Chapter 2

Plan

Background
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This section presents an overview of the ecological, heritage and recreation themes which make up this plan. Additionally, the process leading to this plan’s Greenway Network conclusions is described.

2.1 Ecologic Resources

The 1991 Berks County Comprehensive Plan and the Natural Areas Inventory (NAI) initiated detailed 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 considerations 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 Open Space and Recreation Plan 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 is more thoroughly refined in this Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan.

Through the use of the Geographic Information System (GIS) the County identified more clearly where the special physical environmentally sensitive areas are located in the Vision 2020 Plan. Using this information along with other sources, such as the NAI and its updates, development patterns, hydrology, and steep slopes the County identified the Rural Conservation and Environmental Hazard Areas of the Vision 2020 Plan. In order to protect these areas from inappropriate development the County established the Conservation Zoning Incentive Program (CZIP). This program provides municipalities with the funding and tools to enact land use regulations that promote sensitive and flexible design principles and techniques allowing land to be developed efficiently with the least degree of environmental impact. Following in the footsteps of the Vision 2020 Plan is the Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan Update to the 1994 Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Butterfly Garden at Kernsville Dam

While the Vision 2020 Plan is a sound basis for environmental protection, the amount of area shown in both the Environmental Hazard and Rural Conservation is far beyond what the County or any other entity is able to permanently protect. Therefore a clear and precise identification of the
most important natural and habitat areas needed to occur in order to maximize limited funding and resources available for protection. Also, other strategic ways of protecting the remaining environmentally important areas while still allowing for growth and development are needed. The County used the NLT Smart Conservation Modeling process for the identification of the most important ecological resources. The model processed data including; PNDI, protected lands, and conservation resources, to develop an ecological cluster map to determine where the County should focus its habitat protection efforts. The cluster maps included the top 20% of the highest valued habitat areas found in the County. These cluster areas were revised dependant upon existing development and connections with already preserved areas and shown prioritized on the “Greenway Network”. One of the main goals for habitat protection is interconnecting hubs and corridors. The hubs are the main “every day living” areas for the various species. A hub must be at least 250 acres. The corridors are the linear connections between the hubs that promote species diversity, additional food supplies, and migration. While it is extremely important to protect the hubs as the main habitat areas for plants and animals, without the simultaneous protection of the corridors to interconnect the hubs many species will not flourish. Corridors vary in size and width dependant upon existing development and ability to interconnect with a hub. Wide corridors provide the best connection. However even narrow connections are better than none. Generally, the corridors should be between 1000 to 3000 feet wide for optimal connections.

The objective of this Plan for habitat protection is to identify and prioritize projects based upon ecological value. Each project lists the partners that should work together to accomplish the goals identified for the project and identify potential funding sources to complete the project. This process starts with the identification of already protected lands and the connections between these lands and the hubs that are prioritized as needing the most protection. Also, the projects will list the opportunities (benefits) for each project. Certain areas will list protection of the ecological resource as the opportunity; however there are a number of projects throughout the County that will have opportunities other than ecological.

Some of the most important ecologically valuable lands in the County of Berks are those hubs and greenways found along the Northern and Southern borders, the Kittatinny Ridge and the Highlands Corridor. (See chapter 3 for individual regions) The reason for this is the availability of water, forests, meadows and large masses of undeveloped land equate to high habitat values. Most species, no matter which type, need all of these factors to survive.

2.2 Heritage Resources

Berks County has a diverse history that reflects an ever changing cultural and economic dynamic spanning its 255-year history. Cultural groups have each left and continue to leave their own distinct impression on the county in such ways as language, dress, architecture and food. Additionally, national and international events as well as an evolving economy have impacted Berks County. The following historical overview highlights some of the County’s major milestones and the more prominent heritage themes.
Historic Overview  At the start of the Eighteenth Century, the mild climate, fertile soil, and the Schuylkill River combined to attract European immigrants to Berks County. The area was originally settled by Swedes in 1701, followed by Germans, English, Welsh, and French Huguenots. Most of the County’s eastern section was settled by people migrating inland from the Philadelphia area. In 1752, Berks County was incorporated from parts of Lancaster, Chester, and Philadelphia Counties. In 1772, Berks gave up territory for the formation of Northumberland County, and again in 1811, for the formation of Schuylkill County. Berks County was named for Berkshire, England, home of William Penn’s family. Likewise, Reading was named after the main town in Berkshire, England. In 1790, the first federal census of the county reported 30,189 residents, 22,345 of whom were of German descent. Reading Town, the only sizeable settlement, had 2,225 residents.

Reading’s early growth was largely influenced by the Schuylkill River. Flat-bottom boats made it possible to carry products, mainly agricultural goods, to the markets of Philadelphia. Later the County emerged as a hub of the steam railroad industry. Reading’s early economy attracted considerable numbers of immigrant laborers during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, an era of great industrial growth for Berks County.

In 1995, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania designated the Schuylkill River Corridor as a State Heritage Area, which promotes its industrial legacy. In 2000, the U.S. Congress acknowledged the river’s national historic significance by designating it as a National Heritage Area. The Schuylkill River Greenway Association (SRGA) is the designated management organization for the area. Additionally, the SRGA has made strides to conserve, interpret and develop the Schuylkill corridor’s historical, cultural, natural and recreational resources.

Benefits of Historic Preservation

Historic preservation is a key element of planning and Smart Growth strategies. A major part of creating an attractive, vibrant and welcoming community is preserving its historic character and charm. Berks County is fortunate, with a wealth of historic structures and a historic fabric with little fragmentation, to have an excellent basis from which preservation efforts can be expanded.

Educational benefits are derived from safeguarding a historic asset in its current state allowing future generations the ability to learn from the past. While different styles of building structures and architecture can be recorded in books and even replicated in modern construction, the ability to visit a fully
preserved and original ‘Pennsylvania Bank Barn’, one room school house, covered bridge, general store or grist mill is a priceless resource.

A **cluster of similar historic resources** presents the potential for preserving a region’s historic fabric and establishing a historic theme. Many regions in Pennsylvania have identified consistent and clustered items like a specific bridge structure, architectural style, barn type or factories from a manufacturing practice of a bygone area. These clusters give a community a unique identity and a special role in historic preservation.

