



# Water Trails Program Strategic Plan 2017 - 2022



pennsylvania environmental council

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## ACTION PARTNERS:



# Introduction

The Pennsylvania Water Trails Partnership began in 2008 with a shared goal for the successful promotion and management of water trails. The partnership was created to achieve a common vision that included:

- Developing more water trails in Pennsylvania
- Strengthening connections between existing water trails to promote a system of trails
- Marketing and promoting Pennsylvania water trails more effectively
- Providing technical assistance to local managers implementing water trails
- Promoting national recognition of Pennsylvania's water trails
- Providing assistance to managers for long-term maintenance, stewardship, and sustainability
- Promoting water trails as a means to enhance citizen stewardship of local water resources

Since that time, the network has grown to include over 2000 miles of trails across all the major watersheds in the state. The Pennsylvania Trail Strategic Plan has also incorporated water trails into its comprehensive trail strategy. The 2014 - 2019 plan includes goals of evaluating strategic gaps in public access along water trails; developing and implementing trail ambassador programs to increase volunteer engagement in water trails; and developing a marketing strategy to promote Pennsylvania as a premier land and water trail destination (see appendix B). The Water Trail Partnership is central to achieving these goals.

The 26 individual trails that make up the network showcase a wide array of organizations and citizen groups that work together to promote their waterways' unique outdoor experiences. This diversity of stakeholders presents a challenge: due to limited resources and scale of the program, the Partnership has not always been able to work with individual groups to provide comprehensive, statewide solutions to common problems. In 2017, the opportunity exists to re-evaluate the program and determine the path forward. The following areas of improvement and actions reflect the best understanding of the needs of the program:

**Oversight:** opportunities for managing organizations (PA DCNR, PEC, PFBC, NPS, etc.) to streamline or enhance the work that provides the program with structure.

**Support:** increase funding opportunities and channels of communication between water trail managers and organizations and water trail partnership organizations.

**Promotion & Celebration:** develop new and expanded ways to spread the word about Pennsylvania's water trails including programming and outreach.



# History of the Water Trail Partnership

On September 30, 2008 officials from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, and the National Park Service signed an agreement to encourage the expansion and enrichment of Pennsylvania Water Trails. This agreement brought these four partners together in concert with federal and local governments, volunteers, and non-profit groups to create a farther-reaching, better maintained, and better marketed Pennsylvania water trail system. The Pennsylvania Water Trails Partnership also fosters citizen engagement and stewardship of the State's water trail system.

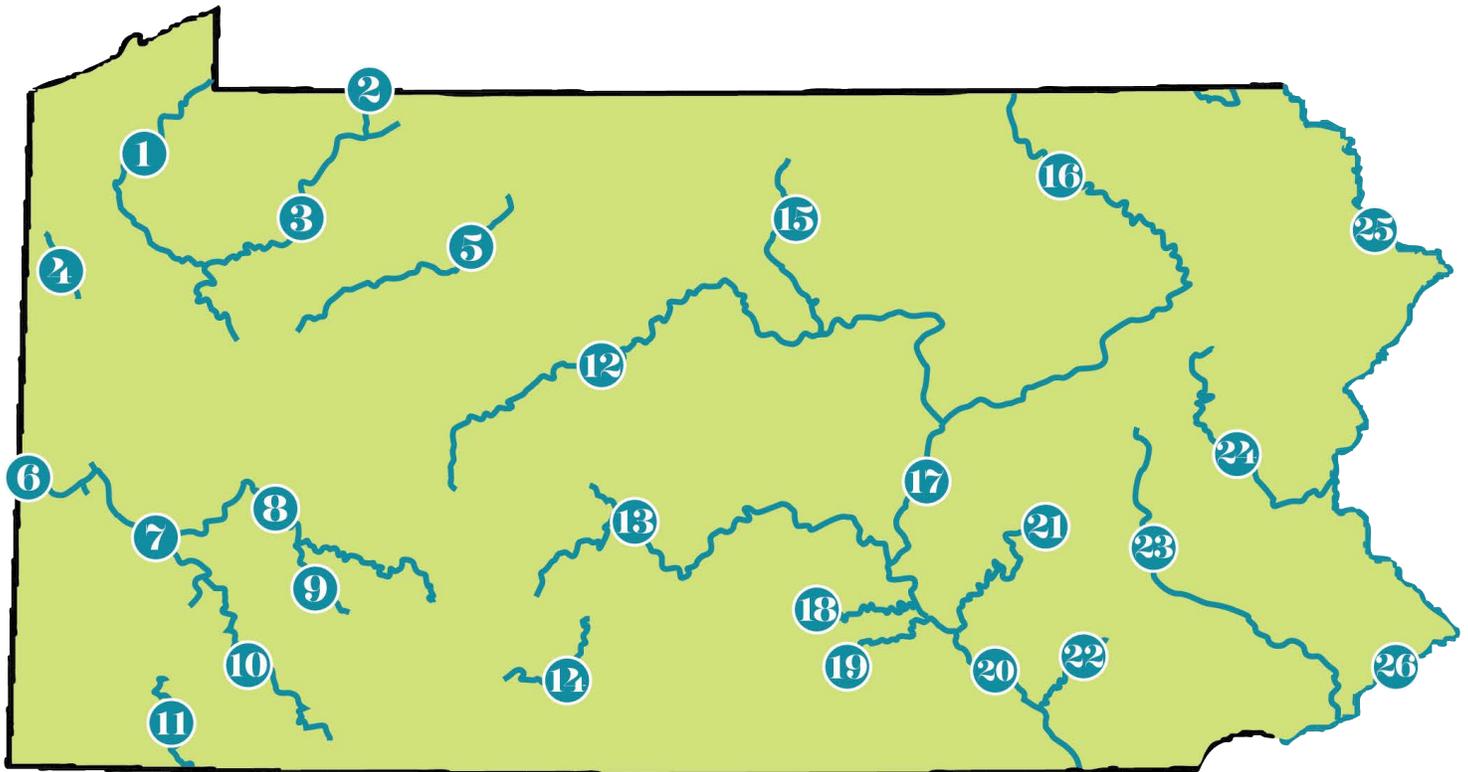
Today, 26 designated water trails have been established around the State of Pennsylvania. As such, the Pennsylvania Water Trails Partnership is increasingly focused on marketing the water trail system to residents and visitors and ensuring that it is adequately maintained. Specifically, the Pennsylvania Water Trails Partnership utilizes eight main principles to carry out its broader goals of water trail expansion and enrichment. These principles are:

1. To develop partnerships with volunteers and key supporters
2. To ensure the long-term maintenance of the trails through community stewardship
3. To encourage community engagement through volunteering
4. To use the trails to educate the public about their environmental virtues
5. To conserve the water trails as vital natural resources
6. To foster community vitality
7. To allow for diverse, non-exclusive participation in the water trail system
8. To promote wellness and wellbeing using the trails

In addition to promoting water trails across the state under a unified brand, the Pennsylvania Water Trails Partnership also provides technical assistance to local organizations maintaining designated water trails. At the Pennsylvania Water Trail's annual meeting, water trail managers from across the state come together to share their successes and to discuss strategies for addressing challenges. This annual meeting is complemented by various summits, public meetings, trainings, and workshops throughout Pennsylvania. The Partnership also organizes periodic conference calls for trail managers on a variety of topics to increase knowledge and awareness of issues facing Pennsylvania's water trails. Additionally, the Partnership offers technical, design, and financial assistance to water trail managers creating or updating their water trail maps.

The Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC) plays a major role in the Pennsylvania Water Trails Partnership. With funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), PEC serves as the primary coordinator of water trail managers across the state. PEC developed the Water Trails Program Strategic Plan (2017 - 2022) by aggregating three years of water trail manager survey responses (see Appendix A) with interviews with water trail managers and stakeholders. PEC will continue to work in partnership with DCNR, Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, the National Park Service, local water trail managers, and a host of non-profits and volunteers to manage and implement the Partnership's goals and objectives detailed in this plan.

# Designated Water Trails



1. French Creek Water Trail
2. Conewango Creek Water Trail
3. Middle Allegheny River Water Trail
4. Upper Shenango River Water Trail
5. Clarion River Water Trail
6. Ohio River Water Trail
7. Three Rivers Water Trail
8. Kiski-Conemaugh River Water Trail
9. Loyalhanna Creek Water Trail
10. Youghiogheny River Water Trail
11. Upper Monongahela River Water Trail
12. West Branch Susquehanna River Water Trail
13. Juniata River Water Trail
14. Raystown Branch Juniata River Water Trail
15. Pine Creek Water Trail
16. North Branch Susquehanna River Water Trail
17. Middle Susquehanna River Water Trail
18. Conodoguinet Creek Water Trail
19. Yellow Breeches Creek Water Trail
20. Lower Susquehanna River Water Trail
21. Swatara Creek Water Trail
22. Conestoga River Water Trail
23. Schuylkill River Water Trails
24. Lehigh River Water Trail
25. Delaware River Water Trail
26. Tidal Delaware River Water Trail

## ACTION I:

Review existing water trail inventory and prioritize designations to be considered.

The original Partnership had a stated goal of 2000 miles of designated water trails; this goal was achieved in 2014. Future designations should be evaluated based upon criteria that emphasize the various values of the program, including watershed connectivity and creating longer trail opportunities.

### STEPS:

1. Analysis of the geographic representation to prioritize specific regions with an eye towards the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan's goal to provide “a land or water trail within 15 minutes of all Pennsylvanians.”
2. Updating the water trail application and handbook to give better guidance prior to undertaking a feasibility study. Emphasize a diverse management committee.
3. Expand the current Water Trails Partnership executive committee to include a few active water trail managers, partner agencies, and peer organizations.

### OUTCOMES

Near Term: Program documents will provide clearer goals and structure for participants.

Long term: The network of water trails will be complete at a watershed level.





## ACTION 2:

Focus attention on “orphaned” water trails and provide support to water trail managers whose missions don’t align to the entirety of the water trail.

The need for this is both immediate and long term. Currently, the Clarion, the Middle Allegheny and the Upper Monongahela do not have active managers (defined as an identifiable individual who is in communication with the program). But beyond these immediate needs, there are other managers who are either geographically removed from the water trail or are focused on a single stretch of a longer trail.

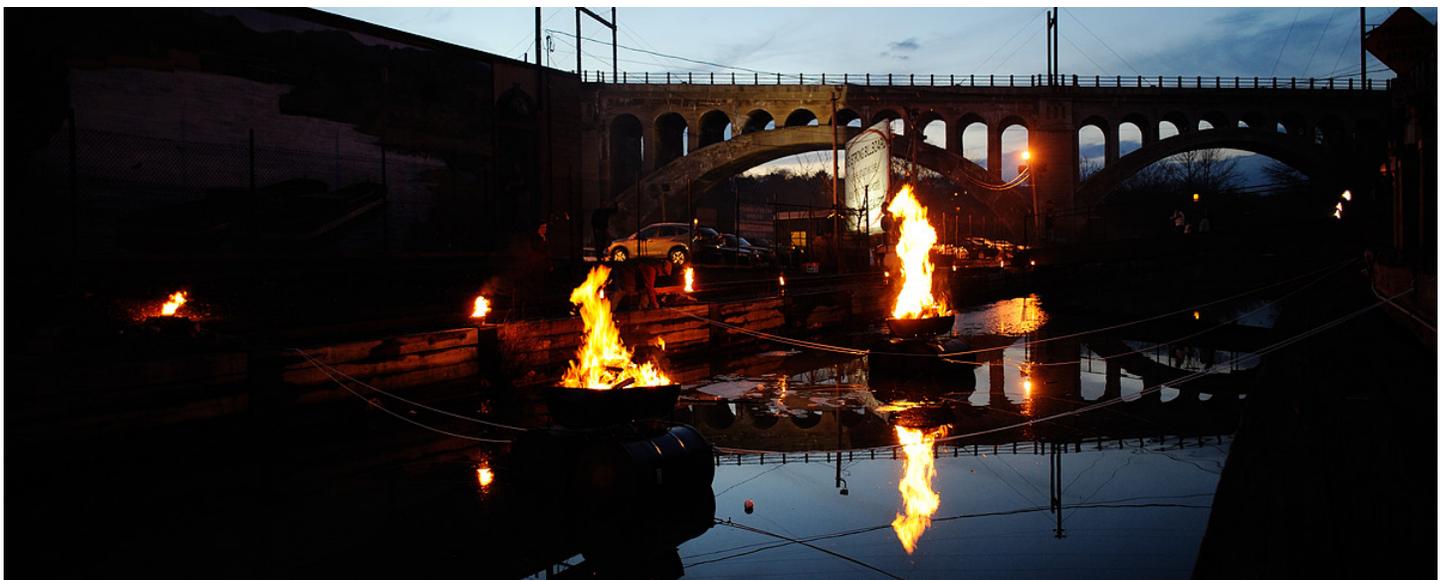
### STEPS:

1. Direct outreach and stakeholder engagement along the orphaned water trails to re-introduce the concept and help support a new management structure.
2. Develop consistent guidelines for new water trails to be considered, including strategies for the management of long waterways such as the inclusion of “satellite” managers who assist with management of the trail’s far reaches. Upon completion of the guidelines, work with current water trail managers to ensure that all currently designated water trails meet the guidelines.
3. Update the water trail application to give better guidance prior to undertaking a feasibility study. Emphasize a diverse management committee that can target the full length of the trail.

