

# INTRODUCTION

## STUDY AREA

The project study area, located in the Blue Mountain Gap region of Northern Berks County, Eastern Pennsylvania, includes the five townships of Tilden, Upper Bern, Upper Tulpehocken, Windsor, Perry; three boroughs of Hamburg, Shoemakersville, Strausstown; and the village of Shartlesville.

The Blue Mountain Gap region of Northern Berks County presents a wide array of underdeveloped natural and cultural resources immediately accessible to the residents of the region via routes I-78 and Route 61.

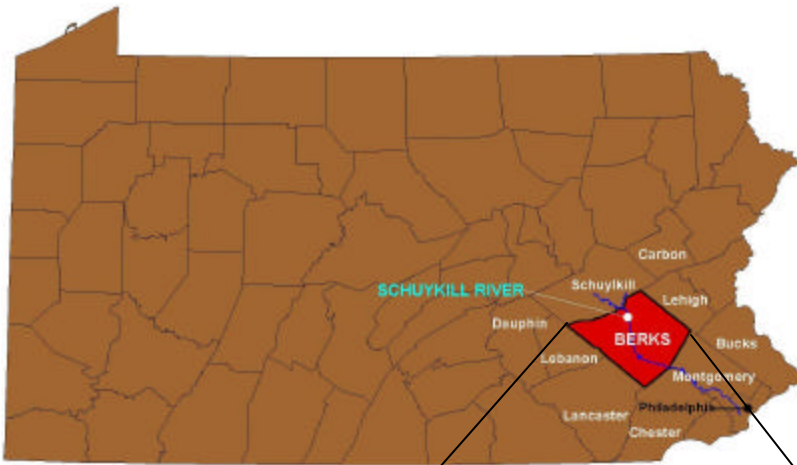


Figure 1.1 Pennsylvania Location Map - Berks and surrounding counties

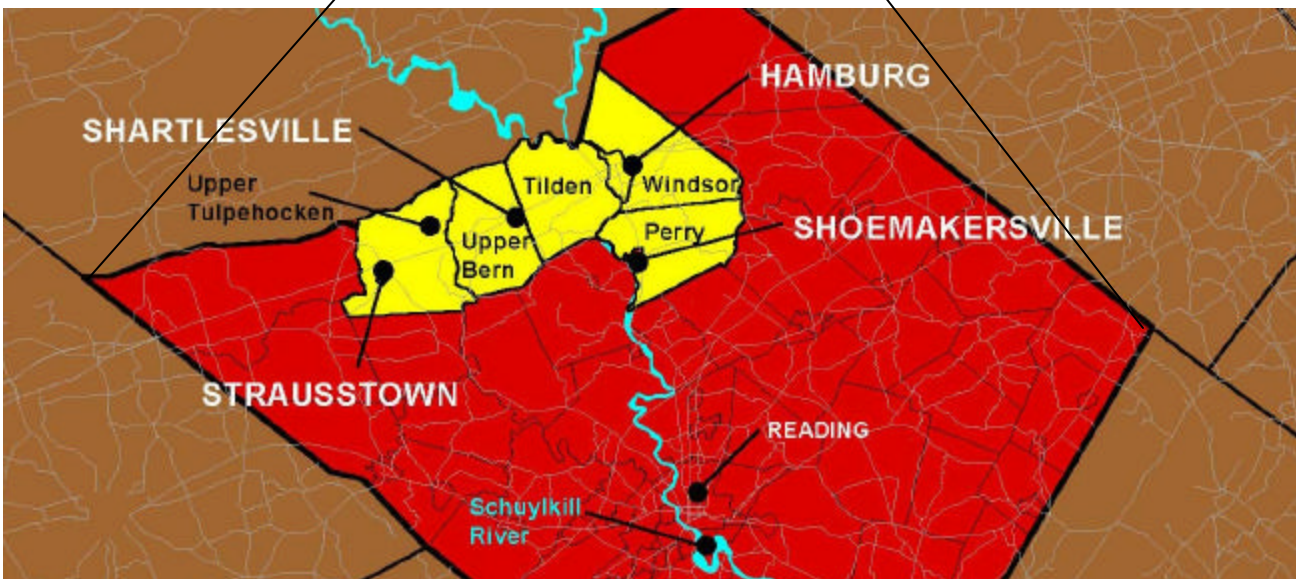


Figure 1.2 Berks County Location Map - Townships, Boroughs and Village in project area.

