

# *Juniata / Mifflin County Greenway, Open Space and Rural Recreation Plan*



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*Juniata and Mifflin Counties, Pennsylvania  
December 2009*

## *What is a Greenway, Open Space and Rural Recreation Plan and what does it mean for Juniata and Mifflin Counties?*

A Greenway, Open Space and Rural Recreation Plan is a planning document that explores the status of parks, recreation, greenways, trails, and open space and recommends strategies and actions to enhance these assets for current and future generations. Juniata and Mifflin Counties worked together to create a vision that builds upon the unique characteristics of the Counties while setting strategic direction to enhance the quality of life for citizens through the conservation of open space and provisions of parks and recreation opportunities. The Plan defines recommendations for providing recreation facilities, parks, greenways and trails; preserving open space and farmland; and protecting important natural resources.

The Plan is not a law. It is an advisory document that will serve as a long-range planning tool for the two Counties and guide future plans and decisions.



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### *Why Plan?*

Juniata and Mifflin Counties have beautiful natural areas, important farmland, significant historic and cultural resources, and a rural character that is valued by residents and visitors to the area. Residents cite the lack of traffic congestion, clean water and air, and easy access and abundant natural area as valuable attributes of living in Juniata and Mifflin Counties. The wooded ridges, clear flowing streams, and nearby public lands provide extensive opportunities for outdoor recreation.

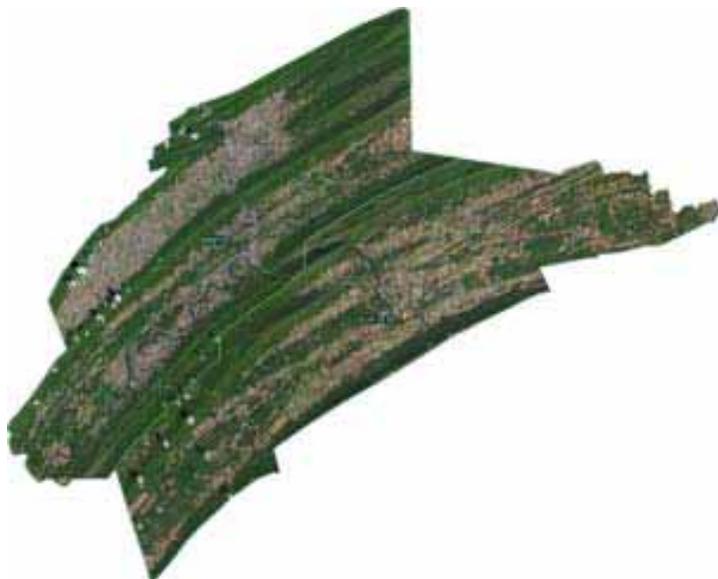
Juniata and Mifflin Counties are under many of the typical growth and land development pressures found elsewhere in the Commonwealth, if only to a somewhat lesser degree. Sustaining the desired characteristics of Juniata and Mifflin Counties will not occur naturally. Planning, conservation initiatives, management of resources, and strategic actions are necessary to maintain the quality of life currently enjoyed. While approximately 100,000 acres of land is protected throughout the two Counties, 66 percent of the land area is vulnerable to development. Establishing parks, open space, greenways, and trails offers a proactive approach to addressing conservation and protection of significant resources and important landscapes. These initiatives also expand opportunities for recreation and enjoyment of the great outdoors.

Recreation and participation in leisure activities promote health and wellness and is an important part of a well-balanced lifestyle. Recreation plays an important role in promoting a strong sense of community by providing settings for people to socialize and share common interests, while encouraging community interaction and pride. Places that offer interesting social and recreation opportunities play a role in attracting businesses and retaining young people. Outdoor recreation is a hallmark of the Counties drawing visitors to the area to hunt, fish, and boat. Expanding outdoor recreation opportunities in Juniata and Mifflin Counties will advance economic development goals through increased tourism.

# The Planning Process

Juniata and Mifflin Counties joined together to develop this Greenways, Open Space and Rural Recreation Plan. Working with a team of consultants, the Counties undertook a six step process. The planning process was rooted in public participation and considered input from the project advisory committee, citizen opinion surveys, key person interviews, public meetings, and topical forums. The planning process included:

- Inventory, mapping, and analysis of existing resources and conditions.
- Research and assessment of strengths, challenges, and opportunities.
- Defining vision, mission, goals, and guiding principles.
- Developing recommendations and an implementation strategy.
- Plan production.
- Plan adoption.



