

## Centre County Planning Opportunities

# Recreation

### Centre County Comprehensive Plan -- Phase II Implementation Strategies

## Introduction

In 2003, the Centre County Board of Commissioners adopted a County-wide Comprehensive Plan which included background studies, inventories of existing conditions, goals and recommendations. And, in 2010, a county-wide Greenway Plan was adopted. Both documents contain recommendations that serve as a vision and a general direction to shape public policy and community improvement. Those specific to recreation will be discussed here along with implementation tools to achieve the recommendations. For more detailed background information please refer to the 2003 Comprehensive Plan available on the Centre County Planning and Community Development (CCPCDO) webpage:



The board walk on Moss-Hanne Trail, Black Moshannon State Park, Rush Township.

<http://www.co.centre.pa.us/planning/compplan/default.asp#county>

The 2010 Centre County Greenway Plan is also available on the CCPCDO webpage:

<http://www.co.centre.pa.us/planning/recreational.asp>

## The Keystone Principles

In 2005, Pennsylvania adopted the “Keystone Principles for Growth, Investment and Resource Conservation”, a set of principles that have focused Pennsylvania on reinvestment and reuse of its assets.

Initially intended for state agencies, these principles are becoming embraced by local governments as a tool to guide local decisions and have become adopted into county comprehensive plans.

- Redevelop first
- Provide efficient infrastructure
- Concentrate development
- Increase job opportunities
- Foster sustainable business
- Restore and enhance the environment
- Enhance recreational and heritage resources
- Expand housing opportunities
- Plan regionally and implement locally
- Be fair

**This plan update recommends county-wide adoption of these principles.**

### County-wide Planning Goals Adopted 2003

**#1—Identify, preserve, enhance, and monitor agricultural resources.**

**#2— Identify, preserve, and monitor environmental and natural resources.**

**#3— Preserve historic and cultural resources.**

**#4— Ensure decent, safe, sanitary and affordable housing in suitable living surroundings, compatible with the environment for all individuals.**

**#5— Appropriately locate and maintain existing and proposed community facilities, utilities, and services for all residents.**

**#6— Identify and promote economic development initiatives to maintain and grow a diverse economic base in each of the County’s planning regions.**

# Current Trends and Considerations

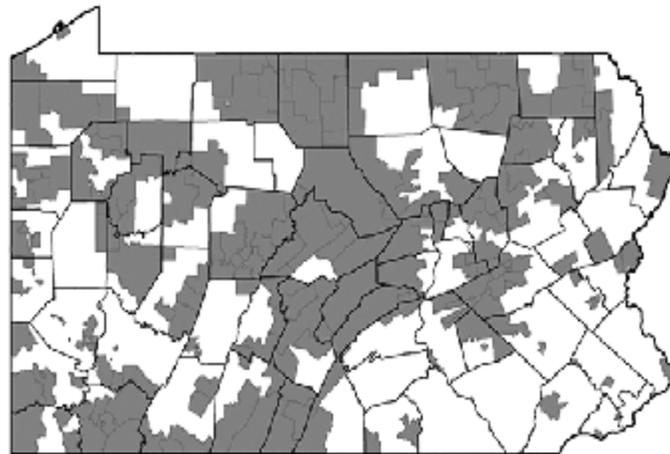
## Recreation & Health

With national and state obesity rates among youth and adults reaching record percentages, the need to increase physical activity across all age groups and provide opportunities for physical activities is being widely discussed and promoted. A 2002 study by the PA Department of Health (the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System) found that 60% of adults were overweight or obese, and 25% admitted to being physically inactive. A 2008 study by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania identified school districts where 20% or more of the students were considered to be overweight. **In Centre County, 6 of the 7 school districts were identified as having 1 in 5 students considered to be obese.** Obesity is linked to a number of health issues including diabetes, heart disease, and cancer.

Increasing recreational opportunities in Centre County is an effort to combat obesity.

## Recreation and Sustainable Communities

Tourism dollars generated from recreational opportunities has helped the economic base of many post-industrial and manufacturing towns. Tourism dollars are sometimes referred to as *soft monies*<sup>1</sup>, but the purchase of goods and services within communities that have park facilities, trails, museums, cultural and historic



PA school districts with 20% obesity rates. Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2008.

attractions, has real impact on local economies. Visitors need lodging, food, or often purchase items from local retailers during their stay. The Pennsylvania Wilds Planning Team estimated in 2009 that every \$1 spent on tourism in the PA Wilds generated \$25 in tax revenue<sup>2</sup>. Recreation planning can also add to the sustainability of communities through open space protection, offering alternative modes of transportation, connecting neighborhoods and towns, and conserving natural areas for future generations to enjoy. Proximity and access to trails and parks in urban areas, according to the National Trails Training Partnership, increased property values by an average of \$1,200 an acre. Creating and maintaining recreation opportunities will increase the economic vitality

## Recreation & Historic Preservation

Historic architecture and historic walking tours are tourist attractions. Protecting

historic buildings, bridges, cemeteries, and other sites distinguishes older towns, giving them a unique look and feel. The boroughs of Bellefonte and Philipsburg offer self-guided tours of their historic districts and have preserved older buildings through *adaptive reuse*<sup>3</sup>. For example, the Bellefonte Intervalley Area Chamber of Commerce uses the restored train station in Bellefonte as its visitors center.



The train station for the Bellefonte Historical Railroad.

## Recreation and Partnerships

Creating and maintaining recreational facilities and infrastructure requires effort, funding, time, and vision. Advancing and

promoting recreation requires assistance from municipalities, land trusts and conservation groups, civic organizations, businesses and industries, outdoor clubs, state agencies, and the public. One step in recreation planning is the formation of partnerships to create corridors and linkages between communities in the county and surrounding counties. With partnerships comes strength in numbers: more ideas, more support, and more potential to pull and/or match funding sources. Municipalities on their own, and in conjunction with county support, have been instrumental in planning and implementing local and regional recreational infrastructure such as trails and parks. The Tri-Municipal Park outside of Centre Hall Borough is a good example of multi-municipal efforts on a regional basis. Centre Hall Borough and the townships of Potter and Gregg jointly purchased and are working together to plan and develop this regional park. The Centre County Recreation and Greenway Plan, which is discussed on the next page, identified several partnerships between the public and private sectors to identify, study, and implement recreation projects that would not otherwise happen if one entity took full responsibility for the effort. Other regional plans that are being discussed as of January 2011 are the Howard Borough segment of the Brick Town Trail and the Spring Mills portion of the abandoned Lewisburg to Tyrone Railroad line that could potentially connect into Union County.

