

Spring Creek Rivers Conservation Plan

Executive Summary

ClearWater Conservancy
The Pennsylvania State University Department of Landscape Architecture
Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

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The Spring Creek Rivers Conservation Plan is composed of two separate studies sponsored by the ClearWater Conservancy of Central Pennsylvania, Inc. The purpose of this Executive Summary is to describe the planning process underlying the Rivers Conservation Plan and to compile the recommendations of the studies into an easy to understand Management Options Matrix.

For the full text of the Spring Creek Rivers Conservation Plan, please visit the ClearWater Conservancy website at www.clearwaterconservancy.org.

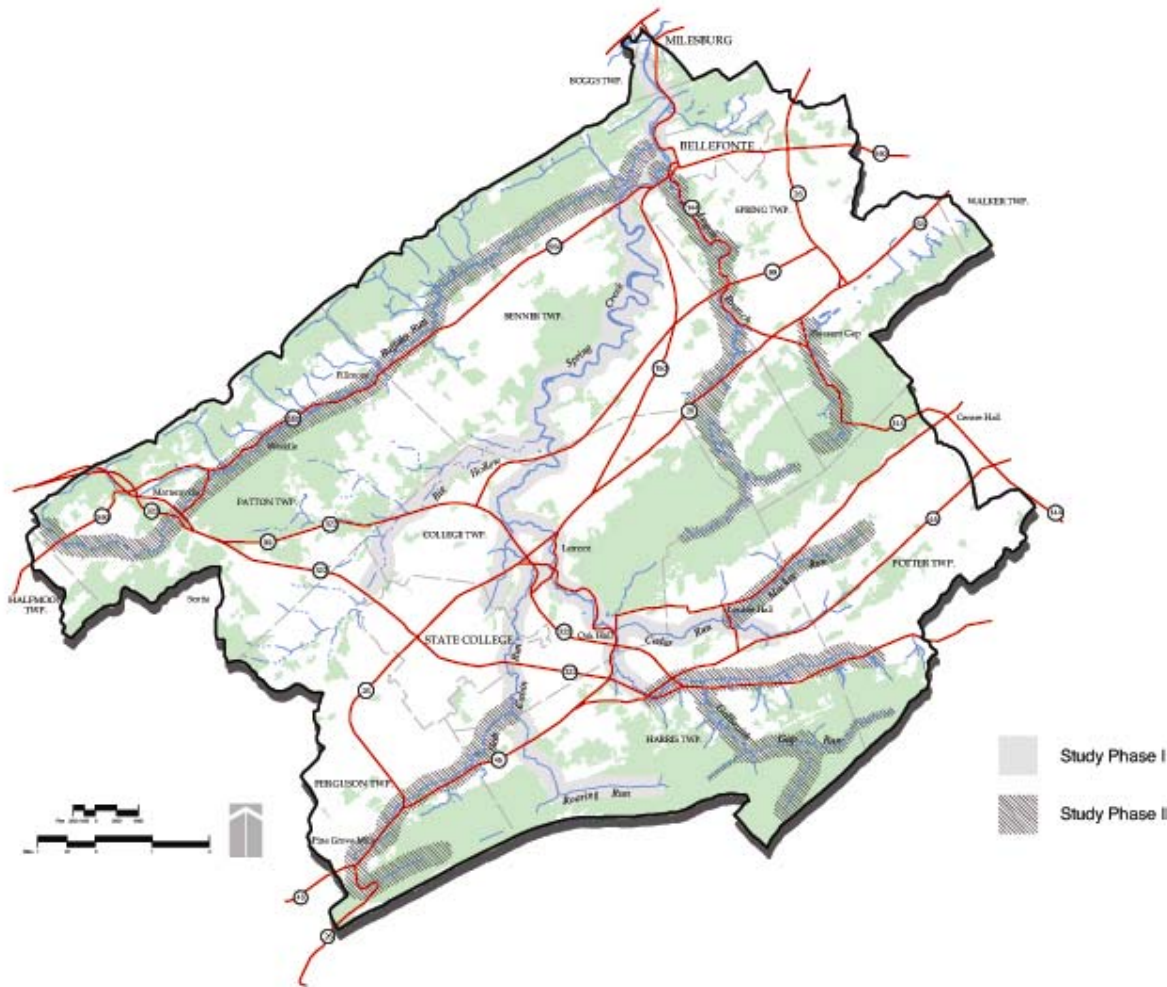
Introduction

The landscape can be seen as an intricate fabric of diverse threads. The fabric of the Spring Creek watershed is woven of streams and forests, fields and mountains, roads and railroads, compact towns and rural villages. These threads of the natural environment and our development patterns compose our present landscape and are the basis for future growth. New threads replace the old as values and resources change. They express new values or enhance existing ones, strengthening our sense of community and our connection with the landscape.