**Neighborhood revitalization** is often intertwined with historic preservation. Often aged and overlooked historic communities are “re-discovered” by individuals that see value and potential in the historic homes, businesses and community. The municipality can help by making infrastructure repairs, updating land use ordinances and participating in main street and façade improvement programs.

**Adaptive reuse** of historic structures has become a widely accepted practice as renovation processes have attuned to preserve a historic structure’s integrity, meet modern code standards as well as remain economically viable. Adaptive reuse has been successful throughout Berks County. Important examples include the Silk Mill Apartments (former mill/Reading City), The Works restaurant (former factory/Wyomissing), The American House Hotel (hotel/Hamburg), and numerous Kutztown mansions that now house Kutztown University offices. As existing communities continue to revitalize, adaptive reuse will play a more prominent role in downtown commercial districts.

**Economic Benefits** of Preservation: Berks County communities can simultaneously preserve their heritage as well as benefit the local economy. Tourism is often based primarily on an active community promoting its heritage through the preservation of historic resources. The community’s effort is supported by locally owned shops, restaurants and bed & breakfasts and can be enhanced by additional recreational activities. A historic themed festival, like the Kutztown Festival, or a historic walking tour are good community activities that raise historic awareness and promote the local economy.

Municipal support is important for a successful historic preservation program. Private initiatives and investment will be more readily available with an assurance that historic preservation is an integrated goal of the entire community.

**Clusters of Historic Resources in Berks County**

Clusters of historic resources have potential as tourist attractions and the resource surveys that were conducted as background for this plan have identified a number of clusters. Listed below are some significant clusters.

**Boroughs and Villages** – Berks County has many historic villages and boroughs. These clusters of population and commerce reflect the region’s early establishment. Villages began in the pre-revolutionary era as a trading post for fur traders. As the landscape and economy changed coinciding with the influx of Germanic settlers, Berks developed yet more towns as hubs for the burgeoning agricultural community. These towns often included a general store, school, mill and post office but in some cases also provided lodging and restaurants as well.

**Barns** – An array of barn styles including but not limited to the “Pennsylvania”, “Three Gable” and “Tobacco” are found
throughout Berks County. One of the most important styles for both the County as well as the Commonwealth is the forebay bank barn or also commonly referred to as the “Pennsylvania Barn”¹ or the “Pennsylvania German Barn”. The feature that most distinguishes the Pennsylvania Barn from others is its hallmark 7-8 foot forebay, overshoot or overhang. The barn is typically “banked” or built into a slope utilizing the upside for access to the main floor of the barn and the louver overhanged entry into the base floor of the barn (source: PMHC).

Efforts to protect barns have escalated as the number of unique and historically significant barns, such as the Pennsylvania Barn, has dwindled. The main thrust of early efforts was to make barn owners aware of the treasure they possessed. This effort paid off as many owners took it upon themselves to restore their barns and keep them in use. Also, historians documented the different styles and raised awareness by publishing books and reports on the buildings. A local example this is a book titled “The Pennsylvania Barn” by Kutztown University Professor Robert Ensminger.

**Bridges:** The number and variety of bridges in Berks is another example of a cluster of historical resources. In recent years covered bridges have developed a loyal interest group that enjoys visiting the bridges as well as aiding in their preservation. Steel bridges are another type that is attracting national efforts for preservation. Having many steel and covered bridges within Berks County, many of which are included within existing historic surveys and are registered with the Pennsylvania Museum and Historic Council, it is important that they be inventoried and regularly inspected.

**Canal System:** The canal system grew during the 1700’s, in the midst of Berks County’s burgeoning agricultural and lumber economies. The canal met the integral need for transport of commodities to points of sale in Philadelphia and beyond.

**Churches:** Many churches that exist today have roots that predate the official formation of Berks County. Early church buildings were not only used for religious services but also as a community gathering places since they were often the first public buildings built in the community. Congregations for these churches still thrive today and maintain birth, death and cemetery records that date back to the 1700’s. These records are invaluable for genealogical researchers as well as local historians who may be trying to re-establish key elements of the County’s heritage.

¹ For more information of this local historic resource please consider the book *The Pennsylvania Barn*, by local historian Robert Ensminger, a Professor at Kutztown University.
Farmsteads: Similar to barns, farmsteads are the fully intact nucleus of a historic agricultural operation. These building clusters at least include a farmhouse and a barn but often also include several outbuildings, silos, chicken coupes, privies, spring houses, corn silos as well as additional barns. In some cases there may still exist another older dwelling that, in many cases was constructed from logs, but due to an increase in size of the residing family’s was outgrown and replaced by a larger farmhouse.

Furnaces: Furnaces in Berks County played a pivotal role in the American Revolution. The Hopewell Furnace, a National Historic Site, is Berks County’s best example. It was a major arms contributor during the Revolutionary War. These furnaces were so important that George Washington encamped at Valley Forge in order to protect the furnaces from capture by British forces. In addition to being a major factor in America’s Revolution, furnaces were the beginning of the steel industry and often manufactured stoves and grates that can still be found in historic homes throughout the region.

Education: The public schools and colleges in Berks County are also a source of historic resources. Kutztown University, formerly the Kutztown Teachers College, was established 130 years ago, and Albright College is more than 150 years old. For more than 114 years the Reading Hospital School of Nursing has prepared individuals for careers in the medical field while strengthening Berks County’s health care system.

These and other early education structures still exist in Berks, varying in size and use from one room school houses to the large stately buildings located within Kutztown University’s campus. A more recent trend in some communities has been to preserve and continue to use the neighborhood school. In many cases, these school buildings are roughly 50 years old and built of traditional materials, including brick, stone and marble. While the structure’s material/architecture is important, citizens are more concerned with the school’s traditional location within walking distance for students, with the building serving as a cornerstone of the community. While economically and logistically these buildings cannot always be saved, the site can be reused for a replacement school thus preserving the role that the school serves for the community.

Hex Signs: The hex sign is a unique decoration on many farmsteads throughout Berks County. These typically round symbols were an example of artisanship from original German immigrant farmers who brought the hex sign tradition from their homeland. The symbols have various. Efforts to preserve and restore these symbols are underway but currently are under funded. In at least one case, a driving tour
is centered upon local hex sign examples. If existing signs are restored and other signs are brought back (based on historical records) these elements could become part of a broader tourist economy.

