



# **1.0 THE PLANNING CONTEXT**



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## 1.1 PROJECT LOCATION AND BACKGROUND

The Schuylkill River Valley National Heritage Area is located in southeastern Pennsylvania within the drainage area (watershed) of the Schuylkill River from its headwaters in Schuylkill County through the City of Philadelphia. It encompasses the river’s watershed within five counties: Schuylkill, Berks, Chester, Montgomery, and Philadelphia (Figure 1-2). Historic centers within the watershed include, among others, Tamaqua, Pottsville, Reading, Pottstown, Phoenixville, Norristown, and Philadelphia.



Flat Rock Dam, Gladwyne



### Regional Location

Native Americans were the first inhabitants of the Schuylkill River Valley. The Lenni Lenape called the River “Ganshowahanna”, or Falling Water, and considered it a great fishing river. In the 1600s the Dutch became the first Europeans to explore the River, naming it “Skokihl” or Hidden Creek, which over time became “Schuylkill.”

Since the 1700s the Schuylkill River Valley has played a significant role in the development and growth of the region and the country. The City of Philadelphia grew along the shores of the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers and became the nation’s first capital. Many significant events of the Revolutionary War occurred upstream of the City, along the river, and within the nearby watershed. One of the world’s first public water



Downtown Pottsville



Schuylkill Navigation System at Fairmount Dam, Philadelphia

systems was developed in Philadelphia using water from the river. By the early 1800s, the Schuylkill Valley became one of the most important manufacturing and productive agricultural regions in the country. Coal mined from the southern anthracite fields of Schuylkill County fueled the development of the nation's early manufacturing industry. By manipulating the river with slack water pools and canals, the Schuylkill Navigation System provided a transportation corridor to bring coal, manufactured goods, and crops to the port of Philadelphia. In the 1840s, railroads such as the Philadelphia and Reading began to supersede the canal system as the principal carriers of bulk freight. Today the Schuylkill River Valley contains significant recreational and historic resources, such as Fairmount Park, Valley Forge National Historical Park, Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, and French Creek State Park. It has a number of population and cultural centers, such as Philadelphia, Reading, Pottstown, Norristown, and Pottsville. It supports a diverse population and market for the promotion of its key historic and recreational attractions.



Schuylkill River, Auburn

The Schuylkill River was Pennsylvania's first recognized "Scenic River," designated by the Commonwealth in 1987. Eight years later, the Commonwealth further recognized the historic and recreational significance of the area, designating part of the watershed as the Schuylkill Heritage Corridor under the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Heritage Parks Program. After five years of management as a state heritage corridor, it became evident that there were significant recreational and cultural resources beyond the borders of the heritage corridor that should be conserved. National recognition of the Schuylkill River was also warranted.

Two studies identified and analyzed the significance of resources in the region, eventually leading to its designation as a National Heritage Area:

***River of Revolutions, January 1992:*** *River of Revolutions* established the Schuylkill River Valley as a place of special importance in the development of the nation. It summarized the historical influences of the region and identified potential heritage resources and significant regional heritage themes.

***Management Action Plan for the Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor, March 1995:*** The *Management Action Plan* has guided the organization, management, and promotion of the Heritage Corridor for the last eight years. It designated the Schuylkill River Greenway Association (SRGA) as the lead management organization and made recommendations for interpretation, marketing, and capital investment in the corridor. These recommendations have led to the implementation of projects intended to conserve, interpret, and market the corridor's rich heritage resources.





Several other recent initiatives recognize the resource value of the heritage area and offer strategies for enhancing interpretation of its cultural resources while effectively managing its natural resources. These initiatives include:

- *State of the Schuylkill River Watershed*, 2002
- *Schuylkill Watershed Conservation Plan*, 2001
- *Montgomery County Schuylkill River Greenway Stewardship Study*, 2001
- *Chester County Landscapes*, 1996
- *Montgomery County Open Space Plan*, 1996

In 2000, Congress recognized the historic and natural importance of the Schuylkill River Valley by designating it a National Heritage Area with SRGA as the lead management organization. Designation and management of the Schuylkill River Valley National Heritage Area reinforces the efforts of prior and current initiatives to conserve and enhance the River Valley's diverse heritage resources.