# The Centre County Recreation and Greenway Plan

The Centre County Recreation and Greenway Plan, adopted in August of 2010, will be the foremost guiding tool towards utilizing, protecting, and promoting natural, historic, and cultural assets by outlining a wide variety of projects ranging from conservation, outdoor recreation, historic preservation, and the promotion of tourism.

The plan was developed as part of the Pennsylvania's Greenways Program which was launched in August of 2001 (*Pennsylvania's Greenways -- An Action Plan for Creating Connections*). The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) was the lead agency that was responsible for each county developing and implementing these plans. Greenways will become one of Pennsylvania's most powerful tools to achieve sustainable growth and *livable communities*<sup>4</sup>.

**What is a greenway?** A greenway is a corridor of open space. By definition, these open spaces can vary greatly in scale and transect rural, urban, and suburban spaces. Greenways will incorporate natural, cultural, and scenic spaces by including both public and private properties. The greenway plan does not concentrate simply on trails; it identifies unique corridors which could be developed for both recreational and educational purposes from the remnants of railroad beds and canals to ridge tops and streams.

## Goals of the Centre County Recreation and Greenway Plan:

- 1.) Use information and tools from the plan for recreation planning to link communities, parks, schools, natural areas, and historic sites.
- 2.) Establish links to future greenway networks and facilities in surrounding counties.
- 3.) Identify specific locations for wildlife viewing, scenic views and view sheds, and areas of historic significance.

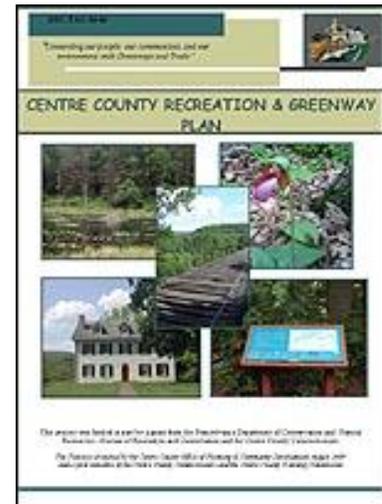
4.) Guide feasibility studies and implementation that may develop out of the plan's recommendations.

5.) Ensure consistency with the Centre County Comprehensive Plan and Future Growth Management Plan.

## Benefits of Recreation and Greenways:

- 1.) Creates local economic development partnerships between the public and private sectors.
- 2.) Builds new partnerships within communities.
- 3.) Creates connections throughout our neighboring six (6) counties.
- 4.) Provides active recreation to combat the obesity problem in rural areas.
- 5.) Sustains our environment for future generations.
- 6.) Provides vegetative buffers to protect water resources from pollution.
- 7.) Provides opportunities to protect and manage wildlife, forests, and ecological systems.
- 8.) Protects and preserves rural communities and farmland legacy.
- 9.) Offers alternatives to automotive transportation.
- 10.) Creates educational opportunities outside of the classroom.
- 11.) Provides recreational opportunities for families which foster health and wellness.
- 12.) Enhances property values.
- 13.) Stimulates tourism.
- 14.) Preserves biodiversity.
- 15.) Directs growth.

Three major corridor types and a number of priority greenways were identified in the plan. Corridors for conservation, recreation, and transportation were identified.



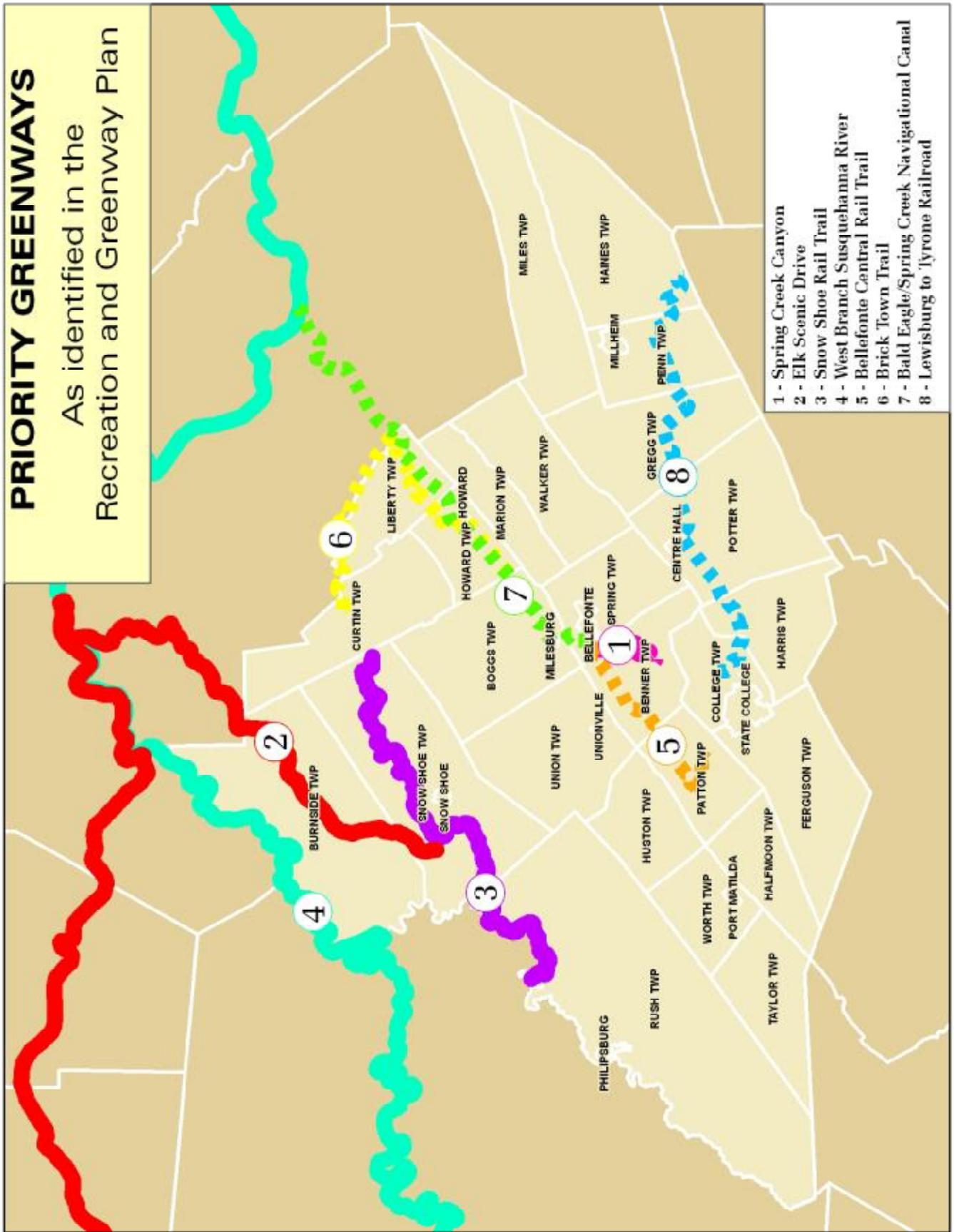
The cover of the Centre County Recreation and Greenway Plan, adopted August 2010.