**Highway System:** Within Berks county the highway system was initially established along Native American Paths and early trading routes. As America’s early economy grew and trade with Philadelphia increased, the highway system connected natural resource areas to population centers. Most of today’s most heavily traveled roadways have a historical connection with our early development.

**Mills:** Within Berks there are primarily three variations of the typical mill: grist, wood/saw and knitting. Grist is the most widely understood and recognized for its processing of corn, wheat and flour. The wood mill produced lumber. Knitting mills supported the recognized textile industry that existed within the Berks County. Tens of thousands of people were employed by the mills and its related industries. The large textile mills still stand with many having been converted to retail or loft apartments.

**Native Americans:** The earliest of this area were Native Americans, mainly sub sects of the Lenape or Delaware tribe. Many feature names that are common today were derived from the native American language including but not limited to the following:

- Maxatawny, from the Lenape Tribal word Macksithanne meaning “Bear’s path creek”
- Monocacy: from the Shawnee Tribal word Monnockkesey meaning “River with many bends”
- Tulpehocken: from the Lenape Tribal word Tulpewikaki meaning “Place of the Turtle”
- Wyomissing: surmised to be from the Lenape Tribe meaning “A place of Flats”

Many of our current roads began as Native American trails, evolved into trading routes and then to significant roadways.

**Rail System:** Due to the greater efficiency and increased service area options (by not being limited to waterways), the railroad flourished and replaced the canal systems. The rail system primarily carried agricultural goods, coal and steel. It also allowed for extensive passenger service. The Reading Railroad was a nationally significant railroad company based in Reading. Many of its repair facilities still exist, along with the typical community railroad stations. Today, restored railroad facilities and museums are major tourist attractions. The Reading Company Technical and Historical Society has

![Barn with Hex Signs](image-url)
an extensive collection of important railroad locomotives and cars.

During the early 1900s, rail ran Philadelphia tourists to the well known resorts located in western Berks County. Additionally, local rail service was provided by trolley. Tracks ran east through Mt. Penn as well as west through West Reading. A novelty to the trolley system was a gravity line that was installed from the Pagoda down to the city of Reading.

**Vehicle/Auto Industry:** The automobile was a perfect match for the established steal industry that existed in Berks. The Duryea brand of car was manufactured as well as tested in Reading. Some of the early auto and truck manufacturing companies still exist, but many have recently left the area or gone out of business. The Boyertown Museum of Historic Vehicles has a well-respected collection of important vehicles.

**Historic Preservation Tools**

There are several options for municipalities that want to take a more proactive role in preserving their historic resources. Many programs exist to legally protect historic sites. Additionally, there are options to persuade landowners to value and protect their historic properties much like an investment. Beyond the historic resource inventory, which is the first step and basis for nearly all additional preservation options, are the following potential heritage/historic resource preserving tactics:

- With any program there must be appreciation and respect for a community’s heritage. Knowledge of these resources and acceptance of their value is the initial step to incorporating them back into the community. Use of municipal newsletters to relay information is a way to increase awareness of the resources and cultural heritage, and offering classes is a way to educate residents how to maintain them.
- Establish historical commission/committee to advise local officials about the effects of activities on historic resources, etc.
- Identify and evaluate historic resources and character (the building setbacks, height of structures, architectural style, area and location of parking, signage, street furniture, landscaping, etc.)
- Evaluate land use ordinances. How do they affect areas with historic assets? Regulations should encourage the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of existing buildings, delay demolition, and require that new development, particularly infill development and additions to structures, be compatible with the existing historic resources. Zoning should focus on the area and bulk provisions encouraging new structures to compliment the building mass, scale, height and character of the existing historic buildings. Such provisions can help prevent tear downs from being replaced with monster homes that are out of character with the neighborhood. The use of form-based regulations emphasizes the form of structures rather than managing uses. Further refinements should include revised sign regulations with the goal of deterring excessive visual competition. Zoning regulations that provide incentives to restore a structure, or encourage the use of cluster development can provide a degree of flexibility in mitigating the impact of development on historic resources. The
zoning provisions can either be built into the base zoning or through the use of a historic conservation overlay district. Design guidelines on the appropriateness of modifications to historic resources can be developed to encourage consistency and help property owners to understand expectations. The historic resource surveys developed during the inventory process should be referred to during the subdivision/land development review to ensure that significant historic resources are not being overlooked.

- Where there is a concentration of historic resources with architectural integrity consider establishing a certified historic district in accordance with the Pennsylvania Historic Districts Act (Act 167). This act requires the appointment of a Historical Architectural Review Board (Harb) and provides maximum protection of architectural details and facades. Certified historic districts may not be the right fit in most situations, unless the concentration and integrity is there.

- Undertake public improvements in a manner that preserves the historic and architectural integrity of structures and neighborhoods. A variety of public investments to neighborhoods such as street and sidewalk improvements, street trees, appropriate street lights, signage and street furnishings, upgrading neighborhood playgrounds/parks, debris removal, reduce sign clutter, and creating neighborhood gardens can be supportive of the historic environment and preservation effort.

- Consider instituting Elm Street and Main Street Programs that blends economic development and historic preservation.

- Develop a financial strategy. Seek funding sources to establish revolving loan pools for façade improvements, adaptive reuse of buildings, or housing rehabilitation.

- Support heritage tourism efforts.

- Hold festivals that replicate and recreate historic experiences and celebrate cultural traditions.

- Along trails, in parks and at cultural destinations install interpretive signage that tells “the story”.

- Establish a Historical Marker Program that identifies properties that are historic and have been restored to an acceptable level. Another similar option is to nominate a property for a Pennsylvania Historical Marker Program.

- Nominate historically significant public structures to the National Register of Historic Places.

Mapping

Historic resources data was used as part of the modeling that created the Greenway plan and network. The existing historic site survey was used and ranking was differentiated according to historic status (National Register, National Register Eligible, PMHC Survey etc.). Similarly, historic districts were separated according to their status as National Register listed or eligible. Additional items that were also incorporated include historic trails and rail lines.

