

Pike County's Open Space, Greenways, and Recreation Plan

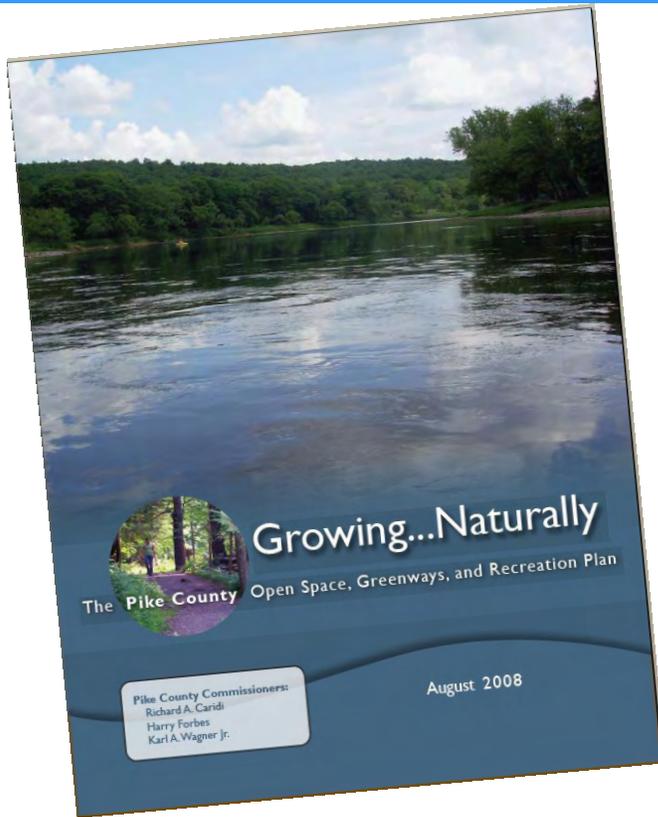


2012 Progress Report



Pike County Commissioners:
Richard A. Caridi, Chairman
Matthew M. Osterberg, Commissioner
Karl A. Wagner, Jr., Commissioner

Introductions

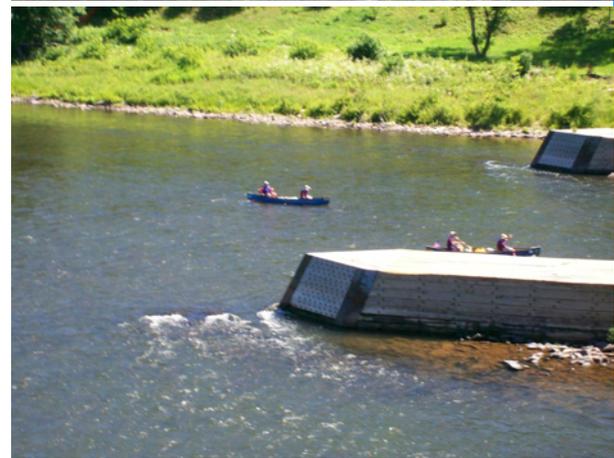


The Pike County Commissioners adopted *Growing Naturally: The Pike County Open Space, Greenways, and Recreation Plan* on August 27, 2008 as a way to strengthen and integrate protected open space, greenways and recreation into rural and small town community life and patterns in the County. In the four years since its adoption, this Open Space Plan has directed the preservation of critical habitats, encouraged regional cooperation to achieve mutual goals, and increased communications to visitors and residents that promote the recreational opportunities and natural assets of Pike County.

This progress report describes where Pike County has succeeded in accomplishing its Open Space Goals and highlights opportunities for improvement. No one wants to see a written plan collect dust on a shelf somewhere after all of the time, money, and work that went

into its production. Completion of a progress report allows the County to take a critical look at what has been accomplished, what is currently being done, and suggests steps to take for future action. Sometimes a certain recommendation or action strategy was written in response to a contemporary topic of concern and is no longer applicable. Other recommendations were resolved through an alternative action strategy. Revisiting the goals and recommendations described in the plan offer a clearer path in which to move forward.

