



## A. Susquehanna River by Region

### *A.1 North Branch Region*

The North Branch Region extends through five counties from the New York State border through Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. The area includes portions of the Endless Mountain Heritage Area and touches upon the Lackawanna Valley Heritage Area. With close proximity to NYC and the eastern metropolitan area of the United States, this region is attractive to weekenders escaping the daily stresses of an urban environment.

The North Branch Region landscapes provide majestic vistas and scenery linked by small towns along the river that are working to expand historical and cultural attractions. The area has forested hills and mountains linked by vast valleys that lead to the river.

Farming operations are found throughout the area, in the valley and on rolling hills. The scale of the river in this area is moderate. Rail trails, hiking, hunting, camping, biking, and fishing are just a sampling of recreation opportunities. Yearly events, including the North Branch Arts Fest and the River Sojourn, are popular with locals and draw crowds from nearby states.

The North Branch Region is home to several conservation-related organizations, watershed groups, trail organizations, and outdoor clubs that provide countless hours of time for maintaining resources and improving the quality of the environment. The nearby Pocono region provides competition to the resources along the Greenway.

#### *Strengths*

- Close proximity to NYC—a three hour drive
- Endless Mountains Heritage Region and Lackawanna Valley Heritage Area—document the coal mining past of the region, promote recreation and visitation to area communities
- Close to Lehigh Valley National Heritage Corridor



## SUSQUEHANNA GREENWAY

- Part of the river is designated as American Heritage River
- Wilkes-Barre city and Wilkes-Barre International Airport
- Presence of local universities and colleges
- North Branch Water Trail
- Interstates 81 and 476, Historic Route 6 provide good access
- Mobilized community groups working to develop trails and protect water quality
- Presence of the Susquehanna River Institute (Kings College)

### *Weaknesses*

- Limited resources for tourists in the way of lodging and food in rural areas
- Limited promotion of Endless Mountains Heritage Area
- Large distances (vehicle miles, and mountain ridges) between towns
- Acid mine drainage pollution in some areas
- A perception still exists that the river is polluted due to its historic past
- Flood protection levees (in Wilkes-Barre) limit access to the river

### *Opportunities*

- Market to eastern seaboard cities to attract visitors for day and weekend trips
- Partner with Endless Mountain and Lackawanna Valley Heritage Areas and the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor to develop linked itineraries
- Capitalize on college student populations
- Partner with local universities to implement projects to market the Greenway
- Develop partnership between towns with limited visitor resources and strong recreational and cultural resources with cities that have visitor accommodations
- Environmental research and education on acid mine drainage and mine reclamation
- Offer more recreational opportunities with an inflatable dam in Wilkes-Barre
- Expand adventure sports opportunities for students and visitors
- Incorporate the SG into scenic drives and other areas of interest
- Promote local farming and produce through cultural and heritage attractions, farmers markets and other venues

### *Threats*

- Limited tourist resources to support visitors outside of urban areas
- Competition with the Hudson Valley National Heritage Corridor
- Competition with the Pocono resort area and attractions
- Limited funding for projects and the presence of competing interests
- Acid mine drainage and pollution perception about the river
- Historic flooding has created negative perceptions of the River for some locals

### *Political, Economic, Socio-Cultural, and Technological (PEST) Factors*

- Many depressed former-industrial towns; single industry towns that were once focused on mining now have service industry focus and a few major employers
- Extractive industries including lumber and mining are still major employers in area
- Predominantly blue-collar jobs in outlying areas; hub areas have concentration of white-collar jobs



- Branch is marketed through several outlets including the Endless Mountain Visitors Bureau, Luzerne County Visitors Bureau, and the Northeast Pennsylvania Convention and Visitors Bureau
- A new rail line connecting Scranton and NYC is in the planning stages; it's development could open up this area to new development pressures
- Young people are moving out of the area; Wilkes-Barre is losing population
- The population has a limited buying power; extends well for land-based, inexpensive recreational opportunities
- Residents have intimate knowledge of local trails that are not always mapped
- Elderly populations may be less technologically savvy in rural and remote parts of the North Branch Area
- Wilkes-Barre serves a technology hub

### ***A.2 West Branch Region***

The landscapes of the West Branch Region provide solitude with opportunities to view the wildlife and 'wild' river in its most pristine setting. Steep forested mountains frame the river and define the rustic and mostly undeveloped character. The charm of this area is in its remoteness. With the headwaters of the West Branch high in the Allegheny Mountains near Carrollton, Cambria County, the river starts its journey as a trickle. This area is rich with history and tells the story of the people and land as they endured the age of the lumber industry, documented by the Lumber Heritage Area. A portion of the region is also part of the PA Wilds Initiative, aimed at increasing recreation and visitation resources to benefit local towns and communities. Small towns flank the river, with large distances in between them. The size of the River is more suited to human-powered recreation in the far ends of the Branch, offering a unique connection with nature. This area is filled with opportunities for outdoor recreation.

