

# Cumberland County Land Partnerships Plan 2025



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## Acknowledgements

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### Cumberland County Board of Commissioners

- Kelly Neiderer, Chair
- Jean Foschi, Vice Chair
- Gary Eichelberger, Secretary

### Steering Committee

- Jason Beale, (formerly with) Central PA Conservancy
- Andrew Bomberger, Tri-County Regional Planning Commission
- Julia Chain, South Mountain Partnership
- Tyler Fairchild, CPRP, Silver Spring Township
- Dr. Edward Franco, Cumberland County Planning Commission and Lower Frankford Township Planning Commission
- Bonnie Myers, North Newton Township
- Mike Pion, NextHome Capital Realty
- Kristen Rowe, (formerly with) Cumberland Valley Visitors Bureau
- Heather Sweitzer, (former member) Cumberland County Planning Commission
- Anna Yelk, Cumberland Conservation Collaborative
- Kirk Stoner, Stephanie Williams, and Elizabeth Grant, Cumberland County Planning Department Staff

### Consultant

- Michael Baker International, Inc.

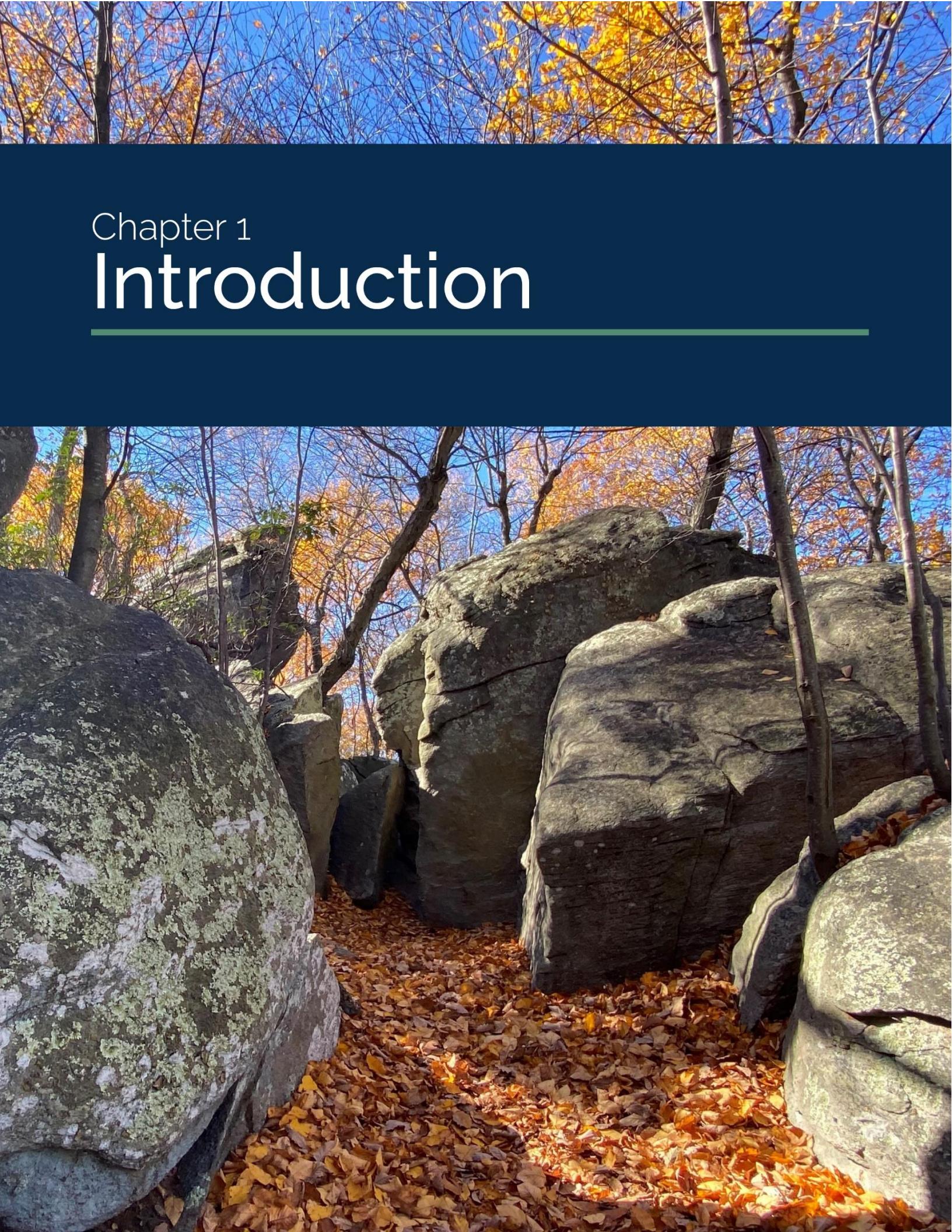
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Chapter 1

# Introduction

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# Plan Purpose and Need

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Cumberland County is fortunate to have an abundance of natural resources, rich and productive farmland, numerous streams, and picturesque forested hills and ridgetops. These resources are an important cultural and economic asset to the County, attracting visitors, new residents, and businesses, and providing the foundation for a place-based economy.

However, the agricultural and natural lands of Cumberland County do not exist in a static environment. The population of the County is growing, increasing the need for housing, services, and places of employment. Accommodating this development, while also preserving the prime agricultural soils and sensitive natural environments, is an especially challenging task. However, achieving this balance is crucial to ensuring that the County remains an attractive place to do business and has a high quality of life.

To preserve the natural and agricultural features that make Cumberland County a great place to live, work, and play, it is essential to plan for the future. The 2025 Land Partnerships Plan is a countywide strategy designed to maintain and improve the quality of life in Cumberland County through farmland preservation, natural resource protection, and parks, trails, and greenways development.

The Land Partnerships Plan (Plan) is a blueprint intended to help the County achieve a healthy balance between preservation and development, by identifying important natural, recreational and agricultural features and offering recommendations to protect those resources for current and future generations. The Plan seeks to encourage action in the community and facilitate partnerships among federal, state, county, and local governments, non-profit organizations, businesses, and landowners to achieve the goals stated above. The Plan will also serve as a guidebook for the 33 municipalities in the County; municipalities should use it as a reference and starting point for their planning initiatives.



## Previous Planning Efforts

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Cumberland County has been addressing the issues of farmland preservation, natural resource protection, and parks, trails, and greenways over the last 30 years. A listing of relevant County planning activities and milestones is provided below:

- *Cumberland County Conservation and Open Space Task Force Report*, 1995
- *Cumberland County Natural Area Inventory Report*, 2000, 2005, 2026 update pending
- *Cumberland Countywide Greenway Study*, 2000
- Creation of Greenway and Open Space Coordinator Position, 2001
- Cumberland County Comprehensive Plan, 2003, 2010, 2017, 2024 updates
- Bond Issues for Farmland Preservation and Pilot Land Partnerships Grant Program, 2004 and 2006
- Land Partnership Plan, 2006 and 2013 Update

## 2013 Land Partnerships Plan Implementation

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Between 2013 and 2024, Cumberland County successfully achieved many goals set in the 2013 update to the Land Partnerships Plan. In total, approximately \$61 million in investments in conservation and recreation can be directly attributed to the efforts of Cumberland County to implement the goals and recommendations of the Land Partnerships Plan through the Farmland Preservation Program, Land Partnerships Grant Program, and American Rescue Plan County Grant awards. Undoubtedly, there are thousands, if not millions, of additional dollars in projects initiated by our stakeholders and partners throughout the County that did not include County funding.

In addition to these significant accomplishments, Planning Department staff, municipal staff, and private or non-profit stakeholders continue to work diligently to integrate plan implementation into policy, projects, and operations.



## Farmland Preservation Program

A total of \$32.3 million was invested in the Agriculture Conservation Easement (ACE) Purchase Program between 2013-2024. The investment has resulted in the preservation of 103 farms, totaling 10,389 acres of high-quality agricultural land, increasing the pace of farmland preservation over previous years. Cumberland County's contribution of \$8.6 million leveraged \$23.3 million in State and Federal funds.

In 2019, the County Commissioners adopted a resolution that enacted a County-wide goal of preserving 30,000 acres of farmland by the year 2030. As of 2024, 17 percent of existing farmland in the County was preserved; however, that makes up only seven percent of the total land area of the County.

## Land Partnerships Grant Program

The Land Partnerships Grant Program distributed a total of \$2,224,619 to qualifying projects that met the goals of the plan between 2013-2024. The County utilized revenue from the Act 13 Marcellus Legacy Fund to fund this program. Each \$1 invested in the grant program unlocked an average of \$6 of additional Federal, State, local, or private matching funds. Overall, the program leveraged a total investment of \$13,765,277 for local projects. A total of 38 different municipalities and non-profit organizations have received grant funds since the program's inception, with the majority being municipal applicants.

### Program Outcomes

As a result of the 2013-2024 Land Partnerships Grant Program, a total of 106 projects were completed in the following four categories:

- 74 Park and Trail Development Projects
- 21 Planning Projects
- 7 Land Acquisition Projects
- 4 Water Resource Management Projects



## American Rescue Plan Act Funds

In addition to Land Partnerships Grants, the Board of Commissioners elected to allocate a portion of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to conservation and recreation initiatives. Of the \$49.2 million awarded to Cumberland County in 2021 and 2022, \$3 million was allocated to projects consistent with the goals of the Land Partnerships Plan. This allocation funded eight conservation and recreation projects, with a total cost of \$14.8 million. Projects with a regional impact were prioritized. A notable project included the acquisition of Camp Tuckahoe, a 900-acre natural area with high-priority conservation and recreation attributes.

## Other Staff Initiatives

Staff implemented the goals and objectives of the Land Partnerships Plan daily through a variety of projects and initiatives. A sampling of 2013-2024 activities is provided below:

- Encouraged and coordinated the creation of six joint preservation easements between municipalities and the County Agricultural Land Preservation Board.
- Completed the "Picking Up the Pace of Preservation" report in partnership with Lancaster Farmland Trust to explore the feasibility of a non-profit farmland preservation program.
- Expanded inspection and stewardship of preserved farms, including hiring a part-time staff member who was upgraded to a full-time position in 2023.
- Secured two, 100% easement donations through the County Farmland Preservation Donation Program.
- Secured a \$50,000 annual general fund allocation to support assistance to local comprehensive plan and land use ordinance planning efforts that protect the right to farm, preserve prime farmland, and sensitive natural resources across the County.
- Conducted an audit of all 17 municipal Agricultural Security Areas (ASAs) and developed a program to proactively encourage 7-year municipal reviews. Also enhanced technical assistance to municipal partners.
- Developed a "Tools For Agriculture Preservation" Municipal Workshop and presented at numerous agricultural stakeholder events.
- Participated in the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's Local Climate Action Plan Program and adopted a climate action plan.
- Adopted a Countywide Action Plan/Clean Water Cumberland and secured over \$10 million of State and Federal funding for implementation projects.
- Participated in MS4 stormwater management collaboration and encouraged regional partnerships. Provided ongoing technical assistance to municipalities to address stormwater issues.
- Implemented a sub-grant program to support TreeVitalize, urban landscaping, and street tree planting efforts in developed areas.



- Updated signage and brochures for the Yellow Breeches and Conodoguinet Creek Water Trails.
- Convened meetings of the Cumberland Valley Trail Connections, a regional trail planning group.
- Provided technical assistance and/or served in leadership positions for numerous local and regional conservation and recreation initiatives such as South Mountain Partnership, Kittatinny Coalition, Central PA Conservancy and Cumberland Valley Rails to Trails Council.

## 2025 Land Partnerships Plan Update

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Cumberland County obtained a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to update the Land Partnerships Plan in partnership with a planning consultant, Michael Baker International. The Plan will be a supporting plan to the Cumberland County Comprehensive Plan. The 2024 Comprehensive Plan is organized around the eight "Cumberland Principles", which are policy statements that epitomize effective planning practices. More specifically, the Land Partnerships Plan more deeply addresses the principles of "Protect the Best First" and "Plan for People and Places."

The Land Partnerships planning process consisted of six steps:

- Update the inventory and mapping of agricultural, natural, recreational, and trail resources
- Reassessment of public opinion and level of support for farmland preservation, natural resource protection, and parks, trails, and greenways
- Reassessment of 2013 vision and goals
- Development of strategies regarding farmland preservation, natural resource protection, and parks, trails, and greenways
- Establishment of recommendations, funding options and action plan

## Plan Organization

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The 2025 Land Partnerships Plan is organized in the following manner:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction** provides an overview of the planning process, the planning context and status of land preservation as well as an update on implementation of the 2013 Land Partnerships plan.
- **Chapter 2: Public Participation** describes the public engagement components and overall findings of the public participation process.



- **Chapter 3: Farmland Preservation, Chapter 4: Natural Resource Protection and Chapter 5: Parks, Trails and Greenways:** The three core chapters of the Plan are organized similarly with three main sections. The first section includes an introduction and discussion of the agricultural, natural and recreational resources of Cumberland County. The second section, "Making the Case", describes the need and benefit of these conservation and recreation resources. Each chapter closes with an implementation plan including goals, outcomes and benchmarks as well as strategies and actions to achieve the goals. Additionally, the implementation section includes priority projects which constitute the County's new Conservation Improvement Plan, which is further described below.
- **Chapter 6: Sustain and Growing Progress** describes the strategies to create a sustainable level of funding to fully implement Land Partnerships.
- **Appendices** provides the supporting data and information which was collected during the planning process and serves as the foundation for plan development and future reference materials.

### ***Cumberland County Conservation Improvement Plan***

The Cumberland County Conservation Improvement Plan (CIP) is a listing of priority projects which, when implemented, will make a significant contribution toward advancement of the goals and strategies of the Plan. The list is intended to be fluid, as new projects are conceptualized and added and other projects are removed as they are completed or their status changes. The CIP was developed through stakeholder outreach and review of existing studies and plans.



# Land Partnerships Plan Vision

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For any long-range plan to be successful, it needs to have a vision, a broad idea of what successful implementation of the plan will look like in 10 years. The vision statement of the Land Partnerships Plan was refreshed to help the community understand the Plan's values and generate a call to action for public, private, and non-profit stakeholders.

## **Vision Statement**

The Land Partnership Plan will ensure that the Cumberland County landscape:

- Retains its heritage, character, and identity through its scenic, natural, and historic features;
- Balances the need to preserve irreplaceable natural and agricultural resources with the need to provide housing and places of employment for County residents;
- Includes economically sustainable working farms and a healthy agricultural community;
- Protects valuable natural resources and improves overall environmental quality;
- Features an interconnected network of parks, trails, and natural areas within and between County communities; and
- Accommodates diverse business opportunities and a vibrant economy that supports a high quality of life and health benefit opportunities for residents.

## County Description

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Cumberland County is located in south central Pennsylvania, just west of the state capital of Harrisburg. It encompasses 550 square miles and is home to over 275,000 people.<sup>1</sup> The County contains 33 municipalities, including 11 boroughs and 22 townships.

The County's borders are formed by distinct physical features, typical of the ridge and valley region of Central Pennsylvania:

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<sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau, July 1, 2024, Population Estimates  
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/cumberlandcountypennsylvania>



- To the east, the Susquehanna River separates Cumberland County from Dauphin County and the state capital of Harrisburg.
- To the north, the Blue Mountain-Kittatinny Ridge divides Cumberland County from Perry County.
- To the south, the County border with Adams and York Counties is formed by the Yellow Breeches Creek and the ridges and uplands of South Mountain.
- To the west, the County boundary with Franklin County follows a series of smaller waterways, including Mains Run, Gum Run, Middle Spring Creek, and Laughlin Run.

## Planning Context

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The 2020 United States Decennial Census identified Cumberland County as the fastest-growing county in Pennsylvania. Between the 2010 and 2020 Census reports, the county added more than 24,000 residents. Population projections indicate that steady population growth of approximately 10 percent per decade will continue for the next 20 years. By 2040, Cumberland County's population is expected to grow to nearly 322,000 residents. **Table 1-1** details population growth from 2000-2050.

TABLE 1-1 POPULATION GROWTH		
CENSUS	POPULATION	% CHANGE
<b>2000</b>	213,674	9.4%
<b>2010</b>	235,406	10.2%
<b>2020</b>	259,469	10.2%
PROJECTIONS	POPULATION	% CHANGE
<b>2030</b>	291,441	11%
<b>2040</b>	321,933	9.5%
<b>2050</b>	355,614	9.5%

Source: Decennial census data from US Census Bureau, Projections by Cumberland County and CGL based on 1% annual growth rate

The County's population growth has fueled demand for residential, commercial, and industrial growth. Since 2013, over 1,300 new residential dwelling units have been proposed each year, yet vacancy rates remain at historic lows and prices have escalated to levels unaffordable for many residents. The County's strategic location and residential growth have attracted commercial and industrial development that provides needed services, jobs, and tax revenue. The County's access to major highways and growth in online shopping have been a powerful attractant for the transportation and warehousing industry with 319 establishments employing nearly 20,000 people, the second largest employment sector in the County.



The County's growth, despite its benefits, must be carefully managed to avoid irreparable harm to the County's natural environment. Since 2017, 23,265 acres of farmland in the County have been transitioned to another use, making Cumberland one of the top farmland loss leaders in the state. Productive agriculture lands must be considered in meaningful use and losses mitigated in the future given their contributions to the County's food security and rural quality of life. The County's rich groundwater resources and high-quality surface waters provide drinking water supplies to over 105,000 households while also supporting water based outdoor recreational opportunities. With over 60% of the County's 784 stream miles showing pollution impairment, existing and new development must protect water quality to avoid further degradation.

The County's sense of place and high quality of life are regularly cited as key reasons why residents and businesses call Cumberland County home, factors that cannot be taken for granted in the future. Increased investment in parks, trails, public lands, and thoughtful community design will be necessary to keep residents healthy and make neighborhoods distinctively appealing. History must be protected and interpreted, telling the stories of the people, places, and structures that have contributed to the County's reputation as a preferred destination in Pennsylvania.

The County needs to remain nimble in the future, adjusting to forces of change, both predictable and unpredictable. With temperatures projected to increase by 5.4°F and precipitation by 8% by 2050, severe weather and heat may threaten public health, agriculture productivity, and the sufficiency of public infrastructure. Pandemic-induced workforce changes and broadband technology have yielded a 175% increase in residents working from home while also making the County an attractive place for remote workers from surrounding metropolitan areas. Environmental concerns and geopolitical tensions will require utility system upgrades as new non-fossil fuel energy sources are used.

Cumberland County's success must not be taken for granted. Careful, proactive planning for conservation and recreation, is required to leverage the community's assets for maximum benefit while avoiding the pitfalls commonly associated with rapid growth communities.



# Status of Land Preservation

An inventory of preserved land revealed 22 percent of the County is preserved, 20 percent is developed and 58 percent remains undeveloped and unprotected. Preserved land included parks and natural areas preserved by public and non-profit entities, as well as permanently preserved farmland. The **Protected Lands Map** is a composite illustration of lands that are currently protected. **Table 1-2** details protected lands by ownership status.

## Cumberland County is...

- ✓ **22% Preserved**
- ✓ **20% Developed**
- ✓ **58% Undeveloped/Unpreserved**

The land in Federal ownership primarily includes the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and its associated land holdings. Approximately 60 percent of the protected lands in the County are owned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as State Forests, State Game Lands, State Parks, or Fish and Boat Commission lands. These natural areas protect natural resources and provide limited, passive recreation opportunities.

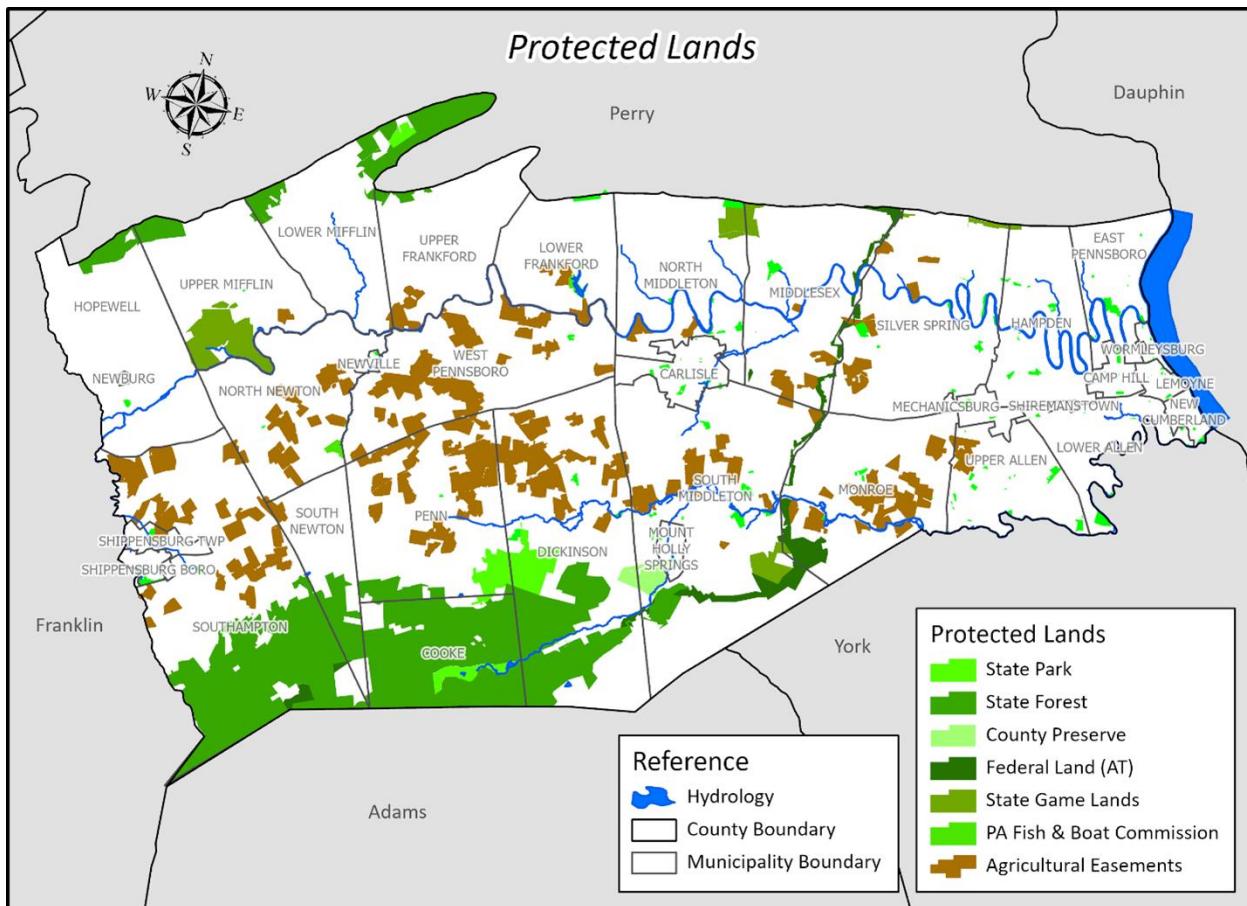
The Mount Holly Marsh Preserve, the only County-owned open space area, is an important natural area and provides passive recreation. Municipal parkland accounts for three percent of the preserved lands in the County and serves the local recreation needs of the community. Several non-profits and school districts also contribute to the inventory by providing recreational facilities and preserved open space areas. Farmland preserved through the Cumberland County Agricultural Conservation Easement Program does not provide public access but rather serves to protect and enhance the agricultural industry.