2.3 Recreation Resources

Benefits

Imagine our communities without parks, playgrounds, trails, nature centers, basketball and tennis courts, soccer and
baseball fields, historic sites, and museums. These facilities help make up our cultural fabric, add to the quality of life and are an essential part of our life. They provide public gathering spaces. It is relationships with people that make parks more than just fields, courts and playground equipment. These intangibles are as important to a community as tangible benefits. Investment in park and recreation facilities and programs provide opportunities for personal enrichment, community welfare, and can be a catalyst for economic growth. The contributions that can be made to the individual, community and the local economy by park, recreation, heritage and cultural amenities are well documented:

- personal enrichment benefits include, physical fitness, emotional wellness, release of stress, learns to compete and cooperate, build relationships, develop character and leadership skills;
- foster community pride and spirit;
- alleviate youth crimes by providing organized recreational programs;
- enhancing real estate value (people are willing to pay more to live close to parks and protected natural areas);
- attracting new businesses and retaining old ones (community spirit, entertainment and cultural opportunities are great lures for businesses- businesses depend on their work force and a deciding factor on where they locate is often quality of life considerations for their employees-park and recreation amenities are a major quality of life component); and
- attracting tourists (tourists/participants in events stay in our motels, eat in our restaurants, and shop in our stores).

Enhancement of a community’s quality of life, which embraces its livability, is an important benefit communities derive from great park systems and abundant recreational and cultural programs.

Trends and Desires

Social, environmental, participation and management trends influence the provision of parks and recreation, and the delivery of those services. The implication of these trends is that leisure needs and desires are constantly changing, and need to be monitored.

Trends:
- Explosive population growth placing a strain on municipalities to keep up with the provision of park and recreation facilities and programs;
- The changing characteristics of our population and households, and their diverse leisure needs, including multicultural diversity and the increasing Hispanic population, the aging baby boomers, the disappearing traditional family and the increasing numbers of children at risk;
- Changing housing patterns including conservation residential development design that includes natural area preservation and provides recreation areas, traditional neighborhood development, over-55 developments, downtown revitalization with an emphasis on greenspace, and the emphasis on walkable pedestrian-oriented development;
- Disappearing natural resources resulting in greater public interest in waterway protection, water quality enhancement, plant and wildlife habitat protection, and greater access to nature;
- Disappearing historic resources resulting in greater emphasis on heritage and cultural resource planning;
- Emphasis on greenway network planning;
- Importance of tourism in local economy;
• Physical inactivity, obesity and the associated health problems of diabetes, stroke and heart disease, resulting in the growing fitness and wellness movement;
• Changes in participation including the increasing numbers of girls in sports, older adults staying active longer, persons with disabilities, and the year round play of many youth sports;
• Continued growth of organized youth sports and the need for additional indoor recreation facilities and outdoor fields for league play and practice;
• Trails are the most preferred recreation facility according to state and Berks County surveys. According to the Berks County citizen survey, the top five recreational facility preferences were: walking/hiking/biking trails, natural areas, playgrounds, museum/heritage park, and outdoor entertainment (amphitheatre, fairgrounds, etc). The most important recreational programs were: cultural arts (concerts, theatre, etc), fairs/festivals, holiday events, athletic/sports leagues/clinics, and environmental education;
• Interest in family-oriented indoor recreation centers;
• Growth of “extreme” action sports and the interest for in-line skating and hockey facilities, skateboard/bike action parks, and facilities for mountain biking;
• Growing interest in orienteering and geocaching (outdoor treasure hunting game in which participants use global positioning receivers to hide and seek containers, the location of which is posted on geocaching websites-a typical geocashe is a small waterproof container with a logbook and small trinket-geocashers are free to take objects from the cashe in exchange for leaving a trinket for the next geocasher to find);
• Growing interest in dog parks;
• Interest in multi-municipal recreation planning for regional park acquisition, development, maintenance, programs, management and financing;
• Greater collaboration between municipalities and schools through joint acquisition, development and use of recreation land and facilities;
• Exploring partnerships among public, private and non-profit recreation providers;

Soccer at Muhlenberg High School

• Declining economies and decreasing fiscal resources forcing government to supplement recreation budgets with a mix of new revenue sources and tapping community resources including user fees, impact fees, sponsorship, fund raising, donations, grants and volunteerism; and
• Greater emphasis on zoning and subdivision as recreation planning tools.

Park and Recreation Facility Classifications

Successful park systems are ones in which the recreational facilities are comprehensive, cohesive, equitably distributed
and accessible. The degree of service which park and recreation areas provide, or the influence they have on a community(s), depends on the types of facilities available, the activities provided, the size of the site, the condition of the facilities, connectivity and the proximity of the site to potential users. A well-rounded municipal system of parks and recreation areas should be composed of a number of different park types.

**Mini-Park:** Generally is a single-purpose public property offering a very limited range of passive or active recreation use, often servicing a unique or specific recreation need. Examples include tot lots/play structures, community gardens, sitting area, picnic area, or a landscaped public use plaza in a downtown. Typically, they are not intended to be used for programmed activities. The service area is usually less than a ¼ mile in radius in a residential setting. Ease of pedestrian access to and from the surrounding area is of key concern since parking is usually not required. Typically, the size of mini-parks range from 2,500 square feet to one acre, however, could include park areas up to 3 acres.

**Neighborhood Park:** Serves as the recreational and social focus of a residential neighborhood, providing close-to-home public areas for playgrounds, passive pursuits, and limited programmed athletic activities. Active recreational facilities are intended to be used in an informal and unstructured manner, except for limited use by youth teams. The menu of potential facilities include a general use playfield, play structures, sport courts, picnic/sitting areas, trails, and passive open space. A small activity room and restroom facilities are appropriate. If space allows larger scale active recreation facilities such as baseball/softball and soccer fields can be included. Development of a neighborhood park should seek to achieve a balance between informal active and passive park uses geared specifically for those living within the service area, accommodating a wide variety of age and user groups. Service area ranges from ¼ to ½ mile radius uninterrupted by non-residential roads and other physical barriers. Ease of pedestrian access and walking distance are key as most people arrive by foot/bike, although the site should accommodate a limited number of off-street parking spaces. Generally, 5 acres is the minimum size to provide space for a menu of activities, but can be as small as 3 acres, with 7 to 10+ acres considered optimal. Ideally, it should be connected to other park system components.

