Trails and Recreation Concept Plan

October 2009
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The Hopewell Big Wood's 25,000+ acres includes the 7,730-acre French Creek State Park, 1,848-acre Birdsboro Waters, 848-acre Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, 604-acre Crows Nest Preserve, and 2,909 acres of State Game Lands. The scenic area straddles parts of Pennsylvania's Berks and Chester counties and is the largest forest tract remaining in southeastern Pennsylvania. Located between the Reading and Philadelphia metropolitan areas, the Hopewell Big Woods is one of the highest priority conservation areas in the Pennsylvania Highlands. Additionally, it is part of the US Forest Service's Highlands Conservation Area and is an integral piece of the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area and the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Schuylkill Highlands Conservation Landscape Initiative.

Although under increasing development pressures, the Hopewell Big Woods region makes a compelling case for revitalizing local communities through recreation related businesses and heritage tourism based on environmental and cultural education. Improved connections to the regional trail system, including the Schuylkill River Trail and the Horse-Shoe Trail, will help support economic development initiatives by making the region's assets more accessible to and appreciated by the public.

**THE HOPEWELL BIG WOODS PARTNERSHIP**

The Partnership is an informal network of public-private groups representing communities, non-profit organizations, governments, institutions, landowners, recreational groups, businesses and other stakeholders interested in conservation of the unique characteristics of the Hopewell Big Woods. The Partnership fosters community action to sustain and promote the Hopewell Big Woods' natural, cultural, and recreational heritage. Membership is open to all who share the Partnership's goals, which include:

1. **Forests** - Permanently protect at least 15,000 unbroken forest acres in and around French Creek State Park.

2. **Watersheds** - Conserve water quality and quantity in the watersheds of the upper reaches of French Creek, the entirety of Hay Creek and in other watersheds within the Hopewell Big Woods.

3. **Rare, Threatened and Endangered Species** - Conserve state and federally listed and other rare species occurring within the Hopewell Big Woods.

4. **Resource Conservation** - Increase outdoor recreational opportunities related to the Schuylkill River Valley's natural and cultural heritage and strengthen its historic communities within the Hopewell Big Woods region of the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area.

5. **Sustainable Economic Development** - Foster compatible economic development within the Hopewell Big Woods that is consistent with other Partnership conservation goals.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In 2007 the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership engaged the National Park Service to identify recreational resources. This Concept Plan represents the first step towards developing the vision and goals for recreation and trails in the Hopewell Big Woods Region.

In 2007 the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership engaged the National Park Service to identify recreational resources. This Concept Plan represents the first step towards developing the vision and goals for recreation and trails in the Hopewell Big Woods Region.
6. Historic and Cultural Resources - Seek to protect historic and other cultural resources occurring within and near the Hopewell Big Woods.

The Vision for the Hopewell Big Woods applies to nearly 73,000 acres through two Pennsylvania counties, ten townships, several incorporated municipalities including the boroughs of Birdsboro and Elverson, and more than 16 unincorporated villages. Existing greenways and trails, recreation and conservation plans, and proposed projects and ideas lay the foundation for the Hopewell Big Woods vision and goals and activities of each of the Working Groups.

CONCEPT PLAN VISION

- The communities of the Hopewell Big Woods and the larger region recognize the area as a premier recreational destination for a diversity of activities.
- Access to recreational facilities is supported by a trail network that provides safe, easy access from adjacent communities as well as connecting with the larger regional trail system, including the Horse-Shoe Trail and Schuylkill River Trail.
- The trails benefit the communities as a catalyst for economic revitalization, improved health and well being, and increased social interaction.
- The trail system is largely multi-use, supports a variety of users of different ages and challenge levels, includes a diversity of non-motorized uses and is primarily off road, while using local roads as appropriate for trail connectors. Motorized recreational vehicles have their own places to ride, where appropriate, separate from non-motorized recreational activities.
- Visitors and local residents move through a scenic, agricultural landscape and experience compelling, high-quality interpretation of the area's natural and industrial heritage, supported by a variety of media and a consistent and well maintained signage system. As powerful visual attractions, water and other natural, cultural, historic and industrial heritage features are incorporated into trail design and interpretation, and protected and enhanced through sustainable development.
- Recreational users understand rules for using the facilities including use during hunting seasons, respectfully share the facilities without impacting the resources, and are engaged in maintaining them.
- Visitors and local residents are knowledgeable about area trails and recreational facilities and can plan a safe, enjoyable experience due to the availability of comprehensive, detailed information coordinated at the federal, state, and municipal levels.
- A regional recreation and trails commission/organization supports the community's commitment to permanently protect and manage the trails, aided by a management, maintenance, and monitoring plan that addresses emergency response.

The Vision of the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership

Our Big Woods is renowned for its rich natural and cultural heritage, celebrated and sustained by vibrant, welcoming communities whose practices promote and respect their history and the interdependence of natural resource conservation, economic health and human well-being. It is a unique natural home whose heart feeds the spirit and engenders good stewards.

- Pat Pingel, 2008
COMMUNITY NEEDS

At workshops with the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership, local residents, and recreational user groups, it was clear that local communities are interested in improving existing access points to the regional trail system and adding new trail connections. While communities within the Hopewell Big Woods understand some of the potential economic benefits in developing long-distance trails, a more immediate priority is to enhance the quality of the residents' environment and their health, safety and well being. Communities expressed the need for a network of safe, contiguous trail connectors throughout the Hopewell Big Woods so that residents can walk or bike throughout the entire system.

Additional priority programmatic and infrastructure needs can be divided into 1) distribution of information about the existing trail system to the public, as well as inventory information to help plan additional trail access points and support facilities, and 2) development of trail user support infrastructure at existing and new access points, such as parking, trailheads and alternative transportation.

Regional Trail Planning: Formalize institutional support and sharing of resources with municipalities in order to make trail development more desirable and feasible.

Trail Design: Encourage consistent, compatible standards for trail design across jurisdictions to ensure a complete regional trail network and to meet user expectations. Support consistency with Hopewell Big Woods goals through trail design, development and management that enhances watershed conservation, historic preservation and forestland protection.

Trail Operations: Reduce potential for conflicts on multi-use trails to create a positive experience and encourage appropriate uses.

Trail User Experience: Address differences in mobility, ability and type of experiences desired by different trail users and provide safe routes.

Trail Access: Improve existing trail access points and provide additional options to safely connect to the regional trail network, including the Schuylkill River Water Trail.

Trail Protection: Work with landowners and local officials to ensure the long-term sustainability of trail rights-of-way adjacent to private property, and educate landowners regarding trail easements, benefits of trails, recreational use laws, and emergency contacts.

Trail Maintenance: Ensure long-term viability and capacity of the trail system to serve the users. Provide consistent, standardized information on trail systems that can help prioritize trail maintenance and permit more efficient management.

Stewardship: Promote conservation actions that can be taken by trail designers, builders, and interested property owners.

OBJECTIVES

Outreach: Implement an outreach program to provide information to the public, agencies and organizations on trails and recreation in the Hopewell Big Woods to promote public awareness, appreciation and stewardship.

Inventory: Review open space, recreation, trail, and greenway components of regional and municipal planning documents for consistency and compatibility with Hopewell Big Woods project goals, themes and recommendations.

Communities realize that healthy natural ecosystems and a viable economy are inextricably linked.

TRAIL RECOMMENDATIONS

The Hopewell Big Woods Trails and Recreation Concept Plan takes a broad view of trails, considering alternative forms of transportation and a variety of recreational uses in the region rather than focusing exclusively on off road trails.

The proposed Western Loop, a focus of this Concept Plan, consists of regional trails along the peripheries of Hopewell Big Woods – Schuylkill River Trail
and the French Creek / Sow Belly Trail from Pughstown to Elverson along the southern border of the Big Woods. These three regional trail systems would be united by north-south connector trails, including one from Birdsboro to New Morgan, one through French Creek State Park, and the North and South Coventry trail systems. On-road Pennsylvania Bicycle Route L along PA Route 345 could be included as an additional north-south connector trail. Pennsylvania Bicycle Route S along PA Route 23 forms an on-road alternative to the French Creek trail corridor, paralleling the latter from west to east.

Intersecting the western loop through the heart of the Hopewell Big Woods is the existing Horse-Shoe Trail. This regional trail spine trends northwest to southeast through Berks and Chester counties, accessing French Creek State Park, a regional recreation hub, and Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, a premier example of an early iron plantation.

The proposed Eastern Loop starts at the eastern edge of the Hopewell Big Woods, beginning with North and South Coventry’s trail system. From this trail system, three regional trail spines – Schuylkill River Trail and the associated Water Trail, and French Creek Trail – extend east along with Pennsylvania Bicycle Route S to converge in Phoenixville. From there the Schuylkill River Trail and Pennsylvania Bicycle Route S continue to Valley Forge, accessing the national park, before diverging to other parts of southeastern Pennsylvania.

The regional trail segments for the proposed Eastern and Western Loops represent a total of more than 50 miles in distance, including the 5-mile Schuylkill River Trail segment from Phoenixville to Valley Forge. Although the primary focus of this Concept Plan is the western loop, it must be acknowledged that the eastern and western loops are integrally linked thematically and culturally through the Schuylkill River Valley National and State Heritage Corridor. The Hopewell Big Woods and Valley Forge NHP represent the early history of the iron industry, while Phoenixville is representative of its later 19th century history.

Heritage Tourism and Recreation

This Plan is intended to support heritage tourism that utilizes the Hopewell Big Wood’s natural assets and cultural history as a catalyst for:

- saving historic structures;
- conserving the countryside;
- informing the region’s growing number of residents about the recreational facilities, preserves, and historic and cultural sites;
- attracting tourism; and, in turn,
- stimulating and supporting local economies.

The Concept Plan looks at how Hopewell Big Woods communities and historic and recreational destinations could better serve recreational users, how information about the region is organized and distributed or communicated, and the type of information and services recreational users could be provided at key locations. Key locations that can provide information/education functions and visitor support services are identified as gateways, which can take many forms as described in the Concept Plan.

The Hopewell Big Woods Trails and Recreation Network recognizes the need to capitalize on the existing attractions, mainly the recreational facilities and enjoyment of the scenery. At the same time, a broader marketing and interpretive strategy can be organized that interjects information on the iron industry, resource extraction and conservation, and what it means to the landscape and culture today.
ABOUT THE HOPEWELL BIG WOODS PARTNERSHIP

The Partnership is a network of public-private interests representing communities, non-profit organizations, governments, institutions, landowners, recreational groups, businesses and other stakeholders interested in preserving the unique characteristics of the Hopewell Big Woods in Berks and Chester counties, Pennsylvania. The Partnership supports conservation and recreation planning for the Hopewell Big Woods, recognizing this landscape as a key component of the Schuylkill Highlands in southeastern Pennsylvania. The Schuylkill Highlands, where the Pennsylvania Highlands and the Schuylkill River watershed intersect, are forested uplands that include 139 municipalities in portions of Berks, Bucks, Chester, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lehigh and Montgomery counties. The Partnership fosters community action to sustain and promote the Hopewell Big Woods’ natural, cultural and recreational heritage and coordinates with the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources as part of the Schuylkill Highlands Conservation Landscape Initiative. Membership in the Partnership is open to all who share the Partnership’s goals and interests.

HOPEWELL BIG WOODS
Building the Public Vision

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Planning for the Hopewell Big Woods is conducted by Working Groups of agencies and organizations with professional expertise drawn from the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership. Six Working Groups are subcommittees of the Partnership, and are organized around the implementation of specific goals. An Advisory Council, comprised of the chairs from each Working Group, coordinates the planning efforts among the Working Groups, advises the Partnership on emerging issues of interest to the Partnership as a whole, and recommends potential directions for the Partnership’s consideration. Citizens, organizations, and county and local governments play a significant role in conservation, historic preservation, sustainable economic development and recreation planning within the Hopewell Big Woods through participation in the Working Groups and other activities.
Establishing Vibrant, Sustainable Communities within a Natural Treasure

The vision for the Hopewell Big Woods applies to nearly 73,000 acres through two Pennsylvania counties, ten townships, several incorporated municipalities including the boroughs of Birdsboro and Elverson, and more than 16 unincorporated villages. Existing greenways and trails, recreation and conservation plans, and proposed projects and ideas lay the foundation for the Hopewell Big Woods vision and goals and activities of each of the Working Groups. Municipalities have shown significant support for and made contributions to the Hopewell Big Woods project through the:

- Strategic Plan for the Iron and Steel Heritage Region;
- Living with the River, the Schuylkill National and State Heritage Region Management Action Plan;
- Phoenixville Regional Comprehensive Plan;
- Southern Berks Regional Comprehensive Plan;
- Northern Federation Regional Resource Protection Plan;
- Berks County Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan;
- Hay Creek Watershed Greenway Plan;
- Sustainable Watershed Management: The Vision Program for Northern Chester County;
- Chester County’s Linking Landscapes: A Plan for the Protected Open Space Network in Chester County, Pennsylvania;
- Birdsboro Waters Master Site Plan; and the
- Elverson Borough Revitalization Plan.

Work continues on the Strategic Plan for the Iron and Steel Heritage Region which is predominantly in the Hopewell Big Woods. The plan defines driving routes between iron and steel related sites for heritage tourism.

Additional implementation activities include:

- ongoing revitalization of St. Peter’s Village;
- the development of the Boar’s Back/Sow Belly Rail-Trail through Warwick Township;
- completion of the Schuylkill River / Thun Trail through Birdsboro and Chester County;
- planning and design of North Coventry’s and East Vincent’s trail network; and
- planning and design of the Hopewell Trail.

In addition to the development of trail and greenway networks, networks of conserved lands are expanding through partnerships involving non-profit recreation and conservation groups, and federal, local and state governments. For instance, the Federation of Northern Chester County Communities is scheduled to begin work on a Regional Park, Open Space and Recreation Plan during 2009.

A grant through the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources’ (PA DCNR) Community Conservation Partnership Program will support these local planning efforts. The grant has enabled Natural Lands Trust and partners to initiate the next phase of the project – the Middle Schuylkill Compatible Economic Development Plan. This plan is scheduled to begin in the first half of 2009 when funding partner North Coventry Township receives a grant from Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development. The plan’s geographic scope expands beyond Hopewell Big Woods northwest to Reading and southeast to Valley Forge, as part of the Schuylkill Highlands Conservation Landscape Initiative. The plan will document existing recreation and heritage tourism businesses, and identify future ecologically sustainable business opportunities.

The Vision of the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership

Our Big Woods is renowned for its rich natural and cultural heritage, celebrated and sustained by vibrant, welcoming communities whose practices promote and respect their history and the interdependence of natural resource conservation, economic health and human well-being. It is a unique natural home whose heart feeds the spirit and engenders good stewards.

- Pat Pingel, 2008
The Partnership is a response to the conservation intent of the Partners and area residents. The Partners recognize that the Hopewell Big Woods landscape has state and national importance and a distinct identity within the larger Schuylkill Highlands. The Hopewell Big Woods planning effort ties into the Commonwealth's initiative to develop a network of conservation landscapes throughout Pennsylvania. The conservation landscapes are large areas of land with ecological, social and economic value whose protection and recreational use are priorities for PA DCNR investments, including assistance to local communities in developing trails and public access to waterways.

GOALS

In December 2003 the Natural Lands Trust published the Hopewell Big Woods Landscape Conservation Plan. This initial plan outlined a series of four conservation goals developed by the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership:

GOAL 1. Forests – The permanent protection of at least 15,000 acres of unbroken forest in and around French Creek State Park.

GOAL 2. Watersheds – The conservation of water quality and quantity in the watersheds of the Upper Reaches of French Creek, the entirety of Hay Creek and in other watersheds within the Hopewell Big Woods. The primary indicator for watershed conservation is retaining impervious cover below 6% in these watersheds.

GOAL 3. Rare, Threatened and Endangered Species – The conservation of state and federally listed and other rare species occurring within the Hopewell Big Woods.

GOAL 4. Resource Conservation – The conservation of the resources identified in the Management Plan for the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area located adjacent to the Hopewell Big Woods. (This goal was later modified to address regional recreation and trails planning, development, and management: “Increase outdoor recreational opportunities related to the Schuylkill River Valley’s natural and cultural heritage and strengthen its historic communities within the Hopewell Big Woods region of the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area.”)

Work of the partners on the original four conservation goals identified the need for additional conservation goals. As a result, two additional goals were included in the Natural Lands Trust’s Hopewell Big Woods Land Protection Plan (2007):

GOAL 5. Sustainable Economic Development – The Hopewell Big Woods Partnership seeks to foster compatible economic development within the Hopewell Big Woods that is consistent with our other conservation goals.

GOAL 6. Historic and Cultural Resources - The Hopewell Big Woods Partnership seeks to protect historic and other cultural resources occurring within and nearby the Hopewell Big Woods.

Each of the six goals is currently associated with a Working Group. Each Working Group develops implementation strategies and measurable indicators to determine progress towards the goals. These goals are the basis for annual operating plans that contribute to the Partnership’s overall strategic plan.
The Hopewell Big Woods includes some 25,000 acres of natural area straddling parts of Berks and Chester counties and is the largest such tract of forest remaining in southeastern Pennsylvania. The Hopewell Big Woods is located close to the major metropolitan areas of Reading and Philadelphia and is subject to increasing development pressure. On the other hand, significant protected open space such as the 7,730-acre French Creek State Park, 1,848-acre Birdsboro Waters, 848-acre Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, and 2,909 acres of State Game Lands provide the Hopewell Big Woods region with a strong base for revitalizing local communities through recreation related businesses and heritage tourism. Improved connections to the regional trail system, including the five-county Schuylkill River Trail and four-county Horse-Shoe Trail, can help support economic development initiatives by making the area’s unique assets more accessible to and appreciated by the public while minimizing impacts to resources.

**HOPEWELL BIG WOODS IS A REGIONAL AND NATIONAL TREASURE**

Hopewell Big Woods is one of the highest priority conservation areas in the Pennsylvania Highlands, and is part of the Highlands Conservation Area, a US Forest Service designation. The Highlands stretch from northwest Connecticut south into southeastern Pennsylvania. Within Pennsylvania, these areas are known as the Schuylkill Highlands, a priority landscape for the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (PA DCNR). The PA DCNR’s Schuylkill Highlands Conservation Landscape Initiative is focused on ecotourism, recreation and conservation.

Key assets of the Highlands include:

- **French Creek State Park**, 7,730 acres managed by the PA DCNR Bureau of State Parks;
- **Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site**, 848 acres managed by the National Park Service, including Baptism Creek National Recreation Trail;
- **12,000 of 15,000 core conservation acres** currently preserved, including a variety of federal, state, municipal, and non-profit ownership;
- **Crows Nest Preserve**, 604 acres of private land managed by Natural Lands Trust;
- **State Game Lands 43**, 2,909 acres administered by the PA Game Commission;
- **Warwick County Park**, 538 acres managed by the Chester County Department of Parks and Recreation;
- **Birdsboro Waters**, 1,848 acres managed by the Birdsboro Municipal Authority;
- **Glen Morgan Lake**, 596 acres privately managed and designated a Pennsylvania Important Bird Area
- **Rare, threatened and endangered species**, including the bald eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus) and the bog turtle (Glyptemys muhlenbergii);
- **Joanna Furnace**, a privately owned historic site of 61.90 acres nestled within the Hay Creek watershed;
- **French Creek**, a Pennsylvania designated Exceptional Value Waterway;
- **Pine Swamp**, 8 RTE species and rare natural communities as part of a large and intact freshwater marsh;
- **North Coventry Township’s Coventry Woods**;
• South Coventry Township’s Woody’s Woods; and
• Warwick Township Park, 90 acres.

BIG WOODS RESOURCES – THE POTENTIAL FOR PROMOTION

Although it is located in between two major metropolitan areas, Hopewell Big Woods does not attract large numbers of visitors, with the exception of certain venues at French Creek State Park. Although the resources are unique and outstanding in conglomeration, recreation is focused most on the state park, due to the variety of facilities offered to the public. This is the destination for most visitors and represents what they know about the area. State Game Lands 43 are well known by hunters. Other recreational and historic resources, with the exception of Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site and Joanna Furnace, are not very well known.

The potential economic value of the region’s agricultural and industrial heritage cannot be underestimated, with the possibility to tap the resources of the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Corridor, and Valley Forge National Historical Park. Several iron heritage based tours have been proposed for the Chester County portion of Hopewell Big Woods. The PA DCNR Middle Schuylkill Compatible Economic Development Study is anticipated to help identify options and opportunities to market and promote the region’s scenic, recreational and cultural resources in a coordinated fashion, building on these existing tours and assessing the infrastructure needed to inform and serve visitors. Making the area a compelling destination depends largely on the local communities building on the existing recreational base.

CHALLENGES AND THREATS TO THE REGION AND ITS RECREATION BASE

Urbanization and development that is inappropriate in scale and character threatens the distinctive look, culture, and sustainable economy of Hopewell Big Woods communities. Expanded roadways, impervious pavement, and urban/suburban “sprawl” are altering the scenic features that residents care about. Certain established leisure activities are disrupted, such as when “no trespassing” signs appear on traditional hunting lands. The area is undergoing transformation from rural to suburban and a change in demographics from close-knit communities with long-time families to more culturally diverse, urban and mobile populations.

Access from metropolitan areas via I-76 and PA SR 422 and 100 virtually assure the expansion of Reading and Philadelphia into rural areas, with consequent loss of open, green space. Poorly planned development and road renovations and expansions may take away opportunities for connecting communities to parks, historic sites and other assets through trails and from conserving and sustainably using open space. French and Hay creeks, designated by the Commonwealth as “Exceptional Value Streams,” will be under increasing pressure from the threat of pollution associated with stormwater runoff. Viable fish and wildlife habitats are being disturbed and reduced, diminishing the area’s “people to nature” connection and long standing hunting, fishing and horseback riding traditions.
Hopewell Big Woods has a Distinctive Look and Feel Worth Preserving

The geology of the Chester / Berks County “iron belt” results in a vertical topography, with relatively quick changes in elevation. This geology gave rise early in our nation’s history to a distinctive approach to landscape management, all in the service of industrial development. Historically, iron furnace owners kept large tracts of land in “plantations” in order to have adequate supplies of timber for fuel used in iron making. These once forested tracts, cut over and regenerated many times, became the foundation for today’s 10,000+ acres of public parks, gamelands and private preserves that help make up the Hopewell Big Woods. The forest lands are located on rolling hills within a matrix of farmlands and villages. Historic buildings show off the striking red stone pigmented by iron that contributes to the special sense of place. The area offers a diverse and memorable range of experiences, from world-class rock climbing, walking, biking and a variety of recreational activities, to historical programs, and special seasonal events such as fall foliage tours and bicycle races.

A Call to Action for the Townships

Recognition of the Hopewell Big Woods as a distinct living landscape has united its communities and set the stage for improved land use and development policies and ordinances. These can be formulated to protect the region’s land and water assets and its cultural heritage, and create communities that are desirable places to live, work and recreate. Townships have recognized the opportunities to create a sustainable economic base and good quality of life. Townships that are part of the Federation of Northern Chester County Communities are starting to join together to examine local and regional development with an eye towards preserving the region in a systematic way. Recognition of Hopewell Big Woods in local open space and recreation plans is increasing. Ties to local development plans and ordinances are key to preserving the region’s identity and authenticity. On the horizon are opportunities for conserving open space, restoring habitat, promoting recreation, and shaping new development to economic and environmental advantage.

Early and Consistent Participation of Landowners in Local and Regional Plans is Key to Trail Development

Local landowners are important partners in implementing, managing, and using trails and recreation facilities in the Hopewell Big Woods. The regional trail spines such as the Horse-Shoe Trail and French Creek Trail can not be completed without the cooperation and participation of landowners throughout the planning and development process. The Hopewell Big Woods Partnership includes local landowners and encourages local governments, recreational interests, and non-profit conservation organizations to work with landowners to accomplish the Hopewell Big Woods goals, with a sensitivity to concerns about privacy, safety and liability.

Education about the benefits of trails and outdoor recreation, and marketing Hopewell Big Woods recreational resources, are vital program components directed towards landowners, developers, and municipal officials. Trails connecting Hopewell Big Woods destinations represent key community assets, and not just for recreation. They:

- support recreational options for families and individuals of different ages and abilities;
- help to reduce traffic congestion by providing an alternative to motor vehicle travel;
- create options for hands-on learning about the environment and the area’s history;
- contribute to tourism and economic development by promoting area destinations; and
- provide opportunities for exercise, fostering mental and physical health.
Most importantly, they reflect the wishes of many area residents. The Hopewell Big Woods trail network will support a wide variety of options consistent with local and regional needs and desires. The network will connect to existing regional trails beyond the boundaries of Hopewell Big Woods, exponentially expanding options for experiencing the area’s recreational, cultural and historical resources.

**Vision and Goals for the Hopewell Big Woods Trails and Recreation Network**

The Hopewell Big Woods Partnership saw the value in addressing recreation as part of a broader strategy for conserving the Big Woods. In 2007, the Partnership charged two Working Groups to collaborate with the National Park Service in developing a vision and goals for trails and recreation in the Hopewell Big Woods. The Goal 5 Working Group was initially selected because of its potential role in promoting sustainable economic development with heritage tourism and recreation as its base. The Goal 4 Working Group’s mission is to “Increase outdoor recreational opportunities related to the Schuylkill River Valley’s natural and cultural heritage and strengthen its historic communities within the Hopewell Big Woods region of the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area.” The major theme areas for Goal 4 include Trails, Recreation, River Aesthetics and other Quality of Life issues, and Outreach. The National Park Service helped the two Working Groups organize a process for public input to develop a proposed vision and goals that would provide a blueprint for trail and recreation related actions in the Hopewell Big Woods.

The draft vision and a preliminary set of goals and actions were suggested by the Goal 4 Working Group, which developed one goal with a set of six objectives, presented below. Many area residents contributed to the vision and goals, and expressed support for the creation and promotion of a Hopewell Big Woods Trails and Recreation Network. The Partnership anticipates additional public input from a broad range of interests.