**TABLE 1-2**  
**PROTECTED LANDS OF CUMBERLAND COUNTY, 2024**

RESOURCE	ACREAGE
<b>Federal Resources</b>	3,694
<b>State Resources</b>	46,928
<b>County Resources</b>	894
<b>Municipal Resources</b>	2,426
<b>Non-Profit and School Resources</b>	329
<b>Agriculture Easements</b>	24,504
<b>Total Acreage</b>	<b>78,774</b>
<b>As % of County Acreage</b>	<b>22%</b>

Source: Cumberland County GIS Inventory





Chapter 2

# Public Participation

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# Public Participation Components

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The vision, goals, and recommendations of the Land Partnerships Plan are rooted in the needs and concerns expressed by the Cumberland County community. The public participation and outreach process to develop Land Partnerships was multi-faceted, to ensure that it effectively captured the full range of input from County residents. The main components included the steering committee, focus groups and surveys.

## Steering Committee

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A steering committee was formed consisting of ten members representing various stakeholder organizations. The committee met eight times and provided valuable guidance, direction, and insight throughout the project.

### **Committee Members:**

- Jason Beale, (formerly with) Central PA Conservancy
- Andrew Bomberger, Tri-County Regional Planning Commission
- Julia Chain, South Mountain Partnership
- Tyler Fairchild, CPRP, Silver Spring Township
- Dr. Edward Franco, Cumberland County Planning Commission and Lower Frankford Township Planning Commission
- Bonnie Myers, North Newton Township
- Mike Pion, NextHome Capital Realty
- Kristen Rowe, (formerly with) Cumberland Valley Visitors Bureau
- Heather Sweitzer, (former member) Cumberland County Planning Commission
- Anna Yelk, Cumberland Conservation Collaborative
- Kirk Stoner, Stephanie Williams, and Elizabeth Grant, Cumberland County Planning Department Staff



## Focus Groups

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A total of four focus groups were hosted to have in-depth discussions with subject matter experts on the main themes of the Land Partnerships Plan. Focus group topics were Farmland Preservation, Natural Resource and Open Space Preservation, Parks, Trails, and Greenways, and Funding and Financing.

Each focus group meeting consisted of a PowerPoint Presentation that reviewed the plan update process and a facilitated discussion that helped participants identify major threats, challenges, and opportunities central to each subject area of the plan. The input gathered from each group was then condensed into a set of "key findings" that were used to inform the goals and objectives of the plan.

Additionally, project staff attended meetings and held discussions with other organizations to gather their insights on issues or priorities central to the Land Partnerships Plan. They included, but were not limited to, the following:

- Cumberland County Agricultural Land Preservation Board
- Cumberland Conservation Collaborative
- Cumberland County Planning Commission
- Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- South Mountain Partnership
- York County Planning Commission
- York County Agricultural Land Preservation Board
- York County Farm and Natural Lands Trust
- Greater Harrisburg Association of Realtors

Major themes or takeaways from each of these conversations were also used to inform the goals and recommendations of the plan.

### Farmland Preservation Findings

- Agricultural land is facing pressure from new development.
- Money offered for conservation easements is perceived not to be keeping pace with increasing land values.
- It is increasingly challenging for farmers to make a living, and they need to be supported.
- There are major obstacles to getting young people into farming.
- There is a lack of awareness from the general public about the importance of agriculture.
- There is a need to connect with and educate farmers on the value of preserving farmland.



## Natural Resource and Open Space Preservation Findings

- There is a need for more robust and comprehensive partnerships to coordinate and collaborate on land preservation efforts. Current efforts are fragmented and lack resources.
- There is limited non-profit capacity to accelerate preservation.
- There is a need to create a more interconnected system of preserved lands.
- There is a need for additional funding to support acquisition and maintenance.
- A low or minimal-impact county-owned park system is of interest.
- There is a need to direct development away from natural lands.

## Parks, Trails, and Greenways Findings

- The cost of park and trail development has escalated significantly.
- There is a need to better manage and coordinate the mapping of existing trails, green spaces, and greenways. A central database would make it easier to identify needs and gaps.
- There is a need to develop better connections between existing trails. Regional trails should connect major destinations, and smaller bike/ped facilities should act as "feeders."
- There is a desire for County-wide leadership to coordinate trail development efforts.
- Parks and trails should serve all ages, abilities, and cultures.
- The development of parks and trails and the preservation of greenways and open space need to be recognized as part of our economic development strategy.

## Funding and Financing Findings

- The Farmland Preservation Program is very successful with an established budgetary policy and goal for acres preserved.
- Grants from the current Land Partnership Program are used by municipalities to fund smaller-scale parks and trail projects. This fills a niche not addressed by other funding sources. Land Partnership grants help leverage additional grant money.
- There is a need for additional, dedicated funding streams for natural land preservation efforts. The current source (Act 13) is inconsistent and flat/declining in value. The York County funding model was viewed as a promising strategy to consider.
- Demonstrating that there is widespread popular support for funding natural land preservation is key to convincing County political leadership to create new funding.



# Surveys

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Two surveys were conducted, each targeting a different audience. One survey was distributed to the public, and the other focused on municipal governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The goal of both surveys was to assess opinions regarding farmland preservation, natural resource protection, and parks, trails, and greenways.

## Community Survey

The community survey was conducted online, with paper ballots provided on request. The survey asked residents to describe what they like/don't like about living in Cumberland County, what conservation, transportation and water quality projects they feel need to be prioritized, and their familiarity with common land use planning documents, ordinances, and public processes.

The survey ran for approximately 75 days and received 1,354 responses. Responses to the survey are summarized below and in **Table 2-1**. A full summary of community survey responses can be found in the **Appendices**. Note that the survey was also utilized for assessing public opinion for the County Comprehensive Plan; therefore, some of the questions addressed other topics outside of the scope of this plan but informed plan development, nonetheless.

### ***What Survey Respondents Like Best and Would Change***

Respondents were asked open-ended questions to identify what they liked best about Cumberland County and what they would change. A summary of responses includes the following:

- The responses to what was liked best reflect key aspects of quality of life in Cumberland County. These fall broadly into themes touching on community features and amenities, natural features, recreational amenities, employment, transportation, and regional connections.
- More than 35% of all respondents focused on the environment and landscape of Cumberland County. The natural features respondents discussed most often included the rural countryside, mountains, streams and lakes, forests, and the temperate weather of Cumberland County. Respondents valued the aesthetic and scenic beauty of the landscape, open spaces, and farmland, and the recreational opportunities for which the county is renowned. These include state and municipal parks, playgrounds, biking/walking trails, and water trails. Respondents enjoy fishing, hiking, cycling, and boating in Cumberland County.
- Respondents to what should be changed focused on slowing, stopping, or redirecting development and increasing land preservation. These responses accounted for more than 38% of the key elements to change in Cumberland County. Most of the comments for what should be changed focused on warehouse development, specifically the need for



Cumberland County's economic base to be diversified and less dependent on warehousing, and for new warehouses to be restricted to previously developed areas to utilize less farmland and open space.

- Respondents said that they wanted to see more preservation of farmland, open space, and forested areas, and more efforts to reduce air pollution, light pollution, and water quality concerns. They wanted to see more public parks, including county parkland, and more recreational amenities, such as trails in greenways, more pools, boat launches, and dog parks. One key priority was the completion of the Cumberland Valley Rail Trail.

TABLE 2-1

**WHAT RESPONDENTS LIKE BEST AND WOULD CHANGE IN CUMBERLAND COUNTY**

What Respondents Like Best	What Respondents Would Change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small town feel</li> <li>• Distinctive historic features</li> <li>• Diverse commercial amenities</li> <li>• Good schools and multiple colleges/universities</li> <li>• Low crime rate</li> <li>• Available jobs</li> <li>• Affordable cost of living</li> <li>• Balance of development and open space</li> <li>• Outdoor recreation</li> <li>• Natural features (farmland, mountains, streams/lakes)</li> <li>• Convenient transportation facilities</li> <li>• Proximity to major population centers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rate of growth is too fast</li> <li>• Diversify the economy away from a strong focus on warehousing/distribution facilities</li> <li>• Increased land preservation</li> <li>• More recreational opportunities</li> <li>• Enhanced broadband coverage</li> <li>• Additional services and living opportunities for senior citizens</li> <li>• Better coordination between municipal land use and zoning</li> <li>• Provide more affordable housing</li> <li>• Traffic congestion and safety on I-81</li> <li>• More transportation options aside from the automobile</li> </ul>

***Special Places in Cumberland County***

Respondents overwhelmingly listed natural features and recreational amenities as the most significant special places in Cumberland County. Leading this list were the following: Children's Lake, Kings Gap State Park, Yellow Breeches Creek, Adams Ricci Park, Pine Grove Furnace State Park, Cumberland Valley Rail Trail, Appalachian Trail, Michaux State Forest, Conodoguinet Creek, and Opossum Lake.

Municipal parks, such as South Middleton Park and Lower Allen Park were also commonly noted. Small towns and activity centers such as Carlisle, Mechanicsburg, and Camp Hill were cited as respondents' favorites as well as businesses located in those areas including breweries, coffee shops, and farmers markets. Public amenities such as libraries and the Army Heritage Education Center were also favored by respondents.



## **Programmatic Priorities**

Respondents were asked to identify priority initiatives for several programs administered by Cumberland County. Responses to these questions are used by the county to consider current and future investments in priority service areas. The following **Table 2-2** identifies the top three priorities identified in each initiative area.

PRIORITY RANK	CONSERVATION AND RECREATION INITIATIVES	TABLE 2-2 TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVES	WATER QUALITY INITIATIVES
1	Preservation of open space and natural areas	Road repairs and improvements	Planting trees and natural plant buffers along stream banks to capture and clean stormwater runoff
2	Preservation of working farmland	Pedestrian facilities (sidewalks, walking paths, crosswalks, etc.)	Installing structures on farms to reduce barnyard runoff into streams
3	Construction of trails	Bridge repair and replacement	Installing facilities in developed areas that collect and clean stormwater runoff from buildings, roofs, and paved areas

## **Planning Familiarity and Participation**

The final survey questions polled respondents on their familiarity with local planning documents and participation in the land use approval processes. These questions were designed to identify stakeholder educational needs and improve communication. Key findings included:

- Respondents know the least about the comprehensive plan and the SALDO with nearly 1/3 of respondents having never heard of either planning tool.
- Respondents reported the most familiarity with their municipality's official map and zoning ordinance with 38% responding they knew "a fair amount" or "knew it well" for both tools.
- Respondents are not familiar with the process required to plan for development in their community as nearly 30% have never heard of the approval process.
- Respondents rarely participate in the local decision-making process and when they do, it is typically for special topics of interest. Less than 6% of respondents attend county or municipal elected official or planning commission meetings on a regular basis.
- Respondents cited they were very likely to use municipal newsletters (38%) and websites (38%) to learn what is going on in their community.



## Municipal/Non-Governmental Organization Survey

The municipal and non-governmental organizational (NGO) survey was designed to gain an understanding of the needs and preservation priorities of municipalities and NGOs. Additionally, respondents were asked to share what land preservation, park improvement, or trail extension projects they were planning or constructing, and what financial, technical, or planning assistance they may need from the County.

Information from this survey will assist with making any needed changes or updates to the Land Partnership Grant Program to better meet local needs, in addition to helping create the final recommendations of the plan.

This survey received 26 responses, 14 municipal and 12 NGO. Responses to this survey are summarized below. A full summary of Municipal/NGO Survey responses can be found in the **Appendices**.

### ***How important are the following issues to Cumberland County as a whole?***

- a) Preservation of prime farmland*
- b) Preservation of open space and sensitive natural areas*
- c) Providing parkland to serve the needs of current and future residents*
- d) Construction of a connected system of trails*
- e) Maintenance of existing parks, trails, and open spaces*

The majority (54%-62%) of respondents considered each of the issues to be "Very Important".

### ***If Cumberland County made funding available to invest in conservation and recreation projects, how should the County allocate funding across the following types of projects?***

(Respondents will be allowed to divide up the funding pot across the 4 program areas)

- a) Preservation of prime farmland*
- b) Preservation of open space and sensitive natural areas*
- c) Acquisition and development of parkland*
- d) Trail construction*

Respondents showed no clear preference for where County funding should be allocated, with most indicating that up to 20% should be designated for all four categories. However, 42% of respondents stated that a larger share, up to 30%, should be allocated towards the preservation of open space and sensitive natural lands.



**If Cumberland County made funding available to invest in conservation and recreation funding, indicate your ability to provide local funding to match County funding across the following types of projects.** (Responses – Match available now, Match available in 1-2 years, Match available in 3+ years, No match available)

There was a clear distinction between the types of projects for which respondents could provide local match funding. A majority stated that they have no match available for land preservation efforts; 62% stated that they had no match available for the preservation of farmland, and 52% stated that they have no match available for the preservation of open space and sensitive natural areas. By contrast, respondents stated that they had local match funding available now for trail construction and municipal park projects, with 31% selecting this option for each.

**What type of technical assistance or resources are needed to address the issues and projects outlined previously?** (Please select all that apply)

- a) Financial support for the implementation of conservation and recreation projects
- b) Engineering support for project scoping or cost estimate assistance
- c) Notification of grant opportunities
- d) Grant writing and/or administration
- e) Data collection, spatial analysis, or mapping
- f) Financial support to prepare plans or ordinances that advance conservation and recreation opportunities
- g) Workshops or training for practitioners on emerging conservation and recreation topics
- h) Written guidance on best practices or program/policy models
- i) Facilitated discussions with municipal officials and/or stakeholders on conservation and recreation issues
- j) Educational materials for the public that increase awareness and knowledge on conservation and recreation issues
- k) Assistance in prioritizing projects on a regional or county-wide basis
- l) Other (please specify):
- m) None

Respondents indicated that access to financial resources is the most needed type of support for municipal projects. About 77% of responses were for "Financial support for implementation of conservation and recreation projects," and "Financial support to prepare plans or ordinances that advance conservation and recreation opportunities."



# Overall Public Participation Findings

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The following public participation findings are derived from a comprehensive analysis of all the public participation components:

- Preservation of open space, working farmland and trails should be the County's highest funding priorities.
- The existing farmland preservation program is well established and successful, with funding and staff resources to meet program goals.
- Challenges with the farming industry are seen as a high priority, as changes to the agricultural economy are putting increasing pressure on smaller, local farms.
- There is a need for additional coordination and leadership among stakeholders and non-profit organizations focused on open space preservation.
- There is strong interest among key stakeholders in exploring the possibility of establishing a source of stable funding to accelerate open space preservation efforts in Cumberland County.
- The capacity of local non-profit organizations in the County to expand and accelerate land preservation efforts is very limited.
- Local matching funds for farmland preservation and open space preservation is non-existent or very limited. Modest local matching funds for parks and trails is more readily available.
- There continues to be a strong demand for trails and greenways to create opportunities for both recreational activities and active transportation.
- There is a desire for a more interconnected network of trails and greenways that allow residents or visitors to move between communities and access green spaces. Larger regional trails, like the Cumberland Valley Rail Trail, should be expanded, and local trails should be created to connect them directly with downtowns and neighborhoods.
- There is a strong need for public parks and green space in developing or developed areas of the County. Maintenance of existing facilities is also critical.
- Education on the benefits and threats to agriculture, natural resources, and parks, trails, and greenways is viewed by respondents as essential. Partner organizations that specialize in agriculture, natural lands, trails, etc., should be leading educational efforts.
- Most county residents have limited familiarity with local land use plans and ordinances, and do not regularly participate in public meetings.
- Municipal newsletters and local websites are the best options for communicating with residents.



Chapter 3

# Farmland Preservation

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# Overview

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Cumberland County is home to some of the richest, most productive agricultural lands in the United States. The County's fertile soils have long supported working farms that provide quality food, feed, and fiber while enhancing the local economy. The long-time presence of agriculture has also created an iconic landscape that is home to numerous scenic, cultural, and historic resources. The soils that support the Cumberland County agricultural economy are irreplaceable, so they must be thoughtfully protected as an important investment in our economy, our environment, and the overall quality of life for all residents of the County.

## Cumberland County's Agricultural Assets

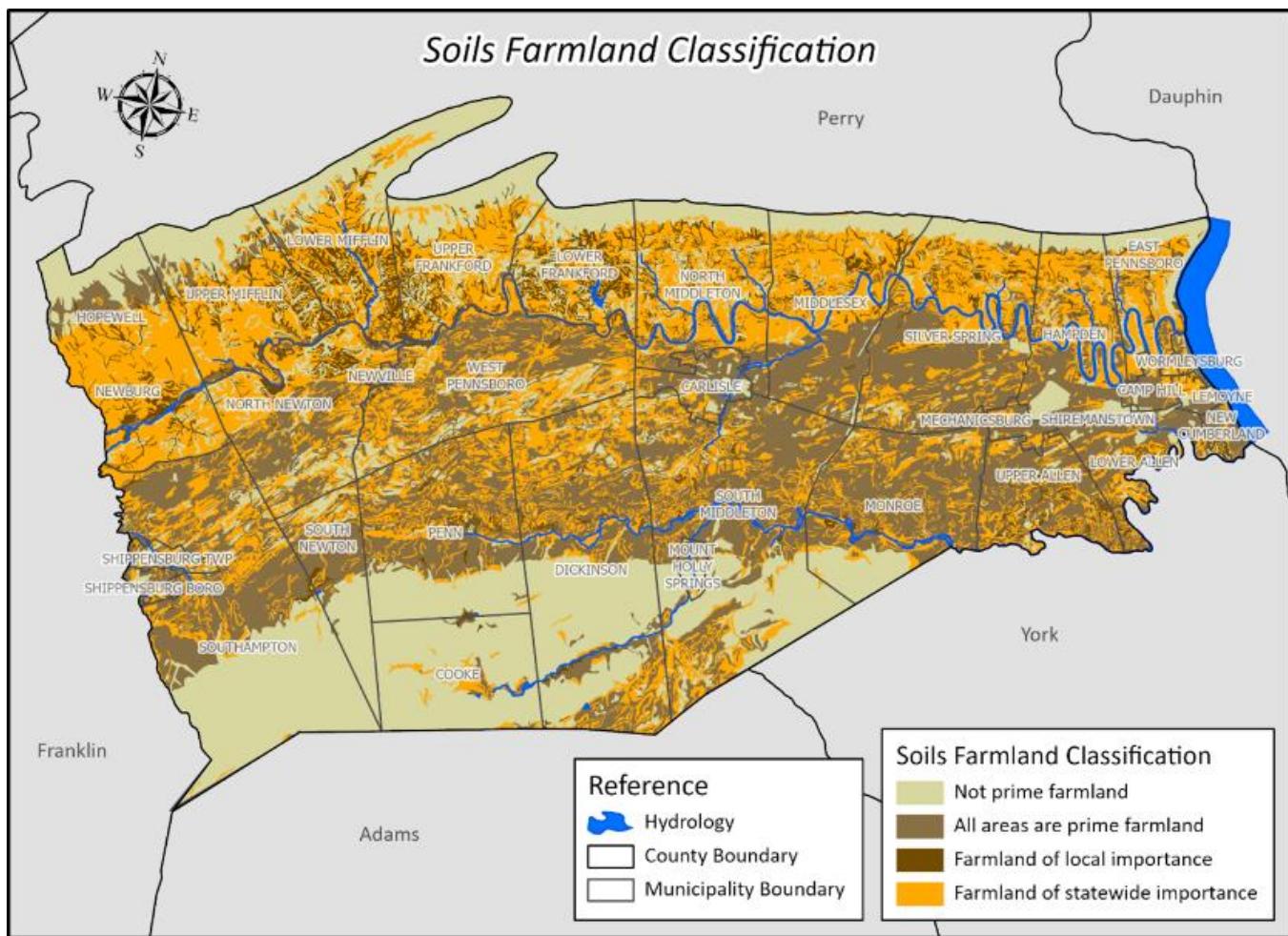
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The quality of the soil and protection of the best soils are critical for the future of agriculture. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has classified farmland in Cumberland County as prime, statewide important and locally important.

- **Prime Farmland**, generally including Class I and Class II soils, encompasses approximately 43 percent of the County or 150,800 acres and includes land that has the best characteristics for agriculture production.
- **Farmland of Statewide Importance** includes Class III soils and display statewide productive capabilities. Cumberland County has about 20 percent or 69,900 acres of these soils.
- **Farmland of Local Importance** are land areas valued at the local level for their contribution to agricultural production in the County.

Cumberland County soil quality is illustrated on the **Soils Farmland Classification Map**.





## Making the Case for Farmland Preservation

Preservation of Cumberland County's best working farmland benefits the agricultural community, residents, and businesses alike. Those benefits must be clearly communicated to generate awareness and support for farmland preservation efforts. Likewise, economic, environmental, and social trends must be closely monitored to avoid negative impacts to the irreplaceable farmland in the County. The following sections identify the benefits of farmland preservation and accompanying trends that help to make a convincing case why Cumberland County should be preserving farmland now.

## Economic Impact of Agriculture

Agriculture continues to be a significant industry in Cumberland County. In 2022, the County ranked 8<sup>th</sup> in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for total agricultural products sold, a drop from 7<sup>th</sup> in the State in 2017. The 2022 United States Department of Agriculture Census of Agriculture listed the market value of agricultural products sold from Cumberland County at \$300,139,000. This is a significant increase from the 2017 value of \$219,177,000. Livestock, poultry, and their related products represent a majority of the total market value, accounting for 73 percent of the total. This is a slight increase from 71 percent of the total market value in 2017<sup>1</sup>.

Farmland preservation efforts, in addition to the agriculture industry itself, have significant economic impact. According to a 2019 study, *An Analysis of the Economic Impact of Pennsylvania's Farmland Preservation Program*, the money spent on acquiring conservation easements circulates through the local and state economy, also known as the "Multiplier Effect." Productive farms employ managers, farm laborers, accountants, feed, and fertilizer consultants, veterinarians, and agricultural equipment suppliers. Farms also provide raw materials for food processing plants, restaurants, and grocery stores.

The Multiplier Effect for purchasing agriculture easements between 1989 and 2017 across the Commonwealth was estimated to be \$1.62 to \$2 for each dollar spent<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, the \$1.75 billion in 2017 dollars spent on acquiring easements from 1989 to 2017 generated a total of \$2.835 billion to \$3.5 billion in economic activity statewide.

