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# Preface

## to the Mercer County Greenways, Open Space and Rural Recreation Plan

### Purpose

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Mercer County's Greenways, Open Space, and Rural Recreation Plan address the need to plan and manage open spaces and to provide recreational opportunities for the health, safety and well-being of county residents. A plan of similar scope was developed in the 1970s. Since then, the county comprehensive plan has been the guiding policy document for natural resource protection and recreation in coordination with community development policies.

Today, resource planners recognize that new tools are available to protect sensitive natural resources, to sustain their productivity for economic benefits and to integrate many rural recreation activities into rural environments. Focused planning for resources and rural recreation can help to coordinate protection, strengthen production industries, and publicize recreation initiatives.

The plan was developed to ensure that:

- open space under public and private ownership preserves the functions of sensitive natural resource systems,
- local communities remain connected with the natural and cultural features that define them and the region,
- open space for active and passive recreation remains accessible to all residents, and
- the recreational needs of rural residents are met.

In addition, the Pennsylvania Department of Natural Resource encourages counties to develop open space, greenways and recreation plans in response to land development trends and planning code requirements for recreational services. *The Pennsylvania's Greenways: An Action Plan for Creating Connections* initiative aims to connect Pennsylvania's open space, natural landscape features; scenic, cultural, historic, and recreation sites; and urban and rural communities through direct state investment and through public and public-private partnerships. The Mercer County Greenways, Open Space and Rural Recreation Plan is consistent with this initiative.

#### **PA Greenways Vision**

Pennsylvania and its many partners will develop an outstanding network of greenways across the Commonwealth, creating an asset highly valued by Pennsylvanians and enhancing the quality of life for all. This network of greenways will connect Pennsylvania's open space, natural landscape features, scenic, cultural, historic, and recreation sites, and urban and rural communities. Greenways will become one of the Commonwealth's most powerful tools to achieve sustainable growth and livable communities.

- From *Pennsylvania Greenways: An Action Plan for Creating Connections*, June 2001

## Plan Goals

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The goals for the Greenways, Open Space, and Rural Recreation Plan is to establish policy and planning priorities to support future County investments, to establish a framework for municipal level open space, greenways and rural recreation planning, and to coordinate public and private investments. As a component of the Mercer County Comprehensive Plan, this plan and its goals are to be accomplished in a manner consistent with other county policies, namely those outlined in other components of the comprehensive plan.

The four goals for natural resources established in the Mercer County Comprehensive Plan focus on retaining Mercer County's natural systems while allowing for low impact recreation and other activities in a sustainable manner.

- Retain natural landscape systems
- Sustain or improve the quality of natural and manmade environmental features
- Encourage the sustainable management of natural resources for resource-based industries
- Demonstrate the value of the natural environment to landowners, residents, and visitors

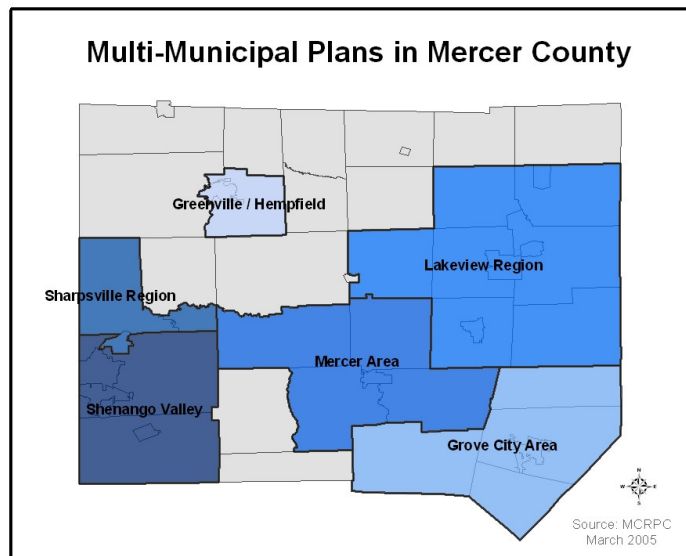
In fact, this plan provides further definition and direction of how natural resources protection these goals can be accomplished in Mercer County.

