

NEPA TRAILS



**Assessing Connections & Community
in Northeastern Pennsylvania**

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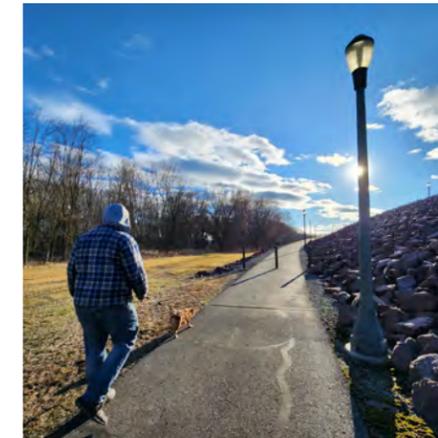
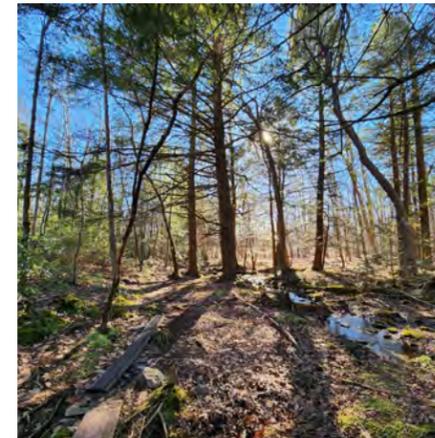
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**Power
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduction

The northeast corner of Pennsylvania, commonly referred to as NEPA (Northeastern Pennsylvania) is a region not unlike many others in Appalachia. Known as an area rich in anthracite coal, the downturn in the coal industry has presented challenges as the face of energy production in America shifted to alternative sources. For this report's purposes, the NEPA footprint is the eight counties that comprise the NEPA Trail Forum (see callout) - Carbon, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe, Pike, Susquehanna, Wayne and Wyoming - which are home to a collection of natural resources, recreational assets and landscapes that serve as amenities to residents and visitors alike. The work undertaken as part of this effort is funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission's (ARC) Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization (POWER) Initiative. ARC describes the program as one to help communities and regions that have been affected by job losses in coal mining, coal power plant operations, and coal-related supply chain industries due to the changing economics of America's energy production.

More and more, communities are looking to outdoor recreation as a means for economic diversification and to provide resilience to downturns in the economy. The Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) estimates the outdoor recreation economy accounted for 1.9 percent (\$454 billion) of current-dollar gross domestic product (GDP) for the nation in 2021. BEA data shows that in 2021, outdoor recreation contributed \$13.6 billion in GDP to Pennsylvania. Among the multitude of recreational pursuits for which the NEPA region is recognized, cycling, and its related infrastructure, is a key player. Considerable groundwork has been laid and effort expended creating a collection of cycling assets the region and its stakeholders should be proud of. This includes dozens of multi-use trails, 100+ miles of singletrack mountain biking and almost unlimited gravel/mixed surface riding opportunities. Coupled with complimentary natural and cultural

Convened in 2014, the Northeastern Pennsylvania (NEPA) Trails Forum is a loose alliance of organizations, government entities, and individuals who are involved with trail development in the region. These include recreational, mountain biking, snowmobile, park, municipal, and water trails, on both public and private lands. The NEPA Trails Forum focuses on addressing issues in the trail building community. Representatives from trail user groups, municipalities and government agencies, civic organizations, professional firms, trail managers, and interested individuals attend the events to meet fellow trail groups, learn more about projects in the region, and share ideas and best practices. The NEPA Trails Forum meets on a quarterly basis.

assets and vast expanses of public land, NEPA has an opportunity to become a premiere destination for bicycle tourism. And, in addition to, boost local quality of life and help to attract and retain the skilled workers essential to strong, vibrant communities. While substantial work has been done to build this infrastructure, additional effort and guidance is needed to fully maximize the benefits and impacts of this sector of the outdoor economy.

What follows is part resource, part handbook and part roadmap for stakeholders to utilize to evaluate existing cycling resources and approach next steps in the process. The report evaluates existing cycling infrastructure and opportunities for connectivity, identifies stakeholders and assesses their needs and challenges, incorporates public/stakeholder input and lays out a package of recommendations derived from the work assembled herein. Armed with this report, the path to advancing cycling-centered activation, improving public health and fostering community connectivity will be a much smoother journey.

Blueberry Trail Marker at Eales Preserve.



Chapter 2

NEPA Today



NEPA Today

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Depending on whom you ask, NEPA is some variation of the assemblage of 12 counties in the upper right corner of the Keystone State. The eight county region branded as such here comprises the counties of Carbon, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe, Pike, Susquehanna, Wayne, and Wyoming. Home to one of the largest reserves of Anthracite coal in the world, the region's history is steeped in extractive industries spurred by the discovery of anthracite near Pittston in 1775. The coal boom brought immigrants from all over Europe who settled in the region, contributing to the culture and heritage the region proudly boasts today. It also brought hundreds of miles of railroads to move the coal, most of which are now abandoned, allowing for rail trail development on some of the former corridors.

Perched on the eastern edge of the Appalachians, the region is replete with mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, and lakes. Luzerne, Lackawanna, and western portions of Carbon counties have distinct ecological and cultural characteristics associated with the Northern Anthracite field, including the Susquehanna and Lackawanna River "Valley" communities of Scranton and Wilkes-Barre, and Lehigh River communities of Hazleton, White Haven and Jim Thorpe. The culture and ecology of Pike, Monroe, and portions of Wayne county have been influenced by the Delaware River, its river communities, and its long-standing tourism industry, more commonly known as "the Poconos." Susquehanna and Wyoming Counties are part of the "Endless Mountains" known for picturesque pastoral landscapes shaped by centuries of farming and timbering.

The entire region has significant natural features, and public lands, including over 67,400 acres in 15 State Parks, nearly 130,000 acres in three State Forest Districts, over 187,000 acres of PA State Game Lands, three National Park Service-managed sites, four State Heritage Areas, a National Wildlife Refuge, over 200 miles of community, regional and long-distance trails, over 48,000 acres of lakes and ponds and 4,700 stream miles, making the landscape unique considering its proximity to the major population centers of the East Coast. The convergence of six major highways—Interstates 80, 81, 84, 380, 476, and 78—creates a transportation hub providing easy access to the north, south, east, and west.

By the 1950's, the anthracite coal economy began to wane and with it, the jobs it supported. While still an important part of the history and heritage of the region, coal jobs make up only a small portion of employment in the region today. Like many of the towns and cities in Appalachia that felt the strain of coal's decline, leadership had to look for ways to attract new industry and diversify local economies. In NEPA, today's workforce finds employment in fields such as healthcare, manufacturing, education, government, transportation/warehousing and retail, but there is still work to be done. The unemployment rate has, on average, been roughly 1.5% higher for the 8 county region than the National average over the last 4 years. Already an important part of the diversification efforts, outdoor recreation and tourism can continue to spur economic development and provide a better quality of life for those calling the region home.

Data in the tables on page 13: Table 1 - 2017-2021, 5-Year Average, American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau (hereafter reported as 2021); Table 2 - US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry.

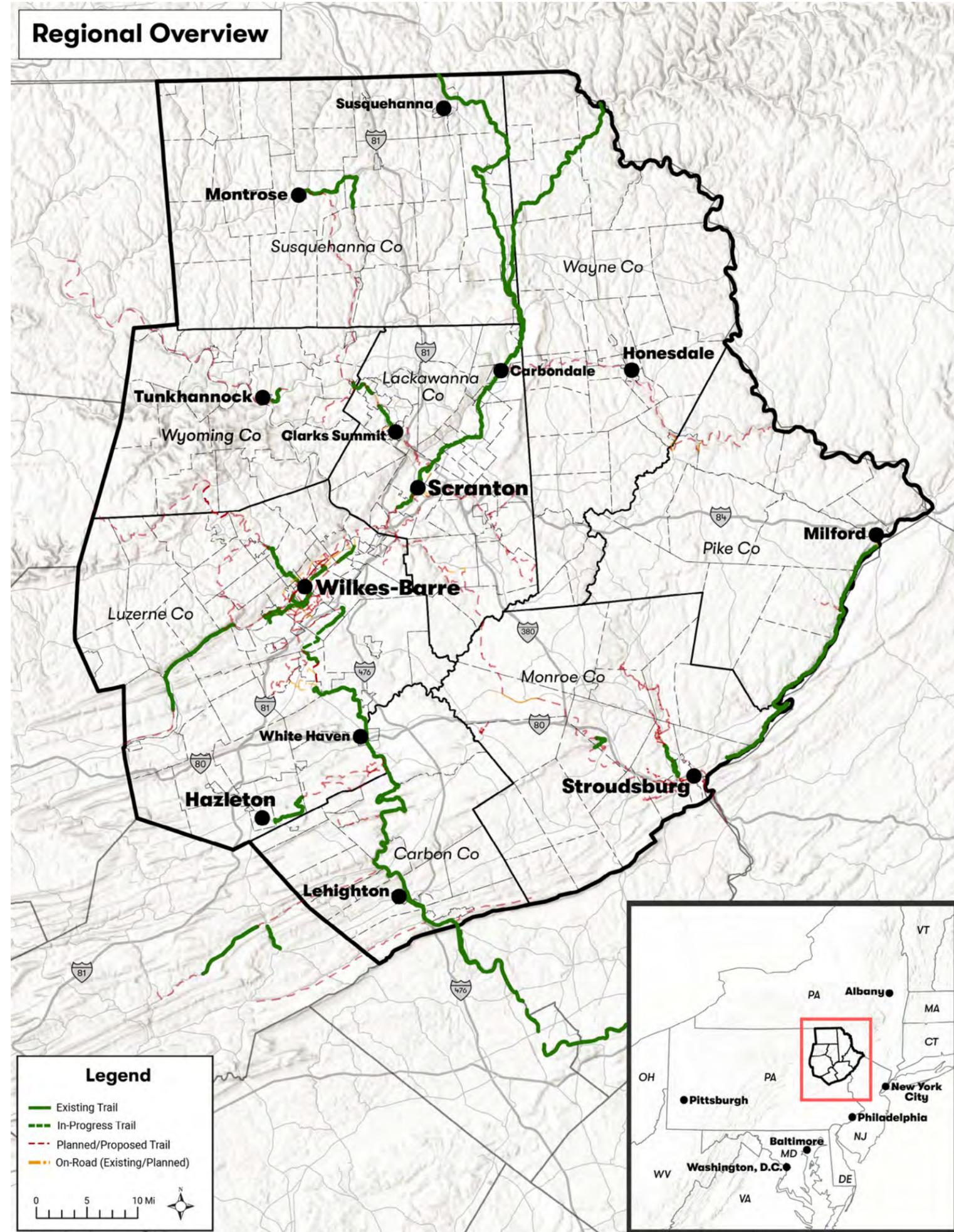
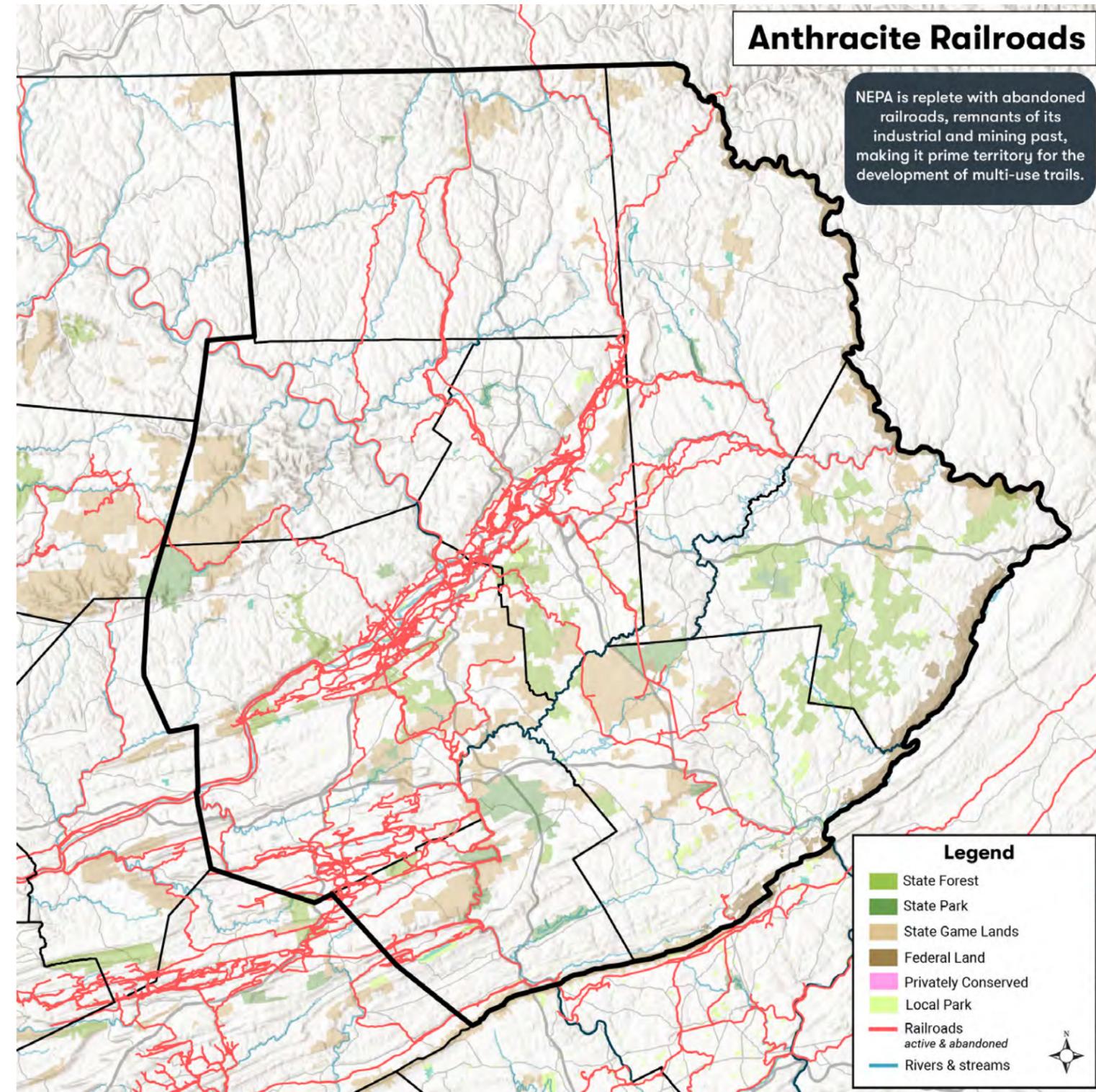


Table 1.

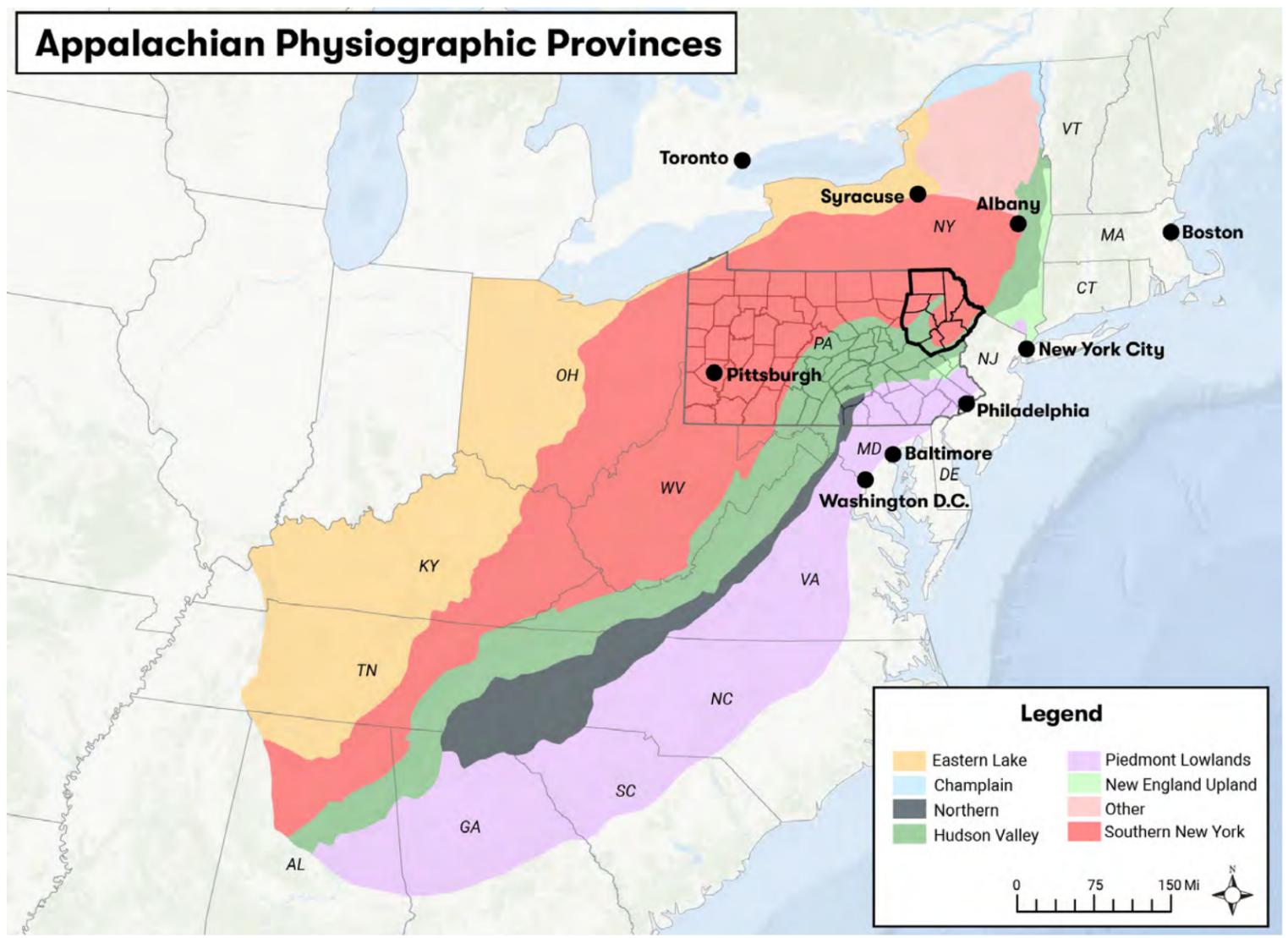
Total Number of People Employed in NEPA in 2021	440,993
Educational Services, and Health Care and Social Assistance	22.98%
Manufacturing	10.84%
Retail Trade	12.50%
Prof., Scientific, Management, Admin., and Related Services	8.59%
Arts, Entertainment, and Rec. and Accommodation and Food Services	9.40%
Finance and Insurance, and Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	5.40%
Construction	7.43%
Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities	7.58%
Other Services	4.89%
Public Administration	4.55%
Wholesale Trade	2.40%
Information	1.48%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting, and Mining	2.05%

Table 2.

Year	National Unemployment Rate	NEPA Average
2018	3.90%	5.05%
2019	3.67%	5.23%
2020	8.05%	9.65%
2021	5.46%	6.91%



Appalachian Physiographic Provinces

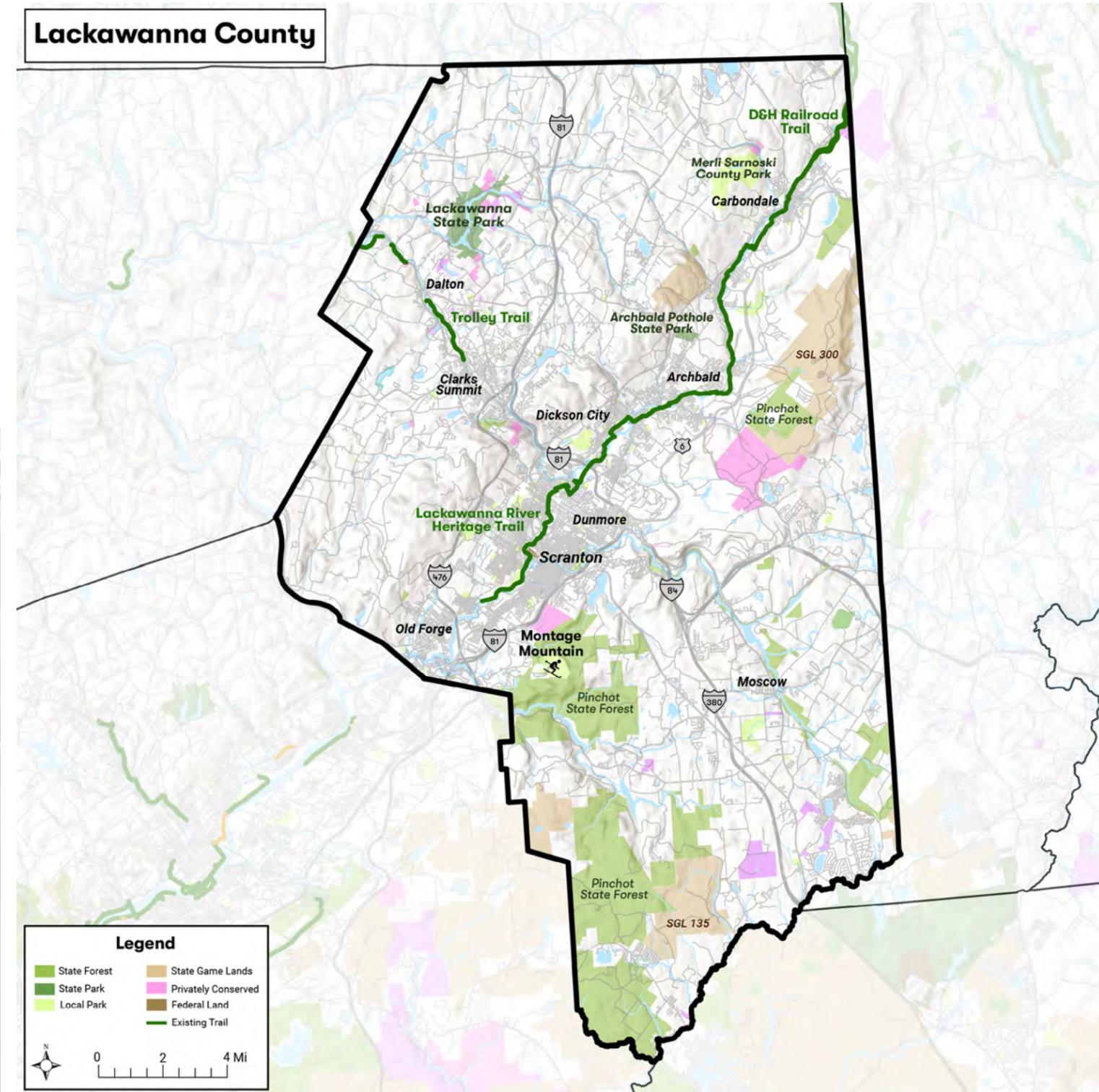


Lackawanna County

County Seat: Scranton

Population: 215,663

Lackawanna County, named after the 42-mile-long Lackawanna River, is a transportation hub located just an hour from the New York and New Jersey borders. The county has a rich history of coal mining, iron making, and locomotives. The Lackawanna River Heritage Trail is a county staple, traveling parallel to the River and eventually connecting with the D&H Rail Trail in Simpson. There are several historical attractions like Steamtown National Historic Site, the Scranton Iron Furnaces, and the Lackawanna Coal Mine Tour. In addition to several city and county parks like Nay Aug, McDade, and Merli-Sarnoski, the county boasts 2 State Parks and many nature preserves.



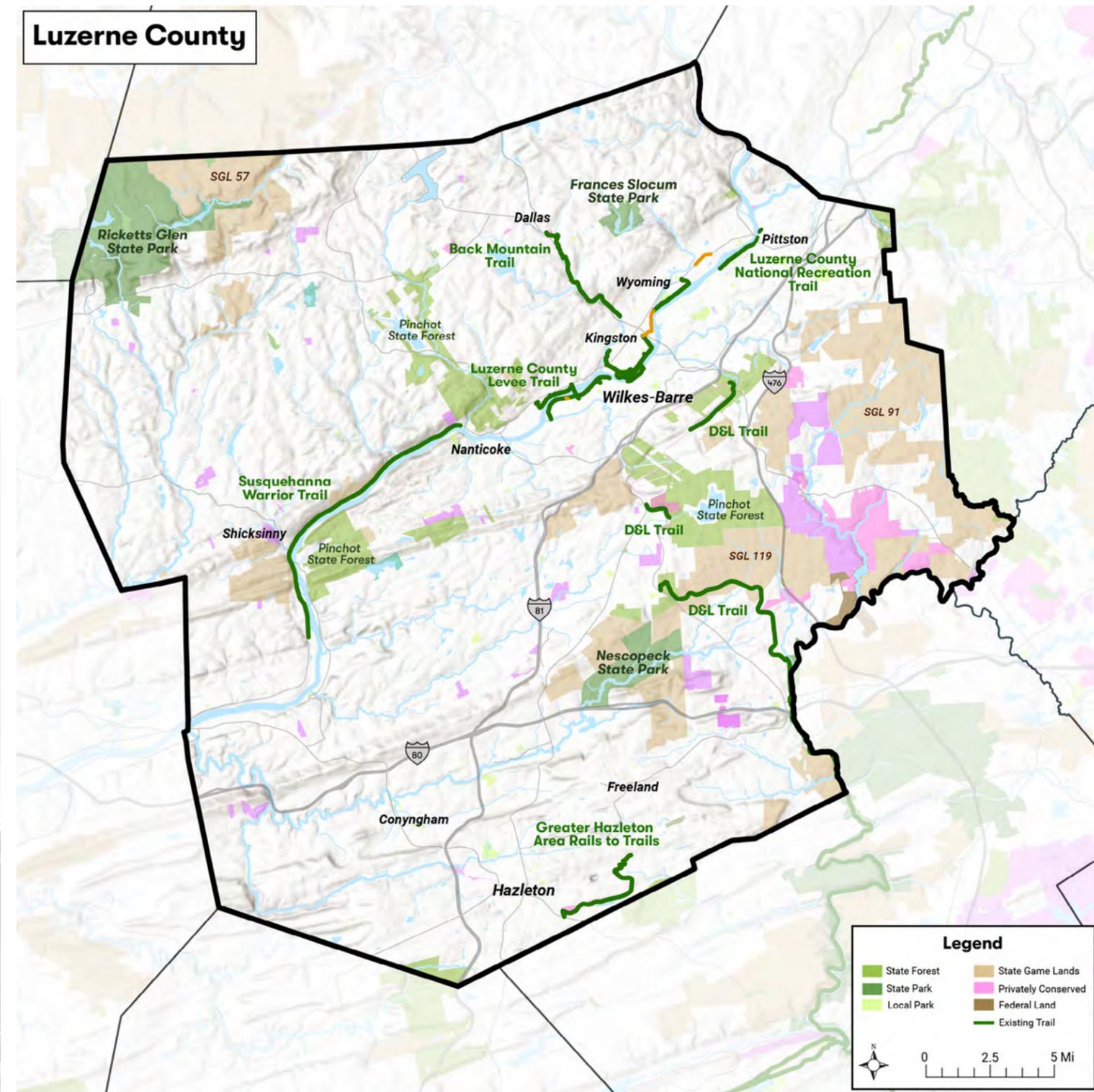
Luzerne County

County Seat: Wilkes-Barre

Population: 326,053

An urban county with historic roots dating back to the Revolutionary War, Luzerne County has a unique mix of urban and rural trails with plentiful opportunities to participate in outdoor recreation. Downtown Wilkes-Barre features the Levee Trail, historical Walkitecture Trail, and will eventually be the terminus for the D&L Trail, connecting it to multiple other rail trails. The county's other urban center, Hazleton, also features a rail trail that will eventually connect to the D&L. The county includes Frances Slocum State Park, Nescopeck State Park, a portion of Ricketts Glen State Park, and several tracts of land managed by Pinchot State Forest District.

Luzerne County



Riding the Luzerne County Levee Trail. (Credit: Abe Landes, Firespire Photography.)



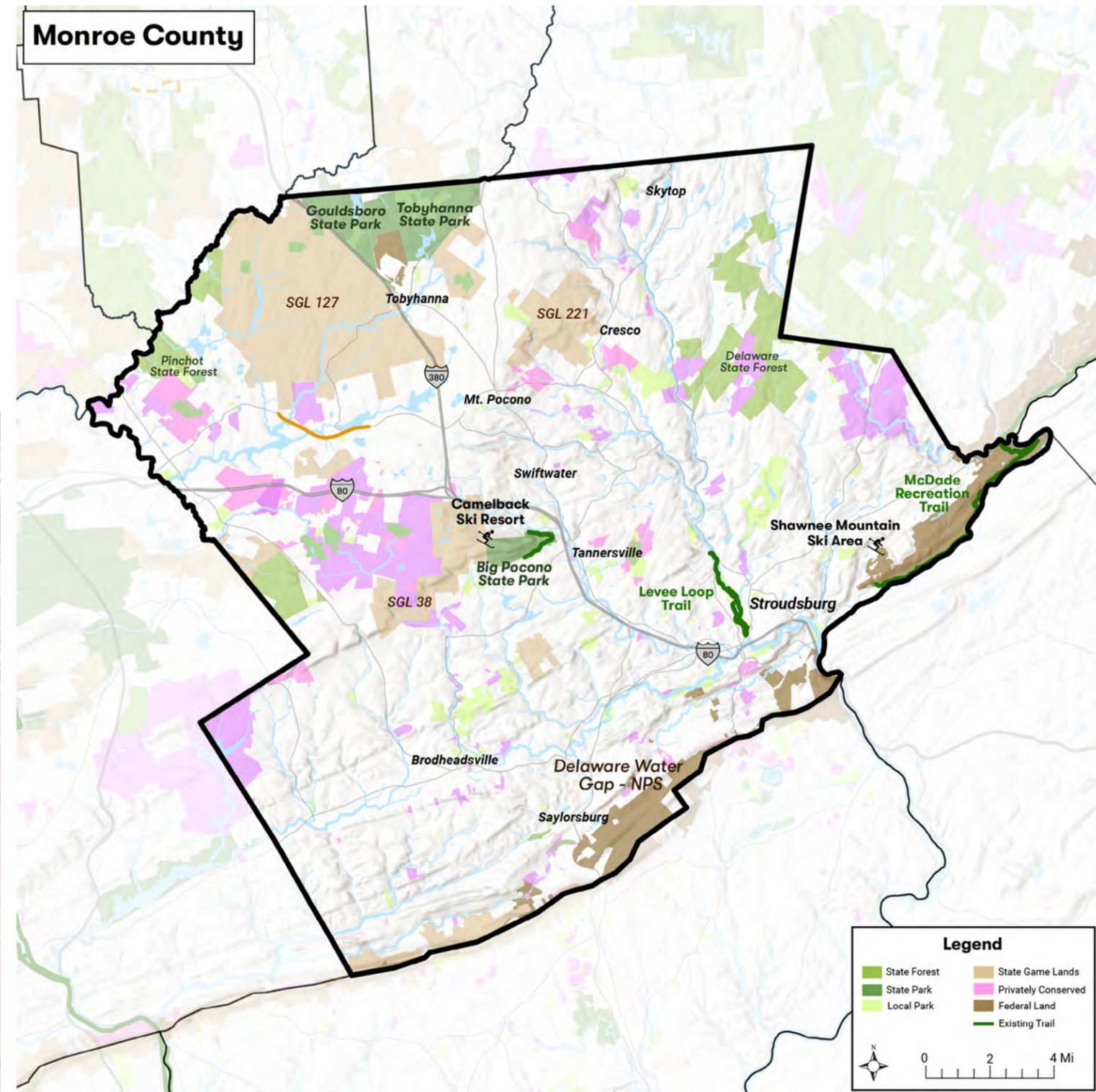
View of the City of Wilkes-Barre's Riverfront Trail from across the Susquehanna River.

Monroe County

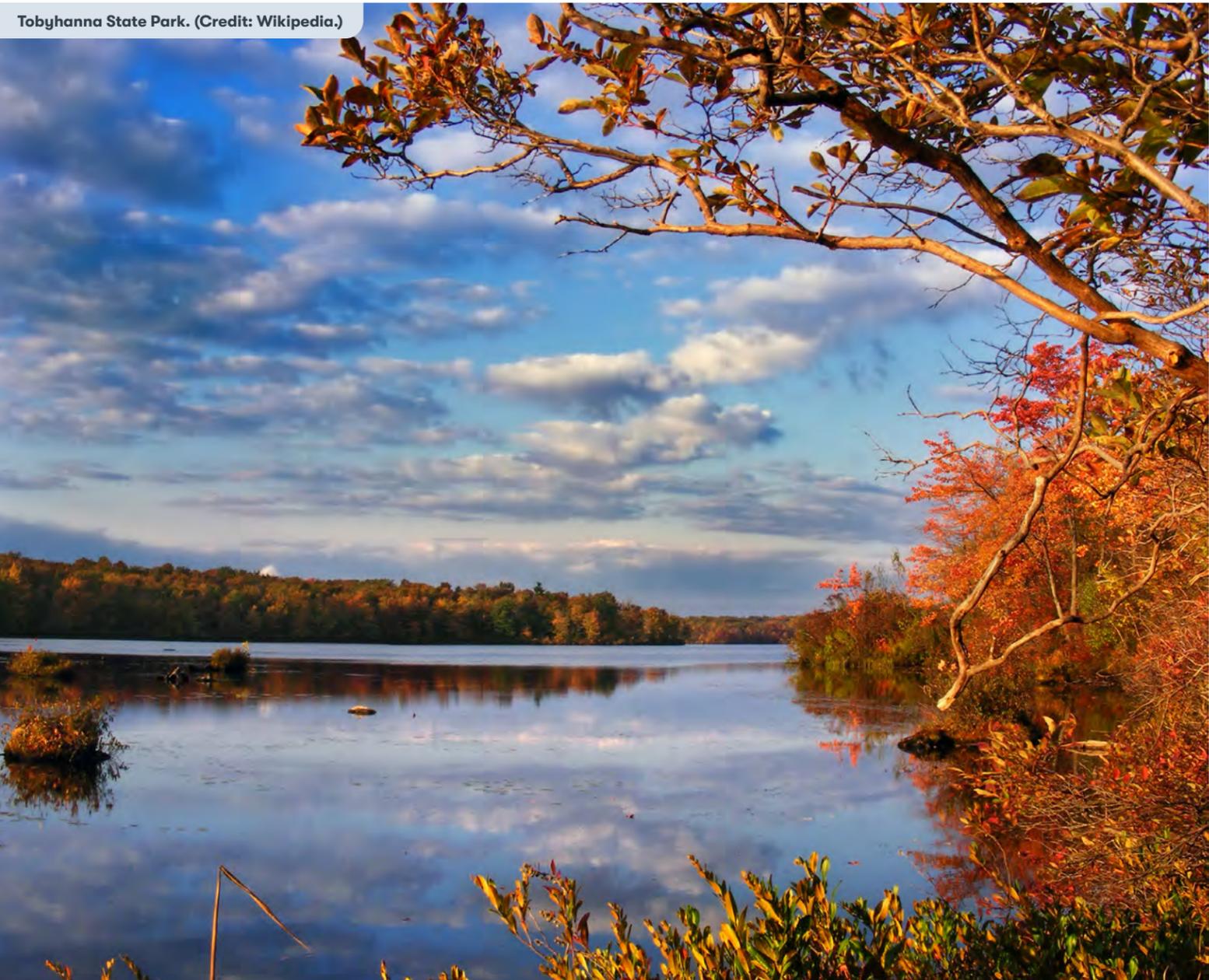
County Seat: Stroudsburg

Population: 169,273

Located along the New Jersey border, tourism is an important component of Monroe County's economy. The county is known for its diverse array of outdoor activities and a portion of the Appalachian Trail travels near the towns along the Kittatinny Ridge at its southern border. Home to two National sites - Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge and a portion of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation area, and three State Parks - Big Pocono State Park and a portion of both Tobyhanna and Gouldsboro State Park, Monroe County has no shortage of outdoor recreation opportunities.



Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

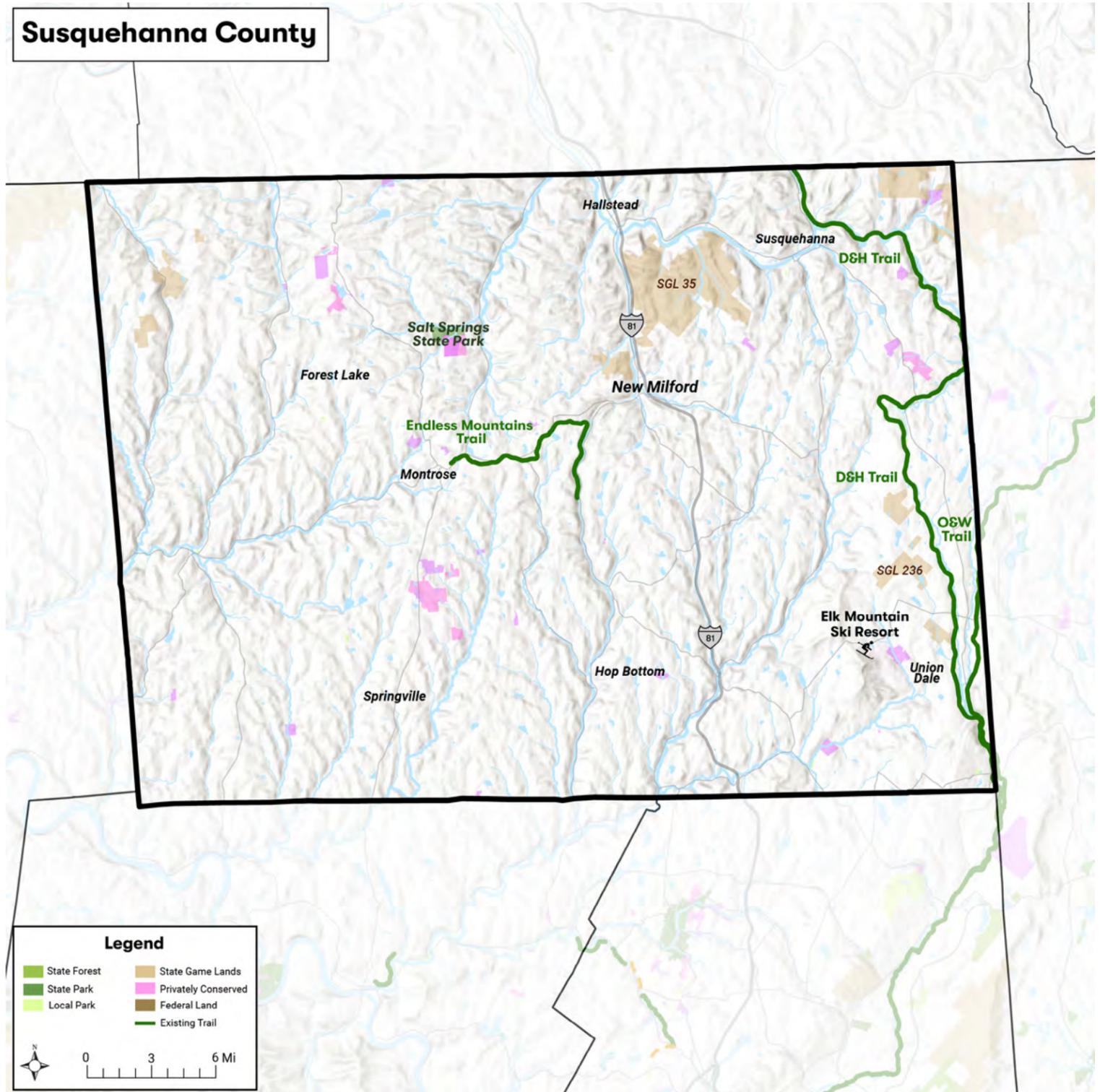


Susquehanna County

County Seat: Montrose

Population: 38,389

Located in the Endless Mountains along the New York border, Susquehanna is a rural county known for its wilderness. The D&H Rail Trail traverses the eastern edge of the county, connecting the town of Simpson to the town of Susquehanna at the New York border. It is a popular spot for hikers and bikers, and is open to snowmobiles in the winter. Additionally, Salt Springs State Park offers camping and hiking opportunities in an old-growth hemlock forest. The 2023 River of the Year, the North Branch of the Susquehanna River, also flows through Susquehanna County and provides excellent paddling opportunities.



Salt Springs State Park. (Credit: Wikipedia.)

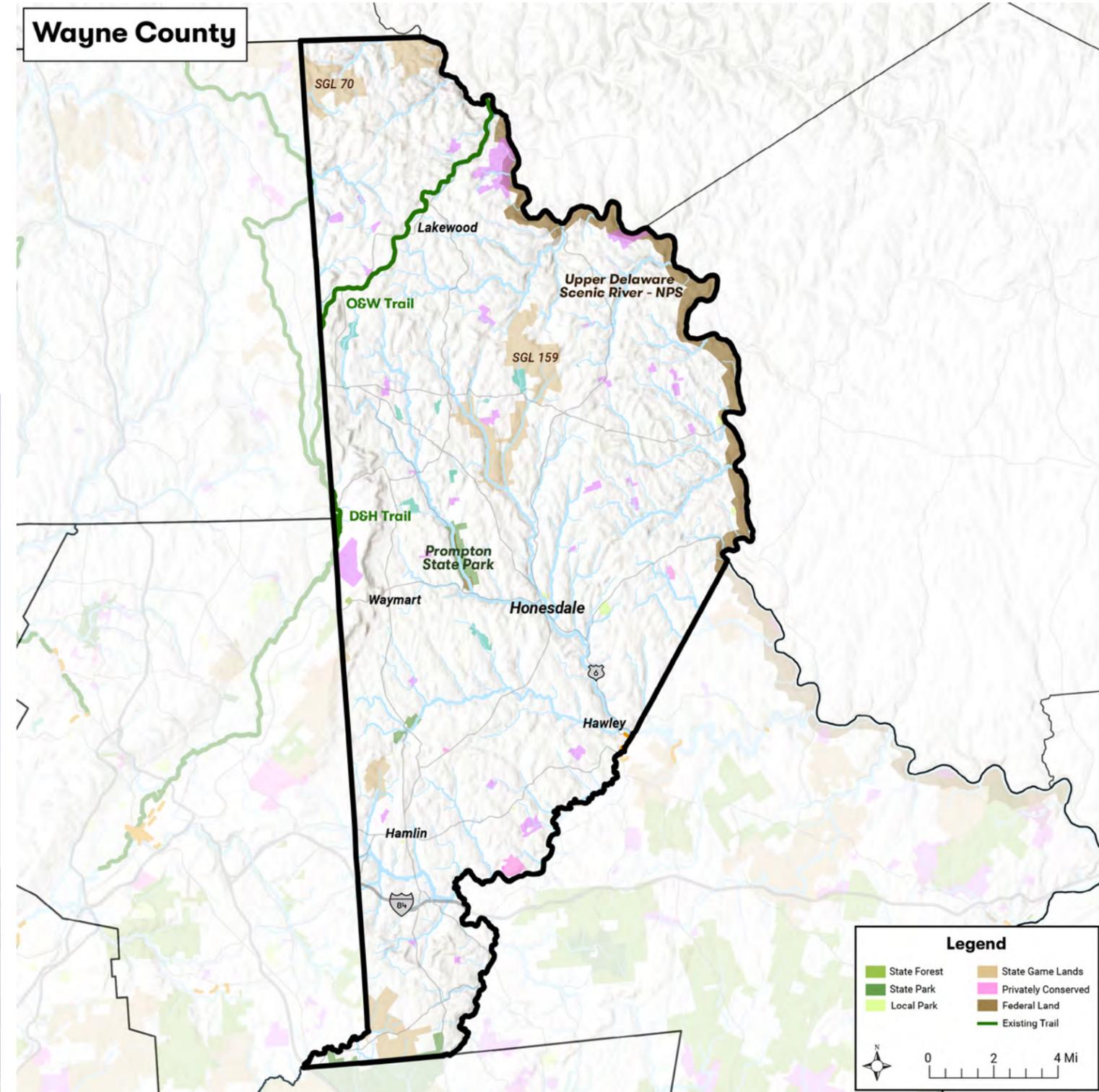
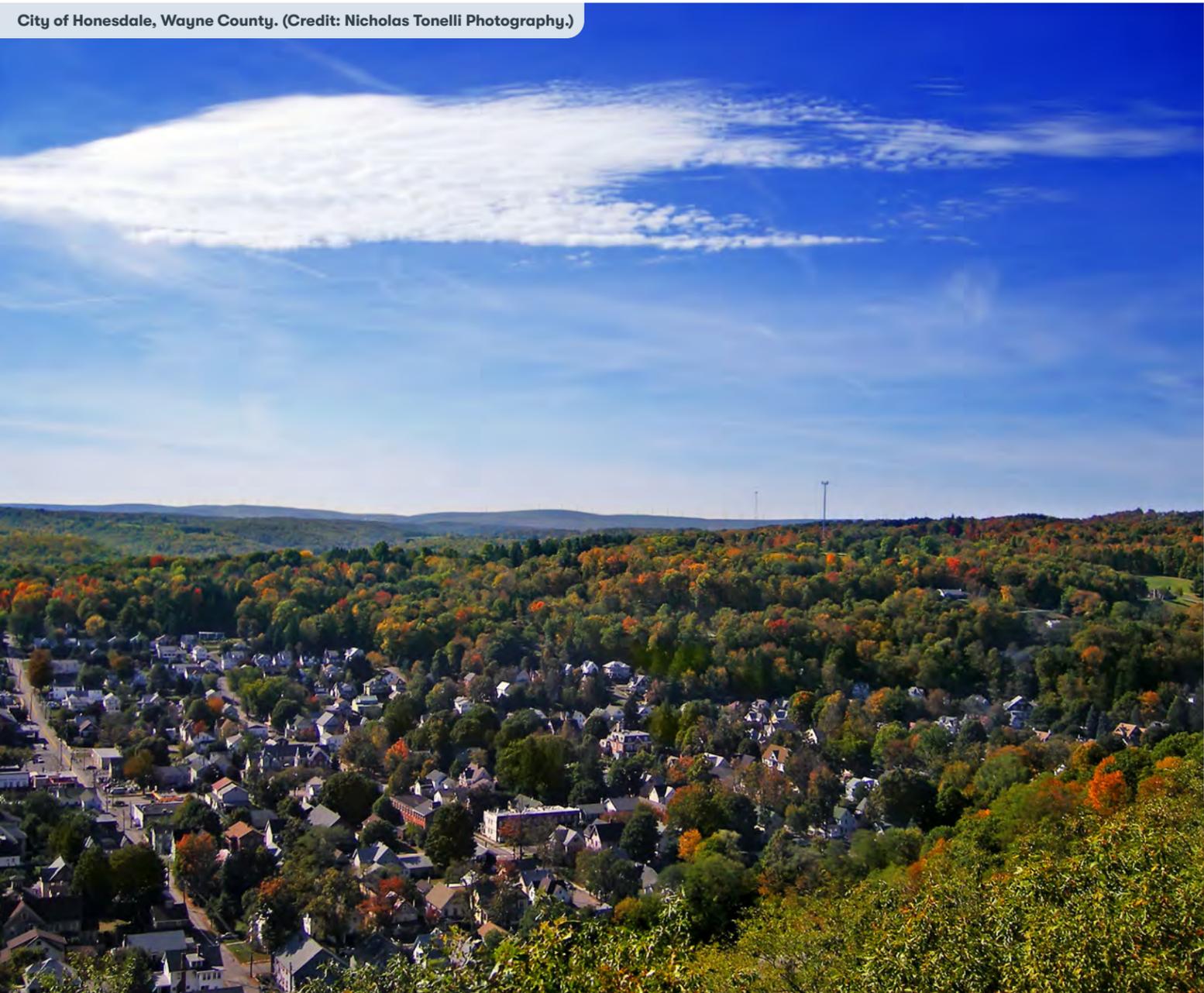


Wayne County

County Seat: Honesdale

Population: 51,431

Located in the Northeast corner of PA, Wayne County offers outdoor recreation opportunities paired with charming towns to relax and recharge. Its proximity to the New York border makes it a popular spot for out of state tourism. The Lackawaxen River Trail will eventually connect Honesdale to the town of Lackawaxen, uniting existing and future greenways and waterways. The Upper Delaware Scenic River, managed by the National Park Service, spans the eastern border. The county is also home to the popular Lake Wallenpaupack, one of Pennsylvania's largest reservoirs, and Prompton State Park, which offers mountain bike trails..



