



#### Acknowledgements

#### Prepared by



Berks County Planning Commission Berks County Parks and Recreation Department Berks County Greenway Plan Steering Committee

#### **Recreational Practitioner/Consultant**

Sue Landes, President, Recreation and Parks Solutions

#### **Berks County Commissioners**

Christian Y. Leinbach, Chair Kevin S. Barnhardt, Vice Chair Michael S. Rivera

#### **Steering Committee**

Brianna Treichler, USACE, Blue Marsh Lake Chris Spohn, Albright College, Berks County Planning Commission Member Crystal Seitz, PA Americana Region Visitors Bureau Daphne Klahr, MA, CPRP, Reading Recreation Commission David Esser, Berks County Park and Recreation Board Deena Kershner, Our Town Foundation Jay Worrall, Vice-Chair, Berks County Park and Recreation Board Jeremy Haymaker, Berks Nature Judy Houck, Director of Parks and Recreation, Spring Township Michele Bare, Borough of Wyomissing

#### Additionally, the Berks County Planning Commission and the Parks and Recreation Department would like to acknowledge and extend a warm thank you to the following individuals and organizations for their assistance and insight into the preparation of this Plan

#### update

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Schuylkill River Greenway NHA Dan Richards, Director of Professional Learning, Berks County Intermediate Unit James Wassel, French Creek State Park Levi Landis, Executive Director, Goggleworks Center for the Arts Berks County Park and Recreation Board **Tower Health** Dr. Jacquelyn Fetrow, President, Albright College Alvernia University **Kutztown University** Natural Lands Trust Berks Nature

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Redevelopment Authority of Berks County A portion of the funding for this Plan was provided by the Authority through the Federal Community Development Block Grant Program.



and

County of Berks

and

#### A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF BERKS COUNTY AMENDING THE PREVIOUSLY ADOPTED BERKS COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2030 UPDATE, BY ADOPTING THE 2022 BERKS COUNTY GREENWAY, PARK, AND RECREATION PLAN AS AN ELEMENT OF THE COUNTY **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.**

WHEREAS, the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (Act of 1968, P.L. 805, No. 247, as reenacted and amended) enables the County of Berks to amend its comprehensive plan from time to time; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners of Berks County on December 20, 2007, adopted the Berks County Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan as an element of its previously adopted comprehensive plan, entitled Berks Vision 2020: A Comprehensive Plan for the County of Berks, to address greenways, ecological conservation, recreation needs; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners on January 23, 2020, adopted an amended comprehensive plan, entitled the Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030 Update, which incorporates by reference the Berks County Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan adopted in 2007;

WHEREAS, the Berks County Planning Commission and Berks County Parks & Recreation Department, have partnered to make necessary updates to the Berks County Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan (the "Plan"), based on input from stakeholders and the general public; and

WHEREAS, the updated Plan includes recommendations to enhance and sustain its park and trail system and to provide memorable community events and programs that celebrate the County's rich natural and cultural heritage; and

WHEREAS, the Berks County Planning Commission on October 12, 2022, held a public meeting and forwarded the Plan to the Board of Commissioners, who held a duly advertised public hearing on December 8, 2022 in accordance with the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code.

#### NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that:

- as an element thereof: and
- in accordance with the requirements of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code.

Attest:

Carmen Torres, Chief Clerk

#### RESOLUTION NO. 421-2022

1. The Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030 Update is amended in accordance with the provisions of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, to incorporate the Berks County Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan, 2022 Edition,

2. The Berks County Planning Commission is directed to publish the Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030 Update, as amended, and distribute copies of it to all municipalities, school districts, public libraries, and appropriate stakeholders

COUNTY OF BERKS

Christian Y. Leinbach, Chair

Kevin S. Barnhardt, Commissioner

Aichael S. Rivera, Commissioner

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# **CHAPTER1 PLAN PURPOSE AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

#### CHAPTER 1 : PLAN PURPOSE AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION



the Pennsylvania Statewide Comprehensive of this plan. Outdoor Recreation Plan known officially as Recreation for All 2020-2024. This plan provides a five-year blueprint for state and local governments and other providers on how to best deliver and invest in outdoor recreation. The State developed their plan around the following five priority areas:

#### **Health and Wellness**

**Recreation for All** 

#### Sustainable Systems

Funding and **Economic Development** 

Technology

At the start of this project, the state just released These five priority areas served as the foundation for the development

Additionally, as part of the state's plan implementation, DCNR partnered with the Trust for Public Land (TPL) and WeConservePA to use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to understand access to outdoor recreation in Pennsylvania. TPL's Research and Innovation Team used the data analysis methods to assist DCNR in identifying areas with the greatest need and opportunity. This interactive map of outdoor recreation access in Pennsylvania shows the results of the analysis. Data is available for a 10-Minute Walk by municipality and county and a 10-Minute Drive for trails and water. These data resources should be used by the municipalities in determining the need for access to outdoor recreation within their community.

The 2022 Berks County Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan is an update to the 2007 Plan. This plan sets specific goals for the direction Berks County should take to provide future open space, greenways, and recreation for its citizens. The 2022 Plan provides information for the development of future recreational facilities and the preservation of the greenway system which the County, municipalities and nonprofit organizations should use to seek and apply for various grants and funding. This plan is to be used as a guideline by the County and municipal officials for how this can be achieved. The goals

and recommendations set forth in this plan are based on the year 2030. These goals and priorities will change over time since recreational needs are dynamic. Changes in recreational trends will require development of new forms of preservation, recreational facilities, technology, and new strategies in the use of existing facilities and programs.

Berks County, much like the rest of the nation, has continued to see the trend toward more individual or passive types of recreational activities such as hiking, biking, and jogging during the last decade. Consequently, the development of greenways, or linear parks, has become more and more popular in most major cities and local municipalities. Recreational tourism is also helping to bolster the economic vitality of areas where recreational amenities are available. Technology is also playing an important role in how people, find, use, and research recreation. The recreational needs of Berks County's citizens reflect this national trend, and therefore the recommendations in this plan are oriented toward regional greenways connecting parks and points of interest. However, traditional parks still serve a vital purpose because they are the major source of local, close-to-home recreational facilities.

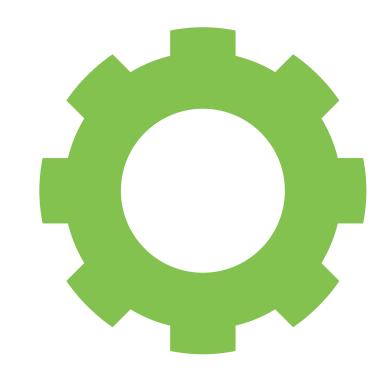
#### CHAPTER 1: PLAN PURPOSE AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

# **PLAN PURPOSE**

The purpose of this plan update is to evaluate the current greenway, park, and recreation system that is in place in Berks County and how it can be sustained and improved for future generations to come. This update is also a gauge to determine how the County, as well as municipalities and other agencies, have done as far as implementation of the prior recommendations from the 2007 plan. In addition, the plan provides an extensive inventory of all public, private, and school district recreational facilities in the County.

# HOW TO UITIER TO THIS PLAN





THIS PLAN IS A LIVING DOCUMENT IN THAT IT WILL BE UPDATED OVER TIME TO REFLECT EMERGING TRENDS AND CHANGES IN PRIORITIES WITH REGARDS TO THE RECREATIONAL NEEDS OF BERKS COUNTY AND ITS RESIDENTS

It is intended to be used by multiple entities to plan and prioritize projects that add to and/or enhance the already robust recreational, historical and ecological resources of Berks County.

This plan is a guide for municipal officials, quasi-public organizations, developers, and private interests on the development of future recreational facilities, connections to existing trails, greenways, schools, residential developments, shopping centers, and in the preservation of open space throughout Berks County.

It should also be used as a reference by municipalities when writing their own recreation plans as well as applying for funding. Policies and recommendations of this plan are advisory rather than regulatory but will be used by the Berks County Planning Commission as criteria in making recommendations on priority projects and funding.

# **BERKS COUNTY**

The County will use this plan as a guide for the development of future recreational facilities, connections to existing trails and greenways and in the preservation of open space and historic resources. Additionally, this plan will assist the County in determining where to focus and/or prioritize projects, events and funding.

MUNICIPALITIES

The municipalities should use this plan as a reference when writing their own open space, greenway, and recreation plans. It should also be used when reviewing plans for development to make sure that proposed development does not adversely affect the existing recreational, historical and/or ecological resources present in the area.

Providing close-to-home active recreation opportunities should be the responsibility of the local municipalities. It is essential that all

municipalities prepare/update a Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan to guide their recreation planning. Reassessment of needs ensures that facilities and programs provide the service their users seek. Where appropriate, municipalities should prepare joint plans, create recreation boards and share facilities with adjacent jurisdictions. Municipalities should form cooperative use agreements with local school districts for joint use of school facilities that supplement recreation facilities and programs. A capital improvement program should be developed that provides adequate funding for operation and maintenance, new facilities and programs. Alternative funding sources should be explored including a variety of grants, corporate sponsorship, endowments, volunteer programs and user fees. Land use ordinances should be assessed for adequate recreation provisions, sensitive design techniques, growing greener provisions and smart growth concepts.



Non-profit groups can use this plan to establish priority efforts in preservation and conservation initiatives as well as foster partnerships amongst similar organizations.

This plan supports non-profit organization's applications for project funding.



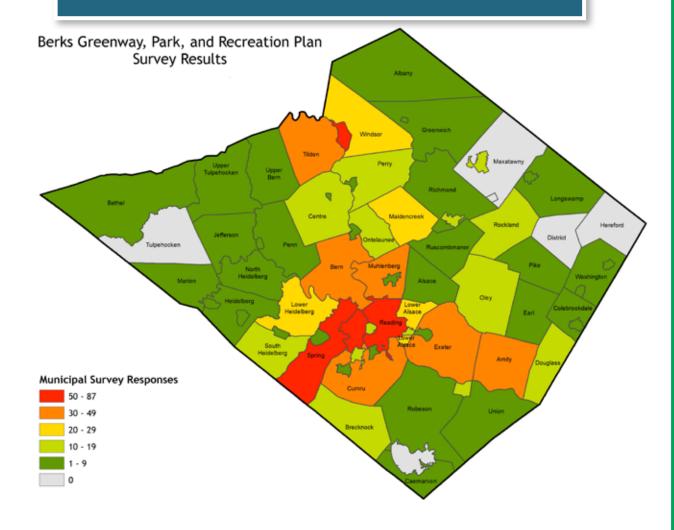
This plan informs County residents of the valuable ecological, recreational, and cultural resources that Berks County has to offer. Residents are encouraged to support the goals and recommendations of this plan by actively taking part in the conservation, preservation and utilization of the greenway amenities the County has to offer.

# **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS**

As with any comprehensive planning initiative, public participation and input were fundamental elements needed for this update. Staff concentrated efforts on engaging the public by utilizing surveys and key stakeholder interviews, conducting steering committee meetings and public presentations.

# **PUBLIC SURVEY**

One survey in both English and Spanish was conducted during the development of this plan. The survey was designed to evaluate the opinions and experiences of the public who engage in recreational activities throughout Berks County. Responses to the survey enabled staff to develop the framework for this update. More detailed information on the results of the survey can be found in the <u>summary report</u> associated with this plan update.



Berks County GREENWAY, PARK AND RECREATION PLAN

## **CHAPTER 1: PLAN PURPOSE AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

## **CHAPTER 1: PLAN PURPOSE AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**



# PUBLIC MEETINGS AND OUTREACH EVENTS

During the development of this update, it was imperative for staff to reach as many people as possible to make them aware of the project, solicit input, and to be transparent with our findings. A number of outreach events were held at the local television station, various partner agency events and a public open house was held at the County Agricultural Center. These meetings were designed to be informative while allowing attendees the ability to directly contribute to the process. One of the first presentations was on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at the Schuylkill Highlands Annual Meeting. The Schuylkill Highlands are a group of local, county and state governments, land trusts, nonprofit organizations, watershed associations, and business representatives in a six-county area working together to protect, connect and sustain the amazing natural, recreational, and cultural gems in the Schuylkill Highlands. They are a diverse group of partners completing big picture projects together, that require complex crossjurisdictional approaches. Their collaborative approach acts on a targeted set of goals using the power of partnership to advance work together.

The County is home to a large Hispanic population. It was important for staff to engage the Hispanic community on how they view and utilize the recreational resources we have to offer in the County. With the assistance of County Commissioner Michael Rivera, staff held two interactive sessions with Hispanic community groups and business leaders on January 24th and 25th, 2022. Participants in these meetings provided recommendations such as naming recreational facilities or trails after outstanding members of the Hispanic community as well as providing events and recreational activities which meet the needs of multigenerational families. Staff participated in a locally televised television program on April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022 to outline the process of developing and updating the plan. This presentation was another opportunity to engage the public about the project and its current status and findings.

On June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022, staff presented the update status and proposed analysis to the Berks County Planning Commission for their information and comment. The update informed the Commission of current project findings, stakeholder interview results and an updated project timeline for adoption.

Planning Commission staff held a public open house on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022 to officially unveil the mapping analysis and solicit input on the findings to the general public and various stakeholders.

All of the outreach began with a brief explanation of the objectives of the Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan update and were followed by a presentation that solicited audience opinions with regards to individual and County needs for recreation. All of the meetings were held in an effort to maintain awareness and to provide an update on plan progress and outcomes.

Plan Steering Committee A steering committee numbering approximately 40 individuals was assembled to provide a consultative element throughout the planning process. The individuals who were asked to participate in this capacity were selected due to their extensive knowledge/ involvement in recreation, green infrastructure/ecology, and/or heritage resources. The participants included professors, teachers, engineers, economic development professionals, historians, utility executives, mobility experts, municipal employees, and business owners. It should be noted that all individuals were from Berks County which allowed a link of their professional and local knowledge to the overall planning process. Four Steering Committee Meetings were conducted both in person and virtually during the development of the plan. Specifically, there was an in-person Plan kickoff meeting in September 2021 to introduce the steering committee members to the purpose of the plan update and their role in the development of the plan. Following the launch of the public survey the steering committee met in March of 2022 to discuss the survey results and review the recreational needs of the community. After March of 2022, the steering committee met to review all identified priorities that came from the mapping analysis as well as to discuss the recommendations which were proposed.



Stakeholder Interviews Due to COVID protocols, 43 stakeholders from varying professions were provided the option of conducting either an in person interview or completing a 12 question digital Responses were received survey. from members of the limited mobility community, recreational tourism providers, Pennsylvania State Parks and the school district community. These responses were used in the development of the plan's recommendations and identification of partners for the implementation of the recommendations.

Four stakeholder interviews were held with each of the Berks County Commissioners (3) and the Berks County Chief Financial Officer (1). These interviews were held to address progress and recommendations of the plan as well as get input on potential financial investment prioritization for the County's Park system. The input received enabled staff to refine the scope of the plan as well as establish plan goals and recommendations.



As population changes within Berks County, so do Baltimore (97 miles), and New York City (125 miles). recreational needs. The population for Berks County in 2020 was 428,849 which has risen by 17,407 persons or 4.2%, between the years 2010 and 2020. Although this is only a slight increase, there are several other ways to delve deeper into demographic data to gain further insight into amenities, programs, and services that should be offered to the population of the County.

# **Growth and Loss**

Berks County is an urban county of the third class, comprised of one city of the third class, 27 boroughs, and 44 townships. It is located in southeastern Pennsylvania, surrounded by six other counties: Schuylkill County to the north, Lebanon County to the west, Lehigh and Montgomery Counties to the east and Chester and Lancaster Counties to the south. Reading, a city of the third class, serves as the county seat. The County's geographic location is within a day's drive of larger metropolitan areas including Allentown (39 miles), Philadelphia (56 miles),

Since 2010, Berks County has grown by 4.2%, exceeding the nearly 1% Pennsylvania population change, but shy of the 5.5% population growth across the nation during the same time. Berks County is the ninth most populated county in Pennsylvania and experienced the 12 highest percentage of growth out of the 67 counties. Berks County is located in Southeastern Pennsylvania, which as a region experienced the highest percentage growth across the state between 2010 and 2020. In comparison to the six neighboring counties, it ranks fourth in overall population. Four of the neighboring counties are also in the top 10 counties for population in Pennsylvania.

Looking ahead, it is projected that Berks County will continue to grow at a somewhat steady rate between 2020 and 2040. The six neighboring counties are also expected to grow with no population loss over the same 20 years.

COUNTY POPULATION PROJECTIONS, 2010 - 2045							
County	2020 Census	2030 Projected	2040 Projected	2045 Projected	% Change 10-20	% Change 20-30	% Change 30-40
Berks	428,849	448,095	467,942	477,789	4.2%	4.5%	3.6%
Chester	534,413	599,932	645,562	662,000	7.1%	12.3%	7.6%
Lancaster	552,984	613,208	651,982	n/a	6.5%	10.9%	6.3%
Lebanon	143,257	145,663	149,347	n/a	7.2%	1.7%	2.5%
Lehigh	374,557	419,745	447,739	458,252	7.2%	12.1%	6.7%
Montgomery	856,553	884,387	918,918	932,820	7.1%	3.2%	3.9%
Schuylkill	143,049	161,671	166,154	n/a	-3.5%	13.1%	2.8%
Pennsylvania	13,002,700	13,759,594	14,132,588	n/a	2.4%	5.8%	2.7%

Source: U.S. Census, 2020 Decennial Census; The Center for Rural Pennsylvania Pennsylvania Population Projections 2010-2040, March 2014 for Lebanon and Schuylkill Counties and the state of Pennsylvania; Berks County Planning Commission 2022 Projections; DVRPC 2021 projections for Chester and Montgomery counties; Lancaster County Planning Commission 2012 projections, LVPC DATALV 2020 projections. n/a-Not Available

As a growth county, Berks will continue to experience more demand for existing recreation resources and will require more investment in new facilities. Along with the population rising over these years, so follows population density and the demand for new development. It is important with these growth projections to keep multimodal connections available between communities, schools, places of interest, and recreational opportunities.

# **Environmental Justice Background** - Recreation for All People!

Environmental justice addresses fairness of federal actions in regard to disadvantaged persons, particularly lowincome and racial minority populations. Environmental justice became an active part of federally funded planning activities with Executive Order 12898, issued in 1994, that required federal agencies to examine the potential for their programs, policies, and activities to have negative impacts on minority and low-income populations. The Environmental Justice executive order is based on Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which requires recipients of

federal aid to certify and ensure nondiscrimination.



# CHAPTER 1: PLAN PURPOSE AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

# **BASIC PRINCIPLES ADDRESSED BY AN ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ANALYSIS INCLUDE:**



To avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority populations and lowincome populations.



To ensure the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the decision-making process.



To prevent the denial of, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority and low-income populations.



The transportation planners for Berks County conduct an Environmental Justice analysis when putting potential transportation projects on the Transportation Improvement Plan and the Long Range Transportation Plan. These projects include multimodal and active transportation projects that are of interest in planning connections to greenways and parks. For the Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan, Environmental Justice populations and their geographic concentrations down to the block group, which may indicate traditionally underserved areas, were considered and further analyzed, especially when considering potential projects and their prioritization.

# **Environmental Justice Populations**

Using the American Community Survey 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Environmental Justice populations can be further analyzed. The following table shows race and low-income populations compared to the county population as a whole, along with other potentially disadvantaged populations which are considered in further analysis.

While the White, Non-Hispanic population makes up nearly three guarters of the population, the Hispanic population makes up more than 20% of Berks County population, with the next highest minority being Black or African American, Non-Hispanic. Included in this table is the number and percentage of Low-Income Population.

The Other Potentially Disadvantaged Populations are also displayed in this table by number and percentage. These numbers show that of the Other Potentially Disadvantaged Populations, Elderly and Persons with a Disability are the highest in this category making up 16.92% and 13.52% respectively. The other three demographic indicators in this category, Limited English Proficiency, Female Head of Household with Child, and Carless Households all make up between 6.21% to 8.47% of Berks County. Inclusion of these populations is imperative to determine the broader transportation and social needs of disadvantaged populations and ideas of transportation equity.

	Berks County, Pennsylvania		
Demographic Indicator	County Population	County Percentage	
Total	418,025		
White, Non-Hispanic	299,730	71.70%	
Minority	118,295	28.30%	
Black or African American, Non-Hispanic	17,728	4.24%	
American Indian and Alaska Native, Non-Hispanic	353	0.08%	
Asian alone, Non-Hispanic	5,711	1.37%	
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic	50	0.01%	
Some other race, Non-Hispanic	603	0.14%	
Two or more races, Non-Hispanic	5,936	1.42%	
Hispanic	87,914	21.03%	
<b>Low-Income Population</b> *out of the 404,844 for whom poverty status is determined	48,573	12.00%*	

#### **Other Potentially Disadvantaged Populations**

Limited English Proficiency (LEP) **out of 393,824 Population 5 years and over	29,738	7.55%**
Persons with a Disability	56,526	13.52%
Female Head of Household with Child ***out of 154,696 Occupied Housing Units	9,600	6.21%***
Elderly (65 years or older)	70,728	16.92%
Carless Households ****out of 154,696 Occupied Housing Units	13,096	8.47%****

Source: American Community Survey 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles Tables: B03002, DP02, DP04, DP05, S1701



The following table and graph identify the total population by race and the amount of each population that is Low-Income. While the Native Hawaiian population has the highest poverty percentage, they also however have the lowest total population. On the opposite side of the spectrum, the White population has the highest population and most individuals that are Low-Income, however, the overall poverty percentage only accounts for 9.30%, which is the lowest among the races, and lower than the county average of 13.61%. The only minority population lower than the county average being Low-Income is the Asian population with 11.70%. 20%-30% of each the Black, Some Other Race, and Hispanic populations are also categorized as Low-Income. Meanwhile, 30-40% of the American Indian and Two or More Races populations are considered Low-Income.

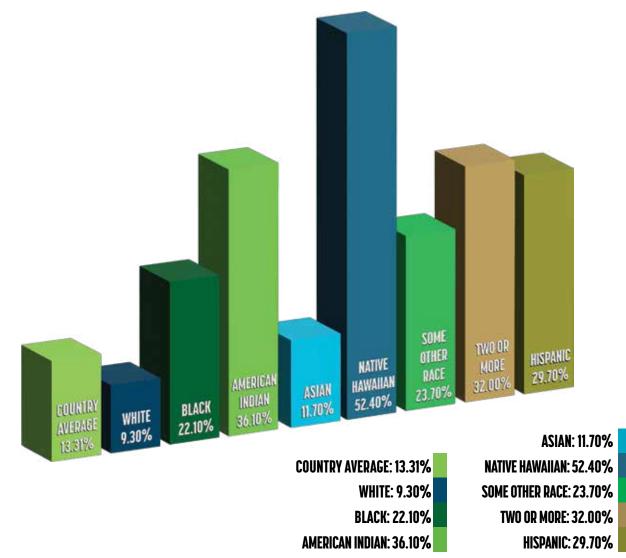
White	Total: Low Income:	Berks County, Pennsylvania
Black	Total:	20,941
DIdCK	Low Income:	4,618
American Indian	Total:	2,409
American mulan	Low Income:	870
Asian	Total:	5,674
ASIdfi	Low Income:	663
Native Hawaiian	Total:	63
	Low Income:	33
Some Other Race	Total:	22,977
Some Other Race	Low Income:	5,436
	Total:	18,441
Two or More	Low Income:	5,903
Hisponia	Total:	85,828
Hispanic	Low Income:	25,502
<b>Total Population</b>		404,844
<b>Total Poverty</b>		74,075

Source: American Community Survey 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles Table: S1701

## **CHAPTER 1: PLAN PURPOSE AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

# **POVERTY RATE AMONG RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUPS IN BERKS COUNTY, 2019**

Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates:



Source: American Community Survey 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles

Understanding the economic makeup of the County directly impacts the type of recreational facilities and programs that are offered and if they are affordable to everyone. This plan provides goals and priorities which address equal access to recreational facilities based on the future economic forecast of County residents.



# **Berks County Elderly Population**

As the "baby boom" generation ages, the size of the elderly population in the county will increase from the current 16.9%. By the year 2030, all baby boomers will be at least 65 and are projected to outnumber children across the nation for the first time. This will impact the types of recreation that will be in higher demand. Consideration should be taken to how the senior population enjoys spending their recreation time. By providing level, easy to walk trails, parks with picnic tables, and passive recreation opportunities, planners in the county can aid this population in leading healthy, active lifestyles.



## **CHAPTER 1: PLAN PURPOSE AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**



#### **CHAPTER 1: PLAN PURPOSE AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**



# LAND USE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

The association between the natural resources of an area and the land utilization within it is an important aspect to consider in planning. Land use is the alteration of the natural environment into the man-made or built environment and includes lands which are undisturbed by man. Development regulations, physical constraints and highway networks all contribute to the land use patterns within a region. Land use is used as a tool for evaluating current zoning and subdivision and land development policies as well as provides guidance for future development. Land use helps evaluate public service needs, potential environmental impacts as well as prevents potential conflicts. Municipalities and the County utilize land use planning to balance development and preserve natural resources. It serves to guide official decisions regarding the distribution and intensity of development, reinvestment in urban centers and capital improvement programs.

The 1991 Berks County Comprehensive Plan and the Natural Areas Inventory (NAI) was the first attempt to initiate detailed natural resource and ecological planning for Berks County. These two documents promoted the idea that there are areas of the County that need special protection from development. The 1991 Comprehensive Plan designated Environmentally Sensitive Areas that needed special consideration due to

factors such as steep slopes and large contiguous wooded areas while the NAI identified areas associated with plant and animal habitats that needed protection from development. The 1994 Berks County Open Space and Recreation Plan further promoted the idea of protecting critical and unique natural areas along with the creation of a "Greenway System" or "linear parks" that would interconnect greenways and historic sites along natural areas and stream corridors throughout the County. The need to protect sensitive environmental areas was more broadly developed in the 2003 Berks County Comprehensive Plan Vision 2020 and was more thoroughly refined in the previous 2007 Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan.

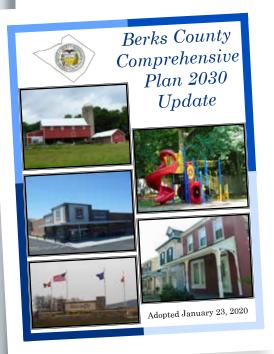
Since Vision 2020 and the 2007 Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan some things have changed, but the vision remains the same. For one, the Vision 2020 Plan has been updated twice since its adoption in 2003. Each time improving upon the previous version and continuing to evaluate the ever-changing landscape of Berks County. The current comprehensive plan for Berks County, the Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030 Update adopted in January of 2020, provides the basis for the utilization of land use and the preservation of natural resources in Berks County as well as forms the foundation for this plan update.



## **CHAPTER 1: PLAN PURPOSE AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

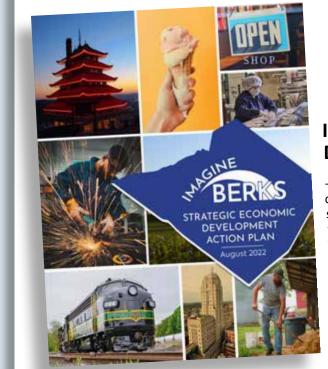
# INTERRELATIONSHIPS WITH EXISTING PLANS AND PARTNERSHIPS - A UNIFIED APPROACH

Throughout the development of this Plan, Planning Commission and Parks Department staff were dedicated to evaluating the County's existing and proposed planning documents to ensure a unified approach to recreational planning. It was essential to review these planning documents, along with regional, municipal and state recreation plans to align this plan's priorities with the recommendations identified in those planning documents. Some of the key planning documents that provided information for this Plan, and in some instances were directly incorporated into the Plan are listed below:



# **Berks County Comprehensive Plan** 2030 Update

- Part of the Vision Statement for Berks County is to "protect its rich agricultural land and heritage, expand its parks and trail systems, and promote the settlement of its population in a reinvigorated City of Reading and in boroughs and townships planned to emphasize higher density and more intimate walking-biking friendly communities.



# **Berks County Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan 2020**

-The Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, composed of community members representing trails, conservation, recreation, county & local government, public health, the disabled community, non-motorized commuters, and biking & walking advocates, felt very strongly about the Vision for Walking and Biking in Berks County: "Healthy, vibrant and economically strong communities encourage and value transportation connectivity. Berks County will be a place where people of all ages and abilities can safely, comfortably and conveniently walk or bicycle everywhere." By incorporating this Vision into our efforts, we hope to better connect people and communities with opportunities for growth and development while retaining the character of Berks County that makes it so desirable to live and conduct business here.

# **Berks County Bicycle and** Pedestrian Transportation Plan 2020 ADOPTED JULY 2020 AMENDED MARCH 2022 Berks County Planning Commit

# Pennsylvania Statewide **Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan**

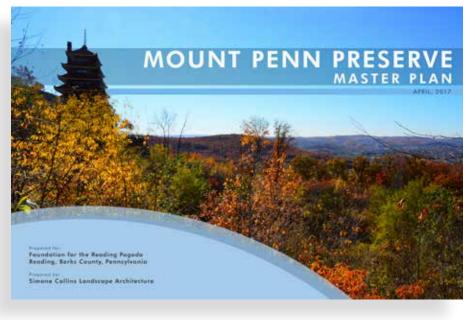
- The State's outdoor recreation plan is meant to be a plan for all people. The plan provides a five-year blueprint for state and local governments and other providers on how to best deliver and invest in outdoor recreation.

## **Imagine Berks Strategic Economic Development Action Plan**

- The IMAGINE Berks plan is organized into six economic development focus areas, each defined by goals, strategies, and desired outcomesthat were developed through data analysis and community engagement. While this report and its supporting analysis reflect a point in time, the planning team that developed the action plan considered the ever-changing dynamics of Berks' economy. As such, the plan is designed with enough detail to guide and catalyze action, yet enough flexibility to meet the future needs of the county.

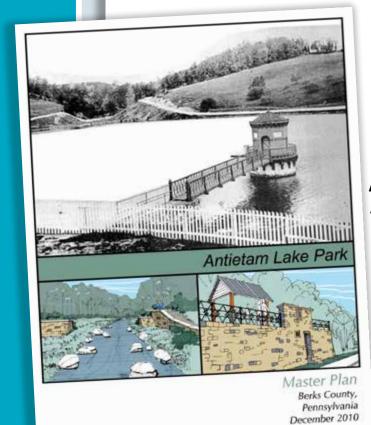
#### PENNSYLVANIA STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN





#### Mount Penn Preserve Master Plan

- This plan seeks to create a vision for this important natural resource. Through an intensive community planning process, goals emerged on how best to protect, market and finance its future as a public natural amenity.



### Antietam Lake and Angora Fruit Farm Master Plan

- This plan outlines Berks County's commitment to the stewardship and enhancement of Antietam Lake Park and the surrounding landscape. Goals include developing Antietam as a County Park to preserve natural and scenic ecological resources, while promoting sustainable public use and passive recreation and environmental education.

## Schuylkill River Greenway **Association Schuylkill River Trail Feasibility Study**

- This study was undertaken in Northern Berks County to determine the best route for the Schuylkill River Trail from Hamburg to Reading.

# Audubon Society Return on **Environment Reports (ROE)**

- There have been a number of these studies conducted in Berks County over the last several years. Return on Environment (ROE) is the process of estimating the financial value of open space. There have been three studies conducted within Berks County over the recent years. They include Robeson and Union Townships as well as along the Kittatiny Ridge in Northern Berks County.

## **Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program (PHNP) Climate** Change Connectivity

- In 2020, PNHP scientists produced a map of climate change connectivity corridors in Pennsylvania for the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. This work and associated data is designed to provide guidance to stakeholders on management, restoration, or land protection priorities and support on-ground conservation efforts.

## **Neversink Mountain Trails Assessment**

- Prepared by a consultant for Berks Nature, this plan set out to prepare a comprehensive trail assessment for the Neversink Mountain Preserve. Through a series of community meetings and trail surveys, a report of recommendations to improve Neversink Mountain's existing trail network was produced in the spring of 2022. Berks Nature will take these recommendations into consideration as they continue to redesign and implement a sustainable trails system for Neversink Mountain over the next several years.

