Growing...Naturally

The **Pike County** Open Space, Greenways, and Recreation Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

August 2008

Pike's Top Ten!

The "Blueprint for Action" items shown at the top of each page are this plan's top ten recommended initiatives for Pike County.

blueprint for action INITIATIVE # 1

LAND PROTECTION

Over the next 10 years, preserve 24,100 acres of land as open space: 19,500 acres of private forested land, 1,100 acres of local parkland, 1,500 acres of regional parkland, and 2,000 acres of farmland. Target easements, acquisitions, and land donations to interconnect and buffer existing protected lands.

What is happening in Pike County?

Intense Growth

Pike County is a great place. We have beautiful natural areas, a relaxing pace of life, and affordable living. Although much of our county feels like wilderness, we're remarkably close to urban areas of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. That convenient proximity, in fact, has drawn visitors to Pike County for more than a century. And once visitors see what this area has to offer, they often decide to stay.

It's not surprising that Pike County is the fastest-growing county in Pennsylvania, and has been for the past three decades. What is surprising—and alarming—is what that trend could mean for our future.

Our Population Could Triple

If our current rate of growth continues, Pike County's population could nearly triple in just over 20 years, hitting 150,000 by 2030. And that doesn't count the thousands of tourists who visit on weekends or vacations—a number also bound to increase. After all, Pike County is one of the closest destinations for enjoying the great outdoors for more than 11 million people living in New York City and other nearby metropolitan areas.

In Pennsylvania, we can't place a moratorium on development, nor should we close the door on tourism. Instead, we need to think about what we absolutely must preserve, and take action to protect it now, before it's too late.

We Must Act Today

We need to act now to conserve land and the rural character of Pike County before it is lost or irreparably changed by development. The window of opportunity to preserve land and resources is narrow—and closing. Land is being consumed by development at a rate of 500 to 1,000 acres per year. While the $10 million bond funding for the Pike County Scenic Rural Character Preservation Program (passed in 2005) is a lot of money, it's not nearly enough to set aside land on the scale required to retain the present character of Pike County. We need to do more, and we can't wait any longer.

We need to think about what we absolutely must preserve, and take action to protect it now, before it's too late.

blueprint for action INITIATIVE # 2

RESOURCE AND CHARACTER PRESERVATION

Update county and municipal ordinances to include contemporary environmental protections. Update or complete environmental resource water and wildlife studies to provide accurate foundations for planning, zoning, and land development plan review. Develop and implement resource management plans for public lands. Encourage resource management plans for private lands.

What is this plan all about?

Growing...Naturally

The Pike County Open Space, Greenways, and Recreation Plan is entitled, *Growing…Naturally*. That's a fitting title because it is what the plan seeks to encourage—growth that respects and preserves Pike County's most precious natural resources. It also aims to connect those natural resources in logical ways, to the benefit of wildlife and the people who enjoy Pike County.

This document is the Executive Summary of *Growing…Naturally*, for those who would like highlights of the study and its recommendations. The full report is available from the Pike County Office of Community Planning. It is a component of the Pike County Comprehensive Plan.

A Framework for Decision-Making

Growing…Naturally is not law or a regulatory document. It is a recommended approach to achieving a healthy balance between preservation and development in Pike County. It suggests management strategies and policies to protect our natural resources and provide quality recreation opportunities for people who live or work in Pike County or visit here. The plan will be used as a reference by county officials, municipalities, developers, land owners, and other interested parties.

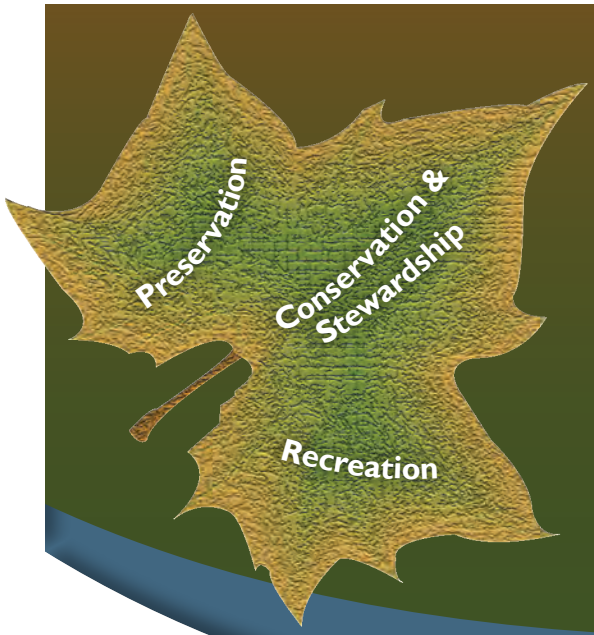
The plan is not a law.
It is a framework to guide future plans and decisions.