The progress report examines the eight overall goals that comprised the 2008 Open Space Plan: a Land Protection Strategy, Resource and Rural Character Conservation, Greenways and Trails, Parks and Recreation, Resource Stewardship, Promotion for Community Recreation and Tourism, Management and Organization, and Financing. Instead of simply assigning performance grades to the 57 individual recommendations included within these goals, this report analyzed the individual recommendations in the greater context of the overall goals. In the report that follows, highlighted achievements and areas for improvement or future action are described for each of the eight goals, and conclude with a discussion of recommended next steps. Much has changed in Pike County and its surrounding landscape since the publication of the Open Space Plan in August 2008. This introspective into Pike County's open space, greenways and recreation activities will help to ensure that Pike County can continue to offer an exceptional quality of life for residents, businesses, and visitors alike.

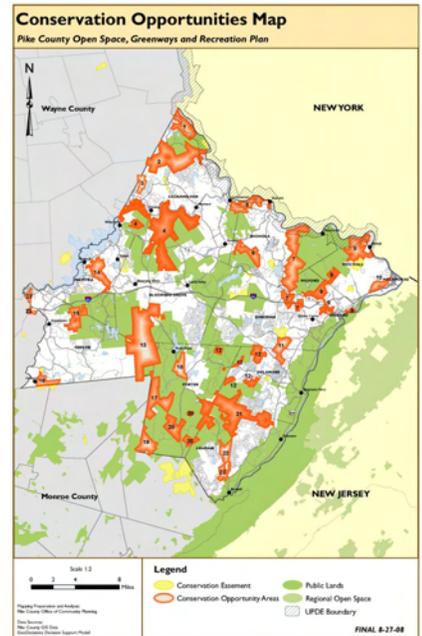


Land Protection Strategy

Goal 1: Promote the identification and protection of critical open space land areas of environmental, scenic, and recreational value, as shown on the Conservation Opportunity Areas Map, through acquisition and easement.

Notable achievements:

- Agricultural Land Preservation Program** - Pike County's first agricultural conservation easement was placed on a working farm (98 acres) in Dingman Twp. To date, over 6,739 acres have been incorporated into Agricultural Security Areas in 4 townships throughout the county.
- Pike County Scenic Rural Character Preservation Program** – The program has protected 2,354 acres to date with conservation easements. An additional 700 acres have been acquired in the County for municipal and county parks and additions to state forestlands; another 923 acres are in process. The Board is actively working with partners on the acquisitions and protection of 2,500 additional acres in the county.
- Planning:** Pike County Preservation Program funding has assisted with development of comprehensive and open space planning in 70% of Pike County's municipalities; worked with USGS as a partner on two special county-wide studies on groundwater levels and water quality; and Pike County's Natural Heritage Inventory was completed in 2011.
- Partnerships:** The Planning Office worked with numerous land trust partners and government agencies to protect critical habitats determined from planning analysis.



Areas for improvement:

- Acquisitions:** Only a small percentage of Conservation Opportunity Areas have been protected. Funding is limited at all levels of government, resulting in greater competition for grants and other opportunities. Planning office needs to continue partnerships at all levels broadening support and working together to achieve mutual goals.

Resource & Rural Character Conservation

Goal 2: Encourage conservation of our natural resources and rural character through best planning practices and sustainable development in accord with the integrity of our rural environment.

Notable achievements:

- Planning:** Approximately half of Pike County's municipalities have started or completed revisions to their subdivision ordinances to incorporate "Conservation By Design" elements.
- Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI):** Pike County's update of the NHI was completed and adopted by the Commissioners in October 2011.
- Conservation Landscape Initiative (CLI):** Pike County has played an active role in the Pocono Forest and Waters CLI working with partners throughout the region. A special 2011 grant award led to the publication of Pike Outdoors: Guide to Public Lands, a tremendously successful economic outreach effort.

