

II. ISSUES, CONCERNS, CONSTRAINTS, OPPORTUNITIES

This section is provided for the purpose of addressing those unique and watershed specific issues, concerns, constraints and opportunities which are immediate. They are so important that we gave them the first “working” section of the plan. Because of their important nature we followed the outline for Rivers Conservation Plans for the order of the sections. We were torn with the argument to put it in the back so folks would have the history and characteristics of Pine Creek in focus before they started looking at the Issues, Concerns, Constraints and Opportunities section. The decision to keep it here in front was made so that before too far into the plan you would be interested in the watershed and compelled to read further to learn more.

Some of the following are problem areas, some are concerns, but from the perspective of the majority of the Steering Committee they are opportunities. The ability to single out and address each issue on a unique and individual basis allows for more focused and creative outcomes. Any noteworthy situations not accounted for in other sections of the plan are included here. When we came to the final draft phase we realized that this Section was the place for everything we had revealed during our research, worked on, and in the end, we found these items defied category or held special significance, hence the prominence in the front of the plan. These issues are “on the plate” - out there and in here, where they should and need to be. Section II has special status in the vernacular of the group. Since most of the committee live, work and play in the watershed and have a vested interest in the outcome of this plan (ownership if you will), we felt a special need to include those noteworthy “situations” that the outline called for and honor them with front line status and early implementation projects, strategies and management options. Keep in mind as you read these that they are a work in progress, that there are many facets to them, and that consensus is what we seek.

So herein the reader will find the distillation of four years of chewing, gnashing and tossing around some very controversial topics. We all have had a feeling of frustration and confusion with new and conflicting information. The Steering Committee knew this plan would break new ground. But we didn’t understand the new perspective and respect we would have for each other and the resource during the plan’s incubation.

It doesn’t take an expert in the manipulation of statistics to understand that the survival of the entire human species depends on a sustainable relationship to the local expression of the processes of the biosphere. From everything one can learn through the nearly impenetrable veil of modern history, prehistoric humans acted out this latter assumption for most of our species’ time on Earth. The very root of the word indigenous means “of a place.” But the seductive social mechanics of the relatively recent Industrial Revolution have been so successful that even as we humans have exhausted our source of sustenance, we have convinced ourselves that there is no other way to act. We have engaged in a process of purposeful and systematic forgetting; we have lost previous

models of a more elegantly balanced life among humans, and we have convinced each other that it is fruitlessly utopian to imagine any other way of life.

--- Freeman House, **Totem Salmon**

A. PA WILDS

The recent development of the PA WILDS initiative, a top-down tourism and economic development program administered by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), has created a stir within the local tourist promotion agencies, DCNR, and county government and planning departments. The promotion of the elk viewing attractions in the west central mountains of Pennsylvania has increased the focus on outdoor recreation and the potential for increased demands on an inadequate infrastructure. The Pine Creek watershed has been included in PA WILDS due to the Grand Canyon and state forest holdings. Our primary caution: Because of the large expanse of forested state lands there is a feeling of unlimited potential and opportunities for economic development.

As the consultant for the PA WILDS project, Ted Eubanks from Fermata, Inc., has said: “We must be careful not to exceed the physical, biological and social carrying capacity of the resource.” His words were well taken. We must remind ourselves that for many years, perhaps centuries, northcentral Pennsylvania has had an extractive economy. First, they came and took the pine; then they came and took the hemlock. Later, they came and took the coal and corn. Now, we are experiencing the loss of our young people and natural beauty. The loss of our resources is not new to this area. In terms of social carrying capacity, these losses are a factor to be considered. The diversity of views on the carrying capacity of the watershed ranges from “they’ve won” to “it’s limitless.”

Two major gateway communities have been identified by the PA WILDS consultant. They are Wellsboro in the north and Jersey Shore in the south. These communities have different needs and requirements for the success of the initiative. The most important concept to keep in mind from a watershed perspective is the dynamic unforeseen consequences of our actions. This will require vigilance and monitoring of the factors embedded in the carrying capacity of the physical, biological and social indicators. As we demonstrate later, these initiatives or opportunities must not be taken out of context. Since the effects of PA WILDS will affect all the projects outlined in this plan’s management options, we have commented on PA WILDS first.

