands is located an hour east of Pittsburgh in southwestern Pennsylvania and is defined by three Allegheny Plateau ridges: the Chestnut, Laurel and Allegheny. With more than 100,000 acres of public lands, scenic vistas and gorges, diverse wildlife and outdoor

recreation opportunities ranging from whitewater to the Great Allegheny Passage rail-trail, the region is a destination for visitors from Pittsburgh, Ohio and the Mid-Atlantic. The region's economy is migrating from resource extraction to natural assets based on the quality experience for residents and visitors. Accomplishments include a unique joint master plan between Ohio State Park and Ohio State Park; support of the Trail Town Program, which helps communities maximize the economic benefit of the Great Allegheny Passage; and a comprehensive interpretive plan for Laurel Ridge.



The South Mountain Partnership focuses on 1,100-square miles in the South mountains and surrounding lands that constitute the northern prong of the Blue Ridge. Key assets include Michaux State Forest, six state parks, and 60 miles of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. The region has thrived with

its fertile limestone agricultural lands, timber resources that fed iron furnaces, diverse wildlife, and pure spring water captured by the mountains' permeable soils and released into the valleys. The communities including Gettysburg, Chambersburg and Carlisle have a rich cultural heritage. Accomplishments include permanent protection of nearly 4,000 acres; establishment of a unique partnership between agricultural interests, conservationists, and local small communities; and a region-wide conservation focused speakers' series.



The Lower Susquehanna focuses on the Susquehanna River and its core river town communities in Lancaster and York counties. The largest natural area and recreation land holders are utility companies. Protecting the river means protecting this greenway corridor (approximately 13,000 acres of utility lands) and using it as the

foundation for an economic development, community sustainability and conservation stewardship strategy for the two counties. Major accomplishments include a signed sales agreement protecting, through fee simple acquisition and conservation easements, 3,600 acres of PPL lands, some of which will become a state park; continued development of the Northwest River Trail, which will stretch 14 miles along the river corridor; and community downtown and riverfront park rehabilitation in Marietta, Wrightsville, and Columbia.



Poconos Forests and Waters covering a six-county area in north-eastern Pennsylvania, has a rich and diverse past, ranging from Colonial settlements along the rivers and valleys, industrial development and extractive uses, to the outdoor leisure and vacation mecca of the Pocono Plateau. The landscape includes one

of the state's largest concentrations of public lands, abundant water resources with 4,700 miles of streams and 47,000 acres of lakes and ponds, and miles of recreational trails. Due to tremendous population growth pressures in recent years, the landscape and its natural assets are threatened. Accomplishments included permanent protection of more than 30,000 acres; cooperative planning and implementation of open space goals; outdoor recreation planning and development; and support for the new Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge.



Lehigh Valley Greenways is located in the third largest metropolitan area in the state and includes Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton. There is little DCNR owned land, but at the heart of it is Jacobsburg Environmental Education Center, a key community asset that will be further developed in 2010.

The initiative's accomplishments include supporting the development of Jacobsburg and two other nature centers – Trexler Nature Preserve and the Lehigh Gap Nature Center; connecting residents with nature on more than 28 miles of new trails; continuing to complete the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor through the Valley; and providing technical assistance and funding to help communities respond to growth pressure, protect ecological areas and improve urban parks.



Schuylkill Highlands encompasses parts of the Pennsylvania Highlands and the Schuylkill River Watershed from Valley Forge National Park to Reading. Significant natural resources include the Hopewell Big Woods, the largest unbroken forest between Washington, D.C. and New York City, French Creek

State Park, and the Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site. The Schuylkill River Trail extends through the middle of this landscape linking together recreational hubs, parks and the towns along the river. Accomplishments include permanent protection of over 2,500 acres of critical habitat; a compatible economic development study for trail and woodlands gateway towns; completion of a trail network connecting the communities to the Schuylkill River Trail and development of a natural resource greenway conservation plan.

Pennsylvania Wilds, Lehigh Valley - Case Studies



The following case studies and findings draw from the two evaluations as well as additional interviews.

Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative Encourages Young Couple to Return to Start a Business

Piper Lindell and her husband Josh yearned to return to the place where they had grown up—a beautiful section of Pennsylvania with sparkling rivers, vast herds of elk, and stunning vistas.

But the young couple was wary. They knew their hometown in Warren County struggled with a bleak economy and high unemployment.