**Vision**

- The communities of the Hopewell Big Woods and the larger region recognize the area as a premier recreational destination for a diversity of activities.
- Access to recreational facilities is supported by a trail network that provides safe, easy access from adjacent communities as well as connecting with the larger regional trail system, including the Horse-Shoe Trail and Schuylkill River Trail.
- The trails benefit the communities as a catalyst for economic revitalization, improved health and well being, and increased social interaction.
- The trail system is largely multi-use, supports a variety of users of different ages and challenge levels, includes a diversity of non-motorized uses and is primarily off road, while using local roads as appropriate for trail connectors. Motorized
recreational vehicles have their own places to ride, where appropriate, separate from non-motorized recreational activities.

- Visitors and local residents move through a scenic, agricultural landscape and experience compelling, high-quality interpretation of the area’s natural and industrial heritage, supported by a variety of media and a consistent and well-maintained signage system. As powerful visual attractions, water and other natural, cultural, historic and industrial heritage features are incorporated into trail design and interpretation, and protected and enhanced through sustainable development.

- Recreational users understand rules for using the facilities, including use during hunting seasons, respectfully sharing the facilities without impacting the resources, and are engaged in maintaining them.

- Visitors from the region and beyond and local residents are knowledgeable about area trails and recreational facilities and can plan a safe, enjoyable experience due to the availability of comprehensive, detailed information coordinated at the federal, state and municipal levels.

- A regional recreation and trails commission/organization supports the community’s commitment to permanently protect and manage the trails, aided by a maintenance and monitoring plan that addresses emergency response.

**OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS**

The following objectives and actions are based on Partnership discussions as of February 2009. The actions under each objective have not been prioritized by the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership, nor have the responsible parties been identified or a timeline established.

**A. Outreach Objective:** Implement an outreach program to provide information to the public, agencies and organizations on trails and recreation in the Hopewell Big Woods to promote public awareness, appreciation and stewardship.

1. **Action:** Identify and publicize existing trails so potential users are aware they exist. Include information about major trail corridors as well as local trail networks and ways to access the trails from towns. The media could include information kiosks and a master trail map that shows facilities, points of entry, distances, and directions.

2. **Action:** Provide a clearinghouse function for information on trails development, management, and trail related activities.

3. **Action:** Provide guidance to landowners, municipalities, and other stakeholders to better describe trail and recreation project benefits.

4. **Action:** Reach out to businesses and development interests to make them aware of the economic benefits of trails.

5. **Action:** Educate municipalities on economic, recreational and cultural benefits offered by the Schuylkill River and the Hopewell Big Woods trails to increase visitation for economic development. Clearly articulate the benefits of trail development for community support and to encourage recreation related businesses.

**B. Inventory Objective:** Review open space, recreation, and trail and greenway components of regional and municipal planning documents for consistency and compatibility with Hopewell Big Woods project goals, themes and recommendations. (Plans to be reviewed include, but are not limited to, the Iron and Steel Strategic Plan, the Southern Berks Comprehensive Plan, and many Northern Federation documents, which all include goals, objectives, and recommendations.)

1. **Action:** Create overarching planning guidance document for Hopewell Big Woods that incorporates recommendations found in existing planning documents.

   a. List and codify a comprehensive review and create a summary of methodology and recommendations from existing plans and maps.

   b. Identify and resolve possible inconsistent recommendations among plans and between the plans and Hopewell Big Woods project goals, themes, and recommendations.
c. Create document for presentation to the Partnership.

2. Action: Inventory open space / trails in township comprehensive plans and policies, and identify township representatives with an interest in trails.

C. Regional Trail Planning Objective: Formalize institutional support and sharing of resources with municipalities in order to make trail development more desirable and feasible.

1. Action: Define criteria and priorities for trail development, along with a timeline for implementation. (Some potential priority trail connections have been identified at previous workshops: 1) Phoenixville link to Schuylkill River Trail and French Creek Trail; 2) Woody Woods to Coventry Woods to Warwick County Park; 3) Warwick County Park to Kimberton-Warwick School.)

2. Action: Promote ordinances and municipal trail plans to make trails a part of future land development to ensure recreational access to and from communities.
   a. Identify and publicize planned trails so developers can incorporate them into subdivision design.
   b. Promote connections between downtown businesses and the regional trail system to support economic revitalization. Appropriate support services such as bike rentals, eateries, stables and outfitters may be needed to attract trail users but have not been identified.
   c. Incorporate proposed trails in comprehensive plans, along with a recognition of Hopewell Big Woods as an important landscape.

3. Action: Identify and leverage funding to support trail development, including PennDOT mitigation funds, seed money and companies with workers, materials and equipment who need to meet development requirements and want to be “good neighbors.”

4. Action: Develop political support for county bond programs and/or other financing mechanisms through the public and private sector to develop trails.

5. Action: Support, promote and lead implementation of the Hopewell Big Woods Trails and Recreation Concept Plan.

D. Trail Design Objective: Encourage consistent, compatible standards for trail design across jurisdictions to ensure a complete regional trail network and to meet user expectations. Support consistency with Hopewell Big Woods goals through trail design, development and management that enhances watershed conservation, historic preservation and forestland protection.

1. Action: Compile and share information with municipalities on existing design standards for multiple and single use trails, related to type of class and use, as appropriate.

2. Action: Define / modify standards for trail surface and width based on permitted and intended recreational uses, including horseback riding, bicycling and hiking/walking.

3. Action: Explore and identify capacity of existing trails and recreational facilities to determine if they are adequate in numbers, size and types of facilities to accommodate new recreational users.


E. Trail Operations Objective: Reduce potential for conflicts on multi-use trails to create a positive experience and encourage appropriate uses.

1. Action: Clarify permitted recreation uses on trails and share “rules of the trail” with users through signage, maps and education. Examine Dauphin County’s section of Horse-Shoe Trail as a potential model for shared use.

2. Action: Identify and map permitted recreational uses on existing trails and intended recreational uses on planned trails and assess potential for user conflicts prior to trail development. Multiple uses such as horses, bikes, and hiking may not be compatible on all trails.
a. Identify permitted recreational uses at the junctions of two or more trails through signage and/or other information.

b. Identify and create, if necessary, appropriate alternative sites and trails for ATV users.

3. **Action:** Identify locations for design features such as bollards that can limit inappropriate access to trails.

4. **Action:** Identify differences in operation of trails, their users and needs, and existing and potential access points into the community.
   a. Identify differences in design standards and management needs that may be required between trails. (e.g., Horse-Shoe Trail permits bike use with consent of landowner.)

5. **Action:** Develop a set of graphics standards for interpretive and directional signs, based on Schuylkill River National and State Heritage standards, to be used throughout the Hopewell Big Woods area.

F. **Trail User Experience Objective:** Address differences in mobility, ability and type of experiences desired by different trail users and provide safe routes.

1. **Action:** Provide comprehensive information on existing trail routes to the community that includes trail etiquette, location, trail lengths, trail surface and required ability and/or expected challenge level.

2. **Action:** Implement stacked loop trail system for Hopewell Furnace NHS and French Creek State Park (per IMBA trails assessment) to allow bicyclists different challenge levels and take pressure off resources. The stacked loop system will include a series of three trail loops of differing distances and difficulty levels for beginner, intermediate and advanced bicyclists.

3. **Action:** Contact ATV users to identify their preferred routes, desired experience, and support needs.

4. **Action:** Identify specific safety concerns (e.g., poor lines of sight around curves, lack of shoulders) related to on road bicycle use and work with PennDOT and municipalities to implement improvements, including possibly bicycle lanes and/or separate sidepaths. Focus initially on Route 23/Pughtown Road and Route 345/4082 since they are designated PA Bike Routes.

5. **Action:** Identify locations in developed areas that are suitable for trail user amenities such as benches, picnic tables, and refreshments. It is desirable to concentrate recreational user support services in villages and existing urban areas to encourage economic revitalization and minimize impacts to natural and recreational resources.

6. **Action:** Link trail development to enhancement of the preferred visitor experience and increased visitation at significant recreation and cultural sites such as Hopewell Furnace NHS and French Creek State Park. The function and potential locations of gateways, including information needs, should be identified to support recreation and heritage tourism.
   a. Identify gateways, clarify their functions and work with partners to develop facilities to serve visitors and interpret the area's heritage.
   b. Develop a demo project using the Boar’s Back Trail that would draw significant interest from Chester County and townships, because it would extend beyond one municipality.
   c. Develop trail connection from St. Peters Village to Crow’s Nest Preserve and Green Lane entrance into Hopewell Furnace NHS to support the park’s vision for the visitor experience.
   d. Develop St. Peters Village railroad station as a “green” building shared by NPS and Warwick County rangers and an interpretive hub for the iron and granite mining stories.
   e. Develop walking trail to connect Hopewell Furnace NHS, Joanna Furnace and Warwick Furnace in order to interpret the iron industry.
   f. Interpret the Horse-Shoe Trail as the original link among iron furnaces in the 18th century.
7. **Action:** Provide promotional materials and/or activities for health and wellness related to trail use.

G. **Trail Access Objective:** Improve existing trail access points and provide additional options to safely connect to the regional trail network, including the Schuylkill River Water Trail.

1. **Action:** Identify, enhance and increase, if necessary, the number of permitted and safe parking areas adjacent to trailheads.
   a. Identify and GPS the number and types of parking spaces that currently exist near trail access points, and include this information on a map that is provided to trail users.
   b. Determine adequacy of existing locations and number of spaces of parking areas within the Hopewell Big Woods trail system as a whole, considering that trail users often park along the road shoulders rather than in the limited spaces available at trailheads.
   c. Identify and compile information on standards for numbers and types of parking spaces – e.g., size lots to allow for horse trail users, and vans with bike carriers – that considers numbers per miles of trail, and plan for new parking spaces accordingly.

2. **Action:** Develop alternative transportation access – e.g., shuttle loop system – to connect villages to the trail system.

3. **Action:** Encourage community activities that support use of the larger regional trail network from local community access points.
   a. Create additional access points into the regional trail system from smaller community-based trails and pathways, including urban sidewalks.
   b. Improve access from the Schuylkill River Trail to local and regional trail networks by identifying and developing potential north-south connections from Schuylkill River Trail through French Creek State Park to Hopewell Furnace, and by securing funding for land acquisition and trail development to complete connections to the Schuylkill River Trail.

4. **Action:** Identify encroachments into trail rights-of-way, including the conversion of lands to other uses, and locations where recreational users are prevented from using the trail, and work to resolve access issues. (Horse-Shoe Trail is a good example of changes in land ownership and agreement that affect trail use and access.)

5. **Action:** Identify and partner with public agencies to promote and provide safe and environmentally friendly waterway access. (Issue: Private access groups have liability concerns, leaving the bulk of river/stream access to the public sector.
   a. Determine the recreational capacity of the Schuylkill River and Hopewell Big Woods streams for sustainable waterway health.
   b. Inventory recreation opportunities on waterways.
   c. Assist riparian communities to obtain grants to improve and make more visible existing river access, including trail access and parking, and develop new access points and facilities where appropriate. (Issue: Access to the Schuylkill River water trail is blocked due to physical impediments and lack of adequate signage.)

H. **Trail Protection Objective:** Work with landowners and local officials to ensure the long-term sustainability of trail rights-of-way adjacent to private property, and educate landowners regarding trail easements, benefits of trails, recreational use laws, and emergency contacts.

1. **Action:** Place signage along trail corridors that indicate the name of the trail and the managing entity so that adjacent landowners are aware of the trail’s existence and emergency responders can locate callers.

2. **Action:** Include state and local law enforcement in trail planning and policing.

3. **Action:** Work with municipalities and trail managing organizations to ensure formal legal protection for Horse-Shoe Trail, and model ordinances and easements for trail development and protection.
4. **Action:** Clearly delineate trail corridor boundaries for adjacent landowners through appropriate landscaping and addition of physical markers such as fencing, while avoiding a “stockade” effect for trail users.

5. **Action:** Create endowment funds for landowner stewardship and easement enforcement.

6. **Action:** Provide information about the overall Hopewell Big Woods project and cooperate with municipalities to serve as a forum and resource for local landowners seeking to protect trail corridors. Provide landowners with an information package, including:
   a. Information on recreational use of private property under the 1960 PA Recreation Act, as amended.
   b. Trail related emergency contact information.
   c. Provide landowners with positive examples of trail use by multiple types of users from other locales.

7. **Action:** Coordinate with cell service providers to determine existing level of cell phone service on trails and communicate this to trail users and landowners.

8. **Action:** Recommend to trail managers to establish a consistent, regular and reliable system of ranger patrols for the trails (with a minimum 2-3 weeks at one time).

**I. Trail Maintenance Objective:** Ensure long-term viability and capacity of the trail system to serve the users. Provide consistent, standardized information on trail systems that can help prioritize trail maintenance and permit more efficient management.

1. **Action:** Develop a comprehensive trails assessment report that identifies trail segments and their condition, replacement value, deferred maintenance needs, capital improvements, and relative priority for maintenance and improvements. The NPS Comprehensive Asset Priority Index provides a model for systematically prioritizing trails and other park assets for repairs, rehabilitation and maintenance. The Index in Excel format could be simplified for use by trail managing entities.

2. **Action:** Establish criteria to assess whether or not the existing trail system has adequate capacity to serve existing and future users without compromising natural and historic resources.

3. **Action:** Reach agreement with townships to maintain trail design standards and conditions suitable for intended uses.

4. **Action:** Promote a Friends group and develop sponsorships to pay for trail sustainability.

5. **Action:** Promote partnerships with special interest groups (examples are equestrian or hiking groups) that can provide funds and/or technical assistance and labor for planning, acquisition, and maintenance.

**J. Stewardship Objective:** Promote conservation actions that can be taken by trail designers, builders, and interested property owners.

1. **Action:** Encourage backyard conservation efforts through enhancing educational opportunities.

2. **Action:** Promote native plantings for terrain restoration.

3. **Action:** Promote land stewardship by providing environmental education of trail users to protect the natural resources, including ways to minimize the spread of invasive species.

4. **Action:** Develop trail buffer guidelines for trail designers, builders, and interested property owners to help preserve ambiance and usability of access routes.

The Goal 4 Working Group would be the logical group within the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership to shepherd the implementation of many of these objectives. The Goal 4 mission is to:

“Enhance recreational and educational experiences related to natural and cultural heritage, and to strengthen historic communities within the Hopewell/Big Woods region of the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area”.

The major areas of focus for this group are: Trails, Recreation, River Aesthetics, Quality of Life issues, and Outreach.
In 2007, Natural Lands Trust engaged staff of the National Park Service’s Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program (NPS RTCA) to aid the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership in identifying the existing recreational resources. This effort represented a first step in developing the vision and goals for recreation and trails in the Hopewell Big Woods. NPS RTCA worked with county and local government and conservation organizations to locate sources for GIS-based and hard copy map data on trails within the Hopewell Big Woods. NPS RTCA interviewed resource managers entrusted with the care of recreational facilities and trails, and local government representatives, conservation organizations and recreational interests. NPS RTCA also reviewed regional and local open space and recreation plans.

A preliminary list of issues and opportunities in trail development, and contacts for recreational groups, were identified. Natural Lands Trust began developing a GIS-based trails database. The database distinguished trails in four categories:

- Proposed only in concept
- Formally recognized in regional or local plans for future development
- Under design or construction
- Complete, on the ground and open to the public

Natural Lands Trust created a base map to include the trails information. A preliminary matrix was developed to supplement the map data with information on trail segment length, start and end points, physical condition, status of development, key destinations and trailheads, and types of recreational use permitted or envisioned. The map and matrix are works in progress that will continue to be refined as individual trail projects get under way. Completion of the regional trail system through the Hopewell Big Woods is anticipated within five to ten years, although refinements to trail alignments crossing private property may continue beyond that timeframe.

NPS RTCA facilitated a series of four regional trail planning workshops in 2007 at French Creek State Park, two with the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership and two specific to recreation interests. The first workshop with the Partnership focused on making corrections to the existing base map of trails and recreation facilities throughout the Hopewell Big Woods, and adding new information on proposed trails, key destinations and trailheads. The mapping exercise was followed by a discussion on top priority issues, opportunities and challenges related to trail development and management. Site-specific issues and opportunities were also identified.

The second and third recreation and trails planning workshops focused specifically on trails within French Creek State Park and Hopewell Furnace NHS and existing and potential trail connections between the two parks. Together these two parks form the core of the Hopewell Big Woods recreational and historical experience. The workshops included state park staff, staff of Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, National Park Service staff of the Northeast Region, Chester County Planning Commission representatives, health interests (Chester County Health Department, Brandywine Valley YMCA), Schuylkill River Greenway Association staff, township representatives, and several conservation and recreation organizations (Natural Lands Trust, French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust, International Mountain...
Bicycling Association (IMBA), Pennsylvania Trail Hands (PaTH), Mid-Atlantic Super Series (MASS), Horse-Shoe Trail Conservancy, and Elverson Walking Club. Several of these groups help maintain the trails at French Creek State Park.

The intent of this coordination was to establish a positive dialogue between resource managers and recreation interests. Each group shared its perspective on resource management policies affecting trail development and use, and each gained a better understanding of issues and opportunities from the other's perspective. The workshop participants mapped their favorite trails and destinations within the two parks and areas where they felt there is room for improvement. The information helped the park managers better understand how people use the parks. It also identified the potential for use conflicts and opportunities for how different user groups can work together on areas of common concern.

The information was also used to help plan an event with the International Mountain Biking Association’s (IMBA) Trail Care Crew in June of 2007. The intent was for IMBA to evaluate some of the “hot spots” within Hopewell Furnace NHS and French Creek State Park identified through the mapping exercise. This information, added to resource management needs and the parameters of policies and regulations, helped state and national park staff to select the most critical areas that would be the focal points of the Trail Care Crew’s visit. Through this trails assessment process, the parks have developed stronger relationships with recreational clubs. There is increasing advocacy and support for the parks, and more volunteers are interested in monitoring and maintaining the trails.

In addition to the workshops, two surveys of recreational users were conducted, one in conjunction with a recreation and trail planning workshop and one tied to the French Creek Iron Tour, an annual bicycling event. The former survey was focused on local hiking, biking and equestrian groups and the latter on a mix of on road cyclists from throughout the region and those participating in a number of different recreational activities. Both surveys derived a basic recreational user profile, such as gender, age and type of recreation engaged in, and identified the use of local roads as part of the regional trail system. The surveys also established the level of awareness of area trails and asked questions specific to Hopewell Furnace NHS and the proposed Hay Creek Trail.

Additional questions varied between the two surveys. The survey distributed at the recreation and trail planning workshop distinguished how current recreational users are using the trails and roads in French Creek State Park and Hopewell Furnace NHS. It also identified which trails they are using and the frequency of use, how they access the trails, and their trail related needs and concerns. The survey distributed to Iron Tour participants focused on the frequency and type of recreational use of local roads, perceived road conditions for bicycling and other recreational use, length of trips and number and type of travel companions, start and end points for the trips, and stops, activities and destinations preferred.

The fourth workshop in 2007 with the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership shared the results of recreation roundtables for land managers and recreation groups. The workshop also:

- provided a synopsis of the trails assessments, as part of the International Mountain Biking Association’s Subaru/IMBA Trail Care Crew visit to French Creek State Park and Hopewell Furnace NHS;
- explored implications for the overall vision for Hopewell Big Woods trails and recreation;
- shared the results of recreation user surveys;
- began to construct a recreational user profile
- crafted a vision for Hopewell Big Woods trails and recreation; and
- provided sources of assistance and tools for individual trail projects, based on local needs.

Ongoing coordination with the Goal 5 Working Group helped to identify the potential locations and functions of “gateways” into the Hopewell Big Woods which could serve as trailheads and information hubs.

An additional workshop organized with the Goal 4 Working Group brought together many government representatives, landowners, health interests, recreational groups, and a private developer. The
workshop was an opportunity for diverse interests to work together to finalize the draft vision statement for the Hopewell Big Woods Recreation and Trails Network and review issues, opportunities and concerns related to trails and recreation. The participants developed a draft set of goals and actions; considered ways to prioritize trail development and establish feasibility criteria; and agreed a regional approach was necessary to develop and sustain trails in the long-term.

Natural Lands Trust worked with NPS RTCA to develop a map that summarized existing on-road elements of a potential trail system, including designated Pennsylvania Bicycle Routes, Iron & Steel Heritage auto tour routes and Pennsylvania Scenic Byways. The map shows the gateways, discovery centers, and interpretive pods that are part of the Chester County Iron & Steel Heritage Plan and could be linked to the Goal 5 gateways analysis as that process moves forward. The map also shows access points into the off-road regional trail system. The map shows some potential opportunities for combining trailhead facilities such as parking and interpretive signage for both off and on road trail/tour routes. The map indicates opportunities for combining the protection of scenic corridors with context-sensitive safety improvements that benefit both trail users and motorists.

A second map includes information on permitted recreation uses on trails, as well as the intended uses for trails not yet on the ground. There may be potential points of conflict where trail segments with differing permitted uses meet up, or where permitted uses have not been clarified for the public by the managing entity. Future feasibility evaluations will need to identify locations of these potential “hot spots” and physical design approaches or communications strategies to address them.

The previous work of the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership and Goal Working Groups, along with public input, was collected and summarized in the Hopewell Big Woods Trails and Recreation Concept Plan. The Hopewell Big Woods Partnership suggested a relatively brief promotional piece was needed, rather than a detailed, technical report, in order to develop broad public support throughout the region and a greater awareness of the proposal. There is already a high degree of support for the idea of a Hopewell Big Woods Trails and Recreation Network within the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership and among members of the public who have participated in the workshops to develop elements of the Concept Plan. Consistency of the Concept Plan with other local and regional plans is considered imperative. At the same time, the Concept Plan was painted with a broad brush to allow flexibility in how local communities implement the proposal.
The Concept
Characteristics of the Hopewell Big Woods Trails and Recreation Network

Regional trails and river routes currently provide connections between the communities of Hopewell Big Woods and their key resources. While local trails are an important asset to these communities, making regional connections will improve opportunities for recreation and conservation, and also set the stage for regional coordination of sustainable development. The local economies of the region can be connected in support of heritage tourism, through the continued development and improvements to existing trail systems and the completion of new trails linking Reading, Phoenixville and Valley Forge to the Hopewell Big Woods. It is primarily the regional trails that are the focus for this Concept Plan, although potential regional connections to internal park trails and community trail systems are also described in the plan. The regional trails include:

- long distance, off road hiking, biking and equestrian trails;
- the Schuylkill River as a designated water trail;
- two on-road designated Pennsylvania Bicycle Routes; and
- historic routes that include auto tours and scenic roadways with the potential for Pennsylvania Scenic Byway designation.

It is important to note that users of Hopewell Big Woods recreational facilities often engage in more than one type of recreational activity. For instance, bicyclists who use the roads through the Hopewell Big Woods may also engage in other types of recreational activities, including horseback riding, cross-country skiing, fishing, hunting and hiking. Hopewell Big Woods is a recreational mecca for many types of recreational users; therefore, the Hopewell Big Woods Trails and Recreation Concept Plan takes a broad view of “trails,” considering alternative forms of transportation and a variety of recreational uses in the region rather than focusing exclusively on off road trails. The trail system of the region is a major tourist attraction in itself.

Regional trail connectors are community-to-community and community-to-park trail segments. They range from rustic nature trails through state and county parks to more formal, paved routes through urban areas. They may permit single use or multiple uses. Some of the regional trails described below already exist, such as the Schuylkill River Trail, and may be fully or largely complete and open to the public. Other regional trails are envisioned as opportunities for future expansion and improved access to recreational and cultural facilities and historic sites.

Information on trail alignments and status of development contained in this plan was complete as of January, 2009; however, it must be understood that opportunities for re-imagining trail connections are currently under consideration and will evolve over time. Local communities and agencies responsible for trail development and management will consider new opportunities for acquiring easements, environmental and fiscal constraints, needs of trail users, and the details of trail location and design, and make adjustments accordingly.

Iron Heritage and the Double Loop Trail Concept: Overview

The Schuylkill River Trail and Water Trail, following the river’s drainage from west to east, together
form the northern boundary of the Hopewell Big Woods. The French Creek trail system (including the Boar’s Back and Sow Belly trails) is under development along the southern boundary of Hopewell Big Woods. Together, these two regional trail systems could be united by north-south connector trails to form a “double loop” trail system. The north-south connector trails would include one proposed from Birdsboro Borough south to New Morgan and Elverson, forming the western border of the Hopewell Big Woods; a trail proposed to roughly parallel PA Route 345 through French Creek State Park; and North and South Coventry townships’ trail system running along the eastern border of the Hopewell Big Woods.

The proposed “western loop” that is the focus of this Concept Plan consists of regional trails along the peripheries of Hopewell Big Woods – Schuylkill River Trail and Water Trail from Birdsboro east to Pottstown, and the French Creek / Sow Belly Trail from Pughtown to Elverson along the southern border of the Big Woods. These three regional trail systems would be united by the north-south connector trails described above. On-road Pennsylvania Bicycle Route L along PA Route 345 could be included as an additional north-south connector trail. Pennsylvania Bicycle Route S along PA Route 23 would form an on-road alternative to the French Creek trail corridor, paralleling the latter from west to east.

Intersecting the western loop through the heart of the Hopewell Big Woods is the existing Horse-Shoe Trail. This regional trail spine trends northwest to southeast through Berks and Chester counties, accessing French Creek State Park, a regional recreation mecca, and Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, a premier example of an early iron plantation. The trail intersects briefly with and parallels French Creek Trail before turning south through East Nantmeal Township.

The proposed “eastern loop” starts at the eastern edge of the Hopewell Big Woods, beginning with North and South Coventry’s trail system. From this trail system, three regional trail spines – Schuylkill River Trail and the associated Water Trail, and French Creek Trail – extend east along with Pennsylvania Bicycle Route S to converge in Phoenixville. From there the Schuylkill River Trail and Pennsylvania Bicycle Route S continue to Valley Forge, accessing the national park, before diverging to other parts of southeastern Pennsylvania.