### OUTCOMES

Near term: Newly created stakeholder structure will encourage new participants and strengthen existing managers.

Long term: All water trails will have engaged and active management.



## ACTION 3:

Work closer with PFBC, DCNR Forestry, and State Parks for outreach and regional coordination.

An opportunity exists for water trail managers to benefit from a closer coordination with regional PFBC and DCNR staff. Over the last several years of the partnership, it has been reported that there has not been a line of communication with outreach and educational field staff, and there have been some awkward interactions with enforcement personnel.

### STEPS:

1. Provide outreach to regional staff, including making direct introductions between managers in a region and State agency staff.
2. Assess opportunities for support and resources available to the managers from the State agencies. Create an overview document to share with managers and all other field staff.
3. Create a master calendar of Water Trail events early in the season to share with regional staff.

### OUTCOMES

Near term: Identify and implement coordination plan to agency staff.

Long term: Water Program awareness and engagement will be at a consistently high level across all agencies.



## ACTION 4:

Build upon the original PFBC access analysis.

Completed in 2007, the PFBC access analysis has been used to assess the effectiveness of water trails to meet the public needs. It has become apparent that a better, more specific analysis focused on the needs of non-motorized recreation should be used to measure whether the program is achieving statewide access.

### STEPS:

1. Analyze trail users' experience of access points on existing, designated water trails to see if they are compatible with both put-ins and take-outs, specifically looking at travel distances in between.
2. Assess opportunities to connect water trails with land trails, physically and organizationally.
3. Encourage water trail managers to revisit the recommendations of their feasibility studies.
4. Identify funding opportunities or other access creation opportunities along trails.
5. Facility and infrastructure should be added to the inventory.
6. Work with DCED to establish better grant guidance for access projects seeking financing through the Department's Greenways, Trails and Recreation Program.
7. Work with all DCNR bureaus to identify potential opportunities as well as ensure program alignment.

### OUTCOMES

Near term: Identify at least three key water trails to undertake this process.

Long term: All water trails will complete a similar self-assessment.





## ACTION 5:

Bring new funding to the program to serve as a benefit for program participation.

The Water Trails program has achieved significant results with little structural support for the goals of the program. To continue to accomplish these goals as well as encourage broader participation, new dedicated funding streams need to be identified. The Partnership should reach out to other agency partners, such as Department of Community and Economic Development, Army Corps of Engineers and the PA Tourism Partnership to better align goals and funding opportunities. Non-public funding sources must be identified and cultivated in order to develop a more broad, inclusive, and sustainable program. Additionally, the overall structure of the program being outlined by this plan requires more direct management and engagement that can only be met by a fulltime, dedicated staff position.

### STEPS:

1. Develop a mini-grant program for water trail managers with specific, measurable outcomes while still allowing for manager creativity.
2. Funding for water trail program management should be increased to accommodate a full time position.

### OUTCOMES

Near term: Identify key potential partners and present the program's needs and benefits.

Long term: Secure multi-year funding from diverse, sustainable sources.



## ACTION 6:

Develop a reporting process and encourage its use to start to record a cumulative impact benefit to the program.

A snapshot overview will increase the effectiveness of the program while also identifying areas for potential improvement more quickly. It will also help establish lines of communications with managers so that needed support or changes can be addressed quicker.

### STEPS:

1. Establish goals and benchmarks for the program as a whole with input from managers and program partners.
2. Assess similar programs (example: Master Gardener's program).
3. Create simple reporting tools to capture information at regular intervals.
4. Create an annual reporting structure that will compile information into a document that will serve as both a press release and a guide for managers.

### OUTCOMES

Near term: Collect initial set of annual numbers to establish baseline.

Long term: Use statistical information to promote access and further participation.





## ACTION I:

Develop a recommended stakeholder coordination structure and composition for each water trail.

The current Water Trail program designates a single manager and asks them to consider the principles of “Partnership, Stewardship, Volunteerism, Education, Conservation, Community Vitality, Diversity and Wellness & Wellbeing” as the core goal of the program. But as individual managers, they have specific strengths that have unintentionally emphasized a smaller number of these as opposed to the entirety. By encouraging a committee structure with responsibilities to each of these principles, the water trail program can become a more effective tool to achieve the larger state wide goals.

## STEPS:

1. Create a best practices document that will outline the types of organizations that could be involved.
2. Using various planning and regional overlay maps, identify water trails within Heritage Areas, Conservation Landscapes and other opportunities for coordination.
3. Work with POWR and regional DCNR watershed specialists to identify groups in watersheds that currently do not have a stewardship component.
4. Create a water trails fact sheet for county and regional tourism groups to educate and encourage their involvement in the program.

## OUTCOMES

Near term: Focus on key trails in need to help develop stakeholder process.

Long term: Ensure sustainability of the program through more effective management of the individual trails.



## ACTION 2:

Implement a more robust manager communication strategy.

A top down approach to communication has not been effective at creating the type of networking that would strengthen the program. Tools can be made available to managers, but if they are cumbersome or inconvenient they will not be utilized. Instead, attention needs to be paid to creating more resource archives that match inquiries and fostering direct communication.

### STEPS:

1. Establish communication protocols that look at both “Passive” and “Active” communication strategies.
2. Establish watershed-based networks which might have a better chance of coordination.
3. Coordinate with PFBC on their website redesign to improve individual trail information.
4. Create a master calendar of Water Trail events early in the season to share with PFBC regional staff.

### OUTCOMES

Near term: Implement multi-pronged approach to disseminating information.

Long term: An active informational exchange network that promotes the vision of the program.





## ACTION 3:

Establish a planning grant for water trails focused on both access and conservation objectives.

River conservation plans were a necessary tool for many watersheds to begin to undertake important restoration work. As a part of re-engaging various stakeholders around water trails, a similar resource should be made available to managers. By undertaking the planning process, managers will be able to better prioritize goals and develop the local partnerships that will more effectively implement needed projects. For long established water trails, this will be an opportunity to update some of the original recommendations of their feasibility studies if one exists.