Partnership With Willing Landowners

Pike County is working with willing landowners to preserve open space and develop logical connections—such as completing a missing link between two trails.

Private property rights are of tremendous importance to the people of Pike County. To support this right, Pike County has adopted a policy that acknowledges that:

- All landowners are land stewards.
- All land conservation will be through partnerships with willing participants.
- Not all preserved lands will have public access.



blueprint for action INITIATIVE # 3

GREENWAYS & TRAILS

Develop a trail within a 15-minute walk or bike ride of every citizen. By 2017, establish four county greenway spines and 100 miles of trails that connect people to the rivers, parks, neighborhoods, schools, shopping areas, business centers, towns, and villages to which municipalities and other organizations can connect.

What do we mean by "open space?"

The terms "open space," greenways," and "recreation" can mean many things to many people. Here are the basic definitions used in the plan:

Open Space:

Land and water features that have not been intensively developed, such as:

- wildlife areas
- wetlands
- parks and recreation areas
- productive farms or forestry lands

Greenways:

Linear corridors of public or private open space lands, such as:

- ridgelines
- stream corridors
- trails
- streetscapes

Recreation:

Parkland and outdoor facilities that people use year-round for leisure activities, organized programs, and their management and operation. These include:

- parks and recreation areas
- trails

What are the benefits of Open Space, Greenways, and Recreation?

Economic

- Increase nearby property values.
- Foster new and expanded businesses, employment opportunities, and revenues related to greenway and trail use.
- Create/increase tourism expenditures on food, lodging, and services.
- Reduce damage and financial loss from flooding.

Transportation

- Promote non-motorized transportation.
- Provide safe alternative transportation routes for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Provide emergency access via trails to undeveloped areas.
- Reduce roadway congestion through redistribution of users to alternative transportation routes.

Recreation

- Provide areas to jog, walk, bike, ride horses, canoe, and swim.
- Serve as sites for passive pursuits such as picnicking, fishing, hunting, and enjoying nature.
- Provide connections between parks and other protected lands and interconnect existing and planned trails.

Social

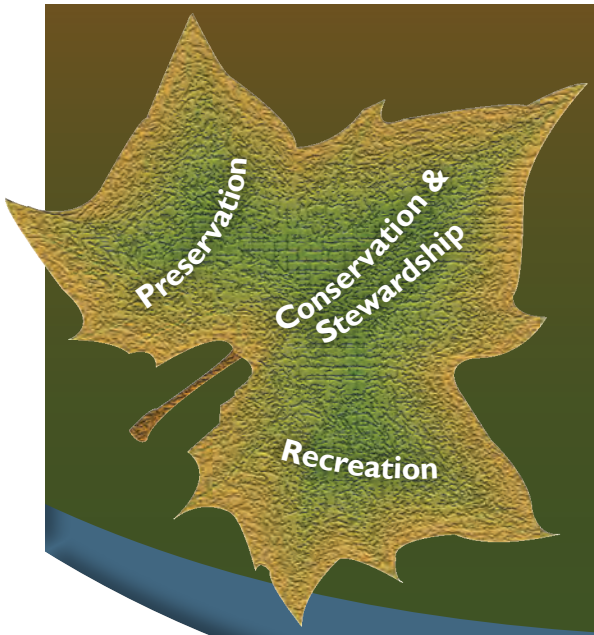
- Provide access to historically and culturally significant features.
- Help preserve the character and aesthetic appeal of a place or landscape.
- Provide significant new public places to connect people and communities.
- Improve health and wellness.
- Heighten sensitivity to and interaction with the natural environment.