The Dorflinger-Sugdum Wildlife Sanctuary.



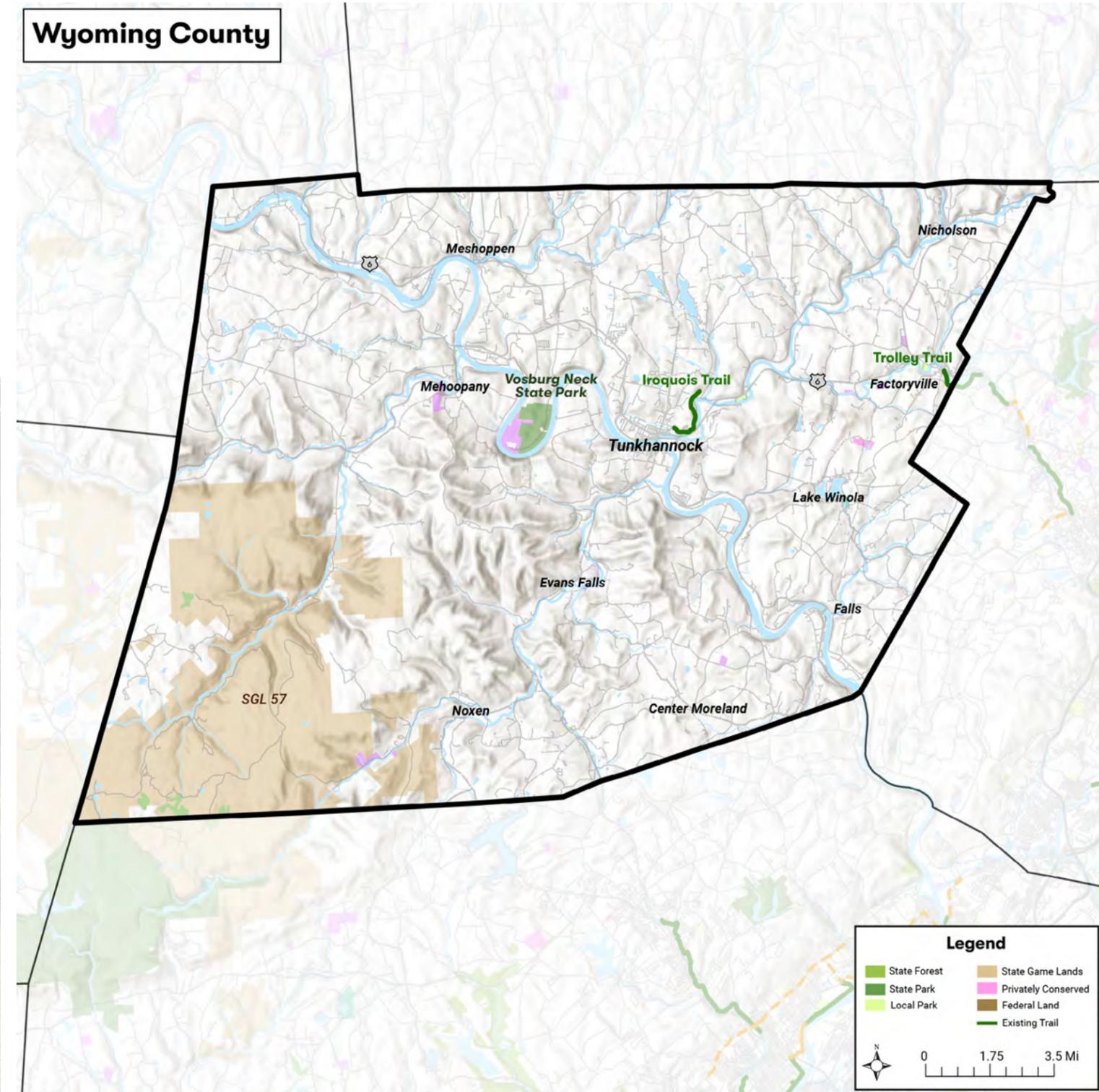
Wyoming County

County Seat: Tunkhannock

Population: 26,034

A rural county with pristine wilderness and waterways, Wyoming County is known as the "Gateway to the Endless Mountains." The Susquehanna River flows through the heart of the county in one of the State's newest State Parks—Vosburg Neck—a 669 acre park featuring historical structures, non-motorized boating access, and eight miles of trails. State Game Lands 57 offers popular gravel riding loops that connect to Ricketts Glen State Park in the south.

The Vosburg Neck State Park Opening Ceremony.



Credit: Discover NEPA.





Chapter 3 Methodology

Methodology

Plan Review

In order to determine the connectivity needs for the NEPA region, relevant plans were reviewed to gain an understanding of what planning efforts have been undertaken previously. These plans ranged from feasibility studies for individual trails or sections of trail to broader-level municipal, county, or region-wide plans. The reviewed plans ranged from less than a year to almost 20 years old, but many of them are less than 5 years old. Efforts were made to reach out to knowledgeable parties to determine what, if anything, has been accomplished since the plans were published. Each plan was read and summarized in the Connectivity Analysis section, and maps were digitized and compiled for this report. The full list of the plans reviewed can be found in **“Appendix B” on page 171** and are typically referenced in each trail gap or planned trail profile.

GIS and Mapping

The basis of any connectivity analysis starts with mapping. In addition to the linework derived from the plans reviewed, several trail groups and planning organizations provided mapping of their existing and planned trails. This data provided a baseline for the connectivity analysis as well as the mapping displayed in this report.

Other layers utilized in the mapping and as reference for the connectivity analysis include public and conserved lands, active and abandoned railroad lines, gravel and dirt roads (compiled from a variety of sources, including Penn State University, PA DCNR, and Pennsylvania Game Commission), and hydrography.

Stakeholder Engagement

When undertaking this assessment, it was important to understand the current and aspirational cycling ecosystem from a variety of perspectives. To this end, multiple methods of stakeholder engagement were employed to gain insights from county planners, tourism promotion agencies, trail organizations, event promoters, business owners, cycling advocates, and others.

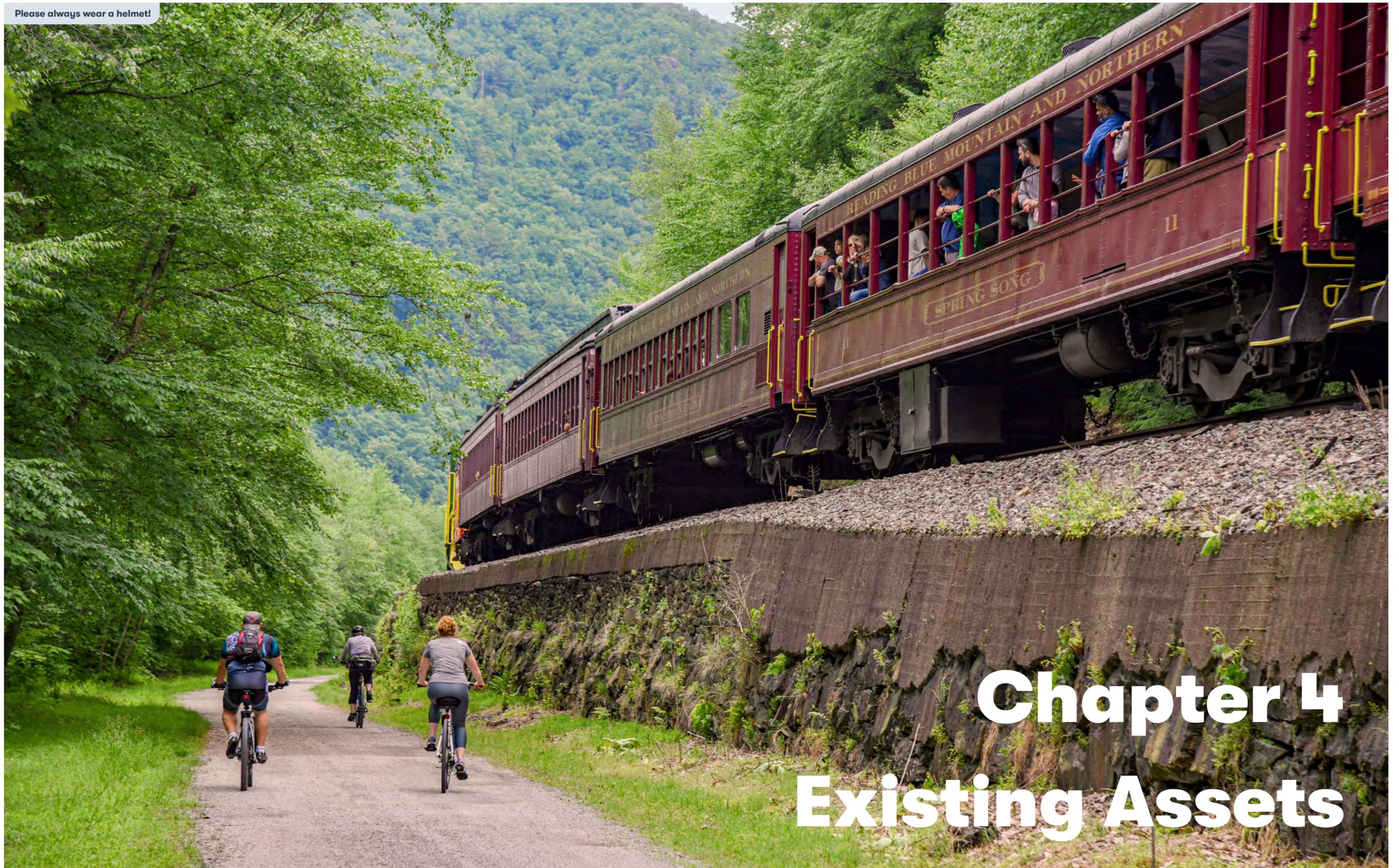
In March 2022, an initial kickoff mapping workshop was held in Moosic, PA (near Scranton) with the intention of filling gaps in trail data. About 20 stakeholders showed up to share their knowledge of planned and potential trails, as well as proof what was shown on prior mapping. Feedback from this workshop was incorporated into the trail data used in the report.

In October 2022, a “Visioning Session” was held in Moosic that brought together over 60 stakeholders from a broader audience. While this event also contained a mapping component, it was much more focused on the cycling ecosystem as a whole and revolved around a discussion about needs and opportunities. Once again, feedback was incorporated into this report and influenced the recommendations contained herein.

In addition to the Visioning Session, a survey went out via email blast and social media that was open to a broader audience of cycling advocates, enthusiasts and the general public as well. The survey received 89 responses between December 2022 and February 2023, mostly from the NEPA region but also some from the Philadelphia area as well as other parts of Pennsylvania. Results and takeaways from the survey are contained in **“Stakeholder Interviews” on page 141**.



Please always wear a helmet!



Chapter 4 Existing Assets

Public Lands

STATE PARKS

NEPA is home to 15 state parks offering a variety of scenery, amenities, and outdoor recreation opportunities. Lackawanna and Prompton both are notable for their mountain bike trail systems. Ricketts Glen is well-known for its gorgeous waterfalls. The massive Hickory Run features the Boulder Field National Natural Landmark. Vosburg Neck, nestled in a bend of the North Branch of the Susquehanna River, is Pennsylvania's newest state park. Most of the state parks offer camping, lakes, and trails.

- **Archbald Pothole**
- **Beltzville**
- **Big Pocono**
- **Frances Slocum**
- **Gouldsboro**
- **Hickory Run**
- **Lackawanna**
- **Lehigh Gorge**
- **Nescopeck**
- **Promised Land**
- **Prompton**
- **Ricketts Glen**
- **Salt Springs**
- **Tobyhanna**
- **Vosburg Neck**

STATE FORESTS

Delaware State Forest totals 83,519 acres in Pike, Monroe, Northampton, and Carbon counties and features glacial lakes and bogs rich with biodiversity and beautiful scenery. Pinchot State Forest comprises about 50,000 acres and includes several notable recreation areas such as Seven Tubs and Moon Lake. Though most of Weiser State Forest is southwest of the NEPA region, there are small tracts in Carbon County.

DELAWARE WATER GAP NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

Delaware Water Gap is a long, narrow strip along the 40 miles of the Delaware River at the eastern border of Wayne, Pike, and Monroe counties. This National Recreation Area offers hiking, paddling, fishing, hunting, and cycling opportunities, as well as four campgrounds. It is home to the McDade Recreational Trail, which travels almost the entire length of the park and offers varied terrain and scenic river views.

CONSERVANCIES & LAND TRUSTS

The Land Trust Alliance states, "Land trusts and conservancies work in their communities to conserve habitat for wildlife and plants, secure water quality, ensure land is available for future generations, provide equitable access to nature, protect family

farms and ranches, tackle climate change, build healthy communities and so much more."

Buck Hill Conservation Foundation - protects 4,600 acres of Pocono Woodland in Monroe County. The property is located between the Pennsylvania State Game Lands and other extensive private and public holdings including Spruce Lake Retreat and Skytop.

Countryside Conservancy - Countryside Conservancy owns 510 acres of lands in Lackawanna and Wyoming counties. These preserves are managed to protect their natural conservation values, and most of them are open for public visitation from dawn to dusk year-round.

Delaware Highlands Conservancy - The Delaware Highlands Conservancy is an accredited land trust dedicated to conserving the natural heritage and quality of life in the Upper Delaware River region in partnership with the region's landowners and communities.

Earth Conservancy - Earth Conservancy works to address the impacts of past coal mining operations in Luzerne County. Their work centers on the former holdings of the Blue Coal Corporation, which total nearly 16,500 acres. 10,000 of these acres were

Bear Creek Preserve in Luzerne County.



allocated for recreational, green, and conservation spaces including 6 recreation areas.

Edward L Rose Conservancy - The Edward L. Rose Conservancy holds seven conservation easements on over 434 acres of land in Northeastern Pennsylvania and Southern New York.

Lackawanna Valley Conservancy - The Lackawanna Valley Conservancy functions as a Land Trust organization in the Lackawanna River Watershed. They acquire vulnerable and prominent properties, including lands adjacent to the river and trail.

Natural Lands - Natural Lands currently owns 42 nature preserves and one public garden, totaling more than 23,000 acres across eastern Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey.

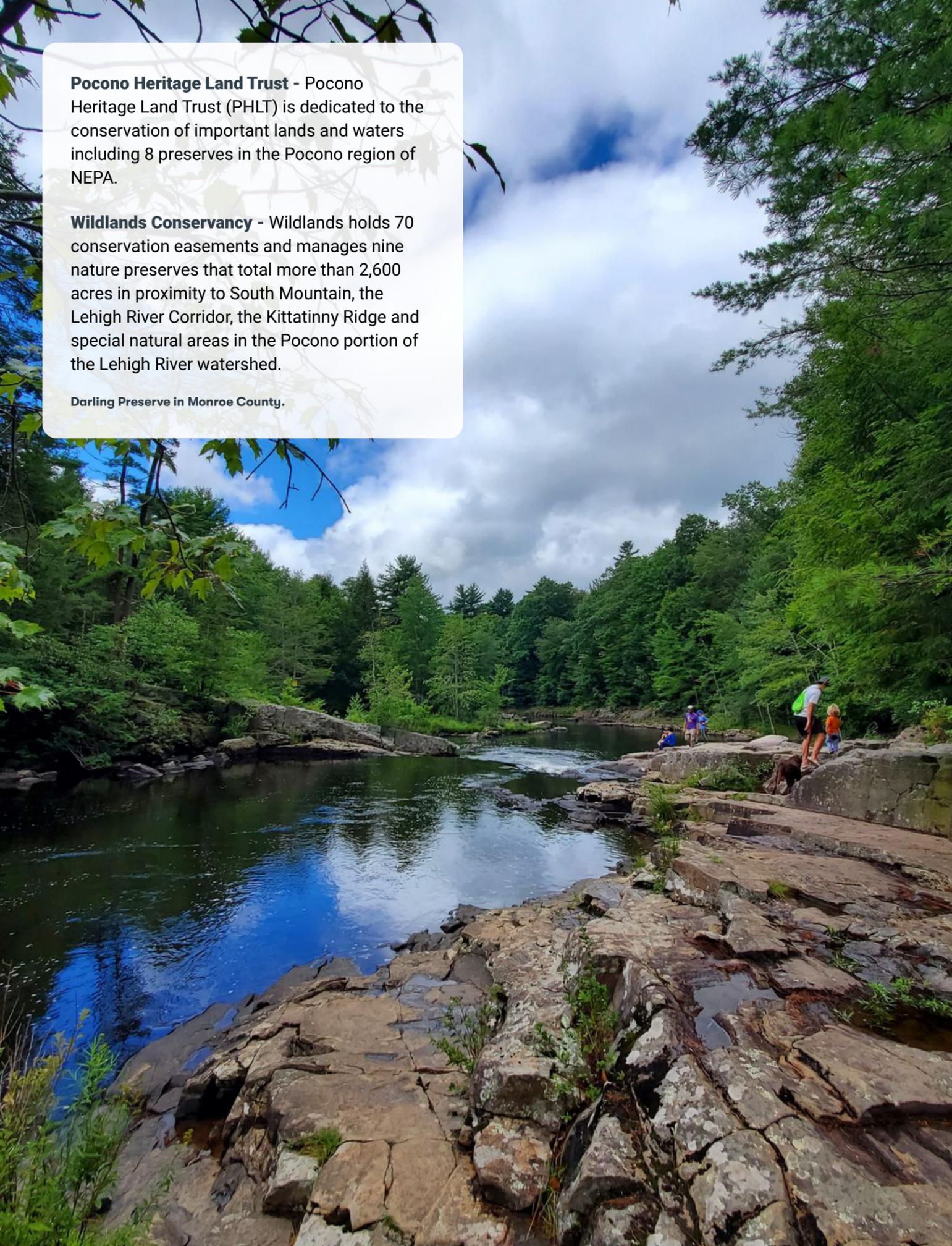
The Nature Conservancy - Operating in over 70 counties, the Nature Conservancy in Pennsylvania has conserved over 100,000 acres of land and operates several preserves in NEPA.

North Branch Land Trust - North Branch Land Trust conserves land across eight Northeastern Pennsylvania counties. The Land Trust has conserved or taken ownership of over 60 natural lands totaling over 22,000 acres.

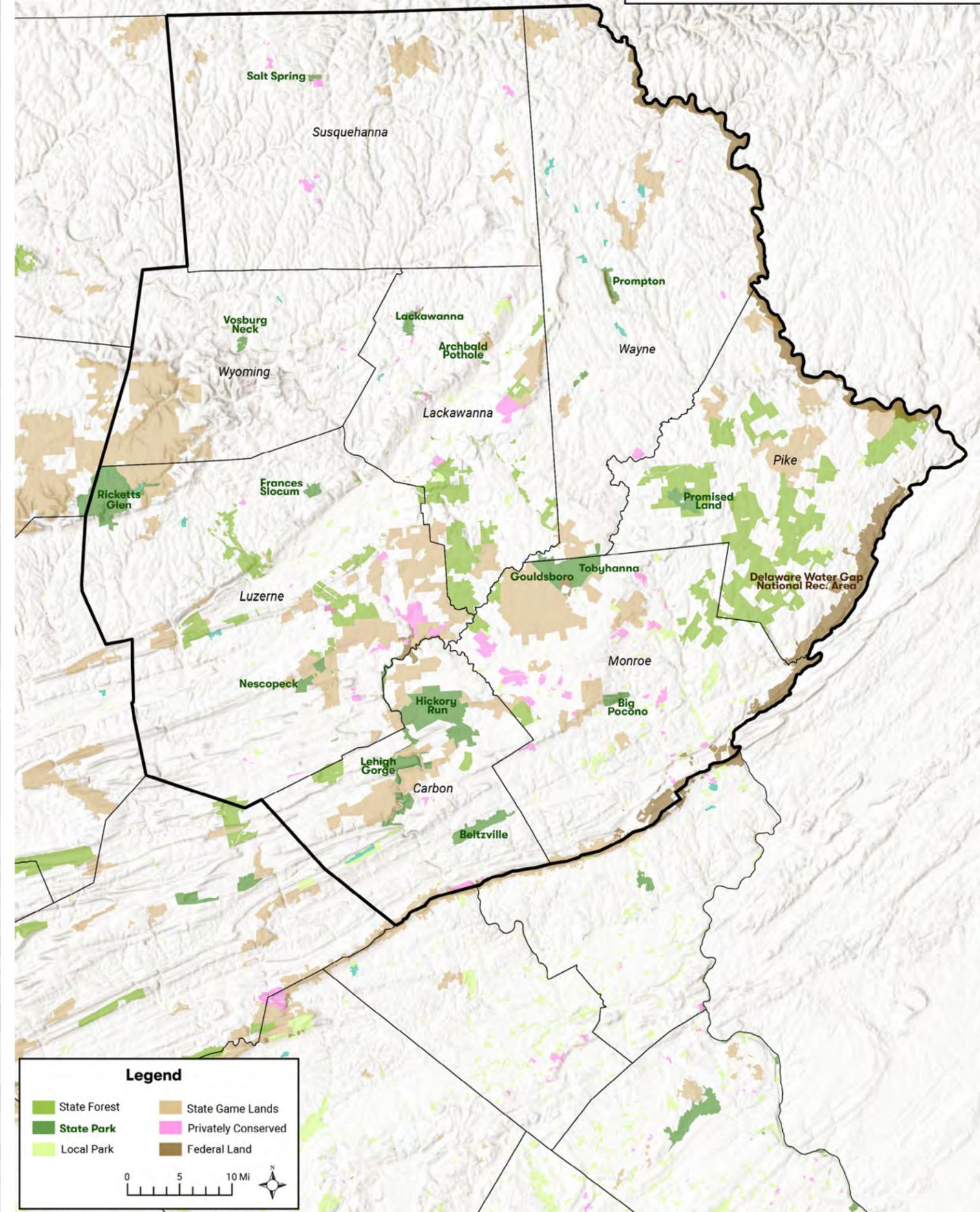
Pocono Heritage Land Trust - Pocono Heritage Land Trust (PHLT) is dedicated to the conservation of important lands and waters including 8 preserves in the Pocono region of NEPA.

Wildlands Conservancy - Wildlands holds 70 conservation easements and manages nine nature preserves that total more than 2,600 acres in proximity to South Mountain, the Lehigh River Corridor, the Kittatinny Ridge and special natural areas in the Pocono portion of the Lehigh River watershed.

Darling Preserve in Monroe County.



Public & Conserved Lands



Multi-Use Trails

D&H RAIL TRAIL

Existing Trail Miles: 38 miles

Trail Organization: Rail-Trail Council of NEPA

The Delaware and Hudson (D&H) Trail spans 38 miles, utilizing part of the Delaware and Hudson Rail corridor and paralleling a section of the Lackawanna River. In 2021 it was named PA Trail of the Year. The trail crosses three counties, connecting the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail in Simpson to the Pennsylvania/New York border just north of Lanesboro, PA. The Delaware and Hudson railroad was a major transporter of anthracite coal, a large part of the region's identity.

The D&H Trail connects trail users to a series of historic towns, lakes, rivers, and scenic farms from the Lackawanna Valley to the Endless Mountains. Multiple access points and trailheads exist along the trail.

Riding the D&H near Simpson, PA. (Credit: Discover NEPA.)

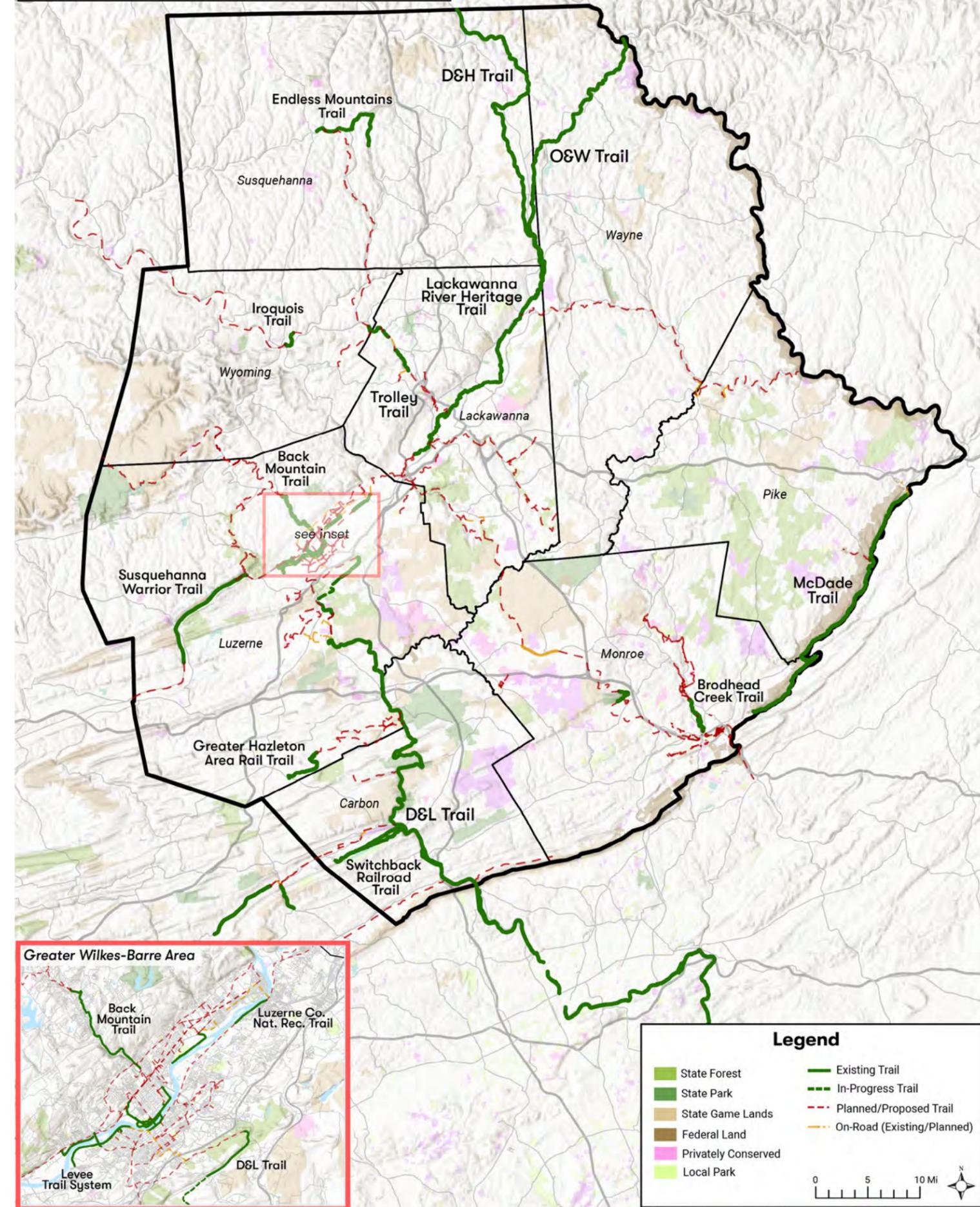


trail, giving users greater ability to access and tailor their trail experience. Amenities such as bathrooms and rest areas are located along the trail.

The southern terminus of the D&H Trail in Simpson connects seamlessly to the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail, a proposed 40-mile multi-use trail along the Lackawanna River, with 18 miles already constructed. The connection of these two long-distance trails helps create a valuable trail network in the region that connects to 30+ communities in the area. The O&W Trail roughly parallels the D&H trail, offering trail users more routes and the ability to create loops.

Heading north from Simpson, the first 19 miles of trail have an improved crushed-stone surface. Further improvements are scheduled for the remaining length of trail, which still has its original cinder surface. The trail is open to hiking, cycling, cross-country skiing and horseback riding. The trail is groomed for snowmobiles in winter, and riders are required to obtain a permit.

Major Existing Multi-Use Trails



O&W TRAIL

Existing Trail Miles: 8 miles

Trail Organization: Rail-Trail Council of NEPA

The Ontario and Western Railway Trail, referred to as the O&W Trail, is 32 miles long and connects to the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail and the D&H Trail in Simpson, paralleling the D&H Trail for eight miles and enabling trail users to utilize both trails and create loops.

The trail extends from Simpson, PA to the Pennsylvania/New York Border near Hancock, NY, just north of the confluence of the East and West branches of the Delaware River. However, access varies across its length. The Rail Trail Council of NEPA has a recreational easement on the first 8 miles of trail from Simpson to Stillwater Dam. The middle section is privately-owned and allows ATVs with trail passes. The northern section is owned and operated by Preston and Buckingham Townships as low-maintenance roads.

The trail uses the original rail bed surface, which is graded, but is rough in many areas, especially those that allow ATV usage. These sections are more suited to mountain bikes.

The Lackawanna River Heritage Trail and the D&H Trail are valuable connections to the O&W Trail. The trail offers recreation within the Lackawanna River corridor, trail connections to Stillwater Dam, the Delaware River, and Panther's Bluff, a 1,500-acre conservation and recreation area with hiking trails and waterfalls.

The O&W Trail is open for snowmobiles in winter, and all riders must have a permit. It should be noted that another trail in New York is also named the O&W Trail, as they use part of the same railroad line.

ENDLESS MOUNTAINS TRAIL

Existing Trail Miles: 9.2 miles

Trail Organization: Rail-Trail Council of NEPA

The Endless Mountains Trail is considered one of the first rail trails in the nation, spanning 10 miles on an abandoned railroad bed from Alford to Montrose. The Rail-Trail Council of NEPA is currently working on restoring the trail, but for now has a rough surface that is more suited for mountain bikes. The trail allows snowmobiles and equestrian access in addition to hiking and cycling.

The trail is split into two segments by a short on-road section creating the Montrose and Alford trail sections. The Montrose section is variable in width, down to two feet at the narrowest, adding to the challenge and experience. The Alford section widens, allowing room for trail users to pull over or pass. The trail does not have an outlet or connection as it is constricted and pinched-off by the railroad, therefore the trail is most often used as an out-and-back trail.

IROQUOIS TRAIL

Existing Trail Miles: 1.8 miles

Trail Organization: Wyoming Industrial Development Authority

The Iroquois Trail is a 1.8 mile out-and-back rail trail. The trail uses the railroad bed from the Lehigh Valley Railroad's Montrose Branch, and has a smooth crushed gravel surface. The trail begins in the town of Tunkhannock, positioned at the gateway to the Endless Mountains in northeastern Pennsylvania. The trail then travels north, lined by rocky cliffs to the west and occasional views of Tunkhannock Creek to the east. The trail passes Marcy Pioneer Cemetery, dating back to 1797. The wooded trail ends on an incline where future connections have yet to be planned. Parking is available at sports fields at the trailhead in Tunkhannock.

The Iroquois Trail. (Credit: Discover NEPA.)



TROLLEY TRAIL

Existing Trail Miles: 5 miles

Trail Organization: Countryside Conservancy

The Trolley Trail utilizes an urban trolley line which started in 1907 to link several rural communities in the Abingtons and beyond, to Scranton. The Trolley Trail is a total of just over 5 miles long and is currently comprised of three trail segments. The majority of the trail uses the former Northern Electric Trolley right of way, preserving history and offering opportunities for education. The northern section of trail links Factoryville and LaPlume through a winding, woodsy section at Keystone College; and the southern section connects Dalton through Glenburn to Clarks Summit.

The trolley line was operated from 1907 to 1932 and had several company names including the Scranton, Montrose, and Binghamton Railroad. It is best known as the Northern Electric Street RWY, Co. Educational signage is located around the trailheads for interested trail users. A 1.7-mile section of trail on Keystone College campus was developed collaboratively with the institution and offers access to campus hiking trails, as well as the college's athletic fields. Countryside Conservancy plans to extend the trail west to Lake Winola and possibly north to Nicholson in the future.

The Trolley Trail. (Credit: Discover NEPA.)



LACKAWANNA RIVER HERITAGE TRAIL

Existing Trail Miles: 18 miles (+36 miles of connected D&H Trail)

Trail Organization: Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority

The Lackawanna River Heritage Trail (LRHT) is a mixed-surface multi-use trail paralleling the Lackawanna River. The trail is planned to extend 40 miles, connecting to the D&H Trail to create a 70 mile greenway from Wilkes-Barre to the Pennsylvania/New York border. While currently in three separate sections, the LRHT offers connections between communities and access to spaces for outdoor recreation, all via the Lackawanna River corridor.

The northmost segment is the Carbondale section, extending 3.25 miles and is continuous with the D&H Trail. This section of improved rail trail connects the D&H Trail to the Enterprise Street trailhead, and offers trail users a smooth paved surface alongside the Lackawanna River.

The middle segment, the Mid-Valley section, spans 8.5 miles and is a mix of gravel trail and on-road connections. The Mid-Valley section has multiple trailheads and offers trail users access to recreation in the river corridor.

The southernmost segment is the Scranton section, extending from Dean Street in Scranton to Depot Street in Taylor for a distance of 6.1 miles. The trail is a mix of levees, existing unimproved trail, and the new Scranton Riverwalk.

LUZERNE COUNTY LEVEE TRAIL

Existing Trail Miles: 12.8 miles

Trail Organization: Luzerne County Flood Protection Authority, Riverfront Parks Committee

The Wyoming Valley section of the Susquehanna River has been equipped with earthen levees since the 1930s, helping keep urban areas safe from flooding events. Today, these levees are topped with paved multi-use trails that offer safe and scenic routes along the river. The Levee Trail is a total of 12.8 miles of built trail, consisting of three disconnected trail segments. The easternmost segment parallels the river for 2.5 miles, passing the Wilkes-Barre Wyoming Airport and Forty Fort Borough recreation fields. This trail is equipped with a paved surface and trail signage.

The middle section, centered in Kingston and Wilkes-Barre, is 1.8 miles. This section of trail has neighborhood access, river views, and connections to both Nesbitt and Kirby Parks, offering access to a range of outdoor recreation. Trail users have the option to cross the Susquehanna River using wide sidewalks on the Market Street Bridge, connecting to Wilkes University and its network of walking paths.

The westernmost section of trail is a total of 5 miles long and offers trail users two options. The trail starts on Riverside Drive, a connection to Wilkes University and continues west atop river levees for 1.7 miles until Carey Avenue Bridge. Trail users may continue west for 1.8 miles, terminating at a flood-control facility that serves as the turnaround point. Alternatively, trail users may cross the Carey Avenue Bridge using the protected crossing, providing access to Plymouth before ending after 1.6 miles in a gravel parking lot. The west end of this section is planned to connect with the Susquehanna Warrior Trail.

LUZERNE COUNTY NATIONAL RECREATION TRAIL

Existing Trail Miles: 1.8 miles

Trail Organization: Luzerne County Redevelopment Authority

The Luzerne County National Recreation Trail is a crushed gravel multi-use trail within an active railroad corridor. The trail is currently 1.8 miles long, from downtown Pittston to Port Griffith, along the river and railroad. Trail users are separated from the railroad tracks via chain link fence and have views of the river and passing trains, and access to Riverfront Park.

The trail is intended to be 16 miles long and within the railroad corridor for its duration. When completed, the Luzerne County National Recreation Trail will make valuable connections to other trails in the area, such as the Levee Trail and the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail. The existing section of trail is predominantly flat and straight, and has trail signage every 0.1 miles.

Riding the Luzerne Co. NRT on the Lu Lacka Wyco Hundo. (Credit: Abe Landes, Firespire Photography.)



BACK MOUNTAIN TRAIL

Existing Trail Miles: 5.6 miles

Trail Organization: Anthracite Scenic Trails Association

The Back Mountain Trail currently spans 5.6 miles from Dallas Township to Luzerne Borough, and utilizes the Wilkes-Barre and Harvey's Lake Railroad corridor. The trail currently begins at Terrace Street off Lower Demunds Road and terminates at the corner of Buckingham and Tener Streets in Luzerne, with future plans to extend and connect to other existing trails in the area. The planned 14-mile route will extend from Riverfront Parks in the City of Wilkes-Barre to Harveys Lake Borough, adding trail miles to each side of the existing segment.

The connection to Riverfront Parks in the City of Wilkes-Barre is particularly noteworthy, as the trail would connect to the Luzerne Levee Trail and the Susquehanna Warrior Trail when completed. Many additional trails without proposed direct connections are in the area, including the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail, the D&L Trail, and the Luzerne County National Recreational Trail.

The trail is a crushed stone surface, though its width varies and at times becomes narrow. The trail follows the meandering Toby's Creek, allowing trail users to experience a waterfall, meadows, and wooded sections. A series of steps is located on the trail at approximately mile 2.25 that cyclists must walk or carry their bikes to traverse. The Back Mountain Trail uses the Luzerne Creek Walk for 0.3 miles, which is wheelchair accessible.

LEVEE LOOP TRAIL - EAST STROUDSBURG

Existing Trail Miles: 4.4 miles

Trail Organization: Stroud Region Open Space & Recreation Commission

The Levee Loop Trail in East Stroudsburg is a 4.4 mile loop trail that follows the flood levees along Brodhead Creek. The partially shaded multi-use trail offers many local connections including historic downtowns, multiple parks, schools, and neighborhoods. Six trailheads with parking are located along the trail, allowing trail users practical connections and access to amenities.

The trail connects to Brodhead Creek Park, offering a 1.8-mile hiking path and extending trail users' experience of Brodhead Creek. The trail passes through Dansbury Park, East Stroudsburg South High School, Creekview Park, Stokes Mill Park, and Yetter Park, all offering outdoor recreation and greenspace.

Currently less than one mile of the trail remains on low-volume roads. The loop takes trail users over Brodhead Creek twice, both on existing roadway bridges equipped with sidewalks.



SUSQUEHANNA WARRIOR TRAIL

Existing Trail Miles: 12.5 miles

Trail Organization: Susquehanna Greenway Partnership

The Susquehanna Warrior Trail currently spans 12.5 miles from the Susquehanna Riverlands in Salem Township to Canal Park in West Nanticoke. The trail is planned to be 18.5 miles long, with an additional 6 miles proposed from Canal Park in West Nanticoke to Kirby Park in Wilkes-Barre. The Susquehanna Warrior Trail has high potential for valuable trail connections.

The Susquehanna Warrior Trail is positioned in between Route 11 and the Susquehanna River, providing views of the river for much of the trail. The trail goes through the Shickshinny Borough, offering easy access to amenities for trail users. Along the route is the Garden Drive-In, one of the few remaining drive-in theaters in the state.

Multiple trails are planned to connect to the Susquehanna Warrior Trail, including the Luzerne Levee Trail and the Back Mountain Trail. Future connections through the Wilkes-Barre and Scranton areas would connect the Susquehanna Warrior Trail to the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail and the D&L Trail, contributing to a vast network of connected trails and communities in the region.

The Susquehanna Warrior Trail.

MCDADE TRAIL

Existing Trail Miles: 31.3 miles

Trail Organization: U.S. National Park Service

The McDade Trail extends 31.3 miles from Milford to East Stroudsburg along the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River along the Pennsylvania/New Jersey border. The McDade Trail is a multi-use crushed stone trail with access points and trailheads consistently located along the trail.

A 2.5-mile section of trail from Conashaugh and Pittman Orchard trailheads (miles 26 to 28.5) is closed from December 15 through July 15 to avoid disturbing nesting eagles in the area. This section is easily avoided by utilizing Route 209 for 2.5 miles. The multi-use trail does not allow horseback riding or motorized vehicles.

The trail provides recreation in the river corridor, connections between communities, and connections to existing recreation and natural assets, including Smithfield Beach, Raymondskill Falls, Hackers Falls, and the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. Multiple campgrounds can be accessed from the trail, allowing trail users to spend the night and extend their trail experience.

SWITCHBACK RAILROAD TRAIL

Existing Trail Miles: 4 miles

Trail Organization: Carbon County

The Switchback Railroad Trail links Jim Thorpe near the D&L Trail with Summit Hill in Carbon County. Built to haul coal from the Summit Mine to the Lehigh Canal, the railroad began as a combined gravity-powered (downhill) and mule-powered (uphill) system. This resulted in two different tracks

– the Down Track and Back Track, each about 9 miles long. The Back Track is a bit rougher, more suited for mountain bikes, and offers beautiful views from Mt. Pisgah. Both feature a considerable grade headed downhill towards Jim Thorpe, though shuttle services can drop riders off in Summit Hill for a downhill-only ride. Along the way, there are interpretive panels depicting the historic railroad and an old mine shaft. The Down Track passes Mauch Chunk Lake Park, which offers camping, fishing, swimming, boating, and food and boat concessions.

GREATER HAZLETON AREA RAILS TO TRAILS

Existing Trail Miles: 4 miles

Trail Organization: Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership

The Greater Hazleton Area Rail Trail is a multi-use trail east of Hazleton in Luzerne County. The trail is currently 5.6 miles long, from Route 93 at the border of the City of Hazleton to Hazlebrook in Hazle Township. The trail passes along the Dreck Creek Reservoir, providing views over the water. The majority of trail users enjoy the trail as an 8-mile out-and-back, as future extensions and connections are still in the planning process. Trail amenities such as mile markers, signs, and permanent exercise stations are located along the existing trail. A variety of proposed routes are being considered to connect Hazleton to the D&L Trail.

DELAWARE & LEHIGH (D&L)

Existing Trail Miles: 142 miles

Trail Organization: Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor

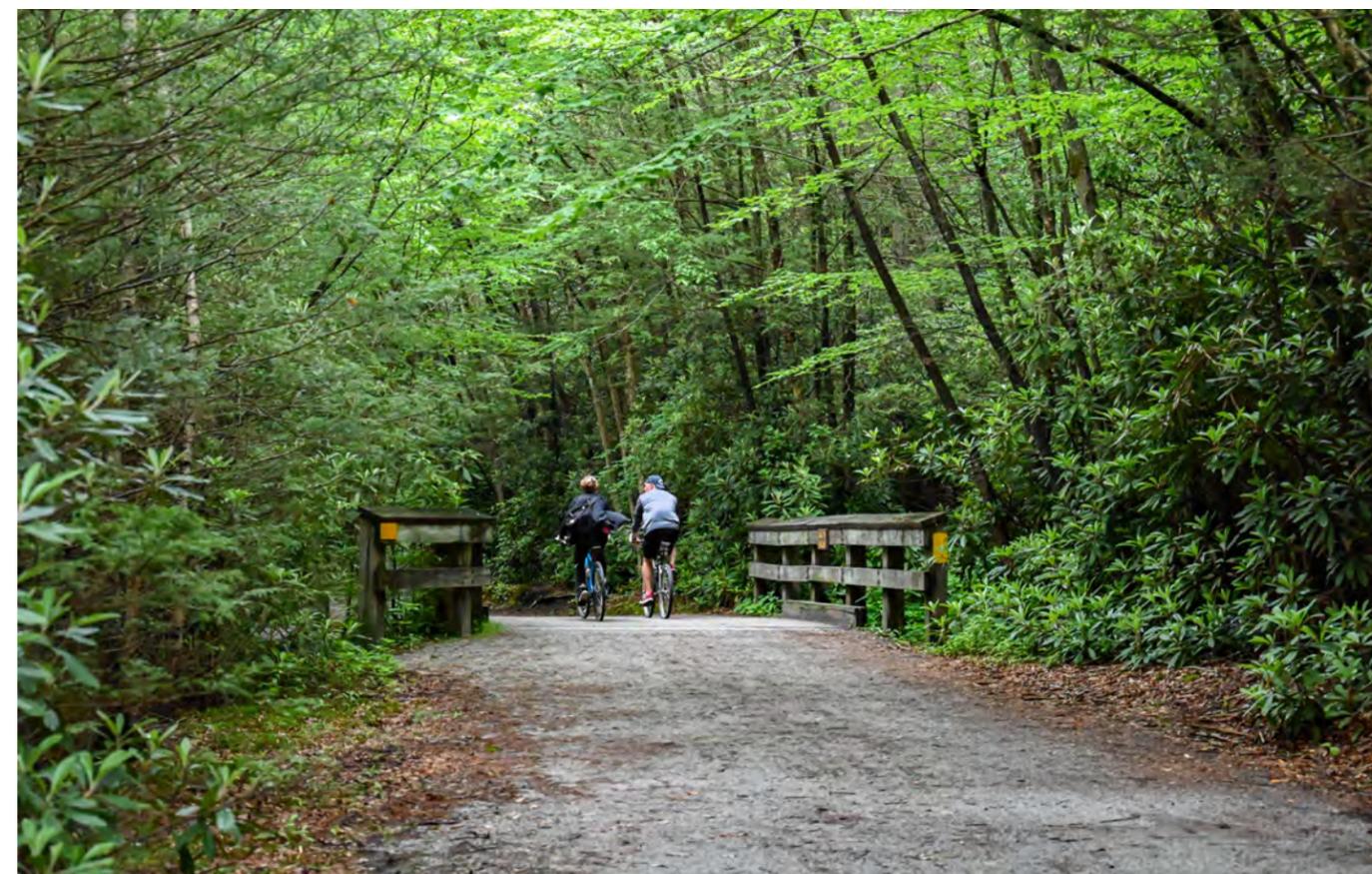
The Delaware and Lehigh (D&L) Trail is currently the longest rail trail in Pennsylvania. From its southern terminus in Bristol, PA, it continues northward towards Wilkes-Barre on old rail beds and canal tow paths along the Delaware and Lehigh Rivers. The southernmost section in Bucks County is part of the East Coast Greenway, which, when complete, will connect communities over a 3,000-mile corridor from Maine to Florida. The D&L Trail also connects into the 350-mile Circuit Trails network (which is planned to be 800 miles upon completion). The D&L is one of the “spines” of the NEPA region network of trails.