## Priority Greenways (Existing and Proposed):

- Spring Creek Canyon
- Elk Scenic Drive
- Lewisburg-Tyrone Railroad
- Bellefonte Central Rail Trail
- Brick Town Trail
- Bald Eagle/Spring Creek Canal
- Snow Shoe Rail Trail
- West Branch of the Susquehanna River

The Centre County Recreation and Greenway Plan can be viewed or downloaded from the county's webpage from the recreation link:

<http://www.co.centre.pa.us/planning/recreational.asp>



## Priority Greenways at a Glance

### Spring Creek Canyon

Spring Creek Canyon is Centre County’s highest priority greenway because it contains a unique biological diversity area and serves as a development buffer area. The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, which routinely inventories biological diversity areas and landscape conservation areas, has ranked it as an exceptional *biological diversity* area<sup>5</sup>.

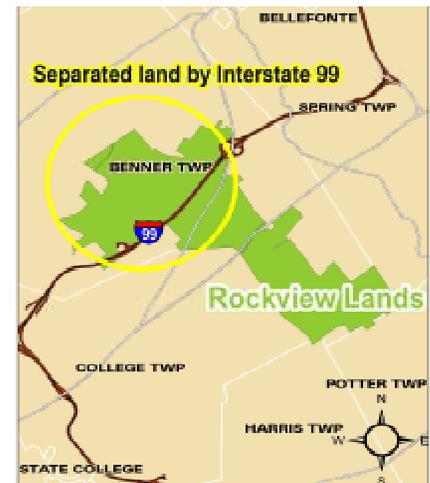
Spring Creek Canyon is located on lands in Commonwealth ownership under the supervision of the State Correctional Institute at Rockview. In response to a proposed land transfer and land divestment on which the canyon is located<sup>6</sup>, ClearWater Conservancy contracted consultants to compile the Spring Creek Canyon Master Plan. This Plan identified several historic and prehistoric resources from archeological studies performed by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission<sup>7</sup>. The 1,800+ acre tract has remained nearly undisturbed and has served, in many respects, as a development buffer between State College and other Centre County communities.

ClearWater Conservancy cited Spring Creek Canyon as an area of historic, cultural, and environmental significance<sup>8</sup>. If the canyon is opened to the general public, recreational opportunities should follow the recommendations of the studies and plans produced by the Centre County Planning and Community Development Office<sup>9</sup> as well as ClearWater Conservancy.

Per the above, passive recreation in the canyon is considered the most ideal. Types of recreation could include non-motorized use trails, kayaking, bird watching, fishing, and activities which would not pose a harm, threat, or disturbance to the land, plants, or animals in this unique biological area.

Accessing the canyon is limited and plans to increase access will be focused on existing points from Fisherman’s Paradise, Shiloh Road, Rock Road, and Seibert Road. The land divestment proposal is to divide and transfer 1,800+ acres of Rockview State Correctional property which was separated from the main prison grounds

when the Interstate 99/US Route 220 corridor was built in the northeast section of the Rockview lands. When the final land transfer is decided, the lands will be divided and the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission will oversee Spring Creek<sup>10</sup>. The final land distribution is as follows: PA Game Commission (1,210 acres), Penn State University (452 acres), PA Fish and Boat Commission (142 acres) and Benner Township (25 acres); for a total of 1,829 acres.



### Elk Scenic Drive

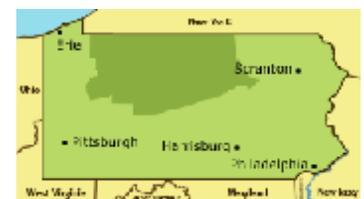


The Pennsylvania Wilds logo, featuring the keystone and the silhouette of an elk, is an economic and tourism initiative launched by the Commonwealth in 2004.

The Elk Scenic Drive is a 127-mile route linking Centre County and the Pennsylvania Wilds region. The Pennsylvania Wilds initiative, first launched in 2004, covers a twelve and one-half county area where the promotion of tourism, economic development, artisan culture, and the wood products industry are key components. The scenic drive, which follows State Route 144 north from Snow Shoe and State Route 120 west from Renovo, takes

visitors into the village of Benezette, where elk were re-introduced by the PA Game Commission between 1913 and 1926. The Pennsylvania Wilds team developed and marketed a tool kit for communities which features strategies for local government, businesses, and non-profit groups to coordinate and collaborate efforts to promote tourism<sup>11</sup>. The tool kit features ideas by which communities can display their association with the Pennsylvania

Wilds through architecture and signage. Increased industry activity and truck traffic in the northern tier of Centre County may or may not have impacts on tourists traveling the Elk Scenic Drive. This remains a priority greenway because it is a connection to the Pennsylvania Wilds.



## Snow Shoe Rail Trail



A portion of the Snow Shoe Rail Trail.

The Snow Shoe Rail Trail (SSRT) is a multi-use trail spanning 31 miles between the village of Casanova, Rush Township, and into the former mining areas around Kato., Snow Shoe Township.

The trail can be used for walking, hiking, mountain biking and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use. The rail trail is managed and monitored by the Snow Shoe Rails-to-Trails Association<sup>12</sup> (SSRTA). The SSRTA maintains

the trail and its trailheads with monies collected through membership dues and fundraisers.

The SSRT is a very popular destination for ATV enthusiasts because it is one of the few places in central Pennsylvania where ATVs can be safely and legally operated. For the smaller communities along the SSRT, the trail has provided an economic boost. Out-of-town ATV users typically spend an entire day

or overnight in the area, typically expending money for food and lodging. The rail trail is expanding east into the Bloody Skillet, a closed track ATV area northeast of Orviston and Monument on the Centre-Clinton County border.

A trail-head is located at Gillentown, in Snow Shoe Township, providing ample parking and easy trail access.

## West Branch of the Susquehanna River



The West Branch of the Susquehanna River at the Karthaus canoe and kayak launch.