### STEPS:

1. Determine best approach to integrate water trails into River Conservation Plan program.
2. Commit funding to a limited number of targeted water trails as a pilot.
3. Coordinate with DEP initiatives to take advantage of efforts by watershed organizations.

### OUTCOMES

Near term: Make water trail managers aware of the potential of a river conservation plan.

Long term: Have all water trail managers become a part of the implementation of local plans.



# Promotion and Celebration

## ACTION I:

Implement a state-wide signage and mapping program.

The promotional strength of the Water Trails Program lies in the consistency of visitor expectations being met. Wayfinding and signage standards, while accommodating individuality differences, can bring a greater awareness of the trails statewide. Additionally, minimum mapping standards including information beyond the trail itself will meet visitor needs more effectively.

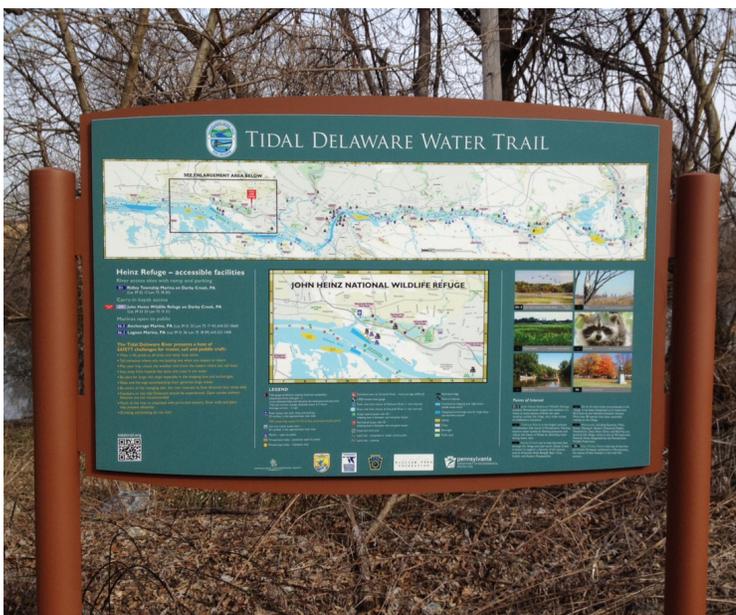
### STEPS:

1. State program identification should be required on all trailhead signage, kiosks and other signs. It should not be overwhelming, but rather create visual consistency among all trails.
2. A mini-grant program aimed at implementation should be created.
3. A resource library of best practices on signage should be made available to managers.

## OUTCOMES

Near Term: All water trail managers are aware of the signage resources that are available to them.

Long term: Statewide consistency helps support the idea that the individual trails are part of a coordinated network.



## ACTION 2:

Develop mapping standards and online resources.

The Water Trails program will always have a need for physical maps; however, online mapping is a standard expectation for visitors to aid in planning and coordination of trips. These maps need to have a standard feel and ease of navigation that can only come from a central, planned resource. Additionally, cartographic support should be provided to water trail managers to improve their own physical maps.

### STEPS:

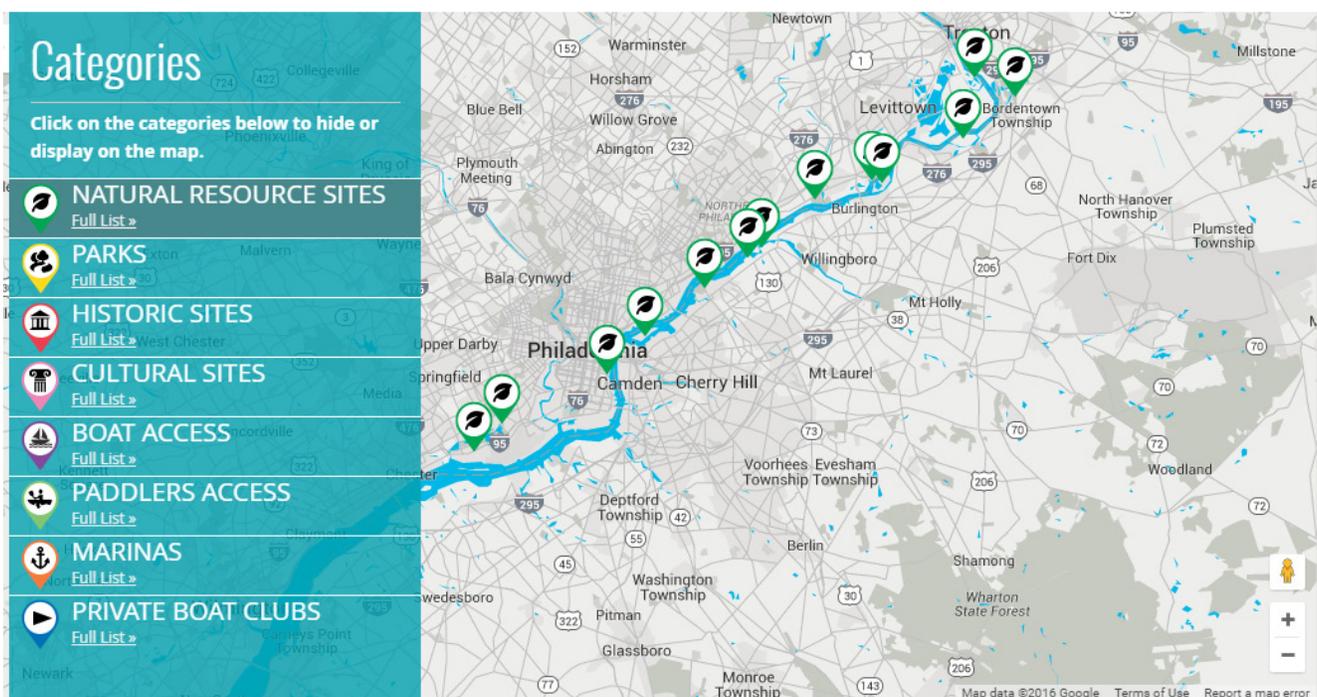
1. Determine the best location for online mapping resources.
2. Develop guidelines for wayfinding including best shuttle routes and identifying local business resources.

### OUTCOMES

Near term: Collect all digital files of existing water trails, including available access information and trail amenity inventory.

Long term: Create a better, more functional web portal.