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## STUDY BACKGROUND

This study was initiated by the Schuylkill River Greenway Association (SRGA) and the North Berks Recreation Corporation (NBRC) to assess the feasibility of:

- extending the planned Schuylkill River Trail from Hamburg to Shoemakersville;
- linking the towns of Hamburg, Shartlesville and Strausstown by establishing a pedestrian / bicycle and automobile touring route; and,
- utilizing state owned properties in and around the Kernsville Impounding Basin for recreational activities.

## NEED FOR THE STUDY

To fully capitalize upon the region's extraordinary assets, area citizens recommended the formation of a recreation planning and implementation agency during recent "Community Visioning" efforts. The North Berks Recreation Corporation (NBRC) was established to plan and develop recreational facilities for the region. In 2000, the NBRC incorporated as a non-profit group. Representatives from the Hamburg School District, the five townships, three boroughs and one community that make up the School District, participate in the organization. The NBRC initiated negotiations with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), through the Bureau of Abandoned Mines and Reclamation (BAMR) to

investigate acquisition of the Kernsville Impounding Basin as a centrally located regional recreational facility.

## RECREATION

NBRC is interested in exploring ideas of how to responsibly utilize state-owned land adjacent to the Schuylkill River for multiple types of active and passive recreation. Interest has been expressed in implementing walking/biking trails, a boat launch, and athletic fields with support facilities. A goal of the plan is to carefully integrate public recreational facilities within the character of the river and surrounding landscape. Development of new public recreational facilities along the river corridor is permitted by the State, but it must adhere to guidelines set by the Pennsylvania Scenic Rivers Program, which address aesthetic and ecologic issues.

## FUNDING

The NBRC invited Schuylkill River Greenway Association (SRGA), a trail and open space advocacy organization and a regional stakeholder (as owner/manager of the Bartram Trail- a segment of the Schuylkill River Trail) to provide assistance to NBRC. Early in the year of 2000, SRGA applied for and received a Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Heritage Park grant from the first round of "Growing Greener" funds to prepare a "North Berks Land Utilization/Reconnections Planning Study." The NBRC and the Hamburg Area Soccer Association (HASA) provided matching funds to the state grant.

## PROJECT SCOPE

This study assesses the opportunities to; utilize state owned properties in and around the Kernsville Impounding Basin and former DER campground for recreational activities; to assess the feasibility of extending the planned Bartram Trail from Hamburg to Shoemakersville; and to establish a pedestrian/bicycle and automobile touring route along Route 22, linking the communities of Hamburg, Shartlesville and Strausstown. Additionally, the study recommends methods to enhance pedestrian connections within Hamburg, Strausstown, Shartlesville and Shoemakersville.

There are four project work areas:

**Study Area 1.** Bartram Trail Extension - This study examines potential routes for the Bartram Trail linking Hamburg to Shoemakersville.

**Study Area 2.** Hex Highway Touring Route - Old Route 22 (Hex Highway), an east/west route, connects the communities of Hamburg, Shartlesville and Strausstown. The study recommends roadway improvements to provide a separated bicycle touring lane and interpretive facilities.

**Study Area 3.** Kernsville Dam Impounding Basin Site - BAMR manages 252 acres of land adjacent to the Borough of Hamburg along the Schuylkill River. The site contains the Kernsville Dam, Impounding Basin, an abandoned campground, and a section of the proposed Bartram Trail. The study identifies passive and active recreational opportunities.

