

# Schuylkill Highlands Conservation Landscape Initiative

## Fast Facts



**The Schuylkill Highlands** is a place to protect and guide the “history of our future.” This diverse and extraordinary landscape of national significance in southeastern Pennsylvania, with its splendid vistas, quiet woodlands, pristine headwaters, rolling farmlands, and deep cultural and historic past includes:

- Largest unbroken forest between Wash DC and NYC (12,930 acres)
- 660 miles of Exceptional Value and High Quality streams
- Source of drinking water for 1.75M people
- Schuylkill River Bike & Water Trail
- High concentration of cultural sites
- 3 National Parks, 5 State Parks, 9 Important Bird Areas
- 8.5% of the 926,057 acres are protected
- Federally threatened species and critical habitat areas for wildlife

### Counties:

Berks, Chester and Montgomery, Bucks, Lancaster and Lebanon.

## What is a Conservation Landscape Initiative?

The Conservation Landscape Initiative is a place-based strategy for natural resource stewardship and advocacy in key landscapes across our state where there are strong natural assets and local readiness and support for land conservation, locally-driven planning, and community economic revitalization efforts.

## Vision

The Schuylkill Highlands Partnership is working to protect the natural and cultural resources, encouraging economic development that creates a sustainable regional landscape, and inspiring people to care for, enjoy and explore the Schuylkill Highlands.

## Region

The Schuylkill Highlands encompasses a geography at the nexus of the Schuylkill River watershed and the Pennsylvania Highlands of southeastern Pennsylvania. The natural resources within this landscape are significant to America’s history, from iron and steel, coal and foundry industries, to the headwater streams that now provide drinking water to the Philadelphia regional area. The Highlands region was designated by an Act of Congress, The Highlands Conservation Act, declares the area to be nationally significant. The Schuylkill River is within a National and State Heritage Area and as such, the preservation, interpretation and celebration of the river’s industrial heritage is key to new economic growth.

## Our Collaboration

The Schuylkill Highlands Partnership integrates the inspiration and action of many local, county and state government partners, land trusts, and nonprofit organizations enabling a vibrant sustainable economic future

## Our Goals

**Collaboration & Engagement:** Create opportunities for unique multi-partner approaches to issues, problem solving, project work and region-wide policy that support the quality of life of residents and conservation values.

**Recreation, Trails, and Interpretive Experiences:** Create an interconnected trail network to destinations and gateways to increase the recreational opportunities for connecting residents and visitors to the outdoors, and to heritage sites in the Schuylkill Highlands.

**Economic Vitality and Natural Resource-Based Tourism:** Encourage sustainable practices that respect the cultural, historic, recreational, and natural resources of the Schuylkill Highlands.

**Conservation of Natural Resources:** Conserve, protect, restore, and steward lands, watersheds, greenways and habitats of high natural resource value.

## Key Initiatives

### Trails

Complete the main stem of the Schuylkill River Trail from Valley Forge to Reading with access points to and from the communities along the river.



Create a network of interconnecting trails from the Schuylkill River Trail to gateways and places of interest by advancing the **Schuylkill Highlands Regional Trail Plan**. Among regional trails of importance include: Big Woods Trail, Angelica Creek Trail to Nolde Forest, Boars Back Trail, French Creek Trail, Rte 82 to Birdsboro Waters, Brandywine Creek Greenway, Struble Trail to Marsh Creek State Park, and the Pa Highlands Trail into the Schuylkill Highlands Landscape.

**Promote Get Out and Enjoy Yourself!** Expand the connectivity to the myriad of opportunities which can be found within the Schuylkill Highlands. Host nature-based experiential and interpretive offerings, and promote tours, walks, talks, adventures and events of the area's cultural heritage and recreational opportunities.

**Compatible Economic Development.** Promote sustainable economic development in communities through recreational, cultural, historic, and nature-based tourism. Undertake early actions items within the **Compatible Economic Development Plan for the Middle Schuylkill** to promote the regional area and inform visitors and residents of the opportunities. Encourage people to come to the area to bike, walk, camp, kayak, bird watch, photograph, orienteer, horseback ride, geocache, and to explore the back roads and enjoy the many natural, cultural, recreational and historic places in this richly diverse landscape. Revitalize gateways and towns and encourage new business development in the towns that is compatible with the nature-based tourism market in the regional area.

**Land and Watershed Protection** Protect, restore and steward a significant number of acres of the most critical habitat in the landscape that contain important ecological lands, water resources, wildlife habitat, geological features, heritage sites and recreational lands.

Implement the strategies found within the **Schuylkill Highlands Natural Resource Greenway Plan, A Path Forward**, for the protection of natural resources found within the key hubs of Green Lane/Unami Hills, Oley Hills and Oley Valley, the Reading Regional Area, Monocacy Hill/Daniel Boone, the

Hopewell Big Woods, French Creek Valley and the Middle Schuylkill River corridor.

**Promote Local Agriculture** Connect residents to locally grown foods, support local farmers' viability and work to preserve farmland and encourage best stewardship practices.

**Mini-Grant Program** Provide small grants to advance certain nature-based and natural resource-based project implementation in the Schuylkill Highlands landscape that also advances the goals and objectives of the Schuylkill Highlands.

## Partnership Objectives

- **Protect** the region's natural, cultural and recreational resources.
- **Connect** residents and visitors to the many outdoor opportunities.
- **Sustain** the conservation landscape through best practices

**Steering Committee**  
Natural Lands Trust; Berks County Conservancy; French and Pickering Creek Conservation Trust, Green Valley's Association, Montgomery County Lands Trust; Brandywine Conservancy, Berks, Montgomery and Chester Counties; Schuylkill River Heritage Area; National Park Service, William Penn Foundation, Audubon PA, Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation, Partnership for Delaware Estuary, PA DCED, and numerous municipal leaders, Executive Directors of key non profits, and business representatives, along with the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

- Project Partners**
- Federal , state, regional and local government entities
  - Land Trusts, watershed associations, and conservation non-profits
  - Tourism and Economic Development Councils
  - Universities and Colleges
  - Local businesses and residents



Photo by Fred Weyman



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## For More Information

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