Ecological

- Promote and sustain wildlife diversity through protection of habitat and migration corridors.
- Absorb and filter storm water and flood waters.
- Improve air quality and reduce noise.
- Connect or reconnect fragmented landscapes.
- Focus attention and clean-up efforts on damaged or degraded corridors.

Environmental Education

- Provide landscapes for learning.
- Create an awareness of and appreciation for the environment.
- Introduce environmental issues and best practices to the public.



blueprint for action INITIATIVE # 4

REGIONAL PARKS & OPEN SPACE

Organize Pike County into four multi-municipal regions for planning trail and greenway systems, and as the foundation for the countywide system of parks and recreation services. Create one regional park in each planning region. Program two-thirds of each regional park for passive recreation and one-third for active recreation. Establish county, multi-municipal, or municipal management.

How was this plan developed?

A Recommendation of the County Comprehensive Plan

The 2006 Pike County Comprehensive Plan recommended development of an Open Space, Greenways, and Recreation Plan to provide direction on:

- Protecting high quality water resources
- Retaining our rural character
- Connecting public lands to preserve and enhance our open space network
- Expanding recreational opportunities

With that mission, work began on this plan in February 2006.

A Committed and Diverse Team

The planning team included staff from the Pike County Office of Community Planning, consultants Gannett Fleming and Toole Recreation Planning, and a countywide Study Committee comprised of interested citizens. Participants represented forestry, conservation, economic development, tourism, and land use planning. The Study Committee met regularly throughout the project to guide the development of the plan. The public was involved throughout the process through interviews, focus groups, public meetings, and regional meetings with municipal officials.

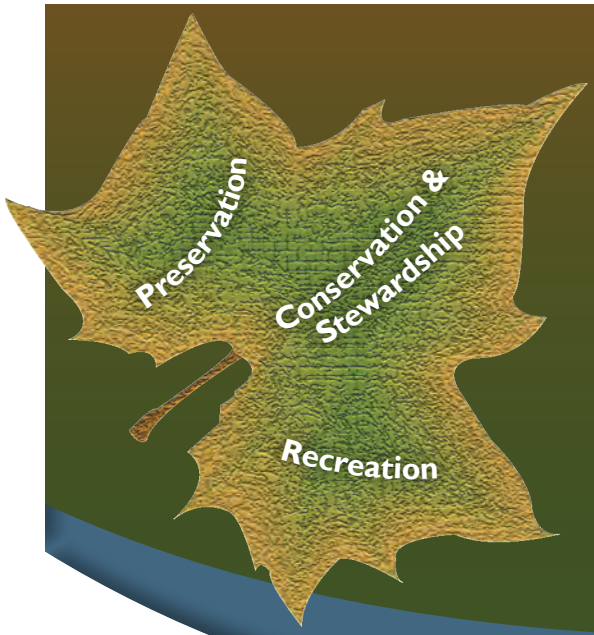
Six Study Steps

1. Inventorying existing resources and conditions
2. Analyzing strengths, challenges, and opportunities
3. Mapping
4. Establishing a vision, mission, goals, and guiding principles
5. Developing actions and recommendations
6. Reviewing and finalizing the plan

What is Pike County's vision for open space, greenways, and recreation?

photo: E. Salak

By 2017, Pike County will be a community sustained by its open space, greenways, and recreation network. The critical components of Pike County's open space, greenways, and recreation network will be protected and enhanced through collaborative public investment and partnerships and by working with willing landowners for the overall benefit of the community. The network will demonstrate a visible connection between our natural areas, high quality water resources, recreation areas, and livable communities. This network will continue to support a diverse and prosperous tourism economy based on outdoor recreation and the scenic quality of the rural landscape. The rural character and quality of life that Pike County residents value will continue to be maintained through balanced conservation planning, smart growth, and active preservation efforts through our partnerships, citizens, and communities.



blueprint for action INITIATIVE # 5

CLOSE-TO-HOME PARKS & RECREATION

Assist the municipalities in developing multi-municipal park, recreation, and open space plans. Focus parks and recreation facilities within 15 minutes of every household in the planned growth areas. Include school districts within the close-to-home recreation system. Outside of the growth areas, focus on creating trails to connect rural residents with parks and recreation facilities in planned growth areas and to the regional park.

