

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Recreation

Recreational opportunities exist throughout the French Creek watershed. Most of these opportunities highlight the natural resources in the basin. As the human population continues to expand, demands for recreational opportunities will only increase. Opportunities must be developed that satisfy these demands at the same time providing protection for the natural resources that outdoor recreationists potentially threaten.

The quality of recreational opportunities in the French Creek watershed, and elsewhere, are inextricably linked to water quality, wildlife and plant quality, and overall environmental quality. Conservation of natural resources is necessary to ensure quality recreational opportunities exist in the future.

Demand

Often, forms of outdoor recreation are not compatible with the sustainability of the natural resources they utilize. It is the responsibility of planners, municipal leaders, and recreational organizations to ensure that activities in the French Creek watershed do not negatively impact the rich diversity of natural resources that draw tourism dollars into the region. There is an abundance of recreational opportunities within the French Creek watershed that increase the quality of life for residents of the region. As the watershed population continues to grow and population centers in and around the watershed expand, demand for recreational opportunities will increase. If the natural resources that these recreational opportunities are centered around are not protected, recreational opportunities will disappear and quality of life will suffer.

Recently, there has been interest in developing French Creek into an official Water Trails Project under the PA Fish & Boat Commission program. Under this program, minimal amenities would be provided at various locations throughout the French Creek watershed for canoers and kayakers. An educational program would be part of this project. Paddlers would have the opportunity to learn about the resources of the French Creek watershed and some of the threats to these resources through signage. Some examples of this educational signage have already been erected at various access points in the watershed through a cooperative project between Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, French Creek Project, and U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and through a grant from PA Department of Environmental Protection's Growing Greener Watershed Protection Program. Some concerns have been raised over the impacts to freshwater mussel beds and other aquatic life if access points are located in sensitive areas or if boating traffic increases significantly on French Creek.

Today, more and more people are turning to alternative forms of transportation for travel, recreation, and fitness. Specifically, walking and biking have grown in popularity throughout the region. This resurgence has led to increased interest in walking and biking trails and greenways. These projects can benefit the individuals using them, the communities in which they are located or link together, and the environment through protection of open space and natural resource buffering. In response to this demand, several groups have begun planning and implementing

trail and greenway development throughout the watershed. These projects range from preserved green space and paved walking trails to proposed rail trails and designated on-road bike routes. Other forms of recreational transportation include all terrain vehicles and snowmobiles. Presently, snowmobiling and ATV riding occurs on select public lands but largely both forms of recreational transportation are limited to private property. In particular, these motorized forms of off-road transportation can negatively impact the natural resources of the region when done irresponsibly. Statewide, efforts are being made to include designated areas where ATV riding and snowmobiling can occur with minimal environmental impact.

Power boating and jet skiing are also popular forms of recreation that occur within the French Creek watershed. Although mainly restricted to lakes, some power boating does occur on the lower reaches of French Creek where public access areas allow motorboats to be launched and the creek is large enough to allow the boats to maneuver. Many of the lakes and reservoirs in the watershed have motor or horsepower restrictions for powerboats; however Conneaut Lake and Edinboro Lake are two of the glacial lakes in the watershed that have no restrictions on horsepower and these see extensive powerboat and jet ski usage. Powerboats used in Lake Erie and then brought to Edinboro Lake are believed to be the cause of the introduction of zebra mussels to Edinboro Lake. This mode of potentially transporting a number of exotic species into the watershed is a constant threat.

There is also demand for many other types of outdoor recreation. Hunting, fishing, ice-fishing, hiking, bird watching, and cross-country skiing are a few of the many activities that are enjoyed throughout the French Creek watershed.

Supply

The French Creek watershed offers the outdoor enthusiast a good supply of outdoor recreational amenities, although many activities are limited by the relative lack of public lands in the watershed. Water based outdoor recreational activities are often restricted by lack of access due to the overwhelming amount of privately owned land. There are however, some public facilities that do offer access to French Creek, area lakes and reservoirs, natural areas, wildlife refuges, and hunting land (Figure 9).