The threads of Spring Creek and its tributaries flow through the heart of Central Pennsylvania. Located in the south central portion of Centre County in the Ridge and Valley physiographic province, the Spring Creek watershed drains an area of approximately 175 square miles and is part of the larger Susquehanna River and Chesapeake Bay watersheds.

Within the Spring Creek watershed are fourteen municipalities that are searching for new and creative ways to weave together their common interests, heritage, and resources. The watershed contains all or a portion of Benner, Boggs, College, Ferguson, Halfmoon, Harris, Patton, Potter, Spring, and Walker Townships and the Boroughs of Bellefonte, Centre Hall, Milesburg, and State College. Together, representatives from these fourteen municipalities make up the Spring Creek Watershed Commission.

In its initial attempts at planning together on a watershed basis, the community began to recognize the importance of Spring Creek as a valuable asset for the future. Its high quality reflects on the environment, the economy, and the quality of life of the people who live, work, and play here. But in order for the community to consider Spring Creek as an integral part of its daily decision-making processes, a foundation must be created to raise awareness of how vital the Spring Creek thread is to the fabric of our identity. The Spring Creek Rivers Conservation Plan is intended to provide that foundation and give the community specific ideas for the future of the Spring Creek Watershed.



The context map of the Spring Creek Watershed shows the fourteen municipalities, major place names and roads, and the stream segments studied in Phase I and Phase II of the Rivers Conservation Plan.

Spring Creek Corridor Study

The ClearWater Conservancy is a Centre County based non-profit organization that has been working since 1980 to foster conservation and resource protection in the heart of Central Pennsylvania. In 1994 the ClearWater Conservancy completed the original Spring Creek Corridor Study, with the invaluable help of many partners. The mission of this original study was:

“To protect and enhance the natural, historic, and scenic resources in the vicinity of Spring Creek through a planned program of easements, acquisitions, and cooperative arrangements with local landowners and local governments with provisions for improved public access, and recreational and educational use where feasible and appropriate. To ensure that the resources in the Spring Creek corridor are available for the use

and enjoyment of future generations and to ensure that the public is informed about the corridor and engaged in its protection and enhancement.”

A number of issues were identified through the study process for their effect on the resources of the Spring Creek watershed. Among the issues that the community must understand and address in any attempt to protect and enhance Spring Creek are growth and change, water quality, loss of natural habitats, quality of life, historic resources, and fragmentation of authority.

With these issues in mind, the study team embarked upon the task of establishing a comprehensive inventory of the natural, historic, scenic, and cultural attributes of the corridor, which was defined as an area 2,000 feet on either side of the stream. Due to the extensive nature of the watershed, the original study was limited to a corridor that followed the main stem of Spring Creek from Boalsburg to Milesburg and the tributaries of Cedar Run, Slab Cabin Run downstream of its confluence with Roaring Run, and Roaring Run, as representatives of the varied conditions that exist within the watershed.

After collecting and recording the data, the study team analyzed the information, consulted with recognized experts, and suggested a set of issues and opportunities to be considered within the Spring Creek corridor. Finally, a set of conceptual recommendations was developed to describe actions that could be considered by the community in order to address the issues and take advantage of the opportunities presented along the Spring Creek corridor.

The value of the original Spring Creek Corridor Study was in informing the public about Spring Creek, increasing the community’s awareness of the creek and its resources, and ultimately engaging the people of the Spring Creek watershed in its conservation. Several specific recommendations caught the interest and imagination of the community and have since been implemented. For instance, the recommendation to preserve a rare wetland in the urban core of the Centre Region through a Millbrook Marsh Nature Reserve led to the creation of the Millbrook Marsh Nature Center. This cooperative effort between ClearWater Conservancy, Centre Region Parks & Recreation, and the Pennsylvania State University is a wonderful educational and environmental asset to the community.

