

Pennsylvania Highlands Conservation Atlas

Executive Summary

The Pennsylvania Highlands cover 1.4 million acres and form an important statewide greenway, arching from South Mountain on the Maryland border across a band of rolling hills to the steep cliffs along the Delaware River. This greenbelt is the backyard for almost every major city in southeastern Pennsylvania and provides critical public resources, including clean drinking water, outdoor recreation, and wildlife habitat.

However, this wonderful and diverse landscape is highly vulnerable to sprawl development. According to a 1997 Natural Resources Inventory completed by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Pennsylvania was fifth in acreage of rural land lost to development, with almost 545,100 acres being lost to development between 1992 and 1997. Much of this development is occurring in the 13 counties of the Pennsylvania Highlands.

In an effort to protect the incredible natural resources of the Pennsylvania Highlands, the Appalachian Mountain Club, Highlands Coalition, and the Trust for Public Land developed a Pennsylvania Highlands Greenway Map illustrating the region's most important natural resources. A Pennsylvania Highlands Conservation Atlas was developed as a companion piece showcasing some of the most important landscapes to protect from an ecological and community value perspective.

Key Findings from the Conservation Atlas:

The Conservation Atlas highlights some of the most prominent natural, historical, and cultural "Conservation Areas" in need of protection. These include:

- Northampton Highlands in Northampton and Bucks counties
- South Mountain in Lehigh and Northampton counties
- Oley Hills in Berks County
- Unami Hills in Montgomery and Bucks counties
- Hopewell Big Woods in Berks and Chester counties
- Welsh Mountain in Lancaster and Chester counties
- Furnace Hills in Lancaster and Lebanon counties
- Sand Hills in Dauphin County
- Conewago Mountains in York County
- Whiskey Springs Uplands in Cumberland and York counties
- South Mountain Faces in Adams County

* Of the 246,992 acres identified as the highest priority Conservation Areas in the region, 85 percent (209,682 acres) remain unprotected

* The 11 Conservation Areas contain over eight state designated Exceptional Value streams, including the Cooks Creek (Northampton Highlands), Bieber, Pine, Oysterville, Saucony Creeks and the West Branch of the Perkiomen Creek (Oley Hills), Hay and French Creeks (Hopewell Big Woods).

* Threatened, endangered or species of concern found here include the least bittern and peregrine falcon, bog turtle, rigid sedge, bog bluegrass, bald eagle, long eared owl, upland sandpiper, Allegheny woodrat, and timber rattlesnake.

Significant Historical sites:

- ∞ Jacob Arndt farmstead, Coffeetown Grist Mill, Moritz Grist Mill, Rodenback Farmstead and Durham Mill—all listed on the National Register of Historic Places (Northampton Highlands)

- ⊞ King’s Highway—first public road into the Lehigh Valley (South Mountain)
- ⊞ “Zufluchtshaus” or Shelter house—established by settlers in 1734 as a way station for travelers (South Mountain).
- ⊞ Oley Township—only township in the U.S. listed on the National Register of Historic Places (Oley Hills)
- ⊞ Goschenhoppen—settled in early 18th century by German immigrant farmers, it is one of the only continuously occupied German communities in America (Unami Hills)
- ⊞ Ante House—Pennsylvania German architecture from mid-18th century - listed as a National Historic Landmark (Unami Hills)
- ⊞ Coventry Forge—the birthplace of the American colonial industry (Hopewell Big Woods)
- ⊞ Joanna Furnace National Historic Site (Hopewell Big Woods)
- ⊞ Cornwall Furnace— produced various cast iron products, pig iron, cannon, and cannonballs during the Revolutionary War and gun blocks during the Civil War (Furnace Hills).
- ⊞ Victorian Mount Hope Mansion and gardens—listed on the National Register of Historic Places (Furnace Hills)
- ⊞ Hummelstown Brownstone Company—listed on the National Register of Historic Places (Sand Hills).
- ⊞ Boiling Spring Historic District—listed on the National Register of Historic Places (Whiskey Springs Uplands)
- ⊞ Furnaces of the former Carlisle Iron Works dating back to the 1760’s (Whiskey Springs Uplands).
- ⊞ Seven Stars Confederate Hospital Site, the March Creek Skirmish Site and Cashtown Inn and Historic District (South Mountain Faces)

Pennsylvania Highlands Facts

- * 1.4 million acres from Maryland border to New Jersey border
- * Spans 13 counties including: Northampton, Lehigh, Bucks, Montgomery, Chester, Berks, Lancaster, Lebanon, York, Dauphin, Cumberland, Franklin, and Adams
- * 180 municipalities
- * Designated as one of only five “Mega- Greenways” in Pennsylvania by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Four-State Highlands Region Facts

- * 3.5 million acres in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and Connecticut
- * Deemed nationally significant by the Highlands Conservation Act passed by Congress in November 2004
- * Less than a two-hour drive from a number of cities, including New Haven, New York City, and Philadelphia
- * Hosts 14-plus million recreational visits annually, more than Yellowstone National Park
- * Eastern most ridges of the Appalachian Mountains
- * Provides drinking water to over 15 million people
- * Provides habitat to over 100 plants and almost 50 animals listed on Federal or State endangered or threatened species lists
- * 1,860 miles of cold-water trout streams

For more information about the Highlands visit: www.highlandscoalition.org