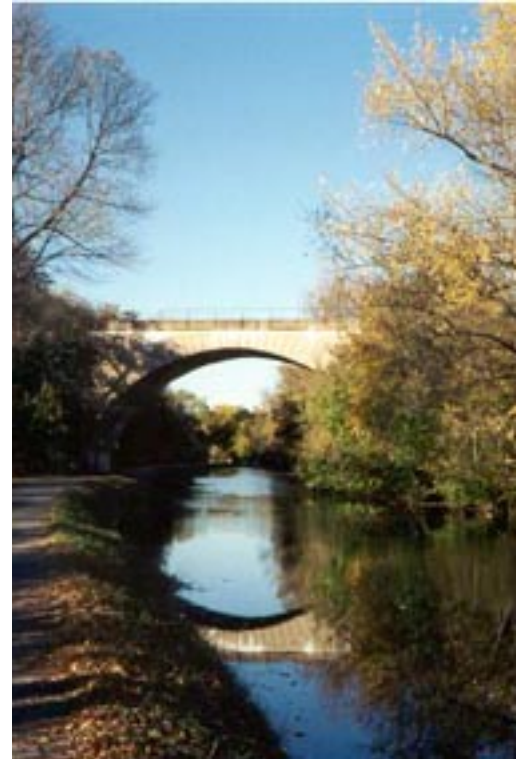
## 1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED

Designation and management of the Schuylkill River Valley National Heritage Area is intended to fulfill several objectives. As established by Congress, the overall heritage area mission is:

***To conserve, interpret and develop the historical, cultural, natural and recreational resources related to the industrial and cultural heritage of the Schuylkill River Valley.***

This mission is to be achieved through partnerships among regional and local organizations and governments to preserve, interpret, and promote the River Valley's heritage resources. The promotion of local heritage resources is intended to stimulate local economies, while preserving threatened cultural and natural landscapes. The creation of a unifying interpretive framework for the heritage area is proposed to encourage cooperation and partnerships among the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. Management as a heritage area is intended to increase public awareness of heritage resources through public outreach/ education and by maximizing their benefits for local communities and residents.

Referred to as "heritage partners" throughout the Management Plan, a variety of public and private sector agencies and organizations with an interest in historical, cultural, natural, and/or recreational resource preservation and enhancement will work cooperatively to achieve the heritage area mission. As administrators of the National Heritage Area and State Heritage Parks Programs, respectively, the National Park Service and Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural



Mont Clare Canal



Fort Mifflin on the Delaware, Philadelphia



Resources (DCNR) will be key partner agencies. Examples of other heritage partners include:

- Regional and local organizations engaged in cultural/historical resource preservation
- Regional and local environmental organizations (e.g., watershed groups, land conservation trusts)
- County and local governments
- Regional tourism promotion and economic development agencies



Main Street Manayunk, Philadelphia

### 1.2.1 Threats to Heritage Resources

The Schuylkill River Valley National Heritage Area has a rich historic legacy and is endowed with abundant natural, recreational, and cultural resources. At one time it provided a wealth of coal, agricultural products, and iron manufacturing and textile goods to a developing country. Many historic and cultural resources remain from this period of unprecedented growth in the nation's early history. There are also many parks and water access points that contribute to the area's scenic and recreational value.

However, several factors threaten the historic and natural resources of the region:

*Many of the historic boroughs are struggling with the loss of local industry and erosion of their traditional roles as centers of commerce, employment, and culture.* For example, many communities in Schuylkill County have steadily lost population due to the decline of the coal and textile industries in Pennsylvania. Many historic remnants of the local industry and early settlements in these areas could be lost. The scars left from strip mining remain visible on the landscape. Waterways suffer degradation from past mining practices and inadequate sewage treatment facilities. Many towns that relied on local industry have fragile economies and lack the financial resources to preserve or restore their cultural centers. Downtowns have been severely impacted by the emergence of suburban shopping centers and employment parks.



Downtown Hamburg

*Residents are often unaware of the Schuylkill River watershed's significance and the attractions it contains.* Many residents are unaware that they live in the Schuylkill River Valley. The large size and diversity of the watershed contributes to this lack of awareness. Attractions located within the heritage area are not well promoted to other parts of the watershed and to nearby population centers. Residents of and visitors to Philadelphia are often not aware that the river flowing through the City originates in the coal-mining region of Schuylkill County more than 100 miles away. Few people know that the region was the site of one of the first paper mills and public waterworks. Most educational institutions and centers do not incorporate the area's unique human and natural history into their curriculum. The preservation of heritage resources is dependent upon their acknowledgement and enjoyment by nearby residents.