#### *Strengths*

- A portion falls within the PA Wilds area and the Lumber Heritage Area
- Williamsport City provides anchor to region
- Williamsport Regional Airport
- A large portion of the river frontage is owned and protected by State Forests
- Region is in the central portion of the State allowing a draw from Philadelphia and Pittsburgh
- The headwaters of the West Branch are located in Cambria County
- The Pine Creek Rail Trail has received national recognition
- The scale and remote context of the River in this Area make it attractive for canoeing and paddling
- A large concentration of sportsman's groups
- Several active watershed organizations are focused on water quality improvement
- Presence of local universities and colleges
- The West Branch Water Trail
- Interstate 80, and Routes 11 and 15 provide access to the West Branch Region



### *Weaknesses*

- Access to rural areas is very difficult
- There are large distances between activity areas and resources
- Tourism/visitor accommodations west of Lock Haven are very limited
- Historical resources in small towns are poorly developed and marketed due to limited resources
- Areas of the River are still undergoing pollution abatement from sewer systems and acid mine drainage
- Susquehanna River tributaries lack identification/link to Susquehanna River

### *Opportunities*

- Develop partnerships with PA Wilds Initiative and the Lumber Heritage Area to promote the SG
- Market resources and the SG to the Pittsburgh market
- Develop itineraries for rustic recreational outings that complement sites in PA Wilds and Lumber Heritage Area
- Develop environmental education resources on wildlife, aquatics, plant, water pollution, and forests
- Acquire rail right of way to develop new trails as part of a Susquehanna Greenway Trail System
- Capitalize on college student populations
- Partner with local universities to implement projects to market the Greenway
- Increase development of visitor resources (B&B, restaurants, lodging, etc.)
- Promote the development of recreational outfitters to meet local and visitor needs
- Work with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation to actively promote the Headwaters of the West Branch
- Harness the energy of area watershed groups and volunteers for collective projects and in hosting events

### *Threats*

- Limited visitor facilities in remote areas. Pollution of the river via sewage, acid rain and acid mine drainage contributes to a negative perception of the resource
- Restrictions on State Game Lands affect the level of public use and access to the river
- Limited highway access in some areas may inhibit visitation
- Water level controls by the Army Corps of Engineers (around Lock Haven and south) affect the ability of local outfitters to plan river events

### *Political, Economic, Socio-Cultural and Technological (PEST) Factors*

- An emphasis is placed on municipal-level efforts rather than regional projects
- Water pollution abatement is a major concern and focus; towns convey resources to address these issues first
- The Army Corps of Engineers controls water levels that limit recreational opportunities
- The State Game Commission regulations limit public access to land along the SG
- Tourism/marketing groups tend to look west and north rather than east toward the river



- The Area is marketed through Northwest PA Great Outdoors Visitors Bureau, Centre County Convention and Visitors Bureau, and Keystone Mountain Country
- Many parts of the Area are economically depressed
- The population is aging in place; young people do not stay due to lack of jobs
- Cost of living is low
- There is strong senior involvement/interest in conservation
- There is minimal cell phone coverage in the far West Region
- Internet use may not be as prevalent in rural areas among older populations

### *A.3 Middle Susquehanna*

The defining feature of the Middle Susquehanna Region is the confluence of the West and North Branches of the Susquehanna River in Northumberland County. As the two rivers come together, the landscape is filled with rolling hills and valleys interspersed with farmland. The unique feature of the confluence is supplemented with the Sunbury inflatable dam that creates a 3,000-acre impoundment on the river providing boating and fishing at the Shikellamy State Park in Northumberland and Union counties. As the middle portion of the river, this region is a gateway to points north and west on the Susquehanna River as well as to the south to the Lower Susquehanna. Small river towns are found along the SG with cultural and historical attractions. The Middle Susquehanna Region is not part of a State Heritage Area. Efforts are underway to designate this area as a new Heritage Park, with emphasis on the Susquehanna River and Susquehanna Greenway as contributing factors to its importance.

#### *Strengths*

- The Middle Susquehanna Area is equal distance to all other Greenway Regions
- There are established resources to meet the needs of visitors
- SEDA-COG offices are located in Lewisburg
- Several local universities and colleges are located along the river
- Middle Susquehanna Water Trail
- Routes 11, 15 and Interstate 80 provide excellent transportation access
- The region represents facets of all other areas – ridges, valleys, farmland, and an expansive river
- Large number of covered bridges
- Danville Historic District and downtown
- Geisinger Health Systems is a major employer in the region
- River recreation opportunities are strong and include riverboats, powerboats, and tours, etc.
- Susquehanna Life magazine is produced in Lewisburg and highlights the central valley area

#### *Weaknesses*

- Flood protection levees block access to the river in some areas



## SUSQUEHANNA GREENWAY

- Major transportation routes (truck) are mostly unattractive and separate people from the river creating access issues
- Adult-related attractions along Routes 11 and 15 detract from the vision of SG
- The area's largest hub, Sunbury, is not as well-recognized as other Greenway hubs
- Because the landscape of the area is a blend of all other areas, it does not have a defining landscape characteristic