The regional trail segments for the proposed eastern and western loops represent a total of more than 50 miles in distance, including the 5-mile Schuylkill River Trail segment from Phoenixville to Valley Forge. Although the primary focus of this Concept Plan is the western loop, it must be acknowledged that the eastern and western loops are integrally linked thematically and culturally through the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area. Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site (PHOTOS 1 AND 2) and Valley Forge National Historical Park represent the early history of the iron industry, while Phoenixville is representative of its later 19th century history.
It should be noted that trail systems with large loop trails are the most attractive type of trails to both mountain bicyclists and on road tour bicyclists. Bicyclists should be able to access multiple trail loops within one day in the Hopewell Big Woods. Parking for trail users would also need to be available along designated loops.

Inherent in the Hopewell Big Woods recreation and trails network is the concept of long-term environmental sustainability and ease of maintenance; therefore, the design and siting of new trails and improvements to existing trails should work with the conservation goals for this area and consider impacts to the environment. The existing Schuylkill River Trail is currently the only trail through the area with some impermeable surfaces and up to twelve feet in width to accommodate multiple uses and large volumes of users. Maintaining the rural, scenic characteristics and ecological integrity of the Hopewell Big Woods will require a sensitive approach to design and development. Impervious surfaces should be minimized or avoided, topographic contours should be followed to the extent possible, existing utility and road corridors should be used where possible, and trail width should be the minimum required for the intended uses.

Described briefly below are each of the regional trails included in the Hopewell Big Woods recreation and trails network, their characteristics and types of uses, key destinations, status of development, and issues related to design, development, maintenance and management.

**Schuylkill River Trail and Schuylkill River Water Trail**

**Schuylkill River Trail**

*Total Trail Miles: 56.05 miles completed and open for use out of 124.71 miles*

*Total Trail Miles to be Completed (Birdsboro to Valley Forge): 14.61 miles*

*Permitted Uses: Varies by trail segment – permits walkers, bicyclists, and generally horses and pets; for the most part, non-motorized uses except on-road portions of trail.*

The Schuylkill River Trail, designated a National Recreation Trail for a significant portion of its length, is the spine of the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area, following the Schuylkill River nearly 125 miles through five counties in southeastern Pennsylvania. Most sections of this accessible, multi-use trail are off road, paved and level. The trail stretches through a landscape that varies from urban and suburban neighborhoods, to farmlands, to heavy industrial sites and accesses major metropolitan areas – Reading, Pottstown, Phoenixville, Norristown and Philadelphia. The trail supports recreational hikers and bikers, as well as people seeking exercise, and tourists visiting the region. It traverses a number of urban areas, including Philadelphia and Reading, where it serves as an important commuter route for pedestrians and cyclists.

The grand vision for this trail began with the Fairmount Park Commission during the 1970s. Montgomery County took on construction of the trail from the Philadelphia County line to Valley Forge, with the result that this first completed section of trail was designated as a National Recreation Trail – the “Philadelphia to Valley Forge Bikeway” in 1976 in time for our nation’s Bicentennial. With the recent completion of the Thun Trail section through Birdsboro, the Hopewell Big Woods portion of the trail is now complete. Sections of the trail from Pottstown to Phoenixville are under development and anticipated to be open for use in 2011, eventually enabling trail users to travel from Philadelphia north to the Schuylkill headwaters in Schuylkill County.

Trail management is coordinated through Schuylkill River Greenway Association with local land managing entities and other partners. Different sections of trail are owned and managed by a number of different entities, including government agencies. The Schuylkill River Heritage Area formed a Trail Council composed of members of each owning or managing entity. The Trail Council is working together with a Trail Steward to create a unified trail system, including a standardized system of signs and brochures. They also developed a standardized method of managing and maintaining the trail, so that users recognize the entire trail as a single unit, rather than a group of interconnected trails.
Schuylkill River Water Trail

Total Trail Miles: 11.8

Permitted Uses: Motorized and non-motorized boating

Paralleling the land based Schuylkill River Trail, the Schuylkill River (PHOTO 3) is a designated water trail within the Pennsylvania water trail system. The water trail idea was born several years ago with the Schuylkill River Sojourn, a 7-day, 112-mile trip on the Schuylkill River that provides a wealth of activities, learning opportunities and fun on the river and in the riverside communities. The water trail takes the boater from the headwaters of the Schuylkill – Little Schuylkill Branch and West Branch – in the heart of coal country. The trail passes by historic river and canal towns, and through the scenic Blue Mountains and State Game Lands, dramatic geologic features such as the Reading Prong, a wealth of parklands, and a variety of settings from the agricultural and rural to suburban to industrial.

The Schuylkill is nicknamed the “Revolutionary River” because its resources represent the themes of the American Revolution, Industrial Revolution and environmental revolution. The Schuylkill River Water Trail offers tremendous opportunities for environmental education and stewardship of natural resources and consequently eco-tourism prospects. Online and printed trail guides are available through the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area at www.schuylkillriver.org/Water_Trail.aspx, along with links to real-time data on water levels, water quality forecasts and safety tips. Unifying directional and orientation signage for the Schuylkill River Water Trail is under development.

There are four public landings adjacent to the Hopewell Big Woods that allow access to the river trail and, to varying extents, the land trail. At River
Mile 61.6 is the Union Township landing, with parking for approximately 25 cars. The landing is located within the Union Township Recreation Area, which has its own internal trail system, access to PA Bicycle Route L along Route 724 and access to the Thun section of the Schuylkill River Trail. At River Mile 57.7 is the Ganshahawny Park landing, owned by Douglass Township, with parking for about 10 cars and picnic tables.

Less than one mile north along the Schuylkill River Trail is located the historic Mouns Jones House, part of the Morlatton Village, the earliest settlement in Berks County. At River Miles 53.8 and 53.6 respectively is the landing at Pottstown Riverfront Park (owner: Pottstown Borough) and Hanover Street boat ramp (owner: North Coventry Township). Both include lots for some 25 cars and are accessible from Ridge Pike or Route 422. Pottstown’s landing includes picnic tables and a trailhead pavilion as well as direct access to the Schuylkill River Trail. It is only a ½-mile walk to historic Pottsgrove Manor.

Currently, the Ganshahawny Park landing does not provide a direct link to the Hopewell Big Woods. The Union Township landing will eventually provide a connection to French Creek State Park via a north-south connector trail through the Sheeder and Yelenoc properties. The landings at Pottstown Riverfront Park and Hanover Street are proposed to connect with the Hopewell Big Woods via on and off road trails through North Coventry Township that would connect to the township’s parklands and French Creek State Park.

An additional landing upstream of the Hopewell Big Woods is located at Gibraltar, near the Allegheny Aqueduct at River Mile 67.9 on the southwest bank. Owned by Berks County, it is unimproved, difficult to spot and not particularly close to the Schuylkill River Trail. The section of water trail south at Birdsboro is
noted in the Schuylkill River Water Trail Guide as a dangerous stretch of river because the current can sweep boats into the Route 82 bridge abutments. It is recommended that paddlers use the channel parallel to the east bank – if it is navigable. The Gibraltar landing currently does not provide direct access via trails into the Hopewell Big Woods.

FRENCH CREEK TRAIL:
BOARS BACK SEGMENT

Total Trail Miles: 5.6 (Elverson to St. Peters Village)
Total Trail Miles Under Development: 2.7 miles from Route 345 to St. Peters Village
Intended Uses: equestrian, bicycling, hiking

Forming the southern section of the Hopewell Big Woods trail loop, the Boars Back trail is under development as the first phase of a five-phase project to build the 15-mile French Creek Trail. The trail would be located on the former railroad bed of the Boars Back Railroad and the Sowbelly Railroad. These short-distance railroads used to transport granite and iron from the area, and the elevated area still exists where the track used to be.

The trail is intended as a multi-use, non-motorized, natural- and crushed-stone surface, providing recreation for hikers, equestrians and bicyclists through some of the most spectacular areas within the Hopewell Big Woods. The trail will be about 10 feet wide. Trail users will be able to access Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, Natural Lands Trust’s Crow’s Nest Preserve, French Creek State Park, State Game Lands 43, and the Horse-Shoe Trail.

A $1.5 million grant from Chester County Commissioners was awarded to French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust for the purchase of easements and to finance the construction. Matching funds are currently being sought. Included in the project is the purchase of three acres of land at Route 345 to build a parking lot and trail head, the purchase of one acre of land in St. Peters Village (PHOTO 4), and the rehabilitation of the St. Peters train station potentially to create offices for the county park rangers and a visitor’s pavilion. Restaurants and bike shops are envisioned as part of the long-term economic benefits for this key destination within the Hopewell Big Woods.

Not all adjacent landowners understand or support the trail’s development, and some dispute the trail corridor’s ownership. The Hopewell Big Woods Partnership can play an important role in explaining the Hopewell Big Woods project, how the trail project fits the vision and goals for the area, and the benefits of trails to the local residents. The Partnership can also allay landowners’ safety and liability concerns, including those related to hunting within State Game Lands 43. It is anticipated that Chester County may lease or may take ownership of the trail corridor in the future.

FRENCH CREEK TRAIL:
SOWBELLY SEGMENT

Total Trail Miles: 11.3 miles from St. Peters Village to Kimberton and 4.2 miles to Phoenixville
Total Trail Miles Completed: 2.0 miles ADA accessible trail in Warwick County Park and on border of East and West Vincent townships, east of Hollow Road
Total Trail Miles Under Development: 0.25
Intended Uses: Equestrian, Bicycling, and Hiking

The Sowbelly Trail is proposed to use the former railroad bed of the Sowbelly Railroad. From St. Peters Village, the Sow Belly Trail accesses Warwick County Park and continues east along French Creek. A short segment of trail uses Pughtown Road in East Vincent Township before continuing off road along French Creek through West Vincent and East Pike land townships as far as Kimberton. An alternative alignment would take the trail off road at Pughtown, roughly paralleling Pughtown Road to the north for about one mile. This alternative alignment would then use Pughtown Road until intersecting with Hoffecker Road. Here the two proposed trail alignments would join. French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust intends to develop the Sowbelly section of the 15-mile French Creek Trail as part of a future phase and has purchased easements on four miles from the Warwick/South Coventry Township border to Hollow Road.

Pughtown Road is critical to the implementation of not only the French Creek Trail, but also two of the auto tours proposed in the Strategic Plan for the
Iron and Steel Heritage Region. Pughtown Road is also designated as Pennsylvania Bicycle Route S. Hollow Road feeds into Pughtown Road from Birchrunville and is a segment of the proposed route for the Pikesland Nails to Rails Trail. A comprehensive assessment of capacity for these local roads will be needed in order to implement the French Creek Trail and the auto tours. Design speed, traffic volumes, and safety issues will need to be addressed for motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians.

Currently the Trust has no plans to extend the Sowbelly Trail to Phoenixville; however, a connection between Kimberton and Phoenixeville has been proposed as part of the Phoenixville Area Regional Comprehensive Plan and Chester County’s Forge to Furnace trail concept. The connection to Warwick County Park will allow trail users to access the park’s Iron Heritage Loop Trail, and provide opportunities to highlight the thematic ties to the larger iron and steel heritage area.

HORSE-SHOE TRAIL

Total Trail Miles: 140 miles

Permitted Uses: Hiking, equestrian permitted along entire trail length; bicycling permitted on some segments

The Horse-Shoe Trail is a long established and primarily equestrian trail that stretches through five counties in southeastern Pennsylvania. From its intersection with the Appalachian Trail—a National Scenic Trail—in Dauphin County, the Horse-Shoe Trail winds through the agricultural landscape of Lebanon and Lancaster counties. From here it extends through the southern corner of rural Berks County, and northern Chester County until it reaches Valley Forge National Historical Park and connects to the Schuylkill River Trail. The Trail runs roughly parallel to I-76, the Pennsylvania Turnpike, between Harrisburg East exit 247 (formerly 19) and Valley Forge exit 326 (formerly 24). Along the way, the Horse-Shoe Trail accesses these features:

- scenic and wild Swatara State Park on the Schuylkill-Lebanon County line;
- Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area;
- French Creek State Park;
- Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site;
- St. Peters Village;
- Warwick County Park; and
- Wharton Esherick House and Studio, a National Historic Landmark in Paoli.

A total of 18.4 miles of the Horse-Shoe Trail traverses the Hopewell Big Woods in Berks and Chester counties. Here it accesses:

- Birdsboro Waters, a recently acquired conservation easement and recreation area;
- French Creek State Park;
- Hopewell Furnace NHS;
- State Game Lands 43;
- St. Peters Village;
- Warwick County Park; and
- Welkinweir, the 162-acre arboretum and headquarter of the non-profit conservation organization Green Valleys Association.

This trail is a major pedestrian and equestrian connector route that links key destinations within the watershed and provides connections to areas outside the watershed. The Horse-Shoe Trail connects to several trails within French Creek State Park, including the Six Penny, Boone and Mill Creek trails. The Horse-Shoe trail is being considered as a designated section of the proposed Highlands Trail within Pennsylvania.

Segments of trails that would later become the Horse-Shoe Trail linked many furnaces such as Coventry, Hopewell, Joanna, and Cornwall, which operated during the Industrial Revolution in the 1700s and 1800s. The non-profit Horse-Shoe Trail Club (recently renamed the Horse-Shoe Trail Conservancy) founded the current trail during the 1920s and largely had completed it in 1935 as a horse riding path from Valley Forge National Historical Park (Valley Forge NHP) to Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site (Hopewell Furnace NHS). Since that time, the Horse-Shoe Trail Conservancy has since maintained it with the help of many volunteers.

Member dues and contributions largely support the preservation and maintenance of the trail.
Started as handshake agreement with farmers, the trail is still largely based on short-term informal agreements with the adjacent landowners. As landowners change, the Horse-Shoe Trail often must be relocated. Working with French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust and Natural Lands Trust, the Horse-Shoe Trail Conservancy is seeking to secure easements and address liability concerns on private property. They are also trying to make the trail truly open to the public, and remove any segments that are still on road. On-road sections are no longer safe due to heavier volumes of traffic, often traveling above the speed limit. The vehicles startle the horses.

The demand for horse trails and their relative scarcity in the region make the Horse-Shoe Trail a valuable recreational resource. People come from hundreds of miles away to ride the trail. In addition, Hopewell Big Woods has the support infrastructure for horseback riders, including stables and horse farms. Examples include:

- Wyndsor Farm in Elverson, a full service boarding and training facility;
- Magic Hill Farm in Douglassville, a horse training farm;
- Ryerss Home for Aged Equines in Coventryville; and
- horse equipment stores in Pottstown and Elverson.

Some of these properties provide the opportunity to develop additional horse trails on agricultural lands. Existing plans and studies recognize the Horse-Shoe Trail; however, the trail has not been formally adopted in local ordinances. The PA DCNR recently placed the trail on its most endangered list. A feasibility study funded through the PA DCNR is under way to:

- evaluate potential alignments in Berks County for 29 miles of trail and analyze the demand for trail facilities;
- identify environmental constraints;
- determine the legal feasibility of relocating the trail off-road through fee simple acquisition, easements, or other forms of agreement;
- determine costs for relocating the trail; and
- outline the financial options for the acquisition, design, construction, operation, and maintenance components of the trail.

The feasibility study also incorporates the results of the Horse-Shoe Trail Conservancy’s strategic planning.

Meanwhile, the Horse-Shoe Trail Conservancy continues to seek opportunities for securing more permanent alignments through private and public property. The trail segment between I-76 and PA Route 4082 in Robeson Township is a priority for securing a permanent right-of-way. Local developers have committed to routing a connector trail through the Bryn Eyre development, provided that a connection can be made from the existing Horse-Shoe Trail through private property south to Bryn Eyre. A three-mile section of trail east of I-76 could be re-routed south into New Morgan, tying into a proposed trail along Route 10 through the subdivision. A trail connection to Joanna Furnace could also be developed.

The area around Glen Morgan Lake has been noted as an Important Bird Area by the PA Audubon Society. This trail could link State Game Lands 43 and 52 with French Creek State Park and could benefit a variety of recreational user groups, including hunters. French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust is offering assistance to the Horse-Shoe Trail Conservancy to convey land leased to the Pennsylvania Game Commission to Chester County in order to permanently protect the Horse-Shoe Trail easement through State Game Lands 43.

**Birdsboro to Elverson via Hay Creek Corridor**

**Total Trail Miles:** 9.7

**Total Rail Miles to be Developed (Birdsboro to Elverson):** Currently approximately ¼ mile between Birdsboro and Birdsboro Waters

The former proposed trail alignment for the western border of the Hopewell Big Woods between Birdsboro and Elverson was recently abandoned by Berks County, the trail’s sponsor, due to the concerns of landowners and private property rights issues. Known as the Hay Creek Trail, it proposed using an abandoned Norfolk Southern rail line that followed
Hay Creek south from Birdsboro to Elverson. The trail would have passed through Union, Robeson and Caernarvon townships, and New Morgan Borough. The rail line had for the most part reverted back to adjacent property owners, although existing easements for the railbed and previous ownership by the rail company had been retained in limited sections. Easements would have been needed from 65 landowners along some 10 miles of trail corridor, making trail development a complex and expensive process.

An off-road trail from Birdsboro to Elverson remains a high priority for Chester and Berks counties and other Hopewell Big Woods partners. The Schuylkill River Trail through Birdsboro was recently completed, and connecting the Schuylkill River Trail with a north-south spur trail in this area would be desirable. Such a trail would cut through the heart of the Hopewell Big Woods, Birdsboro Waters recreational lands, and the Pennsylvania Highlands Region, providing a critical north-south connection with other regional trails and with the potential to intersect the Horse-Shoe Trail. A north-south trail spur is currently under development through French Creek State Park and is intended to utilize connections through properties on the northern end of the park. The New Morgan Borough/Bryn Eyre section to the south could eventually connect to Reading area trails now under development, as the Angelica Trail is anticipated for completion as far as Nolde Forest in 2009. The Birdsboro / New Morgan Connector would access the western edge of French Creek State Park as well as the historic community of Elverson and Joanna Furnace.

The recent abandonment of much of PA Route 82 south of Birdsboro paves the way for an alternative trail route that closely parallels the previous rail corridor alignment. Concurrently, the Birdsboro Waters Master Site Plan is under way which is studying the feasibility of renovating the historic Millard/Tucci House as an environmental education center. The Master Site Plan will address appropriate recreational uses of more than 1,800 acres of this site, which is bisected by Route 82. Hay Creek Watershed Association recently acquired the Millard/Tucci property, which is the gateway to Birdsboro Waters as well as the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area. Rock climbing, orienteering and excellent trout fishing are available as well as foot trails.

The first bridge south of Birdsboro (adjacent to the Millard/Tucci House) and the third bridge have been removed and the second bridge (flood damaged) and fourth bridge (Trap Rock bridge) remain. A total of three bridges are needed for the trail to span Hay Creek, unless an alternate route can be acquired.

As a result of PennDOT’s recent decision not to repair and reopen PA Route 82 south of Birdsboro Borough, which has been closed since 1987 due to flood damage, the Pennsylvania Environmental Council is taking the lead to convene the various affected governmental agencies to discuss the divestment options for PA Route 82. Issues to be discussed include ownership options, trail potential and design considerations, needed improvements, cost estimates, and maintenance. A Vision and Action Plan for PA Route 82, completed in mid-2009, was created and will be presented to PennDOT, and incorporated into the Birdsboro Waters Master Site Plan and Millard/Tucci House Feasibility Study.

A multi-use trail could utilize existing PA Route 82. Alternatively, a separate side path could be created for those sections of PA Route 82 further south that will not be abandoned. It is possible that select portions of the abandoned rail corridor could be utilized in addition to portions of PA Route 82, with the concurrence of adjacent landowners. FHWA will require PennDOT to fund improvements which could include trail heads, parking areas, and other trail related amenities.

**Pennsylvania Bicycle Route L**

*Total Trail Miles: 225 miles*

*Miles through Hopewell Big Woods: 10.3 *

*Permitted Uses: Bicycling only*

Designated and signed in 2001, Pennsylvania Bicycle Route L extends north to south throughout the entire Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, traversing the eastern portion of the Commonwealth from Susquehanna County in the north (just south of Binghamton, NY) to Chester County in the south (just north of Wilmington, DE). PA Bicycle Route
L crosses 10 counties – Chester, Delaware, Berks, Lehigh, Northampton, Carbon, Luzerne, Lackawanna, Susquehanna and Wayne. It passes close to the major metropolitan areas of Scranton, Allentown, and Philadelphia, while retaining the rural charm that characterizes much of Pennsylvania.

PA Bicycle Route L is on road, as are all designated PA Bicycle Routes. In Berks County, it follows PA Routes 724 and 345 through Birdsboro, heading south through French Creek State Park and Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site on PA Route 345 into northern Chester County. PA Bicycle Route L then heads south through the Village of Warwick, crossing PA Route 23 and PA Route 401, a scenic roadway. PA Bicycle Route L continues on PA Route 345, crossing underneath I-76 in West Nantmeal Township. The route is critical because currently it is the only existing, direct north-south trail connection between the Schuylkill River Trail and Boars Back / French Creek Trail system within the Hopewell Big Woods. A few additional off road north-south trail connections are planned or currently in the design stage.

Surveys have indicated that bicycle touring and special events using the roads through this area are quite popular. PA Route 345 is adequately signed for orientation to PA Bicycle Route L. The narrow road is challenging for bicyclists because it has no shoulders and poor lines of sight due to several sharp bends. In addition, motorists may exceed the 35 to 45 mph speed limits on this road. The intersection with PA Route 23 does not include a light or stop sign for motorists approaching PA Route 345 from PA Route 23. There is also a sharp incline from south to north along PA Route 345, making it difficult for bicyclists and motorists approaching the intersection with PA Route 23 from the south to see other motorists over the rise who may be approaching the intersection.

For PA Bicycle Route L to function effectively as a trail through Hopewell Big Woods, the route would need to be taken off road as a separate side path, at least in some sections, or shoulders added to PA Route 345. Safety signage and crossings with lights may be needed at certain key intersections. The townships could work with PennDOT to evaluate specific enhancements needed, including redesign and/or relocation of PA Route 345, for safety. There is the potential to utilize an off road trail connection through French Creek State Park which is planned to roughly parallel PA Route 345.

Pennsylvania Bicycle Route S

Total Trail Miles: 435 miles

Miles through Hopewell Big Woods: 14.5

Permitted Uses: Bicycling only

The longest Pennsylvania Bicycle Route, Bicycle Route S extends 435 miles from Washington County (east of Wheeling, WV) to Washington Crossing State Park on the Delaware River in Bucks County, and skirts the metropolitan areas of Pittsburgh, York, Lancaster, and Philadelphia. The route, designated and signed in 2001, stretches across southern Pennsylvania through 16 counties – Washington, Allegheny, Westmoreland, Fayette, Somerset, Bedford, Fulton, Huntingdon, Franklin, Adams, York, Lancaster, Berks, Chester, Montgomery, and Bucks. This spectacular route includes 65 miles along the Youghiogheny River and Allegheny Highlands Rail-Trail through southwest Pennsylvania, a ride that saves thousands of vertical feet of steep climbing.

In Berks County, PA Bicycle Route S follows Route 23 through Churchtown. At this point it is also following the auto tour route for the Colonial Forge to Furnace Trail (See below.) Heading east through Morgantown, PA Bicycle Route S enters Chester County at Elverson, on the border of the Hopewell Big Woods. PA Bicycle Route S continues along Route 23, intersecting with PA Bicycle Route L near Warwick and passing to the south of PA Game Lands 43. Further east, PA Bicycle Route S accesses Warwick County Park and continues past Coventryville. At Bucktown, PA Bicycle Route S diverts south briefly onto Route 100 to Pughtown, where the route turns onto Pughtown Road, roughly paralleling the planned off road French Creek Trail. Heading southeast on a variety of local roads, the bicycle route passes south of Phoenixville and accesses Valley Forge National Historical Park via Pawlings Road.

Besides the Schuylkill River Trail, PA Bicycle Route S represents the only existing, direct east-west trail through the Hopewell Big Woods. The 15-mile French Creek Trail is planned to also serve that
Hopewell Big Woods Trails and Recreation Concept Plan

Purpose and will roughly parallel PA Bicycle Route S. Surveys have indicated that bicycle touring and special events using the roads through this area are quite popular. PA Route 23 is signed for orientation to PA Bicycle Route S. The road has shoulders and appears relatively straight and level for bicycling. In addition, there are sidewalks on both sides of the street within Elverson, although it is not clear whether these are adequate for both pedestrian and bicycle passage. Traffic is becoming more congested on this road and motorists sometimes exceed the speed limit.

Bicycling safety could be improved for PA Bicycle Route S through Hopewell Big Woods. While the route would not necessarily need a side path separated from the road, additional safety signage could be added and the shoulders widened. Safety signage and crossings with lights may be needed at certain key intersections. Another option is for the townships to step up enforcement of the speed limit. The townships could work with PennDOT to evaluate specific enhancements needed for safety.

Auto Tour Routes and Scenic Byways

Iron and Steel Heritage Road Tours

Chester County has the nation’s longest history of iron and steel production, dating back to the early 1700s, and one of the highest concentrations of iron and steel industry historic sites in the country. The Iron and Steel Heritage Region is bounded to the west by Lancaster County and its rural Amish farmland, to the north by the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area to the east by Valley Forge National Historical Park, and to the south/southeast by the Brandywine Valley and the City of Philadelphia.

Chester County and its municipalities adopted a Strategic Plan for the Iron and Steel Heritage Region that is intended to preserve, protect, and promote the region’s historic, cultural and natural resources. The plan can also help foster economic growth and revitalization, and increase awareness and appreciation of the region’s unique identity as the birthplace of the nation’s first industrial revolution. The Strategic Plan focuses on a select number of significant heritage resources located in Chester, Berks, Montgomery, and Lancaster counties that tell the story of the evolution of America’s early iron and steel industry and its inherent ties to colonial America and the birth of the nation.

The Plan focuses on the evolution of the iron and steel industry in Chester County from the early 1700s to the present, and includes historic, cultural, and greenway links to neighboring Lancaster and Berks counties. Unique in the nation, this heritage area is where visitors can explore iron industry vestiges from its 18th century infancy, observe 19th century technological innovations and industry expansion, and learn about 20th century international steel markets – all within a radius of 35 miles. Through partnerships with public and private sites, the plan recommends the establishment of various levels of visitors’ centers, heritage driving loops, greenway trails, visitor amenities, and a general marketing plan. Three heritage auto tour loops are proposed: Colonial Forge & Furnace Trail, Green Hills & Steel Mills, and Pikeland Nails to Rails Trail.