The West Branch of the Susquehanna River was first identified by the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership<sup>13</sup> as a water trail. The West Branch is also a greenway of state significance and a nationally recognized water trail.

The river bounds Centre County at its northern border. The

nearly 230-mile river, which connects Cherry Tree (Indiana County) to the North Branch of the Susquehanna River in Northumberland County, flows through five (5) state parks, four (4) state forests, and several communities.

In 2004, the North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and

Development Commission developed a water proof map packet which details the entire West Branch to show sites for lodging, food, portages, scenic views, and other points of interest.

The West Branch of the Susquehanna River can be accessed in Centre County from the canoe and kayak launch at Karthaus just off of State Route 879.

## Feasibility Studies for Recreation Opportunities

Feasibility studies frame out the opportunities, challenges, and time line that will need to be completed in order to implement projects. The Centre County Planning and Community Development Office partnered with consultants, local governments, and the public to study three (3) recreation linkages which connect communities within and beyond the county.

The Bellefonte Central Rail Trail, the Brick Town Trail, and the Bald Eagle-Spring Creek Navigational Canal are discussed in the following section.

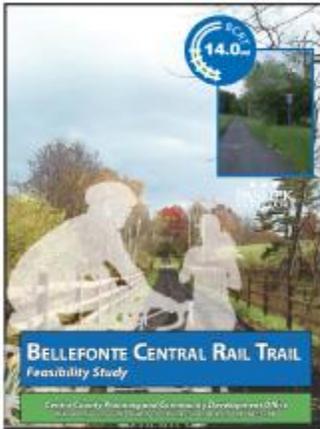
Each of these corridors is identified in the county's recreation and greenway plan as a priority greenway that has the potential to be developed but not without significant challenges. The three primary issues to developing these recreation corridors are:

- (1) *Securing funds for trail development.*
- (2) *Gaining access across privately-owned land.*
- (3) *Forming long-term partnerships for trail maintenance.*

Some portions of each corridor will be more feasible to develop first and each consultant clearly identified how to best develop each corridor in phases.



Feasibility studies assess current conditions, future needs, and step-by-step procedures to implement projects. Fiscal analyses may also be included.



Front cover of the Bellefonte Central Rail Trail Feasibility Study.

## Bellefonte Central Rail Trail

The abandoned Bellefonte Central Railroad was identified in 2007 as a potential connection between Bellefonte and State College. The railroad infrastructure is all but gone; however, a right-of-way has been maintained for years by the Spring-Benner-Walker Joint Sewer Authority. The proposed 13-mile trail would be limited to

non-motorized uses and passive recreation. The Bellefonte Central Rail Trail feasibility study<sup>14</sup> was compiled by Pashek and Associates. In 2008, the initial construction estimates were approximately \$7 million. Smaller linkages in and around Bellefonte were identified as being more feasible to construct in phases 1 and 2. Penn State

University has plans to link the western portion of the Bellefonte Central Rail Trail into the *arboretum*<sup>15</sup>.



The Arboretum at Penn State.

## Brick Town Trail

The feasibility study for the Brick Town Trail<sup>16</sup> was prepared for the Beech Creek Watershed Association<sup>17</sup> in 2007. The association wanted to launch their own greenway effort to promote the history, culture, and recreational opportunities within the watershed. The Brick Town Trail is aptly named because the proposed trail will link several communities whose industrial history is linked to brick refractories and the communities that flourished because of the industry. The Brick Town Trail would also directly tie into Bald Eagle State Park. Trail development to support the greenway effort will rely heavily on the partnerships and efforts between the watershed group, local municipalities, and financial resources from the commonwealth.

The feasibility study was completed by Albertin/Vernon.



Front cover of the Brick Town Trail Feasibility Study.



The Bald Eagle and Spring Creek Canal Trail Feasibility Study is part of the Clinton County Greenway Plan but the study was a joint effort between Clinton and Centre Counties.

## Bald Eagle and Spring Creek Canal Trail

A joint feasibility study between Clinton and Centre Counties was performed and assessed the potential to connect Bellefonte and Lock Haven along the remnants of the Bald Eagle and Spring Creek Navigational Canal. The canal system, which was approximately 30 miles in length, once provided the

primary method of transporting goods before the railroad was built. The proposed trail will have multiple uses. Sections will include those for driving and walking as well as historic markers and signage. The proposed trail would cross through portions of Bald Eagle State Park and follow Bald Eagle

Creek to the confluence of the West Branch of the Susquehanna River. The Bald Eagle and Spring Creek Canal Trail Feasibility Study<sup>18</sup> was completed by Simone Collins Landscape Architecture, GTS Technologies Inc., and Delta Development Group Inc.

## The Penns Valley Rail Trail: Study in progress

The former Lewisburg-Tyrone Railroad was identified in the Centre County Recreation and Greenway Plan as the next potential corridor on which to conduct a feasibility study. The Penns Valley Rail Trail would be in close proximity to the Old Gregg School Community and Recreation Center<sup>19</sup>, within the village of Spring Mills, which offers space for lease, athletic and educational classes, a farmers market, and a library. The former railroad right-of-way intersects the village of Spring Mills and, potentially, could connect the village of Lemont (in College Township) to the village of Coburn (in Penn Township), and perhaps beyond the county border. The initial 19-mile study area presented in the greenway plan reveals that the railroad rights-of-way cross mostly agricultural lands. In-depth deed research for the entire corridor length will be necessary in order to prepare and present easement documents for property owners along the former railroad through the Penns Valley Region.

# Recreation Planning Tools and Techniques

The Centre County Recreation and Greenway Plan will serve as the guiding tool by which recreational planning in Centre County moves forward. Covered in detail in that plan is the importance of:

- Maintaining an up-to-date inventory of recreation infrastructure including trails, parks, libraries, museums, and other points of interest.
- Surveying the natural features of the region and promoting recreation types that compliment, and are not in conflict, with the environment.
- Recognizing the array of recreational types: passive, active, motorized uses, etc.
- Building strong relationships between community groups and local government to implement the goals as outlined in feasibility studies.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) was a useful tool during the inventory process.

## Resource Inventory

Before linkages and connections were made between historic, cultural, and natural resources, an inventory of resources was completed. The Centre County Planning and Community Development Office took on this challenge for the

Greenway Plan.

The inventory included not only the type of facility or resource but also the specific infrastructure within the location. Using geographic information system (GIS) technology, all resource locations were identified and mapped, making the linkages or connections

easier to visualize. By doing so, several points of interest were included that would otherwise have been missed. It became evident that resources within close proximity of the county boundary be inventoried to assist in making future connections with neighboring counties.