### *Opportunities*

- Develop a gateway and visitors center for the SG in the confluence area to capture tourists and direct them to other parts of the Greenway
- SG water recreation events on Lake Augusta
- Capitalize on college student populations
- Partner with local universities to implement projects to market the Greenway
- Develop activities and events that involve North and West Branches and the Lower Susquehanna
- Partner with nearby Knoebels Amusement Park to promote SG
- Work with local farmers to showcase produce and products from the SG
- Rail corridors along the river offer excellent views of the river and could be better utilized
- More fully develop a program for Native American history and interpretation

### *Threats*

- Issues regarding ownership of the River beyond the bank (Union and Snyder counties do not have ownership beyond the bank) could affect opportunities for increased river recreation and access points
- Divestment of rail rights-of-way to private developers could further impede river access

### *Political, Economic, Socio-Cultural and Technological (PEST) Factors*

- The Area is marketed by Columbia-Montour Visitors Bureau and the Susquehanna Valley Visitors Bureau
- Cooperation within and between counties has not been as strong as in other regions
- The area has a solid mix of agriculture and industrial businesses
- Efforts are underway to designate this area as part of a state heritage area. It is the only part of the greenway not represented through another state-level initiative

### ***A.4 Lower Susquehanna***

The Lower Susquehanna is the most densely populated and recognized portion of the river due to the presence of the State Capitol at Harrisburg, river towns, and close proximity to both Philadelphia and Washington, DC. Known partly as the River Hills, the river is almost 1.5 miles wide in some areas, with contrasting landscapes ranging from farmland, to rolling hills, to urban areas. Power-generated sports are popular and many initiatives exist to more fully develop historic resources. The



Lancaster York Heritage Region provides leadership and marketing for the lower portion of the river. The area has excellent accommodations for visitors including hotels, B&Bs, restaurants and other attractions and a number of successful historical and cultural attractions. Development pressures increasingly threaten the landscape of the Lower Susquehanna and, as a result, many efforts are focused on land conservation and preservation at the county, municipal, and non-profit levels. In addition, a large portion of the land along the river is owned and managed by area utility (hydro-electric and rail) companies.

While portions of this land are open to the public through recreation facilities and resources, great opportunities exist to partner with the utility providers to increase access to the river and expand the number of acres in permanent conservation. Hydroelectric dams control the river, creating nuclei of water recreation areas upstream.

#### *Strengths*

- Harrisburg is the urban center and State Capital, drawing visitors from around the state and beyond
- The Lancaster York Heritage Region is well established and involved in local efforts
- The Appalachian Trail travels through Duncannon and along the river
- The area has adequate visitor accommodations
- Harrisburg International Airport, Pennsylvania Turnpike, Routes 11 and 15, and Interstate 81 provide excellent access
- This is the most populated area of the SG and draws a large number of tourists who pass through on the way to other destinations such as the PA Dutch Country, and Hershey Park
- Lower Susquehanna Water Trail
- A unique concentration of archaeological resources exists
- Established river towns are already working together to promote visitation
- A strong system of recreational opportunities and outfitters already exist
- A large portion of land is owned protected by electric utilities
- Active community groups and conservation organizations
- The river's size allows power recreation opportunities not found in all areas of the river

#### *Weaknesses*

- Limited access to water due to utility holdings
- Competition for funding due to multiple projects and initiatives
- Overlapping initiatives to promote industries (farming, recreation, conservation, environment)
- Lack of central archaeological center for area/river

#### *Opportunities*

- Adjacent to the State of Maryland and nearest points to the Chesapeake Bay providing partnership opportunities to extend the greenway and develop shared marketing efforts



## SUSQUEHANNA GREENWAY

- Partner with the Lancaster York Heritage Region to facilitate projects and marketing
- Partner with utilities and promote additional land stewardship, conservation, and recreational opportunities
- Work with established river towns to develop joint marketing opportunities
- Develop education opportunities for Native American Indian or indigenous cultures, archaeology, history and the environment
- Develop a large-scale heritage center focused on history of river, Native Americans, rock art, etc.
- Work with utility providers to develop additional access points to the river

### *Threats*

- Development pressure for highly sought after land
- Over-emphasis on Lancaster and York, need to balance resources and promotion
- Competing tourism markets to PA Dutch Country
- Rail road and electric utility of right-of-ways limits access to the river
- The river serves as a county boundary for much of the region

### *Political, Economic, Socio-Cultural, and Technological (PEST) Factors*

- Both Lancaster and York Counties promote progressive planning and conservation
- There is good visibility of this area and its resources due to the location of State Capital
- The area has strong and diverse economies with strong employment
- Strong cultural tourism industries exist in York and Lancaster counties
- Strong development pressure in rural areas/small towns
- A blend of urban and rural populations and values
- A range of ages and cultural backgrounds lending to diverse population
- Region is marketed by the Lancaster York Heritage Region, Pennsylvania Dutch Convention and Visitors Bureau, Juniata River Valley Visitors Bureau, York County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Hershey Capital Regions Visitors Bureau
- Strong county websites and visitor sites