Areas for improvement:

- Plan Development:** County should work towards the adoption of the Act 167 Stormwater Plan to provide a critical base for continued protection of stream corridors and water quality. As a follow up to the successful preservation of important forest habitats through the County's Scenic Rural Character Preservation Program, the County should begin to encourage the development of forest stewardship plans. Pike County's next Comprehensive Plan should include a chapter on, and inventory of, the county's historic and cultural resources. County should work towards identification of critical water planning areas and a Water Resources element of the comprehensive plan.

Managing our Lands Today - - Creating our Legacy for the Future

Protecting and managing your natural resources is an essential part of managing your biggest financial investment – your land. By envisioning what you want your land to be and setting goals for the future, you begin a land management planning process that can protect the quality of the soil, water and forested resources of your property. These land management activities can also enhance wildlife habitat, increase recreational opportunities and improve the aesthetic value of your land.

Special Points of Interest:

Conservation Plan

Wildlife Management Plan

Forest Stewardship Plan

Tree Farms

Best Management Practices

Financial Assistance

In Pike County, there are private landowners with sizable acreages containing agricultural and forested lands looking for assistance in protecting their natural resources. This guide is designed to provide information on land management options that, if implemented correctly, can reduce soil erosion, enhance wildlife and fisheries habitat, and protect water quality. It also lists financial incentive programs offered by government agencies and private organizations that can help Pike County landowners. By incorporating some of these suggestions and making use of the financial assistance that is available, you can protect your long-term investment, demonstrate your commitment to conservation of your land, and leave a legacy for future generations.



What are Best Management Practices?

Throughout this guide you will run into the term Best Management Practices (BMPs). BMPs are effective and practical methods that prevent the movement of sediment, nutrients, pesticides and other pollutants from the land to the water. BMPs are developed to achieve a balance between water quality protection and maintaining your land.

Greenways and Trails

Goal 3: Identify linkages in critical open space areas and develop methods to create, restore and conserve the connections.

Notable achievements:

-Regional Cooperation: Pike Planning is working with Sullivan County, NY Planning to develop a greenway plan for revitalization of the Upper Delaware riverfront on both sides of the river. We continue to participate in statewide planning for the scenic byway designation for the Route 6 corridor.

-Other Trail Developments: Several new trails have been constructed or are in planning process: PPL Creek and Lake Trails, East Stroudsburg Area School District (North Campus) Trail, Delaware Township Akenac Park Interpretive Trail; walking trails planned at Pike County Santos Riverfront Park and Dingman Township Bridge Preserve.

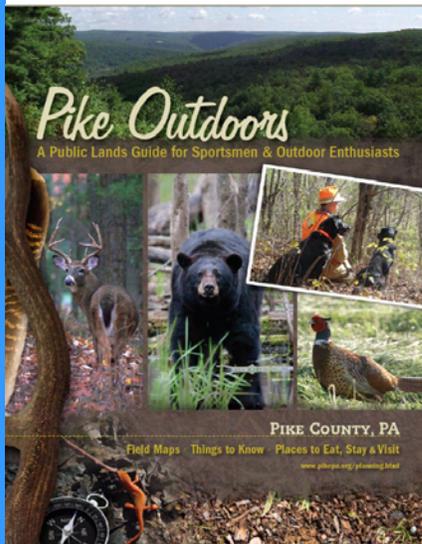
-Greenway and Trail Development: Completion of the McDade Trail from Milford Beach to the Delaware Water Gap by the National Park Service and completion of planning for the Pinchot Greenway running from the Delaware River at Milford Beach to USFS Grey Towers are important steps under this goal.

-Municipal Planning: Several Pike County municipalities have taken the lead on park planning which include trails and greenway areas. Examples include: Lackawaxen Township Park, Delaware Township Akenac Park, Dingman Township Bridge Preserve Master Planning; Pike County's Santos Riverfront Park; Lehman Township Park; Palmyra Township development of Wallenpaupack Lake Trail.

Areas for improvement:

-Development: Implementation of trail recommendations in Master Site Plans for County Parks.

-Education: Outreach to municipal officials, local businesses and the public on the economic benefits of "greenways" dispelling myths on private property encroachment



Parks and Recreation

Goal 4: Establish a countywide system of parks and recreation areas through the collaboration of state, county, regional, municipal, and private parks and recreation opportunities in Pike County for present and future generations.