Lindell and her husband grew up in an area that is now one of the Conservation Landscape Initiatives called the Pennsylvania Wilds. It encompasses a rural 12-county area in the northern tier of the state that has a declining population and has been feeling the impacts of an economic slowdown, particularly with a decline in manufacturing activity.

It also has beautiful natural resources like the Pennsylvania “Grand Canyon,” the Allegheny, Clarion and West Branch Susquehanna rivers, abundant wildlife, and unparalleled night skies. In all, the area encompasses more than 2 million acres of public lands including 29 state parks, 8 state forests, 50 state game lands and the Allegheny National Forest.

While faced with an economic downturn, many residents appreciate the rural, undeveloped nature of where they live and do not want a sudden influx of tourists.

Yet Lindell and her husband saw an opportunity. They could purchase a business that would provide them with a livelihood *and* stay true to the rural character of the area.

That’s where the Pennsylvania Wilds initiative stepped in.

Through the initiative, the commonwealth has invested more than \$5 million in regional marketing and \$5 million in grants and loans for small business development. It has also invested \$126 million to improve state parks and forest infrastructure.

Lindell said that knowing the Pennsylvania Wilds initiative was working to grow the region’s outside tourism gave her and her husband the confidence to leave their careers and move back to their hometown in Warren County. They purchased two small canoe and kayak liveries on the Allegheny River.

“As important as the marketing is, the community and business outreach, new programs and infrastructure investments are really helping the region engage in a meaningful conversation about what sustainable tourism development is and how it can benefit the people who live there,” Lindell said.

Since purchasing the business, Allegheny Outfitters, Lindell and her husband have grown it by 300 percent and are about to undergo a major expansion to become a year-round outfitter.

“...a meaningful conversation about what sustainable tourism development is and how it can benefit the people who live there.”

Clarion River Partnership Forges Regional Cooperation



But the help that the Pennsylvania Wilds gave him in managing visitation along his beloved Clarion River changed his mind.

The Clarion River was once one of the most polluted rivers in Pennsylvania. By the mid-1990s, thanks to years of restoration efforts, the river had started to turn around and local residents and tourists began to return to its banks. But the increased interest brought a new set of challenges.

The river was often used as a local hangout and its banks were littered with trash. It lacked rest room facilities for local residents or tourists, negatively impacting the resource.

The Pennsylvania Wilds provided the spark for the Clarion River to complete its comeback. Through the initiative, DCNR convened county commissioners and funded an effort to assess the opportunities and challenges facing the Clarion River Corridor.

Another long-term resident of the Pennsylvania Wilds area had a much different reaction when he heard about the initiative.

Eric Patton, a Millstone Township, Elk County supervisor, was an early skeptic of the work. A long-term supervisor, he held a deep love for the land and perhaps an even deeper suspicion of outsiders from the state government trying to tell him what to do. He had endured years of planning efforts by outside organizations with what he felt was little consultation with local residents.



Patton, seeing the commitment and willingness of DCNR and other state agencies to let communities take the lead in planning their future, soon became a local advocate in communicating the potential benefit of the Pennsylvania Wilds to the communities.

This spirit of cooperation led to the creation of the Clarion River Municipal Partnership under Patton's leadership. The Partnership is an intergovernmental cooperation agreement among 10 municipalities of the Clarion River Corridor. It marked the first time that groups from various jurisdictions formally came together to work on common issues.

Through their work, the group began collaborating on projects of mutual interest including archaeological field schools for local students that provide a hands-on experience in history and stewardship. DCNR and its federal partners at the Allegheny National Forest invested significantly in the Clarion River Corridor funding new visitor amenities like restrooms near river access points, better signs and maps, additional fishing access and improvements to boat launches.

"The Pennsylvania Wilds has provided a common focus that has brought a wide range of federal, state and local agencies together to work on mutual issues that we all face," Patton said. "It has helped us think about the area from a regional standpoint."

"The Pennsylvania Wilds has... brought a wide range of federal, state and local agencies together to work on mutual issues..."



Lehigh Valley Greenways Gives Citizen Group Boost to Restore a Watershed

John Mauser, a retired math teacher, is the type of active citizen who is making a difference in Pennsylvania's future. As a middle-school teacher, he helped teach his students math by taking them on canoe trips on the Lehigh River.