The Steering Committee spent many hours on this topic, and one of our members has been appointed to the Governors Task Force on PA WILDS. We deliberated and expressed our concerns for the pressure this marketing campaign could have on the watershed and discussed and debated ways to express our concern. The input from the public and municipal officials in the watershed was also sought. The feedback was and has been very interesting, as you might expect, across a wide spectrum of thoughts and feelings on the subject. Unequivocally, the consensus was we must not forget the need for

a careful holistic review and analysis of any promotion of the watershed. PA WILDS has great potential, but we must not be driven by the fast buck or “need to accommodate” attitude that might be expected. The resource and the local communities must come first.

B. Pine Creek Trail

The acquisition of the Conrail Railroad right-of-way through the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon has been another notable development in the watershed. For the last 15 years the Bureau of Forestry has been working on the construction of the trail. Phase 1, the canyon section, was completed early and easily. Phase 2, from Blackwell to Waterville, was next and required construction of the trail on the right-of-way as it passes through private lands. Phase 3, from Waterville to Jersey Shore, is nearly complete with some major infrastructure improvements scheduled as this plan goes to the printer. Phase 4, the Marsh Creek section, is in design and is the last and most contentious section of the trail.

From the beginning the Phase 4 section has been controversial. The early conflict was over ownership. With the passage of time and the education about the exact meaning of a rail bank system the concern has been refocused on the obligations the Bureau of Forestry has assumed with ownership of, or at least responsibility for, the right-of-way. These obligations include the drainage along the railroad due to the past promises and legal commitments of the Pennsylvania Land and Timber Co. These include the maintenance of the culverts and parallel ditching and access to lands on the other side of the right-of-way. We have provided support and information to members of the Pine Creek Rail Trail Advisory Committee, spoken with and listened to the landowners in the Marsh Creek Valley, and assisted them with communicating their concerns to DCNR. The lack of an all-encompassing approach to the completion of the trail has been most apparent in these final months. Attempting to rush the trail to completion has left unresolved issues in the north on Phase 4 and loose ends and reduced infrastructure in the south on Phase 3. Community development concepts were not considered when planning for construction of the trail, and this has resulted in minimal local input to the project and the shortage of funding for the necessary infrastructure improvements. These issues have not been resolved as of this writing. It is the Steering Committee’s hope that the concerns of the residents and gateway communities in the PA WILDS initiative can be worked out and the trail can be completed in a win/win fashion.

C. Chesapeake Tributary Strategy

The *2000 Chesapeake Bay Strategy* developed for the protection and restoration of the Bay includes the Susquehanna River watershed. The effect of this strategy will include the Pine Creek drainage. Increased focus on the watershed will result. The primary objectives of this program require the reduction of sediment and nutrient loads to the Bay. Each sub-watershed has load reductions that must be met by 2010. If these load reductions are not met the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is threatening to impose a total maximum daily load (TMDL) for the Chesapeake Bay. This will have

implications for the enforcement of water quality regulations. For the majority of the Pine Creek watershed this will not be an issue. But, in Tioga County's tributaries that are agricultural and currently meet their designation standards, enforcing the TMDL will impact the farmers. With all the regulatory restraints these guys may not be farming in the future. That is not to say that the current production agricultural paradigm is the most environmentally friendly. The difficulty is in changing these production methods AND maintaining a profitable enterprise. Farming is changing, farming must become more sustainable, and this change is important for the success of the Bay Strategy and the future of agriculture. It must not be dismissed as an agriculture problem, unless of course you don't eat!

The Conservation Districts are the lead agency for the implementation of this program but, as identified in the tiers of the Chesapeake Bay Tributary Strategy. The only successful tier is Tier 4 and includes E3 (Everybody, Everything, Everywhere) so this requires the inclusion of the Rivers Conservation Plan to be successful!

