



(Re)Turn to the River

SCHUYLKILL RIVER NATIONAL & STATE HERITAGE AREA
2017 – 2026 STRATEGIC PLAN



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Prepared for:



SCHUYLKILL RIVER
NATIONAL & STATE HERITAGE AREA

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In Fall 2015, Schultz & Williams' (S&W) consultants, Rick Biddle and Jill Macauley, were engaged by the leadership of Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area (SRHA) to facilitate a planning process to provide SRHA with a new strategic plan.

Schultz & Williams appreciates the opportunity to continue our relationship with the SRHA, which began over two decades ago. We commend the entire Board of Directors along with former Executive Director Silas Chamberlin and current Interim Executive Director Tim Fenchel for their leadership and willingness to engage the staff, key partners, community leaders and interested citizens in a comprehensive and inclusive planning process about the future of the SRHA.

S&W expresses particular thanks to the Planning Task Force, their leadership, regular discussions and meetings, and passion for the mission in guiding the development of the new strategic plan. Task Force members include: Bill Gladden, Jack Koury, Rob Kuhlman, Edie Shean-Hammond, Deirdre Gibson, Drew Gilchrist, Tim Fenchel and Silas Chamberlin.

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The efforts of all who contributed to this document are greatly appreciated.

Executive Summary

The Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area (SRHA) celebrates the tremendously valuable resource that is the Schuylkill River and its companion Schuylkill River Trail. Encompassing 1.2 million acres over 1,700 square miles, SRHA links 3.2 million people across five counties to the unparalleled opportunities afforded by the river, its trails and its watershed. By encouraging stewardship and appreciation of the environmental, historical and recreational opportunities provided to residents and visitors alike, SRHA also seeks to leverage the economic and community development benefits to the region.

Making the most of the advantages and possibilities of the shared historic and natural heritage of the Schuylkill River region requires consensus building, strategic planning and goal setting. In accordance with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Heritage Park program requirements, a Management Action Plan was completed for the Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor just prior to its official designation in 1995. Following the subsequent designation by Congress in 2000 as a National Heritage Area, SRHA created a new Management Action Plan to further define its mission, vision, goals and strategies; build consensus on priorities; focus energy and activity; and develop partnerships. The 2003 plan - *Living with the River* - outlined goals related to the key areas of resource preservation and enhancement, education and interpretation, recreation, community revitalization, and heritage tourism.

This *(Re)Turn to the River: 2017-2026 Strategic Plan* provides SRHA the opportunity to evaluate progress made against the 2003 goals, establish new benchmarks and milestones, and reconfirm our commitment to continue leading the region in leveraging the economic development, recreational, and heritage tourism opportunities of our Heritage Area.

The planning process also provided the opportunity to bring together key stakeholders to redefine core values and review and refocus our mission and vision. Through active engagement and thoughtful discussion with Board members, key stakeholders and community members, SRHA created updated mission and vision statements to encompass our guiding principles and reflect current status, purpose and potential for 2017 to 2026.





Updated Mission:

Our mission is to connect residents, visitors and communities to the Schuylkill River and the Schuylkill River Trail by serving as a catalyst for civic engagement and economic development in order to foster stewardship of the watershed and its heritage.



Updated Vision:

The five-county Heritage Area is a thriving and economically vibrant region whose residents, visitors and communities understand, value and are fully committed to the stewardship of the Schuylkill River watershed and its heritage.



Updated 10-Year Goals:

GOAL 1: COMPLETE THE SCHUYLKILL RIVER TRAIL

Advance the completion of the Schuylkill River Trail and Water Trail through direct implementation and collaborative partnerships.

GOAL 2: CONNECT COMMUNITIES TO THE SCHUYLKILL RIVER

Create and leverage physical connections to the River and the Trail to foster residents' appreciation and stewardship for these resources and to enhance the economic vitality and promote heritage tourism of our river communities.

GOAL 3: RESTORE AND PROTECT THE SCHUYLKILL RIVER WATERSHED

Improve the quality of the water in the watershed through public/private partnerships, in particular serving as the administrator for the Schuylkill River Restoration Fund.

GOAL 4: ENGAGE EXISTING AND NEW CONSTITUENCIES

Build constituencies that value, advocate for and participate in the protection of the Schuylkill River and its history through educational programming and events that focus on recreation, heritage, arts and culture, and health and wellness.

GOAL 5: IMPROVE SRHA AS AN ORGANIZATION

Continue to develop the board, staff and volunteers so they are empowered to act as stewards of the organization and high-capacity advocates for its mission in the region.

To ensure productive action towards achievement of these goals, SRHA has identified three-year action steps on which to base the evaluation of staff performance and progress towards milestones. The goals should be revisited and action plan should be updated annually to maintain a three-year rolling action plan.

Introduction

The Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area (SRHA), encompassing parts of Schuylkill, Berks, Chester, Montgomery and Philadelphia Counties in Pennsylvania, started out in 1974 as a small, nonprofit organization based in Wyomissing, focusing on a simple but powerful mission: restoring the Schuylkill River and creating a corridor of green space along its banks. In the subsequent decades, we've held true to that mission, even as we have expanded our vision of what a clean and accessible river could mean to this region.

Today, we see the Schuylkill River and the Schuylkill River Trail – the land and water trails – as platforms for the revitalization of the communities through which they pass:

- As platforms for engaging residents and visitors with nationally significant revolutionary, industrial and environmental history.
- As platforms for improving public health by encouraging safe, close-to-home outdoor recreation.
- And, finally—and perhaps most importantly—as platforms for reconnecting our youth and our residents to the incredible natural and historic areas in their own backyards and encouraging them to become stewards of those resources.

At the same time, we continue proudly to honor and celebrate the Schuylkill River watershed's heritage as one of America's most significant cultural, historical and industrial regions.



History of the River and its Surrounding Region

The Schuylkill River played a role of national prominence throughout America's history, especially in the American, Industrial and Environmental Revolutions. Originally known as "Ganshowahanna" or Falling Water by the Lenni Lenape, the first inhabitants of this region, the River eventually was renamed "Skokihl" or Hidden River by the Dutch who arrived as the first European explorers of the area in the 1600s.

Later referred to as the Revolutionary River for its historic role in the evolution of our nation, the Schuylkill River's impact on the region's development, growth and significance cannot be ignored:

- Growing along the shores of the Schuylkill up to the banks of the Delaware, Philadelphia emerged as a pivotal city in the nation's dawning years, its first capital and the birthplace of our democracy.
- Significant events during the Revolutionary War played out in and along the Schuylkill River, especially at Valley Forge.
- The Schuylkill River fueled the region's growth and prosperity throughout the 1800s, supporting agriculture and manufacturing, most notably in the industries of iron, steel, coal and textiles.
- The Schuylkill Navigation System provided for the transport of coal, manufactured goods and crops from the headwaters of the Schuylkill down to the Port of Philadelphia.
- Throughout much of the 19th Century and up into the beginning of the 20th, the Schuylkill River supplied the water for the Fairmount Water Works, one of the world's first public water systems, celebrated near and far as a modern technological marvel providing safe, clean drinking water to a fast-growing and dynamic city. The Water Works is one of the many efforts that was part of the nation's first and largest environmental cleanup projects, which started on the Schuylkill River. Our nation's conservation ethics and environmental responsibility were born here. The roots of the nation's environmental movement can be traced to the people, places, and events of the Schuylkill River Heritage Area.