Notable achievements:

-Planning: Development of Master Site Plans for Pike County's Santos Riverfront Park, Delaware Township's Akenac Park, Dingman Township's Park and Bridge Preserves, Lehman Township Park planning and Matamoras Borough Airport Park Planning. Implementation of many of these plans.

-Support: Participation in the Akenac Park Peer to Peer study and Master Site Plan development, Dingman Township Bridge Preserve Master Plan and Lackawaxen Park master site planning process.

-Acquisitions: Pike County's Scenic Rural Character Preservation Program has promoted public use on all acquisitions funded under the program, increasing the close-to-home recreational needs in Pike County.

-Education: Planning Office is working with East Stroudsburg Area School District to develop an interpretive trail and outdoor classroom at their Lehman (North) Campus

Areas for improvement:

-Development: Implementation of recommendations in Master Site Plans for County owned Parks would enhance the recreational experience.

-Community Recreation: Assess the need for public indoor recreational opportunities in the County. Examine cost effectiveness of opening school recreational facilities to community during non-school hours.



Image: Entrance to Akenac Park

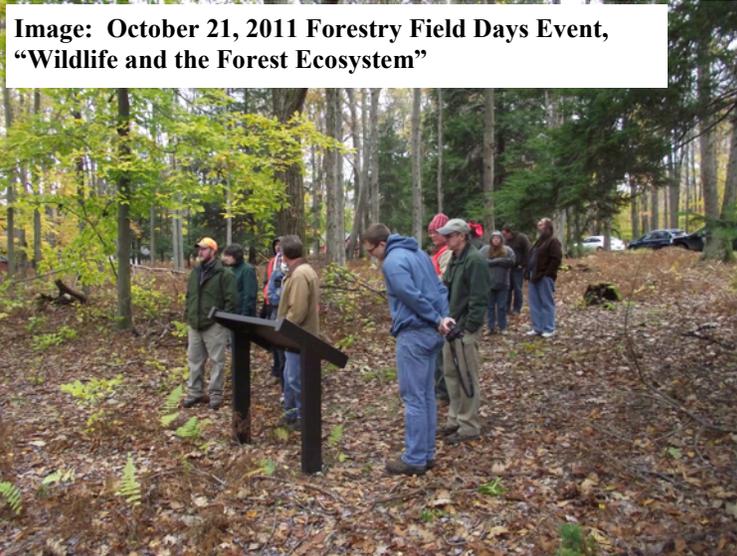
Resource Stewardship

Goal 5: Build stewardship for Pike County's land, water and natural resources through public outreach and education.

Notable achievements:

-Education: Probably our greatest strength has been education to groups and individuals. The County's well-rounded program of outreach to citizens on resource stewardship has included outreach to Pike County landowners through regular educational programming such as Forestry Field Days, Forest to Faucet, and Clean Water-Healthy Communities programs. The Pike County Preservation Program has sponsored informational workshops, special mailings and personal contacts. Partnerships between county agencies and with other organizations have also produced quality programming and outreach to visitors, residents and businesses.

Image: October 21, 2011 Forestry Field Days Event, "Wildlife and the Forest Ecosystem"



-Partnerships: Continued and on-going participation in regional partnerships such as Common Waters, Pocono Forest and Waters Conservation Landscape Initiative, and Wayne Pike Conservation Partnership provides important opportunities for outreach to private landowners on stewardship. Pike Marcellus Shale Task Force meetings and programs provide regular contact with concerned citizens and municipal officials.

-Promotions: Pike County Planning promotional efforts such as *Greetings From Pike County* natural resources brochure, *Pike Outdoors: Guide to Public Lands, Best Management Practices Guide* for landowners and others highlight importance of private land stewardship.

Areas for improvement:

-Outreach Diversity: Investigate ways to increase communications with residents and visitors. Consider including the use of social media on County websites to reach those not familiar with local media outlets.

Promotion for Community Rec. & Tourism

Goal 6: Position Pike County as a premier tourism destination in the U.S. and internationally for outdoor recreation, eco-tourism, heritage and agri-tourism through protection and promotion of county resources.