As the D&L stretches northward, it passes through Bethlehem and Allentown. Farther north, the smaller communities of Jim Thorpe and White Haven have capitalized on the trail and paralleling Lehigh River, which is popular with whitewater paddlers and rafters. A highlight of this section of trail is Lehigh Gorge State Park, which offers a remote and wild atmosphere with gorgeous scenery along the river.

The 10 miles north of White Haven are known as the Black Diamond section. The trail deviates from the Lehigh River along this stretch and instead climbs a plateau to its current terminus at the Black Diamond Trailhead just south of Glen Summit. There is active work being done to complete the trail into Wilkes-Barre.

While the D&L Trail is managed by the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, the trail itself is owned by different organizations throughout its length.

Riding the D&L near Jim Thorpe, PA. (Credit: Discover NEPA.)



Gravel Riding

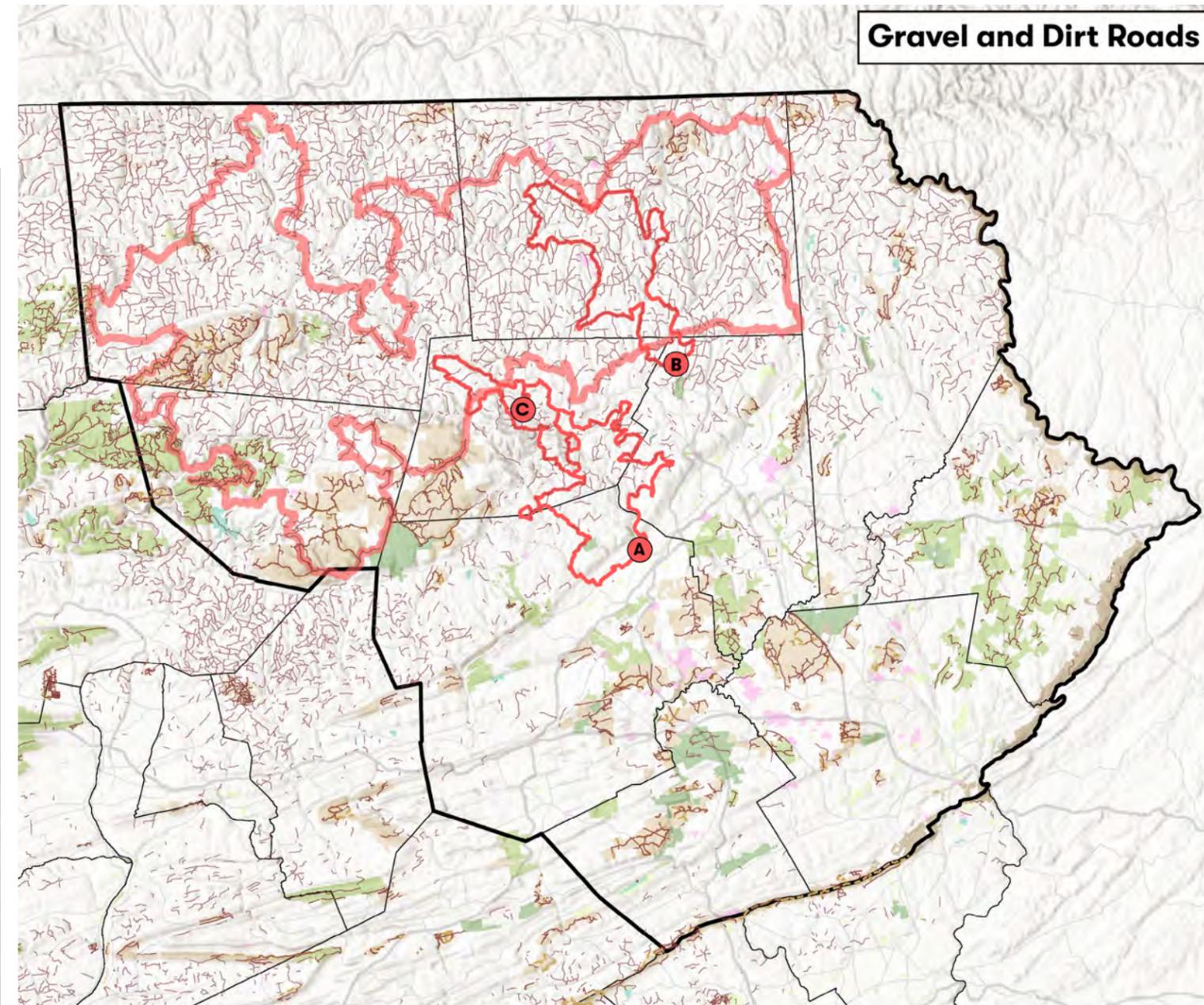
WHAT IS GRAVEL?

Gravel riding, also known as “mixed surface” riding, is a fast-growing form of cycling that features dirt and gravel roads as the backbone of routes, though routes can use just about any surface including pavement, singletrack, rail trails, and doubletrack. Routes can be any distance and often feature great scenery and points of interest. Gravel cycling is a great way to link from remote forests into towns and back again, connect off-road paths, and experience the true flavor of a region. Its popularity has resulted in an ever-growing number of events, both of the competitive and non-competitive variety, and mapped routes that riders can explore on their own time and on their own terms.

Northeastern PA has its fair share of gravel roads, especially in the northern part of the region in Susquehanna and Bradford counties, where just about every local municipal road is dirt or gravel.

Much of the NEPA region is mountainous, making for challenging riding, but this is also what makes it such attractive riding to many. In the survey, the quiet gravel roads, challenging terrain, and beautiful scenery through which they travel was mentioned often as assets that make the region great for cycling.

Riders on the Lu Lacka Wyco Hundo. (Credit: Discover NEPA.)



Gravel and Dirt Roads

Legend

- State Forest
- State Park
- State Game Lands
- Federal Land
- Privately Conserved Land
- Local Park
- Gravel/Dirt Road
Aggregated data from Penn State University, DCNR, & the Pennsylvania Game Commission
- **Endless Mountains Gravel Bikepacking Loop**
410-mile route through four counties
- **Mapped Event Routes**
**This is not necessarily a comprehensive list of all gravel events in the region, and each event has multiple routes. The longest route of each is shown.*
- **A Lu Lacka Wyco Hundo**
Occurs annually in April, based out of Pittston. 100, 75, 62, and 40-mile options.
- **B Starrucca Crossing**
A new event in 2023, based out of Fleetville and 80% gravel. 100 and 75-mile options.
- **C Cross Cut Dirty Metric Century**
Ride from the Howland Preserve along the Susquehanna River. 62, 50, and 30-mile options.

GRAVEL ROUTES

Because gravel riding is not confined to one trail system, riders often will create routes through platforms such as RideWithGPS or Strava as a way of exchanging information and intel about the best places to ride. Routes can be created by individuals, but routes of varying distances are also created by event organizers that are custom-designed for events. More recently, state agencies, tourism promoters, organized cycling groups, and bike shops have begun developing and marketing routes as well. These routes are more likely to be carefully vetted, and are also typically developed in support of a larger agenda, such as tourism or economic impact, or land stewardship.

In northeastern Pennsylvania, the Endless Mountains Heritage Region and the Route 6 Alliance have both recently begun developing and promoting gravel routes in their regions.

Endless Mountains Gravel Bikepacking Loop

The Endless Mountains Heritage Region (EMHR) recently began promoting a 410-mile route covering the counties of Bradford, Susquehanna, Sullivan, and Wyoming called the Endless Mountains Gravel Bikepacking Loop. The EMHR partnered with multiple organizations in the design and development of the route, including the Endless Mountains Visitors Bureau, Bradford County Tourism Promotion Agency, and the Northern Tier Regional Planning and Development Commission. The loop is meant to be ridden either as a multi-day trip or in sections. EMHR has partnered with local businesses along the way to ensure that cyclists have access to repair and charging stations, and other supplies and lodging. The route traverses Loyalsock State Forest, four different state parks, and the D&H Trail, and interactive mapping highlights other attractions and amenities along the way.

Route 6 Alliance Signature Loops

PA Route 6 itself is PennDOT-designated BicyclePA Route Y, traversing the state west to east in the northern tier. However, noting the growing popularity of gravel riding, the Route 6 Alliance has also created a number of “Signature Loops” along the Route 6 corridor that highlight the flavor of the region on gravel and back roads. The Route 6 Alliance RideWithGPS page also contains a route library of countless other gravel rides along the corridor.

GRAVEL BIKE EVENTS

Routes can be ridden at any time, but annual events are popular with cyclists as a way to enjoy a supported ride with aid stations, post-ride food and drink and the camaraderie of like minded enthusiasts. Within the gravel cycling scene, events draw anywhere from a hundred to a thousand or more participants (the unPAved event in Lewisburg, PA attracts over 1,200 riders) from all over the state and country.

There are currently three major gravel events in the NEPA region, all run by the same organizer and all offering a variety of distance options. The Lu Lacka Wyco Hundo takes place in late April out of Pittston and is a long-standing staple in the Pennsylvania gravel biking scene, now going on its tenth year. In 2023, the inaugural NEPA Outdoors and Arts Festival will coincide with the Lu Lacka Wyco Hundo as a complementary event.

The Starrucca Crossing is a new event based out of Fleetville, and most of the route is on the remote roads of Susquehanna County. The event website boasts that the route is 80% dirt and gravel.

The Cross Cut Dirty Metric Century is based out of the Howland Preserve in Wyoming County, on the Vosburg Neck section of the Susquehanna River. It offers 62 miles of gravel and dirt roads followed by a riverside pizza party.

Additionally, the internationally-recognized Grinduro event has been held in neighboring Sullivan County for the past two years. The Grinduro series was on the forefront of gravel events when it began in California, with an emphasis on fun and inclusivity rather than hardcore racing. The fact that this caliber of cycling event has chosen northeast PA for one of its annual races is a testament to what the region has to offer.

Riding the Lu Lacka Wyco Hundo. (Credit: Abe Landes, Firespire Photography.)



Mountain Biking

Mountain biking is defined as “riding bicycles off-road, particularly on rough terrain.” The reality is that the sport of mountain biking is quite varied, as are its participants. Most trail systems offer a combination of climbs and descents, utilizing whatever terrain exists in the landscape, on trails that are mostly singletrack as opposed to doubletrack or fire roads (which are wide enough for a 4-wheeled vehicle). However, many mountain bike trail systems also often include doubletrack or utilize gravel or dirt roads to connect sections of singletrack.

Most of the trails in the NEPA region are characterized by rocky terrain and plenty of elevation change. The region is also home to Pennsylvania’s largest lift-served bike park, Blue Mountain, as well as popular enduro race locale, Glen Park. The trails in the area are typically maintained by volunteer groups specific to the trail system, such as the Lackawanna State Park Trail Care Crew or Moon Lake Trail Crew. The Anthracite Mountain Pedalers and Pocono Bike Club are regional organizations that bring together cyclists and advocates from various trail systems.

The region has a team affiliated with the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Cycling League (PICL), part of the National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA) youth mountain bike program. High schoolers from all over the region ride for the Keystone Mountain Bike Team, which is based out of Lackawanna State Park just northwest of Scranton.

Survey results and stakeholder interviews suggest that while the region has a variety of trails and a decent number of smaller trail networks, it is lacking a destination-worthy trail system with amenities such as camping close by, as well as less technical “flow” trails.

1. Moon Lake Recreation Area

LUZERNE COUNTY

The Moon Lake Recreation Area is located within Pinchot State Forest just west of Wilkes-Barre. It features about 20 miles of singletrack. The trails don’t have much elevation gain, but are rocky and rooty. The Moon Lake Trail Crew, a collection of volunteers that is part of the Anthracite Mountain Pedalers club, maintains the trails in collaboration with DCNR. There is no hunting allowed in the Recreation Area, so it is a year-round option for mountain bikers as well as other outdoor recreationists.

2. Moosic Mountain

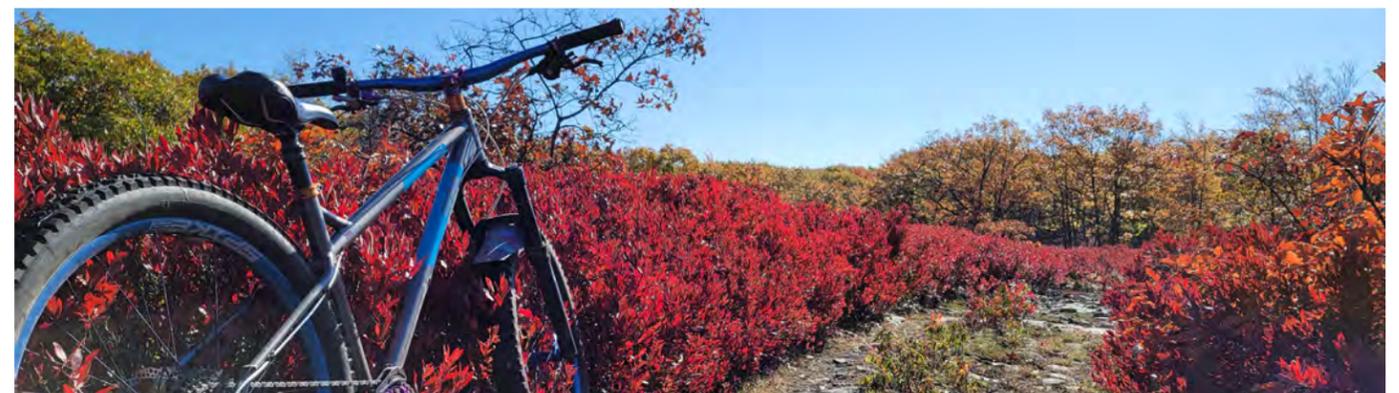
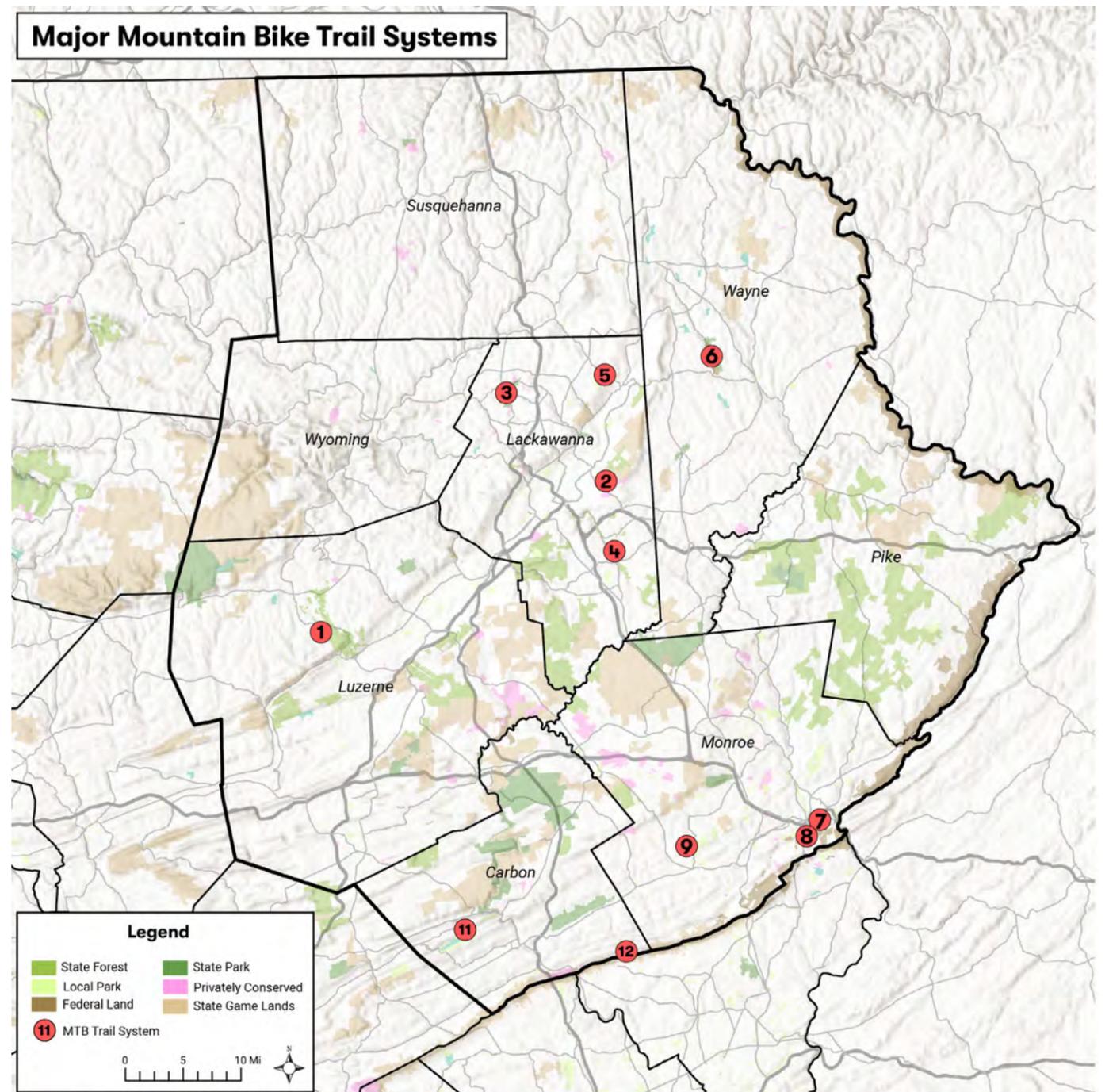
LACKAWANNA COUNTY

The Moosic Mountain Trails are located on The Nature Conservancy’s Dick and Nancy Eales Preserve, and were originally built by the Hubbard Bike Club. There are currently about 15 miles of trail, which feature plenty of rocks and technical challenges through a unique scrub brush landscape. The trails are also great for hiking and wildlife watching, and offer great views of the region and blueberry picking.

3. Lackawanna State Park

LACKAWANNA COUNTY

About 18 miles of multi-use trail wind through the 1,445-acre park and adjacent preserves owned by Countryside Conservancy, traversing hills, lakeshore, forests and fields. There are several trailheads on both sides of the lake and a variety of loops ranging from beginner-friendly to more advanced trails. Some trails are relatively flat and smooth while others



offer rockier and steeper terrain. Trails are built and maintained by the Lackawanna State Park Trail Care Crew, a partner organization of the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation. The Keystone Mountain Bike Team, a chapter of the PICL, calls these trails home.

4. North Pocono Trails

LACKAWANNA COUNTY

The North Pocono Trails are managed by the North Pocono Trails Association on a mix of lands owned by utility companies and DCNR Bureau of Forestry. All 13 miles are open to mountain biking as well as other activities, including hunting.

5. Merli Sarnoski Park

LACKAWANNA COUNTY

There are about 16 miles of singletrack at this park owned by Lackawanna County. The main trail is a 7-mile loop with several different access points. The trails are open to bikes, equestrians, hikers,

and cross-country skiers, though the park is only open during daylight hours. The park includes a 35-acre lake with a beach as well as sports fields and pavilions.

6. Prompton State Park

WAYNE COUNTY

All 26 miles of trail at Prompton State Park are open to both hiking and mountain biking. Like most other trails in the region, they offer plenty of rocks and a somewhat remote experience as they see less traffic than many other locations. The trails flank the shores of a lake and are a mix of old-school and purpose-built mountain bike trails.

7. Glen Park

MONROE COUNTY

Glen Park is described as a “hidden gem” and “one of the original freeride/downhill spots on the east coast.” It features a number of downhill trails with drops, gap jumps, and steep fall line chutes. The

park has been the locale of several enduro races, and even hosted one of the MAXXIS Eastern States Cup Enduro Series events in 2022.

8. Glen Run Nature Preserve

MONROE COUNTY

Just down the street from Glen Park, about 5 miles of singletrack were built by the Pocono Bike Club on land owned by the Pocono Heritage Land Trust. The terrain is considered beginner to intermediate.

9. West End Regional Park

MONROE COUNTY

Trailforks describes West End Regional Park as “a model of conservation and public recreation” and offers public access to a variety of recreation opportunities including sports facilities and indoor recreation as well as about 8 miles of singletrack trails. Pocono Bike Club describes the trails as “a step up from rail-trails, but still accessible for less advanced riders.”

10. Blue Mountain Resort

CARBON COUNTY

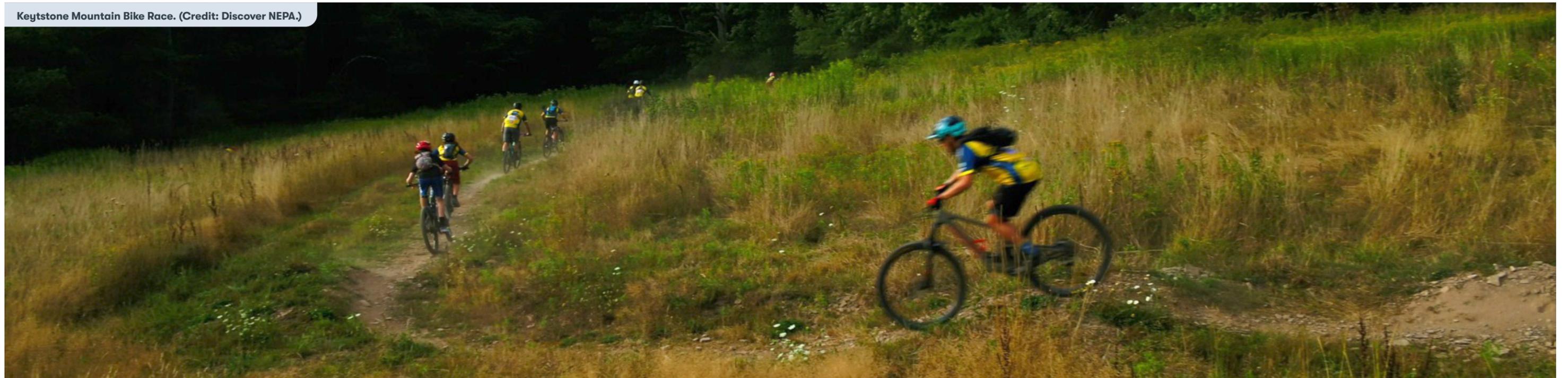
Blue Mountain is one of few and the largest lift-served downhill bike parks in Pennsylvania, and offers 28 trails covering 19 miles, ranging from beginner to expert difficulty. The bike park is open seasonally, from May to October. It is a pay-to-play facility, offering day passes as well as season passes. The resort also offers lessons, as well as bike and gear rentals.

11. Jim Thorpe

CARBON COUNTY

Jim Thorpe was “the mountain biking capital of the East Coast” in the 1990s and was host to Mountain Bike Weekend, one of the nations premiere bike festivals at the time. However, many of the formerly-frequented trails were closed to mountain bikes and the area’s popularity decreased, especially as other areas to ride opened up. There is still some mountain biking centered around the Switchback Trail on top of Mt. Pisgah.

Keystone Mountain Bike Race. (Credit: Discover NEPA.)



Trail Boosters

This section describes entities that aren't associated with any particular multi-use trail, but play an integral role in the region to advocate for and promote cycling and outdoor recreation.

Endless Mountains Heritage Region

The Endless Mountains Heritage Region (EMHR) was established in 1998 as a non-profit, membership-based organization within the PA Heritage Areas Program. It is one of 12 current heritage areas across the Commonwealth, which are designated by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). The EMHR proudly serves a 2,850-square mile area encompassing Bradford, Sullivan, Susquehanna and Wyoming Counties. The organization also serves as water trail manager for the upper North Branch Susquehanna River Water Trail, a national recreation trail and official gateway to the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network.

Pocono Forests and Waters Conservation Landscape

The Pocono Forests and Waters Conservation Landscape (PFWCL) is one of 8 designated in Pennsylvania. Conservation Landscapes are large regions that work together to drive strategic investment and actions around sustainability, conservation, community revitalization, and recreational projects. The PFWCL covers the counties of Carbon, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe, Pike, and Wayne.

Anthracite Mountain Pedalers

The mission of the Anthracite Mountain Pedalers is to advance mountain biking in Luzerne County through cooperation and service.

NEPA Trails Forum

Convened in 2014, the Northeastern Pennsylvania (NEPA) Trails Forum is a loose alliance of organizations, government entities, and individuals who are involved with trail development in the region. These include recreational, mountain biking, snowmobile, park, municipal, and water trails, on both public and private lands. The Trails Forum focuses on addressing issues in the trail building community. Representatives from trail user groups, municipalities and government agencies, civic organizations, professional firms, trail managers, and interested individuals attend the events to meet fellow trail groups, learn more about projects in the region, and share ideas and best practices. The Trails Forum meets on a quarterly basis.

PA Route 6 Alliance

The PA Route 6 Alliance, a 501(c)(3) corporation, was established in 2003 to manage the PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor and to implement the Management Action Plan, branding and marketing plans, community development programs, and other planning efforts along the corridor. The Alliance includes representatives from all 11 counties, 9 convention and visitor bureaus, 4 heritage areas, local development districts, local business owners, Chambers of Commerce, and other interested parties along the corridor.

Anthracite Bicycle Coalition

The Anthracite Bicycle Coalition is a fully volunteer non-profit organization, with a long history of community engagement. Founding members of the organization met while volunteering for the yearly Heritage Valley Bike Tour, running successful events each year bringing many hundreds of cyclists and their families to Northeast Pennsylvania for a day on the trails. The organization continues to engage in regular bicycle safety events, trail clean ups, support services for local races, kids and helmet bicycle giveaways, as well as organized rides.

Keystone MTB Team

The Keystone Mountain Bike Team is a non-profit, co-ed mountain bike team for students in Lackawanna County entering grades 6-12. The team is part of the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Cycling League (PICL) and National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA). The team was founded in 2016 by a group of local cyclists who wanted to share their love of riding bikes with the younger generation. The team encourages fun, inclusivity, equity, respect, and community above racing and competition, though they do participate in races statewide as part of the league. The team practices at and is based out of Lackawanna State Park.

Discover NEPA

Robert K. Mericle, President of Mericle Commercial Real Estate Services, established DiscoverNEPA in 2017. His goal was to create Northeastern Pennsylvania's first regional quality of life resource covering a 10-county region. He wanted local residents to have access to all of the amenities and opportunities in the region they call home. With DiscoverNEPA they can find things to do, explore NEPA's communities, and get involved with area non-profits. DiscoverNEPA is also a recruitment tool for economic development organizations, companies, healthcare institutions, and colleges and universities. National surveys reveal that quality of life is one of the most important factors in the

site selection process. DiscoverNEPA aims to help retain skilled workers and attract new residents. This vibrant workforce will also make NEPA appealing to companies.

Endless Mountains Visitors Bureau

The Endless Mountains Visitors Bureau (EMVB) is the designated tourism promotion agency for Sullivan, Susquehanna, and Wyoming counties. Since 1962, the non-profit organization markets the region and promotes local businesses, attractions, and events.

Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau

The Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau (PMVB) is a private, non-profit, membership organization established in 1934. They are the official destination marketing organization for the four counties of Carbon, Monroe, Pike and Wayne in northeastern Pennsylvania.

Visit Luzerne County

Visit Luzerne County is a well-established organization with over 20 years of destination management experience. The mission of the Visitors Bureau is to increase the number of visitors to Northeastern Pennsylvania by means of advertising, promotion, and comprehensive customer service. They work with our partners to help visitors and locals discover all the area has to offer.

Lackawanna County Convention and Visitors Bureau

The mission of the LCCVB is to market and sell tourism and hospitality in Lackawanna County in an effort to enhance economic impact and development.

Neighbors & Connections

NEIGHBORING ASSETS

The Circuit Trails

GREATER PHILADELPHIA REGION

The Circuit Trails contain over 375 miles of existing trail in the Greater Philadelphia region, throughout nine counties in southeastern Pennsylvania and southwestern New Jersey. When completed, the Circuit Trails network will include over 800 miles of multi-use trail. The D&L Trail links the Circuit Trails to the NEPA region.

The Circuit Trails network. (Credit: Circuit Trails Coalition.)



Liberty-Water Gap Trail

NEW JERSEY, NORTHAMPTON COUNTY, MONROE COUNTY

The 150-mile Liberty-Water Gap Trail currently connects Liberty State Park in New Jersey with Portland, PA. The Liberty-Water Gap: PA Extension Alliance is working on a 6-mile section from Portland to Delaware Water Gap in Monroe County, PA to complete the trail.

The Link

LEHIGH VALLEY

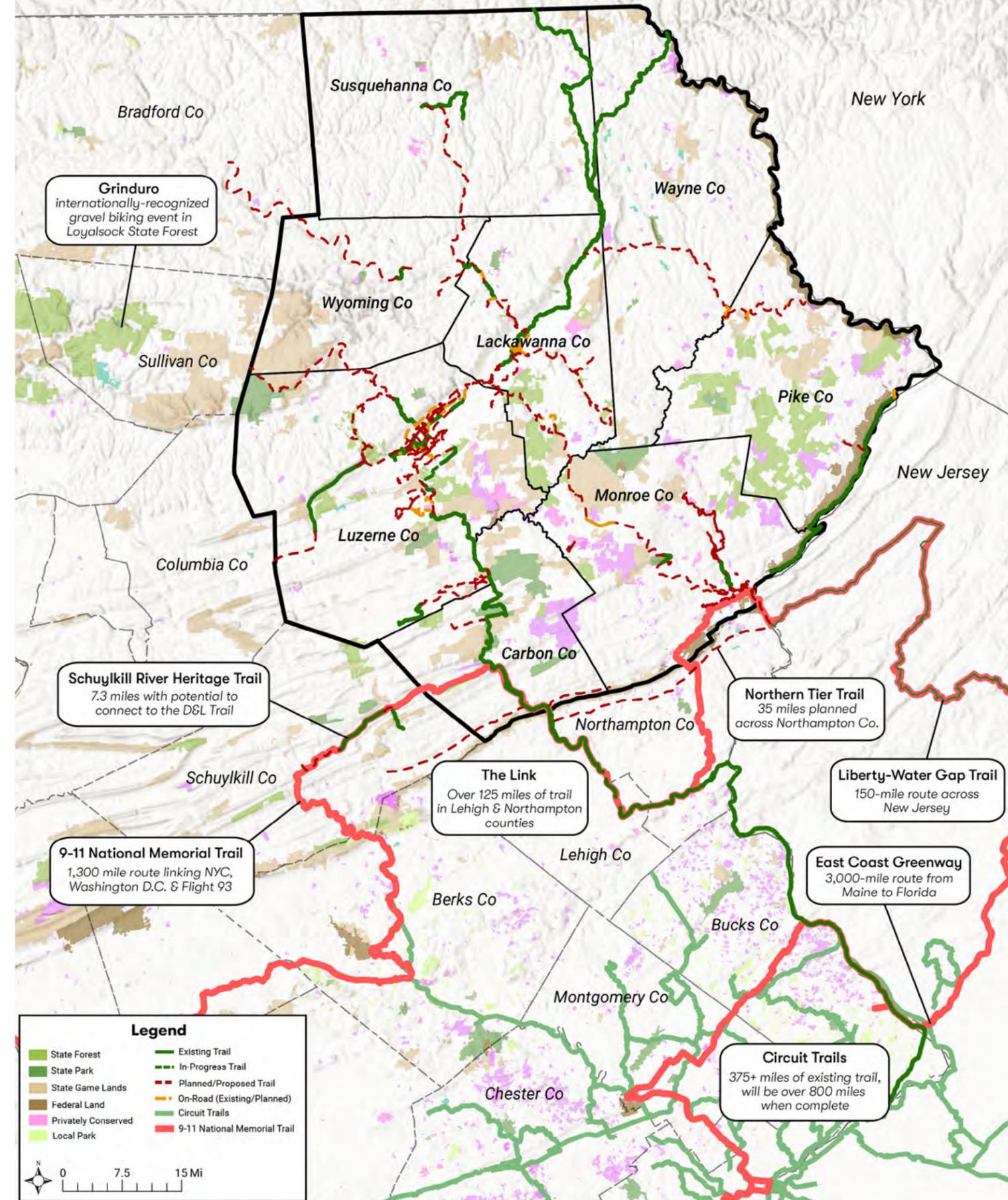
The Link trail network in the Lehigh Valley encompasses over 125 miles of trail in Lehigh and Northampton Counties, including the urban areas of Allentown and Bethlehem. This trail network borders the NEPA region, with the D&L stretching across the county borders and connecting NEPA's network with The Link. Longer trails in The Link network include the Saucon Rail Trail, Nor-Bath Trail, and Ironton Rail Trail.

The Lehigh Valley Link Trail Network Logo. (Credit: The Link.)



Neighboring Assets

*not comprehensive



Northern Tier Trail (planned)

NORTHAMPTON COUNTY

The planned Northern Tier Trail stretches 35 miles from the Lehigh River to the Delaware River through northern Northampton County. When complete, it will utilize a mix of on-road segments and multi-use trail, beginning at the D&L Trail in Walnutport and ending at the proposed Liberty-Water Gap Trail in Portland.

Schuylkill Valley Heritage Trail

SCHUYLKILL COUNTY

The Schuylkill Valley Heritage Trail stretches 7.3 miles from Middleport to Tamaqua, passing historic sites and mining heritage along the way. There are plans to extend the trail west to Pottsville, but development has not yet begun. To the east, it connects to the Panther Creek Valley Heritage Trail, which is proposed to extend to the Switchback Trail in Jim Thorpe and beyond to the D&L Trail.

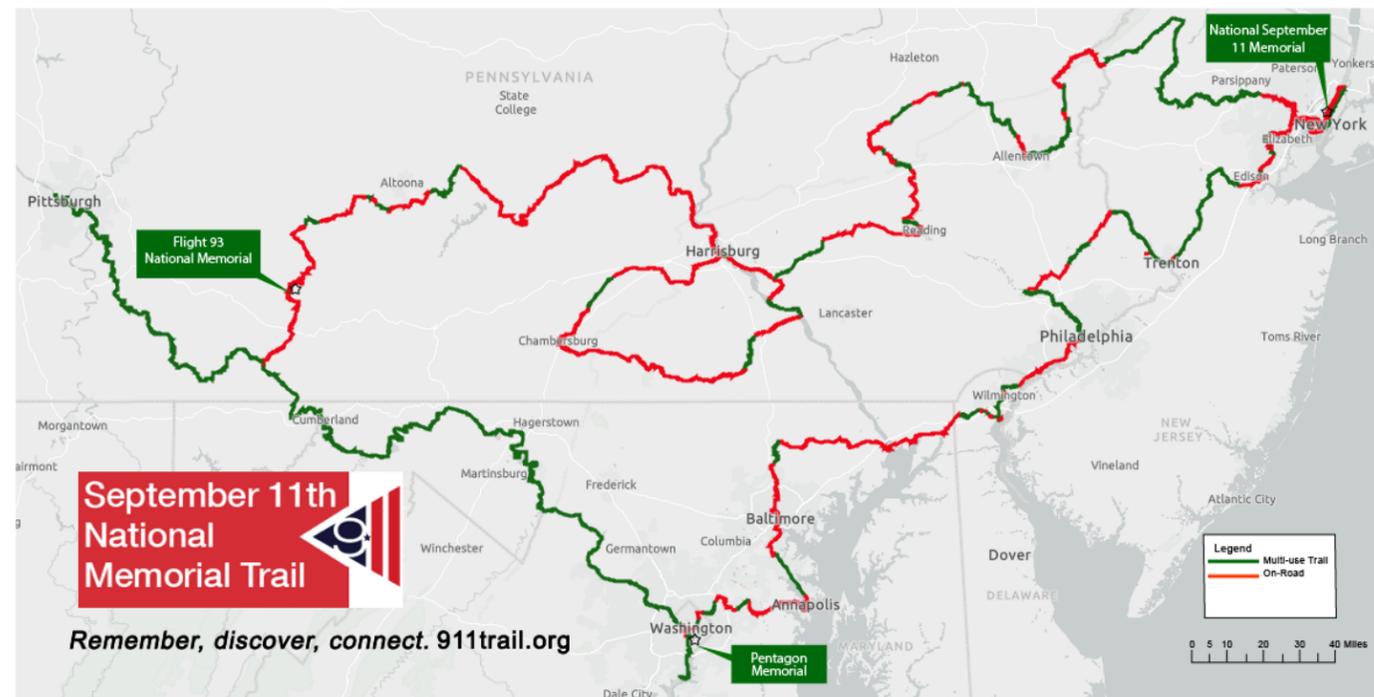
LONG DISTANCE CONNECTIONS

9-11 National Memorial Trail

The 9-11 National Memorial Trail is a 1,300-mile multi-use mix of off-road trail and on-road routes that link the World Trade Center, Pentagon, and Flight 93 National Memorial. The 9-11 Trail passes through the southern end of the NEPA region, utilizing the Schuylkill Valley Heritage Trail and Switchback Railroad Trail to connect to the D&L Trail at Jim Thorpe. It then travels southward on the D&L towards Allentown before curving northward again and passing through Stroudsburg in Monroe County.



The 9/11 National Memorial Trail. (Credit: 9/11 Trail.)



Adventure Cycling Routes

The Adventure Cycling Association is a non-profit member organization based in Missoula, Montana that is focused on travel by bicycle. The organization develops routes in North America (such as the iconic Great Divide Mountain Bike Route), publishes maps, organizes trips, and advocates for better and safer cycling. Adventure Cycling Routes are well-known for being high-quality, vetted by accomplished cyclists and map-makers, and include information on amenities and points of interest that allow cyclists to make the most of their journey.

Two different Adventure Cycling Routes pass through the NEPA region – the Chicago to New York City Route, which connects the two cities either via the northern tier of Pennsylvania or by way of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia (there are two options), and the Atlantic Coast Route, which stretches all the way from Maine to Florida. Both routes converge in Stroudsburg, and the Chicago to New York City Route passes through the Pocono Mountains near Hickory Run State Park, White Haven, and Hazleton.

BicyclePA Routes

Three of PennDOT's BicyclePA routes travel through NEPA. BicyclePA routes cross the state using mostly roads, but also follow rail trails where possible. BicyclePA Route Y crosses the northern tier, following Route 6 most of its distance and passing through northern Wyoming and Lackawanna, central Wayne, and northern Pike Counties. BicyclePA Route L travels north to south, bisecting the region. BicyclePA Route V traverses the state from west to east at its middle, passing through the NEPA region in southern Luzerne, northern Carbon, and southern Monroe Counties. The routes are signed, but don't uniformly adhere to recognized standards for on-road bicycle facilities.

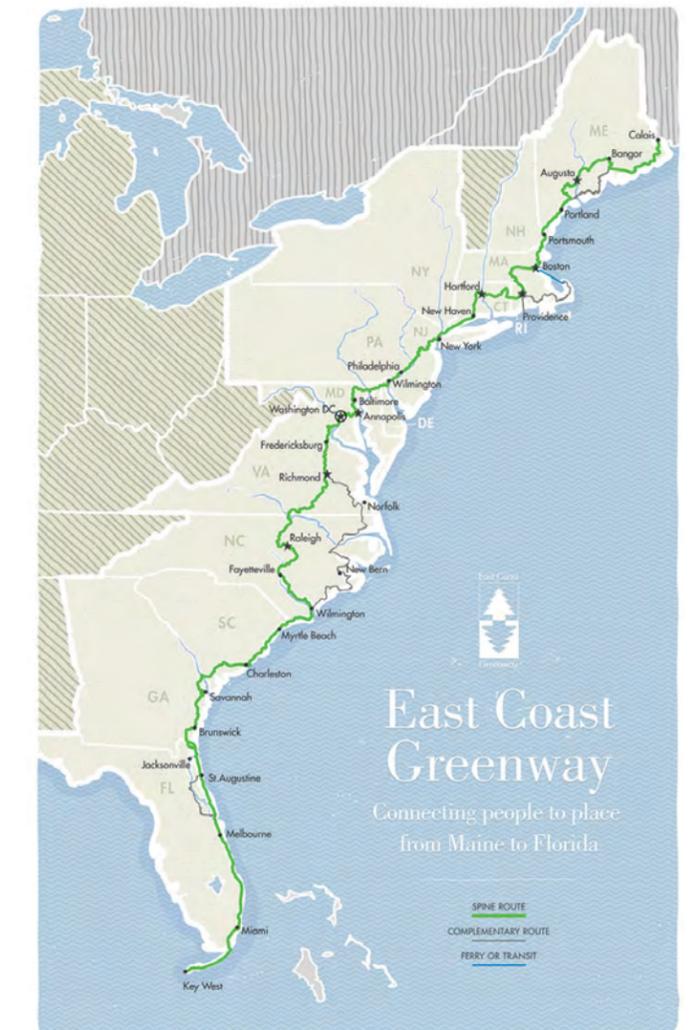
East Coast Greenway

The East Coast Greenway (ECG) connects Maine to Florida via a 3,000-mile corridor and a mix of on-road

routes and off-road multi-use paths. The East Coast Greenway Alliance is continually trying to move more of the route off-road, leveraging its expansive reach for funding opportunities while working with local partners on the ground to facilitate the completion of trail projects. Currently, about 35% of the route is off road and more miles are built every year. The effort has leveraged over \$2 billion in investment since 1991.

The NEPA region indirectly connects into the ECG via the D&L Trail, which currently travels from southern Luzerne County through the Lehigh Gorge, then through Allentown and Bethlehem to Bristol in Bucks County. Here it connects to the ECG, which travels south through Philadelphia to Wilmington and Baltimore, and north through Trenton and New York City.

The 3,000-mile East Coast Greenway. (Credit: East Coast Greenway Alliance.)





Chapter 5

Connectivity

Planned Trails & Trail Gaps

This section reviews the main gaps in existing multi-use trails, as well as entirely new trails that are identified in planning documents. For the purposes of this assessment, we focused on major trails that would enhance connectivity on a regional scale, acknowledging that there are many other local trails and community connections that are also important.

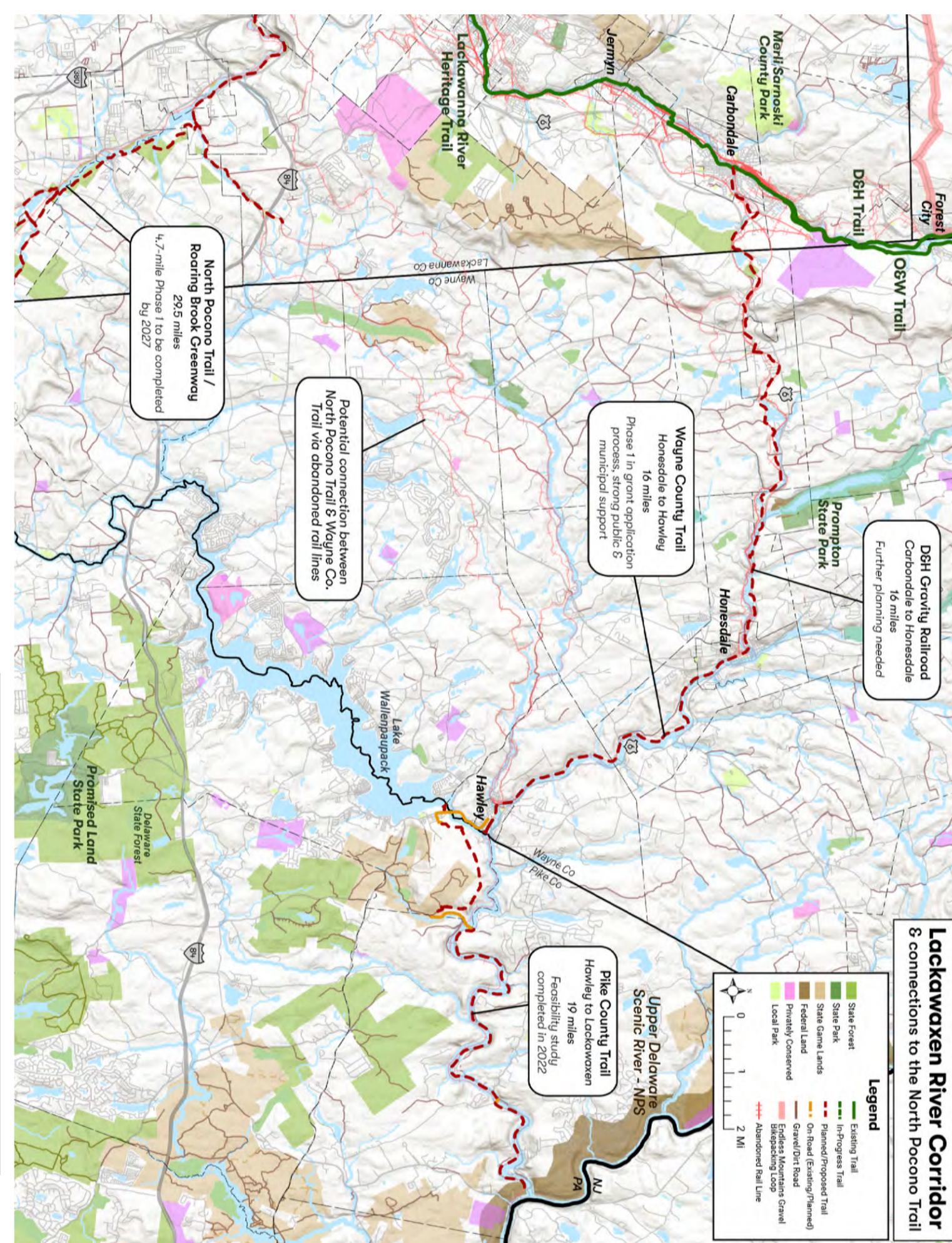
The level of detail conveyed about each planned trail and gap assessment varies, reflecting the level of detail of the plans themselves. Some trails have had in-depth studies done and are ready to move on (or are already moving on) to the next phase of development, while others will need more planning before implementation can take place. Needs and connectivity potential for each trail gap are mentioned at the end of each description. This section is meant to provide an overview of the potential for the region and compile information on what is needed to move each of the gaps forward, arming stakeholders with the necessary information to pursue funding and further trail development.