What Is a Heritage Area?

As both a National Heritage Area and a Pennsylvania Heritage Area, SRHA benefits from these two designations that complement and support each other.

The specifics of each designation are detailed in the following sections.

National Heritage Area

As a National Heritage Area, SRHA exists to conserve, interpret and develop the historical, cultural, natural and recreational resources related to the industrial and cultural heritage of the region surrounding the Schuylkill River and its watershed. All of these resources are brought together and leveraged through SRHA to convey the uniquely rich story of a specific landscape – the Schuylkill River Valley – that is critically important to our nation’s birth, development and progress.

Any region or area designated as a National Heritage Area is affiliated with the National Park Service (NPS), but the land is neither owned nor managed by the NPS. Each National Heritage Area can access technical support, planning resources and limited financial assistance from the NPS, but maintains individual management to determine the best ways to link its specific heritage stories to its local community and celebrate its history in collaboration with local partners.

“For decades the National Heritage Area Program has enabled our Nation to set aside places that define our shared history and that will help future generations understand what it means to be American.”

- President Obama proclaiming April 19-27, 2014 as
National Park Week.

Becoming a Heritage Area

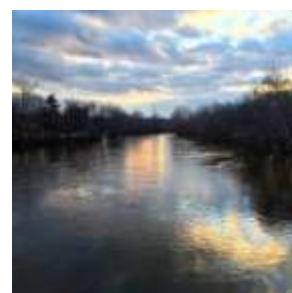
As a key player in industry, agriculture, manufacturing, defense, transportation and sustenance for our growing nation, the Schuylkill River served as a significant driver of growth, helping the region now known as the Schuylkill River Heritage Area become home to over 3.2 million people across the five counties. And, to this day, approximately 1.5 million people draw their drinking water directly from the River.

With this significant history and impact in mind, Congress designated the Schuylkill River a National Heritage Area in 2000. A National Heritage Area is a place where natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally distinctive landscape. The Schuylkill River watershed had already been designated a Pennsylvania Heritage Area by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) in 1995. National and State Heritage Areas work to revitalize and restore the region through natural and cultural resource preservation, education, recreation, community revitalization and heritage tourism.

Like all heritage areas, the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area has a management action plan that supports its official designation as a heritage area and uses a strategic plan to reaffirm its mission, update its vision and outline its long-range goals for the Heritage Area. SRHA developed its first Management Action Plan in 1995 prior to its official designation as a state heritage area by DCNR. Then, following its congressional designation as national heritage area, SRHA developed the *2003 Living with the River: The Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the Schuylkill River Heritage Area*. This plan again laid out priorities, strategies and tasks for achieving goals of resource conservation, recreation, education and interpretation, community revitalization, and heritage tourism for the entire Heritage Area.

The following strategic plan document serves as a ten-year update to the 2003 Management Action Plan. This strategic plan will evaluate the goals stated in the 2003 Management Action Plan, chart achievements and milestones, recommit to a mission and vision for the future, set strategic priorities moving forward, and identify action items for short-term (3 years) and long-term (10+ years) attention. The goals should be revisited and action plan should be updated annually to maintain a three-year rolling action plan.

A central part of this plan involved gathering input from the Heritage Area's key stakeholders – staff, board members, partners and community members; assessing trends; identifying organizational needs and capabilities; defining program strengths and weaknesses; and thinking creatively about where SRHA should be headed and how to get there.



The power of planning lies in the excitement generated by realizing gains, recognizing strategic opportunities and stepping up in unified strength to fulfill SRHA’s mission and achieve its vision.

And so, it is in the spirit of ambitious advancement that we present our *(Re)Turn to the River: 2017-2026 Strategic Plan for the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area*. This plan prioritizes SRHA’s work around reaffirming our region’s connection to the River, so often hidden just behind the main streets of communities through which it flows, just as centuries ago when it earned its Dutch name “Skokihl” or Hidden River.

Building on the tremendous progress made since 2003 and on the existing strategic framework, this plan is visionary in its forward-thinking approach, but remains consistent with the interpretive themes from *Living with the River*. SRHA is not changing what it does; rather it is simply mapping out its future with very focused action steps, positioning SRHA in continued leadership to leverage the economic development, recreational and heritage tourism opportunities made possible by our ever-evolving relationship with the Schuylkill River.

***(Re)Turn to the River* lays out an aspirational and achievable strategic roadmap for the Heritage Area for 2017 through 2026.**

Like the River itself, all of the facets of SRHA’s body of work – all of the programs, initiatives and activities – twist and turn, rush through rapids, trickle through tributaries, and carve a path through diverse landscapes of town and country. Undertaking the planning for a Strategic Plan allows SRHA to step back and enjoy the view of the entire region around the Schuylkill River and the work we have done there, delighting in the improved water quality, the increased usage of the waterways and trails, and the exciting partnerships that have contributed to regional tourism and commercial development.

Fueled with this progress and with a renewed connection to a strong mission and compelling vision, we use this Strategic Plan to recommit to working together to harness the power of the River to forge our future through a sustainable, forward-thinking approach that positions SRHA for ongoing success.



SRHA's History & Current Situation

About SRHA

Spanning the entire Schuylkill River watershed, Schuylkill River Heritage Area (SRHA) includes parts of five counties from its headwaters in Schuylkill County, and continuing down through Berks, Chester and Montgomery Counties to its terminus in the City and County of Philadelphia. A watershed is defined as a river or creek and all of the land area that drains into it. The Schuylkill River Heritage Area is over 1,700 square miles in area containing over 1.2 million acres. Nearly a third of the state's population lives within its boundaries and nearly 25% of the nation's population lives within a five-hour drive.

Within the boundaries of the Heritage Area, there are five National Park partners:

- Valley Forge National Historical Park,
- Independence National Historical Park,
- Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site,
- Appalachian National Scenic Trail, and
- Washington-Rochambeau National Historic Trail.

As communicated in the previous mission statement, SRHA is dedicated to assisting communities, organizations and citizens of the Schuylkill River region to preserve and sustain their cultural heritage and natural environment for future generations.

Founded in 1974 as the Schuylkill River Greenway Association, focused on the preservation of the riverfront in Berks and Schuylkill Counties, the organization has grown in its mission and geographic scope over the years. Today, SRHA is still managed by the Schuylkill River Greenway Association as a nonprofit organization, yet that name is reserved for legal and financial purposes only. Guided by a Board of Directors (ranging from 15-25 people) and supported by a staff of six to eight employees, SRHA is funded in executing its work through federal (NPS) and state (DCNR) budget appropriations and also through grants and donations from foundations, corporations and individuals committed to advancing SRHA's mission and to promoting the critical importance of the Schuylkill River as a vital part of the region's present and future health and vitality.



Current Map of SRHA



Schuylkill River Trail

SRHA's signature project and overarching goal has been to trace the course of the Schuylkill River itself with a 130-mile land trail that connects Pottsville to Philadelphia. This Schuylkill River Trail is all about bringing people to the River and the communities that surround it.