The public input process revealed citizens preferences, opportunities, and challenges which were the foundation for the plans recommendations.

- Citizens' love of the rural agrarian quality of life in Juniata and Mifflin Counties and place high priority on the preservation of farms, natural resources, and open space.
- Recreation in the great outdoors is a hallmark of the bi-county region. Citizens ranked public forests, natural areas, playgrounds, and picnic areas as the top four recreation facilities or opportunities in the Counties.
- Organized scheduled recreation close to home is in the arena of private non-profit organizations and volunteers.
- Health issues related to the lack of physical activity are a major issue in Juniata and Mifflin Counties and citizens of all ages with varied interests should have access to programs and services. Year-round recreation should be a priority.
- Tourism is vital to the Juniata/Mifflin region.
- Local parks and recreation programs rely heavily on community organizations and volunteers.
- Close to home parks are limited and there is not enough parkland to meet the recreation needs of the existing and projected population. Taking care of existing facilities and maximizing their use is preferable to building new facilities.
- Governmental entities are experiencing austere fiscal conditions and funding for open space, greenways, and recreation is limited.
- Partnerships are important for advancing open space, greenways, parks, and recreation initiatives.



# The Plan

## Guiding Principles

The five guiding principles describe what residents of Juniata and Mifflin County value and provide the foundation for the vision, goals, and recommendations.

1. Active healthy lifestyles made possible through plentiful recreation opportunities are vital for our quality of life and for future generations.
2. Rural character and high quality natural resources are valuable to our citizens and our community as a whole. Agriculture is crucial to our economy and our rural agrarian way of life.
3. Economic vitality, community wellness, and livable communities depend on the health of our natural environment and the integrity of our rural character.
4. Collaboration, partnerships, and involvement by the state agencies, regional conservation and recreation entities, community organizations, the private sector, municipalities and citizens are crucial to the successful implementation of greenways, open space, and recreation initiatives.
5. The primary role of the Counties is to serve as the catalyst for open space conservation by harnessing partners in collaborative efforts, providing leadership, encouragement, and professional technical assistance to municipalities, outreach to landowners, and educational support for municipalities and the public. Through these services, Juniata and Mifflin Counties offers a basic level of investment in open space, greenways, and recreation.

## Vision for Juniata and Mifflin Counties for 2019

By 2019, Juniata and Mifflin Counties will have preserved our rural agrarian way of life through the conservation of agricultural lands, forests, streams, and natural resources. Our natural resources and scenic beauty offer plentiful opportunities for exceptional recreational experiences for our citizens as well as support thriving tourism.

Recreation will be a hallmark of the Juniata and Mifflin County area as a well-known tourism destination. Recreation will help our citizens and visitors to engage in active recreational pursuits that contribute to their own health and wellness as well as to the healthy economy in the region.

## Juniata and Mifflin County Greenway, Open Space and Rural Recreation Plan Goals

**Goal 1:** Preserve the scenic rural character of Juniata and Mifflin Counties through open space conservation.

**Goal 2:** Connect the Counties and the region beyond through a network of greenways and trails.

**Goal 3:** Foster and promote recreation opportunities to advance active healthy lifestyles year round for people who live, work, and visit here.

**Goal 4:** Organize and manage open space conservation, greenways, and rural recreation through partnerships for the greatest public benefit and responsible use of resources.

**Goal 5:** Invest in open space, parks, and recreation to enhance the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens and contribute to the economic vitality of Juniata and Mifflin Counties.

