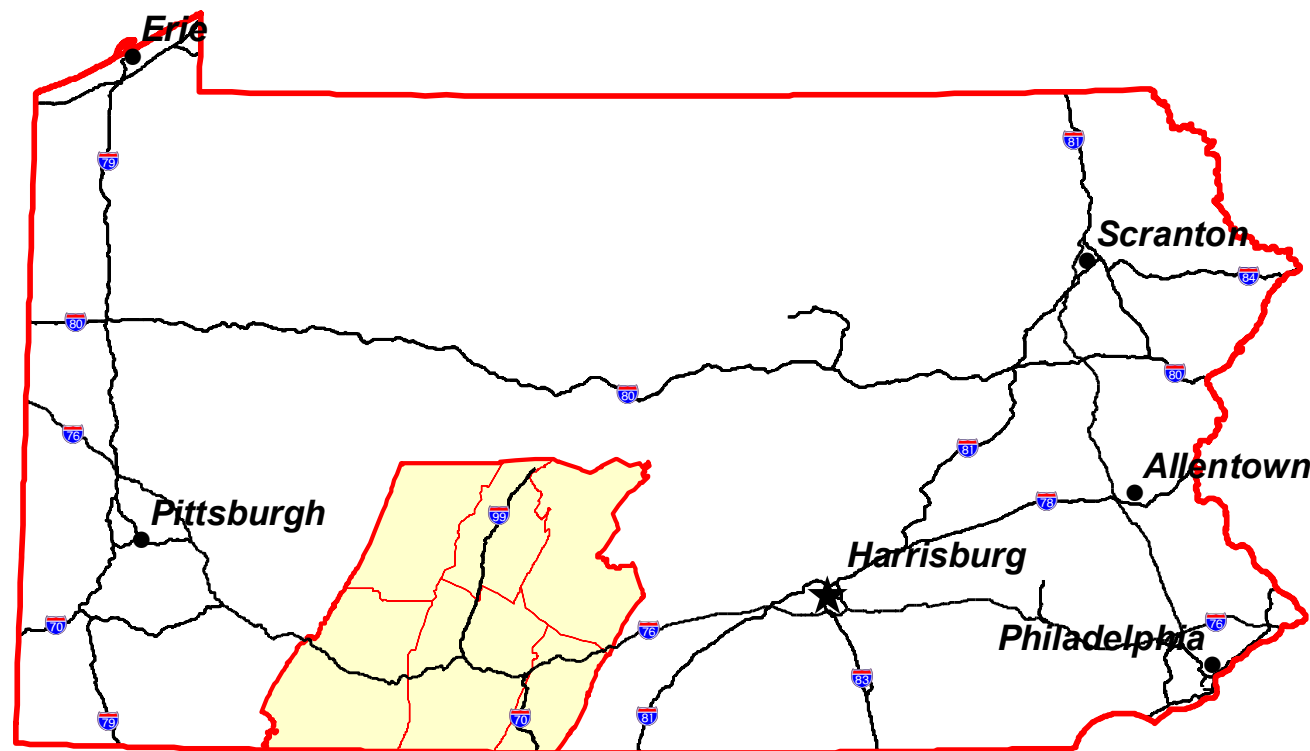


The Southern Alleghenies Region

The Southern Alleghenies Region spans the Laurel Highlands and Allegheny Front in the west across the Appalachians to the east. It is comprised of Blair, Bedford, Cambria, Fulton, Huntingdon and Somerset Counties. These counties, working together through the auspices of the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission (SAP&DC) have developed a Greenways and Open Space Network Plan for their region and individual plans for five of the six counties (Blair County is currently preparing a greenways plan as a part of its County-wide comprehensive land use plan).

Figure 10: The Southern Alleghenies Region



Southern Alleghenies Planning & Development Commission

The SAP&DC is an Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) designated Local Development District (LDD), a US Economic Development Administration (EDA) designated Economic Development District (EDD), a Pennsylvania designated Workforce Investment Board (SAWIB) and a Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) designated Rural Planning Organization (RPO). Within the SAP&DC area are the member counties of Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Fulton, Huntingdon and Somerset. Recently, the entire region was branded as “The Alleghenies,” as part of a regional marketing strategy.



Figure 11: Blue Knob State Park

The mission of SAP&DC is to promote economic and cultural progress throughout the region, to foster cooperation among communities and the agencies that serve them and work to make the Alleghenies a better place in which to live, work and do business.

SAP&DC is governed by a board of directors comprised of county commissioners from each of the member counties along with representation from the private sector. Numerous other public and private sector representatives provide valuable guidance through participation on advisory committees.

What are Greenways?

Generally, greenways are linear corridors of land that connect key resources and open space within a region. Open spaces are blocks of land that are generally self-contained with limited connections or linkages to other areas. The DCNR defines greenways as the following:

“Linear corridors of public and private land that serve as the linkages between specifically identified natural resource-based or manmade features. They can be either land or water based and serve a variety of functions and benefits including recreation, transportation, community revitalization and economic development, natural resource conservation, environmental protection, wildlife habitat and migration and education. These corridors often follow old railways, canals, ridge tops, rivers and stream valleys.”