Water-Based Recreation

The main stem of French Creek is navigable by canoe for its entire length from the Union City Dam to its confluence with the Allegheny River at Franklin. Some canoeing is also possible upstream from the Union City Dam when water levels are elevated however access is limited to private property. There are several public access points along the entire stretch of French Creek (Figure 21). These access areas have been mapped and described in the *French Creek Canoe Guide* produced by the FCP and summarized below:

- Beginning at the Union City Dam Recreation Area, owned by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, it is a 3.5-5 hour float to a public access area at the intersection of routes 6N and 19 south of Waterford.

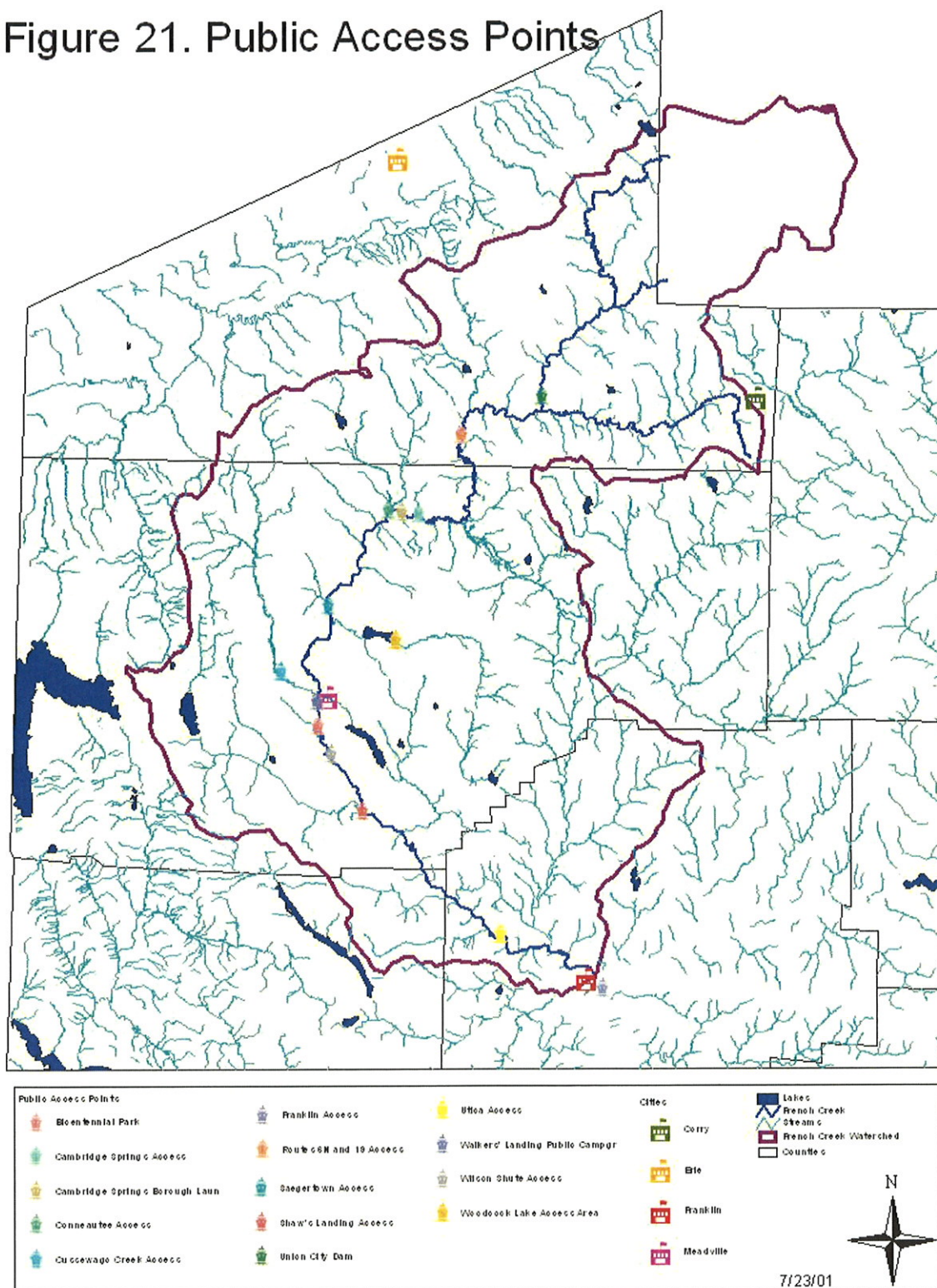
- This access area is owned by French Creek Canoe and Kayak, a local retailer, and maintained for public access by the Conneaut Lake/French Creek Valley Conservancy. The next public access area is a 5-7 hour float to the PFBC access at Cambridge Springs. Just downstream, Cambridge Springs Borough also operates a public boat launch and picnic area on French Creek.
- From Cambridge Springs, it is less than an hour float to a Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PA DOT) owned public access area at the confluence of Conneauttee Creek and French Creek. It is another 3-4 hour float to a PFBC access at Saegertown. A small dam upstream of Saegertown must be portaged along this stretch.
- From the Saegertown access, it is a 2-3 hour float to Bicentennial Park owned by the city of Meadville. Walker's Landing Public Campground is owned by the CLFCVC and is accessed by canoe only just upstream of Meadville. There is also a canoe access point on Cussewago Creek owned by the PFBC that links to French Creek, and Woodcock Creek Lake has an access area owned by the USACE for canoeing on the lake.
- Just downstream of Meadville, the PFBC owns an access area at Wilson Shute (1-2 hours from Meadville) and another downstream at Shaw's Landing (1-2 hours from Wilson Shute) near the confluence of Conneaut Outlet and French Creek. From Shaw's Landing, it is a 4-5 hour float to the Utica Access, owned by WPC.
- Another 3 hours on French Creek brings canoers to the mouth at Franklin where the PFBC owns an access area on the Allegheny River, a designated Wild and Scenic River. The city of Franklin also owns Riverfront Park where canoe access is possible.