What does the plan recommend?

Targeted Goals and Focused Action

The plan develops Pike County's broad vision for open space, greenways, and recreation into guiding principles, goals, and recommendations.

These goals are further distilled into a "Blueprint for Action" that outlines the top 10 initiatives. These initiatives are presented at the top of each page of this Executive Summary.

Central to the plan is the concept of developing Pike County's open space, parks, and recreation resources as a network, following a hub-and-spoke layout.

photo: J. Grohmann

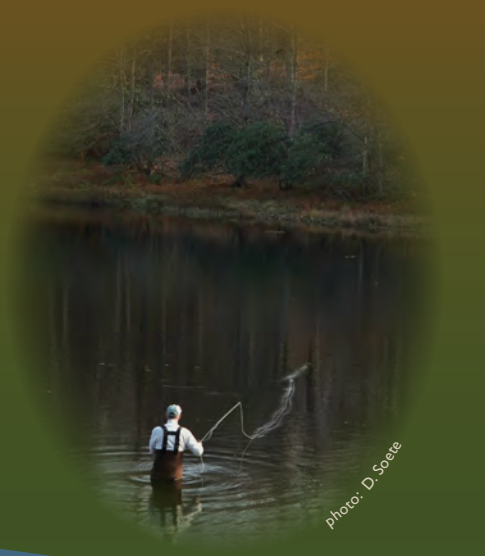
Pike County goals:

- Identify and protect open space areas.
- Conserve natural resources, rural character and preserve our cultural heritage.
- Connect open space areas.
- Establish a system of parks and recreation areas.
- Encourage private stewardship for Pike County's land, water, and natural resources.
- Position Pike County for natural resources-focused tourism.
- Maximize public benefits and responsible use of resources.
- Invest in open space and recreation for health and economic vitality.

blueprint for action INITIATIVE # 6

PRIVATE STEWARDSHIP

Foster the ethic that every land owner is a land steward. Create a program of public education and outreach for municipalities, owners of large properties, citizens, and tourists. Advocate the benefits they can receive from land conservation and natural resource protection; alternatives to development; parks, recreation, and open space as a community investment; and educating the next generation of land stewards.



What do we mean by a "network?"

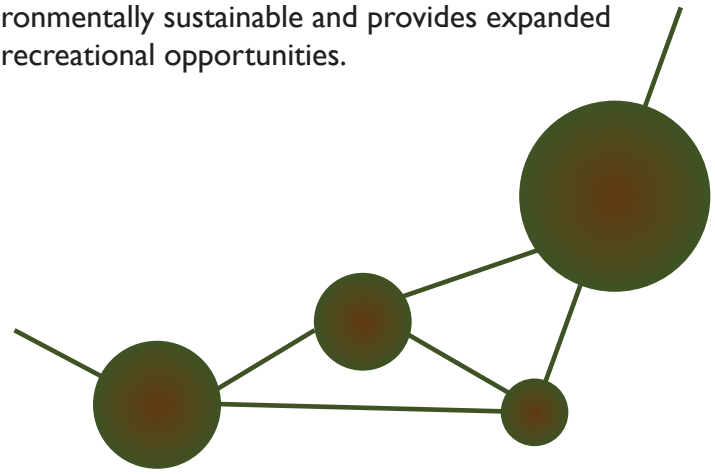
Developing open space, greenways, and recreation areas as a network means they are interconnected in a hub-and-spoke concept. The "hubs" would be the large preserved areas like the Delaware Water Gap National Recreational Area, state game lands, or state parks. The "spokes" would be the connecting greenways, trails, or scenic byways, many of which have yet to be developed or preserved.

Pike County has an excellent foundation for the network, with significant public and protected lands. These include the Delaware State Forest, the various state game lands, Promised Land State Park, public water accesses, county and municipal parkland, and the numerous private properties that have been protected from development. These protected areas encompass more than 128,000 acres, or nearly a third of the county's land.