## Getting to Know the Tidal Delaware Water Trail



## ACTION 3:

Clearer guidance to the managers for promotion and outreach.

In order to achieve the visitation goals of individual trails, information about events, access and changes to the trail needs to be consistent. By creating standardization within the program, it will be easier to share information across many channels.

### STEPS:

1. Create a water trails fact sheet for county and regional tourism groups, to ease their involvement.
2. Develop an effective intake of annual calendars and individual events to better promote across all available platforms.
3. Create templates for coordinated promotion.
4. Create master list of events.

### OUTCOMES

Near term: All water trail managers provide annual calendar information.

Long term: Effective dissemination of information statewide leads to better program awareness.





### ACTION 4:

#### Develop a statewide River Towns Program.

The State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) proposes a more ambitious statewide River Towns Program. This program should be a component of the Water Trails Partnership, but it will only be effective if it is seen as a vehicle for achieving the goals of the Water Trail Partnership, not as the endpoint of engagement or another check box on a program application. River Towns need to be the barometer for a healthy vibrant community as well as being the hub of outdoor recreation. Finally, such a program should not be unique to Water Trails, but rather integrated into the wider strategy of a state-wide comprehensive program. The emphasis in the SCORP should be used to encourage participatory conversations.

#### STEPS:

1. Create a River Towns playbook with best practices that can be replicated, including an emphasis on low cost.
2. Work with potential partners to develop River Town-specific support, including technical assistance on specific strategies.
3. Develop best practice documents, including an evaluation of current programs around the state and beyond.
4. Work closely with PA Tourism Partnership to increase the overall visibility of communities that participate.

#### OUTCOMES

Near term: Existing River Towns, regardless of who runs them, begin to communicate about best practices.

Long term: A statewide River Towns network inspires community improvement and citizens view their water trail as directly related to community.



### ACTION 5:

Coordinate with POWR to enhance the efforts of both programs.

Many individual Water Trail managers engage in the Sojourn program, and many have rallied their constituents to win River of the Year honors, both programs coordinated by POWR. The Water Trails Program should build on this enthusiasm and make the Sojourns a vehicle for furthering the goals of increasing access and diversity on our rivers. The River of the Year (RoY) award should actively acknowledge efforts to improve a river or creek's recreational or ecological values. By improving the coordination between POWR and the Water Trails Partnership, managers will make better use of the resources available to them.

### STEPS:

1. Incentivize Sojourn plans that meet goals of diversity and engaging new users.
2. Create template programs or trips that water trails with less capacity can put into practice.
3. Track and publish the accomplishments of RoY awardees and provide additional incentives for the water trails to grow and have a larger impact in the years following the award.

### OUTCOMES

Near term: Make all water trail managers aware of the benefits of coordinating with POWR for resources and recognition.

Long term: Pair all water trail managers with watershed organizations to improve effectiveness of both groups.



# Plan Implementation Matrix

ACTIONS	METRICS	
	Near Term	Long Term
<b>Oversight</b>		
Review existing water trail inventory	Program documents will provide clearer goals and structure for participants.	The network of water trails will be complete at a watershed level.
Focus attention on “Orphaned” water trails	Newly created stakeholder structure will encourage new participants and strengthen existing managers.	All water trails will have engaged and active management.
Work closer with regional agency staff	Identify and implement communication plan to agency staff.	Water Trails Program awareness and engagement will be at a consistently high level across all agencies.
Build upon the PFBC access analysis	Identify a handful of key water trails to support undertaking this process.	Have all water trails undergo similar self-assessment.
Bring new funding to the program to serve as a benefit for program participation	Identify key potential partners and present the program’s needs and benefits.	Secure multi-year funding from diverse, sustainable sources.
Develop a reporting process	Collect initial set of annual numbers to establish baseline.	Use statistical information to promote access and further participation.
<b>Support</b>		
Develop a recommended stakeholder management structure	Focus on key trails in need to help develop stakeholder process.	Ensure sustainability of the program through more effective management of the individual trails.
Implement a more robust manager communication strategy	Implement multi-pronged approach to disseminating information.	An active informational exchange network that promotes the vision of the program.
Establish a planning grant for water trails	Make water trail managers aware of the potential of a river conservation plan.	Have all water trail managers become a part of the implementation of a local plans.

ACTIONS	METRICS	
	Near Term	Long Term
<b>Promotion and Celebration</b>		
Implement a statewide signage and mapping program	All water trail managers are aware of the signage resources that are available to them.	Statewide consistency helps support the idea that the individual trails are a part of the network.
Develop mapping standards and online resources	Collect all digital files of existing water trails, including available access information and trail amenity inventory.	Create a better, more functional web portal.
Provide clearer guidance to the managers for promotion and outreach	All water trail managers provide annual calendar information.	Effective dissemination of information statewide leads to better program awareness.
Develop a statewide River Towns program	Existing river town communities, regardless of who manages program, begin to communicate about best practices.	A statewide River Towns network inspires community improvement and citizens view their water trail as directly related to community.
Coordinate with POWR to enhance both programs	Make all water trail managers aware of the benefits of coordinating with POWR for resources and recognition.	Pair all water trail managers with watershed organizations to improve effectiveness of both groups.

## Acknowledgments and research

The action steps recommended by this strategic plan are a response to the Water Trail Manager Survey conducted in 2013, 2014 and 2015 as well as a series of meetings with water trail managers, staff and key volunteers throughout the Summer of 2015. I would like to thank all who gave of their time to help shape both this document and the future of the program:

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# References & Bibliography

## TOOL KITS

National Park Service National Water Trails System Toolbox: [www.nps.gov/watertrails/toolbox](http://www.nps.gov/watertrails/toolbox)

Iowa State Parks Toolbox:

[www.iowadnr.gov/Things-to-Do/Canoeing-Kayaking/Water-Trail-Development-Tools/Water-Trails-Toolkit](http://www.iowadnr.gov/Things-to-Do/Canoeing-Kayaking/Water-Trail-Development-Tools/Water-Trails-Toolkit)

## SIGNAGE AND WAYFINDING

Susquehanna Greenways Partnership sign guide:

[www.susquehannagreenway.org/sites/default/files/Visual\\_Guidelines\\_July\\_2012.pdf](http://www.susquehannagreenway.org/sites/default/files/Visual_Guidelines_July_2012.pdf)

## PROGRAMS IN OTHER STATES

Oregon State Water Trails:

[www.oregon.gov/oprd/Trail\\_Programs\\_Services/Pages/Oregon-Water-Trails.aspx](http://www.oregon.gov/oprd/Trail_Programs_Services/Pages/Oregon-Water-Trails.aspx)