Paddlers on French Creek are encouraged to obtain a copy of the FCP's Canoe Guide for complete information on canoeing French Creek. French Creek Project has recently begun providing canoe tours to promote French Creek through ecotourism and educate watershed stakeholders on the importance of French Creek's resources.

Canoeing is also permitted on all lakes and reservoirs mentioned in the Water Resources section of this document. Canoers should remember that canoes must be registered with the PFBC if the canoe is to be put in or taken out at a PFBC operated access area. Public access areas are designated on Findley Lake in New York, Eaton Reservoir, Lake Pleasant, Union City Reservoir, LeBoeuf Lake, Edinboro Lake, Conneaut Lake, Woodcock Creek Lake, Tamarack Lake, and Sugar Lake. There is also canoeing permitted on several impoundments located in PA Game Commission's State Game Lands throughout the watershed, for example, Conneaut Marsh in SGL #213 near Geneva, Crawford County.

Conneaut Lake and Edinboro Lake offer unlimited restrictions for powerboating and several other lakes and impoundments in the watershed offer access for limited horsepower or electric

Figure 21. Public Access Points



motors. Lake Pleasant, Eaton Reservoir, and Union City Reservoir allow no motors for boats. In addition to these opportunities for canoeing and boating, the French Creek watershed lies in close proximity to popular boating areas like Presque Isle Bay and Lake Erie, Pymatuning Reservoir in western Crawford County and eastern Ohio, Shenango Reservoir and Lake Wilhelm both in Mercer County.

Land-Based Recreation

Land-based recreational opportunities also abound in the French Creek watershed. There has recently been a surge in interest in establishing trails and greenways throughout the basin. Several PA roadways have recently been designated as PA bicycle routes. These include PA Route 98 as Bicycle Route A and PA Route 6/6N as Bicycle Route U.