**Downtown Reading Active Transportation Plan** - Although still under development at the time of this publication, the Active Transportation Plan for the City of Reading seeks to improve conditions for walking and biking along several key corridors, as well as increase trail connections and access to recreational opportunities to create a reinvigorated central core in the city.

- Berks Nature prepared the first State of the Environment report for Berks County in 2010. In subsequent years they have reported on the five environmental categories: Air. Energy, Land, Waste, and Water. The State of the Environment evaluates specific data and trends in the five environmental categories. Within each category, several specific quantitative indicators are evaluated using available data, trends in the data are assessed, and specific action items that residents can practice making each specific indicator more "positive" are identified. As part this update, the five environmental categories and their associated action items in the State of the Environment report were considered in the development of this plan's recommendations as well as the mapping analysis.

## State of the Environment

# **MUNICIPAL RECREATION PLANS**

Over the years, municipal recreation plans have been developed throughout Berks County. While some are older (>20 years) and some are more recent; some are for specific facilities, and some are regional; they all have one thing in common: strategies/goals for developing, maintaining, and managing the recreational resources of their respective area. These municipal plans have an important purpose in that, projects identified for development and acquisition are more likely to be funded rather than projects which are not included in the municipal plans.

One of the many tasks completed during this update was to review all the municipal plans to make sure that our goals and strategies for Berks County are consistent with the goals and strategies of the municipalities. The following is a list of those recreation plans broken down by region with their year of adoption:

## HAWK MOUNTAIN REGION

Albany Township- 1993 Kutztown Borough- 1992 Kutztown Borough- 2009 – Kutztown Park, North Park, Park Interconnections Maidencreek Township- 1990 Maxatawny Township- 1996

## **OLEY HILLS REGION**

Hereford Township- 1991 Washington Township- 1992

# SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS REGION

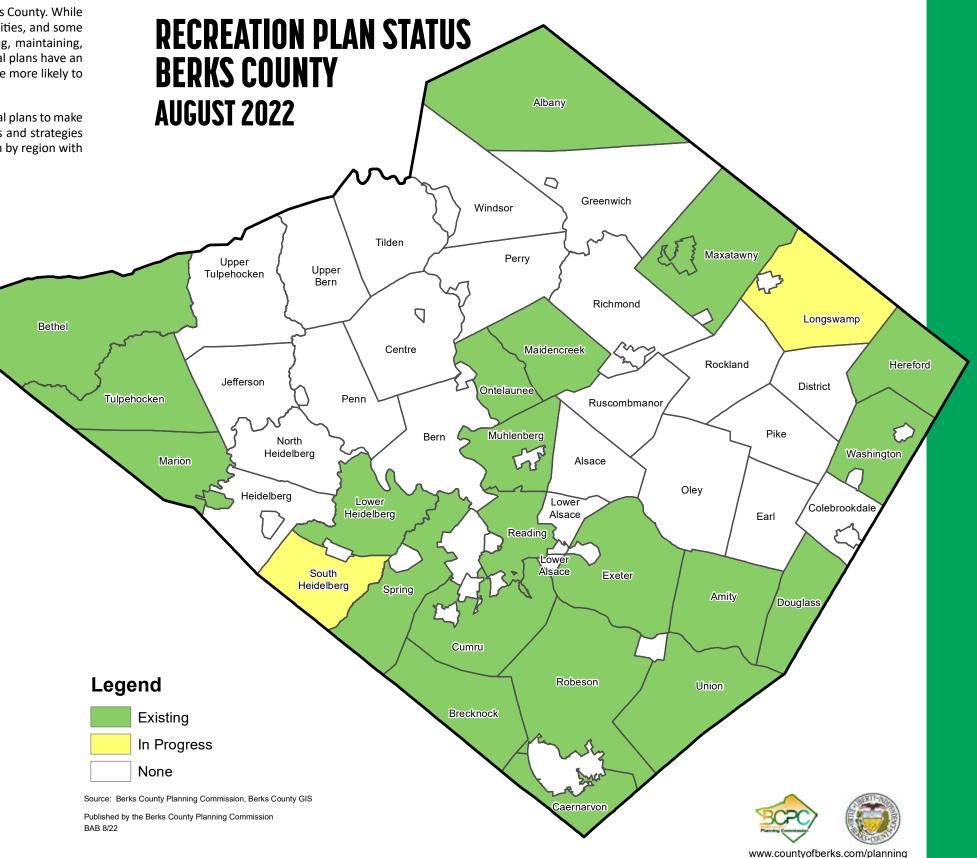
Amity Township- 2001 Brecknock Township- 2009 Caernarvon Township- 2002 Douglass Township- 1998 Douglass Township- 2004 – Ironstone and Municipal Park Exeter Township- 2018 Robeson Township- 1991 Union Township Recreation Area- 2004

# **METRO REGION**

Cumru Township- 1999 Muhlenberg Township- 2006 Ontelaunee Township- 2005 Reading City- 2002 Spring Township- 2007

# **TULPEHOCKEN REGION**

Bethel, Marion, Tulpehocken Townships- 2020 Lower Heidelberg Township- 1991 Wolmelsdorf Borough- 1993

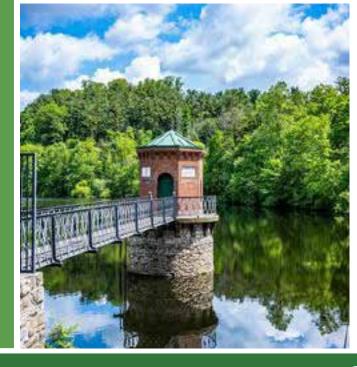




# CHAPTER 2 BERKS COUNTY OWNED GREENWAY, PARK AND RECREATION SYSTEM

**CHAPTER 2: BERKS COUNTY OWNED GREENWAY, PARK AND RECREATION SYSTEM BACKGROUND** 

# Berks County Owned Greenway, Park And Recreation System Background



This Plan guides the future of Berks County parks and trails and ensures its resources are aligned with current needs, future trends, community values, and changing demographics. The Plan provides direction to the Berks County Parks and Recreation Department in serving as a conservation leader, connecting people to nature and active lifestyles, and ensuring Berks County parks and trails are a major source of pride, a vehicle for placemaking, and an economic catalyst for the region.

For almost 60 years, the Berks County Parks and Recreation Department has provided high-quality parks, programs, outdoor experiences, and facilities to the public. Berks County owns and manages more than 1,075 acres of public open space which includes three parks, Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park, Allegheny Aqueduct Historical Park, and Antietam Lake Park/ Angora Fruit Farm, and the 4.5-mile Union Canal Bicycle and Walking Trail. The County parks include fishing

opportunities, environmental education and cultural history programs, hiking, an action park for skaters and bikers, picnic pavilions, playgrounds, and more. The Berks County Heritage Center is located in Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park. Historic sites include the Gruber Wagon Works, the C. Howard Hiester Canal Center a National Historic Landmark, Wertz's Red Covered Bridge, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Epler's Schoolhouse, and additional historic buildings and memorials.

# **CHAPTER 2: BERKS COUNTY OWNED GREENWAY, PARK AND RECREATION SYSTEM BACKGROUND**



In addition to the three County parks, Berks County owns a 117.4-acre property in Bern Township (formerly named the Youth Recreation Facility) with soccer, baseball, and softball fields that is leased to a private organization, Big Show Sports, to operate and maintain. The County also owns land at Neversink Mountain that is maintained by Berks Nature under the terms of an agreement and land at the Mount Penn Preserve.

The Berks County Parks and **Recreation Department** is dedicated to planning, developing, and maintaining a system of parks that provide recreation and leisure, environmental education and awareness, and cultural and historic education. The open spaces, recreational areas, and historical sites within the parks will be clean, safe, attractive, and will support a wide range of citizen participation and involvement.

#### THE OBJECTIVES OF THE **BERKS COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT ARE TO:**

- Make available to the citizens of berks county a park system that is safe, attractive, and clean.
- Preserve open space through the development and expansion of the park system.
- Enhance park system activities and recreational programming to ensure a mix of activities that appeal to all ages and cultures.
- Preserve the historical facilities within the • park system and to make those facilities available to citizens.
- Maintain parks in excellent condition through an effective program of preventive maintenance
- Increase the public awareness of the park system and to encourage and motivate use and support.
- Obtain adequate funding to ensure the park system can be maintained and supported at levels appropriate to its needs through a combination of public and private partnership funding.



# **Berks County Parks** and Recreation Board

Berks County has had resident involvement in its park system since 1964, when the first County park was acquired and the Parks Board was formed. Today, the Berks County Parks and Recreation Board is a nine-member advisory board appointed by the County Commissioners for four-year terms to support the operation of the Parks and Recreation Department. The Board meets every other month and members serve on three Board committees: Finance, Programs and Events, and Maintenance, Development, and Facilities.

# Staffing

The Parks and Recreation Department employs 23 fulltime staff: Director, Assistant Director, Park Maintenance Supervisor, Park Ranger Supervisor, Assistant Park Ranger Supervisor, Historic Resources Supervisor, Cultural Program Coordinator, Natural Resource Supervisor, Office Support, Recreation and Special Events Supervisor, and 14 Park Maintenance workers.

A number of full-time positions are being redesigned. The Natural Resources Supervisor position is taking the place of the former Environmental Education Supervisor position. Environmental education will be part of the new position's duties. A former Cultural Program Supervisor position will become the Cultural Program Coordinator and will assist with Heritage Center operations, do archive work, and supervise volunteers. A second full-time Office Support position will be reinstated, and the part-time Office Support position will be eliminated.

year-round work with a budgeted amount of 990 hours a year. Pool positions are for seasonal recreation, Heritage Center, and maintenance staff to allow for hiring people when needed. The number of employees in the pool is not limited but the hours must stay within the total pool budget. Volunteers The Department relies on the support of a staff of 75 to 100 volunteers to offer special events and programs to the public, support Heritage Center operations, and complete maintenance projects. The majority of Department volunteers work at the Heritage Center as tour guides, herb garden maintainers, and admission, snack bar, and country store clerks. Other volunteers assist with special events and programs. A bi-monthly newsletter informs volunteers about Department activities and projects. An annual volunteer recognition dinner is held each spring to welcome new volunteers and reconnect with current volunteers. Several times per year student clubs from Penn State Berks, Albright College, and Alvernia University do park maintenance spring cleanups. Berks Trail Works and the Berks Area Mountain Biking Association (BAMBA) work on projects at Antietam Lake.





Berks County GREENWAY, PARK AND RECREATION PLAN

Part-time staff includes 15 Park Rangers who enforce County park rules and regulations and assist park visitors, 14 Park Maintenance workers who assist with the overall upkeep of park buildings, grounds, and equipment; four Park Attendants for picnic reservations and barn rentals, one Recreation Program Coordinator, one Public Relations/ Marketing Coordinator, and one Environmental Education Coordinator. Seasonal staff are categorized as pool and non-pool employees. Non-pool positions are open for



# PARK MAINTENANCE

Mowing, park, trail, and building upkeep; and most painting, carpentry, plumbing, and roofing projects are completed in-house. Major repairs are contracted out. The major and minor equipment used for park maintenance is owned by the County and maintained by Parks and Recreation Department employees with the exception of vehicles and repairs on larger tractors.



# **PARK RANGERS**

Park Rangers are responsible for providing a safe and controlled atmosphere for park visitors and Department staff. They serve as the front-line staff to assist the public, enforce park rules and regulations, and protect park resources.

# **SPECIAL EVENTS AND PROGRAMS**



The Parks and Recreation Department was hoping to return to offering special events and programs in 2022. Plans are to offer at least two outdoor recreation, environmental, or cultural history programs each month from February to October with additional programming during the summer months. Other planned activities include wellness program opportunities and lectures and workshops presented by cultural organizations. The Heritage Center is open for public tours May through October and offers scheduled group tours. Park special events include a Summer Concert and Arts Series, Fall Heritage Center Festival, and December Holiday Lights. Other largescale events are being evaluated and considered for addition into the program schedule after the pause of all programming in 2020.

# FINANCING

The Department's 2021 operating budget was \$3,176,197, consisting of \$2,131,646 for payroll and benefits expenses and \$1,044,551 for administrative, park maintenance, and program expenses. The capital improvement budget for 2021 was \$1,229,769. Budgeted income to be generated through pavilion and barn rentals, programs, snack and store sales, and Gruber Wagon Works tours was \$66,750.

The Friends of the Parks Fund is sponsored through the Berks County Community Foundation so that tax-deductible contributions can be made by the public to support the Berks County Parks and Recreation Department's property and programs. Approximately \$60,000 is currently in the fund.



# MARKETING AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

The Parks and Recreation Department promotes its parks and programs through its website and on Facebook. The Department does not offer online rental of facilities and registration for programs by the public. Because of this, digital marketing using newsletters and flyers is not possible since email addresses are not captured. An on-line reservation system was being evaluated for implementation in 2022.



# **PARTNERSHIPS AND COOPERATIVE EFFORTS**

The Parks and Recreation Department currently partners with Yocum Institute, Berks Heritage Council, Berks Nature, Natural Lands, Nolde Forest Environmental Education Center, Pennsylvania's Americana Region, Schuylkill River Greenways National Heritage Area, Spring Township Parks and Recreation Department, and U. S. Army Corps of Engineers Blue Marsh Lake.



# **PARKS, TRAILS, AND RECREATION FACILITIES**

The Berks County Parks and Recreation system includes the Allegheny Aqueduct Historical Park, Antietam Lake Park/Angora Fruit Farm, and Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park. Within Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park are a number of recreational and historic areas including: Berks County Heritage Center, Berks Leisure Area, Gring's Mill Recreation Area, Red Bridge Recreation Area, Stonecliffe Recreation Area, Union Canal Bicycle and Walking Trail, and the restored Union Canal Lock #47E.

# **Allegheny Aqueduct Historic Park**

Location: Robeson Township; 1130 Old River Road

The 34.9-acre Allegheny Aqueduct Historic Park contains a 112-foot long aqueduct consisting of five red sandstone and brownstone arches, built in 1824 as part of the Schuylkill Navigation Company Canal System to carry the water of the canal and canal boats over the Allegheny Creek. Operation of the canal and aqueduct ended in 1931. In 1983, the Schuylkill River Greenway Association began efforts to restore the aqueduct, and had the structure listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. Adjacent to the aqueduct stands the 1783 Beidler House built for the operator of a nearby grist mill. The parking lot, restrooms, and first floor of the house are handicapped accessible.

# Antietam Lake Park/Angora Fruit Farm

#### Location: Lower Alsace Township; 230 Angora Road

The Antietam Lake Park/Angora Fruit Farm is a 479.2-acre watershed consisting of a small man-made lake and its associated forested lands. The property is used by County residents for passive recreation pursuits, particularly fishing and hiking, and contains the Bingaman House Visitor Center. The origins of Antietam Lake date back to 1865 when Reading purchased a dam and gristmill on Antietam Creek, with a waterfall now flowing over the 60-foot high solid rock. There are over 12 miles of interconnecting trails at Antietam Lake Park. The 22-acre Angora Fruit Farm in the center of the park provides an outdoor classroom for year-round environmental education programs. In 2005 the County acquired fee simple title to the property from the City of Reading for a public park. A master plan for future development of the Angora Fruit Farm was projected for completion in 2022.

### **CHAPTER 2: BERKS COUNTY OWNED GREENWAY, PARK AND RECREATION SYSTEM BACKGROUND**

# **Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park**

#### Location: Bern Township, City of Reading, Spring Township, and Wyomissing Borough

The 280.6-acre Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park is located along a 5-mile stretch of the Tulpehocken Creek and contains a number of recreation and historic areas with individual access points discussed below:



**Berks County Heritage Center** 1102 Red Bridge Road

The 41.4-acre Berks County Heritage Center is a historical recreation area of relocated and restored structures commemorating important eras of Berks County's cultural history. The Heritage Center contains the Gruber Wagon Works, a National Historic Landmark built in 1882; the C. Howard Hiester Canal Center which has artifacts of the Schuylkill Navigation System and focuses on the history of the Union and Schuylkill Canals, Wertz's "Red" Covered Bridge, listed on the National Register of Historic Places and built in 1867; Melcher's Grist Mill, Reeser Farm House, Deppen Cemetery, Epler's One Room Schoolhouse, various memorials, remnants of the Union Canal towpath, picnic areas, and a Distelfink sculpture. The Heritage Center is open for self-guided tours May through October and hosts an annual Festival in October as well as other events and interpretive workshops and programs for all ages. The parking, restrooms, canal center, and first floor of the Heritage Center offices are handicapped accessible; limited access is available at the Wagon Works given the historic nature of the structure.

- Gruber Wagon Works Erected in 1882 by Franklin Gruber, the wagon works is recognized as one of the most complete surviving examples of an integrated rural manufactory of its kind in the nation. The Wagon Works fashioned wagons for farm and industrial use until production stopped in the 1950's. The two and one-half story T-shaped frame building holds over 19,000 artifacts, machinery and tools, and depicts the business' peak production years of the early 1900's. Originally located near Mt. Pleasant in Berks County, the Wagon Works was moved by the Army Corps of Engineers in 1976-1977 to prevent its inundation by the Blue Marsh Lake project. In 1972, the shop was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1978, the Wagon Works was designated as a National Historic Landmark by the United States Government, commemorating its historical significance as an industry from a bygone era of American craftsmen.
- C. Howard Hiester Canal Center This education center presents the story of the important contribution the canal transportation system made to the history of Berks County and this Country's early growth. Canals saw their rise and fall in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They offered means of bulk transportation and travel in the era prior to railroads when the only alternative to walking was the horse and wagon. The C. Howard Hiester canal collection consists of artifacts from the active days of local canals and is considered to be the most extensive private collection of 19<sup>th</sup> century canal memorabilia in existence today. This collection is displayed in the restored barn at the Heritage Center.

- Wertz's (Red) Covered Bridge The Wertz's "Red" Bridge is a 204-foot clear span combination truss arch wooden covered bridge built in 1867. The bridge, listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979, is recognized as the longest single span covered bridge still in existence in Pennsylvania today. The covered bridge allows pedestrians to pass over the Tulpehocken Creek and links the Heritage Center and Union Canal Trail to the Red Bridge Recreation Area.
- Deppen Cemetery Also known as the Catholic Cemetery, was relocated from its original location near Mount Pleasant. Buried here are Irish workers who died of "Swamp Fever" while building the Union Canal, in addition to local residents from Mount Pleasant.
- Melcher's Grist Mill Relocated from Bally, Berks County, this restored grist mill was built around 1888 for the Nicklos Melcher family. The mill represents a rare and complete example of a water-powered farm mill used to serve only the needs of the farm on which it was located. This family-owned mill operated through the use of millstones for grinding cornmeal and grains into feed for animals.



**Berks Leisure Area** 1901 Tulpehocken Road

Facilities at this 7.1-acre recreation area include a picnic pavilion, picnic areas, pickleball court, shuffleboard courts, horseshoe pits, restrooms, and parking areas. The Sheeler House, a colonial revival structure, serves as the office for the County recreation staff and park rangers. The iron and wood footbridge provides access to the Union Canal Trail on the opposite side of the Tulpehocken Creek. This bridge marks the location of a mule bridge that was used for the operation of the Union Canal. Crossing over the bridge are the remains of lift Lock No. 51. The parking, restroom, and picnic areas are handicapped accessible.

#### **CHAPTER 2: BERKS COUNTY OWNED GREENWAY, PARK AND RECREATION SYSTEM BACKGROUND**

**Reeser Farm House** – This early 19<sup>th</sup> century stone farmhouse, barn and several outbuildings including a silo, storage shed, brick smokehouse, milk house, pig pen, and pumphouse, represents the agricultural life-style of early Berks County. The land was actively farmed until 1978 when the farm was acquired by Berks County for development of its park system. The farmhouse serves as the main office and information center for the Heritage Center, and the barn houses the canal center, restrooms, snack bar, and country store.

Epler's Schoolhouse - The Epler's one room schoolhouse was moved to the Heritage Center in 2020 from its original location approximately 1.5 miles away. Built in 1847, the school served as one of 11 one room schoolhouses in Bern Township through 1931. Following its closure as a school, the building was used for grain storage then converted to a private residence in the 1950s. The Friends of the Epler's Schoolhouse manage the property including its educational programming, special events, and the planned historic restoration of the structure to the year of 1847.

#### **Gring's Mill Recreation Area**

2083 Tulpehocken Road

This 45.8-acre recreation area is the former site of a commercial grist mill, barn, and homestead constructed by William Gring. These historic buildings house the Berks County Parks and Recreation Department's administrative (1831 stone house) and maintenance offices (1811 grist mill). The 1896 barn has been converted into a visitor's information area, housing limited group meeting facilities, snack bar, and restrooms. Outdoor recreation facilities include tennis courts, shuffleboard, horseshoe, and quoits courts, picnic area with restrooms, children's play area, exercise course, and sand and macadam volleyball courts. Annual festivals, several interpretive lecture programs, and Sunday evening concerts at the outdoor amphitheater highlight summer activities. Gring's Mill also hosts the Holiday Lights Program during the month of December. The concrete bridge and dam were built around 1931. The bridge now connects the recreation area to the Union Canal Trail located on the opposite side of the Tulpehocken Creek. The parking, restrooms, picnic areas, and barn are handicapped accessible; the administrative offices are not.



#### **Red Bridge Recreation Area** 2141 Tulpehocken Road

This 4.3-acre recreation area consists of a picnic pavilion, restrooms, picnic area, accessible fishing area, and badminton court. A short path connects the recreation area to Wertz's "Red" Bridge, which allows pedestrians to pass over the Tulpehocken Creek to the Union Canal Trail and Berks County Heritage Center. The parking, restrooms, picnic, and pavilion areas are handicapped accessible.

#### **Stonecliffe Recreation Area**

#### 1200 Monroe Street

This 11.3-acre recreation area is situated on land that formerly was Gring's limestone guarry in the late 19th to 20th century. Family-oriented recreation and athletic facilities include a children's play area, picnic area, restrooms, fitness stations, fishing dock, volleyball and basketball courts, an action park for skaters and bikers, and a soccer field. The Union Canal Trail passes through the park along the Tulpehocken Creek. The parking, restrooms, picnic areas, and action park are handicapped accessible.

Mill Recreation Area, Red Bridge Recreation Area, and Stonecliffe Recreation Area, and at Reber's Bridge. The trail winds through 170.7 acres along the Tulpehocken Creek, tracing the former canal towpath from the City of Reading limits northward to Reber's Bridge. Designated as a National Recreation Trail, this 4.5-mile crushed stone trail is utilized year-round for hiking, jogging, biking, crosscountry skiing, bird watching, and as a means for visiting the recreation and historic areas of Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park. Located along the trail is the restored Union Canal Lock #47E. The trail averages 6 to 8 feet in width and is handicapped accessible. At Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park's Stonecliffe Recreation Area, the Union Canal Trail connects to the Schuylkill River Trail, and at Reber's Bridge Road, a 1.8-mile connector trail links the Union Canal Trail to the Blue Marsh Lake trail system.



Along with reviewing the existing County recreational facilities it was important to look out how aware recreational users were of the County system. Specifically, how were recreational users becoming aware of activities or park amenities. Currently, the Parks and Recreation Department's website is the main hub for outreach and information for visitors to the County Park system. On the site visitors can find out where the various County parks are located, how they can reserve the facilities and what programs and activities are being hosted in the parks. Although all this information is valuable to parks users it was identified early in the development of this plan that the presentation of the County's Park system needed to be enhanced. To do this, Parks and Recreation Department staff and the County Planning Commission staff determined that the utilization of a Storymap would be the most efficient way to enhance visitors experience to the department website.

The Storymap provides a more visual appealing invitation for the County Parks System while providing the information users are looking for. Additionally, the Storymap is one part of an implementation goal of expanding the technology assets of the Department. To view the story map please visit the Berks County Parks and Recreation Department's website. It is the aspiration of the County Parks and Recreation Department along with County Planning Commission to build the story map into an interactive resource for visitors to explore all that Berks County has to offer.

#### Union Canal Bicycle and Walking Trail

Located in City of Reading and Bern Township; with access points throughout Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park at the Berks County Heritage Center, Berks Leisure Area, Gring's









# CHAPTER 3 FACILITIES AND **OPEN SPACE INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS**

**CHAPTER 3: FACILITIES AND OPEN SPACE INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS** 

# Facilities And Open Space Inventory And Analysis

# **GREENWAYS, HUBS AND NODES ANALYSIS BACKGROUND**

In 2007, a thorough analysis was completed to support native species, maintain vital ecological identify the greenway network in the County. The greenway network is composed of a system of hubs, nodes and corridors that highlight the County's significant ecological habitats as well as our historic, cultural, and recreational resources. Each of these components are defined to capture the specific contribution they bring to the Greenway network.

The **2007 Greenway Hubs** are defined as anchors for the greenway network which have concentrations of cultural, historic and local recreational resources. Greenway Hubs are primarily large

functions, and protect significant geologic features. Additionally, the greenway hubs provide habitat for wildlife moving to or through them. The 2007 Corridors are linear features that link together the greenway hubs and nodes. The 2007 Nodes are primarily county boroughs which provide support services to the recreational amenities and greenway systems. Specifically, trail heads, restaurants, points of interest, and lodging.

It is important to note that the greenway network does not require or imply public ownership of all the areas of significant natural resource value that land in the system. Privately-owned land will play

an important role, particularly in the future conservation of the greenway hubs, nodes and corridors.

The mapping analysis was completed using a Geographic Information System or GIS. GIS is a software program system that creates, manages, analyzes, and maps all types of data. The components of the 2007 Greenway network served as one component of the base data layers for examining what has changed to the County Greenway system over the last fifteen years. Additionally, there are several other data layers that were used in the overall

### **CHAPTER 3: FACILITIES AND OPEN SPACE INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS**



analysis. They include: Berks County parcel data, Municipal Recreation plans, the Berks County Comprehensive Plan Update 2030 Future Land Use, Trail data, DCNR 10 Minute Walking data layer, Natural Heritage Area Core Habitats and Important Bird Areas

The 2022 Greenway, Hubs and Nodes Analysis was conducted for the entire County. Additionally, maps for each of the County's five planning regions have been created to further capture in more detail what the greenway system looks like in any one region.

#### CHAPTER 3: FACILITIES AND OPEN SPACE INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS



# **Existing Recreation Facilities and Trails**

The Existing Recreation Facilities and Trails maps provide the location of existing recreation facilities and trail systems within the county.

Within the map legends are the terms Greenway, Destination Trails and Local Trails. A **Greenway** is a corridor of open space. Greenways vary greatly in scale, from narrow ribbons of green that run through urban, suburban, and rural areas to wider corridors that incorporate diverse natural, cultural and scenic features. They can incorporate both public and private property and can be land-based or water-based. They may follow old railways, canals, or ridge tops, or they may follow stream corridors, shoreline or wetlands, and include water trails for non-motorized craft.

Some greenways are recreational corridors or scenic byways that may accommodate motorized and nonmotorized vehicles. Others function almost exclusively for environmental protection or wildlife habitat and are not designed for human passage. Greenways differ in their location and function, but overall, a greenway will protect natural, cultural and scenic resources, provide recreational benefits, enhance the natural beauty and the quality of life in neighborhoods and communities, and stimulate economic development opportunities.

Destination Trails are a trail or system of trails that may attract visitors from outside of the local vicinity. Destination trails can cross between regional planning areas or jurisdictions, such as other counties or cities. These trails may provide connections to two or more areas of interest.

Within the regional maps there will also be Local Trails. Local Trails are a trail or trail system that is contained within one municipality or local park.

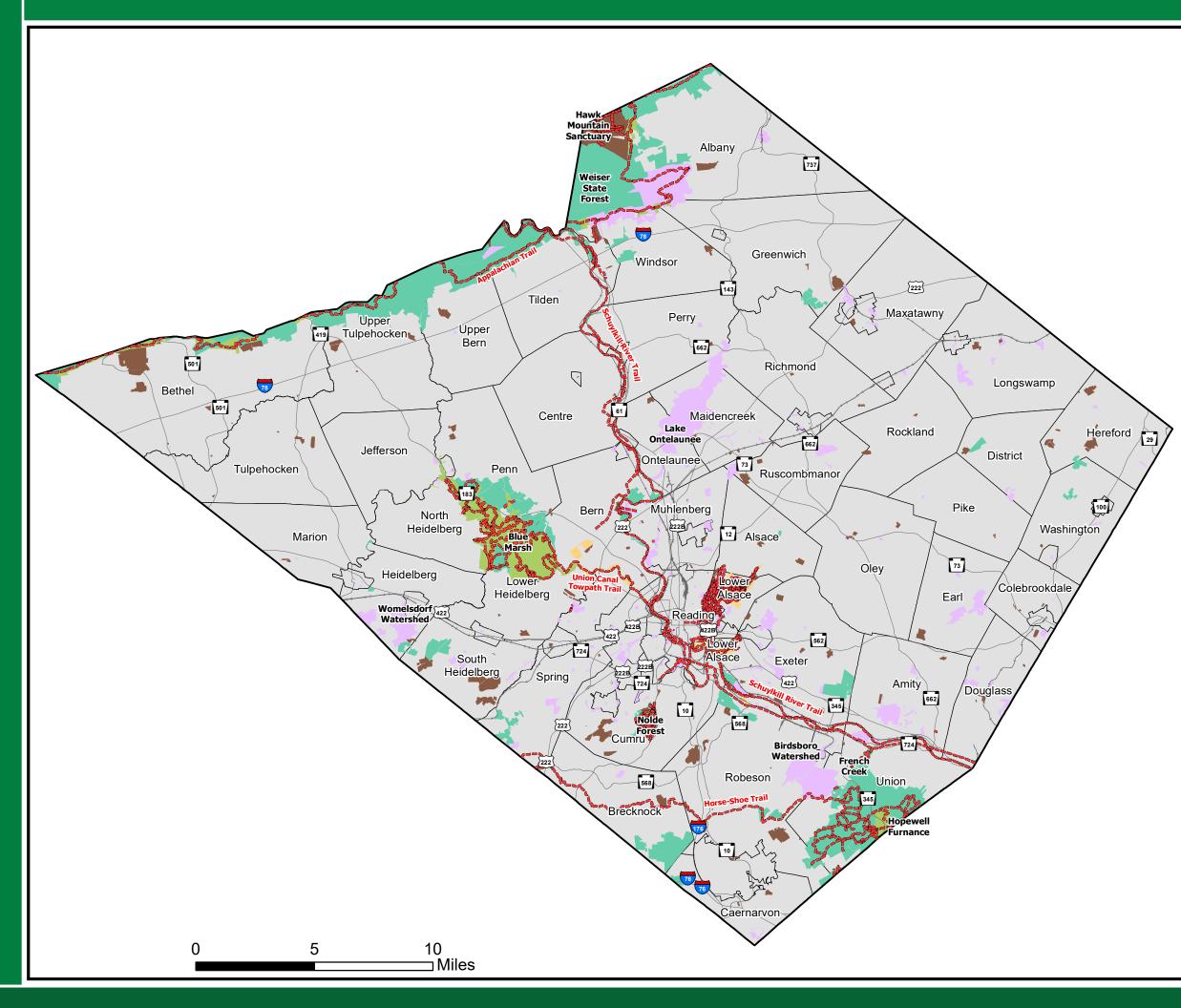
Additionally, there are several recreation managers within the County. This includes the Federal government, state agencies like the Bureau of Forestry, the County of Berks and several nonprofits. As shown in the legend, nonprofits such as Berks Nature, Natural Lands Trust and even church groves are included in the recreation system. Municipal parks and trails are also large contributors to the greenway system. Federal lands within the County comprise a total of 7,480 acres. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has the largest greenway system ownership in the County with

County.