D. Emergency Services

In September 2002 the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) with the assistance of Governor Schweiker's Fire and Emergency Services Task Force presented, "A Study of Volunteer Fire and Emergency Medical Services in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania" committees of to the state's House of Representatives Committee on Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness and the Senate's Committee on Communications and High Technology. The task force identified issues within the volunteer fire and emergency medical services community, which if not addressed, may lead to problems within Pennsylvania's rural communities, boroughs, and cities. The issues can be categorized as: membership recruitment and retention, training and education, mutual aid, interoperability (compatibility of equipment between organizations), mergers and consolidations, fire prevention and safety education, and the Volunteer Loan Assistance Program.

In 2001 the National Fire Protection Association released a study showing that 73% of fire departments in the United States are staffed only by volunteers; another 15% of the departments are staffed mostly by volunteers. The number of Pennsylvania citizens willing to volunteer for their local fire department or emergency medical services provider is decreasing, raising concerns. In 1976 "Pennsylvania Burning" estimated the number of volunteers providing these services to be 300,000. The Department of Community and Economic Development estimates the volunteers had decreased to 70,000 in 1995. This dramatic decrease of 230,000 volunteers statewide cannot be ignored.

The 2002 PEMA study cites a change in communities from locally owned businesses to corporate owned businesses as one possible cause for the decline. The report also acknowledges that many families are more involved in their children's activities than before. Pennsylvanians are commuting longer distances to work making them unavailable

to respond in their home community. The threat of litigation is another factor felt to be influencing the decrease in volunteers.

Mutual aid and interoperability are related issues. Mutual aid is fire, emergency medical, hazardous materials, law enforcement, public works, emergency management, and other agencies assisting each other during emergencies and disasters. Interoperability is the ability of equipment from one entity to be compatible with another entity's equipment.

Currently, state law requires mutual aid agreements to be executed by municipal, county, and state government. Individual fire companies cannot legally enter into mutual aid agreements with one another. The report recommends changing the legislation so that mutual aid agreements are entered into at the county level, state level, or by regional counter-terrorism task forces.

Interoperability is problematic from radio frequencies to the ability of one company to share or connect fire hose to another company's equipment. Interoperable standards are being discussed and created at the local and regional level. One example in Lycoming County is the Rescue Task Force, which is developing common training, terminology, equipment, and operational standards.

The PEMA study committee suggested mergers and consolidations to assist in providing better service to the Commonwealth's citizens with less work needed by volunteers. The merger of organizations can eliminate some of the on-going administrative work and fundraising, and would only take place after much discussion and analysis.

How does this state-wide perspective apply to the Pine Creek watershed? The Steering Committee recognized that it is beyond the scope of this plan to study these issues in depth. We can, however, note that for the most part the Pine Creek watershed is very rural in character. There is extensive public land and a fairly low resident population in most municipalities. The volunteer fire companies and emergency medical services are largely volunteer-based. Individuals involved with these organizations have expressed concerns about the ability of emergency responders to deal with an increase in demand from recreational users of the area.

Where cell phone service is available in the watershed, calls are relayed through a number of cell phone towers. Some calls go through towers in southern New York. Some calls to 911, due to the service provider's relay, may go to a 911 call center in a county other than the one from which the call is placed.

The Steering Committee has developed a series of management options to begin the dialogue and discovery needed to address these concerns and issues. Much of the work will need to be done with cooperation from the various volunteer fire companies and emergency medical service providers, hospitals, regional counter-terrorism task force and PEMA; as well as the Bureau of Forestry, Bureau of State Parks, and Pennsylvania Game Commission.

Fortunately, the counties that make up the Pine Creek watershed all belong to the same counter-terrorism task force, so a platform for beginning this dialogue exists and has been functioning for several years. The next step is to gain consensus and support to begin studying these issues and developing solutions.