View of Penns Creek.

Inventoried and updated natural resources are critical to recreation planning. The Centre County Planning and Community Development Office keeps a database of natural features that includes attribute information which helps planners make decisions.

## Natural Features Survey

However, most of this data is created by other agencies. Natural resources that were studied and used to evaluate greenway corridors include the Natural Heritage Inventory<sup>20</sup>, soils<sup>21</sup>, flood hazard zones<sup>22</sup>, important bird and mammal areas<sup>23</sup>, high quality and exceptional valued streams<sup>24</sup>, and contiguous forest<sup>25</sup>.



As recommended in the recreation and greenway plan, recreation planning should include activities across a wide spectrum from passive to active to those including motor vehicles and all-terrain vehicles.

Locating particular types of recreation needs to be a logical process. Passive recreation should be located in areas where conservation is necessary and the activities

will have little disturbance to the natural environment. More active types of recreation, like hiking and bicycling, need to be located where infrastructure is already in place, be it hiking trails or road shoulders for bike lanes. Scenic drives and the popularity of ATVs lends these types of activities to roads or already established ATV trails.

By definition, recreation has several types of venues from

## Recreation Types

the outdoors to the indoors. The more types of recreation that can be offered will increase tourism and revenue from tourism. If enough recreational options are available there is bound to be an audience for each of them.

## Implementation Strategies and Opportunities

### Promote recreation through municipal efforts.

- Provide municipalities with a toolkit<sup>26</sup> for recreation planning.
- Create incentives for municipalities in recreation planning projects through technical assistance such as grant writing or matching funds.
- Meet with municipal officials to discuss the goals and recommendations of the Centre County Recreation and Greenway Plan to advance recreation planning efforts through local comprehensive plans and ordinances.
- Work with municipal officials to incorporate the priority greenway corridors and recreation projects identified into local comprehensive plans.

### Current and Future Municipal Efforts to Promote Recreation —

#### OAK HALL REGIONAL PARKLANDS



The 68-acre tract off the US Route 322 by-pass at Oak Hall has been studied and a master plan produced by the consultant firm Pashek and Associates for a multi-use regional park. The Oak Hall Regional Parklands<sup>27</sup> will be managed by the Centre Region Parks and Recreation (CRPR) Department.

The regional park study began in 2007 when the tract was purchased and CRPR met with municipal officials in the Centre Region (State College Borough and the Townships of College, Halfmoon, Harris, Patton, and Ferguson) to discuss recreational needs. CRPR coordinated the municipal efforts so that the final product would be unanimously accepted by each township and the borough. This level of coordination required several public and advisory committee meetings with the consultant. The master site plan (as seen above) details areas for both active and passive recreation including sports fields and trails. The study was made possible through grants from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR).

## Current and Future Municipal Efforts to Promote Recreation (con't)

### HOWARD BOROUGH: LINKING EAST AND WEST END PARKS

**Proposed Transportation Enhancement Project**  
Howard Borough, Centre County



Howard Borough was identified as a community that lies within 2 proposed Greenways: the Brick Town Trail and the Spring Creek-Bald Eagle Navigational Canal. As part of their on-going recreational efforts, the borough applied for grant money as a transportation enhancement project for trail design and development that would connect their community parks. The proposed trail alignment follows the old railroad bed which runs adjacent to Spearing Street Extension, through the central parklet, past the elementary school, and to the eastern edge of the flood control impoundment. While this segment is small compared to other proposed trails (approximately 3,000 linear feet), it is a project that can be completed in a short period of time and shows a good possibility of being funded by transportation enhancement monies. Because this proposed alignment is an example of a shovel-ready project<sup>28</sup>, it has a greater chance of qualifying for DCNR grant monies as well.

### THE TRI-MUNICIPAL PARK



The Tri-Municipal Park is a joint effort between the Townships of Gregg and Potter, and Centre Hall Borough. With technical assistance from the Centre County Planning and Community Development Office and grant monies from DCNR, the 165-acre tract was purchased in 2008. ELA Group<sup>29</sup> drafted the master site plan (at left) which features multiple sports fields, a traditional style playground, and walking paths. This joint municipal effort between the townships and the borough started with informal discussions between municipal supervisors who wanted to address the lack of recreation opportunities in the Penns Valley Region. As the population of the region continues to grow and the demographics shift to include more families, the municipal supervisors wanted to be proactive in meeting residents' needs. The Tri-Municipal Park Master Plan was open to public comment in the Spring of 2010. Implementation, administrative costs, and possible funding sources are being identified and ad-

ressed. This regional park will be planned out in several phases over the next 10 to 20 years. Conservative cost estimates for construction are approximately \$60 million. The final construction costs will be based on contractor bids. In addition, the adjacent parcel was purchased by the Grange Fair for future expansion of their equine facility. A long-term strategy for the municipalities will be to tie these two locations together.

The Tri-Municipal Park will be owned and operated as a joint effort between the Townships of Gregg and Potter, and Centre Hall Borough.

# Implementation Strategies and Opportunities, continued

## Coordinate with multiple groups to identify recreation opportunities.

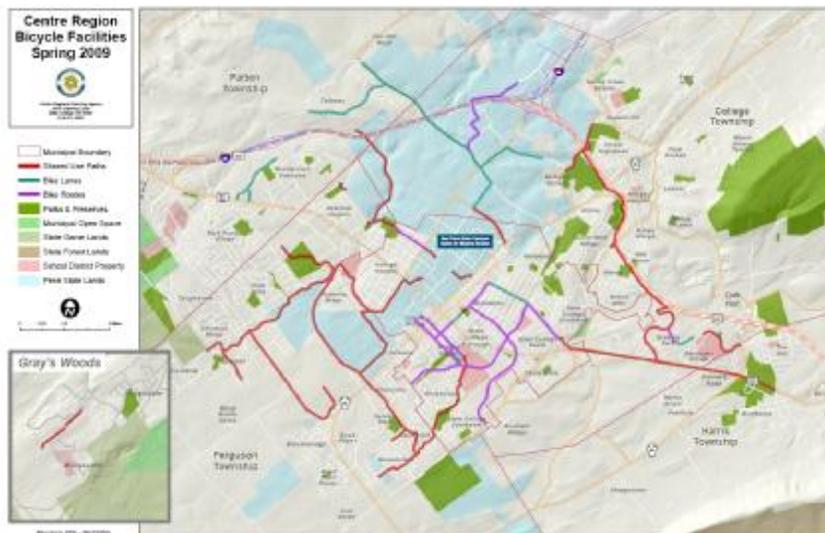
Working with multiple groups of different perspectives and interests will result in the best recreation planning effort and the end result will better fit the needs of the community, the region, and the county. In addition to working with municipalities, recreation planning efforts will include:

- School districts
- Civic organizations
- State agencies
- Land owners
- Watershed associations
- Outdoor clubs
- Recreation retailers
- Transportation authorities
- Builders/developers
- Historic societies and boards
- Cultural organizations



## Advance recreation for non-motorized transportation and pedestrian friendly communities.

Bicycle facilities (bike paths and designated bike lanes) provide a safe, alternative means of transportation that has grown in popularity across the Centre Region. The number of residents commuting to and from both work and school increased from 0.8% to 1.7% of all county residents between the years 2000 and 2008<sup>31</sup>. Residents who commute on bicycles cited different reasons including the health benefits of biking, the desire to adopt a more *green lifestyle*<sup>32</sup>, saving money, and saving time versus commuting by automobile. The Centre County Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) needs assessment identified several proposed bicycle facilities that would connect the borough of State College to surrounding communities including Lemont, Gray's Woods, and Pine Grove Mills.

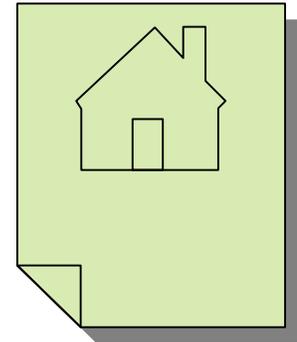


Walking to work and school is not an option available to all county residents who travel long distances. However, the number of county residents who primarily walk to work and/or school increased from 7,844 in 2000 to 8,043 in 2008. Increasing pedestrian opportunities such as providing walking paths and increasing pedestrian safety is not only a daily benefit to in-county residents but a draw for out-of-town visitors. Pedestrian friendly communities that offer downtown shopping centers and districts that are closed to vehicular traffic are growing in popularity. Cities and towns that are deemed *walkable*<sup>33</sup> offer the following characteristics: diverse development, safe passages, no barriers, and an interesting streetscape that offers a mix of architecture and natural beauty. Both Bellefonte and Philipsburg Boroughs have improved their downtown / central business districts by increasing pedestrian opportunities and safety. Implementation strategies to make a community more pedestrian friendly include sidewalk upgrades, traffic calming mechanisms, and new signalization at crosswalks.

## Implementation Strategies and Opportunities, continued

### Advance recreation efforts for smart growth and conservation.

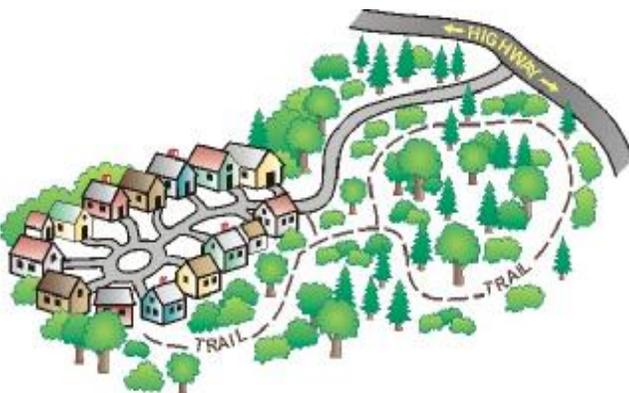
- Limit development in sensitive environmental areas through zoning and/or subdivision and land development ordinances.
- Provide home builders and developers with incentives to construct conservation style subdivisions with denser, more affordable units that offer either open space or a common park for parents and youth.
- Provide municipalities with conservation design models and zoning ordinance language; guide municipal officials through the process of adopting conservation design.
- Identify connections between existing residential subdivisions that provide a means for pedestrian and/or bike travel to promote neighborhood connectivity.
- Provide incentives and examples to incorporate green technology into new recreational facilities. These can include porous surfaces for stormwater management and using recycled materials.
- Encourage municipalities to adopt transit-oriented development through zoning.
- If possible, adaptively reuse vacant and underutilized buildings for recreational venues or facilities.
- Work with the Centre County Farm Land Trust and Clearwater Conservancy to identify and retain agricultural lands as open space; and incorporate agricultural tourism as a recreation opportunity into regional comprehensive plans.
- Work with local land trusts and conservation groups to acquire parcels that will be dedicated as open space.



## CONSERVATION DESIGN and RECREATION

Traditional residential subdivision design often uses all available land on which homes and infrastructure are built.

Conservation design promotes denser development by decreasing lot sizes and preserving a portion of the original tract (sometimes one-third to one-half) for open space and/or recreation. The graphic shows a simple conservation designed residential subdivision. This design example portrays a walking trail for the residents to use which loops through the undeveloped area (forested). Beyond recreational opportunities, the preserved open space in a conservation design offers environmental benefits as well. Traditional subdivisions include drainage basins for stormwater management, although a necessity, can be considered open space in a sense, but are not always useable land. Open space naturally handles stormwater runoff because the surfaces are *permeable*<sup>34</sup> to water and the open space land is useable to residents. While a traditional subdivision is constructed to direct stormwater runoff into a retention pond located within the development, conservation subdivisions are designed to allow rain water to flow onto a natural surface, where the water will be absorbed into the ground. Design methods also stress reducing the amount of *impermeable*<sup>35</sup> surfaces in a development to further aid stormwater management.



In addition, some residents are unable or unwilling to travel any distance to a park or a recreation spot. Promoting conservation design subdivisions is a great method of “bringing recreation” or “bringing the outdoors” to residents, just beyond their homes. Conservation design trends are leaning towards including a common community building for all residents to use for family gatherings or neighborhood meetings. These community buildings are maintained through *homeowner association fees*<sup>36</sup>.

## Implementation Strategies and Opportunities continued

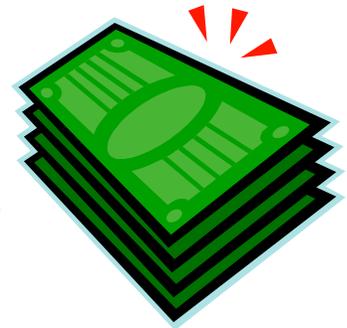
### Provide recreational opportunities for all audiences while meeting the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.



