
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sinnemahoning Creek is the largest tributary to the West Branch Susquehanna River. The headwaters begin in three tributary streams—Bennett Branch, Driftwood Branch, and First Fork Sinnemahoning Creek. It is located in northcentral Pennsylvania in Cameron, Clearfield, Clinton, Elk, McKean, and Potter counties.



Driftwood Branch Sinnemahoning Creek

The Sinnemahoning Creek Watershed Conservation Plan is a comprehensive study that compiles broad-based data about recreational, historical, socio-economic, and natural resources throughout the region. The plan involves a strong community participation element through the identification of local needs and concerns.

This document is non-regulatory, and serves as a reference and educational tool promoting the conservation of natural resources, monitoring and improvement of water quality, and advocating sound community-planning practices. Recommendations identified in this plan are not enforceable by any agency. Implementation of this plan is the responsibility of the entire watershed community, and depends upon cooperation and collaboration among many different organizations.

Pennsylvania Rivers Conservation Program aids groups in accomplishing local initiatives through planning, implementation, acquisition, and development activities. As part of the program, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) established the Pennsylvania Rivers Registry to validate the completion of approved watershed conservation plans. The registry serves to promote public awareness of completed plans, while fostering support for future projects that will enhance the overall quality of the watershed.

The Sinnemahoning Creek Watershed Conservation Plan was conducted to document current conditions that identify initiatives to improve the livability and attractiveness of the region. Through public perception of current conditions and future expectations, the plan engages community involvement into the development of a future vision for the watershed and creates a prioritized list of recommendations to achieve this vision.

Project Background

In 2006, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC), in cooperation with Bennett Branch Watershed Association and Bucktail Watershed Association, received funding for the Sinnemahoning Creek Watershed Conservation Plan from DCNR.



Focus Group Meeting March 2008

The planning process was initiated in July 2007 with the establishment of the local project steering committee comprised of representatives from various community and conservation groups, residents, businesses, and agencies. The steering committee was the local driving force guiding the plan's development. The goal of the Sinnemahoning Creek Watershed Conservation Plan is to assess past and present conditions of resources to develop a plan for the future of the watershed, which will: promote responsible recreation; educate and

encourage stewardship to protect and restore natural resources, and foster an appreciation and understanding of cultural and historical legacies.

Outreach to the community, a key component of the planning process, began by September 2007 with the development of surveys and traveling displays. John Sidelinger donated one of his original paintings to be used as the cover design of the plan and as a raffle prize to increase survey participation. In October 2007, a series of public meetings was held in Austin, Emporium, Force, and Sinnemahoning to engage public participation. Individuals were given additional opportunities for involvement through personal interviews and/or advisory committees. Municipalities were asked for their involvement through a phone questionnaire and follow-up survey. School student workshops were held to obtain the students' perspective on the watershed and its future. In March 2008, advisory committee members gathered for a focus group meeting to discuss the resources, assets, and issues in relation to the Sinnemahoning Creek watershed.

In November 2009, with the completion of the draft plan, area residents were given another opportunity to participate by reviewing the plan at a series of public meetings. Comments about the draft plan were collected for 30-days following the public meetings and incorporated into the final plan. A copy of the plan is available on the WPC website at <http://www.waterlandlife.org/115/watershed-conservation-plans>.



Student Workshop March 2008

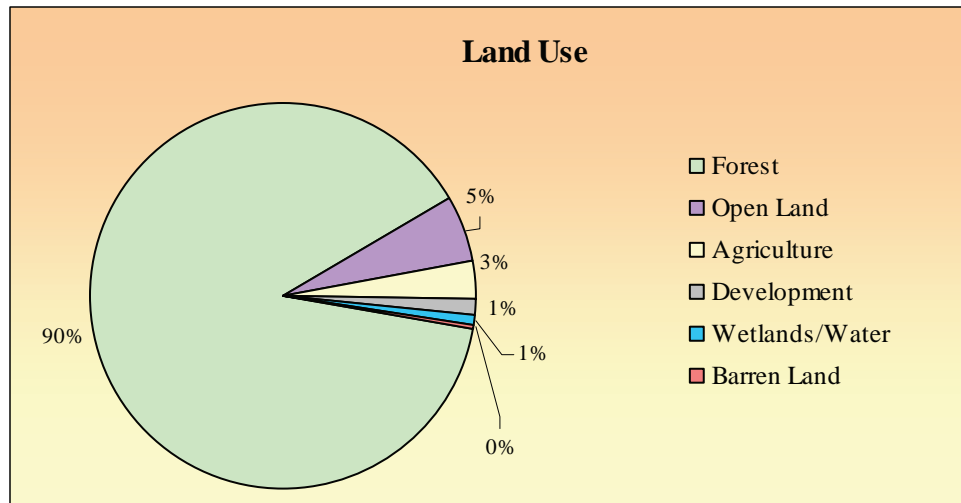
Report Summary

Project Area Characteristics

- Located within Cameron, Clearfield, Clinton, Elk, McKean, and Potter counties, the project area includes 1,050 square miles in 26 municipalities.
- Situated within the Pennsylvania Wilds and Pennsylvania Lumber Heritage Region, the Sinnemahoning Creek watershed is home to free roaming elk, seven state parks, four state forests, and several state game lands.
- Primarily a rural watershed, there are four population centers in the region—Austin, Driftwood, Emporium, and Saint Marys.
- In 2000, the population of the watershed reached 9,096 residents, an increase of 515 from.
- Consistent with Pennsylvania and the U.S., manufacturing, retail trade, and healthcare industries are the primary workforce industries within the watershed.