LACKAWAXEN RIVER CORRIDOR

The planned Wayne County Trail and its potential eastward connection, the Pike County Trail, follow the Lackawaxen River from Honesdale to the Delaware River and the small town of Lackawaxen. To the west, the Delaware and Hudson Gravity Railroad Trail, if developed, could connect the Lackawaxen River corridor to the City of Carbondale, the Lackawanna River, and the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail and D&H Trail. This entire corridor is 51 miles long and is in various stages of planning and development. Completing this entire corridor would provide a connection from the “spine” of the NEPA multi-use trail network to the Delaware River and Delaware River National Recreation Area, as well as connections to a variety of public lands and assets in Wayne and Pike counties at the northeastern corner of the NEPA region.

The **Central Wayne Partnership Comprehensive Recreation, Parks and Open Space Plan (2012)** lists a trail along the Lackawaxen River Corridor as a priority for active transportation and trail planning. Creating a trail along the entire length of this corridor, linking the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail (as well as the D&H Trail and O&W Trail) and the McDade Trail, would provide a level of connectivity that is currently lacking in the northeastern corner of the region.

(See “Lackawaxen River Corridor Map” on page 70.)



Delaware & Hudson Gravity Railroad Trail

Distance: 16 miles

Prior Plans: Delaware and Hudson Gravity Railroad Feasibility Study and Conceptual Design (2009), Central Wayne Partnership Comprehensive Recreation, Parks and Open Space Plan (2012)

The former Delaware and Hudson (D&H) Gravity Railroad runs approximately 16 miles from Carbondale to Honesdale, and has been considered for the development of a greenway and multi-use trail. A design concept proposed in a 2009 assessment of the corridor would form a hub and spoke greenway. Along the D&H Gravity corridor, Carbondale, Waymart and Honesdale would form the main hubs, with spokes stretching into the surrounding areas. Some proposed destinations include Prompton State Park, Lake Ladore, and communities such as Bethany. The **2012 Central Wayne Partnership Comprehensive Recreation, Parks and Open Space Plan** also mentioned a connection to Prompton State Park, and connections between Bethany and Seelyville.

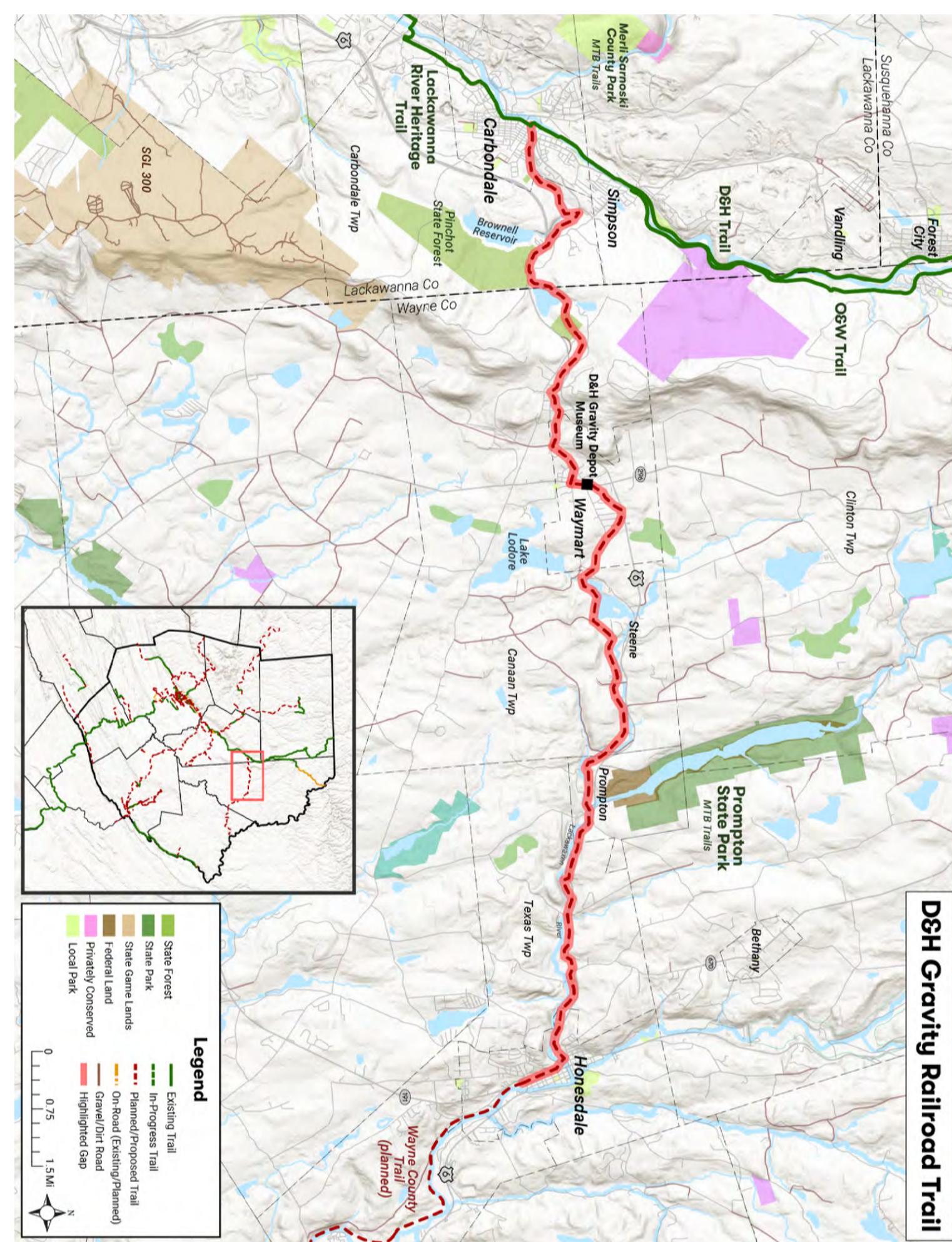
Several historic sites along the corridor were also suggested as potential trailheads or points of

interest along the trail, such as the D&H Gravity Depot Museum. It is housed in a former railroad depot in Waymart and features an original open-air gravity railroad car.

NEXT STEPS

While the 2009 assessment provided a birds-eye view of the corridor, a more detailed and updated feasibility study will be needed to determine whether this project is possible, and if so, determine project phasing and next steps. Land ownership is the greatest obstacle to development of the original rail corridor, as residential development has encroached on the former rail bed and it is broken into hundreds of different parcels.

Riding the D&H Trail near Forest City.



Wayne County Trail

Distance: 16 miles

Prior Plans: Central Wayne Partnership Comprehensive Recreation, Parks and Open Space Plan (2012), Wayne County Trail Feasibility Study (2020)

The **Wayne County Trail Feasibility Study (2020)** assesses the proposed Wayne County Trail, which begins where the proposed D&H Gravity Railroad ends in Honesdale, utilizing the same railroad corridor eastward along the Lackawaxen River to Hawley.

The feasibility study found that public support for the trail is strong, it is physically feasible to construct, and most of the landowners along the route are agreeable to easements. Recommendations coming out of the study include working with the railroad for trail use within the right-of-way, working with landowners to implement easements, and coordinate support amongst all the municipalities within the corridor.

The study also recommends a “pilot project” to construct a section of trail from 4th Street to Brown Street in Honesdale as the first phase to work out a signage system, maintenance plan, funding approach, and multi-municipal collaboration. **As of winter 2023, the pilot project section is currently in the grant application process and will be the first segment of trail.**

The Dorflinger-Suydam Wildlife Sanctuary (Planned Connection).

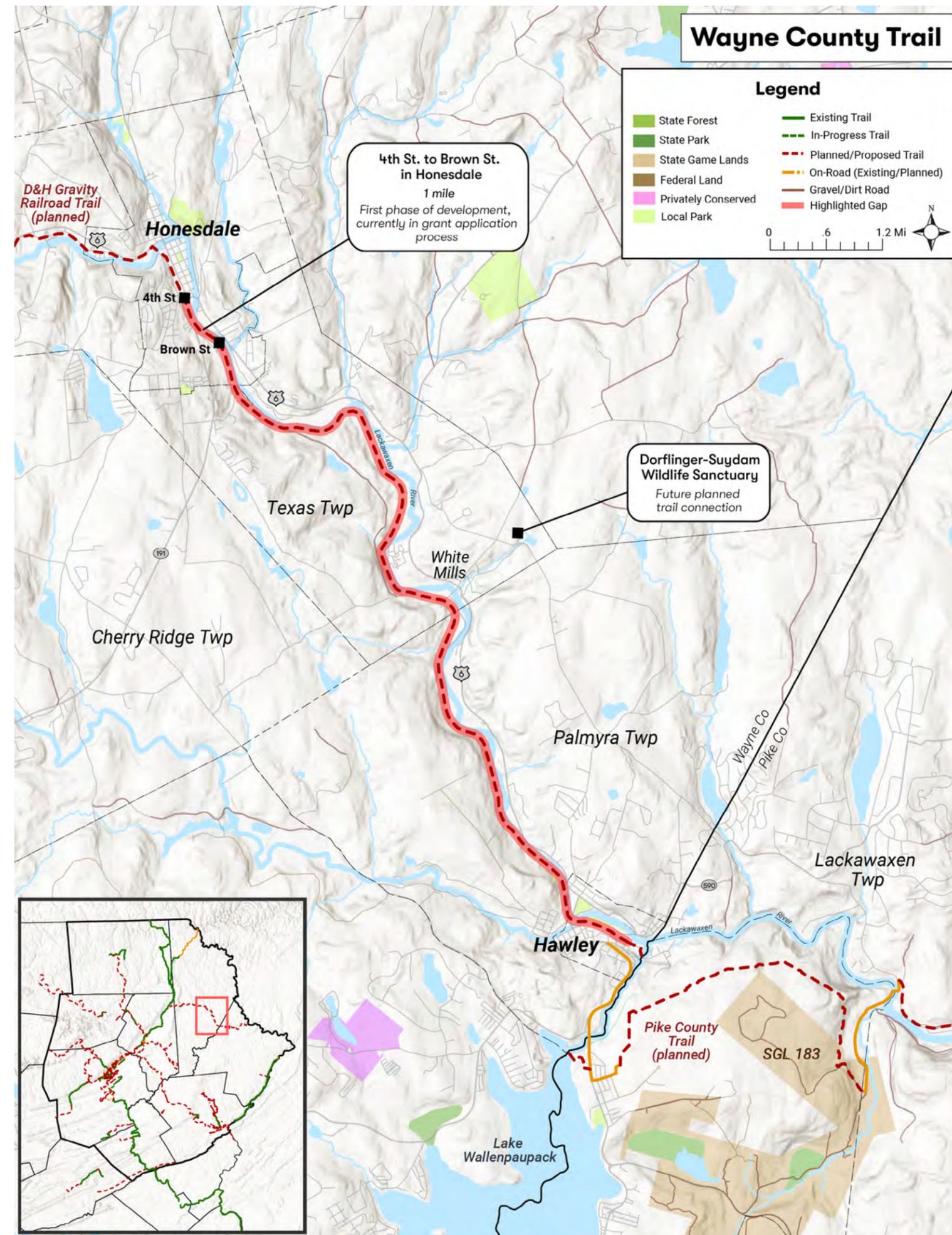


CONNECTIVITY AND COMPLEMENTARY PROJECTS

Several river access projects are also currently underway in the Honesdale area along the Lackawaxen River Water Trail. Three new river accesses have been funded and are in various stages of design and construction. The water trail and accesses would complement the multi-use land trail, linking the region together via multiple modes of human-powered transport.

In historic White Mills, about halfway between Honesdale and Hawley, design work is underway to connect White Mills Park with the White Mills Community Trail and eventually to the Dorflinger-Suydam Wildlife Sanctuary.

The **Pike County Trail Feasibility Study** was completed in 2022, and looked at the potential to connect further eastward along the Lackawaxen to the Delaware River (see **“Pike County Trail”** on page 75).



Pike County Trail

Distance: 19 miles

Prior Plans: Pike County Trail Feasibility Study - The Lackawaxen River Corridor from Hawley Borough to Lackawaxen Township (2022)

The **Pike County Trail Feasibility Study: The Lackawaxen River Corridor from Hawley Borough to Lackawaxen Township** assesses the feasibility for a trail along the Lackawaxen River corridor in Pike County, connecting the towns of Hawley, Wilsonville, and Lackawaxen, as well as spaces for outdoor recreation such as Bingham Park, Lake Wallenpaupack and the Wallenpaupack Dam, Wallenpaupack Schools, and State Game Land 183. The proposed Pike County Trail offers recreation along the Lackawaxen River and a trail connection to the Delaware River on the Pennsylvania/New York border.

The initial study area was defined as a corridor along the Lackawaxen River with the intention to utilize the existing railroad corridor on the south side of the river for as much of the trail as possible. Physical constraints such as steep topography and rock-cuts with no room for a trail necessitated expanding the study area. Additionally, local emergency services noted a lack of cell service and low accessibility for certain portions of railroad property. The study area was expanded to include Route 6, State Route 590, and State Route 4006 – all with sections designated as PennDOT’s BicyclePA Route Y. BicyclePA routes were created in the 2000s as a means to cross the state on roads and rail trails. There are 9 mapped and signed routes, as well as several spurs.

The alignment leaves Hawley utilizing BicyclePA Route Y on Route 6 to the south along Wallenpaupack Creek. PennDOT’s BicyclePA Route designation allows cyclists to legally use the lanes of travel, and PennDOT has started the process of developing a Bike Route Master Plan, including upgrades to 5-foot-wide shoulders where possible, and additional sharrows and signage where shoulder upgrades are not feasible. The Pike County Trail alignment follows Route 6 on-road for 1.9 miles until

Atlantic Ave., giving cyclists the option to continue on Route 6/BicyclePA Route Y, or head north for 0.3 miles towards Lake Wallenpaupack Primary and Middle Schools and multi-use trail. The connection to Lake Wallenpaupack and Wallenpaupack Schools has been identified as valuable connections for the trail.

The Pike County Trail would be adjacent to school grounds as the trail travels northward, proposed as a 10-foot-wide crushed gravel trail for about 1500 feet until joining an unnamed gravel road that follows a power line cut for approximately 3.7 miles. The proposed multi-use trail then utilizes an abandoned forest road to connect to Kimbles Road within State Game Land #183.

The proposed Pike County Trail utilizes Kimbles Road for 1.1 miles, crossing the Lackawaxen River and turning southeast to use State Route 4006. Multi-use trail within the right-of-way is proposed for 8.1 miles on the north side of the Lackawaxen River from Kimbles Road to the Rowland Bridge.

At Rowland Bridge, the multi-use trail crosses to the southern side of the Lackawaxen River. Cyclists again have the option to continue straight, now on State Route 590 to utilize PennDOT’s BicyclePA Route Y to Lackawaxen, or cross the river to enjoy a crushed gravel multi-use trail along the existing railroad corridor. The multi-use trail would continue for another 3.8 miles to the Lackawaxen Fire Department.

CONNECTIONS

The Pike County Trail is the easternmost piece of the proposed trail within the Lackawaxen River corridor, linking the Wayne County Trail and D&H Gravity Railroad Trail to the Delaware River. While each proposed trail would individually bring value to the communities it reaches, the connection through Wayne County to existing multi-use trails on the Lackawanna River is a key goal of the Pike County Trail project.

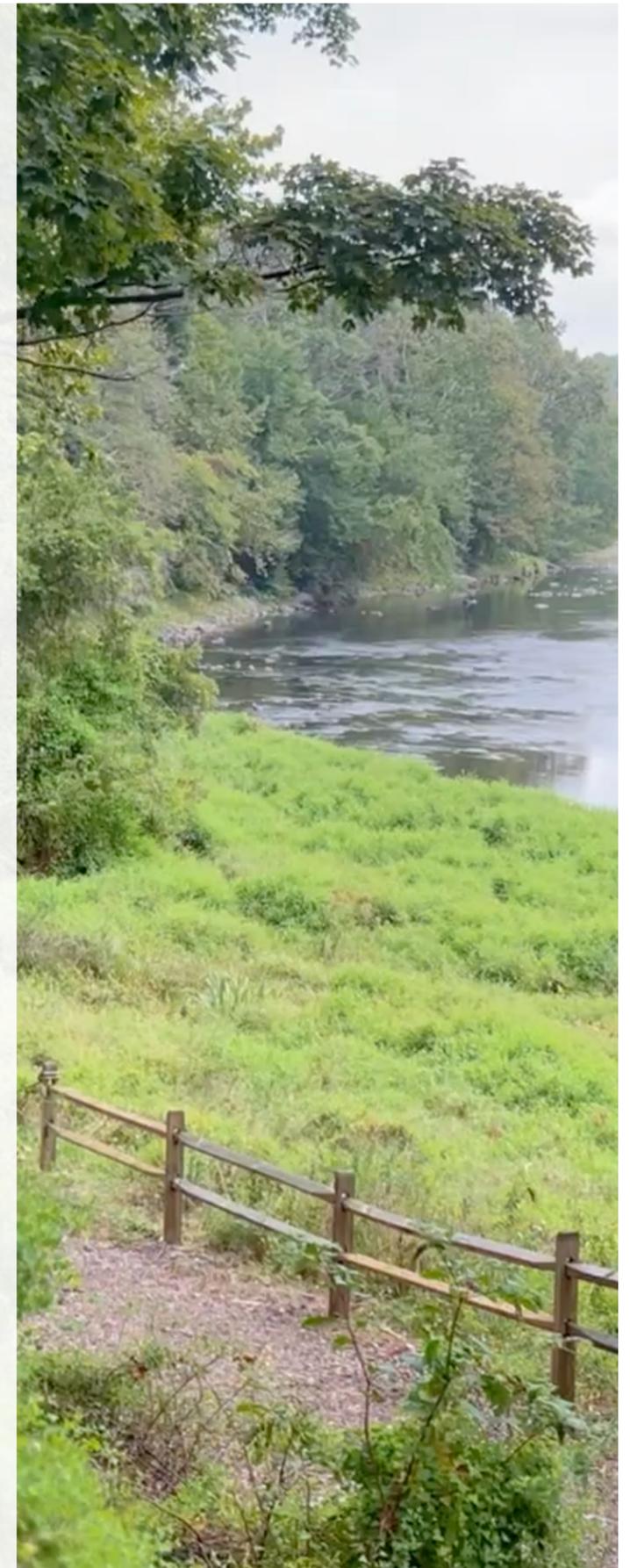
PennDOT BicyclePA Route Y utilizes Route 6 through Hawley and State Route 590 through Lackawaxen, and is an additional complement to the proposed trail.

The Lake Wallenpaupack Gorge Trail, an already-planned and funded hiking-only trail, follows Wallenpaupack Creek from Hawley to Lake Wallenpaupack, paralleling BicyclePA Route Y and acting as a potential hiking-only alignment of the Pike County Trail from Hawley to Wilsonville.

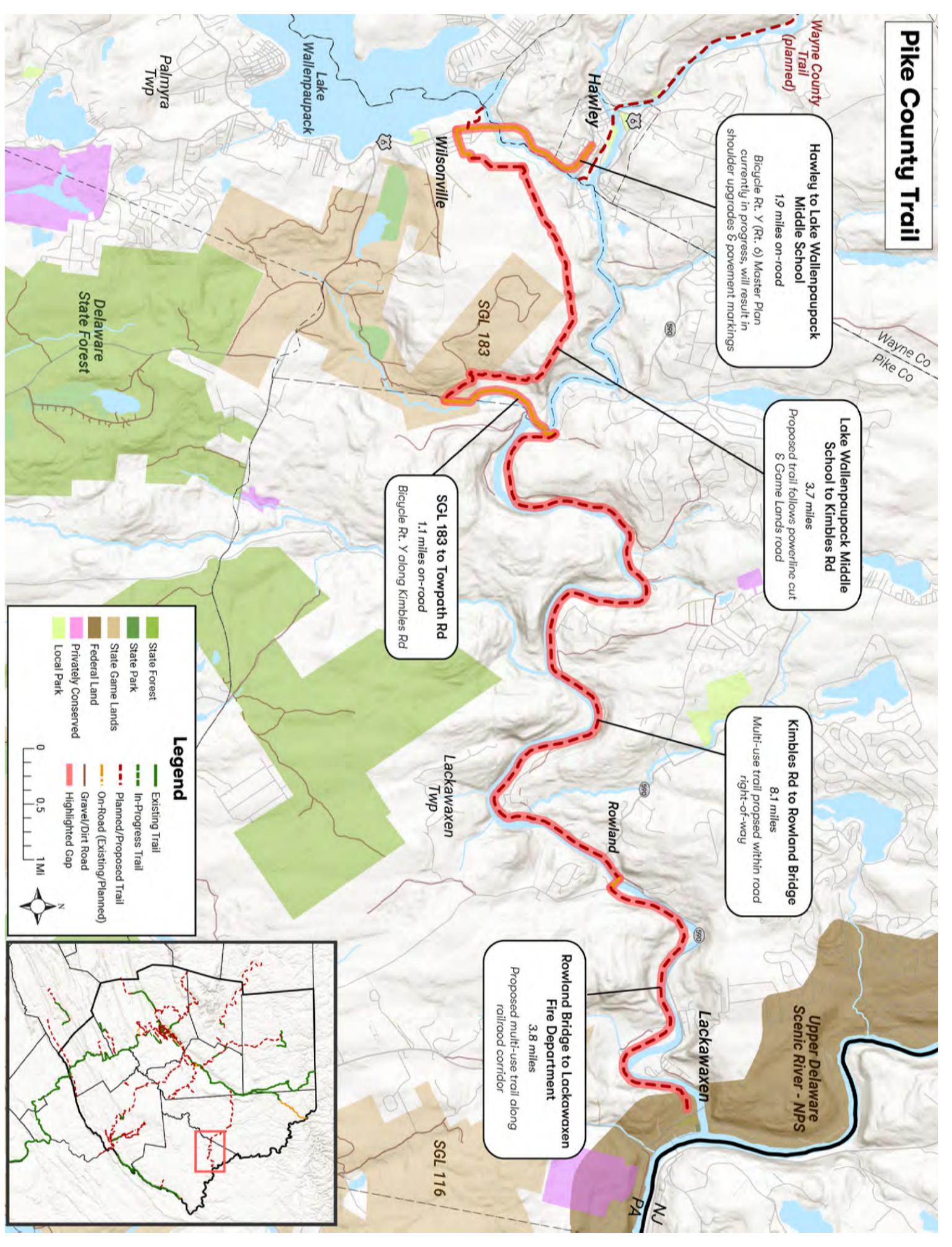
From Wilsonville and State Game Lands 183, cyclists could travel southward on gravel and low-volume roads into Delaware State Forest and toward Promised Land State Park (about 11 miles).

NEXT STEPS

Pike County must still secure easement agreements with landowners in the corridor. It has been recommended that Stourbridge Railroad Company be approached first as they are the largest landowner in the study area, followed by landowners associated with specific trailhead locations. Recently, vocal opposition to trail development is providing challenges to progress. Stakeholders could leverage continued education on the benefits of trails and momentum from the Wayne County Trail’s development to assist in overcoming hurdles and advancing acquisition.



The Delaware River in Pike County. (Credit: Nicholas Tonelli Photography.)



NORTHERN NEPA

Gravel Connections

Northern Wayne and Susquehanna counties are characterized by fewer people and more gravel roads, making it an ideal location to look at low-volume road connections between trails. There isn't as much public land as in the southern part of the region, but most of the township roads are gravel, and a couple longer trails – the D&H and O&W – form a spine through the region and an opportunity to create a loop between the two.

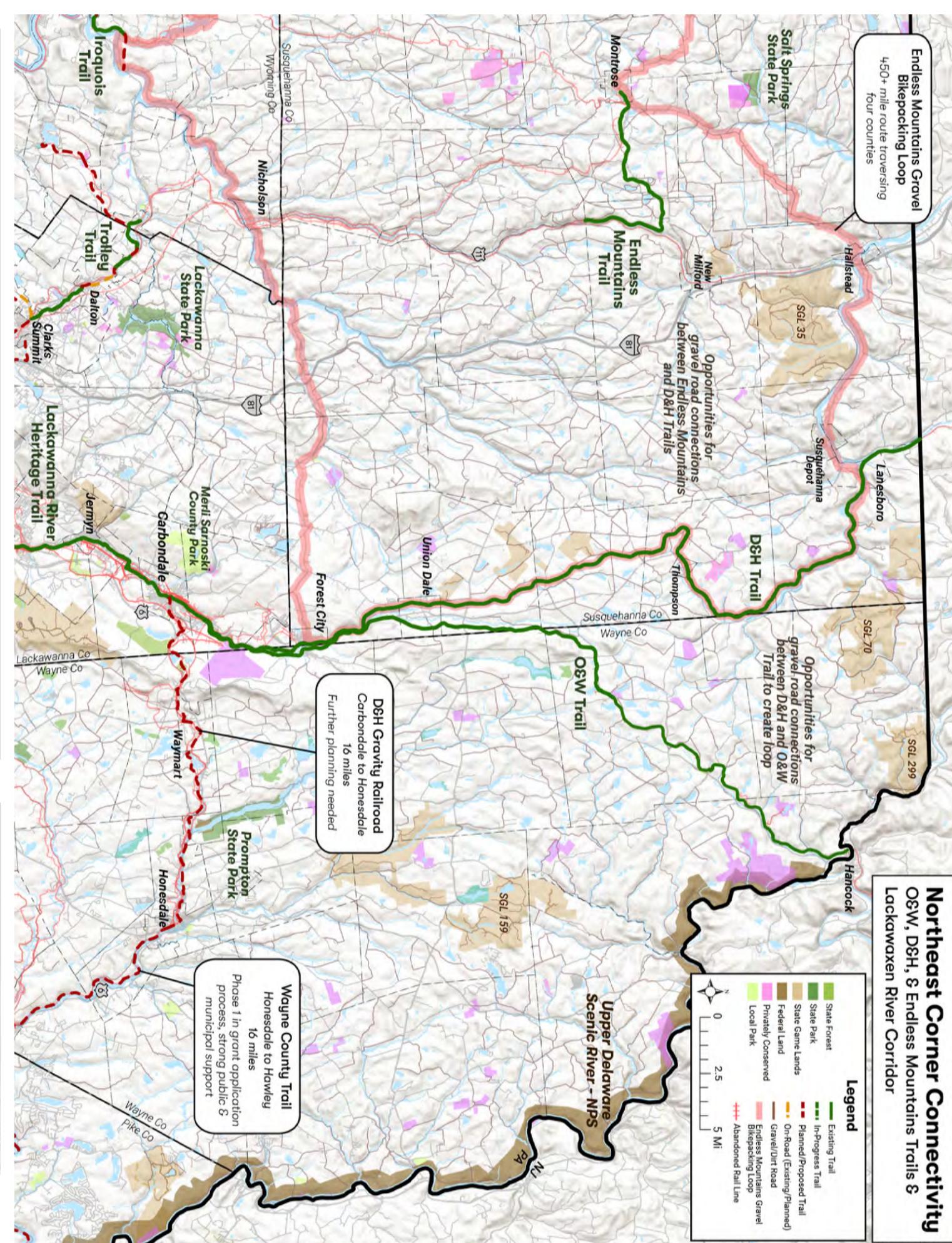
The creation of a mapped and potentially signed gravel road connection between the D&H Trail and the O&W Trail is a need and goal that came up multiple times during the stakeholder engagement process. The Rail Trail Council of NEPA, who manages both trails, mentioned interest in this in their interview, as well as linking the Endless Mountains Trail to the D&H Trail and to Salt Springs State Park.

The Endless Mountains Gravel Bikepacking Loop (EMGBL, see **"Gravel Riding" on page 53** for more info) does already link the Montrose end of the Endless Mountains Trail through Hallstead to the Lanesboro Trailhead of the D&H Trail. This route goes through Susquehanna Depot, which is already in the process of creating an active transportation plan, and passes close to Salt Springs State Park.

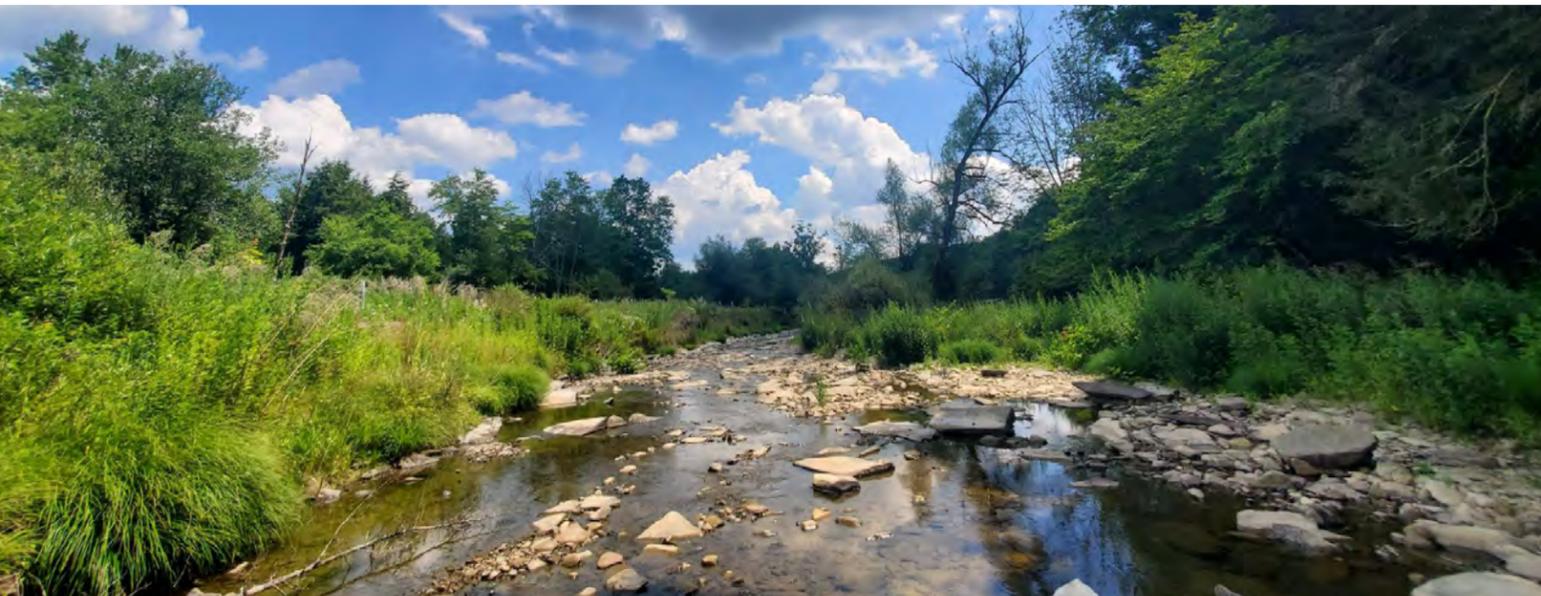
(See **"Northeast Corner Connectivity Map" on page 80.**)

Heading northwest out of the Lackawanna River Valley, the proposed Leggett's Creek Greenway and existing/planned Trolley Trail provide a link into Wyoming County and towards the EMGBL and more potential gravel connections. There are also several abandoned railroad corridors that may have potential for multi-use trail and could link the Trolley Trail to the Endless Mountains Trail, as well as extend the Iroquois Trail westward past Vosburg Neck State Park towards Wyalusing in Bradford County.

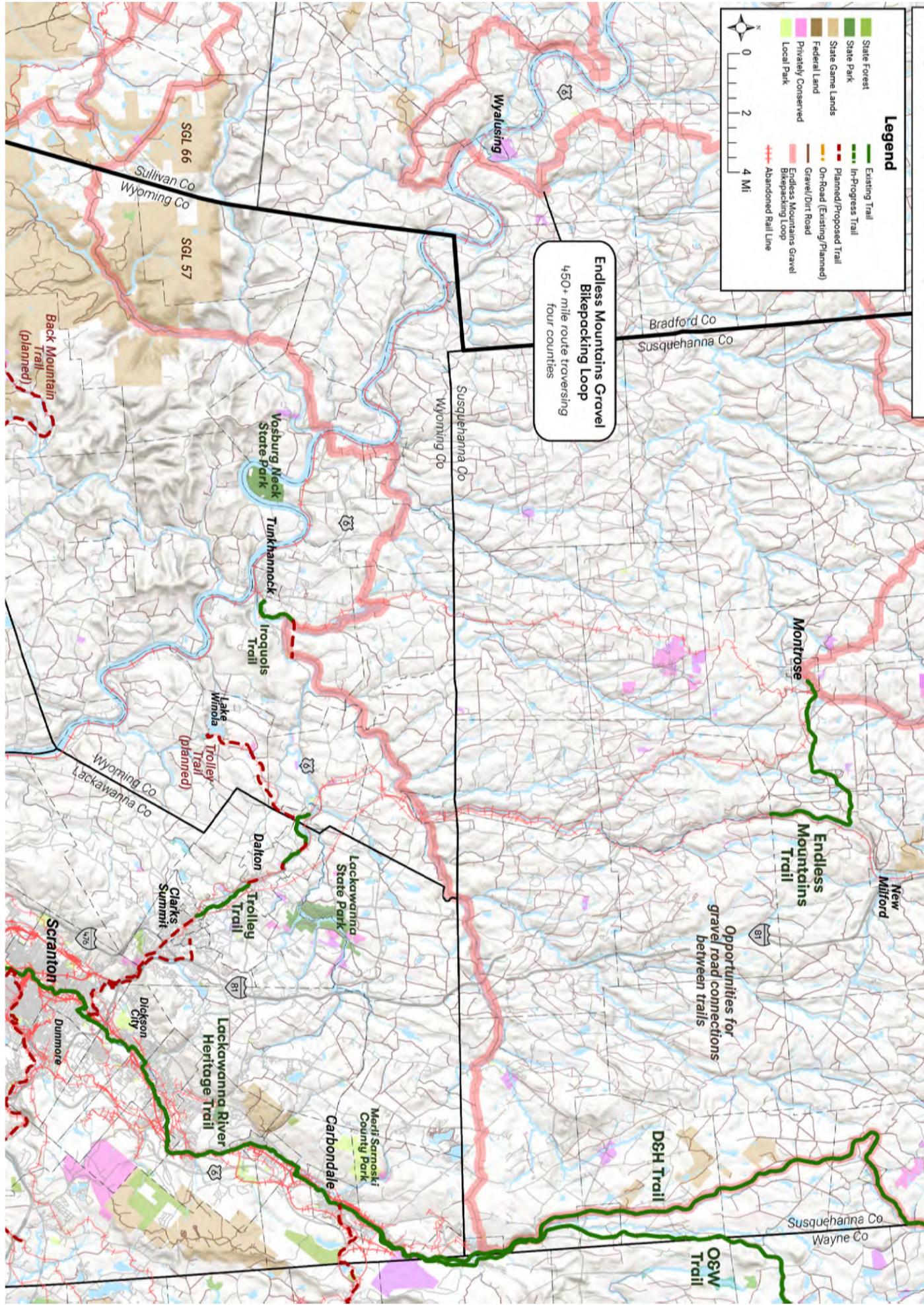
(See **"Northwest Corner Connectivity Map" on page 82.**)



Salt Spring State Park in Susquehanna County.



Northwest Corner Connectivity
 Iroquois Trail, Endless Mountains Trail, DSH Trail,
 Trolley Trail, Lackawanna Heritage Trail



Trolley Trail

Distance: 8 miles

Prior Plans: Trolley Trail Feasibility Study Update: South Turnpike Road to Brookside Road, Dalton Borough (2019)

The Countryside Conservancy is working to convert the long-abandoned Northern Electric Trolley corridor into a non-motorized multi-use trail from Dalton to Lake Winola. There are currently three different disparate sections open to the public – Clarks Summit to Dalton (2.5 miles), the Countryside Conservancy-owned Rinaldi property to La Plume Road (0.5 mile), and a section on Keystone College’s Woodland Campus in Factoryville (1.5 miles). These sections are broken up by gaps, and the planned extension from Factoryville to Lake Winola has yet to be realized.

From the current terminus along South Turnpike Road in Dalton, there is a 0.4-mile gap where a multi-use trail is planned to continue to Main Street. From Main Street, the alignment will use North Turnpike Road through the Borough to Maple Street. Currently, PennDOT is reviewing the signage and marking plan for approval, and if approved, it will go to the Borough to sign off on it. This will result in sharrows and trail signage along North Turnpike Road to officially make it an on-road section of the Trolley Trail.

From Maple Street, there are two different alignment options. One is to continue following Turnpike Road through La Plume Township. Turnpike Road is a township-owned road once it exits the Borough of Dalton, and for now, Countryside Conservancy is waiting to see if PennDOT approves their signage plan before moving on to submit something similar to La Plume Township.

There is a 0.8-mile section of completed trail on the southern side of Route 6/11 from the Countryside Conservancy-owned Rinaldi Property near Maple Street to LaPlume Road. The Rinaldi Property is about 17 acres and holds promise for some singletrack bike trails and a bike park, something that Countryside Conservancy is interested in pursuing.

If the on-road alignment on Turnpike Road through La Plume Township were adopted, it would skip this section of multi-use trail and users would have to backtrack or use it as a spur. However, there are significant challenges and costs associated with trying to cross under Route 6/11 at Maple Road to connect to the Rinaldi Property and the completed section of trail. There is currently a feasibility study underway to figure out exactly what those challenges are and if there are any viable options.

Beyond La Plume Road, an on-road section on College Road connects to the existing 1.6-mile section of trail near Keystone College. This trail connects into Factoryville, but a proposed connection out to Lake Winola shoots southward as the existing trail turns north. Currently, most of the action on this section is on the two miles from the Countryside Conservancy-owned Davis Crossing Preserve to the Fish and Boat Commission launch at Lake Winola. There is currently public outreach and a survey underway, and Overfield Township and the Fish and Boat Commission are on board with the project, though one landowner along this section has so far been unwilling to grant an easement for the trail.

There has not been any movement on the 3.5-mile section between Factoryville and the Davis Crossing Preserve. There are many pieces of the right-of-way along this section that Countryside Conservancy does not own, so some sections of this stretch may need to be on-road.

OTHER CONNECTIONS AND SPURS

There is currently forward movement on a spur from the southern terminus of the Trolley Trail in Clarks Summit to the Hillside Park Community Center and Abington Heights High School in South Abington

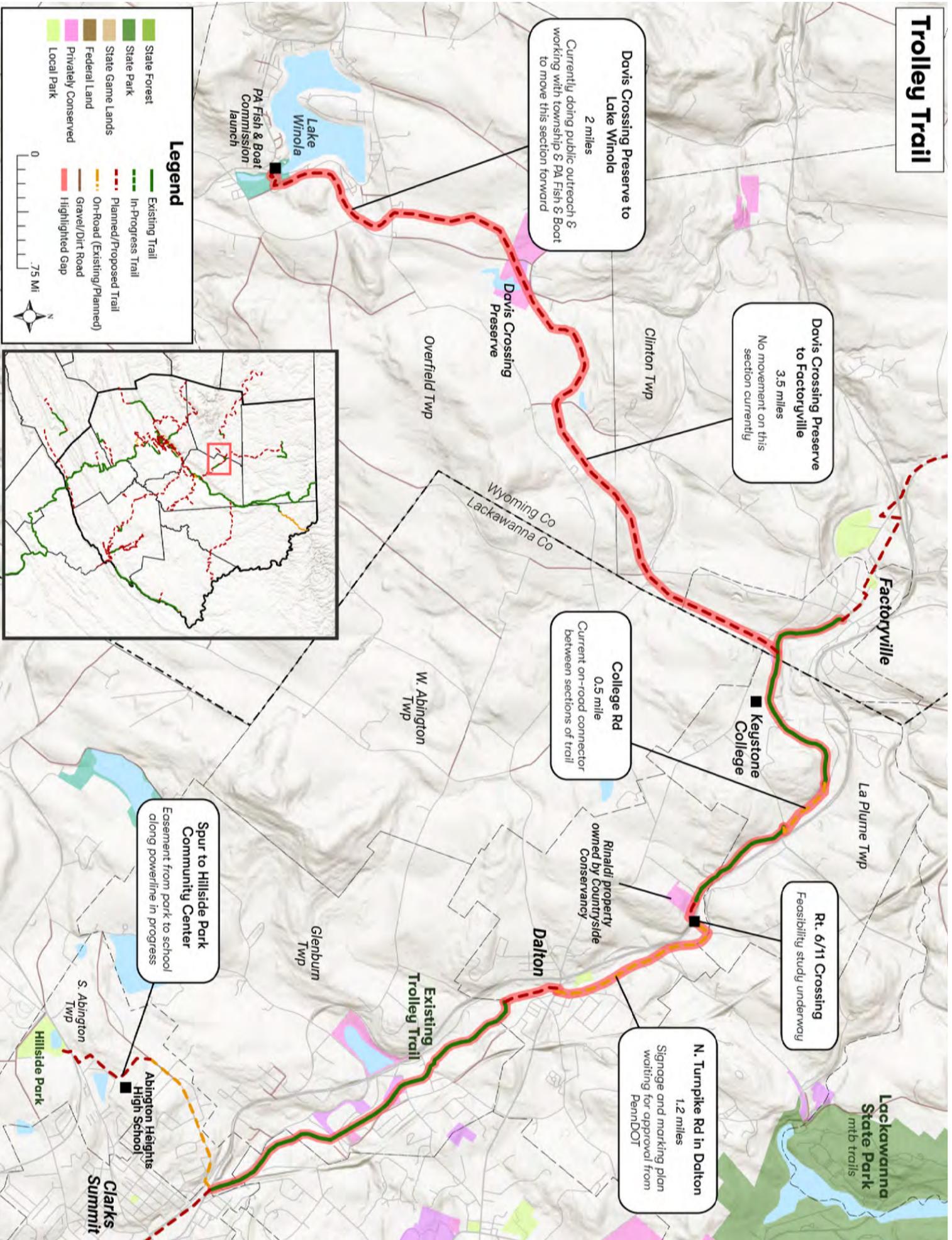
Township. As of February 2023, there is an easement being drafted for use of a powerline to connect the Community Center to the school. There may be potential to continue a multi-use trail into Clarks Summit, but more planning would need to be done. The easier alternative would be to install signage and sharrows on Gravel Pond Road, which is fairly low-volume, to connect to the Trolley Trail. Crossing Route 6 in Clarks Summit would, however, be an obstacle.

Heading north from Factoryville, the trolley line continues and there has been some interest in trying to extend the trail. Nicholson has a lot of interest in having the Trolley Trail reach the Borough and some conversations have been had with landowners, but

getting out of Factoryville has so far proved to be a challenge. The “Trolley Trail Pipedream” would extend along the former DL&W line all the way to the Endless Mountains Trail in Susquehanna County, but at this point, that is just a vision and much more planning would need to be done to assess its feasibility.

Providing a connection to Lackawanna State Park would also prove valuable, especially due to the existing cycling activity and mountain bike trails already within the park (see “Mountain Biking” on page 57). Connecting multi-use trails to state parks was brought up as an important goal during the stakeholder interviews.





Leggett's Creek Greenway

Distance: 7.3 miles

Prior Plans: Recreation, Conservation, & Restoration Plan: A cursory review of the Leggett's Creek Watershed (2020)

Prepared for the Lackawanna River Conservation Association, the Leggett's Creek Greenway plan addresses the need for a bicycle and pedestrian connection between the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail (LRHT) in Scranton and the Countryside Conservancy Trolley Trail, and discusses two feasible alignment options along this corridor. The 2009 Scranton-Abington Planning Association Comprehensive Plan discussed the then-planned Trolley Trail and LRHT, and recommended investigating the feasibility of connecting them.

The plan calls out a critical need in the Leggett's Creek watershed for more bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Currently, most residents of North Scranton and "The Abingtons" must get into a car and drive to a trail suitable for hiking or biking and the roads are only suitable for the most experienced of cyclists. All past connectivity efforts between these locales have been designed solely for vehicular traffic.

The first trail option laid out by the 2020 plan proposes shared use of the existing rail corridor owned by Norfolk-Southern for most of its length, from just west of Route 11 in the northern end of Scranton to the beginning of the Trolley Trail in Clarks Summit. From the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail, the plan proposes using a combination of on-road, sidewalks, and utility roads turned trails to connect. Option 1 is the easier lift in terms of construction, but cooperation from the railroad is uncertain.

