



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Antietam Lake Park is Berks County's largest park at over 643 acres. The park includes Antietam Lake, extensive woodlands, wetlands, and remnants of the past use of the site as a water supply reservoir for the City of Reading. The park provides a scenic setting for nature-based recreation and residents of Lower Alsace Township and nearby City of Reading have long enjoyed hiking on the many trails and fishing in Antietam Lake.



This master plan was undertaken to provide a framework for the long-term conservation of the site while exploring opportunities to enhance recreation opportunities for park visitors. Berks County retained Yost Strodoski Mears (lead consultant), Toole Recreation Planning, Rettew Associates, Inc., Murphy Dittenhafer Architects, and the Lancaster County Conservancy to develop the master plan. With expertise in landscape architecture, park design, recreation planning, ecology, forestry, architecture, and public participation, the planning team undertook a study of the park, visitors, staff, management, operations, and services.

The Planning Process

The foundation of the planning process for the Antietam Lake Park Master Plan was community input through various public involvement strategies. A study committee provided input and guided the planning process that also included input from key stakeholders, a public meeting, and County Commissioner briefings. The planning process included the following steps.

- Developing goals for the park.
- Investigation and analysis of the site's natural resources.
- Needs assessment and research.
- Exploration of alternative designs for the park.
- Presentation of the pre-final park design to the study committee, general public, and County Commissioners.
- Finalizing the design and documenting the final recommendations.
- Defining probable capital costs for development, phasing, and implementation action steps.
- Evaluation and assessment of park operations, maintenance, and management.

Antietam Lake Park: Past and Present

The origins of Antietam Lake date back to 1865 when the City of Reading purchased a dam and gristmill on Antietam Creek as a water supply. Throughout the next century, Antietam Lake and the surrounding lands were developed to provide a source of drinking water for the City of Reading. Lands surrounding the reservoir were purchased, tree plantations were established, and silt basins were developed to enhance the water quality and protect the lake.



While not officially developed as a public park, the scenic setting, streams, lake, and woodlands with extensive trails have drawn visitors to Antietam Lake over the years for recreation activities and the pleasure of spend time outdoors.

Antietam Lake was officially closed as a water reservoir in 1974 and following a period of neglect and controversy, the lake and the surrounding lands were acquired by Berks County between 2005 and 2009 for a county park.

Antietam Lake Park Vision and Goals

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.

Antietam Lake Park Master Plan

The master plan for Antietam Lake Park promotes the conservation of the site's natural resources and historic elements while promoting sustainable public use and introducing public accommodations to enhance visitor experiences. The master plan accomplishes the following objectives:

- Conserve and enhance the site's natural resources while providing opportunities for compatible passive, nature-based recreation.
- Protect areas of sensitive natural resources.
- Minimize disturbance to the site's natural features.
- Connect to regional trails.
- Retain and enhance the visual aesthetic of the park.
- Enhance the accessibility and convenience of visiting the park.
- Provide opportunities for interpretation of the site's historic and natural resources.
- Assess existing site features and recommend upgrades necessary for public use.
- Develop features that enhance the safety of visiting the park.
- Assess opportunities and recommend re-purposing strategies for the Bingaman Farmhouse and Caretakers House.
- Evaluate management and maintenance functions associated with the improved park.
- Define improvement and development costs.
- Define resource management options for the forest land.



