



## CHAPTER 2 – Public Participation

## Introduction

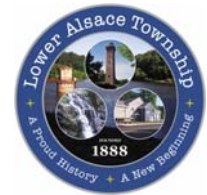
Public participation was a key component of the planning process for the Antietam Lake Park Master Plan. The planning project included a four part public participation process: working with a study committee, conducting interviews, holding a public meeting, and review of public comments gathered about the property and the potential park prior to initiation of this planning project.

### Antietam Lake Park Study Committee

The study committee for Antietam Lake Park Master Plan was tasked with steering the development of the master plan and working with the project consultants. The committee consists of representatives of the Berks County Parks & Recreation Department, Berks County Planning Commission, Berks County Parks & Recreation Board, Berks County Facilities and Operations Department, Friends of Antietam Lake, Alsace Township, and Lower Alsace Township. The Study Committee provided input throughout the planning process and attended committee and public meetings.

### Interviews

The consulting team conducted interviews to obtain additional input regarding the Antietam Lake property and other aspects of the project. Persons with specific insight into the facilities and past public use were contacted. Input was gathered from representatives of the Pennsylvania Game Commission, Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, nearby land owners, municipal supervisors, Schuylkill Heritage Area, and others. Interviewees were provided a brief background on the project and asked questions relative to their expertise and knowledge about the park.



### Public Meeting

A public meeting was held mid-way through the planning process to present the pre-final master plan for public comment. The consultants described the planning process, key findings of the needs assessment, and the pre-final master plan design. Approximately 44 residents plus members of the study committee attended the meeting. Meeting discussion focused on explanation of the design presented, strategies and suggestions for implementation, and inquiries about next steps in the process.

### Review of Previous Public Comment

A meeting of public stakeholders was held with the Berks County Commissioners and then Executive Director of Berks County Parks & Recreation Department on June 26, 2008, prior to the initiation of this planning process. Summarized comments documented from this meeting included:

- Keep it natural.
- Restore the valve house.
- Retain opportunities for fishing, including ice fishing.

- Continue trail use - hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding – no motorized vehicles.
- Explore ice skating.
- Upgrade what is there – don't develop.
- Encourage connections.
- Do not allow boating.
- Concern about silt build-up in sediment basins.
- Concern about invasive species and need to protect water resources.

## Findings of the Public Participation Process

The following documents the input gathered through the public participation process.

### General

- The recent acquisition of the property by Berks County was seen as a positive development.
- The natural setting is the main attraction of the park site and natural resource protection should be balanced with public use.
- Residents like the park the way it is. Keep it natural.
- Litter in the park is mainly associated with fishing activities.
- Angora Road is a cut-through across the mountain and heavily used.
- Greater Reading is a hub along the Schuylkill River Greenway.

### Environment

- Fire is a concern due to the amount of standing dead timber.
- Protect the watershed of the small stream just west of the Angora Road parking area which has a high diversity of vegetation.
- There are springs and seeps which should be protected.
- The lake is stocked with trout four to five times a year. Stocking occurs at the Mother Tree area.
- The lake is very popular for fishing – a lot of fishing pressure. Reality is that the lake functions as a “put and take” fishery.
- Protect the wildlife habitats.
- The spread of invasive species is a problem.
- Manage the site for environmental and ecological function while providing for passive recreation.
- Concern about the Angora Road parking area adjacent to wetlands and seeps.
- The rocks at the dam breast are Precambrian gneiss rock which dates to 1+ billion-years-old. The rocks are often studied by university classes.

## Park Use

- Fishing is popular in the lake and the park is heavily used on the first day of trout season.
- Large special events are scheduled by non-county organizations which use the park. These events bring hundreds of people to the park to run on the park trails, often entering areas of sensitive natural resources.
- Equestrians ride throughout the park on trails. They either ride to the park from the immediate surrounding area or trailer to the main parking area on Angora Road.
- A local college uses the wetlands and nature trails for field instruction.
- There should be a trail to get to the seven-step dam.
- Mountain bikers use the park trails and provide volunteer hours to maintain the trails.
- Trails are good for mountain biking because there is a wide diversity of terrain at one site – from gentle to aggressive, heavily rocky to fire roads. Don't change the character of the trails.
- Maintain trail links to adjacent trails and parkland.
- Hiking, hunting, fishing, horseback riding, enjoying nature, environmental education, and spending time with family and friends are activities that people want to participate in at the park.
- Passive use of the park is preferred.
- There has been increased park use since Berks County took over the property and continued increase in use is anticipated as basic facilities (parking, restrooms, trails) are rehabilitated and introduced.
- Historically, ice fishing and ice skating on the mud catcher were important activities in the park.
- The Lower Alsace Township Fire Department draws water from the lake. To draw water the fire truck parks on either Angora Road or Antietam Road and fire police temporarily close the road.
- People sneak in and hunt.