Huron River (MI) Water Trail: [www.huronriverwatertrail.org/](http://www.huronriverwatertrail.org/)

Maine Island Water Trail: [www.mita.org/](http://www.mita.org/)

## NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

American Canoe Association: [www.americancanoe.org/](http://www.americancanoe.org/)

American Whitewater Association: [www.americanwhitewater.org/](http://www.americanwhitewater.org/)

American Rivers: [www.americanrivers.org/](http://www.americanrivers.org/)

Blue Trails Guide (from American Rivers): [www.bluetrailsguide.org/](http://www.bluetrailsguide.org/)

## WATER TRAILS PARTNERSHIP

Pennsylvania Environmental Council: [www.pecpa.org](http://www.pecpa.org)

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources: [www.dcnr.state.pa.us](http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us)

Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission: [www.fishandboat.com](http://www.fishandboat.com)

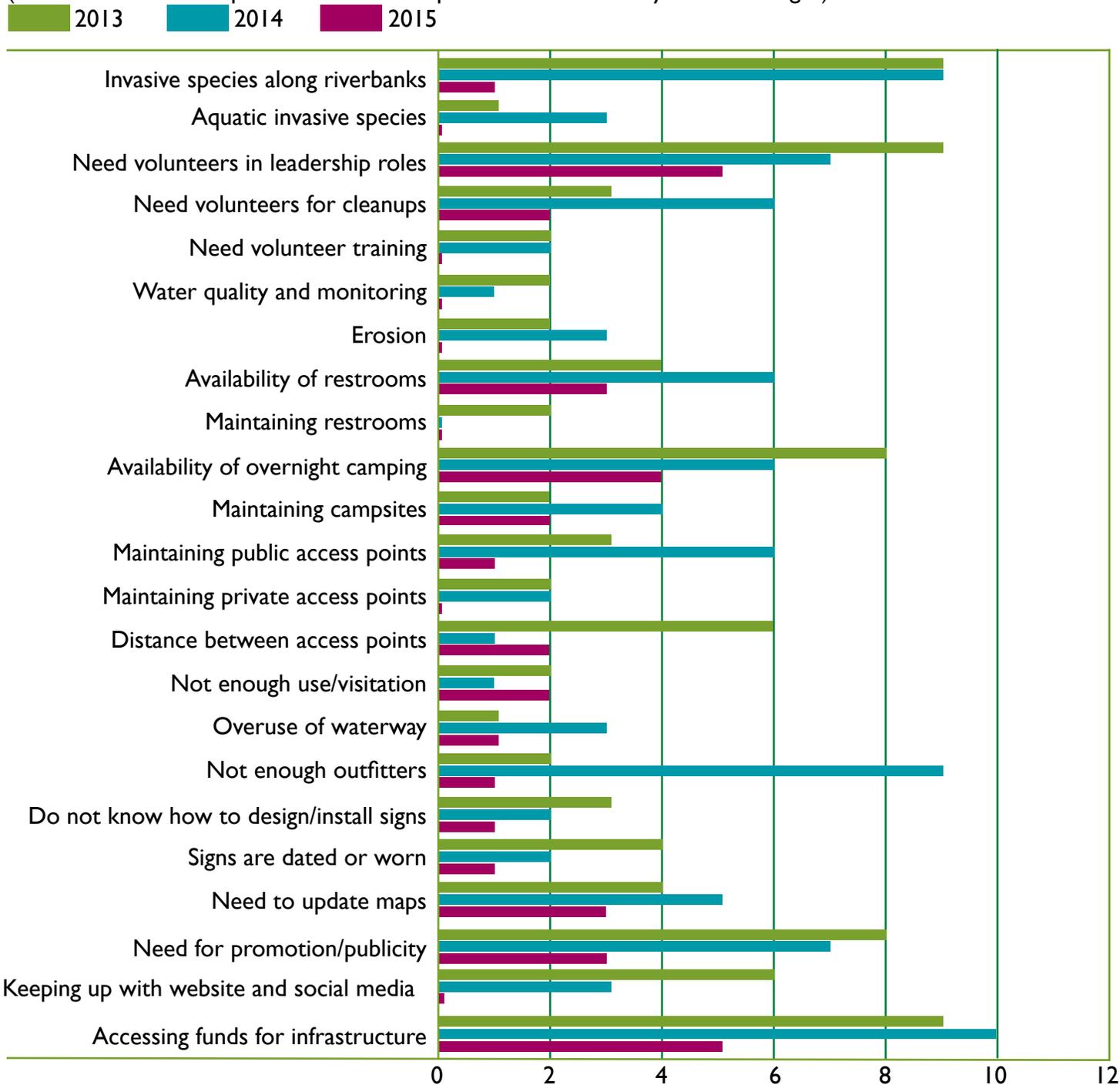
National Parks Service: [www.nps.gov/cajo/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/cajo/index.htm)

# Appendix A

## Survey Results

In 2013, 2014, and 2015, water trail managers were asked to rank the issues or needs that they saw effecting their water trails. These responses were then used to try to develop support and resources in the Round 22 of the Water Trails Partnership grant through DCNR's C2P2 funding, as well as being directly tied to many of the action steps in this document.

(There were fewer responses in 2015 than previous due to survey format changes).



# Appendix B

## Pennsylvania Land and Water Trail Network Strategic Plan - Water Trail Excerpt

### Pennsylvania Land and Water Trail Network Strategic Plan

2014-2019



April 2015

## **WATER TRAILS**

Water trails are recreational and educational corridors between specific locations that can be used for both single day and multiple day trips. They are comprised of access points, boat launches, day use sites, and -- in some cases -- overnight camping areas. They provide formalized access to and information about Pennsylvania's waterways while also providing connections to our diverse history, ecology, geology, heritage and wildlife.

Pennsylvania Water Trails provide information to users about general boating safety and also local information that's necessary for enjoying the specific water trail. Information is provided through a combination of materials including a trail map and guide, signage, web site, or other formats. Trail guides and maps, and other key information about Pennsylvania's 27 designated water trails is available online on the PA Fish & Boat Commission website (<http://www.fish.state.pa.us/watertrails/trailindex.htm>)

Water-based recreation is on the rise, both in Pennsylvania and nationwide. Based on the results of a resident survey distributed to Pennsylvanians as part of the 2014-2019 SCORP research, local citizens have reiterated this increasing interest in water-based recreation. Eighty-four percent of survey respondents find it important or very important to "protect wildlife and fish habitat." Similarly, eighty- one percent of survey respondents noted that "restoring damaged rivers and streams" was important or very important. Water trails contribute to the protection and restoration of aquatic resources by engaging users and promoting an ethic of stewardship that makes the Commonwealth a better place. Pennsylvania Water Trails embrace the "Leave No Trace" code of outdoor ethics that promotes the responsible use & enjoyment of the outdoors.