In 2000, the Erie County Department of Planning and Metropolitan Planning Organization developed a *Trails and Greenways Plan* for Erie County. This plan describes existing on and off road trails and greenways and proposes the development of new trails and greenways for the county. Greenways are defined in the Erie County plan as “any undeveloped area that is open for recreation, transportation, and quality of life activities. Greenspace resources include: agricultural area, recreational parks, education parks, bikeways, trails, forests, state game lands, riparian area, and community courtyards.”

Existing trails and greenways within the French Creek watershed include:

- Edinboro University Highlands Trail (bike trail for Edinboro University faculty, students, and staff only)
- Routes 6 and 6N in Erie and Crawford Counties are designated as an on-road National Recreational Trail.
- The Ernst Bike Trail from Meadville
- Trails on WPC’s Lowville Fen Natural Area north of Lowville
- Erie National Wildlife Refuge trails
- Woodcock Creek Lake trails
- State Game Lands trails throughout the watershed

Many organizations are proposing to form new trails and greenways with the hope of providing linkages between trails within the watershed and between regions outside of French Creek. The Erie County Department of Planning is proposing to designate on-road trails for many routes in the watershed (Table 8). The designation of roads as trails is dependent upon modifications to existing roadways, such as widening berms, to increase safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Table 8. Proposed On-Road Pedestrian Trails in Erie County Portions of the French Creek Watershed

Name/Location	From	To
Arbuckle Road/Lake Pleasant Road	PA 8	Lake Pleasant
Edinboro Road/Cambridge Springs Road – PA 99	Crawford County/Edinboro	Interchange Road/Millcreek Mall
Jamestown Road – PA 474	Wattsburg	New York
Old Wattsburg Road/PA 8	Waterford	Wattsburg
Route 6N	Mill Village	Springfield/Seaway Trail
Route 19	US 6N	Waterford
Route 89	North East	US 6
Route 97	Waterford	Glenwood Park Avenue
Source: Erie County Dept. of Planning, Trail and Greenways Plan		

Off-road facilities include trails, abandoned rail trails, rails with trails, and greenways with no designated trail. There is a nationwide movement to convert abandoned railway lines into recreational trails known as “railtrails”. More recently, some trail organizations have established trails along still-in-use railway beds. These trails are referred to as “rails with trails”. Several of these off-road facilities have been proposed for Erie County (Table 9).

Table 9. Proposed Off-Road Pedestrian Trails in Erie County Portions of the French Creek Watershed

Name/Location	From	To
Allegheny and Eastern Railroad – Rail with Trail	Shannon Road/Penn State – Behrend Campus	City of Corry
Bessemer and Lake Erie (B&LE) Railroad (Conneaut Branch) – Rail with Trail	Cranesville/Albion	Springfield/Ohio
Corry to Clear Lake Trail (abandoned Penn Central RR line)	City of Corry	Crawford County/Clear Lake
Corry to Findley Lake Trail (Chautauqua R/T, Incorporated Corridor)	City of Corry	New York/Findley Lake
French Creek Greenway Trail	To Be Determined	
Northwest Pennsylvania Rail Authority Rail Corridor – Rail with Trail	City of Corry	Crawford County/Meadville
Source: Erie County Dept. of Planning, Trails and Greenways Plan		

Other proposed greenways include plans by the newly formed Cochranon Greenways, Inc. to establish a greenway along French Creek in and around the borough of Cochranon. There is also a multi-municipal Environmental Advisory Council (EAC), made up of municipal leaders and community members from the City of Meadville, Vernon Township, and West Mead

Township, which is proposing to establish a greenway linking these three municipalities in Crawford County.

Many of the trails can be utilized for cross-country skiing during winter months. There are designated cross-country ski trails at Eaton Reservoir, the Erie National Wildlife Refuge's Sugar Lake Division, and in Cornplanter State Forest's Ingraham Tracts in Crawford County. Cross-country skiing is also permitted on trails and roadways in State Game Lands throughout the watershed.