“What we’re celebrating is not just about recreation. This project is about building a constituency for the river.”

- Former Secretary of PA Department of Environmental Protection John Quigley, during celebration of SRT being named Best Urban Trail in America in the 2015 USA Today 10Best Reader's Choice awards.

Today, there are about 60 miles of completed trail, accomplished through the hard work and dedication of SRHA: supporting the vision, convening meetings, acquiring rights-of-way, connecting partners, pursuing grants, leveraging funding, mediating issues, and building and maintaining trails through volunteer support. The Trail serves as the point of access for thousands of users to hike, run, bike and explore along the Schuylkill River and its surrounding towns and communities. The Trail also provides connection for the five National Park sites within the Heritage Area. SRHA actually owns the Trail in Berks County and is responsible for building and maintaining it in Berks and Schuylkill Counties. In Chester, Montgomery and Philadelphia counties, the Trail is owned and managed by a variety of entities with SRHA serving as a facilitator and consultant on trail development and management.



SRHA's Programs

Complementary to the Schuylkill River Trail, SRHA is championing the organization and development of the Schuylkill River Water Trail to support paddling and water sports on the River. Developing maps and public access points are the major focus of this effort, which are being prepared in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Water Trails Partnership.

But the Schuylkill River Trails are just two of many aspects of how SRHA drives economic and community development:

- Towns and cities along the River's banks take advantage of the commercial and recreational opportunities afforded by their scenic waterfronts with restaurants, sports/outdoor outfitters, rental companies, shops and hotels.
- Regional gems within SRHA's purview along the River such as Fairmount Park, Valley Forge National Historical Park, Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, Appalachian National Scenic Trail, Washington Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Historic Trail and French Creek State Park increase popularity and relevancy of the Trail for history buffs, school/educational trips, outdoor adventurers, birders and tourists alike.
- Since 2003, SRHA has introduced 21 Schuylkill River Heritage Area Gateway Centers in popular sites throughout the five-county region. These Gateway Centers serve as orientation points for visitors, providing information about the region's cultural and historic significance; maps of the Schuylkill River, its tributaries and trails, and local points of interest; and tourism brochures and video kiosks that highlight specific sites and attractions.
- The waterways of the Schuylkill River offer countless recreational opportunities for boating, fishing, kayaking and other water sports, and also serve as a venue for various regattas, races, charity events and other large-group water activities. One such activity is SRHA's own Schuylkill River Sojourn, an annual event established in 1999 to raise awareness of SRHA; actively and personally engage people with the River; educate people about the region and its cultural heritage; promote an appreciation for water conservation, nature and the environment; highlight community revitalization initiatives along the waterfront; and promote tourism. Other SRHA events such as Scenes of the Schuylkill Art Show the popular Pedal and Paddle outings, and the recent addition of Hike and Paddle highlight the myriad opportunities for people to enjoy various aspects of the River and the Trail.



Schuylkill River Restoration Fund

In large part, due to the interest and awareness generated by the Schuylkill River Trail and events along the River, SRHA has the opportunity to highlight the critical importance of water quality, especially insofar as the Schuylkill River remains the source of drinking water for 1.5 million people in the region. Therefore, SRHA is incredibly dedicated to its role as the administrator of the Schuylkill River Restoration Fund, which provides grants to government agencies and nonprofit organizations for projects that improve the quality of water in the watershed. Since its inception in 2006, the Schuylkill River Restoration Fund has distributed more than \$2.9 million and leveraged another \$4.7 million for 82 projects that protect and restore the Schuylkill River. Supporting projects that improve water quality throughout the Schuylkill River region, the Fund continues to promote and advance the decades-long work of keeping pollutants out of the River.



Educational Outreach

SRHA also promotes the importance of water quality and watershed protection through its Schuylkill Explorers program. Aimed at elementary school student groups, the Schuylkill Explorers program provides K-8 students the opportunity to explore the Trail, learn about the River's history and significance, and develop an awareness of environmental concerns. In 2016, SRHA engaged over 1,700 individuals in its educational outreach.



Partners in Progress

Another of the core commitments of SRHA is to facilitate partnerships and strengthen local capacity. SRHA works to maintain both formal and informal partnerships to promote common goals and leverage resources, engaging with well over 140 organizations. Partnerships serve to extend SRHA's capacity and reach, support the staff in carrying out diverse activities and facilitate the exchange of mutually beneficial information and resources. These partnerships include federal, state and county agencies including the National Park Service, the PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources and the County Commissioners. SRHA has also partnered with local universities, including Montgomery County Community College and Alvernia University. SRHA has demonstrated leadership in partnerships in the region, including Circuit Coalition, Delaware River Basin Commission, Schuylkill Action Network and the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary. SRHA works closely with private foundations and corporations, including William Penn Foundation, Exelon, Aqua Pennsylvania, and Sly Fox Brewing, as well as the five National Parks in the SRHA. SRHA works directly with local townships, boroughs and cities from Philadelphia to Pottsville, too, including East Falls, Manayunk, Conshohocken, Norristown, Phoenixville, Pottstown, Birdsboro, Reading, Hamburg, Schuylkill Haven, Pottsville.



SRHA's Economic Impact

The economic benefits derived by the region from SRHA are real and significant. The findings of a recent comprehensive economic impact study of 6 national heritage area sites (including SRHA) conducted by Tripp Umbach were impressive: the natural and historic features of SRHA annually generate \$589.9 million in economic impact, support 6,154 jobs and create \$37.7 million in tax revenue. This significant impact, realized through SRHA's commitment to its mission, leverages public/private partnerships to support historic preservation, natural resource conservation, recreation, heritage tourism, educational projects and commercial development in and among the communities in the region.

“The commitment to revitalize the natural resources of the NHA (National Heritage Area) through the restoration of the Schuylkill River and creation of the Schuylkill River Trail has not only provided the region with recreational assets but has also served as a catalyst for economic development.”

- From 2016 *The Economic Impact of National Heritage Areas*, a study conducted by Tripp Umbach, a nationally recognized consulting firm.



2003 Management Action Plan Goals & Assesment of Progress

The 2003 Management Action Plan defined three interpretive themes to provide a unifying framework in which to consider the goals and strategies for SRHA: (1) Making History, (2) Creating Community, and (3) Restoring the River

These themes, which overlap and interconnect, remain relevant to our *(Re)Turn to the River: 2017-2026 Strategic Plan for the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area*.