E. Implementing the Pine Creek Watershed Rivers Conservation Plan

The Growing Greener initiative has created an increasing awareness of the potential for local citizens groups to contribute to healthy communities. The Pine Creek watershed has had the advantage of two watershed associations operating in the region for many years. Due to several constraints, one physical (the Cedar Run Narrows), one political (Tioga/Lycoming County Line) these groups have not often communicated or worked together much in the past. This has changed since August 17, 2001. On that date the groups that would morph into the Steering Committee for this Rivers Conservation Plan met for the first time. Included were representatives from each of the watershed groups. Now these organizations find they are working together for the entire watershed. To date the Steering Committee has had strong representation from both north and south in the watershed. While both groups have had different mission statements in the past, we all realize the unique experience we have had cooperating and joining forces. This new outlook will undoubtedly require new tools and support for the implementation of the Pine Creek Watershed Rivers Conservation Plan. One possible outcome and segue to the Early Implementation Projects listed below would be to empower the Steering Committee to morph, yet again, into an organization to facilitate these and other projects.

F. Conservation Easements

The Pine Creek watershed is at a unique point in its history. While past development occurred because people were needed to remove the natural resources such as lumber and coal, some of the current development in the watershed is based on leaving the natural resources in place and enjoying them for their scenic beauty or the recreation they provide. Today, people are retiring to the watershed or buying a second home because they enjoy the forested hillsides and pastoral landscapes of the watershed. They enjoy the trails, hunting, fishing and floating that the natural resources provide.

How much development can the watershed handle before it loses its unique character? Everyone has their own idea, but no one has quantified it. What can be done now to help retain some of the watershed's character; to help maintain the quality of life the residents and visitors enjoy? There are lots of answers to this question.

One answer is conservation easements. This widely used land protection tool is discussed in more detail in the Land Resources Section. Their importance here relates to the opportunity to use conservation easements to permanently protect land while allowing it to remain in private ownership.

The easement spells out the permitted uses of a property. This includes such things as agriculture, forestry, recreation, habitat improvement, and other open space uses. The easement also spells out the residential, commercial, and industrial uses of the property. This includes such things as where additional houses may be built and the amount of sub-division that will be allowed. Once an easement is in place the landowner can give, sell, or otherwise transfer the property. The easement follows the deed to the property, binding all future owners.

When conservation easements prohibit or limit the amount of sub-division and development that can occur on a property, they are working to keep the scenic quality, the open fields and forests, in place. Conservation easements can be used by a landowner to provide future generations with a farm or forest to manage, or to ensure future generations will have a place to play in woods or along streams.

If several neighboring landowners all place conservation easements on their properties, they begin to protect landscapes and ensure wildlife will have needed habitat. We can begin to define areas that will remain rural, which in turn helps define areas where development should and can occur.

Conservation easements won't work everywhere. It is not the intent to have the entire watershed under conservation easement. The idea is to protect those areas that are important or define the watershed while at the same time providing areas and opportunities for communities to grow.

G. Oral History

Long before written languages and a literate populace, civilizations passed their heritage and culture from one generation to the next through stories. Whether the stories provided an overview on family genealogy or explained how the culture evolved, the stories were told and retold, around campfires, hearths, in fields, at forges.

Anthropologists and archaeologists have relied on these oral histories to lead them in their work to find a lost city, understand a custom, or simply document a people's beliefs. In modern society oral history and storytelling are not the primary sources of data collection or historical documentation of daily life, but are recognized as important in documenting events, usually tragic.

The United States Army's Center of Military History has a manual on how to collect oral histories from soldiers. The Army recognizes that, "oral history is an essential means of preserving the experience of past battles and imparting that experience to young soldiers." These histories will provide future scholars, strategists, and grandchildren with a better understanding of what happened, how people responded, and what they felt.

While these histories are important and serve a purpose, there is also importance and purpose in collecting the stories of everyday life in the Pine Creek watershed. Whether

it's a miner's story about a lunch time prank, a child's adventure along a stream on a summer day, or the story about the day the ginseng buyers came to town on the train. The events held in these stories shaped this watershed and its residents.

Unfortunately, many of the watershed's stories are gone forever. The people who experienced them are no longer here to tell us their stories. Fortunately, there are still many people to talk, and many stories to be heard. The Pine Creek watershed's stories should be gathered, organized, and saved. Because this implementation idea is time sensitive, the Steering Committee decided to make it an early implementation project. We want to hear the stories from the people who experienced them. We want to hear in their voices the excitement, the disappointment, and the laughter.