Further, the DCNR defines a greenway network as:

“A greenways network includes greenways as well as hubs of specifically identified natural resources or open space and manmade features or destinations that influence the development of the linear greenway corridor.”

Purpose and Goals

Purpose 5: Increase pedestrian mobility.

Goal 5A: Construct connections between county and regional trails to improve east-west travel.

Goal 5B: Utilize existing railroad corridors, ridge tops and stream valleys to expand the region’s trail network.

Purpose 6: Promote healthy lifestyles.

Goal 6A: Expand trail opportunities to enhance physical, mental and spiritual wellness among the region’s residents.

Goal 6B: Develop a natural resource-based network of greenways and open spaces that provides for recreation uses such as hiking or cycling.

Table 1: Purpose Rankings

	Bedford	Cambria Cambria Co. Average	Fulton	Huntingdon	Somerset	Overall Average (using Cambria average)
Conservation	1	3.7	1	1	1	1.53
Recreation	2	2.0	2	2	2	2.00
Cultural Heritage	3	3.7	3	3	3	3.13
Economic Development	4	3.0	4	5	4	4.00
Transportation	5	2.7	5	4	5	4.33

Preface

Importance of Greenways

As the links between a region's open space opportunities, greenways are critically important to leveraging the existing resources of a region and adding new opportunities at the State level, DCNR has set a goal of developing a greenway plan for each county in the State to leverage previous State and local investments.

Benefits of developing greenways include:

- Additional recreation opportunities for residents;
- Enhanced attractiveness of region for tourism;
- Transportation opportunities/connections;
- Ecological benefits of connected habitats; and
- Riparian/water quality benefits from protected stream corridors.

Public participation and polling have indicated a strong desire for the types of trails and recreation opportunities associated with greenways. Most recently, these preferences have been documented in the results of a 2003 survey conducted as part of the revision to the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). The results indicate that walking and bicycling paths are generally the preferred recreation facilities State-wide. Trails of all types were ranked higher in importance than other popular recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, boating and camping.

The Southern Alleghenies Greenways and Open Space Network Plan

The Greenway Plans that cover the counties of the Southern Alleghenies region follow these definitions. Furthermore, the greenways plans differentiate between corridors for recreation and human use and those for preservation purposes. The land and open spaces used to create this plan currently exist, however they may be controlled by a public entity, a private land trust or be under private ownership. This Plan weaves these spaces together into a comprehensive network without regard to current control or ownership. The Plan for action includes a list of tools available to protect land that is privately held so that it can be incorporated into the overall network.

The Southern Alleghenies Greenways and Open Space Network Plan is unique within the State for both its size and scope as a six-county regional plan. It is the first regional plan in the State, covering about 1/10 of the Commonwealth. The Plan is designed to be both a regional plan and a component of the comprehensive land use plans of Bedford, Cambria, Fulton, Huntindon and Somerset Counties.

The development of a regional greenways plan for the region will ultimately bolster local economic development by promoting tourism and recreation opportunities. Previously, the Southern Alleghenies region has seen the benefits of greenway development in projects such as the Ghost Town Trail, the Great Allegheny Passage and the Laurel Highlands Heritage Trail. New greenways can leverage these successes and further increase mobility

and connectivity between important historical, cultural and heritage amenities that are popular among residents and tourists.

The Southern Alleghenies region is home to a wide range of precious resources including an extensive supply of natural and recreation areas. These resources include 31,000 acres of State Parks, 240,000 acres of gamelands, 171,000 acres of State Forests and 24,000 acres of Federally preserved land. Within the region there are hundreds of miles of major trails that extend beyond the region and numerous miles of designated water trails on the region's rivers and streams. In addition to these protected and designated resources, a number of areas have been identified as Biological Diversity Areas with unique habitats or endangered species, some of which are located within existing State, county or Federal lands.

Beyond these quantitative statistics, the Southern Alleghenies region is a unique area within the Commonwealth characterized by ridges and valleys, prime farmlands, extensive forests and high quality streams and rivers for fishing and boating. The nature of this landscape changes from the edge of the Appalachian plateau in Cambria and Somerset Counties to the ridge and valley formations in the remainder of the region. These two different landscapes result in different resources, land use patterns and recreational experiences. In short, the Southern Alleghenies region contains a rich tapestry of natural features available for the use and enjoyment of the region's residents as well as for those from well beyond the region's boundaries.

Given the breadth of the resources that the region possesses, the overall goal of this

plan is to create an integrated network of greenways that links and leverages these resources into a comprehensive system of open space and greenway connections. Once integrated, the overall network will form a "whole that is greater than the sum of its parts."

Purposes of the Plan

Upon evaluating issues in the region, it was recognized that the Southern Alleghenies Greenways and Open Space Network Plan (the Plan) will have a multitude of purposes. As a part of the planning process, a series of goals have been established to guide the development of the plan for each individual county.