Of the three auto tour loops, only the Colonial Forge & Furnace Trail loops through the heart of the Hopewell Big Woods. It has been designated and the route signed by Chester County, although other promotional materials and information for tourists has not been developed. The proposed gateways within Hopewell Big Woods are Morgantown and Hopewell Furnace NHS, with the proposed Visitor Hub at Warwick County Park, and Interpretive Pods located at Warwick County Park, Hopewell Furnace NHS, and Joanna Furnace. The auto loop tour would utilize local roads, including PA Routes 23 and 345, designated Pennsylvania Bicycle Routes. The auto loop tour would physically connect and interpret 29 sites associated with the early iron industry, including furnaces and iron works from the 18th century, the mines that provided the raw materials, and historic villages and towns serving these enterprises such as Elverson, Coventryville, Churchtown and St. Peters Village.

Gateways on the peripheries of the heritage area are designed to provide orientation and an overview to those visiting the heritage area. Each gateway location would provide information, including a display map, brochures, information concerning events,
specific tour routes and visitor services information. Gateway structures that house this information may range in size from full discovery center facilities to a kiosk appropriately placed where high visibility or exposure to travelers can be provided. Additional gateways proposed include Pottstown’s Pottsgrove Manor, which is not connected to a particular auto tour, and Phoenixville’s Visitor Facility and Sculpture Garden and Valley Forge National Historical Park, which are both included in the Pikeland Nails to Rails Trail.

Discovery Centers are the major gateways to each of the subregions represented by the auto loop tours. There is only one Discovery Center for each loop tour, and each is proposed to provide comprehensive visitor information for these distinct tourism regions within the larger Iron and Steel Heritage Area. Each discovery center is also intended to consolidate the most essential information about the entire heritage area in the proposed locations. Discovery Centers may include interpretive displays, museums, visitor services, and are designed to enhance gateway functions. Each is designed to provide answers to the questions, What is this place?, What is there to do here? and How do I get there? Each is designed to open the door to the heritage region and provide a passageway for people to explore a portion of the heritage region and landscape. Morgantown is the proposed Discovery Center for the Colonial Forge & Furnace Trail, Coatesville for the Green Hills and Steel Mills Trail, and Phoenixville for the Pike-land Nails to Rails Trail.

Visitor Hubs are designed to support some of the gateway functions at locations that are internal to the heritage region and centrally located. Since most heritage sites and interpretive facilities are located inside the perimeter of gateways, the hubs serve to provide orientation from locations within the heritage area that are associated with significant clusters of heritage resources. Just as visitors may be greeted by gateways at the edges of the heritage region, they may receive orientation at hubs from within the heritage area, at which point they may proceed to explore sites and resources located outward from each of the hubs. Currently Chester County park facilities are proposed to serve this function, as they already contain structures that can serve to orient visitors and provide space for display information. Warwick County Park is the proposed Visitor Hub within Hopewell Big Woods. Additional hubs might be established over time as appropriate locations are identified. Each of these hubs would include displays of interpretive materials featuring some aspect of key heritage area themes that have not yet been developed.

Interpretive Pods are facilities designed to tell the stories of the iron and steel industry and the people that are part of it. Interpretive Pods are context-based, where specific elements of the iron and steel story are told. Each is designed, by virtue of its location, unique attributes and/or physical features and improvements to tell a part of the heritage story in such a way as to make the iron and steel history, culture, or scenery accessible and understandable to visitors and residents. Interpretive Pods can also be viewed as places that flesh out components of interpretive themes and answer questions raised at gateways and discovery centers. The Colonial Forge & Furnace Trail includes Interpretive Pods at Joanna Furnace, Warwick County Park (colliers’ trails and Coventry Forge), possibly St. Peters Village (limestone quarry and French Creek Forge dam), possibly Coventryville Historic District and Coventry House, and Hopewell Furnace NHS.

Development of the three initial driving tours that feature visitor access to scenic creeks, valleys and vistas within the region are proposed as early implementation projects to enhance the visitor experience of the heritage area. These three initial driving tours can serve as a backdrop for developing heritage area themes. The Colonial Forge and Furnace driving tour and several existing and proposed trail linkages (e.g., Struble Trail, Horseshoe Trail and others) can form the core of the experience linking resources and communities as an organizing tool within the Hopewell Big Woods. The driving tour would be integrated with the Hopewell Big Woods trails system such that a system of car, bike and pedestrian routes would provide diverse recreational opportunities that can be combined with the heritage experience.

A coordinated set of interpretive programs could be designed to use the themes and to tell the story of
the region through the proposed driving tours, trails and other heritage venues. There will be a need to coordinate with existing interpretive and educational organizations and entities to develop and enhance initiatives that will shape the visitor's interpretive experience along the tour route.

The PA Route 23 and PA Route 345/82 corridors serve as the primary interconnecting spines for the heritage region, together touching on all three auto tours. They are also designated Pennsylvania Bicycle Routes and major routes through the Hopewell Big Woods. The scenic value and orientation potential for these road corridors should be protected and enhanced, perhaps through designation as PA Scenic Byways. Traffic calming strategies and improvements for bicyclists and pedestrians should be considered, such as widening the roads minimally to accommodate a bike lane and installing safety signs, crossings and lights at busy intersections.

The Colonial Forge & Furnace and other auto tours should be linked to these corridors to facilitate visitor orientation and access. Minimal signage should be sited on these road corridors – adequate to indicate access to the auto loop tours but not so much as to contribute to “visual clutter.” Completion of the “core” tour loops will link major historical, cultural, natural, and recreational venues, allowing for an enhanced visitor experience.

Other local roads that are part of the proposed Colonial Forge & Furnace Trail and also regularly used by bicyclists include Hopewell Road, Park Road, Harmonyville Road, Geigertown Road, St. Peter’s Road, and PA Route 10. Bicyclists who use these roads may travel for recreation or commuting, and travel distances from five miles upwards of 75 miles. They may travel solo, with family or friends, or with tour groups.

A recent survey of bicyclists in the area indicated a desire for improvements to road safety for recreational users, while at the same time more off road recreational opportunities should also be provided to serve a variety of users and ultimately help protect the land, preserve green space and scenic beauty, and promote a sense of community. Bicyclists commented specifically on their perception that wider roads were needed with more shoulders for safe on-road bicycling, improvements to road surfaces would be needed, and that the high volume of traffic should be addressed as a potential contributor to unsafe conditions for recreational users.

Promotion of local roads as part of a scenic auto tour route should be paired with safety improvements for bicyclists. A comprehensive assessment of local roads, whether part of the Iron and Steel Heritage tours or not, is needed to evaluate relative safety for bicycling. Safe on-road routes for bicyclists should be designated and publicized. If the auto loop tour routes can not be improved for bicycling safety, alternative routes for bicycling should be provided.

SCENIC BYWAYS

The network of roads within the Hopewell Big Woods provides a pleasant and scenic means to link visitors with heritage resources. These roads traverse a variety of rural and forested scenic landscapes, offering panoramic and dramatic viewsheds as well as more intimate drives through woods and along creeks. These scenic roadways are an important part of the heritage experience and valuable because they help retain the region’s rural character and attract visitors interested in the area’s history and heritage. They provide the first impressions of the region for visitors and are visible expressions of the area’s themes and stories. For instance, creekside views can be related to Iron and Steel Heritage themes since these same creeks provided the source of power to operate earlier forge and furnace plantations. Likewise there are panoramic views of many former limestone quarries and iron ore mining sites scattered throughout the Hopewell Big Woods that could be interpreted as part of a program or tour.

All of the municipalities within the Northern Federation have identified scenic roads in their respective open space, recreation and environmental resources plans even though the criteria or process used to define and identify them differ. Within the Hopewell Big Woods, PA Route 23 and PA Route 401 / Conestoga Road are locally acknowledged scenic roadways, and PA Route 23 is also a designated Pennsylvania Bike Route.

Both routes could potentially be nominated as a Pennsylvania Scenic Byways. Other roadways that
are part of the Colonial Forge and Furnace auto tour may also be evaluated as potential Pennsylvania Scenic Byways. Pennsylvania Scenic Byways are independent routes that have scenic, historic, cultural, archeological, natural or recreational features that are considered representative, unique, irreplaceable or distinctly characteristic of an area. There are 10 designated Scenic Byways in Pennsylvania, including the Exton Bypass on Route 30 and the Blue Route in southeastern Pennsylvania.

PennDOT designates Pennsylvania Scenic Byways in support of local planning efforts to enhance and improve the visual impact of specific routes, to maintain the natural resources and intrinsic qualities along specific routes, and to educate residents and visitors on the history and culture of the Commonwealth. The Pennsylvania program is an offspring of the National Scenic Byways Program.

Any governmental entity can nominate a federal, state or local road, or portion thereof, for consideration by PennDOT. Pennsylvania Scenic Byways can also be designated by the Pennsylvania General Assembly. Pennsylvania Scenic Byways become eligible for federal scenic byway funds and opportunities for enhanced funding in related state programs. The designation limits the type of advertising that may be placed along the roads and gives them special recognition on state maps. Local governments are required to develop a corridor management plan for the designated routes. The corridor management plans would provide an opportunity for incorporating bike paths along the scenic road corridors.

In addition, there are several programs available to local governments to help maintain the scenic quality and character along the roadways. These include PennDOT’s Adopt-a-Highway Program to reduce litter and the overall cost of litter removal in Pennsylvania, and the Great Pennsylvania Clean-up Program, which involves communities in organizing and conducting local cleanups - recruiting volunteers, promoting the event, and reporting the results for inclusion in statewide and national cleanup totals.

**Regional Trail Connections to Internal Park Trails and Community Pathway/Trail Systems**

At workshops with the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership, local residents and recreational user groups, it was clear that local communities are interested in improving existing access points from the communities to the regional trail system and adding new trail connections. While communities within the Hopewell Big Woods understand some of the potential economic benefits in developing the long-distance trails, a more immediate priority is to enhance the quality of the residents' environment and their health, safety and well being. Communities expressed the need for a network of safe, contiguous trail connectors throughout the Hopewell Big Woods so that residents can walk or bike throughout the entire system.

The trails network should consider differences in mobility, ability, and the type of experience desired. The challenge is that local municipalities often use different design standards for their multiple and single use trail systems. For instance, North Coventry Township identifies three types of trails – regional, rural, and community. Rural is typically a natural walking path through public parklands; regional includes long-distance trails crossing jurisdictions; and community trails are local trail networks in urban areas that can include sidewalks. Each is associated with different design standards. Chester County's design standards relating to type of class and use may be applicable across the Hopewell Big Woods.

The Hopewell Big Woods Trails and Recreation Concept Plan identifies priority connections to the regional trail system from internal community pathway/trail systems, and the infrastructure and programs needed to support their development. The Concept Plan does not make recommendations regarding the classification system and design standards that should be applied to trails within the Hopewell Big Woods. Nor does the Concept Plan map all of the internal and community-based trail networks within the Hopewell Big Woods. The priority physical connections to the regional trail system from internal community trail systems, and to key destinations such as parks and historic sites are described.
below. These are connections that are currently under development or proposed for the future. These additional access points into the regional trail system from smaller community-based trails and pathways include urban sidewalks and paved pathways as well as more traditional off-road recreational trails.

Additional priority programmatic and infrastructure needs can be divided into 1) distribution of information about the existing trail system to the public, as well as inventory information to help plan additional trail access points and support facilities, and 2) development of trail user support infrastructure at existing and new access points, such as parking, trailheads and alternative transportation. The objectives and actions that address these needs are described in IV. Trails and Recreation in the Hopewell Big Woods Landscape – Challenges and Opportunities (pp. 4-7).

Woody’s Woods / Coventry Woods Connector

Three proposed trail segments would complete an approximately 8-mile loop through the largest tracts of public land and private preserves within the Hopewell Big Woods. Residents of St. Peter’s Village and Coventryville could directly access this loop.

The first trail segment consists of a connection between Coventry Woods and French Creek State Park’s eastern boundary. Coventry Woods facilities include a pavilion, picnic area and parking at its west end, although Coventry Woods (PHOTO 5) is generally considered a Wilderness Area. The protected area has been expanded to include over 400 acres of contiguous forest. Existing trail at the western end of Coventry Woods would continue west to access French Creek State Park’s Mill Creek Trail through a recently acquired private tract. The trail segment is located in North Coventry Township.
On-road options were considered for a portion of this trail connection; however, no option has yet been chosen. North Coventry Township intends to dead end the trail for now at the state park border. Environmental clearances are needed from the Commonwealth, and there are physical obstacles such as wet soil and very rocky terrain where the trail would enter the state park. It is possible to use an old logging road to go uphill from the North Coventry property in order to avoid first order streams. Heading south along this road will impact the streams.

The second trail segment is 0.43 miles in length and is comprised of existing and proposed off-road and on-road (Chestnut Hill and Coventryville roads) trail segments connecting the east end of Coventry Woods in North Coventry Township with the northern tip of Woody’s Woods in South Coventry Township. Woody’s Woods includes an entrance and parking lot off of Harmonyville Road at the park’s northern tip. An additional entrance/parking area is available off of Coventryville Road, although otherwise the park is served only by old logging roads as trails. The proposed trail connector ties into the existing trail systems within each park. Development of this trail segment is a priority for the township; however, the township will need to address trail corridor encroachments.

The third proposed trail segment is 0.85 miles in length and is off road. It would connect the southern tip of Woody’s Woods in South Coventry Township with the northeastern edge of Warwick County Park in Warwick Township. This trail segment bypasses the historic town of Coventryville to its west, although residents would have direct access to the Pennsylvania Bicycle Route on PA Route 23 and French Creek Trail, both of which intersect the Woody’s Woods trail connector at Warwick County Park. A ped/bike crossing for the intersection at Ridge Road and Coventryville Road and the installation of a separate side path along Coventryville Road would make the existing parking area/trailhead at Warwick County Park more accessible.

North and South Coventry townships both formally recognize trail systems within their comprehensive plans, although implementation is not complete. North Coventry Township would like to create a multi-use trail – bikes, pedestrians, equestrians – using its “rural trail” classification and design standards, which may not work for all of these uses. ATVs are not permitted on township trails.

POTTSTOWN AND NORTH COVENTRY TOWNSHIP’S TRAIL SYSTEM

An interlocking series of on and off road trail segments is proposed to connect North Coventry Township with Pottstown and the Schuylkill River Trail. These trail segments are major connectors that allow access from North Coventry communities and the major population center of Pottstown south into the regional trail system traversing the heart of Hopewell Big Woods. The communities of South Pottstown, Kenilworth and Pottstown Landing would be tied into the North Coventry trail system, with access to Woody’s Woods and Coventry Woods.

An approximately 2-mile trail section is planned to extend from the north side of Coventry Woods to PA Route 724 and the Schuylkill River, near the junction of Berks, Chester and Montgomery counties at West Pottsgrove. Consisting of on and off road trail segments, it would traverse private property as well as public parklands. The trail segment would continue for another 2 miles east along the south side of the Schuylkill River, joining existing sections of the Schuylkill River Trail at Route 100. Access to a riverfront park with parking would be available, and the trail would access the headquarters of the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area in Pottstown.

A second trail section would continue south along Laurelwood Road to West Schuylkill Road and continue on road east along West Schuylkill Road until reaching South Hanover Street. The trail would head south along South Hanover Street, traversing a municipal park before heading back onto South Hanover Street. Heading south on Laurelwood Road, this trail segment veers west across North Coventry Township on a variety of routes, both off and on road. The trail heads south and follows St. Peters Road briefly from east to west before heading south into Coventry Woods.

A third trail section is proposed to head east and then south from the junction of Route 100 and South Hanover Street for approximately 1 mile before
heading west north of Harmonyville Road. The mainly off road trail section would roughly parallel Harmonyville Road, crossing Pigeon Creek and the North-South Coventry township boundary. At the township boundary, the trail would head south into the northern tip of Woody’s Woods.

The selection of trail alignments and the design and treatment of these trails calls for coordination between North Coventry Township, Montgomery and Chester County planning departments, and Pottstown Borough to ensure consistency. It appears that the Pottstown Regional Trails Plan is proposing an alternative trail alignment that primarily uses a series of local roads south from the Schuylkill Riverfront at the junction of Route 100. These roads include West Schuylkill Road, Sheep Hill Road, St. Peter’s Road, and portions of Harmonyville Road. The proposed trail alignment is off road where it traverses Coventry Woods and proposes to enter French Creek State Park.

**MONOCACY HILL CONNECTION WITH FRENCH CREEK STATE PARK**

A 2-mile trail connection is proposed that would link the Union Township Recreation Area and the Schuylkill River Trail with newly acquired lands at the northern end of French Creek State Park. Two properties will help make the connection to the state park. The Sheeder property is adjacent to French Creek State Park and represents the first part of the connection between the state park and Thun Trail/ Schuylkill River Trail east of Birdsboro. The Sheeder property has been acquired by Natural Lands Trust (NLT) for the state park.

Adjacent to the north side of the Sheeder property is the Yelenoc property. Berks County Planning Commission has committed $700,000 in open space funds for the acquisition of the Yelenoc property. Currently, there are no existing north-south trail connections through the Hopewell Big Woods except for Pennsylvania Bicycle Route L, strictly an on-road route.

PA DCNR is working with state park staff on the design of the new trail alignment through the state park. The project is in the preliminary planning stages. Several alignment options are currently under consideration, including the use of an old road to the northwest of Hopewell Furnace NHS, coupled with off road segments through the woods. A connection with PA Route 345 would potentially allow the use of the existing trailhead and parking area with access to the Six Penny and Orange trails.

There are currently no trails in the northern section of the state park. The development of a new trail through this area would provide an opportunity for a northern gateway into the state park, and the possibility of developing interpretative materials highlighting the historic and natural resources. The planning and design of the proposed trail must address complex environmental challenges relating to the presence of rare, threatened and endangered species; stream crossings; and steep slopes. Concurrently, there are safety issues related to the presence of an abandoned quarry near the proposed trail corridor. The quarry is currently the scene of unauthorized activities and trash would need to be cleared from the perimeter. It is not clear if Departmental policy will allow for public access to the quarry, even if certain safeguards are put in place.

The design and use of the new trail within French Creek State Park would conform to the current state park standards. It would be a dirt surface, and primarily used by hikers, with the possibility of equestrian and mountain biking. Design features to ensure stability and long-term viability of the trail and practicality for multiple uses would be needed.

The northern end of the proposed trail would tie into an existing trailhead at the Schuylkill River Trail. There is the potential to connect to a proposed trail through Amity north of the Schuylkill River, since this trail ties into the Schuylkill River Trail just ½ a mile east of the proposed connector to French Creek State Park. Just 1/4 of a mile to the west the Schuylkill River accesses the Union Township Recreation Area, which has its own internal trail system and a variety of recreational facilities, including one of the designated Schuylkill River Water Trail landing sites.

The existing and proposed trailheads for those trails that connect with the Schuylkill River Trail should include signage and the logo indicating the Hopewell Big Woods, and direct access from Monocacy Hill to those connecting trails should be pro-
vided. The intersection of PA Bicycle Route L (PA Route 724), the Leaf Creek Trail, and Schuylkill River Trail near Monocacy Hill would include a trailhead. Parking, water fountains, restrooms and bike racks should be considered at this location, along with signage indicating the rules for each trail, permitted uses, and nearby attractions.

**MORGANTOWN TO NEW MORGAN CONNECTOR**

Morgantown is located at the junction of I-76, PA Route 10 and PA Route 23. PA Route 23 is a designated Pennsylvania Bicycle Route and a scenic road that is designated as an auto tour route by Chester County. Given its location at the junction of major roads into the region, and its designation as a proposed “Discovery Center” for the auto tour route, Morgantown is an important gateway into the Hopewell Big Woods.

The proximity of Bylers Iron Mines, Bethlehem Cuba Mines, and Joanna Furnace make the physical and thematic connection to Morgantown important. The PA Route 10 corridor is a critical link between Morgantown and the area’s historic and recreational assets. PA Route 10 enables visitors to the area and New Morgan and Robeson Township residents to access not only Joanna Furnace and view the mine sites but also visit the area’s premier recreational venues – French Creek State Park and State Game Lands 43. PA Route 10 can serve as an alternative north-south trail connection (on or off road) to PA Route 82.

As the new town of Bryn Eyre develops, it will be important to protect the scenic qualities of the Route 10 corridor from Morgantown to the New Morgan Connector and Joanna Furnace. Accommodations for safety – for instance, a separate side path, crossings at intersections, and stop signs – should be considered for bicyclists and pedestrians to travel this corridor.

**CROW’S NEST PRESERVE AND HOPEWELL FURNACE NHS CONNECTIONS WITH FRENCH CREEK STATE PARK**

The privately owned Crow’s Nest Preserve, managed by Natural Lands Trust, is 600+ acres of exemplary Piedmont habitat dissected by French Creek, designated by the Commonwealth as an “Exceptional Value” stream. Hiking trails take visitors through forests of oak, hickory, tulip poplar, beech, maple and spicebush; through grassland meadows and wildflowers; and through crop fields reflecting the tradition of Chester County farming. Visitors can see and hear a diversity of birds and mammals, which is why the Preserve is part of an Important Bird and Important Mammal Area.

The northern tip of Crow’s Nest Preserve touches Hopewell Furnace NHS, while another “arm” of the Preserve borders the southeastern tip of French Creek State Park. The walking trails within the Preserve previously did not continue past the borders into the state and national park. With proximity to major historic and recreational destinations, and considering Natural Lands Trust’s role in conserving significant natural habitat in the region, opportunity may exist for a stronger physical connection among these public and private lands that will benefit the region’s visitors and help in managing habitat and visitor use.

The Bethesda Church Trail now takes visitors from Crow’s Nest Preserve into the Baptism Creek area of Hopewell Furnace NHS, where trail users can connect with the designated National Recreation Trail and walk through forested wetlands. From the Baptism Creek National Recreation Trail, visitors can walk east along Hopewell Road into the main park complex. The Bethesda Church Trail and all of the Preserve trails permit hiking, and horseback riding on select trails, but do not allow mountain biking or motorized transportation such as ATVs. These constraints are meant to preserve the environmentally sensitive areas, prevent the disruption of animal life cycles, and maintain the tranquil setting.

The remaining connection under consideration is the trail from Crow’s Nest Preserve and/or Hopewell Furnace NHS into French Creek State Park on the east side of the state park. Currently, a steep “fall line” trail known as Raccoon Trail and a spur from the Buzzards Trail enter the national park and converge near Baptism Creek. Although bicycling is not permitted on these trails, bicyclists are nonetheless using them. These trails are seen as short cuts through the national park and a way to return to the west side of
the state park without having to retrace a path back to
the north of the state park through very steep terrain.

National park staff would like to re-route bicycle
trail users away from the Baptism Creek area to mini-
imize impacts to this environmentally sensitive area,
while providing an alternative route. Eliminating a
quarter-mile section of Raccoon Trail and equivalent
section of the Buzzards Trail would break the con-
nection with the Baptism Creek National Recreation
Trail and avoid dumping bicyclists into this area. A
new section of trail would be established to cross
Baptism Creek and head south below the border of
French Creek State Park and Hopewell Furnace.

Implementation of this section would be
predicated on the cooperation of private landowners
for easements and/or acquisition of property along
Hopewell Road. Alternatively, Raccoon Trail would
be completely eliminated and there would be a new
trail connection between the southern end of
Buzzards Trail and Hopewell Road. The short 1/16-
mile connection needed between French Creek State
Park and Hopewell Road could be facilitated through
Crow's Nest Preserve, with the concurrence of
Natural Lands Trust.

GATEWAYS AND TRAILHEADS
This plan is intended to support heritage tourism
that utilizes the Hopewell Big Wood’s natural assets
and cultural history as a catalyst for:

• saving historic structures;
• conserving the countryside;
• informing the region’s growing number of resi-
dents about the recreational facilities, preserves,
and historic and cultural sites;
• attracting tourism and generating jobs; and, in
turn,
• stimulating and supporting local economies.
The Hopewell Big Woods Trails and Recreation
Network recognizes the need to capitalize on the
existing attractions, mainly the recreational facilities
and enjoyment of the scenery. Such facilities bring
visitors into the region. At the same time, a broader
marketing and interpretive strategy can be organized
that interjects information on the iron industry,
resource extraction and conservation, and what it
means to the landscape and culture today. There-
fore, the Hopewell Big Woods Trails and Recreation
Concept Plan draws from the Management Action
Plan for the Schuylkill River Valley National & State
Heritage Area as well as the Strategic Plan for the
Iron and Steel Heritage Region. These documents
provide important basic organizing principles that
can be applied to the Hopewell Big Woods Trails and
Recreation Network in developing a “Hopewell Big
Woods experience.”

Linking tourism and preservation and attract-
ing visitors to the area for a combined cultural and
recreational experience can certainly enhance local
economies. However, the physical and program-
matic infrastructure must be in place first or the
visitors will be less likely to return for a second visit.
Cultivating heritage tourism opportunities typically
requires sponsorship of activities, interpretive pro-
grams, facilities and services which provide visitors
with the opportunity to experience, understand, and
enjoy the special values of a place’s natural and his-
toric heritage. A sustainable heritage tourism strategy
will provide a wide range of authentic experiences
for area residents and visitors, create a product than
can be promoted to stimulate economic opportuni-
ties and benefits to businesses and communities, and
enhance community awareness and appreciation of
local heritage resources.

Developing an interpretive framework, evalua-
tion of infrastructure needs, and marketing strategy
for the Hopewell Big Woods Recreation and Trails
Network is beyond the scope of this Concept Plan.
However, this plan will summarize key findings
from the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership gateway
analysis, the Strategic Plan for the Iron and Steel
Heritage Region, and the Final Management Plan for
the Schuylkill River Valley National & State Heritage
Area that can serve as a foundation for a structural
framework to promote heritage tourism within the
region and serve recreational users.