Through a detailed process of considering multiple alternatives ranging from no action to focusing on places or experiences, to the preferred alternative of layering the focus, five goals were determined for the 2003 Management Action Plan, along with supporting strategies as detailed below:

2003 Goal 1: Conserve and enhance the Schuylkill River Valley's regionally significant historical, cultural and natural resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Preserve and enhance historical and cultural resources.b. Conserve and restore the Schuylkill River Valley's significant environmental resources, particularly those vital to the health of the River and its tributaries.c. Advocate sustainable land use, open space and greenway planning and preservation related to the Schuylkill River Valley's cultural and natural landscapes.
2003 Goal 2: Foster awareness and appreciation of the Schuylkill River Valley's heritage resources and the stories they have to tell.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Establish a consistent, area-wide framework for the interpretation of the Schuylkill River Valley's heritage resources.b. Connect heritage sites and resources through interpretive themes and products.c. Support educational and research initiatives that teach the public about the Schuylkill River Valley's historical, cultural and natural heritage.
2003 Goal 3: Increase outdoor recreational opportunities related to the Schuylkill River Valley's natural and cultural heritage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Complete development of the Schuylkill River trail system, including connections to the tributary trails.b. Enhance existing and provide new outdoor recreational opportunities related to the Schuylkill River Valley's natural and cultural heritage.
2003 Goal 4: Strengthen the Schuylkill River Valley's historic communities through sustainable community development related to heritage resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Conserve and use heritage resources to foster sustainable economic activity in traditional centers.b. Promote entrepreneurial activity and small business development related to the Schuylkill River Valley's heritage resources.
2003 Goal 5: Increase heritage tourism and associated economic benefits for the Schuylkill River Valley region and its communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Use a distinct visual image and identity in the design of heritage area products such as informational materials, signage and interpretive exhibits.b. Develop physical and programmatic linkages between heritage area destinations to assist visitors in experiencing the Schuylkill River Valley's diverse resources.c. Promote awareness of and increase visitation in the Schuylkill River National Heritage Area through public relations and marketing programs.

Assessment of 2003 Goals

The National Park Service (NPS) engaged the services of Westat, a research corporation, to evaluate the accomplishments, investments and sustainability of SRHA from 2000 through 2015. Their evaluation was guided by the following 3 questions, which were derived from a Congressional mandate:

1. Based on its authorizing legislation and general management plan, has the management entity achieved its proposed accomplishments for the National Heritage Area?

1. What have been the impacts of investments made by Federal, State and local government and private entities in the National Heritage Area?

1. How does the management entity's structure, partnership relationships and current funding contribute to the National Heritage Area's sustainability?

Their report of August 2016 indicates that SRHA has fulfilled the legislative requirements in pursuing the goals detailed in the 2003 *Living with the River and Environmental Impact Statement for the Schuylkill River Heritage Area*, which they categorized into following 3 program areas:

1. Heritage Tourism/Community Revitalization

Approximately \$5.9 million (38% of total expenditures) has been invested by SRHA since 2001 in projects related to heritage tourism and community revitalization goals. The Heritage Towns and Tours and Heritage Action Plan projects were cited as the major accomplishments in this program area by SRHA because of the success in promoting such businesses as restaurants, canoe and kayak rental businesses and outdoor and recreation businesses.

Since SRHA's inception, SRHA partnered with Montgomery County Community College (MCCC) to offer Heritage Area-themed continuing education classes. In 2005, SRHA's partnership with MCCC expanded with the planning and development of the Schuylkill Riverfront Academic and Heritage Center, which serves as SRHA's offices and hosts SRHA's Interpretative and Visitor's Center.

2. Building the Schuylkill River Trail

Approximately \$6.2 million (38% of total expenditures) has been invested by SRHA since 2001 in projects related to the planning, development and maintenance of the Schuylkill River Trail. It is important to note that though the Schuylkill River Trail is owned, managed, maintained and developed by multiple entities across 5 counties, SRHA is the sole organization whose mission encompasses the entire length of the projected 130-mile trail. SRHA's role as a convener and a trusted partner provides a critical and otherwise absent unifying approach, technical expertise and holistic vision for the Schuylkill River Trail.

Since 2001, SRHA has played a significant role in the development of 38.46 of the total 60-miles completed of the Schuylkill River Trail, including the development of new sections, construction of bridges and the creation of trailheads and water landings, which promote access to and use of both the Schuylkill River Trail and the River itself including the Water Trail, which is recognized as National Recreation Trail. The River and/or the Schuylkill River Trail has been awarded no less than 11 awards, most notably 2015's "Best Urban Trail" as named by USA Today's Reader's Choice Awards.

3. Resource Conservation and Stewardship

Approximately \$3.7 million (23% of total expenditures) has been invested by SRHA on projects related to resource conservation and stewardship. A major part of these efforts was achieved through the Schuylkill River Restoration Fund, which made 58 awards to 73 projects including the retrofitting of 9 storm water basins, drainage projects at 6 abandoned mines, protection of 6,500 streams, installation of 10,000 feet of streambank fencing, planting of over 2,500 native trees and shrubs and agricultural improvements made to 120 Berks County farms.

SRHA successfully promotes stewardship and raises awareness of the importance of the River through recreational events that link education, conservation and heritage, the largest of which is the Schuylkill River Sojourn. Since its inception, the Sojourn has introduced the Schuylkill River to more than 3,000 registrants, while at the same time drawing attention to SRHA and its mission.



The evaluation further stated that SRHA possesses the necessary management structure – governance and staff – to operate a sustainable National Heritage Area organization. The Board and staff expressed a shared understanding of SRHA's mission and goals and were committed to pursuing the stated vision.

Overview of Planning Process

Schultz & Williams, Inc. (S&W) submitted a proposal in response to SRHA's request for proposals in July of 2015. The S&W team of Rick Biddle, Vice President, and Jill Macauley, Consultant, began the planning engagement with a discovery process, during which they collected and reviewed materials about SRHA including previous plans, program information, membership information, financial information, marketing materials and staff and Board organizational structure, among other background information.

To launch the strategic planning process, a Task Force was created to facilitate the initial strategic planning discussions. The Task Force and S&W planning team met six times (approximately every other month) during the entire planning process. The Task Force's role was to guide the strategic planning discussions and process. The Task Force meetings were to review and test findings and to help frame strategic recommendations and goals.

The Task Force included the following:

Task Force Members	
<i>Name</i>	<i>Title</i>
Bill Gladden	Board President
Jack Koury	Board Member
Rob Kuhlman	Board Member & Immediate Past Board President
Edie Shean-Hammond	Board Member
Deirdre Gibson	National Park Service Liaison
Drew Gilchrist	Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources Liaison
Tim Fenchel	Grants Program Coordinator
Silas Chamberlin	Executive Director

Internal Input – Staff and Board Interviews and Surveys

To further solidify S&W's understanding of SRHA, Rick and Jill conducted one-on-one interviews with staff and key members of the Board to better understand the issues to be explored and the scope of goals and vision for the 2017-2026 Strategic Plan. Each interview was about 45-60 minutes in length.

Internal Interviewees	
Name	Title
<i>Board of Directors (8)</i>	
Bill Gladden	Board President
Kelly Anderson	Board Member
David DiMattio	Board Member
Jack Koury	Board Member
Rob Kuhlman	Board Member & Immediate Past Board President
Don Moll	Board Member
Carl Raring	Board Member
David Thun	Board Member
<i>Staff (6)</i>	
Silas Chamberlin, PhD	Executive Director
Dolores Bauman	Financial Manager
Laura Catalano	Communications Director
Robert C. Folwell	Trails Project Manager
Tim Fenchel	Grants Program Coordinator
Cynthia J. Kott	Administrative Assistant

Using the key findings from interviews, S&W developed two surveys – one for staff, and one for the Board – to collect additional input on the key strategic opportunities and challenges facing SRHA over the next three years, as well as to foster a sense of inclusiveness during the planning process. The confidential surveys were sent out electronically using Survey Monkey.