The many tracts of State Game Lands throughout the watershed, as well as the Cornplanter State Forest's Ingraham Tracts, WPC lands, and the Erie National Wildlife Refuge (with some restrictions) provide areas for public hunting in French Creek. Fishing and birding opportunities are plentiful and have been discussed at length in the Land, Water, and Biological Resources sections.

Venango County, the city of Titusville, and Oil Creek Township in Crawford County are designated as the Oil Heritage Region within the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Program. This designation highlights the region's booming oil history and works with a diverse background of organizations to promote cultural and natural resource conservation, recreation, and heritage education. Although most of the Oil Heritage Region amenities and recreational opportunities lie outside the French Creek watershed, this region is partially within the French Creek watershed and offers area residents many opportunities for educational and recreational pursuits.

A final important consideration for recreational opportunities in the French Creek watershed is the Peek 'n Peak Resort and Conference Center in the New York headwaters of French Creek. Peek 'n Peak includes a downhill ski area, lodge complex, condominiums, and two golf courses. The Nature Conservancy's French Creek Project views the continued growth of this resort as a potential threat to French Creek's water quality (McAlpine, 1999). Ski resorts contribute to water quality and quantity problems through water withdrawal for snowmaking and increases in pollutants running off through snow melt.

Golf courses, like those at Peek 'n Peak and scattered throughout the watershed, represent a significant threat to water quality. PA Department of Environmental Protection has noted increased nutrients and pesticides associated with runoff from golf courses through its stream assessment program. The French Creek watershed, because of its highly rural, gently rolling landscape has many public and private golf courses.

Early History

The French Creek watershed has a rich history beginning several thousand years ago when humans first appeared on the landscape. The Native Americans that settled this region were descendants of peoples who migrated across a land bridge that connected Alaska with Asia and then spread across North America. The following is an excerpt from the FCP Factsheet entitled *The Iroquois of the French Creek Valley* (Stewart, 1998):

The Iroquois...typically settled inland where their communities revolved around farms, orchards, and hunting. The Iroquoian language family included the Cherokee, Tuscarora, Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Onondaga, and Seneca (all languages still spoken today), along with the Huron, Wyandot, Eriez, Susquehannock, Wenro, and other languages now silent.

Prior to the formation of the Iroquois Confederacy, the relatively small nations of the Eriez and Wenro (no more than 5,000 people at their peak) controlled the French Creek Valley and the Lake Erie shore. The early traditions of the Iroquoian peoples record that the various nations were frequently in conflict as they competed for territory. Then around 1300, a Huron named Deganawida – the Peacemaker – voiced a new vision and proposed a forum in which “thinking will replace violence.” Five of the nations agreed – the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas. The Iroquois Confederacy was created.

The sphere of influence of the Confederacy in 1600 extended from the Hudson River across New York State. The Mohawks became the keepers of the eastern gate, the Onondagas were the keepers of the Great Council Fire, and the Senecas were the keepers of the western gate. As Europeans began to settle the continent and compete for trade, the Iroquois became increasingly aggressive against their non-Confederacy neighbors. By the mid-1700’s the Eriez people, already decimated by an epidemic, were defeated and its survivors assimilated into the Seneca people of the upper Allegheny region (which included French Creek). Earlier, the Susquehannocks had been similarly defeated and absorbed.

In the 1600’s, the Iroquois (and especially the Seneca) were faced with a white incursion from three different fronts: 1) the French had claimed the Ohio River basin from the headwaters of the Allegheny River down the Mississippi, primarily for hunting and trade; 2) the British by this time had established settlements along the Atlantic Coast; and 3) the increasingly assertive “Americans” had claimed the American interior and especially the Ohio River basin for settlement...

By 1753, the French had established a series of forts in western Pennsylvania to stem English penetration of the West. These forts included Fort Presqu’ Isle (at present day Erie), Fort LeBoeuf (at Waterford), Fort Venango (at Franklin), and Fort Duquesne (at Pittsburgh). The following is an excerpt from the May 1995 FCP Factsheet (n.a.):

In 1753 a young George Washington was called upon to make an arduous journey to Fort LeBoeuf by way of the Allegheny River and French Creek. Sent on a mission to gather strategic information about the French for the British, Washington traveled for several months from Virginia to northwestern Pennsylvania via these waterways. He arrived at the fort in mid-December 1753, where he remained for five days and found the French strength to be much greater than expected. Washington accepted the French Commander’s written response and returned to Virginia experiencing “tedious and fatiguing passage” by canoe down partially frozen French Creek.