Looking at the existing recreation facilities within the County's five planning regions will provide even further insight on where the recreation and greenway system needs growth and support. The Hawk Mountain region, which contains the largest amount of recreation facilities at 24,445 acres comprised of federal, state, county, municipal and nonprofit properties. The largest recreation area being the state-owned Windsor State Forest as well as Gamelands 106 and 110 and Kaercher Creek Park. In the Oley Hills region, there are 2,681 total acres of recreation lands and facilities. Land owned by the municipalities of the region makeup the largest category of recreational land in the region. Specifically, the Boyertown Reservoir. Within the Southern Highlands region, which has a total 14,490 acres of recreation facilities, State owned properties comprise the largest category of recreation facilities and areas. These areas include French Creek State Park, Daniel Boone Homestead, and Gibraltar Hill State Forest. The Southern Highlands planning region hosts the second largest acreage of recreational facilities in the County. In the Metro Region that houses the County seat of the City of Reading, there are a total of 8,738 acres of recreation facilities. This region has the most population density of the five planning regions. Municipal owned land like City Park and Mount Penn Preserve account for most of the acres of recreational facilities along with Nolde Forest and gamelands which are owned and managed by the State. In the final planning region known as the Tulpehocken region, the federally owned land of Blue Marsh Lake serves as the largest recreational acreage of the region. In total the region has 14,080 acres a bit shy of being the County's second largest recreational facility host. There are also two large nonprofit recreation areas in the region, Camp Swatara and Conrad Weiser.

31,205 acres. The County along with the municipalities own a total of 17,875 acres. Non-profit lands which are usually areas of conservation easements comprise a total of 7.876 acres.

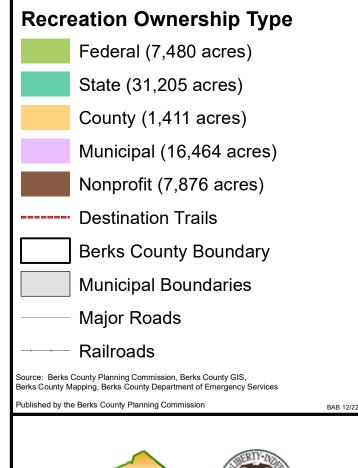
Since 2007, there have been 1,172 acres of recreational areas added to the overall County greenway and recreation system. With the addition of the 1,172 acres, the County currently has a total of 64,434 acres of recreation land in the County which is 11% of the total acreage of Berks



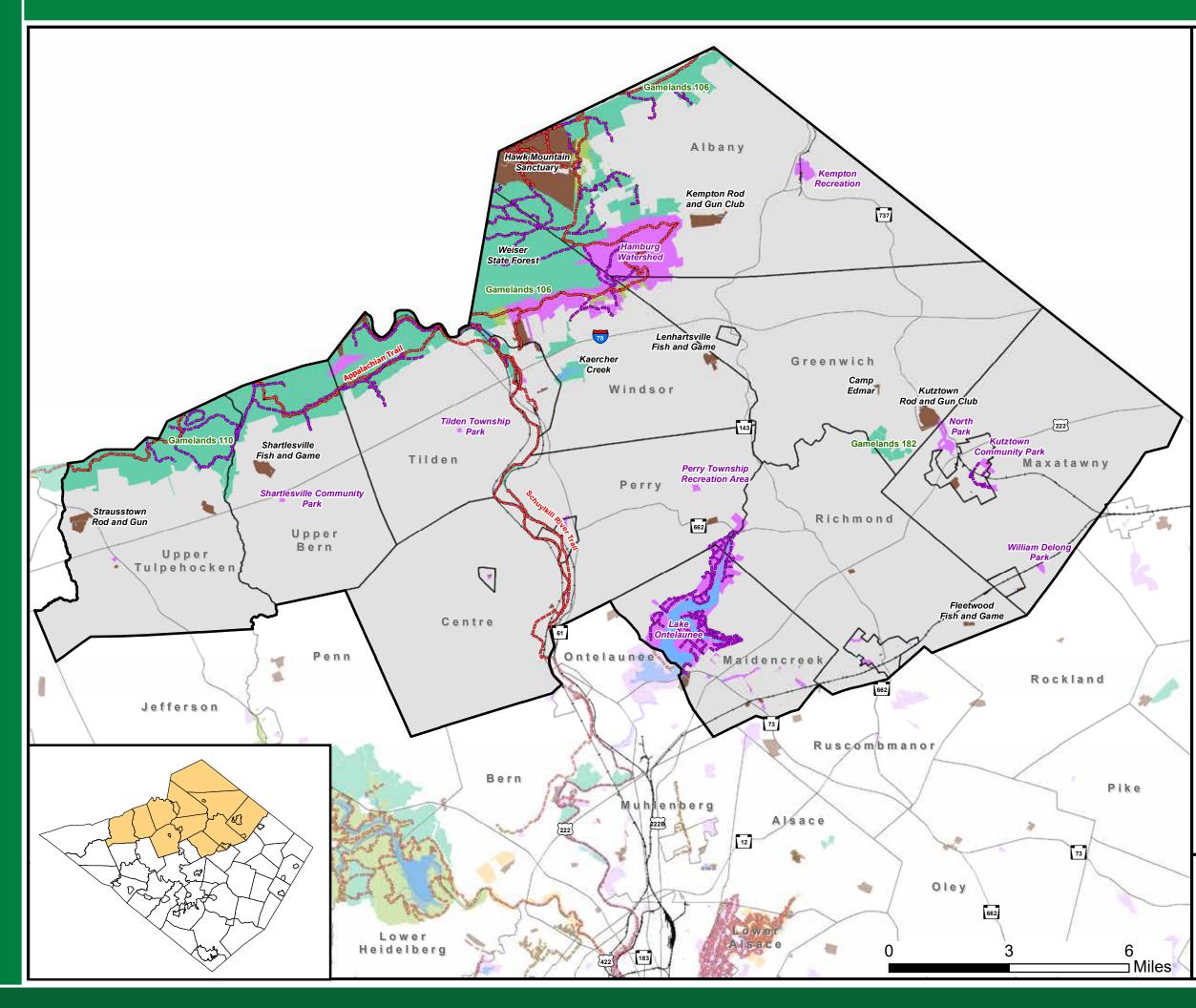
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# Existing Recreation Facilities and Trails









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Hawk Mountain Region Existing Recreation Facilities and Trails



# **Recreation Ownership Type**

F

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Federal (453 acres)

State (15,381 acres)

County (2 acres)

Municipal (5,941 acres)

Nonprofit (2,668 acres)

**Destination Trails** 



Hawk Mountain Region Boundary Municipal Boundaries

Major Roads

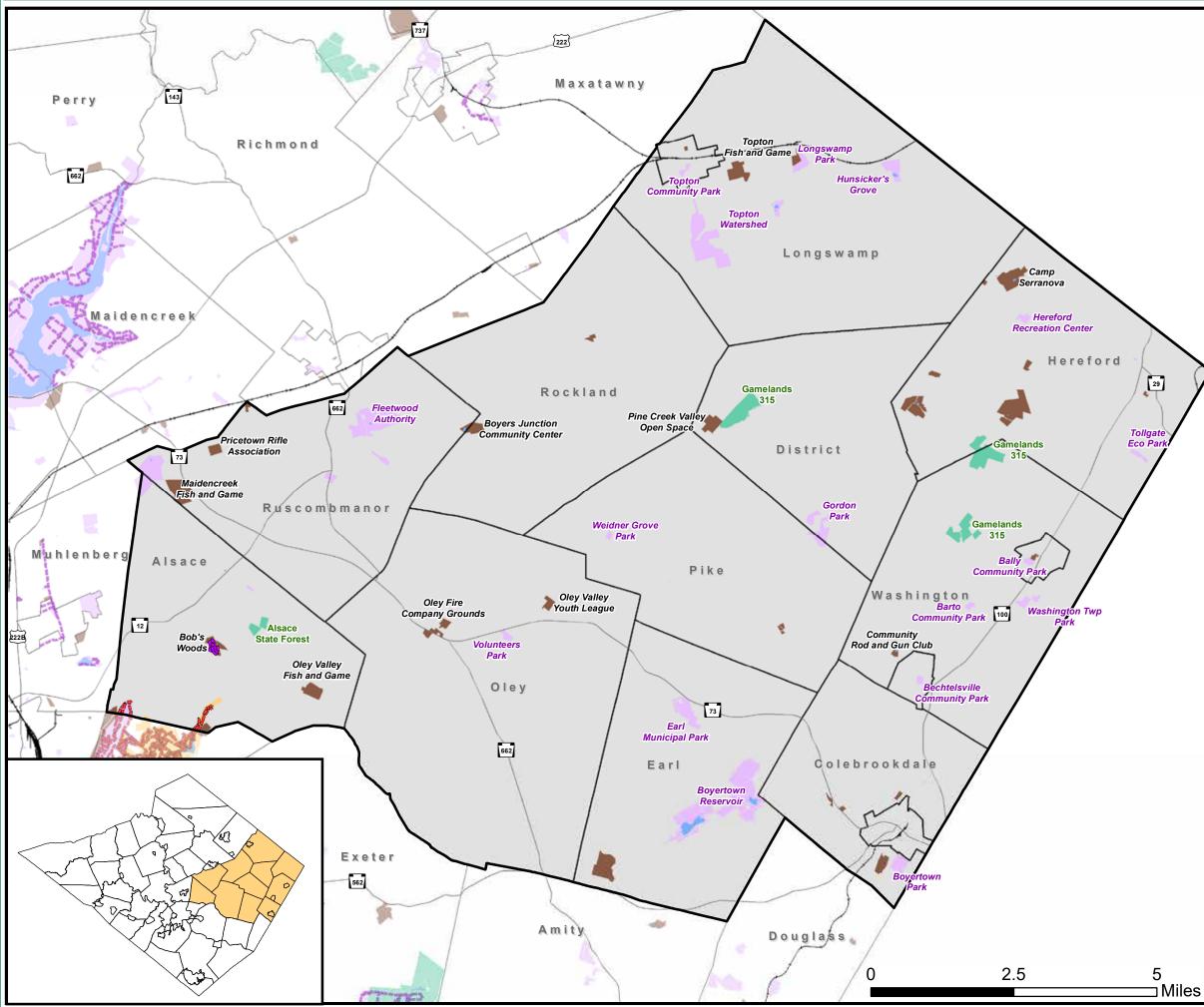
Railroads

Source: Berks County Planning Commission, Berks County GIS, Berks County Mapping, Berks County Department of Emergency Services Published by the Berks County Planning Commission

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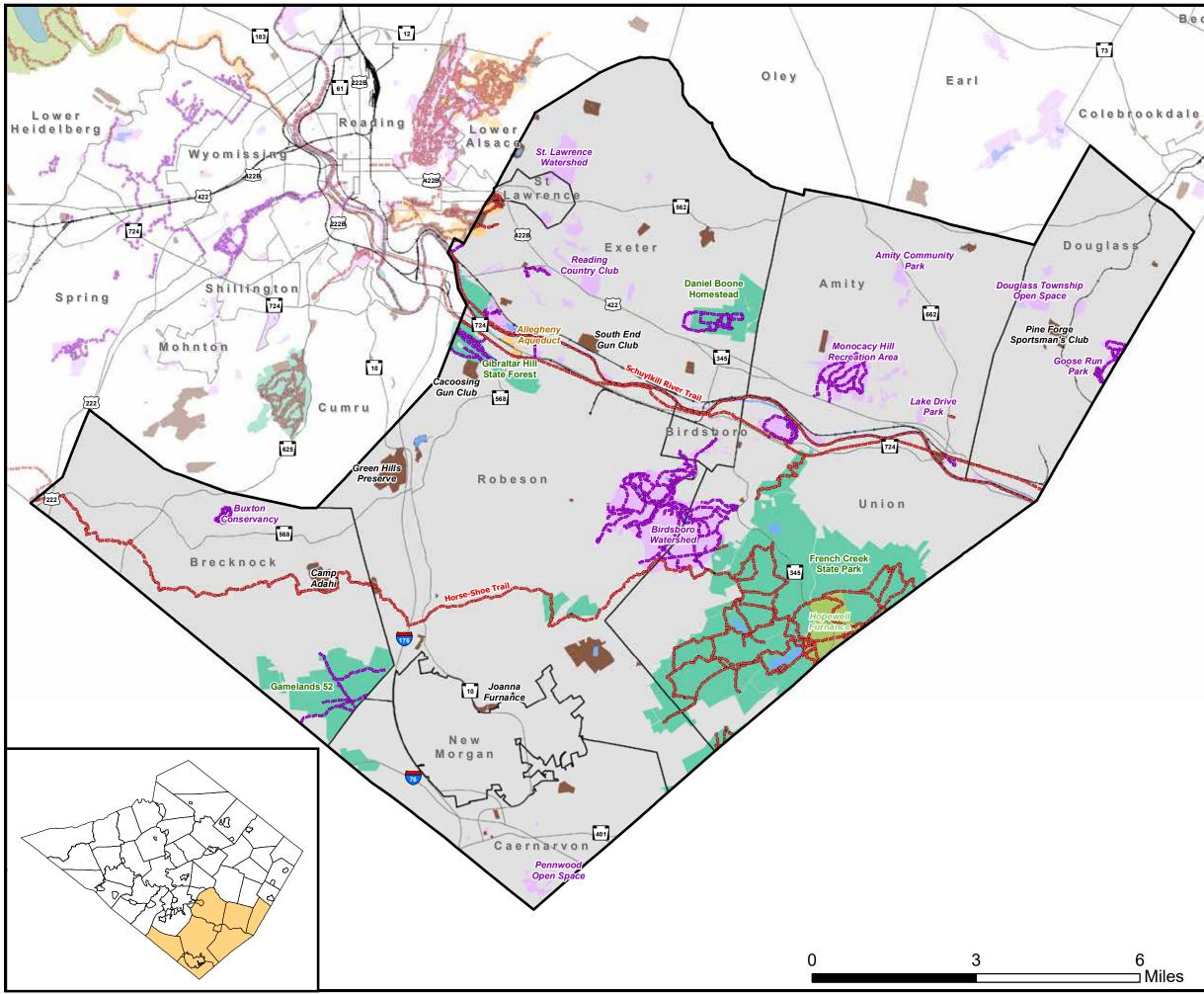
Berks County Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan Update Adopted: December 8, 2022

# Oley Hills Region **Existing Recreation Facilities** and Trails



# **Recreation Ownership Type**

	Federal (0 acres)	
	State (344 acres)	
	County (40 acres)	
	Municipal (1,412 acres)	
	Nonprofit (885 acres)	
	Destination Trails	
	Local Trails	
	Oley Hills Region Boundary	
	Municipal Boundaries	
	Major Roads	
_• • • •	Railroads	
	s County Planning Commission, Berks County GIS, Mapping, Berks County Department of Emergency Services	
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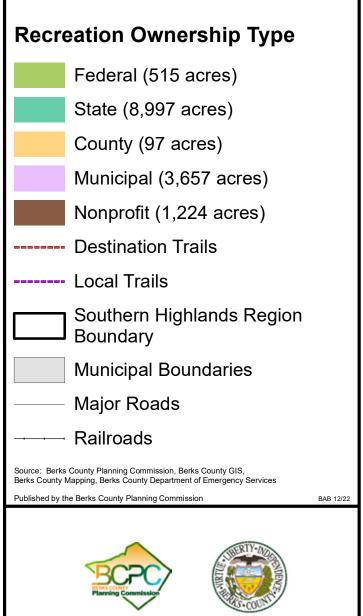


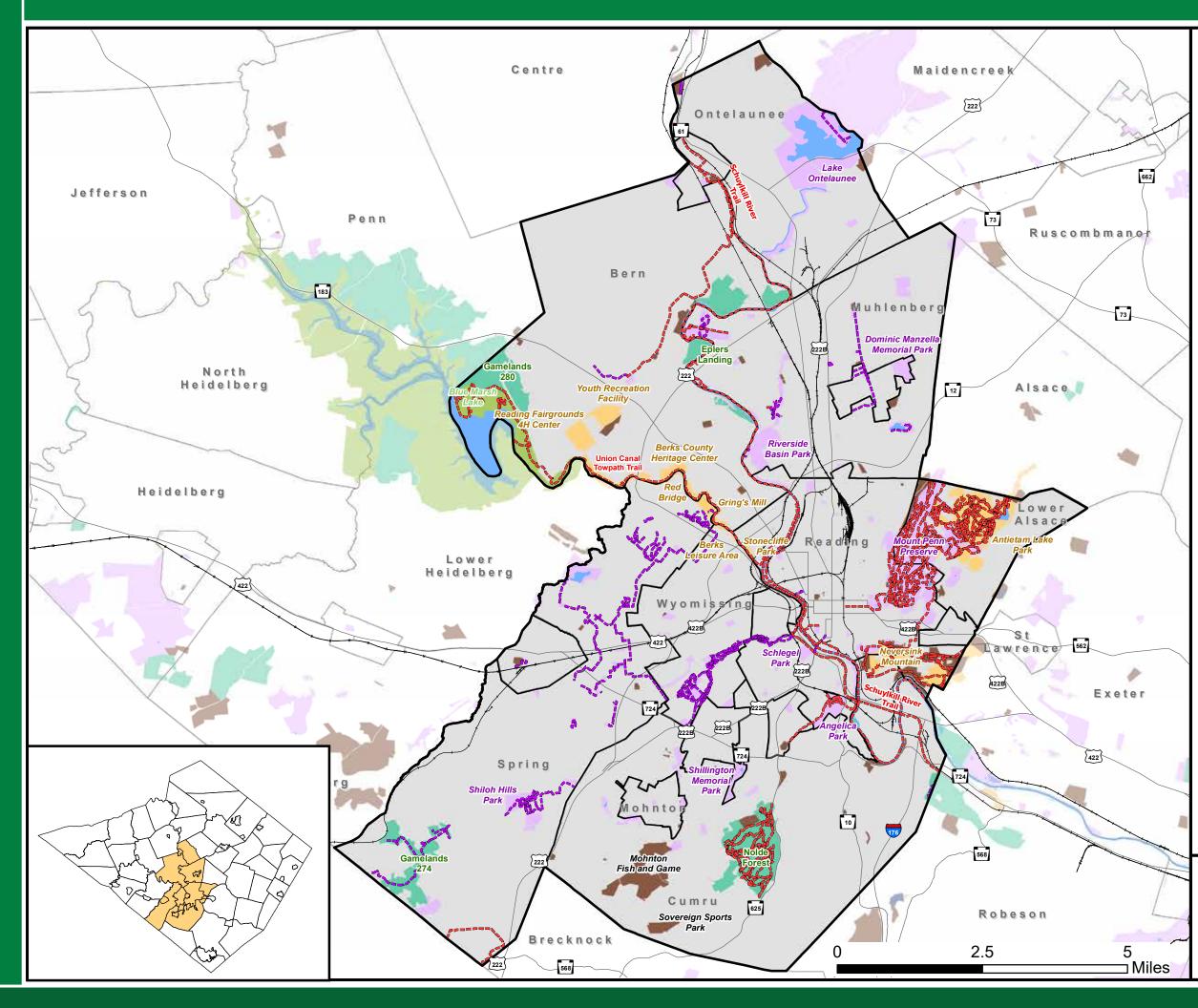
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Bed

Southern Highlands Region **Existing Recreation Facilities** and Trails







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# Metro Region Existing Recreation Facilities and Trails



# **Recreation Ownership Type**

Federal (851 acres)

State (1,773 acres)

County (1,246 acres)

Municipal (3,882 acres)

Nonprofit (986 acres)

**Destination Trails** 



Metro Region Boundary

**Municipal Boundaries** 

Major Roads

Railroads

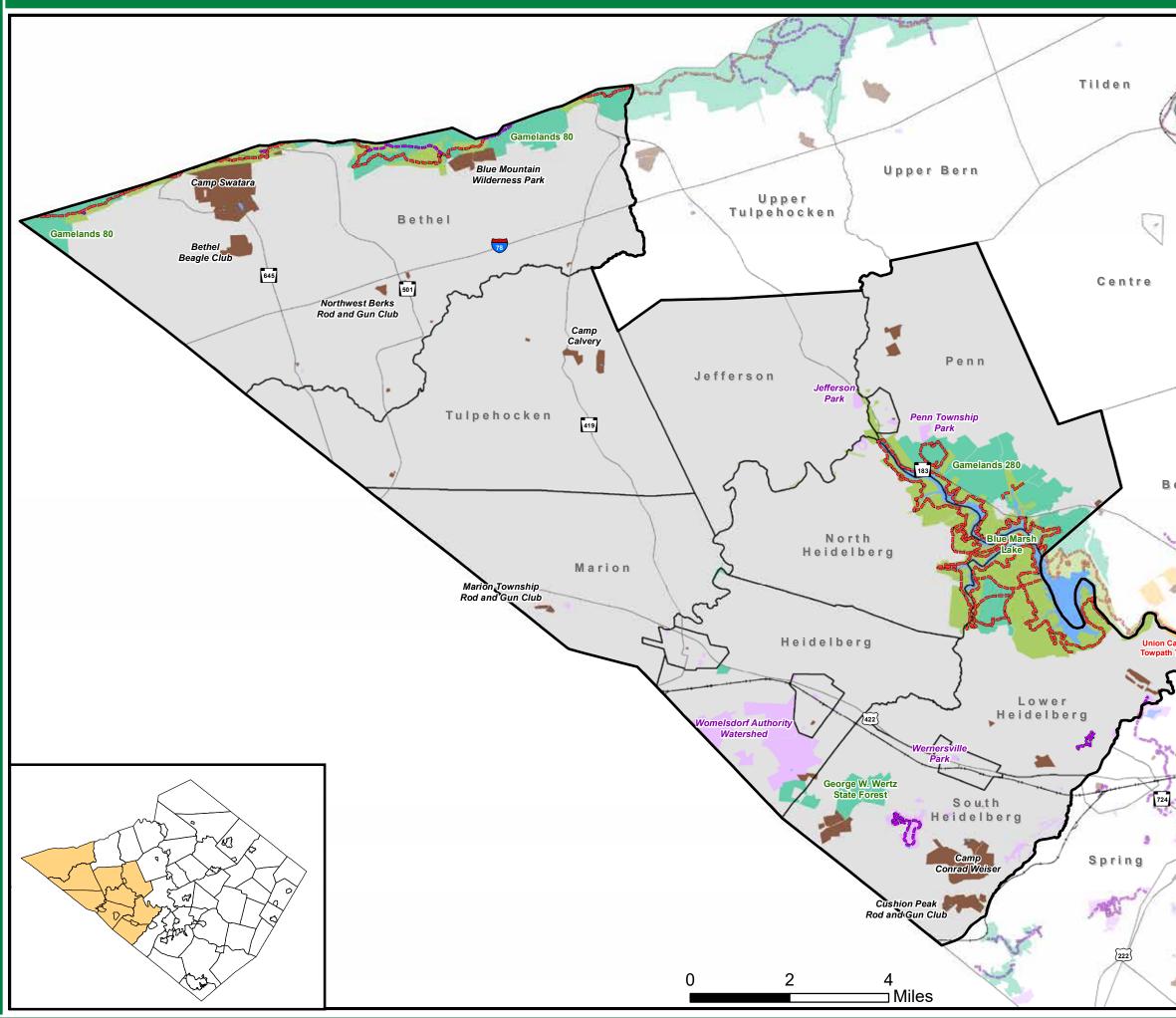
Source: Berks County Planning Commission, Berks County GIS, Berks County Mapping, Berks County Department of Emergency Services

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# Tulpehocken Region **Existing Recreation Facilities** and Trails



# **Recreation Ownership Type**

Bern

Federal (5,661 acres) State (4,710 acres) County (26 acres) Municipal (1,572 acres) Nonprofit (2,111 acres) **Destination Trails** ----- Local Trails Tulpehocken Region Boundary **Municipal Boundaries** Major Roads Railroads Source: Berks County Planning Commission, Berks County GIS, Berks County Mapping, Berks County Department of Emergency Services Published by the Berks County Planning Commission BAB 12/22

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# **Trail Connectivity**

When reviewing the recreational resources of the County, the trail systems must be considered. The Trail Connectivity analysis goal is to determine where significant trail gaps are in the trail system of the County. When analyzing areas which were lacking trail connectivity, several factors were considered including: County Tax parcels, 2007 Greenway System Hubs and Corridors, population density, DCNR's 10-minute walk data layer, proposed trails from existing municipal recreation plans. Utilizing these factors, the **8** trail gaps which have been identified will connect a regionally significant greenway trail system, connect two or more trails and extend existing trails into Federal, State, County, or Municipal parks, or key communities.

It is important to note that there are several important destination trails within the County that serve as the spine of the entire Countywide trail system. The largest of which is the Schuylkill River Trail which runs from the northern region of Hawk Mountain and meanders along the river into the Southern Highlands region. The Appalachian Trail found in the Hawk Mountain region of the County, is a nationally recognized trail which Berks is proud to be host to one of its segments. Another important destination trail is the County's Union Canal Towpath trail system which intersects the Schuylkill River trail in the Metro region. The last destination trail of importance is the Horseshoe Trail found in the Southern Highlands region. The Horseshoe Trail provides a west to east or east to west trail connection within the region as well into adjacent counties.

In the Hawk Mountain region, there are two trail gaps which have been identified. Trail Gap #1: Schuylkill River Trail (SRT) between Hamburg Borough and Shoemakersville Borough. Currently, the Schuylkill River Greenways Association is preparing a feasibility study for this and several other trail segments within the County. This specific trail gap connects an existing portion of the SRT to another existing portion of the SRT, links an existing trail (SRT) to an existing destination/ ecological greenway hub, and is within a 2007 Primary Connection Greenway Corridor. This trail gap is within compatible future land use categories within the County Comprehensive Plan Update 2030. Additionally, a portion of the trail gap is within the "High Need" category of the DCNR 10 minute walk map. The trail gap also will reach population densities up to 15,800 people per square mile. Trail Gap #2: Proposed Willow Creek Trail from Fleetwood Borough to the Proposed Muhlenberg Rail Trail Extension. This gap contains two proposed trail sections from two different municipal plans. The eastern portion of the trail gap has been identified in the Maidencreek Township Open Space and Recreation Plan and the western portion of this trail gap has been identified in the Berks County Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan of 2007. This trail gap will extend into the Metro Planning region to the existing Muhlenberg Rail Trail. The trail gap is within the 2007 Additional Connection

#### **CHAPTER 3: FACILITIES AND OPEN SPACE INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS**



Greenway Corridor, connects to a Greenway Destination Hub in Fleetwood Borough, and is within compatible future land use categories. A portion of the trail gap is within or directly adjacent to areas of the "Medium Need" category of the DCNR 10-minute walk map. The trail gap will reach population densities of up to 8,400 people per square mile.

In the Oley Hills Region, Trail Gap #3 is identified as the Boyertown Borough/Douglass Township Gap. This trail gap connects two 2007 Greenway Hubs. The trail gap is also within compatible future land use categories. The gap is within proximity to an area in the "High Need" category of the DCNR 10-minute walk map. The trail gap will reach population densities of up to 8,400 people per square mile. It is important to note that **Trail Gap #3** is also within the Southern Highlands Planning region.

Within the Southern Highlands region, Trail Gap #4 is called the Cider Mill Open Space to Schuylkill River Trail (SRT). This gap contains a proposed trail section from Amity Township called the Leaf Creek Trail. The proposed trail location meanders through a high-density residential development, open land and woodland, before connecting to the SRT to the south. The trail gap is within both a 2007

Primary and Additional Connection Greenway Corridor and is in both compatible and incompatible future land use categories. The portion of the trail gap in the incompatible future land use category would require planning of future development to take into consideration the location of the proposed trail gap. The trail gap is near an area in the "High Need" category of the DCNR 10-minute walk map. Trail Gap #5 is identified as the extension of the Exeter Scenic River Trail. This gap contains a proposed trail section from the Exeter Township Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan. The gap would connect to the existing Exeter Scenic River Trail to the west and the Schuylkill River Trail to the south. It would run parallel to the Schuylkill River National Recreation Water Trail. The trail gap would assist with connecting a 2007 Ecological Greenway Hub to a Destination/Ecological Greenway Hub and is within a 2007 Primary Connection Greenway Corridor. The gap is compatible with the future land use categories and would reach population densities of up to 8,400 people per square mile.

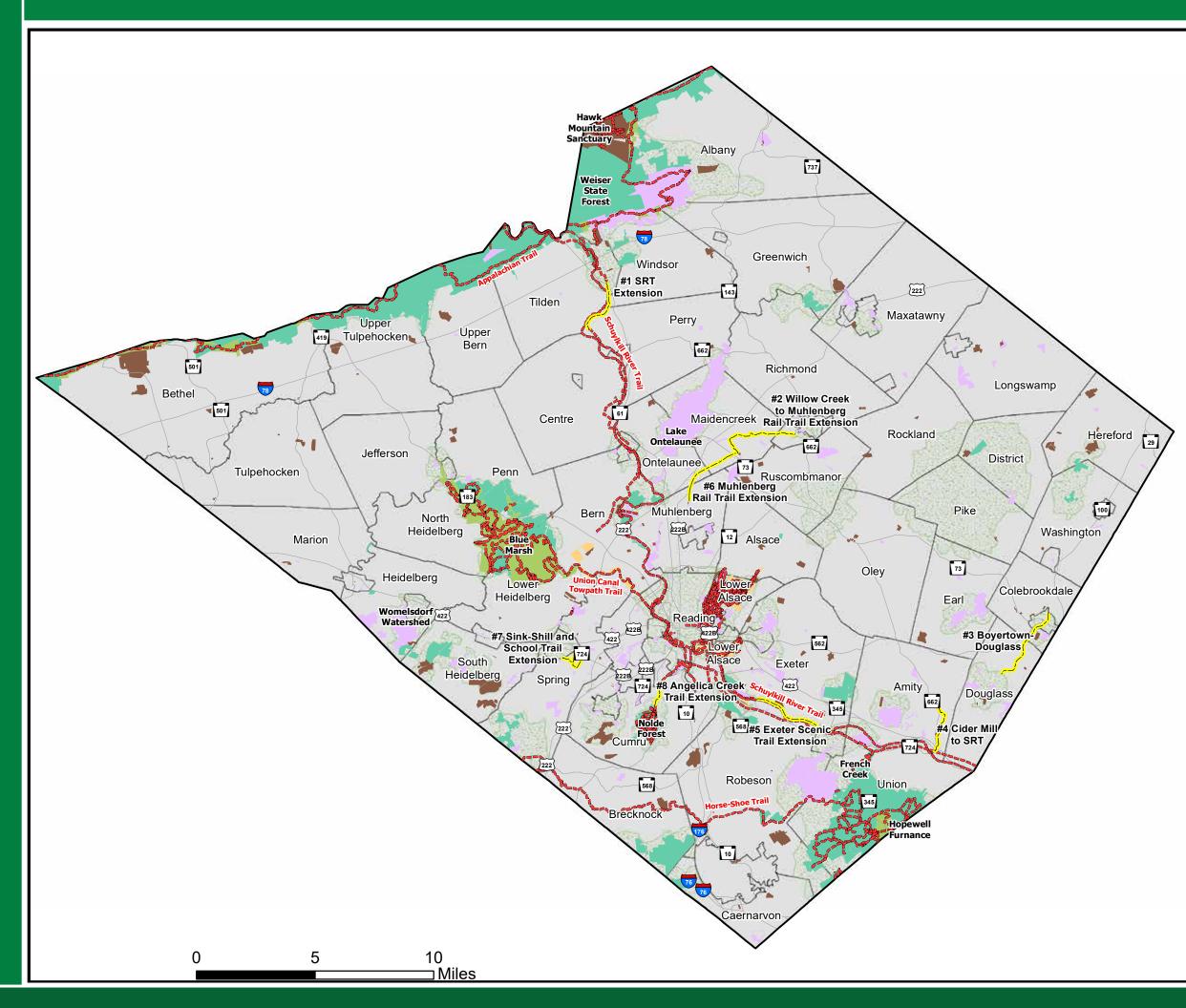
Within the Metro Region, there have been three trail gaps identified. It is important to note that these trail gaps have the potential to serve up to 8,400 people per square mile each. Trail Gap #6 is identified as the Muhlenberg Rail Trail Extension. This gap contains two proposed trail sections from two different plans. The eastern portion of the trail gap has been identified in the Maidencreek Open Space and Recreation Plan and the western portion of this trail gap has been identified in the 2007 Berks County Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan. This trail gap will extend to the Hawk Mountain region to the north and connect to the existing Muhlenberg Rail Trail to the south. The trail gap is within the 2007 Greenway Hub in Fleetwood Borough, and is within compatible future land use categories. A portion of the trail gap is within or directly adjacent to areas of the "Medium Need" category of the DCNR 10-minute walk map. Trail Gap #7 is known as the Sink-Shill Trail and School Trail Extension. This trail gap contains two connecting proposed trails shown in the Spring Township Greenway Plan. This trail gap would complete the connection to three other local trail systems in the area around the Wilson School District's elementary and middle school that is surrounded by high density residential development. The trail gap would also complete the connection to multiple municipal parks and recreation areas - LenOak Park, Cornwall Terrace Park, Midvale Manor Park, and Red Caboose Park. The gap would also provide connection to a 2007 Destination Greenway Hub in Sinking Spring. The gap is not within



#### CHAPTER 3: FACILITIES AND OPEN SPACE INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

any Greenway Priority Corridors. The trail gap is also within the "High Need" category of the DCNR 10-minute walk map. The gap is compatible with the future land use categories. Trail Gap #8 is identified as the Angelica Creek Trail Extension. This gap has been endorsed by the Berks County Planning Commission and Natural Lands Trust. The gap would connect to the existing Angelica Creek Trail to the north, run through Shillington Park and utilize the existing Shillington Park Nature trail. This trail gap would connect to a 2007 Ecological Greenway Hub and is within a Primary Connection Greenway Corridor. The Gap is compatible with the future land use categories.