**Community Park:** Focus is on meeting community-based active and passive public recreational needs, serving at least two or more neighborhoods. Designed to provide active and structured recreational opportunities for youth group activities (often not feasible nor desirable at neighborhood parks), as well as provide informal individual exercise. It can also preserve unique natural features. Typically include multiple athletic fields and sport courts, play structures, picnic shelters/sitting areas, extensive internal trails, passive open space and any unique natural areas. Nature study areas, facilities for cultural activities, skate parks, swimming pools, restroom facilities, and indoor recreation centers are also appropriate. Service area ranges from ½ to 3-mile radius. Ease of pedestrian access remains a concern, although a significant number of people arrive by car. Parking lots should be provided. Optimal size of park is between 20 and 50 acres, however smaller parks with a very concentrated menu of activities can function as community parks. Ideally, internal trails should connect to a community trail system or greenway.

**Large Urban/Suburban Park:** Serves a broader purpose than community parks and are used when community and neighborhood parks are not adequate to serve the needs of the community. These parks are designed to serve the entire
community, and perhaps residents of adjacent municipalities. They can provide a wide variety of specialized public active recreational needs, including sports complexes (heavily programmed athletic fields and sport courts used for league play and tournaments), passive recreational needs, cultural attractions, as well as preserve unique natural features. Designed to accommodate large numbers of people, usually exceed 50 acres with 75 or more acres being optimal. Because of their size and the number of facilities offered, they require more support facilities such as significant off-street parking, restrooms, concession stand, fan seating, multi-purpose building, storage, lighted facilities, etc. Sites should be accessible from major thoroughfares, and provide multiple access points.

**School-Park:** Public school sites with facilities that could serve as a neighborhood or community park. Combining the resources of a municipality and a school district allows for expanding the recreation opportunities available to the community. Establishing a clearly defined joint-use agreement between the agencies is critical to making the school-park relationship workable.

**Special Use Park or Recreation Facilities:** Covers a broad range of public parks and recreation facilities oriented toward a single-purpose use. Examples include: arboretum, performing arts facility, amphitheater, museums, heritage/cultural park, community center, arena, stadium, swimming pool, fairgrounds, camps, etc. Size is variable.

**Natural Resource Area:** Public lands set aside for preservation of significant natural resources, ecosystems and for visual aesthetics. Typically include state gamelands, state forests, municipal watersheds, sanctuaries, and nature preserves. Examples of the types of resources to be preserved include: geologic features, watersheds, rare/threatened/endoangered species, forests/woodlands, wildlife habitat, wetlands/floodplains/marshes, water bodies/riparian buffer, steep slopes/ridgelines, etc. The objective is to enhance the livability and character of a community by preserving as many of its natural amenities as possible. Resource quality and uniqueness is the primary determinant when it comes to selecting a site for preservation. They can function as greenways and habitat corridors. Although these natural areas are resource rather than user based, they can provide some passive/active recreational opportunities, such as nature study, picnic, trails, swimming, camping, etc. Clearly the emphasis is on conservation and preservation and development should be kept to a level that preserves the integrity of the resource. Size is variable.

**Greenway Corridor Linear:** Public park corridors that focus on passive recreation and conserving the natural environment. Serve to tie park components together and provide for pedestrian movement between parks and throughout the developed community. Can be land based or water based. Typically developed to include trails for different modes of recreation travel such as: hiking, walking, jogging, bicycling, in-line skating, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, canoeing, etc. It can include bike lanes along existing road right-of-way, abandoned railroad right-of-ways, utility right-of-ways. Many greenways are located along waterways and support flood-plain management, water quality enhancement, and fish/wildlife habitat protection. While most greenway corridors function as a combination of recreation use and environmental conservation, some function for environmental protection and are not specifically designed for human passage. They vary greatly in scale from narrow ribbons (20 feet wide, although 50 feet is often considered minimum) to
wider corridors (200 feet wide and greater). The optimal width for wildlife corridors is 1,000 feet.

Private Park/Recreation Facility: Parks and recreation facilities that are privately owned yet contribute to the public park and recreation system. This category is divided into two sub-groups: commercial recreation (for-profit) and not-for-profit park/recreation. Examples of commercial recreation include: health and fitness clubs, golf courses, driving ranges, miniature golf, ski areas, water parks, amusement parks, campgrounds, bowling lanes, picnic groves, etc. Examples of not-for profit recreation include properties owned by quasi-public organizations, neighborhood associations, YMCA, churches, fire companies, etc. such as: swimming pools, sportsman clubs, camps, homeowner association common land, trails, preserves and tot-lots ballfields.

Municipal Park and Recreation System Guidelines

There are several tools that can be used to evaluate a municipal park and recreation system. One measure is the traditional acres per 1,000 population guideline. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) suggests that a public park system, at a minimum, be composed of a core system of parklands, with a total of 6.25 to 10.5 acres of developed parkland per 1,000 population. This local, close-to-home space should be composed of a number of different park types including mini-parks, neighborhood parks and community parks. Also, they suggest an additional 15 to 20 acres per 1,000 population in regional space including natural resource areas. In 1996, NRPA refined their traditional land standards and instead suggest that local park standards be based on a level of service (LOS) analysis. Even though LOS is measured in acres per 1,000 people these guidelines reflect the amount of land, the types of facilities and programs needed to meet recreation demand as determined by a needs assessment. This requires first-hand knowledge of the community and how community residents use the parks. Each community is expected to shape their own basic level of service to fit individual circumstances and it is up to each community to determine what amount of parkland is suitable for its residents. For the purposes of this plan and for simplicity sake, the traditional guidelines will be used. These guidelines may not be what is best for all communities, but it provides guidance for creating a park system. Municipalities are encouraged to use the LOS formula when preparing or updating their individual/joint plans.

Another measure of a municipal park system is the distance people live from a park, in terms of walkability. Focus is less on the number of acres of parkland provided and more on the distribution and determining areas of the community that are
under-served by current facilities. Parkland should be sited throughout the municipality in a way that every neighborhood and every resident is equitably served. While there is no standard for accepted distance, preferably, people and parks are no farther than a five minute (1/4 mile or less) walk in dense (urban) areas or five minutes apart by bicycle in more suburban sections. Distances over ½ mile to a park almost guarantees that most people will either skip the trip or drive. Once we have to drive to a park it doesn’t matter how far the park is because it has become a formal destination and not a place to drop in on.