The first step is to look at how Hopewell Big
Woods communities and historic and recreational
destinations could better serve recreational us-
ers, how information about the region is organized
and distributed or communicated, and the type of
information and services recreational users could be provided at key locations. Key locations providing information/education functions and visitor support services can be designated as “gateways,” and these can take many different forms. Gateways can:

- be major entry points into the Hopewell Big Woods and larger Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area;
- provide a wide range of visitor services;
- act as orientation centers that provide an overview of specific types of resources within a region;
- function as visitor hubs that focus on a particular theme or cluster of resources; or
- be the location of one or more trailheads with basic facilities such as parking or restrooms.

These distinctions are emphasized and clarified in describing potential Hopewell Big Woods “gateways” below.

**HOPEWELL BIG WOODS GATEWAY “TRAIL TOWNS”**

**POTTSTOWN AND COVENTRY MALL**

Pottstown is one of two major entry points from the Schuylkill River Trail into the Hopewell Big Woods. Pottstown is also the spine of the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area. The headquarters of the Schuylkill River Greenway Association and National and State Heritage Area is located here, at the Schuylkill Riverfront Academic and Heritage Center in downtown Pottstown. The planned center will provide space for four college classrooms, a science lab and an Interpretive Center with educational, historic and tourist information about the Schuylkill River Heritage Area. The focus of interpretation is the Schuylkill River as a natural, cultural and historical resource.

Pottstown is currently the only community in or on the borders of the Hopewell Big Woods that has a broad range of services specifically geared towards recreational users. There are bike repair and sales shops and a community bike share program known as BikePottstown; a stable for horses with instructional riding; outfitters; and sporting goods stores.

SRGA also provides some limited bicycle maintenance and riding tips at its headquarters, as well as basic kayaking and canoe instructions.

Pottstown also has a wide range of visitor support services such as lodgings, restaurants, gas stations. It is located on PA Route 100, one of only two major north-south roads through the region. The other major east-west road is the Pennsylvania Turnpike on the western border of the Hopewell Big Woods.

In addition, Pottstown’s historic resources thematically relate to the iron and steel industry and other historic sites in the Hopewell Big Woods that address this topic. Pottstown’s iron and steel related historic sites span the 18th and 19th centuries and beyond, with the town gaining recognition for producing the Panama Canal Locks and components of the Golden Gate Bridge.

The Schuylkill Riverfront Academic and Heritage Center is an appropriate venue to provide an overview beyond the Schuylkill River Heritage Area’s attractions. The Center could provide an explanation of the different Heritage regions including the Hopewell Big Woods, a list of basic visitor services in the area (particularly sporting goods and recreation related stores), trails in Pottstown and links to North Coventry Township/Hopewell Big Woods trails, and places to go for more information (e.g., Hopewell Big Woods visitor centers).

The Heritage Center may be difficult for some visitors to find without appropriate signage and/or directions. Supplementing the Center with distribution of information at other venues would also be reasonable, considering where the major population centers are – for instance, the Coventry Mall is a prime shopping destination, or BikePottstown facilities and sporting goods stores as destinations for recreationists. Tri-County Chamber of Commerce could also distribute promotional materials and in addition interpret the area’s iron and steel heritage. The form the information takes could vary – printed materials, an audio tape, an IPOD or internet download. Signage along PA Route 100 and at SRGA should indicate the visitor is entering Hopewell Big Woods and could work off of the already established format for the Heritage Area.
Birdsboro
Birdsboro, founded circa 1740, is well situated to function as a gateway into the Hopewell Big Woods. With Morgantown and Pottstown, it is one of the most populated towns in the Big Woods, with a wide range of commercial services available for residents and visitors. With Pottstown, it is one of only two access points into the Hopewell Big Woods from the north, located as it is at the junction of PA Routes 345 and 724. Access to the Schuylkill River Trail, recently completed through Birdsboro, is available, and there are plans to extend a spur trail through Birdsboro south along the abandoned portion of Route 82 to Birdsboro Waters. The latter is poised to become a major recreational destination in the region once the master plan is implemented. Currently, access to the Schuylkill River Water Trail to put in or take out canoes, kayaks or motorboats is problematic. A dock or launch in Birdsboro would be desirable to serve water trail users and enable them to connect to land trails and other recreational facilities.

When Berks County was formed in 1762, Birdsboro was already a town of considerable size. Named after its founder, William Bird, the town was an outgrowth of his enterprises, including forges along Hay Creek as well as a sawmill and gristmill. William Bird’s mansion, constructed in 1751, was remodeled as a community and recreation center in 1920. His son, Marcus Bird, succeeded his father in the 1760s and built a furnace at Hopewell, becoming the largest producer of iron in America during the Revolutionary War. In 1796, Matthew Brooke purchased all of the lands owned by the Bird family including all forges and mills. His two sons became the exclusive owners of these lands in 1837. They later became organized into the E & G Brooke Iron Co., and their influence made the growth of this one-industry town possible.

The interpretive connection to Hopewell Furnace NHS, the large numbers of iron and steel related historic sites, and availability of top notch recreational facilities make Birdsboro an appropriate Visitor Hub and potential “Discovery Center.” Birdsboro can not only tell the preservation story and the development of the iron and steel industries in the region, but it can also serve as a major recreational hub and “Trail Town” in much the same way as Elverson to the south. Recreational facilities in the Borough itself include the Maple Springs Swimming Pool and tennis courts as well as golf courses, while for more passive forms of recreation there is nearby Birdsboro Waters and French Creek State Park for hiking, horseback riding, bicycling, fishing, boating, hunting, swimming and picnics.

The presence of the Millard / Tucci House as the headquarters for the Hay Creek Watershed Association provides the opportunity for the Discovery/Visitor Center to be sited here. Such a center could also be sited at the Borough Hall. The Discovery Center would introduce visitors to the Hopewell Big Woods within the context of the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area, provide an overview of area recreational and cultural attractions and the regional trail system, a display map, brochures, and information concerning events, specific tour routes and visitor services information. Structures that house this information may range in size from enclosed facilities with visitor amenities and interpretive exhibits to a kiosk appropriately placed where high visibility or exposure to travelers can be provided – e.g., Schuylkill River trailhead or Borough Hall. While the Discovery Center will consolidate the most essential information about the entire heritage area, it will also feature a broader range of information regarding those heritage resources located in proximity to Birdsboro.

There are challenges in developing Birdsboro as a gateway to the Hopewell Big Woods. Visitor services are currently very limited. Motels, bed and breakfasts and other lodgings are mainly available in the Reading and Douglassville areas. The nearest campgrounds are located in the Reading area, Honey Brook or French Creek State Park. There is only one sporting goods store in Birdsboro to support visitors who would be interested in a wide variety of recreational activities, including specialized activities like rock climbing. An organized promotion of the downtown such as through walking tours and special events would need to be developed, and recreation related businesses encouraged. The presence of the multi-use Schuylkill River Trail and PA Bicycle Route L on the edge of town would require more bicycle
friendly routes through Birdsboro, bike racks downtown, and preferably a full service bike shop.

As in Elverson, downtown businesses can be enlisted to distribute information about trails, recreation and historic sites, perhaps developing an “ambassador” program in which volunteers are specially trained to assist visitors with directions and questions about area attractions and how to access the trail system. Birdsboro can be the starting point for a number of walking and bicycling tours through the area and could eventually support commercial tour operators in partnership with other nearby historic towns and sites along the PA Route 724 corridor. Trailheads with basic facilities such as parking and interpretive signs would be needed in several locations around the Borough.

MORAGANTOWN

Morgantown is uniquely positioned to be a major gateway into Hopewell Big Woods. Located at the junction of PA Routes 10 and 23, it is also conveniently accessible from the Interstate – I-76 and I-176. It is one of the most populous towns in the Hopewell Big Woods and includes many services for visitors such as hotels, gas stations, sporting goods, travel agencies and a variety of restaurants. ST Tack and Horse Supply serves horseback riders and stables. The sizeable Morgantown Historic District, with its 128 historic features, represents village commercial activity and architecture from 1790–1945. The village was advantageously situated in the vicinity of three Indian paths which became the early trails for traders and settlers. Today, PA Bicycle Route S and the Colonial Forge & Furnace Trail intersect in Morgantown. It was, and still is, a point of merging commerce and transportation.

Morgantown is thematically connected to nearby historic iron and resource extraction resources. Morgantown developed specifically to serve the surrounding farms and nearby iron and mining communities. Growth continued through the Revolutionary War because of the close proximity to the Jones Mine and charcoal iron furnaces and forges at Hopewell, Warwick, Joanna, Reading and Rebecca furnaces and the forges at Windsor. These activities, which flourished during the Revolution, demanded skilled workers and services necessary to support small growing industrial communities through the end of the 18th century. Bylers Iron Mines and Bethlehem Cuba Mines sites are located in Morgantown. These and other mines located at nearby Joanna – Copper, Kenny and Jones mines – could potentially be interpreted at sites in Morgantown, for instance at the Tri-County Heritage Society Archives and Museum. The numerous restaurants and other small specialty shops testify that Morgantown’s economy is no longer farm related; rather it caters to tourist oriented services.

Morgantown is identified as both a gateway and potential site for a Discovery Center in the Strategic Plan for the Iron and Steel Heritage Region. Morgantown is an appropriate venue for a visitor center that would provide:

• an overview of the Hopewell Big Woods and Iron and Steel Heritage Region and their historic, natural and recreational attractions;
• a list of basic visitor services in the area (particularly sporting goods, campgrounds and recreation related stores);
• trails in the area, including auto tours and PA Bicycle Routes; and
• places to go for more information (e.g., other Hopewell Big Woods visitor centers such as that proposed near Hopewell Furnace NHS).

An appropriate facility (not necessarily staffed) could be located so that it is easy for visitors to find and provides amenities such as restrooms, bike parking, fountains, and interpretive information. The form that information takes could vary – printed materials, an audio tape, an IPOD or internet download. Signage along I-76 and the PA Turnpike as well as PA Routes 23 and 10 should indicate the visitor is entering Hopewell Big Woods and could work off of the already established format for the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area.

ELVerson

Elverson was established in the late 1700s. Much like Morgantown, it retains a sizeable Historic District and the character of a small, early 19th century vil-
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lage. Even though it became host to the Wilmington and Northern Railroad in 1870 it never really grew and flourished. Originally part of West Nantmeal Township, early settlement in the area of the present-day Borough of Elverson responded to its situation along an established trade route from Lancaster to the French Creek iron furnaces at a location where travelers had access to three important springs.

Elverson is situated on the edge of Chester County and looks westward into the Conestoga Valley of Lancaster and Berks Counties. There are regional records of iron ore being dug here in the late 17th century. The opening of the Warwick Mines (1717) in Chester County for the French Creek furnaces brought regular travel on the “Blue Rock Path” from Lancaster’s Conestoga region to points east. A petition in 1736 was issued for a road to “the new furnace” (Reading Furnace, Warwick/East Nantmeal townships) which would also connect with iron deposits and furnaces in Lancaster County near Cornwall. The iron industry supported an increase in population and provided economic stability to this otherwise remote area of Chester County.

Today, the Borough of Elverson is a nexus for existing regional and local trails, including PA Bicycle Route S and the Colonial Forge & Furnace Trail. Elverson has the potential to become a Pennsylvania “Trail Town” should the Morgantown Trail Connector, Boars Back Trail, and Hibernia Trail be developed and related support facilities installed. The Pennsylvania Trail Town program is patterned after “Main Street” principles, and relies on communities becoming bicycle and pedestrian oriented. The program recognizes that trail corridors can create new opportunities in town to serve visitors who are hungry, need supplies, and who may want to spend the night and explore interesting places along the trails. Technical assistance is available through PA DCNR, the local PennDOT engineering district and regional Metropolitan Planning Organization or Rural Planning Organization to transform Pennsylvania towns into more inviting and memorable tourist destinations.

Elverson has already taken steps to re-energize its downtown and make it safer for motorists and pedestrians, completing the Elverson Borough Revitalization Plan and implementing some of its recommendations. The right mix of easily accessible businesses and services would accommodate a variety of visitor and resident needs, and many of these services are already available in Elverson. For instance, groceries, ice cream parlors, and restaurants are available downtown, and there are two sports shops in the area.

There are also a couple of Bed-and-Breakfasts. An historic home that has been turned into a B&B in the downtown would be very attractive to visitors. Currently, there is no full-service bicycle shop for equipment, rentals and repairs in Elverson, although there is one such business in nearby Joanna and one of the Elverson sports shops sells bikes and related equipment. There are no campgrounds in or adjacent to Elverson, although there are some to the south in Honey Brook and campgrounds to the north in French Creek State Park.

Elverson can serve as a Visitor Hub and major distribution point for information relating to the Hopewell Big Woods trail system and recreational facilities, where to go for supplies such as recreational equipment, and where to go to participate in certain types of recreation. Downtown businesses can be enlisted to distribute this information, perhaps developing an “ambassador” program in which volunteers are specially trained to assist visitors with directions and questions about area attractions and how to access the trail system. Elverson can be the starting point for a number of walking, bicycling and auto tours through the area and could eventually support commercial tour operators in partnership with other nearby historic towns and sites along the PA Route 23 corridor. Trailheads with basic facilities such as parking and interpretive signs would be needed in several locations around the Borough.

VISITOR HUBS

Birdsboro Waters

The primary purpose for the 1,848 acres managed by the Birdsboro Municipal Authority is to protect the public water supply for the Borough through conserving the natural environment around the reservoirs. The recently completed draft for the Birdsboro
Waters Master Site Plan recommends permitting low-impact, nature-based recreational activities "to complement its unique and natural features without harming the environment." Birdsboro Waters, with its unusual variety of natural, historical and recreational features packed into a relatively small area, is poised to become a premier recreational destination once the recommendations of the Master Site Plan are implemented.

Existing authorized and unauthorized recreational uses were considered as part of the master planning process. Current permitted uses include hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding along existing trails, picnicking at the Rustic Picnic Area, and rock climbing at the Birdsboro Quarry. Camping and motorized uses such as ATV and motorcycle riding are not permitted; however, these uses do occur on the property. Motorized users are a major presence on some of the trails and seem to be responsible for the only trail maintenance that occurs. They cut away downed trees and keep the main trails clear; however, motorized use also causes trail erosion that is not being addressed. Unauthorized camping and the addition of informal fire rings and picnic tables to certain parts of the property also take place. Currently, the only alternative for ATVs available in the region is a private track run by Pagoda Motorcycle Club. There are no public ATV accessible properties in the Reading or SE PA region. Some accommodation may be possible on the Haines and Kibble house property; however, there are currently no potential ATV accessible properties on the west or south sides.

The trail system is most frequently used by geocachers, hikers, ATVs, and motorcyclists. Bicyclists rarely use the trails due to access and condition issues. Horseback riders infrequently use the section of the Horse-Shoe Trail in Birdsboro Waters. Totaling 27.8 miles, the trails consist currently of a series of interconnected dirt roads and narrower hiking pathways blazed in different colors. There is no formal sign system within Birdsboro Waters. The Horse-Shoe Trail (or yellow route) skirts the southern boundary of Birdsboro Waters. Access and parking is available at the Kulptown Fire Department, and the area is also accessible through Geigertown Rod & Gun Club property and the gravel road from PA Route 4082 to the Indian Run Reservoir. South of the Reservoir, the road is washed out.

The Birdsboro Waters Master Plan proposes the existing trails to remain and additional paths or trails constructed, if necessary, to provide pedestrian access and linkage between the Millard/Tucci House and the proposed adjacent camping and picnicking area. The proposed trail along Hay Creek will follow former PA Route 82 south through Birdsboro Waters.

The primary attraction for this site is the Dyers/Trap Rock Quarry west of the Millard/Tucci House. With its series of eight walls and more than 75 climbing routes, the quarry is a unique feature of the Municipal Authority property which users travel many miles from throughout the region to experience. The Master Plan suggests capitalizing on this feature due to the popularity of this activity and the few outdoor rock climbing experiences that are available in the region. This use is anticipated to continue and may increase once access to the site is improved with the replacement of the bridge adjacent to the Millard/Tucci house; however, rock climbers would still need to backpack their equipment and supplies into the quarry site. The access would continue to be available only for pedestrian and emergency/maintenance vehicle use. In addition, the safety of rock climbers and other recreational users in this area would need to be addressed for two reasons: 1) the risk of falls, and 2) the nearby location of a shooting range used by Birdsboro and Robeson Township police departments. The rock climbing may best be approached by only permitting organized groups who provide safety training to climb.

Other future recreational uses initially suggested for Birdsboro Waters include camping and picnicking, proposed for a 37-acre area northwest of the Millard/Tucci House. The Forest Legacy Conservation Easement precludes improvements such as buildings, structures, and paved parking areas on Municipal Authority lands. Restroom facilities at the Millard/Tucci and Rustic Picnic Area and parking at the Rustic Picnic Area could be made available and shared with the users of the camping and picnic area. Since direct vehicular access to each campsite can not be permitted, the camping area would be located as near as possible to the proposed Hay Creek.
pedestrian bridge. Additional unpaved paths could be developed to provide increased access from the parking and restroom facilities to the camping and picnic areas.

The final Master Plan eliminated primitive camping due to the impacts human waste and litter and reduction of native vegetation at these campsites could have on water quality in the reservoir. It is known that fishing in the old quarry and reservoirs is currently associated with littering problems.

Additional uses of Birdsboro Waters would be bird and wildlife watching, fishing, exercise walking, camping, bicycle riding, running/jogging, hiking, cross-country skiing, and hunting on a seasonal basis. Improving public access points to the Hay Creek would help to serve the region's needs for fishing areas and would complement the fishing available at the two lakes in adjacent French Creek State Park. Providing the variety of activities in one area would appeal to a broad spectrum of recreational users who would likely become repeat and overnight visitors.

Playground and picnic tables are proposed for a turnaround to be constructed for Hay Creek Road. The playground equipment would require an amendment to the Forest Legacy Easement, which prohibits structures and other improvements except where exempted.

Due to access limitations and restrictions of the Easement, the Millard/Tucci House would be needed for restroom facilities and the Rustic Picnic Area used for parking and additional restroom facilities. Since shared parking would be required for multiple recreational uses, the adequacy of the existing parking lot at the Rustic Picnic Area will need to be determined, in addition to possible paving and landscaping/screening of the parking area. No support facilities such as restrooms, storage and maintenance facilities, or paved parking areas can be constructed on the site except within a few exclusion areas (e.g., shooting range, Rustic Picnic Area, water plant and cell tower lot) or property not owned by the Municipal Authority (e.g., Millard/Tucci house). Restrooms and parking at the Millard/Tucci House and Rustic Picnic Area would provide access and use by visitors to the camping and picnicking area northwest of the Millard/Tucci house, the rock climbing area around the old quarry, and fishing along Hay Creek.

The presence of the Millard/Tucci House as the headquarters for the Hay Creek Watershed Association provides the opportunity for a Discovery/Visitor Center for the Hopewell Big Woods to be sited here, as described above in the Birdsboro section. In addition to providing information as previously described, the Discovery Center could be one of five venues to tell the conservation story and educate the public on the natural values of the Hopewell Big Woods as well as provide more site-specific information about Birdsboro Waters, the Hay Creek watershed and water resource conservation.

Given the ecologically sensitive nature of the site, introducing permanent interpretive facilities or structures would not be proposed. Rather, removable kiosks, waysides and electronic media should be considered. A washing station and educational materials on invasive species could be provided, along with information on appropriate uses of the trails and recreational facilities. Historic features – quarry and related structures, mill and race, dam, charcoal platforms, collier’s huts, the cannon testing site – would not be ignored, but highlighted and interpretively connected to French Creek State Park and other historic sites in the area. These resources, accessed by the public, would constitute an “Interpretive Pod.”

WARWICK COUNTY PARK

The park is one of three Chester County facilities proposed as a Visitor Hub in the Strategic Plan for the Iron and Steel Heritage Region. Warwick County Park currently has the structures and space for display information that can help orient visitors and is a popular recreational destination. Warwick County Park can provide an overview of sites and resources in the Hopewell Big Woods, and from here visitors may proceed to explore the nearby attractions. The park can provide visitors with both a broad look at Hopewell Big Woods and a more detailed focus on the iron industry, so that visitors can drill down to the level of detail that interests them and make decisions about where to go and what to do. Warwick County Park is well positioned to tell the stories of natural resource exploitation through charcoal and
iron production, and conservation of the area’s significant natural resources, all of which are integrally linked.

The 538-acre park includes a variety of habitats, from vernal pools and wetlands to meadows to woods, and an extensive system of trails that offers numerous opportunities for hiking, biking, horseback riding and bird watching. One of these trails is the Horse-Shoe Trail, which winds its way along the southern boundary of the park. Hiking and walking are permitted on all trails, bicycling and cross-country skiing on some trails, and horseback riding exclusively on the Horse-Shoe Trail. The trails take advantage of historic features and landscape elements, recognizing that Warwick’s woodlands provided much of the timber for charcoal used in the early American iron industry. Charcoal hearths, historic house and barn ruins and the site of 1717 Coventry Forge are marked to inform the visitor about the area’s iron heritage. The existing collier’s trail, with its charcoal hearth sites, provides the opportunity to feature the lives of the furnace plantation woodcutters and colliers.

According to the Strategic Plan for the Iron and Steel Heritage Region, the site “should feature the process of reducing wood to charcoal, and feature various aspects of the life of the collier. Buildings on the site could be used to display artifacts and photos and further communicate this aspect of furnace plantation life. A colliers hut could be added as a trail feature to further develop this interpretive theme.” A system of walking, bicycling tours and even hay rides could be developed with Hopewell Furnace NHS, Coventryville and St. Peters Village to highlight different aspects of iron-making technology and the lives of furnace managers and workers.

The more developed day use area is confined to the western end of the park. This area offers several single-family picnic tables and two roofed pavilions that can be reserved for special events. Park facilities feature two age-appropriate playgrounds, a sand volleyball court, horseshoe pits and a quoit pit. The day use area also includes a water spigot. Restrooms are available and there is a ranger station. There is even a public telephone. Other areas of the park are generally unimproved, although there are two parking areas and trailheads at the eastern end of the park, along Mt Pleasant Road and Coventryville Road.

Another popular recreational pastime is fishing in French Creek. Two miles of this pristine waterway can be accessed from within the park. French Creek is one of the most popular destinations in southeastern Pennsylvania for trout fishing, and is stocked each year with rainbow and brown trout.

There are no special facilities for horses and their riders, or for bicyclists. Improvements to trail facilities would be needed to better support users of the Horse-Shoe Trail, the existing PA Bicycle Route S, which follows PA Route 23, and the proposed multi-use Boar’s Back/French Creek Trail. It is anticipated that the latter would use the existing North Loop Trail, which currently permits bicycle use, along the northern boundary of the park. A secure bike parking area would be needed so that bicyclists can leave their bikes behind temporarily to explore the hiking trails or take advantage of the amenities in the day use area.

Amenities such as a horse trailer parking area and/or hitching posts and watering trough would encourage additional use of the Horse-Shoe Trail. The existing day use and parking areas could be considered to accommodate these amenities, or possibly expanded. Information about the auto tour and various trails in the area could be provided through maps and brochures at each of these parking areas, and at the park office.

French Creek State Park
At close to 8,000 acres, the state park is the largest public recreational facility in the region and a major recreational destination. French Creek offers two lakes – Hopewell and Scotts Run – extensive forests, and almost 40 miles of trails. Lake activities include boating, fishing and swimming, with the availability of boat rentals, showers, restrooms, phones, and a seasonal food concession shoreside. A variety of camping experiences are available, from organized group tenting, to organized group cabin camping, to individual and family cabins, campsites and RV camping. Some of these campsites are ADA accessible.
The most significant recreational use at the state park occurs at Hopewell Lake and adjacent campgrounds, although hunting is quite popular in season. Hunting is allowed in most areas of the park except around the two lakes and campgrounds. The pool at French Creek State Park is very popular, attracting visitors from Lancaster, Reading and other parts of southeastern Pennsylvania. The state park is one of the few recreational facilities in the Hopewell Big Woods area that includes overnight camping. There is an extensive, year-round campground with 200 wooded campsites in the more developed part of the park north of Hopewell Lake. The campground has paved parking pads, hot showers, a playground, 60 sites with electric hookups for RVs, accessible campsites and two family-assist restrooms. There are also three cabins that sleep five each in single bunks and double/single bunks, with windows, electric heat, porch, picnic table, fire ring and electric lights and outlets. Two Mongolian-style round tents or “yurts” on a wooden deck sleep 4-5 people in single bunks and double/single bunks. Each yurt has a cooking stove, refrigerator, countertop, table, chairs, electric lights, electric heat, outlets, fire ring, and picnic table. A showerhouse is nearby.

All trails at the park allow for hiking and access to hunting areas. Some trails also permit off-road bicycle use, and in fact the state park is a regional mecca for mountain bikers. Horseback riding is only allowed on the Horse-Shoe Trail. Off road biking has been taking place in areas of French Creek State Park where this use is currently restricted, and also in the adjacent national park; however, in recent years the state park has been working effectively with bike and hiking groups to better monitor and manage trail use, educate users on trail etiquette, and maintain the trails.

Workshops on sustainable trail design with the International Mountain Bicycle Association, local recreational clubs and land managers resulted in the development of a Concept Plan for a series of loop trails through the state and national park. The multi-use loop trails would utilize sections of existing park trails, re-locate and redesign others, and add new trails in the northeastern part of the park where there are currently none. Each loop addresses a different level of challenge for beginners, intermediate and advanced bicyclists. Additional connections from the state park trail system to the regional trail system have been proposed in the north, south, east and west quadrants of the park. These connections are described on pp. 55-58 under Appendix A – Initiatives Contributing to the Concept Plan and pp. 29-34, Regional Trail Connections to Internal Park Trails and Community Pathway/Trail Systems. The PA DCNR and state park staff are working to implement some of the plan recommendations over time as funding becomes available.

The former quarry, with a total height some 300 feet, is a geological and scenic wonder at the northern tip of French Creek State Park. There is currently no authorized trail access to the quarry. While the quarry provides an opportunity for rock climbing, some faces are unstable, presenting a serious safety concern for rock climbers. Creation of unauthorized ramps for ATVs is also a concern in the quarry area. There is nonetheless tremendous potential for the development of several climbing walls in the area, including St. Peters Village and Birdsboro Waters, which together would comprise a unique and very marketable recreational attraction for the Hopewell Big Woods.