He brought a similar energy and creativity to Pennsylvania's number one pollution problem: sedimentation that runs into rivers from eroded stream banks and pollutes drinking water. But Mauser ran into a major roadblock in accomplishing his vision until he began working with the Lehigh Valley Greenways conservation landscape.

The Lehigh Valley, which includes Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton, is among the fastest growing parts of the state, with many communities feeling overwhelmed by sprawl.

The region was losing open space at a rate of four square miles a year. With the population expected to increase 22 percent by 2030, preservation of open space, farmland, and natural resources have been a focus of Lehigh Valley's planners and local governments.

Lehigh Valley Greenways works with the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor Inc., a regional nonprofit organization, to create new environmental advisory committees, assist local government in natural resource protection, and plant thousands of native trees. Small grants from DCNR help local partners implement greenway, conservation, land use planning, stream bank restoration and trail development projects.

It was the Lehigh Valley Greenways that Mauser turned to for help in reducing water pollution in the area.

The region was losing open space at a rate of four square miles a year.

As founder of the Martins-Jacoby Watershed Association, Mauser hoped to carry out two projects to restore stream banks for homeowners. If successful, those projects could provide a model for stopping the sedimentation runoff. But Mauser was disheartened by the fees that consultants quoted for the work: \$50,000 per project. Those prices made it prohibitive for most homeowners to undertake.

“I was pretty discouraged,” he said. “The project had to come in at a reasonable cost so that homeowners could replicate them.”

But through Lehigh Valley Greenways, Mauser learned that the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission could provide low-cost design and construction services. The work by the commission brought the cost for stream bank repair down to around \$12,000 per project, making it much more viable as a model for future stream bank restoration projects, Mauser said.

“We’re a small group and we cover 100 square miles,” Mauser said. “It’s a little tough. Being part of the Lehigh Valley Greenways gave us credibility with funders because they saw that we were part of a regional effort. It also gives me quick and easy access to people who can provide us expert advice. Because of their help, we’re setting the right example, we’re stabilizing stream banks, and we are starting to change attitudes.”

“The Conservation Landscape Initiative has made a big, big difference here...”

Nature Preserve Created through Funding and Assistance

For Jan Creedon, director of general services for Lehigh County, Lehigh Valley Greenways has helped her region create a now treasured nature preserve.

Located about 10 miles northwest of Allentown, the Trexler Nature Preserve, was originally a private zoo donated to Lehigh County in the 1930s. In 2004 the county decided to open the entire underused property to the public and operate it as a park and environmental center.

Lehigh Valley Greenways adopted the redevelopment of Trexler Nature Preserve as one of its signature projects. Lehigh County lacks a state park; the preserve helps fill that gap. The redevelopment efforts include the construction of an environmental education center with a sustainable “green” design. The preserve now features more than 20 miles of hiking trails, a 2.5-mile single-track mountain bike trail, picnic facilities and places to fish, stargaze, and bird watch.

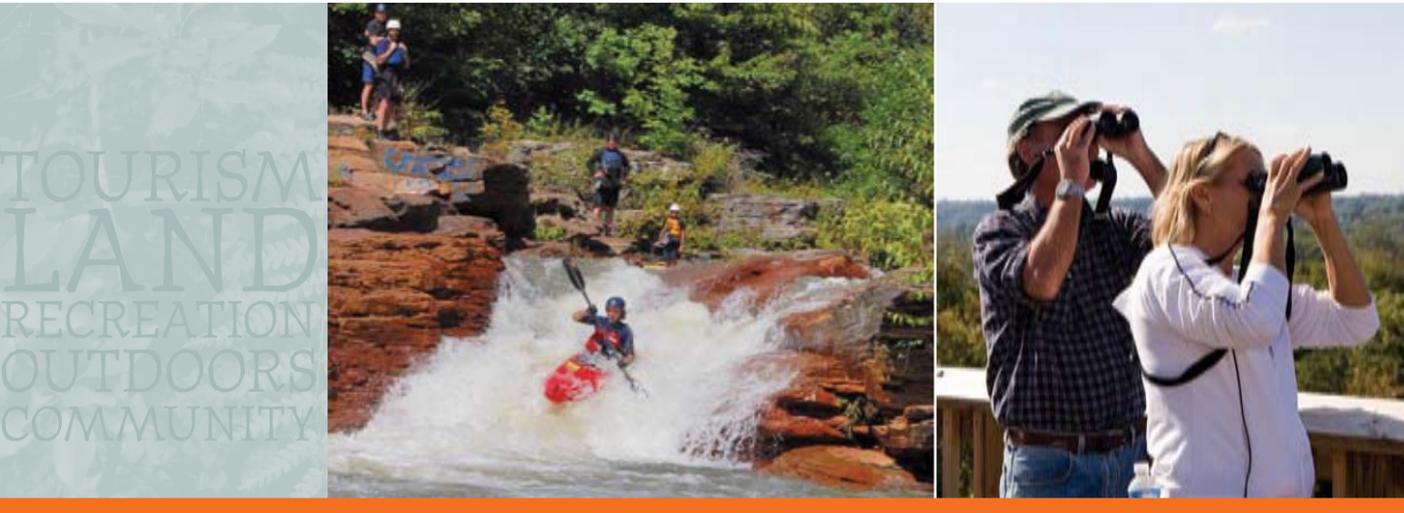
According to Creedon, Lehigh Valley Greenways provided much-needed funding and technical expertise to build and staff the environmental education building. The initiative also funded public awareness materials and campaigns so that Lehigh Valley residents and others can learn about and enjoy the nature preserve.