NRPA have suggested outdoor facility development standards which expresses the exact spatial and dimensional requirements for a specific recreation facility. (See NRPA’s *Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines*)

**Inventory of Park and Recreation Facilities**

The scope of this update involves an analysis of park and recreational opportunities that are available in Berks County through public, non-profit/not-for-profit, or private interests. Inventories of existing and proposed facilities represented a tedious undertaking involving the assistance of various agencies, municipal and school district officials, and concerned individuals. Information was compiled from county tax parcel information, surveys, public input and stakeholder meetings, municipal comprehensive plans, municipal park and recreation plans, and various plans developed by non-profits. This inventory is ever evolving, as constant reassessment of needs and modifications of park facilities is vital. (See Appendix for the inventory of facilities by region and municipality.)

**Ownership**

In Berks County every level of government, as well as non-profits/not-for-profits, and the private sector share the responsibility to provide citizens with adequate recreation and leisure opportunities. The public sector includes municipal, county, state and the federal government who provide park and recreation facilities/programs for use by the general public supported primarily by tax dollars. Non-profit/not-for-profit recreation providers rely heavily on volunteers, donations, fund raisers, membership fees and are typically social/service/civic organizations, such as lions clubs, churches, fire companies, scout camps, little league organizations and swimming pool associations. The private sector includes commercial recreation businesses, such as golf courses, fitness clubs, ski resorts, miniature golf courses and driving ranges. Together, these recreation providers deliver an inter-related system of leisure and recreation opportunities on 71,000+ acres or thirteen percent of the county land area. The total acreage breakdown by ownership is shown in the following chart. The largest landowner is the Commonwealth with nearly 30,000 acres of gamelands, state parks, and state forests.

**Park & Recreation Inventory by Ownership- 2006**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Facilities</th>
<th>Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Facilities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Lands (Nat’l Parks, Nat’l Historic Sites, etc.)</td>
<td>7,501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Lands (Parks, Gamelands, Forest)</td>
<td>29,801</td>
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<tr>
<td>County Park Lands</td>
<td>1,138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Regional Sub-Total</strong></td>
<td>38,440</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Public Parks and Recreation Facilities

Public park and recreation facilities in Berks County consist of municipal, county, state and federal lands. These lands include property specifically managed to provide public passive and active recreation, as well as lands set aside as natural preserves, such as state gamelands, and municipal watershed land. In total, public park and recreation facilities consume approximately 54,294 acres or 9.8 percent of the county’s land and water resources. The amount of public park and recreation space has increased by 11,650 acres since 1994. Berks County is fortunate to have a wide range of public park and recreation assets, as well as many of our unique natural and historic features protected by public entities. However, despite the vast inventory of public resources, much of the federal and state land is located along the periphery of the county, and in some cases municipal recreation land is not evenly distributed among its neighborhoods making accessibility problematic for many Berks County residents. Currently, thirty-nine percent of Berks County residents live within a ¼ mile of a public park or recreation area.

Inventory of Federal Lands

The federal government maintains areas that have scenic, historic, conservation or recreation values to the nation. Federal ownership of recreational lands in the county totals over 7,501 acres, the majority of which is associated with Blue Marsh Lake (5,587 acres). Blue Marsh Lake, managed by the U. S. Army Corps of
Chapter 2 Plan Background

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>Planning Region</th>
<th>Acres</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Appalachian Trail</td>
<td>Hawk Mt,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tulpehocken</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blue Marsh Lake/Old Dry Farm</td>
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<td>5,587.64</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farm Living History Farm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hopewell Furnace National</td>
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<td>Historic Site</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Federal Acreage</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>7,501.02</strong></td>
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</table>

Engineers, was primarily constructed for flood control with water supply and recreation as secondary uses. However, it has developed into a popular regional recreation venue providing: boating, water skiing, swimming, picnic areas, volleyball and play areas, fishing, hunting, wildlife viewing, living history farm complex, a variety of winter sports, and thirty+ miles of non-motorized multi-use trails. The federal government also owns 1,376 acres along the ridge of the Blue Mountains (Kittatinny Ridge), forming the northern border of Berks County. Besides protecting the scenic ridgeline these lands serve to protect, in part, the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, a nationally known footpath. Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site is a National Park Service property located in southern Berks County and Chester County. This site consists of 848 acres, 537 acres of which are located in Berks County. One of the finest examples of a rural 19th century restored iron plantation, Hopewell Furnace is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district.

Inventory of State Lands

State lands provide outdoor recreation in natural settings, environmental education and preserve heritage, natural and wildlife resources. In Berks, more than half the state’s ownership is along the Blue Mountains and provides a secondary benefit of protecting the A.T. The Pennsylvania Game Commission owns nearly 20,000 acres of gamelands on ten tracts within Berks County, the majority of which is located along the Blue Mountains. These lands are managed to provide habitat and food for wildlife, but hunting, fishing, hiking, and similar activities are encouraged. Part of the Weiser State Forest is located in Berks County along the Blue Mountains. These 1,515 acres of rugged woodland is located in Forest District #18, and managed by the state’s Bureau of Forestry to ensure forest viability and productivity. State Forests are open to the public for hunting, fishing and general recreation. The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of State Parks operates the Nolde Forest Environmental Education Center and French Creek State Park. Nolde Forest encompasses more than 628 acres of woodland in Cumru Township, and contains an extensive trail network that makes the center’s streams, ponds and diverse habitats accessible to students and casual visitors. The center is maintained for environmental education, but hiking, birding, etc are permitted. French Creek State Park is located along Berks County’s southeastern border with Chester County. Nearly 6,000 acres of heavily forested and scenic parkland in Berks County support habitat for plants and
Chapter 2 Plan Background

Wide ranges of recreation opportunities are available, including: camping, hiking, fishing, hunting, boating, swimming, picnicking, disc golf, orienteering and play areas. Two of the French Creek campites are listed on the National Register of Historic Places as historic districts. French Creek State Park, surrounds Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site and helps preserve lands that the furnace utilized for its natural resources. The Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission, aided by volunteer groups, operate two historic homesteads in Berks County, which interpret the life of Daniel Boone and Conrad Weiser. The Daniel Boone Homestead and the Conrad Weiser Homestead are both on the National Register of Historic Places and the Weiser Homestead is also a National Historic Landmark. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission provide opportunities for fishing and boating and their regulation. The Commission’s website provides the location of approved trout waters, class A wild trout waters, and boat access/launch ramps throughout Berks County. The Fish and Boat Commission owns the 183-acre Kaercher Creek Park, however leases it to Berks County. Recreation opportunities available at the park include: fishing, boating, picnicking, and play areas. Recreation potential is also available at unique state owned facilities in Berks County. These include watershed land associated with two state hospital complexes, and nine former desilting basins along the Schuylkill River used by the state to facilitate dredging and storage of dredged material associated with the coal industry. Since future dredging is not anticipated downstream of Kernsville Dam, DEP has made the commitment to transfer surplus desilting basins to the local governments for recreation purposes, if interested. At this time Exeter, Muhlenberg and Union Township’s have acquired basins from the state to develop park/recreation facilities. The Schuylkill River Water Trail, designated a National Recreational Trail, runs the 147-