If the railroad is unwilling to entertain rail-with-trail, which is likely, Option 2 serves as an alternative. It could also complement the first alignment and provide a loop. However, it would be more expensive and would require extensive engineering to construct, as it requires multiple bridges and

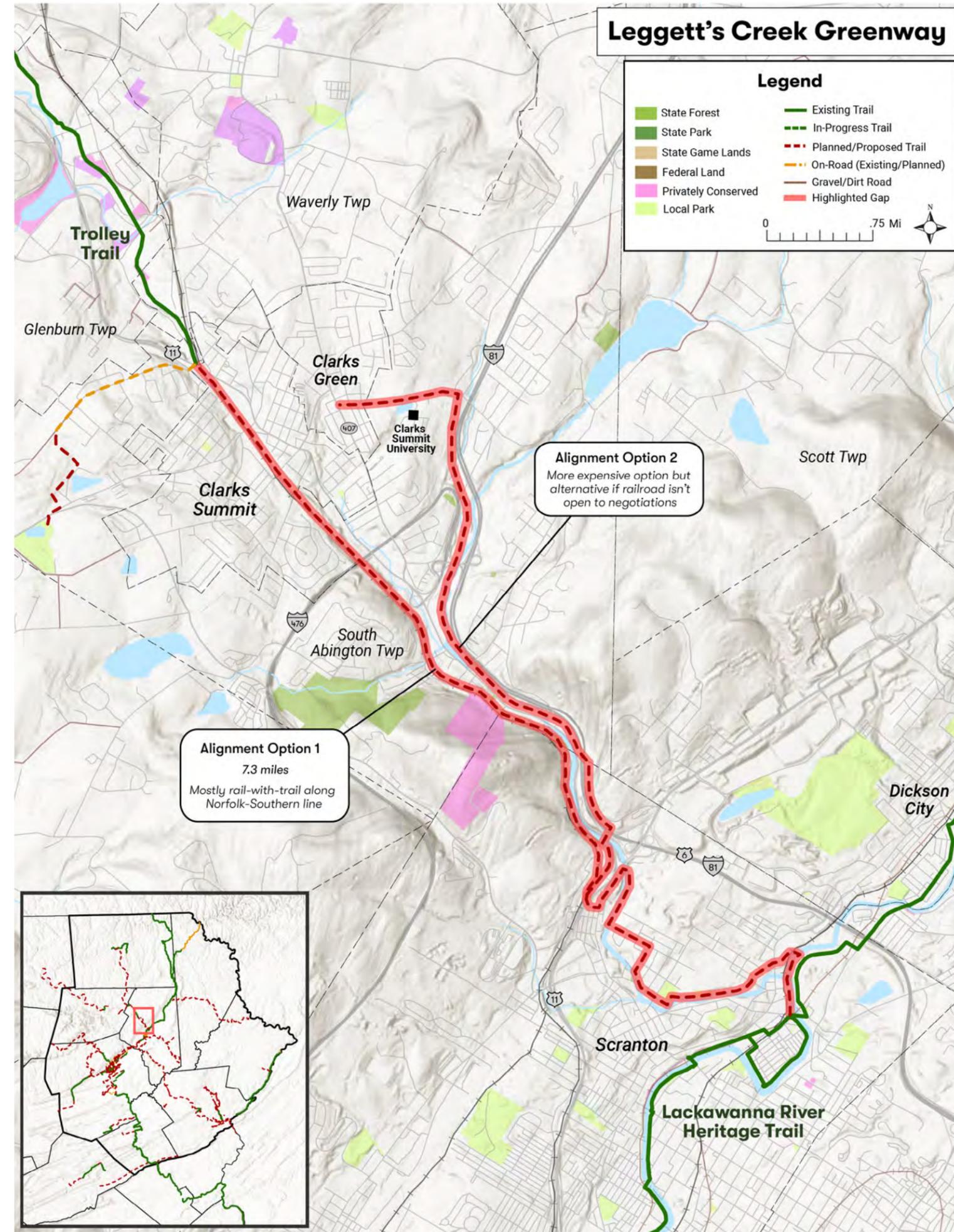
the construction of more miles of brand new trail corridor.

The plan also called out several potential small hiking and mountain biking trail systems that could be developed in the Leggett's Creek Greenway area, and investigated the viability of using dirt and gravel roads to make connections. While there are gravel roads in the area, they are isolated and adjoin unsuitable roads, so relying on them for a connection is not ideal.

NEXT STEPS

Further planning will be needed in order to determine the true feasibility of either option and decide on a final alignment.

An existing portion of the Leggett's Creek Greenway. (Credit: Thomas J. McLane Associates, Inc.)



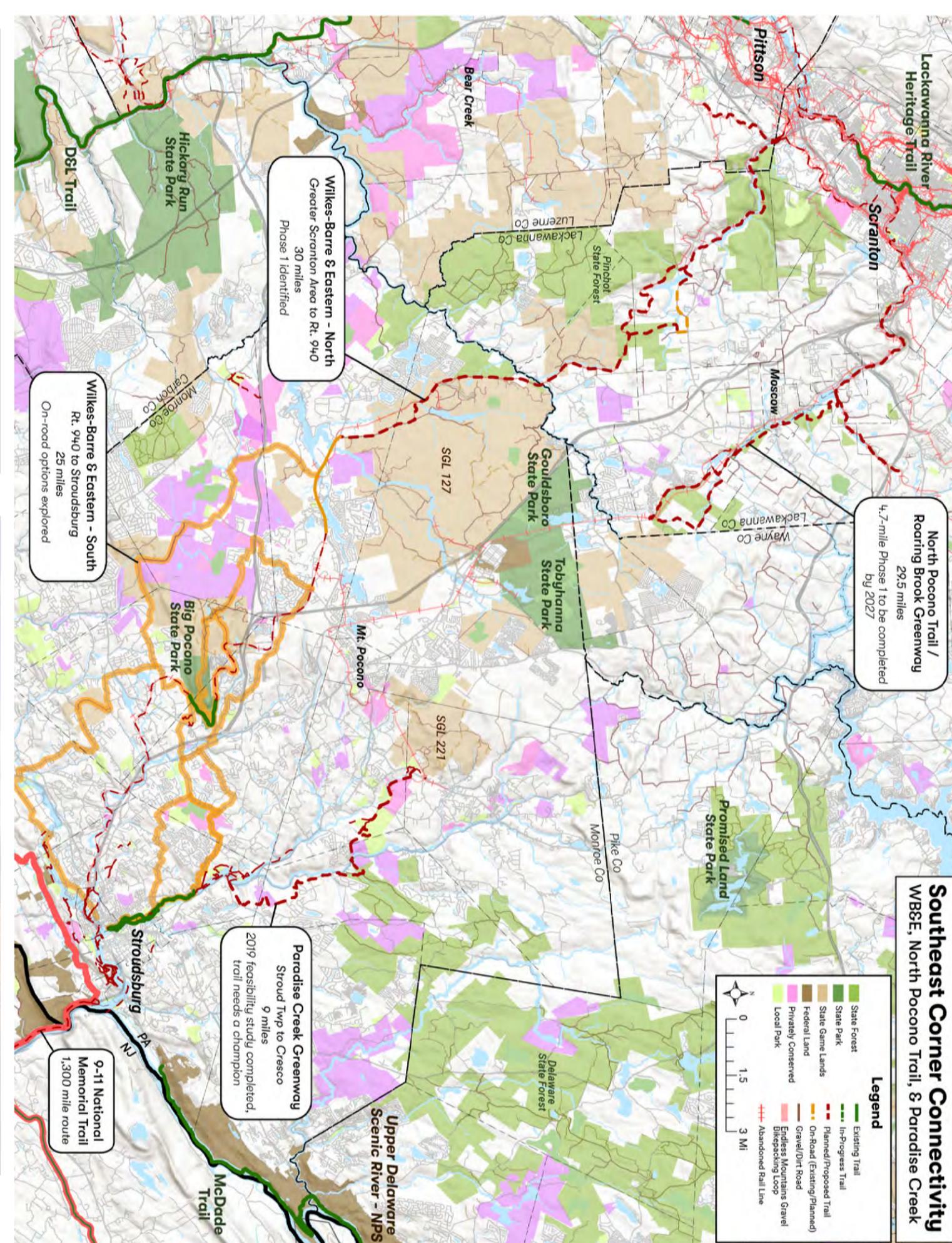
SOUTHEAST CORNER

The southeastern section of the NEPA region, comprising largely Monroe County as well as southern Lackawanna, currently has a paucity of multi-use trails but a lot of potential. With some larger tracts of public land, including Pinchot State Forest, State Game Lands 127, and Gouldsboro, Tobyhanna, and Big Pocono State Parks, there is an opportunity to create connections linking all of these assets.

Like along the Lackawaxen River Corridor, there is great value in linking the Wyoming Valley with the Delaware River at Stroudsburg, providing an east-west connection to complement the north-south “spine” of the trail system. A number of regional trails and bike routes all converge near Stroudsburg, including the Liberty-Water Gap Trail, Northern Tier Trail, 9-11 National Memorial Trail, and Adventure Cycling bike routes (see “**Neighbors & Connections**” on page 63).

The 2020 Eastern Monroe Active Transportation Plan details multimodal transportation improvements in the greater Stroudsburg region, which, if implemented, would only be value-added in making it a destination for cyclists as well as creating safer transportation opportunities for residents.

Gouldsboro State Park in Monroe County. (Credit: Nicholas Tonelli Photography.)



Roaring Brook Greenway/North Pocono Trail

Distance: 29.5 miles including spur to Wimmers Road

Prior Plans: Roaring Brook Conservation and Greenway Plan (2022), Feasibility Study & Phase I Master Plan for: North Pocono Pedestrian/Bicycle Trail & Greenway (2004)

The Roaring Brook Conservation and Greenway Plan, produced by the Lackawanna River Conservation Association (LRCA) in January 2022, outlines goals for the conservation of the Roaring Brook watershed along with the development of active transportation and recreation opportunities along the stream corridor.

The main goal proposed by the plan is the development of a continuous bicycle and pedestrian trail system from the Lackawanna River in Scranton to the headwaters of Roaring Brook in the Freytown and Lehigh Summit areas of Covington Township. Currently, there is no formal trail or greenway system along Roaring Brook, though the removal of railroad trackage and the acquisition by the county of the 12-mile section of Erie and Wyoming Valley (E&WV) Railway in 1980 provided an informal way to access the middle reaches of Roaring Brook for hiking, bicycling, and ATV uses. Footpaths and unmaintained roads also provide access to Roaring Brook for fishing. This plan suggests that the goal to connect the Lackawanna River to Covington Township is achievable in a 20-to-30-year time span.

From the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail in Scranton, the plan recommends using a combination of city streets and existing bike paths through the Historic Iron Furnaces, on the University of Scranton Campus, and through Nay Aug Park. The trail would then cross I-81 via a proposed pedestrian/bicycle bridge, connecting Nay Aug Park to the 26-acre Watres Addition, which is currently cut off from the rest of the park. If the bridge is not deemed feasible, there are several on-road alternatives outlined by the plan.

The alignment would then follow the abandoned E&WV Rail corridor eastward 7 miles to connect to the portion of the rail line owned by Lackawanna

County. These 7 miles are currently under private ownership.

At Silver Lake, the E&WV crosses over Roaring Brook on a 300-foot-long trestle, which has recently been repaired and is currently being used by contractors working on the replacement of twin bridges on I-380 near Dunmore.

The improved bridge, which is slated for completion in 2026, will be incorporated into the first phase of the North Pocono Rail Trail. The first phase, which should be finished by 2027, will entail the improvement of a 4.7-mile section of the county-owned rail corridor from the I-380 bridge project site to the Elmhurst Reservoir.

From the Elmhurst Reservoir, the proposed Roaring Brook Greenway deviates from the county-owned corridor to continue following Roaring Brook in a southeasterly direction, though the plan recommends that the rest of the county-owned corridor be improved to its terminus at Wimmers Road.

At Elmhurst Reservoir, remnants of piers from an iron truss bridge could be redeveloped to link to a network of hiking and mountain bike trails managed by the North Pocono Trails Association. These trails were developed on a combination of Pinchot State Forest and Pennsylvania American Water lands, and currently offer about 13 miles of singletrack.

Past the North Pocono Trailhead in Moscow, the preferred route of the trail would require the purchase of easements from four residential property owners, as well as trail improvements. An alternative option would be to follow Moscow Borough streets to access a small sliver of state

forest land to where Route 690 crosses Roaring Brook and connects to another state forest parcel.

This section of Pinchot State Forest hosts Hollister Glen, an exceptional natural area in Covington Township characterized by high sandstone escarpments that create a gorge surrounded by hemlock, white pine, and old-growth rhododendron. Development of a multi-use trail through the area could spearhead some much-needed stewardship, improved public access, and appropriate management of the area.

The approach to Hollister Glen from Moscow follows a well-defined road subbase of gravel with several still-intact culverts, which would provide a solid basis for trail improvements along this stretch.

From Hollister Glen, there are two preferred route options utilizing a combination of township roads and water company access roads to Hollister Reservoir, creating a 4-mile loop around the body of water. Discussions are currently underway between PA Water Company and LRCA to develop cooperative agreements to manage public access for recreation, and the trail loop around the reservoir is considered achievable in the short term.

The final reach of the Roaring Brook Greenway also forms a loop using low-volume roads, another 7-mile circuit that returns back to the reservoir. There is also an option here to continue along Lehigh Road another five miles to the village of Gouldsboro and Gouldsboro State Park.

NEXT STEPS

The plan recommends developing a partnership of stakeholders to develop the Roaring Brook Greenway, including local and county governments, state agencies, public utilities, community organizations, health institutions, and private landowners. This is called out as the first goal and should be achievable within five years.

The plan also addresses the heavy ATV use in the area, both legal and illegal, and recommends better management to avoid conflicts. Lackawanna County Planning Commission has begun a study of ATV issues and needs. The pay-to-play Lost Trails ATV system is located along the Roaring Brook corridor.

ADDITIONAL CONNECTION OPPORTUNITIES

There is potential to use an inactive section of rail line to connect south towards Montage Mountain, as well as northeast towards Lake Ariel and Hawley. At Lehigh Summit, there are opportunities to expand into other public lands and regional trails in Monroe County, as well as extending a trail through Wimmers County, as well as extending a trail through Wimmers into Wayne County to Lake Ariel and Hawley. This trail could also link southward towards Montage Mountain and the northern end of the Wilkes-Barre and Eastern.

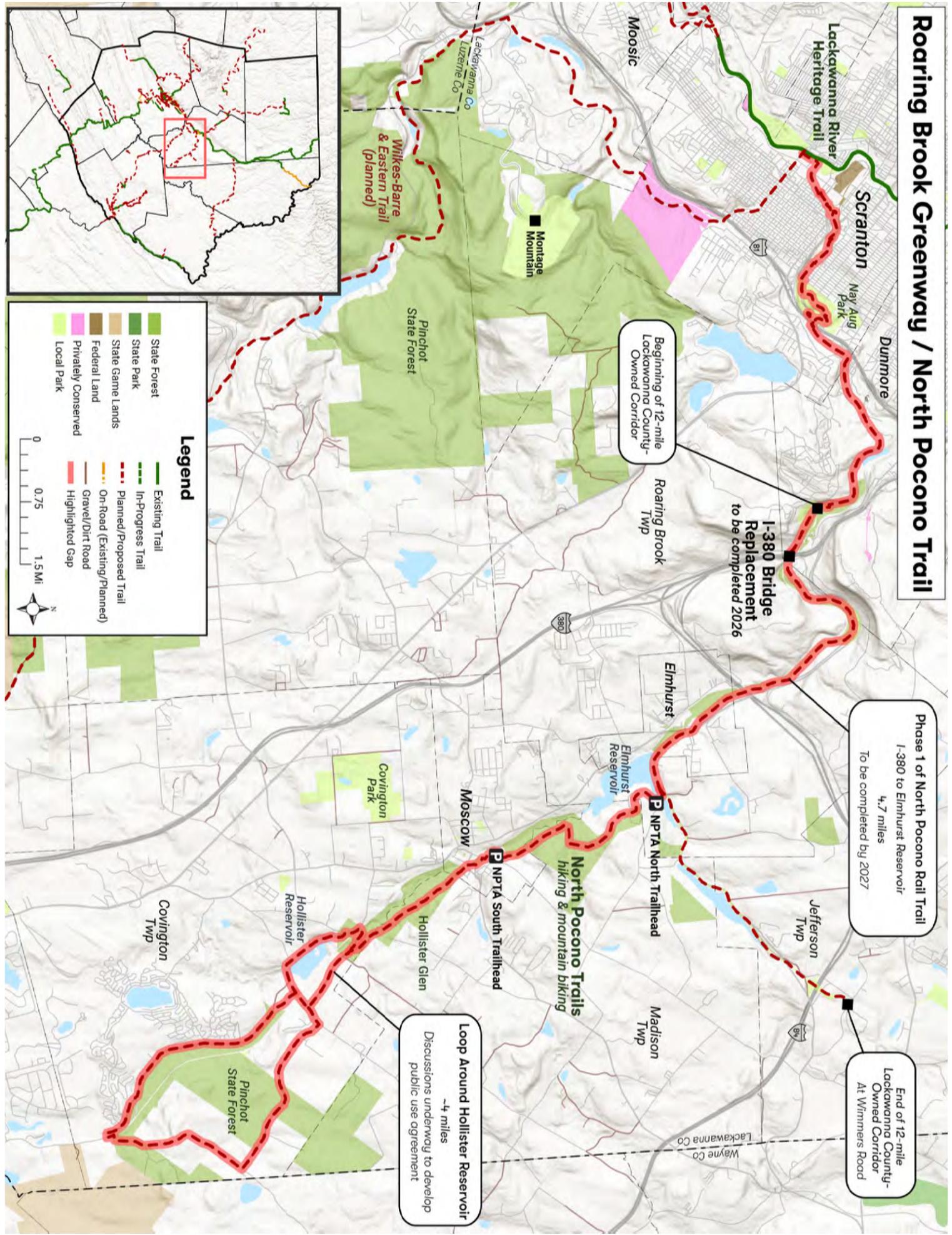
Community connections from the main Roaring Brook Greenway corridor may include a route from Moscow through St. Catherine's Cemetery and the Moffat Estate to Covington Park. A link from Van Brunt and Orchard Streets could provide a safe connection of the North Pocono School District Elementary and Intermediate campuses.

Additional planning will be needed to continue the trail southwest towards Scranton, as well as further east.

NEPA Trails Forum Workday on the North Pocono Trail.



Roaring Creek in Winter.



Wilkes-Barre & Eastern - North

Distance: 29.5 miles

Prior Plans: Wilkes-Barre & Eastern (WB&E) Trail Feasibility Study (2020)

The Wilkes-Barre and Eastern (WB&E) Railroad once connected Scranton to Stroudsburg, and has long been of interest to convert into a multi-use trail. The railroad was one of the last to be developed in the region, offering a more direct, yet more mountainous, path to the eastern seaboard. The route through Lackawanna and Monroe counties was abandoned in the 1930s in favor of corridors with multiple tracks, which made scheduling easier.

Due to significant differences in characteristics, surroundings, and ownership, the 62-mile corridor was broken up into two separate sections to examine the feasibility of constructing a trail on the former rail grade. The Northern Section runs from the Lackawanna River in Scranton to Route 940 in Tobyhanna Township, Monroe County. The rail bed in this section is mostly intact and in good condition, and much of it is on public lands. An in-depth assessment in 2020 looked at the former WB&E corridor north of Route 940, and the 11-mile Section 1 was identified as a logical first phase of development.

SECTION 1: SR 940 TO LEHIGH RIVER

The proposed Phase 1 begins at Route 940, where Tobyhanna Township recently completed bike lanes. It would head northward on Brady's Lake Road for 2.8 miles through State Game Lands 127, rather than using the remnant rail line, in order to bypass a section of private property, as the owner is not amenable to granting an easement for a trail. At a game lands road just south of Brady's Lake, the route would bear left to connect with the abandoned rail grade, which is a gravel road in this section. At a gate, the corridor narrows to doubletrack but remains intact as it travels northward towards the Lehigh River.

Just shy of the Lehigh, the corridor enters private property again and stops at the river, where the former bridge has been removed. There are singletrack paths that remain on state forest property that connect to Plank Road, which could be improved for multi-use. Trail users could also bypass this section on a grassy doubletrack game lands trail called Silver Creek Road. The proposed Phase 1 ends at Plank Road. The entirety of this section is managed by Pinchot State Forest or the Game Commission, and would be a substantial-enough stretch of trail to be an asset for the region, demonstrate the concept of the WB&E, and build momentum for further development.

SECTION 2: LEHIGH RIVER TO WATRES RESERVOIR

Beyond the Lehigh, the corridor once again enters Game Commission property at an existing trailhead along Clifton Beach Road, and is used as a dirt road for almost 4 miles through Game Lands 135 and another section of Pinchot State Forest until reaching private property in an area known as the "Hog Back." While utilizing the former rail line is physically feasible in this section and would be the preferred alignment, private ownership may make that option unrealistic. An alternate alignment was explored that would require the construction of a new trail that would remain on state forest lands and connect to Ash Gap Road. The trail alignment would then follow Ash Gap (a gravel road) to a short stretch of Route 502, then connect with PA American Water lands via Watres Road. Another new trail would be built to connect Watres Road past the Watres Reservoir Dam to the remnant Spring Brook Line. The biggest challenge for this section will be working with PA American Water to prepare a design that meets their requirements.

The feasibility study also looked at the possibility of developing some singletrack trails around Watres Reservoir and in the adjoining Pinchot State Forest. These could complement the multi-use trail or provide another alternative option should development of a multi-use trail become problematic. There are also a number of snowmobile trails in this area, part of the Thornhurst Snowmobile Trail System, as well as forest and access roads.

SECTION 3: WATRES RESERVOIR TO HILLSIDE JUNCTION PARK

The Spring Brook Line is another former rail corridor which began near Watres Reservoir and ran northwest towards Scranton along Spring Brook. The abandoned rail line in this section is privately-owned, though anecdotally is already open for public non-motorized use for fishing access and recreation. The feasibility study noted motor vehicle use as well as illegal dumping in the area, and a multi-use trail would require some improvements such as a new subbase and resurfacing.

At Aston Mountain Road, the trail would leave the rail grade and utilize the road shoulder, as the rail corridor has been mostly destroyed due to erosion. Most of it is in the floodplain, which will make trail construction more difficult, though it is still feasible. As the alignment approaches Nesbitt Reservoir, the rail grade becomes more defined again, and the trail could once again use it to travel northward. Parts of the corridor are currently being used as an access road for PA American Water, and the simplest solution would be for the trail to follow these already-existing dirt roads before jumping back on the Spring Brook Line to connect back to Route 502 in Pittston Township.

SECTION 4: HILLSIDE JUNCTION TO SUSCON ROAD

This section is a spur that heads south from Hillside Junction Park to Suscon Road in Pittston Township along an abandoned rail line owned by the Luzerne County Redevelopment Authority. The tracks are still in place, though vegetation has encroached the corridor. This section traverses residential areas

near Suscon Road, then transitions to the Grimes Industrial Park where it must cross an active rail line and then parallel it past I-476 to Hillside Junction.

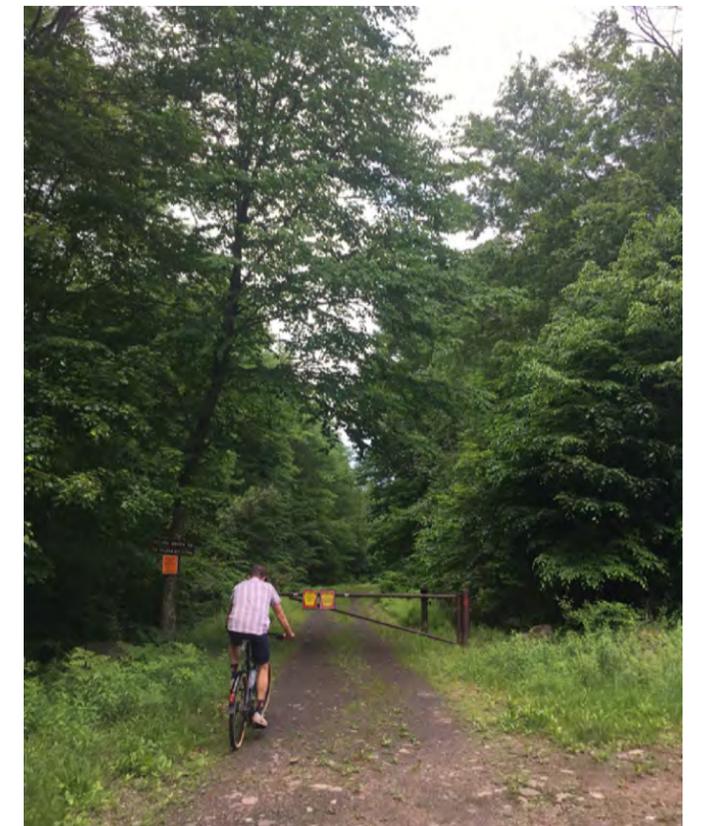
NEXT STEPS

First and foremost, the Wilkes-Barre and Eastern needs a champion. Monroe County no longer has an open space planner, and no one has stepped into that role to advocate for trails in the county. Once a champion steps up to take the lead, they can look at developing the first phase of trail from Route 940 to the Lehigh River.

OTHER POTENTIAL CONNECTIONS

The northern section of the WB&E passes through plenty of public lands, which offer opportunities to make connections via gravel roads and doubletrack trails into State Game Lands 127, beyond to Gouldsboro and Tobyhanna State Parks, and Pinchot State Forest.

Riding the WB&E - Northern Section.



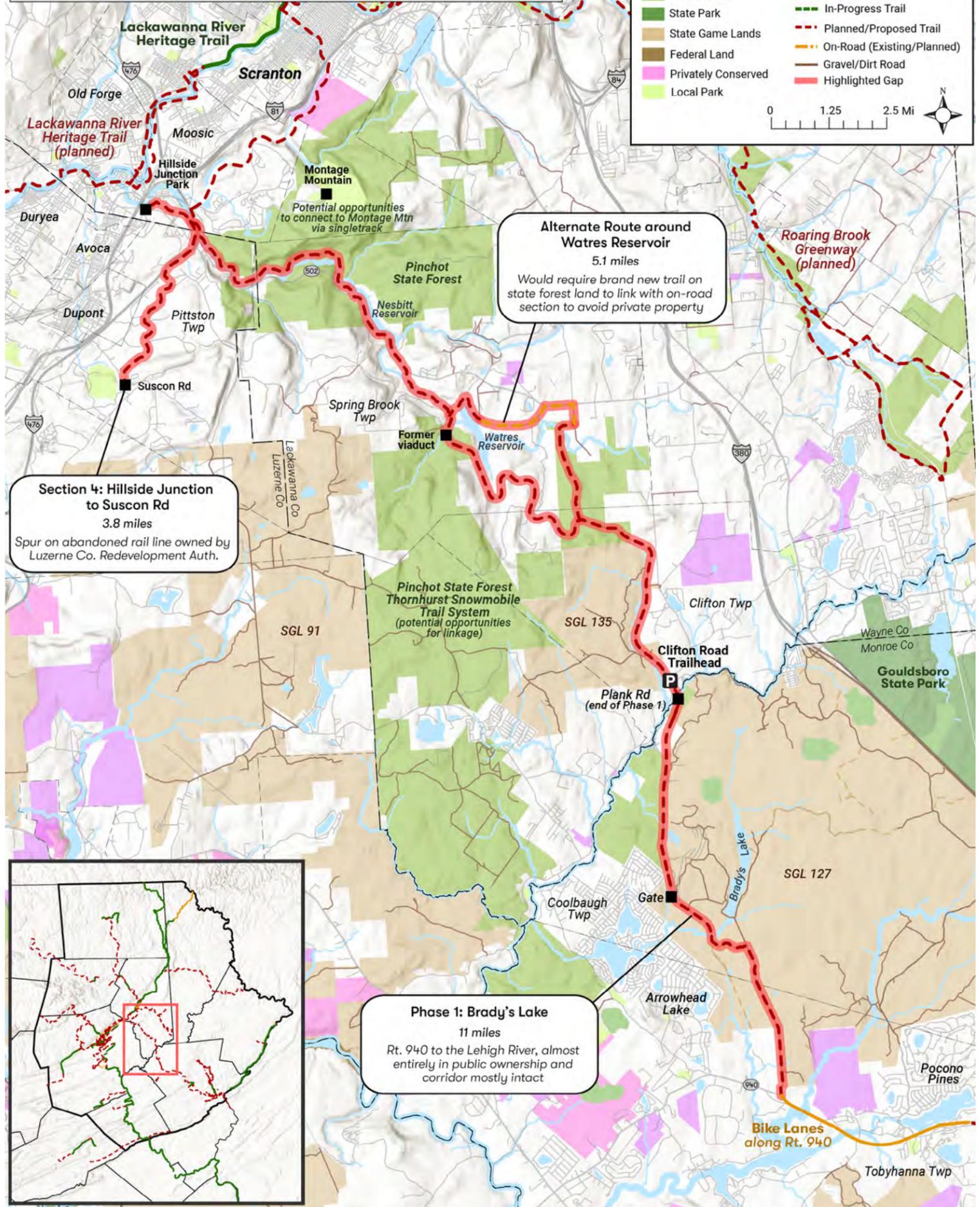


Wilkes-Barre & Eastern: Northern Section

Legend

- State Forest
- State Park
- State Game Lands
- Federal Land
- Privately Conserved
- Local Park
- Existing Trail
- In-Progress Trail
- Planned/Proposed Trail
- On-Road (Existing/Planned)
- Gravel/Dirt Road
- Highlighted Gap

0 1.25 2.5 Mi



Paradise Creek Greenway

Distance: 9 miles

Prior Plans: Upper Brodhead and Paradise Creeks Greenway Plan (2010), Upper Brodhead - Paradise Trail Feasibility Study (2019)

The **Upper Brodhead and Paradise Creeks Greenway Plan (2010)** details several potential on-road bikeways as well as off-road multi-use trail options. The plan calls out a 17-mile unused rail line owned by the Pennsylvania Northeast Regional Railroad Authority (PNRRA) that could be converted into a trail. However, subsequent follow-up implementation efforts with PNRRA proved unsuccessful due to their current policies.

The **Upper Brodhead - Paradise Trail Feasibility Study (2019)** suggests alternative possibilities to connect 9 miles through Monroe County from the ForEvergreen Nature Preserve and Brodhead Creek Heritage Center in Stroud Township to the Cresco Station Museum in Barrett Township. Much of the northern half of the study corridor is on public lands, while the southern half is mostly owned by hunting and fishing clubs. Though these are privately-owned, they are large parcels with only a few different landowners to negotiate with.

This study found that there isn't a suitable alignment to connect the entire distance using a traditional rail-trail-style multi-use path, but that a connection is possible with some sections of singletrack. Using the rail line is still the best way to provide a multi-use trail connection, and the barriers to its development may fade in time.

NEXT STEPS

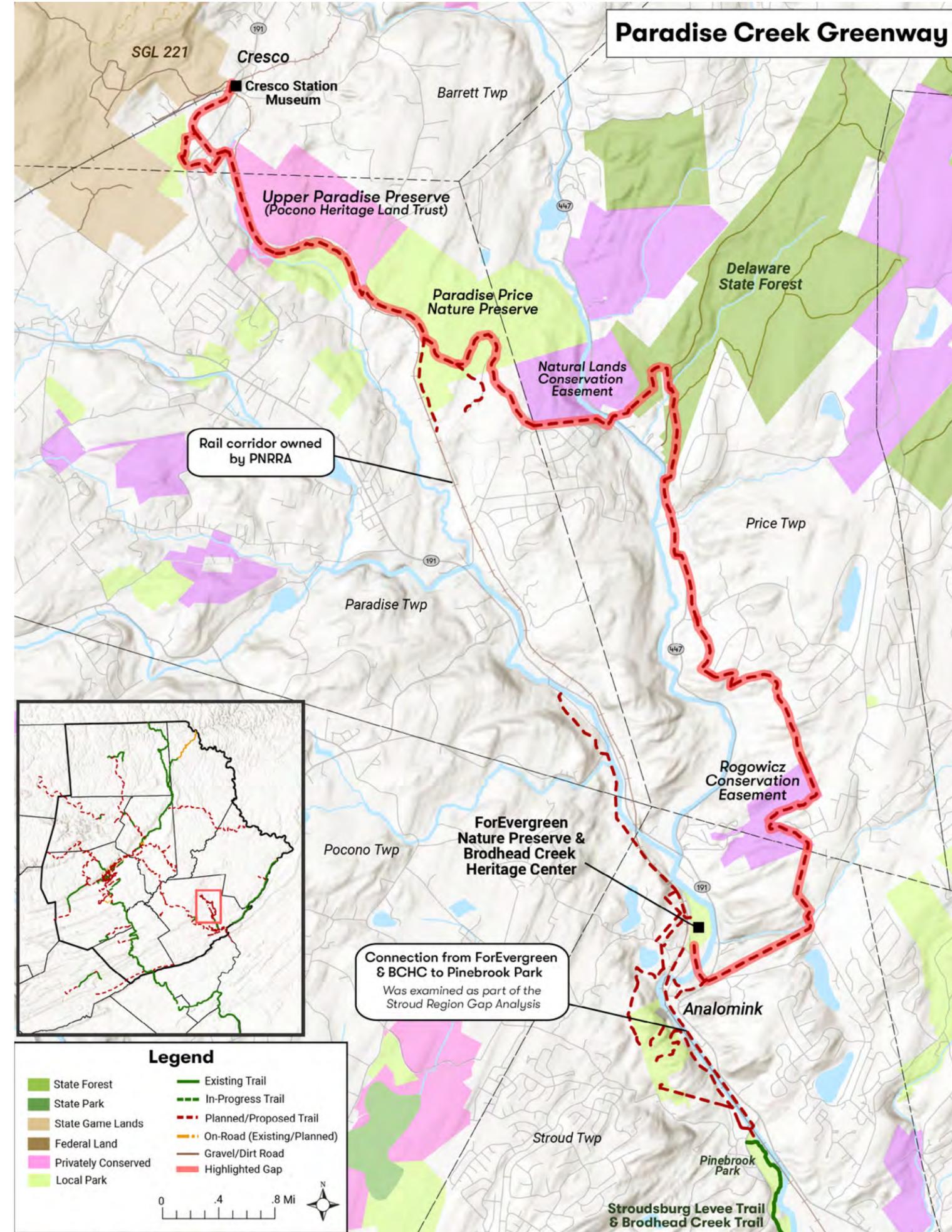
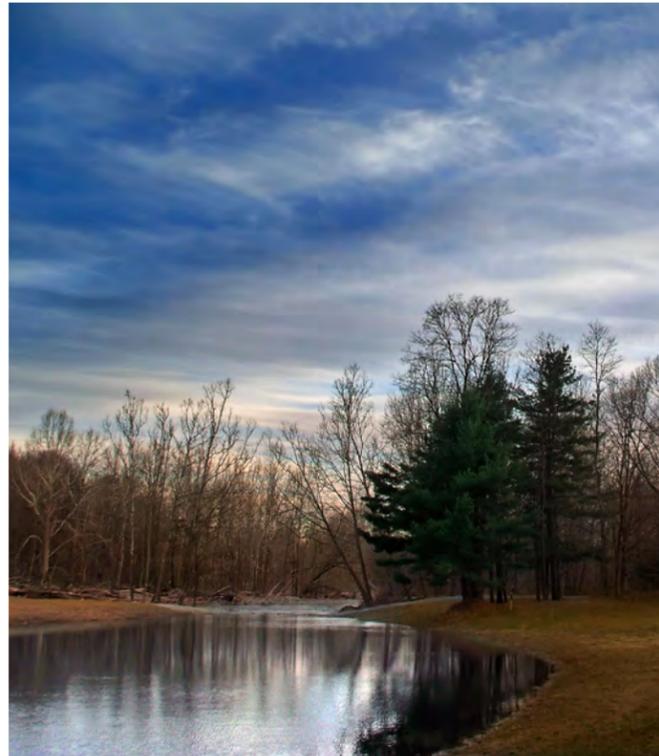
The next step to move the trail forward is the acquisition of public access through easements or purchase, an effort that is currently being spearheaded by the Pocono Heritage Land Trust (PHLT) in partnership with other conservation organizations and municipalities.

OTHER POTENTIAL CONNECTIONS

At the northern end of the proposed Upper Brodhead-Paradise Trail, the potential exists to connect into the WB&E Trail at Pocono Pines, but a second phase of study would be necessary to continue the trail southwest. If connected to the WB&E at Pocono Pines, that also opens up possible connections through State Game Lands 127 to Gouldsboro and Tobyhanna State Parks, and eventually the Roaring Brook Greenway.

South of the ForEvergreen Nature Preserve and Brodhead Creek Heritage Center, the **2019 Stroud Region Gap Analysis** explored options to connect to Pinebrook Park and the Brodhead Creek Trail and Stroudsburg Levee Trail, ultimately connecting into Stroudsburg.

Brodhead Creek Park. (Credit: Nicholas Tonelli Photography.)



THE WYOMING VALLEY

The bulk of NEPA's population lives in the Lackawanna and North Branch of the Susquehanna River Valleys (also known as the Wyoming Valley), in the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton metro area. The "spine" of the NEPA trail network travels through the valley on the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail, Luzerne County National Recreation Trail and Levee Trail system before leaving the valley and heading southward into the mountains on the D&L Trail. Continuing along the North Branch of the Susquehanna, the Susquehanna Warrior Trail hugs the river towards Berwick.

The most critical connections to fill are located in the Wyoming Valley, as it serves as the central hub and spine of the network. Among them are the Lackawanna River Trail "Lower 6," completion of the D&L Trail into Wilkes-Barre, and connecting both the Back Mountain Trail and Susquehanna Warrior Trail to the Levee Trail system.

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Study for the Central Business Districts of Scranton and Wilkes-Barre (2020) also provides a suite of recommendations for on-road improvements in both cities including bike lanes and wayfinding signage to improve multi-modal transportation opportunities and safety.

Lackawanna River Heritage Trail: Keyser Creek to Pittston

Distance: 6 miles

Prior Plans: Lackawanna River Heritage Trail Lower 6 Trail Feasibility Study (2021)

A 2021 feasibility study looked at the "Lower 6" gap between the current end of the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail at Davis Street in Taylor Borough and the Pittston Riverfront/Luzerne County National Recreation Trail. This section is a critical gap to finish the LRHT and create a continuous corridor from New York to Philadelphia. The 2010 Lackawanna Greenway Plan and Lackawanna River Heritage Trail Feasibility Study has guided development in the upper reaches of the LRHT, but it illustrated an alignment along an active rail line for the Lower 6 section. This is not a feasible option, which necessitated the Lower 6 study.

The feasibility study broke the gap into four sections:

SECTION 1: KEYSER CREEK TO MOOSIC

The first option would be to extend the LRHT south from its current terminus at Keyser Creek along the west bank of the Lackawanna River via a combination of on-road improvements, existing old roads and ATV trails, improvements to an existing footpath, and brand new trail construction. This alignment was found to be a feasible, but more costly approach.

The second option would be to cross the Lackawanna River upstream of the Davis Street Bridge either via an existing structure behind the Elliott Plant or new pedestrian bridges that would use an island as a halfway point. This island could be developed as a recreation site for educational activities and primitive camping.

The trail alignment would then follow an abandoned rail line on large parcels of privately-owned land, which would require easements from several different landowners. However, this is the preferred alignment for Section 1.

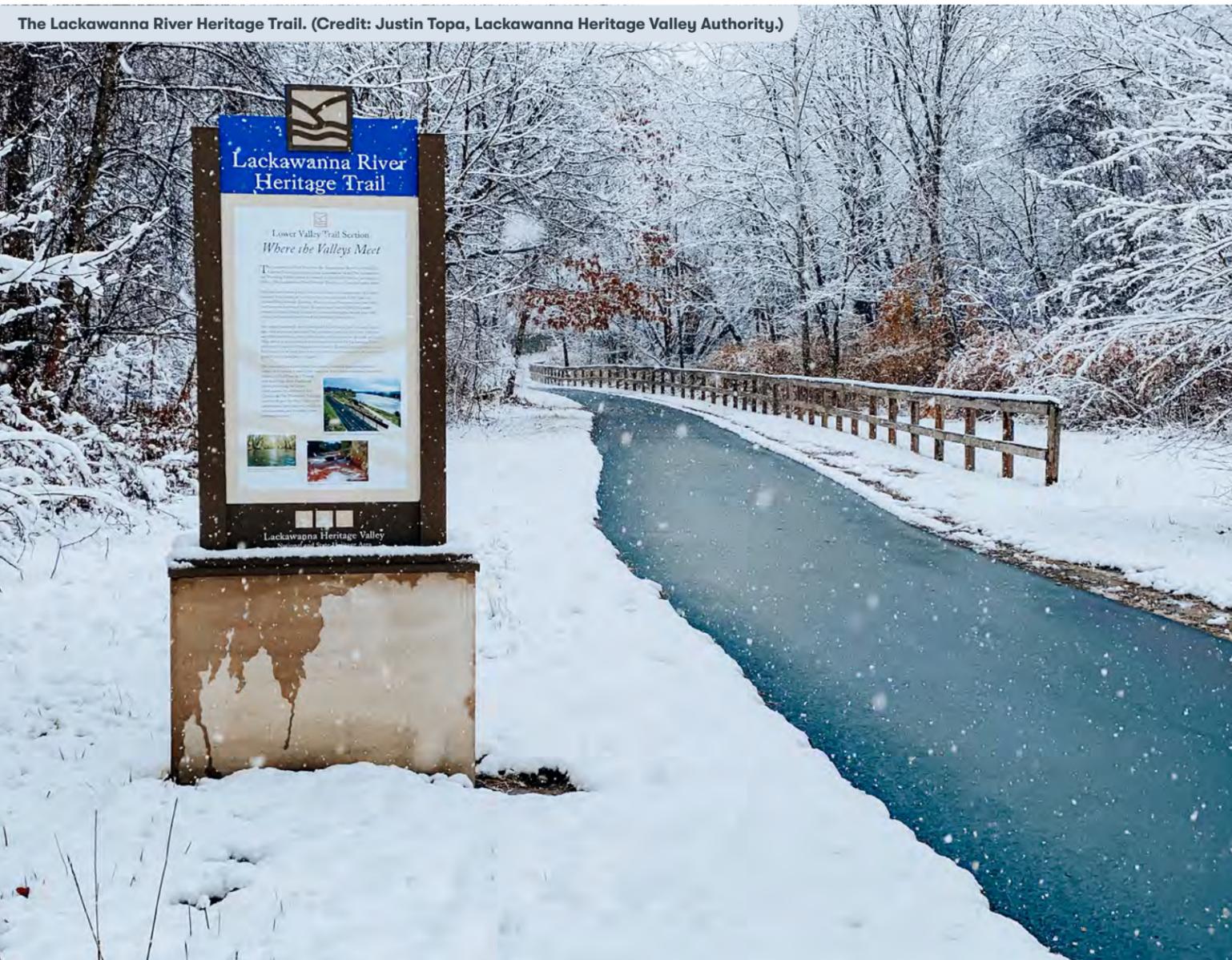
SECTION 2: MOOSIC TO OLD FORGE BOREHOLE

Both of the Section 1 alignment options end up on the eastern side of the Lackawanna River on 3rd Street and Main Street in Moosic, where pavement markings, signage, and sidewalk improvements are proposed as the trail would follow Main Street on-road to Lonesome Road. The alignment could either continue on-road on Lonesome Road or a trail could be constructed between the road and the river, which would require extensive engineering as the area is subject to flooding. However, this could be the catalyst for much-needed riparian buffer improvements.

At South Main Street the alignment would continue on-road to the Union Street Bridge, where it would cross back over the river to the western bank. The PennDOT-owned South Main Street would need to be upgraded with infrastructure improvements, as it is a narrow street and cars park on the sidewalks in some areas. Collaboration with PennDOT and Lawrenceville Borough will be needed to implement the improvements.

SECTION 3: OLD FORGE BOREHOLE TO COXTON ROAD VIA DURYE SWAMPS

The preferred and least intrusive alignment from the Union Street Bridge would be to follow Coxtan Road and Ripple Street, with some safety improvements on Coxtan Road. Ripple Street is a dead-end with minimal traffic, so signage and pavement markings should suffice. South of Ripple Street, there are several large tracts of already-disturbed industrial land. If landowner agreements are successful, the preferred alignment for the trail is to run along the border of these properties along the river, which should not negatively impact any future development plans for these parcels. This section of multi-use trail would continue to Stephenson Street.



The Lackawanna River Heritage Trail. (Credit: Justin Topa, Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority.)

Beyond Stephenson Street, the easiest option would be to use Swamp Road, which is a dirt road transecting Duryea Swamps. There is potential here to create a Wildlife Sanctuary and trail loops, in addition to a boat launch, fishing docks, boardwalks, and educational signage. The Borough of Duryea recently applied for a grant to acquire property, but did not receive funding. Their plan is to try again in the next round.

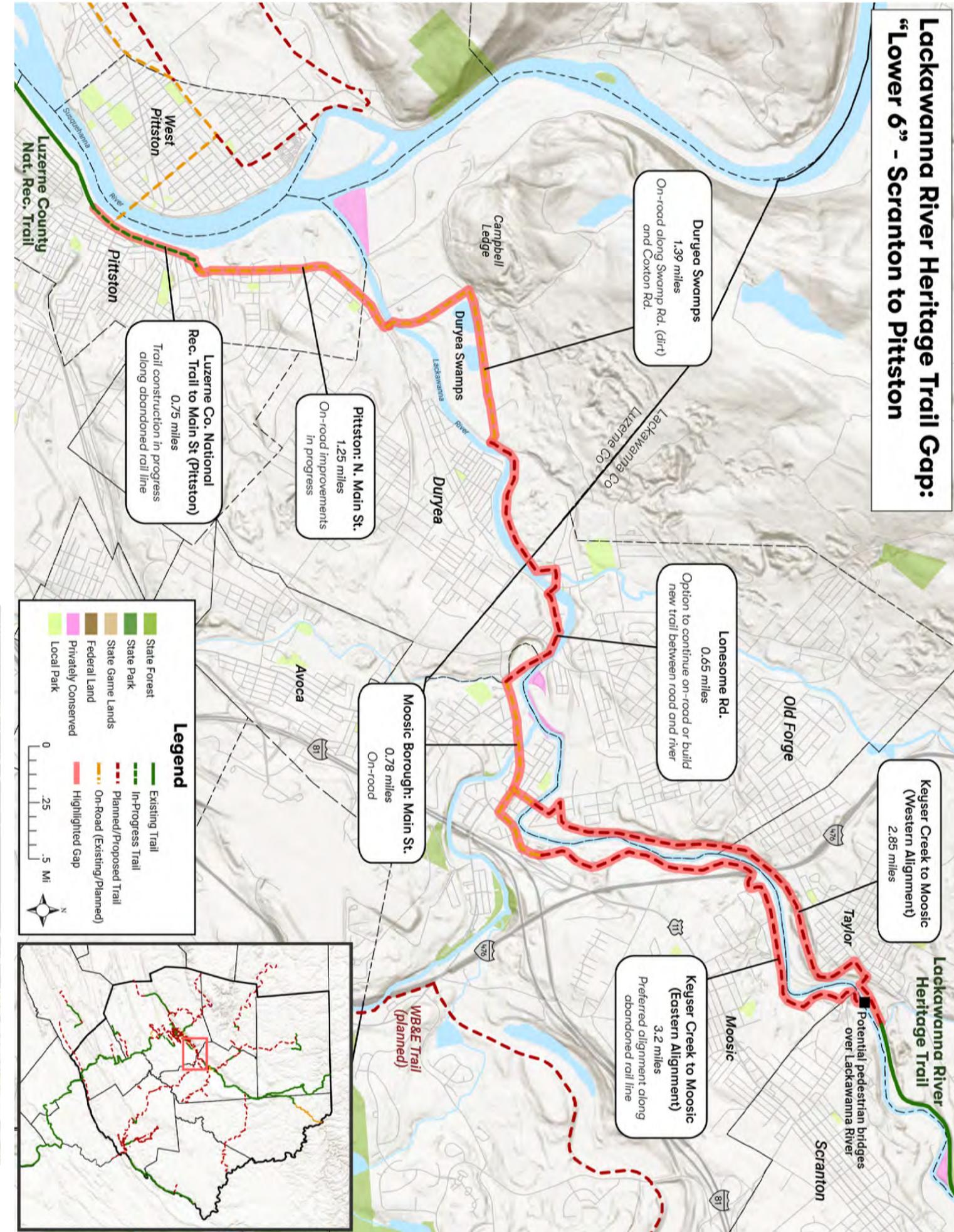
SECTION 4: COXTON ROAD TO PITSTON RIVERFRONT

Coxton Road is the only viable solution to get back over the Lackawanna River towards Pittston. However, the current conditions are not ideal due to steep grades and a narrow bridge over the river and rail line, so safety improvements will be needed. On the eastern side of the river, Main Street streetscape improvements are already designed and funded, and construction is underway. The trail alignment will piggy-back on these improvements and will be

on-road on Main Street from Coxton Road to near Parsonage Street in Pittston, where it will then hop over to a rail line owned by the Luzerne County Redevelopment Authority. A 0.75 mile section of off-road trail is currently being designed that will intersect with the Luzerne County National Recreation Trail. Construction on this section of trail is slated to begin in early 2024. Pittston City is very enthusiastic about moving this section of trail forward all the way to Duryea Swamps.