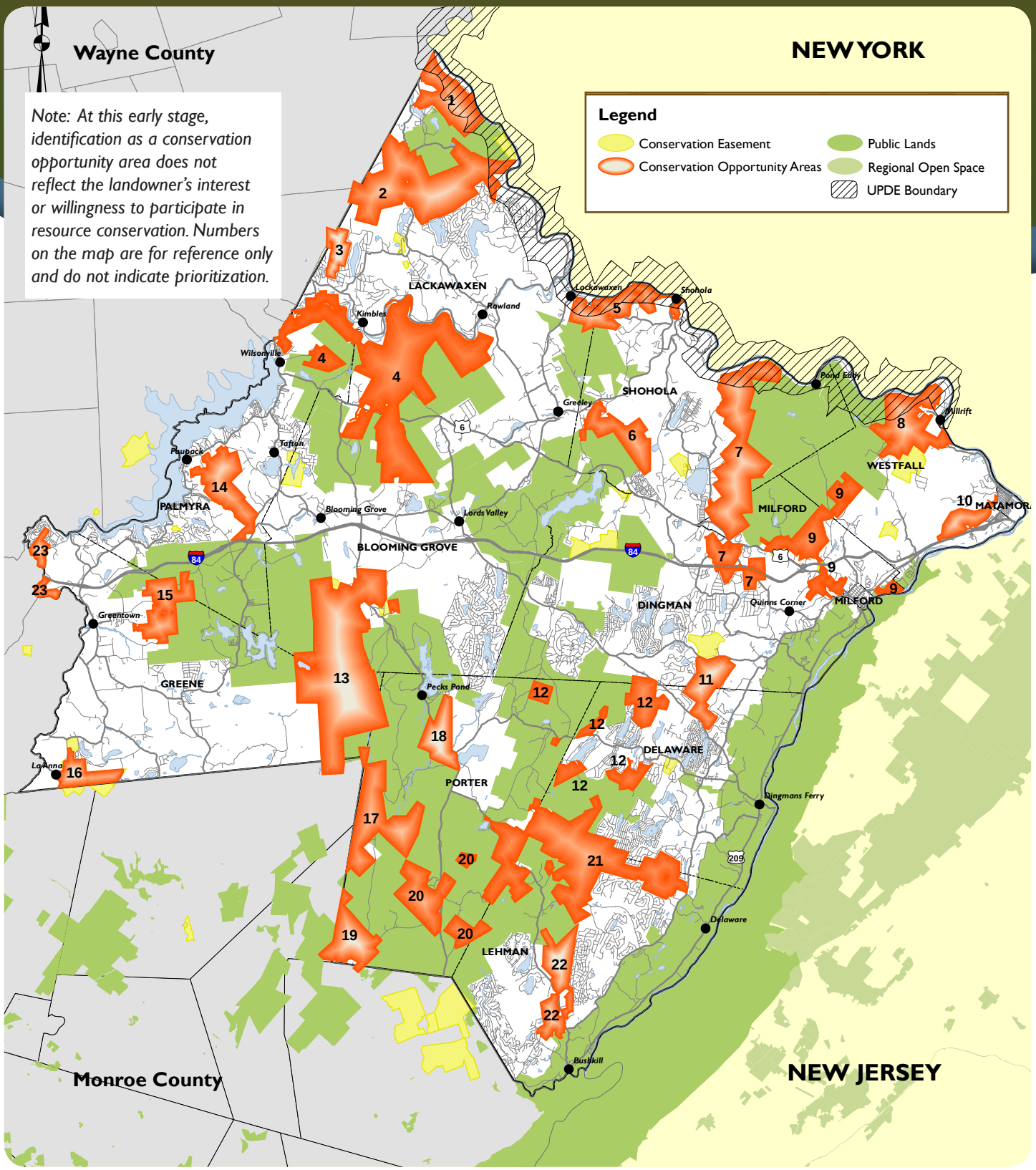
To this foundation, the network will provide opportunities for significant resource conservation and open space protection on large tracts or clusters of tracts. These are called conservation opportunity areas, and are shown on the map on the following page. These areas contain valuable natural resources and their protection from development has been determined to be a priority. Outreach regarding land conservation options, resource management, and stewardship programs should be targeted to landowners in these areas to ascertain their interest in long-term protection and management programs. Willing landowners in these areas should receive priority for technical assistance and funding from public conservation programs.