**Study Area 4.** Reconnections - The advent of the automobile has severed the “walkable” linkages between neighborhoods, employment centers, community facilities, and cultural features. The study analyzes existing pedestrian linkages and provides

recommendations for improving pedestrian connections within Hamburg, Shoemakersville, Shartlesville and Strausstown.

## OPEN SPACE

SRGA and NBRC were interested in exploring ideas to preserve state-owned land for wildlife preserve / wetlands / habitat. There are multiple parcels of state owned land located along the Schuylkill River in the Hamburg area that can be considered for open space / nature preserve. It must be understood that this segment of the Schuylkill River corridor is not a pristine, untouched landscape. It is land that has been shaped by the coal mining industry and a variety of other uses throughout the centuries. Although this land is not native, reserving its’ open space for future generations is important.

Berks and other surrounding counties have an abundance of existing preserved open space, parks, and campgrounds. There is a combined total of 121 state game lands, state parks, state forests, county parks and campgrounds totaling over 130,000 acres within a 30 mile radius of Hamburg. These state, county, and private facilities provide public access to protected natural lands and camping facilities.

## TRENDS IN THE UNITED STATES

Studies have proven the need for and benefits from trail development. A 1996 report titled The National Bicycling and Walking Study, prepared by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy in Washington D.C. estimates that 131 million Americans regularly bicycle, walk, skate, or jog for exercise, sport, or recreation. Walking is the most popular recreational activity in the United States, with more than 100 million people of all ages walking for recreation from two to three times a week. In past years,

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more bicycle owners say that there are few places near their homes where they can ride safely. In 1987, President Reagan's Commission on the American Outdoors recommended that a national system of greenways (a network of natural and man-made corridors connecting communities, parks, and recreational areas) be established.

Individual organizations and communities like the Schuylkill River Greenway Association, continue to preserve linear greenspaces. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is preparing a state-wide greenway plan to weave these individual green threads into a larger green network .

## PROJECT SCOPE

This planning study is based on three broadly stated goals for exploring opportunities in land utilization and community reconnections as follows:

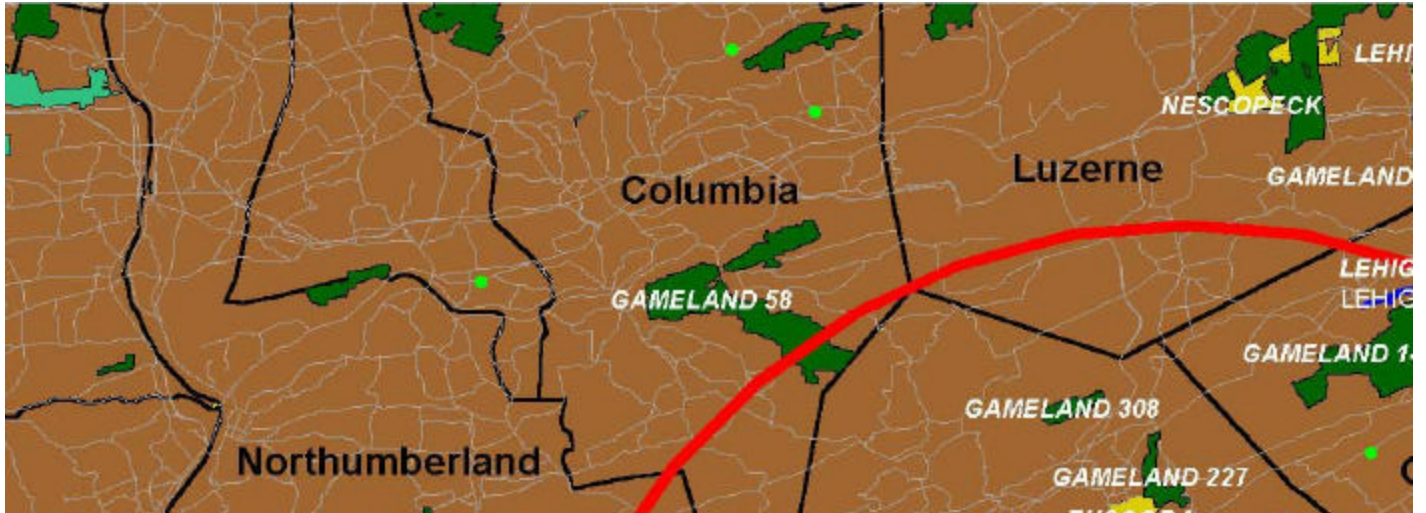
### ***1. Opportunities for utilizing the properties in and around the Kernsville Impounding Basin and former DER campground.***