Trail and park design standards designed to meet the accessibility needs of persons with physical disabilities took effect in March 2011 and compliance will need to be met by March 2012. Newly constructed and altered governmental facilities must be readily accessible to, and useable by, individuals with disabilities. From the perspective of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), all grant-funded projects are required to meet ADA standards in their design or must be made ADA compliant<sup>37</sup>. Meeting the recreational needs of persons with disabilities benefits not only the individual with the physical handicap but it also allows the individual's friends and family to participate with them. Parking, level paths, bathrooms and drinking fountains, and access ramps are just a few examples of ADA compliant elements that need to be included in park and trail design.

### Continue to identify funding sources for recreation projects and assist municipalities through grant application processes.

Primary funding sources for recreation projects in Pennsylvania are provided by grants from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources through the Bureau of Recreation and Conservation<sup>38</sup>. The primary funding mechanism is the C2P2 (Community Conservation Partnerships Program). However, the Bureau prioritizes which types of projects are funded on an annual basis. In 2011, DCNR will focus on awarding grants to:



- Park and recreational facilities that demonstrate *green principles*<sup>39</sup> and connect children to the outdoors.
- Trail projects.
- River access projects.
- Projects identified by regional partnerships including Conservation Landscape Initiatives<sup>40</sup>, Statewide Significant Greenways<sup>41</sup>, and Heritage Areas<sup>42</sup>.

Keeping abreast of DCNR funding priorities is an important step in the application process to determine if a particular recreation project will even qualify. Be sure to contact a regional DCNR advisor<sup>43</sup> to discuss your project! DCNR is not the sole source of funding; the Centre County Recreation and Greenway Plan identified several other non-government grant sources.

Groups can always be encouraged to raise their own monies by organizing events.

Grant application processes can be very lengthy and complicated. As with the C2P2 grants, the Bureau of Recreation and Conservation requires that recreation projects fit within 5 (five) core components: project benefits, green and sustainable principles, partnerships, does the project fit into Pennsylvania's action plan for recreation, and a project time line. Each component is scored, and higher scored projects have a greater chance of being funded. Municipalities may need assistance to complete the application, making sure that the project scores as high as possible.



The C2P2 Grant applications are completed through a website where the applicant has a user-friendly interface where important documents can be stored or uploaded, critical step-by-step instructions are found, and grant application deadlines are posted.

Be sure to know the application deadline so that any problems with the project can be addressed quickly, and the application submitted on time.

## Interrelationships

Recent revisions to the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code specify that a comprehensive plan include a statement of interrelationships among various plan components with emphasis given to environmental, energy conservation, fiscal, economic development and social impacts.

### Environmental Impacts

- Recreation promotes conservation of natural resources for future generations to enjoy.
- It provides vegetative buffers to protect water resources from pollution.
- Alternative modes of transportation, especially walking and bicycling, removes automobiles from the roads, leading to higher air qualities.
- Incorporating greenways and green spaces as recreational facilities reduces urban sprawl and directs growth.
- Open space development provides opportunities to protect natural resources, wildlife, and land management strategies.
- Greenways preserve biodiversity and conserves landscapes.

### Economic Development

- Recreational opportunities promote tourism; generating dollars for the local economy.
- Recreation can create seasonal and permanent jobs.
- Recreation facilities can attract new employers.
- Communities with recreation assets attract new residents.
- Creates local economic development partnerships through public and private entities.

### Trail Towns — An Economic Development Strategy Working in Pennsylvania

A trail town is simply a destination along a long-distance trail. The trail whether it be a water trail, towpath, hiking trail, bike trail, or rail trail allows users to venture off the trail to enjoy the scenery, services, and heritage of the nearby communities. The trail town provides both residents and trail users a place to find the goods and services they need and easy access to both the trail and the town by vehicle, foot, or bicycle. The Centre County Planning & Community Development Office will work with interested municipalities to educate and coordinate the planning and development of trail towns.

In 2005, the Allegheny Trail Alliance published "Trail Towns – Capturing Trail Based Tourism, a Guide for Pennsylvania Communities". This excellent guide provides step by step guidance in preparing a blueprint to provide goods and services required by trail users and how to promote trail friendly towns. The guide states that trail towns:

- *Entice trail users to get off the trail and into your town*
- *Welcome trail users to your town by making information about the community readily available at the trail*
- *Make a strong and safe connection between your town and the trail*
- *Educate local businesses on the economic benefits of meeting the needs of trail tourists*
- *Recruit new businesses or expands existing ones to fill gaps in the goods or services that trail users need*
- *Promote the "trail friendly" character of the town*
- *Work with neighboring communities to promote the entire trail corridor as a tourist destination*

## Interrelationships

### Energy Conservation

- Providing alternative transportation modes, such as walking and biking, reduces vehicular trips; and therefore, consumption of fossil fuels.
- Likewise, by providing nearby recreational opportunities for county residents, overall energy consumption is reduced, and local businesses profit.
- In more densely populated areas, such as the Boroughs of State College and Bellefonte, parks and open space help relieve the urban heat island problem.
- Due to their strong correlation with conservation practices, Several recreational facilities now incorporate green technologies into their construction and operation.

### Fiscal

- Healthier people who actively engage in recreation have lower insurance rates.
- Property values in close proximity to recreational opportunities are on average higher in urban areas; however, in rural areas proximity to recreation has little affect on property values.
- In downtowns and urban centers, recreation facilities considered within “walkable” distance add to community revitalization.
- School districts with higher student obesity rates may see future cuts in state funding, similar to how schools are graded based on students’ standardized test scores.

### Social and Community Development

- Recreation promotes wellness and healthy lifestyles.
- Recreation creates a sense of community between residents through foot paths and non-motorized trails.
- Facilities must take into consideration persons with physical disabilities and make adaptations in recreational uses.
- Access to trails and bike paths may reduce the financial burden on individuals and families that come with owning a vehicle.