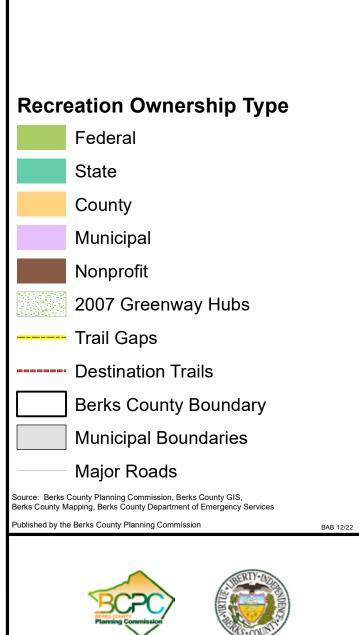
The Tulpehocken planning region has no trail gaps identified. However, this could suggest that this region should explore opportunities to provide trails within the entire region as well as on a local level which tie into the Blue Marsh trail system in the southern portion of the region. Specifically, loop trails could be developed within existing open space and recreation areas as identified on the Existing Recreation facilities and Trails map for the Tulpehocken Region.



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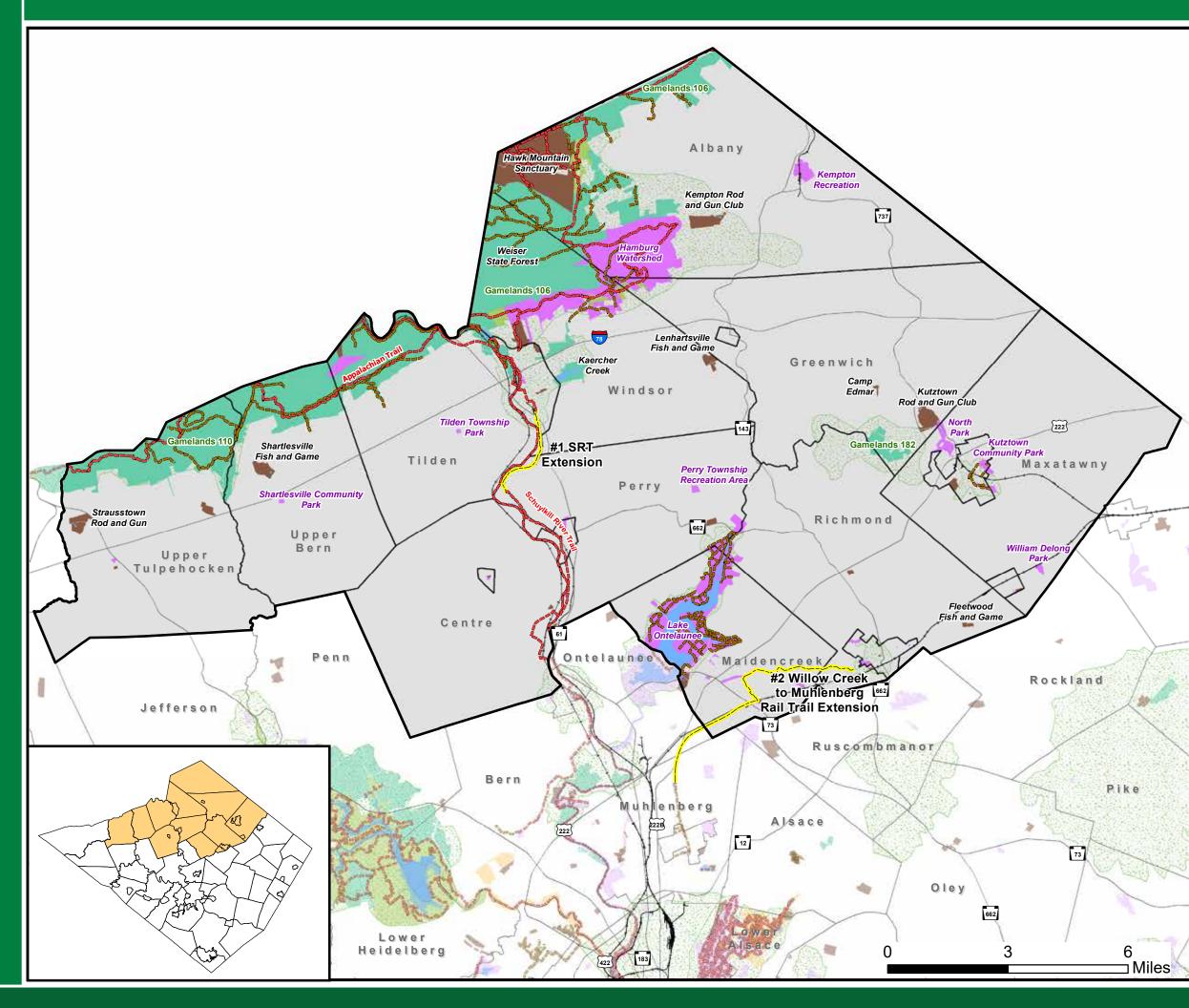
# Trail Connectivity





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# Hawk Mountain Region Trail Connectivity

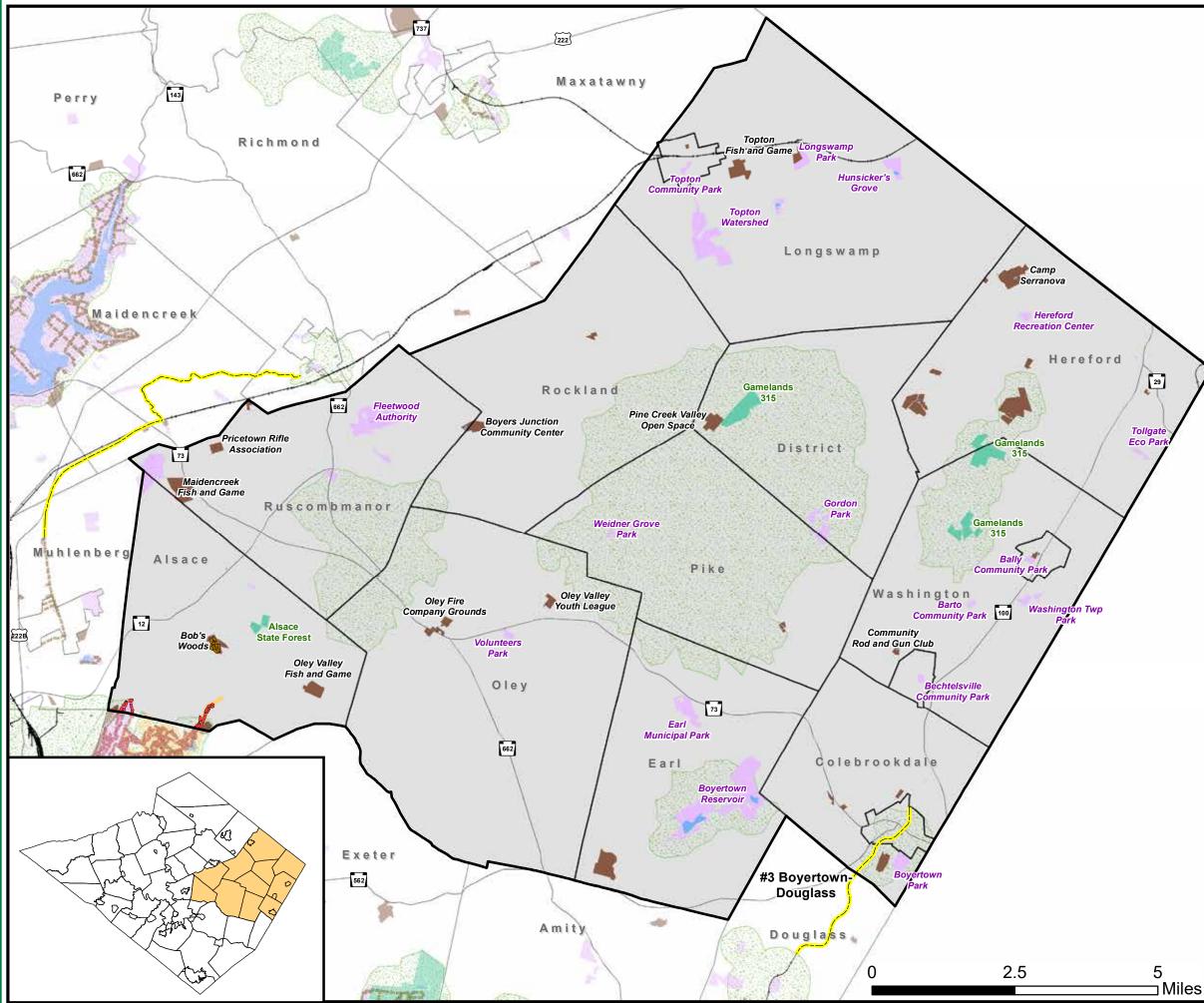


# **Recreation Ownership Type**

Federal State County Municipal Nonprofit Trail Gaps ----- Destination Trails ----- Local Trails 2007 Greenway Hubs Hawk Mountain Region Boundary **Municipal Boundaries** Major Roads Railroads Source: Berks County Planning Commission, Berks County GIS, Berks County Mapping, Berks County Department of Emergency Services Published by the Berks County Planning Commission BAB 12/22

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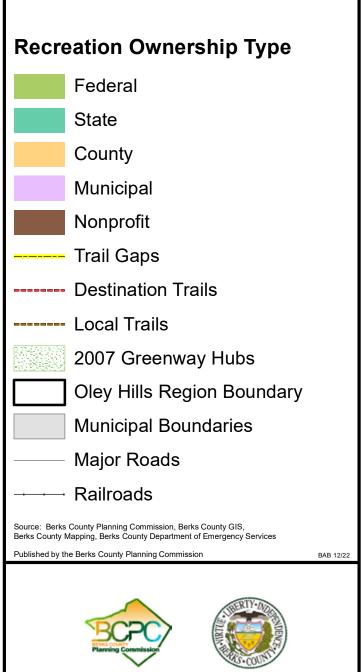
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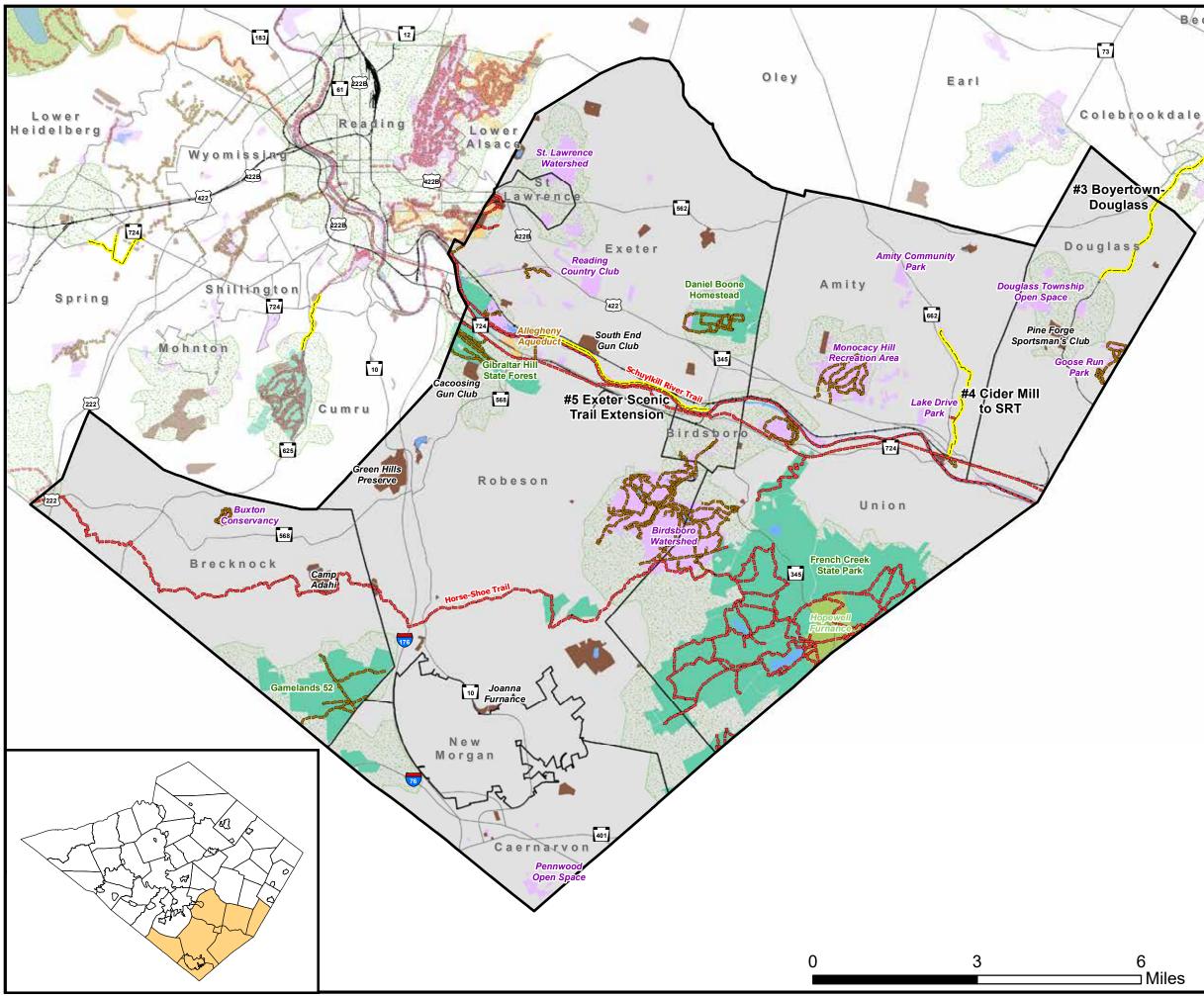


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# Oley Hills Region **Trail Connectivity**







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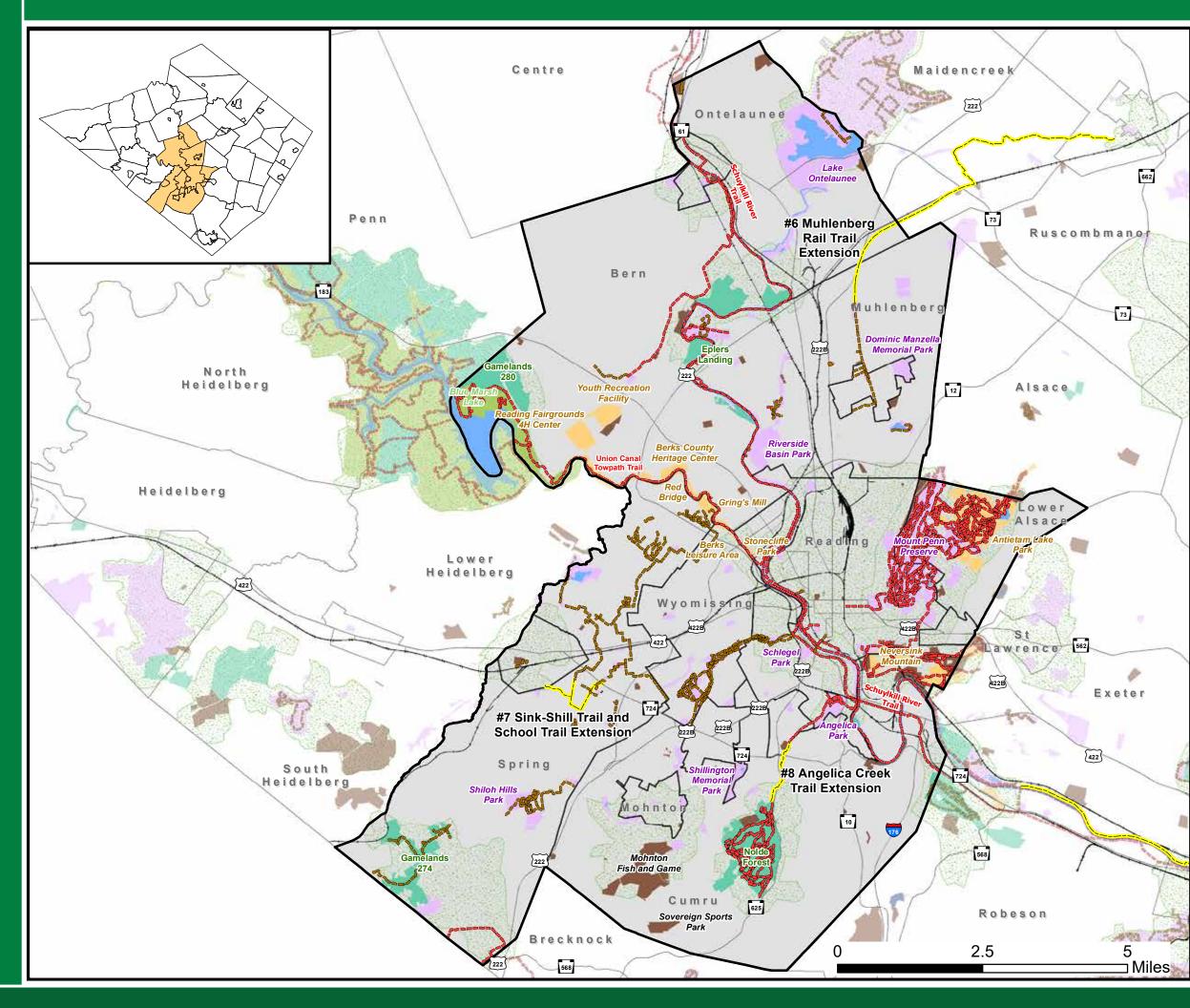
Bed

# Southern Highlands Region Trail Connectivity



# **Recreation Ownership Type**

Federal				
State				
County				
Municipal				
Nonprofit				
Trail Gaps				
Destination Trails				
Local Trails				
2007 Greenway Hubs				
Southern Highlands Region Boundary				
Municipal Boundaries				
—— Major Roads				
Railroads				
Source: Berks County Planning Commission, Berks County GIS, Berks County Mapping, Berks County Department of Emergency Services				
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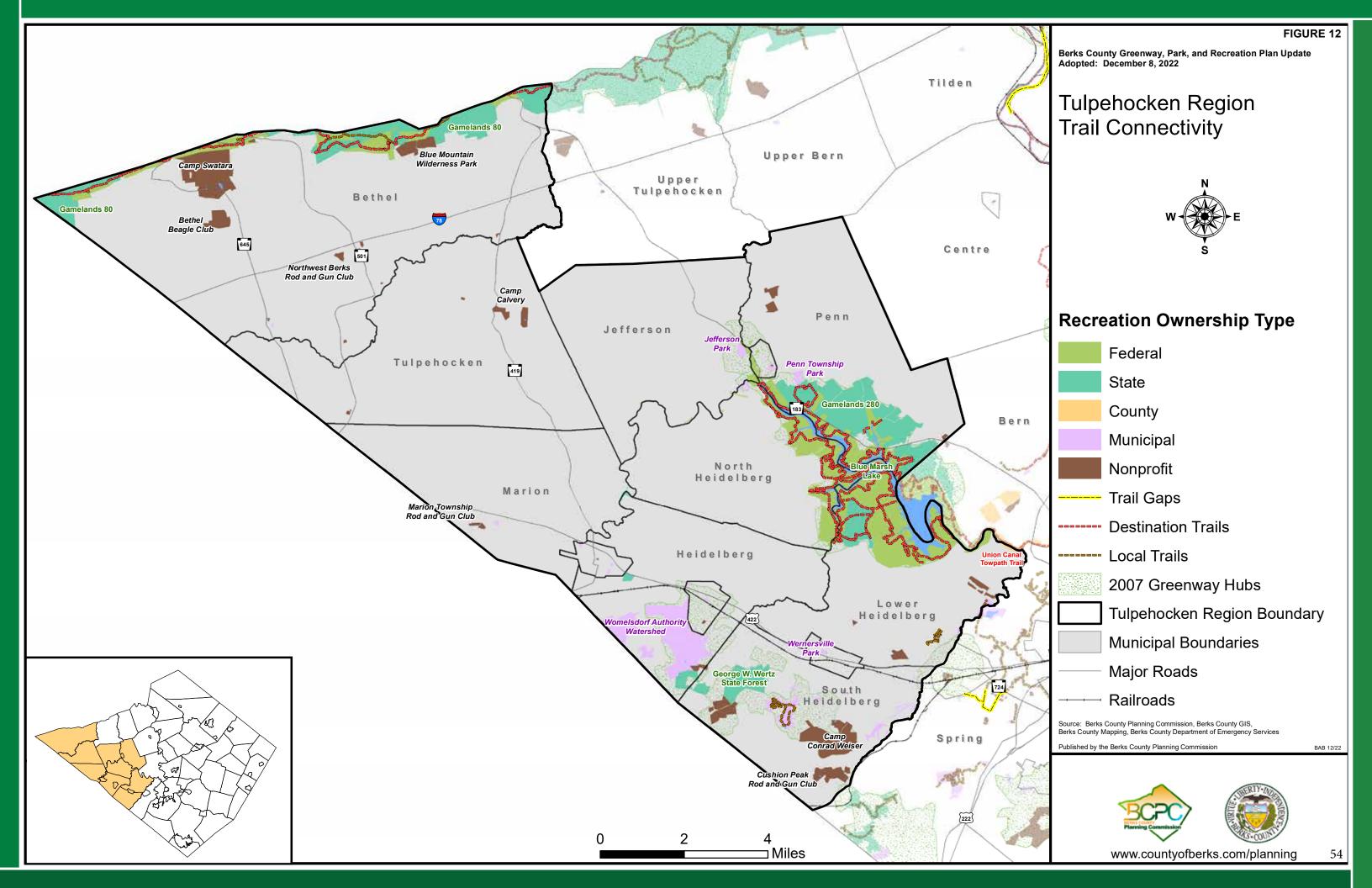
# Metro Region Trail Connectivity



# **Recreation Ownership Type**

	Federal	
	State	
	County	
	Municipal	
	Nonprofit	
	Trail Gaps	
	Destination Trails	
	Local Trails	
	2007 Greenway Hubs	
	Metro Region Boundary	
	Municipal Boundaries	
	Major Roads	
	Railroads	
	County Planning Commission, Berks County GIS, Mapping, Berks County Department of Emergency Services	
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### **Greenway System Connectivity**

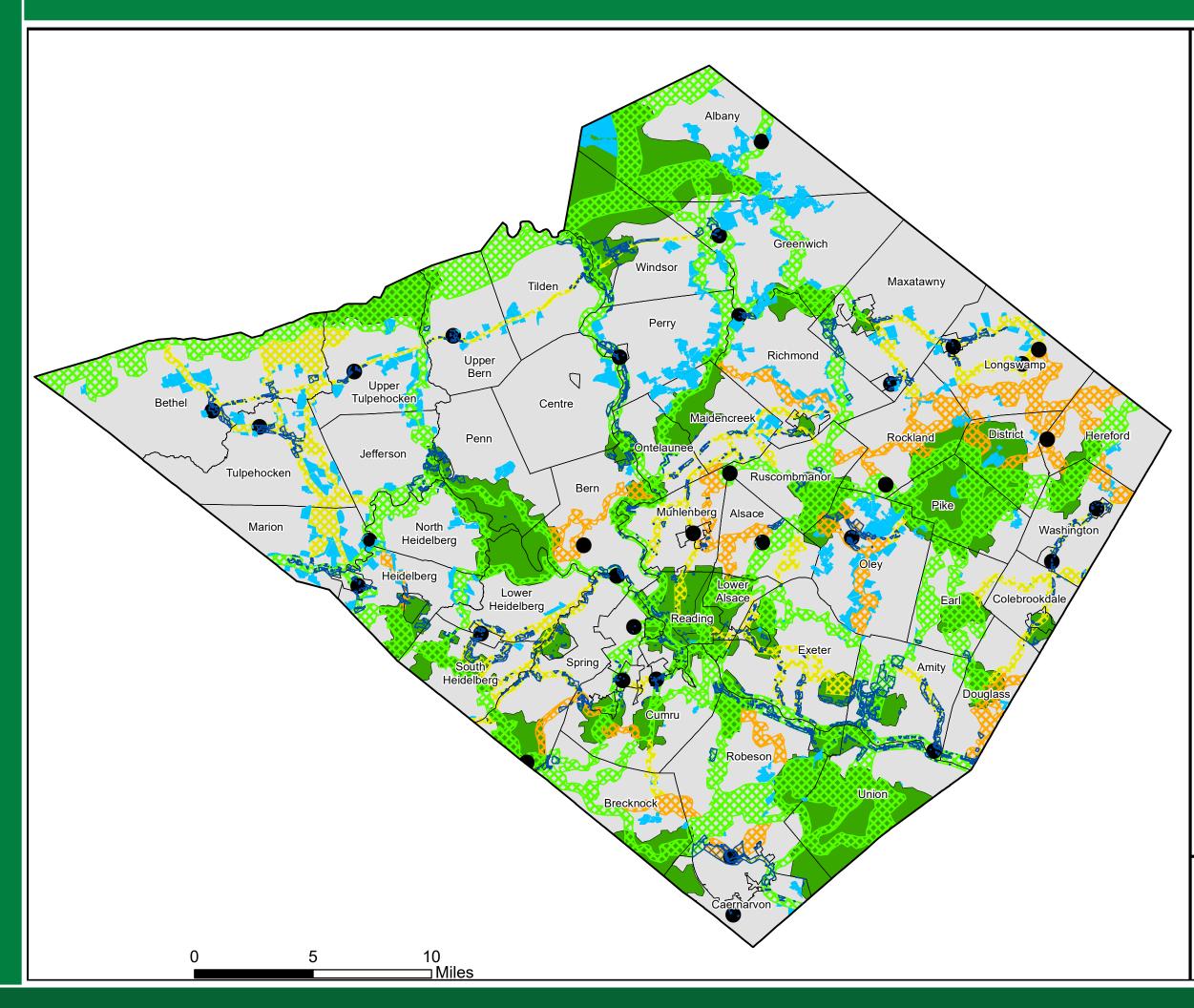
As previously noted, the purpose of the plan update is to determine which greenway corridors and hubs have been protected, expanded, or encroached upon since 2007. The areas identified as Greenway System Expansion on the following maps are areas which include new acreage of recreational facilities as well as preserved natural areas. The areas identified as Greenway System Encroachment are areas where greenway hubs/corridors/nodes overlap areas currently defined as growth areas for future development in the Berks County Comprehensive Plan 2030 Update and which are susceptible to degradation.

In 15 years, the County greenway system of hubs, nodes, and corridors has expanded by 26,416 acres. Of the total acres expanded in the system, most of the expansion occurred in the 2007 Priority Corridor areas. Conservation and agricultural preservation easements secured in the 15-year timeframe are to be credited for this expansion. The Greenway system of hubs, nodes, and corridors has experienced a total of 10,456 acres of encroachment. Land use growth areas identified in the County Comprehensive Plan 2030 Update are the parameters which account for the encroachment areas. The majority of encroachment occurred in the 2007 corridors.

Within the five planning regions, the Hawk Mountain and Tulpehocken regions had the largest area of greenway system expansion as shown in the regional Greenway System Connectivity maps.

Large encroachment areas were found in the 422 Corridor within the Southern Highlands, specifically in Amity Township. Additionally, there was some encroachment predominantly along the southwest portion of the County in the Tulpehocken and Metro Regions.