Specific opportunities include:

- Utilization of part of the basin for the development of at least three soccer (athletic) fields and other desired recreational uses.
- Safe, convenient pedestrian / bicycle access to the active recreation and passive recreation areas from Hamburg and other North Berks communities is essential. This should include handicapped accessible connections to the maximum extent feasible.
- Vehicular access to the active recreation areas, including participant and spectator parking, and emergency and maintenance access.
- Development of support facilities for the active recreation components (i.e. restrooms, utilities, storage, security)
- Utilization of part of the basin and surrounding public lands to preserve and enhance wildlife habitat and protect wetlands.
- Utilization of part of the basin for future / continued desilting operations.
- Investigation of dam safety as it relates to water trail, canoe portage and access issues.

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- Reuse potential for the former DER campground.

## ***2. Opportunities to enhance, capitalize, and build on the variety of natural, man made and cultural resources in the North Berks and Blue Mountain Gap area.***

Specific resources include:

- Appalachian Trail
- Hawk Mountain Nature Preserve
- State Game Lands No.106 & No. 10
- Historic RR tunnel
- Schuylkill River Navigation System remnants
- Former RR grades / alignments
- Historic neighborhoods and architecture
- Area cultural institutions
- Scenic beauty
- Superior transportation access via the Highway node of I-78 and PA Rt. 61.
- Existing traditional neighborhood fabric of Hamburg, Shoemakersville, Strausstown and Shartlesville.
- The I-78 / Rt.. 61 highway node has the potential to become a TOD (transit-oriented development).
- Although technically not a part of the study area, the Village of Port Clinton, located just north of the Berks County line in Schuylkill County on Route 61, must be

considered in this study due to its proximity and the unique character of this former canal town.

- The Reading Blue Mountain and Northern Railroad is located in Port Clinton, and offers unique steam railroad excursions at various times during the year.

## ***3. Reconnections Concept.***

Modern transportation routes such as I-78, State Route 61, and other streets and railroads have increasingly led to the isolation of neighborhoods. These "modern" transportation improvements have made pedestrian / bicycle circulation both circuitous and dangerous. Since 1992, changes in federal legislation and Federal Highway Administration and PENNDOT policies have given new emphasis to non-motorized transportation modes. Federal and state funding programs have followed legislative and policy changes to make funding more available for pedestrian/bicycle connections. This study identifies barriers to village connections, examines the potential for new links to regional trail systems, and recommends potential routes for non-motorized circulation.

Some specific reconnections under this goal include:

- Concept plan for the extension of the Schuylkill River Trail, Bartram Trail (by means of an off-road trail) south from Hamburg through Shoemakersville.
- Concept plan for a pedestrian / bicycle route connection from Hamburg - west through Shartlesville to Strausstown (probably via an on-road route - old Rt.. 22)
- In Hamburg, Shoemakersville, Shartlesville and Strausstown - Inventory of the destination locations of major recreational,

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historic, cultural, natural and man-made resources, schools, and employment centers (current and future). Analysis of the potential pedestrian/bicycle connections between these destinations, barriers to making these linkages, and development of a recommended concept plan for reconnecting these destination locations.