***Governance within the heritage area is fragmented due to its large geographic area and the diversity of its resources.*** State and federal agencies and municipal and county governments each have authority over parts of the heritage area. An extraordinary number of local watershed, economic development, and conservation organizations are at work to preserve and promote the resources of the region. A unifying framework for heritage resource conservation and development will foster partnerships and will help these organizations and governments in project planning and implementation.

***While the heritage area has many parks and open natural areas, recreational opportunities have not been fully realized.*** Trail networks that connect the recreational and historic resources are incomplete. Visitor use of state gamelands is relatively low. Access to the Schuylkill’s waterfront is impeded in many areas, often by abandoned industrial sites and railroads. Optimization of recreational resources could provide watershed communities with opportunities to attract residents and tourists.

***While water quality has been improving throughout the heritage area, a number of water quality concerns remain.*** Many of the headwater streams in Schuylkill County are contaminated by acid mine drainage and other pollutants. Streams in the lower portions of the heritage area are often impacted by non-point source pollution associated with urban runoff. Drainage from agricultural practices affects waterways in Berks County. High levels of PCBs and mercury are a potential health issue, triggering fish consumption advisories. In addition, water from the Schuylkill River is the primary source of drinking water for area residents. The water is treated; however, poor water quality can cause high treatment costs.

***New development, industrial practices, and coal mining have impacted the heritage area’s scenic resources.*** Population increases are causing many areas that were historically wooded or farmed to develop quickly. The agricultural inheritance of northern Montgomery County, Chester County, and much of Berks County is threatened due to the influx of new residents into rural areas. Abandoned strip mines affect the scenic beauty of the mountains in Schuylkill County. Local governments and conservation organizations have requested assistance in ways to preserve their rural legacy and scenic vistas while encouraging sustainable economic development.

### **1.2.2 Relationship to 1995 Management Action Plan**

This Management Plan is an update to the 1995 *Management Action Plan for the Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor* prepared under the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s Heritage Parks program. The 1995



Acid Mine Drainage, Schuylkill County



Oley Valley Farm





Downtown Ashland



East Falls, Philadelphia

plan and subsequent implementation actions funded by Heritage Parks and managed by SRGA provide a sound foundation for the programs and initiatives proposed in this document. However, there are some significant differences between the 1995 *Management Action Plan* and the Management Plan for the Schuylkill River Valley National Heritage Area. These differences include:

- 1. The Schuylkill River Valley National Heritage Area has a larger geographic scope than the State Heritage Corridor addressed by the 1995 Management Action Plan.** The National Heritage Area is composed of the Schuylkill River's watershed within Schuylkill, Berks, Chester, Montgomery, and Philadelphia Counties (approximately 1,740 square miles) while the State Heritage Corridor consisted of a more limited area along the river and its main tributaries (approximately 1,135 square miles).<sup>1</sup>
- 2. The Schuylkill River Valley National Heritage Area addresses a broader range of resources than the State Heritage Corridor.** The scope of the National Heritage Corridor includes historical, cultural, natural, and recreational resources. While the State Heritage Corridor also addressed a range of resources, under the Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Program it was established to focus primarily on industrial legacy of the Schuylkill River Valley.



<sup>1</sup> With this Plan the boundaries of the Schuylkill Heritage Corridor under the State Heritage Parks Program are expanded to include all of Schuylkill, Berks, Chester, Montgomery, and Philadelphia Counties.



3. *The National Heritage Area Management Plan is intended as a programmatic guide for decision-making rather than as a detailed action plan.* The 1995 *Management Action Plan* included a detailed, 10-year capital program of projects to be pursued to implement the plan. By contrast, this Management Plan is structured around strategies, programs, and criteria to be used by heritage area partners as guides for decision-making with respect to the specific actions and resource commitments they will make as they move forward with implementation of the Plan.
4. *In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Management Plan includes an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to assess potential environmental impacts associated with the National Heritage Area.* An EIS was not required for the 1995 *Management Action Plan*. The EIS for the National Heritage Area Management Plan is programmatic in scope, addressing the general environmental consequences that could be expected to result from the types of programs and actions it contains (see Chapter 4.0). Additional NEPA assessment may be required for future, site-specific projects involving federal funding or action.



Valley Forge National Historical Park

### 1.3 GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The Management Plan establishes five goals in support of the Schuylkill River Valley National Heritage Area mission. Strategies have been developed for each goal to provide more specific guidance for plan programs and actions to be carried out by SRGA and its heritage partner organizations to achieve the mission. These strategies are described more fully in Section 2.2.1.