### The Farmland Preservation Multiplier Effect

Every \$1 spent on farmland preservation generates \$1.62 to \$2 of additional economic activity.



Protecting local farmland also limits demands for public services. Working farms do not generate a significant demand for public services such as public sewer and water, fire and police protection, or other infrastructure investments. According to the Cost of Community Services Study by the

<sup>1</sup> 2017 and 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture, <https://www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus/>

<sup>2</sup> *An Analysis of the Economic Impact of Pennsylvania's Farmland Preservation Program*, Professor Tom Daniels, [https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/pda/documents/plants\\_land\\_water/farmland/documents/PA%20Farmland%20Preservation%20Economic%20Impact.pdf](https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/pda/documents/plants_land_water/farmland/documents/PA%20Farmland%20Preservation%20Economic%20Impact.pdf)



American Farmland Trust, for every \$1 a farm family pays in property taxes, they use on average \$0.37 in public services. By comparison, residential property owners use \$1.16 worth of services for every \$1 in property taxes paid.<sup>3</sup>

## Social and Environmental Benefits of Agriculture

Agriculture has demonstrated social and environmental impacts that complement its economic benefits. Local farms provide fresh food at a reasonable cost. Locally produced food is more nutritious and less costly as transportation and environmental costs are high for foods that are imported from distant regions and other countries. The average distance that imported food travels from farm to plate is 1,500 miles. The fuel burned to transport products this distance pollutes the air and water, and fruits and vegetables lose their nutrition from lengthy stays in shipping containers and on store shelves. Local agriculture provides a secure, sustainable food source for the County and region.

Well-managed farms also benefit the environment. Farms enrolled in the farmland preservation program are managed by private landowners using sound soil and water conservation practices that protect soil from erosion and surface waters from contamination. Open farmlands provide wildlife habitat and are important for groundwater recharge that is necessary to support residential, commercial and industrial development.



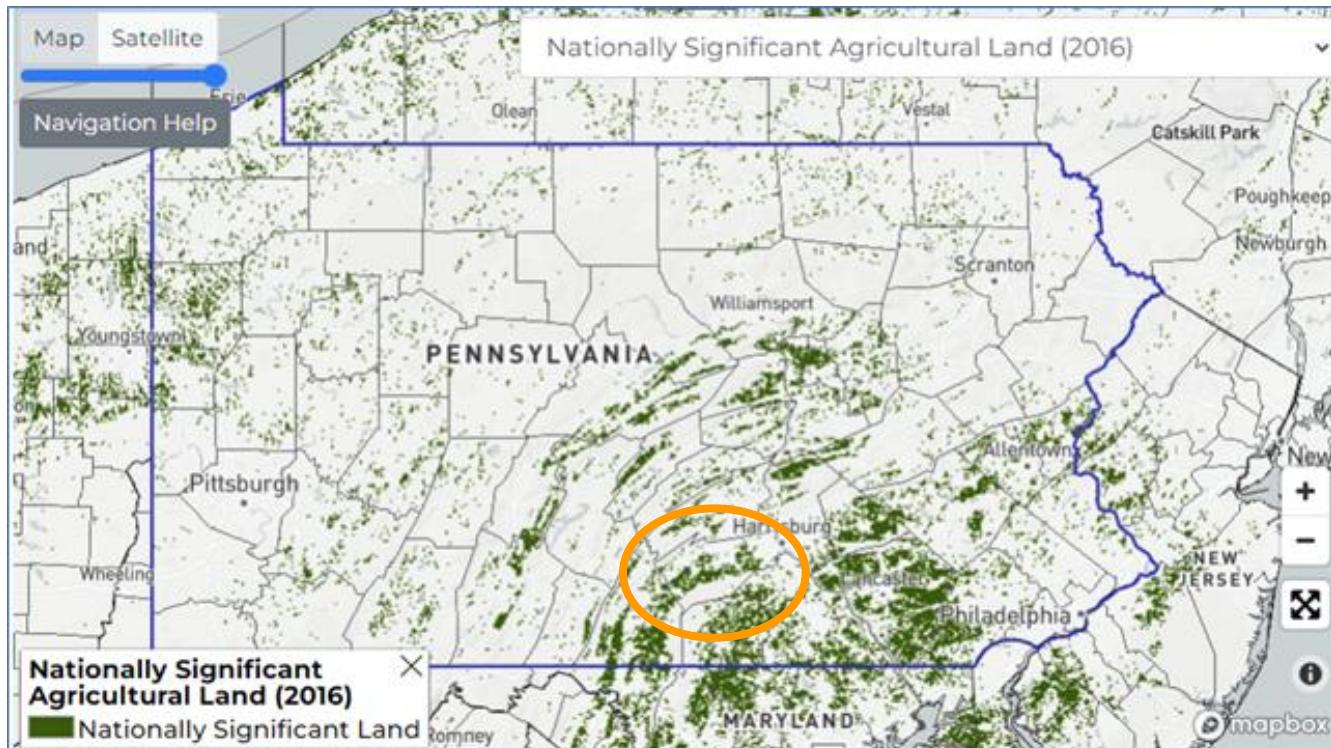
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<sup>3</sup> Cost of Community Services Studies, American Farmland Trust Farmland Information Center website, <https://farmlandinfo.org/publications/cost-of-community-services-studies/>. Accessed March 26, 2024



## Irreplaceable, Nationally Significant Agricultural Land

The American Farmland Trust has identified Nationally Significant Agricultural Land that represent the best agricultural land in the United States and play a crucial role in securing the nation's food supply. Cumberland County contains some of the finest agricultural land in Pennsylvania and in the nation. The following figure depicts a high density of Nationally Significant Agricultural Land in Cumberland County and the south-central Pennsylvania region at large<sup>4</sup>.

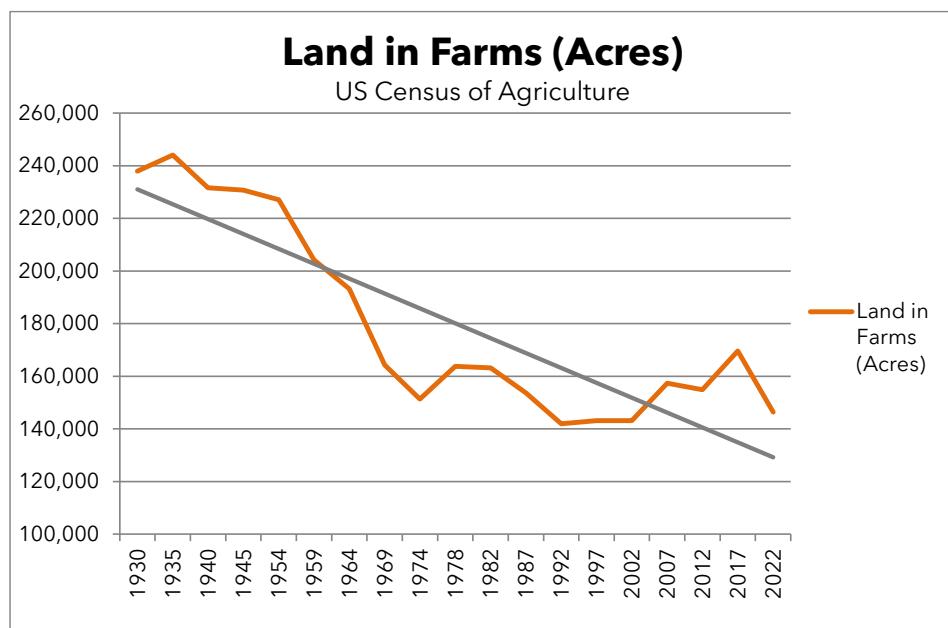


<sup>4</sup> Farms Under Threat: State of the States, American Farmland Trust website <https://csp-fut.appspot.com/#:~:text=Nationally%20Significant%20land%2C%20which%20is,acres%2C%20falls%20in%20this%20category>

## Loss of Farmland

The benefits of farmland are lost forever when agriculture soils are converted to another use. Cumberland County began experiencing significant farmland conversion in the 1940s. Between 1940 and 2002, nearly 90,000 acres (or 25 percent) of the County was converted from farmland to another use. The **Appendices** provides additional historical data from the USDA Census of Agriculture on farm characteristics such as land in farming, farm size and farm sales. The figure below depicts the decrease in land in farms from 1930 to 2022<sup>5</sup>.

Between 2017 and 2022, the period of the most current Census of Agriculture, Cumberland County lost 23,300 acres of farmland, the third most in the Commonwealth during that timeframe. The County's growth must be closely coordinated with farmland preservation policies to ensure that new development does not inadvertently destroy prime farmland.



### Loss of Farmland 2017-2022



**- 14%**

OR 23,265 ACRES LOSS  
OF LAND IN FARMS BETWEEN  
2017 AND 2022 IN  
CUMBERLAND COUNTY

**23,300**

ACRES LOST  
IN CUMBERLAND COUNTY

**74**

FARMS LOST  
IN CUMBERLAND COUNTY

<sup>5</sup> 1940-2022 USDA Census of Agriculture <https://www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus/>



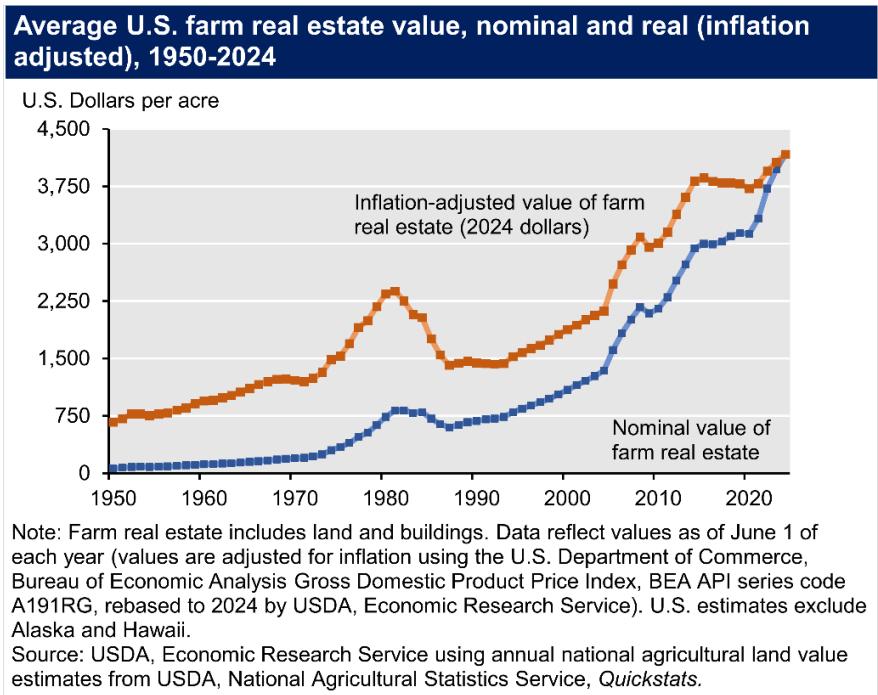
## Increasing Land Costs

Cumberland County has a growing population and economy. However, that growth often competes with agriculture for the County's limited land resources. That competition becomes more intense when the land most suitable for residential, commercial, and industrial development also contains productive farmland.

This increased competition for space has resulted in steadily rising prices for agricultural land in Cumberland County, a trend that is common across Pennsylvania. In 2024, the average value of an acre of agricultural land in Pennsylvania was \$8,160.<sup>6</sup> The figure below depicts the escalation of farm real estate values nationally from 1950 to 2024.

This trend has two notable impacts on agriculture and farmland preservation efforts in Cumberland County. The Farmland Preservation Program includes a per-acre price cap on what the County Agricultural Land Preservation Board can offer landowners as compensation for their development rights. If easement values exceed that cap, then an agricultural easement becomes a less attractive, or less financially feasible, option for farmers potentially interested in applying to the program. In 2023, the County Board approved an increase in the per-acre monetary cap for easements from \$4,000 to \$4,500 to keep pace with rising agricultural land values.

Additionally, rising land prices also impact the agricultural community. High land costs are one of several significant barriers to the entry of new farmers, especially if they are not already in a farming household. Established farmers also feel this effect, as it increases the cost of acquiring additional acreage. As broader changes to the agricultural economy are pushing farms in Cumberland County to grow in size, this could have the effect of squeezing out smaller-scale farmers who are unable to pay higher prices for land.



<sup>6</sup> Farmland Value, USDA Economic Research Service, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/land-use-land-value-tenure/farmland-value/>



## Farmland Fragmentation

Uncertain, conflicting land use patterns also have the potential to discourage investment and expansion of both farms and agricultural support businesses. According to the 2022 report Farms Under Threat 2040: Choosing an Abundant Future from the American Farmland Trust, agricultural areas are especially vulnerable to low-density residential (LDR) development, which was the largest driver of farmland fragmentation and conversion to non-agricultural uses and development<sup>7</sup>. Only a handful of farms converted to large-lot rural subdivisions can lead to the decline and failure of agricultural support businesses, which in turn makes keeping the remaining farmland under cultivation increasingly challenging. According to the report, since 2001, agricultural land in areas with LDR was 23 times more likely to be converted to urban high-density development than those without LDR. This vulnerability underscores the importance of protecting large blocks of agricultural land from the fragmenting effects of low-density residential development.



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<sup>7</sup> Farms Under Threat 2040: Choosing an Abundant Future, American Farmland Trust website, <https://farmlandinfo.org/publications/farms-under-threat-2040/>



# Implementation Plan

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## Farmland Preservation Goal & Benchmark

### **Farmland Preservation Goal**

Preserve the agricultural lands of Cumberland County and support the long-term viability of the agricultural economy.

### **Desired Outcomes:**

- Farmland is protected through a combination of agricultural easements and municipal ordinance provisions that promote agriculture.
- County and municipal planning and land use ordinances include strategies that protect and sustain the agriculture industry and respond to trends in local sustainable food production.
- Farms are managed utilizing best management practices, emphasizing water quality improvements.
- Agriculture is promoted via farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture programs, and community gardens.
- Agricultural partners work to promote and educate the public on the importance of the County agricultural industry, farmland preservation and the availability of local agricultural products.

### **Farmland Preservation Benchmark:**

- In 2019, the Cumberland County Board of Commissioners adopted a resolution setting a policy **goal of preserving 30,000 acres of working farmland by the year 2030**.
- As of March 2025, farmland preservation efforts are on target to achieve this goal, with over 24,500 acres preserved.



## Strategy 1: Promote the Pennsylvania Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program

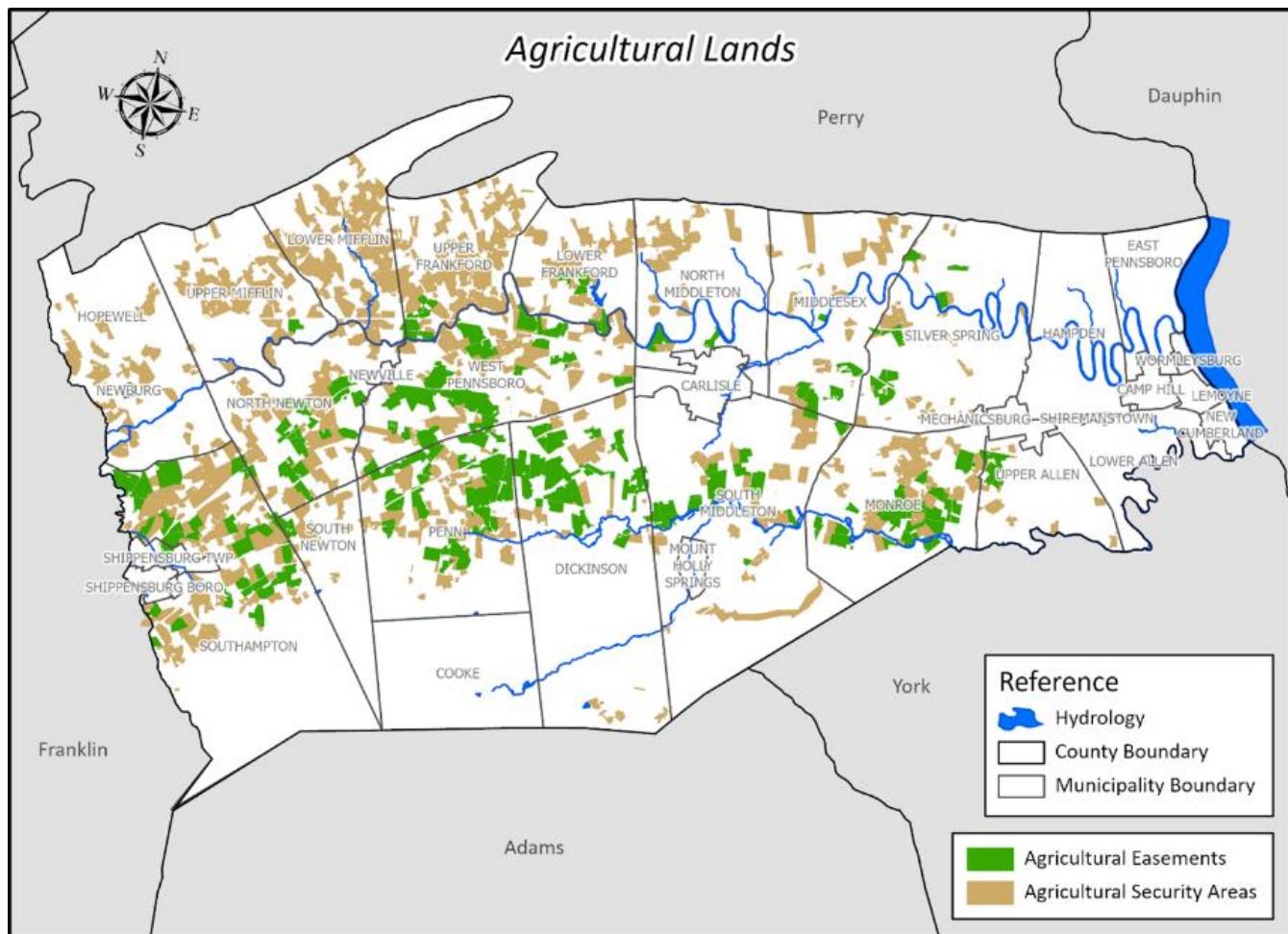
The Pennsylvania Agriculture Conservation Easement Purchase Program (ACE) is a county-administered State program that provides a mechanism for purchasing agricultural conservation easements from willing landowners in Agricultural Security Areas (ASAs). Federal, State, County, and local government funds along with private and non-profit funds can be used to purchase agricultural conservation easements. The landowner maintains ownership of the land and can continue to farm it but cannot convert the land to non-agricultural use. The agricultural conservation easement is held in perpetuity and provides permanent protection of farmland. Additionally, the landowner benefits from the money generated from the sale of the easement.

Between 1989 and 2025, the ACE program has preserved approximately 230 farms and 24,500 acres. Cumberland County ranks 7th in the state for total acres of farmland preserved. To date, over \$68 million in County, Federal, and local dollars have been invested in farmland preservation in Cumberland County.

Interest in the ACE program remains high, with applications over the last 10 years remaining steady at between 26-34 per year. For the 2025 program year, application numbers spiked to 47 farms totaling 4,633 acres of farmland. Despite a recent increase in applications, farmers in the County may still not be aware of the value of preserving farmland and the benefits available to them through the easement program. There is a need for additional education and outreach, especially through developing connections with farmers one-on-one.

The **Agriculture Lands Map** illustrates farmland parcels that have been permanently protected through agricultural easements and parcels enrolled in the Agriculture Security Area Program. The **Appendices** provides a summary of preserved farmland and ASAs in Cumberland County by municipality and a farmland preservation comparison with other counties in the region.





#### **Actions:**

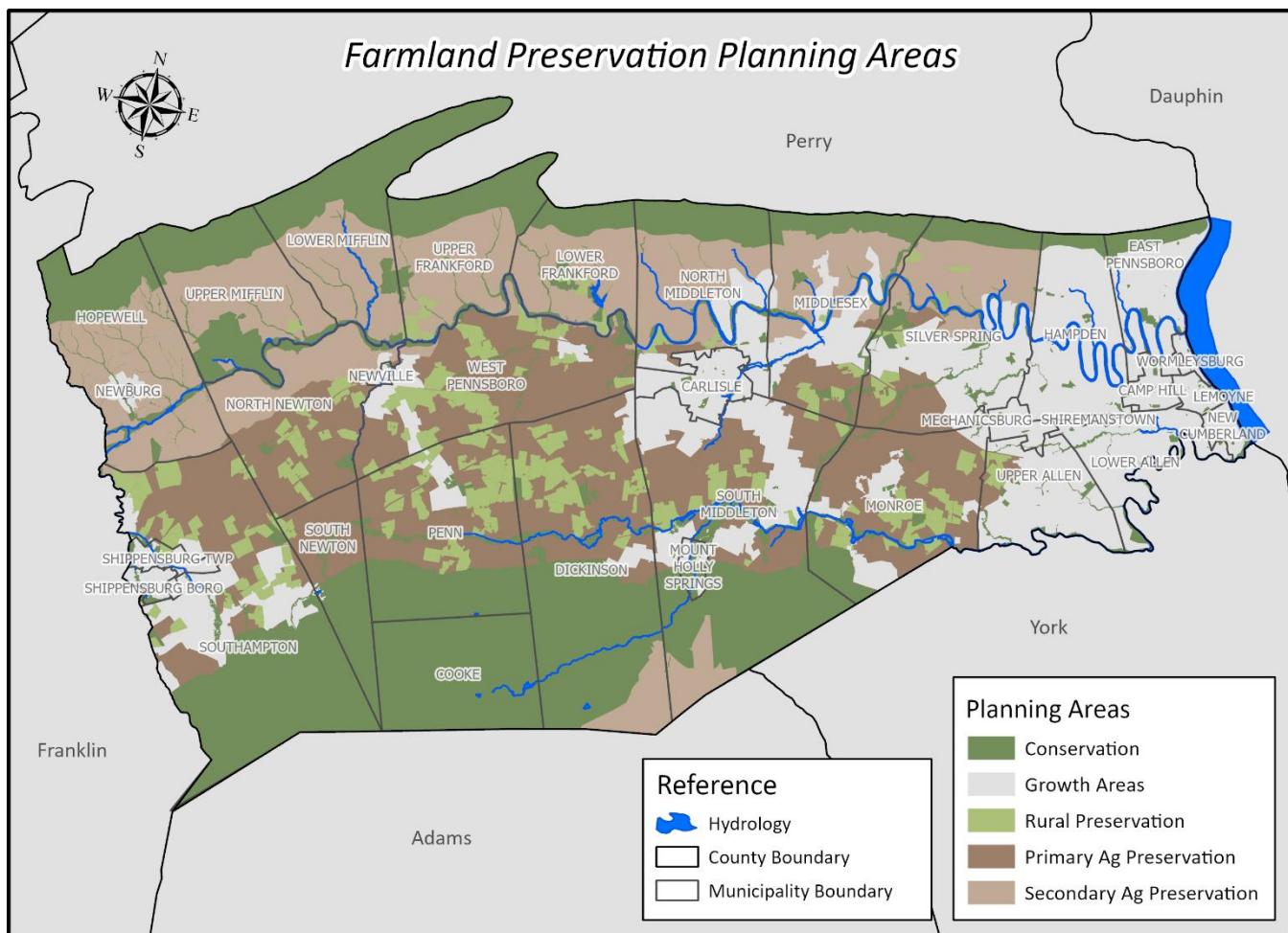
- Grow the number of applications to the ACE program by raising awareness through educational workshops, printed materials, and the county website. Host at least one annual community meeting, aimed at farmers.
- Increase the general public's awareness of the importance of agriculture and benefits of farmland preservation to maintain support for the ACE program through social media, website and outreach events. Special emphasis shall be placed on the importance and benefits of local food. Update the local food guide in coordination with partners.