One purpose of the Plan is to create physical connections between various regionally- and County-significant areas such as heritage sites and existing and planned recreation facilities. Another purpose is to identify opportunities for protecting other resources including sensitive natural land.

Building on these two overarching purposes, the Plan also seeks to:

1. Conserve important natural resources;
2. Expand recreation opportunities;
3. Celebrate cultural heritage;
4. Bolster economic development opportunities;
5. Expand mobility through alternative transportation opportunities; and
6. Promote healthy lifestyles.

The importance of each purpose was ranked at individual county meetings held in October

2005. Most counties ranked conservation and recreation as the Plan's two most important purposes. Unlike many other greenway efforts, equal interest exists in the Southern Alleghenies region to ensure the conservation of animal and plant habitat areas as to provide new and expanded recreation opportunities. Table 1, as outlined below summarizes the rankings expressed during these meetings.

The sixth purpose, "promote healthy lifestyles," was added to the list as a result of public input gathered during the October 2005 public meetings.

Goals

The development and prioritization of the overall purposes for the Plan led to the following related goals:

Purpose 1: Conserve important natural resources.

Goal 1A: Protect the region's most sensitive and unique natural areas and habitats by reserving sensitive and contiguous lands for greenways and open space areas.

Goal 1B: Identify and manage watershed issues within the region to minimize negative impacts on natural resources and waterways.

Goal 1C: Designate protected areas for wildlife habitat and migration patterns.

Purpose 2: Expand recreation opportunities.

Goal 2A: Leverage the broad range of existing committed open space investments within the region's recreation network.

Goal 2B: Delineate a formal system of land and water trails to link regionally significant recreation assets and heritage sites.

Purpose 3: Celebrate cultural heritage.

Goal 3A: Establish formal linkages between cultural resources to increase tourism and awareness within the region.

Goal 3B: Create educational opportunities and increase the visibility of cultural assets by integrating them into a publicly accessible trail network.

Purpose 4: Bolster economic development.

Goal 4A: Capitalize on nationally and State-significant efforts, such as the Great Allegheny Passage, the Rock Run Recreation Area, Main Line Canal Greenway™ and the Flight 93 National Memorial, to strengthen regional economic development.

Goal 4B: Expand local economic opportunities through the interconnection of various existing and future natural and cultural attractions, urban areas and historic sites.

This Southern Alleghenies Greenways and Open Space Plan (the Plan) has been organized into the following five parts and a series of appendices. The parts represent the primary steps or work tasks completed as part of the planning process. The parts are chronologically organized and generally describe the key data sets, planning criteria, policies or projects that have developed as part of that step. Maps, tables and images have been included to further summarize or illustrate the information. Throughout each part, key notes or points have been highlighted in light grey boxes.

Part One – Planning Approach

Outlines the overall approach used to develop the Plan, which includes an emphasis on the resource-based opportunities that exist in the region. The Plan was developed through the use of extensive geographical information system GIS-based mapping and analysis, includes a detailed action plan and incorporates an extensive public review process.

Part Two – Regional Profile

Provides a summary overview of the region, its counties and its natural and man-made resources. Much more detail about these resources can be found in Appendix A; an overview of the key findings is provided here. This section also includes a brief overview of previous planning efforts that have been conducted.

Part Three – Analyzing Opportunities

Describes the process used to sift through all of the GIS mapping and other data to establish potential greenway corridors and then to define the individual project corridors.

Part Four – Greenways and Open Space Vision

Presents the final greenways plans and project corridors for each county which are then integrated into a regional plan. It includes a description of each corridor type as well as mapping and descriptions of the greenway plans and project corridors for each of the five counties as well as for the entire region.

Part Five – A Plan for Action

Proposes an overall implementation strategy for developing the Plan and structure for the implementation partners. It also includes descriptions of potential implementation techniques and resources.

Bibliography

Outlines the plans, studies, reports and other literature sources used to compile this report.

Appendix A: Background Data

Contains descriptions of the existing features of the region (State Parks, Forests and Gamelands, Federal lands, on and off-road trails and water trails). Additionally, the full range of mapping prepared over the course of the project has been included along with summaries and descriptions.

Appendix B: GIS Data Dictionary

Lists the GIS datasets used to prepare the base mapping including the type and contents of each layer.

Appendix C: Public Participation Summary

Summarizes the public meetings held over the course of the project.

Appendix D: Conservation Easement

A sample conservation easement agreement based on a model agreement developed by the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association.

Appendix E: Riparian Forest Buffer Agreement

A sample riparian forest bugger agreement based on a model agreement developed by the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association.

Appendix F: Trail Easement Agreement

A sample trail easement agreement based on a model agreement developed by the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association.

Appendix G: Water Quality Improvement Easement

A sample water quality improvement easement agreement based on a model agreement developed by the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association.

Appendix H: Natural Infrastructure Data Layers Needed

Provides a summary of the GIS data layers needed to complete a natural infrastructure-type computer mapping database. The natural infrastructure data layers were defined in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.