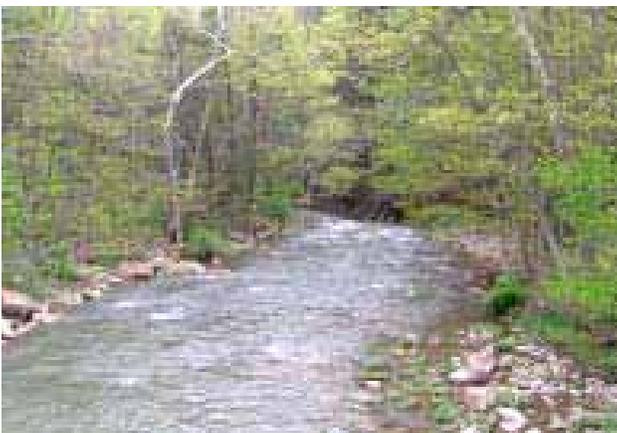
# Implementation Strategy

The challenge for Juniata and Mifflin Counties is undertaking an implementation strategy that is realistic and targeted toward early successes that will build capacity and momentum for achieving the plan's vision. The strategy calls for leadership first to move the plan forward. The Counties should identify partners and key stakeholders to work collaboratively with County planners to advance the plans goals. Focus first on cost effective actions that can be achieved in the near term. As initial milestones are reached, and the capacity of the planning and management entities of Juniata and Mifflin Counties grows in concert with their partners, more ambitious efforts may follow. The implementation strategy is organized in two timeframes: the immediate and short term (2010-2012) and the medium to long term (2013-2019).

## Immediate and Short Term Implementation Strategies

- Adopt the policy that Juniata and Mifflin Counties will be facilitator in providing parks and recreation opportunities but the Counties will not own or maintain conservation areas, parks, or recreation facilities or directly provide recreation services.
- Establish the Juniata and Mifflin County Open Space Board to harness the various entities involved in open space conservation to work towards the common vision and goals set forth in this plan.
- Create a work program within each County planning department to advance implementation of this plan.
- Establish recreation as a priority and tool to address issues such as wellness, tourism, and economic development.
- Organize a Juniata/Mifflin Land Conservancy.
- Increase public awareness and understanding about open space, greenways, and recreation. Strive to make land stewardship "everybody's business".
- Strive to establish funding for open space, trails, and greenways.
- Promote conservation to protect the natural resources, agricultural lands, and open space lands of Juniata and Mifflin Counties.
- Work with the municipalities to provide additional parkland to meet the needs of County residents.
- Promote the development of greenways, trails, and bikeways throughout the two Counties.





## Medium to Long Term Implementation Strategies

- Continue to focus County Planning on leveraging partnerships to advance the Plan and undertake projects with high likelihood of success.
- Move efforts with the Land Conservancy forward.
- Evaluate the Open Space Board to determine progress and future direction.
- Review the recreation service delivery and opportunities.
- Continue to facilitate and support local and multi-municipal planning for open space conservation.
- Set goals and objectives and monitor the accomplishments of the potential recreation director/circuit rider annually. Determine that progress is advancing in terms of meeting community needs and creating stable support for the position through public and private resources.
- Continue the education and outreach program as part of a partnership program.
- Consider undertaking a public opinion survey to ascertain if the implementation of the plan is creating more awareness and support for open space, greenways, and recreation.
- Continue to support conservation of natural resource lands, agricultural lands, open space, and greenways through outreach, education, coordination, and assistance to municipalities and their partners and landowners.
- Continue to act as a facilitator of park and recreation initiatives and support the municipalities in their efforts to expand parks and recreation facilities to citizens.
- Continue to work with municipalities, conservation organizations, government agencies, and landowners to connect the Counties and region with greenways and trails.

## Investment Not a Cost

The challenge for the Counties and their municipalities is to view open space, parks, and recreation as a tool to help solve problems and enhance citizens' quality of life. Economic development, retaining young people, tourism stimulation, health and wellness, attracting business, and protecting the scenic rural character of the region are all advanced through investment in open space, parks, and recreation. Consider the following economic benefits of parks, recreation, and open space:

**Property Value Increase:** Trails increase property values. A home near a trail can offer a pleasing view, quieter streets, recreational opportunities, and a chance to get in touch with nature. Studies find that properties located near trails generally sell for five to thirty-two percent more than those farther away.<sup>1</sup>

**Increasing Competitive Location:** Quality of life is not only important in location, expansion or relocation decisions of businesses, it is also important to employee retention and has an economic bottom line. If a community commits to long-term comprehensive plan to enhance the factors that it can control to positively influence the quality of life, it is likely to have an advantage over other places when recruiting or retaining businesses.<sup>2</sup>

**Value of Sports in Pennsylvania:** In a study sponsored by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, researchers found that hunters, anglers, and furtakers created a \$9.6 billion impact from participating in these activities. Results showed that another economic benefit associated with these activities was employment, which totaled more than 88,000 jobs.<sup>3</sup>

**Deters Crime:** Recreation deters crime and substance abuse: incarceration of a juvenile offender costs 218 times more than public recreation for one youth over a lifetime. The cost of incarcerating a juvenile offender in Pennsylvania is \$362 per day or \$132,130 annually<sup>4</sup>. The average municipal investment in public recreation is about \$7.78 per capita in rural communities in Pennsylvania<sup>5</sup>. Over a 77.9 year life expectancy<sup>6</sup>, the \$7.78 per year investment in recreation equals \$606 in 2009 dollar value, less than one half of one percent of the cost of a year in prison!

