

## FACT SHEET 3: Developing a Statewide Trail Network to Facilitate Recreation, Transportation and Healthy Lifestyles

2009-2013 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

The Pennsylvania Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan for 2009-2013 presents research and recommendations on how to best reconnect visitors and citizens with Pennsylvania's treasured outdoors. This fact sheet outlines the challenges, and opportunities identified through the SCORP process for *Goal 3: Developing a Statewide Trail Network to Facilitate Recreation, Transportation and Healthy Lifestyles*.

The trails that offer access to the natural resources and communities of the Commonwealth come in all shapes and sizes; visitors and citizens use local and state parks and forests, greenways and water trails that provide opportunities for equestrians, hikers, bikers, paddlers, motor sports enthusiasts and more. Research and collaboration during the SCORP process resulted in the identification of widely agreed upon challenges and opportunities, and the resulting 6 recommendations and 20 detailed action steps.

### Challenges

#### Not Reinventing the Wheel

Quality information to inform better trail planning and implementation has been gathered, analyzed and reported over the years, and should inform the current process. Recreation planners are advised to use these available resources as great efforts already undertaken to better understand resource and user issues and their findings should be considered first.

#### A Variety of Gaps to Conquer

A Trail Gap Study conducted identified 107 major trail gaps, with a continued data collection effort planned as a more comprehensive inventory of gaps. Identifying and closing gaps will make Pennsylvania trail systems more user-friendly for residents and visitors. Opportunities exist to complete trails, connect trails to parks, communities or adjacent trails, add access points to water trails and connect them to land-based trails.

#### Continued Trail Maintenance for Long Term Sustainability

Trail maintenance concerns exist across the Commonwealth, with issues ranging from lack of maintenance, poor design, and insufficient resources at state and local levels to properly maintain trails. While grant-making agencies encourage maintenance plans, it is important to explore more ways to align trail grant programs and promote best practices.



### Pennsylvania's Trails – A National Leader

- No. 1 in the nation with 138 open rail trail projects
- Over 1,370 miles of rail trails
- Great Allegheny Passage—Longest multi-use trail in the nation at 318 miles and the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's first Hall of Fame Trail
- Over 1,900 miles of water trails with the 500-mile Susquehanna Greenway and Water Trail as one of the nation's longest
- 24 National Recreation Trails—8 new trails designated in 2009 adding over 400 miles
- Over 25,000 miles of water and land-based trails with an additional 3,500 miles proposed

### **Disconnect in Statewide Trail Planning**

Planning efforts have been strong within individual trail advocacy organizations, but there has been no solid statewide effort focused on comprehensive planning of trail systems. An integrated strategic effort is needed to develop a trail network that facilitates recreation and transportation throughout the state.

#### **Opportunities**

### **Statewide Solutions Start with Statewide Planning**

Establishment of a statewide trails committee is needed to build on existing work of trail stakeholders and will represent Pennsylvania trail ownership groups, including the three state agencies with primary trail responsibilities, DCNR, PennDOT and PFBC, as well as local government entities, regional and county planners, motorized and non-motorized trail organizations, rail trail, greenway and heritage groups.

### **Strong Existing Partnerships and Abundant Water Resources**

Pennsylvania is fortunate to have a partnership of agencies, non-profits and local water-trail groups working together to promote water trails. This partnership's goals for improving and expanding trails in Pennsylvania include improved signage, access and facilities, mapping and electronic information, and expanded opportunities for maintenance, stewardship and sustainability of water trails.

### **Collaboration for Consistency**

The recreating public will be best served by trails that adhere to the same standards or guidelines, regardless of which agency's land holdings they cross or which trail group holds ownership responsibilities.

### **Using New Technologies**

In 2008, DCNR also launched an ongoing statewide trails GIS project. Collected data and technologies used to support the statewide trails GIS effort will be critical for analyzing trail needs and tracking progress toward trail access and information sharing.

### **Best Funding Mechanisms to Close Gaps**

With trail development costs escalating and funds shrinking, aligning and standardizing the funding criteria for trail projects will be important to keep moving toward the goal of priority based trail gap project selection.

### **Proper Maintenance for Future Sustainability**

Efforts to promote best maintenance practices can also play a role in funding decisions and certainly play a role in the future sustainability of a trail. Land-holding agencies encourage maintenance plans for consideration in project selection for funding.



### **Making Trails Accessible**

Directional signage along roads to access areas, signage signifying parking areas and facilities, the increased visibility of trailheads and entry points or the addition of access points to trails have all been raised as areas for improvement. Additional concerns raised include the need for trails heads and access areas to contain trail information, maps and safety precautions.

### **Meeting Expectations through Quality Information**

There is a need for more and better information on trail availability, location, access points, regulations, and conditions users can expect to encounter along the way. Trail users want to know what other local attractions and amenities are available in communities along or near trails; and this information may spark greater participation.

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