## Strategy 2: Acquire Easements in Farmland Preservation Planning Areas

Acquisition of agricultural conservation easements is the most recognized tool for farmland preservation. Easements should be acquired in strategic locations in order ensure long term viability of the agriculture industry while avoiding conflicts with non-agricultural development. The **Farmland Preservation Planning Areas Map** was developed to identify priority areas for acquisition of future agricultural conservation easements as well as areas for growth. The County and its partners should seek easements in the Primary and Secondary Farmland Preservation Areas as shown on the map and described below.

- **Primary Farmland Preservation Areas** generally consist of land defined as prime farmland by the USDA. They are mostly located between the Conodoguinet and Yellow Breeches Creeks in regions containing limestone geology. It includes Class I and Class II soils defined as having few to moderate limitations that restrict their use for cultivation.
- **Secondary Farmland Preservation Areas** preserve rural landscapes that reflect the agricultural history of the county. Most of this area is located north of the Conodoguinet Creek in areas that, for the most part, do not contain prime farmland soils but include soils classified as having statewide and local importance that also support productive agricultural operations.
- **Growth Areas** generally contain existing development in the County, including urban, suburban, and some rural communities and are intended to serve as the location for most of the new development. By concentrating new growth around the water, sewer, and road infrastructure, growth pressures are decreased on surrounding farmland and natural resources.
- **Conservation Areas** are natural landscapes, often permanently preserved, that have inherent public benefits for agriculture, recharging groundwater, mitigating floods, filtering air, purifying water, and providing critical plant and animal habitat.





#### **Actions:**

- Continue acquisition of agriculture conservation easements to reach the countywide benchmark by 2030. Re-evaluate the goal of 30,000 acres by 2030 goal in 2029.
- Promote the out of ranking order/50% bargain sale provisions in the ACE program to leverage additional funds and extend existing funding.
- Expand the 100% bargain sale program to acquire easements from landowners seeking to donate an easement.
- Encourage partnerships among the County Agricultural Land Preservation Board, local municipalities, and non-profits to purchase joint agriculture conservation easements. Seek to create at least 2 new partnerships.
- Pursue alternative funding sources, such as the Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) for the purchase of agricultural conservation easements. Advocate for streamlined USDA easement purchase program processes.
- Promote the farmland preservation financial donation program to bring additional private funding to the ACE Program. Seek to increase financial contributions to the program by 5-10% annually.

## Strategy 3: Improve Administration of ACE

The Cumberland County Conservation Easement Purchase Program reached a milestone of 35 years in service in 2024. The ACE Program has experienced many successes, but as the agriculture industry and economic environment change, program guidelines and ranking systems for the program must evolve to respond to these changes. Further, to remain economically viable, many farmers are seeking to establish new markets or rural enterprises on preserved farms. These enterprises must be accomplished in a manner that protects the value of easements but affords farmers some flexibility.

### ***Actions:***

- Conduct ongoing review and evaluation of the County Agricultural Conservation Easement Program guidelines to respond to changes in the agricultural industry, environmental regulation, etc. Recertification of the program is required every 7 years to maintain Commonwealth funding.
- Advocate for changes to the ACE Program to permit recreation trails on preserved farms by right with landowner consent.



## Strategy 4: Steward the Land and Farmers

Stewardship of the ACE Program has become increasingly challenging. In the last two years alone, approximately 10% of the farmland in the program has transferred ownership. New landowners

and next generation preserved farm owners are further removed from the original easement transaction, which can present challenges for stewardship and compliance with the terms of the conservation easement. The potential for enforcement actions and litigation is increasing. Additionally, landowners that manage preserved land merit additional support and technical assistance to ensure that the County investment in agriculture is sustained into perpetuity.

***Actions:***

- Increase outreach with preserved farm owners to enhance landowner relations and ensure long-term compliance with the easement provisions. Develop resource materials related to common enforcement and stewardship challenges such as change of ownership requirements and subdivision criteria.
- Continue with the annual inspection of the County's preserved farms. Enhance monitoring efforts and pursue enforcement of violations, as necessary to protect taxpayer investment.
- Host at least one informational workshop per year with preserved farm owners to provide technical assistance on trending issues such as farm transition planning or innovative conservation practices.
- Encourage and support best management practices on farms to ensure compliance with Pennsylvania's erosion and sedimentation and nutrient management requirements, with emphasis on water quality improvements. High priority shall be given to farms preserved through the ACE program including financial assistance to develop conservation plans and implement best management practices.

## Strategy 5: Improve Planning for Agriculture

Farmland preservation goals cannot be achieved only through the implementation of easement purchase programs. Land use planning is an important, cost-effective tool to protect agriculture and establish a balance with development opportunities. The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) is intended to empower local municipalities to preserve and regulate agricultural land uses. Comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances, as authorized by the MPC, provide municipalities with the tools to plan for agriculture.

Article III, Section 301 of the MPC specifies that **County and Municipal Comprehensive Plans** shall provide a plan for the protection of prime agricultural land. Further, Section 301 specifically requires that County Comprehensive Plans *"identify a plan for the preservation and enhancement of prime agricultural land and encourage the compatibility of land use regulation with existing agricultural operations."* A protection plan should include establishing goals and objectives for the preservation of prime farmland and identifying areas of prime farmland on a future land use map where agriculture is desired.



The **Zoning Ordinance** is a planning tool to establish the location, amount, and type of agriculture desired in a municipality. Agriculture is dependent on the quality of the soil; therefore, zoning districts should be established in areas with the most productive soils. Effective agricultural zoning districts limit the amount of conflicting non-agricultural development, protect the right to farm, and allow for related accessory uses that supplement farm income.

In addition to comprehensive planning and zoning ordinances, the **Agricultural Security Areas (ASA) Program** is an important planning tool to protect the agriculture industry. Historically, implementation of the ASA program has been challenging at the municipal level. Administration of the program tends to be cumbersome, which has led to poor tracking and management of enrollment. Additionally, since the program does not offer permanent protection or allow for recoupment of administrative costs, the importance of the program has been diminished or misunderstood. However, all farms applying to enter the ACE Program must be included in an ASA. Thus, municipalities must take their ASA management responsibilities seriously. Likewise, the County has an interest in making sure municipal records are accurate. Approximately 80,000 acres of land (23 percent of the County) are enrolled in the ASA program. The **Appendices** provides a summary of ASAs by municipality and benefits of the ASA program.

**Actions:**

- Provide funding and technical assistance to municipalities to develop and implement municipal comprehensive plans and land use ordinances that protect the right to farm and preserve prime farmland and the agricultural industry in the County.
- Update the Agricultural Land Preservation Guide from 1998 to provide best practices for agriculture preservation for local governments.
- Promote the ASA Program and assist municipalities with the development and periodic review of ASAs. Provide training and technical assistance on ASA implementation. Improve ASA data collection and create an enhanced database for ASA tracking.

## Strategy 6: Coordinate with Partners

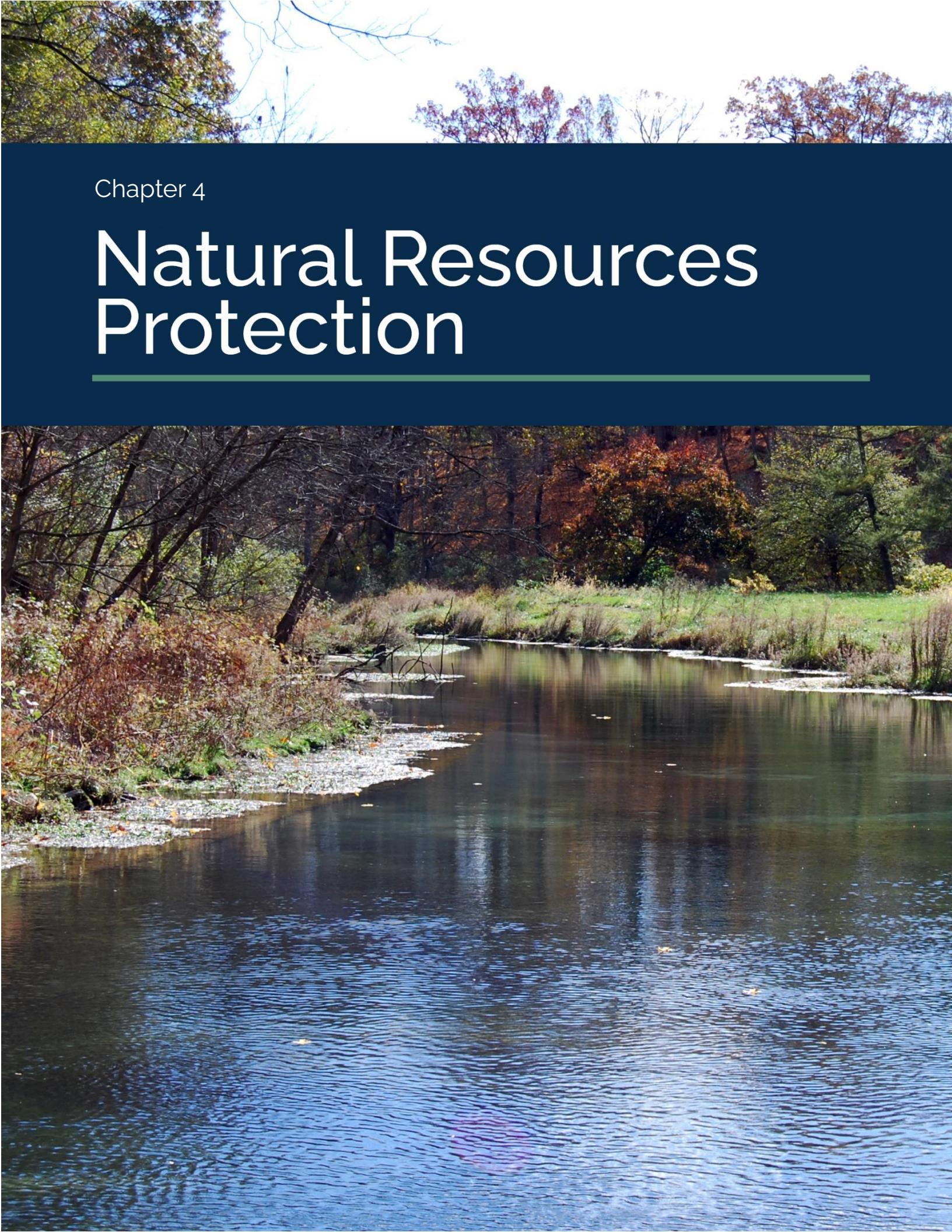
There are a wide range of agricultural stakeholders in Cumberland County working to support the farming community in a variety of areas including technical assistance, business planning and legislative advocacy. The County should coordinate with partners to advance common goals. The **Appendices** lists the stakeholders in agriculture and highlights their focus areas.

**Actions:**

- Support and partner with local agricultural stakeholders to promote the agriculture industry and preserve prime farmland. Participate in partner events and programs where farmers are the primary audience.







Chapter 4

# Natural Resources Protection

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## Overview

Cumberland County's significant natural features deliver essential ecological services to the County. Additionally, these natural resources contribute to its scenic beauty and the quality of life it offers residents. The wooded ridges of North Mountain and South Mountain, the stream corridors of the Yellow Breeches Creek and Conodoguinet Creek, and the Susquehanna River along the eastern boundary are natural resources that define Cumberland County. The valley between the ridges with its rich agricultural soils, wetlands, and riparian areas adds to the diversity of the County's natural resources.

Protection of these resources for future generations has always been important to our citizens and is incorporated into the Pennsylvania State Constitution as articulated to the right.

This chapter centers on the protection and restoration of Cumberland County's natural resources. The plan includes an identification of priority land for preservation and an exploration of the importance of these areas. The chapter concludes with strategies for natural landscape protection.

*"The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic, and aesthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people."*

- Section 27, Article 1 of the Pennsylvania Constitution



# Cumberland County's Natural Assets

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The following list defines the natural resources that are considered as part of this plan. Detailed descriptions and mapping of these features are provided in the **Appendices**.

- Soils, including mineral resources
- Woodlands
- Surface and groundwater
- Floodplains
- Wetlands
- Critical habitats for wildlife and plant species

## Making the Case for Natural Resource Protection

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### Economic Impacts of Natural Resources

The significant positive impact that protected natural lands have on air quality, water quality, and the local recreation and tourism economy has become increasingly clear over time. The [2015 Cumberland County Return On Environment Report](#), compiled by the Kittatinny Ridge Coalition in coordination with the Cumberland County Planning Department and Audubon Pennsylvania, quantifies the profound economic benefits that intact natural landscapes bring to Cumberland County. The report estimates that the County's open spaces provide natural systems services, recreational, and property-value benefits that exceed \$1 billion annually. This includes \$739.1 million in savings from natural system services and \$146.7 million in avoided costs for air pollution removal and carbon storage and sequestration<sup>1</sup>. An update to the 2015 report is currently underway to provide updated economic data and additional tools for decision-making.

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<sup>1</sup> 2015 Return On Environment, Cumberland County, Kittatinny Ridge Coalition website, [https://kittatinnyridge.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/KIT\\_ROE\\_cumberland\\_6.pdf](https://kittatinnyridge.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/KIT_ROE_cumberland_6.pdf)



## Social & Environmental Benefits of Natural Resources

Natural resources serve as the cornerstone upon which the health of a community is built. The services natural resources provide to a community often go unnoticed, until they are no longer present and irreversible damage has been done. Thus, residents must know the specific natural resources present in the County and how they support overall community health. **Table 4-1** displays the environmental and social benefits of natural resource protection to Cumberland County.

<b>TABLE 4-1</b> <b>SOCIAL &amp; ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS TO NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION</b>	
<b>Soils and Minerals</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Supports resource-based industries and economic development (ex. commercial agriculture and quarries/extraction operations)</li></ul>
<b>Woodlands</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provides renewable forestry resources</li><li>• Stabilizes slopes with root systems to minimize erosion</li><li>• Slow runoff to maximize groundwater infiltration</li><li>• Protect groundwater by protecting headwaters and filtering stormwater runoff</li><li>• Provides critical wildlife habitat</li><li>• Enhances scenic landscape</li><li>• Supports nature-based recreational opportunities and tourism</li></ul>
<b>Surface and Groundwater</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sustained source of clean drinking water</li><li>• Supports economic development</li><li>• Supports water-based recreation such as fishing and boating</li></ul>
<b>Floodplains and Wetlands</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prevent property damage</li><li>• Protect public safety</li><li>• Carry flood waters and reduce flooding</li><li>• Provide groundwater recharge</li><li>• Capture sediment and pollutants</li><li>• Improve water quality</li><li>• Stabilize stream banks</li><li>• Stormwater management</li><li>• Wildlife habitat</li><li>• Enhance scenery</li></ul>
<b>Critical Wildlife and Plant Habitats</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maintains biodiversity</li><li>• Supports nature-based recreation and tourism, including hunting, fishing, and birding</li></ul>

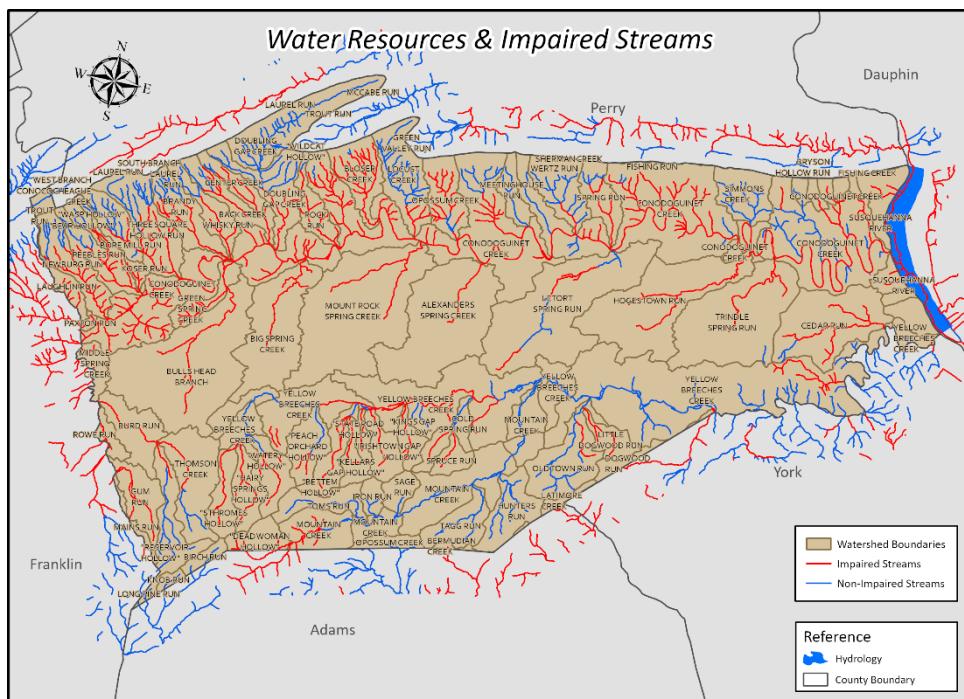


## Water Quality

Cumberland County has 784 total stream miles, of which 61.6 percent (483 miles) are impaired due to siltation, nutrient loading, and other issues. Water quality is closely tied to land use with agricultural sources (63 percent), developed/urban areas (17 percent), and wastewater treatment plans (10 percent) all delivering pollutant loads to County waterways<sup>2</sup>. The extent of Cumberland County's stream impairments are depicted on the **Water Resources and Impaired Streams Map**.

Clean water is paramount to the vitality of Cumberland County. Fresh water is essential for public health. Residents expect clean water for drinking and sanitation. Water is also critical for economic development. Agriculture, industry, and tourism all rely on water resources. Clean water is also important for maintaining healthy habitat for plants and animals that contribute to the County's food system.

In addition to the health of Cumberland County, impaired water has downstream impacts. The County's streams drain to the Susquehanna River and ultimately the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The Bay is the largest estuary in the United States providing significant ecological, economic and recreation benefits to the region. Unfortunately, the Bay has been severely impacted by pollution and overfishing, threatening the long-term viability of its ecosystem.



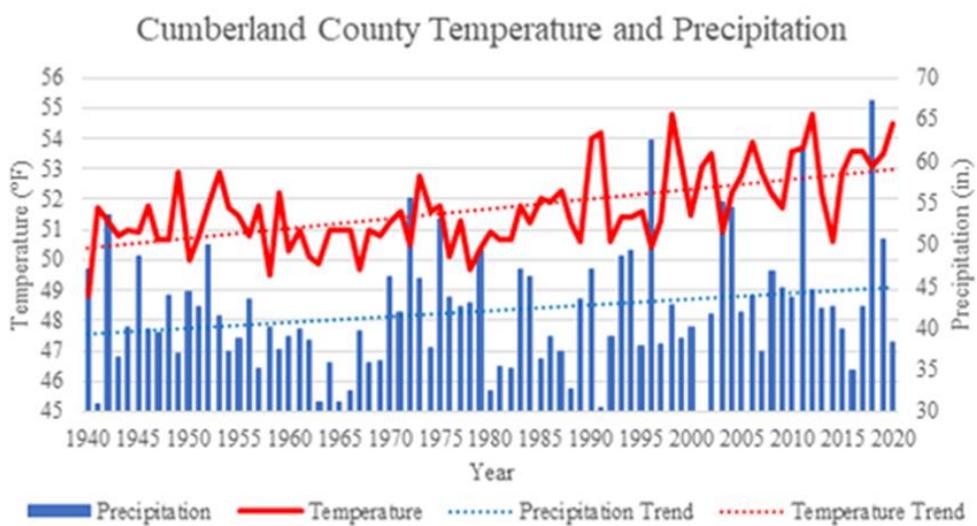
<sup>2</sup> 2024 Pennsylvania Integrated Water Quality Report,

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/7af67824d6924b88b544dbad302ebc4f>, Accessed June 25, 2025

## Mitigate the Impacts of Climate Change

Climate change is a pressing environmental challenge of the 21st century that can impact Cumberland County's natural resources, economy, and residents' physical health. Scientists expect that with the current trends in fossil fuel use, Americans may see more intense heat waves, droughts, rainstorms, floods, wildfires, and landslides in the future. These impacts could drag down our economy, stress our natural resources and negatively impact resident health<sup>3</sup>.

The [Cumberland County Climate Action Plan](#), adopted in January of 2022, details how the changing climate is impacting the County. The following figure depicts rising temperatures and rates of precipitation in Cumberland County. These increases create challenges for agriculture, water quality, tourism, infrastructure, air quality, human health, forests and wildlife.



Land preservation and restoration of natural systems are powerful tools to mitigate the impact of climate change. Natural landscapes are responsible for carbon storage and sequestration. Intact forests, wetlands and protected areas help to filter and absorb water, improving water quality and reducing the amount and severity of flooding. Trees improve air quality by trapping pollution on leaf surfaces and absorbing pollutants. Additionally, land conservation is a critical tool for slowing the loss of biodiversity<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> *Green Up the Footprint, Cumberland County Climate Change Action Plan 2022*, Cumberland County website, <https://www.cumberlandcountypa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/40197>, Accessed March 28, 2024

<sup>4</sup> *The Power of Land Conservation to Address the Climate Crisis*, Trust for Public Land, [www.tpl.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/073124\\_Green-Papers\\_Climate-Crisis\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.tpl.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/073124_Green-Papers_Climate-Crisis_FINAL.pdf), Access June 2, 2025



# Implementation Plan

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## Natural Resource Protection Goal & Benchmarks

### Natural Resource Protection Goal

Conserve the significant natural resources of Cumberland County.