**Access to Locations for Physical Activity:** Creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity combined with informational outreach produced a 48.4 percent increase in the frequency of physical activity. Easy access to a place for exercise resulted in increase in aerobic capacity, weight loss, reduction in body fat, improvements in flexibility, and increase in perceived energy.<sup>7</sup>



## Local Economic Benefit



5:00 P.M.  
Baseball team playing in  
Derry Township Community Park



6:30 P.M.  
The same baseball team purchasing  
food at a local eatery

**Attracting Residents:** Lower Merion Township in Montgomery County reports that residents move into the township because of parks such as Penn Wynne and Ashbridge Parks. These parks include gathering places for families and friends, sitting areas, playgrounds, ball fields, game courts, and beautiful scenery and landscaping.

**Investment not a Cost:** The Manheim Central Recreation Commission, a multi-municipal recreation organization, generates \$3.06 for every dollar of tax money provided by the municipalities. Seventy percent (70%) of their operating budget is derived from non-tax sources such as fees, charges, donations, sponsorships, and partnerships. Over 43 businesses and service organizations support MC Rec projects, programs, and facilities. MC Rec includes Rapho Township, Manheim Borough, and the Manheim Central School District in Lancaster County.<sup>8</sup>

**Local Economic Benefit:** The baseball team playing in Derry Township Community Park at 5:00 pm in the top photo gathers at a local restaurant at 6:30 pm for an after game treat. While one team buying pizza and ice cream might seem like no big deal, consider this event on a larger scale. The economic impact of a youth soccer tournament is \$71 per participant per day. Softball tournaments yield an economic impact of \$129 per participant per day as adjusted to a 2008-dollar value. Therefore a softball tournament over a weekend with 20 teams with 15 players per team would yield \$166,100 in local economic impact.<sup>9</sup>

1 American Trails, (2009) Benefits of Trails and Greenways. <http://www.americantrails.org/resources/benefits/ontario2010.html>.

2 Crompton, John. 2005. Parks and Economic Development: Why Public Parks, Open Space and Greenways are Wise Public Investments. (Asburn, VA: National Recreation and Park Association), p.5.

3 Center for Rural Pennsylvania. (1998) Economic Values and Impacts of Sport Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Activities in Pennsylvania, p.5.

4 Melissa Sickmund, T.J. Sladky and Wei Kang. (2008) "Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement Databook" [http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/cjrp/asp/State\\_Adj.asp](http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/cjrp/asp/State_Adj.asp); American Correctional Association, 2008 *Ditectory: Adult and Juvenile Correctional Departments, Institutions, Agencies, and Probation and Parole Authorities* (Alexandria, VA: American Correctional Association, 2008).

5 Center for Rural Pennsylvania. 2004. Rural and Urban Municipalities for Parks and Recreation. Center for Rural Pennsylvania: Harrisburg, PA. pl. Note: per capita investment was adjusted to the 2009 dollar value.

6 Jiaquan Xu M.D.; Kenneth D. Kochanek, M.A.; and Betzaida Tejada-Vera, B.S. 2007. *Deaths: Preliminary Data for 2007*. **National Vital Statistics Reports** Volume 58(1), Center for Disease Control: Washington, D.C. p.1.

7 Kahn, Emily; Ramsey, Leigh; Brownson, Ross; Heath, Gregory; Howze, Elizabeth; Powell, Kenneth; Stone, Elaine; Rajab, Mummy; Corso, Pahedra; and the Task Force on Community Preventive Services. (2002). The Effectiveness on Interventions to Increase Physical Activity. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 22 (45). Pp. 87-88.

5 Toole, Ann (2009) MC Rec Partnerships, Roles, Responsibilities and Funding Recommendationns. (Manheim Borough Manheim Central Recreation Commission), p. 12.

6 Crompton, John L. (September 1999) Parks & Recreation: The Economic Impact of Sports Tournaments and Events, p. 26.