## Study Area

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The Greenways, Open Space, and Rural Recreation Plan addresses Mercer County as a whole and in part. Greenways and Open Space were analyzed across the county, while recreational opportunities were examined with a focus on the rural areas of the county (the gray areas of the Multi-Municipal Plans graphic). These communities include the following and collectively represent 18% of the population.

1. Delaware
2. Fredonia
3. Greene
4. Jamestown
5. Pymatuning
6. Sugar Grove
7. West Salem
8. Deer Creek
9. French Creek
10. Perry
11. Otter Creek
12. Salem
13. Sandy Creek
14. Sheakleyville
15. Lackawannock
16. Wilmington



General guidance for recreation in urban communities and multi-municipal planning regions can be found in the Mercer County Comprehensive Plan.

## **The Planning Process**

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The planning process was conducted through a series of steps to identify the following:

1. Unique and special resources, recreational areas and organizations
2. Issues and concerns for meeting residents' needs
3. Goals for the protection of resource areas and corridors, the provision of recreational facilities and services and the education of residents on these important community topics
4. Strategies for enhancing the management of open space, the establishment and extension of greenways and the development of a recreational network
5. Indicators by which to measure the plan's progress
6. Partners and programs for implementation

The project was developed in conjunction with the Mercer County Comprehensive Plan and supplemented with additional input from the Greenways Committee. The Greenways Committee was comprised of resource managers and recreation service providers and contributed its collective knowledge and perspective to the analysis and findings of the comprehensive plan, and focused further input on the specific goals and recommendations of the Greenways Plan. Once complete, the Greenways Plan was incorporated into the draft comprehensive plan as a supplemental document. The comprehensive plan was then presented at public review sessions before the Plan was finalized and adopted by the Mercer County Board of Commissioners.

The Mercer County Regional Planning Commission was the lead agency in preparing the plan. The planning staff administered a grant from DCNR, coordinated meetings, and assisted in the preparation of the document.

## **The Plan's Relation to County Policy and Planning**

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The Greenways, Open Space, and Rural Recreation Plan was developed in tandem with the Mercer County Comprehensive Plan. The Mercer County Regional Planning Commission will be able to reference this document in their reviews of subdivision and land development plans. Where opportunities to accomplish the Plan's goals exist and are not recognized by the proposed subdivision or land development plan, the Commission and the planning staff should feel confident in requesting further consideration of the identified opportunities by the landowner or developer. The planning staff may also reference this plan during municipal plan reviews, amendments and updates for comprehensive plans or parks, recreation and open space plans.

Local municipalities can look to the plan for its data on resources and existing facilities, ideas for municipal and multi-municipal projects, a listing of project partners and assistance programs and its case studies of approaches to resource management and recreation services, particularly in rural areas. Municipalities can also directly reference the existence and recommendations of the plan in their grant applications to funding agencies; this emphasis on consistency with county policy often improves a municipality's competitiveness for limited funding.

The plan has value for many other county partners. School districts may be interested in sidewalk and trail projects that provide safe routes to school, interpretive sites for outdoor education and ideas appropriate for student service projects. Public and private recreation organizations may be willing to partner on unique recreation facilities or programs. Non-profit community and environmental associations may find new locations for special events that bring residents together. Finally, business development groups may take interest in projects that will enrich the quality of life for their employees and project sponsorship opportunities that help to market businesses in the region. In addition to their own interests, many project partners may be eligible to apply for technical and financial assistance to accomplish projects more efficiently.

## **Plan Overview**

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The Greenways, Open Space, and Rural Recreation Plan begins with an introduction to the county and the region in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 inventories the county's current open space resources and recreation facilities and Chapter 3 identifies the organizations working in the fields of resource management and recreation and evaluates their policies and programs. Chapter 4 compares residents' need for recreation and open space to the available facilities. Chapter 5 presents Mercer County's vision and goals for open space, greenways and recreation. Chapter 6 presents an action plan to improve management of current open space and recreation resources and finally, Chapter 7 outlines tools, resources and funding sources to facilitate implementation of the plan, including descriptions, eligibility and contact information on technical and financial assistance programs.