The proposed network also encompasses various greenways, trails, and scenic byways. All three types of corridors link key natural and recreational features with scenic and cultural journey points or destinations.

Developing a network rather than isolated pockets of preserved lands makes the open space more environmentally sustainable and provides expanded recreational opportunities.



What are our potential new hubs, or Conservation Opportunity Areas?



blueprint for action INITIATIVE # 7

TOURISM & RECREATION SERVICES

Work with the Pike County Visitors Bureau and the Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau to create and support tourism destinations. Create a recreation council focused on providing opportunities for year-round active, healthy lifestyles.

photo: D. Soete

Conservation Opportunity Areas—which could be added to the "hubs" of open space that Pike County already has—were identified based on the presence of significant natural, recreational, cultural, or scenic resources. The study team identified 23 multi-tract areas that contain concentrations of valuable resources, making them especially worth preserving. These areas total approximately 65,750 acres, or 18 percent of Pike County.

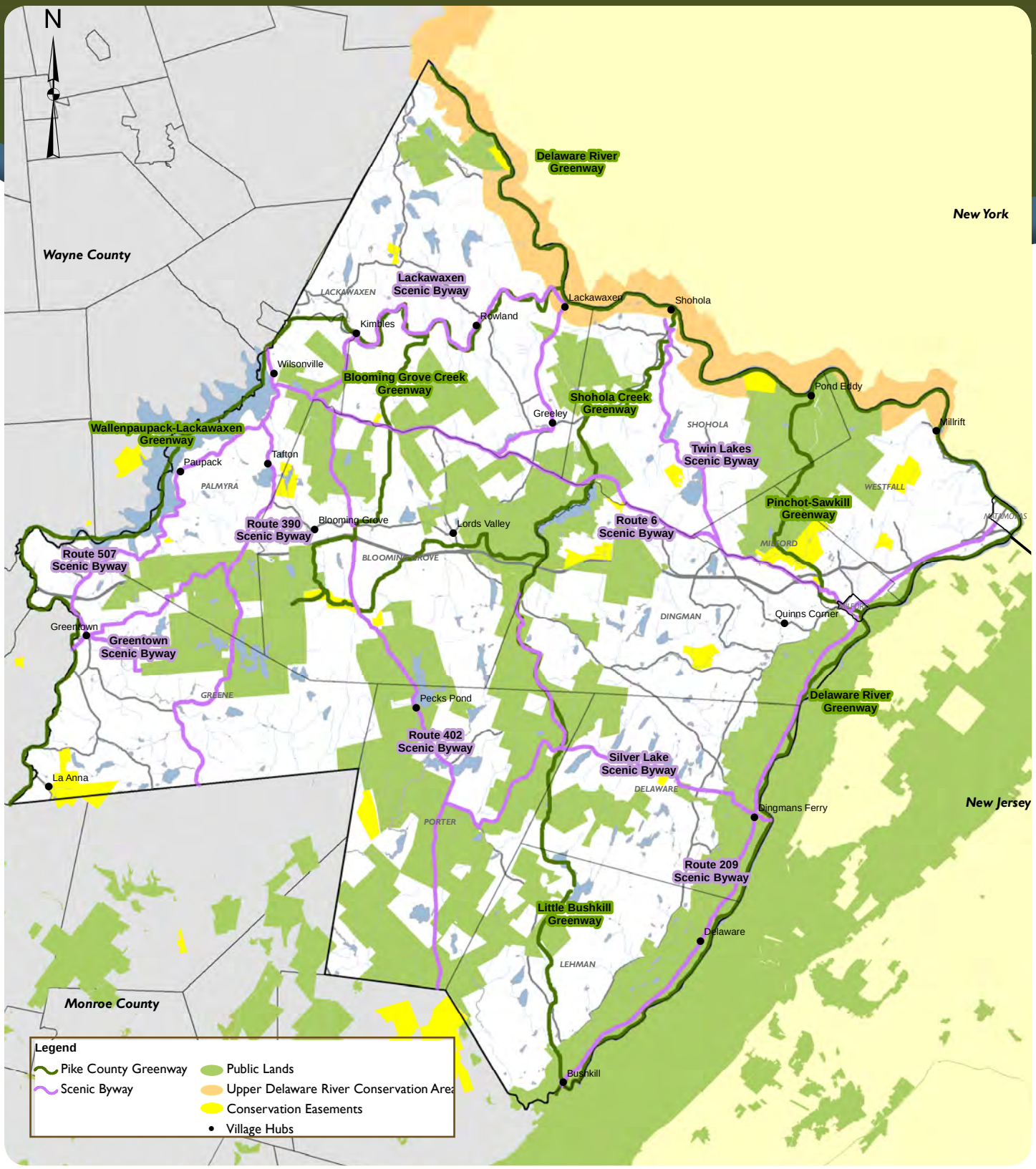
Conservation partners should target outreach to landowners in these areas and identify appropriate conservation tools for the resources to be conserved. At this stage, being identified as a conservation opportunity area does not reflect the landowner's interest or willingness to participate in resource conservation. No landowners were identified during this study.