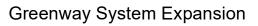


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# Greenway System Connectivity



# Legend







2007 Greenway Nodes



2007 Greenway Hubs



Primary Connection Corridor

Secondary Connection Corridor

Additional Connection Corridor

# **Municipal Boundaries**

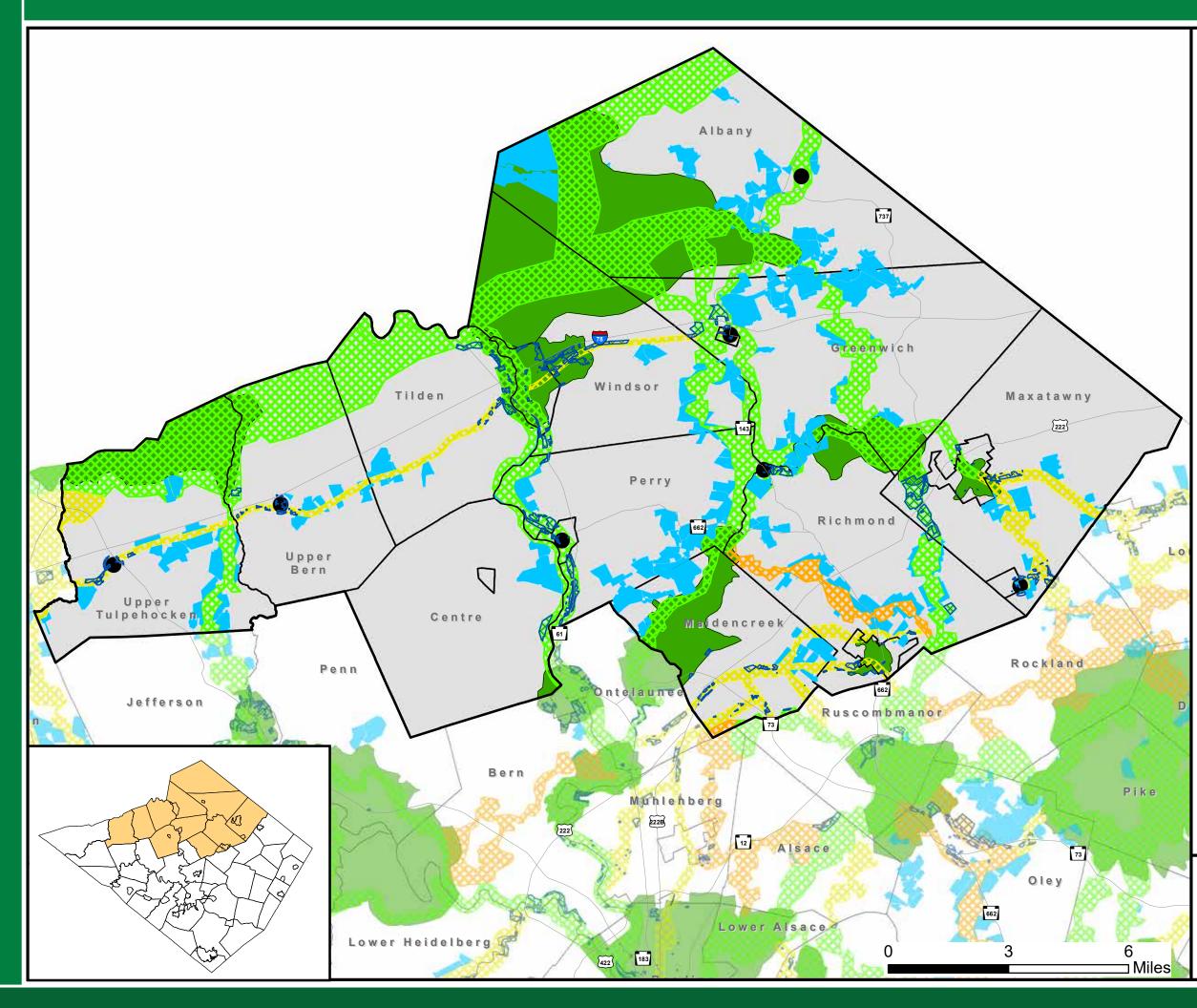
Berks County Boundary

Source: Berks County Planning Commission, Berks County GIS, Berks County Mapping, Berks County Department of Emergency Services

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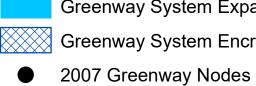


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Hawk Mountain Region Greenway System Connectivity



# Legend



Greenway System Expansion

Greenway System Encroachment



2007 Greenway Hubs



Primary Connection Corridor

Secondary Connection Corridor

Additional Connection Corridor

Hawk Mountain Region Boundary

Municipal Boundaries

Major Roads

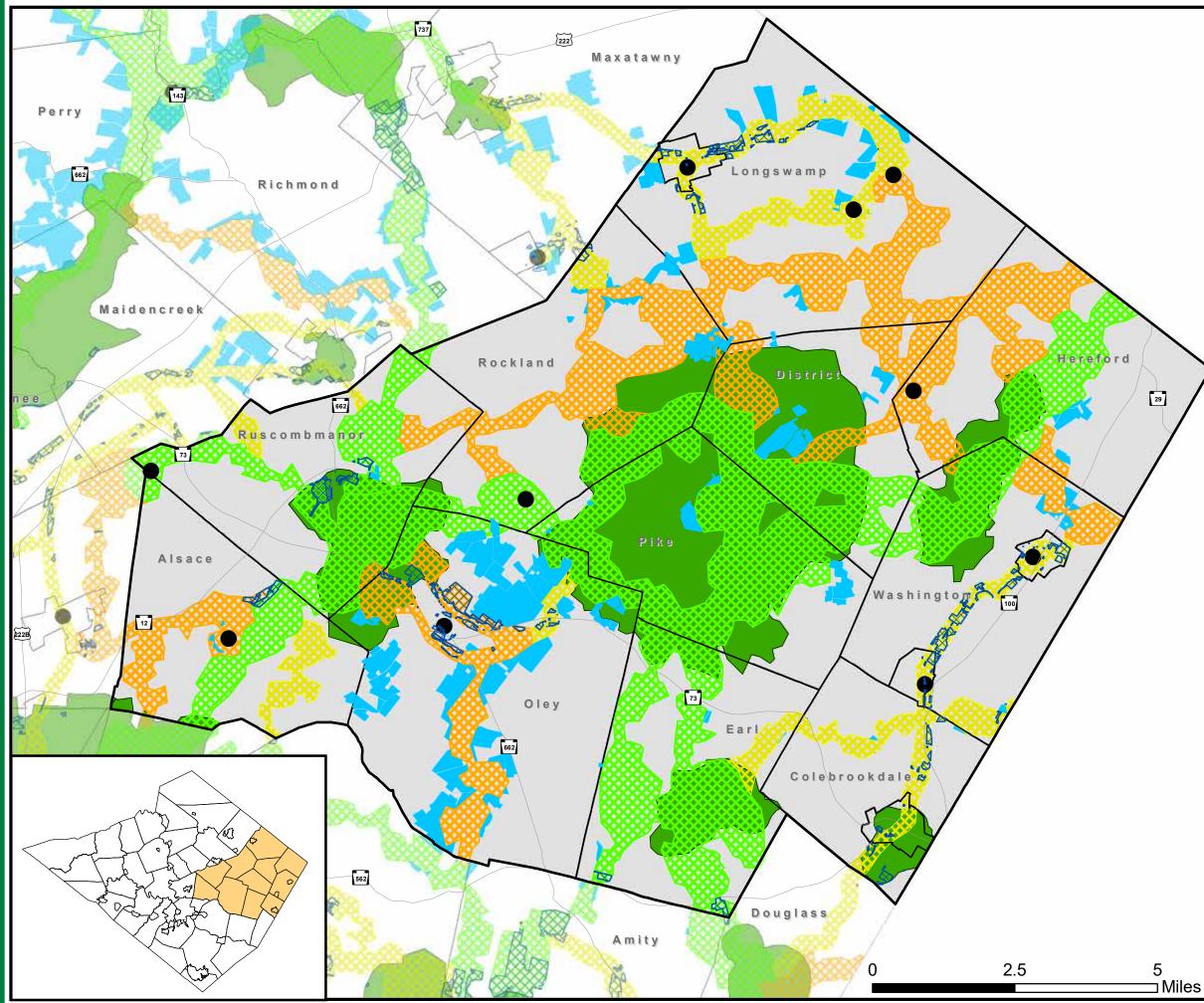
Source: Berks County Planning Commission, Berks County GIS, Berks County Mapping, Berks County Department of Emergency Services

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Oley Hills Region Greenway System Connectivity



# Legend



Greenway System Expansion

Greenway System Encroachment

2007 Greenway Nodes



2007 Greenway Hubs



Primary Connection Corridor

Secondary Connection Corridor

Additional Connection Corridor

Oley Hills Region Boundary

**Municipal Boundaries** 

Major Roads

Source: Berks County Planning Commission, Berks County GIS, Berks County Mapping, Berks County Department of Emergency Services

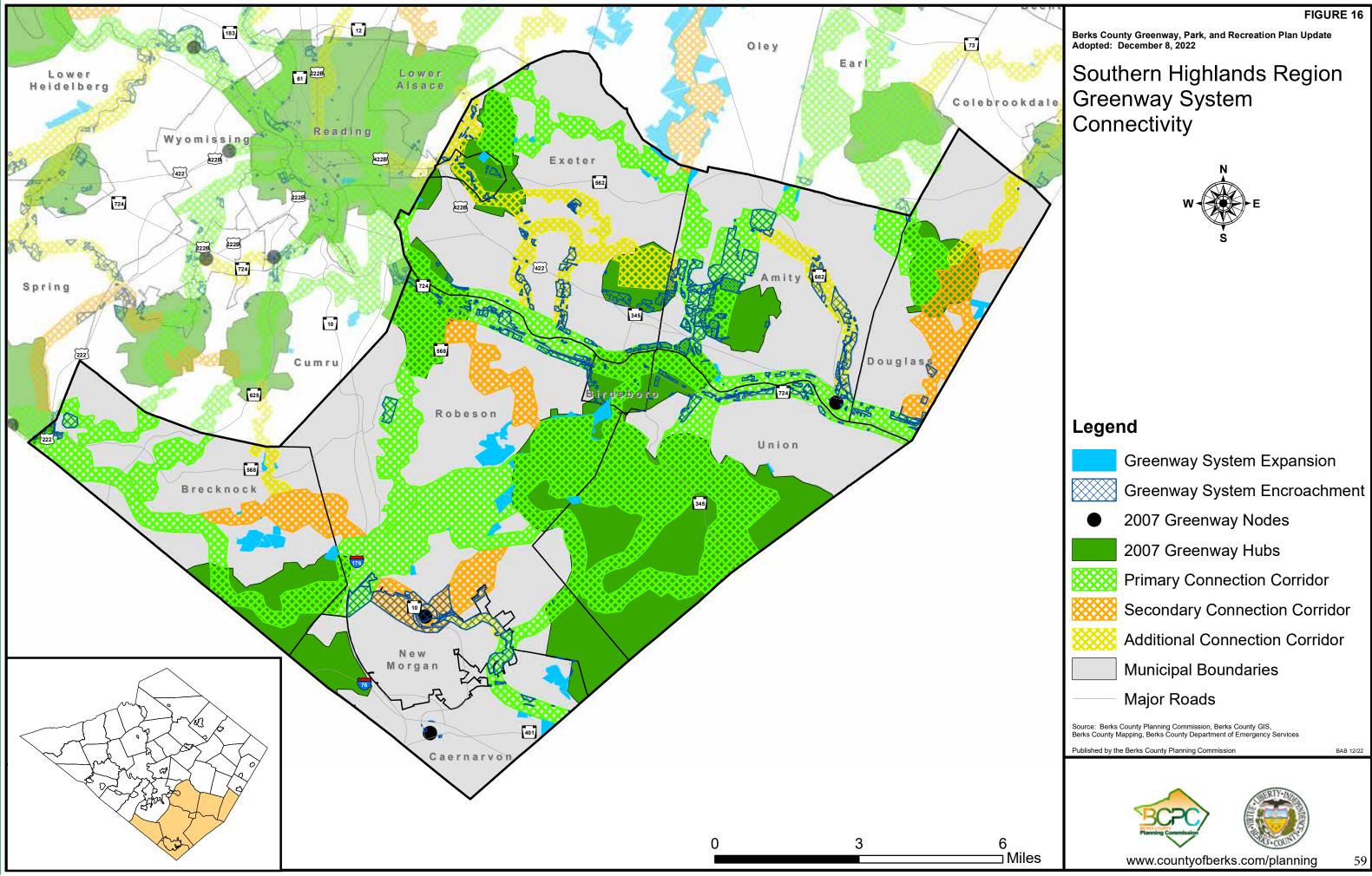
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Southern Highlands Region Greenway System Connectivity



Greenway System Expansion

2007 Greenway Nodes

2007 Greenway Hubs

Primary Connection Corridor

Secondary Connection Corridor

Additional Connection Corridor

**Municipal Boundaries** 

Major Roads

Source: Berks County Planning Commission, Berks County GIS, Berks County Mapping, Berks County Department of Emergency Services

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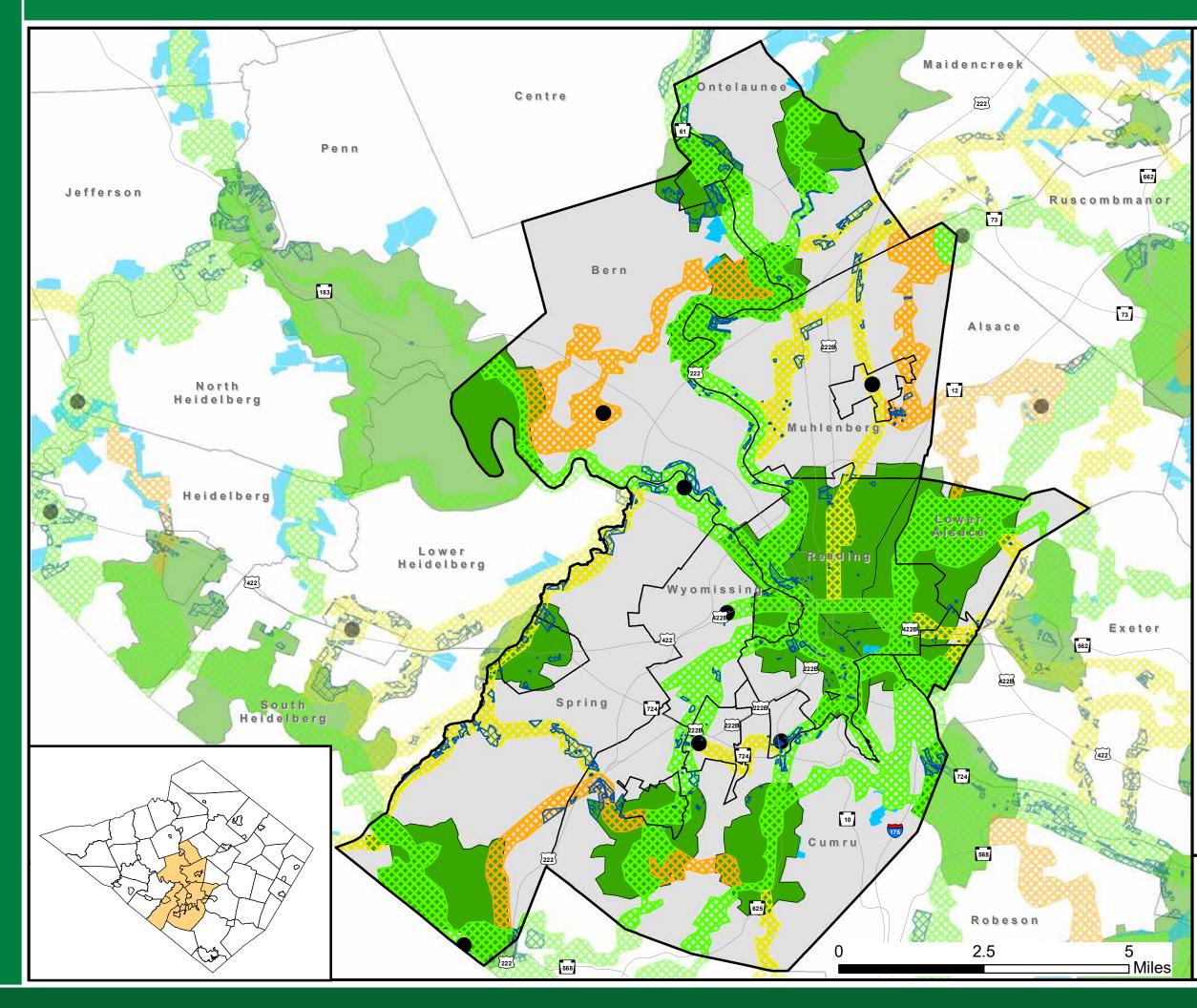






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# Metro Region Greenway System Connectivity



# Legend



Greenway System Expansion

Greenway System Encroachment



2007 Greenway Nodes



2007 Greenway Hubs

Primary Connection Corridor



Secondary Connection Corridor

Additional Connection Corridor

Metro Region Boundary

**Municipal Boundaries** 

Major Roads

Source: Berks County Planning Commission, Berks County GIS, Berks County Mapping, Berks County Department of Emergency Services

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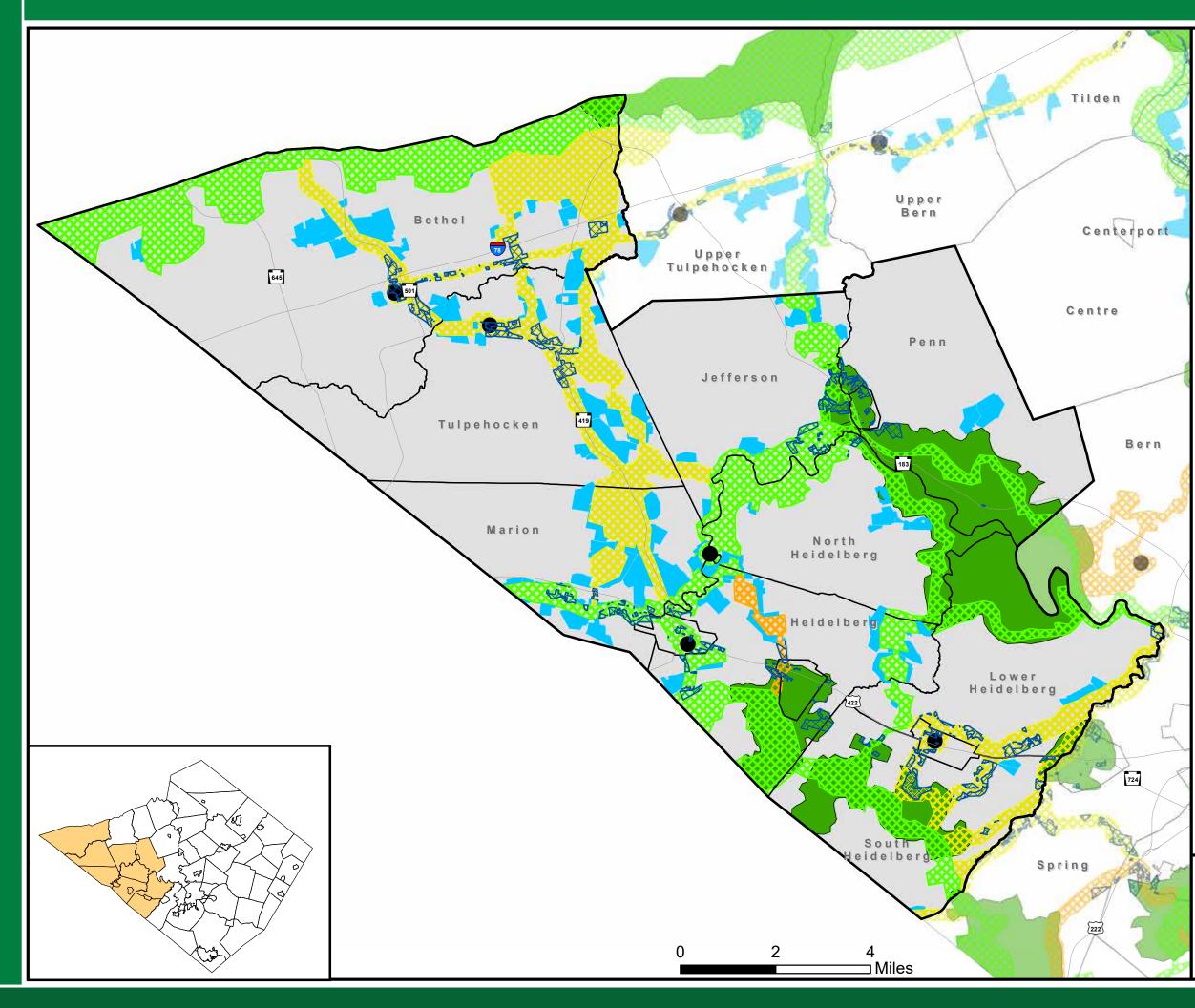
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Tulpehocken Region Greenway System Connectivity



# Legend



Greenway System Expansion

Greenway System Encroachment



2007 Greenway Hubs



Primary Connection Corridor

Secondary Connection Corridor

Additional Connection Corridor

Tulpehocken Region Boundary

**Municipal Boundaries** 

Major Roads

Source: Berks County Planning Commission, Berks County GIS, Berks County Mapping, Berks County Department of Emergency Services

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# Future Greenway System

The final piece of the mapping analysis serves as the guide to which the County and its partners should seek to expand the Greenway system. To determine the Future Greenway system, several data layers were used including Future Land Use Category Permanent Open Space from the County Comprehensive Plan 2030 Update, agricultural preservation easements, conservation easements, natural heritage areas core habitats, population density, and existing recreation and trail areas.

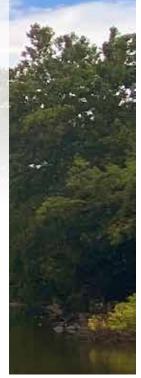
PAST

PRESENT

**FUTURE** 

Future Greenway areas are identified in the analysis as areas where existing greenway hubs or corridors should expand or be created. Greenway hubs are shown in the future greenway system and have been revised and redefined from the 2007 plan. For example, in 2007 Blue Marsh Lake was designated as an ecological greenway hub for the important natural resource areas and animal habitat. However, in the future greenway system, Blue Marsh Lake not only serves as an ecological hub for important species and plants, but is also a destination hub for fisherman, boaters, mountain bike riders, and hikers. Therefore, to support and grow the economic impact of Blue Marsh Lake, it has been classified as an ecological/destination hub. Similarly, French Creek State Park, Nolde Forest, and Hopewell Furnace have been changed to ecological/destination hubs.

There have been 10 areas of future greenway system identified. These 10 areas create new recreational areas equaling 10,253 acres.



### **CHAPTER 3: FACILITIES AND OPEN SPACE INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS**

greenway system identified. There are two greenway hubs and one corridor expansion. Hub Expansion #1 is located in Albany Township. This Ecological hub expansion area is directly adjacent to an established 2007 Ecological Hub and within the 2007 Primary Connection Greenway Corridor and is approximately 1,274 acres. The land is predominately Gamelands and has a future land use designation of permanent open space and recreation. The Appalachian Trail is within this expansion area as well as local trails within the Gamelands. The expansion area is also within a Natural Heritage Area Core Habitat due to the large, forested area along the Kittatinny Ridge and is recognized as an "Important Bird Area" by the National Audubon Society. The population density in this area is zero. Hub Expansion #2 is located in both Tilden and Upper Bern Townships. This Ecological hub expansion area is directly adjacent to the 2007 Ecological Hub directly to the west. The expansion is also within the 2007 Primary Connection Greenway Corridor. The land is predominately Gamelands and the Weiser State Forest with a future land use designation of permanent open space and recreation and makes up approximately 3,863 acres. The Appalachian Trail is within this expansion area as well as local trails and intercounty trails (Schuylkill River Trail and Bartram Trail). Most of the expansion area is within a Natural Heritage Area Core Habitat due to the densely forested section for the Blue Mountain/Kittatinny Ridge and is recognized as

In the Hawk Mountain region, there are 3 areas of Future an "Important Bird Area" by the National Audubon Society. The population density in this area is zero. Corridor **Expansion #3** is identified in Windsor Township. This expansion area would widen a 2007 Primary Connection Greenway Corridor and is approximately 230 acres. The land is predominately agriculture with a large pond and minimal population. The expansion is compatible with the future land use categories and is within a Natural Heritage Area Core Habitat due to the aquatic and riparian habitat at this site. A portion of the area is also an Agricultural Conservation Easement.

> In the Oley Hills region, Hub Expansion #4 is located in Longswamp Township. This additional Ecological Hub could provide more area for sensitive species of concern. Hub Expansion #4 is within a Natural Heritage Core Habitat. Approximately 884 acres (37%) is already preserved with Agricultural Easements or Conservation Easements which limits development and would provide a more permanent habitat for sensitive species of concern as well as other types of wildlife. An Additional Connection Greenway Corridor also connects and flows through this newly created Hub. **Corridor Expansion #5** is located in District Township. This expansion area would provide a connection between two existing Secondary Connection Greenway Corridors and is approximately 410 acres. This area also overlaps with a large Ecological Greenway Hub and is directly adjacent to a Primary Connection Greenway Corridor. A majority of this

area is preserved with Conservation Easements allowing for limited development in the future which would assist with preserving the newly added Corridor.

Within the Southern Highlands region Hub Expansion #6 is located in Robeson Township. With the expansion of this area, approximately 366 acres would be added to the adjacent Ecological Greenway Hub that surrounds French Creek State Park, expanding the existing Greenway Hub to the west. The southern portion of the expansion also lies within a Primary Connection Greenway Corridor. This area is also an Important Bird Area as defined by the National Audubon Society. Multiple Conservation Easements are also within Hub Expansion #6 as well as compatible future land use designations geared towards permanent open space and preservation. Additionally, Hub Expansion **#7** in Brecknock Township would add approximately 865

acres to the existing Greenway Hubs in this region. This new addition will help offset the loss of land within the ecological hubs and corridors in Amity Township. The new ecological hub contains both Agricultural Conservation Easements and Conservations Easements and is within two different Natural Heritage Area Core Habitats.

An Additional Connection Greenway Corridor and a Secondary Connection Greenway Corridor also intersect with Hub Expansion #7.



### **CHAPTER 3: FACILITIES AND OPEN SPACE INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS**

The Metro Region has two corridor expansions. Corridor **Expansion #8** is located in both the City of Reading and Lower Alsace Township. Approximately 405 acres would be added to the adjacent Primary Connection Greenway Corridor that also overlaps an Ecological Greenway Hub. This area has compatible future land use designations and is within an area known as the Mount Penn Preserve. A portion of the corridor expansion also overlaps with a Natural Heritage Area Core Habitat that supports a sensitive species of concern. Corridor Expansion #9 in Cumru Township is approximately 200 acres in size and would be added to the adjacent Primary Connection Greenway Corridor. A portion of this corridor overlaps with Conservation Easement and is immediately adjacent to a Natural Heritage Area Core Habitat that supports 5 different sensitive species.

The Tulpehocken Region contains only one future greenway system expansion corridor. Corridor Expansion **#10** identified in Bethel Township. This expansion area would add an Additional Connection Corridor between two current Corridors that have been encroached upon due to incompatible future land uses. Corridor Expansion **#10** is within a Natural Heritage Area Core Habitat due to riparian habitat at this site. A portion of the expansion corridor is within Agricultural Conservation Easements.

#### **CHAPTER 3: FACILITIES AND OPEN SPACE INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS**



Additionally, another important feature of the Future Greenway system is the Development Impact zones. These areas are identified as potential loss of the greenway system due to underlying factors including municipal zoning and land use development. Municipalities and recreational partners should work with the development community to incorporate and protect as much of the greenway system as possible so that the network is cohesive rather than fragmented.

In Hawk Mountain, Development Impact Zone #1 identified in Hamburg Borough and Windsor Township has approximately 332 acres of incompatible future land use designations which overlap into a Destination/Ecological Greenway Hub and Additional Connection Greenway Corridor. Consideration should be given to the realignment of the Additional Connection Greenway Corridor to the south where more compatible future land uses are found. Development Impact Zone #2 located in Maxatawny and Richmond Townships is approximately 337 acres of the Primary Connection Greenway Corridor. The impact is due to incompatible future land use designation of Future Growth according to the Berks County Comprehensive Plan update 2030. However, there is an option to realign the Primary Connection Greenway Corridor farther west where more compatible future land use designations exist.

Within Oley Hills, is **Development Impact Zone #3** found in Washington Township, Bally Borough and Bechtelsville Borough. Approximately 179 acres within the Additional Connection Greenway Corridor has been impacted by incompatible future land use designations. The result is the removal of the entire corridor. An option to realign the corridor to the east would be compatible with the future land uses in the area and would also connect to an existing Ecological Greenway Hub. **Development Impact Zone #4** is located in Oley Township. Approximately 170

acres within a Secondary Connection Greenway Corridor has been impacted by incompatible future land use designations. This area is predominately farmland with more than half of the township preserved through the Berks County Agricultural Preservation Easement Program. The impacted area is also within a Natural Heritage Area Core Habitat. Although the elimination of the corridor is not desirable, there is another Secondary Connection Greenway Corridor that runs parallel just south of this impacted connection that could continue the gateway between the existing Ecological Hubs.

When reviewing the Southern Highlands region, there are three areas of development impact. **Development** Impact Zone #5 is the first located in Amity Township. Approximately 1,068 acres within a Primary Connection Greenway Corridor, Ecological Greenway Hub, and Destination/Ecological Greenway Hub has been impacted by incompatible future land use designations. This is the largest area impacted by incompatible land uses in Berks County. The degredation of this area from the Primary Greenway Corridor will significantly impact the access to the Ecological Greenway Hub which is also within a Natural Heritage Area Core Habitat that supports two sensitive species of concern as well as other wildlife. Development Impact zone #6 is also located in Amity Township. This zone is approximately 304 acres and within an Additional Connection Greenway Corridor which has been impacted by incompatible future land use designations. This area is located just east of the largest area impacted within the county. Realignment of the corridor is not likely due to the existing high-density development. However, the purpose of identifying this impact zone is to call out to the municipalities to engage with the development community to preserve as much of the established greenway corridor as possible in the development process. Development Impact Zone #7 is found in Robeson Township and New

Morgan Borough. **Development Impact Zone #7** is approximately 691 acres and within a Secondary and Additional Connection Greenway Corridor which has been impacted by incompatible future land use designations. The result is the elimination of the 167-acre Additional Connection Greenway Corridor and a possible realignment of the Secondary Connection Greenway Corridor to the north. The changes of both corridors will affect three different Natural Heritage Area Core Habitats that fall directly within the elimination areas.

The Metro region which serves the largest population has identified two areas of impact zones. **Development** Impact Zone #8 is located in Ontelaunee Township. There are approximately 41 acres within an Additional Connection Greenway Corridor which have been impacted by incompatible future land use designations. Thru the analysis there was no option to realign the corridor in this area resulting in the elimination of this corridor in the Metro Region. Development Impact Zone #9 is found in both Spring and Cumru Townships. Approximately 159 acres have been impacted within a Destination/ Ecological Greenway Hub, and Additional Connection Greenway Corridor and a Secondary Connection Greenway Corridor. There is no option to realign the zone which is in the Additional Connection Greenway Corridor due to incompatible future land use designations. A possibility of realignment of the Secondary Connection Greenway Corridor to the south is possible and would provide a connection between the Destination/Ecological Greenway Hub and Ecological Greenway Hub.

In the Tulpehocken Region five Development Impact Zones have been identified. This region contains the most impact zones however, not the largest. **Development Impact Zone #10** is located in Bethel Township. **Development Impact Zone #10** encompasses approximately 180 acres of incompatible future land use designations which overlap

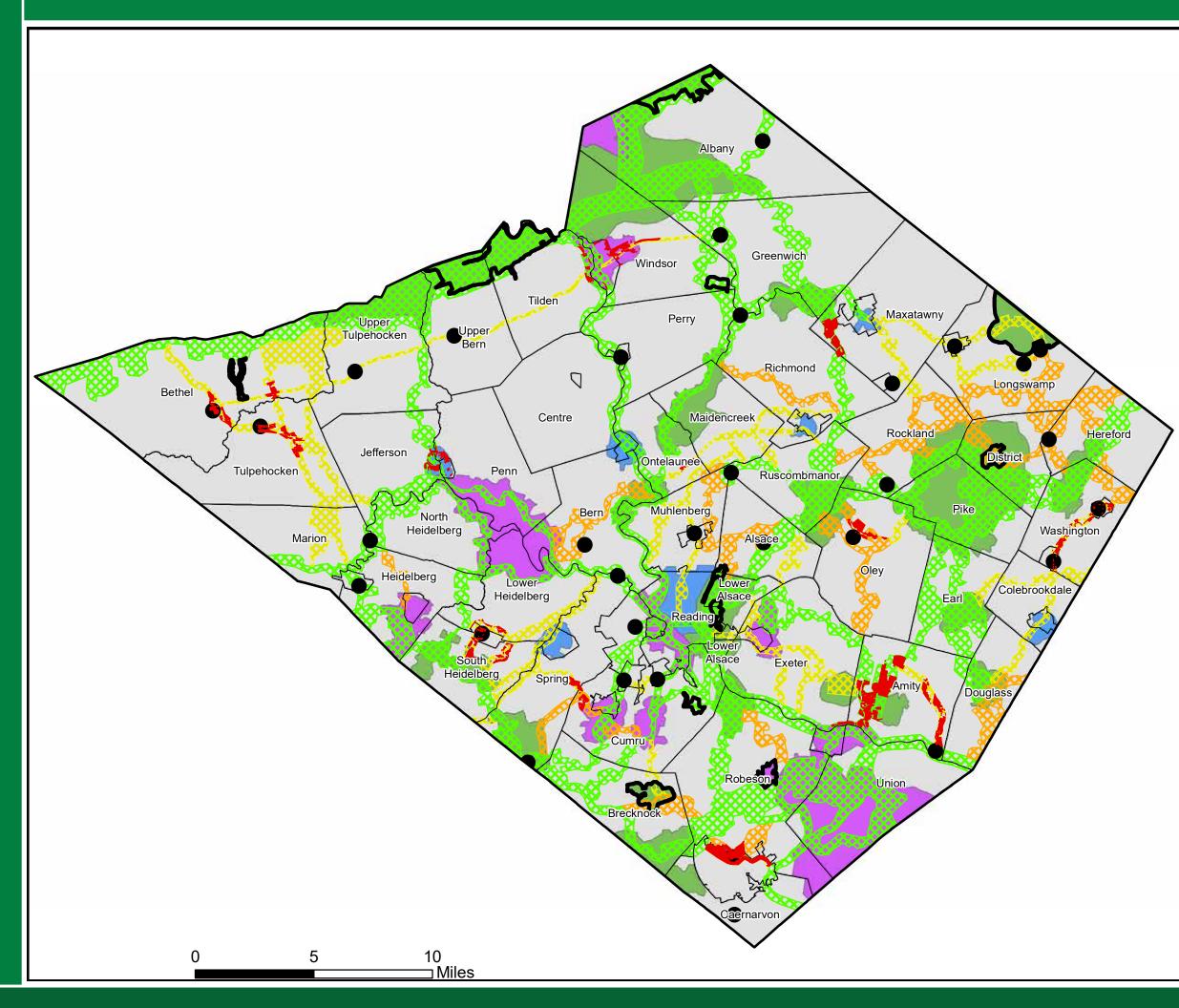
into an Additional Connection Greenway Corridor around the Bethel Greenway Destination Node. Options to continue a connection were identified and addressed by adding the Future Expansion Corridor #10 in Bethel Township. Development Impact Zone #11 is also within Bethel Township. A total of 97 acres identified as incompatible future land use designations which overlap into an Additional Connection Greenway Corridor. The continued purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements allow for the connection to continue. The new addition of a **Future** Expansion Corridor #10 will also help address the removal of land in this area. Development Impact Zone #12 is located in Tulpehocken Township. Approximately 284 acres of incompatible future land use designations overlap into an Additional Connection Greenway Corridor south of the Bethel Greenway Destination Node. This area also contains a Natural Heritage Core Habitat in the agricultural lands at this site. Options to continue a connection is still available from the Additional Connection Greenway Corridor that intersects to the east. Development Impact Zone #13 is located in Bernville Borough and Jefferson and Penn Townships. The zone contains approximately 165 acres (22%) of the Destination Greenway Hub (729 acres

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area.