Bellefonte Gazebo—Talleyrand Park



Millheim Little League Field



Cold Stream Dam Recreation Area



Walker Township Community Park

## References and Resources

1. **Soft monies:** often applied to government dollars, special projects, or “one time” funding scenarios. The opposite term, hard money, refers to annual or on-going funding.
2. **Pennsylvania Wilds website.** <http://www.pawilds.org>. The Pennsylvania Wilds Tourism Marketing Corporation. 2011.
3. **Adaptive reuse:** the process of adapting old structures for purposes other than initially intended.
4. **Livable communities:** a term that applies to the quality of life factors that a community offers and how those factors are measured. These quality of life factors include, but are not limited to: affordable housing, public transportation, employment, recreational and cultural activities, educational opportunities, and a sustainable approach to environmental protection and/or conservation.
5. **Biological diversity:** the degree of various life forms (plants, animals, insects, fish, etc.) in a given ecosystem. Biodiversity is the measure of an ecosystem’s health. A healthier ecosystem tends to have more diverse life forms.
6. **ClearWater Conservancy website.** <http://www.clearwaterconservancy.org>. 2010.
7. **Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission website.** <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us>. 2011.
8. **Spring Creek Rivers Conservation Plan.** <http://www.clearwaterconservancy.org/scrcp.htm>. ClearWater Conservancy. 2001.
9. **Centre County Planning and Community Development Office.** <http://www.co.centre.pa.us/151.asp>. 2011.
10. **Anne Danahy.** *Rendell signs Rockview land deal but wait begins.* Article on-line at Centre Daily Times at <http://www.centredaily.com/2010/07/14/2092473/rendell-signs-rockview-land-deal.html#>. July 14, 2010.
11. **Pennsylvania Wilds Planning Team Toolkit.** <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/info/pawilds/partnerships.aspx>.
12. **Snow Shoe Rails-to-Trails website.** <http://www.ssrt.org>. 2010.
13. **Susquehanna Greenway Partnership website.** <http://www.susquehannagreenway.org>. 2010.
14. **Bellefonte Central Rail Trail Feasibility Study.** Available at the Centre County Planning and Community Development Office website <http://www.co.centre.pa.us/planning/recreational.asp>. Pashek and Associates, 2007.
15. **The Arboretum at Penn State website.** <http://arboretum.psu.edu/>. 2011.
16. **Brick Town Trail Feasibility Study.** Available at the Centre County Planning and Community Development Office website <http://www.co.centre.pa.us/planning/recreational.asp>. Albertin Vernon, 2007.
17. **Beech Creek Watershed Association website.** <http://www.beechcreekwatershed.com>. 2010.
18. **Bald Eagle and Spring Creek Canal Trail Feasibility Study.** Available at the Clinton County Planning Department website <http://www.clintoncountypa.com/planning.htm>. Simone Collins Landscape Architecture, GTS Technologies Inc., and Delta Development Group Inc., 2010.
19. **The Old Gregg School Community and Recreation Center website.** <http://www.oldgreggschool.com>. 2010.
20. **Natural Heritage Inventory.** Pennsylvania Western Conservancy, 2002. *Copies of this document are available at the Centre County Planning and Community Development Office, 420 Holmes Street, Bellefonte, PA, 16823.*
21. **Soils:** the data set used was provided by the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), from the State Survey Geographic Database. Soils data can be obtained through the NRCS website <http://soils.usda.gov/survey/geography/ssurgo>.
22. **Flood hazard zones:** the data set used was provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Complete flood hazard definitions can be found at the FEMA website <http://www.fema.gov>.

## References and Resources

23. **Important bird and mammal areas:** designated areas which provide either habitat or a migratory area for birds and mammals. The important bird areas dataset was provided by the Pennsylvania Audubon on line at <http://pa.audubon.org/iba/>. The important mammal areas dataset was provided by the Pennsylvania Game Commission on line at <http://www.pgc.state.pa.us>
24. **High quality and exceptional valued streams:** the dataset used was provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection as special designated streams. High quality and exceptional valued streams are designated because they contain various aquatic life forms, have a stable pH, and low turbidity.
25. **Contiguous forest:** a forested habitat with either few or no roads, and no human development.
26. **Toolkit:** a term that refers to a collection of information, resources, and advice for a specific subject or activity.
27. **Oak Hall Regional Parklands.** The master site plan and study can be viewed and downloaded from [http://www.crpr.org/parks/Regional-Pks/OH/GF\\_May09/OHRP\\_MSP-COG-GF26May09\\_files/frame.htm](http://www.crpr.org/parks/Regional-Pks/OH/GF_May09/OHRP_MSP-COG-GF26May09_files/frame.htm). Pashek and Associates, 2006.
28. **Shovel-ready project:** a project that is in the advanced stages of planning and/or development. The term implies that the next phase would be construction.
29. **Tri-Municipal Park Plan.** The master site plan and study can be viewed and downloaded from <http://www.elagroup.com/tmpark.html>. ELA Group, 2010.
30. **Land trust:** a private, non-profit organization that, as part of its mission, actively works to conserve land by undertaking or assisting in land or conservation easement acquisition, or by stewardship of such land or easements.
31. **The Centre County Long Range Transportation Plan 2040.** Available through the Centre County Planning and Community Development Office website at <http://www.co.centre.pa.us/>. Centre County Metropolitan Planning Organization, 2010.
32. **Green lifestyle:** adopting and incorporating methods for reducing waste, conserving natural resources, and sustainability into one's daily routine.
33. **Walkable:** the measure of how pedestrian friendly a city or community is. Factors that determine walkability include quality of sidewalks and footpaths, pedestrian crossings and signals, traffic congestion, and surrounding land use.
34. **Permeable:** a measure of the ability of a surface to transmit water.
35. **Impermeable:** the inability of a surface to transmit water.
36. **Homeowner association fee:** a fee paid by homeowners, usually through covenants or agreements, which is used to benefit all homeowners and is used to pay for services and maintenance within the community.
37. **Americans with Disabilities Act website.** <http://www.ada.gov/>. 2011.
38. **Bureau of Recreation and Conservation website.** <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/brc/index.htm>. 2010.
39. **Green principles:** essential elements or qualities in design and production which promote environmental responsibility, sustainability, and long-term economic benefits.
40. **Conservation landscape initiatives:** goals set by the Commonwealth to conserve and preserve natural landscapes.
41. **Statewide significant greenways:** established connections for recreation, conservation and/or transportation highlighted in Pennsylvania's Outdoor Recreation Plan 2009-2013.
42. **Heritage areas:** designated geographic areas in the Heritage Parks Program that share common history and cultural resources; these areas are designated not only to promote tourism and economic development but to build private and public partnerships. For more information visit the website <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/brc/heritageparks/>.
43. **DCNR advisor.** Northcentral Region: Wes Fahringer, phone (570) 326-3521.

# County of Centre



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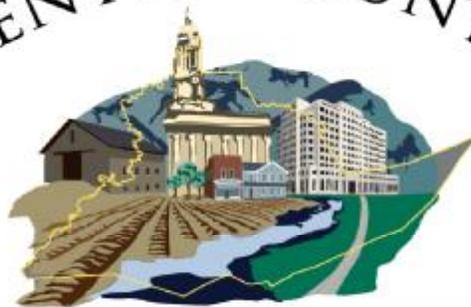
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CENTRE COUNTY



PLANNING AND  
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