Staff & Board Surveys			
Group	Number Invited to Take Survey	Number of Participants	Percentage Participation
Staff	6	6	100%
Board	20	16	80%

The results from the surveys were shared as part of staff planning session and board planning session both in January 2015.

External Partner Interviews

Recognizing the uniqueness of SRHA's operating model and its collaborative relationship with partners to accomplish its mission and vision, S&W worked with the Planning Task Force to identify a select number of its over 140 partners to interview as part of this planning process. These interviews were conducted one-on-one in person or over the phone to collect external feedback on the core strengths and weaknesses of SRHA, where the partners share the greatest opportunity for partnership and collaboration, and what external environmental factors should SRHA be aware of as it considers opportunities and challenges for its future.

Jill Macauley and Rick Biddle conducted 12 partner interviews – each facilitated by a discussion guide and lasting between 30- and 45-minutes.

Partner Interviews (12)	
<i>Name</i>	<i>Title</i>
Jen Adkins	Partnership for the Delaware Estuary
Erika Batdorf	Borough of Pottstown
Joanne Dahme & Kelly Anderson	Philadelphia Water Department
Andy Johnson	William Penn Foundation
Dave Kraybill	Pottstown Health & Wellness Foundation
Diane Kripas & Mike Piaskowski	PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources
Kim Murphy	Berks Nature
Peter Samuel	National Park Service
Patrick Starr	Pennsylvania Environmental Council
Sarah Clark Stuart	Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia
Crystal Seitz	Greater Reading Convention & Visitor Bureau
Kay Sykora	Manayunk Development Corporation
Joe Syrnick	Schuylkill River Development Corporation

Planning Meetings

Using all the information collected as part of the interviews and surveys, S&W facilitated several planning meetings, which included discussions around:

- A thorough assessment of SRHA's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
- Updated mission, vision and core values
- New strategic goals and objectives

In total, there were eight meetings between January and June 2016, which included working sessions with the Executive Director, staff, Planning Task Force and a Board retreat.

Community Input

In late June and early July 2016, S&W facilitated three public community meetings to test the draft mission, vision and goals developed in the spring planning sessions. These three meetings were advertised in the local media and through social media. Local partners and stakeholders were also personally invited by SRHA's Executive Director. The meeting locations were selected to attract different geographic perspectives across the five counties in the Heritage Area.

Schuylkill Haven, PA at Walk In Art Center	Manayunk, PA at Manayunk Brewing Company	Reading, PA at Reading Public Museum
June 30	July 6	July 12
23 Participants	22 Participants	22 Participants

The response to the presented materials was positive and supportive of the overall direction being developed for the 2017-2026 Strategic Plan.

Finalizing the (Re)Turn to the River: 2017-2026 Strategic Plan

With the affirmation of the public meetings, the Task Force worked in August 2016 to finalize the mission, vision and strategic goals for the 2017-2026 Strategic Plan.

To ensure all was on the right track, S&W facilitated a second Board retreat in early September 2016. The agenda of this retreat was to share all the progress made in the planning process, including the feedback from the three community meetings. In addition, a portion of this retreat focused on Board development. As the Strategic Plan pushes SRHA to new levels of leadership, the Board took the opportunity to think about its own developmental opportunities. These opportunities are included in the Plan as strategic action steps under the organizational goals.

The final step in this planning process was a review by representatives from the National Park Service and Pennsylvania's Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, as each entity will be asked to accept the final plan.

The planning process for this Plan was made much easier by having the thorough and thoughtful 2003 Management Action Plan as our starting point. In addition to helping us draft this forward-thinking Plan, the entire process of reviewing, assessing and updating SRHA's mission, vision, goals and strategies had myriad positive side benefits that helped to:

- Build consensus and reaffirm SRHA's critical role as a unifying force throughout the expansive and diverse region;
- Acknowledge the power of our partnerships and explore potential new possibilities;
- Reflect on and enhance our mission and vision statements and re-connect to our guiding core values; and,
- Define expectations, establish priorities, project workflow and leverage forward momentum.

At the completion of the process, SRHA has a roadmap for its future that details specific action steps necessary for fulfillment of each of the identified goals. It lays out specific benchmarks and milestones that we can evaluate to track progress and chart our advancement and growth. It will guide SRHA's decision-making as the previous plans have, and keep the staff and Board leadership grounded in what is most important to SRHA as an organization.

2017-2026 Mission, Vision & Values

A mission statement is a succinct expression of purpose that articulates what an organization does and why. An organization's mission identifies how it manifests its reason for being. A vision statement reflects a futuristic view of what an ideal world would look like if an organization achieves its mission. Taken together, these two statements serve to galvanize positive action and unify an organization at all levels: internally, as a team working together to achieve goals; and externally, as an identifiable brand known and understood by all of its stakeholders – community members, donors, funders, partners, tourists and visitors alike.

Through the planning process, the Planning Task Force, along with the Staff and Board, took the opportunity to dive deep into thinking about what is at SRHA's core: *What is the uniqueness of SRHA and its work throughout the region surrounding the Schuylkill River? What does SRHA "own"? What is singular to SRHA?*

The answer to that question formed the starting point for thoughtful discussion. As a result, the following is the updated mission and vision to reflect SRHA's current status, purpose and potential for 2017 to 2026.



Updated Mission:

Our mission is to connect residents, visitors and communities to the Schuylkill River and the Schuylkill River Trail by serving as a catalyst for civic engagement and economic development in order to foster stewardship of the watershed and its heritage.



Updated Vision:

The five-county Heritage Area is a thriving and economically vibrant region whose residents, visitors and communities understand, value and are fully committed to the stewardship of the Schuylkill River watershed and its heritage.

Drawing on the updated mission and vision statement, SRHA identified the following as a positioning statement from which to build the Heritage Area's branding, marketing and messaging for the next ten years:



Positioning Statement

We connect people to the River and its heritage.

With this newly enhanced mission, vision and positioning statement front of mind, the SRHA leadership turned to considering its core values - the key standards and beliefs that guide SRHA's operations. Defining core values helps an organization calibrate its decisions and actions as it attempts to advance its mission and fulfill its vision.

Core Values:



•Culture & Heritage

- We act in a manner that celebrates and generates respect for the Heritage Area's natural history and cultural heritage.



•Leadership

- We strive to be a gracious, thoughtful and strategic leader – in our role, leadership is defined by building our expertise, being a trustworthy partner, having courage to be a catalyst for positive change and having a vision which inspires and motivates others.



•Collaboration

- We work with our partners with a collaborative, respectful and inclusive spirit, recognizing that together we can maximize our ability to be stewards of the River and its heritage.



•Excellence, Integrity & Accountability

- We uphold a commitment to excellence and integrity in all aspects of our work and take personal accountability for our actions and results.



•Diversity

- We conduct ourselves in a manner that fosters a community that is open and welcoming to diverse people, ideas and perspectives.