### **PENNSYLVANIA WATER TRAILS PARTNERSHIP**

In 2008, DCNR, the PA Fish and Boat Commission, Pennsylvania Environmental Council, and National Park Service – Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network and National Park Service - Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program signed an agreement to form the PA Water Trails Partnership. That year, leaders from these organizations came together to sign the PA Water Trails Statement of Purpose, which established the Partnership on the following goals that continue to drive the work of the PA Water Trails Program:

- To encourage and further the development of water trails in Pennsylvania,
- To strengthen the connections between and among existing water trails to promote a system of water trails,
- To better market and promote Pennsylvania's water trails as a recreational resource to residents and visitors alike,
- To provide technical assistance to local project managers who are implementing water trail projects,
- To promote the national recognition of Pennsylvania's water trails,
- To provide assistance to local project manager specifically with the long-term maintenance, stewardship and sustainability of water trails.
- To promote the development and management of water trails as a means to enhance citizen stewardship of local water resources.

In 2011, the PA Water Trails Partnership published the PA Water Trails Program Report to both detail the history of the PA Water Trails Program, and provide technical assistance and an overview of future Partnership initiatives. In 2014, Pennsylvania's Water Trail system grew to 27 designated trails totaling 2,135 river trail miles. Six new water trails have been designated since 2009.

While the PA Water Trails Partnership remains open to creating new water trails, the focus of the organization in the near term is on managing, maintaining, and marketing the 2,000+ miles of water trails already developed in Pennsylvania.

## **PROMOTING WATER TRAILS**

Pennsylvania's work to promote its vast network of water trails has only just begun. The Water Trails Partnership is now working to market and promote water trail mileage through a variety of endeavors including a comprehensive water trail signage initiative, river sojourns, a River of the Year contest, and numerous specific projects involving DCNR funding and/or technical assistance.

### Sojourns

Pennsylvania River Sojourns are guided paddling trips, sponsored by the Pennsylvania Organization for Watershed and Rivers (POWR) with funding support through DCNR and insurance offered by [American Canoe Association \(ACA\)](#). From May through September, local organizers offer one day and/or multi-day water-based journeys for canoeists, kayakers and others to raise awareness of the environmental, recreational, tourism and heritage values of rivers. These sojourns also serve to acquaint new paddlers to this recreation opportunity, increase stewardship, and enhance the local economy. In 2014, organizations, statewide, arranged nearly 20 sojourn opportunities for the public through the POWR/DCNR/ACA partnership, with many other sojourns occurring outside of this particular program.

### River of the Year

Since 1983, DCNR and POWR have annually selected a River of the Year. Through an array of special activities, a poster, and a multi-day Sojourn, the designation helps raise public awareness about the stewardship needs of that particular river, celebrate conservation successes along its course, and highlight the natural, cultural, and economic values it provides. Each year local organizations submit nominations and a public voting process selects the winning river. In 2015, 13 miles of the Conewango Creek in northwestern PA was voted River of the Year. Prior award winners include: the Schuylkill River (2014), Monongahela River (2013), Stonycreek River in south western PA (2012), and Delaware River (2011).

### River Towns

The River Town Program, originally launched by the Pennsylvania Environmental Council in 2011, helps communities to recognize their local river as an asset around which community and economic development can occur, and therefore a resource worthy of protection. The goal of this initiative is to improve the vitality, stability, sustainability and prosperity of communities, businesses and neighborhoods in currently distressed regions; to introduce the concepts of outdoor recreational market growth, sustainable development, conservation, and environmental sustainability; and to position these communities to attract new businesses and jobs. Success is built from the work of partners that recognize the inextricable links between the environment, the economy, and quality of life. The program has assisted communities across the state by developing outdoor recreation amenities, hosting special events, and attracting visitors.

## **WATER TRAIL FUNDING**

DCNR administers an annual grant program that provides funding for water trails planning and development, among other conservation and recreation projects. Throughout the program's history, DCNR has funded planning projects related to water trail feasibility studies, public access plans, rivers conservation plans, and capitol project plans and specifications. Funding for development projects such as water trail signage, boat launches, stream stabilization, fishing piers and other amenities is also regularly provided to local communities and non-profits to further common strategies of increasing public waterway access, inspiring natural resource stewardship, and promoting the preservation of local natural assets.

## **CONCLUSION**

Several decades ago, trail leaders began organizing and laying the groundwork for a bright future for a land and water trail network in Pennsylvania. Popularity in both land and water trails continues to increase. To meet the demands of trail users, trail advocates and builders continue to work toward fulfilling the vision of a trail in every community. However much work needs to be done to plan, develop, maintain and promote trails.

# Pennsylvania Land and Water Trail Network Strategic Plan 2014 - 2019

**Vision: Develop a Statewide Land and Water Trail Network to Facilitate Recreation, Transportation and Healthy Lifestyles**

## Recommendations and Action Steps

**1. Close priority gaps in Pennsylvania's statewide land and water trail network to achieve the overall goal of having a trail within 15 minutes of every citizen.**

- a. Analyze status of current statewide gaps.
- b. Re-evaluate process for identifying new gaps.
- c. Complete the Top 10 Trail Gaps.
- d. Evaluate strategic gaps in public access along water trails.

**2. Coordinate state and federal funding programs to leverage maximum investment in priority trail projects.**

- a. Establish Interagency Trail Funding Coordination Committee.
- b. Synchronize funding cycles and project selection.
- c. Identify common priority projects to leverage maximum joint investments.
- d. Integrate trail gap needs into PennDOT project delivery system.

**3. Cultivate diverse partnerships to build capacity to address local and regional trail needs.**

- a. Establish semi-annual regional trail focus groups (DCNR regional offices, MPOs, RPOs, PennDOT district bike/ped coordinators, tourism and visitors' bureaus, trail stakeholders, health organizations, etc.) to develop trail priorities, address trail gaps, identify trail opportunities and regional needs.
- b. Increase sharing of information through newsletters, blogs, websites, etc. to improve communication with trail stakeholders.
- c. Develop and implement trail ambassador programs to increase volunteer engagement in water trails.
- d. Coordinate with stakeholders to increase public access to land and water trails in association with transportation and utility corridor projects.
- e. Work with the motorized trail community to identify and develop off-highway vehicle facilities on non-DCNR lands.
- f. Work with the PA Equine Council to identify and address high priority need areas.