photo: J. McBryan

Conservation Opportunity Areas

1. Rowland Swamp
2. Lackawaxen Lakes
3. Tinkwig Headwaters
4. Shimers Mountain
5. Delaware River Ridgeline
6. Bald Hill
7. Sagamore Ridge
8. Millrift Highlands
9. Buckhorn Oak Barrens
10. Delaware Valley Cliffs
11. Middaugh Pond
12. Long Swamp
13. The Knotch – Belle Mountain
14. Millbrook Ridge
15. Paupack Lowlands
16. LaAnna Divide
17. Bushkill Highlands
18. Pickerel Lake
19. Bushkill Basin
20. Twelvemile Pond
21. Whittaker's End
22. Little Bushkill Ridge
23. Wallenpaupack Confluence

How could we connect these areas—What are our spokes?



blueprint for action INITIATIVE # 8

PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY

Embrace partnerships to implement the plan. Identify actions to pursue and assemble these partnerships to work on initiatives collaboratively. Strategically manage partnerships to address all elements of the plan. Use existing partnerships, such as the Conservation Partnership, as the springboard.

photo: E. Salak

Proposed Greenways and Scenic Byways

As defined in the plan, greenways are corridors of open space that can be either public or private. Greenways serve a variety of functions and benefits, including natural resource conservation and protection, wildlife habitat and migration, community revitalization, transportation, economic development, community education, and recreation.

The conceptual map on page 12 illustrates key potential connections between the county's natural and man-made resources, in order to promote conservation and landowner stewardship. The network includes greenways, trails, and scenic byways. It builds upon recommendations from the public, the Study Committee, and the County Comprehensive Plan.

Some greenways are designed for resource conservation or ecology, not public access. Others would be well suited for public recreational use, such as links between public open lands.

Pike County's scenic byways encourage preserving the intrinsic qualities of rural roadways. Intrinsic qualities may be cultural, historical, natural, recreational, or scenic features.

Greenways are corridors of open space that can be either public or private.

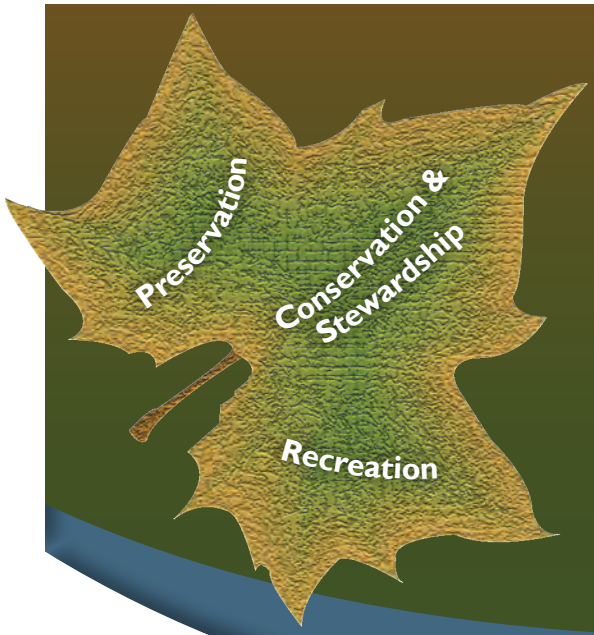
Greenways:

- Blooming Grove Creek Greenway
- Delaware River Greenway
- Little Bushkill Greenway
- Sawkill-Pinchot Greenway
- Shohola Creek Greenway
- Wallenpaupack-Lackawaxen Greenway

Scenic Byways:

- Greentown Scenic Byway
- Lackawaxen Scenic Byway
- Route 402 Scenic Byway
- Route 6 Scenic Byway
- Route 209 Scenic Byway
- Silver Lake Scenic Byway
- Route 507 Scenic Byway
- Route 390 Scenic Byway
- Twin Lakes Road Scenic Byway

photo: J. McBryan



blueprint for action INITIATIVE # 9

ORGANIZATION & MANAGEMENT

Continue to expand the staff of the Office of Community Planning and focus the responsibilities of each staff member. Experts should be available in forestry, water resources, land use and infrastructure, recreation and trails, cultural resources, and tourism.

How can we achieve these goals?

Partnerships

Pike County Commissioners and staff alone cannot accomplish all that needs to be done within the rapidly narrowing window of opportunity. Partnerships are essential. There is already a force of conservation organizations, land trusts, trail enthusiasts, and outdoor recreation devotees with a common interest in sustaining nature while growing naturally in Pike County. Harnessing these interests into productive partnerships to work strategically and collaboratively on priority actions could have a significant impact. The members of the Conservation Partnership are already working in coordination with one another using an annual work plan to identify priorities for comprehensive management and education. Expanded partnerships of this type are needed.

More staff resources

Providing staff and resources at the county level can help leverage great gains in open space, parks, and recreation through planning, conservation by design, public/private partnerships, and multi-municipal operations. Investing now in staff to work in a concentrated, collaborative fashion will produce results that may not be possible if we wait another decade. Concentrated, intensive planning and outreach is likely to have a payback worth millions of dollars. It will help retain Pike County's high quality of life and preserve open space and character that could still be enjoyed a century from now.

photo: J. Grohmann

blueprint for action INITIATIVE # 10

INTEGRATE OPEN SPACE, PARKS, & RECREATION

Position parks, recreation, and open space as a tool to support economic development, create a sense of community, stimulate tourism, promote health and wellness, attract business, and protect the environment. Integrate investment of open space, parks, and recreation into these aspects of public and private planning.

photo: J. McBryan

How can we begin implementation?

This plan will serve as a guide to coordinate preservation, conservation, and private stewardship efforts on many fronts. As implementation begins, the plan may be used to:

Prioritize projects funded through the Scenic Rural Character Preservation Program

The Pike County Scenic Rural Character Preservation Program was one of the first county initiatives to assist municipalities with conservation and preservation projects. The Pike County Open Space, Greenways, and Recreation Plan provides a list of recommended projects for advancing the plan's goals. Those recommended projects should receive priority consideration for funding through the Scenic Rural Character Preservation Program.

Continue open space planning at the municipal level

This plan provides fairly broad recommendations for the development of open space, greenways, and recreation facilities. It indicates generally where preserving open space would be most valuable, and at what scale. Individual municipalities, or multi-municipal partnerships, should now develop those recommendations to the next level of detail. Which specific facilities should be developed or preserved, and where, exactly? Should they provide public access, or remain private, for conservation only? The county can provide guidance and certain technical assistance for municipal open space plans.

Launch private stewardship initiatives

Outreach to landowners, students, and tourists on the importance of using and enjoying our natural resources wisely should be an outgrowth of this plan. Under the county's leadership, municipalities, environmental agencies, tourism entities, and other groups should consistently communicate the importance of individual responsibility and private stewardship. The county should also begin systematic outreach to landowners in the areas identified as being of exceptional value for conservation. Countless landowners are interested in preserving Pike County's most precious natural resources while maintaining our way of life. These willing partners will be the foundation of a legacy of stewardship that will shape our future.

Our Pennsylvania forefathers began a legacy of land and water conservation—one that should continue as we grow…naturally.

Pike County Commissioners:
Richard A. Caridi
Harry Forbes
Karl A. Wagner Jr.

For more information or to get involved in preserving Pike County, contact:

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Inset: J. McBryan