•Stewardship

- We strive to exemplify the highest practices of stewardship of our human, natural, historic and fiscal resources to generate the greatest positive impact in our region.



•Education & Life-Long Learning

- We embrace our mission to generate widespread public awareness, understanding and appreciation for all of the assets of the Heritage Area by supporting educational opportunities and promoting life-long learning.



•Active & Healthy Living

- We promote a safe, healthy and sustainable environment where our residents and guests can flourish personally, physically and socially as active, whole beings.

- The core values reflect and help shape the culture of the organization; these shared core values are a statement to the outside world of what is most important to SRHA and what qualities SRHA leadership embraces.

Strategic Direction Forward – Updated 10-Year Goals

Positioning SRHA for the Future

As both a Pennsylvania Heritage Area and a National Heritage Area, SRHA is required by both the NPS and DCNR to have a strategic plan that builds from Management Action Plans that were created upon designation in 1995 (PHA) and 2000 (NHA). SRHA's original Management Action Plan was drafted in 1995 and subsequently updated with 2003's *Living with the River*.

In approximate ten-year intervals, the plans are expected to be updated, including an assessment of progress, evaluation of goals and priorities, and the establishment of new ten-year goals. In this new Plan, our *(Re)Turn to the River: 2017-2026 Strategic Plan*, SRHA defines ten-year goals for 2017 to 2026 and outlines a plan defining three years of action steps in support of those goals.

To maintain a three-year rolling action plan, SRHA will review and update the action steps annually, always to advance the over-arching ten-year goals.

Not only does this Plan chart SRHA's future course and provide a framework for ongoing decision-making, it also serves as a foundation for a case of support to engage public and private funders with SRHA. It definitively highlights SRHA's progress and the clear steps being taken to advance SRHA's mission and ultimately realize the stated vision. This kind of unified and well-defined approach provides SRHA's rationale and worthiness for support in the ongoing process of seeking public and private funding, as well as in identifying and fostering new partnerships.

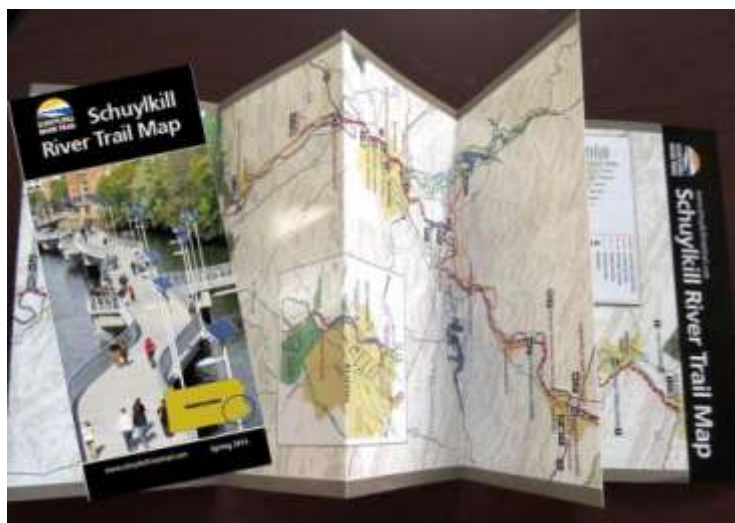


Context Around Goals

SRHA is in the enviable position of leveraging the successes brought about by the thoughtful implementation of the action steps introduced in the 2003 *Living with the River plan*. Without having to change course, we can use the positive momentum generated by a sound plan to fuel innovative, refined focus and forward-thinking approaches to advance our mission.

Maintaining a deliberate commitment to our core values, SRHA fully embraces its leadership role. Known and respected as a catalyst, a convener, a partner and collaborator, SRHA takes seriously the fact that our reputation and involvement lends legitimacy and authority to any projects related to the Schuylkill River.

The goals outlined on the following pages encapsulate SRHA's priorities and direction and provide a roadmap for the next ten years.



“They say it takes a village to raise a child, but it takes a whole watershed of citizenry to really protect a watershed as beautiful as the Schuylkill”

-Former Executive Director of the Delaware River Basin
Commission Carol R. Collier.

GOAL 1: COMPLETE THE SCHUYLKILL RIVER TRAIL

Advance the completion of the Schuylkill River Trail and Water Trail through direct implementation and collaborative partnerships.

This goal serves as the core of SRHA's work and continues to serve as a mechanism to leverage the broader impact of the organization's full mission. Activities in support of this goal revolve around providing the leadership, expertise and management skills necessary to assess the strategies and investment associated with addressing trail gaps, maintaining current sections and planning new trail sections; convening key partners, stakeholders and neighboring communities in meetings and planning; facilitating discussions and negotiations; identifying the heritage stories associated with the trail; leveraging national recognition of the Trail, including the water trail as a National Recreation Trail; developing and fostering volunteer involvement and training; and serving as advocate and cheerleader to generate awareness of the trails. Ultimately, SRHA strives to have a completed 130-mile trail, and this goal outlines a strategy to significantly increase the amount of completed trail.



GOAL 2: CONNECT COMMUNITIES TO THE SCHUYLKILL RIVER

Create and leverage physical connections to the River and the Trail to foster residents' appreciation and stewardship for these resources and to enhance the economic vitality and promote heritage tourism of our river communities.

The achievement of this goal, which is supremely important to SRHA's planning theme of *(Re)Turn to the River*, revolves around pursuing all projects that enable, enhance and expand access to the Schuylkill River and its trails physically, as well as connecting back to and reflecting the region's heritage. Much of SRHA's work in this area will involve developing highly collaborative public and private partnerships to advance the overall well-being of a specific community or smaller region. Prioritized, focused projects will be identified based on their "catalytic" nature – meaning SRHA with partners will work to create access to the River to spur on economic growth, increased tourism, greater awareness of natural resources, healthier living through recreation and respect for the heritage of the region. By (Re)Turning to the River, SRHA hopes to help targeted communities and regions have ever increasing vitality.



GOAL 3: RESTORE AND PROTECT THE SCHUYLKILL RIVER WATERSHED

Improve the quality of the water in the watershed through public/private partnerships, in particular serving as the administrator for the Schuylkill River Restoration Fund.

SRHA's work in this area will center on raising awareness and understanding of water quality issues through public/private partnerships, outreach initiatives and funding programs aimed at promoting conservation and maximizing opportunities to educate children and adults through programs and events. As the administrator of the Schuylkill River Restoration Fund, SRHA continues to identify new funders and partners to expand the Fund's impact.



GOAL 4: ENGAGE EXISTING AND NEW CONSTITUENCIES

Build constituencies that value, advocate for and participate in the protection of the Schuylkill River and its history through educational programming and events that focus on recreation, heritage, arts and culture, and health and wellness.

By promoting its heritage, river and trail programming, SRHA will raise awareness of its mission and vision; promote use and enjoyment of the Schuylkill River and Schuylkill River Trail for hikers, bikers, birders and paddlers, among others; engage new audiences, including youth; and communicate effectively with its varied constituencies with a unified voice and brand.

