

Southern Perry County Conservation Plan for the Central PA Conservancy Grant

Scope of work for our proposed project from Grant application

Develop a comprehensive, publicly-driven watershed conservation plan for Shermans Creek, Little Juniata Creek, Fishing Creek and the Susquehanna River tributaries between Duncannon and Marysville, Perry County. The plan will cover nearly all of southern Perry County that drains east to the Susquehanna River south of the Juniata River watershed. The decision was made to lump these watersheds together for several reasons: 1) Blue Mountain and adjoining ridges, which make up the southern and southwestern borders of Perry County are natural watershed boundaries; 2) the region is similarly rural, farmland and forested ridges, with small communities interspersed; 3) timing is critical as the region is beginning to see sprawl pressure and development; and 4) together with the Juniata River Watershed Conservation Plan, nearly all of Perry County will be covered by a DCNR approved plan.

Immediate and future long term benefits that will be realized if the proposed project is completed.

Southern Perry County has a diversity of natural resources including forested mountain ridges, rolling agricultural land, warm-water fisheries, and high quality trout streams. The rural nature and recreational opportunities of this region, relatively low land prices, lack of restrictive land use regulations, and proximity to Harrisburg and Carlisle, make it appealing to commuters. The result is the region is beginning to see pressure from sprawl and new housing developments are replacing prime farmland and forested mountainsides. The rural municipal governments have little or no land use restrictions in place to guide growth and development is outpacing conservation of open space. Areas of Blue Mountain, Little Mountain, Bowers Mountain, and Cove Mountain not protected as State Forest or Game Lands are being targeted for improper timbering and subsequent single family home developments. Consequently, waterways are being dgraded and natural habitats are being lost.

Perry County needs comprehensive planning that will allow farms to remain, local communities to capitalize on the economic benefits of open space and protected waterways, and development of recreational opportunities. Now is the time to develop support for these plans before important natural and cultural resources are lost. The watershed conservation plan is also timely as it will help introduce communities in Perry County to the importance of proactive planning and may assist DCNR efforts to initiate a Perry County Open Space or Trails and Greenways planning effort.

Description of how the project involves partnership efforts among governmental, nonprofit or other public and private organizations.

Partnerships will be critical for the success of this plan. Central Pennsylvania Conservancy is partnering with the Perry County Conservation District for development of the plan. Staff from PCCD will assist with GIS development and some of the community outreach. Contact Todd Brajkovich, PCCD Manager, (717) 582-5138 or Sally Tangeres, PCCD Watershed Specialist, (717) 582-5139. The Perry County Conservation District will contribute in-kind services in the form of some staff time and GIS mapping.

CPC will also partner with the Shermans Creek Conservation Association, contact Linda Sieber, (717) 579-2729, lsieber@pa.net. SCCA has completed a watershed assessment for Shermans Creek and are interested in community outreach. They will be the lead partner on community outreach in Shermans Creek watershed through newsletters and public events focused on the plan.

CPC is also partnering with Pennsylvania Audubon through the Kittatinny Ridge Coalition. Audubon has an ongoing effort to raise awareness and protect the Kittatinny Ridge (includes Blue Mountain) as an Important Bird Area. Audubon's efforts of identifying key land parcels and targeting landowners with conservation information will provide valuable information to the plan and vice

versa. Contact Paul Zeph, Deputy Director and Kittatinny Ridge Project Coordinator for Pa. Audubon, (717) 213-6880.

Lastly, CPC will partner with the Perry County Ag Preservation Board and key agricultural landowners in the watershed area. CPC has been successful at obtaining conservation easements on several farms in the area. One such easement is on the farm of the President of the Perry Co. Ag Preservation Board, Jonas K. Stoltzfus, (717) 536-3618.

Description of how the proposed project will contribute to the advancement of Commonwealth and DCNR recreation and conservation priorities.

One of the main purposes of the proposed plan is to highlight the need for sound land use practices and comprehensive planning that incorporates open space protection and natural resource conservation. Perry County needs aggressive planning for agricultural preservation, riparian protection, and proper forestland management. Sound land use planning now will ensure that Perry County's recreational opportunities, rural landscape, and watersheds will be conserved for future generations.

The plan will support acquisition and protection of the Appalachian Trail corridor within the watershed area.

4 of the 7 sites deemed most critical for preserving Perry County's biodiversity are found within the proposed watershed area. 17 of 30 sites identified with statewide biodiversity significance in Perry County are within the proposed watershed area. 4 of 6 areas of local biodiversity significance in Perry County are found within the watershed area. This plan will address the majority of biologically significant natural areas identified for Perry County in the Natural Areas Inventory of Cumberland, Dauphin & Perry Counties.

The proposed watershed area abuts and incorporates a portion of the Kittatinny Ridge Important Bird Area. The plan will address further protection of this IBA.

Riparian buffer protection and ag BMPs will be a major focus of the plan in Sherman, Little Juniata, and Fishing Creeks along with tributaries to the Susquehanna River within the study area. Flood plains will be highlighted as important natural areas and water quality protection areas that should be maintained in an undeveloped state.

Finally, because of the highly agricultural nature of the watershed area, nutrient management and ag BMPs will be stressed to lessen impacts on the creeks, Susquehanna River, and ultimately the Chesapeake Bay.

Description of how the level of public participation in the planning process.

The development of the Southern Perry County Watershed Conservation Plan will be a publicly driven process. Support letters are currently being sought from all municipalities in the watershed area through a partnership between Central Pennsylvania Conservancy and the Perry County Conservation District. A steering committee will guide the project and will be made up of landowners, township officials, educators, business owners, scientists, and other members of the watershed public. Public input on watershed issues and concerns will be collected at several public venues and through SCCA newsletters throughout the planning process. Additionally, several public meetings will be held to solicit public input and enable public review of the Plan and its recommendations. The final plan will have been reviewed in draft format as well as in final format before submission to DCNR. The plan will be placed on CPC and SCCA websites to further facilitate public review.

Reasons why the proposed site was chosen and why it is appropriate for the proposed project.
What is the impact of the proposed project on the existing environmental conditions of the site

The watersheds in this conservation plan were chosen because they represent a large portion of Perry County that would greatly benefit from proactive natural resource planning. Timing is critical because the region is beginning to see pressures from sprawling development. Prime farmland is being lost and waterways are being degraded. Additionally, the region contains significant biological resources in need of conservation.

The proposed watershed conservation plan will help prioritize areas for conservation efforts such as targeted land acquisition, conservation easements, recreational development, riparian restoration and protection, and BMP implementation. The Plan will also encourage local municipal leaders to incorporate natural resource protection into county and township comprehensive plans.

The plan is also timely as it will continue momentum built by the Shermans Creek Conservation Association for awareness of watershed issues in the region.