“The Conservation Landscape Initiative has made a big, big difference here,” she said. “It has brought funding and focus to a region that has a lot of potential and enabled us to develop that potential in a far shorter time period than we would be able to do otherwise.”



photo by Dennis Scholl,
Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor

Key Outcomes of the Conservation Landscape Initiatives



The 2009 evaluations of the Conservation Landscape Initiatives work concluded that “in short, this approach works”—that strong partnerships, strategic grant making, and more meaningful engagement with citizens pay off with more vibrant communities and increased opportunities for people to connect with the outdoors.

The studies noted the following results:

- **Increases in tourism have created economic benefits.** In the Pennsylvania Wilds, tourism and economic development have increased in the region. Specifically, tourism-related employment earnings and tax revenues in the region increased over state averages: the economy grew 3.7 percent each year, there was a 5.3 percent increase in overnight leisure travel per year and a 2.7 percent increase in state sales tax revenue from tourism per year. In addition, attendance at state parks within the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative was up 3.3 percent a year from 2004 to 2008.

- **Land acquisition has protected natural resources and parks.** DCNR acquired more than 66,000 acres in the Conservation Landscape Initiatives between 2003 and 2008. Each parcel acquired contributed important value. For example, in Ohio State Park in the Laurel Highlands, land acquisitions created connections to other land and increased the recreational capacity of the park.
- **Visitors have enhanced experiences through updated and expanded recreational opportunities.** DCNR invested more than \$126 million in the Pennsylvania Wilds alone. Other investment examples include:
 - In the Lower Susquehanna, more than \$1.7 million in public funds were invested in the development of a park that connects the riverfront with the community.
 - In the Laurel Highlands, DCNR invested \$1 million in recreational infrastructure – a special dam release valve and whitewater park features – on the Stonycreek River to create a 22-mile whitewater recreational asset that will

- position the Laurel Highlands as a major national whitewater recreation destination.
- In the Lehigh Valley, three environmental education centers are under construction or complete: the Trexler Environmental Center, Lehigh Gap Nature Center and Jacobsburg Resource Conservation Center.

- **Communities are connected to the outdoors.** DCNR sought to enhance the outdoor experience and bring it to the doorsteps of communities—urban, suburban and rural. Four of the Conservation Landscape Initiatives include major trails connecting communities to outstanding recreational and natural resources. For example, much of the early implementation in the Laurel Highlands focused on expanding and linking trails to communities along the Great Allegheny Passage, a 150-mile multi-use rail trail between Cumberland, Maryland and Pittsburgh.
- **Local governments have become engaged with conservation issues.** Local governments, many of which were unsure of the value of this regional approach, have become champions for the work, particularly working at a regional level around conservation and community development. For example, in 2005 the 12-county Pennsylvania Wilds Planning Team formalized through an intergovernmental cooperative agreement, representing the most significant example of regional cooperation in the state’s history.
- **Citizens have become more involved in their communities.** As each Conservation Landscape Initiative has gained momentum and recognition, citizens have become more engaged in the work. In Lehigh Valley, environmental advisory committees, which are small groups of appointed citizens, advise the

municipal planning commission, park and recreation board, and elected officials on the protection and management of natural resources.