### Desired Outcomes:

- The forested ridges, streams, and important natural areas of Cumberland County are protected.
- County, municipal, and non-profit stakeholders coordinate resources to acquire land and/or easements for preservation.
- Municipalities integrate natural resource protection provisions into zoning and subdivision ordinances for woodlands, steep slopes, floodplains, wetlands, wellheads, and drinking water sources.
- Landowners utilize conservation techniques (e.g. best management practices) to manage their properties.
- Natural resources are protected through stormwater management and investments in existing public infrastructure.

### Benchmark:

- **Preserve 30 percent** of Cumberland County's land and water resources.
- As of 2024, approximately **22 percent of the County is preserved**.



## Strategy 1: Preserve Priority Conservation Areas

A review of the County's land area reveals that 22 percent of the County is preserved, 20 percent is developed, and 58 percent remains undeveloped and unprotected. While the present ratio of preserved versus developed land is balanced, important natural resources remain unprotected. The County must make room for future growth but should not do so at the expense of the natural resources that have made it successful. Thus, the County needs to proactively identify the highest priority unprotected natural resources and strategically work to secure their protection.

An analysis of Cumberland County's natural features was completed to help identify the most sensitive environmental resources. Using Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis, the county's sensitive environmental resources were ranked using the following layers:

- Hydrology (i.e., waterways) with a 200-foot buffer
- 100-year Floodplain
- Woodlands
- Slopes with a 15% or greater grade
- Natural Area Inventory (NAI) Core Habitat Sites
- Wetlands

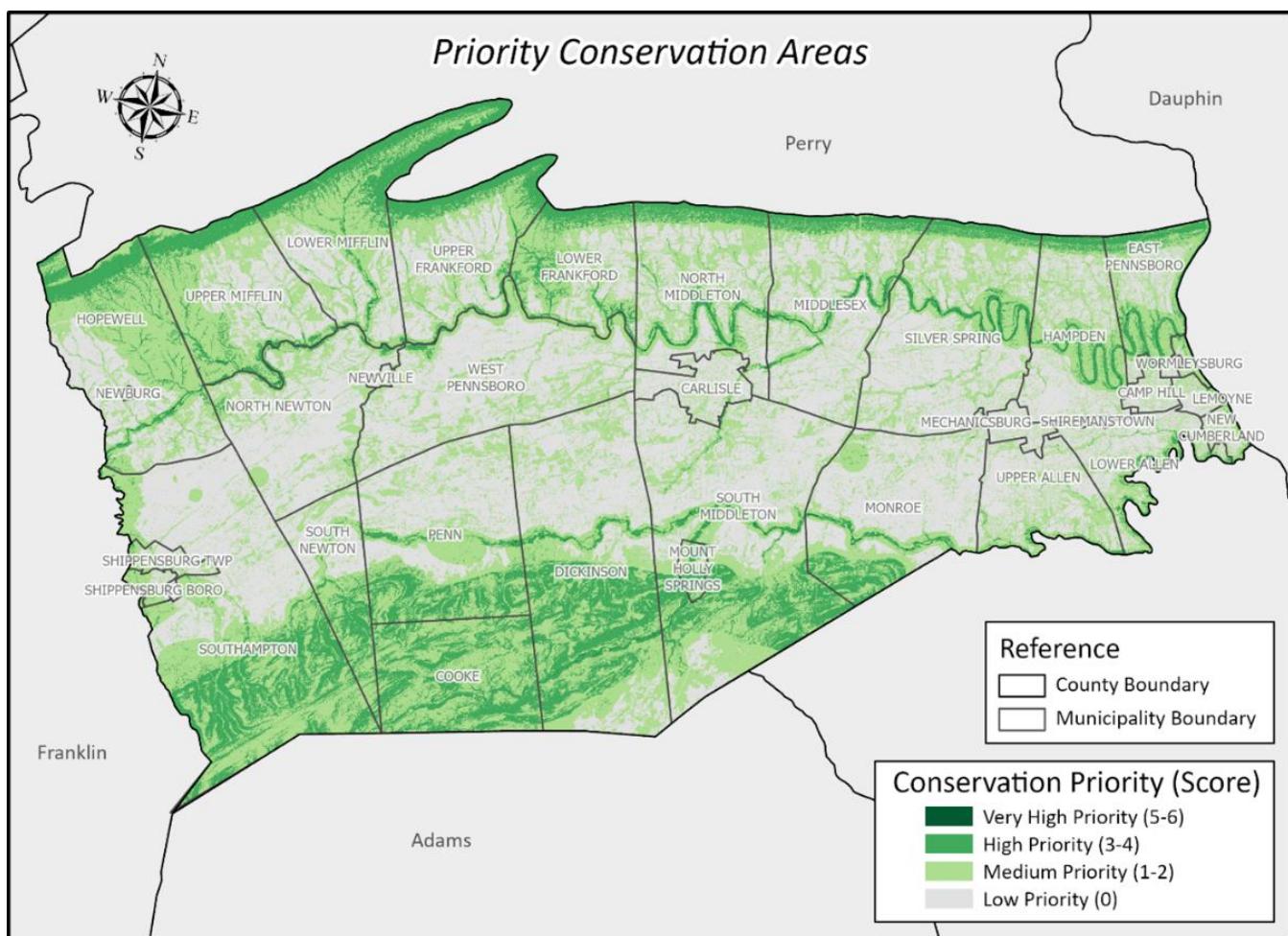
This analysis used overlapping sensitive features to assign a score of one through six, with one being lower priority resources for protection and six representing the highest priority natural resources. Overall, the results indicate the landscape features of North Mountain and South Mountain contain the most important natural features. Additionally, the stream corridors and headwaters of the County's waterways contain high-priority natural assets. This analysis can be applied at a smaller scale to prioritize local areas suitable for preservation and combined with other qualitative factors, such as proximity to other preserved lands, to comprehensively assess land preservation opportunities

**Table 4-1** details the results of the analysis of the amount of land and the percentage of the County. The **Priority Conservation Areas Map** illustrates areas with low, medium, high, and very high conservation values.

**TABLE 4-1**  
**PRIORITY CONSERVATION AREA RESULTS**

CONSERVATION VALUE	ACRES	PERCENT OF COUNTY
<b>Low Conservation Value (0 score)</b>	147,633	42%
<b>Medium Conservation Value (1-2 score)</b>	145,382	41%
<b>High Conservation Value (3-4 score)</b>	58,602	16%
<b>Very High Conservation Value (5-6 score)</b>	777	0.2%





#### **Actions:**

- Coordinate with partner organizations to identify specific priority conservation areas.
- Support land trust outreach to property owners in priority conservation areas to discuss voluntary land preservation opportunities.
- Leverage Act 13 funding through Land Partnerships Grants and other funding sources to secure voluntary conservation easements and fee simple acquisitions on priority conservation areas.

#### **Priority Projects for Conservation Improvement Plan:**

- Land preservation projects in priority conservation areas on North or South Mountain and along the Conodoguinet and Yellow Breeches Creeks.

## Strategy 2: Improve the Capacity of Land Trusts to Accelerate Open Space Preservation

The planning process showed that open space preservation is a policy priority with the public and partner organizations. Planning participants expressed a desire for more County coordination, leadership and funding to accelerate open space and natural area preservation efforts. The County's role in direct land preservation has been primarily focused on farmland preservation while regional land trusts have led direct open space preservation efforts. Thus, the County will need land trust support if open space preservation efforts are to be accelerated.

Unfortunately, Cumberland County lacks a county-based land trust like the neighboring counties of Adams and York. Cumberland County is served by several regional conservancies including the Central PA Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, and Natural Lands. While these organizations have provided exceptional benefit, more could be done with staffing and financial resources specifically targeted to Cumberland County.

Cumberland County should work closely with its land trust partners to identify the administrative, technical, and financial resources needed to accelerate open space preservation efforts. Those needs should be communicated with the County Commissioners and municipalities to identify innovative partnership opportunities to enhance open space preservation efforts.

### ***Actions:***

- Convene land trusts and other preservation stakeholders regularly to coordinate open space preservation efforts countywide.
- Explore the feasibility of providing operational support to local land trusts to accelerate preservation efforts.
- Provide technical support to preservation partners to enhance local capacity.
- Conduct additional polling to determine public support for additional open space funding beyond existing Act 13 funding.



## Strategy 3: Improve Cumberland County Water Quality

The 2020 Countywide Action Plan for Clean Water is intended to serve as a blueprint for how public, private, and non-profit partners can collaborate to protect and restore water resources and help the Commonwealth meet its obligation to reduce pollution entering Chesapeake Bay. The plan focuses on three priority initiatives:

- Establishing County programmatic initiatives
- Achieving new pollutant reductions
- Monitoring, verifying, researching, educating, and training

To advance these initiatives, the County has administered Countywide Action Plan Block Grant since 2021, using Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection and local funds to complete clean water projects. In 2024, the County formalized a subaward program called the Clean Water Grant Program to accelerate the rate of project implementation. Municipalities, non-profit partners, and businesses leveraged program funding to complete water quality projects including stream restoration, conservation landscaping in place of turfgrass, and agricultural practices such as animal stream crossings, manure storages and heavy use areas. Since 2021, the County Planning Department and Conservation District have managed more than \$10 million in funding for these projects. Continuation of the County's water quality programs will help to ensure clean water for future generations.

### ***Actions:***

- Implement the Countywide Action Plan for Clean Water to include tracking land use changes that impact water quality, implementing existing Planning Department program priorities, identifying potential projects and sites, and conducting landowner outreach to drive project development.
- Leverage Block Grant funding to implement the Clean Water Grant Program for Best Management Practice construction to reduce pollutants and achieve local water quality benefits.
- Engage the Clean Water Cumberland partnership in furthering collaboration and efficiencies in addressing local water quality priorities and strengthening capacity of organizations to implement projects and engage and educate the public.

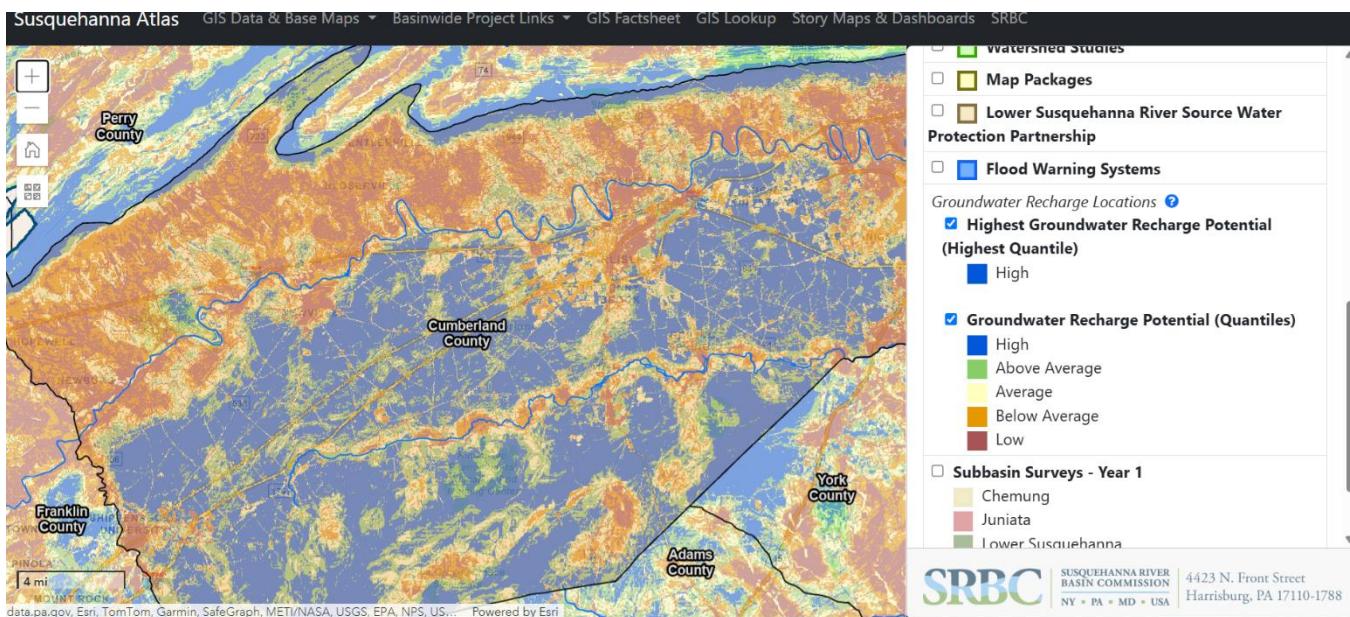
### ***Priority Projects for Conservation Improvement Plan:***

- Structural agricultural BMPs such as manure storage structures, agricultural heavy use areas, stream exclusion fencing and rotational grazing systems for livestock as well as cover crop incentive program through the Conservation District.
- Stormwater management and stream restoration projects such as raingardens, wetlands, riparian buffer installation, stream bank stabilization, in-stream fish habitat structure improvement, and floodplain reconnection projects.



## Strategy 4: Preserve the County's Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas

The Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) was established in 1971 to coordinate water resource efforts across the three states in which the Susquehanna River flows. In 2023, SRBC published a study and GIS mapping tool identifying important groundwater recharge areas. Maintaining or preserving groundwater recharge is the primary means of ensuring water is available in aquifers for water supply and as baseflow to streams. The best recharge areas, which are responsible for a large fraction of groundwater replenishment, are referred to as "Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas" (CARAs) by SRBC. The identification and protection of CARAs is increasingly important as the water supply becomes more stressed with increased urbanization. The figure below represents a snapshot of the CARA mapping. The blue areas represent land with the highest recharge potential. These areas are responsible for 80 percent of groundwater recharge. Land preservation should be prioritized in these areas for the protection of our water supply.



### Actions:

- Coordinate with SRBC to identify the highest priority aquifer recharge areas in the County and apply for land preservation funding to permanently preserve those areas through voluntary conservation easements with landowners.
- Develop model land development and zoning ordinances to protect critical aquifer recharge areas during typical development activities.
- Integrate CARA identification into the ACE Program evaluation system.
- Conduct training sessions with municipalities and residents to understand the importance of aquifer recharge area protection.



### **Priority Projects for Conservation Improvement Plan:**

- Voluntary land preservation projects on land with the highest aquifer recharge rates.

## **Strategy 5: Improve Planning for Natural Resource Protection**

Land use planning is an important tool to protect natural resources for the benefit of current and future residents. The Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) is intended to empower local municipalities to preserve important natural resources. The comprehensive plan, zoning ordinance, subdivision and land development ordinance, and official map are all tools available for natural resource protection.

Article III, Section 301 of the MPC specifies that **County and Municipal Comprehensive Plans** shall provide a plan for the protection of natural resources. This clause includes but is not limited to wetlands and aquifer recharge zones, woodlands, steep slopes, floodplains, and unique natural areas. A plan for protection should include establishing goals and objectives for the preservation of natural resources and identifying important natural resources that should be preserved. Further, the Comprehensive Plan shall include a plan for a reliable water supply, considering current and future water resource availability, uses, and limitations, including provisions adequate to protect water supply resources.

The MPC also empowers municipalities to adopt an **Official Map** for flood control and stormwater management purposes. **Zoning**, Article VI of the MPC, authorizes municipalities to enact ordinances that protect and preserve natural resources. Moreover, provisions in the **subdivision and land development** ordinance help support the implementation of those provisions. Examples of natural resource ordinance provisions include but are not limited to:

- Conservation subdivision and zoning
- Steep slope management
- Woodland Management, Tree Protection
- Floodplain management
- Riparian Buffer Protection
- Wetland Protection
- Source Water and Wellhead Protection
- Stormwater Best Management Practices

The County's role in these activities includes education and technical support to our municipalities. This can be achieved through MPC required reviews of subdivision and land development plans as well as writing comprehensive plan and ordinance reviews. The Planning Department has written plans and ordinances for municipal partners as part of its Local Planning Assistance Program. County-sponsored training programs can also be used to help improve municipal awareness of available tools for natural resource management.



**Actions:**

- Provide technical assistance to municipalities to write plans and ordinances that include provisions that promote natural resource protection.
- Incorporate recommendations for natural resource protection into MPC required County land development plan reviews.
- Conduct educational workshops/training for municipal officials on the benefits of natural resource protection and tools to preserve those resources.
- Develop guidance on green infrastructure for developed communities that will help to improve water quality.
- Leverage funding through the Cumberland Plans Grants to provide funding support to municipalities to develop or update local comprehensive plans, official maps, and land use ordinance provisions to be consistent with Land Partnerships.

***Priority Projects for Conservation and Recreation Improvement Plan:***

- Development of plans and ordinances in communities with no plans or outdated plans and ordinances.

## Strategy 6: Support Large Landscape Preservation

Conservation practitioners have been promoting the conservation landscape approach to natural resource protection for many decades. Landscape conservation brings people together across geographies, sectors, and cultures to collaborate on conserving our important landscapes and the many ecological, cultural, and economic benefits they provide.

Cumberland County is part of three regional conservation landscape initiatives. The County's role varies from organization to organization, but staff participate in organizational activities including leadership positions, attending training events, and actively partnering on initiatives.

- **South Mountain Partnership (SMP):** The SMP is a collaborative network of people and organizations protecting and promoting the agricultural, natural, cultural, and recreational resources of the region in Adams, Cumberland, Franklin, and York counties. The South Mountain is a forested upland landscape that covers a half-million acres in south-central Pennsylvania and forms the southern boundary of Cumberland County. This area is also home to the Appalachian Trail, giving additional importance to preserving scenic views and historic landscapes. Most municipalities in southern Cumberland County are designated as "Core South Mountain Conservation Landscape."
- **Kittatinny Ridge Conservation Landscape (KRCL):** KRCL is a diverse partnership of government agencies, non-profit organizations, conservation groups, recreational clubs, and educational organizations that are developing a shared vision for the long-term preservation of Kittatinny Ridge and combining resources to acquire and protect natural lands within the region. The Kittatinny Ridge is a 185-mile-long mountain range that runs from the Maryland

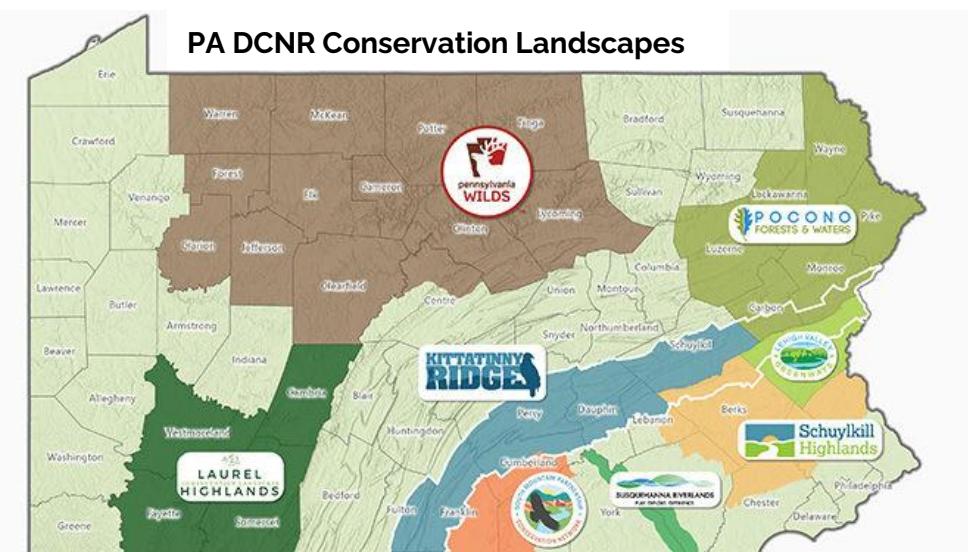


State Line near Hagerstown to the Delaware Water Gap north of Allentown. The ridge has been identified as a biodiversity hotspot and, according to the Nature Conservancy, "the most resilient landscape in the state for adapting to climate change." Kittatinny Ridge forms the northern border of Cumberland County, and most municipalities in the north fall partially or entirely within the designated landscape.

- **Susquehanna Greenway Partnership (SGP):** The SGP consists of 25 partners, including state agencies, national park programs, non-profit conservation groups, recreation associations, and educational institutions. The Susquehanna Greenway is a 500-mile green space corridor that covers the entire course of the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. The partnership's long-term goal is to link destinations on the Susquehanna with walking, bicycling, and paddling corridors, fostering recreational opportunities and economic development in communities along the river. The river forms the western boundary of the County, with Cumberland County lying within both the Middle Section and Lower Section of the greenway.

#### **Actions:**

- Update and promote the Natural Areas Inventory in collaboration with the South Mountain Partnership and encourage its use in municipal land use planning and development. Educate municipal officials and residents on the importance of biodiversity.
- Support implementation of the South Mountain Partnership State of the Region Report including participating in the proposed regional trail coalition and wildlife corridor initiative.
- Update the 2015 Return on Environment Study in partnership with the Kittatinny Ridge Conservation Landscape Initiative and Audubon PA.
- Support the conservation landscape initiatives by serving in leadership and committee positions to provide input and guidance on regional projects. Attend meetings and training opportunities, as appropriate.