#### 1. Resource Conservation and Enhancement

##### Goal

*Conserve and enhance the Schuylkill River Valley’s regionally significant historical, cultural, and natural resources.*

##### Strategies

- 1A. Preserve and enhance historical and cultural resources.
- 1B. Conserve and restore the Schuylkill River Valley’s significant environmental resources, particularly those vital to the health of the River and its tributaries.
- 1C. Advocate sustainable land use, open space, and greenway planning and preservation related to the Schuylkill River Valley’s cultural and natural landscapes.

### Management Plan Goals

1. Resource Preservation & Enhancement
2. Education & Interpretation
3. Recreation
4. Community Revitalization
5. Heritage Tourism





## 2. Education and Interpretation

### Goal

*Foster awareness and appreciation of the Schuylkill River Valley's heritage resources and the stories they have to tell.*

### Strategies

- 2A. Establish a consistent, area-wide framework for the interpretation of the Schuylkill River Valley's heritage resources.
- 2B. Connect heritage sites and resources through interpretive themes and products.
- 2C. Support educational and research initiatives that teach the public about the Schuylkill River Valley's historical, cultural, and natural heritage.



OINK! The Children's Museum, Ridgewood

## 3. Recreation

### Goal

*Increase outdoor recreational opportunities related to the Schuylkill River Valley's natural and cultural heritage.*

### Strategies

- 3A. Complete development of the Schuylkill River trail system, including connections to tributary trails.
- 3B. Enhance existing and provide new outdoor recreational opportunities related to the Schuylkill River Valley's natural and cultural heritage.

## 4. Community Revitalization

### Goal

*Strengthen the Schuylkill River Valley's historic communities through sustainable community development related to heritage resources.*

### Strategies

- 4A. Conserve and use heritage resources to foster sustainable economic activity in traditional centers.
- 4B. Promote entrepreneurial activity and small business development related to the Schuylkill River Valley's heritage resources.



Kernsville Dam, Hamburg

## 5. Heritage Tourism

### Goal

*Increase heritage tourism and associated economic benefits for the Schuylkill River Valley region and its communities.*

### Strategies

- 5A. Use a distinct visual image and identity in the design of



heritage area products such as informational materials, signage, and interpretive exhibits.

- 5B. Develop physical and programmatic linkages between heritage area destinations to assist visitors in experiencing the Schuylkill River Valley’s diverse resources.
- 5C. Promote awareness of and increase visitation in the Schuylkill River Valley National Heritage Area through public relations and marketing programs.

## 1.4 PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Establishing unifying interpretive themes to link and inform the stories told by individual sites and attractions throughout the Schuylkill River Valley National Heritage Area is key to achieving the heritage area mission and goals. Like other complex regions, the Schuylkill River Valley has several histories – and many stories. Given the rich variety of themes, events, personalities, and landscapes in the heritage area, a few salient ideas must be identified to focus attention and frame stories that resonate with area residents and visitors alike. The following primary themes have been selected to provide the basis for establishing a unifying interpretive framework for the heritage area:

### Living with the River

- 1. Making History
- 2. Creating Community
- 3. Restoring the River

A few basic notions underlie the selected themes. To be effective the themes need to be experiential, not just intellectual. They must emphasize the centrality of the River and its watershed, its romance, and its importance as a regional commons and shared legacy. And it should be remembered that being serious and substantial does not preclude humor, wit, and playfulness.

It also should be noted that the three themes are not perfectly symmetrical. They overlap and interconnect. They are neither simple nor one-dimensional, but complex and rich with possibilities. Consequently, almost any place within the region evidences two or three themes at the same time, which is just what one would expect from a cultural landscape embedded with centuries of human experience.

Because the Schuylkill River is a dynamic icon for the region, the term “River” is used interchangeably with “watershed” and “River Valley” in the following discussion of three selected themes.

**“To live by a large river is to be kept in the heart of things.”**

**- John Haines,  
Moments and Journeys**



Gruber Wagon Works, Bern Township



## 1. Making History

*There are rivers of social and political change and rivers of people moving through the channels and backwaters of history.<sup>2</sup>*



Schuylkill River, Leesport

The Schuylkill River Valley National Heritage Area has a deep and rich historic legacy. Generations of area residents have established homes, raised families, made a living, and shaped the shifting currents of history. The heritage area was once the breadbasket of the colonies and also the most intensely industrialized region in the American colonies, a key region in the making of an independent nation, and an economic center of America's most prolifically productive state (the Keystone State). In addition to being a center of American agriculture and industrialization, the heritage area is a site of nation-building and a model of American diversity—ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural.