One of the major ideas discussed over and over again during this process has been the need to share information. A lot of research, documentation, and work have been done to catalog the Pine Creek watershed's acid precipitation, water chemistry, aquatic life, historical structures, history, and industrial uses. This information is not always easily accessible for residents, let alone visitors, and in many cases this information would enhance a resident's sense of pride or a visitor's sense of wonder.

This led to the idea of a Pine Creek Room. This room(s) – virtual or physical - would display, interpret, educate, and interest the general public about the Pine Creek watershed. The displays would cover the spectrum from water quality, geology, geography, flora, fauna, history, and many other topics. The Pine Creek Room may be a stepping off point for a visitor's adventure, a stop on the way to somewhere else, a class field trip, or the place a resident goes for a special program summarizing summer water quality research or to hear a local musician.

The Pine Creek Room might not be limited to a single location. Based on need and support, Pine Creek Rooms would ideally be in several locations throughout the watershed. These rooms could be attached to a DCNR facility, a visitors center, or stand alone. They may be open only seasonally or year 'round. The rooms will evolve over time and provide visitors with an overview of where they are and how unique this watershed is.

Additionally, the reports, books, and information that currently exist, as well as the oral histories that will be collected, would be permanently stored at a local college. Copies of these materials may be available in the Pine Creek Rooms, but the originals would be stored, cataloged, and accessible through the college's library services.

H. Early Implementation (brief list with supporting comments & contact person)

Wilson Creek Management Plan and Demonstration Project. This project is in collaboration with the Babb Creek Watershed Association to develop a watershed management plan for the Wilson Creek watershed, a tributary to Babb Creek. Wilson Creek is the last tributary to complete abandoned mine drainage (AMD) remediation in

the watershed and also has agricultural and development impairments. Plan calls for demonstration projects for grazing and riparian buffer habitat development. Contacts: Bill Beacom and Jim Weaver. (*Currently approved for funding and plans call for grazing and riparian habitat research to start in the spring of 2006*)

Keeping Track. A wildlife monitoring program for ecosystem health. This project is at a standstill at the present due to lack of funding. PROPOSAL DEVELOPED AND SEEKING FUNDING. Contacts: Kerry Gyekis and Tom Murphy.

Marsh Creek Greenway. This project by local partners in Tioga County is in the planning stage. This project would connect the northern terminus of the Pine Creek Trail with the Borough of Wellsboro. *Feasibility grant application anticipated for the fall round of 2005.* Contacts: Grant Cavanaugh and Jim Weaver.

Consistent Signage in the Watershed. This project is currently seeking support of the Tioga County & Lycoming County visitors bureaus and would have the support of the Secretary of DCNR. Contacts: TBD (*as of this writing, the Steering Committee has been informed that this project is already underway. The as yet to be released Outdoor Recreation Plan for PA Wilds has its own set of early implementation projects and the same recommendation was made there.*)

Oral & Literary History Projects. As we interviewed and talked to Pine Creek residents we discovered an amazing diversity of histories residing in the local libraries and the heads of the people that live, work, and play here now, or did in the past. Some can be recorded and documented. Others can be republished. Two that are worthy are Bob Weber from Slate Run and George Washington Sears – Nessmuk- from the 19th Century.

A Pine Creek Action Plan. The Steering Committee is set to continue their work. We realize that this is truly a work in progress. The more we know about the watershed the more we find we don't know, or could include here. To that end we are exploring a structure and strategy for continuance. The projects for immediate action would be to champion and empower local initiatives in the early implementation projects. In addition, we have several projects that would provide a stepping off point for other management options. On the ground we would like to develop a Pine Creek Room. A place for reference on Pine Creek: MAPS, PLANS, DOCUMENTS, PHOTOS, SONGS, ORAL HISTORIES, VIDEOS, ARTIFACTS, AND MULTIMEDIA. As a way to jumpstart this project we are working on a website, a Virtual Pine Creek Room. But our hope would be to house the Pine Creek Room in a museum, historical society, library, visitors' center, district forest headquarters or similar location. In addition the idea of a circuit rider to develop an education forum/programming for municipal officials and the public has been floated. It is the Steering Committee's hope to morph into a permanent vehicle for leadership and coordination with all our partners.