CONNECTIVITY

Along with the D&L Trail, the Lackawanna “Lower 6” is one of the most important gaps in the region to close in order to create a continuous long-distance trail all the way through NEPA, which will be the basis of a connected network. In addition to its regional importance, it will also provide opportunities for locals to use the trail for active transportation and recreation in their backyard.



Taking a Break on the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail.



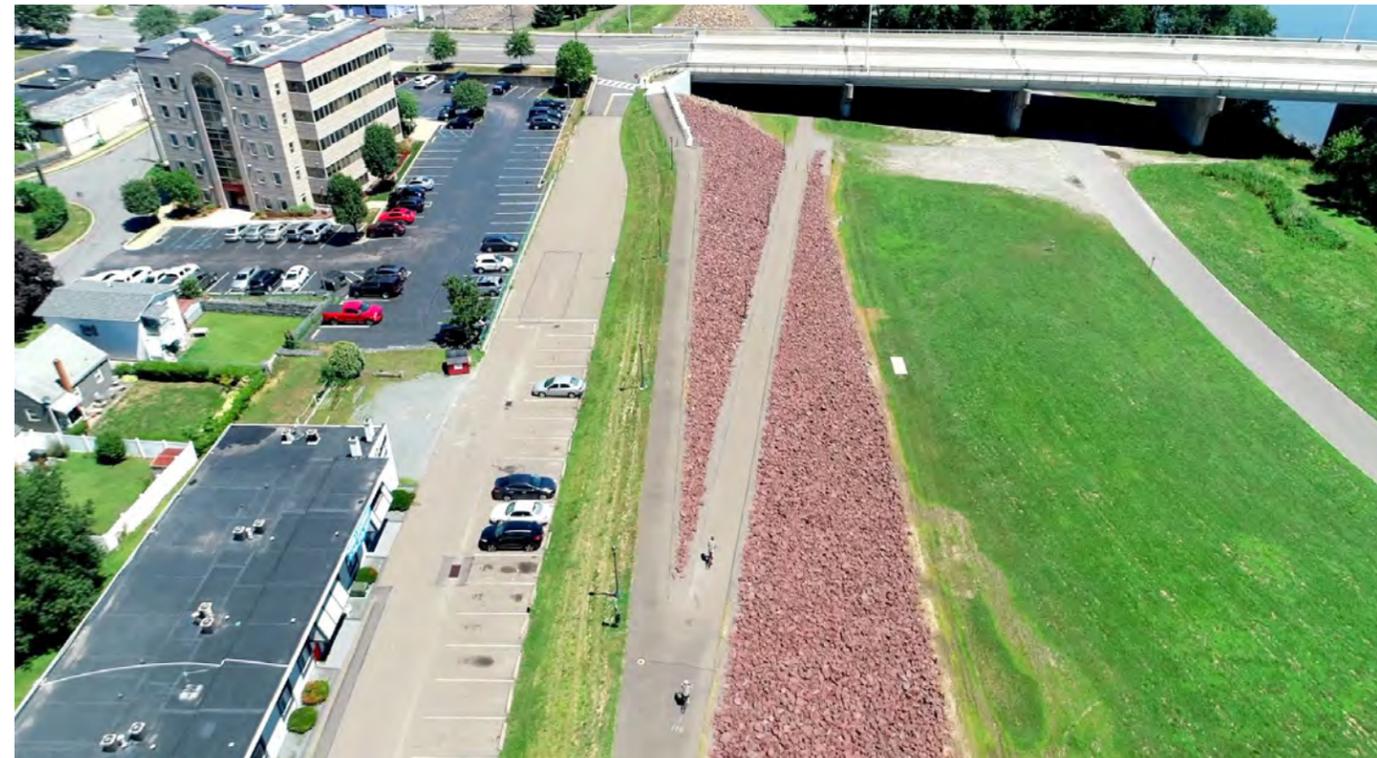
Greater Kingston Area Trail Plan

The **2011 Greater Kingston Area Trail and Greenway Feasibility Study/Master Plan** investigated several different trail and on-road route alignments in the Kingston region, with the intention of linking the Susquehanna Warrior Trail, Back Mountain Trail, and Levee Trail System into one cohesive network.

The **Kingston Area Trail** would form the spine of the system, running north-south from the proposed terminus of the Susquehanna Warrior Trail at State Route 11 to the intersection with the West Side Trail in Wyoming Borough. Most of the proposed 5.7 miles of trail follows abandoned railroad right-of-ways. The completion of this section was recommended as Phase 2 in the plan.

The **Back Mountain Trail Extension** would begin at Buckingham Street in Luzerne and connect to the Luzerne County Levee Trail behind the Kingston Recreation Center, also intersecting with the Kingston Area Trail. The proposed trail route follows an abandoned railroad grade that is currently owned by the Redevelopment Authority of Luzerne

The Luzerne Levee Trail. (Credit: Discover NEPA.)

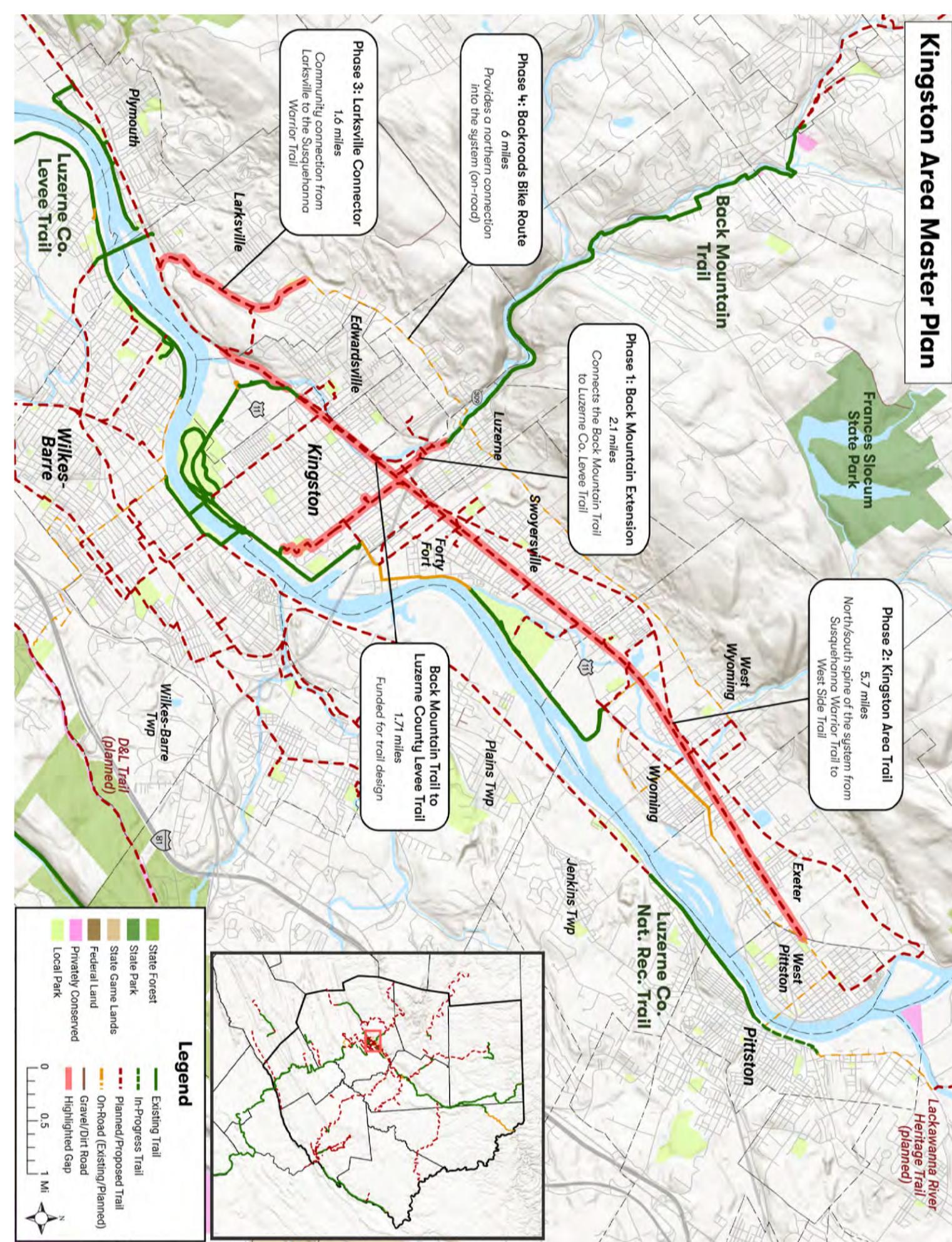


County, and investigation in 2011 showed only minimal encroachments along the corridor. This was recommended by the study to be Phase 1.

As of winter 2023, the Anthracite Scenic Trail Association has received funding for trail design for a section from Luzerne to Edwardsville on lands owned by the Luzerne County Flood Protection Authority.

The 1.6-mile **Larksville Connector Trail** would link Romanoskey Park in Larksville to the Susquehanna Warrior Trail, providing neighborhood access to the regional trail system. The completion of this trail was recommended to be Phase 3 in the master plan. In addition, there are numerous other community connections planned to link neighborhoods of the greater Kingston area to the main spine.

Once the Larksville Connector Trail is completed, the Plan recommends the implementation of a **Backroad Bike Route** to provide a northern connection into the trail system.



Susquehanna Warrior Trail to Plymouth Borough Levee Trail

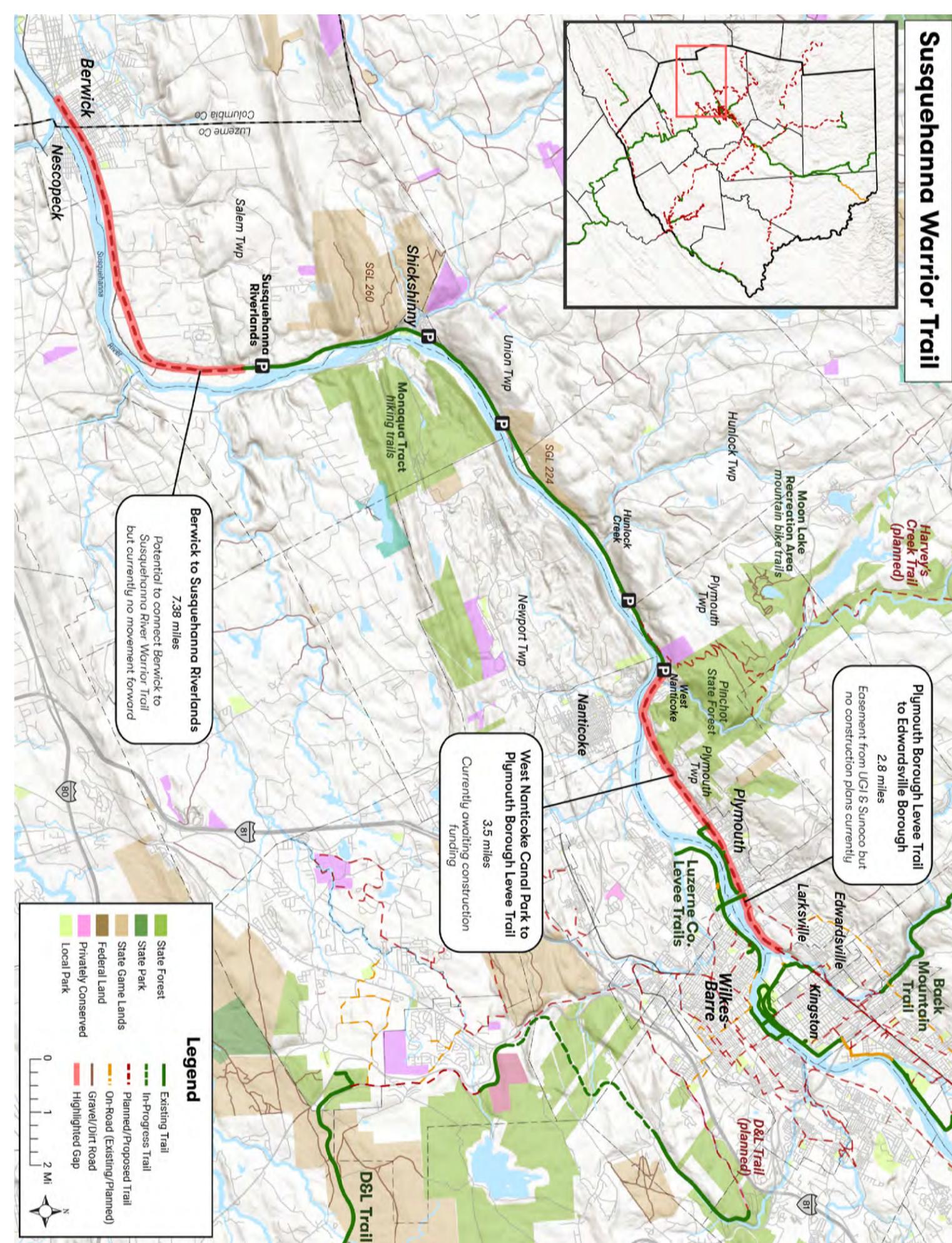
Distance: 3.5 miles

The Susquehanna Warrior Trail Council has submitted a grant for construction funds to complete the remaining 3.5 miles of trail from West Nanticoke Canal Park to the Plymouth Borough Levee Trail. Though the Trail Council holds an easement from UGI and Sunoco into Edwarsville, there are no current plans to extend the trail beyond Plymouth.

Susquehanna Warrior Trail. (Credit: Wikipedia.)



There have been some conversations about linking to the southern end of the Susquehanna Warrior Trail from Berwick, but it has proved to be a complicated endeavor that no one has stepped forward with the capacity to undertake at the moment.

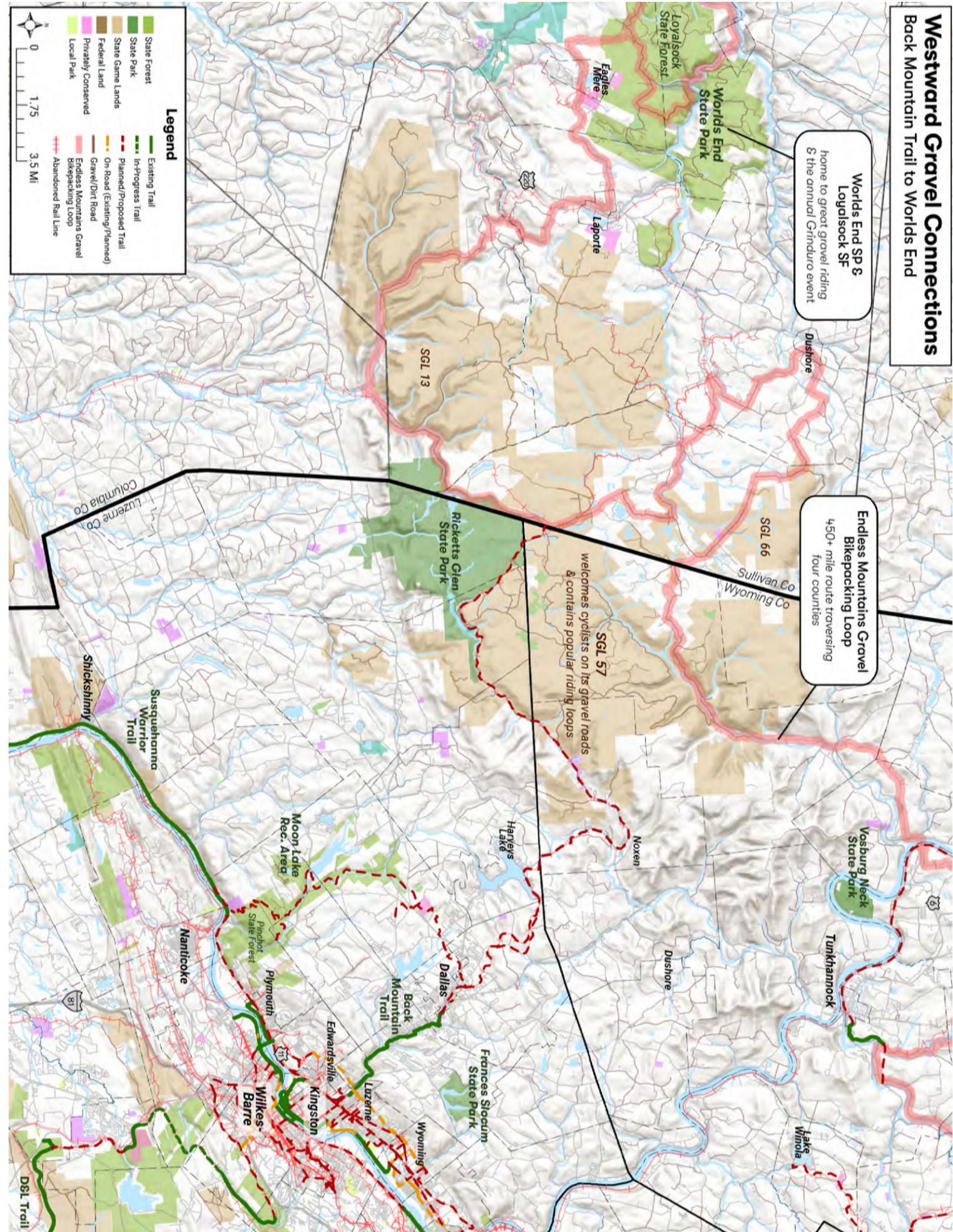


THE BACK MOUNTAIN & WESTWARD CONNECTIONS

The term “Back Mountain” refers to the area’s location behind the mountain ridge forming the northwest side of the Wyoming Valley and is home to the boroughs of Dallas and Harvey’s Lake, as well as Frances Slocum State Park. The existing Back Mountain Trail connects Luzerne in the valley with Dallas up on the ridge, and its proposed extension westward would connect to Ricketts Glen State Park, State Game Lands 57, and gravel road networks.

The planned Harvey’s Creek Trail would connect the Back Mountain Trail and the Susquehanna Warrior Trail via Moon Lake Recreation area, a popular mountain bike trail network. Connecting the Wyoming Valley to the Back Mountain area and beyond has potential to link a major population center with ample public lands and additional outdoor recreation opportunities.

Rickett’s Glen State Park. (Credit: Nicholas Tonelli Photography.)



Back Mountain Trail: Dallas to Rickett's Glen

Distance: 26.6 miles

Prior Plans: Back Mountain Trail Feasibility Study/Master Plan (2014)

The Anthracite Scenic Trails Association (ASTA) has visions of extending the existing 6.65 miles of Back Mountain Trail from Dallas past Harvey's Lake and Noxen, to Ricketts Glen State Park. The 26-mile abandoned Lehigh Valley Railroad right-of-way is the preferred alignment for this trail; however, a 2014 feasibility study identified that some sections wouldn't be feasible due to corridor encroachment by development or private property concerns. These sections would be moved to on-road or other alignments, as identified in the study.

A 2.5-mile section from the existing trail in Dallas to Misericordia University was identified as Phase I, because of its proximity to the existing trail and connections to downtown Dallas. While it passes through congested areas and poses the most issues with regards to heavy traffic, road crossings, and trail safety, it also has the potential to be one of the most-used sections of trail and provide vital community connections. The proposed trail alignment uses both publicly and privately owned properties. High-priorities sections in this phase include the end

of the existing trail past Lower Demunds Road to Geisinger, working with PennDOT on sections of trail in Dallas along the Route 309 right-of-way, and street improvements along Lake Street.

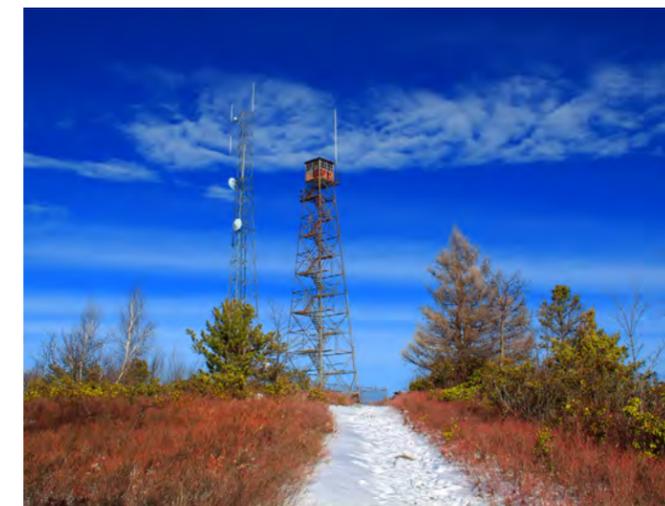
The next identified phase is from Noxen past Mountain Spring Lake to Ricketts Glen, because there is not much resistance for the trail and there is support to connect to the state park. This section mainly follows existing gravel roads and connects into a network of gravel and dirt roads in State Game Lands 57 that are bicycle-friendly and already popular routes. Additional improvements for this section could be fairly minimal, and can help build momentum to connect the sections in the middle that will be more difficult to implement. The feasibility study identified the creation of a Mountain Spring Lake Trailhead as a high-priority item in this phase.

Harvey's Lake to Noxen was identified as Phase 3, with the largest barriers to development being private property and the need for acquisition or easements

to create a viable trail corridor. However, sections of the right-of-way in this section are already being used as informal trails. Highest priorities were identified as the segment from Route 29 to Dimmick Hill Road and Dimmick Hill Road to Noxen, both because of limited alternative options other than using the right-of-way.

Misericordia University to Harvey's Lake was considered to be the last and most difficult phase, as the feasibility study identified most of the railroad right-of-way to be not feasible for development due to private ownership. The plan suggests using public ROWs along roadways for the section, which will be costly to design and construct, and will likely rely on momentum from completing the other sections to garner public support.

Top: State Game Lands 57; Bottom: Rickett's Glen State Park
(Credit: Nicholas Tonelli Photography.)



A section of Phase 1 that was considered the highest priority, from the prior endpoint of the Back Mountain Trail in Dallas to Geisinger and the loop trail around ponds, has been completed. Otherwise, there has not been much movement. There is currently a lack of capacity to move forward with trail construction north of Dallas, and most effort has been centered on extending the Back Mountain Trail southeastward from Luzerne to connect with the Luzerne County Levee Trail (see "**Greater Kingston Area Trail Plan**" on page 107).

CONNECTIVITY

The completion of the Back Mountain Trail all the way from the Luzerne County Levee Trail to Ricketts Glen would provide an extremely valuable connection from the greater Wilkes-Barre/Scranton region and the "spine" of the NEPA trail network westward to the state park and beyond. The trail or route would connect not only to Ricketts Glen State Park, but also into State Game Lands 57, which has a vast network of gravel roads and doubletrack trails that are open to bicycle travel and are already popular with local riders.

The Endless Mountains Gravel Bikepacking Loop Route (see "**Gravel Riding**" on page 53) also passes Ricketts Glen and then travels west through State Game Lands 13 on its way to Loyalsock State Forest and Worlds End State Park. Loyalsock/Worlds End is home to the annual Grinduro gravel event, and is already a well-known gravel cycling destination. The Back Mountain Trail corridor provides a link from these more remote areas in the mountains to the Lackawanna River Valley through areas that are otherwise more dangerous to navigate on a bicycle due to high traffic and narrow roads. The completion of this trail could both draw visitors from the forests into town, and allow access from town into the forests, both increasing tourism potential and amenities for locals alike. (See "**Westward Gravel Connections**" on page 112).

The Back Mountain Trail near Mountain Spring Lake.



Harvey's Creek Trail

Distance: 18.2 miles

Prior Plans: The Harvey's Creek Trail / Greenway Feasibility / Master Plan (2012)

The **Harvey's Creek Trail / Greenway Feasibility / Master Plan (2012)** proposes a multi-use trail connection between the Susquehanna Warrior Trail and the Back Mountain Trail in north-central Luzerne County. Connecting these trails is one of the main goals of this project. Trail alignments following Harvey's Creek and Route 29 were considered before determined to be unviable for trail.

Existing but abandoned forest roads were discovered in the study area and allow the trail to reach the mountain top. Representatives from a major landowner in the study area, Pennsylvania American Water, have shown interest and support in the trail running through their property. Additionally, much of the proposed trail alignment goes through state forest and county park land which alleviates some concern about right-of-way acquisition. The proposed alignment does go through some privately owned farm land, the owners of which are yet to be contacted (2012).

The Harvey's Creek Flume, an earthen and concrete channel that was a historic water system, runs through the study area and the route being used for portions of the proposed trail. The historic structure is on a low grade and is ideal for a trail, as well as education and preservation.

The Harvey's Creek Trail was split into four phases, each with an established destination as the start and end point, allowing for trail phases to be built independently.

SECTION I: SUSQUEHANNA WARRIOR TRAIL TO PIKES CREEK RESERVOIR - 6.6 MILES

This section was deemed most important because it would link the Susquehanna Warrior Trail with Pike's Creek Reservoir, Moon Lake Recreation Area, and Pinchot State Forest. The steep slopes of Larksville

Mountain present a challenge for trail development, but a feasible route was found using a mix of old roads, existing state forest trails, and the Harvey's Creek Flume.

Beginning at the Susquehanna Warrior Trail, the trail would immediately cross Route 11 and follow Poplar St. to the base of Larksville Mountain. At this point, the trail would enter property conserved by North Branch Land Trust, and on a series of old woods roads would begin the climb up the mountain and into Pinchot State Forest. A half mile of new trail featuring switchbacks to allow for a gradual climb is needed to link to a series of existing trails and the Harvey's Creek Flume. The trail would follow the Flume to Pike's Creek Reservoir, linking to existing hiking and biking trails at Moon Lake as well as an existing parking area.

Section I uses 0.72 miles of paved roadway, 3.35 miles of woods roads and dirt/gravel trail, and follows the Flume for 2.54 miles.

SECTION II: PIKES CREEK TO BACK MOUNTAIN RECREATION AREA - 5.6 MILES

Section II connects Pikes Creek Reservoir through Lackawanna State Forest and Pennsylvania American Water land to Back Mountain Creek Recreation Area.

This section begins at the Pikes Creek Reservoir parking area on Route 29, where a bridge may be required over the road as there is not sufficient sight distance and shoulder to travel along Route 29 to cross over the Pikes Creek Reservoir outlet. Once on the other side, the trail would follow a series of Pennsylvania American Water service roads, then reconnect to Harvey's Creek Flume as it continues north through the river valley. The proposed alignment follows the Flume to its source, Rice Dam,

before continuing north along Harvey's Creek. North of Route 118, the alignment enters privately-owned farmland at Meeker Road. The proposed route runs along the outer edge of the fields in order to minimize impact to these properties. The trail then connects into Back Mountain Recreation area with a trailhead and parking.

SECTION III: BACK MOUNTAIN RECREATION AREA TO BACK MOUNTAIN TRAIL - 4.5 MILES

Section III connects Back Mountain Recreation Area through a variety of privately-owned parcels and Luzerne County Fairgrounds to reach Misericordia University and Dallas High School, where it connects to the Back Mountain Trail.

This section uses trails through Back Mountain Recreation Area to reach a gas pipeline right-of-way that could be followed through privately-owned properties. When the trail reaches Route 118, the route will run parallel to the road until it reaches the intersection with Idletown Road, where a preliminary field evaluation found that there is sufficient sight distance to create a safe crossing. The trail will connect to the Luzerne County Fairgrounds, then follow a privately-owned forested hillside and undeveloped road right-of-way towards Misericordia University and the Back Mountain Trail.

This is anticipated to be the most challenging section to complete due to the number of private landowners and potential right-of-way acquisition issues. However, the completion of this section will provide a valuable link for the regional trail system. By connecting the Susquehanna Warrior Trail, Harvey's Creek Trail, and Back Mountain Trail, users will have an opportunity to travel a 35+ mile trail loop.

SECTION IV: LEHMAN CONNECTOR TRAIL (PENN STATE CAMPUS TO BACK MT. REC. AREA) - 1.5 MILES

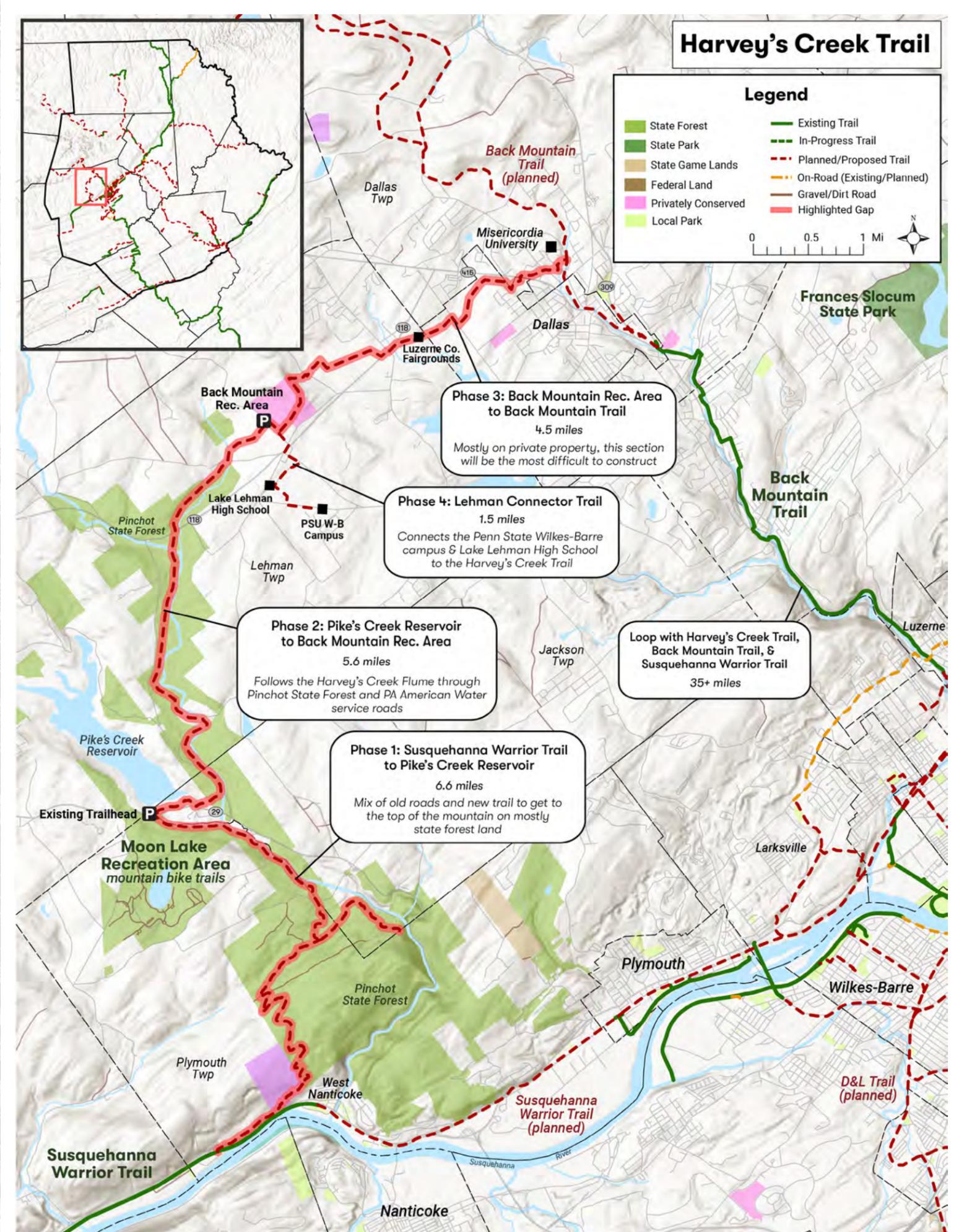
Section IV is a spur trail from Back Mountain Recreation Area through the township of Lehman, connecting the Harvey's Creek Trail to Lake Lehman High School and Penn State Wilkes-Barre Campus via sidewalk and gravel trail.

NEXT STEPS

While the Harvey's Creek Trail would be a valuable link to create a loop through a very interesting area, and it is mostly on public land with paths already in existence, lack of a champion has caused this project to stall for over a decade. Before any progress can be made, someone will need to take on trail development.

Pinchot State Forest in Luzerne County. (Credit: Nicholas Tonelli Photography.)





SOUTHERN NEPA

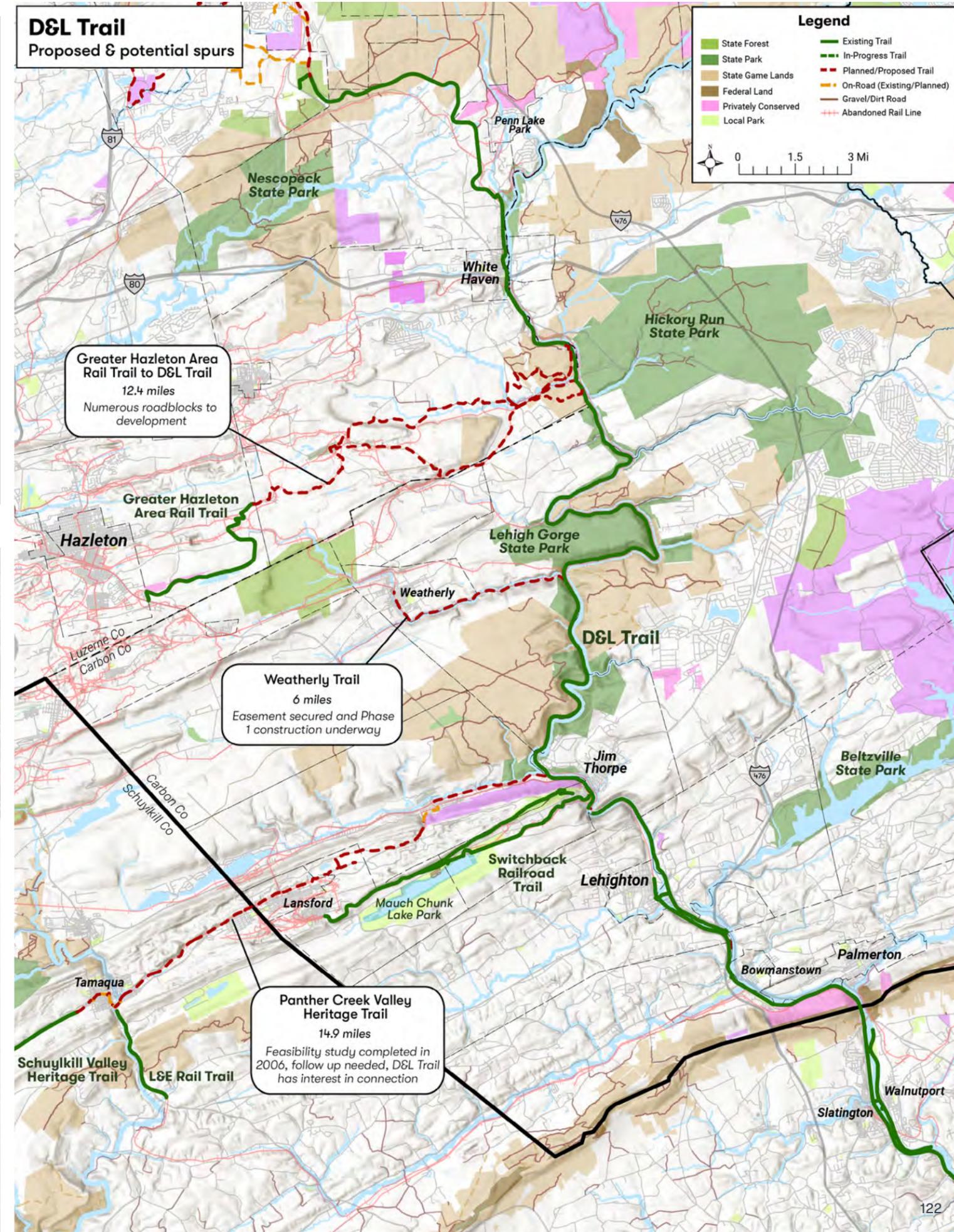
The D&L & its Connections

The southern half of the “spine” of the NEPA trail network is made up of the D&L Trail, most of which is already existing through southern Luzerne and Carbon counties. Many of the final gaps, mainly between Mountain Top and Wilkes-Barre, are currently in progress, with a few of them nearing completion within the next two years.

There are several spurs and connections that are currently in various stages of planning and development. The Greater Hazleton Area Rail Trail hopes to connect to the D&L eventually, but is currently running into a variety of roadblocks. The Borough of Weatherly is working on the first phase of construction for a connection from town to the D&L Trail at Penn Haven Junction. A fairly old (2006) study looked at the possibility of connecting the Schuylkill Valley Heritage Trail in Schuylkill County to the D&L via the Panther Creek Valley Heritage Trail, but further and updated planning is needed.

Four state parks, as well as Mauch Chunk Lake Park, are near the D&L corridor, and offer camping, more trails, and other amenities that are attractive to locals and tourists alike and complement the long-distance trail.

The D&L Trail near Jim Thorpe.



D&L Trail: Black Diamond Trailhead to Wilkes-Barre

Distance: 16.65 miles

Prior Plans: City of Wilkes-Barre Trail/Greenway Feasibility/Master Plan (2010), Bicycle and Pedestrian Study for the Central Business Districts of Scranton and Wilkes-Barre (2020), Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor - Johnson Street to Black Diamond Trail Segment Feasibility Study (2021), Ashley Borough to Laurel Run North Corridor Analysis (2022)

Aside from a few short gaps, the Delaware and Lehigh (D&L) Trail spans an almost-continuous 140+ miles from Bristol in Bucks County, PA to near Mountain Top in Luzerne County along the Delaware and Lehigh Rivers. While managed by the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, the D&L Trail is owned by different organizations throughout its length. The existing Black Diamond Section, from White Haven to Mountain Top, as well as another 8.7 miles of undeveloped trail corridor northward to the Oliver Mills crossing, is owned by the Anthracite Scenic Trails Association.

The Black Diamond Trailhead marks the current northern terminus, though there is another 1-mile section of complete but less improved section of trail to the north, separated by a 3-mile gap.

This 3-mile gap from the Black Diamond Trailhead to Johnson Street was the focus of a 2021 feasibility study that looked at 4 different alignment options. The preferred route is to follow the historic railbed through two different private properties, one being the Glen Summit private community. This alignment requires the least amount of grading and disturbance, would be the cheapest option, is the most direct route, and requires fewer easements than the other potential alignments. The study also looked at three alternative routes in case easements couldn't be negotiated with both parties, but both landowners are open to easements at this time. In 2023, the D&L plans to move forward with acquisition after doing title research.

This new section of trail terminates at Johnson Street, where a completed section of trail travels approximately one mile into the town of Mountain Top. This stretch lacks signage and the trail surface

is not well-maintained, with grass growing in the middle. Some sections appear to be currently used by ATVs. There is a large gravel parking area on Lehigh Street, but it lacks kiosks, signage, or any amenities.

From the Mountain Top Trailhead northward 4.7 miles to Oliver Mills, the corridor is owned by the Anthracite Scenic Trails Association and is open for public travel, though undeveloped. The treadway is sometimes smooth but in other places rutted and still covered in ballast, though still passable, especially with a mountain bike. This section features incredible scenery and views of the Wyoming Valley. Several hundred feet before the Oliver Mills crossing, the trail peters out, and the corridor passes very close to some private residences and becomes grown-in. Construction funding has been secured to improve this section, and currently it is in the engineering and permitting process.

The Oliver Mills crossing requires either utilizing an active railroad right-of-way or building up the trail to meet the above-grade roadway before descending back down on the other side. For this reason, this is the most challenging gap to fill to complete the D&L through Luzerne County. The D&L Trail recently completed a Phase II Corridor Analysis to determine the best route to connect.

On the other side, 3 miles of trail to Seven Tubs Natural Area are finished and improved, complete with signage and bike repair stations. However, there is currently no official access, so it is still considered to be in construction, slated to be finished early in 2023.

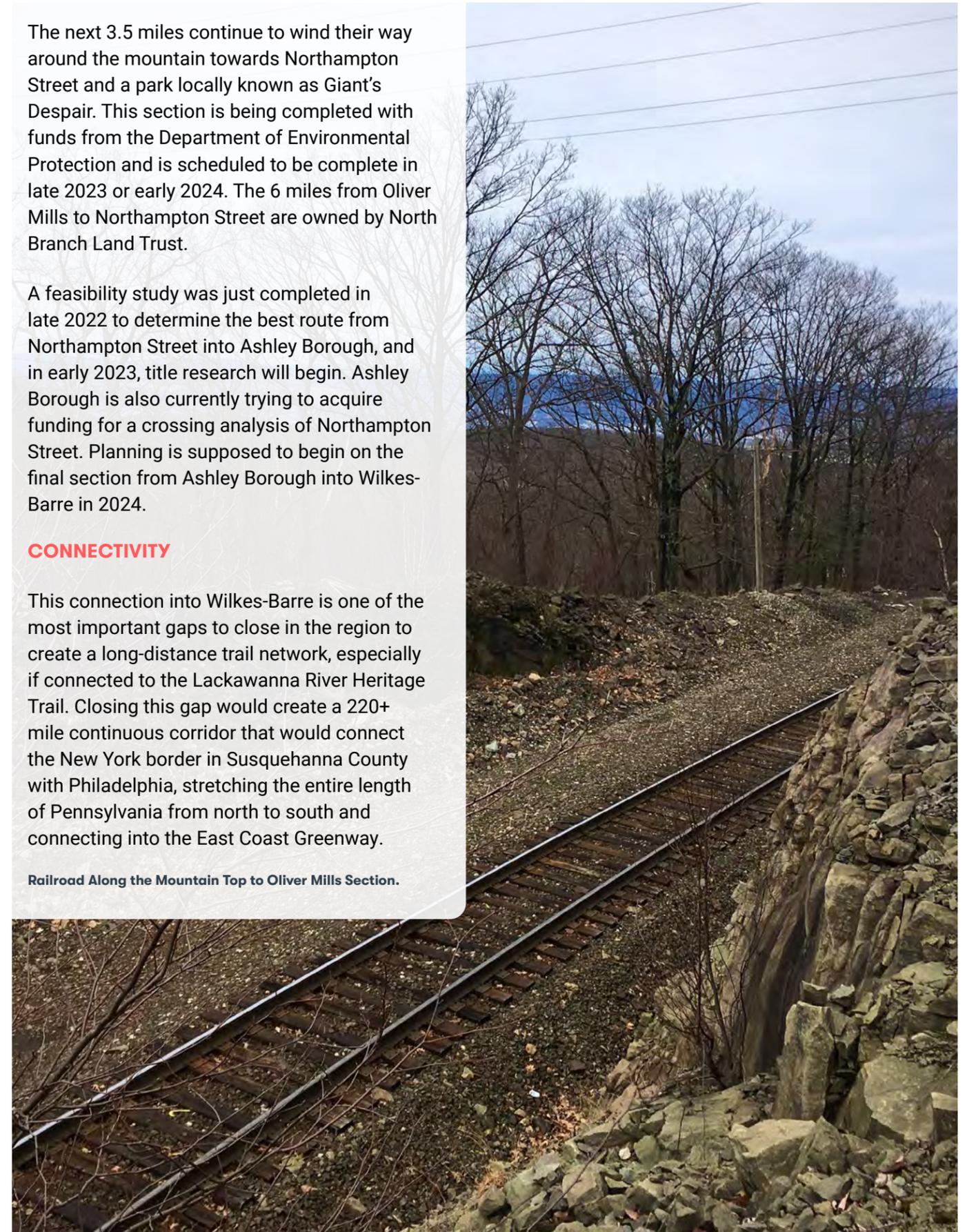
The next 3.5 miles continue to wind their way around the mountain towards Northampton Street and a park locally known as Giant's Despair. This section is being completed with funds from the Department of Environmental Protection and is scheduled to be complete in late 2023 or early 2024. The 6 miles from Oliver Mills to Northampton Street are owned by North Branch Land Trust.

A feasibility study was just completed in late 2022 to determine the best route from Northampton Street into Ashley Borough, and in early 2023, title research will begin. Ashley Borough is also currently trying to acquire funding for a crossing analysis of Northampton Street. Planning is supposed to begin on the final section from Ashley Borough into Wilkes-Barre in 2024.