Along with its recreational importance to the region, French Creek State Park has historical significance that is intimately connected with the development of Hopewell Furnace and later the national park. The historical and continuing relationship between the two parks provides tremendous opportunity to seamlessly complement the interpretation at each park. While Hopewell Furnace NHS should continue to be the primary focus for interpretation of the iron industry, French Creek State Park can also provide some limited interpretation in this area, with an emphasis on resource extraction and management and impacts to the environment.

Operations at Hopewell Furnace from 1771 to 1883 required tremendous amounts of charcoal to fuel the large blast furnace. To sustain the furnace operations, the entire area now contained in French Creek State Park was timbered repeatedly to make charcoal. The thick woods visitors see today were once barren and treeless. During the 1930s, the
federal government purchased the lands that would become the state and national parks to create a Recreation Demonstration Area. Two Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps were built here and operated until the early 1940s. The CCC built two dams, two group camps, several tent camping areas, beaches, roads, and picnic areas, and began to restore the historic core of Hopewell Furnace.

In 1946, most of the property and recreation facilities were transferred to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and French Creek State Park was created. The historic core of the furnace operations and some of the surrounding fields and woodlands were retained by the federal government to create Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site.

The state and national park are working together to develop a seamless and sustainable trail system that is understandable to users but also meets the conservation, use and education mandates of each managing agency and Hopewell Big Woods environmental standards. Signage and informational materials that are clear regarding appropriate times and types of use, trail etiquette, level of challenge, and key resources would help support a seamless trail system that combines a recreational and cultural experience.

Opportunities for waysides and other interpretive approaches should be pursued to highlight historic features along the trails, and access provided where there is currently none. Key features to be interpreted include the site of Hay Creek Forge, Birdsboro Iron Works, New Pine Forge, and the marble mines at the southern tip of the park. A consistent design of signs and informational materials with use of the Hopewell Big Woods logo should be considered.

An interpretive connection with the trail system would communicate the character defining features of Hopewell Big Woods. For example, flat areas within the steep landscape would be identified as colliers’ charcoal beds. Management of forest areas would be connected to interpretation of the iron industry. More than 100 years of forest development is essential to a visitor’s understanding of the forest as a resource that was cut historically but is now viewed as a recreational setting. French Creek State Park can control its “cut zone” for interpretive purposes. The park staff will not allow cutting near trails; however, other areas of the park could be potentially open to timber harvesting. The different stages of succession and how they relate to the area’s historical development could be demonstrated. A 40-year forest cycle could be demonstrated more easily at the state park as compared to the national park, which is much smaller in size.

Minimal alterations to interpretive media at the visitor center would allow French Creek State Park to become one of the key sites in Hopewell Big Woods to tell the conservation story and provide an overview of the area’s iron heritage resources. Along with detailed information on state park facilities, an overview of the Hopewell Big Woods trails system and recreational facilities would be provided to visitors, with directions on where to go for further information. Visitors would be directed to the proposed Hopewell Big Woods visitor center near Hopewell Furnace NHS to get very detailed information on area services, recreational and cultural attractions, tours and events, and significance of the Hopewell Big Woods. The existing video for the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area in the state park visitor center should be modified or supplemented with an orientation to the Hopewell Big Woods.

In addition, the state and national parks are seeking opportunities to eliminate or redesign sections of state park trails that impact the resources of Hopewell Furnace NHS. Access points between the two parks that enhance the visitor experience for both would also be considered. For instance, the Lenape Trail could be discontinued at the northern border of Hopewell Furnace NHS, routed onto the Mill Creek Trail, and the Mill Creek Trail redesigned to narrow the width of the existing 35-foot right-of-way and create a surface that is amenable to bikes and hikers. Likewise, sections of the Raccoon Trail and Buzzards Trail could be eliminated to prevent access to the sensitive Baptism Creek area and re-routed to use a scenic section of Hopewell Road to enter the national park. Direct, efficient access from the pool at French Creek State Park to Hopewell Furnace NHS would be developed.
St. Peters Village

This historic mining community and black granite quarry village is located next to a dramatic waterfall on French Creek. Built in the late 1800s, St. Peter’s Village was constructed as a company town for the quarry and iron mines, owned by 19th-century entrepreneur Davis Knauer. It was owned by the Knauer family for nine decades but was sold several times from the 1970s to 2005, when it was purchased by a development firm in Pughtown, Chester County. The developer has begun to construct roads, recreational trails and upscale homes around the village, which was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2003. Many shops feature views of French Creek, which runs through the town and is full of large boulders that attract rock climbers.

The existing restaurants, shops and inn within this charming village provide key visitor services in a part of the Hopewell Big Woods which has few such facilities. The development of the multi-use Boar’s Back Trail to connect the village with significant historic and recreational resources would likely drive the need for additional visitor amenities. These could take the form of bike racks, trailheads, interpretive kiosks, and comfort facilities, among other amenities. There are currently no recreational specialty shops or sporting goods stores, which would be useful in an area frequented by a variety of recreational users, including rock climbers.

The French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust is working with Warwick Township and the developer to implement a land development program as part of the Hopewell Big Woods which has few such facilities. The development of the multi-use Boar’s Back Trail to connect the village with significant historic and recreational resources would likely drive the need for additional visitor amenities. These could take the form of bike racks, trailheads, interpretive kiosks, and comfort facilities, among other amenities. There are currently no recreational specialty shops or sporting goods stores, which would be useful in an area frequented by a variety of recreational users, including rock climbers.

St. Peters Village is unique in its almost absolute historic integrity as a small-scale company village of the 1880s. There are few villages that can boast a common ownership of the entire village for 130 years. The integrity is further supported by the village’s unique position in a ravine and bordered on the west entirely by Pennsylvania Game Lands, ensuring minimal encroachment by modern development. The historic integrity of a simple, plain working man’s company village of the 1880 period should be retained with any new development, as the village’s period charm is a major attraction in the region. Particular consideration should be given to accommodating the needs of horseback riders (for instance, providing hitching posts), other trail users, and rock climbers.

St. Peters Village is suggested as an “Interpretive Pod” in the Strategic Plan for the Iron and Steel Heritage Region rather than a Gateway or Visitor Hub. It is a key destination along the Colonial Forge & Furnace auto tour, which utilizes St. Peter’s Road. The reason for the village’s designation as an Interpretive Pod is that the recommended interpretive focus would likely flesh out elements of interpretive themes and answers questions raised at other Hopewell Big Woods Gateways and Discovery Centers. St. Peters Village would largely concentrate on the village’s industrial development, while making broader interpretive connections to Hopewell Furnace NHS and other related historic sites and districts such as Coventryville. The village has an important role to play in this regard, by virtue of its location, compactness and walkability, and unique physical attributes. It can tell a part of the heritage story in such a way as to make the iron and steel history, culture, or scenery more immediately accessible to visitors and residents and express the personal drama of history.

The village makes an excellent starting point for walking tours. A walking tour already exists between Hopewell Furnace NHS and the village, and can be expanded to include cultural features in Warwick County Park and Coventryville. Other forms of transport can be considered – perhaps bicycles, trolleys or horse drawn carriages (e.g., such as those at Acadia National Park) for transport.
St. Peters Village is located at the junction of three trails – Horse-Shoe Trail, the proposed Boar’s Back Trail, and the Colonial Forge & Furnace Trail; therefore, a trailhead with directional and interpretive signage would be useful in the village, perhaps at the railroad station. It is not necessary for St. Peter’s Village to provide detailed information and an overview of all the attractions in the Hopewell Big Woods, as there are facilities nearby that can play that role more effectively; however, informational materials about the nearby trails (including the Colonial Forge & Furnace auto tour), how to access them, permitted uses, and nearby recreational facilities such as Warwick Woods Campground would be useful for visitors and residents alike.

DISCOVERY CENTERS

MORGANTOWN – See Hopewell Big Woods Gateway Trail Towns above

BIRDSBORO WATERS – See Visitor Hubs above

HOPEWELL FURNACE NHS

The National Park Service manages Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, an 848-acre unit surrounded to the north, west and east by French Creek State Park and to the south by private and public conservation lands. Hopewell Furnace NHS and the state park together may be considered as “gateways” for orienting the public to area attractions; however, the primary visitor hub would be a future “Discovery Center” or Hopewell Big Woods Visitor Center adjacent to the national park. The existing program on the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area could conceivably be relocated to the new Discovery Center in the future.

The Discovery Center could pull visitors into the Hopewell Big Woods as a “center of gravity” and then send visitors out to explore the area. The existing Hopewell Furnace NHS visitor center and the complex of village structures could continue to tell the story of the development of the early iron industry as they currently do. Existing materials such as the Unigrid brochure and NPS web site relating to the park’s recreational facilities, trails and permitted uses would need to be updated to reflect changes to park facility locations and uses associated with Hopewell Furnace General Management Plan.

Hopewell and other “iron plantations” of southeastern Pennsylvania formed the basis for America’s iron and steel industry. Hopewell Furnace NHS represents America’s development during the industrial revolution. The complex of historic and reconstructed structures represents Hopewell during the years 1820 to 1840, featuring a cold-blast furnace restored to its 1830s appearance. Hopewell Furnace serves as an example of an early American iron-making community, one of hundreds of “iron plantation villages” that once utilized charcoal-fueled iron furnaces. These furnaces produced iron items to make arms that supported the Americans during the Revolutionary War and to support the nation’s growth during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

The ongoing planning effort related to the General Management Plan for Hopewell Furnace NHS has yielded a wealth of information on the early iron industry that greatly affected the Hopewell Big Woods landscape the visitor sees today. The Hopewell Furnace Company once encompassed 10,000 acres, roughly the size of the core conservation area for the Hopewell Big Woods. Two-thirds of an acre per day of woods was needed to bake the charcoal that fueled the iron furnace. The policy during the 18th century was to use one acre and leave it untouched for another 30 years, in order to regenerate the forest. Remnants of the iron industry are everywhere in the landscape, and include earthworks such as colliers’ pits and 18th-century Joanna Furnace.

The existence of many intact remnants of the iron industry makes interpretive planning for the entire Hopewell Big Woods vitally important for an authentic, informative and memorable visitor experience and one that is not duplicative. The interpretive plan can be a starting point to address significant iron mining history and resources associated with private lands that present challenges in access, preservation and interpretation. Hopewell Furnace NHS will embark on its own interpretive planning process in the near future, which can form the core for the broader interpretive strategy for the Hopewell Big Woods.
The physical landscape at the park could provide a stronger statement to help visitors understand the environment, life and times of the early iron workers and managers. The General Management Plan suggests re-orienting access to the park from the south, which would have been the historical entry point to the furnace. It has also been suggested that visitors could be transported by horse carts to provide a unique and historical experience.

The surrounding vegetation and woods are also important interpretively. Diversifying the set of stands – also important to maintaining healthy and diverse ecosystems – would suggest the historical approach to forest management in the interest of fueling the furnace. This diversification would occur through managing for different age structures and leaving down and dead woody debris and cavities for nesting animals. A working demonstration of the 30-year rotation system is possible.

The approach to landscape management at the park would be complemented by existing and new interpretive programs. During summer months, costumed historical interpreters demonstrate, describe and tell the story of Hopewell’s iron-making years (1771-1883) and depict village occupations. Producing charcoal on a small scale and lumber carving are activities that could be part of the hands-on approach appropriate to this former Recreation Demonstration Area. Hopewell Furnace NHS could be one of five venues to tell the conservation story, along with Crow’s Nest Preserve, Welkinweir, French Creek State Park, and Birdsboro Waters / Millard House.

Nature walks and talks at French Creek State Park and Hopewell Furnace NHS could be expanded in partnership with Natural Lands Trust, which provides on-site environmental education programs. Currently, there is a four week summer program and an after-school program at Crows Nest Preserve. The route between Crows Nest and Hopewell Furnace NHS can follow local roads as part of an educational field trip for school children. These programs and tours, and self-guided tours of the Hopewell Big Woods, could start from the proposed Discovery Center near Hopewell Furnace NHS.

Hopewell Furnace NHS currently serves a great number of interpretive functions. It represents the only assemblage of buildings within the heritage region, in one location, that characterize the form and arrangement typical of 18th century iron plantations. The site explores the lives of ironmasters Mark Bird and Clement Brooke, provides a characterization of Iron Plantation life, and provides the only opportunity within the region to see all of the components necessary to 18th century iron production in one place. It is also an excellent place to interpret African American resources such as Sixpenny Village and the contribution of African Americans to the region’s iron industry. Hopewell Furnace NHS should continue to concentrate primarily on its history education role; however, opportunities to provide recreational activities that complement this role and create a coordinated system with the adjacent state park would be useful in exposing more visitors to the national park.

Opportunities to expand recreation and enhance connections with the state park have already begun at Hopewell Furnace NHS. The Horse-Shoe Trail has been re-routed through Hopewell Village from its entrance via the state park on the west side of Hopewell Furnace NHS. The Student Conservation Association developed walking trails in the Baptism Creek area, with landscape assistance through the NPS Olmsted Center. Planning is under way to develop a trail connection between the southeast end of French Creek State Park and Bethesda Church area that could encourage bicycle use of Hopewell Road through the national park. This connection would create the opportunity for a trail loop through French Creek State Park and Hopewell Furnace NHS. The latter currently only allows biking on paved roads. The Colonial Forge & Furnace auto tour also follows Hopewell Road, and a stop or turnout specific to this tour should be provided, along with interpretive information, perhaps near the Marble Mines at French Creek State Park or Bethesda Church, or the proposed concession / parking area at Baptism Creek.

A bicycle repair and rental concession, with distribution of safety information, and potentially concessions for other recreational equipment are sorely needed in the Hopewell Big Woods. There is an opportunity to place such concessions near Hopewell Lake at French Creek State Park, the visi-
tor center area or Baptism Creek area of Hopewell Furnace NHS, or in the future the Hopewell Big Woods Discovery Center. The Baptism Creek area is not ideal for this purpose, as it includes wetlands and historic features, drawing water through a head race. The area is also some distance from Hopewell Road and not marked.

The existing CCC picnic shelter at Hopewell Furnace NHS could provide a central operating location for trail users and concessioners; however, concessioners would need to provide temporary structures that generate their own power, which is currently not available in this part of the park. Baptism Creek National Recreation Trail would need to be re-routed around the East Race. The fee for the bike concession could be split with French Creek State Park. A bike permitting program would support trail maintenance. 100 parking spaces total could be provided, with 50 or less paved. Permeable paving may be used to retain water on site and direct it away from the stream. This bike hub could also provide an educational opportunity to emphasize reasons visitors can not access cultural resources in this area.

CONSERVATION HERITAGE NODES

WELKINWEIR

Welkinweir is the 197-acre property and former estate housing the offices of the Green Valleys Association, which has been pursuing protection of the lands and waters of northern Chester County for more than 36 years. Green Valleys has contributed substantially to the public education and awareness of the need to preserve the region’s natural resources, including obtaining Pennsylvania Scenic River designation for French Creek, providing environmental education programs for adults and children, and continuing to conserve the Pigeon Creek, Stony Run, French Creek, Pickering Creek, and Valley Creek watersheds of northern Chester County.

Welkinweir was placed in 1976 into a conservation easement held by Natural Lands Trust. The property was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2001. Welkinweir’s grounds include formal gardens, an arboretum and a diversity of native habitats through which wind trails open to the public. The grounds are open daily. Hiking only is permitted on the trails, with the exception of the Horse-Shoe Trail. A visitor education center with restrooms and parking, and a picnic pavilion, is available.

Several factors make Welkinweir an excellent potential visitor information hub for learning about conservation and recreation in the Hopewell Big Woods:

- the location of Welkinweir along Route 100, a major north-south thoroughfare, and as the eastern anchor of significant private and public preserved lands;
- the location of the Horse-Shoe Trail;
- the availability of visitor support facilities; and
- the role of Green Valleys Association in conserving open space and water quality.

Welkinweir could function much like the “Visitor Hubs” described as part of the Strategic Plan for the Iron and Steel Heritage Region. Welkinweir could introduce visitors to the Hopewell Big Woods within the context of the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area, and describe its significance and the ongoing conservation efforts of Green Valleys Association and its partners such as Natural Lands Trust and Hay Creek Watershed Association. Welkinweir could also provide an overview of the recreational facilities and trails – including auto tours – in the area (and how to use them responsibly), along with information on visitor services.

Welkinweir could also expand its interpretive programming and visitor services, perhaps considering a trailhead and/or parking off of Route 100 for access to the Horse-Shoe Trail and a location for washing off hiking boots or horses hooves to minimize the translocation of invasive species. Printed and digital materials and signage could use the Hopewell Big Woods logo. Welkinweir could serve as one of five major locations to tell the conservation story, along with Crow’s Nest Preserve, Hopewell Furnace NHS, French Creek State Park, and Birdsboro Waters.
Crow’s Nest Preserve

The Preserve is one of several major tracts of privately owned conservation lands within the Hopewell Big Woods. Natural Lands Trust owns and manages the Preserve. The non-profit land trust NLT was founded by a group of avid bird-watchers in 1953. NLT is one of the first regional land conservation groups in the country and one of the largest in the region. NLT owns and manages conservation lands in the counties surrounding Philadelphia, in northeastern Pennsylvania, and in Salem and Cumberland counties, New Jersey. NLT is spearheading the Hopewell Big Woods project, which the organization describes as one of four “Keystone Landscapes” that are critical to the region’s ecological health.

Crow’s Nest Preserve is a 600+ acre property along French Creek characterized by wildflower meadows and grasslands, crop fields and forested areas typical of Piedmont flora. NLT manages the land for native habitat as well as for agricultural and passive public use. Bow hunting for deer only is allowed. The preserve provides environmental education and research opportunities, including a summer day camp and after-school programs. The visitor center includes a library, meeting space, and restrooms; however, the center is only open by chance or appointment.

Several factors make Crow’s Nest Preserve a potential “Interpretive Pod” for learning about conservation and recreation in the Hopewell Big Woods:

- its location adjacent to Hopewell Furnace NHS and State Game Lands 43, as the southern anchor of significant private and public preserved lands;
- its location adjacent to the Horse-Shoe Trail, Boars Back Trail and Forge to Furnace auto tour;
- the availability of visitor support facilities; and
- the role of Natural Lands Trust in conserving open space in the region.

Crow’s Nest Preserve could describe to visitors the conservation values of the Hopewell Big Woods and the ongoing conservation efforts of Natural Lands Trust and its partners. The Preserve could also provide an overview of the recreational facilities and trails – including auto tours – in the area (and how to use them responsibly), along with information on visitor services. Crow’s Nest Preserve could consider regular hours of operation for its visitor center, and expanded interpretive programming and visitor services.

A trailhead, kiosk and/or parking off of Hopewell Road could provide access and information to serve two trail routes – Chief’s Grove Trail within Crow’s Nest and the Colonial Forge & Furnace auto tour along Hopewell Road. Printed materials and signage could use the Hopewell Big Woods logo and tell the conservation and iron heritage story, supplementing the existing kiosk. A location for washing off hiking boots or horses hooves could minimize the translocation of invasive species, in keeping with the Preserve’s Leave No Trace visitor management approach. Crow’s Nest Preserve could serve as one of five locations to tell the conservation story, along with Welkinweir, Hopewell Furnace NHS, French Creek State Park, and Birdsboro Waters.

State Game Lands 43

Pennsylvania Game Lands #43 consist of three discontiguous properties totaling 2,909 acres for the benefit of the public. Pennsylvania Game Commission policies focus on managing wildlife populations and minimizing impacts to their habitat to the extent possible, for the benefit of hunters. Game Lands management and facilities maintenance are funded through hunting license fees, mineral revenues, and timber fees.

Existing access roads serve informally as trails, but there are currently no authorized single track or cross country trails and no authorized connections to French Creek State Park or Hopewell Furnace trails, with the exception of the Horse-Shoe Trail. The PA Game Lands trails are essentially service roads and were not developed to enhance recreational experiences for hikers and bicyclists. In 2000, state regulations were changed to permit bikers on Game Lands; however, unauthorized bike trails continue to be an issue. There are time-of-year limitations on trail use for safety. For instance, during the major hunting season, the trails are closed except on Sundays.

Pennsylvania Game Lands #43 (SGL #43) and French Creek State Park are major regional hunting destinations where there are open areas to hunt.
A shooting range is available on the Pennsylvania Game Lands only. Hunting is possible most times of the year (bow season, deer season, bird season), although limited to bow hunting and shotgun. Rifle hunting is not permitted in Chester County but is permitted in Berks County. Currently, trails on public hunting lands are generally not used by groups other than hunters.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission is concerned about the development of biking / hiking trails through Game Lands because of safety issues; however, the Commission has been receptive to the idea of a land exchange or purchase that would enable NPS and its partners to expand trail connections to adjacent properties. There is also the possibility to use Game Lands facilities off season, with the exception of the pistol range and other hazardous areas used year-round.

For each region, there are designated routes. These route designations, which total more than 1,000 miles, are in compliance with State Game Lands use regulations that went into effect on February 1, 2003. Under the new regulations, anyone who rides a non-motorized vehicle (e.g., bicycle), conveyance or animal on State Game Lands must do so only on designated routes. Such riding activities will not be permitted, except on Sundays or on roads open to public travel, from the last Saturday in September to the third Saturday in January, and after 1 p.m. from the second Saturday in April to the last Saturday in May. This does not apply to anyone lawfully engaged in hunting, trapping or fishing on State Game Lands. Within SGL #43 (western property), there is only one designated route currently which starts from the rifle range off of Laurel Road and loops around and back to the rifle range within the Game Lands for 3.4 miles. The rifle range includes a buffer to avoid use conflicts, and bicyclists can ride at night or on Sundays to avoid hunters.

The Horse-Shoe Trail is noted as a special use trail on Pennsylvania Game Commission maps but is not listed as a designated route. There is an opportunity to identify the Horse-Shoe Trail within SGL #43 and the proposed Boar’s Back Trail as designated routes. The designation could provide the impetus for preserving additional lands adjacent to the trail corridor, providing improved access for hunters and greater safety for recreational users away from the rifle range area, and expanding wildlife habitat. The trails would need to be properly posted on both SGL #43 property and also French Creek State Park to alert recreational users to the rules and safety precautions.

Unlike other conservation organizations and agencies that manage area lands, the Pennsylvania Game Commission does not include interpretation and education of natural and cultural resources in its mission. The education focus is primarily on hunting safety and management of wildlife habitat on State Game Lands. An additional challenge is the lack of visitor support facilities such as a visitor center, restrooms, and picnic or rest areas. Nonetheless, the connection of all three SGL #43 properties through the proposed Boar’s Back Trail, the existence of a major regional trail – the Horse-Shoe Trail – connecting two SGL #43 properties, and the presence of historic resources on or adjacent to the Game Lands provides an opportunity for interpretation.

Existing parking areas could be used to provide an enhanced overview map of State Game Lands #43, including the existing designated trails and their permitted uses, historic resources, and ways to access the regional trails from the SGL internal trail system. Parking areas near historic iron mines could include waysides, brochures or other relatively simple media to interpret the mines’ role in the iron industry and how they impact the landscape today. These historic mines include Hopewell Mines, Everhart Mines, Warwick Mines, and Steel’s Mines. The role of the Commonwealth in conserving the Hopewell Big Woods could also be interpreted here, as well as at French Creek State Park. Due to the poor condition of these historic features, direct physical access should not be provided to the public.

Currently there are no existing trailheads on SGL #43 properties. A trailhead in conjunction with existing parking would be needed for the Horse-Shoe Trail where it enters the State Game Lands from Hopewell Furnace NHS. Suitable locations for additional trailheads for the Boar’s Back Trail should be considered on or adjacent to the southern portions of SGL #43. Special design features for horseback riders should be considered – e.g., spaces for horse trailers, horse unloading ramp, hitching rail, etc.
IRON HERITAGE NODES

JOANNA FURNACE

The location of Joanna Furnace adjacent to PA Route 10, a segment of the Colonial Forge & Furnace auto tour, and near a proposed off road trail (New Morgan Connector), and its visitor facilities and interpretive programming provide excellent potential for developing the Furnace as an interpretive node or potentially a “visitor hub” in the future. Joanna Furnace has the potential to serve a great number of interpretive functions.

Ongoing restoration efforts have provided a full range of structures that offer interpretive opportunities, including the furnace, charcoal house, blower engine house, blacksmith shop and a number of other structures. Joanna represents opportunities to highlight changes in iron manufacturing technology through most of the 19th century. The site also offers opportunities to feature the daily lives of the workers and that of the owners and ironmasters. Interpretation at Joanna Furnace can complement and enrich the stories told at Hopewell Furnace NHS by helping to provide a complete continuum of ironmaking history.

The Hay Creek Valley Historical Association (HCVHA) owns and operates the Furnace. The Association’s mission is to “support and demonstrate, to foster interest in and appreciation for our local heritage, and to provide a living experience of Berks County’s rich agricultural and technological past.” The furnace is supported almost entirely by the services of HCVHA’s volunteer members and festival activities such as Christmas at Joanna, Hay Creek Festival, and the Hay Creek Apple Festival, which attract thousands of visitors each year. Visitor facilities include a museum in the Charcoal Barn, restrooms and parking. Hours of operation would need to be expanded in order for the site to function as a Visitor Hub, as proposed in the Strategic Plan for the Iron and Steel Heritage Region. A trailhead suitable for bikers and hikers, and trail connections to the newly developing community of Bryn Ayre and the abandoned PA Route 82, would enhance this function.

In much the same way as Crow’s Nest Preserve, Birdsboro Waters, and other select sites could tell the conservation story, Joanna Furnace could tell the story of iron production in the region, linking it to the conservation story. Joanna Furnace could serve as one of seven hubs of information for the Colonial Forge & Furnace auto tour and the Iron and Steel Heritage Region, along with Birdsboro, Hopewell Furnace NHS, French Creek State Park, St. Peters Village, Coventryville, and Warwick County Park.