## Facilities

- Parking is at a premium in the park and additional parking areas are needed.
- The main parking area is in poor condition, often wet and muddy.
- Additional access points to the lake for fishing are desired.
- Restrooms are needed in the park.
- Introduce picnicking – need people in the park so that it is used properly and not destroyed.
- Like idea of a visitor center where fishing supplies, refreshments, and trail maps could be purchased/obtained.
- Maintain and consider the re-use potential for the Bingaman House.
- The trails that traverse the area just west of the Angora Road parking area are nature trails and some of the trees in this area have identification tags.
- Crossing Angora Road is a safety issue. Accommodations for safe crossing should be developed.

- The main dam, seven step dam, Hinnershitz dam, and creek walls along Antietam Creek are unique structures that should be incorporated into the master plan through interpretive opportunities.
- Environmental education opportunities should be incorporated into the design. An environmental education center is planned elsewhere in Berks County but use of Antietam Lake Park for environmental education field study is appropriate.
- Accessibility improvements (ADA) are needed in the park.
- Need better maintenance of the parking areas.
- The Caretakers House is in disrepair but is part of the visual setting of the park.
- Too many trails have been developed in the park.
- The trails are extremely rocky and overgrown for equestrian use.
- The western mud catcher had been used to breed fish to stock the lake.



### Tourism

- Antietam Lake Park can be a major tourism destination as a location in the Schuylkill Highlands Conservation Landscape Initiatives program of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The goals of this program include: protect what is special to this area by saving a significant amount of remaining land in this landscape; connect residents and visitors to the outdoors; and implement sustainable land use practices in local municipalities in the landscape. By working with the Natural Lands Trust that is managing this effort, the park can benefit from advertising, promotion, and funding under this program.
- Tourism is a major economic development engine. A study is underway now for the economic development of the Schuylkill Highlands area. It will offer recommendations that the Berks County Parks & Recreation Department can use to position Antietam Lake Park as an important component of vibrant economy in Berks County.

### Management

- The management of Antietam Lake Park has changed, as has the Berks County Parks & Recreation Department. The park is being managed through an organized program of planning,

- implementation, and evaluation that will both protect the natural resources and provide high quality experiences to park visitors. This is requiring a review and modification of policies on special events, programs, services, and maintenance. The policies are being designed to conserve the important natural features and an appropriate level of public visitation and participate in programs.
- While the park acreage has more than doubled, the staffing is the same as it was in 1980. The capacity to provide a suitable level of care for the parks has diminished resulting in carrying out park maintenance with basic services focused on ensuring safety. As a result, maintenance practices are more reactive to situations than planned so that most of the work can be routine scheduled work and preventive in nature. A major backlog of projects exists due to the capacity of a small workforce and limited maintenance funding.
  - Division managers now carry out most functions including planning, directing, operating and evaluating projects and programs. The one function that is missing is an operations position that could support multiple division managers with the performance of routine tasks such as setting up for programs, purchase of supplies and equipment, routine contacts and calls, scheduling assistance, and so on. This one position would expand the productivity of the managers as they reduce the obligation to carry out routine activities better suited for an operations person.
  - The management team enlists a cadre of volunteers including the Berks County Conservancy, scouts, and community organizations to partner on park improvements, natural resource conservation, and programs. Volunteers have offered to assist with maintenance.
  - The rangers provide important security and protection of both park resources and visitors. The management system is now at a point where the mission of the rangers can expand from enforcement alone to a combination of enforcement and interpretation. The ranger staff now includes expertise in environmental education that can be tapped.
  - Getting the maintenance software program up and running will be a great boost in providing reports and information to facilitate decision-making, allocation of resources, and park planning and management.

### Financing

- As major parkland acquisition occurred, the commensurate level of support to care for the additional facilities, natural resources, and land has not kept pace. The investment in maintenance will have a major payback in terms of resource protection, visitor experience, positive public image for Berks County, and economic development through park visitation and tourism.
- A mix of public and private resources is the likely means to support the park in the future. Not all of the financial support necessary can come from Berks County. A policy on fees and charges is being considered to establish appropriate financing of programs and events.

### Communication and Outreach

- A variety of key stakeholders identified the need for enhanced and timely communication to facilitate management and enhance visitor experiences.
- Creating new ways of outreach featuring social media will help to create more awareness about Antietam Lake Park and generate more visitation with its associated support and revenues.

## Antietam Lake Park Vision and Goals

The vision and goals for Antietam Lake Park were defined based on the findings of the planning and public participation process.

### Antietam Lake Park Vision

Antietam Lake Park is a natural oasis for outdoor nature-based leisure pursuits. Visitors enjoy fishing in the pristine streams and Antietam Lake, exploring the park's trails, learning about the site's natural resources and historic role as a water reservoir, and spending time in the outdoors. The site's natural resources are conserved and managed to provide a healthy ecosystem that continues to protect the water resources. The site's historic remnants are preserved, adding to the scenic setting.

### Goals for Antietam Lake Park

- Develop a master plan for Antietam Lake Park to meet the needs of County residents.
- Protect and enhance the natural, historic, and cultural resources of the site.
- Provide opportunities for nature-based recreation and passive leisure activities.
- Provide opportunities to view and interpret the site's unique features.
- Link park trails to the regional trail system.