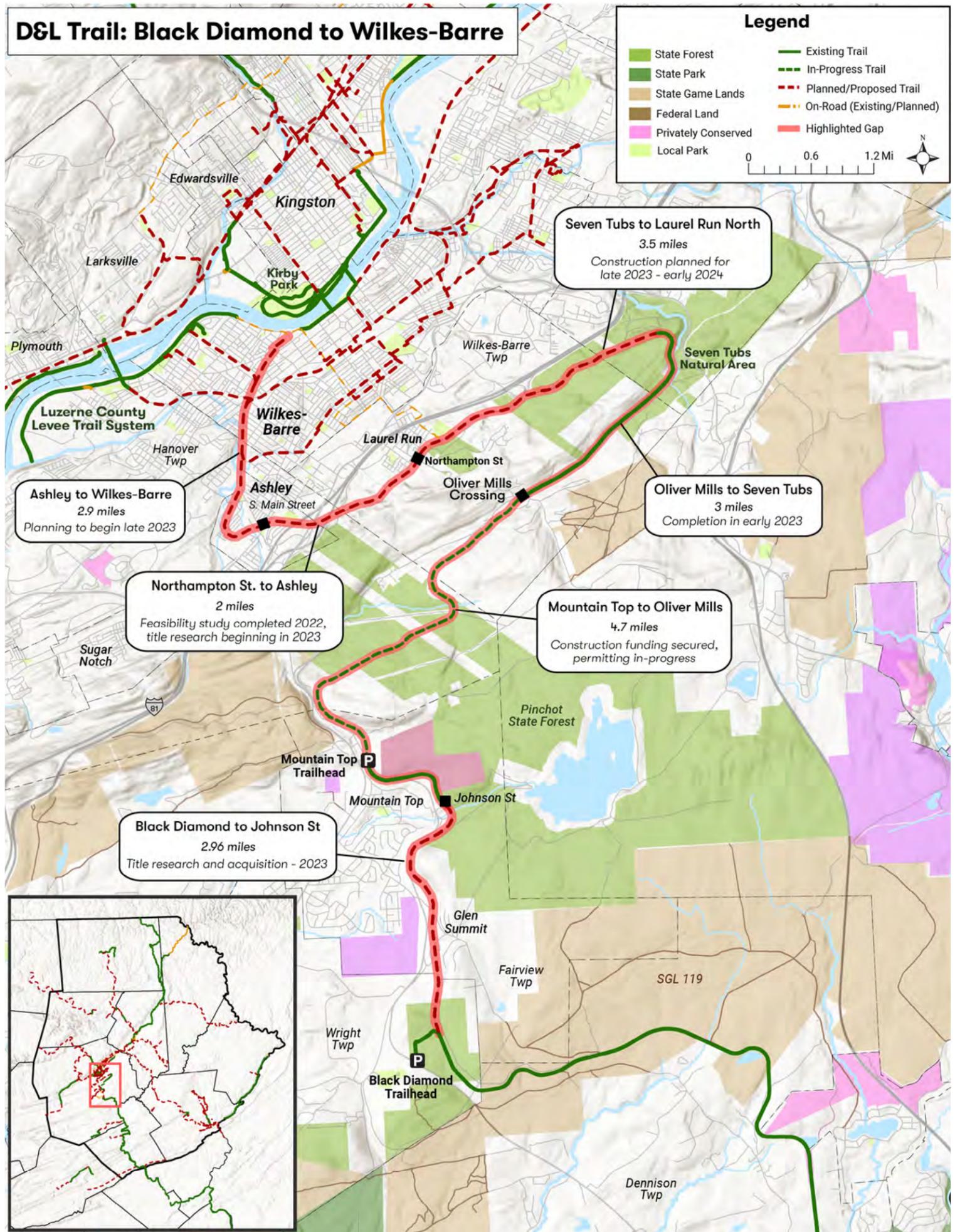
CONNECTIVITY

This connection into Wilkes-Barre is one of the most important gaps to close in the region to create a long-distance trail network, especially if connected to the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail. Closing this gap would create a 220+ mile continuous corridor that would connect the New York border in Susquehanna County with Philadelphia, stretching the entire length of Pennsylvania from north to south and connecting into the East Coast Greenway.

Railroad Along the Mountain Top to Oliver Mills Section.



Riding the D&L Trail near Jim Torpe. Please always wear a helmet!



Greater Hazleton Area Rail Trail to D&L Trail

Distance: 12.4 miles

Currently, the Greater Hazleton Area Rail Trail (GHART) spans approximately 5.6 miles from Route 93 on the southeastern corner of Hazleton to Hazlebrook in Hazle Township. The only trailhead is at the edge of the City of Hazleton, along Route 93 and adjacent to the Butler Preserve, owned by the North Branch Land Trust.

The Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership is in charge of the trail and has recently been focusing on improvements to the existing trail, such as fixing drainage issues, resurfacing, and installing amenities such as benches. They have also been working to try to connect to the Eckley Miners Village, a museum run by the Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission showcasing the area's mining heritage, and eventually to the D&L Trail. However, there have been several recent roadblocks that have stalled progress towards this goal.

The 3.75-mile section from the current terminus in Hazlebrook to Eckley Miners Village is the first priority for completion. The alignment was finalized and the Civic Partnership was able to secure lease agreements with four out of the five landowners needed to extend the trail to Eckley, but the fifth stood in the way of being able to move on to the next step. This resulted in the Civic Partnership unfortunately losing a million dollars worth of funding.

That parcel has since been sold, and will be strip mined in the near future. However, the Civic Partnership has a good relationship with the new owner and it is possible that they will be able to negotiate a lease agreement. However, new funding will need to be obtained.

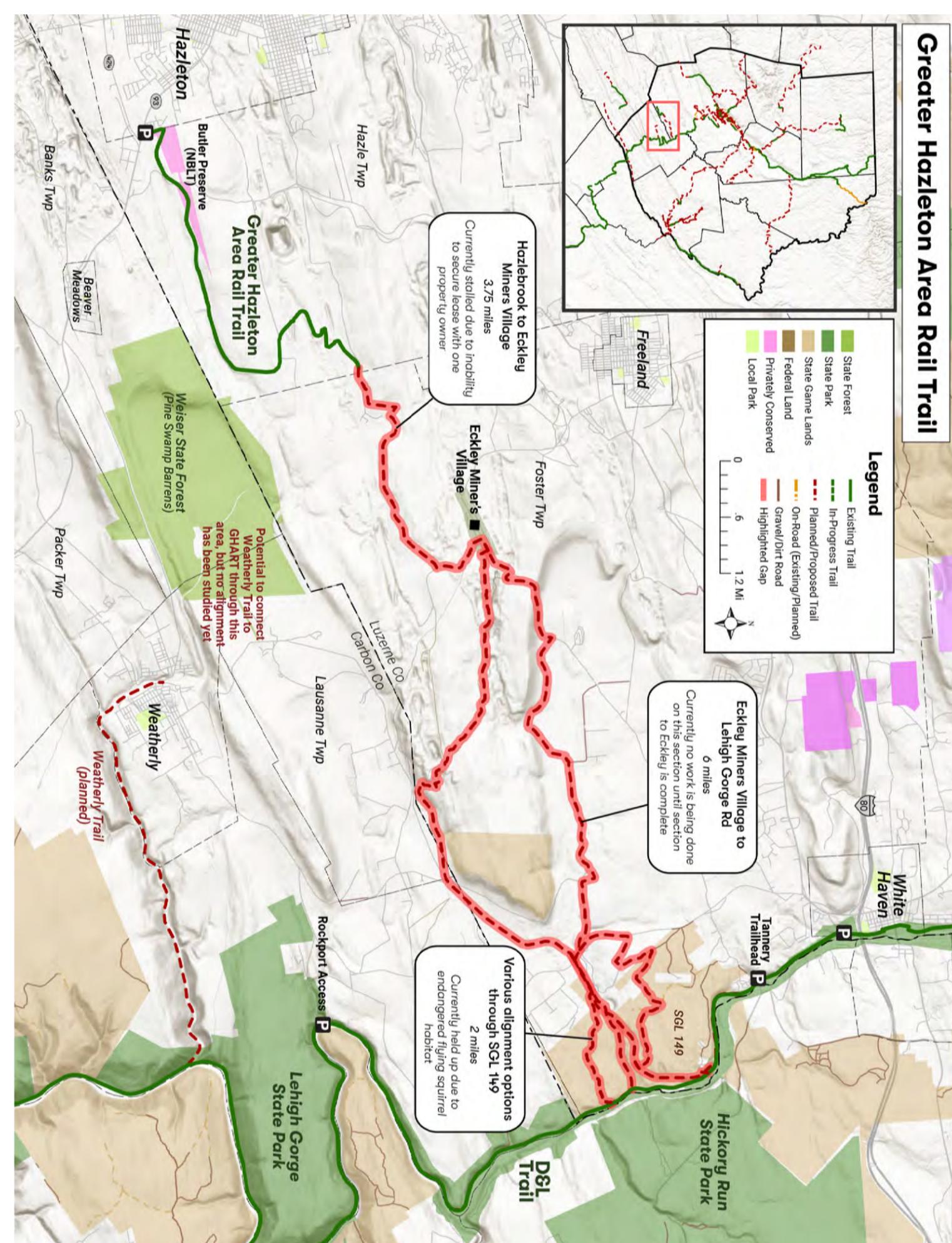
The second main roadblock is between Lehigh Gorge Road and the D&L Trail. This 1.7-mile connection passes through State Game Lands 149 and endangered flying squirrel habitat, so the Game Commission is not allowing trail development.

Alternate routes will need to be explored, but the Civic Partnership doesn't have the capacity to work on issues beyond Eckley Miners Village at this time. Their hope is that once that section is complete, the momentum will help garner support for the trail's continued extension to the D&L.

The Civic Partnership emphasizes that the GHART is a huge asset to the community as-is, and that diverse populations utilize the trail. However, the ability to make the connection to a long-distance trail such as the D&L would only amplify its value.

OTHER POTENTIAL CONNECTIONS

Weatherly Borough approached the Hazleton Area Civic Partnership about looking at a connection between the Greater Hazleton Area Rail Trail (GHART) and the planned Weatherly Trail. PA DCNR lands make up much of the area in between these two trails and there are former rail corridors that connect the two trails, so theoretically there is good potential for construction in the near term. If this connection were completed, as well as the GHART connection to the D&L, this would make an interesting loop off the D&L Trail of approximately 25 miles in length. This loop would connect to the historic Eckley Miners Village, Weatherly Area Museum, and Train Works.



Panther Creek Valley Heritage Trail

Distance: 14.9 miles

Prior Plans: Panther Creek Valley Heritage Trail Feasibility Study (2006)

The Panther Creek Valley Heritage Trail is a proposed connection between the Schuylkill Valley Heritage Trail and the D&L Trail through the Panther Creek Valley. Outlined in the **Panther Creek Valley Heritage Trail Feasibility Study (2006)**, the proposed trail would begin along Route 209 in Tamaqua and span 14.9 miles, utilizing Nesquehoning Creek for part of the primary alignment and terminating at the confluence of Nesquehoning Creek and the Lehigh River near Jim Thorpe. In addition to existing trail connections, the proposed trail offers access to local schools, two historic districts, and the Lehigh River.

The trail begins at the eastern terminus of the Schuylkill Valley Heritage Trail along Route 209 at the Newkirk Trailhead. The Newkirk Tunnel is accessible from the trailhead. Built in 1942 and recently restored to improve water quality, the tunnel provides education on mining history.

The trail continues east to Lehigh Street, which offers a connection to the Tamaqua School District Campus to the south. The trail uses Lehigh Street to cross Route 209 and join the Philadelphia and Reading (P&R) Railroad right-of-way that runs diagonally through the intersection. The railroad bed continues through Tamaqua, becoming Berwick Street and passing the Tamaqua Train Station.

From the Tamaqua Train Station, the trail crosses Route 209 to Railroad Street, then uses Railroad Street to Spruce Street, crossing the active Reading Blue Mountain & Northern Railroad (RBM&N) before turning south and utilizing Sewer Plant Road for 500 feet to connect to the Route 309 Bridge over the Little Schuylkill River.

The Lehigh & New England (L&NE) Rail Trail is accessible just 1000 feet south of the Route 309 Bridge and can be accessed via sidewalk and parking lot.

Immediately south of the Route 309 bridge, the trail crosses Route 309 and heads east along a detention pond embankment towards South Greenwood Street. The proposed trail follows South Greenwood Street to the former L&NE railroad, operated by RBM&N as an active single track. The trail can be 10 feet wide and will be separated from the active rail via an embankment, and is planned to extend to Coaldale.

The railroad crosses Panther Creek northeast of the shopping center. The existing railroad bridge is not wide enough for trail, but abutments from a different bridge remain and may be in suitable condition to be reused. The trail continues east, crossing the Lehigh Coal & Navigation Company access road to enter into Arlington Yard where the right of way widens considerably. The trail continues in the railroad right-of-way until Miner's Memorial Park in Coaldale, a proposed trailhead. Continuing east, the trail is pinched by regulated wetland habitat and must be routed on parallel haul roads north of the railroad. The trail follows the unnamed series of haul roads to the former Lehigh & New England Train Station which is in the early process of being restored.

From the L&NE Trail Station, the trail utilizes Oak Street for a short segment to rejoin Panther Creek and the L&NE railroad, going east before connecting to the Panther Valley School District Campus Trail via a small spur on a haul road. The school district campus offers athletic fields, and the trail provides additional recreation options to residents.

The Panther Creek Valley Heritage Trail continues northeast on haul roads, the majority of which are suitable for a trail. The existing haul road system crosses Route 209 west of Wash Shanty Curve, although this crossing may need modification for bicycle and pedestrian traffic. The rail continues on the east side of Route 209 on Allen Street, a one-way

road that will need counter-flow bicycle lanes. From Allen Street, the proposed trail would take Railroad Street east to Mermon Avenue, going north for five blocks before turning east to parallel the Carbon County Railroad. Ample space for trail exists along the still-active single-track railroad. The proposed trail follows the Carbon County Railroad right-of-way until the terminus of the trail at the Nesquehoning Trestle. Use of the railroad corridor to carry the trail underneath Route 93 is essential to the trail's eastern connection.

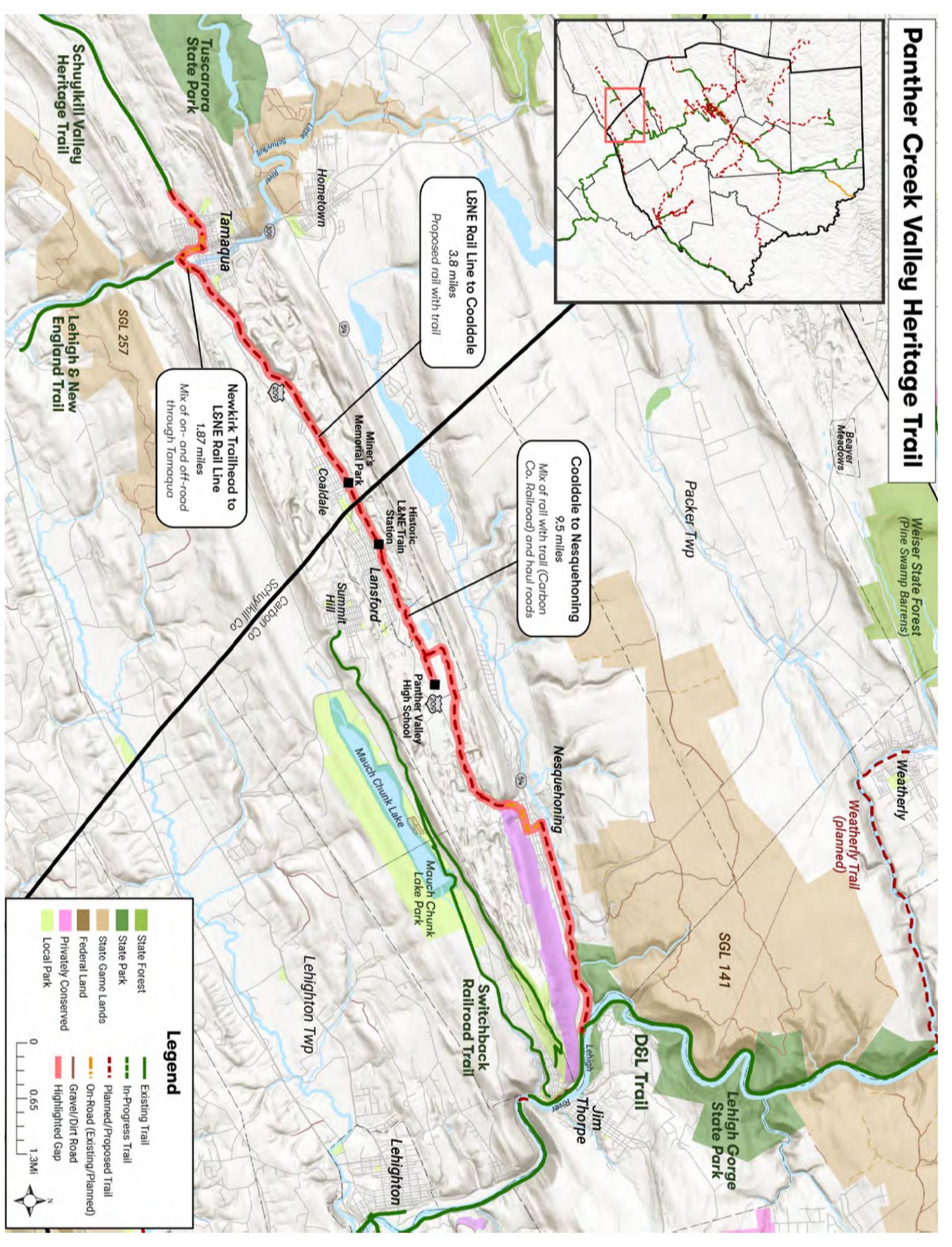
Mauch Chunk Lake, a Potential Connection off the Panther Creek Valley Heritage Trail.



The RBM&N Railroad has plans to construct a new bridge across the Lehigh River, north of the Nesquehoning Trestle. It is recommended that discussions begin about possible ways to include the trail on the new bridge.

Other Potential Connections

A secondary trail alignment has been identified for sections that pose challenges to the primary trail alignment. The secondary alignments run south of Route 209 on mostly unnamed service and haul roads. Portions of the secondary alignments could create trail loops and potentially connect to the Switchback Gravity Railroad Trail in Summit Hill.



Weatherly Trail

Distance: 6.0 miles

Prior Plans: The Weatherly Trail Feasibility Study (2019)

The **Weatherly Trail Feasibility Study (2019)** addresses the potential connection between the D&L Trail and Weatherly Borough in northwestern Carbon County. Weatherly Borough has identified the trail as valuable to their development and has prioritized linking themselves with the D&L Trail. The Borough has procured easements and made agreements with all property owners in the study area as of 2019.

A 'Rail with Trail' option had been considered to connect Weatherly Borough to Penn Haven Junction and the D&L Trail, but is not viable due to Norfolk Southern operating the rail as a Class 1 freight line. This potential alignment would provide an 8-12 foot wide trail with ADA accessibility from Weatherly Borough to the D&L and should be considered were the railway ownership or freight status to change.

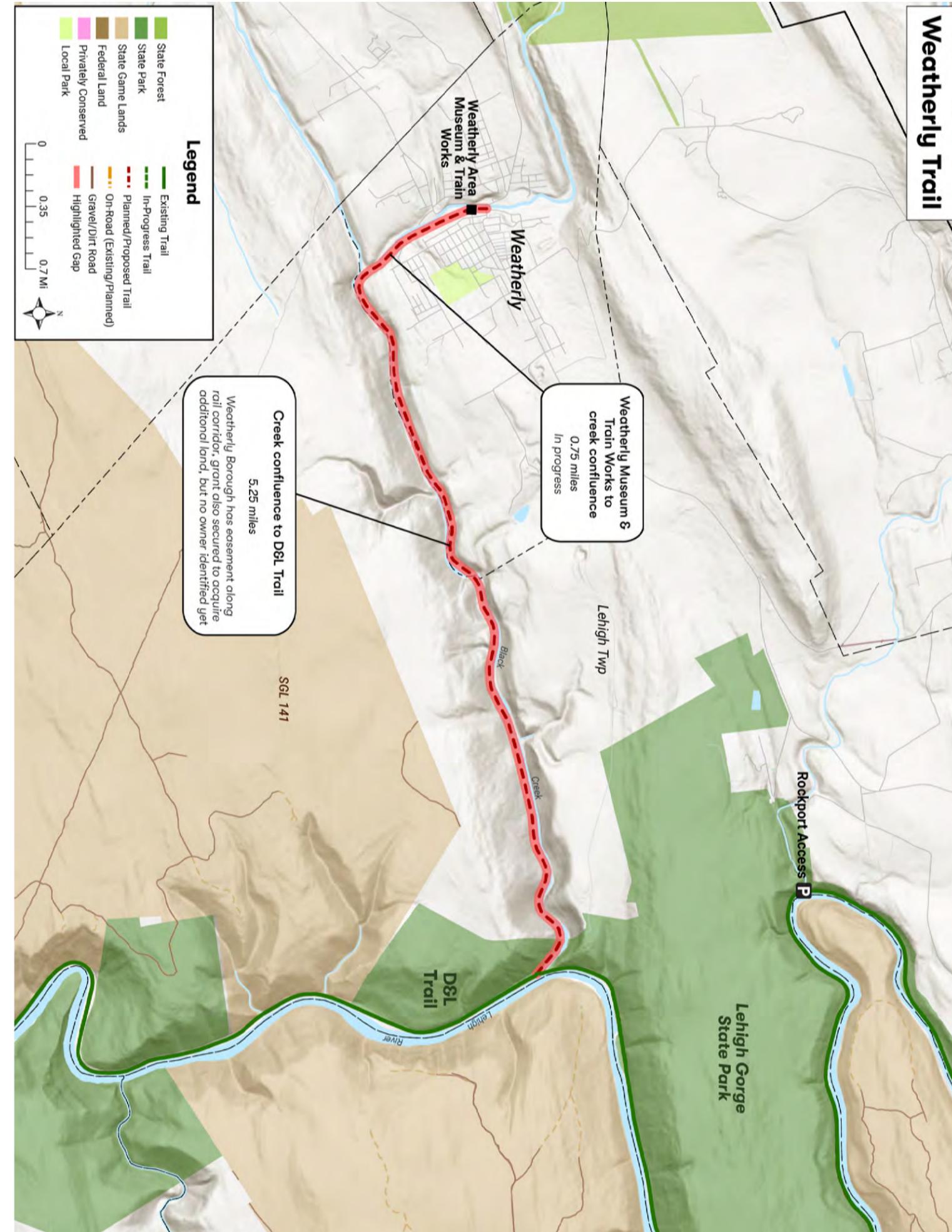
The proposed alignment leaves Weatherly south from the Wilbur Street Trailhead (Train Works Complex) as a multi-use trail for 0.75 miles until the confluence of Hazel Creek, Quakake Creek, and Black Creek, where a pedestrian bridge will be needed to cross the confluence. The remaining 5.25 miles east to Penn Haven Junction are planned to be unpaved hiking trails. The Weatherly Trail Feasibility Study (2019) does not include an alignment for a multi-use trail connection between the creek confluence and Penn Haven Junction.

Weatherly Borough received 1.5 million dollars from the Department of Environmental Protection Office of Surface Mining in 2019 for master planning, design, and construction of the trail. Weatherly Borough is recommended to begin construction with the 0.75 mile multi-use section from Wilbur Street Trailhead (Train Works Complex) to the confluence of Hazel Creek, Quakake Creek, and Black Creeks.

Weatherly Borough has an easement along Black Creek and the rail corridor to the D&L, but will likely need more land for trail development. The Trust for Public Land has acquired a grant to purchase a parcel that runs the length of the trail corridor and will allow for use of more of the hillside if needed, but they are lacking a recipient to take over ownership of the land (as Trust for Public Land does not own property).

OTHER POTENTIAL CONNECTIONS

Weatherly Borough approached the Hazleton Area Civic Partnership about looking at a connection between the Greater Hazleton Area Rail Trail (GHART) and the planned Weatherly Trail. PA DCNR lands make up much of the area in between these two trails and there are former rail corridors that connect the two trails, so theoretically there is good potential for construction in the near term. If this connection were completed, as well as the GHART connection to the D&L, this would make an interesting loop off the D&L Trail of approximately 25 miles in length. This loop would connect to the historic Eckley Miners Village, Weatherly Area Museum, and Train Works.





Chapter 6 Public Engagement

Visioning Session

VISIONING

In order to gain local insight and identify the needs and opportunities for growing cycling in the NEPA region, a visioning event was held in October 2022. Just over 60 stakeholders gathered from various backgrounds including trail groups, municipalities, state agencies, county planners, and Chambers of Commerce to envision the future of NEPA as a cycling destination. The event included a powerpoint about the NEPA Cycling Ecosystem, discussion about challenges and opportunities, and group breakouts to envision this future for the Northeast Region.

The NEPA Cycling Ecosystem

The NEPA Cycling Ecosystem creates an interconnected network of trails, natural resources, and amenities. Like a natural ecosystem, these pieces work together to bring value to visitors and residents of a community.

- Connects/provides various outdoor recreation opportunities
 - » Examples include cycling, hiking, water-

The NEPA Cycling Community on the D&H Trail.



based activities, snow-based activities, camping, adventure sports, and wildlife viewing.

- Provides necessary support services
 - » Examples include bicycle shops, dining, lodging, signage into towns from trails, parking, welcome centers
- Promotes and encourages economic growth and business development
 - » Out of state visitors will gravitate towards attractions within towns including historic sites, wine/beer tasting tours, fairs/festivals, libraries, art museums/exhibits, music/entertainment, and shopping

Discussion - Issues and Challenges

A group discussion was led about issues and challenges facing NEPA's future as a cycling destination. Stakeholders agreed on the following:

- The NEPA region lacks bicycling infrastructure, amenities, and outfitters
- Connectivity
- Promotion to residents is lacking
- Current municipal land development regulations prohibit or discourage trail connections
- While branding is needed to reinforce unity, such an effort should not compete or take away from individual community efforts
- The region's topography can make bicycle routes more challenging.

Discussion - Barriers and Obstacles (actual, potential and perceived)

Stakeholders shared some of the obstacles they routinely face, including:

- On-road traffic and safety
- Funding
- Public perceptions
- Organizational capacity (staff and volunteer)
- Local buy-in from residents and decision makers
- Land ownership/Rights of Way
- Municipal ordinances
- Transit (lack of stops at trails/parks and bus mounted bike racks)
- Equity of accessing to the region's outdoors

- Timeline expectations
- Perceived cost of biking equipment

Discussion - Opportunities and Ideas

Participants shared their ideas about things that are already working within the region, low-hanging opportunities, and creative ideas to overcome the barriers and obstacles. These include:

- NEPA Trails Forum
- The COVID-19 pandemic forced residents to look in their 'regional backyard' and see the local resources and amenities that already exist within arm's reach
- The younger generation needs to get engaged, enjoy the region and extend the effort for the next generation
- Trails equal transportation

Stakeholders Present their Ideas at the Visioning Session.



- There is limited bicycle advocacy
- Safety is a major concern; people are sue (tort) happy; communities and organizations are fearful of making suggestions/implementing ideas that may ultimately may trigger a liability claim
- There are several good state-based implementation/advocacy programs to build from. These include the PennDOT Connects and Safe Routes To School programs
- Make sure trails and connections are safe and welcoming through signage, DE+I, and advocacy in local neighborhoods
- Not just education but visit or tour the facilities and places
- We need to reverse many residents' perception of trails – e.g. they think trails are dens of despair, crime, etc...
- Well-marked trails – lots of signage are what people want
- Trails and their use should be actively promoted through social media, promotion photos of trails with people on them!
- Scranton and Wilkes-Barre downtown walkability study provides a starting point for building awareness and advocacy
- Most people don't connect trail initiatives to health initiatives; this is a missed opportunity
- We are also not very good at pointing out the mental health benefits of getting outdoors – particularly as related to trail use
- E-bike promotion and advocacy

Shared vision – 20 year Timeframe

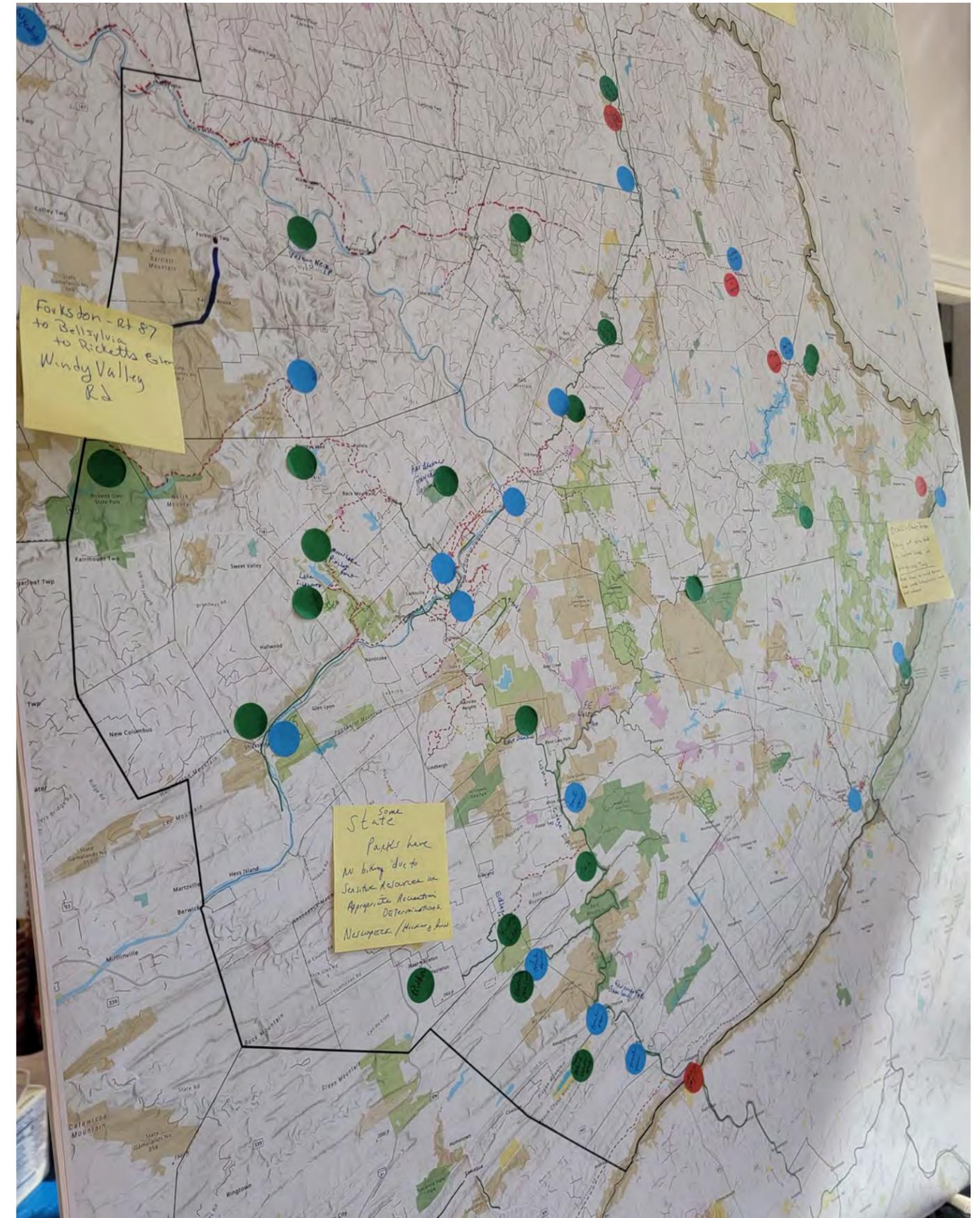
Build a fully integrated cycling system where you don't need to take your life into your own hands to ride.

Next Steps

Priority “next steps” were discussed and agreed upon to include:

- Education of elected officials and local leaders
- Overcome the local perceptions of trails and bikes
- Develop a regional “brand” identity
- Create an elevator pitch/toolkit/resource book for presentation to local and county governments containing statistics, potential funding options/sources, and a story board with uniform narrative.
- Form a support group/team to communicate, advocate and educate the public regarding the issues and opportunities
- Study the impacts of outdoor recreation on the local economy
- Develop a unified cycling event to build awareness and excitement
- Recognize and celebrate national outdoor “holidays” (i.e., bike/trail day, birdwatching day, etc.) and curate tours, events, and social media posts.
- Instill a sense of pride within residents and businesses and develop stewardship initiatives.

Comments on the NEPA Region Map at the Visioning Session.



Stakeholder Interviews

Interviews were conducted with stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to gain a better understanding of the needs of the NEPA region. These individuals were provided the questions in advance to prompt them to answer thoughtfully and honestly.

Summary of stakeholder Interview Responses by Question

1. What value do you see in exploring connections between trail systems in NEPA?

- » Economic Impact
- » Public health
- » Transportation

Most stakeholders named economic impact as one of the most important outcomes of exploring connections between trail systems. They went on to explain how the outdoor recreation industry has already benefited their local businesses and Downtowns or Main Streets. Stakeholders also felt strongly about the public health value, explaining that trails provide recreation opportunities for residents in need of physical and mental wellness. In some counties, trails are anticipated as a means for transportation to work, school, or downtown centers.

2. Outside of Right of Way issues, what do you consider the biggest obstacle to creating a connected network of trails?

- » Public perception - Cost and out of state visitors
- » Visitor readiness
- » Individual identities
- » Traffic/safety
- » Marketing/Visibility

Public perception was recognized as one of the greatest obstacles to creating a connected trail network. Interviews suggested that some residents perceive trail costs and out of state visitation as a negative impact, and their voice is often heard at town hall meetings. Furthermore, stakeholders mentioned that a lack of marketing and public outreach has led to a misunderstanding about trail function and future opportunities. Other obstacles varied by county, including visitor readiness, individual identities compared to a regional brand, visibility, and safety of on-road bikers and pedestrians.

3. What opportunities do you believe might be present to foster the development of a connected trail network?

- » Marketing opportunities - Take advantage of DiscoverNEPA
- » Lots of trails/bike paths

- » Outdoor towns
- » Public health

The opportunities identified by our stakeholders were extremely diverse, illustrating the endless amount of resources already available in the NEPA region. Many mentioned that marketing is already a strong suit, naming DiscoverNEPA as the region's greatest asset moving forward. Stakeholders also recognized that the region is rich in trails and bike paths, with a positive outlook on future connectivity.

4. Does it make sense to create a cohesive identity for the network of trails in the NEPA region that could be used to assist in marketing, fundraising and amenity developments? Why or why not?

- » All the stakeholders answered this question with a resounding yes. Many expressed that

the general public, especially millennials, are more likely to give to a broad organization that benefits a region rather than a specific one.

- » Susquehanna County is seceding from the Endless Mountains Visitors Bureau, so they currently don't recognize the need for a regional identity. This could pose threats in the future.
- » Many mentioned a broad marketing effort for NEPA is good, but being careful to still allow counties/trails to have their own identity so they don't feel unrecognized.

The response from stakeholders was overwhelmingly positive regarding the need for a cohesive identity for a regional trail network in NEPA. Many felt that the NEPA region was already becoming well-known on its own. Stakeholders also expressed that they don't feel like a regional

NEPA Trails Forum Members out for a Hike.



identity would trample any individualized efforts, as there would still be an opportunity for specific trail marketing as more people turn to NEPA for outdoor recreation from all over the country.

5. How might you envision the creation of an alliance of trails in the NEPA region whose goal would be to advance a larger network of trails? Is there an organization you believe would have the capacity to lead this effort? If so, who?

- » Experience in leading coalition type efforts
- » Capacity to take on and prioritize the work in addition to other roles
- » Experience working across organizations within the region
- » Proven success in acquiring and administering grant funding

We heard from our stakeholders that the lead organization is one with proven success and experience in working across organizations, acquiring and administering grants, and leading coalition type efforts. Many identified the NEPA Trails Forum as an already valuable organization that should play a major role in this effort.

6. Who do you think should be included as key stakeholders to help advance trail development, connectivity, and regional identity and promotion?

- » PEC
- » NEPA Trails Forum
- » Visitors Bureaus
- » Heritage Regions
- » Conservation Districts
- » DiscoverNEPA

- » Corporations
- » Chambers of Commerce
- » Municipalities/local decision makers
- » Downtown businesses
- » Bike groups/shops
- » Public

The identification of key stakeholders varied with each interview. Most immediately recognized the Trails Forum as an extremely valuable opportunity to help advance these goals. Others recognized visitors bureaus, heritage regions, conservation districts, corporate entities, municipalities, main street managers, local businesses, and the general public - all with their own unique and relevant reasoning.

NEPA Trails Fopum.



7. Are there opportunities to use on-road connections via gravel and low-volume roads to make connections where multi-use trail development may be prohibitive? If so, are there specific areas where this option should be examined? Some specific locations that were brought up in the interviews are:

- » Tunkhannock, near the Walmart
- » Jenkins Township (Pittston) where the rail trail ends
- » Route 6 (safety issues when natural gas traffic increases)
- » Trolley Trail to downtown Clarks Summit

During this discussion, on-road bike safety came up as a major issue in the NEPA region. Many expressed that limited bike lanes and a lack of aggressive driving enforcement has led to unsafe road conditions that make biking feel like it can only be done by professionals. Additionally, areas that are popular for gravel biking are often threatened by heavy truck traffic when a new natural gas well is installed, causing another hindrance.

8. Do you feel the region is well-prepared from a visitor readiness standpoint? If not, what is missing or can be improved?

- » Bike friendly businesses (i.e., Route 6 program)
- » Stations for charging/repairing bikes
- » Bike-accessible hotels are limited.

Answers to the visitor readiness question varied from county to county. While some counties detailed beautiful, bike-ready Main Streets, they felt that their accessible overnight accommodations were lacking. For instance, there is no safe way to get to Montage Mountain or hotels on Wilkes-Barre Blvd. by bike, and there are no hotels in the more accessible downtowns of Wilkes-Barre or Scranton.

Susquehanna County is not prepared for an influx of visitors, but meetings have been held regarding getting more cabins and short-term rentals in the area. The Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau feels that they are ready, and have not had many issues with increased visitation.

Some stakeholders suggested frustration over a lack of connectivity to towns that run parallel to the trail, with safety issues preventing people from venturing onto the road. It was also expressed that, while many towns might be prepared for visitors, they aren't particularly prepared for bikes, with a regional lack of bike racks and repair stations.

9. Would you support the pursuit of state and federal grants that would be used to advance projects in the NEPA region? How would you envision prioritizing projects for inclusion in an application?

- » Overwhelming yes from everyone
- » First identify lead organization
- » Emphasis on regional identity, branding, improving/increasing presence at NEPA Trails Forum, etc.

All stakeholders that were interviewed in this process supported the pursuit of state and federal grants to advance the projects discussed, with priority being given to the identification of a lead organization for the regional branding effort.

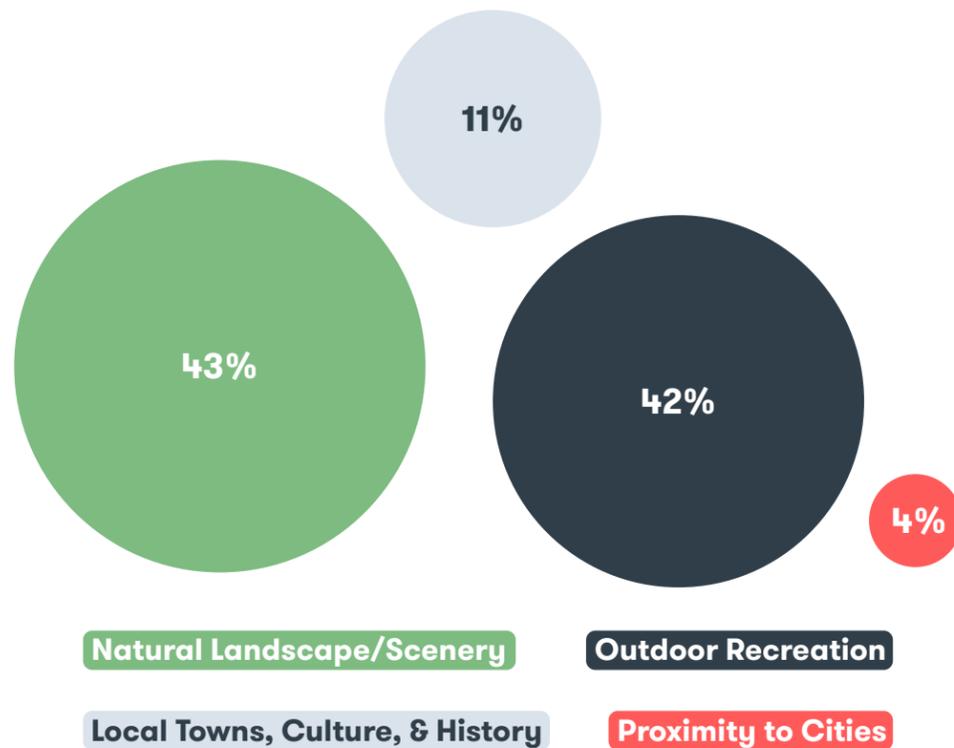
Public Group Ride on the D&L Trail.



Public Survey

QUESTIONS

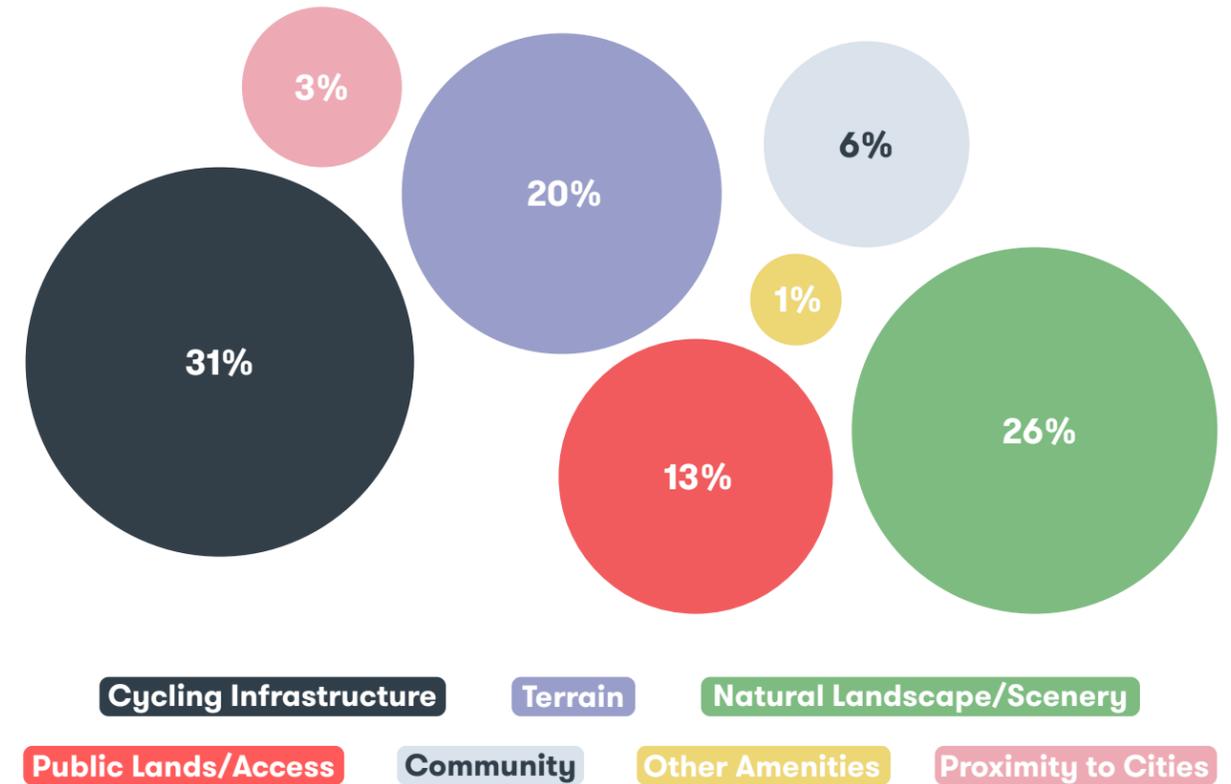
What about the NEPA region do you consider to be a draw for visitors?



The responses overwhelmingly mention the natural landscape, beautiful scenery, mountains, waterways, and outdoor recreation opportunities as the major draws for visitors to the region. Several respondents called out its proximity to major cities such as New York and Philadelphia, among others, as well as the accessibility of recreation opportunities. The diversity and multitude of cycling and other outdoor recreation options was discussed in many of the answers, as well as supporting and complimentary amenities such as restaurants, historic and cultural sites, and small towns.

“There are a surprising amount of outdoor things to do that don’t get promoted enough that are located close together. Combine this with some locally-owned food establishments and you can plan out a pretty solid day or weekend.”

What do you think makes NEPA a great place for outdoor recreation, especially cycling?



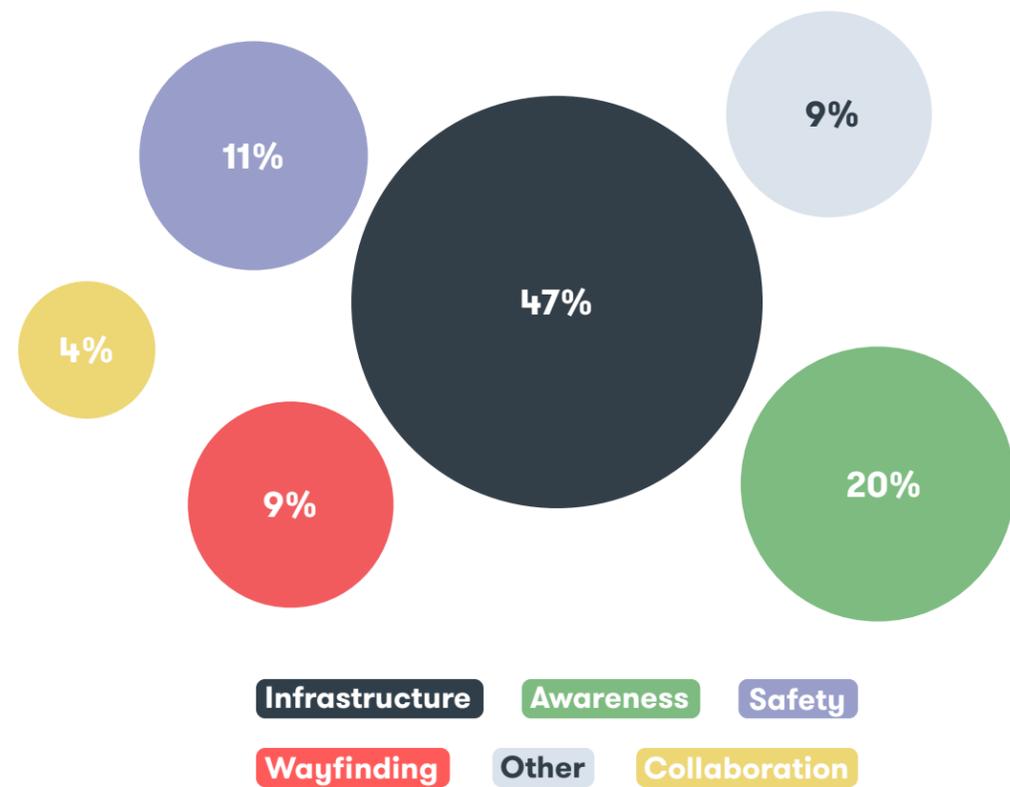
For the purposes of grouping responses into themes, roads and trails were both categorized as “infrastructure.” A number of responses mentioned the gravel and low-volume roads, while others specifically called out certain mountain bike trails and the variety that the region offers as a whole. The terrain tends to be pretty hilly, which many cyclists find attractive, because it adds interest and variety to rides. Responses also mentioned events, proximity of parks and trails to towns and other amenities, and abundant access to public lands.