SRHA has a strong history of successfully engaging people in activities and experiences in and around the Schuylkill River. Through Schuylkill Explorers, children have the opportunity to explore, learn about and experience the River and the Trail in new and exciting ways, hopefully establishing a lifelong appreciation for the history, significance and ongoing role of the River for the entire region. Through events such as Pedal and Paddle and Schuylkill River Sojourn, SRHA welcomes hundreds of new and returning participants to connect personally with the River and/or the Trail. SRHA's free community bike shares - Bike Schuylkill and Bike Pottstown – promote health, wellness and recreation and serve as an alternative mode of transportation for residents and visitors to Pottstown, Phoenixville and Hamburg. These and other programs will remain essential vehicles for engaging with existing and new constituencies.



GOAL 5: IMPROVE SRHA AS AN ORGANIZATION

Continue to develop the board, staff and volunteers so they are empowered to act as stewards of the organization and high-capacity advocates for its mission in the region.

To achieve these goals and safeguard SRHA's future viability and sustainability, it is necessary to evaluate Board, staff and volunteer organization, capacity and deployment and ensure availability of necessary resources, both human and capital.



Implementing the Plan – 3-Year Action Plan

Although SRHA's five goals are singularly significant, their synergistic relationships are the key to realizing the plan's vision for meaningful and lasting change. Considered one by one on their own merits, each goal is compelling and legitimately advances SRHA's mission in real and measurable ways that residents, visitors and surrounding communities will genuinely experience and appreciate.

Taken together, however, these goals become something else entirely, something greater. They embody and exemplify SRHA's grand vision of the Schuylkill River, with its trails and connected waterways, as the center point of a dynamic, prosperous, culturally-rich and widely celebrated region. Ambitious yet achievable, these goals in concert will drive SRHA's progress over the course of the next decade and beyond.

To ensure productive and measurable progress towards achievement of the ten-year goals detailed on previous pages, as well as the overall organizational vision, SRHA has identified a three-year action plan, a living document, supported with specific, coordinated and timed action items. These sequentially organized and sometimes overlapping steps form the workplan on which to base the evaluation of staff performance and progress towards milestones. The three-year action plan will be reviewed and updated annually by the Board so that SRHA has a timely, rolling annual action plan to consult at every step of the way from now through 2026.



GOAL 1: COMPLETE THE SCHUYLKILL RIVER TRAIL

Advance the completion of the Schuylkill River Trail and Water Trail through direct implementation and collaborative partnerships.

Land Trail

Development:

- Assess the feasibility of completing the entire trail with an estimate of cost for each segment. (Years 1 and 2)
- Create a prioritized strategy for completion of the trail based on 1) community support, 2) control of land, 3) available funding and 4) connection to heritage stories and sites. (Years 2 and 3)
- Advocate for the completion of existing trail gaps and provide technical assistance where appropriate. (Ongoing)

Maintenance:

- Assess and outline expected annual trail maintenance needs for both regular upkeep and circumstantial needs (Year 1)
- Build the capacity of the Trail Keepers and Trail Ambassadors to undertake trail maintenance tasks with minimal supervision from SRHA. (Years 2 and 3)

Sustainability:

- Assess the risk and liability of all existing trail sections and structures owned by SRHA. (Year 1)
- Develop risk mitigation strategies for ongoing and emergency maintenance of the trail and associated structures, including insurance and a financial reserve. (Year 2)
- Create a strategy to transition ownership of SRT to a government body to minimize risk. (Years 2 and 3)

Goal 1 – Continued...

Water Trail

- Form a water trail committee composed of river recreation and stewardship non-profits to leverage collective resources. (Year 1)
- Promote of the new water trail guide to a national audience. (Ongoing)
- Develop a water trail micro-site within schuylkillriver.org to promote the trail and provide mapping, water quality, hazard and other information to paddlers. (Years 1 and 2)
- Serve as the lead management entity for the Schuylkill River Water Trail by proactively addressing issues affecting existing river access points, signage, etc. (Ongoing)
- Continue to create new access points to the river through the efforts outlined in Goal 2. (Ongoing)

Connecting Trails

- Serve as technical assistance resource to municipalities or nonprofit peers developing trails with direct connections to the SRT or significant heritage resources. (Ongoing)
- Partner with the Circuit Coalition to promote the SRT and advocate for the creation of a regional trail network. (Ongoing)
- Provide consulting services to other trail planning and development entities. (Year 2)

Heritage Corps

- Develop and launch a workforce training program, Heritage Corps, that directs the labor and skills of at-risk young people toward the development of trails and conservation of heritage resources in Schuylkill County. (Year 1)
- Engage Schuylkill Vision, Schuylkill County and other partners to build the capacity of the corps and create opportunities for corps members. (Years 1 and 2)
- Expand the Heritage Corps beyond Schuylkill County to other areas of the heritage area. (Years 3+)

GOAL 2: CONNECT COMMUNITIES TO THE SCHUYLKILL RIVER

Create and leverage physical connections to the River and the Trail to foster residents' appreciation and stewardship for these resources and to enhance the economic vitality and promote heritage tourism of our river communities.

Catalytic Projects

- Through river and trail access prioritization processes, identify “catalytic projects” that have the opportunity to connect the river, the trail, the adjacent community and the region’s heritage in a way that would leverage additional investment or significant community engagement. (Year 1)
- Develop a start-up plan to launch a catalytic project. (Year 1)
- Develop and implement a strategy of public and municipal outreach to advance the project. (Years 1 and 2+)
- As priority projects are completed, select new catalytic projects on which to focus resources. (Year 3+)
- Develop regional summits and committees to discuss leveraging connection to the river, the trail, regional community assets and regional heritage to promote economic growth and vitality. (Years 2 and 3+)

Engage the Private Sector in Compatible Economic Development

- Identify opportunities to engage the private sector—land developers, recreation outfitters, retail, etc.—with (Re)Turn to the River projects (Years 1, 2 and Ongoing)
- Secure funding pool to support business plans for businesses catering to river and trail users or new businesses located adjacent to priority projects. (Years 1 and 2)
- Complete business plan for and support launch of shuttle service between communities along the river and trail. (Year 2)

Goal 2 – Continued...

River Access

- Inventory existing river access points along the entire river, as well as potential water access points. (Year 1)
- Create a prioritized strategy for creation of new river access points based on 1) community support, 2) control of land, 3) available funding and 4) connection to heritage stories and sites. (Years 1 and 2)
- Working with regional planning organizations, develop mechanisms to track the land development process adjacent to the river and the trail to proactively seek opportunities to create new access points or maintain public access. (Years 1 and 2)
- Conduct public and municipal outreach and other approaches to create priority access points. (Years 2, 3 and Ongoing)

Trail Access

- Identify communities, especially historic downtowns, adjacent to the SRT that lack safe and accessible bike-pedestrian access. (Year 1)
- Create a prioritized strategy for creation of safe and accessible connections to the trail based on 1) municipal support, 2) community support, 3) local and state agency support, 4) available funding and 5) connection to heritage stories and sites. (Years 1 and 2+)
- Serve as a convener for communities that want to discuss their bike-pedestrian access issues by bringing together state agencies, municipal staff and stakeholders. (Ongoing)

GOAL 3:

RESTORE AND PROTECT THE SCHUYLKILL RIVER WATERSHED

Improve the quality of the water in the watershed through public/private partnerships, in particular serving as the administrator for the Schuylkill River Restoration Fund.