Joanna Furnace could introduce visitors to the Hopewell Big Woods within the context of the Iron and Steel Heritage Region, and describe the Furnace’s significance and the ongoing preservation efforts of Hay Creek Valley Historical Association and its partners. Joanna Furnace could also provide an overview of the historic sites in the area and distribute information about the local parks and recreational facilities for other organizations and agencies. The Furnace could provide information about the locations and permitted uses of trails once these are established, along with information on visitor services available in nearby Morgantown and Elverson. Printed materials and signage could use the Hopewell Big Woods logo and tell the iron heritage story, supplementing existing information about the Furnace history.

COVENTRYVILLE

Coventryville is among the most scenic and historic villages in the Hopewell Big Woods and identified as a destination for the Colonial Forge & Furnace Trail. It is a possibly unique example of a community built in the early years of the iron industry that does not represent a more traditional iron plantation. Coventryville’s location near a significant cluster of iron related resources (Coventry Forge, Coventryville Iron Works, and Rock Run Furnace) and near the junction of several trails, and the presence of visitor support services such as the Coventry Inn, make it an excellent starting point for walking, bicycling and driving tours related to the early iron industry.
Coventryville can serve a function similar to that of “Interpretive Pod” described in the Strategic Plan for the Iron and Steel Heritage Region, offering interpretive information that clarifies the links between the formation of the community and the early years of the iron industry. Should an appropriate facility be located in town, Coventryville can expand its function to “Visitor Hub” and provide an orientation to the iron related resources and history of Hopewell Big Woods, on and off road trails that access those resources, and directions to nearby attractions and visitor services. Direct connections to the French Creek Trail and Horse-Shoe Trail could be developed from downtown Coventryville.

Alternately, Coventry House, the headquarters for French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust, could serve as an interpretive stop for the Colonial Forge & Furnace Trail, providing an opportunity to showcase the lives of early ironmasters. Coventry House could also house information materials relating to the Colonial Forge & Furnace Trail, French Creek Trail, Horse-Shoe Trail and other trails in the area.

Other sites that double as Iron Heritage Nodes and Gateways, Visitor Hubs or Discovery Centers include: St. Peter’s Village, Warwick County Park, Morgantown and Hopewell Furnace NHS.

TRAILHEAD TOWNS

MONOCACY – See pp. 32-33, Monocacy Connection with French Creek State

PUGHTOWN

This historic crossroads village at the eastern end of Hopewell Big Woods would be an appropriate location for a trailhead and information kiosk, perhaps located in the Norchester Red Knights field, although only portable restrooms are available. Directional signage could indicate the route for the Pikeland Nails to Rails auto tour to the east as well as the Colonial Forge & Furnace auto tour to the west.

Puhtown is also the junction of PA Bicycle Route S and the French Creek Trail, and direct access could be provided to the French Creek Trail from town. The trailhead could include a small parking area so that visitors and trail users could stop to read the interpretive signage and information about French Creek Trail – e.g., rules for its use, resources, etc. A box with self-guided French Creek Trail brochures could be stationed here or information could be available at a nearby business (such as Coventry Tea Room), along with an overview of Hopewell Big Woods, places to get additional information about recreation and historic resources (e.g., Welkinweir Visitor Center), and nearby attractions.

EAGLE/LUDWIGS CORNER

Ludwigs Corner represents the southeastern entry point into the Hopewell Big Woods. This rapidly developing crossroads is now mainly the location for high-priced residences, although the vestiges of an historic town and some small businesses are visible along PA Route 100. A suitable location for an information kiosk or visitors center could be at the Henrietta Hankin Library on PA Route 401 just east of its intersection with PA Route 100. Just north of Ludwigs Corner is a sizeable park –the Ludwigs Corner Horse Show Grounds – where information about the Hopewell Big Woods could be provided. At a minimum, roadway signage should indicate the visitor is entering Hopewell Big Woods. Directions to the Horse-Shoe Trail and the nearest trailhead would be useful.

The 33-acre Ludwigs Corner Horse Show Grounds are located nearby, the site of significant regional riding competitions, horse shows, kennel club shows, and an annual 5K cross country race. Income to maintain and improve the grounds for show purposes and to secure this open space for similar activities in the future is obtained from membership dues and donations; the annual Ludwigs Corner Horse Show; and the rental of the grounds to other groups for other horse shows, dog shows, antique shows, automobile shows and similar activities; and other fund raising activities. In addition, area rides for the public are sponsored by the Ludwigs Corner Riding & Driving Club, a non-profit organization of about 100 people who enjoy riding and driving. Members include English and Western pleasure horseback riders, carriage drivers, and competitors of all ages and skill levels. Annual dues are collected to fund club activities, and for donation to worthy equine and open-space organizations.
The Horse Show Grounds provides a potential venue for distributing information about Hopewell Big Woods trails and recreational facilities that would appeal to auto tourists, horseback riders, and a wide range of recreationists. In addition, there is the potential for partnering with the Ludwig’s Corner Riding & Driving Club to distribute information, market the nearby riding trails in particular (e.g., Horse-Shoe Trail), and develop and maintain trails.

A few miles south of Ludwigs Corner is the town of Eagle. Eagle has a wide range of services for visitors, including gas stations, restaurants, and lodgings; however, the town does not support businesses that specifically cater to the area’s recreational users. Currently, Eagle is the last town before entering the Hopewell Big Woods on PA Route 100 and located along a busy, commercial area of the highway. Although the location and range of services create some potential for Eagle to become a “gateway” into Hopewell Big Woods, information infrastructure would need to be developed and promoted with area businesses and West Vincent Township. The commercial development detracts from the gateway idea.

OTHER TRAILHEADS / TRAIL ACCESS POINTS

Woody’s Woods and Coventry Woods

These protected lands in South and North Coventry townships respectively are relatively unimproved and do not offer the broad range of amenities visitors would find in French Creek State Park and other local parks in the area. While not suitable for the location of full service visitor facilities, Woody’s Woods and Coventry Woods (PHOTO 6) are proposed to tie into North and South Coventry’s multi-use trail system. Hikers, horseback riders, and bicyclists are anticipated to use these parks. Therefore it is likely that some expansion of visitor services would be required if trail use justifies it – e.g., installation of restrooms/port-a-potties, parking, bike racks, and outdoor picnic facilities.

Both parks could maintain a large “You are here” map of the Hopewell Big Woods with an overview of the trails and recreation facilities, where to go for specific recreational activities, permitted uses and “rules of the trails,” and more detailed information on the developing trail systems of North and South Coventry townships. The information could be provided in the form of a simple kiosk or waysides. Alternately, a box with brochures for self-guided trail information could be provided, along with a “sign-in sheet” to track visitor use during the year. As in the case of other area parks, the issue of invasive species and their relation to trail use should be included in information materials.
BOOST LOCAL ECONOMIES AND SUPPORT TOURISM

All Hopewell Big Woods communities can participate in the significant economic benefits of heritage tourism supported by a well integrated transportation network and organized, coordinated marketing and promotion. An organized trail system is a desirable amenity and can contribute to the economical vitality of the community, often boosting values of properties adjacent to the trail. Evidence shows that the access to quality natural, recreational and cultural settings is an important factor in corporate relocation decisions.

Trails are often cited as important contributors to quality of life and they offer opportunities for employees to commute by foot or bicycle. Trail network users provide a market for food and beverages, lodging, equipment, bicycle sales/rental/repair, clothing, accessories, books, maps, and guides. The Hopewell Big Woods trails can guide both visitors and residents through diverse neighborhoods, past interesting shops, enticing restaurants, and many other businesses in downtown areas such as Elverson, St. Peters Village, and Birdsboro. Revenue generated from trail related recreation and sports activities can provide substantial income and employment opportunities.

INSPIRE INTEREST IN HISTORY, CULTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The Hopewell Big Woods Trail Network can provide a unique opportunity for current and future generations to learn about and appreciate the American Revolution, the rich iron-making heritage of the region, resource extraction and its impacts on the environment, and consider the concept of sustainability in resource use. The trail network would essentially form part of a nontraditional classroom, with heritage assets linked together thematically and enriched by interpretive areas for use by schools and the general public. Communities would understand and be motivated to protect the cultural, historic and natural resources that make the Hopewell Big Woods a special place to live, play and work.

PROMOTE AND SUPPORT HEALTH, FITNESS, AND RECREATION

Inviting pathways and trails that link population centers to the great outdoors and scenic, historic and recreational attractions would encourage residents and visitors to participate in outdoor exercise and fitness activities. Walking, bicycling and other human powered transport are ways to contribute to the health and well being of participants, reducing both the direct and indirect costs of illness and disease, improving lifestyles, and reducing geriatric costs. Well designed trails get people in the habit of exercising and socializing with others. Alternative transportation choices create more cohesive communities, conserve gasoline, and reduce traffic congestion and pollution. The Hopewell Big Woods Trail Network can create more opportunities for recreation and make parks more accessible to the community.
Share Our Vision

The Hopewell Big Woods trails and recreation network can provide excellent opportunities to link communities, boost local economies, encourage alternative modes of transportation, support environmental and history education, and reconnect people to their heritage. But it can’t happen without you. Forging new partnerships between public and private interests is the only way to make the network a reality.

Please Join Us!

Contact:
Jim Thorne, Senior Director of Science, Natural Lands Trust, 610-353-5587 (ext. 241) or jthorne@natlands.org
1031 Palmers Mill Road, Media, PA 19063

Check out the Hopewell Big Woods web site at:
http://www.hopewellbigwoods.org/

Get Involved!

Link Communities with the Valuable Assets that Surround Them

Residents can build on existing plans such as the Berks County Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan and Chester County’s Linking Landscapes, as well as current community revitalization and trail development efforts, to provide more travel choices (PHOTO 7). They can identify short trips between communities and their heritage assets, tying them together socially and economically using safe routes for cyclists, wheelchair users and families with strollers. They can connect to the larger region through long-distance trails such as the Schuylkill River Trail and Horse-Shoe Trail.
A. Initiatives Contributing to the Concept Plan

The Hopewell Big Woods Recreation and Trails Network is not a completely new idea. Elements of the concept were circulating for several years among the townships, recreation groups, local landowners, nonprofits and area businesses. The idea for these groups to work together for the “collective good” of the Hopewell Big Woods region was conceived several years ago in 2000, when the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership was born. A coalition of interest groups (see Acknowledgements Section) and dedicated individuals volunteered to examine ways to unlock the full potential of Hopewell Big Woods assets for all to appreciate, protect, and enjoy. Previous planning for the Hopewell Big Woods is described below.

Municipal Planning Efforts

Birdsboro Waters Master Plan (2009)

The master plan identified appropriate recreational activities within Birdsboro Waters and provided the concept for the trailheads. Trail design treatments will be provided to PennDOT for guidance on the future disposition of Route 82. Federal Highways Administration will require improvements from PennDOT that could fund enhancements to trails in Birdsboro Waters such as trailheads and parking areas.

Birdsboro Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan (2006)

Birdsboro Borough completed a comprehensive review of its recreation facilities and programs. Through this process the Borough identified ecological, recreational, heritage, and management goals in order to guide the future growth and development of the Borough’s park system. Among the highest priority projects identified in the plan are:

- Develop Millard House
- Acquire right-of-way within Armorcast Property
- Acquire right-of-way for Mountz Trail from F.M. Brown

These projects support the revitalization of Birdsboro as a northern gateway to the Hopewell Big Woods and important access point for the Schuylkill River Trail. The right-of-way within the Armorcast property has been acquired for one year, with the possibility of future renewal.


Currently there are few pedestrian crossings in downtown Elverson, the sidewalks are relatively narrow, and motor vehicles are generally traveling at speeds greater than those posted. Traffic calming and streetscape enhancements along Route 23, a designated Pennsylvania Bicycle Route, and improvements to the pedestrian and bicycling environment, are important elements of the Revitalization Plan. Elverson Borough is interested in reducing the negative impacts of vehicular traffic on Route 23 and improving pedestrian and vehicular safety along borough streets. The Borough supports encouraging motorists traveling through the borough to patronize Elverson businesses, and creation of a pedestrian-oriented community where sidewalks and trails connect to community destinations and enhance the pedestrian experience. Bumpouts, gateway signs and pedestrian crossings are planned for Route 23 to create a more pedestrian friendly environment. New trails connecting a proposed elementary school and recreation facilities to the Borough pedestrian system are recommended. In addition, businesses will be encouraged to provide bicycle racks.
The recommended actions in the Elverson Borough Revitalization Plan support the development of the regional trail system by providing safe access to the trails from this historic community through a system of on-street and off-road walkways and bicycle routes. Working in concert with the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership, Elverson Borough can re-imagine itself as an information hub and southern gateway for Hopewell Big Woods trails, providing facilities and services for trail users such as bike rentals and repairs, outfitters, and tours and tour guides.

COUNTY INITIATIVES AND PLANNING EFFORTS

Chester County Forge to Furnace Concept (ongoing)

During 2008, a series of meetings were held with municipal and county representatives to develop the scope of work for the Federation of Northern Chester County Communities Regional Park, Open Space and Recreation Plan, beginning in 2009. One of the concepts which came out of this coordination was the “Forge to Furnace” corridor. This concept was not a formally adopted or approved plan. Rather the concept is a recognition that the various trail and greenways that exist, or are proposed, in northern Chester and southern Montgomery Counties could create a trail network linking Valley Forge National Historical Park with Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site. As a network, this corridor need not be one trail facility owned and maintained by one organization, but rather a series of interconnected trails and greenways that have the same identity, and might share the same minimum design criteria, signage, and a common friends-of group.

Such a corridor would require substantial coordination and planning, and would likely be realized through a series of related smaller trail planning efforts such as the Northern Federation plan and the plan for trails along French Creek being pursued by the French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust. The benefit of the Forge to Furnace Concept is that it would link two national parks and Phoenixville Borough, thus making the corridor well-suited for receiving funding from state grants, recreational grants, and urban revitalization grants. Currently, three municipalities in eastern Chester County are conducting a study of the “Patriots Path,” which links municipal parks to Valley Forge Park using the same sort of approach. As a result, there is precedent for pursuing the Forge to Furnace concept over the long term in incremental steps. The Strategic Plan for the Iron and Steel Heritage Region described below can be the overarching guidance for developing the Forge to Furnace concept.

Horse-Shoe Trail Feasibility Study (2009)

This study focused on approximately 29 miles of the Horse-Shoe Trail in Berks County, where segments of the trail are either on road or on private property and not protected through easements. The goals are to get the trail off-road and permanently protected. A portion of this 29 miles falls within the Hopewell Big Woods, and in this area options for re-locating the trail off road are being considered. One option is to re-locate the trail after it exits French Creek State Park by taking it through the proposed Bryn Eyre community.

Bucks County Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan (2007)

An update to the 1994 Berks County Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan, this plan guides municipalities, organizations, developers and private interests on the development of future recreational facilities. It also addresses connections to existing trails and greenways and preservation of open space and historic resources throughout Berks County, setting specific goals with a target date of 2020.

The plan sets forth recommendations specific to the Southern Highlands Region, which includes Hopewell Big Woods. The plan describes the multitude of recreational, ecological and historical resources within the Highlands, and specifically identifies the Schuylkill River Greenway/Trail, the Horse-Shoe Trail, and the proposed Hay Creek Trail. The plan notes the importance of key destinations connected by the trails, such as Hopewell Furnace NHS, French Creek State Park, Birdsboro Waters property, and state gamelands. The Hopewell Big Woods is characterized as the “heart of the Pennsylvania Highlands” and an “Ecologic Hub of Significance” that is a high
priority for conservation. The plan further notes that, although there seems to be an abundance of parks and trails in the region, the demand for these recreational opportunities is increasing across Pennsylvania.

About the Thun/Schuylkill River Trail, the plan notes “Some sections are incomplete and it is very important to finish the connection to Montgomery County.” The gap in the Schuylkill River Trail from Birdsboro southeast to Pottstown was recently eliminated. The trail section from Birdsboro northwest to Gibraltar remains an on road segment that in time will be re-located off road. The Horse-Shoe Trail is described as a “major pedestrian and hiking connector route that links key destinations within the Southern Highlands Region and provides connections to areas outside the region.”

The plan suggests a trail along Hay Creek utilizing the abandoned Route 82 and rail corridors. The proposed Hay Creek Trail has since been abandoned; however, a replacement connection is being pursued in Union Township. The plan suggests that these trails be developed as part of greenway corridors that are vital for wildlife migration corridors and connect “Ecologic Hubs of Significance,” including Hopewell Big Woods. The plan also suggests two themes – gristmills and furnaces – that can be applied to the historic resources of the region and used to organize the visitor experience, including trail use.

Other recommendations that support the Hopewell Big Woods Trails and Recreation Network include:

- marketing and promotion of the Hopewell Big Woods and French Creek State Park;
- completion of the Schuylkill River/Thun Trail through Birdsboro;
- securing permanent protection of the Horse-Shoe Trail off road;
- recognizing and incorporating local trail segments into the Pennsylvania Highlands Trails Network; and
- marketing and restoring Joanna Furnace and linking it to adjacent trails.

The Berks County Greenway plan also proposes creating a historic resources “hub” at Birdsboro; providing recreational trail connections to St. Lawrence, Monocacy Hill and Birdsboro; and preserving the Lower Allegheny ecological area with potential trail connections to the Schuylkill River Trail and Big Woods.

**Linking Landscapes: A Plan for the Protected Open Space Network in Chester County, Pennsylvania (2002)**

In February 2002, the Chester County Board of Commissioners adopted *Linking Landscapes*, the first of the specific plan elements tied to Landscapes as the open space element of the Chester County comprehensive plan. The primary goal of *Linking Landscapes* is the protection of open space through the coordinated efforts of Chester County, municipalities, land trusts and conservancies, and private property owners. Open space is defined as “woodland, meadows, farms and even back yards or the lawns surrounding industrial parks.” The plan includes policy recommendations for protecting agricultural and natural resources lands and the creation of open space linkages, as well as the development of recreational resource areas for township residents.

Relevant to the Hopewell Big Woods Trails and Recreation Concept Plan is the *Linking Landscapes* recommendation to rehabilitate already developed lands as open space. In particular, two railroad corridors within Hopewell Big Woods are identified for potential rehabilitation: Sow Belly Railroad and New Holland Branch. *Linking Landscapes* recommends that these rail corridors be recycled into trails, if they are not likely to be used for future rail transport. While *Linking Landscapes* evaluated the Hopewell Big Woods region as not needing additional regional (federal, state) or county parks, it did recognize the need to connect these existing resources through non-motorized routes. *Linking Landscapes* identified the Schuylkill River Trail, Horse-Shoe Trail, and Welsh Mountain – St. Peters recreation corridor as “Regional Priority Trails” that Chester County would like to see developed and/or completed.

*Linking Landscapes* looked broadly at ways the Regional Priority Trail Corridors would fit into a larger regional and interstate network of trails. Such a network would allow residents from the Delaware
state line to bike through Chester County to French Creek State Park. Cyclists could also travel from the Octoraro Valley to Valley Forge and the Schuylkill River Trail. Given Chester County’s central location and the presence of several regional trails in a relatively compact area, such a network could increase tourism and promote the revitalization of older urban centers.

**Landscapes: Managing Change in Chester County 1996-2020 (adopted in 1996)**

*Landscapes*, now undergoing revision, established a vision for the future of Chester County to preserve and enhance the unique character of Chester County landscapes by concentrating growth in the most appropriate areas. The primary goal of the Chester County policy plan is to focus new development in areas where it can best be accommodated and encouraging the revitalization of the County’s urban areas. The plan stresses the importance of protecting natural and historic resources and emphasizes the need to preserve farms and prime agricultural soils. The plan identifies growth boundaries around four types of landscapes: Natural, Rural, Suburban, and Urban, and proposes key actions to protect and enhance the character of each landscape.

The majority of the Hopewell Big Woods region is located in the Rural and Natural Landscapes, with the Borough of South Pottstown and Pottstown Landing in North Coventry Township identified as Urban Landscapes. Portions of East Coventry, East Pikeland, East Vincent, and North Coventry are identified as the Suburban Landscape. The Region also contains rural centers that are part of the Hopewell Big Woods, including Bucktown and Puigtown in South Coventry; St. Peters Village and Knaurtown in Warwick; and Ludwig’s Corner in West Vincent.

Recommendations regarding trails and recreation facilities are folded into the goal of providing safe and efficient transportation via an intermodal system which optimizes mobility, strengthens the economy, protects the environment, and supports the vision for Chester County. Chester County is charged with developing a bikeway plan consisting of a network of trails and roads and expediting key components of a county-wide trail network. Local governments are charged with encouraging developers to incorporate designs into their proposals that consider forms of transportation other than automobiles, to include transit, pedestrians, bikes, and existing trails, and to build alternative transportation into subdivision ordinance design standards.

County and local governments are urged to promote alternative means of travel to reduce automotive dependency, increase accessibility, and improve air quality. The emphasis is on:

- developing a network of corridors for non-motorized travel and protecting existing corridors to link areas of concentrated development;
- enhancing pedestrian and bicycle connections within and among residential, commercial, and employment areas, and among community facilities; and
- supporting concentrated, mixed-use development that encourages bicycling and walking.

Separate bicycle facilities and pedestrian facilities are encouraged wherever possible to avoid user conflicts. Policies guiding the provision and management of parkland and recreational facilities include:

- providing new land for open space and recreational facilities to meet forecasted needs;
- establishing a trail and bikeway network to link residential areas, business uses, community facilities, and parks;
- ensuring that special needs populations can access recreational facilities;
- providing diverse recreational programs;
- supporting joint recreational use of facilities among state, county, and municipal governments, local organizations, and school districts; and
- cooperating with surrounding areas to link Chester County’s open space system to a regional network.
REGIONAL PLANNING EFFORTS

Hay Creek Greenway Plan (2007)

Along with conserving, enhancing and protecting natural areas within the Hay Creek watershed, the Hay Creek Greenway Plan recommends diverse and unique outdoor recreation opportunities should be provided highlighting the Hay Creek Watershed’s natural and historic resources. Objectives include:

- Creating a regional hiking, biking, and walking trail network that connects people with natural and historic resources, and
- Increasing outdoor recreation-related tourism opportunities that take advantage of the abundant resources in the watershed such as bird watching, rock climbing, hiking and biking, kayaking, and canoeing.

Related to objective #2 is the emphasis on heritage-related tourism and environmental education opportunities throughout the watershed, including those available at Joanna Furnace, Hopewell Furnace, and other National Register sites. The plan further recommends the development of “outdoor classrooms” within the greenway systems that provide hands-on access to environmental resources. Indoor and outdoor classrooms that provide access to historic and cultural resources, such as the Tucci House, Joanna Furnace, and other key sites, are also recommended.

The plan describes the recreational network for Hay Creek watershed, including parks and recreational trails such as the Horse-Shoe Trail, Schuylkill River Trail, and the proposed Hay Creek Trail as important community amenities. Key recreational, historic and cultural destinations to be linked through a recreation greenway system include:

- French Creek State Park
- Union Township Recreation Area
- Twin Valley and Daniel Boone school campuses
- potentially rock climbing areas
- Joanna Furnace
- Hopewell Furnace NHS
- Geiger Mill
- St. Michael’s Church
- a potential historic district for Birdsboro, along with the Brooke Mansion

Birdsboro Waters is clearly a major natural and recreation focal point for the Hay Creek watershed and a key element in the greenway system. Recommendations for developing, enhancing and managing the recreational network include establishing recreation greenway corridors throughout the watershed to provide additional recreational opportunities for area residents. The plan suggests completion of the Schuylkill River Trail through Birdsboro and development of at least one trailhead with support facilities, as an economic stimulus. The plan also recommends preparing a feasibility study for the Horse-Shoe Trail, which would include costs associated with realignment of the Horse-Shoe Trail from an on-road facility to a primarily off-road trail facility.

Integrally linked to the development of the recreation greenway corridors are the heritage greenway corridors. Heritage greenway corridors serve to protect the watershed’s locally and nationally significant historic resources, increase awareness and expand the Hopewell Big Woods initiative, and facilitate implementation of the Schuylkill River Trail and Greenway. Birdsboro would be marketed as a gateway to the Hay Creek Watershed and Hopewell Big Woods. Joanna Furnace Complex would be rebuilt to serve as a southern gateway for the Hay Creek Greenway and Hopewell Big Woods. Acquisition, planning and reuse of the Millard “Tucci” House in Birdsboro would provide an environmental education center and headquarters for the Hay Creek Watershed Association.

Various greenway management options are described, including regional or county management, non-profit management or shared management among several entities. Roles of greenway partners are also outlined, including the ecological management role of Hopewell Big Woods Partnership.

Phoenixville Area Regional Comprehensive Plan (draft 2006)

In 2000, six municipalities facing similar challenges joined together to develop a joint comprehensive plan. The six municipalities include the Borough
of Phoenixville and the townships of Charlestown, East Pikeland, East Vincent, Schuylkill, and West Vincent, covering approximately 70 square miles in northeastern Chester County along the Schuylkill River and portions of select tributaries. East and West Vincent townships are located within the Hopewell Big Woods. The plan has as its central focus the revitalization of downtown Phoenixville as a regional magnet for shopping, arts, culture and entertainment; protection of agriculture and natural resources, including the Hopewell Big Woods; and creating a sustainable framework for growth and resource protection. Development of design guidelines for small-scale village style and mixed use development are encouraged, resource protection areas that include riparian corridors are identified, and an aggressive reforestation program is recommended for municipal-owned lands, particularly within the Hopewell Big Woods.

The Phoenixville Area Regional Comprehensive Plan contains recommendations specific to regional trails. The plan references the Chester County Linking Landscapes Plan, which identified the Horse-Shoe Trail corridor as a priority for protection. Additionally, the Sow Belly-French Creek Corridor and Pickering-Upper Uwchlan Corridor are recommended for expansion, as these corridors connect regional parks, municipal parks, and points of interest along their routes. Building trail connections from Phoenixville area communities to existing segments of the Schuylkill River Trail (SRT) is a regional priority, as the SRT is the primary greenway/trail in the region. Chester and Montgomery Counties are working together to acquire property for the SRT and have determined the route of the trail on the Montgomery County side of the Schuylkill River and crossing over to Phoenixville on the Route 29 bridge.

