Susquehanna Riverlands Conservation Landscape

Fast Facts

The Lower Susquehanna River corridor through York and Lancaster counties is a crossroads of history and a scenic tapestry of recreational opportunities and wildlife habitat. The region includes:

- Three major lakes created by hydroelectric dams on the river: Lake Clarke, Lake Aldred, and the Conowingo pool.
- Three National Recreation Trails: the Lower Susquehanna River Water Trail, Kelly's Run -Pinnacle Trail and the Mason –Dixon Trail.
- The Ferncliff Nature Preserve – A National Natural Landmark
- A state-recognized Heritage Area and the site of the last Susquehannock village
- An Important Bird Area designated by the national Audubon Society
- Renewed riverside towns – attractive places to live, work, and explore
- More than 2,000 acres of protected, publicly accessible land

What is a Conservation Landscape Initiative?

The Conservation Landscape Initiative is a place–based strategy for natural resources stewardship and advocacy in key landscapes across our state where there are strong natural assets and local readiness and support for land conservation, locally driven planning, and community economic revitalization efforts.

The Region

The Susquehanna Riverlands Conservation Landscape encompasses the Susquehanna River and riverside lands in York and Lancaster counties. Framed by miles of forested rocky cliffs and rolling hills of the high Piedmont, the river and the towns adorning its shores are the ribbon that binds this majestic region.

Native Americans have occupied the Lower Susquehanna for over 12,000 years. Stockade settlements were noted as early as 1550, well before John Smith's epic journey into the upper reaches of the Chesapeake Bay.

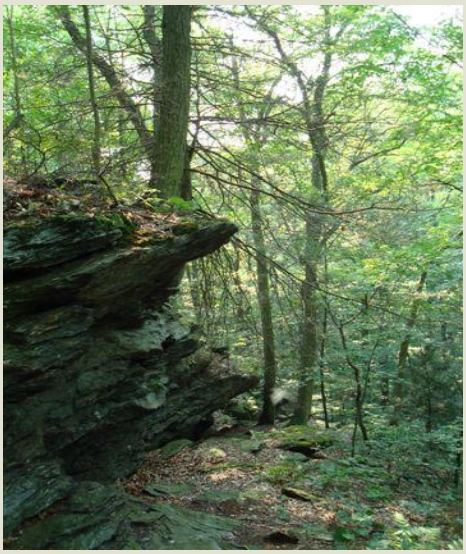
Today, Columbia, Wrightsville, Marietta, and other riverside communities are capitalizing on their industrial past in innovative ways and embracing their adjoining natural resources to forge a viable future. The river towns offer a wealth of opportunity for sustainable heritage tourism and economic development. From park development, trails, and river access to infrastructure improvements and green economic development projects, DCNR and its partners are investing and making an impact.

The Susquehanna River's improving health, growing importance as a recreational resource, and status as one of the region's key assets are increasingly being recognized. The river is emerging as a major recreational attraction. Significant riverside lands are being protected, including the potential acquisition of lands from the regional power companies. Greenways and trails - on land and water - have been established or are under development.

The river provides more than half the freshwater to the Chesapeake Bay. President Obama's recent executive order on the Chesapeake is advocating for a new approach to addressing the degradation of the great estuary. Land conservation is undoubtedly one of the best ways to improve the water quality of the river, and ultimately the bay, while nurturing the quality of life and integrity of habitats ashore.

Vision

The Susquehanna Riverlands Conservation Landscape seeks to enhance the rich landscape of the Susquehanna River corridor through increased land protection, natural and cultural resource stewardship, increased public connection to these resources, and promoting sustainable economic development strategies keyed to heritage and eco-tourism.



Goals

Stewardship
Conserve and protect the natural, cultural, historic, and scenic resources that define the special character and qualities of the Susquehanna River corridor in Lancaster and York counties.

Connection
Strengthen positive relationships between people and the natural and cultural heritage of the Susquehanna River corridor. Foster appreciation of the river corridor and awareness of the need to preserve its special resources. Support local economic activity through physical connections.

Economic Development
Promote local business and employment based on conservation, sustainable use, and enjoyment of the river corridor's resources. Sustain farming, forestry, and other components of the rural economy. Encourage place-based economic activity in the towns by positioning them as gateways to the river corridor. Promote visitation in selected niche markets (heritage, eco-tourism, and agri-tourism) consistent with maintaining the carrying capacity of the natural and built infrastructure.

Collaboration

The primary organizing partners are:

- Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- Lancaster County Conservancy
- Susquehanna Gateway Heritage Area
- Lancaster County Planning Commission
- York County Planning Commission

As projects and planning progress, additional partners – organizations, businesses, local governments, agencies, and others – may become involved.

Recent Progress

- Lancaster County North West River Trail-20 mile trail along the Susquehanna River between Bainbridge and Columbia Borough.
- East Donegal Riverfront Park/ North West River Trail head Rehabilitation
- Wrightsville Riverfront Park Master Site Plan
- Susquehanna Gateway Heritage Area's enhancement to the Zimmerman Center (Heritage Office) and development of Lower Susquehanna Water Trail
- Landings and pedestrian walkways across Route 624 from the river to Kline's Run Park and proper link to the Native Lands Interpretive Area and Mason Dixon Trail.
- Manor Township's 5 mile section of the Low Grade Rail Trail with views of the Susquehanna River on both Lancaster and York counties
- Susquehanna Gateway Heritage Area and York County- comprehensive planning, interpretation, and enhancement of the Susquehanna Heritage Park
- Wrightsville Bridge Lighting Project

For more information

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