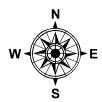
#### **CHAPTER 3: FACILITIES AND OPEN SPACE INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS**

total) and has been impacted by incompatible future land use designations. I **Development Impact Zone #14** is identified in Wernersville Borough, South Heidelberg and North Heidelberg Townships. Approximately 302 acres of the Additional Connection Greenway Corridor has been impacted by incompatible future land use designations. Although there are Primary and Additional Greenway Corridors to the east and west of the impacted area, the immediate vicinity around Wernersville has been significantly impacted since the inception of the corridors. Possibilities for realignment in this area is not likely due to the high population densities and development in the



Berks County Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan Update Adopted: December 8, 2022

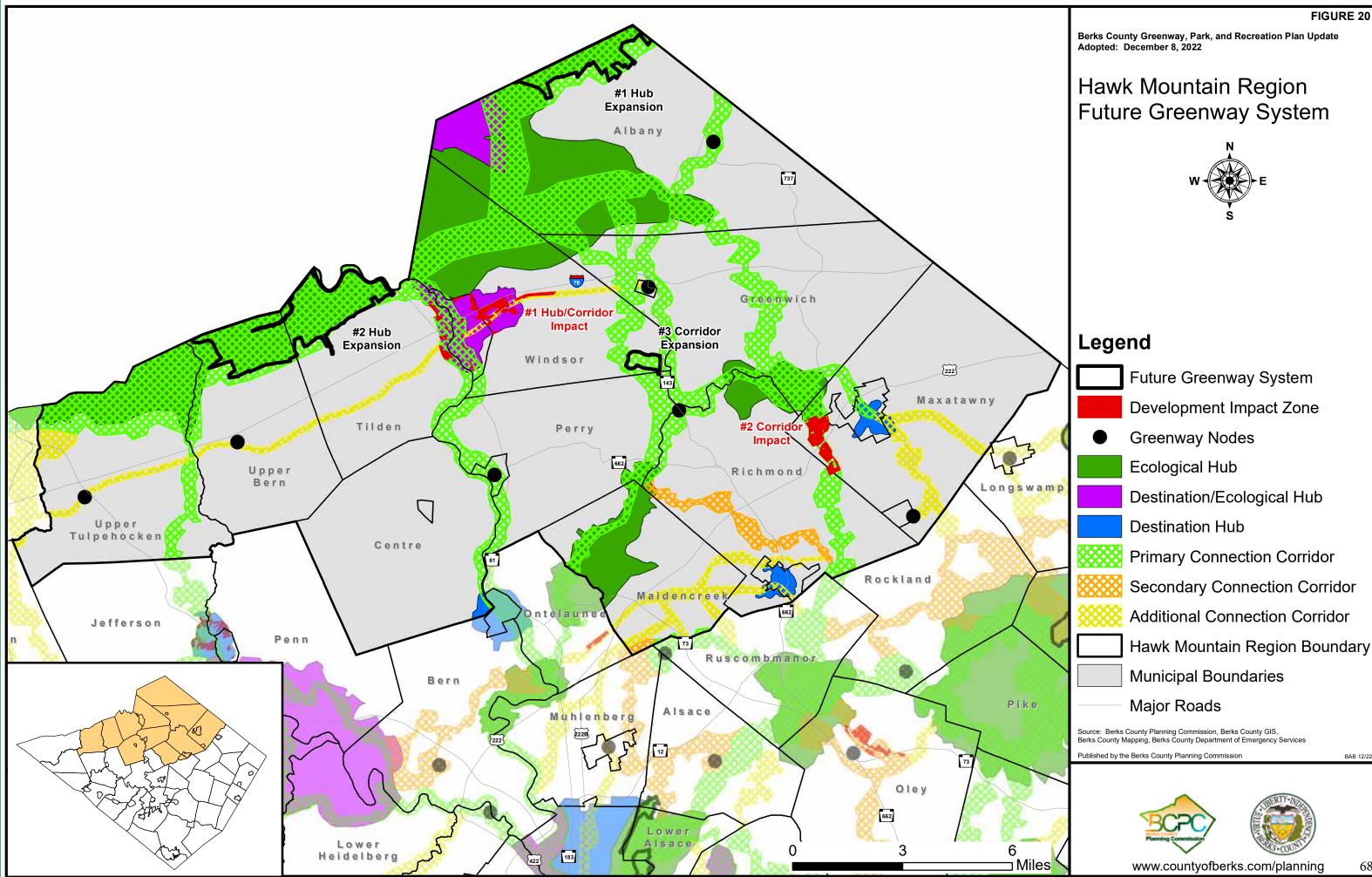
# Berks County Future Greenway System



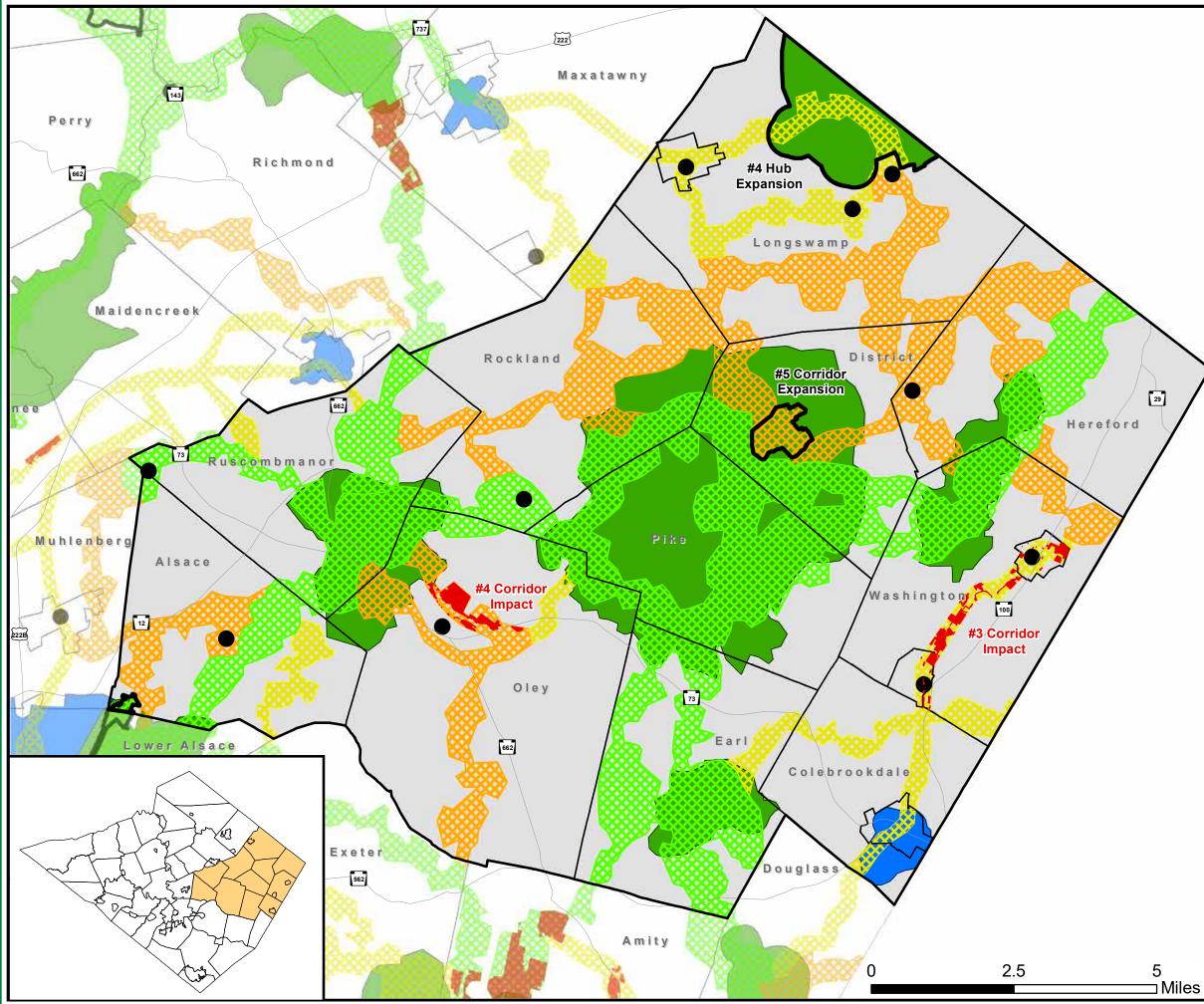


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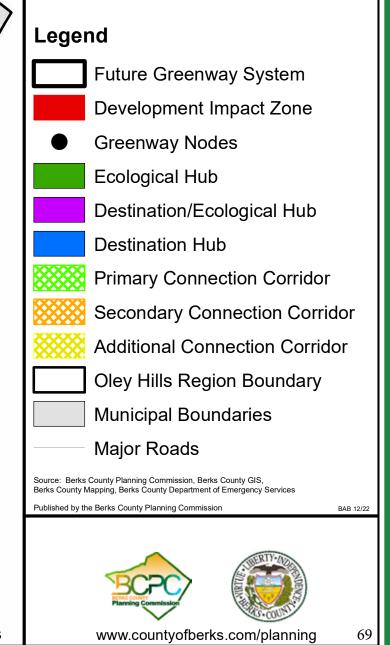


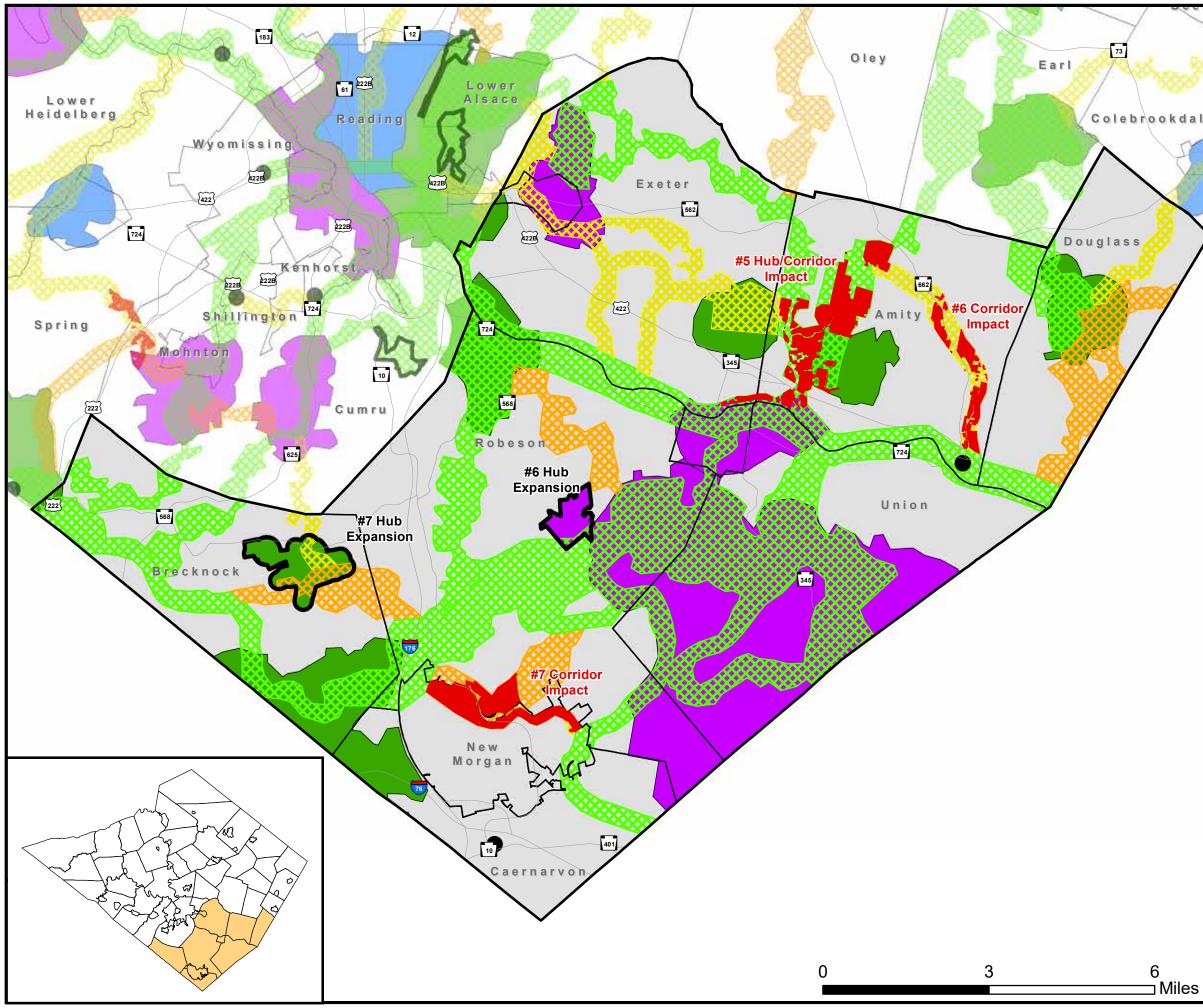


Berks County Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan Update Adopted: December 8, 2022

# Oley Hills Region Future Greenway System





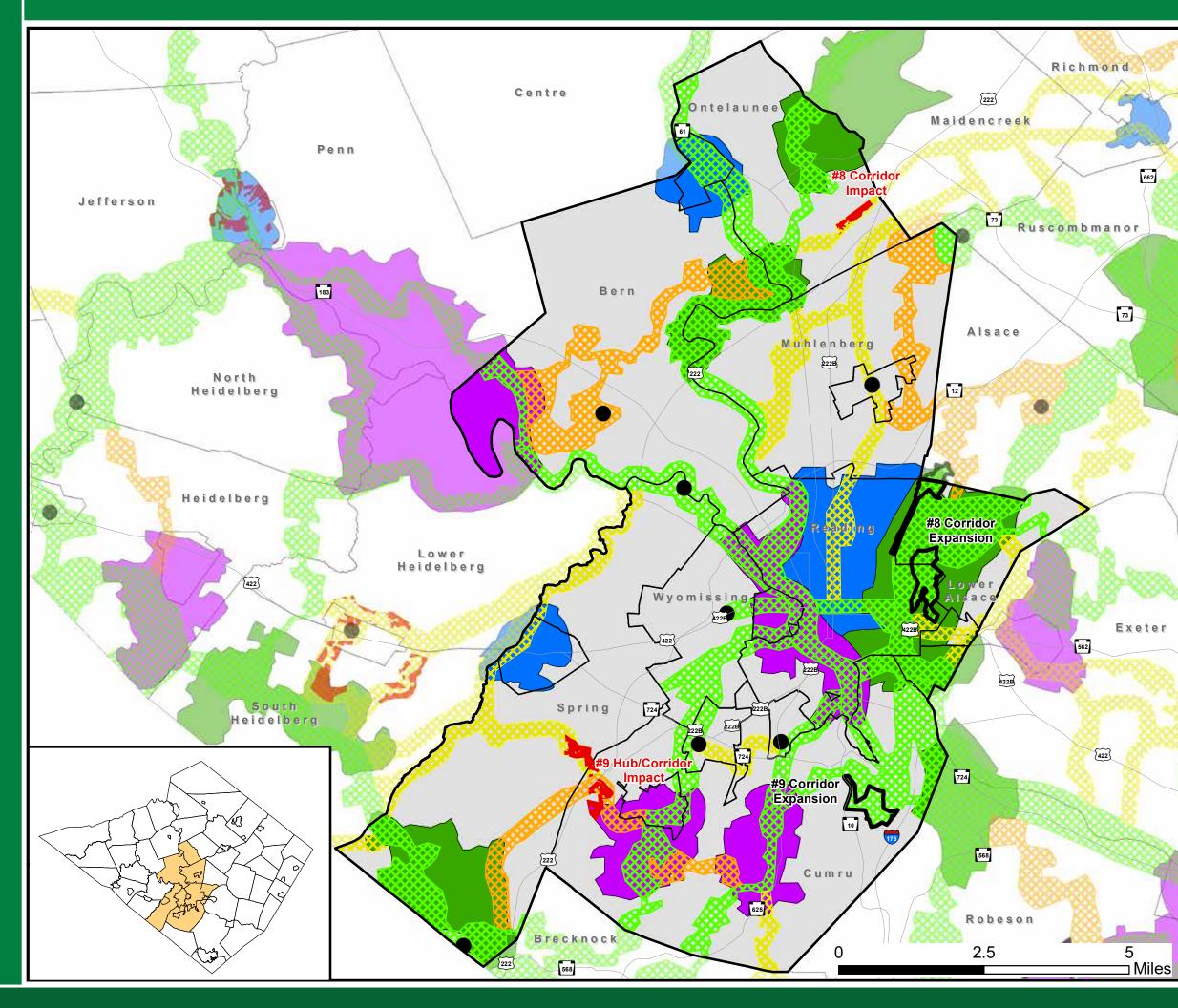


Berks County Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan Update Adopted: December 8, 2022

# Southern Highlands Region Future Greenway System



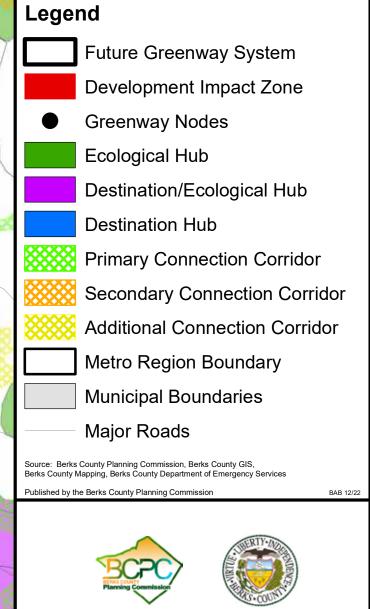




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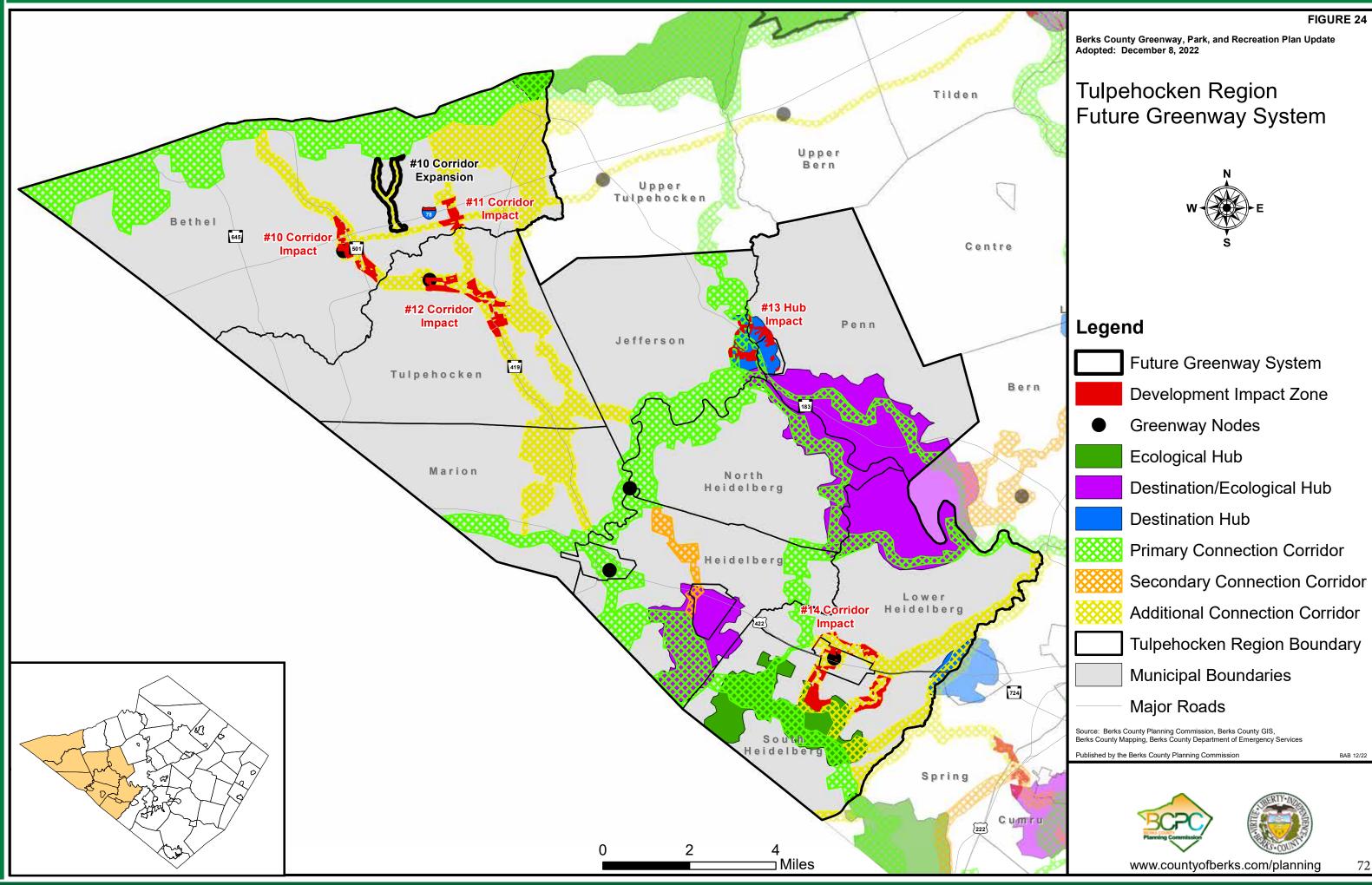
# Metro Region Future Greenway System





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# **CHAPTER 4** GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION

### **CHAPTER 4: GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION**

# Goals and Implementation

Since the adoption of the 2007 Berks County Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan, the County greenway and recreation system has added 1,162 acres of recreational resources. The entire greenway and recreation system comprises 64,436 acres or 11 percent of the total acreage in the county. This was achieved through the implementation of the overall countywide actions identified in the 2007 Plan.

# **CHAPTER 4: GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION**





The goals and priorities identified in this plan will expand upon the overall countywide actions from the 2007 Plan with consideration given to the new needs and priorities recognized through public and stakeholder input.

One of the major goals of this plan is to ensure the protection of important natural and historical resources and provide adequate open space and parkland to the public. This can be done through an easily accessible system of interconnecting greenways and linear parks. To reach this goal, specific recommendations are established in subsequent sections of this chapter. Additionally, specific actions to achieve a strong greenway system are detailed below.

### Acquisition

The Plan recommends the acquisition and preservation of important natural areas and stream corridors throughout the County. These corridors were chosen using criteria such as: water quality; accessibility; Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory (PNDI) sites; feasibility; and importance to the overall system.

### Protection

The Plan recommends protection of critical and unique natural areas including:

- Schuylkill River Corridor
- Neversink Mountain
- Mount Penn
- Kittatinny Ridge
- High and exceptional quality waters
- PNDI sites
- Wetlands, floodplains, watersheds
- Steep slopes (>25%)

The Plan also recommends sensitive design techniques as a method to preserve open space and agricultural lands. Cluster development, when used in appropriate areas, can maintain the character of the landscape and provide recreational opportunities by developing the least sensitive portion of the site while leaving the rest as open space.

# **Historic Sites**

The Plan recommends the protection and preservation of historic sites and districts on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Since 2007, the Planning Commission staff, with information provided by various state and local agencies, has updated and maintained the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) database from the Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission (PHMC).

# **Greenway System**

The Plan recommends a system of interconnecting greenways along natural areas and stream corridors throughout the County. This system is shown on the mapping within this plan. The greenways will connect major existing recreational facilities with developed areas and can be used for hiking, biking, nature study, and other activities. These greenways are not only important for human use but also serve as ecological highway systems for the various animal species that travel throughout the County. The County must work with local municipalities, private and non-profit organizations, and other counties to preserve these corridors. The Schuylkill River corridor is the critical link to an inter-county trail system and is of highest priority. The Schuylkill River corridor is basically the "spine" of Berks County. Further development of the Schuylkill River Trail system will provide connections to other recreational, historical, and natural areas throughout the County. Ultimately, the goal for this trail is to stretch from the headwaters in Schuylkill County all the way to the City of Philadelphia.

Implementation of this Plan will require cooperation from the County, municipal officials, private interests, non-profit groups, and the public.

Goals and priorities are categorized in three different parts:

#### Municipal and Countywide; Berks County Parks and Recreation Department; Regional

Municipal and countywide goals should be implemented through a collaboration between municipal governing bodies, non-profit organizations, school districts, recreational organizations and partners, and State agencies.

Berks County Parks and Recreation Department goals and recommendations should be executed through partnerships

with recreational organizations, the County Commissioners, the Parks and Recreation Board, private sector contributions, non-profit organizations, and State agencies.

Regional recommendations should serve as policy guidance and action for municipal governing bodies, non-profit organizations, school districts, recreational organizations and partners, and State agencies.

# **Municipal and Countywide Goals and Priorities**

These goals were driven by the five priority areas identified in the Pennsylvania Statewide Comprehensive Recreation Plan: Recreation for All 2020- 2024. Additionally, these goals were developed from the new recreational needs and priorities identified through the public participation process, steering committee, and stakeholder input. These priorities capture the current challenges and opportunities that the County and municipalities face and offer goals for supporting recreation for all Berks Countians.

## **Health and Wellness**

Outdoor recreation, or any type of physical recreation for that matter, is key to helping address some of today's pressing health care issues. Evidence suggests that spending time outdoors can have lasting benefits on individual health and well-being. Creating walkable and bikeable communities can encourage active living. An increased focus by the health care community on recreation and opportunities for new partnerships and coordination can lessen chronic health issues. Getting people of all ages connected to the outdoors and nature has proven to have positive effects on the health and wellness of our residents. One focus of this plan is to increase awareness and the importance of the growing connection between good health and the outdoors, the communication of this connection to our residents, and leveraging partnerships with the health care community to expand nature-based health and wellness programs.

Health and Wellness		
Goal / Priority	Action	Partner(s)
Inform/educate on Hhow recreation of all different types can be a benefit both mentally and physically	Promote and develop municipal recreation programs which address physical and emotional wellbeing.	County Healthcare Providers, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, County Wellness Organizations
Support programs that promote healthy living through recreation.	Collaborate with healthcare providers to provide healthy living programs at municipal and county events.	County Healthcare Providers, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, County Wellness Organizations
Build relationships with the health care community.	Engage in discussions with County Healthcare providers and wellness organizations to foster and develop recreational events and programs.	County Healthcare Providers, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, County Wellness Organizations
Work to equip health care providers with resources needed to promote the health benefits of outdoor recreation.	Continue to build the Walk with Doc program and other wellness programs and initiatives that should incorporate recreational facilities.	County Healthcare Providers, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, County Wellness Organizations
Support the creation of walking and biking networks that provide safe, efficient, and close-to-home access to recreation and encourage healthy behavior in communities.	Develop municipal active transportation plans and park, recreation and open space plans which identify walking and biking needs for access to recreational amenities.	Municipal park and recreation departments, consultants, municipal governing bodies

# Inclusivity – Recreation for All

Inclusivity pertains to ensuring that all residents in Berks County have close-to-home opportunities for recreation. This is vitally important to the future of outdoor recreation in the County. This plan will not serve all people if there are segments of the population who feel disconnected or unwelcomed, or simply do not have easy access to outdoor spaces and amenities. Age, neighborhood, gender, ethnicity, color of skin, language, ability, or socioeconomic standing should never be barriers to enjoying outdoor recreation in Berks County. This plan strives to identify and make recommendations on where new parks, greenspaces, and trails are clearly lacking. It aims to ensure that all people feel invited and engaged in our outdoor spaces by developing strategies to overcome real and perceived barriers through enhanced access, amenities, and programs.

#### Inclusivity

Goal / Priority Action Partner(s)			
Goal / Phoney			
Make available park systems that are safe, attractive and clean.	Properly maintain municipal and county recreation facilities through capital budget planning and prioritization.	Municipal Governing Bodies, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, Volunteers, Non- Profit Organizations, State Agencies	
Work to provide opportunities for everyone to regularly engage and enjoy outdoor recreation.	Expand and promote recreation opportunities which address generational enjoyment, physical limitations, and cultural identity.	Municipal Governing Bodies, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, Volunteers, Non- Profit Organizations, State Agencies	
Work to enhance recreational amenities to fit the needs and expectations of underserved communities and/or populations.	Increase the availability of adaptive facilities and develop and promote loop trails in local community parks.	Municipal Governing Bodies, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, Volunteers, Non- Profit Organizations	
Enhance park system activities and recreational programming to ensure a mix of activities that appeal to ALL ages, cultures and abilities.	Evaluate and update printed materials, displays, and programs in order to alleviate potential barriers to accessing recreational programs and facilities.	Municipal Governing Bodies, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, Volunteers, Non- Profit Organizations	
Provide equitable access to outdoor recreation and conservation programs.	Make sure that public recreation facilities and programs provide opportunities for individuals with different accessibility and mobility needs.	Municipal Governing Bodies, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, Volunteers, Non- Profit Organizations	
Build a diverse workforce and volunteer base.	Develop apprenticeship programs and expand internship opportunities for young adults from diverse backgrounds, including people of color, interested in recreation and conservation employment positions.	Municipal Governing Bodies, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, Volunteers, Non- Profit Organizations, Businesses	



# Conservation / Sustainability / Stewardship

The ability to protect and enhance our public natural and recreational resources grows increasingly challenging as interests diversify, pressures intensify, infrastructure ages, and our climate changes. Recreation providers must plan for how to sustainably manage the resources, while trying to predict the uncertainty of the future. Land managers, conservation leaders, and recreational program providers must work tirelessly to uphold Berks Countian's right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic, and aesthetic values of the environment. This plan outlines strategies to balance the needs of our natural resources with the ever-changing demands of recreation enthusiasts through careful planning and design, innovation and partnerships, and an emphasis on stewardship by all.