PENNSYLVANIA STATE OWNERSHIP

<table>
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<th>Facility</th>
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<td>Desilting Basins</td>
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<td>Daniel Boone Homestead</td>
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<td>Eplers Landing</td>
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<td>French Creek State Park</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Metro</td>
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<tr>
<td>#315</td>
<td>Oley Hills</td>
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<td>#324</td>
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<td>Hamburg Center Watershed</td>
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<td>Kaercher Creek Park</td>
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<td>(Leased to Berks County)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kernsville Rec Area/Desilting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basin</td>
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<td>Leizes Desilting Basin</td>
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<td>Schuylkill Canal-Five Locks</td>
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<td>Weiser State Forest</td>
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<td>Wernersville State Hospital</td>
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<td>Watershed</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total State Acreage</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>29,800.93</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>
mile length of the Schuylkill River. Water trails are recreational waterways, containing access points and day-use or camping sites for the boating public. The Schuylkill River is considered a Class I-II+ river, containing easy rapids, and is suitable for canoes and kayaks.

**Inventory of County Lands**

The county's role is to provide regional park and recreation facilities and programs. The Berks County Parks & Recreation Department is responsible for the maintenance, operation and development of over 1,000 acres and 13 (including the state-owned Kaercher Creek Park) park sites, providing active and passive recreation facilities, natural and historic resource protection. The park system features many historic resources including: the Gruber Wagon Works, Wertz's Red Bridge, Allegheny Aqueduct, and the Leesport Lock House all of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The wagon works is also a National Historic Landmark, and is operated as a museum.

The C. Howard Hiester Canal Center presents the history of the Union Canal and the Schuylkill Navigation System in an interactive museum setting. The five-mile long Union Canal

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BERKS COUNTY OWNERSHIP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allegheny Aqueduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Park/Beidler House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antietam Lake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berks County 4-H Center (Leased to 4-H Development Council)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berks Neversink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp Joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunsicker's Grove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leesport Lock House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Fairgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Leased to Agricultural &amp; Horticultural Assoc of Berks Co)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>Berks Leisure Area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gring's Mill Rec. Area</td>
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<td>Heritage Center</td>
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<td>Red Bridge Rec. Area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stonecliffe Rec. Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Canal Bicycle &amp; Walking Trail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Recreation Facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total County Acreage</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bicycle and Walking Trail, designated as a National Recreation Trail, connects five of the County’s park/recreation Additional county-owned facilities, not under the purview of the Parks & Recreation Department, but provide leisure opportunities include the Reading Fairgrounds and the 4-H Center. The fairgrounds is leased to and maintained by the Agricultural and Horticultural Association of Berks County as the home for the Reading Fair. Facilities include pole barns for livestock and other exhibitions, and a midway for vendors and amusements. The 4-H Center is leased to and maintained by the 4-H Development Council to foster the 4-H program in Berks County. Facilities include two horse-show rings, and a community building for public exhibitions and recreation purposes.

The Berks County Parks & Recreation Department offers more than 125 recreational and educational programs scheduled throughout the year, including: playground activities, concerts, interpretive lectures and workshops, and annual special events and festivals

Inventory of Municipal Facilities

The role of municipal government is to provide close-to-home park and recreation facilities and programs for the benefit of their residents (see Appendix 5.2 Facilities Inventory). Park and recreation facilities and programs are an essential public service in communities where people desire to live, work, and enjoy life. Municipal parkland grew by 8,100 acres since 1994. Some municipalities have begun to acquire natural resource areas, usually through the subdivision process, that is not used for active recreation other than trails, but used to protect floodplains, wetlands, or other environment resources. These non-recreational lands can be of value to a community, protecting water quality, improve stormwater management, providing wildlife habitat and providing scenic viewsheds, which can improve the value of adjacent homes. Berks County, in aggregate, appears to be adequately supplied with local close-to-home recreation acreage. Local municipal recreation acreage totals 3,149 in comparison to the NRPA minimum recommended 2,448 acres, based on 2004 population. Countywide, this equates to 8 acres of local close-to-home recreation space per 1,000 persons. However, based on the regional analysis found in Chapter 3, not all regions or municipalities met the minimum NRPA guidelines of 6.25 acres/1,000 population. The Southern Highlands and the Metro Regions are the only regions that exceed the minimum guidelines, while only 28 municipalities have enough municipal recreation acreage to accommodate their current population. The remaining 45 municipalities are deficient in providing recreational facilities for their residents, some more than others. A total of 21 municipalities need less than 10 acres to accommodate current residents, while 24 need more than 10 acres. Sixteen municipalities out of the 45 that are deficient currently provide no recreation facilities. In most cases, these municipalities rely upon adjacent municipal facilities, school district facilities, and/or local service organizations to provide their recreational acreage. Most municipalities will have to increase their recreational acreage, some significantly, over the next decade in order to meet the needs of their growing populations.

Recreation programs are an important service to our residents and many times are overlooked, as municipalities do not fully understand their role in providing leisure activities. Ideally, municipal programs should be planned to offer diverse activities that meet the needs of all ages and interests. Recreation programs are not just athletic activities. A well-planned program also focuses on arts & crafts, performing arts, education, fitness & wellness, and special events
Over sixty percent of Berks County’s municipalities provide organized recreation programs for their residents. Of those programs provided, playground programs were clearly offered the most, with athletic leagues/lessons (baseball, softball, soccer and basketball) offered second most. Due to the rural nature of parts of the county and its dispersed population, it is difficult for many of our rural municipalities to address local recreation needs. Only a few municipalities offer a well-rounded recreation program. These municipalities also have progressive public relations program, with websites and newsletters to advertise programs to their residents. In most cases, communities tap the local school district for use of their indoor and outdoor facilities.