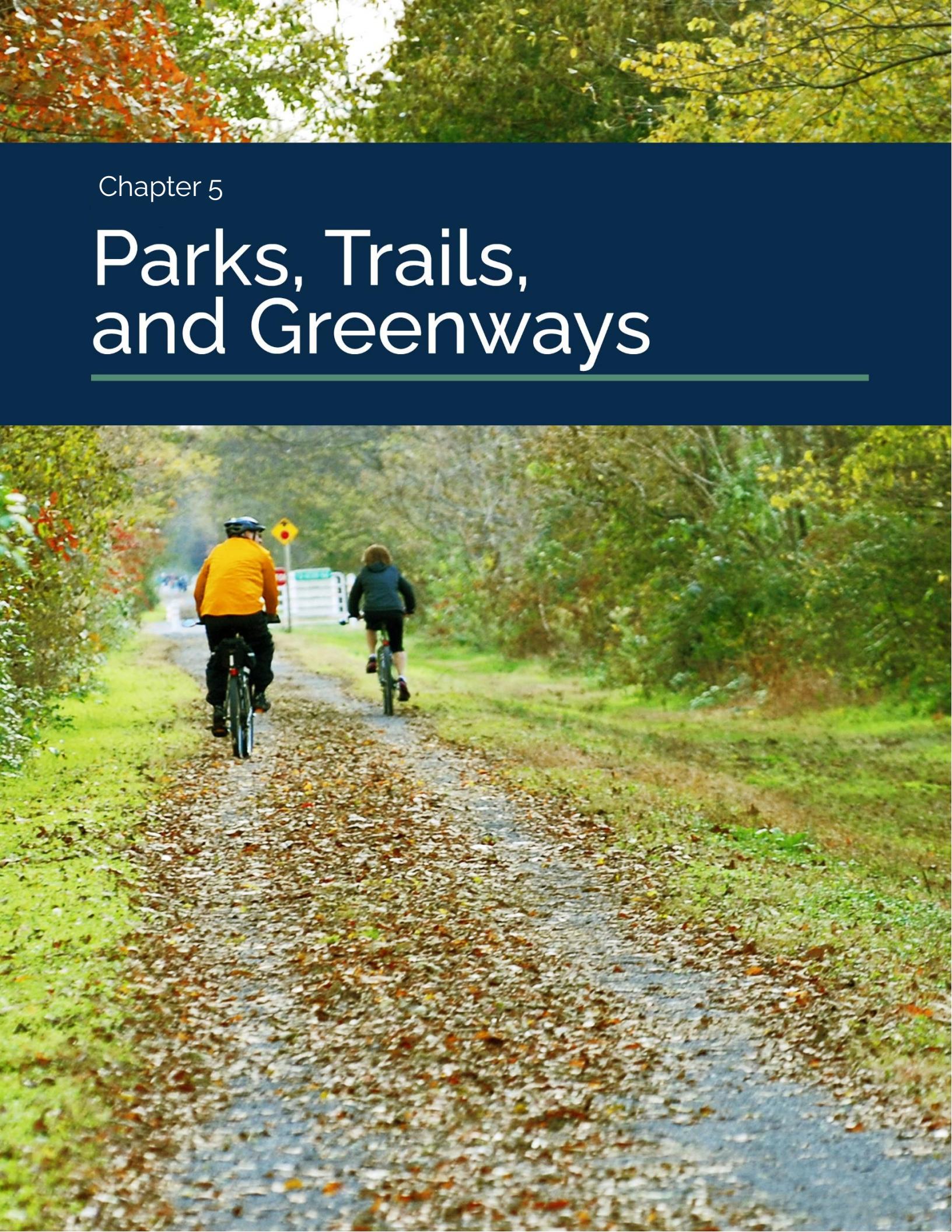
## Strategy 7: Coordinate with Partners

In addition to large landscape conservation organizations, there are also many local partner organizations that promote natural resource education and preservation in the County. Through their efforts, natural resource-focused policies and projects are developed and implemented. The **Appendices** lists the prominent natural organizations in the County and their respective focus areas.

### ***Actions:***

- Provide support and technical assistance to local watershed organizations to implement local river conservation plans and community-based watershed initiatives.
- Raise public awareness about the benefits and importance of protecting Cumberland County's natural resources.
- Educate private landowners about voluntary conservation practices such as woodlot management, the establishment of riparian buffers, invasive plant control, native plant landscaping, wildlife habitat improvement, rain barrels, rain gardens, etc.



A photograph of a paved trail through a park. The trail is covered in fallen autumn leaves. Two people are riding bicycles away from the camera. The person on the left is wearing a bright orange jacket and a blue helmet. The person on the right is wearing a dark jacket and a blue helmet. The trail is lined with trees and bushes, some with red and orange leaves. A yellow and red yield sign is visible in the distance.

Chapter 5

# Parks, Trails, and Greenways

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# Overview

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Cumberland County's agricultural and natural resources have a significant positive impact on the physical, mental, and social well-being of local communities. Without public access, the benefits of those resources go unrealized. Parks, trails, and greenways are the gateways that enable residents and visitors to access and experience the natural world. They create opportunities for outdoor recreation, exercise, and active transportation. This chapter identifies the County's park and trail resources, discusses their importance, and defines strategies to increase their number and connectivity.

## Cumberland County's Outdoor Assets

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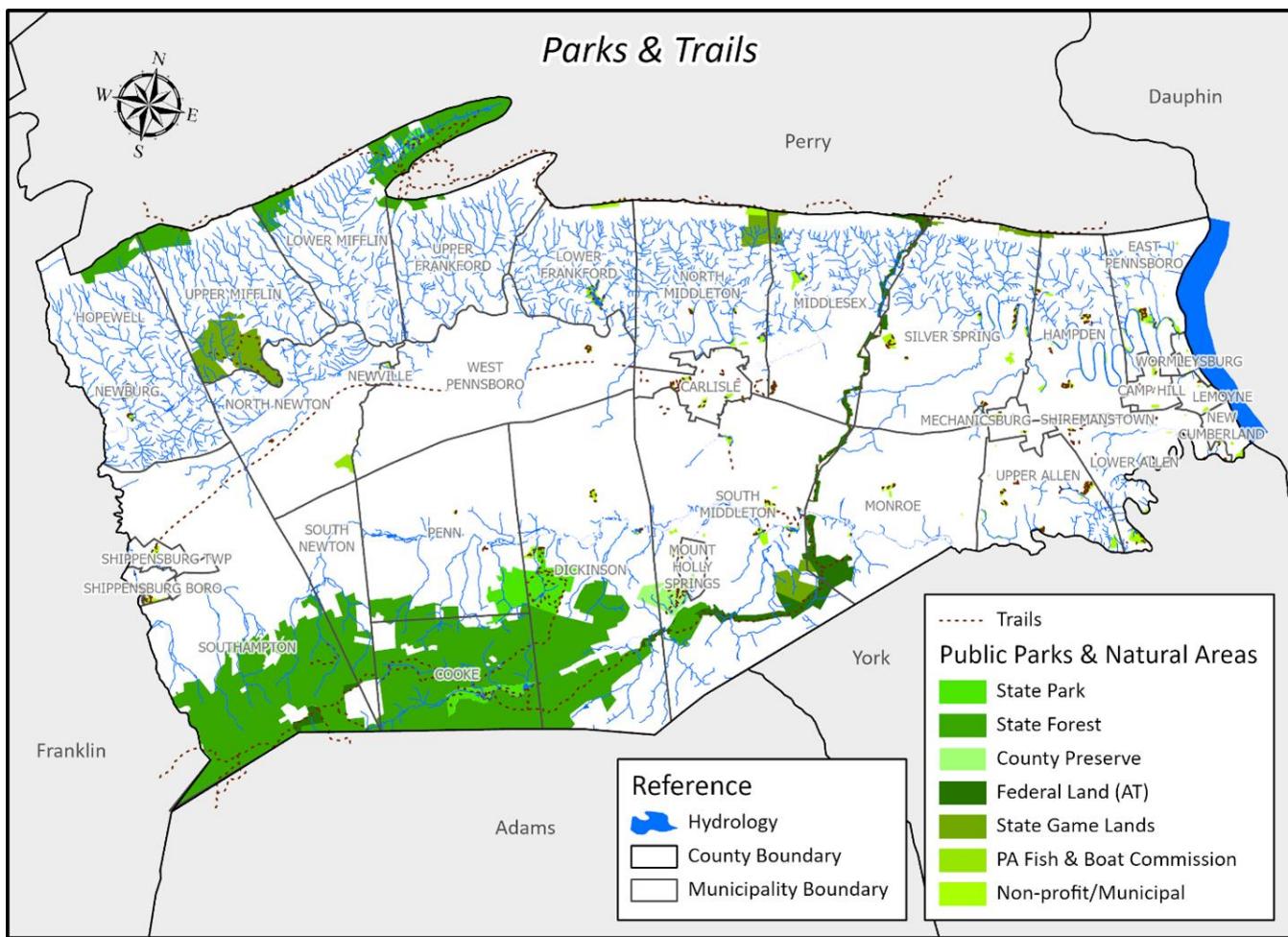
### Public Parks & Natural Areas

Cumberland County has over 54,000 acres of public parks and natural areas which represents about 15 percent of the county's land area. **Table 5-1** provides an inventory of the park and natural areas available in Cumberland County by provider. These facilities create a diverse network of outdoor assets for the public to enjoy. The **Appendices** includes detailed descriptions of these resources, and the **Parks and Trails Map** depicts their locations.

**TABLE 5-1**  
**PARKS AND NATURAL AREAS OF CUMBERLAND COUNTY, 2024**

PROVIDER	ACERAGE
<b>Federal Resources</b>	3,694
<b>State Resources</b>	46,928
<b>County Resources</b>	894
<b>Municipal Resources</b>	2,426
<b>Non-Profit and School Resources</b>	329
<b>TOTAL ACREAGE</b> (Acres calculated utilizing available GIS)	<b>54,270</b>
<b>AS % OF COUNTY ACREAGE</b>	<b>15.4%</b>





## Land Based Trails

Cumberland County has approximately 250 miles of trails serving both long distance and close to home needs. The **Appalachian National Scenic Trail** and the **Cumberland Valley Rail Trail** are renowned trails and represent the north-south and east-west spines of the County trail network, respectively. Trails are important for tourism, fitness, and recreation. The 2020-2024 Statewide Outdoor Recreation Plan for Pennsylvania identified walking for pleasure or fitness as the number one outdoor recreational activity in the state. In addition to recreation, trails offer non-motorized transportation alternatives for commuters. The **Appendices** provides a detailed list of trails and the **Parks and Trails Map**, depicts the location of trails in Cumberland County.

## Water Trails

Water trails are boat routes suitable for canoes, kayaks, and other small watercraft. Like conventional trails, water trails are recreational corridors between specific locations. Water trails are comprised of access points, boat launches, and day-use sites. One of the main goals of the water trails program is to highlight existing recreation facilities and to encourage stewardship of, and safe recreation on, our local waterways. Cumberland County has three Pennsylvania designated water trails:

- The **Susquehanna River Water Trail** is divided into several sections. The Middle Susquehanna Water Trail extends from Sunbury to Harrisburg and is managed by the Susquehanna River Trail Association. The Lower Susquehanna River Water Trail extends from Harrisburg to the Mason-Dixon Line and is managed by the Susquehanna Gateway Heritage Area.
- The **Yellow Breeches Creek Water Trail** includes approximately 22 miles of the Yellow Breeches Creek. The trail is divided into two trips due to the existence of several hazardous dams and the lack of approved access and/or portage. Trip A extends from South Middleton Township Park to Boiling Springs. Trip B extends from Messiah College to the Susquehanna River.
- The **Conodoguinet Creek Water Trail** covers approximately 40 miles of the Conodoguinet Creek. The trail begins near Carlisle at North Middleton Park and ends at "The Point" in West Fairview, where the creek flows into the Susquehanna River. Users must exit the creek at Cave Hill Nature Center and reenter at Creekview Park to circumvent the Carlisle Raw Water Intake Dam.



## Greenways

A greenway is a corridor of open space that incorporates or links natural, cultural, and scenic resources. Some greenways are recreational corridors that accommodate pedestrian and non-motorized vehicle traffic, while others function exclusively for environmental protection.

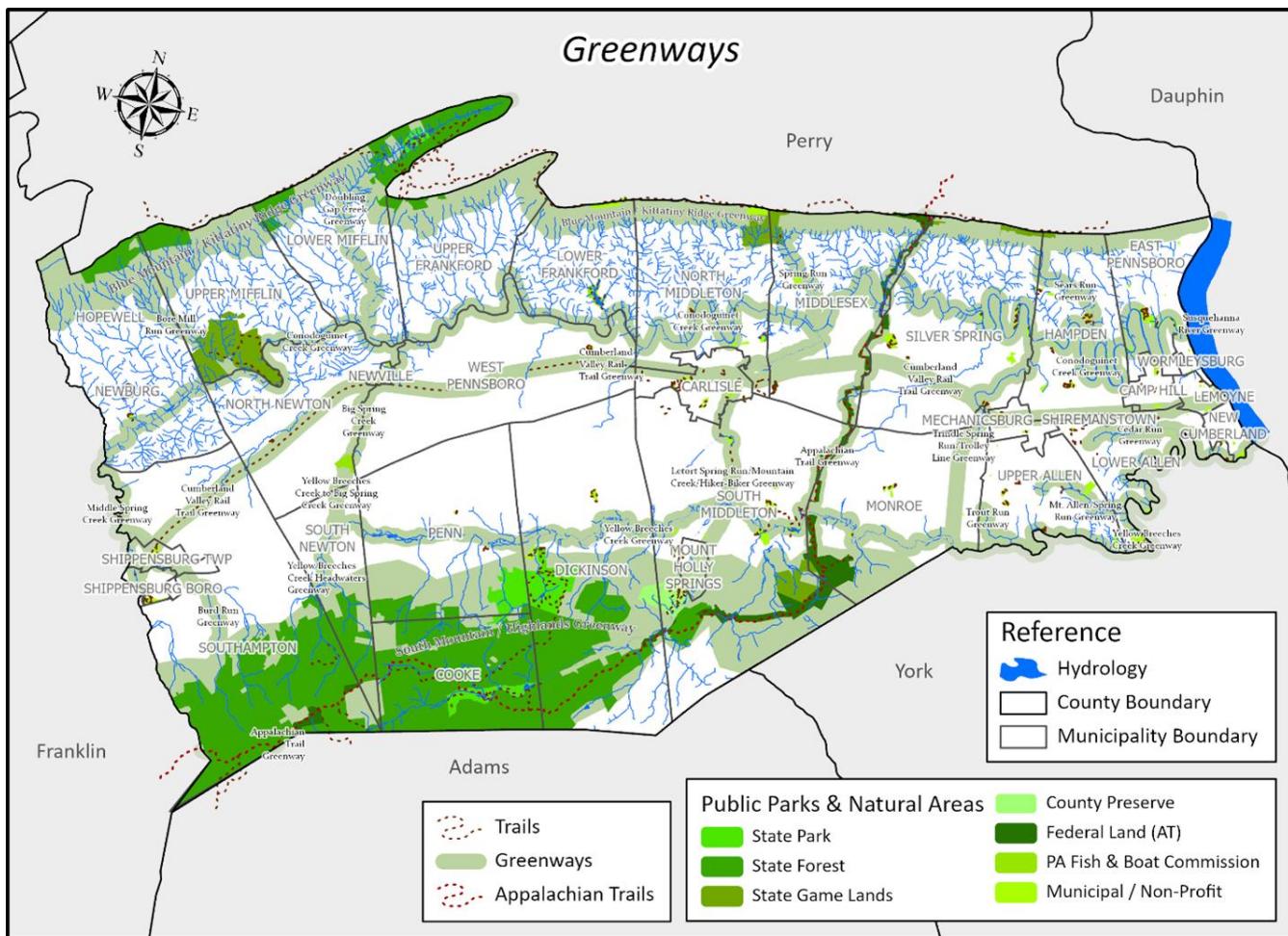
Cumberland County's greenway network forms a grid-like web of linear green spaces throughout the County. The ridge and valley characteristics of the County promote east-west corridors that follow streams, rail corridors, and ridge lines. The system of major and minor greenways provides a comprehensive network of greenways connecting the entire County and providing greenway opportunities to all citizens of Cumberland County.

The **Greenway Map** illustrates the following priority greenways:

MAJOR GREENWAYS	MINOR GREENWAYS
Appalachian Trail Greenway **	Burd Run Greenway
Big Spring/Doubling Gap Creek Greenway	Middle Spring Creek Greenway
Blue Mountain/Kittatinny Ridge Greenway	Bore Mill Run Greenway
Conodoguinet Creek Greenway	Trout Run Greenway
Cumberland Valley Rail Trail Greenway	Yellow Breeches Creek Headwaters Greenway
LeTort- Spring Run/Mountain Creek/Hiker-Biker Greenway	Yellow Breeches Creek to Big Spring Creek Greenway
South Mountain/Highlands Greenway **	Spring Run Greenway
Susquehanna River Greenway **	Sears Run Greenway
Trindle Spring Run/Trolley Line Greenway	Cedar Run Greenway
Yellow Breeches Creek Greenway	Mt. Allen/Spring Run Greenway

**\*\*Designated Statewide Important Greenways by PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources**





## Making the Case for Parks, Trails, and Greenways

### Outdoor Recreation Economic Benefit

Cumberland County experiences positive economic benefits as residents and visitors alike come to enjoy the County's parks, greenways, and trails. Numerous studies have quantified the economic impact of such outdoor recreation opportunities. A summary of the salient findings is included below:

- Open space, parks, and greenways generate tourism dollars for an area. Travel destinations generate revenue from food, lodging, gas, equipment, and a variety of other services. Overall, tourism in Cumberland County brings in \$955.6 million in visitor spending, \$46.7

million in state and local tax revenue and supports 6,474 jobs<sup>1</sup>. Outdoor recreation is one of the key components to Cumberland County's tourism strategy.

- Conservation and recreation can increase business development. Businesses prefer to locate and expand their operations in communities with ample parks, open spaces, and a clean environment.
- Parks and open spaces enhance property values. Studies have shown that property values are higher in communities with athletic fields, walking trails, parkland, open space, and scenic vistas than in comparable homes in communities that don't provide and protect these assets. The National Recreation and Park Association found that park space in urban environments added an 8 percent to 10 percent premium to abutting properties<sup>2</sup>.
- Outdoor recreation is a significant economic driver that is growing rapidly in the Commonwealth. A 2022 report by the US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis found that in Pennsylvania, the industry is growing significantly and is responsible for approximately 164,000 jobs and contributes \$17 billion to the Commonwealth's gross state product.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup> By the Numbers: The Power of Tourism in Cumberland Valley,

<https://www.visitcumberlandvalley.com/tourism-partners/tourism-in-cumberland-valley/>

<sup>2</sup> How Much Impact Do Parks Have on Property Values?, National Recreation and Parks Association website,

<https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2020/april/how-much-impact-do-parks-have-on-property-values/#:~:text=This%20led%20us%20to%20conclude.point%20guideline%20for%20developing%20estimates>

<sup>3</sup> The Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, Bureau of Economic Analysis website,

<https://apps.bea.gov/data/special-topics/orsa/summary-sheets/ORS%20-%20Pennsylvania.pdf>



## Growing Outdoor Recreation Participation

Participation in outdoor recreation activities is growing. The COVID-19 pandemic saw explosive growth in the use of trails, parks, and waterways as residents looked to the outdoors as a source of relief during closures and lockdowns. According to the [Outdoor Industry Association](#), in 2022, outdoor recreation reached a record of 168.1 million participants, or 55% of the U.S. population ages six and older. Hiking is the most popular outdoor activity, Running, bicycling, fishing and camping round out the top five activities.<sup>4</sup> In Pennsylvania, more than 9 out of 10 residents reported participating in at least one outdoor recreation activity in the past year, and more than 30 percent recreate outdoors two or more times a week, which is a 10 percent increase over five years ago<sup>5</sup>.

Between 2018-2022, Pennsylvania's senior citizen population (ages 55+) experienced higher outdoor recreation participation rates, increasing from 28 to 35 percent. Participation rates are expected to continue into the future as the [Pennsylvania Department of Aging](#), estimates that by 2030, Pennsylvania's 60 and older population will reach 4 million, about one-third of the state's population.<sup>6</sup> This will increase the need for additional recreation facilities accessible to older residents.

## Advancing Health & Well-Being

Access to parks and trails is not just about having fun. Outdoor recreation is an important part of a healthy community. In 2024, Penn State Health completed a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). The CHNA identified critical trends in the health and well-being of the population living in the 6-county region it serves, including Cumberland County. The CHNA identified physical and mental well-being as critical focus areas for the future<sup>7</sup>. The implementation plan for the physical well-being goal recommends enhancing and promoting walking and biking trails and partnering with local park and recreation departments to enhance physical activity. Additionally, the mental health benefits of nature and outdoor time are well documented. Time outdoors lowers stress, improves immune function, and can help fight heart disease, depression, and dementia. For children, time outside leads to lower obesity, improves attention spans, and boosts creativity and problem-solving.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> 2023 Outdoor Participation Trends Report, Outdoor Industry Association website, <https://outdoorindustry.org/resource/2023-outdoor-participation-trends-report/>

<sup>5</sup> PA 2025-2029 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, [https://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/GetDocument?docId=9137016&DocName=2025\\_SCORP\\_Plan\\_Draft.pdf](https://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/GetDocument?docId=9137016&DocName=2025_SCORP_Plan_Draft.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> State Plan on Aging 2020-2024, Keystone for Empowered Aging, Pennsylvania Department of Aging website, <https://www.aging.pa.gov/publications/state-plan-on-aging/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> 2024 Community Health Needs Assessment

<https://www.pennstatehealth.org/sites/default/files/Penn%20State%20Health/2024-PSH-CHNA.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Outdoor Recreation Access for All,



## Growing Demand for Municipal Parkland

Municipal parks are the foundation of Cumberland County's park and recreation system. They provide day-to-day, close-to-home active recreation opportunities such as baseball, soccer, basketball, tennis, playgrounds, and paved walking trails suitable for strollers and wheelchairs. The County's rapidly growing population combined with elevated outdoor recreation participation rates requires an accompanying increase in municipal parkland.

The municipalities of Cumberland County have demonstrated a strong commitment to providing park and recreation facilities for their communities. Twenty-eight of 33 municipalities (85 percent) have at least one park within their boundaries. Currently, there are 150 municipal parks, which encompass approximately 2,430 acres of land. In addition, 15 of 33 municipalities have a park and recreation professional on staff or coordinate with a regional park and recreation organization to administer recreation programs.

A recent report by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) found that a typical park and recreation agency has approximately 10.8 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents<sup>9</sup>. If that "typical" standard is applied to Cumberland County, the County and its municipal partners will need to add more parkland in the future to keep up with the increasing population. **Table 5-2** summarizes the parkland provided in each municipality for per 1,000 residents. Numbers shown in red indicate a level lower than the typical standard identified by NRPA.

Between 2012 and 2024, the total amount of parkland countywide increased by over 250 acres, and the population grew by over 24,000 persons. The percentage rate of growth in parkland acres was similar to that of population growth. Despite the growth in parkland, the County still falls short of the 10.8 acres per 1,000 residents level identified by NRPA. **Table 5-3** depicts countywide parkland ratios between 2012-2024. As shown in **Table 5-4**, the County will need to add over 700 acres of parkland by 2030 and an additional 329 acres between 2030 and 2040 to achieve the NRPA typical standard of 10.8 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents.