Washington’s report to Virginia’s Governor alerted the English to French plans for the Mississippi Valley. Within a year he was back in western Pennsylvania and fought in the first battle of the French and Indian War. During the war, unsettled and wild French Creek Valley

was a battleground for the French, Native Americans, the American colonists, and the British as they fought for control of western Pennsylvania. The forts along the creek were lost by the French, then recaptured, only to be lost again.

...By the time the French and Indian War began in the mid-1700's, these groups were impacting heavily on different fronts of the Iroquois Confederacy...the Seneca allying with the French; the Mohawks and some Oneidas allying with the British; and the Tuscaroras, Onondagas, and Cayugas trying unsuccessfully to remain neutral (FCP, 1998).

The end of the French and Indian War did not bring peace to the French Creek Valley, however. The area remained a battleground through the Revolutionary War and beyond until Anthony Wayne's victory over the Western Tribes at Falling Timbers in 1794.

The French had originally named French Creek "La Riviere aux Boeufs," or "the river of the cattle," for bison that were reported to have been found in this area. It was George Washington on his trip in 1753 that first called this waterway "French Creek".

Expansion of whites into the French Creek watershed is further described by the FCP Factsheet (Stewart, 1998):

With historical accounts of abundant fish, deer, turkey, squirrels, wild pigeons, and bear in the area surrounding French Creek, it is clear why the Allegheny River Seneca had a summer camp in Meadville into the early 1800's. For the most part, the Seneca got along with their new white neighbors like William Wilson at Fort Franklin, Colonel Hackney (a Meadville merchant), and David Mead (who founded Meadville in 1788).

A majority of the Seneca were soon to leave the French Creek Valley, however. In 1800 there were about 2,500 American settlers in Crawford County; by 1810 there were about 6,000, and by 1830 there were 16,000. Most of these new settlers were farmers, who began cutting the trees, cultivating the land, and building dams and mills on the streams. The hunting grounds on which the Seneca lifestyle depended were disappearing from the French Creek Valley.

These historic accounts of French Creek are largely chronicled in, *In French Creek Valley*, by John Earle Reynolds. Written in 1938 and reprinted in 1985, this book can be found in the Crawford County Historical Society.

Early settlers utilized French Creek as a transportation route for goods. Timber, skins, and other products could be shipped all the way to the Gulf of Mexico from the French Creek Valley, via the Allegheny, Ohio, and ultimately the Mississippi Rivers. Until this time, settlers in the region had to traverse the 15 overland miles from Waterford to Lake Erie via the Portage Trail in order to get goods to the Atlantic Ocean. Then in 1837, The French Creek Feeder Canal was completed between Meadville and Conneaut Lake. This allowed goods to be transported from French Creek at Meadville to Conneaut Lake and then on to Lake Erie via the Erie Extension Canal, thus ending the need to transport goods overland to Lake Erie. The French Creek Valley prospered as timbering and farming molded the landscape, the remnants of which we still see today. Many sites in the watershed became popular tourist attractions. People flocked to resorts

in Cambridge Springs to bathe in the mineral-rich springs in the area. In the late 1800's and early 1900's, resorts also attracted tourists to many of the glacial lakes in the watershed, including Conneaut Lake and Lake Pleasant, where social halls, water slides, and boat rides provided family recreation.

Historical Sites

The Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission reviews and lists properties in Pennsylvania for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. Because of its rich history, the French Creek watershed has 63 sites listed on the National Registry. These sights are listed in Appendix I.

Many historic landmarks from the French Creek watershed have probably been lost. The lack of publicly owned land, including no state parks, and few county or municipal parks in the watershed, make historic preservation difficult.