<b>4. Develop a marketing strategy to promote Pennsylvania as a premier land and water trail destination.</b>
a. Identify Destination Trail Systems in each region.
b. Create story maps to promote Destination Trail Systems.
c. Contract with a marketing team to produce statewide and regional strategies to market Pennsylvania trails.
<b>5. Connect community assets through accessible trail networks.</b>
a. Develop a systematic approach for calculating bicycle and pedestrian needs statewide.
b. Implement a process to calculate regional bicycle/pedestrian needs.
c. Conduct local bicycle/walking assessments.
d. Increase the availability of overnight camping facilities along trail corridors where feasible and supported.
<b>6. Elevate the priority to maintain and improve existing land and water trails and related infrastructure.</b>
a. Complete studies on the cost of trail maintenance on various trail types and in different locations throughout the state.
b. Develop a tool to electronically collect and report trail conditions on ExplorePATrails.
c. Emphasize the use of the non-motorized and motorized trail design manuals in building and maintaining trails for their managed use.
d. Identify and document best management practices for trail construction and maintenance.
e. Promote the <i>Universal Access Trails and Shared Use Paths Design, Management, Ethical and Other Considerations</i> manual as a best management practices guide for universal access trail development and provide training on implementation of the guidelines.
<b>7. Promote the economic, environmental, and public health benefits of trails through education and outreach.</b>
a. Complete additional studies on the economic impact / value of trails.
b. Complete a statewide trail economic study.
c. Complete an economic impact study of destination off-highway vehicle facilities (e.g., Rock Run Recreation Area and the Anthracite Outdoor Adventure Area.)
d. Continue to support statewide and regional greenways and trails summits, workshops and training to share information.

# Appendix C

## PA Water Trails Partnership Agreement - signed in 2008

### *PA Water Trails Partnership Statement of Purpose*

Among  
The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania,  
The National Park Service,  
The Pennsylvania Environmental Council

**WHEREAS**, Pennsylvania has an abundance of natural resources that are enjoyed by residents and visitors alike with 86,000 miles of rivers and streams in one state;

**WHEREAS**, Pennsylvania is a major contributor to the Chesapeake Bay as home to 517 miles of the Susquehanna River, which provides the Chesapeake Bay with fifty percent of its fresh water (24 million gallons) on a typical day;

**WHEREAS**, Pennsylvania is a participating partner in the multistate effort to conserve and restore the Chesapeake Bay watershed and as a signatory to the Chesapeake 2000 agreement has committed to expanding public access to Bay tributaries in an environmentally sensitive manner, to increasing the number of designated water trails in the region, and to support local and community-based watershed restoration and protection projects;

**WHEREAS**, the Chesapeake Bay Initiative Act of 1998 (*P.L. 105-312, Sections 501-2*) calls for the National Park Service to facilitate development of a network of Chesapeake Bay gateways, water trails and other connecting routes in cooperation with other Federal agencies, state and local governments, non-profit organizations and the private sector and to establish a technical and financial assistance program to aid development of the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network;

**WHEREAS**, Pennsylvania is a national leader in the development of water trails with an active water trails program and over twenty water trails developed or under development. Each water trail provides users with a different and unique trail experience;

**WHEREAS**, In order to ensure the ongoing stewardship and sustainability of our water trails, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, National Park Service-Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network, National Park Service-Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program and the Pennsylvania Environmental Council agree to work together in a coordinated effort with local and regional organizations to achieve collaborative goals of the Pennsylvania Water Trails Partnership; and

**NOW, THEREFORE**, we the undersigned representing the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, National Park Service – Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network, National Park Service – Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program, Pennsylvania Environmental Council intend to collaborate to provide overall planning and coordination for implementation of water trail projects in Pennsylvania. The partners will work in concert with a variety of local and regional organizations and agencies to implement projects throughout Pennsylvania and with our adjoining states. We will work with the understanding that each resource has its own character and will need to be approached with that character in mind. The goals of the Pennsylvania Water Trails Partnership are to:

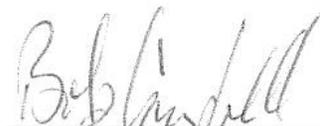
- To encourage and further the development of water trails in Pennsylvania,
- To strengthen the connections between and among existing water trails to promote a system of water trails,
- To better market and promote Pennsylvania's water trails as a recreational resource to residents and visitors alike,
- To provide technical assistance to local project managers who are implementing water trail projects,
- To promote the national recognition of Pennsylvania's water trails,
- To provide assistance to local project manager specifically with the long-term maintenance, stewardship and sustainability of water trails.
- To promote the development and management of water trails as a means to enhance citizen stewardship of local water resources

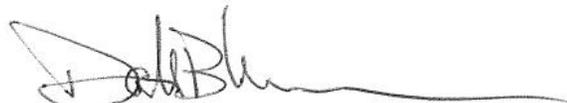
By this statement of our intention, we will work toward our goals in a spirit open to others, welcome new ideas, encourage collaborative approaches, and always be committed to the common goal of a strong system of water trails that benefit the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

This Statement of Purpose and the commitments of the parties hereunder are subject to the availability of funding. Nothing contained herein shall be construed as binding the parties to expend in any one fiscal year any sum in excess of appropriations or administrative allocations for the purpose of this statement, or to involve the parties in any contract or other obligation for the further expenditure of money in excess of such appropriations or allocations. In addition, nothing contained herein shall be interpreted as obligating the parties to provide funding, compensation or reimbursement.

  
 Michael D. DiBerardinis, Secretary  
 PA Department of Conservation &  
 Natural Resources

  
 Douglas J. Austen, Ph.D., Executive Director  
 PA Fish & Boat Commission

  
 Bob Campbell, Program Manager  
 Chesapeake Bay Gateways and  
 Watertrails Network

  
 Davitt B. Woodwell, Senior Vice President  
 Pennsylvania Environmental Council



Secretary DiBerardinis (PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources), Dr. Austen (PA Fish & Boat Commission), Davitt Woodwell (PA Environmental Council) and Bob Campbell (National Park Service – Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Water Trails Network) sign the PA Water Trail Partnership Statement of Purpose at the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual PA Greenways & Trails Summit (2008).