Expand Schuylkill River Restoration Fund Resources

- Complete bylaws and policy guidelines for the Schuylkill River Restoration Fund to clarify role of current and future funders and restrictions on their funds. (Year 1)
- Engage the SRHA Board with Schuylkill River Restoration Fund. (Year 2)
- Create a development plan to attract new major donors to the fund. (Year 1 and 2)

Schuylkill River Academic Partnership

- Define Schuylkill River Academic Partnership program objectives and desired outcomes. (Year 1)
- Relaunch partnership with Montgomery County Community College (MCCC) to launch Schuylkill River Academic Partnership program. (Years 1 and 2)
- Complete at least one pilot project with MCCC to establish benefit of partnership. (Year 2)
- Working with leadership of MCCC, create and implement outreach strategy to the leadership of target higher education institutions with environmental studies and sciences programs. (Year 2)
- Bring at least two additional institutions into the partnership. (Year 3+)

River Conservation Tools

- Create a mobile phone based litter collection app. (Year 1)
- Create a watershed health indicator dashboard. (Years 1 and 2)
- Promote the app and dashboard to partner organizations and the public. (Year 2)
- Working with SAN, serve as a clearinghouse for information about the health of the watershed, with an emphasis on simplifying stewardship messages to better engage the public. (Year 3+)

GOAL 4: ENGAGE EXISTING AND NEW CONSTITUENCIES

Build constituencies that value, advocate for and participate in the protection of the Schuylkill River and its history through educational programming and events that focus on recreation, heritage, arts and culture, and health and wellness.

Heritage, River and Trail Programming

- Develop a strategy to track key metrics for all SRHA programs and align the collected data with the organization's fundraising and stewardship development priorities. (Years 1 and 2)
- Identify additional opportunities for new and existing constituencies to experience the River in a personal way and generate more positive net impact through SRHA's signature events: Sojourn on the River, Ride for the River, Pedal and Paddle, and Scenes of the Schuylkill Art Show. (Years 1 and 2)
- Expand the Bike Schuylkill bike share program to at least two additional communities. (Years 2 and 3)
- Seek opportunities to provide bike share at private facilities, corporate and business locations, as well as residential neighborhoods. (Year 3+)
- Secure funding to support private sector kayak rentals, bike rentals and shuttle service in communities without access to adequate resources. (Ongoing)
- Support other regional events that connect to the mission of SRHA. (Ongoing)

Youth Initiatives

- Implement a pilot project with the STRIVE (Strengthening Tomorrow Requires Initiative & Vision Everyday) partnership and NPS and evaluate whether to continue or expand in subsequent years. (Year 1)
- Increase the number of youth served through the Schuylkill Explorers program at SRHA's office. (Year 1)
- Expand the Schuylkill Explorer's program to at least two additional sites. (Year 2)
- Create a traveling exhibit or tool box based on the Schuylkill Explorer's curriculum and make it available to educational institutions and nonprofits for a fee. (Year 3+)
- Continue to support existing Project SOLO/ Schuylkill Outdoor Leadership Odyssey classes and in addition create a transition plan as appropriate. (Years 2 and 3)

Goal 4 – Continued...

Branding and Marketing Plan

- Complete a comprehensive branding and marketing plan that will allow SRHA to communicate its mission, key messages and identity more clearly to target audiences and the general public. (Year 1 and 2)

Websites

- Combine SRHA's existing websites into one integrated website with consistent brand and messaging. (Year 1 and 2)

(Re)Turn to the River Annual Summit

- Each year, host a full or half-day summit to bring together stakeholders and partners from the heritage area to hear updates on SRHA and to share best practices. (Ongoing)

GOAL 5: IMPROVE SRHA AS AN ORGANIZATION

Continue to develop the board, staff and volunteers so they are empowered to act as stewards of the organization and high-capacity advocates for its mission in the region.

Staff

- Reorganize the staff to reflect the priorities in this plan. (Year 1)
 - Add two staff positions related to trail management and (Re)Turn to the River. (Years 1 and 2)
- Develop succession plans for key staff positions. (Years 1 and 2)
- Increase the leadership capacity of the executive director by changing title to Executive Director/CEO and retain the Chief Operating Officer position to manage day-to-day operations. (Year 1)
- Create professional development plans for each staff person and update them as part of the annual review process. (Year 1 and Ongoing)
- Create employee handbook and code of conduct to clarify requirements, expectations and a uniform procedure for addressing areas of concern. (Year 1)

Board

- Update roles and responsibilities of the Board including by-laws and expectations of individual members. (Year 1)
- Review and update, as needed, Board meeting schedule and meeting format. (Year 1)
- Formalize the Board recruitment and onboarding process. (Year 1)
- Create a formal committee structure based on best practices. (Years 1 and 2)
- Create and implement a series of Board trainings. (Year 1 and Ongoing)
- Increase the diversity of the Board, especially regarding race, gender and geographic representation. (Ongoing)

Goal 5 – Continued...

Volunteers

- Formalize and improve SRHA's recruitment and management of volunteers. (Year 1)
- Establish a part-time volunteer coordinator to maximize depth and breadth of the impact of signature events as well as other outreach activities and mission related events. (Year 2)
- Increase the quantity and quality of volunteer support for SRHA. (Years 2 and 3)
- Create a culture of volunteerism for the SRT that functions autonomously from SRHA's direct management. (Year 3+)

Philanthropy

- Complete a development/fundraising plan for SRHA. (Year 1)
- Create a Board culture that emphasizes personal philanthropy and include this goal as a consideration in the recruitment and nomination processes. (Year 1)
- Increase SRHA's development capacity by hiring a part-time consultant to assist with the cultivation of major donors and the review of fundraising communications. (Year 2)

Business Best Practices and Sustainability

- Standardize financial practices, especially consistent reporting to the Board. (Years 1 and 2)
- Develop a multi-year strategic business plan based on strategic initiatives. (Year 2)
- Develop a strategy to achieve Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Organizations Standards of Excellence. (Year 2+)

Conclusion

This document reflects more than a year's worth of thoughtful discussion, systematic planning, detailed analysis, outreach, engagement, and inspired thinking.

SRHA entered this process fully committed to putting in the hard work that is required for the production of a viable, useful and, ultimately, successful Strategic plan. SRHA's goals are lofty, as they should be in keeping with the prominent and historic role the Schuylkill River has played, not only in the development and prosperity of our region, but of our nation as a whole.

It is SRHA's intent and expectation that, as with *Living with the River*, the goals and actions steps outlined here in *(Re)Turn to the River* will put us in good stead so that in 2026, SRHA will be ready and well-positioned to chart a continuing strong course through the next decade.



Photo Credits:

SRHA would like to give credit to the various photographers used throughout this document, which include SRHA staff, Board members, and friends, in particular, Heather Mull, Walt Hug, and Cody Goddard. In addition, photographs were used from the following sources: *Something for the Eyes*; Valley Forge Convention & Visitors Bureau; WRT; and DCNR.