DCNR has also provided mini-grants to nonprofits that allow them to take action on issues their communities deem most important.

- **State government agencies have carried out more efficient spending and coordinating, which has led to greater leveraging of state funds into additional resources for communities.** State agencies are coordinating their projects and additional dollars are coming in as funders see the commonwealth’s strategic commitment to protecting natural resources — over \$135 million has been invested in the Pennsylvania Wilds alone.
 - The Department of Community and Economic Development provides funding for a Small Business Ombudsman in the Pennsylvania Wilds to provide assistance to area businesses.
 - The Fish and Boat Commission and DCNR have worked together along the Clarion River in the Pennsylvania Wilds and helped with streamside plantings in the Lehigh Valley.

The 2009 study from OMG Center for Collaborative Learning concluded: “The Conservation Landscape Initiatives are bound to have lasting impacts on the regions themselves. We have documented substantial and tangible progress toward meeting goals. Perhaps most important, significant efforts were made to ensure the long-term stewardship of both the public lands and the character of the communities involved.”

Recommendations for the Future of Conservation Landscapes



Conservation Landscape Initiatives deliver beneficial results to local communities, visitors and the next generation

The results of the recent evaluations show the Conservation Landscape Initiatives deliver beneficial results to local communities, visitors and the next generation. Regions have become more prosperous, government is working better at every level and local leaders see a brighter future.

The evaluations found that state and local leaders can learn valuable lessons from what has worked on the ground and use those lessons to implement best practices across the state. While this kind of work is entrepreneurial and evolving, the research leads to recommendations and specific actions:

• Place Matters

- Recognize that the special natural and heritage values of Pennsylvania's landscapes offer a new way to engage citizens and communities in regional planning around what is important to them.
- Expand the Conservation Landscape Initiative from the current seven regions to a strategy that is available across the commonwealth.

- Ensure the Conservation Landscape Initiative approach is coordinated with the other regional and landscape efforts of greenway and trail organizations, heritage areas, county greenway and open space planning, and other key landscape partners.

• Public Investment Matters

- Target state funding for strategic land preservation, trails and greenways, watershed restoration and community greening and revitalization projects.
- Invest in parks and forest infrastructure that will improve recreational opportunities for local residents and out-of-town visitors.
- Continue to strengthen the collaboration among state agencies such as Community and Economic Development, Environmental Protection and Transportation, and the Fish and Boat Commission on funding regional and community-focused initiatives.
- Offer small grants to assist local governments and community groups for community, recreation, and conservation-related projects.

• Working Landscapes Matter

- Acquire intact high value forest lands to protect the health of the ecosystem and serve as a recreational resource for public enjoyment.
- Support land conservation that helps provide for agricultural and forestry-related jobs that depend on local products and the well-being of the local environment.
- Engage watershed groups, private citizens and other volunteers in the work of conservation and restoration of lands and waters of the commonwealth.

• Local Governments Matter

- Help local governments envision collaborative solutions to the common challenges facing their region.
- Provide educational assistance on land use and conservation strategies compatible with the commonwealth's tradition of local governments.
- Demonstrate the power of the Intergovernmental Municipal Planning program through real world examples and case studies to address regional needs.

• Visitors Matter

- Use tourism partnerships and brands that reinforce the unique recreation, aesthetic and cultural values that define a region.
- Consider and incorporate the values of local residents when promoting and sharing special places and offerings of a region.
- Provide targeted technical and financial assistance to assist and expand small-scale, tourism-related business.
- Develop planning programs for communities that are gateways to the public lands and recreational resources.

• Learning by Doing Matters

- Institutionalize the practices that have been successful in the Conservation Landscape Initiatives: being present in a place, engaging communities, focusing investments, and always collaborating.
- Invest in management practices and staff training that recognizes the importance of strong interagency partnerships and civic engagement to conservation stewardship, community revitalization and quality of life issues.
- Continue to evaluate key indicators related to tourism and economic development, visitation to parks and recreation facilities, land and water resource conservation and state investments.

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For more information on Conservation Landscape Initiatives, including all reports referenced in this summary, log on to the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resource's website at www.dcnr.state.pa.us/cli

To read a copy of DCNR's strategic plan: *Shaping a Sustainable Pennsylvania: DCNR's Blueprint for Action*, log on to www.dcnr.state.pa.us and select the Agency Highlights tab.