“The terrain is diverse. Lots of gravel and less traveled roads and incredible trail systems at Lackawanna State Park, Moon Lake, Moosic Mountain, and Countryside Conservancy lands with energetic, hard-working trail crews.”

“Beautiful landscapes and challenging terrain. Large community, especially cycling, to encounter and share experiences.”

“Bang for buck, NE PA has the most scenic trails within driving distance of Philadelphia.”

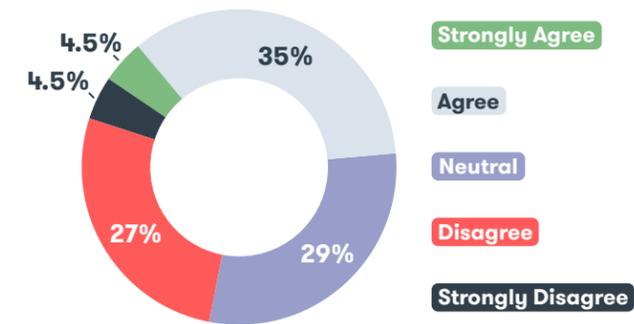
What specific improvements are needed to make the region better for cycling as a whole?



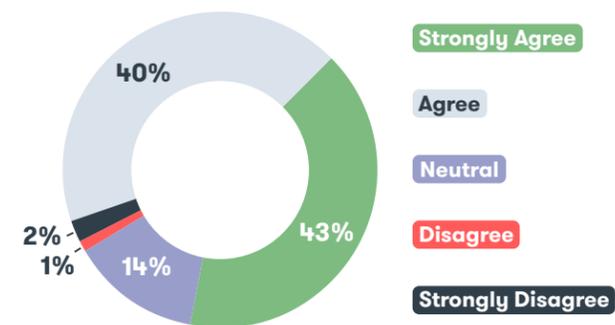
An overwhelming number of the responses mentioned increased awareness from a variety of perspectives, from drivers learning best practices and laws when passing cyclists to getting locals in the region to normalize cycling both as a form of transportation and recreation. On-road improvements and safety measures were also called out, as well as the need for more mountain bike trails and specifically, a destination-worthy mountain bike trail system. More funding, family-friendly events, and better maps and wayfinding resources were also mentioned.

“We have wonderful trails, but the streets and roadways surrounding them are not always safe or bike-friendly, especially for families or novices. We lack bike lanes and share-the-road signage, and I think drivers here simply aren’t used to cyclists. I also think more bike rentals or shops would be beneficial. The Lehigh Gorge does fantastic with their bike rentals-- it would be wonderful to see the same resources on other long trails like the D&H.”

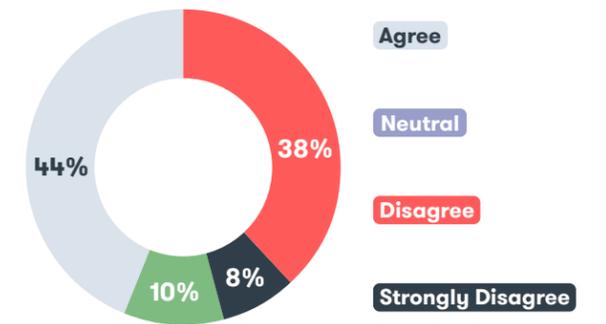
People from outside the 8 county region know where you are referring to when you reference NEPA.



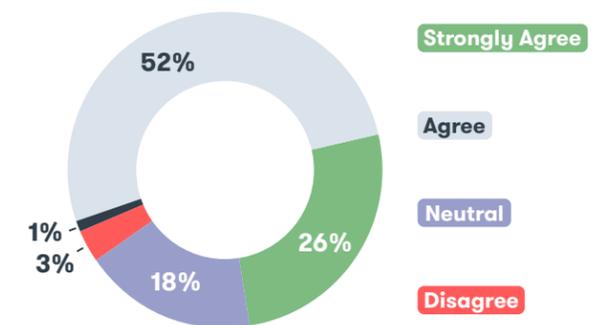
Outdoor recreation is an important part of the economy in the NEPA region.



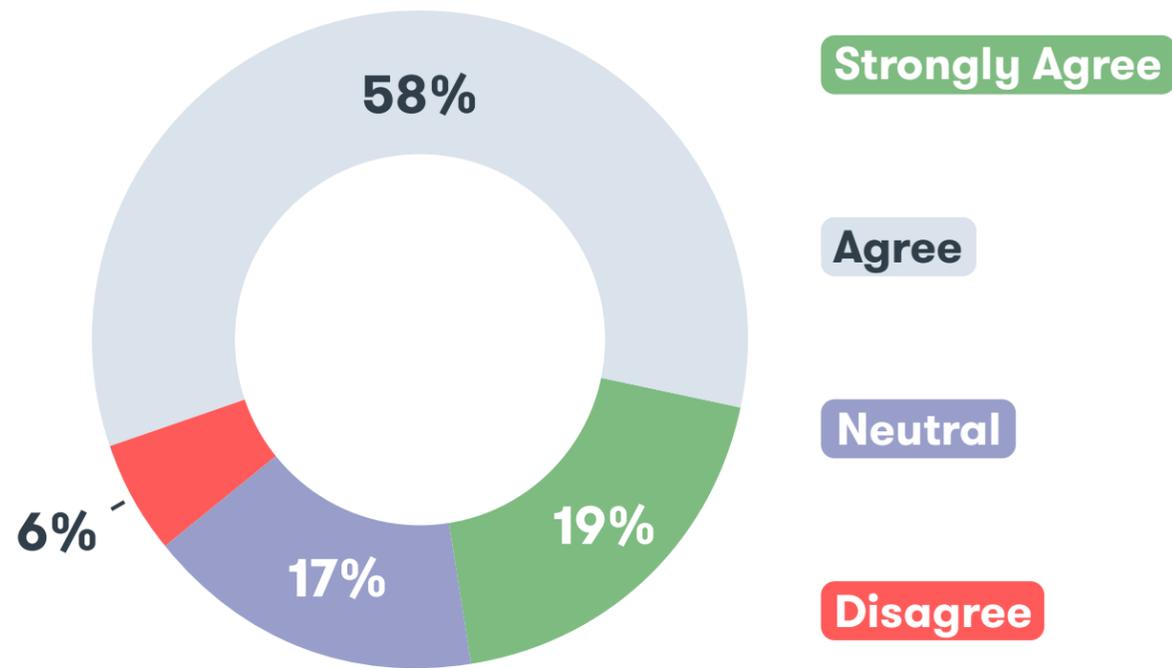
Elected officials at the local and county levels value trails and cycling.



Creating one brand to market the cycling assets in the NEPA region would strengthen regional identity and help promote bicycle tourism.



I feel safe using trails in the NEPA region.



About three quarters of respondents said they feel safe using trails in the NEPA region, and only 5% specifically said they do not feel safe (the rest said “neutral”). Reasons cited for feeling safe included well-maintained trails, lots of people around, lack of any previous issues, and just overall personal comfort level and local knowledge. Reasons for not feeling safe included overcrowding, lack of connectivity and needing to cross or travel along roads, and hunting and other potential user conflicts.

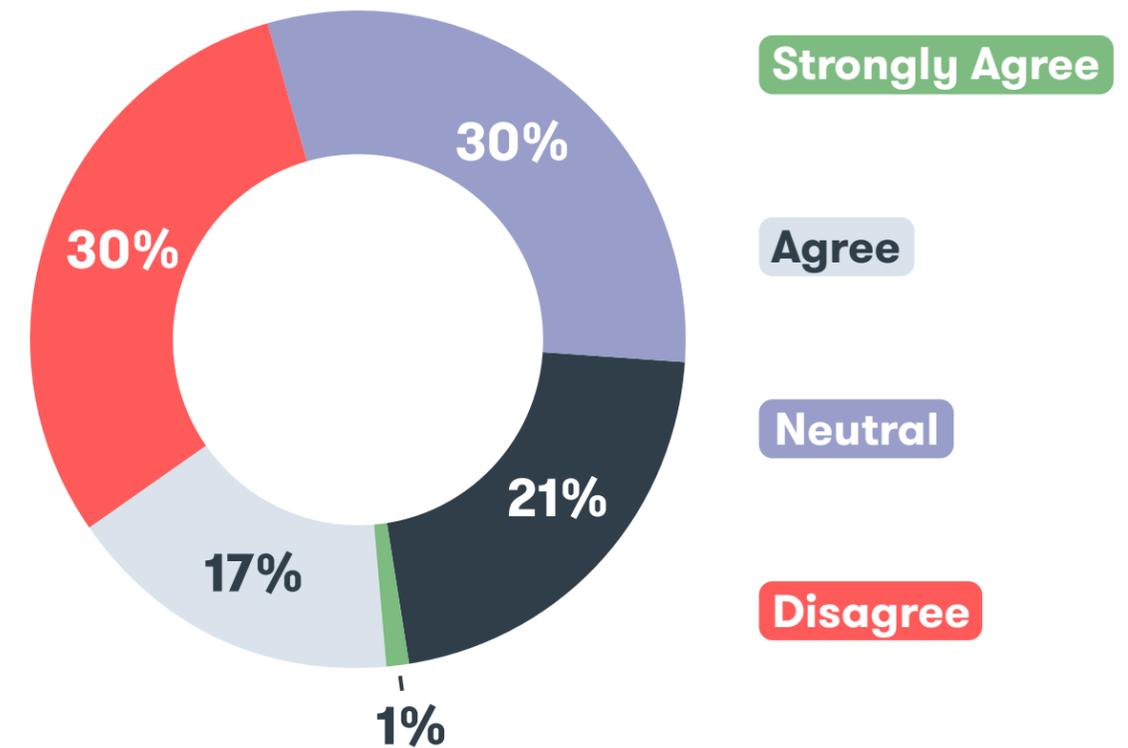
“The trails are great, but there are too few and they’re not connected.”

“Trails are always either alongside roads or cross roads where cars regularly speed and people with children feel unsafe. In NEPA biking feels like it’s for professional bicyclists not families.”

Riding the D&H Trail. (Credit: Discover NEPA.)



I feel safe cycling on roads in the NEPA region.



Only 16% of respondents reported feeling safe cycling on roads in the NEPA region, and all the reasons mentioned touched more upon individual responsibility and comfort rather than the overall conditions of the region. Aggressive, distracted, and uninformed drivers were the top reasons for feeling unsafe, along with the winding nature of the roads and lack of shoulder or any on-road infrastructure such as signage, sharrows, or bike lanes.

“Roads have narrow shoulders and surfaces are sketchy with debris and potholes. The worst part is the drivers. I have been buzzed and yelled at more times than I can remember. Someone even threw a bottle at me last year. There seems to be a mentality that cyclists do not belong on the roads and it breeds resentment in the people here.”

“Most roads have very little shoulder and have a speed limit of > 35 mph, often > 45 mph. Because there are not that many roads, even very rural roads see relatively high usage and high speeds. Locals don’t anticipate cyclists on the roads and lots of tourists from NY and NJ driving like crazy people to get to their destination.”

Additional comments about cycling or bicycle tourism in the NEPA region.

“There is lots of potential to transform the area. Many towns already have greenways that just need to be connected and offer opportunities for both casual riders AND hardcore bikers. There’s great bike culture among those that do ride.”

“We have natural resources at our disposal, ready to be explored.”

“There is so much wonderful potential in NEPA! It would be great to see that marketed toward the world and to our own population. Maybe it would entice people to take better care of our home.”

A Happy Turtle in Eales Preserve.





Chapter 7

Recommendations

Recommendations

This project was born out of the desire of local trail stakeholders to explore the potential for connectivity and the potential to create a unified network of trails. It quickly grew to include not just the physical connections between multi-use trails, but also the potential to connect cycling infrastructure as a cohesive set of interrelated assets housed in the footprint of the NEPA region. In addition, the associated components required to build a branded cycling ecosystem for residents and visitors alike have been incorporated into the report.

An undertaking of this scope is not without its challenges, but it is clear through past achievements, what's been learned through outreach and the strong capabilities of the multitude of stakeholders engaged, it's one that is ready to be tackled. The following set of recommendations are two-fold, addressing physical connectivity as well as broader actions to enhance cycling based activation in NEPA for its residents and the visitors who come to enjoy the region.

COORDINATION

Identify lead organization with capacity and resources to implement recommendations from this report

Prior to this project, discussions related to aligning and branding the region's cycling assets have taken place, particularly as part of the convening of the NEPA Trails Forum. While collaboration has been a key facet of success to date, the call for a coordinating entity to take the lead was heard loud and clear during visioning and public outreach. The entity wouldn't be one of authority, but rather serving as the lead to drive the work forward through coordination, convening, collaboration and communication.

Guiding Principles - guiding set of conditions that should be applied to all work

- **DEI - all efforts should address Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to ensure fairness and that all feel welcome and included**
- **Geographic Flexibility - NEPA boundaries are interpreted differently by regional organizations such as Discover NEPA and the NEPA Alliance. Welcoming projects, stakeholders and partnerships that extend beyond the 8 county footprint should be considered when it adds value**
- **Stewardship - build a network of caretakers for the work put forth; help to create new leaders, foster volunteerism, and facilitate local buy-in**
- **Sustainability - any effort should consider how work can be maintained over the long term**
- **Apply a Local Lens – consider how projects impact residents**

An undertaking of this nature will require an organization that has demonstrated leadership and coordination abilities, including:

- Experience in leading coalition type efforts
- Capacity to take on and prioritize the work conducted in addition to its other projects and priorities
- Experience working across a spectrum of agencies and organizations, both recreation and non-recreation focused, in the NEPA region
- Proven success in acquiring and administering grant funding
- Relationships with elected officials, and state/federal agencies

A recommendation won't be made as to potential organizations to fill the leadership role. It would make sense for this to be taken up by the NEPA Trail Forum, whose stakeholders have been collectively engaged since 2014, to propose and decide on which party best fills the role to champion the project and sustain it for the long-term. Keep in mind, selecting a lead is just a step in the process. Future work might require:

- Determining a structure for decision making
- Formalizing a stakeholder group to guide the lead agency (i.e ad hoc regional alliance v. standing committee within an existing group v. task force)
- Establishing a stand alone organization to support and manage the work as it evolves

Conduct an economic impact study

Commissioning an economic impact study designed to gauge the current and potential impact of cycling to the region from direct, indirect and induced spending should be an early priority. While individual

trails have undertaken such work, and it's important to incorporate existing data, developing a cohesive set of data around the entire region's cycling assets paints a detailed picture of how a regional approach can amplify the impacts of the individual assets within. Establishing the current impact and future potential around cycling in the NEPA region will be a key tool to:

- Present to elected officials to garner support for initiatives launched from this effort; this was specifically called out during outreach
- Engage economic development officials to envision how the outdoor economy can be a facet in economic diversification
- Build the stakeholder base
- Educate the public on the broader impact of cycling
- Show funders the value of investing in the project and the NEPA region
- Create a baseline for measuring success moving forward
- Attract new businesses and foster established business expansion
- Promote investment in continued trail development and sustainable management of existing trail infrastructure

Studies of this nature are common practice for trails and other forms of outdoor recreation (see "**Economic Impacts of the Great Allegheny Passage**" on page 159). They set the table for future documentation and can help to establish baseline data for trail visitation and visitor spending. By establishing protocols and consistent methodology now, future tracking across trails in the NEPA region will be an easier task. The cost for a study could range from \$50,000-\$125,000 or more.

Developing a Regional Cycling Brand & Network Identity

While the NEPA name serves as a recognized regional identity, a cycling-centric form of branding would help the region develop a reputation as a destination known for trails, amenities and a thriving cycling culture. This has been discussed by the NEPA Trail Forum as well as the Pocono Forests and Waters Conservation Landscape, and was heard through stakeholder engagement and surveys during outreach. The opportunity is two-pronged:

1. Creating an identity for the trail network (generically, "NEPA Trails")
2. Creating a slogan/brand for marketing the region as a cycling destination (generically, "Bike NEPA")

Establishing these would be a key component to both rural and urban activation throughout the eight counties. It's important to consider how existing trail identities are incorporated into a brand, or, vice-versa, how a regional brand can be incorporated into existing identities. An aspirational goal would be for the NEPA moniker to become synonymous with cycling much in the same way Moab, UT or Asheville, NC invoke visions of biking and outdoor recreation.

Economic Impacts of the Great Allegheny Passage. (Credit: Great Allegheny Passage, Fourth Economy.)



One example to look to for inspiration is the Northwest Arkansas (NWA) region and its Oz Trails network. While the footprint is smaller than NEPA, it has many physiographic similarities. It's located in the Ozark Mountains with a collection of lakes and easy access to a wealth of public lands. There is a robust network of cycling infrastructure throughout the region including greenways, MTB trails, bike parks, gravel riding, road routes and multi-use paths. The collection of trails, over 500 miles worth, has been showcased as a regional asset, with individual trail systems maintaining their identities. The Razorback Greenway serves as a spine connecting the cities of Bentonville and Fayetteville and the communities in between. Paved shared use pathways along with bike lanes branch off of the Greenway providing even greater connectivity. Direct marketing organizations have championed promoting NWA as a premiere cycling destination. The shining star of the region is the city of Bentonville, which serves as a primary hub and is also the birthplace of Walmart and home to its world headquarters. The Walton Family Foundation has made significant investments in trail development and establishing art, food, music and cycling culture in the town and region. The NWA area has rapidly established itself as a must-visit cycling destination and stakeholders continue to develop more trails, add amenities and grow the reputation. A 2017 study estimated bicycling brought \$137 million in economic benefits to NWA. This recipe for success has ingredients not readily available to all but the lesson to be learned is how residents, stakeholders and the business community can come together to improve quality of life and foster economic diversification and activation through outdoor recreation.

The process to develop a unified trail network identity and regional cycling brand complementary to each other and the existing NEPA mark would need to be laid out as part of a series of next steps. Stakeholders should consider engaging a consultant to hash out particulars but some considerations in the interim:

- Development of a logo(s) which could function as a standalone mark or be integrated into existing trail signage, allowing the individual trails to maintain their identity while showing inclusion as a piece of a larger network
- Conducting an audit of existing regional branding efforts—there may not be a need to reinvent the wheel; integration into a known commodity should be discussed
- Incorporating the natural and cultural heritage of NEPA
- Consider how a brand and accompanying logo resonates with residents and helps to create a regional cycling culture, promotes local pride and facilitates buy-in
- Looking outside the region to sample how others have successfully created an identity around outdoor recreation

Regional Trail & Outdoor Recreation Branding Examples - Leafline Trails Coalition, Seattle, WA; Oz Trails, Bentonville, AR. (Credit: Leafline Trails Coalition, Bike Bentonville.)



PHYSICAL CONNECTIVITY & ASSETS

Work to fill critical gaps in "the spine" of the NEPA multi-use trail system

The natural "spine" or main artery of the potential interconnected multi-use trail system in NEPA is the existing D&H Trail, Lackawanna River Heritage Trail (LRHT), connections through the Wyoming Valley on the Luzerne County National Recreation Trail and Levee Trail system, and the D&L Trail. When gaps in all these trails are filled, it will result in a continuous corridor from the New York border in Susquehanna County to Philadelphia, as well as a connection into the East Coast Greenway, a 3,000-mile route stretching from Maine to Florida.

The two main gaps are the LRHT "Lower 6" and the D&L Trail from Mountain Top to Wilkes-Barre, both of which are detailed in the "Planned Trails & Trail Gaps" on page 69. The D&L Trail is actively working on the connection to Wilkes-Barre, with several segments currently in progress and others in the feasibility study and design phase. While there is ample capacity and strong drive to move these projects forward, it is crucial that momentum is retained to finish this connection even if roadblocks arise.

The D&L Trail near Jim Thorpe. (Credit: Discover NEPA.)



The Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority and City of Pittston are actively working on closing a portion of the “Lower 6” gap from Duryea Swamps to the Luzerne County National Recreation Trail. Capacity-willing, work should also begin on moving the northern portion of the gap forward, through the Boroughs of Moosic and Old Forge. Next steps could include:

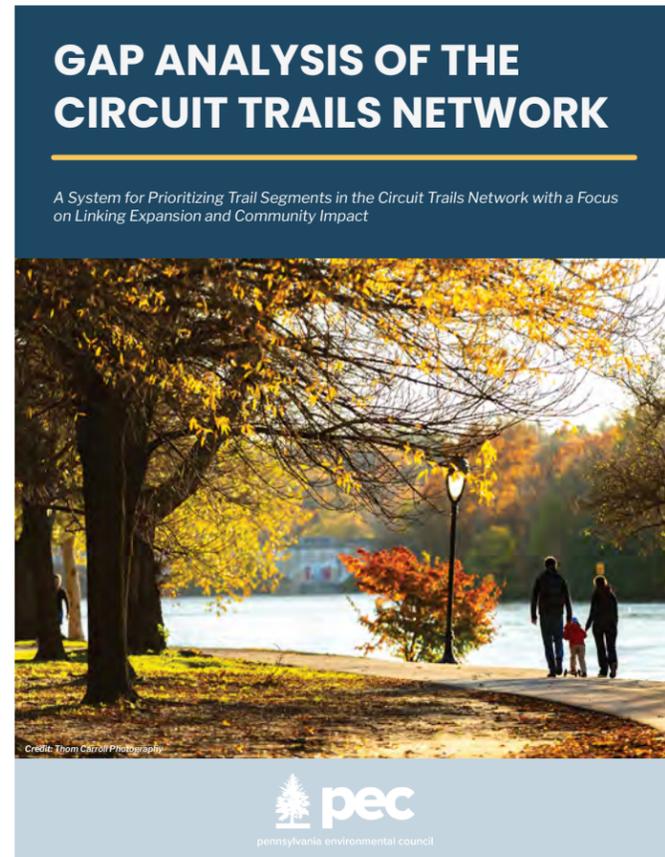
- Approaching landowners along the corridor from Keyser Creek to Moosic to begin discussions about easements
- Begin conversations with PennDOT and the Boroughs of Moosic, Old Forge, and Lawrenceville about on-road improvements
- Further examine the potential to connect from Keyser Creek to the eastern bank of the Lackawanna River

Employ a prioritization process to determine which planned trails and gaps should be the focus of resources

While the connectivity assessment presented in this report sheds light on potential connections and the current status of the planned trails and gaps in the system, prioritization has not been a consideration. This is the role of the overall lead organization and group of stakeholders, after a prioritization process has been employed to help with decision-making. A data-driven gap analysis can provide the basis for rallying around specific projects with funding and support, rather than each entity only working separately on their disparate trails.

Gaps should be prioritized based on connectivity both to other trails and other amenities such as state parks, outdoor towns, mountain bike trail systems, and other attractions. DEI principles should also be applied to ensure that historically underserved populations have access to trails.

PEC’s Circuit Trails Gap Analysis Report - view and/or download at www.pecpa.org.



An example from a neighboring region is the Circuit Trails Gap Analysis, which was first implemented in 2022 and ranked over 250 individual unbuilt segments in the Circuit Trails region by 8 different factors. Other trail networks across the country, such as the Leafline Trails in the greater Seattle area, are undertaking similar analyses. The factors and methodology can be tweaked to serve the purposes of the NEPA region, and should be decided on by a group of varied stakeholders to ensure that all perspectives and interests are being incorporated.

If a gap or trail that is identified as high-priority doesn’t have a champion to move it forward, an organization with the capacity to do so may consider taking on the trail project. For example, the D&H Gravity Railroad Trail from Carbondale to Honesdale may be identified as high-priority if the Wayne County Trail continues moving forward, as it would provide a connection to the network spine, but there is currently no one working on that trail corridor. If

a champion is to take on an “orphan” trail, it would behoove the group to make sure it is an entity with the capacity to not only push for trail development but also keep up with operations and maintenance once the trail is complete.

Create and promote gravel route connections where appropriate

Specifically in the northern half of the NEPA region, gravel roads are numerous. With the increase in popularity of gravel riding, these low-volume roads pose a viable solution for connecting trails and filling gaps in the region, as well as standing on their own in the form of mapped gravel routes (see “Gravel Riding” on page 53 for more info).

Gravel road connections between the Endless Mountains Trail, D&H Trail, and O&W Trail were specifically mentioned as a desire in the stakeholder

PEC’s Gravel Report - view and/or download at www.pecpa.org.



interviews. This area of Susquehanna and northern Wayne counties is indeed ripe with potential for low-volume road connections, especially with its paucity of multi-use trails and fewer large swaths of public lands than other parts of NEPA.

While potential routes and connections can be mapped with computer software, they should be vetted and ground-truthed before publicizing them to ensure that the real-life conditions match those on the maps (for example, confirming that all roadways utilized are open to public travel). Routes can be published digitally on platforms like RideWithGPS, and even potentially signed. Communication with road owners (municipalities or state agencies such as DCNR or the Game Commission) is a good practice to stay informed of construction projects or other road closures, so that those disruptions can be conveyed to the public users.

Some entities, such as the Endless Mountains Heritage Area, are already creating and promoting gravel routes in the region. They can be looked to as an example to follow when creating additional routes.

Work to implement on-road improvements where needed to provide connectivity and safer cycling

Most of the planned trails have some sections that will need to be on-road due to physical or property ownership constraints. Most of the proposed on-road sections will require some improvements to be considered reasonably safe for cyclists. General on-road improvements include widened shoulders and bike lanes, share the road signage and sharrows, and trail wayfinding signage.

A couple of examples where on-road improvements should be examined include but are not limited to:

- Route 6, which is BicyclePA Route Y in many locations in the region. Bicycle Level of Comfort and National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) design guides should be considered when examining on-road routes and connections. Route 6 should be a priority for widened shoulders, signage, and other safety improvements.
- Part of the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail “Lower 6” is on-road in Moosic and Pittston. As this is a critical gap to fill, on-road improvements should be prioritized in these municipalities in order to close the gap and create a safe corridor for cycling within the heavily-populated Wyoming Valley.

Stakeholders should continue to work with PennDOT, city and county planners, and municipal officials to identify improvements and add them to Transportation Improvement Plans. The Anthracite Bicycle Coalition already works to advocate for safer cycling in the region, and should be a key partner in these efforts.

The Trails at Jake’s Rocks - view at www.pawilds.com.

The screenshot shows a website for 'The Trails at Jakes Rocks' on the Pennsylvania WILDS platform. The header includes navigation links: 'Explore Landscapes', 'Take a Journey', 'Find Activities', 'Attend an Event', and 'Made in the PA Wilds'. The main content area features a large image of a mountain biker with the title 'The Trails at Jakes Rocks' and a 'VISIT WEBSITE' button. Below this is a section titled 'MOUNTAIN BIKING PA WILDS STYLE' with a map of Pennsylvania and a 'SEE MAP' button. A small text box at the bottom left states: 'The Trails at Jakes Rocks is a new stacked loop mountain biking trail. This 30+ mile trail was developed in partnership with world renowned trail development company, Trail Solutions, sister company of IMBA (International Mountain Biking Association).'

Explore creation of a destination mountain bike network

A point that was brought up often, particularly in the survey, was that the region is lacking a destination mountain bike trail network – “destination” meaning enough miles of trail to ride over multiple days rather than just a single day. Typically, this means at least 30 miles of trail in one network. NEPA has numerous locations for mountain biking with 10-15 miles of trail, but they are spread throughout the region and are not necessarily easily accessible from one another for visitors.

Exemplar networks within Pennsylvania are Jake’s Rocks (Warren County) and the Allegrippis Trails (Huntingdon County). Both are well-known across the country and even internationally, and draw many out of town visitors each year, in addition to being valuable assets to the local communities. In 2022, a study conducted at Jake’s Rocks found that it saw about 37,000 users, with 60% of those being non-local. The study estimates that those 24,000 visitors generated \$9 million per year for the local economy.

Both Allegrippis and Jake’s Rocks offer over 30 miles of trail in a “stacked loop” format, which allows riders to choose how long of a ride they would like to tackle and offers options for beginners and advanced riders alike. Both trail systems are also purpose-built for mountain bikes, which is an emerging trend within the past ten or so years. These machine-built networks often result in “flow trails,” which is something that is sought after by many riders and was identified as lacking in the region.

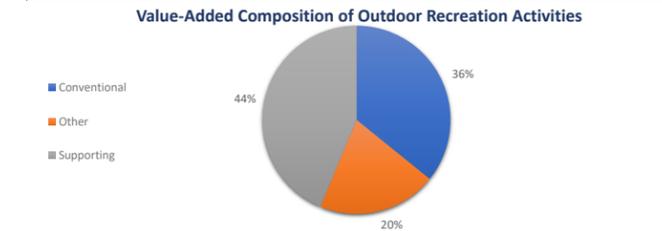
Available land and appropriate topography for the creation of a large mountain bike network can be limited, but NEPA’s 80,000+ acres of abandoned mine lands offer an unexpected, yet prime, opportunity for trail development. Adaptive reuse initiatives on former extraction sites are gaining in popularity, with successful examples of mountain bike trails on former mine lands coming out of Minnesota’s RedHead Mountain Bike Park and the Coal Basin Ranch near Redstone, Colorado.

Bureau of Economic Analysis Report on the growth of the outdoor economy in PA - view and/or download at www.pecpa.org.



Value added [gross domestic product]		Employment		Compensation	
ORSA total	Share of state	ORSA total	Share of state	ORSA total	Share of state
\$13.6 billion	1.6%	151,531 jobs	2.5%	\$6.8 billion	1.4%

Value Added by Select ORSA Activity [Thousands of dollars]				
Activity	2019	2020	2021	State rank
RVing	530,383	601,746	704,840	7
Boating/Fishing	511,816	575,553	555,122	19
Hunting/Shooting/Trapping	307,121	327,553	354,052	8
Motorcycling/ATVing	333,887	302,381	304,423	6
Equestrian	210,094	199,663	223,026	8
Snow Activities	228,288	185,467	184,620	8
Climbing/Hiking/Tent Camping	121,337	129,192	166,527	9
Bicycling	122,152	147,589	141,985	5
Recreational Flying	24,280	21,312	21,341	10



Conventional ORSA activities include traditional outdoor activities, such as camping, hiking, boating, and hunting. Other ORSA activities include those that take place outside, such as gardening and outdoor concerts. Supporting ORSA activities are those that contribute to the core activities and include such things as construction, travel and tourism, local trips, and government expenditures.

The Earth Conservancy in NEPA specializes in addressing the impacts of coal mining in Luzerne County, and should be included as an interested party as well as local mountain bike clubs and advocacy organizations. Creation of mountain bike trail networks is often a grassroots effort, and an enthusiastic group of volunteers is almost always necessary for getting such projects off the ground. Reclaiming abandoned mine lands for recreation also offers an opportunity to partner with state agencies such as the Department of Environmental Protection, as well as local conservation groups.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Foster a culture that is attractive to both local and visiting cyclists and makes them feel welcome

In addition to physical connectivity, a culture that fosters a welcoming environment for cyclists is an important piece of the puzzle when trying to both attract visitors and engage locals in cycling and outdoor recreation. Some tools to accomplish this include:

- Engage youth and new audiences

The Keystone MTB Team is based out of Lackawanna State Park and works to engage high-school-age youth from the Scranton area in mountain biking. The team currently has about 35 students involved and is a great start towards developing the next generation of trail stewards.

Other programming to engage new audiences of all ages and backgrounds could include beginner bike clinics and demo days hosted by bike shops, or downtown events that highlight cycling and outdoor recreation.

The NEPA Outdoors and Arts Festival will host its inaugural event in April 2023, bringing the arts community and outdoor industry together in downtown Pittston. The merging of multiple interests can be a tool to promote outdoor assets and help to normalize cycling culture in the region. This model could be replicated in other downtowns throughout NEPA. Initiatives to engage new audiences could be led by an existing entity such as the Anthracite Bicycle Coalition, or a new entity or partnership could be formed. For example, Bike Bentonville in Arkansas has partnered with others to increase cycling events and programming.

- **Continue development of additional Outdoor Towns**

The Outdoor Towns Toolkit, created by the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, lays out a set of 7 steps designed to assist self-motivated communities capitalize on their outdoor recreation assets to revitalize local economies.

The City of Carbondale in Lackawanna County and the Borough of Forest City in Susquehanna County served as pilot projects for the Outdoor Towns program and are now implementing projects via their respective Action Teams developed during the process. Forest City's Action Team is now a committee of the Borough.

Other interested communities that would be a good fit for this program should take steps to begin the process. The Outdoor Towns Toolkit can be found at townsandtrailstoolkit.com and more info can be found in "Appendix A" on page 167.

- **Create amenities that make that area more attractive to cyclists**

This can include uniform signage that makes a cyclist feel as though they are part of an interconnected system, bike fix-it stations in towns and along trails, and bike racks at local

businesses. Several local organizations, such as the Route 6 Alliance, have Bicycle Friendly Business programs that provide resources to businesses to help them attract more cyclists.

Employ tactics to foster support for cycling and outdoor recreation from county and municipal leaders, economic development agencies, business owners, and the general public

In order for the NEPA region to thrive as a cyclist destination and better place for cycling and outdoor recreation for locals, the recommendations laid out in this report need buy-in from community leaders as well as the public. Some tools to foster support include:

- **County/Municipal Resolutions**
Develop a general resolution supporting the continued development of cycling as a quality of life, economic development and regional tourism draw and have all 8 counties sign, can be used as a show of general support for the effort and could help with other local buy-in
- **Work with economic development officials**
Coordinate with economic development agencies to incorporate outdoor recreation business development into their missions
- **Work to overcome negative public perception**
This could include the development of a task force to foster change and work to change the minds of those who are against trails.

Riding the Lu Lacka Wyco Hundo. (Credit: Abe Landes, Firespire Photography.)



Appendix A

Outdoor Towns Toolkit

OUTDOOR TOWNS TOOLKIT



www.outdoortowns.org

An Outdoor Town is a place that uses natural assets to bring people together and revitalize economies. Use this toolkit to explore the seven steps to transform your community into an Outdoor Town.

Guiding Principles For Outdoor Towns:

Parks, trails, rivers, lakes and forests are **valuable resources** that are the basis of a healthy Outdoor Town and economy. They should be **protected and enhanced**.

The **community is responsible** for creating and implementing its own Outdoor Town Vision and Action Plan

Success depends on **Leadership, Teamwork** and **Partnerships**.



The 7 Steps

- 1 Organize an Action Team**
Organize members of the local community passionate about making your community more attractive and accommodating for outdoor recreation.
- 2 Identify Partners and Resources**
Review any existing plans that may have laid the groundwork for you. Engage prospective partners that can provide assistance or funding.
- 3 Assess Your Community and Create a Vision**
Community members stand to benefit the most from your efforts, so gathering their input and gaining their support is key to success.
- 4 Set Priorities and Create an Action Plan**
Report back to your community about the input you have gathered and build consensus for choosing priority improvements.
- 5 Implement Your Action Plan**
Project by project, work on implementing your plan. Continue to hold regular meetings of your Action Team to work through tasks and issues.
- 6 Celebrate Success!**
Not just at the end of a project, but all the way along. This builds awareness for what you have achieved and support to take on the next project!
- 7 Track Results and Set Next Priorities**
Keeping track of what you have accomplished, and what hasn't worked so well, informs how you work in the future.



Appendix B

Prior Planning

Plans Reviewed

Plan Name	Year
Pike County Feasibility Study in the Lackawaxan River Corridor	2022
Roaring Brook Greenway Study	2022
Monroe County Return on Environment Study	2022
D&L Trail - Ashley Borough to Laurel Run North Corridor Analysis	2022
2045 Long-Range Transportation Plan Joint Comprehensive Plan & Long-Range Transportation Plan for Lackawanna And Luzerne Counties	2021
Wilkes-Barre & Eastern Southern Section	2021
Wilkes-Barre & Eastern Northern Section	2021
Lackawanna River Heritage Trail Lower 6 Trail Feasibility Study	2021
Bicycle and Pedestrian Study For the Central Business Districts of Scranton and Wilkes-Barre	2020
Wayne County Trail Feasibility Study	2020
Leggetts Creek Greenway Study	2020
Eastern Monroe Active Transportation Plan	2020
Upper Brodhead / Paradise Trail Feasibility Study	2019
Northern Tier Trail	2019
Weatherly Trail Feasibility Study	2019

Trolley Trail - South Turnpike Road to Brookside Road	2019
Lackawanna-Luzerne Long Range Transportation Plan Update	2016
Back Mountain Trail Feasibility Study/Master Plan	2014
Update to the Monroe County Open Space, Greenway, and Recreation Plan	2014
Harveys Creek Trail/Greenway Feasibility/Master Plan	2012
Central Wayne Partnership Comprehensive Recreation, Parks and Open Space Plan	2012
Greater Kingston Trail/Greenway Feasibility/Master Plan	2011
City of Wilkes-Barre Trail/Greenway Feasibility/Master Plan	2010
Upper Brodhead / Paradise Creeks Greenway Plan	2010
Northern Tier Open Space, Greenway and Recreation Plan	2010
Delaware and Hudson Gravity Railroad	2009
Pike County Open Space, Greenways and Recreation Plan	2008
Pike Country Comprehensive Plan	2006
Feasibility Study & Phase I Master Plan for: North Pocono Pedestrian/Bicycle Trail & Greenway	2004
Luzerne County Open Space and Greenways Plan	2004

Appendix C

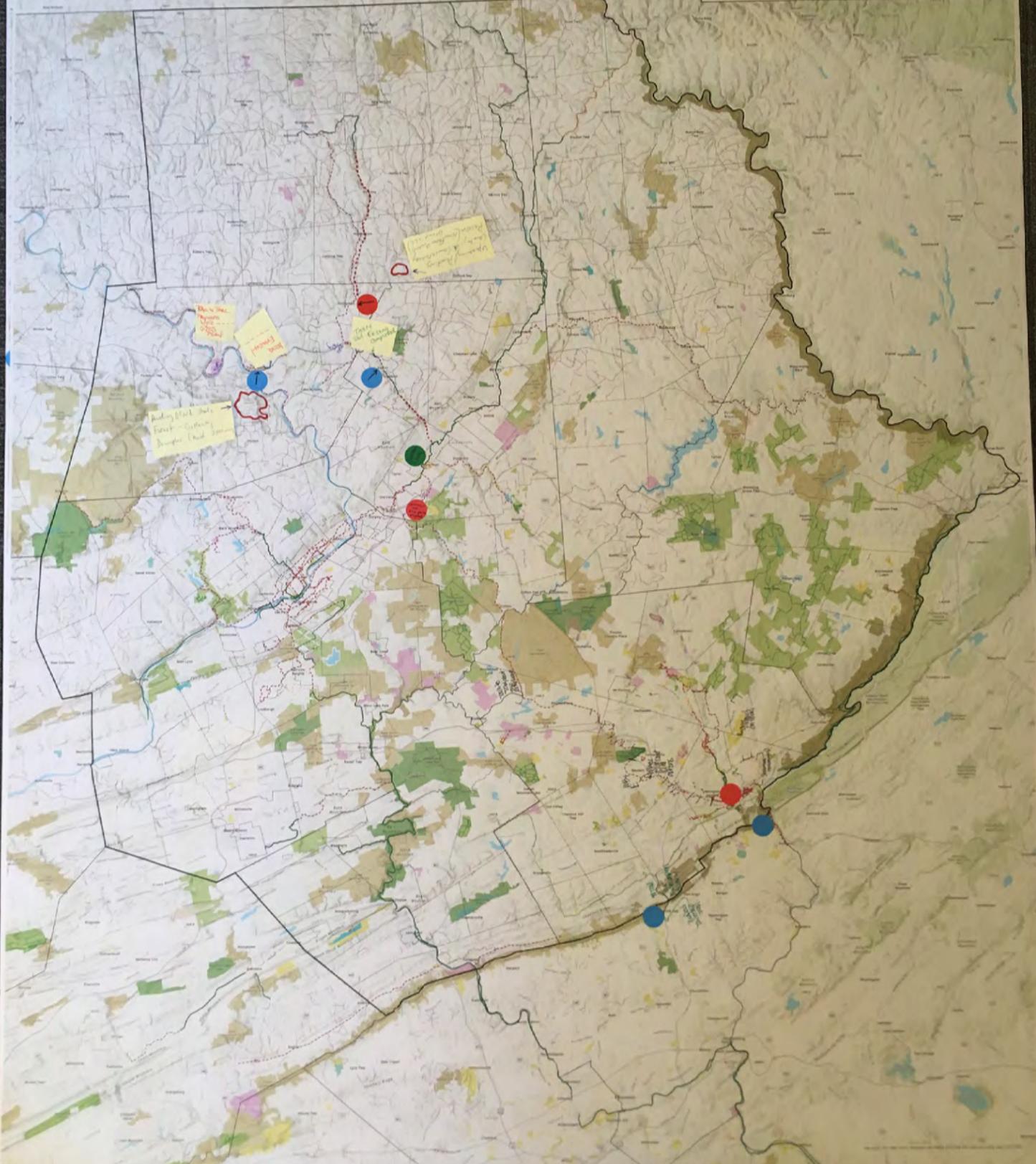
Visioning Session Maps

NEPA Connectivity Visioning

October 6, 2022

Legend

- Existing Multi-Use Trail
- Planned/Proposed Multi-Use Trail
- Existing On-Road Route
- Planned/Proposed On-Road Route
- Unpaved Road
- DCNR Roads & Trails (those open to bicycle travel only)
- PA Game Commission Roads
- PA Game Commission Trails (may or may not be open to bicycle travel)
- State Forest
- State Park
- State Game Land
- Federal Land
- Local Park
- Privately Conserved Land

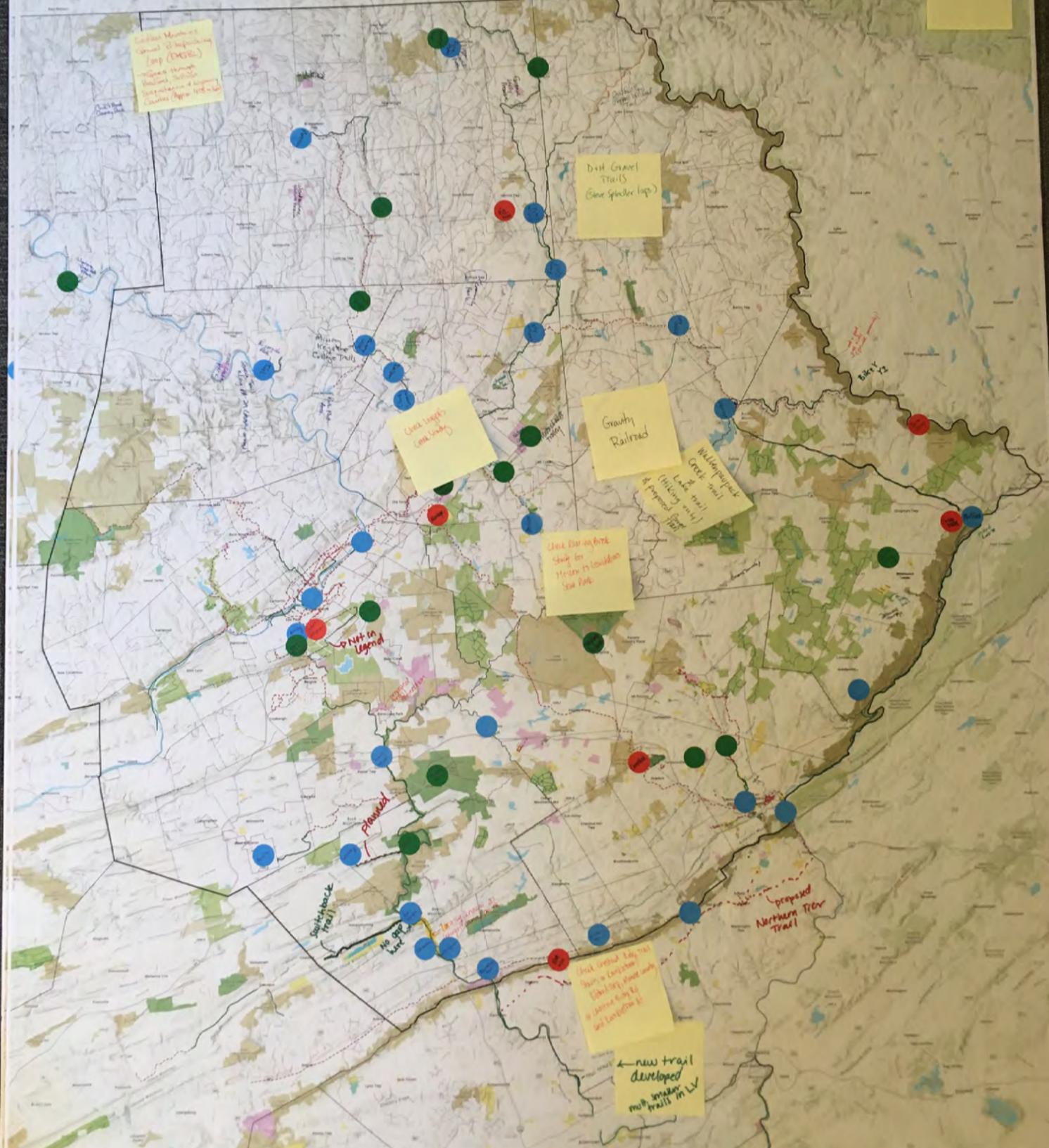


NEPA Connectivity Visioning

October 6, 2022

Legend

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- PA Game Commission Roads
- PA Game Commission Trails (may or may not be open to bicycle travel)
- State Forest
- State Park
- State Game Land
- Federal Land
- Local Park
- Privately Conserved Land



NEPA Trails

DEVELOPED BY:

The Pennsylvania Environmental Council

PUBLISHED:

April 25, 2023