# Concernation / Sustainability / Stowardshir

Goal / Priority	Action	Partner(s)
Goal / Phoney	Action	Partner(s)
Maintain parks in excellent condition through an effective program of preventive maintenance.	Prioritize projects and maintenance on recreation amenities in order to keep them in good working order and well-maintained for the end user.	Municipal Governing Bodies, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, Volunteers, Non-Profit Organizations
Protect and conserve lands and waters considering the impacts of climate change and to vulnerable species.	Design and construct ecologically sensitive and resilient infrastructure to accommodate increased stormwater flows and changing water levels.	Municipal Governing Bodies, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, Volunteers, Non-Profit Organizations
Foster stewardship for recreation areas and natural, cultural, and historic resources.	Identify best management practices and provide training for managing human impacts on public recreation land.	Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, Non-Profit Organizations
Design outdoor recreation areas to minimize impacts on the environment or conflicts among user groups.	Encourage professionals involved in the design or consultation of new parks or renovations to be certified in sustainable landscape techniques and practices.	Municipal Governing Bodies, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, Recreational Design Consultants
Preserve open space through the development and expansion of park systems.	Support or implement projects that aim to develop new or expand existing park systems.	Municipal Governing Bodies, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, Non-Profit Organizations, State Agencie
The County Parks Department should play an expanded role in the preservation of open space for potential future development as parks and trails.	The Department should continue to coordinate and discuss land development with the County Planning Commission to understand any potential impacts to County recreational facilities.	County Parks and Recreation Department, County Planning Commission, Development Community
Put special emphasis on preserving the County's most important natural features and ecological corridors.	Utilize this plan's identified Development Impact Zones as well as the County's Comprehensive Plan to plan for their preservation.	Municipal Governing Bodies, Municipa Parks and Recreation Departments, Non-Profit Organizations
Support local, regional, state, federal and non- profit organizations in efforts to conserve/ preserve important natural and historical resources in Berks County, Pprovided it is consistent with the goals and objectives of the County Comprehensive Plan.	The County Planning Commission, County Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners along with municipalities should continue to provide letters of support and consistency for funding applications which fulfill preservation priorities.	County Planning Commission, County Department of Agriculture, County Commissioners, Non-Profit Organizations, Municipalities
Support programs and endeavors to educate and create awareness of the importance of natural resource preservation and the impacts it has on everyday quality of life.	The County along with the municipalities should continue to support and promote outreach and education programs provided by Berks Nature, County Parks and Recreation Department, County Conservation District, and other non-profit organizations.	County Commissioners, Non-profit organizations, municipalities, County Parks and Recreation Department, County Conservation District
Support regulations and programs that aid in the restoration and preservation of waterways and drinking water supplies.	The County along with the municipalities should continue to support and promote programs provided by Berks Nature, County Parks and Recreation Department, County Conservation District, and other non-profit organizations which prioritize water resources. Additionally, the County and the municipalities should continue to provide letters of support and consistency for funding applications which fulfill water resource protection.	County Planning Commission, County Department of Agriculture, County Commissioners, Non-Profit Organizations, Municipalities, County Conservation District

# **Economic Development and Funding**

Berks County's parks, trails, and other recreational amenities create places where people want to live, work, and play. Berks County should continue to capitalize on the benefits of the recreational and natural resources which it hosts. Given the wealth of outdoor assets, the opportunities for growth of the outdoor recreation economy in Berks County is hopeful, but commitment to reinvestments and prioritization must improve. Infrastructure needs and recreational demands greatly outpace investments at the local level and grow exponentially each year. This plan outlines why safeguarding and increasing investments in outdoor recreation and expanding support for the outdoor recreation economy must be high priorities.

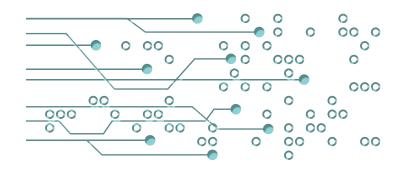
### **Economic Development and Funding**

Goal / Priority	Action	Partner(s)
Obtain adequate funding to ensure park systems can be maintained and supported at levels appropriate to their needs through a combination of public and private partnerships.	The County and municipalities should actively seek and apply for grants and funds through various funding sources.	County Commissioners, County Parks and Recreation Department, State agencies, Municipalities, Non-profit organizations
Protect and expand public and private investments in outdoor recreation.	Advocate for the increase in state and local funding to ensure that recreation remains a vital public service	Municipal Governing Bodies, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, Non- Profit Organizations
Build strategic coalitions to maximize the economic impacts of outdoor recreation in Berks County.	Create regional coalitions with community leaders, tourism agencies and businesses to strengthen main streets and outdoor destinations.	Municipal Governing Bodies, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, Non-Profit Organizations, Local Tourism Bureau
Market the County as an outdoor recreation destination. (Eco-Tourism)	Consideration should be given to creating a branding strategy for Berks County's outdoor recreation opportunities and provide consistent messaging about the County's outdoor assets.	Local Tourism Bureau, Non-Profit Organizations, Municipalities, State Agencies
Demonstrate the benefits and impacts of nature-based solutions to address community needs.	Demonstrate the value of investing in green infrastructure to create more resilient and sustainable recreation facilities that will support multiple community needs.	County Conservation District, County Planning Commission, Berks Nature, State Agencies, Municipalities
Encourage the collective effort of the public, private and non-profit sectors in providing park and recreation facilities, festivals and entertainment and build upon the economic potential of recreational destinations and events.	Continue collaboration and coordination of countywide or municipal events that promote recreational resources available in the County.	County Commissioners, County Parks and Recreation Department, municipalities, non-profit organizations, local tourism bureau

# Technology

Over the last decade, advances in technology have had profound effects on how people experience the outdoors. Technology gives the public instant access to information about outdoor recreation opportunities. Advances in technology have allowed for better data collection and analysis. New tools and equipment that enhance the way we navigate and explore are exposing more people to nature. At the same time, technological advancements can lead to overuse and overpromotion and can detract from the beauty of nature. This plan seeks to set the right balance on how we can capitalize on technology without it being disruptive or destructive.

Goal / Priority	Action	Partner(s)
Increase public awareness of park systems and encourage and motivate both use and support.	Use various means such as online tools and signage to inform and encourage use of the recreational amenities that the County has to offer.	Municipal Governing Bodies, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, Non-Profit Organizations, Local Tourism Bureau
Utilize recreation technologies to support health goals and to find places to recreate outdoors.	Update and expand existing recreation databases, maps, and apps to improve their accuracy and usability by recreation providers and the public.	Municipal Governing Bodies, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, Non-Profit Organizations, County Wellness Organizations, County Healthcare Providers
Enrich the understanding and availability of the natural, cultural, and historic aspects of the outdoors through technology.	Develop a virtual guide of existing apps and tools to help users navigate, learn about, and enjoy their recreational experiences.	County Planning Commission, Coun Commissioners, County Parks and Recreation Department, Municipal Governing Bodies, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, Non- Profit Organizations, local tourism bureau
Increase mobile connectivity in outdoor recreation.	Identify priority recreation areas for expanding cell phone coverage or deploying connectivity alternatives to enhance user experience and safety.	County Commissioners, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, Non-Profit Organizations, Utility providers
Plan for the increased use of new technologies (i.e. e-bikes, charging stations, etc.)	Develop training or best practices for recreational providers on how to best utilize and monitor these emerging trends.	County Commissioners, County Parks and Recreation Department, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, Non-Profit Organizations, utility providers
Support the creation and maintenance of databases for recreation facilities and ecological habitats so that subsequent planning initiatives and future needs can be quantified.	Create a database that can monitor any intrusion or addition to the system in order to evaluate the outcomes and address them accordingly in future planning endeavors	County Planning Commission, County Parks and Recreation Department, state agencies, non- Profit Organizations, municipalitie





# **BERKS COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**



### Introduction

This Plan is dedicated to moving the Berks County Parks and Recreation Department into its future role for parks, recreation, trails, greenways, and open space. Berks County's commitment to implementing this Plan ensures the parks and recreation system will continue to be essential to quality of life and play a vital role in supporting the health and well-being of residents and visitors.

The five priority areas of the Pennsylvania Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2020-2024 capture current Berks County opportunities for parks and recreation and serve as the foundation for this Plan's recommendations on the future direction of the Parks and Recreation Department.

Berks County has challenges it must address so that County parks and trails remain well-maintained, safe, and attractive. Addressing these challenges successfully hinges on the Parks and Recreation Department having the necessary staff and financial resources to do so. Implementation will require focused energy, commitment, and resources.

Great parks and recreation systems don't just happen. They require a guiding vision for the future and a sustained set of strategies for bringing that vision to reality. This Comprehensive Greenway, Park, and Recreation Plan outlines Berks County's vision for the future of its parks, trails, recreation facilities, programming, and open space network, while sharing strategies for how to achieve this vision. The Plan is a work in progress. To meet resident desires today and provide a legacy for future generations, it is important to seize opportunities, adjust for emerging needs, and respond to trends. The process of building and sustaining a vital and exceptional parks and recreation system is ongoing.

To begin implementing the recommendations of this Plan, it should be utilized as the basis of the strategic planning process for the Berks County Parks and Recreation Department, with an updated Strategic Plan prepared every three years.

# **MISSION, VISION, AND CORE VALUES**

A mission statement defines the purpose of an organization, while a vision statement presents an organization's desire for the future. Core values are guiding beliefs that directly support the vision and help prioritize and define an organization's goals. The core values are the motivations that drive all work.

# UPDATED MISSION STATEMENT

Enriching quality of life for all in Berks County through an enduring park and trail system that preserves natural resources and cultural heritage, offers inspiring recreational experiences, and promotes healthy lifestyles.

# VISION STATEMENT

A vibrant Berks County where everyone leads healthier lives by exploring, learning, playing, and connecting outdoors, and where our diverse natural and cultural resources are celebrated and protected for generations to come.



## **CHAPTER 4: GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION**

The Berks County Parks and **Recreation Department mission** statement has been updated and a vision statement and core values have been prepared to guide development, operation, and programming of County parks and trails over the next 10-15 years. A tag line has also been suggested to use with the Department's logo.

# TAG LINE CONNECT INSPIRE EXPLORE

### **CHAPTER 4: GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION**

# **CORE VALUES**

# HEALTH AND WELLNESS

We create a healthier Berks County and improve quality of life by promoting physical activity, safe public spaces, positive community interactions, and relief from everyday stress.

# RECREATION For All

We embrace the diversity of Berks County through County parks and trails that are inclusive, welcoming, and accessible to all and proarams that provide all people the opportunity to play, learn, and explore by removing barriers to participation.

# COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND PROMOTION

We build awareness among residents and community leaders about the value and quality of the County park and trail system through effective marketing of recreation facilities and programs and education about the individual and community benefits of parks and recreation

# **ECONOMIC** GROWTH

**~**...

We play an important role in making Berks County a place where people want to live, work, and play. Public financial support to safeguard, maintain, repair, and invest in the County park and trail system will help to attain the region's economic goals and provide the quality of parks and recreation services residents desire.

-

# STEWARDSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY We conserve and sustain natural and cultural resources for present and future generations and provide education and learning opportunities for people to appreciate and connect with

culture, history, and nature.

# PARTNERSHIPS AND VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT

We promote opportunities for partnerships, volunteer support, and private sector involvement in funding to keep Countyowned historic sites, parks, and trails a vital and treasured component of Berks County, with residents and partners engaging with us by contributing ideas, funding, and time.

# INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

We strive to be forward thinking and are committed to providing leadership in innovative services, technology, and facilities for the public's benefit, by constantly exploring new ways of doing things better and doina better thinas

# **Recommendations**

Recommendations for addressing the challenges the Berks **County Parks and Recreation Department faces are based** on the core values identified as the basis for this plan. The Plan recommendations provide elected officials, parks and recreation board members, volunteers, staff, partners, local businesses, nonprofit organizations, and residents with the tools that will lead Berks County to do the best job possible to enhance and sustain its park and trail system and provide memorable community events and programs that celebrate the County's rich natural and cultural heritage. Cooperation, communication, oversight of Plan implementation, partnerships, and support will be essential.

While this Plan sets out an ambitious vision for the future of the Berks County Parks and Recreation Department, realizing this vision will require:

- A commitment to the municipal funding necessary to improve and enhance Berks County park areas, recreation facilities, recreation programs, and trails.
- Continued and expanded resident involvement, through volunteering, fundraising, advocacy groups, and support for new initiatives.

It is the responsibility of the Parks and Recreation Department staf with the guidance of the Parks and Recreation Board, to develop Strategic Plan to begin implementing the recommendations of this Plan. Prioritizing items and setting realistic goals will be very important The starting point for the Strategic Plan should identify the three or four highest and hardest priorities that need to be accomplished to establish a successful long-term path forward. In addition, completing shorter-term actions that can be easily accomplished will help to gai momentum and show results.

The Parks and Recreation Department has identified recommendations for priority action within the first six months to three years. The recommendations are listed below and are not in order of importance Some are grouped together as they are interrelated.

Berks County GREENWAY, PARK AND RECREATION PLAN

<ul> <li>Recommendation 1.4 – Build Relationships with the Health Care Community</li> <li>Recommendations 2.2 and 7.4 – Hire the Natural Resource Supervisor and Fill Vacant Positions</li> </ul>	S
Natural Resource Supervisor and Fill Vacant Positions	
<b>Becommendation 2.1</b> Make Association	
<b>Recommendation 3.1</b> – Make Accessibility Improvements to County Parks and Trails ar Provide Accessibility Information	١d
<b>Recommendation 3.3</b> – Adopt a Written ff, Inclusion Statement	
is <b>Recommendation 4.1</b> – Strengthen the t. Volunteer System to Build Advocacy and Support	
Recommendation 5.1 – Develop and Implement a Comprehensive Marketing Pla	n
Recommendation 6.1 and 5.4 – Implement Online Registration and Reservation System and Improve the Department Website	
<b>Recommendation 7.6</b> – Hire a Berks County Engineer/Project Manager	′

# lation 1.4 – Build Relationships Ith Care Community



# **CORE VALUE 1 – HEALTH AND WELLNESS**

Getting people of all ages connected to the outdoors and nature will have a positive effect on the health and wellness of residents. An increased focus by the health care community on encouraging active living through outdoor recreation will help to address today's pressing health care issues. The communication of the connection between health and the outdoors to Berks County residents and community leaders is a priority for the Parks and Recreation Department.

**Recommendation 1.1 – Play an Expanded Role in Growing and Connecting the County Trail Network** – Berks County has a long and successful greenway preservation history. Berks County's connections to the Schuylkill River and its tributaries form an integral part of the Parks and Recreation Department's purpose and mission. Trails are what the public wants. The online survey results revealed that three of the top four outdoor activities that residents most often participate in are walking/running, hiking, and bicycling/mountain biking. In addition, three of the top four highest facility priorities for financial investment concern trails - community or regional trail systems, closing gaps between different trail systems and recreational areas, and walking and biking connections between schools, parks, and neighborhoods. The Parks and Recreation Department should play an expanded role and work closely with the County Planning Commission on greenway and trail development and acquisition in the County.

#### Recommendation 1.2 – Examine the Possibility of Taking over Ownership of the Schuylkill River Trail Sections in Berks County

- The Schuylkill River Trail is a multi-use path that, when completed, will extend 120 miles from Frackville in Schuylkill County, through Berks, Chester, and Montgomery Counties to Philadelphia. Over 75 miles of paved and crushed stone trail are open to the public. Every County that the Schuylkill River Trail passes through (Schuylkill, Chester, Montgomery, and Philadelphia) has accepted ownership and maintenance responsibilities for it except for Berks County. Regional trails along the Schuylkill River and trail connections are aligned with the Parks and Recreation Department's mission and are critically important to the County's open space system. If this recommendation is implemented, the Thun Trail from Reading south to the Montgomery County line, the section of the Bartrum Trail from Hamburg to the Schuylkill County line, and a 30-mile stretch from Hamburg to Reading (when it is completed) would become a part of the Berks County Parks and Recreation system. While the County would take ownership of the trail, maintenance and operation could be accomplished with the help of partners, rather than through the Parks and Recreation Department. A thorough examination of the pros and cons of taking over ownership of the Schuylkill River Trail should be completed, to include in-depth discussions with Schuylkill, Chester, Montgomery, and Philadelphia Counties.

Recommendation 1.3 – Consider the Establishment of a Trails Supervisor Staff Position – As the County expands its role in greenways and trails, the addition of a Trails Supervisor position should be considered. Work would focus on improving the existing and proposed trail system at Antietam Lake Park, developing loop trails at County parks, improving the maintenance of the Schuylkill River Trail, completing a network of greenways and trails in Berks County that connect population centers to parks, schools, trails, and other community destinations; and expanding greenways and trails to connect to areas of the County that have service gaps. Work would also involve coordinating with trail groups at Blue Marsh Lake, Neversink Mountain, and Mount Penn Preserve for trail improvements and linkages and coordinating with the Schuylkill River Greenways National Heritage Area and Berks Nature for existing projects as well as future trail connections.

**Recommendation 1.4 – Build Relationships with the Health Care Community** – The Parks and Recreation Department and health care organizations in Berks County share the mutual goal of nurturing healthy and active residents. Growing scientific evidence confirms that being outdoors, especially in natural settings, has essential health benefits. Through partnerships and relationships with the health care community, the Parks and Recreation Department will expand nature-based health and wellness facilities and programs and equip health care providers with the tools needed to promote the health benefits of outdoor recreation.

Recommendation 1.5 – Implement a Tobacco-Free Policy for County Parks, Trails, and Recreation Facilities – As part of its commitment to improving the health of residents, the County-owned parks and trails should become tobacco-free public spaces. This would include any location within a park, including parking lots.

Recommendation 1.6 - Improve Outdoor Recreation Facilities - In addition to walking or biking on the Union Canal Trail, the County parks have many other health and wellness opportunities. Improving facilities in the County parks that support outdoor recreation such as fishing, birdwatching, paddling, picnicking, hiking, and mountain biking, will help to engage more people in outdoor activities. As examples, improvements for picnicking could include upgrading the electric service at all pavilions, building a new pavilion at Stonecliffe Recreation Area, installing a new play area near the picnic facilities at Red Bridge Recreation Area, and adding picnic tables and grills in areas that can accommodate them.



The ability to protect and enhance natural resources grows increasingly challenging as the public's interests diversify, infrastructure ages, and climate changes. The Parks and Recreation Department must plan for how to sustainably manage its resources in the future. Conservation efforts that protect open space, prioritize greening of existing parkland, utilize greenways for open space and trails, find a balance between recreational opportunities and natural resource protection, and restore and improve natural habitats should be expanded.

Recommendation 2.1 – Play an Expanded Role in the Preservation of Open Space – The Department should be included in all discussions on preserving land and open space for potential future development as parks and trails. The most important regionally significant land, natural areas, historic resources, and linkages to acquire for the future County park and trail system should be identified.

Recommendation 2.2 – Hire the Natural Resource Supervisor – The new Natural Resource Supervisor will be the champion for the natural aspects of the park system, currently only the Assistant Director has the necessary expertise to oversee this work. The Natural Resource Supervisor would lead efforts to expand naturalized areas and maximize the ecological benefits in the County parks.

Recommendation 2.3 – Expand Environmental Outreach – Well-managed parks balance the desire to enhance natural resource areas with the need to provide active and passive play opportunities. Incorporating passive environmental education and sustainability initiatives into park sites will expand resident understanding of environmental issues, opportunities, and benefits and encourage a lifelong commitment for caring and conserving natural and cultural resources. Programming such as habitat restoration, sustainable living, nature, and cultural history programs should be expanded. Other activities should include interpretative signs, demonstration areas (BMP's, rain gardens), and natural resource enhancement areas (pollinator gardens, habitat enhancements) in the parks.

**Recommendation 2.4** – Expand the Number of Full-Time Park Rangers and Their Enforcement Capabilities – As the number of visitors to County parks and trails increases, issues with inappropriate facility use or conflicts between visitors increases. To better protect park resources and park visitors in the future, additional full-time park rangers with expanded roles and enhanced abilities to enforce rules and regulations will be necessary.



# **CORE VALUE 3 – RECREATION FOR ALL**

Ensuring all Berks County residents have close-to-home opportunities for recreation is vitally important to the future of outdoor recreation in the County. All people are not served if there are segments of the population who feel disconnected or unwelcome, or simply don't have easy access to outdoor spaces and amenities. Age, neighborhood, gender, color of skin, language, ability, or socioeconomic standing should not be barriers to enjoying outdoor recreation. Overcoming real and perceived barriers through enhanced access, amenities, and programs will help all people feel invited and engaged in Berks County outdoor spaces.

Recommendation 3.1 – Make Accessibility Improvements to County Parks and Trails and Provide Accessibility Information – The Parks and Recreation Department should give priority to ADA and basic amenity improvements at County parks and trails and enhance recreational amenities to meet the needs and expectations of underserved people. Providing information on accessibility on the Department website would prepare visitors who need accommodations for what they will or will not be able to access when they arrive at the park. Facility improvements such as providing accessible pathways to all recreation facilities, accessible benches in shaded areas, wheelchair accessible fishing areas, and accessible kayak launch/exit sites allow physically disabled visitors to enjoy the outdoors and are important amenities for the elderly population. The lack of accessibility to the County Parks and Recreation administrative offices sends the message that the physically disabled and those with mobility challenges are not welcome in the parks and recreation system. It is imperative that the offices be made accessible so that everyone can access them.

Recommendation 3.2 - Eliminate Special Event and Program Fees - The Parks and Recreation Department should make its special events and programs free to the public. This will open the program doors to all, regardless of income. Business sponsorships should help to cover the cost of special events. An entire season of interpretive programs can be underwritten by a business, as well. Donation buckets should be available at all special events. Grants should also be investigated to support interpretive programs and special events.

Recommendation 3.3 – Adopt a Written Inclusion Statement – Promoting and valuing the involvement of all persons in recreation program offerings and at park areas and recreation facilities is important. An inclusion statement such as this should be placed on the Department's website: "The Berks County Parks and Recreation Department values diversity as a community asset and is committed to creating inclusive spaces, places, and programs that promote the dignity and respect of all users of its services and facilities regardless of age, race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical ability, economic background, country of origin, or religious practices."

**Recommendation 3.4 – Adopt a Berks County Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights** – All children deserve the opportunity to grow and learn through outdoor experiences. The Parks and Recreation Department should play a leadership role and adopt a fundamental list of outdoor experiences that every child in Berks County would benefit from experiencing, before entering high school, and enlist partners to join in working towards making this come true for all children. Sample text would be: Every child in Berks County should, by the end of their 14th year, have the opportunity to experience the following activities: 1. Play in a safe place 2. Explore nature 3. Learn to swim 4. Go fishing 5. Follow a trail 6. Camp under the stars 7. Ride a bike 8. Go boating 9. Connect with the past 10. Plant a seed.

Recommendation 3.5 – Diversify the Staff to Reflect Berks County's Population – The Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park and its recreation areas and Antietam Lake Park/Angora Fruit Farm are in close proximity to the City of Reading and its immediate suburban areas where many people are of Latino heritage and may primarily speak Spanish. A sufficient number of County parks and recreation staff, particularly park rangers, front desk workers, and program leaders, should reflect this segment of the population.

Recommendation 3.6 – Add Experiences that Make all Feel Welcome – Making all segments of the County population feel welcome at the County parks and trails is important. With the large Latino population in the County, adding familyfocused special events and adding amenities at parks where all generations can comfortably and safely recreate together should be a priority for the Department. Gathering as an extended family is a top recreation activity for people of Latino heritage.

# CORE VALUE 4 – PARTNERSHIPS AND VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT

Partnership initiatives and volunteer involvement strengthens and expands the County parks and trails system and results in the Parks and Recreation Department being recognized as a valuable community asset. Identifying the key strategic partners for the Department and strengthening the volunteer program is vital for the growth and viability of the County parks and trails system.

Recommendation 4.1 – Strengthen the Volunteer System to Build Advocacy and Support – Strengthening the current volunteer program is essential to the Department's operation. Naming the volunteer program 'Friends of Berks County Parks and Trails' will provide volunteers with a group identity and solidify their important role as part of the Parks and Recreation Department. Volunteer opportunities for members of Friends of Berks County Parks and Trails would include the Heritage Center jobs and new opportunities such as Trail Stewards and Trail Ambassadors. All of the things currently provided to volunteers such as the bi-monthly newsletter and annual recognition dinner would be part of the benefits of Friends membership. Other benefits could include items such as special event coupons, apparel, pavilion rental discounts, and the first chance to register for programs. The purpose of the Friends of Berks County Parks and Trails would include:

- Promoting responsible use and care of parks and trails.
- Providing advice and support for park and trail improvements.
- Raising the public's awareness of the parks and recreation system.
- Volunteering at programs and activities.
- Promoting environmental responsibility and outdoor education.
- Sponsoring fundraising special events for the parks.
- Engaging residents as stewards of the parks and recreation system.

**Recommendation 4.2** – Develop and Maintain Effective Public and Private Partnerships – The Parks and Recreation Department has a number of important partners whose missions align with it, including Berks Nature, Schuvlkill River Greenways National Heritage Area, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Blue Marsh Lake. Strengthening these existing partnerships will further advance the mission of the Parks and Recreation Department. In addition, forming new strategic partnerships will help to expand the reach of the County parks and trails to a more diverse population. The Parks and Recreation Department should consider:

- Beginning partnerships with Penn State Health St. Joseph Medical Center, Tower Health Reading Hospital, and other health care agencies for promotion of outdoor park experiences, self-directed recreation opportunities, and programmed recreation opportunities, keying on the important link between physical activity and better health.
- Exploring a partnership with Penn State Berks due to its close proximity to Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park.
- Exploring partnership with agencies that serve lower income and other underserved populations.
- Beginning partnerships with the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance, Smart Growth Alliance of Berks County, and Greater Reading Economic Partnership to better position Berks County's parks and trails as important in County economic development efforts.
- Identifying expertise that the Parks and Recreation Department needs (marketing/promotion, sustainability) and actively pursuing partners in those areas, particularly among the County's higher education agencies such as Reading Area Community College, Alvernia University, Penn State Berks, and Albright University.

Recommendation 4.3 – Strengthen the Role of the Berks County Parks and Recreation Board – The Parks and Recreation Board plays an important role as a direct connection to advise the County Commissioners. Board members should leverage their personal and professional connections to foster partnerships to support the Department. As a Board, it should advocate for budget funds and recommend future Board appointees to County Commissioners. Board meetings should be focused on specific topics that require input, rather than the day-to-day work of the Department.

# CORE VALUE 5 – COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND PROMOTION

Expanded marketing and promotion efforts will build public awareness of the value of Parks and Recreation Department services to residents and the community. Better recognition by the public of the park and trail system, its mission, and its importance to the community is needed. Education of government, business, and community leaders about the value, benefits, and community impact of the County parks and trails is important to acquire partnerships and public and private financial support.

Recommendation 5.1 - Develop and Implement a Comprehensive Marketing Plan - A marketing plan should be developed that emphasizes the connection between outdoor recreation and improved health and wellness and begins to position the Berks County Parks and Recreation Department as a driver of economic development for its role in outdoor recreation, heritage, and eco-tourism. These efforts should promote the Parks and Recreation Department's success in the quality of its parks, recreation facilities, and recreation programs; the positive experiences people have, and how people and the community benefit from County parks and programs. The marketing plan should address 'brand' recognition through strategies such as signage standards, improved outreach efforts and information distribution, and improved public awareness and use of parks, recreation facilities, and recreation programs. A broad array of techniques and strategies should be used to reach diverse audiences including social media influencers, staff outreach, bloggers, program banners, word of mouth networks, program participant and park user testimonials, and community liaisons. Utilizing the expertise of marketing and communication experts to develop the marketing plan will ensure that the marketing plan is responsive, efficient, and communicates as intended.

Recommendation 5.2 - Establish a Marketing and Development Supervisor Position - To expand public awareness of the park and trail system, promote the parks and historic sites as tourist destinations, foster increased volunteer support, build partnerships, promote special events and recreation programs, seek business sponsorships, and raise funds, a full-time staff position is needed whose work is completely focused on marketing and development. Dedicating a staff person to marketing and development will lead to increased revenue to support the Parks and Recreation Department's operation.

Recommendation 5.3 – Prepare and Distribute an Annual Report – An annual report that features highlights from the past year including important projects completed, visitation numbers, testimonials from visitors, volunteer spotlights, special event and program successes, photos of people enjoying the parks and programs, and the conditions and needs of the parks and recreation system should be prepared and distributed to educate local opinion and public leaders who can advocate for and influence funding.

**<u>Recommendation 5.4 – Improve the Department Website</u> – The Department website does not highlight the** wonderful natural and cultural features of the County park system as best as it could. In addition, items such as online facility reservations and program registrations, downloadable maps, and the Department mission statement, vision statement, and core values should be included. Redesigning the website will expand the amount and quality of the information available and make it easier to access the information. As Berks County updates the overall County website, improvements to the Parks and Recreation pages should be incorporated. Utilization of interactive mapping tools on the Parks department website should also be employed.

<u>Recommendation 5.5 – Promote the Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park</u> – The County recreation areas along the Tulpehocken Creek should be promoted under one name as the Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park. Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park should be prominently listed on park signs at each recreation area entrance (with the recreation area name below the park name), in newsletters and brochures, on social media, and on the Department's website.

Recommendation 5.6 - Install New Park Entrance and Road Signs - The park entrance signs at County park sites should be replaced with unified signs designed to unite the separate recreation areas into the Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park and to promote the parks as a County system. Road signs to direct visitors to the park entrances are also needed.

Recommendation 5.7 - Change the Department Name - The title of the Department should reflect the facilities it operates and its overall responsibilities. A suggested new title for the Department is Berks County Parks, Recreation, and Trails, dropping the word 'Department' which is not needed. Recommendation 5.8 – Cross-Promote Regional Outdoor Recreation Opportunities – Berks County has an abundance of outdoor areas that are not County owned, such as Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Blue Marsh Lake, and Lake Ontelaunee, that offer outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities. As a County-wide agency, the Parks and Recreation Department should promote all outdoor recreation opportunities whether they are operated by County, municipal, state, federal, or non-profit agencies. Residents do not care who owns the parks and trails or offers the programs. They just want to enjoy the outdoors. Berks County has 54,294 acres of public park and recreation facilities (federal, state, county, municipal) and an additional 17,037 acres of private recreation facilities such as sportsman's clubs, scout camps, and golf courses. Promotion can be done through the Department website with photos and online links. A very good list of outdoor recreation opportunities is on the Pennsylvania's Americana Region Visitor's Bureau website. Visitors to Berks County are the primary users of this website, not residents, so replicating this list on the Parks and Recreation Department website will build awareness of these outdoor opportunities among residents. Berks Nature's Greater Reading Trails Partnership website provides links to the many trails and greenways in Berks County, including Angelica Creek Park and Trail, Antietam Lake Park, Appalachian Trail, Big Woods Trail, Blue Marsh Lake, Earl Poole Sanctuary, Exeter Scenic River Trail, French Creek State Park, Gravity Trail, Green Hills Preserve, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, Horseshoe Trail, Monocacy Hill Recreation Area, Mount Penn Preserve, Muhlenberg Rail Trail, Neversink Mountain, Nolde Forest, Pinnacle, Reading Public Museum, Schuylkill River Trail, Union Canal Trail, and Wyomissing Creek Trail. Links to these trails should be on the Parks and Recreation Department website. In addition, the website should include links to social media pages that offer information on family-friendly outdoor activities in Berks County.

**Recommendation 5.9 – Promote Use of County Parks through Dynamic Programming** – Recreation programs and special events are often the catalyst that brings residents and visitors out to parks for the first time. Parks are places for recreation activities to happen, including organized recreation programs and events. Because of the pandemic shutdown, the Department has the opportunity to reimagine the future for park special events and programs. A dynamic program schedule meets the needs of a wide range of residents, from educational programs for school and scout groups, fun summer day camps, gardening programs, walks and hikes, cultural history programs, environmental education programs, outdoor activities, arts and crafts workshops, and seasonal and holiday special events. All special events and programs should have partners involved. The Department should consider offering the following:

- Outdoor wellness programs in partnership with health care organizations, as a series of Park Rx programs.
- Special events planned with the help of multiple partners rather than special events sponsored solely by the Department.
- Contracted environmental programs using partners such as Berks Nature.

# **CORE VALUE 6 – INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY**

All aspects of life are linked in some form or another to technology, including how people experience the outdoors. Technology gives the public instant access to information about outdoor recreation opportunities, allows for online program registration and rental of park facilities, and enhances the way people navigate and explore the outdoors. Outdoor purists feel that unplugged outdoor experiences are "real" or "better," but the traditional vision of outdoor recreation is evolving as the needs and interests of residents evolve and change. A compromise between technology and nature is necessary because future generations will expect technology accessibility. The fact that people are outdoors is what matters, whether they are using the Internet, laptops, phones, and other technology or not. Leveraging technology innovation is an opportunity to continue to make parks and recreation facilities and programming relevant to generations of Americans who will never remember a time before the Internet. In addition, technology and Internet access make the outdoors safer. With GPS units, personal locator beacons, satellite telephones, smart phone apps, and increased cellular coverage, technology allows outdoor visitors to know precisely where they are, how fast they are moving and in what direction, and how to signal for help, all at the press of a button. Women, people of color, LGBTQ+, and many other underrepresented groups still face harassment, threats, and assault in the outdoors. This danger is mitigated with technology and people can feel more confident in nature.

**Recommendation 6.1 – Implement Online Registration and Reservation Systems** – It is essential that the Parks and Recreation Department upgrade its computer systems to allow residents to reserve and pay for picnic pavilion and barn rentals and to register for programs online. This will save staff time and add convenience for visitors by making the reservation and registration process easier. Systems should include being able to see facility availability and program openings in real-time. The process to sign up as a volunteer should also be converted to an online system.