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[https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/4b34299cf99b4d699135e38c3ca0d6d9/page/About-the-Project?org=DCNR#data\\_s=id%3AdataSource\\_7-TPL\\_for\\_web\\_gdb\\_5758%3A327](https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/4b34299cf99b4d699135e38c3ca0d6d9/page/About-the-Project?org=DCNR#data_s=id%3AdataSource_7-TPL_for_web_gdb_5758%3A327)

<sup>9</sup> The 2023 NRPA Agency Performance Review Report | Research | Parks & Recreation Magazine | NRPA



**TABLE 5-2**  
**MUNICIPAL PARKS AND RECREATION DATA, 2024**

MUNICIPALITY	2020 POPULATION	NUMBER OF PARKS	ACRES OF PARKLAND	ACRES OF PARKLAND PER 1,000 RESIDENTS
Camp Hill Boro	8,130	5	67.62	8.32
Carlisle Boro	20,118	14	163.95	8.15
Cooke Twp	201	0	0	0.0
Dickinson Twp	5,294	2	61.11	11.54
East Pennsboro Twp	20,910	13	218.11	10.43
Hampden Twp	32,761	101	167.67	5.12
Hopewell Two	2,542	1	31.36	12.79
Lemoyne Boro	4,659	9	50.17	10.77
Lower Allen Twp	20,099	15	174.94	8.70
Lower Frankford Twp	1,757	0	0	0.0
Lower Mifflin Twp	1,755	0	0	0.0
Mechanicsburg Boro	9,311	3	55.61	5.97
Middlesex Twp	7,021	3	118.66	16.90
Monroe Twp	6,230	4	60.17	9.66
Mt. Holly Springs Boro	1,995	3	14.50	7.27
New Cumberland Boro	7,507	6	52.35	6.97
Newburg Boro	364	1	0.19	0.53
Newville Boro	1,376	2	17.25	12.54
North Middleton Twp	12,039	6	104.79	8.70
North Newton Twp	2,546	1	6.32	2.48
Penn Twp	2,874	1	7.75	2.70
Shippensburg Twp	4,315	2	103.32	24.11
Shippensburg Boro	4,286	1	46.76	10.84
Shiremanstown Twp	1,634	2	3.60	2.20
Silver Spring Twp	19,557	10	275.70	14.10
South Middleton Twp	16,135	10	292.08	38.92
South Newton Twp	1,371	0	0	0.0
Southampton Twp	7,504	1	39.55	28.85
Upper Allen Twp	23,183	16	232.07	10.01
Upper Frankford Twp	2,128	0	0	0.0
Upper Mifflin Twp	1,319	1	7.35	5.57
West Pennsboro Twp	5,595	2	26.63	4.76
Wormleysburg Boro	3,043	5	26.79	8.80
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>259,469</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>2,426.36</b>	<b>9.35</b>



**TABLE 5-3**  
**COUNTYWIDE PARKLAND RATIOS, 2012-2024**

YEAR	POPULATION	NUMBER OF MUNICIPAL PARKS	ACRES OF MUNICIPAL PARKLAND	ACRES OF PARKLAND PER 1,000 RESIDENTS
2012	235,406 (2010)	142	2,168	9.2
2024	259,469 (2020)	150	2,426	9.35
<b>Change 2012-2024</b>	<b>+10.2%</b>	<b>+5.6%</b>	<b>+11.9%</b>	<b>+1.6%</b>

**TABLE 5-4**  
**COUNTYWIDE PARKLAND GOALS. 2020-2040**

	COUNTY POPULATION	TOTAL ACRES NEEDED TO REACH 10.8 ACRES PER 1000 RESIDENTS	DEFICIT
<b>2020 Base</b>	259,469	2,426	(376)
<b>2030 Projection</b>	291,441	3,147	(721)
<b>2040 Projection</b>	321,933	3,476	(1050)

## Increasing Access and Recreation for All

The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), the Trust for Public Land, and WeConservePA developed a GIS tool for evaluating outdoor recreation access<sup>10</sup>. The project focused on identifying community needs with the vision that every Pennsylvanian deserves quality outdoor recreation close to home. This effort created “10-minute service” areas around parks, waterways, and other public lands and compared them with United State Census data, creating a map of communities and neighborhoods that were within a 10-minute drive or walk of outdoor recreation opportunities. The County and its partners can use this tool to strategically invest in park and trail projects that will increase accessibility for all residents.

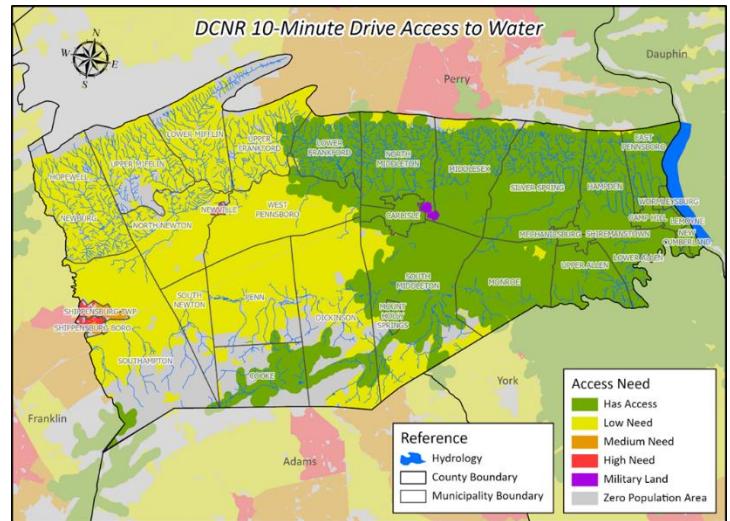
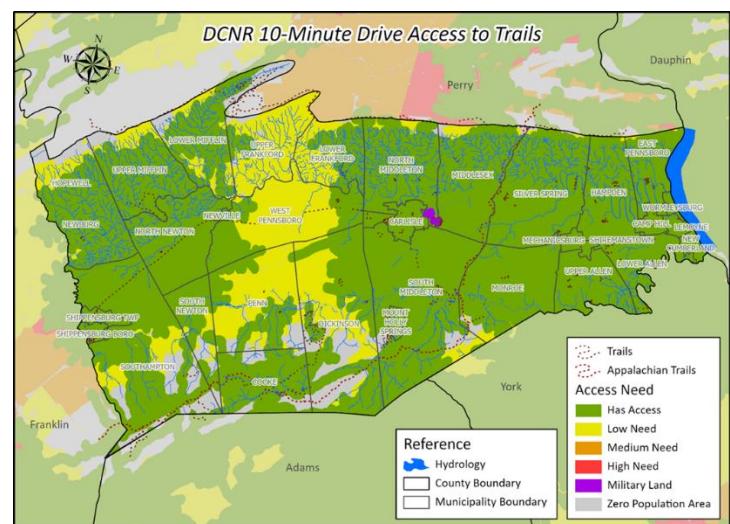
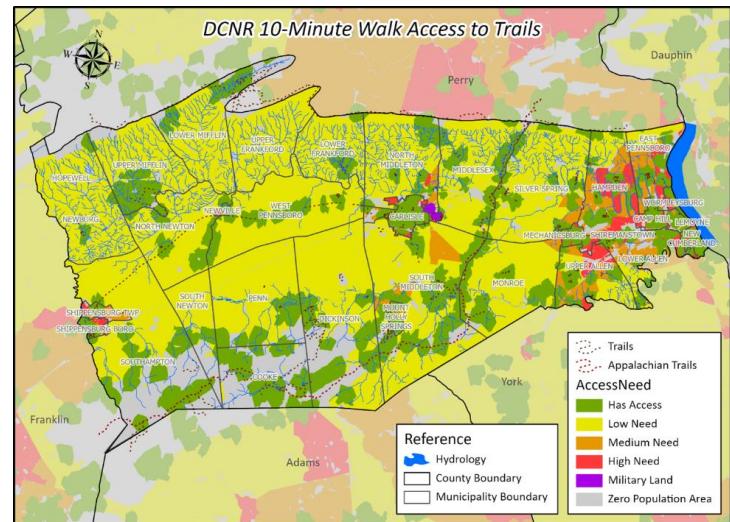
<sup>10</sup>Outdoor Recreation Access in Pennsylvania,

<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/4b34299cf99b4d699135e38c3ca0d6d9/page/About-the-Project>



Specific to Cumberland County, the analysis found that:

- Only 43 percent of the County has access to a park, trail, or open space via a 10-minute walk, which is considerably lower than the statewide metric of 53 percent. Higher needs areas included Shippensburg, Newville, Carlisle, and the West Shore.
- 95 percent of County residents enjoy access to a trail within a 10-minute drive, well above the statewide metric of 82 percent drive access to trails.
- Eastern and central Cumberland County (approximately 83 percent of the population) are within a 10-minute drive to water recreation, due to multiple access points on county waterways.
- The Newville and Shippensburg areas of western Cumberland County have fewer access points for water recreation and residents may have to drive longer than 10-minutes for water access.



# Implementation Plan

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## Parks, Trails & Greenway Goals & Benchmarks

### **Parkland Goal**

Provide parkland for the recreation needs of County residents.

#### **Desired Outcomes:**

- A diverse system of parks is in place that includes Federal, State, County, municipal, non-profit and school based parkland.
- Parks and public spaces are designed and managed in a sustainable manner and expanded when appropriate.
- Park and recreation amenities serve all ages, abilities and cultures.

#### **Benchmarks:**

- Additional parkland will be added to achieve **10.8 acres per 1,000 residents**. The current metric is 9.35 acres per 1,000 residents.
- 53% of County residents are within a 10-minute walk of a park or public open space area, representing a 10% increase over current conditions and matching the statewide metric.

### **Trail Goal**

Provide trails to connect citizens with destinations throughout the County.

#### **Desired Outcomes:**

- A network of local and regional trails creates connections between communities, allowing residents to travel as bicyclists and pedestrians from one community to another.
- A countywide trail plan connects municipal trails to broader, regional trails.
- Local trails connect residential areas, parks, schools, and community destinations.

#### **Benchmarks:**

- 53% of County residents are within a 10-minute walk of a trail, representing a 10% increase over current conditions and matching the statewide metric
- 100% of County residents are within a 10-minute drive of a trail, representing a 5% increase over current conditions.



## Greenway Goal

Create a comprehensive greenways system throughout Cumberland County.

### Desired Outcomes:

- Green corridors of open space create connections between parks, nature preserves, and riparian corridors.
- Greenways protect natural resources, such as the mountain ridgelines and riparian corridors of the Susquehanna River and streams.
- Greenways conserve the cultural resources and their surroundings throughout Cumberland County.
- Greenways in rural areas reduce agricultural runoff and limit livestock stream access.
- Partnerships between Cumberland County and preservation partners focused on trails and greenways have increased.
- The public understands the benefits of greenways through informational signage, interpretive nature trails, and greenway tours.

### Greenways Benchmark:

- 93% of County residents are within a 10-minute drive of water recreation access, representing a 10% increase over current conditions.



## Strategy 1: Increase and Enhance Access to Public Parks & Open Spaces

The need to increase access to public parks and green spaces was well established through the data analysis and stakeholder outreach. The Outdoor Recreation Access for PA analysis identified areas in the County that are underserved for access with only 43 percent being able to walk to a park or open space area. Additionally, an evaluation of established parkland goals revealed the need for acquisition of additional parkland to respond to a growing population. 70 percent (23 of 33) of County municipalities do not achieve the NRPA standard for amount of parkland. Similarly, the public participation findings determined that acquisition of open space was highest need and maintaining and enhancing existing parks and facilities was also critical.

As articulated previously, municipal parks are the foundation of Cumberland County's park system. As such local governments will be critical to the success of this strategy. The County's role in parks includes coordination and technical support to municipal and non-profit partners and management and operation of the Mount Holly Marsh Preserve, the County's large municipally owned park.

### ***Actions:***

- Encourage and assist municipalities to adopt PA DCNR 10-minute walk and drive standards for outdoor recreation to achieve equitable locational access to amenities.
- Encourage and assist municipalities to adopt the NRPA parkland standard to achieve adequate amounts of parkland to meet community needs.
- Encourage development and maintenance of park and trails utilizing PA DCNR's Creating Sustainable Community Parks and Landscapes publication.
- Leverage Act 13 funding through Land Partnerships Grants to provide funding support to municipalities and non-profits to acquire and develop parks and green spaces.

## **Priority Projects for Cumberland County Conservation Improvement Plan:**

- Acquisition of additional active parkland with a focus on the following:
  - Communities with “medium to high need” based on PA DCNR 10-minute walk and drive standards
  - Communities not achieving the NRPA parkland standard.
- Acquisition of public open spaces that provide passive recreation and contribute to natural resource protection goals.
- Implementation of New Cumberland Park, Recreation & Open Space Plan and Lemoyne Park, Recreation & Open Space Plan
- Park improvement projects at Paul Walter Park, Generations Park, Smith Drive Park, Valley Meadows Park, LeTort Spring Garden Preserve
- Trail improvements and site amenities at Tuckahoe Tract, Michaux State Forest



## Strategy 2: Develop a Countywide Land Based Trail Network

The public participation process identified a desire for a connected system of trails which includes longer distance, regional trails and shorter local trails which collectively provide for recreation, fitness and active transportation. The County's role in trails includes coordination and technical support to municipal and non-profit trail partners, who build and manage trails.

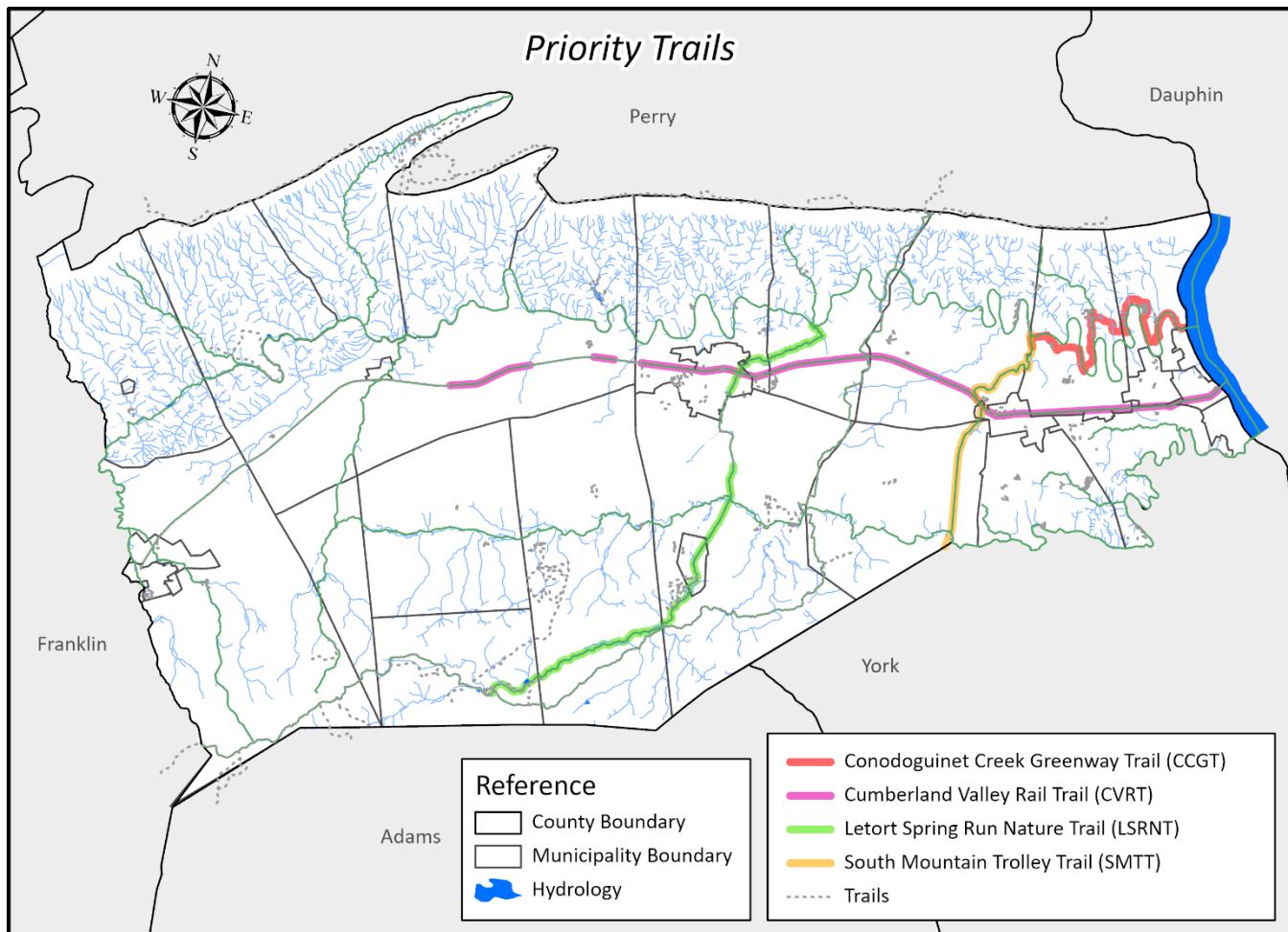
To make effective use of limited resources and establish a backbone network to a countywide trail system, the planning process identified priority trails. Priority trails are those projects that, if built, improved, or expanded, would link together existing trails or open recreational assets to new communities. The routes are consistent with the priorities and findings of the Harrisburg Area Transportation Study's Active Transportation Plan and the South-Central Pennsylvania Trails Connectivity Assessment, which are further detailed in the **Appendices**. The priority trail corridors are described below and depicted on **Priority Trails Map**:

- **Conodoguinet Creek Greenway Trail:** The long-term vision for this trail includes the entire 104-mile length of the Conodoguinet Creek. In the short-term, a feasibility study has been completed to develop approximately 15 miles of the corridor, focusing on existing quiet roads and off-road multi use trails. The trail would bring essential access to green space and recreational amenities in the heavily developed West Shore region of the County. The effort to develop the trail is being led by the Friends of the Conodoguinet Greenway, a 501(c)3 organization in partnership with the local municipalities.
- **Cumberland Valley Rail Trail:** The Cumberland Valley Rail Trail follows the path of the abandoned Cumberland Valley Railroad, which ran from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to Hagerstown, Maryland. The Cumberland Valley Rails to Trails Council, Inc., a non-profit, all volunteer organization, owns and maintains the trail. The corridor is a segment of the 9/11 National Memorial Trail and a designated National Recreational Trail. The current Cumberland Valley Rail Trail is a 14-mile recreational corridor that extends from Fort Street at Shippensburg University to Greenhill Road past Newville; there is also a 2-mile section centered on the village of Greason and a 1-mile branch at Allen Road which connects into downtown Carlisle via the West End Trail. The community has expressed strong interest in seeing the Cumberland Valley Rail Trail continue both east and west. Design is underway to connect the current western terminus at Shippensburg Station with the headquarters of the Shippensburg Community Parks and Recreation Authority (SCPRA) to the west and Dykeman Park to the south. Two trail gaps remain between Newville and Carlisle and are under private ownership.
- **LeTort Spring Run Nature Trail/Mountain Creek/Hiker-Biker Greenway:** The LeTort Spring Run Nature Trail is a 3.5-mile trail that extends from LeTort Park in Carlisle to Heiser's Lane in South Middleton Township. The LeTort Regional Authority owns and maintains the largest segment of the trail and the Central PA Conservancy, Carlisle Borough and South Middleton Township are also partners on trail development and operations. Extensions to



the north through Carlisle are envisioned. Connections to Boiling Springs are planned and connections to Pine Grove Furnace State Park are also conceptualized via Mount Holly/Mountain Creek/Hiker-Biker Trail.

- **South Mountain Trolley Greenway:** The trolley greenway project was launched by the South Mountain Partnership in 2016 to study developing a trail along the 8-mile route of the former Dillsburg Branch of the Cumberland Valley Railroad, which ran between Dillsburg and Mechanicsburg. A feasibility study was completed in late 2019, and in 2021, the greenway became a project of the Cumberland Valley Rails to Trails Council. Currently, the project is in the promotion, fundraising, and design phases with active planning projects in both Mechanicsburg and Dillsburg.



**Actions:**

- Encourage and assist in the development of priority trail corridors and local connections with partners through technical assistance and support.
- Reconvene the Cumberland Valley Trail Connections group to meet periodically to network and coordinate countywide trail development.
- Consider the feasibility of a countywide trail authority.
- Develop an online GIS tool for use by partners for conceptual trail planning. Enhance and promote existing "Park & Trail Viewer" at <https://gis.ccpa.net/parks-trails/>
- Leverage Act 13 funding through Land Partnerships Grants to provide funding support to municipalities and non-profits to acquire and develop trails with an emphasis on priority trail corridors.

**Priority Projects for Cumberland County Conservation Improvement Plan:**

- Appalachian Trail - Implementation of Scott Farm Trailhead Master Site Plan
- Conodoguinet Creek Greenway Trail – Implement the recommendations of the 2022 feasibility study in Camp Hill, Hampden and East Pennsboro Townships.
- Cumberland Valley Rail Trail – Acquire voluntary easements and construct the remaining two trail gaps between Newville and Carlisle.
- Cumberland Valley Rail Trail - Conduct a feasibility study(s) aimed at extending the trail east from Carlisle to the West Shore Area.
- Cumberland Valley Rail Trail – Construct the West Shore Gateway Trail as deemed viable by the pending trail feasibility study.
- Letort Spring Run Trail – Construct the Peffer and Reiff Farm extensions in South Middleton Township.
- South Mountain Trolley Greenway – Acquire necessary voluntary easements or land and construct the Trindle Spring Segment in Mechanicsburg area and Coover Park Segment in Dillsburg area.

### Strategy 3: Enhance the Water Trail Network

The purpose of the Pennsylvania Water Trail Program is to link recreational and conservation efforts in order to promote sustainable use of the resource and enhance recreation of our waterways. Cumberland County is the Commonwealth designated water trail manager for the Conodoguinet Creek and Yellow Breeches Creek Water Trails. The County's role is primarily coordination of network wide amenities such as signage and trail guides, promotion and facilitation of partners. Day-to-day operation and management of access points is done by partners, primarily municipalities. Additional stakeholders in the water trail program include the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, Pennsylvania Environmental Council, Cumberland Valley Visitors Bureau and local watershed organizations.



**Actions:**

- Seek expansion of the official water trail designation of the Conodoguinet Creek west to State Game Lands #169 in cooperation with partners.
- Seek expansion of the official water trail designation of the Yellow Breeches Creek to extend "Trip A" west beyond South Middleton Township Park and extend "Trip B" west of Messiah College to Leidigh Park in coordination with partners.
- Reprint the water trail guides, as needed.
- Convene water trail partners regularly to discuss trail needs, challenges, and successes.
- Encourage and support development of a trail management plan for both the Conodoguinet Creek and Yellow Breeches Water Trail to guide sustainable development, conservation and recreation of the waterway.
- Leverage Act 13 funding through Land Partnerships Grants to provide funding support to municipalities and non-profits to acquire and develop additional water trail access.

**Priority Projects for Cumberland County Conservation Improvement Plan:**

- Conodoguinet Creek - Develop additional access points in western Cumberland County to reduce the paddling distance between approved access points.
- Conodoguinet Creek - Obtain approved access around the Carlisle Raw Water Intake Dam and construct the necessary portage and site amenities.
- Conodoguinet & Yellow Breeches Creek - Improve access and amenities at existing put-in and take-out points to enhance the user experience and preserve stream quality.
- Yellow Breeches - Remove dams located in Brandtsville and New Cumberland and restore stream conditions.



## Strategy 4: Steward the Mount Holly Marsh Preserve

The Mount Holly Marsh Preserve was donated to Cumberland County in 1992 without the benefit of a stewardship fund or a park and recreation department to operate and manage the resource. Over the years, the County through its Planning and Facilities Departments have performed basic maintenance and completed small capital projects to improve the user experience and sustain the resource. Regular operational funding is essential to continue a basic level of service. In order to implement the 2023 master site plan larger, capital funding to leverage outside grants will be necessary.