The creation of the Nature Center led to the protection of the rare and sensitive limestone fen, which had formerly been privately held land adjacent to the Millbrook Marsh Nature Center property. This ecological gem was given as a gift to the ClearWater Conservancy to protect with a conservation easement.

Another recommendation from the original Corridor Study that had fruitful results in the community was the identification of the eastern entrance to State College on Route 26 as an exciting opportunity to enhance the Spring Creek corridor, celebrate our history, and demonstrate the pride we take in our healthy, beautiful environment. An East College Avenue Gateway Corridor Study Committee was formed in College Township to further study the possibilities in this corridor. As a result, the community was prepared to embrace an opportunity to preserve an environmentally sensitive and important 43-acre piece of property that was slated for development within this Gateway Corridor area. Thompson Woods has now become a forest preserve in a partnership between the landowners, the developer, the ClearWater Conservancy, College Township and the Borough of State College, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and many individual community members who contributed generous private donations in order to make the land acquisition possible.

Probably the most important outcome of the original Spring Creek Corridor Study was that it provided the foundation for a broader, watershed-wide initiative. As a vehicle for building a cross-sector, multi-municipal dialogue between the various stakeholders of the watershed, the community hosted an International Countryside Stewardship Exchange Team in 1996. The excitement generated by this community project successfully translated into the creation of the Spring Creek Watershed Community, a diverse stakeholder group focused on activities to preserve and enhance the watershed, and the Spring Creek Watershed Commission, a cooperative governmental effort among the fourteen watershed municipalities.

The first Spring Creek Corridor Study was so effective in raising the community's awareness of Spring Creek's issues that the need for another study to pick up where the first left off became apparent. The community recognized the importance of the tributaries that were not studied in the first analysis, and Phase II of the Spring Creek Corridor Study was born.

Spring Creek Study, Phase II

In late 1996, ClearWater Conservancy, on behalf of the Spring Creek Watershed Community, applied for a planning grant through DCNR's Rivers Conservation Program to complete the Spring Creek Corridor Study and mold it into a Rivers Conservation Plan. The conservation plan was extended to the remaining tributaries of the Spring Creek watershed, including Buffalo Run, Logan Branch, Gap Run, and the upper reaches of Slab Cabin Run, Spring Creek, and Cedar Run.

In addition, a key component of Phase II of the Spring Creek Study was the conversion of the original data into a Geographic Information System (GIS) format. All new data has also been produced in GIS.

Process

The goals of the Spring Creek Study remained very similar to the earlier study and are as follows:

- to protect and enhance the natural, historic, and scenic resources in the vicinity of Spring Creek;
- to ensure that the resources in the Spring Creek corridor are available for the use and enjoyment of future generations; and
- to ensure that the public is informed about the corridor and engaged in its protection and enhancement.

Work began on Phase II of the Spring Creek Study in 1998. The Department of Landscape Architecture at The Pennsylvania State University, who performed the work on the original Spring Creek Corridor Study, was once again contracted to extend the geographic scope of the study and manage the conversion of the original data into GIS. The co-principal investigators for the project were Landscape Architecture faculty members Mark Battaglia, Neil Korostoff, and Thomas Yahner.

Because of the specialized nature of the task, the geospatial data compilation was performed on a subcontract basis by the Land Analysis Laboratory of The Pennsylvania State University. Mike Anderson served as principal investigator for this portion of the project. Sources for the geospatial data included the Pennsylvania Spatial Data Access (PASDA), the Centre County GIS Project, and others. Additional GIS data were also created specifically for the study project.

The project team conducted extensive field inventory, photography, archival research, and local interviews during the course of the study process, and recommendations were developed and refined throughout the study period.

The project team made sure that public participation was an integral part of the study process. First, a Steering Committee was formed to guide the study planning process and provide oversight of the project. In April 1999, the larger community was first introduced to the plan and asked to review its preliminary issues and analysis. By October 1999, the project team was ready to present its preliminary recommendations to the public on issues such as scenic resources, future development, water quality, landscape ecology, cultural and historic landscapes, and recreational opportunities. The process of integrating the earlier Spring Creek Corridor Study data with the current Phase II data and converting it all into a Geographic Information System was also explained to the public.