**Recommendation 6.2 – Increase Mobile Connectivity through Wi-Fi** – Smart parks allow park visitors (both adults and children) to remain connected to their applications while still benefitting from being outdoors by providing easily accessible Wi-Fi. Wi-Fi allows the always-connected consumer to maintain their online lifestyle inside the boundaries of a park, engaging with media — social and otherwise — and staying in touch with work and family. With the pandemic, many jobs went remote, and that gave people an opportunity to work while on the move. Technology, like Wi-Fi hotspots and solar generators, allows people to work and enjoy the outdoors more than ever before. It removes barriers for those who want and need to become more physically active but are afraid of feeling isolated without access to their messaging apps, streaming digital music services, and social media platforms. Social media can serve as its very own marketing and promotion channel. As visitors share their photos and comments about the great time they are having, they motivate their friends and followers to join in on the fun. Technology is also a wonderful way to bring social equity to the park system. Wi-Fi in parks can provide free Internet connection in parts of the community where it is otherwise scarce. App-based gaming systems are being made available in multiple languages and are being refined to put physically or emotionally challenged children at the center of play.

Recommendation 6.3 – Utilize Digital Kiosks and Mobile Apps – Smart parks can offer on-site digital displays and mobile apps that promote park and facility features and allow residents to easily register for upcoming events and activities while offerings are top-of-mind. Proprietary, park-designed apps can educate visitors about activities in a particular park. as well as others in the system that the visitor was not even aware of and give them the opportunity to reserve facility space. Park kiosks and apps can also serve as education tools and help younger generations learn to appreciate and enrich their understanding of the natural, cultural, and historic aspects of the outdoors through technology. Interactive displays and apps can educate users about local history, provide fun facts about flora and fauna, and offer interactive games and guizzes that are relevant to the park.

<u>Recommendation 6.4 – Install Solar Charging Stations and Benches with USB Ports for Portable Electronic Devices</u> - Wi-Fi enabled parks must allow residents to keep their connection through the availability of charging stations. Charging stations and solar-powered charging benches should be added within the parks and at selected pavilions. This convenience may be a decision maker between a resident choosing to take their lunch break outside or continue to sit at their office desk, phone charged, while they eat their lunch and scroll through their social media accounts.

**<u>Recommendation 6.5 – Include QR Code Plaques throughout the Parks and Trails</u> – QR codes are another way to** communicate with park and trail visitors by sharing messages and information of interest while they are physically at a park or trail spot. QR codes are currently in use in some of the County parks but consideration should be given to expanding the use of QR codes to more areas of the County Park system.

Recommendation 6.6 – Explore the Efficiency of Technology Applications for Park Maintenance – Trash pickup can be done less frequently through the use of solar-compacting trash receptacles. Apps are available that allow park visitors to alert staff to areas of the park that require immediate maintenance. Residents can report maintenance needs from any connected device, eliminating the time-consuming process of making a phone call or walking into a park office. The most advanced solutions allow residents to use a variety of communication channels to report repairs, including phone calls, text messages, email, and even social media. Residents can take a geo-tagged photo and submit it with their request, further streamlining the repair process for parks and recreation maintenance teams. This helps the park staff more efficiently handle these issues and demonstrates to visitors the responsiveness and dedication of the park maintenance staff.

**Recommendation 6.7 – Install Electric Charging Stations for Vehicles** – As more people purchase electric vehicles, installing charging stations in parks will be a feature visitors will look for. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), transportation accounted for the largest portion (27%), of U.S. Greenhouse Gas emissions in 2020. Electric Vehicles (EVs) reduce air and noise pollution. With more EV driving visitors, the short and long-term quality of the parks' natural resources and the local environment will be preserved. Parks are also an ideal location for EV Charging Stations due to the amount of time visitors spend there. Installation costs can be minimized by choosing a location with easy access to existing electricity, for example pavilions and visitors' centers. If choosing to install at a remote location with no electric, renewable energy sources can be considered, such as solar, to power the charging station. The plans for a county park lighting upgrade are currently being worked on and will include electric charging stations.

**<u>Recommendation 6.8 – Promote Gaming Integrations</u> – One of the greatest hurdles that parks and recreation** departments face is their ability to connect with youth who are spending more time indoors and in front of a screen than ever before. Thanks to augmented reality technology and park exploration gamification opportunities, young people no longer need to choose between their devices and being outdoors. Mobile-based games such as Pokemon Go and other geocache and digital treasure-hunting applications help children to engage with, learn about, and develop a connection with the outdoors, all while developing a lifelong love of parks and nature as they play. Smart playgrounds use app-based games in conjunction with playground equipment. Parents simply open up an app that allows the children to play ageappropriate, interactive, imagination-fueled games. Other app-based games, such as Discovery Agents' Mission Maker, promote getting kids out in nature and learning, and allow park staff to customize "missions" based on the features of the park. These missions use geo-triggered content, and challenges center on the geographic landscape of a particular park. Research has shown that these interactive games are not only an effective learning tool, but also cause kids to play longer, harder, and more often. In addition, parents can access a dashboard showing their children's physical activity profile, and parks are provided with a wealth of data, including usage patterns, distance walked, and challenges engaged with and solved.

# **CORE VALUE 7 – ECONOMIC GROWTH**

There are opportunities for growth of the outdoor recreation economy through Berks County parks and trails, but commitment to financial investments must improve. Most of the County park system development took place from the late-1960s to the mid-1970s. Capital repair and rehabilitation needs are mounting up and new parks and trails are being created. To sustain a viable park and trail system, the public sector must provide the necessary financial support.

Recommendation 7.1 - Expand Revenue Generation - Innovative ways to generate revenue to support the Department's operation are needed. These funds should go into The Friends of Berks County Parks Fund to be used for park improvements, rather than into the County general fund. Presently, the Friends of Berks County Parks Fund is an endowment fund which only allows the Department to use 4.5% each year. The ability to withdraw funds more readily should be explored. Ideas to generate revenue include:

Make the Friends of the Berks County Parks Fund (which currently totals approximately \$60,000) more visible and put a plan in place to seek contributions. A start would be a description of the Fund on the Department website with a link to make donations.

Accept donations at special events.

- Obtain business sponsorship for all special events.
- Hold a fundraising walk/run for the parks and trails.

Offer a Park Rx wellness program series sponsored by health care systems.

Recommendation 7.2 – Budget Sufficient Funds to Operate Antietam Lake Park/Angora Fruit Farm and Other Parks and Trails - As new parks and trails are developed, their ongoing maintenance and long-term care must be adequately budgeted for. Deferred maintenance at the parks is being chipped away at, but additional funds are needed for this important work. A well-funded County park system is an investment that supports the County's economy and its quality of life.

Recommendation 7.3 – Budget Funds for New Staff Positions – The Parks and Recreation Department is understaffed for the size of the parks and trails system while services and facilities continue to grow. The County's capacity to plan, support, and manage its parks, trails, and open space system needs to be enhanced. As the County park and trail system continues to grow with the development of Antietam Lake Park and possible transfer of the Schuylkill River Trail, additional staff will be required for the administration, operation, and maintenance of these facilities. Two full-time Maintenance Workers and one full-time Park Ranger will be needed when Antietam Lake Park is fully operational. The Trails Supervisor and Marketing and Development Supervisor positions will need to be funded as well

Recommendation 7.4 - Fill Vacant Positions - The Director and Assistant Director are bogged down with day-to-day, hands-on operational work. This leaves little time for planning, project coordination, and bigger-picture thinking. Many essential staff positions are also currently vacant. Wages may need to be increased to attract candidates to fill these important jobs. In particular, filling the full-time Office Support IV position should be a priority to handle the office operations and implement the proposed on-line reservation system more effectively.

Recommendation 7.5 – Hire a Berks County Grant Writer/Coordinator – To successfully obtain grant funds for County park and trail improvements and to manage the reporting requirements once grants are received, a County staff position completely focused on grant writing and coordination is needed. This position should be shared across other County departments. For the Parks and Recreation Department, assistance is needed to secure alternate funding sources for parks capital projects.

<u>Recommendation 7.6 – Hire a Berks County Engineer/Project Manager</u> – To manage Berks County facility capital construction projects more efficiently, including those of the Parks and Recreation Department, a County Engineer is needed. Parks and Recreation Department staff do not have the expertise or the time necessary to oversee capital construction projects effectively. If an in-house County Engineer is not possible, the County should contract with an engineering company that can be used when needed by the Parks and Recreation Department.



## **CHAPTER 4: GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION**

# **REGIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

# **HAWK MOUNTAIN:**

- Coordinate implementation of developing Trail Gaps #1 and #2.
- Prepare regional recreation, park and open space plans.
- Support development and expansion of greenway system. Specifically, Greenway Hub #1 and #2 and Corridor #3.
- Review zoning ordinances and subdivision ordinances to allow for increased protection of greenway hubs and corridors. Specifically, existing regulations which guide development in areas of Development Impact zones #1 and #2.
- Continue support of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary.
- Collaborate in the completion of Schuylkill River Trail segments.
- Support and grow recreational economy through Appalachian Trail thru hikers and Hawk Mountain Sanctuary.



# **OLEY HILLS:**

- Coordinate implementation of developing Trail Gap #3.
- Prepare regional recreation, park and open space plans.
- Support development and expansion of greenway system. Specifically, Greenway Hub #4 and Corridor #5.
- Review zoning ordinances and subdivision ordinances to allow for increased protection of greenway hubs and corridors. Specifically, existing regulations which guide development in areas of Development Impact zones #3 and #4.

# SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS:

- Coordinate implementation of developing Trail Gaps #4 and #5.
- Review zoning ordinances and subdivision ordinances to allow for increased protection of greenway hubs and corridors. Specifically, existing regulations which guide development in areas of Development Impact zones #5, #6 and #7.
- Prepare regional recreation, park and open space plans.
- Implement projects identified in the County Bicycle and Pedestrian plan.
- Support development and expansion of greenway system hubs and corridors. Specifically, Greenway Hubs #6 and #7.
- Collaborate in the completion of Schuylkill River Trail segments.
- Support and grow recreational economy through visitation and use of French Creek State Park, Birdsboro watershed, Monocacy Hill, state forests and gamelands, Schuylkill River Trail and Daniel Boone Homestead.

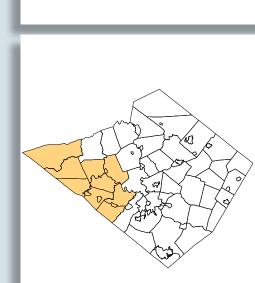
These recommendations are specific to the five planning regions of Berks County and should be employed along with the municipal and countywide goals identified previously in this chapter. The recommendations should be implemented through collaboration among municipalities and identified recreational organizations. Recommendations were developed from the results of the mapping analysis, identification of region-specific projects from existing municipal planning documents, the plan's core values, and input from stakeholders and county residents.

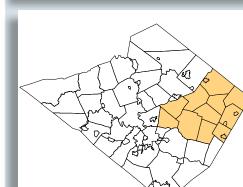
# **METRO:**

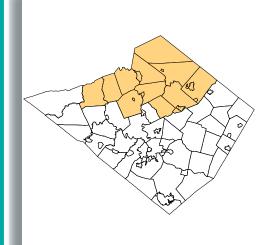
- Coordinate implementation of developing Trail Gaps #6, #7 and #8.
- Prepare regional recreation, park and open space plans.
- Implement projects identified in the City of Reading's Active Transportation Plan.
- Support the development of the GoggleWorks outdoor plaza and art park.
  - Implement projects identified in the County Bicycle and Pedestrian plan.
  - Support development and expansion of greenway system hubs and corridors. Specifically, Greenway Corridors #8 and #9.
  - Review zoning ordinances and subdivision ordinances to allow for increased protection of greenway hubs and corridors. Specifically, existing regulations which guide development in areas of Development Impact zones #8 and #9.
  - Support the Mount Penn Preserve development of Forest Stewardship and Trails Feasibility Plans and their implementation.
  - Continue collaboration of Greater Reading Trails, Berks Nature, Berks County Parks and Recreation Department.
- Collaborate in the completion of Schuylkill River Trail segments.
- Promote the WyoWays Bike Trail program.
- Antietam Lake Park.
- Support the development of the La Vereda: Gerry Street Connector Trail Support and complete construction of 600 Canal Street Skate Park through cooperation with Reading Skate Park Association.
- Support the development of the Alvernia University Bike Share program.

# **TULPEHOCKEN:**

- Support development and expansion of greenway system hubs and corridors. Specifically, Greenway Corridors #10.
- Review zoning ordinances and subdivision ordinances to allow for increased protection of greenway hubs and corridors. Specifically, existing regulations which guide development in areas of Development Impact zones #10, #11, #12. #13 and #14.
- Work to provide additional trail systems within the region. Specifically, creating accessible loop trails on publicly owned lands.
- Prepare regional recreation, park and open space plans.
- Implement projects identified in the Bethel, Marion and Tulpehocken Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan.
- Support and grow recreational economy through visitation and use of Blue Marsh Lake, Camp Conrad Weiser and George Wertz State forest.







### **CHAPTER 4: GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION**

Support and grow the recreational economy through visitation and use of Nolde Forest, Mount Penn Preserve and Neversink Mountain, Schuylkill River Trail and







# CHAPTER 5 FUNDING

### **CHAPTER 5: FUNDING**

# Funding

Municipalities, recreational organizations, and non-profits should strive to provide accessible and safe recreation facilities through various financial mechanisms which are also economically sustainable. To achieve that goal, funding programs should be reviewed and discussed on a regular basis. The following information provides insight and guidance into how municipalities, recreational organizations and non-profits can apply for financial assistance.

# **LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES**

#### **Taxes**

Parks and greenways can be funded through sales tax revenues. One example of a community that is using sales tax dollars to fund bicycle and pedestrian facilities is, where citizens voted to implement a one percent local sales tax to provide funding for transportation projects. Over four years, Cobb County Department of Transportation will receive \$3.8 million of this sales tax revenue for bicycle improvements alone, to be used as a match for federal dollars. Another example is, where voters approved at temporary \$0.01 sales tax, which generated millions of dollars for greenway acquisition and development.

#### **Impact Fees**

Impact fees are monetary one-time charges levied by a local government on new development. Unlike required dedications, impact fees can be applied to finance greenway facilities located outside the boundary of development. These fees can be levied through the subdivision or building permit process to finance greenways.

### **Bond Referendums**

Communities across the nation have successfully placed propositions on local ballots to support parks and greenway development. Since bonds rely on the support of the voting population, an aggressive education and awareness program will need to be implemented prior to any referendum vote.

## **Capital Improvements Program**

Some local governments have initiated a yearly appropriation for park, greenway and trail development in the capital improvements program.

### **Private Sector Sources**

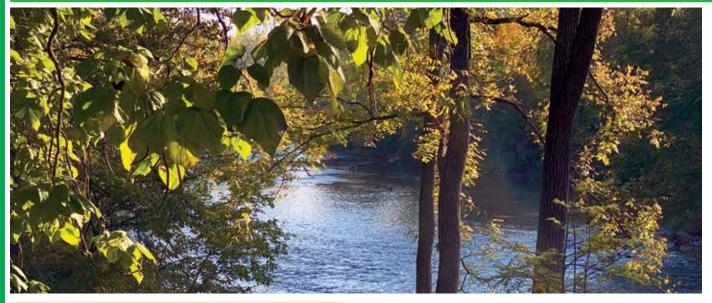
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Many communities have solicited park and greenway funding from a variety of private foundations, corporations, and other conservation-minded benefactors. As a general rule, local foundations and businesses will have a greater interest in and be more likely to fund local projects. These local sources should be approached first, before seeking funds outside the community.

## **CHAPTER 5: FUNDING**



#### **CHAPTER 5: FUNDING**



### Local Businesses

Local industries and private businesses may agree to provide support for development of greenways through:

- Donations of cash to a specific greenway segment;
- Donations of services by corporations to reduce the cost of the greenway;
- Implementation, including equipment and labor to construct and install elements of a trail;
- Donations in the cost of materials purchased from local businesses which support greenway implementation and can supply essential products for facility development.

This method of raising funds requires a great deal of staff coordination. Sometimes materials donated are considered waste materials by local industries and clean fill.

### **Trail Sponsors**

A sponsorship program for trail amenities allows for smaller donations to be received both from individuals and businesses. The program must be well planned and organized, with design standards and associated costs established for each amenity. Project elements which may be funded can include wayside exhibits, benches, trash receptacles, entry signage, and picnic areas. Usually, plaques recognizing the individual contributors are placed on the constructed amenities or at a prominent entry point to the trail.

### Volunteer Work

Community volunteers may help with trail construction, maintenance, fund raising and a whole host of other activities. Potential sources of volunteer labor could include local bicyclists, local historical groups, neighborhood associations, local churches, conservation groups, school groups, and local civic clubs such as Rotary and Lions Clubs.

A manual for park, trail and greenway volunteers should be developed to guide and regulate volunteer work. The manual could include a description of appropriate volunteer efforts, request forms, waiver and release forms, and a completion form (volunteers are asked to summarize their accomplishments). To better organize volunteer activity, a municipality could develop an "Adopta-Spot" program. Participants who adopt a segment of trail are responsible for periodic trash pick-up, but can also install landscaping, prune trail-side vegetation, develop wildlife enhancement projects, and install site amenities. All improvements must be consistent with the municipality's Development Plan and must be approved by the local municipal coordinator. Adopt-a-Spot volunteers are allowed to display their names on a small sign along the adopted section of greenway.

### "Buy-a-Foot" Programs

"Buy-a-Foot" programs have been successful in raising funds and awareness for trail and greenway projects across the Country. Under local initiatives, citizens are encouraged to purchase one linear foot of the greenway by donating the cost of construction. An excellent example of a successful endeavor is the () Greenway "Buy-a-Foot" campaign, in which linear greenway "feet" were sold at a cost of \$25 per foot. Those who donated were given a greenway T-shirt and a certificate. This project provided an estimated \$5,000 in funds.

### **Developer Dedications**

Cary, North Carolina, has used a dedication program to acquire land for its greenway program. Other communities have used such programs to build facilities, such as sidewalks, trail and other amenities, as part of new development. The developer typically fronts the cost of these improvements and passes the costs along to home buyers.

# **PENNSYLVANIA FUNDING SOURCES**

# **Department of Conservation & Natural Resources Community Conservation Partnerships Program Grants**

#### https://bit.ly/ProgramGrants

The State of Pennsylvania makes available grant moneys to municipal governments and non-profits through DCNR's Bureau of Recreation and Conservation (BRC). Funding under this program assists local governments and conservation organizations with funding for projects related to parks, recreation, and conservation. Applications for DCNR's Community Conservation Partnerships Program grants are typically accepted once a year in the spring. Currently available grants are described below.

For more information contact the Northeast Recreation and Conservation Manager: (610) 746-5607.

# **Community Recreation** and Conservation Planning Funding

#### https://bit.ly/PlanningFunding

Planning projects made available under this funding assist in laying the groundwork for future land acquisition, development, and/or management of parks, recreational facilities, critical habitat, open space, natural areas, greenways, and river/watershed corridors. Examples of what this funding supports are: Comprehensive Recreation, Park and Open Space and Greenway, Land Conservation and Stewardship, Master Site Development, and Rivers Conservation Plans. Money is also available for Indoor Recreation and Swimming Pool Complex Feasibility Studies under this funding.

# Park Rehabilitation and Development Funding

https://bit.ly/OppDevelopment

Projects under this funding involve the rehabilitation and development of public indoor and/or outdoor parks, recreation and conservation areas and facilities. Under this funding there are two programs listed below.

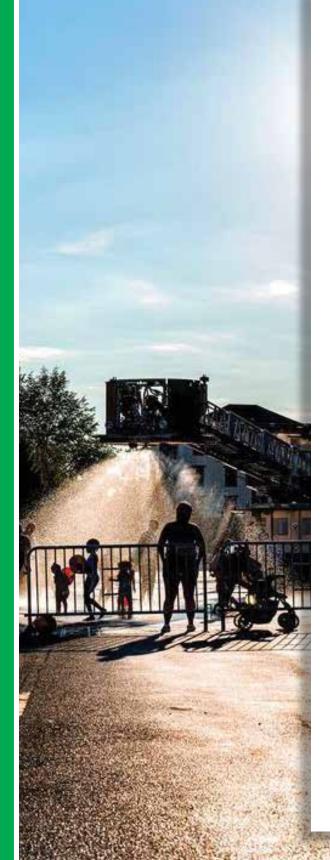
#### Small Community (SC) Program

#### https://bit.lv/SmallCommPrograms

This program allows DCNR to award grant funds with smaller match requirements to municipalities with a population of 5,000 or less.

#### **Rivers Conservation Development**

These projects connect communities to their local waterways by developing public access to waterways for recreation; and/or restoring waterways and the condition of the local watershed.



# **Land Acquisition** and Conservation Funding

#### https://bit.ly/LandConservFunding

These projects involve the purchase and/or donation of land for park and recreation areas, greenways, critical habitat area, and open space.

## Motorized and **Non-Motorized Trail Funding**

#### https://bit.ly/OppMotorized

#### https://bit.lv/OppNonmotorized

Motorized project types include development, rehabilitation, maintenance, and educational programs. Non-motorized project types can include acquisition, planning, development, rehabilitation, maintenance, and educational programs.

# **State and Regional Partnership Funding**

#### https://bit.ly/OppsPartnership

Partnership projects are collaborative statewide or regional initiatives that help build local, county, regional, and statewide capacity to better develop and manage recreation and park facilities and to promote the conservation of natural and heritage resources through plan implementation, education, and training.

# **Peer and Circuit Rider Funding**

#### https://bit.ly/OppPeer

These grant programs fund projects that help municipalities, counties, multi-municipal partnerships, and councils of government to increase local capacity for recreation, parks, and conservation. The Peer program funds collaborative projects that focus on a specific need identified by the grantee and its partners. The Circuit Rider program aids in the hiring of a full-time park, recreation, or conservation professional whose services are shared by the members of a formal partnership, commission, or authority.

# **DCNR Community and** Watershed Forestry Program

#### bit.lv/DCNR Grants

Grants for this program are awarded to municipal entities, educational institutions and non-profits to identify locations in need of riparian forest buffers, lawn conversion, and urban tree-planting and to design, implement, and establish those practices. DCNR will consider a variety of forest buffer project types, including conventional and multifunctional riparian forest buffers. More information about the multifunctional buffer concept is available in the grant application portal. All grants require 20% match from cash or non-cash sources. This grant program requires a minimum grant amount of \$50,000.

# **Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED)**

#### https://dced.pa.gov/

DCED offers a variety of grants that have a relationship to greenways: economic development, travel and tourism, technical assistance and community development. Following is a short list of these grants.

# **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)**

#### https://bit.ly/DevBlockGrant

Grants and technical assistance for federal designated municipalities for any type of community development.

# **City Revitalization and** Improvement Zone (CRIZ)

#### https://bit.lv/ImproveZone

The focus of the program is to provide opportunity to spur new growth, helping to revive downtowns, reviving local economies and improving the lives of residents and visitors. An example of fund usage would be improvement projects including fixtures and equipment for a facility.

# **Flood Mitigation Program**

https://bit.ly/FloodMitigationProgram Projects identified by a local government for flood mitigation are eligible for the program.

https://bit.ly/SmallWaterSewer Grants cover activities to assist with the construction, improvement, expansion, rehabilitation or repair of small water, sewer, storm sewer, and flood control infrastructure projects.

# Greenways, Trails, and **Recreation Program (GTRP)**

#### https://bit.ly/TrailsAndRec

This program funds projects which involve development, rehabilitation, and improvements to public parks, recreation areas, greenways, trails, and river conservation.

# **Keystone Communities Program (KCP)**

#### https://bit.ly/KeystoneComm

This program encourages the creation of partnerships between the public and private sectors that jointly support local initiatives such as the growth and stability of neighborhoods and communities; social and economic diversity; and a strong and secure quality of life.

# **Local Government Capital Project Loan Program (LGCPL)**

#### https://bit.lv/LGCPL

Low-interest loans to local government for equipment and facility needs.

# Local Share Account (LSA) - Category 4 Facilities Program (Berks County)

#### https://bit.lv/LSA Berks

This program funds projects in the public interest to improve the quality of life of citizens in the community.

# **Municipal Assistance Program** (MAP)

#### https://bit.lv/MunAsst

Provides funding to assist local governments to plan for and efficiently implement a variety of services and improvements, and soundly manage development with an emphasis on intergovernmental approaches. Funding is available for shared services and community planning.

# **PA Small Water and Sewer**

# Watershed Restoration and **Protection Program (WRPP)**

#### https://bit.lv/WRPP Berks

The overall goal of the WRPP is to restore and maintain restored stream reaches impaired by the uncontrolled discharge of nonpoint source polluted runoff, and ultimately to remove these streams from the Impaired Waters list. Projects which involve the construction, improvement, expansion, repair, maintenance or rehabilitation of new or existing watershed protection Best Management Practices (BMPs) are covered under this program.

Source: PA DECD Website

# **Rails-to-Trails Grants**

#### https://bit.ly/RailsTrailsGrants

The Rails-to-Trails grants provide 50% funding for the planning, acquisition, or development of rail-trail corridors. For more information call the Northeast Regional Office at (267) 332-4267.

# **Urban and Community Forestry Grants**

#### https://bit.lv/UaCFG

Can be used to encourage the planting of trees in Pennsylvania communities. For more information call (800) 835-8065 or email thePFA@paforestry.org

# **Pennsylvania Department** of Transportation (PENNDOT)

#### www.dot.state.pa.us

Provides various greenway funding options related to transportation.

### **Historic & Museum Commission (PHMC)**

www.artsnet.org/phmc See website for grant information.

# **DEP Growing Greener Plus**

https://bit.ly/DEP GGP Various natural resource related grants.



# LOCAL/STATE/FEDERAL **NON-PROFIT FUNDING SOURCES**

# **Berks County Community** Foundation; Reading, PA

https://bccf.org/

Various grant available to help specific public benefit organizations.

# William Penn Foundation;

#### https://williampennfoundation.org

Dedicated to improving the quality of life in the greater Philadelphia region.

# **Greenway Association** (SRGA); , PA

#### https://schuylkillriver.org/

SRGA administers grant funds for the Schuylkill River Heritage Area through the National and State Heritage Area programs. Also administers other grant funds.

# Natural Lands; Media, PA

### https://natlands.org/

Natural Lands administers and coordinates various grants related to natural resource protection. They also have a successful easement program.

# Heritage Conservancy;

#### https://heritageconservancy.org/

The Heritage Conservancy is very active in natural resource protection.

# Wildlands Conservancy:

https://www.wildlandspa.org/ The Wildlands Conservancy is very active in natural resource protection.

# **Environmental Council;**

#### https://pecpa.org/

Provides technical assistance to organizations. Helps establish Environmental Advisory Councils. Involvement in the PA Water Trails Program.

# **PA Recreation and Park** Society

#### https://www.prps.org/

Provides ongoing training on the nuts and bolts of trail development, economic benefits, trail maintenance, etc.

# We Conserve PA

#### https://weconservepa.org/

Provides conservation education, training and technical assistance service regarding land trusts and greenways and trails.

# Audubon Pennsylvania; Harrisburg, PA;

#### https://pa.audubon.org/

Provides technical assistance to organizations in identifying natural resources. Main interests are related to protection of Important Bird Areas (IBA's).

# **PA Highlands**

#### https://pahighlands.org/

Dedicated to identifying, prioritizing and the future preservation of critical parcels along the Highlands Corridor.

# The Nature Conservancy

#### https://bit.ly/NatureConserve

Provides technical assistance to organizations and is active in easement acquisition.

# **BERKS COUNTY FUNDING RESOURCES**

## Commissioners

#### https://bit.ly/Berks Commissioners

The Berks County Commissioners support many organizations that work towards the protection of our County's natural resources. For more information call (610) 478-6136

# **Planning Commission**

#### https://bit.ly/BerksPlanning

The BCPC staff provide letters of consistency for several grant programs. For more information call (610)478-6300.

# **Berks County Conservation District**

#### http://berkscd.com/

The BCCD conducts numerous educational programs on the preservation of the natural resources of Berks County. For more information call (610) 372-4657.

Certain funding opportunities listed may or may not be active at this time. Please check with that individual organization for more information.

# **PARTNERS TO WORK WITH**

Sustaining the greenway and recreation system within the County is supported by many funding programs as previously discussed. Demonstrating collaboration with partners provides a boost for your funding application. Below are partners that are recommended to be included in your projects. Specifically, these partners could provide financial support, project development support, or assist in bringing you closer to the target audience of your project.

Partner	Contact	Assist
I'm Able Foundation	ttps://imablefoundation.org/	Support for mobility challenged users, equipment for mobility challenged users
Penn State Health St. Joseph's	https://www.pennstatehealth.org/community	Health and wellness programs and connection to target audiences
Berks County Area Agency on Aging	https://www.co.berks.pa.us/Dept/Aging/Pages/default.aspx	Wellness programs and connection to aging population
Tower Health -Reading Hospital	https://towerhealth.org/about-tower-health	Health and wellness programs and connection to target audiences
Take It Outdoors	https://takeitoutdoorsadventures.com/	Support to outdoor programs with equipment
Berks Nature	https://berksnature.org/	Conservation, Environmental Education, Trail projects
Barrio Allegria	https://www.barrioalegria.com/	Grassroots organization providing connections to performing arts and diverse population
South of Penn	https://volunteer.alvernia.edu/agency/detail/?agency_id=117481	Grassroots organization providing outreach and connection to diverse population
Centro Hispano	https://www.centrohispano.org/	Organization providing outreach and connection to diverse population

Partner	Contact	Assist
Vision Resource Center of Berks County	https://vrcberks.org/	Organization providing outreach and connection to recreation user group
Natural Lands Trust	https://natlands.org/	Conservation, Environmental Education, Trail projects, target audience connections
Berks County Department of Agricultural Preservation	https://www.co.berks.pa.us/dept/deptofag/Pages/default.aspx	Conservation, Environmental Education
Berks County Conservation District	http://berkscd.com/	Conservation, Environmental Education, Trail projects
Berks Area Mountain Biking Association	https://berksmountainbiking.org/	Trail projects, Volunteer Resources, user group, target audience connections
Berks Trail Works	https://berkstrailworks.org/	Trail projects, Volunteer Resources, user group, target audience connections
Schuylkill Highlands	https://www.schuylkillhighlands.org/	Conservation, Environmental Education, Trail projects, funding programs, target audience connections
Reading Berks PA Americana	https://www.visitpaamericana.com/	Outreach organization, target audience connections
Berks County Community Foundation	https://bccf.org/	Funding programs, target audience connections
Berks Alliance	https://www.berksalliance.org/	Funding assistance, target audience connections
Greater Reading Chamber Alliance	https://greaterreading.org/	Funding assistance, target audience connections
Reading Recreation Commission	https://www.readingrec.org/	Target audience connections and programming assistance
US Army Corp of Engineers – Blue Marsh Lake	https://www.nap.usace.army.mil/missions/civil-works/blue-marsh-lake/	Target audience connections, programming assistance and support
GoggleWorks	https://goggleworks.org/	Target audience connections, programming assistance and support
French Creek State Park	https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks/FindAPark/FrenchCreekStatePark/ Pages/default.aspx	Target audience connections, programming assistance and support
Hawk Mountain Sanctuary	https://www.hawkmountain.org/	Target audience connections, programming assistance and support
Joanna Furnace	https://haycreek.org/joanna-furnace/	Target audience connections, programming assistance and support
Hopewell Furnace	https://www.nps.gov/hofu/index.htm	Target audience connections, programming assistance and support
Nolde Forest	https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks/FindAPark/ NoldeForestEnvironmentalEducationCenter/Pages/default.aspx	Target audience connections, programming assistance and support
Schuylkill River Greenways	https://schuylkillriver.org/	Target audience connections, programming assistance and support, trail development projects
Berks County Parks and Recre- ation Department	https://www.co.berks.pa.us/Dept/Parks/Pages/default.aspx	Target audience connections, programming assistance and support

# **CHAPTER 5: FUNDING**