Despite the challenges with long term stewardship, the Preserve is popular with users and numerous organizations are interested in partnering on initiatives. Stakeholders include but are not limited to The Nature Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, Cumberland Valley AT Club, Mountain Creek Trout Club and Conservation Society, South Mountain Partnership, PA Fish & Boat Commission, PA Game Commission and Mount Holly Springs Borough.

### ***Actions:***

- Maintain and enhance the trail system, signage, and parking facilities.
- Develop a volunteer program for routine tasks such as trail maintenance, trash clean-up, trail marking, etc.
- Cultivate relationships with partner organizations to advance projects of mutual interest.
- Implement the forest resource management plan including pursuit of an invasive plant removal strategy.
- Sustain and enhance annual operational funding. Develop capital funding and pursue grant opportunities.
- Implement the 2023 master site plan including stream and floodplain restoration and outdoor recreation enhancement.

### ***Priority Projects for Cumberland County Conservation Improvement Plan:***

- Implement Phase 1 of Master Site Plan to include priority recreational enhancements, invasive plant removal and native plantings.
- Develop interpretative signage to depict the natural, cultural and historic stories of the Preserve.



## Strategy 5: Improve Planning for Parks, Trails, and Greenways

The creation and development of parks, trails, and greenways can be achieved through the land use planning and development process. Article III, Section 301 of the Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) specifies that **county and municipal comprehensive plans** shall provide a plan for land use to include park and recreation areas and a plan for community facilities, which also includes parks and recreation. Similarly, the Comprehensive Plan is to include a plan for the movement of people and goods, which would include provisions for pedestrian and bikeway systems (i.e., trails).

A plan for parks, trails, and recreation facilities should include developing goals and objectives, establishing recreation needs, and identifying the proposed location of future parks, trails, and recreation facilities. Municipalities often elect to develop a standalone **park, recreation and open space plan** or **active transportation plan** to address these issues.

Article IV of the MPC empowers municipalities to adopt an **official map** for parks, playgrounds, and pedestrian ways/easements. The Official Map is intended to show the locations of future park and recreation facilities and articulates a municipality's interest in acquiring these lands for public purposes sometime in the future.

The **subdivision and land development** process can be utilized in several ways to advance park and recreation goals. Article V, Section 503 (11) of the MPC allows a municipality to include ordinance provisions that: 1) require a developer to set aside land for recreation purposes 2) require construction of recreation facilities, and/or 3) allow payment of fees instead of reserving parkland and/or constructing recreation facilities. A municipality must have an adopted park and recreation plan to enact such provisions.

The County's roles in these activities includes education and technical support to our municipalities. This can be achieved through MPC required reviews of subdivision and land development plans as well as draft comprehensive plan and ordinance reviews. The Planning Department has written plans and ordinances for municipal partners as part of its Local Planning Assistance Program. County-sponsored training programs can also be used to help improve municipal awareness of available tools for park, trail, and greenway planning and development.

### ***Actions:***

- Provide technical assistance to municipalities to write plans and ordinances that include provisions which promote park, greenway, and trail development.
- Incorporate recommendations for parks, trails and greenways into MPC required County land development plan reviews.
- Consider the feasibility of a countywide official map for priority trail corridors.
- Leverage Act 13 funding through Land Partnerships Grants to provide funding support to municipalities to develop or update local comprehensive plans, official maps, and greenway



and open space plans to be consistent with Land Partnerships. Multi-municipal planning for trails and greenways is encouraged.

#### ***Priority Projects for Cumberland County Conservation Improvement Plan:***

- Development of plans and ordinances in communities with no plan or outdated plans and ordinances.

### **Strategy 6: Coordinate with Partners**

Cumberland County has a variety of parks and trails managed by an assortment of governmental and non-profit organizations. Accordingly, coordination and outreach among those various organizations are critical to maintaining, enhancing, and promoting a high-quality system of parks and trails. The **Appendices** lists the stakeholders in parks, trails, and greenways and highlights their focus areas.

#### ***Actions:***

- Support and partner with local stakeholders to promote and expand parks, greenways, and trails throughout the County.
- Raise public awareness of the benefits of parks, greenways, and trails among all facets of the community through educational seminars, workshops, printed materials, and websites.
- Update and distribute the Local Food, Farm, and Outdoor Attraction Guide in coordination with partners.
- Update and distribute the Conodoguinet Creek Water Trail Guide/Map and the Yellow Breeches Creek Water Trail Guide/Map in coordination with partners.



Chapter 6

# Sustain and Growing Process

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# Overview

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The goals and strategies of the Land Partnerships Plan can be achieved through a variety of means. Many of the actions are low cost and involve existing County staff resources and community partnerships. Other actions, such as land preservation and park and trail development, require significant capital investment to achieve the desired outcomes. Throughout the planning process, a strong need for additional capital investment and staff resources was articulated by stakeholders. The final chapter examines options for funding conservation investments and details current and future conservation investments. The chapter closes with goals and strategies for financing and organizational capacity building.

## Funding Options

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### Financing and Taxing Options

There are five primary types of financing and taxing options available to municipalities and counties in Pennsylvania to pay for parks and land conservation. Counties can use discretionary annual spending (i.e.. general fund), electoral debt financing, and non-electoral debt financing<sup>1</sup>. Municipalities can use discretionary annual spending, electoral and non-electoral debt financing, a voter-approved property tax, or the earned income tax. Each of these financing and taxing options as well as case studies on local conservation measures are further described in the **Appendices**.

### Act 13 Marcellus Shale Legacy Fund

Act 13 of 2012 authorized the creation of impact fees on the natural gas drilling industry. As a county without gas wells, Cumberland County is eligible for an annual distribution of funds under the Statewide Legacy Fund which can be used for conservation and recreation initiatives. Act 13 legislation prescribes funds from the Statewide Legacy Fund to be utilized "for the planning, acquisition, development, rehabilitation and repair of greenways, recreational trails, open space, natural areas, community conservation and beautification projects, community heritage parks and water resource management. Funds may be used to acquire lands for recreational or conservation

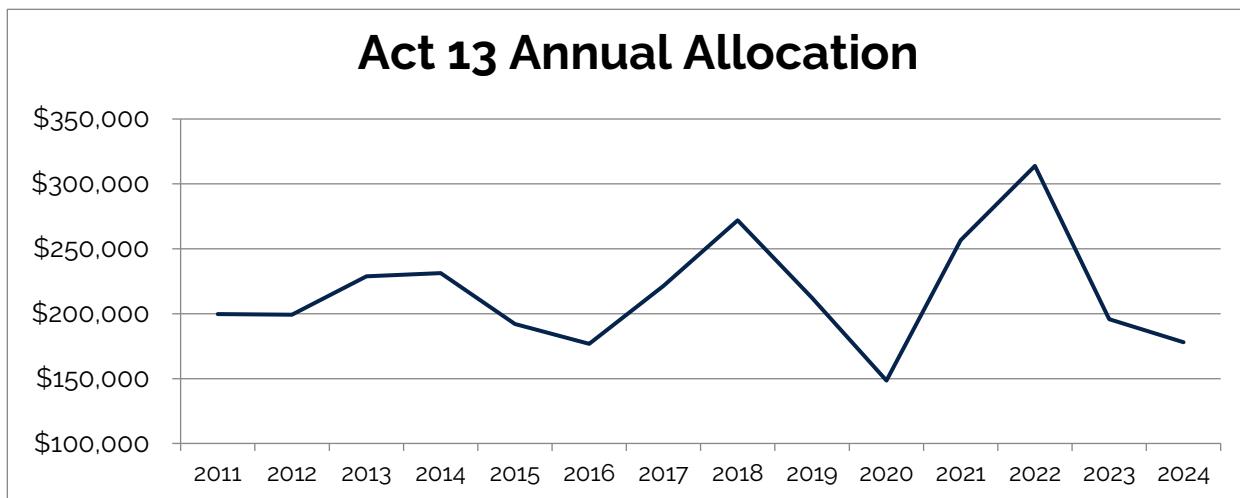
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<sup>1</sup> Trust for Public Land, *Preserve Pennsylvania Local, State and Federal Funding for Parks and Open Space*, PowerPoint Presentation (10minutewalk.org)



purposes and land damaged or prone to drainage by storms or flooding."

Since 2011, Cumberland County has been fortunate to receive over \$3 million in Act 13 funding and has invested in a variety of conservation and recreation projects which has leveraged additional state, federal and local funding. Unfortunately, the County's modest allocation of \$175,000 to \$300,000 annually is on the decline and expected to continue to decline given the nature of the funding formula. The figure below depicts the downward trend for these funds.



## Grants and Private Partnerships

A variety of grant opportunities are available at the county, state and federal government level to support conservation and recreation projects. Additionally, community foundations, corporations and professional organizations offer grants and sponsorships that align with their mission. Private citizens can also support projects through financial contributions. A listing of the potential grant opportunities is provided in the **Appendices** to further leverage conservation investments.

## Current Conservation Investment Strategy

Since the last Land Partnerships Plan update in 2013, the County has developed a solid conservation investment track record. The County has realized its success by combining limited County and Act 13 funds with Federal, State and local funds to support farmland preservation, natural resource protection and outdoor recreation projects. Special funding, such as the American Rescue Plan Act, have provided one-time conservation investment spikes that have addressed major projects in the county. On average since 2013, the County has invested approximately \$1.1 million in conservation initiatives per year. Each County dollar has leveraged \$2.32 of additional investment from Federal, State, and local sources. **Table 6-1** outlines the County's current conservation investment strategy.



**TABLE 6-1**  
**CUMBERLAND COUNTY'S CURRENT CONSERVATION INVESTMENT**

PROGRAM AREA	ANNUAL INVESTMENT	FUNDING SOURCE	TYPICAL ANNUAL OUTCOMES
<b>Farmland Preservation</b>	\$850,000	County General Fund	790 acres preserved
<b>Land Partnerships Grants</b>			
Parks, Trails, and Natural Resource Protection	\$250,000	Marcellus Shale Legacy Fund	6-8 small grants
<b>Mount Holly Marsh Preserve</b>	\$0	County General Fund	No progress on the Master Plan, unless Land Partnerships Grants are awarded internally
<b>COUNTY INVESTMENT</b>		<b>\$1,100,000</b>	
<b>ESTIMATED LEVERAGED FUNDS</b>		<b>\$2,562,182</b>	
<b>TOTAL INVESTMENT</b>		<b>\$3,662,182</b>	

While this strategy has proven successful, its ability to support long-term Land Partnerships Plan implementation is questionable. The following threats to the County's current conservation investment strategy were raised during the planning process:

- **Increasing costs:** Escalating land and material costs outside of the County's control consume more financial resources with fewer visible outcomes.
- **Increasing demand:** Demand for the Farmland Preservation Program has increased in recent years with 47 farms comprising approximately 4,600 acres submitted for the 2025 application cycle. Total cost to preserve the current application list is approximately \$18.4M. Likewise, the planning process revealed over \$66M of unfunded conservation and recreation projects in the County. Flat funding levels will not address the emerging conservation and recreation needs in the County.
- **Competing priorities:** Discretionary, general fund conservation and recreation investments must be balanced with other services the County is legislatively mandated to provide. Those other services, much like conservation need, are growing in number and scope given the County's growth and cannot be ignored or cut substantially.
- **Changing policies:** New County Commissioners are elected every 4-years which can result in increasing or decreasing support for farmland preservation. Similarly, new state legislators may change policies on natural gas revenue sharing resulting in decreased or no funding for parks, trails, and natural resource protection projects. The future of many federal grant programs also remains uncertain.
- **Project continuity:** Unpredictable annual funding allotments cannot support conservation or recreation projects that require multi-year commitments for engineering, design, and construction or a long term land preservation strategies.



- **Limited funding for Mount Holly Marsh Preserve:** The 900-acre, County-owned Mount Holly Marsh Preserve is the largest locally owned park in the County yet has limited funding for maintenance or enhancement. Without dedicated funding, the Preserve may struggle to support the low impact outdoor recreation opportunities it was intended to provide for residents and visitors.

## Future Conservation Investment Analysis

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Cumberland County cannot rest upon its success to date, as there is more conservation work to be done, especially in the State's fastest growing county. Cumberland County must proactively implement the Land Partnerships Plan to deliver well-timed conservation investments that preserve prime farmland, provide clean water, and protect sensitive natural resources amid rapid growth. Similarly, the County needs to work with its conservation partners to develop the parks, trails, and recreation infrastructure necessary to support a healthy, growing population and economy.

Beyond its financial investments, the County has played a significant role as a convener and facilitator of conservation partners that work collectively to provide local and regional trails, parks, and open spaces, and natural resource protection. Those partners look to the County for leadership, technical assistance, and funding to achieve shared goals. Thus, funding and staffing resources are integral components of the County's future conservation investment strategy.

### Dedicated Real Estate Tax Millage

As noted earlier, the County's conservation funding sources are all unpredictable, inconsistent annual allotments. Those allotments are determined through annual approvals or marketplace metrics outside of the County's control. Such sources may increase, decrease, or be eliminated according to political will or economic turmoil.

The County should consider passing a resolution that dedicates a certain millage of its real estate tax revenues to conservation and recreation initiatives. The millage rate could be determined to deliver an acceptable level of funding that would be provided to implement the Land Partnerships Plan and expended according to established guidelines. A dedicated millage rate would provide a predictable level of annual funding that would grow with the County's tax base.

The potential revenue that could be generated from a Cumberland County property tax assessment is significant. According to the County's Tax Assessment Office, the revenue generated from a 1.0 millage assessment on the county's assessed real estate value is approximately \$27.5 million. Therefore, a small millage could provide a tremendous revenue stream for conservation efforts in the County. Moreover, these funds could leverage even more dollars from State and Federal programs and strengthen efforts from the County's conservation and recreation partners.



York County took similar action in 2019 by directing .1 mills of its annual real estate tax revenue to its Open Space and Land Preservation Committee that was charged with preserving 2,500 acres of land each year and advancing park and recreation initiatives. York County conducted extensive public polling on the topic prior to enacting the dedicated land preservation millage. More information on this best practice can be found in the **Appendices**.

## Bond Funding

Non-electoral debt is bonding the municipality or county issues directly, without voter approval, and is limited by law. The Local Government Unit Debt Act establishes the limits for non-electoral debt by type of local unit. The amount of non-voted debt that can be issued for a county is up to 300 percent of its borrowing base. The Act defines the borrowing base as the average annual revenue taken over the last three years. Voter-approved general obligation bonds do not have a debt limit and have been approved in municipalities and counties in Pennsylvania.

Bonds expedite conservation projects by infusing large amounts of funding in a short period of time. Bonds are most effective for shovel ready projects that can be constructed in 1-3 years. While bonds carry interest rates that drive up overall costs, they enable local governments to cash flow projects that may be otherwise unaffordable.

Cumberland County issued a non-electoral \$3.6 million farmland preservation bond in 2004 and a \$1 million non-electoral bond in 2006 as to support implementation of the inaugural Land Partnerships Grant Program. The 2006 bond proceeds supported various parks, trails, and planning projects across the county.

The County should consider electoral or non-electoral bonds if it desires to quickly reduce the farmland preservation program backlog in 1-3 years. If the County desires to use bonding for parks, trails, or open space preservation, substantial planning, design and engineering work would be needed to get a critical mass of projects ready for near term construction.

## Redistribution of Existing Funds

**Table 6-1** illustrates Cumberland County's \$1.1 million investment in three focus areas. The farmland preservation program consumes the most funding with a typical annual allotment of \$850,000 general fund dollars. Parks, trails, and natural resource protection projects are funded using \$250,000 of Marcellus Shale Legacy funds.

The County could consider reallocating its general fund farmland preservation contribution to other priority conservation and recreation initiatives. The planning process revealed open space and natural area preservation as the top priority conservation initiative for the County. The County could redistribute a portion of its farmland preservation general fund contribution to increase funding for open space and natural area preservation.



Planning process stakeholders expressed concerns with redistributing existing funds from farmland preservation to other purposes as it puts one conservation initiative in competition with another. Additionally, the farmland preservation program consistently maintained high levels of community support and achieves the co-benefit of open space preservation. Rather than redistribution, the planning process stakeholders suggested the County increase its overall funding levels to maintain farmland preservation funding while providing new, dedicated funding for the emerging open space and natural area priority.

## Increased Staffing

The Cumberland County Planning Department (CCPD) is tasked with Land Partnerships Plan implementation. The 6-member CCPD administers the farmland preservation program and the Land Partnerships Grant Program. The CCPD also provides technical assistance to municipalities, nonprofits, businesses, and other stakeholders that share the County's conservation vision.

In addition to financial investments in conservation and recreation initiatives, the allocation of staffing to the CCPD should be routinely evaluated. Stakeholders in the planning process applauded the efforts of the county but indicated a desire to see even greater leadership and coordination of countywide issues such as regional trail development and open space preservation. Enhanced funding and/or new programs and initiatives may require additional staffing or reprioritization of tasks.



## Future Conservation Needs

Stakeholder focus groups, key person interviews, municipal surveys, and resident surveys were used to identify future conservation needs that are summarized in **Table 6-2** below. The table does not reflect an exhaustive list of potential projects nor does it reflect the emerging or unknown needs identified outside of the plan development process. The projects, the associated costs, and leverage opportunities are subject to change and are presented for illustrative purposes to demonstrate current demand that can justify additional County conservation investment.

<b>TABLE 6-2</b> <b>FUTURE CONSERVATION NEEDS</b>			
<b>PROGRAM AREA</b>	<b>FUTURE NEEDS</b>	<b>COST PER ACRE / PROJECT</b>	<b>LEVERAGE OPPORTUNITY</b>
<b>Farmland Preservation</b>	47 applications representing 4,600 acres	~\$4,000/acre	\$1 County = \$1 - \$2 Federal and State funds
<b>Parks and Trail Development</b>	51 projects	Total project costs vary between \$50K-\$7M	\$1 County = \$5 Federal, State, local or private funds
<b>Natural Resource and Open Space Preservation</b>	18 projects	~\$1,000/acre County contribution	\$1 County = \$1 - \$3 Federal, State, local or private funds
<b>Mount Holly Marsh Preserve</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Dedicated annual maintenance funding</li><li>14 improvement projects in master site plan</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>\$25,000 annual maintenance</li><li>\$500,000 for Master Site Plan improvements</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>No match on maintenance</li><li>\$1 county = \$1 Federal or State funds for master plan implementation</li></ul>



# Implementation Plan

## Finance Goal

Maximize Land Partnerships Plan outcomes through County funding, grants, public-private initiatives, community partnerships, and investments in staff.

Strategy 1: Maximize the impact of County conservation funding by leveraging partner funding and investing in high priority projects.

Increased County conservation funding was a widely shared goal expressed by planning process participants. However, the County's financial resources are limited, and increases may not be readily available to meet every demand. Thus, the County must focus on maximizing the impact of its current funding by strategically partnering with other stakeholders that share its conservation mission. By leveraging those outside resources, the County can amplify its reach, accelerate progress, and implement high-impact conservation initiatives that would otherwise be out of scope. This approach not only stretches each County dollar further but also strengthens the community partnerships and investments necessary for Plan implementation.

### ***Actions:***

- Conduct public polling to investigate support for additional County funding for parks, trails, natural resource protection, and farmland preservation projects. Specific emphasis should be placed on willingness to financially support initiatives.
- Continue to leverage Federal, State and local funding for the Farmland Preservation Program.
- Promote the County's Farmland Preservation Donation program to secure both conservation easements and financial contributions.
- Encourage the Agriculture Land Preservation Board to use out of ranking order and bargain sales to maximize the impact of County farmland preservation funding.
- Secure SRBC funding for voluntary easements on properties with critical aquifer recharge areas.
- Inventory and seek grant opportunities to fund parks, trails, and natural resource protection projects.
- Revise and relaunch Land Partnerships Grant Program based on new Plan priorities. Prioritize regional, high value conservation projects as part of the Land Partnerships Grant Program.



## Strategy 2: Enhance organizational capacity of stakeholder organizations that implement the Land Partnerships Plan.

Effective Land Partnerships Plan implementation depends on effective partnerships as much as available capital. In particular, the planning process revealed that Cumberland County needs a strong land trust partner to successfully implement the Plan. Land trusts serve as the eyes and ears on the ground, building relationships with landowners, identifying high priority conservation projects, and stewarding the long-term care of those properties after preservation. Without land trusts to do the vital work of identifying and stewarding key lands, even the most generous increases in County funding could be underutilized or misdirected, thereby not achieving desired outcomes. Thus, Cumberland County must assist in building the organizational capacity of its land trust partners to successfully implement the Plan.

### ***Actions:***

- Convene regular meetings with land trusts, municipalities, and other partner organizations to discuss organizational capacity, partnership opportunities, and the most effective ways to deliver the successful conservation outcomes identified in the Plan.
- Consider investments in land trust staff through County funding or grants to build the organizational capacity of the Central Pennsylvania Conservancy.
- Encourage County staff to actively serve on stakeholder organizations' Boards or committees with a shared conservation mission.

## Strategy 3: Continue investments in County staff to implement the Land Partnerships Plan.

The CCPD staff are the essential drivers of the Land Partnerships Plan's success. These highly experienced and certified planning professionals bring expertise, strategic thinking, and fiscal stewardship to the table, ensuring that every County dollar invested in conservation delivers maximum impact. Beyond their technical skills, they serve as a lifeline to nonprofit and municipal stakeholders that are passionate about conservation but often lack the staffing needed to bring projects to fruition. By offering guidance, coordination, and capacity-building support, County staff enable more conservation initiatives to move forward. Thus, the County's investment in CCPD staffing, valued at \$650,000 in 2025, is not only prudent, but also foundational to the success of this Plan.

### ***Actions:***

- Monitor staffing levels to ensure the efficient delivery of the Farmland Preservation Program and Land Partnerships Grant Program.
- Provide technical assistance to municipalities seeking grants for parks, trails, and natural resource protection projects.



- Assist municipalities in writing plans and ordinances that implement Plan goals.
- Lead parks, trails and natural resource protection initiatives that transcend municipal boundaries and involve multiple stakeholders.

## Strategy 4: Grow Support for Plan Implementation and Celebrate Progress

Education and outreach are key to building support for the actions detailed in the plan. The County should coordinate with partners to raise awareness about the plan. Additionally, the County should track progress annually on plan goals and celebrate successes.

### ***Actions:***

- Conduct outreach with municipalities, residents and stakeholders on the goals, strategies and actions of the plan.
- Reconvene the Land Partnership Plan committee as needed to provide ongoing input on plan implementation.
- Maintain and update the Cumberland County Conservation Improvement Plan listing of priority projects.
- Develop a matrix to track plan implementation. On an annual basis, provide a progress report to stakeholders.

