

### III. Methodology

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#### A. Existing Plans and Field Survey

This feasibility study builds upon previous studies, planning efforts, current field surveys, interviews and workshops. The findings in this report are the products of information found in existing planning studies, synthesized with field observations, and input from the public participation process.

Information on existing conditions was obtained from aerial photographs obtained from the Berks County Regional Planning Commission. This information was supplemented and updated by field observation. Information on ownership was obtained from Berks County GIS and land records. An environmental reconnaissance was performed.

Planning documents incorporated into this study are summarized below.

#### **Management Action Plan: The Schuylkill Heritage Corridor, Schuylkill River Greenway Association (1995)**

[http://www.schuylkillriver.org/management/draft\\_documents.asp](http://www.schuylkillriver.org/management/draft_documents.asp)

The Schuylkill River Greenway Association, in partnership with the five Pennsylvania counties included in the Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor (Schuylkill, Berks, Chester, Montgomery, and Philadelphia), completed this study as a requirement for State Heritage Park designation. The

*Management Action Plan* includes a comprehensive assessment of the Schuylkill River corridor's natural, cultural and recreational attractions in these counties.

**Berks County Comprehensive Plan:**

<http://www.co.berks.pa.us/planning/site/default.asp?planningNav=|26469|>

**Berks County Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan**

<http://www.co.berks.pa.us/planning/cwp/view.asp?a=1124&Q=442529&planningNav=|26451|>  
This study adopted in 2002, and sponsored by the Federal government and PennDOT, is currently being updated.

**Greenway, Park & Recreation Plan Update**

<http://www.co.berks.pa.us/planning/cwp/view.asp?a=1635&Q=464110&planningNav=|>  
Berks County is currently updating its Greenway, Park and Recreation Plan. This plan will prioritize opportunities that will further the goals of a countywide network of interconnected greenways, trails, and parks. The plan studies three main elements: recreation; green infrastructure/ecology; and heritage resources.

**North Berks Land Utilization & Reconnections Planning Study**

[http://www.schuylkillriver.org/studies\\_reports/](http://www.schuylkillriver.org/studies_reports/)

This 2001 study sponsored by the Schuylkill River Greenway Association included examination of an alignment for the Schuylkill River Trail between Hamburg and Shoemakersville.

**Reading Riverplace Master Plan**

<http://riverplacepa.com/>

Connection between the Reading Riverplace development and the proposed Schuylkill River Trail has been coordinated through meetings and discussions with Riverplace's planning consultant.

**Schuylkill River Heritage Area Signage Manual**

The Schuylkill River Greenway Association has also developed signage standards. These standards will be incorporated in the design phase.

**Schuylkill River Outdoor Recreation Business Study**

[http://www.schuylkillrivergreenway.org/pdf/intro\\_letter.pdf](http://www.schuylkillrivergreenway.org/pdf/intro_letter.pdf)

This June 2004 study sponsored by the Schuylkill River Greenway Association considers some potential economic development

Articles published about the Heritage Area and the Trail were reviewed as well. Samples are attached in Appendix M.

**B. Other Related Plans**

**Borough and Township Recreation Plans**

The study team attended meetings with municipal officials, and public meetings at several of the municipalities to review the proposed trail, and to assure its compliance with local plans.

## C. Public Participation

Public participation has been a critical aspect of the trail planning process for the study. Benefits of public participation include:

- Stakeholders and their constituents can exchange ideas and learn about the recreational, environmental and socio-economic benefits of the proposed trail.
- Public participation is an opportunity for consensus building. Conflict and delay are minimized.
- Additional resources to support trail implementation and management are discovered.



**Trail Excursion along Maiden Creek**

The Schuylkill River Greenway Association is an established membership association with members throughout southeastern Pennsylvania. For about thirty years, the Schuylkill River Greenway Association has been working to create a riverside trail connecting Philadelphia to the Appalachian Mountains. Working closely with agencies such as Delaware Valley Regional Planning Committee (DVRPC), the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Schuylkill Canal Association (SCA), PennDOT, The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and others, this vision is becoming very much a reality.

Freedom Trail, Inc. has grown out of the recognition of a need for recreational trails to establish community, equestrian and open space connections in Central Berks County.

These two trail advocate organizations gathered other key community leaders to form a Steering Committee to guide this feasibility study. This committee has been involved from the initiation of this study and has contributed significantly to its content and production.

Large group (public presentations), Key Person Interviews and Trail Planning Workshops have provided multiple modes of public participation and assimilating citizen input.

Another mode of public participation has been direct outreach with principal stakeholders. A list of the stakeholders with whom meetings were held can be found in Appendix E.

Finally, two trail excursions were held to highlight the beauty and feasibility of the proposed Schuylkill River Trail and Freedom Trail in Berks County. These excursions were attended by walkers, bicyclists, and, in the case of the excursion along Maiden Creek, equestrians and a carriage.



**Towpath trace, Ontelaunee Township**

## D. Trail Alignment

The abandoned towpath of the Schuylkill River Canal is a prominent geographic feature in much of Northern Berks County. The Canal is an integral feature of the Schuylkill River Heritage Area. The towpath provides an important link to the community's nineteenth century industrial heritage. The abandoned towpath is the obvious preferred path for much of the trail. Where the towpath cannot be used because of development or natural constraints alternative alignment possibilities were investigated.



**Railyard in Hamburg**

In order to determine location feasibility, aerial photographs were examined to view existing land use and other physical features. Existing wetlands maps were also entered into the trail data-base. The location of rights-of-way, rail corridors and property ownership were also mapped. An environmental assessment was performed to determine the likelihood of environmental contaminants. (See Appendix F).

Analysis of information collected during the inventory phase yielded a preliminary trail alignment. The following elements were analyzed:

- Ownership patterns (See map in Appendix B)
- Historic, cultural and scenic resources (see map in Appendix H)
- Connections to other trails and recreational facilities (See trails shown in the Trail Alignment Maps, Section II-A, and in the Trail Development Phase Maps in Appendix H)



**Abandoned Lock, Bern Township**

Opportunities to reinforce other economic development initiatives in Berks County were examined. These initiatives included Reading Riverplace, the Airport Business Park, the "Nutrition and Wellness Corridor", and the Reading Company Technical and Historical Society's Museum and excursion trains, among others.

The proposed trail alignment was reviewed by the various public agencies participating on the Trail Advisory Committee. Their comments are incorporated in the "Recommendations" section of this report.