Finally, after considering the community's input and completing further study, the project team generated the Draft Rivers Conservation Plan and presented it to the public for review on February 22, 2000. A diverse cross-section of the

community attended this meeting, but the local C-NET cable channel reached an even broader audience by broadcasting the presentation to the wider community.

Final editing and production of the study report and display boards were completed in the summer of 2001. Recommendations in the final plan can be broken down into two main categories: watershed-wide recommendations and site-specific recommendations. Watershed-wide recommendations, including conserving water resources, developing with history, creating recreational networks, and preserving scenic value, are ideas that can be incorporated into planning throughout the watershed and implemented in many locations.

In contrast to the watershed-wide recommendations, the final plan also provides site-specific recommendations for the tributaries analyzed in this phase of the plan. Ideas were generated for the Rothrock/Spring Creek Headwaters, Slab Cabin Run, Logan Branch, Buffalo Run, and Scotia, which is the major recharge area for Bellefonte's Big Spring and an important part of the Spring Creek groundwater basin.

Compilation of Significant Findings

The recommendations from the Spring Creek Corridor Study and the Spring Creek Study, Phase II have been thoroughly analyzed and compiled into the Management Options Matrix that can be found in Appendix C. In the detailed breakdown of the recommendations, two distinct types of recommendations became apparent. The first type of recommendation is a Management Goal, which refers to a broader planning initiative. The second type of recommendation is a Special Project, which details a specific action the community can take to promote the various Management Goals.

The Management Goals and Special Projects are further classified and described in an attempt to organize the recommendations presented in the study. First, the Management Goals were broken down into three main categories:

- Conserve and Protect Water Resources,
- Maintain and Enhance Environmental Quality, and
- Emphasize Regional Identity.

From there, the Management Goals were further classified as Watershed-wide Goals or Site-specific Goals.

Special Projects were also classified as Watershed-wide or Site-specific. Site-specific projects were grouped into general locations, such as Bellefonte or Spring Creek Headwaters.

After the recommendations were classified, Potential Partners and Potential Funding Sources were identified. The lists are not exhaustive, but are meant to give a sample of contacts in each category.

The project team, with input from the Spring Creek Watershed Community Coordinating Committee, next assigned a Priority to each project. Classifications range from High to Very High to Highest. Finally, a Status column was included to describe any current action on a particular recommendation.

Future Activities

The Spring Creek Watershed Community and the ClearWater Conservancy are eager to move forward with the implementation of the recommendations of the Spring Creek Rivers Conservation Plan. In fact, progress is already underway to build the necessary support to create a comprehensive Watershed Plan for the fourteen municipalities of the Spring Creek Watershed. The Spring Creek Rivers Conservation Plan will be an important component of that overall Watershed Plan.

In addition, several focused plans are also in the works, including the Stormwater Management Plan that was created for the Spring Creek Watershed by Centre County and the Nittany and Bald Eagle Greenways Study that is currently being coordinated by the County with the assistance of a broad local steering committee.

But beyond the various watershed planning efforts, there are also many specific projects that are already receiving attention from stakeholders and decision-makers.

- In the Spring Creek Headwaters area, a Galbraith Gap State Forest Recreation Gateway Task Force has formed to develop plans for a trailhead area and stream restoration at a heavily used entrance to the Rothrock State Forest.
- Spring, Benner, and College Townships, three of the watershed's municipalities that are facing ever-increasing development pressures, are in the process of enacting Spring Creek Overlay Zoning districts.
- A riparian restoration demonstration project has been developed and constructed at the Pennsylvania Military Museum in Boalsburg.
- The ClearWater Conservancy's Stewardship and Resources Committee has prioritized a list of potential land acquisition properties based in part on the recommendations of the Spring Creek Rivers Conservation Plan.

With all of the activity in the Spring Creek Watershed, the completed Spring Creek Rivers Conservation Plan is sure to serve as a guide and a resource for future water resource protection efforts. Spring Creek's listing on the Pennsylvania Rivers Registry will open new doors of opportunity for the community and will help us to continue to protect our water resources in an effective and meaningful way.

On behalf of the entire Spring Creek Watershed community, the ClearWater Conservancy would like to thank the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources for making this Rivers Conservation Plan possible.

appendix c

**management
options matrix**