Additionally, the project scope required that the plan address the "Project Evaluation Criteria" set forth in the *Management Action Plan of the Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor*. These criteria include:

- Does the project show clearly an aspect of the corridor's themes as part of a system-wide story?
- Does the project build identity for the corridor?
- Does the project appeal to at least one of the target audiences - residents, corridor explorers, or tourists?
- Does the project generate visitation of more annual visitors?

An answer of "no" to any of these questions should eliminate a project, except for very special circumstances.

## **The next set of criteria applies to phase 1 projects:**

- Does current ownership of the site allow the project to proceed?
- Does the project have funding or is it likely to be funded in the next two years?
- Does the project essential to happen in the in the next two years?

## **All projects, regardless of phase, should meet many of the following criteria:**

- Does the project have the ability to create additional funding support, partners, or volunteers?
- Does the project encourage preservation and/or adaptive use of historic structures?
- Does the project contribute to sustaining important natural resources?
- Is there a sponsoring organization or partners with the capability of executing and managing the project?
- Do elements of the project exist now?
- Does the project enhance the accessibility of the corridor's river, recreational, historic and cultural resources?
- Does the project encourage movement from one attraction to another?
- Does the project advance the corridor's educational objectives?
- Does the project generate permanent jobs?
- Is the project's community impact positive?
- Does the project generate tax revenues from retail sales or from lodging in addition to ticket sales?

A series of "no" answers to these questions should either eliminate the project, or move it to phase 3 if answers are unknown.

The Management Action Plan defines three phases or stages for heritage development. Phase one targets corridor wide projects of advertising, market-

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ing and overall management. Phase two projects relate to portions of parallel linear systems such as land and water trails, as well as waterfront open space. Phase three projects target site specific projects within the corridor. These are categorized into one of the four regions of either Anthracite, Agricultural, Industrial, or Urban Gateway.

The Bartram Trail extension and the Hex Highway trail are linear systems parallel and perpendicular to the Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor. These projects fall into phase two and three of the Management Action Plan. The Kernsville Dam Recreation Area can be categorized as a phase two project being along the Schuylkill River. The “Reconnection” of the local community to the Heritage Corridor are site specific and fall into the third phase within the Agricultural Region.

## PROJECT PARTNERS

### ***North Berks Recreation Corporation***

The North Berks Recreation Corporation was formed in response to a "Community Visioning" effort to serve as a recreation planning and implementation entity. The North Berks Recreation Corporation, comprised of representatives from the Hamburg School District and the five townships and four communities that make up the School District, was incorporated as a non-profit corporation to serve in this capacity.

### ***Schuylkill River Greenway Association (SRGA)***

The Schuylkill River Greenway Association's mission is to improve the quality of life by completing the Schuylkill River Greenway and leading the Schuylkill River Heritage initiatives. Since 1995, under its broader mission, the Schuylkill River Greenway Association has managed the Pennsylvania Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor, which encompasses much of the same 5-county region as the Schuylkill River Valley National Heritage Area. The Greenway Association has

worked with the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to bring \$1.2M in direct Heritage Park funding to 30 different recipients, including five county governments, 11 local government entities, 13 non-profit organizations and a community college.

### ***Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)***

The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) was established on July 1, 1995. DCNR partially replaces the former Department of Environmental Resources (DEP). The agency is charged with maintaining and preserving 116 state parks; managing 2.1 million acres of state forest land; providing information on the state's ecological and geologic resources; and establishing community conservation partnerships with grants and technical assistance to benefit rivers, trails, greenways, local parks and recreation, regional heritage parks, open space and natural areas. DCNR has provided funding for this project through its “Heritage Parks” program with money directed from the Commonwealth's Growing Greener program.