The theme of history-making connects the whole length of the Schuylkill River Valley. At one end of the River is the mining museum at Ashland. At the mouth of the River is Historic Fort Mifflin. Between these two points are sites, communities, and features that reflect state and national history—to name a few:

- Valley Forge and the encampment of Washington's Army
- The Oley and Skippack Valleys with their agricultural and craft traditions
- Pottsville and the story of the Molly Maguires
- Phoenixville and its steelworks
- Pennypacker Mills, Manayunk and the Schuylkill navigation system
- Cultural features—dams, bridges, aqueducts, landings, etc. — along the Schuylkill River and its tributaries

## 2. Creating Community

*A home river is that rarest of friends, the one who frequently surprises you with new elements of personality without ever seeming a stranger.<sup>3</sup>*



Manayunk Industrial Mural, Philadelphia

The Schuylkill River Valley National Heritage Area is preeminently a place of homes and communities: neighborhoods, villages, towns, and cities; churches, cultural organizations, and voluntary groups. Engaging stories of home and community life within the watershed link contemporary residents to history, historic preservation, open space programs, and conservation of agricultural acreage. This theme also invites residents and visitors to explore the River Valley's rich traditions and celebrations of community.

The Schuylkill River Valley's landscapes are dotted with cities, towns,

<sup>2</sup> John A. Murray, *The River Reader*

<sup>3</sup> Paul Schullery, *Home River*





villages, and hamlets of varied character: Norristown, Conshohocken, Pottstown, Pottsville, and Reading; Port Carbon, Auburn, Spring City, Port Clinton, Schuylkill Haven, and Birdsboro; and many smaller villages, suburbs, and rural communities. Local churches, community centers, firehouses, historical societies, historic homes (Fairmount Park Houses, RittenhouseTown, Boone and Weiser Homesteads), and seasonal festivals offer occasions to encounter and engage the ideas of home and community life in the River Valley.

### 3. Reclaiming the River

*Water is the blood of land—always in motion.*<sup>4</sup>

Efforts to protect the Schuylkill River and its watershed go back nearly 200 years. Particularly since World War II, area residents have successfully reclaimed their riparian heritage by confronting environmental issues, restoring communities throughout the watershed, and celebrating the romance of the River Valley through events such as the Sojourn. This theme links history and environment, encouraging residents and visitors to view the Schuylkill River as a vital commons and to lay claim to a shared heritage.

The story of reclamation embraces the story of earlier despoliation: sewage, runoff, pollution, deforestation, damming, diking, and filling. Aspects of reclamation can be found along the entire length of the River Valley, from Tamaqua with its fishing and hunting to the Fairmount Waterworks and Bartram’s Garden; from Hawk Mountain Sanctuary to the Wissahickon Gorge; from the post-World War II Schuylkill River Desilting Project to current programs to clean up acid mine drainage in Schuylkill County. Nature preserves, environmental centers, agricultural landscapes, parklands, arboreta, the greenway, and even the de-silting basins offer inviting opportunities to experience the traditional pleasures of man-in-nature and to accept responsibility for sustaining “the blood of the land.”

The three themes provide the foundation for the interpretive plan that is integral to and reflected in all sections of the Management Plan. Interpretation was used as a criterion in the process of evaluating alternatives and selecting the preferred alternative described in Section 2.1. Interpretive potential informed the selection of cultural and natural landscapes described as heritage resources in Chapter 3.0. The primary interpretive themes are interwoven throughout the strategies presented in Section 2.2.1, which work in combination to describe how an overall interpretive program is to be developed for the heritage area. The project evaluation criteria presented in Section 2.2.2 establish the interpretive themes as a basic criterion for determining priorities



Conrad Weiser Homestead, Womelsdorf



Little Schuylkill River, Hawk Mountain



Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education, Philadelphia

<sup>4</sup> Alice Outwater, *Water, A Natural History*



for heritage area programs and actions. Interpretation is also embedded in the priority action programs identified in Table 2.2. Taken together, the priority action programs and the decision-making framework set up by the Plan define the direction for a holistic approach to heritage area development that will be informed by interpretation at multiple levels.