A majority of Berks County municipalities have appointed a recreation board or commission to oversee their parkland and recreation programs, while only a handful have park and recreation departments. Several municipalities have recently updated or prepared their first local park and recreation plans. However, a majority of our municipalities rely upon the recreation evaluation provided in their joint comprehensive plans or have obsolete or no recreation plans at all. As varied as our municipal recreation acreage and planning efforts, so is our municipal expenditures on parks and recreation. Annual municipal expenditure in Berks County ranged from $2.4 million to zero dollars in 2004.

School Districts

Public school districts play a vital role in providing recreation services by allowing community use of their indoor and outdoor recreation facilities, meeting rooms, auditoriums, computer labs, etc. In many rural communities, school districts are often the major provider of recreation facilities. All of our school districts cooperate with local youth sports organizations to share their gymnasiums and/or sports fields. However, according to our surveys, approximately half of our school districts have agreements with municipalities to share the use of facilities. It is assumed that this moderate use of school facilities by municipalities is due to the fact that many municipalities do not offer any or a very limited schedule of recreation programs. In limited cases, school districts use municipal sports fields for scholastic events. While schools are an important source of recreation facilities for community use, availability (especially of indoor recreation facilities) can be a problem since school related activities have top priority for scheduling.

Non-profit and Private Sectors

These sectors play a significant role in providing recreation and leisure opportunities. They supplement public resources by providing capacity and resources that are beyond the realm of the public sector. Berks County has a host of community groups, other non-profit and private recreation providers that contribute greatly to our recreation/leisure opportunities:

- Countless youth athletic organizations/little leagues/legion programs located in most communities throughout Berks County offering a range of programs including soccer, football, baseball, softball, basketball, wrestling, field hockey, ice hockey, and cheerleading. These programs fulfill the need for youth recreation, and in doing so diminish the burden on municipalities to provide such services. Municipalities should support the work of these organizations financially and/or sharing the use of municipal facilities;
- Service organizations such as Lions and Rotary Clubs are very important throughout the county as they not only
contribute financially to municipal recreation, but in some cases they own and maintain recreation facilities;
- Outdoor swimming associations are located in over 20 communities;
- Churches often programs for youth and senior citizens, as well as facilities for softball, picnicking, and some are providing community centers and campgrounds;
- Fire companies often provide ballfields, picnic facilities and social halls;
- YMCA, Olivets Boys and Girls Club, Camp Fire USA provide recreation centers and camps;
- 37 Sportsman and Rod & Gun Clubs own over 2,220 acres;
- Homeowner Associations, organized in residential developments, in which the individual owners share common interests and responsibilities for the costs and upkeep of common open space;
- Berks County Sports Commission, a committee of the Greater Reading Convention and Visitors Bureau, promotes Berks County as a destination for state, national and international sporting events. The Commission is responsible for bringing the National Archery tournament and Skate America to Berks County;
- Berks Arts Council hosts the annual Jazz Fest and bandshell concert series, made possible by corporate sponsorship;
- Numerous organizations that annually sponsor festivals and fairs that celebrate our people and our agricultural and industrial heritage;
- several theatrical and musical organizations;
- Commercial recreation entities that provide a wide range of opportunities including, golf courses and driving ranges, miniature golf, bowling alleys, fitness centers, campgrounds, ice and roller skating facilities, rock climbing, racing venues, ski area and museums;
- Six professional sports teams, including baseball, ice hockey, soccer, indoor and outdoor football, and basketball;
- Hawk Mountain Sanctuary is a non-profit organization dedicated to raptor conservation, and is a world-class observation site and field station for raptor migration. The Sanctuary’s 2,600 acres is situated along one of the most significant raptor migration flyways in North America;
- The BicyclePA movement involves the development and signing of seven cross-state border to border bicycle routes using lower traffic volume public roads and rail trails. Two BicyclePA routes traverse Berks County. Route S, the states southern east-west route, uses Pa 23 through Caernarvon Township in the southern part of the County. Route L, the states eastern north-south route, follows a north-south route through the rural eastern part of the County. See PennDot’s website for maps at www.dot.state.pa..

2.4 Greenway Resources

What is a Greenway?

“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 non-motorized vehicles. Others function almost exclusively for environmental protection 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.”

The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

The County of Berks greenway network is an overlay of the three main elements of the plan; Recreation, Green Infrastructure/Ecology and Heritage Resources. These elements are composed of hubs, nodes and corridors. They range in size and function. Functions of a hub, node or corridor may include one, two or all three of the main elements. A priority of the Plan is to establish interconnectivity of greenways that will ensure the County’s most sensitive ecological assets remain viable while expanding access to recreational opportunities and preservation of the County’s heritage resources.

The main benefit of the Greenway Network is the preservation of habitat. Certain species require larger areas in order to reproduce. As the habitat areas are developed these species become compromised and either does not reproduce or the genetic stability of the species is lowered. Other species are affected by the loss of interior forests, barriers to their water supply or breeding grounds, or changes in their habitat that in turn affect their food supply or breeding grounds. Through the Greenway Network, which will interconnect the hubs and nodes with corridors, preservation of the most important ecological areas in the County of Berks will occur and will interconnect with other Counties to form a regional greenway network.

Other benefits of the Greenway Network are the creation of additional interconnected recreational opportunities and the preservation of historic and heritage resources. With the large recreational facilities, such as Blue Marsh Lake, the Appalachian Trail and Lake Ontelaunee located within the County of Berks and numerous historic and heritage resources “clusters” when linked to the ecological factors create a unique ability to draw tourists to the area.

In order to define the parameters of the main elements of the Plan, steering committees, made up of persons with specific knowledge of each element, were created. These steering committees reviewed the background data for each of the three elements and made suggestions as to the accuracy, importance and prioritization of each data set based upon their own individual experiences. This information along with the public survey input and various other survey information collected throughout the County helped to create and prioritize the Greenway Network.

The Greenway Network identifies, by priority and type, the greenways, hubs and nodes that are the most important in the County of Berks to preserve. Some of these designations are based entirely upon the need to protect habitat, while others are ranked high due to the combination of the three elements. While individual municipalities or not-for-profit organizations may also have priorities that do not necessarily reflect what is shown on the Greenway Network; that does not mean that their projects are not noteworthy. In many cases projects are reflected in the Chapter 3 region recommendations, which are high priorities for that region, but are not considered regional on a County, Multi-County, State or Federal ranking, and therefore not reflected on the Greenway Network.