### ***Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)-Bureau of Abandoned Mines and Reclamation (BAMR)***

The Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation administers and oversees the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program in Pennsylvania. The bureau is responsible for resolving problems such as mine fires, mine subsidence, dangerous highwalls and other hazards which have resulted from past mining practices, and for abating or treating acid mine drainage from abandoned mines. BAMR is also charged with periodic dredging of the slackwater pools that have been created behind the various dams it owns on the Schuylkill River. These dams were created to prevent coal silt from migrating down river.



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## ***Public***

The North Berks area citizens were an essential part of the development and planning of a conceptual plan for the North Berks Recreational area. During a series of public meetings held by SRGA and the North Berks Recreation Corporation, the public contributed many ideas relating to the overall design of the site.

## ***Simone Jaffe Collins (SJC)***

Simone Jaffe Collins is a Landscape Architecture firm based in Berwyn, Pennsylvania. SJC was retained by SRGA as the consultant for this study. SJC has considerable experience with land planning projects and has worked on a wide variety of projects that are highly relevant to this SRGA project such as the Montgomery County Schuylkill River Greenway Stewardship Study and the Bartram Trail Development Study.

## ***Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PAF&BC)***

In the commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission has jurisdiction over waterways. The PAF&BC establishes and monitors regulations for recreational water use. Lands surrounding the water most often are private or public lands under a different state agency. The use of the pool above the Kernsville Dam is an active and important recreational facility for local residents.

## ***Communities***

Townships of Tilden, Upper Bern, Upper Tulpehocken, Windsor, and Perry were part of the study area. The boroughs of Hamburg, Shoemakersville, and Strausstown and the community of Shartlesville were also partners in the study.

## ***Other participants***

County Commissioners, Blue Mountain Eagle Hiking Club, Hamburg Area Soccer Association, Hamburg Area Business Association, Area Boating

Association, Keystone Canoe Club, Blue Mountain Hamburg Little League, Berks Fishing Association, Berks County Historic Association, Berks County Conservancy, Hamburg Emergency Services, Berks County Federation of Sportsman, Audubon Society, and others.

## PROCESS (METHODOLOGY)

### MAP RESEARCH

The planning process began with collecting basemaps of the project area. United States Geological Survey (USGS) topographical maps were obtained from the State of Pennsylvania, and were the main source for topographic and roadway information, as well as for identifying significant landmarks and waterways. Digital Orthophoto Quadrangles (DOQ) were also referenced in conjunction with the USGS topographic maps. DOQ's are aerial photographs that are used as the base for the USGS topographical maps. These high-resolution photos are extremely useful for site inventory and developing an understanding and an accurate picture of the landscape.

Historical maps were also collected from various sources including the Berks County Historical Society and were useful in locating historic landmarks and features of the landscape that have been disguised or lost through time. The Berks County Mapping Office also provided tax maps that identify the legal boundaries of land parcels. This information aided in identifying state owned land and private property that revealed the opportunities and constraints to utilizing specific parcels of land. Current and accurate road maps of Berks County proved to be an invaluable resource for locating local roads and places of interest. BAMR provided several maps of the basin and adjacent lands.

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## RECONNAISSANCE

The consultant performed several field reconnaissance visits between the months of July and December 2000 to gain a comprehensive understanding of the project area. The project area was surveyed on foot and by car. Notes were compiled and many photographs were taken to aid in this study.

## SITE ANALYSIS

The consultant surveyed substantial portions of the Northern Berks area by foot. State owned lands surrounding the Kernsville Impounding Basin along the Schuylkill River were thoroughly examined using USGS topographic maps and DOQ aerial photographs to record information about significant landscape features. Possible pedestrian routes from Lowland Road to the northern end of the project area just south of Port Clinton were walked and investigated to determine feasible alignments. Some of the main streets of Hamburg were also walked to develop a clear picture of the town. Many photographs were taken for later reference. The collected information was recorded and compiled in a series of site analysis maps that helped direct the design concepts.

