

# Pa. Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan SUCCESS STORY

## Nay Aug Avenue Natural Play Area

### SUMMARY

The Nay Aug Avenue Natural Play Area in Scranton opened in July of 2015. Situated on land adjacent to the levee of the Lackawanna River and the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail, the park is built with natural and recycled materials. Its unique design and construction make the play area the first of its kind in Pennsylvania. The park features Turtle Hill, a turtle-shaped area formed from mounded earth, a wooden Snake Climb, and a glider that can accommodate two wheelchairs at a time. A small clubhouse, the Fidelity Fishing Shack, will house interpretive panels that focus on water conservation and pollution. A bicycle safety track, the Tike Bike Trail, encircles the play area. Safety signage, such as “Stop,” and “Curve Ahead,” line the simulated road, and a small performance space, the Lily Pad Stage, features a frog center stage.



### Partnership is Key

DCNR Funding  
Grant Award: \$100,000  
Total Project Cost: \$405,201

American Water  
Charitable Foundation

PA Department of Conservation  
& Natural Resources (PA DCNR)

The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg  
Foundation

Fidelity Deposit & Discount Bank

National Park Service (NPS)

Lackawanna County

Willary Foundation

Margaret Briggs Foundation

Christopher & Dana Reeve  
Foundation

Pennsylvania Environmental  
Council (PEC)

City of Scranton

### CHALLENGE

Mother Nature presented the greatest challenge in creating the play area. The project was initiated in August of 2014 when the American Water Charitable Foundation awarded a grant to Lackawanna Heritage Valley — the first of many grants that would eventually bring the park to life. Construction was scheduled for completion by the end of December, but an unseasonably cold fall and winter halted the project. An unusually rainy spring caused further delays.

Our own creative vision was a challenge in itself. As the project progressed, the desire to add more features to the plan necessitated additional funding. As funds became available, the park grew.





## SOLUTION

The project resumed when the weather broke in late April of 2015. In addition to professional construction crews, LHV turned to the support of community volunteers to help build the park as quickly and efficiently as possible. Local businesses and civic organizations answered the call with enthusiasm. In addition to weeding and planting, painting and building benches, they also played a vital role in building a simulated beaver dam from cob. Cob is a natural building material that is made by mixing subsoil or clay, water, straw and sand through a process called trampling, or blending with bare feet. Throughout the project, 190 volunteers provided 885 service hours to bring the natural play area to life.

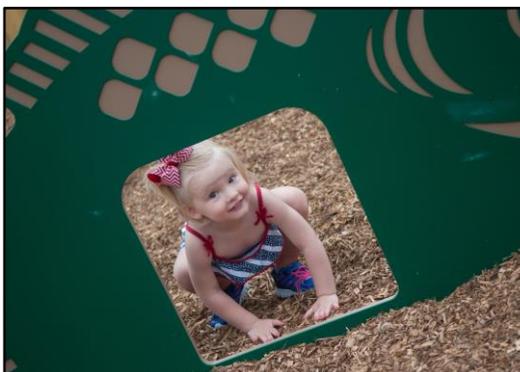
## SUCCESS

As more funding was secured, features were added. By the time the play area opened on July 27, 2015, DCNR funds had been matched more than 4 to 1. Many of the adults involved in this project wondered if children would understand the concept of natural play, or if they would need guidance to enjoy the unconventional playground. We quickly realized that those concerns were unfounded. Children instinctively knew what to do, and they used the play area just as it was intended — to run, jump, climb, pretend, and perhaps best of all, explore the wildlife and nature near the Lackawanna River. Feedback from parents and children has been enthusiastic. Adults appreciate the park's convenient location and active recreation that encourages imaginative play. The Tike Bike Trail works well for early lessons on tricycles and bicycles, and it is common to see children comb through dirt piles near the levee to select rocks for their collections (and their pockets!). The park has "regulars," including children from a nearby daycare center, who visit daily. As the park gains more exposure through media coverage and word-of-mouth, the play area attracts families from other sections of the city and neighboring communities. Plans for 2016 include adding a pavilion, community garden, and environmental programming.

The natural play area meets a recommendation of the PA Outdoor Recreation Plan to make strategic investments in local priorities and respond to emerging trends.



"I think it's tremendous how they transformed an underutilized lot into a place where families from across the city can unplug and enjoy imaginative play in an open, safe space."— *Christopher Hughes, parent*



### For more information:

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