Notable achievements:

-Digital Outreach: Discover Pike PA and The Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau have done a great job in promoting outdoor recreation in the area through well-designed websites and the use of Social Media. In addition, Pike County has participated in the Shop Local Save Land program to promote local agriculture and regional wood products industries.

-Print Promotions: Discover Pike PA publication "Hike Pike" and Pike County's "Pike Outdoors" are used by local Bed and Breakfasts and Hotels to provide visitors with information on available recreational activities.

Areas for improvement:

-Negative Perceptions: Pike County and its business community have been working to combat the negative perceptions of the area that have occurred as a result of the national media coverage of shale gas exploration in Northeast Pennsylvania. In addition, misunderstanding of current recreation and greenway planning has drawn concerns from some Pike residents still upset by the region's history and the development of national park units in the river valley.



Image: Shop Local Save Land homepage

Management and Organization

Goal 7: Organize and manage open space conservation, greenways, parks and recreation through partnerships for the greatest public benefit and responsible use of resources.

Notable achievements:

-Partnerships: One of Pike County's strengths. Partnerships with CommonWaters, neighboring counties, the Conservation Partnership, the NEPA Land Trust Partners, the Pike-Monroe Woodland Owners Group, planning the 2012 Eastern PA Greenways and Trails Conference, and the Conservation Landscape Initiative have brought together public, private, and nonprofit entities to coordinate plans and activities related to conservation, open space, and recreation.



Image: Pike County Planning and Conservation District Staff participated in a wetland restoration project, July 2012

Areas for improvement:

-Staffing: The plan recommends increasing the planning staff by hiring more planners to allow for specialization and increased attention to various areas of focus. Other staffing recommendations include the addition of a County forester, or at least having a DCNR Service Forester with a sole focus on Pike County.

-Coordination: No coordinated effort to plan, manage, and develop a countywide system of trails currently exists.

Financing

Goal 8: Invest in open space, parks & recreation

Notable achievements:

-County Funding: The first six years of implementation of the Pike County Scenic Rural Character Preservation Program has been very successful in preserving lands, updating county and municipal plans, and protecting groundwater. As of December 31, 2011, the program has spent a total of \$11,161,344 to accomplish these goals, \$5.3 million dollars of which has come from outside matching funds. For every dollar the program has spent, it has been able to pull in 90 cents in matching grants and other outside funds.

-Municipal Investments: Several townships have taken the lead on funding parks and recreation in their communities – funding park planning initiatives, implementing and constructing park improvements, and in some cases dedicating tax revenue specifically for park construction, management, and operation.

Pike County Santos Riverfront Park



-Planning: Completion in-house of Pike County Santos Riverfront Park Master Site Plan and baseline documentation for land acquisitions and easements under Pike County's Preservation program has not only saved the County thousands of dollars but also has ensured quality control over the end product.

-Grants: Pike County has been successful in receiving grant money to acquire land for public access, improve the County Park (Lily Pond site), and promote existing recreational opportunities. The Planning Office has also recently applied for grant funding to develop a greenway plan for the Upper Delaware Corridor, with the support of its neighbors in New York and New Jersey.

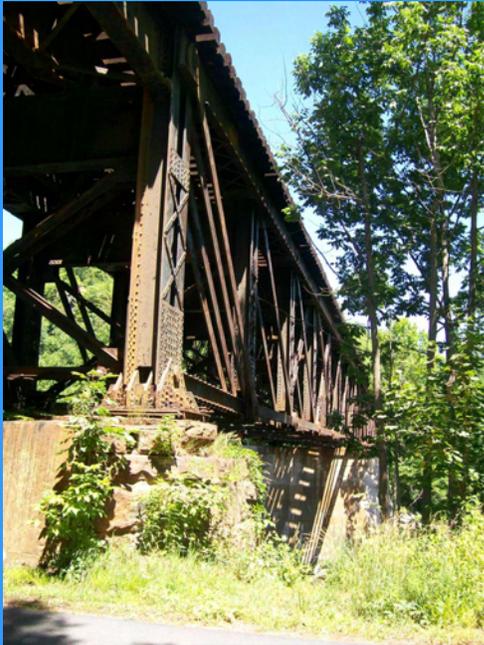
Areas for improvement:

-Park Funding: Economic realities have prevented the County and some municipalities from funding park infrastructure, maintenance, and oversight. Continue to consider innovative ways to fund these endeavors.