The proposed Bartram Trail Extension from Hamburg to Shoemakersville and the proposed Hex Highway Trail from Hamburg to Strausstown were also surveyed on multiple occasions. Collected information was recorded and compiled in site analysis maps and matrices found later in this report.

## SCHEMATIC DESIGN

The schematic or preliminary design incorporates key programmatic features. The site analysis information was compiled and used to form a framework of opportunities and constraints. The consultant used the opportunities and constraints to identify where the specified elements of the program could be implemented.

## PUBLIC MEETINGS

An important component of the design process is public participation. Four public meetings were held that had a combined attendance of over 150 participants. The first public meeting included an overview of the project goals and programming suggestions from the public and the consultant.

The second meeting featured a presentation of the site analysis along with the preliminary concepts for the Kernsville Impounding Basin. Preliminary routes from Hamburg to Shoemakersville and Strausstown were also presented. The public reacted to the preliminary concepts and voiced their ideas and concerns to the consultant.

The third meeting featured a presentation of the draft report. The draft plan was presented and questions were answered. Comments were also recorded in meeting minutes.

The fourth meeting entailed a summary of public comment received on the project and the notable changes to the plan.

## DRAFT PLAN AND REPORT

Based on comment at public meetings and programmatic development, the consultant developed a preliminary draft plan. Presentation of the draft plan provided opportunity for initial reaction from meeting participants. The draft report is a culmination of all the information collected during the planning study, including the draft plan. The public was given 30 days to review the draft plan and submit further input/comments. Copies of the plan were distributed to the organizations, local libraries and townships for comment. The draft report summarized the procedures leading to recommendations in the draft plan.

## FINAL PLAN AND REPORT

After the public review period, final changes to the plan were based on comments received. The final plan satisfies the program elements provided by SRGA and the Berks County Recreation Corporation. The recommendations respond to information collected during the site analysis, issues raised by the public during public meetings, and comments received on the draft plan. The final plan was prepared and presented to the North Berks Recreation Corporation and the Schuylkill River Greenway Association. The final report provides a basis for future planning and development efforts.

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## PROJECT SCHEDULE

<b>July 20, 2000</b>	Site Reconnaissance (basin, DER Campground, old Rt. 22, Rt. 61 south)	<b>October 2</b>	Prepare Concept Plans
<b>July 24 - August 7</b>	Research Base Information	<b>October 6</b>	NBRC Meeting
<b>July 31 - August 7</b>	Growing Greener Grant Application Preparation	<b>October 12</b>	Public Meeting No. 2 Present Design Concepts (52 attendees)
<b>August 1</b>	Meeting with DEP/BAMR	<b>October 16 - November 10</b>	Prepare Draft Plan
<b>August 7 - 21</b>	Map Development / Preparation	<b>November 10</b>	NBRC Meeting
<b>August 7</b>	Historic Research	<b>November 14</b>	Site walk with Borough of State Forest Representative Service
<b>August 11</b>	Growing Greener Grant Submission	<b>November 15</b>	Public Meeting No. 3 Present Draft Plan (64 attendees)
<b>August 14</b>	Map Points of Interest	<b>Nov 13 - Dec 31</b>	Public Review Period
<b>August 17</b>	Meeting at Kernsville Dam Boat Launch and Site Reconnaissance (island, canal section, trail reconnaissance)	<b>January 3</b>	Meeting with DEP/BAMR
<b>August 21</b>	Site Reconnaissance (old Rt. 22, state lands)	<b>Jan.-April, 2001</b>	Prepare Final Report
<b>August 21</b>	Site Analysis	<b>April 30</b>	Public Meeting No. 4 Present Final Plan (35 attendees)
<b>September 1</b>	NBRC Meeting		
<b>September 13</b>	Public Meeting No. 1 Programming (57 attendees)		
<b>September 18 - 25</b>	Develop Preliminary Design Concepts		