Land Resources

- Forestland dominates the land use at 90 percent; of which, 74 percent is deciduous forest, six percent is evergreen forest, and 20 percent is mixed forest.
- Other important land uses within the watershed include oil and gas exploration, mining, and agriculture.
- A variety of potential critical and hazardous areas exist, including scrap salvage yards, illegal dumpsites, Resource Conservation Recovery Act sites, abandoned mines, and brownfield sites.



Water Resources

- Sinnemahoning Creek and its tributaries form the largest watershed tributary to the West Branch Susquehanna River.
- Over 67% of the streams within the Sinnemahoning Creek watershed are designated as High Quality or Exception Value Coldwater Fisheries.
- A vast majority of the watershed is forested, which helps to protect water quality and benefit restoration efforts.
- Approximately 118 miles of streams are impaired.
- Major sources of water quality impairments result from abandoned mine drainage, sewage contamination, and erosion and sedimentation.
- Five Total Daily Maximum Load reports have been completed for Bennett Branch, Dents Run, Spring Run, Trout Run, and West Creek.
- A tragic train derailment in 2006 spilled 42,000 gallons of sodium hydroxide into the exceptional value waters of Sinnemahoning Portage Creek, poisoning fish and other aquatic life for miles downstream. In the end, the resulting legal settlement brought over \$7 million for conservation efforts throughout the region.

Biological Resources

- Vast forest expanses, intact habitats, and high water quality support a diversity of wildlife.
- Game species, such as whitetail deer, black bear, turkey, elk, and coyote, bring hundreds of sportsmen to the region, which boosts the local economy.
- The Sinnemahoning Sportsmen's Association hosts a unique rattlesnake hunt annually.
- This section of the PA Wilds is inhabited by the largest herd of elk east of the Mississippi River.

- Four Pennsylvania Endangered species (Case's ladies-tresses, cattail sedge, downy willow herb, and northern water-plantain) and four Pennsylvania Threatened species (Appalachia blue violet, Allegheny woodrat, bald eagle, and stalked bulrush) are found within the watershed.
- In all, 57 species and habitats of concern can be found here, including 22 plants, 13 invertebrates, seven natural community types, five reptiles, four mammals, four birds, one bat, and one geological feature.
- A nesting pair of bald eagles is resident at Sinnemahoning State Park.
- Eastern hellbender salamanders, indicators of good water quality, are known to inhabit the watershed.
- Eastern mountain lions have been sighted in the watershed, but biologists have yet to confirm their existence.
- Two Important Bird Areas (Quehanna Wild Area and Southern Sproul State Forest) and one large Important Mammal Area (Northern Allegheny Plateau) are located within the project area.

Cultural Resources

- Year-round recreational opportunities are available with the four state forests, six state parks, seven state game lands, and numerous other facilities.
- Cherry Springs State Park is the only designated star park east of the Mississippi.
- Popular recreational activities include fishing, hunting, trapping, wildlife watching, camping, bicycling, snowmobiling, ATV riding, horseback riding, sledding, ice fishing, ice skating, canoeing, and kayaking.
- The region has a profound place in Pennsylvania history. The region served as home to numerous Civilian Conservation Corps camps, had the second-worst flood in Pennsylvania history, and because of its vast forest resources, was a major part of Pennsylvania's lumber heritage.

Issues and Concerns

- Identifying visions and goals is a fundamental element of watershed conservation planning. In order to obtain these visions and goals, local stakeholders were contacted using a variety of methods, including portable displays, public meeting workshops, student workshops, a focus group meeting, public surveys, municipal surveys, individual interviews, personal communication, community events, and a project website.



Wildlife watchers impeding traffic observing the elk herds in Benzette

- Survey and interview participants identified priority concerns including water quality and quantity, abandoned mine drainage, illegal dumping, invasive species, erosion and sedimentation, illegal use of all-terrain vehicles, wildlife habitat, tourism impacts on local communities, oil and gas well exploration, and the Norfolk Southern train derailment.

Management Recommendations

- Management recommendations are suggestions to maintain or improve the conditions that affect many aspects of life within the region. The recommendations were compiled from municipal and public surveys, public meeting workshops, student workshops, focus group meeting, and key individual interview comments.
- The recommendations cover a broad range of topics, but should not be considered all encompassing. The suggestions are non-regulatory in nature, and best-suited as a guide to conserving, restoring, or improving important watershed characteristics.
- Creativity in implementing the identified recommendations or developing additional suggestions is highly encouraged.
- Management recommendations may be broad and general to support funding proposals for a variety of projects and purposes, or they may be very narrow and specific to benefit a certain need for this watershed.