Master Site Plan February 2012

Closing Thoughts



Holistic look at issues. “Trails” or “preservation” do not need to be single issue items of focus. Trails could be instituted through discussion with developers to use in place of dedicated space. Protected lands could become public demonstration areas (ie farms), or combined with a county energy policy (wood chipping or grass pellets) to reduce energy costs, promote clean energy and local businesses, while also funding park facilities and promoting responsible conservation. Limited funding from all levels of government presents a challenge and opportunity to cultivate and develop new partnerships and consider alternative paths to achieve shared goals.



Thinking three steps ahead. What steps will get us to where we need to go? While we may not have the money or support to immediately implement all of the goals and recommendations outlined in the plan, small steps to lay the groundwork for future government or private funding can help the process continue. Directing positive attention to an area, such as through an APA Great Places Designation, PA Scenic River Corridor designation, or CommonWaters brand for the region will draw people and money to a given area, and increase the social, political, and monetary capital potential.



Unexpected Benefits. Establishment of Pike’s Marcellus Shale Task Force has allowed government, businesses, and individuals to reevaluate their conservation priorities. While Pike County (and the greater Task Force) has not taken a formal stand for or against shale gas exploration, the County has taken proactive efforts to ensure the protection of its pristine natural assets. This includes the recently-commissioned USGS water well study, educational programs, and the “Greetings from Pike County” nostalgic brochure promotion. Pike County has yet to experience any natural gas drilling; however, the negative perceptions of the hydraulic fracturing process are enough to deter visitors to the area. This Progress Report reveals that the strengths of the Pike County Planning Office programs include public education and outreach. In order to continue our open space planning efforts and continue to welcome visitors and new residents to Pike County, the Planning Office must properly focus its education and outreach to a wider and more diverse population base.

Unexpected Consequences. What happens when we continue to preserve lands? How do we protect local tax bases? How do we protect existing recreational lifestyles, such as hunting? How can we demonstrate the economic attractiveness of the area to prospective businesses? How do we meet the needs of our permanent and seasonal residents? Future county and municipal Comprehensive and Open Space Plans will need to consider how to incorporate the three principles of sustainable development: environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, and social sustainability.

Next Steps:

Increase Communication and Outreach Efforts.

We need to draw upon our strengths. Pike County agencies and cooperating partners have accomplished a great deal in the way of providing educational opportunities and products to residents and visitors. However, we still seem to run into difficulties when it comes to reaching out to visitors whose perceptions are formed through the nightly news coverage of shale gas development. We also have had trouble in promoting recreational and economic development opportunities to some of our full-time residents and municipalities. Efforts should be made to include these individuals in the planning process to alleviate their concerns.



Recreational Opportunities Inventory. Many recommendations in the Open Space Plan are geared towards increasing the amount of recreational and outdoor opportunities for its residents and visitors. Currently, no comprehensive inventory exists of the available opportunities, public and private. While some private opportunities are limited to members (hunt clubs, community associations), others are open to the public, such as the PPL Creek Trail. Developing park opportunities in one area may not be necessary if targeted users already enjoy the same amenities in their private community, likewise areas with significant public lands may be overlooked for active recreation opportunities, when those opportunities are desired by the community.

Collaboration With Partners. Pike County agencies, local municipalities, non-profit agencies, and businesses have individually undertaken many of the projects recommended in the Open Space Plan, sometimes without the knowledge of the other involved entities. To avoid redundancy and ensure the most efficient use of limited funding, an Open Space and Recreation committee involving all of the area stakeholders should be formed. This will also provide an opportunity to share ideas, apply for funding, and better promote the recreational opportunities of Pike County.