The Phoenixville Area Regional Comprehensive Plan notes:

The regional trail system is important; however, it is the local connections to that trail system that boost its usage. Municipalities should identify potential linkages to the regional trail system from park spaces, subdivisions, and commercial areas. One of the initial steps the Region can take to work together in creating a regional trail system is to create a GIS map of the existing trail network and work as a group with French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust to identify linkages within each municipality as well as connecting across municipal boundaries.

The Federation of Northern Chester County Communities Regional Resource Protection Plan (2006)

The Regional Resource Protection Plan is a joint planning effort of the townships of East, North and South Coventry; East and West Vincent; East Nantmeal; East Pikeland; Wallace and Warwick in northern Chester County. Portions of all of these townships except Wallace and East Pikeland are located within the Hopewell Big Woods. The plan outlines recommendations and actions for the identification and protection of the region’s natural, historic, scenic, agricultural, and recreational resources, building on previous conservation efforts of the individual townships. The chapter on recreation focuses on regional and municipal efforts to expand and/or create parkland and recreational facilities, the connection of recreational facilities, and the coordination of community events and organizations. In addition, a recreational resources inventory identifies size and type of parkland and recreational resources in the region and describes the legal basis that enables municipalities and regional groups to manage recreational resources.

To improve the environment and quality of life for residents, the plan recommends expanding ADA accessibility to public lands to the extent possible. It also encourages the creation and connection of trails and pathways in order to provide a regional pedestrian circulation system. The plan identifies “regional parks and recreation facilities” to include national and state managed lands such as French Creek State Park, State Game Lands #43, and Hopewell Furnace NHS, and “sub-regional parks and recreation facilities” to include significant private and county managed facilities such as Natural Lands Trust's Crow’s Nest Preserve, Springton Manor Farm, and Warwick County Park.

The plan also identifies nine community parks and recreational facilities that include several within
Hopewell Big Woods: Kimberton Community Park, Warwick Township Park, Welkinweir, and Woody’s Woods. Regional, sub-regional and community parks and recreation facilities all serve the region rather than just individual townships and communities. It was noted that portions of West Vincent and East Nantmeal townships are deficient in community recreation facilities. These townships are located on the southern and eastern borders of the Hopewell Big Woods and are divided by the Horse-Shoe Trail. Access to the Horse-Shoe Trail and French Creek trail system further north, and development of local trails, may help alleviate the current deficiency in community recreation facilities.

The Regional Resource Protection Plan further identifies a lack of adequate inventory information and current, accurate plans for individual municipal parks, recreation facilities and environmental resources, such that it is difficult to determine the need for future facilities based on municipal impacts such as increasing populations. Current plans need to be updated so that township officials can determine the potential need for additional neighborhood facilities. The plan further recommends establishing a regional recreation commission for Northern Federation municipalities that would enable municipal officials to address recreation needs from a regional perspective, including a coordinated strategy for land acquisition, capital expenditures, programming and management of recreational facilities on a regional basis. The Hopewell Big Woods Trails and Recreation Network supports the establishment of a regional entity, proposing coordinated development of consistent trail standards, supporting the development of trails and recreation facilities across the region, and suggesting the regional management entity would provide resources and tools to municipalities to successfully implement and manage trail projects.

Many of the actions recommended in the Regional Resource Protection Plan relate to marketing and promotion of the recreation facilities, and sharing information on their hours and operations with township residents. A comprehensive inventory of recreation facilities and associated operating information is suggested that would provide information to a variety of user groups. In addition, it could provide economic benefits to business owners within the region in providing related services to these users such as refreshment and the sales/rentals of related equipment. The Hopewell Big Woods Partnership has published a map of existing trails and recreational facilities that is an excellent starting point for such an inventory. Other venues for sharing this information with the region’s residents include community events.

The Regional Resource Protection Plan notes the challenge of having only one trail through the region – the Schuylkill River Trail – with a formally designated right-of-way, while many other existing and proposed trails are informal “social trails” or sidewalks and trail systems within residential developments designed specifically for interior circulation and connection. In addition to recommending the development of trail master plans for each township to address this challenge, the Regional Resource Protection Plan goes on to urge development of a regional public trail system master plan. This plan would “identify the location of trail corridors and provide a plan for connection or the linking of these facilities to other similar uses within and beyond the boundaries of the Region.”

The Regional Resource Protection Plan further challenges the townships and PennDOT to “make our roads safer to bicycle on and constructing cycling specific facilities where appropriate.” Combined with other societal trends (such as increasing traffic congestion, fuel costs, and development densities), safer roads would make cycling a more attractive travel option for a greater number of county residents. In addition to the cycling facilities that are either in place or in the planning stages, there are other corridors in Chester County where cycling facilities are needed but not currently available, such as Routes 100 and 23. Route 23 is designated as a Pennsylvania Bicycle Route. These corridors link key areas of population density, employment areas, commercial areas, and recreational areas. In each case, there is a potential and/or existing demand for bicycle access to these corridors that is currently unmet.

The plan specifies ways to make existing roadways more bicycle friendly, such as through wide shoulders/curb lanes, dedicated bicycle lanes, dedicated
off-road path, and a “road diet” that narrows or removes lanes. The Regional Resource Protection Plan identifies specific actions that would lead to the improvement of roads for bicycle use or creation of appropriate bicycle facilities on state and local roadways, such as through PennDOT road improvements, municipal transportation planning efforts, routine road maintenance, and safety education for bicyclists and motorists. Recreational user surveys conducted as part of the Hopewell Big Woods Trails and Recreation planning effort further support the need for bicycle friendly roadways as part of a complete regional trails system.

**Southern Berks Regional Comprehensive Plan (2004)**

This plan provides direction and guidance for future growth, development and preservation efforts for the next 10 to 20 years within the Borough of Birdsboro, and Caernarvon, Robeson and Union townships. The Southern Berks region covers portions of French Creek State Park and Hopewell Furnace NHS as well as Pennsylvania Gamelands 43. Chapter VI, Parks and Recreation, identifies the trails within these recreational facilities as well as specific “linear parks” (e.g., trails) as valuable assets for the region. The linear parks include the Horse-Shoe Trail, Thun Trail, and Joanna (Hay Creek/Conestoga Creek) Trail. The plan urges local officials to protect and incorporate these trails into the region’s overall park and open space system and programs.

The plan recommends local incentives to developers to protect the trail alignments and type of use, respect the trails’ physical integrity, and provide connections from the development to the trail. In addition, the plan goes on to suggest, "local public facilities projects (e.g., roads, drainage, parks, etc.) should similarly include measures to protect and develop the trail with suitable use and access features (p. 122)."

The Southern Berks Regional Comprehensive Plan also referenced the Joanna Trail as part of the Berks County Open Space and Recreation Plan (January 1994). The Southern Berks plan notes the potential length and difficulty of the process for developing a potential rail-trail along Hay and Conestoga creeks. The proposed trail has since been abandoned. The Hopewell Big Woods Trails and Recreation Network supports the idea of these regional trail “spines” while recognizing the importance of local input into trail routing and design options.

**Reconnections: “Reconnecting the people of North Coventry Township and Pottstown Borough with each other and their Schuylkill River Heritage” (2004)**

The Reconnections project, a joint planning effort of Pottstown Borough and North Coventry Township, examines the potential physical, economic, social, heritage, and aesthetic connections between the two communities. The plan focuses on the Schuylkill River as the “heart” of each community’s history. Reconnections proposes major recommendations for physical improvements to connect the two municipalities. These improvements would be completed within two years, and include:

- Enhancements to the Hanover Street Bridge to create a functional and symbolic link and gateway for both communities;
- Establishment of the River Road Trail from the Hanover Street Bridge to River Park in North Coventry;
- Other improvements along Hanover Street, Laurelwood Road and Rt. 724 to create more attractive and walkable links between Pottstown Borough and Coventry Mall; and
- Conversion of the existing unused railroad trestle into a pedestrian bridge across the Schuylkill River to connect River Park and Riverfront Park.

Enhancements to existing trails and pedestrian paths, and development of new trail connections, completing connections from Pottstown and North Coventry to the Schuylkill River Trail, addition of bicycle and pedestrian facilities along Route 724, and completion of the North Coventry River Trail are all actions that support the implementation of the Hopewell Big Woods Recreation and Trails Network. The Schuylkill River Trail through Pottstown Borough and North Coventry Township’s trail system form the northeastern and eastern segments, respectively, of a proposed Hopewell Big Woods trail loop.
Living with the River: Schuylkill River National & State Heritage Area (2003)

This management action plan guides the Schuylkill River National & State Heritage Area in its approach to the Schuylkill River watershed as one of America’s most significant cultural and industrial regions. A National Heritage Area is a place designated by the United States Congress where natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally distinctive landscape. The boundaries of the Heritage Area cover the Schuylkill River watershed in Schuylkill, Berks, Chester, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties.

This region is nationally significant for the role that its people, places, and events played in the American, Industrial, and Environmental Revolutions. The Heritage Area is home to over 3.2 million people across the five counties and works to revitalize and restore the region through natural and cultural resource preservation, education, recreation, community revitalization, and heritage tourism. The Schuylkill River National & State Heritage Area forms the northern boundary of the Hopewell Big Woods and is thematically linked to it. Physical linkages between the two areas are under development through local trail implementation efforts.

Strategic Plan for the Iron and Steel Heritage Region (2002)

This heritage tourism management plan is designed to focus on and bring to life a select number of resources located in Chester, Berks, Montgomery, and Lancaster counties in such a way as to relate the evolution of America’s early iron and steel industry. The plan provides a strategy for furthering efforts to implement a heritage park program using iron and steel-making themes. This distinctive program approach is intended to support the region’s economic revitalization by attracting visitors and creating opportunities for investment in new visitor support services and facilities as well as making greater use of existing facilities.

By telling the story of the people, places, and activities that shaped the iron and steel industry, this plan seeks to link two major objectives: to preserve the historic and cultural resources within the heritage area, particularly those important to the development of the iron and steel industry; and to act as a catalyst for economic development by attracting tourists who seek authenticity, consequently generating jobs, stimulating investment and yielding permanent economic benefits. One of the three auto tours proposed in the plan specifically focuses on Hopewell Big Woods resources related to the early iron industry.

FEDERAL AND STATE PLANNING EFFORTS

Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site General Management Plan (draft will be distributed end of 2009)

The two action alternatives in this plan entail very different management scenarios. One action alternative concentrates on 100 years of ironmaking at Hopewell Furnace and the development of the iron industry. The second alternative expands the interpretation of Hopewell’s history to address the concept of sustainable industry and resource use, and brings the park up to date with current environmental issues. A new visitor center is proposed for the latter alternative, to be located within Chester County and used as a headquarters for the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership. Both action alternatives support physical and thematic connections to Hopewell Big Woods recreational, historic, and natural attractions.

Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site Alternative Transportation Study (2009)

In 2007, the National Park Service launched an Alternative Transportation Study (ATS) effort to assess the potential for an alternative transportation system at Hopewell Furnace NHS. The study is in its second year of investigating existing conditions and making recommendations for future transportation improvements at Hopewell. The goal is to resolve existing localized transportation issues as well as concepts for a broader system. The study area includes connections to sites run by partners within the Hopewell Big Woods. Initial findings demonstrate that most partners would welcome an ATS and provide marketing support. A few have strong enough interest and capability to contribute to it financially. NPS plans on releasing a draft of the study for comment and review in 2009.
Trails Assessment: French Creek State Park & Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site (2007)

Through the help of the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) Trail Care Crew, some 50 volunteers worked side by side in June of 2007 with state and national park staff to re-route .75 miles of formerly unsustainable hiking trail within French Creek State Park. The trail re-route was part of a five-day series of events at Hopewell Furnace NHS and French Creek State Park that included roundtables with recreational user groups and land managers; IMBA's Trail Building School; a trail ride; and the Trail Care Crew's user survey and trails assessments at the state and national parks. The Crew was sponsored by French Creek State Park, Hopewell Furnace NHS, Natural Lands Trust, and Birdsboro Borough, who worked closely with local bicycle clubs such as Pennsylvania Trail Hands, Beans Racing, and the Southeastern PA representative for IMBA, to organize the events. NPS RTCA helped make contacts for partnerships and assisted with coordination of the week's events. Volunteers from Pennsylvania, Maryland and beyond participated, representing a broad range of trail users from teenagers through seniors and including bikers, hikers, paddlers and equestrians, all working together on creating a sustainable trail system.

This partnership project resulted in the forming of new relationships to continue trail design and development, and specific recommendations for trail building and management in the state and national parks. IMBA's trail assessment and user survey information has been considered as part of the analysis for the Hopewell Furnace NHS General Management Plan. Currently the state park allows biking on some trails, while the adjacent national park only allows biking on select roads. The national park is considering whether or not to open up some trails to bicycling.

The two parks' trail systems were considered jointly as one seamless system in the development of a proposed "stacked loop system." The stacked loop system would include trail loops that provide three different challenge levels for bicyclists and other users – beginning, intermediate, and advanced. Redesign and relocation of existing trails, elimination of non-sustainable trails, and addition of new trail segments, were considered in the proposal. A total of eleven existing trail segments, ranging in length from several feet to 45 yards, have been modified in French Creek State Park as a result of IMBA's recommendations. In addition, a new parking area has been added at the intersection of Shed Road and PA Route 345 to accommodate trail traffic.

Pennsylvania and Schuylkill Highlands & Trail System

The PA DCNR is leveraging and advancing trail work in the region through the Schuylkill Highlands Conservation Initiative. The PA DCNR has provided matching grant funds for the Middle Schuylkill Compatible Economic Development Study in 2008, and seeking additional funding from the Department of Community and Economic Development as well as partnerships with select municipalities. Building on the Hopewell Big Woods Partnership's gateways analysis, the plan will focus specifically on Schuylkill River Towns as potential gateways to the region and connections to the Schuylkill River Trail. The completion of the Schuylkill River Trail is a priority, along with the identification of several spur trails that connect to important destinations such as French Creek State Park and Hopewell Furnace NHS.

DCNR is currently cooperating with French Creek State Park in the design of a north-south trail alignment within the park that would pass to the east of the quarry roughly parallel to Route 345 and eventually connect directly with the Schuylkill River Trail. PA DCNR is also working with North Coventry Township to create a trail linking the State Park with North Coventry Township's Coventry Woods park. This effort complements the current NPS effort to upgrade connections between National Recreation Trails. Hopewell Furnace NHS features Baptism Creek NRT and has applied for funding for its improvement in FY09.

The Schuylkill Highlands Conservation Initiative will address connections between the Hopewell Big Woods trails and trails in other parts of the region, including Reading and Phoenixville. For instance, the Angelica Trail, completed from Angelica Park in Reading to Cumru, is planned to extend to Nolde...
Hopewell Big Woods Trails and Recreation Concept Plan

Forest in 2009. A link to the New Morgan Connector further southeast in the Hopewell Big Woods will be considered in the future, although highway crossings will make this connection challenging.

In the Pennsylvania Highlands, land conservation in the Schuylkill Highlands is a high priority for the Pennsylvania Committee of the Highlands Coalition. Working with key partners, the Coalition helped to secure federal funds from the U.S. Forest Service Forest Legacy program for Birdsboro Waters, a 2000-acre property in the heart of the Hopewell Big Woods in the Schuylkill Highland. The Pennsylvania Committee will continue to support land acquisition in Schuylkill Highlands and will seek to secure federal and state funds to accomplish this.

The Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) is cooperatively planning a trail network in the Pennsylvania Highlands by coordinating with trail stakeholders, non-profit organizations, public agencies and communities to link existing trails throughout the 13-county region. The trail network will link the “hubs” of the Pennsylvania Highlands greenway vision, especially emphasizing the eleven priority conservation areas. The Hopewell Big Woods is one of these eleven priority conservation areas. The Pennsylvania Highlands Trail Network is conceptual in the Hopewell Big Woods area, but AMC has been reaching out to the Horse-Shoe Trail Conservancy and North Coventry Township on possible co-alignments of existing trails with the Network. The vision of the route in the Hopewell Big Woods area would be to connect from Green Lane Reservoir in Montgomery County over to Pottstown. From Pottstown, the trail would connect with French Creek State Park and co-align with the Horse-Shoe Trail to the Lebanon Valley Rail Trail. AMC met with North Coventry Township in December 2008 to discuss the township’s goal of making a trail connection into French Creek State Park.

AMC has also created a series of “Hike the Highlands” cards for the public that highlight trails in the Pennsylvania Highlands in cooperation with the Wildlands Conservancy. The cards identify the priority conservation areas in which the trails are located within the Pennsylvania Highlands. There are four that have been categorized in the Hopewell Big Woods. AMC is also creating a Pennsylvania Highlands recreational map that will highlight the Hopewell Big Woods and the region’s many recreational opportunities. AMC will continue to highlight the Hopewell Big Woods in their publications and recreational materials for the Pennsylvania Highlands to aid in branding the area as the Hopewell Big Woods.

B. INDIVIDUAL TRAIL AND RECREATION PROJECTS

In 2008/9, several trail projects and projects related to acquisition of open space for conservation and recreation have moved forward, following the vision and goals described in the previous plans. These projects are critical to the eventual completion of a Hopewell Big Woods trails system.

Thun / Schuylkill River Trail

The Thun Trail is a section of the Schuylkill River Trail that runs through Berks County. A .68-mile section of the Thun Trail was recently completed through Birdsboro. The Thun Trail, owned and sponsored by the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area, now stretches 19 miles from Reading Area Community College in Berks County to Pottstown’s Riverfront Park in Montgomery County. This section of trail includes a 3.5-mile on-road piece that, over time, will be converted to an off-road trail. When completed, the Schuylkill River Trail will run 130 miles along the river, from Philadelphia to Pottsville. The Schuylkill River Trail section in Birdsboro provides a gateway into Chester County through the Hopewell Big Woods and resources such as Hopewell Furnace NHS and French Creek State Park.

The Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area requested Chester County funding to complete, on behalf of the County, a 3.5-mile gravel segment of the Schuylkill River Trail between Spring City Borough and Cromby Village. Matching funds from the PA DCNR Schuylkill Highlands Conservation Landscape Initiative could potentially be applied. Chester County acquired trail easements for four PECO properties that will help solidify these connections, including the PECO power plant property at Spring City. Private property was also purchased.
in Parkerford for a ranger station. The latter property south of Pigeon Creek includes the potential to construct a boat access on the creek.

**Boars Back Trail**

Further to the south, Chester County commissioners provided a $1.5 million grant award to the French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust as part of a pilot trail funding program to purchase easements and fund construction of 2.7 miles of multi-use trail through Warwick Township. Known as the “Boars Back Trail” because of the former Boars Back Railroad right-of-way it follows, the trail is expected to be complete in 2010. It will connect historic St. Peters Village to PA Route 345 and provide a link to Warwick County Park, Hopewell Furnace NHS, Natural Lands Trust’s Crow’s Nest Preserve, French Creek State Park and the Horse-Shoe Trail. Another $1.5 million in donations of material, labor and the purchase of land will be provided by Earth Companies of Kimberton, a land-development company that owns much of St. Peters Village.

Included in the project is the purchase of three acres of land at Route 345 to build a parking lot and trail head. One acre of land will be purchased in St. Peters Village, with the goal of rehabilitating the old train station to create offices for the county park rangers and a pavilion for visitors. The new trail is just the first phase of a five-phase project to build a 15-mile trail known as the French Creek Trail on the former railroad bed of the Boars Back Railroad and the Sowbelly Railroad. Phase I includes the development of the trail from St. Peters Village to Route 345. French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust is in the process of acquiring the railroad bed and developing the St. Peters visitor center. The Pennsylvania Game Commission was provided the right-of-way title. Private landowners will also be contacted to apprise them that the right-of-way title is clear and insured.

The Schuylkill River Trail and French Creek Trail, along with the Horse-Shoe Trail, are major east-west “spines” through the region that are anticipated to connect with trails running north to south currently under development in northern Chester County and southern Berks County. Development of these trails will be coordinated with the PA DCNR assisted trail projects in French Creek State Park. The trails could form a complete loop of about 30 miles through the Hopewell Big Woods, allowing communities and visitors access to a remarkable variety of recreational activity options. The loop would provide a systematic way to experience all the region has to offer, and an understanding and appreciation of natural and cultural resources through interpretive programming.

**New Town of Bryn Eyre and New Morgan Borough Trail Connections**

The transformation of the approximately 3,100 acre New Morgan Borough into a master planned community (a traditional neighborhood community) is envisioned to take at least 20 years to complete. The new town, currently in the planning stages, will be known as Bryn Eyre. Located on the southern border of Hopewell Big Woods, the proposed smart growth, walkable community at full build-out would consist of 12,500 residential units of various types. The town would also include:

- five churches;
- seven community centers;
- 3.27 million square feet of office space;
- 1.06 million square feet of retail and commercial space;
- 584,000 square feet of light industrial space;
- schools and other community services; and
- 1,000 acres of open space.

The new town is planned to be self-sufficient and include a complete range of services for the people who live and work there.

The development of this new town, with more than 30,000 new residents in addition to significant new economic development, is expected to provide opportunities to incorporate recreational facilities and community trails that would connect to the larger regional trail system. Access to nearby Joanna Furnace and the Horse-Shoe Trail would be developed, and mills associated with Joanna Furnace would be preserved. The Horse-Shoe Trail Conservancy is reviewing options for connecting to the Bryn Eyre development, potentially via easements.
through private property. Natural Lands Trust is assisting the Horse-Shoe Trail Conservancy in identifying potential funding sources for land conservation and easement acquisition. Natural Lands Trust has also contacted the New Morgan developer regarding the protection of important bird habitat around Glen Morgan Lake. This habitat includes a bald eagle nesting site.

**Easements and Acquisitions for Parklands and Open Space Conservation**

- **Birdsboro Borough – Birdsboro Waters acquisition** (1,848 acres), rehabilitation of Millard/Tucci House, and redevelopment plan for Armorcast property.

  The Millard/Tucci House was transferred from PennDOT to the Hay Creek Watershed Association via Birdsboro Borough. This historic house was recently inspected by a restoration specialist and assessed as in relatively good condition. A cost estimate for its restoration was being developed as of December 2008. The property is anticipated to be renovated and reused as an environmental education center and headquarters of the Hay Creek Watershed Association. It is the physical and visual gateway to Birdsboro Waters as well as the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area.

  The redevelopment plan for the Armorcast property, which includes a short section of the Thun Trail, will address options for crossing the Hay Creek through the Middle Schuylkill Compatible Economic Development Study. The current bridge on this property is closed, as are two additional bridges over Hay Creek that access Birdsboro Waters. These bridges are key to the development of a Birdsboro Spur Trail that connects Birdsboro Waters to the Schuylkill River Trail. The Spur Trail could potentially use the abandoned railroad or abandoned section of Route 82. Haines and Kibble have volunteered to salvage 60-foot I-beams from the Bethlehem Steel site and transport them to the Birdsboro bridge site, as a first step in replacing one of the bridges over Hay Creek. Another option under discussion is the use of temporary bridges.

- **Sheeder and Yelenoc property acquisitions** – The Sheeder property is adjacent to French Creek State Park and represents the first part of the connection between French Creek State Park and Thun Trail/Schuylkill River Trail south of Birdsboro. Berks County Planning Commission has committed $700,000 in Growing Greener funds for the acquisition of the Yelenoc property further to the north.

- **North Coventry Township** – The Board of Supervisors created the Open Space Review Board on June 24, 2002 under Ordinance 120. The Board was created in response to a citizen referendum voted on May 21, 2002, which authorized a .25 percent wage tax increase for the purpose of establishing a fund to purchase and preserve open space within the township. The Open Space Review Board makes recommendations to the Board of Supervisors, who have final approval over the acquisition of property and easements in the township. The Township’s Open Space Master Plan identified properties that should be connected with trails. In 2008, North Coventry Township:
  - Developed the connection between Woody’s Woods and French Creek State Park
  - Worked with Natural Lands Trust to acquire the Furlong property – 28 acres
  - Added to the Coventry Woods Preserve (315 acres) – 5.3 acres, with Kulp parcel (2.1 acres)
  - Acquired a portion of the Bentley property – 60 acres
  - Acquired the Hill School property

This acquisition of the Bentley property is the first half of a joint project by North Coventry, Warwick and South Coventry townships to acquire a total of 115.44 acres of land from the Bentleys. The 115.44 acres are included in three parcels adjacent to and contiguous with North Coventry Township’s Coventry Woods Preserve. This application is for the Warwick and South Coventry portions of the property only. North Coventry Township intends to acquire the North Coventry acreage (55.44 acres) in a separate transaction. North Cov-
entry Township will act as the lead contact agency in this transaction, as noted by an inter-governmental agreement among the three townships. Warwick and South Coventry Townships, with assistance from Natural Lands Trust and North Coventry Township will acquire a fee interest over the indicated parcels. The parcel in Warwick is 46 acres and the South Coventry parcel is 14 acres.

This acquisition project is located within the Coventry Woods, an extensive maturing woodland situated at the headwaters of Pigeon Creek, a tributary of the Schuylkill River and the headwaters of Rock Run, a tributary of French Creek. North Coventry Township currently owns 315 acres of forest in Coventry Woods. The two parcels in this project would protect a portion of the wooded ridgeline of and adjacent to Chestnut Hill, an extension of the ridge in the eastern end of French Creek State Park, and a part of the contiguous wooded area of the Hopewell Big Woods.

**Hopewell Big Woods Heritage Tourism Map & Web Site**

The Goal 5 Working Group completed the development, printing and distribution of a heritage tourism map and brochure for the Hopewell Big Woods, showing the major attractions and existing trails. It is a first step in wider publicity for the recreation facilities so that people know what is available in the area and how to access these facilities. Printed copies are being distributed through Hopewell Furnace NHS. More information on the Hopewell Big Woods project can be accessed on the internet through Natural Lands Trust at www.hopewellbigwoods.org. In addition to the brochure, the Goal 5 Working Group identified Hopewell Furnace NHS Visitor Center as the point of contact for people interested in Hopewell Big Woods. The park serves as an information gateway to the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area as well as now to Hopewell Big Woods.
Map 3: Regional Map and Double Loop Trail Concept

HOPEWELL BIG WOODS
Berks and Chester Counties, Pennsylvania

Natural Lands Trust
1031 Palmers Mill Road, Media, PA 19063
610-353-5587 ~ www.natlands.org

Compiled By: MTM 10/09/09